

Random Acts...

by

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The Worst

There is no rhyme or reason for thinking the things I think when I'm with her. Then, the Worst comes forth. It peers its little head out from behind my head. It jumps up to attention on my shoulder, and starts whispering in my ear. "She's going to find someone better than you, asshole. How long did you really think you could keep her? All you have to offer is good sex, and how do you know that's any good?" It whispers these horrid things over and over again. Sometimes the Worst perks up and whispers, "you need to go help her. She's probably getting hurt by that burly truck driver that just went in. Where is he? If you can't see him... he's attacking her in the bathroom!" This always leads to me looking stupid by running in and her walking out. Me looking as if I'd seen a ghost, and her wondering what the hell's gotten me so rattled. So it goes on like this for days, months, and then a year.

The time seemed to pass incredibly fast. The Worst got older and more experienced at what buttons to push for me to do unimaginable things. I was never one to pick fights, but the Worst would sit there on my shoulder and say, "you are the biggest pussy. Why don't you do something about that asshole bothering her."

I only hit two or three of her co-workers. It wasn't my fault. She looked disgruntled in the conversation, or at least the Worst would make me see it. She would always blame me for being an asshole, and it sucked. I couldn't tell her about the Worst. She would have me committed. So, I did what any good man would do, I started drinking heavily. Thus, I was too incapacitated to act on any of the Worst's whisperings.

I thought that this plan had no flaws, and I was right, for three days. See, my situation is this: I work at home, my girlfriend works in an accounting firm, and we live together, take trips together, basically... you get the idea. The day was going so good. I had gotten all my work done, and some housework too. She was going to be home any minute, and, me being the nice guy, I thought I'd order dinner. It was going to be a perfect evening to go with my good day. I ordered a pizza and waited for it, and her, to arrive.

Almost as soon as I get off the phone, the Worst peeks out, "it's too perfect, it'll never happen. Something's going to go wrong." I assure the Worst that his prediction is wrong and that he should fuck off. Ten minutes pass. "Why isn't she here? She should've been here ten minutes ago," he whispers.

"Ten minutes is nothing. Go away. I've gotten stuck in traffic before, or maybe she had more work than usual at the office," I half-scream back at him.

Thirty minutes pass, and I know he is going to have some little comment. "Where is she now, dickhead? She's probably out with one of those nice guys that you blind-sided," he lets out a little laugh just to make his point.

I tell myself to ignore him. She is probably just finishing something up at the office and will be home shortly. Anyway, the pizza hasn't even arrived yet. I decide to turn on the stereo to keep myself from thinking about it, and to make sure I can't hear the Worst.

There is a quick knock at the door, and I jump at the awkward sound that doesn't belong with "Gimme Shelter." I know it can only be the pizza guy. He stood outside my door and looked around like he had somewhere better to be. For God's sake he's the

pizza guy, if he wasn't here he'd be at some other door. Who the hell does he think he's fooling? I open the door and hand the money in his direction. "I'm sorry, man, but I don't have change for a twenty."

I think to myself, *yeah, how convenient is that?* "You can keep it." He has to know that I know he's full of shit, but then again he's the one who just got six bucks for driving a pizza to my house.

I set the pizza on the counter in the kitchen, and start to wonder how cold it will get before I get a piece.

The Worst jumps at the chance, "you didn't think she'd be forty-five minutes late, did you, smart guy? I told you something would go wrong."

"Would you please fuck off," I yell at the Worst.

The Worst quiets down and starts his persistent whisperings, "where is she? I can't believe she's not here yet. Can you believe it? It's been an hour."

I start to pace around the living room. I wonder when she's going to get there. The pizza's getting cold for Christ's sake! All I want is some dinner, goddamnit! Where the fuck is... I can hear the key slide into the lock. I stomp over to the door, and stand there like my father when I used to get home past curfew. "Where the hell have you been?" I scream.

"Jason! You scared the shit out of me!" she screams, and jumps at least a foot into the air. "What the hell's your problem, screaming at me right when I walk in the door. Are you fucking insane!"

The fight would go on for hours. It would wake all the neighbors. The Worst would sit on my shoulder, doubled-over in laughter. I couldn't even hear Ann over his grotesque cackle. She would yell at me for yelling, then yell at me for not listening to her yell. I was always the asshole, no matter what the fight was about.

The Worst wasn't always a fighter. He was also a lover. He walked through the supermarket at my side, and commented on the female shoppers. "Wouldn't you like to fuck her?" he would whisper, or "look at the ass on her." Whenever I was alone, the Worst would whisper about the women around. "You aren't married to Ann. All she does is yell at you, anyway. Do you really see yourself married to her?" his arguments would sound more and more reasonable. "It'd be easy. She'll never find out. All you have to do is, keep your mouth shut."

It's Thursday. Ann's been out of town for two days on business. The Worst and I aren't getting along, because I've been staying at home working in the evenings instead of going out. I turn up the stereo and sit down at my desk. The stereo must be way too loud, because, before I can get situated, Lisa is knocking at the door. "I heard the music. What's going on?" she says. She walks in and flops down on the couch. I sit back down at my desk, and the Worst props himself up on my shoulder.

"Why hasn't anything ever happened between you and Lisa? She's been your neighbor for two and a half years," he whispers. "She doesn't like Ann. That's why she's always here when Ann's at work, or out of town, or in the shower. And the best thing, her and Ann never talk."

I stop listening to what Lisa's saying, and my eyes start roaming up and down her legs. She is, by no means, the perfect air-brushed goddess, but she's attractive. Then

again, she's only nineteen. She hasn't put on the pounds of stress that most women gain after they discover alcohol in college.

"Jeff left me," she says. "He's such a fuckin' child. He wants to *see* other people. He's not even smart enough to know the difference between *see* and *fuck*. What an asshole!"

The Worst's head almost explodes with comments, "she's young and she's on the rebound. She might as well be naked and screaming, 'fuck me!' What are you waiting for?"

I get up, go to the kitchen, and grab the vodka from the freezer. I hold it out of the kitchen, "want some?"

I sit down on the couch and hand her the glass. Before the first sip of vodka slides down my throat, we're kissing. I lightly bite and kiss her neck as she quietly moans in my ear. Clothes fly everywhere between the couch and the bed. I run my hands over her young body. She lets out a little scream as I slide in between her legs. I can feel the Worst sitting on my back, laughing harder with each thrust into her. He disappears as both our bodies tense and release and tense again. The apartment is silent as the last song ends. Neither one of us know what to say. Sweat and sex lingers in the air. I light up a cigarette from the pack on the nightstand. Lisa stands up and starts to look for her shorts. I grab at her and pull her back on to the bed. Our sweat mixes and starts a puddle on the sheets. The next two days are a blur of sex. We live naked for the duration.

Three hours before Ann was to arrive home, the Worst jumped up on to the bed. "Ann's going to be home any minute. You better get *her* out of here," he whispered.

I lean over to Lisa, "Ann's coming home today."

"So, what are you going to tell her?" she asks.

"Nothing. I can't...," I stutter.

The Worst sits on the nightstand, "too late."

I can hear the key slide into the lock. Lisa and I jump up and try to get dressed before Ann gets to the bedroom. We fail, and the door flies open to Ann's screeching voice. "How could you?" echoes through the building. All three of us yell at one another while the Worst sits on the nightstand and laughs.

The Worst never really liked Ann. Whenever they were in the same room he would always say, "no one would miss her. It'd be easy. She doesn't have any family that's still alive, right?" He would always scream louder than Ann. She would think I wasn't listening, but I was trying. I couldn't hear her over the screams of, "do it! Are you going to stand here and take that shit from her? Just pound in her face!"

I didn't want to hit her. I wanted him to stop screaming at me. She fell head first on the coffee table. Her lip was split open and bleeding all over the rug. After it happened, I couldn't believe what I had done. Her lips moved, but I couldn't hear her over, "she deserved it." Then, he would sit there and laugh at me as she cried. The cries and laughter all mixed together in my head.

I felt stunned and confused. I can still hear her whimpering when I yelled, "fuck you!" into the air. The sobs burst out of her as she ran to the bedroom to pack her bag. She slammed the door behind her, as I sat on the couch trying to force the Worst to stop laughing. I could hear her sobbing out in the hallway, wondering where she was going to go.

Ann got married a month ago. I remember when she moved out. She told me I was too immature to handle a *real* relationship. I hear, from a mutual friend, that she and her husband fight a lot. Maybe, the Worst visits Ann's husband too. Lisa moves out next week, after she graduates. We had a brief affair after Ann left. What the hell, we were both on the rebound. The Worst must have liked Lisa, because he never caused any problems between us.

I don't hear from the Worst that much, anymore. Some mornings, he stands on my chest when I wake up. "You are so pathetic. Why don't you get up and do something? You never go anywhere. You are such a fucking loser!" He screams in my face, "I wish I was dead!" Maybe today's the day I make his wish come true.

I Feed the Machine

I stand over the slot where I feed the machine,
Listening to the hissing and crack as it chews.
It feasts on the suicides of demigod songwriters
With scheming wives who use it for fame.
It tears at the scandal of political vandals
Who care more about money than the people they hurt.

I'm to blame, for I feed the machine
That gobbles the bundles of lies and abuse.
I buy the stories that sensationalize life
And laugh at the decline of civilized morals.
I stand and get paid for feeding the beast,
And I live with the fact that I'm part of the crimes.

I stand with the mother that drowns her two babies,
I watch as the girlfriend cuts off his dick,
I laugh as the gunshots rip through the Post Office,
I cry for the children of rock star addicts,
I keep on stuffing in bundle after bundle,
And I hope that someday the machine will get full.

The Final Days of Mr. and Mrs. Barton

Day One

They sit there in the corner of the huddle. It's the blackest part of the ship, or at least I think it's a ship. Those two sit close together. They know one another. It so happens that they're, the almost infamous, Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Barton IV. You know, the banker and his wife. He got bored with banking and became a politician. I'm sure you've read about them somewhere. Well, anyway, they are always talking about how they used to take trips on the Riviera, and they keep wondering how they got here. I talk to them every once and awhile. They're very interesting, you know. It just so happens that they have a son. He didn't make the journey. He's the only one in their family that passed the test. Imagine that, they were all so well educated. They went to the best schools, Ivy League all the way. He must've been the only one who actually went to class. They should be so proud.

They started out just like the rest of us. They stood in line and took the test just like all of us. The world has become so crazy. One day you're sipping daiquiris onboard your yacht, and the next you're in line for the boat. Everyone looked at Hitler and said it would never happen again, but they were wrong. Hitler was a joke compared to the System. They sit in their offices picking and choosing. One day their number will come up, and they'll be the only one's left. Then, what will happen?

I took my test at eighteen, and here I am. I get to celebrate my nineteenth birthday with this ship of fools. Literally, this is the ship. I stood there sweating in line. I felt like one of those little mice in the maze. My stomach was so tight when they showed me to my cubicle, I almost threw up. I had to stop my test twice to go to the bathroom. The cubicles all lined up for miles. Each person staring into the monitors. All in unison, they chanted their answers at the screens. I walked to the bathroom. I was told not to look at anyone, but I glanced over and there he was. Imagine, my cubicle next to Mr. Edward Barton. I was amazed. I thought rich people didn't have to take the test.

Three days passed after I took my test, and I heard nothing from the System. Finally, a letter came. "You will be retrieved in two days." It sounded like I was a goddamn animal. I hated that letter. I walked outside, looked up at the sky, and asked, "why?" You know God didn't hear me on that day, or otherwise I wouldn't be here. The sad thing is; when this all started I laughed at the people who got tested and thrown on the boat. They told us that anyone who failed the test or didn't supply society with any use, would be forced to leave. They would all be transported by boat to nowhere. They didn't even have the decency to send them to an island. They just sent them out to sea, like trash.

I never thought that I would have one day to get myself ready to go. I thought the Barton's would get more time than me, but obviously they didn't. In some ways, I can see why they chose me. Sure, I'm not very bright and I sit around, but I'm not ignorant. I sat there in line watching people kiss their family good-bye, but I had no one. See, my family went long before I did. It was really weird when they left. I remember when the System started. They gave out passes to get on the boat like parking tickets. If someone cut someone off in their car, they were sent. It started as a joke at work. I can still hear

them, "that asshole got what he deserved when he cut me off." People didn't think that assholes were disappearing left and right.

Then, they changed to undereducated people. The tests started, and dumb people started to disappear. It was weird, because as the System promised, the world got better. No one did anything wrong. Everyone was kind, and everyone was smart. You could go into a bar, sit down with someone, and always have a stimulating conversation. I was amazed. I thought about the friends that had been sent, and I almost thought it was okay. That's what's so fucked up. The System made everyone believe it was okay to ship off anyone who wasn't "socially acceptable." Even scientists had their theories on how it would destroy civilization, but they were wrong. Everyone was happy. It was the solution to almost every problem. Crime, violence, overcrowding, homelessness; that's the most interesting one. If homeless people passed the test, they got someone's house who didn't; isn't that a laugh? Well, you get the point. All life's problems and fears were obliterated.

Day Two

Most everyone has realized exactly what's going to happen to us. I say "most everyone" because some of the blue-bloods haven't quite grasped that we've been sent to die. I can't believe we've been sent to die. I can't believe...

Day Three

I've sat with the Barton's everyday. They crack me up. They're always asking why they're here. I'm amazed. A man can become a multi-millionaire, but can't figure out that he's stupid. I guess that's the point. I keep looking back at "Day Two," and it makes me so sad that I didn't have more to say. Well, today is a new day. I sat with the Barton's, and they told me that the boat lands somewhere. They're still not sure where they are. They told me it was against the law to send people to die. Like I said, they crack me up. It's sometimes hard not to laugh at them. I let out little smiles, and they think it's because I like them.

They talk about their bridge parties, tea dances, and so on. Then, they talk about their brilliant New Year's Eve parties. "It must've been nice," I say. Mrs. Barton just smiles and says, "yes, they were." I think she knows that we aren't going to have New Year's Eve this year. She tells me of the food and booze. It seems like a dream, something I've never seen or will see. She always ends in tears, so I don't talk to her that often. She likes to talk about her husband wanting to be part of the System. He loved politics, and she loved being a politician's wife. I always thought that was a kicker. The fact that her husband actually had a chance to become part of the System, and now he's sleeping in the darkest corner of the ship. I thought that, pretty much, made him the king of all fools.

They were so proud when their son passed his test. He took it early, because he was so accelerated in school. He was the first boy to take the test at age fifteen, or so his mother always told me. He was going to go to Harvard in two years. His parents expected a lot out of him. They wanted him to make them proud. He wanted to be a

lawyer but his dad always prayed for a doctor. Now, it really didn't matter what his father wanted. Their son was now part of the elite. That's all they ever wanted for him anyway.

Mrs. Barton always talked of her sister who passed the test. The amazing thing was that her sister was thought to be mentally ill. That usually got you a ticket to the boat immediately, but not in her case. She got her chance to take the test, and passed. Mrs. Barton spent a lot of her time wondering about her son and her sister. Most of her family was gone and these thoughts were all she had left. It was interesting to watch her. Sometimes she would breakdown and cry, and other times she would laugh to her husband about how this really wasn't happening. They thought they were being treated like Scrooge being visited by the three ghosts. They thought they would wake up and it would be fucking Christmas.

There were other rich people on the boat, but I didn't find them quite as funny as the Barton's. I think they knew, sometimes, that I was laughing at them. I was just so amazed, I couldn't help myself. You know, you read the paper, there's this flashy rich man, and you think he's smart, because he's rich. Well, now you know, he's worthless. That man you see is lucky to be tying his shoes. He may have gotten himself into money, but once he does his brain shuts off. He doesn't have to think anymore. All he has to do is nothing, and that's why we're all here. I used to think I did something worthwhile, but I was obviously wrong.

Day Four

Everyone's hungry today. Everyone has figured out the situation we're all in, and I think it's bringing us closer together. The Barton's, of course, are off in their own corner. It kind of pisses me off to see them act so selfishly. You'd think by now they'd learn. The workers on the boat have all failed the test as well. The only difference is; they know where the food is. They bring it to us, but they never bring enough. Everyone is talking of killing the workers, but I think that's what the System wants us to do. Then, we'll starve and we'll have no one to blame but ourselves. You know, the workers won't tell us where the food is, because they'd rather die quick than starve to death. We could torture them, but if you were going to die like this wouldn't you want to take a few people with you. I don't think killing them is the answer. Then again, I don't think there is an answer. We're all just waiting to die. It sounds so sad when I say it that way. I've always tried to make the best of any situation, but this one is tough. It's very hard to swallow the fact that I'm being killed because I'm worthless. I don't think I'm worthless, but some goddamn test says I am.

Well, the Barton's they still think the boat's going to turn around and drop them off at their yacht club. I've tried to tell Mrs. Barton that it's just not going to happen, but she insists that it will. "They can't kill us, my husband's a politician. You can't just kill a politician and think no one will notice," she always says. The truth is the System can. All they have to do is tell his constituents he didn't pass the test. Everyone will think it's okay, because the System says so.

The tears on her face subside, I apologize, and we go back to talking about the real world. Mr. Barton is in some sort of shock. He still hasn't decided to talk to me too often, but occasionally he pipes up. His wife started in about how their son would most

likely become a lawyer now. He turned immediately and said, "there's no chance of him becoming a lawyer. He'll be a doctor, because he has respect for me and what I want." I just walked away from that conversation.

Day Five

Well, the first person died today. He was old and he was starving. I think there will be more people dying in the next few days. I wish I didn't have to see it. No one likes death. The worst serial killer in the world will even disassociate himself with the act of killing. They say they black out as the crime is happening. I wonder if the System blacks out as we die. I'm sure they don't think about it in their perfect little world. I remember when we boarded the boat. There was only one representative of the System there. He stood on a high platform thirty feet above us. He stood there and watched. The look on his face was of disgust. I wonder if it was directed at us or at what the world has become. I saw him turn and walk back into the building. I hope he felt something.

The System never really became the government by the democratic process. It just took power. There were always people behind the scenes in government, and for many years they enjoyed their lives behind the scenes. You know, they funded government programs, they asked for donations to a certain candidate's campaign fund, and they funded small wars in small countries. They had the power to do anything, and they soon did. They became the government. A lot of people were upset at first, but people got used to the idea. Things were getting done, something that the government could never quite achieve. People prospered for awhile. Everyone was happy. It was somewhat like the Reagan years, from what I hear. Now, people are upset by the fact that their loved ones are being taken from them, but they think if they rock the boat they'll be sent too. It's turned into a country where everyone is in it for themselves. I know you're saying to yourself, "that's how it's always been." I don't think that's true. People banded together more in the old days. No one could fuck with your family, and the family was what everyone wanted to be strong. Now, no one cares. If you lose your family it's strangely okay.

I sat down for awhile with Mrs. Barton today. She knew I was there, but she didn't feel like talking. So, instead, she just ignored me. Her husband was in the mood to talk. He started in on how he came from a poor family. He told me how he worked hard to get what he had, and how he deserved the life he had. He didn't realize that he was loosing his grip with the ideals he grew up with until the day he got his notice for the boat. I knew he wasn't dumb. That moment felt like the times when my grandfather sat me down and talked to me about the old days. He would tell me how hard his life was, and how he wished for me to have much better. It turned out that Mr. Barton wasn't here because he was stupid, but because he was worthless to society as a whole.

Day Six

The workers were killed today. It was the most bloody revolution I had ever seen. The strongest men on the boat got together and beat the men to death. It reminded me of

the stories I read in this book about people being stoned to death for blasphemy. Whenever I say that word most people don't know what I'm talking about. At one time, there was a book, called "The Bible," everyone built great buildings to the God described in it. They all rejoiced and celebrated a man called Jesus. Those must have been happier times. Nowadays, no one has any direction, at least not from a book. The sky is still blue and the grass is still green, but no one follows any kind of messiah. That same book told me that we were all sinners. Today, there's no such thing. I wish I would have finished that book, but it was banned before I got a chance. People believe more in destiny and fate. They think they have these guardian angels watching over them. I know that's true. It's my destiny to be here with all these people, and especially the Barton's. I don't really answer to any one God. I answer to the universe, but then again doesn't everyone.

Well, anyway, back to the killing. Fortunately, the men who killed the workers found the key to the food storage area of the boat. We will have to ration out the food, but they'll probably throw a huge feast tonight. You must remember that these people are here because their imbeciles. They don't realize the importance of every morsel of food. They think we're going to land somewhere.

Day Seven

I was dreaming of the Barton's home today as Mrs. Barton told me about it. She called it modest which made me laugh. There was absolutely nothing modest about their house. It was huge from her description. I was so amazed. They had everything, stables, servants quarters, acres upon acres of land, and a seven-car garage. They didn't even have to see each other for a week if they didn't want to. She told me that one day she walked from one wing of the house to the other, can you believe it took her a whole day to make it to the other side. Of course, I've never seen the house, so she could be lying. During Christmas, she told me, the kids had a train that ran from one end of the house to the other. They were spoiled. I guess that's what went wrong with the Barton's, they just spoiled themselves stupid.

Day Eight

Mrs. Barton has fallen ill. I feel sorry for her husband, because he thinks it's the end for her. I could hear him crying during the night. The people on the boat are getting restless. They are waiting for someone to die because the food supply is getting scarce. I hope she doesn't die. I've always liked her, and I think we've become somewhat friends. It's hard to say, because it's only been eight days. She 's got this silver pin she wears on her coat, and I'm afraid someone will steal it if she dies. I know her husband can't protect her from scavengers. Of course, he's become so delirious and weak that he can barely protect himself. I have a feeling others on the boat have gotten wise to who they are. I wish I could watch over them, but it's not my job anymore.

