LONE STAR COLLEGE KINGWOOD
STUDENT LITERATURE AND ART MAGAZINE

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Dear Readers,

This year’s Starbursts is the last edition published with Dr. Katherine Persson as the Lone Star College-Kingwood campus president.

Dr. Persson has been the president of Lone Star College-Kingwood since 2008 and is one of the founding members of this college. In her years as the president, Dr. Persson has encouraged the arts on campus. We have art installations around the campus, photographs and sculptures inside and outside of buildings, which make it clear that even though Dr. Persson is herself a STEM person, she cares deeply about the creative arts. Under her leadership, the college’s art gallery has also come back to life.

Starbursts has flourished due to her championing of the magazine. When we lost funding and did not have a magazine in 2015, Dr. Persson used money from her President’s Fund to help us reorganize the magazine in 2016, prior to Harvey. After Harvey hit in 2017, Dr. Persson has been instrumental in bringing our campus back on its feet, all with a smile on her face. She also continued to support the magazine by attending every Starbursts reception since 2017 to show the students and their parents her support.

As we move forward as a college without Dr. Persson’s leadership, we rely on the many lessons and memories she has given us. We take her vision and look at the future, as we work together to become better and stronger. We, the editors and students, are deeply indebted to Dr. Persson for her support.

This issue of Starbursts is dedicated to Dr. Katherine Persson.

Sincerely,

Starbursts Editorial Team
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I always thought Carson was cool. He could run the fastest in PE, he could carry five stacking-chairs at once, and he could swing the highest at recess. My friend, Dylan, would always tease me when he caught me staring at him. "Emma and Carson, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!"

It always made me feel confused. I didn't have a crush on Carson, I just thought he was interesting. He wore bright green sneakers with lightning bolts on them, and he almost always wore basketball shorts. My favorite pair of his were these really neat red shorts with a camo print. What Dylan didn't know was that I didn't want to be with Carson, I wanted to be Carson.

One Sunday morning, my mom took me shopping. I whined the whole way there. Once we got there, she took me to the Girls' section. We looked around for what felt like hours. My mom would hold up random shirts, and I hated every single one. All I wanted was to go home. But then I spotted them. The same red camo shorts that Carson wore. I ran over to them and yelled, "Mom, can I get these? Please? They're perfect!"

"Sweetie, those are boy's shorts. Put them back. Come over here and see these cute Rapunzel shirts that I found for you!"

"Mommm, I don't like any of those shirts over there. Please, please, please, can I at least try on these shorts? I know I'll like them better than anything over there."

"Honey, I already told you 'no.' Let's just go home. You're being too picky today."

The next day at school, Carson was wearing the red camo shorts. It made me sad that his mom would let him wear them, but my mom wouldn't.

At lunch that day, I sat with Dylan. He asked me if I wanted to play basketball after school at the park near his house. He said that he and some of his friends on the school's basketball team would be playing there. I said I did, but that I'd have to ask my mom.

After school, I asked my mom if I could go hang out with Dylan and his friends. She asked me, "Sweetie, why don't you have any girlfriends? You only ever have friends who are boys. It's important to have friends who are girls like you."

"Why can't I just be a boy?"

My mom just stared at me wide-eyed.

Right then, I finally realized that what I wanted, more than anything in the world, was to be a boy. If I were a boy, my mom would want me to have guy friends. If I were a boy, my mom would have bought the red camo shorts for me. If I were a boy, I would be free to be myself. I ran to my room and shut the door. I buried my face in my pillow and sobbed. If anyone else would have seen me like that, they probably would have thought that I was sad. But really, even though I was nervous and scared of what the future would hold for me, I was very relieved that I finally figured out what felt so wrong inside of me. I was actually amazed that I hadn't realized it sooner.

But my thoughts were interrupted when I heard my mom's footsteps pounding down the hallway. As she knocked on my door, I tried to brace myself for what insults and unaccepting words she might hurl at me. I hesitantly opened the door, but instead of being faced with the fuming red-faced monster of a mother I was expecting, a more gentle, tender version of my mom hugged me. She whispered, "You can be anything you want to be, and I'll be there for you no matter what."
I hugged my mother tighter as tears of relief slid down my face. She squeezed me one last time and told me that I could wipe my tears and go have fun with my friends. I smiled and ran to get ready.

I rode my bike as fast as I could all the way to the park near Dylan's house. He and his friends were already playing a game of basketball, so I joined his team. The other team was just about to score a basket. Dylan shouted, "Emmal Defense, quick!"

I ran up to the guy on the other team who had the ball. Like a professional, as soon as he threw the ball to try to make a basket, I jumped up to stop it, and swatted the ball away from the basket and towards a person on my team. The rest of my team whooped loudly to applaud me. My face beamed brightly, and Dylan gave me a thumbs up.

After the game, I walked over to talk to him. He was practicing his dribbling at a nearby basketball court away from all his friends. I had been brainstorming about how I would tell Dylan that I felt more like a boy than a girl, but instead, the words just slipped out of my mouth: "Dylan, I want to be a boy instead of a girl."

He was pretty cool with it, but I hadn't really expected anything else. After all, Dylan was a cool person. He asked me if I wanted to change my name to reflect how I felt inside. I said I did, and he thought for a moment, then said, "I think you should go with Jonah. It's a cool name, and I think it fits you."

"Hmm. Jonah. I like that. But I always wanted to be called Michael... you know, because of Michael Jordan."

Then, a bunch of Dylan's friends came over. Dylan said, "Hey everyone, I don't think I introduced you all to my friend. Meet Michael! He is really awesome, and he's great at sports, so I think he should join our basketball team for keeps!"

All Dylan's friends clapped, pumped their fists in the air, and started whooping and hollering again. A gigantic grin leapt onto my face. It felt good to be part of a team, but it felt even better to be called 'he.'

The next day at school, there was a substitute teacher. While he called roll, I sat in my seat waiting for my name to be called. "Jake?"

"Here!"

"Billy?"

"Present!"

"Emma?"

My stomach sank a little bit after I heard my old name called. I shyly raised my hand and quietly mumbled, "here."

But Dylan corrected the substitute, "His name isn't Emma anymore. It's Michael."

I felt relieved that I didn't have to explain myself. The substitute looked up at me, confused. I nodded. He peered at me intently, and then tentatively changed my name on the roll call sheet. After that, he continued calling names.

Later that day, when recess had just started, all the girls went over to the swings to push each other. All the boys gathered at the basketball court. Even Carson, the coolest guy in my class, joined. He was, of course, wearing his red camo shorts. I stood between the swings and the court, hesitant to go to the field with the guys. But then, Dylan yelled, "Hey Michael, get over here! You're one of the boys now!"
Grayscale Reproduction of “The Predictor” by Giorgio de Chirico

Meybel Guzman
No.3

Crystal Gonzales
The Houston Astros broke my heart.
On Halloween eve the pain went on.
When the pitching staff fell apart,
the knife in my heart, its name was Juan.

This Christmas I may be a grinch;
the loss lingers like a broken pinkie.
And, yes, I partly blame A.J. Hinch
for doing dirty the man named Greinke.

Washington now has all of the fun.
Our 2017 championship grows old.
The 2019 season is done,
our bats were stale and cold.

But above all I demand no slander,
to the still G.O.A.T. Justin Verlander.
Someone
Carlos Recinos
In the silence that surrounds me,
here, alone I sit,
with an urge that's calling out to me,
it never relents; it just won't quit.

This story began with a fight,
just as it always has before.
With fists and with words
that shatter my core.

"Worthless."
"Burden."
"Useless."
"Broken."

Few of many words
spoken to me.
Stabbing my heart,
letting it bleed.

The purity of my heart
is enveloped by a calling.
An urge that is so strong,
I find myself falling.

Deeper and deeper,
my sanity crumbles.
My life as I know it,
completely in shambles.

In the silence that surrounds me,
here, alone I sit,
with an urge that's calling out to me,
it never relents; it just won't quit.
Surrounded by darkness, 
this urge penetrates my heart. 
Tearing away my peace of mind, 
piece by piece, it rips apart.

