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### Author

Rabe, Kristi Daune-Edwards

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ALT

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of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Kristi Daune-Edwards Rabe

December 2014

Thesis Committee:  
Professor Mark Haskell-Smith, Co-Chairperson  
Professor Andrew Winer, Co-Chairperson  
Professor Tod Goldberg

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2014

The Thesis of Kristi Daune-Edwards Rabe is approved:

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Committee Co-Chairperson

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Committee Co-Chairperson

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To my boys, I love you all.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Some Would Call it a Mess	1
The 90's Are Back	10
The Kid	11
Forward	33
Pancakes	41
Infection	49
Monday	66
God Is Dead	72
New User	86
I'm DONE with love...Page 4	88
O	90
Good Morning Thread	103
The Answer	106
Welcome to Consciousness	112

## Some Would Call it a Mess

When her face smacked against the sticky bark of the Christmas tree, shattering her Avon limited-edition snowman ornament, Irma noticed how the light in the room was familiar. She'd oughta known it would happen this way. That was the problem with her hyper-intuition; she never recognized it until after the fact. She was no clairvoyant. She was useless as a medium, a psychic, a cognitive seer of what was to come. *Premonitions ain't useful when you only recognize 'em in hind-sight.*

First, there was her fear of Christmas lights. She never understood the appeal of a blinking tandem of colors parading around windows and lining rooftops. There was something eerie about the warm glow of the lights in the cold air that made her feel as if she was having a bad memory in reverse. The introduction of the hanging strands when she was nine only made it worse. The faux icicles sucked out even the smallest amount of happiness she found in the colors. Every December she just counted the days for her neighborhood to recede into the darkness of January.

Then there was her mental image of domestic violence. Despite the fact that every TV movie about abusive relationships involved a certain amount of OCD and neurotic demands for cleanliness, she always thought of a picture full of clutter in a dimly lit room. She never really thought about the disparity between her idea of abuse and the more likely scenario of a pristine living room with track lighting. It wasn't until the exact moment she felt her body collide with a strand of lights that she happened to notice the



room looked like sepia rendition of a junk yard. She'd always known it would happen this way.

Some people would call it a holy mess. But, Irma wasn't a hoarder; she made clutter an art form. Intricate landscapes depicting months of her life strewn across the dining table. Papers, old cups, books, kid's drawings nuzzled against baskets filled with odd and ends, mounds of receipts, and the nail clippers she had been looking for all week. Being lazy about a mess wasn't exactly right. It just sort of evolved into beauty that would sit until Jim would have a melt down and break shit while yelling about never having a dinner at his Nana's table.

After he left for work, she would get the kids off to school, smoke a joint in the garage, and begin to relive the past few months by sifting the mess into piles. She would throw away Becca's forgotten fashion obsession, the must-have necklace that turned into a neon tangled mass of plastic tubing as well as Jimmy Jr's school shoes with a hole in the sole. But, she would hold Lilly's old stuffed elephant, Ellie, long enough to inhale its baby powder, peanut butter, and puke scent. In her head, she would have the conversations she should've had. Imagining how she would finally be able to talk to Becca about her blossoming teen attitude and bond with the woman who was emerging. Then, warning Jimmy Jr. again he couldn't destroy his shoes just because Mary Jean Walters had called them stupid and he wanted new ones. There was no yelling, no pleas for silence, no babysitter television cartoon buzzing in the background. In her mind, she could handle it all better. She would be a Mama she could be proud of, like her Mama.

Then she would get to the papers, by far the largest pile of shit on the table, and the argument she should've had with Jim would start unfolding in her head. Envisioning his smug face at the sight of a clean table, she would show him the pile of papers he left. It would fill two, maybe three, laundry baskets before she ripped it into pieces to throw out. She'd prove that the mess was mainly his. Did he not know that he could throw away junk mail? Or was he just missing the ability to take the twenty steps to the kitchen trash?

And they had dinners. Every night, they would eat at the Formica kitchen table, which was always clear because she always did the dishes after cooking and serving dinner. Cleaning all day wasn't equivalent to his job as a mechanic. So, while she scrubbed dishes, then wrangled kids into baths and then pajamas, he drank beer, watched Family Feud, and burped over the sound of the red buzzer.

Maybe if she spoke to Jim in the form of a survey he would listen. Name an item that gets women hot and bothered. A shredder. No. Wait. Someone who would actually *use* a shredder. Instead, she was stuck ripping bills into quarter size bits of confetti to prevent identity theft.

She hadn't done this at first, figuring if anyone really wanted her warped financial life they were welcome to it. But he hadn't liked that. Not at all. That was the first window to break, as Jimmy Jr's toy truck had been hurdled across the room after she shrugged off a babbling rant on the dangers of merely throwing away old credit card bills. Ripping the paper helped fuel her irritation until she could imagine all of the sharp, acidic comments she should've thrown back at him.

He'd said they weren't a real family because real families had dinner in a dining room on table set with china and said grace. Grace? If he ever so much as entered a church, the roof would probably fall in. And, his precious Nana was a wino who gave him the table while drunk, and then tried to take it back. They didn't talk for the last year of her life because of the stupid thing. *Why'd he want to relive that during dinner?* And china? Yeah, he was right. China would be nice to have. But, somebody had a habit of slamming dishes into the sink or the table if the steaks were under done, or overdone, or chicken because beef was too pricey that week. Hadn't he notice the plastic plates showed up around the third or fourth time he had a tantrum?

Real family? Why not, because he refused to propose? Because she didn't know if she would even say yes if he asked? Was it because they were livin' in sin? Or, was it because Becca was from when Irma was a teenager and didn't know you could get free condoms at the clinic in Lubbock? She came with the package. And, although he never said it, he resented that his kids had to share their Mama.

By the time she got out the lemon oil and shined that table, she'd be in a full rage. She'd buff the table and scoff while she thought of few more points to bring up. But, looking at the beauty of the wood with its inlaid floral oak center and Queen Ann legs she would see he was right, it was a nice table, and she'd vow to keep it clean.

She did always enjoy the hour it took to clear it. The whole process was cathartic. She'd place a jar with fresh wild flowers in the middle and feel centered. Plus, there was the added bonus that no one knew how little time it took. It should take hours to finish. But she was an artist, a master at the mess and the cleanup. So, on the mornings she

cleaned the table, she basically had the day off. For the remaining five hours, until she had to pick up Jimmy Jr. and Lilly, she could sit and watch cooking shows and get the munchies while dreaming of serving a Lobster Ravioli Carbonara knowing the closest dinner she could muster would be Tuna Helper and peas.

On this particular lazy Tuesday, she really should've been cleaning. The entire house resembled the table. There had been the cold shared around the family. Twice. And with Christmas shopping, parties, and school projects she hadn't really been picking up the way she should. Laundry still lay in baskets at the foot of the stairs and the empty boxes still sat near the back door waiting for Jim to take them to the shed. Toys were everywhere and the cat had ripped up Lilly's crepe paper reindeer. Christmas carnage had been stuffed in every corner and under the table where the breakfast dishes still sat.

But, the appeal of a lazy morning watching TV and chatting on her online bulletin board had more draw, more appeal than cleaning – even if Jim would be an asshole all night. Before, she'd just give him a quick blowjob and all would be forgiven. But, after Lilly BJ's didn't seem to hold the same appeal they once had - to either of them.

On the BB, she wasn't in charge of anything, there were no pressing chores or tasks or lists to get, buy, mend, or wash. She was just *MamaBear*. She could do as she pleased.

She always started with her longer threads. These general topics lasted months, years. Her favorite, The Cooking Thread, was filled with last night's accomplishments

from the kitchen. She rarely contributed to the food porn. Even her more fanciful dishes never compared to the duck fat roasted potatoes or saffron and mint braised chicken with Sicilian olive and chili relish.

Then she would eat a snack and peruse the Laugh You Lose Thread and the Weed Thread to laugh at silly videos and pictures of cats before catching up on how everyone was doing in the all-encompassing chat of the Pic Post Thread.

Only after all of that would she visit the shorter, daily threads that caught her attention.

<b>To Pixie Cut or Not to Pixie Cut?</b>	
<b>JuliepDrinkers</b>	<b>No, seriously that is my question. Irma?</b>
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<b>On you? No. LO fuckin' L</b>
<b>Samari 12</b>	<b>NEVER</b>
<b>HansRolo</b>	<b>Follow the lyrics of 12th Night, they always know best.</b>
<b>Tubular12</b>	<b>Didn't you just break up with your husband? <i>Get a divorce, get a new haircut.</i> Pfft, Don't be cliché</b>
<b>Dee12</b>	<b>Shut up Blake – Julie, Yes! Go for it. Wish I had the guts.</b>
<b>NYCSports</b>	<b>Only if you want to look stupid and never date. Guys don't go for it. They dream of long curly locks, not cuts that remind them of their best friend in 3rd grade.</b>
<b>Shit on a Stick</b>	<b>Do it!</b>
<b>BoobsMcgee</b>	<b>No No No</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>Has InSp seen this yet? And Dee... DON'T YOU DARE!</b>
<b>Shit on a Stick</b>	<b>I think you would be hawt with shorter hair AND you should change the color too.</b>
<b>InnerSpace</b>	<b>Yes, I saw the thread... JOHN. Your hair is already really short right?</b>
<b>Kimber</b>	<b>Do it, I need something new to laugh at.</b>
<b>BoobsMcGee</b>	<b>Blake's Alt Shut up, Like InSp doesn't know the exact length of each strand of her hair. *** Rolls Eyes</b>

<b>InnerSpace</b>	<p><i>[Quotes BoobsMcgee: Like InSp doesn't know the exact length of each strand of her hair. *** Rolls Eyes]</i></p> <p><b>You're right, Darling. I gather the hair from her brush AND measure it with a high power laser in order to know the exact length. But hey, I also find your old bras, fill them with pudding, and use them as bowls.</b></p>
<b>Shit on a Stick</b>	<b>***Inserts lyric from 12<sup>th</sup> Night.</b>
<b>MamaBear</b>	<p><b>If you think you will like it, you should do it. It'll be hard to grow out though. When the layers are distorted, it don't look very good. I know some tricks in that stage. So, If you do it and then grow it out message me and I can share. Also, remember a few things.</b></p> <p><b>~ It doesn't save that much time getting ready, you have to style it and it's tricky.</b></p> <p><b>~You must wear makeup every day. Or you look like a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boy.</b></p> <p><b>~The cut looks sloppy when not styled and trimmed.</b></p> <p><b>~It takes off tons of maintenance, cuts every three weeks and deep condition weekly.</b></p>
<b>JuliepDrinkers</b>	<b>Thanks Irma. I think I'm going to do it. If I sent you some sample cuts, would you tell me which one would look best on me?</b>

She liked when she could actually offer useful information. Everyone knew she had been a beautician; just not that it'd only been for a few months. They didn't know that her expert advice was only from what she had learned in school, not from the years of experience she allowed them to assume she had.

With Jim's award-winning personality, real life friends had become a memory and with personal time being a luxury no mother of three could afford the 12<sup>th</sup> Night Bulletin Board had become her social life.

She remembered seeing the band in concert when she was in high school. Howard, the guy she was dating at the time, was a huge fan. The concert had been exhilarating. The guitarist and bassist sang of pure love, of a joy that filled her with a sense of hope. The crowd's energy was uplifting, everyone dancing or singing along or both and they were genuinely nice. There wasn't the same raw, thrashing energy she knew from other punk and country music concerts; there was a synergy, a contagious hunger for everyone to participate.

But, the drummer was the real highlight. The way he beat a rhythm was magic. It was as if each time those sticks hit, the reverberation made was for the sole purpose of penetrating her body. It started in her hips; an uncontrollable motion that inched its way into every muscle. Without knowing a single song, her body welcomed the music as part of itself. As if it was always there, she caressed each beat, each chorus, each verse with the rest of the crowd.

Howard and Irma didn't last long but years later, she sat at her computer and looked up the band. She had just moved in with Jim. She was pregnant with Jimmy Jr., which meant she wasn't allowed to work. Not because the doctors were afraid of complications of her being on her feet all day cutting and styling peoples hair. Not because of the perm fumes or the acrylic nail dust that permeated the salon's air, but because Jim wouldn't allow it.

"No boy of mine is going to start his life being trapped in some foo-foo, sissy fucking merry salon all day. The boy might turn fag with all that girly shit being pumped into his developing brain," he said. It was around this time that Irma realized moving in

with Jim because she was pregnant might have been a mistake. When she had her own place, he was a doting boyfriend paying for everything and giving Becca gifts every time he came over. He lured her in with one personality then, after only two months of dating, she moved in with a completely different man.

She quit the salon and began her years of servitude as a housewife. Without a baby, this was a simple job. Becca was in school and gone for most of the day. She cleaned and organized the house each day within a few hours. Because daytime soaps never appealed to Irma, she found herself exploring the internet. It was nostalgia, she told herself. Her intentions for checking out the band's website had nothing to do with Howard, her problems with Jim, or loneliness. She just wanted to feel like she had at the concert. She wanted to believe again that life was joyous.

But, the BB was not joyous, quite the opposite in fact. She often wondered how such inspiring music could draw in so many assholes.

It was entertaining, though. It was like a soap opera, but a soap opera that was live and real and where the actors constantly made mistakes. There were the great plot lines of a soap - love triangles, mystery, and feuds - but without all the stupid shit like brain tumors and amnesia. She checked back each day and read for months before creating her own user name. She had her favorite BBers and when Dee replied to one of her posts, she felt like she had just met the Queen of England, Jane Austin, and Jennifer Aniston all in one. In an instant, she was hooked. She just turned a blind eye to the rude trolls and troublemakers and chatted.



## **THE 90'S ARE BACK: Twelfth Night Announces a Reunion World Tour**

Some of us actually miss the early 90's. The last decade of good music before boy bands, emo, and terrorists ruined everything. We trudge through our days listening to old CDs and hating the radio wistfully wishing for a time when MTV played music and bands actually played instruments.

Well, for those of us that can still imagine a time before iPods, Britney Spears, and reality TV there is something special glimmering in the distance. A throw back to a time before we worried about mortgage rate bubbles is coming. The beloved band that faded away with Netscape and Napster officially announced they are reuniting for a one time World Tour in June of 2008. While the band broke up in 2003, they haven't had any real success since '97 with the release of their multi-platinum, anthem of a generation, the unforgettable album *Bandaid*.

The tour will hit 12 large metropolitan areas in Europe next spring before beginning another 24-stop tour in North America for the summer ending with a final show in the city of sin and secrets, Las Vegas, Nevada. The tour, aptly entitled "Remembering in Retrograde," promises to hit all songs off the band's four-album discography as well as five songs from the unreleased album, *Date* – which was leaked during production in 2003.

Twelfth Night began, like much of the 90's greatest music, as a garage band turned local highlight in Phoenix, Arizona. An executive assistant of Five

Star label mogul, Bruce Covington, bought a CD at a show in a dive bar while on vacation. When she played it at work, she not only changed the lives of the trio she also changed the music of generation X, for the better.

The band's music has been characterized as a reggae and grunge mix. Blending the positive beat and soul of the Jamaican cultural phenomenon with the melancholy passion of grunge, it is punk rock without the grit.

While the exact reason for the bands sudden break up in 2003 has never been disclosed, some blame the leak of their final unreleased album. Others blame a turbulent love triangle between the band members. During a telephone interview, Jonas Peters – the drummer and arguably the heart of the band – refused to offer any illuminations on the subject, but said, "For a time, I deluded myself into thinking I could ignore I was a part of the band. But, I recently fell in love and it made me remember the happier moments of sharing my music with fans and I wanted that back."

While the lead singer and guitarist of the band, Grace Poulson, is the initiator of the entire tour, Peters stated he was "glad to agree when the offer was presented." Having just completed his circuit in the documentary film awards, he was primed for a break from his production company, Pandemic Films. "I am excited to concentrate on a more uplifting project."

*Tickets for the European leg of the tour go on sale February 12, 2008, with North American tickets following closely behind in March. Both Ms. Poulson and bassist Gianna Yandel could not be reached for comment.*

## The Kid

Wyatt was just about there. He could see her, completely undressed and unhooking her bra, her finger beckoning him while her teeth adorably bit her lower lip. He began reaching, an outstretched arm inches from touching the pale curve of her cleavage. He was going to touch her and that was just the beginning. Then the phone rang.

The first ring, he stayed in the dream, incorporating the sound into bizarre moans from her mouth. He thought it strange, but he wasn't going to give up those breasts just because her voice was suddenly a little abnormal. He wasn't proud.

The second ring, he couldn't stay with it any more. His subconscious lost to consciousness.

He answered on the third ring. "Hello?"

"Wyatt? It's Dee, have you seen the BB?"

"Fuck." He pushed the tower of soda cans on his nightstand and found his glasses before looking at the alarm clock. "It's 6:30 in the fucking morning Dee. I swear to God if this about the stupid tour I'm going to ban you."

"What? No, it's Irma. She posted something really strange and now won't pick up her phone."

"Irma?"

"Mama Bear. Just open the BB."

"Hang on." He threw off his blanket and sat up before stumbling over the mounds of clothes and shoes in his way. Wyatt crossed his room to the stupid, giant

desk in the attached den. His cousin, Grace, had decorated the room for a British lord, or something. He turned on the computer. "This better be good."

"What? Were you asleep?"

"It's 6:30 in the fucking morning, what do you think?" Wyatt opened Firefox on his first of three screens.

"I think you're a lazy little shit. Did you open it?"

"Yeah, is it on the first page?"

Dee didn't have to answer. It was the second thread.

<b>Is anyone even there?</b>	
<b>MamaBear</b>	I know it's the middle of the night. But, I was hoping someone would be on. I just need to chat. I'm sitting in the lobby of some Motel 6 with no idea of what I am going to do and as sad as this is, I have no one I can even call.
<b>MamaBear</b>	Sorry to complain. This is just a low point in my life.
<b>Shit on a Stick</b>	I'm here now. Are you still on? What's going on?
<b>Dee12</b>	Irma, I called you. Why aren't you answering? Call me!

Wyatt leaned back in his chair. "Huh, weird? So, what do you want me to do?"

"Can't you find the ISP address or whatever? See where it's posted from?"

"I'm not the CIA, Dee," he said. He started sniffing the empty soda cans and cups near his computer. His cottonmouth was always the worst first thing in the morning. "I only see *IP* addresses when someone is actually online."

