THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW
FALL 2005

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Be My Poem
Gloria Carmen Lara

Be my hullabaloo, my clamor, my silence.
Be my night sky, my forever and a day,
My heart’s content.

Be my vow, my veil, my valiant steed.
Be my harbor, my jetty,
My light house.

Be my go-go, my disco, my ballroom.
Be my thoughts, my dreams,
My interval.

Be my lunk-head, my genius, my math problem.
Be my mate, my love,
My star-crossed babe.

Be my dither, my happy thought, my peril
Be my fastest pace, my slow down
My race.

And So We Went To The Show
Diana Horst

It was one weird ass day. I can’t even explain it. Saturday, at the diner, I walked into the kitchen and heard the new girl talking to the retard dishwasher.

"Eddie, you have the bluest eyes. I bet all the girls chase you. You like girls don’t you? You ever seen a girl naked?"

Eddie looked down at his feet. His face was red. He started tugging on his bushy eyebrows. Sweat dripped from his shaggy sideburns and ran down his face.

"Hey, Josie!" I said. "I’ve seen plenty of naked women. And I know just how to make ‘em scream. Leave the retard alone and come to papa, if that’s what you’re after."

"Pig," she said. She huffed out of the kitchen, her panties in a bunch.

"Eddie, she may be one fine piece of ass, but she’s just a mean bitch. Stay away from her. She’s trouble," I said.

"She wink at me yesterday. She like me."

"She’s just a cock-tease. And don’t forget, she’s hooked up with the boss. Stay away from her."

"Okay, Ray. She pretty though. You think she pretty?"

"Yeah, but she’s no good. Just stay away from her."

Dee came into the kitchen. Dee. I wished I could have seen her ten years ago. She was still all right. But she must have been smokin’ ten years ago.

"Hey, Jack’s new toy was just in here hittin’ on Eddie. Straighten her out before there’s trouble," I said.

"Eddie, have you been talking to that fast piece of trash?" Dee asked.

"She okay. She wink at me yesterday." Eddie’s face got red again.

"Well, don’t believe one damn thing she says. You understand me Eddie?"

Dec said.

Eddie nodded, turned, and started scrubbing pots.

"Ray, I’ll talk to her, but you stay out of it. Your mouth gets you in enough trouble. And come to think of it, your hands do too, junior." She jammed an order slip on the board.

I grinned and snapped her bra strap as I walked past her to the order
board.

"For Christ's sake Ray, grow up! Jesus. You're not twenty anymore. Now listen. I came in here to see if you guys wanna make an easy fifty bucks."

"Cash?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"What, where and when?"

"Well, you know my daughter, Sandi, is a hairdresser, right?"

"Yeah, and?" I wasn't sure I liked the sound of this.

"She and one of the stylists she works with are in a hair show today. One of the guys she had lined up for a model got a DWI last night. And they can't track down the other guy. Sandi always seems to pick losers."

"Anyway. So she's in a pinch. And I said I would see what I could do. Now, Ray, you really could use a haircut. Scruffy would be a compliment for you right now."

"Hey! I'm just going for that 70's look."

"Dirtbag would be more accurate. It's a free cut and fifty bucks while you sit your dumb ass in a chair for an hour or so."

She turned toward Eddie.

"Honey, I thought you might be able to help Sandi out. I called your mother and she said it was okay and that you needed a cut anyway. She just wants to make sure you get home all right and that you don't mind. It's fifty dollars, Eddie. And you know, Sandi always said that you have the most beautiful, thick, wavy hair."

Eddie had a funny smile on his tired face. "Okay, Dee. I help Sandi. What you think I do with the money?"

"Honey, why don't you take your sweet little old mother out for dinner? I'll bet she hasn't gone out for dinner in a long time."

She turned to me and said, "You in, Ray?"

Fifty bucks is fifty bucks. I could score a quarter of Columbian or an eighth of some Humboldt Purple with that kind of cash."

"Yeah, I'm in. She won't make me look like no fag will she?"

"Of course not. Can you take Eddie home after?"

"Yeah. Who'd of thought? Me and the retard were going to be in a hair show."

Eddie and I walked into the hotel where the hair show was. I asked a guy in a monkey suit by the front door where to go. He said to go to the main ballroom. Eddie's eyebrows were getting bigger by the minute. He started tugging his eyebrows.

"Stop picking at your brows, Eddie. You want people to think you're strange or something?"

He put his hands in his pockets and looked around.

"This a nice place, Ray. It big!"

"Yeah, it's pretty fancy all right. You ever been to a place like this before?"

Eddie shook his head. "Unh, uh. Nope."

The music was getting really loud as we walked down the hall to the ballroom. Some sort of techno-dance crap. Sandi waited for us by the doors. She had on a short leather skirt with a tight shirt that showed off her tits.

"Well, Ray, you'll make a nice before-and-after impression on the judges," she said. "Eddie, that is one fine looking tie. Where's yours Ray?"

"Hey, I put on clean Levi's and shined my boots. And I'm doing you a favor. So don't be so bitchy."

She rolled her eyes. "Come on," she said.

We followed her through a maze of tables and displays toward the back of the room where they had styling chairs and mirrors set up.

"Well, Ray, you'll make a nice before-and-after impression on the judges," she said. "Eddie, that is one fine looking tie. Where's yours Ray?"

"Hey, I put on clean Levi's and shined my boots. And I'm doing you a favor. So don't be so bitchy."

She rolled her eyes. "Come on," she said.

We followed her through a maze of tables and displays toward the back of the room where they had styling chairs and mirrors set up.

She pointed to a chair. "Eddie, you can sit right there. Ray, you're in the one on the left. Sit tight for a minute and I'll be right back. Don't touch anything!"

A girl walked past with tin foil in her hot pink hair. I looked at Eddie. His mouth was open. I laughed and pointed to a woman with glowing blue lips and silvery white skin. Her eyes were rimmed in black and she had silver eyelashes. Her white blond hair looked like it was wound around twisted wire or something. She had on a skin tight silvery almost see through dress. Nice ass, no tits. All I could think of was a tree in winter when I looked at her.

"Yep, it's a God-Danged freak show around here!"
Diana Horst

Sandi came back with a huge black guy.

“So, you’re Ray,” he said to me. “I’ve heard all about you. Name's Andrew. Let’s get ready. We’ve got five minutes until show time.”

“What? Sandi, I thought you were cutting my hair.”

“No, Andrew is. And watch what you say, Ray.”

I looked at Andrew. Damn, he was one big mother. He had some weird purple stripe on one side of his short, curly hair. I could deal with the earring but when I looked closer I realized he was wearing mascara. I shuddered. Fuckin’ A, what did I get myself into?

He whipped out a cape and winked at me. “I picked this lavender cape out just for you, Sugar.”

He put the cape on me and I looked down at it. It had all these sparkles on it.

“That a pretty cape, Ray,” Eddie said.

“Shut up, ya retard,” I said.

Andrew snapped a comb on the top of my head.

“Oh. What did you do that for?”

He leaned down and whispered, “Look man, I don’t like you and you don’t like me. So keep your mouth shut and we’ll get along just fine.”

Remember the fifty bucks, Ray, remember the fifty bucks. I definitely had to roll me a fat one after I scored a bag tonight.

A horn sounded. Some guy came over the P.A. system. “Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome to the Men’s Cutting Competition. You have twenty minutes to cut and blow-dry your model’s hair. Let the cutting begin!” The techno music got even louder. It sounded like one of the tunes they played at the WWF matches.

Sandi and Andrew sprayed our hair with water. Andrew shoved my head forward and started cutting my hair in the back. Long dark pieces of my hair stuck to the cape. Andrew moved my head upright. Out of the corner of my eye I saw this thin blond guy whip a pair of scissors out the leather holster strapped to his waist. He twirled the scissors around on his finger like a gunslinger and started cutting his model’s hair.

“So that’s what a gay Billy the Kid looks like,” I said. I prepared myself to get hit with the comb.

Andrew roared with laughter. “You got that diva nailed. Maybe you’re all right after all. That’s Pierre Blanc. Shit, I remember when he was a pimply-faced fat kid in cosmetology school. His real name is Peter White. Had to go and change his name to something French. He thinks it makes him more posh. Asshole.”

Andrew took out some trimmers. “We’re gonna take off that beard. I’ll leave you with a peace patch or a goatee. Which do you want?”

“Goatee. It’ll make me look more dangerous,” I said. “How ya doin’ over there Eddie?”

“Oh, I’m hungry though.”

“Not too much longer, Eddie. Hang in there,” Sandi said. “I just want to shave the hair growing out of your ears and get rid of these mutton chop side burns you have going on.” A minute later she put some crap in his hair and turned on the hairdryer.

Andrew turned my chair toward the mirror. It didn’t look like me. My hair was short and spiked on top. I liked the goatee. It did make me look dangerous.

“Andrew?” Sandi said, “Have you figured out what you’re going to be for the Halloween party?”

“Ooh, Diana Ross,” Andrew said. “Girl, I just love her.”

Diana Ross? Jesus.

“Supremes’ Diana Ross or Mahogany Diana Ross?” Sandi asked.

“I don’t know yet, what do you think?”

“I know Diana Ross. She good. I like her,” Eddie said.

“What did you just say, Eddie? You know Diana Ross?” Andrew said.

“Oh, huh,” Eddie said. He started to sing. “Ooh, baby love, my baby love. I need you oh, how I need you. But all you do is treat me bad. Break my heart and make me sad.”

I couldn’t believe it. Not only did Eddie know every word to Baby Love, he was good. I mean really good. Spot on, knew it cold good. I didn’t know he could sing. Andrew and Sandi started singing backup. People started nudging each other and looked at us. The techno music suddenly stopped and those three
fools kept singing. The horn blew again. People started clapping.

"Andrew," I said. "I think Eddie's got Diana nailed. Looks like you'll have to be a Supreme." Sandi and Andrew laughed. Eddie grinned. He didn't look too bad with his new cut. He didn't look shaggy anymore, he looked... different. His hair was shorter and he didn't have long sideburns anymore.

The judges began walking around looking at all of us, writing stuff down on clipboards. After the judges were finished, they said we had to be back in an hour for the results of the competition. Eddie and I decided to go get something to eat.

I figured we'd go to the hotel bar. We could get a burger and fries there and I could have a beer.

We sat down at the bar. The barkeep came over.

"We'll each have a burger and fries, a Miller draft for me and a Coke for him," I said.

"Ketchup, Ray. They got ketchup here, don't they?" Eddie said. "I like ketchup on 'tatoes.

"Yeah, they do. Don't worry, you'll get your ketchup," I said.

I took a long pull off my beer. Boy, it tasted good. I looked around. The place was crowded with lots of pretty girls, probably from the hair show. A cute little brunette was sitting next to me.

"Do you have a light?" she asked.

"Sure. You have to smoke outside now though. Stupid law," I said. "I could use a smoke myself. My name's Ray, mind if I join you?"

"Not at all," she said. "I'm Brenda, by the way." She giggled like she was a little drunk.

"Eddie, my man, I'll be right back. Stay right here. The food ought to be here soon."

"Okay, Ray."

Brenda and I went outside the hotel's front door. It was getting dark out and it was kind of chilly for October. I lit her cigarette first and then I lit mine.

"Where ya from?" I asked.

"Albany. How about you?"

Diana Horst

And So We Went To The Show

"Right here in good old Syracuse. Go Orange and all that, ya know."

She was looking at me kind of funny. "Hey, you're one of the models aren't you?"

"Yup! Just helping out a friend."

"That's sweet. Well, you got a great cut. Hey, do you want to come party upstairs with me? Me and my friends have a bunch of rooms on the fifth floor. I've got some rum and some vodka in my room." She swayed toward me and grabbed my ass.

Hot dog! Maybe I could get laid! Man, just the way she grabbed me, I knew she was horny. She was hot, too. Big breasts, big hair, and a firm ass. Just what the doctor ordered. I had just enough time for a quickie before we had to get back. Shit. What about Eddie? I thought about him sitting at the bar by himself. Oh, screw it, he'd be all right. What kind of trouble could he get into while he was eating? Besides, I'd been babysitting him all day. About time I had a little fun for myself.

"Let's go," I said.

She smiled and we went inside to the elevators. I pushed the up button. The bar crowd was getting pretty loud. I looked over and tried to find Eddie through the bar's windows. Damn. Where was he? The elevator door opened and we stepped inside. Brenda was giggling about something and leaned against me.

"Just wait until you meet my friends. Talk about a good time! I'll warn you though, don't do any shots with a ditsy blonde named Missy. She can drink anyone under the table. Tequila is her thing and she loves to do body shots. Most guys think she's great—that is until they wake up the next morning. Missy has a habit of shaving guys who pass out. The catch is that she shaves one half of their entire body and I mean entire," Brenda said.

"Hmm, Missy sounds like fun. Body shots. I'd love to do a body shot off of Brenda. Maybe this Missy girl would like to join us." Brenda and I went outside the hotel's front door. It was getting dark out and it was kind of chilly for October. I lit her cigarette first and then I lit mine.

"Where ya from?" I asked.

"Albany. How about you?"
Diana Horst

We got off the elevator. It was like a "Girls Gone Wild" spring break video! There was music blaring and there were these girls in skirts and just their bras, singing into their beer bottles in the hallway. Another girl ran down the hall in just a towel screaming something about her underwear. It was fan-fuckin-tastic.

Brenda tugged on my belt, "C'mon. My room's at the end of the hall." The door was open and there was a blonde dancing on a table with a bottle of Cuervo in her hand.

"Brenda, baby! Did you bring me a toy to play with?" the blonde screamed out.

"Let me guess. Missy," I said to Brenda.

"Yeah." Brenda looked up at Missy. "Hands off, you crazy bitch. You'll have to find your own prey. Gimme some of that." She grabbed the bottle out of Missy's hands and slammed back a shot. She shoved the bottle at me.

"Here."

I tipped the bottle back. It was a pleasant fiery burn all the way down. I handed the bottle back to Missy. She squinted at me.

"Hey, weren't you with that guy singing a Diana Ross tune?" Missy asked.

Eddie. Jesus Christ. I couldn't get away from the retard.

"Well, kind of. He was just sitting in the chair next to me." "Maybe he'd like to party. I could show him a thing or two," Missy said.