The urge I feel, 
it longs for pain. 
For me to bleed, 
To have its gain.

The pain it speaks of, 
I have felt before. 
I fell for it once, 
but now I say, "No more."

Yes, I may feel this urge 
to cause me pain. 
Turn emotional to physical, 
"to cut a vein."

So in this silence, that surrounds me. 
Here, alone, I still sit. 
With this urge that's calling out to me. 
It never relents; it never quits.

"Worthless." 
"Burden." 
"Useless." 
"Broken."

Am I these things? 
Perhaps maybe, but I don't know. 
I want you to see these things. 
Because I want them to show.

"Broken" I truly may be. 
But, I will no longer hide this fact 
for I have my friends, 
who I know will keep my sanity intact.

My sanity may be crumbling, 
but I am not alone as it falls. 
The urges may remain, 
but they seem to block out its calls.

So, yes the urge may linger. 
But, my friends have my back. 
Despite me feeling useless, 
they say there's nothing that I lack.

I see myself as ugly, 
and so does my Mother. 
But, you my friends say I'm BEAUTIFUL, 
that I'm truly like no other.

So, in this silence that surrounds me. 
Here, alone I sit. 
With this urge that's calling out to me. 
It never relents; it never quits.

But you my friends keep me strong. 
Your support keeps the urge away. 
Your words and love help me heal. 
You make me smile, 
You make me happy, 
You make me want to STAY!
The house knows what it's supposed to do. It's supposed to stay sealed and keep the roof on its head to protect its innards from the elements. Rain and snow are not its friends. Neither is the wind nor lightning. The former makes it rigid to hold its foundation; the latter makes it tremble like a frightened dog. But when the house questions itself, well, that comes from deep inside. The gut has its own brain, they say. When it growls through walls, you know the shelter is not working. Often this leads to divorce. So, my dear, we must annihilate ourselves. That, or one of us must succumb to the other.
Purple Flowers
Crystal Gonzales
Jessica’s grip tightens around Afrika’s arm as she watches Lily, Jackson, and Taylor’s fingers move on the Ouija board. Afrika uses her hand to wipe the sweat trailing down her forehead. She can hear the spirits speaking through the walls and see shadows through her peripheral vision. The energy in the room becomes unbearable for Afrika. She needs to leave before something bad happens.

“Hey, let’s break the rules,” suggests Lily.

Jessica looks at Lily bewildered, “Are you insane?!”

“Jess come on. Nothing is going to happen. Have some fun,” Jackson says, agreeing with Lily.

Taylor notices Afrika’s eyes looking across the room and sweat pouring down her face. Taylor starts to feel that something is not right.

“Hey, I think we should stop and go home,” says Taylor.

Lily scoffs, “Oh, now you’re scared too, Taylor?”

“Don’t you see Afrika’s face? She is not feeling well.”

Lily turns her head to look at Afrika, annoyed. She gasps looking at Afrika’s pale and petrified face. She gulps, now feeling uneasy. Jackson shakes his head, the feeling of annoyance and anger rising. He takes the board and breaks it. Afrika screams in terror, her eyes traveling to different parts of the room, her breath even. She gets up and looks at Jackson, rage evident in her eyes.

“Do you know what you just did?!”

“I just broke a stupid board.”

“That’s the worst thing you could have done.”

Afrika grabs her jacket and umbrella and makes her way to the front door. Jessica looks at the rest of the group.

“I’m going home.”

Jessica grabs her purse, following Afrika out the door, leaving the others in silence. Once Afrika walks outside, she is greeted by cool air and the smell of rain. She takes a few deep breaths, calming her nerves. They do not know what they’ve unleashed in that house. Afrika saw it come out of the broken pieces of the board like liquid. It took the form of a man, its body made of shadow. What shook Afrika to her core were the red eyes that stared back at her.

Chills run down her spine just thinking about it. Jessica walks next to Afrika, giving her a weak smile. She knows it was her fault that Afrika was scared. Jessica wanted to avoid telling others about Afrika and her ability to see and hear the dead. They would think her crazy. Yet, the way Afrika reacted back in the house, there may have been something lurking, waiting for the opportunity to be released.

“Somebody’s going to die.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Something came out of the board. Now it’s out for blood.”

“You’re talking nonsense. Nothing came out of the board.”

Afrika looks at Jessica, her face showing no emotion. Jessica knew Afrika was right. She felt something back in the house. Both girls head to their car until a scream erupts from the house. Jessica and Afrika look at each other for a few seconds then sprint back in the direction of the house.

They reach the living room where they were previously playing the game, where now on the floor lays Jackson. Blood spills from his nose and
eyes and his body shakes violently. Afrika sucks in her fear and goes to help Jackson. The spirit of the board was out for Jackson’s blood. Afrika has to act fast if she is going to save him.

“Jessica, in my glove compartment I have a box with a triquetra on it. Grab it. Quickly.” Jessica takes no time; she runs to the car going inside to grab the box. She opens the compartment to reveal a birch wood box with a triquetra burned into the top lid with designs on its four corners.

“How did I not know about this?” Afrika screams, “Jessica!” Jessica runs back inside of the house to the others, handing Afrika the box. Jackson is still convulsing on the ground and his eyes have rolled to the back of his head. Lily and Taylor are in a corner watching the scene unfold. Afrika opens her box and picks up a small bag of basil, rue, and rosemary. She puts her hand on his chest murmuring a prayer of protection.

Lily asks, her eyes full of tears, “What is she doing?” Taylor, who realizes what Afrika is doing, mutters, “She’s trying to save him.”

Jessica replies, “She’s a priestess of Auset. A follower of the goddess. She’s the only one here who can help him.” Jessica looks back at Afrika as she whispers and throws the herbs on his body. A warm feeling arises in her being. Jessica feels proud of her girlfriend. She wouldn’t have anybody else.

“A priestess? Goddess?” Lily shouts, “What are you saying? Call a doctor!” Jackson’s body goes completely still except for the rise and fall of his chest. Afrika gets up from the ground, but stumbles. Jessica wraps her hands around her waist making sure she does not fall. Jackson opens his eyes, frantically looking around the room. Immediately, Lily and Taylor are next to Jackson asking him questions.

“Is he okay?” Taylor asks, turning her head from Jackson to Afrika.

“He’s fine. The spirit is gone. Just make sure he gets some rest and eat.” Afrika grabs a hold of Jessica, exhaustion clear on her face, “Let’s go home.”
Summer fruit jars
  crash over Andalusian tiles.
The syrup pours slowly,
  following the sun toward
  a puddle of juice where
  the floor-slanth slant ends.
Argo gobbles up chunks
  of watermelon and grapes,
  pleased by the treat
  since he's been steering sheep
  all morning.
He deftly avoids glass shards.
So does Pepi, leaping
  carelessly and barefoot,
  trying to catch a symphony
  of purring kittens.
Mama takes a long hard drag
  from her Lucky Strike.
The smoke calms her down
  after she's had a meltdown.
The maids return with brooms and mops
  and sunken heads.
Fabula

Jose Sanchez
To Whom It May Concern

Taylor Anderson

To whom it may concern,
I know not who I am.
I fear I never will.

I've spent years trying to find myself,
in the depths of the ocean,
the tides of the sea,
the clouds in the sky,
the grains of the sand,
the cold of the raindrops,
the reflection in the glass.
Nothing is found there.

There's no reason,
no purpose,
for this skin I am in,
these sights I see,
these scents I smell,
these words I speak,
this air I breathe.

I stand in everyone's way,
and yet,
I am invisible.
I cease to exist.

I am but
a space on the ground,
a breeze in the air,
a whisper on the lips,
a rising of the sun.
If I compare at all.

So...
if anyone knows where I am,
please bring me home.
I miss them.
PEACOCK VISITS

Anastasia Aourik

The lake is calm.
Four feet dangle
over a boulder,
quietly,
facing the expanse.
The horizon holds its secrets.
So do lovers
with one last chance
to get it right.
A peacock waddles by
to inspect,
or to reassure,
depending on which side
of the lake
you are coming from.
Requiem

Jose Sanchez
Pretentious Youth

James Graham

In the spring of our youth
Knowledge seems to flow like rain,
Soaking our feeble minds with truth.
The gods we once knew are now slain.

