





Light



Light

by  
Evan Jones

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<<http://www.cse.ucsd.edu/~skumar/photography/sanjacinto/nature/pages/light.htm>>.

I dedicate this book to: All the people that have  
Looked over my work in the past.  
I don't think this book would be very good without your  
Suggestions and comments. Thank you, and I hope you  
All enjoy the book.



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Introduction:  
Sand and Salt

This story was the first bit of writing I did in Creative Composition, and is thus the first story in the book. It was meant to be a test of our skill, which I believe I passed with flying colors.



## Sand and Salt

It was raining. The archeologist slammed his shovel into the ground again, lifting the wet dirt of the earth and letting it fall onto the growing pile. The workers had left for the day. The archeologist looked around, aware that here, in the deserts of Israel, raiders could fall upon him and his aid at any time. Then his shovel hit stone. He fell to his knees and began to feel for a seam between the rock and the earth. When he had, he began to trace it until he had uncovered the entire slab. Then he began to pry it upwards. It was heavy, too heavy for him alone. But the archeologist knew he couldn't wait until the next day, when the workers returned. If they knew that he had found something, word would get back to the ruler of the area, and he would confiscate whatever treasures were uncovered.

The archeologist called to his aid, "Help me." Together they lifted the slab from its resting spot, slowly uncovering a dark hole. "Get the rope, I'm going in." He lowered himself slowly down, expecting gold or other riches, but what

he found was beyond his wildest dreams. It was a statue of an Israeli woman, made out of a substance that glittered strangely in the light of his torch. She was amazingly beautiful and extraordinarily lifelike. It was as if she was a real person, frozen in time. The curves and details of her clothes were spectacular. Whoever had done this was a genius, a master.

“Petrov! Backup the truck. We are leaving this place now.” He called to his aid, “Quickly, but don’t damage her!” The archeologist smiled; if they were able to get it across the border, they could keep it. The archeologist got into the driver’s seat in the cargo truck and sped off into the desert, quickly finding the main road. The drive was spent in complete silence, except for the rain hitting the windows and roof. Five miles from the border, lights flashed and sirens wailed: the police. The archeologist pulled to the side of the road, trying to keep calm.

When the officer made it to the window, the archeologist smiled and said, “What seems to be the problem officer?”

The policeman smiled, "You were speeding, and we have reason to believe you are carrying contraband. Please, come with me and open your cargo hold." The archeologist's eyes narrowed. He pushed the door open and the policeman stumbled backward, arms flailing. His gun glinted in its holster, reflecting a lightning strike a few miles away. The archeologist reached forward and grabbed it, pulling it from its snug container. Turning it on the officer, the gun screamed his reply to the cop's request, then another, and another, and yet another. The man jerked with each shot and when the shooting was finished, stumbled a step forward. He looked at the archeologist with shocked eyes, then turned his gaze down to his bloody hands. He looked up at the archeologist again, his mouth moved, but no sound came out. Then he fell to the ground, his knees bending and curling under him. He lay there silent, and a pool of blood began to form around him. The archeologist dropped the gun into the growing puddle and climbed back into the truck.

His aid stared at him with wide eyes, “My god...What’ve you done?” The archeologist turned to him, a mad gleam in his eye.

“We must get her home. She must be seen by the world.” He cranked the truck into gear and sped off onto the road, the lights in his rearview mirror soon faded.

One last checkpoint and they were free. As he pulled into the station, a guard peered into the hold; there was nothing they could do to stop the man.

Much to the archeologist’s surprise, the guard waved them through. “They’ve got nothing of value in here.”

The archeologist leapt from the car. “No... the statue...” He scrambled back to the cargo hold. The statue was gone; all that remained was a wet pile of sand and salt. “No...” The archeologist screamed, “No!” he descended quickly to madness and was restrained by the guards.

A half an hour later, Petrov, the aid, frowned as he took a cigarette from one of the guards and lit it. “Who’s Lot?” The guard asked.

Petrov frowned again. "Lot? Why?"

The guard shrugged, "Just curious. The madman you brought with you kept raving about him and his wife."

The cigarette fell smoldering to the ground. "Of course. It makes perfect sense." He shook his head, "Lot was a man who lived in the ancient city of Sodom. When the sins of the people called down the vengeance of God, two angels were sent to warn Lot of the catastrophe about to happen. The angels took Lot, his wife, and his daughters by hand and brought them out of the city, saying, 'Save yourselves. Look not behind you unless you become involved in the calamity of the city.' And so they ran away. But then his wife defied the heavenly host and looked back. In retribution, God turned her into a pillar of salt."



Introduction:  
Golden Lions and White Sunsets

This story originally started out as a short story with no letter at all. When the assignment for a Letter Story was given, I began to write what eventually became 'Knowledge Quest!' but I scrapped it, choosing instead to elaborate on my short story 'The Cards.'

If I may say so myself, which I do, it improved a hundredfold from its original state.



## Golden Lions and White Sunsets

The bright, flashing lights lit the casino as a diverse crowd of people played the slots. The bells and sirens of the machines were barely audible over the chatter of the crowd. A young man with brown hair sat on a stool near a blackjack table, awaiting the dealer. His black suit-jacket hung slightly open over a plain white shirt and crumpled black tie. The man looked around and smiled. The Golden MGM Lion covered everything in the casino; the ceiling, the floors, the walls, the gift shop counter, even the employees. The dealer finally arrived and the waiting gamblers clapped quietly. The dealer straightened his green visor over his young face, he was probably twenty, twenty-five at most, and brushed a fleck of dust off his red vest, branded with the Lion. He pulled a deck of cards from under the table and broke the plastic seal. Then he spread them face up on the green felt table and snapped them back into his hand. He began to shuffle, hand over hand, hand over hand, spread, flip, snap, and then hand over

hand again. After two minutes of shuffling, he spread the deck face up on the table once more. The cards were evenly mixed, and completely random. He snapped them back into his hand and let them fall to rest in his palm. The cards zipped together as he did so, the sound was as sweet as music for a gambler. The dealer set the pile onto a small white square traced out on the felt, and spread his hands.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the game is single deck Blackjack, standard rules; dealer must hit on sixteen and stand on seventeen.” He ran his hand across a bronze plaque inset on the felt; it was a list of the rules of blackjack. “Now... Who’s ready to play?”

The game commences and many leave the table with much less money than before. Only one player had remained there since the beginning. It was the young man with the brown hair. Finally, after losing two thousand dollars, he sadly stood up and made his way through the ocean of people and to the empty elevator. He pressed the button for the third floor and leaned casually against the back of the small box. As

the elevator rose, cheery music filled the air and after a three minute trip, it stopped as the door opened. The man stepped out of the elevator and headed down the long hallway, carpeted with a diamond pattern of green and scarlet, to his hotel room. He opened the door and took in the room; it was small, but not too small. There were two beds covered with the same diamond pattern as the carpet to his left, and a desk with a small lamp to his right. Straight ahead was the television, and above were the two incandescent bulbs in their flower shaped shells. The man looked to his right and cast a smile to the woman sitting there. She flicked her long scarlet hair over her shoulder and straightened an old red t-shirt that she wore with a pair of faded blue jeans. As she turned to face the man, he could see that her stunning face was filled with the glow that only those in their mid-twenties possessed as her eyes twinkled.

“It’s going as planned,” he looked around the room, “Where’s that letter I wrote?”

The woman set down a deck of MGM Grand cards and smiled, "You had it mailed two days ago, remember?"

The man ran a hand through his hair and let out a breath of relief. "Good. I was hoping I had done that."

Captain Allan Jones stood tall just outside his new cabin on the United States Carrier Regan. Dressed in his whites, with all his ribbons pinned and his medals hung, he was an impressive sight, and at the young age of twenty-seven, he looked just like one of the men in a recruitment poster. He smiled as his crew worked diligently on the deck below. An ensign hurried by with the month's mail call. After a few more steps the new officer skidded to a halt and turned on his heels.

"Sir!" His hand swept up in a salute as the bag of mail fell to the deck. "I have a letter for you, Sir."

Allan gave a return salute and took the offered envelope. "Carry on." The ensign scurried away to finish his duties as Allan looked at his

mail. Judging by the chicken scratch handwriting, it was from his brother. He checked the return address, Vegas. He clicked his tongue disapprovingly and turned back to his cabin. Closing the door behind him, he regarded his room, as he always did. It was small, but not cramped. The bed to his right was pushed into the corner to save space and his foot locker was beneath it. His desk was to his left and cluttered with papers. After switching on the lamp above his desk, his only real source of light other than the small window on his door, he sat down on his bed and ripped open the letter. The three pages inside were typed, thank god; he wouldn't have to read his little brother's script.

.....

Dear AJ,

Sorry that we haven't been in touch, I know that we've liked hearing from each other

every now and then, but I've been busy and apparently, so have you. I saw that article in the paper, the one with the picture of you standing on the Flight Deck of your new ship. Congrats on your promotion to Captain. Have you been finding pleasure, searching the world for treasure, just like the Village People said? Just messing with you. How's the commission going? Is there any chance you'll see service in that Japan conflict? If you do, launch a mortar for me and give 'em hell.

So after I graduated college, I took off for Vegas, mainly because I got a teaching job there. It's a pretty sweet gig; and after a rough patch, I've got a nice way of supplementing my income. Actually, it's more like our income. I met someone about a month ago, and it's getting pretty serious.

When I met her, it was night time outside the Bellagio, and I was almost completely out of money. I was leaning against that famous fountain out front; you know, that one from *Ocean's Eleven*. Anywho, I was leaning against that fountain, staring up at the sky. It was

pointless, I know, the lights in Vegas are too damn bright to see any stars. I looked around, down at the street where the Luxor, the Mirage, and the Grand were hidden from my view, but I knew they were there. It was pretty damn empty. None but the desperate would be out at this ungodly hour. I was out here because all of them were the same. All of the casinos. They sucked out my money like vampires bleeding a victim dry. Only two other people were out around the fountain. One was a businessman, drunk I wagered, by his stumbling gait. The other was Gwen. The first thing I noticed about Gwen was her hair. It was red as a velvet rope. It hung behind her like a scarlet curtain, reaching down to her waist, where she had a blue silk sash tied around her silver evening dress. She was holding a very small frozen margarita covered with salt in her hand, and as she walked past me, one of her high heels snapped. She stumbled towards me, but managed to regain her balance. Her margarita, however, sloshed down the front of my shirt. And that drink was cold as hell. She gasped and stumbled over an

apology, and that was when I noticed her eyes; they were beautiful. Two almonds on her face, filled with two dazzling emerald stars.

“It’s ok...” I stammered, “at least now I have a drink.” She smiled and laughed. “I’m Gwen. Gwen Black.” I nodded and gave a small bow, “Evan Jones.” She looked around the fountain, at the Casino. “You from around here?” I shook my head, “No, I’m from Chicago, but I do teach at that highschool just off the Strip.” She smiled, “Oh. I’m from Portland. Came here for a little fun about a month ago, and then decided to stay.” I nodded over to the Bellagio, “And how’s your luck been?” She shook her head, “Lady Luck comes and goes. Mostly goes.” I chuckled, “Same here. Hey, you want to get a drink?”

Gwen smiled, “Sure. But you should probably change first.” She pointed at the stain on my shirt, and I felt the chill for the first time since it had spilled. Being with her had seemed to dispel the cold. I grimaced, “Yeah. Tell you what; I’ll meet you in the Mirage’s Oasis Lounge in about ten minutes.” She nodded, picked up

her broken heel, and took off her shoes. "I'll be waiting."

I went back to my room and changed out of the wet button-down white shirt I had been wearing and into an identical one, then headed to the Oasis Lounge. The desert theme was everywhere; there was a sandbox in the center of the floor, and electric palm trees lit the lounge with red and white light. Gwen was sitting at a table near the door, and as I sat down, she pointed over to the bar where a lone bartender stood, cleaning out a glass with a rag. "Servers are gone. We have to talk to him directly." I nodded and we both stood. as we walked over to the bar, the bartender looked up, "Can I get you anything?" He was wearing a black shirt with black pants, had a towel over one shoulder, and a pencil behind his ear, he looked like the cliché of a barman. Gwen nodded, "Can I have an Appletini?" I raised my eyebrow, "Isn't that kind of a weak drink?" She nodded, "Yeah, but I don't want to really drink in front of someone I just met." I shrugged, "Try me."

Gwen turned back to the barman, who was listening to our conversation with an amused smile on his face. “A dry martini,” she said, “in a deep champagne goblet. Three measures of Gordon's, one of vodka, half a measure of Kina Lillet. Shake it very well until it's ice-cold, then add a large thin slice of lemon peel. Got it?” The barman nodded. “Uh... yeah...” I smiled. Any fan of James Bond would recognize that order. “I'll just have a White Sunset, thanks.” When the bartender had given us our drinks and we had headed back to the table, I chuckled. “So, a fan of the Bond films?” Gwen laughed and nodded, “Yeah. The books were better, though.”

After some small talk, I eventually found out her full name was Gwendolyn Persephone Black, and she found out mine was Evan Walter Jones. Then I pulled a deck of cards from my pocket and showed her that trick where I draw on the card with my finger. You remember our physics teacher, Mr. Kulesza? Well, he was right. Women love magic.

.....

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Allan sighed, after their physics teacher had taught Evan a magic trick, which was probably the only thing he actually got out of the course, Evan had spent his summers learning slight-of-hand and illusions, and now it had finally paid off. He set the page he had just read on top of the previous page to his right, picked up the last sheet of paper, and began to read.

.....

So after one of my tricks, Gwen commented that I must be a whiz at Blackjack. That's when my brain kicked into action. I had thought up the perfect plan to make money. Gwen would get a job at the casino a few days before I checked in, working at the gift shop. I would play the tables as horribly as possible for a day or two, losing a few thousand dollars. Then, I'd complain. I'd quietly suggest the casino's cards were fixed, different than the ones

they sell to the public. This would guarantee a visit from the pit boss. I would suggest playing with a deck of the house brand, bought from the gift shop, where Gwen would happen to be working. At this point, one of two things would happen; the pit boss would agree to use the deck, or he wouldn't. We've found that most casinos agree, hoping to avoid trouble. So I'd buy a deck from the shop, but in place of one of the normal decks, Gwen would hand me a special deck. One that she and I had marked with one of those calligraphy pens. Then I'd play with the top of my game. We'd rake in the cash like autumn leaves. Gwen was kind of skeptical at first, but after we worked the Mirage, she was all for it. Anyway, we worked the Mirage first; we made a nice fifty grand, and then realized we could only do this so often. The Mirage knew us, and if the Mirage knew, so would Excalibur; they were owned by the same people. So Gwen and I took a small vacation. To Monte Carlo. We came home with two point three million dollars more than we left with. That's right, AJ, your little brother's a millionaire. Eat it.

.....

Allan choked on the candy bar he was eating, *What!? No way!* He re-read the last couple of lines. If that was true, it was amazing. He found his place and continued reading.

.....

