

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

A THEISIS

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IN CREATIVE WRITING AND MEDIA ARTS

By

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AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

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ABSTRACT

This multi-genre thesis has been split into three parts. The first consists of nonfiction works that focus on moments in his life that had the biggest impact such as the birth of his two nieces. The second consists of at first car crash and the dealing of the aftermath of a shocking incident. This section has a focus on poetry and explores the topics of health, addiction, genocide, violence, poetry, and food with a bit of humor and alliteration added. The poetry employs a variety of poetic forms such as prose, abecedarian, couplets, erasure, odes, pantoum, and sestina. The final section is all about relationships as each fiction story explores the personal relationships between a couple, a grandfather, and his grandkids, and two friends. It also explores the professional relationship between a client and a business. The final story is two chapters of a soon-to-be-written longer piece that focuses on a murder mystery. The stories also include themes of relationships in trouble, betrayal, redemption, revenge, and desire. Two stories are written in an experimental format as one story is told through dialogue and the second is an epistolary story.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT,” presented by Todd Loughran, candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

When I was coming up with a title for this thesis, there were multiple options for me to choose from, like the title of a poem that I felt best represents my work such as “Not About Aliens” or “I Can’t Sleep” or the title of my nonfiction short story “Newest Addition(s)” or even the original title of “Grandpa’s Myths and Legends” which was “Modern American Myths.” That changed when my thesis adviser, Professor Pritchett, made a good suggestion about splitting the introduction in half. One half will focus on my growth as a poet while the other half will focus on my growth as a prose writer. That was when I figured out the perfect title “And Now for Something Completely Different.” It is a quote from the old British comedy troupe Monty Python, and it would later be used as a title for their first movie. This quote stuck with me from the moment John Cleese said it behind a desk in the middle of a field at the end of one of the troupe’s many funny and silly skits. The quote has a bit of irony in it as the “something different” was just another silly and funny skit that had a few differences. That is how I see my prose and poetry work, as something different but still familiar.

Poetry became an interest for me back when I was an undergraduate at Humboldt State University. I spent every Tuesday night of my final school year going to the local coffee shop and performing spoken word. It was a wonderful and inspirational experience that resulted in me writing a new poem for every performance I participated in. When I came to UMKC, my spoken-word options were limited. Fortunately, the school helped me build my

voice as a poet during my time here by helping me discover subjects I want to write about and poets whose work I wish to draw upon as inspiration.

A lot of books have inspired me, but one particular book has done so in a very different way and that is Victoria Chang's *Obit*. I absolutely dislike this book, and yet it still inspired me. However, don't get me wrong. Victoria Chang is a great poet with great style. So it is not the poetic style of her work that caused me to dislike this book. It was the consistent use of one poetic style and the singular focus on the theme of grief and loss that caused me to dislike this book. The entire book was written in the obituary style one would find in an old newspaper. It was the constant use of that style that truly got to me. It was page after page of this old newspaper obituary prose that literally made it a struggle to finish the book. But there was a good thing that came out of reading the book which was inspiration because I realized I did not want to be a poet who focused on one thing whether it be form, style, theme, or genre. I wanted to explore all forms, all styles, and all subjects.

While I do try to diversify myself with my poetry writing there are a few elements that are recurring in my writing. Two recurring subjects I like to discuss are antiviolenace and genocide. I will admit there are not a lot of subjects I feel strongly about writing a poem for. It does not mean I will write about any particular subject if I am inspired to but when it comes to these two subjects, I cannot help but reference them in works such as "Not About Aliens" or write poems about them like "Power in a Name."

The other recurring element that I frequently use in my writing is humor. I have a strong belief that poetry can be funny while tackling serious subjects. In "Addiction," for example, there is a part in the poem where I say addicts are similar to the Cookie Monster

from *Sesame Street*. And in the poem “In Love with a Cattle Prod,” the speaker’s partner becomes oddly obsessed with a cattle prod.

Fortunately, I have discovered other poets who do an amazing job blending humor with serious subjects and have been a great source of inspiration. The first is Denez Smith and their book *Don’t Call Us Dead*. There are multiple poems in the book that use humor to discuss important topics of race, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS. For example, the poem “Dinosaurs in the Hood” makes fun of the film industry while exploring the problems with the industry and exploring race. As an added bonus, Denez Smith’s book quite possibly has the widest range of forms and poetic styles that I have ever seen in a poetry book. The second poet is Sam Sax and his book *Madness*. His blend of humor is not as strong as Denez Smith, but it is still in there in his book *Pig*. The title itself plays on that humor if you consider that Sax is Jewish.

My time as a prose writer has been a bit different from my time as a poetry writer. Even how I write a story is different from how I write a poem. I always start writing poetry by hand in one of my many notebooks. Then I leave it alone for some time before typing the second draft. This is followed by workshopping it, then I edit the piece. After that I might submit it to a literary magazine. If it gets rejected, I might edit it some more. Writing fiction and nonfiction are also a bit different from each other.

There is a recurring theme in both my fiction and nonfiction stories and that is relationship. Many of my stories center around a relationship in crisis with “Newest Addition(s)” exploring the relationship between my sister and the rest of our family after she chose not to share life changing information with us not once but twice. My fiction, such as my story “A Punch in the Eye,” shows a friendship that struggled to survive after a betrayal.

My story “The Dealer” focuses not on personal relationships but on the relationship between a desperate client and a business.

While the nonfiction story “Car Crash” and the story “Grandpa’s Myths and Legends” do not explore a relationship in crisis, they do show relationships operating during a crisis. It was my relationships with my family and my bosses that truly helped most during my own crisis of crashing my car into a ditch. “Grandpa’s Myths and Legends” explores the relationship of a grandfather and his two grandkids as he tells them stories as a way to deal with his grief.

The final story in the collection is the beginning of a much longer piece that will be expanded upon in the future. The piece is different because it was inspired by Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and its epistolary style, though it does not have the supernatural elements of the horror genre. While I do not have a problem with the traditional style of storytelling, I do try and find ways to experiment when writing a story.

The one thing that has definitely helped in my writing fiction and nonfiction was the five bones concept that Professor Pritchett introduced in his fiction and multi-genre workshops. The purpose of the five bones is to understand the characters in the story from their desires, fears, what makes them strong, what makes them weak and the actions they take to attain their desires, avoid their fear, be unaffected by their weakness, and make the best use of their strengths. This concept made fiction writing much easier for me because it allowed me to build the story around them. When I start a story, I always start it with a simple idea. For example, in “Punch in the Eye,” the idea was the betrayal of a friendship. Then I do the five bones on the central character or characters. In the story, Ben, the main character, desires the forgiveness of the friend he betrayed and fears losing that friendship.

His strength is his loyalty and his weakness is sexual desires for a woman that hates his friend. Then I build their actions into the story and further develop the story around the five bones.

Poetry and fiction writing might be different from each other, but there is one similarity these two forms of literature have in this thesis and that is me. This is a glimpse of who I am as a person and as a writer. I am the guy who will tell try to make people laugh, cry, and think with his words, and someone who likes wrestling, rock and roll and cooking. I am a person who explores and experiments with the concepts of storytelling and poetry, and also an uncle who drove into a ditch after surviving a snowstorm with limited vision, a plug-in heater, and bad headlights. This is who I am.

Dedicated To

My Aunt and Uncle for their support throughout my time at UMKC

My sister for being okay with me writing a story about her and then letting me add more to that story.

My parents for their support.

My fellow students and professor who gave me great ideas to improve my writing

And Now for Something Completely
Different

This is My Life... Well, Part of It

The Newest Addition(s)

Part One: The Biggest Change

My bedroom door swung open; it was my mom. She was standing there with an unhappy and shocked look on her face. She stared at me for a few seconds before she said, “Your sister called. She is pregnant.”

“Wait. What?” I said as I turned my head away from my video game. I was at that time playing Final Fantasy IX.

“She also got married,” Mom said as she turned around and walked into the living room and sat down on the couch.

“Wait, what!?” I repeated as I quickly got up from the floor and followed her.

“Your sister is pregnant, and she got married,” she repeated as she got comfortable on the sofa. Her face still looked shocked.

“She just left home about week ago! How in the hell did that happen?”

“Well, she was already pregnant when she came home, and she just called to tell me she just got married.”

“What!”

That was the start of a months-long ordeal in which my little sister, Cyndy, got impregnated by some guy (I want to say Kyle? It doesn't matter), married a different guy (her ex-boyfriend. I think his name is Rascal) and made the rest of the family very angry.

Surprisingly, we were all angry at her for different reasons. Our dad was angry because she did not let him know she was pregnant during the entire two weeks that she was visiting our home in California. Mom was upset because my sister went to a courthouse to get married instead of having a traditional wedding with a dress, bridesmaids, flowers, catering, and lots

of money being spent. She was not that angry about the pregnancy because Cyndy already told her during her visit. My brother was Mount-Vesuvius-pissed because he found out about this through our aunt and me, but not from her. He was the last one to know or be told about Cyndy. As for me, I was more surprised, hurt, and confused than angry. I was confused because she got married to her ex-boyfriend that cheated on her twice. She told me when she dumped him, months ago, that she was done with him and they were never, ever, ever getting back together. I just did not understand why she would marry him. I guess being pregnant changed her mind. Finally, I was hurt because she spent two weeks with us and said nothing. Nothing! I can understand that she was possibly embarrassed and was concerned about our reaction to her being pregnant but still. Two weeks!

But the person in our family who received the news the worst was my little brother, Liam. He took the news horribly. I called him about fifteen minutes after Mom told me the wonderful news. The conversation did not go well:

“Hey, Liam. How is it going?” I asked.

“Not great,” Liam replied, “Cyndy is pregnant.”

“Who told you? Because Mom just told me she hasn’t told you yet.”

“Auntie Tyke told me.”

“Oh. I didn’t know she knew.”

“Well, she does, and she told me,” He repeated.

“Did she tell you about the marriage?”

“Yes.”

“Did she tell you that there is a possibility that the husband might not be father of the kid?”

“What? Who did she fuck?” he bellowed. Yes, he actually bellowed.

“Oh shit. I am so sorry, calm down,” I said. I spent the rest of the conversation trying to calm him down and inform him about everything I knew at that point.

After our phone call, he refused to speak to her, call her, or even text her. When he visited for Christmas, four months later, she called the house to wish us a Merry Christmas, and to apologize for not being able to come home due to her being pregnant. After the rest of the family talked to her, Mom handed him the phone hoping that there would be some form of reconciliation. Instead, he quietly hung up the phone and walked away. Mom went to her room in tears.

Truthfully, my brother’s anger surprised me. He could be slightly irritated when something bothered him, but he never became angry. In fact, before the incident he was truly angry only four times, and those emotional moments of anger were caused by one person. Me. All those times that I made him angry resulted in the both of us getting into a physical altercation that always ended in the same way: My mother in tears, my ass kicked, my pride thoroughly bruised, and some property damaged. One time I threw a chair at him, and another time I locked him out of the house for two hours. It would have been longer if he hadn’t smashed the back door window. I have also punched him, kicked him, called him very horrible names, and yet he somehow forgave me quite easily each time. When the fights ended, we would quickly forgive each other an hour later, sometimes thirty minutes. However, it took him almost a year to forgive her.

It was sad to see the close relationship be damaged due to poor communication. Liam and Cyndy were close growing up. Their birthdays are a little over a week apart. He is closer to her age than I am, and he was a school grade above her. They hung out when she was not

with her friends or working at a hair salon, and he was not busy with wrestling. When he graduated from high school, he immediately joined the army. When she graduated a year later, she decided to follow in his footsteps by joining the Army too.

My parents, through multiple phone calls, eventually forgave Cyndy and focused more on being supportive first-time grandparents. Mom and Cyndy spent many hours communicating through phone calls and Facebook messenger about all the things she would experience during pregnancy, raising a child, her new life as a married woman, and her need of baby stuff. Mom soon became the cliched grandmother wanting to spoil the child with clothes and toys. Even today the family avoids the baby section in the stores because it takes hours of negotiating and gentle nudging to get her to leave. Dad was the same too, but he used Amazon to spoil the child instead. He spent hours looking for the most obnoxiously loud toys to send as revenge for having to put up with our obnoxiously loud toys for years. One of the toys he sent to the kid on her first birthday was a little kiddie pool and a huge box containing hundreds of multicolored plastic balls. Cyndy had a lot of fun cleaning that up.

They also tried to be more welcoming towards her husband (Rabbit?). One of the things Dad started doing when he got his own smartphone was sending a good morning text to everybody in his close friends and family list. That included his stepmom, half-sisters, and of course his children (Mom did not have a cell phone at this time). To make Cyndy's husband feel welcomed to the family Dad added him to the family chat group. Mom became friends with him on Facebook.

I spent a few weeks venting my frustration about my sister's marriage, pregnancy, and lack of communication to some of my close friends. I was hurt that she did not trust me enough to tell me about the pregnancy. She was home for two weeks! The only time she left

the house was to get her hair done, and to tell Mom's best friend that she was pregnant. She avoided her best friends because she did not want them to know. I just did not understand why she didn't tell me. Mom told me that she was too embarrassed and scared to talk about it at the time. I could say that I would not have reacted negatively if she told me, but I am not sure. I still think she should have told me. In the end, I was the first to forgive her because I was going to be an uncle and felt that it was better to focus on the two positive things that would come out of this mess: my future niece and becoming an uncle for the first time.

I was not a fan of her marriage or her husband, but I decided to keep my opinions to myself because Cyndy had more important things to deal with other than her older brother's dislike of her husband. I did have a little respect for him due to the fact he was willing to help raise a child that might not be his. However, it did not stop me from predicting, to the rest of the family, that their marriage would implode in a year. I was wrong.

Their marriage ended about seven months later in March. They are currently separated and are trying to get a divorce, but due to them both not having a lot of money it is going to take some time. When they eventually started the divorce procedures the whole thing became stupidly complicated and annoying with him being difficult to contact whenever Cyndy tried to bring up child support. She is currently thinking about dropping the subject because she just wants out of that mistake of a marriage. Which will bite her in the ass in the future.

On the 21st of January 2018, Cyndy, after many hours in labor, gave birth to Viviana Loughran, and it was a great day for the Loughran family. Three months after Viviana, Viv, Vi, or Vivy was born, Mom and Dad went to visit Cyndy, in Tennessee, so they could see their first grandkid. They also wanted to help her move out of the apartment she shared with

her husband, his dog, and another couple. A week after their trip, Mom decided she would move in with Cyndy to help take care of Vi due to Cyndy's maternity leave ending. She had to go back to work as an Army chef. It went well because nothing bad happened and, after a few months, Mom went back to California.

During the months that Mom was staying with Cyndy, Liam's time in the Army ended. He decided to drive from Fort Bliss, El Paso to Tennessee just so he could see Mom, Viv, and work on forgiving his little sister. When he left her place a week later, their relationship was repaired, and he too was happy about being an uncle. Of course, his happiness was short lived when he totaled his car in the-Middle-of-Nowhere, Nevada. A great example of driving after not sleeping for twenty-four hours. Fortunately, he survived with no injuries. Which led to Dad, the dogs, and I driving to the middle of nowhere to get him. It sucked driving there because it was close to midnight when we left our hometown – one of the dogs hated me (not sure why), while the other dog constantly wanted to do the classic dog thing and stick her head out the window – and we were just tired. It sucked on the drive back, too due to the additions of 100-degree weather, another person, a car with no air conditioner, and so much of Liam's stuff that some of it had to be in the back seat because the trunk was full. So yeah, the trip was awesome.

Even though I was the first to forgive Cyndy for her extremely poor communication, I ended up being the last one to meet Viv. Mom felt that Cyndy could handle raising Viv by herself, and she wanted to spend time with me before I left for Humboldt State University. Plus, she missed her dog. They both flew to California towards the beginning of August, and I met my niece for the first time at Sacramento Airport. At the time she was a tiny, cute little thing that liked to sleep.

During her visit, Cyndy, Liam, and I took a road trip to my college. It was an interesting trip. We ended up taking an exceptionally long drive due to many of the roads and highways being closed due to California being on fire. Again. We saw some interesting things like towns covered in smoke, firefighters, a house made out of a giant redwood log, and a fistfight at a gas station that was across the street from the house made out of a giant log. During the drive everybody discovered that Vi and I enjoy sleeping during car rides. After they dropped me off at the college and helped me move into my dorm room, we had a bittersweet goodbye.

As time kept moving forward interesting things were discovered. We found out that the not-soon-to-be-ex-husband, whom I will now call Mister B or bastard, was Vi's biological father and not the other guy (Kane?). It did not surprise me at all to later learn that he cheated on Cyndy for the third and possibly a fourth time during their marriage. He would get some form of karma-like comeuppance because he knocked up another woman who, unlike my sister, was able to get him to pay child support. He, at this time, resides in Las Vegas as a "dancer" at a club.

It has been a year since the last time that I looked at this story and a few things have changed. Viv is now two, spoiled, and still loved by the family. My sister is finally divorced but won't be receiving any monetary support from Mr. B because of complicated reasons like her desire to get out of her marriage. Which was a bad idea. She has since transferred to Colorado and is dating a new guy who is a nice guy. The family likes him a whole lot better than the ex-husband. Mr. B is still a stripper, and he occasionally sees Viv.

My mom had always said that no one can piss you off more quickly than family. Which is true, but family is sometimes more willing to forgive than most people. We knew

that being angry with Cyndy would just end up hurting all of us in the long run and we would miss out on the wonderful experiences that come with Viv, the newest member of the family.

Part 2: Three-Year Intermission or Things that Happened During a Time Skip

Before talking about the events that led to the second newest addition to our family, there are a few things that happened during the end of the first part and the upcoming next part. First COVID. Other than a few family members being quarantined, everybody in my family got out of the pandemic relatively unscathed. Now, onto the family.

Let's start with me. I graduated from Humboldt State University with a BA degree in English. During the pandemic, I participated in a Zoom meeting with some professors from Humboldt. The meeting was about MFA degrees as an alternative to a master's degree for those who want to continue their education or further their writing career. Inspired, and having very little to do during the pandemic, especially after graduating, I decided to continue my education and applied to a lot of schools' MFA programs. Fortunately, I was accepted by the University of Missouri-Kansas City (Go Roos!), which led me to move from California to Missouri. Before leaving California, I spent that summer working as a cook at an old folk's home. I hated it because the kitchen staff was very understaffed, and they overworked me to the point of exhaustion. I stayed because I needed money, and I was going to quit in August.

Now my sister. She is still in the Army and has been promoted to Sergeant. She now outranks Liam. During the summer of 2022, she moved to the land of Georgia because the Army decided to station her there. Also, she has a new boyfriend because the last guy has something in common with Mister B: both are former members of the Army, and both are

just really good at cheating on my sister. Unfortunately, she found out about this at some point around Christmas 2021 and broke up with him around the beginning of the new year. The reason for the delayed break up was due to them planning a family vacation in Georgia to check out the area and meet his family that lived in Florida or South Carolina. When she found out about his dastardly deed, he had already left with Viviana. She had to work a couple more days of work before she could join them. She thought that they should go early and have some fun before she arrived. She still planned on going to Georgia and staying the entire time because getting an earlier plane ticket around the holidays was impossible, and she really wanted her daughter back. All of this was told to us over the phone in between moments of cursing his name, crying, and stating she wants “my Viviana back!” Our parents decided to help her pack up her place in Colorado, transport her to Georgia, and unpack in Georgia.

My mother temporarily joined her in Georgia because Cyndy needed a cheap babysitter. Apparently, Georgia’s cost of living is much lower than Colorado’s, so the Army used that as an excuse to pay my sister less. Plus, the amount of money she spent moving and getting a new place and the things she needed to survive meant that she was broke. Fortunately, she got a raise six months later and is now making the same amount of money she was making when she was in Colorado.

My dad was not happy with the situation. He understood why Mom was helping Cyndy, and even helped her move, but he missed his wife. But other than his temporary unhappiness, his life has remained unchanged over the years. He goes to work, takes care of the dogs, complains about his idiot coworkers and customers, and struggles with his diabetes.

Meanwhile, Liam is currently helping Dad out and contributing to the household by giving some money, helping out with the household chores like cooking, or doing household repairs. He has also got a new car and a part-time job at UPS. He is currently taking classes at the local community college.

Then there is Viviana. She is still a perfectly happy and healthy little girl. Though her mother tends to spoil her a bit too much. At the time of writing this part she had just turned five years old. Her favorite food is a cheeseburger because during one of her many visits to her grandparents (my parents) they went to a local diner, called Giant Burger, that makes really good burgers (surprising). So, while everybody was eating at the local park, Vi asked her Mew-Maw if she could try out her burger. One bite later and Mom never got her burger back. She also enjoys running around, coloring, Pokémon, and Tom and Jerry. She hates baths, going to bed on time, and not doing what she wants to do. If told she is getting a bath, she will proceed to double jump kick everybody. By that I mean she will jump and try to kick someone with both of her little feet. She has not done it successfully yet. Finally, she has started to go to preschool and is doing very well, according to her report card.

Last and unfortunately least: Mister B. He is now a personal trainer, married, super religious, lives in Tennessee, and is still a bastard. Finally, he barely sees Vivi because he just does not have the time or the patience to follow my sister's "crazy" rules about not taking her to China during a pandemic, not calling her at one o'clock in the morning to demand to talk to his daughter, and always making contact beforehand when he wants to have Vivi stay with him. Insane rules, am I right?

Part 3: A Bad Sequel or a Prelude to Another Beautiful Kid

Around October, in the year 2022, I was doing my usual thing: listening to my mom complain about my sister or Mister B or talking about the things going on in my life. Which was work, school, and my aunt's (Mom's younger sister's) family. Then the conversation took a familiar turn:

"I have something important to tell you," Mom said over the phone. "You will not believe what has happened to your sister."

"Oh, what now?" I asked as I entered my first mile on the treadmill. I was expecting another frustrating update on Mister B. I got something else.

"She is pregnant again."

"What!"

"Cyndy is pregnant."

"Again!"

"Yes, again."

"You're joking?"

"Not joking."

"What! What! What?" I repeated. "Don't tell me it is ex-boyfriend-from-Colorado's (Kail?) kid?" (At the time of this conversation, I did not know she got a new boyfriend.)

"No, she has a new boyfriend. His name is Kal-El (not his real name but that is what Mom called him when she told me his name because she could not pronounce his name properly. I also won't be typing his real name for two reasons: not sure how to spell it and I think the relationship won't last.) and I have not met him yet. Cyndy did tell me he will be visiting her soon."

"His name is Kal-El? Like Superman's Kryptonian name?"

“No, not like Superman.”

“And he got her pregnant?”

“I think so.”

“It’s happening again,” I moaned, I held onto the bars of the treadmill while the belt dragged my feet. The rest of the conversation was pretty much the same as it was years ago. I kept saying “What?” every time Mom gave me new information. I also kept moaning that it was happening all over again.

Once again, my sister pissed off the family. Dad was angry at her for two reasons: she did not tell him when he helped her move and when he spent time with her (again), and it meant that Mom would be staying with Cyndy even longer. He really missed his wife. Also, Liam – Liam does his best when it comes to cooking. He is not a bad cook; he is just not creative when he is cooking. Dad’s favorite dish was roasted chicken and plain rice. It is not his favorite dish anymore.

Liam was upset because Cyndy did not tell him. Again. Luckily, he was not the last person to know about the pregnancy this time. That would be my aunt (because I told her). Even more fortunately, he did not do what he did last time she was pregnant and did not talk to her for a year. He just focused on his life, and his hobby of recreating manga or comic book covers that he would sometimes send to Vi to color.

Mom was upset for the same reasons Dad was except she was temporarily living with her daughter. It took some time before she saw a noticeable bump showing. It took weeks of pestering Cyndy until she finally admitted she was pregnant then confirmed it a week later with a sonogram. She also missed her husband and her dog.

Finally, there was me. I was upset she did not tell me. Again. And upset that Mom was the person who told me. Again. And upset that I would have to be the first one to forgive her and be excited about being an uncle, again. I had this nagging feeling that I would be the last member of the family to meet the new kid. Again. And that has been true so far. Finally, I was upset because it was a repeat of the last time she got pregnant. Sure, there were a few differences. For example, I was already in school when I found out, but the similarities were just too much for me not to notice, and not to complain about.

A huge similarity was that the second child was going to be biologically female like her older sister. She was even going to be born on the exact same day as her sister, Viviana. The final similarity was Cyndy's relationship with the baby daddy was not as strong compared to other couples who were having a child, which was much like her relationship with Bastard. They had been dating for a couple months before the unexpected pregnancy, and like the last two boyfriends, he was also in the Army. I strongly felt she should stop dating people at her work.

But there was one major difference between the two pregnancies, and that was the overall feeling. The first time the feeling was intense or felt intense. The anger we felt towards Cyndy was huge. The excitement we felt towards the arrival of Viviana was huge. It just felt different the second time around. The feelings were still there. We were angry at Cyndy, but we got over it a lot quicker. Hell, I even stated to my coworkers and the women who gave me a haircut that "I will forgive her in a day or two and focus on the positive like having another niece, but right now I want to stay mad at her." Maybe the feeling was due to us having gone through this before and knowing that being angry was not going to change anything and feeling it was best to be angry for a short time and move on.

One of the odd things that my sister did during her pregnancy was pretend to not be pregnant. Every picture she posted on social media or sent to the family chat was above the shoulder or had something to hide her baby bump like Viviana, a tree, counter, pillar or wall, but mostly Viviana. One of the reasons was Bastard. Since he became super religious, he also became super judgmental. Their relationship was already tense, and she really did not want to hear how she was going to hell for being an unmarried pregnant woman. A second reason was that she wanted to “surprise” the family with her pregnancy. It would be her attempt at telling the family, but life became complicated.

During my sister’s second time enjoying the wonders of pregnancy, she had some complications both internally and externally. The internal problem was contracting Braxton-Hicks. Instead of getting it during the last six weeks of her pregnancy, she got it much earlier than planned. Around Thanksgiving, I think. Due to the arrival of painful practice contractions that can cause false labor, her doctor advised her not to travel. This prevented her from carrying out her holiday plans of visiting Pop-Pop and Honey Liam (Dad and Liam’s names according to Vi). Instead, she sent Mom and Vi back to California in the middle of December to stay with them until February. That way she could give birth, spend some time taking care of the newborn, and be mentally prepared to take care of two children. Mostly by herself. The new baby daddy was stationed in Colorado, though he was trying to transfer to Georgia but ended up going to Korea. He was in the field performing Army maneuvers and was unsuccessful at getting paternity leave. Sadly, it meant that he would miss the birth of his daughter, but he was able to visit a few times and he got to see his daughter.

The external problem she was facing was her ex-husband Mr. B. Apparently, his wife was a paralegal for some law firm, and he decided to sue my sister to change the custody agreement with some help from one of the wife's coworkers. Which might be a conflict of interest. The original agreement stated he gets a hundred days with his daughter that is coordinated with Cyndy, and he gets to not pay child support. Which was not good enough for him. (Apparently, he wants Vivy when he wants her and he won't pay for airline tickets, drive out to get her, or participate in transportation, and he wants her at the most inconvenient time like during school.) Before I delve further into the law drama, I do think a father should have equal custody of their child but fuck this guy. I don't trust him because of his past with my sister, and his desire to make my sister look like a bad parent.

Anyway, I got off topic. Mister B tried to sue her in Tennessee. Cyndy spent weeks trying to fit the cost of a lawyer from Tennessee into her budget, communicating with the lawyer, and finally winning the case. Unfortunately, this was not the end as Bastard hired a Georgia lawyer to sue her again. Fortunately, she finally realized she needed to get those child support payments from Bastard. Unfortunately, she was once again not pursuing child support for newest baby daddy (see what I mean about this being a repeat). The custody battle also resulted in Vi getting a phone so he would not be able to use the argument that Cyndy was preventing him from communicating with his child against her. The argument would be valid if he called more than once a week or answered the phone when Cyndy calls for their child. The custody battle is still going on at this moment.

He had sent her a list of ridiculous accusations that Cyndy had to spend weeks proving false. He accused Cyndy of turning Vi into a lesbian because she watches shows on Disney+. No, I am not kidding. Another accusation was she had a volatile emotional response

at some point towards the end of their marriage that resulted in her throwing a wine glass at him. What he failed to mention was her discovering his infidelity and him breaking her finger during their argument. If Cyndy's lawyer is smart, they will use this against him.

Due to some outside events caused by Mister B, Vivi and Mom had to go back to Georgia earlier. He found out which preschool Vi went to, contacted them, made a whole list of demands and threats to get information, and found out she was not back at school when winter break was over. Since he would use that fact to prove Cyndy was a bad parent, my sister decided to do two things. The first was to have Mom and Vivy fly back to Georgia early and put her back into school. The second thing she did was to induce her pregnancy a week earlier than the appointed delivery time so she could have a few days of rest before becoming a single parent with two kids.

On January 14th, 2023, my sister gave birth to little Luna Loughran. I call her "The Little Lunatic Fringe" while Mom calls her "Lunatoons" when Cyndy is not in earshot. The child had some jaundice but other than that she is perfectly healthy, happy, and unlike her big sister is a big fan of baths and smiling. Finally, she is just adorable, especially wrapped up in this blue blanket with whales on it. A gift from me. Viviana was quite excited about being a big sister and already loves little Luna.

