

HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY

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Pfleiderer Hall

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Humanities Center

The

Morpheus

2011 Edition

The
Morpheus
Literary Publication

2011 Edition

Sponsored by the Heidelberg University
English Department



About this publication

Welcome to the Fall 2011 edition of the *Morpheus*, Heidelberg University's student writing magazine.

This year's issue follows the precedents we established in 2007:

- 1) We publish the magazine electronically, which allows us to share the best writing at Heidelberg with a wide readership.
- 2) The magazine and the writing contest are managed by members of English 492, Senior Seminar in Writing, as an experiential learning component of that course.
- 3) The publication combines the winning entries of the Morpheus writing contest with the major writing projects from English 492.

Please note that Morpheus staff members were eligible to submit entries for the writing contest; a faculty panel judged the entries, which had identifying information removed before judging took place. Staff members played no role in the judging of the contest entries.

We hope you enjoy this year's Morpheus!

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Dr. Ruth Wahlstrom, Professor of English

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*Pictures seen throughout publication came from the Visual Arts
portion of the Morpheus contest. Thanks to all who submitted!

Senior Projects from ENG 492 68

Fiction



Photo taken by Tyler Terwilliger

Conversations at Cornelia

By Matt Echelberry



Matt Echelberry, better known as “Mclovin” on campus, is a senior English writing major and film studies minor from Bucyrus, Ohio. He served as the layout editor for this edition of the *Morpheus* and also just completed his third semester as Co-Editor in Chief of *THE KILIKILIK*. “Getting There,” a play he wrote and directed, recently appeared in Heidelberg’s New Works Festival. He was also president of Sigma Tau Nu fraternity for fall 2011. After Matt graduates, he will pursue a career in journalism.

They took a cab into Greenwich Village because it was thirty-two blocks from the office. The destination: the Cornelia Street Café, which was alive with people and jazz and smells when Geoff opened the taxi door. He stood on the sidewalk and helped her get out behind him, then they split the fare. Marietta was an associate; he had to keep reminding himself that this was just a friendly meeting, just two colleagues grabbing drinks after work. She looked gorgeous, though, the way women always do in their professional garb, stockings, and heels. The two walked past a few of the sidewalk tables and through a small crowd that stood outside the door in conversation. They went inside to the cocktail lounge and sat side by side at the bar.

“This place is small, but it’s cozy,” she said.

“I’ve been here once before, it all looks exactly the same. The Martinis are the best in this neighborhood,” he replied.

As they waited, Marietta looked around the room. Most of the dinner crowd had already cleared out, now it was the slow time between then and the drinking crowd, who came for the music and the atmosphere. Paintings donned the walls, not hanging in frames but literally inked into them, and there was a second level above with more tables.

“This place is . . . unique. Don’t you think?” she asked.

“I guess its novelty wears off after the first visit,” he said.

The bartender, a thin man who must have been in his fifties, approached them. “Good evening. What can I get for you tonight?” he asked.

“I’ll have the house martini,” he said.

“And for the lady?” the bartender said.

“A Long Island, please,” she requested.

A few more customers walked in. At the back of the shop, a guitarist was tuning his instrument on the stage. Geoff was wondering if the Café had a live band tonight, if they were any good.

“This place is fabulous,” she began. “And this wine list is impressive—Pinot Grigio, Monastrell. Plus all the usual American and French names . . . Oh, I can’t believe they carry Tannat.”

“I didn’t know you were so keen on wine,” he said.

“Well, I have yet to meet someone at the office who’s not. But I suppose wine tasting is somewhat of a hobby for me.”

“And for Renny Lehman. Did you know he always has a bottle of Sangria in his bottom desk drawer?”

They both laughed.

She said, “That sounds like him. What happened to the rest of the gang?”

“They all cancelled.”

Some of their other coworkers made plans to go out tonight. Geoff had agreed, assuming that this would be a group thing; he

had no idea he would end up here with a former lover. They hadn't been alone together in over a year, but amazingly, it now felt like no time had passed.

The bartender reappeared with a drink in each hand. He placed each one gently on a napkin embroidered with the restaurant's logo.

"Thank you," the two patrons said at the same time.

"So what do we drink to?" he asked her, trying not to imply anything.

"The Weimer-Gershwin contract went through today. I think that's worthy."

The two glasses made a light clinging sound when Geoff and Marietta toasted. They sat in silence, enjoying their drinks and watching the occasional customer come or go. They had many good nights together, back when he was at the top of his sales game and she was just an accounting assistant. The decision to end the relationship came mutually and then she received several promotions. They worked on the same floor now.

It was not until a young couple entered that she commented, "You know, I feel like I see you less now than I did back when I was in payroll. I'm glad you still agreed to come all the way to the Village with me."

He wondered if she was making advances on him but decided it was just the gin from his near empty glass kicking in. "How could I let you down like everyone else? Besides, it's beautiful out here in the fall."

Marietta looked over her shoulder to glance at the young couple who seated themselves at a table toward the front of the room. Then she turned around and stared intently at the mirror behind the bar. He studied her, curious. Before he could say anything, the bartender returned with a broad smile on his face.

"I'm pleased to tell you that it is now eight o'clock," he explained. "We offer our wine tour until midnight this evening if the two of you are interested."

"Yes, that'd be wonderful," he said without hesitation.

"Very good. Then may I suggest beginning with the Sparkling Rosé, one of our sweeter imports from France?" the bartender inquired.

"Actually, could we try the Macabeo?" Marietta said.

The bartender nodded as if to say it was a wise choice, then prepared their glasses.

"Macabeo?" he asked.

"It's a rarity from Valencia. Trust me."

"You were looking at that couple over there earlier. Why?"

She looked puzzled for a moment. "Oh! I almost forgot. Yes, I was looking at them because they reminded me of a game I used to play with friends while I was at Columbia. They're sitting in a perfect position for us to see them from the mirror. To play the game, we watch them and make up what they're saying."

They embraced the wine. She was right; this was better than the Sparkling Rosé. It complimented the jazz still playing over the speakers.

"Alright then. Those people are out of earshot, so let's try to play this game," he said.

"Ok. You speak for the man and I'll take the woman," she agreed.

The woman was talking now, a warm smile on her face as she gripped the handbag on her lap. Marietta said, "I just adore my new purse. It doesn't go with my dress but what the hell, it's Thursday and I need to be adventurous."

Geoff spoke for the man: "I don't care about your purse. Let's order some food, I'm starving."

Marietta giggled beside him. The wine went down easily.

Geoff continued as the other man spoke: "Should I get a side salad, too? No, if I do then I won't have as much room for my Amstel."

Marietta: Oh, don't drink tonight, darling. It's my birthday and you promised we'd go to the park after this.

Geoff: Fine.

The woman laughed at something.

Marietta: Oh, my sugar bear. This night is going to be so wonderful.

Geoff: Sugar bear?

She looked back at him. "I don't know. . . that's all I could think of."

Geoff: You never were good at pet names.

Marietta: That's because they're stupid and demeaning.

Geoff: Point taken.

Their wine glasses were already empty. Once a new wine was in each of their grasps, they resumed watching the couple. The guitarist up on the stage was finished tuning and began playing something soft and atmospheric. Another musician was accompanying him on a piano off to the side of the stage.

"So what are we doing after this?" Marietta said in place of the other woman's dialogue.

"Let's drink this town dry. I know a great pub down the street," Geoff said for the man.

"But what about work tomorrow? We'll be dead."

"Forget about tomorrow. Tonight's tonight."

She laughed. "Very profound. Did you make that up just now?"

"I think I heard it somewhere once, I'm not sure," he replied. "Excuse me for a minute. Nature calls."

Geoff walked off to the bathroom. Marietta continued watching the other couple and finished her glass before he returned.

When he sat back down, he said, "So what're we drinking next?"

"I haven't decided yet. . . I wonder what the other couple is drinking."

"Oh, right. Are we still playing the game?"

"Well, it looks like their conversation over there has taken a turn for the worse."

"What do you mean?"

"He seems frustrated about something, which is making her try to calm him down. He gets mad when she does this, which in turn makes her upset. Looks like a vicious cycle."

"It always is."

She thought for a moment, then looked at him. "I don't think it was ever like that with us."

Geoff tried to think of something to say but was taken off guard. Instead, he called the bartender over.

"Yes, sir. Are the two of you enjoying the wine tour?" the bartender inquired.

"What's the. . . the—"

"—Strongest wine you have?" Marietta finished.

The bartender frowned at first, looking from Geoff to Marietta, but slowly smiled. "I'll see what we have."

They sat in silence as they waited for new glasses. The musicians were taking a break now, so the only sound was the chatter of the rest of the patrons. Once in a while he saw her eyes dart up to the mirror to see what the other couple was doing.

"Oh, she's mad now," Marietta observed.

"About what, do you think?"

"She's giving him some kind of lecture. He doesn't seem to want to hear it."

The bartender returned with two full wine glasses. This drink had more bitterness and didn't go down as easily.

"You never know, maybe he does. . . Look, he's put his beer down to talk to her. He's probably telling her how sorry he is."

"She's not convinced. Right now, she's saying 'You ignore me. Why can't we just talk more?'" Marietta said.

"Things change. Sometimes you can never go back to the way things were, even when you want to," Geoff said for the man.

Marietta raised her glass to toast him. "Things do change."

"Bottoms up," he replied.



Picture created by Jaime Furda

Feed Me the Children

By Matt Echelberry

“Yes, of course. A lot of people in similar situations come to us for help,” Lady Vandercamp said as she nodded slowly.

Charlie and Maple sat across from her, nervous and weary. Months and years of slaving away for little pay in so many dead-end jobs had taken its toll. The office looked more like a living room; the couple sat in elegant cushioned seats while Lady Vandercamp sat on a hand carved rocking chair, a bookcase the width of the wall looming behind her. There was no desk between them, only a glass coffee table. A fireplace was tucked away in the corner and framed paintings hung on the other walls. Maple wondered how expensive they were. She and her husband were there for one reason, the only reason anyone ever stepped inside that office: money.

“I understand your plight and empathize with you, truly I do,” Lady Vandercamp continued. “I can offer you a loan, but let me make something clear to the two of you: we have a very strict repayment policy. We are here to help people, but ultimately, if we are not refunded, we simply cannot continue doing business. It’s a very strict policy with little room for excuses or exceptions, but we try to be as . . . fair as we possibly can.”

Maple looked at her husband sitting beside her. “We’ll do whatever it takes to pay you back. Please, understand, the only reason we need help is because my husband recently lost both of his jobs.”

“I’ve been looking for a new one for three weeks but haven’t had luck,” Charlie added. Her hand rested on his leg, he caressed it tenderly.

“When both of us are working again, it won’t be a problem paying back the money. We promise,” Maple said.

“I certainly hope that’s the case. You look like good people and we want to help you,” Lady Vandercamp stated with a look of genuine concern. Her hair was yellow-white, and though she was older, there didn’t appear to be a single wrinkle creasing her face. Her voice was soothing with the hint of a British accent, and came out between two lips that were lined with a pink lipstick that made them her most pronounced feature.

Two men sat on a couch off to one side of the room listening quietly. One was a pudgy gentleman named Mr. Wey, who looked like he was ready for a golf outing in his polo shirt and khakis. The other one was younger and wore an expensive-looking suit; he had introduced himself as Mr. Crisp. After the introductions had been made at the initiation of the meeting, neither of them spoke. That is, until Mr. Wey said:

“Yes, you both certainly look like good people. Times are tough and everyone needs help once in a while. There’s no shame in having the courage to admit it.”

Lady Vandercamp smiled at the couple. She went on to explain all the details of the agreement and then there was some material to read and two forms Charlie and Maple needed to sign. She would lend them \$3,000 that day, in cash. The couple would have three months to pay back the loan, plus ten percent interest. They didn’t have to worry about returning to the restaurant; Mr. Crisp would arrive at their apartment at 5 p.m. sharp to collect the payment. The man nodded in agreement, his dark, slicked back hair glistening in the room’s soft lighting.

Charlie and Maple left the back office of Pierre’s feeling better than either of them had in a long time. After worrying about money for so long, they would finally be able to catch up on rent and pay long overdue bills. It was a shame that they were forced to resort to a loan shark, but they were desperate. They stepped out into the bitter December wind and rode the crowded bus home—home, such a simple word. To Maple, home was not at the apartment. That was just a dwelling where they lived, a tiny, two-bedroom hole in the wall. She worked part-time as a maid; that was all she had time for. Her real job was taking care of the twins—they were getting bigger, almost six months! Charlie used to drive a taxi cab all day and stock shelves at the grocery store down the street for a few hours in the early morning. Even back then, money had always been tight. Having twins didn’t help the situation, but they still made it work and somehow scraped by. Everything changed, though, when Charlie suddenly lost both of his jobs.

"I'm going to get off at the next stop and check on some applications. You should stop by the store on your way home to get some food," he said to her.

"Guess we better stock up while we can," she sighed.

He kissed her. Things could only get better from here.

A female employee at the grocery store accused Charlie of sexual assault back in August. The allegation was absurd; he would never do anything so horrible to another person. The charges were later dropped, but the whole fiasco still did plenty of damage to his reputation, to their relationship, and, of course, to his ability to hold down a steady job. Maple picked up as many extra hours as she could, it just wasn't enough to get by on though. Sure, they asked for money from friends, begged for help, but their friends had little to offer themselves. They tried family too—Charlie's mother in Ithaca, an uncle somewhere out west, Maple's brother in Vermont. It was Hector, their landlord, who recommended them to Lady Vandercamp.

Maple walked down the basement stairs with four brown paper bags full of groceries, barely able to peer over them to see where she was going. She stepped into the musty hallway, lit by a few bare bulbs, past the storage area and the boiler room. The door for the janitor's closet was to her left, and to the right was their apartment door. Home sweet home. It was the only living quarters down there; the real tenants, the ones who could afford to live in the building, were upstairs on the floors that were above street level. Floors that had windows. In this apartment, there were none. The pipes leaked, so all throughout their apartment and the rest of the basement, buckets and bins were scattered about to collect the dripping water. She could see her own breath as she walked in because they couldn't afford to pay for heat, but Hector turned their furnace on twice a day for them, let it run for a couple hours each time. After she dropped off the groceries, she went back upstairs to the first floor to pick up the twins from Ms. Jacobi.

Three long months went by. Once in a while Charlie managed to get an odd job here or there (painting walls, unloading trucks, deliveries, etc.) and Maple requested a raise multiple times, not that she ever expected to get it. If her boss didn't care about any of the Latina maids, why should he feel any different about one little black woman?

Just as promised in the contract, exactly three months to the day when they borrowed the money, Mr. Crisp knocked on their apartment door. The clock on the wall read 5 p.m.

Charlie answered. "Uh, Mr. Crisp . . . nice to see you."

Did he look older than he did three months ago? His hair seemed to be more gray than black now, and his face somehow seemed more aged.

"And you as well, Charles. I'm here to collect your repayment of the funds Lady Vandercamp gave you. It's been three months," he replied.

Inside the apartment, Maple scrambled to get as much money as she could: from her purse, from the jar in the cabinet above the refrigerator, and finally the \$500 they had stashed beneath a loose floorboard in the hallway.

"Yes, I know. We've been setting aside all of the money we could. We have. But we can't give you all of the money plus the interest back today," Charlie said.

"I see," Mr. Crisp began. "You know that we have a very strict repayment policy. It's written out in detail in the contract, which you and your wife both signed."

"Of course, and we intend to return every cent. It's just that . . . I have not managed to get a regular job yet. Once I do, it will be much easier to get the rest of the money to you. We didn't spend all of the five thousand, so today we can return anything that's leftover, and we have some money we've been saving up."

Maple came to the door with a shoebox. "There's just under a thousand in here. It's everything we have."

Mr. Crisp smiled. He pulled a couple of bills out and handed them to Charlie, then took the box from her.

"I'll extend your deadline two weeks. But that's all you get. I'll return at dinnertime and I expect to have the rest of your repayment waiting for me when I arrive," he said calmly, then walked away without waiting for a response from either of them.

Two more weeks of working, saving, starving. Two more weeks of hell. They got through the cold months though, so at least it

didn't feel like an icebox in the apartment anymore. Charlie started work as a ticket taker the week before but still hadn't been paid. It was amazing how many jobs he could get before the accusations started. He was white and could find something, however awful it may have been, in this city. They still owed around \$2,000 but had only managed to acquire a third of that. They knew Mr. Crisp would have never accepted that—he would want all of what was due. On the evening he was supposed to arrive, the two decided to pretend no one was home. The only light they left on was the one in their bedroom, and the twins slept peacefully so the apartment was quiet.

Maple laid in bed reading and he stared at the ceiling. "I'm sorry for getting us into this, he said.

"It's not your fault. We'll get through this somehow."

5 o'clock struck, Mr. Crisp said he would return at dinnertime tonight.

He still hadn't knocked at 6 o'clock. Another hour passed and he still hadn't arrived.

The twins woke up a short time after that, so Charlie and Maple each bounced one of the girls in their arms to keep them quiet.

When the clock read 8 o'clock, Maple decided to cook something; she knew the twins were hungry. Elisha sat in a high chair and Charlie was still bouncing Emily—she was the one who always cried. As Maple heated up the stove and gather some pots, there was a knock at the door. Their eyes snapped to it as they froze in dismay. The kitchen light was still off, maybe they could still pretend not to be home. In his arms, Charlie's daughter began to whimper. He tried to soothe her, but the whimper became a cry. Another knock sounded at the door. They looked at each other, unsure what to do.

"Mr. and Mrs. Whitehall, I know you're home. Answer the door, please," Mr. Crisp said from the hallway.

Maple slowly went over to the door. After some hesitation, she unbolted the lock and opened it. Mr. Crisp stood there with his usual smile. "I'm here to collect the remainder of your repayment."

Charlie said, "Sir, I'm sorry. But we don't. . . have it."

"That is simply unacceptable," Mr. Crisp replied.

"Please, can't you give us one more extension? He just got a new job last week, he just hasn't been paid yet. Just a few more days. . . please," Maple pleaded.

"I'm afraid that would be impossible. You knew the risks and the consequences of borrowing from us. If you can't pay us back with money, I'll be forced to take something else. . ."

"What do you mean?" Charlie asked.

Mr. Crisp laughed. "That was outlined in the contract you signed, Charles."

The man definitely looked older. The dark hair he had at the time of their first meeting with Lady Vandercamp, which seemed like ages ago, was overpowered by gray now. In his face, they could see crow's feet around the eyes, wrinkles across the forehead. The couple stared at him blankly.

"Oh, did you just skim over a few details? That's a shame, because if you hadn't, you would have seen that failure to repay your loan in full allows us to take one of your children."

"Take one of our children?! We would never let you do that," Charlie shouted.

"The contract is a binding legal document. You must accept that. . . And I'm not going to take the child. I want you to cook one for me, I'm rather famished."

"You must be crazy," Maple said.

Mr. Crisp gave a wide smile now. His teeth seemed to be larger and more pointed. "You will offer me a child. I'll let you choose which one, but if you two don't make a decision, I'll choose for you. And I my choice might be both of them."

Charlie handed the child that had been in his arms to Maple. She backed away as he closed in on Mr. Crisp. "You will leave this apartment now," he commanded.

"I don't think so," he replied, just as calm as ever.

Charlie swung his arm to punch Mr. Crisp, but his fist caught in the open palm of his open hand without difficulty. Then he felt fingers tighten around his neck before he even realized what happened. He couldn't breathe as the eyes of the man in front of him stared into his. Mr. Crisp pushed him backward and stated, "You are going to make a decision of which child I get to eat tonight. Maple, I want you to get out the largest cooking pot you have, put some water in it, and bring it to a boil."

Mr. Crisp walked over to Elisha, who was sitting in the high chair and starting to cry. He picked her up cautiously; all Charlie and Maple could do was watch. A strange, unrecognizable fear washed over them. Neither could accept a consequence this extreme. He stood there, soothing their daughter. "Shhh . . . it's okay, darling."

"Let her go," Maple requested.

"Make up your minds. Which one will it be? Mr. Crisp asked.

"You can't do this," she said.

"Get out your largest cooking pot. Put water in it and bring it to a boil."

They continued to look at him in horror. He smiled and looked at the baby girl in his arms, then gently placed her back in the chair.

"There's no sweeter flesh than the flesh of an infant. It's tender and easy on the stomach—life's poisons have not been mixed in with the body yet. Make a choice, or I'll eat one now and take the other one back to my employer," he said.

The couple looked at each other. Charlie offered her a reluctant nod, then she brought out a pot and did as she was instructed. Charlie casually searched the room for a proper weapon, though somewhere in his mind, he knew it would be a futile effort to attack the man again. The twins were as silent as the adults now. Everyone seemed to wait for the water to begin bubbling; Maple sobbed quietly after a time, when she saw steam rise.

"Make up your minds," Mr. Crisp said. "Failure to comply with the contract would mean death for us all . . ."

"Take me, then . . . I'll be your substitute payment," Maple announced.

"No. Your husband would need to cut your body up before it could fit into the pan. Things would get too messy."

"At least let us hold both of them one last time," Charlie said.

Mr. Crisp gave a slight nod and Charlie removed the twins from their high chairs. He walked in a circle through the kitchen, bouncing them and making funny faces. Maple watched the bubbles get bigger . . . moving to the top of the pot faster . . . more bubbles, coming faster still. She was between her family and Mr. Crisp now and knew it was the only chance she would have to do something. As fast as she could, Maple lifted the pan from the stove and flung the water at Mr. Crisp, putting her entire body into the thrust. The boiling water splashed onto him and he retracted back to the front door as he shrieked. Charlie handed her the twins and forced her out of the kitchen. She went back to the bedroom, as if in understanding. He turned to face the loan shark now. After a moment, Mr. Crisp straightened back up, laughing. His face was red and still sizzling, but that didn't seem to faze him.

"Nice trick. But you're trapped down here . . . I'll have a good meal tonight one way or another. A little water isn't going to change anything."

Mr. Crisp stepped closer. Charlie backed into the living room, grabbing a lamp from the coffee table. Mr. Crisp continued closing in, only a few feet away now. He swung the lamp, missed. When Mr. Crisp advanced closer, Charlie kicked him in the knee, and in that moment of surprise, he wound up and hit him square on the side of the head. But Mr. Crisp just faced him again, the blow not affecting him at all. Then Charlie felt himself being lifted up, almost high enough to touch the ceiling. He flew through the air, crashing into a wooden cabinet. The world became a disoriented gray fuzz for him.

Mr. Crisp took a deep breath and went back to the bedroom, looking for his dinner. Both rooms were empty—impossible, there were no windows down here. He searched every nook, every possible hiding place. He ran outside into the hallway, seeing if she took the children into another room in the basement. That's when he discovered it: a door that connected the bedroom to the main basement hallway.

Maple ran as fast as she could, which wasn't that fast with the twins in her arms. She was barefoot but didn't care. She ran down the hall and up the stairs, never looking back. It was pure adrenaline and instinct propelling her; she didn't even remember bursting through the door to the first floor and running out the fire exit. The building's alarm system was triggered as the cool night air surrounded her. She slowed down and finally stopped to breathe and collect herself. All the residents would be coming outside in a moment. The police and fire department would arrive shortly after that. She was so out of breath that she almost dropped her children, which made her cling harder to them, never wanting to let them go.

Further down the alley, a black town car was parked alongside the apartment building. In the back seat, an elderly woman watched Maple with hungry eyes . . .

Blogjam

By Logan Burd



A Tiffin native, Logan led a rambunctious, albeit normal, life of Legos and Hot Wheels as a child. Now, a sophomore English major, he enjoys writing and renting movies in his free time, but still dabbles in Lego architecture occasionally.

It's 2014. Claude DuBois is lying on a cold, yellowed hospital bed, shivering slightly. A doctor, an old Filipino man, enters the room cautiously. Claude shakes, completely unaware of the doctor's presence. The doctor shines a light at him, looking at his lifeless, weary eyes. The physician shakes the motionless patient lightly, holding him by his shoulders. Finally, he slaps Claude on his cheek. He trembles more and turns his head, finally recognizing the doctor.

"It's me" the doctor says, speaking as he would to a young child. "Claude?"

He finally speaks, lightly, under his breath. "I did it," he says.

"You sure did, Claude," the doctor replies, shaking his head in disappointment as he disappears out the door.

It's November 2nd, 2011, and Claude DuBois is beginning his quest to become the greatest blogger on the web. At first, his only goal was to pick a respectable name for his blog. After almost an hour of perpetual writer's block, he decided on a name. "Blogjam," of course, writer's block for bloggers.

Claude, fresh off his unforgettable—but inevitably forgotten—23rd birthday, is recovering from a nasty hangover.

"Check the closet for babies and the bathroom for lions" he jokingly warns his equally queasy roommate Charlie Daugherty, who searches the cabinets in their small apartment's kitchen for a blender.

Charlie is a college basketball star, leading St. Louis University in rebounds and blocked shots. Charlie and Claude have lived together for almost two years now, and they are the quintessential bachelor pad roommates.

"How many eggs you want in your smoothie?" he asks after finally finding the small blender.

"Give me four, hold the whites."

After downing the hangover cure, Claude returns to his keyboard. "23rd Birthday . . . or what I can remember" he writes in the title spot. His first post.

"Wouldn't it be cool if I got like a million subscriptions or whatever? I'd be the best blogger in the world, dude" Claude asks his roommate. He is looking at the names of the top blogs on the site, judging his opponents on the blogging site.

"I guess dude, how you gonna do it?" Charlie asks.

"I'm not sure, but could you throw me a pencil?"

"Sure, just a sec," Charlie replies. Claude catches the flying utensil in the air. He begins writing down the names of the blogging site's top bloggers.

"What are you doing?" "I'm gonna write down all the names of the best bloggers, to make sure I'm better than 'em."

"Claude," Charlie says, laughing, "how the hell will you get more views than them? That takes dedication, like Ripken. Or Musial. I'll just wish you luck and hope you don't let this mess with your brain. I know how you get with weird shit like this, man."

"Don't worry, mom, this isn't even that fun, I'll probably stop writing in a week anyway." Claude retires to his cramped, St. Louis Cardinals-themed room to recoup. Before napping, he installs a moblog, or "mobile blog," application on his phone allowing

him to blog from anywhere and at anytime. "Genius," he thinks to himself, "genius."

The next day, a Wednesday, Charlie awakes to find Claude on his beat up laptop, sitting alone at the kitchen table. Claude turns—his face stuck in a giant grin—and greets his roommate.

"Why good day, ol' pal!" he says in a terrible British accent.

"Yes, jolly good," Charlie replies hesitantly, in no such accent. "Why are you so happy?"

"Well, look who rose to number 989,458 on the blogging site overnight? It's sort of . . . exhilarating," Claude announces, after trying to find the word to complete his sentence. "I blogged last night about that movie I saw a couple nights ago on TV . . . what was it called? I don't know the name, it doesn't matter. Then I woke up today and WHAM! I'm in the top million" he says enthusiastically.

"Did you sleep at all, dude?" Charlie asked, honestly concerned. "A few hours, but that's all I ever need." he responded.

His ecstasy is broken by a call from his mother. Claude loves his mother, but since moving out of her basement nearly three years ago, she calls him every morning to see what he plans to do that day. Then, naturally, she must call again at the same time each night to see what he did. Normally it's exactly the same conversation, spoken in different tenses, but she minds not.

"Hello, mom," Claude answers. "Probably just doing my laundry and looking for more job openings, like I've been doing the past week," he says halfheartedly. "What are you going to do?" he asks, completely disinterested and without any care for a response. "Ahh that sounds fun." After a lengthy conversation, Claude wishes his mother a good day, says his goodbyes, and hangs up the phone.

"But you always pick up," Charlie says after seeing the phony look of frustration on Claude's face.

"Yeah I know, but it's my mom—I have to." Sipping a now lukewarm cup of black java, he returns to his blog to write about his mother.

Dr. Degala enters the room again, scribbling, the way doctors do, on a clipboard. The doc doesn't step close, because Claude is laughing again. The staff has been warned to give distance when patients laugh uncontrollably, for it is often a sign of a manic attack. Once his fit of hysteria is through, Dr. D (as Claude calls him, the times when he realizes his presence) leans closer.

"Claude?" he asks, unsure whether the laughing has truly ceased. "Hello boy."

"Dr. D, am I . . .?" Claude asks.

Knowing exactly what he means, but frustrated by this particular question, Dr. D responds "Yes Claude, yes you are." A lie, but one Claude has now heard hundreds of times.

Flipping through pages and pages of the Post Dispatch, Claude fails to find a viable employment option. "Figures, in this shitty economy," he says aloud, trying to make excuses for himself. In the past, Claude has worked for a pizza eatery, a local park, and a college—though he's never attended one—but now he's just desperate for one that pays.

Charlie is out, at the theatre on an afternoon date with his fiancée Monica. Monica is a beautiful young lady, attending a local community college and still living with her parents (but only as often as she stays with Charlie).

After only an hour truly searching for employers, Claude turns to his phone to blog about his job search. "The economy sucks," he titles it. Blogjam is stealing Claude's time, and he knows it. The problem is he doesn't care. He begins to laugh at his own wit as he writes, smiling at his word-play.

Charlie returns, teasingly shakes his head at Claude's still unbroken concentration, and leads Monica to his room.

"My boy need to get himself a job and stop typing all day, he's bound to get carpal-tunnel or whatever," Charlie vents to his disengaged girlfriend.

"Why don't you come over here and kiss my ear" she says seductively. Charlie slams the door, locks it, and walks toward the bed, smiling all the while.

The loud thud of the closing door snaps Claude's gaze. Dr. D is pleased that he finally discovered how to get his attention, and opens the large, metal door again.

"We have good news, boy" he says a bit more optimistic than usual. "Some tests came back, and it looks like you might be

showing signs of improvement in your coherence. We're still gonna keep you here, but I'm thinking you'll be back out there before too long" he says, pointing out the window with a big smile.

"Thank . . ." Claude says, glancing out the small window at a large oak with a chipmunk climbing around the trunk.

"I understand, boy . . . you're welcome." Dr. D exits the room, smiling a grin of uncertainty.

"Claude?" Charlie shouts, unsure of where in the small apartment he's escaped to.

"What's up?" Claude asks.

"We're going to dinner," Charlie says as he looks to Monica and back, "we'll be back around 11 or so."

"Sounds good." Claude returns to his keyboard and opens a new post. He sits for a few minutes, scratching his head, unsure of what to write about. Then, Claude begins to run his fingers through his hair. Soon, he begins violently pulling, stealing locks of his wavy, auburn hair. He shouts in pain and frustration. Claude, perturbed and visibly so, grabs his phone, but doesn't immediately dial. He thinks. After a few short moments, he finds the right contact in his phone.

"Hey man," he begins, "you blog, right?" "Awesome, well I have a few questions . . . yeah . . . what do you write to get subscribers?" "Ahh sounds good, yeah I'll try it. Awesome. Thanks, bye." Claude, the quickest typist anyone has seen, finds a website with a copious amount of tips on how to draw an audience to a blog.

"Could you pass the cheesy potatoes?" asks Claude's aging mother. She is graying, both from stress and age. Having six kids surely didn't help.

"Sure, ma" replies Claude, who is sitting around his parents' large kitchen table with his family of eight—it's Thanksgiving. After passing the potatoes, Claude returns to his discreet under-the-table blogging. He titles the blog "I hate Thanksgiving" on his phone, but quickly remembers the website he found and changes it to simply "Thanksgiving." "Be as relationship-oriented and courteous as possible when blogging," the website said.

"Claude, the potatoes please?" his mother was noticeably perturbed now.

"I just gave them—" he started, then saw the potatoes exactly where they were before, unmoved. "Yeah, here," Claude mumbled, completely puzzled.

Claude sits, silent, eating his instant oatmeal and staring at the psych ward's purple-gray walls. Not the most pleasant sight for people already in need of some pleasantries. The other patients, much less serious cases than Claude, peek at him through relieved eyes, glad they aren't as bad. Many of the patients are from the deep South, and have thicker accents than most St. Louisans.

"Claude, hun, are you done with your food?" asked a kind older nurse.

The patients often converse, except for Claude of course. And old man observed, "I'm sure glad this ain't anything like that Cuckoo's Nest movie, these nurses isn't too bad."

"Sure ain't, this more like a nursin' home than anythin'" said a large, older woman sitting next to Claude.

The nurse gently helps Claude from his seat, as was procedure with him. Walking back to his room, Claude notices—amazingly, he rarely notices anything—an old IBM computers being used by one of the more veteran, important nurses in her office.

He pulls his arm from the nurse's grasp and makes a break for the computer. Before reaching the door, he trips over his own slippers, falling on the floor without trying to stop his momentum.

"I pray for that man," whispered the older woman, to another patient, "God know he needs it." Her whisper broke the silence of the ward's small cafeteria.

When Monica enters the bathroom after two minutes of constant knocking, she thinks Claude is dead. His eyes are stuck open, his mouth is ajar, drooling, and his skin is a violent, morbid color. She shakes him, yells at him, even tries CPR—she's not trained, but she's seen Baywatch.

"Wake up!" she shouts, with no answer.

Charlie is down the street, picking up the pizza they had ordered. Claude lies stiff, with no visible chest movement to indicate

breathing. Monica finally gives up, and that's when Claude blinks; just once, then many in quick succession. When he wakes up from his unconsciousness, he is unaware of the situation.

"Why are you in the bathroom with me?" he asks Monica.

"You . . . you were passed out . . . or something," she replies.

Shaking his head, as if trying to rid of a headache or rattle around a reason for the madness, Claude searches frantically on the floor. Finally, he finds his phone in the empty bathtub. "Yes, 191 views," he mumbles.

He quickly begins a new post, and thinks carefully before punches the letters on his phone. "Be timely," "Break news," the website said. But it also said "Write something people would want to read anytime, even years from now." Thinking of the impossibility, Claude nevertheless writes a long passage about his state of unconsciousness.

"He spoke to me," he writes, "in a loud, deep, commanding voice. It was inspiring."

Later that evening, after receiving a call from Charlie about the bathroom incident, Claude's mother arrives, keying into the apartment with her spare. "Claude? Claude? Claude?!" his mother calls in quick succession.

"I'm over here, ma" he replies, around the corner on the living room couch, blogging.

"Are you okay??" she asks.

"Yes, I only blacked out for a few minutes. Maybe I was tired."

"I always tell you to get more sleep. How much are you getting?" she inquires.

"Six or seven normally," he replies, a lie. He continues to type his post. "I'm up to number 60,335, ma. I just listened to the website I was telling you about."

