



# *Nota Bene 13*

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society Anthology

## From the Founding Editor

It is with a great sense of pride that we present the 19th edition of *Nota Bene*, the literary anthology of Phi Theta Kappa. We delight in the words of these outstanding Phi Theta Kappa members and are honored to showcase their efforts.

In 1994 we embarked on a bold new venture to publish literary works by Phi Theta Kappa members, promoting the ideal of excellence in writing. Our initial efforts were rewarded with a gratifying response, both from our members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and by the audience who enthusiastically read the printed book. After 19 years we continue to see increased results as the number of manuscripts received escalates.

One of Phi Theta Kappa's oldest traditions is to encourage, promote and reward excellence in writing. We believe the writings contained herein not only showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members, but also affirm the commitment to academic excellence displayed by the community college arena. In more than 1,700 libraries nationwide and abroad, *Nota Bene* carries its banner of literary excellence to an ever-increasing audience. We are also pleased to offer the Ewing Citation and Reynolds scholarships to four outstanding *Nota Bene* authors.

*Nota Bene* takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We are hoping you will take note and be inspired to join us in our scholarly obligation to nourish good writing and exceptional authors.

We thank you for your continued support over the past 19 years. Without our members, chapter advisors, college presidents, librarians and friends, *Nota Bene* would not be possible. As we move forward, we encourage your continued patronage.

Sincerely,



Dr. Rod A. Risley  
Executive Director and CEO of Phi Theta Kappa  
Founding Editor, *Nota Bene*

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## In Memoriam



### Jadene Felina Stevens

1947-2013

The 19th edition of *Nota Bene* is lovingly dedicated to Jadene Felina Stevens, "*The Saltwinds Poet*." Jadene won the Citation Scholarship in 1997 and the Reynolds Scholarship twice, in 1996 and 1998. She was a member of the *Nota Bene* Editorial Board.

Jadene was a widely published award-winning poet. She was founder and director of The Saltwinds Poets on Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

**The opinions expressed in the *Nota Bene* articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the opinions of Phi Theta Kappa.**

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# Ewing Citation Award



Casey Covell  
Brevard Community College-Titusville  
Florida



## Genuine

She	is a diamond.
Taking blows but never marks Showing others their own reflections in a million angles Making them search deep within to try to understand their fascination	
She never	ignores embraces forgets
	her faults.
Others take no notice of the miniscule specks in her pure facets.	
The past	is past.

She remembers

the coal  
the earth

And knows she is but dust.

Humility makes her grand.

Though others strike her, she always leaves the mark behind

on them.

So they never forget.

So they one day remember.

So they are forced to reflect.

And reform.

*She*

is a pearl.

Smooth.

Enticing.

Pure — deception.

Absorbing light  
But never reflecting  
A clear image...

just a distorted  
Visage of what

could be.

*Should be.*

Vain.

Yet others are deceived.

Hers is but a synthetic attraction.

A mask.

Her soul is false.  
A grain, a parasite.

Her trappings, worthless  
A covering for shame.

Deceiving others

*and herself*

with

An air  
A charm  
A lie



Genuine

A whisper  
Promises  
The world in  
Nothing but  
A gilded shell.

Pearls may adorn  
a neck,  
a wrist.

But only diamond  
Can forge the greatest  
Of all bonds and  
Grace a finger.

For beauty is vain  
When behind it lies  
But a grain.

William Lawrence Levitt  
Coastline Community College  
California

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## Point of View

The clinking pinball machine by the bar,  
the sudden smack of caroming billiard balls  
echoing from the back,  
and I am surrounded by vertical lines.

A café solo in Alice's teacup before me,  
a blinding sun bounces off the glass windows  
of the apartment building across the courtyard  
where people queue at the post office  
and customers check out at the Chinese antique store on the ground floor.  
All remains indistinct against the backlighting.

Wooden table and chair legs stand haphazardly at attention  
on matte finished ceramic floor tiles  
whose only details are  
the ungrouted shadows of the tiles' joints  
which suck up the radiated light.

Behind them the threshold of the shop's entrance:  
a timber double door with glass mantel boldly framed  
in matching sienna verticals.  
Sentinels awaiting a password,  
they stand guard over the cobblestone patio  
where burnished aluminum umbrella poles thrust skyward  
from scattered cast cement cones;

Their fabric wings still closed like the flowers on bachelor buttons  
at dawn daybreak.  
In the background vertical ceruleans support the covered walkway.  
Verticals all rise from ill-defined foundations  
and extend into the blur above  
in the glaucomatous world of tunnel vision.

Reynolds Award

much in their hands now Please write soon  
that you do, and do not take any notice  
of our being alarmed as I must say I am  
much alarmed we must first keep think  
our selves we are on the best of  
all this I am with Comfort  
Yours truly Dear Sir

Kathren Rintoul  
Lower Columbia College  
Oregon

Kilkenny

all  
1826  
Berk Maxwell Esq.  
Perrywick House  
Perrywick

3 June, 1844 Kilkenney, Ireland

My Dear Husband,

We hope that you found your voyage easy and that America is all we have heard it to be. Your lad Peter wonders if you made it through the immigrant tests he heard talk of and if the streets are really paved with gold as the songs say. He is become my man of the house at age 12, he follows the instructions you gave him before you left, never letting his sisters out of his sight, chopping all of the wood we need and taking care of the animals. Your mother is now living with us to help with the children while I carry our newest child. This time is proving more difficult than the last ones but do not worry for me, I am a strong Irish woman. I pray we hear from you by the time this little one enters the world. Postage for overseas letters is as high as St. Canice's so I will send this letter as soon as the first of the money you send reaches us.

Love Always,

Your Tara

13 March, 1845 Kilkenney, Ireland

My Dear Michael,

You have a new baby daughter! We named her Katie after your late aunt and took her to be christened by Father Dominik today. She screamed through the ceremony, just as your ma says you did at your christening. We are getting along well, Peter is working hard with the animals and planning the garden with Patrick O'Malley, the neighbor. Marie is just turned 9 and works as much as she can, but ~~she was~~ her health is worsening. I fear she might not make it through the winter if it turns out as harsh as last year. Little Rose helps with the cooking, cleaning and the other chores. The child is strong for a 6 year old, I believe she gets it from you, my love. Katie and your ma are well. I pray you have found work in New York or somewhere else in America. Mr. O'Malley has told us there have been rumors of a sickness in the potatoes near Dublin, but I do not believe that it will reach us, even if it is true. You can never much trust the words of old men fresh from the beer kegs. I pray for you daily and hope to receive a letter with some money from you quickly so I might send these letters I have written.

Love Forever,

Your Tara

Kilkenny

12 August, 1845 Kilkenny, Ireland

Dearest Michael,

I am sure you have heard of the trouble with the food here even all the way across the Atlantic. It is not bad here in Kilkenny yet, but there is nigh on to nothing that hasn't been tainted and the potato crops are dead in other parts of the country but at least things still grow here. I have been told the rent in the small counties is being raised beyond reason so the fat landlords can still live the style they are accustomed. Some poor families have come through Kilkenny on their way to the larger cities in search of work and we help them in whatever way we can. Peter found his first love with a golden haired daughter of one such family that stayed a few days with us; he has been quiet and dark since they left. He is putting me more and more in mind of you, dear Michael, and I pray you will send for us in time for you watch him finish his journey to manhood. The children have started a small journal for you, telling of each little thing that happens within our wee world here and I hope you will be able to read it before long. It will be as if you never missed a day. The girls are well and all wonder what ~~you~~ you have been about this past year. I know it is not uncommon for many months to pass between letters traversing the Atlantic, but unless postage is as high in America I cannot see why we have not received even one letter. Perhaps the ship that was carrying them to us sank as other reasons why you haven't written are so ridiculous I will not write them. Stay safe and write us soon.

Always Yours,

Tara

11 February, 1846 Dublin, Ireland

My Dear,

The famine has spread over most of the country now and the evictions forced us to move into the city to find work and food. I am looking for work so we can continue to afford the rent of this small room just inside Kilmainham. Peter is also

13 February

I do not want to accept it but Peter tells me that it is true. Marie passed two days ago and my little angel is dead. I feel like a part of my soul has been torn from me and I will never be whole again. She died asking when we would see you again Michael. Starving, dirty, too weak to move and her last words were still about you. She will never know what America will be like when you send for us. If you send for us. Where are you Michael?

Tara

1 April, 1846 Dublin, Ireland

Dear Michael,

Your ma and I have taken jobs at a workhouse because the money and letters I hope you sent have never arrived. Peter has also taken work at a butchers shop down the road from the small room we rent for a hefty price. It is still the cheapest living space we can find off the streets. We have had nothing but cabbage and small bits of meat to eat the past two weeks and we have all grown thin and weak. Peter has begun to think you have deserted us no matter how often I tell him you are not like your old friend Donald O'Reilly. Your ma doesn't say anything, but she must be thinking of how wild you were as a young man. I still say that you have not forgotten us and it is just as much for my own comfort as for the children. Peter is allowed to bring home scraps from the butcher's shop on Friday nights, but oft times he is able to fill his pockets with a few bites during the week. These small acts of thievery are the only thing keeping our family alive, Michael. I pray you will soon send money for we have none here. I am sending a letter to the Disney family using money that Ma and I have secretly saved to inquire if they know what has become of you. Sending a letter to the family who sponsored your voyage to America seems sensible, as I do not know how else to find you. I hope they will explain and be able to give us news of you.

Love,

Your Tara

17 November, 1846 Dublin, Ireland

Michael,

Katie could not live with the miniscule rations any longer and my baby girl joined Marie in death last week. I was holding her and I swear she was still breathing Michael, but Rose kept saying she was gone and pried the small body out of my arms. You never even got to meet Katie. In the two and a half years since America took you from us we have not even received a letter nor the money you promised to send to us and so I was not able to purchase more food nor any medicine for her when she fell sick. I have not received any word from the Disneys either and the children have been saying that you have left us for a new wealthier American family. Even when taking your wild streak into consideration I cannot believe that you would abandon your own children to die of starvation while you began anew. I must believe that if you are not dead, there was some terrible accident that caused you to forget who you are as in the stories that the sailors down at the docks tell. Food is meager as ever and this last week we have lived only on grass and old eggs. There is meat aplenty in most pastures here, but it is all shipped out to British nobles while Ireland's own children starve. Peter is enraged at the leaders and has joined the Youth Rebellion. I pray that he does not find himself arrested for certain death awaits him and us as well if he is sent to the jailhouses and we are left to die in the filth of Dublin's streets. Rose has carried on by the grace of God if you can call it that, and though she is nothing more than bare bones, she is alive. Your mother is weak and frail and I fear that she will soon pass on to be with Marie and Katie. We both are still employed at the factory workhouse by some miracle. The evictions have forced so many people to leave there are now empty houses that Rose scours for forgotten trinkets to sell or food left by the one night trespassers seeking shelter. Some have had the luck of St. Thomas himself and have secured passage on a ship

bound for America. We could not scrounge up the money to send even Rose if we all sold ourselves as servants the tickets cost so much. The stories of husbands leaving their wives and beginning anew in America are rampant here in Dublin and I pray you have not joined their sorry ranks. This letter will join the growing stack hidden under my mattress but I still have a small hope that someday you will read them.

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Tara

31 July, 1847   Dublin, Ireland

Michael,

It pains me to tell of your ma's passing, though more with us in mind than your own feelings. And this brutal admission scares me for it means that I have lost hope of your return. I had grown to love your mother as if she were my own, now I am scared and alone in this world unless you somehow remember us. Your ma was always quiet whenever Peter or Rose would begin to blame you for the hardships we have had to endure. But like her, I will not let it show that my belief in you has waned. I will not allow my children to grow up ashamed of their father. Rose now works alongside me at the workhouse and we only retained a bit of strength because of the thievery of Peter during his butchery job. But even that is now lost to us, Mr. O'Delly caught poor Peter sneaking a rotting sausage into his pocket and turned him in. My lad was jailed for a week and came back to us barely alive because of the guards' pitiless treatment. We have returned to cabbage, grass, and what scarce other food we can find. Rose's and my wages go firstly toward the high rent costs and a few bits of bread when we can manage. I truly do not know how long we can survive in these new circumstances. God care for us all.

Wishing you would write back,

Tara

25 December, 1853 Dublin, Ireland

Husband Michael,

We were suposed to be strong together, I wasn't suposed to have to do this ~~on my own~~ with only your ma and my children by my side. I am not suposed to ~~have to look to~~ lean on our son to provide for the rest of us as I should have leaned on you. I have stopped counting the letters I hide under my mattress that I wrote to you, but I believe this will be my last. ~~but I~~

~~I hide under my mattress that I wrote to you, but I believe this will be my last.~~

It is the Yuletide season now and rather than save hope for the past, it is time for me to move on and care for what I can in the present. I hold on now not for the hope of your return, I have given you into God's hands, but for my two children. They are who I live for now, and I wish only that you could see the fine young man and woman that they have grown into. I am tired, but maybe by hanging on for the living and not for the past, I will be able to stay in this life for a little while longer. I will never forget you Michael. Lord knows I will never do that but it may be eventually that I will be able to forgive you. Be it that you died not long after reaching America, were killed by one you called friend, are for some unknown reason ashamed to contact us, or have begun afresh with someone new, I pray that I will find the strength left in me before I too pass to forgive you for leaving, and to forgive myself for letting you leave.

For our children,

Tara

12 of June, 1855

Dublin, Ireland

Da,

I do not know if you are dead or simply living your own life, but should it be the latter I wanted you to know that Ma has passed into a better world than the one you left us to. She died two weeks ago of exhaustion, collapsing in the aisle of the factory. I was fired for leaving my work post to run to her and she died before I could find a doctor that would take us without immediate payment. I was cleaning her room this morning and found a stack of unsent letters she had written to you over the years, pouring out her heart and our troubles and pleading with you to come back. She detailed everything in those letters, and I thought it fitting that a last letter to you should close her time on this earth. You will not read this letter as I know not where to send it, but I think that it is what Ma would have wanted. She never told us that she too lost faith in you. She wanted us to believe that our father was a good man. I do not know if you are or were a good man, but knowing will not change anything so I cannot see that it matters what we think of you. Peter has just turned 23 and taken up work in the dockyards and I am now a maid in a cattleman's house on the outskirts of Dublin. The wages are good and we have begun to save in hopes of affording passage to America someday soon. Please know that I am enclosing my few remaining memories of you in this letter — I have no more need of them.

A woman of Ireland,

Rose Margaret Connelly





Reynolds Award

Casey Romero-Tobia  
Trident Technical College  
South Carolina

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**Bleeding Hearts**

The smoke from my cigarette curled up toward the bleeding heart plant in the hanging basket on the porch. Somehow I found this ironic. I cannot remember when it started, this season of the bleeding heart. It was not after his first deployment to Iraq. When he came home, he was different, but not so much changed that I no longer recognized him. He still told me I was beautiful. He still said he wanted to go far away with me to somewhere exotic and live together until we were old and the world no longer mattered to us. We still danced to silent music in the kitchen and laughed spontaneously at the antics of our children. The future still existed.

During his second deployment a roadside bomb changed him forever. That was when it started, the season of the bleeding heart. When they sent him home this time, he was different. The war had killed his laughter and a bomb broke his body. The man I married was gone, replaced by an apparition. He limped through his days. I begged him every day to tell me how to fix it, what I could do to make it better. His answer was always the same, "Nothing."

He had a bad morning; I spent most of it with the children in their bedroom while he raged around the house. He marched around, checking the doors and windows, watching for invisible enemies to fly into the yard and seize the ground that was his. They never came, but his vigil was constant. The trick to mornings like this is to stay off the radar. I took the children to my sister's house; afterwards, I drove around my neighborhood.