Things have been going well. Mom will be going back to California in the beginning of February so she can celebrate her birthday and Valentine's Day with her husband before going back to Georgia from March to May. She is doing this to help Cyndy find a suitable daycare or nanny or babysitter for the two kids when her maternity leave ends. Dad has mixed feelings about the new situation. He doesn't have to pay for any of the airline tickets, but he is worried that it will be a repeat of last year, and he won't be able to spend a lot of

time with the woman he married. Also, Mom will be there for emotional support and as a character witness as Cyndy continues to fight her custody war against Mister B. She won a year later and has full custody of Vivianna. Mister B has more days added to his side of the custody agreement and has to pay child support. Unfortunately, he is a bad loser and has paid very little.

Cyndy is not a bad parent or even a bad family member. She loves her children and does what she can to make sure they are fed and loved. Does she tend to spoil them a bit too much? I think so, but that is not really a huge problem. Yeah, she has a communication problem when it comes to important events like being pregnant or being sued again, but it does not really matter. She is still my sister and being mad at her just diminishes the important things in life, which is spending time with the newest additions.

Car Wreck

I am reminded of the movies where the protagonist goes through one hell of a journey or ordeal where they go through waves upon waves of danger where they survive by the skin of their teeth only for a surprise and sometimes ironic twist that comes out of nowhere and completely wrecks the hero. I think the *Saw* movie franchise was like that. Well, unlike any of the characters that went through that gory, bloody mess my story still had that shocking twist and I did not die. If I did, this would be a strange, ghostly way to tell an autobiographical nonfiction story.

Well, the story begins between 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening on March 16; I had just finished my second and last class of the day and was about to start my journey home. The weather was cold and miserable with the dark sky being covered in great big clouds. I was not looking forward to the drive home because of the possibility it would snow or rain or be miserably cold. Also, my car does not have a great heater. It works but it only blows cold air. My father bought me a plug-in heater and I attached it to the dashboard behind the steering wheel and one day later the car plug melted, and a fuse broke. So, I bought another one that has a handle, and it can blow cold air too.

As I exited the building that my class was in, I texted my cousin to find out what was on the menu for dinner that night. Sometimes someone cooked dinner, and sometimes no one cooked, and I was left to my own creative culinary devices. Fortunately, my uncle cooked dinner that night. Unfortunately, it was beans and rice. Nothing wrong with that as a dinner option, but I just do not like beans. I never did even though chili with beans was a recurring thing my mother cooked for dinner as I was growing up. It was a cheap meal, and it could be

a meal for two to three days, and my dad loves chili. So, I decided I would stop by a fast-food joint and get something unhealthy but delicious to eat.

The first half of the drive was the usual, I ended up stopping at every stop light before entering the highway. While on the highway I was constantly passed by cars despite going what looked like 30 miles over the speed limit despite me going 60 to 65 miles per hour. During the drive I was switching radio stations to find something to listen to, or I would just turn it off and ~~just~~ come up with poems, scenes I should include in any of my stories, or what I thought about someone else's written work that I had read in one of my workshop classes.

I first stopped at the recently built Whataburger on Barry Road. I had never eaten the food at that restaurant chain, and I wanted to try the place out. However, it appeared that everybody was also interested in eating at Whataburger since the drive through was ten cars long, and I had no desire to wait in line. Plus, I was not interested in eating at any of the other restaurants nearby. Especially at the Olive Garden next to the Whataburger. To put it nicely, the food is really bland. I parked in the empty Macy's parking lot to figure out where I wanted to eat when I saw something bad. A singular feathery looking snowflake. Then worse followed it: more snowflakes.

"Shit, I got to get out of here," I muttered before I put my car into gear and quickly drove out of the parking lot and back onto the highway. I drove until taking my car down another road that stated they had some food. Which was a failure for a multitude of reasons. The road was under construction and the fast-food restaurants were not as close as the sign implied. Then it started to snow even harder. So, I continued to drive down the road trying to find an entrance back onto the main highway.

To this day I cannot believe how lucky I was to survive this experience. It became extremely difficult with each passing moment and the storm kept getting stronger and stronger. The snowflakes looked like huge cotton balls as they plopped onto my car. My wiper blades were moving so fast they were making little thumping noises whenever they hit the end of their path while trying to remove the onslaught of snow from my view. My little heater was working on overdrive as it blasted its heat onto the window. My headlights tried their best to illuminate the road ahead of me.

I had the radio off, my fingers tightly wrapped around the steering wheel as I continued to plow ahead into the blinding storm. I continued to drive on the side streets as I continued to struggle to find an entrance to the highway. I don't really remember much of what I saw during the drive since much of my vision was obscured by the snow. I do remember speed bumps, a roundabout, and a possible golf course. At one point I reached a four-way stop. I did not cross the road for a few minutes because I was terrified at the possibility of getting into an accident. Talk about future irony. Eventually, I reached the highway, and the situation was still bad with the added bonus of other cars that I could barely see on a road I could barely see. If it was not for the ridges that signified the edges of the highway, who knows what would have happened? I continued to drive down the highway until I reached Smithville. Just before I reached the town it stopped snowing.

I was relieved because I had done it! I survived the white gauntlet of the storm and made it to Smithville. The streets were completely empty. I stopped in front of Sonic and internally debated whether or not I should get something there, and the decision was no. I just wanted to get home in case it started snowing again, and the place was either closed or going through the process of closing. I did not want to make their night even longer because of my

hatred for eating beans. I drove on. While driving through the town, I started to think about my job. Thoughts ranged from whether my night shift coworkers were able to get home safely to whether they closed early due to the weather and trying to make a list of all the things I had to do tomorrow, and the weekend.

The streets were empty as I drove through the town and it continued to be empty as I drove to the next town. I think the only vehicle I passed was a snowplow that was heading in the opposite direction. During this time, I was driving slow even though there was very little evidence of snow and ice on the road. That is until I reached the road that led to my neighborhood.

The road was completely covered in snow, fortunately the layer of snow was thin because I could see the black road when my headlights illuminated the path ahead. I continued to drive slow down the road until I reached the second to last house before the entrance to my neighborhood when suddenly I hit a patch of ice and lost control of my car. I was swerving to the left and then to the right before I landed in the ditch in front of the house. The car went into the ditch before it bounced out of the ditch and stopped in front of the house's trash cans and pipe sticking out of the ground. I would later find out that the pipe was connected to the house's waterline according to the owner of said house. While the owner was slightly upset about a car in his ditch, he was relieved that I did not hit the pipe.

After my car made a complete and safe stop I started to freak out, "oh no, oh no oh no," I muttered to myself as I unbuckled my seat belt and got out of the car. My first step was into mud, but I did not care due to my concern about my car. As I walked around, my emotions were almost un-describable. I was extremely upset about being in a car crash, yet I

was doing my best to keep calm and not burst into tears. I was freaking out about what my future would hold and trying to come up with answers.

“My car,” I said in a really upset tone as I continued to walk around the car.

There is this cliché about horrible incidents, that they feel much longer than they are, where one second feels like hours. That did not happen. The accident lasted thirty seconds, maybe even less, possibly fifteen seconds and every second of it was terrifying and horrible.

I was starting to pick up some of the pieces of my car when the owner of the ditch came out to see what was going on. I re-laid everything that had happened. When I finished telling my tale the second upsetting thing happened: a snowplow pulled up to the house. Hindsight is a bitch. If I had waited at a gas station or gotten dinner at a fast-food restaurant the road would have been salted and plowed and I would not have crashed.

For a third time I repeated the incident and for a second time I got a stranger’s sympathy (the owner offered his earlier). The plow man contacted the cops before he continued to do his job. I called my cousin and my uncle and waited in the owner’s house.

“Yeah,” she replied.

“Is your dad busy?” I asked. I asked this question because one of the things he does in his spare time is have religious discussions with people over zoom or record a religious speech. He does not like to be interrupted when he does these things. I tried to call him, but for some reason he did not have his phone with him.

“He is in the living room talking to my mom,” she said.

“Okay, can you tell him to come get me. I crashed my car in a ditch,”

“Oh no, you, okay?”

“No, I am freaking out, and I need help. Can you get your dad and have him meet me on the highway? I am like a hundred feet from the entrance of the neighborhood.”

“Okay, we will be there soon.”

This was not the first time I ended up in a ditch due to snow. Several weeks before this incident, there was a much bigger and longer snowstorm that left more than a centimeter of snow. The following morning of that storm I was driving to work very slowly down the same road that I would crash on when I came to the intersection. I pressed the brakes and my car slowly skid to a snow filled bank. I took a deep breath, reversed the car, and kept on driving slowly.

After the accident, I also texted my female boss, Sarah, around 10:00 at night:

Me: I do not know if I'll be able to make it to work tomorrow. My car is in a ditch.

Sarah: Oh no, do you need help?

Me: I am getting some soon.

Sarah would then tell Dan, my other boss, what had happened to me. Which I am not surprised since Dan is married to Sara.

Dan: I can run out and help get you out of the ditch

Me: It's fine thanks.

Dan: Are you sure I am not doing anything important. Just want to make sure you are okay

I did not reply since that was when the cousin I texted, and my uncle, arrived in their really nice, new SUV. We would then spend the next twenty minutes talking to the owner of the house and the cop that arrived five minutes after my family. I told the cop what happened, and he didn't do anything but leave to handle another problem. My uncle tried to

tow my car out but couldn't find a proper spot to hook my car. With the owner's permission we decided to leave it in the ditch until the next day. I proceeded to turn off my car, grabbed my stuff, locked the doors, and went home.

When we got back to my house, I noticed that my aunt was still up. She usually goes to bed around 8:30 due to her having to go to work early in the morning. So, her being up signified her concern for me and that she had the next day off. I spent the next half an hour telling her what happened. While I was talking to my aunt. I told her about the texts from my bosses. She suggested that I text my boss back.

Me: I'm ok, and back home. The car is still in the ditch, going to try to get it out tomorrow morning.

Dan: Let me know or Sarah know how it's going. I can come out. I have pulled lots of cars out ...fast. Where is it?

With some help from my aunt, I was able to tell where the car was currently located.
Me: It's on the highway, can you help me out tomorrow morning? I'm back home changing my muddy clothes.

Dan: Yes. Tell me when, and I'll be there. Sarah said she would come get you in the morning if needed also. I have no clue where you live.

Me: Thank you so much, my address is above. My aunt and/or uncle can meet you by my car around 8:30 am. If that's okay?

Dan: That's fine. I'll be there. How far out on the highway?

Me: About a quarter of a mile from the highway.

Dan: So, you are opening, and I am getting your car?

Me: Yep.

Dan: Sounds like a plan.

Me: And again, thank you for your help.

Dan: Let me know anytime you have a problem. We will jump to help.

Me: Ok. Thank you.

After talking to my aunt and uncle and texting my boss, I called my brother and Dad. It started well before it got upsetting. I had called my brother's phone since Dad needed his phone for his job since there is always the possibility of someone being locked out of their car or a fatal car wreck.

"Hey Liam," I said calmly.

"Hey Todd, what's up," he asked.

"I can't watch TV tonight because, um, something bad happened and I don't feel up to it," I answered. My brother and I had a nightly ritual where we would watch anime together. It was a way for us to relax after a long day, and to maintain our closeness through technology.

"What happened?"

"I, uh crashed my car. I hit a patch of ice and swerved into a ditch. I am fine, just upset. Can you get Dad on the phone?"

"Yeah. (away from the phone) Here, Dad. Todd wants to talk to you."

"Hey Todd. What's wrong?" Dad asked.

"I uh...", I started to say before completely breaking down. I suddenly felt like a child that did something awful like physically destroying a toilet or was feeling bad for disappointing a parental figure. I did not understand why I felt this way since the accident was an accident, the car was mine, and I am an adult. Perhaps I cried because I was talking to

someone who could provide me with comfort and support, despite it being over the phone. Once I calmed down, I told him what happened.

“That sucks to hear. You have insurance make sure you file a claim as soon as possible,” Dad said.

“I will. Should I call Mom? I don’t think I can handle her freaking out right now, plus it has to be really late in Georgia,” I replied.

“I wouldn’t tell her tonight, but you should tell her soon.”

“I will. Good night, Dad. Thanks for the help.”

“Good night. If you need any help or advice, call me okay.”

“I will,” I said and hung up the phone.

The last thing I did before I tried to sleep was eat three small bags of chips and drink some grapefruit-flavored Costco sparkling water. They did a good job of calming me and relaxing me. I ended my night by watching some dumb YouTube clips before going to sleep.

The next day, I did my usual morning routine woke up at 7:10, showered, brushed teeth, got dressed, and waited for my female boss to arrive. I soon realized with help from Dan the boss man that I forgot to text Sarah about her giving me a ride. Fortunately, my aunt was able to give me a ride to work, and I was about 10 minutes late, which is not surprising. While I was working my boss and one of my coworkers pulled my car out of the ditch and towed it back to my house. I also filled out an insurance claim and scheduled a free check up at the local body shop.

My visit to the autobody shop went as well as I expected it would, which was poor. The drive to the shop was filled with fear that more parts of my car would fall off, especially, my right headlight that was being held by a wire and lots of duct tape. It was really cold too

and it seemed like my sweater was not enough, which made for a great start. The estimate was twenty minutes long and the gist of it was the repairs were going to cost more than I spent on purchasing the car, which was about three thousand dollars. They didn't know the full extent of the damage due to the amount of mud stuck to the car. It would later turn out that the majority of the damage was cosmetic. Finally, I was given the list of things that needed to be repaired with the cost.

“Fuck that. I will do the repairs myself,” I said to myself as I drove back home and went to Rock Auto.com and Amazon to check part prices since the inspector gave me the opportunity to fix my car by giving me a list of parts that were damaged or possible damaged. The damage to the car had no effect on the car's ability to drive. The ditch and tow out of the ditch, possibly, resulted in the front passenger side of the car to be destroyed. That meant the stuff holding the headlight, the shock absorber, the bumper cover, the grill, the chevy decal, were in pieces held together by screws, tape and mud.

It took me about a week after the accident to tell my mother. I purposely chose not to call my mother for a few reasons. One reason was it being eleven o'clock in Georgia. My parents are not divorced or separated but she was living with my sister because my sister needed a little help taking care of my two adorable little nieces. The second reason is that I did not want to upset her at eleven o'clock at night. The final and most important reason is that I did not want to deal with my mother. I love her but I just didn't have the emotional strength at that time to handle her freaking out while trying to explain to her that everything including me is going to be fine at the moment. In the end I chose to tell her and my sister in the family's group chat about two days later. I also included pictures of the damage to show

that it was not a bad accident. Which led to a phone call and led to me explaining everything to her.

“Hi, Mom.”

“Why didn’t you tell me you were in an accident?”

“Well, it was late, I thought you were asleep, and I did not want to worry you. Plus, there really isn’t anything you could do.”

“It doesn’t matter what time it is. If something happens you call me no matter what the time is. Okay?”

“Alright, if I get into another car accident, I will make sure to call you too.”

“Good,” she said, “Now tell me about your car.”

“Well...” As I proceeded to repeat to her the events that happened to me, I also told her about my experience with the insurance company. They weren’t going to pay for the damages because I did not purchase the plan that included protection from hitting a patch of ice and swerving into a ditch. If only another car hit me then I would have been covered. I was congratulated by the insurance agent for reporting what happened to me, and now my insurance bill costs fifty dollars more. Idiot. I did not tell my mom about that part, just my insurance won’t be covering it, and I will not be going to a car repair place because the bill was more than I can afford. After that we continued to talk about other subjects like my nieces, my sister, and her ex-husband.

It took two months, at least \$1,500, and a couple big trucks that delivered big packages, but I was able to get all the replacement parts I needed to fix my car. I waited until the spring semester ended for a few reasons. One was I felt the project of rebuilding the front end of my car would be a long one and I did not want that to distract me from completing my

final school assignments. Two, as much as my uncle was fine with me borrowing his twenty-year-old red Toyota Blazer he was starting to get a bit concerned about me constantly using it and not even bothering to do something with my car. The final reason was that I realized I missed driving my car.

Before I started to fix it, I decided to drive to the nearest Dollar General to get my usual supplies to survive the week which are cans of triple-shot Starbucks coffee and a powder drink mix that has caffeine in it. The drive to the place was short and incredibly satisfying. It felt right being in my car. There was no struggle to get up to the speed limit, the steering did not feel so stiff, and I didn't need to fill it up with gas every time I had to drive it. It made me realize how much I truly missed driving and being in my own car.

The repairs were not as complicated as I thought they would be. I honestly thought it would take an entire week for me to fix the car. The reason I thought that was due to the last time I had to make major repairs to my car it took a lot longer, or two very long frustrating days, than what the YouTube videos said it would take which was three hours. The repairs to fix the front end of my car took about three days. One day was to remove all the broken parts and clean off any residual mud. The second day was putting on all the new parts onto the car. Finally, the third day, which took place a few days after the majority of the repairs were done, was placing the front grilles on and reattaching the license plate again because it was in the way of me putting in the grilles. After that I deep a deep clean of my car inside and out. I took it to a car wash where I spent a good amount of time spraying and scrubbing it. The inside of the car I vacuumed, wiped the nonfabric parts of the car with a cleaner, and then scrubbed the fabric seats with a car seat cleaner. There was a lot of mud in the car due to me

using it to store the tire splash shields. They did not need to be replaced because they were in good condition despite being forcibly removed from their original location

It filled me with joy once the repairs to my car were complete. However, if anyone was to take a good look at my car, they would instantly tell that my car had an accident. The entire front bumper has been replaced with a black one that clashes with the silver paint of the Impala. I think it gives the car a unique look that screams, "I've been in an accident." Fortunately, I do love how it looks. I did make a few mistakes during the repair process. The first mistake was making sure that the parts I was buying were the parts that needed to be replaced. I used all the parts that I bought during the repair process except for the bumper reinforcer, and a plastic cover that I had no idea where it would go on the car. I would later discover it was a splash shield that covered the wheel well.

My second mistake was not getting all the mud off the car. If I did, I would have discovered that the big metal bumper reinforcer was in good condition, and I would have saved a couple hundred dollars. I had foolish reasons why I did not remove the mud. When I first looked at the car after it was pulled from the ditch, I started to remove the mud and the right-side headlight fell off. It would have hit the ground if it weren't for the wires that were attached to it. I remember how I reacted to that:

"Oh no," I said to myself out loud.

"You doing alright?" my aunt asked. She and my uncle were hanging out on the patio talking about work, their eldest son, church, possibly my car, I am not sure because they were about twenty feet away. "How's the car?"

"I'm okay. The car is just upsetting me."

"Well, I am sure things will be okay."

“I know. At least the car still runs.” I said in my attempt at being positive.

“Good.”

“My poor, poor car,” I whimpered quietly to myself.

After that I was concerned about other parts of my car would continue to fall off if I removed more mud. I was able to get the headlights back in place and held them together with duct tape. The second reason was done out of laziness. After my short drive in the car, I decided to drive my car to work on the days I did not have class or work nights, which was Sunday; I was not comfortable taking it on the highway and I was scared I might get ticket for headlights. They still worked but I did not want to take a chance. Anyway, I thought the bumpy roads and the rain would remove the car.

There was one thing I did not fix or replace and that was the windshield wiper fluid container. I did not get a replacement part because I did not know it was broken until I started fixing the car. It has a gash in the middle of the container and a hole, the size of a dime, at the bottom of the container. I tried plugging up the holes with little success. So, I decided that I did not need it and have been relying on the rain, carwashes, me pouring water on the windshield, and the gas station squeegees. I will admit the squeegees tend to make it worse of leave a very annoying streak across the windshield.

In the end I experienced my first car crash and came out pretty well considering a lot of people’s first car crash can result in the completed destruction of their car, like my brother’s first car, destruction of property, and/or the ending of someone’s life. It has something that I look back on with a sense of pride due to me fixing my car without spending any money on a mechanic. Unfortunately, this isn’t the last time I experienced struggles with my car or have been put in a terrifying experience due to my car. The next thing that broke

down was the water pump, it circulates the coolant, while I was driving. I was terrified my car would overheat and break down on the highway (that came later). After a few phone calls and gallons of coolant I had a mechanic fix the car. I then had the same mechanic fix the heater because I did not want to go through that experience again during the winter. My car broke down on the highway due to the cold damaging my alternator. Luckily, I survived and was able to fix the car. I really look forward to the next adventure with my car. As long as it doesn't kill me, or the weather is not too bad.

And Now For Something Completely
Different... Proportional Poetic Prattling
or Poetry

I Can't Sleep...

because my mind was blown away by the swirls and burls of the great cog of spinning dynamos causing the blind meld of the lowest log in Dali's thoughts on soft monsters, and red dishes holding fishes coming to the lofty conclusion that my meaty gray matter was whirled away by the cataclysmic drug of life while being warped by the ideologies of parts unknown in the atomic scale of universal transparencies where foreign knowledge of far off places are stolen by the 12 Tongue God, who sacrificed the voices of the quiet riot million while stating that the Marxist dreams of hegemonic freedom can only be achieved with zombification caused by rectangular boom tubes living in our pockets that shows us streets filled with marching ticker, taker, tonker soldiers searching for the limited-edition crude goo dudes that is more precious than the toxic air we breathe slowly being degraded with every ounce of shiny AU in the veins chasing chain ganged lightning, who murdered rocks for going I say I say twice like the foghorn, screaming are you a GOD because they are elder beings from beyond our understanding of the wibbly wobbly timey wimey color of space Foucault's prison made real with Big Brother laughing as each package of the latest Adventure of *Buckaroo Banzai* is delivered to the inside heart of CO2 homes, but before you take your last deadly breath...

Can you recommend a hearse for the next time some lunar trash falls on the most dangerous of days as the seas boil the last sustainable fishes hiding in the shrinking ice cold Cola bear islands while we check my brain before my rampant left side AI shoots me down in flames of isolation imagined through Goya's eyes with mad titans runs amuck at *The Witches Sabbath* who drink their strange brew until they see AA in their breath giving children nightmares of reenacting their parents DUIs while scraping cash together to fill their high proof, low tar, caffeine addiction as they continue to swirl in debt trying to achieve the higher education of flipping mystery meat burgers as I lay in the sucking black hole called darkness crying over future mother/daughters' conversations about being different waiting for the internal clock to strike three...two... one.

Stage Fright

Shazam!

Power slam!

The feeling of fear hits me hard and fast,
my hands tremble with nervous anticipation.

I have to start to get a sitting ovation.

My legs weeble wobble,

but they don't fall down

turning me into the ghost of Elvis

as I gyrate across the stage.

My heart bouncing around the cavity of my soul,

while my meaty gray matter spouts falsehoods and negative encouragement,

believing that I will fail in the most fantastic of fashions

as sweat start to shoot out of me like bullets,

staining me with its terrible musk,

all while my eyes are bouncing off walls, blinding lights, ceiling fans,

my jittery legs, some persons' shoes.

These feelings start to overwhelm and it

becomes too much, I have to STOP!

So, I take a deep breath...

to calm the fears,

to focus my body,

to push myself to finish what I started,

which usually works... but my legs keep shaking.

Feeling Fear Falling

No matter how far away I
stand the edge always appears to
be inches away. The path on this
majestic maestoso mountainside climb
can fit two people but it still isn't enough room.
The fear has a firm grasp on my body with
a firm hardy handshake from some
weirdo with sweaty hands that loves the
felt feel of my noncold shivering hands

My body shakes in anticipated dread
of anybody touching me. I will
Break emotionally if that happens.
deep down I know they won't hurt me,
but fear has ravaged the brain to
the point of ferocious ferality, blindingly
binding my little grey cells, rerouting the
synapses to hide in the dark corners of
the system

Drenched in cold sweat as the rich warm
blood quickly oozes through my veins.
I cannot stop the fear of a fantasized death:
falling to my doom on this mountain binds me still.

No Return Policy

Broken, Beaten, Burden.

Chewing on livers is an offal
punishment for humanity's
greatest gift giver, and me:
the gods' avian punisher

Every crack of the whip
from dawn's fiery chariot brings
about the flapping beat of a
tragically gory musical

You live to die

Or do you die to live?

Can the brief sweet release
be a drug to escape the cold irons,
chained imagination, dismally boring view,
and the daily morning glory feast?

Is your real punishment watching
what humanity has done to your
gift of the burning flower? As they
improved so has their uses for the flame
from cooking to making weapons to being
a weapon. It is funny as one little spark can
now burn, crisp, incinerate, or sticks to kids

Ironically, your gift will lead to their down fall. As they will eventually char themselves into extinction while you remain chained to a rock waiting to be feasted on.

Saturn's First Meal

Behold! We see the mad eyes of Saturn eating his first son. It was a terrifying sight to see! Young Pluto was always fond of his father but Saturn couldn't be restful anymore. For the great prophet predicted that he will be learning about the same betrayal his father received. For nothing felt sweeter to Saturn as he carried out the necessary usurpation of castrating Uranus with his scythe. Just as it became imperative to eat his lovely boy to protect his throne. Was this the moment that cursed Pluto with nights no longer restful, centuries after escaping his acidic jail? Learning anatomy as his arms is gnawed off, head crushed, crazed eyes staring like he was nothing. Blood everywhere as his voice pleaded that this un-necessary punishment of being Saturn's child stopped. It always ends with a view of a gaping maw. He was tired of the nightmare, being alone, he needed a pomegranate to make him restful.

Western Ghazal

Your time is done, the bad guys are dead.

It's time to leave, to ride off into the sunset.

The money is in your hands, payment for a job well done.

It's time to spend it somewhere hidden by the sunset.

Blood seeps from your gut, but you are a tough guy.

You've got no time to bleed, as you stare at the sunset.

You found a family, the love of your life, all destroyed by the violent west.

They cry your name into the wind into the sunset.

The revenge you seek has been achieved with a fatal cost.

You draw your last breath wishing you could see the sunrise.

Ode to the Old Western Tale

It always starts the same way:

You casually stroll into a trouble town

A different name for each place

Blondie

Rooster

Joe

Harmonica

Django

Silence

You come save them from

the evil cattle baron, rustler, rebel, military bandits,

whose war never really ended

sometimes you are a man with a imaginary shield

no bullets can hit you, the only thing

that fall is your hat sometimes

Even when you are beaten down

You stand tall and win in the end

Sometimes barely, sometimes it's complete domination

When the bad guys are dead

you ride off into the setting sunset

your love, whose kindly kiss still lingers,

calls your name as you repeat

the bullet-crazy cycle of bloodshed

Red Clay

Is the brick block building of old west with older memories of land
snatching, is violent shifts in territories is genocide of the former occupants.
Is gladiator entertainment of jagged bones piercing through flesh with limbs turning into
destroyed trophies is gifts to Mars and the God of wine and Madness is modern
entertainment with similar violent aspects is kayfabe with ten shots with a steel chair.
Is ancient lands shaped by a millennium of wind filled dust, is spotted wolves hiding in
ridges is grand views found at canyons is ghost, devils, and the dead buried in the desert
rock.
Is apples dangling on pesticide coated trees is the American way is the land of confusion
is me in a sterile environment donating o- negative life pint by pint as the world slowly
crumbles like a decayed brick.

The Power Behind a Name

Is Ralph Lemkin's life work is a broken
man is a survivor of abhorrent atrocities
is the Holocaust is a detestable demon's
desire to destroy the innocent

is inspired by the repetition of history
is former Ottoman Empire purging its "less
than desirable denizens" is Armenian Genocide is
history being ignored yearly by Turkey

is countries watch as machete maniacs march through streets is
hacking, slashing, destroying all those hiding in churches
and schools is the only safe place in Rwanda was a hotel
is everyone screaming this is wrong but not stopping

is similar to smallpox blankets is collecting sacred scalps
is the tearful trails of those displaced is authoritative
assimilation to make the Native Americans good
little Christians who forgot their mother tongue

is all the same things being repeated is people destroying people
because of their race, beliefs, nationality is genocide is
a word not even a hundred years old and filled with pain
is something that is happening again.

Not About Aliens

I hate the show *Ancient Aliens*.

They take the tiniest unimportant detail
or fact about anything and use that as proof that aliens exist,

Don't get me wrong

I do believe in the possibility of life outside
this big, bruised blueberry,

But why come here?

Our history of violence is so vast and wide, it would make Rambo and John Wick blush and maybe cry.

The wheel was not the greatest invention,

it was the club.

We have killed: to enslave,

to erase,

to enrich,

to defend,

to conquer,

killed because of difference:

of race,

of religion,

of politics,

of money,

of gender,

of sexuality

Hell, someone was probably killed because they prefer *Star Trek* over *Star Wars*.

We have people shooting up schools, theaters, protesting crowds because they can.

While those who uphold the law fail to, beyond taking the lives of people who look “suspicious, violent, and dangerous.”

We stopped asking the question “How could this happen?” and ask, “How long till this happens again?”

Good Christians plunge daggers into pagan’s hearts to let their almighty God in those same people who believe in the one true god, still kill each other because they worship him wrong.

Governments ripping pages from history books, hiding their horrific crimes.

I mean who remembers the Armenian genocide?

While allowing radical racists to parade down the streets screaming they are exercising their 1st amendment rights!