Mr. Barton stood up from his wife while I was thinking to myself in the corner. I think she's passed away. It was almost like vultures landing on their prey. The others just took what they could. Then, one of the stronger men came over, picked her up, and took her away from the general population. I'm sure they were taking her to the food locker. I looked around for Mr. Barton. The darkest corner of the boat looked empty, but I could make out the small outline of him. I know he wants to be alone. I'm sure he feels like a failure, and now he knows that we're all going to die.

It's quite amazing to me, the fact that he's just now realizing he's going to die. Money must make you feel like a teenager, you know invincible. Mortality, I think, is the worst realization in the world. It let's us know just who we are, too bad it doesn't tell us why we're here.

Day Nine

I'm slowly losing my senses. I don't think I've seen sunlight in the last two days. I can tell it's there, but I just can't see it. I'm almost becoming nocturnal from all the time I spend below deck. I feel like most of the others look. There is a feeling of failure in the air. I feel it. Everyone sits in small huddles talking about nothing. They all have the same question in mind. They wonder when we'll land. I know we won't. I was put in charge of all these people's destinies, and I've failed miserably.

Mr. Barton sits close to me and I tell him about my life, and how I've lived in poverty for most of it. I tell him that I understand what happened to him. He looks closely at me and tells me I have no idea what he's been through. He takes some gasping breaths and falls limp in my lap. The thing that killed me at that moment was that he was wrong. I do know what he's been through. It's tough being a guardian angel.

Cowards

My wife will be
Standing at the door,
Pissed as usual.
The boy will be asleep,
But I will wake him
As I trip through the halls.
I will shake him
As my anger grows.
I will think back
To the piano player
That filled me with escape,
And the seven and sevens
That filled me with fear.
The fear that I'm no better
Than my old man.

I will lie awake and pray
For death.
Wishing the pains would stop
Ripping and pulling at me
With every swing of my fist.
I lie awake and wait
For God to do His worst.
He fucked up
When He put me here,
When He let her fall
In love with me,
And when He gave me a child.
And now,
As I question His will,
The blade pierces its first vein.

Straight Jacket

“No one gets out of this life without pain.”

-Mary Tyler Moore

Shock

Our parents named him Sultan. He never liked it much. He thought it sounded like a dog's name. So, over the years he slowly became S'tan. He's always been popular with the ladies. He's always had a girl with him when he comes to visit. He was in the car that day. He sat in the backseat so quietly that Lester didn't even know he was there. S'tan sat, pushed into the corner, quiet. He never said a word, even when Lester started yelling. I couldn't help swerving. I was getting upset, and Lester was scaring me. My feet pushed harder into the floorboard. I screamed and jerked the wheel. Lester screamed for me to slow down, but it only frightened me more. I can still hear the squeal of the front bumper and his terrified screech as I lost control.

I woke up still hearing his horrid screaming. I jumped, but couldn't move. I'd been strapped into the bed so tightly that the nylon straps tore into my arms when I attempted to move. Everything was blurred. People were all standing over me trying to talk to me, but they didn't speak English. Their mouths would open and close sometimes, and no words would come out. It was like a badly dubbed Japanese monster movie. I could feel the impact of the car hitting the tree in my chest. It made it almost impossible to breathe. I kept asking the people about Lester, but none of them would tell me. I could hear his screaming the whole time. It rang in my head, and echoed through my room. I asked about S'tan, but everyone just looked at me like they didn't know what I was saying. “Everything's going to be okay, dear. Don't try to move, you'll hurt yourself. Just lie still,” the people all talked to me like I was a three year-old.

I could hear the squeak of the old wheelchair as it edged into my room. I was too frightened to ask who was there. I laid there, shaking, wondering if I would ever find out who was in my room. The squeak fell silent as the chair pulled right up to my bed. I still couldn't see who it was. Finally, Lester's black hair popped into my range of view. His face flinched in pain as he moved himself up to see if I was awake. “Lilly, you awake?” he grunted. I could feel tears running down the sides of my face from the relief that it was Lester, instead of some psychotic patient loose from the nylon straps of his bed.

“I'm awake, Lester. What happened? Why are you in a wheelchair?” I sobbed. “Where's S'tan?”

Denial

They all stood, silently crying, over the grave. I stood next to Marion, my oldest sister. She said nothing to me, but kept leaning over to Lester's ear. I couldn't hear the sobs of my brothers and sister. All I could hear was the wind as it picked up the leaves around the cemetery and laid them on top of whoever rested beneath. It was so cold, and every gust made it that much colder. My fingers started to numb inside my gloves. Finally, the sobbing started to subside, and my siblings turned from the grave. I stayed

for a moment longer, and then turned to join them. Marion took three steps, and then fainted into Lester's arms. With a graceful swoop, he picked up her legs and carried her the rest of the way to the limousine. In the car, they all sat silent, until S'tan leaned to Marion's ear. "It's all right, dear. She's gone to a better place."

Marion looked confused. "I don't care. I'm going to miss her terribly, and neither of you care. She was the only one of us that understood me, and now she's gone," Marion's voice shook with sobs as she spoke. She was right, I was the only one that understood her. But, I wasn't gone. I was right here. I leaned over to her and whispered, "I'm right here, Marion." The cold wind of my voice made her whole body shiver, and she moved closer to S'tan to keep warm. S'tan put his arm around her and received her chill.

Marion sat in her room for days after the funeral. I sat in the far corner and watched her. S'tan and Lester went to work, as usual, and left Marion by herself with her sadness. She would pace back and forth in her room, and then sit for hours and stare out the window into the garden. She would remember the long walks her and I would take through the garden, and talk about things. She was a beautiful girl, and needed guidance on many occasions. I was her older sister, and I was there for her. Just like I was there for her now. She would squint and stare out at the garden until she could see me walking through the hedges. Then, she would jump from her seat and yell for the two boys. "She's back! Lilly's out in the garden! Come on!" Lester and S'tan became less amused when she started waking them up at all hours of the night. The truth is, though, I went walking through the garden quite often. I would walk and try to think of a way to get Marion out of her room. I would stand out in the garden and motion for her to come join me. I didn't want her to wake up our brothers. I just wanted her to get out for awhile and breathe in some fresh air. It couldn't be good for her to stay cooped up all the time. But instead, she would yell and scream until the boys woke up. I kept trying to motion to her not to scream, but she did it anyway.

The boys really had no choice but to bring her here. She needed help. The doctors here could do just that. I still sit in the corner of Marion's room, and watch her. She tries to talk to me, but she can't understand what I say to her. She stares out the window and waits for me to show up every night, but I stopped taking outdoor walks when we left the house. The staff here is very good to my poor sister, and they don't treat her like she's lost her mind. The boys visit twice a week, and sometimes they bring flowers from the garden.

Anger

S'tan had a temper ever since he was little. He and Lester fought constantly for, probably, eight years. Our parents just thought of it as natural for two young boys to fight. But, the years past and the fights got increasingly more violent. It all started as wrestling, but soon gave way to bare-knuckle brawling. Lester had no choice sometimes but to give S'tan a black eye or bloody lip. Our parents continued to shrug it off and figured that sooner or later S'tan would either give up or learn to fight better. The fighting subsided for a few months, and everyone thought that S'tan had finally learned his lesson.

The day started like any other. Lester woke up and made his way to the kitchen for some breakfast. I woke up soon after him and did the same. It was summer, and the three of us were all out of school. S'tan enjoyed sleeping in, and rarely joined us for breakfast. Sometimes, he would make it out of bed in time for lunch. Lester looked up as I walked into the kitchen. "What's up for today?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," I sleepily replied.

"Do you want to play a game?" his eyes brightened with mischief.

I was still half asleep when I answered, "Sure."

Lester explained that his game couldn't start without S'tan. So, we sat down in front of the TV until S'tan woke up. It was very odd, but S'tan drug himself down the stairs at around ten. Before he could fully awaken Lester yelled, "hey S'tan, wanna play a game today?"

His dry throat answered back, "why not? Is there anything left for breakfast?"

Lester waited for S'tan to eat, bathe, and dress before the game started. "This game is called 'Escape Artist'," Lester announced to us. "S'tan, you and I will tie up Lilly. Then, we'll set the egg timer to ten minutes. If she doesn't escape, we'll untie her. Then, it'll be my turn."

S'tan and I looked at one another in amazement. We couldn't believe that we were going to get to play such an exciting game. We scurried to the garage and kitchen to get the necessary equipment. Lester pulled one of the kitchen chairs into the middle of the living room, and turned off the TV. I took my place in the chair and acted as if I was getting mentally prepared for the world's most amazing escape. The two boys started wrapping and tying the ropes around me. I could feel the ropes burning into my skin, but I was a professional escape artist. It didn't hurt until Lester grabbed the egg timer, turned it to ten, and I started to wrestle my way out of the series of knots. The egg timer ticked away the minutes. I kept trying to pull my way free, thinking I was stronger than the ropes. Finally, the timer went off.

"Okay S'tan, it's time to let her free," Lester laughed. I begged him to give me more time. "You can go again after me and S'tan go." I turned the chair over to Lester and took my turn at tying the strongest knots I could. S'tan turned the dial on the timer to ten and we waited. Lester's face turned white as he concentrated on the ropes. He closed his eyes and started to wiggle slowly in the chair. His hands moved from their tied positions and slid towards the other, harder knots. He slithered around like a snake in the chair, and finally the ropes dropped to his feet. He was free in eight minutes. S'tan stood there, awestruck, by his older brother's feat. Lester stood there, triumphant over his two younger siblings. I was amazed at Lester's unique skill. He had beaten me, but S'tan still had a chance to better his older brother.

S'tan slid quietly into the chair, and started planning his escape. Lester looked over to me and gave me a small nod. "When we get him tied up we'll dump him out on the front lawn and lock the front door. Trust me, it'll be funny." A small laugh jumped over my lips as we tied the ropes as hard as we could around S'tan. Lester grabbed the timer and set it to ten. And then with a wink, he and I picked up our poor younger brother, chair and all, and carried him out to the front lawn. Lester set him down right in the middle and started laughing. I couldn't help myself. At the sound of my brothers laugh, I started laughing uncontrollably. We both ran back to the front door and slammed

it shut locking it behind us. We could hear S'tan's yelling as we laughed with our backs to the door. As soon as our laughter would subside, a car would drive by and honk at the tied boy in the front yard. Immediately, we would burst into laughter again.

It had been an hour since the egg timer went off when S'tan entered the house. He acted calm, but we could both see the hatred in his eyes. He said nothing. He just walked to the kitchen. Lester turned towards the kitchen, "hey S'tanny, we've been looking all over for you. Where you been?" With that, both of us burst into a fit of laughter again. S'tan walked back to the kitchen doorway again. He started running at Lester. Just before he reached him, I saw the glimmer off the butcher knife. He raised it above his head, and thrust it down at Lester. A scream jumped out of my stomach. Lester side-stepped and kicked S'tan's legs out from underneath him. He landed with the knife off to his side. As fast as he had hit the ground, he was back on his feet swinging the knife at Lester. "For God's sake, it was a joke S'tan."

Hope

Everyone moved around the room in complete silence. They were running around like mom and dad the day I told them I was pregnant. The baby added insult to injury at the time, because the baby's father wasn't a boyfriend or stranger. I was only fifteen, and not ready for the responsibility of motherhood. Our cousin Sydney had come to stay with us for a few months while he looked for a job. He wasn't having much luck, and he stayed at home most days. He was sinking into depression. He would lay on the couch for hours on end staring at the TV. One day he told me that he doesn't even watch the TV, instead he watches me and wishes that he was still young. He told me he missed the days of no responsibility. I was very interested in Sydney. I didn't want him to be upset anymore. So, I would sit and talk to him. Somewhere along the way, we fell in love. He would hold me in his arms for hours when my parents were away at work. He made me feel beautiful and special. These were things that I had never felt before. Of course, my parents would tell me I was beautiful, but they had to. Sydney was the first person outside my immediate family that I felt comfortable with. The summer was almost over, and he was leaving in a week. I can still feel the small kiss on the cheek he gave me, because of my parents, the day he left. He knowingly winked at me as he pulled away.

My father called me a tramp, and that's the last word I heard before the room went silent. I watched him yell at me as my mother sat in the chair next to the bed and cried. I tried to explain to them how much I loved the father of the baby, without giving Sydney away of course. My father demanded to know, but I never told him.

Now, the room was silent again. All the nurses and doctors scurried around as I tried to push the baby out of me. I screamed, but I couldn't even hear that. I pushed harder and harder, and finally I felt a huge wave of relief. It was all over and my daughter laid in the doctor's arms. He cleared her air passage and made sure she was breathing. The nurse wrapped the baby in a small pink blanket and handed the girl to my mother. It was all over. My own baby girl was to be my sister from this point on. My father had made this decision early on after he knew about the child. He never even came to the hospital while I was there. My mother took pity on my situation, even though she would never cross my father, she let me name the baby. Marion was a beautiful child. As she

grew older, I spent more and more time with her. We would walk in the garden and talk like sisters do. She was never to be told that she was my daughter instead of my sister, and it was probably better for her that way. After a few years, I had almost forgotten that she was my daughter. I know it was all for the best. I got a sister, and she got a life I could never provide.

Depression

Lester would spend most of his days in my room after the car wreck. He would watch me sleep, which is what I did most of the time. I couldn't see him when I was awake unless he propped himself up onto the side of my bed. The nylon straps kept my back in place, or at least that's what the doctor said, but they also kept me from seeing my brother. He would read to me for hours on end. I never heard more than three or four pages at a time, because of the sedatives. I would fall in and out of sleep constantly during Lester's reading. His deep voice would lull me to sleep, and as soon as he saw me dozing off he would raise his voice for emphasis. I would wake up for a couple more pages and then he would do it all again.

When he wasn't reading, he would sit and look out the window. I wondered for the longest time why Lester wouldn't stand over me like the doctors that came in to examine me. I could hear the creak of the wheelchair, but I couldn't see what I'd done to my brother. I asked him, almost daily, for three weeks what I had done, but he never answered. He just continued reading or staring out the window, whichever he was doing at the time.

I woke up early one morning to the sound of Lester crying. He brushed me off when I asked him what was wrong, but I could tell it was not nothing. I started to feel responsible for Lester's sadness, and started crying on a regular basis when I was awake. Lester tried to keep my spirits high, but there wasn't much he could do. I knew deep down that I was responsible for whatever had happened to my brother, but he was not going to blame me. So, I did. The pains in my chest started a couple of days later. The doctors couldn't explain it. Lester pressed them for answers daily, but to no avail. They had no answers for him. I was getting weaker. I could barely stay awake for more than thirty minutes. My body ached, and I couldn't help but cry when I was awake. Lester was getting more and more impatient with the doctors, but they still had no explanations for him.

Three days went by, and Lester hadn't come to see me. I missed the company of my brother. It was late afternoon when I heard the door being pushed open. I didn't hear the creak of the old wheelchair, so I assumed it was one of the doctors. Lester's head peered down over me. I sobbed as I looked up at him. The wheezes and coughs came up through my chest with the sobs and I could feel the pain scatter through my body as I closed my eyes.

Resignation

S'tan's letter sat on the chest of his bullet-riddled body. I cradled his head and screamed for help into the summer night. No one came for an hour, and by that time he

was gone. I could feel the blood rush out of him the whole time I was holding him. I could feel his last breath as it wheezed through his blood-filled mouth. He stared up at me one last time with contempt, or as if to say it was somehow my fault. He gave me a knowing wink before he gasped that last time.

S'tan was working at a casting agency. He would audition people for movies, commercials, or whatever else actors do. He worked for some big shot. S'tan would always whisper quietly to Lester about the women he would audition. I could only hear parts of their conversations, but I knew that S'tan did more than just audition some of these girls. He would take them out to dinner, or set them up in apartments. He would call them at all hours of the night. I could hear him screaming at them over the phone. He would ask them if they had his money mostly. Sometimes, he would have to leave in the middle of the night to go get one of them out of trouble, at least that's what he would say to Lester. Lester and S'tan never spoke about their work. They always told me they preferred not to bring it home with them. I was always concerned when I heard S'tan yelling at the people on the phone.

One night at dinner S'tan looked particularly unnerved. His hands shook every time he picked up his glass of wine to drink. Beads of sweat gathered on his forehead and raced down to his eyebrows. Lester, finally, broke the awkward silence. "What the hell's wrong with you S'tan?"

"I resigned today," his voice shook as he spit out his admission.

Lester nearly choked when the words reached his ears. "You what? Do you know what you're doing?" A small vein in Lester's head pulsed with each word.

"Please Les, not in front of the girls," S'tan whimpered trying to hold back the fear.

That night Lester and S'tan argued for four hours in the office. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but I knew Lester was awfully mad at S'tan. The next morning at breakfast Marion and I sat as if we hadn't heard the argument. "Your brother S'tan is going on vacation for awhile, girls," Les sounded just like our father handing out punishments. "I know you both will want to go on vacation with your brother, but you can't. He has to go away and be alone for awhile. Do you both understand?" Both of us nodded our heads and went right back to eating our breakfasts. Neither of us wanted to upset Lester any further.

After breakfast, S'tan went to his room to start packing. I followed him to find out where he was going, but when I reached the door I could hear him inside weeping as he packed. I decided to wait until he was finished before attacking him with questions. He stayed in his room all day. Finally, in the middle of the night his door slid open. I was still awake, and still curious about where my brother was going. I opened my door and followed him downstairs. He hurried out the front door. He threw his bag into the trunk of his car and turned to head back towards the house. I waited by the front window. A car was parked in front of the house across the street. A short man stepped from the driver's side and started across the street toward S'tan. He could hear the footsteps behind him, because he turned to face the man right as the man's gun fired repeatedly into his chest. I could see S'tan fall to the ground in a huge puddle of his own blood. An inaudible scream jumped from my throat as the man jumped back into his car and sped away.

Acceptance

Marion sits in her wheelchair and stares out at the thunderstorms. For the last three years, doctors and nurses have come and gone from her room none of them saying a word to her, and her never saying a word to them. Some of the nurses reported seeing her writing on the tables with her finger at dinner. She would stare at her food and write long, invisible volumes on the table until her finger would start to bleed. One of the other patients, Lester, would read the long stories about Marion's family. He would tell about her sister-mother, her corrupt brothers, and her careless parents. None of the staff knew if the stories were a figment of Lester's or Marion's imagination. Lester told the nurses that Marion talked to him, and even though she did have the ability to talk, most of the nurses doubted it. Lester would sit with Marion for hours staring at the garden. She would lean over to his ear, occasionally, but the nurses paid no attention to it, thinking that Lester was moving her. So, she sits.

I miss Marion. I miss our long talks in the garden. I know that she can't see me anymore. I've sat in the garden too many nights beckoning her to come out and talk. She never came, instead she just sat at the window. She stared straight at me most of the time. I know she could see me, but was just scared of telling anyone. Look where it had gotten her already. I stood over her as she talked to Lester. She told him stories that I didn't even know about her. She talked about a family that she never had, and made up wild stories to keep Lester interested. Lester was old, and he missed the excitement of living outside in the real world. So, the two became very close. Most people thought Lester was losing his mind in his old age, and maybe he was. Marion, on the other hand had already lost hers. So, she made Lester look crazy by not talking to anyone but him. She was afraid of talking to anyone but Lester. He didn't laugh when she couldn't remember things. One thing she can remember is that there was a time when she never forgot. So, she sits with the dreams and stories and Lester.

In the Road

I feel the radiation off the white-
Green light as it runs over my Dad's face.
The lines of battle move ever so slight,
The bench-seat never provides enough space,
For soldiers preparing for brutal fight.
Both of the soldiers will fall to disgrace
When tactics become questioned in the night.
The soldiers stand and try to make their case
As generals stand over them without light.
The front seat won, I slide into my place.
Victory sealed there's no more to my plight,
Except my rival readying her base.
Tomorrow's battle will be twice today's,
And tomorrow's balance of power sways.

Tonight only the road we left behind
Shall taste the odors of the dead skunk's soul.
The rearview headlights, like mace, spray Dad blind.
Imprisoned, he hopes for motel parole.
Finally, passed out as if I'd been wined
Resigning myself for my dreams to roll.
The girl before me, once a man designed,
And crying for me her heart to console.
Somewhat curious thoughts enter my mind.
What would it be like to lose all control?
To lie with her our body parts entwined,
And love her lacking any love loophole.
The wrongs of mainstream thought are left denied.
To satisfy my mind, I slip inside.

No one knows how it feels in my bed where
The warmth of skin grafted to make her sex
Moves in orgasm, to my great despair.
It only makes my movements more complex
Which leaves her face as if caught unaware.
Her eyes flare to project her vicious hex,
And knows this is the end of our affair.
As if by some amazed, repulsed reflex
She acts as if she couldn't ever care
That our lives have been turned to utter wrecks.
My body finds its way beyond nowhere,
Perhaps the most cliché of any treks.
Then I realize the fact of others' pain
Amongst my normal thoughts, it seems profane.

The awkwardness conspired with my misdeed
To make me feel like I had been the dick.
Though sometime I must make myself concede
That somewhere in my soul I'd been lovesick,
And acted upon all my greatest greed.
The foulness of my actions was a trick
That made it easy for me to mislead,
And send her thoughts into her head seasick.
I find myself that somehow I am freed,
And inside my emotions turned to brick.
She had no one, her love is left to bleed
The only option to take arsenic.
The only memory left of her, her ghost.
It stands there in the road my only host.