I got stuck in the traffic circle. I just kept driving around and around it. The music thumped through my body and I hung my head out of the window like a dog trying to catch the wind. I was building up my courage to talk him into getting some help. There had to be a way for him to find himself again. Surely, God did not expect me to live like this for the rest of my life. This would pass. Soon my children's laughing Daddy would reappear and all would be right in the world — I would dance in my kitchen and plan a lifetime with the man I loved.

I rattled the handle of the front door. It was locked; I hadn't locked it before I left. The shades looked out at the front porch like two giant white eyes in the windows of the house. I hadn't left those like that either. Sitting down I contemplated whether or not to open the door. Maybe it would be better if I just went to my sister's house to wait it out. I considered that this had just become too hard. I remembered my vows, "in sickness and in health," but what was this? I tried to call his caseworker and I got a very pleasant voicemail, but no help.

Sitting on the porch looking at the bleeding heart plant, I heard the shot. I knew what it was when I heard it, but I could not bring myself to get up and go inside. The still summer air hung around me like a blanket of fear. All I could do was sit there looking at the bright pink heart-shaped flowers. The neighbor came over and said she had heard the shot, she said something about calling the police. I knew his private war was over and that ultimately I was going to be the only refugee.

I sat on the porch for hours. They came, the officers, ambulances, and coroner. The invasion that he had so desperately looked for was finally here. They took his body out covered in purple velvet, and the gurney crept past me in a slow motion macabre nightmare. I hadn't moved from my spot on the porch. My neighbor said I should stay at her house, the officer placed something in my hand, "This was on the desk. I don't want it to get lost," he said. I stood there looking at the plant as they drove him away from me. I felt cold metal in my hand. Looking down, I realized the officer had given me my husband's Purple Heart. It was covered in blood.

Reynolds Award

Stacey Bouffard  
Pima Community College  
Arizona

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Chasing Canyons

Jim Olsen was 46 when he converted to the Mormon faith. If polygamy had still been accepted in the mainstream of the Mormon religion, this would have made some sense to his daughters, who, as it stood, could not imagine their father without his favorite hobbies: cussing at televised sports events, telling lies to beautiful women in dimly lit bars, and driving drunk through the canyon lands of southern Utah. It was suspected that his fourth wife, coming off a six-year bender herself and having been raised Mormon, was influential in Jim's decision to convert. He had already tried out Catholicism, the new age cult phenomenon EST and the Baptist church. He had walked in and out of a couple of 12-step meetings of various stripes. He had made a career out of trekking through the desert for days and months at a time, carrying surveying equipment and mapping out boundaries for mineral claims. Jim Olsen was a cowboy at heart in search of faith, forgiveness and redemption, like so many country songs on the radio of his 1972 Ford F-150.

It was equally surprising to his family when Jim was carried into the emergency room at Cavalry Hospital kicking and swearing, and did not come back out alive. It was a Friday night, and 600 miles away, across the high plains of the four corners region and down into the Northern New Mexico desert, his daughter, Onyx, was dressed in drag. The Mineshaft Tavern was hosting its annual party/fundraiser/performance and general assembly of outcasts in a little town without a police station, one of the last refuges of the weird, shady and repentant in the desert southwest. As she stepped outside to look for a friend who had been last seen in the drunken clutches of a tall blond woman, Onyx looked at the sky and knew something was wrong. She felt a shift of some sort, something she could not name and did not imagine to be the universe tearing a little hole to let her father out. The wind came up for a moment, something sparkled in the dirt, and the missing friend could not be found.

Of his four daughters, Onyx was the most like a son to Jim Olsen. Her first job was mineral surveying with her father in the canyon lands, at 14 years old, camping and working alongside the rest of an all-male crew. For Onyx, Jim was more like a brother than a dad. Childhood outings for ice cream were subsequently outnumbered by their late nights out, drinking on the faded hood of the Ford or in the dive bars of isolated desert towns. She gave him dating advice, commiserating with him on the many hazards of dating beautiful women. When he died, her inheritance included a topographical map of Arizona, his archaic surveying equipment, and a lawsuit for unpaid tuition to the art school that she had attended. Jim had said that he'd paid it all, but his file cabinet, stuffed with old newspaper clippings and love letters, contained no financial records. The small, local bank he had used back in those days had been reduced to cinders years ago. Onyx was left with rich memories of her father, but no money to speak of.

More than 15 years ago, Onyx had been my first real girlfriend. She was the one who had made my coming out declarations real to my family and friends, and they had come to love her as their own. Over the years, our connection had changed, stretched, and redefined itself, but that bond had never broken. Her perplexing family had also been my own for some time, and when she told me the news, there was no question that I'd go. Onyx had miraculously survived not only her upbringing, but somehow managed the continual soap opera that was her family life. Now that Jim was gone, the drive from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to Mesquite, Nevada, for the funeral with her three sisters and two nephews must be made. I actually welcomed the opportunity to act as co-pilot, referee and stress management advisor, as a temporary escape from my own set of circumstances.

I'd flown from New York, where I was living with Diana, my girlfriend of almost three years, back to New Mexico, toting a neatly pressed, black Brooks Brothers skirt and jacket. We had been advised by Diana's father to have funeral clothes at the ready, as an inoperable brain tumor had been having its way with Diana's mother's motor skills, language and memory for the past year or so. As her mother's life was skidding towards its end, Diana had developed "intense feelings" for an old friend of mine who had come to visit over the summer. We were in the midst of renegotiating monogamy, which meant that I was attempting to come to terms with the existence of this new relationship Diana already seemed to be having, with or without my consent. At the least, I wanted to feel that I had any choice in the matter. I didn't really. I was

angry a lot. I was tired a lot. I was not eating a lot. A few days prior to Onyx's early morning phone call with the news that her father had passed away, I had found a sizable lump in my right breast. I would call the doctor after this trip, I figured, to have it checked out. Many things, it seemed, had gone from bad to worse.

Our band of travelers would include Tammy, who has lived through a few suicide attempts and has a son in federal prison on cocaine charges. Grace pays the rent (or doesn't) on bingo proceeds, welfare checks and trips to the Western Union office when the inevitable emergencies arise that require Onyx to wire money, money she doesn't really have to spare. Roxanne is sure that just a few more months of Mary Kay sales will earn her that pink Cadillac, and she'll be able to take a vacation away from her noisy trailer park. Her son, Allan, at 23, bloated and twitchy, scarred from a procession of accidents, now considers himself the patriarch of the family since all the men of older generations are officially dead. And then there's the one undoubtedly gay but not-yet-out teenage nephew, the only one among this wrecking crew who has any idea how to dress for a somber occasion and does not chain smoke. Thank God for Jeremy. Onyx's other nephew can't make the trip because he's in juvenile detention for arson, and her nieces are with their unpredictable father in Texas. So it's the seven of us, in a few unreliable cars, with 13 hours of road ahead of us.

It is still dark when Onyx and I pull up to Allan's crumbling adobe in one of the rare, as-yet-ungentrified neighborhoods near downtown Santa Fe. There is a tent in the yard and an apprehensive dog on the porch. Inside, years of cigarette smoke have glazed the window panes. There are stacks of newspapers, a variety of containers repurposed as ashtrays and a dust-covered collection of figurines resembling Indian children obscuring the heavy Spanish colonial furniture. Allan has thoughtfully assembled all the necessities for our roadtrip. He's got a crumpled bag of Egg McMuffins, an undisclosed amount of Vicodin, and a carton of generic cigarettes, along with an extra lighter. He's also bringing his favorite pillow without the added burden of a pillowcase and a bottle of bright purple cough medicine. He's barely gotten any sleep in the past three days, he tells us, what with the meth and the grief and the fistfight with Crazy Eddie, who turns out to be the bum occupying the tent in the yard, but he assures us he's ready to go. Grace has been Allan's accomplice not only on this latest binge but many others, and her clothes flap around loosely where 40 or 50 extra pounds used to be. Tammy is crying. Roxanne is already mad, and quiet.

Nothing good is ever happening at four a.m. at the Allsup's' gas station on the corner of Gualdalupe and Paseo de Peralta, but that's where we make our first stop. This Allsup's has long been a hub in the underground railroad for hitchhikers making their way up to Taos, unencumbered travelers wandering over from the railyard, and the teenage hippie tribe, homeless by either choice or chance, floating around the West with The Grateful Dead or just on their own. Stray dogs hang out around the dumpster. Chimichangas are being fried in advance of the breakfast rush, lining up in their greasy little sleeves under the heat lamp by the countertop carousel of beef jerky.

An "out of order" sign hangs on the women's bathroom in the Allsup's. I glance back and forth between the hand-lettered sign and the non-skirted stick figure on the men's bathroom door, and decide to brave it. The scene inside the small room is not pretty, but my stomach has curled up in the knots it has become accustomed to as of late. It is not more than 30 seconds before someone is pounding at the door. It's Allan, I could tell, whose house (complete with bathroom) we had left not more than five minutes before. "Just a minute," I call out, and after trying the door a few more times, he eventually shuffles off.

Back in the car, Grace lights up her third cigarette of the morning. It is not yet dawn.

She and Allan are discussing their driving records and addiction, though they don't call it that. In an effort to control the chaos, both are thinking of cutting back on their smoking. Besides, it's an expensive habit to feed on bingo winnings, aluminum can returns and plasma donation. Allan knows his smoking style: "I gotta cut back slow. I can't have no turkey withdrawals." Grace says, "Man, I know what you mean. I can't quit hot turkey."

I wonder if they are speaking in code, but no, the blank looks as I turn around from the front seat betray no contrivance. We hit open road, just west of Albuquerque, and Allan says "Pull over...I gotta piss. Some chick was in the bathroom at the Allsup's, taking a big dump."

Eventually, the darkness is replaced by light, and the desert landscape takes on new color for the day. We weave through canyons, small towns and pieces of indian reservation. Roxanne and Jeremy drive ahead of us in a yellow Buick. Tammy has insisted on driving alone. In the rearview mirror, we can see her gesturing to the air and moving her lips. Our three-car caravan is frequently halted for smoke breaks, after Onyx mercifully outlaws smoking in the car. Finally, Allan and Grace succumb to slumber brought on by the bottle of cough medicine, which now lies empty on the floorboards. Onyx and I talk of life after death, hallucinogenic drugs, geology, border politics, and the other current events in our lives. I take the wheel, and for a while, she sleeps. There is no radio reception, and in the quiet afternoon, I imagine rewinding the past few years and making different choices. I imagine a different past, a different future.

The road finally dips into the small city of Mesquite, where we navigate to the house Jim shared with his final wife. The house is full of her grown children, so she has graciously made reservations in our names at the local casino for our lodging, at a discounted rate. The 19-dollar-per-night price seems low for even Mesquite, until we arrive at the casino and discover that it has been shut down. One wing of the hotel has been kept open, and we find the registration desk in a corner of the cavernous space, where brighter squares on the faded carpet mark the places where slot machines once stood. The smoked glass mirrors reflect nothing, and only lights sufficient to serve the desk have been kept on. Our rooms are found on the back side of the last building in the oceanic parking lot, on the top floor. A few cars linger in the parking spaces at the foot of the building, but any comings and goings of other guests are kept quiet. The back of the hotel abuts a high mound of earth, topped by a concrete wall. On the other side, cars pass by, faintly heard but not seen.

The day of the funeral dawns, as surreal as the night before it. Onyx's sisters and Allan have been up most of the night, clinking beer cans together to toast Jim, telling stories and lies, crying, laughing and arguing. I have the sense that the real funeral has already occurred, right here in Room 309 of the Golden Strike Casino Hotel, but still we dress and drive to the church. The October sun is too bright for the bleary eyes of our motley group, and the brew generated by the tiny coffee makers in our hotel rooms is not nearly sufficient. We arrive at the church, a band of outsiders, sporting sunglasses and at least 12 different shades of black.

The funeral itself whirls by in a procession of unfamiliar hymns, readings and eulogies. When the congregation is asked if there are any others who'd like to share a formal word, Onyx stands and approaches the podium. She explains that the Allman Brothers' song, "Pony Boy," was always her father's favorite. And then she starts to sing, in a clear voice that nevertheless sounds far away,

"Don't worry for me, well I'm all right  
 Lord knows I'm having a natural good time,  
 Pocket full of money, gonna boogie all night;  
 There ain't nobody tell me that's crime  
 When morning comes and it's time to go  
 Pony boy carry me home  
 Pony boy carry me home."

There seemed to be nothing more to say. Jim had gone, and it was time for us, too, to go home. I'd head back to New York, attend another funeral in a few weeks. The lump in my breast would be removed with no consequences, and before spring, I'd be alone at the wheel of a moving truck heading to Tucson. As for Jim, he'd visit Onyx in her dreams for a while, and on the days she most missed him, she'd turn on the car radio. "Pony Boy" would be there, and she'd roll down the window, turn up the volume, and sing to the sky.



Cheryl Kutcher  
Lone Star College-Tomball  
Texas



## Submerged Awareness

A short turn, stand-still traffic  
A lawyer misses the million dollar client  
Yet pales in comparison to what happened  
Five miles down the road, an accident  
Caused loss of life, devastation  
Wrecking metal and lives simultaneously  
A single terrifying moment in time.

Nothing can or ever will be the same.  
Grief strikes the hearts of mourners  
Sudden  
Unexpected  
Final.  
Others lay in white beds, glad to be,  
Holding gratefully onto their precious lives.

The drivers didn't know they'd be  
Facing God that fateful morning.  
If only her dog hadn't needed to go out.  
If only another had listened and lingered for one more moment.  
If only he had given in and gone back to sleep.  
May they rest in peace.  
And all you can think about is being late.





Jill A. McEldowney  
Jackson Community College  
Michigan



## Feral Cat

Between oaks and walnuts  
Fast as a shadow  
Give me your curiosity  
And quick paws





Tess Nakaishi  
Clark College  
Washington

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The Idol

I'd seen you a million times before,  
God-like on a vast silver screen.  
I'd marveled at your skill,  
And wished I had such talent.  
So when I heard you were signing autographs  
For a publicity meeting nearby,  
I rushed down breathless and waited in line.  
Until there I stood,  
Small before the master.  
You took my paper,  
Barely glancing up.  
My tongue felt frozen, but I had to speak  
So I blurted out:  
"I want to be like you."  
Your soulful eyes found my face,  
And a sad, worn smile appeared.  
"No, you don't."  
So I hastened to tell you:  
"It's not about the fame or the money  
It's the craft, the art, the work.  
Making a movie...it's magical.  
When I'm before the camera, something happens.  
The passion, the escape; I feel alive.  
It's my love, it's my life,  
But I'm so afraid I could never be someone,  
Someone truly great  
Who can inspire with a word,  
And touch with a glance.  
Someone like you."  
I stopped, awkward and unsure,  
As you shook your head  
At my foolish innocence.  
Adding one final flourish to your name,  
You slid the autograph across the table  
And gave me a pitying smile.  
"It's just a job," you said.



Lachuna S. Fedrick  
Darton State College  
Georgia

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## A City called Home

Stretched for miles that gray concrete  
Rattled upon by the jazz coming from passers-by feet  
The leaves that fall stay hungry  
Eager to extend their hospitality to strangers they've never met

Still, her streets wear worry lines in their faces  
Crying when her children weep and no longer wish for her  
Scattered across her palms, fruit from which her hands grew  
Laborers strong and cold pull up her roots anxious to cut all ties

Yet elsewhere in the bosom of someone else's city they seek comfort,  
Searching for the light in her eyes  
And she, knowing they won't find it there, beckons them back,  
Waiting, with open arms, as her children walk back into a city called home



Mirline Petit-Frere  
Palm Beach State College  
Florida

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## My Spirit Speaks Through Dance

As I jump  
Across the stage  
A twirl here,  
A twirl there,  
A pounce, a spring,  
A leap into the air,  
My spirit speaks  
Of joy

As I slowly melt  
Into the stage  
Collapsing  
Splat!  
Like a corpse;  
Rolling slowly  
Into a ball,  
My spirit speaks  
Of sorrow

As I reach  
Across the stage  
Pulling towards me  
A body,  
The air,  
The sky above me,  
My spirit speaks  
Of hope

As you watch me entertain you  
With the twists and moves  
That seem to awe you  
It is my spirit  
That you really see  
Calling out  
To you

Using my body as its voice  
And my dance as its words



Stacie Brown  
Blinn College  
Texas

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## Literacy Lessons Learned

The chorus of Tracy Lawrence's "Lessons Learned" sums up my experience in literacy: "Lessons learned and they sure run deep \ They don't go away and they don't come cheap..." In my early childhood, I learned to read and write, but those teachings were expanded upon and kept coming as I grew older. My lessons in literacy were not always formal or even straightforward, but they taught me about myself and my relationships with others, and they shaped who I am today.