"Me and your dad are worried about you, kiddo. You're on that phone way too much." She says, as he ignores her and continues typing angrily. "Put that damn phone away!" she screams. She quickly controls her temper, and waits for a reaction.

Claude drops his phone sarcastically, toying with his mother. She laughs an insecure giggle, and continues. "We . . . me and pa . . . we think you need to start looking harder for a job. We can't pay your rent forever, hun."

"I know, I know," he says, reaching for his phone. "Do email interviews with famous people" he mumbles under his breath, as he tilts his head in contemplation and then frantically types in his phone.

"Good morning, young sir!" Dr. D bellows to announce his presence.

"Write daring posts about other bloggers," Claude recites, he has the whole list memorized.

Shaking his head, Dr. D leans out the door and beckons a small, blonde-haired, young college intern to enter. "This is Claude," Dr. D announces to the young intern Marah Anderson, "His is a rare case. It is an extended case of what we call brief reactive psychosis, brought on by chronic stress."

Claude, slurring and mumbling each word he says, "Job . . . anxiety . . . ma . . . bl—," the last word slurred too much to comprehend fully.

"Great, more learning experiences for you Dr. Anderson. This seems to be a case of schizophasia, or 'word salad' as you may have learned in school," Dr. D explains to his apprentice.

"Yes, I've actually heard word salad before, but from what I know thus far, her case was not comparable," Dr. Anderson replies as she scribbles notes on a small notepad. "When was he admitted?"

"It was a few years ago," the doctor replied.

"When did this chronic stress start?"

"Just months before that," he says, knowing the news will be shocking for Dr. Anderson, "his was such a rapid progression."

At a local eatery, dubbed "the best in Saint Louis," Claude orders the usual—turkey, Swiss, and spinach on rye. He feels the smooth Swiss on his pallet, and enjoys the taste of the rye. It's especially soft today. Claude, ever the professional food critic, blogs in detail about his wonderful meal as he sits at the counter.

Suddenly, he hears a door slam behind him, a customer. Claude, as if alerted of an armed intruder, throws himself under the counter. His head whips itself all around on the swivel that is his neck—and he shouts uncontrollably, using words that aren't

words at all, unless they are of some African origin.

“Claude, hey . . . man . . . what’s wrong?” shouts the frightened restaurant cashier, a good friend of Claude’s. “Claude!?”

Finally, Claude approaches from under the counter; slightly unaware of what has happened. “What are you shouting about?” he asks the cashier.

“Why the hell did you jump under the table like a war vet?” he responds. As the clerk calms down, he hands Claude his sandwich from behind the counter. “Sorry your order took a little longer than usual.”

Even more confused, on the verge of annoyance at his state of mind—or lack thereof—Claude slowly rises and begins exiting the restaurant. He quickly remembers his order and returns for his sandwich, and then heads home.

“Good luck with whatever’s going on” the clerk shouts as Claude slowly closes the door behind him.

Upon returning home, Claude lays down for a much-needed nap. His eyes drift to dreaming, and he is asleep quicker than ever before. Suddenly, as if slapped in the face, Claude awakes, gasping for breath.

It was a nightmare. One of the worst he’s had in a long time, he thinks to himself. He pulls his laptop from beside his bed—he keeps it handy in case he has an idea for a post. He opens his blog, and titles the post “Crazy ass dream,” then immediately recants, remembering the website telling him to “Be courteous.” Then he re-writes what he had originally, remembering the other website that said “Be snarky” and “Don’t be boring.”

“What the hell?!?” Charlie yells, seeing Claude shaking violently on the living room floor.

It’s the next day, around lunch time, and Claude is having another fit. “Monica! Monica!!!” he shouts. Claude stops, and stands up quickly; frightening Charlie and making him take a step back.

Claude smiles, and begins to bellow laughter loud enough for the neighbors to hear. Then he stops. “He spoke again. He talked about dying, and living, and killing. He talked about Monica. He talked about you,” he said ominously.

Charlie, reasonably disturbed, backs away with a look of fear plastered on his face. Suddenly—as was everything he had been doing lately—Claude lay down again, and went to sleep. It was all as if he were possessed.

The next day, his phone battery nearing its death, Claude types a long post about what his voice told him.

“He said, in the usual low, grumbling, commanding voice, that I wasn’t good enough. I never would be. My parents can’t stand me. My friends hate me. He suggests I commit suicide. I won’t though, because of you. My readership is my life. Thanks be to you all for making this life livable.” His post got 349 comments in under an hour.

“Hey Charlie!” he shouts from the toilet.

“Yeah dude what’s up?”

“I’m number 76!” Claude yells enthusiastically.

“Shit, dude maybe you can be number one!”

“ . . . I know I can,” Claude mumbles.

That night, Claude lay on his bed, his eyes fluttering, near sleep. Knowing the voice brings in the readers, and knowing he only hears the voice when he’s awake, Claude forces himself up the entire night, keeping a light shining his direction and slapping his face occasionally. Finally, around four o’clock in the morning, Claude hears the voice.

“Your ma . . . kill you . . . man in deli . . . spies on . . . murdering . . . don’t leave . . . don’t . . . anyone.” The voice spoke so fast, Claude only caught pieces of what it said. He did, however, understand its meaning.

Gripped with fright by the obviously irrational—but not to him—ideas of his mother being a cold-blooded killer or a stranger spying on him, Claude quickly rolls off his bed and onto the ground, and then shuffles his body under his bed, looking all around for spies and intruders. Suddenly, he began to laugh hysterically. Then, absolute terror again, and Claude froze, his eyes wide open.

As Claude lies on his stiff hospital bed, he hears faintly, “And John 14:27 reads ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Rev. Jim, as the patients like to call him, is reading Claude yet another scripture. Recently, the team of medical professionals called on Jim as a last resort.

“I don’t even know if Claude is Christian,” Dr. D says.

“Claude, did you like that one?” Dr. Anderson asks.

“Bible . . . Lord . . . peace . . . heart,” Claude replies, parroting the scriptures he had heard throughout the day.

“Claude, we’re here because we love you. We all want what’s best for you, and we don’t think this is it.” His mother, father, and oldest brother Jesse—a Harvard graduate and newlywed, living downtown—as well as Charlie and Monica, are sitting around Claude in the living room. An intervention.

“We are worried about the blogging, and the weird fits of seizures and the delusions . . . remember at Thanksgiving?” his mom asks, verging off topic but making a point. “Remember? You could have sworn on your grammie’s grave that you passed those potatoes, but they were sitting right there the whole time.”

The distressed mother looks at Charlie, urging him to add to the conversation. “And this,” he says, “This is unacceptable, man.” Charlie holds out a tiny bag of cocaine.

“That ain’t even mine,” Claude defends nonchalantly, looking at Charlie and Monica.

“Well it isn’t mine!” Monica raises her voice, feeling personally accused.

Claude admits, “Okay, I promise I’ve only used it twice, to stay up at night. Flush it down the toilet, it’s all I got.”

His father, never one to break silence, “And the blogging, son. That’s all fun and games until you’re only sleeping a couple hours a night.” Claude shoots Charlie and Monica a look; he knows one of them ratted.

“Dad you really don’t understand. I say that a lot, I know, but this time you really don’t. I’ve been blogging about the voices in my head lately; they’ve got me all the way—”

“Voices?” his mother inquires, an obvious look of alarm on her face, “What in God’s name are you talking about voices?”

“They got me to number 17, ma. There’s like a million bloggers or something, and I’m number 17,” he says, impressed for himself.

Quickly, excitement turns to irrational fear and Claude shouts profanities at the top of his lungs as he sprints to a small coat closet and slams the door, hiding inside from whatever evil he sees . . . or hears. His ma and pa jump up, both panicked and perplexed. His mother screams, not knowing what else to do. She runs and opens the closet door, finding her youngest son, her baby, lying in the fetal position. She would have thought he was asleep had his eyes not been wide open.

Upon waking, Dr. Anderson forgets exactly where or why she fell asleep in the first place. It’s her small, temporary office; she decided to nap on the plaid sofa by her desk. She is groggy, not entirely awake. Then she hears the sound.

It’s a loud, constant sound, like that of the violent shaking of a tambourine. She looks up, finally realizing what is going on. Claude had come to visit Dr. Anderson to ask a question—even though patients are supposed to stay in their rooms unless personally called upon. Upon seeing her slumber, Claude hijacked Dr. Anderson’s laptop, and now ferociously types post after post. He has typed thousands of words in a matter of minutes, and is not soon stopping.

Dr. Anderson yells, screams at the man, but he is in a stupor so deep nothing would break it. She calls for Dr. D, who arrives quickly—supposing the seriousness of the situation—and shakes Claude. Soon, he begins hitting him, as if trying to win a heavyweight title. Nothing will stop his hands from masterfully typing.

Dr. D sprints out of the office and into the nearest patient room, surprising the small old lady who sits humming and rocking in her chair. He says a quick hello, and then grabs the small defibrillator beside every patient’s bed. He runs across the hall, places the pads on Claude’s head, yells “Clear” as if he needed the whole ward to hear him, and shocks Claude into unconsciousness. Security officers arrive after hearing the commotion and help carry Claude back into his room.

Finally, Claude snaps out of his unconsciousness. He sits up, and looks at his frightened friends and family. All of a sudden, he laughs, and then frowns, and then sporadically hits the wall beside him with superhuman strength. His mother watches in

complete horror, jumping up from the table at which the group was sitting.

Charlie runs toward him, grabbing at his arms to stop him. Claude is standing now, and swings at his roommate and friend, violently fending for himself. Eventually, Charlie is knocked down, and Claude kicks him in the face.

His mother, appalled at what she is witnessing, hurries out the apartment door to get some sort of help. Claude is by the closet, waiting for the next person to get in his way. Both his father and Monica keep their distance. Charlie begins slowly crawling away, afraid for himself and his friend, his nose bleeding profusely but still intact.

Claude takes his phone out of his pocket with a wicked grimace, but when he gets to his blog it's quickly replaced with a grin so wide and vast it covers most of his face.

"Number one," he mumbles, "Number one!" this time louder, ensuring all the neighbors heard clearly. Monica's face turns to a slight congratulatory smile, and then back to fear upon remembering the prior events. "Number one!" he shouts over and over again.

He begins howling laughter so frightening; once the police arrived they hesitate before apprehending him. After a struggle, the police calm Claude down enough to take him to University Hospital.

"Good evening, Claude," says Dr. Anderson, walking into his room.

He is quietly reciting blogging tips again, "Be timely. Announce news."

"Claude, we have some not-so-great news . . . we don't think we can let you leave anytime soon, your condition still needs some great improvement before we feel you'll be ready to be out there again," Dr. Anderson says solemnly as she points out the large window.

Claude peeks out the small window, noticing the dark, feathery clouds of an approaching thunderstorm. "Dr. Anderson,"—he continues to stare out the window—"am I still . . . am I still number one?" he asks, changing the subject unintentionally.

"Of course Claude, you're still the best," the doctor says with a smile.

It's a lie, but one Claude DuBois will never get tired of.

Journalism



Photo taken by Marisha Sullivan

The Life and Times of Richard III

By Natty Berry



Natty Berry is one cool cat. Once a stunt double on the set of *Robocop 4*, he decided to trade in his dreams of Hollywood stuntman superstardom to be an English major at Heidelberg and impress people with his writing. Also, he makes a good pouting face, as evidenced by the photo on the left.

Very recently I went to Available Light Theatre in Columbus to see an original production; a reworking of William Shakespeare's *Richard III* entitled *The Life and Times of Richard III*. Directed by Matt Slaybaugh and starring Ian Short, *The Life and Times of Richard III* was one of the best things I've ever seen on stage. Slaybaugh reworked Shakespeare's play, changing the order of some scenes and cutting out portions of the original script. This, and the glam-rock inspired costumes and makeup, had a dramatic effect on the play, and completely changed the way I thought of Richard III. Slaybaugh's augmentation of the script, the visual and audio choices, the acting, and how each impacted the show will be the focus of this essay.

In Slaybaugh's *The Life and Times of Richard III* the costumes and makeup are reminiscent of the glam-rock movement in the 1970s, pioneered by artists such as David Bowie. During his career, Bowie sometimes performed under the alias "Ziggy Stardust," going so far as to dress and act like his alter-ego off stage. Ziggy Stardust had red hair and bizarrely colored clothing, and sported matching face makeup. Richard of Gloucester's costume was very similar, a brightly colored tunic and red hair in the first act, and a glittery lightning bolt painted over his face in the second, after he's been crowned. The use of glam-rock imagery not only creates a unique spectacle, but also provides metaphorical depth to the characters in the play. As Bowie constantly assumed a different persona for his performances, so too does Richard of Gloucester assume a variety of personalities to achieve his political ends.

Despite cuts to the script, the first act is crammed with dialogue, giving it the effect of an Aaron Sorkin movie. Although the first act is only eighty minutes long, Slaybaugh managed to fit in the death of Edward IV, Margret cursing the Yorkists, Richard seducing Anne, the murder of Clarence, the deaths of Rivers, Grey and Dorset, the imprisonment of the princes in the Tower, the beheading of Lord Hastings, and Richard's acceptance of the crown, all before the intermission.

Most striking in the first act is Margret's curses against the Yorkists. The woman playing her dressed in blood red rags, and hunched over menacingly when she appeared on stage. Margret's role in *The Life and Times of Richard III* is much more prominent than in the original, and it is her prominence in this version helps create a general sense of unease throughout the entire play. Indeed, much of Slaybaugh's changes have the effect of making Richard III seem even more unsettling than usual. For example, Lords Rivers and Dorset are represented by ghastly hand puppets, and when they are murdered the puppets are hung from the fly rails, visible for the rest of the show. The murderers of Clarence have been reduced to one solitary murder, who while maintaining all the original dialogue, argues with himself suggesting a kind of schizophrenia.

More frightening than all of this is the performance of Ian Short, who plays Richard Gloucester. In *The Life and Death of Richard III* Richard moves around the stage on a pair of crutches, Short developing a spider-like gait, using the crutches to pull himself along the stage without the use of his legs. When Richard is crowned King in the second act, the crutches are replaced by a staff, which has the effect of making Richard's movements much more precarious, a metaphor for the feeble hold he has on the

crown, and on his own life.

In keeping with the glam rock theme, the second act begins with two dance numbers, the music by David Bowie, and the dances acting out Richard Gloucester's coronation, and the murder of Lady Anne. The second act details the murder of the princes, Richard's betrayal of Buckingham, and the gathering of the resistance under the Earl of Richmond, played in this production by an African-American woman. All this culminates in the famous dream sequence, wherein Richard is confronted by the ghosts of the people he's killed. In his dream, Richard is beaten and stripped by the ghosts, who are seemingly led by Anne. Anne's appearance in Richard's dream is very different from real life in terms of the way she behaves. In the dream, she is violently in charge, where in life she was submissive to her husband even to the point of knowing that he was to murder her, and doing nothing to try and stop him.

After the dream, Richmond and Richard make separate appeals to their respective armies, with the woman playing Richmond entering from the back of the house, delivering her speech and pointing out audience members, until she finally reached the stage. Shakespeare's language and her voice combined were so moving that I felt the urge to stand up and join her pretend army. Richard's speech was appropriately boorish and wavering, and after their speeches were done, the battle began, featuring some very creative choreography in the battle between Richard and Richmond. When Richard is eventually wounded, he stumbles toward the front of the stage, falls to his knees, and almost whimpering speaks his famous last line, "A kingdom for a horse." (Shakespeare, 627) So convincing was the acting of Ian Short, so palpable was his sadness at the end that I cried at the death of Richard, despite all that he'd done earlier in the play.

The single most captivating thing about the entire performance, and absolutely the most effective re-cut of the original play, is the inclusion of Richard's monologue from the play's original beginning, at the end of *The Life and Times of Richard III*, this time spoken by Margaret. Coming onto stage and spitting on the body of Richard, Margaret cries mockingly "Now is the winter of our discontent/made glorious summer by this son of York" (indicating the corpse on the ground.) Margaret talks about how she is not made to enjoy the comforts of peace, and ends the play with these two lines, "I am determined to prove a villain/And hate the idle pleasures of these days." (Shakespeare, 548) The play's conclusion on this note, rather than the customary end, is quite dark indeed. The idea that Richard Gloucester was not an isolated incident, that there are more people who might brutally vie for power rather than endure peace, is a much more realistic, and certainly more chilling sentiment. The surprise too, of attending a play usually concluded happily, and redesigned to end darkly, is thrilling. Shakespeare might well have approved of this notion, he himself having changed the ending of the story of *King Lear* from happy to tragic.

The Life and Times of Richard III was able to reduce the total length of the original play greatly, and add physical spectacle modern cultural reference without sacrificing the original concept of the story of Richard Gloucester. The glam rock element was both stunning to look at, and a functional metaphor for Richard's character. The music and dance was fun, and gave an opportunity for the actors to tell some element of the story very effectively without words. The performances, especially that of Ian Short, were incredible, and the augmentations to the original play created something new, both like and unlike Shakespeare's play. For these reasons, *The Life and Times of Richard III* by Matt Slaybaugh is as great an argument for the adaptation of Shakespeare as I have ever seen.

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Do you know “The People in Your Neighborhood”?: Sesame Street comes to campus

By Liesl Barth



Liesl Barth is a December 2011 graduate, majoring in middle childhood and intervention specialist education with an emphasis in social studies and language arts. Barth has been the co-editor in chief of *The Kilikilik* since 2009 and has a passion for journalism. While at Heidelberg, she has been a member of the Concert Choir, the Euglossian Society, H. A. N. D. She has also worked as an Admission Ambassador and was the 2011 co-editor in chief of the Model United Nations of the Far West newspaper, *The World Press*.

Walk into the office of Dr. Lori-Arnold Grine, associate professor of early childhood education, and Sesame Street comes to life. Her walls are decorated with posters of the famed show, a picture of Jim Henson, and a variety of Ernie puppets.

“Ernie is my favorite character. I have used Ernie since I was eight years old. He was an extension of me and is now my teaching buddy. I have had the puppet Ernie on my hand most of my life,” said Grine.

Grine is not alone in her love of Sesame Street. Dr. Julie O’Reilly, chair of the department of communication and theatre arts, is also what Grine calls a “Sesame Street professor.”

“Julie is as much a Sesame Street fan as I am. She knew we had that same interest and had told me about her idea of bringing Carol-Lynn Parente to campus,” said Grine.

Grine and O’Reilly have been preparing for the arrival of Carol-Lynn Parente, executive producer of Sesame Street. Parente is the keynote speaker for this fall’s Patricia Adams Lecture Series, to take place Oct. 14-15.

During her visit to campus, Parente will be taking part in several activities, including four open sessions on Friday. All students are invited to attend these sessions, as well as a student reception.

“These events exceed the parameters of the average classroom- the series is directly applicable to future occupations,” said senior Kate Loar, who served as the first student representative of the Patricia Adams Lecture Series committee last year. “Students will walk away with important lessons. You can only lose by not attending.”

Loar played a role in Betsy Bernard’s visit for last year’s series, having had the privilege to introduce Bernard at the dinner and keynote address. A music and business major, Loar stressed that the Patricia Adams Lecture Series is not just for business students.

“An important thing that isn’t discussed enough is that the Patricia Adams Lecture Series is for all students-business focused, but also leadership focused and applicable to all students,” said Loar.

O’Reilly has been a member of the steering committee and is looking forward to seeing the event come together next month.

“Sesame Street is huge in the sense that it has been the standard for children’s television since its debut in 1969. It’s going into the 42nd season, helping children learn, count, socialize and play well with others,” said O’Reilly.

Saturday will also be a busy day for Parente, as well as the School of Education. In the morning there will be an education workshop called “Literacy on the Street,” co-sponsored by the Friends of Heidelberg Education Alumni Network. At the conference four education professors, as well as Parente, will be presenting on different aspects of literacy.

“Sesame Street is foundational in development. It was important in my life and is important today. The same concepts of numbers and color are presented today but in new ways. Segments have changed over the years, but the approach is the same. School readiness and early learning development is so important. That is what Sesame Street is all about,” said Grine.

Teachers from about 50 local schools have been invited to take part in the educator workshop and will be presented with a certificate of attendance at the end of the conference. The conference ends on Saturday with closing remarks by Elmo and Kevin Clash, Sesame Workshop’s senior creative consultant.

Students and faculty can also catch Parente, Clash and Elmo at the pre-game Sesame Street tailgate event on Saturday from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m. Right before the Heidelberg vs. Mount Union football game, local children have been invited to the event near the football field to play games, have their faces painted, and have the opportunity to get a photo with Elmo and the Student Prince mascot.

Parente will give her keynote address on Friday evening at 7:00 p.m. in Seiberling Gymnasium.

“Carol-Lynn started as a production assistant and has been with the show for more than 20 years; started by carrying rolls of film and is now running the show. Her story is going to be a good one in communicating perseverance and endurance to keep working toward your goal and that it can come true” said O’Reilly.

Loar, Grine and O’Reilly encourage all students to attend as many of the lecture series events as possible.

“The focus on leadership is relevant no matter your gender or subject area,” said Loar.

By attending the conference, students and faculty members will get the once in a lifetime chance to meet a woman who is important in the worlds of business, television and education.

“I think the opportunity to meet these women, the fact that you can sit with them at a dinner or ask them a question, is important,” said O’Reilly.

Registration for the Patricia Adams Lecture Dinner and Keynote Address with Parente is available on the Heidelberg website. The reservation deadline for this event is Sept. 30. Also, if you are interested in helping out with the tailgate event on Oct. 15, please e-mail Grine at lgrine@heidelberg.edu.

“This is really something for everybody and will bring out the Sesame Street characters in all of us,” said Grine. “I’m an Ernie, Julie’s a Grover and Jim Troha keeps joking that he’s a Cookie Monster. Who wasn’t raised on the ‘Street’?”



Photo taken by Tyler Terwilliger

Soups, Breads, and Trolleys, oh my!

By Logan Burd

“Between soup and love, the first is better.” So says an old Spanish saying, and many in Tiffin would undoubtedly agree. That may be part of the reason why, on Sunday, Oct. 23, Tiffin Tomorrow is holding the third annual Tiffin Soup and Trolley event. According to Theresa Sullivan, manager of Tiffin Tomorrow’s downtown office, soups will be served from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Historic Tiffin Train Depot on North Monroe Street (near Fort Ball Pizza).

The depot will feature specialty soups from area restaurants, including The Clover Club, The Viaduct, Fort Ball Pizza, GW’s Fine Food and Spirits, and Reino’s Pizza and Pasta. The Tiffin Bake Shop will be providing fresh homemade bread for the afternoon.

Every hour beginning at 12:30 p.m., the rented trolley—appropriately named Dolly—will be leaving the depot to give everyone the experience of exploring the historic trolley route through Tiffin, ending in Greenlawn Cemetery.

As reported by Sullivan, the streetcar will then be flooded with theater performers and re-enactors to portray legends of Tiffin’s historic past. The performers will be in appropriate period attire and will recite notable facts about their characters’ lives. The famous Tiffinites include, but are not limited to, a freed slave, victims of the 1913 Tiffin flood, a Civil War captain, a prominent female attorney, an architect, and a judge.

Last year’s event went off without a hitch, with the affordability and distinctiveness of the event drawing a crowd. This year’s event is sure to be a unique experience to all who attend.

According to its website, the non-profit organization Tiffin Tomorrow was founded in April 2010 in order to “lead the community in the implementations of the city of Tiffin” as well as to “beautify” the city. According to Sullivan, the idea was the product of the Cincinnati design and planning firm Kinzelman, Kline, and Gossman, and initiated by the city of Tiffin and the Seneca Industrial & Economic Development Corporation (SIEDC).

After the plan was set, a group of individuals formed to carry out the idea. The main part of Tiffin Tomorrow’s mission is to develop plans, programs and actions for the Tiffin’s downtown area to assure its long-term vitality and prosperity.

The trolley tour route was planned by the Tiffin Tomorrow Design Committee, which includes local historian John Huss, Tiffin City Councilman and business-owner Brian Bilger, the Rev. Frank Murd, business-owner Mary Lee Vadalabene, and Sullivan. Sullivan said that the event should “promote downtown restaurants, while also making people aware of the [train] depot.”

The program is being sponsored by Huffman-Gottfried-Mack, Engle-Shook, and Traunero funeral homes, as well as Seislove Burial Vault and Wellys Monument Company.

Soup meal tickets cost \$5 for soups, a roll and a drink. Trolley tickets are \$2. All tickets can be purchased on the day of the event. For more information, contact Theresa Sullivan at 567-230-4289 or at tsullivan@tiffintomorrow.com.

Poetry



Photo taken by Becca Dickinson

Track 6

By Laura Van Valkenburgh



Laura Van Valkenburgh, from North Royalton, Ohio, is a junior AYA Language Arts education major with a minor in Spanish and a minor in writing. She plays clarinet in the Symphonic Band and is a member of 'Berg Allies. She likes cats. And cheese. But usually not at the same time. She also likes to play Nintendo 64 because it's obviously the best video game console ever invented. She also thinks Modest Mouse is a highly underrated band.

I'm the type of song you skip over
on an album recommended to you
by a friend –

the same song everyone
says is lyrically profound -
but not a favorite. The melody
is not very resonant.

The rest of the songs on the album
are catchier –
they're played on the radio.

They're the types of songs
you can dance to
or sing along with.

But I am the track someone thinks about
only when she needs to indulge herself
in a pint of ice cream, and after,
she needs to call a friend to make her laugh.

What I must remember
is that after hearing it over and over
and over
people get sick of hit singles.

No, Alice

By Mandy Stovicek



Amanda Stovicek is an English writing major from Shaker Heights, Ohio. She will graduate in May of 2012 and plans to pursue a graduate degree in English. Amanda has been writing since she was ten years old and she has always had a passion for literature. Amanda has had poetry published in the Mount Union Calliope, and has received two honorable mentions in Ohio Poetry Day. Amanda hopes to publish more writing in the future.

She makes her way down past the singing Dahlias, Roses, Petunias, and Johnny Jump-Ups. The butterflies flutter by, dragging along her friends—dancing marionettes with the strings sewn in. We missed you, the flowers sing with sickening hope. You'll finally stay? A cat's claws scrape the cobbled path with only toothy fangs to greet her. The Tweedles bounce at her return flipping their caps back and forth. The March offers tea, but the door mouse won't sing with the flowers. No, Alice, he says, you won't be staying with me.

The Lighthouse

By: Diana LoConti



Diana is a senior AYA Education Literature Track and English Writing double major at Heidelberg. Originally from Mentor, Ohio, Diana is looking forward to going back home and entering the world of teaching after graduation this year to spreading her love of literature and writing with her future students.

To the lighthouse we went,
Where we escaped our daily lives,
The sun beating down on us,
As we carved our names into the rocks.

I see you.

To the lighthouse again,
Where we talked about our lives,
The waves creeping around our feet,
As we imagined what the future could be.

I hear you.

To the lighthouse once more,
Where we joined our two lives,
The sand warming our toes,
As our hands locked perfectly together.

I feel you.

To the lighthouse I go,
Where I contemplate my life,
The wind twirling all around me,
As I remember how we used to be.

I sense you.

Academic



Picture created by Kyle Bensman

Jack London and Buck: The Call for Wilderness

By Mandy Stovicek

Jack London wrote scores of novels and short stories during his short life. Notably his most recognizable title is *The Call of the Wild*. This novella was published in 1903 and its royalties could have supported London comfortably for the rest of his life. London did not believe that his dog book would make it in American literature. But to his surprise, the book sold 10,000 copies on the first day (“THE FICTION. . .”). Since its publication, *The Call of the Wild* has become a staple book in American literature. London’s own humble beginning and itch to travel created in him a sense of nature that is translated in this novella. London’s adventures as a young kid gave him the knowledge and life experience to create Buck and convey “the call” that Buck feels throughout his journey.

John “Jack” Griffith Chaney was born on January 12, 1896 in San Francisco. His mother was Flora Wellman and his father William Chaney (Merriman). His parents never married, and shortly after Jack’s birth his father deserted the family. Jack’s mother married John London that same year and Jack took that last name. Though Jack attended school, there was pressure on him to contribute to the family income (Merriman). He began selling newspapers on the street and said later in his essay “What Life Means To Me” that his “environment was crude and rough and raw,” (qtd. In Merriman).

London’s childhood consisted of working many jobs for menial pay, including laboring in “a cannery, a jute mill, a laundry, and shoveling coal in a power station,” (Hartzell). His later life experiences stemmed from his working-man mentality. He hungered for knowledge and success and instead of caving under the pressure of societal wants, London developed an “indomitable spirit” that created in him a spirit of individualism (Hartzell).

London spent the next part of his life living as an oyster pirate, a sailor, a hobo, and an Alaskan prospector. While all of his experiences provided him with writing material, the latter was the focal point of his most famous novella, *The Call of the Wild*. London departed for Alaska on July 25, 1897, overcome with “Klondike fever” (“Who Was. . .”). London entered the Yukon Territory by way of the Dyea River, much like Buck in his novella. London staked a claim on Henderson Creek in November of 1897 and became a favorite storyteller among other prospectors (“Who Was...”). Though he did not find much gold, the experiences London gained would stick in his mind.

London's poor health and the contraction of scurvy led him to desert his claim and return home. His father, John London, had died while he was away and London became the sole care-taker for his mother and family. He searched for work, but soon realized that he must plunge himself into writing. London had been writing since before his time in the Yukon, but he now considered writing his purpose and in December 1898, London sold his first short story, "To the Man on the Trail" ("Who Was . . .").

London's writing career launched, he was constantly writing and publishing. His total body of work included eighteen volumes of short stories, nineteen novels and seven non-fiction books, not to mention hundreds of articles, essays and reviews (Hartzell). London continued to be a busy man, travelling everywhere from Cape Horn to Tahiti (Merriman). He was married twice, but it was in his second marriage that he found his equal, Charmain Kittredge. Charmain and London married in 1905 and started his plans on his fourteen acre "Beauty Ranch" and his dream mansion "Wolf House," (London xi). In 1907, Charmain and London embarked on a planned seven year journey aboard the Snark, but the trip only lasted 27 months because of London's health (Merriman). London continued to keep himself busy, publishing many works including *Burning Daylight* (1910) loosely based on farming at his ranch. London's health continued to fail and after his beloved "Wolf House" burned down in 1913, he and Charmain also faced debt. London kept writing and kept himself busy against doctors' wishes. He prophesized that "I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time," (qtd. In Merriman). Certainly London used his time wisely, making a profound mark on American literature. He died on November 22, 1916.

More than one hundred years after it was published *The Call of the Wild* is still a classic book. It has been re-printed, reviewed and criticized but has never been out-of-print. That alone attests to the profundity of London's words. What London assumed would be a spin-off of one of his earlier dog stories entitled "Batard," soon turned into a 32,000 word novella of the primordial beast within his protagonist Buck ("THE FICTION . . ."). London admits that he was unconsciously creating a story with more intensity and rich symbolism than his original, "Batard." His daughter Joan London quoted his saying, "I plead guilty . . . I did not mean to do it," (qtd in Labor). Yet London must have been semi-aware of his own experiences influencing the actions of Buck.

The plot of the story is well known, it's action can be summed up in a few sentences. Buck lives as a pampered dog in San Francisco and his stolen by a servant and sold for fifty dollars. He makes his way north to be a sled-dog in the Yukon. Through many life experiences he retrogresses into a wild dog, answering the call of his ancestors. Yet as the plot can be easily defined, the depth of Buck's experiences is something else all together.

London, in *Buck*, created a protagonist that is appealing to the reader because of his lack of sense of morality. The reader can suspend reality, where human emotions and values dominate, and identify with a character that has instincts and does what he can to survive. This instinctual behavior translates to London's own life experiences. As a child he worked to survive and did

was he had to do, including living as a hobo “. . . begging my way from door to door, wandering over the United States and sweating bloody sweats in slums and prisons,” (qtd in Merriman).

Buck learns the laws of his land quickly. He adapts to the situations in his life with Darwinian skill. The most prominent adaptation being his respect of the “law of club and fang” :

He was beaten (he knew that); but he was not broken. He saw, once and for all, that he stood no chance against a man with a club. He had learned the lesson, and in all his after life he never forgot it. The club was a revelation. It was his introduction to the reign of primitive law, and met the introduction halfway. (London 12).

This realization begins a transformation in Buck. It opens the door for him to experience the world as a primitive dog, a wild dog. He starts to feel different towards humans, toward other dogs and toward everyday life. Nature becomes a driving factor for him and he is open to things that he never would have done as a lap dog in San Francisco. This adaptation can be seen in London’s own life. London took many jobs as a child and a teen. He adapted to many different lifestyles with many different rules. Though he didn’t succeed at everything he tried, London gleaned valuable life lessons and experiences from his undertakings. As an oyster pirate in the San Francisco Bay, he had his boat pirated and removed of its anchor and ropes and instead of dwelling on his failures, he moved on (Merriman). Buck shows these adaptive characteristics in the novella. He doesn’t dwell on his inability to conquer the man with the club, but instead accepts the primitive law and moves on in his journey.

Buck also has ambition, like London. Buck desires more than anything to defeat Spitz and become the lead dog in the sled. Even after his crushing battle with Spitz, Buck struggles with Perrault and Francois to have the lead position:

The driver went about his work, and he called to Buck when he was ready to put him in his old place in front of Dave. Buck retreated two or three steps. Francois followed him up, whereupon he again retreated. After some time of this, Francois threw down the club, thinking Buck feared a thrashing. But Buck was in open revolt. He wanted, not to escape a clubbing, but to have the leadership. It was his by right. He had earned it, and he would not be content with less. (London 39).

Buck gets his lead. His open ambition for success and determination get him that leadership among the other sled dogs, and they can see his determination. The sled dogs do not try to undermine Buck as he did with Spitz. This ambition was clear in London’s life as well. London moved up from humble beginnings as a low-class laborer and became a celebrated novelist and traveler. London’s ambition kept him busy with “Beauty Ranch” and his plans on “Wolf House.” He owned many boats and went on many adventures with his wife Charmain. He supported his mother with his writing and ended his life with a large body of work, much of which is well known today. How could London have accomplished so much if not for his strong drive? Buck acquired the same drive that his creator possessed.