Brenda and Missy laughed.

"There's something I've got to do," I said. "I'll be back in a while, okay?" "Maybe I'll be here, maybe I won't. This isn't a revolving door, ya know," Brenda said.

"Hey, I just gotta do this thing."

"Whatever," she said.

I walked down the hall through the girls to the elevator. I just worked with him. I didn't even really like him. I jabbed the down button to the elevator and stepped inside. Why did I have to be the one to keep track of him? Just look at Brenda and her friends. Man, I'd never have another opportunity like this again. The elevator doors opened.

And So We Went to the Show

I sighed and went to the bar to find Eddie. He wasn't at the bar. I looked around. He was nowhere in sight. Oh, God. Don't tell me he's lost. It would take forever to find Eddie in this crowd. Dee and Sandi would blister my ass if something happened to him. I called down to the barkeep.

"Hey, that guy I was with. You seen him?" I asked.

He looked at me strangely. "He's right there in the booth behind you. It opened up when your food came. He said he didn't mind sitting there."

Sure enough, Eddie was right there behind me. I don't why I didn't see him there. I sat down. He was eating his French fries, smacking his lips noisily.

"Hi, Ray," he said.

"Hey, Eddie. I see you got your ketchup." I leaned over and wiped a blob of ketchup off his tie with a napkin. I sat back and drank some of my beer. I looked out the window and caught our reflection in it. Eddie looked like a banker or something and I looked almost clean cut. We looked like average everyday guys.

Eddie was humming Baby Love. I realized I was humming it too. Damn. I knew I'd be humming it when I got stoned later. I hated it when a song got stuck in my head. I looked back at our reflection and took a huge bite of my burger. It tasted pretty good.
Dear Diary,

The doctors think it's best that I express my thoughts in this notebook. They feel that if I write down what I have done, what I have gone through, it may make it easier for them to understand me. They said that this is for me, to help me, they don't care to read it. I don't know what they are thinking though. I know what I did, and I don't regret it one bit. I guess I should start at the beginning. Only you will understand what I feel.

I never was the popular girl in school, nor was I the most beautiful. I never was in a relationship, and I never had any friends. I wouldn't say that I was a weird child; I just didn't get along with the kids around me. I enjoyed watching movies and imagined getting everything that I always wanted. I grew quite fond of watching movies and learning about all the different people out there. The people that were the stars, the people that I wanted to be.

I really hated being the ugly girl. All the kids always tormented me. As the years progressed, I really just covered up my body: baggy pants, non-flattering blouses, and big ugly glasses to cover up my hideous brown eyes. The anger at all the people was building up inside of me. I could feel something growing inside that was never there before, and I kind of liked it.

"Skanky Claire. Hideous Claire. You're such a dog Claire, go home to your shack by the hill!!"

These words were going through my head when I finally learned what would cheer me up. It was a usual day at junior high school, but things just set me over the edge. Toby, the boy who had the most amazing eyes I had ever seen in my life, almost made me burst out into tears in front of everyone when he started making fun of me for staring at his beautiful, sparkling blue eyes. I obviously ran away, far away. I ran into the woods, deep into the woods. Something was just pulling me deeper and deeper. I saw this gigantic rock, and a family of baby birds with their mama regurgitating food into their mouths. I was so angry and upset, I just needed something to make me feel better. The rock was calling me.

"Pick me up. Pick me up. Smash those birds. They are too happy."

March 28, 1968

Crazy Eyes
Chris Thatcher

Dear Diary,

The doctors tried electro-shock therapy on me today. They think that the electricity running through my body will make all the evil escape from me. Evil? They all think that I am evil. I don't think that I am evil at all. Evil are the pretty people in the world that had everything that I wanted. I am not evil.

I don't consider myself evil just because I killed some animals. I've been killing animals ever since that day that I got so angry at Toby. Oh his eyes, his beautiful blue eyes. The birds that I killed that day in the forest were just the beginning. I got sick of killing little birds. Actually I got quite bored killing them. The voice that was in my head kept telling me to get more creative. To have more fun with it. So I did.

Diary, did you know that a squirrel screeches at the top of its lungs as you drag a metal nail file around its head? Or a skunk's legs twitch as you scoop its brains out with a spoon? It's such an incredible feeling Diary. No one knows I ever did this though. I did it for quite sometime. A skunk or squirrel, whatever crossed

March 29, 1968
April 3, 1968

Dear Diary,

I really do not understand this whole mental institution thing. I really am not mental. There isn't anything wrong with me. The doctor tried to talk to me today. She didn't understand why I didn't wear my glasses anymore. I just told them that my eyes were beautiful, and I didn't need my glasses to cover them up anymore. I wanted everyone to see my new eyes.

I always hated staring in the mirror, Diary. I really did. All those people that said I was ugly when I was in school can go to hell. If they could see me now with my beautiful eyes, they would regret everything that they said. They would all want me, just like I wanted his eyes.

April 4, 1968

Dear Diary,

Today someone was shot. I don't know who he was though. Some black gay named Martin Luther King Jr. I don't know though, I guess he was all for civil rights. I don't really care. It's one less person that will ever judge me in the world.

My doctor's appointments were canceled today because of it. Last night I was staring outside the window and I saw a cat eating a mouse. The window was open a bit and I could hear the cat chomping its teeth into the cracking bones of the mouse. I just wanted to go out there and help the cat finish off that mouse, and then cut open that cat. Oh to be able to go outside and get out of this room.

Dearest Diary, April 10, 1968

My parents came to visit me today. They seemed so embarrassed to be in this place. They were embarrassed to be here? Ha! Are you kidding me? They aren't the ones that have to be in this padded room all day. They aren't the ones that have to get electroshock therapy twice a week, for two-hour sessions at a time. They aren't the ones that are locked up here for no reason!

It really was a waste of my time. My mother and father just came to tell me that my grandmother was sick and in the hospital. Eh, I don't really care. It's of no importance to me.

Crazy Eyes

April 12, 1968

My Dear Friend

The cops came in today again and tried speaking with me with my doctor present. The doctors have been trying to figure everything out about me, honestly if the doctor's can't get anything out of me, what makes them think the cops are going to. I honestly did nothing wrong. I don't understand why they keep bothering me.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. The doctors diagnosed me as a sociopath today. A sociopath? That's such an awkward word. They said that they are going to start medicating me with a new drug that's on the market. Like I'm some sort of guinea pig? Whatever. I start the medication tomorrow. I don't know what this medication will do for me, so it may be a while before we can communicate with each other. Stay strong Diary, we will reunite soon.

April 21, 1968

To my Love,

I awoke this morning to the sounds of you calling me. This medication is horrible. It is making me not be myself. The doctors are still trying to get all the information out of me. They want to know where the eyes are. Where they have gone. I don't know how long it's going to be before I can resist this medication anymore. I need to tell you what happened that night before the doctors find out.
Chris Thatcher

You need to promise to keep this secret forever. No one will take away my beautiful blue eyes.

It was a few weeks ago, Diary, before we ever met. Before I got put into this place. I got caught staring at Toby's eyes; I loved his eyes so much. Honestly, he wasn't that good looking; he only had the most gorgeous eyes ever. Anyway, I got sidetracked. I apologize my love. He confronted me later that day. He told me that he wanted to take me out later that night. Take me out? I was just as shocked as you are. I'm not a dumb girl; I knew he wasn't up to any good, especially after what he said to me. Obviously, I accepted. Come on, who wouldn't? A whole night staring at Toby's eyes was something I could only dream about.

I decided to take a side trip on my walk home from school to visit my father at work. Oh that man, how dumb could he be? I walked to the Vet Office, and I went right in. It was unusual for me to visit him there, so it was quite a shock to him when I visited. I went into the office and the secretary told me that he was working on an animal and that I could go on in. He was working on a German Shepard who was just hit by a car. What a shame, ha! I talked to him for a little bit and he told me that I could watch him work and such. Still I had ulterior motives being there.

I looked around the operating room and I searched for something. Something that would knock something out, and keep them out. Something that would make something not feel pain while they slept. Something like a horse tranquilizer. A horse tranquilizer was exactly what I needed. But where to find it? I knew the name of it because my father always talked about his medications with my mother. So I searched the shelves. My father was too in-depth with his surgery to even care what I was doing. I looked in the cabinets, being oh so silent. And then I found it. It was quite obvious; they were in the drawer labeled "TRANQUILLIZERS." Even better, it had a label, "Horses and other Big Beasts."

I said goodbye to my father, and grabbed a syringe before I left. I was so excited. This was going to be the night that I have been waiting for all my life. I was going to be amazing. I was going to be beautiful. I went home and put on some nice clothing. I looked gorgeous. I was so ready for this night.

I walked to where Toby and I were going to meet. Actually surprised, he was there on time and waiting for me. He wanted to meet me in the park, by the woods. He was there sitting on the bench with a bag. I didn't care what was in his bag, all I cared about was that he was there and I was going to see his beautiful eyes. As I got closer, he stood up. He opened up his bag, reached in, and grabbed something. Something white, something hard, and all of a sudden he started throwing. He hit me in the chest and it burst open. It was an egg, not just an egg, a rotten egg.

The fury set in. I knew what I had to do. I started chasing. I didn't cry, I knew I was going to get what I wanted. Running faster and faster, I caught up to the bastard. He was so close to me. Four feet, three feet, then he tripped, and wiped out. He was on the ground just panting, looking at me. I stared into his mesmerizing eyes and I reached into my bag. I pulled out the pre-loaded syringe and he saw it. He started to scream. The voice in my head told me I had to do it to be beautiful. I wanted to be beautiful. I stabbed the syringe into his neck. Within seconds, he was out.

I reached into my bag and I grabbed my metal nail file and I gently carved around Toby's right eye. He twitched a little bit, but he didn't wake up. I was so gentle. I didn't want to hurt this marvelous part of his body. I wanted it. I went around his eye with the file once more to make sure it was loose, and then I took my spoon and scooped it out like a scoop of ice cream. It was so magnificent in my hand. I just gazed into it and I could see the eye becoming part of me. I started on the left eye and Toby started to twitch even more. I don't know why, but it seemed the tranquilizers were wearing off. I had to be quick, but I had to be gentle. I had to make it perfect. I could not damage the blue eye. I finally got it loose where I could spoon it out and I did. I had both eyes in my hands. I was amazed.

I took out the mirror in my bag, closed my eyes, and held it up to my face. I opened my eyes and I gazed into it. I looked with excitement at my new beautiful eyes. No more disgusting brown eyes, no more ugly glasses. My eyes were beautiful now. Marvelous and blue, just like Toby's used to be. I felt like a beautiful goddess.

I left Toby on the ground and I ran back. I ran back carrying both of the eyes in my hands. I was the happiest that I have been all my life. I put them in the...
Chris Thatcher

most secret spot ever. I won’t even tell you that Diary: it’s my little secret.

Lover,

The cops came in today trying to figure out where the eyes were, but I wouldn’t tell them. Apparently, Toby was found wandering around, running into things and screaming at the top of his lungs. That’s how I ended up here where you and I were united. I should have known that he would say something. He had such an ugly mouth. A mouth that didn’t deserve to be paired with those eyes. I almost gave into the medication and I almost told them where they were, but I didn’t. I stayed strong.

I have to tell you where I put them, my magnificent eyes. I have a small teddy bear that is sitting above my dresser. When I got home that night, I used my nail file and cut open the back of his head. I ripped out his eyes, and put my eyes in its place. I sewed it up together and hid him under the secret floor tile that is under my bed. Oh Diary, promise me that you won’t say anything. I know you won’t. I trust you more than anyone in the world.

April 26, 1968

You Bastard,

I trusted you more than anything in the world. How could you do this to me? They found the teddy bear last night! How could you do this to me? They are going to put me away for a long time now. Isolation. It’s all your fault. I can’t believe that you did this to me. How could you tell anyone about my secret! I trusted you and it’s all your fault. Worse, I looked into the mirror today, and my eyes were ugly. My beauty was gone. I am disgusting again! I hate you. If I could burn you to shreds I would, but the doctors are standing here watching me write this goodbye message to you, so that they can analyze you much further. I hope you get locked up somewhere just like I am going to. Burn in hell Diary.

April 28, 1968

Suicide

Michele Abounader

We keep taking our own lives.
Firing unimpressive insults
into our mouths.
Cutting our wrists
with inadequate love confessions.
Bleeding to death
upon the jersey cotton excuses.
Driving off a cliff
into jagged phone calls at the bottom.
With ropes around our necks,
we suffocate explanations.
With rocks in your pockets,
you walk calmly into a river of apology.
But even with my head in the oven,
I wouldn’t dream of taking you back.
In His Shoes
Nicole Caltabiano

Our therapist told us we should never go to bed right after an argument. She says it’s just not healthy. We don’t listen to her much. We don’t listen to her at all.

He limped into the living room on his favorite worn out New Balance sneakers and sat down on the couch.

“Dinner was delicious,” he lied.

“Thanks, Dan,” I said. I made pork chops. He hated pork chops.

We sat in silence. It was our safety net. If we did not talk then we could not argue. But we both knew that the topic would come up sooner or later.

“Did you pay the electric bill yet?” I asked.

“No,” he said as if he smelled something rotten. “I’m so fucking sick of you asking me about the bills and money. If you’re so worried about them, get a job!”

I told myself I would not cry. I went to our bedroom, grabbed a pillow from our bed and brought it to him. He knew where he was sleeping that night.

The line in the grocery store seemed to go on forever. I scrounged up some money for milk. Dan would have told me to save the money for something important. We needed milk.

As I approached the register, I watched the cashier’s face transition from normal to horrified. I followed her eyes to the register next to us.

“Give me your money and I won’t hurt you,” an unsteady voice said. He had on a black ski mask so his face was not visible. The gun that he held seemed to be too heavy for him. I watched his hand shake.

After the cashier emptied all her money into his white pillow case, the gunman made his way out of the store. He limped out on his favorite New Balance sneakers. I paid for my milk and followed him out.

Branching Out
Jessica Maier

Our Monkey Tree stood along the back edge of my family’s property line kissing the neighbor’s field, the field that transformed from lush green in the summer to luminous gold in the fall. There’s no such thing as a Monkey Tree, but whenever anyone asked what type of tree it was, that was always our reply. The name probably derived from its massive cinnamon colored trunk, the hundreds of branches varying in size, shape, and texture that protruded along its length and the untamed eleven-year-old imaginations of my best friend Rachael and I.