My earliest memories of reading go back to my early years, before kindergarten. My single mother worked three jobs in order to support my sister and me, and we lived at my grandparents' farm and ranch until we were five. While my mother worked, my grandmother watched us, and she wondrously instilled in us a love of reading. I first felt my imagination come alive through barnyard sounds. Though I do not remember the name, I can recall my grandmother's enthusiasm as she peep-peep-peeped her way through the book. Perhaps she delighted in how attentive I was during naptime. Other times of the day, my innate curiosity frequently got me into trouble. The closer I got to kindergarten, the more reading became a way into another world where trouble or boredom could not touch me.

As time moved on, "peep, peep, peep" gave way to a classic. *An Apple Ran* was the book I chose to color and staple together in my kindergarten class, and that story was the first one I ever truly read. My teacher advised my classmates and me to read to the other classrooms from the books we each had assembled. The idea that others could enjoy what I created was remarkable. Pride in my work lent itself to eagerness, and once I had learned to read, I could not get enough. After kindergarten, I read everything that crossed my path, from Dr. Seuss books to Dr. Pepper labels to the dictionary.

By the time sixth grade rolled around, I knew I loved to read and I knew I was curious, but I had not known the desire to learn everything. The Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program sparked my inquisitiveness and pushed me ahead of the pack. I was no longer content until I found the answer I was searching for, and I was immensely pleased when it was right. When it was wrong, I wanted to know why. So when — to my dismay — my sixth-grade teacher told me I "write like a boy," I pondered the reason behind my wasted ink. I had never noticed that my handwriting was atrocious, filled with scribbles, strike-throughs, and write-overs. My analytical mind did not let me settle for "It was just an observation." Several years passed before I realized that I simply felt compelled to edit my work, to perfect it.

Yet, terrible handwriting did not get in the way of solving math problems. In math class, our teacher taught us that there was no right or wrong way to get the solution, only different approaches to the same problem. Was it possible that teachers and parents did not have all the answers, that some answers were not cut and dry, and that it was possible to see things in more than one way? Although my class of 18 was not diverse, I understood immediately that people of other cultures who possessed different values and beliefs were not wrong purely because they did not think like me. They were just different from me, and that was ok. Like Richard Rodriguez sensing the cultural differences between his home life and his school life (18), I sensed differences in my peers and instinctively knew there were as many approaches to solving a problem as there were people to solve it.

The following year, my seventh-grade teacher declared that my classmates and I were to keep a journal. Keeping this journal was a way to learn about myself and about my relationships with others. Middle school could be a precarious place, but my precocity and the writing process let me find my footing rather quickly, and I learned how to express myself more clearly. I keep a journal to this day.

High school brought a whirlwind of new experiences, and, naturally, it was a time when my parents were a major source of grief. My dad habitually called me fickle. At the time, however, I thought Dad just meant I changed boyfriends like I changed my underwear. Actually, he was trying to tell me I should stick with something long enough to see it through to the end — the same goes for writing. When Dad was not calling me fickle, he was calling me "stoopid." He meant that there was always more to learn, and I was supremely ignorant of that fact.

My mom was easier to understand; she always said the first thing that came to her mind, uncouth or not. I get that from her, so she should not have been surprised when I told my dad I did not want to come home smelling like her. My mom was a cashier at a convenience store, and besides cashiering and managing the store, she made burgers. The smell of the grill on her grease-soaked clothes made me want more opportunities than she had. Education was the key to bettering my socioeconomic status, and my mom's "way of life [was] not only different but starkly opposed to that of the classroom" (Rodriguez 18). I could not afford to admire my mother any longer, yet that smell "often remind[s] [me] of the person [I] once was and the life [I] earlier shared with [her]" (Rodriguez 19). Sometimes I still yearn for that greasy grill smell.

My years after high school brought more tribulations. I enrolled in college for the first time, but I also worked full-time, so my enrollment was met with challenges. My fickleness kicked in. Consequently, I withdrew from two classes and failed the other two. One of the latter classes was English 1301, and part of that failure had to do with " '[c]ultured' phrases [coming] out sounding stilted and hollow in my mouth" (Graff 24). However difficult it was, my choice to quit school in favor of work was necessary at the time. But then, I quit work to play. I never settled on any one path; it all seemed trite and, therefore, not worth the effort, including my second college enrollment to be a veterinary technician. Motherhood greeted me a few years later and reaffirmed my lack of knowledge. The things I thought I knew were completely changed, and the things I did not know were made perfectly clear. I did not want my son to regard me as I had viewed my mom, so I answered my beckoning conscience, started writing my manuscript, and enrolled in college once again.

My third time in college has been outstanding. Opportunities have opened up for me, beginning with the Emerging Writer's Contest. With a bit of luck, I saw the flyer for the contest and entered it. Upon getting second place in the fiction category, I realized that a "first place" manuscript required a deeper understanding of writing, so I started researching. I knew that effort corresponded to success when I made the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and the President's Scholar standing. I became aware that the "primary reason for my success in the classroom was that...schooling was changing me and separating me from the life I enjoyed before" (Rodriguez 17).

Listening to my calling to be a writer and finally following my dreams brought back the excitement I once had about school and education, and I felt "a sense of personal engagement that I had not felt before" (Graff 25). As I continue to strive for excellence, I revisit my lessons in literacy and cherish the time I spent learning them, for they have made me the reader and writer I am today.

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Erika Padilla-Morales  
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California

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**Don't Act Like Those  
Black People  
(Aunque Somos Negros)**

"Don't act like those black people." This harsh statement fell from the lips of my tia-abuela (my mother's aunt) and from my mother. These words bored into my 7-year-old consciousness and were my introduction to the concept of "race." My mother and tia-abuela held up the urban poor (particularly black people) as examples of what could happen to us if we did not work hard in life. "Don't act like those black people" confused me as I grew up in the suburbs, a brown child of an IBM executive who pioneered navigating the corporate world without roadmaps or mentors. The American notion of race was a foreign concept in my household. I was not raised with the histories of American slavery and its legacy upon me. I was raised Boricua (Puerto Rican).

The Puerto Rican concept of race is fluid. From a young age, I understood that there were more than two "races" of people. As Puerto Ricans we experience this within our own families. For example, my sister Leticia and I were both born "white" (fair-skinned). Although we both eventually "browened out," she still has lighter skin than me. My mother always exclaimed that I had "pelo malo" (bad or hard hair), whereas my sister had "pelo bueno" (good hair) whenever she put relaxer in it. My sister and I have different hair textures. At home our ethnicity was highlighted when discussing identity. Our language and cultural practices distinguished us from other Latinos and certainly from other Black people my mother called "negro Americanos" (African Americans). Puerto Rican culture, as I experienced it, praised the cultural contributions of its African ancestors, but bristled against specifically identifying as "Black." "We're not Black. We're Hispanic," my mother would say.

### **Criolla Boricua**

Aurora Levins Morales expresses the complexity of the Puerto Rican understanding of race in her poem "Ancestral Roots": "I am not African. Africa waters the roots of my tree, but I cannot return. I am not Taíno. I am a late leaf of that ancient tree, and my roots reach into the soil of two Americas. Taíno is in me, but there is no way back. I am not European, though I have dreamt of those cities..." As described on [www.topuertorico.org](http://www.topuertorico.org), Puerto Ricans are a blended people with ancestry hailing from the indigenous Taínos, the white European explorers and merchants, and the slaves "imported from Africa (Sudan, Kongo, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leona, and the Gold, Ivory and Grain coasts)" who replaced the Indians as workers on sugar plantations. My parents, like many immigrants or children of immigrants, desired to achieve the American dream and buried any remnants of slavery under the banner of pride for racially unified Puerto Rican culture (even though slavery was not abolished in Puerto Rico until 1873, eight years after it was abolished in the United States).

My parents were part of the immigration boom from the early 1950s that inspired the musical "West Side Story" (which I noticed did not feature any Puerto Ricans that looked like us or had any phenotypically identifiable African ancestry). My mother was raised in a modest house in the southwest of the island, in rural sugar plantation country, by her tia (her paternal aunt) with her cousins. Her father died when she was 10 years old. My father was the ninth of 10 children raised in a tenement in the Barrio (Spanish Harlem) of New York City. His father was in the American Navy and a survivor of the attack on Pearl Harbor who developed alcoholism. As a result, my father was raised in a single parent household by his mother and older siblings.

Both of my parents experienced discrimination within the New York City High School system. My mother was placed in a class for developmentally delayed students because English was not her first language when she enrolled. My father was told that the Air Force was an ambitious goal for a Puerto Rican and that he should keep the courier job he worked his senior year in high school by his guidance counselor. These incidents of institutional discrimination planted seeds for my parents to defy these low expectations. My father joined the Air Force and then worked for a bank before joining IBM. My mother worked in an office and took care of the home while my father pursued his master's degree. Soon after I was born, we moved to the suburbs. When

it was time to put their three children in school, we were sent to Catholic schools. We were not raised with the concept of education or good manners as being something "white." Achieving the American Dream often translates to a certain amount of assimilation into the dominant culture. My father's master's degree is imprinted with "Felix John Padilla" instead of his given name, "Felix Juan Padilla," because he was convinced it sounded more American.

## Nuestra Cultura

The compromise to assimilate and make social and academic achievements did not corrupt my family's cultural/folkloric concept of being Puerto Rican. We pronounce our surname with the Spanish pronunciation /pah DEE ya/ instead of the more Italian-sounding /PUH dih lah/. Our house was always filled with the smells of arroz con gandules or arroz con pollo and the sounds of El Gran Combo or Tito Puente or improvisations that would joyously erupt at family gatherings. Our parties always had live jams with panderetas (hand drums), congas, timbales, cow bells, clapping, singing, and lots of dancing to bombas, plenas, salsa, as well as doowop and Motown songs. My mother never denies that "Africans were part of the formation of the 'Puerto Rican' culture and identity from the very beginning" since they helped "shape our music, art, language and heritage," as can be seen at [www.elboricua.com](http://www.elboricua.com). Because of these memories and family traditions, it seemed odd whenever my mother would disparage black people and, yet, deny being racist.

## Conclusion

William Ramirez, ACLU Executive Director of the Puerto Rican chapter, said, "Whoever does not want to see that there is racism in Puerto Rico will never see it." My sensitivity to the idea of race began at seven when my mother and tia-abuela used uneducated, urban Black Americans as examples of who not to emulate. Urban poor African Americans were "cafres" or "titeres" — labels for people who were considered "bajo" (low-lives). My understanding of race became even more complex as I encountered the American sense of race, when cousins and classmates would tell me I "sounded white" or crudely ask me, "What are you?" when I pronounced my name.

I am a product of my parents' rural-urban-suburban, poor-to-middle-class transplantation. I am the product of my parents' aspiration for their children to achieve more than they have. Why? Because of their drive to be American middle class, while maintaining proud cultural ties to Puerto Rican-ness (versus any close identification with any of its specific racial branches), my family (and lots of families) still have room for growth in its understanding of race. I am now able to call them on any remarks I find racist. I consider myself unformed and evolving in the concept of race. I am a tri-racial latina: Black, White, and Native American. I identify as *borícua*, latina, or blatina. Living in the Bay Area is a powerful classroom where I have learned to think about, discuss, and even form humor around identity. It has reinforced the absurdity of the dominant American categories of black-white-other while affirming the blended cultural/racial identity I embody and understand.

And I don't act like *those* people — those who would categorize someone's character solely because of their race.



Monica Samson  
Prince George's Community College  
Maryland

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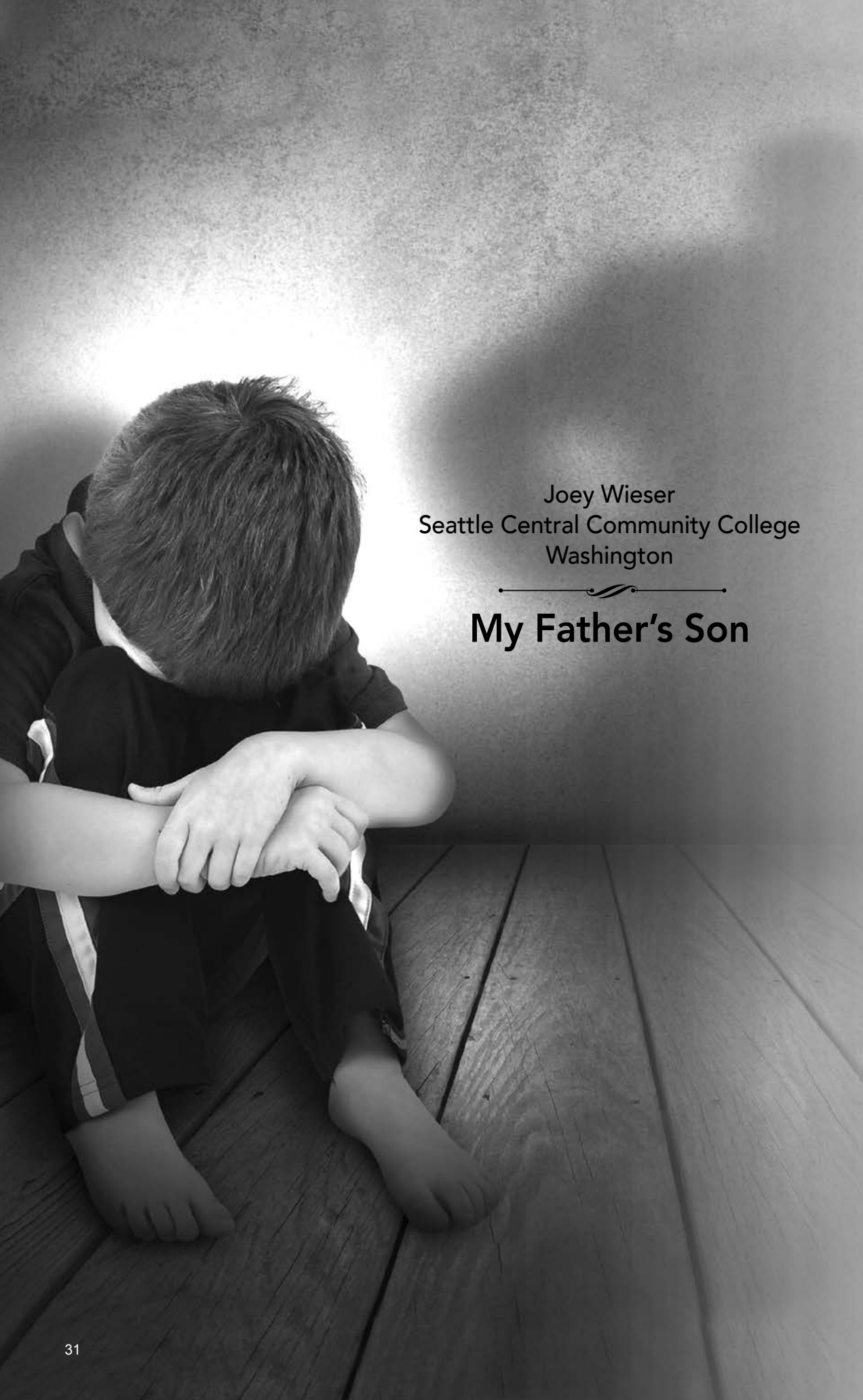
## Cage

Confined in this tiny space  
Can't move. Can't breathe.  
Life goes by in a slow daze.