"Is she?"

He opened up his control panel on the middle screen, "No."

“Dammit. Do you have more than one contact number for her?”

“I can’t give you her number, that’s confidential.”

“You’re not CIA, Wyatt,” she said while he started looking up Irma’s registration information on the last screen.

“Look, the number I have ends 8767.”

“That’s the number I have.”

There was silence on the line as if Dee expected him to solve the issue. Just because he held together the hellhole that was the Twelfth Night Bulletin Board, didn’t mean he could solve every member’s problems.

“It’s probably fine, you know how people get.”

“Irma doesn’t reveal her personal life, you know that. You didn’t even know her real name.”

“So?”

“Look, I’m worried about her. This isn’t like her.”

“Well, we’ll just have to wait. I bet she’ll get on when the sun actually comes up.”

“The sun is up, idiot.”

“I’m going back to bed.” He braced himself for an argument.

“Ok. Bye.”

He wasn’t expecting Dee to give up. He stared at the silent phone. The blank screen was more jarring than when it woke him up in the first place.

He looked at the member's online. Dee12 and Shit on a Stick, but that guy was always on. Some lurkers, but less than ten and they never posted. It was so early; the east coast crew wasn't even on. They wouldn't be done with their coffee and morning commutes for another twenty minutes. The place was dead.

Wyatt thought about laying back down, getting back to the dream. He looked longingly at his comforter, but knew it would be useless. He was up for the day. His mini-fridge was out of Redbull and only held one lonely caffeine-free Dad's root beer. The trek downstairs was necessary. Wyatt sniffed a shirt slung over the back of his chair. Although, it didn't really matter if he stunk, he was only going to make coffee. Opening it out wide in front of him, he realized it was his green closing tour tee. He forgot he had that one, must have been months since he last wore it.

No one in the house was awake. He clanged the coffee pot against dishes left in the sink. Grace insisted it was a valuable salvage from an old farmhouse in Maine. Wyatt was pretty sure she was duped into buying the piece of shit, single-bowl sink from someone with a flair for story.

If he was awake, there was no reason the rest of the house should sleep. When it seemed that the girls hadn't heard the dishes, he decided to fill a pitcher with ice - the metal one that clanged like a deranged wind chime when you filled it.

That worked. He heard Grace's footsteps above him. Better slice some lemons, make it look like he was trying to be sweet. Then he could even act hurt when she bitched about the noise.

“What the hell, Wyatt? It’s fucking the butt crack of dawn!” Grace was yelling as she came down the steps.

“There was an emergency on the BB. I fixed it, but I thought you would like your lemon water all ready when you woke up.” He held up a lemon and the knife.

“Fuck that place.” She grabbed an empty mug. “What’s the emergency? Are they like crashing the server because of the Grand Reunion Tour?” She flourished her arms like a ringmaster introducing ballet-dancing elephants.

“No, there still hasn’t been that much extra traffic.” Wyatt poured her some coffee.

“None?” Grace’s long black hair fell slightly across her eyes. She looked like she was actually going to cry.

“A few lurker accounts were on this morning. Usually they don’t start until the evening. So, maybe.” Wyatt put an arm around her deflated shoulders and handed her the creamer. “Don’t worry. It hasn’t even been a week since the article was printed.”

“True, most people don’t read their entire Rolling Stone cover to cover right away. We’re on what like the thirty-fourth page, right?” Grace sat in the chair.

“Twelfth and thirteenth page spread with your picture on the facing page – just as you ordered it.” Wyatt poured her some water and placed it on the table along with the copy of Rolling Stone.

“Then what could possibly be the emergency?”

“Oh, nothing.” Wyatt didn’t want to go further into that conversation. He knew better than to bring up the BB with Grace. It always ended in her ranting about them stealing the demos from her email and threats of shutting the whole thing down.

“No, it can’t be nothing. Did someone on the BB read about the tour? Are they all a flutter with excitement?”

“A member is in some sort of trouble. Dee, you remember Dee right?”

Grace had always liked Dee. Maybe mentioning her would stop the rant. He waited for a response, but Grace just drank her coffee. With her free hand, she rolled the air to fast-forward the conversation.

“Anyway, she called and wanted to know if I could find out where the member was posting from because-”

“Oh my God.” Grace spit her coffee back into her cup. “You’re telling me I am awake because of trivial online drama?”

“No, it could be serious...”

“It’s bullshit, petty garbage.”

Wyatt didn’t say a word. Arguing with her at this point would only exacerbate her opinion of the BB’s vileness.

“You want to know why you’ve never been laid?” Her voice was high, she was about to make a point. “My dear little cousin, while you are a geek - I’ll admit it. It isn’t the reason you don’t attract women. No, many men rock the whole skinny,

loser-look. The reason you can't find love is no girl wants to be with a guy that lives his life on an online rendition of a junior high locker room."

Wyatt knew where the conversation was heading. Grace was in the mood to offer her life saving wisdom. Problem was it never amounted to more than cliché hooks used in her songs. "Love is only something you can recognize after you see it in yourself."

Wyatt already knew why he'd never had sex and it had nothing to do with the fact that his social life revolved around the BB. The reason was sleeping above him.

Gianna Yandel. The perfect woman and the reason he was still a virgin at twenty-five. She had always been the pinnacle of femininity to him and no other girl really seemed worth the trouble. Not that he really talked to many girls. Usually, he only talked to confused groupies Grace brought home. As a hopeless romantic, and introvert, he never tried to make a move on them. Who wanted to have sex with someone using you to get to a semi-famous person? It would be like paying for it.

He poured a cup of coffee and tried to ignore Grace's lecture on love and self-esteem as well as their correlation between hermit tendencies and lack of real social interaction.

Let her think that he stuck around because he wanted to keep the BB going - that he hated himself and was too shy to ask a girl on a date. It was better than her knowing the truth. Better than her finding out he always hated her music, but stayed around to be near Gianna.



It wasn't as if he was taking advantage of his cousin's wealth. The girls would never survive without him. He kept the house going, clean, fed. He did all the shopping, cleaning, laundry, and cooking. Yeah, there were maids that came in every Tuesday and Friday, but really they only did the deep cleaning. The chef only came out for parties and the laundry place didn't put away the clothes. He had to do that.

He gladly mopped up after the late night beer pong parties and the puke from someone not knowing their limit but still wanting to party with a rock star has-been. At least the morning after was all his. Gianna would stumble down the stairs and it would be just the two of them for a few hours while they ate breakfast. That was his job. That's why he stayed. Fuck the BB.

"Are you even listening to me?" Grace began thumbing through the Rolling Stone.

"Sure." He got her coffee cup and started rinsing last night's dishes.

"What the fuck?"

"What?"

"I mean how in the fuck?" Grace threw down the magazine, the pitch of her voice spiking on the *fuck* and accentuating the magazine's thud against the tile. "I cannot believe the..." She began pacing. "Arguably the heart of the band? I bet he said that. That low life prick... mother fucking piece of shit."

"What? I thought it was a great article?"

"Did they try to call?" She got up into Wyatt's face.

“No?”

“That’s right. They didn’t even try to contact me. How in the freakin’ hell can they say.” She went back to the magazine, picked it up, and found the page. “That I ‘could not be reached for comment?’” She traced the line as she read it before looking up. “They didn’t even try? Don’t they have to try?” She shoved the magazine into Wyatt’s arms.

“I don’t know, I guess.”

“You guess? You guess. Shouldn’t you know these things?”

“Guess the article isn’t great.” Gianna was standing in the doorway to the kitchen. She was wearing the silk embroidered robe. The emerald one that made her gray eyes brighten to more pale blue in color. Unlike Grace, she always looked perfect in the mornings. Her pixie bleached hair seemed to always fall perfectly on her head. In the seven years he had been living with her, he had never seen it disheveled – not even when she puked in his laundry basket or stayed out all night and came home from some random guy’s place.

“I thought it was okay,” was all Wyatt could muster.

Gianna took the magazine from him. “That’s what you get for thinking’ kid.”

Kid. That is all he would ever be to Gianna. The kid that stuffed envelopes with the band’s newsletters in the summers before the internet.

Gianna read the article while Wyatt calmed Grace and poured her some more water. He almost had her settled then Gianna said, “A love triangle, that’s rich. As if I would ever sleep with that loser.”

Grace started again. "How could they possibly know about that?"

"Look, you were the one that made the move on him, not me." Gianna threw the magazine onto Grace's lap. "It's not that far off, you quit the week after he refused your ass." Grace went silent and glowered at Gianna, mouth agape.

"Come on, it isn't that bad of an article. It did give you credit for the tour and it was all really positive about the music itself." Wyatt said.

"The kid's right. It's not a bad article. Not bad enough to wake me up this early, anyway."

The kid. The kid cousin of her best friend. He would always just be the kid. He was only a few years younger than the pair, but when you meet a guy before his voice changed and he grew hair in his pits – that's the image stuck in your head. The kid, not the man.

"The kid," Wyatt said. "That's it. The kid."

"What?" Gianna asked.

Wyatt didn't answer. He ran up the stairs two at a time and sat down at his desk. He typed frantically then picked up the phone.

She answered on the third ring.

"Hey, you remember last summer I banned everyone that was in on that poll thread about when I would lose my virginity."

Dee laughed. "You called me to reminisce about great threads you ruin?"

“No, you remember MamaBear,” he shook his head. “Irma. She was one of the people that got banned and then she created an ALT so she could still chat. Only when I caught her, she said it was really her daughter Becca.”

“Vaguely.”

“Well, I just checked. She used Becca’s name and contact info.” There was silence on the line. Did he really have to spell this out for her? “You want me to call the number? Maybe it’s real.”

Within forty-five minutes, thirty-five texts, and eight phone calls it was all settled. First, Wyatt called Becca and she didn’t answer. He then texted her and said he was a friend of her mom’s and needed to speak with her. Then Irma called him, he called Dee with the number, and the two women talked. Then Dee texted Wyatt and asked if he would be willing to give Irma a place to crash and some money. He asked how much money because he wasn’t the rich one, that was his cousin. She told she would send him money to give to Irma. Then Irma would drive up to Dee in California the next day. There was more back and forth about the logistics and cash before she finally called him.

“Look, she’s in real trouble and has less than a few hundred bucks on her.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“That’s her business to tell you, if she wants.”

“Grace is not going to let her stay here. Even if I said I was having a three-way, she’s not going for it.”

“God, gross. Becca is thirteen. Plus, there’s the little ones.”

“Little ones? That seals it, they can’t stay here.”

“Get them a hotel then, I’ll Pay Pal you like \$500 extra. They’re in Texas, so they should reach Phoenix by midnight.”

“Fine.”

Wyatt then had to call a hotel, but it didn’t have a pool. The kids would want a pool. He called a second hotel. It was pricier, but it had a pool. Problem was it had no late check-in. He would have to go over at 4:00 and check them in himself. He texted Dee to let her know.

“Pool?” She texted, “make it two nights so the kids can rest up.”

Finally, the last call. Two nights in Phoenix, all set and he was done for the day. It was more than he usually did in a week and he was going on about three hours of sleep, no less. He lay down and thought about trying to sleep, but his mind kept replaying Dee’s voice. *She’s in real trouble.*

What kind of trouble could a housewife from Texas be in? Did she murder someone? Hit and run in a minivan? Maybe Becca was pregnant and Dee was going to take the baby? His mind coiled around every made for TV movie scenario he could think of until he got up and went to the computer.

<b>Is anyone even there?</b>	
<b>MamaBear</b>	I know it’s the middle of the night, but I was hoping someone would be on. I just need to chat. I’m sitting in the lobby of some Motel 6 with no idea of what I am going to do and as sad as this is, I have no one I can even call.

<b>MamaBear</b>	Sorry to complain. This is just a low point in my life.
<b>Shit on a Stick</b>	I'm here now. Are you still on? What's going on?
<b>Dee12</b>	Irma, I called you. Why aren't you answering? Call me!
<b>Tubular12</b>	Oh no, I'm in trouble. What should I do? Oh, I know. Let me go to the lobby of the cheap redneck hotel I live in and get on the BB. Christ, if you don't have anyone to call. That thought process right there might be the reason.
<b>Samari</b>	STEP AWAY FROM THE COMPUTER.
<b>MorningBreeze</b>	Oh honey, I wish I could have been up to help you. I pm'd my number, but Dee knows it too, maybe we can all chat this afternoon.
<b>DocHoliday</b>	Jesus Blake, you are such an ass. Leave the poor woman alone, she probably just couldn't get the store clerk to give her booze because all she had was food stamps.
<b>Shit on a Stick</b>	Mama Bear, I hope to God you don't listen to these idiots. I PM'd you my number. You can always call me.
<b>Dee12</b>	God you people make me want to quit the BB.

That was about right. He wasn't even that surprised. It got worse and Wyatt knew it would roll into one giant turd fest once the west coast morning crew got wind of the thread. He deleted it. He thought about banning Blake, but he would just use one of his thirty-seven ALTs and post anyway.

Half-heartedly he checked the daily threads. He really didn't ban that much anymore; he had given up after the massive kill-off-summer of '06, where he banned people for using a font color he didn't like. Still, every day he would sit at the desk, read all the posts, and participate as the likeable virgin, Jedi. He liked to switch it up though. His Administration handle logged into the left most screen and Jedi on the far right. One day was so slow, he even argued with himself for a good hour before banning Jedi for a week.

As much as he bitched about the trolls, he wasn't completely innocent. On occasion, he could be a bit harsh, even rude. All right, he was an ass at times. But, that was the BB. It just kind of allowed the asshole more room to stretch.

After a bit, he found himself gravitating to posts that Irma had made. He never really noticed her. She was more filler than BBer, in his mind. Her profile showed that she rarely created threads, never added to conversations unless asked directly. She had 2,587 posts and joined in 2000. She was a one-post-a-day filler. Justification, she wasn't that big of a deal. Any BBer would have had the same reaction and filler wasn't a put down, necessarily. It just meant they weren't intricately woven into the community. They were necessary parts that had their space, but they weren't important.

Her sign on times were consistent - afternoons, lunch break hour for the Central Time Zone. There was the occasional late night entry, but that was rare and usually only in the weed thread. Maybe she got caught selling weed. He went through her posting history, trying to figure out who exactly this MamaBear was and what kind of trouble she could be in. Then he found a thread she actually created a month back.

<b>Can everyone just post a Good Morning in here?</b>	
<b>MamaBear</b>	I had a horrid dream that one of y'all died. I want to be sure everyone is okay.
<b>MamaBear</b>	Jokes and bashing' would work too. I just want to make sure we're all here.
<b>Shit on a Stick</b>	I'm here, but the shit I just took didn't make it.

<b>DocHoliday</b>	God, I hope it was Samari, that guy needs to get the hell off the BB
<b>BreezyMorning</b>	Was it me? That creeps me out! I don't like people having dreams about me when I haven't even met them.
<b>MamaBear</b>	I don't want an uproar. But I'm a little crept out myself. Ive been known to have dreams that actually happen, but only when they're really - real. And this one woke me up in full on tears.
<b>Jedi</b>	A good morning in here
<b>Dee12</b>	Good Morning, Mama Bear ☺ All of us are here.
<b>BoobsMcGee</b>	I don't think you can just post this shit and then not say who it was! It seems like attention seeking pandering to me. ****Rolls Eyes.
<b>MamaBear</b>	Think what you want Jan, the person already posted. I'm okay to leave the BB for the day.
<b>Juliepdrinker</b>	[Quote: <i>BreezyMorning</i> "Was it me? That creeps me out!"] No see, Boobs, this is an attention-seeking whore.

It was odd, but he barely even remembered the thread when he thought about it. She wasn't exactly a nut job like some other lurkers coming in and spouting prophecy. Plus, it was endearing that she actually woke herself up crying. She was really invested in this stupid place. Suddenly, filler seemed a bit rude.

As he read her posts that spanned seven years, he started to understand Dee's concern. It didn't seem like her to post about problems. He also saw their friendship forming. They had been pregnant at the same time. Their daughters were only a few weeks apart. While there were no pictures of Irma anywhere on the BB, there was one of her three kids when the littlest, Lily, was born. What he assumed was a much younger Becca cradled a bundle of pink blankets while smiling at the camera and a toddler boy made a silly face.



He read every single post she had made and she was never a douche or an idiot. She even had her moments, real good lines of advice and not just rehashed song lyrics like some idiots. Like when the king douche, InnerSpace, couldn't decide if he should take the really great job in Tulsa or the mediocre job in Miami, but was keeping both firms on standby until he figured it out - she offered exactly what Wyatt had been thinking. Only, she said it better.

<b>Mama Bear</b>	<b>Shit or go eat some prunes, 'cause, honey someone else needs one of those porta-potties.</b>
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Really, overall, she seemed like a pretty decent person and he felt like an ass for only knowing about one of her kids, when she obviously had three and posted about them all the time. He felt guilty for barely knowing that MamaBear was a BBer when Dee yelled it at him this morning. He was a dick because the only thing he could remember about her was she created an ALT once and pissed him off - and if her name hadn't inferred parenthood, he doubted he would even have remembered that fact.

"You'd better be sneaking' porn on that computer," Gianna said from his doorway.

"Huh?" Why couldn't he formulate sentences around her?

"You've been up here all morning and well, even if we forgo the fact that we had to eat cereal for breakfast, you're about an hour late for lunch." She walked towards him picking up a couple of shirts on the way. "God kid, this place is a crap festival."

“Yeah,” he looked around and shrugged. “I guess I haven’t really been able to clean much. Sorry about lunch, I’ll order something from Pita Jungle. Is she really upset?”

“She’s been asleep for hours. I thought you were too, but then I heard you laughing.”

“Just BB stuff.”

“You know kid,” She pushed some clothes off the bed and sat. “You should get out a little more.”

Wyatt started to pick up the laundry around the room. “You sound like Grace.”

“Well, maybe this one time, she actually has a point. You’ve been in a funk for a while. I mean, I’m kind of getting sick of take out and we haven’t had breakfast together for like a year.”

Had it been that long? “I guess.”

“When was the last time you shaved? Got a haircut? Plus, this room. Good Lord, it smells like the inside of a roadie’s duffle bag.”

“Well, I’ve been seeing someone.” He lied. Watching for any signs of jealousy, maybe a subtle eye twitch or lip quiver, he waited to hear her response.

“Online?”

“She’s coming tonight. I’m getting a hotel room over in Gilbert.” He added dramatics to see if he could get the response he hoped for, dreamed of every night.