Awaking to look back on nothing there,
No trace of her, or her apparition.
Looking at myself to become aware
And searching the depth of my cognition.
It was not I involved in this affair.
Still she lingered in fragile condition
To watch over me, and bid me "beware"
When her memory falls into remission.
Somehow I feel that my mind's made an error
By feeling guilty, showing admission
To these crimes which now I am forced to bear.
Now my mind starts the simple omission
Of the dream which caused all my intense pain.
I was too young these thoughts to entertain.

All but slight memories slip into my head
Of the dream which I had when I was young,
Until a virgin came with me to bed
And lack of love for her over me swung.
Lying before me with her legs widespread
The ghost looked up and lashing with her tongue,
"Don't treat her as you've treated me," she said.
"She's not a conquest, nor another rung.
Don't be this stupid, don't be this mislead
By your hormones, they are the loveless dung
That forces man to be the loving dead."
Her words floated around the room and hung,
But she had gone and left me impotent
And I wished to forget this incident.

I let the memories fade into a blur
Of when she came to me in my bedroom,
And made love, for me, into massacre.
It was time for me to outgrow this gloom
No matter if my problem would recur.
I spared my pride and put on my costume
Of confidence, and tried to act demur.
I found someone to love, with to resume
Sex lost at the hand of my punisher.
It was very arrogant to presume
No more would meetings with my ghost occur,
And my heart her shadow could not entomb.
I was very surprised when my dream called,
And amazed to see that she had been mauled.

She looked at me perplexed as if to say,
"You haven't learned a thing from all your dreams."
She stood there, a dream that I'd thrown away,
And slowly said, "nothing is as it seems.
Your loved one's honesty is in decay,
And as she lies there in your bed she schemes
About her next betrayal, and what she'll say.
When you find out that she's had sex with teams
Of men, and then lead your beliefs astray
By letting out her fake virginal screams."
I stood there like a captured stowaway,
Deer-in-the-lights, or other cliché themes.
I knew then that she spoiled my love again,
And my life, from this point, I would begin.

The years of life collapsing all around
I find myself driving along the road
Where the dream first made its loud, crying sound,
And upon me left this ghost's heart bestowed.
I look into the place where she was found
Only to see the grass was freshly mowed.
The dust flew up as her foot hit the ground,
Uneasy, I stood ready to explode.
I saw her stand there melancholy drowned.
It seemed that all around us life had slowed,
And we could only stand there mouths spellbound
Until she found the power to unload.
"I've been your true love all along," she said.
"You can never touch what you feel is dead."

Brian

Dr. Allen K. Field sat in his study. It had been three years since he watched the woman die after giving birth. He had decided shortly afterward that he would take in the small child, whom he promptly named Brian. It was perfect for him. He had always wanted a son. Too bad it wasn't so perfect for his wife, she left him. She had firmly made her point clear early on in their marriage. They were to have one child, and one child only. After the first few years of their daughter's infancy, she was exhausted and made sure Allen knew that she would never do it again. He, on the other hand, wasn't so sure. There was no middle ground on this one, and they decided to divorce. He got to keep the boy, and she got everything else.

The boy, only three, walked into the room. He opened his mouth. "Are you all right, sir?" Allen was amazed. His son, whom he'd adopted, called him "sir." He had warned Brian not to call him that anymore, but Brian never listened to him. Somehow, he knew the boy knew he wasn't his true father. Brian had told Allen once a wild story about his mother and father. Of course, Allen couldn't believe it. This story was so vivid, but how could he ever remember his mother?

Brian sat on his lap. "My mother hated my father, and I hate him too." It seemed odd to everyone, Brian's accelerated development. He was making sentences at four months, and they made sense. He could formulate complex ideas at two. It was simply amazing. The doctor's colleague had told him about a child in Africa that started talking at three months. He wanted to believe that the child was not a freak, but that was impossible. "I've hated my daddy since the day I met you. I call you 'sir,' because I know you're not my daddy. If it really bugs you that much, I promise I'll try."

The memories rolled around in the doctor's head. He remembered the powerful feelings he had the day he delivered Brian, and he fully respected this power. The doctor stared into the fireplace. Nighttime had slipped across their world, and the doctor enjoyed his time in front of the fire. He could sit for hours and ponder himself. He just stared into the flames, as if there were answers across the fire that he couldn't quite reach. Sometimes, he would burst into laughter. Brian had heard this laughter before. It was something that he could never forget. It was one of the few pieces of his mother that he could still carry around with him.

"Sir?" The doctor turned to meet the glance of the boy. "Dinner's ready, come on." The doctor looked as if he'd been jerked from the path of a speeding car. "I've been waiting for ten minutes, and I want to talk to you." Allen couldn't imagine what it was going to be about tonight. The boy always wanted to talk to the doctor. Asking what is right and what is wrong. The boy couldn't understand that he was way too young to comprehend how the world worked. He wanted to know everything. Like every child, the boy was naturally inquisitive. The doctor explained the best he could, every night at the dinner table, and the boy sat and listened as if he understood. The boy would nod his head at everything he thought he should affirm, and act disapprovingly at everything that struck him as wrong. The boy would ask often about his father, if the doctor knew who he was, if the doctor could locate him, and if his mother had told the doctor anything before she died.

Two more years passed, and the boy's questions got more complex. At the age of five, Brian would explain his theories of life, and at the doctor's dinner parties his guests would amuse themselves by listening to the small boy. The theories may have been simplistic and childish, but they made sense to everyone. The doctor never missed a chance to show off his son, and the love between the two had become very real. Then, Brian started having the nightmares.

He would wake in a sweat and be disillusioned about where he was. In every one of the dreams, he was playing in a huge meadow. He would see his mother and father. They would be fighting over something. He could only get so close, so the details of their conversation were always inaudible. He would be moved by a group of children's voices. He never got a chance to see the other children, but he felt them all around him. They would put him down in a red room. His mother and father were in there too. They wouldn't really yell at one another here, it was much more physical. His father would hit his mother. Then, she would cut off his head. She would walk over to where Brian was, and wipe the blood all over his face. He would ask her if it was over, and she would always reply, "not yet."

Then, he would wake up. He always described his father's decapitation in gory detail, and he would always have a slight smile on his face as he did. This troubled the doctor. His five-year-old son was dreaming of people he'd never met, doing things that a child shouldn't understand, and then he'd explain these things with a smile. This was quite disturbing. The blackness that came over the doctor in the delivery room had become all too real for him, and he was not prepared.

Brian's nightmares continued until the age of ten. One morning Brian woke up, and he wasn't scared, he wasn't laying in a pool of sweat, and he hadn't seen something so horrifying that he didn't want to sleep again. The thunder in his head had subsided, but not without changing Brian. He turned to a child obsessed with everything about his father, but the doctor had no answers. Brian would change his focus to his mother. The doctor would sit him down in front of the fireplace, and tell him everything he knew about his mother. The lack of information on his parents bothered Brian. "Why didn't you find him?" Brian would always ask the doctor.

"Brian, when I saw your mother die I did everything I could to locate your father. Your mother never gave the hospital the information. I even took you to her funeral. No one was there. We stood there alone, in the rain, crying over the casket. I adopted you two months later, and the rest you know." The doctor wanted to take all the words back. He wished he could start over again with Brian. He wouldn't have told him anything. He would have kept everything from him, and that would have given him a son. Instead, all he had was a boy who he felt responsible for.

Brian decided that he was going to find his father. He knew it would be hard, but didn't care. He wanted to know this man that he knew nothing about. The thing about it was, he didn't know if he loved his mother enough to hunt the man down, but he knew he hated his father enough to find him. Brian knew that the doctor had the one piece of information he needed, his birth certificate. The doctor kept it locked away. He had never looked at it. The doctor just didn't want to know. He wanted Brian to be his son, and the birth certificate would take that away.

Brian knew that the doctor was going to a banquet, for some foundation of his. He would be leaving at five o'clock. Brian would have plenty of time to find the combination, open the safe, get the information, and put it all away before the doctor would be home. He felt scared and excited. He knew he wanted to know who his father was, but what would he do once he knew? Brian had no answers. The adrenaline was scorching through his veins. The last minutes before the doctor left almost killed him. His breathing became irregular, and his palms started sweating profusely. He wanted to get started, but the damned doctor wouldn't leave the house. He did not want to look anxious as he told the doctor good night. It was now time, and Brian felt like he had waited an eternity. The door slid closed, and Brian went to work.

The safe was behind an original painting of the doctor's wife. Brian found it amusing that the doctor kept the painting, after all his wife had taken from him during the divorce. Brian knew the combination had to be close. He felt that if he concentrated enough the location of the combination would just come to him. He knew it was silly, but for some reason he felt predestined to find out who the man in his nightmares was. He stood in the room for quite awhile before he decided that the good doctor had etched the combination on the bottom of the huge oak desk. It sat right in the middle of the room. The doctor spent many hours sitting there filling out forms, of some sort. Brian walked to the desk and peered underneath. Strike one, he had come up with nothing. He turned back to the painting.

The woman was very strong that stared down upon this young boy. He stepped up to the painting, and floated a cold look towards the woman. He knew that he was stronger. He knew that she was gone, and the doctor loved him more than he loved her. Then, he saw it. In the corner of the painting was the artist's name, and underneath it a date. Brian didn't know how he knew, but he did know, this was the combination. He slowly pulled down the painting and laughed at the woman, as if she were a fool that he just fooled. He twisted the dial to the first number, and felt it click. That's all he needed. He knew that the combination had been found, and in seconds he would know the man he hated so.

There were only two files in the safe and a small brown envelope. Brian picked up the envelope slowly. He thought about what he was going to know. He was finally going to see the man that deserted him and his mother. The hatred started to boil in him. A small laugh came up as he opened the envelope. The paper inside was hard to read. Finally, his eyes settled on the box labeled father. The name inside was Alister Linwood. There was no address. Brian laughed out loud. He felt his mind changing. He fell to the floor. His body convulsed in a mixture of evil laughter and fear. "Here I come, dad, ready or not."

He stood back up, still laughing. Then, the door to the office flung open. There was the doctor, standing in front of his worst nightmare. Brian heard the sound of heartbreak, and turned towards the door. The silhouette in the doorway fell to its knees. It cringed on the floor, as if it were dying. Brian saw the shape, and let out his last small laugh. "I never meant to hurt you, sir, but I had to know." He really didn't care deep down that the doctor was lying there swollen with pain. He only wanted to find his father, and that moment had taken him one step closer.

It took three days for the doctor to finally talk to Brian again. He was still heartbroken when he walked to the living room to sit by the fire. He knew Brian was there, but it was time for them to talk and he was not going to cower away from the boy he had raised. His body shook with fright as he entered the room. He hadn't wanted anyone to ever look at Brian's birth certificate, least of all Brian. The boy sat on the edge of the couch. He was leaning over the side with his face close to the flames. He felt the doctor enter the room, and decided to let the man start the conversation.

"What are you going to do now?" This is not how he wanted to open this conversation.

"I'm going to find him." Brian knew what the next question was going to be.

"What will you do when you find him?" The doctor was very predictable.

"I don't know. I'll probably ask him why he left. I may go nuts and kill him on the spot. I just don't know what I'm going to do." Brian wished he hadn't shown so much hate.

"You don't have to find him, do you?" It was the doctor's last attempt. Maybe, Brian would stay.

"Not today, sir, but someday." Brian looked back to the fire. The doctor knew the conversation had ended. He was happy Brian wasn't going to run away, but he knew their love as father and son had died. Brian's head was spinning. He tried to clear his thoughts, but couldn't. The fire was bright, and his thoughts turned to the bluish color of the inner flames. He seemed to be falling asleep, but he knew he was awake.

The crossroads wasn't far away, and Brian knew he could reach them within fifteen minutes. He looked at the familiar field, as the children's voices started to surround him. His favorite part was the choirs of children's voices. They were the most beautiful thing that had ever graced his ear. He walked slower when they were around. He was just hoping that they would be there when he woke up. The grass was up to his waist. It tickled his sides as he walked closer and closer to the crossroads. He was, finally, there. He knew that he could go no further. He parted the blades of grass, and peered through knowing all the time what he was going to see. There were two people in the road. Brian knew that these were his parents, and he wished he could run up and hug his mother. They were always arguing. He tried to get a closer look. All of a sudden, he looked down and found that he was no longer in the meadow. He had wandered into the crossroads. He was never allowed to go that far before, and wondered why this time was different. The two people turned and saw the little boy. They opened their mouths in unison, and with evil thoughts in their eyes said, "Brian, we love you."

His eyes opened. The fire had died down to small embers. He wasn't tired enough to go to bed, and who could sleep after that dream? He stood and paced in front of the fireplace. The doctor had, obviously, gone to bed. Brian started talking outloud. "My father doesn't even know me, how can he love me? He can't. My mother I know loves me, but my father. He left, and tore out my mother's heart. He killed her." Hours passed, and Brian paced the floor furiously. "I hate him," Brian kept repeating it over and over again. The answer was stuck in the back of his head, and he couldn't force it to the front. It started to move. Brian felt the thought enter his conscience. It was the only thing to do. It was what his mother would have wanted. Brian looked directly into the flames. He couldn't believe that he was considering...

Brian turned his attention to the window. It was snowing out. He was trying desperately to get rid of the thought that was in his head. Outside everything was covered in white. It was beautiful. Brian could see no beauty in the snow. He only saw how cold it was. He felt his body get colder. There was no breeze, but the room continued to drop in temperature. His body numbed, and he felt like hypothermia was going to set in any moment. "I guess I have to kill him, don't I mom?" He had lost all senses. He knew exactly what he was saying, but his soul wouldn't tell him if it was right or wrong. Brian slowly walked from the window. His body still felt cold as he moved towards his room. The one thought was the only thought in his head.

By the time Brian was thirteen, he had run away eight times to go and find his father. The doctor had resorted to every kind of therapy, as well as punishment to try and keep the boy. It wasn't working. The doctor finally gave in, and granted Brian his freedom. He told Brian that if he ran away again, he wasn't going to try and find him. Brian knew that the doctor was lying. He knew that the doctor felt responsible for him, and would follow him to the center of the earth if need be.

Everything that Brian did that day was in slow motion. He walked into the study. He started towards the doctor, who was sitting in the huge leather chair by the fire. His head was ringing, and he could feel nothing. The doctor had his back to him, and was spewing some crap about how he wished Brian would give up the search for his father. Brian snuck up and stepped into the doctor's shadow. His fists flew into the doctor's neck. The doctor choked on his lecture, and fell straight to the floor.

Brian awoke from the blackness. He looked down. The face stared back up. It was broken and bruised and battered. Blood stained every part of Brian. He was covered in little spatters. His hands hurt. He tried to move them, but they were too badly bruised to open. The laughter started out of Brian's gut. It made its way up his wind pipe. The room resonated with the sound of Brian's laughs. He couldn't stop. Then, his stomach stopped him. His body convulsed, and he threw up all over the doctor's broken face. He slowly regained his composure. "I'm ready, mom. I hope dad recognizes me."

He didn't really know what to do next. He had to get rid of the body, but had no where to put it. He couldn't take it from the house, someone may see him. The furnace was the only way to go. It was an old house. The furnace had to burn coal, or wood, or something. Anyway, there must be an incinerator. He drug the body to the cellar door, slowly opened it, and pushed the body down the stairs. He got to the bottom of the stairs, and spied where the incinerator stood. It was a huge behemoth of a machine. The door was as big as Brian. He swung it open, and bent over to lift the body. He slid the body in feet first. He felt the heat as the legs started to burn. He pushed the shoulders into the flames, and caught a last glimpse of the doctor. He stared for a while, "I'm sorry, dad." It was the only time he hadn't called him, "sir." Brian sat and watched the flames for an hour. He saw the face of his real father in the flames, and knew he had done the right thing.

Frat Boy Steps To

"If you open your mouth one more time, I'm going to hit you."
The frat boy mentality staggers my imagination.
I understand the hostility of a boy who is forced to walk in a circle,
Your brother's dick in one hand, your thumb in the ass of another brother.
All in the name of making you a man... but you remain a boy.
You're just following the big kids, being their weasel,
Doing what they say because they say it's cool.
When you stand up, they knock you back down
And tell you that's how it is the rest of your life.
You stupid, friend-buying, shitty beer swilling, coed-raping,
Hallway pissing, 900-number calling, no common sense asshole.
You knew what you were getting into...
After all, you're a legacy.

Neo-Hippies

I see them walking back to communes,
Spouting off free love, free drugs, and poetry.
They wish that the Sixties would come back.
And in their hopes, they wear the clothes,
Smoke the pot, and read the propaganda.
They don't pay attention to the Soviet Union
Where even Lenin thought it looked good on paper,
But forgot to figure in human nature.

Revelation Drinking Vodka on My Porch

My older brother is a member of
Young Republicans, the Student Finance Committee,
Empower America, the Klan, the N. R. A.,
The Michigan Militia, and the Pro-Life Movement.
He also follows Reverend Phelps.

My younger brother smokes marijuana,
Wants to become an actor, dropped out of school,
Advocates a woman's choice, supports womynist groups,
Believes today is the Sixties,
And finds his truth in Democrats.

It's not so bad to be the middle child.

Suburbia

I wonder if I looked as stupid as I felt. The lights were glaring into the dark glasses, and I could feel the cheap black wig shifting on my head. The stage manager popped up, “we’re back in five, four, three...” The lights steadily got brighter as the crowd went nuts for the flashing, red applause sign. The host walked out from the middle of the crowd,... and that’s when I went blank.

The houses all stood in perfect rows. They all looked as if they were the exact same house except for exterior color. Some had bushes, some had trees, some had children in the yard, and others looked abandoned. The sun was out, the sky was blue, and the birds were singing. It was another “Pleasant Valley Sunday.” The neighborhood was the perfect stereotype right down to the father mowing the grass in his Bermuda shorts, black socks, and sandals.

We pulled up to 1532 England in our beat-up station wagon. The moving van blocked most of the driveway. “Well, here we are, Lizzy, the suburbs,” I laughed and shot her an uneasy smile. I knew this was the last place she wanted to live. She scowled back at me, and reached for the door handle.

“You sure know how to pick ‘em, Drew,” she half-screamed when she saw the house. She lit up a cigarette and started toward the front door. All the neighbors stared as we walked past the perfectly trimmed shrubbery, and into the house. They were all staring at the two most unlikely suburbanites. True, Lizzy was an up-and-coming book editor that worked way too hard for what she earned. She loved the city and hated the fact that I had decided to move in next to June, Ward, Wally, and The Beaver. But, she humored me because she loves me. Me, I had to get away from the noise of the city. I’m a computer network consultant, so I do all my work from home. I don’t have to get up early, I don’t have to shower to go to work, and I made seven figures last year sitting in front of a computer monitor. But, that’s all irrelevant now.

The first weekend we lived in the house, we were invited over to the neighbor’s for a barbecue. Ed, the neighbor, sent his wife over to ask if Lizzy and I would like to come over and mingle with them and some of the other neighbors. I told her we’d love to, even though Lizzy hated the idea. We walked up to Ed’s front door where there was a small note telling us to come around to the backyard. We opened the gate and were immediately attacked by the smoke from Ed’s grill.

“C’mon in!” Ed yelled. “Grab a cold one from the cooler, buddy.” Lizzy’s face turned pale white. I could tell she was going over every suburban stereotype in her head. “How do you like your burger, pal?” I walked over to the cloud of talking hickory smoke.

“The name’s Drew, and you must be Ed,” I laughed. Ed was dressed in the traditional Sunday barbecue garb, right down to the apron with the saying, “If you don’t like my cooking call 1-800-EAT-SHIT.” I grabbed a beer and struck up a less-than-sparkling conversation with Ed. Lizzy sat down at the redwood picnic table and opened her beer.

The sliding glass door to the house opened, and Ed’s wife stepped out. She was wearing a pink bikini top and white shorts. I decided that she was much younger than Ed

based merely on the fact her ass looked like she was still in high school. “So, Ed, how long you lived here?” I asked with my eyes glued to his wife.

“Only five years. We love it here. See, we got married straight out of high school, and I went to work for my old man... insurance. It took me five years to save up for this place. So, what do you do?” he smiled, even though he knew I was staring at his wife.

“Computers. I consult companies on their networks,” Ed looked confused. “Lizzy, she works in the city. She edits books,” Ed looked even more confused.

“So, you both drive to the city every day. Why the Hell’d you move here?” he laughed.

“I work at home. Lizzy’s the only one that commutes,” I knew this was going to get a weird reaction. Ed said nothing. He just stood there and looked dumb-founded, which, I guessed, was quite normal for Ed.

Two more couples arrived, there was Neil, Mike, and their wives. Everyone was borderline thirty. Lizzy and I were the oldest at thirty-two and thirty. She and I compared notes, later, and found out that we had both been grilled with the same questions by the husbands and wives. What do you do? What does your wife do? Why’d you move here, if you both work in the city? We answered, and received the same dumb-founded looks. These people just couldn’t grasp that I stayed at home and Lizzy drove to the city every day. But, they were nice people, for conservatives. It made us laugh for at least an hour when we got home and thought about our new-found friends.

Six months went by, and Lizzy and I got used to suburbia. I would get up around six and fix breakfast. Lizzy would get up around six-thirty, shower, and then come downstairs. “So, what’s up for today?” she asked. I would explain to her that I would be on-line all day with clients, and what their specific needs were... blah, blah, blah. She’d stand up, still half asleep I think, and say, “well, see you at dinner.” She’d laugh thinking about how mundane our lives had become, stumble out the door to her car, and then drive away.