Buck finds in John Thornton a companion to which he shows true loyalty. Thornton saved Buck from three inexperienced

sled-runners who tried to travel during the spring thaw. The other dogs in Buck's sled team were not as lucky as he. Thornton's act to Buck was complete salvation. Buck finds that Thornton is to him like no other human being had ever been. He shows complete loyalty, and even harbors affection for his new owner— "Love, genuine passionate love, was his for the first time. This he had never experienced at Judge Miller's. . . . With the Judge's sons, hunting and trapping, it had been a working partnership; with the Judge himself, a stately and dignified friendship. But love that was feverish and burning, that was adoration, that was madness, it had taken John Thornton to arouse," (London 62). This revelation of love is something new to Buck and he takes it very seriously. He learns that his life, even among all of its experiences, would not have been full without loyalty and love.

London's life also shows parallels in this aspect. His first marriage, to Bessie Maddern, could be seen as Buck's relationship with the Judge. He had a partnership and friendship with Bessie. They had two kids, they lived happily for a while, but it wasn't London's most pure relationship. It wasn't until he met Charmain Kittredge that he found the most pure form of love. The two were a perfect pair. Charmain complimented London's adventurous personality and her ambitions matched his. After London's death, Charmain kept up their ranch and presided over his estate. Charmain published several more of London's books and even one of her own, entitled *The Book of Jack London* (1921), (Merriman). She was the John Thornton to London's Buck.

The end of the novella details "the call" and Buck's need to search it out. He spends less time with Thornton here and more time searching for himself. He endures nature, sometimes staying away from the camp for days on end. A blow to Buck is the deaths of the entire camp at the hands of the indigenous people in Canada. It seems that after all of his ties have been severed from the human world, that Buck accepts the call that has been pulling him since he entered the Northland. That is, the call of the wild. Buck accepts the wilderness and the primitiveness that his ancestors used to live by:

But he is not always alone. When the long winter nights come on and the wolves follow their meat into the lower valleys, he may be seen running at the head of the pack through the pale moonlight or glimmering borealis, leaping gigantic above his fellows, his great throat a-bellow as he sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack. (London 89).

Buck becomes the epitome of primitive and of the law of fang. He retrogresses to the most pure form of himself, calling upon something more ancient and infinite than any of the laws he learns from man. His transformation and growth through the novella ultimately show his strength as a leader and characterize the ending perfection of nature.

London also ends his life with a sigh of perfection. He did not believe in spending his days preserving himself like so many of us do today. He lived everyday to the greatest extent and spent his time doing what he liked. What else could he ask of his life than to be a fulfilling one? And from all he did, from his writing to his travelling, London's life was time well spent.

Jack London was a prolific and insightful author who used his life experiences to create wonderful pieces of literature. In

The Call of the Wild, he created a protagonist that appealed to people of all ages and cemented the novella as an American classic. His own life supported the goals Buck and his experiences translated into the journey the book accounted. London created a real novella, from the point of view of a dog, and hit home on human issues and the strength of self and nature.

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Picture created by Brittany Green

The Transformation of “The Original Caped Crusader”

By Logan Burd

His deductions might be “elementary,” but his constant transformation of character is certainly not. Sherlock Holmes has long been the master of mystery in film. However, this dynamic character has sometimes undergone dramatic changes from movie to movie. In most cases, this has little to do with the actor playing the role, and much to do with the culture of Hollywood at the time of the film’s release. A sociocultural analysis such as this assumes that everything in the characterization of Sherlock Holmes is there for a reason (Dickerson 11). In this way, Holmes in part does not play the character British author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—writer of the famed book series—intended him to. In some cases, Holmes is not even playing himself; he is portraying American culture (and sometimes even British culture) as a whole.

In the year 1922, John Barrymore starred as the famous sleuth in one of the premiere Holmes movies, the silent *Sherlock Holmes*. In the years leading up to its release, America was going through a revolutionary time, with the first commercial radio broadcast, the passing of the 18th Constitutional Amendment prohibiting the sale or purchase of alcohol and the 19th Amendment granting women suffrage in 1920, and the end of the bloodiest war in American history to that point, World War I in 1919 (Rosenberg). Americans seemed to be on top of the world, with ecstatic women lucky enough to see their husbands back from war and men lucky enough to come home to a new radio. *Sherlock Holmes* clearly reflected some of the values and motifs of this “roaring” American era. In lieu of Holmes’ infamous addiction to cocaine, Barrymore played a romantic. With masses of young men returning from WWI, Holmes’ “uncharacteristic romantic interludes,” as one Internet Movie Database user reviewer describes, could very well have had such an important role in the movie because he is representing these young soldiers (Internet Movie Database). Complementing this old-fashioned goodness, the fact that this film disregards Holmes’ cocaine addiction for a more romantic approach could be due to the fact that this movie was released shortly after prohibition set in.

Critics of this analytic viewpoint might protest that these values are not necessarily the values of America, but perhaps the actor playing the role, or the director telling him what to do. One such critic, writer for Turner Classic Movies online, Brett Woods, writes “There would have been a [cocaine] needle and there wouldn’t have been a honeymoon if Rex Ingram [popular director of the time] had filmed *Sherlock Holmes*” (Woods). In this opinion, Woods implies that the characterization of Holmes

is such because director Albert Parker made it that way. While this may play a small part in each of the characterizations, I contend that further evidence will be too overwhelming to hold such a strong opinion.

In the next movie I examined, 1939's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Basil Rathbone starred as Holmes. Rathbone, who has played Holmes more than any other actor—14 times—played a “clever and classy”, yet “playful” and “keen” Holmes. Dr. John Watson, Holmes’ right hand man, was characterized as a complete dunce (Hakari). In the late 1930’s, America was flirting with war in Europe. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had Hollywood executives shelling out propagandized movies to get Americans on board with military intervention. These characterizations could be subtle attempts to show a vital message (Snow 61). In one corner, Rathbone is portraying America. In the other, Nigel Bruce, who plays Watson, depicts Great Britain—a lesser hero, but still capable of helping America in its endeavors. More specifically, the characterization of Holmes as an intellectual, refined man in charge of every situation could easily be an attempt to portray President Roosevelt. Similarly, Holmes’ character was also described as stern and inquisitive (Hakari). To go along with this, it may be found interesting that in World War I, Rathbone served in the Liverpool Scottish 2nd Battalion as an intelligence officer, and even received a Military Cross for his courage (Internet Movie Database). This patriotism may have led to acceptance of such a propagandized role, if that in fact was the case, because the United Kingdom was a keen ally of the United States in both World Wars.

In 1954, a television series titled “*Sherlock Holmes*” appeared on NBC and ran only 39 episodes. Ronald Howard played Holmes, a “flighty, playful man possessed with an almost juvenile sense of humor” (Miller). The years following World War II, the so called “baby-boom era,” saw joyous Americans seeing their loved ones, and in the early 1950’s America’s economy started looking upward. As a result, popular television shows, including “*I Love Lucy*,” “*The Red Skelton Show*” and “*The Jack Benny Program*,” were created to capitalize on America’s collective good mood (Screen Source). Along the same lines, “*Sherlock Holmes*” gave Americans a “lighthearted” series that starred the famous detective (Miller). For instance, in episode 38, Watson found a detached diamond tooth. After putting an ad in the lost and found section of the newspaper, he checks daily to see if anyone reports a missing incisor. After glancing at the newspaper for some time, Watson cleverly proclaims to Holmes “Everything’s lost in this lost and found!” (Internet Movie Database). Otherwise, Watson, so often a dunce, was a capable and smart sidekick in this series, interestingly the only Holmes television series ever produced in America (Internet Movie Database). In essence, in this time when America’s sense of humor allowed for a lighthearted series, “*Sherlock Holmes*” delivered.

In 1975, an “entirely new *Sherlock Holmes*” was introduced in *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (Canby). In this film, produced in both America and Britain, Watson tricks a drugged-out Holmes into meeting psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Holmes has reached rock bottom. He has not had a case in months, he has lost much of his deduction skill, and he irrationally worries about

his arch-nemesis, Professor Moriarty (Valentin, Kehr). Both the United Kingdom and United States began the 1970's with an economy familiar to much of us today. In Britain, spending was cut significantly to conserve money (Watt). In America, it was a "decade of pessimism." Their unemployment hovered around the same level that we see today and they too were in a recession (Schwenk). Recently, an American comic book has appeared titled "The Adventures of Unemployed Man" ("Adventures"). In this same manner, *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* showed a Sherlock Holmes with no workload, so Americans and Brits could see that they were not alone. Also around this same time, the Soviet Union continued their unruliness with the allies during the Cold War. Holmes, in the movie, had a constant worry of his enemy Moriarty. This could be a direct connection to the real world, where many Americans were worried about the threat of the Cold War turning into a "total war." Going along with this same theme, Holmes engages in an uncharacteristic sword fight, which could represent the battle between America/Britain and the USSR.

From *Sherlock Holmes* to *Sherlock Holmes, 2009* brought us our last notable Holmes film. Prominently different than past portrayals, Robert Downey Jr. plays a "tough, sarcastic," "rascally," "awesomely sexy," "wayward," "charismatic" action star in this new film (Pais, Rodriguez, Shoji, Tse, Wilhelm). This film, directed by Guy Ritchie, is clearly aiming at teens and young adults, with fast, action-packed scenes. In America, Generation Y—or those of us born between 1982 and 2002—have often been described as "high performance and high maintenance" and "cynical" (Williams). While Downey Jr. was not born during this range, his acting style in this movie clearly panders to it. Movie critics have observed that Downey Jr. transformed Holmes into a "master of fisticuffs" and more than one critic, including Roger Ebert, likened Holmes and Watson to Batman and Robin (Wilhelm, Ebert). Converting Sherlock Holmes into a character that is more likely to use his fists than his magnifying glass is the best way for Ritchie to draw the broadest audience. In America, teens dig this stuff. However, other countries also loved the movie. For example, the aforementioned quote calling Holmes "awesomely sexy" came from a Japanese newspaper, and a quote calling him "superhero-like" came from China. In addition, the journal that claimed Downey Jr.'s Holmes was a "master of fisticuffs" came from South Africa. All around the world, this characterization of a tough, sexy Holmes grabs our attention and never lets it go. The analysis of this film, while perhaps the simplest, is also arguably the most widespread, blatant, and effective.

For almost 90 years, Sherlock Holmes has been America's favorite "classy, flawed, romantic, fun, sexy" detective. Often, the man Holmes becomes in each particular film reflects the happenings of the country and world around him. Without these changes, ranging from moderate to severe, these films would perhaps not draw the same audiences that they do. The films' popularity depends on how effective the director and actors are in portraying American culture. Naysayers often disagree with sociocultural analyses, claiming that characters play their parts regardless of what culture is like, and any connections are pure coincidence. I, on the other hand, believe that everything in film is there for a reason. We just have to find the reason.

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Photo taken by Becca Dickinson

“Death is Merely a Pause”:

Emily Dickinson’s Transcendentalist Tendencies in Three Poems

By Brittany Cook



Brittany Cook is a junior at Heidelberg University studying English. She is the associate co-editor in chief of the Kilikilik and the vice-president of the Euglossian Society. Besides writing, she enjoys participating in the concert choir and show choir.

Emily Dickinson’s poems focused mainly on death and immortality; she believed in transcendentalism, or the idea that a perfect spiritual reality exists that “transcends” the observed and is known simply through perception. These themes and this idea lend themselves to reader-oriented criticism, psychoanalytical criticism, and feminist criticism, which can be applied to Dickinson’s works “Because I could not stop for Death—”, “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—” and “There’s a certain Slant of Light”.

Reader-oriented criticism makes the text act “as a stimulus for eliciting various past experiences, thoughts, and ideas of the reader, those found in both real life and in past reading experiences” (Bressler 358). This criticism changes the reader into the critic; with this theory, the text creates an individual image for each different reader.

Dickinson’s poem “Because I could not stop for Death—” is one of her more important pieces, as it presents the idea of death as a gentleman caller bringing the speaker to eternal life. In this poem’s case, the actual reader and the implied reader are both people who have faced death in some way. The narrator is a woman who has faced Death herself, even though Emily Dickinson implies that “Death [is] a person she knew and trusted, or believed she could trust” (Davis 111). The horizons of expectation are evident in this text. It is set in the time period it was written—the 19th century—because of the central action. Death is presented as a gentleman taking a lady on a carriage ride, which was the usual form of courtship in this era. This was something that was not uncommon; in fact, it was one of the most universal actions in 1863. This action dates the poem and the poem remains in the same time period throughout the entire work.

As a reader of “Because I could not stop for Death”, it is worrying, yet reassuring. Because it forms Death into a person,

it creates an unsettling feeling, because it presents an all too common part of humankind, but it also indicates that there is hope for eternal life. Immortality was present within the text of the poem; “the Carriage held but just Ourselves—/And Immortality” (3-4). The character of Immortality was along on the ride with the narrator and Death.

In the case of “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—” the actual reader is someone who has lived through life and potentially witnessed the death of someone that he or she loved. In accordance with that, the implied reader is the same; it is a person familiar with death is to whom Dickinson was writing. The narrator of the text is much more difficult to recognize; I picture the narrator is walking through a cemetery and spies a mausoleum, prompting the narrator to consider death and immortality. As Charles R. Anderson comments in Davis’s book 14 by Emily Dickinson, “Stanza one gives a religious view of death, with a confident belief in personal immortality; . . . two, a humanist view of life in a world vibrant with sensations, but precariously enjoyed; three, a scientific view of cosmic peace achieved by extinction” (26).

My first “horizon of expectation” would be the usage of the term “alabaster”. The word describes death, since it is inanimate, cold, hard, and smooth, but it is hardly ever used in our time. The poem begins, then, with the idea that the poem is set in the past. As it continues on, the horizon begins to change. Line 6 says “Grand go the Years—in the Crescent—above them”, which causes the poem to jump forward, past our time period, and into eternity. More specifically, Mother Angela Carson states that “in the Crescent” references the “curve of the universe” (Davis 24), which relates to eternal life. Heaven is eternal, and so is immortality.

My personal identity theme as I read this makes me consider what it actually means to die. Yes, they are “safe in their alabaster chambers” and are untouched by any sort of light or suffering as they wait for eternal life, but what is death? Is it the “worlds” and their “arcs” as the “firmaments row”? Or is it the fact that no matter what holds you here—the “diadems” and the “doges” which reference kings and political figures—will “drop” and “surrender” just like every other human being. Even if we all die, “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—” reminds me of eternal life.

One of Dickinson’s later poems “There’s a certain Slant of Light” is another verse that considers death, life, and the journey towards eternity. Sharon Cameron, in her book Lyric Time, emphasizes that “death is a metaphor for winter light and winter light is a metaphor for death” (17). Like “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—” the implied reader and the actual reader of “There’s a certain Slant of Light” are very similar: they are both familiar with death. The narrator, on the other hand, is someone who is not only familiar with death, but life as well.

The first stanza implies a religious service at a cathedral. In our time, cathedrals do exist, but in the 19th century, they were more prominent in the area that Dickinson lived. Much like “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—”, the theme of the poem changes throughout, from a dated first stanza to the end, where eternity is questioned: “’tis like the Distance/On the look of Death—” (15-16). Yvor Winters, in Davis’s book, says that this poem deals “with the inexplicable fact of change, of the absolute cleavage between successive states of being, and it is not unnatural that. . . [this poem] should be related to the theme of death” (32). This is evident with my interpretation of the text; the poem is all about change and the split between life and death.

All three poems create an image of death, immortality, and eternal life in the 19th century. They situated her posthumously as a major literary contributor, but not until much after her death in 1886. Reader-oriented criticism, when applied to “Because I could not stop for Death—”, “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—”, and “There’s a certain Slant of Light”, gives her readers the idea of mortality versus eternal life.

Another main theme that is present in all three of Dickinson’s poems is the psychoanalytical idea of archetypes. The psychoanalytical theory creates many interesting points, like the sexual connotations, archetypes, and the focus on death. Dickinson’s references to death appear to have double meanings when analyzed psychoanalytically.

“Because I could not stop for Death—” has a central theme, and that theme “is the interpretation of mortal experience from the standpoint of immortality. . . the defining of eternity as timelessness” (Davis 107). Immortality in the poem is displayed by the many archetypes within the text. The lines 8 and 9 say “We passed the Setting Sun—/Or rather— He passed us—” personifying the sun. “He” refers “to the sun, suggesting that the sun had set on this apparently dead speaker” (Engle 75). This also applies to the “cycle of life”. When she sees the setting sun, she asserts “her place in the universe and [recognizes] that when she dies, something of her lives on” (75). The sun, in an archetypal sense, implies Freud’s consciousness. It also is associated with the passage of time and life, which is the basis of the poem.

In the fourth stanza, as well, she mentions “For only Gossamer, my Gown—My Tippet—only Tulle—” Making the “bridal veil” into a “Tippet” (a scarf-like piece of cloth that is worn by religious figures) creates imagery that suggests some sort of religious service—most likely a wedding or funeral. Yet her “Gossamer Gown” can only be seen as a bridal gown; the narrator is getting married to Death and will be bound to him for eternity. The fact that Dickinson implies the narrator’s marriage to Death makes the reader understand that Dickinson had many problems herself dealing with death around her.

In “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—”, water is one of the most common symbols of creation, death, and resurrection. At the end of the poem “soundless as dots—on a Disc of snow—” can refer to water, hence hinting at the idea of rebirth. According to Frank, by the end of the poem, the “alabaster graves” were “white on white, they are sure to remain invisible” (212). Archetypal colors also are important. Snow, one of the most important images in the poem, is white, which means timelessness and innocence, but can also mean death, terror, and the supernatural. The sun is also a major archetypal feature; it is implied in the poem that the dead do not have to face light: “untouched by Morning—and untouched by Noon—” (2-3). The lack of light means the lack of consciousness, the lack of wisdom, and the lack of life.

Not only is this poem related to death, but also to Freud’s idea of repressed sexuality. Bernhard Frank explains that “meek members of the Resurrection” implies the “male sexual organ,” and even though the “sexual aura is reluctant to leave” (“rafters—sloping roof beams—are of satin”), it returns with a feminine twist: the words “Crescent,” “Arcs,” and “Disc” suggest the yonic symbol (213).

Kher believes that “paradoxically, death becomes our only hope, the only thing that can free us from the existential pathos” (192). Many of Dickinson’s poems are linked with death, and some of these moments are associated with the more specific death of her mother. She uses the term “white as alabaster” in a letter to symbolize death and she also uses allusions to snow to imply death: “[her mother] slipped from our fingers like a flake gathered by the wind, and is now part of the drift called ‘the Indefinite’” (Davis 28).

“There’s a certain Slant of Light” contains many allusions to archetypes. The term “slant” indicates that the light is being refracted and turned so one could actually see the light, and the “winter afternoon” indicates that the end of the day is near. Both of these ideas are indicators of death and the end of life. The usage of the term “light” suggests consciousness, and Pollak says that “light is the traditional symbol of spiritual illumination” (218). Light also signifies the passage of time and life, which this poem displays entirely.

The mention of “shadows” also implies the color black or darkness in general. This indicates that death is mysterious and unknown, like a part of the unconsciousness. “There’s a certain Slant of Light” is entirely about the conflict between the consciousness and the unconsciousness. The number of stanzas and the number of lines in each stanza is four, which is significant to the life cycle, the four seasons, and the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Dahl states in his article in Davis’s book that

the third stanza's reference to "Air" can be taken in a multitude of ways: "benign and natural", as it brings "Heavenly Hurt" and "imperial affliction", or possibly the "heir", or Jesus Christ.

Perrine, as stated in Davis's book, believes that the "Cathedral Tunes" that are playing are most likely funeral music due to their "Heft". "This quality of the mood may be caused by... the image of death which it calls up" (34) says Perrine about the "stillness of the moment". The archetypes used in this poem are symbolic and create a mood that only Dickinson can produce.

Dickinson's poems are full of archetypes, repressed sexuality, mentions of death and how this all relates to the unconscious. The insinuation of unconsciousness and the archetypes of light counter the idea of immortality and darkness. Kher states that "immortality is not beyond death... but an accompaniment of death" (213) and Dickinson thrived on that theme.

In Dickinson's case, feminism was very important to the success of her writing. Most of her texts could be narrated by either male or female, which makes her poetry very versatile. Pollak explains that Dickinson's "internal difference/ where the meanings, are" (as said in "There's a Certain Slant of Light") indicate that "her individuality is the source of her suffering" (218).

Dickinson's culture influenced the feminist views that can be contributed to the text of "Because I could not stop for Death"; because the narrator was so bold in her actions, perhaps the typical female of the time had more personal control over her actions. Engle says the narrator of this poem, and ultimately Dickinson, are both aware "that she is not what her people and her times expect her to be" (73). At one point in Dickinson's life, she considered joining a women's literary subculture (Pollak 223), and when she attempted to get some of her poems published in the *Republican*, she sought out Higginson, a literary critic who was sympathetic to female writers. For Dickinson, it was imperative to find a publisher who supported such causes, since women were still not considered worthy to be literary figures.

The wording of her poem indicates her feminist qualities. The fact that Dickinson states "I could not stop for Death" instead of "I would not stop for Death" is important in the statement of the poem; Engle says in her article that "stopping, for this speaker, is not discretionary. It is simply not her nature to stop for Death" (74). The woman is shown as much more of a person with her own will, instead of someone who would stand idly by. This is Dickinson's attitude towards women in society; this strong narrator "looks her own death in the eye and... achieves... [the] perspective essential to living one's life fully" (Engle 74).

Yet her culture also influenced her attitude; the region she was raised in helped form her thoughts. Living in New England at the time made writers see only in the outlook that was taught there. Christianity was one of the most important ideals in the New England states, and this is evident in her poems. Her culture also was infused by the idea of American Transcendental-

ism. This idea drove the majority of her writing: transcendentalism was a philosophy that stressed the instinctive and spiritual ideas above the practical or observed. This was a revolutionary idea, and “she had all the elements of a culture that has broken up” (Davis 104).

Her culture made her often question her religion, and this is one poem that gives us insight on that question. It is hard to understand what exactly it is she is addressing in “Because I could not stop for Death” but she seems to doubt the idea of death and immortality. She seems to answer her own question by the end, as “the final stanza is not an extension of knowledge beyond the grave but simply the most fitting coda for her poem” (Davis 116).

Specifically in “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers”, women are not mentioned, but it is implied that both women and men are the “meek members of the Resurrection” (4), and there is no discrimination in death. More specifically, there is much feminine imagery; as mentioned before, terms like “crescent”, “arcs”, and “Disc” all can be interpreted as symbols for the woman. The implication of this imagery can be associated with psychoanalytic theory and the idea of the “The Good Mother”, who signifies birth, growth, abundance, and life.

Dickinson’s culture, of course, affected the way she felt towards women. When approaching Higginson about publishing this poem, she seems pleading yet strong, stating “are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?” and “I enclose my name—asking you, if you please . . . that you will not betray me—” (Pollak 223). Even though she was a female, she was bold, and expected to be published just as a man would. Emily Dickinson was a very brave woman with her writing, and her poems displayed that quality. But, as many of her poems demonstrate, she is concerned with death and immortality; eternity does not care whether a soul is male or female. In the “firmament”, the “meek members of the Resurrection” will not be subject to criticism or discrimination, no matter the sex. “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—” was another poem that Emily Dickinson used to express her Transcendentalist ideals. Her culture, affected by its view on women, is made evident in the course of the poem.

One of Dickinson’s later poems “There’s a certain Slant of Light” is another verse that considers death, life, and the journey towards eternity. Sharon Cameron, in her book *Lyric Time*, emphasizes that “death is a metaphor for winter light and winter light is a metaphor for death” (17). Like “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—” the implied reader and the actual reader of “There’s a certain Slant of Light” are very similar: they are both familiar with death. The narrator, on the other hand, is someone who is not only familiar with death, but life as well.

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Dickinson’s writing is clearly not narrated by one sex or the other, but remains ambiguous. “There’s a certain Slant of Light” presents the idea of repression: words like “oppresses,” “heft,” “scar,” “weight,” “hurt,” “despair,” “affliction” and “the look of Death” support this conjecture. The “certain slant of light”, for Dickinson, is the “ultimate realization of truth and beauty” (Davis 36), but can this also be related to her sex?

Her culture influenced her writing because of the area in which she lived and wrote. Winters also discusses this poem in Sewall’s book, where he states that “Dickinson was a product of the New England tradition of moral Calvinism; her dissatisfaction with her tradition led to her questioning most of its theology and discarding much of it” (39).

Dickinson was a strong woman, and her poetry displays that. She wrote about mature subjects, and even though her culture forced her to believe she was a second-class citizen, “she rose above that and she is one of the greatest lyric poets of all time” (34).

Not only have scholars interpreted Dickinson as an apparent feminist, but they have found hidden archetypes and Freudian themes in her writings. Emily Dickinson displayed many different thoughts and ideas in “Because I could not stop for Death—”, “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—” and “There’s a certain Slant of Light”, but overall ended with the theme that there is a higher reality that can only be found through insight. “Dickinson affirms life and its continuity . . . death is merely a pause” (Kher 213).

Because I could not stop for Death (712)

*Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.*

*We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –*

*We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –*

Or rather – He passed us –
The Dews drew quivering and chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity –

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers (216)

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—
Untouched by Morning
And untouched by Noon—
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection—
Rafter of Satin—and Roof of Stone!

Grand go the Years—in the Crescent—above them—
Worlds scoop their Arcs—
And Firmaments—row—
Diadems—drop—and Doges—surrender—
Soundless as dots—on a Disc of Snow—

There's a certain Slant of light (258)

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –
'Tis the Seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –

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Photo taken by Marisha Sullivan

Dependency and Controlling Spouses: Women in Noir

By Brittany Green



Hipster Brittany Green dabbles in the relatively unknown sport of underground bug collecting--it gets very competitive. After graduating, she plans to become the elite ruler of the Earth. She is awesome, all should bow to her greatness.

The role of women in noir is a topic of much debate among film scholars. Three examples of films featuring strong women are *Scarlet Street* (1945), directed by Fritz Lang, *Gilda* (1946), directed by Charles Vidor, and *Witness to Murder* (1954), directed by Roy Rowland. Each of these films features a different character archetype in the lead female role. In these films, there are three intelligent and capable women, and yet these women find themselves helpless, hated, and both dependent upon and controlled by the men in their lives. They also do not conform to the traditional female roles of their time.

In these films, each of the women fulfills a different character archetype. Kitty, played by Joan Bennett in *Scarlet Street* can be thought of as a traditional femme fatale, however, she lacks much of the cunning that many other femme fatales seem to have. Throughout the entire plot of the movie, Kitty is controlled by her abusive boyfriend Johnny, played by Dan Duryea. This controlling is sometimes suggestive of Johnny being Kitty's pimp, which was their relationship in the French version of the film, *La Chienne* (1931). This pimp/prostitute relationship is not specifically spoken of in the American version because the production code would not allow it (Spicer 124). Johnny came up with the idea to con the bumbling Chris Cross, played by Edward G. Robinson. He then coerces Kitty into going through with the plan. She tricks Chris into believing that she is in love with him and convinces him to give her money for a new apartment and for clothes so that she can become a successful actress. In the end, she tells him that she finds him disgusting, and lets him know, saying "You're old and ugly and I'm sick of you! Sick, sick, sick!" (*Scarlet Street*).

In *Witness to Murder*, Cheryl, played by Barbara Stanwyck, is a woman who witnesses a murder in a neighboring apartment building through her window. When the police go to check the scene of the crime, they find nothing and assure Cheryl that she is dreaming. Later, the murderous ex-Nazi neighbor Albert Richter, played by George Sanders, tries to make Cheryl look insane by typing letters to him using her typewriter. She is eventually put under observation at a mental institution until she is retrieved by a police officer that she had been seeing, Larry, played by Gary Merrill. Cheryl embodies the female victim in this film.

Gilda in *Gilda*, played by Rita Hayworth, can be defined as the good-bad girl. She enters as the new wife of Ballin Mundson, played by George Macready. She is also the ex-lover of Johnny, played by Glenn Ford. Ballin is a German man living in Buenos Aires, Argentina. *Gilda* is set up to be a femme fatale, and is sometimes regarded as the classic example of a femme fatale. This is an easy conclusion to draw. Before *Gilda* enters the picture, Ballin says to Johnny, "Gambling and women don't mix" (*Gilda*). *Gilda* later says to Johnny, "I hate you so much that I would destroy myself to take you down with me" (*Gilda*). With this type of framing, it seems that *Gilda* might be a femme fatale, however, she does not follow through with her words. Instead, she

tries to avoid violent solutions to her problems. The only person that dies or ends up doomed in the film is Ballin, but it is as a result of his actions, not Gilda's. He tries to kill Johnny and Gilda, and the servant Uncle Pio, played by Steven Geray, kills Ballin in defense of Johnny and Gilda.

The earliest movie of the three is *Scarlet Street*, and one would expect the woman to be the most dependent in this film. As it turns out, this is apparent right from her entrance into the film. From the very start of the movie, Kitty appears as a damsel in distress when Chris sees her being beaten up by a man on the street. He immediately rushes to her aid. Later we discover that the man that was beating her, who mysteriously disappears before Chris sees his face, was Johnny, Kitty's fiancé.

Later, we find out that Kitty is unemployed, and her roommate Millie, played by Margaret Lindsay says that she has not been paying her share of the rent. Johnny's pet name for her throughout the film is "Lazylegs." Her excuse for her shiftlessness is that she is "in love." She claims that Millie could not possibly understand why she was always late to work, and why she can't find a job now because she has never been in love. This love also causes Kitty to tolerate constant battery from Johnny. He also steals money from her purse on a regular basis throughout the film. Her excuse for that is that they are "in love" as well. It seems as though she is dependent on Johnny to validate her existence. Johnny repays her love with frequent beatings.

When Kitty first has coffee with Chris after he saves her from Johnny (who Chris thinks is a mugger) Kitty is fascinated with Chris because she thinks he is rich. She believes he is a famous painter, and he becomes infatuated with her. When Johnny finds this out later, he is the one that comes up with the plan to have Kitty seduce him for his money. Kitty does not think she is capable of this at first, and doesn't want to, but in the end, she begins her seduction of Chris. Chris is not actually rich, so he must turn to theft to get the money that he thinks he needs to win Kitty's affections.

Johnny continues to be the brains behind the con throughout the film. He tries to prove to Kitty that Chris is not actually a famous painter, so he attempts to sell some of Chris' paintings on commission on the boardwalk. The paintings are noticed by a famous art critic who insists upon knowing who painted the masterpieces. When the art critic finds his way to Kitty and Chris' apartment, Johnny says that Kitty is the artist. Johnny insists that Kitty keep up the façade, even though she doesn't want to. This move ends up making Kitty and him a lot of money, as the paintings begin selling for thousands of dollars. This shows both how Johnny forces his way into Kitty's life and controls her.

Chris is a rather pathetic character. His only vice is that he wants to be loved by a young, attractive woman. When he meets Kitty, he believes she is exactly what he has been longing for. He is a married man, and his wife, played by Rosalind Ivan, is a miserable, domineering woman, that does not respect Chris at all. He is emasculated by her constantly, and is overshadowed by her deceased ex-husband whose portrait still hangs on the wall. During one of the scenes, we see his wife walk over to a bird cage, with Chris standing meekly in the background of the shot. This birdcage seems to symbolize that Chris is trapped with her in a loveless marriage. According to *Women in Noir*, this scene "suggests that a routinised boredom and a sense of stifling entrapment are characteristic of marriage" (Harvey 42). When Chris discovers that her husband is not actually dead, he pushes him back into his wife's life, and it signifies his freedom to go off and do as he likes.

As domineering as his wife is, she also seems to depend upon Chris. After her husband died, she refused to touch any of the insurance money that he left behind. She complains about Chris spending all of his money on paints, and badgers him to buy her a radio. She clearly has the money to buy herself a radio, but she won't touch her own money. She feels that her husband should be the one to take care of buying these sorts of things, even though he doesn't want a radio. She behaves as though the reason they don't have any money is Chris' fault, even though she has a drawer of untouched insurance money of her own.

The film *Gilda*, Gilda appears to be an independent woman for the most part. She did marry Ballin for his money after knowing him for about a day, and she does not turn down any of the fancy jewelry that he buys for her. However, she doesn't seem to care about his money as much as the men in the film care about money. She also seems to regret her hasty marriage decision immediately. One theme that remains consistent from *Scarlet Street* is that Gilda's love interests seem to want total control over her life.

Gilda fears her first husband Ballin. He treats her like his property several times through the film. Ballin tells Gilda that Johnny will be looking after her. He says, "Johnny takes care of all my things" (*Gilda*). Gilda and Johnny are ex-lovers, and Johnny decides to take his role of caretaker very seriously. Gilda begins cheating on her husband right after they are married, and Johnny is always trying to cover her tracks. He resents her for cheating on her husband, who has become a friend and mentor to

Johnny. In protection of his boss, he takes charge of Gilda, telling her "From now on, you go anywhere you please with anyone you please, but I'm gonna take you there and I'm gonna pick you up and bring you home. Get that? Exactly the way I'd take and pick up his laundry (Gilda)". Gilda is objectified by the two men, and it feeds her rebellious nature. She tries to make Johnny jealous by dancing with other men, and going out and getting drunk with them. In one scene, Gilda attempts to seduce Johnny while dancing together at a costume party, but Johnny is too loyal to his boss to succumb. Later, it is hinted that Gilda had not been unfaithful to Ballin when Uncle Pio says, "Gilda did not do all those things you have been losing sleep over" (Gilda).

Eventually, because of his shady dealings, Ballin dies, and Johnny swoops in and marries his ex-lover, Gilda. Unfortunately for Gilda, Johnny decides he should punish her for cheating on Ballin. He proceeds to ignore her completely, while also having his security guards chase away any of the male company that she keeps. Gilda becomes extremely frustrated, and eventually throws herself at Johnny's feet, begging him to be a husband to her. When he refuses, she decides to run away. She becomes a nightclub singer, where she thinks she might be free from the cruelty of Johnny. She meets someone who appears to be a lawyer while working in the nightclub. He tells her that he can get an annulment on her marriage to Johnny. In fact, the man works for Johnny. He takes her directly back to Johnny, where she is forced to face him again. In the end, they decide they love each other, and they go back to the United States. This is supposed to be a happy ending, where we are lead to believe that they will live happily ever after. According to "Gilda Didn't Do Any of Those Things", the film's producer, Virginia Van Upp was of the opinion that 'her women should always find a happy ending in romance" (Martin 214). Despite Van Upp's words, the film makes it difficult to believe that Gilda and Johnny could ever be happy together. The couple seems to have hated each other from the start, and Gilda still does not have the independence that she has been craving for the entire movie.