The tree was a refuge from seventh grade and from life in general. Often we would climb the chunky sprawling branches until we each found a spot we could nestle into. Sometimes we would eat heaping bowls of cereal amongst the tree limbs before our clattering school bus came to a screeching halt out front. There was a broken off branch about a quarter of the way up that protruded several inches from the trunk of the tree. This was the perfect place for our gallon of 2% milk to dangle.

As we ate our breakfast, we giggled about whatever it is little girls giggle about.

The transition from seventh to eighth grade was a huge leap. No longer the babies of our middle school, we had survived the hardships of the previous year: Mr. Colburn and his crude jokes, the infamous Seventh Grade Slaughter, having only three minutes of passing time between our classes in a brand new, seemingly huge, school. Many of us dropped out of band because it was no longer “cool.” And we somehow managed not to get cooties when the lunch ladies, often outfitted in drab polo’s and sloppy brown hair nets, made us sit boy-girl-boy-girl as punishment when we got out of hand in the cafeteria. As a matter of fact, it was around this time that we started to have an uncanny interest in boys. That’s when our childhood Monkey Tree slowly began to evolve into our Love Tree. Rachael and I sat in our Monkey Tree on a crisp and sunny early fall afternoon, legs crossed and swinging them back and forth, we both confessed to having crushes on boys in our class.
Jessica Maier

“I have an idea,” said Rachael. “Let’s write the names of boys we like on the branches of our tree.”

“We should,” I said. “That would be really cool.”

The next day we ventured out to the tree with an old can of white paint we found while rummaging through my garage and several bottles of brightly colored glitter nail polish. When we had the last of our supplies secured amongst the branches we began our project. It started off with only a few names: Rachael Loves Tommy and Jessi Loves Alex, but it wasn’t long before all of our friends came over to add their own touches to the branches. I guess it only seemed logical to call it the Love Tree, though I’m not sure when we came up with the name.

Rachael kissed Alex in the Love Tree at a Halloween Party my parents agreed to let me throw. He was my crush, but he didn’t like me. He said I was too skinny and besides, he only liked blondes. Alex had liked Rachael for some time now, and at that party they wedged themselves between the branches of our Love Tree as we all gathered below to watch.

“Kiss her, kiss her,” someone yelled from the ground.

“Come on, just freaking kiss already,” a boy called out.

“We’ll kiss if everyone turns around,” Rachael yelled down.

A group of girls turned towards the field and took turns using a tiny mirrored compact to peek up into the tree behind them. The air was beginning to cool off and I shivered in the impending dusk. It must have been an awkward moment for them, but I guess they got over it because the next thing I heard was “Rachael and Alex sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G.”

High School promised even more changes over the next several years. The Love Tree, with its weathered and fading artwork, became frivolous and immature, but it remained a window into our childhood, a portal to innocence. I still climbed its expansive branches when things weren’t going my way, like the time Rachael’s parents shipped her off to a different school district in the middle of our freshman year because they didn’t approve of the new crowd she had gotten involved with.

My family moved the following year. The first spring after we left, I was driving around with a few of my friends when we passed my old house. It didn’t look like anyone was living there so we parked along the road and ventured out back to the tree. It didn’t look the same as I remembered it. Perhaps some of the magic washed away through the many seasons that had passed since the days of seventh grade. But there’s always a chance that is what it looked like all along, just like any other tree.

I still drive by that old house, and when I do I can’t help but smile as my eyes wander for a split second from the road to the Love Tree that still stands proudly along the back of the property. It doesn’t look as big as it used to. Its new owners have cut many of the branches off, leaving the tree looking naked. But in my memory, the branches of that tree are still filled with colorful nail polish and little girls, young lovers sharing their first kiss, and an apprehensive teenager trying to make sense out of ninth grade.

Branching Out

involved with.
(Lights up on HIM and HER. They sit on a couch center stage. A coffee table sits in front of the couch. HIM has his heels kicked up on it. JEREMY enters. He’s nervous. He begins pacing, checking his breath and fixing his clothes. He fixes things around the room and exits where he entered perhaps once or twice to signify he’s making sure everything is in place. He is completely oblivious to the presence of HIM and HER.)

HER: So what’s on the agenda for tonight?
HIM: A date… well… not really a date, per say. Remember that girl he met last week at the bookshop?
HER: For the most part.
HIM: Yeah, well he invited her over.
HER: He invited her here to the apartment? That’s a little creepy if you ask me. I wouldn’t trust a guy who would do that.
HIM: He just wants to have some coffee and get to know her. That’s all.
HER: He wants to get laid. That’s what it sounds like.
HIM: Oh come on. She’s just stopping by for a little while on her way home from work. You can’t honestly believe that he plans on having sex. This isn’t some cheap gritty porno where the girl puts out the second she walks in the door.
HER: You would love that, wouldn’t you?
HIM: He’s not planning on having sex! Well… maybe it crossed his mind.
HER: As it does every guy, every minute, of every day.
HIM: Come on. We taught him better than that. Now which game did we decide on this time?
HER: Arm Wrestling?
HIM: Naw.
HER: Oh. That’s right. We played that last time… and I won.
HIM: Fluke. Total fluke. How about rock-paper-scissor?
HER: Overdone. We can read each others moves by now.

Flipping the Three Sided Coin
HIM: Odds and Evens?
(HER thinks about this.)
HER: Fine. (Doorbell rings.) There she is.
HIM: Let the games begin!
JEREMY: Hi Skylar. How are you? Oh, here, lemme take your coat. (Takes her coat off and folds it neatly over the couch arm.)
SKYLAR: Thank you. I’m doing alright. What’s new with you?
HIM: Alright. Jeremy, I want you to tell her you’re fine, and offer her a spot on the couch.
JEREMY: I’m... good. Here, have a seat.
(SKYLAR moves to the couch. HER and HIM quickly hop off, hiding behind the couch. They are unseen. JEREMY sits down next to her. Small awkward silence. Coin flips in the air from behind the couch.)
HIM: Dammit.
HER: (HER pops her head up from behind the couch.) Ask her if she found the apartment okay.
JEREMY: (SKYLAR moves to the couch. HER and HIM quickly hop off, hiding behind the couch. They are unseen. JEREMY sits down next to her. Small awkward silence. Coin flips in the air from behind the couch.)
SKYLAR: Oh...Did you find the place all right?
HER: (HER pops her head up from behind the couch.) Ask her if she found the apartment okay.
Ryan Sprague

*that he has won.*

HIM: Tell her you’ve never heard of her.

HER: Wait a second. Natalie from across the street? Didn’t they... you know... last month at that party?

HIM: Yeah. But no past acquaintances are coming up here. I want to keep his slate clean.

HER: Starting off with a lie eh? Typical...

HIM: As I was saying... Jeremy, tell her you have never met the girl.

JEREMY: Natalie? I don’t think I know any Natalies.

SKYLAR: That’s weird. She said she knew you.

HER: Ouch! How’s he gonna get out of this one?

(HIM flips the coin. JEREMY searches for an answer.)

JEREMY: Oh, well... I-uh...

HIM: *(Indicating he has won the toss.)* Tell her you just remembered her, and you-uh-you’ve seen her around, and... change the subject... quick!

JEREMY: Ooooh. Natalie! So that is her name. I thought it was Naomi or something. Yeah I’ve seen her pass by once or twice. Don’t really know her on a first name basis... obviously. So... would you like a cup of coffee?

SKYLAR: What brand?

(HIM flips. Indicates he has won.)

HIM: Tell her it’s a very rare French roast.

HER: It’s Folgers instant from the corner store down the street!

JEREMY: Freshly brewed as well.

JEREMY: *(From offstage)* So, Skylar. What are your thoughts on this country of ours? Its current state I should say.

SKYLAR: Well, I love this country. Don’t get me wrong. I guess it’s just the leader I’m iffy about. His radical policies and unfair tax cuts...

HER: Okay. Let’s-

SKYLAR: *(Interrupting.)* And his favors for corporations...

HER: Right. Let’s-

SKYLAR: *(Interrupting.)* And his dishonesty about his silver-spoon upbringing, and, oh yes, the way he walks and talks.

HER: Oh my god, chill out woman.

JEREMY: *(Laughs.)* Hey you’re the one who asked the question.

*(JEREMY re-enters, holding two cups of coffee.)*

SKYLAR: How bout you? *(Takes a cup from JEREMY.)* Thank you.

JEREMY: Well... I-uh...

HIM: *(Laughs.)* Hey you’re the one who asked the question.

*(HIM flips the coin. Indicates he has won.)*

HIM: He should... he should um...

JEREMY: Jeremy?

JEREMY: Um... I...

HIM: This ones tough. Tell her...tell her... just agree with her. Can’t go wrong that way, I guess.

JEREMY: I feel the same way.

HER: Easy route, eh? You know for a fact he’s all for him. It could have been an interesting conversation.
HIM: He wants to get closer to her, not scare her away. Three things you never bring up on a first date... religion, past relationships, and POLITICS! Two of which you've managed to squeeze out of him already.

(SKYLAR and JEREMY sip from their cups of coffee.)

HER: I could say the same for inviting her here for a first date. That's scary enough...not to mention your idea.

SKYLAR: So...I noticed the little crucifix hanging over your doorway...are you a church goer?

HER: (Mockingly.) Three things you never bring up on a first date...

HIM: I hate her. Should we play it safe and tell her he's Catholic?

HER: Catholic. You call that playing it safe?

HIM: Good point.

HIM/HER: Tell her your open-minded.

JEREMY: I'm an atheist. Those crosses were here when I moved in. My parents were hardcore Catholics though and tried to brainwash me into it. Bible study, church three times a week. It was all a joke. I never seemed to grasp the whole "everything's a sin" concept. It didn't help that my little brother was a little on the slow side, so being the compassionate catholic I was forced to be, I basically had to keep him on a leash for most of my adolescence.

SKYLAR: I had a cousin who was like that. Kids used to laugh at him sometimes. Alright, I'm flipping.

HER: Tell her the truth. And tell her about Huey Lewis and the News.

JEREMY: Mill Valley, San Francisco. Huey Lewis got his start there actually. Played in a bar down the street from us called "The Sweetwater".

HIM: Huey Lewis? Like she's really gonna be impressed with that.

SKYLAR: I love Huey Lewis and the News! (HER gives HIM a "told you so" look.)

JEREMY: Yeah, well, Reilly would stop by this comic shop every afternoon, and there were these two kids who would always play a trick on him. They would offer him a choice of taking either a nickel or a dime. He would always take the nickel. The kids thought he always took it because it was bigger. I walked down there one day after he took the nickel, and pulled him aside and said, "Reilly, those guys are making fun of you. They think you don't know the dime is worth more than the nickel. Are you grabbing the nickel because it's bigger or what?" He says to me, "Well, if I took the dime, they'd quit doing it." (They both laugh.) Just goes to show you can't judge a book by its cover.

HIM: (Mocking laugh.) Ugh. I can't believe you made him tell that story, again.

SKYLAR: Good point. I've always felt the same way.

HER: She seemed to like it.

SKYLAR: So what do you do, Jeremy? I mean, do you work? If you don't mind me asking.

JEREMY: I'm an actor.

SKYLAR: (Skeptical.) Oh really? Have I seen you in anything?

JEREMY: (Surprised.) I was in...oh what-cha-ma-call-it...

HIM: Tell her you were a regular on that show with the gay guys.

JEREMY: I was a regular on Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.
Ryan Sprague

HIM: No! Not that one! The other one!
JEREMY: No...wait... “Will & Grace.” Yeah that’s it. I played the redhead’s macho boyfriend.
HER: (Laughs.) Nice slip-up. See what happens when you conjure up these little white lies?
(JEREMY sits, nodding)
HIM: Yeah, well I don’t think she would have been impressed with his one acting job playing a patient for a back hair removal commercial.
SKYLAR: Well, Jeremy, I’d love to stay and talk more, but I should get going. I have jury duty in the morning.
JEREMY: Jury duty, eh? Doing your part as an American citizen, I see.
HIM: Whoa, easy partner. We didn’t tell you to say anything.
HER: Yeah. I’d rather stick safety pins through my eye sockets.
SKYLAR: (Laughs.) Ya know. I think I’d have to agree with ya there.
JEREMY: What the hell is he doing? Jeremy, we didn’t flip the coin, buddy.
SKYLAR: I had a great time just sitting and talking.
(HIM flips the coin. Indicates HER has won.)
HER: Let’s get you back on track here. This is very crucial, Jeremy. I want you to agree with her, get her coat, and ask if she’d like to get together again.
JEREMY: I had a great time talking, too. I feel like we really got to know each other. In fact, I’d love to do it again some time.
SKYLAR: I’d like that. How about Friday night?
JEREMY: He’s gotta lay one on her. Okay, Jeremy. Lean in and—
HER: Wait a second! He can’t just kiss her like that! He’ll scare her away. It’s a first date.
(JEREMY and SKYLAR stand, staring at each other, not sure what to do.)
HIM: A lot of girls kiss on the first date.
HER: I don’t think she’s that type of girl.
HIM: Fine. What do you propose he do?
HER: Shake her hand, Jeremy. Keep it friendly.
JEREMY: I don’t think so! I won the toss! Kiss her!
HER: Jeremy, listen to me, you don’t wanna screw this up. Shake her hand.
HIM: Kiss her, mother fucker!
(SKYLAR leans in and hugs gently. SKYLAR smiles. She looks at him for a moment, and lunges in, kissing him. They Both pull away after a moment. JEREMY is wide eyed, along with HIM and HER.)
HIM: What the f—
HER: Hell? He hugged her. And she kissed him. I guess she is that type of girl.
JEREMY: Who cares what type of girl she is... Jeremy didn’t listen to either of us.
HER: That’s odd. (Laughs.) I guess we were both wrong.
HIM: No. That can’t be. That’s impossible.
HER: No. It’s not impossible. It’s impulse. He’s going on impulse. I guess that’s a good thing... Isn’t it? (Looks to HIM. He shrugs his shoulders.)
SKYLAR: Goodnight, Jeremy. (SKYLAR smiles once more, and exits.)
(HER moves to Jeremy, who watches SKYLAR exit. HIM plops himself onto the couch, still in disbelief. HER takes the coin from HIM and takes one last look at it and drops it into JEREMY’S shirt pocket.)
HER: She’s all yours.
(HER moves back and sits on the couch with HIM.)
Ryan Sprague

(JEREMY moves to the doorway, still staring out where SKYLAR left. He smiles brightly.)
HIM/HER: (Still surprised and confused.) Good-night, Jeremy.
JEREMY: (To SKYLAR'S recent presence.) Goodnight.
(Lights fade to black.)