Freedom is merely a dream to me.  
Everything else I've known  
Is just a foolish fantasy.

A summer's dream  
Is what it all seems.  
Can never move. Can never breathe.

Just as I was about to spread my wings,  
I am clipped. And snipped.  
To nothing but little feathery things.



Joey Wieser  
Seattle Central Community College  
Washington

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**My Father's Son**

I am my father's son.

My father was a victim of severe child abuse, and my mother was sheltered from the pain of the world. Two "I do's" and three kids later, their vastly different worlds collided, and my two younger brothers and I were brought up in a mixture of it all.

I am my father's son.

My father was stern, seemingly emotionless, and intimidating, while my mother, loving, embracing, and nurturing. My father was the usurping king of his castle, and he was equipped with an army of "don't even think about it's", "don't make me get to three's", and "don't make me say it again or else's" to uphold his autocratic authority. Not to mention he was 6'3, 230 pounds, and had a mean backhand.

I am my father's son.

My father worked nights, while my mom worked during the day. Weekends were scary territory, and the three of us were left to fend for ourselves. My father would make his official decree, and if his demands were not met, his reign of terror would commence. Luckily, our mother was just a phone call and a speedy, 30-minute drive away. You can only pull the "I have to go, my child is sick" card so many times in a month. Good thing there are three of us to choose from, and thank God she's in the union.

I am my father's son.

A family divided, the king has left the building, and his eldest son of 14 is sworn in to take his place. Outside the walls of my home I was a saint; within, I was a monster. *Veni, vidi, vici*, "I came, I saw, I conquered." Children learn by example; with a tampered heart, I quickly became the very evil I had detested for so long. I inflicted rage — my father's rage — onto my younger brothers, causing emotional wounds that would come to drive a wedge between us for many years.

I am my father's son.

It would take over seven years to start repairing the bonds that three generations of rage played a role in tearing apart. My father is after all, his father's son, and my father's father, his. With a newly renounced title, I have made efforts to make amends to my family for the damage I have caused. Things are peaceful now, and a future family of my own seems like a possibility. Still, the thought of having children frightens me. What if it ever comes back? What if I pass it on to my own child?

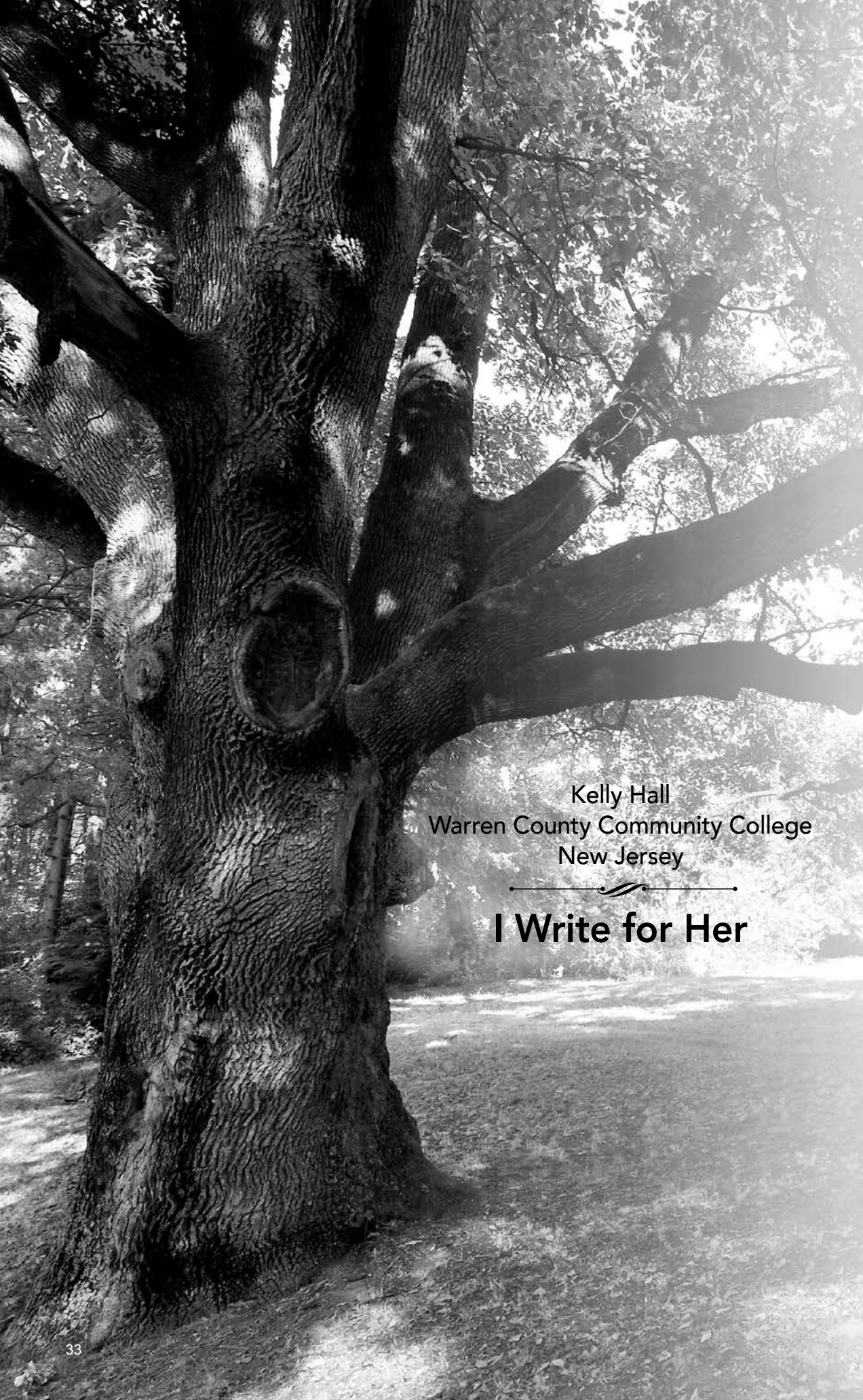
I am my father's son.

I called him. Seven years went by with no contact and I called him — around midnight. "It's me, Joey." A tense tightness swelled my entire body, partially paralyzing me. That split-second pause before his reply lasted an eternity. I had so many questions. The birds began chirping. It was 6 a.m. The conversation was an emotional whirlwind swallowing regrets, acceptance, smiles, tears — I am changed for the better because of it.

I am my father's son.

A wise man once said, "To become different from what we are, we must have some awareness of what we are." I will always remember the pain I felt from my father growing up, and I will never allow myself to put that pain on anyone else again. I know that I have the power to choose, to respond...to change. For my final ruling, I declare that the trend of patriarchal abuse in my blood must stop right here and now — with me — my father's son.





Kelly Hall  
Warren County Community College  
New Jersey

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**I Write for Her**

I has to get me and my boy through that fence. They says they can get us to the underground. Says someth'n about be'n free. I can see the field through that miss'n board in the fence. My breathe'n so loud I fear they can hear it from far up at the big house. I'm afraid he's gonna hear the dry grass crunch'n beneath our bare feet. Gots to run faster. We almost there now. If they catch me I'm gonna get a lynch'n, get'n too old to keep a'round, not worth much no mo'. I'll take it if the boy gets to free. It's good cause he's run'n faster than me. He so small he slip right through, run'n so fast that boy. I gots to duck my head, and my otha' parts so big after have'n babies to try an gets'em through. My cloth'n sound so loud scrape'n against the wood seem like it has an echo, gots to hope my rips don't gets a' snatch on that splinter wood.

Right then I feels the pull of my shirt, that Man hands are so big and strong when he pulls my shirt back I'm gonna go with it. Ain't got no choice. Never did. Dragged me by it like I was his baby girl doll she carry. Cept' I was swing'n, cry'n and carry'n on more like the little baby girl then that doll a'hers. I'd give just about anythin to be that little white girl doll right now, no life to takes away from me. Man threw me so hard against that big oak, I thought about half a'my life already fell outs o'me in that loud breath when I hits it.

Kept see'n him go'n round and round with that rope, now I see him, now I don't, now I see him, now I don't. Round and round he goes wher' he stop'n don't nobody knows. My boy always like when I make my words sound like the other. He like rhythm. He run so fast that boy. It's bright daylight now but they didn't see him go. No need to go yell'n abouts'm or to him, he know what to do. This give him more time. He'll get there, that boy run so fast. Hurt every time one goes but I hope I don't neva' see this one again.

Just keep see'n that white shirt go'n round, don't dare look at those eyes, wouldn't want to. Been hear'n the eyes is the window to the soul, don't know what I'd see if a man ain't got no soul. Man got that rope so tight around my body to this big ole tree. Praise the Lord I might pass out. Wake up in Heaven. Some says I'd be free there too. Don't understand that cause they says I see all white and to follow that white light. Don't sound free to me but that's what they says.

I'd seen plenty a hang'n in my time and Man do'n somethin different. He down close to me by the ground now, all I can see is the top a' that big ole ugly brown hat he wear all the time. Although its ugly its cleaner than that dirty white shirt he always wear'n. My shirt is white too and got rips, but I gots no other choice in the matter of clothe'n. Man does, but he wear that dirty shirt and ugly hat everyday. Only Lord know why he wear it when he gots choices. What that Man do'n?

Now he gots himself a good hold a' my foot with them big hands a' his. Sometimes my boy touch my feet makes me want to laugh, not that we have much time for touch'n but sometimes. Don't feel like laugh'n much now. I'm still hope'n I pass out.

My Scream'n that poor boy must a' heard even though he run so fast and far. I had heard a' that kind a pain that'd blind someone. Thought I knew pain. Even though the Man down there, I feel it all ova' an up inside o'me. I know I'm tied tight to this here tree but my body can't help but go wile try'n to get loose.

That Man, his hands so big and strong, he rub'n glasspaper on across my foot, don't think he gonna stop till he sees white. All I see is red. All ova' both a' our dirty white shirts, the dry yellow grass is turn'n and it's get'n all ova' the hang'n rope. Man knows I'll never run again, I just hold'n on that I walk again. Don't know if I'll even have a foot when that Man get done. I can't take my own screams, but don't bother him none.

He finally ok with his work, and put my foot down. Easier try'n not to put my weight on it be'n tied to this big ole tree. He still down there though. I felt those calloused hands against my otha' foot, then he went to work again and I started buck'n like the animal he always told me I was. Just like it. And the screams came again when I thought I couldn't no mo'. Scream'n and Scream'n, and Scream'n...



"Are you ok, what the hell are you doing?"

I wake up startled, and soaked with sweat screaming. That bright sunlight that started flailing with my head was gone and now I'm back in my dark bedroom. "I had that same dream again, it was so real. But this time..."

"You don't need to keep telling me about your silly dreams. Save it for your girlfriends. I just wish you'd stop hitting and kicking me while we're sleeping. You keep waking me up. Maybe you should go see someone and spend a little time on the couch or something. Too weird."

"It's happening almost every night now. I think the woman is maybe trying to tell me or show me something? My feet are tingling and have pins and needles."

"That's from kicking me so hard."

"Seriously, I'm not kidding feel my heart. It's like I can hear all her thoughts or like I am her and she's talking me through what happened to her, it's horrible."

"I'm not kidding either, you need some time on the couch, and you're not a slave women. Well except maybe to the kids. Now go back to sleep or I'll wake them up. Then you'll really have trouble sleeping."

"Very funny. Clearly I didn't marry you for your sense of humor." Still trying to catch my breath I threw the blankets off of me to go downstairs to the kitchen for a drink of cold water. Those blankets always feel so much heavier after those dreams. On my way back up I brought a mug of milk for each of the kids and left them by their beds. With this reoccurring dream that wakes me it's become routine for them.

I decided to go into the office instead of waking up Victor again. He has to be at the lab early tomorrow, and besides I'm not in the mood to hear about how crazy he thinks I am. Let the mad scientist get his sleep. I head into my home lab and sit down to breathe life to my own creation. All the paper I have ripped away at in this room, trying to reveal the woman through it. So he can see her as real as I see her. I write to her, and for her. It doesn't matter what time, place, or color we come from, we search and fight for the same. Some have to fight harder and against the devil himself. *Only God knows why.*

I sojourn with you at night,  
the possessor of my dreams.  
Good night goodnight  
I hate to hear your screams.

The woman on blood stained yellow,  
against that big ole tree.  
With that Man so busy down below  
I hope your boy got free.



Kathren Rintoul  
Lower Columbia College  
Oregon

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## Winter, 1916

Snow silently drifts  
Ice stealthily builds  
Blackened feet sting  
In a foxhole.

The orders not to tire  
Sleep a different threat  
Whistles streak close by  
Trees crack and splinter

Men rise, half-crouched  
Browning echoes Mauser  
Each covers a brother  
In their foxhole.

Johnston tries to shoot  
Bullets tear through flesh  
Lundendorff won't give up pursuit  
Companions die alone.

A hole pierces my chest  
Bandaged hands fumble  
No gun has fired  
From my foxhole.

The wound runs red  
My face relaxes  
Bone and blood rain  
Mingling in the white.

War goes on  
Death is marching  
Night is falling  
On the foxhole.

Stacey Bouffard  
Pima Community College  
Arizona



# Descent



I remember  
    descent  
from the embracing  
grace of the mountains,  
down into the wide valley  
and the empty, insatiable hunger.

I was carefully removing the thorns.  
I was fighting the stinging vision.  
while obviously relentless, even the wordless  
burdened air was heavy, and charged with its own truth.

into the space between silence  
the sky itself spoke aloud  
quick exclamation  
followed by overarching brightness.  
then there was nowhere  
for the sure knowledge  
of the coming storm  
to evade us, and nowhere to hide.

it was then  
there was  
a turning of your eyes  
to mine,  
a sudden flash of illumination  
and  
the lightning found  
the everpresent air  
to be its conduit

electric

like our own love,  
    briefly bright  
    and  
        jaggedly  
            descending  
            to earth.

Carolyn Lucas  
Pearl River Community College-Forrest County  
Mississippi

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**The Pilgrim**



**COLUMBINE MEMORIAL**

The air falls hot and dry around me. I really should have left hours ago, but my insatiable need for sleep took first priority. I am not familiar with the concept of public transit, and the payment machine boggles my mind. Why does it need my driver's license number anyway? I allow it. This seems like a small price to pay. As I stand before the Denver University Light Rail station, I realize just how lost I feel. Fortunately, a Vietnam veteran takes the time to direct me to the correct train. As a small town girl from Mississippi, I seem to exude confusion, and I thank him for the help.

I finally find my train and sit alone. I try to look casual, to not betray the fact that I've never actually taken public transit before. I try to blend in and pretend I live in Denver. A woman looks over me, smiles, and then returns to her book. I suddenly realize that I am still wearing the bright red name tag from my honors convention. Damn. I shove the scarlet letter into my bag.

I have studied this place for so long that I almost feel a kinship with its people. I even feel a pang of guilt as a tourist who has come to take pictures of their greatest tragedy. I have memorized the directions by heart; take the Light Rail south, then Bus 59 toward Grant Ranch, and then walk 1.18 miles to Columbine High School.

Twelve minutes later, I step onto the pavement at Littleton station. I immediately notice the calm pace of this small town. Small, but still a metropolis compared to my rural southern hamlet. The sun reigns down oppressive against the lack of atmosphere. I am only used to the muggy Mississippi weather; I still must acclimate to the thin oxygen around me. Every so often, a friendly breeze breaks the heat. As I sit on the hot, metal bench, I wonder why I insisted on taking this sojourn to the middle of nowhere. I wonder if my morbid fascination with the massacre has finally reached the point of the ridiculous. I wonder if I'll ever feel a full breath of air in my lungs. The cigarette doesn't help.

