

The Aquila Review



Aquila Review

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Unsolicited interviews and reviews will not receive consideration. Reading occurs during the summer months.

Writers may send submissions as hard copies, or writers may send submissions in the body of an e-mail to *brian.billings@tamut.edu*.

Simultaneous submissions are acceptable. When mailing hard copies, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Submissions without a self-addressed stamped envelope will not be returned. *Aquila Review* cannot accept responsibility for the loss or damage of any materials sent by mail. Sample copies of *Aquila Review* are available upon request for \$5.00 apiece.

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Fiction and Nonfiction

Railbridge at Fulton
Carol Flori



Changing My First Tire

Leah Beall

It was a dark and rainy the night when I made my mother proud, and she knew I was listening. My family has always valued the practical thinker, what they call the “common man,” over the analytical thinker. They take more pride in mowing a yard with no flaws left behind or building a smooth table with no unlevel spots than in getting a good grade in a class or writing a paper with almost no mechanical errors in it. My family members are hard laborers who, sadly, feel the need to avoid people with more academic professions and interests. They feel that those people who make a career out of academic intelligence are a lazy, soft, and often snotty species of people. It isn’t a fair judgment, but it stems from their past interactions with these people—doctors who treated them like they were clueless about anything, teachers who treated them like cancer because of the choices their parents made, and lawyers who scammed them when they needed help. They’re antisocial, eccentric nature lovers because people have not always been kind to them.

I’m not saying that they did not support me and my academic pursuits. They did. Many of them even went to my graduation, even if a few did just sit in the car or make a ten-minute appearance before leaving. College has been great, but it has created what I feel are permanent rifts between me and them. They constantly feel that I am acting superior to them when I talk about anything relating to my classes or when I pay for something I once could not afford, like a Smartphone or a concert ticket. When I try to explain why they feel this way, they become even more angry.

When the chicken plant hired my sister and began to praise her work, Mom was so happy. No one even took my job seriously when I was in undergraduate courses because it was part time, air conditioned, and in a tutoring center. They could whine about work, but if I even mentioned something that resembled a complaint, I was met with, “Stop being dramatic. You wouldn’t get work frustrations. You don’t have a real job.”

I have always known that they are proud of me, but I have often wondered if they would respect me more if I were more like them—a person who shared more of their interests or more of their thoughts. Well, one dark and stormy night, I had the chance to prove that I was practical and that I was listening to everything my mother had said; for a moment, I earned her respect.

It was the end of the semester, which meant tutor party time. Of course, that meant everyone was dressed up a little, including me, which is rare. I curled my hair, and I spent almost two hours to make sure each ringlet was even and bouncy like a spring. My head was a wave of dirty blond spirals. I chose a deep maroon

sweater that was thick enough to be warm without a jacket because I always feel trapped in jackets and sweaters. I had on tightly fitting jeans tucked into my dressy boots, and I was wearing full makeup. I was ready to go and meet my friend Blake in Texarkana so that we could ride together. (I get anxiety while driving in the city, so we ride together.)

As I was heading to town, I ran into a thunderstorm. The lightning cut the darkness with its bright white claws, the thunder shook the ground like a mighty beast stomping, and the clouds cried large tears. I could barely see, but I knew my turn was up ahead. As I turned, I began to hear a rough sound. I looked around and saw no one near me, so it had to be my car growling as I drove down the lonely, dark road. I turned right off of the access road, which just so happen to be an old, abandoned motel parking lot. I checked the area and didn't see anyone around, so I got out to check . . . and I discovered that I had a blown-out tire. It had come completely apart. I had just bought the car, and the tires were not that old! I was pissed.

I called my boyfriend, who was home with the flu, and he said, "There's a doughnut in that car. I checked it before you drove off. If you can't get help or can't change it, I can try and come up there."

A tear formed in one eye as I said, "It's raining here. Maybe it'll stop in a few minutes, and I can get out and see what I can do."

I also called my house to let them know where I was in case somebody murdered me in the parking lot. They would at least know where my car was. I also texted Blake to tell him that I would be a little late. Now, all I could do was sit in the car and wait . . . and fight that single tear from leaking out and ruining my eyeliner. Listening to the rain tapping on the roof was calming. It was playing a song, but no one else on the road was there to hear it. The lot was empty and silent. The motel, however, was creepy. It had broken windows and a worn appearance. Paint was peeling down the front and sides. I was afraid to turn my back to it because I feared someone inside was waiting for an opportunity to attack. I wanted to go home.

The rain seemed to be slowing, when, suddenly, the entire sky opened up and dropped gallons of water onto the windshield. The temperature and humidity had jumped up as well because I was starting to sweat—partially from nervousness and partially because of that sweater and my long hair, which was now beginning to frizz. Hours of work were about to come undone, and my car didn't have air conditioning to slow this process. Lightning struck the sky with great power, and the thunder roared. Hail began to fall as the wind picked up. The hail began to salt my windshield, and it continued growing louder as the ice grew larger. I felt like I was being shot at, so I plugged my ears and tried to ignore the tree blowing around above me. Holding that tear in was useless at this point.

Blake called me and asked, “Hey. Are you coming? Did you fix the flat?”

I replied, “No. It’s raining. It won’t stop. It was hailing. I have changed a shit-ton of flats, but I wasn’t alone in the dark those times.”

“I can come to you. Is there anything I can do?”

I had changed flats when I was with Blake before, and I knew there was not much he could do except stand there, which was really all I needed. Moral support. I knew he wouldn’t like the sketchy parking lot, either. I uttered, “No, I’ll be fine. I can’t leave the car here, and I’m not even sure if I’ll want to go to the party after getting out there on the wet ground. Just go and have fun at the party.” I hung up the phone, and I began to cry. Every time I had ever changed a flat, someone had been there to hold the flashlight, at least. This time, I was alone.

The rain slowed down, finally. I got out of the car and noticed that my car was now sitting in a mud hole. “Thank you,” I sarcastically screamed to the skies as they pissed on me. The new jack I had just bought worked beautifully, and the lug nuts came off easily enough. Then the rain began to fall harder and heavily pelted the top of my hair. I knew at that moment that there was no way I was going to the party. I grabbed my long, spiraling strands, twisted them into a ball, and wrapped a hair-tie around them to secure them tightly in place. Luckily, I had worn a tank top under my layers. I slid my brand-new maroon sweater over my head and put it in the car, and I wiped the tear and stinging make up from my face.

The night was pitch black, and the only street lights were too far away to matter much, but my little flashlight flickered on. Ken called again to make sure I was okay or to see if I needed him to come and help me, but I told him that I was fine. I hoped I wasn’t lying. I hung up and yanked and pulled to get the tire off; I’d never had so much trouble actually pulling the tire off of a car. I slid my boots off to keep from ruining them and placed my feet on the tire to rock it back and forth. I was hoping it would pop right there. It didn’t.

“Why the hell is this happening?!” I screamed into the growling sky that screamed back at me. I reared back and kicked the tire . . . and off the car and onto the ground it fell. “Yes!” I shrieked as I threw my fist into the air in triumph. The rest of the job was easy. I put the new tire on, put everything up, and drove back home for the night.

When I came inside, drenched with sweat and water and covered in mud with no shoes on, my family looked relieved. My mom had already gotten out of bed to come and help me if I needed it, but I know she was proud that I had changed the tire by myself. I told my story as if it were terrible and frustrating, but inside, I felt empowered. Mom simply smiled and said, “Well, it’s good that you changed it and made it back. It was smart to come right home because driving on a doughnut is not the safest option. We’ll get another tire in the morning.”

Even though she didn't actually say she was proud of me, she did stop worrying about my driving to Texarkana by myself (especially at night). That night, I showed her that I'd been paying attention to the little lessons that she valued in her life and that just because I prefer a different type of job environment doesn't mean I'm not thankful for the everyday lessons that I get from home—the lessons I get from her.

He looked over at the pot of water on the stove. The coils underneath the pot were orange rings. The water in the pot was . . . nonchalant. His grandmother's voice echoed in his head: "A watched pot never boils."

He looked out the window. The front porch, a faded green wood, rested on top of a clean lot. There was grass everywhere but the place where tires had worn a path to the back of the country home. No cars were out front. The driveway stretched a mile down to the dirt road that was the main highway in these parts. He leaned over the sink and looked out the window as far as he could. His eyes scanned the length of the highway to see if he might pick up a cloud of dust: the approach of a car.

His eyes flicked back to the pot. Nothing.

He shuffled out of the kitchen and into the living room. The TV wasn't on; the tattered grey recliner was reflected in its dilated pupil. He walked around to the recliner while casting an eye out the living room window and seeing nothing again. He slid into the recliner from the side. The foot rest was already in position; the lever had been stuck that way many years ago. His violent attempts to shift the lever made no difference.

As soon as he sat, he heard the mechanical hiss of the ceiling fan as it made its slow, methodical revolutions. He was hot, and his forearms stuck on the recliner's old vinyl like melted cheese to bread. He wanted desperately to pull that beaded chain and speed the fan up, but to do so would make the fan spin as though possessed with more intention to crash on his head than to provide comfort. He was only sitting for a moment before he peeled himself off of the chair and swooped back into the kitchen. His boots clicked as he transitioned from the carpet to the linoleum in front of the sink . . . in front of the window.

Nothing.

He looked at the pot on the stove.

Nothing.

* *Iktsuarpok* is an Inuit term for the feeling of anticipation that leads you to look outside to see if anyone is coming.

Maybe there were more bubbles in the pot now? No. He looked at the knob on the oven. Was it working? It was still orange. It must be. He could feel the heat, he thought, stretching out his hand. He looked up and out the window again. He saw dust.

A comet was leaking a dusty trail as it soared down the road. He followed the cloud as the car travelled from the left side of the window toward the middle line that divided the two panes and also marked the start of the driveway. The dust was almost there now, which meant the car was at the driveway.

He wiped the beads of sweat from the corner of his eye and leaned forward again, but the cloud was past the driveway now. The comet did not slow. (Comets usually don't.) He watched the brown cloud settle back on the road.

He looked at the pot again.

Nothing again.

He stole a glance at the old clock on the wall above the door. The clock told him what it had told him all day: five fifty-five. Like a crushed bug with one leg still moving, still resisting Death, the red second hand was still twitching. It was stuck on thirty or thirty-one. It couldn't move forward. Or wouldn't? Had it been five fifty-five all day?

That's what the clock says, he thought, and it had never lied before. He stuck a finger in the pot. The water wasn't cold, but that's all he knew. It was still, still.

He walked back into the living room, unbolted the front door, and swung the door open. He bent down, picked up the piece of brick he used as a door stop, and put the brick to work. In the threshold, the air seemed cooler than the rest of the house, but that was impossible. He could see the air tremble as heat rose up from the ground.

He looked out at the road

Nothing.

He walked back into the kitchen again. He could hear the breeze now; it was moving through the lone oak tree on the side of the house and rustling the leaves with its oven breath. The second time he heard the breeze, he thought it sounded like a car. He looked out the window to an empty highway. The third time, he slammed the door back shut, not troubling to remove the piece of brick which scrapped to a stop somewhere on the paint-chipped porch.

He wanted to pull the drapes closed on the living room window. That would help with the heat . . . but he needed the drapes open to see.

He settled on pushing the recliner away from its TV-viewing spot until it sat right next to the window. He pulled the old tan drapes shut, but where he sat allowed him to pull them back and spy through them at any moment. He could also see into the kitchen for when his water would boil. He pulled back a drape and saw dust again. He stood up on the recliner to see better. No, it was the heat and glass conspiring to look like dust.

He saw no sense in sitting back down when he had just jumped up, so he walked back to the kitchen again. The water was not boiling. He watched drops of sweat pile together on the cliff of his fingertips before splotching on to the linoleum. He looked up.

The clock still said five fifty-five, though.

He hadn't been waiting that long.

Larry and Guster
Caleb Dan Gammons

It was Sunday morning when Larry met Guster at the nursing home cafeteria. Larry and Guster were retired cops and hated it.

The Chief had basically said, “You’re too old to be a cop!”

Larry responded by saying, “As my grandfather would say, you’re an ignorant idiot, Chief Lester!”

This only made matters worse as they were now confined to a nursing home due to being what the Chief called insane.

“You’re playing chess the wrong way, Guster,” Larry said as Guster moved his queen. “Honestly, do you want me to beat you?”

“Just play your own game, Larry. I do what I do, and that is that!”

Larry was short. He usually wore slacks, a button-up shirt, and dress shoes. He had a bit of a hunched back in his old age, and he never left anywhere without his fedora. Guster, on the other hand, was a tall, gangly black man. He, too, always wore a button-up shirt, slacks, dress shoes, and an old light-brown dinner jacket. Guster never left anywhere without his wooden cane.

On this particular day, as the two of them were playing their chess game, a murder was taking place inside the old Cherry Shop down on Main Street. Larry was the first to notice Chief Lester and his cronies rolling down the streets in their police cars.

“Look, Guster. I told you there was going to be a murder today! I always get that feeling, you know?”

“You don’t get feelings, Larry. You’re just hungry. Besides, Larry, you don’t even know if that was a murder.”

“I say we go and investigate, Guster. Undercover. If we solve this one, it’ll prove that we’re perfectly capable of being reinstated.”

“They’ll never let us in, Larry. We’re washed up, remember?”

“Guster, you egghead! This is our opportunity to get back on the force, you nitwit. Can you tell me you don’t want that?”

Guster sighed and then replied, “Fine. Just because I think this trip will be amusing, I’ll humor you, Larry!”

Both Larry and Guster stood up and then hurried after the police cars. The two seniors ran down the street while bowling people over and trying to avoid cars. Hiding behind a nearby tree, they could hear every word that Chief Lester was saying to the coroner.

“You say the murder took place just ten minutes ago. Is there anything else you can tell me?” Chief Lester asked as he took notes on a pad.

“The murder weapon was a blunt instrument,” said the coroner. “Most

likely a hammer. I'll know more once we get her back to the lab."

"Okay then. Thank you." Chief Lester turned to Sheldon, his assistant. "I should probably go and visit her brother Vick and her grandmother." He checked his pad. "Cassandra. I believe she works at the old Sunny Dale Library, right?"

"Yes, you would be correct," said Sheldon.

Larry and Guster fist bumped and then ran off back to the nursing home to hijack a vehicle.

"Alright, Guster. Let's blow this joint!"

"You haven't got a clue. They'll throw us out for this, Larry!"

"Quit your whining, Guster. This is unofficial police business! Now let's get going so we can grill that lady's grandma before Chief Lousy gets there first!"

Larry slammed the car into gear and peeled out of the driveway as they headed to the Sunny Dale Library. Larry made sure the car would drive off a bridge and into a nearby lake so that no one would know that they were at the library. Inside, they found Cassandra cleaning a nearby bookshelf and singing opera to herself.

"Hi, I'm Larry, and this is Guster. I hate to tell you this, lady, but your granddaughter has been murdered, and we need to ask you a couple of questions."

"Nessy is dead?" The woman said as she sat down and began to wail.

"You don't just blurt out that the woman's granddaughter is dead, Larry. Now you've upset her!"

"We got to get answers fast if we are going to stay out of that stupid nursing home, Guster. Sometimes, we can't have the luxury of waiting to dish out important information."

"I just knew that Jimmy Duehorn was an evil character."

"Who?" Both of them looked at the old lady.

"Her boyfriend. He was always beating on her! It had to be him! He lives down the road; you should talk to him. Last house at the end of Mellow Drive."

Larry and Guster ran out of the Sunny Dale Nursing home just as a cop car pulled up. It was Chief Lester. The Chief's mouth dropped open as he recognized Larry and Guster standing there.

"Run for it, Larry!"

"I'm with you all the way, Guster!"

Larry and Guster ran for it despite the Chief's commands for them to stop. They commandeered a bicycle by punching its owner in the jaw. They rode away with Larry riding in the front basket while Guster pedaled. They made their way to Jimmy's house.

"Jimmy Duehorn! This is the police! Come outside so we can ask you a few questions," Guster said as he whacked on the door repeatedly with his cane.

Suddenly, they saw a young man run out onto the street from behind the

house. Larry and Guster quickly mounted their bicycle and chased after the man down a back alley.

“Pedal faster, Guster! The perp is getting away!” Larry yelled as Guster replied, “Larry, I do what I do, and that is that!”

The man threw dumpsters, trash, boxes, and everything else he could reach to obstruct Larry and Guster, but they still managed to catch up with him. As soon as he was in reach, Guster whacked him on the head with his cane, and the man fell flat on his face. Larry quickly jumped off of the bicycle and held the man’s hands behind his back so he couldn’t escape.

“All right, you goon! Out with it! How did you kill your girlfriend?”

“I didn’t! I swear! I might have accidentally hit her a few times, but I never would have murdered her! I loved her!”

“You have a funny way of showing it, running away like that,” Guster said as he and Larry fist bumped each other.

“I did love her! Man, I always knew you couldn’t trust her brother Vick who works at the shoe department store over on Main Street. He always wanted her Cherry Pie Store. Always threatening her and whatnot!”

Larry and Guster nodded to each other.

“All right, get out of here, but don’t go too far. I’m on to you, Mister! You can’t pull the wool over the eyes of Larry and Guster!”

The man ran off. Larry and Guster were about to get on the bike when a police car pulled up at the far end of the alley. They quickly got on their bike and went in the opposite direction.

“Pedal for it, Guster!”

“I’m with you all the way, Larry!”

Guster pedaled them all the way back down to Main Street and over to the Shoe Department where they threw the bike in a dumpster and went inside.

“Hey, what young whippersnapper you think this Vick is, Guster?”

“Probably the man at the front counter sleeping, Larry, if I had to guess.”

Larry and Guster made their way over to the counter, and Larry grabbed the man by the collar to wake him up.

“Whoa, old dudes, what do you think you’re doing grabbing me and stuff? I’ll call the police on you!”

“Are you Vick, son?” Guster asked.

“Yes, who’s asking?”

“The police, pipsqueak! Now give us the truth! How’d you do her in, huh? Why won’t you confess to your sister’s murder, eh?”

“Calm down Larry, you’ll give the boy a heart attack before we get his confession out of him!”

“Look, I never killed my sister. I’m just as devastated as everyone else!

Why don't you go and ask that Handyman Horris! He's been working on her building. You'll probably find him at his old shop just across the street."

Larry and Guster looked at each other and ran out the door and accidentally bowled Chief Lester over.

"Halt! This time, I have you both!"

Larry and Guster ran across the street as Chief Lester chased after them.

"Run for it, Larry!"

"I'm with you all the way, Guster!"

They ran into Handyman Horris's workshop and quickly blocked the door with a Lazy Boy armchair.

"You can't run forever! I'll drag you both back to that nursing home if it's the last thing I ever do!" Chief Lester yelled through the window.

"Um, what exactly are you gentlemen doing blocking my door?" Handyman Horris asked as he walked over to move the armchair out of the way.

"Get him, Guster!" Larry yelled as they both tackled the man and held him to the ground. Guster held his cane threateningly.

"There was a murder over at the Cherry Pie Shop. You've been working there every day! Do you use a hammer, Handyman Horris?" Guster asked.

"I'm a handyman! Of course I use a hammer!" Handyman Horris snapped.

"Did you kill the girl or not? Trust me, you had better answer truthfully. I've seen Guster use his cane to cause pain in ways you've never heard of, Handyman Horris!"

"Yeah, and Larry has been known to pinch a man so hard that he had internal bleeding!"

"You can't scare me! You wouldn't dare!"

Guster whacked the handyman in the face with his cane, and Larry pinched as hard as he could.

"Okay! I did it! I killed her! Let go of me!"

Suddenly, the door smashed open as the police came barging through and over the chair. Larry and Guster got to their feet and turned around to find Chief Lester fuming; he was very red in the face.

"Take these two idiots back to the nursing home where they belong," Chief Lester said as Horris ran out the side-door exit behind his front counter.

"Quick, Guster! The murderer is getting away!" Larry yelled as he and Guster jumped over the front counter and out the exit with the police and Chief Lester not far behind.

"I got him, Larry!" Guster yelled as he jumped on Handyman Horris's back and tried to get him to the ground.

Larry quickly ran around to the front of Handyman Horris and punched him in the face, and the man fell on top of poor Guster. Guster let go, and the man

plowed into Larry in an attempt to escape.

“After him, Larry! Take my cane and whack him good!” Guster said as he threw Larry his cane.