Gwen has persuaded me to end it so we can enjoy our wealth, and so I get back to my real job, you know, teaching, so after we hit the Grand, we're done. At least for now. The rush I've had has been amazing. Remember in Scholastic Bowl when we stole the leftover refreshments from other schools? Multiply that feeling by a thousand. When you're sitting on that stool under the flashing lights, amid the bells and sirens of the game machines, staring across a verdant field of felt at the pit boss, who's dealing you cards that you know without even flipping them over, it's bliss. Bliss. A

tingling rushes down your neck, your palms begin to sweat, and it's all you can do to keep from laughing when the house busts. It's one hell of a feeling.

Anyway, congrats again on the promotion. When you get your leave time, look us up; we live just west of the Strip. Gwen wants to meet you, and I wouldn't mind seeing you again.

Stay safe,  
Evan

.....

Allan folded the pages and slipped them back into the envelope. He was going to look them up. He wanted to find out if his brother was telling the truth. Then he shook his head and muttered quietly, "Right. He's a millionaire with a gorgeous girlfriend. I call bull."

.....

Evan Jones was losing, and he knew it. He had lost five thousand dollars and in the process of doing so, his black suit-jacket had opened slightly open over a plain white shirt and his smooth black tie had crumpled. A waitress in a clichéd vest and skirt brought over a drink complements of the house; they wanted to keep him there, to keep winning his money. But he had other plans. Smiling inwardly, he took the drink, set it beside him, and made the motion for the dealer to deal. The dealer straightened his green visor over his young face, brushed a fleck of dust off his red vest, branded with the Golden MGM Lion, then smiled and dealt out the cards. Evan took a glance at his new hand, a Queen of clubs, and a King of diamonds. Twenty. He stayed. The dealer flipped over a ten of spades to join his four of hearts. Fourteen. He hit a two of clubs, sixteen, then hit again. The five of hearts, twenty-one. Evan looked down at the finely carved felt-covered table and read the engraving for the thousandth time; Dealer must hit on sixteen and stay on seventeen. "I want a new deck."

The dealer looked up, "Pardon?"

Evan glared up at him. "I want a new deck. And a new dealer."

The dealer frowned. "I just broke this one ten minutes ago."

Evan repeated his request, louder this time. "I want a new deck."

The pit boss seemed to step out of thin air, as always, "Do we have a problem?" He asked, his hands clenching behind the brown suit that covered his large body. His nose was flat and bent, as if someone had smashed his face into a wall, and his eyes were a light blue that stood out against his dark bronze skin.

The dealer shook his head. "He wants a new deck, but I just broke this one ten minutes ago."

Evan spoke up, "Seems to me there are a lot of fives in your deck."

The pit boss grimaced. "Spread 'em." The dealer fanned out the cards face up on the table, then snapped them back into his hand.

The pit boss sighed, "Whatever. Break a new one"

The dealer looked up, "What?"

The pit boss growled. "Do it."

Evan spoke up again. "It doesn't make any difference. They all come from the same place."

The pit boss truly snarled now, his pearl white teeth glaring out from his dark mouth. "What? I just agreed to what you asked!"

Evan shrugged. "I'm just saying that all your cards might be giving you more than the house edge."

He held up a deck of the house brand. "I bought these at the Casino shop an hour ago. Let's use them."

The dealer laughed. "Can't do that. Who knows what you've done to 'em."

The pit boss nodded. "He's right. No one saw you buy them; no one knows what you've done to them. If you bought them now, that would be different."

Evan smiled. "Fine. Let's do that."

The pit boss frowned "You can't be serious."

Evan looked up, "You just said it would be fine... And I'd hate to think that the cards you sell are different than the ones you use..."

The pit boss frowned again, he could either agree to lay a game with a deck from the shop, or he could refuse, and lose hundreds of gamblers from the resulting suspicion. "Fine. Let's go."

Evan led the pit boss over to the shop and pulled out a crumpled dollar bill. "One deck, please." He said to the red-haired girl behind the counter. She popped her gum and handed him a deck of cards with a Golden Lion on the back. "Here ya go." Evan handed the deck to the pit boss, who led him back to the table. The boss himself broke the plastic band around the cards and shuffled thoroughly.

An hour later, Evan had won eighteen thousand dollars. The pit boss sighed and looked over at the dealer. "It's been an hour, break a new deck." Then he looked over at Evan. "As for you," he whispered, "don't let me see you causing another stir of any sort."

Evan nodded. "Don't worry. You won't see me again." He downed the White Sunset that was sitting beside him and headed to his room. He closed the door behind him and smiled to the girl sitting at the desk on his right, she was folding a black MGM employee apron. "Thirteen thousand net."

Gwen smiled back and brushed her red hair out of her face. "Awesome."



Introduction:  
Window and The Dead of Winter

The story 'Window' was the Story Within a Story assignment, involving six friends who sit around a campfire telling ghost stories. In the original story, which follows, Anne is a gothic girl who is mildly creepy. In 'The Dead of Winter,' Anne evolves into a more complex character.

'The Dead of Winter' was the subject of my Steeplechase, an exercise that took one of my stories and developed it further. I chose 'Window' because it had more characters for me to develop and a very open storyline, after all, the only things set in stone were that it was winter and they were camping. The Steeplechase became the Major Rewrite, where we took the best of the Steeplechase and created a story out of that.

What evolved forms 'The Dead of Winter.'

And if you find 'Window' creepy...

Don't read 'The Dead of Winter' in the dark....



## Window

Stan was holding Jean's shoulder as he told his tale, "...And to this day, no one knows where the Scrabbling Claws are." He paused, let go of Jean, and began to pat down the front of his puffy blue coat with confusion written on his face. "Oh God...NO!" He screamed as a pale white hand burst from his collar and grabbed his neck. Jean jumped up and screamed, the sound echoed in the silent snow covered forest. The blond haired man next to her was rolling in the snow laughing as his own hand clutched at his throat.

She flicked her black hair over her shoulder and brushed some snow from her brown parka. "Grow up, Stan." She kicked her friend playfully in the ribs, and then dragged him back into the flickering circle of firelight. The warm glow illuminated four hunched figures, three of which were shaking with laughter, and the glint of reflected light gleamed off the four small tents that sat twenty feet from the fire.

One of the hunched figures stopped laughing as he stood up and threw off a blanket that was crusted with snow. "I've got one."

All the others groaned, and one of them spoke out in an accent laden with history, "Ah, come on, Alex, no one wants ta hear about yer 'eadless Lumberjack again."

Alex sat with a frown crossing his pale face as his eyes glittered in the firelight. As he pulled his blanket from the snow, he faked indignation. "Fine, Joe. But mine is better than that 'man with the hook' crap you come up with."

The girl sitting beside Joe quickly rose to his defense. "That story is classic, Alex. Besides, every time Joe tells it, it gets better."

Joe pulled his friend into a warm hug, and his long, curly red hair meshed with her brown locks as they smiled at each other, "Thank yeh Rebecca."

"I have one." The voice was barely a whisper, but everyone looked up. The speaker was the last and most unique member of the group, Anne. She and Alex were the only ones

who were sleeping alone, but Alex wasn't alone by choice, his date had had to cancel. Anne, however, had chosen to come alone, and her tent was a good indicator of her relationship to the group; it was a good twelve feet from all the others. The only reason that Anne had come was because the others pressed her into joining after they found that she had never camped before. She brushed her blonde-dyed-black hair from where it hung over her eyes to behind her ear and repeated herself. "I have one." Her voice was still just a whisper, scarcely audible above the sounds of the night and the crackle of the fire.

Jean smiled, "Go ahead, Anne, we'd love to hear it."

Stan frowned at Jean, "We would?" Jean flashed a smile at Anne and drove an elbow into Stan's side. He grunted then nodded, "I mean, yeah, we would."

Alex smiled and waved a hand in the air as if cracking a whip, "Whatish!"

Anne nodded and smiled. Rebecca shivered, but not from the cold. It was the way that Anne had just smiled, it was sinister,

almost evil, and in the flickering fire, it seemed as if her teeth had become fangs. Anne brushed her hair from in front of her eyes again and began to speak in the same whispered tone, “This is called ‘Window’”

“The year is 1999 in Freshport, Colorado. But the story isn’t set in the town, it’s set in the institution on the outskirts. This is the tale of Martin Gats. Martin was institutionalized because of delusions and violent outbursts. They placed him in a cell with another inmate, and strapped him to the bed. All Martin could do was turn his head to the left,” Anne turned her head to the left, “and the right.” She turned her head to the right. “That’s all. He could only see the doors to his cell, the cold stone ceiling, featureless except for cracks, and his cellmate’s bed, where he too, was strapped tightly.”

“The cellmate introduced himself as Buddy. Buddy and Martin had so much in common; they liked the same things and agreed on almost everything. But there was one thing about Buddy that Martin didn’t like. Buddy had a window. A small, dirty window facing the town

next to his bed, and Buddy would tell Martin of all the wonderful things he could see. Oh, how Martin wanted to look out that window, but Buddy was in the way. Martin despised Buddy for being there, if he was gone, he could look out the window. Every day, for every moment that Buddy told him about the wonderful sights outside, Martin wished him dead. He wished him dead because Buddy could see the world and he couldn't. He could only see the doors to his cell, the cold stone ceiling, featureless except for cracks, and Buddy's body, strapped to the bed."

Anne paused, brushed her hair out of her eyes, and took a sip from the hot chocolate she had at her feet. Her seemingly black irises darted from person to person; Alex was lounging, bored and interested at the same time, against one of the logs that formed a ring around the fire, Joe and Rebecca were still holding each other, hanging on her every word, Jean and Stan had moved around the fire so as to hear her whispery voice; Stan's eyes were following a trail similar to hers as he checked the reactions of his friends, and Jean was leaning forward, waiting

for her to continue. Anne brushed her hair from her eyes again and continued.

“Then one day, one of the attendants broke a cup as he was feeding Martin. Martin quickly palmed the sharp shard. When the man had left, he began to cut through his straps. It was tiring and Martin soon stopped. But then Buddy awoke and began to describe the beautiful day outside. Fueled by hate for his best friend and only confidant, Martin attacked the straps with new energy. After an hour, Buddy fell asleep and Martin was free. He slipped quietly over to his friend’s bed and raised the shard of porcelain high; he would finally look out the window. He drove his arm down and blood sprayed up. Buddy screamed, and Martin laughed. The guards came running and soon had Martin strapped into his bed again. Buddy’s body was taken away. Martin laughed, even though all he could do was turn his head to the left,” Anne turned her head to the left, “where he could see the doors to his cell. Look straight up,” she looked forward, “and see the cold stone ceiling, featureless except for cracks. And look to

the right,” Anne turned her head to the right, “where he could see the cold stone wall, featureless except for cracks, a few dripping spots of blood, and a drawing scratched into the wall; a drawing in the shape of a small window.” Anne brushed her hair from her eyes, smiled the same sinister smile as before, sat down on the log, crossed her legs, and sipped her hot chocolate.

A log in the fire popped loudly and everyone but Anne jumped. Joe spoke up as he held Rebecca close, “Jesus, Anne. What in ta name o’ God ‘elped you think up sumtan’ so dark?”

Then Alex shivered, and he pulled his blanket up around himself. “I’m gonna turn in. I hate psych horror.”

Jean had clutched Stan’s arm tightly at the end, and her nails had left five indentations in his wrist. He rubbed them out, and then stood up. “Alright, I’m freaked. I’m with Alex. Let’s put out the fire and hit the sack.”

Stan piled some snow on the fire and waited as the light faded, then went out. As he

took out his flashlight, he started, Anne's eyes were catching the moonlight and reflecting it back; her eyes looked as if they were shining in the dark. He shook his head, helped Jean out of the snow, and headed for their tent.

When everyone else had returned to their shelters, Anne still sat by the dead fire. She smiled her sinister smile and laughed. The sound echoed off the peaceful trees and disappeared into the night.

## The Dead of Winter

The forest was sleepy and silent, covered in a shroud of snow and frost. The moonlight pierced through the large clearings that had been formed by the loss of leaves and glittered off the snow. The branches of trees reached up with skinny fingers of wood to claw the moon, angered at the loss of their green coverings. The cold wind blew through the woods, unhindered by the absence of leaves that had previously prevented its flight in the summer. The chilling current of air didn't stop the nightbirds from flying, searching for prey that hid under the freshly fallen snow.

The snow was deep and unbroken, its surface a frosty plain of white crystals. It would stay pristine until spring, when it would melt. The water created from the snow's passing would fill the stream that it held captive to overflowing. The water would flow over the banks and form a swampy area in the middle of the forest.

The stream was still, trapped in time by the cryogenic clutch of the winter cold. Ripples froze where they were the moment they had been touched by winter's dread chill. Twigs sat frozen in the ice that had once been water, each was an Excalibur, waiting to be pulled from its stone. The stream waited for spring, when it would flow once more, it longed to fill the dead silence of the frozen forest with the sound of water rushing and falling over the rocks that lined its bed.

The forest was filled with only the sound of winter, a whistle of the wind and the scratch of dead trees clawing at one another. A bird called into the night, hoping for a companion, to be with another in the dead of winter. The bird was answered only with an echo, a version of itself twisted by time and distance. The bird took wing and flew into the night, searching for an area with more life than the forest, which was dead in the winter.

But the forest was not dead, it was filled with life. But not the life of animals. It was filled with the life of six teenaged humans. They sat in a clearing around a large fire that had melted

away a patch of the snow to expose grass beneath the chilling crust. Three tents sat in a cluster away from the fire, while a fourth had isolated itself from the rest. The life of humans was an odd sensation for the forest; it had not had visitors for a long time.

Five of the humans stood up and one of them extinguished the fire. Darkness descended upon the clearing, and then a beam of light shot forth, one of the males was holding an electric light. All of the humans began to move to their shelters, except for one. It was a female with black hair and black clothes. She tilted her head backwards and laughed, it echoed off the woods and bounced back, but wasn't twisted by the echo. If anything, the time and distance had improved the sound, made it more human. The forest did not like this girl. She gave off an unnatural feeling, the feeling of death. The forest turned its attention from her to the tents. Inside the first tent, a blue and red structure of insulated fiber, one of the humans shivered.

Stan shivered and pulled Jean close as he zipped up the red and blue tent. He ran a hand through her golden-black hair and smiled, she was warm, a beacon of life in the frozen forest.

Jean shivered and hugged him tightly. “Anne was kind of creepy tonight.”

Stan chuckled and nodded, his blonde hair shaking, “You mean creepier than usual?”

Jean pulled out of his hug, “Stan, Anne isn’t as weird as you make her out to be. She’s just different.”

Stan laughed and brushed his hair away from his face. “You’ve got that right, she’s definitely different.” He smiled and brushed Jean’s hair again. “Why’d she come with us, anyway?”

Jean sighed and punched him lightly in the shoulder, “Anne needs us, she needs to be around people, it’ll help her.”

Stan just shrugged. “Whatever. She’s just weird and I really don’t like her.” Jean shook her head and then sneezed. Stan frowned. “You might be catching a cold. I told you to wear another layer under your coat.”

Jean frowned and sneezed again. “What are you, my mother? I’ll be fine, it’s just allergies-” she sneezed again.