Yet, upon the setting of that sun,
Upon the end of that day
From what we once fled, to now which we run,
Fearing the bed in which we lay.

The knowledge that once drowned us
We look back on as poison.
Yet, in these fires that surround us
We look upward, towards the horizon.

We learn to separate the truth from lies,
Or we with us our mental freedom dies.
It is difficult to accurately remember some of the details provided below, especially numerical, but the estimates are sufficiently close. My memory, after about 50+ years, may be a little hazy but the images and events are clearly etched in my mind like cave drawings begging for sunlight. The emotions and circumstances are real and timeless.

It was probably early October, 1964, a cold Saturday morning in Plymouth, Indiana, a small town about 30 miles south of South Bend. We were at a camp, not a resort camp, but a camp of small, one-room cottages outside the small rural town that provided housing for migrant workers from South Texas between the months of May through October, the growing and harvest season.

We migrants were a hardy bunch that would form a caravan with fifteen to twenty families in three to five cars and a large truck or two that carried the families and their belongings, a pared down list of items needed to cook or dress for about five or six months.

This was always an exciting day. We were ready to make the estimated 1500 mile odyssey back home to South Texas. The trip could probably take a full two days if the trip was incident-free, but that was hardly the case. The caravan, when going from Texas to Indiana, went through downtown Houston, a big highlight, through Texarkana, through Little Rock, Arkansas, through Cairo, Illinois, through Terra Haute, Indiana, went around Indianapolis, through West Lafayette, finally arriving at Plymouth, Indiana. The trip home was just the reverse. It was not unusual for the trip to take three or four days. The family cars, often older models, were subject to breakdown. Overheating was a typical problem. Sometimes a car would wander off and stray from the caravan causing critical delays and unrecoverable time. Auto accidents were an infrequent but inherent problem due to the long hours of driving, especially well into the late evening hours. Hotels stops were not an option. The crew leader knew all the rest stops along the way and would strategize possible stops for overnight rest and sleep. Nevertheless, the trips were always exciting for everyone, especially the kids and young teens.

Going back home was the big event of the “summer vacation.” Most families would go back home with a good amount of money they had earned and saved. “Housing” was provided free of charge so money was spent on mostly food and a few frills. The venture was a prosperous one. The caveat was that this money was supposed to carry us from October through May. By the time the next May rolled around, most people were broke and desperate to embark on the journey back to Indiana. It was a callous cycle.

It was early in the morning and the tangerine sun had barely made its presence known casting rays that exploded off the distant cumulus clouds creating a spectacular autumn scene. My older brother, Rey, and I were outside playing and hanging out with other teens and at times helping my mother get last minute stuff for the trip and loading it on the truck.

My mother came up to Rey and me and asked us to go to town, probably about a five mile drive, and pick up something. For the life of me, I cannot recall what that something was, but my mother had to have it and it was important enough that she was willing to take a chance on us holding up the caravan.

“Hurry up, and come back as soon as you can. Don’t waste any time or make any stops.

Fill up the car with gas and get back. I don’t want to keep the caravan waiting,” she instructed. Of course, this conversation was conducted in Spanish. She did not speak English.
My mother had some clout. She knew that if we delayed the caravan it would not be a big issue. The crew leader was married to a cousin of mine. Years before he would actually let my mother ride shotgun in the truck along with his wife for the big voyage. This was a privilege and a sign of status. Nobody questioned that status. Typically, my siblings, all six of them and myself, would ride in the back of the truck with a bunch of other people along with everybody’s belongings. These were not comfortable accommodations but we managed. But this year we had our own car.

Rey and I jumped in our car, a 1957 Ford Fairlane. We took off. Rey, as usual, had a heavy foot and liked to put the 6-cylinder, 3-speed standard transmission Fairlane to the test. Right now he was justified, with a license to speed, and he took advantage of it.

"Hey, slow down, man," I cautioned, "there could be other cars coming."

"Don’t worry, I know what I am doing."

The country blacktop road was winding and the terrain was hilly. Fields of tall corn stalk flanked the road on both sides. The corn fields lined the roads in seemingly perfect rows of radiant green like a majestic Korean military outfit with the tops of the stalks gleaming from the suppressive sunlight. The fields were practically non-stop, a typical Indiana landscape. Except for an occasional farm residence with a small open spread, the road did not offer much of a view for on-coming traffic or the layout of the road ahead. Occasionally, another car would suddenly appear headed in the opposite direction and Rey was deft enough to avoid a problem. At times we would approach a car travelling in the same direction but without our urgency. Of course, Rey would just swerve around it, swiftly get back on his side of the two-lane road and just wave at the other driver.

"Out of my way, slow poke!" Rey would say and we’d both crack up. He thought he was cool and I was in agreement. I idolized him in a typical younger brother fashion. He was kind of a rebel with a lot more “experience” in life and I was a little mousy and eager to learn. He had all the answers. I trusted him. I especially trusted his driving. He was my personal “Mario Andretti.”

We kept swiftly moving along, swerving, hitting the brakes, accelerating and waving. I must have cautioned Rey about his speed about twenty times but to no avail. Every hill and curve was a gamble but luck was riding shotgun. A combined hill and curve was an added danger. Rey persisted. The fact that it was not yet full daylight such that Rey had to turn his dimmer lights on, heightened the peril.

We approached one of those hill and curve points where you could not see too far up the road. As Rey took the curve, a pair of cats suddenly appeared right in the middle of the road. Rey could not take a chance of veering off the road by trying to avoid them but made an honest effort still maintaining control of the car. The cats hardly moved and the little they moved was in the direction that Rey made a slight swerve. Needless to say, he ran over them. Rey slowed down but kept on going saying a few mild curse words blaming the “stupid cats” for hanging out in the middle of the road.

"Aren’t you going to stop?" I pleaded.

"Hell no, you’re crazy. You want to get run over too?" he reasoned. I did not have an argument, so we kept on going.

The road straightened out right after the curve for a nice stretch with the hills and curves appearing less frequently than before. We continued towards town, picked up what we needed, gassed up and headed back to the camp. Still, Rey had his foot firmly on the pedal. The previous incident did not appear to faze him very much. By now, about twenty minutes later, I kind of became comfortable with it and essentially forgot about it.

As we got back on the straightened section and approached the curve we saw some dark object in the middle of the road. We could not make it out very well. As we approached the point and the image became clearer,
we realized it was the cats. One of them was totally smashed flat on the road while the
other one patiently sat right next to it as if saying, “Okay man, get up. Come on. Let’s go,”
not realizing his lifeless partner was not going to respond. I have no idea whether the cats
were male or female, two little buddies, a momma and a baby, a couple, or what type of
relationship they had. I remember I was amazed at the loyalty that one had for the other.
I was very impressed but we just kept on going. We did not have the time. Maybe under
different circumstances we might have stopped and figured out something. I’m not sure
what, but something. As I said, “Rey had all the answers.”

We got back to the camp with plenty of time, thanks to “Mario.” Everything was in line and
everyone was on board. The odyssey to Texas had begun. I don’t remember being overly
bothered with the image of the cats on the road. I moved on. Well, maybe not, because
the incident has never escaped me.

I am 67 years old. I still think of those cats, especially in the more recent years. A while
back, I asked Rey if he remembered the incident but he did not recall anything. Several
times, I have seen situations where a loyal animal patiently waits for a dead mate or friend
to get up only to be disappointed. In a particular personal incident, I ran over a fawn
who dashed in front of my car while the momma, I presumed, was watching on the side
of the road in the wooded roadside. The injured fawn continued on to the other side
of the road and escaped into the woods. I don’t think it died but I am sure it was hurt
badly. I could only imagine what ensued after the momma tracked down the fawn and
helplessly tried to console it. I actually had a friend whose son jumped onto the freeway
and got hit by a car. I could only envision the image they cast. These poignant images are
permanently etched inside the walls of my skull, an enduring graffiti.
Grayscale Reproduction of “Dead Mother” by Egon Schiele

Gabrielle Martinez
Who am I?
Now isn't that the question.
I am but a girl,
trying to grip and hold this lesson.
What is this lesson?
May you ask.
It is simply a realization.
And me taking it up to task.