Larry charged after Handyman Horris as the murderer ran down an alleyway. However, this alleyway led to a dead end. Just as Handyman Horris tried to turn around and escape, Larry whacked him in the gut and then on his head with the cane. Handyman Horris fell on his knees and clutched his stomach and head as Larry pushed him over and smirked.

“There he is! Get him!” Chief Lester yelled as five police officers ran down the alley and grabbed Larry by the arms.

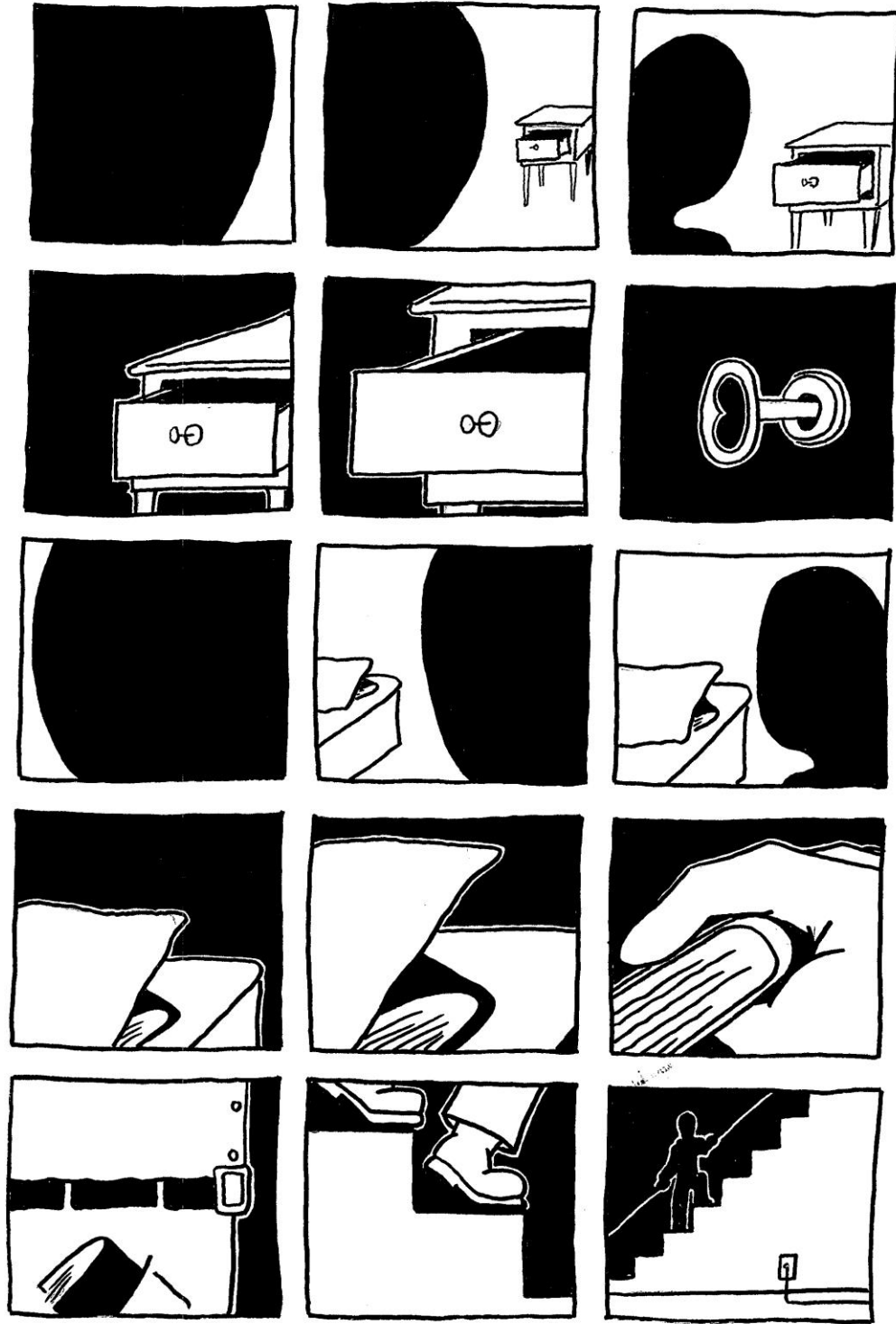
“Keep your shirts on! Me and Guster got a confession out of Handyman Horris already! Now how do you feel about us? Still think we should retire?”

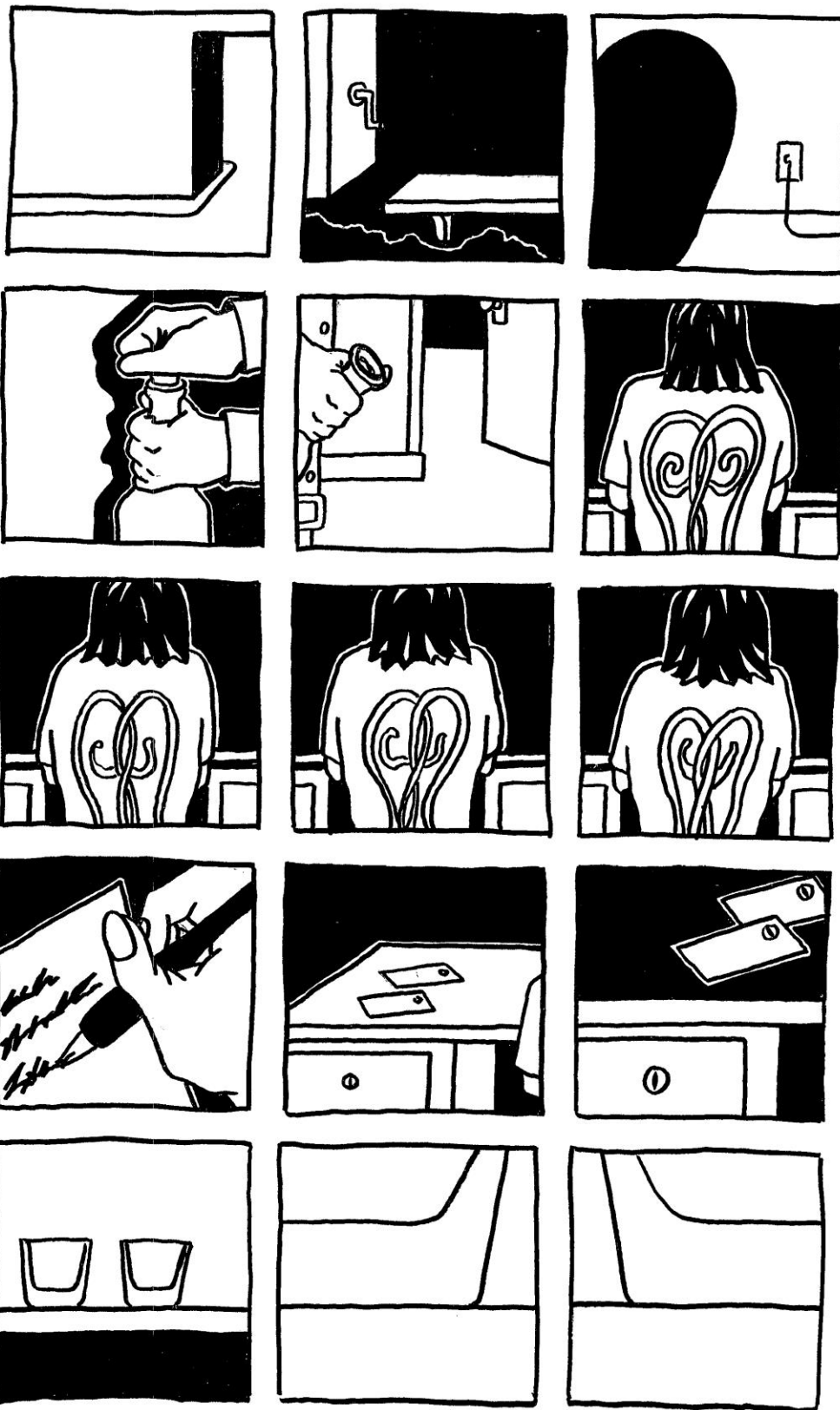
“After trashing a nursing home car, stealing bicycles, scaring pedestrians, and threatening people? You really think that I’m going to let you back on the force? I said it before, and I’ll say it again: ‘You’re both insane, Larry!’”

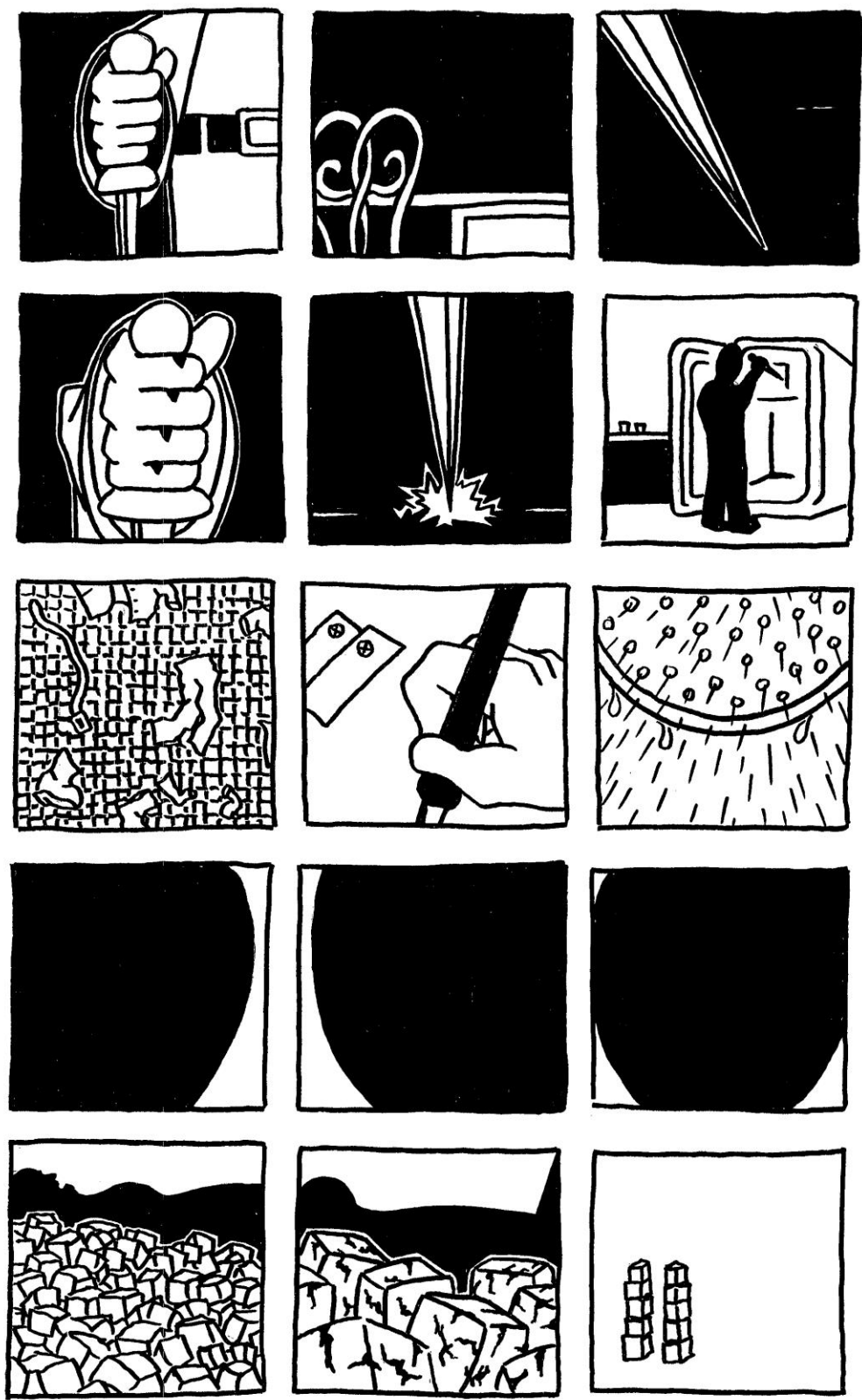
Chief Lester turned to his officers and said, “Book Handyman Horris and take Larry and Guster down to the station for their individual statements. I suppose the main thing is that the murderer has been caught! To that, I say job well done, and I hope I never see you two again. Maybe if you both behave, I might let you be private consultants next time. Just stay at the nursing home!”

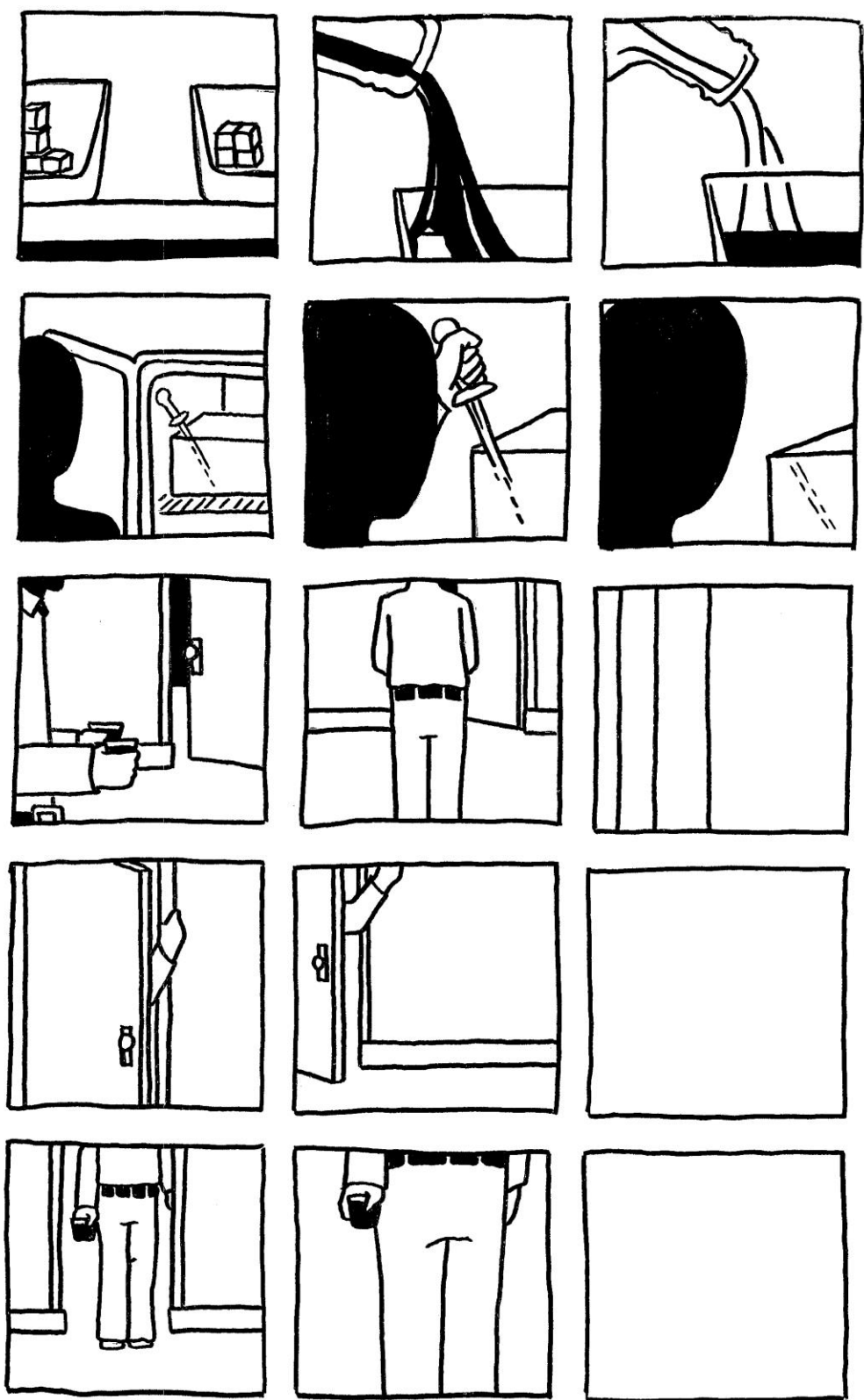
Larry and Guster went away that day happy, but they both secretly agreed that staying at the nursing home and waiting for the Chief to call was not going to happen. That’s how the adventures of Larry and Guster truly got their start.

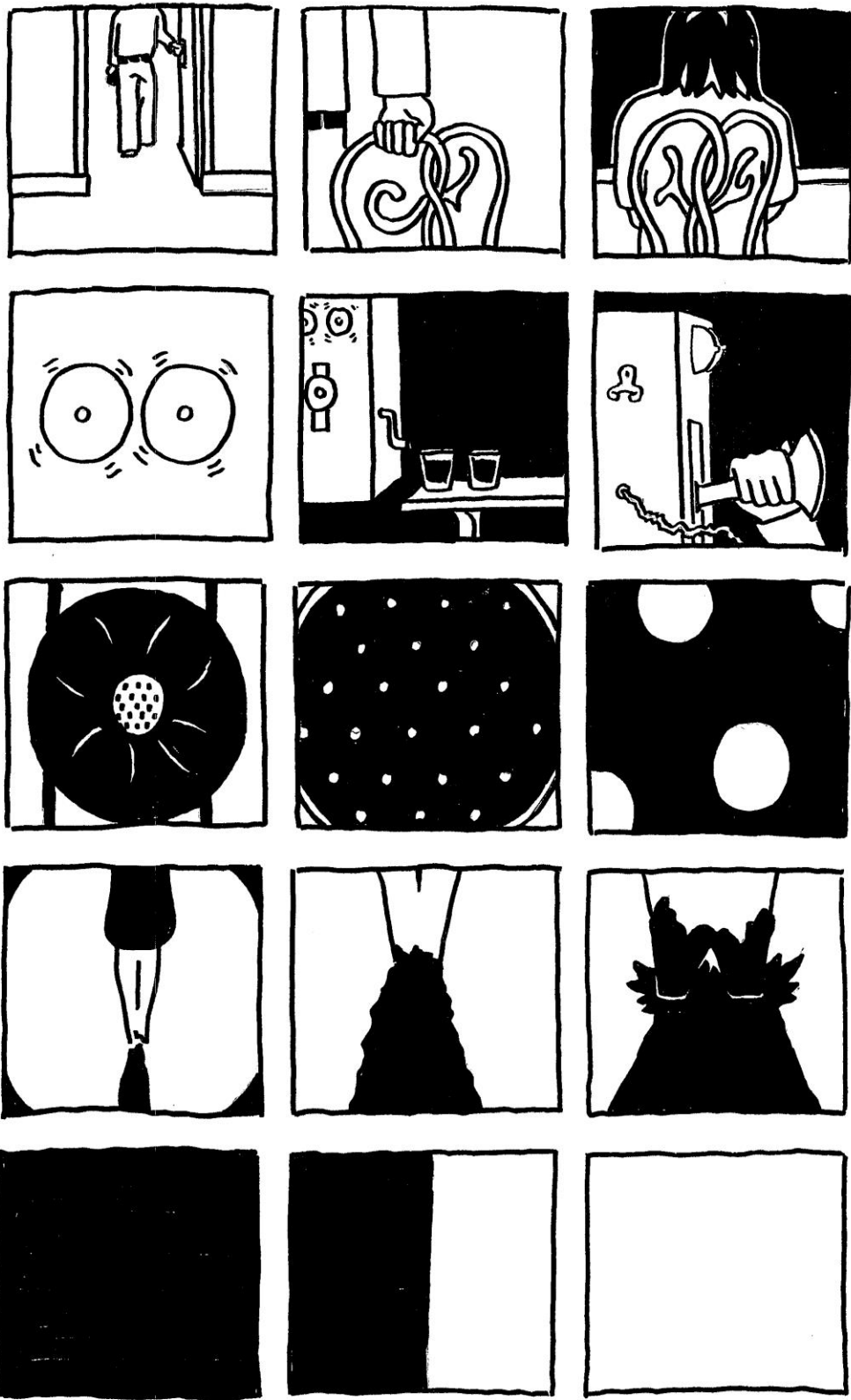
Lolita: The End of Chapter 22
Josh McGuire











Papaw

Sam Tirrito

I bring my green tractor to a stop next to the gas pump. The engine, roaring on the journey here, finishes its tirade with a few tired clicks. The man working the pump is an older guy. He is bald save for the thick hair hiding on the back of his tanned head. He wears black framed glasses with big lenses that normally catch enough glare to obscure reading his thoughts through his dark eyes. I look over at him, waiting to be acknowledged. Finally, he turns his head.

“I’m out of gas. Can you fill up my tank?” I ask nervously.