In reality, I would get most of my work done before noon, so I could go over to Mike’s house. At Mike’s, I would sit with the wives, smoke cigarettes, drink coffee, and gossip. We would talk about our relationships, past and present. The women would complain about their husbands, while inquiring how Lizzy and my’s relationship got so perfect. Hours would pass without a break in the conversation, but right before the husbands, and Lizzy, came home we would break our conference and make it home right before them. Lizzy would get home. We’d eat dinner, talk or read, and then go to bed. Occasionally, we would go clubbing just to make sure we weren’t as old as we were feeling.

“So, tell us how the day started,” the stage lights viciously glared off the host’s glasses. The cheap, black wig made another attempt to slide off my head. I looked out over the silent audience.

Lucas and Christian stood at the gates of Sodom. It was three days before the city was plucked off the map by the hand of God. They weren’t trying to go against His will.

They weren't renegades. Lucas brushed the dust from his wing. "I'm going, with or without you," he sang at Christian. With that, he started into the city.

Lucas stood in the doorway. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. Men, women, and God-knows-what else laying together. He was repulsed and interested. His body pulled him into the room, and immediately he was sucked into the orgy. He pulled, tore, and scratched in an attempt to get away, but his scratching turned to rubbing and prodding. Every muscle in his body tensed and pulsed in the pile of sex.

Christian saw the lightning coming from the west. He could hear the sin going on inside the city, and he knew Lucas was in the middle of it all. Lucas came stumbling towards the gates. He smelled of sweat and sin. As soon as he reached the gates, his throat closed and he fell over choking. He was doubled over trying to cough his throat open, it wasn't working. Christian watched as Lucas struggled. He writhed on the ground, as his wings were torn from his back. As if that pain weren't enough, his head was ripped from his neck. Christian knelt in the dirt cradling Lucas's head.

"Ed's wife called me that morning, after Lizzy had left. She invited me over for lunch with Neil and Mike's wife. I accepted. Around noon, I walked over to Ed's," I paused to clear my throat. The lights were burning through the dark glasses. I was sweating so much I thought the cheap, black wig was going to wash away. "When I arrived, the front door was unlocked and there was a note telling me to come in. I stepped into the doorway of the living room. I could see Ed's wife sitting on the couch. She jumped up as soon as she heard me behind her. She was completely naked." The crowd let out a long sigh, and then settled back.

"She walked around to the back of the couch and stood directly in front of me. Her body was muscular and firm. She knelt down on her knees, and started to unbuckle my belt. Over her head, I could see Mike and Neil's wives on the couch, kissing. Their bodies were tied together in sex," there was no immediate reaction to my pause. The crowd sat, riveted. "We all piled together on the floor, and had repeated orgasms all afternoon."

I could still feel that afternoon as I told the story. I could feel each one of the women's bodies rubbing against mine. Their soft curves fit my hands perfectly. I could feel my hands searching, and my fingers prodding every open orifice. The women would moan softly when I found a sensitive spot, and squeal when my tongue finally got there. I could feel the hot breath of Ed's wife on my cock, and the wet warmth of her saliva washing the lipstick from her lips. Our four bodies rhythmically pounded together on Ed's carpet. I could feel the pulsing of all our muscles contracting and releasing in orgasm. As soon as we all caught our breath, it would start all over again. There were no partners, no husbands, no wives, only a sweating, pulsing pile of sex. Finally, there was one long moan of excitement. All the muscles in the pile tensed and released for the final time. The pile fell into peices in the middle of Ed's living room.

"We knew it was getting to be *that* time, so we put on our clothes, kissed good-bye, and went home," The crowd was completely stunned. They had no idea how to react. Thank God for the red, flashing applause sign. As they clapped and the commercials rolled, I sat with a sharp pain in my neck. I tried to cough it away, but it

didn't work. I ran my fingers across the scar around my neck. I can still feel Lizzy's knife as it slides around my throat.

The cameras all come back on, and the host is seated on a stool ready to give his final thought. "Today we looked at women out for retribution from their cheating husbands. Today's guests were extreme examples. These women all let their emotions get the best of them, and viciously attacked their husbands, sometimes scarring or maiming them for life. But, do these men not deserve some sort of punishment for their gallivanting." He looked over to the panel, "I want to thank all my guests for being here today." Then, he turned solemnly back to the main camera, "and remember, be good to one another."

Circus of Thanks

I held Di's hand tightly as we drove on the long dirt road. The dust rose up around the convertible, and then settled back into place when we were long gone. I looked out onto the desert from the speeding car. In the distance, long lost friends would appear, waving and smiling. We flew down the road toward the small town just over the second hill. Before the town was upon us, I could see the outline of the circus tents. Inside the tent, the ringmaster, Skinny D, looked out over the crowds. They laughed and clapped and cheered. He introduced the acts above the din of the Jazz Xpress. I stood at the entrance to the dusty tent and watched the circus. Days passed, and I watched as the acts performed their incredible feats. Di and I stood off to the side. I watched in amazement while she held my hand.

I stepped up to the ringmaster, cleared my throat, and asked, "can I join the circus?"

He looked down at me. To him, I was Toby Tyler ready to take my first try at stunt horse riding. His coarse voice slid from his throat, "sure, kid. We could use some new blood in the rings."

So, I practiced and practiced, and the night for my debut came. I was to go on after Nicky and Jacki, the lion taming duo. I sat in the dressing rooms with the three veteran clowns, Mark, Andy, and Drue. They kept my mind off the intense nervousness that was building up in my stomach. In the main ring was Jodi, the high flying trapeze artist. I could hear the crowd go wild as she completed each of her stunts. The lion tamers were next, and then me. Brian, one of the midgets from the freak show pulled at my pant leg. I looked down to him giving me a small look of "go get 'em."

I walked out to the center ring. The horse was circling the ring readying to feel me on its back. For that tiny moment, I looked out into the crowd and saw everyone I'd ever known clapping and cheering me on. The whole tent was dark except for the spotlight circling the ring with the horse. I ran beside the horse, and jumped up to grab its mane and start my routine. I could feel the push of my sister, Ellen, at my back. She had taught me all about horses when I was young. She had shown me how to do the tricks I was about to do. After my routine, I jumped down to the middle of the main ring. I could hear nothing, but I could feel the screaming and shouting in my chest. It hit me and almost threw me off my feet. The ringmaster introduced me again to a hearty round of applause,... and then it was over.

After everyone had gone, I made my way over to the owner's trailer. Inside I could hear the voices of Skinny and Tyson counting the night's take. I stepped up to the door and knocked. The inside of the trailer fell silent, and Tyson's voice rang out, "who's there?" After answering, the door was unlocked and I was permitted to enter. I looked around the trailer. It was poorly lit, and smelled of cigarette butts. At the far end there was a door that simply read, "El Presidente." From what I was told, no one knew his real name. Tyson handed me my share of the night's take. I turned, and walked back down the stairs toward the tent. The janitors stood by the tent chomping on their cigars. It was "Old" Mike Cunyningham and Mark Holt. They laughed as I passed, and I could hear them say, "I've seen that horse routine a million times. I think it was the Flying Mooney

Brothers or maybe the Granada Boys that used to do it, but I knows I seen it somewheres before.” They continued their laughing and carrying on as I walked through the tent.

As I got to the front door, I could see Di’s silhouette with the moonlight behind her. She walked with me to my trailer and we went to bed. As I was laying there readying myself for sleep, I thought to myself what a circus my life had become...what a circus my life has become...what a circus.

Mom & Dad, there are no words to thank you enough for the love and support. To the rest... thanks.

-jim

Random Acts...

"The Titanic will not sink. It's unsinkable. Inconvenience is the only thing the passengers will suffer."

-Philip Franklin

Act I

Eric

I sit here. I know that she wouldn't approve. She sits at home wishing I was there, but I'm not. I feel this woman's crotch pressed hard against mine. She grinds back and forth on me. Her tongue slides down to her nipple. She thinks she's sexy, but she's just another stripper. Oh, excuse me, exotic dancer. She turns her ass toward me and continues to grind into my crotch. I think of all the girls I've watched do this to me before. I smile at her and she thinks it's because I'm aroused. I sit there, knowing the woman I love is at home wishing that I was there.

I slide the money into the dancer's G-string and cop a cheap feel. She giggles and sits down next to me. "What's your name?"

I think this is amazing small talk for such an intellectual as I answer, "Jimmy Carlton, and you?" I'm no better.

"Allyson," she smiles.

"No, not your stage name; your real name." I don't know why I can't just let the little fantasy world exist.

"That is my real name. I don't use a stage name."

I think, "sure you don't." I light up a cigarette and continue to think about my girlfriend.

"What does your wife think about you coming here?" she says.

I completely forgot that I had put on the wedding band I bought in high school to get older women to notice me. I also forgot that I told her my name was Jimmy Carlton. Her fantasy world is gone because she doesn't use a stage name, and mine is just beginning. "My wife doesn't care. As a matter of fact, she's a dancer." I was getting creative. "I own a bar in Michigan. It's real similar to this one."

"Really?" She says.

After this comment, I know I'm dealing with the smartest girl in the place. I think it's funny that she's buying into my little fantasy world. There is an awkward silence as I think of a witty response to such a brilliant question. "Yes, I'm in the middle of a recruiting trip." I'm so full of shit that I scare myself.

Her eyes light up as she asks, "have you seen me dance yet?" A smile slips across her mouth.

"No, when are you, next?"

"Not for awhile. So, I guess you'll have another dance?" She had no use for beating around the bush anymore.

"Maybe in a bit." I didn't want to spend the money when I had her eating out of my hand. She is no longer looking at me as a customer, instead she thinks I can give her

a better life elsewhere. She smiles to herself and thinks of working in a nicer bar with nicer people who don't take all the money she earns. She knows her baby boy is at home, and he is counting on her to bring home food, clothes, and someday an education. "I don't run the usual club." I play into the fantasy that's written all over her face. "I only take ten percent."

"How do you make money?" She is astounded by the fact that I take so little.

"Off the bar." She must know I'm lying. Even though, I could have probably told her I wrestled alligators for a living and she would have bought it. "You're very attractive. Do you do any modeling?" I play up my sleaze bag persona. "Maybe you're an actress?" She knows exactly what I mean.

"I do a little acting. Am I convincing?" She looks at me wryly and knows that her lap dance got me excited.

"Yes, you're a very convincing young lady. Do you like working here? Or, maybe you want to come audition for me?" I think that I know what I'm doing, but the truth is I'm winging it.

"I'd love to fuck you, Jimmy, but I don't think your wife would approve." She thinks to herself how naughty she is, but this man's cute and he's far from home. What else was he expecting?

"On that note, I must excuse myself. Will you be here when I get back?" I know she will be.

"Meet me on the couch in the VIP room. I'll order you another drink." She thinks she has me.

I light up a cigarette as I walk towards the men's room. I walk in and look at this stranger in the mirror, "Nice to meet you, Jimmy." I laugh to myself. "I need to get out of here before I get into trouble." This revelation is cut short by Allyson entering the bathroom.

"You don't mind, do you?" She wants me. She knows if her boss caught her in here, she'd be fired.

"I'm really sorry, dear, but I have a wife. You're very attractive, and I wish I could, but I can't." I know that I've gone too far.

"At least stay to watch me dance, okay." She uses the puppy dog eyes, which she hasn't used since she was a girl. I agree, and we make our way out of the men's room.

She slithers on-stage in a black rubber mini-dress. At that moment, I know I'm cheating. I shouldn't be here, and my girlfriend shouldn't be home alone, and she shouldn't be loving me right now... but she is. I wish she wasn't loving me. I wish she hated me, and if she knew where I was, she would. Still, I want Allyson, and there's nothing that could possibly stop me. I start the rationalization process. Before I come up with one reason, my body stands up and heads for the door. The upstairs brain had kicked in and dragged me towards the exit. It knows. It knows that what I'm doing is wrong.

She spins around a few times and I see everything. Nothing is left to my dirty imagination anymore. I twist and turn and fight with my body to turn back and stay, but it pushes the door open. I light up another cigarette as I walk to my car. I know I'll be back.

Sarah

It's night. I stand by the window looking down at the curb. His car isn't there. "Where are you, Eric?" I ask the empty living room. I know he's not doing anything wrong, but he isn't here. Every bad thought keeps jumping around in my head. He's out there on the road bleeding to death. He had one too many with the boys, and he's dead. Some jackass mugged him, he decided to be the hero as always, and the guy got sick of his bullshit and shot him. "Where are you, Eric?" The room still won't answer me. I look back out the window. There he is. His car pulls up, and out he steps. He's liquored. He stumbles himself to the sidewalk. I get in bed, I'm not going to help the bastard.

Allyson

He came in. I know he's going to have some slick line. He has dialogue, he's a player, and he's done this before. His wife's at home. Why don't they ever know what they have? This guy's just as stupid as the rest. Well, let's get this over with. I'll relieve him of as much as he's got. "Want some company?"

I put my arm around him, "how'd you like me to get a little closer? It's only a small tip." Of course, he agrees. I love mounting men, it makes me feel empowered. He wants me to grind into his crotch. I can feel his hands pulsing on my back and sliding down my legs. He's pretty good. He's getting hard, and it feels so nice between my legs. Shit, I think I'm actually getting wet. It's been so long since a man has done that to me. Just for that, I'm definitely taking all his cash. I'm not here to feel good, I'm here to feed my kid.

"So what's your name?" I know he's going to lie, the bastard.

"Jimmy Carlton, and you?" He smiles like I want to fuck him.

"Allyson," I smile and flip my hair. Men are so stupid. I'm going to make a killing off of this dumb-ass. He tells me he wants my real name, and I tell him I don't use a stage name. He probably thinks I'm lying, but that just ices his stupidity. Who the fuck does he think he is. Like I have something to hide. No one knows who the fuck I am anyway, what the hell do I need a stage name for?

I notice the wedding ring on his hand and ask, "what does your wife think of you coming here?" I love married men. It's so easy to get them to open their wallet. He gives me some line of shit about how he's from Michigan, and how he owns a club. He honestly thinks I'm going to fuck him. What an asshole! He probably thinks he doesn't have to pay for the goods anymore, "do you want another lap dance?"

"Maybe in a bit," he says with a smile.

He really thinks that I'm eating out of his hand. I guess that's good, because now his wallet's open. Now all I have to do is ice the deal by following him into the bathroom, ask him to fuck, he'll graciously decline, and then tip me heavy for the rest of his life.

Reverend Phil

The road lies there; it just lies there. I wish that it would shorten and I'd be somewhere, but it just lies there. The dust rises, the dust settles. How did I get here? I was the best. God himself came down from heaven and touched me. He touched me! That's all gone. No one believes anymore. I'm in a world that's damned. I had the chance to save it, but I decided that sex was more important. The deadly sin of lust. That dirty

bastard took me in, gave me everything, and then gave me what I truly deserved. I don't have any regrets, except that I'd do it differently now, maybe.

I met Alex through a random act of violence. He had the chance to be more than he was too. I wonder if everyone has those small thoughts. Those small thoughts that tell you to punch someone in the face even though they've done nothing to you. I have those thoughts, and I know Alex has those thoughts too. He can't control his, though. He's lost. Just like those thoughts, I also have the thoughts of fucking a young girl just because she's there. Pushing her down on the ground, and having her. I know God gave me these thoughts. He gave me these thoughts in order to save the lost. These poor runaways that need my help to be saved. Sometimes, God uses a little violence to make sure the lost know his power. He has to. These people must be saved.

People never expected God to use this violence. That's why I was the best. I knew God did this, but I kept it secret. I knew people couldn't understand His motives, thus no one need know. I was making millions off the people who had already been saved, and using it to save the poor little lost ones. Now, that's all gone. God giveth and He taketh away!

I wish Alex would get here. I can feel the dust rising up around me. I wish he would get here. I've been waiting at this highway motel for days. He should have been here yesterday, but he had so many things to take care of. I know God uses Alex too, but in a different capacity.

Alex

Shit, Phil's gonna be pissed! I left him at that motel three days ago. I know he's gonna ask me where I've been. Fuck him! Mother fucker used to be a priest or something. He made a million dollars, and then pissed it away on fifteen year-old prostitutes. He said he liked 'em young. They were lost, or some shit like that. I've lost track of time the last few days. That's what I'll tell him. I've had so much to do. People to save. Shit, he'll love that one.

I guess I could kick him in the face if he doesn't believe me. I could make him ride in the trunk for a few days, that would shut him up. I like how he tells me God makes me do what I do, and think how I think. He's full of shit, but it sounds nice. If God really wanted me to be me; He would have made me good. People wouldn't look at me and say all those horrible things. They would just look at me, and let me be good. Why can't people just let me be good?

I've got to get rid of this last briefcase and go pick up Phil. Phil's gonna be pissed! The blood keeps leaking out of these cheap cases, and spilling on my shoes. It keeps dripping on the ground, and the dust keeps flying up wherever it drips. It stains the dirt. That's fuckin' hysterical, it stains the dirt. It doesn't stain anything but the dirt. It doesn't stain the sky, or the grass, or me. It just stains the dirt. Fuck, I've got to go get Phil. He's gonna be pissed!

Cameron

I've sat here in this same room for three months now. Room 214. I sit and I think about it over and over again. I wish I knew why they chose me. I'm no one special. I used to be someone, but I can't go back now that this has happened. I can't leave. They

told me I can't leave. They told me. I wish it was all a dream, then I could dismiss it and get back to my life. It wasn't a dream, though. It happened, no matter what Phil says. He's nice, but he doesn't believe me. He believes that God has a plan for him, but I think he's wrong. I think God doesn't have time for people like us. God has the whole universe to worry about, what does it matter to Him if a few of us are lost.

I keep having nightmares about that night. It was so odd. I walk and I walk through the hills. Everywhere around there's dust. It swirls high into the air, then falls down around me. The sky fills with one huge cloud. A small beam of light peeks through the cloud, and then settles on my chest. All of a sudden, the beam engulfs my body and I feel a burst of heat hit my chest. The back of my head slams into something solid, and then darkness.

I wake up slowly. I'm naked. I can feel the cold desert wind around me. I slide down into the fetal position to keep warm. All I can do is sweat cold bullets down my forehead and back. The wind chills them, and freezes my bones. I can't remember how I got here. I crouch down in the corner and try to think. I can only remember one thing; my sister's phone number.

"Hello," there's a long pause. "Who is this? I haven't seen my brother, and I don't know where to find him, so fuck off!"

I try to talk, but I can't. Finally, a rough grumble comes from my throat, "Allyson, don't hang up. It's me. I need you."

"Cameron, come home; we need you to come home. People everywhere are looking for you. Where have you been?" She was frantic.

"I'm at the Cardinal Inn, Highway Nine. Please, I need money to get home." I had no intentions of going home. They told me to stay, and for some reason I couldn't leave. They told me to stay.

Act II

"Phil, I told you not to ask me about it. You know damn well where I've been! One more fuckin' word, Phil, one more..." Phil stands there and says nothing. He knows he shouldn't have asked me about my shit. I should kick him in the teeth. He deserves to get his ass kicked, the sanctimonious asshole.

"Don't get so upset, Alex. I just want to help you." He steps back as he tries to explain himself.

The room is entirely too dry. The dust rolls around and gets into everything. I can feel the heat in my head slowly subside. I can't beat up Phil; he's a priest or somethin'. Phil leaves the room to let me cool down. He doesn't understand that I'm the coldest bastard he'll ever know. I can feel the blood trickle down my hands, and I see her again. She's right there. I see her squeal as I hold the knife against her. Then, I feel the trigger slide back as I take off the jogger's fuckin' head. I see them all. The little boy. I had to masturbate on his back, because I had run out of ideas. The prostitute that I tattooed crosses all over her ass, now that was funny shit. The cops rounded up every tattoo artist in the tri-state area. What a bunch of fuckin' losers. Then, there was the cop. He had to be put in seven different briefcases. I sent a note to the station. It was just like Jack the

Ripper, or some shit like that. I could give a shit about these fuckers! They were all in the wrong place at the wrong time, or I was in the right place at the right time. However you look at it, someone died. I still see them all. I see them. They come to me when I sit here. I get so pissed that I see them. I see them all the time, now.

It's really weird that I got mad, because Phil was just asking me to do something for a friend of his. He wants me to get rid of someone that's already dead. He says I'll make five hundred bucks! I don't need the money. I don't want the money. I don't like the whole thing. Too many people are in on it. The only good thing about it is, I can do whatever I want to the body. I still don't like it, though.

Cameron, next door, he'd tell everyone he knows. If he knows? He's such a loud bastard. He has no common sense. If you are told something that could get you killed, wouldn't you keep your ass shut? God knows I would. Not Cameron, he'd tell the whole fuckin' world, the weird little fuck. He told me about the night he forgot. I don't understand why he's so freaked out. The whole thing's a load of shit, anyway. There are hundreds of times I've woke up naked in the desert, and I don't think it's a big deal. Cameron, on the other hand, wakes up one time naked in the desert, and he's been abducted. What kind of bullshit is that?

"Will you please do this one favor for me, Alex? I'll never ask for anything again. I need you to do this. God needs you to do this. It will save someone very important to God." Phil knows not to ask for too long.

"I'll do it for you, Phil, but if you bring God into this I'll make sure you're the next one. I'll hang you up like Jesus Himself." I like to threaten Phil. He doesn't quite know how to handle me after I do.

I don't know why I give into Phil so easily. He asks, and I do. He's not the type to get his hands dirty, and that's why he likes being with me. I'll do what I feel. It doesn't matter to me if there's a little bit of dirt involved. I guess my hands have gotten so dirty that it just doesn't matter anymore.