Witness to Murder is about a woman named Cheryl Draper, who witnesses a murder in the apartment building across from hers. She reports the murder to the police, but when they go to look at the murderer's apartment, they find nothing. When they go talk to Cheryl, they tell her that she must have had a very vivid dream that she saw Richter kill a woman. Cheryl begins to attempt to investigate for herself, and she finds some evidence, but Richter is clever, and he comes up with justification for every clue that she finds. Then he tries to make Cheryl look delusional, and makes it look as if she is threatening his life. Cheryl is put under observation at a mental hospital as a result. According to Women in Noir, Cheryl "witnesses the murder by a noted writer (who turns out to have Nazi sympathies) of his mistress... before his imminent wedding to a wealthy woman" (Kaplan 219). For some reason, the police trust the story of an ex-Nazi more than they trust the story of this woman. Richter even has a book that includes excerpts on how killing is necessary to advance within society. This seems strange, considering the film was made less than ten years after the end of World War Two. It seems as though the fact that he was once a Nazi, and the fact that someone claims to have seen him murder someone, would make him a prime suspect in a murder. What makes Cheryl seem less credible? She is a UCLA educated woman, with no previous history of mental illness.

Cheryl is under the control of the police and Richter throughout this movie. The police officer that she dates throughout the movie keeps telling her that the crime is all in her head, and that she is being paranoid. The police have the power to make her feel helpless when she knows that she saw a man murder a woman. She feels as though she may be Richter's next victim.

Throughout the film, we see Cheryl becoming increasingly paranoid, but with good reason. The finale of the film is Richter's attempted murder of Cheryl. He writes a suicide note on her typewriter, and then attempts to push her out of a window. She escapes the scene, and runs up a building that is currently under construction. At the top, she is cornered by Richter, and she falls off the building, but lands on a ledge without serious injury. Larry has followed them up the building, where a scuffle breaks out between him and Richter, ending in Richter falling off the building to his death. This makes Cheryl even more a victim, in need of saving.

The end of the movie was not particularly satisfying. The murderer is dead, but there is no retribution for Cheryl. We are still under the impression that the police woman that was watching her apartment believes she was actually suicidal, and there is no real evidence that Richter was the murderer. The only thing that the audience knows is that Cheryl will not be Richter's next victim. This says to the audience that the most important thing is that she is safe, there is no evidence that the people around her will ever have respect for her.

Cheryl is very dependent on male assistance, mainly upon Larry. Larry is one of the two police officers that checked out the crime scene at the beginning of the film. He ends up asking her out to eat, and Cheryl and Larry date throughout the movie.

Every time Cheryl has a new hunch, or finds new information about Richter, she calls Larry to tell him about it, even though he repeatedly tells her that he thinks she is being paranoid about the entire situation. Luckily for her, he wants to prove that she isn't crazy, so he continues to look at her case. When Cheryl is put into the mental institution briefly, Larry, who has been taking law courses, finds a way to get her out. This is the first time in the film that we see Cheryl as a damsel in distress. At the end of the movie, when Cheryl is on the ledge of the building, the ledge begins to break, and she nearly falls to her death. It is Larry who is able to grab onto her arm and pull her back to safety.

Cheryl briefly attempts to assert her independence when she tells Larry that they should stop seeing each other. It is unclear why she does this. She has shown no hints at disliking Larry, and it seems to be a plot device to put Cheryl into more danger, however the next time something happens to her, she calls Larry again to let him know what has happened. She is also dependent upon him for her life, after he decides that Richter may have killed the woman and he saves her life by pulling her to safety.

One theme that is seen in each of the three movies is the equivalence of the emotion of hatred to love. In the film *Scarlet Street*, Kitty has a fatalistic relationship with her fiancé, Johnny. He beats her all the time, but she sees this as what makes him manly. At one point in the film when she is complaining about having to spend time with Chris, she says if he hit her she might like him better. The anger in this relationship is unsettling. The couple argues frequently, and yet Kitty insists that they love each other, the abuse that she takes seems to make her think he loves her more. Her roommate does not seem to understand it either. She says she doesn't know why Kitty stays with him because he treats her so badly. She also makes it clear that Kitty has a lot of potential in modeling or acting. It also seems as though Kitty would not have difficulty finding another man. It is her attachment to Johnny that holds her back.

In *Gilda*, love-hate relationships are played up even more. Kitty and Johnny are always speaking about how much they hate each other, and yet the film is filled with so much sexual tension between the two of them. At one point, Johnny states, "I hated her so I couldn't get her out of my mind for a minute" (*Gilda*). Gilda tells Johnny at another point that she hates him so much that she thinks she might die from it, right before the pair exchanges a passionate kiss. It seems as though Ballin feeds off of their hatred. He almost encourages it by making Johnny watch after Gilda. When he inquires about the relationship between Gilda and Johnny he says, "And he hates you. That's very apparent. But hate can be a very exciting emotion. Very exciting. Haven't you noticed that?... There is a heat in it, that one can feel. . . Hate is the only thing that has ever warmed me" (*Gilda*). Even other people notice the hatred between the pair, but they also seem to believe that it is love. Detective Maurice Obegron, played by Joseph Calleia, notices their hatred. Obegron and Johnny have a conversation in which Obegron remarks upon how much they love each other. Johnny responds, "I hate her," and Obegron replies "That's what I mean. It's the most curious love-hate pattern I've ever had the privilege of witnessing."

While *Witness to Murder* doesn't have much of a love story, there is a line of love/hate comparison in this film as well. It comes when Richter is confessing to Cheryl that he murdered his mistress. He then starts coming onto her, saying that he's seen the way she looks at him and that he can feel her hatred, and that love is the same as hate. Then he forcibly kisses her.

These hate relationships help to signify how doomed these women are in these films. The mixture of love and hate, usually thought of as opposite emotions, show how mixed up the lives of the characters are. Other than in *Witness to Murder*, the relationships between the people that love and hate each other are of a romantic nature, and are clearly abnormal and abusive relationships.

Each of the women in these movies has reached a state of helplessness, in which they have no choice but to return to men for help, (or in the case of Kitty, die because the man she loves doesn't offer her help). In *Scarlet Street*, Kitty dies because of her loyalty to her conniving fiancé. She can't take pretending to be nice to Chris anymore, and Johnny won't let her stop seeing Chris because he has become a major source of income. She tells Johnny several times that she hates being with Chris, but Johnny disregards her entirely. Finally, when Chris proposes to her, she can't take it any longer. When she lashes out at him because she can't take pretending to love him anymore, it results in Chris snapping and stabbing her to death with an ice pick.

Gilda is forced to return to Johnny and remain his loyal wife because he has provided her with no other option. He refuses to give her a divorce, he has cut her off from relations with other people, and when she tried to escape, he dragged her back to his side. The movie ends on a deceptively happy note because it appears as though they have decided to set aside their differ-

ences and forgive each other for being horrible to one another.

In *Witness to Murder*, Cheryl is helpless because she cannot win against Richter. He has outsmarted her at every turn, and the police believe she may be mentally disturbed. She has no choice but to keep on calling for the help of the police in the hopes that they might eventually believe her side of the story. Luckily for her, Larry still has faith in her, and he comes to her rescue. He gets to be the knight in shining armor to her damsel in distress.

Was this a mirror to society at the time? All of the women in these films were working women. Kitty was a failed, unmarried actress. Gilda tried to make a name for herself singing in a nightclub for a while before she was forced back to her married life. Cheryl was working and supporting herself as an interior designer. This was a time after world war two when G.I.s were returning home and women were expected to return home so that the men could reenter the workforce. Women were expected to be housewives and mothers, but none of the women in these movies conformed to these cultural expectations. It is possible that these women were being punished on the silver screen for not conforming to societal norms.

In Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, she addresses the expectations of women in the forties and fifties. According to *The Feminine Mystique*, World War II created a lot of fear in women that they would not be able to have children and homes like their parents had had, and when the G.I.s came back, they missed their homes and wanted to recreate their childhood homes. There was a marriage boom. Women were told "the cold dimension of loneliness which the war had added to their lives was the necessary price they had to pay for a career, or any interest outside the home (Friedan, 270).

In *The Scarlet Street*, Kitty does not face loneliness if she keeps Johnny happy, but Johnny makes her work to keep him around. Kitty uses a lot of effort to please her fiancé, even when that includes pretending to be another man's mistress. When she messes up, he storms out angrily and usually comes back heavily intoxicated later on. She may be paying the price of not having a traditional home and family.

Gilda is a newlywed, but the lively lifestyle of her and Ballin does not allow for a traditional family. Gilda is unhappy being the wife of a casino owner. Uncle Pio senses her unrest. He says, "You smoke too much. I noticed only frustrated people smoke too much and only the lonely people are frustrated (Gilda)". When she tries to run away from the frustrations that her marriage is causing her, she keeps getting dragged back. At the end of the film, Johnny and Gilda go back to America, perhaps to start one of these traditional lives.

Cheryl Draper in *Witness to Murder* is the best example of a working woman in these three films. She lives by herself, and supports herself. The movie demonstrates to audiences everywhere, that there are some problems that she cannot take care of herself. She needs Larry the police officer who loves her, to be there to scare off the monsters. The film *Rear Window* (1954), directed by Alfred Hitchcock, came out the same year as *Witness to Murder*, these two films have very similar plots, except in *Rear Window* it is a man that witnesses a murder in a neighboring apartment. Jeff, played by James Stewart, in *Rear Window* is strangely helpless in the film for a leading man at the time. His leg is broken, but he is still not constantly in need of rescue like Cheryl is. At the end of the film, he is pushed out of a window by the murderer, just like in *Witness to Murder*, but he does not get rescued by anyone. His other leg is broken, but he survives. It might be said that Jeff uses his own strength gets him through the difficult period in his life, but Cheryl needs Larry to protect her.

Women in film noir often find themselves helpless. They are controlled by the men that surround them. These men are sometimes using their women as status symbols or using them to make them money, but the women need them one way or another nonetheless. They are often dependent upon them for money and for their well being. These films frequently make them out to be damsels in distress, to be rescued by the Chris Cross' and the Police Lt. Lawrence Mathews' of the world.

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Visual Arts



Photo taken by Brittany Green

Woman of the Mountains

By Jaime Furda



Jaime Elizabeth Furda is an average young woman studying music and psychology at Heidelberg University. She enjoys traveling, learning, thinking, and creating, among many other things. This particular picture was taken at a monastery during the summer of 2010, when Jaime was in Nepal.



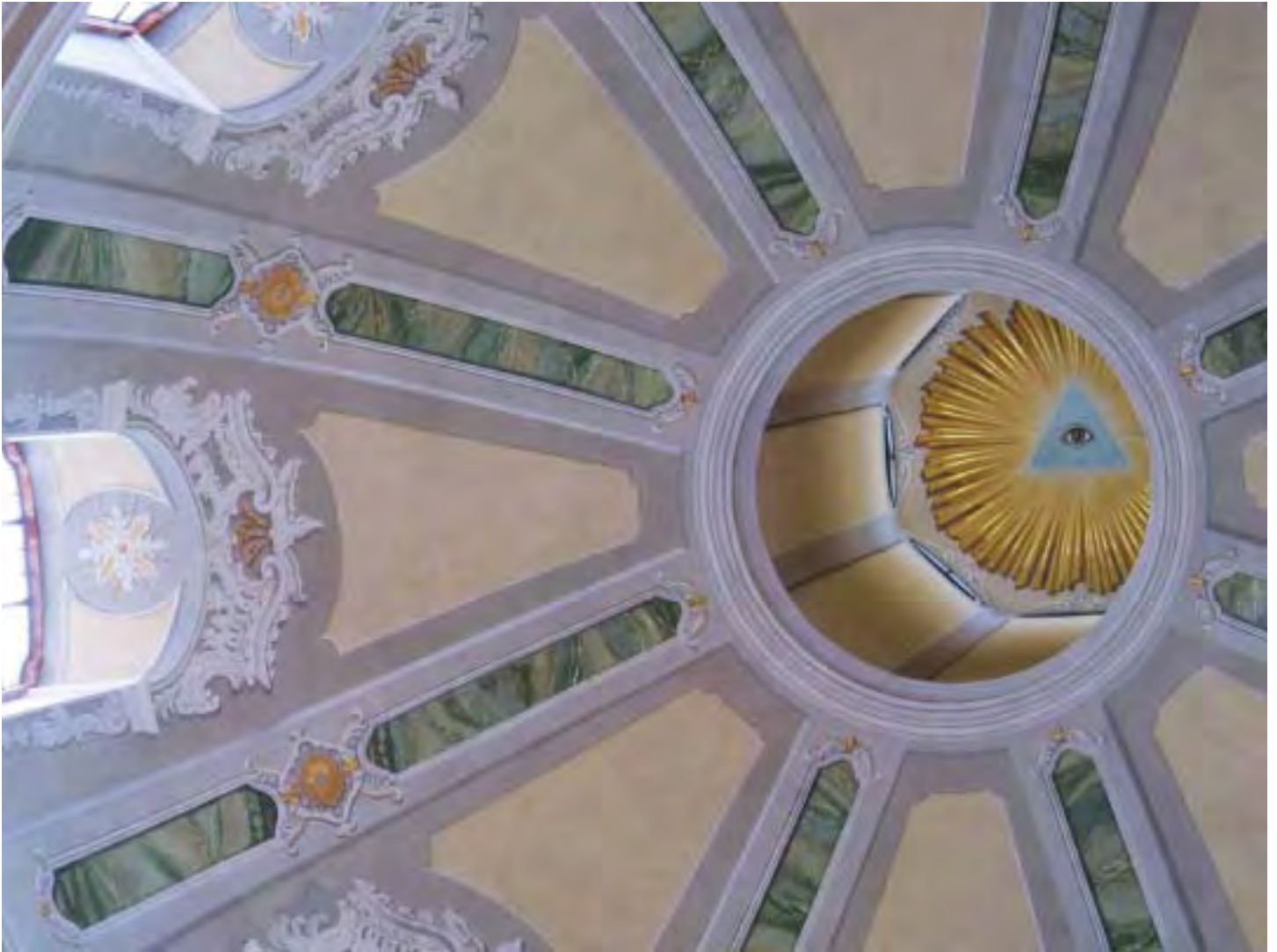
Liberation

By Mandy Stovicek



Second Sight

By Mandy Stovicek



Senior
Projects
ENG 492

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The Phoenix Rising

Chapter: The Hostage

By Dustin Bertschman

“Today’s rations,” the guard said. He handed the fourteen year old, Thomas, a bag of dried meat and a full waterskin. The boy took the food and drink.

The guard closed and locked the door. Thomas stared at the door for a few moments and then turned around and headed the corner he claimed for himself. He scraped across the hard, dark, old wood floor; the boards that creaked and moaned with every step the hostage took. The room had a bed that sat across from the only window. A table was set off to the right of the door. Thomas never used it. Trunks and shelves littered the rest of the room. The items in these trunks were a mystery to Thomas. As for the shelves, Thomas didn’t care. They were just common household items. A dresser blocked the window, so prying eyes could not see in. From the look of the room, Thomas concluded that it must have been a room at an inn in a previous time.

The boy reached his corner, which was to the right of a second door. Thomas assumed that this door led outside. This door was locked and guarded. The captive slid to the floor with his back against the wall. A chest was at arm-length away on his left. Thomas guided his hand into the opening in the bag to retrieve some petrified meat for another day of uncertainty. Uncertainty of what was going to happen to him. Uncertainty of who had kidnapped him. Uncertainty of why he was taken in the first place. Thomas gazed to the left of his boot where a sliver of light lay on a hand mirror.

“Odd,” the boy said softly, “must have fallen off that shelf in the night.”

He gathered up the mirror in his left hand and began examining it. The mirror had no ornate design, no personal inscriptions on the back, just a plain walnut frame with the varnish rubbed off. After inspecting the workmanship of the mirror, Thomas looked at the mirror itself. It had gathered a layer of dust over the years. He brushed the dust away, so he could see the mirror looking back at him.

He first saw his eyes. Those round blue eyes that his neighbors, the Matels, said were little orbs of the sky. His eyes scrolled up and down his face. He saw the dirt that streaked his face from the long journey from Mantelberry to where ever he was now. The guards had not allowed him to bathe since he arrived three days ago. Because of the dirt his skin looked darker than it actually was from the countless hours outside in the hot, summer sun. His eyes traced his wide set jaw or as his father

called it, a sturdy jaw, and wondered if he was going to get a chance to grow a thick beard. Finally, he gazed up at his hair, the hair that he so hated. The color was a dark brown that he received from his mother.

As his eyes lingered on his hair, the boy's mind wandered off to the afternoon a few days before he was kidnapped.

"Thomas," Jacob, a sixteen year old, called.

"Thomas," Jacob called again. Jacob's friends, three in number, stood by their leader with smirks on their faces. Thomas ignored them. He didn't want to deal with the talentless knight trainee and his sniveling friends. He continued down the alley between two wooden buildings, away from them to the main street of the city. Thomas was coming back from an errand for his mother when Jacob and his cronies showed up. He walked two more steps, reaching the middle of the alley, when Jacob moved around him to cut Thomas off.

"Thomas, I was calling you," Jacob said. "When a future knight calls for someone, they come."

Thomas stood silently, brooding. Though Thomas was two years younger than Jacob, he was the same height as him, but with broader shoulders. He matured early like his father. "Are you going to apologize?" Jacob said. "A removal from the Knights Academy means you're an outcast of Mantelberry. So apologize for your presence, outcast."

Thomas' face tightened with the mention of his removal from the Knights Academy, the school where they train knights for the kingdom of Mantelberry. His family ran into some financial problems recently, so they had to remove him from the Academy or at least that was what they told him. He left the school right before he began the second of three stages to become a knight, the same stage that Jacob was on. Thomas stood silent.

Jacob took a step forward to stand an inch away from Thomas. "Apologize."

Thomas still stood silent.

Jacob shook fiercely at Thomas' continued silence. Thomas never said anything to Jacob. Jacob couldn't stand it. Most times, Jacob and his worthless friends would leave without any action taken against Thomas. This time, however, Jacob had enough of Thomas' disrespect and threw a punch at Thomas. Thomas sidestepped the punch. He saw a clear opening to knock Jacob out cold, but he didn't take it. Instead, Thomas burst past Jacob and ran into the street. He didn't know if they chased after him or not. All he knew and all he thought was that he was a coward.

Thomas just missed running into an old woman wearing a ragged-looking dress. He continued without pausing. He passed the Yll Brothers' goblet stand and other merchant stands as he ran. The market was filled with potential buyers causing Thomas

to dodge through the gaps between the people. Most of the buyers here were peasants. Their clothing was soaked with their sweat and dirt. He finally escaped the crowd and continued running straight to his house.

His house was at the northern end of town. Thomas' father ranked on the third level of the lowest tier of the knight's hierarchy. It wasn't the greatest position, but it provided more land than the previous levels. His father had been losing money recently. Thomas' father wasn't forthcoming with the reason. He only needed one great, high-profile, and successful mission to propel him and his family to the countryside with the middle and upper-tier knights. The two-story house held two families. Thomas' family lived on the ground level and the Matels lived on the second floor. The Matels were an elderly couple who had been living in the building for over forty years. They were the closest thing he had to grandparents. His real grandparents died when he was still young. His home consisted of two bedrooms, one for him and one for his parents, and a living area where everything took place that did not involve sleeping. At the end of every day the family would relax around the fireplace and listen to a story told by his father. His favorite story was the Myth of Jakel the Phoenix. It was a new story compared to the rest, which were many generations old. It told of Jakel Taronamon of the House of the Phoenix who started revolts against Mycerda and his goblin hordes in the occupied kingdoms during the last war that encompassed all of the land ten years ago. Because Jakel was the only member of the House of the Phoenix, he became known as Jakel the Phoenix or simply the Phoenix. He always believed that the Phoenix Ranger should have killed more of those filthy goblins.

Thomas entered his house. He saw his mother opening the lid to the cooking pot, which was hung above the fire in the hearth. A succulent aroma of simmering beef and carrots floated across the room to rub up against Thomas. Thomas did not give heed to the wonderful smell. He stomped off to his room.

His father, who was sitting at the table, asked Thomas, "What happened?"

"Nothing," Thomas answered not stopping to face his father. He closed the door after he entered the room. Thomas sat down on his bed and put his head in his hands. He was in this position when his father came in.

"Tell me what happened," his father said.

"Nothing happened," Thomas said.

"Do not lie to me," his father said. His eyebrows furrowed across his eyes as he walked across the room to stand in front of his son.

Thomas heard the anger in his father's voice. He looked up and said, "It was Jacob again."

With a sigh, the father sat down next Thomas. He said, "What is it, three times this week? It seems Jacob enjoys your

company.” He smiled down at his son. He hoped his son would catch the sarcasm.

Thomas did not. “He enjoys embarrassing me.”

“It is only embarrassment if you think so.”

Thomas looked at his father as if he just told him that the grass was blue, “It’s embarrassing because I ran instead of fighting him.”

The father shook his head, “When is retreating when outnumbered a cowardly decision? Jacob’s friends were there, right?”

“That doesn’t matter. I could’ve taken them.”

“Maybe. But fighting should only be done as a last resort and for a reason. And pride is not a reason,” his father said sternly.

“I’m not prideful.” Thomas said defiantly.

“Embarrassment stems from loss of pride.”

“I won’t go looking for a fight.”

“No,” his father said, “but are you going to back down if a fight is brought to you?”

“I don’t know. I do know I want to punch that garblec in his face.”

Thomas’ father slapped his son hard across his face. “Don’t you ever use that word again.” The word garblec was a derogatory term men call a goblin or anyone who were filthy, disgusting, or a thief, the common characteristics men associate with goblins. “We raised you better than that. You know better. That word should never be used in any circumstances.”

“What’s the big deal?” Thomas said with his eyes downcast and his hand on his cheek. “They are only goblins.”

“They are only goblins,” his father said. “They are an intelligent race with its own culture just like men. You only see goblins as they are portrayed in the stories, especially in the Phoenix Ranger, where they are the evil invaders bent on world domination. This is false. There are many evils in this world, Thomas, and men are a part of them. Men have done deeds that would make a goblin villain in your stories blush.”

Thomas’ father’s eyes softened then as he saw the red mark that had formed on Thomas’ cheek. He reached over to examine the red mark and Thomas shrunk away. His father sighed, “I am sorry, Thomas. I should never have hit you. It’s just that I expect more of you because you are better than most kids your age and I don’t want you to end like those pompous, egotistical men I have to obey every day. You need to start living in this world instead in the world of your stories, where men are always fair

and just.”

Thomas just sat there with his head lowered to the floor. His father stood up and headed to the door.

“Is that why you removed me from the Academy?” Thomas said meekly.

“No,” his father said when he turned around, “I did not remove you because of your naïve prejudice. Your mother and I removed you from the Academy because we can’t afford it. Money is short, these days. We have already discussed this.”

Thomas said, “The Knights Academy is hereditary and without payment for the sons of knights. It only cost money if you are a first generation.”

His father brushed back strands of his chestnut hair that had fallen across his eyes, the same blue eyes that his son had. He said, “I can’t answer that. You won’t understand. Just trust me, it was necessary.”

The images faded from Thomas’ mind. The hostage set the hand mirror aside as he pondered his father’s refusal to answer his question. He went through every possible scenario, and in every case he couldn’t see a reason why his father blatantly lied and then refused to answer the simple question. To distract himself, Thomas searched the surrounding area. He hoped to find an oddity, a rare object, which the trunks that filled this room must hold. Minutes flew by with no success. The biggest find Thomas discovered was in a wooden trunk that stored record books of the patrons who had stayed at a place called the Stag Inn. Thomas figured it was what the building he was being held in used to be or still was. He wasn’t sure.

Thomas moved closer down to the door to peruse the contents of a particular trunk that had caught his eye. He had a good feeling about this trunk. It had the same design as the trunk that held the Stag Inn record books, so this one might have the same. He could read through the books to pass the time and maybe even recognize a name or two. Upon reaching the wooden trunk, Thomas opened the curved lid to reveal the trunk’s treasure. Once again the trunk had record books identical to the ones in the other trunk.

He took out and sifted through the books for the names of the guests who visited the Stag Inn. Unfortunately, Thomas did not recognize anybody on the multiple lists, but the records had one interesting fact. The records were from nine years ago, a year after the Phoenix Ranger defeated the goblin hordes. While Thomas went through the records he detected a book that was out of place in the trunk. The book was three times larger than the record books and instead of being bound with soft leather it was bounded by leather over some sturdy material that kept it from bending.

Thomas reached down and brought the book up out of the chest. He needed both hands to accomplish the task. On the front cover, there was a design of a tree fully bloomed with a winding river flowing out of the trunk of the tree. For a second he be-

lieved he saw a full moon with two large, closed gates take the place of the tree and the river. But in the next instant it was gone. It was a trick of the light he thought. With the book held in his hands, Thomas sat back against the wall with the outside door on his left and the chest on his right. He flipped open the book. On the first page Thomas read:

Myths and Legends
Derived from the cultures of the Elves, Dwarves, Men, and Goblins

By Slínea Wyna

“Of course,” Thomas whispered silently, “it would be an elf.”

For the next half hour, Thomas looked through the many legends that stalked these pages. The majority of them he knew nothing about, like the legend that inspired the cover of the book. The name of the legend Thomas couldn't pronounce because it was an elfish word, but he understood the meaning. The legend said that the world was created from a large maple tree whose leaves never wilted. The tree or the creation tree as Thomas named it, released a river of life into the nothingness that surrounded the tree. And everywhere the river touched life sprang up. Thomas enjoyed this story because how similar it was to legend he was told when he was a young boy of how the world was created.

He skimmed through the dwarven legends which were warriors conquering lands for the “great” dwarven people. “Typical,” Thomas thought, “they only think of forcing their beliefs on other people. They have no innovation and they are nothing without their great halls that they hide in. At least Elves are men and don't hide from threats.”

He skipped over the goblins section and went to the section about the legends of Men. He looked over many of these legends and he was impressed about how accurate the author was. He suspected that the elf would change the legends to fit more of an elven view of the world, but the elf didn't. Out of all of the legends mentioned in the book there was one particular legend that caught Thomas' eye and that was the legend of the Gatekeeper, the keeper of souls. This legend told of a man, the size of a mountain, who guarded the Gates to lost souls, souls who haven't fulfilled their destiny. They will come back in another life to accomplish their goals. Some souls will never move on to the next realm because of the evilness of their souls and they will remain in darkness for all eternity. In the entry, it was said that a soulless man will one day meet the Gatekeeper in battle to retrieve his soul from the beyond the Gates. In the story of the Phoenix Ranger, it was told that he was prophesied to be the soulless warrior who will fight the Gatekeeper. There was no mention of the Phoenix Ranger in the entry or in the book itself.

Thomas figured that the book was written before the war.

Voices floated through the door to pull Thomas away from the book. He leaned closer to make out what the

guards were saying.

“I can’t take this,” a guard said. “We shouldn’t be watching this boy. We should be out finding that villain who’s hunting us.”

The other guard rebuked the man, “You couldn’t do nothing against anybody. Let alone against that man. So be glad we were given guard duty.”

The first guard sputtered a few, incoherent words, and then he replied, “Coward. At least I would stand up to the man in the red cloak. You would just run and hide.”

“You are damn right I would. You would too.”

Thomas couldn’t see it, but he guessed the first guard had nodded his agreement from the short pause.

The first guard said, “Still we shouldn’t be guarding a worthless kid. I was enjoying myself with all of the pleasures that this town has. Then Azrec forced me to play guard for the boy.”

“Forced,” the other guard said, “You mean told. Azrec never needs to force someone to do something. He just tells them to do it and they do it.”

“Yeah. Okay, you’re right. The red cloaked man must be after the boy if Azrec assigned four guards to watch the boy.”

“Three guards, not four. There is only one guarding the inner door. And yes, the man is after the boy. There is no other explanation.”

Thomas strained to hear the first guard who started to whisper. “The father of the boy must have hired him.”

A smile crossed Thomas’ face when he heard mentioned that his father was involved in a rescue attempt. He knew his father would save him. Thomas’ focus on the conversation wavered as he thought of how his father planned on saving him. He saw his father wearing a red cloak running up the outside stairs, dispatching the guards, and then taking him away from this place.

This dream shattered with a booming, powerful voice coming from outside. “Move. That boy knows something.”

Thomas scooted away from the door. He made it as far as the other side of the open trunk when the door crashed against the wooden banister. A large man stormed into the room, swiveling his head side to side searching for the boy. He located Thomas on the second turn. Thomas held up the book. He hoped, prayed, and wished that it would protect him from the angry man.

The burly man snatched Thomas up by the tunic and slammed him against the wall. The room started to spin for Thomas. Noise went into his ears but he couldn’t decipher any of it.

A hand cracked across his face. Thomas muffled a cry before it escaped his lips. The room settled back into place.

“Who killed my brother? Who is the man that has been killing us since Mantelberry?”

Thomas didn't answer. He couldn't answer because he didn't know what the man was talking about. He looked at the two guards standing by the door watching. The black hair one was smiling at the spectacle while the sandy blonde chuckled at it. A smack brought Thomas' focus back on the big man.

“I asked you a question and I want an answer.”

Thomas did not know what to do. So, he just stared dumbfounded at the man. The large man yanked Thomas towards him. He shook with fury.

“Dain,” a man said from across the room, “Let the boy go.”

The man's voice made Thomas feel like he stood underneath a waterfall in early winter, chilled to the bone with his breath stolen away. Dain released Thomas and walked over to stand by the two guards who weren't smiling anymore. Thomas would rather take the beating by Dain than be in the presence of this cold-voiced man. He knew this man was the leader, Azrec, and he knew the situation had just gotten worse.

Azrec walked across the room. Every step, every move the man made was deliberate. There was no wasted movement. Everything about Azrec displayed efficiency. His raven black hair was cut short to his head taking away the chance of having a strand of hair blocking his vision. His body was hardened by years of fighting. Two swords swayed at the man's waist as he walked with fluid motion that skilled warriors acquire over the years.

“Stand up straight,” Azrec said to Thomas who was hunched over in submissive posture, “You are nearly a man, so you should stand up like a man.”

Slowly, Thomas obeyed Azrec. There was no hesitation, no second pause wondering if he heard the leader right. He knew that the slap from Dain would feel like a hug from his mother compared to the pain Azrec would put him through if he disobeyed. With his back stiff straight, his arms and legs rigid, Thomas looked Azrec straight in his iron grey eyes. Thomas was surprised that he was the same height as this man who seemed to fill the room.

The leader said, “Now we can look each other in the eyes and know if the other person is lying.”

“It looks like you have decided to take upon yourself to do some inventory,” Azrec stated as he looked at the scattered record books on the ground and the open trunk.

“Sorry, sir,” Thomas apologized.

“The information was true,” Azrec said, “you were in the Academy.”

“Yes, sir,” Thomas answered.

"We're not in the Academy. You shouldn't talk like we were."

Thomas nodded.

"Why did you look in the trunk?" Azrec asked.

"I'm not sure," Thomas said, "I guess I was curious."

"My father told me that curiosity is the death of men," Azrec said. Thomas' throat constricted at this. "That was what happened to my brother. He became curious in a woman which is a double death trap, curiosity and women. Women only want your money. This combination led my brother down the road of expenditure. He spent all of his money on this woman so she would stay with him. Our family owned this building which was called the Stag Inn in its prime. While my brother spent his life savings and the savings of the Inn, which we didn't find out until later, our father tried to keep the Inn afloat. He was dying from consumption at the time. His last two years, my father wondered why the Inn wasn't making any money. He never found out. He died believing he failed his father and grandfather for letting their life's work collapse."

"Where were you at the time?" Thomas asked.

"I was twelve when my father died. I watched him slowly die because of my brother's betrayal. Because of this, I killed my brother."

Azrec saw the fear in the eyes of Thomas. "Now you understand who you are dealing with. Betrayal brings death. That is what would have had happened to your father if he was under me."

"My father never betrayed anybody," Thomas said.

"He betrayed King Martel," Azrec's eyes had a hint of anger in them. Thomas was stunned by the announcement. "He had what some people call a moral dilemma. He decided to disobey a direct order from the king and let a useless little girl live. Women destroy kingdoms."

Dain spoke up then while Thomas tried to digest what he just heard, "Could you blame the king for not holding out? You saw her. She was developed beyond her years."

"She must have gave the king a good ride," the blonde guard said. He had a crooked smile splayed on his face. Dain and the two guards continued to talk about the girl and her experience with the king. Azrec seemed oblivious to the whole thing. Thomas couldn't believe how evil these men are acting. They were acting like every goblin mentioned in his stories. He heard what his father said to him, "There are many evils in this world and men are a part of them." Thomas lowered his eyes in agreement.

Azrec snapped his eyes to the men. There was anger in his eyes. The guards and Dain went quiet. They had never seen that much anger in their leader's eyes before. "Do you want to just tell the boy what the king did so he can go back and tell every-

body?" Azrec looked back at Thomas. "Do you understand now why you are here or do you need me to explain it? The king is using you to force your father to finish the job."

My father would not murder the girl, Thomas thought. But he knew that was not true. His father would do anything to protect him. Every wrong that he and his family had suffered in the past flashed through his head. His embarrassment and disgrace for being removed from the Knights Academy. His parents living on lower wage than they should and now his father being forced to become a murderer. All these moments coalesced into ball of rage in his chest. It was the king who caused on all of the recent misfortunes. It was the king who had him kidnapped. It was the king who had this cold-hearted man telling him that his father was a traitor. He saw the king's face sneering at him. Before he realized it, spittle flew out of his mouth and into Azrec's eyes.

With a trembling hand, Azrec wiped the spit from his face. One second, Azrec was just trembling in front of Thomas. The next second he had Thomas pinned up against the wall by his throat. Azrec breathed furiously. He wrenched Thomas from the wall to him and then he shot Thomas back against the wall so hard that Thomas blacked out for a second. He wished he could've just blacked out for good because Azrec repeatedly, without a break, slammed his head and body against the wall. He knew there was a cut on the back of his head but he couldn't feel. He could only feel the incessant pain in his skull. Everything became disoriented and distant and then Thomas' eyes lulled back into his head and the lights went out.

Thomas opened his eyes, revealing the dark room. There was only a red sliver of light that broke pass the window-blocking dresser. Thomas struggled to his feet. He immediately placed his left hand on the wall to support himself. His vision was blurred, so he stayed where he was. The room went in and out of focus. Sometimes the bed was crystal clear and a moment later it was just a non-distinguish mass of color. He gently touched the matted clump of hair on the back of his head where he received a gash from his beating. He felt like an avalanche of boulders had rammed into his skull.