There was no disappointment - only a large grin that filled her entire, beautiful face and a slap on the back.

“Way to go kid.”

She told him to take the day off; she would explain it to Grace. He found himself wandering around the streets of Phoenix trying to find something to do until check in. He had really fucked himself into a corner on this one. He decided to eat a burger because he couldn't eat fast food with the girls around. Then suddenly, his outfit smelled like a duffle bag. He walked across the mall to Old Navy and bought an outfit that didn't look like he had just bought a new outfit. He didn't want Irma to think he went shopping for her.

In the dressing room, the outfit was too nice for his mop of black hair. It had been eight months since he had a haircut. Maybe, the girls were right – he'd given up after New Year's Eve and the lean incident.

He never made a move on Gianna. She was above that just as all other girls were somehow below it. That night, everyone but Gianna and Wyatt were passed out. They sat on the back patio playing slapjack. The loser was taking shots every time the deck finished.

“Booya,” Gianna said as she slapped the Jack of Hearts. She did a little shimmy dance in the chair and laughed. “Your shot, loser.”

Wyatt took his shot and shuffled the deck. That was the real Gianna, dancing in her chair and talking about how the lampshade Grace bought at a flea market in

London would really make a better hat. “Maybe, it actually is a hat?” She let her beautiful eyes go wide in fake shock, before laughing at her own joke. “Mind blown.”

Most of the time she played the blasé rock star - afraid to let the socially awkward weirdo out. “Go again?” Wyatt asked.

He sucked and after the third shot in a row, Gianna took pity on him and took the shot for him. He watched as she took it straight, with no chaser. He reveled in the way her delicate chin cast a shadow on her long, thin neck when she looked up at the night sky. Then, she looked straight at him with that smile – the look of accomplishment that dared him to take a shot anyway.

He still didn’t know why he had done it. The silent invitation was obviously not meant for anything more than another shot. He couldn’t resist that it might be for a kiss. He leaned towards her before...

“Don’t Kid.” She got up and went inside. They never mentioned it again.

He chose a haircut from a magazine, slight fauxhawk. The guy in the picture wore glasses and seemed like one of those guys that rocked the dweeb look. He got a shave and still had an hour before he could check them in. So, he stopped in a used bookstore, thinking that maybe he should take up reading or something. Then he could stay downstairs and be around Gianna more, get away from the BB.

Towards the back of the store, there stood a Christmas tree with handmade macaroni and Popsicle stick ornaments. It was a week until Christmas. The poor kids were on the lam a week before Christmas. How could he not have thought of

this? He was so worried about Gianna's lack of envy and his own lack of empathy towards MamaBear he hadn't even considered what the little kids were going through.

"Excuse me? Do you have any children's books?" He asked the lady behind the counter before buying a large assortment of cartoon-filled books about animals, princesses, and adventures on the high seas as well as a few novels with tees in front of locker-filled hallways on the cover.

He drove to the hotel and thought how they would probably need some swimsuits. If Irma was really in that much trouble, she might not have packed. Luckily, next to the hotel there was a Target. He bought each kid a hundred-dollar gift card, some healthy snacks, and some Christmas decorations before heading over to check in.

They arrived just after 1:00 in the morning. Wyatt had fallen asleep, but jumped awake at the text from Becca. He responded with directions to the right elevator and the room number before opening the door and waiting in the hall. He paced and practiced his smile. He folded his arms, but decided that made him look impatient. So, he leaned against a side table. That was too GQ. Waiting in the doorway seemed like he wanted something inside.

When MamaBear and her little crew started down the hall, he was standing in the middle, stunned. He expected an old lady in a southern muumuu, but Irma was a young brunette in tight skinny jeans and a wrinkled button up. She rocked the

disheveled look, even with her black eye and swollen lip. However, her kids looked terrible. Becca, curvier than her mother, had a round face with eyes blood shot and hair in what he supposed was intended to be a bun while her hand pulled a young boy behind her who sobbed uncontrollably through sleep shut eyes. The baby was asleep in her mother's arms. Her small body wrapped around Irma's in grip that would put an octopus to shame.

"Becca, honey, get the babies into bed. I want to talk to, um," she paused, blushed, and then finally said "Jedi."

The girl moaned, but obeyed.

"I want you to know I will pay you back somehow for your time. It all means so much. You just don't understand. I want to... I need..." She looked down and kicked at the baseboard. "It's funny, you know. I had this whole dumb speech planned. I thought about how y'all never even met me and you giving up so much to help my babies and me." Her accent was adorable and suddenly all the things he read that morning came to life. "I had a mind to be all eloquent as if that would be enough. But, it all seems sillier than dog with a bowl of yarn, now"

Becca stuck her head out, "Ma, you got to see this."

Inside Wyatt had created a wonderland where Christmas threw up. He wrapped all the books and gift cards and placed them in crevices like Easter eggs for the kids to find. With the extra paper, he wrapped the pictures like he saw BoobsMcGee do each year. Once he started decorating, he couldn't stop. Four more trips to Target later, he had three small trees in the room each decorated with

different colored balls and beads. Cheap plastic garlands were draped and tapped in every door way and a giant blow up snowman kept watch at the window.

“I don’t know what to say.” She was tearing up. She looked at him in a way he had never been thanked before.

Wyatt simply held out his hand and smiled. “Irma, I’m Wyatt. It’s nice to meet you.”

## Forward

That Tuesday afternoon, before Irma drove half way across the country, her kids had been ecstatic to see the clean table. They set up a homework station, complete with crayons, scissors, and glue as soon as they got home with none of the usual pleas for outside time or cartoons. Even Lilly, whose homework consisted of coloring a picture of a xylophone and a giant X, insisted she wanted to work alone at the pretty table.

Irma used the quiet to go through the receipts. Usually, she just put them in a shoebox and told Jim she had filed them properly. Then every few months she threw out one of the older boxes, without even glancing at its contents. She could actually file this time, maybe work it into her table clearing routine instead of being petrified that Jim would ask for the receipt to some old car part he needed to exchange.

There were mostly receipts for his daily lotto scratchers and cigarettes. While she tossed a few gas receipts, anything else over \$50 she kept. She just glanced at totals. The smaller stuff couldn't be worth the work to exchange it. By the time that was done, the excitement over the newly cleaned table was gone. Lilly was whining about her colors not working and Jimmy Jr. was yelling about needing to concentrate.

Nick Jr. to the rescue. A large blue cartoon dog searched for paw marks and Blue's Clues and allowed Irma to finish the receipts. She quickly glanced at each,



started alphabetizing them, and planned to sort them by value. But, one receipt stopped all of those intentions.

Victoria's Secret for \$68.73. She read the first item:

66 77524 06628| PNK MESH THONG...\$9.50

*Ten bucks for a pair of holey panties. They can't be serious.* Irma was livid that he would spend that much on shit he knew she hated wearing. He'd give her that shit and call it *her* Christmas present. But, then she read the next item.

66 67522 17540| 32DD PINK BDY BRA...\$38.99

That bra would be too large to fit on her head let alone her tits. The last item a suspect,

66 52754 58795| VNLLA LNE BDYWSH ...\$15.00

made it official. Anything vanilla scented made her gag. When she was pregnant with Lilly, she drank a bad milkshake and was sick for eight days. The taste and smell of anything resembling vanilla caused her stomach to churn and lurch away from the possibility of reliving that week.

Her first thought was one of relief. Jim was cheating and that was a perfect out. She actually smiled for a moment while staring at the final paw, the final clue on the screen. The show's host would draw the mailbox and instruct Lilly on how she could draw the same in her handy dandy notebook. Then he would compile all three clues and ask, "What does Blue want to do today?"

Her moment of relief was gone. What did she want to do? What could she do? She had no money, no job. She had a beat up Chevy Astro sitting in the driveway, but

she had nowhere she could drive it to. Her parents were dead. Her sister was off in Florida somewhere - they hadn't talked in years.

There was the \$230 in cash stored in her tampon box upstairs. She had been getting \$5 cash back all year when she went grocery shopping to buy the useless dick a toolbox from Sears for Christmas. How far could \$230 take her?

Becca arrived home within a few minutes, slamming the door. Her eyes were soggy, bulbous and redder than the devil's ass. "I don't want to talk about it." She threw her pack on the table, and ran upstairs.

Irma barely acknowledged her arrival. Somehow, she floated into the kitchen and ordered a pizza from Gianni's. She dumped the receipts all across the table, looking for any other clue, a sign of what to do. Then she went upstairs and grabbed the money from the tampon box. She counted it twice. She could fill up with the gas card before Jim even knew she was gone. Still, with feeding three kids, \$230 was not going to get them from Texas to Florida in the Astro getting a mere fifteen miles to each gallon of overpriced gas.

"I need a tampon." Becca was at the door. Irma handed her the box without looking up. "Woah, where'd you get all that cash."

"Never you mind, just go set the table for dinner." Irma still didn't look up.

"Dinner? You cooked already."

"Ordered a pizza."

"Pizza? Ma do you know how fattenin' that is? It's like 4000 calories a slice!"

“Go set the fuckin’, God damn table, Rebecca.” Irma never swore at the kids. She yelled, sure, what mother had never lost her cool? But, she had never taken the Lord’s name in vain, never so much as said crap in front of her kids.

Becca started crying again and ran down the stairs. Irma didn’t have the energy to run after her. It wasn’t until she heard the clanking of dishes being thrown on the table that she started to cry.

Turning on the shower to mask her sobs, she curled up next to the door and shook with tears. She was trapped, not even able to cry aloud that her lousy boyfriend had suddenly become a boob man. Steam trundled into the corners near the mirror. In the reflection, Irma watched the slow spiral and could almost imagine it was smoke from a fire or car exhaust. She imagined falling into the softness of it being dangerous, deadly. She would never really want to die like that. Still, these wispy thoughts had an appeal. A hazy daydream that didn’t mean anything, but it offered a way out. She began to calm down but sat there until she was composed enough to answer the doorbell, pay the delivery gal, and apologize to Becca who was having none of it and sulked all evening.

This pissed the fuck out of Irma. The little bitch didn’t know how good she had it. She wished her problems maxed out with whom Bobby Dotterman was asking to the New Year’s social. So, instead of trying to defuse the tension, she sulked back. She yelled at the younger ones when they fought over the bubble gum toothpaste. She made Becca do her homework on the table, already on its way to another mess.

Irma snuck another joint in the garage - evening highs being only for emergencies. She didn't even clean up the Pizza boxes. Jim still wasn't home, Becca was grounded after swearing in a mutual yelling match, and the little ones were so confused they put themselves to bed. And there they slept, until Mama got thrown into the tree.

She should've remembered her fears about Christmas lights when Jim stumbled in drunk and fell on top of her while she slept on the couch under the old afghan her mother had made her. If she had just remembered how they made her feel like someone was walking on her grave she would of turned away. She could have ignored Jim's yelling. She could have avoided the whole mess and just gone upstairs to bed.

But, she was too upset, focused only on his broken promises of sober driving and never fucking another woman, to notice the lighting was just right. She should have stopped when he tripped on the boxes by the door and started ranting about the mess. She should have left it be when he irrationally started throwing pizza boxes, and asking what in the hell she did all day.

"The table, I cleaned the table and found your receipt," she looked at the dining room and realized it was hard to tell now. "It was all clean." Exactly the wrong thing to say and he backhanded her in the middle of the kitchen. By the time she realized she should've walked away, it was too late. Jim stumbled after her as she escaped to the front room. He pushed lightly at first, like he didn't really want to

hurt her. As if he was in one of those dreams, where you were madder than a bobcat in a piss fire and you scream and hit at someone while they just smile. Then, Jim tripped over Lilly's backpack and shit got real.

She didn't feel the first punch, but the second one knocked her on her ass. When she got up, he shoved again - this time with gusto. She fell into the tree feeling somewhat numb, even a little sad. It was over - really over.

Becca came down somewhere in the fight and had tried to get Jim off Irma, but when he turned and went after her daughter, Irma yelled, "Get to the van!"

Becca grabbed the keys and ran up the stairs. Irma's keys were always hung on a little dog tail hook by the door, the only thing that ever seemed to stay put. Irma'd always wondered why she was so neurotic about the keys and purse being by the front door at all times. Now she knew.

Jim was still after Becca, but his feet kept hitting the stairs and he fell on his face every other step. It was only a second, a blink, but suddenly he had ahold of Becca's ankles. Irma sprang up and was up the stairs before Becca could scream. She dove onto his back and pressed her fingers into his eyes. "Becca, go down the back steps."

Becca ran, forgetting Lilly and Jimmy Jr. huddled in his bedroom door crying. Jim fell and rolled onto his back, gasping for breath. "Fine, go. See if I care. I'll just find you anyway."

Irma grabbed the little ones and rushed them down the back stairs. "Go to Becca in the van." She smiled at her babies, trying to create some sort of assurance.

“Mama will meet you there.” She went back to the front stairs and stepped over Jim. His arm made a gesture as if it was going to grab her, but it was half-hearted at best. She grabbed her purse and slowly walked out to the van as if she had decided to take a late night stroll, a midnight drive into town.

In the car, she still wasn't even going to leave. She just figured she had the only key and he would give up and sleep it off. The torment of his guilt was too much for that, she guessed, because he didn't give up.

Quite the opposite.

He ran out the door in his boxers, having stripped at some point, and began kicking and banging on the van so hard that Irma was sure there were new dents to match the older ones. The little ones were screaming, Becca was trying to get her cell phone to work, and Irma sat in the driver's seat calmly fumbling with her keys.

“Mama, just go.”

But, she was hypnotized by Jim's face; it was all contorted and red demanding to be let into the van. It was a lot like a Halloween bobble head. Like some vampire with spit foamed at the edges instead of blood. Old beer and probably some puke were spraying the window as she just calmly looked and knew. It all made sense and she was calm.

There was a disconnect from the air around her that made her feel like she was somewhere else. She slowly blinked a few times as his face bobbed in front of her window. He bent over and she wondered if he was passing out. But, when he stood back up he had a rock and he pulled his fist back, like a pitcher in slow motion.

It wasn't until the glass of her window shattered that she actually got that the whole thing was really happening. The sound matched her Avon ornament and she snapped back into panic.

Jim reached into the van and tried to choke Irma. His bloody, intoxicated hands couldn't get a proper grip when she dipped away from his arms. The keys were in the ignition, but it wouldn't start. Becca sprayed him with the Air Scent canister that was kept in the glove box for fart emergencies, or if Irma hadn't cleaned out the car in a while and the rancid odor of old takeout was too much. He staggered back for only a brief moment, but it was long enough for Irma to plead with God for it to start. When she heard the putter of the engine she threw it into reverse, but Jim understood her plan and jumped behind the van.

She didn't want to kill the bastard. But, she was stuck. She put the car into neutral and prayed for a way out.

While Jim slowly maneuvered to the front of the vehicle, ready to jump behind if thrown back into reverse, Irma reeved the engine and created a dust bowl from the gravel of their drive. This was enough of a distraction to pop the car into drive and peel out. Forward. She took out the side of the porch she painted each spring and the little apricot tree she had grown from a seed when Jimmy Jr. was born. But she was going forward.

## Pancakes

Sundays used to mean pancakes for breakfast. Jacob would wait all week for the gooey goodness of his wife's under-cooked pancakes. Somehow, the instant oatmeal and Pop Tarts of the workweek were more bearable knowing that Sunday would give him a lopsided stack of pancakes with peanut butter and raspberry syrup. Now, Sundays – as well as the rest of the week – consisted of organic fruit and vegetable smoothies infused with flax meal or chai seeds or whey protein or whatever else was the newest health trend. His wife had caught the holistic lifestyle train three years ago after suffering from kidney stones attributed to her low carbohydrate diet. But, like her pancakes, her cooking skills lacked a certain finesse. The shakes were always a bit too high in the vegetable content and most days Jacob ended up throwing out the green lumpy pulp and eating a candy bar from the vending machine at work.

This Sunday morning's rendition of liquid hell was the exact color of carnival puke after eating cotton candy and peanuts all night before riding the tilt-a-whirl.

"It's a raspberry, kale, and peanut recipe I found," his wife said. She smiled as if she was giving him an ice cream sundae. "I added a just bit of maple essence to yours."

"I see." Jacob said rubbing his eyes. Sundays also meant no coffee. Caffeine, and any other simulant, was against her holistic ideals. He usually drank coffee at work and could even sneak a cup on Saturdays by pretending to go for a jog. He



would walk the two blocks to the Dunkin' Donuts for a Bavarian Cream and a cup of coffee before ducking into the bathroom to make sweat marks on his shirt and then return home.

“Well, drink up,” his wife said turning to the blender to make more puke colored breakfast shakes for the girls. “It snowed last night. I need you to shovel the drive before church.”

Jacob gulped some of the concoction. Puking would have been better. The bitter kale overpowered any tart sweetness the berries could've given the drink. Then there were the unsweetened, freshly pressed peanut butter chunks that stuck to the roof of his mouth to mix with the medicinal aftertaste of the maple essence. There was no way he could finish this. “I'll get started now, drink this while I'm working.”

Of course, the moment he got outside the shake went into the bushes. Jacob dumped a bit of snow over the mess to hide the spoils.

There wasn't even three inches of snow on the driveway. Why he had to clear a driveway of snow that didn't even reach the top of his shoes was beyond him. He decided to start in the middle and work his way to the edge. Only the mini-van had to get out for church and the rest would melt before they got home for lunch.

He ran the length of the drive to make a path to work from and then began the monotonous task of scraping horizontal stripes. Scrape and dump, probably twenty-five times, scrape and dump.

Jacob Dotterman was bored. It was not bored like a Sunday evening when football was over and he had to watch the insipid dramas his wife TiVo'd throughout the week. He was bored with life.

It began with Bowling Night. For years, it had been his weekly night with the guys, but last fall he sat watching the stupid ball roll down the same lane week after week. The pins were reset and again he would roll a ball at them hoping for a different outcome. The whole futile game started to annoy him.

"Jake. Man," his friends would continually say. "It's your turn."

"Pass," Jacob would drink another beer and wish he could be somewhere else – anywhere but home.

He stopped going around Thanksgiving.

Some would call his current disdain a mid-life crisis. He called it being bored.

"Hey there Jake," His neighbor was crossing the street coming towards him.

"Morris," Jacob stopped shoveling and leaned on his shovel.

