





## Struggles



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Steve Wolinski

Some Lame Publishing Company

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Dedicated to anyone and everyone that helped me in life...  
with anything... ever.





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## A Train, Derailed

I stare at the teacher blankly. As he glances around the room his eyes catch mine. It's awkward. We stare at each other for just a second but it's just enough. He can tell exactly what I'm thinking. He looks around the room to see if anyone else feels the same way I do. I look around as well just to see for myself. I feel out of place. Everyone else is working diligently, pausing only if their hands cramp up from writing too much. All I hear is the sound of pens and pencils going back and forth over their papers. Back and forth, back and forth, broken only by the sounds of the ticking clock. I hear some pages turn. I can't believe it. Only ten minutes into the assignment and some people are already on their second page. I look back at the teacher and he is staring straight at me. This time I break the eye contact and quickly look down at my paper. It's still empty. I haven't even written my name on it yet. I can still feel the teacher's eyes burning a hole in my head. I won't even consider looking back. I hear the clock. It seems to be getting louder every second. My head starts to pound. I can't even think straight anymore. I know I will never get this paper written. I try to remain calm and maintain my composure so no one else will notice me struggling in my chair. I close my eyes, tight. It's as if I'm telling myself that if I can't see them, they must not be able to see me. I pray. I pray that I can at least start my paper before class is over. I'm thinking. A picture, a mental scene, a couple random words, anything will do, anything just to spark an idea. And then I get it. It's perfect. Who cares if everyone else got a head start? I've got so much to write that it won't matter. I have to actually take a moment to make sure I'm not just dreaming. Just as my pen is about to reach the paper the bell rings. It's off to my next class. I can't believe it. All that time, gone. I try to pull myself together. I tell myself to just jot down a word or two so I'll remember. I

think about it for the next few minutes and ideas are running wild through my mind. By the time I get home my head is about ready to explode. I don't start writing though. I sit, knowing what needs to be done. My self-diagnosed ADD kicks in and I flip on the TV. Nothing's on. I'm stuck either watching I really don't want to or something I've seen about a hundred times before. Sometimes it's both. I grab some food. My parents walk in and ask me if I have any homework. I tell them that I'll get right on it... as soon as the show is over. Then I head off to my room and turn on my music. I pull out my notebook and see what I have done so far. For some reason, I can't remember all of the good ideas that I had before. Even the two words on the top of the page don't help. They don't even make sense anymore. I lie down and close my eyes. I listen. I try to find some clue or idea in the music. When the song is over there is a short, quiet moment and all I can hear is the ticking of the clock. In my mind I go back to the classroom. I'm about to get mad that I have to start all over, when it hits me, again. I scramble around to find my pen. I settle for a pencil. Furiously I write down everything I can, but before too long the pencil has been worn down to a dull little stub. If I sharpen it now I will lose too much time. I need to find a pen, immediately. I don't have time for this. I begin to panic. I can feel the thoughts quickly slipping away from me. I need to some way to get them on to the paper before they disappear forever. After a frantic search I finally locate one. Time to get back to work. My mind and my hand are racing. Both hurt. My mind is constantly coming up with new ideas. My hand can't keep up. I need a break, but just a short one, just enough to slow down and collect myself. When I go back I can't seem to pick up where I left off. My mind has gone completely blank. What was I about to say? Well I've come too far to stop now. I have to just make it up. I have to keep going. It's 12:30 in the morning and I'm almost finished. Just a few more sentences... done, relief. I