When his vision started to clear up, Thomas heard a commotion outside. The noise pounded into his head amplified the pain that was already in existence. The fourteen year old crumpled to the floor with his eyes closed and hands covering his ears to shut away the pain. His body shuddered when the door crashed against the balustrade. The sound of booted feet clamoured into the room. Thomas' hands muffled the sound, keeping the ache in his head at a minimum.

"Go tell Azrec that the red cloaked man will be here shortly." Though the voice was muffled, Thomas recognized it as Dain's voice. Footsteps rushed across the floor and a pounding noise followed the quieting of the footsteps. The inner door opened. There was some mumbling, and then the door closed.

The pained hostage cracked open his eyes to see what was happening. He kept his hands at his ears. The pain hadn't sub-

sided yet. Thomas saw Dain and the two guards standing in the middle of the room. The two guards' eyes flashed back and forth like they believed they would be dying soon. Dain stood defiantly against their fears.

Dain glanced at the open door and yelled at the blonde guard at his right, "Close the door."

The guard ran to the door and closed it. They all forgot that the door opened outwards and it wouldn't prevent the man from entering the building. By luck, Thomas woke up on the side of the Myths and Legends trunk that faced away from the door. He curled into a ball and hoped no one would notice him. It worked.

"The Phoenix, the soulless hero, is going to kill us all," the black haired guard remarked.

Dain smacked the guard across the back of his head. "There is no such person as the Phoenix. He is just a myth that people created who needed an inspiration during the occupation of the goblins. He wears the red cloak to play off that myth, nothing more."

"Who is it, then?" the guard asked.

"Just some average fighter. Either one of you can finish him. And with me, he has no chance."

"He systematically killed off every outpost and spy with no effort," the blonde guard countered before the other guard could.

"So," Dain replied forcibly, "they were weak and needed to be removed. Don't worry. I am not weak."

"What about your brother? He . . ."

"What about him?" Dain growled.

"This man killed him too."

"That man snuck up on my brother and stabbed him in the back. If that man fought my brother in a fair fight, he would've lost."

The conversation ended there because they realized their mistake about the outside door. A man stood in the doorway in complete serenity. Thomas inched his eyes over the top of the chest when he heard the door open. The man, the same man who had killed Dain's brother, for indeed he wore a blood red cloak clasped at his throat by a brooch in the classical shape of phoenix head. The face of the man was slender with hint of a tan to his skin. Lank hair, black as death, hung just past his ears. His black tunic and pants fitted well to the man's muscular form. His visible weapon, a dirk, was held at his side. Thomas figured that there was another dirk in the man's left hand. The steel pommel of the dirk was shaped like a crystal. At the bottom of the blade itself, there was an insignia of a full moon with two large, closed gates. It was the picture that Thomas had of Jakel the Phoenix.

The men attacked the Jakel. They were in a jagged line. The black hair guard led the way. He was lined up to attack the soulless hero's left side. The blonde guard followed a step behind, aiming for the ranger's right side. Dain brought up the rear on the left. They all were doomed. Jakel Taronamon of the House of the Phoenix was fire on a dry grass. He consumed all. In mere seconds the three men laid on the ground dead. The man stood at the head of Dain.

Jakel held his two bloody dirks and stared at the closed door. He said to Thomas, "Stay hidden."

The door burst open, letting Azrec and two other men in. Azrec had two swords strapped to his waist. There was just a cold stare on his face. The other two men, who stood on the either side of Azrec, had single-handed swords. They encircled Jakel, using the dead bodies as a barrier. The hero calmly went into a defensive position. Azrec and two men truly seemed formidable. Thomas knew the speed and power Azrec could provide a dangerous combination and with the two other guards as distractions, Jakel will have a challenge.

The next couple of minutes took Thomas' breath away. He never saw such skilled swordplay in his life. The Phoenix parried, countered, and evaded the three men. Not to be outdone, Azrec attack with such deadly precision that if Jakel didn't move at the exact time as he did, he would've been dead. The other two men were just average fighters. They did their job though. They kept pressure on the red cloaked man. Though he was holding his own, Thomas knew that Jakel couldn't hold them off forever. He needed help.

Thomas rose unsteadily to feet. His hands moved from his ears and the screeching sound of metal on metal assaulted his ears. The hostage ignored the pain in his head as best as he could by focusing on moving his feet forward, one step at a time. After moving seven feet, Thomas fell. He had tripped over the blonde guard's body. He collected himself and was about to push himself up when he saw the guard's short sword on the ground next to him. He reached out and grabbed it. Thomas stood up and continued to move slowly forward.

With no rational decision, Thomas went after the man on the left. Thomas held the sword with both hands and swung upward to parry the attack of the man. His arm shook, ears rang, and head roared with pain. He wanted to lie down, but he couldn't because that meant death for both him and the man who came to rescue him. So he held the sword as his father taught him. What his father didn't teach him was how to fight with an impaired head. He slashed at his opponent. The weapon sliced air. Thomas stumbled forward, off balance. The man had taken a step back and let the attack pass. Then he rushed forward and smashed the hilt of his sword into the face of Thomas. The blow had Thomas momentarily unconscious. When he came to he was on his back and the man was preparing to plunge his sword into Thomas' chest. The blow came and embedded itself in the wood. Thomas had rolled

onto his side to avoid the blow. He rolled back and stabbed out. The man was still bent over when the blade pierced his neck. He fell onto the hostage with his blue eyes staring into Thomas'. Thomas saw the astonishment and the disbelief in those blue eyes before the life of the man drained from his body. Thomas just laid there, staring into those dead, blue eyes when a boot smashed into his head. He saw no more.

Fires in the Lake

By Alexa Cleveland

Lydia was already in the kitchen watching her ancient television when I walked in. She sat slouched against the countertop, absorbed by the static voice of the news reporter taking up the small screen. Her graying hair was still draped about her shrunken shoulder; the thin locks left sections of white scalp visible beneath her hair.

I paused in the doorway, half-tempted to run back to my room and wait until she had left for church, but she seemed to sense my presence and turned to look at me.

“Do you know what time it is, Jamie?” she asked crossly. Her pale eyes narrowed as she took in my disheveled hair and ripped jeans. “You can’t go to church dressed like that.”

I crossed the kitchen without answering and pulled a carton of orange juice from the fridge. When I turned to face her she had already gone back to watching the television. The news reporter had been replaced with a picture of a man with hooded black eyes and the faint shadow of stubble on his shaved head. I nearly choked on my juice when I saw that face watching me from the screen.

“The suspected rebel leader is rumored to have left Sector S-K16, where it was suspected that he was recruiting new members, sometime late last week. Sources say he intended to go to the northern cities of the UFICS. Authorities advise locals to stay alert until more information is available.”

The reporter shuffled her papers importantly as she read solemnly from the teleprompter.

I took a few swallows of juice from the carton while I watched the report and returned it to the fridge before Lydia noticed what I’d done. She turned back around when the television turned to commercials.

“The patio needs swept before we go.”

“I’m not going to church,” I answered automatically, still preoccupied with what I had just seen.

“We’ve already had this discussion.” She stood, tall and straight despite her age, and somehow managed to look down at me even with our similar heights. “I will call your father.”

The threat hung between us while I stared back at her defiantly. The threat of my father had

stopped striking fear in me a long time ago.

“Do it.”

I stalked out of the kitchen and retreated to the upper floor, making sure to slam my door loud enough for it to echo throughout the house.

I waited until I heard the front door shut an hour later before going downstairs again. The television was still on in the kitchen. The power button was broken and if the thing had come with a remote control, I had never seen it, so Lydia left it on to recite its 24-hour news to no one. The news anchor was continuing her government dictated speech.

“The UFICS council is currently deliberating upon its selection for its new member, also the new governor of H-122. In addition, the governors have requested that N-K12 begin to import industrially manufactured goods, as per the trade agreement that was signed last month. The governor has stated that such trade from a more industrial city will reduce the cost of goods and improve the current standard of living for those in the city.”

I ignored the broom Lydia had left propped against the counter and went out to the back patio. The neighborhood was one of the oldest in the city, built before the lake had dried up; it stood on the edge of the steep hills that led into the valley. The patio hung directly over the steep decline, once a deck that had overlooked the water of the massive lake, so I could see much of the eastern edge of the city as it spread out into the distance. The flat asphalt rooftops glittered in the strengthening sun as it crested over the banks of the ancient lakebed.

The patio was covered with small twigs and golden-red leaves. I cleared away space with my foot and sat on the edge of the patio, putting my legs through the slots in the fence so they could dangle freely. The morning breeze swept my hair across my forehead while I gazed out on the distant buildings of the city. On a clear day the rooftops seemed to go on endlessly; the valley was enormous, taking more than three hours to cross, even without traffic. But on most days, this one being no exception, the hot, wet air of the valley created a haze that hung so heavily over the city that I could barely see for more than a few miles.

After a while, I finally got up. Lydia was sure to be at church for most the day, so I went to the

tiny garage where my bike was waiting for me. If it were up to her, she'd never let me near it, but it was the one thing she couldn't take away with the threat of my father, because he was the one who'd given it to me. The tiny solar panels glistened in the sunlight as I punched down on the starter with my foot. I leaned low over the bike and took off.

The road circled the rim of the lake for several miles until it connected with the huge inter-city highway that led to the core of the city. I stopped at the entrance of the on-ramp and slid my identification card through the scanner. The computer took a few minutes to process before the light turned green and the mechanized gate, more like a thick metal wall than anything else, began to open. The highway was the only way to drive out of N-F12, but as I slowed going up the on-ramp I could see it was almost completely deserted. A road block had been set up just weeks ago, keeping anyone from entering or leaving the city. The men standing watch stared when I paused at the entrance to the highway, but I turned my back to them and headed into the thick air of the inner-city.

Deeper into the city the traffic picked up. The highway was filled with the ragged-looking cars of commuters, each trailing a dirty cloud of exhaust in its wake. I exited almost an hour later, squeezing between two large trucks just in time to catch the ramp, where I had to scan my card again to open the gate and exit the highway.

I drove up the narrow street of the neighborhood and stopped at a particularly rundown building crammed between an almost identical neighbor and the chainlink fence that separated the residential from the commercial district. I parked my bike on the street and the building glared down at me as I approached. I couldn't see them with the sun reflecting off the dirt-encrusted windows, but I knew they were waiting for me.

They knew I'd know he finally came back. Dane was home.

The door swung open freely when I pushed it, clanging sharply against the wall and rebounding so I had to jump out of the way to avoid being hit. When the echoes faded, I was greeted by silence. Everyone was upstairs, probably badgering Dane to regale them with his latest tales of the Southern sectors.

I ran up the stairs to the second floor and yanked open the door on the landing. I froze

in the doorway, greeted by at least a dozen pairs of eyes all focused intently on where I now stood. I tried to ignore them, but I couldn't help catching some of their hostile gazes as I scanned the room for Dane's face. A face that I couldn't find among those seated throughout the room on an assortment of mismatched chairs and couches.

"Why're you here, Jamie?"

I looked in the direction of the voice, startled. "You know why, Jake." He rose from his chair near the door and towered over me. I crossed my arms and met his eyes defiantly. "Where is he?"

"What makes you think Dane would want to see you?" a girl asked viciously from across the room. Her hair was cropped close to her head, the same as mine, but her dark eyes were almost identical to the ones I wanted to see. The hot venom in her look shook me more than Jake's hostility ever could have. Once, we had been close enough for me to consider her a younger sister.

"Addie..." I bit my lip, my determination suddenly swept out from under me.

"No!" She stamped her foot childishly. "You think you can just come back here like nothing happened? After you just left?"

"I didn't just leave." I searched for a sympathetic face in the crowd, but found only accusing stares. Of course, none of them really understood what had happened. I sighed. "I didn't come to fight. I just want to see Dane."

"Are you deaf?" Addie yelled. "He doesn't want anything to do with a traitor like—"

"What's going on?"

The deep, weary voice came from behind me and it felt like a lump of concrete had somehow found its way into my stomach. I clutched my hands into fists and slowly turned to face him. The photo they had shown on the television must've been months old. Dane's hair hung almost to his shoulders, a look I never thought I'd see on him. I opened my mouth, but couldn't seem to make a sound. The very sight of him seemed to have struck me dumb, and Addie got her say in before I could even make a sound.

"She thinks she can just abandon the cause and then turn around and barge in here. Tell her you don't want her here! Nobody does."

Dane looked over my head at her, his lips set in a stern line. I could feel the rest of the room watching us silently. After a moment, he dropped his eyes and met mine. I bowed my head, my face getting hot under the intensity of his gaze.

"Let's talk," he said quietly, and took me by the arm. He steered me away from the door and toward the stairs to the third floor. He pulled the door shut behind us, cutting off Addie's furious yell.

The top floor had the musty smell of an attic. It was a single large room, lit by the dim sunlight filtering through the dirty windows. Much like the room downstairs, it was filled with an assortment of furniture, including a few narrow cots, but it was deserted. The emptiness felt a little eerie. The small group downstairs was barely half the number of people that were here just a few months ago. I couldn't help but wonder where everyone was.

"Sit down." Dane pointed at a nearby couch.

I ignored the gesture. "Dane, look..."

"I don't want to hear excuses." He dropped onto the couch and rubbed his temples. "Addie said you just up and disappeared without a word. Why'd you come back?"

I shrugged at him helplessly. "I saw the report on the news. I knew you'd be home."

"And?" he asked, his expression cold and distant. I sat on the couch next to him, twisting my fingers in my lap.

"I had to leave. My father found out where I was. You know how bad it would have been if I stayed and he sent someone to come snooping around, looking for me." I reached to touch his arm, but he pulled away automatically and I let my hand drop back into my lap. "I didn't want to abandon everybody. Not while you were gone. But I didn't have a choice. It was too dangerous for me to stay."

"Don't be stupid," Dane snapped. "We been doing this for years. You think we don't know how to avoid being caught?"

I stared at him, exasperated. "Not when the governor's daughter is involved! Not with you gone, with nobody around to lead everybody, to handle things properly."

"That was supposed to be your job," Dane said, his temper flaring. "I thought I could trust

you to keep things under control, but I was wrong. Now look what's happened! Before, the government didn't have a clue who was in charge of the rebellion. Hell, they weren't even sure there was one. Now they even have my name. My picture, for Christ's sake. And they know we're trying to stir up trouble and they're watching for it." He jumped to his feet and began pacing in front of the couch. "Look how empty this place is."

"Were they caught?" Suddenly, the answer seemed obvious, but there had been no mention of arrests on the news.

"How do you think the cops found out so much about us? The gang got reckless. They thought they were doing what I wanted them to, but they didn't think any of it through."

He lapsed into silence and I dropped my eyes to the floor. Maybe coming here had been a mistake, after all.

"I'm sorry," I said, standing. "I thought I was doing what I had to do."

I started for the door, but Dane reached for my hand and held me back before I could take two steps.

"You're not leaving us again, are you?" He kept his eyes on my feet, but he held onto my hand so hard it almost hurt.

"What am I supposed to do, Dane?" I tugged at my hand, but he didn't loosen his grip. "Everyone's already made it perfectly clear that I'm not welcome."

"Everyone?"

"I can't stay." I wrenched my hand away. "I have to get back before Lydia gets home."

Dane snorted. "You still living with that old rag?"

I sighed and headed for the stairs. In a moment Dane was on his feet and striding after me, easily out pacing me with his long legs. He cut me off, blocking my way.

"You didn't come all this way just to walk out on me," he said, grabbing me by the shoulders. "You think I'd let you get away with that?"

I refused to meet his eyes. "I just wanted to see you. That's it. I didn't come back to join up again. I can't do that anymore."

“So you stay for five minutes, then you’re done with me?”

“Sorry, I’m not a big fan of hearing about how badly I messed everything up for you.”

He released my shoulders and stepped back. “Fine. Get the hell outta here. Run back to Daddy and all his fancy toys.”

His words hit me as effectively as if he’d slapped me. I shoved past him, but had jump out of the way as Jake came barreling up the stairs.

“Dane,” he gasped, his eyes shining with excitement. “I just got the message. We’re ready.”

Dane gave me a side-long glance before setting his jaw firmly and nodding at Jake. “Good.” Jake ran back down the stairs, yelling something I couldn’t make out as he went into the other room. Dane turned back to me. “Go home,” he said with complete finality, and left to join the rest of the group.

I crouched with my back to the wall, burying my head in my arms. What had I expected, coming back after all this time? Dane must’ve known I would never betray them, but the rest of them all thought I was a traitor. How many of them were convinced I had given my father information about them when I had left and it was my fault so many of them had been caught? I was stupid to think it would be any different.

I listened as they all stampeded out of the building and into the street. With a sigh, I straightened and glanced out the window. Most of them jumped into the back of a rusted, old truck, but some had their own bikes, though they were just as beat up as the truck. I winced when Addie kicked my bike as she passed, knocking it over onto the pavement. Minutes later the street was empty again.

I dropped back to my knees and rested my head against the warm, gritty window pane. I didn’t want to go back to Lydia’s. This place, even though it wasn’t much more than an old warehouse, felt more like home than anywhere else had ever been. Even on the days where I had given up my pillow and blanket so that someone else could have a little comfort, I wouldn’t have traded it for all the luxury I had now.

Reluctantly, I got to my feet and returned to my bike. I considered for a moment, utterly

lost on what to do next. But then, I couldn't help but wonder what the group was up to. If I hurried, I could catch them up and find out. Without stopping to think about what I might have been getting myself into, I jumped on my bike and headed back to the highway. It wasn't long before I caught sight of the truck and began to tail them at a distance. A while later, they finally turned off at an exit just before the capital, but my instincts told me to keep going, and I took the exit the went directly into the capital.

The further into the capital I got, though, the more it dawned on me that something was up. A thick crowd sprang up as I approached the Office, and it wasn't the sort of people I would normally expect to find in this part of the city. They all looked like workers, dressed in faded, worn out clothes.

I slowed to a stop when there were too many people to maneuver around. What were all these people doing in the capital? I turned around and found a nearby parking lot before continuing on foot. The crowd was standing almost shoulder-to-shoulder, so that I had to fight to squeeze between them. Many just stood there, squinting into the distance as if they were waiting to see something; others chatted among themselves, but their conversations didn't contain any hints at why they were here.

When I finally reached the front of the crowd, I found a stage set up in front of the Governor's Office. I frowned, confused. If there was going to be a speech, I was sure Lydia would have mentioned it to me. But there he was, discussing something with his assistant while several members of the crew scurried around the stage, setting up the microphone and speakers. I pushed back into the crowd, so that I would be invisible when my father looked out into the crowd.

That man, the governor of N-F12 since before I was even born, was someone I hardly knew at all. Sure, he bought me gifts when he thought it would keep me complacent, but otherwise he might as well have been a complete stranger. He shunted me off to Lydia the moment my mother had left after finding a job in another city, and he forgot about me. When I ran away when I was nineteen and joined up with Dane and his small gang of would-be rebels, I was gone for over a year before my father finally made an effort to find me. Ever since then, he was more than just my dead-beat of a father. He was the enemy. And he'd ruined everything for me.

“Thank you all for coming out today,” my father said into the microphone, his voice amplified so that it could reach every ear of the massive crowd. “Such a delightfully unexpected turn out for a standard press briefing.”

I blinked and glanced to the side. A press briefing? Hundreds of workers didn’t come out here just to see a press briefing, especially when practically everyone knew such a thing was complete nonsense anyway. The press was just another branch of the government in this place. Whatever was happening, I knew my father hadn’t been prepared to see a crowd of this magnitude gathered to hear about it, and from the look on his face, I knew he wasn’t at all happy at its popularity. Or infamy, it occurred to me, when I saw how most of the crowd was glaring up at him.

“I’m sure you know how excited we are to make this announcement,” he continued. “It’s been my goal as governor to clean up the city’s industrial districts and we are finally making progress. Beginning next week, we will be demolishing three of the most outdated factory districts in N-F12 and converting them into our newest residential districts in order to make way for the future of our city.”

I gaped up at the stage and angry shouts rose in the air all around me. Of course, it made sense now. My sorry excuse of a father, charged with protecting the interests of the people he governed, just destroyed the livelihood of hundreds of his citizens. The crowd surged forward, everyone fighting to get as close to the stage as possible in attempt to have their own shouts heard. I dodged an old man with a dirty face and sagging cheeks as he swung a knobby, home-made walking stick wildly in the air, only to get knocked into the edge of the stage by a large woman who was wearing nothing but what appeared to be an incredibly long poncho.

I rubbed my ribs, hoping the stage hadn’t caused any more damage than some bruising, and looked up at the stage to find my father staring straight at me. I swallowed hard and pushed away from the stage. A second later I was thrust back towards it by the thick crowd.

“Please, try to stay calm,” my father called over the noise of the crowd, never taking his eyes off of me. “Resorting to violence will only force us to call in the authorities.”

While he spoke, he motioned to his assistant, who came to the edge of the stage and tried to grab me. I slipped away before he get a firm grip and dove into the crowd. The infuriated workers

barely noticed when they slammed into me, tossing me back and forth as I fought against their tide. It was all I could do to stay on my feet and avoid getting trampled.

Then, a deafening bang silenced the crowd before a chorus of panicked screams filled the air. Seconds later, there was another bang, much closer, and I could see thick red smoke rising over the crowd. Someone was setting off smoke bombs.

The panic and confusion only made it harder to navigate the crowd. There seemed to be no end to the mass of people. A large man in a police uniform came barreling through the crowd, waving his metal nightstick indiscriminately at anyone who came within range. He shouldered me in the chest and would have succeeded in knocking me off my feet, except someone caught me from behind and kept me from being trampled by the crowd. I turned to see who had saved me and found myself face-to-face with Dane. I stared, frozen with shock.

“Let’s get out of here,” he said and, without waiting for an answer, dragged me through the crowd in his vice-like grip. He had an uncanny ability for finding the gaps in the wall of workers and it didn’t take long for him to find a more sparsely populated section of the street. With enough room for us both to breathe freely, he stopped and pulled me against his chest before I could wrap my head around what was happening.

I sank into him, unthinking, resting my head on his shoulder and clutching his thread-bare shirt in my fists.

The next moment, he was pushing me back. “What are you doing here, Jamie?” he asked, looking at me with suspicion.

I pulled away from him completely, ignoring the sinking disappointment that seemed to fill my chest. “I could ask you the same question. You wouldn’t be here unless you were planning something. You’re getting reckless if you are planning to do something with all these people around.”

He frowned. “How do you think they all knew to come?”

“What are you up to?” I asked, beginning to worry there was more to this than just inciting a riot.

“Not anything you want to stick around to see.” Dane took hold of my arm again and

started up the street. "Where's your bike?"

"There," I said, pointing to the small lot where I'd parked.

He stopped at the entrance of the lot and looked down at me. "You're going to get on that bike and go back to Lydia's as fast as you can. I don't want anybody to know you were here today."

I twisted my arm out of his hand again. He held it so tight it was beginning to lose circulation. Rubbing the feeling back into my limb, I told him, "It's too late for that. My father saw me in the crowd already."

"Damn it, Jamie!"

"It's not my fault! How was I supposed to know? And what's it matter if anyone knows I was here?"

Dane pressed his palm against his forehead, as if fighting a headache. "If you're father knows you were here, then he's going to know we were behind this."

"That's ridiculous," I said, sneering at him. "I haven't had anything to do with you for ages."

"You think any of that matters?" He laughed. "You're so naïve. You think he'll believe you showing up at a place you're not supposed to be on the same day as an attack is a coincidence?"

I knew he was right, but there was nothing I could do about it now. Besides, something else was suddenly nagging at my mind. "Attack?" Somehow, it sounded much more serious than I had expected.

"You have to come with me."

"What?" I stared at him, certain I hadn't heard right.

Dane opened his mouth, and I was certain he was about to snap at me, but something behind me caught his attention and his eyes grew wide. Without a word, he dragged me to the ground and shielded me with his arms.

The explosion drowned out everything and shook the pavement beneath us like an earthquake. Tiny pieces of rubble showered down on us like hail and in the wake of the deafening explosion the wail of a siren was rising.

I pushed Dane off of me and leapt to my feet, whirling around to see the devastation behind me. The front corner of the Governor's Office had been blown away, leaving nothing but a still-burning hole.

Most of the crowd was now on the ground, except for a few officers who were running towards the building. As for those who were closest to the blast... I couldn't look.

"Dane..." I was utterly numb. "How could you... all of these people..."

"Casualties happen when you go to war, Jamie." He took my hand, threading his fingers through mine, finally gentle for the first time all day, and pulled me away from the devastating scene.

He sat me on the back of my bike and took the driver's seat himself. I stared off to the side, unseeing, as he weaved through the crowded streets, expertly avoiding the police that now swarmed the capital. The gate out of the capital was blocked, shut down to keep anyone from leaving without being inspected and questioned first, but Dane knew how to get out without taking the highway, and we slipped through the net of security like smoke.

He must've driven for hours through different sectors of the city, but I closed my eyes and laid my head against the back of his shoulder until I felt the bike come to a complete stop. When I looked up, it was Lydia's old house looming over us.

Dane followed me into the house, barely pausing before he ran up the stairs and opening doors to find my bedroom. I went into the kitchen, following the sound of the latest news report coming from the television. I sat on the floor and leaned against the cabinets as I listened to the same anchorwoman from earlier today.

"Authorities are currently unable to locate the rebels suspected to be involved in the bombing of the capital. Several witnesses are currently being interviewed for any information concerning the attack."

I gave a sigh of relief. No one been caught. Not yet, at least.

"Authorities believe the bombing was directed at the governor, who managed to avoid the worst of the blast and is currently hospitalized for the treatment of minor injuries. Several rioters were killed in the bombing, and many more were severely injured. The UFICS council is now concerned with the escalating violence of the rebel group and is considering imposing further sanctions upon N-K12 until the threat can be eliminated."

I hear a snort from the doorway and freeze. I peak around the edge of the cabinets and see Lydia

watching the television with her usual look of disapproval. I look up at the ceiling, remembering he had come inside with me. What would Lydia do if she saw him? I leaned back against the cabinets and prayed she wouldn't come around to this side and find me.

After a few minutes of watching the newscast, Lydia turned around and shuffled toward the stairway. I didn't want to have to face her right now, but I couldn't let her go upstairs and find Dane. I got to my feet.

"Lydia," I said, and she stopped.

"What are you doing, hiding in the kitchen?" she snapped as she stepped back into the room.

I swallowed. "Did you hear the news?"

Lydia finally seemed to actually look at me, taking in my pale, sweaty face and my wide, fearful eyes. I was shaking with nerves. She seemed confused for a moment, before answering, "Yes, your father called me. But what are you so upset about? Your father's going to be fine. He's just been released from the hospital and he's on his way here."

I forced my face to stay neutral, even while my entire being was filled with horror. My father? Here? I glanced at the ceiling again.

"I better get ready," I mumbled to Lydia as I slipped past her. Once I was in the hallway, I sprinted for the stairs, slamming my door shut behind me as I hurtled into my room. Dane was still there, with my clothes strewn about the room and a half-filled bag on the floor. "Lydia's here," I told him.

"I know, I heard you talking." He looked completely unconcerned about how close he was to being found in my house, of all places.

"You have to get out of here."

He looked at me, his mouth set in a hard, determined line. "I'm not going anywhere without you."

"Are you out of your mind?" I kicked the bag over on the floor, spilling the carefully packed clothes everywhere. Dane shot me a deadly glare and righted the bag, refilling it with renewed determination.

"You can't just take me somewhere in the city and expect not to be found."

"We're not staying in the city. We're heading for the checkpoints I set up with the rebels in the other cities." Dane paused and looked at me. With an unusually soft look in his eyes, he touched the tips

of his fingers to my cheek. "The things we've been working so hard for are finally happening. I don't want to do it without you. Especially if I have to leave you behind in this mess."

"There's no way to get out of the city. The highway's been blocked."

Dane rolled his eyes at me. "There are other ways out of the city. How do you think I got here in the first place?"

I stepped away from him and sank onto my bed. Suddenly, having Dane back in my life had become all too real and somehow I wasn't sure it was everything I wanted it to be. Nothing truly kept me attached to this house or this city, but watching Dane kill innocent people in the name of the cause had made me uneasy. Freedom, the right to not have our lives dictated completely by the council. Were innocent lives truly going to be the cost for gaining these things?

But I could make a difference if I was there. I could be a voice of reason if their tactics became too extreme. Maybe I was just one person, but deep down they all knew that it was part of our cause to protect the people. Calling them necessary sacrifices made the rebels no better than the council. I looked up at Dane.

"We'd better hurry up, then. My father is on his way here."

Dane growled and threw a few more things into the bag haphazardly. "Can we get out through the window?"

I nodded and he slung the bag over his shoulder. He pulled the window open, the old wooden frame whining in protest. He ducked out onto the roof, which hung over the driveway, and dropped off the edge into the soft grass next to the garage. I climbed out after him, leaving the window open behind me, and followed his example. Once we were both astride the bike, the bag strapped across my chest so that Dane could drive, we took off in the direction heading away from the highway.

Closing my eyes, I leaned into Dane and concentrated on the wind whipping through my hair. I imagined this is what it would feel like to be outside the boundaries of the city. No barriers and no gates cutting me off from rest of the people in the world. Nothing but a long, open view.

Freedom.

Until the End Becomes the Beginning

By Emily Doseck

Driving through Iowa is one of the most boring things Haileigh has ever done. It's nothing but flat farmland and even though that makes it strategically near-perfect, she's pretty sure the zombies took one look at the bland state and skipped right over it. The next day, she curses herself for ever thinking anything bad about driving through it because walking the highway in nearly one hundred degree weather is much worse. Colby takes point after their car finally runs out of gas, the taller woman being far more adept with guns from her law enforcement training. Haileigh watches the rear even though they haven't seen a soul since they crossed the state line; it's less likely she'll accidentally fire at a tree or something equally innocent from back there.

"I told you not to complain about Iowa," Colby says from a few paces in front of her.

Haileigh can tell Colby is smirking. She's been on the receiving end of more than her fair share of them, especially since everything went to hell in a hand basket. "Yeah, yeah," she says under her breath as she turns to check behind them. She shoulders her rifle and jogs to catch back up once she's satisfied they're still alone. "Not like it isn't the truth, though. Even the cows decided this place was too boring to hang around."

"Pretty sure the cows leaving have more to do with the zombies taking over than with the state being boring, dear," Colby says with a laugh and roll of her eyes.

They walk in silence for a while. Haileigh checks the cars that occasionally show up deserted by the side of the road. She hasn't found anything good in them since they left Illinois; the last car she checked there had enough guns and ammo in the trunk for a small militia. The shredded and torn bodies half-dragged out of the front seats kept her from sticking around for too long. She grabbed just enough supplies to keep them going until their next stop. Now they're beginning to run low. If they don't find some more ammunition soon, they could be in real trouble.

This car is empty like most of the others along the stretch of Highway 20, no gas and nothing else that can help them. A map, something they already have, and a pack of cigarettes, something neither of them can use, sit on the front seat. Haileigh slams the driver-side door shut with a sigh.

"Nothing?" Colby says from a few feet ahead. She's standing in the middle of the road, holding their map out in front of her with a compass in one hand to check their position.

“Nope. Where are we?” Haileigh walks over and leans into Colby’s back, hooking her chin over the taller woman’s shoulder and letting some of the tension drain from her body at the contact. They don’t touch as much as they used to. It’s limited to sleeping together at night if they feel safe enough to both rest at the same time and little gestures, accidental touches throughout the day. She misses just being together, getting lost in the warmth of their relationship. Colby seems to be dealing with it better, content with the minimal affection; Haileigh isn’t sure if that makes her feel better or worse.

“I’d say about thirty-five miles east of Waterloo. There’s a small town, Winthrop, less than five miles away. If we keep moving, we’ll probably make it a little after noon. Hopefully there’ll be somewhere to get some food. We need to replenish our stock before we get too much farther into the state.”

Haileigh nods, looking up at the sun. “Maybe we should rest for the afternoon. It’s gonna get hot out here. I’d rather risk getting into a scuffle with some zombies at night when it’s cool enough to walk than keep moving all afternoon and be sun burnt tomorrow.”

Colby stuffs the map and compass into the hiking pack at her feet. “Let’s get going then. I’m dying for something to drink.”

Haileigh begins to smile, but Colby quickly holds up her hand.

“And no, that isn’t an invitation for more of your corny zombie jokes.”

“You’re no fun,” Haileigh grumbles as they start walking again.

Winthrop is a bust. Haileigh smells the smoke on the air half a mile before they reach the town. Even from a distance, they can both tell that there isn’t going to be much left. People started burning the towns, not sure what was turning everyone into zombies but hoping that fire would kill it. It doesn’t work, but that doesn’t stop anyone.

A few brick buildings are gutted but still standing. Everything else is gone, just piles of distorted furniture and support beams. They split up to do a quick glance-through at the rubble on the off chance that there’s something of value left. Colby finds a first-aid kit that’s still stocked in an open car trunk, but Haileigh comes up empty.

She hates walking through towns like this. The emptiness is unnerving. Every sound is amplified tenfold and it makes her jumpy. Haileigh nearly shoots at a swing when the rusty chains screech in the breeze. Colby puts a firm hand on her shoulder.

“It’s ok, I’m pretty sure we’re alone. Do you wanna stop and eat? Maybe that’ll calm your nerves.”

She shakes her head. “No, let’s keep moving.”

They’re soon standing on the steps of what used to be City Hall, looking out over the ruined town when Haileigh voices

the fears that have been niggling in the back of her mind since everything started. "Is this what it's going to be like from now on? Just town after town left empty and burnt?"

"Until someone realizes that setting things on fire isn't going to kill the zombies, yeah." When Haileigh sighs, Colby turns to look at her. "Are you ok?"

"Honestly? No, I'm not ok. This whole situation is not ok. It's the freaking apocalypse and I'm stuck in the middle of Iowa searching for scraps like a dog. Nothing is ok." Haileigh feels stupid finally saying it, like she's some sort of weakling from one of her silly sci-fi movies that needs the big, tough leader to protect her, but when Colby's face softens, she realizes that maybe her badass girlfriend has been a little scared too.

Glass crunches under Haileigh's feet. Every store window down the block is shattered, jagged edges of glass tinted red with blood or black with ash. Colby is still packing. Haileigh's been sent down to see if anything is left in the corner market. She hasn't been out on her own since everything started and it's a little unnerving to see the normally busy thoroughfare so empty. The rifle in her hands feels wrong, too heavy and unwieldy. She's used to the gentle weight of flowers and greens, thorns pricking her hands.