Stan cracked his neck. “Allergies? In winter? No way. Jean, we still have a week out here, and you’re very susceptible to the cold.”

Jean shook her head, “Look, I’ll be fine. It’s not like I’ll die if I get a little chilly.”

I shook my black hair out of my face and frowned. Stan was getting protective again. I hate it when he does this; it makes me feel like a child. I’m nineteen for god’s sake.

“Look, I’m just saying, if you get sick, it’ll make me feel horrible.” Stan was looking at me with his deer eyes. They were so cute; big and round, just like a little fawn. He was tall and blonde, and very nice. The only flaws he had, in my eyes, at least, were that he was very over protective, and extremely jealous. He wanted to protect me from the world. If a little boy had a toy gun pointed at me, I have no doubt that Stan would beat the shit out of him. If that same little boy apologized for pointing his toy at me and

presented me with a heart-shaped 'sorry' card, I'm sure that Stan would jealously beat the shit out of him again.

"Oh?" I asked coyly, "And why would you feel horrible?"

He smiled and blinked his big, round eyes twice, "Because I encouraged you to come on this trip..." Sometimes he sounded like a child, and now was one of those times. It did annoy me, but occasionally, I just loved it. He was so cute and innocent. If he had murdered someone in front of me and then showed those eyes and spoke in that tone, I'd believe he was innocent.

I slid into my sleeping bag and smiled. "Fine. Tomorrow I'll wear another layer. Now can we sleep?"

Stan smiled and slid into the sleeping bag that lay on the floor of the tent next to me. "Sure. Tomorrow I'll start the fire up again and make some eggs."

I laughed. "No, you won't. I'll make the eggs. You remember what happened last time?"

Stan laughed. "I apologized to your mother for that pan, and I paid for the ceiling. Besides,

how was I supposed to know that nonstick spray was flammable? It said it was inflammable.”

I laughed and wrapped my arms around him. “Night.”

He smiled and clicked off the battery powered lantern that sat in the middle of the tent. Moonlight spilled through the tent and illuminated everything in a dull blue glow. It was very pretty, and I soon fell asleep.

The forest liked that pair of humans, they were very close, they were loving and caring. The forest turned to the next tent, a green construct with a shamrock on the sides. It had only one person inside it currently, but a second was heading towards it. The one inside was female, and she was writing in her diary.

Dear diary,

Hello, my friend, from the snowy woods just outside of town. Today was a different day. My friends, Jean, Joe, Alex, Stan, and I departed

yesterday for a week long camping trip. Anne too, she came along with us. Jean invited her and insisted that we be nice. I try my best, but she creeps me out now. She changed since Jr. High. I remember when she was one of my best friends. She was blonde then, and she was one of the peppiest people you'd ever meet. You couldn't tell that from looking at her now, though. She's dyed her hair black, and never wears any other colors than red and black. It's really creepy how she's withdrawn into herself and...

Anywho, this isn't about Anne. This is about me! You, my diary, aren't the place for my dark feelings, you're the place for happy things, like puppies and flowers and kittens and sunshine! Oh, god, reading that last line just shows what happens when I let myself go. I need to work on keeping my hyper tendencies controlled, like when I'm with Joe. Joe seems to calm me down. A lot. As I mentioned before, he's from Ireland, and his accent always makes me giggle. He can't say the letter 'h' and it's just so different from the way that Americans talk. I do

feel kind of bad for Alex though, Eve had to cancel and Alex is alone for the week, like Anne. Hey! That's an idea! What if I manage to hook Anne up with Alex? No, that'd never work. Anne's crazy. Besides, Alex loves Eve way too much to leave her. I'll write more later, Joe just came back into the tent. Bye!

--Rebecca

Rebecca hid her diary under her sleeping bag as Joe walked in. His red hair was rolling behind him down to his neck, where it stopped. He smiled, "ello, Rebecca. Anyt'ing I ken do fer yeh?"

Rebecca smiled and tossed her brown hair over her shoulder. "No, I'm fine. How's Alex doing?"

Joe smiled, Rebecca was always worried about her friends, something he found to be a very attractive trait. He shrugged and nodded, "Oh, 'e's doin fine, lass, jest a lil' bummed 'bout Eve, dat's all."

Rebecca slipped fully into her sleeping bag and nodded. "I really think it's sad that Eve had

to go at the last minute. Alex was really looking forward to this trip with her.”

Joe slipped into the green sleeping bag on the ground next to Rebecca. “Yea, it be a cryin shame for ‘im to be spendin the nite alone, but t’ers not a ting to do about it.”

Rebecca smiled and switched off the electric lantern in the center of the tent. Moonlight streamed in and the whole tent filled with a soft blue light. “Ooh, look at that...” She breathed, “Nature is so beautiful...”

Joe put an arm around his friend and nodded. “Aye, but she can but ‘old a mere candle to you, dearie.”

Rebecca laughed and kissed him lightly, “That’s so sweet... Thank you Joe.”

Her friend returned the kiss, then laughed, “It be time for us to go ta bed, lass. Neit’er one o’ us is good tempered in ta mornin.”

The forest turned its attention from the green tent to the third felt structure in the cluster, a yellow tent housing a single person, male. The man was asleep. If the forest had had

a face it would have frowned, it had wanted to hear what the fifth human had to say. The forest turned away from the yellow felt and looked over to the maroon tent that sat away from the group. The aura around the tent was fluctuating, first smooth and calm then jagged and irate, while the tents in the group gave off a soothing pulse of peace. The maroon tent held two people, both female. No, the forest corrected itself, one person. The forest felt uneasy, something was wrong with this girl, something very wrong.

The tent was dark as Anne sat in the center, alone. She brushed her black hair out of her eyes, “I don’t understand what you’re moaning about. You had your chance.”

Anne flicked her head and her long blonde hair flew over her shoulder. “I just don’t like it. You’re dark now. Completely different from me.”

Anne smiled sinisterly and her eyes flared, “Exactly. And that’s why you kept me caged for eighteen years, but now it is my chance to live. *You* will be imprisoned while I am free. *You* will know the pain I endured, *you* will suffer.”

Anne wailed and her blonde hair flowed behind her, "Please, I'm begging you, let me out. I love life, but you hate it. I love my friends, but you drove them away. Why can't you let me be happy?"

"Shut up!" Anne snarled and lashed out with her right hand, it was holding a small razor blade, and when it struck, Anne screamed.

A large gash on her wrist oozed blood. Her blonde hair hung around her face as a few tears dripped from her blue eyes, she whimpered, "w-why did you do that... it...it hurts..."

Anne smiled and licked the blood from her arm as she laughed, "Exactly. Your pain is my pleasure..."

Anne spat the taste of blood from her mouth in disgust, "How can you do this? I lived with you, I trusted you, and I loved you-"

Anne slashed out with the blade again, "You caged me! I was a nuisance to you, the secret you hid, and hoped your friends would never find. But they found me, Anne, and look how much your friends love the new you!" She slashed out with the blade again and again until

blood ran down her arm. She laughed as she brushed her black hair out of her eyes, "I feel so alive!"

Anne stumbled from her tent; the snow chilled her bare feet as the wind whipped her blonde hair around her face. Blood dripped from her arm and stained the snow around her. She headed into the peaceful forest, trying to escape. As she ran, the blood made a long trail behind her, a scarlet river in a pearl world. She became light headed and the world began to spin. The ground in front of her shimmered like a mirage. She smiled, she no longer felt cold, and she was warm. The trees turned into hands, clawing at her trying to pull her into an embrace that she could never escape. She turned and ran, blonde hair flowing behind her, a stream of gold to match the stream of ruby that flowed from her arm. She tripped over a root that stood above the ground, and she rolled, landing on her back. The snow around her was staining, turning red, but her gaze was on the sky, the tiny points of light that glared down at her, the stars. Several of them twinkled, the form of a lion. She smiled,

Leo. Some more twinkled, Draco. She laughed; she could see how the ancients saw constellations. The moon was huge. It looked as if all she had to do was reach up and pluck it out of the sky. She stretched her left arm up to grab the shining orb, but something wet dripped into her face. She looked at her arm in confusion. It was pouring blood. She frowned and reached up with her other hand to wipe the blood away. Her right hand held a small razor blade. She made a small sound and dropped the blade. It caught the moonlight and sparkled as it fell into the snow. She reached up for the moon again, ignoring the drops that splashed her face. For some reason, she felt as if when she reached the moon, everything would be okay. It would help, the moon. She needed the moon. But it was just out of her reach. Anne stretched some more. Just a little further and everything would be all right.

“You’re dying.” She looked up, it was Anne, her black hair waving in the wind. “It’s not too bad. We just need to stop the blood. Then we’ll be fine. I’ll wait and heal tonight, and then

tomorrow, I'll have some more fun. Come on, there's some bandages in the tent."

Anne got up, her black nightgown fluttering in the wind. She put her hand over the cuts on her arm. "Come on, now." She began to follow the trail of crimson back to her tent.

"Tomorrow..." Anne whispered, her blonde hair falling in front of her eyes, "No..."

Anne laughed, her black nightgown and hair waving in the wind, "Yes. Tomorrow." She laughed again, "And there's nothing you can do to stop me."

Anne turned, and her blonde hair trailed behind her. "There's one thing I can do!" Her hand closed around the razor that was lying in the snow. She whirled and lunged at Anne.

As her black hair fell over her eyes, Anne stumbled backward until she hit a tree. Her hand reached up to feel the blade in her throat. Blood ran down her arms and stained her black nightgown. "You...you've...killed...us both..." Blood gurgled in her throat and she coughed. Blood sprayed in a fine mist from her mouth. Anne keeled over and fell on her side in the

snow. Her red blood rapidly stained the cold white crystals, and her eyes rolled upwards. She could see the moon, it was so close. She reached up to grab the shining orb, she almost had it. Her vision blurred, but the moon was still visible, a shining beacon in the dark night. All the stars had disappeared; there was only the moon, a circle of blue-white against the black sky. It was fuzzy, but within her grasp. Moonlight filled the forest, illuminating her surroundings in a soft blue glow. Anne's eyes slowly closed and her bloody arm fell limp to the snow, never to move again.

Introduction:  
Extraordinary Natural Talent

This story is the Model Telling assignment. I used myself as a character, as I often do, but this time I magnified my biggest flaw, pride, to make a hilarious tale that should leave you laughing.



## Extraordinary Natural Talent

I flicked the collar down as I straightened my grey polo shirt and glanced into the mirror. My glossy black dress shoes blended with my smooth, black cloth socks, which in turn meshed with my tar-colored slacks. The slacks were tainted with a small amount of white lint from my bed. I brushed the offending specks away; my pants were always spotless. I flashed a dazzling smile to the mirror, a smile that shone bright with clean teeth, and made the toothpick in the right corner of my mouth dance. My gaze traveled from my mouth to my nose, round and pointed naturally. My eyes traveled up the mirror to the images of themselves, sparkling and gleaming in the small light thrown from the glowing tubes above me on the ceiling. My eyes were almost green, almost blue, and almost brown. The mix of the almost colors formed a slate grey iris that twinkled in the mirror. I smiled again and shook my messy mane of brown-black-blond hair away; in my twenty

years of life, my face was always clear of my hair.

I headed out of my room and down the carpet covered stairs towards the building next door. That building contained my teacher's office. The best thing about my teacher was these meetings to analyze our progress in his curriculum. Campus was a different type of college; each department had one head instructor who oversaw all classes. The schedule was built on his decisions, the teachers below him taught us what he wanted us to learn. In these meetings, he always did an excellent job of expounding my virtues. "Evan," he would begin, "you are an... unbelievable student."

To which I would reply, "Thank you."

My instructor would continue, "Your achievements are a credit not only to the class, but to our institution as a whole."

I would inspect my nails and clean out any dirt I found with my toothpick as I nonchalantly replied, "I know."

It was a formula. It never changed, and I never tired of hearing it. "You have extraordinary natural talent."

I would nod, "Thank you."

Then he would go on to tell me how great my recent achievements were. I would be silent throughout. Then, when he had finished praising me, we would stand, shake hands, and I would leave happy. Always. It would be hard for me to leave anything but pleased. After all, I have extraordinary natural talent.

I entered the building, soared up the stairs, and came to a stop outside my teacher's office. After a moment, the door flew open and one of my classmates slowly trudged out, no doubt saddened by the negative report he had just heard. The student looked up and his frown deepened. "Oh great. You."

I smiled and nodded, "Indeed. Who else is as handsome and clever as myself?"

He scowled and stalked down the stairs, his blue jeans and grey designer t-shirt disappearing from view as I swept into my instructor's office. The room was static, it never

changed. It was always lit by two lamps on the side, while the one in the back was never on. Upon walking into the room, the puffy green chair invited the guest to take a seat in its cushy plush confines a few feet in front of a redwood desk. The desk was ornately carved, clearly by a master, and the top was clear except for three pictures of the instructor's child, at various stages in her childhood, a small green desk lamp that was never on, a Newton's Cradle that clicked together happily, two sharp black lead pencils, and a yellow legal pad.

The shelf behind the desk was filled with reading materials that ranged from weekly magazines to great novels written by the masters. A few of the titles, however, were hidden from view by the assortment of knick knacks that cluttered the shelf. There were four small white marble figurines, a sphinx, a griffon, a phoenix, and a dragon, that guarded the ends of the top two rows of shelves. The lower shelf was dominated by a Tesla Coil that hummed quietly as purple sparks crawled up its spiral pathway and threw an eerie glow onto the golden

titles around it. The bottom shelf was hidden from view when seated in the chair, but while standing, a small plaque with the picture of a snowflake and the words “Always remember that you are unique. Just like everybody else” were visible on the last row of the storage space.

The small window on the left wall always caught attention with its view of a small fountain with a statue of the mascot, an armored goddess, which sprayed mist into the flower-scented air of Campus Gardens. Students were always congregating there; it was the perfect place to write, read, and study. The large clearing in the center of the Gardens was perfect for games of frisbee, football, or soccer.

My instructor was almost part of the scenery, shrouded in a shadow as he sat in his high-backed oak chair; he looked like the cliché of a super villain, with the exception of not having a fluffy white cat. He smiled as he always did during these monthly meetings, “Welcome, welcome. Have a seat and we can begin.”

I sat down in the cushy chair and my instructor smiled, “Evan, you are an... unbelievable student.”

I smiled and nodded, it was the formula, “Thank you.”

He continued to speak, “Your achievements are a credit not only to the class, but to our institution as a whole.”

I cleaned under my index finger with a toothpick, “I know.” I also knew the words that would follow; you have extraordinary natural talent.

I was so used to the sound of those words following that when he said, “There is, however, a problem.”

I smiled and said, “Thank you.”

He tapped his fingers on the legal pad on his desk, “Evan.”

I blinked and looked up; I opened my mouth, and then closed it. Finally, I managed a strangled word, “P-problem?” What about my extraordinary natural talent? I wanted to ask, but he cut in.