look back at what I've got. There are scratch marks and arrows and notes all over the paper. I decide to type it up later. Right now I need some sleep. I need to get my mind off of this assignment. Sleep doesn't come easy. It never does. I lay staring at the glow-in-the-dark stars on my bedroom ceiling and I switch gears completely. My mind flies back in time, back to the Christmas when I got those stars from my girlfriend. That in turn sends me on to another memory, which sparks another and another and another. I can't stand not being able to focus on any one thing. Then I realize that these random thoughts are distracting me from the paper. I smile. It quickly fades. Oh no, the paper. I fly out of bed and, breaking all land speed records, make my way to the family room. By the time I turn on the computer, type the essay up, print it out, and shut off the computer, it's almost 2:00. I go back to my room and throw the papers down on my desk. I climb back into bed and begin to hate myself for taking away all of my precious sleep to write a dumb essay. But then the other part of me is ecstatic. I'm done, finished. Mission accomplished. It's time to retire. I start to worry that now I'm too excited to get to sleep at all. I don't know exactly when I fall asleep, but I know that when I wake up, I'll wish that I had stayed asleep. In the morning I throw on anything I can find, too tired to care. Off to school. When I get to class I perk up, knowing that I wrote a phenomenal essay last night. Before I turn it in I read it to myself, just as a confidence booster. Sadness sinks in as I realize that "tired writing" is a hell of a lot different than writing while completely cohesive. I look up and the teacher is once again staring at me, anxious to see what I've written for him. He probably went out and bought fresh, new, red correction pens last night, just for me and my "masterpiece". One more depressed glance at my work and I stand up. As I place the paper on a stack of twenty or so

other essays in front of the teacher, I smile and think to myself, “hey, there’s always next time”.

## Randy

I couldn't sleep. I don't sleep much *these* days. When I turned on the news, it was 3:32 in the morning. I was wide awake. Well, there's not much else to do so early in the day. Day, hah, sure looks like night to me. Then again, it always looks like night. I spend most of my time indoors, usually in my basement. Without windows it's hard to tell whether it's day or night, and without clocks it's impossible to tell a specific time at all. That's why I watch the news. There's always a clock at the bottom of the screen. Sometimes I don't even pay attention to the stories, I just watch the clock. I stare at the little blinking colon between the hour and the minutes. I stare. I stare at it as if there's some message it's trying to send out to me. Then the minute changes, and I'm snapped out of my trance. All I needed was a couple more seconds and the message would have been complete, but a minute is just not long enough. I don't sleep much *these* days at all. The story they were discussing seemed familiar. There was one just like it a couple nights ago. Someone was killed in their bedroom at around 2:00 this morning. Although they didn't say it, I knew that it was more than a simple murder. Somewhere, someone had gone through hell. I turned off the television. I knew that if I kept watching they would just keep withholding information from me. I couldn't stand it. My only friends, lying to me. Tonight was no different from any other night, and like all the other times, I would vow never to succumb to them again, but then quickly forgive them for their deception and once again tune into their bullshit the following night. I stood up. I hadn't stood for a while. My knees popped. The crack they made was deafening in the silence. It hurt, but the pain was relieving. I went to the fridge to get a beer. The cool air rushed out to meet me. It hit me in a way that sent chills up and down my

back. I liked it. Sensations are what let me know I'm awake, and that I'm not actually asleep all the time. It lets me know this isn't a dream. I sat back down and grabbed the remote control to my stereo. I turned on the power and cranked the volume. I had felt the pain in my knees and in my back and now I wanted it in my ears. The pain would help. The pain always helps. I listened. My favorite Nine Inch Nails CD was playing, "The Downward Spiral". Trent Reznor was speaking to me in a loud whisper. "I am the voice inside your head. I am the lover in your bed." His words, his music, his emotions, they were all speaking to me. "I am the sex that you deny. I am the hate you try to hide." Yes. Yes I know. I turned to pick up the newspaper that lay, neatly folded, next to my favorite chair. I had already forgotten my promise. As I lifted the parchment source of false information and extreme understatement, an envelope fell to the floor. I picked it up forgetting all about the newspaper. It was heavy and thick. I ripped it open. I knew who it was and why he had left it for me. I knew that he would confess. When I unfolded the papers, I realized that I would finally hear the truth. This is one place where I know the real information won't be viciously raped by a bunch of lies and left for dead. This is the one source I can trust, and fuck this is the one source I never wanted to hear from in the first place.