The people of Littleton show great kindness and courtesy to me in my naivete of the bus system. A young man strikes up a conversation. We discuss our dogs, our upbringing, and our love of the outdoors. He asks what brings me to Littleton. I feel somewhat ashamed of my purpose here. What should I say? "Oh, I am a writer. I came here to pry into your town's business so I could get inspiration for a story." I lie. "Oh, I am here to see Clemet Park. I hear it is beautiful this time of year." Clemet Park, directly behind the school itself, holds the memorial. The park also served as a rendezvous point for distraught parents and children to find one another, and for some parents to find out that their children would never be coming home again.

As I step off of the bus, I notice a stark difference in the way in which Eric Hanis and Dylan Klebold described their town; Littleton does not seem to be a Podunk amalgamation of ignorant hill-people stereotypes. The town's thriving business district, complete with chain restaurants and intersections, reminds me of my own hometown. I resign myself to the fact that the bus does not run where I need to go and I must walk. I take stock of the warm, pleasant summer day; much like the day the children died. I walk slowly, drinking in the surroundings, though my adrenaline threatens to drive me mad. Only three more blocks until I reach my destination. I admire the beauty of this mountainous city. Even with the obligatory Chili's and strip mall, it appears far more majestic than I expected. Without warning, I reach Clemet Park. No turning back now.

As I step onto the grounds, a familiar sight greets me. Children run and play freely as their parents take shelter under one of the many trees. I notice the unspeakable beauty of the land. The formerly oppressive sun shines off of the lake like sparks against a mirror; and in every direction, the mountains stretch impossibly further than the clouds themselves. Small, rural hamlets populate the valleys, and I stand in awe of the simple, green countryside. I read the map well, but I cannot help but travel the scenic route. I make my way to a covered picnic table to rest. I realize for the first time that I neglected to eat breakfast before beginning this trek. I

hope this won't slow me down. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I notice a fighter kite whirring around at the foot of a large hill. Rebel Hill. I wait patiently as the man tires from flying his scary yellow kite. I really hate kites.

Once the fighter kite man leaves, I make my way to the foot of the hill. As I enter the sanctuary, a calm silence meets me. The screaming children and whirring kites seem to fall away. I step softly onto the ground, afraid to disturb those immortalized in the Rocky Mountain boulders. The stones feel hot under my fingers and I slowly trace the names of the victims who I have studied so well. Under each name, a single dried red rose rests on a brick, honoring their memory. A few have fallen to the ground and I take extra care to replace each one I find. I didn't expect the feverish religiosity of the memorial, but that may have been folly on my part. The plaque at the entrance of the memorial only refers to massacre as "a senseless act of violence." I notice no mention of Eric and Dylan. Not even once. I cannot blame anyone for this omission. To acknowledge them here would be a travesty to the victims. While I wanted to visit the killer's graves, I read that they were cremated in a secret ceremony to prevent people like me from finding them.

I suddenly realize that I do not feel the way I expected to feel.

I remember the day of the massacre. Two-thousand miles away and 10 years old, I didn't understand death. I didn't understand loss. I heard the horror stories from other children in the halls. I began to have nightmares about hiding under the tables in our own library, awaiting a bullet to the head. Dark figures invaded my room while I tried to sleep. As the years went by, crippling fear turned to insatiable curiosity. I wanted to understand how such a thing could happen. The tragedy inspired me to study sociology. Sociology inspired me to write about what I studied. I found my passion and love for writing and I longed to delve as deep into the darkest reaches of human nature as I could travel. As I tried to understand the unspeakable carnage of that day, insatiable curiosity turned to seething anger when I realized that no answers exist. I resolved to step upon these grounds myself. I wanted to see this place with my own eyes.

I anticipated tears. I anticipated an overwhelming sense of grief and righteous indignation over this horrific tragedy. I feel nothing. Not sad, but calm. I realize that I did feel that sense of sorrow and anger during my research. Now, those feelings have left me, emptied onto the stones around me like a cathartic heavy weight from my heart. And yet, I still can't cry. I had expected resentment, but I felt nothing. I hoped to find answers, but no one ever will. I hoped to find inspiration for my writing, but I am not sure that I have. For what it is worth, I wouldn't trade this calm for anything in the world.

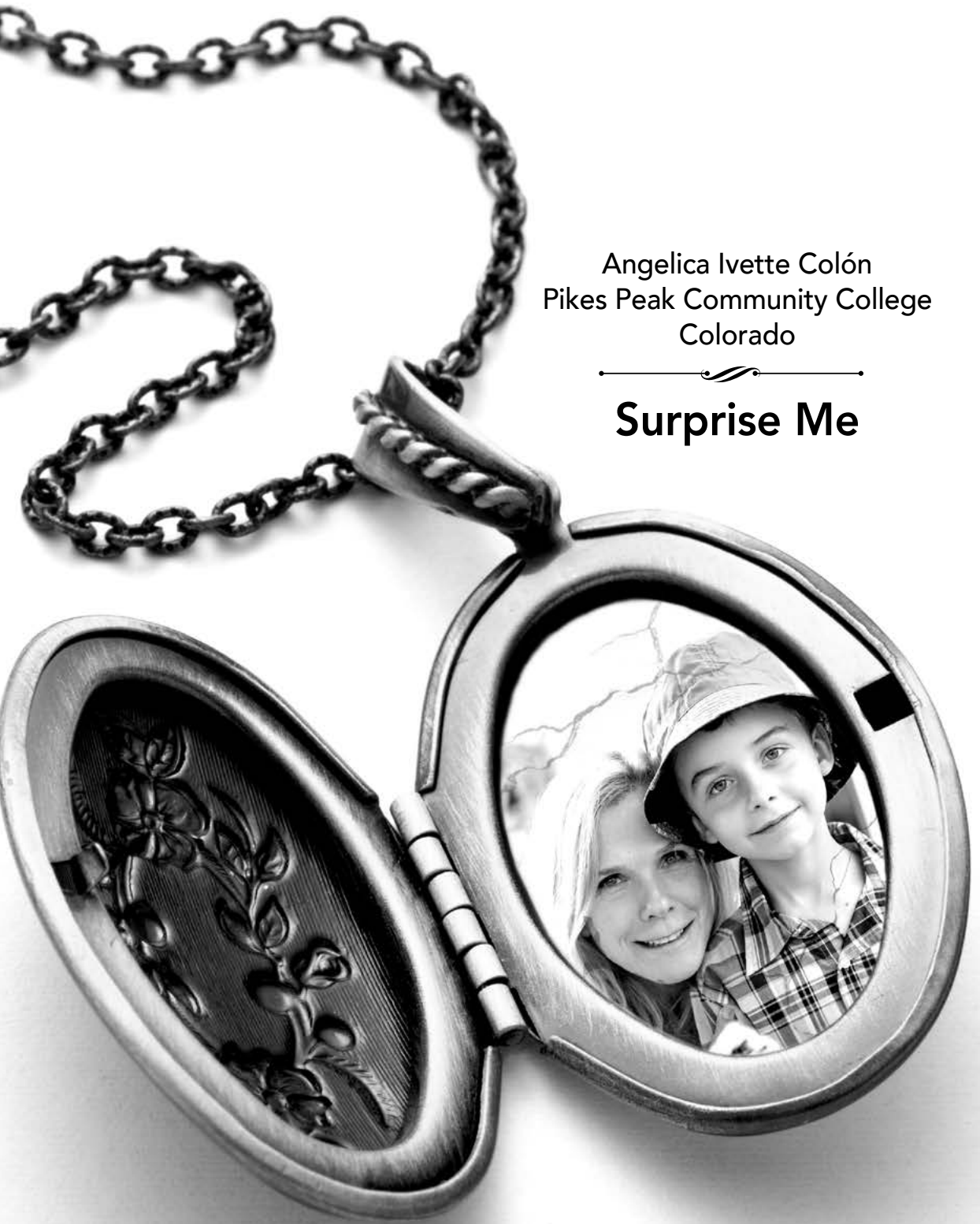
I walk to the top of Rebel Hill, and I survey the area. Tranquil, blue mountains punctuate the landscape. From my new vantage point, I can once again see the children playing. I feel grateful that they cannot yet understand the significance of this monument. They do not understand the violence and danger the world holds. In the distance, I see Columbine High School itself. The sounds of little league baseball faintly litter the air. On that horrifying day in April, Eric Hanis and Dylan Klebold sought to destroy this place, to destroy this community. I know now that they failed. Communities rebuild. Wounds heal. These two child killers may have destroyed this town's sense of safety, but today, it is a thriving, burgeoning metropolis. They failed. No one can ever truly explain violent acts such as these. Maybe answers are irrelevant. Evil will always exist; however, if this tiny hamlet can piece itself together after such a vicious bloodbath, I think it's time for me to let go of my own preconceptions. And maybe it took one wild, misguided pilgrimage to a remote location to truly understand that.

To this day, I cannot fully articulate what I expected to find. But I know that I found peace. I know that my journey ended that day. I don't know why I needed to be here in this hallowed ground. I only know that I found peace.

Three weeks later, after returning to my muggy Mississippi home, I flipped through the channels of my television. Something caught my eye; a deranged, armed man made his way into a crowded movie theatre and opened fire on the innocent patrons in Aurora, CO, less than an hour from Columbine. The breath left my body. My eyes felt misty, but no tears would fall. I listened to the traumatized victims and the scattered reports about the madman responsible. White noise. Chaos reigned that day with no reprieve in sight. I turned the television off. I needed the silence and the darkness.

Maybe I was wrong.





Angelica Ivette Colón  
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**Surprise Me**

"Surprise me."

"I thought you hated surprises," Abel grumbled.

"I typically do, but the occasion calls for it! Wouldn't you agree my love?"

"Yeah...I guess a going away present to keep me in mind would be nice. Helen, just do me a favor and please, please stop talking like that."

"Like what, dear?"

"Like you're some fucking character out of a Jane Austen book."

"But it is such a beautiful language! I firmly believe we should still communicate as eloquently."

"Helen, think, we live in the middle of the ghetto, we don't have a goddamn penny to our names, and we invent dishes with spam. Do you think that Bennet girl ate spam for dinner?"

"Well, how can one say Abel? She was humble. I believe Elizabeth would most likely display gratitude for any meal she was privileged enough to receive."

"It's not real."

"What's that you say?"

"It's a book. I was trying to make a point."

"Well, whether it's a fictional character or not, I greatly admire her."

"It's not really a surprise if you know it's coming though."

"But it is dear Abel! I know that's it coming but I don't know what the gift entails! And how much you do exaggerate Abel! Why, I believe we are quite comfortable in our living accommodations. Not everyone could be so fortunate."

"Bullshit," Abel inaudibly muttered as he dismissed the conversation.

Helen walked past him as though the world was perfect despite any sort of devastating experience she had endured. She had become oblivious to emotional pain and financial turmoil. Abel had solemnly watched her for years spiraling into the depths of an ethereal state, claiming she had dabbled in only the finest foods, wines and luxuries.

She was, however, of no affluence from family affairs, or of any prospective status herself being unemployed now for three years, and certainly not with a husband who worked barely 20 hours a week at his new place of employment, the local "Beep and Cheap" gas station. Nor had the two ever tried anything more exquisite than Hamburger Helper and Boones Farm's Sangria; consequently, those delicacies were only for exceptional circumstances.

Cubic zirconium adorned her wrists, ears, neck and fingers. She sauntered with an elevated poise, her arms outstretched horizontally as if she believed she were flying, each step taking a minimum of three seconds. She did somehow manage to captivate an audience, nevertheless, with her stunning, flower patterned muumuu.

Although only 40, Helen appeared much older due to the excessive surplus of gray hair beginning at her widow's peak, then descending into her dull, shoulder-length auburn hair. She typically could be found barefoot, her toenails mimicking a neon montage of the eighties, topped with a glossy finish. And at the tip of each toenail was a jeweled sticker, purchased from the clearance cart at K-mart; yet, according to Helen, they were "...originally used for ceremonial prayers, found within the ornamentation of *Mesopotamian Votive Figurines*."

Abel's attention became fixated upon her eyes. The pecan brown encircling her pupils no longer contained the zest of gumption they once had. They continued to regard an invisible vision, unwaveringly, but never truly seeing a thing.

"Perhaps Billy will help you find the gift of perfection!"

"Yeah, uh...sure, I guess. *Perhaps*." Abel replied dully.

"But of course, you must Abel! Billy loves to see his mother giddy with excitement, and I do also love to see him happy!"

Abel sighed.

\*\*\*\*

The morning of the "surprise" came much too quickly for Abel. On the other hand, he woke to find that Helen had not forgotten, for the overwhelming scent of Windsong consumed him.

After the initial drowning of perfume, Abel detected the familiar aroma of butter sizzling in a pan.

"Helen," he called out. "What are you cooking?"

"Pancakes...so we can begin the big day with a filling meal in our bellies!"

"Damnit, just when I was actually hoping for spam."

"Billy wants chocolate chips. Do you want some as well, dear?"

"Sure," Abel responded with a tinge of doubt in his voice.

*Church on Easter*, Abel thought as he glimpsed at the outfit Helen had laid out on the bed next to him. The assorted mix of soft pastels reminded him of Billy. Billy with his champagne colored hair, gratification filled eyes, and foxy grin.

At four, Billy tore through the house on Easter morning, in search of the chocolate bunnies Abel and Helen had hidden, dispersed throughout the house. The night before, Abel and Helen had stayed awake past the wee hours of the morning discussing old times, laughing, and taking breaks to make love. And although they had not received much sleep, they watched their delighted son frantically search as they held coffee cups and each other, nestled closely. *They were a family then*, Abel remembered:

"Here mommy?"

"No sweetie, you're getting warm though," Helen replied with undeniable glee.

"Am I hot now?" Billy slowed his pace.

"Boiling!"

Billy quickened his searching tempo.

Abel, laden with thrill, took Billy's hand and assisted in the bunny hunt.

Billy had looked up at him oddly. His eyebrows arched downward, and his nose crinkled with question.

"You help me daddy?"

"Yes baby, we'll find them together."

Billy's cherub fingers wrapped themselves around Abel's hand and tightened.

"We're boiling daddy! Mommy says we're boiling!"

Billy tugged Abel into an adjacent bedroom. In frenzy, he tore the bedcovers off. Abel assisted, chuckling with hearty content.

Helen watched, gripping her coffee cup tighter as she yelled out,

"Yes! Lava hot!"

Billy saw the top of the box poking out from underneath a pillow. A solemn green, muted in vibrancy, congratulated Billy's yearning.

"Bunny! We did it daddy! We did it!" Abel pumped his fists into the air.

"I can open it daddy?"

"Yes baby."

Billy fumbled with the packaging but eventually created a hole in the plastic lining large enough to fit his plump fingers through. He ripped a chunk of the bunny's chocolate ear off and shoved it into his mouth. The ends of his mouth turned upwards with pleasure, as if the chocolate were instantly permeating his veins with sugary delight. He began to giggle, ferociously, falling back unto the bed. Dribbles of brown ran from his mouth, his teeth tinted with confection.

Abel glanced at Helen. Her eyes, squinting, struggled to hold back an outpour of tears. Abel's mind began circling through the memories in which created this moment: *the promise in which eternity was sealed with "I do," Billy making his debut after 16 hours of labor, falling asleep to the breathing of an infant-bliss, his career blossoming with a promotion to senior architect, their first home in which Abel designed and Helen decorated — mahogany flooring,*

*indigo accents, granite countertops, colonial arches, and geometric stained glass windows; the smell of pampers, hand sanitizer, and Desitin in Billy's room — innocence, a hint of vanilla infused with sensual amber engulfed the master bedroom, the 400-thread-count white cotton sheets bearing witness to hours of gasping, moaning, sighing — again and again, together, two bodies saturated with sweat — muffled explosions, again and again, true love experienced in her arms.*

What a remarkable life, Abel thought, *where did it go?* Today, Helen was leaving and the ideals of a family would be vacant for an uncertain period. Abel knew he would excessively miss her while she would be gone, but he had already started to miss her years ago, as she digressed from sanity. The Helen he married, the Helen he fell in love with, the Helen he worshipped — long gone.

