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Let's Be Adventurers: An Original Collection of Poems, Short Stories, and Drama

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Let's Be Adventurers: An Original Collection of Poems, Short Stories, and Drama

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Louisiana State University
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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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Honors Thesis

Poetry Collection:

Ronan

STOP IT!

I think that's my name?

Sniff

Wif my SHNAZZTASTIC nose

Nibble nibble nibble on the

Curled frays of wormdust-

CARPET? Mother said!

Rare delicacy delight!

Sniff

FUR! Not mine? Wait wait wait

MEOW-MASTER! We meet again!

Your paws-that-claw-and-pain-me of death

Will not survive!

Quick on the double!

Back-thrusters into overdrive!

ATTACK!

fwump

Another one bites the dust.

Open the door, bitch!

YEF! The world!

Frewsh air and

Omg omg omg

LEAVES!

Crunchness Supremed!

Trees! ROCKS!

Glorious [piss] time

Out of a leather watermelon

Self-combusting

This is the mother-load

CHASE

BITE

SEEK AND DESTROY

Everything in sight

Fluff of pillows, jump and hide

And roll over for more kisses

When hand-that-feeds-me

Finds Me.

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Night Cats

Crusted flakes of Ham and Cheese Tuesdays
Line the rim of the hard lip
Crumbling on a pale flowered napkin where
Imaginary Cats chase imaginary balls of string.

They're Imaginary because
As mothers and fathers said hundreds o' times
Before when you questioned it:
Cats can't smile.

Instead, they just wait till everyone's asleep
And unstitch a furry mask held together
With a blue
Polka-Dot Ribbon-or green depending if amiable.

There, the flesh is smooth and glowing and
The smile is perfectly there
Rather pinkish skin, new, and ah yes
Baby's bottom!

Any smart person would be agreeable with this practice
Because of course, cats are much more beautiful than humans.
No need for hurt feelings-
Rather peaceful coexistence is best!

Cats don't kill rats, by the way.
They simply shoo the real rat out the house, a spank on the paw
And chew on the fake burlap rat they made
In art class on Thursdays-always keeping up with appearances.

Don't worry about your cat running around naked.
He or she wears trousers with suspenders or a silk dress depending
They are civilized
After all.

They drink tea promptly at 2am
And play croquet on the roof.
But they usually retire right before the sun
Or their tenant [i.e. owner, but don't use that derogatory word, please] awakens.

Keeping up with tradition, they always
Sew their furry mask back on, careful along the seams
So they can greet their tenants
With blank faces.

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Cheese

The family portrait doesn't suit you.
Your dress is stiff and modest.
Your smile is, well...not one.
Everyone looks dead and fake
and all you can think of while the bulb flashes over and over
is how you'd rather be
lighting up
watching your cigarette burst into flames, flicking off the sparks
as they lace up their ballet shoes and pirouette away.
You'd rather be with him, in the dark theatre where monsters are right before your eyes,
and they look how they're supposed to look----instead of
your aunt Janice's pantsuit.

Peeping Tom

This glacier appears to bleed
Drip goes the ivy, watch a droplet form
Survivors speak didactic plans
Endless monologues of speaking tongues
Whispering murmurs of seduction
Fishnet stockings capture thoughts and phrases
Moans of intercourse coarse, pass, transcend
Reality stops being real for one minute, thirty seconds
Stop the clock
Already ended in front of the eyes
Mind's eye, third eye
All *I* can see is
Nothing

Bird's Nest

pit stomach
a ravenous cave filled with borborygmus arms
outstretched towards empty, beating sky
cold wind thrusts open dusty cabinet-chest
hinges pulled from bonds
the blood drum pours out sentiments
on swaying tree diaphanous willows
agelastian tears shriek out
against a soundless barrier
turning backs march ruthless
embittered in search
for another to call home

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Sherbet Popsicle

There is a way to instill panic in your neighborhood.
You're going to need some elbow grease,
Crazy-huge wooden balls
Strung in a
Scalloped-fashion
A wine shop and wine bar.
It's something called interval training.
In unison, they lower their coffee cups from their lips
And stare at the man blankly who slobbers into view,
Their youngest having just asked
For a refill of her juice.
Ora cen porta l'un deri margini.
That's probably what gives the Bywater
It's sticky-sweet ambiance.
It's a real orange, orange,
Isn't it?

Where's the Bleach?

"Broadhurst Theatre?
In that direction."
I lift my heavy heart up
Solemnly.
I overturn the ashes.
I felt like a fresh-born prince.
You must be or you wouldn't
Have come here.
"My leader of the pack!"
"My professor of desire!"
What sort of people live here?
"We're all mad!"
"Les Miserable!"
The fierceness and urgency of her whisper...
"My Lancelot!"
For surely we may weep
To know
So dark and deep
Our spirits stain.

Highland Coffee

Coffee shop smog chatter lightly dances above heads. People are living day-to-day activities while they drink their tall white chocolate mochas discussing what their daughter, Amanda, does in her dance class or what type of flowers look best against the Turner's white picket fence. Sinking into the plush leather seat and breathing in the warmth of the bean, just take a second breath of the life around you.

Listen to their words, their diction, and the slur of their "s." Hang on to the drips of sadness and bursts of sunshine when they talk of family, death, gossip, boyfriends, and teachers alike. Stare at the guy in the corner; his afro is a cotton-candy sheep blob mess that almost invites you to pet it, but you second guess that due to the massive amounts of piercings and tattoos peeking out his eyebrows and sleeves of an old Pink Floyd tshirt. At least the Smiths' song blaring out his headphones makes you smile.

Glancing over you see a tired professor, angry at his students for missing the point of their papers. His wrinkled brow is creased with worry, alcohol, and the longing to ride off in the Appalachians with his dog, Sampson, drooling out the window. The pen scratches a harsh judgment on the paper lying prostrate on his lap. GPA's at his mercy. All he sees, however, is their lack of interest in the allusions of Arnold, Tennyson, and Wordsworth. He sees their pajamas, Ipods plugged into their lobes, their eyes wet and blinding over in visions of being anywhere else than the basement floor he's ruled for years.

Slurping herbal tea, the law student adjusts her button-up under her sweater. Precise pearls, pleats, and matching messenger bag. Thermal mug is still steaming with health as she inspects her Mac for typographical errors. Her highlights are fresh as are her ambitions. Expertly applied eyeliner only emphasizes her fierceness yet Chanel softens the approach leaving you with a whiff of inspiration.

Guitars are strumming outside and the salty sweat lingers on the tip of your nose forming drops of relaxation. Bearded vagabonds, men and women alike, let the tired flies rest on their shoulders. Patchwork shirts read names not their own, mechanic grease pit stains with leather combat boots. They lovingly pet their Pitbull, Fuck Off, and shove a stick in his direction. They don't have any signs, they don't have any money, but they have the fucking guitar and harmonica jig down pat, and you might as well dig out that extra dollar to see them smile.

Because then you'll smile, too.

And pause, wait, think about yourself in each of their shoes. And feel their pains, their joys, their Tuesday mornings, and realize

Your coffee is cold.

George Washington's Twin

The Quaker Oat Man sits in front of me on Tuesdays

I nibble on his tailcoat and crumble hair to pass the time.

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Lunchtime Swap time

Oh you wonderful being of lurve, let me tangle your hair in my fingers...come hither, I didn't put this dress on for nothing...stare into my sultry eyes and melt into my throbbing flesh...pick apart my memories...

Wing me through

Like a trapeze, gliding aching, lurching forward-

You bitch...

Just do it...

Don't be a ninny....you fucking cropduster.

It's just a vagina....

Respect? Sorry, I'm more into indulgence....really?

You're not the one who's offering yourself up,

Naked

Stark,

White, abandoned and dripping with cold sweat wondering....

Did I work out the other day....shit....suck it in...

Now ju----

Finally....

Sweet release, like a water spilling from a crystal sluice...rejoice, oh heavenly songs of the sky!

REJOI-

WHAT?

That's it....what are you.....a mouse?

Mini Mouse here to the rescue with his tiny sacs of 30 second pleasure. Don't worry...there's not enough cum in here to get you pregnant much less lubricate your pleading baby-hole.

How could you're parents have produced you....they should be shot...

I didn't even have time to enjoy it, relish it, sip on it's ambrosia, more or less feel it you jerk.

I bet you think porn is gross, too.

I can't believe this is happening...what a letdown, psh....

I think I'll awkwardly grab my clothes and slip away into the night of bigger dicks and longer partners...

Oh.....

Well.....

I wish you would've told me....my first time sucked, too....

.....

.....

.....

Well your eyes are fantastic.

And I really like your laugh.

In fact, let's go get dinner,

hmmmmmanduhmabyewecanforgetaboutwhathappenedandstartovertomorrow?

Great, see you at 8.

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Flaming June

Tantric winds blush through the curtains
As a dreaming lovely Anguish pines away on her silk
Hair raw as the berry bloom scarlet on the Balkans
Skin diaphanous and smooth as newly-uttered milk.
Silent is her breathing just like the star's sigh
Lashes ebony veins that quiver in blind sight
Darkness worms through the cracks that burn and lie
Polished mahogany blood that soaks in the light.
Blue is the gauze that covers her limbs
Wraps up her sorrow in forgettable knots
Black swollen pastures form holes in her skin
While thoughts of him in her brain form clots.
Beating lump in her chest is nearly tuckered out
While the sun slowly fades leaving nothing but doubt.

The Laces That You Tie

I've been running my entire life
Whether it be away or to or from
It's always been a race
And my poor feet
They are tired
They are blistered and calloused and burnt
And Lonely

But I keep running and sprinting
Stepping over stones, logs, and rivers
Burning up pavement
Burning up my body
How I think about the flames
Inside me
Now let's set a table for them
First it's anger, then sadness, joy
Oh, we can't forget jealousy
Or the small plate for childhood
And remember rage? He likes his salmon
Fire-grilled
There's no time to eat-only run
And if you see me, it's not just me
It's the little machine in me
That keeps my feet
Moving on one in front of the other
Without me collapsing breathless on
The ground

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Rotten Gavel

O My rotten worm

Called Justice

She's really a bitch you know

Her blindness

It's fake

She stares down at me

Peeking with her destructive worm

Eyes

Worms crawl in

Worms crawl out

They play hide and seek

In her

Gavel

Tablets

Scales

And chew holes in her words

Drip, drip, dripping with

Blood-stained venom.

She takes a step

DOWN

From her pedestal and

Crunch-falls- bones

Sticking out of her ankles, green

She was rotten

After all...she would break

Sooner or later.

Why Melanoma is Bad for You... and Shakespeare

I have to take a shit, and it won't be pretty. It's never easy on Teriyaki Chicken Tuesdays. This has got to be the worst feeling in the world; my stomach is doing a quadruple front flip as the bits of overly-sauced chicken giblets are croaking in my hydrofluoric stomach acid. I chuckle as they score a ten-worthy back flip, but I can't help but let a groan escape as they slip on the dismount. Those little fucking cluckers; they get you every time.

I can't let this happen right now; not in fifth period English with Mrs. Sherman. You have to understand my history in Mrs. Sherman's class to fully comprehend the magnitude of the situation. Mrs. Sherman hates me and all the atoms of my soul. Every time I stare at the huge mole above her gorilla lip, I can feel my corneas burning from the evil seeping from the black hairs of death. She knows that I'm looking at her melanoma monster; that's just the beginning, too. Mrs. Sherman was supposedly once this voluptuous and sensual woman way back in the 1800's, but all that remains of her former raving beauties is a hump-backed whale of a woman with an overly abundant source of testosterone. This vile hormone production could explain her stern, gruff voice and the bugling triceps under her baby-blue angora sweater, but it can not in any shape or form explain that mole.

It's cancerous; there is no doubt in my mind. The mole is another alien being attached to Mrs. Sherman's mug; it has a mind of its own, too. When Mrs. Sherman gets angry with me for drawing penises on my homework, the mole grows three sizes and roars at me. When I couldn't draw penises on my reports anymore, I took to carrying my Sharpie around in my back pocket. With my permanent pen of literary destruction I tattooed bathroom stalls, walls, and lockers with my own personal poetry and genitalia self-portraits. Once I even did a little rap about Shakespeare, and her face turned blood red with beastly anger. The mole shook its hairs violently at me for disgracing the wonders of Chaucer and Shakespeare with visions of male anatomy.

Now all I can do is to stare mesmerized at its ebony flecks of sweaty pores dripping with venomous glandular substances; the mole consumes her entire face. Mrs. Sherman's overly painted face soon balloons into a giant butt-shaped mole muffling screams at me, and there's no escaping the wrath of the melanoma monstrosity.

I hear her voice in my head right now as I'm staring at her fat back jiggling sonnets across the blackboard.

"Now, Mr. Dunlay, you can't possibly tell me you don't find Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* a heart-wrenching and absolutely fascinating story of love, triumph, death, blah...blah...blah..."

I loved having the power of drowning out her screeching soprano voice, but it was so much more fun in my daydreams to pound my five pound *Complete Works of Shakespeare* into her piggy face and watch the sweat squirt out of the screaming mole.

"Hey, Marky, can I borrow a pencil, pretty please?" whispers Joan, the freckle-faced freak behind me. Sometimes I think Joan borrows my pencils just so she can nibble on the delicately painted #2 where my index finger curls around the angular wood panels. I swear I hear moans after I lend her a black pen. Joan's a freaky girl. She once asked me if I'd ever seen a wild animal porn session. I kindly turned my back towards her and took a nap.

I didn't want to find out her expertise in this area. Plus, Joan smells like ferrets on crack. It's just my luck that our names both begin with D's, and I can only do my best to ignore her sensual breaths on my wilting neck hairs.

"Markussssss...I'm waiting," she breathes once more a little bit more heavily. "Here," I mumble as I back-hand her the pencil I keep on my desk just for moments like these. I sigh as the classroom submerges once again to the ticking of life; paper rustles as students sigh, and their bones bend and whine as their pens move up and down the paper. The second hand on the clock to my left ticks rhythmically to each breath I take. In and out...in and out...in and out. I hate it when the clock controls my breathing; it's almost like my soul becomes trapped in its white face. That stupid Cheshire grin; it almost seems to relish each moment it refuses to move the minute hand to the wondrous recess bell. I picture Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* bursting through the dim glass and shattering that stupid grin off its face. Maybe Chaucer would cause a greater impact. I laugh as I see the Knight's Tale ripping into pieces as the clock cries out in its high-pitched prepubescent voice,

"Stop Mark, please, Mark...MERCY, MERCY! Look Mark it's time to go! Look, I'll make a deal; one that doesn't involve chicken giblets ripping your diaphragm in half...look, MAR----."

Crack.

There's no better class than Mrs. Sherman's to daydream in, even if her mole sucks the life out of you. Speaking of Mrs. Sherman, where was that man of a woman? Ah, there's the bitch... wallowing in the rush of another kill. Jonas Thompson forgot his make-up work from when he was "sick" yesterday. Too bad Mrs. Sherman already knows about the "hang-over flu" that attacks the student body after every fantastical block party Jonas throws around this time of the year. As soon as football season is over, Jonas discreetly sends out his velvet-bound invitations. They usually last the entire weekend with Sunday night being the finale. The only one I went to I ended up puking my guts up all night, but everyone counts down the days till they can enter into the magical world of alcohol and sex.

I watch as the elephant-lion-she-bear pounces on the shivering Jonas. He squelps as her breath reaches his nostrils; it's too late...she smells his fear. She's already won. Before Jonas can arm himself against further injuries of self-pride, the mole ambushes his eyelids with pounding vibration after pounding vibration.