Who am I?
I am simply a girl.
Emotionally, a child,
but still facing this world.
But do you notice?
Do you realize?
If you knew my secrets,
would you criticize?

Who am I?
I am lonely.
A lonely girl
Inside, I hold her closely.
So close to give her a name.
To give her a past.
To give her a character,
that will surely always last.

Who is she?
She is Caroline.
She is who I wish to be.
She is who I envision.
She is everything I am not.
Along with the characters she knows.
Whom I have created for her,
so she is never to be alone.

Who is she?
She is my creation.
Born from my fear of loneliness.
My fear and my tribulation.
Characters I have created.
To counteract my loneliness.
To speak and converse with them.
In the realm of odd liveliness.

But are they real?
They are not.
They are figments, fragments of me.
I wish I had, I wish a lot.
Could I be them?
Maybe if I tried.
But, what's the point,
all I do is hide.

What do I hide?
I tell others I'm an open book.
But I am not.
So, maybe you should look.
The pain I feel,
is always with me.
My eyes seem to show it.
But, do they really?
What is this pain?
Why do I feel it?
Why won't it go away?
Why is its target, always hit?
Is the light inside, my own?
Or is it the shadow, that is me.
How am I to know?
When can I be free?

Who am I?
Honestly.....Don't....Know.
I'm lost, I'm confused.
But, I still wish to grow.
I have taken the lead,
but, whom am I to follow?
Even a leader can be lost.
But, that may be hard to swallow.

What is my wish?
To not be lonely.
To not be weak.
To not be criticized.
To not be bleak.
And before you ask,
"Is this how I feel?"
To be honest, Yes!
I am trying to be real.

So, who am I?
I am me.
Broken and crazy.
But, trying to be free.

So I hold out to you all,
My vulnerability.
To gain some friendships.
To heal me, ever so deeply.

The pain I wish to end.
So, end it I will try.
So friendships I will find,
with honesty in my life.
Who am I to judge?
When I feel this deep turmoil.
For what little life I hold,
I will NOT let it spoil.

What am I to ask?
There are many things to say.
But the ones I hold true,
will never go away.
So I say, please be my friend.
Listen to my plea.
Please...
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Please...
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Regret

Sejal Gupta

Gnawing at my stomach, it continues to grow like fire in a cage.

Panic fills the pauses -- if only I could turn back time.

A few simple words possess chaotic power and change my world.

I miss the before - when things were in place; the naive bliss, the calm.

But the storm always comes: a whirlwind of bad luck taking its victims and leaving emptiness.

The aftermath sets, leaves a rubble of misery, reminding me of that day. An auto loop of my failure.

Why did this happen? What could I have done? How will I move on?

All that’s left is dread. Sunny past, blank future.
The Evolution of Kanye

Hunter Simmons
They’re saying let go --
The anger and pain,
My fortress of protection.
How can I let go
After this long?
Honesty - I’m still shit at.
This surface level’s safe, but
I’m getting away from that.
I just need another day.
Love and acceptance,
I’m fighting – still dying for.
Retracing this back -
Thank you, Dad, for everything I never had.
I’m still chasing this high,
Hoping one day you’ll love me back.
Regardless of the norm,
This man’s love is conditional.
This confidence, I’m still learning.
Surely, I’ll get it –
This life is an endless searching;
I know what I know –
One of these days,
I’ll be at the top,
Another sold out show.
I need this.

Falling pride for doing wrong,
Family looking at me like I never changed.
Bitch, I’ll prove you wrong.
I want to be
Someone who is great.
Who I am, besides an addict?
Am I ready for this answer? Am I ready for change?
Fuck everyone,
I need this confidence.
Give me time to rise,
I’ll prove to every blind man,
I’m going to be somebody,
One of the greatest,
In due time.
Coffee

Katherine Nehmar
The Blood of The World
Gabrielle Martinez
Purple skies as the night sets in,
The moon reflecting on your skin,
I’m playing out a dream I’m in,
Where do I begin?

You were only seventeen,
Me a little older.
You set out to save the world
And I was at your shoulder.

I fell in love with you,
Must have been your constant smile,
The sacred color of your eyes,
Or your porcelain skin.

Someone said everything must fail,
Even our endeavor.
If it’s true, this theory will fail,
And I’ll be yours forever.
If it’s true, this theory will fail,
And I’ll be yours forever.

We’ve seen highs and lows,
We’ve learned to compromise.
Sometimes, it seems we’ve seen it all.
We’ve stood the test of time.
Murphy’s getting nervous,
Writing corollaries on the wall.
He’s been writing corollaries on the wall.
Demitto
Jose Sanchez
The Truth

Anika Qualls

The Truth,
Hidden,
Hard to find,
You can't even recognize.
The deceit that lies behind,
Your truth.
   Her truth.
   His truth.
   Their truth.
   My truth.
   Our truth.
It swindles our minds.
Then you wonder,
Why do you have trust issues?
   Why does she have trust issues?
   Why does he have trust issues?
   Why do they have trust issues?
   Why do I have trust issues?
   Why do we have trust issues?
The Answer?
We are lied to on the daily.
The knowledge that is given to us,
We don't question.
The "facts" that we hear,
We don't question.
The "History" we are given,
We don't question.
But, is it our fault?
No.
The foundation on which we are born,
Is crooked.
It destroys us.
Until we become a hidden lie,
Disguised as
The Truth.
Human

Carter D. Peeler

Rose petals falling from the sky
make me think of older times.
Life was frantically innocent and chaotically pure
or maybe just beginning, fate and destiny occurred.
I wonder what my purpose is now?
I wonder if it's cancer I'll cure
The events which unravel, the crescendo of the moment, this one right now
has got me thinking, thinking especially out loud!
“Where do my talents lie?”
Reform education? The life of our student? What about reforming what it means to be human?
What it means to be human...
Gandhi

Jorge Palomarez
Fear

Juan Beltran

Fear, why do you grip me so tightly?
Like fists wrapped around my throat,
Sometimes cold and sometimes warm.
Butterflies in my belly, they swarm!
You aim to make me weak, shivery, and meek.
The more I try, it gets harder to speak.
You can't have me.
You won't.
You shouldn't!
Mouths are for speaking not shushing.
There's shame in me for who I am -- to be!
Why, if it makes me happy?
Then it's not fear.
It's excitement!
Vibrant lights.
It's just insight.
It's meant to be.
I must live like I'll die inside.
CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Alison  the wife
Mason    the husband
John     the neighbor
Darla    the girlfriend
Mailman  (This seemingly unfortunate mix-up begins on Alison’s porch. The place is decorated with flowers, a small table, a rocking chair, a welcome mat, and gardening tools; the picture of happiness and domesticity. Next to Alison’s porch is the neighbor’s front porch which is bland in comparison.

Alison is waiting for someone to pick up her call over the phone, nervously pacing back and forth. A beat later, we hear a door opening and closing and then footsteps. Alison hurriedly slides her phone into her pocket and pulls on gardening gloves, kneeling and fussing with various tools as her husband enters the stage.)

MASON: (Enters with a frown. He is wearing a suit and holding his car keys with a wedding ring on his finger) Alright, Alison. I’m all set to go. I’ll be back soon.

ALISON: (bent over the gardening supplies, not really looking at him) Mason, dear. Good luck at the office today. I thought I’d do a bit of gardening today. The peach trees have been needing a trim for a while now.

MASON: Will you be ready for tonight?

ALISON: (stops and straightens herself slowly, surprised and upset.) I... Mason, of course I will. It’s our anniversary.