"You want to come over and watch the game later?"

"Nah," Jacob hated watching games at his house. His two boys were always asking questions and interrupting the commentary. Morris would actually pause the damn game to explain something – totally broke the momentum and ruined the game. "I have some work to do. I'm going to knock it out during half time."

“Well, if you change your mind after half time, Melanie bought stuff to make nachos.” Morris smiled like waxy fake cheese and Doritos was an ultimate treat.

He walked home and started his snow blower. He was done with his entire drive before Jacob was even got a quarter of his done. That was Jacob’s life - one giant snow covered drive he was merely plowing through waiting for the next snowstorm where he would do it all over again.

He had hinted that he would like a snow blower for Christmas. He complimented Morris’s drive and mentioned how he had gotten the new model on clearance last spring. Explaining how his own plastic shovel made it really difficult to get a clean lines. He said he wanted something to do a better job.

Christmas morning a giant box with a big red bow sat under the tree. For a few brief moments before he opened it, he really thought his wife had bought the snow blower. He even thought it might be the next model up. It wasn’t a snow blower. It was a metal shovel.

“I read on the internet that the titanium makes it so you don’t have to scrape as hard,” his wife said, grinning. Hiding his disappointment took everything he had and he took a nap right after the girls unwrapped their mountain of presents.

As soon as Jacob stepped inside, his chore complete, his wife called out, “Did you salt the drive? We don’t want the girls slipping in their dress shoes.” He stepped back into the garage and grabbed the salt. Grab and toss, grab and toss then inside to

take a cold shower as all the hot water would've been used by his wife and three daughters while he was shoveling the drive.

Even getting ready was routine. It had to be because of the mere five minutes of bathroom time he was allotted after the four females were done getting ready. He cursed himself for choosing a one-bathroom house. This was how boring his life was, his fondest wish was for a second bathroom.

Jacob had lost his luscious brown hair, along with his dreams of a basketball career, shortly after high school. He had grown a mustache to compensate. This facial hair was his pride and joy. He meticulously trimmed and combed it daily. It got three of the five minutes.

First, he wet the mustache with distilled water and washed it with a thickening shampoo using circular motion to break up any pieces that might have breakfast shake stuck in them. Then he rubbed in baby conditioner and combed in a straight downward motion. The hypoallergenic product could be left in and saved rinsing time.

The next step was crucial and something most novices skip. He dried the mustache using a horsehair brush, again only in straight downward motions. Facial hair has a curl to it and without the strict adherence to the straight lines, his mustache would become sloppy, he combed it again to be certain there were no kinks.

He had a Remington MB200A Titanium Mustache Trimmer he first set to three. He would thin the mustache in an upward motion and then comb down again.

Then using a comb guard he would trim again before sharpening his scissors to trim the lip line. Finally, he tweezed stray hairs and applied organic Norwegian pomade.

Due to his height, all of his ties were too short for his elongated torso, and most of his pants bordered on high waters. Even if they had fit, he had no style to speak of, which made him just give up all together. Getting dressed was the other two minutes, a quick whatever-he-grabbed-first outfit.

“Jacob, I really wish you wouldn’t shovel only half of the drive like that.” His wife said in the van while she snatched his glasses from his face and cleaned them. “It looks tacky.”

At least after church, there was a playoff game. That was something.

<b>Titans vs. Chargers ... Page 7</b>	
<b>Doc Holiday</b>	ANOTHER FUCKING PUNT?!?!?!?
<b>John</b>	Another stellar game from the Titans this season.
<b>Doc Holiday</b>	I get one thing each weekend to look forward to and it’s only during Football season.  We are in the playoffs people! 3 PUNTS?
<b>MalcomTent</b>	CHARGERS ARE GOING TO WIN!!!
<b>John</b>	Ah, come on
<b>Tubular 12</b>	Chargers are a bunch of expired sparks that don’t know their asses from the football.
<b>Shits on a stick</b>	If I wanted to watch the damn game, I would. I HATE FOOTBALL THREADS!!!
<b>John</b>	Then don’t come into ‘em shits. It’s that simple.
<b>Doc Holiday</b>	GTFO Shits. No one asked you.
<b>John</b>	I think I’m going to end this game right here. The girls are begging for a bike ride.

<b>Doc Holiday</b>	Man, if my girls wanted to go on a bike ride with their old man... Nah, I still wouldn't go. Not during football.
<b>John</b>	Yeah, but I like my kids.
<b>Punk</b>	I see shits point. On Sundays the first page is always just threads about football. You know what would be better than having a thread for each game – a solid thread devoted just to football.
<b>Shits on a Stick</b>	Still wouldn't help. No one would chat with me in the other threads. I just don't get the appeal. All this "We did this or We did that" talk pisses me off. NO, YOU DID NOTHING.  You sat on your ass and watched a game while other people got paid millions of dollars to perform for you. AND usually they perform poorly.
<b>Doc Holiday</b>	Missed a FUCKING field goal?!?! In the FUCKING PLAYOFFS!>!>!
<b>MalcomTent</b>	Haha! You're gonna lose.
<b>Doc Holiday</b>	I'm done. Between shits ruining another perfectly good football thread, John leaving, and the piss poor game, I just can't.  Guess I'll just slowly die in front of the television with the missus.

"The game is over already?" His wife asked when he walked into the TV room at half time.

"No, just boring."

"Oh good, we can finally watch The Biggest Loser premiere."

"Good, I was afraid we wouldn't get to see it before TiVo deleted it," John said with a fake smile.

She missed the sarcasm. “Me too, especially since you’ve got to get to bed early.” John’s face must have formed the question he failed to, “It’s supposed to snow tonight and you’ll need to get up early to shovel the drive.”

## Infection

The day Constance Harvey joined the BB was agony. Within hours of waking up, three hours earlier than she needed to, she was reduced to grabbing her bent knees and glaring under the stall door in her work's ladies room. Usually Connie would stagger her breaks to take them earlier or later than the crowds. Today, she couldn't wait even though it was the prime break time. She chose the first stall; studies had proven it is the least used in public restrooms. Placing the paper barrier between the cold porcelain and her butt, she prayed for relief.

She glanced at the graffiti on the door.

*Betty is a slut, she fucked my man.*

*Bitch fucked mine too! I luv Jayson!*

*I'm gonna kick your ass - Jayson's my man!!!!*

Reading material aside, she still could not pee. The sweat was like perma-glaze on her forehead and the cramping would not let up. She had taken the Uristat an hour ago. It usually did not take this long to work. She hoped it was not something more serious. A slow burning pellet of pain traveled through her abdomen, climbed up her spine, and through the top of her head. It pushed and shoved its way out each hair follicle. A small drip of urine splashed into the toilet.

She felt nauseated.

*Stop bitching you stooped hoers u know he's not no good. Betty*

*You might want to spell correctly before calling us "stupid" you fucking retard.*



*Like grammar is important on a bathroom stall, idigit*

*Great place for an argument*

She had followed the Jayson saga over the past month. There had been nothing new for over a week. She remembered when she saw that Betty's spelling had been corrected she actually laughed aloud. It echoed in the empty stall.

It was a hobby. Easier to communicate when no one could judge what came out of her mouth. The beauty of graffiti was in the fact that a person could formulate a perfect thought, not that she had ever contributed. In fact, she had never even written on a wall. What would she have to say?

It seemed some people actually had a knack for it. Really, if people were to pay attention to the graffiti in bathrooms, amid the cliché and stupid responses there were some very well crafted sentences. Usually she loved her bathroom drama, her little gossip escape. Today, she felt like tattling on the janitor who was not doing his job.

She gave up and started washing her hands. One of the line workers, Sarah, walked in and Connie was faced with the dreaded look.

"Well, well. Don't we look tired?" Sarah asked while bending her neck to the side and giving Connie an exaggerated wink and a laugh. Connie responded with a smile, or rather a movement resembling a smile where the corners of her mouth tilted up, her lips held tight over her teeth.

Everyone knew about Sam. Connie hated that everyone knew about Sam. In the hallway, it happened again. Maggie from marketing wanted to give her a high

five. Connie pretended to miss and kept walking. She never liked Maggie. Her skirts always hugged her mid-thigh and her blouse could always use another button or two. Connie had no clue how the grown woman thought any of that was appropriate. Did her husband see her before she left the house?

The two women's sudden enthusiasm mirrored the entire factory. Suddenly, every person who usually ignored Connie's presence was talking and chatting with her. They smiled, joked, and asked for details that were really none of their business. They were all just the best of friends.

The fakeness was maddening.

Once Connie was safely at her desk in the front office, she tried to finish payroll and distract herself from the bladder cramping.

Thanks to the receptionist, her love life was now the best news of the week. It seemed that the receptionist's job was not only to answer all of the factory's incoming calls, but also to share all the best gossip. That bitch was the keeper of all juicy tidbits, so everybody loved her. Connie sometimes wondered if she was involved in the Jayson saga.

Jayson. *Why he spelled it that way?* Was his mother trying to be creative or did he change it because he wanted to be an even bigger douche? The receptionist told everyone about the roses he sent. Sam sent, not Jayson.

Connie met Sam two Saturdays ago at a local computer store. Her brand new laptop kept freezing and throwing up the blue screen of death. He was behind her in line. She held the plain silver laptop across her chest, secure in her folded arms. The

girls in front of her let their laptops dangle at their side in the designer cases turned purses. Their hair was carelessly streaked with obvious highlights and their makeup took away from their faces. No woman should ever pencil on her eyebrows.

“You gonna trust just any stranger with your baby?”

Connie looked down at her feet not acknowledging the comment. Mainly because, she did not believe it was directed at her. She thought that she was actually in the way of its intended recipient, so she ducked lower resting her chin on her laptop.

“I just mean because of the way you are holdin’ it so tightly.”

She looked around trying to find the mother that seemed to be holding her child too closely.

“Does it have important docs on it or something? The computer I mean.”

Connie looked up. The comment *was* for her. She let the smallest grin leave her face and shrugged. It had photos she didn’t want to lose, but mainly the night before had been terribly frustrating. Google kept crashing and no videos would load. She ended up watching some street magician show on television and cringed at the grown women squealing like they had just been shown God, a real orgasm, and a \$10 shoe store all in one.

“You know, if you come over to my house, I could fix it – free of charge.”

“Oh, no,” Connie said. “Thank you, but I would rather pay a professional.”

“Oh well,” he said. “But, your loss. You should know, my services are so good, you probably couldn’t afford them.” Then he winked. “I just offered you a deal of a lifetime.”

Connie was fairly certain that he was making an innuendo to prostitution so she laughed.

After the computer store, she did her normal weekend stuff. Not once did she think about the incident. No one ever flirted with her. She had a knack for being invisible, a blended smudge in the corner of a crowded painting. She was always the extra who ran in the crowd while the hero saved the city from Godzilla. She would be one of the first casualties in the zombie apocalypse. It did not bother her. Not everyone could be a survivor. It would not be an apocalypse if everyone did.

Sam noticed her and probably listened to her when she gave the geek behind the counter her employment information. The flowers and a note begging for a date arrived at the front desk early the following Monday.

It took her a minute to even place where she met Sam. She tried to think back about what she was wearing on Saturday. She believed it was her old Bongo jeans with a hole in the knee, hardly what you would think of as sexy, inviting, or even stylish. She was not even wearing makeup and she knew her hair was in its usual weekend ponytail.

By lunchtime, the entire factory, both office and line staff, knew she had an admirer. She had forgotten a lunch and was waiting in the cafeteria line, still trying

to remember the details of the encounter. She barely noticed the girls from shipping behind her.

“You’re the one that got those roses right, you’re Connie in Accounting?” one asked.

“Excuse me?” Connie.

“I know it’s personal and stuff, but it’s just so romantic. Like something from a movie or something,” The other friend said.

“You should totally go for it; any guy that would go through that much trouble is definitely a keeper.”

Before she could even say excuse me, or ask how they knew, Deloris, the line cook said, “I don’t know it sounds kind of creepy if you ask me. I’d worry about his head, you know” she paused and leaned forward over the mashed potatoes she was slopping onto Connie’s plate. “Psychopathic Stalkers. They’re everywhere.”

The single girls behind her refused to listen to Deloris. They were too busy basking in the romance of it all. Connie tried to sneak away to the table on the patio where no one ever sat, but the girls followed her. Before she could cut her dry turkey breast, eight women from the factory joined her table. There were two women who were married, a supervisor from shipping, the single girls from the line, and three women Connie only vaguely recognized.

“I met my man on an online chat room, back when AOL was sending those disks out in the mail like Costco gives out free samples,” the married blonde from the line said

as she bumped Connie's arm with her elbow causing her to spill the spoonful of greasy peas all over her tan pants.

As Connie tried to clean up the mess another line worker said, "Mine was a blind date. Who says they never work out?"

The shipping supervisor chimed in grabbing Connie's hand and making her look at her, "I got you all beat. I met Kameron on a plane to Paris. He was on his way to a cooking conference and I was supposed to be doing a tour of romantic vineyards with an old college pal." She said a mischievous grin. "We both skipped out of our plans and created new ones in the sheets of his hotel room." The group laughed. One woman whistled and they laughed again. Then they all continued to talk about one-night stands turned into romances and why lingerie never fits right.

Connie preferred being the smudge.

Somehow, it turned into a debate. Who had the most romantic tale of meeting their mate? It gave Connie enough time to eat a few bites before, "I think Connie will win, if she can manage to hang onto Sam," the blonde line worker with elbow said. This time it was the mashed potatoes in Connie's lap. That was the breaking point. She excused herself from the lunchroom and ate at her desk, as usual.

The receptionist was the one who actually called Sam back. She put the call through to Connie's extension without as much as a giggled warning.

"I swear, I'm not a stalker," Sam said.

Connie laughed.

“Really, I just liked your smile. The little bit of it that I got. Did you like the roses?”

“Ah, yes?”

“That impressed, huh?”

“Pretty much.”

He laughed. It was the throaty kind where you could really feel the bass. “Was it impressive enough for a date?”

“That would be a pretty cheap date.”

He laughed again. “You’re going to make me work for this, aren’t you?”

She kept making him laugh. She wasn’t even trying. He even told her she was “a big flirt.” She had not really ever really been a flirt. So she was surprised how easily she picked it up. She wasn’t sure if it was the laugh or the ease of flirting, but she agreed to meet him for lunch the next day.

Monday night consisted of Connie throwing things out of her closet, trying them on in different combination, peeling them off, and then tossing them onto the bed in disgust. In the end, she chose the first outfit she thought of.

Of course, she screwed up the date from the beginning. He bought a single rose and she tripped over the curb reaching for it, falling right into him. He laughed “It usually takes a bit longer to get my dates into my arms.”

Connie immediately pulled away. The joke was just this side of personal. She was not ready for personal. They ate Greek Gyros from a Mexican place called “Home Cooked Food.”

“I’m usually really handy with computer stuff.” He was explaining what was wrong with his computer. An easy first conversation - you tell me yours and I’ll show you mine. “I tried reconfiguring and even wiping the whole system and starting from scratch. Nothing was working. So, I take it in and the guy’s like, blaming me, as if it’s something I did.”

His hands flew about his body as he talked. It was a like an interpretive dance acting out a dramatic battle. “He sees I’ve opened the case ‘cause the screws are a bit scratched up. And I’m like I know what I’m doing, it isn’t rocket science.” His tongue clicked against his teeth punctuating each word. Hypnotic. She sat, listened, and studied his green eyes, his fading red hair.

“Turns out when I switched out the modem I screwed up the IP address or something. Did you know that they track that shit? Whatever you search, people are analyzing it.”

Connie wondered what they think about her searches. She started in one place, whatever caught her fancy and she always end up somewhere else completely bizarre and random. She prided herself on finding all the interesting dead sites on the internet. There was a blog where a man was exploring these caves in South Dakota or something and he was saying they were strange, eerie. His last blog explains he was going deeper into the caves to get proof of what he believed was the reason. He wrote about all the danger and how he was positive there was a huge discovery in the caves that would change the way we looked at the world. Then the blog stops. The last entry was four years ago. Connie tried to remember how she found that one.



“I’m just sick of hearing it’s some conspiracy. I mean come on. The government is not that interested in you.”

That’s right. She was looking up information on the Doris Day song about black hills when she found that one.

He wasn’t exactly in shape or what people would call sexy, but he was interesting enough. She caught him staring at her chest and she blushed. He did too. It was exciting to know he wanted her, but even more shocking that Connie realized she wanted him, too. She hadn’t put a lot of thought into sex in the three years she went without it.

She agreed to see him again.

The next date was bowling, Thursday night special: Free Beer with every Turkey. Connie was a great bowler and was semi-drunk by the sixth frame. When Sam went to the bathroom she sat for a bit, but got antsy. She felt people looking at her. She knew people look at the person that eats dinner alone or goes to the movie alone. They wonder about why and how. That’s the reason no one does stuff alone. She knew everyone lied and said they don’t think such things. She also knew life would be so much easier if everyone just admitted to being judgmental freaks.

She had to find Sam. Checking the women’s first, she guessed that each restroom was a single occupancy facility, which meant he would be alone as well. She tapped on the men’s door hoping that it was Sam in the room. When he opened the door, she smiled and then looked down. She was losing her nerve. He grabbed her clasped hands and guided her into the room. There, amid the bits of used paper towels and mildewed grout,

they shared their first kiss. It was short, soft. The second kiss, which was much more urgent, immediately followed.

First, they stood in the center of the room, then Connie pushed Sam against the door. Somewhere in there, he rolled her against the wall next to the dripping sink. It was if she was living out a great romance, just like all of her favorite characters.

She kept thinking that, maybe, she would finally understand love.

Connie kissed him as if she would never feel his slightly chapped lips again. Still being pinned against the wall exposed her shoulder blades to the chilled tile. When they came up for air, she turned him so his back would be the one against the cold wall, hoping to avoid the unnecessary shivers in round three and rested her face on his shoulder.

*Since writing on toilet walls is done neither for critical acclaim, nor financial rewards, it is the purest form of art...discuss.*

Surrounding the quote was dirty limericks about sex, dicks, ball, and women's snatches. Sam nuzzled into her neck, then began to softly lick her earlobe. The slurping sound popped against the words while she read silently.

In blue pen:

*The finest thing ever I bought*

*A hooker girl's fine ass bald twat*

The limerick became progressively worse until the final line.

Sam grabbed her ass and pushed her against him - swishing his hips back and forth. The obvious hard penis implication of the action was almost irritating.