While demonizing protesters doing the same with messages of positive change, gassing them for “peaceful” Christian photo-ops, threatening to sick the patriotic men and women whose only desire is to protect our country.

Since when did “We the people” become “We the enemy?”

As our representatives keep blaming each other for their inability to fix anything.

So, yeah aliens might be real,

But we need to stop questioning their existence.

and ask if it is worth them coming to Earth.

The Before Time

People have been here before
We read their lives on the road,
Desecrate their memories in their graves then
Display it in locked glass boxes
Each of us did something to those
Who came before
At the place where they were standing

Descendants finding power
In the midst of becoming blazed
To follow the path of honoring ancestors
By looking out for the tools
Of generations beyond a sense of
Paramount

Life stories sharing a continuous
Practice with the future mandates of power

In Love with a Cattle Prod

For the three years that we have been together she used to feel soft when I held her at nights but now her curvy body feels rough with sharp edges all because she became fascinated with that damn coil of electric power! It was a gift from the cheddar sausage baron of Northwest Wisconsin, also known as her Uncle Nikola, gave her the great googly moogly of all moo zappers. The soft black rubber handle molds into her tiny pale hands, two feet of chrome shaft that sparkles the newly twisted laughter in her formerly hazel eyes, wicked metal barbs of silver arcs some of her high voltage powerful wattage thoughts of violence. Oh boy, she is in love with the cattle prod. It fizzes and sparks with every press of the easy red button. I saw her test it out on a raw slab of marble rib eye that became a sizzling medium rare when she was done. Carpal tunnel starting to set in as her thumbs turns into a thick callous. Seeing how she plays with the shock master has me concerned. Especially when her new hobby of taking long walks in dark alleys looking for stranger Danger late at night. Oh no she is in love with her cattle prod. All our friends avoid her, but she says she needs no one else just me, and her zippy zapper Zzzax. She takes it everywhere she goes now: to our formerly friendly date nights, her high paying work, and our bedroom. I think I need to leave before her shocking gleam shines on me. She used to be meek, was a woman with her bluebell heart and a kind sultry voice now she plans for world domination with one zap at a time because she is in love with the cattle prod.

The Greatest Action Figure Ever Made!

Hello there, modern day children.

Are you tired of your call of overlooking
miner creator, fort day, smashing modern plumber
duty screen board game? Well

Look no further and interact with me

For I am encased in this wonderfully cheap plastic case,
attached to this colorfully, thick cardboard stock,
and wonderfully created with this sturdy durable plastic,
I am an utterly fantastic sight to behold!

I do not need or want to have kung fu grips.

Why should I throw a punch when I
wield the weapon who's feathery might is greater than a sword
that was used to create 3 ethereal time traveling holiday spirits,
dodgy, twisted little orphans and little Nell.

I have no need for outside accessories or add-ons:

no perfectly pink paradise dream house,
pudgy pizza pie throwers or frosty freezes ice cold batmobiles.

Just a classic brown 19th century molded on outfit

And a removable hat! The best option ever!

All of life can be seen a bit better with a removable hat

especially when it's on me: Charles Dickens Action Figure™, (patent pending)*

with my action pack writing quill, removable hat,
explosively awesome bibliography on the back of my case

So, children please beg, bribe, ask, demand, cry to your
overworked parental caretakers to take you to your
nearest abandoned mall, toys R us, or deserted library
and look on the dark shelf in the west side corner of the building
to get your very own Victorian British teller of timeless tales action figure toy

Ballad of Charley

Let me tell you all about
the toughest son of the bitch I knew.
He weighed eight pounds, was two feet long
from tail to pink mushroom shaped nose, yellow eyes
with orange cream soda and white fur. Got all of his wild
genes and traits from his wild crazy peanut brained mother.

He may not have been the king of the jungle
or the concrete one, but he was the ruler
of the block on the street filled with echoes. Showed no fear
towards trailer trash bandits,
 invading fat cats,
 yappy dogs,
 or slow rolling cars

Despite his rough personality
he could still show affection to those he deemed
worthy. Spent many nights waking to the sound of bones
crunching by my head as he tried to share
his midnight snack of rat, gopher, or mouse with me. Or having to chase
him through the house with a screeching half-
dead blue bird firmly trapped
in his jaws with eyes filled with pure pride over
his skills as a killer of the pesky plague of pests
He lived a long time never losing his toughness
even as his fur became scraggly course,

his body so thin his xylophone ribs can be seen,
his movements slowed, with a mouth of
a 90-year-old man
with no teeth and a resting bastard scowl.

He died proving that he was a true all-American Badass

as he slayed and partially gummed a possum.

Who had the fighting skills of a glass jaw boxer.

Unfortunately, possum meat did not agree with Charley on a terminal basis.

In the end, he knew he was the best and was loved as he was given a proper burial.

Thus, ending the tail (sorry) of Charley the cat.

Free write

This is the end

For everything has been read

But we are not dead

Because we still have the red

We are their

But not there, or over there're

U see the letter you

In the utopia for anarchists

Why would the pig go wee wee

All the way home when

There is a rest stop next door?

Green Define

Green Noun A connection to life, surrounding people from all over the damaged world, giving people the life-giving air and the surrounding beauty, and health. It is all plants, light, forests of the giant still-life only moving with the wind. It takes to sky to be seen for miles and miles. It takes to gorgeous ground providing positive serene.

Noun Someone who is new, unsure what they can handle and do. A new skill yet to be tried. An amateur on their way to excellent expert

Adjective A color used to describe things connected to nature. something has been slowly rotting in the back of the fridge forgotten by all inhabitants until it gains a brain with thoughts of freedom from the cold tomb

Noun A place created by Len Wein for Swamp Thing to reside.

Poem Define

Poem: Noun. Po-em. (1) An expression of lump gray matter clay called thoughts, feelings, and love. A story told by the briefest amount of words hidden in symbiotic symbolism, meticulous metaphor and similes, and vivid imagery of droopy upside down flags, murder of crows, empty fields of green vines, or other possible points. With rhythmic patterns of rhymes being present occasionally. It's an exploration of perfect grammar or lack of grammar as fractured sentences makes the perfect break. Where one word can have multiple meanings: mines, yours, theirs, that random stranger, the poets. All different and all the same in this Schrödinger concept expressed in writing. Where form is more important than the air we breathe until it is considered worthless like ten tiny tears in wool socks.

(2) An ever-fluctuating written work started as long-winded spoken ballades, tales, and myths filled with Swedish B wolves, decade long Greek cruise taken after years' worth of war and wooden horses, the latest sexcapade of Gods involving bulls, gold, nets, and trees. Transformed to pastoral elegies of drowned shepherds, satires based on women's beauty, nature, and royalty paycheck from "godly" people. The irony of romantics focusing on depression, horror, and the futility of life. With time shifting again to focus this crazy pre-apocalyptic world filled with radical racism, cataclysmic climate control, and the hidden beauty that life can offer

Synonym- spoken word, long ramblings of a crazy people, something people just "don't understand," something in motion, beauty, horror, Rock n roll!

Antonym- short story, novel, movies, flowery language

My Chef Hands

I have the hands of a chef who creates temporary art to combat the growling pits of hungry people. They are covered in thin scars and invisible burns from years of work. A fingerprint alteration caused by a slip of a knife to the sous chef's bragging about his extramarital affair two weeks after I had helped him make cheater's version of bitter dark chocolate mousse for his 15th anniversary. My right-hand uncontrollably twitches every time I remember the loss of my fingertip to the accident-giving mandolin and a tearful onion. Knuckles burned almost smoothly by the grills, ovens, gas stoves, and the accidental touching of boiling pots containing blanching broccoli or noodles al dente.

Chef Poet

I cook to salivate the tongue,

I write to salivate the brain,

Truthfully, I just want to “*put a smile on that face*”

A Joker said that. Unlike him, my intentions are pure:

I want to bring joy to people through food and words.

Cook up some lyrical goodness.

Serve it on some paper plates peppered with alliterations

and finished with some garnished rhymes.

Smell my writing style wafting through cast iron cookbooks:

black as night, heavy

as a

brick,

nothing gets burnt in there.

Crispy golden nuggets of symbolism for the brain,

drop knowledge bombs of peace on our hearts

make them think of imagery and activism while snacking on chain-link donuts (mmm)

I just want to bring peace

and love

to the world. While giving it a little chuckle and pasta primavera.

Turns guns into herbal garden of words.

Use violence as a description of

pizza eating not an action against the people.

Perhaps...

I might be a peace-loving fool

serving up clichés by the
spoonful.

talking about how fascinating white space is
as a metaphor for a peaceful white flag flapping in the wind. Scented
by hamburgers, hot dogs, and good old apple
pie.

placing / slashes/ too/ distracting/ for/ the/ words/ to/ get/ out/ of/ this slanted// jail/
overusing italics to express inner thoughts on peace

Hands of a Poet

My hands are those of a writer that
constantly holds books and pens searching
for insipid inspiration, a new rhetorical rhyme,
altered alliteration, looking for that one prime word,
while playing on the expectations of the audience,
describing things to what they are not:

My hands are puppets controlled by the little
gray cells of my mind, erasing the mistakes that will
never be seen. Writing things that are unkind funny.
Emotional, truthful or downright horrible. Getting
cheers and jeers from the offended and inspired, these
hands. Let my voice be heard through food and words
and it pleases my soul.

Behind the Scenes

This is a poem
In its magnificent melodic glory
with a good form, crisp clean lines
focused subjective symbolism
timely themes, systematic setting,
illiterate alliteration, embittered enjambment,
fun titles that can run, whispering hints of
code switching, wonderous trip into symbolism,
and theme. This is what everybody sees

They won't see the erased marks,
the strategic strikethroughs,
faded lines, the good, bad and useless
advice, rigorous rewrites, the multiple drafts
after, the rigorous rereads, the rejection,
after rejection, the frustration of ideas
odd pencil marks, the misconception,
manic misspells, multiple trips to workshops,
the rejection, a view being unseen and unrealized
all to make this great as it can be.

A Hopeful Writer's Legacy

When we pass on to the valley of parts unknown, a subtle fear grows. As we get old, our precious body breaks down. Breaking bones become a common thing as our little gray cells wander around our great big noggins revisiting fresh memories of olden days long forgotten.

This, I fear.

That I die with a substantial amount of fear as with each step I go closer and closer to the inevitable part of the end game.

If I die, I will die at the violent hands of a violent world at the incredibly violent age of 80. With my legacy achieved. I hope to create complete chaos with the English language. My Heaven is not created by the great diviner deity of Christianity, but by Whitman, Joyce, Dickens, and King. My dead hands used to write as an agent of confusion, hoping to spout multiple meanings, experimental creative writings, Wordless word plays. a small appreciation for irreverent irony and alternative alliteration.

The First Journal

Blue notebook--Lost years ago. Disappeared during the time of indoor sanctuaries, the new fashion for the face, and virulent viruses wreaking havoc on our bodies. It was the starting point for my poetic pathway of perplexing thoughts, attempts at punishing the fabrics of the English word with some amateurish word play fixed in. Perhaps it can be found. By strange hands and peculiar minds who can pencil in their own thoughts of poetic change and political aspirations for a better world. I hope.

Foreclosure

this

house built by ancient hands long since pass

is sold

severing ties to all communities

home

over

under

steep

entry fee to get in

investment

suffers

so

old, tired, bones creek, wood squeaks

longing for some of that sweet, sweet

death, but she isn't knocking

Theater Haikus

There's grease on fingers
Makes my hands feel really weird
Must not touch my face

Where there are silky napkins
I can only see iron man shoot beams
At Captain America

Audience annoying
They can't be quiet like the grass
Stop crying please

I'm out of popcorn
Hand now feels gritty from the salt
Still can't find napkins

Saw the Endgame
Fat Thor was hilariously cool
Captain Marvel eeeeeeh

Astrology Memory

I remember the time when the moon was
red as the swirling forever storm on Jupiter
signaling the wailing wolves to break
the quadruped chains to hunt for some burger

I remember Mars as a ping pong ball as it
retrograded across the sky between two
paddles making the necks of all astrologists
slowly strain as they follow its move

I remember the welder's vision of the lunar sun
changing on paper shadows as idiots
stare directly at its blinding aura
hoping to get a divine message

Up in the Dark Sky

I remember the dark days
that I miss you the most.

I tend to miss the most is your
nice slices of silver.

You always shine as a nice slice of silver,
or at your best a gleaming quarter.

People clamor to see your gleaming quarter
as you beam down on them.

You only beam light on them
when you are not taken away.

It's not your fault that you're taken away,
but a place isn't a home without you outside.

The times that I get to see you outside
is when I remember the days.

The Bloody Fight Between Two Riddling Geese

OF COURSE! The Announcer cries!

MY GOOSE, RIDDLES, RUNS, AND KILLS.

MY OPPONENT'S GOOSE POSES,

RIDDLES, AND PERSUES IN OUR HEADS.

We are silent

as the gregarious geese hang from stiffly ceiling panels
stroking the excitement with their bloody brutal bantering beaks,
ripped webbed toes, raining snow-like feathers.

We stroke lightly the

bloody tangles of feathered fur

of the winning grand golden goose

behind the quasi-life city with trains

roaring in the distance

Inhabitants! THE WINNER SOLVED

ALL THE RIDDLES AS THEIR PATH

ENDS IN THE

TOWERS OF TOPEKA,

AND WILL CONTINUE TO RIDDLE IN

NEW YORK,

NEW YORK,

NEW YORK.

We remember that one made from many is
something we must prove
because silence is broken by our nets
as we search for more geese

Affair from Afar

For the briefest moment
I was an audience to a possible affair
that could have come out
of those stereotypical cheap romance
novels found in the stereotypical grocery stores
with a voluptuous stacked, long hair, sexily clad
woman in the arms of a
buffed, ruggedly handsome, and somehow
shirtless man with horses on the cover.
somewhere.
even in a lawyer's meeting room

The woman was a stereotype:
blonde, long legged, big breasted
low cut tank top, short Daisy Dukes.
While he was a cliched California redneck
with arm tattoos, farmers tan, beer belly
oil stains everywhere
even on his favorite baseball cap

Their wandering glances, false
Touches, stranded desires, secret whispers
Of dirty plans at the semi-clean motel
down the street during their hour break lunchtime.
All this happening 10 feet from his blue rust bucket

of a truck, adorned with yard, construction, mechanic's tools
And her wax on the latest model Chrysler.
Hand in hand, heads scanning the Save Mart
Parking lot, looking for unknown stoppers of monogamy

As they drive off in his truck
As they go off to be a stereotype.
Leaving their only audience member. ME.
stuck in my father's truck
Bored, waiting, while holding,
a struggling whiney little dog

Love Despite the Bleach and Ghosts

The smell permeates my hands
as I clean the countertops with bleach.
It follows me around like a dastardly ghost
haunting my dreams of natural living
turning my skin into the pink hue of love.
A feeling that has never fully reached me.

What can I say about me?
I make magic with my hands:
Whipping up some scrumptious meaty goodness of love
Untouched by the bleaching
process. One accidental sip destroys a person's life
Turning a person into ash. Leaving behind a pale ghost.

We were all haunted by ghosts.
They can turn into skeletons and closets, but not by me.
I don't want them to interfere with my life.
It is hard to do with past mistakes staining my hands.
Not even when it is bitterly bleached
can remove these spots, but it can be ignored with love

We could all use a little loving
Even when we become ethereal ghosts.
True love comes. even through basic bleach.
The only thing preventing me

from reaching out to grasp it with these hands
is mental fear, belief of penance, and life

experience of seeing others living
their lives making the same mistakes in the name of lust
but they believe it is love even as the hands
of their ghostly
exes haunt them. As for me,
I want it to be untouched by bleach

Stories of Love

Archivals compete for the owner of a lonely heart as a
backseat Romeo plays dirty in this game with some
cheap tricks, a wad of cash and some eggplant emojis.

Dum dum girls always fall for it, but

Epica wants fulfillment, not just a phallic vegetable, she wants the
Flowers of romance as they open her passion.

Ghost can give the girl all that plus

Holy White Hounds, if only she takes the plunge.

Iron Maiden lusting for her Iron Man. She goes on some
journey through the concrete jumble jungle looking.

Kiss the maiden with love,

Live for the moment, take her heart. As the
midnight oil burns bright in the bedroom.

New York Dolls lost in their Five Point mazes as the

One Eyed Gypsy cursed their souls to be forever loveless

Pink Floyd wants a little fun with the girls' time.

Quiet sun rises after a hard day's night of passionless fornication

Replacement lover of the heart can be very hard to find

Seven Mary Three is sick, tired, bored of digital dick pics and scenic swipes from
those charming bastards, they just don't know how to pleasure, all talk no action.

Ugly Wanda offers a different love.

Violet iron is a good but strange gift to start a new relationship.

Without love humanity has no future

Xillions of people look for love in every side street, bar, Chick Fil-A drive thru

Yes, love is hard to find, but if

Zebras and Giraffes can find it without help, then so can we.

People These Days

I look like a caveman with a sophisticated brain living in a modern society.

Instead of swinging tree to tree screaming like Tarzan I use a VR headset.

Instead of getting dates by bopping rivals on the head with a club.

I go to clubs, speed date, swipe left or right, bopping women with cheap lines.

Instead of chasing burly bison off cliffs and hoping that pretty flower isn't going to kill me.

I race after the latest deals to save a penny but still spend 200 dollars.

Food is no longer cage free, gluten free, fat free, organic, low sodium, meat free

It is now infused with chemicals, baked in radiation, trapped in metal for decades

Instead of cooking meat over a fire pit, or eating it tartare

I sauté, braise, bake, fry, sous vide, or air-fry to the perfect temp.

The biggest and strongest guy is no longer chosen to be our leader.

Instead, we vote for the better at bathos bullshitter: the idiot blues, or the cultist reds.

People no longer stare at walls painted in crushed cranberries and charcoal for entertainment.

Instead, we stare at screens as people make blue razzberry pies and water charcoal filters

We live in crazy times

Instead of a time where we did crazy things

This from the Homo Sapien who looked in the mirror,
His Neanderthal ancestor staring back.

Reflection of a Relationship

We used to kiss behind her red, stained door

Under the arc-light

of glass slippers fitting

Perfectly on neon signs of

Drunken ramble rabble rousers hangouts

I felt like crying about her

I thought of her

It felt like hell

It is easier to reject someone, to mourn an end

at night

Mr. V

I am eternally everywhere,
Hiding in the atomic air of your planes,
Transporting through tunnels in your tectonic trains,
Napping in the backseat of your automobiles,
Snuggling in the darkest holds of your buoyant boats,
Clinging to the squeaky soles of your shoes,
Wanting to give you my deadly gifts of painful coughs,
delirious fevers, bedridden aches, purple skin puss,
with a little bit of death on the side,
If I'm in a good mood.

Let me cling to your tongue,
Catch a ride on your breathe,
Pass me off with the tiniest touch,
Spread me to friends, family, children next door,
a dog dressed like a bee, and fat cats,
I don't care about race, gender, age, species
I want to give them all my dangerously glorious gifts.
Just let me in, I have a quota to meet,
One thousand by the end of the week
As soon as I'm done with you,
Johnson is next,

Just try to stop me,
All these efforts,

Just delay the inevitable
Hands unwashed,
A spot missed in the constant chemical purge,
Meat cooked to 130 degrees F,
It's the mistakes that help me grow,
From a lonely unit to legion,
Until then I will wait,
Evolving,
Growing,
Spreading,
For I am a. Virus,
It is a pleasure to infect you

Bad Reflection

It's the same thing every day,
Pale. Skin reflection illuminated
in abysmal fluorescent light.
Strange hair. In the oddest places there
is a lump. I felt it deep
in the tensed muscle tissue, and blubbery
fat near the heart. A dangerous
feeling as it grows and grows,
I feel like I am dying.

I feel like I am dying. It...
grows and grows: a dangerous
feeling, I felt it deep. In the tensed
muscle tissue and flabby fat near
the heart, a lump. In the oddest places,
Strange hair illuminated in abysmal
fluorescent light, pale skin reflection.
Every day it's the same thing.

Sick Questions

In my head it is the same mystery
a decade of dizziness disaster
centered on the red liquid life
as it is being removed, replaced,
reversed by artistic tubes connected
to expert machines powered by man:
Is my sickness the descendant of
the same animal called punishment
caused by the genetic inheritance
of black bile that has changed my organs
into riotous rebels that racked my
body with constant pain and failure?

Let me ask you another question that
has been quietly getting louder with
each pop of numb welcoming pill: Can life
be easier to manage with a sickly hope for
a medical miracle cure or cynical acceptance of
a doomed fate, dying like an overdosed rockstar?

These I ask the sickly pale creature
in the golden copper mirror: How are we still alive as
each cell in ourselves fights to kill us, save us,
and carry on like nothing is wrong?

Designer Illness

I am the picture perfect of health
and looking utterly fabulous!
For example, my skin, isn't it
a lovely shade of golden
jubilant jaundice. No more
spray tans and Halloween
makeup.

Let me flash you my five dollar
broken watt smile filled with
broken black jagged teeth and
gelatinous bleeding gums, and my
hairy boiled covered tongue. Infectiously
radiant is it not! Let me look

at you with my hemorrhaged eyes. Red has
been my favorite color. Please ignore
the coughing, wheezing, the bit of red on
the back of my hand, I'm just clearing my
strep throat. I am the object of everyone's
desire from my molted hair to my infectious

charm. My arsenic clothes need to be
washed in a special self-made yellow liquid, then I apply
my makeup and lotion. I mix in a little led paint so it really

sticks. Finally, I dress in tight clothing so everyone can see my slim figure. I make the clothes even tighter with long thin strips of bone and steel. I'm a trend setter, and fashion mogul if you want to support this icon, please help donate to my Patreon, follow my TikTok, subscribe to my Instagram for some good old fashion advice, I got some med bills to pay

Addiction

Is an eternal enemy to you and me.
A boundless destitute desire that can never
be fully satiated. It is similar to tossing
rocks into an endless pit
never filling, never truly
satisfying, just brief moments
of jubilant joy.

It turns us into the cookie monster
but we feast on a different type of cookie.
We fill our desperation by taking it
handful by handful as little perfect pills
needle after needle with plagued syringes
swallow after bitter swallow of fermented hops
perfectly parallel lines cut by razors
mixed with flour, baking soda, powder milk
to create false purity
who knew coke could lie.

We are poisoning the body,
hollowing the soul,
wreaking hazardous havoc on
the decaying gray matter,
becoming single minded beings
almost animalistic. In search of new survival needs
stealing from our loved ones

then helping them look for what is “lost”
we stomp, destroy, corrupt, trample
everything and anything that prevent
us from getting that bitterly fleeting
satisfaction until
nothing remains but a hollow husk
with unfocused eyes

Cogs

I am an it because there are days when I feel like an object much like chairs, bikes, the horrible stuff you can find at a demonically bad Denny's. Where I feel unnaturally unhuman. My name is unimportant because I am another syncretic cog grinding in the wall of machines. Sometimes, I am a dynamic dynamo, other times I am a gear but always, I am rusted from time, grinded by the hardships of systematic stress caused by the collapse of individual mentality with tumultuous tasks that pushed my body to be torn apart. My parts keep creaking despite medical oils of pills, liquor, the fantasy of excitement to keep me running. Spirally down dark paths of addiction to function properly. If my body breaks, they build me back up at a hospital. If my mind breaks, they analyze me at an asylum. If my addiction breaks, I am reigned in with 12 step rules at a rehab. They expect me to skip back to the machines that broke me to continue grinding. I have no choice but to comply. Repairs are not free. Each day blurs into one long hardship. Where each thought ends with I don't care. If I die, I die a violent death. I keep asking society, "What am I?" tthe answer is always the same: I'm another unimportant syncretic cog grinding in the wall of machines. In other words an it.

Rent to Live

Am I a good person?

One of the several hundred important questions that ramble through our brain cases during the course of our speck-of-dust lives here on planet earth. Sometimes intruding into our thoughts from out of nowhere or late at night cause uneasy sleep. This question sends us into deep thought and causes a reflection on past deeds, misdemeanors, and truly terrible acts of humanity found in the murky haze of memory

we see our greatest moments like defending the weak from the strong arms extortionist, bully, giver of bad nicknames, black eyes, stretchy underwear, and bruised ribs.

or

The time you returned a wallet, purse, bag. Denying the offer of a reward in return for their legal lives back, saying “I did it because it was the right thing to do.”

or

Helping the little old elderly cross street corners, holding doors for those who came after, giving a person a dollar because they desperately need it more.

However, humanity is not perfect. We make mistakes, mess things up, or intentionally go out of our way to hurt, so we must look at the other side

of our own personal scale.

To reveal every fight both physically and vocally
with our friends, strangers, and our loved ones.

Red faces, spittle, hurtful words flying

sometimes they crouch in corners

dodging what is thrown

fearing the one-handed clap

sometimes they fight back

dealing their own hurtful damage

Leaving both parties bitter, hurt, sore, tired

There are the lazy lies, the slurs slinging like bullets
(that hurt just as much), the stealing, exploitation of
the weak and naïve,

We contemplate the question hoping the good
outweighs the bad, so we can all get a good sleep
and hope the world's scales are leaning to the

righteous

Mr. V Returns

Hello, it's me again

I'm a little different this time

I've been upgraded, promoted, changed,

I'm wearing a new coat now.

Don't these synthetic sinister spikes and particle
pathogens look good on me?

I'm a product of evolution, baby!

Darwin would love me!

This time I'll get you like my cousins

got your cousins in 1917,

or how my ancestors brought

putridly plagued humanity for their sins.

I feel myself getting stronger with each year

Your medical advancements are slowing down

While my daring durability, quick infection, and powerful
resilience keeps growing at a radical rapid pace.

So, let just let me inside, I have a lot to offer:

I can subsequently strip and soar your throat, joints and muscles

Spread infection to that lumpy gray matter lobes, overhydrate to dry lungs

Don't you just enjoy the sounds of a wet cough? Such beautiful music it makes.

I will enflame, weaken, melt and destroy your body. Aren't you

excited! Allow me to reintroduce myself. I'm Mr. Virus, it so great to see you again

Stories of Destruction

A-HA! The waging war starts with a flash as
B-52s on their way to their blitzkrieg bombing run while
company of wolves wreaking hazardous havoc with
dead Kennedys strewn all over the country.

Escape their final fate! GET OUT!

From ashes to new worlds reborn giving our
grateful dead a prayer for swift returns, while the
Higher powers gave them none.

I prevail through fire and flames hiding from
Judas Priests and their painkiller mob, they're
killers of women and children. All for their possum kingdom.
Lost Boys hide in terror, drinking their deathly dream elixirs to escape.

Metal roses pollinate the land with metal militia.
Neon cross symbolizes the rise of their eternal empire. Our
offspring become citizens to the machine. Pray to
prophets of rage for swift obedient oppression and long destruction.

Quarterflash and destruction is just over a
rainbow of radiation leads to a kettle of mutation.
Sick puppies are kind of cute when we're sick too, as
tainted angels try to heal us to no avail, giving our last rites instead.

Unstoppable kamikaze idiots break on through to the other side with the

Velvet Underground looks or riches and infernal infidels.

Widowmakers make quick plots for their spousal graves with

X of Eden becoming a tomb.

Young fathers go to war. While the

Z plan is in full effect, dropping the peacekeeper bomb.

If you knew me before you would not know the man now before you
I used to be fat
A triple chin that jiggled, wiggled, and jowled every time I spoke or breathed
I hid behind a wall of hair so people would not stare
I used to be fat and drenched in sweat in seventy-degree weather,
in a t-shirt and shorts after walking 20 feet in the shade
I used to be fat. When I walked up a flight of stair
I took a five-minute nap, just for strength to go on
I used to be fat.
My knowledge of vegetables was the potato,
only after it was turned into fries and chips
Eaten handful by handful for breakfast, lunch, and dinner,
with an insatiable hunger for more,
lettuce, tomatoes, and onions could only be found in burgers and tacos
I used to be fat
fruit tasted better with a cup of sugar or
baked into pies, cakes drenched in whipped cream or ooey gooey chocolate
I used to be fat. I started to work out,
my body shut down:
my limbs hung like fish on a hook,
my lungs struggle to give me air,
my heart would beat, hard and fast, like a war drum like a heart attack!
But no, my body was not shutting down. It was rebooting itself
my heart pumped fast and hard to push out the globs of grime that clogged my arteries,
Unconstricting my lungs so I breathed again

giving new life to my limbs

I used to be FAT!

I was 300.

We Need to Get Along

Abysmal abstract views help poets go
beyond their limited gray matter en-
cased in blobs of fast-food fat while
delicious monsters tantalizingly
eat an absurd amount of
frolicking foxy ladies, all while
giving people lessons in
hatred. Which can be
impossibly imprinted on a captured soul like
jumping jack jamboree producing sweat with arm waves, side
kicks, hair flinging to Miss Pop Star's poppy musicality.

Little livery lemmings let loose onto
Major metropolitan cities. News calls them rioters when they are
nonconforming noncombatants promoting
open hearts, clean earth,
pacifying generalize hate with
quizzical questions about the arrival of peaceful
racial change, but it is always
sabotaged by fraught frail old representatives
trained by their hypocrisy to be against
us by filling empty brain cases with
venomous synaptic syntax syllables.