He reaches for the nozzle of the pump with the faintest smile on his face and pumps the gas before sending me on my way. I travel around the couch once or twice before I scoot my tractor to a stop by the arm of the couch. Papaw looks away from the TV again, and again I ask him to fill up my tractor tank. He is a patient man, and there is no way to know for sure how many times I stopped for gas before he informed me that the station was now “out of gas.”

This was my dad’s dad. For the most part, I knew him as the indiscernible occasional babysitter. He was a quiet man whose silence and authority drew me warily toward him as a young child . . . but never close enough that I remember a full-on conversation with him. He watched the History Channel from the couch, usually until he fell asleep. That was a death sentence to a five-year-old. Why watch boring things in grey when we could watch the Red Ranger fight evil?

One time, I remember creeping close to the snoring giant on the couch and trying to steal the golden remote. When I had the treasure in my hand, I slowly turned up the volume on the TV: one, two, twenty, fifty. I do not remember how loud the WWII bombs became before they interrupted Papaw’s slumber. His legs jumped out before his body, much like the Red Ranger recovering from his enemy’s blow and preparing to retaliate. He hollered to turn it down and stayed awake for awhile before drifting back to sleep.

I have more memories of Papaw than this, but although I was in middle school before he passed, I don’t have any memories that are more favorable than these. I can remember hugging him at family gatherings and going fishing with him (and the family) what seemed like every weekend. He was quiet, though, and despite our physical closeness, we were truly generations apart. There is a feeling I get in my gut some times: the realization of an opportunity lost that sucks air out

of my lungs like a tide receding to expose a naked shore and pulling the beach's treasures down to irretrievable depths.

I have built, through the stories of others, a solid structure of who my grandfather was, but it is not a building I ever entered myself. Sometimes, I walk by the sturdy doors. The building is impassive. Neutral. It must must have been busy long ago, but now it looks more like a museum with secrets as rare and interesting as they are unvisited.

I grow sad looking at the doors. I would like to go inside and search those halls. I would read the descriptions below the art and learn his history, which is part of my history.

By the time I realized I had a key, the doors were shut permanently. I only know what I can gather from observing the architecture or pressing my face against the windows to see into a dark room where I imagine I see what others have told me would be there.

Turkey and Tannins[†]
Sterlin Lujan

The smell of turkey wafts through the house on Thanksgiving Day. It mingles with a cornucopia of yams, ham, casseroles, green beans, and mashed potatoes. An endless selection of sweets and treats sit beside the main course. Kith and kin gather round. They enjoy the scents and sumptuous sights. Then they prepare to gobble it up. They are bright-eyed and happy, eager to feast, frolic, and celebrate the harvest.

Everyone knows this scene. It is debatable whether the meal served is traditional or not. It is the classic Thanksgiving Day feast when whole families meet and party. It is a day to appreciate everything and to rejoice.

However, what is a spread without fine drink? Many people might desire a relaxing buzz to imbue the festivities with gaiety. What better way to accomplish such relaxation than with quality wine? Of course, with the possibilities, choosing a wine may seem too daunting a task. It causes fear. The anxiety moves people to panic and drink anything for peace of mind.

They should step back. Breathe. Relax. Be Zen.

The taste of wine is an opinion. Wine and food pairing for many people is a preference, not physics.

This view also exists in Texarkana.

Daniel Vammen, the clean-cut, boyish, and intelligent bar manager at Texarkana's Twisted Fork, says that his "number-one rule for pairing wine is 'drink what you like.' If you don't like it, then there may not be a food that makes you like it."

Terry Willet, the amenable, humble, and wine-savvy owner of Red Road Winery in Texarkana, echoes Vammen: "Multiple times a week, someone will call and ask what goes well with a steak and pasta, and my opinion is you drink what you like."

These rules, however, almost imply splurging and going wild. Some guidelines exist for pairing wine and food that will help boost the sensory experience and cause the combinations of flavors to sing on the tongue.

[†] This essay first appeared in *Her Magazine* on January 9, 2015.

Vammen has a warning about not being too tense and picky but being able to research what one likes: “There is a lot of great information on the Internet, and people, I think, are just so uptight when they are considering a pairing, like if they want to have a nice dinner and wine. People overthink it. They should try not to hit the ball out of the park on the first swing. They’ll probably have some good hits and some misses.”

With that being said, where does one start? A basic wine primer will suffice.

Dry red wines, depending upon sauces and sides, go well with meat. “You’ve got Merlot, which is another red wine. It can be dry, but not as dry as a Cabernet, and it pairs well with softer foods versus a Cabernet, which would go well with a great steak. Merlot might not be able to stand up to this big piece of meat. But if you had creamy side items, it would go well,” Vammen explains.

Chardonnay represents another great wine. It possesses great potential because it imparts many different flavors and textures, but its use depends upon many factors. Sometimes Chardonnays spend time in oak barrels, and this steeping lends them a drier, crisper, and more complex taste, whereas a stainless-steel cask might pass on a different, maybe less complex flavor.

Vincent Senatore, the experienced, worldly connoisseur and owner of Vincent’s Fine Wine and Liquors in Texarkana, comments on Chardonnay’s rich diversity of flavor: “Chardonnay’s one of the strangest grape varieties because it flies all over the place. It can be crisp, clean, and dry and can even have a little sweetness to it, all the way down to the other side, where it is . . . fermented in French oak barrels. It can be rich and super juicy with lots and lots of flavors and finish up with a tremendous oak nose. That is your sixty-dollar Chardonnay. So you have such a gamut of flavors and tastes when you get into these particular styles.”

Judy Moore, the reserved, scholarly, and kind owner of O’Farrell Country Vineyards near Atlanta, Texas, has her own thoughts about wine pairing: “Generally speaking, you want to pair however strong in flavor with what the food is in texture. You pair a wine with it that is similar. In other words, you wouldn’t really put a hearty, robust red with a really light seafood, like a muscle or clam or oyster. You would put a crisp, white, usually dry wine with it.”

Moore also waxes eloquent upon a basic wine listing, but she warns that O’Farrell’s vineyard is not in the same category as the true wine grapes: “Probably

the most popular wines not in the category we sell would be the Chardonnay, the Merlot, Cabernet, Pinot, or a Shiraz. The Chardonnay is a white, and the rest are reds except the Pinot Grigio.”

The sweeter wines pair well with sweet foods. Port and Riesling and Moscato have a history of being sweeter and pairing well with desserts and hors d’oeuvres.

Senatore possesses a great Thanksgiving dessert-wine philosophy: “We look at Thanksgiving in a lot of different ways. It depends on your family, history, and background. I like the idea of having an apple pie or a pumpkin pie after a coffee and maybe a nice Italian Moscato—a true Moscato.

“And in typical Thanksgiving fashion, we finish after the coffee. Sometimes, we have cordials, a glass of port with some good, deep, rich, dark chocolates, pears, walnuts, and maybe pecans . . . and maybe a piece of Stilton cheese. And this is the way you finish a feast.”

Willet offers an interesting and unique perspective to consider during the holiday season: “In the wintertime, on a cold day, on a Thanksgiving, I am going to prefer Cabernet Sauvignon. If it were seventy-five to eighty degrees outside, I would probably prefer a Chenin blanc, Chardonnay, or Sauvignon blanc. So to me, it is the conditions around me as to what mood I am in for a particular wine.”

But with all the Thanksgiving meal possibilities and the vast spread of foods and flavors, what wine could possibly match perfectly with everything?

Senatore elaborates upon a more particular idea of what to drink with Thanksgiving dinner: “There is only one wine that matches a Thanksgiving Meal: Beaujolais Nouveau. It is a very special wine. It is absolutely perfect with Thanksgiving dinner—not because it is perfect with turkey, but . . . since this is a cornucopia of different tastes and textures, the Beaujolais Nouveau is the most unique wine for this particular feast. Now, you can start the meal off with a glass of Chardonnay with some shrimp or something, but the main part of the meal is best with Beaujolais Nouveau.”

What about nontraditional Thanksgiving Day meals?

Not all families prefer gobbling up the time-honored turkey dinner. Depending upon many factors—including preference, ethnicity, family and culture—one might eat something different. The wine pairings should also match a person or family’s dining choices.

Moore mentions several variations on the traditional feast relevant to Americans: “We have Cajun friends, and they have gumbo, which is awesome. And we love a white wine with gumbo. But the trend this day and time is whatever you like. If you are having barbecue, then you are usually going to have a red wine . . . but you are going to have people who don’t like red wine or can’t drink red wine because of the tannins, which gives them a headache. So you want to have a rosé, a white and red available.”

The nontraditional combinations are countless. An Asian family might have sticky rice and soup. A Hispanic family might have a spicier meal with rice and beans. A German family might have sauerkraut and bratwurst. A Jewish family might have a kosher dinner with maple squash.

The specific wine pairings for each meal depend upon the food and sauces. This dependence harkens back to the initial concept: wine pairing should follow personal preference while relying upon basic guidelines and not stressing over the selection process.

A lot of potential choices exist, but because wine and food pairing follows opinion and taste, one should obey the golden rule: “Drink what you like.” One must keep tasting wines and foods in various combinations until something appealing arises.

Research is vital to understand the basics, find a favorite selection, and reduce fear. The gung-ho wine enthusiast knows her hobby.

More importantly, though, one must enjoy the process. Thanksgiving is ultimately a time of being grateful and appreciating family while devouring a feast. Wine should modify the experience and tease the senses.

Seven Point
Agnes Tirrito



Poetry

Down the Rabbit Hole
Cindy Holmes



At the Funeral Olympics

John Grey

After the funeral mass,
it's a contest among family
to see who looks
the most like the deceased.
The judges are distant cousins,
great-aunts we haven't seen in years,
and a guy he worked with at the factory.

Another event is
sincerest of tears
though attendees keep
their grading to themselves.
We young ones look
around the church
at the haggard faces,
bent necks,
play a silly game of
"Who'll go next?"

Death doesn't happen often enough
for anyone to get good
at all these competitions.
The storytellers
muff their punchlines.
The greedy gourmands
fail to hear
there's caterers back at the house.

The only sure thing is that
the guy in the box
will be feeling that constant slap of dirt
before the rest of us.

Eighty-five years of age.
That's the time to beat.

Flash Frame Southern

Aaron Brand

Offshore rigs plug the Gulf
for ecstatic draws of oil:

catfish, cicadas, logging, speed.

Georgia eyes melt inside bowls
of okra and tomato:

peaches, pecans, asphalt, satin.

Grits Bar bourbon swings New Orleans
until the sweat shuts down:

shrimp boats, murder, lavender, shoulders.

Conductors run trolleys
to Mississippi rhythms:

pine trees, silt, sweet rain, and honey.

Graveyards and Hot Springs
in the swipe of summer shadows:

flagpoles, Confederates, lingerie, and willows.

Hospital Run

Casey Purifoy

The woman's maroon-streaked apron teases
The man's eyes in the truck's rearview mirror
While a table-saw sleeps in the yard with a bloody lip.
But the high-pitched wail fills the cab.
The boy's hands look like a finger painting on the fridge.
Lost in clouds of peroxide, he holds
His finger, a theatrical prop; it bounces
With the rusty clunker's gear shift
Like a red-faced caterpillar hoping to escape
The man's sideways stares, catching
The boy's tears in one glance
And the two-hour drive in the other.

Momma's Boy

John Grey

He blames it all on his mother
even though he's thirty-five,
fifteen years out of the family home.

It's why sometimes he's stupid,
just plain incompetent.
It's the genes, he explains.
The placenta just won't stay buried.

His wife exclaims,
"Grow up, will you!"
and he just responds with "How?"

He looks at his naked body
in a full-length mirror.
He has her eyes, her mouth.
But, more than anything,
the inevitability of his life
is writ large in that navel.

He's forever the baby birthed,
the hunger breast-fed,
the coo of dumb approval,
the punishment forever deferred.

When other kids called him "momma's boy,"
he always took umbrage.
Now he takes her calls.

Sunday Prayer

Aaron Brand

I'll take the radio

plugged into a BBC drone, interference
of car noise and wheel spin, the mulch of papers

undone down this highway of days.
Link me to a February mist,

first inkling of warm stars on tonight's horizon,
the sky like a mirror for a brush fire

come summer's arrival: first names in a universe
of lights. Today: strong beer, string cheese,

knit caps, and a tortilla morning. A rusty Toyota groans us
through the scablands around Cheney:

the basalt forest for moose, ruts of landscape visible
beyond the asphalt curves, a ride out with coyotes

alongside my heart: I feel the wind, the rush
of possibility as a howl in blankets of fog.

The Unseen Mother[‡]

Alicia Walden

A Pawnee woman lingers on these grounds.
This is home, but now uninhabited.
Others still remain, present but unseen.

Beneath the watchful eye of her father,
This woman is greeted by her mother.
The Drums of an elapsed home cease beating.

Her mother's arms are peaceful, firm, and cool,
Like the Soil after winter's bite is spent,
And they gently caress her weary frame.

Her breath that carries cedar's heady scent
Is brisk as the morning autumn Air and
Returns the roses to her daughter's cheeks.

Her tresses, sinuous and black as pitch,
Resonate like the breath of ocean waves
And timidly take flight like raven's wings.

Her mother has greeted many daughters,
For she is the Mother of all daughters,
Birthing several thousand generations.

Mother, not history or something past.
Mother, not archeological site.
Mother, who will comfort all her daughters.

[‡] Shan Goshorn's photograph *Pawnee Woman in Field* inspired this poem.

Tractor Part

John Grey

When you were young,
your father took you to another town
where he was to buy a part for a tractor.
You were anxious but excited for the world outside.

You rode in the station wagon,
confident in your father's big hands
on the steering wheel.
The countryside changed
but whether woods or farms,
gas stations or silos,
they seemed to step aside for him.
Slender trees lines lined the road like guards.
You could have sworn their upper branches saluted.

He pulled up to the tractor store.
You followed him in,
gaped at all the red and yellow monsters,
the overstaffed boxes and shelves, stacks of giant tires,
even chains and ropes hanging from the rafters.

Your father and the salesman
talked business at the counter
while you wandered, lost in all the machinery.
Your little heart ticked.
Your tiny brain opened wide but couldn't take it all in.
Your miniscule muscles lifted you high enough
to look into the cabin
of a sparkling new John Deere.

"Look out!" Father and salesmen screamed at once.
Your father was worried you might hurt yourself.

The salesman was concerned you might scratch the paint.
No harm done. They both calmed down.
But at least your father got his warning right.

A collage artwork featuring a stylized, abstract figure. The figure's head is composed of torn newspaper clippings, including the word 'IMPER' and phrases like 'st your time of', 'office on', and 'you can have'. The figure's body is made of dark, layered paper, and the background is a light, textured surface.

Drama

Daniel
Michelle Holman



A Ghost Story: Janusz Visits Magda
Marianne Taylor

Characters

JANUSZ, 30s, MAGDA's dead husband
MAGDA, 20, JANUSZ's widow

Time and Place

The action takes place in an East Side tenement in Passaic, New Jersey. The time is the 1920s.

(Lights rise on a tenement in Passaic, New Jersey, in the 1920s. JANUSZ and MAGDA face the audience. THEY do not hear what each other say.)

MAGDA: Oh! Oh, my God! Janusz! Janusz, what do you want?

JANUSZ: Oh, my Magda. Look at you!

MAGDA: How can you be here? What is this? Why do you sit here watching me?

JANUSZ: Four weeks I'm dead, and you've already got some bull in your bed.

MAGDA: Is Stefan why you're here? You're jealous?

JANUSZ: In our bed. Your father's wedding present to us, along with the mahogany dresser and wardrobe.

MAGDA: Stefan's in bed with me because I'm scared. You know how I'm always scared. There's noises all the time in this crummy place. You remember how I'd wake you up to go see?

JANUSZ: But I don't want to think about your father. He never believed I was the right man for you, did he? Not rich enough, not loud enough, not . . . not enough like him.

MAGDA: But now it's just me and those children who sleep like the dead. Oh . . . no disrespect, Janusz. You know, you look pretty good, considering.

JANUSZ: And he influenced you, I realize. After you'd spend an evening at your parents' house, you'd return to find all manner of things wrong with me.

MAGDA: I remember first seeing you in that suit on our wedding day, so handsome and fine, your eyes and your tie so blue, so sure of yourself. Were you ever really so sure, I wonder?

JANUSZ: Why didn't I play cards? Why wouldn't I smoke a fine cigar? And why did I look after my father and sisters?

MAGDA: That day you looked at me like I was a prize you'd won, and I thought you'd never let me go. But you stopped looking at me that way, stopped looking at all.

JANUSZ: Why did I look after my father and sisters? You know why, Magda, and you should be ashamed for asking.

MAGDA: Just work and work and English school, and your sisters and your father, then your sons.

JANUSZ: What kind of man would turn his back on his family?

MAGDA: My God, Janusz, what about me?

JANUSZ: Family means everything in this life, everything.

MAGDA: So don't you say anything about Stefan here. He's a good man, his Hancha gone last fall, and me needing someone to be here when I'm scared. You left me!

JANUSZ: Oh, Magda, I can't hear what you're saying, and I can't read your lips in the dark. But I can tell that you are upset.

MAGDA: You left me, Janusz! And those widow's benefits don't go far, not far at all. You never made enough for anything much to add up, they told me.

JANUSZ: You look tired, a little thin. I expect you're putting in extra hours to pay the bills.

MAGDA: So now I'm taking extra hours at the suit factory, and you know how much I hate that place.

JANUSZ: I'm so sorry. Never did I imagine this would happen. I feel like I have let you all down.

MAGDA: And that nasty foreman, Helena. You know what she said to me at your funeral? She said, "Now, Magda, don't be sad. With Janusz gone, you can flirt all you want, eh?"

JANUSZ: And how are Nikolai and Andre? They are such good boys, so kind and quiet. I know they must be a comfort to you.

MAGDA: I know. I know you think I flirted all I wanted when you were still alive. Well, I didn't. But so what if I did? You never stopped me.

JANUSZ: But how can you have this man here, considering that those fine boys are next door? Have you lost your head, Magda?

MAGDA: You never gave me reason not to. It's not like you were so much of a man that a girl didn't need to flirt a little on the side just to feel she's still pretty.

JANUSZ: I understand that in time you may wish to marry again, of course. You are a young woman and still somewhat pretty.

MAGDA: And I am, you know. Everyone says I walk like some kind of movie star . . . and do you see my dark curls and smooth skin?

JANUSZ: You have sons and a steady job. Even an apartment with good rent next to the shops and close to the factories.

MAGDA: Stefan here says my lips are like Well, never mind, just never mind.

JANUSZ: Many men will find you desirable, I am sure, especially when you cook goulash!

MAGDA: So, aren't you going to say anything?

JANUSZ: I loved your goulash.

MAGDA: Cat got your tongue, like always. Even dead you're too quiet.

JANUSZ: But marrying should not be rushed into. You must wait for the man who wants your best interests, not just some Tom, Dick, or Stefan who is lonely for a woman, that's all.

MAGDA: Sometimes, when you'd sit at the kitchen table just like you're sitting here next to the bed now, and I'd be trying to have a conversation with you, you'd have that exact look on your face—your eyes big like you do now, like I'm crazy or something, and you're

JANUSZ: Did this Stefan come to you straight from the tavern full of drink and big talk? He's not the right sort of man for you. I knew him only slightly, and, while he worked hard and didn't beat his wife, he likes to gamble. He ruins his prospects with drink, and he cannot even read or write English.

MAGDA: You're too good to even answer me. Too good! I'm the one who's always been too good for you!

JANUSZ: Men like him waste their short lives, Magda. You and our boys have no future with him.

MAGDA: My father was a magistrate in the old country, and even now he wears starched white shirts and polished black shoes every day.

JANUSZ: When I asked you to be my bride in your father's shop, I knew deep inside we were meant to be together. Of course, I thought it would last much longer than these eight years. That I do not understand. And me just getting citizenship? And that truck? Where did it come from with its brakes on the fritz? How can I understand any of this? God help me!

MAGDA: Not like your father with his "poor heart," so poor his wife died of exhaustion taking care of him. So poor his daughters can't marry because Papa needs them.

JANUSZ: But Magda, Magda, it was your goodness that drew me to you, and the kindness you showed to my father

MAGDA: And you, giving them whatever overtime you earned. We could have used that money, Janusz. Let your good-for-nothing father get a job of his own. He's managing fine without you now, you know. He always could have gotten by.

