The Staff of *The Chestatee Review* dedicates the 2008 edition to Professor Tom Sauret for his years of service and instruction toward the progression of the publication. Professor Sauret served as advisor from 1993 to 1997 when the magazine was titled *Perceptions*. While also serving as advisor of the English Club, Professor Sauret coined the name *The Chestatee Review* and led the publication through nine years and nine editions before retiring his post in 2005.

Thank you, Professor Sauret, for contributing to the success and growth of *The Chestatee Review*. 
This edition of The Chestatee Review marks a truly exciting time for the magazine. You have probably noticed that this edition is much thicker than the 2007 edition. We have combined Hoi Polloi, our essay magazine, with The Chestatee Review, and seen outstanding results. Now, both campuses are collaborating on one fantastic publication and we expect the readership of the magazine will continue to grow in the coming years. Additionally, we have been able to gain recognition as a Campus Organization, which means that in the very near future we will blossom into the vital entity on campus that our student contributors deserve.

We have been very fortunate this year to have such an amazing staff which has been nothing but understanding during the merger, and I want to say thanks to all of them for their incredible patience and fortitude. Without you, things would have been messy. I would specifically like to thank our layout staff - John Amoss, Tiffany Forrester, and Jessica Eskew - who have held their moxie and persevered, especially towards the end. I am honored to have served as your Editor this year and to have been present during this amazing transformation.

Thanks again to everyone that gave moral (and financial!) support - you are the cornerstone of this publication. I know that you will enjoy the 2008 edition of The Chestatee Review.

I leave you with one of my favorite quotes by one of my favorite people: “Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” – Mark Twain
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## Short Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome to Kansas</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Fuqua</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Path of the Pylons</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.J. Schmitt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Transformation of Willy Walsh</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca Bruno</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ballad of Ron Deaux</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Mayhew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archeology</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Mayhew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Vinke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds On Deaf Ears</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Fuqua</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Things Go Wrong</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Fowler</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moonshine</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin O’Dell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Minor</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Vickers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First Place
Lauren Fuqua

Picking at the Bed Sheets
Jacob Hickman

Ten Minutes From the World
Lauren Fuqua

Artwork

One-Act Plays

Ghosts
Justin Mayhew

The Holy Church
Adolfo Castellanos

Informal Essays

The Ultimate Hike
Cristy Worthington

Religion . . . a Choice?
John Splaine

Formal Essays

Monitoring Employees
Melissa Gooch

Something Fishy Here
Nathan Barlett

Contributors

Writing Contest and Awards
The wind had let up just a little and was barely pushing against the sides of the car. The colossal raindrops gave way to a persistent drizzle. Surrounded on all sides by nothing, Kansas was bleak, providing civilization a blank canvas to paint.

From “Welcome to Kansas” by Lauren Fuqua
It was before sunrise when they crossed the border into Kansas, beginning their second day of driving. Welcome to Kansas! The cool air wrapped its arms around them like an old friend. The land rose and fell over small hills and the road curved with it. Without air conditioning the intense heat of the day would be difficult to suffer through, but right now everything was okay. Still sleepy from the morning, they rode in silence.

Jackson, barely awake in the passenger seat, tapped his fingers on the door to the rhythm of an unheard beat, thoughts of rivers and mountains filling his head. Taylor, the driver, stared out into the darkness ahead. His mind was as empty as the land around them. Gradually the sky changed with the coming dawn, as the sun made its dramatic appearance in the sky behind them. The air began to get warmer. The world opened up with the soft shining of the morning light. Some of the hills they passed had small cliffs cut into the sides; striped with time, a landscape left over from Missouri. A lonely, crooked tree stood guard at the edge of a passing lake. A light breeze from the south pushed against the old Suburban that was still holding strong in the journey across the country. Tumbleweeds occasionally bounced across the road, shattering beneath their wheels. Kansas was starting to wake up.

“Hey, you know what I was thinking?” said Jackson, his words cutting into the blanket of silence that was settled comfortably around the pair. “I was thinking maybe instead of heading straight back home after California, we could do that road trip we were talking about doing. You know, maybe go up to Washington and then over to Montana and back down.”

“We already talked about that, remember?” Taylor sighed. “We don’t have enough time or gas money.”

“We did? Oh, okay, yeah I guess you’re right,” said Jackson, no longer singing a song in his head.

“Jesus, it’s starting to get hot already. This is going to be a loooong day,”
Taylor said. The sun, soft and subtle in its first waking moments, was now beating down on the car. The light breeze intensified, steadily leaning against the side of the Suburban. Jackson drove on. The green lights of the clock glowed 8:55.

“I can’t wait to get back home,” Taylor sighed to himself, thinking of honeysuckle perfume and afternoon breakfasts.

“Oh yeah? Why’s that? You got a secret girlfriend or something?” asked Jackson.

“Oh, um, no, nothing really like that. Well, you know, just can’t wait to get home. To, um, get back to work and stuff,” Taylor stammered.

“Yeah right, there is a girl! Who is she? What’s her name? Where’d you meet her?”

“There’s not a girl, don’t worry about it!” Taylor snapped.

“All right, all right, I’ll let you keep your secrets. For now. Hey, you think we’ll be able to see the redwoods?” asked Jackson.

“What? Oh yeah, sure, I guess so...” Taylor drifted back into his daydreams. The hills had flattened out into a desolate plain. On and on it stretched with no end in sight, views so vast they could see where one cloud ended and another began.

“You know, this is the first trip I’ve been on since my accident,” said Jackson.

“Yeah, I know,” Taylor said, never turning his head from the window.

“I really needed to get away from my parents. They’ve been smothering me ever since I got home from the hospital,” Jackson said.

“Uh huh,” Taylor mumbled.

“You know how my mom is. She’s always asking me how I’m doing, how I’m feeling, if anything hurts, how my memory is. I have to be like ‘Mom! I’m fine! I’m almost completely recovered, leave me alone!’” Jackson laughed as he said it.

“Hey, how about some music?” Taylor turned on the radio louder than it needed to be. The severe sound of static, almost deafening, filled their ears. After circling through the radio stations twice and still not picking up anything but static, Taylor gave up, frustrated. “This state blows. Nothing to look at, no music, hot,” he said. Jackson just stared out the window. The wind beat steadily on the side of the
Suburban. Kansas was wide awake now.

“Dude, at least tell me a little about this girl, this mystery woman,” Jackson half said, half sang, a big smile on his face.

“No. Not now,” said Taylor.

“Ok. I’ll guess, you can tell me if I’m right or not. Is she…like a supermodel?”

“No.”

“Is she….like a drama queen?”

“No.”

“Okay, okay. Is she….like a….porn star?”

“No! She’s not any of those things! She’s like…she’s like Jenny, okay!” yelled Taylor, gritting his teeth and startling Jackson.

“Oh,” Jackson said, feeling his heart break a little at the mention of her name. Once again silence settled around the pair. Taylor drove on. Jackson tried to remember.

“Tell me again about the first time I met Jenny,” said Jackson. Taylor looked at him to see if he was serious, and waited a few seconds to respond. He sighed.

“We were swimming at White Oak Falls,” he started. “It was a great day for swimming, hot and sticky. She came up with her friends just as we were starting to get pruny. She had on that yellow bikini. We both liked her but she went after you. Remember?”

“Maybe,” said Jackson. “Go on.”

“We stayed a couple of hours until the sun disappeared and the water got cold. Then we all went back to the cabin, made a big fire out back and drank whiskey and made s’mores. Remember?” said Taylor.

“Kind of, but it might just be me picturing what you said. You know, she always smelled like honeysuckles. I loved that,” Jackson sighed. “I really miss her.”

“Yeah,” said Taylor. “I know.”

The day was hot and sweat seeped through their shirts. Dust lingered everywhere, in the air and on the ground, settling in for a permanent stay on every
surface. Water could do nothing to rid their mouths of the taste. The sun, brutal and unforgiving, extracted whatever energy they had stored up. They lounged lethargically, dreamlike, in the sticky car.

On and on they drove. Miles and miles of pavement passed beneath the wheels of the Suburban. The landscape never changed. They passed fields with farmers on combines ignoring the roar of the highway slicing through the land. They saw a small dust tornado form and disappear as they passed a gas station. Taylor dreamed of things back home. Jackson dreamed of things to come.

The heat grew almost unbearable. Sweating, trying to breathe in the thick air, Jackson struggled for something to say. Anything to keep him in reality, to remind him of who he was and where he was going, anything to remember why. But they had run out of things to say to each other. Conversational currency in Kansas was down to pennies.

“So do you think we’ll be able to see the redwoods?” Jackson asked again.

“Yeah, sure,” Taylor replied, his mind empty.

Finally they reached the halfway point, the first definitive sign that there would be an end. Switching seats, Jackson took over driving for the rest of Kansas, making waves with his hand on the air outside the window.

“Did I ever tell you about the day I woke up?” asked Jackson.

“Yeah, dude, you did,” said Taylor.

“I’m not talking about the day I regained consciousness,” said Jackson. “I’m talking about the day I started remembering things -- May 15. I remember because I kept saying the date over and over. May 15. May 15. It was the first time I could remember,” he finished.

“Uh huh.”

Even talking was proving to be more of an effort than it was worth. The hot air flowing through the windows provided no comfort against the blazing heat of Kansas. There was no relief. Taylor looked at his watch, the lines adding up to 12:15.

“Does this state ever end?” Taylor asked, wiping his forehead with an old
“Where are we going again?” Jackson asked, his eyes searching his brain for an answer.

“California,” said Taylor.

“Oh, yeah. That’s right,” said Jackson. “What do you think it will be like?”

“I don’t know,” said Taylor. “Hot.”

They passed a telephone tower that looked like a small oil rig. Surrounded by nothing, they could see miles and miles to the horizon with no obstructions.

“All this space,” said Jackson. “Makes me want to talk to God.”

“I don’t believe in God,” said Taylor.

“Really?” asked Jackson. “Since when?”

“I don’t know. Always,” said Taylor.

“Did you ever tell me that?” asked Jackson.

“No,” said Taylor.

“Why?”

“I don’t know,” said Taylor. “I mean, I want to believe in God. I really do. I just don’t. It doesn’t make sense.”

“Oh,” said Jackson. “I never would have made it through the hospital without God.”

“Did he talk to you?” asked Taylor.

“No,” said Jackson. “But he listened.”

On and on they drove, in separate worlds. Clouds began to appear in the sky. A wall of darkness was forming on the horizon ahead.

“I didn’t know it was supposed to rain,” said Jackson.

“Me neither,” Taylor responded.

The hostile sun disappeared behind a thick gray cloud, a brief reprieve for the travelers. Cool air flowed through the open windows for the first time in hours. Taylor tried the radio again, only to receive a static reply.

“You know B-Noms said it was my fault I got in the accident? My fault!” Jackson said. “The bike broke, how is that my fault? He said I had no business
doing that jump, but how are you supposed to get better if you don’t try harder things!”

“Yeah, man, you told me that,” said Taylor.

“I don’t understand. And Jenny told me she was tired of hearing me talk about it. All my friends said that. I guess they weren’t that great as friends. Honestly, dude, you’re the only friend I have left,” said Jackson. “But we’ve been friends too long to change,” Taylor just stared out the window. A light rain began to tap the windshield of the Suburban like a nosy neighbor.

“Everything is so different since my accident,” said Jackson.

“Jesus, there you go again,” Taylor said before he could stop himself.

“What?” asked Jackson.

“Nothing. I’m just messing around, don’t worry about it,” said Taylor.

“No, seriously, what are you talking about? What did you mean by that?” asked Jackson.

“It’s just that you talk about your accident a lot,” Taylor said. “It’s no big deal, I didn’t mean anything by it, don’t worry about it.”

“Jesus, Taylor!” Jackson yelled. “Don’t tell me you’re going to be just like every other friend I had! You know how big a deal this has been for me! You know what I’ve been through!” The rain was coming down a little harder now.

“Yeah, I know! I know what you’ve been through! You tell me every fucking day! Get over it, Jackson! It’s been two years, and you’re almost completely recovered! You can’t center your life on one event that happened in the past! Everyone else has moved on, why can’t you?” Taylor said, staring into the rain, feeling guilty for being able to remember simple things and feeling guilty about everything.

“What are you talking about? Are you saying there’s a grace period as to how long I’m allowed to talk about something that changed my life? Something that made me who I am? What kind of bullshit is that?” said Jackson, hitting the dashboard with his fist and grunting in frustration.

“Yeah…yeah!” said Taylor. “A grace period! Perfect choice of words! I can only support you so long! Eventually you’re gonna have to stand on your own, I’ve
run out of responses to your talk! Come up with something new and stop using it as an excuse not to live your life! I can hardly stand being around you these days!” said Taylor.

Heavy raindrops began pounding the car, pinging like nails being dropped on a wooden floor. The once calm landscape of Kansas disappeared into a raging torrent of violent wind and unforgiving rain. Taylor stared, seeing nothing, feeling nothing. Jackson squinted to see as far in front of the car as the rain would allow him, slowing the pace to a crawl.

“God, it’s gonna take forever to get out of this state now! What luck!” Taylor screamed at the rain that ignored him and it continued to pound away on the windshield.

“It’s all right, dude, we’re not in that much of a hurry. Calm down.” Jackson yelled over the deafening sound. Lightning split the sky. Thunder followed quickly behind, the sound vibrating through the core of their bodies. Kansas was in full swing now.

“I’m in a hurry! You might not be, but I am! I can’t wait to get across this fucking state and into the mountains so we can go on this stupid hiking trip and get home! Aaaahhhhh I feel like I’m going crazy in here!” Taylor yelled.

“What? You’re going crazy? Come on, Taylor! You think I’m not suffering too!” Jackson yelled. “I…I…I…God, I can’t even talk! I’m hot, I’m tired, and every few minutes I have to remind myself where we are and where we’re going! I’m suffering too!” he finished.

Taylor stared, his jaw clenched so tightly he felt he might crush his teeth. “Shut up!” he screamed, “Just shut up! You’re bringing me down, man! You’ve been bringing me down this whole trip! Just shut up and drive so we can get through this!”

They only had a few miles to go. They drove silently under a gray sky, both wondering why they were there. The wind had let up just a little and was barely pushing against the sides of the car. The colossal raindrops gave way to a persistent drizzle. Surrounded on all sides by nothing, Kansas was bleak, providing civilization a blank canvas to paint.
“What’s wrong with you, Taylor? Why are you acting like this? You’ve been acting weird lately. What’s going on? Is it this girl of yours? You know I don’t know if I like her so much and I haven’t even met her. She’s got you all--”

“It’s Jenny! My girlfriend is Jenny!”

The Suburban glided for a few minutes before the screaming tires yelled in their ears and burnt rubber began to waft up from behind them, mixing with the cool rain. Taylor hit his head on the window in the sudden stop. Jackson looked at him for a second, his knuckles white on the steering wheel, before he jumped out of the door and he stepped out on the deserted highway. Taylor left his dry seat to stand in the rain. They met each other halfway. Jackson’s fist was the first to make contact, feeling Taylor’s nose crunch beneath his fingers. Taylor was quick with his blow, shattering the calm sheen of Jackson’s bottom lip. The rain continued to fall. They continued to fight.