Randy,

I'm not sorry. I'm not writing this as an apology, or a confession. If there's one person I don't have to explain myself to... it's you. You know who did it, you know it was me, so I have no need to tell you shit you already know. I will tell you *how* though, you sick fuck, you *know* you want to know *how*. Well, I tried to be creative, but it seems, in that sense, I'm no match for you. You were always the clever one. All of my good ideas came from you, and your goddamn books. We worked well together,



you know that? You would write a story, and I would live it out. Once you found out though, you shunned me, forever. Now I have no one to help me. I'm left alone to create my own methods. Let me tell you, Randy, yours were much better. But I digress. As I was saying, I tried to be creative. I hung the guy by his feet. Those new chains I got are pretty strong, and that padlock... man someone must have answered my prayers because this was one large dude and that damn thing didn't even bend. So yeah, he's hanging there, right, hands chained to his side so he can't wiggle around too much, and all of his blood starts running to his head. Man was he turning red. And I don't mean like "bright pink", man I mean like fucking "fire truck red". Well I let him hang there for a while, the whole time giving him some shit I stole from a doctor. I'm not exactly sure what it was, but it kept him awake for as long as I needed him to be. Then after a while I tested him out. I started at his legs. The knife penetrated easily into his skin. No blood. It was already most of the way to his head. The legs were empty. I worked my way down to his stomach. I stuck it straight in, about one inch below his navel. Or above... if you looked at it from his perspective. It went in like butter. There was a little spurt, but that was it, nothing to really worry about. By now the guy's trying to scream for his life, trying is the keyword, but there's so much blood in his head that he can't make a sound. Poor guy got blood all over his bedroom floor. I slid the knife down towards the floor. I stopped when it got to about the middle of his chest. I pulled it out. Clean. Well, basically at this point I've run out of that shit I was giving him. He starts to go under. Now I don't want this guy to pass out because I'm just a nice guy like that, so I figure I'll relieve the pressure a little bit. I wasn't exactly sure how to go about doing this though, until I noticed the drill lying on the floor across the room. Don't worry, you little pussy, I didn't end up using it. I

found something better, something a little more... fun, if you will.

I looked up. I couldn't read on, but I wanted to know. God, maybe he was right about me. *He* had used my work, my books for inspiration. *He* was messed up, but he may have been right. Maybe I am sick. I kept reading.

You are sick. I told you you were sick. If you're still reading this you may be worse than me, and boy have I got some issues. Well, by now you probably feel like you're gonna throw up, so I'll make it brief. Basically I found that a hammer and chisel provided more entertainment than a damn power tool. It just felt more personal. I was proud of myself, but, I'll admit, it was nothing compared to that one you wrote about with the handcuffs and the cheese grater. That was probably you're best one. It's a shame you don't publish that shit. There'd be a lot less maladjusted pricks in the world if you did. Everyone would have a chance to employ the techniques you so carefully think up and jot down. You call yourself an author, ha; I've read your latest stuff. It sucks. It's fucking garbage and you know it. But let's talk about something else, shall we? Now that you've gotten your jollies off, reading about torture and murder, you twisted son of a bitch, I've got something to say. I know things about you. Horrible things that you refuse to acknowledge yourself. It makes me sick, you got that, it makes *me* sick, **ME**, to think about the shit you've done. In fact, it's gotten to an agonizing level. You're always the innocent one, always. I, on the other hand, get blamed for everything. Maybe not publicly, but you personally hold me accountable for any "legally, and morally, ambiguous" activities that take place. Well it's time you took responsibility for your actions. Open your fucking eyes. You made me what I am. I am the unstable product of your

distorted vision of reality. If it had not been for you, all of those people would still be alive, or at least have lived longer than you seemed necessary. Oh wait, did I say you? I meant me. I killed them right? **WRONG!** You wrote the fucking books. You made me believe. You somehow persuaded me that even the shit you did before I met you was my fault. Well I'm through. I've had enough. I know that you're the one to blame, and I can't live with the knowledge that I was fooled for so long. It's gotten so goddamn unbearable that somewhere in the time it takes you to read this, I'll be dead. I'd rather not live at all if given a choice between that or living as your fucking mind slave for the rest of my existence. I've done that for too long, far too long. Now I'm not gonna do it in a cleverly planned out manner. I will not give you *that* satisfaction. I'm simply going to do it. All I need is a bullet and a gun. I figured that some day, someday soon, you would want to do the same. You know what? Go for it. I even took the liberty of giving you half of the necessary supplies.