Sigh.

At least it's not me this time, but you can never be too careful of her powers. I stare at the blackboard scribbled with her lumberjack swoops. The one problem with Mrs. Sherman's writing is that when she thinks I comprehend "Shakespeare was a genius and man before his time," she doesn't really know that I see, "Shakespeare was a cock-sucker in his time and now." I will never truly understand the need for seventeen year old men to delve into the homosexual writings of Willy S.

As I dim Mrs. Sherman's spittled screams at Jonas, I let my eyes focus on each letter scrawled on the board one at a time. My eyes blur back and forth; the glaze covers them like Krispy Kremes, and I salivate at the notion of downing another dozen this afternoon. You have to get them warm, though; that's the only way to start off the day right...warm, gooey, and dripping with fat, cholesterol, and a life riddled with Lipitor pills in neat little packages.

"*MR. DUNLAY*. What do you think about Shakespeare's Eighteenth Sonnet*? What do you gather from its honey lines and lilac-laced metaphors?" screeched the Shermaneister. Honeylacedafucklitaphor? What is this woman talking about? I thought Shakespeare was comparing some lover-thing to summer?

Summer's a bitch; I wouldn't ever tell a girl she was like an ass-sweating 95 degree day when your AC goes out and the milk curdles in the fridge. What kind of a sicko does that?

“WELL, Mr. Dunlay? Don’t just gape your mouth open like a cod fish. You look rather foolish, now don’t you? Just answer the question, please, sir,” she hissed as my face drops three levels below hell.

What was the question again? Where am I? Why does my stomach keep earth quaking back and forth.

Oh wait, Teriyaki Tuesdays; I know that answer, but Shakespeare...that’s a whole other animal I’m not ready to butcher.

I take down a big gulp as the mole creeps closer to my dark corner of the room, and I think I mumble something about “beautiful temperature fairer than Atlanta’s AC-free summers.”

“Hmph,” Mrs. Melanoma huffs. “It appears you gathered the gist of the glorious Eighteenth Sonnet, although it is a much more modern approach than to my liking.” I slowly, very slowly, let the air escape my squealing lungs; I can’t let her get to me. It’s only a few more weeks till winter break, and I’ll be free from her reign of terror.

Leaning back on my desk, I stare at the dots on the ceiling. They are so peaceful far up there; heavenly black peas dancing in patterns of lines above my head eons away from the cancerous infection known as Mildred P. Sherman. Eck, even her name could bring shivers to the most swarthy and heartless Mongolian conqueror. I would love to see Mrs. Sherman battle Attila or Hannibal the conqueror. She could take them out with one swipe of her *Milton for Dummies* occult book. I bet she could even shoot poison from her death-mole.

“Mmhhmmm, Markyyy, you do have such round and strong shoulders for a guy. I bet you could really put those babies to use on the field,” lulls Joan in my right ear. I swear, this girl has a way of making a guy want to eat his own ears off...maybe his face, too. It’s not that Joan is a bad-looking girl, either. Rounded and curvy in the right places, Joan could pass for a “Girls Gone Wild” set reject any day, but there was something about her that makes me cringe. Maybe it’s the onion breath. Yeh, that and the one crooked tooth that points at you when she smiles.

I can’t take it anymore; I scoot my desk a foot in front of Joan’s grasp, and lean forward in chicken-fury misery. I whisper “Sorry” to the little chicken souls I devoured at lunch, and I try to explain to them how their life did indeed have a purpose...a depressing purpose, but one that would feed me nonetheless. The chicken gods aren’t buying my pleadings, and the war drums sound deep within my large intestine. I’m gonna blow.

But I can't leave now; Sherman's lecture of doom has only been going on for thirty-seven minutes now, and there is no way she's going to let me leave in the last half of the class...especially after we had our generous "potty breaks" during our twenty-minute lunch. With nearly one thousand students cramming these halls, there's not nearly enough time to get a decent meal and enjoy it properly. Everyone knows it takes at least fifteen minutes to brave the cafeteria lunch line in search of nourishment; most freshmen don't even eat for the first week. Seniority rules in this land, and by all means, I will not let my hard-earned junior status be taken away by a puny, pimply eighth-grader. The first week of school I sauntered into the cold, concrete cafeteria with my broad shoulders squared and my beer-polished stomach ready to take on anything that was before me. The smells of mass produced and packaged mystery hit me like a train, a very stinky one at that. Moldy cheese seemed to curl towards my nostrils and spread their spores; the orange juice screamed scurvy. Oh well, I was starving. Nothing beats punching a little eighth-grader out of the way; you can almost hear their bird-bones crack with the impact. How can high school get any better?
Blurgle...Gurgle....

For one thing, I could have skipped lunch today, and I wouldn't need to have a bowel movement in the middle of hell.

Wriggling free of the sweat forming on the back of my seat, I stare at the brass door knob. It's the key to the world outside Sherman's domain; water fountains, bathroom stalls, vending machines, and cheerleaders practicing in fifth period P.E. all await me outside this prison cell of literature. The A.C. is thumping in the background of my thoughts. My heart starts to beat faster and faster as I imagine Tonya Smith, the head cheerleader, slipping up her extremely short, excruciatingly tight orange skirt. I just see her glowing, seducing glance burning in my mind.

Reality crashes in with the creeping of fog breath. I sigh as Mrs. Sherman waddles in front of my gaze. I feel the vomit rising in my throat as I catch sight of the moon-shaped patch of cellulite on her right side. The craters beam at me through the angora sweater, and I can't help but hear the distant muffled static of Neil Armstrong. I'm too enthralled in Mrs. Sherman's jiggling fat to realize she's staring me down right now.
Crap.

What class is this again? Oh right, How to Be Gay 101.

Fuck little chicken.

Fuck Tonya Smith and her sumptuous breasts bouncing up and down right now in the gym next to the guy's restroom.

I need to be more studious or at least pretend to be, and I need to learn how to control my boners. Maybe then I won't have to deal with Mrs. Sherman's piggy eyes glaring at me right now. Or that sewer breath she has after she devours her haggis at lunch.

"Mr. Dunlay, I think I've had quite enough of you today. What seems to be the problem with you that you cannot focus on today's lesson?" she screeches at me.

"Well you see Mrs. Fatty McShermafap, I have to take an impossibly huge dump right now; Shakespeare isn't exactly my forte," I scream in my mind.

All I really do is shrug my shoulders to her inquests, and stare down at my blank notebook. I feel her shadow move away from me, and I take a deep breath of fresh, haggis-free air. Why is this woman such a bitch? I just can't imagine anything so horrible that could have ruined her life to make her who she is today. She isn't over in Iraq right now in a trench; it's not like she would fit anyway. She obviously isn't experiencing the effects of world hunger; one look at her and you would know that. I just glare at that woman; she doesn't have anything to be sorry about except for being herself.

I can't let her get to me. I won't let her bother me because that's what she wants. My eyes meander towards her desk. Sitting on the mahogany panel-top there's a bowl of Godiva chocolates. It's a good thing I'm allergic to chocolate, because I'd be tempted to steal some. Sherman never gives the candy to her students. She told us that the first day of class way back in September.

"Candy rots your teeth just how MTV and Youtubies rot your minds; my class is one of culture and literature that will form your minds and hearts into the sophisticated young adults I know you can be," she had performed at 1:17 P.M. on September 14. All that candy explained why Mrs. Sherman's smile was rotten, but it sure as hell didn't explain why all her insides were rotten, too. Looking away from the chocolates, I peruse the other various objects on her desk. A pink feather pin sits depressed in its pen holder, and there's a disgusting pink and frilly picture frame of her dog, Weanie. Weanie is a constant source of inspiration for Mrs. Sherman and her lectures, but I just can't grasp the beauty of a blind, twelve year old, hemorrhoid-infested wiener dog.

Blurp...

Oh shit...

Did I just let that loose?

I can't take it anymore. My stomach is going to force itself through my esophagus and explode on Alisha, the soccer lesbian, in front of me. I definitely wouldn't want to piss Alisha off like that; she'd rip my ball-sack off in one kick. Maybe then I wouldn't have to face the wall everytime Tonya Smith cascades pass me in waves of that sexy perfume. What the hell am I thinking? I need these babies.

I shiver at this thought and swing my right leg over my left. I need to be subtle but forceful. This is an urgent situation. I stare at the front of the classroom then back at my desk. I glance towards the clock; it's still smiling at my discomfort. I move one inch a minute; I can't let Sherman catch on to me...

Five minutes pass by and my left butt cheek is finally off of the seat. I stare up at the lights and wait for the tears to burst forth in pain. I have to look desperate to get away with this. I gradually raise my hand and wait for the dead silence. One by one, my classmates turn and glare at me; they know exactly what I'm up to.

"Yes, Mr. Dunlay," Sherman hisses between her thin, pencil lips of venom.

"Well, Mrs. Sherman, since I grasp the full importance of the Eighteenth Sonnet, I was wondering, if you don't mind of course-

"What do you want Mark," she barks as she cuts me off.

"May I please use the restroom, Mrs. Sherman?" I whimper between my puppy eyes.

Her eyes narrow to reptilian slits; the glowing embers of hell are seeping through their gates. Time stops, and my stomach even quiets the hurling tsunami in my gut.

"Why should I let *you* of all the wonderful people in the world loose in the halls of our school to disgrace it with disgusting ridicules and anatomy?" she shrieks at the top of her lungs. She didn't stop there.

"*You*, Mr. Dunlay, of *ALL* the people to have to nerve to ask to leave MY class? Who do you think you are? If you were truly a deserving young student, I might ponder on the thought of letting you go, but *YOU? NEVER!*" she huffs before gasping for air.

I just sit there with my eyes burning with fake tears. I have to get out now or I'm going to piss everywhere over Alisha's backpack. I'll lose my balls. I won't be able to have kids. I think I'm going to die.

"Mrs. Sherman, I will take the largest dump in this classroom that both our world and Shakespeare's has ever seen if you don't let me go this very instant, please!" I squeak while holding my crotch.

Time lapses for eternity; even the clock stops ticking as Sherman and I lock eyes. Those eyes are dull and lifeless; there's nothing but pain and hatred burning at me. I don't have any hope now.

"You have three minutes," she snarls at me.

What?

What just happened? There's no time to think, I don't waste any time jumping up from seat and hurdling my body through the door.

"Thanks, Sherman," I yell through the closing door.

"That's *MRS.* Sherman to you, Dunlay!" she retorts back.

My feet are pounding through the halls; I hear children's laughter.

I can hear the angels' choruses; I see the blinding white light at the tunnel. Or is it a gleaming toilet in the clouds?

FREEDOM!

The fresh AC brushes against my face fanning away the haggis and whore breath. I'm *FREE!* Now, it's time for business. I can't help but smile ear-to-ear as I sprint to the restroom next to Tonya's seduction grounds. I might as well make the most of it, right?

The brown tile floor is so cracked and stained; my high school is disgusting. It almost feels like it was abandoned in the middle of a war. Graffiti is everywhere outside on the walls, and the bathroom stalls are still a form of communication. Where else could I get the B.J. hotline?

Looking down at those cracks I couldn't help but hum, "Don't step on a crack, or you'll break Mrs. Sherman's back."

Chuckle.

By the time I reach the restroom, Mrs. Sherman's vertebra has been pulverized into dust. I smile when I think of her gelatinous body flopping around like a spineless jelly fish. I push open the heavenly doors of intestinal relief. The smell of the bathroom fills my nostrils; the

burning sensation drives me crazy, but I can't wait to unload all my troubles in stall three of the men's restroom on the second floor of Washington High School, Atlanta, Georgia.

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Ah, sweet relief.

This is heaven. I feel like I'm flying; I'm ten pounds lighter...literally. I lean back on the seat and relish in the moment. I keep seeing stars and the darkness overwhelms my senses. This is the life. Screw Mrs. Sherman and her allegories and metaphors that just cover up this shitty life. That's what makes life beautiful; the crap that happens to you.

Leaning forward, I pull out a Sharpie in my back pocket. I scan the stall door looking for the perfect place to leave my mark on Washington High. Right below the handle, there's an innocent and empty piece of panel waiting for me to create a masterpiece.

*I'd rather eat Shakespeare's shit
than see Mrs. Sherman's mole
ever **again**.*

I stare at my work of genius for a few more seconds, smile, add an unnecessarily hairy penis portrait, and politely shut the door. Outside the door I hear the cheerleading chants echo, and I swear those "Go, Go, Go's" and "Hooray's" are for me.

By this time, I'm all worn out; even Tonya Smith can't get me up now. But I might as well just have one little peak. Just a small one.

I stand near the gritty window and peer through the wobbly glass. There she is. Pamela Anderson's twin in a teenage body. Those breasts, that butt, those legs, those breasts. Her blonde hair twirls around her face as she jumps to her friend's shoulder, and I can't help but notice her brown eyes glisten in the moist glow of her sexiness.

God, she's beautiful.

I turn away and groan; I shouldn't even tempt myself like this, she's way too hot for me. It's already past the time Sherman wanted me back. I need to get back to class before the mole starts hunting for m-FUCK. I'm UP again.

I Like a Happy Plate

Martha wished the man seated to her left was a cheeseburger. If said man were a moist patty dressed with crispy onions, tart pickles, and the gentle melt of cheddar, she would eat him. She would be much more satisfied at the end of that meal than the one she was currently suffering. Jonathan, the undesirable human date, not cheeseburger, would make a better pulled-pork sandwich based on his appearances.

Martha recanted her thoughts upon this observation. Yes, Jonathan's squinty black eyes and up-turned nose perfectly mimicked a swine's visage, but after deeper inspection, Martha cringed at his visible pit stains drenching his short-sleeved button-up. That simply would not hold up well in her favorite barbeque sauce. She narrowed her eyes in disgust. Nothing was worse to her than a greasy pulled pork sandwich.

"Is everything okay with your food, Martha? Your sister said you loved Thai food," Jonathan garbled between bites from his ornate golden trough. Martha smiled as she bit her inner cheek.

"Yes, Nicki. She seems to think she knows everything about me."

Jonathan paused and stared down at the worms of Pad Thai snagged in his fork and tie. Martha understood then that Jonathan regretted picking that tie; it was an ugly mauve mess with geometric shapes shimmering with fake silk threads. It looked ridiculous in the peanut sauce. "Well, she is your sister. You could have suggested another place if you didn't want Thai," he mumbled as he wiped away a noodle.

"Well," Martha began with emphasis on the double-L, "she was right for once. I do love curry."

Jonathan smirked and shoveled another spoonful into his dumpster. Martha pursed her lips and leaned towards her steaming bowl of red duck curry. The spices danced the polka up her nostrils, and she sighed them out warmly.

Jonathan was another despicable liverwurst that her sister dug out of her husband's human resource department. Nicki was happily married with three little dumplings of her own, and Martha could not understand how her sister had so much free time to be concerned about her sister's personal life, or lack thereof. Martha dreaded the constant phone calls wafting like the plague through her hollow apartment. The conversation always began and ended the same way.

“You’re going to be alone forever, Martha. You need to get over Tim and move on,” Nicki chided on through the crackling static.

Tim.

That’s where Martha’s thoughts stopped with Nicki. Timothy, her dead Tim. Martha felt her tight-lipped smile drooping at the thought of his pale face. The face that used to crackle and beam when he was frying bacon and eggs for her hangover in the morning. Timothy was her everything, her best-friend-turned-lover, her sandwich-maker. Now he was gone and buried in a little hole that was too small to hold a person who had everything good in the world packed into his thin, human frame.