With every blow they released a little more of the anger that had been brewing since Kansas began, since the accident, since their friendship started. With every blow they forgot a little more, until neither could remember why they were there at all. The horn of a passing truck snapped them awake, the spray of the tires like needles on their broken bodies. Exhausted, they stared at each other from opposite sides of the hood.

“I should have known,” said Jackson, spitting blood onto the black asphalt.

“Yeah,” said Taylor, his white shirt stained red from his dripping nose. Up ahead, a cheerful wooden sign stared at them. They had almost made it across Kansas. Welcome to Colorful Colorado: a deadline, a decision, an impending sense of reality in the form of large reflective words.

“Is that why you came out here with me? To feel a little less guilty?” Jackson asked, struggling to remember. Anything, something, he just wanted to remember.

“I came out here to find a reason to hate you,” Taylor said. “I’m tired of being your rock. I’m tired of treating you with kid gloves. I’m tired of hiding my own thoughts and feelings just to protect you. I’m just tired.”
“Yeah,” said Jackson, wiping his lip again. “Me too.”

They felt the hot sun peek through, shining on their wet and bloody shoulders. The rain disappeared as quickly as it came and the clouds ahead began to break apart.

“So what do we do now?” asked Jackson.

“I don’t know,” Taylor shrugged, heading towards the driver side of the car.

“I guess we turn around.”

“Yeah,” said Jackson. “All right.”

They softly closed the doors, dripping their pain onto the floor of the dry Suburban, neglecting their wounds. The U-turn was quick on the lonely highway. Emotions stretched, they stared straight ahead. Jackson tapped his hand on the door, struggling to remember anything but seeing only the bleak land of Kansas. Taylor sighed, remembering honeysuckle perfume and afternoon breakfasts. Silently they drove, and Kansas started all over again.
I’ve always taken it for granted, he thought as he stared at the fluorescent glare from his prone position. Always, always.

The lights buzzed quietly behind their cloudy, faceted faces, and one bulb was in the habit of flickering ever so slightly, interrupting the monotonous tone with which he tried to harmonise under his breath. He hummed aimlessly, searching for the correct pitch. He gave up after a while. Never had an ear for music anyway. The high-pitched drone and stammering silences sounded better, and he gazed towards the ceiling with unblinking eyes.

On the verge, he narrated silently, the poor bastard. In another month or so he’s going to be blinking like a strobe. Then he’s going to die up there. Or maybe they’d put him out of his misery. Merciful of them.

He inhaled slowly and exhaled, and listened to the slight change in the rhythmic beeping of the ECG machine at his bedside. He wondered what sort of an institution they would put him in, or if he’d be forced into some ridiculous physical therapy programme where he’d be followed about all day by a nurse. He wondered if they’d ever let him wear buttons and zippers again, or if they’d keep him in one of those ghastly hospital tunics that left his buttocks glaring out from between the ties. He wondered if he was going to spend the rest of his life sleeping in a bed with straps holding him fast. He wondered if they were going to be watching his every move from a camera mounted high in the corner of his white-walled room. He wondered if they would keep him heavily sedated, fill him with pills and syringes three times a day, medicate him until he felt nothing again, just like he had before he.

Outside the hospital, a low rumble of thunder sounded. The ECG suddenly spiked, its chirps keeping steady time with the beating of his stimulated heart. He closed his eyes and lay absolutely still.

The sand’s started to fall. . .I’m frightened.
Four months prior, Frederic Frankly had been quite different. Or rather, he was the same as everybody else, so similar that he was practically indistinguishable from the rest of the mediocre middle-class population of which he was a part. He was the living, breathing antonym of ‘special,’ quite possibly the most unextraordinary human being on the whole planet. He was the middle child of three siblings—his older sister Cheryl and his younger brother Paul—and little did he know that this familial hierarchy would project itself upon the course of his entire life.

Never wholly failing but never quite succeeding: this was Frederic’s inescapable destiny. If he were a colour, he would be the same shade used to paint the interior walls of government buildings. He was of medium height, medium build, and medium looks. Brownish-grey hair, brownish-grey eyes, a nondescript complexion. When he was eight years old, it was discovered that he had the eyesight of a geriatric mole, and to this day he wore the same style of glasses that made him look like Buddy Holly’s ugly twin sister. He escaped ridicule from his classmates by essentially refraining from speech for the next ten years. A straight-C student all his life, Frederic always avoided any necessary exertion in favour of ‘just barely scraping by.’ After a brief stint in community college, he took a desk job with the civil service which worked spectacularly for him since he didn’t know the first thing about politics and had no opinions about anything, including the government.

If a lack of personality was still technically considered a form of one, then it could be said that Frederic had a personality. Whether or not he made any use of it was debatable; the man was as sharp as a bowling ball and duller than a chartered accountant. He had no wit, no sense of humour, couldn’t dance, and he looked terrible in denim. He had absolutely nothing going for him. No natural talent, no hobbies, no unique abilities, nothing. He had nothing to live for and, ironically, was at the same time too stupid to realise it. He never contemplated the fact that he might be better off dead than alive, but suicide didn’t occur to him since he hadn’t
really used his brain before in his life. He was like a potted plant: required a little bit of sunlight, a little bit of food and water, and maybe some fresh air, but that was it. Everything beyond those staples was up to his own good fortune.

Yes, this was Frederic Frankly, a man who hadn’t really lived a single day despite his being on earth for the past 26 years. Looking on the bright side, however, he had great potential for being any number of things as he hadn’t really tried to do much of anything by this point in his life.

That potential had been waiting for a very long time, and on the 19th of March, it would at last be given the proper catalyst to set it into motion.

Frederic lived with his sister and brother-in-law in a small suburban home at 3542 Columbus Street in Waking, Hamfordton, just west of London. Cheryl was a nurse and worked evenings with her husband Graham who was a specialist of something-or-other at the same hospital. Frederic usually arrived home just as Cherie was leaving, meaning that their interaction with one another was kept to a bare minimum. They had both gotten on all right growing up since Frederic never had anything to argue about, so they remained on good terms.

That day—it was a Wednesday—he passed his sister on the front walk at 6.23 p.m. They waved their hellos and goodbyes to one another and continued on their separate ways. Frederic entered through the front door as he usually did and flipped the light switch in the hallway. Nothing happened. He paused halfway while removing his coat and tried the switch again. And again. More of nothing happened.

Dead fuse, he imagined, and went to find the torch they kept in the laundry cupboard.

The peculiar thing about the house at 3542 Columbus Street was that it was a part of a block of terraced houses that had been built some forty years ago and still utilised fuse boxes instead of reasonably safer circuit panels. The current residents had no idea exactly when the building had been erected, but judging from
the condition of the fuse boxes, they guessed about the same time as electricity had first been introduced into private homes.

There was a small attic upstairs where Graham kept spare fuses, and Frederic naturally found them in a box marked ‘fuses.’ Taking up one of the small glass cartridges, he made his way down out of the attic and into the laundry closet, where he wrestled with the beaten metal lid of the fuse box until it grudgingly opened with a squeal. Adjacent to the short bit of wall wherein the fuse box was placed was approximately 4 millimetres of space. The clothes-washer occupied the rest.

Frederic had to lean over the washer in order to reach the box, whose door opened from the nearest end, making a simple task like changing a fuse the most annoying, tedious experience of one’s entire day. However, seeing as how our lad Frederic was impervious to annoyances due to a lack of sentiment and etcetera, he championed onwards and eventually located the blown fuse that had taken the lights out of the main part of the house.

One noteworthy point to mention about fuse boxes is that, unlike circuit panels, there is the potential for a careless person to get electrocuted should one of his or her digits come into full contact with the disengaged plug of an open circuit. And Frederic, juggling a torch in the dark and attempting to locate the socket with his fingers, did exactly this.

In television and movies, there is always a familiar sound that seems to accompany the act of somebody being zapped; this is only a silly residual of cartoons because the only sound heard when one is being zapped is his own scream.

But Frederic didn’t scream—in fact, he had no idea what had happened to him at first. All he knew was that he was suddenly gripped by what felt like an irresistible magnetic force, rendering him motionless, subjected to a tidal wave of molten fire roaring into his body. He shook and trembled violently—but quietly—and allowed the 230 volts of electricity to course through every fibre of his fragile mortal frame.

It was during this moment, during the six whole seconds of the actual mishap, that Frederic Frankly, for the first time in his life, felt something. And then,
as if the gods of electricity had finally been appeased, he was thrown one metre backwards into the opposite wall where he crashed into a shelf of detergent and collapsed against a wicker hamper.

Faint wisps of smoke rose from his singed clothes, and he was quite certain that his eyeballs were steaming. Foamy spit bubbled at the corners of his mouth while trails of superheated snot leaked from his nose; he wiped his face on his sleeve and tried to remember how to think. His heart, fluttering like a pinwheel in a hurricane, continued to deliver adrenaline-rich blood to his brain and other vital organs that were suddenly jarred awake.

For a long while he remained slumped against the hamper, glasses hanging askew on his face, waiting for his pulse to slow and wondering if he were dead or not. Presently he opened his mouth, allowing a thin cloud of steam to issue from his throat as he said in a long sort of sigh, ‘Muhhaaaaa.’

After a moment he lifted his hands up and wiggled his fingers, noting his blackened nails with interest. He touched his hair—which was standing on end—and checked to make certain that he still had feeling in his arms and legs (he did). Once he had concluded this personal investigation, he did something that was even more fantastic than surviving a nearly-fatal shock of electricity: he began to laugh. He laughed, and he laughed, and he waved his roasted extremities about and laughed again. Then he picked himself off of the floor, trotted upstairs, and went straight to bed.

Frederic woke up late the next morning and had no time to dwell upon last evening’s experience—he hurried through his morning routine with reflexive efficiency and still managed to miss the bus by a good twenty-two minutes. He was fully prepared to sit on the bench and wait for the next bus when it suddenly occurred to him that he had legs. Legs capable of carrying a person from one place to another. Legs that yesterday could have very well been completely fried off. And since they were still there, and since they still had some use, Frederic decided that
he would like to make the best of them. So he walked to work that morning.

He was at least three hours late; however, not even a sound lecturing from his supervisor could drop an anchor through the bottom of Frederic’s dinghy of unusual liveliness.

He whistled tunelessly for most of the day. His co-workers didn’t know he could whistle, and neither did Frederic. It was obnoxious and disconcerting. And then Frederic put cream in his tea at break. He never took cream with his tea. In fact, sometimes all he had at break was a cup of hot water poured over yesterday’s teabag. This bizarre behaviour was noticed by everyone in the department, but Frederic himself seemed blissfully unaware.

He walked home that evening, his mind strangely alert and talkative. He noticed things en route that he hadn’t noticed before, little things. Like the faces of the people he encountered, the noise of the busy street, and the intense green hue of Mrs Adderback’s hedgerow. Then there was the way the front gate chirped when he opened it, and he said to his sister as she passed on the front walk, “Oi, Cherie! What’s new?”

Cheryl halted dead in her tracks and stared back at her brother who had given his customary wave in closing and was now entering the house. She stood puzzled for another moment before heading towards the bus stop.

Graham must have repaired the blown fuse sometime during the night because the lights were working again. Alone in the house, Frederic shucked off his shoes and had leftovers for dinner. Then he restlessly wandered the house until eight o’clock, volleying back and forth between the television and the laundry room where he’d stand in front of the washer and stare at the fuse panel without blinking.

He fell asleep on the sofa that night watching the BBC news. He was still wearing his tie.

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It was fortunate to some that this inexplicable strangeness Frederic Frankly
was displaying had begun to fade as the month drew on. He slipped back into his old ways again: taking the bus every morning and evening, hot cups of water at break, no whistling, no unpredictable behaviour. He was back to his normal, bland, dull, boring, colourless, mindless self.

But that all changed when he decided to have toast for breakfast one morning.

Frederic was never a bright lad, and he was honestly too stupid to know better than to poke about the toaster slot with a butter knife in an attempt to extricate a crispy slice of bread. He was—promptly and appropriately—electrified.

White-hot fire and blue pixie sparkles burst through his nervous system like every cannon of the Royal Fleet combined with all the fireworks on earth going off at the same time. It was a frame-shaking, teeth-chattering nine seconds of spastic convulsions, ended only by Frederic’s inability to keep a firm grasp on the butter knife. He eventually landed on the kitchen floor, looking alive if slightly burnt about the edges.

*I should really be more careful*, he realised after his senses had returned, *or else next time I could be toast.*

He smiled. Then he chuckled. And then he spent the next five minutes rolling about on the floor, holding his sides as if to keep them from bursting apart with laughter. At last he composed himself enough to get on his feet, put some new bread in the toaster, have tea with cream and sugar, and walk to work whistling.

I’m sure that by now you have already managed to draw conclusions about this little story, and it seems as if it would have a happy ending so long as Frederic Frankly was able to light himself up like a Christmas tree every month or so. But it wasn’t that easy, you see, to ‘accidentally’ electrify oneself in such a way that nobody would take notice, because sooner or later the blackened nails and frazzled hair are going to alert people that something dreadfully awful is happening at home.
Frederic’s co-workers thought he had gotten addicted to speed or one of those palpitation-inducing energy drinks that tasted like battery acid. The formerly-dour civil servant was unusually bright and animated, joking and chatting with people during break and acting as if he honestly enjoyed his job (which was strictly forbidden and reinforced by a ‘must be this depressed to work here’ stipulation in the code book). He even wore a bright yellow tie one day. Yellow. It was practically a declaration of corporate mutiny. Had anyone in the office actually cared about Frederic in the first place, they’d have arranged some sort of intervention. He needed a good re-programming, perhaps even a lobotomy, but, as it was, the civil service minions went about their business as usual and tried to ignore the radical amongst them.

About the time that the effects of the Paperclip-in-the-Wall-Socket incident were beginning to wear off, it finally dawned on Frederic—who now referred to himself as simply ‘Fred’—that perhaps he ought to seek help concerning his high-voltage addiction before it killed him. He sat in on a Cocaine Addicts Anonymous meeting one evening and decided two things after the first 10 minutes: Firstly, that this was not the appropriate programme in which he should be investing his time, and secondly, he would never be able to look at flour again without conjuring up the image of a fat, grease-stained lorry-driver named Herbert whose teeth resembled mangled jigsaw puzzle pieces. Needless to say, Fred didn’t return for the next meeting.

He caught Graham one evening after work and asked if they still offered electroshock treatment to reasonably insane persons, to which Graham replied in his scholarly tone, “It’s called electroconvulsive therapy these days, Frederic, though most doctors are reluctant to prescribe such an extreme procedure to even physically healthy individuals.”