At the market, one door is nearly off its hinges, the other a spider web of fractured glass. It's dark inside; the city lost power only hours before and the cloudy sky provides little in the way of light. The glossy laminated ads catch the dull gray midafternoon sky and reflect it onto patches on the floor as she walks in. Carts are lined up along the wall, bumping into the produce coolers. The little fresh food left behind is already beginning to rot and the overly ripe smell stings her nose.

Haileigh stops and takes a deep breath. "Ok, I can do this. Get in, grab anything useful, get the hell out. Easy."

She takes three steps more into the darkness when a shadow pitches to her left. Her mind is flying, thoughts coming and going before she can focus on them. Then Colby's instructions come to her. 'Hold the rifle steady. Sight your target. Inhale, squeeze the trigger on the exhale. Be confident and you'll never miss.' She's firing as the shadow lunges, an agonized howl torn from the zombie's bloody lips. The crack of the bullet igniting and being pushed down the barrel is mind-numbingly loud, echoing off the walls as though she's been transported into a war zone.

The zombie falls over onto a toppled cart, setting a wheel spinning and squeaking from lack of oil. It's all Haileigh can do to not start crying.

Two o'clock comes and goes before they find a roadside diner that hasn't been ransacked. Another mile past Winthrop is

Kelly's Diner, boasting the "Best pie this side of the Mississippi River!" While Haileigh doubts she'll be finding the best pie here or anywhere, she'll take whatever they can find. If they're lucky, the building will still have power and they'll be able to get a warm meal for once.

When Colby opens the double doors, cool air pours out and Haileigh could cry at the relief she feels. It's a typical Midwestern diner: red and white booths with white Formica tabletops and bar-style seating facing the kitchen in the back. Metal pop and car signs from the '50s decorate the walls along with signed pictures of celebrities that have stopped by. Haileigh runs her fingers over the cool keys, A through Z and 1 through 26, of a refurbished jukebox that sits in the corner. She wishes she had a quarter to play "California Girls" for Colby. It was the first song they danced to years ago in a dive bar in the middle of Chicago. Moving on, she eyes the pie case. As she suspected, it's empty.

They lock the doors behind them after setting some quick-and-dirty trip wires, just in case they aren't as alone as they think. The walk-in cooler and stock room are full of food. Some of the fresh fruit and vegetables are beginning to turn, but everything else is still good. Colby fires up the grill, powered by a large propane tank in the back, and throws on some steaks, veggies, and potatoes.

Spinning around on one of the bar-like stools, Haileigh considers the pros of waiting out the food supply instead of moving on later in the evening. The building is relatively stable and as long as they have power and propane, they'd be good to go. But eventually the food will run out and power will either be cut or the propane will run out. Not to mention the chances of them running into zombies the longer they stay in one spot is a lot higher. Maybe they are better off leaving before dark.

"So, what's the plan? I mean, I get the basic avoid-the-zombies plan, but . . . are we going anywhere in particular?"

Colby flips the steaks before answering. "We should be in good shape when we get to the Rocky Mountains. A lot of people were heading west from what I heard over the radio before it died. Seems like as good a plan as any. You've always wanted to get out of the city and into the country anyway, right?" She's quick with a grin, but Haileigh can tell it's forced, for her benefit. Haileigh's little freak-out in Winthrop has erased the carefree mask she'd carefully put in place early on in their adventure.

"Right," she says, filing away the thoughts running through her head for another time as Colby plates their food.

The flower shop is ready to close when the small bell attached to the top of the door dings. Grabbing a towel to dry the water from her hands, Haileigh puts down the garden hose and walks around front. Colby is petting the large cat that resides on the windowsill.

“You’re here early,” Haileigh says as she leans up to kiss her girlfriend’s cheek.

“Mario needs me to stay late for him next week, so he came in early tonight,” Colby replies as she turns to drape her arms over Haileigh, lightly kissing her on the lips.

Alfonso tuts from behind the counter. “None of that mushy stuff in my flower shop, ladies. Some of us past our dating prime don’t need to be reminded of what we’re missing.”

“Mind if I steal her from you, Mr. Martz? I thought maybe I’d take my girl out for dinner and a movie, if you don’t mind.”

“Oh, why not. You’re young, have fun while you can!” He tries to hide the smile, but fails when Haileigh dances around the counter to grab her jacket and bag.

“Thank you, Alfie! See you Monday!” she calls as she drags Colby out the doors, bell dinging merrily in their wake.

Haileigh is dozing, dreaming of their life before the end of the world, when a scuffling comes from the ceiling. She jumps up and both of them are on their feet in seconds, guns ready and scanning the area, standing back to back. She breaks the heavy silence first. “What are the chances that it was just a rodent?”

“We could only be so lucky,” Colby says under her breath. “I’m going to head out back, circle around front on the west side. You take the east and front. Just be careful of the wire, they aren’t set as well as I’d like.”

Nodding, Haileigh moves forward, unwinding their homemade security system before unlocking the door. It’s quiet outside. The oppressive heat of the afternoon has driven any wildlife left to shelter, and even the bugs have silenced their humming. She suppresses a shiver, not liking the eerie stillness.

Automatic gunfire and a loud “son of a bitch!” send her sprinting around the corner of the diner. As she skids to a stop in the dusty grass, Haileigh cringes at the large bird that crunches when it hits the ground. Feathers flutter down between her and Colby as the other woman checks her rifle. “Please tell me we don’t have to deal with zombie birds now.”

“Nope. Just looked a bit too hungry and nasty for my taste. I’ve never been a fan of vultures.” Colby looks up at the high afternoon sun. “Let’s get back inside. You spend too much more time out here, you’re gonna get burnt.” She’s smirking again.

Scrunching her nose, Haileigh takes Colby’s hand as they walk back around the building. “I hate Iowa.”

They spend the next two weeks making their way west. Iowa doesn’t improve in Haileigh’s opinion and while Nebraska is better, it’s still boring as hell. They haven’t encountered too many rogue groups of bandits or militias, mostly just families

straggling behind after their vehicles break down. Sometimes they spend the night camped with them. Haileigh entertains the kids while Colby talks strategy with the adults. She's fine acting as a glorified babysitter. She's gotten better with her rifle and survival skills, but she's still nothing like Colby. The second night they spend camping with a family, they're snuggled together underneath the stars. It's colder than the night before and they zip their sleeping bags together to conserve body heat. Colby is reciting constellations that Haileigh never knew existed when she finds that she can't hold her tongue any longer.

"I've missed this, you know."

Colby stops. There's a pause before she speaks. "Missed what?"

"Being with you. I mean, we've been doing this whole post-apocalypse survival thing for three weeks now, but this is the first time we've really done something normal."

"If you call babysitting three munchkins and planning a hardware raid a normal night." Colby's smirking again but that quickly disappears when Haileigh aims an elbow into her ribs.

"No, I was talking about sleeping together, acting like we used to. Remember how we'd sleep on the fire escape when it was warm out and we didn't have to work the next day?"

"Yeah. We'd drink wine and talk about the house you wanted with all the animals." Colby is whispering and if Haileigh didn't know any better, she'd say that her lover was a little choked up.

Rolling over, Haileigh props herself up on her elbows to look at Colby. "We'll have that someday. When this is all over or better or whatever's going to happen, we'll build our house and have a barn full of animals."

"Sounds like a plan," Colby says as she leans down to kiss Haileigh.

Haileigh smiles, truly smiles, for the first time in what feels like weeks.

Another three weeks finds them passing the Welcome to Cheyenne! sign in Wyoming. The skyline is full of smoke, church spires cracked and broken stabbing the sky. They walk down side streets, past the wreckage of cars and houses, as they head to the main drag through town. Surprisingly, groups of people are scattered around in yards with fire barrels and tents.

"Keep your eyes open. I'm not sure I trust people staying here. No other town has had anyone sticking it out so far," Colby says as they pass a compound of rough men with a few straggly mutts.

Haileigh just nods, tightening her grip on her rifle and moving closer. It's a few more blocks before they can see the parallel lines of buildings. They've just passed a small garage with dirty windows when they hear a wolf-whistle from down the street.

Colby freezes, but Haileigh spins around instantly.

“Well, well, well. What are a couple of girls like you doing all alone in our fair city?” The taller of the three men approaching speaks. He’s exactly what Haileigh would have effected from a post-zombie apocalypse creep: dingy, tanned, and overly-muscled.

“Seriously?” she mutters as Colby places a restraining hand on her forearm.

“What kind of hosts would we be if we didn’t offer them some good ol’ hospitality, right, boys?” His sneer is the final straw.

“You can take your hospitality and shove it—” Haileigh begins. She’s cut off as the man’s hand connects with her jaw, sending her down to her knees.

The other two men reach for Colby as she tries to jump the leader and that’s all Haileigh sees before everything goes black.

Haileigh wakes up with her arms tied behind her back. She’s on her side, cool concrete soothing her cheek where it burns from the slap. Groaning as she struggles to set up, Haileigh tries to remember where she is. After the fight, everything is a blank.

“Fine mess we’re in now.”

Colby is sitting cross-legged on the ground five feet away, separated by metal bars.

“What happened?” Haileigh asks as she finally gets vertical. The world tilts at a dangerous angle but closing her eyes helps the feeling pass quickly.

“You threatened the wrong person, apparently. Someone came up behind us and knocked us out.” With a sigh, Colby looks over at her. “I don’t think we’re going to be making it to the Rockies anytime soon.”

A door across from their cells opens. The three men from earlier enter, setting their rifles down on a table. The two flunkies pull up folding chairs while the leader walks up to where Haileigh is being kept.

“So, you gonna act like a lady now, missy?”

She doesn’t say anything, biting her tongue against the flurry of retorts that pop into her mind.

“Hmmm,” he says before turning to Colby. “We went through your bags. Have quite a bit of ammo and supplies stored up, didn’t you? The people of Cheyenne thank you kindly for your generous gifts.”

“Just give us our stuff back and we’ll leave town. We aren’t looking for trouble, we just want to find somewhere safe to settle down.” Colby’s voice is even, but Haileigh can tell from the tightness of her shoulders and the way she keeps flexing her

hands behind her back that it's a cover, a way to keep from upsetting the bandit.

"I'm insulted. Cheyenne isn't good enough for the two of you? Boys, I don't think these ladies like our fair city." The two men at the table chuckle darkly.

"We just want to leave. We're sorry if we've done anything to offend you, but if you let us go, we'll get out and won't say a word about anything." Colby gets to her feet slowly and leans against the bars.

At the leader's nod, the bigger of the two goons pulls a taser from his back pocket. Haileigh scrambles to her feet when the leader unlocks Colby's door, pulling her roughly out and shoving her at the other man. When Haileigh starts yelling, Taser Man points it in her direction. She's forced down to her knees again as the electricity courses through her body and sends her back into the darkness.

When she finally comes to, the setting sun is shining brightly in through the window, reflecting off the opposite wall and nearly blinding Haileigh. Colby is curled up around her, dried blood caked in her hair and on her lips. There's a darkening bruise on her cheek. Sitting up, Haileigh tries her best to settle into a comfortable position without jostling her girlfriend. She manages it, but wishes that her hands weren't tied behind her back so she could at least attempt to figure out if anything is majorly wrong with Colby. As it is, she takes comfort in the steady rise and fall of her chest and waits for her to wake up.

The sun has set by the time she wakes. Haileigh is beginning to nod off herself, jerking awake every time she feels herself drifting into sleep. Colby coughs, fresh blood staining her lips. She slides off Haileigh's lap, resting her bruised cheek against the cool concrete. "How long have I been out?" she asks after a few minutes of harsh breathing.

"A couple of hours I'd guess. They tasered me when they took you and I woke up with you here."

"How are you feeling?" Colby struggles to sit up and Haileigh wishes there was something more she could do.

"Like I was hit by a couple million volts of electricity. Oh wait..." The joke falls flat, Haileigh can tell, but she appreciates the grimace masquerading as a smile that Colby shoots her. "What about you? You're the one who was taken God-knows-where."

"Just some back room. Nothing really happened. They just wanted to know what we knew about everything. I'd put my money on them being government conspiracy idiots. Dumb and Dumber about had heart attacks when they saw my EMT stuff in my wallet." Colby shrugs with a sigh, setting off another fit of coughing.

"This isn't nothing. You've been bleeding. What did they do to you? I'll kill them, I swear I will."

"Haileigh, don't. It's not worth it. If we stay cool, we have a better chance of getting out of this alive. They roughed me up a

bit, ok? I've been hurt worse playing basketball with my brothers."

She isn't satisfied with that answer. The bruises and cuts that decorate Colby's visible skin speak far louder than her words. Shifting down so she's pressed tightly against her, Haileigh maneuvers so her shoulder is shoved under Colby's head, turning it into a make-shift pillow.

Colby shuffles closer, leaning in so their foreheads are touching and Haileigh is forced to make eye contact. "We're gonna make it out of this. We'll keep going west until we find some little piece of land and then we'll build our ranch on it, with horses and cows and chickens, even if I have to go all over the county myself to pick up strays. We'll fight zombies and bandits until everything is better. We just have to keep fighting."

Haileigh nods, holding back the tears that are threatening to spill. She'll keep fighting, will never stop fighting if fighting means getting back to their dream and finally starting to heal.

Getting Even

By Diana LoConti

Tuesday

"I really don't understand why you are making me do this." I walked sluggishly out of the dressing room to the three-way mirror. "I told you, I'm not going."

"That's what everyone says when they first hear about reunions. Trust me, in two days you will be jumping into the car with me praising me for making you buy this dress." Liv walked over to me – staring and tugging at the far-too-revealing magenta dress she insisted I try on. "A few alterations and a couple days of crash dieting, and you will be the hottest thing in that reception hall. Just like high school."

Olivia Bryant was a tall, beautiful, and extremely talented actress/dancer. And my best friend. After high school she got a degree in theater and dance from Juilliard and landed a job teaching ballet and improv acting there. I stood motionless staring at the unknown reflection the mirror portrayed.

"I look like an up-scale hooker." I turned slightly to see Liv's reaction. "I'm not going, but even if I was I wouldn't be caught dead in this."

Liv was pissed. "What are you talking about!?! You look great. No one will be able to take their eyes off you! Not even Mr. I'm-too-good-for-everyone Brody Jackson."

Brody Jackson. Star quarterback of the football team, Harvard Graduate, and my father's idea of my perfect match. We dated once in high school. The last person I wanted laying eyes on me like this was Brody Jackson.

"I don't want anyone looking at me. The less attention on me the better. Hence why I'm NOT going."

"What the hell is wrong with you? Where is Jess Oswald, miss varsity cheerleader, miss prom queen, miss voted most likely to succeed? You are acting like a completely different person."

I could tell Liv was irritated. She stood there – her hand on her hip, lips pursed – waiting for my response. My mind screamed to tell her the truth. Jess Oswald is gone. This is the new Jess. Miss unemployed, miss down-on-her-luck, miss can't go a night without a drink.

"People change, Liv." She rolled her eyes at me.

"You're crazy Jess. You may be older and had more life experiences, but you are still the same old Jess everyone at

Cathedral remembers. You have an education from two of the top schools in the country, you are starting your own law firm for God's sake."

Cathedral High School was one of Boston's top private schools back when Liv and I were kids. Parents, including ours, sent their children to Cathedral with some absurd idea that this separation from the "less fortunate" students would ensure their children made it big after graduation. I wanted to tell Liv that she was wrong. That I had fallen farther than any of them had realized. But what good would that do? How do you tell your best friend and your father – a well known surgeon who spent thousands on your education – that it was all for nothing? That you blew it? That you – his precious can-do-no-wrong-princess had become one of the "less fortunate" people he had spent his entire life keeping you from becoming? The answer is simple: you don't. In order to keep the little bit of sanity and dignity I had left I had to keep lying. At least for now.

Liv handed me another stack of dresses. Apparently fashion show time was not going to be over until we both agreed upon a dress and I bought it. I tried on a royal blue knee-length strapless dress by Gucci. The deep color made my olive skin and dark features look even more exotic. For a second I felt unstoppable, like the old Jess again. Even if I wasn't going to this reunion it would be nice to have a new dress just in case something came up. And I did have my cousin Joe's wedding coming up that summer. We both agreed it was the one – well all until I looked at the price tag. \$679 was almost one month's rent – one month's rent that I had not paid in three months.

"I dunno, Liv," I said trying to persuade her to agree with me by the tone of my voice, "I probably have something at home I can wear, if I even decide to go."

"No way!! I know for a fact you don't have anything close to this dress in that out-dated closet of yours. And you are going."

"I'm not going to spend \$700 on a dress for an event I don't even plan on attending." I could feel my credit cards screaming inside my wallet.

"You're getting the dress. And you're going to this reunion - even if I have to drag you there."

"Liv, plea-"

"No more arguing! You are getting the damn dress and we are both going to this reunion! Together. Just like we said we would in high school."

"Okay. . ." I reached inside my wallet and found the only credit card I had that wasn't maxed out – the one I had been saving for real emergencies. With one swipe I felt the weight of my situation begin to settle into a more permanent state.

Wednesday, 3am

“What kinda pie you got?” The tall man, probably in his late twenties early thirties, attempted to keep his focus on my answer. I could smell the heavy liquor on his breath. Top designer suit, enough “bling” to open a small jewelry shop, and four beautiful, young women sitting around him in dresses they surely couldn’t afford. I’d seen him around before and I knew some of the girls he came in with. They all worked down the block at Cantina Lounge, and I assumed this was the man in charge. Just another typical night at Mel’s Diner.

“Pecan and Blueberry tonight.”

“Let me get one of each, sugar.”

“Comin’ right up.” I walked toward the kitchen as fast as I could, trying to push the fact out of my mind that Mr. Player at table 6 was watching me the whole way.

“Two slices, fresh from the bakery.” I set the plates down in the center of the table.

“Thanks sugar. What’s a pretty little thing like you doin’ workin’ at this diner?”

“Just trying to make rent, sir.”

“Ah I see. An’ how much you make wokin’ this job?”

What was this? 20 questions? I make shit, sir. \$ 2.30 an hour plus whatever measly tips the dead-beats that come in here this late at night, or early in the morning depending on who you are, want to give me. Is that what you want to hear? I bit my tongue and answered.

“Not nearly enough.” I cracked a smile hoping he would end the conversation and let me go back to filling salt shakers and ketchup bottles. He stared for a minute, rubbing his thumb and pointer finger across his scruffy beard.

“How’d you like to come work for me? Get outta this dump and make some real cash.”

“Uhh . . .” I stumbled to find words, “and what exactly would I be doing to get this cash?”

“Hah! Don’t worry baby, you don’t gotta do nothin’ you don’t wanna do. Just put on a little show, get a little cash and go home. Nothin’ to it. Pretty thing like you could make a fortune.”

I tried to force my anger down to politely refuse his offer. Who the hell did this guy think he was? Just because I work a crap job doesn’t mean I have to lower my standards.

“Thanks for the offer but I think I’ll pass. If you need anything else just ask Cynthia over there. I’m headed out on

my break.”

I rushed to the back of the kitchen, threw down my apron and kicked the back door open. Has my life really come down to this? Working a dead end waitress job in a scummy neighborhood and actually being asked to work at a strip club? I lit a cigarette. The new life style had come with some new life choices – smoking being one of them. I finally understood why broke people continue to smoke even when they have no money. Stress reliever. Man if my dad could see me now. That would surely be a kick in the ass. Precious, perfect Jessica sitting on the back steps of Mel’s, smoking a cigarette on her break from her 3rd shift waitress job. Priceless.

By the time I got back inside Mr. Macho and his ladies had already left. I grabbed the bussing bin and started to clear the table. Under the bill I found two hundred dollars and a business card.

Cantina Lounge

Joey Cantina, owner

On the back of the card was a phone number. “Think about it, sugar . . .”

Wednesday night

I spent most of the day staring at Joey’s little note and the \$ 200 tip he had left me. How could someone be so sleazy? How could he think someone like me would want to be up on a stage with hardly any clothes on just to make a few bucks. Disgusting! That would really make my parents proud. I could see it now: “Sorry Dad, but I lost my job and wasted my education. Oh and did I mention I’m a stripper now? By the way, Mom, this is great chicken! What’s for desert?”

I always told myself I was going to make it big. My name was going to be one that everyone knew, well at least everyone in New York. I’d been working towards my future plan for so long – how could it have gotten so fucked up? It just didn’t make sense. I thought people like me were supposed to go to school, get a great job, meet the man of their dreams, and live happily-ever-after with my intelligent and hansom husband and our three perfect children.

I went to the kitchen to get some dinner. I opened the fridge and found nothing but some leftovers from Mel’s and a few cans of Bud Light. I don’t think I had been to the grocery store for actual groceries in over a month.

What if he was right? What if this was the only way for me to get back on my feet? Plenty of girls did it back in college. It wasn’t like I was becoming a prostitute or anything, just a dancer. Yes. A dancer. No big deal, right?

I finally made a decision. There was no way in hell I was going to show up at my reunion as a nobody. I couldn’t let

them all know I had failed. And to do that I needed money, and fast. Liv said something about us all going out to some private dinner with our group from high school. Knowing them this meant a five star restaurant with a seven-course meal – at least \$ 150 a person, plus drinks. I put on some tight jeans, a revealing red blouse, red pumps and headed out the door.

Cantina Lounge was only a block away from Mel's, which made the commute easy. From the outside it looked like a typical bar, but once you walked in everything changed. The room was filled with top notch furniture, granite table tops, and men dressed in Armani suits with Rolexes. Nothing about this place was typical.

I spotted an empty seat at the bar and sat down.

"What can I get for ya?" I turned around to see quite possibly the best looking bartender in the city. Tall, olive skin, piercing green eyes. I froze. "You alright?"

"Oh, uh, yeah. Sorry I'm just not used to this kind of place. Can you tell me where Joey is? I need to talk to him."

"Hah, yeah that's what they all say their first day. He's in his office – down the hallway to the left. Just make sure you knock first, okay?"

"Uh sure. Thanks."

The hallway leading to Joey's office was dark and empty. Not a single person in the club stepped into it. I could see a light on at the end of the hallway coming from a slightly cracked door. My heart was beating faster than when I took my bar exam. I took a deep breath and knocked.

"Come on in!" Joey shouted from inside. I pushed the door open reluctantly and stepped into the light. "Oh hey sugar! I knew you'd come around. Come in! Have a seat."

Joey's office looked like a bad '80's movie. Shag carpets, neon oddly shaped couches, and a disco ball hanging from the ceiling. I sat down on the bright blue couch and waited for him to say something.

"So what can I do for ya, sweet cheeks?"

I paused. "I need money. A lot of money. And quick."

"You in some kinda trouble little lady?"

"No. Well, yes. I just need to make some fast cash. Can you do that for me or not?"

He chuckled. "Of course of course. Big J's got just what you need, sugar. Ever been on stage before?"

"N-no. But it can't be that hard. Shake a little bit and flirt with some old sleazy men." I turned around and did a little

shake. "Got it. When can I start?"

By the time I turned around he was already standing right in front of me. He grabbed my hips and pulled me closer to him. "Fiesty! I like it. Come back tomorrow. Tonight, you watch an' learn." I got up and headed towards the door. "An' one more thing, sugar. You need a stage name. Somethin' . . . bad, if ya know what I mean."

I pushed him away and walked closer to the door. "I'm here on business, Joey. I'm not another one of your little pets. Got it?"

"Whatever you say sugar. Whatever you say." He laughed a despicable laugh.

I slammed the door, the sound of his laughter still lingering.

Friday Morning

Liv picked me up bright and early. The plan was to drive down, check in, and spend the day lounging around the pool until dinner.

"The Santino twins made reservations at the hotel lounge." Liv sounded overly excited, as usual. "The whole group will be there! Me, you, Stacy, Julia, Tim, Jake, Bri, Robbie, and, of course, Brody."

Great. Just what I wanted to hear. Not only will I have to sit through an entire dinner of questions on how life was going and where my career has taken me, but now I would have to come up with a whole new set of lies to keep Brody from finding out that his perfect ex had ruined her life.

"Sounds like a blast." I forced a smile, holding back a scream.

"I knew you would change your mind about this whole reunion thing! I can't wait to see everyone. And who knows, maybe you and Brody will finally reconnect. The perfect couple back together." Liv was giving me that devious smile she always does when she's plotting some grand scheme that usually backfires.

"Liv, I don't want to get into this again. I'm not looking for a relationship right now, especially not one with Brody Jackson."

Truth is every fiber of my being wanted him back. I missed him. I missed us. But us could never happen now. Brody Jackson would never be caught dead dating a broke New York waitress, especially not with my recent career change. Liv's eyes burned holes through me. Sometimes it felt like with one look she could read every thought I was having. I turned to look out my window, fighting her analysis.

"You know, you're not getting any younger. We are almost 30 years old Jess! Don't you think its time you stopped

fighting it and let him back into your life? I mean, come on, your biological clock just keeps on ticking and Brody is a great catch! Any other woman in the whole world would die if he gave them the time of day.”

How the hell do you come back to that? She was right. There isn't a single girl I know that would turn down the chance to be Mrs. Brody Jackson.

“Well I don't want to,” was all I could come up with. Pathetic.

Liv rolled her eyes. “You're impossible, you know that?”

The rest of the ride was silent except for the occasional sing-along song that popped on the radio and the isolated comments about the scenery. Liv and I had grown apart. Her world revolved around designer clothing, good-looking men, and lunch dates with other actors and dancers in town. Mine consisted of last year's fashions from the thrift store, waitressing at a sleazy café on the north side of the city and now dancing like a Girls Gone Wild girl on a stage for New York's elite. Not that she knew any of that.

Friday Afternoon

We pulled into the hotel around 2:30 in the afternoon.

“Jeez, this place is huge!” An older man in uniform approached my door.

“Good afternoon, ladies.” He opened our doors and helped us out. Two younger men came to help carry our bags inside the building. The lobby of the hotel was just as fancy, maybe even more so. It was painted completely in yellows and golds, making it feel as though everything was gold plated. In the center of the lobby was a giant fountain that poured into a large pool of water. A grand staircase, like one you see in movies about royalty, led to the second floor dining and lounge area. It was the most magnificent thing I had ever seen.

“Isn't this great, Jess? The reunion committee sure outdid themselves.”

I followed Liv to the check in desk trying to keep myself from staring like a fool. The woman at the desk gave us our keys and pointed us in the direction of the elevators. Liv was babbling on and on about something, but all I could do was stare. We reached our room and Liv opened the door.

“Ohhh my goodness! This is absolutely beautiful! Jess look at this place! Isn't it great?”

“Yeah. . .” my mind was blown. All I could think about is how much this hotel room was going to cost us. “Liv, how much did you say this place was a night? It's bigger than my apartment.”

“\$300, I think. But they said something about the reunion class getting \$50 off per night, so we will see when we check

out. What does it matter though? This place is worth every penny!"

I gulped so hard I felt my throat hit my stomach. \$ 300 a night? Jesus! I knew I had been brought up in a more well-off family but this was just insane. How the hell were a bunch of people in their late-twenties supposed to think \$ 300 a night for a hotel was nothing? \$ 300 was 1/3 of my month's rent!

"O-oh." Another gulp. "\$ 300 a night? Isn't that a bit.. much?"

Liv laughed. "Oh come on Jess. Don't act like \$ 300 is really that big of a deal to someone like you. You make twice that in a few hours at work!"

It took every ounce of me to keep myself from bursting out in laughter. Sure, this new gig with Cantina was making me a lot more money. In one night I had been able to bring in almost \$ 600, but who knew how long that would last? How long I would last?

"Lets go down to the pool and relax for a few hours. I'm exhausted and could use some vitamin D."

Friday Night

Liv and I spent a few hours getting ready. I hadn't gone through this routine in months, maybe even a year. The hotel suite had two separate bathrooms, so each of us got ready alone. I figured this would give me some time to reflect on everything that was about to happen.

"Jess you look amazing! I told you that dress was the one." Liv walked around me checking out each and every angle. "Now THIS is the Jess I remember. Brody is definitely going to be turning his head your way tonight." She gave me that same little devilish smile.

"Thanks, Liv." I said, ignoring the end of her statement. "You look great too. What time are we supposed to meet everyone?"

"Reservations are for 8. If we leave now we will be fashionably late."

One thing Liv always loved was making an entrance. We walked out of the elevator and down the hallway. The lounge not only had a grand staircase heading from the lobby to the entrance, but another one from the entrance to the lobby of the lounge. We turned the corner and stood at the top of the stairs. Liv immediately zeroed in on our group.

"Look! There they are." Liv nudged my arm.

As we started down the stairs I looked down and saw him standing there. Tall, muscular, and absolutely perfect. Three years had passed since I'd seen Brody but nothing had changed. He was just as handsome as I remembered, maybe even more

than before. Getting older only seemed to improve him.

“Liv!! Hey sweetie how are you?!” The twins flocked toward Liv instantly. Most of our group had kept in touch over the years, but I was never really that close to anyone but Liv and Brody.

“Ahhh! It’s so great to see you! It’s been too long.” Liv led the way to our table on the patio. The meal was spectacular, but the catching-up talk was not.

“So Jess, Liv tells us you left the Cohen firm and are trying to start your own?”

“That’s amazing! Just out of law school and already starting your own place!” The Santino twins, Stacy and Julia, were always the gossip queens. They had to know all the details on everyone’s lives.

“Yeah, I mean it is still in the works but, uh, eventually it will get going.” I tried to dodge their questions all night, being as vague as possible. “But enough about me, what have all of you been doing?” One thing I remembered: the Santino twins loved to talk. Especially about themselves.

“Well, I got married after undergrad to Tommy Paxton. He’s a doctor. We just had our first son, Joseph, last year. Tommy doesn’t want me to rush back into working, so I am taking some time off and just being a mom.”

“Yeah and right after Stacy got married I got engaged.” Julia flashed her at-least-three-carrot diamond in our direction. “His name’s Jonathon and he just got the senior partner position at an accounting firm in Seattle.”

Small talk lasted through dinner, everyone trying to hit all the highlights since graduation. Everyone decided to head down to the hotel bar to have a few more drinks and catch up. I stayed to the back of the crowd, hoping to avoid more questions.

“Jess, can I talk to you for a minute?” Brody grabbed my arm lightly and pulled me to the side. Every hair on my arm stood straight up.

“Uh, s-sure.” I stuttered. Three years of waiting for this moment. Three years of picturing how we would meet again and what we would say, and now it had to happen when I was completely unprepared.

Brody led me outside to the balcony towards the back of the bar.

“God, it feels good to get away from that, huh? I forgot how much those three chat when they are together.” He leaned against the railing, smiling his perfect smile at me.

“Yeah, they always have been the social butterflies.” I chuckled in an attempt to relieve some of the awkwardness.

“Yeah. That’s what I always liked about you. You never were one of those girls who was always in everyone’s business. Always more mellow . . . down to Earth.”

We stood there in silence for a few moments, sipping our drinks and looking out off the balcony.

“Remember that family vacation we took together to Palm Springs back in high school?” He finally broke the silence. “The one where your dad kept trying to convince my father that the Red Sox were going to win the series that year?”

I laughed. “Yeah. They bicker more than an old married couple.”

“Yeah they do. Always have to turn everything into a battle on who is right and who is wrong.” He chuckled and I gave another little smile.

His laughing faded but he continued to look at me – his face turning more serious. “Look, Jess,” he looked down at his drink, “I know things ended badly with us last time, but I really want to start over. I’ve been thinking about it for a while and, well, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to put you through that. I didn’t mean to push you away like that.”

“Brody, please-“

“No just let me say this. We were young! And heading off to different colleges. I thought- I just thought I needed some time to experience new things. I thought there was something beyond Cathedral that I was going to find. But I was wrong.” He paused, looking at me like he had pictured this in his head a thousand times and knew how I would react.

I looked out to the skyline hoping an answer would come to me.

“Brody, I just don’t think right now is the right time. I don’t think . . . you would feel the same way if . . . if you knew everything that was going on right now.” My voice cracked as I spit the words out.

“Jess, I don’t care what’s going on right now! I don’t care if you’re busy with your career or if you have changed. I know you – the real you. And I want you back. I want to go back to how things used to be.”

“Can we talk about this another time? Please, Brody. I just . . . can’t right now.” I turned and hurried for the elevator.

“Jess, wait! Come back!”

I went straight to our room without turning back.

Saturday afternoon

“Hey, where did you disappear to last night? Jules and I were looking everywhere for you.” Liv rubbed her eyes and moved to the couch.

“I didn’t feel good after dinner. I just came back here and went to bed. Sorry.”

“I saw you and Brody talking.” Liv said bluntly after a pause. “It looked pretty serious.” I knew this conversation wasn’t going to stop until she got the information she wanted.

"Yeah, he wanted to talk about us," I said reluctantly.

"Oh? And?"

"I dunno. He just said that he was sorry for everything."

"...and?"

"And... and that he wanted me back."

"I knew it!" Liv basically jumped out of her seat. "I told you he wanted you back! Oh my gosh this is great! Now you and him can finally get on with everything!"

"Don't get too excited. I told him I couldn't talk about this right now."

Her eyes turned to daggers. "You did what?"

"I told him I wasn't ready to talk about everything."

"Are you insane!? I've listened to you talk about him for years and now he finally comes around and apologizes and tells you he wants you back and you blow him off?! What is wrong with you!"

It took almost all day for Liv to finally calm down about the Brody situation. By the time the reunion dinner came around she had convinced herself that it was just me having cold feet and that tonight would be different. I spent the majority of the night listening to the twins and Liv gossip about everyone they could remember, and the rest of the night avoiding being left alone with Brody. A slow dance came on and I found myself isolated next to him, coincidentally, I'm sure.

"It's our song." He leaned over and whispered in my ear. "Care to dance?" He smiled that oh so familiar smile.

I smiled back, "Sure."

He led me out onto the dance floor and whirled me around, just like he had in high school. Brody was an excellent dancer, light on his feet and extremely good at taking the lead. Some things never change.

Halfway through the dance he leaned in close. "Jess, just give it a chance! Dinner. That's all I'm asking for." He begged.

He looked so cute when he really wanted something. Dinner. Just one simple dinner. I could do that, right? No big deal. Go to dinner, go home.

"Fine. Dinner. But I'm picking the place," I teased as he twirled me around the dance floor one more time.

His whole face lit up with a smile. He was going to be trouble...

Wednesday

“Sugar! Sugar, where the hell are you!” Joey was running around back stage screaming as loud as he could.

“Sugar you better be ready in the next 5 seconds and be on that stage!”

“I told you I picked my stage name! It’s Raven now. No more sugar, no more sweet thang, just Raven.” I walked around the corner and headed toward my dressing station. “I’ll be ready in a minute! I just need to change.”