Martha returned alone to their apartment the evening of the funeral. Pictures from trips and family holidays were grim against the peeling plaster. Martha felt just as exposed as the red brick peeking through the grey. One moment Tim was serenading Martha with his spatula mike in hand and the next he was in the ambulance with his pale pale face, eyes dimming. Heart attacks ran in Martha’s family, not Tim’s. It wasn’t fair. He would have known how to move on if it had been her, but she was utterly lost, flapping like a flounder on the bleak shore.

Shuffling through the apartment with socked feet, Martha’s downcast eyes streamed over the dust bunnies that had collected through the last few days. She always cleaned when Tim was alive because of his allergies, but what was the point now? She wanted to hear his hay fever sneeze. She regretted every time she fussed him for coughing without covering his mouth. She would have done anything to have him spew his germs all over her again. As she passed the kitchen, she stared at the same pots in the same places they had been since that day.

Baked ziti was on the menu that night. Tim was a food connoisseur in his own right: his mother a domestic baking machine and his father an Italian meatball. On the other hand, Martha had been raised a sad vegan. Martha’s life lacked the salt that makes everything better in a soup; Tim was an entire cabinet of spices. His zest in the kitchen had sparked other avenues in Martha’s life, and it was only when he was gone that she realized how empty things were without him. Toast was too rich for her palate now that it was just placing bread in a metal box. Tim’s buttery humming was the magic in his cooking, and Martha knew she had run out of pixie dust.

Martha was deep in these thoughts while Jonathan continued to slurp at his side of the table. He had tried to make contact with her, but he had resolved himself to accepting her dead stare and forced smile because the Pad Thai was delicious.

“You still haven’t taken one bite yet! How can you resist all this,” he exclaimed enthusiastically as a final attempt to break into her igloo of bitterness.

“What? Oh, it’s delicious. Thank you,” she mumbled automatically.

“Nicki said you were ready to mingle,” Jonathan grumbled over another curry-filled bite.

Martha wanted to slap him. She wanted to see his piggy nose hit the table and hear him squeal as he ran all the way home.

“Did Nicki also tell you my boyfriend just passed away?” Martha shot back while straining to maintain an innocent stare.

“Um, well yes, she mentioned it, but she also said it happened a year ago and that seemed long enough, at least to her...and me,” Jonathan replied slowly. Caution slurred his speech, and his black speck eyes squinted behind his thick glass frames. Martha noted the beads of sweat starting to form on the bridge of his nose. She wanted to make him nervous. She never wanted to hear from him again. He was not Tim.

“I know you’ve been through a rough spot, but I was really looking forward to meeting you. It’s not fair of me, though, to act like this,” Jonathan murmured contemplatively as he stared at the grease pools forming between the noodle barracks. Martha was taken aback at this sweet gesture but only for a moment. She took in a deep breath.

“Jonathan,” she began, “you’re a very swee-”

“Look, Martha, I know I’m being a little pig-headed, but I understand that you’re not ready for this. I don’t need the whole spiel again about being a “nice guy,” he retorted with a wave of his hand.

Silence consumed their table. Martha stared at her uneaten plate. She felt a wave of guilt lump up in her throat, but it was not triggered by Jonathan’s obviously hurt feelings. All Martha could hear in her broken record mind was Tim’s voice laughing, teasing her to let him see a “happy” plate. Martha always finished meals that Tim prepared; they were manna from heaven. It was their joke, their own ménage a trois involving Tim, Martha, and their kitchen table. The remnants of those meals were distant visions of happiness and full stomachs, and no matter what she ate now, everything tasted like cardboard.

“I think we should just call it a night,” interrupted Jonathan’s nasally intercom voice. Martha numbly nodded her head in agreement, Tim’s voice still heavily pounding in her ears.

“Did you want to take that home with you? You barely touched it,” Jonathan gruffly pointed out as he wiped his neck with the napkin.

“No, I don’t like leftovers,” she responded coldly before turning to grab her purse.

Martha awoke to her phone buzzing angrily on the nightstand. She moaned and clutched her throbbing forehead. After Jonathan had practically thrown her out of his car, she found comfort in her emergency stash of liquor for such occasions. The buzzing phone nearly jumped off the table at her face; she knew it was Nicki.

“What the hell is wrong with you, Martha? The poor guy was a mess when he told Chris about it at work today,” Nicki’s shrill voice pierced through the line.

“Today? What time is it?” Martha meekly sighed.

“Uh, hello? It’s 3:30 pm. Dammit, Martha, are you really still sleeping? Christ, I swear you’re just going to...” Nicki’s voice faded with the static. Martha was an expert of blocking out all things unnecessary, all things that were not Tim. She rolled over on to her side and drew Tim’s empty pillow to her breast.

It did not smell like him anymore. It would not smell like him. No matter how many times she sprayed his cologne on its threadbare cotton, it never held. She pressed her face into the lumpy mess of feathers and searched for the curve in Tim’s neck.

“Martha are you listening to me?” Nicki interrupted more forcefully. Martha noted Nicki’s new strategies, new tones that caught her attention. Nicki spoke again with a softer, dove tone that their mother had often used. Honey-laced and slightly like cinnamon, it made Martha intake a sharp breathe before it disappeared.

“Martha, what am I going to do with you? You know you haven’t been yourself ever since Tim’s passing, and I don’t expect you to be,” Nicki spoke firmly but with sisterly love drenching the undertones. There was a small silence.

“But, you have to just try. You’re not even trying.”

“I don’t want to try,” Martha mumbled with the pillow’s skin clenched between her teeth.

“What was that? What’d you say?” Nicki’s voice raised an octave. The syrup had run dry, and Martha knew the conversation would be wrapped up quickly.

“I just don’t even want to bother with you anymore. If we weren’t sisters, I’d...I’d...oh just never mind,” Nicki stuttered.

“I have to get ready for work,” Martha slurred. She wiped her mouth where the drool had settled in her boredom.

“Oh now you have responsibility. All that money for a master’s degree and you’re a coffee house barista. Mom and Dad are rolling in their graves,” Nicki half-snarled. Martha darkly laughed thinking of her sister with fangs and whiskers poking in all directions under her sharp nose. The look suited her.

“I have to get dinner ready for Mark anyway. I really hope you’re going to try and get better, Martha. It’s been long enough.”

“I’m fine. I have to get to work. I’ll talk to you later.”

Click.

“I’m not fine, and I won’t go to work. I hope you don’t call later to check on me,” she stated as a confession to the empty plastic receiver shaking in her hands. Nothing was said in reply as she expected. Martha rolled over and slammed the phone back on its stand. Tim’s pillow was crushed beneath her arm. She gingerly smoothed it out just as she used to stroke his hair, but she stopped suddenly.

“*What is wrong with me,*” she thought. The sentence violently reverberated against her skull’s fence line. Martha rolled her back to the pillow. She hated it. She poked it rudely. She prodded it again deeply with her finger as if she were testing it. Was it soft enough for the broiler? No, it was too firm, too callous to be enjoyed. She started pounding it over and over again with her fists. Her meat mallet fists turned to steel as she tore into the unyielding pillow carcass. Her hair untied in from its bun and the tendrils flew about her like a halo of tentacles in the fury of a storm. Feathers burst out of the pillow’s sides but she did not stop. She didn’t stop until a flurry of snow feathers covered the room and the beads of sweat chilled on her quivering upper lip. Martha was ready to admit the truth that haunted her every turn, her every action.

The pillow’s previous owner was not there and would never be there to comfort her after Nicki’s obnoxious, abrasive phone sessions. There would never be egg-and-ham Tuesday’s or the smell of pancakes whispering into the room on a Sunday morning. Tim was gone and Martha was still there watching his memory fade each day while she herself became a shadow of the formerly robust and vivacious woman she used to be.

Martha stood up and took off her shirt. She removed her pants slowly and unsure of her next action. Stark white, shrunken, and newborn she stood in front of the mirror in the corner of the room. She examined herself like a fish in the market, trying to decide if she would pick herself based on her current appearance. Of course, she would not; she wouldn't have given herself a second glance. No one would.

She used to have a butt, one that Tim enjoyed to touch on more than one occasion, but her pants now sagged away from the former outlines of her once-curves. Her ribs were gnashing teeth against her transparent skin, and her eyes were just lifeless voids of dark pools deeply dredged in her pale skin. Dead Tim looked better than she did.

Martha put her clothes back on and stood alone in the room. In that instant, she became aware of the emptiness in her gut. All this time she blamed it on the absence of Tim, the incessant nagging depression that hung over her like a cloud, but she knew that Tim could never fill it again. She knew she would have to fill it herself.

Walking into the kitchen wasn't nearly as painful as she had imagined. There was still that certain electricity in the tile against her feet, but the tingling created a soothing numbing sensation after a few steps. She took a deep breath, a slight diagonal step forward, and pulled out the bread. She was going to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and enjoy it. The rest of her life would come later, but for this singular moment in time, she was going to savor every peanut buttery bite, every warm crumble of the toast against her tongue. The slight surprise of the blackberry's tart prickled her cheeks, and she found herself running to the fridge to down it all with a cold glass of milk. She was so caught up in the moment of the meal that she found herself reaching for more only to find nothing beneath her finger's grasp. At the tips of her fingers, she found a very, very happy plate.

She paused.

An unexpected warmth flooded her lungs. A deluge of the senses overcame her. She heard strains of Sinatra all sung in Tim's tenor float above her head. She smelled the cinnamon musk lingering on the tip of her nose, and felt the push of Tim's fingers on the small of her back. She craved him all over again but opened her eyes.

She did not want to cry; she was not a baby anymore. She would not allow herself the tears. Martha felt Tim walking out of the room again, but she did not turn around this time to

stop him and pull him back to her. He needed to go run an errand much more important than a hefty grocery list. She had her own duties to attend to here in her home.

Martha briskly stood from the table and stared down at the plate. Its happy face was still waiting for her. She felt the corners of her mouth twitching, nervously unsure of their next action until the beams broke forth into a grin. Martha's face welcomed the smile and the release from her tired shoulders. Picking up the plate she tenderly traced the floral outlines on its border. Crumbs slid off the porcelain disk, but she did not sweep them up. She would clean the apartment later after she tended to the plate's bath. Swaddling it like a child, Martha let the water in the sink stream over the plate until the remnants of jam and brown disappeared down the drain. After it was dried off, she helped it back to its place in the cabinet before closing the door with a hush and blessing.

Martha stood in the kitchen for a few seconds surveying her surroundings. She was not as alone as she once believed. She smiled again. This was becoming a quick habit, but she did not mind. She stood more firmly now on her two feet, spun giddily, and turned off the light as she floated out of the kitchen.

Echo Park

“All Asian chicks hit the ugly. You can forget it after 40, no, 35. They just shrivel up,” Tom preaches. Whether or not it’s the new spiked hair, the man jewelry, or the constant evangelization stemming from sudden world knowledge, I do not like who my brother, Tommy a.k.a. “Tom” has become. I stare forward as the rain bleeds across the car’s front, its eyelashes batting them away only to find more in their place.

“You’re lucky I’m your big brother. Not many guys would tell their little sister these things.”

I keep my head turned to the white line feet away from my face. He doesn’t have to be so bitter about some girl breaking up with him, even if she was Asian.

“You gotta know that we’re only after one thing,” he continues.

He pauses waiting for his pupil to raise her hand diligently, breathlessly eager to answer.

“You know what I’m talking about, right?”

Yes, you fucking idiot, my mind screams. “I think so,” says my mouth.

“Sex, that’s it. And tits. Don’t forget that. I don’t want anyone messing around with my little sister.”

I smirk silently and turn back towards the window. Is that what you were thinking when you left me alone in the bar in L.A.? A life lesson you called it. Fending for myself.

The longer the drive goes on through the pitiful weather I realize this impulsive day trip for some New Orleans shopping was more of a penance brought on by the wrath of our zealot and micromanaging parents. Somewhere their parenting stopped short of teaching proper and protective aspects supposedly instinctual in sibling relationships.

But it’s here now. Macho big brother gonna beat the crap out of any potential rapists.

I roll my eyes at this dramatic persona he’s suddenly come in touch with. The minute a leggy blonde walks in our vicinity, screw little sister. She’s on her own. She’s eighteen now and needs to learn how to drink beer. It’s too bad, though, since I developed a liking for gin and tonic on spring break.

“You gotta learn how to be a bitch. Real guys can handle a bitch. The weird ones are looking for the nice ones like you.”

Everyone at school thinks I’m a bitch. “I’m not *too* nice. I know how to say no,” I retort.

“Nah, you got that look. Naïve, innocent. And you act it, too. Don’t even know a thing about going out,” he sighs.

My mind numbs at his carelessness. I feel like throwing up on his newly cleaned car seats and all over the fancy flashing dashboard of his massive SUV. He doesn’t even realize what he’s done to me. Voices pound against the frames of my skull as I lean deeper into the plush leather headrest.

Because I had to be the perfect one when you left home.

Because our parents locked me away from the world.

“You got me, though. I’m going to teach you everything I know.”

Another stupid remark, but I sympathetically laugh knowing that if I don’t seem normal on this trip, then it’s going to cause more harm to me in the long run.

“Tommy, just park the fucking car!” I scream while we swerve in and out of a perfectly fine spot again. The ride from the interstate had been surprisingly mellow until we crossed over Lake Ponchartrain. Tommy-Turned-Tom switched roles midsentence and decided we should be cultured by “Anna Karenina: Book on Tape Edition.”

“I’ve just been so busy lately with work, you know?”

Sure, Tom. You’ve always been too busy for me.

“So, you know, these books on tape are just awesome! It lets me really catch up on stuff. You wanna borrow some?”

I glare through my closed eyes, and mumble, “Not really.”

I instantly feel a punch in my gut. He’s just trying to be nice, make a connection.

“I just like the see the words better.”

That’s a good enough excuse, I guess, because he turns up the nasally narration. By the time Anna realizes she doesn’t love her husband anymore, we have sped through lanes and sloughs of sleet to find ourselves in the heart of the French Quarter.

Turn after turn we miraculously fit through the tight streets only to be birthed through another gut-busting canal. I hold my breath each time we screech closely to a stop sign praying

that a nomadic biker will sense my brother's incompetent driving. It's not that he doesn't know how to drive, he just has one speed.

Aggressive.

I don't know whether to attribute this to his army lifestyle while stationed in Germany and the fluid autobahns or some darker carelessness that surfaced in a distant childhood trauma.

"This stupid shit hole. Exactly what I was telling you about earlier. You gotta get out of here, be on your own," Tom curses under his breath.

I don't exactly know to what or when he was referring to "earlier," but lots of what my brother has talked about this last hour and a half melted into the rhythmic beating of the car's wipers and my utter lack of interest.

"Do you keep calling me Tommy because it's habit or is better sounding than Tom?" he asks not bothering to hide his worry about donning a new name.

If I didn't love my brother, I'd tell him Tom was a stupid name that made him seem even more pathetic and dull. Tom is a stuffy asshole who dumps little sisters off in bars where she meets drunken artists who want to draw her nude. Tom is the teacher who keeps failing you but never lets you know what you're doing wrong. Tom is sitting next to me in a new Cadillac and making me listen to a congested cat lady reading Tolstoy.

"It's out of habit," I offer with an endearing shrug.