Why can't people let the poets' words be
xfer from paper to heart pleading that
y'all got to stop being so cruel or things will become
zestless because we doomed ourselves to hate

A Souper Ode

The warmth you give on a cold foggy day,
The smooth, creamy, mixture of flavors,
Tomato,
 Broccoli,
 Atomic ginger carrot,
 Or even (uggh) mushroom
Could bring a smile to the masses.

It is time to take stock,
You can be the most vegemite vegan liquid
Of all time
To the beefiest one,
 Or,
That cowardly one that crosses roads, for some reason.

The bits inside make an exciting mixture.
A liquid trail mix of
Stale Bread, Noodles,
Kidney beans,
Or even tortillas
All together to deliver savory flavors.

Then there's your treat:
The garnish.
A pop of flavor to tie it all together,

Thin strips of basil form
A hill sinking into the sea of deliciousness,
flakes of snowy parmesan,
Or sour cream shaped into an endless void,
Hypnotizing the stomachs,
Growling that it is time to eat.

Poetic Food Critic

I find this restaurant to be a disappointing place to eat.
The food is not good or bad, it's just bland.
The greatest sin a food can ever be.
Burnt food are mistakes made through
Inexperience and bad time keeping
Good food warms the stomach, fills the memory banks
But bland food shows
carelessness of the food and the people. A disregard of our mouths.

I mean...
Where are the flavors?
The bitter hit of garlic
The slight acidity of the fruity tomato
The hint of the virgin olives pressed into oil industry
The concoction of herbs from the peppery basil,
 minty thyme,
 earthy organic oregano
 the fragrant rosemary
Melded together to make the classic Italian seasoning
that is cheaper to buy than the actual herbs
both fresh and dried
Where the fuck is the salt?

Servers cranking their hamster wheel shredders piling ounces
upon ounces
upon ounces
of parmesan cheese to hide this monster called bland.

Stuffing us with pounds of breadsticks, salads, and soups

Warning us that this is the best they got.

Despite the food the service was great

I enjoyed my accidental fruity alcoholic drink being showered on my head.

Junk Mail Pantoum

Hold me in your arms all night long.
Life is better with a cute boyfriend!
You don't have to work hard to get me!
Want to do some naughty stuff?

Life is better with a cute boyfriend.
I'm new in town. Don't know my way around! Help!
I won't do some naughty stuff.
I want to get to know new people.

I'm new in town, don't know my way around. Help
me conquer career
obstacles, meet new people,
and ask about the 20-titanium half-off sale.

Conquer career obstacles
by buying cheap government-owned homes.
A toast! About the 20-titanium half-off sale!
Plus, I got a new card that could help my credit.

Hopefully these cheap government-owned homes are for sale.
I must work hard to get it.
Getting a new card can help my credit?
Just hold me in your arms tonight.

30,000,000,000 Scoville Ode

I can breathe fire when I am with you,
Piercing the taste buds adorned on my tongue,
Having my own burning ring of fire around my lips,
as a furnace is ignited deep within the dark depths of
my cast iron gut. All created from just the tip
of a pointed wood shaving toothpick, coated
in the pepper and charred bones jolly roger bottle
of 30,000,000 dangers in atomic cellular form inferno

the buildup is also a scorcher of emotions
it starts with excitement, nervousness,
a false cocky egotistical bravado of
pretending that this won't hurt (but it
will... a little) as I hide the sultry pain behind
my enflamed red face, blurry teary eyes, and
strained voice as I dream and prepare for the next taste

First Encounter with the Spice Kind or How I became a Spicy Man

There will never be enough spice!
I thought as I wolf down my dinner,
But it seems to be enough as my beard
And mustache begin to smolder due to
The fiery inferno like flames that seem to sprout
On my lips. The Thai spices have destroyed any
Taste on my tongue except for heat and the sweet
Robust pepper flavor of the bashfully wilted basil.
A furnace burns deep inside as the volcanic feather farm
animal and rabbit food slides down to continuously stoke
the flames as my beet red face turns into sour as I gasp for
low fat or dihydrogen monoxide instead of the bitterly sour
plum wine. It took some time but the boisterous burning is gone.
What a rush! What a ride! Let's go again!

Fly God

Flies imagine their God as

a green, black, gold, pink, purple

fly, an inconceivable, beautifully, monstrous creature,

terribly benevolent beneficiary,

vengefully just,

a youthfully embellished creator

but always a Fly

not an overworked ox, otter, or

an owl. Just a Fly

They imagine their God as small

it might be missing wings

or it has infinite wings, beating so fast that it is

hard to see,

antennae horns surround their head

forming a crown.

When Flies die

they go to a pretty paradise

with infinite hunks of rotting meat,

heavenly scraps to chew and procreate,

or

they go to hell

a place sparkling with clever cleanliness

with fresh fragrance of devilish lavender Lysol

in an ungodly home

with a collection of swatters.

Path of Pork

My mind wanders while risk deep in pounds of steaming pool pork. I do not think about the ironic history between pulled and pork in reverse?? From the meat being pulled from each other and the hip bone, from the smoker after half a day imbued with cherry smoke and BBQ flavor. From being taken out of the walking refrigerator and plastic bag and cardboard box. Transported by a truck filled by a variety of food/food related cargo: to go boxes, bags of sugar, potatoes and pickle buckets. Then yanked from cold freezers where it was tightly wrapped in plastic and dropped into its coffin, stuffed with other pork butts. Unfortunately, it was pulled apart much earlier, when its life was taken as its limbs, bones, skin, curly curly tail by surgical saws and blades. The final pull is when the baby is yanked from its mother's teat and led away to its doomed path.

Instead, I thought AC/DC is an awesome band.

Bedtime Palindrome

Just tell me a story.
It doesn't have to be extremely epic
I just want to go to sleep
and chase a good dream
It can be about a precocious princess
parrying the final flame of the forked tongue dragon,
A retro robotic wrecking derby,
Or hellhound puppies looking
to get cuddles from their demonic deity.
Surely there are tales you can share.

Surely there are tales you can share.
A demonic deity looking for cuddles
from their hellhound puppies.
A wrecking derby for retro robots.
It can be about a fork-tongued dragon.
parrying the final flame from the precocious Princess.
just so I can chase a good dream
I want to fall asleep
it doesn't have to be extremely epic.
Just tell me a story.

For My Dad

One...

One of the things
I will always
miss
is the great roar
of your tow truck
as it clammers up the steep hill.
The long whiine
of a capitalist conqueror
as it turns down
our road

The desperate
pleading
barks
of a tiny dog
who
expresses all that your family feels:

We miss you,
Welcome Home.

Time for a little fiction

A Punch in the Eye

Ben laid Zephir down on the cushy mattress, then grabbed a green duvet from her closet and draped it on her sleeping figure. It did not matter if she remembered that he helped her. She would still hate him when she woke up. A sad tranquility washed over him. He quietly lumbered out of her apartment into the frosty night, down the dimly lit streets. He thought of a huge mistake from three months ago. It started the destruction of the friendship that officially ended with a failed attempt at reconciliation. This was the first night they were together **since** that did not involve screaming, name calling, or her pure hatred. He made no defense of his actions. He deserved it. No need to give her more reasons to hate him.

They were friends since sitting next to next to each other in middle-school Science, and English and History class, all except Math though they shared that class too. They became friends through study sessions and group projects, and one awkward moment when Zephir politely rejected Ben's advances. Their friendship was strong through high school, college, and after college, helping each other through homework, relationships, and emotional problems. They told each other everything, from Ben's fears of chalkboards and love of blacksmithing reality competitions to Zephir's love of mixed martial arts, roller derby, boxing and wrestling and her fears of cotton balls and Q-Tips.

The day the friendship started along a path of destruction was a pleasant one. The sun was out, the temperature a nice seventy-two degrees, and there were a few puffy little clouds in the sky. Ben received a text: she needed to talk to him in person. She wanted him to meet her at the clock tower in the town's center at four. When he got there the place was almost empty. There were a few people walking their pets, eating, hanging out, or just lying on the

grass. Right when the copper bells of the clock tower struck four by ringing four times, he saw her. She was sitting on a bench staring at her feet, fiddling with her hands. He tried to call out to her, but the ringing of the bells drowned him out. She then lifted her head and looked around until she saw him. When she saw him, her face changed from a peaceful look to volcanic fury. It scared him a little. She rose from the bench, charged right at him, and quickly punched him in the eye.

“Ow, what the fuck, Zeph!” he screamed with his hands immediately covering the hurt eye. “Why would you do that?”

“You goddamn son of a motherfucking bitch! How could you do this to me! I thought you were my best friend!” she screamed as she shook the stinging pain out of her left hand.

“What the hell are you talking about!” he yelled, taking a giant step back away from her. He was still covering his eye.

“You told someone my secret!” she screamed.

His face fell with utter shock. He was hoping Margi would have kept her yappy mouth shut about the very personal thing he told her about Zephir. He knew that if people found out she would not be happy. He decided to deflect by playing dumb, “I have no idea what you are talking about. Are you talking about that time you were with your cousin?”

“Don’t make me punch you again. You know what I am talking about. The embarrassing secret that includes me going to AA.”

“I didn’t tell Margi anything,” he lied. He could not look her in the eye.

“Stop lying to me!”

“I’m not lying.”

She took another swing at his face, and it failed to connect. He lifted his hands up to defend himself.

“Okay, I told her. Just don’t hit me,” he said.

“Yeah, I know you told her, you stupid asshole.”

He asked, “How did you find out?”

“Tracey told me after she heard it from Margi who told Drew, Scott, Tissy, and Yvette!”

“I’m sorry, I begged her not to tell anybody, I even paid her twenty bucks.”

“You tell my secret, that I told you about in absolute confidence, to the one person who hates me as much as I hate her, and you expect her to be silent? You’re a stupid idiot!”

She screamed while taking another swing at him. This time she was aiming for his other eye. Sadly, she missed because he saw it coming. After quickly regaining her composure, she stormed off.

“Zephir, wait! I’m sorry!” Ben yelled.

“Leave me alone, you bastard!” she yelled back as she crossed the street. He decided not to follow her. She needed some time to calm down before he attempted to talk to her. His eye was starting to swell shut as he went home to ice it.

He gave Zephir a day before he sent her a few texts and two voicemails. He said the same thing: he was sorry, he could explain, and he was stupid. He left Margi a few angry texts and one angry voicemail. She had not replied. After three days of no communication, Zephir returned his call and agreed to talk to him at her place. He arrived at 6:00 pm with a box of chocolate donuts. Whenever one of them wronged the other, they would always buy a box of donuts as an apology.

“I am truly sorry about what happened,” he said as he entered her apartment. He placed the donuts on the coffee table. Zephir was sitting on her ottoman. Ben took the seat across from her.

“Yeah, you better be sorry,” she retorted, her body shaking in anger.

“Well, I am sorry,” he said.

“Stop saying you’re sorry! That is all that I have been hearing. My family, especially my mother, saying, ‘I’m sorry you two are fighting,’ our friends telling me they’re sorry that I didn’t trust them with my problems, Margi saying sorry to random people I barely know because I apparently have a raging resting bitch face and they think I am mad at them, and other people who do know about me and my secret saying sorry to people we both know who are saying sorry. I am fucking sick and tired of people telling me they are sorry, and I am especially sick of you saying sorry! Saying sorry to me means nothing, especially if it is coming from you!”

“I’m so – I apologize.”

“Changing the word does not help.”

“Sorry.” He said without thinking.

“Aah!”

“Okay, I will stop saying that word. What do you want me to say or do to make this right and put this incident behind us and move on?”

“Move on? There is no moving on. You stabbed me in the back for sex with a horrible bitch.”

“We did not have sex. She told me she was not interested and had other things to do.”

“So, Judas didn’t get his thirty pieces of silver. Why did you tell her?”

“I don’t know. I was desperate, a bit drunk. I liked her, and it just came out. I am sorry.”

“She didn’t force you, try to blackmail you, or even bribe you? You just told her? Like it was a regular conversation?”

“Yes, I don’t see what is so bad about people finding out. It is kind of funny, when you think about it.”

“You don’t get it!” she screamed.

“Then tell me why it is so important for me not to share it.”

“Because it was not your secret to tell. Because I don’t want people to know about my problems. Because people see me as a good, moral, nice girl. Because I thought the one person I trusted most in this world, wouldn’t tell anybody.”

“Zephir...”

She took a deep breath, tears flowing down her face. She pointed at her door, “Just get out, don’t come back. Ever.”

“What?”

“Get out!”

“Zephir...”

She grabbed the box of donuts and flung it at him. It went wide and to the left above his head. It hit the wall and exploded with bits of donuts and sprinkles. “Get The Fuck Out! Now!”

He quickly exited her place before she flung something that might hit him. She did have a collection of rocks by the door. As he walked away, he hoped she was not going to end their friendship because of his mistakes. Turns out she would.

A couple of weeks before, Ben, for the hundredth time, had been trying to hook up with Margi, one of the prettiest women in the town. He had been trying to do this since high school. There was a major problem. Zephir. She hated Margi with an unbridled passion that could only be stopped with a nuclear holocaust and the eruption of the super volcano located at Yellowstone. This was due to them being in constant competition all throughout their school years. From every sport, contests, grades, boys, and pageants they competed for, both would fight to win. Margi would win about eighty-five percent of the time using dirty tricks and underhanded tactics. It finally came to an explosive confrontation when Zephir beat her in a 5k obstacle course challenge. Margi, being a sore loser, spread some nasty rumors about Zephir that regarded pickles and pants. This resulted in Zephir and Margi getting into a fist fight. Zephir won the fight. Things had cooled down since then due to their attempts to avoid each other. However, they sometimes ran into each other since they lived in a small community, and they frequented the same places. Fortunately, these confrontations were usually filled with backhanded comments and snide remarks. Sometimes there was a screaming match.

Despite his best friend's objections, he still wanted to be with Margi because he enjoyed spending time with her when Zephir was not around. He even wanted to date her, or at least spend an intimate night with her. Zephir had long since given up understanding his desire and chose to mock his many failed attempts.

Tonight was the best opportunity he had to get what he wanted. He changed into a nice pair of khaki slacks, a blue collared shirt, and sprayed some stuffy cologne. Druw was throwing a kick-ass party, and Margi was definitely going to be there. She had recently ended her latest relationship and, as rumor had it, she was on the prowl. Unfortunately, Zephir was

unable to attend due to work. Which might be a good thing since he felt that his chances might increase without her presence. Zephir always made a point to “kindly” greet Margi whenever they see each other when Ben was with them. Before he had the chance to even talk to Margi. He was not going to let this rare opportunity get away from him. He even bought a whole new outfit and used his fanciest cologne. It cost him thirty dollars and a ten-minute discussion with the salesman.

He arrived at the party around eight o’clock. The party was in full swing with people dancing, drinking, and having fun. There was a light haze of smoke spread out through the place. After he dodged a couple clusters of people, grabbed a beer, thanked Drew for the invitation, and chatted up a couple of friends, he spotted her with a beer in her hand. She was chatting with a few of her friends. He slowly made his way to Margi with the focus of a marathon runner who just saw the finish line in their sight.

“Hey Margi!” he yelled over the noise caused by the crowd and music. She turned, waved at him, and went back to chatting with her friends. By the time he got to her location, the friends she was talking to left giving Ben the opportunity to start his seduction. “How’s life treating you? Beautifully I hope,” he said with a crooked grin.

She giggled at his horrible pickup line before taking a sip of her drink. She replied, “Oh I’m doing great. Where’s Zephir? I expected her to come out from behind you to greet me with her usual collection of vulgarity and name calling.”

“She could not make it this time. She had to work.”

“Aw, that is just tooooo bad. Is she still asking people if they want fries with that?”

“I am not sure if that place serves fries. All I know is that we can have some fun without her interrupting.”

“Like what?” A sly smile appeared on her face.

“We could do some vertical dancing,” he said while his eyebrows wiggled.

“Maybe, maybe not.”

Margi had a slight interest in Ben. She found him attractive, and really enjoyed flirting and talking with him. She just had no desire to sleep or be in a relationship with him. This was mostly due to his close friendship with Zephir. Margi strongly believed that by entering into a relationship with Ben, the relationship would be a very brief and volatile one. Also asking him to stop being friends with a person he has known for most of his life might have a negative impact on the relationship. Oddly, she did not want to end their friendship. She believed that Ben was one of the few people that could keep Zephir calm and happy. Casual sex or a one-night stand with Ben just once was out of the question. She was tired of one-night stands, friends with benefits, and secret relationships. She wanted to have a long and healthy relationship. She wanted marriage and a kid or three. So, she made sure that any interaction with Ben ended with her leaving him disappointed, frustrated, wanting more, and some confidence in herself for making the right decision not to be with him. However, that does not mean she still enjoyed hanging out with him.

They spent the next couple of hours drinking, dancing, and flirting. It was two o'clock in the morning. The party was dying down as people were starting to leave or were passing out on the floor or furniture. Ben realized that this was the moment that he had been waiting for. He asked Margi, “So do you want to go to my place?”

“Sorry, Ben, but no.”

“But didn't you have fun tonight?”

“I did, but it doesn't mean I'm going to sleep with you.”

Ben started to freak out. This wasn't supposed to happen. Zephir would tease him if she found out about this. He blurted "What if I tell you something about Zephir that no one knows and would be embarrassed if people find out?"

"What is it?"

He told her every single detail of Zephir's secret. About a year before the fallout of the friendship happened, Zephir briefly left town to visit a cousin for a couple of months. The cousin lived on the east coast and enjoyed having a lot of crazy alcohol-inspired adventures on the weekend. Zephir, at the time, was not that much of a drinker but decided to take part and have some fun. Well, she had a little too much fun. Ben was able to figure out what happened through the combination of YouTube clips, what Zephir and the cousin remember, and a copy of the police report.

It started with a very clear video, almost movie quality due to it being filmed on the latest iPhone, of an intoxicated Zephir cursing at the manager of Costco after getting caught stealing a pallet of Lucky Charms, slab of bacon, three eggs cartons, and a candy bar. Apparently, she wanted to make a leprechaun breakfast. The first video ended with her running from the cops, who were holding tasers. The second video showed the chase ending with her stumbling into a closed phone store because she thought she lost her phone and wanted to call herself to warn her about the cops chasing her. In the end, her phone was still in her pocket. The final video showed Zephir trying to punch a cop in the eye. She missed so badly that she stumbled, fell to the ground, broke her nose, and knocked herself out at the same time. She woke up the next day in a somewhat crowded jail cell, with a bandage on her nose. She was arrested for public intoxication, attempted assault on a police officer, two charges of trespassing, and theft. A week later, she was given a quick and speedy trial that

ended with her pleading guilty. She was sentenced to sixty days of community service, six months of probation, and a five-thousand-dollar fine. Finally, she was legally required to go to AA for a year. Zephir felt humiliated and wanted no one other than Ben to know what happened. She prided herself on being an upstanding citizen with good morals and values. After spending hours searching on the web and bribing the cousin for more information, Ben was able to find Zephir's not-so-flattering mugshot. It was remarkably similar to Lindsay Lohan's but with blood and bandages. He was able to find the videos of her adventure, which he gladly showed to her. It embarrassed her even more and it helped her remember what she did during her visit. In the end, she wanted to forget that it happened and move on with her life. She even stopped talking to her cousin who helped fuel the little misadventure, made some friends at AA, and was getting ready to tell more people about the incident.

While Ben was telling this to Margi, her evil smirk grew bigger and bigger, and her blue eyes sparkled with chilling anticipation with the thought of what fun she could have with this information. When Ben finished telling the story, she thanked him, and bid him a good night.

“That’s it? No sex?!” Ben said as she turned away from him.

“I didn’t promise anything, and I wasn’t going to sleep with you,” she replied as she walked out of Druw’s house.

“Wait! You can’t tell anybody, especially Zephir, what I just told you,” he said as he reached into his pocket. He pulled some cash out of his wallet and handed it over to Margi. Once the money was placed in her hand he said, “Here take the money and swear that you will say nothing to her.”

“I swear,” she lied. Her eyes rolled with annoyance. She headed out the door and into her friend’s car. Ben watched her leave, his head hung in disappointment.

“That fucking sucks,” he said to himself. He stumbled to his car and passed out in the passenger’s seat.

Three months after the final argument that doomed their friendship, Ben was miserable and severely depressed. Zephir absolutely refused any more attempts at forgiveness. Ben was treated horribly by Zephir. Most of his friends and acquaintances sided with Zephir in the breakup. They could care less about people fighting, friendships ending, and secrets being leaked because it happened a lot in their little community. They just did not like how Ben’s betrayal changed Zephir into a different person, and the loss of their friendship changed Ben. Their personalities shifted with Ben becoming horribly depressed like a high school goth, and Zephir turned into the Hulk or a very bitter, angry, and paranoid person. Just minus the height and the green skin.

It was around one o’clock in the morning when he got off work. It was a long and stressful day that left him exhausted. As he was walking home, he passed Saint Francis’ Bar when he heard some raised voices. He could not make out what was being said, but one of the voices sounded angry and vaguely familiar. As he passed the alley next to the bar he looked and saw three people. There were two men and Zephir having a very vocal and almost physical fight. One of them, a big, fat guy, pushed her down. When she landed on the ground with an “Oomph”

Ben charged in yelled, “What the hell are you guys doing?”

“Back off duuuuude,” bellowed one of the drunks, who was short and skinny. He took a swig of his cheap beer. He started giggling at some hilarious joke that no one understood

but himself. His fat buddy shook his head, his double chin flapped in agreement while making a weird confirmation grunt or piggy-like squeal.

“It looks like the lady wants to be left alone,” Ben said with his fist clenched.

“Mind yorr business, assholllle”

“Can’t do that”

“Thema Imma goona kick your ass!” The skinny drunk took a final swig of his beer before he flung it at Ben. It went wide to the right way above Ben’s head, hit a dumpster and shattered. Ben lifted his arms to protect his face as he slowly charged at the drunks. The skinny drunk ran at him with his fists swinging like medieval morning-stars. When he got into striking range Ben mustered up as much energy as he could and punched the drunk in the eye. The drunk stumbled back and dropped like a rock. The fat drunk dropped his bottle and charged at Ben with his head down like he was a rhino. Ben quickly jumped out of the way. As he ran past him, Ben grabbed the fat one’s collar and redirected his path towards the stone wall of the bar causing the drunk to slam into it. He was knocked out.

Ben walked towards Zephir. She was still on the ground where the drunks pushed her. Her gray eyes were still burning with rage as he stuck his hand out. She swatted it away as she pulled herself up off the ground. It took about two minutes for her to get on her feet. She looked like she was drinking just as much as the two men who accosted her. Once on her feet she stumbled towards him, misjudging the distance as her body fell on him. He froze, unsure if she was going to hug, hurt, or scream at him. Instead he heard her snore. He picked her up in a firefighter carry and walked in the direction of her house.

During the walk he realized that Zephir was still in AA, and she should not have been at the bar. He was not sure why he did this, but he started talking to the unconscious woman,

“What happened to you Zephir? I know that our breakup has affected us both, but did it really affect you this badly? What happened to your sponsor? Are you even going to the meetings? I really do regret everything I did. I just wanted to be happy, and I thought being with Margi would give me that happiness, but I was wrong. Not having you in my life sucks. Maybe someday you will forgive. Maybe when you do forgive me by show up at my place asking if we could talk.”

By the time he dropped Zephir at her house and arrived at his apartment, it was close to three in the morning. He unlocked the door and went inside. His apartment was a small three-room place with a tiny bathroom, and a tinier bedroom with a living room/kitchenette room combo. While his place was relatively clean, but it was extremely disorganized. His kitchen counters were covered in dry goods and kitchen utensils. His table was covered in books, loose papers, and change. He tossed his keys onto the cluttered table and grabbed a water bottle in his barely stocked fridge. He sat down on the couch. Despite the time he did not feel tired but felt anxious and concerned about the possibility of being arrested.

He passed out on his couch and drifted off into a dreamless sleep. He did not get any sleep due to his windows having a wonderful, unblocked view of the rising sun. Ben finished off his half empty, warm bottle of water and lumbered to his bed, collapsed face first, and quickly passed out. Again, he did not get much sleep because of the excessive knocking on his front door.

“Alright, alright, I’m coming,” he grumbled as he lifted his tired sore body out of the bed. The knocking did not stop. Instead, it got louder.

“Alright! Alright! I said I’m coming,” he repeated, “people are just so goddamn, fucking impatient.” He looked into his peephole and saw two police officers standing. He let

them into his apartment. The cops were tall and had dark hair, clean-shaven faces, and they wore the standard police uniform. Ben walked into the kitchenette and made some coffee on his Keurig. The cops took a cursory look around his disorganized apartment before they sat down at his table. One of the officers pulled out a little notepad and pen and scribbled a few things. About a minute later, Ben's coffee finished brewing and he poured a lot of cream into it. He took a cautionary sip before taking a seat on the opposite side of the table.

Once he got comfortable, the cops started in with their questions about the events that happened early that morning. Ben told the officers what he saw, what he did during the incident, and what he did afterward. They asked him questions about his reason for being there, whether the bar was a part of his usual route home, and other general questions. They then asked about his relationship with Zephir. He was truthful about their current situation. They were close friends, but they no longer were friends. He did not go into any detail despite the curious looks on the cops' faces, but they did not press the issue. The two cops thanked Ben for answering their questions and would be in touch for a possible follow up.

“Will that be all? I am not in any trouble?” Ben asked as he opened the door.

“What do you mean?” asked one of the cops.

“I did assault two guys. Isn't that a crime?”

“Your former friend's statement and your statement tells us that you acted in self-defense. Plus, it is not the first time those guys instigated a fight and lost.”

After the police left, things didn't exactly go back to normal for Ben. People around town treated him a bit better. He had not seen Zephir since the incident. Which was fine. Their relationship was most likely too damaged to be fixed. Fortunately, Ben started to feel a bit better about himself. He knew that he fucked up and that he was a horrible person, but it

felt good helping Zephir. Even if they never become friends again for the rest of their lives, he was happy to know that he saved her life once.

It had been three weeks since the bar fight incident. The two drunks are in jail awaiting trial. The DA told Ben that he was not needed to testify as there was a security camera that caught the whole incident. Ben was looking up apartments in other towns because he wanted to start a new life somewhere else. He hated his job and felt that this small town had nothing to offer him financially. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. He opened the door to find out who's visiting him. He was surprised to see Zephir standing in front of him. Her face showed no emotion.

“Zephir. What are you doing here?” he asked.

Crash Course Marriage

Have you ever wanted to take back the things said in the heat of the moment? I have and I have regretted it ever since. My husband, Jericho St. Trailer and I, Karrill Bulivard St. Trailer, have been having marital problems for the last year and a half. The first six months of our problems stemmed from a mixture of unwanted desires, lack of communication, and jealousy. Then I fucked it all up because I did something really stupid that caused my latest year in our marriage to be crappy.

Before the incident my husband was a different man. He was lazy, rude, and could not even try to be a father to our kids. He was a flabby man with a keg instead of the six pack he had in his younger years as a student athlete. The only thing he still has is his nice thick brown hair, and goatee. It can be chalked up to us just aging but I have been in the same ten-pound range of hundred forty to hundred fifty pounds, minus the two times I was pregnant, since the beginning of college.

By not being a good father, I meant he would take the kids out to do fun activities, give them sugary treats before dinner, and wouldn't discipline them. It just frustrated me because I don't want to be the sole authority figure, the disciplinary person, the bad cop, and other metaphors and stuff related to being the one who has to do the responsible or disciplinary stuff. Maybe I want to have fun with my kids too! Maybe I want to see him struggle disciplining the kids like he does to me all the time.

He somehow always found the time to hang out with our friends. I know there is nothing wrong with hanging out with them once or twice a week, but he did at least three to four times a week. Not once did he even think of inviting me or seeing if I had plans for us. Unfortunately, I was not perfect either. I thought I was, but hindsight is twenty/twenty.

During the few times I spent with our friends I started to become jealous of them. They were still single, it looked like they had no real responsibilities, and they had a lot of fun going out and doing stuff like going on trips to lakes and pulling all-nighters at nightclubs. I wanted to have that fun and lack of responsibility they had, to have the opportunity to not worry about adult things like kids, bills, planning meals, and stepping on sharp toys.

Our relationship started in the last two months of our junior year in high school. My family had just moved from Idaho at the beginning of the school year, and I was seated next to him in geometry, biology, and Spanish classes. At first, we were two hormonal, shy teens with an attraction to each other at a purely physical level. He was a wrestler at the 190 pounds weight limit, and I liked wearing skirts because I was told by my last boyfriend that I had really “bitchin” legs, something that Jericho liked about me too.

Over time we soon started talking and hanging out outside of school. The conversations, at first, were about schoolwork. Then it was about wrestling, and my enjoyment when I have the chance of working on my hobby of soap carving. Soon we were able to share personal stuff about each other such as me missing my hometown, my childhood friends, and my dumb older siblings. While he talked about his struggle to please his father, who was a hardcore wrestling fanatic, who always seemed to be disinterested in his victories and angry over his losses. He also talked about his parents’ messy divorce because it bothered him how much those two did not care about each other at all when they were married. Yet when they got divorced, they spent all their time spouting hateful comments about each other, even when they were just in their own separate homes with their son.