“No shit. What the hell you all dolled up for?”

“I just came from dinner. Is that okay with you, boss?” Joey had really been getting on my nerves the past few days. Apparently he needed to know the whereabouts of all his girls all the time.

“You went on a date? How the hell you pull that off? He know you strip?” Joey couldn’t control his laughter.

“That’s my business, not yours.” Who the hell did he think he was? I was a grown woman. If I wanted to go on a date, who’s to tell me I can’t? So what if Brody didn’t know every little detail of my life just yet? It had been years since we were close. And this was just a temporary thing to get me back on my feet. What he didn’t know wouldn’t kill him.

I got on stage around midnight. Joey had Bambi go on before me to make sure I was ready to put on a good show. God forbid any of his customers weren’t one hundred percent satisfied. I was doing my normal routine when I saw him out of the corner of my eye sitting near Candy’s stage. Robert Cohen; president of Cohen and Associates law firm in the city. My old boss. The man responsible for ruining my life.

I started working for Cohen right out of law school. My job was simple: keep a low profile, listen, and learn. I figured it would only be a matter of months before I found some great discovery in one of their cases that would win it all and they promoted me. I spent months doing all the grunt work when finally my window of opportunity presented itself. I got placed on a case with a few associates dealing with some immigrants whose son had gotten involved in gang life. Long story short, the whole family was now in danger of being deported.

“Yes Mr. Chang, Edward and I have everything under control. Don’t you worry about a thing. We are meeting with the deportation officers today.” I was sitting outside Doug’s door combing through police statements. “Okay, Mr. Chang. See you tomorrow. G’bye.” The phone clicked. “Can you believe this guy? Actually thinks that he and his family are going to get off that easy.”

“Hah! Yeah, too bad. I almost feel sorry for the guy. I mean, he doesn’t stand a chance against the immigration office. Especially not when they are the ones paying us.” Both men laughed.

“Ahh just think. A few months from now and we will be in the Caribbean while Mr. Chang and his family are enjoying the wonders of their home town in China.”

After hearing this, I decided it was time to start snooping. I found out Edward and Doug had been taking pay-offs from the immigration office and the local politicians to purposely throw cases, making it look like the government was doing their job in keeping immigration laws tight.

I went in to the office that morning determined to tell Robert what his associates were doing. I had an entire speech prepared on how I would explain how unethical and disgraceful their little scheme was. Robert would be so pleased with my discovery and confidence that he would make me, 25-year-old Jessica Oswald, a junior partner.

Have you ever had a plan that you ran over millions of times in your head? Speaking each and every line and imagining all of your mannerisms? You have this entire scene already pictured in your head and know exactly what the outcomes will be. If you know what kind of situation I am talking about then you know that they never play out the way you pictured them.

I stepped out of the elevator on the 20th floor and headed straight for Robert’s office.

“Where are you going?!” his secretary screamed after me.

“Not today Trudy. I have something to talk to Mr. Cohen about.”

I walked past her desk and knocked on his door, Trudy still telling me I had to make an appointment or wait for permission to go in.

“Good morning Jessica. To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“Mr. Cohen,”

“Please, Jessica, call me Robert.”

“Right. Robert. I’m afraid I have some terrible news regarding some of your associates.” My knees were trembling so much I thought I was going to fall over.

“May I offer you a drink?” Robert leaned over the giant table and reached for two glasses. He turned his attention back to me. I could feel his eyes watching me. Something about him made me nervous – broad shoulders, dark complexion, power.

“Uhm, just a water please.”

He handed me the glass. “Now, what was it you needed to tell me?”

“eh hem, Right! Well, sir, I have been working closely with the Chang case and I have come across some disturbing news. Based on the information I have gathered, it appears that some of the associates working under you have taken it

upon themselves to throw certain cases to receive a pay off by local politicians.” My heart was pounding. I had never spat out information so fast in my entire life. I sat back and waited for his praise. But it never came.

Three weeks later I found out that Robert was in on this little money game as well. He had been stringing me along to see how much I would actually find out, probably so he could learn how to cover his ass in the future. I threatened to go to the police, but Robert ensured me that it would do no good. He had all the players sitting in the palm of his hand. I left the firm in hopes of getting a new job somewhere else. Only problem was Robert had blacklisted me to every law firm in the city. Told them I was deceptive and greedy.

“Candy, you know that guy that was over by your stage tonight? Mid forties, dark features?”

“Mr. Cohen! Yeah I know him real well. Been comin’ here for years. One of my regulars now. Why? you know ‘im?”

“Oh, uh, no. I was just wondering. . .”

“Ahhh you like what you see, huh?”

“Y-yeahh. Yeah, I do.”

“Mr. Cohen comes here ‘bout twice a week. Wednesdays and Fridays, usually. Makes some deals with that Johnny Turner fellow that’s always here.”

“Wait, what? Johnny Turner? The drug dealer?” The cards may have just turned in my favor.

“Yeah, yeah. The one that’s always here with Baabs.”

Robert Cohen making deals with some of New York most high profile drug dealers. I have never been one for seeking revenge, but it seemed fate had placed this right in front of me. This man ruined my career, my life. And I was going to make sure I ruined his.

Friday, 3 weeks later

“Hey! Jess over here!” Liv was sitting at a round table on the patio.

“Hey, Liv.”

“I ordered us some drinks. Long islands. Hope that’s okay.”

“Yeah, that’s fine.” I laughed a little. Liv was always ordering the drinks before I got there. It didn’t matter if it was 10 in the morning, if we were meeting for a meal and catch up chat, we were ordering drinks.

“Soooo. Tell me all about it.”

“All about what?”

“Your date with Brody! What else? Don’t act like you could hide it from me. I know you two have been seeing each other since the reunion. Stacy and Julia said the boys have hardly seen Brody on the weekends cause he keeps taking trips up to the city.” Liv sounded so proud that she had played detective so well.

“Well, I dunno. It’s going good I guess. We’ve been on a few dates. Dinner, movies. Nothing too out of the ordinary.”

“Oh come on. That’s it? You and Mr. Right get back together after years and you just go to dinner?”

I laughed, “Yes Liv. We just went to dinner.”

“Well thanks for taking all the fun out of it.”

“I’m sorry. As soon as something juicy happens, I promise you will be the first to know. We are going out this Saturday. I’m going to stay out at his place, I think.”

“SEE! Those are the details I want!”

Liv and I finished our meals and headed out. She had some important meetings to get to, and I pretended like I had to go meet with some clients.

I walked down to a small café on 4th street. As soon as I walked in I spotted the man I was looking for sitting at a small table in the back. I walked over to him and sat down.

“Detective Duncan?” I asked, putting my hand out for a shake.

“Yes. You must be Raven, I presume.”

I call Duncan at the beginning of the week and told him I had information that would help him put Turner away. Duncan had worked on a case involving Turner two years ago. Turners lawyers – also friends of Cohen – had found some holes in the processing of the evidence, which caused the court to throw the case out due to lack of evidence. Ever since then Duncan has been looking for his opportunity to give Turner what he deserved. Needless to say, he was more than willing to meet with me.

“Yes, sir. I have the information I told you about. It seems Robert Cohen will be dropping by to see Turner sometime tonight to pick up a fairly large . . . order. I will have pictures to prove it tomorrow.”

He looked shocked. “Robert Cohen? As in the big-wig lawyer? How did you get this information?”

“He comes to our club every week. I overheard and saw some things. You will just have to trust me on this one.”

“And why should I trust someone like you?”

I knew he meant, “why should I trust a low life stripper”. I stared him down intently. “Because, Detective, not all people like me are what you think they are. Some of us want the same things as you. Some of us want to put those who wronged us or who have done wrong behind bars.”

He was silent for a moment. “And you’re sure Cohen is making deals with Turner? You’re absolutely positive?”

“Yes. I would bet my life on it. Cohen is not all his appearance makes him out to be.”

“Alright. Meet me here tomorrow at noon with the pictures. I don’t want anyone getting a hold of them before I do. Turner’s got half the department in his pocket. I’m putting that son of a bitch away for good this time.”

Friday evening

I had Candy spend the past few weeks observing Robert for me. Told her I was working undercover and needed to get some insider information about the times and places of these deals he was making with Mr. Turner. Luckily for me, the girls at Cantina lounge aren’t the brightest and they believe just about anything. Candy thought it was “so cool” that I was a woman of power. She took the sidekick role pretty seriously, giving me updates nearly every twenty minutes.

She found out that Robert usually did his pick-ups before he got to the club on Fridays. 7 or 7:30. I just needed to find out where. Robert had a very typical Friday routine, one that hadn’t changed since I left the firm. Leave the office at 2, go down to the salon on 7th street to get a massage, head over to the school to pick up the kids at 3:30, grab something to eat with them, drop them off at their mothers, and then go down to the private club he and all his lawyer friends belonged to.

I followed him from the school to the club. Waiting outside was extremely boring. How do those detective people do this all day long? No one to talk to, nothing to do, and you can’t even leave for bathroom breaks cause you don’t know when the suspect will be walking out. That’s when I saw Turner. I got out of the car and moved closer to get a better view and hopefully be able to hear.

“I told you I wanted double this week. Beth is going on vacation with that new husband of hers and I have the kids all week. I won’t be able to come back out.” Robert looked pissed.

“Woah woah man! Calm down! I got your stuff. Half here and half tonight at Cantina. I gotta go see my guy.”

“Fine. How much?”

“\$ 1,500 now, \$ 1,000 later.”

Robert pulled out a stack of cash, and I pulled out my camera. After Turner counted it he pulled out a large bag

of white powder. Cocaine. So Mr. Socialite was a coke addict. Go figure. I snapped a few pictures and ran back to my car.

That night I had Candy take a few more pictures for me. Apparently Turner and Robert thought it was no problem to do a deal while Baabs was doing her show. Leaving tracks must be one of his specialties.

Saturday

“Hey babe.”

“Hey.”

“I’ll pick you up about 7. Is that okay?”

“Yeah that sounds perfect.” I tried to contain my smiles.

“Alright. Make sure you wear your best dress. We’re going all out tonight.”

Brody always knew how to make a girl feel special. Big dates, flowers, compliments, the whole nine yards. I decided to wear one of his old favorites. A bright red, mid-thigh dress by Jovani. It was old, but definitely not out of style.

He picked me up at 7 o’clock sharp with a handful of pink and red roses.

“Jeez, Brody. What are all these for?” I tried not to blush.

“Can’t a guy bring the woman he loves some flowers without being asked questions?” Loved? Brody hadn’t said he loved me since we broke up in college. I blushed and leaned in for a kiss.

“Well, shall we?” He held his arm out for me to grab and escorted me to the car.

He took me to an authentic Italian restaurant on the east side of town. On the back patio was a small round table set for two with candles. As we sat down a little Italian man came out dressed in a tux and began singing “Al Di La”.

“Brody, this is perfect.” I couldn’t stop smiling.

“Perfect night for the perfect girl.”

Brody ordered a bottle of their finest White Zinfandel win – my favorite. “So what do you think you wanna get?”

“Geez, I don’t know. It all sounds so good!”

“So get one of everything.”

“Smart ass,” I laughed. “What are you getting?”

“Chicken parmesan.”

"I should have known."

There were a few moments of silence before the waiter took our order. "So, how is the new firm going? Getting any clients?"

I nearly choked on the piece of bread I was chewing. It had finally come. I knew we were going to end up discussing my personal life soon or later, I was just hoping it would be later. "It's . . . going. I should be able to get things rolling soon."

"You know I really admire you. I mean, how many other people our age leave their job to start their own major law firm? It's really inspiring."

Great. Now I felt even more like crap. "I guess so. It's not all that great. There are plenty of other people in the world who do more spectacular things." And don't have to spend their nights on a stripper pole in order to make rent.

"Don't sell yourself short, Jess. You are an amazing, talented woman."

The look in his eyes as he stared at me almost made me sick. I didn't want to keep lying to him, but how could I tell him the truth? He would never understand. The evening ended with a piece of tiramisu followed by a slow dance. We walked along the streets of the city for a while until we decided to head back to his place and call it a night.

Sunday Morning

"Babe come in here!" Brody yelled from the living room.

"What is it?"

"Isn't that the guy you used to work for? Robert Cohen?"

Robert Cohen, one of New York's finest defense attorneys, was arrested last night on charges of Drug possession and intent to sell. Cohen was arrested at the Cantina Lounge late yesterday evening after some anonymous tips and photographs were handed over to the police. Police say that at the time of the arrest Cohen was in the company of known drug dealer Johnny Turner and was personally carrying well over \$2000 worth of cocaine. Trial is set to start next week. Police are still looking for Turner. Anyone with information concerning his whereabouts should contact their local police immediately.

"Wow, who'd have thought?" I couldn't believe it. My plan had actually worked! The T.V. showed Cohen's kids being taken from the house by authorities, probably child services. For a second I felt bad for putting them in this situation – but then again they would be better off with their mother and her new husband.

"Damn. Good thing you got out of there when you did. The whole firm is probably going to go under now."

I smiled. "You know, I think it's time to start looking for an actual building for my firm. Can't keep taking clients out of my living room."

If I Die Tomorrow

By Jackie Scheufler

Heavy rain fell in sheets through the streets of New York. It was nearing nine o'clock in the evening and Raleigh Turner was just finishing up her shift at Domenic's Italian Restaurant. It had been a slow night, rush peaked at around six, and service had gone downhill since then. Thankfully, Alfredo De Luna, the owner of Domenic's had called earlier in the evening and told them to close at nine unless customers came. Raleigh was in the process of wiping down the yellow plastic tables when the bell on the door rang and a cold blast of air rushed in. Glancing at the clock, Raleigh saw that it was 8:58. Sighing, she rapped on the order counter to tell the kitchen staff that a customer was there before she walked over to the front door with a fake smile plastered on her face.

"Hi there, welcome to Domenic's. How many in your party?" she asked, not really looking up as she approached the register station where the menu rack was.

"Just one, thanks," came the reply, spoken in an accent that was not New Yorker.

Looking up at the speaker, Raleigh had to bite the inside of her bottom lip to keep from gasping. In front of her stood one of the most gorgeous men she had ever seen. Dark brown hair, blemish free pale skin, and just the right amount of muscle. The patron didn't notice her staring right away, having his nose buried into a rather worn copy of *The Iliad*. However, when silence met his reply, he looked up to see what was happening. That's when Raleigh was hit by the sheer intensity of his eyes. They were a breathe taking green, and Raleigh stammered a bit as she fumbled to get a menu for him.

"Uh...right. Right this way, sir." She mumbled as she finally snagged a menu and turned to lead him a table.

After he was seated and he ordered his drink, a Diet Coke, she walked over to the order window to place his drink order and give him time to decide what he wanted to eat. Leaning against the order window counter, she closed her eyes and hissed silently to herself. She was getting another one of her monster headaches, and if what she was feeling right now was any indication, it was going to be a monster. Opening her eyes when she heard the soft thunk of the Diet Coke glass making contact with the order window counter, she sighed and opened her eyes. Turning to pick up the glass, she saw Meredith the cook looking at her with concern in her eyes.

"You okay, Rae? You're lookin' really pale." Meredith asked, harshness of her New Yorker accent weighing heavily on Raleigh's headache.

"Headache. I'm fine, Mere." Raleigh replied as she picked up the glass and headed over to the table when the customer sat.

Setting the glass on the table, Raleigh removed her order notepad from the red apron around her waist and smiled at the customer. The simple action caused Raleigh's head to throb slightly, but she just ignored it as best she could.

"Hi there, sorry for the wait. I'm Raleigh and I'll be your server tonight. What can I get ya?" She asked, waiting for his reply.

"Perfectly fine, ma'am." The customer replied, looking up and piercing Raleigh again with his brilliant green eyes and a smile. "I think I'm gonna have the rigatoni combo, light on the sauce."

Writing his order down, Raleigh thanked him and walked back over to the order window where Meredith was waiting for her and the order. Handing the order ticket to Meredith, Raleigh walked through the door into the back room in order to get some aspirin from her shoulder bag. Popping two pills into her mouth and taking a drink from the water bottle that she'd dug out of her bag, she swallowed and hoped that the pills worked quickly. As she felt the pills starting to work, she walked back out into the restaurant and over to where the customer sat reading the old book.

"Everything okay, sir? Do you need a refill on your Diet Coke?" She asked, causing him to look up from the book.

"Thank you, I'm fine." He replied with a smile that lit up his entire face.

"Okay. Just lemme know if you need anything." Raleigh replied.

As she attempted to walk back over to the order window, he legs suddenly gave out and she fell forward. Before she could put her arms out in order to catch herself, she felt a strong arm wrap around her waist and hold her steady.

"Woah, careful there." A voice said in her ear as she was lead over to a chair nearby.

When she was steadily seated in the chair, she looked up and saw that she had been helped by the customer who she had just talked to. Feeling like an idiot for almost falling in front of him, she kept her head down and picked at a frayed edge of her aprons tie strings. The customer in question, knelt down in front of the chair in which Raleigh sat and looked at her with concern etched into his features.

"Are you okay, miss?"

Looking up slowly, Raleigh was taken aback slightly at how close he currently was to her. Blushing from a combination of embarrassment and nervousness, Raleigh looked back down at her lap.

"I'm okay, thank you sir. I have no idea what happened." Her voice was barely above a whisper, but Robbie heard it.

"You don't need to apologize. I would have done it for anyone. My name's Robbie by the way. Robbie Buchanan."

He replied, one of his hands coming up and resting gently on her knee.

"It's nice to meet you, Robbie." Raleigh said as the bell for pick up rang.

Carefully getting up, Raleigh made her way slowly over to the order window and picked up Robbie's plate of food. Shaking her head slightly at Meredith when the cook gave her a questioning look, she walked back over to Robbie's table and sat his food down in front of him. He smiled up at her and motioned for her sit down across from him. Looking back at Meredith who was still watching her from the order window, she shrugged before sitting down.

Two Hours Later

Raleigh stumbled into her apartment after she unlocked the door when she finally arrived home after her shift ended. Robbie had ended up staying until nearly eleven o'clock and only left when Meredith came out front and told Raleigh that she had finished cleaning the dishes and that she was leaving for the night.

Raleigh finished wiping down the remaining tables that she hadn't gotten to when Robbie came in. Taking his empty plate and cup back into the kitchen, she quickly washed and dried them before she returned out front to do the final tasks that she needed to do in order to lock the restaurant up for the night. Robbie helped her place the chairs upside down onto the tables and then she closed the register. Grabbing her coat and shoulder bag from the back room, she escorted Robbie and Meredith out the front door before she exited herself and locked it behind them.

Turning to Robbie, Raleigh thanked him for his help cleaning up and for catching her when she almost fell to the floor. Robbie enthusiastically told her not to worry about it and again stated that he would have done it for anyone. The thing that surprised Raleigh most was when Robbie pulled her into a quick hug. Their hands lingered together when the hug broke and Raleigh felt Robbie slip a piece of folded paper against her palm. As Robbie walked away, Raleigh turned to see Meredith giving her a knowing look. Slipping her hands into her pockets, Raleigh stuck her tongue out at her friend and walked away to the sound of Meredith laughing.

Raleigh was now safely back at her apartment. After taking her jacket off and hanging it up in her coat closet, Raleigh shuffled into her kitchen and sighed as she got a cup out of one of the cabinets. 'What the hell happened tonight?' Raleigh asked herself as she filled the cup with tap water before going over and picking up two orange pill bottles from where they sat on the counter beside her fridge. She'd become so used to taking these pills that it had become old hat to take one of each in the morning before she left for work, and one at night when she returned home.

Opening the first bottle, she poured out one dexamethazone pill before picking up the other bottle and pouring out one Tegretol pill. The dexamethazone was to help relieve the swelling in her brain, and the Tegretol was to help control the seizures. After taking a large drink of water from the cup, Raleigh tossed the pills into her mouth at the same time and swallowed. She honestly hated taking the pills and sometimes wished that she could simply stop taking them all together. But, they helped with the symptoms of her brain cancer and they kept the seizures and tumors at bay.

Dumping the rest of the water from the glass into the sink, she set the glass in the sink and left the kitchen after turning off the light. Walking down the hall, she froze suddenly as she remembered the piece of paper that Robbie had slipped into her hand after they hugged. Turning and returning to the coat closet, she dug into the pocket of the coat she'd been wearing and found the piece of paper in question. Unfolding the paper, she gasped slightly and then chuckled.

Raleigh,

I hope you don't think I'm being too forward, but I'd like to take you out on a date sometime. Give me a call if you're ever free.

Robbie

(212) 367-9420

Crumpling the piece of paper up in her hand slightly, Raleigh's first thought was to simply throw it away and forget that tonight had ever even happened. That's how she found herself standing back in her dark kitchen in front of her garbage can. Suddenly, her better judgment intervened and told her not to make a rash decision. Sighing, she tossed the wadded up piece of paper onto the counter and walked out of the kitchen and toward her bedroom. She needed sleep. Badly. She'd figure out what to do about Robbie tomorrow, when things would hopefully make more sense than they did at the moment. But Raleigh just attributed that to the meds she had just taken.

The morning after their first run-in at Domenic's, Raleigh was in the kitchen fixing herself a bowl of cereal when she spotted the note laying on the counter. Picking it up and reading it again, she immediately remembered what had happened the night before. Reading the note several more times, she finally decided that she didn't have anything to lose in giving Robbie a chance. Slowly, she picked up her phone and dialed his number. The phone rang twice before it was picked up.

"Robbie Buchanan." His voice drifted through the phone.

She was silent for a moment or two, slightly unsure of what to say.

"Hi. It's Raleigh. From the restaurant." She finally said, hoping that he remembered.

"Raleigh! Hi! How're you feeling?" He asked, sounding generally happy that she was actually calling him.

"I'm feeling better, thanks for asking. . . . Listen, about your note. . ." She began to say, but she was cut off suddenly by Robbie.

"Yeah. Look, I'm sorry if that was too sudden. I just. . . I'm a terribly hopeless romantic and sometimes I act brashly and do irrational things. You don't have to say yes. I just wanted to put myself out there in hopes that you'd want to see me again. . ." Robbie said quickly and Raleigh could just imagine a blush playing across Robbie's cheeks.

"Robbie, hold on. I liked the fact that you put yourself out there and asked me out. I think it's cute. I'd love to go out and get coffee or dinner with you sometime." She told him honestly, thrilling at the sound of him sighing in relief.

"Really?! Great! How about Friday? We could do dinner and a movie? I know it's a little cliché, but I promise it'll be fun!" Robbie enthusiastically said into the phone.

"Sure. That sounds great." She'd replied.

"Excellent! I'll see you then!" Robbie exclaimed enthusiastically into the phone.

After she gave him her address, she hung up and got ready for another mundane day at the restaurant. When Friday night rolled around, Raleigh found herself getting ready for her first real date in a considerably long time. After stepping out of an almost scalding hot shower and wrapping a towel around her body, Raleigh walked into her bedroom and over to the clothes that she had laid out for the date. When she'd last talked to Robbie – he'd texted earlier in the day – he told her that the restaurant was dressy casual. With this in mind, Raleigh had settled on a red strapless dress, a white shrug, and a pair of black high heels. Dressing quickly, she did her hair and makeup before going into her living room and waiting for Robbie to arrive.

Robbie arrived promptly at seven o'clock. Opening the door when he knocked, Raleigh smiled at him when he handed her a small bouquet of flowers.

"Thanks." Raleigh said, taking the flowers and holding them up to her nose and inhaling the scent deeply.

"You're welcome. I hope you like them." Robbie replied.

After putting the flowers into a vase, Raleigh rejoined Robbie at the front door and the two of them walked out onto the streets of New York. They walked a short distance through the city and arrived in front of a small, quaint diner that was tucked into the side of an office building. Escorting her in the restaurant, Robbie confirmed their reservation with the hostess and they were led to their table. After they were seated, Robbie smiled across the table at Raleigh as they both looked through the menu.

"Thank you again for agreeing to go out with me tonight, Raleigh." Robbie said softly.

“Not a problem at all, Robbie. Thank you for asking me.” Raleigh replied, a soft smile crossing her face.

When their waitress returned, they placed their order before being left alone again. At first the conversation was a little lacking. Robbie asked about Raleigh’s job and Raleigh asked him what he did for a living. It turned out that Robbie was a journalist who worked for a local paper. The arrival of their food hardly hindered the flow of their conversation, as they discussed a wide range of topics that seemed to interest them both equally. As they were both nearing the end of their meals, Robbie brought up the topic of her headache and almost falling over at the restaurant earlier that week.

“So, what happened on Monday when you almost fell over?” Robbie hesitantly questioned, cutting a piece of his steak before popping it into his mouth.

Raleigh froze with her fork halfway to her mouth. What the hell was she supposed to tell him? That she had brain cancer and that one of the most prevalent symptoms was that she got insanely bad headaches that occasionally affect her balance? How did you tell someone that? Was there a good way? Of course, she already knew the answer to that. No. There was absolutely no good way to tell someone something like that. She’d known that from the moment that she’d gotten the diagnosis.

“Umm . . . yeah, I’m okay. I just had a really bad headache.” She replied, the fact that she was lying clearly evident in how long it had taken her to reply.

Robbie studied her cautiously, his eyes piercing into hers as he studied her across the table. Setting his fork and knife down, Robbie looked down at his plate for a moment before he looked back up at Raleigh. In the course of a few moments, Robbie’s eyes had completely changed in intensity. When they had once been piercing and fierce, they were now full of compassion and worry. He truly was something else, Raleigh thought to herself. She’d never met someone like him, someone whose expression and entire demeanor could change in an instant.

“Raleigh.” Robbie said quietly, his eyes locking onto hers. “You can tell me. I promise that I won’t judge you, whatever it is.”

Raleigh looked back at him, her eyes full of trepidation. She was fighting a war inside herself. Robbie seemed like he was telling the truth. It honestly seemed like he was being sincere. But it was impossible to tell for sure.

“Robbie, I swear, nothing’s wrong.” Raleigh insisted, trying to deter him from continuing down the path he was currently steering the conversation.

Robbie merely stared across the table at her, his eyes pleading with her. Raleigh felt herself giving in to the temptation of telling Robbie what was going on. Maybe he could help her? She scoffed inwardly at the thought. How the hell

could he help her? She had brain cancer. She'd had the disease for three years now, and no one had been able to help her in that time. Her doctors had put on her on medication that had been working thus far, but she had no idea how long that would last. As she had been warring with her emotions, she hadn't been paying attention to Robbie. He was patiently waiting for her to say something. Sighing, Raleigh closed her eyes and spoke softly.

"I have brain cancer." Robbie had to strain his ears in order to hear what Raleigh had said. When it sunk in, Robbie sat back in his chair. Watching his movements, Raleigh felt the hot prick of tears collect at the corners of her eyes. With a small sob, Raleigh rose from the table and walked out of the restaurant.

A Month Later

The past month had been rocky for Raleigh. A few nights after her first encounter with Robbie at the restaurant, she'd fallen again and it had resulted in her having to stay in the hospital for a few days with a slight concussion. Alfredo had insisted that she take some time off when she'd been released, and Raleigh didn't have the will power to tell him that she was fine and that she didn't need the time off.

The symptoms of her brain cancer had worsened quite drastically since her fall and she'd was routinely having to go into her doctor with a new symptom. The morning she first noticed her symptoms worsening, she'd woken up with an intense feeling of nausea that kept her in the bathroom for most of the morning. The daily nausea was then accompanied by increasingly bad headaches throughout the day. Some days, her symptoms got so bad that it was a struggle for her to get out of bed and function normally. Luckily, she had Robbie in her life.

That had been a month ago, and Robbie was still around. They went on three more dates before Robbie had officially asked her to be his girlfriend. Agreeing almost immediately, they began their whirlwind romance. He'd take her out to dinner, cook for her, and accompany her to a few of her doctor's appointments. In the early stages of their relationship, Raleigh found out everything about Robbie. His favorite color was navy blue, he loved Chinese food, and the fact that he was allergic to pet dander. Inversely, he found out that her nickname was Rae, her favorite color was orange, she was allergic to peanuts, and that she wanted to visit Rome before she died.

A month after their first date, sunlight gently poured through the curtains in Raleigh's bedroom. Scrunching her eyes lids when the sun shined across her face, Raleigh rolled over in an attempt to go back to bed. The momentum of her roll caused her stomach to churn violently and she flung herself out of her bed and into the bathroom. Immersing from the bathroom ten minutes later, she made her way back over to her bed and curled up under the covers again. Opening her eyes a crack,

she reached over to her bedside table and grabbed her phone. Pressing the speed dial number that she had assigned to Robbie's number, she held the phone to her ear and listened as it rang.

"Good morning, beautiful." Robbie's voice came through the phone exactly three rings later.

"Can you come over, please?" She asked in a weak voice.

"Rae? What's wrong, darling?" He questioned, worry evident in the words.

"I don't feel good and I want you here." She whispered.

"I'll be over in a few minutes, Rae." Robbie said before hanging up the phone so that he could drive to her apartment.

Raleigh closed her eyes and curled in on herself as she lay in bed waiting for Robbie to arrive. Ten minutes later, she heard her front door open and Robbie called out to her. She weakly replied back and gave him a small smile as he walked into the room and over to the bed. Carefully, he climbed onto the bed beside her and gathered her into his arms. Sighing happily, Raleigh snuggled into his embrace and soon fell into a light sleep.

Two Months Later

Since the day that Robbie came over to be with Raleigh when she had gotten sick, her condition had steadily worsened. The morning nausea had increased, as had the number of headaches that she would get. Pressure in Raleigh's brain had increased as well, and it had been discovered when she had gone into the hospital to see what could be done for her that she had a tumor growing in her brain. A few weeks after the appointment, it was revealed that tumor was cancerous and that it could not be removed without causing terrible damage to Raleigh's brain

Running out of the hospital with tears streaming down her face, Raleigh ran toward where Robbie had parked his car. She was halfway to the car when she stopped to catch her breath. That gave Robbie the opportunity to catch up with her and he pulled her into his arms.

"Robbie... I can't do this anymore." Raleigh sobbed into his chest.

"Rae. I'm so sorry. So, so sorry." Robbie whispered.

Raleigh gasped a few times and felt the hot tears cascade from her eyes. Clutching Robbie's shirt, the thought that had been raining heavily on her mind for weeks came to the forefront again.

"You don't have to stay, Robbie. You can leave me now and I won't hold it against you at all." Raleigh said quietly.

Robbie was shocked when her words sunk in. Was she seriously telling him that he could walk away now? That

was absolutely impossible now.

“Raleigh, you can’t be serious. I’m not going anywhere.” Robbie replied.

Raleigh pushed herself away from Robbie’s chest so that she could look into his eyes.

“Robbie. I’m dying. I’m not worth it.” She whispered passionately.

“I don’t care, Rae. I’m not leaving you. No matter how much you push me away. I’m staying right here with you until the very end.” Robbie replied before he pulled her into a kiss.

One Month Later

Robbie stared out of Raleigh’s hospital room window and began to work his bottom lip with his teeth. He was on the verge of tears and couldn’t bring himself to cry in front of Raleigh or her doctors. Raleigh had become so weak and it was only a matter of time before she would pass on. Looking back over at the girl laying on the bed, Robbie stifled a small sob. Walking over to the bed, he sat down in the chair beside the bed and took her hand in his.

“Rae. I know you can’t talk to me anymore. But, I know you can still understand what I’m saying. I love you, Rae. You’ve shown me how to live with no regrets. I’m so lucky that I came into Domenic’s all those months ago and met you. I know you’re not scared, you told me that a few days ago. But, I’m honestly terrified to lose you.” Robbie said, letting the tears finally fall from his eyes.

Closing his eyes and holding onto her hand, his heart dropped when he heard her heart monitor flat line. There was nothing more he could do. She’d passed on from this life. She was free and Robbie hoped that she would be watching over him from above until he was able to join her at the end of his own life.

Pitfall

By

Matt Echelberry

MAIN TITLE SEQUENCE

SCENE 1

FADE IN. EXT. BENNY'S POOLHALL AT NIGHT

Some cars pass by. Then a BMW parks in front of the building. Cut to: Terry, a lean man in his late 40s, exiting car and walking inside.

CUT TO: INT. OF POOLHALL.

The main room is lit dimly with a bar to the left, booths on the opposite wall and tables in between. Further back are 4 pool tables. POV shot as Terry makes his way through, revealing several people sitting at a bar and a few others playing pool. Music plays faintly in background from the jukebox.

Mary, the beautiful bartender in her mid-30s, smiles from behind the bar.

MARY

Hey, Terry.

At the back of the room is a partition leading into a smaller room with a poker table. Terry turns just before the partition and walks down a hallway into an office.

Ramone, bulky and dark-skinned, is sitting behind a desk talking on the phone. He waves Terry in.

RAMONE

Yes, yes, yes. I know we can't get another shipment until Tuesday, but we need to change our quota... That's fine, just do it...No, I don't give a fuck what your manager says...(angry) Well then put him on the phone!

(puts a hand over the phone as he looks at Terry)

I fucking hate liquor suppliers, they can be pricks sometimes.

(resuming phone conversation)

...No, don't give me that 'sir' bullshit. I bet when you woke up this morning, you thought about how you could fuck over someone else's day, didn't yuh? ...Just get into your computer and *change the goddamned quota!* ...Fine then, I'm

(MORE)

RAMONE (cont'd)
gonna have a crew out there in
fifteen minutes (screaming into
phone) *to throw you off the roof!*

Ramone slams the phone into its cradle.

RAMONE
(after a long sigh) Sorry
about that. This business
kills me more and more
everyday...Want a drink?

TERRY
Not right now. Just my usual fee,
Ramone.

RAMONE
(getting up and moving to a
wall safe) Nice job today. My
guy on the inside said the
police are looking into
Blanco's own crew.

TERRY
It was quick and clean, as always.
He never saw it coming.

RAMONE
Benny sends his thanks. He wished
he could have said that to you in
person, but he's out of town for
the weekend.

Terry gives a sly smile as Ramone hands him a brick of cash.
Terry fans through it and then puts it away.

TERRY
Anything for Benny.

FREEZE ON TERRY. TITLE IN: "TERRY"

CUT TO: FLASHBACK

BENNY'S OFFICE, ABOVE THE POOLHALL, DAYTIME.

Benny, a bald man in his 70s, is painting on a canvas. A
moment later, Terry walks in.

BENNY
(looking up) Terry, come in.
Good to see you.

TERRY

Hey.

BENNY

Sit down, please. I'm glad you could stop by on short notice...(resumes painting) Ramone doesn't know I asked you here. I wanted to speak with you privately, Terry. How did the meeting with Blanco go this morning?