"Yeh, I guess so, ha, it's just not me anymore, though," he snarkily laughs as he crinkles his nose and punches my shoulder. I duck from his hand laughing, but I really wish I could slap him in the face over and over. Make him stop pretending.

Silence consumes the car again. The rain slacks and slows to a few sad, sniffing drops. As the clouds clear, the mood in the car uplifts in sync with the heavens. Tolstoy has been replaced by the Tourette-like flipping through radio stations till Tom settles on an "alternative" station.

"You like this shit, don't you? All this new wave stuff?" he laughs and bobs his head to the bridge of a Coldplay song.

"Coldplay is good," I say still staring at the beaming windows on the top floor of a hotel.

"Aw, my little sister is a hipster," he exclaims while trying to rub my hair down like he used to before he became Tombot.

“Ah stop, please. I do try to fix my hair,” I growl as he continues to laugh and try to poke me. I can’t take all this sibling bonding. Where is all of this coming from? First this trip, then the lectures, now it’s creepy poke time. I can’t ever get a break.

“Okay, okay, I’ll stop,” he says chuckling even though his hands are in mid-swipe. “How’s these last weeks been? Are you doing okay?” he asks in a much more serious tone.

This is what I’ve been waiting for, the elusive brother check-up time. The parental spy tactic to win over my trust and get into my head. Too late, brother, you’re one step behind.

“It’s great. I love school,” I say blandly. I make sure to hold eye contact with him for a few seconds for assurance, but he sighs looking forward at the passing traffic.

“I’m still just feeling like shit after everything that happened on your spring break. I really wanted your first trip away from the ‘rents to be fun...and safe, of course. You had fun, though, right? I mean, I know that I wasn’t the best big brother, but...”

Could he be more original, please? This is the same word-for-word spiel he droned after our parents chewed him out upon our flight’s landing. Our uncle who we had stayed with in L.A. had “slipped” and mentioned to my parents on the daily phone check-up that I was at a bar, alone, and Tom had come home early. So much for “what happens in L.A. stays there.”

I interrupt him mid-drivel, “Look, it’s fine. I’m fine. I had fun, and I’m still a virgin, I’m not pregnant, and I don’t have any STD’s.”

That pretty much covers all the bases.

His face drops suddenly but rebounds quickly with his goofy grin.

I’ve passed inspection. Now let’s get to shopping.

“What do you think about this shirt? Gay? Hot?” Tom asks earnestly as he steps out of the dressing room. This isn’t exactly the shopping I had in mind. I thought it was for me. It’s always for Tommy.

“It looks retarded. And don’t ever ask if something looks hot, that’s just...uncomfortable,” I respond sulkily, arms crossed and a lightning bolt flashing in my eyes.

“Well, your shirt is retarded, too,” he retorts like a child.

The remark catches me off guard. I suddenly realize what I'm wearing. I'm still in my high school uniform, constricting and Catholic. My face begins to burn as red as my sweater.

"It's the same fucking uniform you had to wear, asshole, and there are pictures to prove it," I snap back at him.

"Yeh, well we didn't have those gay sweaters. Why are you wearing that anyway?"

"It's because I'm a tour guide on Thursday nights and Fridays, you jerk. Mom and Dad picked the sweater out, not me."

Tom shrugs and walks back into the dressing room. I collapse on the nearby chair and block out the wailing children in the department store with my nightmarish daydreaming about last evening's tour.

My cashmere turtleneck was tightening around my neck like a noose; my parents had picked it out themselves. Everyone knows that the color red makes me look like a fat raspberry about to burst, and the fabric meant to exude wealth and fat pocketbooks simply scratched against my face clawing to consume me. I snapped back to attention...I was starting to slouch in the line. Only slackers slouch.

I fixed my limp nametag to perk up proudly and reveal my name. As I arched my back and looked into every eye of the hands I shook, I gritted the backs of my teeth against my tongue. By the end of the night, my mouth bled the same color as the cashmere straightjacket. I must have looked rabid in my fake enthusiasm as a high school tour guide, and I felt the parents staring at my red red mouth and sweaty pits. Slackers don't stop smiling so I grinned until I was the Cheshire cat. I spilt out my guts in forms of the school's history and even managed to crack a few used and beaten down jokes about areas the future little maggot freshman are not allowed in because senior bitches like me would give them the death stare.

Of course, I filter this image with a disgusting wink and reassuring laugh, even though I wish I could have stabbed them all with their fountain pens that write checks to keep this place in business. The parents were now at ease, and as I rounded the last corner of my speech, I sent them off down the alley of oaks that have been on the school grounds since 1892, very rare and dignified!

I sighed as the last maggot skipped off to their parents squealing excitedly about twenty minutes for lunchtime. Sinking down to one of the cold cement benches beneath the creaking oaks, I closed my eyes. I slouched my shoulders and didn't fix them immediately because in that failing light where no one could see, I could just slouch.

"Alright, fine, let's get out of here. I'm hungry," Tom rumbles as he exits the fitting room with a huff.

Sure, Tom, whatever you want to do! I'm just along for the ride!

"Where do you want to eat?" he asks.

Before I can even reply, all-knowing Tom blurts, "Oh I know exactly where we'll go!" My mouth is still formed in the opening syllables of "Chick-fil-a," but my lips close tightly.

Tom is pulling all of his "good" moves as our waitress saunters over to our table. I am sitting at a table in a restaurant whose name I can't even pronounce much less get over the fact that there are no prices by the food. What kind of sick game is this? I'm mortified that I might pick something that might require an organ donation, but Tom waves me off with that sick flick of his wrist.

I wish I could break it in half.

I settle for the "soup du jour" which ends up being a sinister looking cup of viscous glandular secretions while Tom munches down on his bloody steak. Mid-bite, I realize that my stomach bile would be much more appetizing than this "delicacy" as both Tom and our waitress assured me, and I settle for nibbling on the crouton-size crackers.

"What's wrong with you," Tom asks with blood down his chin.

"It's not that good," I grimace trying not to look at the cow matter splattered in front of me.

"Come on, live a little!" CowTom exclaims.

Well, considering my definition of living consists of me doing what everyone else wants me to do, I scoop another spoonful of the semen soup into my mouth and smile like an idiot.

Instead of smiling back, Tom bristles.

"What, is your steak mooing?" I ask laughing.

Tommy doesn't acknowledge me. Instead, his eyes penetrate through my shoulder blade. I start to turn around to see what I'm missing, but he suddenly hisses at me to turn back around and eat.

"Kate's over there."

Oh, one of his law school worms. Yay.

"So? It's not like ya'll are that great of friends," I mumble no longer interested in seeing old news.

"But she looks great! In fact, she looks amazing," he dreamily states.

"Tommy, I mean, Tom. Snap out of it," I say snapping my fingers in his face.

"I have to go talk to her. Here, here's my card. I'm going talk with her just for a little bit, but who knows I might buy her a drink. You don't have to be back early tonight for anything, right?" he word-vomits in one breath and ends with a wink.

I stare at him blankly.

Am I missing something? What was the reason for this trip again?

Before I can say anything, Tom has wiped his face clean and tossed his Visa on my lap.

"You're a big girl now. L.A. was just a bump in the road, but you're fine. Why don't you go walk around for a while and buy something nice for yourself. The Tom-Cat is in town and sees some fine pussy that needs to be tamed."

I'm sorry, but did my brother just refer to himself as "The Tom-Cat." I feel the acid burning my throat as I watch his back fade into the crowd.

Staring down at my plate, I don't even have time to think before I'm interrupted by our waitress.

"Did you and your brother want dessert?" she inquires over the black notebook.

"Nope, here's the card."

Alone and hardly full, I glean the crowd looking for Tom-Cat and his pussy. The waitress brings back the card, and as I am sullenly signing the receipt, I hear the traitor's loud voice over the hum of the restaurant.

"Yeh, she's right over here. You know how I am. I love taking my little sister shopping. We do it all the time."

I see his shark fin hair spikes bobbing up and down excitedly in the frenzied waves of the crowd outside on the patio. Somehow, he catches my eye and winks before turning his back to me. The feeding frenzy continues.

Outside on the street, the air is musky and dank with the sweat of the homeless and piss. I stare back at the patio scene through the window, but I can't see my brother anymore. I don't really care anyway.

This day was not going to change anything, but I thought it couldn't hurt to get my hopes up. I kick a can in my path and watch it bounce down the cement. Its echoes bleat dejectedly against the brick alleys until it scuttles to a stop. Silence once again engulfs the street.

“Wolves, Bears, and Pigs, OH MY!”

A Modern Children’s Play

Act I

Scene 1:

Policeman strolls onto stage eating donut. Looks at donut and watch. A very mild day in Fairy tale land.

Goldiclocks is braiding hair in forest and humming.

The wolf rushes through forest away from faraway screams of Pig 1.

*He pushes over Goldie into nearby bushes within earshot of the policeman. *once dialogue starts, begins to listen**

Wolf runs offstage to change into Baby Bear.

Suddenly, Pig 1 rushes forward through forest, frantic.

Policeman: Ah, now what do we have here! I’ve never seen a pig fly this fast!

Pig 1: Help! Help!

Policeman: Woah, now what’s going on? Catch your breath!

Pig 1: He’s done it again! By golly, that bastard’s done it again!

Policeman: Who? What? When? Huh? Start from the beginning!

Pig 1: The wolf. The big bad one! My house is gone because of him, and I’m not buying his excuse about having allergies this time of the year. He blew my hay clear off the ground, and showed me the same doctor’s excuse for HAYFEVER from last year! I won’t take it, won’t take it anymore anymore! **stomps foot**

Policeman: Now wait a minute. Calm down. I remember this last year. I was new to this beat. I can look into it for you, but if it’s just happened this once, then I’ll just have to fine him. He does have those notorious hay allergies. I just can’t imagine him directing them at you on purpose.

Hamette 1: I just know he does, though. He loves waving around that stupid paper with a signature! He did it on purpose I tell you! And it’s not just me! He stole eggs from the Golden Goose, and I bet he’d even go after her himself, too! I even heard he was stalking children in the woods! That pedophile!

Policeman: Calm down. Calm down. I’ll look into it. Let’s head to the station so we can file a formal report just for records...for your case only. I’m not so sure about all those other claims.

Pig 1: I’m telling you; this happens every year. It’s too much of a habit to not be premeditated! Don’t take this lightly!

Policeman: Okay, okay, I’m not saying it isn’t odd, we just need to follow procedure.

Both walk off stage.

Scene Ends: Music

Act I

Scene 2:

Goldilocks is in Three Bear's home. She is chowing down on porridge/oatmeal.

Two Bears (Moma and Baby) begin walking through forest with groceries in hand. Goldilocks hears them approaching.

Goldilocks: OH SHIT!

Panics, and grabs pen and paper. Scrambles to write a message and runs out offstage only to smash into PIG 2 STICK HOUSE. Raises arms in exasperation, leaves a note, and loops around offstage.

Moma and Baby are talking as they walk slowly to "door."

Baby Bear: Momaaaa, I'm so hungry. Do you think that porridge is done cooling by now?

Moma Bear: Baby, I said they' be done three times. I already talked with Dr. Frankenstein, and he said no more sugar for you. You gotta be trim and all glossy-furred for the debeartaunte ball. You hear me? You wanna look good in your spring coat, right?

Baby Bear: Yes, moma, I'm just sick of dieting. Couldn't I just go to the Fairy Godmother? She made Cinderella all pretty. I bet her moma wouldn't make her diet.

Moma Bear pauses to unlock door. Still fussing Baby Bear.

Moma Bear: You listen here; she had a stepmother, and she didn't give a rat's ass about her. That wasn't no magic, Baby. That was Slimfast. Not everything is a fairytale, you hear me? You're going to look good through honest, hard work. That's what we bears stand for.

Baby Bear: Whatever.

Moma Bear: Mhmm, whatever my hide.

Bears enter home and walk to table. Moma bear gasps and drops groceries.

Moma Bear: The porridge! It's gone!

Baby Bear: Oh noooooooo....not again.....are you serious?

Moma Bear: Well skin me alive, I bet I know who this is from (picks up note).

Baby Bear: I'm so hungry....ughhhhhhhhhh.....why can't that damn girl find her own food!

Moma Bear: Baby, don't curse, it's so human-like. Now ain't this something. It looks like it isn't that Goldie girl. Lookie here.

Baby Bear: (Reads note aloud) Thought some porridge would help my head cold. Nice cooking, Moma Bear. Keep up the good work. Yours, the Big Bad Wolf.

Moma Bear: Well, I'll be. That sneaky thing is making his rounds all right. I heard he got Pig's stick house earlier this week.

Baby Bear: What a jerk! UGH! I could rip him apart right now.

Goldilocks is pumping her fist in sneaky victory in forest.

Moma Bear: Baby, you're an up and coming debeartaunte, and you're going to act like one. If only your father would be here to see you, maybe then you'd act more like the classy cub I know

you are. Now, I'll make some more porridge, and you go practice growling. I'm calling that new policeman to get this settled.

Baby Bear walks offstage to change to Pig 2.

Scene Ends Music

Act I

Scene 3:

Policeman and Moma Bear are looking at porridge table. Goldilocks is listening from forest.

Policeman: Well, ma'm, looks like you have a prime stolen porridge claim. Let me just get a few samples of evidence first and then I'll make the report.

Policeman scoops porridge (oatmeal), bowl, and spoon into ziploc bag. Takes a sniff.

Policeman: And by the smell of it, I can see why one would want to steal it. I'm still waiting on that recipe!

Moma Bear: (blushes and small curtsy) Why, Mr. Policeman, you can keep waiting. It's a family secret!

Policeman: I just thought'd I ask again anyway! Now, back to business. You say there was a note left?

Moma Bear: Yes, and at first I thought it was that dreadful Goldie girl again, but this note says otherwise.

Policeman: Hmmmm, this is pretty self-incriminating. He seems to be awfully big, bad, and lawless this week. I better find him for questioning.

Moma Bear: That's right. I don't need two porridge thieves sneaking in this house. Goldie is bad enough. Speaking of which, she hasn't been around lately. I hope she caught the same cold that wolf has.

Goldilocks makes face through forest at Moma Bear.

Policeman: Or maybe she's just grown up a little and decided to be a lady instead of a tramp?

Moma Bear: Oh, Mr. Policeman, you crack me up! Why don't you stay for some second rounds of porridge and milk? It's almost done!

Policeman: Oh, I'm sorry, Moma Bear, you know what second helpings does to me! I'll have to take a nap in one of ya'll's beds pretty soon, too!

Moma Bear: Well, you're always welcome! Hope you catch that wolf!

Policeman: I'll do my best, Ma'm. (tips hat)

Policeman exits and Moma Bear walks offstage. In the forest, Goldie is still watching. Pig 2 runs up just as frantically as his brother.

Pig 2: Help! Help! My house is gone! It's that wolf again!

Policeman: Oh, not again. What is it with you pigs? Can't you just learn the first time? Maybe spend a little more on bricks, bother me less?

Pig 2: Well, so much for looking out for your citizens! My insurance only covers stick housing for your information! I'll just go to the police chief if you don't care.

Policeman: Now, there's not need for that. Just tell me what happened even though I think I can guess.

Pig 2: Look at this! Read this note! The NERVE!

Policeman: (reading note) *"Hammy, sorry about this. Needed a toothpick after all that porridge. Didn't think you'd mind me taking just one from your wall. Guess it was important. IOU.-Biggy Wolf"*

Pig 2: HAMMY! THE NERVE!