“How mad do you have to be to qualify for shock therapy?” asked Fred. Graham thought a moment before replying. “Paranoid Hypomanic Suicidal
Schizophrenic with Depressed Psychopathic Tendencies, I believe. But they don’t experiment with electricity on the human body anymore, Frederic, not since the 19th century.”

Well, so much for the idea of going mad. Fred was going to have to come up with alternative means of getting his fix, because going back to The Way It Was Before was simply not an option. He had finally begun to see how miserable he had been, how much of his life he had wasted doing nothing. He hadn’t accomplished anything at all, and the clock was ticking. He wouldn’t be here forever, he realised. He had to live as if he would die tomorrow, or die the next time he attempted to shock some feeling into his body.

He had rented Frankenstein from the video store one night, the old one with Boris Karloff as the staggering, billboard-foreheaded monster who was sewn together by a madman and brought to life by a bolt of lightning. Fred sat cross-legged on the floor of the living room like a child, neck craned and staring with awe, as if it was the first time he had ever seen a motion picture. And when the windmill went up in black-and-white flames, there was a shimmer behind Fred’s thickly-framed glasses.

Two weeks later, he’d finally had all he could take. The withdrawal he was experiencing was so terrible that it became a grueling effort just to ooze out of bed in the morning. Fred often found himself wishing he had never tried to change the fuse on the 19th of March, but what was done was done, and there was no way to change the past.

So after returning from work that evening, Fred went straight into the attic and found the answerphone that Mum and Dad had given Cherie for Christmas in 1991. It had a very long cord. He took it into the lav, plugged it into the wall, turned on the shower, and stepped under the stream with the answerphone clutched tightly to his chest.

It took a few seconds for the water to seep into the electrical components,
but the wait was well-worth the awesome shock that followed. The pain, the power, the heaven, the hell; it was all there—had been there the entire time—right inside him. Yet only when he brought himself to the brink of death did he feel truly alive. Only when he was aware of what he could lose did the monochromatic world around him burst into colour, like Dorothy taking her first steps into Oz. And the electricity. . . it was the tornado that ripped Fred from Kansas and set him in the middle of these living colours.

In the end, however, it had been nothing but a dream. A beautiful, miserable dream. If only he could find his way to Oz without the tornado. If only he could bring the Ruby Slippers back to Kansas, then everything would be OK again. Wicked Witches and their Flying Monkeys wouldn’t be able to harm him, and Toto would live forever—

Fred was suddenly jarred awake by Cheryl’s panicked voice calling his name, and he found himself lying in the bath, still hugging the charred remains of the answerphone. His sister, in her sterile-white uniform, leaned over and turned off the shower, and was attempting to drag him from the tub. She was shouting at him, but Fred couldn’t understand what she was saying. He thought she was upset about his destruction of the answerphone and offered up an excuse in the form of “I didn’t want to ruin your hairdryer, Cher,” and she burst into tears.

Fred was scheduled to speak with a therapist the next week.

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It was June. Things were a little better since the Death of the Answerphone, though Cheryl remained constantly worried, and Graham was clinically concerned that Fred was suffering from post-electric-shock trauma. The sessions with the therapist were going well, although the psychiatrist Fred was seeing was unable to reach any conclusions about her patient’s obsession with shocking himself other than he was depressed and possibly suicidal. Fred vehemently denied any attempt to take his own life, quoting that he was ‘just trying to make the world a brighter place.’ That one earned him a Zoloft prescription.
Fred’s co-workers found out about his hobby of showering with appliances and took every opportunity to make sure that he knew they knew by whispering and sending sidelong glances and shaking their heads. That was the last thing he wanted—people thinking him mad for trying to make the best of his life. But Fred didn’t resent his co-workers; it was because of them that he knew how anger and humiliation felt. They were the Apple Trees, and the Lions and Tigers and Bears. They were a part of Oz, the bad as well as the good. Fred could never hold them accountable for something they couldn’t help, although he certainly felt like tossing a pail of water on his supervisor from time to time just to see if she’d actually melt into a foul green fondue.

*****

The bright colours were starting to fade again, slowly de-saturating as time passed. Fred was watched closely by Cheryl who lived in fear of coming home to find her brother in a blackened, crispy state of rigour mortis. She had Graham put a lock on the fuse box, and electrical appliances were regularly moved about so that Fred never knew where they were.

Fred tried to resist the urges to shock himself, tried to convince himself that the medication was working, but as the world began to turn black and white again, he grew more and more desperate. He had dozens upon dozens of 9-volt batteries scattered on the floor of his room. He used them like vitamins, sticking his tongue on the terminal to receive a meagre shock that only made him crave the awesome amperage of an open AC circuit. Once or twice, he seriously considered buying a car battery and some jumper cables, but if that thing ever cracked open it would be the end of the carpet (and also the end of his life because Cherie would kill him without remorse).

With his energy draining and his office life reduced to an emotional tug-of-war, Fred decided to take a weekend holiday to Dover. He had been making good progress in his therapy and had everyone convinced that he was on the road to recovery, and Cheryl thought the clean air would do him some good. So Fred
rented a small car from the travel depot and was on his way to the White Cliffs.

Once he had cleared the congested city streets of London and begun to make his way through the more rural areas, something began to nag at the back of Fred’s mind like an obnoxious song whose lyrics you can’t seem to figure. He knew he was missing something but couldn’t for the life of himself reckon what it was.

He stopped at a petrol station shortly before noon. The sky was grey and overcast, thick with a cover of clouds. Fred was exiting the store after buying a soda and some crisps when he looked up and saw it. His mouth fell open.

That was what had been needling his brain. Power lines led out of the city, crisscrossing over the roads and growing bigger, thicker, more numerous. Bunches of wires clumped together like black spaghetti noodles, carrying the vital electric blood to other towns and cities. But where there were capillaries; there were veins. Where there were veins, there were arteries. And where there were arteries, there was a heart. Somewhere. Beating.

Fred swallowed dryly and stepped forward, meek before the giant that dwarfed him. Dozens of metres above, the grey pylon loomed, silent and purposeful. Behind it was another, and another, and another, and another, all strung together by bands of massive cables. They cut a wide swath through the surrounding wooded area, disappeared as the land dipped and then arose—much smaller—into view at the crests of the hills. They went on, it seemed, to the end of the world.

Fred tried to control himself, but his heart was hammering too fiercely. He had found one of the arteries, a path of pylons that led to the Emerald City, just like the Yellow Brick Road. Oz was in Kansas all along, Dottie, he thought to himself.

He had to find it. He had to feel it. No one could stop him; not Cherie; not Graham; not the civil service; not the therapist; not the pills. He was free, and he had to know. He had to know.

It was amazing, really. Fred had never been quite fond of heights, but as he climbed the steel pylon and cast a glance below, he wasn’t the slightest bit queasy. It was very peaceful up here with a steady breeze blowing. Height always puts things in a different perspective, he supposed, and continued upwards with the speed and agility of a monkey that had just escaped the organ grinder.
When he finally reached the first yarn of wires, he lifted the tyre iron he’d taken from the car and gave them a jolly hack with the sharp end. They gave only a little, so he struck harder. Bloody safety precautions. Didn’t they know anything at all about typical occupational hazards? Who were they trying to protect from electrocution anyway, the birds? This lot of nonsense could—

And then the universe exploded. Everything in it, down to the smallest atom, erupted like a million billion suns rushing outwards in a supernova-tsunami of stars and planets and glittering asteroids. Dark became light became life, and the microscopic entity who called himself Frederic Frankly sailed down into the spinning arms of a sparkling green galaxy.

And he knew what life was.

The petrol station clerk had told the police everything once Fred’s unconscious body had been carted off in an ambulance. A small group of people had gathered on the other side of the street, watching with fascination as the electric company went about repairing the cable that had taken the power out for the entire town. The crowd remarked how miraculous it was that the young man had survived both the shock and the 20-metre fall to the ground with only a cracked arm and a few bruised ribs. What on earth could have possessed a person to do such a mad, mad thing?

It made the headlines of three papers the following day. Cheryl brought Fred several copies and showed him the photos when he came out of his coma a week later. The doctors wanted to monitor him for several days just to be certain that he wasn’t at risk for suffering a stroke or possible heart failure. Fred’s physical exam had revealed no internal injuries, though his extremities were nicely singed and his left eardrum had blown like a flat tyre. The doctors said it would heal itself within a few weeks, like most of his injuries. However, it was the patient’s mental health they were truly concerned about. Oz only knows what they had planned for him.

Fred lay in his bed and stared at the ceiling. He was the only person in the
room, and he had his own tele, but he didn’t feel like watching it. Didn’t want to risk seeing stories about the ‘deranged lunatic who zapped himself on a pylon’ in the news. It was bad enough that most of London already knew his name. He’d never be able to go back to the civil service. Maybe he could sign autographs for a while, advertise himself as the Human Lightning Rod. Thunder outside his window gave Fred bad ideas. How would they ever let him go back?

_Well, thought Fred sarcastically, they certainly won’t be giving me electric shock therapy._

What if he told them the truth? No, he’d tried that with the therapist, and all it had gotten him was a 12-month prescription. What else could he do? Lie? Fred wasn’t a liar. They’d never buy his ‘just getting a good look at the scenery’ excuse. There was no easy way out of the Wicked Witch’s castle, was there, Dorothy? The hourglass was leaking sand, and the evil guards patrolled the halls. What to do, what to do!

But wait, that sound outside—was it the Wizard in his hot air balloon? Yes, it was the Wizard!

“Come, my dear!” he cried, beckoning hastily. “Hurry, before it’s too late!”

Electrodes popped off, and the ECG turned into a dial tone. The window was wedged open, a way out of the cursed room—the Witch’s power would not get him out there. It was the only way. Dorothy stepped out onto the ledge, teetering unsteadily as she stared at the dark cliffs below.

“Don’t look down, child!” warned the Wizard, extending his arm. “Grab my hand!”

“It’s too far!” she said.

“Then you must jump!”

“I can’t!”

“You must, my dear! Time has almost run out!”

Dorothy swallowed her fear and pressed her back against the wall, readying her legs for the spring. She was suddenly grabbed by the ankles and pulled back through the window by many pairs of arms just as the Wizard let out a deafening
crack and disappeared into a jagged line of blinding light.

The Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion helped Dorothy back inside the room. A few blinks later, and the faces of Graham, Cheryl, and a particularly large nurse came into view.

“You’re all here,” Fred said with a smile. “You all came to save me.”

Cheryl was in tears, trembling as she held her brother. “Why, Freddy? Why?” she wept.

“There was no way out,” he answered distantly, still staring at the window. “I thought I was going to die in here. But then...you all...”

“He’s delirious,” said the nurse sharply. “He needs to be sedate—”

“He needs to go home,” Cheryl interrupted harshly, cradling Fred in her arms. “You’re treating him as if he’s a rat to be experimented with. You’re all making him mad by keeping him here! Graham, help me get him to his feet. We’re taking him home. Freddy, do you hear that? You’re going home now. We’re going to take care of you and everything is going to be fine.”

“I know,” said Fred gently, “but I really don’t need to be helped any longer. It’s all here and...and I love you all.”

Cheryl crushed her brother in a hug, and Graham put his arms around his wife. Here was a colour that Oz had never had, one that had always been missing, one that never faded—and it was Ruby Red.

Three clicks to get home, and the power had been there all along. The Yellow Brick Road would always be there, but he had no reason to walk the path again. He knew now. It didn’t lead to any heart; the only heart was in the place he had tried to leave behind.

There is no place like home.
"I met him only once
It was like a dream...I think it was"

From “The Transformation of Willy Walsh” by Bianca Bruno
What a wondrous one
    That Willy Sue Walsh
        Who wed the Pancake Princess
I met him only once
It was like a dream…I think it was

Willy Sue Walsh
    A professional gun-slinging cabbage planter
        Who complained only once and apologized shortly after
He was a Nun’s only son
I never saw him that way

    It was that same year…

The Pancake Princess’s pauper prisoner
   Played prey in Willy’s sick game
       A chase and fire of human flesh
I never told anyone

I should have told someone
    The wildness of his stare
        The intensity of his pupils
            The lunatic laugh that haunts my front porch
I was a lamb before him
I shut the door
    Willy Sue Walsh went from dulcet to demon
        He drank blood before every new moon
            Atop his roof I could hear his moan
I lived next door
And I never opened the door
Ron Deaux, with mediocre poet
Would vex us all with stilted verse
From dusk to dawn regale same drunks he would
Til food and drink would seem perverse.

To save his ego, one and all pretend’d
His rhymes were suave, save Barman Bill,
Who clamped to ears his bleached, raw hands, then screeched
To Ron, “We’re green about the gills!”

Which stopped poor Ron betwixt a couplet’s pause,
Who said so soft from pouting lips,
“No one could give a wit to hear me rhyme
Flower and power. I’m so verklempt!”

From roof to roof poor Ron’s sad voice did cry
“For lack of talent I could die!”
He raised a fist of rage against the sky,
“No verse of worth, so now I’ll die.”

And took a horde of sleeping pills, his eyes
Aglint, “that’s just the trick,”
But glad to say the moral plan did fail,
The pills were homeopathic.

Chagrined and brimm’d despond, he wandered on
As if no chain could hold him thus,
And stepped into the street, as if possessed,
To decorate a metro bus.
But lo! A hand so quick and lithe did meet
The nape of Ron’s own outstretched neck,
In embrace he saw his savior’s face,
With grace, beauty and mind firm set.

Maiden so fair! “Why save my haggard hide?”
Our man lament’d piteously.
“Jeanne Doe’s my name, I write low doggerel,
And hold it high courageously!”

She said and smiled, her eyes like diamonds glow.
So with his breast a-brimmed with love,
Went hand on hand with her toward the sun.
The two of them lived, hearts a-buzz.

And lived to be famed far and wide,
For the world’s worst poetry.
Archeology: The Mother Explains to a Disinterested Party the Condition of Her Daughter

Mother calls to the dust and rock of god
Like those people who sift mother Earth
They collect tiny brittle potsherds
Gently scrub millennia from bones
With cheap dime store toothbrushes
Mother wrings the tears that illuminate
Brings a tallow candle glow to hospital halls
She scours infinite wrecked universes
Seismically cracked like suture scars
Daughter’s body etched like shaven ice
Mother bears the words like no-one else
They dare not breathe them in her ear
For the daughter’s life is nobody’s business
So they sail alone the cold seas of time
The artist needn’t lament the loss of love.
“Fuel for the fire,” he says.
A sadistic thing to say?
How do you think it feels?

Relationships fail,
Hearts are broken again.
“I’ll use it,” he says;
Sorrow is the best studio.
Broken hearts can pour words and colors
Onto clean canvases and pure pages.
Wordless bliss is writer’s block.

You never have time to work
“Another day,” you say;
Tomorrow’s winter becomes
Yesterday’s summer;
You’d rather work on your tan.

Then on a warm day
She pushes you away
And the blank page is so inviting.
Jump in and forget
That it hurts to remember;
The canvas doesn’t hold a grudge
Pages will always take you back.
Don’t cry baby, mommy doesn’t care
Wails bounce off the hollow walls in vain
She doesn’t really know you’re there.