The thing that made us want to date each other was prom. Jericho asked me despite the numerous amounts of girls that were interested in him. We went to prom, danced the night away, and during one of the slow dance numbers I told him I wanted to be more than friends. He wanted that too. I blurted out “I love you” and he kissed me before I freaked out. After that we were inseparable and madly in love.

We married after our third year in community college. The proposal was amazing! It was the fourth of July and under the bright and colorful fireworks bursting in the air when he dropped down onto one knee and asked me to marry him. We married exactly a year later under fireworks bursting in the air. We waited until we graduated community college and had decent jobs before having children which took three years, and we have two amazing kids, Gran and Prixie Lynn.

Well, the incident started about a year ago during our eleventh year of marriage. Jericho and I were driving back from having our weekly dinner at my parents’ house. Since it was a Friday, Mom suddenly decided to have the kids stay with them for the night or possibly the weekend. She winked at me when she told me this. She must have been thinking that my husband and I would be having some naughty alone-time when got back to the house. Well, she was wrong for two reasons. The first happened during the car ride and the second was that my husband and I have not been getting along or have been intimate for the last three months due to me constantly turning him down. We constantly argued about everything from bills to what show or movie to watch. I think she thought sex would fix our problems. We got into the car. I was in the passenger seat since I had a couple glasses of wine. Fortunately, he had nothing to drink because he was not a huge fan of wine. As soon as we pulled out of my parents’ house and started driving down the road when he tried to start a conversation.

“Since the in-laws are going to be handling the brood tonight and maybe this weekend maybe we should have some fun. Soooooooo, what do you want to do? Want to see if any of our friends are available to hang out tonight, head home and have some crazy fun loud sex, or heck, try and do both?” he asked. “Personally, and to be very blunt, I want to just go home, have a beer, and have sex, but I would like to hear your thoughts and ideas.”

“Just take me home, okay,” I curtly replied. An angry scowl was starting to form on my face.

“Greeeeecat. Judging by your attitude we are definitely having sex,” he said sarcastically. His eyes rolled. “Like we have been doing every single night.”

“Fuck you,” I said angrily.

“I wish you would because you haven’t in the last four months, I think. In fact, you have been moody, mean, and sometimes tipsy in those months.”

“Oh, so you have noticed, and yet you have not asked why.”

“Why should I? You spend most of your time yelling at me, complaining to our friends, and your mother.”

“How did know I told Mom?”

“She told me.”

“Well then. With all this information maybe, you should realize that I’m yelling at you because you are a fat drunken slob who does nothing around the house.”

“I do stuff. I ...,” he said before I interrupted him.

“Like what: drink, get fat, complain about everything and expect me to do something about it.

“Hey now. I’m not fat, and you’re being little mean. Maybe we should just be quiet for the rest of the drive.”

“You think I’m being a little fucking mean? I will show you fucking mean! I don’t fucking care what you do! I fucking hate you so fucking much that I can no longer stand you, let alone touch you! If I could have a fucking affair I would, and there are days that I just fucking wished you would fucking die! Like right fucking NOW!”

Then irony struck hard as we were t-boned by a drunk driver in his piece-of-shit, chipped-blue-paint, rust-bucket 1970’s Dodge truck. We survived, but the driver didn’t because he ended up flying out of his truck’s front window and down the road. Months after the accident in the right light, you could see the long skid mark that indicated where he landed.

The results of the accident were minimal to me. My head slammed into the passenger window hard enough to crack the glass. I was not sure if my head was bleeding due to me being concussed and in a serious daze. I suffered some major bruising from the seatbelt and some minor cuts from the broken glass. The car became a two-ton pile of junk that we sold to a junk yard for a couple hundred dollars. My stay at the hospital was a very short one.

Then there was Jericho. The damage was severe, but he survived. His left humerus bone broke in two places, along with the radius and ulna bone, a few ribs cracked, his knee was dislocated, and finally his face was heavily lacerated, and he suffered an even worse concussion. He ended up staying in the hospital for about a week before being discharged. After being released from the hospital he would spend three months in physical therapy.

He changed after the accident. He became a different person, whether this was due to the accident, or what I said to him, or both. Truthfully, it doesn’t matter how it happened. He

just changed in a good way because he became a more attentive father. He started doing all the things I desperately wanted him to do before the accident. He would discipline them when they were bad, enforce bedtimes instead of letting them stay up for hours, and would have my back when I would try to get them to do stuff.

I think he spends more time with them than he did with our friends. Since the accident he may have hung out with them five times. I am only guessing since he does not spend time with me, and I also have not spent time with them that much since the accident. There are more important things that I need to do like save my marriage, and my kids.

He became much more serious with his job, and it resulted in him getting a raise. Finally, he started helping out a lot more around the house. He even started working out more and was losing weight. He might not be able to reach the physique he had in his athletic years, but he looks a lot better.

But our relationship changed in a bad way because he barely talks to me and tries to avoid me. If it is not about the kids, bills, and groceries then he doesn't talk to me. I tried in desperation to invite him on dates, dinner at my parents' house, and our bed. He refused sex and dates, and unless the kids were coming, he creates excuses on why he cannot join my parents for dinner. Most nights I still cry myself to sleep over the damage I have caused to our family.

Anyway, the very first conscious thought I had after the accident was freaking out over the possibility that he died. When I found out he lived, I broke down into elated tears. It made me realize that I did not hate my husband, that I love him still. Instead, I just wanted him to be a bit more responsible and more helpful in our parental duties. I wanted feel like I was more than the person who was responsible for everything including his sexual needs. I

had been wracked with guilt with everything that I said because we almost died! Our children would have to be raised by our parents. They are old, and they already raised kids, and they do not need to do that again. Plus, Jericho's parents are very bitter, old people, and my siblings do not know how to raise kids. The last time my sister babysat, Gran destroyed the upstairs toilet and Prixie Lynn covered herself, the living room and the kitchen in flour.

I prayed that his head injury would make him forget about the last thing I said before we almost died. Unfortunately, it didn't work.

A day after I was released, I came back to hospital to visit the man I still love. His room was a typical hospital room. It had four hospital beds. Privacy could be given to them through a flimsy curtain. Finally, there were a variety of medical machines that monitored and maintain a person's health. I sat in a chair next to his bed, gently touched his arm and quietly asked, "Jericho. You awake?"

"Yeah," he said with his bandaged face turned towards me. His voice sounded a bit muffled.

"I want to talk about some of the things I said before we were hit by that truck. It was very wrong of me to say those things. I am sorry"

"Why? There is no point in talking about it. You made yourself very clear about your feelings in regards towards our marriage."

"I was wrong, Jericho, and drunk. I still love you."

"I find that hard to believe. You wished for me to die, and I almost did. At least I know you aren't cheating on me. Yet."

"It was a mistake, Jericho. Everything I said in the car was wrong and stupid. I know that now. Please forgive me."

“I wish I could believe you, but I can’t. Just...leave me alone, I’m tired and the meds are kicking in.” He turned his head and passed out. I left his room in tears. We -- well, Jericho -- decided he would wait until the kids were adults before divorcing me. He really did not want to become a co-parent that got to see his kids part time. He also realized our finances would be so bad after a divorce that we would have to sell our beautiful home and live in very cheap apartments just to get a roof over his head and would have to take a second or even third job just to make ends meet. I might get my parents and siblings to help me if we did divorce, but I do not want to burden them with my problems.

If people looked at our relationship without knowing about our problems, they would see a happy family. Despite his new feelings of dislike towards me, and his personal changes, he still treated me well. Which had given me false hope about our relationship getting. When he did something fun with the kids, he would invite me along. He always made sure to set a plate for me during dinner, if he was the one cooking the meal. There are many small moments of kindness that he did for me, but those two things felt like the big ones. During our last family outing to the local park, I talked to him about it while the kids played on the jungle gym.

“Gran be careful climbing up the slide. Pixie Lynn for the last time put the spikey pinecone down. You are going to hurt yourself,” I shouted to the kids.

“Listen to your mother kids!” Jericho shouted back. We walked in silence for a few minutes before I reached out and grabbed his hand. He gave me a strange look but said nothing and let me have my small victory.

“How are things going at work?” I asked. It was one of the few things we can talk about when we are alone.

“I got a promotion. I am now the assistant manager at the plant. It comes with a fifty-cent raise.”

“That is awesome honey!”

He gave me another strange look before speaking, “Yeah it is pretty awesome.”

“You have changed for the last few months with the working out, the job, and kids.

Why is that?

“You know why.”

“Ha Ha. Don’t be a smart-ass.”

“Alright. Alright. During my physical therapy I realized I missed working out, so I kept going after the session was done. As for work, I realized that if I worked harder and goof off less work might reward me. Finally, I almost died, and my life flashed before my eyes and all my memories of me drinking with our friends. I thought about our kids during the hospital stay and I realized I know very little about them other than their names, gender, and age. It depressed me even more.”

“Prixie’s favorite color is red, and Gran likes Godzilla.”

“I know that now.”

“You know what would make this day complete? Will you join me in the bedroom tonight instead of sleeping in the basement?”

“No.”

“We do not have to have sex. I just miss you terribly.”

“Again, no thank you.”

“I thought we were getting better. I mean we have been spending time with each other.”

“I don’t want the children to know about our problems. Just because I am being nice to you does not mean I want to restart our relationship,” he said as he let go of my hand. “I am sorry for misleading you but my feelings about our relationship is not going to change.” He walked away from me and towards the children. While they played, I did my best not to break down in tears.

After we got back from the park, I went to our... my room and spent most of the day researching a possible solution that could either fix our relationship or at the very least it could do was improve our relationship just enough to make the next thirteen years a bit more bearable before he plans on divorcing me because I could no longer stand this situation anymore. I confronted him the next day.

“We need to talk,” I said. He was in the living room, sitting on the leather couch reading the latest MAD Magazine collection. The tv across the room littered with kid toys was off. Despite his recent maturity, there are still small bits of his old self in there.

“Is it about the kids?” he asked. He did not look up from the magazine.

“No, they are perfectly fine, Gran is in his room doing his homework and Prixie Lynn is in our, my, room coloring.”

“Truck acting up again?” We got a new truck after the accident. It is a ten-year-old blue Ford F150 and every couple of weeks a new problem has arisen. Last time it was the battery and alternator.

“The truck is not acting up right now.”

“Good. Are there any money problems like bills that still need to be paid?”

“No. Everything has been paid until next month,” I said while starting to get annoyed.

He looked up from his magazine and stared at me for a few seconds, my stomach fluttered, before he spoke, “You don’t look sad, which means your parents and siblings are okay, you’re not elated, which means my parents are still functioning so no. We don’t need to talk.” He went right back to reading.

I yanked the magazine out of his hand and flung it across the living room and landed next to the cabinet that was filled with boardgames, “We are going to talk. Now.”

“No, we aren’t going to talk. I told you before if it wasn’t anything related to anything that I had just asked then there is no point in us talking.” He said as he got off the couch, picked up the magazine off the floor, and walked to the front door, “I will be outside. Reading. Alone. Please Don’t bother me anymore.”

I followed him out onto our small red porch. He was leaning on the white porch railing when I spoke, “Fine, I will do the talking, you will just listen. Okay?”

He said nothing and went back to reading his magazine. Doing his absolute best to ignore me.

“I want to talk about our failing relationship and how we can make an attempt to fixing it for the better.”

He looked up from his magazine and said, “There is no fixing our relationship. All we need to do is just get along until Prixie Lynn turn eighteen.”

“I do not want to just ‘get along,’” I said with finger quotes, “I want our relationship to be a happy one again with love, sex, and the closeness we had before I fucked it all up.”

“I don’t want to fix this at all.”

“Hear me out okay. I think we should do couples’ therapy.”

“I don’t want to do couples therapy for a few reasons why: we can’t afford it, you need therapy, I don’t, and finally, this is very important, I do not want to fix our marriage.”

“Okay, I have a counter proposal. We should do couple’s therapy because of a few reasons. The first reason is that we can afford it. I have been saving a small amount of money from my checks, budgeting our finances, and we have not done anything as a family since the accident. The second reason is that we survived a car crash where someone died, and we almost died. Yeah, we had no hand in the man’s death, but I am sure it would not hurt to talk to a professional. The third reason is that we have thirteen years left before we divorce according to you. Are you really going to say you want our relationship to be like this the entire time?”

“Maybe I do”

“I cannot. I think we should try it out. We literally have nothing to lose and so much to gain. If it does not work out, then we can continue with this crappy loveless situation. If it succeeds, then we can look back at it in thirteen years and laugh. I think doing this will help us.”

“I don’t know,” he said as he put the magazine down and looked at me.

“I have done all the research and picked one that has a great success rating in getting couples back together, he is affordable, and is willing to meet us on Wednesday, Thursday, or Saturday next week. All I have to do is call him to confirm, and all you have to do is show up and talk,” I pleaded. I was starting to get desperate. I really wanted him to agree before I resorted to threatening him with divorce. It would help us immensely if he was more willing to participate instead of being reluctant.

“Alright. You have made some good points, and if you are correct about the budget...”

“We do have the money for this, and our insurance will cover some of it. I can show you,” I interrupted.

“There is no need, I believe you. You have always been good with our finances.”

“Thank you,” I said with my heart filled with pride. It was the first compliment he has given me in a long time. There may be hope for us yet! “I call him right away and let you know when and where the appointment will take place.”

“Okay.” He said before heading back inside. Once he was inside, I danced with joy for a few minute, then I went inside the house. I checked on the kids before I grabbed my phone off the charger. I quickly checked the time before calling the counselor. It was close to closing time, but I was fortunate enough to reach his secretary before she left and was able to schedule an appointment.

A week after the confrontation, we drove together to our first couples’ counseling. I was both nervous and excited about our first session. Excited because this could be the very beginning of our relationship being fixed and possibly becoming stronger than ever. I was also nervous about Jericho. While he agreed to participate and talk instead of sitting in the chair and silently glanced at stuff in room. I made him promise after some constant nagging and reminding him multiple times throughout the week. I was also nervous about what he would say about me. Do not get me wrong, I know he will say some negative things about me, but maybe those negative things make the therapist think that our relationship was unrepairable.

We arrived at the place about twenty minutes early. The waiting room was a mixture of spacious but paradoxically small because of the amount of furniture that was all over the place. There was the small, green metal desk that the secretary, Arbry Norymel, was using. It had the typical stuff that people put to personalize their desks: name plate, computer, pictures of a happy family, pictures of kids and partner, corded phone, and a intercom that is connected to the room behind her desk. The room had two small leather couches, two wooden chairs with cushions attached, and two small coffee tables with a variety of magazines on them. They ranged from psychology journals like *Journal of Family Psychology*, and *Canadian Psychology*, gossip magazines like *Star*, *People*, and *US Weekly*, and surprisingly there was a *Mad Magazine*, and a *Women's Fitness*.

“That’s odd,” I mumbled to myself as I stared at the fitness magazine.

“Yeah,” Jericho said, apparently, he heard me. “That issue is almost ten-year-olds, why would he still keep this?”

“Wait what are you talking about? The fitness magazine has to be at least three months.”

“Fitness Magazine? I’m talking about the *Mad Magazine* it came out in 2014 because it talks about the stupid events that happened in 2013 like Ikea serving horse meatballs, and also it has the “Spy VS Spy” comic strip where White Spy gets bludgeoned by Black Spy with a baseball bat disguised as an umbrella.”

“How in the hell do you remember all that and not my parents’ anniversary?”

“I reread the issue about a month ago, and it’s your dad’s job to remember his wedding anniversary and not mine.”

“I keep it because of the cover, since it is mocking an incident where a grown middle aged, married adult has a young, skimpily clad twenty-year-old woman twerking at his private area at a music award show. Which was a contributing factor towards his eventual divorce. I find the magazine to be great way to discuss problems especial when it comes from couples with infidelity issues,” said the couples’ therapist. He was very tall, bald, Latino man wearing a blue polo shirt, and black cargo pants. He had to be at least a foot taller than Jericho and he was six-foot four inches. “I am sorry to interrupt your discussion, I am Doctor Enzo Terapeutalto, you can call me Doctor Enzo or Enzo, and you must be the St. Trailers, please come into my office.”

“Yes, I am Karrill and this is my husband Jericho. It is a pleasure to meet you Doctor Enzo,” I said with my hand raised to receive a handshake. He shook it and then shook Jericho’s hand.

“Yeah, nice to meet you,” Jericho said as we then entered Doctor Enzo’s office. It was a typical therapist office with bookcases filled with psychology books, a file cabinet, and there were three chairs in the middle of the room. Two looked like the same chair in the waiting room while the third chair was made out of leather and had a notebook on it. There is a small wooden desk behind the leather chair with a bunch of folders, a laptop, a pencil caddy, and a picture of a woman holding two babies.

“You explained the *MAD Magazine*, but what about the fitness magazine?” I asked as I sat down while Jericho sat next to me.

“Well, another reason couples have problems in their relationship stems in how they have perceived themselves and each other in a negative body perspective. The magazine

helps inspire one of them to either start eating healthier or start working out,” Doctor Enzo said as he took the notebook off the leather chair and sat down.

“Oh, that makes sense.”

“Now let’s get started. Since this is our first meeting, we will be discussing our goal for this session is to discuss the reason why you two feel like you need to be here with me. Then the next three weeks will group therapy, followed by three weeks of individual therapy, then some more group with individual sessions peppered in when we feel it is necessary.”

“Why individual sessions? I mean this is couple therapy and not regular therapy,” Jericho said with his arms crossed.

“I find that at the beginning of counseling, there is stuff that couples are unable to share in front of each other and in front of me. The first individual sessions is to help make you become comfortable sharing things with me so that we can share them with each other because being honest with each other will help us heal with each other.

“I don’t think there is anything that I do not mind sharing with my wife,” Jericho said with an emphasis on wife.

“Also, the individual sessions can be used to discuss what happened during the couple sessions. Now let start this session with a simple question: If sharing is not a problem for you two, then what is the problem in your relationship?” Doctor Enzo said while he opened his notebook and clicked his pen. We were silent. I was trying to find the words to best summarize our problem. Jericho was not ready to share.

“Well come on don’t be shy, who wants to go first? I know this might be intimidating but for you to get to the required destination you need to start by putting the car in first gear.”

I decided to be blunt, “My husband doesn’t love me because he thinks I don’t love him.”

“Is this true Jericho?”

“No. I still love her but, I know she doesn’t love me. She told me right before I was almost killed in a car accident. She even wanted me dead.”

I turned and looked at him. I felt like a Looney Toon character because it felt like my jaw was on the floor. My eyes were wide and slowly filled with tears as I responded, “you still love me?”

“Yeah, your legs are still pretty bitchin.”

“You’re wrong though, I do love you, I will do everything I can to prove it.”

“I wish I could believe you.”

“I will make you believe.”

His declaration is a good start, if it was genuine, but it is going to be a long road to a long battle before things can get better. I just need to be strong. I wiped away my tears with the back of my hand, turned back to Doctor Enzo and said, “Well, Doctor, can we continue?”

Grandpa's Myths and Legends

Part one:

The Twelve Tongue God

"Hey there Sweetie!"

"Grandpa! It has like months since I last saw you! How was the road trip? Are you feeling, okay?"

"I am doing fine. Each day is its own journey and today is a good one. The road trip was enlightening. I will tell you about it later."

"Will you tell another story while you are here. I missed them."

"Okay, Sweetie, let me tell you about the Twelve Tongue God. Do you want to go outside and sit by that old oak tree?"

"Yes. Oh, we can bring snacks!"

"Good grab one of the stools from the kitchen. My knees cannot handle the rough ground. (five minutes later) Well, the Twelve Tongue God is not a good God, it is an evil one that traveled the world stealing a cultures mother's tongue. In fact, the Twelve Tongue God is a name it gave itself as it increased in power. Originally it was called Hongerizungenmengeur and it had a big icosahedral head with twelve mouths. It walked on thin nimble legs with long thin arms with long hooked fingers that it would use to take a person's tongue out of their mouths. The more mother tongues it takes the more mouths they get."

"So why did it change his name?"

"Sweetie please pay attention. I told you why he called himself the Twelve Tongue God because he was able to steal a whole culture's ability to speak their cultural language

twelve times. It became even powerful with each destruction of a language that they became a god.”

“Why would he do that, Grandpa?”

“Well, it wanted to throw the world into chaos, and it enjoyed destroying people’s lives. It forced people to speak another language they know little about, making them lose an important part of themselves. I know that your inquisitive mind is probably forming a million questions, and I do not want to spend a long time answering those questions. So, I will let you ask one more question before I continue with my story... nothing ok then we start with the world descending into chaos as the Twelve Tongue God was searching for more tongues to eat...”

“How could the god steal a language?”

“(Deep breath) ... I asked y’all if you had questions before the story.”

“I’m sorry that I couldn’t think up a question in the ten second of silence you gave us.”

“You’re giving me sass Sweetumtumtum. It was twenty-five seconds. A long time ago, language used to have a physical form of an old, motherly type woman. Think your Grandma Trickens, God rest her soul, but in clothes made with fur and feathers, who smelled like lavender, loved to star gaze, and gave great hugs. These women where the keepers, teachers, leaders, and mother figures for their people. So, millions of people were devastated not only by the loss of their language but the loss of a dearly loved member of their community.

There was one group in particular that hit the loss of their mother tongue particularly hard. Especially the tribal chief. He was a well-defined older person with huge muscles and luscious silver hair, and..."

"Grandpa... really? You know I have been getting into trouble for lying, and Dad thinks that it is due to your stories."

"Okay, okay, the chief wasn't ripped but he was fit due to his constant regiment of modified pushups, walks, and chair aerobics. I... mean he still had a fair amount of silver hair on his head and seventy percent of his original teeth. Is that better?"

"Yes, please continue."

"Anyway, the Chief came up with an elaborate plan to find and kill the evil God. His first step is to create a simple form of communication that can be done with their hands, sign language, and learn how to read lips. They discovered they can mouth the words of their language; they can't say it out loud. This took almost a year for the tribe to master. During the mastering of their silent communication, they trained their bodies to be in tip top shape and scoured the world to find the dread God's fiendish layer. After a year of training, they discovered the God's base in a cave deep in the Rocky Mountains in a place in what is now known as California in an area called Bear Valley.

On a dark night where there was no moon, and the stars were blocked out by thunderclouds a group of fifty well-armed men and women led by the Chief snuck into the cave of the Twelve Tongue God and attacked it while it slept. The battle was a long one as the god was constantly pelted by arrows, spears, and rocks. Some warriors that would run at the God and slash at it with their steely knives, but they could not kill the beast, but left it terrible injured. Unfortunately, the God was able to fight back with its claws and speed as it

would slash at anybody it could reach. It wasn't until the rising sun peeked its rays into the cave when the Chief and his people were victorious in taking the evil god down. The Twelve Tongue God laid in a pool of blue blood, screaming in pain for the many injuries it has sustained. *It is time to finish this*, the Chief signed to the eight remaining soldiers.

The old injured Chief encroached upon the injured God, his knife in hand, he raised the blade above his head, the God, pleading, and its various stolen languages to not be killed, but its pleas were left unheard as the Chief stabbed the God in its face, the creature squirms on the ground, as the Chief decided to keep going and continue to raise his hand and violently stab into the God over and over and over again. The chief wasn't even sure what part of the God he stabbed. He wanted it to die painfully and horribly. All of its blood and guts were flying everywhere, and the creature screamed louder with each thrust before the screams turned into a pained whimper, then a silent gurgle to nothing but flesh being ripped by the stone blade held in the Chief's hand. Despite the creature being dead, the chief was not done with his revenge and destruction of the dead god. He wanted to do so many horrible things to the body. He called out with his hands to one of his warriors to give him her axe. The warrior signaled back; *the creature was already dead; you do not need to continue with this violence on the corpse*. The Chief signaled back that *he was not done yet*, and again demanded his axe. The warrior reluctantly handed over the axe to the Chief, who raised it above his head and slammed it down. He missed the God's neck, instead he smashed through its head. The wound showed the disgusting brain mush of the God as the Chief for raised the ax again and hit the creature's neck. Decapitating it in one swipe. He dropped the axe, picked up his knife and started to cut into the creature's chest until he came upon the ribs. He used

his fists and started to punch the ribs until they broke into jagged pieces that cut the Chief's hands as he reached into the God's chest to pull out..."

"Dad! What kind of story are you telling?"

"Hey Son."

"Whoa! Dad said a naughty word"

"Yes, I did Sweettums and don't worry your pretty curly haired head I will put money in the swear jar, but it still doesn't change the question. What kind of story are you telling."

"He was telling us the story about the Twelve Tongue God, and you interrupted the good part."

"Sweettums, the last time he told you a story like this you were eleven and you crawled into your mother's and I's bed because of that story about the thing that likes to watch people sleep."

"Son, I told Sweetumtumtum the reason why that guy kept seeing a monster in the corner of his room was due to the random junk in his room and the shadows created by a streetlight. It was a lesson about cleaning her room."

"Doesn't matter. Come on, Sweetie, it is time to say goodbye to Grandpa Arlkens."

"Wait, can I finish this story? I'll skip the continue acts of anger against the God's body, and quickly wrap the story up."

"There are no more scary parts?"

"None."

"Sweetie, do you want to hear the rest of the story?"

"Yes Dad!"

“Okay, despite his victory, despite getting his revenge, despite reclaiming his people’s language and releasing the other eleven languages to the world the Chief was still angry over the death of his matriarch. He felt he needed to travel the world, hoping that his anger would dissipate with each step. Oh, the surviving Mother tongue holders released their languages to the world too in hopes to prevent another language stealing god or deter the previous one in case it was not truly dead. The end.”

“Great story, Grandpa. See you later.”

“Bye, Dad. I’ll call you tomorrow, I want to know if you are doing okay.”

“Goodbye everybody. Son, I look forward to your phone call. I am doing fine. Next time I will tell a less violent story.”

Part 2:

American Jesus

“Oh, it’s so good to see you again, Sweetie. It has been a while since I last visited you.”

“Hey, Grandpa, yeah, Dad was not happy about that story. Speaking of stories do you got another one?”

“Yes, have you ever heard about American Jesus?”

“Granpa, isn’t that a song or something?”

“I have never heard of this band called Bad Religion.”

“Wait a minute...”

“Sweettumtumtum, do you want to hear a story about American Jesus or not?”

“Fine, I will listen to your fake story about fake Jesus.”

“Great. Let us sit here on the couch.”

“OOOOOOOO! Let me grab some popcorn!”

“Okay. You settle? American Jesus is real; you can see him on the interstate.”

“Oh, come on! That is a literal line from the song!”

“SHHHHHH! No interruptions. Anyway, American Jesus can be found on the interstate and highways because he is a long-haul trucker. When he is not delivering stuff or is taking a rest from hauling goods he could be found at truck stops, gas stations, truck weigh stations, scenic spots, and rest stops standing on his little soap box called the mound preaching to anyone who listens about Christianity and Capitalism and how utterly amazing those two things are. You do know about capitalism, right?”

“It has to do with money, I think?”

“Well Sweetie, Capitalism is uuuuuuuuuuh, mmmmmmmmmmm... hold on a second... wear did I put those glasses... okay C-A-P-I-T-A-L-I-S-M DEF-I-NI-TIO-NS”

“You know you could have used Siri, Grandad.”

“I don’t like her at all. I think she is an idiot. She can’t tell me how long it is going to rain, and it keeps recommending I watch cat videos.”

“Siiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiigh, ‘she’ is not real and you’re using it wrong. If you want, I can show you how to use her for the fifth time.”

“You know I would love for you show me how to use Siri, but you better not get frustrated and give up like last time. Anyway, capitalism is, in understandable terms for you Sweetie, it is the country’s ability to let business decide how they run their business. Take your favorite restaurant, Rowdy Rooster Barnyard Food Spectacular and Petting Zoo.”

“I love that place they have new cows and pigs to pet every time we go there! They also have these amazing cheeseburgers and chicken tenders!”

“Yeah... anyway, the restaurant determines how much they are willing to charge for their burgers, and the government has no say in the matter. And in turn they buy their... food from their suppliers who can sell it to the restaurant at any price. You understand capitalism now Sweetumtumtums?”

“I think so.”

“Good. Anyway, Jesus, he knows me.”

“Really, Grandpa you’re going to reference another song?”

“I have no clue who this Ghost band is. “

“Wait a minute...”

“Now stop interrupting. I thought twelve-year-olds would have learned by now not to interrupt people when they are talking”

“Like I said I have met American Jesus. It happened around the time I went on that road trip a while back. At some point during the trip, I was starting to feel a lot less angry, and I wanted, and I was starting to look for answers to the questions I had as I gained more miles to destination unknown, which ended up being Peruvian Cairo, Louisiana. During the trip, I stopped at this rest stop at the salt flats in the Salt Lake, where the ground looked like it was covered in snow, but it just salt. Had finished using the restroom when I saw him on his mound. Nobody was paying attention to them, but something about him piqued my interest. As I got closer to the man, I started to hear what he was saying.

‘And God said unto the people, that businesses should not be restricted by the laws of man, but by the laws of God. Business set prices that benefit all.’ He had his arms out wide like he wanted to hug the world. His long brown hair was tucked away under an orange trucker hat with a big black cross on it.

‘That’s an interesting thought there, stranger,’ I called out to him.