As soon as Abel felt himself once again becoming glum, he shook it off and swung his legs over the bed. The past might still be within reach; Helen may still come back to him. And today, as Helen put it, was a big day, and he would approach it with nothing but the utmost confidence.

He sauntered into the kitchen and swallowed a deep breath of astonishment at the sight before him. Helen stood almost entirely unclothed except for a pair of pantyhose much too small for the bulge above her genitals. Every cabinet door was open, including the refrigerator, and every spice, dish, and food item had been placed in soaring piles upon the center island.

She was singing something mimicking that of Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York," while simultaneously kicking her legs into the air as she flipped pancakes. Her bare, doughy breasts flopped upwards in a dawdling rise, but then quickly collapsed upon her abdomen with a punctuated slap.

Abel cleared his throat as he stammered,

"Helen, what the hell... "

"Good morning dear!"

"Helen, you're naked. Jesus Christ, what the hell are you doing?"

"Well of course I am! I haven't had time to dress trying to make the three of us a scrumptious breakfast, and then of course the cabinets were an absolute wreck and I *had* to organize them!"

Abel continued to gawk at her, mouth agape.

"How about just a touch of gratitude Abel?"

Abel could not find it in himself to respond.

"Well then, watch these while I wake up our son."

Abel watched Helen's once shapely bottom manipulate a slow-motion foxtrot, as she stormed off in exasperation. He turned down the noisy crackle of the skillet, placed his ear against the wall, and listened intently.

"Billy dear, breakfast is just about done. Come on sleepy head, it's time to wake up. Today is mommy's last day home, and Daddy has all sorts of activities planned for the two of you."

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After the pancakes had passed the frigid state and had begun to crisp along the edges, Helen returned.

"That boy has such a difficult time waking up." He could tell by the runny black cascading down her cheeks she had been crying.

"Too much spam?" he asked attempting to muster a laugh from Helen. There was, unfortunately, no response.

Helen dressed as Abel ventured out to pick up her present. Although she had been just as giddy as a child approaching an ice cream truck with money in hand, Abel dictated that she would wait until they reached their destination to open the gift.

Despite the fact they had driven for a lengthy interval, they had filled the time with laughing and fluid conversation, absent of Elizabeth Bennet and false perceptions, as they had a lifetime ago. Abel was so overjoyed he became tempted to turn the car around, but thought back to her display of startling exposure earlier that morning and instantaneously propelled the gas pedal into the floor board.

\*\*\*\*

When they finally made it to the location, Helen grew apprehensive and struggled to conceal it through quick-paced chatter.

"It's just such a shame Billy couldn't join us."

"Yes, it is." They sat in silence for a few moments until Abel placed the red, ribbon-tied box in Helen's hand.

"Oh it's lovely, Abel!" She pulled the end of the ribbon delicately, with the sort of hesitation one places on ruining an immaculate wrapping job.

"A locket!" she exclaimed as she let the necklace suspend from her fingertips.

"Open it."

Inside was a picture of Billy and Helen, smiling with steadfast adoration for each other.

"How cute! Why, I forgot all about this picture! We look so happy!"

"You did, Helen."

Helen peered at Abel inquisitively; it was a look which quickly diminished as agony subsequently invaded her face.

"No! Don't you do it...don't you dare Abel! Not now...I just possibly can't right now."

"I know, we've been over it a hundred times and you're sick of talking about it, but we need to Helen!"

Helen curled her fingers into a fist and began pounding her temples.

Abel leaned back in his seat, shut his eyes tightly, and struggled to remember what the doctor had said a week prior:

"There's absolutely nothing I can do at home for her?"

"Abel," Doctor Caster firmly stated while looking over his glasses, "you have struggled with this delusion for years. How you have taken part in this game, while avoiding your own mourning, is beyond me."

"I love her doc."

"I'm aware but we have been over this. Helen has not been able to find it in herself to accept the matter and grieve. She has concocted a severe, internal façade to prolong this stage of healing. She needs..."

"She needs me!"

"No, she needs a place where she can be reminded of the tragedy, on a daily basis, so that she may reach some level of functioning, in reality."

"I know...I know...but whatever you do for her, I can do. I can change. She can change. It doesn't have to come to this."

"The death of Billy completely stripped Helen of the belief that her child will outlive her. Billy's innocence did not protect him, and she cannot see this —"

"Of course not...it should have never happened."

"Where are you going to take care of her? She tried to kill herself the same night Billy died, Abel. You quit your job to stay on suicide watch. You lost your home. How much more do you have to give up?"

"I don't know...I don't have anything else doc."

"Abel, remember. What's the first thing she said to you when she woke up in the hospital?"

"She asked me if Billy was okay."

"And what did you say?"

"I told her 'he's fine, waiting at home,' but I couldn't be honest. She had just attempted suicide for Christ's sake. She was too fragile, but I didn't know...I didn't know she would turn it into this."

"Be honest for her now."

"I just wish I could help her."

"You are helping Abel. This emotion has been much too difficult to bear, so she would rather live in that fairy tale life than try to interpret the hole that has burrowed itself into your lives. She will come back to you."

The sound of Helen moaning startled Abel.

To accompany her fury she had begun to rock incessantly. Abel hastily wrapped his arms around her and clutched into her desperately. He did not want to lose her again but it was time for her to awaken, to understand why she was leaving him.

"He's dead. He's dead and he has been for three years."

Helen shrieked as though Abel had struck her.

"You're in denial, Helen! And you choose to live this phony life to avoid dealing with it. This is why you're here goddamnit! You're killing me with this game we play, and you're making it harder on yourself to accept it! He is *not* coming back to us!"

Helen's eyes welled up with tears as she crossly glared at Abel.

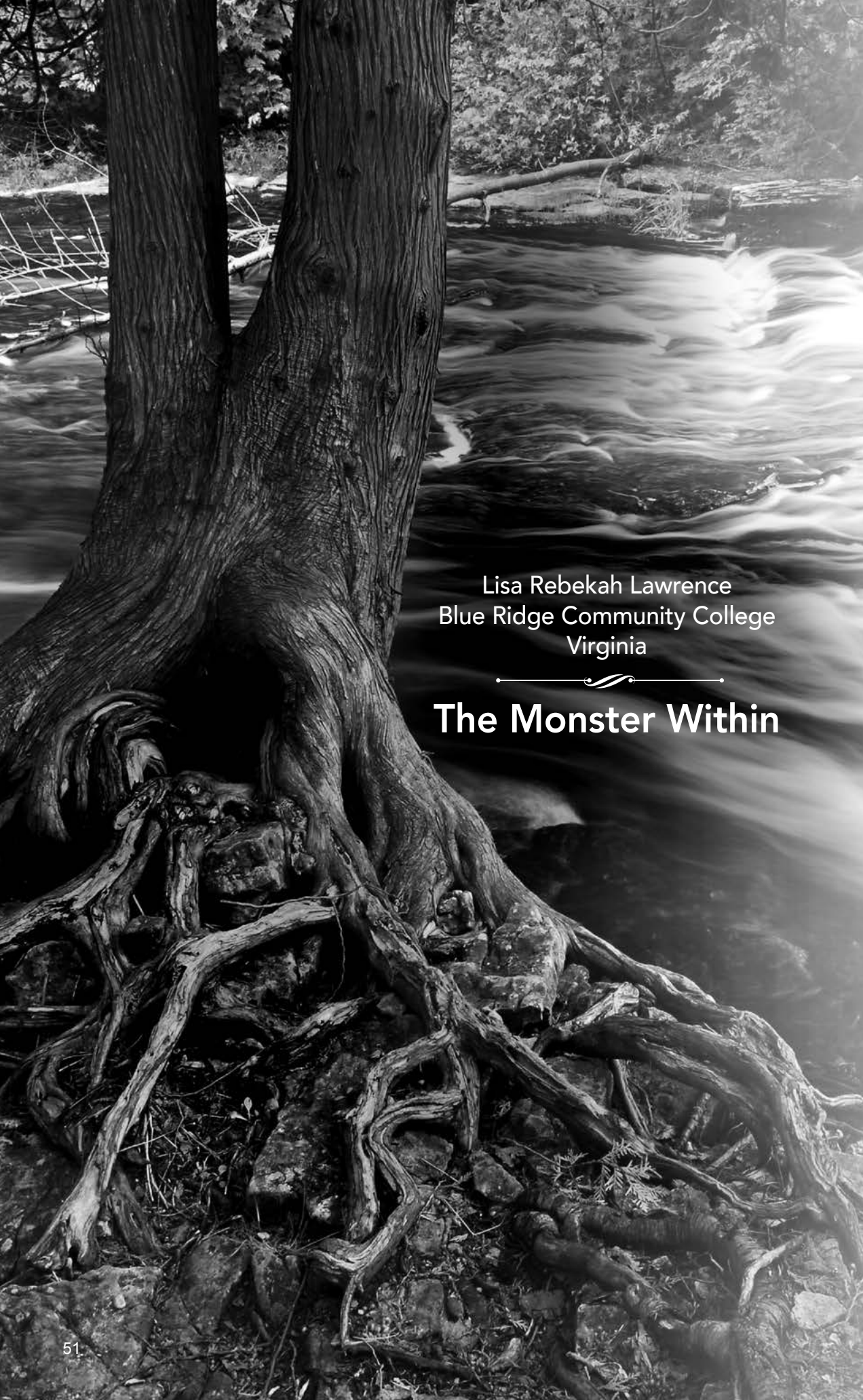
He sat nearly breathless, waiting for some inkling of comprehension from her. She instead avoided his glance and stared out the car window.

"Laurel Oak Psychiatric Facility," she read, "my new home."

Abel allowed his heaving lungs to intake air as he replied,

"Yes Helen, your new home."





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**The Monster Within**

Whispers float on the wind, swirling and twisting in spirals, just out of reach. The grass, dead and dry, seems to shrink even farther into itself. A lone tree, its bare branches stretching out in all directions, is cold and forbidding. It spreads its gnarled fingers and reaches for something to share its misery with. Its thick body lets out an eerie creak as it slowly moves with the breeze. A small figure sits at its roots. Light trickles through her ragged clothes. She lifts her young face and sweeps her eyes over the terrain. She has been traveling on the path for days and has finally stopped here. She glimpses but ignores a clear glassy pool only a few feet away. The water shimmers and sparkles even though the sun hides behind a dark rolling wall of cloud.

A low shuffling sound comes forth in the midst of a soft echo. Barely audible humming accompanies it across the desolate expanse of ground. The tuneless melody reaches the girl's ears and she searches for it. Her eyes drift past the tree, over the water, and on past the rolling slopes along the path. She soon spots a lone figure. Its shoulders hunched, it slowly moves along. After quite some time the being is close enough for the girl to call out to. Joy radiates from her very core, for it has been quite some time since she has interacted with another living creature. The figure can now be recognized as a man. His forlorn tune carries on, almost drowning out her cries of greeting.

He shuffles to where she stands and, without even acknowledging her, he moves right on past. In confusion she reaches for his arm and succeeds in stopping him by her gesture of movement. He slowly turns to her, seeming to just notice her existence. The melody that accompanied him ceases as he searches her face. He then turns as if to leave and in desperation the young lass opens her mouth to speak. Words pour forth, words, words, and more words. She knows not of what she speaks, she only knows of her deep loneliness and of an even deeper need to be listened to, to be acknowledged. The words will not stop, no matter how hard she tries. They tumble and summersault in the air before her. They intertwine themselves around the man, twisting and winding until they cover him and then they reach for her and cover her as well. Then they go on, on to cover the tree, the water, and then across the ground. They run with such fervor she cannot hope to catch them, so crazed and unyielding they are.

So consumed is she that she does not notice the man's hand until it is clasped tightly over her mouth, stopping her onslaught as quickly as it had begun. Upon touching her, however, he jerks away with a cry of pain. As the words melt away she can see stark terror in his eyes. Fear like no other seeps from every part of his being. He holds his hand as if to protect it from further harm and without a sound he turns and flees. She watches his form shrink in the distance. His feet are pounding, pounding to a rhythm that the girl can feel deep within. Upon that rhythm floats a whisper.

*Failed, failed, failed, again you have failed.*

She searches for the speaker but can see no one, so she sits at the base of the tree and waits as before.

Before she can settle down comfortably on the rough roots, she senses movement once again. She raises her weary eyes and sees an old woman moving toward her on the path. Unlike the man, the woman seems to float effortlessly across the terrain. In mere minutes the woman is so close the girl can smell the sweet scent that surrounds the elder. Her face creases and cracks as she smiles sweetly at the lass. With a sense of happiness and belonging, which she has never felt before, the girl reaches for this source of strength and security. Wanting to feel safe and loved she touches her, wanting to embrace this being who is so full of joy.

But before the girl can pull herself closer, the woman looks down to where the girl is clinging to her. The smile that had seemed so inviting turns into a snarl. Lifting her hand the girl sees a black burn where she had previously had her fingers clasped. Darkness from that mark pours forth. Its putrid breath is heavy and it sinks down to lie upon the earth. It surrounds the form of the woman. Her skin turns dark and then darker and darker still. Her eyes burn with hurt and anger while utterances of hatred and disgust tumble from her mouth. The girl shivers under her gaze yet she cannot move or look away. She caused this. She who was only trying to find peace, she who had only wanted love, had hurt the one thing in her grasp that might have given her heart rest. Scalding tears form a stream down her pale cheek as the woman turns to ash before her eyes. The black form shakes and shudders under the pain it is enduring, yet its eyes still are locked upon the young girl. The form that once was, crumbles to the earth and is scattered across the ground.

Flakes of ash rise in the air, dancing with one another. Some twirl slowly with each other, forming an intricate circle that swirls with the breeze. Caressing everything they touch, they leave tiny marks to prove their existence before lifting off and beginning a new performance. Others spin furiously, taunting her with their wild and uncaring freedom. They leap and fly this way or that, never stopping; they dance until they collide with fate and cease their movement.

*Murderer, monster, what have you done? You are a failure, an evil creature, to whom will you turn? You have no one, you are nothing. Who are you, to think that you deserve anything at all? Death, death, death, you deserve nothing more, nothing less. You are a fool if you believe otherwise.*

The words, cold, harsh, and unforgiving take hold of her heart and sink their claws deep into her soul as she watches the dance of death until it too ends. In despair, she stumbles over to the glassy water. She collapses, wondering why she must suffer so. Looking into the still water she takes in her reflection. In horror, she finally sees what she really is. Cold hard eyes stare back at her. A cruel terrifying face snarls with disdain. As she watches the creature before her, she notices droplets running down its cheek. She realizes that she is crying, and she allows the tears to run free. They sooth her and she looks down to take in her reflection once more. Now she notices a change. The tears are slowly washing away some of the darkness. Elated she watches their descent; however, they are not enough. She can still see a vivid picture of the monster within.

A thought emerges and she reaches into the pool. The water is cool and wraps itself around her fingers. She cups her hands and lifts the water to splash upon her face. But no sooner has she removed the water from the pool than it evaporates. The water is too cool to last against her fiery skin. She realizes that her tears only survived because they are just as fiery as she is. Her tears fall in a torrent, blurring the awful sight before her.