I looked in the envelope. Sure enough, he had given me a bullet. No wonder it was so damn heavy. He wanted me to kill myself. He wanted to go together, take the fall as a team. Well, I'm not going to stoop to his level. I will never give him *that* satisfaction. Besides, even if I wanted to go through with it, I don't have a gun. Ha, I've beaten him.

That's right, only half. You've got the gun. You just don't remember. Bullshit! You remember. You remember plenty well. 1997, you were 14. You're mom was the only one that defended you. She believed you were alright. She thought there was nothing wrong with you. When everyone else left, she stayed. She hoped. She believed. But she was wrong. You were messed up. She used that gun. You made her do it. You smiled. You disgusting little shit, you smiled when she did it. You're probably smiling right now just

thinking about it. You'll smile when I'm dead, too. You love death. It's all that makes you happy. Fuck, you're pathetic. Well you know what? You made your mother take her own life, so I'm gonna make you take yours. You kept the goddamn gun. You kept it, knowing you would use it someday. Well that day is today. Today you do my bidding. The roles have been reversed. Now take my bullet and make it yours. Fuck you!

“FUCK YOU!” I screamed at the top of my lungs. I screamed so loud I couldn't hear the music anymore. It had been drowned out with the hate, emanating from every pore in my body. I threw the letter up in the air. I ran into my room and dug through my closet. He was wrong. That son of a bitch was wrong. I *had* kept the gun for a long time, but I destroyed that goddamn memory years ago. Clothes were flying out into the once empty room. Things were furiously making their way from hangers and drawers and boxes and onto the floor. “You don't know what the fuck you're talking about! I'll show you! I don't have the fucking gun!” There was a shoebox on the top shelf. I lifted the lid. Pictures, pictures of her, staring back at me, smiling. She was smiling. I was smiling. I pulled the top one out and gazed back at her. I remember that face. She was so beautiful. I noticed that my vision started to slightly blur. My face became wet. I ran my finger up from my chin to my eye. When I pulled my hand away from my face, it was shiny, dripping. I'd always heard of tears. I stuck my wet finger in my mouth because I had heard that tears were salty. They were. It's painful, the first time you cry. I've seen it in movies before, and on TV, but this new sensation was not one that I was prepared for. It made me cry even more, knowing that I have never experienced this emotion. My hands were shaking. Enraged, I launched the box at the opposite wall. There was a loud crash and it made contact with the cracked drywall. I turned around before it even hit

the ground. And then I heard it, a thud, ominously echoing from the other side of the room. I turned slowly, afraid of what I would find. I walked over to the box, pictures still floating down to the rotting floorboards. It caught my attention. There was only a small piece that was visible, under the mementos from my childhood, but I knew exactly what it was. He was right. How does he know so much about me? How the fuck does he know? I grabbed the cold, black handle and ran back to the note. I snatched the papers from the floor. I began to yell at the words, scribbled in handwriting comparable to a third grader's. I screamed so loud and for so long I thought my throat would burst. "You want me to do it, you fucking piece of shit, you want me to do it?" I pressed the gun firmly against my temple, hand tightly clenching the grip, finger lightly tapping the trigger. "Well FUCK YOU!" I hurled the gun at the stereo, silencing Trent's metaphoric phrases. "I'm not going the easy way! I won't run away from anything! Coward! I will never do what you say!" I couldn't believe what he was suggesting. He's trying to make me feel guilty for stuff I didn't do. Stuff I had no control over. When I looked back at the note I almost fell over. It was like he knew everything I was doing and writing the note as it happened