Tight dress stretching until it tears
With sweaty hands, lonely men pay
Don’t cry baby, mommy doesn’t care.

Living in a moldy room too small to share
Littered with empty bottles of forgotten pain
She doesn’t really know you’re there.

Putrid smoke taints the sour air
She’s clawing the carpet for fallen grains
Don’t cry baby, mommy doesn’t care.

Hungry screams she doesn’t hear
A bullet is an easy escape
She doesn’t really know you’re there.

An empty room drowns the one with no name
A lonely mother slips slowly away
Don’t cry baby, mommy doesn’t care
She doesn’t really know you’re there.
It’s just chaos in the end
Without reason to apply.
Won’t you accept it, dear friend?

Fear no judgment for your sin.
You’re too old to deny
It’s just chaos in the end.

No reward awaits you when
You step through those gates on high.
Won’t you accept it dear friend?

Consequence won’t do me in.
This life here is what I pride.
After all, it’s just chaos in the end.

Boundaries will wear you thin.
You’ll not live by the time you die!
Won’t you accept it dear friend?

Choice is yours. I only lend
This belief for you to try:
It’s just chaos in the end.
Won’t you accept it, dear friend?
Moonlit shadows entangle me.
I know what I want--
    a sip of the moonshine
You are heady and intoxicating.
One sip is all it takes.
The moonshine casts dark and uneven shadows.
You are even more beautiful
    as we drown in the silver light.
Embrace me, cover me with your hands.

I retreat.
Spinning, moonshine.
The dance confuses me,
    steps uneven.
I’m in too deep.
Stay here, silver moonshine,
    be patient.
I’ll be back for more
When I’m accustomed to the buzz
    and I’ll make myself fully yours.
A doubting dove
coos a cadence
amidst a choir of siblings.
   His melody: D minor,
the f is natural.
his ability in air, unacknowledged.

The dove,
A fledging frightened of flying
diminished by fear
falls out of the nest.
Coo
coo
coo
His sound rings through the sky,
the pitch is sharp
The doubting dove’s father
hears his helpless son
Cooing
Coo coo
Coo coo

His father does not answer
The dove’s faith
in his father
falls flat.
coo coo

only one option:
The dove
Flaps his wings
And Flies, Forgetting his Fear
Denouncing the doubt
that no longer daunts him.

The choir of siblings
sing for their brother.
The dove answers them
Time for
a new journey:
Modulation
Coo coo: his Confidence Crescendos.
the F is now sharp

D Major
She got there before the rest
Before the day grew long
She beat the wave before the crest
And woke before the rooster’s song

It was before the day grew long
And all the light began to age
She woke before the rooster’s song
And flew before she left the cage

But when all the light began to age
She had already started growing old
She tried to fly before she left the cage
And her story was over before it was ever told
I watched you change, slowly though,
till your skin turned shades yellow
    and you picked apart the bed sheets.

As your muscles froze and tensed, and
your limbs thrashed about--
    still you picked apart the bed sheets.

I watched you smile, and saw you cry.
I watched you when you were losing
and refused to give up the fight.

I watched you suffer, watched you sleep,
and I saw you drift away.

A sail without an owner, you were gone
but still I stayed.

And as the months wore slowly on
I saw the change inside.
I saw your anger turn to fear,
and I watched you question why.

I watched your eyes go white and your
hand went limp as
you let out a sigh.

I watched them change the bed sheets,
    I never saw you die.
A brilliant flame
Temporarily blinding me before
Delivering me to ecstasy
Light wisps frolic around my head as
Curling waves crash into oblivion
Each breath in draws out the poison
Creeping through every pore
Until all that is exhaled is shadows
My brain swims with the lack of worries
My fingertips buzz in the absence of problems
I watch my stress dissolve into
Swirling arms that caress my lips, then disappear
My pain dances in front of my face
Waltzes and tangos and carefree foxtrots
And then nothing
Ten minutes from the world is all I need
This is more than an addiction
The embers die out
The smoke stops flowing
But my head still swims on the return trip
SELECTED WORKS
by Art Students
Gainesville State College
2007-2008

Wesley Stabler, featured cover artist
Triptych-Panel 2: Chaos
Untitled
Acrylic on Canvas
LEAH HAYDEN, 2007
Untitled
Photograph
CARLOS GOMEZ, 2007
Equus Caballus: Mind, Might and Strength
Pencil Drawing
CARLA McGUIINNESS, 2007
E, C, K and F!
Acrylic on Canvas
CHRISTINE BEAMAN, 2007
Untitled
Mixed Media
HEATHER BEARDEN, 2007
Blueberry-Frog Hybrid
Digital Output
Tiffany Forrester, 2007
Untitled
Pencil Drawing
JOHN ANDERSON, 2007
Untitled
Pencil Drawing
ERIK MIGUEL, 2007
Faeries
Digital Output
LAUREN CARTER, 2007
Brunch With Stacey
Drawing
THALITHA LYNCH, 2007
Maybe you’re just my guilt or something. My shadows....

From “Ghosts” by Justin Mayhew
Characters:

MARTI: A middle-aged woman of average height, weight and appearance. She is wearing a light colored blouse and slacks.

DANNY: A teenaged boy who is fresh-faced and cheerful. He is wearing a flannel shirt, jeans with the cuffs rolled crisply over canvas high-top sneakers, and he carries a knapsack with a towel and some snacks inside it.

MOSER: A man of about 40. He is wearing a stained undershirt, baggy dungarees cinched at his waist with a belt, and heavy boots. He has wiry, thin muscles and an unkempt mop of hair on his head.

Scene:

Marti is sleeping in a darkened airline chair upstage and toward stage left. Moser is likewise sleeping in a darkened sofa upstage and stage right. Stage left is the banks of the mighty Mississippi with a tree hugging the edge. Its limbs are downy with spring buds. Only it and the river are well lighted. After a couple of beats, Danny ambles onstage right. He is the only person lighted now.

DANNY: Wow! What a fantastic morning! (He stretches.) Perfect for a swim! (DANNY mimics his mother.) Now, Danny, don’t you be swimmin’ in that river! You got chores to do. (Mock answering.) Sure thing, Ma.

As DANNY removes his knapsack and starts to strip to his trunks, MARTI stirs restlessly in her sleep.
DANNY: Pshaw! Ain’t no way I’m gonna pass up a swim on a day like this! *(Mimicking his mother again.)* But that Mississippi River is too dangerous! Why not swim at the city pool with your friends? *(DANNY becoming distant and speaking quietly.)* Because Gary Cooper wouldn’t be afraid of an old river. Errol Flynn would skim right over to the other side. Because John Wayne would ride his horse slap out to the middle and fight redskins... Nope, I ain’t no sissy. I swum this river hundreds of times. I ain’t scared *(He says, with more force than he intended.)*.

*While DANNY is speaking, MARTI rouses and moves to the edge of light, standing and staring timidly, as if she has seen a ghost.*

MARTI: *(Unsteadily.)* Danny…?
DANNY: *(Jumping as he faces MARTI.)* Who? What?
MARTI: Is that you, Danny?
DANNY: *(Startled.)* Ma? How’d you know…? *(Confused, now.)* Hey, you’re not Ma, who are you?
MARTI: Danny, it’s me. *(DANNY is still confused.)* It’s Marti, your baby sister.
DANNY: *(Irritated.)* OK, I see. You wanna go back up the hill, go into the Pharmacy, and tell Mr. Grover that; and I bet he’ll get you a ride in a fancy white Cadillac to Rockville where the men in white coats will take real good care of you.
MARTI: *(Stepping forward as DANNY steps back.)* Look at me, Danny, you know it’s me!
DANNY: Unh uh, no way! My sister is ten years old!
MARTI: I don’t understand what’s going on, but try to believe me.
DANNY: Where’s Rod Sterling? You’re taping an episode of “The Twilight Zone,” right?

*At the mention of “Twilight Zone,” MOSER rolls fitfully on his couch. Immediately after, a green light flashes and strobes over him, accompanied by a strange whirring sound. This causes MOSER to awaken violently,*
and clamber over the back of his couch. As fast as it had come, the light and its sound vanish. As soon as it has gone, MOSER leaps from behind the couch, clutching an ancient double-barreled shotgun. He trips and collapses to the stage, accidentally discharging the shotgun into the air with a tremendous boom! DANNY has fled stage left, to the tree, while MARTI retreats toward her airline chair.

MOSER: (Fiercely.) Cattle mutilators!
DANNY and MARTI (Together.): Holy jackalopes!

The lights dim for a moment. Some time has passed.

DANNY: So, you’re my sis?
MARTI: I am (From her airline chair.)
MOSER: (Pacing downstage of his couch.) I knew they’d be back!
DANNY: I’m your brother?
MARTI: You are.
MOSER: Well, they ain’t gonna probe this carcass any more!
DANNY: You sure you ain’t my aunt or something?
MARTI: (Resting her hand on her chin.) I’m not.
MOSER: I told those bastards! I warned `em! Well, let them get an ass full of alien hardware, and see how they like it!
DANNY: OK, so if you really are Marti, prove it.
MARTI: Let’s see... Oh, yes... Remember when you were fourteen and I was eight...?
MOSER: (Interrupting.) I’m mad as hell, and I ain’t gonna take it no more!
MARTI and DANNY (Together.): Hush!

MOSER jumps and keeps pacing, but is quiet for a moment, a sullen look on his face.

MARTI: So, I was eight. We were in the den, and you were introducing me to Carl
Perkins and Fats Domino. Dad came home early, and had one of those huge console TVs.…

MOSER: Invaders!
MARTI: First time we saw any such thing.
DANNY: (Slowly.) Yeah….
MOSER: Green-blooded!
MARTI: Took him all afternoon to rig up an antenna on the roof. He was so proud, he ate dinner right in front of it! Ma was furious!
DANNY: Right!
MOSER: Radioactive bastards!
MARTI: And that very night, lightning struck it and whole thing blew up in the den!
DANNY: Yeah! We were cleaning up glass and fake wood for months!
MOSER: Inseminating our women!
DANNY: What’s with the square? (Hooking a thumb at MOSER.)

The lights dim. Some more time has passed. The light’s come back up. MARTI is reclining in her airline chair. DANNY is leaning against the tree. MOSER is sitting cross-legged, near center stage, the shotgun laid before him.

MOSER: Oh, Gracie, I wish you were here.
DANNY: Who’s Gracie?
MARTI: Probably his long-suffering wife.
MOSER: (Wry look on his face.) Long-suffering ex-wife.

MARTI and DANNY exchange looks.

MOSER: She took the nightmares, the nights I woke up sweatin’ and screaming for dead boys I saw blowed up in Korea. She took the boozin’, all that drinkin’ to burn out the images of the bodies frozen into the mountainsides, old gook bodies washin’ down rivers. (Rectus grin.) But she couldn’t take the
Martians, nope. That was too crazy for her. Being poked and prodded like a piece of meat, no, she couldn’t take that.

DANNY: Don’t blame her.
MARTI: Danny!
DANNY: Cheese and rice! This is corny!

MOSER: (Standing.) Fine. Insult me! I don’t know wat’s goin’ on, but there ain’t no reason I gotta take this. I’m gonna go see if I can get outta here (Waves stage right, rests the shotgun on his shoulder, and exits stage right.)

*MARTI and DANNY watch him go. Just after MOSER goes, a warbling noise surrounds the stage, as mysterious strobing lights flash for a moment.*

DANNY: Wow. Weird.
MARTI: (Looking anxiously around.) Danny, how old are you?...Sixteen?
DANNY: Yup.
MARTI: (Tries to say something, but her face goes white, as she looks heavenward, sighing.)
DANNY: You’re white as a sheet. Ya look like ya seen a ghost.
MARTI: (Smiles sadly, then composes herself.) Do you know, Ma will be–uh, well sent away?
DANNY: (Incredulous.) Nuh uh. Whaddya mean by that.
MARTI: Rockville, right? (DANNY nods.) So, she got to the point she wouldn’t leave her room. I wouldn’t see her for days at a time. Dad started cooking (Another sad smile.) That was horrifying, let me tell you. One time he made us nothing but potatoes–mashed potatoes, fried potatoes, boiled potatoes…for dinner.
DANNY: (Looking confused again.) I don’t remember any of this. Ma ain’t never been sick a day in her life.
MARTI: Maybe she saved it up. Besides, this is difficult–for you, it hasn't happened, won't happen. Unless….
DANNY: Aww, don't be silly. Ma's OK. (He looks out at the river.) Look at it, everything is fine. Besides, it's getting late, and I am ready for a good
swim. *He edges toward the river, down to his swimming trunks.*

MARTI: Wait! *(Realizing she is too loud, as DANNY whirls on her.)* I need to finish.

DANNY: *(Shrugging reluctantly.)* OK, OK, but get on with it.

MARTI: Danny-I-uh, Ma was getting worse. One day, she didn’t come out at all, and Dad was getting so worried, he went in and checked on her. She had taken a whole bottle of some kind of pills, and Dad about had a heart attack.

DANNY: *(Still drawn to the river.)* Right...uh huh–

MARTI: That's when she went to Rockville.

DANNY: *(Surprised.)* No!

MARTI: Yes. They took her away. We had more boiled potatoes. They told us it was “exhaustion.” I think they beat her up in there someway. They knew she lost something, something she couldn’t have back. Eventually she came back, because they knew there was something else that could be taken from her.

DANNY: What are you talking about?

MARTI: They scared her so bad. She did come back, but she was broken, almost gone. ‘Til the day I left, she was just one more ghost in our house, Danny.

DANNY: *(Once again, lost in reverie for the river.)* You know, Marti, those barges that go lazy up and down the river? The tugs that push em, they’re small, but–ornery. They push so hard, they spin them ‘pellers so in the muddy water, it makes a foamy hill behind ‘em sometimes. I saw egrets sucked right into ‘em, saw the bits of fish after they went by, even shoes, and a fender from an old model T that got pulled right out of the mud way down there.

MARTI: Danny. What happened ... you know why I’m here, don't you? You don't have–

DANNY: Sure, I ain't dumb. I reckon I know what you're gonna say, but it don't make no difference. I'm ready, I'm gonna go swimmin'!

MARTI: *(Stalks over to her brother, ready to physically drag him from the edge of the river.)* Jesus. It makes all the difference! I got a chance to save us!
As MARTI is haranguing her brother, a sudden burst of high pitched noise and flashing light breaks out over stage right. As the sound and light disappear, MOSER half staggers, half leaps, from upstage center-right, with his shotgun clutched by the barrel in his white-knuckled hands, held as a bludgeon to fend off would-be attackers.

MOSER: The bastards ain’t takin’ my cattle!

MARTI and DANNY stare coldly in his direction.

MOSER: What? I break in on a family moment?

Again, the lights dim, and more time has passed.