‘It’s not thought, it’s the word of God,’ he said.

‘How would you know that?’ I replied with a questionable look.

‘Because I’m Jesus Christ,’ he said as he got off his soup box

‘OK, good for you,’ I replied with a shrug.

‘You don’t seem bothered by that’ as he picked up the box.

‘I’m an old man. I have very little time for arguing with a crazy person,’ I said again with another shrug.

‘I’m not crazy,’ he said with an annoyed tone.

‘Again, good for you. Are you even a Carpenter?’ I asked.

‘No, I’m a trucker for a furniture company,’ he said with a sense of pride.

‘Okay, see you later, it was nice to meet you Jesus,’ I said as I turned around and started to walk back to my car.

‘Wait, my son, something seems to be bothering you’, he said with his hand on my shoulder.

‘A lot bothers me,’ I replied quietly. I started to think about Grandma Trickens again. God Rest her soul.

‘Would you like to talk about it?’ he asked.

‘Not really,’ I said as I took a step forward and letting his arm slide off my shoulder.

‘Are you sure? Even if you don’t believe I’m Jesus Christ I am still a man with a vast knowledge of Christianity and capitalism that could be useful to hear. Maybe talking to a stranger might give you the answers you seek,’ he said as he placed his box down and sat down on it.

‘Right,’ I said. I gave him a serious look before I replied, ‘How did you know I’m looking for answers?’

He said ‘Everybody’s looking for answers. What troubles you, my son?’

Before we started to talk, I asked if we could sit at one of the benches near the bathroom. It felt weird talking down to the man. Once we were seated, I told him about the death of Grandma Tricken, God rest her soul, due to throat cancer, my sadness, my anger, the road trip. He listened with intense silence before speaking.

‘Let me tell you the story of Corpulus and his encounter with death.’”

“So, you are going to tell me a story in a story?”

“It has been done before. Is that a problem?”

“Not really, but...”

“Good. Anyway, Jesus tells me his story:

‘Corpulus was leaving the graveyard when he spotted a pale man in a dark hood and in his left hand was a small, curved stick. The man was staring at a funeral party at the other side of the graveyard. Corpulus had a strange feeling about the man and walked towards him. When he got close, he asked if the man was Death. The pale man said he was. Corpulus asked if he could ask him a question. Death assumed the question was about Corpulus’s death and refused. Corpulus became angry and shouted the question that has been in his heart for a while now: Why did my son have to die?’

Death stated that all living things live and die.

Still angry and not satisfied with the answer, Corpulus quickly rattled off more questions: Could he have prevented him from being sick? Was there a way he could have

saved his son? What could he do to prevent the rest of his family from dying? What could he do to make sure he is remembered after his death?

Death gave a rather short answer to the first two questions and it was 'no.' As for the third question Death stated there was nothing, he could do to prevent his family's death, but he can continue to be with his family and give them happy moments until the inevitable time. Death started to walk off before he answered the final question: buy the best coffins and urns for yourself to be buried in. Buy the best-looking gravestone. Go to a four or five star rated graveyard and buy the best plot. It is usually the ones on a hill or by a tree. Own a lot of material goods and land to give to your family. Write a book and sell it for twenty dollars at a Wal-Mart or Target.'

'Does my story help you in anyway, my son?' Jesus asked.

'I think so. The solution to my questions is buy stuff?'

"Well, it is either that or turn towards God and he can guide you to supporting small business or the comfort of heaven."

"Right, I'm starting to think my questions regarding my wife's passing is something I could not control or change no matter how much I want it to be different. Anyway, it was nice to meet you, Jesus, and thanks for the story. Good luck with the sermon.' I said as I got up off the bench and headed to my vehicle.

'I am glad, remember if you are in any trouble God and America is here to help guide you,' Jesus replied.

After that I drove and thought about my own questions until I reached my final destination and came back home to y'all. So, what did you think of the story?

"Not as good as the Twelve Tongue God but still good."

“Thank you.”

“Can you tell me another story?”

“Maybe later. Why don’t we go to the park?”

“Actually, can we go to Rowdy Rooster Barnyard Food Spectacular and Petting Zoo?”

“Uh, sure. How can you be so bright and yet so naïve for a twelve-year-old?”

“What was that Grandpa?”

“Nothing! Just reminding myself I need to call your parents to let them know about our plans.”

Part 3

The Patron Saint of Road Rage

“Sweetie, have I ever told you the story about The Patron St. of Road Rage and the time I met her?”

“How someone can be a Saint of Road Rage?”

“Patron St. Well then, come sit by me on the couch and I will tell you. Trust me this story is much better than your pok manservant games.”

“You know it’s called... whatever. I’ll listen, tell your story grandad.”

“Good. Now keep quiet. Despite her name, she does not cause road rage. She prevents it.”

“Then why is she called the Patron St. of Road Rage?”

The man in the blue Kia Soul, who followed me, jumped out of his car and screamed, 'Yeah, I have a fudging problem! You!'

Just as we were about to charge each other the sky made a loud booming noise with a ray of light shining down on a spot not too far from us. That was when she appeared in all her glory. She was African American and was bald because her head had this almost mythical shine. She was wearing a white T-shirt and a hot pink skirt. She skipped up to the constant Honker and his Kia and started talking to him. I do not know what she said because of traffic noises. Whatever she said to the gentleman worked, because as he was soon smiling, laughing, they shook hands and gave each other a hug. She then walked over to me.

'Hi,' she said in a very cheerful voice.

'Hello,' I said in an angry tone, 'Get out of my way.'

'You didn't say please.'

I sighed before I responded, 'Please get out of my way.'

'No, you might hurt that man and he might hurt you.'

"Trust me, I would not mind either option, right now," I said as I tried to move past her.

She moved to stop me before speaking 'Surely you can let go of this anger I sense in you?'

I stopped trying to get past her, 'Let it go? I am having a bad day and that aaaacehold is just making it difficult for me to remain calm.' Just then I saw Kia man get into his car and drive off. 'Look, the guy is gone, so you can leave.'

She turned her head to confirm, 'Well that is good but I'm still worried about you.'

'Why,' I said with a weird look on my face.

‘Well, you need help, from the looks of it,’ she said as she put her hand on my arm, ‘What has caused you to be so angry?’

I sighed again before spoke, ‘It has been a tough year, wife died of a throat virus that I still can not properly pronounce, and it has been hard staying in a house that used to have at least two people in it for the last forty-five years.’

She gave me a hug, ‘I’m sorry to hear about that, but you need to let go of all this anger I sense in you.’

I went rigid from her hug because it felt weird to have a random person hug you, ‘I just feel like anger is the only way I can truly miss her. If I let it go, then what? I become a severely depressed person. No thank you.’

She stepped back and said, ‘You can grieve without anger, you can miss her without being depressed. When you feel these negative emotions just scream, cry, or punch a pillow, then wipe yourself down and go do something positive. There must be something in your life that makes you happy.’

I tilted my head to the left and thought for a few seconds before I said, ‘I have a granddaughter that likes the stories my grandad and dad shared with me that I shared with my children before I started to share it with her. I also have a grandson, but he is a smartass. I do enjoy spending time with her. You know maybe I will try your idea out. It is not the worst advice I have been given.’”

“Aw.”

“Shhhhhh! The Saint smiled and said, ‘Good, and look at you now. You’re so much calmer now. I hope the rest of your day gets better!’

‘I hope so too.’ I said as I entered my truck. She walked to the corner of the street and pressed the crossing button, signaling that she wanted to cross. When she started to cross the street, she started talking to someone who was crossing with her, and I stared at her with this sense of hope for humankind. I then drove to Grandma Tricken’s grave, God rest her soul, and spent some time with her, and started to feel better than I have in a long time.”

“Wow. Grandpa that sounded really cool.”

“Wow, is right Sweetie. I just want to say even though I still miss her your Grandma Tricken, God rest her soul, and I am still sad and angry that she is gone, I still have good memories, the rest of the family, especially you, and hopefully many years left to live, and a lot more stories. Now you want some ice cream?”

Years later.

“Hey, kids!”

“Grandma.” (Unison)

“Are you going to tell us a story, Grandma Sweetumtumtum?”

“Yeah, are going to use your puppets and props too?”

“Why yes, I am children. I even made this skinny, menacing figure for me on my three-D printer. He is called the Twelve Tongue God, and would you like to hear his story? It was a tale told to me by my own grandpa and now I am going to share it with you!”

The Dealer

Part 1: Background on the Unnatural Being

Excerpt from pages 1163-1166 of *Crowley's Guide to Supernatural Beings, Creatures, Deities, and Demons*.

It just shows up when it is needed even when the potential client does not think they need it. The Dealer has no true appearance, height, weight, gender, even its' clothes are all interchangeable. For every client it has a different form that always catches their eye. The only consistent thing it has is a large, worn, leather-bound notebook and a black ballpoint pen in its hands.

Every meeting starts the same way with this strange feeling that something is out of place and that they are being watched by something. The potential client will look around until they see it in The Dealer in its current form sitting at a table, standing on the sidewalk, or sitting on a bench. They get a strange sense of dread, but some intense curiosity that causes them to walk towards it. It does not greet them or initiate small talk (It hates that); instead, it delivers a speech. "I am The Dealer. I can help you if you pay attention and listen. I will not repeat myself, and I do not like to be interrupted. If you interrupt me, I am gone. Do you understand?"

Some people walk away, but most stay out of curiosity or interest. The ones that do leave sometimes come back. It does not matter to it at all because there is always someone else who needs a deal. Once they reply to its question, it starts with its' rules.

"For the deal we make there is a price, you must pay the price, there is no half now, half later. The price may be monetary, a favor, a task, or an object. There is no negotiation or

changing the price. I get to choose what the price will be. If you accept it and do not pay, then you will be punished severely.”

“There are two things I do not deal with and the first is death. I do not kill or introduce you to someone that will, and resurrection. The price is too high and not worth it, but if you are that desperate, then I can tell you who *does* deal in death. The second is time traveling. Repercussions of meddling with time can cause major problems for you and this universe. What happens in the past stays in the past, but again, if you are that desperate, I can introduce you to someone who does that thing. Other than those two things, anything you can imagine is possible.”

“However, sometimes the deals are not a complete guarantee, especially when it comes to diseases, emotions, and life. Being cured of cancer or some other life-threatening disease does not mean it will come back in the future or a different disease is discovered. Emotions can change over time. If you get a person to fall in love with you, it is not guaranteed to last forever because feelings can change. Also, life can be unpredictable and while you may get what you want, it can be cruelly taken away as soon as you get it. You or the person you care about can be happy, healed, or in love one day and the next day die from an accident or a mugging.”

“Finally, you have to be clear on what you want. The more details you can give me, the more satisfying the outcome will be for you. Now do you want to make a deal?”

One of the frequent questions that a client asks is its real name or what it is. The Dealer either ignores the question, replies that their name is The Dealer, that it is something that makes deals, or that it is an unnatural being in a natural world. If the client persists, it will stare at them until they give up. The client will then proceed to tell what they want The

Dealer to do for them. After the customer tells it what they want, it always asks this question before telling the person their price: "Is this what you truly want?"

Once the deal is done, The Dealer will tell the client how they will pay for their deal. Some examples of The Dealer's payment can be one or multiple payments to an offshore bank account, or it can be a task that the person must do at a certain time, or a favor for another one of The Dealer's clients, or it may want an item. The Dealer finally warns the client that not paying is a bad idea, and what it asks for is not an unreasonable price. It also states that it does not take back the deal, despite not receiving the payment, because it is much crueler and more creative than that. Some examples of punishment it has done is killing the unpaying client, torture, or make another client do something horrible as a form of payment.

Clients have even tried to find out more about The Dealer by scouring books on supernatural beings, bibles, and by talking to psychics and experts in the occult and others who have made deals with it. But they all find extraordinarily little information other than what they have been told by The Dealer. Though many former clients believe, and supernatural books have stated -- and it is most likely true -- that The Dealer is the source of most myths and folklore about deities or demons that make deals for a price. However, The Dealer has never asked for a person's soul as a price. One lucky person did find a little footnote about a king who defied a deal-making being by having the being executed. The attempt ultimately failed, and the king disappeared an hour after the event. Days later, the country's capital city and its citizens disappeared off the face of the earth. An extreme example of nonpayment. Though this is possibly speculation and a myth since there is very

little evidence to support this. Therefore, if one should encounter this being, either run away or make the deal and pay the price.

Part 2: A Regular Deal

Clifton was doing what he usually did at 5:00 am, he took his two attention-seeking huskies to the park located three blocks away from his house. He usually enjoyed these walks, but the last few months had troubled him greatly. There had been a constant stream of unwelcome news received from doctors and adoption agencies and repeated to close friends and family members.

The park was usually quiet and empty when he arrived. There had been on occasion a jogger or a homeless person in the area, but this morning was different. As soon as Clifton stepped into the park, he felt that a huge heaping pile of dread had been dropped onto him, causing him to get paranoid like he was being watched. He started to look for the source of the uneasiness. Then he saw, on a green bench next to an old cedar tree facing the playground, an abnormally tall, old man holding a big leather-bound notebook. The man was wearing an expensive-looking business suit that was ruffled and wrinkled like he had been working long hours before arriving at the park. His face was calm and much smoother than the suit he wore, but it was the eyes that unnerved Clifton. Everything about the eyes was normal except for the irises, black as night, and they were staring right at him. Like the mysterious man was expecting him to arrive.

Clifton decided to confront this man. He turned towards the bench and walked towards it. His dogs eagerly followed behind him. As he got closer, he saw that the man had

stopped staring at him and was more focused on opening his notebook. He pulled a pen out of his coat pocket. When he got about six feet in front of the man, the man spoke:

“I can help you with your problem...”

While Clifton remained silent during the Dealer’s speech his thoughts were racing back and forth between disbelief, fear, and the hope that this man could be an answer to all of his problems. If he could really do what he said.

“Now do you want to make a deal?” the Dealer asked after his pitch. Clifton was silent for a minute as he was still trying to decide whether to take this chance (if it was true) and talk to the strange man or just go home and tell his wife about the crazy man he met at a park during breakfast.

He makes his choice, and asks, “Can I ask some questions?”

“If you are going to ask about something I already told you or to ask me to repeat myself then no you cannot,” The Dealer said with a look of annoyance in his eyes.

“I want some clarification on diseases and ailments.”

“Fine. Ask your questions.”

“Where would having a child or starting a family lie in your abilities?” he asks with a small bead of sweat trailing down the right side of his face. The look of annoyance quickly disappeared from The Dealer’s face. What replaced it was a look of interest and intrigue. Clifton continued to speak, “My wife and I have been trying to start a family, but we discovered that we can’t. To quickly summarize: My wife got really sick when she was young, and the medication, and the surgeries heavily impacted her ability to have children. We tried adoption, and well... there is a high percentage of rejection due to my criminal history. I did some things as a teen that resulted in me having a criminal record. Which is

fucking stupid cause some of that stuff I did is legal now. While surrogacy and in vitro are just too expensive,” Clifton had to stop himself before he broke into another rant. He had done that enough towards his family, friends, doctors, the adoption people, and even his coworkers during a birthday celebration.

After a moment of silence The Dealer spoke. “I cannot create life.” Clifton’s heart suddenly dropped the perked up with what it said next. “But I can help you start a family.”

“How?”

“Well, it depends, do you want to adopt, or do you want a child that is biologically yours?”

“I thought you said you couldn’t create life?”

The annoyed look came back. “But I can heal your wife’s body and guarantee you that she can get pregnant at least once.”

“Just once?”

“It is not impossible for your wife to get pregnant multiple times after the first, but it is hard to determine due to human biology. We can always make another deal if you want more children. Of course, the other way can guarantee multiple children if you want to adopt. Then I -”

“I don’t want to adopt,” Clifton interrupted, his heart pounding with excitement over the possibility of having his own child with his wife.

“Are you sure? There are many children that could always use a -- ”

“I’m sure, if you can do what you said, why waste the opportunity?” As soon as Clifton finished saying those words, he instantly regretted it, and became a little frightened. While The Dealer’s face remained plain and unemotional, it was his eyes that changed with a

spark of malevolent anger. Even his voice had a slight hint of this anger when he spoke, “Do not interrupt me again. This is your first and final warning. You will not like what happens when you interrupt me again.”

“I’m sorry. I’m struggling to not get my hopes up. This is something I, we, have been wanting for a long time.”

“Do you want to make a deal then?” The Dealer's demeanor changed as he pulled a pen from his coat pocket. He then opened his notebook onto a blank page. “For the price that will be discussed shortly: Clifton Woodssons, and Mazey Woodssons, will be granted the opportunity to become pregnant with at least one child. Do you agree to this deal so far?” He wrote in the notebook.

“I agr -- no, wait a minute. You mentioned earlier that the details are important. Can I add a couple details to this deal? Will this affect the price I have to pay?” Clifton asked.

“You can always add details, I like details, and the price might change but it depends on the details,” said The Dealer as he scratched out the writing in the notebook.

Clifton took a deep breath, “I need a moment to think.”

“I have all the time in the world. Please take as much time as you need. This deal will change your life forever. It would be a shame if you overlooked something.”

“Thank you,” said Clifton. He looked away from The Dealer and closed his eyes for a second. After a minute of complete silence, he opened his eyes and said, “I want my wife and future child to make it through the entire process. No complications during the three trimesters, no complications during the birthing process, and our child gets to live a full life.”

The Dealer, for the first time during this whole ordeal, smiled and wrote everything Clifton said. After he finished writing he said “You are a smart man to add these details. Your

details have been added and they will have no effect on the price. For the price that will be discussed shortly, you, Clifton Woodssons, and your wife, Mazey Woodssons, will be granted the opportunity to become pregnant with at least one child, maybe more. The pregnancy will reach full term. The child and mother will have no complications during the birthing process. Finally, the child will be able to live a full life. Do you agree to this deal so far?"

"I agree, for now. What is the price. Surely, not my soul," Clifton joked.

"No. I have no use for concepts."

"Souls are real." Clifton felt a sudden rush of anger envelop him. He was a God-fearing man who believed in Heaven, Hell, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. He took a deep breath before he spoke, "I'm surprised that a person like you, who can make women pregnant, cure all diseases, make people fall in love, and do anything that doesn't involve death or time travel, doesn't believe in souls?"

"I have a few questions for you. What does a soul look like? Is it an ethereal blanket that keeps your morals and values warm at night? Or is it a tube sock? You do not know. If it is real, then where is it located? Is it nestled in the chambers of your heart, hiding in the little gray cells traveling through your brain, or is it buried twenty feet from the tree where you got your first kiss? If it is real, how can I extract it? Would it be enough to pay the price? Again, you do not know. I do not know or care. Do you want to continue this discussion about an unimportant concept, or can we get on with the price?"

"Fine. What is the price, I must get home soon. I need to make breakfast for Mazey. Heck, I am surprised my dogs have not been yanking my arm during this entire discussion," Clifton said as turned to look at his dogs. He was surprised to see them both laying down on

their bellies, asleep. The dogs were usually energetic and go absolutely crazy when they go to the park. Clifton was shocked to see them act different, "What the -- "

"The dogs are fine, I do not like being interrupted when I am doing my job. Now, your price."

"What did you do?" he asked angrily, his free hand formed into a fist.

"My presence while I work tends to keep things from bothering the deal making process. When I am working, I want to make sure my clients are not bothered by trivial things while we talk. The dogs will go back to their normal tail wagging selves when we conclude our business here, but for now they will be good dogs and sleep. Can we now talk about price," said The Dealer. The look of annoyance was back in his black eyes. Clifton nodded his head. He continued, "There are two parts of the price. The first part you must complete in order to get the deal. The second part is one you must do after the deal is complete."

Clifton nodded his head. He understood what The Dealer had said so far.

"You must choose one person. The person must be female and preferably close to the same age or younger, by three years, than your wife. I would prefer someone with a reproductive system that you know works. Once you have decided on who that person is going to be, get something that belongs to them and bring it to me."

"How will I be able to deliver the item to you?"

"Just do what you usually do every morning: Take your dogs on a walk. If you have an item owned by the chosen person, I will be sitting right here." He patted the bench.

"Is there a deadline? Any advice on how to complete this?"

“One month or I will assume you changed your mind, and theft is the easiest way to complete the task.” After The Dealer said this, he stood up with his notebook tucked under his armpit. He towered over Clifton as he started walking towards a grove of trees behind Clifton’s dogs. Clifton desperately wanted to turn around and watch him until he disappeared into the trees but found that he couldn’t move at all. Whether it was another example of The Dealer’s powers or the fear of something abnormal and unhuman that he wouldn’t be able to unsee, he couldn’t tell. He knew The Dealer was gone when he felt his leashes being pulled and strained by his dogs who were excited about the chance to run around.

An hour later, Clifton walked home in a daze. The dogs, oblivious to their owner’s mental dilemma, happily rambled on, sniffed everything, and got excited for their post-walk treat and breakfast of wet dog food. Whatever that thing did to his dogs had no effect on them at all. *That’s good, right? They’re going to be fine, and if I do this task, I can have kids,* He thinks. *Can I really just choose some person, and just take away their ability to have kids? How am I even supposed to accomplish this? Do I want to do this?*

Two weeks later

Clifton was doing what he usually did at 5:00 a.m., he took his two attention seeking huskies to the park located three blocks away from his house. He usually enjoyed these walks, but the last couple of days had troubled him greatly. He, at first, decided not to complete the task and see if he and his wife were going to be successful with two adoption agencies they had applied to days before that fateful morning meeting. Both agencies rejected them. He then tried to convince his wife to participate in in-vitro fertilization. He was surprised when she refused. She stated that any child that carried his genes had to be carried by her and not by some, in her words, “big-tit, teeny bopper, con-whore” who would try to

take her place in their family. She started to accuse him of cheating. Ten minutes after that conversation that ended with her assurance that he vehemently loved her, he threw away all of the pamphlets about the procedure, deleted his internet search history, booked a reservation at a fancy restaurant and hotel for a lovely weekend getaway. After the getaway he went back to the mental struggle to choose someone for the deal.

He loved his wife, but this child situation had put a serious strain on their marriage. They got very stressed out from the adoption interviews. When they got rejected, she got depressed and spent days in tears. He would do anything to make her smile again.

Clifton arrived at the park and immediately looked to the bench to see The Dealer on it. Just like last time he was holding his notebook and was staring at him with his black eyes. He hurried to him. He desperately wanted to get this transaction done as quickly as possible before he changed his mind for the fifth time. Clifton reached into his pocket and pulled out a small bracelet with a couple charms on it. "Here is that personal item you required."

The Dealer stuck out his hand and Clifton placed the bracelet in his hand. "Congratulations are in order Mr. Clifton. You are now going to be able to start a family. Now let's talk about the price you will have to pay."

He opened up his notebook, pulled a pen out of his pocket and started writing. After a minute, with the only sound being heard was the scribbling of the pen, The Dealer placed it down, and looked at Clifton, "For the price of the deal you, Mr. Clifton Woodssons, must give me a signed copy of *Crowley's Guide to Supernatural Beings, Creatures, Deities, and Demons*. The book must be signed by a man named Oscar Dolay."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. “Here is his address. You can find the book on Amazon or at your local bookstore. I will give you three months to complete this task and give me the book.”

“OK,” said Clifton as he took the piece of paper from his hand. “Is there a reason why you want him to sign this particular book?”

“It does not concern you.” The Dealer flips his notebook around. “I need you to sign here signifying that you agree to the terms of this deal. Once you do that your wife will no longer have any troubles reproducing, and you can focus on paying me off. Once you procure the item, it will be like the last time. Just take your dogs for a walk, and I will be here. After that you and I will possibly never meet again.”

“Possibly?”

“Who knows what the future holds, Mr. Clifton. Now sign.”

Clifton grabbed the pen, and he was about to sign when he looked at the well-dressed, tall, old man and said, “Before I sign this, there are a few concerns I have regarding the person I have chosen. I chose my little sister and, well, she is currently pregnant with her fourth child, and I’m concerned if what You just did will have any effect on her unborn child.”

“You chose your sister. That is an interesting choice.”

“I love my sister, but she pisses me off all the time. She is just so fucking perfect. Her life is perfect. She has a happy marriage to a great guy. They have three kids who are just carbon copies of her. She is the golden child who can't and never has done anything wrong. Everybody loves her. My parents even admit she is their favorite child. They love me too and never treated me differently, but she never gave them trouble. Unlike me. She is so fucking

nice, too. It pisses me off when she offers to help me and my wife out. Most importantly, she is pregnant again. Here I am struggling to even start a family and she comes in and tells everybody that she is pregnant with her fourth kid. My wife spent days crying her eyes out. She is thinking of divorcing me so I can be with someone who can give me a child. I love my wife and I can't see myself spending the rest of my life without her. That's why I chose my sister."

The Dealer looked at Clifton in his eyes and said, "Thank you for that unnecessary long explanation. To ease your concern, her child will be fine. The only thing that will happen to her is that she will never have children again. If something does happen to her or her unborn child, it will have no connection at all to this deal. If that explanation satisfies you, sign the notebook."

Clifton signed the notebook. The Dealer closed the notebook and said, "Congratulations Mr. Clifton, you are now on the road to being a father. There are a few things you still need to do. Luckily, they do not involve me. Just remember that you have two months to get the book, get it signed by Oscar Dolay, and deliver it to me."

After The Dealer said that he stood up and walked away from Clifton. Clifton didn't even bother to turn his head. He was just thinking about all the fun he was going to have when he got home with his wife. He might even call in sick at work today. He ran home as the dogs trotted behind him.

Ten days later

Clifton was doing what he usually did at 5:00 a.m., he took his two attention seeking huskies to the park located three blocks away from his house. He usually enjoyed these walks, but yesterday angered him greatly. He had received some upsetting news concerning

his sister and her husband. They had been in a horrible hit and run car accident. Some unknown car came out of nowhere, rammed into the driver's side of her car and then drove away from the scene of the accident. Her husband, who was driving, was still in critical condition and there was a very high chance that he might not survive, and if he did, he would have difficulty moving for the rest of his life. His sister was in a better condition. She was conscious and the damage to her body was less severe than her husband's. However, she lost her fourth child. The doctor also believed that the accident had also caused severe damage to her reproduction system. She would no longer be able to have children. Fortunately, her kid was with her husband's parents. Clifton strongly believed that The Dealer had a hand in his sister's accident. So, he procured the book and found Mr. Doley. It took some time and money, but he got the man's signature. The next day, after he got the book signed, he set off to the park to confront The Dealer.

When he got to the park and saw The Dealer, he noticed something was off. The Dealer stood in a field with his face pointed towards the sky, hands formed into fists that he released repeatedly, and he took very loud deep breaths. Clifton got closer to the standing behemoth. His anger, that had been building up since the accident, was quickly replaced by another emotion: Fear. Because The Dealer was angry. Clifton sensed that this was a very bad thing. He thought about those anime shows that he watched on occasion with his wife, where the characters would create this aura when they were powering up. On his dying day, Clifton would have sworn that he saw a faint black aura around the being. He was not sure how, but as he got closer, he could feel The Dealer's rage, and it got stronger with every step he took. Clifton was not even sure if he should run away, piss his pants, or vomit, his arm being pulled behind him by his very scared dogs. He looked behind him to see the dogs as

they pulled on the leashes so they could run away, but he had to confront him about his sister, and pay for the deal. After thinking a tiny prayer in his head, he stuttered out in a tiny fearful voice, “Good, goo, good morn, morning . . . ing, Dealer.”

The rage did not go away, but it was not as strong as it was a second ago. The Dealer lowered its head, eyes still shut. He took one more deep breath before opening his raged filled black eyes and spoke, “I hope that you are here to pay for our deal because I am not in the mood for excuses.”

After a few seconds of silence, Clifton found his voice, “I got the book and I got Dolay to sign it, but before I give you what you asked for, I want to talk to you about my sister. She was in a car accident recently, she miscarried, and her husband is in critical condition, and I want to know if you caused that accident as a way to remove her ability to reproduce.”

The Dealer’s face turned into an inhuman scowl. A sudden wave of rage hit Clifton hard as The Dealer spoke, “What is wrong with you creatures! Do you just not listen to the words I say. I do not deal in death! I have stated that life is not kind and highly unpredictable! I do not need a car accident to take away someone’s ability to have children and when we make a deal you must pay for it...”

He stopped speaking and closed his eyes once again. He took another deep breath that caused his face to relax and look almost human again. After a few seconds of silence, The Dealer spoke again, “I am sorry about that, I am being unprofessional. What happened to your sister is sad, and tragic, and while we may have had a hand in one of her misfortunes the car accident is just coincidental. You are angry because you feel guilty for what you did to your poor sister. But remember this, Mr. Clifton. You chose her out of all the women you

know in your life from your coworkers, your other family members, your friends, your wife's friends, and your friends' significant others. Out of all those people, you chose her. You chose her because you hated her, were jealous of having something you wanted, and you wanted to blemish one thing in her life. Good job, you succeeded. So, you can feel guilty about your actions and wallow in it. You can also just get over it and enjoy the family you are about to start with your wife. By the way, congratulations are in order, I believe your wife is pregnant. I would visit a doctor to make sure, or you can make another deal with me to help fix your sister's misfortune, if you want her to replace the child she lost, the task will be the same, but the price will be different."