JANUSZ: God bless him and also your desire to have children and raise them proper in the old country ways. These qualities spoke to my heart, even when you complained about so many things, like money and the pipes rattling, and Mrs. Hochko next door creaking the floors when she walked at night praying the rosary. I knew these annoyances would pass and be forgotten in time.

MAGDA: Oh, what's the use? So what do you want from me anyway? Why are you here watching me and Stefan sleep? How long have you been here? Did you

MAGDA (CONT.): come to watch us? That's crazy, Janusz! Don't the dead have anything better to do than to spy on the living who are just trying to get by?

JANUSZ: Once my promotion came through, we would have been able to save for our own house, and soon everything would be easy street for us, my Magda.

MAGDA: Why watch now? You should've spied on me while you were still alive. Yes, you should have. Remember that Christmas party at Kotlar's store? Remember the dark-haired soldier, Mikhail, just back from the war? He told me that he never saw a girl prettier than me anywhere in France! And I told him a thing or two, I did. It was so cold in that back alley, but I guess we kept pretty warm. We sure did.

JANUSZ: Easy street, my darling.

MAGDA: Or what about Anton, your cousin from Pittsburgh? His moustache tickled like crazy, you know. Yes, there were plenty of times you should have been spying, but you never seemed to care. Did you really think you were enough for a girl like me?

JANUSZ: Ah well.

MAGDA: You with your fine ideas that life would grow better in time. What good did your ideas do you in the face of that truck that ran you down?

JANUSZ: Look at that photograph we made last year. See how sure our eyes are, looking straight ahead, yours and mine, Nikolai's and Andre's?

MAGDA: And now here I am stuck with our two sons who look just like you and are just as quiet and dreamy, too.

JANUSZ: We see more than Market Street and factory smokestacks, so much more. Now you go on without me, but keep that looking ahead.

MAGDA: So who's going to marry me now? I have no money, just a crummy apartment and a miserable job.

JANUSZ: All these years, Magda, I've never told you what to do or how to behave, but now you must listen. You must honor the plans we had for our lives, for our sons. You must be honorable.

MAGDA: And I'm not getting younger or prettier, although I could find better than Stefan if I tried.

JANUSZ: My friends—men at work, at church—would say you like to . . . well . . . to flirt, but I always supposed you were just being who you are—kind and friendly to stranger as well as neighbor. As it should be, no?

MAGDA: Hah! If you'd sit in the boys' room all night, I could go out dancing! Wouldn't that be a fine plan?

JANUSZ: What do such men understand about a woman's heart?

MAGDA: But, honestly, Janusz, what do you want? Why are you here just looking at me with those eyes that God should've given to a king?

JANUSZ: Sh! Sh! Don't cry. Just listen. Your eyes shine even in the dark with such beauty, Magda.

MAGDA: What am I supposed to do? What is there to do? Just wait?

JANUSZ: It is this light in you that called me back, but I cannot stay.

MAGDA: Wait. Wait just one minute! I'm remembering now the old women talking at Kotlar's store. It was Breznak's brother. Yes. He kept coming back, sitting like this on her bed, and scaring her so bad.

JANUSZ: I wish I could explain to you, but I do not understand myself. I am an unlearned man, but even the man who has studied his whole life cannot expect what awaits him. Of this, I am sure.

MAGDA: And after awhile, she went to the priest, and father made a special service. Turned the dead man over in his coffin so he couldn't see. I guess it worked, and they said he didn't come back anymore.

JANUSZ: I don't want to frighten you, and I will not harm you, but you must do what is right.

MAGDA: But she had to pay the priest, the undertaker, the gravedigger—who knows who else? I don't have that kind of money, Janusz.

JANUSZ: And having Stefan here is wrong. Plain wrong. So send him away, and be patient. God will ease your suffering and send solace to your heart in time. I hope.

MAGDA: And I don't want to put you upside down. You looked so nice in the coffin. So nice.

JANUSZ: In the meanwhile, look after our sons and teach them to be all that's good.

MAGDA: But I'll do it if I have to. I will. If you stay here, I'll talk to father tomorrow. I promise you that.

JANUSZ: I love you, Magda.

MAGDA: You better just go right now. You better leave me alone. You should've paid attention to me when you were alive, you silly man.

JANUSZ: Pray for my soul like they taught us in church. Death is not what one expects.

MAGDA: You silly man. My God, Janusz, why did you have to die?

(Blackout.)

Halloween Flip
Judy Martin

Characters

PETE, 30s, a greedy entrepreneur and brother to RANDALL and RICH
RANDELL, early 20s, a finicky designer and brother to PETE and RICH
RICH, late 20s, a laid-back carpenter and brother to PETE and RANDELL

Time and Place

The action takes place in an abandoned house that the brothers are going to flip for profit. The time is the present.

(Lights rise as the front door opens. PETE is opening the door while RANDELL and RICH are gathered around him. THEY all hold switched-on flashlights.)

RANDELL: I can't believe you dropped money on this dump without letting us do a walkthrough. We don't even know how much this is going to cost us in the long run, you Scrooge.

PETE: They only wanted fifty grand for the place, and they had a notary-signed paper that there would be no structural issues and that the HVAC and electrics were all up to code. It just needs some major TLC.

RANDELL: Why was it so cheap? It's in a good neighborhood, and the house has some great features.

RICH: Pete said it was haunted.

(PETE glares at him fiercely. RICH whispers.)

Or something.

(PETE throws open the door, and THEY all start to cough at the plume of dust that results.)

RANDELL: Haunted?! As if it weren't bad enough that we have to work through Halloween on this dump, you went and purchased something haunted?

PETE: It's not haunted. It's just that the previous resident was found dead surrounded by a bunch of hoodoo voodoo. There's nothing haunted about the house. Deaths always drop the prices on houses, especially on ones that seem to be supernatural. Plus it's been on the market forever. It's all the better for us. They were desperate to get rid of it.

(PETE wiggles his fingers as if casting a spell on certain points. THEY move into the room and survey the dusty surroundings.)

RICH: I can see why they didn't want us to do a walkthrough. They must have cleared out most of the junk, but they didn't bother to paint. Would you look at that stuff on the walls?

(THEY look at the various walls, each more unpleasant than the last.)

RANDELL: I can handle the ghosts. I can handle the bloody pentagrams. But that wallpaper better not go throughout the whole house. Do you remember how annoying that stuff is to remove? I told you I did *not* want to do another wallpaper job this soon.

RICH: Calm down.

(HE goes forward to the walls, takes out a knife, and peels at the layers.)

There's only three layers this time.

(HE smiles, trying to make the best of the situation.)

RANDELL: Calm down? Calm down?! I'm not doing it this time! You will *not* toss it all on me like last time. Either that wallpaper goes, or I do. I'll very well work on something else. Like the design for this dump.

(HE storms off into the next room. RICH and PETE share a look, but then THEY hear a very unmanly scream. THEY rush to the other room and discover that RANDELL has tripped over a box and landed face to face with a nodding stuffed cat. THEY laugh.)

RANDELL: It's not funny! Be quiet!

PETE: Aw! Is widdle Randy-wandy afraid of a little puddy-cat?

(HE goes up to the cat's head and wiggles it about.)

RICH: That's enough, Pete. I swear, sometimes I'm ashamed to call you family. Grow up. Let's get to work.

(THEY all nod, and RICH flips on the overhead light. RANDELL cringes.)

RANDELL: Great! It's in here, too.

(HE gestures at the wallpaper. Then he waves at the boxes and furniture.)

And look at all this junk.

PETE: It's not junk. We can repurpose it. Think of all the saved cash.

RICH: Normally I'd agree, but we'd be better off buying new. Just look at all this stuff! It's falling apart! How long did you say it was on the market?

(PETE mumbles.)

RANDELL: What was that? That better *not* have been right!

PETE: Ten years, okay? It was a bargain.

RANDELL: Do you realize what kind of reputation we'll have to try and negate on this house? Ten years of rumors, ten years of childish tales, ten years of tests of courage . . . I bet we'll find a lot of broken windows.

(HE walks to the window and sees the evidence of squatters.)

Ten years of squatters! You did have the house checked by the police before you brought us here, right?

(PETE looks away.)

PETE: I'm sure it'll be fine. This house hasn't been disturbed in ages. Do you see all this dust?

(RICH shakes his head at the familiar arguing pair and starts moving boxes.)

RICH: Look at all this stuff. The realtors could have done a better job of cleaning this place up. I mean, *really*, Pete! I think you spent fifty grand too much. This is going to be a real project.

(THEY all start moving boxes and cleaning up. RANDELL walks around sketching on his notepad while notably steering clear of the stuffed cat. The cat slowly changes its position. RANDELL sees it move out of the corner of his eye. HE jumps.)

RANDELL: It just moved! I told you I had a bad feeling about this house. I don't like it!

PETE: No, you didn't. Stop being a scaredy-cat. It hasn't moved. You're just imagining things.

(RICH comes up to RANDELL and pats him on the shoulder.)

RICH: You've never been good with the occult. Don't worry. I'm sure it was just a Halloween-loving woman, and her story just got blown out of proportions over the years.

PETE: Yeah. No need to get wound up. Just work on your design.

(THEY get back to work. The cat moves again and meows loudly. RANDELL's head jerks up. HE gets angry.)

RANDELL: It's not funny! I swear it moved again! All right. Who's doing it? You know I hate Halloween!

(HE huffs and flounces off to cover the cat with a nearby drop-cloth.)

There. I swear, if one of you touches it, I'll leave this all in your hands. As if this wallpaper wasn't enough. I mean, when was green and purple paisley ever a good idea?

RICH: Pete! You need to stop picking on him.

PETE: I swear it wasn't me. I was just moving this box. Besides, the cat was facing the doorway earlier, and I'm all the way over here.

RICH: Well, Randell isn't the one who's an overgrown man-child.

(PETE looks to RANDELL and sees no help.)

I don't know why you decided to buy this heap, Pete. Forget the price! I can smell the mold and the cat pee. We should have taken the place on Riley.

PETE: That place was three times as much! And it didn't come furnished like this place.

RICH: You call this furnished? All the furniture is crumbling. The floor is in horrible condition. The walls are covered in Satanic symbols, and the Riley house didn't have a ten-year bad reputation to work against.

PETE: Small stuff. I'm sure we'll find some diamonds in the rough.

(While PETE and RICH are arguing, the drop-cloth slowly lifts away from the cat. A loud bang sounds near the cat. All heads turn that way. The cat's head begins nodding fervently.)

RANDELL: Who did it? That was no prank. We were all over here.

(THEY all look around nervously. A creepy voice says, "Here, kitty, kitty!" PETE, RANDALL, and RICH look at one another and then hightail it out of there. The cat nods throughout. The creepy voice laughs. Blackout.)

Lucy's Last Words: A Dramatic Monologue
Marianne Taylor

Character

LUCY, 70s, a seemingly pious woman

Time and Place

A bedroom in the 1920s.

(Lights rise on an old woman's bedroom in the 1920s. Photograph of a handsome but dangerous-looking young man as well as a framed print of Jesus banishing demons share a small bedside tabletop along with a water pitcher and a glass. LUCY is on her deathbed. During her last minutes, she moves back and forth in time in her memory; SHE imagines her children to be young and believes her husband is in the room with her. SHE sees both him and a young woman as a devil. Through her rant, the audience comes to realize her guilt in the murder of that young woman many years earlier. Her husband took the blame for the murder and left town because he mistakenly believed his son had committed the crime. LUCY reveals all this information to the audience, but SHE may not recognize it completely herself. The lines are feature meter and rhyme but should receive a natural delivery at a fairly slow and open pace.)

LUCY: Children, children, hush your faces

(LUCY appears to be addressing her once-young children.)

for my head is aching me.
I am losing all those traces—
sound to hear and sight to see.

There goes my young rascal, Johnny,
off to mischief now for sure.

(SHE pauses and looks at the young man's photo. SHE takes it and strokes it.)

LUCY (CONT.): Was it he that found the body,

(SHE shudders.)

violated and impure?

Fie, whose was it? I've forgotten.

Were there others in that spot?

Why was it not black and rotten?

Black and blue and My, it's hot!

(Here SHE comes back to reality and fans herself.)

"Here's a sip of water, Lucy,"

(SHE mimics a man's voice and imagines that her husband speaks.)

says some man, but who is he?

Old and wrinkled, don't accuse me!

(SHE addresses him with anger and strains to get out of bed.)

Spare my soul your enmity!

Lord, I'm tired. What's he asking?

(SHE falls back on her pillows and becomes confused and reflective.)

Is that ring he's wearing mine?

Swollen fingers, hands past grasping.

When did I dress up so fine?

Once I was a bride, I'm certain.

LUCY (CONT.): White dress, handsome bridegroom, too.
Worried that he spent time flirting.
Did I have a reason to?

Where's my Ingrid? Leave, you foolish
man! Faith, I've no time for you.
I've got children wild and mulish,
needing much attending to.

Ingrid, go and hide the body.

(SHE imagines her daughter and son are present.)

Johnny, damn it, help her, son.
Let us pray that searching's spotty
Where's your Pa? I swear, he's done!

Ingrid, angel, bring me Jesus's
picture, fighting Demons vile.

(SHE nods towards the bedside picture.)

He's my Savior, always helps us
murder Satan, banish bile.

Why's that man still here and hovering?

(Straining and shouting at a man not there.)

Flaming breath, and evil eyes.
Chase him out! I fear he's smothering
me and spreading wicked lies

to the town and fiendish neighbors.
. . . thinks he left me just in time,

LUCY (CONT.): thinks *I* wronged *him*, forgot favors,
thinks the Devil's death's a crime.

(SHE pauses to reflect and speaks the next line in triumph.)

Christiana Porter, that's it!
Now I've named her Devil's bride!
Evil Fiend, He came to snatch it,
boil and burn our family's pride.

Set *her* down for Pa to fall for,
steamy sweet and kind to all.
But I sniffed her scent of sulphur,
felt the flames of Hell's own hall.

Even Johnny tried to woo her,

(Glancing lovingly at the photograph.)

poor misguided boy, first born.
Brought her trifles, hoped to suit her
fancy. Only faced her scorn.

Oh, such lies! Yes, Pa denied it,
swore he'd never walked her home.
I'd heard begging, crying, spied it
in the darkness, heard some moan.

Off he ran before I caught them!
Just a black coat passed me by.
Next I knew—the Demon—I fought him!

(LUCY struggles as if choking someone, and we come to realize SHE killed the young woman with her own hands.)

LUCY (CONT.): Christiana had to die.

Later Johnny found the body,
wrapped her in his cloak of coal.
Pa pretended it was Johnny—
that he'd raped her, freed her soul.

Said the boy was lost forever,
but he'd take the blame away.
Packed his things, that scheming Devil,
left us all, no crime to pay.

No one looked for Christiana,
guessed that she and Pa had flown.
All these years, I've prayed, "Hosanna,
keep these secrets safe, unknown."

(LUCY pauses, perhaps momentarily cognizant.)

Now I'm dying, you old dastard!

(SHE addresses her husband as if he were there.)

Have you come for me to bless?
Was it you or that young bastard
who despoiled Hell's shepherdess?

Curse you, vile man, curse your offspring!

(SHE attempts to beat him off with Jesus's picture and sends the one of Johnny to the floor with a crash.)

Curse the bloody day you die!

LUCY (CONT.): Leave me! Horror! Horror! Moth's wing

(Gasping, taking her last breaths.)

beats . . . and into flames I fly.

(Lights pulse brightly then go out as LUCY dies.)

Planning the Unknown

Kellie M. Taylor

Characters

ELIZABETH EWING, 18, WALTER'S oldest child

JACKSON EWING, 11, WALTER'S youngest child

WALTER C. EWING, 53, a father and a widower

Time and Place

The action takes place in the Ewings' house during Halloween in the 1960s.

(Lights rise on the Ewings as THEY sit in their living room. WALTER is sitting in a chair reading the newspaper, ELIZABETH is sitting with her legs thrown over the side of a chair reading a book, and JACKSON is sitting upside down in a chair with his feet toward the ceiling. Suddenly, THEY hear a loud thump coming from their father's secret closet.)

JACKSON: Dad, have you done anything about those rats? It sounds like they're getting restless.

WALTER: No, son, I haven't yet, but I'll get to it soon. Just haven't had the time.

ELIZABETH: Well, please do something soon! I *hate* rats!

(SHE makes a disgusted face while wiggling in her seat.)

WALTER: Don't worry. It'll be taken care of. I promise.

(Awkward silence.)

ELIZABETH: Wow. I can't believe it's been a whole year since mom died. It seems like it was yesterday.

JACKSON: I know. I was thinking about that this morning. On all the days she had to be killed, it had to be on Halloween.

ELIZABETH: I know. It's *very* creepy!

WALTER: Now, kids, stop talking about your mother's death, please. She wouldn't want us talking about her.

ELIZABETH AND JACKSON: Yes, sir.

WALTER: Both of you go study for school, please.

(THEY exit. WALTER nervously looks around as soon as the children leave the room and walks to the closet door. HE opens the door to reveal large glowing eyes.)

Hello, my beautiful baby! I'm so sorry that I haven't gotten to spend more time with you today. Did you know it's been a year since my wife died?

(A growl comes from the closet.)

Yes, I know. Time does fly. Elizabeth is about to go to college. Jackson is about to be in junior high. Soon it'll only be you and me in this big old house.

(A growl comes from the closet. WALTER chuckles.)

I know. We'll go crazy, just the two of us! But, seriously, it won't be much longer.

(HE notices that one of the eyes is twitching.)

Well, old girl, it looks like both of us are getting a little over the hill.

(HE cracks his neck.)

ELIZABETH (*offstage*): Dad! Can I borrow the car tomorrow night?

(WALTER closes the door out of fright.)

WALTER: Sure, darling! Whatever you want!

ELIZABETH (*offstage*): Thank you!

(WALTER sighs in relief and reopens the closet door.)

WALTER: Sorry I slammed the door. I thought Elizabeth was going to come down and see you. I'm just not sure how she'd react if she knew you'd been here all of these years.

(*Whimpers of sadness come from the closet.*)

WALTER (CONT.): Don't cry, precious! She just can't handle it right now. I was planning on telling her last year, but then her mom died, and she's just had a really hard time since then. I'm just waiting for the perfect time. I think I hear them coming. Please be quiet!

(ELIZABETH and JACKSON enter just as WALTER slams the door to the closet.)

JACKSON: Were you talking to someone?

WALTER: No. Why?

JACKSON: I just thought I heard you talking to someone.

WALTER: I was just talking to myself.

JACKSON: Oh. Okay. Well, did you get any of those rats? I heard you in your closet.

WALTER: I handled it for the moment. We'll have to see what happens.

ELIZABETH: Well, I'm tired of hearing all that noise at night coming from in there. It scares me.

WALTER: Now, honey, you know there's nothing to be scared of.

JACKSON: Yeah, Liz, it's just a few rats.

(HE makes a rat noise.)

WALTER: Jackson Ewing, stop that!

JACKSON: Yes, sir. Sorry, Liz.

ELIZABETH: So, Dad . . . I have to talk to you. Since it's the anniversary of mom's death and I'm eighteen now, I think we need to talk about what happens next if something happens to you.

WALTER: Oh, Elizabeth. Let's not talk about this now, please. Not today.

ELIZABETH: Well, we need to talk about it, and if not now, then when? I need to know what arrangements to make. What will happen to Jackson, the house, and everything else? It's serious business.

WALTER: Fine. We'll talk about it.

ELIZABETH: Good! Now, what do you want to do with all of the stuff in the house?

WALTER: You and Jackson take what you want, and you can either sell or burn the rest.

ELIZABETH: Okay. I'm guessing you want to be buried next to Mom?

WALTER: Yes, Elizabeth. I want to be by your mother.

JACKSON: Dad, can I have your pocket watch when you die?

ELIZABETH: Jackson! That's rude! You're already asking for his stuff, and he isn't even dead yet!

WALTER: Yet?

ELIZABETH: Oh, you know what I mean! Jackson, say you're sorry!

JACKSON: I'm sorry, Dad . . . but seriously, can I have it?

WALTER: Yes, Jackson. You may have the pocket watch when I die.

JACKSON: Promise?

WALTER: I promise.

ELIZABETH: Can we please get back on topic here?

WALTER: Go ahead, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Okay. So I was planning on your wearing your nice black suit, if that's okay with you.

WALTER: Elizabeth, at this point I don't care what happens after I die because I'll be dead . . . but you both have to swear something to me.

ELIZABETH AND JACKSON: What?