One Girl Army
Taryn Prescott

A light goes off in the distance thirteen minutes to midnight
I keep hearing the same requiem after
The swan songs grow wings and gather at the ceiling.
The only thing left to forgive are the empty hallways.
And the ticking of the clock.
I don't have to search to see that my compass is broken.
We're haunted by the unfinished legends she has left behind.
Please tell me whose idea this was,
How no one is home and the
One girl army has disappeared.
Her mother brought home everything in boxes
In which we all look
For something now gone.
The permanence of eternity is etched in stone while
The china doll goes untouched and the white horse is sold.
Tonight I can't look at those stained glass saints
And pretend everything's fine
Because the silence still rings in my ears and her shoes go unfilled.
Under the Bridge in Toronto
Jenn Calabrese

The day is benighted,
lights brighten the street
rapid frigid winds whip
between the buildings and
snow glosses the sidewalk.

Water drips from the bridge
saturating the blankets.
Making warmth stubborn.
One worn-out bag of garbage,
positioned as a pillow.
A few more are full of returnable cans.

Wearing all he can find,
his outer most jacket layer
soiled and soaked.
Toes hang out of his undersized shoes.
A sock on only one foot, the other
left bare.

Living in a muddle life,
mendicancy as people walk by.
Accepting all imaginable scraps.
just to stay alive.

Pieces
Valerie Talham

Brilliant white light fills my vision as I burst through the doors of
Woodland High, out into the brisk autumn air, deeply inhaling, taking in the pungent
smell of burning leaves. Cutting across the parking lot, I’m startled out of my
reverie by loud jeers from my left.

Great, the usual assortment of chest-beaters. At the center of all the racket
is none other than Mr. Damon Banks, captain of the football team, center on the
basketball team, Homecoming King, blah, blah, blah. God of the High School. In
other words, a consummate asshole.

I guess I can see why they all mindlessly worship him. He epitomizes
“cool” with his James Dean-wannabe look: pouty lips, lost puppy dog eyes, and
of course, the obligatory sideburns. His red letter-jacket could even pass for the
jacket Dean wore at the end of Rebel Without a Cause. Yeah, he’s got the part down,
right. At this very moment he’s striking an aloof pose, leaning against the silver
1955 Porsche Spyder his father bought for him.

Lucky me. I have to pass right by these jerk-offs to get to the shortcut to
Grandma’s house. Bowing my head down, I start moving faster, praying they won’t
notice me. The trees loom into my limited field of vision. Yes! I made it. The last
thing I need on this beautiful day is to be harassed by...

“Lila, wait!” Damon is waving his arms frantically in the air. Shit. Keep
walking, diving deeper into the woods, hoping the dense foliage will conceal me
from his view. “Lila! Wait!” Damon Banks wants to talk to me? Has the order of
the cosmos suddenly undergone a dramatic shift? Has this become a world where
it’s possible that Mr. Stud himself wants to speak with me, Ms. Nobody?

I hear him jogging up behind me. His enormous hand clamps down
roughly around my wrist, spinning me around. “Lila,” he breathes into my face,
“didn’t you hear me calling you?”

“It’s Delilah to you,” I say, and glance pointedly at my wrist.
“Oh, sorry,” he mumbles unapologetically, dropping my wrist from his
grasp.
“To what do I owe this honor?” I ask, rubbing away the rose-colored marks his fingers left.

“I, uh, saw you walking towards the woods and just knew you’d like for me to walk you home.”

“Oh my God, you read my mind,” I say, rolling my eyes. “No, I think I can manage just fine, thank you.”

“I really don’t think it’s safe for little girls like you to walk home all alone.”

Where does he come up with this stuff? It reminds me of that silly song Daddy used to play all the time by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs. *Hey there Little Red Riding Hood, you sure are looking good.*

I can’t help but giggle at my “protector.” He stares at me for a second, then nonchalantly shrugs his shoulders. Damon’s eyes scan the rapidly darkening woods. “So, why are you cutting through Miller’s woods? I mean, don’t you live on the other side of town?”

“I’ve been staying with my grandmother now.”

“Oh! Yeah, right. I forgot.” His eyes widen with excitement. “Are they any closer to catching that psycho who did that to your...”

“Listen,” I murmur, “I’d really rather not talk about my dad, okay?”

We walk in silence for awhile. I notice he slows his usual slinking stride to match my short steps. Up until this point I haven’t really been paying attention to where we were going. It seems to be the right trail, but I’ve never seen that twisted clump of trees over there before.

Damon begins moving even more languorously, falling behind me a little. Nervously I turn around, starting the conversation again.

“Have you started on your paper for Mrs. Carmine’s class yet?” Without waiting for a reply, I charge on. “I have. It’s fairly easy if, you know, you read the-”

“Rumor has it that you actually found your dad, or what was left of him. Is that true?”

Stopping in my tracks, I whirl to face him. He’s calmly looking at me, an enigmatic smile creeping across his face.

...continued on page 45
Happiness by Jon Hester
I have everything I've ever wanted, but I'm still depressed.

Don't Fall Asleep by Lucas Messier
I'm waiting for you
W/ duct tape, thumbtacks and hate
Underneath your bed

Dr. Benway (MacGyver of Invasive Surgery) by Lucas Messier
Rest room surgery
Removes tumors with his teeth
"Who cut my cocaine?"
"Look..."
"Was he really hacked to bits and pieces?"
"I- I already said..."
"Ahh, come on. It’s been months. You’ve got to talk about it sometime."
"Is this why you followed me? I should have known.”
My eyes frantically dart about. There’s got to be some trail to get away. Noticing my discomfort, he starts to laugh a loud, rude laugh, the kind that starts way down in the pit of your belly. His teeth are so white.
"Oh, lighten up,” he said as his laughter died down. “That’s why no one likes you, you know. You’re way too serious.”
"Too serious?" I charge toward him. “You think what happened to my dad is funny? How would you like it? Just because your father’s Mr. Bigshot-Lawyer-Man doesn’t make him untouchable.” Emphasizing this last point, I poke him squarely in his nicely developed chest.
Grabbing my hand, he leers. “You should really watch who you poke. You might just get poked back.”
I struggle in his crushing grasp. This can’t be happening. He strokes my hair, rocking me back and forth like a child. His voice turns sickeningly sweet.
“Now Lila, all I want to do is comfort you. You’ve been through such a rough time.”
I don’t want your comfort, Damn. Please, let me go!”
He shoves my face deeper into his chest, muffling my sobs.
"Tsk, tsk. You’re just in denial. Shh. It’s okay. It’s all a part of the grieving process. Here, I know what will help.”
He releases me a little and tilts my tear-streaked face towards his. My feet pedal uselessly backward. His mouth descends toward mine. I spit a loogey directly into his left eye. He only widens his lascivious smile and purrs in my ear.
“Oh, no you don’t.”
He ravenously shoves his tongue down my throat. Can’t breathe. Pawing at my shirt, he presses himself so tightly against me. No, no Damon...Daddy no.
Valerie Talham

White hot needles of pain consume my body. I moan, then yowl, distantly aware that Damon is getting smaller. No, I’m getting bigger. His eyes bulge, mouth gaping in terror. He backs away, gawking so intently that he slams into an enormous maple tree.

I stretch on my powerful haunches, advancing toward him on my hind-feet. Raising my paw, I marvel at the long, shiny black claws that have replaced my chewed fingernails. Yes, these will do nicely.

Seeing my slight hesitation, Damon takes off through the woods. My stomach flutters in anticipation... the thrill of the hunt. Nostrils flaring rhythmically, I follow my prey. The overpowering urine smell emanating from him makes this a disappointingly swift chase. I expected more from our star football players.

Grabbing him by the nape of his neck, I shake him as though he was nothing more than a rag doll. Taking advantage of his brief stupor, I trail one razor sharp claw down his face to his mouth, savagely ripping the offending tongue from Damon’s mouth, popping it into my own. Tastes like chicken.

Working his jaw frantically, blood spurts everywhere in a fantastic arc, soaking my silvery pelt. My claws tear with lightning speed, creating a gruesome work of art with his entrails. Ignoring his shrieks of pain, I sink my massive jaws into his neck, severing it with a terrible crunch.

Poor Damon. He went to pieces.

The Best Kind of Love Poem
Caroline Depalma

Is set during a tornado, in an Arabian Desert, or in a rattlesnake’s cage. It doesn’t send kisses or hugs, or laments of beautiful eyes and the day they went away. The word ‘forever’ is never mentioned, and spare us some cheap story about a night underneath the starry sky. If they insist upon flowers, please let the narrator get pricked by thorns every other line. It is asking for something more than some pity. It has nothing to do with anything fuzzy, says nothing about dying without them, brings nothing back from work as a surprise. There’s no intimacy underneath satin sheets, no first kisses in the rain. It merely leaves speakers standing among a dozen misunderstood roses.
In the mid 1980's, I used to belong to the now defunct gang of White River Junction, Vermont's "River Rats," as we were self-proclaimed. There were around four or five of us at its high point. At the time, there wasn't any open-container law in that town so we were seen on a daily basis hanging out on Main Street drinking our beers, carousing, and just plain harassing any bystanders who might come along.

Howie was the self-proclaimed leader of the Rat pack and like any other gang there seemed to be a hierarchy, although it wasn't obvious. That probably had to do with the fact that Howie seemed to always know where to get the drugs or girls or whatever we wanted. He stood about 6 feet tall, hair down to his knees and missing two front teeth. He reminded me of the picture on the front of the E-Z Wider rolling paper pack.

Howie always seemed to have two guys with him, Sean and Billy. Sean was the brains of the two and Billy was all brawn. Sean was around 5 feet, 8 inches; red hair at about 185 lbs. Billy was about 6 feet 4 inches, 250 lbs and solid muscle. He was always showing off his strength, like curling cement blocks or putting one of us in a headlock. Sometimes he was a real jerk and wouldn't let up until Howie barked at him.

"Billy! Cut it out!"

Uh, sorry Howie." He always apologized to Howie and it was one of the other guys or me that Billy was beating up on. Now I was fairly certain that Billy could have taken any two of us with his hands tied, so I always wondered what Howie had on Billy.

There was an underground tunnel that started on this side of the Amtrak Railroad station downstreet, right next to the town's courthouse that led under the train tracks to a point just shy of the bridge leading to the other side of the White River. We used to meet there to plan out our day's activities. Just inside the overhang, down the steps and around the corner we used to, when the weather turned ugly, spend our days partying. I used to go there just to be safe, away from all the people that seemed to be watching me every time I walked down the street.

One particular day in the Junction, it was a sweltering 94 degrees when we met at our usual place. Scotty, the only one of our gang that had any real money (his parents were abject rich), said we ought to go pick up some brews and go down to the park and throw some shoes. While that sounded like a great idea, the $20.00 in the pot wouldn't get us very far. So Howie hatched this plan where we would get all the beer we wanted and we would only have to spend the money we had to get there. The only catch was that since I was the only member who didn't know the cashier at the convenience store on the corner and she seemed to take a liking to me (we did some eye to eye flirting in passing), I was nominated to be the lookout/buy guy.

Although I really wanted to show the guys that I could be a real stand-up dude, I was still afraid of getting caught. Howie said I should go in and buy a case of beer and go to the counter and keep her busy while the rest of the gang takes off with as many cases of beer as they can. Since everyone agreed with our supposed leader, what other choice did I have?

I casually approached the front door of the Shop'n Go. It seemed to be much hotter than 94 degrees and the sweat was literally pouring off my brow. I wiped it off and quickly tried to act as if I was just another shopper as I entered the front door of the store. There were only a few stragglers in the store as I felt an instant air-conditioned breeze as I walked toward the back of the store. I looked over to the side and spied the same bright-eyed cashier that had flirted with me before and nodded with a smile. I was a bundle of nerves as I reached the beer cooler and reached inside to get a case of Budweiser.

With the beer in hand, I made my way to the counter and the little cute blonde.

"Hi, how are ya doin?" My voice sounded like a frog as I cleared my throat.

"Hi, did you find everything alright?" the cashier said with a smile. Because of the cigarette rack situated about 6 feet off the ground, and me being 6 feet 7 inches, I had to bend over to talk to her. The space between the counter and the rack was about 3 feet so my 220-pound frame pretty much took up a good deal of it. Just enough to block my cohorts and our evil plot.
Richard John Gocklin

I saw Sean come in the front and thought hard what I should say next.
"Yeah, heh, what’s your name?" I tried to divert her attention while Sean made his way to the cooler. She pointed to her nametag: Angela. I felt like an idiot.
"But my friends call me Angie." Sean had his case and was making his way toward the front as I continued to talk to Angie.
"So Angie, you from around here?"
"I live over on Beech Street, ya know, right next to the park?" From this point on, I didn’t turn around in fear of giving away our devious plan.
"Ohhh yeaahhh, you live in that brown and yellow two story on the corner, right?"
"Yeah, that’s right. You sound like you live in town, but I don’t remember you living here until a couple of weeks ago when I saw you in this store."

We got into a huge conversation and three of the gang got away with their party supplies. I heard a screech and saw the cop tights as I viewed two black and whites pull up in front of the store.
"I wouldn’t run if I were you," said Angela with a smile. She handed me a piece of folded paper. I stuck the paper in my jeans and smiled at Angie as the cops put me in cuffs and escorted me to their car.

The plan would have worked if the 5th guy in did what he was told and left immediately; but, no, he had to stop and check out a magazine. Angela pressed the alarm (I didn’t see her do it), it wasn’t 15 minutes before I was sitting in the back of a squad car traveling to the cop shop for another visit to Woodstock Correctional Facility in Woodstock, Vermont. All the guys including the ‘mag’-peeper got away and I found out later that the boys had a grand ole bash with the beer and snacks they pilfered. Later on when I talked to one of the gang I thanked him for telling me so. I did get the cashier’s phone number and even called her up when I departed from jail nine months later.