Fuck you Randy. Getting pissed at me isn't going to help now. I'm dead Randy. I'm dead and so are you. All you need to do is send your body where your soul went long ago. You're disgusting. You've been lying to yourself for so long you don't even know what the truth is anymore. You're blind. Wake the fuck up. I know you don't sleep at night, which is why you're reading this at some ridiculous hour in the morning, I know that. I know *why*. Do you? The damned don't sleep Randy. The damned are sentenced to forever suffer in the wake of their sins. There's not much I can say to you at this point besides to finish what you

started. You're on a path that can only end in self termination. Do it. There's no use in attempting to turn back. It will only make things worse. Do you really want to live your life knowing that, because of you, so many people's lives have been ended prematurely? If they find you they'll kill you anyways. Do it. Do it for her, randy. She'd be disappointed if you didn't. I'd be disappointed. You'd be disappointed. Can you really go on with all that disappointment in your life? Pick up the gun. End the contract you made with life. It won't make anyone feel better, but at least it won't hurt anyone, either. Well, anyone but you that is.

I looked down. What the fuck? The gun was already in my hand. I had picked it up while I was reading. I didn't even realize what I had done. Maybe it was meant to be after all. I glanced back at the letter, this letter from hell, and read the final lines.

Hurry up, Randy. I'm waiting for you.

Sincerely,  
Randy

I had to read it once, no, twice more, just for it all to make sense. This didn't make sense. What the fuck was going on? I'm randy, not him. Then it hit me. I dropped the paper. Finally I knew. Finally I understood. Finally I realized what I had done. I now knew the horrors of *my* actions. He... I was right. It was *me*. It had been *me* the whole time. Suddenly, it all just clicked. He knew what I was thinking because he *was* me. I had finally figured out what he meant when he said that I had created him. I am my body and he was my soul, and we *have* been apart for too long. I wrote the stories and he lived them out. I lived them out. Subconsciously, I wanted to tell myself. I just

wanted to let myself know. My mind has been playing tricks on me for what seems like an eternity. When he said that he would be dead when I finished the letter, he was right, because he *would* be dead. My soul would no longer exist once I found out. *He* would be dead, because *I* would be dead. I looked back at the gun, with its shiny black surface, reflecting the light onto my face, and loaded it. I loaded it, with the bullet that I had left for myself, in an envelope, under the newspaper, next to my favorite chair. Chances are, no one will even find me here, let alone care, which means, *this* note, *my* note, will most likely never be found. But if you do find this, I want you to know that I did not write this as an apology, or a confession. I wrote this as a piece of information, so that everyone will know what really happened here. I am a credible source. Don't pay any attention to the news, if they even cover my story. Just ignore them. Ignore them know that it'll all just be a pack of fucking lies. "And so," to quote the most influential author to my work, Jhonen Vasquez, "with those final words... I depart".

Sincerely,  
Randy





She is beautiful  
She smells like an angel should  
The love of my life

He lost so much weight  
Cause' he did a hit and run  
Bleaches his hands clean

It's a one man show  
His music inspires me  
Nine Inch Nails trumps all

I love strawberries  
I can't resist pineapple  
Peaches are my fave

Mr. Hoffman Hawk  
I beat everybody else  
I won a free prom

If one were to walk  
Down the street they would declare  
This is a great day

I wish I could write  
A better haiku than this  
But I simply can't

If I did one thing  
I would try to learn to sing  
Words give people wings

I miss my long hair  
Tried to grow it down to there  
Live without a care

University  
Electrocardiogram  
Two really big words

## Goodbye

We'd been sitting on opposite couches for about an hour or so. I kept wanting to talk to her, just to say something, anything, but she hadn't even looked at me. She didn't even look like she wanted to. Even when I wasn't gazing at her, from across the room, I knew that her eyes were never going to make their way over to my area. I had to talk to her. The silence hurt my ears more than the loudest scream ever could.

"Can I at least explain what happened?" She didn't say anything. Her mouth had opened slightly but she immediately closed it. She had nothing to say. "Come on. I need to tell you. You don't know everything about what happened."

"Shut up! I know exactly what happened! I hate you, you know I hate you! Whatever you have to say will not help!"