Policeman: Well, I'll be. He's just going on a regular ole' crime spree. First the forged doctor's note, the porridge, now destruction of private property. Mr. Wolf has quite the growing wanted list.

Pig 2: Well, are you going to do about it? Stand there and eat donuts? I want my house fixed and up running in time for the LSU vs. Alabama game! Just because I'm pink doesn't mean I don't have stripes on the inside! Let's get this done!

Policeman: Okay, okay, but let's not jump to any conclusion's. This is awfully suspicious. I'm beginning to wonder.

Pig 2: And you're beginning to waste my time. He's the big, and might I emphasize BAD wolf.

Policeman: Geez, don't get all heated, we don't need any bacon-suicides this year. Let's go to the station and get this all on paper.

Both walk offstage.

Scene Ends Music

INTERMISSION SHOW: (pre-recorded)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT AND VIEWING

PLEASURE WE BRING YOU, ALL THE WAY FROM FAR FAR AWAY, THE THREE LITTLE PIGS!

Three Pigs walk onstage in can-can position: "and a one, and a two, and a one, two three"

Ve are three little pigs.

WEE WEE WEE!

Ve Hail from ze moderland.

GERMANY!

Schnitzel and bakeries, hot soup in your pot.

You've never met a pinker, cuter lot!

Music is interrupted by record scratching. Pigs pull out caps from back pocket and put on backwards.

RAP:

Pig 1: My name is Hammy, I'm the first of this litter. I walk down the street, and the other piggies skitter.

You might call me Bacon, but that's the last that you'll say. I'll get my buddies here, and they'll make you pay.

Pig 2: Porkie is our uncle, but you won't hear us stutter, we got the better genes from our mommy dearest motha!

Don't even think of eating me for your Christmas lunch; these loins are full of juices for a super power punch.

Pig 3: I went to market this morning for my beef, saw some other brothers, they know I'm the chief.

You'll never hear me running home "wee...wee..wee" because I'm having too much fun in Wai-ki-ki.

ALL PIGS: HAMMM!

Pigs Pose at end and lights go off.

Act II

Scene 1:

Policeman is walking through the forest. Goldilocks puts on red cape to trick him.

Goldilocks: (in Southern Sweet voice) Oh there you are, you brave brave man. I've been searching for help for HOURS. Hours I do say.

Policeman: Uh, can I help you?

Goldilocks: Oh my, well how do I begin? That wolf, that big, bad wolf has done horrible things to me. He's eaten Granny, and gasp, I think he intends to do the same to me!

Policeman: Well, considering his last week of crime, I'm not surprised. Tell me how it happened.

Goldilocks: Well, that's about all there is to the story. I mean, he's been following me in the forest an awful lot, and he's just so big and bad.

Policeman: That' all there is? No details? What's your grandmother's address? When did it happen?

Goldilocks: Well, she lives over the river and through the woods, but why does that matter! He's eaten her and my basket of goodies! Do you not believe me? *bats eyelashes* I'm just so young and scarred from this whole ordeal!

Policeman: Well that's not many details to go on, but let's head to the station. Maybe I can put a stop to this by week's end.

Act II

Scene 2:

Policeman has the wolf in custody. Policeman has flashlight shining down on wolf's face. He is interrogating.

Wolf: I ain't agreeing to nothing without my lawyer.

Policeman: You don't have a lawyer!

Wolf: Well, then I'm representing myself! I plead the Ariel Right of Silence!

Policeman: Look, let's start over. We're going to be here all night if not.

Wolf: I didn't do anything. Well, not all of it.

Policeman: Okay, well what did you do?

Wolf: I had my usual bout of hay fever because that damn pig doesn't pay attention to city ordinances or zoning. His hay shack is supposed to be at least 100 feet away from my woods manor. My allergies are always terrible this time of year.

Policeman: Okay, okay, so ya'll were both at fault here. You could get some better prescriptions, he could move his house a few feet downwind. But still, look at all this notes! All signed by presumably YOU!

Wolf: Well, they say they're signed by me, but you gotta problem, buddy.

Policeman: And what's that?

Wolf: I don't know how to write. I sign with an "X." Whoever wrote those must've had some pretty good schooling, and I was never allowed in school on account of my appetite and these *points to teeth* Villains never get an education, that's why we can never beat the system. All those stupid...(interrupted by policeman)

Policeman: OKAY, enough about politics, you can bring those up to Mayor Grimm later. Let's get back the present problem. What am I to do about all these crimes in the last week if you didn't commit them.

Wolf: Well, for starters you could let me go. I do have a nose for these types of things. Who would know a scoundrel better than a fellow scoundrel?

Policeman: Alright, you have a day, otherwise you get the charges. I gotta put somebody in jail or we're going to have some unhappy endings. And that never flies here, am I right?

Wolf: Alright, alright. I have an idea anyway. Just say you arrested me for tomorrow's paper. I'll tell you tomorrow at midnight. Deal?

Policeman: Deal. Now get out of here.

Scene Ends Music

Act II

Scene 3:

Goldie is reading the newspaper in forest looking for arrests. She smiles when she sees wolf's arrest.

Goldie: YES! HA! I knew it would work. What schmucks. Being a villain is just too easy!

Policeman walks up behind her quietly with handcuffs.

Policeman: Yes, it's super easy until you get caught.

Goldie: WHAT! I MEAN, that WOLF thought it was SO EASY! I mean, ALL THOSE INCRIMINATING NOTES! Evidence!

Policeman: Sorry, Goldie. You forgot one big detail. Wolves don't have fingerprints like little girls. And he can't write worth a damn. It's time for your turn downtown.

Goldie: But I have school tomorrow! And mother will be worried! I can't go to jail! I'm too young! I'm too naïve! How can you blame this on me! It's my parents fault! Why aren't they ever watching me in the stories anyway!

Policeman: Save it for the judge, kiddo. You've got lots of explaining to do.

Goldie: WAHHHHH!

Policeman drags off Goldie while LAW AND ORDER Theme plays.

Scene Ends!

FIN!

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Honors Thesis

ACT I Screenplay: April Showers

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - DAY

The road is deserted and surrounded by cane fields. A speck grows from the horizon. The truck comes head on.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

DEAN slouches in the ripped leather driver's seat.

Dean, 30, is a quiet and simple man. He enjoys his family and beer.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - DAY

The truck backfires down the gravel road. A hanging street sign reads "Paradise Lane." The truck turns down the lane of trailers.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Dean stares out the window at BLACK CHILD, 3, in the grass. He turns his glance away. The child stares as Dean's truck drives past.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

The truck lurches into park.

DEAN leans open the door. The trailer door swings open as a woman bursts out of the trailer.

SUSAN, 22, is a worried and needy girl. She enjoys being pregnant and the attention she receives from it.

DEAN

I'm sorry, Susan. They needed me to work overtime.

SUSAN

Oh, honey, it's okay! I was worried you weren't coming home!

DEAN

Why wouldn't I come home, Suz?

SUSAN

Well, hurry up. Dinner's getting cold.

Dean limps towards the open door and Susan. He pauses to pat her pregnant belly.

Susan smiles and closes the door behind them.

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INT. TRAILER - NIGHT

A TELEVISION murmurs in the small living area where Dean lounges with a BEER in his hand. Other beer cans lay crushed on the floor.

Susan is mopping the peeling stick-on tiles by the sink. She begins to hum to herself.

DEAN

How was April today?

SUSAN

Fine. Her teachers say she's a wonderful little girl but so quiet.

Dean stares at her and turns back to the game.

Susan glances up at a slight movement in front of her.

APRIL, 5, is smiling in the doorway of her bedroom holding a ripped SHEET OF PAPER with colorful swirls on it.

Susan smiles and stops mopping.

SUSAN

Little girl, why on earth are you awake?

April smiles and shrugs. Her mouth is blue from eating candy earlier in the day.

SUSAN

Why don't you go back to bed, ok? What's that in your hand, teddy bear?

April makes a noise and presses the paper higher glancing towards Dean.

SUSAN

Go on, show your Papa.

April teeters towards Dean.

Dean glances up and brightens up.

DEAN

What's this, honey?

APRIL

A picture.

DEAN

It's beautiful, baby. Why don't you go to bed, and Daddy will hang this at work tomorrow?

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April nods and smiles. She walks back to her room and quietly closes the door.

Dean glances back at the PAPER in his hand and smiles. He folds it and shoves it in his back pocket.

Susan is washing dishes.

Susan drops a dirty plate on the floor.

SUSAN

Oh, dammit, I'm just a mess today. I'm sorry, Dean. I'll buy another one. It's my fault.

Susan fumbles with the pieces of glass and brushes them into her apron.

DEAN

Suz, it's okay. I'll go into town tomorrow. It's just a plate.

SUSAN

I know, but you work so hard. I can't help with anything with this little guy on the way.

DEAN

Just go to bed. I'll handle it.

Dean walks towards Susan and presses a kiss to her cheek.

SUSAN

Love you, honey.

DEAN

I'll be in bed after I clean up.

Susan waddles to the bed room.

Dean scoops up the remaining plate mess and washes his hands.

He pauses at the sink and grips its edges. He glances at the FRIDGE and the BANK NOTICE taped to its side.

Dean sighs and shakes his head knowing the long hours ahead of him to pay this off.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

April is asleep while GRANNY, 50, strokes her granddaughter's hair. Granny is a fuller and stronger version of Susan in grey.

Susan is in labor with a second child.

Dean is pacing the carpet.

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April begins to stir from her sleep.

APRIL

Granny, where are we?

GRANNY

Oh, honey, you're awake. Well, we're waiting on Mommy and your new baby brother, Brandon, remember?

APRIL

Oh...I remember now. Is he going to be a nice brother, Granny?

Granny laughs.

GRANNY

Of course, honey! He's going to love you the moment he sees you.

Granny checks her WATCH.

GRANNY

Dean, you're going to kill yourself pacing like that. You're making me nervous as all hell.

DEAN

I'm sorry, Margaret, I just get worried about these things.

April runs off to the MAGAZINE RACK while Granny watches. Granny checks her watch again.

DOCTOR, 45, comes through the maternity ward doors.

Granny begins to stand, but he ushers her back down.

GRANNY

Is everything ok, Doctor?

DEAN

Is Susan doing ok, Doc?

DOCTOR

Everything went perfect. You have another child and grandchild to be proud of...nearly nine pounds!

Granny seems to relax but worry is still in her eyes.

GRANNY

Oh dear, bless her soul. No wonder she was so tired lately.

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DOCTOR

Yes, he's going to be a strong one. Now where's the lucky man?

Dean springs forward.

DEAN

Right here! How's Susan? Is everything alright? How's my son?

DOCTOR

Calm down, sir. It went perfect. If you'd like to come with me right now you can see for yourself.

Granny closes her eyes and sighs.

Dean smiles and grabs the BOUQUET OF ROSES he left on a chair.

April runs forward.

INT. MATERNITY WARD ROOM - NIGHT

Susan is sweaty but happily holding the red and crying baby, BRANDON.

Dean skips towards her and nestles his face into her neck and hair.

DEAN

Oh, Suz, he's just wonderful. You're wonderful.

SUSAN

He's beautiful. He has your eyes, honey.

DEAN

How are you doing? Do you need anything? Water? Anything at all?

SUSAN

No, honey, just some rest.

Susan pauses to look at Brandon and suddenly remembers something.

SUSAN

Well, Dean, could you get my medicine from home. I swear that's the one thing I forgot to pack, and the doctor said they couldn't get it till tomorrow.

DEAN

You bet. I'll be back as soon as I can. You just rest up now.

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SUSAN

Thank you, honey. I love you.

DEAN

Love you, too, hun.

INT. WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Dean walks briskly towards April and picks her up.

DEAN

Teddy bear, I'm going get something for Momma, okay?

APRIL

Can I come with you?

DEAN

No, baby, you need to be here for Momma. You'll need to help her take care of Brandon right now.

APRIL

Okay, Daddy. I'll go help her right now!

Dean places her down again and watches her skip to her Granny.

Dean smiles and nods at Granny.

DEAN

Alright, Margaret. You take care of my babies. I'll be back soon.

GRANNY

Drive safe, honey.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dean walks to his truck and rubs his eyes before getting in. The sleepless nights have been wearing on him.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Dean is speeding down the highway towards home. A CAR swerves near him, and Dean blows his horn.

The TEENAGERS in the car are drinking and waving their liquor BOTTLES at him over the loud music.

The car swerves near him again, almost intentionally, and speeds forward.

Dean speeds up again muttering to himself about stupid teenagers.

The car accelerates up the bridge.

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Dean attempts to pass the car, but as he approaches its side, it swerves again and makes contact.

Dean's truck flies out of control hitting the side barrier on the bridge, flips, rolls, and soars over the bridge in the river below.

FADE TO: BLACK

The sound of an ambulance rings loudly and back to silence.

FADE TO: NEXT SCENE

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

It is two to three years later after Dean's death. The family has not adjusted well, and Susan has remarried out of necessity, not love.

A newer TRUCK lurches into park.

TIM, 32, kicks open the door. Tim is the new husband of Susan, and he is a sadistic and abusive asshole with a steady salary.

The trailer door swings open as a woman bursts out of the trailer.

Susan, 25, is gaunt and drained.

TIM

What the fuck do you want? Already trying to nag me.

SUSAN

I was worried, Tim, you said-

TIM

Said what? I didn't say nothing about being back last night.

SUSAN

Well, I just thought maybe-

TIM

Thought what? I couldn't wait to eat your half-assed burnt chicken for the ninth time this week?

Tim pushes forward into her. Fear keeps her rooted to the dirty patch of grass.

TIM

Get the hell in there and go fix me something decent to eat.

Susan nods and bites bottom lip holding back her tears.

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INT. TRAILER - NIGHT

Tim lounges on the couch with a BEER in his hand.

Susan hums while she sweeps the floor.

TIM

Shut it, Susan. This here is important.

SUSAN

I'm sorry, honey, I forgot it was game night.

Tim grunts and turns back to the game.

Susan glances up at the door in front of her.

APRIL, 8, slightly opens her bedroom door but stops when she sees Tim.

Susan shakes her head as a warning for April to stay in her room.

Tim turns his head in time to see the door closing.

TIM

What's that brat want now?

SUSAN

Nothing, honey. Just a nightmare.

TIM

Huh. Yeh. Send her to me the next time she gets outta bed.

SUSAN

She's just a child, Tim.

TIM

Yeh, and one day she'll be a whore like you.

SUSAN

Don't speak to me like that, Tim. My mother was always right about-

TIM

I'm fucking sick of hearing about your old hag.

SUSAN

Don't you dare call my Momma that!

TIM

You're Momma would've been right to get rid of you.

Tim laughs.

Susan is crying.

TIM

Can't even wash the damn dishes without being a mess.

Susan scornfully stares at the water in the sink.

TIM

April, little darling, why don't you come back here to your paw.

SUSAN

No, Tim, she needs to get some sleep.

TIM

She ain't gonna get no sleep tonight...not after what I'm gonna do to you.

Tim staggers towards her.

SUSAN

Tim, stop, let me clean this up. Not tonight.

TIM

Ain't you good for one thing?

SUSAN

Tim. The kids might...

TIM

They're asleep, right?

Tim pulls Susan close to his face.

Susan pulls away but can only turn her head.

SUSAN

You're hurting me.

Tim smiles menacingly.

TIM

I thought you liked it rough.