Then a push and she is falling. Falling forward towards the pool, arms outstretched, the impact of surprise courses through her veins. The water comes up hard and fast. Time freezes and she is suspended above the icy depths. Then she is falling again, faster and faster. She hits the water with a crash, and yet, it is now that she fully comprehends that she is not alone. Arms and limbs tangle, fighting to gain their freedom. They intertwine as the forms sink deeper. The girl's lungs cry out for air, but the strong form beside her pulls her down, down, down. She can see the shimmering mass of the tree above her. Its gnarled trunk ripples to the rhythm of the waves. She looks down and there is blackness. Fingers reach out and claw at her face. She tries to cry out but all she receives is a mouthful of the cold water. Again the fingers claw at her, they claw and grasp and twist, pulling at her deformed flesh. But the monster is as much within as without. Her cruel companion will tear her to pieces before it is all gone. Can't this being see that? She is lost and no one can free her.

Red covers her vision; it is the color of life and death all in one. The droplets form into perfect balls of liquid, floating upwards in the darkness. The masses collide and form a wall of warmth around her. It touches her lips and the taste of iron enters her senses. All is dark as she drifts into the abyss. When she is dead, her remains begin to sink within the watery prison, a grave reaching forth, ready to consume her. Yet the being is not ready to abandon his prey. It can see deeper than her mere flesh. It can see that just beyond her skin and bone there is a soul that is trying to be free. It reaches out and takes hold of what is left of that pitiful creature.

With powerful strokes, it soon breaks through the glassy wall that separates the two worlds of water and air. It reaches the shore and stands, the waves made by its efforts caressing its legs. Looking down at its prize, it strides toward the gnarled roots of the tree and places her within the crevices, the roots seeming to cushion her, creating a lumpy deformed bed for the young lass. The being sits beside her and opens its mouth. A song like none other passes over its tongue and out into the world. The tune swells and fills the place with awe. The richness of the melody drowns out the sounds of silence until there is no room for anything but the music.

There is a spark, and the soul, that only the being could see, comes to life. A light shines forth and it struggles to join in with the song. It searches for words, trying to join in with this melody of life, searching for a tune beyond the past and within the depths of the future, trying to find a niche within this thing called the present. This soul winds its way around eternity, wanting to find some way to be a part of this world, looking for an opening where it can finally take its place. In an instant, although how long it took to find this instant is beyond anyone's guess, the lost soul grasps a thread of hope. Intertwining itself to this thread, it consumes enough energy to come to life.

The girl's eyes flutter and open. She sits up and looks around and realizes the being is silent and is watching her intently. No malice is within him. She reaches out and the being takes hold of her outstretched hand. Together they rise and set out once more, accepting each other's company on this road. The journey before the girl is a long one. Looking back she can see a small green bud pushing its way forth within one of the crooked fingers of the tree. Turning back to face the path before her, she just misses the dark form, which silently moves out of sight behind the tree, concealing its menacing appearance.



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## The Decline of Reading Proficiency: A Proposal

Of all the skills that students learn in K-12, competence in reading stands at the head of the list of must-haves; and yet, students don't have it. There are those who point a finger at nurture (or lack thereof); others accuse teachers of letting the students down. Unfortunately, the question is moot if children don't have a basic reading ability *before* they enter school. Educators and parents have scratched their heads for years over the problem, and still the kids are graduating with substandard proficiencies. The time for a solution is overdue. To those who say that no stone has been left unturned in trying to resolve this dilemma, I say, "Not so!" Borrowing from my personal bag of tricks in studying foreign languages, there is one technique that hasn't been tried: bringing children to the bedside of the bedridden and telling them (not asking them!) to read to the person in the bed.

Contrary to popular belief, not all residents in nursing homes are elderly, demented, or incontinent. In 2010, 14 percent of residents were between the ages of 31 and 64 (Shapiro). In fact, the number of younger residents is actually increasing (*ibid*). As well, many of the residents are quite lucid but simply unable to care for themselves. According to the 2012 Genworth Cost of Care Survey (Senior Living Advisors), the average hourly cost for basic home assistance is \$19, which, even with a social security disability allotment, is out of reach for most. Even more expensive are permanent assisted living residences for the ambulatory elderly. With average monthly costs of \$3,477 (Moseo Corporation), many of the residents are housed in rest homes instead. Thus, a significant number of individuals are not there by choice or for reasons of incapacity, but for financial reasons. Many are fully able to participate in the education of our children and would be happy to oblige; they simply haven't been asked.

There are few who would be more patient in listening to a slow reader than a person who never gets visitors and whose only excitement is wondering what color Jell-O they'll be served that day. The bedridden are an untapped source of (badly needed) tutors and teaching assistants. With classroom overcrowding, the teachers are overworked; but the real losers are the students, who receive ever less personal attention in the classroom. Many of the residents of rest homes, nursing homes, or hospitals are people with lifetimes of experience and no one to share them with. From a purely financial perspective, whereas the savings in TA (teaching assistant) salary may be quantified in dollars, the value of meaningful human interaction for a young student is priceless. Reading aloud is not only an accepted technique for remedial education (Morrison and Włodarczyk), but, as this writer can personally attest, learning a foreign language is greatly facilitated by reading aloud in that language to a native speaker; that includes reading to an ill person or someone who is blind. The listeners appreciate the attention and return the favor by assisting with word definitions, pronunciation, and grammar explanations. In the same way, for students needing help in reading or speaking English, the bedridden can easily assist.

For some students, this may be the only opportunity they will have to converse with an adult outside their family or meet a person of a different religious or racial group. As important, it will give students whose classroom environment is chaotic and not conducive to learning a chance to learn in quieter surroundings. Many schools have a "Professions Day" where the students are exposed to people who work in different fields. The exposure is brief, the presentation is scripted, and it allows for minimal interaction with the students. In the protected environment of a health care setting, however, the students are able to observe and have an opportunity to interact with nurses, doctors, assistants, and patients in a protracted and more relaxed setting. There they can be immersed in the real world of working professionals in a way that TV sitcoms and edited news clips can't or won't. By providing this experience to students at an early age, we just might spark their interest in health care as a career choice. The demand for skilled health professionals is presently at an all-time high and increasing; researchers anticipate 5.7 million new jobs in the field by 2020 (Acosta). The advantages to this arrangement, however, are not limited to just these few.

Reading aloud will improve not only the students' reading aptitude, but their speaking ability as well. As an added benefit, the listener's bedridden existence and monotonous daily routine becomes richer and more meaningful. There is a far greater probability of academic success utilizing a bedridden or wheelchair-bound person as a tutor than expecting results from the rotely delivered advice to parents, to "Try to help Johnny with his reading at home." It is highly

unlikely that young (often non-English-speaking) parents, frequently working at two jobs and burdened with other children, will sit down with a child after dinner to help with a school reading assignment. The bedridden or wheelchair-bound individual, on the other hand, with largely unstructured time, can listen to the child read, help with the hard words, read a sentence or two to demonstrate where the emphasis is, and, if necessary, do it again. These tutors do not need to be certified. They just need to care. Caring stimulates motivation.

Parents reluctant to allow their child into a hospital for safety or health reasons may find an equivalent solution within their own family. A caring homebound grandparent or other relative (or a neighbor) might jump at the opportunity to help the child (National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies). Success with the concept of volunteer tutors depends primarily on the motivation of the parent(s). Simply attending class is no longer a guarantee that a child will receive a meaningful education. Those responsible for the welfare of our students, as much the teacher as the parents, must realize that a do-nothing approach to our education conundrum is not acceptable. It is an invitation to the scourge of illiteracy, which will destroy the child's life as surely as drug addiction.

Strongly linked to unemployment and social isolation, illiteracy has also been shown to dramatically lower one's level of health care (Berkman, Dewalt and Pignone). Unable to read, a person cannot understand basic diseases or the need for preventive health measures like medical tests. Among the most significant consequences suffered by the illiterate are higher rates of hospitalization and fewer health screening tests (ibid). Sadly, illiteracy begets illiteracy: the offspring of an illiterate couple is much more likely to be illiterate themselves. This is the message that must be transmitted to young families today but, sadly, is often not.

If it were my children and if, for whatever reason, I couldn't help them myself, I'd consider moving with my family to a home across the street from a rest home so that my kids could all walk there after school and read to the residents; or be read to by the residents. It gives the residents a chance to realize unfulfilled dreams of their own: to participate in ways they may not have done before but may have wanted to with their own children. It's a second chance for them and a rejuvenated first chance for the slow learners. The pieces of the puzzle are all there. In one corner we have more than 16,000 rest homes nationwide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), 5,800 hospitals (American Hospital Association), 300,000 spinal cord injured patients in rehab centers (National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center), and some 8 million homebound seniors (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging Related Statistics). In the other corner, there are over 1.5 million children between ages 5 and 14 in daycare and rising rates of illiteracy. Educators, parents and social service agencies must make a greater effort to fit all these pieces of the education conundrum together. Clearly, there are many stones that have been left unturned. This problem merits consideration at the highest levels of our government and should even be included in the platform of presidential candidates. The children can't do it on their own. They need our help.



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## Soldiers to the Slaughter

He marches off to war, a  
Beautiful new toy soldier but  
Far more fearful, for he is not naïve.  
He knows what he has chosen and the  
Fate that possibly lies in wait  
Like a panther stalking its prey.  
He has seen the commercials many o' times —  
Pure propaganda, censoring the ghastly truth  
From the world he's fighting for, sworn to protect.  
He stands tall and smiles as if nothing is wrong,  
Kissing his wife goodbye, and  
Telling his children he won't be gone long.  
He writes them as often as he can, but  
Soon he cannot write at all,  
Caught inside the never-ending maze of hostilities.  
He assures his family he's alright one final time,  
Urging them not to fear for him.  
But as the leaves fade to red, the mailbox remains empty.



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## Jasenovac

He was run down like swine  
Skeletal, slow, and soon to be dust.

She was taken in the line  
Bruised, bloody, and soon to be dust.

He was told "Arbeit macht frei!"  
Moaning, mindless, and soon to be dust.

She was culled from the tiredly  
Weak, worn, and soon to be dust.

They were herded into the gashouse  
Tired, tainted, and soon to be dust.

Their lives with precision the Ustaše doused  
Hellish, hollow, and dust.



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**Two Windows**

Somewhere in Paris is an apartment  
The furniture is plain but the blankets are thick  
The kitchen is white with vases of flowers everywhere  
Lace curtains are at every window, the view is of the Eiffel tower  
and a dumpster

In the middle of the living room stands a simple easel  
Her brushes have been cleaned  
Oil paint dots the palette, swirls of red and white for pink  
black and white for gray  
The canvas has been splashed and massaged with reds, pinks, grays —  
*it's abstract, you wouldn't get it!*

She wakes up, stretching her body over the linen sheets she saved up for  
She slowly gets out of bed  
walks to the window and smiles  
If eyes are windows, then seeing through hers would show scenes from her hometown  
another life somewhere in the distance

Paris: that is the life she thought for herself.

#

Somewhere in Manhattan  
in a studio with no furniture but a mattress on the floor  
with fitted sheets and a green throw, an old drooled-on pillow  
the kitchen is empty — she just needs cigarettes, coffee, and sugar

A small laptop rests on a pile of boxes  
A mess of scribbled notes, boxes of pens, and a tote bag with five days' worth of clothes  
are spread around, filling the space  
It's not enough — the apartment is bare

She leans against the window  
It's open  
She's half-asleep, lullabied by the hum of the city noise  
It's how she falls asleep now  
If eyes are windows, hers would be open to another kind of life in the distance

Manhattan: that is the life she thought for herself.

#

Instead, Paris never happens  
Manhattan is just for visiting

#

They wore white  
They said, "I do"  
Instead of paint, she's picking houses where she can hang her plates  
Instead of pens, she's typing budget reports

They greet each other as cousins  
And create life, not art

#

A sunny space in Paris  
An empty studio in Manhattan  
No...  
This is the life they chose instead  
and now they burn the calendar pages

When the turkey is divided  
or the ham is sliced  
or when the soft-boiled eggs  
are handed out to the children

they smile, sometimes at each other,  
joy swollen in their hearts,  
but through the glass pane of their eyes  
you can see another life in the distance.



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## Falling Rain (You cannot feel)

Mist  
so gentle  
whisper of  
love.

Gentle shower growing Stronger.

Rain is falling but you can't feel it and  
now it's pouring. I'm being swept

away

so far

away

by depthless love for you.

Your blue eyes are a sacred fountain  
Unadulterated, kissed by sunlight

I want to swim, but I'm drowning.  
You're letting me

drown.

I  
wish you  
could feel my  
love for you. But  
you're in a house dry  
and warm with soundproof  
walls and black drapes.  
You are irrevocably  
oblivious

Your blue eyes, unbreakable ice  
perhaps it's better since this is  
love like water,  
no matter how many tears I shed  
into the reservoir of young  
unrequited love  
we wouldn't last longer  
than footprints in sand.

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# For Anybody who got Too Drunk and Spent the Night



I wore your hickey on my left earlobe like a badge.  
Purple heart, my pride, it felt like bee stings every time I touched it.  
I touched it a lot.

It just kept buzzing in my ears like  
your whisper that night,  
my heart a churning hive: all burning and heat and only for you.  
All sweet, like honey.

I wore your hickey like my worth.  
My proof-of-purchase  
as I sat down at the diner booth with my girlfriends the next morning.  
This happens more than you'd think.  
Clothed in last night's crop tops and a  
false film of "*Isn't this funny?!*"  
we'll set our one-night-stumbles  
one-by-one onto the table,  
next to the jelly packets, next to our pride.  
We measure them out like sugar, weigh them, check for evidence.  
Your hickey was still there.

We're always half-laughing and half-  
bangin'-ourselves-over-the-head.  
And sometimes half-hope,  
when we think no one's looking.

*Am I virginal enough?*

*Did I let you kiss me too rough?*

*Am I pressed to your memory like the imprints of bedsheets  
(pretty lines pressed sweetly into skin warm and just-waking)?*

*When I left should I have hurried?*

*Do I worry too much?*

*Did I swallow enough shots that night for me to laugh this one off?*  
To just let it sliiide real easy if this doesn't pan out.  
The liquor weighing heavy as a wet boot to my gut when you tell me,  
you don't remember *anything* from last weekend.

Where is my security? Is it crashing to the floor?  
Or did I leave it between your blankets?  
Cause I'm still tangled in those blankets,  
among your wicked, spidered limbs.  
They wrapped around me in the morning time. Your kiss woke me up.

Bee stings. Honey.  
Your hickey faded with time,  
but some nights, I swear, I can hear it. Buzzing.





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Opening Windows

Literature is a unique way to explore the inner world of the human psyche. It shows itself in various stories whether fictional or true. Early American literature began to use storytelling in a whole new way. Many stories and novels began to include the inner workings of the mind buried within the plots. We could now see how the mind or personalities of the characters develop and speculate reasons why they are how they are by examining the character's behaviors, thoughts, and hidden motives. In the story *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne is embodied a perfect example of how literature began to open up the private world of individual's psychology and the deep effects of psychological stress.

Within the story we have windows of opportunity in which we can peer to view the thoughts and intents of the heart. James Austin says in a literature review that "*The Scarlet Letter* is a modern novel in 1) its unity of plot, characterization, space, time, tone and imagery; 2) its conscious use of symbolism; and 3) its serious moral-psychological theme." The psychological theme starts with Hawthorne exploring the inner struggles of the characters. James Austin also stated, "There are only four significant characters: Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, and little Pearl. They are simplified types — indeed, archetypes — of American character. But they develop morally and psychologically through the novel, and are not, as they would be in a short story, transformed by a single event." Hawthorne guides us through the development of these characters and their fates through showing us their psychological stress made manifest.