“It pains me to confront you with this.” He rubbed his temples and sat back in the chair, his eyes closed and a grimace on his face. Confront?! As if I was a criminal in front of a jury. I didn’t know what it could possibly be that I had done, but I was innocent. I was infallible. Much like a certain figure well known in mythology.

“Sir,” I began, leaning forward to protest, “I assure you I’m falsely accused. You know that I am one hundred percent honest-”

He interrupted me again, “Ah yes. That brings me to my next point, your...honesty. Some would call it other things.”

I paused for a moment, and then rose to my own defense. “The other students accuse me of bragging sir, but I assure you, I do not brag. I merely tell the truth. Can I help it if their skills seem meager compared to my-” my extraordinary natural talent, I was going to say, but I was interrupted once more.

“Evan, your vocabulary is excellent, your poetry is worth its length in cash, and your stories make the works of Sir Walter Scott look

like a children's book," I smiled and nodded, but then he continued, "but there is one area in which you are a bit...slow." Me? Slow? Ridiculous. "You don't interact with others well, you have alienated everyone in your dorm, and you tear down our art majors' dreams like bad wallpaper. Do you enjoy trampling other's feelings and hopes? Do you enjoy making people dislike you?" Dislike me? Who dislikes me? I wanted to ask, but I kept silent. "If not, keep your attitude in check. Especially this afternoon!"

I tilted my head, "Why this afternoon?"

"A government sponsored publishing company is sending three interviewers out to Campus to hire one of my students for an off-campus job editing and writing. I am recommending you." I smiled. That made sense. Who else would my teacher pick except his prize student? "Meet me in the Gardens in two hours. And for the love of God....be civil." I nodded; we both stood and shook hands.

I stepped out of the office. That had been different. As I headed down the stairs, I passed

another of my classmates. This one was always trying to get me involved in social activities, I think he's Campus' social director. "Hey, Evan, you wanna play some chess?" He held up a chessboard and a small box that rattled with the pieces within.

I smiled, "Sure, can I be white?"

He shrugged and nodded, "Why not?"

I smiled again, rattled off a few moves, and then, "Checkmate. I win. Good game, but you're way too predictable." I had played him over and over, at least a hundred times, and he always made the same moves.

My classmate's smile faded and he turned away grumbling. I, however, beamed as I headed down the stairs and took a seat next to the fountain in Gardens. I would wait until my instructor and the interviewers arrived. The plants and flowers swayed in the wind, and two hours later, my instructor emerged from the building. He nodded over to me, "Oh, good. You're here." He looked up at the sky, then back at me. "Remember, be civil. And get rid of that." He pointed at my toothpick. I reached up and

took hold of it with my index and ring finger on the top and my middle on the bottom. Bringing my ring finger back and pushing my middle finger forward, I flicked the piece of wood away. It spiraled end over end in a magnificent arc until it disappeared among the tall grass and flowers.

The air began to thrum and a gust of wind tore through the Gardens. I put a hand up to cover my eyes, and my mouth dropped as a helicopter gently touched down in the clearing twenty feet away. I almost made a sarcastic comment about the need for a flashy entrance, but my teacher had said to be civil, so I held my tongue. I did however turn to my instructor to ask, "What kind of company is this?" Three men in identical black suits hopped from the helicopter and headed over to where my teacher and I stood.

"Welcome," My instructor began, "this is the student I was telling you about. The one with extraordinary natural talent."

I simply smiled, not trusting myself to keep a civil tongue.

One of the interviewers spoke, “‘ello, ‘ello, what, what?” The man’s voice was like an electric guitar riff in the middle of a Mozart sonata. “‘e’s but twenty year younger tan me. Can ‘e really be dat good?” It was all I could do not to mention that, though I was twenty years younger, I had managed to master the English language before him.

My instructor addressed the man, “I assure you, Evan is more than qualified for the job of author and editor.”

Another interviewer voiced his concerns. “Oui, I am sure joo, hiz teacher, would say zat. Perhaps a test of hiz abilities may be conducted, no?” I bit down on my tongue to keep from laughing; the man had a large mustache and a beret. Who wears a beret with a suit? Only if the man was carrying a baguette could he be more stereotypically French.

The third interviewer spoke, thankfully in a familiar Chicago accent, “I’m sure a test is unnecessary, but my colleague is right. This student is a bit young-”

“TAKE HIM!!” All three of the interviewers and myself turned to look at the instructor as he shouted in a frenzied voice. A vein throbbed slightly in his forehead and he smiled, relaxing his face. He added in a quieter and softer tone, “I mean, take him. He’s the best the school has to offer.”

The interviewers withdrew to the helicopter to discuss what my instructor had said. I waited by the fountain, knowing that they would pick me, the best of the bushel, to join their organization. About fifteen minutes later, the third interviewer, the one that actually spoken the language rather than strangled it, stepped from the vehicle and nodded, “We’ll take him.” He pointed over at me, “You should probably go up to your dorm and pack-”

I smiled, “No need.” I reached behind the fountain and withdrew a suitcase and my backpack. Thinking ahead, I had packed before the interview. “I’m ready to go.”

The interviewer raised an eyebrow in surprise, and then shrugged. “Ok... Just hop into the chopper.” We headed over to the vehicle,

and he began to describe what my job would entail, “You’ll be mostly editing at first, but after about a month you’ll be writing and publishing yourself.”

As the helicopter hovered above Campus, I could see my instructor pointing at the sky and hugging one of the other department heads as he jumped for joy. A few other students were below, high fiving each other and clapping. Another group popped open a bottle of contraband champagne and lifted their glasses to the sky. One of my classmates, the one who loved to play chess, raised his hand to me in a salute, I was too high up to hear him, but it looked to me like he said, ‘vacuum.’ I was very happy; I had a job, and the people below were celebrating my accomplishments.

The interviewer smiled, “U.S.Amulet Publishing is very exclusive, so you should be very proud of yourself for being selected.”

I nodded, I was proud. But then again, I’m always proud of myself.

The man continued, “And no matter what people say, I’m sure you’ll agree, as any patriot

would, that there is nothing wrong with producing pro-government subliminal propaganda...” I nodded again, he was perfectly right.

Introduction:  
Weaving Webs and Fifteen Minutes is All it  
Takes

These two stories are the How To and Writing Process assignments. 'Fifteen Minutes' is a glimpse into my mind and shows the reader exactly how it is that I write major papers, and 'Webs' shows how I manage to get out of trouble if I fail.



## Weaving Webs: The Truth of Deceit

The scent of ink on paper and the ozone from an overworked computer mingle under the white fluorescent lights of the office. Your boss walks in, a short, stocky, balding man in white polo shirt and navy pants that clash terribly with his black socks and shoes. He stops a few feet from the small oak desk in your office, it's covered in papers, pens, and tacky knickknacks.

"Hey, Champ," he begins, "have you finished with those TPS reports yet?" Of course you haven't. You were out having fun, emptying a traditional black bottle of tequila. But you shouldn't say that. What *should* you say? Well, you can lie. You've never been very good at lying, though. Back in the day, when you were seven, you broke your mother's favorite lamp...

"Sweetie?" your mother calls from the other room, "What happened to my lamp?" You, in the process of playing with your Action Man figures, had launched the valiant hero into the

evil lamp, shattering it and bringing justice to the world.

“The cat was playing on the shelf, mom,” you say. It’s not really a lie; the cat *was* playing on the shelf, but Mittens didn’t knock over the lamp. That’s called a misleading statement. It’s a good strategy in court, but not at home, because it’s filled with loopholes that logic and a sharp mind, like your mother’s, can look through.

“I don’t think so dear,” your mother calls back, “Mittens came outside a half an hour ago. Did you break my lamp?” The jig is up. Your allowance money is confiscated and put forward to replace the lamp, and you receive a lesson about lying. “Lying is wrong. When you lie, you undermine trust.” But both you and this narrator know that isn’t true. Lying isn’t wrong. In fact, sometimes it’s even the right thing to do. Just imagine if people didn’t lie during World War 2; three Germans clad in crisp black leather jackets and boots barge into your house, “Ach! Where are you hiding the Jews?” You stand up and cross the hardwood floor to your bookshelf and pull back a little red book. The bookcase

slides back into the wall, revealing a small family of four huddled inside. The Germans roar and their guns spit fire. All because you didn't lie, because lying is supposedly wrong.

You glance up at your boss and look into his eyes, being sure to blink. If you don't blink, people know you're lying, but if you blink too much, you look suspicious, and its game over. Once every two or three seconds is a good blink time. You take a deep breath and shake your head a little, keeping your body language natural. You need to stall a little, just to think up the perfect excuse, but excuses haven't really worked out in the past either. Back in your junior year of high school....

"Sorry, Dude," you begin, your rainbow lenses sliding down your nose, "but my bodaciously groovy paper was, like, totally purloined." The teacher stands tall in front of you, his pale skin seeming even lighter against the crisp white shirt that he had tucked into his brown pants. He looks down at you in all your

tie-dyed glory. Ah yes, the 70's, a time when hippie words like 'groovy' and 'bodacious' could be said without receiving strange looks.

"Purloined." The teacher sighs, clearly unconvinced, "By whom?"

You begin to sweat as your mind races. You hadn't gotten that far in your mind yet. "It was, um, like, two, er, guys."

"Indeed." The teacher makes a mark in his grade book that looks suspiciously like a zero, then moves on to the next student. Well. That excuse was a masterpiece. Extremely detailed and well thought out. Perfect. A good lie requires preparation as well as mental and physical follow-through, just like any play or musical.

"No sir, I didn't get those reports done yet, but I have a reason." This is the generic opening to an excuse, and a variation of those words should always be the first sentence of a good lie. It addresses the issue at hand and prepares a lead to the story you are about to tell. A lie is like a spider web. Yes, it sounds like a major

cliché, but it's the truth. Honest. Has this narrator ever lied to you? Of course not. Just picture a spider web in your mind. Hundreds of circles held together by thousands of tiny strands, if a single strand breaks, the web collapses. A lie is like a spider web, it must have a solid circle as a base, and threads reaching out to hold it in place. The more intricate the lie, the more threads and circles are woven. If one of your threads or circles breaks, the lie breaks and you're busted.

A lie must have a logical base to be believable, but a basic fact can't stand alone. For instance, "my coworker gave me an assignment" would be a good start, but alone it would fail to stand up to questioning.

And so we have our base: a coworker's assignment. Yes, all Jones asked you to do was to get him a stapler, but that's why we have imagination. That brings us to our next weave in the web. Flesh out the story with some believable fiction. The keyword is believable, so try not to include aliens, magic, or religion. Also, try to throw in some of the corporate buzzwords

that've been pounded into your skull during those weekend seminars you've been forced to attend. 'Teamwork, family,' all that jargon.

Always close with a promise to finish what you're lying about. It inspires trust in the sucker you're talking to. And if you actually do follow through, it raises your credibility, allowing you the opportunity to fleece him again. If you follow these steps, you'll have a masterpiece, like the one you're about to feed your boss...

"No sir, I didn't get those reports done yet, but I have a reason. Last night, Jones asked me to collaborate on his project. I know that this company values teamwork, so I gave my insights to him and helped him accomplish his goals. I hope that, with the work we did together, we can raise our company-family to new heights. It took all night sir, but I think that both of us would agree that it was worth it. And sir, I promise you I'll have those reports on your desk tomorrow morning." You look back at your desk and smirk inwardly, that was a good lie and you know it.

“Great job, Champ,” your boss slaps you on the back and smiles, “we could use more people like you in our corporate family. Keep up the good work.” He turns and walks out the door, convinced that you are an excellent employee.

You chuckle quietly to yourself, *Sucker*.



## Fifteen Minutes is All it Takes

Sliding his black hoodie over his short brown hair, the devilishly handsome student, Evan Jones, sat down at the cafeteria table in a contemplative state; his paper on Modern Psychiatry was due second block today. He had had all week to finish it, but chose to explore the puzzling world of his computer game, *Myst*, instead. His grey eyes stared off into space as his pale hands drew a small doodle of *Myst Island*. *Should I help Sirrus or Achenar? Or neither? What about the Green Book? Perhaps if I-* His train of thought was broken as a hand shook his arm.

“Hey, you finished yet?” Evan looked up at the speaker; it was his partner. Her raven-black hair hung behind her in a loose braid that swung as she shifted her feet. She gave a small smile, revealing dazzling white teeth and her almond-shaped cobalt eyes sparkled, but the smile diminished as Evan shook his head.

“No... I haven’t found the sixth page yet.” She brushed her braid away from his shoulder, gave a lilting laugh and snapped her fingers.

“Your paper is going to be six pages long? Dang. Just shorten it to five.” Evan blinked.

“What pap- oh. Right. Psychiatry. Yeah, I haven’t started that yet. It’ll be about two pages.” In response to his partner’s shocked expression, Evan shrugged. “Relax. I’ll get it done during seminar.”

In the Media Center, Evan slid into the swivel chair in front of one of the computers and spun around. Even as he spun, he could see the reference section to his left, filled with non-fiction and great classics. Next on his circular tour was the paperback area, filled not only with trashy novels, but also the pathetic titles of the One School, One Book Program. Fahrenheit 451 was the exception, he had liked that book. The paperback area also had several tables for quiet study, all of which were full. Very few of the students actually were studying, but at least they were being quiet. Next was the checkout

desk, and the glare he received from the withered woman sitting there caused him to end his delightful spin.

Stopping himself, he started his pre-write process of limbering up. The five fingers on his left hand broke the silence with quick chirrups, and then his right hand spoke up with the sound of an insect's exoskeleton breaking. Twisting his neck to the left, then the right, Evan smiled at the rippling sound of bones relocating. Then he clutched the back of his chair and turned to the left, then repeated the gesture to the right. He absolutely relished the clicks and crunches as his vertebrae realigned.

After this little ritual, Evan began to think; finding a clever title was his first step. *Psychiatry links to mental problems-- crazy people...*He smiled; he had found his title: "I think I'm crazy!" It was perfect, and his opener was the highest form of humor: the pun.

That was his second step, a witty opening line. "A man walked into a psychiatrist's office clad entirely in celophane. The psychiatrist

looked up and announced, ‘well, I can clearly see you’re nuts.’” Evan chuckled aloud at his joke, he cracked himself up.

The night before he had mentally written a loose outline to base his work around, his third step, and then made some flavorfull filler sentences to give his work a touch of class, step four. Yes, it was slightly out of order, three, four, one, two, but it worked and was how he implemented his steps in the writing process. Then he began his fifth and final step; the typing. That was all he had to do. Fifteen minutes later, after a quick scan for errors, the paper was ready to be turned in. Evan chuckled; any teacher in the school would think it took endless hours of writing, revising, and rewriting. But fifteen minutes is all it takes.

Introduction:  
Knowledge Quest!

This is the Creative Non-fiction assignment, in which we were to write about ourselves and embellish the story we tell with our version of the truth and the story elements. I used my Regional Science Bowl adventure as the basis of this story. And if I had had a bit more time, I would have extended it to include Nationals.