WALTER: Swear to make them cut me open so that I won't be buried alive.

ELIZABETH: You're joking, right?

WALTER: Absolutely not! Why would anyone want to be buried alive?

ELIZABETH: Don't you think I would notice if you were alive?

WALTER: A man can never be too careful.

JACKSON: I think it would be cool to be buried alive! Then they could dig you up fifty years later, and you could see what the world is like.

(WALTER and ELIZABETH look at JACKSON crazily.)

ELIZABETH: Anyway. I think that's it for the questions. Anything you want to ask me?

WALTER: I thought you said you were done with questions?

(JACKSON starts laughing.)

ELIZABETH: Oh, hush Jackson! You two are never serious!

(WALTER starts laughing with JACKSON but regains his composure.)

WALTER: I'm sorry, darling. I was just trying to lighten the mood. Today is a hard day on all of us.

(WALTER walks over to ELIZABETH and JACKSON and hugs them.)

JACKSON: I'm glad we still have you, Dad.

WALTER: I'm glad I still have both of you! You've both kept me going this past year. Thank you for that.

(Loud thumping starts coming from closet.)

ELIZABETH: What is that? That's more than rats!

JACKSON: Seriously, that sounds way bigger than any rat I've seen before.

(ELIZABETH walks to the closet door, but WALTER jumps up and blocks the door.)

WALTER: No! Don't go in there!

JACKSON: Dad, why are you blocking the door?

(The loud thumping continues.)

ELIZABETH: Dad. Move.

WALTER: No. It's nothing. Both of you go to your rooms and go to bed!

JACKSON: I'm not tired.

ELIZABETH: I'm not, either. I'm especially not tired after hearing whatever's in that closet that you're hiding!

WALTER: I am *not* hiding anything. I'm simply trying to protect you two until you're ready for this news!

ELIZABETH AND JACKSON: What news?

(WALTER sighs and opens the door to reveal the large glowing eyes.)

JACKSON: What is that?!

(ELIZABETH screams and faints.)

WALTER: Elizabeth!

(HE runs to her side. JACKSON simply stands and stares at the eyes.)

WALTER: Elizabeth, please wake up! This is why I didn't tell you!

(ELIZABETH slowly starts to gain consciousness.)

ELIZABETH: What is that?!

(SHE points at the eyes with a horrified look. Small growls come from the closet.)

WALTER: It's my pet.

JACKSON: What kind of pet is it? Sure doesn't look like a cat or dog!

WALTER: I'm not exactly sure what it is.

ELIZABETH: What do you mean you aren't sure? And why do you have this *thing*?

(Growling starts coming from the closet. ELIZABETH jumps away in fear.)

WALTER: I mean that I created it years ago while I was doing a science experiment. I didn't want to kill her, so I've been hiding her here for the past few years.

ELIZABETH: Her? You call *it* a *her*? Really?

JACKSON: Are you sure it's even a girl?

WALTER: Yes, I am! I created her, so I know for a fact that she's a girl!

ELIZABETH: Did mom know about this monster that you had in her house, or did you hide it from her too?

WALTER: Don't call her a monster!

ELIZABETH: Answer my question!

WALTER: No! No, your mother didn't know. I hid it from her because I didn't want her to freak out about it.

ELIZABETH: I can't believe you!

WALTER: I'm sorry, Elizabeth! I was only doing it for you and Jackson. I didn't want both of you to freak out if you knew.

(ELIZABETH goes quiet and refuses to speak to WALTER.)

JACKSON: So . . . is it nice?

WALTER: Yes. She's very friendly.

(JACKSON is hesitant at first, but HE slowly crosses toward the eyes. When HE reaches the eyes, HE starts to pet the creature.)

JACKSON: Why is one of its eyes twitching? That's weird.

ELIZABETH: Out of all of this, the eye twitching of the monster living in our closet is what is weird to you?

JACKSON: It's just odd. That's all.

WALTER: Elizabeth . . . Jackson . . . I promise that she won't hurt you. She's very loving. Just get to know her.

(ELIZABETH and JACKSON look at each other doubtfully.)

ELIZABETH AND JACKSON: Okay.

WALTER: Great! I promise that I'll never hide anything from you two again.

ELIZABETH: Well, Dad, I do have one last question. What do I do with her when you die?

(WALTER, ELIZABETH, and JACKSON all start laughing, and the lights fade into a blackout.)

The Giant Spider Corn-Field Strangler
Hollis Thompson

Characters

JAMIE DONNE, early 20s, a college student and GRAYSON's older sister

GRAYSON DONNE, 13, JAMIE's younger brother

THE GIANT SPIDER CORN-FIELD STRANGLER, 20s, a serial killer

Time and Place

The action takes place in a corn-field on the outskirts of town that is believe to be the home of a monstrous spider, sometime in the evening. The time is the present.

(Lights rise on a corn-field sometime in the evening. JAMIE and GRAYSON enter and walk through the field.)

GRAYSON: Are you sure it's safe out here?

JAMIE: Which one are you afraid of? The giant monster-spider the size of a bus with oozing green fangs full of venom that they say lives in the corn-field, or the deranged strangler who strangles everyone who steps foot in here?

GRAYSON: I'm not afraid of either one. I just want to stay alive, that's all.

JAMIE: There's nothing to be scared of. That giant spider thing is just a story. And the only reason the police haven't caught the strangler is because they eat too many doughnuts. Besides, this is the quickest way back home from Taekwondo.

GRAYSON: It's a good thing we take Taekwondo.

JAMIE: Why?

GRAYSON: Because if a serial killer did ever attack us, we wouldn't be like the stupid people in the horror movies. I mean, most of those guys are too fat to lift their own chainsaws for long. You just have to outrun them.

(STRANGLER jumps out at them. JAMIE and GRAYSON scream and sprint away. STRANGLER runs after them, at first keeping the pace but then slowing down as THEY run offstage. STRANGLER stops and tries to catch her breath. JAMIE and GRAYSON reenter behind her.)

JAMIE: Ms. Strangler? It seems that you're having a little trouble breathing there. Let us give you a hand.

(JAMIE elbows her in the face, and GRAYSON hits her in the stomach. STRANGLER reels backward, and GRAYSON sweeps her legs to knock her over.)

GRAYSON: You know, in your line of work, a little cardio could go a long way.

(JAMIE kicks her in the head.)

JAMIE: Is she out?

(GRAYSON pokes STRANGLER with his foot.)

GRAYSON: Yeah, I think so. You should probably call the cops and tell them we caught the strangler.

JAMIE: Probably a good idea.

(JAMIE takes out her phone and dials. GRAYSON, bored, walks around STRANGLER.)

JAMIE: Hello, police?

(GRAYSON sits down next to STRANGLER. HE is facing away from her.)

JAMIE: Yeah. You know that serial killer from the corn-field you guys have been looking for? We found her. Yeah. She's right here. Oh, no hurry! She's pretty debilitated right now.

(STRANGLER stirs and gets up. SHE slowly brings her hands to GRAYSON's neck.)

Okay. See you then.

(JAMIE hangs up. STRANGLER grabs GRAYSON. JAMIE spins around. Something moves and hisses in the cornstalk offstage. THEY all jump back.)

GRAYSON: It's the killer spider! *Run for your lives!*

(THEY all scream and run. THEY flee right into an area covered in webs. Lights begin to dim.)

JAMIE: We're gonna die! *We're gonna die!*

GRAYSON: Taekwondo can't do anything against a giant spider!

(The spider hisses in the distance. JAMIE and GRAYSON look around for a way out.)

STRANGLER: I should never have switched from Scotch to Martinis.

JAMIE: There's no way out! *There's no way out!*

(The spider hisses again. It is coming closer. GRAYSON turns to STRANGLER.)

GRAYSON: Don't you have a knife on you or something?

STRANGLER: I'm a *strangler*! I don't carry a knife! I keep those back at the house for the bodies. What do you think I am?

GRAYSON: I always knew it would end this way. It was only a matter of time till Jamie got us lost in a corn-field.

JAMIE: You can't blame this on me! I didn't think the spider was real!

GRAYSON: Yeah, but you knew about the serial killer!

STRANGLER: I have a name!

GRAYSON AND JAMIE: Shut up!

JAMIE: The girl whose idea of a night out is killing people in a corn-field does not get to join this conversation.

STRANGLER: *Ad hominem* attacks! See, *this* is why I kill people.

(Sounds of movement erupt off stage. The spider hisses again. It is even closer.)

GRAYSON: Well, my only regret is that I never got married.

JAMIE: My only regret is that I lied to Dr. Billings about my interest in *grammar*!

STRANGLER: I'm sorry I strangled all those people and cut their bodies up. It seemed pretty great at the time, but, in retrospect, it wasn't the best way to spend my life.

JAMIE: I love you, little bro!

(SHE hugs GRAYSON.)

GRAYSON: I love you, too! And I forgive you for leading me into this death-trap against my better judgment like a complete moron.

JAMIE: Thanks, Bro.

(STRANGLER joins in on the hug.)

STRANGLER: You two are the closest things to friends I've ever had. If I survive, I promise never to murder anyone ever again.

(The spider hisses, and THEY tremble with fear. The spider drops from above on its web and hangs right in front of them. It gives the most horrific hiss yet. THEY all scream.)

STRANGLER: Well, I've done a lot of bad stuff in my life, but trying to kill you won't make it any worse!

(SHE knocks the spider down and runs over to where it lands. SHE then repeatedly jumps up and down on top of it.)

GRAYSON: Is it dead?

(SHE looks down at it. It hisses softly.)

STRANGLER: Nope.

(SHE jumps on it again and then looks at it once more.)

Now it's dead.

JAMIE: Is it mostly dead or just plain dead? Because mostly dead is still partially alive, you know.

STRANGLER: It's all the way dead. Believe me, I know the difference.

JAMIE: Woohoo!

(JAMIE and GRAYSON jump around for joy. STRANGLER looks pretty proud of herself.)

GRAYSON: Oh, it's good to be alive!

(Sirens ring in the distance. JAMIE and GRAYSON stop jumping and look at STRANGLER.)

STRANGLER: No need to worry about hitting me again. The most important thing my mother taught me was to pick off the weak ones first. But the second most important thing was that you are always bound by your word. I'm going to turn myself in.

JAMIE: Really?

STRANGLER: Yep. This night has changed my entire outlook on life. I don't know what the heck I was smoking to think that living in a corn-field and strangling people with no one but my multiple personalities to keep me company was a great career choice. Lack of direction, I guess. I'm really embarrassed about it all now. I also discovered my real calling: killing harmful insects! When I get out of the joint, I'm going to start up as an exterminator.

JAMIE: I'm so happy you realized all of this!

STRANGLER: And its all thanks to that spider! And you guys!

(STRANGLER hugs JAMIE. JAMIE awkwardly pats her on the back.)

Well, see you in thirty to fifty years!

(STRANGLER waves and then exits.)

JAMIE: Wow.

GRAYSON: That's not exactly what I would say.

JAMIE: Well, I hope it all works out for her.

GRAYSON: I hope they put her in a concrete cell for a long time.

(THEY continue walking in the direction they were walking originally.)

I also hope I never see this corn-field again for as long as I live.

JAMIE: Amen.

GRAYSON: Now . . . explain to me exactly how this was the fastest way home.

JAMIE: Are we seriously going to do this again?

GRAYSON: I just want to hear you say it.

JAMIE: Okay. Fine. You were right. I will *never* decide the route again.

GRAYSON: So you're claiming legal responsibility when I take it to court?

JAMIE: What?!

GRAYSON: Endangering a minor is a very serious offense.

JAMIE: Come on, Bro! You're not serious, are you?

GRAYSON: Sam's dad is a lawyer.

JAMIE: You said you forgave me! Grayson!

(THEY exit. Blackout.)

Across the Water
Vincent Mack

Characters

HAYDEN, 17, a hipster high-schooler

PENELOPE, 17, a hipster-high-schooler

Time and Place

The action takes place in PENELOPE's bedroom and at a nearby party during Halloween.

(Lights rise in PENELOPE's bedroom as PENELOPE and HAYDEN contemplate their hipster Halloween.)

HAYDEN: Ha-ha-ha-ha! Shut up, Nelope! You swear you wanna go and dress up all slutty and dance around the nastiest little lake in the U.S. . . . if not the world.

PENELOPE: Ugh!

(As if rejecting HAYDEN's comments.)

You swear that you've been before and that you're in with these kind of people. I mean, doesn't it make you mad? Not even a little?

(SHE sighs.)

Well, I'm pissed! I've known Zeke and his whole family for about ten years now, and he still doesn't bother to invite me . . . and it's always the best Halloween party of the year. I must look bad hanging around you, ya downer.

(HAYDEN erupts with loud, bellowing laughter, nearly drowning out her speech.)

HAYDEN: Clearly, I am the cool one, my ugly duckling. Ha-ha-ha!

PENELOPE: Shut up! Come on, let's go put the mat out front and finish the Halloween tree.

HAYDEN: I see you have a Halloween tree. I also see it's the same tree you've had for eighteen years now with the same scarecrow and the same fat-bulbed lights. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Maybe that's why you don't get invited. You're predictable. They know you'll just say something awkward and then run away! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Nelope, let's do our own thing. Come on!

(SHE begs as if SHE were a toddler.)

Please, my duckling?

PENELOPE: I like my tree, Hay, and my scarecrow now wears plaid. It was just a T-shirt for the first nine years.

(SHE clears her throat.)

Also, he has on Chuck Taylors now.

(In the background, HAYDEN rolls her eyes. PENELOPE has a sudden epiphany and shrieks like a small school girl.)

Oh, Hay! I've got it! We're gonna go to Zeke's party anyway, and we're gonna tell him—or, well, I'm gonna tell him—and the rest of them how I feel.

HAYDEN: That's dumb, Nelope. Seriously. For one, who cares? For two, they won't let you in. And for three, my little duckling, what are you going to wear?

(SHE chuckles gently.)

You wanna be a cat? Hee-hee-hee.

PENELOPE: No, Hay! I'm cereal like Cap'n Crunch. It's on. I am unveiling myself tonight to all those wannabe's. This holiday is an everybody thing, not a somebody thing . . . and even if it were, I'm a somebody, Hay. I dunno about you, but last I checked, you weren't getting bombarded with invites to awesome mixers or getting passed duck-fart shooters every weekend, either.

(With great excitement, but still very serious.)

So . . . are you in for the crash or not!

(HAYDEN groans.)

HAYDEN: Ugh! Okay, Ms. Palin. Just get off your soap box. Well, I'm not dressing up. I'm just not. Oh, by the way, my duckling, I don't get invites because I don't want invites.

(SHE says the last part of the line matter-of-factly. PENELOPE allows her queen-of-the-world persona to become active.)

PENELOPE: Hush now, Hay. Bring me my swan costume.

(SHE smirks a smirk that is a tad bit too much of a grimace. HAYDEN nods sarcastically.)

HAYDEN: Yes, Bjork. Anything for you.

(HAYDEN exits. PENELOPE grabs a large bag and begins to pack it with a number of strange items: duct tape, rope, and mace. HAYDEN returns with PENELOPE's costume. PENELOPE changes into her costume, and SHE and HAYDEN cross SR to hop into the car and head to the lake. When THEY arrive, THEY cross SL down a foggy dirt path through twisting, winding trees and become slightly winded. THEY arrive at SL in a clearing that is lit well; THEY can hear the clamoring voices of people having a good time.)

HAYDEN: Woo! Nelope, we're here, and, oh, would you look at that that whore Jessica dressed up like a whore nun? Shocker! Okay. Well, will you find whoever and tell them whatever so we can go? I still don't see the point in this excursion. It's sixty-two degrees out, and I'm sweating in places I shouldn't be, so please tell me thy bidding, duckling.

PENELOPE: Kill the attitude or the attitude is gonna kill you! Look! There's Zeke! He's the buff Dracula with the silk shirt. Come on. Let's go talk to him.

HAYDEN: You know what? No! This is dumb, and I'm going back to my car and leaving. If you follow, fine; if not, oh, well. You reek of thirst. What are you even here for? These people don't care at all about how you feel about being rejected by them. It's also very true that I don't even care how you feel about being rejected by them. You know what you do when you get rejected? You *move on*! Had I known you were such a spineless misfire of a person, I would have subjected somebody else to my awesomeness.

(Growing more angry by the word.)

Ugh! You are one of the most pathetic things in these woods tonight. You see this nasty, filthy, two-feet-deep lake? You may be even shallower!

(Silence descends as THEY look at each other. HAYDEN is fuming with anger, but PENELOPE sports a confused but accepting look on her face. PENELOPE drops her bag and rummages through its contents. PENELOPE starts to speak to HAYDEN calmly but never looks up as SHE digs through her bag.)

PENELOPE: Oh, Hay, that hurts . . . but not as bad as what I thought was for Zeke ending up really being for you. Shame, my love. Shame, shame, shame. You were right. They weren't gonna listen, but he wasn't gonna have a choice.

(SHE chuckles deeply.)

Never mind him now. It's you. It may have always been you. It *has* always been you!

(HAYDEN jumps back as PENELOPE charges her and sprays her with the mace. HAYDEN screams. PENELOPE punches HAYDEN in the gut. As HAYDEN folds, PENELOPE forces her against a nearby tree and begins to tie rope around her while occasionally punching or kicking her. SHE bangs HAYDEN's head against the tree and then duct-tapes her mouth closed. PENELOPE finds a nearby rock and bludgeons HAYDEN until blood appears and HAYDEN lies unconscious. PENELOPE begins stroking HAYDEN's face.)

PENELOPE: Your duckling is now a swan.

(SHE lifts the rock for a final blow. Blackout.)

Kennedy
Michelle Holman



Criticism

Wabi Sabi
Chris Thomas



Blue and the Difference between
the Aim (Determined Course) and the Goal (Set Target)
Jesse Morrow

A Note from the Writer

This chapter is part of a longer thesis entitled *Subversive Manueverability: The Politics of Race in the Literary Works of Raymond Andrews*. This thesis analyzes the novels of Raymond Andrews using Zizek's four possibilities for relating to the *Other*, which he conflates with language and stupidity or confusion. The four possible agencies suggested by Zizek are the Idiot, the Moron, the Imbecile, and the Becile, or, in Lacan's terms, the Master, the Slave, the Analyst, and the Hysteric.

The Idiot fancies himself as self-identical to the law, above the law, his speech is registered by others as the *Other*—he becomes the reference point for the field of social relations. The Moron dwells in language stupidly—he bears the burden of the Idiot's will—maintaining and spreading like the gospel an ethics sustaining the Idiot's elevated position in the field of social relations (and, we mustn't forget the paradoxical notion that every Idiot is at the same time a Moron). The Imbecile adopts a withdrawn stance, a critical disposition owing to his belief that he in some way stands outside of the stupidity governing the Idiot's and Moron's society. Such a position is of course untenable. Finally, the Becile is an Imbecile who, upon realizing that his withdrawn position of exclusion/objectivity is illusory and unsustainable, embraces the realm of universality (returning, paradoxically and perchance erroneously, to the *Other*) realizing that, though each of his actions may be somewhat out of his control and open to interpretation, and that the wholly good is an impossibility—commits to action—he protests, riots, and joins the revolution.

Thus, the spell of the old White House had reached out and lured yet another soul into the coldness of its vast bosom. (Andrews 181-82)

Blue is one in whom we find, at least upon first glance, a number of superficially valiant qualities. It is not too difficult to explain my initial fascination with Blue's character during my first reading of *Appalachee Red*. I wanted to rally beneath his banner, and his seemingly downright defiance inspired me: I am admittedly partial to defiance. I admired his predisposition for revolt and rebellion, his embracing an ethics of poverty, basically his hysterical approach to the system. Blue is rather convincing. He picks fights with the system, openly, and I particularly appreciate his fearlessly challenging the established order—it

works for me (or, rather, it worked for me); but, I am concerned with the ways in which, as Andrews shows through his novels, the system makes use of this consistent challenging, and I am intrigued by the ways in which his rebelling functions within a space reserved specifically for protest: *you can protest, yes, but let your voice speak only so loudly and let your dissention manifest in this particular fashion, an acceptable fashion.*

Whereas it initially appears as though Red attempts to modify the *Other* from a veiled position, Blue tries to effectuate change through open contestation. Additionally, whereas Blue petitions the *Other* for recognition (a hysterical quality), Red does not ask. He does not petition. Red takes what he wants, he commands, he conquers. Blue, on the other hand, shouts for equality, and such a desire is not without reason. Blue resembles the Hysteric.