There was a thick black-marker arrow linking to the blue pen quote - a response. It was in conversation. Connie perked up and read:

*Dude, be wary of too much juice, it means that girl be really loose...*

Connie was bizarrely aroused. It was like porn. She envisioned the blue-inked hooker's twat and the wet juices. Aroused by graffiti had to be a new fetish. She wondered why she couldn't just be turned on by candles or something?

"Can we go somewhere slightly less public?" Connie asked.

"My place is around the corner."

The first kiss in the apartment, Connie gave in. Her walk of shame past the receptionist the next morning was obvious and by lunch, she was receiving whistles and pats on the back. It was horrific, but it was Friday. Only one day of hell and she got to see Sam again.

The weekend became a blur of sex. They had so much in common. Connie counted at least thirty things that he said he loved just as much and she did. Like when she would mention her favorite bands. He would immediately say he loved them too. So what if he only could name the greatest hits, the bad ones at that? At least he had heard of Crash Test Dummies and Twelfth Night. Not everyone could be a super fan.

Even better, there was twenty-two things they both hated.

"I hate when people use the word epic incorrectly," she said.

“Me too!” He said. “Like how can you say that Justin Bieber’s album is epic? Have you not heard of Pink Floyd, The Doors? Hell, even some of Michael Jackson’s stuff is more epic than that crap.”

She didn’t correct him or tell him that she meant using epic as anything other than its intended definition - at least he agreed the slang term was overused.

They had a picnic on the bedroom floor, strawberries with dry tuna sandwiches on hot dog buns on a blanket to cover the matted and stained carpet. They fed each other until it became clear that the only way to get a good bite was just to feed themselves. It was the only silence that weekend, eating on the floor. Connie finished first and lay down on the blanket, waiting for the obligatory after food sex. Underneath his bed were bunches of dirty clothes, and she was sure she saw some panties. She smiled; he was experienced. It made her want him more. Somehow knowing someone had fallen for his unconventional and awkward charm made her confident.

It was all so perfect until he propped himself up on his elbow and lying on his side began lightly rubbing her hairline with a single finger. Suddenly, she couldn’t concentrate. Her brain was a giant mass of images of Paul.

Paul and her in the backseat of his Probe, naked, panting. Paul and her on their wedding night, her right breast exposed and the rest of the night her mother bought her still intact.

Sam was talking and she was on the verge of freaking out. She faked an early meeting and left in a rush of apologies and assurances that nothing was wrong.

“Please stay,” Sam said. “We don’t have to do anything, I’ll be a gentleman, I promise.”

Connie just faked a smile and walked out the door. She couldn’t even explain that it wasn’t him.

She woke up at four in the morning with the first clue that her punishment for the week of romance was a bladder infection. She tried to use the heating pad and some Tylenol, but after an hour, she couldn’t stand it any longer and went to the twenty-four hour drug store. One great thing about the three years of celibacy was that she hadn’t had to deal with this shit. The cycles of infection, antibiotic, yeast infection, Monistat, douche: repeat in a year.

Now, she sat at her desk, pretending to input names and work hours into the payroll database. The urge to pee was constant agony. She ignore it. Ignored the flashes of Paul that keep racing in.

She didn’t want to think about Paul. She wanted to think about Sam. Think about his laugh and the way he used his hands to describe every detail. His frumpy body hidden under baggy clothes. Sam: interesting, enjoyable, Sam.

Paul: quarterback, class president, sports car driving, Paul. The dream of every girl in high school. Paul had chosen her: bookworm, honors student, teacher’s pet, Connie. She was so wrapped up in winning him; she forgot to find out if we were actually compatible before marrying him two weeks after graduation.

About twenty minutes since her last visit, she got up and ran back to the bathroom. In the hall a group of line workers whistled at her and start giggling. She always wondered why, if people know about your personal business, they believe it gives them the right to comment on it. When Paul died, the condolences were unbearable. For months, she had to endure questions about her mental well-being and looks of devastated pity. Each time it was like reliving the torment of the funeral again. How do you tell people to just stop when they don't realized they aren't allowed in?

Connie ran past the first stall with the Jayson argument and went to the large handicap access one. Nothing happened. The stall door was pretty far away, but there was something written on it.

*Wanna Play Potty Tennis?*

*Look Right...*

*Now, Look Left*

*And Right, Again.*

*Now, Look Left*

Connie couldn't even *not* pee in peace. At the sink, she longed for a corporate office - clean bathrooms with the faucets that ran automatically. Where she could wash her hands with warm water, not iced drizzle from the lime-crusting antique faucet - a bathroom where you do not read unless you brought in the Wall Street Journal.

She really had to pee and ran to the first stall. The Jayson argument had progressed.

*HAHA! I'M fuckin' him NOW! Heather*

It was an interesting twist. Not interesting enough to brighten her mood, but significant just the same. The cramping was unbearable. Connie didn't even wash her hands this time. All she did was unzip her jeans. The vending machine had a two-dollar bottle of cranberry juice. Sitting at her desk, she chugged the twelve ounces of bitter liquid like a recovering alcoholic. She had to call a doctor.

A text from Sam. She dropped the phone without reading it.

The phone jingled twice more before she went to the bathroom again. Three texts from Sam.

“Lunch?”

“I'll pay”

“Everything Ok?”

She wondered how to tell him what was actually wrong without being too personal. How do single girls do it? How can a girl be open and honest about your husband's death and your bodily functions after only two dates and a weekend of sex? Wasn't she supposed to be aloof, mysterious?

When Connie called her doctor, the nurse picked up and put her on immediate hold. Cradling the phone between her shoulder and ear, she wiped and fumbled with her pants as a rather depressing elevator rendition of a ZZ Top song played in her ear. Then someone came into the bathroom. Connie froze. She couldn't answer any questions if someone could hear her. She started rushing, trying to make it out of the stall when the nurse picked up again, just in time to hear the flush. Giving up, she sat back down. The

nurse knew she just used the bathroom. It was obvious. Whoever was next to her would know exactly what was going on.

It wasn't until she hung up that she noticed the new comment on the infamous Jayson Saga.

*Jokes on all of you - he gave me Chlamydia! Jane*



<b>The “Fuck-it’s-Monday-Already” Thread</b>	
<b>JuliepDrinkers</b>	<b>God, I hate this place. The only thing worse than Monday is Tuesday</b>
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<b>If Mondays didn’t exist, I could probably be a somewhat happy man.</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>What’s wrong with Tuesday?</b>
<b>HansRolo</b>	<b>Today’s my Friday. I have Tues/Wed off. So while you have been on your ass all weekend – I’ve been working. Now, that’s what sucks.</b>
<b>Punk</b>	<b>I hate this place too, but mine – not yours. I don’t really have an opinion about yours.</b>
<b>JuliepDrinkers</b>	<b>Tuesdays serve no purpose. Think about it. Monday, at least it’s okay to bitch and complain. Everyone gets it. Wednesday, Humpday, you are half way to your weekend. Thursday, best night on TV – Always. Do not debate me on this, I’ll win. Plus, because of direct deposit it’s my payday. Friday – Sunday Duh, no explanation needed. See? Tuesday - No purpose.</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>I don’t mind Mondays so much. I don’t love them or anything, but my job isn’t bad.</b>
<b>JuliepDrinkers</b>	<b>It just keeps getting better. Now I have to spend my entire morning cleaning up a mess made by an idiot that doesn’t think company policy applies to him.</b>
<b>JuliepDrinkers</b>	<b>I wish it was Wednesday- (Notice the obvious omission of Tuesday)</b>
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<b>Get a TiVo and watch your Thursday shows on Tuesday – Problem solved.</b>

Jacob re-read his post. God, whoever heard of hating Tuesdays. That should be enough to shut her up – or a zing from John at a minimum. Mondays were actually one of his favorite days. He could have coffee and someone always brought donuts or bagels, something, to share - commiserating the loss of the weekend. He was low-level management at a software company. This meant that as long as he kept his thumb on his

department's assignments and acted as if they took twice as long as they actually did, he could fuck around on the BB most days.

“Mr. Dotterman, Mr. Evens wants to see you in his office.” One of his new interns stood in his doorway. She was holding five folders against her chest. “He said it was urgent.”

“Why didn't he just tell me?”

“He saw you typing away on that website. He said you seemed busy.”

Shit. He'd been caught. He quickly cleared his cookies and web history. He would just tell the shithead that he was chatting on a parent board or something. The PC bastard never questioned the family men.

Mr. Evens was a thirty-two year old MBA prodigy who had taken control of all floor-three departments seven months ago. This kid was all about openness and honesty, even left his door wide open, which frankly bugged this shit out of Jacob.

He waved Jacob in, no smile. Not a good sign. The dork usually greeted everyone like Mr. Rogers. When Jacob sat down, Evens put a finger to his lips. Jacob could hear the faint sound of static on the speakerphone - a conference call with upstairs. Not good at all.

“Just in time, gentlemen, I have the head of Distribution with me.”

Jacob heard a couple of throaty coughs.

“Mr. Dotterman has been with INUT for fourteen years and I have been looking over his file -”

“I can explain, see-”

Evens began waving his arms and nodded a bent hand across his neck. “What Mr. Dotterman is saying is that he already has a plan in place for the PASTECH convention. He would be able to attend as guest without a booth. He would not associate with anyone in Marketing thereby seeming like a free agent. He could investigate our competitor’s distribution strategy for the coming year, without detection.”

Jacob was lost, but added, “Exactly.”

There was the insipid smile. Evens clasped his together as if he was praying and mouthed a *Thank you*.

“What is the return on this, as opposed to the cost of sending a fifth team member?”

The conversation went on about possible streamlining of department functions, using trade secrets, and non-calculable advantages to inside information as well as some other bullshit before Evens finally hung up and said, “Sorry about that, you just have to know how to handle those guys,” he said smiling and pointing up. Jacob had been with the company long enough to know the only finesse needed was green lines on the profit margins. “So, I bet you gathered from the conversation we want to send you to PASTECH.”

“Yeah,” Jacob said. “PASTECH?”

“The first ever Program and Software Technology Forum. You’ve heard of it right?” He looked worried.

“Oh, sure. Just never heard the acronym,” Jacob faked his best, *I’m-all-into-this-shit-too*, smile.

“Oh, good you had me scared. You know I read yesterday they think it might be the next Comdex.”

“Oh, well yeah. That’ll be awesome.” The words felt stupid coming out of Jacob’s mouth.

Evens proceeded to tell him about the ridiculous spy plan. Jacob only half listened until he said, “So, we’re going to set you up in a separate hotel in Vegas.”

“Vegas?” *Holy shit. Was this prick actually going to send him to Vegas?* Jacob head was buzzing. Maybe, his luck was changing.

Evens had that worried look again.

“Oh, Las Vegas. Guess I’m no good at the new, hip abbreviation your generation is using.”

Jacob was going to Vegas - a whole week in August, alone, no family and on the company’s dime. He couldn’t wait to post the news.

<b>Vegas Baby!</b>	
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<b>Company is sending for a weeks’ Vacation with pay!</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>Lucky Dog.</b>
<b>Tubular12</b>	<b>I live in Vegas, it’s a shit hole. You’ll fit right in.</b>
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<b>Now to figure out how to clear it with the wife</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>I’m not an expert or anything, but what if you just took her?</b>
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<b>Nah, it’s for some bullshit convention in Aug.</b>
<b>NYCSports</b>	<b>Then it isn’t a vacation. Conventions are exhausting.</b>
<b>Punk</b>	<b>PASTECH? That’s during the same week as the last show. You going to go to the show while you’re there?</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>Then just tell her the truth. I don’t see the problem. Kori, a convention in Vegas – Normal rules don’t apply. My next conference is in Salt Lake – now that’s going to suck.</b>
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<b>That may work for you and Dee, but it is not how things are handled where I live.</b>
<b>John</b>	<b>Sometimes I can’t tell if you’re serious or joking. Have fun!</b>
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<i>[Quote: Punk: PASTECH – That’s during the same week as the last</i>

	<i>show. You going to go to the show while you're there?</i> <b>And miss an entire night in Vegas watching Twelfth Night try to play songs they haven't touched in six years. No Thank you.</b>
<b>Punk</b>	<b>I just don't get hanging out on a website for a band you hate.</b>
<b>NYCSports</b>	<b>He never said he hated them – don't get your panties all twisted.</b>
<b>DocHoliday</b>	<i>[Quote: John: Lol. Sometimes I can't tell if you're serious or joking. Have fun!]</i> <b>Shit, I never joke about something so depressing.</b> <b>All I do is sneak around. I live with four females. It's called survival.</b>  <b>Three of the four are haughty fucking teens that only want me for my wallet, and the other is my wife. Also, only wants me for my wallet.</b>
<b>Tubular12</b>	<b>Guess that says a lot about your penis.</b>

Of course, he was going to tell his wife he was forced to go. Not all married men had it as lucky as John. If it were optional, his wife would tell him to forgo the trip and stay home for yard work or a dreaded family BBQ.

He spent the morning creating a lie; They chose to display his project at the annual PASTECH convention.

She would tell him to pass it down to one of the interns.

He would tell her he couldn't because it was a very important program and only he knew the ins and outs of its intricate settings.

She wouldn't like it, but she would buy it.

He had a quick lunch, before spending the afternoon researching Vegas nightlife. He planned an entire life's worth of fun into that week. Gambling was a must. There was also a few dance clubs and strip joints that would be cool. A night in Fremont.

Gambling would be an issue and he didn't know how to play any of the real games. He didn't want to only play slots like some Grandma. He bought *Knock-Out Blackjack: The Easiest Card-Counting System Ever Devised* and *Blackjack Secrets: A Handbook for Beginners*. He could spend the next few months becoming an expert on blackjack. He watched a video tutorial on how to roll a chip across his knuckles and found a website where he could play virtual blackjack - free.

It wasn't until he got home that he realized he needed an excuse for the books. He thought up a really good one on the spot.

"Well, we'll be schmoozing clients in the evenings, I have to learn; to impress them." He was proud. It was actually plausible.

"It just seems like a waste of time," she said.

"Why?" And she still found a way to fight it.

"The house always wins," his wife said.

## God is Dead

*Chlamydia?*

As Connie mindlessly washed her hands, she kept repeating that word. *Did Jayson really give Jane a disease? Was it just a joke, for effect in the conversation?* She walked back to her desk. Past the vending machine and the cafeteria, she hugged the phone in her arms. *STDs? She hadn't even thought about that. Why didn't she think about that? She thought they always used a condom.*

At her desk, she pretended to be searching for a file. *They did use condoms.* She remembered thinking they were weird when he pulled a pile of them out of his nightstand drawer. They were the bright red ones that you get free at the clinic. *Free could mean cheap, unreliable. Do they go bad? Are they like cars? Are there better brands?*

She decided she needed to call the nurse back and request a longer appointment. She stood up and straightened her skirt. She would just tell Bill she needed the rest of the day off for a doctor's appointment. Taking a deep breath, she began the trek through the maze of desks and cubicles to his office. She stopped.

*What if he asks what it is about? Can he do that?* She could tell him she was feeling dizzy and planned to go to urgent care. *What if he insists on calling an ambulance?*

She could see it. The whole office would come to a stop. Each woman would gather around her desk, rushing around for cool compresses and candy, thinking it was a

blood sugar thing. Or some would think she was pregnant and a whole mess of rumors would start.

She went back to her desk and opened Outlook and just emailed Mr. Richards to remind him of the appointment she never told him about – making sure to CC HR so that it seemed legitimate. The old man rarely read his emails and he would confirm she had cleared it with him, if asked, because he was embarrassed to admit that he often forgot conversations.

*Why was she putting herself through this?* Connie never really dated as an adult. She barely would call what she did in high school dating. When Paul was still alive, she remembered thinking she was missing something. She was - the awful headache of being single.

After signing in at the Dr. Hilbert's office, she pulled out her phone. She needed to text Sam back.

She typed, "Everything is fine, just busy. Lunch sounds great. ☺" Too much. She deleted it and typed. "Every little thing is cool, the meeting took longer than I thought. Lunch? Where? ?" That was too... Well, it was just wrong. She deleted most of it. "Meeting went long. Lunch? Sure ☺ Where?"

She read it ten times, held her breath and hit send.

Her phone jingled. "How 'bout Scotties on 200 S.?"

She had never been there, but 200 South wasn't exactly the restaurant district.

"Sounds great." She thought about adding a ☺. But, one smile a day was enough.

"1:00?"



Connie wondered if STD testing took longer than a few hours. She didn't want to cancel and have him think something was wrong. *Was there a protocol for standing someone up that you actually liked?* All she replied was, "Sure."

When the nurse called her back, she notice the practice had been expanded into the neighboring office space. "Damn," Connie said as they walked towards the final door in the hall.

"Excuse me?" The nurse asked.

"Oh, you have expanded since the last time I was in."

"We expanded in 2006. So, have you been seen by another doctor since," she looked at her chart, "2005?" Her eyebrows raised a bit.

"No." Connie looked down. It was time for the questions. "Date of last menses" and "Is there a chance you might be pregnant?" and "How many sexual partners in the last six months?" and "Date of your last pap smear" When Connie told her 2004, the nurse looked at her very seriously. "You should really get those every year. Would you like to have Dr. Hilbert do one today?" She pulled out the paper gown before Connie could even respond. "It opens to the front." The nurse had been gone for a few minutes before Connie realized she forgot to ask for STD testing. *How would one bring up testing for STDs?*

Before, when it was difficult to ask, she would go somewhere else. Like, when she wanted birth control, she had gone to the free clinic. It was easier than bringing up something as personal as not wanting to have the baby with Paul. She pretended to try, and hid the pills in her tampon box.

However, she still had to go to Sandy for her annual appointments.

“You’re on the pill?” Sandy asked as she smiled.

“Yes.”

“Does Paul know?”

“Um, well. I mean it’s just that-”

“Oh, never mind” she looked down and started writing something, “It isn’t that important.”

“Okay.”

“It’s just that I thought I heard Paul tell Eddie you were trying for a baby.”

“Oh, well we both decided to wait a couple months.”

“Did something happen?”

“No,” Connie started trying think of a good reason they would want to wait. “It’s just not the right time.”

“Did Paul suggest it or was it your idea?”

“It might have been mine. But, either way we didn’t want go around telling everyone.”

Sandy’s attention was on the chart.