MOSER: I just couldn’t figure it. I was sure that those Martian, alien invaders were outside. I went out. Out there. (Gesturing stage right.) But I didn’t see no cows. I didn’t smell the mesquite like ya usually do on hot nights, like a old spice cabinet. No desert, in fact ....

DANNY: What’s he goin’ on about? (MARTI doesn’t answer.) Fine. (Heading for the river once more.)

MOSER: Like a dark, smooth plain....

MARTI: Danny, maybe I’m dreaming all this.....

MOSER: Maybe I’m dreaming this!

MARTI: And maybe you are; or maybe Danny is!

DANNY: That would be neat!

MOSER: Well, whoever is dreaming this, I did figure somethin’ out.

DANNY: OK....

MARTI: Go on ....

MOSER: Well, I got to thinkin’ about all those years I was so damn scared of aliens. I blacked out early on, years ago and didn’t come home for three days.
MARTI: Gracie must’ve been worried.
MOSER: Yeah, well at first she was scared, then she got mad. Thought I was on the sauce again.
DANNY: Like old man Clementine.... *(MARTI waggles a finger at him.*)
MOSER: Wasn’t long ‘til I had some more episodes. I met some folks who told me I was being kidnapped by aliens. At first I didn’t believe ‘em. But I got more visits. I was up in a flying saucer−twice. I was sure that they were out to hurt me. I guess I went a little crazy. Grace left me, I stopped goin’ out. I started thinkin’ like some of those other fruitcakes that the Martians were gonna take my sperm, or somethin’. I even stayed up nights watching for cattle-rustlers from space. *(He waves the shotgun toward the sky, then retreats to his couch, and gently places the gun on the cushion.)*

*MARTI and DANNY are paying rapt attention now, as if MOSER is telling them a story around a campfire.*

MOSER: *(Chuckling to himself.)* Any hoo...I marched out there, mad at the Martians. Mad at the two of you...and still, God help me, mad at Gracie. But I had time to think, I guess. And I realized that the aliens ain’t hurt me for a long time, if they ever did, I dunno...I was probably seein’ pink elephants the first time I was abducted.... *(He cocks his head to the side, as if listening.)*
DANNY: Go on, mister!
MOSER: Ya know, I met Grace in France. After I left Korea for good, I had a stop in Ramstein. Took my back pay and bought an old motor cycle. Then just wandered west. On to France, on to Paris. Like magic, there she was. Beautiful Grace. You know what she said to me?

*DANNY shakes his head.*

MOSER: *(Look on his face.)* Le vous donnerai tout l’amour du Monde.... that means *(Covers his eyes with his hand.).... I will give you all the love in
the world....

From off stage comes a low, brassy sound, accompanied by the strobing lights, and one, strong, white light illuminates MOSER brightly and crisply for a moment. Then the lights and sounds are gone.

MARTI: Maybe you should talk to somebody? Let someone know how you feel?

DANNY: Rockville? Shoot, he don’t need Rockville any more than I think Ma needed it...I reckon that we need to just make do sometimes, sis....

MOSER: Maybe I am a little crazy. Don’t matter. I know what I believe. Heck, I do believe again. Most important thing, I miss Gracie so much. Where she is, is where I belong, I guess.

MARTI: Lonely. That’s it. We’re all lonely....Those shadows we keep, just to torture ourselves.

DANNY: What are ya talking about, sis?

MARTI: (Waving her hands futilely.) Maybe you’re just my guilt or something. My shadows....

DANNY: Thanks a lot, Marti!

MOSER: Maybe...that’s your problem... but I got futures to make.

DANNY: Futures...I think, uh...me, too. I mean, I sure don’t feel like a “shadow.”

MOSER: (To himself:) Je vous donnerai tout l’amour du monde....

MARTI: (Thinking out loud.) Maybe you are the future, Danny. Maybe there’s a reason I am here.

DANNY: You can’t change me. That’s...wrong.

MOSER: Past, present, future.... (Sits cross-legged, center-staged again.) I’m coming, Gracie.

MARTI: (Obviously ignoring MOSER.) I miss you, Danny....

DANNY: (Suspiciously.) OK....

MARTI: You know what I do, Danny?

DANNY: Nope.
MARTI: I am a funds analyst at Rowan Martin Trades in Chicago. You know what that I is?
DANNY: Uhh uhh. What’s that?
MARTI: I monitor e-funds for trends. I inform investment houses which way they will go, up or down, and they, in turn, advise their clients.
DANNY: (Confused.) Yeah?
MARTI: I sell fake money. Or tell people I never meet to buy it...smoke and shadows. I live in a shadow, I see....
DANNY: Cool it, Marti. So you fudge a bit. So what. Maybe you should write boogey woogey songs like you said you would....
MARTI: (Laughing sadly.) Yes, maybe I will....
DANNY: Boogey woogey sounds a lot more fun if you’re gonna sell nothing.
MOSER: (Half listening.) Maybe you should write a book.
MARTI: What?
MOSER: You should write a book about your shadows; like us. A book about me and...Danny, is it?
DANNY: A book about me? That would be neat!
MARTI: I-I don’t understand.
MOSER: Maybe that’s why you’re here. Write, sing, paint—hell, make some damn lemonade. You gotta work it out, stop hiding! I figure that’s my problem, too. Stop hiding, goddamnit!
DANNY: Cheese, Louise!
MOSER: Sorry about the language, kid (Looking at MARTI.) Look at this, guys....

Moser stands stage center, raises his arms and closes his eyes.

MOSER: Grace, dear Grace, forgive me. I love you. Grace above, come for me!

The lights dim over the stage as the thrumming, brassy noise returns. A pure, white light engulfs MOSER. It brightens until all of his features are bleached and incandescent. Suddenly it blinks out. As the stage lights
come back up, Moser is gone. MARTI and DANNY stand dumbfounded.

DANNY: That was way beyond the Twilight Zone.

MARTI wanders out to center stage and looks all around her curiously.

MARTI: So, I can’t make any difference, can I?
DANNY: I am what I am….
MARTI: …and that’s all that I am.
DANNY: You know I love you, sis.
MARTI: Oh, I know that. That isn’t the problem.
DANNY: What do you mean?
MARTI: Maybe I’m just greedy. Or I wish I had more control. Sometimes I feel like everything just slipped through my fingers.
DANNY: You can’t help what happens, sis. I do what I’m gonna do. Ma always knew that.
MARTI: Somehow, I gotta forgive myself. Mama and Dad never did....
DANNY: You know, maybe you just gotta listen.
DANNY: Take out some Chet Atkins, and listen to it. Just let me be in the music.

Upstage, behind Marti’s airline seat, a “fasten seatbelts” sign lights up, accompanied by a soft “ding.”
MARTI: I guess that’s my cue.
DANNY: Got somewhere to be?
MARTI: Seems so….
DANNY: OK.
MARTI: I love you, Danny.

MARTI and DANNY embrace, center stage. The lights fade a bit, except over the two of them and stage left.
MARTI:  \textit{(Pulling back.)} Good bye, Danny.
DANNY:  Happy trails to you….
MARTI:  Until we meet again….

\textit{Marti} slowly walks backward to her seat, facing her brother.

MARTI:  Maybe I will see you again.
DANNY:  I think Gene Autry has ridden out into the sunset….
MARTI:  \textit{(Sadly.)} I know.
DANNY:  Good night, sis.
MARTI:  Goodbye, brother.

\textit{Danny} watches her for a moment, as her eyes slowly shut, and she assumes a sleeping posture in her seat. The lights dim until only \textit{Danny}, the tree and the fasten seatbelts sign are lighted.

DANNY:  \textit{(To no one in particular.)} Good morning, World.

\textit{Danny} walks purposefully toward the river’s edge, puts his toes in the shallow edges of the Mississippi River, and, for a moment, looks back at his sleeping sister. Then, with gusto, he exits stage left. All the lights dim now, except the fasten seatbelts sign over Marti’s head.

\textit{End.}
**Characters:**

**THE MAN IN BLACK:** Unknown age. Dressed entirely in black. A quiet, stern, and arrogant tone. Graceful as he is deadly. Always cautious and prepared. Completely obsessed with keeping his suit clean.

**FATHER BERITE:** Middle to late 50s. Dressed in the robes of a Catholic Father. A calm tone practiced in private conversations and great orations for the masses. A confident man, but nervous as he prepares to boldly jump into religious politics and dangerous affairs.

**ACOLYTE CORIO:** Middle to late teens. Dressed in the robes of a scholar, or acolyte. A quiet young tone that doesn’t seem to have broken past puberty, though it should have long ago. Quiet and reserved, but loyal to his higher-ranking clergyman. Very organized and protective of church property.

**GUARDS:** Late 20s to 30s. Dressed in the robes of priests. They are lightly armed with small handguns to protect the grounds of the church and certain officials.

**Scene**

*Two men are in the office of FATHER BERITE in the Sanctum of the Spirit Church. FATHER BERITE is in his chair at his desk. ACOLYTE CORIO is delivering a message to him personally, and waits a few feet in front of his desk.*

**FATHER BERITE:** *(Grips the arms of his chair and leans forward.)* What! He’s here? Wait, describe him again to me!
ACOLYTE CORIO: (Nods.) A man dressed in black. He would not give me his name. He said you had an appointment with him today.

FATHER BERITE: (Looks down for a moment then back up.) Well yes, we did have an appointment today….

ACOLYTE CORIO: Then should I let him in, Father Berite?

FATHER BERITE: Yes! By all means; do not keep him waiting. (Waves his hand in the direction of the door.) Send him in at once!

ACOLYTE CORIO: (Nods again.) Yes, Father.

*The ACOLYTE walks out while the FATHER wrings his hands nervously. The ACOLYTE returns, and a man dressed entirely in black walks in behind him. He looks around slowly, not even bothering to acknowledge the FATHER or the one who led him in. He walks into the center of the room and continues to look around slowly. The ACOLYTE waits at the door patiently.*

FATHER BERITE: Welcome! Welcome! Be about your business, young man. (Shoos the ACOLYTE against the wall as THE MAN IN BLACK walks closer to his desk but continues to look around.) I did not expect you so soon, my friend; I am…. (Holds out his hand.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: (Looks down at his hand for a moment then continues to look around, never acknowledging the gesture.) I know who you are, and you’re not my friend.

FATHER BERITE: (Looks mildly shocked.) Ah…yes…well… I am very pleased to meet you…(Withdraws the hand.) Yes…well please….

*THE MAN IN BLACK sits down without being asked to do so.*

FATHER BERITE: …sit down. (Sits down as well then smiles broadly.) So! The infamous Man in Black! The great assassin…. THE MAN IN BLACK: Is there a point to all of this meaningless flattery?

FATHER BERITE: (His smile falters.) I thought you would enjoy hearing your
THE MAN IN BLACK: Not by you.

FATHER BERITE: Of course…so I’m sure the “Man in Black” isn’t really your name. What can I call you?

THE MAN IN BLACK: Sir.

FATHER BERITE: Excuse me?

THE MAN IN BLACK: You can call me ‘sir.’

FATHER BERITE: (Sits back and scowls.) That’s not a terribly friendly way to start a business or friendship; are you sure you don’t want to reconsider–

THE MAN IN BLACK: No. ‘Sir’ will do.

FATHER BERITE: (Continues scowling.) Very well, of course.

THE MAN IN BLACK: (Brushes some non-existent dirt off his suit and crosses his legs.) As I told you before, and I will not repeat myself again, we are not friends. This is not a friendship; this is business. Now what do you want of me?

ACOLYTE CORIO: (Takes a step forward, which causes the Man in Black to barely turn his head in his direction, an action which prompts the Acolyte to stop.) Sir! You cannot speak that way to the–

FATHER BERITE: (Stands up quickly.) Quiet, boy! (Points to the door.) Step outside! (Sits back down and looks at THE MAN IN BLACK nervously.) I’m sorry for the boy; he is still learning.

THE MAN IN BLACK: I will not ask you again. What do you want of me?

FATHER BERITE: (Leans forward and rests his elbows on the desk and locks his hands together.) Very well. Do you happen to read the newspapers?

The FATHER throws a few newspapers onto the desk with pictures of a Bishop on the front page and looks at THE MAN IN BLACK who stares back with no sign of interest or knowledge of the newspapers or what they say. The FATHER takes a deep breath and continues.

FATHER BERITE: As of late you may have noticed that the Bishop has been making numerous statements concerning the policy of the Church with the public.
THE MAN IN BLACK: And what has this to do with me?

FATHER BERITE: (Slams his palms on the desk.) He steps beyond his authority. He questions the actions of the Holy Church. He speaks out against his brothers!

THE MAN IN BLACK: Again, what has this to do with me?

FATHER BERITE: (Nonchalantly.) With you? I wish for you to...deal... with him for me.

THE MAN IN BLACK: Deal with him?

FATHER BERITE: Kill him, curse you!

THE MAN IN BLACK: I know what you meant. I was surprised you used such a clichéd word. Regardless of your poor choice of words, you want me to kill this man over a... conflict of interest?

FATHER BERITE: (Stands and slams his fists onto the desk.) He is a traitor! He speaks out against the Church! He....

THE MAN IN BLACK: (Looks at the Father.) Yes, I heard you the first time. So the fact that if he dies you’re the next in line for his position isn’t part of it at all, now is it?

FATHER BERITE: (Is taken back.) You are more informed than you let on.

THE MAN IN BLACK: Indeed I am, and I prefer a bit of honesty in those with whom I’m dealing.

FATHER BERITE: Well, yes. Very well, I can’t deny that I want the position, but that is not the sole reason I have called for–

THE MAN IN BLACK: Yes it is. Please don’t lie; that tends to offend and therefore upset me. (Stands and begins to walk around the room.)

FATHER BERITE: You must let me explain.

THE MAN IN BLACK: I don’t care to hear it. (Walks toward the artwork in the corner.)

FATHER BERITE: What are you doing...?

The ACOLYTE knocks then comes in carrying a tray with some tea, he looks at THE MAN IN BLACK as he passes him, then sets the tray on the Father’s desk. He pours him a cup and looks at THE MAN IN BLACK.
ACOLYTE CORIO: Excuse me, Father. I have your tea as you requested. I brought some for your guest as well. I wasn’t sure if he wanted anything else. Is there anything I can bring you sir…?

THE MAN IN BLACK bends slightly, and examines a piece of art, a statue, very closely.

THE MAN IN BLACK: Be silent.

THE MAN IN BLACK stands back up very slowly, then turns his head slowly in the direction of the FATHER.

THE MAN IN BLACK: (Points at the statue.) Where did you get this?

FATHER BERITE: (Is stunned by the question, takes a moment then answers.) That? I bought it for the church….

THE MAN IN BLACK: Then why is it here? (Points down, as he turns his back on the FATHER and walks to another piece of art in the room – a painting – and examines it closely.)

FATHER BERITE: Well….

THE MAN IN BLACK: (Points at the painting.) And this: this is an authentic Revalgio…. (Touch the painting.) Yes, I’m sure it is.