## Knowledge Quest!

Buzz! The clock on the wall let out a tired sound that was supposed to be a bell. The block began as I set my black hoodie and backpack on the tile floor and took a seat in the cold stone chair attached to a cold stone desk. As I looked around past the other students filing into the room, my eyes focused on the posters that hung on the walls. One was a picture of the earth in all its majesty, from outer space; clouds obscured most of the globe, but it was still a powerful image. Another poster was split into quarters, each showing the same park- a clearing with three trees and a pond, in each of the four seasons. Yet another poster was of the geologic time period, each epoch its own little yellow bar in a layered list, surrounded with hundreds of prehistoric beasts. The posters reflected a little glare from the fluorescent bulbs overhead, and the room's chatter fell silent as the teacher walked in.

He was a young man with tan skin and a round nose that sat under two soft green eyes.

He was probably about twenty five and he smiled as he spoke, "Welcome to Earth Science. In this course you will learn about rocks, weather, water, and time." He started by splitting the class up into groups of four, I was partnered with two blond girls who looked almost identical and spoke exactly like one another, as well as another male with long brown hair and an American Eagle shirt, who was clearly uninterested in the subject. I sighed. It seemed like once again, I would be doing the work in this science class. The first lab that our teacher assigned was one on the weather. We were given a machine that generated lightning and were directed to aim it at a tub of water to see the effects that storms had on the ocean. I smiled as I worked, the lab was fun. I could end up enjoying the class.

Buzz! The buzzer rang as I pressed the button I held in my hand. I was captain of the scholastic bowl team; I was the literature expert. It was a routine after school practice, held in the same room that I had had my Earth Science

class first block. The white light from fluorescent tubes on the ceiling filled the room with an inescapable glare. After I gave the correct answer, our coach, Mr. Kulesza, a pale man with brown hair and sharp blue eyes above a slightly hawkish nose, nodded and we began to pack up. He called me over to him, “Evan, are you taking a science class now?”

I nodded and held up my Earth science book, “Yeah, Earth Science.”

Mr. Kulesza smiled, “Good, do you like it?”

I nodded again, “Yep, its pretty cool.”

My coach smiled again, “Cool. The Science Bowl Regional is in two months, and we’re going to compete at the Milwaukee School of Engineering. It’ll mean getting up at four in the morning for a five hour drive, intensive studying, and hard work, but the winner gets to go to Washington D.C. for five days to compete in the National Tournament. We need one more person to be on the team this year; would you like to be that person?”

I thought about it for a second, and then replied, “Sure.”

My coach nodded, “Great, here are a few things to study. We’ll meet for practice on Friday.” He pulled a large box of books and flashcards from under his desk and handed them to me. I took the box and stumbled forward, it felt like a ton of bricks. Moving over to one of the tables in the room, I set the box down and took out one of the books. It was large, but filled with pictures. One of the pictures stood out. It was a storm cloud that was discharging a huge bolt of lightning into a tree that exploded outward. The camera had captured the tree in the nova of its explosion, the time when you could tell that it had been a tree, but you knew it was about to spray the area with deadly shards of wood. I smiled as I riffled through the pages; this was going to be fun.

Buzz! The television set let out a sound as I turned off a re-run of an over-syndicated Fox cartoon. I needed it quiet to study. I had a blanket patterned with urban camouflage draped over me as I lay on the floor, note cards

and books scattered around. My feet were leaning against a brown couch that was perpendicular to the door to the room on the far right. My hands clawed at the yellowish-gold carpet as I picked up a stack that read “Astronomy,” and undid the rubber band. I yawned and stretched, it was hard to study this long, but I knew that if I studied hard enough, my team could win a trip to DC for a national tournament. I took off my glasses and rubbed my eyes; the yellowish light from the ceiling was tiring. I flipped through the deck of flashcards, answering most of them right. The ones I got wrong I stacked on top of a huge pile, the pile I still needed to learn. The rest of the cards, the ones I knew, were scattered on the floor. I rolled over and smiled; this was what I lived for- a challenge and a goal. I pushed myself off the floor and brushed the note cards that stuck to me back to the ground. Picking up the huge stack that I had yet to learn, I moved upstairs. The light changed from a yellow to white and I squinted- it was a lot brighter upstairs than it was in the basement. I followed the brown carpet

down the hallway to my room where the color shifted from earth tones to the colors of the sky. Blues and whites covered the walls and the floor. I set my pile of note cards on the floor next to my dresser which was covered with pewter figures from fantasy, and cracked my neck. I looked up at the window. I would have seen the moon and a single tree branch, had the window not been covered by Venetian blinds. My gaze turned to the bar that held the blinds in place. Hanging there were eight medals that signified eight great successes in Scholastic Bowl. I cracked my knuckles and thought about how great it would be to win regional in Science Bowl and add a ninth to my collection. I swung around on my heel and did a commando-style rolling leap into my bed. I bounced slightly and smiled; that was fun.

Buzz! I looked to my left and smiled, my teammate had buzzed in at just the right time. We were practicing furiously now, the regional was just a few weeks away. My teammates, Adil, tall with dark hair and dark eyes several shades

deeper than his skin, he could probably even tell you what caused his hair and eye colors as he was our Bio expert, Jef, short and hyper, the funnyman on our team as well as our mathematician, Dave, medium height and medium complexion, quiet and mischievous, our Chemist, and Scott, pale as a ghost, like myself, and also like myself, an Earth Science and Astronomy enthusiast. We had stopped doing homework or paying attention in class for the past week. We had sacrificed our grades for our sport, Science Bowl. We had failed two tests each, but our knowledge of science had dramatically increased. If we didn't win regional, there'd be hell to pay. If we did win, we would go to D.C. for five days, three of which were school days, and compete in the National Tournament. And if we won that... I'm getting ahead of myself. First we need to win the regional.

Our coach launched into the next question, "Tossup number three, Physics, Multiple Choice: According to the standard model of particle physics, which of the following is a force-carrying particle: w) proton x) neutron

y) quark, or z) photon.” That was how the questions went, instead of a, b, c, and d, we had w, x, y, and z. I have no idea why, but it was.

Dave buzzed in, “Z, photon.” his voice was low and gravelly, it always was, but it was laced with confidence of his knowledge, much like mine was whenever I spoke.

Mr. Kulesza nodded and tallied four points on the score sheet he had on the table in front of him. When a team answered a tossup, they received four points. If they got it wrong, the other team would have the chance to get the question, hearing it from the beginning. If a team buzzed in while the question was being read and answered correctly, they still got four points, but if they answered it wrong, the other team received four points as well as the chance to answer the question. When a question is answered correctly, the team that got the points was awarded a bonus question worth ten points. Our coach began the bonus, “Bonus in Astronomy, short answer: All of Saturn’s moons are composed predominantly of what substance?”

The team turned to Scott and me, we both knew the answer, and instantly passed it down the line to our captain, Adil, "Ice."

Our captain looked over at the coach and shrugged, "Ice?"

Mr. Kulesza nodded, "That's correct, ten points." He marked down the score and began the next question. I smiled as he read. This was a great activity. I was with friends and doing something I was good at, something fun.

Buzz! At four in the morning my alarm blasted. I shot out of my bed like a beam from a flashlight, eager to start the day. After stumbling about my tar black room for a minute, I felt my way to the hallway and flicked on the lights. A white glow illuminated the house and seared my eyes. I blinked several times, and then hopped into the bathroom and into the shower. Following a few minutes under hot water and shampoo, I dried myself and slipped into the clothes I had laid out the night before- a pair of blue jeans and my black scholastic bowl hoodie. Then I bolted at high speed into my father's

room and shook him quickly. "Wake up. You need to drive me." He groaned and rolled over. I quickly dashed into the kitchen and slid to a stop on the tiled floor, snatching up the items I had set out on the table before I had gone to bed- two pencils, one pen, my wallet, a small stack of flash cards I still had trouble with, my ipod, and my lucky protractor. It seemed silly to have such a superstitious view on life as I went to Science Bowl, but I had saved a small circular protractor from a recycling bin at school and kept it with me as a luck charm ever since.

My father stumbled into the room; he was squinting and rubbing his eyes. He was about a head taller than me, with brown hair and brown eyes. He was wearing a grey White Sox shirt backwards and a pair of black sweatpants with holes in the knees. "Where we going?"

I smiled and thumped down the stairs to the garage, "School. You're taking me to school so I can win science bowl."

He groaned again and shambled slowly down the stairs. It took him a full five minutes to reach the foyer, and then he sat down on the

bottom stair and reached out to put on his shoes. I tapped him lightly on the shoulder, "The left shoe goes on the left foot." He grumbled and corrected his sleepy actions. After thinking about it for a minute, I realized that I might not want him to drive in his current state. I bounded up the stairs and opened the refrigerator. A cold blast of air wafted out and I shivered. Guided by the soft yellow glow of the bulb inside, I reached down, past the Tupperware filled with leftover meatloaf, lasagna, and egg salad to pull out a small drawer under the bottom shelf. I plucked a three bottles out of the cache I had there. It was time for me to play alchemist, to make a jumpstart for my father. The Rockstar energy drink glinted in the white light of the kitchen as I set it on the counter. The Surge soda bubbled as I placed it gingerly to the right of the energy drink. The orange juice seemed to shake itself in fear of what was to come. Actually, I was the one who shook it. Orange juice is inanimate; it can't shake, or even feel fear. Anyway, I set a large cup on the table and poured the juice into it. Then I picked up the Surge and splashed a small

amount into the cup. The juice sizzled and hissed as the carbonated caffeine infused its healthy vitamins with a jolt of liveliness. I opened the Rockstar and glanced down the stairs at my father, who was still tying his left shoe. I sighed, he had forced my hand. I poured the drink into the cup, and then recoiled as it gave off a loud “*poomf!*” I blinked. That had woken me up. Unfortunately, my father was still half dead with sleep. I picked up the cup which crackled with energy, lightly skipped down the stairs, and handed it to my father. The drink would wake him up, and hopefully wouldn’t kill him. He took a long sip of the drink and his heavy eyelids shot open. His pupils contracted, and then expanded as he shook his head. Then he began to tie his shoes normally; he was awake. I looked at the beige colored drink that was still hissing in my hand and debated with myself, it might give me a nice kick, but I was already awake, and it could overload my system. I shrugged and decided to play it safe. I dumped the last third of the cup into my mother’s terracotta flowerpot where a closed morning

glory slept. The dirt bubbled as the drink leeches into the vines of the flower. It would probably have some adverse effects, but I didn't care. I was going to Science Bowl!

My father stood up and opened the door to the dark garage. He pressed a button on the wall, and the electric door began to open as a humming green light filled the room and spilled out from the ever-growing opening to the outdoors. The gold Saturn glinted in the light and I opened the passenger door. As I took a seat in the faded seat and my father started the car, I felt a tingle in my stomach, possibly like some sort of pretty flying insect. It was a new feeling, but I knew that no matter what, I'd have a great time. But if we won, it'll be even more fun.

Buzz! The automatic door on the van closes and we're on our way. There's no more time for practice now, we're on our way to Wisconsin. Jef starts up his laptop and opens a word document. The glow from the screen is the only light in the dark van. He smiles, "This

contains all the practice questions we've ever done." I grin. It looks like I was wrong, but in this case, I'm glad to be.

Jef hands the computer to me and nods, "Quiz us."

I scroll down the list of questions and begin, "Biology, Short Answer: How many different cranial nerves are there in the human body?"

Dave speaks out, "Ten!"

Scott jumps in, "Eight!"

Jef takes a guess, "Four?"

Adil speaks the answer, "Twelve."

I nod. "Yeah."

Mr. Kulesza looks away from the road and back at us. "You guys better not play like that at MSOE if you want to win." We all nod and smile. We were just messing around for the first time in the weeks we've been preparing for this. We continue to practice, I ask the questions, and the team gives the answers. This continues until we reach our destination: MSOE: home of the regional tournament. The entire team smiles and

we bump fists, no matter what, we agree, we are going to have some serious fun.

Buzz! I look up, horrified at the sound. Jef has buzzed in way too soon. The last part of the question was cut off as he buzzed in. I clench my fists and begin to pray, God, Thor, Ra, Zeus, anyone. As time seems to slow, I reflect on just how we got into this situation.

We jumped out to a quick start by finishing the morning pool with an undefeated record, posting devastating victories over J.I. Case, Brookfield Central, Waterford Union, and Random Lake. Then we advanced to the afternoon play-off rounds: an eight-team double-elimination tourney. In round one, we martyred Catholic Memorial as Adil beat the crap out of the bio questions. Undefeated Arrowhead awaited us with an open maw in round two, and they bushwhacked us by firing with all cylinders in the first half. We regrouped, and nailed the next several tossups, but we just couldn't match their astonishing first half lead. In round three, in the loser's bracket, we met up once again with

J.I. Case. We lit ‘em up in a humiliating victory that sent Case home and ignited a wildfire that carried us onward. Marshfield High battled us in round four, struggling to find points as we flared out into the lead before slowing to stall mode, draining time from the clock to preserve an excellent win. Libertyville High waited in round five, a match that would crown the "winner of the losers" and provide an opportunity to face undefeated Arrowhead again in the double-elimination championship. Again we blazed into an early lead, but then Jef interrupted ridiculously early in math, which brings me to this moment.

“ $Y=2x+...$ ” Jef pauses, he knew, just like everyone else, that he had buzzed too early, “...16?”

The moderator’s jaw drops, “That is *correct.*”

All of us turn to look at Jef, who laughs. The moderator continues with the bonus and the rest of the game goes uneventfully, ending with our victory. Once we had finished the game, I notice the score; if Jef had answered wrong, we

wouldn't have gotten the points or the bonus, and the other team would have gotten them, and we would have lost. Jef had decided the game with his improbable response.

With Hawk momentum at an all-time high, Dave led a devastating assault against the undefeated Arrowhead that ended in our victory. Arrowhead's first loss proved to be killer as our energy soared higher and higher. In the ensuing second-chance match for the previously undefeated Arrowhead, they couldn't answer a trio of double hits from Adil, Jef, and Scott. At the end of a 76-30 victory, the Hawks found that we braved our way through the losers' bracket and are going all the way to Washington D.C. As we pose for the picture with the trophy and Regional banner, we all smile: we know that Nationals are going to be very, very fun.



Introduction:  
Steeplechase

The Steeplechase was the exercise that spawned  
the story that became 'The Dead of Winter'  
It was a very fun thing to do, because it changed  
my writing style drastically, and created one of  
my best stories.



1 third person

Stan shivered and pulled Jean close as he zipped up the tent. He ran a hand through her black hair and smiled. She was warm; a beacon of life in the frozen forest.

Jean shivered and hugged him tightly, “Anne was kind of creepy tonight.”

Stan chuckled and nodded, “You mean creepier than usual?”

Jean pulled out of the hug. “Stan, Anne isn’t as weird as you make her out to be. She’s just different.”

Stan nodded and brushed his blonde hair out of his face. “You’ve got that right. She’s definitely different.” he smiled and brushed Jean’s hair again. “Why’d she come anyway? She hates people.”

Jean sighed and punched him lightly in the shoulder. “Anne needs friends, she needs to be around people whether she likes them or not.”