"But I ..."

"No! Don't say another word! I'm not gonna forgive you for this one! You messed up, ok? Now just shut up and watch the fucking movie!" I got up and walked over to where she was sitting. "No, get away from me!" She stood up and walked to where I was before.

"At least listen to me."

"I don't want to." She picked up a deck of cards and started to shuffle them. Still watching the screen, her hands moved rhythmically back and forth with the cards. Then she looked down and began to deal them out in small piles.

She was playing solitaire. I figured it just gave her a reason to not pay me any attention.

“I thought you wanted to watch the movie.” Big mistake. I definitely shouldn’t have said that one. Now I’ll be in even deeper trouble than before. She didn’t say anything, but I knew she would take it to heart. “Please.”

“Shut up.”

“No. I’m going to say it, and whether you listen or not is your choice, but I’m going to tell you either way.” She didn’t even look up from the cards.

“Fine, but don’t get mad when I don’t pay any attention, at all, to what you’re saying.”

“Ok I won’t.” She raised her eyebrows like she didn’t believe me. “Just keep in mind that I’m not happy with what happened either. I never meant for it to go that far. I didn’t even want it to happen in the first place.” I was hoping for something out of her. My hopes ended in disappointment. “Well I knew who she was before I actually met her. I hadn’t even talked to her before a couple weeks ago, when we both got hired. Basically I knew that her name was Molly and that’s it. I saw her at work like every other day. I even drove her home sometimes. We were just friends through work. A bunch of kids from school got jobs at the same place and the only reason I spent more time with her was because the managers kept putting us together.”

I was still looking at her, and she was still looking away from me. I figured that I probably shouldn’t be staring at her while I was talking. I looked down at the ground and continued. “I never thought about her that way,

I swear. Yeah, maybe I found her attractive, but I never thought about her that way. Since we've been together I haven't thought about any girls in that way, besides you. You might not believe me but I'm not one of those guys who only cares about getting a piece of ass. I don't chase after every girl I see. I love *you*."

"Stop fucking apologizing and just tell the damn story."

"Well at least I know you're listening now."

"Alright you know what? You can just leave now if you want."

"No, no I'll finish." I knew she was right. Whatever I say will not help the situation. I decided that it would at least make me feel better. Then she couldn't hold it against me for lying, because I'd be coming clean and not holding anything from her. "Since it was only a seasonal position, all of us were gonna lose our jobs at the same time. We decided to have a little party after our last day. We weren't gonna go out and drink or get high or anything. We just went out to eat and then we watched a movie. There were like twelve of us at Stephanie's house. I brought the movie. We just stayed up watching it. Most of them went home before the movie was over, but since it was one of my favorites I stayed for the whole thing, so did Molly. Some of us were gonna stay over at Steph's house that night because it was like three o'clock in the morning, but since almost everyone was gone, and I had to give Molly a ride home, they said that it wouldn't be worth it for me to come back."

I looked up. She had stopped playing mid-game. She was now looking back at me. I was glad to see that my

story was getting some acknowledgement. She spoke, and finally sounded like she wanted to hear what I had to say. “Why did *you* have to drive her home?”

“Well everyone had left, I lived closer to her than anyone else did, and I was wide awake, whereas no one else really was.”

“So then what... you just got in the car and started making out?”

“No. That’s not what happened at all.”

“Right. Sure it’s not.”

“Would you just listen? I drove her to her house; she was falling asleep the whole way there. I had my music turned down because it was so late and she was so tired. She leaned on my shoulder a bit, but I didn’t think anything of it. She was tired, I didn’t care.” Big mistake, again. Those two sentences would cause me a whole lot more problems. I would now be much further away from where I wanted to be. “Hey, don’t give me that look.” She had that look on her face. I’ve seen it before, lots of times.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I should just sit back and listen about how my boyfriend had another girl laying on his shoulder, probably holding his hand, too. How long did it take for you to kiss her? Or are you gonna try and convince me that she jumped all over you?”