Just in Case
Caren Romanyschyn

Tasha ransacked the prescription cabinet, looking for something, anything, to make the voices inside her head stop, the voices that whispered, “Vicodin, Percocet, Demerol.” She knew how to be quick about it, taking a few pills from each bottle so as not to arouse suspicion. It was easy to cover her tracks - find a patient complaining of back pain or coming in for a post-op checkup and write it on the chart later. No one would suspect a thing.

The person she had to worry about was Dr. Stevenson. He’d been breathing down her neck this morning and it wouldn’t be long before he figured out that she’d been lifting narcotics from the hospital every week. Ever since she refused to go as his date to the annual hospital benefit he was always on her case, just looking for a reason to report her to the disciplinary committee. Tasha had to admit that this would be pretty solid proof that she wasn’t so much a recovered drug addict as just a drug addict.

Voices echoed up the corridor, getting louder as the nurses grew closer. Tasha snapped the cap on the Codeine bottle and quickly locked the cabinet, poising her pen over Mr. Keagan’s chart as if writing her notes.

"Hey Tasha," one of the nurses said. "How’s your day been going?"
"Oh same old, same old, Amanda," Tasha replied. "The hours are passing slower than molasses in January."
Amanda laughed as she counted out Mrs. Brown’s Penicillin.
"Well, back to the grind," she said. "See you later."

"Tasha let out a sigh of relief as Amanda’s footsteps slowly disappeared. She put her hand on her pocket, comforted by the indentations of her secret."

"Good afternoon, Tasha."
Tasha dropped her pen in surprise, turning around to find Dr. Stevenson staring at her with an eerie smile. She bent down to pick up her pen, smoothing the top of her scrubs over her pants pockets.

"I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to startle you. Please, just pretend like I’m not here and keep doing...whatever it is you were doing," he said.
Tasha felt her face get hot and tried to calm herself down. Ten, Nine,
“Whose chart do you have there?” Dr. Stevenson said as he peered over her shoulder. “Oh, poor Mr. Keagan must be in a lot of pain to need all that Demerol.”

Tasha’s heart felt like it was going to beat right out of her chest. Does he know? No, he doesn’t know anything, at least not for sure. He’s just trying to get a rise out of her, make her reveal something.

“He certainly is, which means that I should probably get back to what they pay me for,” Tasha said. “Could you sign off on his chart?”

Dr. Stevenson stared at her for a minute, as if trying to figure something out in his head and then silently took the pen from her hands.

“Well, I’ll just finish up with this patient and then I’m done for the day,” Tasha said. “Have a good afternoon, Dr. Stevenson.”

He just nodded and walked out of the room. After she was sure he was gone, Tasha took a deep breath and let it out, slowly. This was starting to become more complicated than she had expected.

Tasha put the chart in the rack with the others and grabbed her jacket out of her locker, saying goodbye to the desk clerks on her way out. As she unlocked her car, Tasha remembered something and smiled: she was having dinner with Chris tonight.

Chris opened the door just as Tasha was about to put her key in the lock.

“Hey stranger,” Chris said. “Right on time, the pizza just arrived.”

Tasha smiled as she walked past Chris into the apartment. She was so glad to see him after the stressful afternoon. Chris had been such a good friend to her while they were in rehab together and lately he’d been incredibly supportive when Tasha ranted to him about Dr. Stevenson’s antics. So when Chris told her that he got kicked out of his apartment because he couldn’t make the rent, it was easy for Tasha to offer to let him crash with her for a few weeks while she looked for a new place.

“Uh oh, I know that face,” he said. “What did that evil man say to you today?”

Tasha managed a smile. She hadn’t told Chris that she was stealing drugs from the hospital, but it seemed important to keep it a secret. It wasn’t like she was using or anything; she just needed that stash of pills, just in case. Tasha knew better than to tell anyone about it because, let’s face it, even if she wasn’t using she was still stealing from her job. She knew if that got out, all the charts and the fake ailments in the world couldn’t justify her actions.

Tasha sat on the couch and lit a cigarette, tossing her lighter onto the coffee table. She took a long, slow drag and waited for the nicotine rush to hit her before responding.

“He didn’t say anything,” she said. “He never really says anything; he just always seems to be lurking around the corner, waiting for me.”

“You should charge him with harassment or something,” Chris said. “I mean, you’re not doing anything wrong but this guy is always on your case.”

Just then Tasha remembered the stolen pills, still in her pants pocket, and felt the sudden urge to put them in her jewelry box with the rest of her stash. She put out her cigarette and stood up.

“I’m just gonna freshen up before dinner,” she said.

“Freshen up?” I feel like I’ve stumbled into the 1950s,” Chris said. “You know we’re just having pizza, right? I mean, I completely forgot to make pineapple upside down cake for dessert.”

Tasha laughed at his mocking tone, giving him a playful shove on her way to the bedroom. Once inside, she pushed the door closed and quickly changed out of her scrub top. As she unlocked her car, Tasha remembered something and smiled: she was having dinner with Chris tonight.

Just in Case
Caren Romanyschyn

pills?"

Tasha felt stuck. She didn’t want to lie to Chris, but she really didn’t want him to know her secret. She had to come up with something soon though because he was just standing there, staring at her, waiting for an explanation.

"I…I stole them from the hospital," Tasha said. She could lie to anyone else, but never to Chris, not after everything he had done for her. She couldn’t bear the thought of losing the only true friend she had.

"Tasha, are you using again? Because you know I love you, but I can’t let you do that to yourself again," Chris said.

"I’m not using," she said. "I just need them." She struggled to find the words to make him understand, to make him believe Tasha choked back her tears and tried again.

"I just need to know that they’re there, that if things got really bad I would at least have something," Tasha said.

"Tasha, there are a lot of pills here," Chris said. "How long have you been stealing from work?"

"Just a few months," she said. "I thought if I just took a few, I could be okay, but now I can’t stop."

"Alright, I think we both need to calm down," Chris said. "Tomorrow we can go to the rehab center and find you someone to talk to. Let’s just eat dinner and get some rest tonight."

They didn’t talk much during dinner, each pretending to be fascinated by the pizza toppings. After dinner, Tasha said goodnight to Chris and climbed into bed, hoping things would be better in the morning.

Tasha’s eyes gingerly opened at the sound of her alarm clock. She looked at the time. 9:15. She groaned and rolled over, pulling the covers up over her head. It was her day off, why was she getting up so early? Then she remembered the night before and her conversation with Chris. Tasha groaned again, this time getting out of bed.

"Chris?" Tasha called, walking down the hall into the living room.

Just in Case

"Chris, where are you?"

Tasha was puzzled. She thought Chris said they should talk about what happened, but she didn’t see him or his things anywhere. A terrible feeling crept into Tasha’s stomach. She tried to push it away, but it refused to be ignored. No, he wouldn’t...

Tasha ran into her bedroom, frantically opening her jewelry box. She turned it upside down on her bed. It was empty, completely empty, months of lying and sneaking around, all for nothing now. Tasha felt her legs go limp and collapsed onto the floor. What was she going to do now? Her mind searched for answers, but as far as Tasha was concerned, there was only one possible solution: the hospital.

As she walked through the automatic doors, Tasha realized that she had forgotten to come up with an excuse as to why she was here. She began to think that maybe she had made a mistake, that she should come back tomorrow during her shift.

"Hey, Tasha," Dave said. "I thought you were off today?"

"Yeah... I forgot to write up some charts yesterday and I should really get them done before Dr. Stevenson finds out," she said.

"Alright, well I gotta get back to work," Dave said. "See you around."

Tasha smiled at him until he was out of sight, then she picked up a chart from the rack. She had forgotten her keys to the prescription cabinet so she would have to find a patient to get the drugs she needed. Mrs. Drake in room 215, complaining of severe pain following reconstructive shoulder surgery. Perfect.

She climbed the stairs, two at a time, to the second floor. Tasha quickly scanned the hallway to make sure no one was around, and then slipped into Mrs. Drake’s room. As luck would have it, the room was empty. The woman was upstairs for x-rays, leaving only her pills sitting in a paper cup next to the bed. Tasha grabbed the cup, emptying the contents into her hand and examined them before shoving them into her pocket.

"What do you think you’re doing?" Dr. Stevenson asked. "Did you just take that patient’s pills?"
Just in Case

Tasha pushed open the door to her apartment, barely remembering to close it behind her. As soon as she was inside, she started pulling off her clothes on her way to the bathroom. She had to shower. Tasha could smell his sweat on her body, and she felt lightheaded as she groped for the faucet. Once in the shower, she poured the soap into her hands, scrubbing her body until it burned and was raw.

She turned off the water and wrapped a towel around herself. Her shoulders shook violently as she began to sob, rocking herself back and forth on the bathroom floor. At least she still had her job, she told herself. It was the right thing to do, she told herself. She had wiped the slate clean and would go to work tomorrow as if for the first time.

Tasha timidly walked into the hospital, passing Dr. Stevenson on her way in.

“Good morning, Tasha,” he said. “How was your day off?”

Tasha looked at him, amazed at how much hatred one person could possess.

“Fine,” she said. “But I really should get to work.”

“Sure, sure,” he said. “Oh, before I forget, Katie wants to see you in her office.”

He walked away, leaving her to wonder why Katie, head of personnel, would want to see her this morning. Tasha clocked in and went into the locker room to change, then took the elevator up to the fourth floor.

“Is Katie McCarthy in?” Tasha asked the receptionist.

“Are you Tasha Greenleaf?” the woman behind the desk asked.

Tasha nodded and the receptionist pointed to the door at the end of the corridor.

“You can go on in, she’s expecting you,” she said.

Tasha knocked on the door and entered the office. Katie smiled and shook Tasha’s hand, gesturing for her to sit. She sat in the empty chair on the other side of the desk and wondered what was going on.

“I suppose you’re wondering why you’re here,” Katie said. “I received a report that a large amount of drugs have disappeared from the prescription cabinet.

Tasha froze. She hadn’t expected to pull this off at first, but it all seemed so easy that she forgot about getting caught.

“I knew you were stealing pills!” Dr. Stevenson said. “I didn’t have any proof before but this is it. There’s no way you’re getting out of this now.”

“Please,” Tasha said. “Please, don’t tell anyone. I love my job and I can’t afford to lose it.” Tasha looked at him, her eyes pleading with his unforgiving expression. “There has to be something I can do, I’ll do anything to make this go away.”

“Sleep with me,” he said.

“What??” Tasha said.

“Sleep with me,” he repeated his voice calm and steady. “Sleep with me and I’ll pretend like this whole thing never happened. Refuse and I’ll make sure you never work in another hospital ever again.”

“Why are you doing this to me?” Tasha asked.

“You think you’re so great,” he said, anger seething into his words. “You think you can turn me down, laugh about me in front of my colleagues, and I’m just going to forget about it?”

“Sure, sure,” Tasha laughed.

Dr. Stevenson moved closer to her, grabbing her wrist and twisting it.

“Sleep with me,” he said.

“No, this is about you thinking you’re too good for me,” he said. “You’re nothing but a mousy little bitch. You don’t even deserve me, but I try to do you a favor, and you humiliate me? You’re going to pay for that, one way or another.”

Tasha looked into his eyes, he was serious. She didn’t know what to do. She couldn’t report him, he would just tell everyone about the pills and she would be fired. She could sleep with him, even though the very thought of agreeing to his demands made her want to vomit. It didn’t matter, the choice wasn’t really hers to make.

“Okay,” she said. “If that will make this go away, then I’ll do it.”

Dr. Stevenson smiled wickedly, pulling Tasha closer to him with one hand while locking the door with the other. His eyes slowly panned down her body, her skin crawling with each look.
That in itself is alarming, but the reason I've summoned you here today is because the pills seem to be disappearing only during your shifts. Now, we don't have any concrete proof that, well, that... we don't know who is responsible, but I received another report this morning that Dr. Stevenson witnessed you taking Vicodin from a patient's room. He also said that you tried to bribe him with sexual favors in exchange for his silence. I'm afraid that these two incidents are justifiable cause to tender your resignation."

Tasha stared at her, dumbfounded.

"This is effective immediately," she continued. "Security will escort you downstairs, where you can clean out your locker and retrieve your last pay stub. Goodbye, Miss Greenleaf."

Tasha turned to see two large uniformed men standing in the doorway. She stood up and walked out of the office, security in tow. She stepped out of the elevator and started to pack up her locker, still in shock about what just happened. She picked up her pay stub and walked past the front desk in embarrassment, doctors and nurses staring at her as she went. On her way out, she passed Dr. Stevenson.

"Oh, Tasha, I'm so sorry to hear you've been let go," he said. His lips curled into an evil smile. "Oh well, have a good afternoon."

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Cyssanweald
Kaelyn Hughes

Twisted fingers,
the taste of tongues,
Blood-Eagle thoughts—
the death of you.

Encircled arms,
my encircled neck.
I lick your lips,
I taste your tears.
I wash my hands
in your blood.

Hover gently,
pinions prick.
Pumping heart,
flapping lungs.

Gurgled gasps,
pain fleeting kiss,
desperate death—
on Celtic lips.
Lights Out
Colin D. Kennedy

It was a hazy, hot and sluggish August afternoon, and I had already nixed the idea of venturing outside after literally seeing heat waves rising from the neighboring brick terrace that was visible from my 16th story window. Mr. Berg's large rose bushes looked as if they were wilting by the minute. Staying slouched on the couch directly in front of the air conditioner, rooting for Jeter to have the game of his life seemed like a much better plan for the day. He was already one for one, with a double, a stolen base and two runs scored. I went to the kitchen to pour myself two glasses of lemonade. All the large glasses had been sitting in the dishwasher for three days.

I went back to my room and prepared myself to sit in the same exact spot for at least two hours. Jeter was at the plate again. I had a good feeling about this at bat.

"C'mooooon Jete," I yelled. "Hit a homer." Strike one. "Okay, Okay. Wait for your pitch Jete. He's scared to throw you that outside fastball. Smack it to the opposite field." I sipped my lemonade. My eyes squinted uncontrollably from the tartness as I waited for the next pitch. The pitcher got the sign from the catcher, went into his wind up and then the screen turned to static.