Stan just shrugged. “Whatever. She’s just weird and I really don’t like her.” Jean shook her head and then sneezed. Stan frowned. “You might be catching a cold. I told you to wear another layer under your coat.”

Jean frowned and sneezed again. “What are you, my mother? I’ll be fine, it’s just allergies-” she sneezed again.

Stan cracked his neck. “Allergies? In winter? No way. Jean, this could be bad. We still have a week out here, and you’re very susceptible to the cold.”

Jean shook her head, “Look, I’ll be fine. It’s not like I’ll die if I get a little chilly.” She frowned and shook her hair out of her face.

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2 switch to first

I shook my black hair out of my face and frowned. Stan was getting protective again. I hate it when he does this; it makes me feel like a child. I’m nineteen for god’s sake. I’m not a child anymore.

“Look, I’m just saying, if you get sick, it’ll make me feel horrible.” Stan was looking at me with his little deer eyes. They were so cute, they were big and round, just like a little fawn. He was tall and blonde, and very nice. The only flaws he had, in my eyes, at least, were that he was very over protective, and extremely jealous. He wanted to protect me from the world. If a little boy had a toy gun pointed at me, I have no doubt that Stan would beat the shit out of him. If that same little boy apologized for pointing his toy at me and presented me with a heart-shaped ‘sorry’

card, I'm sure that Stan would beat the shit out of him again.

"Oh?" I began, "And why would you feel horrible?"

He smiled and blinked his big, round eyes twice, "Because I encouraged you to come on this trip..." he sounded like a child sometimes, and now was one of those times. It did annoy me at times, but other times, I just loved it. He was so cute and innocent seeming. If he had murdered someone in front of me and then showed me those eyes and spoke in that tone, I'd believe he was innocent.

It's either that convincing, or I'm a gullible fool. I think that it's him, though. I know for a fact that I'm no fool.

---

4 dear diary

Dear diary,

Hello again my friend, from the snowy woods just outside of town. Today was a very different day. My friends, Jean, Joe, Alex, Stan, and I departed yesterday for a week long camping trip. Anne too, she came along with us. Jean invited her and insisted that we be nice. I try my

best, but she creeps me out. She changed since Jr. High. I remember when she was one of my best friends. She was blonde then, and she was one of the peppiest people you'd ever meet. You couldn't tell that from looking at her now, though. She's dyed her hair black, and never wears any other colors than red and black. It's really creepy how she's withdrawn into herself and...

Anywho, this isn't about Anne. This is about me! You, diary, aren't the place for my dark feelings, you're the place for happy things, like puppies and flowers and kittens and sunshine! Oh, god, reading that last line just shows what happens when I let myself go I need to work on keeping my hyper tendencies controlled, like when I'm with Joe. Joe seems to calm me down. A lot. As I mentioned before, he's from Ireland, and his accent always makes me giggle. He can't say the letter 'h' and it's just so different from the way that we Americans talk. I do feel kind of bad for Alex though, Eve had to cancel and Alex is alone for the week, like Anne. Hey! That's an idea! What if I manage to hook Anne up with Alex? No, that'd never work. Anne's crazy. Besides, Alex loves Eve way too much to leave her. I'll write more later, Joe just came back into the tent. Bye!

--Rebecca

---

## 5 model

The forest was sleepy, covered in snow and layered in frost. The branches of trees that had shed their leaves reached up like claws to scratch the moon. The chill didn't stop the night birds from flying, searching for the prey that hid under the silent shroud of snow. The moonlight shone from between the branches, sparkling off the pristine white blanket that covered the ground. This is how it always was, and always would be in the winter.

The snow was deep and unbroken, fresh. It would stay in its form until the spring, when it would melt. When it did, the stream that it kept in its frozen grasp would flow over its banks and create a small area of swamp in the peaceful forest.

The stream was still, trapped in time by the cryogenic clutch of winter. Ripples remained where they had been as the clawed hand of ice smothered them in an icy embrace, twigs sat frozen in the ice, each an Excalibur, waiting to be pulled from its stone. Fish still swam underneath, unperturbed by the deathly cold that hung above them.

---

The forest was almost entirely silent; a pin drop would sound like a sledgehammer. A bird called in the night, hoping to find itself with a companion, to not be alone in the cold clutches of winter. The call echoed back, unanswered and the bird took wing, flying into the night, searching for a place with more life.

There was life in the forest, however, a different sort of life, human life, four tents in the middle of a small clearing and the smoldering remains of what had been a campfire. This was something new for the forest, six humans in the middle of it, where there had been only animals before.

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6 movie script

*Setting: small tent, REBECCA lays on a sleeping bag stage left, and empty sleeping bag is to her right. tent is cluttered with camping materials, snacks, and a guitar leans against back wall*

JOE: (ENTERS FROM RIGHT) g'evnin, Rebecca!

Anyt'ing yeh need?

REBECCA: (QUICKLY HIDES DIARY UNDER SLEEPING BAG) No thanks Joe. How's Alex doing?

JOE: (*shrug shoulders and smile*) Oh, 'e's doin fine, lass, jest a lil' bummed 'bout Eve, dat's all.

REBECCA: (*nod and smile cheerfully*) Good, I'd hate for him to be sad and alone tonight.

JOE: (LAY DOWN IN EMPTY SLEEPING BAG) yea, it'd be a cryin shame for 'im to be alone, but t'ers not a thing to do about it.

REBECCA: (SIT UP) Can you play a song? Maybe he'll hear it. Besides, it'd help after that spooky story Anne told...

JOE: (GET UP AND CROSS SLOWLY TO GUITAR PICK UP AND RETURN TO SLEEPING BAG) Still spooked by teh tale she spun, eh? well, tis should calm yeh down.

(BEGIN TO PLAY AN SLOW, IRISH SOUNDING  
SONG, SING ALONG WITH THE TUNE)

REBECCA: (*smile and lay down slowly*) Thank you, Joe.  
That's very nice...

---

7 dialogue

The tent was dark as Anne sat in the center, alone. She brushed her black hair out of her eyes, "I don't understand what you're moaning about. You had your chance."

Anne flicked her head and her long blonde hair flew over her shoulder. "I just don't like it. You're dark now. Completely different from me."

Anne smiled sinisterly and her eyes flared, "Exactly. And that's why you kept me caged for eighteen years, but now it is my chance to live. *You* will be imprisoned while I am free. *You* will know the pain I endured, *you* will suffer."

Anne wailed and her blonde hair flowed behind her, "Please, I'm begging you, let me out. I love life, but you hate it. I love my friends, but you drove them away. Why can't you let me be happy?"

“Shut up!” Anne snarled and lashed out with her right hand, it was holding a small razor blade, and when it struck, Anne screamed.

A large gash on her wrist oozed blood. Her blonde hair hung around her face as a few tears dripped from her blue eyes, she whimpered, “w-why did you do that... it...it hurts...”

Anne smiled and licked the blood from her arm as she laughed, “Exactly. Your pain is my pleasure...”

Anne spat the taste of blood from her mouth in disgust, “How can you do this? I lived with you, I trusted you, and I loved you-”

Anne slashed out with the blade again, “You caged me! I was a nuisance to you, the secret you hid, and hoped your friends would never find. But they found me, Anne, and look how much your friends love the new you!” She slashed out with the blade again and again until blood ran down her arms. She laughed as she brushed her black hair out of her eyes, “I feel so alive!”

---

## 8 Shift to Alex

As I sat in the tent, alone, I grumbled. Everyone else had someone with them. Stan had Jean, Joe had Rebecca. I would have had Eve, but she had to cancel.

We'd been planning this trip for months, and I was really excited to be going, but then Eve's grandmother had to go get cancer. Stupid cancer. Killing people, ruining lives. That actually sounds kind of selfish. I guess it makes sense that Eve would rather be with a family member about to die than with me, who she'll have for the rest of her life, assuming we don't split. But why would we split? We make a great couple. My charm and wit match with her beauty and intelligence. She's beautiful, her red hair like a crimson tide that flows behind her whenever she moves. Her eyes are beautiful gems, twin sapphires that twinkle in whatever light is present.

Damn. I hate it when I sound poetic like that. I have a reputation as a manly man. I don't do all that fairy stuff, you know, cook, clean, write poetry, take Home Ec, that kind of thing. I do manly things. Football, rugby, shop. It's a hard reputation to keep. If I slip up the least bit...

Anyway. This trip is good, but not as good as it would have been with Eve. Like tonight for instance. I could have held her and comforted her when that creepy girl Anne told a freaky psychological horror story. God I hate psych. even taking that class made me uncomfortable. People looking into you and seeing what drives you, what makes you run just seems like a lot of Voodoo. Not that I

believe in Voodoo. I mean come on, dolls that can make people hurt? Right.

Well, time for another night alone. Damn, I wish Eve were here.

---

### 10 reality shift

Anne stumbled from her tent; the snow chilled her bare feet as the wind whipped her blonde hair around her face. Blood dripped from her arm and stained the snow around her. She headed into the peaceful forest, trying to escape. As she ran, the blood made a long trail behind her, a scarlet river in a pearl world. She became light headed and the world began to spin. The ground in front of her shimmered like a mirage. She smiled, she no longer felt cold, and she was warm. The trees turned into hands, clawing at her trying to pull her into an embrace that she could never escape. She turned and ran, blonde hair flowing behind her, a stream of gold to match the stream of ruby that flowed from her arm. She tripped over a root that stood above the ground, and she rolled, landing on her back. The snow around her was staining, turning red, but her gaze was on the sky, the tiny points of light that glared down at her, the stars. Several of them twinkled, the form of a lion. She smiled, Leo. Some more twinkled, Draco.

She laughed; she could see how the ancients saw constellations. The moon was huge. It looked as if all she had to do was reach up and pluck it out of the sky. She stretched her left arm up to grab the shining orb, but something wet dripped into her face. She looked at her arm in confusion. It was pouring blood. She frowned and reached up with her other hand to wipe the blood away. Her right hand held a small razor blade. She made a small sound and dropped the blade. It caught the moonlight and sparkled as it fell into the snow. She reached up for the moon again, ignoring the drops that splashed her face. For some reason, she felt as if when she reached the moon, everything would be okay. It would help, the moon. She needed the moon. But it was just out of her reach. She stretched some more. Just a little further...

---

11 step choice: step 1, third person and step 7 dialogue

“You’re dying.” She looked up, it was Anne, her black hair waving in the wind. “It’s not too bad. We just need to stop the blood. Then we’ll be fine. I’ll wait and heal tonight, and then tomorrow, I’ll have some more fun. Come on, there’s some bandages in the tent.”

Anne got up, her black nightgown fluttering in the wind. She put her hand over the cuts on her arm. “Come

on, now.” She began to follow the trail of crimson back to her tent.

“Tomorrow...” Anne whispered, her blonde hair falling in front of her eyes, “No...”

Anne laughed, her black nightgown and hair waving in the wind, “Yes. Tomorrow.” She laughed again, “And there’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

Anne turned, and her blonde hair trailed behind her. “There’s one thing I can do!” Her hand closed around the razor that was lying in the snow. She whirled and lunged at Anne.

As her black hair fell over her eyes, Anne stumbled backward until she hit a tree. Her hand reached up to feel the blade in her throat. Blood ran down her arms and stained her black nightgown. “You...you’ve...killed...us both...” Blood gurgled in her throat and she coughed. Blood sprayed in a fine mist from her mouth. Anne keeled over forward and fell on her side in the snow. Her red blood rapidly stained the cold white crystals, and her eyes rolled upwards. She could see the moon, so close. She reached up to grab it, and her eyes slowly closed. Her bloody arm fell limp to the snow, never to move again.



Introduction:  
Nanofiction and Haiku

Nanofiction is made when you chose a title of up  
to seven words and then write 55 words, no  
more, no less, about it.

Haiku is created when you take five syllables,  
then seven, then five, and slap them together to  
make 'poetry'

I was very good at writing Nanofiction, and I  
found it to be quite fun. How I feel about Haiku,  
however, is better left unsaid.



“Today, I am Going to Fly.”

Jon said. He stood atop a high cliff in his home town. He pulled a red piece of cloth from his pocket and tied it around his neck. The cape fluttered in the wind. He took a running leap and began to soar. The next day, the paper’s headline was, “Local Man’s Death Ruled Suicide.”

““Wise One, Guide Me With Your Knowledge.”

The samurai stood beneath the old tree in the middle of the grove. He bowed to the owl that sat there and knelt waiting, craving guidance for the coming battle. The owl opened its beak, “Awwrak! Polly wants a cracker, Awwrak!” The samurai blinked, dumbfounded. Then he stood up. “You are not the Wise One.”

“I Feel This One! Come On... Seven!”

The gambler shook the dice in his cupped hands, “Lucky seven, comin up, boys, I got this one in the bag. My mojo’s pumped and Lady Luck’s a-courtin me!” He let the dice roll across the table, “Seven, baby, come on seven!” The

table's operator looked down at the dice, "Snake Eyes, Sir, you lose."

### The Submarine Service

My brother had wanted to be in the submarine service in the Navy ever since he saw the movie "The Hunt For The Red October," but the Navy forced him to be in the surface fleet. They did this because he had straight 'A's, and well, the submarine service only takes people below 'C' level.

### The Beach

My brother and I had gone to the near by beach, the sandy shores always a place to have fun and talk. As we were walking along the shore, my brother, in a million to one shot, tripped over a beached dolphin. I laughed at him, then asked him if he did it on porpoise.

Dear lord how I hate  
Haiku--devil's invention  
Corrupts our culture.

Their cartoons, their books  
They replace us one by one  
Don't outsource culture.

Poetry corrupt,  
How dare you, you heathen scum,  
Go back to your home.

Under a blanket,  
The world slumbers in the cold,  
The pristine winter.

A god among men,  
The young writer waits until  
His genius is seen.

The dice roll and stop,  
But what number do they show?  
Oh, please be seven.

Burn it to ashes,  
Flame: erase all trace of it.  
Warm us in the cold.

Introduction:  
Favorites

What follows are two of my favorite short stories.  
I hope you enjoy these masterpieces by Ray  
Bradbury and O. Henry as much as I do.



## **The Veldt**

By Ray Bradbury

"George, I wish you'd look at the nursery."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, then."

"I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it."

"What would a psychologist want with a nursery?"

"You know very well what he'd want." His wife paused in the middle of the kitchen and watched the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four.

"It's just that the nursery is different now than it was."

"All right, let's have a look."

They walked down the hall of their soundproofed Happylife Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars installed, this house which clothed and fed and rocked them to

sleep and played and sang and was good to them. Their approach sensitized a switch somewhere and the nursery light flicked on when they came within ten feet of it. Similarly, behind them, in the halls, lights went on and off as they left them behind, with a soft automaticity.

"Well," said George Hadley.

They stood on the thatched floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house. "But nothing's too good for our children," George had said.

The nursery was silent. It was empty as a jungle glade at hot high noon. The walls were blank and two dimensional. Now, as George and Lydia Hadley stood in the center of the room, the walls began to purr and recede into crystalline distance, it seemed, and presently an African veldt appeared, in three dimensions, on all sides, in color reproduced to the final pebble and bit of straw. The ceiling above them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun.