She is the most beautiful girl in all my Sunday school classes. I know it's wrong to treat her like a woman, but she is growing up so fast. I think she's the most wonderful woman I have ever seen. She needs me. She needs me to save herself. She's had such a rough childhood, the poor girl. She was abused by her father. He beat her like a dog after her mother died. She did his housework, his laundry, his cooking, his cleaning... She took the place of her mother. He forced her. He pushed her down and forced her. Despite all this, she stands here. The most beautiful woman to ever stand before me. I wish I could show her the way to salvation, but God has not yet shown me. I want her. I see it now. There is the most wonderful light. He is here, and He is showing me the way. I take her in my arms. A small whimper slips through her lips, and I grab her. I feel the heat of her skin pulsing against me. I am doing the work of God here! She will be saved!

She stands up, brushes herself off, and reaches for her clothes. There is a small tear in her eye. That is the love of God overflowing through her. She can feel the love. There are no words, but I know she feels the love of God. I can see the feelings embracing her smooth skin. The heat of passion has drained, and the love wraps around

her. It snakes its way over her body, and I wish to feel the love. I grab her again and hold her so close. I need to feel the love of God. He wants me to feel it.

She walks out of the room. I know that there is nothing I can say or do, but I know she is grateful. She has felt the love of God, and she knows that she is saved. She knows that I have shown her the way. She will love me forever. She will love God forever.

Eric is such a bastard. I think he likes to leave these clues around the house. I know he's been going to that place for months now. He thinks he's fooling me, but he's not. Being a strong woman, I did the only thing that any strong woman would do. I took on a lover. That'll teach that pain-in-the-ass. He wants to go ogle and touch his little strippers, and I want to be loved. I think it's a fair swap. He never touches me anymore, anyway. I wish I could make him leave, but I can't. Deep down I still love him, and I can't throw him out on the street. I guess I should take that back. He would throw me out on the street. He gave me this place, this beautiful apartment with all the trimmings. How could I give all this up? He's just out doing what most guys do. I know I just tell myself that. He's out trying to fuck anything that'll let him. He's such a fucking bastard! God, I wish I didn't love him.

I know he won't be home tonight straight after work. He's going to go to the club, again. He'll come home drunk, and want me to sleep with him. I don't want to be here, but if I'm not he'll kill me. He's such a fuckin' scum! I can't leave, I can't kick him out, and I can't... I better pour myself another vodka. He deserves it. He's been fucking around on me, making sure that I know about it, and making sure that I can't do anything about it.

It's the only thing I can do. He can't go on cheating on me, and this is the only way to stop him. I can't believe he's done this to me!

I shouldn't be here. I should be at home with Sarah. She is the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me, and I end up here. I sit here night after night spending my money on Allyson. If I were Sarah, I would have left me a long time ago. Where would she go, though? She has no family here. All she has is me.

Allyson looks incredible again tonight. "Hey beautiful!" Saying shit like that makes me feel like one of those old fucks who can't get pussy anywhere else but in a shithole like this.

"Eric, I didn't expect you again tonight. Won't your wife get jealous?" She knows my "wife" is nonexistent, but she still plays the game. My fantasy world started falling apart the second time I came in here.

"How's business? You making a lot of money?" I know she will now that I'm here, but I don't care.

"Not really. I'm so happy to see you." Of course she is.

Her body grinds into mine like it has so many nights before. She smells incredible. I can feel her tighten her python thighs around me. It's like she's squeezing out everything she can. I can feel the warmth between her legs as a small drop of sweat

begins to bead on my forehead. That same feeling washes over me that I get when I step out of a steaming hot shower. That heat that develops all over my skin until it hits the cool air of the bathroom. And then the sweat, the sweat pours down my forehead, cheeks, and chin. I feel like I've just had sex when she reclines back and the song ends. I can feel her relief as well. She knows that every time we're together; we're both crossing the line.

"I'll be back, Jimmy. I have to go freshen up." I know she won't be back until she's danced at least once. I have plenty of time to order a few drinks. I feel the alcohol run through my body, and I hope it will do its job. I have to get rid of these thoughts of Sarah. I deserve Allyson. I deserve one little indiscretion.

I stumble toward the apartment door, and I can feel her standing behind it. Her hatred for me right now burns through the door and into my chest. I can hear her pacing, waiting for me to open the door. I fumble in my pocket for my keys. I know she can hear me, but she'll wait 'til I open the door.

The phone keeps ringing, and I still sit here and look at it. I want to pick it up, but I keep thinking it will be him again. I can still hear his voice. He sounded like shit; like he'd been lost out in the desert for a year. "I need your help." His voice still crackles in my ears.

Another ring screams from the phone. I pick it up. "Allyson, is that you? I need you." All the memories came flooding back, and I slam the phone down.

"What the fuck's wrong with you?" The voice of my lover was so calm, even after I hung up on her. "I need you. Come over, I want to see you. I need to be with you right now." She sounds so incredibly childish. She sounds somewhat scared. That's what that sound is...fear.

"I'm on my way. I'll see you soon." I put the phone down slowly. I can still hear the scared voices in my ears. They mix together in a groggy harmony, and I feel them kicking around in my heart.

"I need you, I need you, I need you...," the chorus of ghostly voices sing. I slide into my car in a sort of walking coma. I start my car, and hear the voices grumble to life under the hood, "I need you, I need you..."

The phone call has made me forget everything, and as I pull out of the drive I think of my boy asleep in his bed. "I won't be gone long enough for him to notice," I think to myself as I speed away. My brother's phone call still rips through my head. "I need money. Please, Allyson, send me some cash. I've been attacked, or something. I can't explain to you right now. I need you."

"Cameron, come home. People are looking for you." I can still hear the fear coming from him. It dances around in my mind, wrapping around the memory of my lover's voice. It mixes with the fear of my voice. I drive and wonder about what I'm getting into this time. I sent Cameron money, but he never came home. I wonder if my lover is going to desert me the same way Cameron did. Well, if she does, I guess there's always Jimmy.

I never know what to do with my hands. You know, when I lay in my bed and watch T.V. I fold them in my lap, but it makes me feel like I'm grabbing my crotch. I can't stand men who have nothing better to do than play with their dicks. They must have some kind of childhood hang-up that Freud would have a field day with. Of course, I'm not the perfect specimen of mental stability at the moment.

I have the same dream; crawling across a field of glass shards. It's like someone took all the bottles in the world and smashed them at my feet. They lay scattered over acres of space, and I am forced to crawl over them. I look around at the red skies. They are torn and ripped with shards of glass lightning. I feel my hands and knees being torn to shreds. Soon, there will be nothing left of me except bloody slivers of skin laid out across the endless miles of shattered glass. I force myself to look up into the burning clouds, and I see the remnants of the first time I saw Allyson dance. She was forced by her pride to feed her son. She never asked for my help, and I hated her for it. A piece of glass gouges into my stomach as I am forced forward. Then, I see her there. She dances there, and I am forced toward her as the glass rips apart my arms and legs. She dances there proud and naked forcing me toward her. I know they put this dream in my head, and I can't escape it. I see my father standing on a pedestal behind her forcing her to keep dancing, and keep pulling me across the glass shards. I look down at my hands and see nothing left but blood and bones. My legs start to ache as the sting of the glass becomes too much for my body. Now, there is just an aching throughout my mangled body. I want to stop it all, but can't. She needs me to keep crawling closer, and the closer I crawl the farther she gets from me. The ache becomes unbearable, and I wish I could wake up. There is a light that pours in over the whole dream. They are back. I can still see the dream, but it's like it's not happening to me. I know they are there. Standing over me, they watch my reactions to the aching. They watch to see if I can endure the emotional and physical onslaught of the dream. Why can't they put me in a slaughterhouse and pound me into fleshy pulp?

I wake up, and feel them all standing around me. They want me to scream, but there just isn't enough air. I want to scream. I want to yell out in horror, but the horror has taken away every ounce of air that could be used. There is no one here, and I am still crouched in a ball in the corner of my room.

Act III

I am down on my knees, she stands over me, and I never thought I would ever be in this position. "Get it over with, bitch!" I know I'm not helping my situation. All I can hear is her ranting over something. You'd think I would be able to hear her now, but she still just mumbles. I can see the rage ripping through her eyes. She sounds like a broken down car trying to start, just whines. I shouldn't be making jokes. Crack! I hear the bat crunch the back of my head. My arms and legs are tied, so I fall on my face. The first blow she gave me as I walked in the door took most of her strength, now she just swings like a girl. She picks me back up to my knees. "C'mon honey, I love you." I know it's too late for this tactic, but I've always been a firm believer in the sorry-honey-I-love-you way of getting out of trouble. She raises the bat again, and a smile forces its way across

my face. She doesn't swing. I can't see her now. She starts back into my range of view, I see a flash, and...

"Philip...?" her sweet angel voice was just like I remembered it. I hope that she will allow me to come see her. I hadn't called her in years, and I don't know what made me call her now. I started to wish I hadn't. "Philip, it's been forever. How are you? I was just thinking about you." I'm not quite sure how to deal with this comment.

"I called to see how you were," my voice shakes from nerves. "I know we haven't spoken for some time, and I didn't know if you were still around," my sentences are garbled for some time while we become reacquainted.

"I've been thinking about our time together, and how much I've missed those days. I still feel you around me all the time; like you're watching over me or something. I wish you were here now." Her voice started to scare me a little, but all my feelings for her rushed back into me.

"I wish I was there with you too. I've missed our time together. Is there any way I can see you?" I know that she'll say it's impossible.

"I need some help right now, to be quite honest. I've made a terrible mistake." I hear the fear in her voice. All of a sudden, her voice becomes rattled. "I've done something that I'm going to Hell for, but I was forced to do it."

"Whatever you need. I'll be more than willing to help you. You know that." I feel myself getting into more than I can handle.

"He made me do it, Philip. He made me..." I can hear her sobbing in the background.

"I'll help you, Sarah. I promise I'll save you."

I knock at my lover's door, and can hear her jump inside like a startled cat. Her footsteps pound frantically across the floor, and she slams against the door as she skids to a stop. I can hear her breathing heavily as she opens the door. I hope that she is all right, and all this frantic posturing is for nothing. I think to myself how frantic she would be if she really knew me. She has no idea who I am, no idea what I do, and no idea who I've been doing it with. Maybe I'm doing the same things to her. She opens the door.

I walk into her apartment, and see nothing out of the ordinary. She wraps her arms around me and squeezes as tight as she can. "I'm so glad you're here. I need your help." The voices rattle around in my head again, and I hear my brother's crackling whispers.

"What's going on? You sound like you've killed someone. You didn't..." I see her face turn pale, and I wish I could take back what I just said. I look to the corner of the apartment, and I see the slumped over figure, "Sarah, how could you?"

I can hear him outside the door. I can feel him. He's completely shit-faced, and probably smells like that cheap whore he gives all his money to. I wish I could just run over to that door and pull him inside and beat the shit out of him, but I have to wait. I

want him to get inside first. I wish I hadn't had so much to drink. My body feels like it's going to shake itself apart. This is way beyond nerves. I honestly feel like I'm going to fall over. Shit, I can hear him fumbling for his keys. I can hear them jingle out of his pocket. They scrape and scratch across the door. It's like a teacher whose had enough with her fifth grade class and decided to run her fingernails down the blackboard. The key finally finds its mark. I can hear it as each slot matches up in the keyhole. Everything gets quiet, and the doorknob turns.

Whack! I hear the bat slap into his forehead. He immediately hits the floor like a tranquilized bear. Besides the gash in his head, he looks like he's sleeping. "How was your night, dear?" He laid there just like my old man when he came home and passed out at all hours of the night. I smell the whiskey and perfume mixture that soils his clothes. I go to the closet and look through his camping shit. Where are those ropes? He's going to wake up. Where are those fucking ropes? I find them and walk back out to the mess I left in the entryway. I wonder if the knots I make will hold him. I try to tie them tighter, and I know if he were awake it would hurt him. I feel him starting to move. I've got to speed this up. Finally, I'm finished, and soon he'll be awake. I see his eyes start to skip and jump, and finally open.

I help him up to his knees. "You know you deserve this." He says nothing. I think he's still dazed from the shot to the forehead. He starts to figure out that he's tied, and realizes what's going on. "C'mon sweetie. Wake up! I missed you tonight. Of course, though, I've been missing you every night. Where have you been, darling." I want to hit him again, but the first shot and tying him up took most of my strength. I walk over to the bar and drop in three ice cubes. The cap on the vodka takes unusually long to get off. The liquor slides into the glass. Before I can pick up the glass, a weird heat rises through my chest. I turn quickly towards Eric, "you fucking piece of worthless shit. Why did you take me in if all you wanted to do was fuck me over? I can't stand you!" He smiles. The fucker smiles. Before I know what I'm doing, I pick up the bat and knock him straight onto his face. I don't have the strength to hit him as hard as I did the first time, but the hardwood floor will take care of what my shot can't.

I help him back up again. He looks up at me, "c'mon honey, I love you." He sputters out blood as he talks. It's almost comical, the way he makes his last-ditch attempt at living. I hear the radio. It's playing a love song, as usual. I want to hit him again with the bat, but I can't. Instead, I walk to the bedroom. I've been saving something special for just a moment like this. I open the drawer. He never knew about the gun. I bought it at a pawn shop just after he started ditching me for the slut. Everytime I opened the drawer and felt it in my hand, I could smell the sweaty little guy that sold it to me.

I walk back to the entryway. All the smells intermingle in the air; the smell of the pawn shop clerk, the smell of the vodka on my breath, and the smell of Eric's bleeding, alcohol-soaked body. I see a bead of sweat start on his forehead. It rolls over and runs down to his mouth. Before he has the chance to taste it, I pull the trigger of the .38.

I should be ecstatic. I should be running around the apartment trying to figure out what to do next, but I'm not. All I can do is look at him. His body convulses, but I know he's already dead. He flops down to the nearest corner and, as if in slow-motion, I hear a long gasp of a last breath rattle through him. "Goodnight, daddy."

Then, it hits me. I walk to the phone and call the only person I can think of, "Allyson, I need you."

They all stand there in my motel room, the two women and Phil. I don't see why we don't invite Cameron over. All these fuckin' people, and they can't even figure out how to get rid of a dead body. It's really a very simple process, you just need a shocking plan. Phil and one of the women are very close. They hug and kiss before they talk business. The other woman looks like she doesn't belong. She looks like my type, though. She shouldn't be here. I peer out of the window. The night is lit up by the moon. It isn't quite half full, but it's close. Phil tells the one woman that he'll take care of everything. She seems like she could take care of it herself, but just like everyone else she's frightened. I look up, "why don't you all get the fuck out of here and let me do what you want me to do? You all just stand here like the body's gonna get rid of its fucking self. Are you all stupid?" Phil says something, but I can't hear him. I'm ready. Finally, they all leave, and I sit back into the silver velour chair.

I stare out of the window, and remember the last night I'd seen like this one. The farmhouse was faded yellow. I had to drag the body from the upstairs bedroom, and I was very tired. I had strangled her earlier in the day. She put up a very long struggle, and it wasn't like what I'd seen in the movies. I had found the long railroad spikes in the garage right next to the small sledge hammer, ironically. They were extremely heavy and rusted. I can remember the smell of them. It was that old, musty smell. That smell that gets on your hands when you hold an old quarter for too long. I can still feel the sting in my hand as I pound the first spike into her arm. She hangs by the one arm to the south side of the house. Amazingly, blood starts to trickle from her impaled wrist. I thought that once you're dead, you don't bleed. I nail up the other arm straight across from the first. I stand back and laugh at the old woman in this Jesus Christ pose. She looked nothing like a crucifix. She looked silly. Her bluish-gray hair shined in the light blue of the moon. I slumped down and pounded the last of the spikes through her feet. Mother never looked quite this good. I laughed quietly to myself as I walked to my packed car.

Epilogue

I haven't been able to dream for the last three days. I don't remember a day when they didn't come to me, but the last three days have been without confrontation. They told me to stay here. Phil and Alex left yesterday. I watched the dust fly across the sky as they drove off. I want to leave this place, but I know they're coming back.

I walk out of the door into the darkest night I've ever seen. I can barely see anything, but the sliver of a moon sends down a small blue haze. I walk down the deserted road to the crossroads. I turn left, and walk for what seems like an hour. I stand in the dusty ditch and think about the first night they came to me. I know they're coming back. I stumble out into the dust and remember the dreams. I start to feel the glass on my hands and knees. My legs ache as if by reflex. The blue haze gets brighter as my eyes get used to the darkness. I make my way back to the road, and I wonder which way it is back

to the motel. The telephone poles are all so much shorter here. They look like the paintings of the Roman crucifixions. I can almost see the thieves and beggars hanging from them. I know I'm dreaming, but it looks so real. My eyes focus on one pole. I can see the man hanging there. He hangs within arms reach, and I want to see if this is real. I know it isn't, so I walk on down the line of crucifixes.

The blue haze gets brighter as I walk toward, what I think is, the direction of the motel. I hear nothing, but feel a small spot of heat on my back. The light engulfs me. I know they've come back.

Sidewalk Artist

An afternoon in a foxhole,
Screaming on a cloud,
Or dining with Satan,
And feeling sort of proud.
Chalking out a madman,
In an early morning's rain.
Living with sensations,
You're trying to maintain.
Sex-starved sweat and bullshit,
On the window sill of blame.
Everyone is dying,
And no one's feeling shame.
You wake up in the front seat,
From staking out your wife.
Your hand inside the take-out bag,
It's as empty as your life.
Check your ammunition belt,
You've enough for one more day.
Watch the sky turn blue to red,
In the evening you will play.

Good Night's Sleep

I was walking down the hallway wondering which door I was supposed to go into. The laughter was so loud, and I just wanted to get where I could hear myself think. I opened one of the doors and stepped in. I could hear the muffled laughter outside the door. The room was dark, except for the yellow-gray light coming from the aquarium. It was overflowing every couple of seconds throwing water all over the black concrete floor. A large tube was blowing air into the water, and the bubbles were exploding all over the surface. It sloshed out onto the floor and splashed around the cuffs of my dinosaur pajamas. Dinosaur pajamas? There was something in the water, but I was still too worried about why I was wearing dinosaur pajamas to care. I heard a louder splash of water than, what I guess would be, normal, and immediately looked up at the tank. I peered in through the glass. Floating in the water was a red velvet jacket with black lapels. It looked like something Dean Martin wore when he played the Sands. Another splash of water pulled my feet out from under me, and I fell sideways.

I landed on, what sounded like, a chain-link fence. It snagged me right out of the air. I couldn't see anything so I really didn't know what the hell I was laying on. I was very cold. I rolled onto my stomach and rose to all fours. I crawled in one direction for about five minutes before I reached a wall. It was concrete and rounded like the inside of a grain silo. I followed the wall groping for a door. I continually thought I was going to find something that would get me out of wherever I was. Instead, my hands kept sliding around in something that felt like mucus. It made the grate extremely slippery, and I kept falling onto my side. My hands, finally, found a hole in the chain-link. I had no idea of how far up I was, but anywhere was better than here. The cut, wire links gouged into my sides as I pushed myself through the hole.

I fell onto the floor at the bottom of the staircase. I looked up at the room. It was huge. My eyes adjusted to the darkness, and I could see moonlight through the immense stained glass ceiling. It was a stained glass dome that seemed to depict the rise and fall of a king I didn't recognize. It was done in beautiful reds, blues, and purples. The floor was covered in marble with a huge family crest centered at the bottom of the stairs. The carpet was red, stained with tiny, muddy footprints. I started to follow them up the stairs, but because of the darkness I couldn't see the top of the staircase. When I got closer to the top, I noticed someone standing there. The little boy's features were hard to make out until he lit up a cigarette, and I caught a glimpse of him in the match-light. His face was scarred, like he'd been held face first in a bucket of glass. There were scars going every direction, like some wild animal had gotten a hold of this poor boy but was scared away before he could finish him off. He wore the exact same dinosaur pajamas that I had on, except smaller, and the red velvet jacket with black lapels, which was entirely too big for this little boy. His feet and pajama pant cuffs were covered with a thick black mud. He looked up at me through his cigarette smoke and screamed, "It's in the rocking horse, mom, it's in the rocking horse!"

His screaming startled me and I started to fall backwards, but caught myself on the next stair. The boy was gone, but there were muddy footprints going in every direction. I turned to go down the stairs, and was shoved from behind. I fell down the

long staircase and could feel every stair as it gouged into my ribs, slapped me in the head, or rammed me in the back.

Now, I lie on a hard, linoleum kitchen floor. I feel someone standing over me, pulling at my hair, and pushing my head into the oven. I can only see the arm of the whatever is trying to push me into the oven, and I can feel the red velvet brushing against the side of my head. From behind me, the boy screams, “mom, she tied my shoes together! She tied my shoes together!”

I sit up, and I’m freezing from the sweat all over me. I expect to see the huge stained glass dome over my head, but I don’t. It’s only 4:00 a.m., and I still have six hours before I have to get up. I am scared to go back to sleep. The whole thing is just too weird to get back to right away, but my body gives into being tired.

“Ten thousand dollars, ten thousand dollars, are you sure it was ten thousand dollars?” The old man’s face is, maybe, an inch from mine. Behind his head I can see the staircase. It’s on fire, but this guy is much more worried about ten thousand dollars. He walks away from me in a scolding pose. He has mud all over the cuffs of his slacks. The stained glass dome is filling with smoke, and, what feels like, fifty cats run through and around my legs. In the distance, I can hear the Beach Boys singing “Do It Again,” or maybe it’s Wall of Voodoo’s version.