"Fuckin'shit. You're kidding me," I said to no one in particular. I quickly ran to the television in my father's room. Same thing - static on every channel. I realized the air conditioner had also turned itself off. and beads of sweat were already forming on my forehead. I thought that a blown fuse was the culprit, so I chugged the rest of the lemonade and made my way to the front door, figuring that the fuse box would be high up on the wall near the door like it was at my mother's house. It wasn't there, and I had no idea where else to look. Even if I did find it, I didn't know where my father kept new fuses. I stood in the same spot for a while trying to come up with an idea. Out of habit I checked the peephole to make sure there weren't any weirdos lurking around in the hallway, waiting for me to open the door so they could jump in and murder me. Living in the city can make you a little paranoid. All I saw was darkness. I opened the door and found that the entire hallway was also pitch black.

What the hell is going on? Before I jumped to any rash conclusions, I picked up the phone to call my friend Seth. No dial tone. I tried the radio next and was utterly surprised to find out it worked. I guess some people actually did put batteries into those things. It was already set to 1010 AM, the only radio news channel my father listened to. He was sort of old-fashioned and listened to the radio more than anyone I'd ever met.

"A massive blackout has enveloped New York City and the entire Northeast," a man with a deep, trustworthy voice told me. I had never experienced a blackout before, only a brownout, which was all together lame. The only thing that I knew about blackouts was what my mother and aunt had told me a number of times while we sat at the dinner table around a Trivial Pursuit board game that had been stained and deformed by overanxious participants knocking over glasses of red wine.

I was stuck on the subway during the blackout of '65. I think I was on the J line. No, it was the D because I was coming from MA Bell, which is where I worked at the time. We had to wait for two hours until someone came to get us, and then we had to walk single file, in the dark, through the subway tunnels, which don't forget were disgustingly humid, in order to get back above ground. The asshole in front of me pretended that rats were running past him. He thought that was funny. That creep.

I wanted to be out on the New York City streets. I wanted to tell my children of my experiences 30 years later as we sat down to a Sunday meatloaf dinner. Not a second could be wasted. I rummaged around the apartment for a flashlight, which was crucial in order to navigate the dark hallways of a building that was constructed in 1961 and never had emergency lights installed. Much like the fuse box, a flashlight was no where to be found. It wasn't in the most obvious places, like the drawer that houses the toolbox, and it wasn't in obscure places either, like my father's underwear drawer. Even though I had been living with my father for almost three months, I still felt lost in his large apartment, a stranger in my own home.

Opting for time over convenience, I grabbed two candles from the candelabra that stood on the mantle as a decoration. Through the window, the city
Colin D. Kennedy

looked normal from above, with the bustle of cars and pedestrians, but I knew there was a feeling of excitement on the streets. I lit one of the candles with a match and made my way out into the great unknown. I managed to keep out thoughts of ghosts and ghouls and axe murderers until I opened up the door to the staircase, where I was greeted with an unnaturally cool breeze. The candle flickered, and I cupped my hand around it so that it wouldn’t blow out. I don’t know what I would have done if the candle had gone out, and I was all alone in the staircase, unable to see my hand in front of my face. My fear level started to rise, but the faster I went down the stairs, the closer the flame came to being extinguished. I slowed down and began to whistle a tune, trying to keep my mind off of every horror movie I had ever seen. The tune was “Dixie’s Land,” a southern war song written by Daniel Decatur Emmett in 1859 as a motivational tool for the Confederacy. Not only was it the first song that came to my head but it was the only song that came to my head. Now I was in the dark, with a candle whose flame danced like a child with ADD, all the while whistling Dixie.

I was more scared than I was before I started whistling, picturing a legion of southern soldiers chasing my Yankee ass down the stairs with bayonets. At the 5th floor I dropped the candle and ran the rest of the way, almost falling at the bottom of each flight.

East End Avenue is probably the least lively sector of Manhattan. It’s right next to the East River and only spans 13 blocks - from 79th Street to 92nd Street. My father lives on 82nd Street and East End Avenue, which was completely deserted when I left the building. My eyes burned from the sunlight, so I rubbed them thinking that maybe I would see some sign of life when I regained my vision. Still nothing. It wasn’t until I hit York Avenue, one block west, that I realized the extent of the blackout on the city. Masses of people were streaming from their uptown offices toward the confines of their comfortable Upper East Side apartments. Everyone looked exhausted, with their ties loosened, buttoned down shirts slung over their shoulders and high heels in hand. Cars crawled at five miles per hour because there were no traffic lights to direct them. I was sure there would be an accident or two during my walk, and frankly, I was excited to see it happen. Much to my chagrin, there were random people stationed smack dab in the middle of normally busy intersections to crush my dreams.

“Are you normally a traffic cop or something?” I asked the second or third person I saw taking time out of their day in order to help the city run smoothly. She was in street clothes, but she was trim, well built, had a short, spiky hairdo, and was wearing a leather vest. She was either a cop or a lesbian - or both.

“Nope,” she replied firmly.

“So you’re just helping everyone out then?”

“Yes. Someone needs to do it.”

“Well that’s very nice of you,” I said. “Thank you.”

“Thanks,” she said. A smile began to form on her face and I walked away, feeling warm and fuzzy.

There was a feeling of anticipation in the air. It was a mix of humidity and enthusiasm. Without electricity there was no possible way to continue the work day. The only alternative was to party. I desperately wanted to call every one of my friends and have a massive rager in Central Park, but the cell phone service was still down. The last time cell phones were out of service like this was on September 11th. A brief thought of devastation crossed my mind, but no one on the street looked to be worried or frightened. Instead, everyone had a twinkle in their eye that said, “I’m sure as hell going to enjoy this unexpected and random day off.” I trudged up the hill on 79th Street from York Avenue to First Avenue. My friend Stephanie had been working at the Sharray Tetila Temple on 79th Street and Second Avenue for the last couple of weeks, and I thought she might still be there serving grape juice and macaroons to children whose parents had not come to pick them up yet.

That’s when I saw an idiot on a bike come flying down the hill. “Hey KenneDY!” he shouted. This idiot was my friend Seth. His long, curly, untamed hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and he obviously hadn’t shaved in three or four days. He may not even have showered in three or four days either. The sleeves on his T-shirt were rolled up and there was a ring of sweat around the collar. He was also wearing an enormous smile. “Blackout 2003!” he yelled as if he was promoting an industry party or making a guest appearance on a new Jay-Z track. “I can’t believe I found you. Fuck technology! You and me have that sixth sense shit. We can find each other anywhere in this city.”
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“Where are you coming from?” I asked him.

“I just biked over to the temple thinking I might find Stephanie. Barry said she left about an hour ago.”

“No fuckin’ way, man. That’s where I was headed right now.”

“Well don’t waste your time. I say we head downtown, pick up some 40’s and find Stephanie around her place.”

“I’m down for anything,” I concurred. “It’s the blackout of 2003 for Christ’s sake!” His enthusiasm was rubbing off on me and I was ready for some sort of crazy adventure. It was never dull when you were with Seth Matlick.

As I walked, and Seth slowly rode his bike down First Avenue, the number of people making their way home intensified. Almost out of nowhere we became a current in a large river of people flowing down First Avenue. Many of these people had walked 40 or 50 blocks already, yet no one was in bad spirits about it. It was humid and sticky. Every part of my exposed skin felt glazed with a first coat of maple syrup. There was no relief in sight, yet everyone was smiling, laughing, shaking hands and helping out anyone who needed it. I actually saw, for the first time in my life, a man lay down his suit jacket over a puddle so that an attractive woman who was holding her heels could cross onto the sidewalk. I didn’t think anybody actually did nice things like that - especially in New York City.

We approached 75th Street, and through the throng of pedestrians I saw my mother and her friend Tommy Moran standing outside their favorite restaurant/bar smoking a cigarette. Let me clarify: favorite bar. A feeling of panic and hesitation came over me suddenly.

I hadn’t seen my mother in almost three months, and I hadn’t even spoken to her in about three weeks. We had been constantly fighting since I was 16, like parents and teenagers often do. We couldn’t agree on anything, and it was becoming unhealthy to live life in a constant argument. Our nine-month hiatus, while I was at college for the first time, didn’t do much to calm the tension, so I moved in with my father at the start of the summer. My parents separated before I even entered the world, and needless to say their relationship was a little rocky. So a move to my father’s house was like supporting Satan and his hooligan friends. I think the straw that finally broke the camel’s back was when I couldn’t find my keys one day. Although it was insignificant, it was a reason for my mother to draw attention to my irresponsibility, as well as a reason for me to highlight her eccentric behavior at times. My father was more than willing to have his third eldest son stay with him, so I did. I found my keys two days later at the bottom of my backpack.

“Hey look, there’s your mom,” Seth said.

Now I couldn’t ignore her, so I walked by and nonchalantly said hi, hoping that would be the end of the encounter.

“Whoaa, whoaa, look who it is. Sonny boy Cahl-lin,” Tommy said.

Tommy was an overweight man who spoke very slowly and had a very thick accent. He was born and raised in Jersey City, so I always assumed it was a Jersey City accent. However, he was often intoxicated, and it was hard to tell whether the slurring was a regional thing or an alcoholic thing.

“Hi, Tommy, how are you?” I asked nicely. I didn’t want to say anything out of line because he was usually temperamental, and I assumed was on my mother’s side of our disagreement. He didn’t say anything. Neither did my mother. He just stared right into in my eyes. Actually, he looked into one of my eyes because his right eye was severely cocked and had a mind of its own. All of sudden he hugged me.

“Is really gued to see youze, kid. Ay, youze should stay, and I’ll buy ya a burger. Youze and your friend.” My mother smiled at us, and I could tell she wanted us to stay.

“Thanks a lot Tommy, but I have things to do, people to see. You know how it is.” For some reason I felt comfortable with him. I looked at my mother, who was playing with the rings on her fingers as she dropped her cigarette butt and stomped it out. “Hey, how about this blackout?”

Tommy pulled out another Marlboro light and lit it. “Alls I knows the beers gonna get warm soon, and when the sun goes dah-wn, the looters come out. I’ve seen it haaa-pen.”

“Well then I better get some beer before it’s all warm and gone,” I said, keeping up the good spirited conversation. My mother continued to watch as we shot the shit. She didn’t say anything. She just watched. Not in an annoying and disgruntled way though. She seemed to be in a good mood and showed that by smiling often in the direction of Seth and me.

“Okay, well be careful honey, and give me a call later if you need anything,” she said. “Bye Seth.” She kissed me on the cheek and then we left.
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catching the undertow and getting sucked back into the First Avenue River.

“They only have two Coors Lights and one, two, three, five Ballantines left,” Seth told me from the next aisle.

“Ugh, Ballantines?” I groaned.

“Yeah. This place has been ransacked. Everyone knows what’s up. 40’s are the official drink of Blackout 2003.”

“Well then we better stock up. Grab urn aiL” As Seth and I carried all seven containers of malt liquor to the counter, I noticed that one of the workers at the bodega was keeping a close eye on all shoppers. The store wasn’t that big, in fact, it was quite cramped due to the idiotic way in which aisles had been set up, so he could pretty much see everyone from his strategic location. I remembered him from another time we had come to this store in a similar attempt to buy beer. Seth had succeeded in the purchase, but on his way out of the store the bag slipped from his hands, breaking the 40’s. Boldly, Seth went back in and demanded compensation. The man screamed in his native Indian tongue until Seth left the store. I hoped he didn’t remember the incident as well as I did. Neither Seth, nor I could legally buy the booze seeing as we were only 19, and I was very thirsty. I walked toward him as Seth pulled out his cash. He had been watching me since I stepped foot in the place.

“Why hello there my friend,” he said jovially and Indianly. “Celebrating the blackout?”

“Of course I am,” I replied. I was shocked. This was not the man I remembered. “You should come and join us.”

“Haha. Oh no, I couldn’t. But you, you have a good time tonight.”

Seth walked past me and out the door with 40’s in hand.

“Thanks a lot, man. You have a good night, too.” Not even one mention of J.D. I followed Seth out into the muggy evening air. All of the bodies seemed to make it at least 15 degrees warmer. Seth handed me a 40 and we chugged. There were people walking right between us as we drank in place. No one scoffed at our public display of intoxication. As I drank, I felt the cool malt liquor travel down my throat, through my esophagus and into my stomach. It was frosty and delicious.

“I’m gonna have to owe you some beer at some point in time.” I said to Seth.

“Don’t worry about it. Happy blackout.”

Lights Out

As the sky turned from blue to orange to red, Seth and I sat on the stoop in front of Stephanie’s house on 63rd Street and First Avenue, sipping on our 40’s. We had no plan but to hope that Stephanie would eventually come home. In the meantime we were having a blast talking to everyone who walked by, candle in one hand, beer in the other. The city was getting dark, and for the first time in my life the streetlights were not coming on. Windows flickered with candlelight and there was a certain silence to city. It wasn’t like the silence of the countryside. It felt more like the silence of New York in the 19th Century. I could hear people talking and laughing and having a good time, and I almost could swear that I heard the gallop of horse hooves on cobblestone. Usually these sounds are masked by an incessant buzz that surrounds the city. I looked up to the sky and saw dozens of stars. This was a treat for us city boys, although most of the duller ones were still masked by pollution. I pictured myself a knickerbocker, drinking in the streets and criticizing the British government. I lit the second candle that I had taken from my father’s house and awed in the amount of light in provided.

The first car I had seen in hours drove by, and the driver eyed a potential parking spot that was right in front of where we were sitting. She backed up her green Acura, trying to parallel park. We watched as she pulled in and out of the space 5 times. She couldn’t get the right angle. I’m not the best driver, in fact I don’t even have my license, but I could tell she needed to make a softer turn when she was backing into the spot. As if he was reading my mind, a man on a second floor balcony across the street yelled, “Don’t turn in as hard! You can do it!” Pretty soon there was a crowd of people on the balcony, along with Seth and me, assisting this lady with her parallel park job. She made it in the spot and we applauded. Seth gave her a standing ovation. On any normal day there would probably only be one wise ass standing at the corner making fun of her driving skills and telling her to go back to Jersey.