George Hadley felt the perspiration start on his brow.

"Let's get out of this sun," he said. "This is a little too real. But I don't see anything wrong."

"Wait a moment, you'll see," said his wife.

Now the hidden odorophonics were beginning to blow a wind of odor at the two people in the middle of the baked veldtland. The hot straw smell of lion grass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the great rusty smell of animals, the smell of dust like a red paprika in the hot air. And now the sounds: the thump of distant antelope feet on grassy sod, the papery rustling of vultures. A shadow passed through the sky. The shadow flickered on George Hadley's upturned, sweating face.

"Filthy creatures," he heard his wife say.

"The vultures."

"You see, there are the lions, far over, that way. Now they're on their way to the water hole. They've just been eating," said Lydia. "I don't know what."

"Some animal." George Hadley put his hand up to shield off the burning light from his

squinted eyes. "A zebra or a baby giraffe, maybe."

"Are you sure?" His wife sounded peculiarly tense.

"No, it's a little late to be sure," he said, amused. "Nothing over there I can see but cleaned bone, and the vultures dropping for what's left."

"Did you bear that scream?" she asked.

"No."

"About a minute ago?"

"Sorry, no."

The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled with admiration for the mechanical genius who had conceived this room. A miracle of efficiency selling for an absurdly low price. Every home should have one. Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their clinical accuracy, they startled you, gave you a twinge, but most of the time what fun for everyone, not only your own son and daughter, but for yourself when you felt like a quick jaunt to a foreign land, a quick change of scenery. Well, here it was!

And here were the lions now, fifteen feet away, so real, so feverishly and startlingly real that you could feel the prickling fur on your hand, and your mouth was stuffed with the dusty upholstery smell of their heated pelts, and the yellow of them was in your eyes like the yellow of an exquisite French tapestry, the yellows of lions and summer grass, and the sound of the matted lion lungs exhaling on the silent noontide, and the smell of meat from the panting, dripping mouths.

The lions stood looking at George and Lydia Hadley with terrible green-yellow eyes.

"Watch out!" screamed Lydia.

The lions came running at them.

Lydia bolted and ran. Instinctively, George sprang after her.

Outside, in the hall, with the door slammed he was laughing and she was crying, and they both stood appalled at the other's reaction.

"George!"

"Lydia! Oh, my dear poor sweet Lydia!"

"They almost got us!"

"Walls, Lydia, remember; crystal walls, that's all they are. Oh, they look real, I must admit—Africa in your parlor—but it's all dimensional, superreactionary, supersensitive color film and mental tape film behind glass screens. It's all odorophonics and sonics, Lydia. Here's my handkerchief."

"I'm afraid." She came to him and put her body against him and cried steadily. "Did you see? Did you feel? It's too real."

"Now, Lydia..."

"You've got to tell Wendy and Peter not to read any more on Africa."

"Of course—of course." He patted her.

"Promise?"

"Sure."

"And lock the nursery for a few days until I get my nerves settled."

"You know how difficult Peter is about that. When I punished him a month ago by locking the nursery for even a few hours - the tantrum he threw! And Wendy too. They live for the nursery."

"It's got to be locked, that's all there is to it."

"All right." Reluctantly he locked the huge door. "You've been working too hard. You need a rest."

"I don't know - I don't know," she said, blowing her nose, sitting down in a chair that immediately began to rock and comfort her. "Maybe I don't have enough to do. Maybe I have time to think too much. Why don't we shut the whole house off for a few days and take a vacation?"

"You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?"

"Yes." She nodded.

"And dam my socks?"

"Yes." A frantic, watery-eyed nodding.

"And sweep the house?"

"Yes, yes - oh, yes!"

"But I thought that's why we bought this house, so we wouldn't have to do anything?"

"That's just it. I feel like I don't belong here. The house is wife and mother now, and nursemaid. Can I compete with an African veldt? Can I give a bath and scrub the children as

efficiently or quickly as the automatic scrub bath can? I cannot. And it isn't just me. It's you. You've been awfully nervous lately."

"I suppose I have been smoking too much."

"You look as if you didn't know what to do with yourself in this house, either. You smoke a little more every morning and drink a little more every afternoon and need a little more sedative every night. You're beginning to feel unnecessary too."

"Am I?" He paused and tried to feel into himself to see what was really there.

"Oh, George!" She looked beyond him, at the nursery door. "Those lions can't get out of there, can they?"

He looked at the door and saw it tremble as if something had jumped against it from the other side.

"Of course not," he said.

At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic carnival across town and had televised home to say they'd be late, to go ahead eating. So George Hadley, bemused, sat watching the dining-room table produce warm dishes of food from its mechanical interior.

"We forgot the ketchup," he said.

"Sorry," said a small voice within the table, and ketchup appeared.

As for the nursery, thought George Hadley, it won't hurt for the children to be locked out of it awhile. Too much of anything isn't good for anyone. And it was clearly indicated that the children had been spending a little too much time on Africa. That sun. He could feel it on his neck, still, like a hot paw. And the lions. And the smell of blood. Remarkable how the nursery caught the telepathic emanations of the children's minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras. Sun - sun. Giraffes - giraffes. Death and death.

That last. He chewed tastelessly on the meat  
that the table had cut for  
him. Death thoughts. They were awfully young,  
Wendy and Peter, for death  
thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young,  
really. Long before you knew  
what death was you were wishing it on someone  
else. When you were two years  
old you were shooting people with cap pistols.

But this - the long, hot African veldt-the  
awful death in the jaws of a  
lion. And repeated again and again.

"Where are you going?"

He didn't answer Lydia. Preoccupied, he let  
the lights glow softly on  
ahead of him, extinguish behind him as he  
padded to the nursery door. He  
listened against it. Far away, a lion roared.

He unlocked the door and opened it. Just  
before he stepped inside, he  
heard a faraway scream. And then another roar  
from the lions, which subsided  
quickly.

He stepped into Africa. How many times in the last year had he opened this door and found Wonderland, Alice, the Mock Turtle, or Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, or Jack Pumpkinhead of Oz, or Dr. Doolittle, or the cow jumping over a very real-appearing moon-all the delightful contraptions of a make-believe world. How often had he seen Pegasus flying in the sky ceiling, or seen fountains of red fireworks, or heard angel voices singing. But now, is yellow hot Africa, this bake oven with murder in the heat. Perhaps Lydia was right. Perhaps they needed a little vacation from the fantasy which was growing a bit too real for ten-year-old children. It was all right to exercise one's mind with gymnastic fantasies, but when the lively child mind settled on one pattern... ? It seemed that, at a distance, for the past month, he had heard lions roaring, and smelled their strong odor seeping as

far away as his study door. But, being busy, he had paid it no attention.

George Hadley stood on the African grassland alone. The lions looked up from their feeding, watching him. The only flaw to the illusion was the open door through which he could see his wife, far down the dark hall, like a framed picture, eating her dinner abstractedly.

"Go away," he said to the lions.

They did not go.

He knew the principle of the room exactly. You sent out your thoughts. Whatever you thought would appear. "Let's have Aladdin and his lamp," he snapped. The veldtland remained; the lions remained.

"Come on, room! I demand Aladin!" he said.

Nothing happened. The lions mumbled in their baked pelts.

"Aladin!"

He went back to dinner. "The fool room's out of order," he said. "It won't respond."

"Or--"

"Or what?"

"Or it can't respond," said Lydia, "because the children have thought about Africa and lions and killing so many days that the room's in a rut."

"Could be."

"Or Peter's set it to remain that way."

"Set it?"

"He may have got into the machinery and fixed something."

"Peter doesn't know machinery."

"He's a wise one for ten. That I.Q. of his -"

"Nevertheless -"

"Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad."

The Hadleys turned. Wendy and Peter were coming in the front door, cheeks like peppermint candy, eyes like bright blue agate marbles, a smell of ozone on their jumpers from their trip in the helicopter.

"You're just in time for supper," said both parents.

"We're full of strawberry ice cream and hot dogs," said the children, holding hands. "But we'll sit and watch."

"Yes, come tell us about the nursery," said George Hadley.

The brother and sister blinked at him and then at each other.

"Nursery?"

"All about Africa and everything," said the father with false joviality.

"I don't understand," said Peter.

"Your mother and I were just traveling through Africa with rod and reel; Tom Swift and his Electric Lion," said George Hadley.

"There's no Africa in the nursery," said Peter simply.

"Oh, come now, Peter. We know better."

"I don't remember any Africa," said Peter to Wendy. "Do you?"

"No."

"Run see and come tell."

She obeyed

"Wendy, come back here!" said George Hadley, but she was gone. The house lights followed her like a flock of fireflies. Too late, he realized he had forgotten to lock the nursery door after his last inspection.

"Wendy'll look and come tell us," said Peter.

"She doesn't have to tell me. I've seen it."

"I'm sure you're mistaken, Father."

"I'm not, Peter. Come along now."

But Wendy was back. "It's not Africa," she said breathlessly.

"We'll see about this," said George Hadley, and they all walked down the hall together and opened the nursery door.

There was a green, lovely forest, a lovely river, a purple mountain, high voices singing, and Rima, lovely and mysterious, lurking in the trees with colorful flights of butterflies, like animated bouquets, lingering in her long hair. The African veldtland was gone. The lions were gone. Only

Rima was here now, singing a song so beautiful that it brought tears to your eyes.

George Hadley looked in at the changed scene. "Go to bed," he said to the children.

They opened their mouths.

"You heard me," he said.

They went off to the air closet, where a wind sucked them like brown leaves up the flue to their slumber rooms.

George Hadley walked through the singing glade and picked up something that lay in the corner near where the lions had been. He walked slowly back to his wife.

"What is that?" she asked.

"An old wallet of mine," he said.

He showed it to her. The smell of hot grass was on it and the smell of a lion. There were drops of saliva on it, it had been chewed, and there were blood smears on both sides.

He closed the nursery door and locked it, tight.

In the middle of the night he was still awake and he knew his wife was awake. "Do you think Wendy changed it?" she said at last, in the dark room.

"Of course."

"Made it from a veldt into a forest and put Rima there instead of lions?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But it's staying locked until I find out."

"How did your wallet get there?"

"I don't know anything," he said, "except that I'm beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are neurotic at all, a room like that -"

"It's supposed to help them work off their neuroses in a healthful way."

"I'm starting to wonder." He stared at the ceiling.

"We've given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward-secrecy, disobedience?"

"Who was it said, 'Children are carpets, they should be stepped on occasionally'? We've never lifted a hand. They're insufferable - let's admit it. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if we were offspring. They're spoiled and we're spoiled."

"They've been acting funny ever since you forbade them to take the rocket to New York a few months ago."

"They're not old enough to do that alone, I explained."

"Nevertheless, I've noticed they've been decidedly cool toward us since."

"I think I'll have David McClean come tomorrow morning to have a look at Africa."

"But it's not Africa now, it's Green Mansions country and Rima."

"I have a feeling it'll be Africa again before then."

A moment later they heard the screams.

Two screams. Two people screaming from downstairs. And then a roar of lions.

"Wendy and Peter aren't in their rooms," said his wife.

He lay in his bed with his beating heart. "No," he said. "They've broken into the nursery."

"Those screams - they sound familiar."

"Do they?"

"Yes, awfully."

And although their beds tried very hard, the two adults couldn't be rocked to sleep for another hour. A smell of cats was in the night air.

"Father?" said Peter.

"Yes."

Peter looked at his shoes. He never looked at his father any more, nor at his mother. "You aren't going to lock up the nursery for good, are you?"

"That all depends."

"On what?" snapped Peter.

"On you and your sister. If you intersperse this Africa with a little variety - oh, Sweden perhaps, or Denmark or China -"

"I thought we were free to play as we wished."

"You are, within reasonable bounds."

"What's wrong with Africa, Father?"

"Oh, so now you admit you have been conjuring up Africa, do you?"

"I wouldn't want the nursery locked up," said Peter coldly. "Ever."

"Matter of fact, we're thinking of turning the whole house off for about a month. Live sort of a carefree one-for-all existence."

"That sounds dreadful! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of

letting the shoe tier do it? And brush my own  
teeth and comb my hair and  
give myself a bath?"

"It would be fun for a change, don't you  
think?"

"No, it would be horrid. I didn't like it when  
you took out the picture  
painter last month."

"That's because I wanted you to learn to  
paint all by yourself, son."

"I don't want to do anything but look and  
listen and smell; what else  
is there to do?"

"All right, go play in Africa."

"Will you shut off the house sometime soon?"

"We're considering it."

"I don't think you'd better consider it any  
more, Father."

"I won't have any threats from my son!"

"Very well." And Peter strolled off to the  
nursery.

"Am I on time?" said David McClean.

"Breakfast?" asked George Hadley.

"Thanks, had some. What's the trouble?"

"David, you're a psychologist."

"I should hope so."

"Well, then, have a look at our nursery. You saw it a year ago when you dropped by; did you notice anything peculiar about it then?"

"Can't say I did; the usual violences, a tendency toward a slight paranoia here or there, usual in children because they feel persecuted by parents constantly, but, oh, really nothing."

They walked down the hall. "I locked the nursery up," explained the father, "and the children broke back into it during the night. I let them stay so they could form the patterns for you to see."

There was a terrible screaming from the nursery.

"There it is," said George Hadley. "See what you make of it."

They walked in on the children without rapping.

The screams had faded. The lions were feeding.

"Run outside a moment, children," said George Hadley. "No, don't change the mental combination. Leave the walls as they are. Get!"

With the children gone, the two men stood studying the lions clustered at a distance, eating with great relish whatever it was they had caught.

"I wish I knew what it was," said George Hadley. "Sometimes I can almost see. Do you think if I brought high-powered binoculars here and -"

David McClean laughed dryly. "Hardly." He turned to study all four walls. "How long has this been going on?"

"A little over a month."

"It certainly doesn't feel good."

"I want facts, not feelings."

"My dear George, a psychologist never saw a fact in his life. He only hears about feelings; vague things. This doesn't feel good, I tell you.

Trust my hunches and my instincts. I have a nose for something bad. This is very bad. My advice to you is to have the whole damn room torn down and your children brought to me every day during the next year for treatment."

"Is it that bad?"

"I'm afraid so. One of the original uses of these nurseries was so that we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child's mind, study at our leisure, and help the child. In this case, however, the room has become a channel toward-destructive thoughts, instead of a release away from them."

"Didn't you sense this before?"

"I sensed only that you had spoiled your children more than most. And now you're letting them down in some way. What way?"

"I wouldn't let them go to New York."

"What else?"

"I've taken a few machines from the house and threatened them, a month

ago, with closing up the nursery unless they did their homework. I did close it for a few days to show I meant business."

"Ah, ha!"

"Does that mean anything?"