Why shouldn't Blue have equal privileges and rights, that is, why shouldn't he as a man raced as black not have access to the rights and privileges afforded to white people and white culture the world over? To be recognized among one's peers as worthy of respect, as having equal opportunity, is one of the basic needs harbored by the whole of mankind, but what outcast was ever let into the privileged circle because he petitioned them for the right? And if this is in fact the concern motivating Blue's aggressive, open resistance, then that is certainly one thing; but, this is not truly Blue's wish, at least, this is not his ultimate goal only. Better put, Blue's aim is rebellion (Becility), but his goal is to amass followers to increase his power (to build a University relating to him as a Master, an Idiot). Thus, in order to avoid circuitry and in an attempt to be somewhat intelligible to my reader, I will, without further delay, abbreviate what I believe are two critical flaws with Blue's self-proclaimed rebellion and the particular form his revolt takes.

First, he, the unrecognized, asks the recognized for recognition. That is, he still relates to the *Other* Moronically. His mind is already colonized in relation to race-identity. Will they, those whose life of privilege is protected by lawlike, fantasy-based divisions, give him the power and recognition he seeks out of the goodness of their hearts? And, more importantly, if such power and recognition are available to him only as gifts given to him, the disenfranchised, by those who are in power, should he happily receive in this way and through this means the power and recognition he so eagerly craves? Those in power and protected by power did not reach their level of luxury, privilege, and prestige through acts of mercy or charity; neither do they preserve their wealth and privilege in this way. Blue's rioting, picketing, and sitting in, is a hysterical demand that the *Other* recognize how precious he is: it is an attempt to foster in the *Other* an awareness that the *Other* is missing out on all of the value inherent in this, the one situated before it as powerless, but it is also a request in so far as Blue will not be satisfied until others (which he despises) recognize his value. As long as he is dependent on

others for the recognition he seeks, he will remain colonized, on the wrong side of the chaos of stupidity. Until the truth of Becility is brought to the level of understanding for Blue, he will never be free of the burden of Whiteness; he will never, in truth, subvert Reason nor will he surmount the logics of domination sustaining its reign.

What prisoner ever moved a step closer to his freedom by begging his prison guards for it? I will leave the reader to ponder the meaning of that question. Freedom is not a gift to be given to those who have experienced its loss. Freedom is only ever experienced as its loss, and the promise of its being given as a gift is the promise of both an impossible transference and something which the *Other* does not possess, or, rather, because it is impossible, the *Other* in which we believe ourselves to have located this impossible thing cannot truly deliver it: we are barred. Freedom is a baited hook. We cannot have known that we were free until the jarring tug of the line sets the hook in cheek and, squirming to regain what we now know to have been lost—freedom, we wage war against the current of some unknown fate reeling us sadistically to the surface. Freedom cannot be given, and, if it can be, which it cannot—if it (freedom) is something that can be given as a gift, than it is something that once was taken from its original owner.

Why would one plead for something of which one rightfully had possession unless one mistrusts the notion that one is in fact entitled to possess it or it was impossible to have possessed in the first place and one has simply been duped (because one is neither entitled to it nor can one possess it, precisely because we experience it on the side of impossibility)? As such, Blue's subversion is not about freedom, at least not entirely (the concern with freedom is the distraction—that which hides the true wish). He does not want freedom (at least not for the oppressed masses), just as Red does not want freedom. Blue needs followers and Red needs customers, and both thrive on the currency of truth, the truth of power their society demands. Both are imperialists constructing an empire of truths. This is, instead, a concern specifically with how we position ourselves and our subjective possibilities in relation to confusion and stupidity, the *Other*. Thus, answering this question of why Blue conforms his demand to a raced discourse concerned with freedom of the oppressed requires an investigation of and ultimately leads to the second critical fallacy inherent in Blue's subversive approach, an approach which passes over any opportunity at the notion of subversive maneuverability with which this study is chiefly concerned.

Second, championing for equal rights and alleviating the oppression and underrepresentation of the black community may be the channel through which Blue invests his libidinal energies and articulates his passion, but this is not his goal, it is his aim. Blue uses the truth of his times as a *cover* for his true purposes, his goal. The open rebellion Blue endorses in *Appalachee Red* serves to assuage

the displaced guilt he feels for alienating himself from his mother and also to accrue power to himself so that he might feel better about himself. Simply put, Blue, like Red, hates not only the white community, but the black community. He despises them and cares little about their fates. Actually, he aims to use them as a part of his strategy, and Idiotic disposition, the opposite of the subversion his society needs. Whether it is a result of a capitalistic ideology that emphasizes the role of the individual or otherwise, Blue's fate alone is his concern, and because of this his Becility, like Red's, is a failed Becility.

In fleeing from the gnarled claws of Idiocy, Blue comes full circle, unwittingly transforming into a distorted replicant of the Idiot. Rather than using Idiocy in a Becilic manner, Blue uses Becility in an Idiotic manner. His aim is right, but his goal is wrong. Blue reproduces the very Discourse of Mastery he marks as the source of his misfortunes by increasing the size of the particular University supporting it.

The Aim: Hysterical Provocation

Beginning with the Pine Room controversy seems as good a place as any to start, principally because it is the moment at which Blue makes known to the town his return to Appalachee, or better, it is through the artifice of his Pine Room sit in that he makes known to the town the ways in which he wishes to be recognized by the town members as a revolutionary leader. The Pine Room sit in offers a model foundation from which to erect a framework for understanding the character Blue's subversive contributions (whether they are ultimately failures or otherwise) and also the difference between the aim of Blue's project and its goal. His Aim is politicized Hysteria, the Becile's orientation, an orientation that passes through the Analyst's orientation; his goal is Mastery, the Idiot's orientation.

To begin, why the Pine Room? The reason the Pine Room becomes the focus of social strife is quite interesting because it suggests a multiplicity of layered meanings. For one, the events surrounding Blue's Pine Room sit in address the ways in which an event, while registered by/in the *Other* as meaning one thing (a meaning constructed out of available truths, truths that fit in with what the Spirit of the times will readily accept) can actually stem from motives that are altogether different from how the event is interpreted and becomes registered by others.

The scene begins shortly after Blue arrives in town, while he is drinking coffee in the Pine Room, unnoticed. After discovering Blue's identity, Eddie B., head dishwasher at the Pine Room hotel, draws attention to Blue while Blue contemplates ways to clear his conscience for having intentionally alienated his mother. He reflects on a lonely life of study in pursuit of an education and the

resulting inflated sense of “being an intellectual giant’ among the various people he works with throughout his career (Andrews 248). Through Blue’s musings to himself, we discover that Blue hates the black community, hates the white community, hates capitalism, and after *passing* (the text literally describes his passing from town to town and passing as something he is not) from town to town across the country decides at this exact moment in time, on the day of his mother’s funeral, and at the precise moment that Eddie B draws attention to Blue in the Pine Room (the hotel at Morgan Manor)—Blue uses this moment to articulate his passion, his desire for power and recognition, through the truths his society is primed to witness: he makes use of his society’s expectations—the truths they expect to see—to act in ways that will take power from his mother on this a significant day—her funeral—in which others will bring glory to her: *yes this is a day to honor my mother, but look at me! Look at what a precious object I am and what you are missing about me!*

Let us approach this investigation from an alternative perspective. First, let us look at the conditions surrounding the event, the perspective the people wish to see, and then we will see how Blue’s passion becomes articulated through others’ wishes (the wish Blue attributes to the *Other* [the answer to the question of what the *Other* wants from him]). How, then, is Blue’s subversion registered in the economy of meanings governing society? It is registered as a defiant, heroic gesture that defines the form of protest that his society has been conditioned to see as valuable and ideal as well as relevant to the project of the civil rights movement, integration. His subversion does nothing to affect the lopsided relations of power in any significant manner because he allows the current of truths to take him completely; he does nothing in the way of subversive maneuverability.

Moments before sirens are heard by the hushed crowd moving slowly, respectfully to the town’s funeral home to look over Little Bit’s body, Andrews presents a scene in which Blue ruminates to himself,

His mind soon began telling him, there should’ve been something he could do to clear his conscience of having mistrusted her, and at one time even started disliking her, as he grew older that would now allow him to walk up to that casket and look in without feeling ashamed. Yes, by God, Big Man Thompson’s son Blue sat there that early morning thinking, there’s just got to be something you can think for me to do for that tough little woman before they cover her face over with dirt . . . there’s just got to be something. (249-50)

Blue needs a remedy for the guilt and anguish he suffered by abandoning his mother and giving himself over to the White Hegemonic Ideology materially and psychologically; materially as shoe shiner (against his mother’s wishes) in Sam’s Café, the White House, and as post office worker (a literal man of *letters*) among

white-raced Idiots, and psychologically through his forced education, an education that degrades his self-image and perception of those raced as black, and through his conceding to his society's view of his mother as crazy. One can see clearly from the previous passage as well as the passage below, which describes the overall mindset that Blue will carry with him across the passage to adulthood, Blue's consent to Whiteness and his perception of himself angers him,

But the brunt of young Blue's anger was saved for his momma, who the eleven year old was beginning to feel had tried to cheat him out of his real daddy by constantly lying to him all this time about his whereabouts. And this anger of the boy's toward his mother was to persist despite his later hearing about her lone, heroic stand on that Death Easter against Boots White who had just shot his daddy dead . . . and as time elapsed and the youngster, never before having been accustomed to such respect and admiration from anyone, continued to bask in the ever-widening glow left over the backstreet by his dead daddy, Blue's anger toward his momma slowly began turning into a child's distrust, and now for the first time he started seeing her small black-clad figure groping eerily along the streets much the same way the rest of the townspeople did. The boy had come to hate his mother. *Thus, the spell of the old White House had reached out and lured yet another soul into the coldness of its vast bosom.* (181-82, emphasis mine)

He allows himself to be sutured to a system of Reason that detests not black identities simply, but those identities which have either at one time or presently continue to negatively affect the oppressive relations of power constitutive of society. The spell of the White House is the spell of Whiteness: pinning the locus of Madness to the Novel's only potentially subversive character, Little Bit, because she is not only a black female, but an effective threat to the structure of Whiteness. He abandons her to a fate as the object of hatred in the University of Whiteness, an emplacement of Madness against which his society constitutes their self-image of Reason.

Shortly after Blue's musings, the scene cuts, abruptly switching to a quiet country scene, broken by shrieking sirens and questioning whispers, "but before much more speculation could get underway...Eddie B...dashed on up Red Alley, screaming for all to hear, "De Man jes' rested Blue Thompson fuhsit'n out in de Pine Room! 'N' dat blue Look'tlak a tramp!" (Andrews 252). Something happens, a spectacle, which is not totally understood. However, in order to alleviate mass terror and social upheaval, the event is interpreted by the community in one way: a sit in. But, this was not Blue's intention at all (we later find out that his attempted

removal from the Pine Room was probably due more to hygiene issues: Blue has, since leaving the post office years ago, become a vagrant who rarely bathes).

Society interpreted the event as a sit in because that is what it was ready to see, and Blue capitalizes upon the opportunity by not resisting the meaning they give his actions. He accepts the meanings they give his action because it lends power to his cause. He dons the disguise of truths set out for him (much like the Idiot) in order to achieve his hidden ends. That is, what started as a tactic ultimately becomes a strategy. Acting on the periphery of power, Blue acts from a reference point unseen to this community, but ultimately his project circulates around a goal which remains, for lack of a better word, hidden: he wishes to take the place of the privileged rather than destroying the oppressive logic that makes such a scenario possible. His goal is quite clear: to amass power to his name and project. His goal is the completion of his own sense of self. Blue is not the hero many position him as; rather, he has seized the opportunity to be registered as a hero because it serves his private interests. The community be damned.

The Goal: Mastery (Constructing the Self in Relation to the Truth of Power)

We know that Blue has spent the last several years passing from town to town, rioting, picketing, and joining civil rights movements across the country. We know as well that the event at the Pine Room becomes registered by the townspeople as a spectacle of resistance. We now know, too, that Andrews never describes Blue as intending to conduct a sit in until after he is already arrested and the citizens have already interpreted his actions as such. Andrews shows Blue seeking a remedy for his shame then cuts to the community's interpretation of the event. We know as well that before Blue is arrested, he stewes in the anguish of shame and inadequacy, which are stirred up from the realization of his mother's impending burial. What we have yet to address is the accuracy of stating that Blue's ultimate goal is to amass followers to increase his power. How, then, has such a weighty claim come to find its place within this analysis? Consider the following dialogue between Blue and Red that circulates through prison bars separating the two. On the night of Blue's incarceration, Red asks him if the town can expect more of this type of behavior—open revolt—out of him, Blue's language is definite,

“From me and from all of those who want to *follow* me through every lily-white public door in this town . . . and county.”

“Appalachee's own Martin Luther King.”

“This town sure as hell needs one.” (Andrews 254)

Blue, the angered, wishes not to help the citizens of Appalachee, nor does he wish to aid the suffering black community, though this may very well be an effect of his

actions (doubtful). What Blue wishes is to be adorned with honor and prestige; he wishes to, as the passage describing his youth reveals, “bask in the ever-widening glow . . . of respect and admiration” (181-82). Thus, in order to realize this goal, Blue works in ways that society perceives as potentially subversive—spectacles of open defiance, but he never acts in ways that offer any measure of subversive maneuverability. Who is meant to reap the benefits of Blue’s actions, Blue or the suffering black community? Championing for the black community is simply the language, the available truths, through which Blue’s passion becomes articulated. He does not care, nor does he actually benefit the black community. He, like Red, deceives them; he uses his understanding of their horizon of expectations (an understanding gained by his Imbecilic awareness) to attempt his manipulation of the Other, but in so doing he actually becomes manipulated, he is reeled along by the line of Reason guiding the current of truths with which he becomes sutured. Blue is a failed World Historical Individual. For me, his failure resides in his goal.

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The Jungian Shadow and Illocutionary Suspense
in Frank O'Hara's "To the Harbormaster"
Casey Purifoy

Frank O'Hara's Personist philosophy suggests that a poem should function as a communicative action that "sits between two people rather than two pages" (O'Hara, "Personism: A Manifesto"). O'Hara's poems adopt a personal tone that emulates the atmosphere shared between close friends caught in the middle of a discussion. The resultant language present in the poems creates a sense of free conversation, and this conversation generates interpersonal connection between the sender (the speaker) and the receiver (the reader). Personist poems exist within a liminal communicative space that Timothy Gould brands illocutionary suspense (37-38). This area rests between J. L. Austin's locutionary level of speech action (the syntactical, grammatical, and phonetic construction of an utterance) and the perlocutionary level of speech action (the moment of a receiver's uptake and reception of an utterance). Illocutionary suspense occurs when a receiver denies uptake or understanding, which results in amplified tension and heightened focus for achieving the sent message.

Usually, denied uptake results in a failed communicative transaction. However, in O'Hara's poetry, the illocutionary suspense transpires in successively greater waves that reveal carefully crafted introspection on the speaker's part. These moments of suspense perform as psychological struggles with the Jungian shadow. The speaker hails a projected archetype of himself or herself—the desired persona—to reach a better sense of self but only encounters and recoils from the darker impulses of the current persona until a more stable persona can arise. O'Hara's "To the Harbormaster" best demonstrates the use of illocutionary suspense as a form of talking cure for its speaker's neuroses.

In line one, the speaker conjures the scene of the struggle with the prevalence of nautical archetypes. The ship, sea, and harbormaster expose different facets of the speaker's ritual of confrontation and banishment of the shadow. The ship represents the speaker's personal limitations. The speaker starts the poem by identifying the ship as the cause of the failed arrival to the harbor until finally recognizing the ship as a reflection of himself or herself. The sea represents the set of personal trials that the speaker must overcome to reach the harbormaster. These personal trials involve indecision, insecurity, and irresponsibility. The harbormaster then resembles an archetype for safety and authority. The speaker seeks refuge from the harbormaster through a process of blame, desire, and, ultimately, reassurance. These actions show the catalyst and reconciliation involved in the speaker's confrontation with the shadow. Altogether, the

archetypes metaphorically embody the speaker's path from willful ignorance of self to enlightened awareness.

The accumulation of archetypes provides locutionary stability, but illocutionary suspense quickly manifests. The first line of the poem (and the first hailing statement) sets the speaker's movement towards confrontation with the shadow through a statement of desire for the absent ears of the harbormaster. The banishing and confrontations with the shadow make up a ritual that occurs throughout the poem. The speaker begins by stating, "I wanted to be sure to reach you" (line 1). The address possesses information about the speaker through its locutionary aspect. The words highlight the speaker's insecurity. The words *wanted* and *reach* spell the gap between the speaker and the harbormaster as well as the gap within the speaker's consciousness. The speaker "want[s] to be sure to reach" the harbormaster (1).

The gaps in the speaker's confidence become present here. On the one hand, the wanting expresses desire; "to be sure" shows a palpable desire. The reaching provides a special aspect to the divide between the speaker and the subject. Another aspect of the locution which describes the gap is the placement of *I* and *you*. Both words sit at the opposite ends of each other; an assertion of desire for confidence and recognition divides them. The line does not possess finality in its punctuation. No period occurs at the end of the line; a closing semicolon provides a sense of reaching. From the piece's onset, an insecure tone arises and prepares the reader for the speaker's explanation of what has interrupted the reunion with the harbormaster.

This first line marks the first moment of hailing; the speaker wishes to reach the harbormaster and wishes "to be sure" to reach the harbormaster (1). The addition of the infinitive establishes the speaker's intent not only to desire a reunion with the harbormaster but also to make that reunion confidently. The illocutionary suspense in the first line manifests in the existence of the phrasing itself. The speaker addresses the harbormaster in a way that acknowledges the figure's absence. The speaker has not reached the harbor, and the hail concerns the speaker more than the harbormaster. The speaker's attempt to reach an absent listener to gain reassurance represents an avoidance of the shadow because the speaker does not face the forces which led to the failed arrival at the harbor. The utterance indicates regret. The speaker's address toward the harbormaster demonstrates guilt within the speaker; the speaker cannot confront or recognize the shadow.

Following the speaker's assertion of desire and regret in the illocutionary suspense of the first moment of hailing, the second hailing conjures the inner conflict with the shadow in the form of the speaker and the ship. The speaker elaborates upon the circumstances of the failed arrival: the first banishment of the

shadow. The speaker states, “though my ship was on the way it got caught / in some moorings” (2-3). The lines serve as an elaboration upon the former moment of hailing for the purpose of explaining the speaker’s failure in reaching the harbormaster. The speaker expresses hope in reaching the harbormaster and then unveils the reason for the failure. The ship was on its way when it “got caught” (2).

In terms of locution, the line’s speech action distinguishes between the speaker and the ship. There is an *I* and a *ship*. Though both travel to the harbormaster, the speaker’s distinction between the two establishes further insecurity and powerlessness. The speaker would like to reach the harbormaster, but the ship will not comply. The speaker banishes the shadow by associating failure with the ship. The speaker provides an excuse for the failed arrival in the form of blaming the ship and the sea. The illocutionary aspect of the speaker’s speech arises with this assertion. In Jungian terms, this act summons the first confrontation with the speaker’s shadow. The speech act recognizes the harbormaster’s assumption of the speaker’s responsibility in arriving at the harbor. The speaker avoids responsibility and thereby banishes the shadow.

In the next line, this sentiment becomes more complicated with the addition of “in some moorings” (3). The fact that the ship became caught in moorings suggests the notion that the speaker’s inability to reach the harbormaster results from personal choice. If the ship were only caught up in moorings, the speaker could untie and continue the journey. With the addition of this text, the speaker begins to reflect upon personal faults ambiguously. Illocutionary suspense presents a moment of division in the speaker’s mind. The speaker provides an excuse to the harbormaster, but the act results in fracturing the persona and revealing the shadow’s outline. The act serves as the catalyst for the inevitable confrontation.

After the description of the opening conflict between the speaker and the ship, the second hailing (the third and fourth lines) addresses the speaker’s inability to reach the harbormaster by honing the resulting illocutionary suspense into a further approach towards confrontation with the shadow. The moment of hailing occurs from lines three to four: “I am always tying up / and then deciding to depart.” This utterance demonstrates that the speaker possesses awareness of the failed arrival’s cause. The speaker recognizes that the ship was not just caught in moorings but also caught in moorings to which the speaker decided to tie. The addition of “and then deciding to depart” suggests the speaker’s indecisiveness (4). The fact that the mooring may occur in other harbors also hints at insecurity in the speaker’s lack of home. The locution of the lines suggests complacency within the speaker as well. The moorings are only some moorings; he is always tying up and then deciding to depart. The speaker confesses responsibility only in a glancing manner.