The ACOLYTE walks over to THE MAN IN BLACK and begins to stretch his hand out to restrain him from touching the picture, then stops just short of touching him and takes a step back.

ACOLYTE CORIO: Excuse me sir, please don’t touch that.

THE MAN IN BLACK: (Turns his head toward the ACOLYTE slowly.) Who are you?

ACOLYTE CORIO: I’m…I’m…I’m his–
THE MAN IN BLACK: Servant? *Turns to face the ACOLYTE.*

ACOLYTE CORIO: Well, I wouldn’t put it that way.

THE MAN IN BLACK: But I would, and I did.

ACOLYTE CORIO: It… It’s not like—

THE MAN IN BLACK: *Takes a step towards the ACOLYTE who backs up another step.* Stand aside and remember your place.

FATHER BERITE: *Stands.* Do as he says.

THE MAN IN BLACK: *Looks at the FATHER.* I don’t need your input.

FATHER BERITE: *Is stunned.* Well excuse me but—

THE MAN IN BLACK: *Looks back at the ACOLYTE.* You’re not excused; now be si—

FATHER BERITE: I…

THE MAN IN BLACK: Quiet.

FATHER BERITE: *Points at THE MAN IN BLACK.* See here, I will not be spoken to like that!

THE MAN IN BLACK: *Turns his head to the FATHER quickly and speaks forcefully.* I said be quiet!

FATHER BERITE: *Slams his palms on the desk.* I’ve had enough! Guards!

Two GUARDS burst through the door standing side by side. THE MAN IN BLACK turns his head in their direction, then moves towards them. He punches the man on the right in the neck with his left hand causing him to fall to his knees. He then slams the palm of his right hand into the nose of the guard on the left. Then, he slams his right fist into the back of the head of the GUARD on his knees who falls to the floor dead. He kicks the GUARD on the left in the back of the knee causing him to drop to one knee. He then strikes him in the side of the neck causing his neck to break. THE MAN IN BLACK walks over to the door and locks it. He then tips over a large book rack in front of the door to bar it.

FATHER BERITE: *Sits down stunned.* How did you….

THE MAN IN BLACK: *Looks back at the priest and answers calmly dusting off
his hands and suit.) That doesn’t really matter now, does it?
FATHER BERITE: You killed them! You killed those men! In God’s house!
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Looks shocked and amused.) What?
FATHER BERITE: You murderer!
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Dusts off his suit and walks back over to the priest.) You must be joking. Since this is amusing me I would guess that you are. Out of curiosity, what would you have had them do once they got in here and… subdued me?
FATHER BERITE: (Points to the door.) I…I would have had them throw you out!
THE MAN IN BLACK: (His smile fades.) Really? Is that so–
FATHER BERITE: Yes!
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Cold, quiet, measured tone.) You’re pathetic. A serpent’s tongue speaking God’s words. You religious types are all alike. Trying to bring yourself closer to the Lord by reciting pretty passages and putting yourself above the average man. You’re as bad as the lowest man in the gutter. At least they are honest about what they do to survive.
FATHER BERITE: (Angry and quiet.) How dare you!
THE MAN IN BLACK: Careful! Watch your tone. Or this pleasant little conversation will end very suddenly.
FATHER BERITE: You call this pleasant?
THE MAN IN BLACK: You’re still alive, aren’t you? I wouldn’t be so ungrateful if I were you. Those two are a nice little reminder of the path our conversation could take.
FATHER BERITE: Those two served their purpose in this world.
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Looks at the two dead men.) Dying for you? You call that their purpose.
FATHER BERITE: (Smiles.) Yes, that is what they pledged their lives to do: to guard my holy–
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Looks back at the smiling priest.) You’re not holy, and that’s not a particularly good purpose. Like I said, you religious types are all alike. You think that being a follower of the divine makes you as divine
as what you worship. You’re as bad as the god-kings of France once were. I suppose I will take consolation that you will end up like them before long.

*THE MAN IN BLACK turns in the direction of the door as loud bangs and knocks begin to sound.*

GUARDS: Father, Father!
THE MAN IN BLACK: Tell them to go back to their posts.
FATHER BERITE: *Smiles broadly.* Why should I do that? They are here to protect me from you. That is what they were meant to do.
THE MAN IN BLACK: You mean like those two were?
FATHER BERITE: You can’t beat them all.

*THE MAN IN BLACK walks toward ACOLYTE CORIO.*

ACOYLTE CORIO: What are you doing? *THE MAN IN BLACK pulls out a small blade and puts it against his throat.* Oh my God!
THE MAN IN BLACK: Enough of this. Tell them to get back to where they–
FATHER BERITE: *Smiles again and steeples his fingers.* Again, why should I?
ACOYLTE CORIO: Father, please–
FATHER BERITE: Quiet boy.
ACOYLTE CORIO: Please just do as he asks, Father; I don’t want to die!

*The banging on the door resumes a bit more forcefully.*

THE MAN IN BLACK: Listen to him, Father. Those men at least died with the skills to defend themselves; this young man doesn’t have that grace.
GUARDS: Father, are you well Father?
FATHER BERITE: *Shrugs.* Regardless, if he dies, that was his purpose as well.
THE MAN IN BLACK: *Looks at the boy.* Do you want to die, boy?
ACOYLTE CORIO: No, please… no.
THE MAN IN BLACK:  * (Looks back at the father and smiles.)* I think he is reconsidering his purpose, Father.

FATHER BERITE:  In times of trial some men become weak; he is just a boy, which is to be expected.

THE MAN IN BLACK:  * (Speaks softly into his ear.*)* Remember what you have devoted your life to, boy.

*THE MAN IN BLACK throws the boy to the side and calmly puts away his knife. He then walks over to the FATHER sitting comfortably in his chair.*

FATHER BERITE:  What are you doing? Get away from me!

*THE MAN IN BLACK pulls out a gun with a silencer on it and points it at the priest with no more than an inch or two between the gun and his face.*

FATHER BERITE:  Get that gun out of my–

THE MAN IN BLACK:  Enough of this. You and I are not done talking; tell them nothing is wrong…so that we can finish our friendly little chat.

FATHER BERITE:  You would just kill me anyway; I would rather take my chances–

THE MAN IN BLACK:  I never said that, but I am quickly losing my patience. I doubt you would want to see what happens when I lose all of my patience. Tell them now.

FATHER BERITE:  You wouldn’t, you would never esca—

THE MAN IN BLACK:  * (Presses the barrel of the gun into the priest’s temple and speaks slowly.*)* So you can see into the future now, can you? Another gift of the church? Believe me when I tell you, that you and your kind have no future. You are parasites. How you could take something that is essentially good and warp it in such a manner is disgusting. Something only a filthy little commoner like yourself could do. Now I won’t ask again….

GUARDS:  Father, Father!

FATHER BERITE:  * (Tries to turn his head to look at THE MAN IN BLACK, who*
presses the gun harder into his temple and points at the door.) Stay outside. I am fine. Return to your duties.

GUARDS: But Father, where are Brothers–
FATHER BERITE: I said stay outside!
GUARDS: Yes, Father.

THE MAN IN BLACK: (Puts away his gun and grabs the back of the Father's chair.) Very good, I’m glad to see you can control your dogs so well.

FATHER BERITE: What are you–

*THE MAN IN BLACK unceremoniously dumps the FATHER onto the floor and proceeds to sit down in the chair.*

THE MAN IN BLACK: Your chair looks a bit more comfortable than those... (Gestures to the chairs.) Whatever you choose to call them.

FATHER BERITE: (Stands back up.) GET OUT OF MY–
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Looks at the Priest calmly.) I won’t warn you again about that tone of yours.

FATHER BERITE: You dare to lecture me!

*THE MAN IN BLACK stands and quickly slaps BERITE on the face causing him to fall to the floor in a heap, CORIO rushes to his side and checks on his mentor while THE MAN IN BLACK sits back down.*

ACOLYTE CORIO: Father, are you all righ–?

FATHER BERITE: (Roughly shrugs off the help of the Boy.) Get away from me, boy! Oh my–

THE MAN IN BLACK: So, what do you care to talk about?

FATHER BERITE: (Looks at THE MAN IN BLACK, astonished.) What…?

THE MAN IN BLACK: Philosophy?

FATHER BERITE: Why would you…?

THE MAN IN BLACK: (laughs.) Of course not. What would you know about the mysteries of the world?
FATHER BERITE: I know–
THE MAN IN BLACK: Perhaps religion? You could at least pretend to know about the workings of the soul and the Lord.

FATHER BERITE: I–
THE MAN IN BLACK: Be quiet. That was rhetorical you know. You don’t know anything. Our conversation is almost at an end. I thought we might try to find something at least mildly pleasant to talk about. It would seem that most things are beyond your ability when I think about it. (Looks at CORIO.) What of you, child? What do you know?

ACOLYTE CORIO: I…I was taught… I mean to say….
THE MAN IN BLACK: Come now boy; spit it out. I don’t have all night. Neither does he.
FATHER BERITE: What do you mean by–
ACOLYTE CORIO: I go to school outside the church, Sir, but I also take lessons here.
THE MAN IN BLACK: Of course. So you mean you are taught on religious matters by the likes of that vermin beside you?
ACOLYTE CORIO: (Slowly.) Yes... No…I… Father Berite has been my teacher, yes.
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Sits back and relaxes.) Do you feel you have learned anything from him?
ACOLYTE CORIO: I believe so.
THE MAN IN BLACK: Do you still feel this way after seeing how he would have so carelessly thrown your life away?
ACOLYTE CORIO: (Stunned.) I never thought he would…Father…Why?
FATHER BERITE: (Gets onto his knees and looks at CORIO.) I felt sorrow, my son, but there was nothing I could do!
THE MAN IN BLACK: Don’t lie to the poor boy. He is not as stupid as you take him for. Being on your knees won’t help you plead your case either. You would have thrown his life away without a second thought to save your own worthless hide. Why even try to deny it?
FATHER BERITE: That’s not true!
ACOLYTE CORIO: Isn’t it, Father? You said that was my purpose.
THE MAN IN BLACK: *(Looks at the boy and smiles.)* Well, well, the boy develops some backbone.
FATHER BERITE: I will not be spoken to like this by you as well, Corio! You will mind your tongue!
ACOLYTE CORIO: Or what, Father? You will sacrifice me again so that you can live another few minutes?
THE MAN IN BLACK: Clever kid.
FATHER BERITE: *(Looks at THE MAN IN BLACK with hatred in his eyes.)* You… You’re a devil!
THE MAN IN BLACK: *(Leans forward.)* Am I now? You would have had this young man die for nothing, and you said it was those two gentlemen’s purpose in life to die for you. You. A lip-synching priest. A degenerate form of a once truly devout and honorable position. You who would have a man killed to further your position within the church.
ACOLYTE CORIO: Father… is this true?
FATHER BERITE: No, of course not! He lies! The devil spreads his lies at all times!
THE MAN IN BLACK: *(Sits back again and laughs.)* Amazing. You resort to old rhetoric to try and cover your ass.
FATHER BERITE: I’m doing what I have to do to save our church! To save my community!
THE MAN IN BLACK: Your church, your community. Is that so?
FATHER BERITE: Yes!

THE MAN IN BLACK: Very interesting. When we first talked about it, I never once heard you say anything about your community. You just railed against the Bishop. That was all. What has changed from then to now?
ACOLYTE CORIO: The Bishop, Father? The Bishop? Why?
THE MAN IN BLACK: He was tired of being a big fish in a small pond, of course. In that he is just like every other petty criminal I have ever dealt with. He
wants to move up in the world no matter the consequences. The easiest way to move up? Kill the guy ahead of you.

FATHER BERITE: I don’t answer to you!
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Sneers.) Of course you don’t. You answer to God.
FATHER BERITE: That’s right.
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Smiles.) Too bad that you will never see him then now, isn’t it?
FATHER BERITE: (Looks shocked.) What…?

THE MAN IN BLACK pulls out his gun again and shoots the FATHER in the head. As he falls to the floor, THE MAN IN BLACK stands, returns his gun back to his coat, and dusts off his suit, examining a spot intensely. CORIO kneels beside Berite’s body.

THE MAN IN BLACK: Do you think this is a stain? Can you see it, or is it just me? (Shows his sleeve to CORIO.)
ACOLYTE CORIO: Father Berite!
THE MAN IN BLACK: (Dusts off his sleeve again and looks at CORIO.) I told him he didn’t have all night.
ACOLYTE CORIO: (Looks at THE MAN IN BLACK with unwept tears in his eyes.) Why did you do that?
THE MAN IN BLACK: I shall give you the final lesson of Father Berite. He was a hypocrite. For all of his rants against the Bishop, our friend the Father here was the worst traitor of all. He would have been a source of corruption and inspiration for more like him to follow in his footsteps. He would have been the source of whispers and rumors about his rise to power and position. For all of his faults, the Bishop knows what he has to truly do for the good of his community. While in front of you, Berite was quick to mention his community; all he had for me was weak dogma. He wanted nothing more than to move up and for that he deserved far worse than what I did to him. All hypocrites have their place. Dante said so, and I tend to believe his view on Hell better than the Bible’s.
THE MAN IN BLACK walks around the desk to stand beside the still kneeling CORIO. He places a hand on his shoulder, then lifts it to look at his palm, examining it for anything dirty, then pats the boy’s shoulder again.

ACOLYTE CORIO: Who are you to pass judgment on–
THE MAN IN BLACK: Believe me when I tell you that I am a better judge of character than you are young man. Regardless, what is done is done. Whether or not you choose to believe me is up to you, and of little concern to me.

ACOLYTE CORIO: How can you be so–
THE MAN IN BLACK: That’s enough questioning, and your lesson is now over. You should go.
ACOLYTE CORIO: (Stands up slowly and looks at THE MAN IN BLACK.) How should I do that?
THE MAN IN BLACK: Can you not think for yourself? Surely you don’t need me to spell it out for you. You turn around and walk out that door.
ACOLYTE CORIO: I mean what should I do when they ask me about the Father and…them. (Gestures to the floor and the two dead GUARDS.)
THE MAN IN BLACK: When you leave here, tell them the Father is still talking with me, and the guards are posted at the door. You were told to leave because we were discussing sensitive church matters and you could not be present for it. I will leave here shortly after you.
ACOLYTE CORIO: And after that, what should I do?
THE MAN IN BLACK: That’s up to you, kid. It’s of little concern to me. I would leave the church if I were you. If you truly want to dedicate yourself to the church after this, then go to the Bishop. Want some friendly advice?
ACOLYTE CORIO: I…yes, please.
THE MAN IN BLACK: Be careful who you choose to follow, just because they associate themselves with a good cause does not mean the person you
follow is a good person.

ACOLYTE CORIO: (Nods.) Thank you.

THE MAN IN BLACK: (Waves in the direction of the door.) Be on your way, I have some final business to take care of in here.

ACOLYTE CORIO: (Bows.) Good bye, sir.

THE MAN IN BLACK: Good bye, Corio.

CORIO exits and THE MAN IN BLACK stands there and looks around at his handiwork. He smiles and walks around, then bends down beside the body of FATHER BERITE.