MASON: (sighs and shakes his head, already walking away) Just don’t forget. You know how you are. (Exits)

ALISON: (Stares after him. We hear an engine start and we are to assume Mason drives away. We hear her phone chime and she snaps out of her daze, pulling her gardening gloves off in a hurry and fishing her phone out of her pocket) Elena, thank God you picked up. The package was supposed to arrive last night! What am I going to do? (pauses, listening) Yes, well, I’ve been doing some gardening and wearing those stupid gloves so he wouldn’t notice my ring is gone. (She pauses for a second) What do you mean ‘maybe he won’t notice?’ Of course he’ll notice, it’s our anniversary for god’s sake.

(We hear the sound of a truck pulling up and stopping.)

ALISON: (gasps) It’s here, I’ll call you back. (rushes away from her porch, tucking her phone in her back pocket. She bounces on her heels midstage)

MAILMAN: (enters from the side, earbuds in and clearly disinterested)

ALISON: (holds out her hand, smiling brightly) Good morning! I’ve been waiting for my package--

MAILMAN: (walks right past her, heading towards her neighbor’s porch) Scuse me.

ALISON: (stares at the place he occupied for a second before turning on her heel determinedly)

JOHN: (with an indulgent smile) Na, Mrs. Rodriguez, I can assure you that this is my package.
ALISON: Are you sure it’s yours? Uh, Jeff, was it? Is that your name on the package? (angling her head to try to catch a glimpse of it)

JOHN: (sighs) It’s John, actually. And no, Alison— (he says her name with exaggerated emphasis and pulls the package to his chest) —My name is not on the package but it was on the receipt I just signed, along with my address. Now, if you’ll excuse me. (turns to leave)

ALISON: Wait! (runs between him and his house) I’m sorry, I must insist. That is my package. It is set to come today and it is very important.

JOHN: (surprised and a little offended) I think I ought to know what’s mine and what isn’t.

ALISON: Look, John. Be reasonable. It’s entirely possible that they gave you the wrong package. I am almost certain that belongs to me.

JOHN: The key word being ‘almost’. It’s mine.

(AL John makes to step past her but Alison intercepts him.)

ALISON: Perhaps if you’d just open it and let me see what’s inside—

JOHN: Absolutely not.

ALISON: Please—

JOHN: Mrs. Rodriguez, no. I’ve ordered from this company before and I know what my package is supposed to look like!

ALISON: Are you serious? It’s just a brown box! It could be anything!

JOHN: No! You give it to me!

ALISON: Give me my package right now or I’ll call the police!

JOHN: I will be the one calling the police! You’re on my property, stealing my package!

(AL Alison darts around him and finally takes hold of the package. John sputters and stumbles back, holding the box out of her reach.)

ALISON: John please, be mature. Look at its deceptive size, the color, the lack of brands! It’s perfectly unassuming!

JOHN: That doesn’t mean it’s yours! I also ordered discreet shipping!

ALISON: (finally wrestles it out of his grip and John stumbles back. She pants and frowns in confusion) What did you say?

JOHN: (studies her face before sighing and turning away) I… also ordered discreet shipping. I value my privacy.

ALISON: But you live alone.

JOHN: Yes well, here you are. Invading my privacy. Please… just give it to me.
(Alison sighs but doesn’t move, staring down at the package in her hands with a defeated look on her face.)

JOHN: (waits a beat, sympathetic. Then says in a low voice) Look at it. My name might not be on the package but that is, in fact, my address on it.

ALISON: (frowns slowly with realization and brings the package close to her face) No… actually, this is my address.

JOHN: What?

(John snatches the package from her hands, studying it incredulously. Alison smirks confidently and crosses her arms over her chest.)

ALISON: You see? Now hand it over.

JOHN: No… I don’t understand! That was my information on the receipt!

ALISON: Well, then… they must have made a mistake with the paperwork.

JOHN: Or with the packaging! The label on it must be wrong.

ALISON: (groans loudly) Will you just give me my package? I’m running out of time! My husband will be getting home any minute now.

JOHN: No, I can’t! You don’t understand. This… it’s private. It’s a present for my girlfriend Darla. It’s her birthday today and it’s important, okay?

(Alison is quiet for a moment. Then she sighs and sits down on the porch, patting the seat next to her. After a second John joins her, holding his package tightly.)

ALISON: Darla. Is she the one you’ve been seeing for… how long has it been?

JOHN: Six years.

ALISON: Oh. Wow.

JOHN: (laughs dryly) I suppose you’re wondering why I haven’t popped the question?

ALISON: Well. That’s your business. Relationships… (sighs) they’re complicated.

JOHN: Yeah, to put it lightly. Darla’s been pulling away from me recently and I thought that, you know, maybe this thing would bring us closer together. (holds the package up with a wry laugh, slightly embarrassed)

ALISON: (nods) I get it. I also ordered something for my husband.

JOHN: You did?

ALISON: (sheepish) Sort of. It’s our anniversary today, you know.

JOHN: (quietly) Oh. Congratulations.

ALISON: Yes, well. I’ve lost my wedding ring.

JOHN: (shocked) What? You lost--?

ALISON: Yes. (puts her head in her hands and groans) I ordered another one, custom made because ours are engraved, and I paid so much money. Express shipping and everything.

JOHN: And you’ve kept this a secret from him?

ALISON: I have to! Mason would be devastated. Oh, he would be so angry. So disappointed in me. I’m afraid that if I told him--

JOHN: But you just misplaced it, right? It was an accident. Maybe if you explained it to him--

ALISON: No. I’ve made too many mistakes. I can’t tell him. If I did… especially today, it might be my last mistake. This… this is my last chance.

(John nods slowly in understanding, he deliberates. He looks down at the package in his hands before sighing and handing it to her. Alison is taken aback, frowning at him in confusion. He stands and offers her a hand. She takes it and they stand up.)

JOHN: Take it. You should open it now. Before your husband gets home.

(Alison looks down at the package in her hands before she throws her arms around John. John is startled before hugging her back.)
ALISON: Oh, thank you John! Thank you so much. This means so much to me.

(John smiles at her while she wipes a tear out from under her eyes, smiling down at her package.)

JOHN: I sincerely hope it's your ring. And if it's not, well... then I hope you don't think of me any differently...

(wincing)

ALISON: (frowns, confused) Why would I--

(Just then the sound of the mailman truck comes back and the mailman jogs up to them, another package in hand. John and Alison stare.)

MAILMAN: Looks like I forgot a package. Whoops. This one's for you... I think.

(Mailman hands Alison a package who takes it, confused. He then hands her a clipboard, she signs it. Mailman exits while John looks on with equal confusion.)

ALISON: What... this was under my name. I swear. But the address on the package is yours.

JOHN: (takes the package from her, studying both side by side. Then he shakes his head) You're right. Gosh, they've really made a mess of this, haven't they?

(Suddenly, we hear the sound of a car approaching. Offstage we hear Darla's happy voice.)

DARLA: John! John, I'm here.

(John and Alison turn towards the voice, looking at John's side of the stage. Then they hear Mason on the opposite side of the stage, towards Alison's side.)

MASON: Alison?

(John and Alison look at each other, panicked.)

ALISON: Oh no! What do we do?

JOHN: Ummm-- quick! Choose a package! (holds out both to her)

ALISON: What?

JOHN: We don't have time! Listen, in my package there's... well um...

ALISON: (hisses) What? What are you saying? What's in your package?

JOHN: Just take one!

(A Alison takes one at random and hides it behind her back just as Darla enters and runs up to John.)

DARLA: (loud, peppy, and high pitched) Hi, sweetie! Oh my god! Is that for me? Aww. You remembered!

(Darla kisses him, taking the package happily while John stares at her in shock.)

JOHN: Um, Happy Birthday sweetie.

(Darla starts opening the package, taking her time with layer after layer of wrapping paper and plastic.)

MASON: (enters frowning and staring at Alison) Alison. Seriously? Why aren't you ready?

ALISON: (looks down at herself) Oh... Mason--

MASON: (looks at the package) What's that?

ALISON: W-What? Oh, this? (holds up the package weakly)

MASON: (starts smiling) You bought me a gift? (takes the package) Wow... Alison. I didn't expect-- I mean, this is very thoughtful of you. (starts opening it)

ALISON: Um... (looks worried and glances back at John, John meets her gaze frantically but helplessly)

MASON: (finally opens his package, staring down at it with confusion and then shock) What is this-- oh. Oh my god! Alison!