In terms of the illocutionary act of the statement, the lines show the speaker yielding ground and trying to buy forgiveness from the harbormaster through mild self-awareness. The speaker recognizes the shadow but relies upon the harbormaster as a buffer. The illocutionary speech act serves the purpose of enlightening the harbormaster to the speaker's plight, but in the absence of the listener, the act becomes a moment of self-evaluation for the speaker during which a confrontation with the shadow may emerge.

The speech act's illocutionary suspense forces the message to change from a fracturing of the persona into a moment that reveals the frailty of the persona. This moment leads the speaker to step closer towards confronting the shadow. These lines expose the speaker's inner struggle. Indecision arrives in the speaker's character. With the absence of the harbormaster, the speaker's language becomes more reflective. With the speaker's inability to reach the harbormaster, the illocutionary suspense turns the speaker's messages into a reflective monologue that edges the speaker closer toward shadow confrontation.

As the speaker begins acknowledging the Jungian shadow through the unheard message, the third hailing moment demonstrates how illocutionary suspense results in a more focused confrontation with the shadow. The speaker states,

and then deciding to depart. In storms and
at sunset, with the metallic coils of the tide
around my fathomless arms, I am unable
to understand the forms of my vanity
or I am hard alee with my Polish rudder
in my hand and the sun sinking. (4-9)

Tying up during storms and leaving at sunset present the speaker in another moment of dissociation with responsibility. The speaker illustrates powerlessness through the description of the "metallic coils" of the tide and "fathomless arms" (5-6). The metallic coils suggest a sea that chains and binds the speaker, and fathomless arms suggest a god-like aspect of the ocean. These phrases indicate an association of the persona with that of the ship and present a lack of control. In the uncontrollable tides, one cannot hold the speaker accountable for his actions because the speaker's actions submit to the whims of the vessel.

The illocutionary properties of these lines further drive a wedge between the speaker and the confrontation with the shadow. Instead of taking responsibility for the failed reunion, the speaker acknowledges a lack of control. In this instance, the shadow adopts a more defined form in the speaker's submission to the sea and the ship, but the speaker still avoids the confrontation. The illocutionary aspect of the lines deals with the speaker's advanced meditation. Because of the lacking response from the harbormaster, the speaker's message evolves into deeper self-

examination. It includes an obvious revelation of faults and also an assertion of the speaker's lack of control. The shadow becomes more unearthed. It transforms from a vague definition into a detailed recognition of inner strife on the speaker's part. The illocutionary suspense in these lines takes the direction of the poem from ambiguous evocation of the failings of the ship into the speaker's intense reflection of personal failings.

While in lines four to nine the speaker defines but ignores the shadow, the following hailing moment shows the speaker's first steps in realizing and grappling with the shadow in the form of surrender to the harbormaster. These lines read, ". . . To / you I offer my hull and the tattered cordage / of my will" (9-11). The locutionary aspects of this utterance express the surrender as a direct metaphor for the ship. The speaker offers *hull* and *tattered cordage* to the harbormaster. A hull in this context acknowledges the physical aspect of the ship beyond the speaker's desires. The "tattered cordage of my will" becomes an old, torn sense of willpower. The speech responds to the speaker's need to seek relief from the harbormaster by engaging with the shadow. The speaker wants the harbormaster to accept the flaws and failures of the missed arrival. The speaker achieves the confrontation and accepts it in a way that is more significant than the acceptance of the harbormaster. The confrontation with the shadow comes to a point where the speaker fully recognizes it as a form of growth. The speaker's offering to the harbormaster indicates a fully realized confrontation with the shadow.

As the former lines suggest the ship as a part of the speaker's persona, lines eleven to thirteen further support a continued consideration of the confrontation with the shadow. The lines state, "The terrible channels where / the wind drives me against the brown lips / of the reeds are not all behind me" (11-13). The locutionary elements rest in the metaphoric description of the speaker's "terrible channels" (11). Because of the speaker's identification with the ship, the obstacles change from manmade obstacles such as *moorings* into natural obstacles such as *wind* and *reeds* (12-13). These natural obstacles highlight the speaker's further submission to the elements.

The illocutionary function of the hailing phrase begs the harbormaster to acknowledge and accept the speaker's nature. The speaker acts with the possibilities of the ship in mind. Possibilities for future disappointment exist since the "terrible channels . . . are not all behind [the speaker]" (11-13). Following the earlier lines that deal with facing the shadow, the speaker considers the consequence of the confrontation and expresses the sentiment to the harbormaster. Accepting the inability to reach the harbor, the lines show the speaker offering himself anew to the harbormaster via the promise and devotions to the ship's capabilities. The speaker, now identifying inner struggle with the ship, explains away the failed arrival as the result of a passage among "terrible channels" (11).

The speaker elaborates that the “brown lips of the reeds are not all behind me” and describes future possibilities for failed reunions (12-13). The illocutionary suspense unveils the continued confrontation with the shadow. Although the speaker faces it with clarity, need is present for a full consideration of the decision’s effects. The speaker’s illocution reflects the understanding of the potential for future failure. The speaker’s continued banishing of the shadow up to this point ironically creates the confrontation. The ship receives blame for not arriving, but the continued blame builds the vessel into a metaphoric symbol for the speaker’s life. The ship becomes the speaker’s prison, but the speaker realizes that blaming the ship represents escapist projections. The recognition of the weakness following the confrontation yields greater understanding to the speaker. With knowledge of his limitations, the speaker grasps perspective. In expressing the dangers of the new accepted identity, the speaker reaches greater maturity. Lines thirteen to seventeen spell the final confrontation with and banishment of the shadow in such a way that the speaker reassures the harbormaster rather than seeks reassurance. The speaker states,

of the reeds are not all behind me. Yet
I trust the sanity of my vessel; and
if it sinks, it may well be in answer
to the reasoning of the eternal voices,
the waves which have kept me from reaching you. (13-17)

In terms of locutionary aspect, the speaker establishes an assuring tone in the words and phrases *trust*, *my*, *vessel*, and “reasoning of the eternal voices” (14, 16). Even if the ship should fail, the speaker rationalizes the failure by claiming “it may well be in answer / to the reasoning of the eternal voices” (15-16). The speaker respects the trials of the voyage and accepts his or her powerlessness. As an illocutionary act, these lines serve to assure the harbormaster that the speaker’s trials and failing to reach the harbor should receive acceptance. The speaker goes where the ship goes and does only what the vessel allows. Further, the harbormaster can only accept the speaker in recognizing the possibility of late arrivals. The lines seek to reassure the harbormaster by reconciling the speaker’s doubt and insecurity with the world. The speaker, trusting and accepting the difficulties of the circumstances, settles the confrontation with the shadow. Because of the illocutionary suspense, the speaker’s newfound insight only serves the speaker in sealing the revelatory moment.

Although the reasoning occurs in an extended message to the speaker, this format for the poem shows an understanding of the speaker’s fate through the perceived interaction with the harbormaster. Through the liminal space created in the illocutionary suspense of the speaker’s final reasoning, reconciliation occurs with the binary of the ship and the speaker. The speaker accepts the ship and its

limitations and accepts his own fate by extension. The speaker comes to grips with insecurity and powerlessness by seeing past the fragments of the failed persona to the darker but more sincere shadow. Though the speaker still addresses the harbormaster, he does so to show newfound autonomy. The speaker's reassuring message to the harbormaster represents the finalized confrontation with the shadow; illocutionary suspense performs as a mirror for the speaker's voice and serves as the catalyst for self-actualization.

Throughout "To the Harbormaster," a subtle interplay emerges through the speaker's message to the harbormaster. Recognizing the harbormaster as a symbol of security and safety, the speaker explains the circumstances of the journey. The ship receives blame for its inability to arrive at the harbor. The speaker's monologue eventually evolves into reflections. The speaker sees the ship and the ocean as the forces controlling the journey to the harbormaster. This moment of realization emulates the shadow archetype in Jungian psychoanalysis. The most important part of the confrontation deals with how the speaker prepares for the confrontation.

The speaker wants to blame the failed journey upon the obstacles of the ship and the sea. Instead, the message remains suspended in limbo while the speaker continually adds information until the final confrontation with the shadow manifests. By the end of the poem, the speaker emulates a passenger of the ship and the ship itself. The speaker prepares the ritual of confrontation and banishment with locutionary and illocutionary elements. The speaker tailors a message for the harbormaster, but the lack of perlocutionary uptake leaves the message in suspense. In the resulting liminal space, the speaker keeps editing the message based upon the silence of the harbormaster.

Although the lines show the speaker's avoidance of responsibility, the successive lines demonstrate progressive reflection. The resulting reflection expresses the speaker's conflict with the shadow. In the beginning, the speaker does not take responsibility for his or her behavior. The blame passes onto the ship and the sea. The speaker continues to blame the ship through projection until the speaker sees the ship as a reflection. The metaphoric embodiment of this conflict occurs in the final lines of the poem and represents the moment when the speaker accepts the ship.

Frank O'Hara's "To the Harbormaster" becomes an expression of the concept of illocutionary suspense and Carl Jung's shadow archetype through a speaker's one-sided conversation with a harbormaster. Line by line, the work implements a conversational format to embody a speaker's continued denial of the Jungian shadow until a final revelatory confrontation. The speaker attempts to plead away responsibility for never arriving at the harbor. As the speaker continues, the illocutionary suspense at the end of the speaker's hailing statements

forces the shadow confrontation. Viewing “To the Harbormaster” with the utility of illocutionary suspense and the Jungian archetype of the shadow presents the poem as a speaker’s confrontation and reconciliation with personal denial in order to reach self-actualization.

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War, Latin, and Patriotism
in Wilfred Owen's "*Dulce et Decorum Est*"
Blake Moon

"*Dulce et Decorum Est*" is a 1920 war poem by Wilfred Owen that exemplifies his well-known and highly-commemorated depiction of World War I experience through horrific imagery. Owen's war poems are some of the finest and most quoted poems about war in the English language. Although Owen wrote this particular poem in 1917, it was published posthumously in 1920, as Owen was killed in action on November 4, 1918, the day he received the rank of lieutenant. Owen's condemnation of war resonates beautifully in his work, and "*Dulce et Decorum Est*" is no exception; the poem offers insight into what constitutes the essence of war, honor, and fear. Although the poem and its Latin title propose that a certain necessity to war exists and that it is entirely good and justifiable for one to die for one's country, a close reading of the poem suggests otherwise.

The poem's speaker explains that the war he is experiencing is prolonged and unnecessary, and, despite the title and concluding lines of the poem, nothing is sweet or honorable about death and war. Dying for one's country is slightly different, however, as it constitutes bravery and patriotism, but the speaker cannot seem to describe it as sweet or honorable. He fails to comprehend how others can continuously call for war and assumes that they have not witnessed the suffering he has observed. Through consideration of Owen's depiction of war bias and atrocity in the poem and the poem's Latin theme, one can easily distinguish the characteristics that denote this poem as anti-war and, to a further extent, unpatriotic.

While author Paul Fussell emphasizes a more romantic approach to Owen's depiction of those soldiers he watched suffer by arguing that these details exemplify elements of homoeroticism, Fussell also analyzes Owen's poetic response to war in *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Fussell states, "[Owen] harnesses his innate fondness for dwelling on the visible sensuous particulars of boys in order to promote an intimate identification with them" (291). Essentially, Owen's description of the physical features belonging to those soldiers he watched suffer is a means of correlating with them and establishing some form of bond. In the midst of war, where women are absent and sexual deprivation is common, no other form of emotional connection for men exists other than each other. As such, Fussell stresses the emotional attachments among men in war.

To this extent, Owen—or, simply, the poem's speaker—sees war as the enemy because it sacrifices the lives of men on both sides of the conflict. The speaker discards masculinity in favor of an innate sympathy—almost a feminine tenderness—toward his comrades, who are, likewise, the only ones who can

sympathize with him. Fussell claims, “With a most tender intimacy[,] [Owen] contemplates—‘adores’ would perhaps not be too strong a word—physical details like eyes, hair, hands, limbs, sides, brows, faces, teeth, heads, smiles, breasts, fingers, back, tongues” (291). The reader can distinguish this intimate depiction in “*Dulce et Decorum Est*,” where the speaker describes his comrade’s death by emphasizing his “white eyes” and “hanging face” (lines 19, 20). War mutilates and harms the beauty of man not only emotionally but also physically.

Owen’s depiction of war in “*Dulce et Decorum Est*” is akin to hell due to the descriptions of isolation, desperation, and agony. Critic George V. Griffith reminds readers that “[t]he sounds of Owen’s poem are sounds of horror,” and he cites “the ‘coughing like hags,’ the ghostly ‘hoots’ of the shells, [and] the deadly silent noise of the gas shells” as prime examples (38). Even the silence is terrifying, as it exemplifies the stifled or ineffective cries of war’s victims and signals their premature deaths. Specifically, critic John Hughes highlights the two-line stanza in the middle of the poem during which the speaker describes the death of his maskless comrade in a gas attack: “In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning” (15-16). The haunting scene induces recurring nightmares for the speaker, and the dying soldier’s desperate attempt to remain alive provides a disturbing imagery—that the soldier could have possibly been reaching for the speaker’s own gas mask.

Isolated from home and the people one loves, desperate to find meaning in an atrocious war and live through it, and having witnessed what agony and terror war can produce, the speaker makes telling correlations between war and hell. Hughes elaborates: “[T]he deepest, complicating iniquity of war is that its events can dispossess one of one’s best self, dividing oneself from oneself and others and overwhelming one’s most humane of responses toward pity and truth” (166). This passage notes that war can undoubtedly change a person and result in a tragic state in terms of selfhood and pity toward others. Those people who support war may as well support hell; no glory derives from the displacement of oneself.

The Latin title of the poem derives from the Roman poet Horace’s phrase “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*” (i.e., “How sweet and honorable it is to die for one’s country”). Although the title of the poem contains only the beginning of the phrase, Owen includes the rest at the end of the poem following “The old Lie” (27). What marks these particular words as interesting is that Owen places them before the concluding Latin phrase; such placement suggests that the famous phrase, which supporters of the war frequently quoted around the time of its inception, is an ancient tactic employed to urge those people who love their country to kill in its name. What deceives the “children ardent for some desperate glory” is not a component of glory at all; it is the falsification that Owen attempts

to stress—not only to those it deceives into war but also to those who manipulate others into war and support it (26).

An element of mystery exists concerning the Latin language; it is a dead language not understood by many and certainly not understood by anyone who has never studied it. Its use in this poem is interesting, as Owen attempts to coat his underlying message with a cryptic delivery . . . yet supporters of the war were familiar with the excerpt. Owen employs the phrase as an exhortation, but he denounces it by calling it a lie—one that is old, familiar, and steadfast. Supporters of the war would consider the idea of straying from this ideology unpatriotic, so Owen muffles it with the Latin battle cry. The fundamental meaning of these concluding lines suggests a vastly opposite reality—that there is nothing sweet or honorable about dying for one’s country.

To claim that the poem is unpatriotic is a bold accusation, and to suggest that Owen himself was unpatriotic is even bolder. Owen was a respectable figure in the military, and, though his poetry undeniably expresses his abhorrence of war, he nonetheless chose to write about it. Despite these facts, associating anti-war philosophy with anti-patriotism is unfair if one truly detests war; however, it is quite fair to correlate these two ideas if one feels that a country participating in war is as atrocious as war itself. Owen does not attempt to find glory in war, as he recognizes from personal experience that it does not exist. His Latin theme in the poem grants the subtleties of intrigue for war supporters of the time.

However, people who study Latin typically do not study it for present or future reference; they study it because of its content—for past reference. Famous Latin words and phrases often express virtue; here, Owen decorates the Latin patriotism with the illusion of virtue. This false image of glory devastates those in its path—including the innocent—yet there is a demand for it back home. Those people who refused to fight in the war encountered women who challenged their masculinity and presented them with white feathers as a sign of cowardice. Quite reasonably, the poem’s speaker retaliates: “If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood / Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs, / [. . .] / My friend, you would not tell with such high zest” (21-25). If a person back home could experience all the blood or witness another person choke to death before his or her eyes, he or she would not portray such idealistic enthusiasm in the idea that war is somehow justifiable.

The poem’s concluding lines also offer insight into the speaker’s compassion for his comrades. Author James F. McIlroy comments upon these lines in *Wilfred Owen’s Poetry*: “Owen has great sympathy for the suffering men, the misguided ‘children,’ and even for the jingoists. As [the reader knows], [Owen] is never self-pitying, but concerned and pleading for others” (57). These men have begun to realize the deception of the old lies about war, but their

realizations come far too late. Because war strips what is meaningful to the speaker, he detests it and beckons for recognition of its barbarism. He stresses to the loyalists back home that war is nothing to campaign.

Another example of Owen's dissent toward war is how he describes an unrelenting admiration toward men. Faced with an ultimatum of fighting in the war, enduring its carnages, and risking their lives—or refusing to fight and have others, including women back home, accuse them of cowardice—war offered little contentment for men, young and old. As the speaker describes in the opening of the poem, his comrades are not even fighting men anymore; they are exhausted soldiers desperate for the war's end: “Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, / Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, / we cursed through sludge” (1-2).

Ultimately, the bias and atrocious nature of war present in the poem, as well as its Latin theme and false images of glory, mark it as a questionable demonstration of patriotism in the shroud of its anti-war message. War, being both sides' enemy, cannot constitute the glory or positive connotations associated with it. Owen does not dispute that such characteristics exist; he merely severs their correlation with war. Likewise, Owen is not so much unpatriotic as he is anti-war, which is what the message of this poem should offer for readers.

The old lies about war are like propaganda of deceit for Owen. Perfectly good reasons exist for those people back home to support the war; they believe undoubtedly that it represents the bravery of their country, but Owen recognizes this belief as a lie, for he has witnessed the true cruelty of war. He refuses to accept that dying is sweet, and he rejects the notion of engaging in war to be honorable. Horace argued that dying for one's country is sweet and honorable; in “*Dulce et Decorum Est*,” Owen begs to differ.

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“What the Hell happened to Maggie?”:
Repressed Memories, Guilt, and the Dangers
of Stereotyping in Toni Morrison’s “*Recitatif*”
Allison Johnson

People derive many assumptions from a person’s features or surroundings. Stereotyping occurs so frequently that people can sometimes fail to notice it. Written in 1983, Toni Morrison’s short story “*Recitatif*” playfully illustrates the stereotypes of Caucasian and African Americans through the lives of two women, Twyla and Roberta. The two weave between the racial typecasts, and the reader can never really place either girl in a particular box. In an interview Elissa Schappell conducted for *The Paris Review*, Morrison claims, “I wrote a story entitled, “*Recitatif*,” in which there are two little girls in an orphanage, one white and one black. But the reader doesn’t know which is white and which is black. I use class codes, but no racial codes.”

As one focuses his or her attention upon the racial commentary, he or she may miss the true characteristics of Twyla and Roberta. Looking beyond the colors of their skin and examining their repression of a childhood memory, one discovers that the innocent, moral depiction of the girls is not a true representation of the characters due to the unreliability of memory. In either reading, Morrison challenges readers to acknowledge the injustices of stereotyping. Just as race should not predetermine a person’s actions, neither should his or her age.

In “*Recitatif*,” the reader learns about the humbling situation of Twyla and Roberta in the first line. Twyla, the narrator, explains, “My mother danced all night and Roberta’s was sick” (Morrison 199). The two young girls meet in a state home and become roommates. They share important moments that they later revisit and discuss as they encounter each other throughout their lives. As they age, one memory in particular continues to evolve: a woman named Maggie, who had worked at the state home, was mute, small, and hurt in some way. Though the memory changes throughout the story, the idea that Twyla and Roberta harmed the woman is not viable. The first line with its child speaker lures the reader into a trap of assumption. Children almost always appear as innocent figures. This stereotype, paired with the remorseful circumstance of the children’s environment, creates an illusion that Twyla and Roberta are harmless, scared children.

While the puzzle of figuring out the races of the two girls distracts the reader, the depiction of their innocence strengthens. A reader will have no reason to question their involvement in the Maggie memory if a he or she is not looking to discover what happened to Maggie. In the last line of “*Recitatif*,” readers receive a challenge to examine the story anew when Roberta cries, “Oh shit, Twyla. Shit, shit, shit. What the hell happened to Maggie?” (Morrison 211). A reader must face the same aggravation and emotional heaviness as Roberta.