The old man steps up into my face again, and before he can say anything I scream, “Listen, fucker, I don’t have your money, so piss off.” At the top of the staircase, I see the little boy lighting up another cigarette. He laughs and takes another drag. I start running up the stairs, thinking he needs help even though I don’t know why I’m thinking it. I try to reach for him through the smoke, but all I can feel is the heat of the fire on the back of my neck.

The water runs off my neck, down my arms, and trickles from my fingertips down the shower drain. Everything in the bathroom is lit up and bright white, like it has all just been cleaned. I shake my head and wonder if I’m still in bed, or if I made it to the shower and dozed off standing up. I concentrate on the back wall of the shower, my eyes start to haze over, and the wall turns black and I can smell the natural gas of the oven. I turn to look out the little window on the range, and the water from the shower head almost drowns me. “I see how we’re playing now,” I yell into the air.

I go about my normal daily routine thinking nothing of the dream/nightmare I had, but at the same time I find myself telling everyone I know that I had the weirdest dream. I get through my day, but I keep wondering what will happen when I go back to sleep. I get home, and immediately lay down to take a nap. I barely get my eyes closed, and I’m standing in front of a painting of the old man I had seen previously. I look at the inscription on the small, brass plaque at the bottom of the painting. It says, “Emil Deighton 1657-1702.” The small light above the painting only partially lights the room.

The phone on the desk starts to ring, and I wonder if it’s out-of-bounds for me to answer. I pick up the receiver, “Hello?”

The boy screams on the other end, “six more months and she’ll be home!” The phone goes dead as soon as the last syllable hits my ear. I can hear the echo in my head of the screams. In the distance, I can hear crying. I walk out of the room into, what should’ve been, the hallway, and walk straight into the middle of a crowded club.

I walk up to the bar. The bartender looks at me and says, “nice pajamas, pal. What can I get you?”

I stand there completely dumb-founded. The bartender moves on to his next customer thinking my lack of an answer means, “nothing for me.” I look around for someone that looks somewhat familiar, and find no one. I light up a cigarette from the pack in the breast pocket under the purple stegosaurus. I feel a tap on my shoulder.

“The girl down at the end of the bar says you look lost.” The bartender slides a drink in front of me and points to a girl sitting at the end of the bar. I look down at her, and motion thank-you. She stands up and starts towards me.

“Hey, puppy, just out of the pound?” she laughs to herself.

I give her a strange look of that’s-the-dumbest-thing-I’ve-ever-heard-come-out-of-someone’s-mouth. She takes the rejection well, and keeps right on talking. So, I pick up my glass and take a drink. “Water? You bought me a water?” I say to the toilet. I stand over the toilet and look around the filthy bathroom. Immediately, my stomach gets upset. I drop to my knees, and start vomiting into the bowl. As soon as the first splash of puke hits the toilet, I sit up to the annoying scream of my alarm clock. I look around the room wondering if this is really where I’m supposed to be. I can still taste the puke in the back of my throat.

I trip through my day in a blur. All I want to do is get back to bed, so I blow-off everything after classes to take a nap. I can hear Bugs and Daffy going at it over duck or rabbit season as my eyes start to get blurry.

The smell of stale cigarettes and high school keggers mixes with the intense red light of the bathroom. I reach down and turn on the water at the sink, I fill my hands, and splash it over my face. I look into the mirror, and the room behind my reflection turns black. “Jim, it’s six o’clock. She’ll be here soon,” my reflection says.

“Excuse me?” I stutter back.

“Diana, she’ll be here soon,” my reflection laughs as if I’m an idiot. It turns and walks back into the darkness, whistling.

Just before it gets to where I can’t see it anymore, it lights up a cigarette and laughs. Out of the darkness the little scar-faced boy comes running up to the mirror. He jumps up on the sink so his nose is touching the glass, “Underdog has the best theme song!” he screams at me. “Underdog has the best theme song!” he screams again as I jump backwards. The red shag carpet slides underneath my feet and my head slams into the wall. Two red towels fall like feathers onto my chest.

I sit up in bed to the sound of Di’s key in the door, and immediately reach to the back of my head to see if I’m bleeding. Di opens the door and immediately gets a disappointed look on her face. “You didn’t even get out of bed today, did you?” She sounds exactly like my mom when I used to sleep-in on Saturdays after long Friday nights of binge drinking.

“I was just taking a nap,” I say back to her, but I can tell she only half-buys it. “I’ve been having the weirdest dream,” I say to try and change the subject.

We eat dinner and lay down on the bed to watch TV. Di’s eyes start to close, but then jump open again as she fights sleeping. I look over at her and know it won’t be long until I can get back to my dream.

I lay face down. I can't see anything, but can feel the blindfold across my eyes. I can feel the dead leaves brushing and swirling around my face. The ground is cold against my chest, and soon my body starts to shiver. I can hear the laughter coming from the distance. The footsteps crackle on the dead leaves. They are standing over me. I can't understand what they are saying. It's almost like they're speaking some other language, but I know it's English. I just can't understand it. They grab my arms and legs and tie them so that they're spread as far apart as they'll go. I know what's happening to me as soon as my body jumps from the ground and the intense pain shoots through my extremities as they are pulled in every direction. I scream in pain, and I can feel the tears rolling down my face. Suddenly, one of my feet is free. The other one comes loose as I feel my ankle crack under the pressure. My arm gives way and snaps off at the elbow. My body slams on the ground and is immediately pulled in the direction of the tied wrist.

The sharp pain of my head slamming into the concrete wall pops my eyes open. They don't focus immediately. I can't move, because the straight jacket is fastened too tight. The ultraviolet office lights burn into my eyes. I look down from the ceiling and see them. In every direction, a million gray desks are in perfect columns and rows. Everyone is working at the same pace. I'm mesmerized by the sight. I try to get my arms free, but the attempt is futile. I stand myself up, and look down at the desk directly to my left. The name plaque reads, "Emil Deighton 1703-1776."

The headstone is old and covered with moss. His friends all gather around the grave, not one of them is crying. There were pictures of these people somewhere. I'd seen them. Now, where was it. I know I've seen these people before...in a picture. Two women and three men all staring down into the grave, all thinking about this man, and, from the looks of it, none of them are sad to see him go. One of the men starts towards me. "He was an old bastard, Jim. I didn't mean for it to end like this," he says. "I didn't mean to kill him." The old man walks away without explaining a thing, whistling that damn song that my reflection whistled in the mirror.

I feel a tug at the arm of my red velvet jacket. The little scar-faced boy looks up at me with sad eyes, "don't skip breakfast, it's the most important meal of the day."

It's Saturday. I look at the clock, and figure I have all day to sleep. I lay there, momentarily, and think about whether I'm hungry enough to get up. As my eyes close again, I can see one of the women from the funeral in the corner of my bedroom. She walks over to my bed and sits on the edge.

"He'll be okay. No one meant for it to end this way, but he wanted everything. He wasn't going to give the rest of us anything. He was going to keep it all for himself. We all worked hard for that money. He had no right...", she is visibly rattled by saying all this out loud. "Jim, we stole it."

I could feel the heat of the fire at the foot of Lincoln's bed. He stood there with the torch in his hand, getting ready to slam it down on my chest. Stop, why the hell is Abraham Lincoln burning down the Lincoln bedroom, and why am I in Lincoln's bed? "If I can't have Mary no one can!" Lincoln screams at me.

This is one of those times when I don't remember the rest of what happened. There is a huge block of black dreaming. I think of it as nothing, but I'm sure there's

something to it. I like to think that during these times we die in our sleep, and to keep us from dying in “reality” we either wake up or there is this huge block of black dreaming.

The blackness fades in, like a movie, onto a beautiful green meadow. In the middle of the rolling hills, there is a small stream. Sticking up in the middle of this field is a dead tree. One branch hangs over the stream, and a long, hand-woven vine hangs down into the water. The woman from my bedside lays there, purplish-blue, in the water. The stream keeps on running over her face and down her clothes like she isn't even there. Her eyes snap open.

The scream of the alarm doesn't phase me until I hear my neighbor pounding on my door, “shut that fucking alarm off, asshole!” I reach over and turn off the alarm. There's no need to snooze, because I'm not getting up. I think it's still Saturday, but I know it's Sunday. I open one eye enough to look around the room. My answering machine is blinking from the four or five times Di had called wondering what the hell happened to me, and why she hadn't heard from me. I decided to avoid that whole situation and curled back up in my comforter.

The old man stood in the kitchen. He wore black patent leather wing-tips, black slacks, a dirty-white tuxedo shirt, an untied bow tie, and that red velvet jacket with black lapels. All that was missing was a cigarette and a martini. The three men and two women stood all around him. The three men all wore black tuxedos, and the women wore sequined dresses. The room was filled with cigarette smoke. “Are you ready, Emil?” said one of the men. His question silenced the room.

Emil looked directly at me, “are you ready, Jim?”

I looked around as if he were talking to someone else. I noticed that I was no longer wearing the dinosaur pajamas, but, instead, a black tuxedo that matched the other men's exactly. I felt the cigarette, but hadn't noticed it had burnt down to my fingers. I could feel the scorching of my skin as I answered, “I'm ready.”

Emil flung the door leading into the club open, pulled the gun from under his coat, and screamed, “everybody get down on the floor!”

The scar-faced boy tugged at my pant-leg from his position on the floor. He looked up and handed me the newspaper. The front page picture was Emil. The caption read, “Emil Deighton 1896-1958.”

The scar-faced boy looked up, “bet it all. You've got nothing to lose. She'll be here tomorrow afternoon.” He nodded his head as if to tell me I should know what he's talking about.

The kitchen floor was cold on my chest. I wasn't struggling anymore with the hand that held the back of my head in the oven. My whole body went numb and I couldn't move. I felt the hand release its grasp on the back of my head. I laid there. The little boy shrieked in the background, “Elvis is still alive! Elvis is still alive!”

My eyes took a while to get open. They felt like I'd been asleep forever. The crusted eyelashes, finally, pulled apart and I could see the bright white of the room. I could feel the sting of the needle in my arm, and I could hear the beeps and whirs of the machines. I looked around the room, and saw Di asleep in a very uncomfortable looking chair. I wanted to ask her what was going on, and tell her what I'd seen. I tried to talk, but couldn't. Her head bobbed and she woke up right as my eyes closed.

I stand in the bathroom. The heat of the red light sears my skin. I look into the mirror. My reflection, once again, turns and starts walking into the blackness behind him whistling. He lights up another cigarette and I wait for the little scar-faced boy to come running out of the dark. The boy jumps onto the sink and screams, “she’s here, and now you’re gonna get it!” His screams echo into the black dreaming.

On the Couch

Dad's knuckles burn white as they grip the wheel.
A bead of sweat is vaporized as it reaches
The blindfold of rearview headlights across his eyes.
The car spits out road dowsed in dead skunk
As the dash dances in its white-green lights,
And the engine vomits sounds of untuned wind chimes.
The signs scream of roadside preachers and freak shows
That boast the "world's largest prairie dog."
Cigarette smoke mixes with the odor of over-heated engine
And hundreds of miles, plastered in pools under Dad's arms.

A sudden scream of unconditional surrender stops the car
At a sign that sprays, "World's Weirdest Wonders" in neon.
A man sits in the quiet, driven crazy by the buzzing sign.
Without a word, he invites me into his run-down sideshow,
And I accept with hopes of seeing the surreal.
I step through the curtain to his first exhibit,
Only to find stitched on appendages of dead cow brethren.
Then, I'm amazed by the world's largest prairie dog statue,
And snakes who've been maimed for the illusion of two heads.
There was no weird wonder in my thoughts, only disgust.

The sign above the curtain read, "The Grand Finale."
I went through to find folding chairs in a deserted room.
Then, the most beautiful girl came in from the shadows
Lead by the man who thought *her* a weird wonder.
"Now everyone listen, listen close as you can,
My daughter who stands here, used to be a man!"
The moonshine soaked showman slurred to his crowd,
And too bad no one but me stood there in the silence.
That's when the dream gets all blurred and bizarre,
Because there's me and the girl but no world all around.

Now I was full of the world's weirdest wonders.
If she was truly a he, what would it feel like to hold her,
Touch her, and squeeze her... to love her.
The curiosity sparked deep inside me, and rose through me,
Until it was me.
I had to feel her in my heart and in my bed no matter what
The consequences were to both me and her.
I must have her.
My body tensed and relaxed all in the same motion,
And all the world's notions were left by the bed.

I felt her beneath me, the grafted skin to forge her sex
Pulsed in orgasm, to my great despair.
I couldn't help but feel repulsed by the sensation.
She noticed my turn of emotion from curiosity to disgust,
And swiftly her emotions went from elation to disappointment,
But she acted as if I had never kissed her face,
As if I'd never come into existence, as if I never loved,
And maybe I never had.
But the dream was over, and so was our affair,
And I woke to wonder if she was real.

I never saw the girl again,
Until it was my chance to take a virgin to my bed.
She laid there with her legs ready and widespread,
And I leaned over her only to see the face of my dream.
"Don't treat her as you've treated me," she said.
"She's not a conquest, nor another rung.
Don't be this stupid, don't be this mislead
By your hormones, they are the loveless dung
That forces man to be the loving dead."
Her voice castrated me, and rendered me useless.

I let the memory of that night fade into blurs.
Of when my dream had her revenge,
And made love, for me, into massacre.
I found someone to love, with to resume sex lost,
But it was very arrogant of me to assume
That my dream would not return to spoil such love.
I came to the point where I thought it couldn't happen again,
But she came.
She came back to me as if she'd never left.

"You haven't learned a thing from all your dreams."
She stood there, a dream that I'd thrown away,
And slowly said, "nothing is as it seems.
Your loved one's honesty is in decay,
And as she lies there in your bed she schemes
About her next betrayal, and what she'll say.
When you find out that she's had sex with teams
Of men, and then lead your beliefs astray
By letting out her fake virginal screams."
I knew then that she'd had her revenge again.

The years of life collapsing all about me,

I returned to the sight of the "World's Weirdest Wonders."
It is gone now, and in its place stands a gas station.
If that would have only been there years ago.
Still my dream steps to me from the shadows
When I think that I've found true love.
"I've been your true love all along," she says.
"You can never touch what you feel is dead."
Now, my worlds of wonder center around this,
And all I can ask is, "do you think I'm crazy, Doc?"

Letters From Satan

Dear Charles,

I feel we have become informal over the years, even though you and I have never spoken. We must meet. I have had plans to come see you for quite sometime, but my many requests have been denied. I know why you don't want to see me, and it's all right to be afraid. We do need to sit down and iron out our problems. You see, you've been talking to too many people about me. I wish that you would show some restraint when using my name.

Another matter before us is: you seem to think that I will interject on your behalf when the time comes. You don't seem to understand that I like you where you are. You cause too many problems for me elsewhere. You make me look foolish, and for this I am deeply ashamed of you. In the past, you have tried to make yourself a part of my affairs. You can never be a part of what I am. Your manipulation of people's minds was quite inventive, but you slipped. You made an ass of yourself by contradicting your own philosophies. Kids would not follow you today.

The truth is something you hold very dear, but you haven't learned to be honest with yourself. The only way you made these "children" believe you is through drugged dementia. They don't believe you now, do they? They resent you, Charles. Much like they resented their parents when you dragged them into your "family". They see your contradictions. They looked for something more than what life had already shown them, but all you gave them were illusions of what life could be. You lied to them because that was all you had the power to do. That is all the power you have now, but now you only have one follower to lie to.

We must also talk about your definition of evil. You have told certain members of the media that you are, in fact, evil. So, that's what you think you are? You are no more evil than a stubbed toe or a hangnail. Look at it from my point of view. You kept a city on edge for about a week. In my eyes, a week is a fraction of a second. Charles, look at the big picture. Even an idiot like DeSalvo kept Boston terrified for longer than you. Let's face it, evil... you are not.

I am coming to discuss these issues with you. Please, do not deny my request this time. I will see you soon.

Sincerely,
L. Morningstar

Dear Rev. Phelps,

It is so nice to see someone working for the greater good of this country. I never thought a man who could devote himself to God could be so easily taught to hate, but I was wrong. You have become one of my favorite people to correspond with. Your literature, though, is lacking the true vision you have. I know deep inside you want all homosexuals dead.

I have been asking myself why you do what you do? I feel very responsible for what made you. I was there the night you started to hate. It truly was a horrible sight. You cried for hours and hours. I was so glad to see you finally go to sleep after what had happened. I was wondering if you still remembered that night? Sorry if I brought up a bad memory, but it was such a fulfilling moment for me that I can't help myself sometimes.

The storms were coming in from the northwest. You sat in the smallest chair in the room. That was your favorite chair. Your mother was out, and your father wasn't home yet. Your uncle was there to make sure you were all right. Oh, did he make sure you were all right.

You can remember him forcing you to the ground and raping you, can't you? The only bad thing about this memory is how much you liked it. You couldn't stop yourself. Your father walked in and saw. He knew how much you liked it. He punished you for years, and you began to hate. You couldn't just stop with the hate you felt toward your father. Instead, you had to show your hate to the world. You no better than the flamboyant little queer. You must show yourself off to the world.

I just wanted to write, and thank you for all your hard work. Please, keep it up.

Your Biggest Fan,
Mr. L. Morningstar

To whom it may concern:

I very rarely choose to voice my true opinions anymore. I let people make their own decisions and live with the consequences of those decisions. Of course, when these decisions turn out badly... I get blamed. I get blamed when anything turns out badly. No one looks toward heaven and says, "Oh, God made me do it." It's always my ass in the hot seat.

You all get the same chance. Flip a coin. Life is fifty-fifty. I reclaim half of you anyway, regardless. The sins were put there merely as an outline. Look at pride, for instance. Sometimes, it's a wonderful thing to be proud. You've accomplished a goal that you most likely never thought you would, and that's why you're proud. That's also where you went wrong. You're greatest accomplishment should humble you to the fact that you can do better. Thus, no pride involved. Thus, no sin, etcetera and so on. My favorite of the sins is lust. If you've never felt lust... too bad for you. Of course, lust is the majority of my repossessions. Damned mortals, you can't resist it can you? I admit, lust was the great equalizer. Without it, you'd all get to go to heaven. God had to give me something.

Lust, god it's a beautiful word. A little word that describes the strongest feeling in the world. I know, some of you are reading this thinking love. How do you think you get there? If it weren't for animal lust there would be no such thing. Well, in some cases it's just a good bartender, but that's another point altogether. Come to think of it, lust is what got you to where you are now. Look at what your lust has cost you. All you have to do is look around you. Lust is the beautiful woman with the bitchy attitude, lust is the rohypnol slipped into the woman's drink by the date rapist, and lust is the nightmares she has for the rest of her life not knowing if she consented or not.

Sweet Dreams,
Dr. Beelzebub

Mr. Ramsey,

I can completely sympathize with your situation. You were a wonderful father to a beautiful little girl. Now, everyone suspects you of doing unthinkable things to her. I wanted to write and tell you that I don't think you did anything wrong.

I can remember a time when you were smitten with the girl that lived next door to you. You were what... ten? She was a beautiful little blonde girl. You two were inseparable. She was the first girl you kissed, and later, the first girl you fucked. She was your first love.

I was just wondering, was it her face you saw in place of your daughter's as you strangled her? She was going to tell her mother, wasn't she? Don't fool yourself, Mr. Ramsey, your wife already knew. As hard as she tried, it's still her handwriting on the note. To tell you the truth, I don't know why she covered for you. Maybe, she couldn't stand the truth. She knew exactly what the neighbors would think if they found out what you did. She thinks she can bear the pain of losing a daughter easier than having a murdering rapist for a husband.

One last thing, Your appearance on TV only made you and your wife look more guilty.

Sincerely,
Prof. P.O. Darkness

An open letter to sluts:

I can feel the first time you touched it. How your hand was like silk running up and down the shaft. You were amazed at how big it was, and how you thought it would never fit. You could feel the excitement in his low moans. Your body started to tingle as his moaning got more and more frantic. I can hear your inaudible squeal as he came all over your hand.

The next week was incredible. He told all his friends, and you were overwhelmed with dates. With every step closer to going all the way, your excitement reached new peaks. I can feel the confusion of your first orgasm. Did you push his hands away from your crotch because you couldn't take it, or hold his fingers inside you so he could feel your muscles spasm?

I'm sure you were scared that first night. You had heard all the stories about how much it hurt, and how you wouldn't enjoy it. What was there to enjoy? You barely had time to know whether you enjoyed it or not, or whether or not it hurt. I can feel the awkward moment when he rolls off of you, and both of you wonder what to say. Did you make it home before curfew that night?

Now, you search. You want to feel the hands from so many men ago. You want to feel the tingle throughout your body that you haven't felt since. Almost every man looks like a possibility, but none of them can give you back that feeling. Drugs and drinking bring on new feelings, but they fall short of perfection.

Never fear, that feeling is just around the corner.

Stay optimistic,
Prince Lucifer Morningstar

To whom it may concern:

I stand at the end of your bed and masturbate as I watch you fuck. Your heart racing, your blood pumping through your body, and your bodies thrusting in unison. No one would give up sex, no matter what the consequences. There are no longer thoughts of procreation, only thoughts of ejaculation. There's no disease, operation, drug, or act of God that can change this.

Nude pictures of mothers and daughters are all over every fourteen year-old's computer screen, pornography is a billion dollar business, and there are more adulterers than Christians. It's beautiful to see that a naked person can sell anything, and no one cares when a six year-old boy finds his father's hidden stash of Playboys. Sex has become culture.

Like junkies, everyone looks for that miracle fix. It feels so good, it's hard to resist. Some people can't hide the obsession, people call them addicts. How hypocritical is that? No matter how well it's hidden, everyone wants sex and everyone thinks about when they'll have it next. There's not a person alive who doesn't know how long it's been since the last time they had sex, or who their best lover was. Everyone has the feelings, odors, and sounds of their best sexual experience stored in the back of their head, ready to come forward at any time. And for this, I can't thank you enough.