ALISON: (scared, laughing weakly) Um... surprise?

MASON: Oh my god. This thing must have cost you a fortune! Wow! (hugs her) Holy crap, babe, this is amazing. I had no idea you were interested in trying new things in the bedroom. (laughs and looks down at the package)

ALISON: What?!
(She spins around to stare at John, her jaw dropped. John winces, shrugging and mouthing apologies. Just then Darla drops her package and lets out an excited screech, holding a little velvet box in her hand. John’s startles.)

DARLA: John! I can’t believe this! Yes! A thousand times, yes. (throw herself on him)

Oh, John I’d love to marry you… I was beginning to think… well. It doesn’t matter now. I love you, baby.

JOHN: (shocked) Oh my god.

MASON: (puts an arm around Alison and draws her closer to the newly engaged couple with a smile) Congratulations guys! Wow, what a huge coincidence. They got engaged on our anniversary! Isn’t that magical, Alison?

ALISON: (smiles softly at him and kisses him) Yeah, it is. Happy anniversary, Mason.

DARLA: (takes the ring out of the box, looking down at it what a smile) Oh, this is such a beautiful ring… wait… what? Why does this say ‘Alison’ on it?

(There’s a horrified second of silence when both Mason and Darla back away from their partners at the revelation. Alison and John both turn to look at each other with shared dread and then the lights go off.)

THE END
FLASHBACK

Diego Ramirez

Today, I was popping popcorn for them.
I was at the retirement home, today.
But then they started convulsing again,
Reminding them to never hit the hay.
‘Cause the way of the rice was day to day,
Until the napalm strike hit over there.
But they weren’t the ones to farm that day.
The chopper was not the only thing there,
There was a song playing in our air.
Turns out they were not the fortunate son;
Maybe it was them the trees with scare,
Or having the high ground and a ba-ton.
But that day is never to remember
And for the lost sons to live forever.
**Shoulder Angels**

Cameron Purcell

---

**Cast of Characters:**

**Bob Cart**
Large individual wearing tattered apparel. Spends the play being puppeteered by two different personalities.

**Shoulder Angel**
Dedicated to the ideals of good. Wants what is best for Bob. Generally honest and kind but can be a prude. Wears mostly white and gold.

**Shoulder Devil**

**Jennifer**
A downtrodden woman desperate for companionship, willing to look past many of a man’s flaws. Overall a good, kind, but naive person. Wears inexpensive clothes but tries to look her best for her date with Bob.

**The Boss**
A stern and realistic man. Handsome, clean shaven, and overall just well groomed. He dons a white suit and white tie.

**Detective Brody**
A stereotypical trench-coat wearing police detective.

**Police Officer**
An unnamed police officer to support Brody.

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**ACT I**

**Scene 1**

A trashy apartment whose layout would only make sense for the set of a play.

There are four rooms in order from stage right to left, a kitchen, a living room-esque area, a bedroom, and a bathroom. Each room is absolutely filthy, with garbage scattered about and unwashed dishes piled up on the kitchen counter. The living room’s main features are a decrepit couch facing the audience and an old box television on the ground facing the couch. The bedroom consists of a bed frame, a mattress, and a sheet that’s just a bit too small for the bed. One corner of the bed has a large stain. The bathroom is up to the director’s discretion, as is the level of just how horrible this apartment really is, beyond what has been explicitly stated.

At the beginning of the scene, Bob Cart is laying face-down on the floor in the living room, head pointing downstage. He is dead. Angel stands at Bob Cart’s feet alongside Devil. Angel looks horrified while Devil has a hand to chin with a disturbed/concerned expression. They stand there, quiet for a moment.

**SHOULDER DEVIL:** (Takes a deep breath) Maybe he’s just sleeping and—

**SHOULDER ANGEL:** (Interrupts Devil as he says “and” with a furious stomp) He is not just sleeping! Why did you tell him it was okay to put all that garbage on his sandwich!? You know he has a heart condition!

**DEVIL:** Had a heart condition. Besides, it tasted good! I didn’t think it would kill him!

**ANGEL:** You had him drink five red bulls this morning! What in the— What did you think was going to happen?!

**DEVIL:** Had a heart condition. Besides, it tasted good! I didn’t think it would kill him!

**ANGEL:** You had him drink five red bulls this morning! What in the— What did you think was going to happen?!

**DEVIL:** Look, look. That was in the past. (Puts a hand on Angel’s shoulders) Right now, we have to worry about LOSING OUR JOBS! You realize what happens to shoulder people who end up getting their person killed? We’re through! We’ll never find work again!
ANGEL: (Smacks hands away) Well maybe that’s what we deserve then! You for letting Bob here kill himself! And me… me for… letting it happen… (Takes a step back and falls onto couch as he buries his face into his hands, sniffing in sadness) Oh, Bob… I’m so sorry… He had a date tonight too! He was gonna clean up the apartment… Make some food… And we ruined it…

(Devil looks down at Bob, then to Angel, then down to Bob again and squats down, poking his head a few times.)

ANGEL: (Slowly looks up from hands before jolting a bit in surprise and disgust.) W-What are you doing!?

DEVIL: Shut up a second, your voice is annoying and distracting. (Continues poking Bob’s head before giving it a slap, causing Bob’s body to jolt and shudder before slowly picking himself up while Devil mimes pulling him off of the floor.) Ta-daaa! Bim bam boom! Now he can go on his date and we don’t lose our jobs! Win-win, right? High five! (He offers Angel a high five, his hand hovering in the air for a moment while Angel looks between Devil and Bob in disgust. Bob blankly stares into the audience, his mouth slightly agape and his posture hunched over.)

ANGEL: This… T-This is wrong— This is disgusting! (Quickly raises from couch and roughly gestures at Bob.) You can’t just— D-Did you bring him back to life?

DEVIL: What? No, that’s stupid. His soul’s probably already been processed— No, I just reanimated his corpse!

(Bob and Devil are both facing Angel. Then Devil and Bob speak in unison, though Bob speaks in wavering monotone, as if trying to match Devil’s inflection.)

DEVIL: He’s basically a puppet. If the boss comes, he’ll see Bob walking and talking just fine! Oh, oh! And now we can eat whatever we want without consequence! It’s not like he can die twice, right?

(Both Devil and Bob end their talking with a casual shrug, though Bob is much more lethargic. Bob remains motionless as Devil puts a hand to chin and looks over to Bob. They no longer speak in unison.)

DEVIL: Okay, maybe I gotta practice a little bit.

ANGEL: Devil...

DEVIL: I mean it’s not like I’ve puppeted a body before.

ANGEL: Devil!

DEVIL: I wonder if I’ll be able to get the hang of moving his hips for after the date…

ANGEL: DEVIL!

DEVIL: (Lets out a loud groan and throws his head back before looking back at ANGEL.) Oh my God what is it? You are so annoying! Jesu—

ANGEL: I can’t let you do this. I have to tell the boss we killed Bob. (Starts for the door to exit the apartment.)

DEVIL: W-Wait! Ang— Stop— Come on… I’ll make him kill someone!

ANGEL: (Freezes before he can open the door as he slowly turns towards DEVIL) What?

DEVIL: Yeah… Y-Yeah! In the time it’ll take you to get up there, I’ll have Bob kill someone! And… And it’ll be your fault!

ANGEL: My fault!?

DEVIL: Well, I mean… If you stayed, then I wouldn’t use his body to kill someone… So it’s up to you, goody goody. You can go and tattle tale while I get some poor, innocent soul killed— Probably an orphan or something— Or you can stay here and make sure I don’t kill any orphans.

ANGEL: You’re a horrible person.

DEVIL: (Looks at ANGEL blankly and shrugs as he and BOB CART say in unison) That’s… kinda my job.

(BLACKOUT - END OF SCENE)
Scene 2

(The apartment is mostly cleaned up, save for a bag of chips on the couch and a few dirty dishes near the sink.)