The story is about a minister called Mr. Dimmesdale, a married woman named Hester Prynne, her husband referred to as old Roger Chillingworth, and the love child Pearl. A lot of the story is spent on how awful Mr. Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne felt after the deed was committed. You have a beautiful young woman who was married young to an older man that was hunchback and whom she never loved (Hawthorne 64). Hester is married and left solitary for two years with no companionship. She was moved away from home and so alone in many respects. She finds affection in a young minister of eloquent speech, one who over time developed feelings for her in performing his ministerial duties. She fell in love with him, and both probably dreamed of being together in marriage. The only problem is she doesn't know when or if her husband will ever return or if he is dead or alive. Hawthorne starts the story after the deed was done, child conceived, born, and now being shown for the world to see. Elizabeth Perry Hodges thinks that "Hawthorne's quarrel with his own past is played out in his novel among characters struggling to adapt their lives to a new context." Perhaps, this story also reflects the author's own psychological traumas and his struggle to cope with life after the fact.

The first look into the thoughts of the characters is in Hester's public humiliation. This is now where Hester is brought out into the light from her dark prison. The world is seeing the real pain. How passionately both of the guilty must have felt as Mr. Dimmesdale sat in the seat looking down on Hester, his lover and his child, from the balcony and her standing on that scaffold in front of this crowd with love and shame coursing through their bodies. Pearl James said that "Dimmesdale, as he stands at a literally high place, transfers his own responsibility to acknowledge his part in the crime to Hester. Hester serves both Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, and indeed the whole community, as a scapegoat." When he was asked to adjure her to speak out, and as he spoke it was as if he was begging her to expose him so he could "come down from his 'high place' and stand next to her" (Hawthorne 59). He is pleading for her to expose him and she will not. Imagine what he felt. She looked into his eyes and protested, "NEVER" (Hawthorne 60). His passionate love and respect for her was expressed in his exclamation, "Wondrous strength and generosity of a women's heart! She will not speak" (Hawthorne 60), because she loved him enough to keep the shame from coming on him. She loved him so she stayed in the area with dreams and delusions of their union. He all too well was tortured that

he committed a sin, but also in the fact he passionately loved this woman and wanted to claim the child as his rightful duty, but he could not lay hold of it. He both wanted her to tell and was bracing for it. That pain is as much as hard as guilt to bear. She too desiring to be with him, and knew she could not. She fared better because she at least had her sin known and she could have a part of her lover always, the child. He could have neither wife nor child. The amount of stress on them was amplified because now the deed was made public to what seems to be the most judgmental people.

What's more, the husband shows up and throws a huge wrench into things. His trauma starts at the learning of the child and his wife. Matthew Gartner believes, "*The Scarlet Letter* tells of Roger Prynne's reinvention of himself by an act of naming: when he finds his wife Hester in disgrace in the new world he adopts the name Chillingworth." This man's identity is lost and he assumes a new one. Now we have three people who are suffering psychological trauma. We see throughout the book how it affects their behavior, character and health. Pearl James thinks, that "Chillingworth, using an assumed name and hiding his intent of revenge, becomes an increasingly diabolical villain by his own duplicity." He eventually becomes consumed with finding the truth. Although he thinks he knows, he wants confession. As the story continues Chillingworth is reduced to a scheming leech. A monster, a doctor that tries to help his patient yet feeds on his sickness. Matthew Gartner also makes a compelling argument that we could look at the stories that Hawthorne wrote and see his own inner psychology. For example: the fact that his character Roger Chillingworth went through a name change may reflect the fact that Hawthorne did so also when he wanted to distance himself from his familial Puritan background. Truly, Roger Chillingworth knows his folly, that he should not have married the young girl. He says, "...I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay" (Hawthorne 64-65). His passion was herbs and knowledge. In his words he says, "... [I have] given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge" and he lost his true identity, his home, his wife, and his reality because of that hunger (Hawthorne 64). He realizes his folly, but now he had to live pretending and it destroyed him. Not only that he was betrayed by his wife and another man whom he must know since he is so bent on finding out all knowledge. The knowledge he now seeks is to find "...the man lives who has wronged us both! Who is he?" (Hawthorne 65). This motivation then becomes revenge, but also he too has regrets that eat away at him.

Turn the page and another picture is painted for us of the effects of this psychological trauma. The scene is at the Governor's house, and Hester is begging for her child. Of course both husband and lover happen to be there. Chillingworth begins to look different, "...his dark complexion seemed to have grown duskier, and his figure more misshapen..." (Hawthorne 98). As the Governor starts to decide to take the child she exclaims reasons to keep her. She says that the child is both my happiness and my torture (Hawthorne 99). She daily reminds her of her sin and keeps her alive. Hester appeals to Mr. Dimmesdale to help her keep their child. He becomes pale. How could the minister handle taking his own child from its mother? Gut-wrenching emotion is invoked in the reader time after time in this story. Hester is going half mad to lose her only joy in life, as little as it can bring her. Dimmesdale speaks with "strange earnestness" on behalf of the women then withdraws to a window where Pearl catches his hand (Hawthorne 100). Not only was Hester going mad, so was the minister. Not only is this a symbolic window into their minds, but he and the child stand at a literal window where light can be show in and illuminate the truth, but also hope. The child in this moment is also his salvation, for at least one thing in the world thought him "truly something worthy to be loved" (Hawthorne 101). Chillingworth's suspicions might have been confirmed today, but it wasn't enough for him.

Dimmesdale's deterioration happens over a seven-year period, also. He is a minister and has to deal with the hypocrisy of his profession and devotion to God. He can't trust in the mercy and grace of God. Daily reminding him of his own weaknesses are Hester and Pearl. Every insult hurled at them; every mention of his child as a "demon offspring" was an insult to him, a godly man. He stands at his pulpit condemning himself as he speaks, cursing his own self in a sense. Then he turns to self-mutilation and penance to beat the sin from him. He knows that he cannot wash himself clean. Elizabeth Perry Hodges stated, "...Dimmesdale also reveals the personal torment of a man who knows that the system is vulnerable. In his case, the personal conviction and the body politic, which he represents as minister, are threatened not from the outside but from within — by his own unorthodox urgings. Insofar as he hearkens to those urgings..." (166). Eventually, the minister becomes so ill he moves in with the conniving doctor. Perhaps, the doctor saw the look in the minister's eyes, and the grasp at the minister's heart whenever Hester or Pearl were in sight and knew but could not get it out of him. Both men are sensing the discomfort of their true situation yet know not to whom else to turn. What does Hester think about her lover and husband living in the same home?

Hester suffered extreme social negligence, judgment and exclusion. As Hawthorne puts it, "Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact implied, and often expressed, that she was banished and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere..." (108). She has to live alone and raise a child by herself. She finds work by sewing elaborate designs on clothing. After nine months with nothing to do, but to sit in a prison cold, dark and sew a magnificent letter "A", she finally had to show it. The women of the town said it was "to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates." Perhaps, her excessive extravagance in designing her letter could be a psychological attempt to make peace and beauty out of tragedy. The people of the town allowed her to make designs on clothing worn on even the highest ranking officials. This is symbolic of the fact that Hester touched the lives of the people in her town with her handling of her punishment. For Hester we see a different reaction to her stress. She was very generous to the poor. For seven years she was silent, never complaining although tortured.

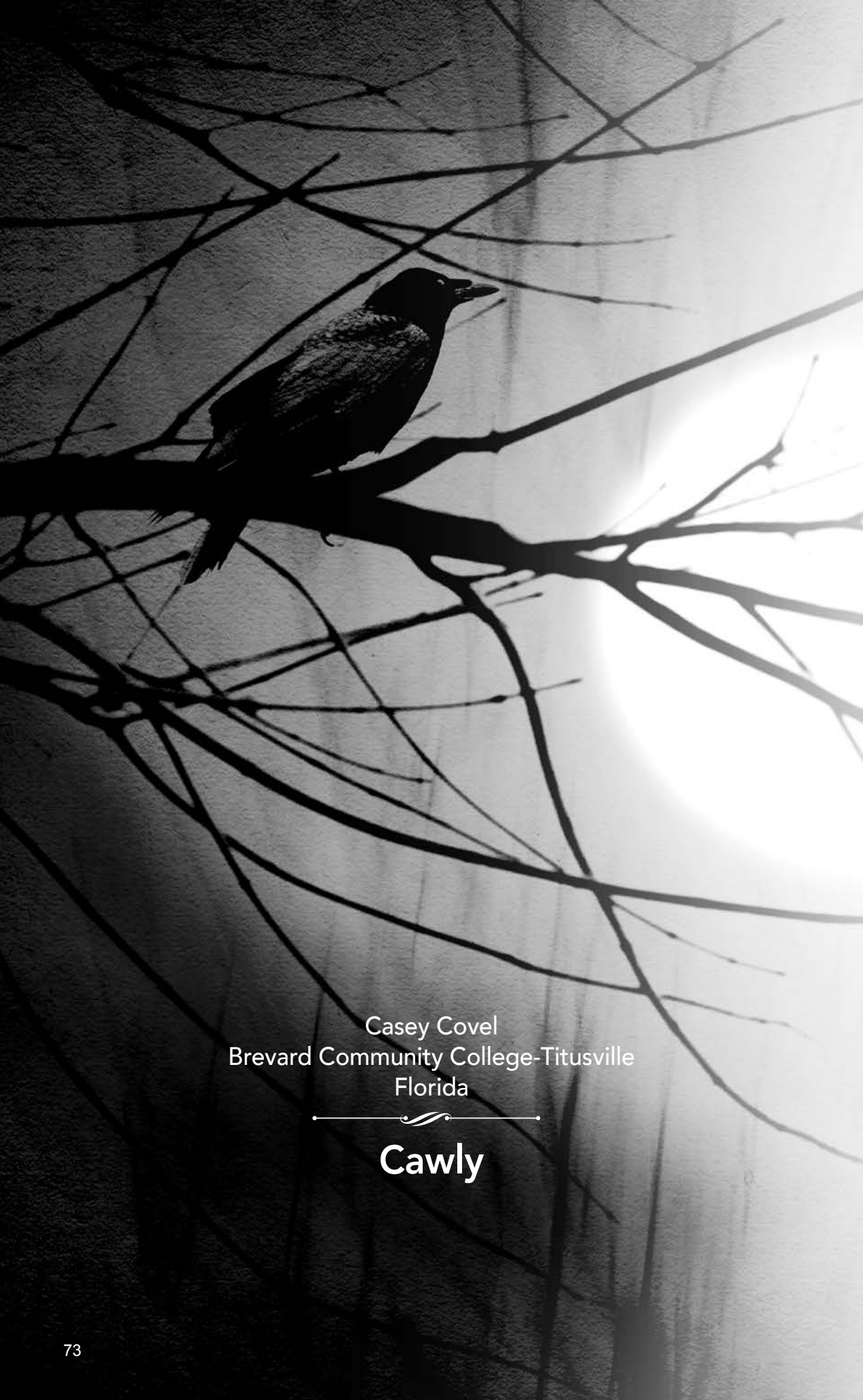
As the story continues to unfold, another window into the dark realms of the mind is opened. Here in this scene with Mr. Dimmesdale, the lover, and Mr. Chillingworth, the husband, they peer out a window at Hester and the child. What an interesting moment as they all beheld each other. Each of them had a secret kept from the other; all knew yet all did not know. What a feeling of discomfort must have now come over Mr. Dimmesdale as he knew he not only was guilty, but his child and love seemed to be free. Mr. Chillingworth expresses by saying, "There goes a woman... [that] hath none of that mystery of hidden sinfulness which you deem so grievous to be borne" (Hawthorne 118). Perhaps he felt angry that he had done so evil, yet even more that she tortured his soul for keeping his secret. He knew that he could never speak of it now, for to gain them was to lose reputation and the trust of all others. What more, a man he knows not to be the husband of his lover is prying into his heart to discover his secrets. Hester must have thought how sad it was these two men were there standing. She was protecting them both from shame yet consistently inflicting pain. Hester was free in a sense. Pearl James put it this way, "At the other end of the spectrum, Hester Prynne, because she wears a sign of shame, on the surface of her clothing, cannot feign innocence; consequently she has a greater potential for salvation and peace." Thinking of windows, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth stand there peering out the window. Perhaps, the fact that Hester and Pearl were set free from their dark prison in a way made them fair better. They were out in the light where all sin is exposed. But throughout the story Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are "left in the dark" peering out windows at the free birds. Light sometimes reaches them in the various scenes, but they're not free.

Now that the windows into the inner world are opened, the physical effects of the psychological problems begin to come out. One particular scene is when the four are all in the dark before they all come into the light. We can see the unfolding of the stress, as it begins to overflow and cause crazy behavior. Dimmesdale stands on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl as he wishes, but he is not yet ready to bring them out into the light. The doctor finds them and helps him home. Soon after, however, Hester finds him out. They have reached their breaking point. They decide to run off together.

In the final scene, Mr. Dimmesdale's soul is set free when he gets on the platform with her and the child and makes it known he is the father. What he wanted to do all along. He finally had what he wanted: his child, his love proclaimed, his sin exposed, and peace in his soul. All who were wronged were on the scaffold, wife, husband, child, and lover. He waited so long that he died on the spot from ill health. I think that Dimmesdale's death was as it were the grace of God that they enter not into further sin, but stand forgiven. All is now brought into the light, open for all to see. The effects of the trauma, the deeds, are now seen at the culmination of seven years of secrecy. This story gives us a tremendous view of how an author can write to explore the psychology of his characters. Not only this but also how the characters might reflect the author's own struggles in life.

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**Cawly**

It's his birthday today, which means she's eight as well  
Or...would have been  
There was always something the grown-ups wouldn't talk about  
Something had happened to her on his birthday — today — eight years ago in Junion Hospital  
Floor seven. Room 178. 3:37.25 in the morning

Mother calls him her little Sunshine  
And if he is the sun then she...  
She must be the moon — the moon, the stars, the night  
So at night he comes to be with her  
Alone  
On the old swings by the tree  
Where he has often watched the sun set  
And waited for the night birds to come  
The birds always come first  
She must like birds, so he does too

Today is her birthday  
A crescent moon  
Sails awash in cloudy waves  
A black bird rustles its wings against the branch, calling her name:  
*Caw-ly Caw-ly Caw-ly*  
The world is surrounded by dark sapphire and diamond  
It is a cold, cold night  
He stops swinging and holds his breath  
The house suddenly seems very far away

And then a noise, like the creak of an old door,  
Only less grating, more soothing  
She arches her back, her bare legs pale in the moonlight  
Dark hair trailing through the air  
Nightdress flowing, ghost-like, in the hallowed wind  
He swings with her  
She does not look at him  
She does not laugh  
She swings, as though it is destiny  
The crow grits out in a long, throaty call:  
*Caw-ly Caw-ly*

Tendrils of moonlight dance in her matted hair  
The swing creaks, flawlessly rhythmic  
The boy leans forward in his own swing, trying to glance around the tree  
He has never seen her face  
Not since eight years ago, in Junion Hospital  
Floor seven. Room 178. 3:37.25 in the morning.  
But that had been an other-world memory  
A time even before memory existed perhaps  
But he remembered how beautiful she had been  
Her eyes bright and glistening, hauntingly pale  
That was the last memory he shared with her  
Silently he whispers, "Cawly...Do you remember?  
Do you remember: Floor seven. Room 178. 3:37.25 in the morning?"  
She is gone



The swing is still again, rocking gently in the breeze  
Moonlight poking through the knots and holes in the old woodwork of her swing  
Without an occupant  
The boy slips down to the grass, bare feet cold against the moist dirt  
"Cawly?"  
Cold fingers slip into his  
He turns, glancing into her featureless face  
Just eyes  
No nose  
No mouth  
Just the eyes  
And he remembers them — bright and glistening, hauntingly pale

The wings of a blackbird rustle, brushing his face  
He watches it take its flight, back to the sky  
Back to the moon and the night where she belongs  
*Caw-ly... Caw-ly*  
He raises his small arm  
He waves at the bird, at the moon, at the night  
"Goodbye Caw-ly," he whispers



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