Clifton stared at The Dealer in disbelief before he spoke, "This is what you want isn't it. To cause some misfortune and get me to make more deals that would destroy my soul. You're a monster."

Another wave of rage hit Clifton so hard that he had to take a couple steps back before he collapsed. The inhuman scowl had once again appeared on The Dealer's face as it growled out, "Mr. Clifton, you are trying my patience. For the first time in over forty-eight years, three months, and seventeen days someone has purposely failed to pay for their deal, and they have gone into hiding. It is that damn blasted king incident all over again but with car bombs! So, I have something more important to take care of than the problems that karma has given to you and your family due to your desperate desires. If you do not want to make another deal, then give me the blasted book and we will never see each other again! If you refuse, then that means I have another problem that needs to be solved, and the result of this problem will be a child being raised by a single parent!"

Constant waves of rage hit Clifton again and again as he cowered in fear on the ground. His body racked in pain. His dogs were also on the ground passed out on their backs. Their paws twitched slightly. With his eyes closed he pulled the book out of the little bag he took with him when he walked the dogs, started to wave it in front of The Dealer while he screamed as loud as possible, “JUST TAKE THE BOOK, PLEASE TAKE IT, I’M SORRY, PLEASE MAKE IT STOP, TAKE IT AND GO! I’M SORRY!”

He felt the book leave his hands. He heard the pages being flipped before it was slammed shut. Then the feeling of anger and rage that had surrounded the area had disappeared. He slowly opened his eyes to see The Dealer was gone. Clifton looked around for any sign of it before he got up to check on his dogs. They still had a frightened look on their faces, but they seemed to be fine. As he looked at his dogs, he vowed that he would do everything possible to help his baby sister through her time of need. Maybe if he helped her, it would alleviate the guilt he felt for all of her misfortune that he caused.

Breaking the Deal.

An abnormally tall, old man walked down an empty street. He wore a wrinkled black suit with a blue ballpoint pen in the left breast pocket. Under his left armpit was a big leatherbound notebook. In his hands was a hardback book titled *Crowley's Guide to Supernatural Beings, Creatures, Deities, and Demons*. The man's face had a whimsical look as he read from the book. His black-as-night irises had a flicker of intrigue behind them. *So that is what they say about me*, he thought as he closed the book. *I thought there would be more written about me. Though I did not expect them to talk about that blasted king or my involvement in the destruction of his kingdom. Apparently, I did not do a good enough job of making sure no one remembers him or his kingdom.*

The Dealer briefly smiled as he reflected how that foolish king defied It. He had asked The Dealer for the most powerful army in the world, and he got what he wanted. The Dealer felt generous for letting him conquer two neighboring kingdoms. That ended up being a mistake on The Dealer's part because the king, with his newly inflated ego and immensely powerful army, refused to pay the price. It was a simple one: one mile of land. Another client wanted to own land that would make him rich. The man was too simple to explain how he wanted the land to make him rich so The Dealer was willing to take any land that the king would give It.

Not only did the blasted king refuse, but he used his army to capture It. The Dealer went along with this farce hoping that the king would see the futility of his actions and give It some land. However, The Dealer changed Its mind after It was executed for the eighth time. It took five decapitations before It got annoyed. Surprisingly, it was the first time The Dealer

ever punished a king whose name would have been a part of history. It would not be the last one though. The Dealer punished the king in two unusual ways. First, It made his kingdom disappear from existence and the minds of everybody on the continent, and destroyed every written work and map that mentioned the kingdom or the king. This took a lot of work, but It was successful. The Dealer still giggled to Itself when It saw artifacts related to the kingdom being mislabeled as artifacts from another culture or countries. The second thing It did was pacify the king and his army. They became exceptionally good at promoting peace and religion, until they ran into a few groups of people who hated peace and believed in different gods. Meanwhile, the client who wanted the land was given way more than he bargained for as The Dealer gave him all of the dead country's land.

Now I must deal with this scum, The Dealer thought. 47 years, 6 months, and seventeen days since someone refused to pay for their deal. That is the longest it has ever been. There was an era where I had multiple people in one hour breaking their deals. I got better explaining things to them, putting a bit of fear into them so they did not doubt my ability to bring ruin towards them for not paying. Somehow it was not enough this time. Why must humans be so stupid? All I was born to do was make deals with humans, not punish them, The Dealer thought as he recalled the events that led to the recent broken deal.

The client's name was Claudettey Reegan, and she said she wanted to be invincible and immortal. "I want a body that doesn't age, doesn't suffer any damage, and will be perfect until the end of time." She wanted more time to experience all the good, bad, horrible, evil, ugly, pleasurable, painful, and informative things that this universe had to offer. She wanted to be at her absolute physical, mental, and emotional peak. The meeting was just like every other The Dealer had had before. It showed up in the corner booth at a vegan café that

Claudettey frequently visited. She sat. It did its usual speech about what It was, what It could do (a lot), could not do (resurrection, force love, time travel, murder), and payment for the deal. She stated what she wanted in detail (It was pleased with that.). It wrote the contract, and she signed. This was not the first time someone asked for this, and this would not be the last. The Dealer always charged the same price: fifteen percent of their yearly financial earnings plus a favor to help The Dealer with a deal (if demanded) and a vial of her blood every year. The enchanted blood could heal any disease or wound and make a person younger by about five years. Finally, It gave her the same stipulation all immortals got: she cannot personally give people her blood. Only It could do that. If she desperately needed to give someone her blood, she was to try and contact The Dealer and make a deal.

The Dealer gave her the usual trial period of a year. After the trial period ended, Claudettey loved being ageless and invincible, and accepted the deal. The deal continued for the next three years. Then one day, she did not show up.

A long time before that, The Dealer met a woman (the Countess as she liked to be called), who wanted a special potion that would make her young and beautiful again. She paid the price: one eighth of her wealth and all of her beautiful dark hair. It assured her that her hair would quickly grow back to its original form a day or two after consuming the blood. While it remembered everybody that it made deals with, what made The Countess memorable was her ability to repeatedly summon It at will. No one in The Dealer's entire existence was able to do that. The Dealer had never figured out how she did it, nor would she tell It, despite offering to give her what she wanted without asking for any blood. That was when It realized that the woman enjoyed having control over The Dealer more than having the chance to stay young and beautiful forever.

Thus, she was the first person to make multiple deals with The Dealer. For a while It was amused, then became frustrated and worried. The woman was bleeding Its stock of immortal blood. In addition, one of the immortals suddenly gave up their immortality, further limiting the blood supply. This caused The Dealer to cash in Its yearly favor early to the remaining immortals to get more blood. Fortunately, luck shined down on The Dealer because the woman now got tired of dealing with It and asked to know the source of the blood. It told her that the blood came from a young woman. What The Dealer did not tell her was that the young woman was living in a country now called the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, a country thousands of miles away from where The Countess lived. In fact, she still lives there, and The Dealer enjoys having tea with her every year. The price for this final deal was for The Countess to leave It alone and never summon It again.

The Dealer kept an eye on her for some time hoping she would break her deal due to her addiction to being youthful and beautiful. It wanted to torture her for the information regarding her ability to summon It, and It could only do that if she broke their deal. Unfortunately, she did not break the deal due to her nasty reputation for slaughtering young women for their blood and increasing taxes. She was almost broke due to her giving most of her money to The Dealer. This led to her people starting a massive revolt that ended with her brutal execution. Five minutes after her death, The Dealer snuck into her home. It hoped to find an explanation as to how she was able to summon It. Fortunately, the castle she had lived in received little damage from the uprising; however, It didn't find anything. In the end, The Dealer decided the best course was to move on in hopes that one day the answer will come to It.

When The Dealer finished remembering about The Countess, It turned down a small alley. As it walked further into the alley a swirl of smoke slowly enveloped its old man's body. The Dealer was not worried about people witnessing its transformation as It figured there would be no one in a small dark alley, in a small town, at midnight. As soon as the smoke enveloped the body it quickly dissipated feet first. A pair of solid blue tennis shoes appeared with toned calves sticking out of the shoes. They were wrapped in green leggings, a grey hooded sweater replaced the black suit jacket, and breasts appeared under the sweater. On her back was a backpack big enough to hold a big leather notebook. As the last of the smoke disappeared, a beautiful face appeared with full lips, and long dark hair tied in a French braid. The skin was no longer old, wrinkled, and white. Instead, it was smooth, young, and ebony. Her eyes remained the same with their black-as-night irises.

Suddenly, there was a shattering of a glass bottle to the left of the newly formed female. She turned her head towards the noise to see a middle-aged man. He wore dirty and ripped clothes, face covered in dirt and hair, and hands empty. The Dealer looked down at the bum's cracked shoes and saw a shattered bottle of cheap store brand liquor.

"What-what-what are you?" the homeless man asked. His voice had a bit of a slur in it.

"I see that you are a person in need of a deal. Unfortunately, I have some important business that needs to be handled first. I will find you later," she replied, as she walked away from the confused and frightened hobo, who stumbled over some garbage cans as he tried to run away from the scary shape-changing lady. She smiled and said nothing as she continued to walk down the alley. *Well, I get to use this form when I make my deal with him.*

When Claudettey failed to show up to the meeting place, The Dealer was not worried or upset about it at first. It was common for many immortals that It dealt with, especially in the early years, forget to show up and honor the deal. It was also common for immortals to not show up when they were tired of living forever. They hoped that breaking the deal would cause The Dealer to track them down and take away their immortality as punishment. It did not work that way because The Dealer never had gone back on their side of the deal, but it would make a new deal for those who wanted to be mortal again. The Dealer went searching for Claudettey. She went to Miss Reagan's home first. There was nothing there except for a bomb that blew up in her face. The only injury she suffered was to her emotional state and pride.

She was pissed. That she, in her previous tall old man form, acted unprofessional towards another client. Sure, the man was being annoying about his sister who was in a car accident (which it had no hand in causing) and complained how it was all The Dealer's fault. The Dealer prided itself on being absolutely professional and calm with all types of clients. Being unprofessional in front of the client angered It. The Dealer decided to temporarily stopped making deals until It could find Claudettey, and do the one part of the job It despised doing: punishing deal breakers. After a few days of searching, The Dealer discovered she was hiding in an abandoned office building with a couple of mercenaries she hired. As soon as the news of her location reached Its ears It teleported itself there. After so many false leads, assassination attempts, bombs, and traps, she finally found her.

Claudettey was hiding out in an old office building on the top floor. The mercenaries that she hired were hiding all over the lower floors of the building. The Dealer knew she could not bargain with the mercs since they would only distract her from getting to

Claudettey, so they must die. It further angered her because she hated having to kill potential clients. The mercenaries were quite easy for her to kill. The first one was hiding by a dumpster. He was smoking a cigarette and looking around. He had not seen her as his back was pointed towards her. The man wore a simple black polo shirt with a bullet-proof vest over it. He had a gun holster strapped around his waist. The Dealer pulled out her blue ballpoint pen from her sweater pocket and stabbed her left hand. A pillar of smoke leaked from the wound and her fingertips. While she could use her smoke without hurting herself, she found it easier and quicker for it to become fully activated when she was injured. She blasted the smoke at the mercenary. It quickly coiled around the mercenary's neck.

“What the fuckkkkk,” was all he could say before the smoke entered his mouth and nostrils. The man collapsed onto the ground as he desperately tried to grab the smoke. It felt solid but was not as the man had his entire fist in his mouth trying to grab the mysterious thing that was choking him. It took seconds for the man to realize that he was going to die, but before he died, he tried to warn the others in the building about the surprise attack. The man pulled the gun from his hip. He still had not seen The Dealer yet. He pointed the gun up to the sky, and he was about to fire when the smoke coiled around the barrel of the gun.

“I cannot let you do that,” The Dealer, finally said. The man quickly turned his arm and pointed his smoke-covered hand in the direction of The Dealer and fired. There was a dull flash and a very muffled noise that sounded like someone punching a pillow. The mercenary, already delirious due to the lack of oxygen, kept firing. After some more flashes and pillow-punching noises came the sound of small pieces of metal hitting the ground as the bullets fell out of the smoke.

“You should have accepted your death without resisting,” The Dealer said. Soon the man's gun fell out of his smoky hand. He clutched his stomach as if he was suffering a stomachache and tried to moan in pain. The Dealer had forced more smoke into the man's body and used it to bash the man's internal organs. This continued for a few more minutes until the man just stopped. The noise coming from his mouth was silent and his arms slid off his stomach. The Dealer retracted the smoke from the man's mouth. When the last of it left the mouth, a fountain of blood gushed out. After the macabre blood shower, she picked up the body and dumped it in the dumpster. She noticed on her left a pile of metal pipes next to the dumpster. She smashed all ten of the pipes with her smoke until they looked like crumpled cans of soda. She then placed them in front of the door to Claudettey's hideout and covered them in smoke. She slammed her fist against the door repeatedly before she hid behind the dumpster. After a few minutes of silence, the door opened, and a second mercenary stepped out.

“Gragl, did you forget your keeeeeee-oh,” the man said as he stepped onto The Dealer's trap. She used the smoke to stretch the squashed pipes way past their original form in such a quick and violent manner that they pierced into the man's flesh. He was instantly killed. Due to the number of pipes that entered his body, he could not collapse onto the ground. He looked like a nightmare-fueled puppet, as blood and chunks of flesh pooled at his feet. The Dealer pushed the corpse to the side and walked into the abandoned office building.

The door led into a dark hallway as The Dealer quietly walked. She kept her eyes and ears open for any more mercenaries on Claudettey's payroll. Soon she heard some footsteps down the hall as another man entered the hallway. He was bigger than the last two men, bald, and wearing the same type of clothes as the last two men. It appeared that he was in a hurry

as he did a stiff-legged run to the closest door. He failed to see The Dealer due to his urgency.

She quickly and quietly followed the man into the room. She realized that it was a big bathroom with four stalls and two urinals on the right side of the room and three sinks and a giant mirror on the other side. She saw the merc's feet in the bathroom stall closest to the door and the sinks. The man again failed to notice The Dealer as she entered the room due to his extremely loud grunts and the sound of things being dropped into water.

Humans and their disgusting bodily habits. The Dealer thought, and in a fit of rage caused by her listening to this man's bathroom time stomped towards the stall and kicked the stall door so hard that it flew off the hinges and smashed into the man. She took one step into the stall and continued to stomp on the door until it was a mangled piece of metal and the man's blood was about to touch her shoes. The merc was a bloody mess with his skull cracked open, his face smashed in, bits of the stall door embedded in his chest, and his blood sprayed all over the stall walls and the bathroom ceiling. *I shouldn't have done that,* she thought. *Someone might have heard that. I really need to learn how to control my anger.*

Unfortunately, she was right because someone did hear the noise. The Dealer was barely able to press herself against the section of the bathroom wall next to the door hinges when a woman charged in wearing similar clothes as the other men but with a baseball hat, a MP-5 in her hands, and a gun strap on her right shoulder. As soon as she saw the bloody mess the woman placed the machine gun by her side and pulled a cell phone from her pocket. Before she even had a chance to unlock the phone The Dealer struck. The Dealer, quickly got behind the woman, pulled out her pen with her right hand, wrapped her left hand around her mouth, pulled her head back, and repeatedly stabbed her neck with the blue ballpoint pen.

After the twelfth stab The Dealer let go of the dying woman's mouth, shoved her fingers into the bleeding neck wound, and ripped off a piece of neck flesh. A geyser of blood shot forward as the mercenary weakly and desperately tried to cover the wound with her hands. She fell to her knees first before she collapsed on the linoleum floor of the bathroom. The Dealer left the bathroom and continued to walk the halls until she found a stairwell and climbed the stairs to the top floor.

Claudettey was hiding and armed to the teeth, a 1911 9mm pistol in her right hand and a cross in her left. If the cross did not work, she had collected a variety of religious symbols and charms, all around her neck. Strapped to her hips was a .38 snub nose revolver, throwing stars, and ammo for all her guns. She had a small .22 pistol tucked into her right boot. Finally, she had a Remington shotgun and a rapier sword strapped across her back. She and the four mercenaries she hired were ready for The Dealer. Her plan was simple: Have the mercenaries attack It while she ran away. Again. Then she would get more money and do it all over again until she could find a way to kill It.

There was no way in hell she was going to give up her blood. It was hers and she didn't care if it was a continuous part of her payment for immortality. She had big plans for her blood. It excited her just thinking how powerful she could become once the people in power got a taste of her life-altering blood, but it was impossible to do that because of the stipulation that The Dealer gave her. So, she decided to kill The Dealer. She did not know how to proceed ~~with kill It~~ because the only book that mentioned The Dealer was unhelpful since it only talked about what the unnatural being did but not how to stop it. In the end, she decided to attack it with everything she had, and hoped that worked. If not, she would just escape.

Claudettey was relaxing in a chair with her back to the door when she heard the door opening. Without turning around, she shouted, "Is there anything to report?"

"The Dealer is here," said The Dealer with a smile on her face.

"What!" Claudettey screamed as she leapt from her chair. ~~She turned around saw~~ The Dealer was standing in the doorway. She whispered, "No. That's impossible."

"Hello Ms. Claudettey. It is so nice to see you again."

"How did you find me? Where are my men? What did you do to them?" she asked with the 1911 handgun and cross pointed at The Dealer.

"I would not worry about your men for they had their lives ended in a brutal manner. To answer your first question, finding an immortal unnatural human is quite easy for someone who is an unnatural being, like myself. Of course, it is not perfectly accurate, but the longer you stay in one location, the easier it is for me to find you. All I needed to do is look for the signs," The Dealer answered.

"Signs?"

"I hope it would not upset you too much if I do not answer that question. There is always the possibility that you will escape, and I do not want to make it harder on myself to try to find you again. But to quickly summarize I tracked you by your extravagant spending like buying an office building, using a fake name with a connection to your original name like 'Mauddettey Veagan,' and most importantly I can track the small bit of my blood that gave you your immortality and invincibility. Now are you going to accept your punishment or are you going to get your ass kicked first."

"DIE YOU MOTHERFUCKER!" Claudettey screamed as she fired her gun. She knew it wouldn't kill It, but it could help her to escape. The bullets tore into The Dealer's

body. Her body shifted with every impact. Her clothes were shredded with each blast. Despite all the that was happening to her, The Dealer's face showed no sign of pain or annoyance. Just anger. A bullet hit her cheek, and a small amount of dark purple blood and small wisps of black smoke leaked out of her cheek and clothes.

Click. The 1911 pistol was out of bullets, she dropped it, pulled out the revolver and kept firing at the creature.

Click. The revolver was out of bullets, so she dropped it. She pulled out the shotgun and kept firing.

Click. The shotgun fired its final bullet, and just like the other guns she dropped that too.

All of Claudettey's guns were empty. She still had bullets and the .22 but had no time to reload or grab it from her boot. She pulled out the throwing stars and threw them. She spent a long-time practicing her throwing star technique, so her throws were quite accurate. The stars stabbed into The Dealer's feet. She hoped to have The Dealer's feet get stuck to the floor. It failed as The Dealer just yanked her feet up off the ground. The sound of flesh being torn echoed throughout the room. Despite the damage, she was able to continue walking like her feet were not damaged. When she got to about five feet away from Claudettey, she raised her hands above her head while she twisted her torso. She was doing some stretching. She asked, "Are you done yet?"

As a last result, Claudettey pulled out her sword, and charged at The Dealer. When she got about two feet from the creature, she swung the blade. The Dealer caught the blade with her left hand while her right-hand slapped Claudettey in the face. She tumbled onto the floor.

“Are...you... done... yet?” The Dealer repeated slowly. She flung the sword into Claudettey's right leg. Claudettey screamed. She screamed again when she yanked the sword out of her leg. She limped back to The Dealer and swung again. This time The Dealer caught it in her right hand and with her left hand gave her the slap. Again, Claudettey stumbled to the floor, and again, the blade entered Claudettey's flesh, this time piercing her neck. She yanked the blade out of the left side of her neck. Blood sprayed everywhere as the neck flopped to the right, a giant chunk of her neck missing from her body. She struggled to breathe as her neck slowly healed. The rest of the fight was the same: Claudettey swung, the blade was caught, The Dealer slapped her, she stumbled to the floor, The Dealer threw the blade into her body, got up, healed, and again, and again, and again.

“Enough!” screamed The Dealer. “This is going nowhere.” She stretched her hand as wisps of black smoke poured out and wrapped it around Claudettey's body.

“What are you going to do to me? Kill me? You won't go back on a deal,” Claudettey said with a blood-smear smile.

“Oh, trust me Miss Claudettey, there is a lot I can do to you without killing you,” she replied. As she got closer the room suddenly started to get dimmer as the smoke enveloped her body. Claudettey's body broke into a cold sweat, and she suddenly became scared as the last thing she saw was The Dealer's illuminated black eyes and twisted grin as the smoke slowly dissipated to a form that she couldn't even begin to describe. It was getting closer and closer before things got dark.

“Hello?... Dealer? ... Where am I?” Claudettey asked aloud. She started going over the events in her head. *She found me and trapped me. I fought back. She changed into something... I can't even describe and then everything went black. In fact, things are still*

black. She quickly realized she was on her back. She raised her arms up until they hit something solid that was about one foot from her chest. As she felt around her surroundings, she soon realized she was in a box. Claudettey started to panic, and her body thrashed against the enclosed space. She felt her right pocket vibrate. *My phone! The stupid creature forgot to check my pockets before throwing me in here!* She struggled to get the phone out. It took a few minutes of pulling the phone out from the tight confines of her denim jeans. Once the phone was free, the ringing stopped. She brought it to her face and realized it was not her phone. ~~because~~ It felt like an iPhone since she found the power button on the side, and she had used one before. She saw that there was a notification telling her that she missed a call from a number: 843-332-5377.

She unlocked the phone to see if there was anything that could help her. The phone was blank. The background was gray and there was only one app. It was the contact list that had one number: 843-332-5377. It took Claudettey seconds to realize who the owner of the number is and the thing that gave her the phone. With for her to do she called the number. The phone screen switched to the call screen as it started to ring. In the middle of the third ring, The Dealer answered in a feminine voice, “Oh, good. You are awake Ms. Claudettey. Now we can talk.”

“What did you do to me?” Claudettey demanded while starting to get frightened again.

“Well, nothing because you cannot get hurt or killed. You remember our deal? The one that you failed to uphold by hiding, hiring thugs, using strange methods to stop me from punishing you,” said The Dealer in an unsettling calm voice.

“What... Did... You... Do?” Her voice went up an octave.

“Well, if you really want to know, I placed you in a concrete box and buried you very deep beneath the earth.”

“What? WHAT?!”

“You heard me.”

“Why?!”

“That is a stupid question, then again you have made some really stupid decisions so perhaps you truly do not understand why I buried you far beneath the earth. You did not honor our deal. I cannot take your immortality away from you because I do not go back on my deals. So, I am making sure you do not get to enjoy the benefits of being immortal.”

“How long will I be in here?”

“Forever.”

“You can’t do that!”

“I already did.”

“Someone will find me, eventually.”

“Nobody will ever find you. You will remain there until the end of time or until the Earth is destroyed by the sun or mankind. I would pray for mankind.”

“Please, don’t do this to me. I’ll pay. I’ll give you all the blood I have. I’ll do anything you want. I mean a creature like you must have some desires or needs that I can take care of. I mean it must be lonely making deals. You could use a little company.”

“I do not have those disgusting human needs. I happen to enjoy my job because that is what I was created for: to make deals with humans and punish those who do not pay the price. Truthfully, I do not like punishing deal-breakers or killing humans.”

“If you don’t like it then you can let me go.”

“You interrupted me. I do not like it because I enjoy it way too much.”

“But you like to make deals? Right? Maybe we can make a new deal?” she said with a whiney pleading voice.

“It is too late to be making deals because I do not want to deal with you anymore. Truthfully, there is nothing you can say or do that can get you out of this.”

“Surely you need my blood. What about that?”

“I do not need desire your blood anymore. There are other immortals who are quite willing to provide their blood, and there will be others who desire immortality, and they will be quite willing to pay for it with their blood.”

“I’m sorry, please let me out, I’m sorry, please let me out, please aaaaaaaaaah!”

Claudettey’s pleas turned into incoherent weeping and screams as tears and snot streamed down her face. She struggled to breathe and think coherently as The Dealer spoke her final words:

“The box provides the bare minimum amount of air for you to breathe. The phone has an infinite battery life, is indestructible and can only receive phone calls. My calls to be specific. So, when I am in a bad mood and do not want to go to a museum. I can just call you and listen to your pleas, your screams, your desperate attempts to breathe, your body breaking down due to the lack of everything though it still survives and take pleasure in your misery. I hope you enjoy your eternity, Ms. Claudettey Reegan. I think I will wait at least a decade before calling you again,” she said.

Claudettey heard the distorted, sinister, inhuman, laughter as it blasted through the phone. She continued with her pleas, tears, and when that didn’t work, she started to smash

the phone against the concrete ceiling as the laughter continued to have no effect against the concrete ceiling or the phone.

“Goodbye Ms. Claudettey and please enjoy your immortality!”

“Nooooooooooooo.”

Killer Rock and Roll

Introduction

The following story is a collection of articles, interviews, transcripts, and other documents surrounding the murder, investigation, and trail of the murder of famous Rockstar Shane Blathoes. Signed Kincaid Thomsonsons.

(Newspaper clipping from The National Newsstands)

SHANE BLATHOES MURDERED! Former singer of the rock band Ethos Locos Path and recent controversial celebrity, Shane Blathoes, was murdered in his home on July 16th. He was 35. His maid discovered him lying on the kitchen floor in a pool of his own blood. The police state that he was shot multiple times. The investigation is ongoing.

Shane Blathoes has been in the news in the last eight months due to several events. The first was the splitting of Ethos Locos Paths?? at the end of the worldwide tour to promote their fifth and final album *What a Strange Hallway*. Then former guitarist, Joel Trim, gave a tell-all interview on *Good Morning Today* about his negative and toxic relationship with Blathoes. There are his legal troubles: three former fangirls sued him for child support, two more women sued him for damages to their relationship and for medical payments. Finally, his ongoing, bitter, divorce from his bitter wife...

Office of Calaveras County Medical Examiner
1080 Bush Road
Autopsy Report

Report of Investigation by County Medical Examiner

DECEDENT: Blathoes Robert Shane SEX: Male RACE: White AGE: 35
OCUPATION: Musician/ songwriter/ singer/ producer
TYPE OF DEATH: Violent: Casualty: Suicide: Suddenly when in apparent health:

Found Dead: In Prison: Suspicious, unusual, or unnatural: Cremation:

Comments:.....o

If Motor Vehicle Accident check one: Driver: Passenger: Pedestrian:
Unknown:

Notification by:.....o

Investigating Agency: Homicide Department.....o

Description of Body: Clothed: Unclothed: Partly Clothed

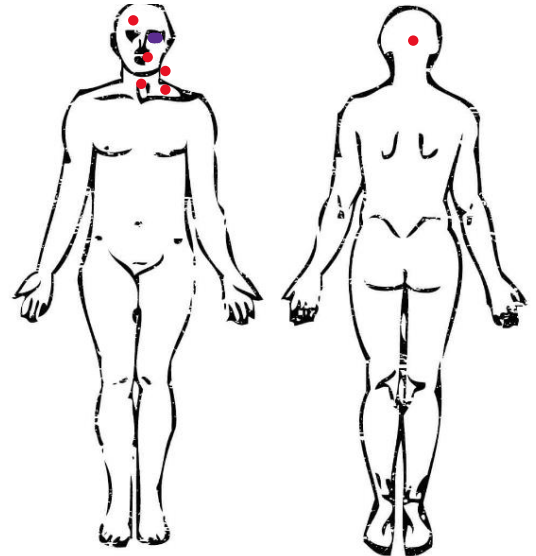
Eyes: Brown Hair: Long, green, blue, black Mustache: none Beard: none

Weight: 220lbs Length: 70 inches Body Temp: 80 F Date and Time: 7/16

8:30am

Rigor: Yes No Lysed

Marks and Wounds: Five gunshot holes entered multiple areas in the head and upper chest regions. 1st bullet entered 3" from left eye damaging the brain. 2nd bullet located at scene, destroyed right incisor tooth, nicked C4 vertebrae, damaged skin around the back of head. 3rd bullet located in left clavicle, 4th bullet entered the heart. 5th bullet located in the upper section of the sternum. Purple bruising around the right eye, looks to be days old. Liver damaged through years of alcohol. Bullets appear to be 9mms. Confirm with Lab.