“Look, Sandy. Please don’t bring it up. Paul is kind of down about having to wait.”

“Dr. Hilbert, please.” Sandy seemed upset. “You really shouldn’t confuse the two relationships. I am your doctor and the sister of a friend. But, really, here I am just your doctor.”

That was about six months Pre-Paul's Death. The last pap smear.

Today, the folded paper and plastic robe sat on the examination table. Connie ran her hands across the rough surface, pushed it, and heard the familiar crinkle of paper.

Connie had seen Sandy Post-Paul's death only once. Sandy insisted she come in after the funeral. She met her in her fancy Personal Office that time.

"This time I am your friend." She said sitting behind a giant desk, plaque after plaque hung on the wall behind her. "Do you still consider me a friend?"

"Oh, thank you. Um, sure." Connie was too afraid to tell she never really considered her a friend.

She stared at Connie for about a bit. "How are you feeling?"

"Okay," Connie said. The week before the appointment, Connie had told someone she was fine and it caused a bit of a stir, being her first week back at work and all. She had learned that okay, hanging in, and half smiles were the only acceptable responses to that question when your husband had died unexpectedly.

"Well, if you ever want to talk. I will have a standing order in your chart that you are to be seen immediately, regardless of my schedule." Her smile seemed overtly sad.

"Here." Sandy handed Connie a pamphlet with a woman dressed in black crying on the cover. *Grief Journaling* was written under what Connie assumed was a widow. "I find it helps."

There were now even more trifold pamphlets similar to the journal one in a display on the wall. Connie put down the paper gown and began reading the titles. *Sterilization for Women* next to *Implants, Injections, Rings, and Patches – Your Hormonal Birth Control Options*. There was teen specific, menopausal specific, and pregnancy specific. In the lower left hand corner, *How to Prevent Sexually Transmitted Diseases – Are you at risk?*

She took the smooth paper from the wall. On the front was a couple in a park, arms around each other while their obscured faces looked at their feet. *What do their feet have to do with their genitals?* She decided to read the pamphlet before opening her mouth.

Connie heard the faint double knock. Sandy was ready to see her. Was she ready to see Sandy? She shoved the pamphlet into her bag and said, “Come in.”

“Connie?”

“Yep.”

“Wow. How are you?”

“Good.” It had been three years; it was acceptable to use normal social generalizations.

“I haven’t seen you since...” She actually started looking down at her chart.

“Since Paul died, yeah. Eddie didn’t really invite me over anymore after the...”

She paused. Even after three years she was not sure how she was supposed to refer to Paul’s car colliding with the center divider because he had drank a fifth of tequila before

getting on the freeway going in the wrong direction. He knew not to drink and drive, it felt wrong to call it an accident.

Sandy nodded. "After that night. I guess he wanted to avoid any conflict." She shook her head and looked at the chart. "So, you need your annual exam?"

"No, actually your nurse didn't give me time to explain I'm on a lunch break. I just need antibiotics." Connie shrugged her shoulders. "Bladder infection."

"Oh, but it's been awhile. You really should have a -"

"I promise to make an appointment to do it, but, I have a big meeting at 1:00. I really can't miss it."

Sandy opened her mouth, as if she would protest, but finally took a breath and shut it. "If you promise." She began to write out the prescription. "You still writing in the grief journal?"

Connie laughed. "Hell no."

Sandy looked up, her face sad and her eyes wide.

"I mean, I haven't done that in ages. Really, I'm good. I'm even dating," she said. "Hence the bladder infection."

"Oh, I see. Are you safe?"

"I don't really know him that well. I mean. He is a good guy. Super sweet. I don't think he would hurt me."

"No, I mean are you practicing safe sex?"

"Oh sure, tons of red condoms." Connie tried to gauge Sandy's face to see if they were a good brand, but Sandy only smiled and handed Connie the two prescriptions.

“You know the drill.”

“Thanks.” Connie thought that would be the end of it. She picked up her bag, but as she got to the door Sandy put her hand on her shoulder.

“I want you to know,” she said. “I didn’t take off like the papers made it seem. I tried to save him, but it was too late. I left for the baby. He was already gone when I left.”

“Excuse me?”

Her face went back to the wide-eyed shocked look. “I thought you knew. I... I thought that was why you stayed away.”

“Knew what?”

“I was the woman in the car that night.”

Connie vaguely remembered the mention of Paul having a female passenger in the article she read. She chalked it up to an error, a misinformation of a passing would-be-hero at the scene mistaken for actually riding with Paul. “Wait,” she realized, “baby?”

“Her name is Sophia,” she said.

“I don’t understand, why?”

“He had just found out he was going to be a dad. I didn’t know he had been drinking.”

“Wait, you were sleeping with Paul?”

“I’m sorry, I know this must be hard to take in, I feel like,” she looked down.

“I’m sorry; I really thought you knew.”

Connie didn't exactly know what the protocol was in this situation. She was fairly certain that it wasn't a regular occurrence. Should she throw shit around? Or make a scene, yell and scream? Threaten to sue for malpractice?

"Okay, well thanks for the drugs." She bolted from the office and tried to drive to the pharmacy, but within minutes, she could not even see the road through the blur of tears. In the parking lot of an Article Circle down the street, Connie cried until it was time to meet Sam.

Sam was already at the restaurant when she finally got there. Well, restaurant would be pushing it. It was the fast food joint in between their two jobs. She walked in to find him sitting at the table texting.

"I'm a pretty cheap date now that I've given it up," she said placing a hand on her hip.

He shrugged and blushed. "Just thought it was the most convenient location."

"It was a joke." She thought that was obvious.

The only comments after ordering were about the weather. Then when the food came, they switched to remarks about the great burgers. The chewing was deafening. Connie excused herself and went to the unisex room outside in the back of the building.

When she sat down, she groaned. She never took a second dose of Uristat. The cramping was back.

*So what if Paul was having an affair, it's not like she loved him?* Connie wondered if she was more upset that Perfect Paul was as fallible as all other men, and not the perfect specimen she thought she had known. *Was it really the affair itself?* Whatever the reason, she couldn't stop the images of Sandy and Paul wrapped around each other naked while they laughed at Connie's naivety. She had been so worried about being a perfect widow and she had every right to hate the bastard. Even if she didn't know it.

Taking in three deep breaths, she stood and looked around. There was a barrage of writing around her. Her heaven. There were the regular pictures and limericks mixed into the cliché – *“for a great time call 801-9303.”*

Her favorites were the philosophical ones. There was something strangely alluring about reading thoughts on spirituality while on a toilet. A public bathroom, the only place where the teachings of Buddha, Jesus, and Atheists can all meet together. The room even had her favorite line. Her favorite not because she understood it, but because it sounded smart.

*“God is dead” Nietzsche*

But, this particular one was new. There was an arrow finding its way through a maze of ink. It started at her favorite quote and traced along the wall. She followed it through the tangle of blue, red, and black. It stopped right beside the mirror.

*“Yeah, well so is Nietzsche” God.*

She was not expecting a joke. She guessed it was funny, but really, why was she disappointed to find a joke? She again mindlessly washed her hands; she was not even using soap.



*Why was she expecting some great revelation at the end of the arrow? Some answer to all her problems.*

She looked at herself in the mirror until the reflection became a stranger. *What was wrong with her?* People shouldn't expect to participate with society through graffiti on a bathroom wall.

The hairline Sam and Paul had traced was still there asking her the same questions, but offering no answer.

On the door, when she left, she saw a sign demanding, "*DO NOT WRITE ON THE WALLS.*"

At the table, Sam smiled. "That took a while."

"Sorry."

"I was worried you had just taken off, again."

"I'm just a bit under the weather."

"What's wrong, cold?"

How was she going to explain? She couldn't think up lies on the spot. Lies took planning. She should have been thinking about that instead of Paul – and Paul and Sandy. Nothing could be done to fix that situation at the moment.

"No, I have a bladder infection from too much sex."

His face contorted, his eyebrows suddenly meeting in a furrow above the bridge of his nose.

“It isn’t contagious. I guess I’ve got a sensitive system or something. I always got them when I was married and Paul never got one. I am so sensitive my doctor says I have to make sure to pee right after sex, which I never did this weekend. Well, you know. You were there. I’m only supposed wear clean cotton underwear. I wore that dirty silk thong all weekend.”

Sam’s face was stone frozen in confusion.

“I got medicine before coming here. Oh, and I’m not supposed to have sex for a week. Although, I just found out my doctor was sleeping with Paul, so maybe she told me that to get rid of the competition for a few days. Although, I wasn’t really that much of a threat to her obviously.”

Sam just shrugged and started picking at his fries.

“Paul was my high school sweetheart. Although, I am not sure I really loved him. I just married him to get back at all the girls that teased me since kindergarten. You know, revenge.”

Sam licked his lips for the seven hundredth time since she got there. *No wonder they were so chapped.*

“It’s not like it was recent or anything, he died in a car accident three years ago. Just, since then I haven’t had sex, I guess this weekend brought up some issues I never faced – that or finding out his mistress has a toddler named, Sophia.” Connie laughed and dipped a fry in some fry sauce. “He took my virginity. So that would make you number two.” She laughed; the jumble from thought to speech was horrendous. “I should probably say second. Number two has the potty humor attached. Although, considering

the conversation, I guess it fits.” She twirled a fry around in the air before popping it into her mouth to make sure she shut it.

His face had morphed into an almost constipated expression.

“The hairline thing bothered me, that’s why I left. See, because he used to do that. Paul. Maybe it’s a sign that we’re meant to be together. I mean, he did all sorts of things to tell me he wanted sex. The hairline thing was the only one I actually liked. Maybe it was because I somehow knew the man I would really love would do it.” *And she had thought the silence during burgers was bad.*

“I worried about telling you because I was afraid of scaring you off.”

He laughed, but a high-pitched fake one. They sat in the torture of silence while he pushed fries without ever taking a bite.

“The bathroom’s full of all kinds of graffiti,” she said to break the God awful nothing.

“I hate that shit. Shitheads like that make me have to work overtime on Saturdays. I mean hours of my weekend gone, scrubbing up dirty jokes. Have some respect for public property, geez.”

“I kind of like it. It’s interesting.”

Again, silence. “I have to get back to work,” he said.

“I understand.” She did.

He left and she sat there, picking at her fries.

*Maybe she needed to find a happy medium between blabbing everything and her normal inner monologue.* She tried to summon some pain from the break up with Sam. But, the truth was it didn't hurt. Not as she imagined a break up should.

She had to pee.

In the room full of words, nothing happened. But, as she left, she pulled out her red pen and next to the "*DO NOT WRITE ON THE WALLS*" sign, she wrote,

"How about on the door?"

## New User

Constance Harvey

*Legal Name*

GrafeettiGrl

CONFIRM USER NAME

\*\*\*\*\*

*Password must be at least 8 characters long and must contain at least one number and one letter.*

Welcome to the Twelfth Night Band bulletin board community. Contrary to what you might believe about the romantic notion of reality the band tried to personify, this isn't a positive or supportive environment. The regular posting members guarantee this. While we can't offer the illusion of happiness found in the band's lyrics, we offer the following rules.

1. Don't be a Douche
2. Don't be an Idiot

While Administration believes this is obvious and doesn't require any extra explanation, the band's management assures us that this is a legal contract you are about sign by checking a box and hitting submit. Therefore, Administration will expand the rules to the following:

### **Terms and Conditions**

#### **Flaming, Bashing, and Trolling**

This is the first example of how the above two rules are all-encompassing. Don't attack people with words. It's stupid. Don't use slurs, name-calling, or stereotyping to help feel better about yourself. We are not in junior high. While you may not agree with what another poster is writing, it is not an excuse or a reason to attack or insult. Like every mother tells her toddler, Use Your Words. There's a difference between a fervent debate and using someone's personal life to make a useless point. A simpler way to explain this rule, debate issues and don't fight. If you still don't get this concept, watch when a line is crossed. The thread will be closed and all post counts will be reset. After a few instances, you should get the point. Some won't (See rule 2). For those that can't grasp this simple concept, see the list of disciplinary actions below. Any post that contains malicious meandering will be considered trolling and is a punishable offence. Administration cannot believe the following is necessary, but is assured it is a must. Threats of any kind will not be tolerated. Ever.

### **Multiple User Accounts**

Each user is allowed only one account. Duplicate accounts will be deleted. If you forget your password, email the Administration and Administration will reset password. Don't be an idiot. Administration has been doing this since 1997; we can tell when an ALT is present. We can look up IP addresses to prove it. Don't be a Douche.

### **No 'Spamming'**

Posting nonsense or blank message to gain a higher post count, or just to be annoying, is not allowed. The same goes for quote trees, no more than three quotes are allowed in one post. (See Idiot and Douche rule)

Promoting your new company, pyramid scheme, child's fundraiser, or your new part in a play, or movie is not allowed - nor is selling your art, cd, skills, talents, or services of any kind.

### **Impersonating Other Users / Accessing Another User's Account**

Hacking someone else's account or attempting to access another poster's account is strictly prohibited. You will be banned permanently. It is fraud and illegal. Don't be the only idiot in jail for hacking a bulletin board account.

### **Disciplinary Actions**

- Verbal warning: This will be done publically within the post containing a violation
- Private message: This will be kept on record as your second offense.
- Deleted thread: If your post is credited as the reason for a deletion, it will be documented. With or without the first two warnings, this is your third offense
- Four Offenses: You will be prohibited from the board for three to ten days.
- At this point, any further offenses will make it is clear you are a douche and an idiot, and Administration doesn't want to deal with this, as it is a fundamental violation of rules one and two.

Administration is aware that many people, if not most, never read the terms and conditions associated with various websites. Therefore, in order to ensure that you have read the above terms and conditions, please email [Administration](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com) the answer to the following riddle.

### **What is between heaven and earth?**

Please use [Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com) for this and any other communication deemed necessary for your continued use of the Twelfth Night Bulletin Board Community.

I have read and understand the terms and conditions and will adhere to the standards and rules described there in.

**I am DONE with love... Page 4**

Pandemic	No Dee, I am not saying this in hopes that, like some movie, I give up and poof there's love. I am just done.
InnerSpace	I'll Love You
GrafeetiGrl	God, InSp – Get out of here. No one wants your herpes-infested love. We are having a serious discussion in here.
DocHoliday	I would tell you not to order InSp around, but Herpes-Infested Love might just be my new signature.
Dee12	I didn't mean it like some movie. God, I was just trying to say that most of the cliché shit is true. At least for me... <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. You know when you know</li> <li>2. It comes when you least expect it</li> <li>3. Fireworks during a kiss - Those all happened. That is why they make then have the status of CLICHÉ.</li> </ol>
NYCSports	I don't buy it. I'm sorry Dee, I don't mean to call you a liar or anything, but I call bullshit. All those things are what married women lie and say happened to make themselves feel better about settling.
BreezyMorning	Dee, Did you really see fireworks?
BoobsMcgee	For once, I agree with Kori
Dee12	Well, yeah. I didn't really fall in love with John until I met him. We had been chatting for a couple of years, but it wasn't until I physically saw him, touched his skin, that I knew. So, it was love at first sight. But, I already knew him.
JuliepDrinkers	I can't blame Pandemic for calling it a movie plot though. What romance is and how it's portrayed in chick flicks is grossly conflicting.
MamaBear	Yeah, well even with all my love issues. I still kind of hope for that 3 <sup>rd</sup> act kiss in the rain, you know?
BreezyMorning	I totally agree with you Dee. It's all the same with me & Malcom.
Pandemic	Do you think that there is only one soul mate, one person we're meant to be with? Like the Greek myth about balls, separated by the gods even though they were one soul and now they're destined to roam eternity looking for each other?
Boobs McGee	God, that is the stupidest question I ever heard. First of all, Greek Balls? Are you talking about falafels? Second, ONE PERSON? You have to be kidding me. 6 billion people and you have to find one particular other person. Impossible: * Rolls Eyes

Dee12	<p>Improbable. Not impossible.</p> <p>Not that I really believe in that only one-person thing. I think soul mates are real, but in many different ways.</p> <p>Some are lucky enough to spend their life with that other half of their falafel. Some slowly bond and become soul mates.</p>
Shit on a Stick	***Inserts lyric from 12 <sup>th</sup> Night.
MamaBear	I don't know. If it is true, my other half probably lives in Florida and is boinking my sister.
JuliepDrinkers	Why do you say that?
MamaBear	It's my Luck.
Pandemic	<p>Well, I do and my soul mate is a stuck up dickhead. He has been around since I was a little girl. It has always been him, you know? He was always THE guy. He just always seemed to be just out of reach.</p> <p>Well, He eloped this past weekend and I am stuck here alone.</p> <p>The God Damn Prick Stole My Soul.</p>
Tubular12	Stole your soul? You should probably go get that back.



## O

Today, John was going to have sex. He woke up to the sound of the shower and a pool of light from the bathroom. His wife had forgotten to shut the door. He read the clock: 6:45. The curtains were drawn tightly shut over the windows. Stretching and scratching his ass, he went and pushed at the divide in the curtains, letting in the light as he cracked them. The sun was barely even awake. The world was still yawning, foggy, waiting for its first cup of coffee. You couldn't even make out the mountain behind the town that held the giant O for Orville.

He heard his wife open up a bottle of some sort. She had dozens in there; shampoo, cream rinse, daily conditioner, weekly conditioner, and several types of body wash. They were all stacked on the floor of the shower and he constantly tripped over them while searching for his one bottle of two-in-one dandruff shampoo. And she had more in the cupboard, the expensive ones. The one only used on special occasions. He didn't mind the money or the tripping on bottles. He loved the way those bottles made her smell and that at any moment he could pick up one of those bottles and remember a moment with her. He would sneak smells every now and then, when she wasn't around. Especially with the cupboard stuff.

*What if he joined her in the shower?* His flight was at 2:30, he didn't have to leave the house until noon. *Nah*, he decided against it. He would wait; a quickie in the shower wasn't what he wanted. He would be gone an entire week for this conference. That meant a nice send off. After the girls were off to school, a nice long sex session, free of little ears and full of yelling, would be possible. Her body all wet and sudsy did offer

some advantages. She was curvy enough that the bubbles could find places to sit, but skinny enough they could both still fit in the small walk in shower.

He sighed; he had made himself hard. He always was hornier in the morning. If he pulled one out quickly, he could make sure he lasted longer later. The thought of masturbation wasn't all that appealing, not with his wife naked in the shower.