THE MAN IN BLACK: He’s a smart kid – definitely smarter than you were. But then that’s not saying much. It might almost be an insult to the boy. I was right, you know; that chair of yours was rather comfortable.

Stands back up and walks around the desk; he picks up the phone on the Father’s desk and makes a call.

THE MAN IN BLACK: Yes? Hello. May I speak to Bishop Zerion please? Thank you. (Pause.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: It’s me. (Pause.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: Yes, Bishop. It’s all taken care of. (Pause.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: No, no problems at all. (Pause.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: Only that you may have a boy calling on you sometime soon. (Pause.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: Yes, Berite’s boy. That’s him. His name escapes me, I’m afraid. (Pause.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: I doubt it; he’s smart, but he likely has no clue as to what went on here. We may never see him again. (Pause.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: Yes, I believe that just about does it. (Pause.)

THE MAN IN BLACK: Excellent, yes, the fee as discussed. Pleasure doing
business with you. (Pause.)
THE MAN IN BLACK: Good day. (Pause)

THE MAN IN BLACK dusts off his suit, straightens his tie, and walks out the door calmly.

End
I was so cold I don’t remember if my heart was actually beating. Were my legs and arms still attached? I couldn’t feel them if they were there.

From “The Ultimate Hike” by Cristy Worthington
I was so cold I don’t remember if my heart was actually beating. Were my legs and arms still attached? I couldn’t feel them if they were there: I was completely numb! I heard voices, but who were they and where were they coming from? It was dark, I didn’t even know where I was, who I was with, or how long I had been there.

In June of 1996 I worked at a bank as a branch manager. This is where I met my friend, Caroline, who also worked at the bank. We enjoyed each other’s company and the time we spent together while at work. We spoke of our likes and dislikes, our spouses and families, and soon discovered that we had a lot in common. We decided to go out for dinner one evening so our husbands could meet. We were both sure they would instantly like each other just as we did. Within minutes, the two were instant friends. Caroline’s husband, Sean, and my husband, Travis, were too much alike not to like each other.

One thing we all four had in common was our love for hiking and backpacking. We decided that our newfound friendship would be spent in the woods, on and off the trails, and at one with nature. Every weekend we found a new trail in Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, or Tennessee. We would either stay the weekend, a week, or a long day. We were addicted to the mountains, rivers, trees, wild animals, and clean fresh air. It was like we could never feed our hunger of the trails fast enough.

During the week we planned our trips, and we talked about what the trail had to offer, what we could see and the experiences that we might have. It didn’t matter what the weather was like; rain, snow or shine we were there with our gear and our well planned hike. We did this for about a year when we decided to plan an ultimate hike. We would backpack in some of the roughest terrain, repel on huge rock facers and ford swift, vigorous rivers. We planned, packed and organized until the time came.

In January 1997, we started out around five o’clock on a Friday morning.
We were being dropped off at our starting point by my parents. We would see them the next Friday at our pick up location over sixty miles away. As I got out of the car, my adrenalin was pumping and I was excited to get started on the long awaited “ultimate hike” that we planned so well. We were backpacking one of the hardest trails in the South: the virgin woods in Tennessee.

As we started out on the trail, breathing in the fresh air, I looked around to get my bearings straight. It was beautiful, the trees were tall but skinny, and the air was thick, not with smog, but with clean crisp morning dew. I knew I had to take it slow because of the many miles ahead. I was ready to run to see the mountains and rivers, and I was anxious to take it all in. We were all quiet, and absorbing the scenery. After a mile or two hiking the trail, we shared our visions, speaking of what we had seen and felt, and we spoke of what was to come. Knowing that we had a lot ahead of us, we were ready for the experience.

We hiked for six miles, and we decided to find a place to make camp for the evening. That night I felt close to the heavens, the stars were my blanket, and my nightlight. I slept like a newborn baby, not a worry in my mind and totally at peace. I woke up before anyone else; however, nature was wide awake. The animals were singing, the sun had a bright smile, and the day was ready for us. We started out again on our hike as we continued doing so for the next two days.

Tuesday, the fifth day, we woke up to a thick white blanket. It had snowed while we slept, and the look of the snow capping the mountains was exquisite. The trees were covered with thick coats of ice, and the branches were so heavy they hugged the ground. Thrilled about the new landscape, we bundled up and headed for a hike in the white beauty. I knew today would be the day to ford the river. I remember saying to myself, “Can I get in the river when it’s this cold, and will I survive these extreme conditions?”

We were shocked at the river when we approached because of the high level. The river currents were strong and too rough for any of us to ford. Nevertheless, we had to make it across because the trail was on the other side. Our pick up destination was also on the other side a few days away. We took a break and contemplated our situation. The trail crossed the river at this particular place because of the massive
boulder that stood before us, both high and wide. Finally deciding the river was too rough to ford, we saw our only chance to make it across was to repel the face of the rock. We would ford the river at a shallow and safe spot.

Having just enough gear for us to repel one at a time, we determined an order of crossing: Sean first, me, Caroline and Travis last. Sean started the climb, and he discovered that most of the boulder was covered with ice. This was great: “I was not an expert at repelling and now I had to repel across the face of a boulder covered with ice.” Sean made it across safely but not with ease, and now it was my turn. I instantly started sweating, my nerves were shaken, my stomach was in knots, and I was actually afraid. I geared up, and with encouraging words from Travis, I started climbing up the boulder. The weight of my backpack seemed to double while climbing. Halfway across the boulder is when I slipped. I think my heart fell to my feet. The gear held me up a little but I couldn’t stabilize myself. The rushing river was right under me along with several boulders sticking out of the water. I had to gain control because if I fell, the river would take me under or I could hit one of the boulders. Either way, if I fell into the river, my chances of survival were grim. I prayed, “Please God, please take me under your wing and give me the strength to hold on.”

I heard Caroline, Sean, and Travis yelling out pointers: “Step to the right,” “Pull up with your left hand,” and “If nothing else, just hold on.” There was nowhere for me to grab on to, and every time I jumped up to try and stabilize myself the safety gear weakened. I gave one big jump to grab a hold, and I felt the gear come apart. I went straight down into the river, and my knees crashed on a boulder, splitting my knee caps as I fell back into the river. Did I black out because of the burning in my cracked knees, or was my body going into shock from the cold river?

When I woke up, it felt as if my body was not attached. I didn’t know where I was and I heard people talking close by. Realizing I was in a tent, I tried to get up, but something was wrong with my legs. Were they broken? Why am I in so much pain? “Hello, who is there?” I called out desperately wanting someone to come. The zipper of the tent flew open, and Travis jumped inside the tent kissing
and hugging me. I could see Caroline and Sean standing at the opening of the tent.

I lay there in amazement as the dramatic story of my rescue unfolded. Apparently when I fell into the river, I cracked both my knee caps on the boulder, and I had passed out from the pain. The river grabbed my body and took me down. Travis and Sean jumped in to pull me out. I had already been in the river for five minutes before they reached me. When they pulled me out, it was obvious that I was suffering from hypothermic shock. They made camp right at that spot beside the river. Travis took off my cold and drenched clothes, covering me with all the blankets that were packed. The wood was all wet from the snow, so they worked for hours to start a fire before one ignited. They listened to me deliriously scream and moan for hours, as I lay unconscious on the ground. Everyone took turns watching me closely for the rest of the night. The next day they checked on me every few minutes. Still hugging me, Travis had tears in his eyes, and he told me how much he loved me.

I made my way out of the tent to warm up by the fire. We ate dinner and planned the remainder of our hike. We realized that two days of hiking were lost, and we had over 20 miles to hike before my parents were scheduled to pick us up. We calculated and determined that we had to hike more than double our daily miles, and I had two busted knees. How would I ever make it in this condition?

Thursday morning we ate a hearty breakfast in hopes of extra energy, and then we packed up camp. I had to play the mind over matter trick because the pain was so intense. After a few miles of hiking I didn’t feel the pain in my body. The only thought I had in my mind was getting to my parents. I prayed for our “ultimate hike” to come to an end. The rest of the day and the next morning I hiked for my life. I felt as if I were walking on air, that the end of the hike was close, and I couldn’t stop. We were on the last mile and an hour late for our pick up time. I knew my parents would still be there waiting for us.

I was never so happy to see my parents in all my life. I dropped my pack and fell to the ground and cried. My dad picked me up and put me in the car. I rejoiced and prayed to God, thanking Him for getting me there to my parents.
Relaxing and knowing I would be home soon, I found myself thinking of our next ultimate hike. I couldn’t wait for another great adventure. After all, you only live once, so why not spend it with what God created, untouched beauty, wild animals, and unbelievable earthly landscapes. How many people live life as one extreme adventure on an amazing, ultimate hike!
Henry David Thoreau once said, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured, or far away.” This quotation has stayed close with me for several years, encouraging me to explore my beliefs and reflect on the ways in which I have been raised. Since I can remember, church and religion were never an option. Catholicism was what I was raised to practice, and Catholic is what I would be. However, my ability to question and the need for answers led me to a place neither I nor my parents would have predicted. Opposed to what I had been taught and the beliefs I developed in my youth, the experience and knowledge I have gained as an adult have shaped my views towards religion, making me agnostic and a “Free-Thinker.”

Church has been something my family participated in every Sunday to show devotion to our beliefs and love to our God since I was a small child. For much of my youth, I would attend Mass every Sunday because it was what I was supposed to do and what I thought was right. My mother preached each week that to do otherwise would be sinful and something I should never be a part of. For several years, my mother’s teachings led my devotion to God, creating dedication based on fear rather than genuine emotion, yet still I was devout. My change in thought began to arise as my confusion with the Bible became too much to restrain. I began asking questions like, “How could Jonah survive while living inside of a fish?” or “How did only two of every animal know to board Noah’s ark?” and received insufficient answers such as, “Because the Bible says so.”

Not receiving a justifiable answer forced me to question the legitimacy of the Bible. Believing that the Bible was not meant to be literal became the first step towards change in my opinions on religion. As time went on, each week at church became a further struggle to maintain what I had previously believed to be true. I continued to see things that I did not agree with or that I simply did not believe. When I was twelve years old my church gained a new priest named Father John.
As he led the parishioners, I felt as though my church had become a sanctuary to earn money rather than praise God. My thoughts made me fear that I was no longer devout. I soon realized that I no longer believed or had faith in the way I did when I was younger, but in a much wiser sense. I also realized I did not need to believe in the way I had when I was younger. This change in attitude from when I was a child helped mold the individual I am as an adult.

Aside from the Sunday ritual, my religious knowledge and beliefs became extended every Wednesday with educational classes. These classes were designed to teach kids everything we needed to know about Catholicism enabling us to be a participating member of the Catholic community and to be confirmed in the Catholic religion. As a child, I was excited to participate in all of my classes. Not only would we learn about religion in innovative ways, but we were guaranteed doughnuts or candy. Offering a break from conventional church, Wednesday classes seemed like just what I needed to keep my head on straight during my time of confusion. At first, the classes kept me interested and sure of my religion and beliefs. However, I soon realized that the same questions I had from being in church were unanswered in my classes. When I reached the age of seven, it was time to further invest my life in the Catholic Church by receiving the Holy Communion. For months my classmates and I learned the meaning behind receiving communion and what happens when we do. Despite my confusion as to how the Eucharist could literally become the body of Christ and the wine become his blood, I continued with my First Communion and “swallowed” my doubts.

The classes carried on this way for a few years as I continued to have questions but remained strong in my love for God and religion. In the same way I had done with church, I began to feel separate from my classes and everyone in them. By the age of twelve I had completely stopped participating in activities during class. However, I was forced to continue going each Wednesday because my mother hoped my attitude would return to what it had been when I was younger. When I reached sixteen it was time to become confirmed in the Catholic Church and this was the last thing that I wanted. I approached my mother and told her I no longer believed in our church like I did when I was young and that to be confirmed would be demeaning towards the sacrament. As much as this pained her, it was
essentially my decision and I did not get confirmed. Choosing to not be confirmed was perhaps the biggest contributor towards leaving the innocent boy who believed what he was told, and becoming the man who knew there was a choice.

In life, it is essential that people use their own experiences and knowledge to shape their beliefs and character. As a child my beliefs and convictions were based on what I had been taught. I had accepted this for several years before I realized that a person cannot be taught what to believe, and that beliefs are developed through the individual. Like Thoreau had stressed, let every man be an individual and step to the beat of his own drum.
We hold the power to assemble and make changes in our society. The only thing holding us back is ourselves.

From “Something Fishy Here” by Nathan Barlett
Employer monitoring of electronic mail encompasses an emerging area of the law that is clearly an ongoing matter of concern. An employee may ask, “Is there really privacy in the workplace?” Employers want to be sure their employees are efficient, but employees don’t want their every sneeze or trip to the water cooler logged. That is the essential conflict of workplace monitoring.

Technology is a boon to business, but it also raises complicated privacy issues in the workplace. It is virtually impossible to conduct business today without using a computer, and technology has enabled employers to monitor nearly every aspect of workplace communications made by employees using computers. Many companies today take advantage of technology to monitor their employees’ use of the Internet and to check employee e-mail. While employees may feel this monitoring is a violation of their privacy, it is allowed by law.

With this new technology it is easier for employers to monitor various aspects of their employees’ jobs, especially on telephones, computer terminals, electronic and voice mail, and when employees are using the Internet. Such monitoring is practically unregulated. Therefore, unless company policy specifically states otherwise (and even this is not assured), an employer may listen to, watch, and read most workplace communications. Recent surveys have found that a majority of employers monitor their employees. They are motivated by concern over litigation and the increasing role that electronic evidence plays in lawsuits and government agency investigations. A 2005 survey by the American Management Association found that “three-fourths of employers monitor their employees’ web site visits in order to prevent inappropriate surfing, and 65% use software to block connections to web sites deemed off limits for employees. About a third track keystrokes and time spent at the keyboard. Just over half of employers review and retain electronic mail messages.” ¹

Many common law claims are difficult to prove, but most employees are given some protection from computer and other forms of electronic
monitoring under certain circumstances. Union contracts, for example, may limit the employer’s right to monitor. Also, public sector employees may have some minimal rights under the United States Constitution, in particular the Fourth Amendment, which safeguards against unreasonable search and seizure. Unfortunately, non public-sector employees are relatively unprotected by federal and state constitutions. A number of laws protect privacy rights. Those pertaining to e-mail are Protection under Constitutional and Tort law and The Electronic Communications Privacy Act.

The Supreme Court upholds personal rights to privacy by way of constitutional guarantees provided by the First, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Ninth Amendments of the Constitution. The Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) of 1986 states, “employers are prohibited from the intentional interception of any wire or electronic communication or the intentional disclosure or use of the information obtained by the interception.” Employers can avoid liability under ECPA by requiring employees to sign forms indicating that they consent to such monitoring.