ANGEL: (Waving hands as if he were controlling a puppet while Bob finishes cleaning the dishes.) There we go! Wouldn’t want to disrespect your body any further by having you wallow around in filth!

DEVIL: (Speaking in a sarcastic tone, standing in living room with arms crossed) Cool, awesome. Are we done cleaning now? (Quickly mimes yanking on a rope. Bob stumbles as if he were being pulled towards Devil, nearly falling over before going stiff and reaching between the couch cushions and producing a bundled up, fine shirt.) We have a date to get ready for after all! Go on Bobby boy, put on that shirt!

ANGEL: W-Wait shouldn’t he take off the shirt he has on n— Wait— You didn’t call off the date!?

DEVIL: (Looks over to Angel while one hand twirls its fingers around as Bob puts on the shirt) Huh? Why would I do that? I’ve— Bob’s been looking forward to this date for two weeks!

ANGEL: Because Bob is dead! W-What are you gonna do, have some poor girl come over and make out with a corpse?!

DEVIL: (Exchanges a look with Bob before they both look to Angel and shrug and speak in unison) Yeah? (No longer in sync with Bob. Devil quickly turns to Bob.) Oh man, you think he’s starting to smell or something? I can’t really tell— Where’s that cologne he bought, like, two years ago and never used?

ANGEL: Devil, this is messed up. We can’t just—

(There is a loud, powerful knocking at the door. Angel and Devil both shudder and freeze up in horror, already knowing who has arrived.)

ANGEL: I-I-is that—

DEVIL: SHIT! IT’S THE BOSS! WHERE’S THE COLOGNE-QUICK GET ME SOME— UH— CLEANER SPRAY! (Flails arms in puppeteering as Bob practically throws himself at the kitchen counter, smacking himself into it and falling to the ground before opening the cabinet, pulling out some cleaning spray, and sprays himself repeatedly.)

ANGEL: OH MY GOD! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

DEVIL: I HAVE TO GET THE SMELL OUT SOMEHOW! WE DON’T HAVE ANY COLOGNE!

(As both Angel and Devil panic, there is another knock at the door. Angel answers the door and screams in terror as he sees The Boss before slamming the door shut.)

DEVIL: WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!

ANGEL: (Breaking down, nearly in tears) I PANICKED OKAY I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO…

DEVIL: OH MY— I— Okay… Okay… Look, Angel.

(Gives Angel a slap across the face before putting his hands on Angel’s shoulders.) Hey. Look at me— Deep breaths, okay? We got this. (Makes a very audible, deep breath along with Angel as the two of them nod in assent before Devil throws open the door.) Ayyyy, Bossman! How’s it—

THE BOSS: Cut it, Devil. Why are you two still here on Earth? You were supposed to report to me and give a debrief on how your human died the instant he died.

(Explains everything to The Boss.)

THE BOSS: Cut it, Devil. Why are you two still here on Earth? You were supposed to report to me and give a debrief on how your human died the instant he died. (Walks in and stops, staring at Bob on the floor) What in the—

DEVIL: Died? W-What do you mean? Bob’s never been more alive! (With a hand behind his back that the audience can see, makes an exaggerated hand motion. Devil flings himself to his feet and stumbles towards the couch, falling onto it and his face landing in the bag of chips.) Bobby here is going on a date tonight!

THE BOSS: . . . Is he drunk or something? What’s wrong with him?
(Angel opens his mouth to speak, but Devil slaps him and shoves him aside before putting an arm around The Boss’s back and tries to confidently explain.)

DEVIL: Well you know h—

THE BOSS: Don’t touch me.

DEVIL: (His smile drops as he clears his throat and quickly pulls away from The Boss) S-Sorry, sir. Heh, but yeah Bob’s just a party ani—

THE BOSS: So why is it I got a form— Hold on, I brought it with me. (Pulls out a piece of paper from out of his suit and reads it as he speaks) Yeah, got a form here from processing. Says here they received a “Bob Cart’s” soul… He went through judgement… And was sent to Hell. (Looks up at Devil.)

ANGEL: (Lets out a whimper) Oh Bob… I’m so sorry… I should’ve done a better job… I should’ve made you donate to charity more or something…

THE BOSS: What was that?

DEVIL: Oh! Well, Angel here is just whining about how we— Uh— Bob here became a cultist! And sold his soul to Satan! Yup! That’s why his soul got processed! Still alive! Just uh… No soul!

THE BOSS: (Glances down to his paper with a raised brow with humdrum disbelief) Huh, that’s strange. They didn’t attach a Satanist addendum to the form. Says here he died from a heart attack.

DEVIL: Haha! Man, that’s strange! Isn’t that strange, Angel?!

(Lets out an exasperated breath as he falls onto the couch beside BOB CART, relieved to see that worked) That was a close one. Hehe, huh, Angel?

ANGEL: (Snaps out of his stupor and shakes his head) Devil… We can’t keep this up. He’s gonna find out the truth and we’ll be in even more trouble. Let’s just—

DEVIL: It’ll be fine, Angel. With all the work he has to do, you really think this is gonna be high on his priority list? Plus, if Bob’s in Hell, it’s not like he’s gonna be able to find Bob and ask him what happened. You realize how many people there are in Hell? A lot!

ANGEL: I wish he would catch us— I-I mean we’re about to set some nice girl up on a date with a corpse!

DEVIL: She’s not that nice. I mean, we—

(There is a knock at the door Devil and Angel exchange glances, then look to the door.)

DEVIL: Hell, is this a sitcom? I think that’s her.

ANGEL (As he speaks, Devil makes hand motions, puppeteering Bob’s body. Bob picks himself up, wipes his face, rolls his shoulders, and slowly makes for the door.) Devil, please. Just open the door and tell her the date’s off. Don’t do this to her, please. This puppeteering business is bad enough. Don’t make her a necrophile!

BOB CART: (Opens the door. He has a lazy smile on his face as he and Devil speak in unison) Hey, Jennifer! Good to see you!

JENNIFER: Hey, Bob! Oh, I’ve been looking forward to this since we met at the bar! (Happily walks inside and sets her purse down by Bob’s couch. Bob follows her for a moment before meandering to the kitchen and opening the fridge, digging around inside of it.)

ANGEL: The bar? Wait, Devil, is this that one girl who you said was really desperate?
DEVIL: That’s right! Jenny, here, has been single her entire life. Her parents died not too long ago, so she had to move out and find an apartment that she can barely afford to live in. She works a job where everyone hates each other and her! And her only friend that she’s had since high school died in a car accident! She’s perfect for Bob! No standards!

ANGEL: (Looks absolutely dumbfounded as he slowly looks between Devil and Jennifer as Bob goes to the couch with a bowl of sauce and another bag of chips) I… Devil, there comes a point where even you have to realize how wrong this is, right?

DEVIL: I think you’re missing the point of a shoulder devil, here. Look how happy she is! Someone’s actually paying attention to her! (Gestures to Bob and Jennifer.)

JENNIFER: So, Bob… I, uh… H-Heheh. Geez, I don’t really— Wait a minute… Why do you smell like Clorox?

BOB CART: (Devil sits beside Bob and puts an arm around his shoulder while Bob puts an arm around Jennifer’s shoulder. Both he and Devil look into Jennifer’s eyes with confident smiles and speak in unison) I just got done getting the place as clean as I could for our date. Here, try some salsa. I asked my grandma for her recipe.

ANGEL: That’s literally canned salsa that Bob bought at the dollar store a month ago.

JENNIFER: Oooh, really? (Reaches forward, grabs a chip, dips it into the salsa, and eats it. She hums as she chews, not impressed with the flavor. She looks to Bob, however, and smiles and she swallows.) Oh— Uh— That’s really good, yeah!

ANGEL: Okay, look, Devil. Just… Please don’t take this date too far, okay? Let’s just have them watch some TV or something. If they have to, they can kiss. Then she goes back home and leave it at that, okay?

DEVIL: (Groans) Oh my god, Angel, come on. Just what do you think I’m gonna do?