TERRY

Everything went as planned.

BENNY

Good, Ramone already told me all the details...Now, how long have you worked for me?

TERRY

I started right after I got my discharge...so that's what, seventeen, eighteen years?

BENNY

(nodding) A long time. With that in mind I want to get to the point. Ramone's pockets have been getting deeper and deeper lately. He's always taking bigger cuts than he should and his management skills lately have been...lacking. Would you agree?

TERRY

He's not as good as he used to be.

BENNY

And that temper of his is just getting to be too much of a liability. It's had an impact on business lately. That's why I want you to take care of him. Tonight, while I'm out of town. I don't care how, just see that it gets done.

Terry nods.

BENNY

You've always been loyal. And that will be rewarded, believe me. I know you've known him for a long

(MORE)

BENNY (cont'd)
time, but this is for the best. I
trust you to get it done...(looks
toward painting) What do you think
of my work?
(end flashback)

SCENE 2

INT. MAIN ROOM OF POOLHALL.

Fenner, a short man in his late 20s, walks in. He struts around, greeting some of the other patrons. Then he sits at the bar. Mary walks over to him.

MARY
You're not in a good mood tonight,
are ya, Sugar?

FENNER
Mary, my sweet Mary, I've had the
night of my life. But it just got
better now that I've seen you.

MARY
If that was an attempt at flattery,
don't quit your day job. The usual?

FENNER
No...I really am feeling like the
luckiest guy in the world right
now. How bout a glass of your most
expensive bourbon?

MARY
(as she prepares a drink) So
what's got you in such high
spirits? You usually don't
drink anything over two
dollars.

FREEZE ON FENNER. TITLE IN: "FENNER."

CUT TO: FLASHBACK

INT. OF A STRIP CLUB.

Loud techno music plays in the background. Fenner sits by the stage watching the dancers. One of them, Sapphire, approaches him and continues dancing. He throws singles at her. Eventually, she leans closer to him.

SAPPHIRE
Want a private dance?

CUT TO: A PRIVATE ROOM.

Fenner sits down and she takes off her robe.

SAPPHIRE
(sitting on him) Just sit back
and relax. I'll do all the
work.

Sapphire begins giving him a lap dance.

FENNER
You're uh...really good at this.
Really good.

Fenner becomes more and more infatuated by her as the dance continues.

FENNER
What's your name.

SAPPHIRE
I'm Sapphire. But you can call me
whatever you want.

FENNER
No, I mean...your real name.

SAPPHIRE
Why?

FENNER
I think I love you.

Sapphire laughs.

FENNER
You probably hear that all the
time, I know, but I mean it. You're
the most amazing woman I've ever
seen.

She stops and stares at him.

SAPPHIRE
Hate to ruin your fantasy, but I'm
just doing my job. You're not the
first one I've had to let down
easy.

FENNER

Come on, gimme a chance. I wanna take you out to dinner or something. When do you get off work?

SAPPHIRE

I don't date customers.

FENNER

Then I'll leave right now. I won't be a customer...Go out with me one time.

SAPPHIRE

(sighs) You're cute, but unless you've got another twenty, time's up.

FENNER

But I love you. You wouldn't tell me your name, so now you've gotta go out with me. What's one date gonna hurt? You can pick the place out and everything. Come on, what time do you get off work?

SAPPHIRE

You're serious, aren't you?

He nods. She gets off of him and sits on the other end of the couch. She pulls out a pack of cigarettes from her handbag.

SAPPHIRE

Got a light?

Fenner pulls out a zippo lighter and she leans in close to him. She takes a drag, then kisses him. When she moves away, he opens his mouth and coughs out the smoke.

SAPPHIRE

Thanks. (sits there smoking)

FENNER

You're incredible.

SAPPHIRE

(tearing up slightly) ...No one has ever talked to me like this before...I don't know what to say.

FENNER

But it's true...And not just your
body. I love everything about you.

After thinking a moment, she takes a pen from her handbag
writes something on a small piece of paper. She hands it to
him and leaves without another word.

Fenner opens it: "WOMEN'S BATHROOM IN 10 MINUTES"

Cut to: a bathroom stall. Fenner and Sapphire are in the
middle of having sex with their clothes still on. Fenner's
wallet falls out of his pocket but he doesn't notice.

(end flashback)

SCENE 3

INT. POOLHALL

As Fenner sits enjoying his drink, Ramone and Terry enter
from the back office.

RAMONE

(walking up to Fenner) So, you
finally decided to show up,
eh?

FENNER

Something came up. Well, actually,
she went down.

The three of them laugh.

TERRY

I wish I was young again.

FENNER

You were young once?

RAMONE

Hey, respect your elders.

Ramone calls Mary over.

MARY

Yes, asshole?

RAMONE

Three shots of Patron.

TERRY

Jesus, I can't drink like I used to.

RAMONE

(looking at Terry) And one glass of water for this antique, Mary.

TERRY

Yeah, real fuckin funny. I came here to play cards, not cause more liver damage than I already have.

FENNER

Terry, you probably don't even have anything left of a liver anymore.

Mary returns with four shotglasses and pours shots.

MARY

Mind if I join you for this one?

RAMONE

You're working.

MARY

So are you. Just one shot, I need it.

TERRY

Trouble with the men in your life?

MARY

Just all the ones in this room with me.

The four of them take the shots.

CUT TO: INT. POOLHALL BATHROOM.

Terry stares at himself in the mirror while washing his hands. He moves toward the door but then goes back to the mirror.

TERRY

Just get it done. It's a job like any other.

He pulls out a gun, checks if it's loaded, then attaches it to a special holster hidden on the inside of his shirt sleeve.

CUT TO: MAIN ROOM OF POOLHALL.

Fenner and Ramone are playing pool as Terry returns and sits down.

FENNER

I guess I just don't see the point.
If the rest of them aren't gonna be
here by midnight, why're we gonna
wait around to start a game?

RAMONE

Well, we can put money down on this
game...if you think you stand a
chance. (breaks the rack)

TERRY

Don't let him intimidate you, Kid.
He sucks at pool.

RAMONE

I don't suck as much as your wife
sucks on my cock.

FENNER

(lining up a shot) Gentlemen,
whoa whoa. I thought this was
gonna be a friendly game.

CLOSE UP: CAMERA FOLLOWS THE POOL BALLS AS THEY ROLL ON THE
TABLE

RAMONE

(to Fenner) I never
congratulated you on getting
laid tonight. What is that,
the first time in three years?

All three laugh. Yappity Dan, a muscular man in his 30s
who's wearing a white pinstripe suit, comes running in from
the back.

YAPPITY DAN

All three of you need to come with
me. Now. (whispering) We have a
serious problem.

SCENE 4

FREEZE ON YAPPITY DAN. TITLE IN: "YAPPITY DAN"

CUT TO: FLASHBACK

EXT. ROOFTOP OF AN APARTMENT BUILDING

There's a party of 30-40 people. Rap music plays from speakers. The camera pans through all of the people drinking and conversing, eventually stopping on a small group of people standing in an isolated corner. Yappity Dan is among them.

CLOSE UP: YAPPITY DAN SNORTING A LINE OF COCAINE OFF OF A POCKET MIRROR.

YAPPITY DAN

That's some good sugar. Where'd you say it was from, Ori?

ORI

Juan Blanco.

Someone else prepares a line on the mirror while they continue to talk.

MIKELL

Did you hear about his father? News said they found him dead this morning.

YAPPITY DAN

No shit, how'd it happen?

ORI

The police haven't given any details yet, last I heard.

A drunk woman walks over to the group and wraps her arms around Dan.

TESS

There you are...I been...looking fer you, ba-by.

YAPPITY DAN

Hey babe. Ready to get outta here? I got a poker game to get to.

TESS

(giggles and mumbles something)

YAPPITY DAN

I'll take that as a yes. (to Ori)
Would you mind driving us to the poolhall?

CUT TO: PARKING LOT.

Dan, Ori, and Tess get into Dan's car. Ori is driving while Dan and Tess are in the backseat fooling around.

ORI
How far is it from here?

YAPPITY DAN
I thought you knew where it was.
(as Tess continues kissing him)
Shit, I'm high...just go straight,
I don't know.

After some more kissing, Tess gives Dan a blowjob. Ori occasionally glances into the rearview mirror. A few minutes later, the car is stopped at a place where the road ends.

ORI
Dan, I gotta turn left or right.
Which way?

YAPPITY DAN
Uh...right. No left. Yep,
definitely left.

As he continues driving, Ori sends a text message on his cell phone.

CLOSE UP ON ORI'S PHONE: "BE AT POOLHALL SOON."

Eventually Dan directs Ori into a narrow alley.

ORI
I think we took a wrong turn. This
doesn't look like the way to the
poolhall.

YAPPITY DAN
Just keep going, it'll be alright.

ORI
Are you talking to me or her?

YAPPITY DAN
Both.

Ori turns to look back at them. As he does so, a dark figure emerges in the road up ahead. Ori hits the figure with the car and the three of them cry out in surprise. Ori slams on the brakes.

(end flashback)

SCENE 5

INT. POOLHALL, IN THE KITCHEN AREA

Yappity Dan leads Ramone, Terry, and Fenner to the back door as he explains.

YAPPITY DAN

So I was on my way over here from a party, right. We took a slight detour and ran into someone.

RAMONE

(puzzled) Who?

YAPPITY DAN

No. I mean we *ran into* someone.

Dan opens the back door, which leads into a small parking lot where Marvin and Ori are pulling a body out of the trunk and Tess is puking out of the car from the backseat.

TERRY

Christ, what the hell happened?

RAMONE

(looking around) Everybody just get inside. Now.

Marvin and Ori carry the body inside and set it on the floor. It's a young girl, dead. Ramone, Terry, Fenner, and Dan stand around it.

CAMERA ANGLE SWITCHES TO THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BODY, SHOWING THE MEN LOOKING DOWN INTO THE CAMERA.

FENNER

Who is she? I mean, *was*.

Dan shrugs.

TERRY

This is bad. We can't just leave this plopped on the kitchen floor.

MARVIN

(pacing around the kitchen)
It's my fault man, it's my fault. Look, I was in this alley...then they came along. It all happened so fast.

RAMONE

(walking over to him)
Marvin...Marvin! Stop, okay. I
need you to just tell me
exactly what happened. What
were you doing in some random
alley?

FREEZE ON MARVIN. TITLE IN: MARVIN

CUT TO: FLASHBACK

INT. MARVIN'S APARTMENT.

Marvin, an addict in his mid-20s, is sitting on the couch with various pills laid out on the coffee table in front of him. He bags them and occasionally takes one. Cut to: Marvin walking on the sidewalk at night, high on the pills. As he passes a local grocery store, he stops and walks back to the door.

CUT TO: INT. LOCAL GROCERY STORE

Marvin enters and walks down an aisle, grabbing a few items. The store is empty except for him and a young female clerk at the cash register. He occasionally looks at her through the shelves. When he walks up to the counter, he sets an armful of items down and she looks at him with disinterest.

MARVIN

How you doing tonight?

She begins ringing up the items. Marvin looks around, visibly high.

MARVIN

D'you hear that? ...There's like a,
like this long ringing sound...Know
what? I forgot something, I'll be
right back.

Marvin walks to a refrigerator. As he gets out a drink, he unfolds a knife and puts it in his jacket pocket.

CUT TO: MARVIN BACK AT THE COUNTER.

CLERK

All set now?

MARVIN

...Yeah. Yeah I'm all
set...(continues looking around as
she rings him up)

(stares at her, then whispers) I have a knife. Don't make a sound, just gimme all the money in there.

CLERK

What? Are you really doing this?

MARVIN

Gimme all the fuckin money!

CLERK

Okay okay. Just don't hurt me.
(begins pulling money from cash register)

MARVIN

Come on, faster. Faster you bitch!(tries pulling out his knife but it gets stuck inside his pocket)

The clerk drops the money and begins running to the back. Marvin chases her and they have an altercation. She manages to break free and runs to the back room.

Marvin follows the clerk, only to see her slip on the wet floor. Her head lands on a shelf at an angle that breaks her neck. He goes over to her and shakes her, but the clerk appears to be dead. Just then, he hears the front door's bell as a customer walks in.

Marvin looks around in panic, then drags her body over to the back door. He gets the body into the alley, stands it up, and puts one of her arms around his shoulders. He moves over to a dumpster, but hears a shout coming from inside. He looks back at the open door and decides to prop the body up against the dumpster. He walks back to shut the door. As he does so, a car comes speeding by and hits the body; it brakes a moment later. Marvin is in shock.

Ori slowly exits the car and approaches the body.

ORI

Fuck! Oh shit...(seeing Marvin)
Hey, man, I didn't see her at all.
This was an accident.

Yappity Dan exits the car as well, high and drunk.

YAPPITY DAN

We hit a dog or something?
(seeing Marvin) Hey, it's Marvin! What's goin on?

ORI
You know this guy?

Marvin is still in shock. Dan looks at the body and realizes what has happened.

YAPPITY DAN
No way...Ori what the hell man?

ORI
Bitch came outta nowhere, I don't know what happened.

MARVIN
We need to get outta here...Help me put her in the dumpster.

ORI
We're not putting a human being in a dumpster...we need to call nine-one-one.

YAPPITY DAN
No way, we can't do that! Do you know how much coke is in my system?

ORI
What if she's still alive?

MARVIN
She was dead before you hit her...

Dan and Ori look at him.

YAPPITY DAN
Marvin, why did you say you were here, again?

MARVIN
Okay, okay. We'll put her the in the trunk instead of the dumpster. I'll explain on the way to the poolhall.
(end flashback)

CUT TO: POOLHALL KITCHEN

Ramone slams Marvin into a wall.

RAMONE
You are so fucking stupid! Why'd you bring the body here? I should run you over with a fuckin car!

Terry and Fenner pull Ramone back.

FENNER

It's too late, we've got to deal
with it now.

RAMONE

Thanks to that son of a bitch!
(calling over to Marvin) Stupid
fuck!

YAPPITY DAN

I'm sorry Ramone, we didn't know
what else to do, man. We thought
you'd be able to help us out.

They all stare at each other. Then they realize that Ori and Tess, two random people, are witnessing all of this criminal activity. Ramone walks over to them.

RAMONE

You two go out front and have a
drink. Tell the bartender to make
you a Boom Boom, they're delicious.

Ori and Tess exit.

TERRY

(after they leave) A Boom
Boom?

RAMONE

Jack, coke, and three ruffies.
After one glass of it people fall
down. Boom boom. Those two won't
remember any of this in the
morning.

MARVIN

...So what do we do with the body?

Cut to: Marvin and Fenner as they drag the body into the freezer while Ramone instructs them where to stash it.

SCENE 6

THE POKER ROOM.

Ramone, Terry, Fenner, Yappity Dan, and Marvin stand there in an awkward silence.

YAPPITY DAN

Well, we came here to play poker.
Let's play some fuckin poker.

Cut to: the five of them sitting at the table playing Five Card Stud. Cue music: CRAZY GAME OF POKER by O.A.R.

RAMONE

What a day. What a crazy fuckin
day.

FENNER

You can say that again.

MARVIN

I'm sorry I--

RAMONE

--Don't even bring any of that shit
up, Marvin. It's been handled so
let's forget it. (lights up a
cigar)

TERRY

I'm out.

FENNER

That makes two of us. Hey Ramone,
you're lookin a little
short-stacked over there.

YAPPITY DAN

I call. Oh, did you guys hear about
Caesar Blanco? That mother fucker
is dead.

FENNER

How'd it happen?

YAPPITY DAN

A bullet to the brain.

RAMONE

(looking at Terry) We know.

FREEZE ON RAMONE. TITLE IN: "RAMONE"

CUT TO: FLASHBACK

EXT. CAESAR BLANCO'S MANSION, DAYTIME.

Terry and Ramone walk through a large outdoor patio, led by
a man in suit and tie.

TITLE IN: "EARLIER THAT DAY"

Caesar Blanco, an older, hispanic man, sits at a table and greets them with a smile.

CAESAR

Good to see you, Ramone. And Terry,
it has been too long, my friend.

RAMONE

Wish I could say the same. Benny's
not happy with you, Caesar.

CAESAR

I know this. Please sit down, we'll
discuss this whole
misunderstanding.

Ramone and Terry sit across from him. The man in suit and tie stands a few feet away.

CAESAR

I love Benny, it's a shame that we
are competitors, and I know that
I've taken some of his business
away. This was not intentional, you
must understand that.

RAMONE

Intentional or not, we need to work
out some sort of arrangement.

CAESAR

Yes, of course. A, uh...what do
they call it--a mutually beneficial
relationship. Some sort of
arrangement that will allow both
parties involved to prosper.

TERRY

Cut the shit, Caesar. Everyone
knows you've been trying to take
over this town for years.

CAESAR

Nah, you misjudge me, Terry. I'm a
good businessman and I seize
opportunity. Please, let us work
something out, I sincerely wish for
nothing less.

RAMONE

Did you have something in mind?

CAESAR

Benny can have the grass market that he loves so much, so long as I can maintain full control of dust. We can split profits from opiates.

Ramone and Terry look at each other.

RAMONE

Now, I don't think Benny would be thrilled at that proposal. Split profits haven't been going well so far, and poppers are a pretty big market.

CAESAR

And easily a big enough market for both of us to survive in.

RAMONE

Tell you what. I'm gonna take a piss. When I get back, we'll discuss this "market."

The man in suit and tie leads Ramone into the mansion. Ramone slips the man a bill, then walks by the bathroom and goes into a large office, rummaging through papers and drawers.

Cut to: Terry and Caesar, still sitting on the patio.

CAESAR

I heard Benny is going out of town this weekend. No offense, but with that crew he has running things, do you think Ramone can maintain control?

TERRY

Everything will be fine. Our boys are stupid, but they always make things work out.

CAESAR

I wish sometimes that family wasn't so tied in with my business. Benny was smart, getting such an eclectic group of people together. Less interpersonal problems that way.

As Caesar talks, the camera cuts to Terry's lap. Under the table, he draws out a silenced pistol hidden in his shirt sleeve.

TERRY
Family's important.

CAESAR
I agree with you my friend. It just breaks my heart though when business matters get in the way of my personal life.

TERRY
That's not the only thing breakin your heart.

Terry quickly lifts his pistol and shoots Caesar in the chest. Terry stands up and fires twice more.

Cut to: Ramone, sitting in his car out front. He is putting a stack of papers in the glove box. Then he pulls out an envelop with the words: "OPEN AFTER JOB IS FINISHED"

Ramone opens the envelope and reads the note inside: "KILL TERRY AFTER HE KILLS CAESAR. -B"

He folds the note and puts it in his back pocket. As he sits there thinking, Terry walks out and gets in the passenger side.

TERRY
We're good. Let's get out of here.

RAMONE
And you're sure it looks like an inside job? (he starts the car and they drive away)

TERRY
It's like we were never there. Did you get those transcripts that Benny wanted?

RAMONE
Everything I could find.

TERRY
Damn. I wish you could have seen Caesar's face.

CLOSE-UP: RAMONE'S LEFT HAND AS IT REACHES DOWN FOR A STASHED GUN.

RAMONE

That why you do it? To see people's reactions.

TERRY

Killing's never easy. Guess I've always thought that if I'm the last thing a person ever sees, I might as well give them the courtesy of looking them in the eye as I plug 'em.

The two drive on in silence. Ramone can hear his own heart beating as he debates whether or not to kill Terry. He looks over at him periodically, but cannot look for long.

TERRY

Is that poker game still on tonight?

RAMONE

(thinks for a moment)

Yep. (camera shows him put the gun back) Why don't you come to the poolhall around 10. I'll have your money ready for you.

SCENE 7

THE POKER ROOM

Ramone, Terry, Fenner, Yappity Dan, and Marvin are still sitting around the table playing poker. Some have drinks and cigars. CRAZY GAME OF POKER by O.A.R. resumes.

Fenner is dealing this round.

FENNER

Alright boys, last card do tell.

They all look at their cards in silence. The camera pans around the table.

MARVIN

I fold.

RAMONE

Check.

YAPPITY DAN

Raise you two grand.

RAMONE

Dammit... Alright, asshole. I'll call... Show 'em. Two pair: sixes and eights.

YAPPITY DAN

Three bitches.

RAMONE

Bastard! (throws his cards onto the table) I'm gettin' shit for cards tonight.

YAPPITY DAN

Well if you played as good as you made money, I wouldn't have to take it from you, now would I?

TERRY

Glad I got out of that round when I did.

RAMONE

This is such bullshit and you know it, Yappity fuckin Dan... Benny won't like you cleaning the house while he's not here.

MARVIN

Man, fuck Benny.

Ramone quickly punches Marvin in the nose.

MARVIN

(groans in surprise) Hey, it was a fuckin joke! Chill out.

RAMONE

I don't ever wanna hear any of you talk that way about Benny. Ever. (grabbing Marvin by the hair) Especially a dumb fuck like you, Marvin. You hear that, *you dirty cocksucker?*

TERRY

Ok, Ramone. You made your fuckin' point, let the kid go.

Ramone lets go but continues to stare at Marvin. They all sit in silence.

YAPPITY DAN

Who's deal?

Mary walks into the room but stands in the doorway.

RAMONE

(looking up at her)

The fuck you want?

FENNER

Oh yes, waitress. I'll have the
Filet Mignon with a loaded baked
potato--

Terry gives him a light smack on the arm and shakes his head.

MARY

Actually, Fenner, there's a woman
out front who wants to talk to you.

The men laugh and tease Fenner.

FENNER

(getting up) Excuse me,
gentleman, I'm gonna have to
check this out.

Music stops. Fenner walks into the main room and sees Sapphire standing by a pool table with two young children at her side.

SAPPHIRE

(awkwardly) Hi...You left your
wallet in
the...store...earlier.

FENNER

Oh...didn't realize it wasn't with
me. (takes the wallet and gives her
a suspicious look)

SAPPHIRE

Well I didn't take it if that's
what you think.

FENNER

I never said that. Thanks for
bringing it, really. How'd you know
I'd be here?

SAPPHIRE

I didn't. The only thing I could find in there with an address was a business card for Benny's Poolhall. Figured it'd be worth a shot.

SCENE 8

CUT TO: INT. OF A CAR

Three young Puerto Ricans--Juan, Gordo, and Batata--are seated in a car, driving. Juan is suave and well-dressed, Gordo is fat and bald, and Batata (Juan's cousin) is scrawny and doesn't speak any English. They slow down as they pass the poolhall, at the same time that Sapphire is walking in.

GORDO

So this is the place?

JUAN

This is it. Benny uses it as a front for his drug running.

Juan turns the car into the alley running beside the building. He puts it in park.

JUAN

I've got a guy on the inside. He should be out in a minute.

GORDO

Shit, Juan. Who do you know that's cool with Benny's guys?

JUAN

Just some bottom feeder that I sell to.

BATATA

(says something in Spanish)

Juan responds in Spanish, then looks at Gordo, who seems confused.

JUAN

Batata doesn't speak English.

GORDO

No English? (looks back at Batata, then back to Juan) You sure it was a good idea bringing him?

JUAN

Gordo. Do I need to remind you why we're here? Huh? One of those bastards in there killed my father, his uncle...I bet it was Ramone. If Batata wants to join me in getting revenge, the more the better. Let the streets run red with blood tonight.

Cut to: Ori and Tess inside the poolhall. They are in a booth; Tess is passed out on the table, but Ori has only had half of his drink. He gets up and walks out to Juan's car. Gordo rolls down his window.

JUAN

What's the deal?

ORI

(nervously) Well...there are five of them in the back room.

POV: ORI LOOKS AT THEM WITH BLURRED VISION.

JUAN

Are they armed?

ORI

Yes...yes, I think so.

GORDO

What's wrong with you? You look all pale and...squirmy.

ORI

No, I...I'm fine. (rubbing his eyes) Just tired all of a sudden.

JUAN

Stay away from this place, man. Go sleep it off somewhere else.

Juan drives to the back parking lot. The camera focuses on Ori in a blurred filter, mimicking his drugged, drowsy feeling. He leans up against a wall and then sags down to the gravel and passes out.

CUT TO: MAIN ROOM OF POOLHALL

SAPPHIRE

Listen...I gotta go so I can drop them (nods toward her kids) off at the sitter.

FENNER

(after a pause) Are we ever going on that date?

Sapphire smiles at him.

FENNER

I was serious about what I said earlier. Lemme take you somewhere, anywhere.

Close up on Sapphire as she thinks about this.

SAPPHIRE

Lena...That's my name.

Camera moves away from them, back into the poker room, in one continuous shot.

Ramone, Terry, and Marvin sit at the table waiting; it's an awkward silence. Close up: Terry as he stares at Ramone. Close up: Ramone looking back at Terry.

MARVIN

...So this turned out to be a fun night, huh.

RAMONE

Shut your face...You look low on chips, Terry.

TERRY

Well, my mind's not really on the game.

CAMERA PANS UNDER THE TABLE TO REVEAL TERRY PULLING THE PISTOL FROM HIS SLEEVE.

MARVIN

Why are you playing then--

RAMONE

Do I gotta tell you again how I feel about your fuckin' opinion?

TERRY

Check your tone. That bad attitude is getting old.

RAMONE

My attitude, huh? (whispering intensely) There's a fucking body in my freezer. After those people

(MORE)

RAMONE (cont'd)
out front leave, we gotta get it
out of here. We have to dispose of
it somewhere. This is all shit that
I don't feel like dealing with
right now and it's all thanks to
this pill addict that didn't know
he needed five cards to make a
straight...And what's up with you
tonight, Terry? You been pretty
quiet.

SCENE 9

CUT TO: REAR PARKING LOT

Juan, Gordo, and Batata exit the car. They go to the trunk
and pull out weapons. Gordo has brought a sub-machine gun.

JUAN
What in the hell encouraged you to
bring a piece of artillery like
that. Who do you think we're going
up against?

GORDO
(shrugging) One is just as
good as another.

JUAN
(handing Batata a pisol) Just
don't go shooting one of us,
comprendes? You take the back
door. (grabbing Batata) We're
going around the front.

CUT TO: THE POKER ROOM

RAMONE
You wanna tell me why you're
looking at me like that?

TERRY
Like what?

MARVIN
He wasn't givin you no look,
Ramone.

Ramone gives him a quick glance, then returns his gaze to
Terry.

RAMONE

I know that look. It's what you do
when you're about to kill someone,
something in your eyes.

Camera pans beneath the table, showing a sawed off shotgun
that Ramone has attached to the underside of the table. He
pivots it toward Terry.

TERRY

Your voice is shaking.

From the main room, Mary screams. They all look out there.

CUT TO: THE MAIN ROOM

Juan has walked in with a pistol in each hand, Batata keeps
watch out front. Juan fires two rounds at the wall as he
makes his way to the back room.

Fenner takes Sapphire and her kids to the kitchen. They run
to the back door, but when Fenner opens it, he sees Gordo,
back turned to him. He's smoking a cigarette, but they can't
get by him. They go back toward the kitchen.

CUT TO: BEHIND THE BAR

Mary lays on the floor covering her head.

CUT TO: THE POKER ROOM

Juan enters and Ramone, Terry, and Marvin remain seated,
staring at him.

RAMONE

Help you?

JUAN

Damn right you can help me. Which
one of you killed my father this
morning? I promise I'll only kill
the man responsible.

RAMONE

I don't know what you're talking
about. You need to leave while you
still can.

JUAN

(pointing his guns at them) I
know at least one of you was
involved.

Dan grabs Juan from behind. Marvin joins in the struggle and they knock the guns out of his hands while Terry sits there. Dan and Marvin hold Juan down on the table.

RAMONE

You come into my store. Threaten me and all my customers? Why...because you think one of us had something to do with your father's death, God rest his soul.

Ramone pulls a small machete off of the wall (part of a decorative piece hanging on it).

Cut to: Gordo entering through the back door. Fenner moves Sapphire and the kids into the freezer.

CUT TO: POKER ROOM.

JUAN

(struggling) Go ahead and kill me. I have proof you were there. My father recently had a surveillance camera put in his office.

RAMONE

Camera? You lie.

Behind them, Batata comes running in yelling in Spanish. Dan picks up one of Juan's guns and yells back in English. Batata stays behind one of the pool tables, using it for cover.

Cut to: Fenner, watching Gordo walk by out in the hall.

FENNER

Stay here. I gotta go out there.

CUT TO: POKER ROOM.

JUAN

I watched the tape...it shows you in his office, Ramone.

MARVIN

Is that true?

RAMONE

No. He's lying, let's kill him.
(moves closer with the machete)

Terry stands up quickly and points his gun at Ramone.

TERRY

No. He's telling the truth. Ramone was there and so was I. I killed your father, Juan.

Camera does a close up on each character as they stand there in silence: Ramone holding the machete; Terry pointing his gun at him; Juan on the table, still held down by Marvin and Ramone; Dan using a wall for cover as he points his gun at Batata; Batata hiding behind the pool table; and Gordo in the kitchen doorway. The only movement is a ceiling fan overhead.

CUT TO: FREEZER.

As Sapphire and her kids hide, she notices the clerk's body hidden on one of the shelves. She gasps and then hides their eyes from it.

SCENE 10

CUT TO: MAIN ROOM.

RAMONE

Ok then. (drops the machete) I guess now there's only one thing to do.

Ramone sits down at the table. Dan and Terry duck as he aims the shotgun out at Batata and fires, only hitting the pool table. Juan breaks free and runs out of the room after picking up his remaining gun; Ramone fires a shot at him but only makes a hole in the wall. Batata and Gordo give him cover fire as he dives into a booth.

Batata shoots Marvin in the throat as Ramone flips the table to its side for cover. Dan tosses his gun to Ramone so he can help Marvin. Ramone and Terry have a shootout against Juan, Gordo and Batata.

Cut to: Mary, screaming as the shootout continues and bottle break around her because of stray bullets.

CUT TO: KITCHEN

Fenner sneaks up on Gordo with a knife and stabs him in the back, causing Gordo to squeeze the trigger in pain. Everyone ducks as his gun whips around randomly until it runs out of ammo. Gordo turns and knocks Fenner back.

JUAN

(looking back at Gordo) I told you not to bring that thing, man.

They all reload and the shootout resumes. Meanwhile, Gordo and Fenner are in a fist fight. After some struggling, Fenner grabs a pool cue and begins swinging it at Gordo.

Terry gets hit in the gut. He sits down, continuing to shoot his gun. Ramone hits Batata in the head. Then he crawls over to the wall and points his gun out of the hole he made with the shotgun earlier. He fires out at Juan.

Fenner ends up jumping on Gordo's back and using the cue to strangle him. Gordo spins around violently until he gets enough leverage to lift Fenner into the light above the pool table. Gordo drags him to the edge and presses the same cue onto Fenner's throat to suffocate him.

Marvin has bled to death, Terry is out of ammo, and Ramone waits for an opportunity to get to Juan. Juan is still in the booth, reloading.

JUAN

I got one more clip left. And all of them are for you, Ramone!

RAMONE

Come on in, Juan. You're a little piece of shit caco just like your old man!

Juan fires a few shots at him.

Fenner is almost unconscious, but Gordo is hit in the head by a bottle of liquor--Mary has snuck behind him from the bar. Gordo staggers back; the bottle broke on his head but has not knocked him out. Fenner gets out his zippo lighter and tosses it onto him. Gordo runs around, frantically screaming, as the fire hits the liquor and spreads.

Fenner pushes Mary on the ground as Juan fires at them. Ramone jumps out and shoots Juan. Silence returns. Slowly, Ramone puts down the gun and picks up the machete. He gets up and goes over to Juan.

FENNER

Ramone, what the hell are you doing? He's done.

Dan helps Terry out into the main room. Sapphire slowly comes out from the kitchen, still hiding her kids' eyes.

SAPPHIRE
(seeing Ramone with the
machete) You people are
insane.

FENNER
Well...they started it.

Sapphire rolls her eyes and begins walking toward the door.

FENNER
Baby, wait. (catching up to her)
Come on, I know this looks bad. But
none of us are usually like this.

SAPPHIRE
I thought maybe you really were
different. But you're all the same,
all you gangster wannabe's.
(turning around) A fucking machete?
Really?

Ramone gives her an innocent look. Terry, Dan, and Mary all
just stand there. Tess has been passed out on the table the
entire time. Sapphire leaves quickly.

SCENE 11

YAPPITY DAN
Guess she won't be coming back.

RAMONE
(looking toward Juan) There's
just one piece of unfinished
business.

TERRY
Let him go Ramone. He knows it was
me. I want him to know....Let him
go.

RAMONE
You must be crazy...He'll come back
with more guys. We already lost
Marvin, and next time we might not
be so lucky.

JUAN
I'll never stop until every last
one of you is in the morgue or the
bottom of the river.

TERRY

No...come after me, Juan. Only me.
Leave the rest of them out of it.

RAMONE

Enough of this.

As Ramone raises the machete to chop Juan into pieces, Terry pulls out the spare pistol on his ankle and points it at Ramone.

TERRY

You kill him, I kill you.

RAMONE

What?

TERRY

You heard me. I'll do it, you know
I will.

Everyone stares at them, shocked. Ramone faces Terry.

RAMONE

(after a pause) Fine. Go then,
Juan. But if you come back
again, I'll be ready for you.

JUAN

I *will* be back again. (spits on
Ramone's shoes and leaves)

TERRY

...There's something I have to tell
you. This afternoon I spoke with
Benny. He told me to take you out.

RAMONE

(laughs) Well now, isn't that
funny. Benny gave me a note
this morning before we left
for Blanco's mansion...Wanna
know what it said. (begins to
reach into his back pocket)

TERRY

Don't.

Ramone pulls out Benny's note from earlier. Terry shoots him in the head, thinking that he's pulling a gun. Everyone looks at each other, then Dan eventually walks to Ramone's body and reads the note.

YAPPITY DAN
Jesus. I don't believe this shit.

He hands the note to Terry, who reads it and then crumples it up.

TERRY
We all need to get the hell out of here. Cops will be coming soon.

CUT TO: REAR PARKING LOT

Juan starts the car, so furious that he forgets to turn on the headlights. He pulls into the alley, then gets out his phone.

At the other end, Ori has regained consciousness. He staggers to his feet as Juan picks up speed. Distracted by his phone, Juan hits Ori, who is lifted up onto the windshield. Juan stares in dismay at the body and the broken windshield.

Cue music: CRAZY GAME OF POKER by O.A.R. resumes and play out through the credits.

The camera begins to move out of the alley, above the buildings. In the distance, police lights can be seen moving toward the poolhall as the camera continues moving away.

Black out.