Susan tries to push Tim's hands away from her waist.

Tim tightens his grip and pulls her closer.

Susan stares at April's once again open door and sees her daughter staring at them.

SUSAN

Tim, okay, let's go to our room, okay?

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TIM

Knew you couldn't resist.

Tim drags Susan to the bedroom and closes the door. Moans and sobs come from the bedroom. Tim's grunts overcome the moans.

EXT. TRAILER - DAY

April is sitting in a patch of dirt while her brother, BRANDON, 3, plays nearby. April is a tomboy and chubby.

Susan is hanging laundry on the line and looks paler than ever.

April is doodling with a stick in the dirt.

SUSAN

Honey, don't play in the dirt. You'll catch something.

APRIL

Momma, where's Tim?

SUSAN

You know how he is, April, he works hard in those construction sites. He's probably working real hard to make some more money for us.

April stops doodling and stares at her mother. Susan is more agitated as she fumbles with a plaid shirt.

APRIL

Really? Tim's always gone. He must work really hard.

SUSAN

He'll be back soon enough. Stop calling him, Tim. He's your father now.

APRIL

He's not my daddy. He's mean.

SUSAN

He loves you, Brandon, and me very much, and I don't know what I would do without him.

APRIL

I think we'd be fine without him. Granny could take care of us.

SUSAN

Granny can't even take care of herself nowadays, April. Wouldn't you like to go stay with Granny for a few days?

APRIL

Could we bake cookies? I'm hungry.

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SUSAN

I'm busy. Stop playing in the dirt.

APRIL

How come Tim never talks to Granny? Does he hate Granny?

SUSAN

No, honey, he doesn't hate Granny...they just forget to play nice sometimes.

April stops doodling again and her brows crinkle.

APRIL

But why does Tim say things so loud sometimes? It hurts my head. And sometimes he-

Susan sighs and pulls some hair out of her face. April stops speaking.

SUSAN

He's just a man, April. They're different from girls. Why don't you and Brandon go on in and watch some cartoons?

APRIL

But I like being outside. When's Tim gonna be back, Momma?

SUSAN

April, I don't know. Stop asking me the same questions. Dammit, will you get out of the dirt!

Susan drops the laundry in her hands and stomps towards April. She pulls her up. Susan is close to tears as she wipes off April's shorts and knees.

SUSAN

Just stop thinking about your step-father and play with your little brother. Can you do that for Momma?

APRIL

Can I have some candy?

SUSAN

Just a little bit. I don't want you to spoil your dinner.

APRIL

Okay, Momma. Come on, Brandon. Let's go watch something on TV.

April scoops Brandon by the arm and they walk into the trailer. Susan watches, sighs, and goes back to her laundry.

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INT. TRAILER - DAY

April sets Brandon on the moldy couch, turns on the television to cartoons, and goes into the kitchen to get candy.

She grabs a candy bar and pauses to look at the television screen. After unwrapping the bar, she takes a bite and looks out the kitchen window at Susan. She glances to her mother's bedroom and back at Susan.

April goes into her parents' bedroom.

INT. SUSAN AND TIM'S BEDROOM - DAY

It is a mess. Cheap picture frames and old pillows choke the small room.

April gets on both knees to look under the bed. She pulls out one box labeled "Wedding."

April opens it and admires a few photos of her mother and father, smiling. She grins at the picture and rubs Dean's face.

April replaces the photos and pushes the box back under the bed. She crawls to the other side of the bed and pulls out more boxes. One does not have a cover. There are pornographic magazines in them.

April pulls out one magazine and stares at the cover. She flips through the pages glancing at the naked women and then to her own body.

She feels her chest and looks down her shirt. Her brows clench together in confusion.

April is too enthralled with these magazines to notice the truck backfiring outside. Heavy footsteps are heard coming up the stairs and through the trailer.

Tim slams open the door.

TIM

What the hell are you doing in here, April?

April shoves the magazine down and turns around horrified that Tim found her looking in the bedroom.

APRIL

Tim! I didn't know you were coming back.

TIM

Like I wasn't coming back to my home. What's that you got there?

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Honors Thesis

APRIL

Nothing, just stuff.

TIM

Stuff, my ass.

Tim leans over and sees the magazines on the ground by April.
He snarls and thrashes them out of her hands.

TIM

You little snoopin' brat. Get out of here!

APRIL

I didn't know what they were, I promise!

Tim slaps April across the face. April's head flies backwards
into the side table. She starts to cry.

Tim shoves the box back under the bed and grabs April by her
wrist.

TIM

What the hell were you doing in there? It ain't none of
your business.

April is wailing as Tim drags her out of the trailer.

EXT. TRAILER - DAY

April trips down the stairs as Tim keeps pulling her forward.

Susan stares shocked as Tim pulls April towards the tree.

SUSAN

Tim! What are you doing? Tim! Tim! Stop! Tim!

TIM

Shut the fuck up, Susan. I just caught this little brat
red-handed. Snooping through my stuff! I'm going teach
her a lesson.

SUSAN

Tim! She's just a baby. She doesn't know any better!

TIM

Hah! A baby! She knew what she was doing.

Tim drags April towards a tree. Tim is maniacal.

TIM

We'll see how she likes being caught red-handed. Ha.

APRIL

(Through tears)

I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

TIM

You'll be sorry after this.

Susan stands back and begins to cry. Tim pulls April's hands up and holds them on the rough bark. He unwinds his belt from the loops of his pants.

TIM

If I ever catch you in my stuff ever again.

Tim presses his full weight against her hands on the tree, rips her shorts to her ankles, and raises the belt in the air.

TIM

I will beat the living shit out of you. You hear me? You hear me, April?

April screams and tries to rip her hands off of the tree.

TIM

You hear me?

Tim slashes the belt down on her bare bottom over and over.

APRIL

I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

SUSAN

Tim, stop! You're going to hurt her.

TIM

Good, maybe she'll learn a lesson.

Tim throws April off of the tree and struts back into the trailer.

April lies crumpled in the dirt beside the tree crying and gasping for air as she attempts to pull up her shorts quickly.

Susan rushes towards April.

SUSAN

Oh, honey. Here you go, April. Are you okay, baby?

APRIL

It hurts, Momma! It really hurts.

SUSAN

It'll be okay, April, just don't go in his stuff again, okay? Don't make him worry about anything he shouldn't have to.

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Honors Thesis

APRIL

I'm sorry, Momma. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Susan holds April and stares at her daughter's tear-streamed face. She brings her into her chest for a hug.

SUSAN

It'll be okay, honey. You didn't know. You didn't know.

INT. TRAILER - NIGHT

The family sits at different spots in the trailer as they chew quietly. The television is on football.

Tim is drinking beers and yelling at the game.

Susan is feeding spoonfuls of mashed potatoes to Brandon, who turns his head away from the spoon each time it approaches his mouth.

April is sitting on the floor staring at her plate and her red hands.

SUSAN

April, honey, eat your food. You'll be sick if you don't.

APRIL

I'm not hungry.

SUSAN

April, you need to eat. I know you like mashed potatoes. It'll make you feel better.

APRIL

I'm full.

SUSAN

Little girl, you haven't eaten anything. Just eat a few bites for me, please, honey.

April stares up at her mother with hollowed eyes. She looks back down at the plate and shuffles some food with her fork.

SUSAN

Good girl, now just eat a little and it'll be time for bed.

APRIL

But, Momma, I'm not sleepy.

SUSAN

Yes, you are, April, you've been grumpy all afternoon. You need to go to bed.

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APRIL

But, Momma-

SUSAN

April, you're going to bed when you're done eating, that's final. Just listen to me for once.

Tim, agitated that his family's conversation is interrupting his game, stares over his arm at his wife.

TIM

Shut up. This is my only time to relax.

Susan and April stare at Tim and then back at their plates. Brandon gurgles and throws food on the ground.

TIM

And clean that up, will you?

Susan opens her mouth as if to say something but closes it and cleans up the floor.

April stares at Tim and starts to jab the meat on her plate.

SUSAN

April, please eat your food, honey. Just a few more bites.

April looks up at Susan. She takes three bites and sets her spoon down firmly on her plate.

SUSAN

Now go off to bed. Can you change Brandon for Momma and put him in his bed?

APRIL

Uh huh.

TIM

(slurs) Goddammit, you two are still just jabbing away. What does a hard-working man have to do around here to get some peace?

SUSAN

Tim, I'm sorry, I was just sending the kids off to bed.

Tim stares absentmindedly at the TV and turns his head towards Susan and April.

TIM

Bed, huh? How come you never ask your dear ole' (hiccup) Daddy to put you to sleep.

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April stares at her step-father, who is obviously in his "nice drunk" stage. She starts to take a step back towards her door. She doesn't want to be anywhere near him when he is like this.

TIM

Huh, April, sugar plum? How come you don't let me put you to bed?

SUSAN

I'm sure April would love you to put her to sleep, right, honey?

April meets her mother's warning eyes. April nods.

Tim starts to laugh.

TIM

Well, then, I'm glad you said so. It's important to love each other, right Susan?

SUSAN

(nods) That's right baby.

TIM

Yeh.

Tim swings his feet over the sofa and teeters towards April and Brandon.

Brandon begins to cry.

TIM

Susan, you handle Brandon. He don't like when I hold him.

SUSAN

Okay, honey. I guess I'll take him in our room.

Tim grunts as Susan walks into their bedroom with Brandon.

April is holding her hands behind her and biting her lip.

Tim kicks her plate to the side and the mashed potatoes fly on the floor.

He bends down and grabs April clumsily, his fingers digging into her.

TIM

All right, honey, off we go.

APRIL

I need to change first.

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TIM

Oh, well I'll help you. (laughs)

APRIL

Okay, well no looking, promise?

TIM

Since when don't girls want guys looking at her?

Tim is the only one to laugh at his joke.

INT. APRIL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Tim carries April into her room and bends down to set her on the bed. He backs away and leans on the doorway.

TIM

All right, now go 'head and change.

APRIL

You said you wouldn't look, Tim.

TIM

April, just change, I'm your daddy.

April begins to take off her shorts and shirt. When she gets down to her undies she turns around and faces the wall away from Tim.

Tim is staring at his step-daughter, up and down.

She hurriedly grabs her set of PAJAMAS and rushes to put them on. Tim takes a step towards her.

TIM

Here, baby, let me help you with that.

APRIL

I can do it. I'm a big girl.

TIM

Okay, okay, I get it. Playing hard-to-get. That's fine.

April squints her eyes at him and pulls her PAJAMAS on and jumps in bed.

TIM

April, it's important that we love each other. Momma knows that and so should you.

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INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

April, 13, sits in the back of the class. Puberty has changed her body significantly; she is in between becoming a girl and holding on to her tomboy childhood.

TEACHER, 43, is a miserable bitch who never should've gone into a profession that involves children and compassion.

The class of about 30 STUDENTS is out of control while the teacher yells out detentions and grammar skills.

DYLAN, 13, pokes April in her back with a PENCIL.

APRIL

Stop it, Dylan. I said stop 500 million times already.

DYLAN

What was that, Fatty? You actually felt that through your fat?

APRIL

Shut up. You're stupid.

DYLAN

If I'm so stupid, how come I made ten points better than you on my math test?

APRIL

Just because you made more points than me on a math "quiz" doesn't mean you're smarter. I don't like math anyway.

DYLAN

Because you're stupid and fat?

Dylan pokes April again.

April turns around quickly and grabs the pencil. She breaks it in half and throws it at Dylan.

DYLAN

That was my favorite pencil, you dumb bitch!

APRIL

I said to stop and you didn't!

Dylan takes a swipe at April's face, but she ducks.

APRIL

What is your problem? Leave me alone!

The teacher is now aware of Dylan and April's existence.

TEACHER

What in the world are you two doing? April?

APRIL

But, he was-

TEACHER

Don't talk back to me, little girl! Such disrespect.
Detention for both of you!

DYLAN

But-

APRIL

But he-

TEACHER

Do you not listen to a word I'm saying? Shut up,
everyone. Now! Or detention for everyone!

The class quiets momentarily, long enough for the teacher to be
satisfied. She returns to the blackboard.

April is close to tears. She's never gotten detention before.

Dylan leans towards April.

DYLAN

I hate you. This is all your fault, Fatty.

April doesn't respond; she closes her eyes and clenches her
fists.

INT. BATHROOM STALL - DAY

April is crying bent over hugging her knees.

JANITOR, 51, enters the bathroom and pauses to listen.

JANITOR

Hello? Is anyone in here?

APRIL

Sorry, I'm done.

April runs out of the stall to outside.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - DAY

April is walking with her BACKPACK down the gravel road towards
her home. The crunch of the gravel echoes in the silence.

Rain clouds form in the sky and drops begin to fall.

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April starts running.

INT. TRAILER - DAY

April bursts through the door of the trailer. She is soaked to the bone.

April throws down her backpack and looks around.

No one is home. There is a NOTE taped to the FRIDGE.

April pulls the note off, reads it, and throws it in the trash.

APRIL

Great, they get to be fed at Granny's while I'm stuck here alone with no food.

April rummages through the cabinets for something to eat. She grabs a BAG OF CHIPS and some TWINKIES and walks to her room.

April slams the door.

INT. APRIL'S ROOM - DAY

Thunder rumbles outside April's window. She draws the blinds shut.

April throws herself on to her bed and grabs a BOOK under her PILLOW.

April begins to flip through the pages of the book. Pictures of father and magazine clippings are tucked inside of it.

April jumps at the sound of a closing truck door. She slams the book shut and throws it under her bed.

The door to the trailer opens, and Tim's heavy footsteps are heard.

INT. TRAILER - DAY

TIM

Fucking liberals...taking all my shit. April? You in here?

April walks out from her room into the living room.

Tim already has a beer opened and is slouched on the couch.

APRIL

I was in my room. When are Momma and Brandon getting home?

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TIM

I don't even know where the bitch is...how I am supposed to know when's she coming back?

Tim laughs and takes a big gulp.

APRIL

Don't call Momma that, Tim.

TIM

I'll call her whatever the fuck I want to.

Tim takes another sip and glances at April.

TIM

Don't you have something to do, like homework? Or are you just going to nag me like the old woman?

APRIL

I'm hungry. When's Momma getting home?

TIM

You sure don't look hungry to me.

Tim chuckles and turns the television on.

April clinches her fists and turns to go back to her room.

TIM

Aw, little April, I didn't mean anything. You look great; you're already looking like a fine woman.

April stops and turns around.

APRIL

I'm thirteen, Tim. Hardly a woman.

TIM

Now what's that got to do with it. You can be a woman even if you're thirteen.

APRIL

Stop, Tim, I don't like it when you say stuff like that.

TIM

Like what? Compliments? My little step-girl is all grown up. Pretty soon you'll be falling in love and playing with boys.

April stares at the ground.

APRIL

All the boys think I'm fat at school. And stupid. They don't want to play with me.

Tim seemingly sympathetic sits up and faces April.

TIM

April, you're not fat. You're just a strong one. That's what your Momma said when you was born.

April's eyes narrow.

APRIL

She said that about Brandon. Not me.

Tim rolls his eyes and throws himself back on the couch.

TIM

Ok, well excuse me, Ms. Know-It-All. I was just trying to be nice.

APRIL

Tim, I know. I just had a bad day. I'm sorry.

TIM

Well, why don't you eat something. It'll make you feel better.

APRIL

I want real food, not Twinkies.

TIM

Shit, they all said teenagers was tough, but Christ, April, quit being so damn picky.