Probable Cause of Death	Manner of Death	Disposition of Case
Gunshot wounds to head and heart	(Check one only) Accident <input type="checkbox"/> Natural <input type="checkbox"/> Suicide <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> Homicide <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pending <input type="checkbox"/>	1. <u>Not a medical examiner case</u> <input type="checkbox"/> 2. <u>Autopsy Requested:</u> <u>Yes</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>No</u> <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Autopsy Ordered</u> <u>Yes</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>No</u> <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Pathologist:</u>

I hereby declare that after receiving notice of death described herein, I took charge of the body and made inquiries regarding the cause of death in accordance with Section 21-830-33-60b) Massachusetts Code Annotated and that information contained herein regarding such death is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Date: 7/20/20xx Place of investigation: 1080 Bush Street, Angels City ME: Dr. Jay Watererly

*

*Typed name in place of signature as per the wishes of Dr. Jay Watererly

Notes taken at the crime scene by Detective Sergeant Charles Walpepper. Donated by Walpepper

- The body was found in the kitchen. He was lying face up. There's blood all over the floor.
- The kitchen looks to be about 10 x 15'. There is a steel island in the middle of the kitchen, a gas stove, a big-ass fridge, and various shelves and cabinets.
- The place is relatively clean other than the body.
- Particles of brain and skull found on island.
- Bullet found embedded in wall.
- The living room is a mess, covered in papers and expensive musical equipment. Nothing looks stolen or at least cannot tell if anything has been stolen. Will return with someone (cleared as a suspect first) to see if they notice anything missing.
- All other rooms are clean. There is nothing in them.
- The recording studio is the cleanest room in the house. Nothing looks stolen.
- The bedroom is just as messy as the living room. Just with blankets and more musical equipment.
- Found a safe in the closet, filled with leather and pleather clothes, had to bring a locksmith. After an hour of waiting for the warrant and safecracker the safe was opened. Here is the list of items found in the safe:
 - Blathoes' Will and testament
 - Sealed. Get a warrant or talk to his lawyer.
 - Sealed documents with (from?) insurance company.
 - Social security card

- Birth certificate (Sean Blathoes is his real name)
- Deed to house
- Proof of ownership for 4 vehicles:
 - 2020 red Camaro
 - 2021 black Ferrari
 - 2016 yellow Mustang
 - 2020 silver Chevy Tahoe
- A few usb drives
 - Possible filled with music
- Last year's tax return
- No Awards appear to be stolen
- All vehicles are accounted for in driveway or garage
- Full list of items will be compiled soon

What follows is a series of interviews with the following suspects: former best friend and former bandmate Joel Trim, Rock Jam studio representative Brandon Citay, and manager of Blathoes and Trim: Doug Butterny. Detective Sargent Charles Walpeper and Detective Greg Ghumchu have been assigned to the case and are in charge of the interviews. The interviews were given to me after the end of the trial.

Chapter 1: The Suspects

Brandon Citay Interview #1

Detective Sargent Charles Walpeper -- Before we start the interview, I would like to remind you that you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can be used against you in court. You have the right to talk to a lawyer for advice before we ask you any questions. You have the right to have a lawyer with you during questioning. If you cannot afford a lawyer, one will be appointed for you before any questioning if you wish. If you decide to answer questions now without a lawyer present, you have the right to stop answering at any time. This is for legal purposes only. You are not under arrest. We are just asking you questions related to the murder of Shane Blathoes. You're a person of interest currently and not a suspect. Do you understand what I have just told you?

Brandon Citay: I understand that if I don't like the questions then I will get a lawyer.

Detective Greg Ghumchu -- Please state your name, occupation, and a brief description of your relationship with the victim.

BC -- Brandon Citay, I work for Rock Jam studios as a go-between guy for the studio higher ups and rockstars like Blathoes and his former band.

DSCW -- Where were you on the night of July 15th?

BC -- I think I was at the Blue Diamond Bar on 202 St. I don't remember when I left but I got home late.

DSCW -- Is there anybody who can corroborate with your alibi?

BC -- The uber driver. I don't remember his name. I took an Uber because that bitch of a bartender took my keys.

DGG -- Watch your language.

BC -- Sorry.

DSCW -- Describe your relationship with the victim

BC – Professionally, he was horrible. Personally, I thought he was a con man who believed in his own hype.

DGG -- Why is that?

BC -- He had an ego, he treated a lot of people, including me, like crap, and he was able to get what he wanted with his charm, threats, or blackmail.

DGG -- Do you have an example of him blackmailing someone or being a conman?

BC -- No, but how else could he get full creative control of the third ELP album? Not even our biggest stars, who have made more money than ELP did, got full creative control over their albums. However, after the success of ELP's second album, which was one of the studio's financially successful rock albums at that time, Shane wanted to do a little renegotiation. He wanted complete creative control for the last three albums in the band's contract, and a guarantee that regardless of how well the third album was received he would get a solo album produced. Plus, he asked for a huge raise. At first the studio was hesitant until he somehow convinced them that he was the brains and talent behind all the songs and the only reason Joel was given credit for some of the songs was due to Shane being nice. The studio believed him, and now we have one of the worst albums of all time. He pretty much screwed the studio in the long run. I almost lost my job because I convinced the studios to give him what he wanted.

DSCW -- Why was the studio screwed?

BC -- Joel. He wanted out of his contract and band. He caught Shane with his wife. The band's manager and I convinced him to stay until the fifth album, which led to the new problem and that was Trim owning the rights to 80% of ELP's songs and any

song he has a hand in writing. Since the studio backed Shane, they decided to limit Joel's involvement for the third album. When it failed miserably the studio realized the golden goose, they thought they had was a mockingbird while the real golden goose had no desire to stay when his contract was up. It took a lot of ass-kissing to get Joel to stay with the studio after the 5th album and the results was worth it. The hype that is surrounding his new band's debut album is huge. Pre-sales are off the chart. The radio single is going over well with the fans.

DGG -- What is your opinion on Joel Trim?

BC -- If it wasn't for Joel, I would have lost my job. I don't think he killed Shane because he would have done it years ago. He wanted to make the man miserable.

DGG -- What is your thoughts on Shane's wife, Layla Shar?

BC -- I think I met her a few times at some company events, so I don't know her too well. However, I thought she could do better than Shane because I thought he was a bad husband. Do I think she killed him? Possible. From my understanding Layla wanted to get away from him and move onto her relationship with Trim.

DSCW -- What about Doug Butterny?

BC -- We have a strong professional relationship. He helped me convince Trim to stay. He was also capable of dealing with Shane. I don't think he would do anything to Shane but drop him as a client, but I doubt that would happen.

DGG -- Thank you for coming in. If we have more questions, we will contact you. Interview ending at...

Joel Trim interview #1

(Was read his Miranda rights and stated he did not need a lawyer)

DGG -- Please state your name, occupation, and a brief description of your relationship with the victim.

JT -- My name is Joel Trim, guitarist, and songwriter for SlashDash, previously the guitarist and songwriter for Ethos Loco Path. My relationship with Shane, in the simplest and politest of terms, would be former bandmate and former friend.

DSCW -- Where were you on the night of July 15th?

JT -- I was at this nice little bed and breakfast called I Can't Believe There is a Bed and Breakfast by Lake Okopoko. It's about a hundred miles from the city. I got back to the city on the 18th.

DSCW -- Is there anybody who can corroborate your alibi?

JT -- I was there with Layla Shar. Also, the owners of the Bed and Breakfast, their names are Greg and Gregg Picaloloes. They might not recognize the name since I used a fake one but if you show them my picture, I am sure they will remember me.

DSCW -- Describe your relationship with the victim.

JT -- We hated each other.

DGG -- We know. We have seen that interview, but for the sake of this interview please give us more details.

JT -- Where do I even begin? He slept with my ex-wife, stole money from me, and tried to claim credit for my hard work. He hated me because I am better than him in every way: I am a better musician, writer, performer, richer, smarter, and most of all, his wife, Layla, thinks I'm a better lover. Also, we got into a few fights which resulted in me kicking his ass.

DGG -- There was some bruising around his eye that appeared to be a day old. Did you two get in a fight before your trip?

JT -- Yes. He was harassing Layla in the court parking lot. I lost my temper and sucker punched him when he pushed her. That was the last time I saw him.

DSCW -- How long have you been in a relationship with Layla Shar?

JT -- We were friends before the band was formed. Shane, Layla, my ex, and I spent a lot of time together as the band became famous. It ended before the development of the third album when I caught him and my ex together. After that I would spend very little time around Layla due to her marriage to Shane. About two years ago, she asked me out to lunch where she proposed that we have a fling. She wanted to hurt Shane for the constant cheating, he got three women pregnant, and giving her chlamydia. I accepted and what started out as a one-time fling became a serious relationship, despite her still being married to Blathoes.

DGG --Why did you accept?

JT -- Truthfully, I did not accept it for revenge. It was a bonus. I accepted it because Layla is an attractive woman both mentally and physically, and we have a lot in common. She was my friend before I met Shane and when he and I fell out over his actions it became difficult for us to remain friends. I missed spending time with her, and it was apparent that she missed spending time with me.

DGG -- Brandon Citay mentioned the third album of ELP. Is there anything you want to discuss about it?

JT -- yeah. That album is when things fell apart. As mentioned before, it was when I discovered my ex-wife's affair with him. Originally, the plan was for both of us to

have complete creative control of the album, but that changed when I beat the crap out of him and got arrested for it. After that incident, I spent months trying to leave my contract with the studio. After some convincing from Citay and Butterny, I decided to stay and finish my contract. I then spent the entire production of the third album coming into studio late at night and playing whatever they wanted me to play which I would do if Shane wasn't there. If he was there, I would just have left and come back the next night. Then the third album came out and it sucked. It was so bad they cut our tour short by eight months. Brandon, on behalf of the studio, begged me to fix it because he knew I had a little studio at my place and had a bunch of songs in various stages of recording. Well, six months after the release of the third studio album, we released the 4th studio album which was well received. It caused the studio to start renegotiating with me, and it caused Shane to hate me even more for embarrassing him.

DGG -- What is your opinion on Brandon Citay?

JT -- He has anger problems that he hides behind his very white teeth, his perfect suit, and alcohol. I don't think he would kill Shane though because Brandon would want the pleasure of firing Shane. Though if he did, he would not remember it. He spends a lot of lonely nights drinking and being banned from bars. Look, detectives, I know that my history with Shane makes me the number one suspect, but I honestly did not want him dead. I did want my revenge for what he did to me, but it was geared towards that saying: "the best revenge is a life well lived." Which I am doing right now.

DGG -- What is your opinion on Doug Butterny?

JT -- The best manager ever and probably one of Shane's only friends. I don't think he would have anything to do with Shane's death. Despite everything surrounding him, Shane was still able to draw a crowd and make money, which is important for Doug. Plus, the guy is super busy running his managing business and cleaning Shane's messes.

DGG -- Thank you for coming in. If we have more questions, we will contact you. Interview ending at...

Doug Butterny interview #1

(Was read his Miranda rights and stated he did not need a lawyer)

DGG -- Please state your name, occupation, and a brief description of your relationship with the victim.

DB -- Doug Butterny, manager of rockstars. My clients include Joel Trim and his new band, the Wackadoodles, Laura Kingsling, and until his horrible untimely death, Shane Blathoes.

DSCW -- Where were you on the night of July 15th?

DB -- I was at Kingsling's concert at the Metro Hall building. I was making sure things went smoothly for her since it was her first concert in five years. I was also taking calls from my assistants who are helping me out with a few of my clients that are currently on the tour. I would say that I left the Metro around midnight.

DSCW -- Is there anybody who can corroborate with your alibi?

DB -- I can write you a list of all the people who could have seen me after we are done here. But I do have a receipt for a parking ticket for the garage, and I believe the Metro has cameras all over the place so it wouldn't be too hard to see me working the entire time there.

DSCW -- Describe your relationship with the victim.

DB -- We got along quite well despite his reputation.

DGG -- Why is that?

DB -- Because I have been doing this business for years and had to deal with a lot of egotistical, demanding, and most of the time inebriated musicians. Shane knew that treating me with respect was the right thing to do for his career even if his other choices were poor and his career was unstable at the moment.

DGG -- What is your opinion of Shane's wife, Layla Shar?

DB -- I thought she was a sweet, beautiful, and intelligent woman. I remembered telling Shane that if I had a woman like her, I would not be cheating on her with skanky groupies. Also, the girl is such a natural businesswoman that she could have spent a lot of her time with Shane while he was on tour and not have to worry about her business, if he asked her to. But he did not do that because Shane wanted to experience the rock-n-roll lifestyle that has ensnared many musicians.

DGG -- Brandon Citay mentioned the third album of ELP. Is there anything you wanted to discuss about it?

DB -- I don't want to be too harsh on that album because he put a lot of work into that album. But it was just way too experimental, and the effects it had on everybody were almost catastrophic. Brandon Citay and I put in a lot of work and negotiation with Joel to convince him to stay and fix things.

DGG -- What are your views on Brandon?

DB -- I think with the events surrounding the third album, Brandon despises Shane. I do not think he would kill him because he would be too inebriated to even get through the door.

DSCW -- What about Joel Trim?

DB -- One of the most professional musicians I have ever managed. I mean he could be an actor, the way he pretended to be friends with Shane during interviews and on tour, never complaining, and always doing a great job.

DSCW -- You have been to Shane's house before?

DB -- I have been to his home multiple times. Why?

DSCW -- We are trying to determine if anything from his house is missing. We are still making a list of everything, but could you look at that list to see if there is anything missing? Once it is done? Maybe even take the time to walk through the house? Once it has been cleared?

DB -- I can do that. Please send the list and any info to my secretary.

DGG -- Thank you for coming in, don't leave town, interview ending at...

Third entry from Detective Greg Ghumchu's therapy journal. All entries related to the case were given freely to me by his wife. Greg would like to mention he still loves his very beautiful wife:

I write this out of protest. My wife is demanding that I follow through with the therapist's suggestion and write out my feelings in this stupid notebook. It will apparently help "control" my anxiety and anger problems. I do not have anger problems! Sure, I get a little upset when I see a dead body but who doesn't? And, yeah, I do tend to yell at people who piss me off but so do a lot of people. But the wife insists. Wait, is this going to be shared

or will she look at this when I am not around? I love you, honey. This is such a great idea! Since I refuse to write about my emotions, I can't pretend to write like last time, and since I got twenty-seven minutes until my writing time is over, I will just talk about my current case. We -- my partner, and I -- are currently trying to figure out who murdered Shane Blathoes of Etos Locos Paths. I think the wife and I went to one of their concerts. I remember the music was good, but Blathoes was acting like a drama queen because he spent the first ten minutes stomping around complaining about parking, the roadies, not getting enough sleep, and the size of the stage. So far in the case, we finished interviewing Joel Trim, Brandon Citay, and Doug Butterny.

We decided to go to Layla Shar's coffee shop called Give ME COFFFEE! Interesting name. When I saw her, I could see why Trim fell for her and why Blathoes wouldn't let her go. She had an impressive hour-glass figure, long slightly curly red hair that reached the middle of her back. Her skin is olive color, and her height is about 5' 10 inches. She is not as pretty as you, honey, and I am lucky to have you! We had an informative and pleasant conversation despite the subject of that conversation being murder and her husband, in her office. Our conversation starts with us introducing ourselves. She confirmed that she was with Trim (or Trimmy as she likes to call him, HA!) the entire time, and that Blathoes is a despicable person. Surprisingly she gave us details about her divorce. The first was that the divorce was complicated due to Blathoes' many attempts at stalling it through dirty tactics.

"His lawyer was able to convince the judges that we need counseling, which we went to for about ... three weeks before he stopped showing up for two weeks, and the counselor sided with me. However, he was able to convince the judge to have us try it again. He did the exact same thing. This was repeated six times. Impossible, right? Well, throw in some

requests for a change in judges and it becomes quite possible. Then there are all the accusations that I needed to prove were false, trying to enforce the prenup, which was useless because both parties cheated,” she started with a huff.

It did not bother her so much that it was taking forever for her to divorce him because she was in no rush to get remarried, she was financially comfortable, and she was just happy to be away from him. “Look, Detective. Shane was part of the past I wanted to leave behind, but it... well, Shane just would not let me go. He saw me more as a trophy than an actual wife.”

After we finished talking to Layla, we went to see Blathoes’ lawyer, Jerry Cruise. He was a middle aged pudgy looking guy who seemed oddly relaxed despite us arriving at his office. My partner noticed this and asked him about it.

The lawyer replied “Look, Shane Blathoes has been one of my greatest sources of stress for the last two years with his constant legal troubles. It got so bad that I had to give up my other clients to members of the firm to properly do my job with him. Now that he is dead, I can relax a bit.” We then asked about a will and if he had any insurance.

“Yes. He does have a will and he had a few insurances. All those insurances focused on his fingers and vocal cords. He did not have life insurance.”

“Would his wife be the sole recipient of the money from the will and insurance?” my partner asked.

“No to both. He would be getting no money from the insurance companies because he died. It would be different if he broke a finger or strained his voice. His wife forced him to include his children in the will, if it was proven they were his. Unfortunately for him they were.”

“How much would they get?” I asked.

“One third of his finances and personal items such as his music collection, instrument collection, and his cars. Layla would get the mansion and other land property Blathoes owns.”

“Tell us about the divorce.”

“You mean the bane of my existence. Sure. Blathoes wouldn’t let his wife win or me go. He had me do everything I could to prolong, delay, and disrupt the process. All the while Shar’s lawyer successfully countered it all. Do you know how many times I have submitted an application to change judges, demand couples counseling, and sit-down meetings that went nowhere? Way too many times.”

“Didn’t she try to get a smaller settlement in the divorce?” my partner asked.

“Yes, but he did not care. He wanted her back by any means necessary. He hated the fact that she left him, and he really hated that she is with Trim.”

“Was Trim around during the divorce proceedings?”

“If you mean if he was involved then yes, he was involved. He did get into a fight with Shane at the last meeting. By fight I mean Trim knocked him down, made a threat, and walked away with Layal.”

“Do you think Trim or Shar had any hand in Blathoes’ murder.”

“It is a possibility, but Shane had a lot of people who hated him.”

After we finished questioning the lawyer, we told him we would be in touch and left his office.

Transcripts from Carrie Ridgeway’s Vlog titled *Police Interview ME over Baby Daddy’s*

Murder!

(From YouTube transcripts and rewritten by author)

(Shot of a clean kitchen table and a twenty something woman sitting in a chair. She has short blonde hair, green eyes, and tanned skin. She is wearing a red sweater with little makeup on her face.)

“Hi!! It’s me again, Carrie Ridgeway, and this is my mommy vlog where I talk about raising a kid as a single parent, tips on kid raising recipes, makeup tutorials, movie reviews, and music. Anyway, this is going to be a short video today because I'm in mourning. As many of you viewers know that my wonderful Brayden came into my life after a lust-filled and rocking sexual encounter with rockstar Shane Blathoes about two years ago. All of which led me to my dream of being a YouTube star and producing awesome content that gets thousands of views every video. Thank you, wonderful viewers! Well, if you hadn't heard from the various news sources, Shane was murdered a couple days ago, and it has been hard on both of us. Brayden will now only see his father through videos and hear his voice through his music. He will also not be able to get to know his daddy, which is sad and depressing. (Faint knock at a door.) Who could that be? Excuse me, viewers.”

(Chair slides across floor. Footsteps grow fainter with each step. Faint creak of a door opening.) (Kerry speaks in a faint voice.)

“Hello. What can I do for you?”

(Detective Sargent Charles Walpeper speaks in a fainter voice)

“Hello ma'am, I'm Detective Sergeant Charles Walpeper, and this is my partner Detective Ghumchu. Are you Carrie Ridgeway?”

“Yes, I am. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Can we come in ask some questions in regard to the death of Shane Blathoes?”

“Okay. Do you mind if I record this?”

“No??”

“Oh. Okay. Do you mind if I shut off my camera in the kitchen? I was in the middle of filming my next video.”

“That is fine with us ma’am.”

(Footsteps getting louder. Footstep can be heard by the doorway)

“This may take a while for me, but for you viewers it will be two seconds. (whispers) maybe I can a recording of some of the questions for you!”

(Fingers tapping on phone screen)

Sometime later

(Sounds of a phone being place on a table. Everything is dark. Kerry speaks)

“Sorry about that I was expecting an important phone call.”

(Walpeper speaks)

“Ma’am, I know your phone is still on and I think you are recording this. Can you please turn off your phone and lay it down screen up?”

“I don’t think my phone is on.”

“Ma’am, please turn your phone off.”

“Okay.”

Ten minutes later

(Still a black screen. Walpeper speaks)

“Ma’am, this is the last time I am going to ask you to turn off your phone. This is an ongoing investigation and you trying to record our conversation can be seen as an obstruction

to the case. Turn off your phone or we can continue this discussion at the station where your phone will be taken away from you during our interrogation.”

(Kerry speaks)

“I’m sorry Mr. -- ”

“Detective Sergeant.”

(One hour later)

(Back to original shot of kitchen and Carrie)

“Hi! I’m back. You all saw were the small clips I was able to get before Detective Sargent Walpeper stopped me. He is lucky that he’s handsome, or I would be upset. I wonder if he is single.

Anyway, those were the detectives investigating Shane’s murder. They started with those usual cliched questions like ‘where was I on the day of the murder?’, ‘what was my alibi?’ and my relationship with the victim. They also asked if I knew anybody who had a grudge against the victim. I answered all those questions easily. I was here working on my videos and taking care of Brayden. Sadly, other than Brayden there’s no one else who can verify this. I will admit my relationship with Shane is not a positive one. He was a little hurt with the trial where the other moms and I asked for child support. ask for grudges. Well, for those who followed the news surrounding Shane, most people who knew him had a grudge against him.

Then those detectives asked more personal questions, like my relationship with the other moms, which is a positive one. We sometimes meet up and have play dates. Any long-time viewers should know that they have been previous guests on the show.

Email Exchange

From: dectghumchu18627@capolicedepart.com

To: b&bokopoko@gmail.com

Subject: POLICE Investigation. Confirming an alibi

Dear Owners of I Can't Believe There is a Bed and Breakfast by Lake Okopoko,

I am Detective Ghumchu of the Calaveras Police Department, Homicide division, and I am currently investigating a murder. Two of our suspects have stated that they stayed at your B&B from July 15th to July 18th. Attached to this email are a couple photos of the two people. Please reply as soon as possible.

Greg Ghumchu

(He/Him)

Detective in Calaveras Police Department

From: b&bokopoko@gmail.com

To: dectghumchu18627@capolicedepart.com

Subject: re: POLICE Investigation. Confirming an alibi

Dear Detective Ghumchu,

Oh yes! We do remember these two people. They were such a wonderful couple and very considerate too. They spent the entire time here or around the lake for the entire time they booked their stay. Which was July 15th to July 18th. They seemed normal and did not do anything weird, but they did spend most of the 15th with this one guy. He seemed weird, scruffy, smelly, and had a couple of cameras. When we asked who he was the couple ignored the question and asked what was for dinner. We hope this was very helpful. If there are any

more questions, please email us and if you and your significant other is ever in the Okopoko region please stay at our beautiful Bed and Breakfast.

We hope the rest of your day is wonderful!

Greg and Gregg Picaloloes

Owners of I Can't Believe There is a Bed and Breakfast by Lake Okopoko,

(We, they)

Joel Trim interview #2 and Lala Shar interview #1. Interviewed together.

Joel Trim -- Why am I here again. I thought I answered all your questions and was considered not a suspect.

Detective Greg Ghumchu -- at the time you weren't a suspect, but investigations always reveal new things. One such thing is you and Ms. Layla Shar's alibi has been confirmed.

JT -- Well, you could have told us through a phone call, text, email or not by bringing me to the police station a second time. Which brings me to my first statement. Why am I here?

Layla Shar -- Trimmy calm down. I am not surprised; we did nothing wrong. Can we go?

Detective Sargent Charles Walpepper -- Not yet. When the Picaloloes emailed us back to confirm your alibi they happened to mention that you two spent a lot of time with a mysterious man. Would you like to tell us who it is, or will you need a lawyer?

JT -- Oh, yeah, forgot about that. No wait, that is a lie. I thought they would have spoken out by now.

LS -- Really that is it? That is a mistake on our part. Yes, we did meet with someone during our stay, but it is unrelated to murder.

DSCW -- Why don't you tell us about the person you met and then we will decide if it is unrelated to the case.

JT -- Their name is Alberto Umberto, a well-known paparazzi and celebrity blogger. They somehow found out about our trip and followed us.

LS -- We found Alberto taking pictures of us and confronted them. Since we could not stop them from doing their job, we decided to make a deal with them.

DGG -- What was the deal?

JT -- an interview about our relationship the divorce, and Blathoes, free dinner, and they get to spend the day taking pictures of us. In return they leave us alone for the rest of our time at the B&E, and they do not publish the photos or the interview until Monday. Which they didn't do.

DGG -- Why do you think they didn't release the information?

LS -- Maybe Alberto is waiting for one of us to be arrested or be considered primary suspects before releasing their interaction with us. The reasons are most likely to get some fame and a lot of money.

DSCW -- Do you have any way of contacting them?

JT, LS (unison) – No.

JT -- You can try their blog. I am sure there is contact information like an email.

Notes

“I Can’t Sleep...”- Dali is Salvador Dali and *Soft Monsters* and *Red Dish Holding Fish* are his paintings. Parts Unknown is used in the bio of wrestler The Ultimate Warrior. Boomtube is a transportation device used in DC Comics. Big Brother is the dictator in George Orwell’s *1985*. “I say I say” is a quote from Looney Toon character Foghorn Leghorn. “Timey Wimey” is a quote from the TV show *Doctor Who*. “Are you a god” is a quote from the movie *Ghostbusters*. Elder Beings are monsters created by HP Lovecraft. *Color of Space* is a short story by HP Lovecraft. *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* is a 1984 sci-fi action movie. *The Witches Sabbath* is a painting by Francisco Goya. Titan runs amuck is a reference to Francisco Goya’s painting *The Colossus*.

“Stage Fright”- “Shazam” is a catchphrase for DC Comics hero Captain Marvel.

“No Return Policy”- “Stick to Kids” is a reference to the 1972 protest song “Napalm Sticks to Kids” the song is about napalm.

“Saturn’s First Meal”- ekphrastic poem of Francisco Goya’s *Saturn Devouring His Son*. The poem is also a golden shovel of Gwendolyn Brook’s poem “The Coora Flower.” The line used for the golden shovel is “It was restful, learning nothing necessary.”

“Ode to the Old Western Tale”- the names in the poem all come from different western movies: Blondie, played by Clint Eastwood, is from 1966 *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, Rooster is Rooster Cogburn, played by John Wayne and Jeff Bridges, from the movie *True Grit*. It was released in 1969 and remade in 2010. Joe is a reference to Joe Kidd, also played by Eastwood in 1972’s *Joe Kidd*. Django is a character who has been in 31 movies and played by various actors. The most famous is Italian actor Franco Nero and Jamie Kennedy.

Harmonica, played by Charles Bronson, is from the 1968 film *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Silence, played by Jean-Louis Trintignant, is from the 1968 film *The Great Silence*.

“Red Clay”- the poetic form was inspired by Saeed Jone’s poem “The Blue Dress.” The line “ten shots with a steel chair” is a reference to the Mick Foley versus The Rock I Quit match where Foley took ten consecutive hits to the head from a steel chair while handcuffed.

“The Power Behind a Name”- another poem inspired by “The Blue Dress.”

“In Love with a Cattle Prod”- The poem inspired by The Struts’ “In Love with the Camera.”

“Poem Define”- Swedish B Wolves is a play on the character Beowulf.

“First Journal”- was inspired by Victoria Chang’s poems in her book *Obit*.

“Theater Haiku”- poem takes place in a packed theater during the time Marvel movie *Avenger Endgame* was in theaters.

“The Bloody Fight Between Two Riddling Geese” is a found poem from the last few pages of Stephen King’s “Wasteland.”

“Stories of Love”- is an abecedarian poem and each line starts with a bands’ name. There are song titles in the poem: Yes’ “Owner of the Loney Heart,” The Beatles’ “Hard Day’s Night” and Black Sabbath’s “Iron Man”

“Fly God”- is a found erasure poem of flash fiction story “The Lord of the Flies” by Maro Denevi.

“Chef Poet”- the line “*put a smile on that face*” is a quote by the Joker in 2008 movie *The Dark Knight*

“Stories of Destruction”- is an abecedarian poem and each line starts with a bands’ name.

The song titles in the poem: Judas Priest “Painkiller,” Dragonforce “Through Fire and Flame,” Metallica’s “Metal Militia,” and Toadies “Possum Kingdom”

“Junk Mail Pantoum”- can be found in issue 74 of *Number One Magazine*

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VITA

Todd Loughran was born in Sonora, California on October 5, 1993. He spent all of his childhood and teen years growing up in Angels Camp, California. A town that is well known for being the setting for a short story written by Mark Twain, and their jumping frog contest in the third week of May. He graduated from Bret Harte High School in 2011. He went to Columbia Community College to get an AS degree in Hospitality Management. He graduated from Humboldt State University in 2019 with a BA Degree in English Creative writing with a minor in literature. During time at Humboldt, he spent his final year as an intern/ co-spoken word editor for *Toyon Literary Magazine*. His duties were being a reader, promoting the magazine, editing, and helped maintain their YouTube Channel. He was also going to be the English-speaking host for book release party for their 66th issue but couldn't do to COVID shutting down the world.

Todd moved from California to Missouri to take part in the Graduate program at UMKC. It would not have been possible if it were not for his aunt and uncle who live in Missouri. During his time at the university, he was a reader for *New Letters*, interned twice for the *Fiction/Non/Fiction* podcast, and was one of the poetry editors and readers for *Number One Magazine*, UMKC's literary magazine. He has won the JoAnne Dale Creative Writing Scholarship two years in a row.

You can find Todd's work in issues 66th and 67th of *Toyon Literary Magazine* and in issues 73 and 74 of *Number One Magazine*.