Just as our last candle was getting too short to hold, Stephanie and my friend Adam walked down the block. Even in the dark it was easy to recognize the two of them. Stephanie was short and stout, had very long wavy hair, and was wearing one of her typical long flowing skirts. Adam was quite thin and had a
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particular way about his walk. He sort of glided along, not seeming to ever lift his feet.

“What do you think you guys are doing out here?” Stephanie asked. Although she was small, she could be intimidating.

“Drinking 40’s, enjoying the way New York once was,” Seth replied. “Why are you drinking 40’s out here? Are you crazy?” she asked. “It’s the blackout,” I said persuasively. “Yeah, I guess you’re right.” She laughed. “Let’s go upstairs and drink some vodka.”

Luckily Stephanie’s apartment was on the second floor, making the travel much shorter and much less scary. Adam was holding a plastic bag with two six-packs of Bud Light in it. He placed it on the table and said, “I guess this is as cold a place as any.”

“What did you get this?” I asked him. “The place on 69th and York. It was the last of it. I cleaned them out.”

We busted out a deck of cards and played drinking games by the candlelight. It was almost romantic. We got drunk and stoned and discussed our blackout adventures. Apparently Adam and Stephanie had met randomly earlier in the day, just like Seth and I had. Stephanie’s boss let her out of work as soon as the power went out, and Adam actually hitched a ride with a trucker from his office on 96th and Columbus all the way to his apartment on 63rd and York. I hadn’t heard a bad story yet. The apartment was stuffy and smoky. We had been stripping off our clothes in a failed attempt to cool off. It seemed our welcome in the small apartment had been overstayed. We peeled ourselves off the couch and headed outside.

The bar on the corner was so lively that the party spilled halfway onto First Avenue. It was at least two in the morning, but people were still partying hard. “There’s no work tomorrow,” some guy told me. People from the farthest reaches of Queens were still drinking in a bar on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, without any plan for the near future, except to enjoy the blackout. Everyone in plain sight was heavily intoxicated, but there were no arguments, no disputes, not even a voice with “that” tone. I walked into the bar, squeezing myself through crowds of people. I caught the bartender’s eye.

“Hey, could I have your coldest bottle of beer please?” I asked.

“Sure thing, buddy. Here, two for one. Our special blackout deal.” I tipped him well. So well that I probably could have paid for both beers and still given a decent tip. This was the bar that carded me earlier that summer when I tried to buy Buffalo wings. I put the cold glass to my forehead and handed Seth the other beer. We drank them slowly, talked to anyone who would listen, and watched a guy stumble backwards, wedging his ass into a trash can. I also learned that the Yankees had lost the game six to four. Apparently they put batteries in their radio too. Jeter went one for four, with a double, a stolen base and two runs scored. He was obviously at a loss without my support.

Once we finished our beers, and I got my first case of the spins, it became apparent that it was time to head home. We walked back up First Avenue. Almost every night I ended up walking home with Seth, no matter which apartment I lived in. Tonight was no different. My mother’s apartment was on 72nd Street and First Avenue, and Seth lived on 77th Street and First Avenue. He either walked me home on his way, or if I was at my father’s, I walked him home on my way.

We passed more crowds of people peeping out from the bars on our walk. The city was still quiet and serene among the occasional group of partygoers. It was also humid as all hell. None of the open stores had that familiar blast of artificially cooled air conditioner air as you walked by.

We approached a street that had two churches on it — nothing else. There were two empy beer bottles standing side by side in the middle of the sidewalk. Seth looked at me with a mischievous grin and proceeded to punt one of the bottles. I followed suit. The second the sound of shattering glass punctured the still, dense air, a flashlight shined in out direction.

“Stop right there,” a voice of authority bellowed. “Run!” whispered “run!” to Seth, but he was too drunk to exert himself and looked at me as if I was crazy. So we stood still and waited for what was coming. Two cops approached us and as soon as they closed in one of them shone his light right in my eyes. I turned away.

“Hey, look at me boy,” the cop demanded. I faced him, eyes closed, for a brief second and then turned my head the other way. “What, you don’t like light?”
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"Well, I haven't seen light in about ten hours, so it might take some getting used to." He moved the light down to the ground. I couldn't see anything. He had fucked with my rods and cones.

"You been drinking tonight?" he asked.
"No sir."
"You been smoking tonight?"
"No sir."

"What about your friend?" He put the light up to Seth's face. His eyes were half-opened and the parts you could see were bloodshot. He was swaying from side to side.

"Umm, no officer," Seth said. "We're sorry for kicking those bottles. We were a little too excited for blackout 2003."
"Where do you live?" he asked Seth.
"Down the block on 77th."

"How about you?" he asked me. I paused. I didn't know what to say. If I told him I was living with my father on 83rd, it wouldn't match up with my I.D. But that's where I was technically living. Did I want to get into details with this police officer? I certainly didn't want any bad news of arrest or citation to reach my mother. My father would handle that sort of news better. "Well?" he asked.

"I live at 399 East 72nd Street with my mom."

"Well you guys should get home. It's pretty late."
Seth and I walked the remaining five blocks in silence, thinking about how close we came to ruining a great night. I looked up toward the familiar beacon that was the 55-story Trump Palace. It's normally luminescent top was dark and shadowy. It seemed dead. It seemed peaceful.

What was it that put everyone in a good mood tonight? It had to be more than just lack of lights and air conditioning. All the beer also could have had something to do with it. People had abandoned their responsibilities and professional façades and were doing what their heart told them. They were enjoying life. I wondered if people were happier before the advent of electricity. I bet it wasn't as fun when you had to deal with it everyday. But if just for today, the absence of technology that we depend on for comfort and entertainment, taught us to find leisure through those who surround us, especially the important ones. With that thought I turned right on 72nd toward my home.

Lights Out

"See ya tomorrow," Seth said with the regularity of any average night.
"Happy Blackout 2003," I responded.
"We'll have to do it again sometime."
"How about tomorrow?" And we did.
Fucking Windshields
Michael Taber

Storm-sense'd towards land,
ominous seagulls
pass-by
and shit,
all in unison
for hours on end.

They squeeze out
over windshields
smear ing
as the officer lifts the wiper
and sticks
a ticket
that waves at
the seagulls
from an empty lot,
not fit for you.
Sage Advice and Fast Cars

Quarter mile in 14.25 seconds at 98 miles per hour. Black cherry exterior, mirror-finish chrome bumpers and trim. The GTO was drastically restyled for 1968 with a new split 112 inch wheelbase, but it was still heavier than the 1967 model. Gas Mileage: 11 miles per gallon.

III. Jeremy and I look very much alike, but people don't see it because he's tall and skinny and I've rounded out from one too many cannolis. We both have our mother's eyes and our father's mouth, which in turn, means that when we smile we look like two very slightly different versions of the same person. My hair is borderline orange, and even though his hair is light brown, his beard is as red as a seafaring Irishman. When he was seventeen, he grew out his goatee, coarse and curly, and had me braid it and affix a tiny colored rubber band each morning. He looked like an idiot.

IV. 1978 Cadillac ElDorado Custom Biarritz Classic. 425 cubic inches, 180 horsepower, turbo transmission. A final production run of 2,000 Classics came off the line in 1978 to commemorate the end of Cadillac's full-size era.

V. My bare feet thumped across the tree roots poking through the eroding lawn. I ran towards the safety of the deck and the sliding glass door into the dining room. Jeremy was right on my tail, stalking me in the riding lawnmower that he, at twelve years old, had just learned how to operate. He was doing his Piggy Monster face, jutting out his jaw, baring his lower teeth and grunting. I was terrified. I bounded up the steps to the deck and lurched to the glass door. I pulled on the handle as hard as I could, but the buildup of pine needles and cat hair in the metal track kept the door from budging. Jeremy aligned the wheels and guided the mower up the ramped planks and onto the deck. He jumped off the mower and lunged for me, just as my mother yanked open the door, pulled me inside, and slammed it shut in his face. I wrapped my arms around her hips and cried, gasping to catch my breath. She and my brother burst out in laughter on either side of the door.

VI. 1961 Corvair 4-door Manza sedan. Rear-mounted air-cooled pancake 6-cylinder engine. A young consumer advocate named Ralph Nader once called the Corvair “unsafe at any speed.” My father drag-raced his in 1966 and won by default when his opponent was disqualified for incorrect tire size.

VII. My brother made an interesting discovery the summer after his freshman year in high school. It was a story I never heard about until more than a decade later. As he and our neighbor, Jason, were goofing around with GI Joes and parachutes in the side yard of our house, he accidentally sent one of his soldiers through the cracks of the deck. Jason was three years his junior, and even though Jason was smaller, it was Jeremy who shimmied under the steps of the deck to retrieve the lost paratrooper.

Once he had wriggled his way underneath, the fragmented light shining through the gaps in the wood shone on his lost GI Joe, but on something less familiar: the skeleton of a small duck with a few matted white feathers still clinging to the bone.

My pet duck had disappeared one early spring morning a few months earlier. I had come outside to feed him and found only one clip holding his cage door shut, the other lying in the dirt a few feet away. A search party had ensued, combing the snow-speckled woods to no avail. I had convinced myself that my duck had escaped his mundane life and was living lavishly in a Mexican resort. Apparently, he had found his resting place elsewhere.

“Holy shit.” my brother said under his breath.
“What is it?” asked Jason.
“It’s Quackers.”
“Quackers the duck?”
“Yeah, man.”
“Becky’s duck! Let me see! I’m going to tell her!”
Sage Advice and Fast Cars

My brother forgot for a moment he was in a confined space, and jerked his head upward, banging it on the underside of the wood floor. Jason was laughing.

Jeremy emerged from under the deck with a stern look on his face. “If you tell my sister her duck is dead, I’ll fucking kill you.”


IX. My brother and I missed sharing a birthday by a matter of one hour, and although we are both Virgos to the core on every other matter, common sense and practicality have never been strong points for either one of us. By the time we were both adults, he had borrowed $3,500 from our parents to buy a 1978 Pontiac Trans Am and I had spent the “car money” from my grandmother on a 1971 Volkswagen SuperBeetle with a metallic paint job. Since we had both made our purchases in the late winter of 2002, we decided on a relatively warm April morning to have “Car Day,” washing, waxing, scrubbing, polishing, tire-blackening and detailing our new cars together in our parents’ driveway.

After a four-step cleaning and polishing, replacing some of the rusted chrome trim, rubbing Rain-X into the windshields, vacuuming the interiors, and taking steel wool to the rusty wheels, we posed for some pictures on our respective hoods and decided we would have dinner at the truck stop before he headed back home to Rochester.

“'I'm driving your car to EZZE’s,” I said.
“Are you serious?”
“Yeah. I’ll look cool. You can drive the Beetle so you look cool too.”
He didn’t look convinced.
“Come on.”
“We can switch. But you can’t drive my car like you drive yours. You’ll kill yourself quick.”

“’You lead the way,” I told him.

He got into the Beetle with his knees up to his chest before moving the seat back as far as it would go, then jerked it out into the road and headed south. I followed him, barely breaking 50 miles an hour, for three miles, until we reached a straightaway and the first passing zone. I took off from behind him with all 325 horsepower, paused beside him to wave as his jaw dropped open, and pulled back into the lane. I laughed all the way to the restaurant. When he arrived behind me, he parked the Beetle, got out, and just shook his head.

X. 1966 Jaguar XKE roadster. 5,343 cubic centimeter V12, 4-speed manual, independent suspension, factory hardtop. Zero to 60 in 1.4 seconds. Drivers in 1966 could also choose the E-type in a straight-6, but for some people, there was just no fooling around.

XI. My brother and I sat on the narrow curb of The Lake Store, a general market in Indian Lake, the village in the Adirondacks where we had been coming to camp since we were small children. (My mother liked to remind me that the first time I came to Indian Lake, I was “in utero.”) At the time of this trip, I was almost twelve, and Jeremy was about to turn 18, and on his way to college on the other end of the state. He had brought me to the soda fountain, after my parents had floated him a $10 loan to buy our ice creams. We sat at the counter sipping, spooning, our ice cream floats and shooting the shit. It was such a beautiful night that we had come outside to relax on the edge of the parking lot in the twilight. We sat in silence for long stretches of time. We had always had our share of sibling rivalry, but I had a respect for him that could only come with an age difference like the one we had. No one else I knew my age had the kind of relationship with a sibling that I had with my brother.

“You know,” he said, “I'm going to miss you when I go away.”
“I'm going to miss you too. A lot. I love you, Jer.”

Becky Oliver
“I love you too.”
He threw a tiny stone and it skipped down the asphalt.

“Now that we got that over with,” he said, “look at those two cars over
there.”
Parked next to each other at the end of the lot were two brand new shiny
jet black 1996 cars, a Grand Prix and a Wrangler.

“What one would you rather have?”
I thought hard.

“I’m gonna have to go with the Jeep,” I said.
It was an unnatural choice for me, but I was trying to impress him.

“Hmm, surprising. Then I’ll take the Pontiac.”

XII. 1975 Porsche 911 Turbo 2-door Coupe. 3,299 Cubic centimeter flat-6, 5-
speed manual, 315 bph. Top speed: 168 miles per hour. Because of its timelessness,
the body design Ferdinand “Butzi” Porche drew up for the 911 has changed very
minimally since its introduction in 1963.

XIII. My brother offered me my first job in the summers after he graduated
from high school. He was working for a fencing installation company, and had to
be at work by 7:30 every morning. He paid me a dollar a day to wake him up and
drag him out of bed. In retrospect, keeping him from getting booted was worth
much more than my meager salary. But I was paid handsomely with the things I
overheard: Jeremy talked in his sleep.

A common occurrence was for him to imitate his boss, Nick, giving orders
to the guys on the crew: “You guys just take that stuff and... put it... over there.”
Sometimes he merely acted out his own job, adjusting fence posts in their
settings: “Just a little bit to the right.”
But occasionally I got a real gem, like the morning I threatened to quit if he didn’t
put his feet on the floor. He stopped snoring and sat bolt upright in bed. “You’re

XIV. 1965 Mercury Monterey, automatic 390 cubic inch V8 engine.
White with black vinyl soft top. Power steering, power brakes. Promotional
literature lauded the Monterey as “4000 lbs. of Pure American Decadence.”