It was always this way in the first trimester with Deanna. She was sick, cranky, and never in the mood for sex or cuddling or even a hug. He went back to bed, grabbed a tissue, and went at it.

"John?" Deanna called from the shower. He froze.

"John? Are you up?"

"Yeah, you need, *something*?" He tried to place emphasis on 'something', make it sound sexy. Maybe he could have his shower now and 'something' later?

"Sorry, honey, but I forgot a towel. They're all in the dryer. Can you grab me one?"

Fail. "Sure baby."

He grabbed a large t-shirt that fell about mid-thigh, and went downstairs. The dog was yelping by the time he hit the bottom stair. The thing had a sixth sense. It knew when anyone was even remotely near the laundry room.

It wasn't really a dog. A dog was an animal that you took into the woods and played fetch with or took hunting or fishing. Not that John had ever done any of those things. He was more a garage band, Dungeons and Dragons, Star Trek type guy. He

guessed that's why he agreed to this curly mass of fur that fit into a purse. Plus, the poodle was the only other male in the house.

John stumbled over a few toys before reaching the door, stubbing his toe on the blue Thomas Engine Tank. "Fuckin' piece of shit!" He hopped to the laundry room door. He was still reeling from the pain in his large toe as he opened it. Max bolted out. The tiny, toy-poodle had a bladder the size of a walnut and John knew better than to wait before letting him out.

The burglar alarm screeched as he opened the back door, "God Dammit!" He ran to the keypad, tripping over a dog bone with his good foot, and keyed in the code before making it back to the dryer to get a towel. Chloe and Midge were up before he made it back to the bottom of the stairs.

"Good morning, Dad," Chloe said.

"Morning, Chloster."

"Daddy, I want mash mellows for breakfast."

"Angel, its marsh, marshmallows." Midge was five and her kindergarten teacher was concerned with her mispronunciation and speech. They constantly had to correct words that a few months back had become endearing little nicknames the entire house had used.

"Marsh," she sighed, "mallows."

"Go down and sit on the couch, Chloe, turn on cartoons. I gotta give this to your mom," he held up the towel, "and then I'll come make breakfast."

He shut and locked the bedroom door behind him

“What was all the yelling?”

“Tripped over Midge’s train set, forgot the alarm.”

“You woke up the girls?”

“Yeah, they want breakfast.”

“Ahh, dammit, John. You’ve got to stop yelling like that. I wanted to be able to lay down for a bit. I’m so nauseous.”

“Go ahead, its fine.” He tried not to let his shoulders sag. *So much for that idea.* Unlocking the door as quietly as possible he said, “Lay down and I’ll get them off to school.”

Breakfast was the easy part, getting ready for school, not as easy. Hair in ponytails, clothes that match, lunches made. These tasks were nearly impossible with a ponytail insisting it sit off kilter, purple and gold only matching in basketball, and two different kinds of sandwiches. Midge couldn’t find her left shoe. Chloe had forgotten to do her times table flashcards. Between searching for the shoe and making sandwiches, John would hold up cards. Half the time he had to double check the answer. By the time the bus finally honked out front, he was exhausted.

In the kitchen, Deanna stood in front of the fridge. “Is the milk gone?”

“The girls had the cereal with the marshmallows.”

“You put way too much milk in the bowls.”

“I let them do it.”

“Jonathan.” She put her head into her hand. His full name was never a good sign.

“Now I have to go get milk too?”

“I’ll go.”

“It’s not the point, they used over a half a gallon of milk. And now I don’t have any for my coffee. My one cup for the day.” John had learned better than to touch the exaggeration. Exaggeration was to Deanna as swearing was to John. It was how she showed she was at the edge.

“I’ll go get you some.”

“No, you’ll be on the go all day. I’ll just have some tea and then I’ll pack your stuff.” She poured in the hot water and plopped a tea bag into her cup. She pouted and sat on the couch drinking tea. It wasn’t the fake pout. Her adorable fake pout she used when she wanted him to get her something. This was a real pout.

He remembered the first time she had used the fake one. He wanted to take her to Sushi King for their fourth date, she wanted tacos. She stuck out her lower lip and pleaded for greasy corn tortillas and cheap meat. They had tacos.

“Tell you what, let’s both go. Then I’ll pack myself and you can rest.”

On this, their 7,000<sup>th</sup> date, he took her to WalMart. The same one they had been going to for eight years. To make sure there were no more issues, he drove her way. Even though his way would have been faster.

When they first moved to the area there had been long debates over which way was best for getting to certain locations. She preferred straighter roads and fewer lights, even if it meant adding two miles to the drive. He hated backtracking. One day, the debates had turned into a horrible fight. She called him names worse than Jonathan. He said things that he regretted and threw a glass at the wall. It was the thick, tiki-god

tumbler they had gotten at a BBQ place in Hawaii. It bounced and hit John in the thigh. Then it fell on the floor without so much as a crack in the glass. They sat stunned. To think they worried about it breaking in their luggage and stole a towel from the hotel to protect it.

Deanna burst into laughter.

“You will never be able to do that again, even if you tried. It won’t ever happen again.”

It never happened again. The solution to it all was simple enough, whoever drove chose the route. She had to notice he was taking her way. His gesture would be sweet, romantic. She would smile at him and he would score one point towards his send off.

They passed the small studio they lived in for the first few months after being transferred to the small mountain town. Deanna just rested her head on the window. She wasn’t frowning exactly, but it was apparent that going this way, as a sacrifice, was missed.

She had to remember their studio. They moved in together after only a month of dating. Even with their family’s warnings that it was too soon, it felt right. And it was hot. They had known each other for years so there wasn’t that normal awkwardness with sex. They spent hours each evening in bed, naked.

They spent most weekends exploring the town, finding which neighborhood was best. All the streets twisting around the mountain made it exciting, but he always wanted to get home. One night she refused to get undressed.

“Why?” It was all John could think to ask. *Was she over him already?*

She pouted. The fake one. “I didn’t shave this morning. I’m not properly *groomed*.” She had done that thing where she put an accent onto a word when she was embarrassed.

“I don’t care about that,” he said.

If he had to pin point a time, a moment, that was the end of that whirlwind of sex and lust, it would be that instant. It was the moment where they started really learning each other. Not just the façade he put up for dating, but the time when he started showing her his faults and noticed hers and it was okay. It was the end of excitement and the start of comfortable.

Not that life wasn’t exciting with Deanna. It was just a different kind of excitement – a kind with stability. He knew how she would act. She knew what he would say before he said it, but the spark was always there.

He remembered the first time she drove up to the WalMart, barely open a month then. She got out and strutted the way she always had.

“That letter’s for you.”

“What letter?”

“That O,” he pointed at the white letter on the mountain. “O for outstanding ass.”

She blushed and walked a few more feet. Then she put a bit more wiggle in it. “Maybe it’s for you?” She didn’t turn to face him. “O for Captain Obvious. Everyone knows I have the best ass in the world.”

He ran up behind her and scooped her up. She squealed and kicked her legs. When he put her down, she ran. They played tag throughout the entire new store, ignoring the rest of the people gawking and trying to buy milk.

The weekend after WalMart tag, they looked at houses in the neighborhood they had chosen. They liked the third house they saw, but they played it cool throughout the downstairs tour. The agreement had been not to buy anything they saw this first day, to make the realtor work for his commission. All resolve went out the window when they saw the view from the master bedroom. There it was, perfectly framed, the O. They laughed and then told the realtor they would offer on this home, without seeing the rest of the upstairs.

He had hoped that coming here, seeing the studio, would mean a trip down memory lane. Deanna always got horny when she got nostalgic. But, she went straight to the grocery aisle and got milk, no usual cart full of crap picked up on the way to the one thing they came for. No lines at check out, either. Just his luck, the one-day he would have loved to wait in line while a barely legal checker flirted with every single guy in line besides him, and the place was empty. He needed a bit more time to make her remember that first time here. He saw the McDonalds by the entrance. “Want to get one of those new ice coffees? Maybe a McMuffin?”

“Whatever.”

When the guy asked if their order was for here or to go, Deanna said, “to go” and John said, “for here,” in the same instant. Deanna shrugged and sat at the closest booth.

“Remember when they opened this McDonalds?” He started the journey.



“Hasn’t it always been here?”

They were silent.

“You know we should get back, the milk.” Deanna motioned to the bags on the table.

At home, Deanna sat on the couch and turned on the TV.

“You aren’t coming upstairs?”

“I thought you said you’d pack so I could relax.”

“Yeah, just thought we could spend a bit of time together before I leave.”

“I guess.” She picked up the remote as if it weighed twenty pounds.

“No, just stay. I’ll make it fast and then we can cuddle here.” He tried his best to smile.

He was running out of time. It was getting closer to go time. He had only ever left once during a first trimester before. Of course, he hadn’t known it was a first trimester until he got home, but he hadn’t gotten his sendoff that time either.

He had spent that entire conference worrying about their relationship. They had been dating about three months. She was irritable and constantly starting little arguments about nothing. She was just plain bitchy. It was like this morning’s milk. Except back then, John hadn’t learned how to handle those moods. The moods where it was better to give her what she wanted than ask what was wrong.

Back then, John had a rule; date until it isn’t fun anymore. Things at that point were not fun with Deanna. The problem was he didn’t want to end it. He already knew

that he would rather stick it out with Deanna than move on. Even a less bitchy girl would be missing something Deanna had. He made up his mind in one moment. When he got home, he would ask her to marry him.

He was convinced she felt the same way, but was scared. Having known each other for so long, she knew his reputation of one to three months of fun, no more. That meant he was overdue on his break up moment with her. She was bitchy because she thought he was going to leave, and that had to be it. He had to show her he wanted to stay. He bought the ring while on a lunch break during the convention and devised a speech on the flight home.

At the gate, Deanna was there with a small gift of her own. He opened it to find a pregnancy test emblazoned with a blue positive sign. He laughed and gave her his present. No speech. No actual yes. Just kissing.

By the time the bags were in the car, Deanna was out cold on the couch. Sitting next to her, he began to kiss her arms, her neck, her cheeks. When he got to her eyes, he thought they would still be closed, but they were open and staring. He kissed her mouth, locking eyes with her.

“Did you want sex?” she asked.

It was like a punch to the gut. “Not now.” He sat up.

“Oh, come on. I didn’t mean it like that.” She went to kiss him but sat up too fast. Coffee-stained puke spilled across his lap.

“John, oh honey, I’m sorry. It’s just a bad morning. The morning sick-”

He shook his head, placed a silencing hand in the air, and pushed himself up.

He took another quick shower. He failed. If he was going to be completely honest, it wasn't all the pregnancy or Deanna's mood swings. He hadn't exactly tried to seduce her. Wal-Mart and a McDonald's Iced Coffee weren't exactly the best way to romance your wife. He took a deep breath; at least he could watch some porn in the hotel tonight.

After the shower was over, his travel suit was laying on the bed. It said what she couldn't.

*“Get dressed. You are not getting any today.”*

Downstairs, Deanna was nowhere to be found. The car was still there, she must have been in the girl's room. Back up the stairs. She wasn't there either. He looked at his watch. 11:30. Did she go for a walk with the dog? He went to the fridge to look for the note she would have left. Nothing, and Max was in the backyard. The garage. No. Laundry room, folding towels. No. Maybe he just missed her and she was changing.

In the master bedroom, Deanna laid naked on the bed, her belly down, glorious bubble ass up, legs playfully kicking the air, and her head resting in her hands.

“Where did you go?” he asked.

“I wanted you to have to chase me a little.”

“Baby, I should always chase you. I guess I forgot how to romance you a bit, huh?”

“What do you mean, going my way to our Wal-Mart and making sure I got my daily cup of coffee. So, romantic,” Deanna fluttered her eyes and made a fake swooning

action with her wrist to her forehead. He got a shot of side boob and smiled. She pulled his tie and kissed his neck, the spot he could resist.

He wrapped his arms around the lumbar of her naked back and turned her towards him. The smell of strawberries enveloped him. It was her hair, the strawberry shampoo. The expensive one saved for date night and special occasions. She had known in the shower, known she would be here naked in his arms.

He remembered the night she had first tried the shampoo. He literally couldn't wait to get home and pay the babysitter. They had made love in the car on the side of the road. The back seat folded down had created the perfect upward angle. Deanna had bought a special pillow from a sex catalogue the next week.

That was the thing with Deanna. His desire was more than physical, more than smelling strawberries. It was the way she would buy a pillow or a kind of shampoo to recreate moments they both enjoyed. That she wanted to keep those moments intact, that's what really made him want her. He wanted to pound those memories, sparking new ones, new things to buy, new little triggers to sex. It was a whole language that only they knew.

He ran his hand up her back and put it on her cheek. She melted when he guided her lips to his. They tasted of kids bubblegum toothpaste. He opened his eyes and saw hers smiling at him. She had brushed her teeth. That was where she had been, the girls bathroom.

He took off his suit and left his tie on, not an easy task while lying down. Deanna kept giggling and teasing him between kisses.

He pulled her body on top of him and felt her naked breast against his chest. They were cool, she had been here naked, waiting. Probably the entire time he had been searching. She guided his hands up her thigh. Her skin softer than usual, she had shaved and exfoliated. She had tried harder than he had. She kissed his chest and then the spot. Her spot. Her spot on his neck. Their spot.

John made love to his wife. It was fast and quiet. The perfect send off.

<b>Good Morning Thread</b>			
<b>Mama Bear</b>	<b>Good morning on this bright and beautiful Thursday Morning!</b>		
	2/1/2008	6:30 AM	<i>"May Love Shine on YOU"</i>
<b>Dee 12</b>	<b>People like you should be killed at birth.</b>		
	2/1/2008	6:31 AM	<i>WE ARE EXPECTING AGAIN! 08/15/2008</i>
<b>BoobsMcGee</b>	<b>Morning</b>		
	2/1/2008	6:32 AM	<i>"Though lovers be lost, love shall not; And death shall have no dominion." — Dylan Thomas</i>
<b>InnerSPACE</b>	<b>Where's the good? Come on, it means nothing without the good in front of it.</b>		
	2/1/2008	6:33 AM	<i>I don't a mother fucking signature</i>
<b>NYCSPORTS</b>	<b>I should not be awake yet.</b>		
	2/1/2008	6:45 AM	<i>Read <a href="http://www.NYCSPORTS.com">www.NYCSPORTS.com</a></i>
<b>Mama Bear</b>	<b>Come on you guys! It's a great day - buck up buttercups!</b>		
	2/1/2008	7:00 AM	<i>"May Love Shine on YOU"</i>
<b>GrafeetiGrl</b>	<b>Good Morning, everyone. Today I get to chat with you all day. Why, you might be asking? Well, I called in sick. I feel so naughty.</b>		
	2/1/2008	7:30 AM	<i>Thanks for the Warm Welcome!</i>
<b>Tubular12</b>	<b>No one gives a shit Feet Girl - go to work before Your BOSS sees this post and you are written up.</b>		
	2/1/2008	7:32 AM	...
<b>Jedi</b>	<b>Just stop, Blake.</b>		
	2/1/2008	7:45 AM	<i>May my force be with you</i>
<b>GrafeetiGrl</b>	<b>Blake? I don't get it. Who is Blake? And I will not get in trouble. I called it is a personal health day. I needed some Me time.</b>		
	2/1/2008	7:46 AM	<i>Thanks for the Warm Welcome!</i>
<b>Jedi</b>	<b>Tubular. His real name is Blake.</b>		
	2/1/2008	7:51 AM	<i>May my force be with you</i>
<b>Tubular12</b>	<b>Aren't you alone all the time?</b>		
	2/1/2008	7:52 AM	...
<b>John</b>	<b>That was low even for you. Who the fuck is GrafeetiGrl?</b>		
	2/1/2008	8:05 AM	<i>Please be a boy, please be a boy, please be a boy! 08/15/2008</i>

NYCSPORTS	<b>OH, that's right. John's been gone. Didn't Dee tell you?</b>		
	2/1/2008	8:07 AM	Read <a href="http://www.NYCSPORTS.com">www.NYCSPORTS.com</a>
John	<b>So, is Feets an ALT? How the hell does she have 1200 posts already?</b>		
	2/1/2008	8:15 AM	<i>Please be a boy, please be a boy, please be a boy! 08/15/2008</i>
Tubular12	<b>Not an ALT, read the Bathroom thread. She's some crazy broad that obsessed with bathroom graffiti and killed her husband.</b>		
	2/1/2008	8:17 AM	...
GrafeetiGrl	<b>I did not kill him. How could you even think to type that?</b>		
	2/1/2008	8:19 AM	<i>Thanks for the Warm Welcome!</i>
GrafeetiGrl	<b>And grafeeti is fascinating. It was even around in Ancient Roman times. Pompeii bathroom's ruins have grafeeti. That's got to mean something.</b>		
	2/1/2008	8:21 AM	<i>Thanks for the Warm Welcome!</i>
NYCSPORTS	<b>GRAFFITI – For the LOVE OF GOD - If you love it so much spell it correctly.</b>		
	2/1/2008	9:05 AM	Read <a href="http://www.NYCSPORTS.com">www.NYCSPORTS.com</a>
Shit on a Stick	<b>She has been here 3 days. Posts about 400 times a day. But 90% of it is a smiley face or a LOL</b>		
	2/1/2008	9:30 AM	<i>Pooping is an Artform. I get Paid to Poop</i>
John	<b>What in the fuck did I just read? I want the last ten minutes of my life back.</b>		
	2/1/2008	9:55 AM	<i>Please be a boy, please be a boy, please be a boy! 08/15/2008</i>
John	<b>Are we sure this isn't an ALT? ADMIN, can we get a confirmation?</b>		
	2/1/2008	10:05 AM	<i>Please be a boy, please be a boy, please be a boy! 08/15/2008</i>
Shit on a Stick	<b>Well, we have a picture of her mouth and one eye. Seems legit.</b>		
	2/1/2008	10:25 AM	<i>Pooping is an Artform. I get Paid to Poop</i>
BreezyMorning	<b>I am good, aren't I? See What I DID THERE? Dee, you still have morning sickness? Aren't you like 15 weeks?</b>		
	2/1/2008	10:45 AM	<i>Yes, the song's about me Boos~4~life</i>
John	<b>Dee's Pregnant!?!?!? I go away for a few days AND everything Changes.</b>		
	2/1/2008	11:02 AM	<i>Please be a boy, please be a boy, please be a boy! 08/15/2008</i>

Dee 12	<b>Funny John, I'm 16 weeks yesterday. I never had this with the other two. Maybe it's a boy for John.</b>		
	2/1/2008	11:05 AM	WE ARE EXPECTING AGAIN! 08/15/2008
BreezyMorning	<b>Oh, that'd be sooooo cute. 2 girls and a Boy - Just like 12th Night! You should name him Jonas!</b>		
	2/1/2008	11:15 AM	Yes, the song's about me Boos~4~life
MamaBear	<b>Has anyone seen Julie lately? She hasn't posted for a few weeks.</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:05 PM	"May Love Shine on YOU"
Samari	<b>Morning</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:07 PM	"I rush to the edge to be the first to fall off..."
Shits on s Step	[Quote: MamaBear - Has anyone seen Julie lately? She hasn't posted for a few weeks.] <b>Irma, PM me.</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:15 PM	Pooping is an Artform. I get Paid to Poop
GrafeetiGrl	<b>You're supposed to say good first. This has already been established.</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:16 PM	Thanks for the Warm Welcome!
NYCSPORTS	<b>Don't correct people</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:17 PM	Read <a href="http://www.NYCSPORTS.com">www.NYCSPORTS.com</a>
GrafeetiGrl	<b>Sorry</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:18 PM	Thanks for the Warm Welcome!
NYCSPORTS	<b>Don't apologize</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:19 PM	Read <a href="http://www.NYCSPORTS.com">www.NYCSPORTS.com</a>
GrafeetiGrl	<b>I don't know what to respond with</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:20 PM	Thanks for the Warm Welcome!
NYCSPORTS	<b>Then don't post</b>		
	2/1/2008	12:25 PM	Read <a href="http://www.NYCSPORTS.com">www.NYCSPORTS.com</a>
Dee 12	<b>God, Kori you are a bitch this morning. I have the morning sickness. What's your excuse?</b>		
	2/1/2008	1:05 PM	Thanks for the Warm Welcome!
NYCSPORTS	<b>Hung over</b>		
	2/1/2008	1:30 PM	Read <a href="http://www.NYCSPORTS.com">www.NYCSPORTS.com</a>
Dee 12	<b>But, that's not new</b>		
	2/1/2008	1:45 PM	WE ARE EXPECTING AGAIN! 08/15/2008
John	<b>Zing! AND match.</b>		
	2/1/2008	5:45 PM	Please be a boy, please be a boy, please be a boy! 08/15/2008



## The Answer

[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[Sent: Mon 02/02/2008 5:39PM](#)  
[Subject: Confirmation Email](#)

To whom it may concern;  
Having read the terms and conditions I am answering the required registration riddle. The answer is the word "AND."