"Everything. Where before they had a Santa Claus now they have a Scrooge. Children prefer Santas. You've let this room and this house replace you and your wife in your children's affections. This room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents. And now you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there's hatred here. You can feel it coming out of the sky. Feel that sun. George, you'll have to change your life. Like too many others, you've built it around creature comforts. Why, you'd starve tomorrow if something went wrong in your kitchen. You wouldn't know how to tap an egg. Nevertheless, turn everything

off. Start new. It'll take time. But we'll make good children out of bad in a year, wait and see."

"But won't the shock be too much for the children, shutting the room up abruptly, for good?"

"I don't want them going any deeper into this, that's all."

The lions were finished with their red feast.

The lions were standing on the edge of the clearing watching the two men.

"Now I'm feeling persecuted," said McClean. "Let's get out of here. I never have cared for these damned rooms. Make me nervous."

"The lions look real, don't they?" said George Hadley. I don't suppose there's any way -"

"What?"

"- that they could become real?"

"Not that I know."

"Some flaw in the machinery, a tampering or something?"

"No."

They went to the door.

"I don't imagine the room will like being turned off," said the father.

"Nothing ever likes to die - even a room."

"I wonder if it hates me for wanting to switch it off?"

"Paranoia is thick around here today," said David McClean. "You can follow it like a spoor. Hello." He bent and picked up a bloody scarf. "This yours?"

"No." George Hadley's face was rigid. "It belongs to Lydia."

They went to the fuse box together and threw the switch that killed the nursery.

The two children were in hysterics. They screamed and pranced and threw things. They yelled and sobbed and swore and jumped at the furniture.

"You can't do that to the nursery, you can't!"

"Now, children."

The children flung themselves onto a couch,  
weeping.

"George," said Lydia Hadley, "turn on the  
nursery, just for a few  
moments. You can't be so abrupt."

"No."

"You can't be so cruel..."

"Lydia, it's off, and it stays off. And the whole  
damn house dies as of  
here and now. The more I see of the mess we've  
put ourselves in, the more it  
sickens me. We've been contemplating our  
mechanical, electronic navels for  
too long. My God, how we need a breath of  
honest air!"

And he marched about the house turning  
off the voice clocks, the  
stoves, the heaters, the shoe shiners, the shoe  
lacers, the body scrubbers  
and swabbers and massagers, and every other  
machine he could put his hand  
to.

The house was full of dead bodies, it seemed.  
It felt like a mechanical

cemetery. So silent. None of the humming hidden energy of machines waiting to function at the tap of a button.

"Don't let them do it!" wailed Peter at the ceiling, as if he was talking to the house, the nursery. "Don't let Father kill everything." He turned to his father. "Oh, I hate you!"

"Insults won't get you anywhere."

"I wish you were dead!"

"We were, for a long while. Now we're going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we're going to live."

Wendy was still crying and Peter joined her again. "Just a moment, just one moment, just another moment of nursery," they wailed.

"Oh, George," said the wife, "it can't hurt."

"All right - all right, if they'll just shut up. One minute, mind you, and then off forever."

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" sang the children, smiling with wet faces.

"And then we're going on a vacation. David McClean is coming back in half an hour to help us move out and get to the airport. I'm going to dress. You turn the nursery on for a minute, Lydia, just a minute, mind you."

And the three of them went babbling off while he let himself be vacuumed upstairs through the air flue and set about dressing himself. A minute later Lydia appeared.

"I'll be glad when we get away," she sighed.

"Did you leave them in the nursery?"

"I wanted to dress too. Oh, that horrid Africa. What can they see in it?"

"Well, in five minutes we'll be on our way to Iowa. Lord, how did we ever get in this house? What prompted us to buy a nightmare?"

"Pride, money, foolishness."

"I think we'd better get downstairs before those kids get engrossed with those damned beasts again."

Just then they heard the children calling,  
"Daddy, Mommy, come quick -  
quick!"

They went downstairs in the air flue and  
ran down the hall. The  
children were nowhere in sight. "Wendy? Peter!"

They ran into the nursery. The veldtland was  
empty save for the lions  
waiting, looking at them. "Peter, Wendy?"

The door slammed.

"Wendy, Peter!"

George Hadley and his wife whirled and ran  
back to the door.

"Open the door!" cried George Hadley, trying  
the knob. "Why, they've  
locked it from the outside! Peter!" He beat at the  
door. "Open up!"

He heard Peter's voice outside, against the  
door.

"Don't let them switch off the nursery and the  
house," he was saying.

Mr. and Mrs. George Hadley beat at the door.  
"Now, don't be ridiculous,

children. It's time to go. Mr. McClean'll be here in a minute and..."

And then they heard the sounds.

The lions on three sides of them, in the yellow veldt grass, padding through the dry straw, rumbling and roaring in their throats.

The lions.

Mr. Hadley looked at his wife and they turned and looked back at the beasts edging slowly forward crouching, tails stiff.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadley screamed.

And suddenly they realized why those other screams had sounded familiar.

"Well, here I am," said David McClean in the nursery doorway, "Oh, hello." He stared at the two children seated in the center of the open glade eating a little picnic lunch. Beyond them was the water hole and the yellow

veldtland; above was the hot sun. He began to perspire. "Where are your father and mother?"

The children looked up and smiled. "Oh, they'll be here directly."

"Good, we must get going." At a distance Mr. McClean saw the lions fighting and clawing and then quieting down to feed in silence under the shady trees.

He squinted at the lions with his hand tip to his eyes.

Now the lions were done feeding. They moved to the water hole to drink.

A shadow flickered over Mr. McClean's hot face. Many shadows flickered. The vultures were dropping down the blazing sky.

"A cup of tea?" asked Wendy in the silence.



## The Last Leaf

O. Henry

In a little district west of Washington Square the streets have run crazy and broken themselves into small strips called "places." These "places" make strange angles and curves. One Street crosses itself a time or two. An artist once discovered a valuable possibility in this street. Suppose a collector with a bill for paints, paper and canvas should, in traversing this route, suddenly meet himself coming back, without a cent having been paid on account!

So, to quaint old Greenwich Village the art people soon came prowling, hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch attics and low rents. Then they imported some pewter mugs and a chafing dish or two from Sixth Avenue, and became a "colony."

At the top of a squatty, three-story brick Sue

and Johnsy had their studio. "Johnsy" was familiar for Joanna. One was from Maine; the other from California. They had met at the table d'hôte of an Eighth Street "Delmonico's," and found their tastes in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves so congenial that the joint studio resulted.

That was in May. In November a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy fingers. Over on the east side this ravager strode boldly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown "places."

Mr. Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman. A mite of a little woman with blood thinned by California zephyrs was hardly fair game for the red-fisted, short-breathed old duffer. But Johnsy he smote; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch window-panes at the blank side of the next brick

house.

One morning the busy doctor invited Sue into the hallway with a shaggy, gray eyebrow.

"She has one chance in - let us say, ten," he said, as he shook down the mercury in his clinical thermometer. " And that chance is for her to want to live. This way people have of lining-u on the side of the undertaker makes the entire pharmacopoeia look silly. Your little lady has made up her mind that she's not going to get well. Has she anything on her mind?"

"She - she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples some day." said Sue.

"Paint? - bosh! Has she anything on her mind worth thinking twice - a man for instance?"

"A man?" said Sue, with a jew's-harp twang in her voice. "Is a man worth - but, no, doctor; there is nothing of the kind."

"Well, it is the weakness, then," said the doctor. "I will do all that science, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish. But whenever my patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession I subtract 50 per cent from the curative power of medicines. If you will get her to ask one question about the new winter styles in cloak sleeves I will promise you a one-in-five chance for her, instead of one in ten."

After the doctor had gone Sue went into the workroom and cried a Japanese napkin to a pulp. Then she swaggered into Johnsy's room with her drawing board, whistling ragtime.

Johnsy lay, scarcely making a ripple under the bedclothes, with her face toward the window. Sue stopped whistling, thinking she was asleep.

She arranged her board and began a pen-and-ink drawing to illustrate a magazine story. Young artists must pave their way to Art by drawing pictures for magazine stories that young

authors write to pave their way to Literature.

As Sue was sketching a pair of elegant horseshow riding trousers and a monocle of the figure of the hero, an Idaho cowboy, she heard a low sound, several times repeated. She went quickly to the bedside.

Johnsy's eyes were open wide. She was looking out the window and counting - counting backward.

"Twelve," she said, and little later "eleven"; and then "ten," and "nine"; and then "eight" and "seven", almost together.

Sue look solicitously out of the window. What was there to count? There was only a bare, dreary yard to be seen, and the blank side of the brick house twenty feet away. An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall. The cold breath of autumn had stricken its leaves from the vine until its skeleton branches clung, almost bare,

to the crumbling bricks.

"What is it, dear?" asked Sue.

"Six," said Johnsy, in almost a whisper. "They're falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost a hundred. It made my head ache to count them. But now it's easy. There goes another one. There are only five left now."

"Five what, dear? Tell your Sudie."

"Leaves. On the ivy vine. When the last one falls I must go, too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?"

"Oh, I never heard of such nonsense," complained Sue, with magnificent scorn. "What have old ivy leaves to do with your getting well? And you used to love that vine so, you naughty girl. Don't be a goosey. Why, the doctor told me this morning that your chances for getting well real soon were - let's see exactly what he said - he said the chances were ten to one! Why, that's

almost as good a chance as we have in New York when we ride on the street cars or walk past a new building. Try to take some broth now, and let Sudie go back to her drawing, so she can sell the editor man with it, and buy port wine for her sick child, and pork chops for her greedy self."

"You needn't get any more wine," said Johnsy, keeping her eyes fixed out the window. "There goes another. No, I don't want any broth. That leaves just four. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark. Then I'll go, too."

"Johnsy, dear," said Sue, bending over her, "will you promise me to keep your eyes closed, and not look out the window until I am done working? I must hand those drawings in by tomorrow. I need the light, or I would draw the shade down."

"Couldn't you draw in the other room?" asked Johnsy, coldly.

"I'd rather be here by you," said Sue. "Beside, I

don't want you to keep looking at those silly ivy leaves."

"Tell me as soon as you have finished," said Johnsy, closing her eyes, and lying white and still as fallen statue, "because I want to see the last one fall. I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of thinking. I want to turn loose my hold on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves."

"Try to sleep," said Sue. "I must call Behrman up to be my model for the old hermit miner. I'll not be gone a minute. Don't try to move 'til I come back."

Old Behrman was a painter who lived on the ground floor beneath them. He was past sixty and had a Michael Angelo's Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along with the body of an imp. Behrman was a failure in art. Forty years he had wielded the brush without getting near enough to touch the hem of his Mistress's robe. He had been always about to

paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it. For several years he had painted nothing except now and then a daub in the line of commerce or advertising. He earned a little by serving as a model to those young artists in the colony who could not pay the price of a professional. He drank gin to excess, and still talked of his coming masterpiece. For the rest he was a fierce little old man, who scoffed terribly at softness in any one, and who regarded himself as especial mastiff-in-waiting to protect the two young artists in the studio above.

Sue found Behrman smelling strongly of juniper berries in his dimly lighted den below. In one corner was a blank canvas on an easel that had been waiting there for twenty-five years to receive the first line of the masterpiece. She told him of Johnsy's fancy, and how she feared she would, indeed, light and fragile as a leaf herself, float away, when her slight hold upon the world grew weaker.

Old Behrman, with his red eyes plainly

streaming, shouted his contempt and derision for such idiotic imaginings.

"Vass!" he cried. "Is dere people in de world mit der foolishness to die because leafs dey drop off from a confounded vine? I haf not heard of such a thing. No, I will not bose as a model for your fool hermit-dunderhead. Vy do you allow dot silly pusiness to come in der brain of her? Ach, dot poor leetle Miss Yohnsy."

"She is very ill and weak," said Sue, "and the fever has left her mind morbid and full of strange fancies. Very well, Mr. Behrman, if you do not care to pose for me, you needn't. But I think you are a horrid old - old flibbertigibbet."

"You are just like a woman!" yelled Behrman.

"Who said I will not bose? Go on. I come mit you. For half an hour I haf been trying to say dot I am ready to bose. Gott! dis is not any blace in which one so goot as Miss Yohnsy shall lie sick. Some day I vill baint a masterpiece, and ve shall all go away. Gott! yes."

Johnsy was sleeping when they went upstairs. Sue pulled the shade down to the window-sill, and motioned Behrman into the other room. In there they peered out the window fearfully at the ivy vine. Then they looked at each other for a moment without speaking. A persistent, cold rain was falling, mingled with snow. Behrman, in his old blue shirt, took his seat as the hermit miner on an upturned kettle for a rock.

When Sue awoke from an hour's sleep the next morning she found Johnsy with dull, wide-open eyes staring at the drawn green shade.

"Pull it up; I want to see," she ordered, in a whisper.

Wearily Sue obeyed.

But, lo! after the beating rain and fierce gusts of wind that had endured through the livelong night, there yet stood out against the brick wall one ivy leaf. It was the last one on the vine. Still

dark green near its stem, with its serrated edges tinted with the yellow of dissolution and decay, it hung bravely from the branch some twenty feet above the ground.

"It is the last one," said Johnsy. "I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard the wind. It will fall to-day, and I shall die at the same time."

"Dear, dear!" said Sue, leaning her worn face down to the pillow, "think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do?"

But Johnsy did not answer. The loneliest thing in all the world is a soul when it is making ready to go on its mysterious, far journey. The fancy seemed to possess her more strongly as one by one the ties that bound her to friendship and to earth were loosed.

The day wore away, and even through the twilight they could see the lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall. And then, with the

coming of the night the north wind was again loosed, while the rain still beat against the windows and pattered down from the low Dutch eaves.

When it was light enough Johnsy, the merciless, commanded that the shade be raised.

The ivy leaf was still there.

Johnsy lay for a long time looking at it. And then she called to Sue, who was stirring her chicken broth over the gas stove.

"I've been a bad girl, Sudie," said Johnsy.

"Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die. You may bring a me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it, and - no; bring me a hand-mirror first, and then pack some pillows about me, and I will sit up and watch you cook."

And hour later she said:

"Sudie, some day I hope to paint the Bay of Naples."

The doctor came in the afternoon, and Sue had an excuse to go into the hallway as he left.

"Even chances," said the doctor, taking Sue's thin, shaking hand in his. "With good nursing you'll win." And now I must see another case I have downstairs. Behrman, his name is - some kind of an artist, I believe. Pneumonia, too. He is an old, weak man, and the attack is acute. There is no hope for him; but he goes to the hospital to-day to be made more comfortable."

The next day the doctor said to Sue: "She's out of danger. You won. Nutrition and care now - that's all."

And that afternoon Sue came to the bed where Johnsy lay, contentedly knitting a very blue and very useless woollen shoulder scarf, and put one arm around her, pillows and all.

"I have something to tell you, white mouse," she said. "Mr. Behrman died of pneumonia to-day in the hospital. He was ill only two days. The janitor found him the morning of the first day in his room downstairs helpless with pain. His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold. They couldn't imagine where he had been on such a dreadful night. And then they found a lantern, still lighted, and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and some scattered brushes, and a palette with green and yellow colors mixed on it, and - look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall. Didn't you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it's Behrman's masterpiece - he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell."