APRIL

I'm just going back to my room. Let me know when Momma gets back.

April starts to walk to her room, but Tim shoots up and grabs her arm.

TIM

Now, what got into you all of a sudden, huh?

APRIL

Ouch, let go. That hurts.

TIM

You know what hurts, you being so mean to your old man when he's trying to play nice.

APRIL

You're not my "old man." Please stop.

TIM

You know, you are just like your Momma. You got that fire in your eyes.

APRIL

Stop, Tim. I'm not Momma. You're hurting me.

TIM

And you talk like her, too. Acting like you're so tough.
I know what you really want, though. I know what's going
on inside that little head of yours.

Tim pulls April closer. She can smell the liquor on his breath.

April tries to pull away, but he digs deeper into her arms.

APRIL

Let go. I know you just wanted to help.

TIM

You know what's coming. And you want it, too.

APRIL

No. Please. No.

TIM

You like playing hard to get.

APRIL

No, Tim, I don't want to play. Not with you.

Tim laughs and pulls her to his face.

TIM

Not with your dear old daddy. I'm the only man who'll
ever love you like this, April. Your real old man
couldn't stand to look at you and drove over that
bridge.

APRIL

Liar! Daddy loved us! More than you ever can!

TIM

You'll never find another man who can make you feel
like-

Tim release one of his arms and puts his hand near April's
lower stomach.

April pushes his hand away with her free arm.

Tim is fuming from the rejection; he pushes April away suddenly
and sits back down on the couch.

April is shaking, but she can't move.

Tim opens another beer.

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Honors Thesis

TIM

You're Momma is gonna be home any second. Get in your room and stay out of my way.

April stares at Tim. She runs to her room and locks the door.

INT. APRIL'S ROOM - NIGHT

April is heaving silently against the door. She is fighting back tears.

The television is louder and Tim is heard yelling at the game through the door.

April crawls into her bed and turns off the lights.

2 ACT Screenplay: Reincarnate

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

JOHN, 45, peruses the chip aisle with a basket of goods and two chip bags in hands. John puts one of the chip bags back and begins to walk toward the checkout.

He suddenly notices something and feels his back pocket.

He pulls out his CELL PHONE and flips it open.

JOHN

(into cell phone)

Mhello?

(he listens)

Oh, hey hon. Just picking up the stuff like you asked.

(he listens)

Okay, sounds good. I think I've got the right kind.

(he stares at the bag of chips)

Love you, too.

John closes the phone shut and shoves it back into his pocket.

He turns back to the chip aisle and grabs the other bag he left behind.

JOHN

Better be safe than sorry.

John rushes back up to the bored CASHIER.

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CASHIER, 18, could care less about which chips John buys or if he buys anything at all.

JOHN
How you doing tonight.

CASHIER
Hmm...

JOHN
Slow night, huh?

CASHIER
Yeh, okay. This it?

JOHN
Yes ma'm, that should be all need for the missus...hopefully.

John cracks a grin in hopes of trying to be light, but Cashier stares ahead ignoring all friendliness.

CASHIER
\$18.52, unless you have coupons.

John digs in his pocket and hands her two crumpled tens.

Cashier roughly opens the register and pushes his change towards him without counting.

JOHN
Wow, you're pretty good with change. You're sure this is right?

Cashier glares at him and silently "counts" it in her palm for half a second before shoving it back in his face.

CASHIER
It's all there.

JOHN
Okay, just picking. Have a good night.

CASHIER
Mhh.

John grabs his grocery bags and heads for the supermarket door.

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Approaching the door from the other aisle is MOTHER, 36, with LITTLE GIRL, 4, and LITTLE BOY, 7.

John smiles, bows, and allows the mother to go through the door first. The little girl giggles and grabs her mother's skirt as they walk out.

John stands before the door watching them leave.

John pulls his CELLPHONE out again and opens the screen.

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT - NIGHT

John unlocks his 2005 FORD EXPLORER and loads his groceries in the back.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - NIGHT

John slides into his seat, but pauses before turning on the ignition.

John stares at the wheel of his car. He stares at his left hand and the wedding band on his ring finger. He sighs and pulls the car into reverse.

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT ROAD - NIGHT

John pulls out onto the dark road alongside the parking lot.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - NIGHT

John remains silent for a moment but begins to tap on his steering wheel. He hums an unrecognizable tune as he taps the wheel.

He has driven the road thousands of times before. He appears the least bit worried about paying attention to driving.

John fiddles with the radio. He pauses on a rock station and turns the volume up.

He reaches again to change the radio and takes his eyes off the road.

The half-full COFFEE MUG in his cup holder sits close by, and John's hand hits it as he looks away to glance at the road.

JOHN

Shit.

John reaches to pick up the cup. He bends further to grab the cup as it rolls away from his grasp.

JOHN

Come on.

A faint glow begins to fill the cab of his car. John still does not notice.

A truck horn blares loudly.

John jerks his head up to the road.

CUT TO: BLACK

The sound of screeching tires and twisting metal rips through the air. The sounds of steam and yells fill the air.

INT. ER room - night

DOCTOR SMITH, 59, rushes alongside the gurney holding a bloody John. Doctor Smith is a man who takes his job seriously.

DR. SMITH

For Christ's sake, get it together people.

Nurse LAURA, 29, also hurries alongside John. Laura is an attractive, young nurse who genuinely cares about her patients.

LAURA

He's losing too much blood too fast.

DR. SMITH

I'm aware of that. Let's just get him through this alive.

John suddenly begins to convulse and cough on the gurney.

LAURA

Doctor!

JOHN'S POV

John's eyelids slightly open only to reveal a blur of lights and colors.

The colors eventually take form into Laura.

John's gaze settles on Laura's face.

The lips distort, and shadows begin to cloud the view. Silence interrupts the noise in his head. Only Laura's red lips can be seen as they form the name, "John" repeatedly until John's eyelids close.

FADE TO: BLACK
CLOSE-UP: JOHN'S FACE

John's opens his eyes underwater. He screams and grasps at his throat until the screen is overcome with escaping air bubbles.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

JOHN'S POV

John's eyelids open to Dr. Smith and CLAIRE, 42, staring down at him.

BACK TO SCENE

John gasps as he attempts to sit up.

Claire, wide-eyed and stiff, continues to stare at John as if he is from another planet.

Dr. Smith clears his throat.

DR. SMITH
I wouldn't try to sit up if I were you. You've been through more than you could ever imagine.

JOHN
What happened?

DR. SMITH
Well, you were in an accident, and what I'm more worried about than your broken ribs is what's going on up there.

Dr. Smith points to his head with a fountain pen.

JOHN
I feel like shit.

DR. SMITH
Well apparently, you were driving like it. Now, first things first, do you know your name?

JOHN
Eh, John Trempsky.

DR. SMITH
How old are you?

JOHN
45.

DR. SMITH
What was your address as a kid?

JOHN
1239 Moultrie Drive, Aiken, South Carolina.

DR. SMITH
The zip?

JOHN
I'm sorry, but can you explain what's-

DR. SMITH
The zip?

JOHN
29803.

DR. SMITH
Okay, you know your past; what about your present?

JOHN
Doc, wait up. Why are you asking me about all this?

DR. SMITH
Son, you just survived some very traumatic damage to your skull. I need to make sure everything's all right up there. We'll get to the nitty gritty after a few questions.

JOHN
Okay well, where were we?

DR. SMITH
Who is this?

JOHN
My wife.

DR. SMITH
Well, do you love her?

JOHN

(baffled)

Yes, why wouldn't I love her?

DR. SMITH

Just checking. You never know. First, let's go over a few things now that we're on the same page.

Claire seems awake for the first time since the questionnaire.

CLAIRE

Is he going to be all right, Doctor?

DR. SMITH

Yes, Mrs. Trempsky, he's fine. We just need to watch for a while.

JOHN

What exactly does that mean?

DR. SMITH

You see, Mr. Trempsky, in the accident and the way you were positioned upon impact, your skull was put under an abnormal amount of pressure. Considering the circumstances, you're lucky to still have verbal and motor skills.

JOHN

Are there any long-term effects?

DR. SMITH

As far as we can tell, you might have what we call traumatic amnesia. The symptoms range due to the severity of the accident. You haven't been in a coma for long, so perhaps the trauma is minor and isolated.

JOHN

A coma? How long have I been out?

DR. SMITH

A month.

CLAIRE

I didn't know if you'd ever wake up.

John seems to be aware of Claire for the first time. Claire's eyes brim with tears. She clutches her jaw tightly.

John appears touched.

JOHN
You were worried about me?

CLAIRE
Of course! Why wouldn't I be worried up
about all this?

JOHN
I've just never seen you so worked up.

CLAIRE
You could have died.

JOHN
I'm still here.

John grins and grimaces after he tries to
shrug.

CLAIRE
Quit trying to be the funny guy!

JOHN
What a way to wake up.

DR. SMITH
Mrs. Trempsky, I hope you do remember what
we talked about for when John woke up? He
and, most importantly, his mind has been
under tremendous stress.

Claire leans back in her chair and closes
her eyes.

JOHN
So what's going to happen to me, Doc? How
long am I going to be cooped up.

DR. SMITH
You should be cleared by the end of the
week. We just want to monitor you for a bit
to make sure you're working alright
physically and mentally.

CLAIRE
When can we go home, Dr. Smith? I hate this
place.

DR. SMITH

We'll evaluate everything at the end of this week. (beat) Mrs. Trempsky, could you please wait in the lobby while I do some final procedural checkups?

CLAIRE

Sure.

Claire leaves the room.

JOHN

So, Doc, more questions?

DR. SMITH

No, we just need to have a chat.

JOHN

About what?

DR. SMITH

You. I just want to make sure everything is exactly how it is supposed to be.

JOHN

Am I going to die?

DR. SMITH

Of course you are.

JOHN

What!

DR. SMITH

But not from this.

JOHN

Come on, Doc.

DR. SMITH

(chuckling)

Sorry, I can't help myself sometimes. So, let's get to business. Do you remember anything from the last month? Strange dreams?

JOHN

Nah. Nothing. I don't feel any different.

DR. SMITH

But you might be thinking differently. The brain is an infinite mystery. You might not remember this entire conversation after you wake up from this afternoon's nap. In any case where the limbic system is damaged, we have to cautious.

JOHN

So you're saying?

DR. SMITH

What's the last thing you remember about your accident?

JOHN PAUSES AND CLOSES HIS EYES.

int. john's car - night

John reaches for the coffee mug.

JOHN

Shit.

The screeching sound erupts in the scene.

CUT TO: WHITE

Laura's face forms in the bright light. Her red lips say John's name repeatedly.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

John opens his eyes and stares blankly at Dr. Smith.

JOHN

I remember crashing.

DR. SMITH

What were you doing before the crash?

JOHN

Uh. I was home. No. I had to leave to go get something. Chips.

DR. SMITH

Take it easy for the rest of the afternoon. I'll send your wife back in if you want.

Dr. Smith begins to walk towards the door.

JOHN

Wait up, Doc. So how will I know if something's wrong.

DR. SMITH

I'm sure your wife will be more than happy to let you know when you're doing something wrong. But seriously, don't think too hard on this. You'll be fine.

JOHN

Thanks.

Dr. Smith exits with a wave.

John stares forward. Time fast-forwards as John tosses and turns in his hospital bed. He reads a magazine, eats lunch, and falls asleep.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

The following scene fills with murky fog and a blurred screen.

INT. JOHN'S OLD CAR - DAY

A JOHN, 22, and CLAIRE, 19, sit in John's old pickup truck. They both stare quietly at the fists in their laps.

Claire, pale and nervous, bites her lip.

John

So that's it?

claire

Yes.

john

I don't think you know what you're saying.

claire

It's the best thing.

john

I don't know. I think you should've talked to me first.

claire

No, you would've stopped me.

john

Well, what are we going to do now? I thought you wanted a kid?

claire

It's too late now.

john

What if we can't have kids when we get married?

claire

Then we'll adopt.

john

This is so stupid.

claire

Just forget about it. It's the past now.

john

Doesn't my opinion matter?

claire

Do you love me?

John stares out of the window into the grassy field. He turns back towards Claire giving her a slow, sad stare before roughly turning the car's ignition.

claire

I said, do you love me?

The truck hums for a few moments before John finally speaks.

john

Yes.

claire

Then just forget about this. In ten years you won't even remember all this.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY
JOHN TOSSES IN HIS SHEETS IN A SWEAT.

JOHN
Claire! No, Claire!

John opens his eyes and sits up in the hospital bed.

JOHN
What the hell was that all about.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY
Claire wheels John out of the hospital in a WHEELCHAIR.

JOHN
Glad to be getting out of here.

CLAIRE
Me, too. I'm not excited about the bills, though.

JOHN
Insurance will take care of it.

CLAIRE
Insurance only handles so much.

JOHN
Okay, can we just talk about it at home.

CLAIRE
I'm sorry, honey. I've just been having a hard time lately.

Claire unlocks the MINIVAN and leaves John by the passenger side to put her things in the driver side.

John stares at the MINIVAN.

JOHN
Since when was the van red?

Claire glares at John.

CLAIRE
It's a rental, John. We can't function as a family on just two cars.

JOHN
Two minivans?

CLAIRE
What's wrong with a van?

JOHN

Claire, cut me some slack. I'm just kidding.

CLAIRE

Okay, let's just get home.

Claire helps John crawl into the car. She walks to the driver side and sits in the seat.

She does not close the door yet.

INT. CLAIRE'S VAN - DAY

Claire stares forward.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry, I've just been so stressed lately. And with the accident it just adds more.

Claire begins to dig in her purse.

JOHN

What could have happened in the month I was out?

CLAIRE

Nothing.

JOHN

So just...bills?

CLAIRE

Just forget about it, John. It was just with your accident.

JOHN

Okay, don't go keeping things from me.

CLAIRE

What's that supposed to mean.

JOHN

I mean, you don't exactly hide your emotions well.

Claire grabs the keys and jams them into the ignition.

JOHN

I'm sorry, hon.

CLAIRE

You don't always have to know exactly what I'm thinking, John.

JOHN

Claire, stop.

CLAIRE

I'm not some plotting monster, John. I'm your wife.

JOHN

I don't want to have this conversation again. I know you're not a monster.

CLAIRE

We barely talk about anything anymore.

JOHN

Christ, what is your problem?

CLAIRE

Do you love me?

JOHN

Honey, stop, you know I love you. Let's just take it easy the next week okay?

CLAIRE

I'm sorry.

JOHN

Honey? I hardly blame you for being stressed through all this. It will pass.

CLAIRE

Right, there was nothing to do to stop it.

JOHN

Right, I mean, who could have known I'd get in a wreck that day?

CLAIRE

No one.

JOHN

So, stop blaming yourself.

Claire sighs and her eyes brim with tears again. Her hands are shaking.

CLAIRE

I hope everything can just go right back to normal.

JOHN

It will, honey, don't worry. Maybe I'll be smarter now. Shifted a few things around up here?

John knocks against his forehead.

CLAIRE

That's not funny, John.

JOHN

I'm just kidding, Claire.

CLAIRE

Okay.

JOHN

Okay?

CLAIRE

Yes.

INT. JOHN'S HOME - DAY

JOHN WALKS THROUGH THE HALLWAY STARING AT THE PICTURES ON THE WALL. CLAIRE FOLLOWS HIM A FEW FEET BEHIND.

JOHN

Feels nice to be back home.