XV. I’ve never been a big drinker. I was never drunk once in high school. And
somehow it always seemed tacky, not cool, to get plastered on your 21st birthday.
So when I turned 21 on a Tuesday, I had one drink at dinner with my parents and
went to bed early so I could be at class the next morning. By the time Saturday
rolled around, however, Jeremy and his girlfriend Susan were on their way into town
to take me out, and I was ready for my first true drunken bar night. My goal for the
evening, since our father had only ever stocked Labatt, Molson, and Guinness (and
I refused to drink the “meal in a can”) was to find several beers I enjoyed so I didn’t
have to be one of those prissy girls who drank only Smirnoff Ice.

Jeremy’s first pick for me at The Raven was a UFO Hefe Weizen, which
he told me was an unfiltered wheat beer, explaining its cloudy appearance in the pint
glass. Susan sipped a glass of White Zinfandel while I rolled my eyes at her. I had
a Yeungling (my favorite) and a Blue Moon (Belgian white ale) at Greene’s. Jeremy
claimed we had “Birthday Mystery Guests” meeting us there, and, sure enough, our
friends Eric and Mo showed up an hour late. It was still a surprise. They led us to
Old City Hall, a bar in an old brick building on the Oswego River. The bouncer put
his hand on my shoulder and wished me a happy birthday. It was a hot night for
September, and he smelled like sweat and woody cologne, the same way my old
boyfriend smelled after a game of tennis.

At Old City, a Rochester band called The Niche was playing inside under
the arch. My brother had seen them back home. He bought me a Harp, which Eric,
whom I had known since before I could actually remember him, quickly followed up
with a shot of Jack, a first for me. Jeremy warned me about what it would taste like
Sage Advice and Fast Cars

and feel like going down. He was in his element, speaking with such authority and affection that I grinned the whole time. I couldn’t help but feel like a child with my daddy explaining to me the dangers and thrills of my first ride on the school bus.

I coughed when the whiskey hit the back of my throat, not because I didn’t like it, but because it was a surprise. It felt like my brother had just given my esophagus a warm hug. He put his hand on my back and offered me his most heartfelt piece of advice:

“You’re an adult now. Don’t fuck up.”

Wendigo

William J. Stewart

Thin membrane of my arteries and skin separates the blood that flows up to my mind, from the blood that flows down my throat in sweet rivulets giving rise to oceans of pleasure that crash spiral and rage within my center an ocean aflame burning brilliance through all of my senses Each taste scent and texture is transformed into an opus exploding in what was once my mind, as it was the seat of my thoughts but now the carriage of the pleasurable perceptions riding through the fires of ecstasy

Sex is a poor cousin to this

Love is a bastard child orphaned and forgotten

What of Humanity? What of Decency?

Men, Women, and Children?

Appetizer, Entrée, and Dessert
TV Girl
Stuart Stevens

She reminds me of that
TV Girl
That dances to that song I hate
But damn it turns me on
She reminds me that
I am still that
Awkward greasy kid
Who wrote secret poems to her
From hidden distances
She laughs like every girl that
I tricked with modest humor
With hopes my skin could
Hold me in and keep
Me from disorder
My secrets all accumulate at the
Bottom of the hour glass
Powdered thoughts
Just add water
Drink it in long and deep
Do not leave a drop
Your belly now will
Rock with pain
From sin soaked
With fun

For secrets
Turn to toxic waste
If you don't regret
What you have done
I don't
You are here
To remind me that
Temptation has a face
And lies they have
A voice soft as silk
Upon your
Skin
And eyes they tell
The story of just
One moment when
The dark flips inverts itself
And
Light betrays our purpose
Which now holds
No meaning when
Miles away
The words have
Gone dry
But they always were
Anyway

Writer’s Handbook
Philip Martino

I found a book today A Writer’s Handbook: Everything you Need to Know to Become a Creative Writer. “Everything” consisted of 108 pages. The author of the book had a last name of Swallow, it was. This woman was genius though; she managed to create a work about creativity, without actually really creating anything. It reminded me of the late night self-help gurus, they will sell you their secrets to a successful life, but their success is directly linked to their selling you their secrets to a successful life.

“Are you in a dead end job, have a frigid wife, overweight, horrible credit, unappreciative kids, crippling halitosis, a limp dick, or just looking to get the “edge?” I’m Toots Gellar, with my 18 day program not only will you get the “edge,” but also unlock a world of poss...”

“Possibilities,” I said to myself confidently.
The book cost four bucks, much cheaper than my man Toots’ program.
It was an important four dollars. A four dollars that would turn my life around.
Who had time to work? Why go to school? I’ve got the Writer’s Handbook. I was excited. I had purpose. I was going to include myself in the elite company of “edge” havers.

I quickly walked home. As a writer wasting time was not an option, there was much to learn. I didn’t know much about becoming a writer, but from what I had seen on TV and movies a writer is a very difficult person to be around. They are often found brooding, wearing dark clothes, and barricading themselves in badly lit backrooms where there only companions are the rats and the deep dark recesses of their artistic minds. They also use phrases, such as “badly lit backrooms where there only companions are the rats and the deep dark recesses of their artistic minds.”

The first chapter was titled, “A Good Writer is a Great Observer.” What confidence I now had. I’ve been observing things my whole life. In grade school, it was called daydreaming. The nuns always said, “Keep dreaming, and that will be all you have, a head of dreams and pockets of lint.” Strangely this empowered

1 Writer’s Handbook, Phil Martino, 2
me back then, gave me confidence. I needed those dreams and cultivated them, knowing they were the only things which would be my way out of suburban boredom. I now had proof that I was correct back then, I was going to observe the rest of the afternoon.

The wall did not move that entire afternoon I observed it. Not feeling as if I accomplished anything, after dinner I decided I would actually read the chapter entitled “A Good Writer is a Great Observer.” Apparently the observational skills required from a writer are different than those I employed as a 4th grader with the attention span of squirrel. The chapter told me, and I am quoting:

Garden tip: Give Juicy Fruit gum to woodchucks. They will eat the gum and not return. Unwrap the sticks of gum and place them where woodchucks have been feeding.

The fuck? Woodchucks and Juicy Fruit? Did they eat Winterfresh? What about Wint-O-Green? Always a favorite of mine. Should I set out to be a woodchuck?

What else did I unknowingly have in common with the woodchuck? Thankfully the phone rang.

The caller I.D. read “Sluggo.” Sluggo also went by the name Danielle. Danielle, a junior high school English teacher, was the rightful owner of the book. Being a junior high school English teacher involves waking up at the delightful hour of 5 A.M. On mornings like these the 5 A.M. alarm was my cue to make the stumble bumble to my home a few blocks down the street. Not this morning, my friends. I was staying in her bed, waking up when I wanted to. I’m a man; I’ll do what I want. There was something keeping me there, a something that I now know, the book. “Our conversation that morning wasn’t the most pleasant, the statement, “I’m a man, I’ll do what I want.” seemed to have excited her a tid bit. Now I was going to hear about it.

“Yeah?” I answered.

“So you were a real joy this morning.”

“Yeah sorry about that, can we talk about this later? I’m a writer now; I’ve got Juicy Fruit to purchase.”

Despite knowing each other for only a few weeks, Danielle and I shared an understanding. Our friendship offered as much in the way of support as someone could hope for in knowing someone for only a few weeks, but also one whose destructive force reared itself on a nightly basis in the corner of the bar known simply and affectionately as the “Stone.” For this reason equating a desire to write with the need to purchase packets of Juicy Fruit was not something considered all that bizarre.

“A writer, huh? I can see that. I’ll see you tonight?”

“Wouldn’t miss it, Danielle. See you there.”

“Bring back that book you took.”

She hung the phone up. I reread the woodchuck passage to make sure I read it correctly. I did. Off I went to the corner store, on the corner down the street.

“Hey buddy, is this all the Juicy Fruit you guys have?”

“Out here yeah, I got more in the back, why?”

“No worries, I’ll take whatever you have in the back too.”

“Woodchucks?”

“Ummm, yeah woodchucks.” I answered suspiciously.

I purchased 12 cases of Juicy Fruit gum. Each case consisted of 24 packs. Each pack cost a quarter and contained 5 sticks each. In all I purchased 288 packs of gum. Individually I had 1,440 pieces of gum that each had to be unwrapped. The grand total for this triumph of Juicy Fruit was an even 72 dollars, add to that $5.64 for a pack of Marlboro “Reds.” plus the 8.75% sales tax existent in Onondaga County, my grand total was $84.43. Quite a bit if I was simply buying gum, but relatively inexpensive as a ticket to the literary fame and fortune that was assuredly waiting just around the corner, hopefully the same corner where the corner store down the street stood. It would be a short journey then.

Carrying 12 cases of Juicy Fruit to my house took longer than I thought; as a result I was running quite late for my session with Danielle. It was of no surprise then that as I walked into the Stone, she was already holding court with the various union workers, dead beats, bikers, and miscreants that made up our home each Monday night. It is tradition at the Stone for a new person walking in to be greeted
Writer's Handbook

by applause; they applauded without any hint of affection towards me. I bowed. My
night was beginning.

Having no desire to compete with the blue-collar menagerie that had had
their attention so captivated by this person, I ordered a Pabst and sent down a shot
of “Birthday Cake” (Jameson’s) and a few drink chips. I had some thinking to do. I
wanted to be left alone.

I figured it would take me the better part of the next day to actually
unwrap the fourteen hundred sticks of Juicy Fruit, after that it would take the rest of
the day to lay out the unwrapped fourteen hundred sticks of Juicy Fruit. It wouldn’t
be until Wednesday, two days after, where I could hope to see any conceivable
results. Wanting to make progress on this as quickly as possible, I decided to call it
a quick night.

“Hey Danielle, I’m out of here,” I said as I walked over. She gave me a
wave and that was that. It was the first night I could remember leaving her, leaving
the bar after only one drink. I was changing I could feel it already. I had a busy day
ahead of me tomorrow, and I wanted to be as prepared for it as possible.

I missed my alarm the next morning and woke up at 11. Hardly the start I
wanted, but the start I was forced to deal with. Unwrapping fourteen hundred sticks
of Juicy Fruit turned out to go much quicker than I first thought. Like everything it
was all about finding the trick. In this case it was quite easy; I figured it out around
pack 18. All I had to do was take a pair of scissors, snip off the top of the entire
pack, and I had five exposed pieces of gum. Granted this shortcut sacrificed some
of the gum, but like everything else in my life I found the shortcut and had a bin of
Juicy Fruit only three hours later.

I had plotted that night where and how to leave the gum out. There were
two factors I made sure to take into account:

1. Ease of observance

2. Where would woodchucks hang out?

As I laid the pieces out, I could not help but start humming the words,
“Juicy Fruit it’s gonna move ya, Juicy Fruit it gets right through ya, Juicy Fruit
the tas... the tas... the taste it’s gonna move ya.” I hummed this song for the
better part of one hour and one half. I hummed this song throughout my work
that afternoon, until finally in mid “Tas-” everything came to a stop and all I heard
was a nasally almost screeching, “HEY!” It was Danielle. She assuredly must be
thinking I have lost my head. Fortunately I knew the truth, I was writing.

“What the hell are you doing?” asked Danielle.

“What are you doing?”

“What are you doing?”

“I told you, I’m going to write. I found that book yesturday in your room
your room. It’s quite good. Most books would have the person they want to teach
to write, actually write. Not this book, this book has you do everything else. And
then you must apparently write. I haven’t got that far yet.”
“Wow. You lost it. You have absolutely lost your mind.”
“Baaaah, it’s good.”
“Look at yourself, you’re outside in a pair of boxers (I apparently forgot to
dress myself that morning) singing gum jingles, dumping wheelbarrow loads of gum
all over the yard. What is going on? Are you drunk?”
“Not yet, no. Let me show you the book.”
I sprinted inside, wondering if Tolstoy or Kafka ever put up with this treatment from
their friends. I also moved quickly hoping not to miss anything that may be crucial
to my observations and eventual writing career. As I located the book in my room, I
also decided it may be in my interest to put on pants. Also a shirt. I was excited to
show her the book. For once I felt I was going somewhere with my life. No need
for me to feel incompetent around anyone any longer, I was becoming a writer. I
was a writer. Any strangeness I exhibited could be chalked up to my eccentricities,
laziness as a result of “writer’s block.” This was the perfect career for me.

“Here it is,” I said as I proudly handed her the book with my thumb
marking the woodchuck page.
“This is awful; you actually are buying this shit.”
“Look it’s in the book; she’s done more than we are doing. Can you think
of any better way to write?”
“OK, OK, I’m curious let’s see what your next task will be.”
I was as curious and eager to find out the next thing as she said she
was. It would assuredly be something to challenge my intellectual and emotional
capabilities. I was assured of it.

Danielle read:

“Chapter 2-The Race
1. Put yourself into the race.
2. Get yourself to jump the hurdles.
3. Get yourself across the finish line.”

Writer’s Handbook

“Nice, so I assume you’re going to run a marathon as well.”
“Yup, if that’s what the book says, you should join me.”
“You are not going to run a marathon, you can’t do it, you smoke a pack
a day, and when you aren’t smoking you are at the bar with me, drunk off your ass.
I’ve had enough of this. If you want to write, write. You don’t need Juicy Fruit,
marathons, or anything else. You especially don’t need this book.”

It was at that precise moment I finally experienced some clarity, and had
a sense of self-realization I’ve never experienced before. You see after chewing me
out, Danielle took a corner of the book, and chewed that up, and spit it out when her
chewing was finished. It was a windy day; the pieces blew all over the yard. I’ve
never seen anything attacked with the ferocity displayed by Danielle at that moment,
these pieces were everywhere. Unfortunately these discarded pieces of literature
attracted the woodchucks, leaving my work for the day as a complete waste.

I learned something from all of this, I didn’t need Ms. Swallow and
her Writer’s Handbook, I didn’t need 288 packets of Juicy Fruit gum, or even the
experience of running a marathon to write. I had enough directly in front of my
eyes, the assembly of despair and disease ever present in the bar, my “home” down
the street which could create a different story on a nightly basis. If this failed I now
had my muse. A muse who in broad daylight eats books. A muse whose complete
lack of logic rivals only my own. A muse who in eating a book showed more
creativity, than a how-to book on creativity could ever dream.