Thanks again,
The Angel Morningstar

My Dearest Whores,

How hard it is to say good-bye to such a wonderful group of disciples. I must say, I was surprised to receive your resignation. I blame myself for the lack of rewards given to you over the course of the last years. But, you gave yourselves so easily to greed that I never thought incentives beyond the illusions of success were necessary. Like all whores, you were more than willing to lie, cheat, and steal to achieve lack-luster goals. I took special interest at your realization that the “fool and his money” saying is a load of shit. It takes a much bigger crowbar to pry loose even a millionth of a percent of the wealth in your world. I should be proud that you’ve learned this very valuable lesson.

You may think there is some reward due you for the efficient spreading of my ideology. I guess I just considered it a favor for what you’ve received from me. Without me, you would be nothing. Your thoughts would all be good and your energies would be better spent on making life more livable, instead of focusing on the debauchery of your fellow mortals. There would have been no stories of dogs getting molested, getting drunk and not getting laid, awkward teenage sexual experiences, car fetishes, or suburban orgies. But, hindsight is twenty-twenty, and you all are very accepting of the consequences of your decisions (I promise the genital warts and anal bleeding will clear up). The truth is, you’ve expended entirely too much effort on examining others’ shortcomings to notice that *you* are the true philanderers, drunkards, and sinners. Maybe, this is why they are your champions.

So with your passing, I lose some of the true champions of sin. Remember, I will never turn a cold shoulder to any of you, I will accept you as any father does his children, and I will consistently supply you with never-ending stream of inspiration.

With all my love,
Satan

PS Mr. Dayton, I will be making a special visit to discuss the interception of my mail.

Father,

I continue to walk the corridors where we torture the Soulless. They wail and moan even though they know their cries are the reason they are here. I listen to them make noise until, in their mind, they resign their souls. They have no comprehension of the fact that they lost their souls back in the mortal world. I've spent some time with these creatures listening to them beg for my mercy. They do not realize I am merely a foreman, a keeper of the gates. For instance, #3452147 was an IRS agent in the mortal world. Right there is the makings of damnation, but his delusions of grandeur led him to financially cripple people with the power he was given by the others. My ultimate punishment for him was to impale his severed head while keeping his consciousness fully intact. He was screaming so loud for the first few hours that I increased his punishment to include a mouthful of glass. Amazingly, the bastard spit it out and continued to scream. I was forced to remove his vocal chords.

The pair next to him are a young couple. They were only eighteen when they were brought to me. I watched them lose their souls in the mortal world. They took the baby and put into a black garbage bag. And when they could still hear its cries, they took turns strangling it until the sounds were gone. They left it in their school gymnasium trash can. The poor thing wasn't found for days. It was brought to me as well. As a baby born out of wedlock, it is immediately damned. I put it out of its misery, but the couple must now sit in their cell with one another, each looking at a murderer, and standing over their dead child. I was going to put the young man that shot twelve of his classmates in with them, but on second thought I had other plans for him.

#41578639 is across the hall. He is taking his punishment the best. I have to laugh as I think about that poor bastard reliving his death every ten minutes. That's what he gets for inventing a pill to regain the sexual lust he lost when he became impotent. I think I'll throw six more whores in with him tomorrow, and make his massive coronary twice as painful. His roommate pays no attention to him because he is too busy watching his children from afar as they learn to love the mother that he kidnapped them from. He brainwashed them into believing their mother was a child molester, when the truth was she was having an affair with a much younger man. I guess he's no different than the rest of the parents in the mortal world. He says he would protect his children from anything, but he doesn't protect them from the other of the numerous Soulless. He breeds mediocrity, and when he finally notices, he blames everyone but himself. This has been going on for eons, though. They've come so far as to say it's all right for young girls to drive by the houses of boys they like, not realizing that it's one small step away from stalking. They teach the young boys to be strong physically, not expecting them to use it for sexual and violent purposes. Then, they blame TV for the whole mess.

The last of them on this floor is #2166784. I'm sure you remember your "chosen one." I gave him a small group of ATF agents yesterday to see if he could persuade them into following him as their messiah. I have to laugh when I watch them. I thought they were going to rip him apart in the first day, but they've decided that he might not be all bad. So now, I have this little cult forming in the east wing. I left a few of the demons with them to make sure they didn't avoid the regular aches and pains of Hell. I thought I'd let them go for awhile. I hope you don't mind. Maybe they can run the place after I'm gone.

So now, All I have to do is hang up the keys outside the gate and dismiss the rest of the demons before I move on to my new position. I'm very glad that you are finally letting this place go. I will miss the time I've spent here, but it will be good to get back to you and the others. If you don't mind my saying, because I know what happens if you get angry; I never thought you'd abandon your creation, but I guess its for the best.

Your Fallen Son

Today

I keep having visions of Reverend Phelps,
Screaming, "Faggots Must Die!"
While wearing women's underwear,
As he marches through Mardi Gras.
I walk past womynist slogans,
Saying, "Fight Sexism",
Immersed in screams of, "Men Suck".
I turn on T.V.
And see every cast member,
Of N.Y.P.D. Blue's ass.
And you say that it's me,
That's lost all my class?

Slap me with sex,
'Cause nothing else will wake up,
The "brain" in my pants.
I smoke crack as I watch Current Affair,
So everything makes better sense.
I'll strip away my hair,
To be just like the boys
Who rape girls,
I love every girl
The police say I harass.
And you say that it's me,
That's lost all my class?

Be My People, and I Will Be Your God

I started the whole thing, and now it's completely out of control. I was walking across campus to catch my bus when I walked into the heart of controversy. Standing on one side of the street anti-gay protesters, and on the other a drag queen competition. I was smoking a cigarette, minding my own business, then a face, two inches from mine, screamed, "Fag-lover!"

My face jumped up away from the book I was reading. My body involuntarily tensed and moved back to retaliate. The face moved on to another unsuspecting victim, and received the same reaction. I sat down on a nearby bench and watched the fireworks, every few minutes laughing to myself and wondering if these people had lives. As I watched, I could feel myself getting more and more angry. The heat rose from my chest and finally peaked in the back of my head. Before I could think, I grabbed the Bible from my backpack and ran towards the protesters. I pulled out my lighter and set the book on fire.

"Love thy neighbor, you backward fucks!" the screams jumped out of my body as the book went flying into the middle of the crowd of protesters. "You're all going to Hell! Tolerance is God! Love is God! Repent now or be held responsible!"

The record scratched to silence and everyone turned. A small group stood behind me like toadies and screamed, "yeah, ...you fuckers?" No screams came from the protesters. No screams came from the drag queens. No one said a word for, what felt like, an hour.

I looked around the crowd. Then, I made the best decision I've ever made...I walked away. As I walked through the crowd to my bus, the music started back up, the screams flew back and forth across the street, and everything was normal once again.

I got home, lit up a cigarette, and immediately went to my medicine cabinet. I grabbed two valium and returned to the living room. The phone rang. "Lyndon, are you goin' to Lloyd Cole?" Danny's rasp spit through the phone. "'Cause I could really use a ride."

"What time?" I was half-asleep.

"Ten. Thanks, man. Later," then the phone rattled around as Danny threw it on the table, forgetting to push the "off" button.

Ten rolled around. I picked up Danny and headed towards Captain Sid's. It used to be a seafood place, until the owner decided it would make more money as a bar. The inside is decorated to look like you're on a pirate ship. There are fish tanks everywhere, and plush velour couches and chairs. The place is lit by mostly candles, or single light bulbs hanging from the ceiling by their cords. Where the bow used to be is the stage. I walk to the stern for a drink, as Lloyd starts into "Rattlesnakes." Sid's isn't as crowded as I thought it would be. I stand at the bar looking over my shoulder to watch Lloyd sing. I feel a sharp nudge in my ribcage.

"Hey, you're the guy that lit the Bible on fire?" her voice rings through "Brand New Friend." The music's loud enough that she has to scream slightly.

"No, you must have me confused...", I say as I turn from the bar, and run straight into her.

She laughs as I drop my beer, “no, it was definitely you. Let me get you another beer. What was it?”

“Newcastle,” my throat goes dry from being caught.

She buys me another beer and returns with me to my table. After a few minutes of awkward small talk, our ears get used to yelling over the music, and we settle in.

“That took a lot of nerve, today. You must really hate religious-types?” I could feel the anger from the afternoon rising again in my chest.

“I hate anyone who uses fear to control people, and religion has been doing that for centuries. But, you don’t want to listen to my organized religion rant. I know it helps some people get through hard times, but religion is something you’re supposed to feel. I think most people just go along with what they’re told,” she got the short version of my religion rant anyway.

After an hour of yelling over the music she says, “you want to go get some coffee?” I agree.

I forgot completely about leaving Danny at the bar until I wake up the next morning. By the time I realize it, though, I could care less if he slept at Sid’s. I slam my hand down on the snooze bar of my alarm clock, and roll over. I try to open my eyes, but they just aren’t cooperative. The alarm screams in my ear again, and I decide to get up and go to school. I walk past the school newsstand. I catch a glimpse of the front page. The headline jumps out “DRAG QUEEN CONTEST ERUPTS!” There on the front page is my outstretched arm throwing the burning Bible into the crowd of protesters.

The next two years in school I became a reluctant leader. I headed a committee that pushed out the religious groups on campus. I had everyone believing that religion had no place here. My senior campaign was to get rid of any department teaching religion. The only exceptions were classes dealing with the history of different religions, because anyone with half a brain could figure out the evil of organized religion through its history. The student body continued its support, but the administration refused my repeated requests. So, I took my books and beliefs and quit school three months short of graduation. Oh yeah, I also took 339 students.

TO THE READER:

This was only the beginning portion of Lyndon’s memoirs. They were never finished. The rest of his life was pieced together through a series of correspondence with his friends and family. At this time, I would like to thank them for their cooperation in helping to tell his story.

February 20, 1998

Dear Mother,

I know my leaving school has let you and Dad down. I can feel your disappointment with my decision, but this was something I had to do. I was taught to act upon my beliefs, and so I have. One of the other students that left school with me has asked me to move in with her in San Francisco. Her name is Alice, and although I know you don’t approve, I’m going to live with her for awhile. This city is entirely too small for me to get anything more out of it. I want to travel and see the world. I’ve barely had the chance to experience life, and now is the only time I can envision getting to do so. I

know I'll soon have to join the work force and become a responsible part of society. So, I need this time to grasp onto life and live.

Your Loving Son,
Lyndon

March 6, 1999

Dear Karen,

Alice and I have spent our days sightseeing in San Francisco. It's so beautiful here. We went to the park today and walked and talked about what we are going to do now that we have left college life behind. She thinks I should keep in touch with all the people that left school with me. She's so idealistic! She looks at me with this sad face and tries to con me into getting these people together for some kind of business, even though I don't know what we could do. If you can't already tell, Alice and I are in love. We spend our days watching TV, walking in the park, or just talking. We laugh almost constantly. She laughs at my lack of understanding of the city, and I laugh at her reckless attitude. I've enclosed a picture of us outside our house. She's dying to meet you.

I'm thinking about following her advice and getting in touch with some of the other students that left school with me. I can't believe, now, that they left school because of my beliefs. I guess everyone needs something to grab onto. I have no idea what I'm going to do with my life, but as long as Alice and I are together everything'll be good.

Your Brother,
Lyndon

July 11, 1999

Dear Karen,

I received your letter last week. I'm sorry to hear about your son. I hope that he gets better. I don't want to crowd you, but if you need someone. I can be on the next plane.

Mom was right when she told you that Alice and I have started a magazine. Right now, it's not making any money, but we've doubled the amount we publish. So, people must be reading it. We've gotten some discouraging mail, but at this point the good outweighs the bad. I know some people don't see the world like I do, but those people don't have to look at my magazine. They aren't forced to buy it. Some people will bitch about anything. I was invited onto a local TV show to talk about the magazine, and they had someone there with the opposing viewpoint (you know the kind of show). Anyway, the crowd laughed at first, but by the end of the show they were asking me questions about how to get involved. I really didn't have a good answer for them, considering the staff I have I can't pay.

There are a few marches coming up that I plan to get involved in. The pro-life movement is marching on an abortion clinic, and we're going to help the women get inside safely. Those people are so fucked up. Most of them are men, and the ones who aren't still think it's the fifties and they should do whatever their husbands say. Some of them have even got their kids believing their bullshit. I can't believe a teenager would follow their parents into the trenches. It's amazing what brainwashing will do. I know you want your son to grow up with good morals, and God forbid he knock up some girl

and she gets an abortion. But, don't you want him to think for himself at some point? Sorry, I should save my speeches for my magazine.

I hope things turn around for you. I'm thinking of coming to visit in the Fall. Hopefully, you'll be up for some company at that time. Give James all my love, and tell him I'm thinking of him.

All My Love,
Lyndon

January 17, 2000

Dear Andrew,

How are things? I haven't been able to get in touch with my parents since I moved back. Do you know where they are? Karen stopped speaking to me after our visit last October. You're the closest thing I have to family in this part of the world anymore. I would really like to know how Karen's son is doing. She won't let me see him now, and that's very troubling.

Alice hates the heartland. She misses the big city, but the magazine has more readers here than anywhere else. So, you go where your fans are, right? The whole staff lives in the apartment building we rented to do the magazine out of. It's great! We're one big happy family. There were only ten staff members that came with us from San Francisco, but the ones that stayed behind are still using the office for distribution. I've hired on thirty new people. I hope they all decide to stay on and live at the building. I've always wanted you to be on staff, but your big-shot job at the Times will keep you in New York forever I'm sure.

I don't mean to take up too much of your time. I'd like to hear from you if you ever come my way. I miss our debates. If you hear anything about my folks, please call me. I don't know where they are, but they've moved out of the house. I hope Karen didn't turn them against me.

Your Friend,
Lyndon

May 3, 2001

Staff Memo

Attention Staff Members:

The lecture tour is going well. I miss all of you. The magazine's distribution has gone up sixty-eight percent in the last two months, and I have all of you to thank. I will be back soon, and I hope to see all of you still living in the building. I heard about Garret leaving. This is only a minor setback. Alice told me that you have all taken up the slack, and I appreciate the extra effort you have put forth.

Regrettably, there is some bad news to report. The IRS has subpoenaed all of my business records for the last three years. I need all of you to give the government your utmost cooperation when they come to the offices. I don't know what the government is looking for, but I'm sure they'll find something. DO NOT RESIST. This problem will not involve any of you. I am the one they are investigating.

Thank You,
Lyndon

September 14, 2002

Dear Mom,

I was so glad to, finally, get a letter from you. I know you and Dad are very upset with what happened at Karen's last time I was there, but don't you think she overreacted? I never meant to hurt her or James. I wish that I could take it all back now, but I don't think that's possible. I can't believe that either of you have let the media attention I am getting move you from your homes. I'm sorry that this has all happened the way it has. I wish the reporters would stick to camping out on my front lawn, instead of bothering you or Karen. I have to shred all my mail now, so that they don't find addresses of people I love. How's Dad? Has he shot below par lately? I miss you both very much.

I'm sorry that my beliefs have gotten me in this much trouble. The government sees me as a threat to national security. I can't take all the blame for the country going from ninety-five percent to fifty-five percent of the people believing in God, even though the magazines distribution goes up by the same numbers as this decline. I know people are saying I'm immoral, but I'm not against God. I'm against people telling me how to perceive God. He's in my heart. The mind-control form of religion is on its last leg, and I plan to be the one to kick it out from under it. I will not be force-fed my beliefs. Not believing in religion is not the same as not believing in God. I hope someday Karen will figure this out. I know you and Dad will love me no matter what happens.

Love,
Lyndon

January 8, 2003

Dear Mother,

I can't believe the bastards have done this to me. I was arrested on the second on twenty-eight counts of first degree murder. I know you've been watching TV. I know they are making me out to be some sort of fanatic. I'm not. I had nothing to do with the suicides. I've written letters of condolence to all the families of my staff, but I'm sure they think of me as whatever the media is making me out to be. I'm glad to hear that the reporters haven't found out your address. You know that they would be all over you and Dad like piranhas.

They stuck me in a small room for two days, continually asking me the same questions over and over. I told them the truth over and over, but they don't believe me. They want me to say I forced all these people to kill themselves, but I didn't. Most of the staff wasn't even at the building that day, they were at home watching my speech. The FBI man says that I had some special word in my speech to tell all of them to do it. That's ridiculous! They've put me in a cell with two other men. One's an investment banker, and the other is a wife beater. I'm very scared. I feel like I've been set up. I know nothing about what happened, except for what the government tells me. They're going to interrogate me again soon.

Love,
Lyndon

January 13, 2003

Dear Mom,

I'm sure you've heard about my cellmates committing suicide. I'm now being interrogated about this. I found them early yesterday morning. I don't know what happened. They were both foaming at the mouth like rabid dogs. The police say I forced them to overdose on some sort of drug. I had nothing to do with their deaths, but I'm sure I'll be blamed. All this means to me now is that I'll have to go through a separate trial for these two deaths. I can't believe this is happening. I've started to think that people want to see me out of the way. I don't understand how my opinions have hurt anyone. I've been told over and over to admit that I had something to do with these crimes. I know they have no proof to connect me with these crimes, because I'm innocent. I feel like the world is caving in on me.

I have made many attempts to call you, and left numerous messages. Please, get in touch with me as soon as possible. I need to know what is going on outside this place. I need to know what people are saying about me. I need to know if you've heard from Alice.

Love,
Lyndon

TO THE READER:

This was the last known letter sent from Lyndon while he was in jail awaiting trial. As most people know, he disappeared some years later after spending six years in jail. He was convicted of tax evasion. There were three more incidents where Lyndon was accused of involvement in mass suicides. He was never convicted of murder in his lifetime.

Epilogue: King of the Pigeons

I hate the homeless! What a fucking waste! They just sit on their asses all day and ask people for money. They expect the tourists that come here to visit to give them something for nothing. They think the world owes them a free ride. Well, I think all of them should go straight to hell! I was born homeless, and I've never asked anyone for anything. I'm a scavenger. The homeless in this city are the worst. They sit on the sidewalk reading with little signs between their knees asking for help. They're too lazy to even get off their asses to beg! These people aren't active parts of society and they expect people to give them money for it and pity them. I say it's all bullshit. I understand that some of them are crazy, or runaways, but why a person wouldn't want to do better than this when they could is beyond me. Sometimes you have to rebuild your life, and if you don't have the strength to do so you shouldn't be living. In my opinion, you don't deserve a life if you're not going to live it. I have no choice but to run after the bread crusts people throw on the ground. That is my life.

Look at that guy over there. That's Lyndon. Oh yeah, I'm the black hooded one sitting next to him. He rambles on all day about how the government did this to him. They were scared of his religious beliefs, or lack thereof from what I understand. He went to jail for awhile for a bunch of idiots that killed themselves. He thinks the

gouvernement killed them to make him look bad. Of course, in this country, that's a really bad attitude to have. He thinks he's Lee Harvey Oswald, or some crazy conspiracy shit like that. I think he's nuts! He does have a very convincing way of telling the story, especially when he talks about his girlfriend. Her name was Alice. I say "was" because I think she's dead, but he thinks he's going to find her. He's been looking for her for the last three years. If you ask me, he's a waste just like the rest of 'em.

Normally, Jared agrees with me. He says I'm just pointing out the obvious. If I can see it, why can't the rest of the world? Jared's not homeless, though. He just comes down to visit me, and talk about the world. He sees the world how it is, and doesn't hold back from giving his opinion. He holds the world in contempt in the hope of making it a better place. But if there's one thing I keep trying to get into his head, it's that the world will never be a better place. It's only gotten worse since the beginning, and it will only continue its downward spiral. He's more optimistic than I am, but he still agrees that people are going to destroy the place. People couldn't just take their place among the other animals on this planet. They had to make everything easier, better, or improved. They couldn't just leave well enough alone. Now look what they've done. The world could end at any moment, and people are to blame. I can't do anything about it, though. All I do is sit with the homeless, or Jared, and talk about how we're all going to hell. Then again, maybe God will take pity on our ignorance and we'll all go to heaven (if there is such a place).

A Night in Hell (a.k.a. Satan Slits His Wrists)

It was colder than normal on the east side of Hell,
And no one in town was feeling that well.
No one had a plan, no one had a clue.
Even Satan had nothing to do.

All the damned sat, and all of them waited.
Some got so bored that they masturbated.
Finally, Satan stood with a glint in his eye,
And declared to them all, "today, the parents must die!"

The damned jumped up in the screams of "hooray!"
While the demons set out to lead the children astray.
For it was the plan of the people of Hell,
For the children to carry out the parental farewell.

So the demons set out to criss-cross the nation,
And secretly give all the kids motivation.
To gruesomely murder every parent in sight,
And to get the job done in the span of one night.

The children awoke and started the carnage.
Stabbings, shootings, or weird acts of bondage.
Little Billy hit his mom with his new baseball bat,
While in the fire burned dad's last chunk of fat.

Some parents slept dreaming of sex,
As their children tied nooses around their fat necks.
Around the world there were blood stained bedclothes,
And children with knives sneaking 'round on their tiptoes.

The blood-curdling screams of terror and pain,
Suddenly silenced with the last parent slain.
In Hell, Satan laughed and danced all around,
Told dirty jokes and generally clowning.

Until from the crowd stepped a small demon child,
His face all distorted and eyes running wild.
He looked to the Prince, his voice started to shake,
"Excuse me, sir, now there's no souls to take."