CLAIRE

I think you should go straight to bed for the rest of the day.

JOHN

I feel fine, hon. I can-

CLAIRE

Just go to the bedroom, John. It'll be easier in the long run if you just rest.

John stares at her for a few seconds before turning to go into one of the rooms.

CLAIRE

Where are you going?

JOHN

To bed like you said, master.

CLAIRE

Why are you going into Sam's room?

John opens his mouth in confusion. Gaping like a fish he tries to find the words.

Claire stares at him eyes wide.

JOHN

Who...who is Sam?

CLAIRE

What do you mean, John?

JOHN

I'm being serious, Claire. Who is-

CLAIRE

John.

JOHN

Who is Sam? What is going on?

CLAIRE

You're joking right? You have to be joking.
Tell me you're joking.

JOHN

I have no idea what you're talking about.

CLAIRE

Our son, Sam?

JOHN

We don't have a son.

CLAIRE

Oh my god.

Claire takes a step back and leans against
the wall knocking down a FRAMED PICTURE. She
begins to sob.

JOHN

Claire, what is going on? Stop crying!

John runs over to her but steps on the
PICTURE, cracking the glass. He bends over
to pick it up but stops in mid-lean.

The PHOTOGRAPH shows not just John and
Claire.

SAM, 7, smiles back through the glass with
his two front teeth missing.

John's hands tremble as he looks down at the
frame.

He drops the FRAMED PICTURE.

John grabs his head. He drops his arms to his side and leans against the wall.

JOHN
Claire, what is going on?

CLAIRE
How can you not remember our own son?

JOHN
Claire, is this Sam? Is this my son?

CLAIRE
They said you were fine!

John grabs Claire by the shoulders and shakes her.

JOHN
Claire!

CLAIRE
You're hurting me. Stop it!

JOHN
Who is this? Is this our son? Answer me, Claire. Dammit, answer me!

CLAIRE
Yes! Yes! He's our son. Why can't you remember?

John drops his hand and turns away from her. He goes into Sam's room.

INT. SAM'S ROOM - DAY
John stares at the blue walls of his son's room. BASEBALL MEMORABILIA hangs on every inch along with PICTURES of John and Sam at baseball games and t-ball games.

(CONTINUED)
John grabs one of the BASEBALLS and feels it in his hands. He rolls it back and forth between hands.

A door SLAMS downstairs.

Sam's footsteps STOMP up the stairs.

With each step, the sound amplifies with John's heartbeat.

Sam yells from the second flight of stairs
mere feet away from being visible.

SAM
Dad! Dad! Where are you, Dad!

Sam sees Claire first.

SAM
Mom, why are you crying? Where's Dad?

JOHN
Oh my god.

SAM
Dad! Dad! You're alive! You're back, Daddy!

JOHN'S POV
John's vision begins to blur. He sees Sam
running towards him but everything darkens.

CUT TO: BLACK
Sam screams echo in the dark.

SAM
Dad! Dad! Wake up, Dad!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY
John opens his eyes and sits straight up in
bed.

JOHN
What the hell is going on?
There is no one else in the room.

JOHN
Hello?
Laura enters the room with a tray of food.

LAURA
Oh, you're awake.

JOHN
What am I doing here?

LAURA
You passed out at home. Your wife explained
to us the situation that happened.

JOHN
Situation? Ah...

John rubs his forehead.

JOHN
Apparently I have a son.

LAURA
You're in good hands. Dr. Smith will get to the bottom of this.

Laura turns to leave.

JOHN
It's just...something isn't right.

Laura looks at John over her shoulder.

LAURA
Just rest, Mr. Trempsky. Everything will be okay.

JOHN
Thanks. By the way, what's your name?

LAURA
Laura.

JOHN
You must get weirdos like me in here all the time.

LAURA
You've just been through a lot. Dr. Smith will be in shortly.

JOHN
Sure thing.

Laura walks out of the room and closes the door quietly.

John watches her as she leaves and heaves a big sigh. He glances to his right and notices a CARD standing on the TABLE.

John picks up the CARD and opens it.

CLOSEUP - CARD
The card reads "Dad, I love you and hope you get better soon. Love, Sam"

JOHN
Christ.

John rubs his forehead.

As he rereads the card again, Dr. Smith walks into the room.

DR. SMITH

Well, son, can't seem to keep away, can you?

JOHN

Might as well set me up a permanent room.

DR. SMITH

Let's see. Where to begin.

JOHN

I have a son that I can't remember.

DR. SMITH

Ah, yes. Mr. Trempsky, it seems you have developed the condition Prosopagnosia, or face blindness.

John stares blankly at Dr. Smith.

JOHN

But I can recognize you. And my wife.

DR. SMITH

Well, that's where it gets tricky. It seems that due to your accident, it's almost a selective blindness and amnesiac state erasing memories and associations from the life you had before. Your son might not be the only one you don't remember.

JOHN

Well what do I do? What's going to happen to me?

John grows increasingly frantic. His breathing begins to deepen.

DR. SMITH

Son, please take a deep breath. We're looking into every avenue we can.

JOHN

Well what am I supposed to do in the meantime? Sit around and stare at some kid I don't even know. Walk around town and run into people that know me but I can't remember them?

DR. SMITH

John, this is not necessarily a death sentence. It seems to be a mild and perhaps even reversible state of the disorder.

JOHN

What am I going to do? Claire must-where's Claire?

DR. SMITH

She will be here shortly. She was at home with Samuel.

JOHN

Is she okay? How is she handling this?

DR. SMITH

Quite well, actually.

John numbly stares at his clenched fist in his lap. He release his grip and tightens it again.

DR. SMITH

Mr. Trempsky, you don't have to put on a brave face for all this. You're going through a tough situation, but we'll be with the entire way. Rest up a bit, you'll be released this afternoon after a few tests. Laura will let you know when your wife is here.

JOHN

Thanks.

John stares at Dr. Smith as he turns to leave.

JOHN

Doc, wait up.

DR. SMITH

Yes?

JOHN

You said reversible condition. Do you think it could be reversed?

DR. SMITH

No promises, John. We'll just have to see how you progress over the next few weeks. Anything is possible.

JOHN

Sure. That makes sense.

DR. SMITH

Laura will be in shortly to check your
vitals. Just take everything in strides, Mr.
Trempsky. You're still alive after all.

JOHN

True. True.

Dr. Smith walks out of the room. The door
clicks quietly. John leans back into the
pillow behind him and closes his eyes.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

The following scene is blurred.

INT. JOHN'S HOME - NIGHT

John walks through the hallway.

JOHN

Claire? Claire? Where are you?

John opens the door to their bedroom.

JOHN

Claire?

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A WOMAN in a silk robe sits at Claire's
VANITY combing her hair. Her back is to
John.

JOHN

Claire?

The woman turns around. Laura smirks at John
while still combing her hair.

John takes a step backwards.

JOHN

You're that nurse. Uh, what's your- what are
you doing here?

LAURA

John, I'm Laura. Stop calling me Claire. I
live here.

JOHN

Where's Claire, my wife?

LAURA

John, stop being silly. I am your wife.

John pauses. He stares at Laura searching her face for an answer. He rushes towards her and grabs her face between his hands.

JOHN

You're not my wife. You're not Claire. Where is she? Where is she?

LAURA

John stop it! You're hurting me. John!

JOHN

Where the fuck is Claire? What did you do to her?

LAURA

John! Stop it John. John wake up! John!

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

John thrashes in his bed while Laura tries to awaken him.

LAURA

John! Wake up, Mr. Trempsky! John!

JOHN

What! Who! Where's Claire? Where is she? Get away from me!

LAURA

Sir, you need to calm down. I'm just trying to-

JOHN

Where's Claire? Where is she? You hid her!

LAURA

I'm going to call for security if you do not calm down. Mr. Trempsky? Did you hear me.

John appears stunned.

JOHN

Where? I'm still here. What just happened?

LAURA

Mr. Trempsky, it was just a dream. You were talking in your sleep.

JOHN

Just a dream?

LAURA

Yes, I had to wake you to take your blood pressure and a few other things. I should have waited. I'm very sorry.

JOHN

It's not your fault. The dream...

John trails off and continues to stare at Laura.

LAURA

Sir, are you feeling all right? I can get you a glass of water.

JOHN

Water? Yes, that'd be great. I'm sorry. I just...it was a very vivid dream.

LAURA

I'll be right back.

JOHN

Ma'am, I'm very sorry for acting like that. Very sorry. I don't know what got into me.

LAURA

It's fine, Mr. Trempsky. It was a misunderstanding.

Laura smiles warmly and leaves the room.

John grabs the sheets in his hand. He wrings them tightly and releases them. Rubbing his head, he sighs.

JOHN

What is going to happen to me?

Laura reenters the room with a glass of water.

John smiles at her sheepishly and pulls the thin sheet closer to him.

LAURA

Here we are. This should help you feel better.

John reaches for the glass of water. His hand skims Laura's slightly.

Laura blushes and retracts her hand quickly.

JOHN

Thank, I appreciate it.

LAURA

You're quite welcome. Now, I do need to get a few things from you. Can you lend me your arm?

Laura blushes again. She keeps her eyes downcast.

JOHN

Oh, yes. Of course.

LAURA

Thank you.

Laura adjusts a strap on John's arm and she presses a stethoscope on his wrist. She writes down a few things on his file.

John watches her the entire time. He stares intensely at her face.

Laura glances up at one moment and sees John staring at her. She clears her throat.

LAURA

All done.

JOHN

That wasn't so bad.

LAURA

Not at all.

The two remain quiet for a split second before both speaking.

JOHN

Well.

LAURA

I'd better get a move on. Other patients are waiting.

Laura makes a move for the door. Her cheeks are still flushed.

JOHN

Do you know when I'll get out of here?

LAURA

You'll have to speak with Dr. Smith. He'll know what's best for you.

JOHN

Yes, I hope so. Did he tell you?

LAURA

Tell me?

JOHN

Why I'm back in here?

LAURA

No, not in detail. I know it involves your accident.

JOHN

I apparently have a condition...eh, prosopagnosia? Face blindness is easier to say.

LAURA

Oh, that's...very unfortunate.

JOHN

Apparently, I have a son that I can't even remember.

Laura stops by the door. She takes a step towards John while holding her hands by her hip.

LAURA

I'm so sorry. I didn't realize it was so serious. That must be horrible.

JOHN

To be honest, I can't really get a hold on it myself. I don't really know where to go from here.

LAURA

You don't remember anything at all?

JOHN

Nothing.

LAURA

Oh...

JOHN

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to keep you.

LAURA

Oh it's perfectly fine. I do need to get to the others, though.

Laura stands awkwardly staring at John. She shifts from one foot to the other.

LAURA

If you need to talk about anything just let me know!

Laura blushes at how silly this sounds. John is married after all.

LAURA

The hospital has some great therapists for cases like yours!

John smiles at her correction.

JOHN

Thanks. That would be nice.

LAURA

Your wife called earlier. She should be here in the next hour. I'll send her in immediately.

JOHN

Thank you, Laura. You've been very kind.

LAURA

You're welcome!

Laura hurries out of the room.

John watches her through the window as she turns the corner.

He turns on his side and presses his face against the pillow.

He breathes in deeply and rubs his head again. John does not look up when he hears the door opening.

CLAIRE

John! Honey, are you awake?

At the sound of Claire's voice, John turns over and smiles.

JOHN

Claire! Where have you been?

CLAIRE

I'm so sorry I wasn't here when you woke up. I had to take Sam to the neighbors after baseball practice.

At the mentioning of Sam, both Claire and John's faces darken. Claire bites her bottom lip.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry for how I responded to everything that happened at the house, John. It was just-

JOHN

Claire don't apologize. It's not your fault at all.

CLAIRE

It's just a shock. I didn't know what to do, John. I still don't.

JOHN

Honey, come here.

Claire hurries over to John's bedside. He pulls her next to him but she remains sitting upright.

John rubs her shoulder. She leans in and kisses him quickly on his forehead before scooting away from his side.

JOHN

What are we going to do? Is...is Sam okay?

CLAIRE

He's so young but I think he's taking this better than we are.

Claire nervously laughs before grasping John's hand in hers tightly.

Both stare at their laps. Claire takes a deep breath in attempts to sound more upbeat.

CLAIRE

The doctor told me the name of the condition. I did a little research while I was at home.

JOHN

Oh really? What did you find? Anything that can make me feel better?

CLAIRE

Well, it's a strange disorder. The problem is that I think you have more than one thing going on. Dr. Smith explained a few things, but I don't think I could tell them to you the way he did. I'd probably make it sound worse than what it is.

JOHN

Claire, honey, don't worry. This will all pass soon enough.

CLAIRE

Most of the cases are permanent.

JOHN

Then we'll just start over.

CLAIRE

Oh, John. You make it sound so easy.

JOHN

Maybe I'll be better this time around. I'm sure I made some mistakes with him before all this.

CLAIRE

Don't say that. You're a wonderful father.

JOHN

He must hate me.

CLAIRE

John. Stop. He understands it as much as a child can. You're his hero. Just think if you weren't here at all. I still can't bear the thought if you had-

JOHN

Sweetie, I'm still alive. I know I should be considered one of the lucky ones. Always wanting more than what you have. Look at us, we're getting all worked up about something that didn't even happen. Let's just take a step back and regroup. This isn't so bad.

CLAIRE

What if you can't remember him? Ever?

JOHN

Then, I'll just have to make new memories each day.

CLAIRE

John, this is going to be hard.

JOHN

Let's just wait and see what Dr. Smith has to say. We might just get lucky.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

JOHN LAYS FACE DOWN IN THE BED. LAURA WALKS IN HOLDING A TRAY WITH A STEAMING MUG OF TEA. SHE PLACES IT ON THE TABLE NEXT TO HIM.

LAURA

John? John?

JOHN

Hmmph...

LAURA

John, I heard what about what Dr. Smith told you. I wanted to make sure you're doing okay.

JOHN

What? Oh, Laura what are you doing here?

LAURA

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come.

She quickly places the tray on the table and begins to walk out.

JOHN

Wait! It's not a problem. I was just sleeping.

LAURA

Oh, I'm sorry I disturbed you. I just wanted to make sure you were doing okay after the talk with the doctor.

JOHN

Well it could be worse. I could be dead.

LAURA

I know but it's an awful thing to think about. Not ever remembering your own child. Lost memories.

JOHN

As long as he understands it's not his fault. There's nothing I can do to fix me, though.

LAURA

Right. Sometimes miracles happen.

JOHN

I don't believe in miracles, but maybe you're right.

LAURA

Well you've got to believe in something.

JOHN

Is this tea?

LAURA

Yes, I wanted to bring you a little something.

JOHN

That's sweet. I like coffee, though.

LAURA

Oh. Well I-

JOHN

I'm just kidding. I appreciate it. I don't like my dreams anyway.

LAURA

Dreams? What kind do you have?

JOHN

Well they're more like nightmares. Everything is out of place.

LAURA

Were you having one earlier when I tried to wake you.

JOHN

Yes, that was one.

LAURA

I see. Well I don't want to keep you up. You do need your rest.

JOHN

Right. I guess I'll see you tomorrow.

LAURA

Oh, Betty has my shift tomorrow. I have to go home for some personal things.

JOHN

Ah, okay well you'll be missed.

LAURA

I-goodnight, John.

JOHN

Night. Thanks for the tea.

Laura lingers at the door for a moment and smiles. John sips from the tea before turning towards her. She walks out slowly closing the door.