(BLACKOUT - END OF SCENE)

Scene 3 ______

(Bob and Jennifer are in the bedroom under the covers. Angel and Devil are in the living room in solemn silence, staring at the floor as they are both sat on the couch.)

ANGEL: (Gulps and shudders) Devil…

DEVIL: I know… I know… Look it was… It was kinda hot, right? I mean, she seemed to really enjoy—

ANGEL: NO!… No… Devil, that… That was too far… Even for you. That was disgusting.

DEVIL: Look, we made her night, right? I mean, that girl was—

ANGEL: Devil, no. You are not justifying that— The fact that you are trying to justify something means you know how wrong that was.

DEVIL: (Opens his mouth to say something but stops and lets out a sigh. As they share their moment, Jennifer wakes up and gently shakes Bob) Yeah, you’re probably right...

ANGEL: Can we tell the boss now? Please?

DEVIL: Yeah… Yeah, let’s go—

JENNIFER: (Lets out a shrill scream of terror. Angel and Devil jump up in surprise and quickly share a look before watching as Jennifer runs out of the bedroom with her phone to her ear) OH MY GOD!… Y-Yes, I— He’s dead!… The man— Bob! We were on a date and I woke up and he’s just dead! Where are we?! We’re, uh… Let me go outside and check; I forgot the address! (Hurries out of the apartment.)

DEVIL: (Both look at each other and speak in unison) Shit.

(BLACKOUT - END OF SCENE)
Scene Four

(The bedroom is occupied by Brody, Officer, Jennifer, Angel, and Devil. Brody is inspecting Bob’s body on the bed, the covers moved to the side. Jennifer’s makeup is running from her crying as Officer tries to comfort her.)

ANGEL: Devil… We’ve really messed up this time.

Getting Bob killed was bad enough, but… This is getting out of control.

DEVIL: Hey, look. Everything’s gonna be fine, alright?

So, we had a little necrophilia — so what?

ANGEL: (Jolts a bit in shock before getting very frustrated and raising voice) What the f— You— You were agreeing with me! That we should go tell the boss what happened!

DEVIL: (Shrugs) I changed my mind. I was just, like… in a state of shock or something after using Bob’s body like that, but I got over it.

ANGEL: How do you get over that!? You literally puppeteered a corpse and… did… things with a woman who thought he was alive!

DEVIL: Thanks for the synopsis. Now look, what’s the worst that could happen at this poi—

BRODY: (Pulls back from Bob’s body in realization before glaring to Jennifer) This man has been dead for nearly a day. Didn’t you say you were on a date with him last night?

JENNIFER: (Confused sniffling) W-What do you mean?

BRODY: Woman comes over for a date with a man. She has some sick corpse fetish and thinks she can get away with killing a man she thinks nobody will miss. You’re un—

JENNIFER: WHAT!? What the hell is wrong with you?! I wouldn’t kill Bob— And I wouldn’t— That’s disgusting!

BRODY: You’re damn right it’s disgusting. Now make this easy and put your hands behind your back. You’re under arrest for the murder of…

(Voice grows quiet as he speaks until he’s simply moving his mouth and handcuffing Jennifer, who mouths screaming to him and Officer that she is innocent. As the mute tragedy plays out, Angel and Devil speak)

ANGEL: What do we do?!

DEVIL: I don’t know! What do you mean?!

ANGEL: What do you mean what do I mean? What do we do about Jennifer?!

DEVIL: What— What about her?!

ANGEL: SHE’S GETTING HANDCUFFED, DEVIL! WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK I’M TALKING ABOUT?!

DEVIL: Angel, I don’t get what you’re trying to say here, and I do not appreciate your raising your voice at me. It’s very rude.

ANGEL: DEVIL!

DEVIL: Look, we can’t do anything, Angel! We can’t just screw with his body again, or we’d really get in trouble!

ANGEL: We’re already in trouble, you jackass! At least now we can get her out of trouble! (Shoves past Devil and grabs Bob’s shoulders, pulling him up out of the bed with frantic rage. Devil tries pulling Angel back)

DEVIL: Angel, stop it!

ANGEL: GET OFF OF ME! WE HAVE TO SA— AH— ah—... Oh no…
THE BOSS: Yes, you! How long do you think it takes to get me over here to take care of things!? Do you seriously think Devil could’ve killed someone in that time— Do you seriously think he WOULD? That would get him in more trouble! It’s your job to come to me about this stuff! And you can’t tell me that you weren’t able to stop him while he was using Bob’s body with that woman! Did you even try to stop Devil? Huh?

ANGEL: Well… I… I didn’t… physically try to stop him or anything, but…

THE BOSS: But nothing!

DEVIL: You’re in truuuubs… Well, I’ll be on my way so…

(Takes a step to walk off, but The Boss snatches the back of Devil’s shirt)

THE BOSS: And in the end… Yeah… You two are disgusting… But worst of all, you’re stupid.

(The Boss pulls Devil back and roughly presses Angel and Devil together side by side, shoulders touching)

Did you seriously think you’d get away with this? Really? I honestly want to know.

DEVIL: Yes? Maybe?

THE BOSS: You’re fired.

Both of you. I’d say report to the Big Man for punishment, but I guess I have to escort you like you’re a pair of preschoolers trying to eat glue and crayons.

DEVIL: Hey, look, Bob was like four-years-old, and it seemed like a good idea at the time, okay?

THE BOSS: (Stares in silence for a moment) You’re fired. Both of you. I’d say report to the Big Man for punishment, but I guess I have to escort you like you’re a pair of preschoolers trying to eat glue and crayons.

DEVIL: Hey, look, Bob was like four-years-old, and it seemed like a good idea at the time, okay?

THE BOSS: What?

DEVIL: (Plays dumb) What?

THE BOSS: Just shut up and get moving (Angrily shakes his head and shoves the two of them offstage, following close behind.)

(BLACKOUT
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67K0Y3nqNL8)

THE END
Mother Teresa
Jorge Palomarez
MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE:
THE APPLICATION OF PLASTIC BOTTLE BRICKS AS A CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL
Emily P. Crain

This research aims to address the issue of plastic pollution in the ocean, how it affects marine life, and what would be the best method of reusing the most plastic found in the ocean in the most efficient and reliable way. To answer this question, existing literature was examined to evaluate several methods of reusing plastic, including ocean walls, public art, and boats, to determine which method used the most plastic in a logical, applicable, and efficient way. Based on the criteria of cost, weight, flexibility, application, and transportation, Eco Bricks were the most successful use of plastic. Eco Bricks, concrete surrounding an empty plastic bottle in the shape of a brick, surpassed the compressive strength, weight, flexibility, and cost of production of the average masonry brick, making these bricks a safer, cheaper, and more reliable construction material. Eco Bricks can be used in a variety of ways, including walls, floors, ceilings, sidewalks, curbs, driveways, roads, medians, etc.; each project taking hundreds if not thousands of plastic bottles out of the ocean. Overall, Eco Bricks were determined to reduce the amount of plastic in the ocean while also supplying the needs of rapid urbanization. Further research may be conducted to analyze the effect of Eco Bricks on the construction business and to verify the long-term strength and durability properties of the bricks.
A Digital Afterlife: Social Media and Artificial Intelligence

Ethan Ferguson

This research analyzes the approach social media companies take regarding deceased users’ accounts to uncover the legal and ethical implications of what happens to a social media account when a person dies. In order to accomplish this, I conducted an analysis of the Terms of Service documents of major social media companies (FaceBook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, etc.) to find information regarding accounts after death and analyzed articles from scholars such as Jason Hollon, Bjorn Nansen, and Jed Brubaker to see what has already been said regarding property laws of digital assets. Findings demonstrate the ways that AI programs could take advantage of these accounts and how families of deceased users may forfeit their rights to digital assets. This research is important because few have considered what may happen to their profile after they pass away, and society needs to consider laws to protect abuse of these accounts.
Consider being a part of StarBursts 2021

Watch for the call for submission for poems, stories, essays, photography, design and visual art entries by LSC-Kingwood students in fall 2020 semester. Final publication decisions are made by a student and faculty committee.

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