Sincerely,  
Connie

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[To: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/02/2008 5:45PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

Holy Crap! You actually read the terms and conditions.  
You're a first. Who are you again?

---

[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[Sent: Mon 02/03/2008 9:04AM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

Dear Administration,  
My full name is Constance Harvey. If you are having troubles locating the account, I joined on 01/28; however, it took me some time to solve the riddle. Might I suggest and easier riddle for confirmation?

Sincerely,  
Connie

---

[To: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 11:25 AM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

No, what's your BB name?

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[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[Sent: Mon 02/03/2008 12:44 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

Dear Administration,

I am registered under the name "GrafeettiGr1." Which brings me to ask the question, are we allowed to change our names? I know that alternate memberships are prohibited and I am not suggesting a new account.

I would like to change the name under this account to something less conspicuous. Perhaps Constant12 would cause less of a stir. Please advise if this is an option and if the name is currently available. Also, now that I have answered the question correctly, I would appreciate a timely change in my status from new member to member as soon as possible.

Thank you,  
Connie

---

[To: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 12:49 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

Dear Connie,  
Kindly chill the fuck out with all this formal writing shit.

Thank you,  
Administration

---

[To: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 12:53PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

P.S. I'll let you in on a secret... This is Jedi. I post under that and the big ADMIN.

---

[To: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 12:55PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

P.P.S. Why would you want to change your name? You're just starting to get a rep on the beeb.

---

[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 1:30 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

This is my work email. When I used it, I had no idea this was you. Please use [conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com) from now on.

[To: charvey@rhinoliner.com](mailto:charvey@rhinoliner.com)  
[Cc: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 1:08 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Confirmation Email](#)

P.P.P.S I don't change member status. It is automatically done when your post count reaches 12,000

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[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 5:30 PM](#)  
[Subject: Just this email](#)

I thought there wasn't supposed to be any ALTs?

---

[To: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 5:45 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: Just this email](#)

Hahahaha! (I hate Lol, please never use it in my presence) Half of the people on the Beeb are ALTs.  
You took the rules seriously, huh?

---

[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 6:47 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

I guess so; I mean they seemed mostly official. The riddle was a bit odd and the language at points was a lot more casual than other terms and conditions, but I assumed it was official.  
Maybe I'll make an ALT and let the feet girl die.

---

[To: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 7:45 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

Um, you shouldn't really tell Administration you're going to break the rules.  
Administration might ban you.

---

[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 7:57 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

Oh, I won't really.

---

[To: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:01 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

Kidding. What I should have said:  
NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! You can't kill Feet Girl :/

---

[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:07 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

Why? It doesn't seem like she is that well liked.

---

[To: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[From: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:15 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

Do you really not understand how the BB works?

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[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:36 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

I have basically done everything wrong. I should just kill Feet Girl and start fresh.

---

[To: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:37 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

That isn't the point. Don't you see, you did it all wrong and you're fine. You even have a nickname already. You're not an idiot, trust me.  
Look let's chat it'll be easier that way.

---

[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:39 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

I thought we were chatting.

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[To: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:45 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

No, what's your handle?

---

[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:48 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

Huh? Handle? Look, I do not understand all the weird names you guys use. Please, speak English.

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[To: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:52 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

OMG! Did you just find the internet yesterday?

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[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 8:55 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

No, I'm actually pretty familiar with the internet.

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[To: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[To: Administration@12thnightbbforum.com](mailto:Administration@12thnightbbforum.com)  
[From: conbon58@gmail.com](mailto:conbon58@gmail.com)  
[Sent: Sat 02/03/2008 9:01 PM](#)  
[Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Just this email](#)

Your Windows Messenger name? You know chatting??

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## Welcome to Consciousness

Her sister's jacket was a faded red, a color caught somewhere between pink and burgundy. It looked like a sleeping bag, but was the fashion for coats in 1983. It was silky, soft, and water resistant and made a swishing noise with every movement. It was also puffy and had buttons the size of her little fist that held together the front of the coat with bits of string made into a loop. Teemy - instead of Tammy, a name way too hard to pronounce - looked like inverted cone on the way to the park.

It was the only color - not because Julie kept her first memory in black and white, but because it was deep in a Utah winter. A vast nothingness of bland houses against an overcast sky and trees that had long since lost any leaves and were really just soggy branches sticking out of the white snow. The snow must have recently come; she remembered only a few bits of asphalt intermixed with soggy snowdrifts and no tracks.

"Make sure she keeps her gloves on," Her mother would yell at her while she buttoned Julie's jacket. It was white fur. Fake, and prickly from getting wet, but close enough to the real thing she could imagine she was rich like the Dynasty ladies on that show her mother watched.

"Make sure she doesn't wander off in a day dream, too." To Julie, this sounded like a challenge.

"Yeah, I know mom," Teemy rolled her eyes and put the leash on the bouncing poodle.

"Don't sass me, this is her first time taking the dog for a walk without an adult. I want you to be careful."

Julie started out right next to Teemy as they exited the house. She was still right there down the steps and even down the driveway to the cul-de-sac. But, somewhere between there and the other side of the street, their mother must have stopped watching. Julie was behind Teemy, probably by ten paces - a lifetime for a three-and-three-quarter year old.

Julie didn't remember sound from her first memory, but she remembered the exact texture, color, and size of the coats. There must have been shrieking, yelling. But in her mind, the memory had no high pitched shrills. No yelps. She never even heard Teemy cry out. There was also no smell in the memory either. Not that a cold January morning in Utah has many distinct smells. There was sound, she knew that. She just had chosen not store that element of the memory - keeping only a calm silence.

When Julie was little, she would fall asleep when she was scared. If a scary movie was playing or if the electricity went out in a thunderstorm, fast asleep in minutes. While others thought it to be a quirky little trait, she figured it was because of the dreams. Everyone has sat with a friend or a coworker and bored them with a rendition of the previous night's dream, but hers were different.

Right after her divorce, she was working in a cubicle farm for a financial institution. The morning coffee spot was her soul-sucking box of gray, while she would recite the previous night's dream. There was always a crowd.

One Tuesday, in the middle of the story, the big bad boss came over.



“So, he pays and then I am in this castle village and everyone is dressed as a drag queen, with fishnets and neon corsets.” It was the second worst thing she had done in front of a boss. The first was a bean burrito and an ill-fated bathroom break.

“What’s happening over here?” He was always trying to be friends with everybody. At first, this made work enjoyable, until Julie realized she was the only one actually working because everyone else was best buds with the boss.

“Just tellin’ them what I dreamt about last night.” She turned back to the computer and logged in. The crowd began to dissipate.

“Fishnets and corsets?”

“I dream in vivid color and theme.” She opened the Excel Spreadsheets the company used as financial records software because they were too cheap to buy actual programs.

“Those from dreams?” His greasy, thin ponytail stuck straight out from his head as he bopped it towards the small corkboard at the back of her cubicle. It was the only place where employees were allowed personal effects. A person could only see it by actually entering the six-by-six padded room. Visitors taking the five-cent tour just saw matching drones who all liked the same nature calendar.

Julie’s cork was covered in the ink drawings made from different sized swirls. It was a hobby. She had been doing since trying to quit smoking for the third time a year before. She would draw thousands of swirls to color in a picture and keep her mind off wanting a cigarette. Swirl. Swirl. Swirl. Swirl. It was mind numbing and the result was somewhat psychedelic. She still smoked; just now, she drew swirls as well.

“Yeah,” She began to input the payments from the previous day into the database.

“What about last night, you going to draw that one?”

“I might draw the ending.” She drummed the large stack of papers on her desk, trying to show the amount of work ahead of her in her morning’s routine. The dream story would have been over by now.

“The faggots in fishnets?”

She ignored the urge to correct him, because she had already found out that was useless. “No, in the end it was lucid and I climbed out of the party and came out in a lighthouse that overlooked an avenue of cherry trees in full bloom.”

“Lucid?”

“Yeah, you realize you are dreaming and you control the path of the dream.”

“Wicked.”

“It’s not as fun as it sounds. I don’t do it that often and can only sustain it for a little bit.”

“Yeah, I don’t have that problem. If you know what I mean.”

She giggled, the response she knew he wanted.

“I think I, and every other adult, can catch the drift.” He went over to the cork and pulled off the latest creation. It was half of a girl’s silhouetted face against a purple sky and exploding popcorn sun. The girl’s hair curled across the entire page and on the top corner, a single blue bird was perched on a strand falling off the page.

“What do you think?” She perked up and smiled at him. It was sad, but she needed praise – any praise.

“I think you did too much acid in high school.” He said as he walked away and threw the paper on the floor. Two weeks later, the office lost the corkboards.

Maybe that’s why she decided to forget the sounds of her first memory. That way it was more a surreal dream she could draw and hang on a board and slightly less horrific welcome to consciousness. Or maybe, the noise wasn’t even registering in the moment. Maybe she was in shock.

Really, she only had the images – a string of shots that could fill a small album, but with holes. Between the crisp and clear images that ran together like a flipbook there were jumps, a chunk of pages missing. Large enough that she questioned the reality of it. A fantastic daydream visited so much it had become a real memory. She read articles in science magazine that said it was possible. They said that humans could create memories or alter them until the story of their life was nothing more than a poorly written movie without a soundtrack.

When she started the slow recovery back to reality, her first order of business was to answer her questions about that memory. A nervous breakdown has a way of making you question the validity of life, of your past – especially when the present is so muddled and depressing. She was scared that it was all just an illusion, her whole life a simple trick of brain cells reacting to chemicals. She had to find proof.

The court records were long expunged or forgotten, so she had to ask her parents. Their mother was out of the question.

“Dad, you want some help organizing your files?”

Their parent's had fifteen filing cabinets they kept in the ten-by-ten storage locker in the back of their trailer park. Maybe her means of investigation were a little backhanded, but asking outright for proof seemed wrong. Not like rude wrong, but like visiting this memory was dirty, sinful.

"Sure," he smiled.

She had been living with her parents for a month. She had made it six months on her own after the divorce. Then there had been the nervous breakdown. She had been an adult for thirteen years, but couldn't make it without a partner for more than a few pathetic months. She had doubts as to if she was strong enough to even go through with finalizing the divorce. Maybe the ex was right. Maybe she was just a stupid bitch that would never survive.

"It would be good for you to have a project," her dad said handing her the keys.

The breakdown started when she quit her job. That memory was completely intact.

Her job had become to fix all the problems that occurred at the cubicle farm. This new department was created because the rattail manager and the customer service manager were at odds - a war of the departments. Accounts were bouncing in and out of her desk like the popcorn from the picture. She was trying to place protocols and procedures into company policy to alleviate her now sixty-hour workweek. One of the jerks in accounts payable refused to follow the rules. He was a college roommate of the owner and didn't think the rules applied to him. One Monday morning, she was in a

meeting all morning trying to explain the importance of each procedure and the chaos caused by not following the policy. She was professional, but probably a bit loud with her complaints.

When she got back to her desk, she found a post it.

“Don’t forget, your only job is to sit there and look pretty.”

She snapped.

It started simply enough with her packing her desk. She didn’t speak, just threw pens and note pads into a box.

“What the hell do you think you're doing?” Rattail was still the epitome of political correctness.

“I’m done.” It was all she could get past the burning dam forming in her throat.

“You’ve got three more hours left. Call the client and fix it.”

“No I’m done!” Yelling helped to keep the tears behind the dam.

“So that’s it?”

“Yep.” More pens were thrown into the box.

“So what, you’re just quitting?”

“Yep.” More pens.

He walked away for a bit and then stormed back. “Good riddance. We don’t need your rules and procedures that cost more money than they save.”

“Fine.” One-syllable words were all she had, all she could let leak out. Rattail went into the boss and then both came out and approached her desk.

“Look, why don’t you take the rest of the day to cool off and then” the owner started to say.

“No, I’m done,” she said closing a box.

“Fine. Good luck finding a job that will let you come in late every day.” Rattail said. The owner whispered something in Rattail’s ear. “and your cat, how you gunna feed him now?”

Julie just kept packing her desk, proud she could hold it together through the cat comment. Usually that was a breaking point. He was her baby.

“Don’t be stealing out pens, either.”

The dam exploded. “These pens?” She opened the box and frantically grabbed a handful of the pens that she had been packing - holding them up high for the office to see. “Are you talking about these pens?” She climbed on top of her chair.

“Yeah, don’t take any of our pens.” His voice was quiet, in shock.

“That’s it. You don’t work here anymore,” the owner said.

“These fucking pens are mine I brought them from home.” A small crowd began to form. “I paid for them with my own money!”

The receptionist and a few sales representatives had gathered from the south half of the company. The customer service manager had come over from the north and was standing slightly to the left of Rattail. The owner’s wife stood behind her husband, shocked. Julie wanted to let her have the best show.

She bent over like a cat and opened a drawer, pulled out the shit pens he should have been talking referring to. “These craptastic pens are yours.” She threw one at

Rattail. “They don’t write for shit” another pen was thrown, “and they take three days to get because only one person is deemed worthy enough for a key to the supply room.” She turned and threw a few at the receptionist. “And that’s only because her tight, white ass is sleeping with the owner and half the guys in sales and they all need a place they can lock it up and keep it secret.”

“That’s it, call security.” The owner had obviously underestimated the value she placed on a good pen.

She was escorted out and told not to ask for a reference.

The dam break in the office led to many other dams breaking. Well, that and her cat died. She lost her apartment and her car because she couldn’t make the payments. Her parent’s said it was their house or an institution. The institution would have been better.

The day of Julie’s first memory wasn’t really talked about in her family. Neither was the trial. Both had been mentioned quickly before the subject changed to a TV sitcom or gossip. She knew very little about it, and she had no clue where to look for information. So, she actually did file twelve of the fifteen cabinets before finding the folder.

Before she found it, she thought she would rip the file apart devouring the contents for proof. Panic set in the moment she read the faded label - Teemy’s testimony. What if the facts were all wrong? What would be her first memory if this one were just

something she dreamed up? Could she really ever trust herself that any part of her life had been real?

She opened it three times. Each time she would realize she couldn't breathe and shut it quickly. Finally, on the fourth try, she held her breath and began to read.

The date was right for the memory. The winter before her brother was born. She knew the season had never been mentioned in the brief, family discussions. There were pictures of the remains, just where she remembered them.

It was real and suddenly the memory started to fill in.

They came from the left. The leader, alpha male, all black with blue eyes seemed to smile smugly as the other three followed behind, proud as peaches they didn't have to think for themselves. The others were more gray and white. But they all had those same blue eyes.

Charlie pulled Teemy, all fourteen pounds of him, towards the park. He probably hadn't been walked for days with the amount of snow that was everywhere. The last time Julie saw him he was happy, his curly tail wagging. Julie didn't see them snag him.

The testimony stated that the man in the house next to the park owned full blood wolves. He feed them raw meat and had a fence made of rotting wood. They got out and roamed the neighborhood freely and regularly. Her parents had complained to the homeowners association several times. The Association responded with their own concerns about the pale blue paint her mother had chosen the previous summer for the gables of their home – it was against regulations.



They must have ripped the poodle from Teemy's arms. When she saw the pack, she said she immediately picked Charlie up and headed for home. Julie's head was turned watching the icicles melt and refract in the sun, which had been missing for a few days. The colors caught her attention. The way the ice brightened the dreary, monochrome houses made her happy.

One minute Charlie was a little poodle on a long awaited walk. The next, Teemy was running back to the house and he was raw meat on a snow bank in front of her piano teacher's house. She left her. Teemy went to get help for a dog and left her baby sister alone on the corner. It was real.

It all started on a corner with a pack of wolves eating her dog mere yards away from her. They ate him and she watched. But, it wasn't really him. It was just a pile of soft white fur and reddish gore. It was more a hole where everything became dark and then the pages skipped forward to her running up the stairs to her mother.