“For the ones that are murdered go straight up to heaven,
And children can’t sin, not until they’re eleven.”
Satan’s eyes exploded in a raging fire,
And the demon child was quickly bound in barb wire.

Satan fell back onto his throne and sighed.
How could it be that he claimed no one that died?
What would happen to him and his kingdom?
Would everyone move, or die from the boredom?

After that night, all the damned moved away.
They went into the world, and some people say,
That they had to find jobs among the common folk.
All because of a night when the children awoke,

And murdered their parents at the Devil’s request,
Making sure that their souls would all be blessed.
Now Satan sits on the east side of Hell,
And, with a small razor, bids the emptiness farewell.

-Thanks for the inspiration, Drue.

Women

The crashes and shouts shot through the darkness of the hallways. Andrew ran in the direction he thought they were coming from, but always seemed to be taking a wrong turn. The night had slid in through the windows, and it was impossible to know just which way to go in the huge white hallways. Andrew ran to every window, peering in to see if this was where the racket was coming from. Each padded cell had the same result, another inmate jumping up to see what the noise was and then immediately making noise just because. They all ran to their windows when Andrew looked in, some licked the glass, others spit, still others started tearing at their genitals, but most just screamed at the top of their lungs when they saw his face. Andrew was scared. He had never had this happen to him since he started working at the Roger Edmondson Home. They treated the patients there better than any other facility, and most of the time the patients acted like they were in a minimum security sanitarium. Tonight was different. Andrew skidded to the end of the sixth floor and hit the emergency alarm. He knew within fifteen minutes this wouldn't be his problem anymore.

“They’ve been screaming at one another every night for a month,” Dr. Erikson said. “They scared Andrew half to death the first night. We had to raise his pay just to keep him on staff,” he walked behind all the other doctors just to make sure they heard him. “We moved them to separate floors and they still find one another during their leisure time, as well as in the middle of the night. They yell at one another through the floor. Lucas, the older one, ripped his room to pieces. We’ve made him stay in it despite his ‘redecorating’,” he laughed to himself, and hoped the others thought it was funny as well. Dr. Erikson’s mouth and the group stopped at the door.

The room was dark. “If we don’t put on the window shades Lucas hurts himself and others,” Dr. Erikson’s throat was dry at the sight of Lucas’s room. The floor tiles were all pulled up and the ceiling tiles were all half-torn from the ceiling. The walls were a mixture of concrete, cotton padding, and blood. Every scratch mark had slivers of fingernail or skin. The scratches went from floor to ceiling in every direction, as if Lucas had been buried alive in his room. The room looked like a tornado had caused the damage not a skinny twenty-three year old. Erikson held his flashlight up to the window to see if he could find Lucas in the room. He was sitting next to the bed, breathing heavy as if he’d been at work all night. His face was pale. He looked malnourished. He started to turn his head away from the light, but his movements were slow because of the sedatives.

“The decision is made, then.” Dr. Howard’s round face jiggled as he shouted to the team of doctor’s sitting at the table. “We will force the two to room together. Whatever problem they have they’ll be forced to work it out. I know a few of you are asking, ‘what if Lucas tries to kill Christian?’ We will have them under constant supervision in their room, as well as during their leisure time.” Dr. Howard reached for his glass of water, filled his round cheeks, and swallowed. “Are there any other questions?” He waited for a moment, “no, well then, let’s get them moved. I am anxious to read the first report.” Howard picked up his papers and waddled quickly toward the

door. All the doctors, still amazed at the recommendation handed down by the trustees, sat and nervously laughed while they wondered who would be the unlucky ones to move Lucas.

“The vast majority of them don’t understand what they’re getting into. You see, Christian, they don’t understand what we’ve made here. They say they’re nice just to not be rude. They don’t seem to comprehend that rudeness is the only language that truly means ‘no.’” Lucas licked his chops and waited for a response out of Christian.

“Lucas, be sensible. They’ve all come so far. They’ve evolved passed their animal instincts. I know... we split them and ended up with an uneven playing field in the grand scheme, but that’s only because in the beginning they needed the differences. We never thought they’d get this far. Now, they don’t need the differences but they’re still there,” Christian’s voice trembled. He was the younger of the two, at twenty, and definitely the weaker. He never knew if what he said would send Lucas into one of his infamous tantrums. So, he sat, nervous, and made his case.

“I love it,” Lucas was laughing himself to tears. “We didn’t look at the grand scheme. You include me as if I didn’t see this coming. I may not have predicted it on this scale, but nonetheless I said it would turn out this way. You sit there waiting for the good to come out. Wake up, son, it ain’t coming! You may get one or two morsels of good in a day. Do you even comprehend how much bad I get in a day. I don’t think you quite fathom the extent of my influence,” Lucas looked at Christian with a boastful smirk on his face. “Like what I was saying before. Women... beautiful creatures. Way more evolved than the males, but... they forget that they deal with these less evolved beasts everyday. Example... women are nice to almost any man that talks to them. Men take any positive behavior on the part of a woman to be, in some small way, one step closer to success in sexual conquest.”

Christian piped up, “these are animal instincts, Lucas. You’re looking at all animals. If a female rubs up against a male during mating season that male knows to mate with that female. You can’t place mankind into such a category.”

“Oh, I can’t! Go into any nightclub, smart ass, and tell me that mankind isn’t the same as any other animal,” Lucas had stood up out of his chair, and immediately the guards got excited. Lucas looked over to them, nodded, and sat back down. “Like I was saying, to men and women mating season doesn’t come and go. It feels too good to them to just have one season devoted to it.” Lucas shifted in his seat to start another point. “I don’t care what you say. Women don’t realize the small fact that men really do think about sex anywhere from eighty to ninety percent of their day. They look at a woman and wonder what she has on underneath her clothes, and if she acts like a whore in bed despite her catholic schoolgirl exterior. Any man who says these thoughts don’t ever go through his head... is lying. The man is a less evolved passionate animal. Not that women aren’t passionate, they just don’t understand what they’re dealing with. They make it out to be so much less than what it truly is. They say things like, ‘not my man.’ They lie to themselves just as much as the man who says he doesn’t think about sex constantly.” Lucas sat there like he had just made the argument of a lifetime. He felt like there was nothing Christian could say to dispute him.

The two started back toward their room. It was getting late and Christian needed time to come up with his argument. Of course, he didn't have very long. They would be back in their room soon, and Lucas would immediately ask, "so, what do you say?"

Christian laid in his bunk, "You know, it's not that bad. It's not what you say it is. There may be people out there that you think you have under your thumb, but they won't stay there. They will evolve, Lucas. Look how far they've come. You think that I haven't seen the big picture, but you're wrong. I've just looked farther than you have. They've got no where to go, but to evolve in the way I've always known they would," Christian finished and hoped to hear concession from the bunk below.

"Christian, you silly boy, I have sex. I can make a man pull an eighteen year-old girl off the busiest street in any town at the busiest time of day and rape her. All you have is love. Today, there's no competition. People will take sex over love every time." Lucas could feel the moonlight streaming in through the window. "Evolution is not their only option." There was a long period of silence. Lucas laughed, "sweet dreams, Christian."

Always Content With the Little Things

I lay in my bed, wrinkled and thin.
My voice slightly wheezing, smelling of gin.
I open my mouth to speak my words.
They dance from my tongue in childish herds.

"I knew a girl, much like yourself,
Always smiling and amusing herself.
Drifting and flying along with life's clouds,
Kissing the sun, alone in life's crowds.

When a kiss from her you received,
You could feel her warmth and somehow believed,
That nothing was bad all the way through,
And everything said was somewhat true.

She showed me that life is for living,
Music for feeling, and hearts forgiving.
The one thing I found in her caring eyes,
Friends are the things that keep you alive."

The girl stepped from her chair and walked over to me.
I leaned to her ear for some secrecy,
"Though angels may fly on broken wings,
She was always content with the little things."

The Question

It was the tenth of April. I decided to take my family sailing. You know how fathers brag about their years in the Navy. Well, my bragging got a little out of hand. It is now the sixteenth of May. Now my family, or what is left of it, sits in the small sailboat wondering if today we'll find civilization. I've gotten to the point where I am numb emotionally. I'd lost my twin daughters two days earlier, and their funerals weren't what you'd call proper. We were forced to eat them for lack of food. Imagine that, a small yuppie family from the east coast eating their children, or sisters. Now there were just three of us. There was my wife. She was still beautiful, even though she hadn't bathed for weeks. There was my son. He was looking like he would go any day, but was holding on because he knew what would happen if he died. I guess it was normal behavior, holding on to life I mean. I knew that my survival instincts were stronger than his, so I knew that I'd be the last man on the boat. My wife would, most likely, live longer than him also. It was very typical of my son to hold on. He was just doing it to spite us. He knew we were hungry, but he was going to deny us food for as long as he could.

The twentieth has rolled around, and my son has been gone for a day. My wife and I had a small service for him. We cried for quite awhile. Maybe we admired him for holding out as long as he did. My wife has turned ill. I am secretly hoping that she is not very sick, because then her body won't be edible. The night is slowly coming over the water. It is like every other day. I miss the real world very much. For a while, I cursed God for putting us here. Now, I know there is only one person to blame... me. I got us into this mess, I killed my family, and I know I'll never see the real world again. I've resigned myself to death. It feels funny when you know you don't have much longer to live. I feel like the kids have grown up and moved away, like my marriage is falling apart, and most of all... like I'm old. I can't sleep very well knowing that I've done all these horrid things. My dreams turned to nightmares days ago, but the nightmares have stopped bothering me. There's not much your mind can do to scare you when you know you're all but dead.

It is now the twenty-second day of May. Amazingly, my wife is still alive. I've walked from the front of the boat to the back of the boat for about three hours. I'm just waiting. Out of the corner of my eye I see them. There's a small boat coming towards us. I walked to my wife, and whispered to her that we are saved. She tries to sit up, but she is much too weak. She lost the use of her legs two, or maybe three, days ago. I start to wave and yell for the boat to come to us, and they oblige by yelling and screaming at me. The men row their boat harder and harder to reach us. They board our boat and immediately look me over to see if I'm friendly. I don't know their language, but it sounds far-eastern. I try to tell them that I won't hurt them, and that we need help. They push me toward their boat. I keep asking them if they're going to get my wife, but all they do is push me harder. One of the oarsmen looks at me and points to my wife. He makes a little sign like she's sleeping. My heart crashes into my stomach, because I know that he means she's dead. The men cast off from my boat and make their way away from it. I look back for some time and see my wife's body slumped over in the boat. A small tear

collects in the corner of my eye. Then, anger slips into my conscience. I sat there and hated her for not hanging on for two more minutes.

After an hour in the boat, I start to wonder if these men are lost. I hoped that I was not just extra food to them. They all kept trying to talk to me. It seemed useless. I couldn't understand. Finally, the head man on the boat, or what I conceived to be the head man, yelled out to the rest of the oarsmen. I could see the small houses on the shoreline. I now knew that they weren't going to eat me, I hoped. As we made our way towards the shore, thousands of children gathered in the surf. They were all yelling and screaming. I always hated the sound of screaming children. The boat got close enough that all the children could see me in the boat. They all started poking at me; wondering if I was real I suppose. Many other men and women started to appear on the shore. They looked interested in the catch of what I thought were fishermen. From the looks of the small village I didn't think there would be so many people. There were thousands of men and women standing on the shore as I got out of the boat.

They all looked somewhat Asian, but they were darker complected. I didn't care much for the way they treated me at first, but I soon came to realize they hadn't ever seen a civilized man before. I didn't look very civilized when I came ashore. I looked like I'd been at sea for months, and indeed I had. They all seemed welcoming after the initial shock of seeing a white man. They gave me food and watched me as I looked around their village. It was a lot bigger than I thought. It went way up into the forests and wrapped around the base of the hills that surrounded it. It was very primitive, but they had plumbing. This made me feel awkward at first, because I hadn't used a toilet for awhile. The men and women wore clothes that, from the looks of it, they made from animal skins. The people still had no idea how to handle me.

Months went by, and I grew increasingly happy that these people came to my rescue. Even though I wasn't one of them, they accepted me into their everyday lives. I went on numerous trips with the men into the forests to trap food. I felt as if I were becoming one of them. Finally, the day came that I dreaded most of all; it was time for me to meet their chief, or whatever. They lead me to his temple. It was much more ornate than the rest of the small houses, and this was about the only thing that lead me to believe that I was meeting someone important. They ushered me in saying very little to one another. The room was completely dark except for a small beam of sunlight over a tiny man's head. He sat there and didn't say a word for some time. I thought that he was looking me over, making sure I was okay. He finally broke his silence, but he didn't talk to me. Somehow he knew I couldn't speak their language. Just as fast as the men ushered me in, they ushered me out. I found out some time later that he told them to teach me their language before I could see him. I thought this was very wise, and it quite impressed me.

The language lessons started immediately. One of the men tried working with me for days, but his grueling teaching habits soon made me frustrated. I wasn't getting the hang of it. One of the other men decided that shorter lessons would be the way to go. This worked slowly and I soon mastered the most important sentences, for instance "where's your restroom? Could I have more to eat?, etc. Even this man could not teach me the full language, though. The task was finally turned over to an older woman in the

tribe. Her voice was very sweet and it helped me to learn the language. She never became frustrated with me. She was the kindest woman that I had ever met.

The days past and I started to fit in more because I could converse with the people. They asked millions of questions. I can't even begin to remember all of them. They were not very open to telling me about their culture, but they insisted to know everything about mine. The men would start to tell me jokes when we went trapping. I felt almost secure in their midst. Everything was coming together for me and I waited for the day to come when I could see their leader again.

They ushered me back into their chief's temple. I stood there for awhile hoping that I would be able to understand everything he was about to say. He greeted me cordially, and began his interrogation. "What brings you here?" I anticipated this would be his first question. I answered him by telling him that I did not mean to intrude on his culture, but I was lost. I went on to thank him for his hospitality. "You know, I cannot let you leave here ever." I found this statement to be very bold, and I asked him why. He told me that it would be way too dangerous to let me go back to my culture. He gave me a choice. "You can stay with us on the condition that you swear loyalty everyday, or you can die." He was a very wise man. He knew that if I was allowed to leave more like me would come, and he couldn't have that happen to his people. I chose to swear loyalty. He told me to return to him daily to swear my loyalty and learn of their culture, because if I was to stay I was to become one of them.

I was taught amazing things about their culture. There was only one thing that amazed me the most. When these people got married, they were allowed one question of their mate. The marriages were always arranged, and to make sure the two were compatible they were allowed this one question. I felt that it was quite primitive to arrange marriages, but I never let this be known. Instead, it made me think about my world. What question would I ask someone who was going to be my wife? I could barely fathom the thought.

I finally got to witness the ceremony where the question was asked. It was the most amazing thing I had ever seen. The ornate costumes, the dances, and the beauty of the ceremony overwhelmed me. The two sat opposite one another and looked directly in the eyes of their betrothed. They asked their questions quietly to one another. Everyone there seemed to hold their breath for a moment. Then, there was a look of relief on the faces of the two, and everyone rejoiced. There was no dating on the island. Men and women were forced into being pure when they wed. Sometimes the opposite happened, and the two would be forced out of marriage. The chief told me that these two would never be wed. They would go through their lives alone.

I was told some time later that the woman who had taught me the language was to be wed. I went to her to talk of her wedding. I really wanted to know what her question would be to her mate, because I still couldn't think of what I would ask. Her family told me that she was gone from the village for a short time. I was told by the chief that this was customary. The woman would leave the village to make sure that there were no chance meetings between her and her soon-to-be husband. I inquired daily to the chief about who her husband was to be. He always changed the subject to something else I was interested in.

The chief told me that he was educated in my world. This shocked me a great deal. I had numerous questions for him, but he answered them all before I could ask. He went on about the destruction of the Native American culture, and how that could easily happen to his people. He left my world and came back to his place of birth after he was college educated. The people found him to be the wisest man, and since he was a native he was made the heir to the throne. The chief died ten years later, and he became the youngest chief they had ever had. Everyone prospered under his rule, and there was no way he was going to let that change. The chief then gave me the biggest shock of my life. The tribe had voted, and I was to be the next chief. I was the most overwhelmed I had ever been. I knew nothing of how to rule. Moreover, he had chosen my wife. Now, I knew why the woman had to leave... she was to be my wife. There had never been an unwed chief, and that tradition was not going to die. There was only one other stipulation, I had to go through a period of purity. The chief knew that I had been wed before. He knew that I was not pure, and it was tradition for the partners to be pure at the time of their wedding.

The chief walked me to the temple where the ceremony for purity would take place. I was to be reborn. The room was lit with small torches, and there was a wooden chair in the middle. There was a beam of sunlight that sat right in the center of the chair. I was told to take a seat and wait. Shortly, one of the more prominent men of the tribe came into the room. The chief slid over to one end of the room and sat in a small throne. There were no painted faces like you see in the movies, instead they looked very solemn like they were staring into the eye of death. Finally, the chief spoke, "you must not leave the chair no matter what happens. You may see Hell, but you cannot move." Needless to say, this frightened me.

The man started to walk towards me chanting and spreading a thick white smoke into the air. He was blowing the smoke from his mouth in huge puffs. It spun around me, and I could feel it crawling up my legs. I felt it suck me in to its cloud, and then force me into some sort of sleep. I still felt almost aware, like I was drunk or something. The chief got up and walked towards me chanting. He had quite a different verse from the other man. I felt their voices crawl around me. Sounds touched me like the hands of my wife in her deepest ecstasy. I could feel the world sliding around in my mind. I saw my daughters as they fell asleep on the boat. My mind kept jumping around to the thoughts of my family, and then to advanced calculus problems. I was spinning, and I couldn't stop.

I awoke in the temple. The room was filled with the sunlight pouring from the front doors. I was alone in the chair. I awoke just as I had sit, the exact position. The most amazing thing was; I didn't feel sore. I was completely at ease, almost peaceful. I was pure.

The days passed, and I couldn't help but think about the day I would be remarried. Then, a small boy arrived at my door to tell me that the woman was coming back from the mountains. She was ready to be married, and I was to come to the elders to be prepared. The night started to fall over the village, and I still hadn't come up with the question. I had been prepared by the elders, and I still couldn't think of the question. I was dressed in the ceremonial robes, and I still couldn't find the question. I walked toward the village square, and as soon as I saw her standing near the fire... I thought of

the question. The fire rose up around her. She stood there, beautiful, and waited. She watched me walk toward her. My thoughts all spun together and became the one glimmer that was the question. Everyone stopped rejoicing and quietly sat on the ground in a circle. It was the first time, in my miserable life, that everyone around me was giving me their undivided attention. The woman looked deep into my eyes. I leaned to her and whispered, "how can you trust me to be a good husband, when you don't know me?"

She looked through me like I was the most arrogant man in the world for asking such a question. She leaned to me and said, "your question gives that away."

My Cloud

She sits upon the highest swirling wind,
Never knowing my pain or just where I've been.
I sit down on the hill right above the sea,
I feel her embrace and find what is me.
She swirls and sways as I reach for her touch,
My hands to the sky as I wish for too much.
Whispers in the wind turn to voices out loud,
And heaven feels my love, the love for my cloud.

She slides through my hand like beautiful truth,
And leaves me alone, cold and aloof.
I see her drift down and grasp for my hand,
Return to the sky with nothing but sand.
She rolls across the sky without my love,
Curled up in her warmth a small, white dove.
Voices in the wind turn to laughter out loud,
And heaven scorns my love, the love for my cloud.

I come to the hill and sit down in the grass,
I wait for my cloud while the hours pass.
I see the small dove overhead crying,
Wishing my cloud would again aid her flying.
She circles with hope and I feel her lament,
My hopes slowly fleeting, my heart somewhat spent.
Laughter in the wind turns to cries out loud,
And heaven knows that I love, that I love my cloud.

She sails over me to reach down where I cry,
My hands in her grasp, my soul in her eye.
We tangle and swirl in the skies of blue,
And our love lasts forever with nothing to do,
Except fulfill every dream that we dream,
And wash every tear down an endless stream.
Cries in the wind turn to silence out loud,
And we share all our love, between me and my cloud.

About the Author

Even the birth of James Wade Dayton on Sunday, September 24, 1972, was not predictable. Jim arrived four weeks early, on the same day as the dedication of a new community college where his mother was an administrator. In fact, she barely made it to the hospital from the college for the delivery. As a young child, Jim tried all the traditional activities for his age, but was always ready to be creative and curious. At age four, he participated in a UMKC Conservatory of Music pilot project and started piano lessons. This was the beginning of his love for music.

Although Jim participated and excelled in several sports throughout his primary and middle school years, his creative and artistic talents led him to music. Traditional music programs, in school, never seemed to satisfy him. He played cello in the fifth grade orchestra, but six months later he had convinced his parents to buy his first electric guitar and amp. This was just the beginning. After several years of lessons, six or eight different types of guitars and lots of electronic equipment, he put together a band that produced a tape and began to compose his own music. Much of his music has been copyrighted and sent to agents with the hope that just one person would like what they heard. Even though he has not yet made it “big” in music, he continues to use his talents to write poetry and short fiction. Family and friends can be identified in his work, but much of his writing reflects the deep understanding Jim has for people and places around him.

Although Jim gives the impression he is a typical 25 year old guy only concerned with getting a degree and a good paying job, with a little time left over to go out with the guys, he is really a very sensitive, loving, caring, intelligent young man who has a dream to write words and/or music that will make the world a more sensitive, loving, caring, and intelligent place to live. If you don't believe this, just ask his mother.

-Dr. Linda Dayton, Ed. D. (Mother)