In the initial reading, readers play with the racial commentary and observe the evolving memory. By the end of the story, the reader has solved no puzzles clearly. Though the story never directly answers either question about race or Maggie, the work contains clues portraying the truth. A reader must classify Twyla and Roberta socially and culturally based upon their involvement in the fate of Maggie; these classifications have little to do with the story but a great deal to do with the reader’s background.

Both girls repress the memory of Maggie, and it resurfaces in many different forms. First, Twyla explains that an orchard grew near St. Bonnie’s, the state home. Older girls attended St. Bonnie’s, and they were mean. Twyla and Roberta would run through the orchard to escape from their bullying. According to their memory, Maggie fell down in the orchard, and the big girls made fun of her; Twyla and Roberta just watched because they were too scared to confront the big girls. Twyla recalls that she and Roberta mocked Maggie, and Twyla says, “It shames me even now to think that there was somebody in there after all who heard us call her those names and couldn’t tell on us” (Morrison 200). Twyla admits that she is ashamed of how she treated Maggie.

While a reader may initially believe this memory as truth, the reader quickly learns that many other versions of this story exist, and any one of these variations—or none of them—could be true. In “Repressed Memories” from *A Guide to Psychology and its Practice*, Dr. Raymond Lloyd Richmond discusses the trickiness of memory: “An event that you falsely remember can be psychologically equivalent to an event that really did happen.” According to Richmond, one theory of repressed memories considers them to be an act of self-preservation. If Twyla is ashamed of how she treated Maggie, then she may be altering the truth of the memory to protect herself from the guilt that the situation caused.

Richmond’s claim that repression occurs for protection receives strengthening in Sigmund Freud’s theory of how memories exist within the

unconscious. From Sigmund Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, one learns that if someone engages in repression, the repressed matter cannot surface because of a force that opposes it. This strong force exists as an emotion (such as fear, shame, or embarrassment) attached to the repressed material. If Twyla and Roberta have repressed the memory of Maggie, a sense of guilt might be blocking their effective reclamation of that memory.

Now that Roberta and Twyla's struggles with repressing the memory of Maggie are clear, one can examine how and why that memory haunts the girls. Matthew Hugh Erdelyi discusses how and why these memories continue to resurface for the characters in "The Unified Theory of Repression": "Freud's clinical experience revealed early on that exclusion from consciousness was affected not just by simple repression (inhibition) but also a variety of distorting techniques, some deployed to degrade latent contents (denial)."

Freud believed that repressing something did not mean that it went away forever; repression only meant that repressed material would manifest itself in different forms. This Freudian theory explains why Roberta and Twyla constantly revisit and reshape the memory of Maggie as it attempted to resurface. According to Freud, this attempt would continuously fall victim to the subjects' various forms of denial. In "*Recitatif*," the girls use the memory in a way that is beneficial for them in the moment. This practice is their denial. They reshape the memory to protect themselves from reflecting upon the past honestly.

As one continues through "*Recitatif*," the memory of Maggie's bullying appears in four different ways. Using Jacques Lacan's theories of signification, one can interpret the evolution of Maggie's memory as the signifier acting upon the subject. In Jacques Alain-Miller's "Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier)," Alain-Miller explains the relationship between the signifier and the subject: "[I]f the consciousness of the subject is to be situated on the level of the effects of signification, governed [. . .] by the repetition of the signifier: [. . .] then only the unconscious can name the progression which constitutes the chain in the order of thought." The signifier, as it continues to receive shaping and reshaping from the subject, lures the subject into decisions unconsciously.

To apply the Lacanian theory of the signifier's control over the subject, one must contemplate why memories receive specific shaping. If one considers that the signifier is the time which Roberta and Twyla are revisiting, then one may see how they, the subjects, allow the material to dictate new interpretations. The

original memory includes Maggie's falling down amid the big girls' laughter while Roberta and Twyla observe in fear. During the next discussion of the memory, Roberta attempts to correct Twyla: "Maggie didn't fall [. . .] They knocked her down. Those girls pushed her down and tore her clothes. In the orchard [. . .] Those girls had behavioral problems, you know" (Morrison 206-07).

At the time Roberta is expressing this contradiction, the girls have just entered into the realm of parenthood for the first time. Roberta has married a gentleman with four children, and Twyla has just started a family with her husband. Roberta may interpret the memory's cause as solely being the behavioral issues of the bigger girls because she is concerned with her own children's behavior. The signifier of parenthood has led her to decide that the repressed memory is the effect of incorrect behaviors left without correction; so when the repressed content returns, she reshapes the memory.

The next time the memory receives transformation, the women stand on two opposite sides of a segregation protest. Roberta changes the reflection again: "[Twyla, y]ou're the same little state kid who kicked a poor old black lady when she was down on the ground. [. . .] Like hell she wasn't [black], and you kicked her. We both did. You kicked a black lady who couldn't even scream" (Morrison 209). Roberta envisions Maggie as a bullied black woman because that elevates her as a symbol of her era.

The new interpretation of the memory displays Maggie as a martyr for the black community and adds a whole new level to the shame the two should feel over the situation. By including Roberta and Twyla in the bullying actions, they become convinced of their involvement in the segregation battle as well. When Roberta reiterates that they kicked the poor, mute, black lady, she is expressing how black American communities have felt for ages—unable to stand up for themselves as the white communities control everything. Roberta's memory displays both girls as bullies because, black and white, they have allowed bullying to affect African Americans.

The final time the memory manifests, Roberta reflects upon her emotions in the moment. She allows the physical details to become irrelevant and focuses more upon how she felt and what she thought: "We didn't kick her. But, well, I wanted to. I really wanted them to hurt her. [. . .] It was just that I wanted to do it so bad that day—wanting to is doing it" (Morrison 211). In this moment, if a reader is closely studying the evolution of the memory, he or she will begin to

notice that there is an immense sense of guilt in the two girls. They do not truly know what happened. Roberta admits that she cannot remember. She clings to the idea that they did not physically harm Maggie. Twyla then follows Roberta's lead, and the result is a conversation of plausible deniability; Twyla and Roberta excuse their actions because they were frightened children during Maggie's attack.

Just as they are beginning to confront the horror of their involvement in the memory, Twyla and Roberta encounter mental roadblocks. Their resistance to facing the repressed recollection appears in the excuses with which they assure each other. They remove self-blame this way and continue to let the event haunt and taunt them. This miserable, trapped disturbance reoccurs in the last line of "*Recitatif*" when Roberta exclaims in frustration and horror, "Oh shit, Twyla. Shit, shit, shit. What the hell happened to Maggie?" (Morrison 211).

"*Recitatif*" includes both a race-based reading and a repressed-content scenario intentionally. Morrison's story shows that stereotypes of any kind are not a reliable judge of character. Whether one chooses to follow the racial commentary within the piece or the transformation of repressed content, Morrison's intended message emerges: stereotypes are unreliable, dishonest depictions of people. Injustice is present in determining a person's actions based upon skin color and in assuming that children are angelic figures of innocence.

In the race-based reading, one will focus all of his or her energy upon following the stereotypes associated with the races. This focus is an attempt to gain some knowledge about the characters that will not appear because it does not exist. The reading that follows the ever-changing memory of Maggie is concerned with a stereotype as well. In the story's exposition, Morrison has written a set-up reflecting a common assumption: children are innocent. The reason one shares in the horror and frustration of the repression at the end of the story is because that initial, assumed typecasting becomes insufficient. Readers discover that those innocent children might be guilty of hurting Maggie themselves. In this reading, the angelic child stereotype is as useless as the racial stereotypes. It reveals nothing about Twyla and Roberta's true natures.

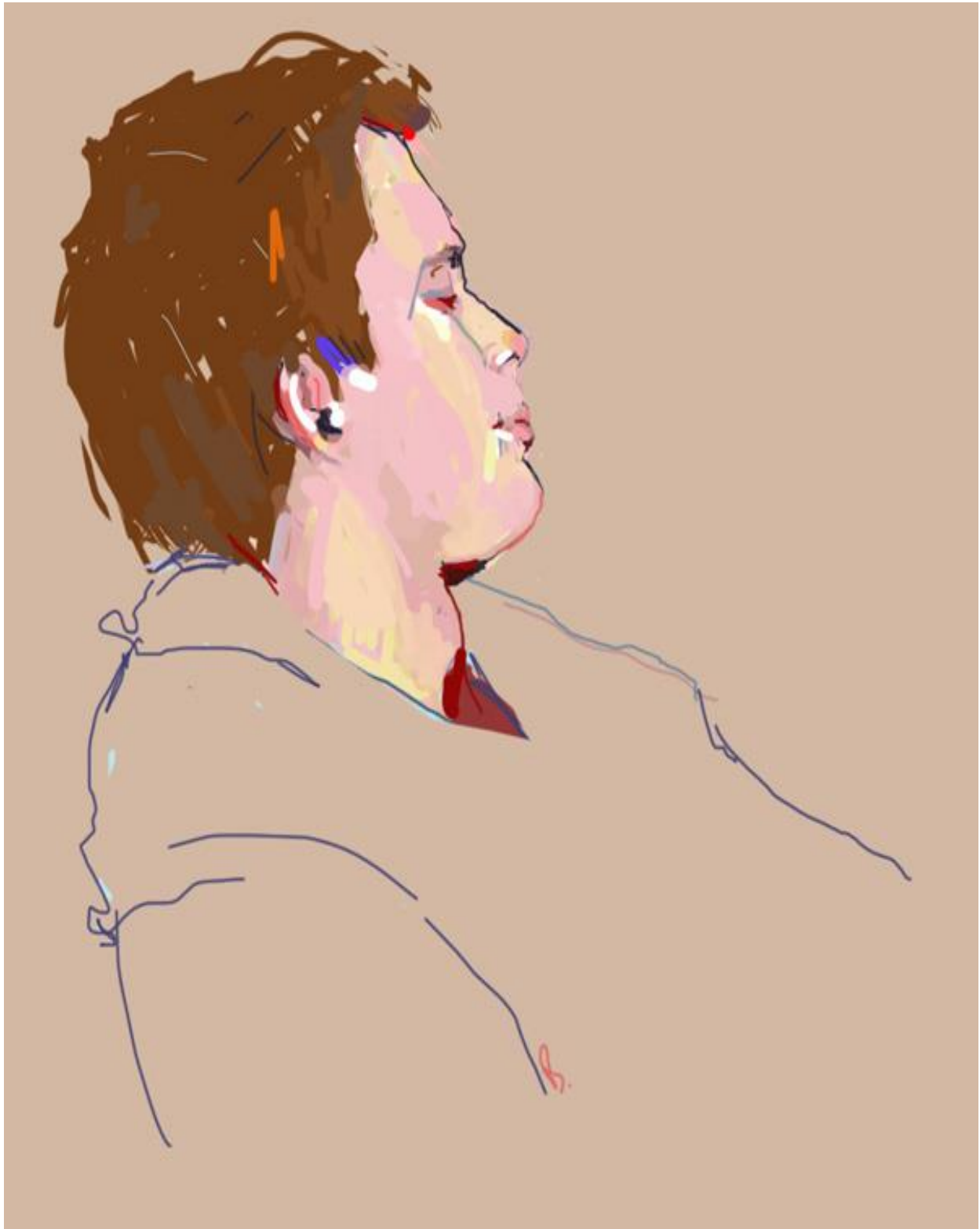
While the racial commentary of the piece is crucial, one must also read "*Recitatif*" as a study of how the repressed memory of Maggie experiences reshaping as a response to how the signifier (the time in which the memory experiences reshaping) is acting on the subject (the two girls who are reshaping it); this reshaping solidifies the dishonesty in stereotyping. One may believe the initial

recounting of the event due to stereotyping the children, but the fact that Twyla and Roberta are guilty of something will remain evident. Repressed content will always resurface until it receives confrontation, acknowledgment, and banishment. As the repressed content reemerges, Twyla and Roberta begin to restructure it into what they need to display themselves as moral individuals. Though one cannot completely answer the question of what occurred in the past, observing the way in which Twyla and Roberta respond to the memory reveals that they have repressed something horrific that will expose their innocent depiction as a farce. This revelation, along with the discovery that the race of the girls is irrelevant to the story, conveys a moral lesson: stereotyping is wrong.

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Arthur
Betsy Sanz



About the Contributors

Leah Beall graduated *summa cum laude* in the spring of 2014 with a BS in English and acquired her Texas and Arkansas teaching licenses for secondary English education. She is currently pursuing a MA in English and eventually hopes to use that degree to teach at the college level. She is currently teaching English at Horatio High School. She is also a member of Sigma Tau Delta and Alpha Chi. Her interests include reading, writing, photography, and various art forms that include painting, drawing, and pyrography.

Aaron Brand, a graduate of Eastern Washington University's MFA program, is currently the arts-and-entertainment features reporter for the *Texarkana Gazette*. His poetry has appeared in *StringTown*, *Mad Swirl*, *Nebo: A Literary Journal*, and *Firebush: Journal of Poetry*.

Carol Flori is a textbook portrait Babyboomer. A worker bee all of her life, she is a retired RN who worked with sick newborns and premies for over forty-five years. She raised three children and maintained a home while working full time. Art was always around, but it was in 2000 and a trip to Watermedia 2000 in Houston that her obsession with watercolor blossomed. She is self-taught and works from her own photos and still-life set ups. Illness has slowed her somewhat, but she still has goals and always enjoys producing paintings. She believes in appreciating the world that is right in our own backyard. She will never get to Paris, but Arkansas is a fabulous state for painters.

Caleb Dan Gammons, who holds an AS degree in Computer Programming and is graduating with an AA in General Studies, was born on February 18, 1994. He grew up in Hooks, Texas, with his parents, Troy and Karen Gammons. Caleb's mother homeschooled him from kindergarten until his high-school graduation. Caleb is a Christian and a member of the Seventh Day Baptist Church in Texarkana, Arkansas. He is the author of the children's book *Humphrey McDumphrey and the Great Bamboozle Stack*, and he is working on his current novel, *The Prisoner*, which he hopes will be in print by the end of this year. He competed for the Sandra Brown Literary Scholarship at Texas Christian University

and placed sixth in the nation. Caleb loves to write, sing, play the piano, and serve God to the best of his ability. Caleb plans to further his education by transferring to Southern Arkansas University so that he may obtain a bachelor's degree in computer-game programming.

John Grey is an Australian-born poet who works as a financial-systems analyst. He has recently published work in *International Poetry Review*, *Chrysalis*, and the science-fiction anthology *Futuredaze*. He has pending publications in *Potomac Review*, *Sanskrit*, and *Osiris*.

Michelle Holman was born and raised in Texarkana, Texas. She is an artist who creates large-scale oil portraits that stylistically use irregular paint application mixed with controlled brushstrokes and refined areas. She also experiments with different types of art mediums. She attended Oklahoma State University, where she obtained a BFA with an emphasis in painting in December of 2014. Holman is currently attending the School of Visual Arts in New York City to achieve her MFA in 2017. She interned at ULAE on Long Island, New York, and has exhibited works in New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Cindy Holmes was born in Los Angeles, California. Her family moved to Starkville, Mississippi, where she grew up and attended Mississippi State University. She graduated with a degree in Social Work. After a number of moves with her husband, she now resides in Texarkana, Texas. In mid-life, after marriage and children, she became interested in art and honed her painting skills in a colorful impressionistic manner. She found successes with entries into national oil and pastel exhibitions and an award-winning work in the *Pastel Journal*. Currently, her medium has changed to acrylic. Individuals throughout the United States have collected her paintings, and recently a large corporation has optioned her art. She is once again being accepted into national shows. The challenge of expressing her artistic viewpoint has made her even more determined to see where her works take her.

Allison Johnson is currently a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She is pursuing a double BA in History and English and participating in the school's honors program. She received her associate's degrees in history and general

studies from Texarkana College, where she was an officer of Earth Club and a member of Phi Theta Kappa. She is now a Texarkana College tutor in biology and English. She spends her free time writing creatively, drawing, and painting.

Sterlin Lujan is a professional writer and aspiring psychotherapist. He is a staff writer for *Bitcoin.com*, and he writes for a Texarkana, Texas, print publication called *HER Magazine*. He has written a peer-reviewed article for the *International Journal of Reality Therapy* about choice-theory psychology. He is also a show host along with Blake Felix on *Sovereign Mind Summit*. He has a bachelor's degree in psychology, and he is working on a master's degree in counseling.

Vincent Mack is pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in biology from Texas A&M University-Texarkana. He has written for Spooky Drama on Demand and acted in *Zoo Story* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Judy Martin received her bachelor's degree in computer science from Texas A&M University-Texarkana in 2014. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in curriculum and instruction.

Joshua McGuire is a graduate student pursuing an MA in English at Texas A&M-Texarkana, where he also works as a tutor in the university's Success Center. He is a poet and an artist who hopes to succeed in the field of creative writing. His interests include literary theory and international travel.

Blake Moon graduated from Texas A&M University-Texarkana in the spring of 2015 with a BA in English. He has remained at A&M-Texarkana, where he is currently pursuing an MA in English. He works as a professional English and writing tutor at Texarkana College and is a member of both Sigma Tau Delta and the English club. He received the 2014-2015 Undergraduate Student of the Year award in English. His academic interests include poetry and American literature.

Jesse Orrin Morrow holds an MA in English from Texas A&M University-Texarkana. He is the Success Center Coordinator and an adjunct English instructor at A&M-Texarkana, where he received the Graduate Student of the Year Award for 2014-2015. He has presented original research at numerous conferences across

the nation and won the award for “Best Graduate Paper” at the 2014 Alpha Chi Honor’s Convention in St. Louis, Missouri. Jesse’s research pursuits include postcolonial literature, psychoanalysis, continental philosophy, and cultural studies. He lives in Texarkana with his wife, Ashley Morrow, and his daughter, Indie Morrow. He intends to pursue a PhD in Comparative Literature with a designated emphasis in Critical Theory. He is also currently learning French, his third language.

Casey Purifoy is a graduate student pursuing an MA in English at Texas A&M-Texarkana. He is an essayist, a poet, a short-story writer, and a budding dramatist.

Shelby Purifoy is an artist and photographer in the Texarkana area who approaches her work with patience and consideration.

Betsy Sanz was born in New York City. She completed a BFA from Rosemont College and earned a master’s degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs from the University of Connecticut. Her group exhibitions include the SACI Gallery in Florence, Italy, and the Lawrence Gallery in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Some of her favorite artists are Caravaggio, Degas, Liepke, and John Singer Sargent.

Kellie M. Taylor is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Marianne Taylor teaches creative writing and literature at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Her work has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly*, *Connecticut Review*, *Nimrod International Review*, and *North American Review*. She is also the winner of the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award, the Helen Quade Memorial Writer’s Award, and the *Iowa Woman* Poetry Prize.

Chris Thomas received her BSHE in Family Studies and Child Development from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. She has enjoyed being a full-time mom and has volunteered for various organizations most of her adult life. As her children graduated and discovered their passions in life, she explored her own. While serving on the board for the Texarkana Repertory Company and studying

for her second degree (a bachelor's degree in theology from St. Gregory's University at the Little Rock Institute of Theology), Chris decided to enroll in the ceramics course at Texarkana College in late 2009. Her strong devotion to clay has been growing ever since and has resulted in pieces exhibited in the annual juried TRAHC art shows and a thriving business producing functional pottery.

Hollis Thompson is currently a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana, where he is pursuing a bachelor's degree in English. He has been involved with writing three different stage productions at the Silvermoon Children's Theatre: *Cryin' Wolf*, an introduction to Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, and *Once upon a Palooza*, which included an adaption of his story "Fiary." He currently works as an English tutor at the A&M-Texarkana Success Center and at the University of Arkansas Community College at Hope. He also directs Internet streams of services from Heritage Church, and pursues interests in drama, medieval literature, fairy tales, film, and superheroes in his spare time.

Agnes Tirrito is a freelance writer and artist. She teaches English at Texarkana College and is a Field Supervisor at Texas A&M-Texarkana. She is a Teacher Consultant and enjoys teaching others how to find joy in the process of art and writing.

Sam Tirrito is a prolific fiction writer. He recently attended Texas A&M University-Texarkana's East Texas Writing Project, where he workshopped several of his works in progress.

Alicia Walden is a senior at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. She is seeking a BS degree in English, Language Arts, and Reading for Grades seven through twelve and hopes to teach high-school English after graduating in May.