The dilemma with the advancement of workplace e-mail is that neither the United States Constitution nor the respective state constitutions provide a clear concept of defining the extent of employee privacy rights as they relate to work-related e-mail accounts. The common law, primarily via the tort of interference with seclusion, provides the most common means by which employees are attempting to define their privacy rights.

Employee use of electronic mail during and after business hours is a regular characteristic of the twenty first century American workplace. Employers provide e-mail services to their employees as an efficient means of facilitating both inter-company communication and communication with the outside world, as well as the company’s customer base. E-mail, a business catalyst, serves to increase the efficiency of today’s workplace because it is inexpensive to provide, simple to install, and easy to use. E-mail usage also dramatically decreases the use of office-related, paper-based correspondence. However, despite these efficiencies, this technological advancement poses security problems concerning
issues of employee privacy that today’s legal environment appears unprepared to solve. This inadequacy in the law is primarily based on the fact that many employees do not know the extent of their privacy rights regarding their company-provided e-mail accounts. In fact, many employees operate under the false assumption that personal e-mail messages sent from work are protected from their employer’s examination.

According to a recent study, over 130 million workers are currently flooding recipients with 2.8 billion e-mail messages each day.³ Studies and attempts at monitoring employee behavior, as silly as some may appear, represent aspects of a legitimate struggle between the employer’s ability to conduct his/her business operations and the employees’ privacy rights. Studies such as this one gather data pertaining to staff efficiency and worker sanity and how they are affected by technological advancements and current laws operating behind the technological curve.

Are employers’ promises regarding e-mail and other workplace privacy issues legally binding? Not necessarily. Usually, when an employer states a policy regarding any issue in the workplace, including privacy issues, that policy is legally binding. Policies can be communicated in various ways: through employee handbooks, via memos, and in union contracts. For example, if an employer explicitly notifies employees through a proper channel, such as the employee handbook, that employee e-mail is subject to review, then the employer is acting within the framework of the law. Messages sent within the company as well as those that are sent from a terminal to another company or from another company to an employee can be subject to monitoring by the employer. This includes web-based e-mail accounts such as Yahoo and Hotmail as well as instant messages. The employer can review these messages if company policy allows.

In the court case Smyth v. Pillsbury, the employee’s termination was upheld by the court, even though the company had a policy of allowing e-mail use for personal communications. In this case, the employee had sent messages to co-workers that were deemed highly inappropriate for workplace communications (Smyth v. Pillsbury, C.A. NO. 95-5712, U.S. District Court for the Eastern

Smyth sued the company for wrongful discharge, claiming that Pillsbury’s actions had violated his right to privacy. The federal district court held that Smyth had no reasonable expectation of privacy in the e-mail communications that he voluntarily made to his supervisor over the company’s e-mail system. Even though Smyth sent the e-mail from his home computer, it did not matter because it still traveled through the company’s e-mail system.

When determining whether an employer should be held liable for infringing upon an employee’s privacy rights, the courts generally weigh the employer’s interests against the employee’s reasonable expectation of privacy. If employees are being informed that their communications are being monitored, they cannot reasonably expect those communications to be private. However, if employees are not informed that certain communications are being monitored, the employer may be held liable for invading their privacy. The breakeven point, the point at which a company’s monitoring program reaches necessary business objectives while also effectively protecting employee privacy, depends primarily on the types of computer programs employers use to monitor their employees’ e-mail. The following section discusses a few common surveillance programs that show different means by which information can be gathered.

There are many companies that are marketing e-mail monitoring services. The scope of these services range from a full e-mail monitoring application to a program that records the time at which employees pick up their e-mail. The full e-mail application program will record all of the following information:

1. The e-mail recipient;
2. The e-mail sender;
3. The number of words in the e-mail;
4. The time the employee spent reading e-mail;
5. The time the employee spent composing e-mail;
6. The number of attachments; and
7. The type of e-mail – business-related or non-business related.

The less-intrusive “e-mail pick-up” program will monitor only the following information:

1. The employee name;
2. The date; and
3. The time the e-mail was picked up by the employee.

Some of these services clearly cross the line between employers’ legitimate business justifications and intrude into employees’ privacy. For instance, a program called Back Orifice 2000 is described as “a very powerful piece of software . . . [allowing] unlimited data access.” The current state of e-mail monitoring and the powerful nature of some of these monitoring programs create a need for up-to-date legal rules and concepts that employers and employees can turn to in an attempt to defend their business practices or to remedy an invasion of their privacy.

Employers wishing to avoid liability for monitoring employee e-mail usage should take all necessary steps to eliminate any reasonable expectation of privacy that employees may have concerning their use of company e-mail systems and privacy through e-mail. This can be done through a detailed and clearly written electronic communications policy that is distributed regularly to all employees before any monitoring begins. This policy should inform employees of several things (including, but not limited to):

1. The absence of any private right by employees while using the company’s e-mail. This could be accomplished by including a statement in the policy declaring that the employer’s e-mail system is employer property, to be used for the purpose of furthering employer business. The policy should state whether personal e-mails are permitted, and define any limitations
on personal use of the system.

2. An explanation of the rules governing the use of the e-mail system; and
3. The employer’s ability and right to monitor, intercept, record, and review all communications sent by employees over the company’s e-mail system. This statement should contain language dealing with the employer’s business reasons behind the monitoring and the circumstances under which such monitoring will take place. This statement should also contain a sentence stating that the employee has no expectation to privacy regarding any e-mails sent, received, or stored at the workplace.

Employees, on the other hand, need to understand that current laws governing workplace e-mail will not protect them from most of their personal use. Most employers seem willing to tolerate some personal e-mail use and will control violations by looking more at employees’ work product and ability to meet deadlines. In fact, employees will be safer using a personal e-mail account from work, as opposed to an employer-provided account, although employees must remember that excessive personal e-mail may still raise employer scrutiny as it will likely construe into a lower overall performance. However, employees should feel secure that excessive monitoring or other employer abuses of their monitoring privileges will almost certainly violate federal and state statutes and also create tort liability.

Employer monitoring of electronic mail constitutes an emerging area of the law that is ever ongoing. This current report rests on the technological frontier of the struggle between an employer’s desire for an efficient workplace and an employee’s right to privacy. As the twenty-first century workplace encounters new technological advances that both increase employee efficiency and create non-work-related distractions, it will be interesting to watch the legal system, through constitutional interpretation, new legislation, and changes in the common law, adapt to meet these new challenges.

“Monitoring Employees” Works Cited
A Response to “We Bring Democracy to the Fish”

For those who feel that the United States of America, beneath all of the things which we are taught make it such a powerful and wonderful nation, represents a system of control in society which actually restricts the freedom of its population, the poem “We Bring Democracy to the Fish,” by US Poet Laureate Donald Hall, outlines very briefly and accurately the demise of true freedom under a government aided by the hand of a fear-driven media. The close parallels drawn between how the fish are governed by an unseen yet unquestioned force and the way in which our society operates now in the 21st century are staggering. Whether it is by fear of ‘predators’ or fear for our “liberty, health, happiness, and nutrition” being put into jeopardy, we live a controlled life. War is constantly preached by our government and military leaders, and we are guided each day by a popular culture which provides for us a model of the ideal American through a saturation of mass media markets. When we should be afraid of losing our liberties (what ones we have left), our collective focus turns toward the threat of losing our money, cars, social status, and all of those other elements which we seem to hold so dear. Are we fish?

First, the author chooses an animal which is rather unsuspecting and altogether ignorant of the scene which is described. The fish was not always like this. One could imagine that living free in its element a fish would have the opportunity to flourish and move about as it pleased. But the voice of control in this writing assures us that “it is unacceptable that fish prey on each other.” For this reason and for the sake of the fish’s “comfort and safety” they are liberated “into fish farms with secure, durable boundaries that exclude predators.” On the surface this seems like a grand turn of events for the fish involved. No more worrying about those predators. This does, however, bring about the question of why it is necessary for the protection of the fish for them to be moved into fish farms. It
FORMAL ESSAYS

does not require a large stretch of the imagination to conceive the fish farm society that has been built around us. Boundaries, ‘liberation,’” someone telling us what is best for us. You get the picture.

There is obviously no grand mechanism which literally feeds on the American population as we would a couple of pounds of fish from a farm. There is, however, much to be gained from a mass amount of people allowing themselves to be ‘farmed’ of their talents, abilities and souls through things such as industry and war.

Reading further we find that the all-knowing voice intends to care for the fish and provide for their needs. It would seem proper at this point to view the person promising this protection as standing with one hand behind his back, fingers crossed. The fish continue not to question the intentions of the voice yet are compelled to do as other fish do in the farm. Just as these fish are being fattened for the unforeseen harvest, we sit and indulge on the sources of sustenance provided to us by our governing body, while they sit and watch as we play right into their hands. Blind to the suffocation of our rights and liberties, we wait just below the surface to gobble pellet after pellet of that food we love. This is paradise. We live in the greatest fish farm in the world! Our every need and desire can be met at a moment’s notice. With just the flicker of a fin on a remote, we can choose to be entertained and trained by celebrities or hooked by the twenty-four-hour news network which is never shy on terrorist threat updates.

We are slowly starting to adopt more of the characteristics of a fish. Has our society ever been more edgy and nervous? Anything that is new or unexpected becomes suspected as danger, and when it arrives, we flee and let the Department of Homeland Security check it out.

One thing that humans have over the fish is the ability to realize this situation. The sad part is that very few of us wish to acknowledge this. Without the fish there would be no yield for the fish farmer. This holds true for the human counterpart as we hold the power to assemble and make changes in our society. The only thing holding us back is ourselves. Too many generations have gone before us and set the mold for this farmed life for it to be readily apparent to the
rest that this deception does not have to remain. For now we still have to watch as complacency allows for so many to go the way of the fish. When they do reach maturity, they do in fact “discover their purpose.” However, there may not be any of them which understand that the reality of their existence is only to be filleted. Rest assured that when the end comes, it is not pleasant.
BIANCA BRUNO is a Journalism Major whose skills are not just limited to writing. She also holds the ability to break the speed of sound with a burp and launch a small sheep dog at least twenty-five feet in the air. She hopes to one day be an anchor on CNN.

ADOLFO CASTELLANOS is a recent graduate of Gainesville State College with a Major in English Education. He plans to attend the University of Georgia or Georgia State University in the Fall of 2008. He enjoys painting little toy soldiers, playing video games, and anything else associated with being geeky.

JESSICA ESKEW is currently an Art Major at Gainesville State College.

TIFFANY FORRESTER is currently an Art Major at Gainesville State College. She plans to transfer to Georgia State University to study Art and Graphic Design in the Fall of 2008. She enjoys photography, blogging, live music, reading, living the purpose driven life, and making awesome-looking T-shirts.

KATE FOWLER will graduate from the University of Georgia this August with a degree in Studio Arts. Since she’s taken up writing again, she’ll probably only utilize the A.B. while schmoozing with society’s elite. She plans to settle down in a little Spanish pueblo, breed and live happily until the U.S. gets too crazy. Then, she will pack her family up and move to New Zealand.

LAUREN FUQUA is finishing her last semester at Gainesville before transferring to Georgia State and applying for the nursing program there. She loves to travel, and her next big trip is Africa.
MELISSA GOOCH is in her last year at Gainesville State College under the Bachelor of Applied Science with a Major in Technology Management (B.A.S.) program. Her other interests include spending time with family, exercising and scrapbooking.

JACOB HICKMAN is a Psychology Major at Gainesville State College. He plans to transfer to Georgia State after completion of his core curriculum classes. In his spare time, Jacob writes poems, short stories, and works on his novels. He also plays keyboards in the band, The Drexl Presley Project, whose sound incorporates influences from funk, jazz, reggae, and bluegrass. Jacob grew up in Decatur, Georgia and looks forward to moving back to his hometown of Atlanta.

JUSTIN MAYHEW is returning to Gainesville State College to pursue an eventual career in writing and film making. He wishes sometimes that he may live as a wandering Gypsy seeing new things and meeting new people. His favorites are Film, Literature and Poetry; amongst other things. Namaskaram!

E.J. SCHMITT is a Geology Major at Gainesville State College and enjoys writing as a hobby. Other pastimes include freelance art and ham radio. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa, enjoys international travel, and plans to pursue a career in Earth Science.

WESLEY STABLER is currently an Art Major at Gainesville State College.

CAITLIN O’DELL is a sophomore at Gainesville State College and plans to graduate in December and continue her education at University of Georgia or Georgia College and State University. She wants to become a creative writing teacher, but first, she wants to compete in the 2012 Olympics in women’s sprint canoe, a sport that isn’t recognized yet, but will be soon.
SUSAN VICKERS is pursuing an Associate’s Degree in Music Education and Spanish. She previously wrote for The Gainesville Times as a freelance writer, but her main focus now lies in education. She plans to be a choral director or Spanish teacher at a high school someday.

JONATHAN VINKE graduated from Gainesville State College in December of 2007, and is currently attending North Georgia College and State University pursuing a B.A. in English. Jonathan lives in Gainesville and wants to pursue a career as a writer and communicator.

BEN WENTWORTH is a Sociology Major, Eagle Scout, and amateur cinematographer. He is also an avid reader who considers “The Bible” and Frank Herbert’s “Dune” series as the two most influential pieces of work in his life.

CRISTY WORTHINGTON is currently an English Major at Gainesville State College.
## Gainesville State College 2007-2008 Writing Contest Winners

### SHORT FICTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Lauren Fuqua</td>
<td>“Welcome to Kansas”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>E.J. Schmitt</td>
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<td>Kate Fowler</td>
<td>“To Bitter and Back”</td>
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### POETRY

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<td>“The Transformation of Willy Walsh”</td>
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<td>Justin Mayhew</td>
<td>“The Ballad of Ron Deaux”</td>
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### ONE-ACT PLAYS

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<tr>
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<td>Justin Mayhew</td>
<td>“Ghosts”</td>
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<td>“A Room with a Voice”</td>
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### INFORMAL ESSAY

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<td>“Religion . . . a Choice?”</td>
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<td>“Monitoring Employees”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Nathan Barlett</td>
<td>“Something Fishy Here”</td>
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<td>Josh McDonald</td>
<td>“A Gem Unearthed”</td>
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The Southern Literary Festival
One-Act Play
First Place, 2008
“The Holy Church” by Adolfo Castellanos

The Southern Literary Festival
One-Act Play
Third Place, 2008
“Ghosts” by Justin Mayhew

The Southern Literary Festival
Poetry
Honorable Mention, 2008
“The Ballad of Ron Deaux” by Justin Mayhew

Horizon Theatre’s New South Playwrights
 Contest and Festival
First Place, 2007
“The Holy Church” by Adolfo Castellanos

Community College Humanities Association
Literary Magazine Competition
Honorable Mention, 2004
The Chestatee Review
Community College Humanities Association
Literary Magazine Competition
Third Place Winner, 2000
The Chestatee Review

The Southern Literary Festival
Second Place, 1999
The Chestatee Review

Community College Humanities Association
Literary Magazine Competition
Second Place, 1997
The Chestatee Review