“No! You don’t get it! I didn’t want to kiss her, it... it just happened. I don’t know why. I was just...”

“Liar!” She threw a tissue box at my head. I deflected it with my hand and tried to ignore it.

“I was just driving her home; I was just trying to be nice. We were friends and this was the last time we were gonna see each other for a long time, maybe forever.”

“And you felt that a good night kiss was the best thing to do, right? I mean, after all, ‘you were never gonna see her again.’” I could tell she was crying. I don’t blame her.

“Listen, just listen to me will you. I know what I did was wrong and trust me I already feel awful about it. Do you think I like hurting you? Because I don’t, definitely not.” Her tears were really flowing now.

“Can you just tell me what happened... please?”

“Are you sure you...”

“No, I don’t want to know, I don’t want to hear about it, but please, just tell me.”

“When I got to her house, I pulled into her driveway. She sat straight up and opened her eyes. I looked at her to say ‘goodbye’. I wasn’t expecting her to say it. I was ready for anything but that. She had a boyfriend. I have a girlfriend. When she looked back at me she said ‘I have a secret’ and she started to pick up her things to get out of the car. I asked her what the secret was, and I swear I was not expecting to hear what she said. She looked back at me and leaned in very close.” I looked down at the ground. I was not going to look at her while I said this. It would not be pretty. “She leaned in and said ‘I like you more than I should.’” I glanced very quickly at her. Her arms were wrapped around a pillow and she was hugging it very close to her face. “Then she opened the door and started to get

out... when I reached out and grabbed her arm. She looked and sat back down. I told her that I had a secret, too.” I would have tried to comfort her, but I knew, after being together for three years, that this was not the right time. I had come too far to stop now, so I finished my story. “She leaned in, again, to hear what I had to say. I told her... I told her that I would be lying to her if I said that I didn’t feel the same way.”

Her crying was silent, but more effective than any loud sobbing would ever be. “So you like her?”  
“I... don’t know anymore. I was never planning on doing anything with her, I just... I just felt more connected to her than I should have.”

“And then what happened? You kissed her?”

“I... I... yeah, yeah I did. We stared at each other for a while and then it just happened. We... we kissed. Then, then she just looked at me and said ‘bye’.”

She had rivers running down her face. Her eyes were completely red. I walked over to her and moved the cards. I was glad when she didn’t run across the room to get away from me. I looked at her as she gazed down towards the ground. She looked up at me and I did the only thing that I thought would help. I embraced her. I held her close. She opened her arms and closed them around my shoulders. We sat like that for a while, when she finally said something. “What’s gonna happen now?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. But I want you to know that no girl will ever replace you, not Molly, not anybody. I love you.”



She looked back and mouthed the same words back to me. Then she kissed me. It was one of the most rewarding yet most painful feelings I have ever experienced. She looked up at me and I looked back at her. I was not ready for this one either. She said, with the happiest and saddest look in her eyes, "I like you more than I should. Goodbye." She got up and walked out of the door, and I knew, at that moment, that my life was over.



## **Yeah Right**

I looked up as he told me that I had to write a story with only fifty five words. I couldn't believe this assignment. I knew that I would never be able to do it. Just as I was starting to complain about the task at hand, he raised his arms and proclaimed, "Start writing."

## **The Scariest Night of Her Life**

My face stung. Her hand had found its way across it not two minutes ago. In the cold winter air, everything hurts. I gazed into her eyes as she glanced away from mine. I grabbed her arm and spun her around. She looked down at the ring on her finger and said, "Sure, why not."

## **Pointless**

The car was resting on its roof. Its wheels no longer had any connection with the pavement. It was as if the wheels had said, "I think we should see other people," and the road responded with a, "Bitch, oh no you didn't." and then threw a big ass rock up at the tires' faces.

## **Decibels Create Confusion**

Her words resonated through my head. It began to hurt. The noise level was giving me a headache and I no longer found that my feet were on the ground. Instead, my face had made a new friend of the concrete. She was screaming so loud. I couldn't even understand what she was saying anymore.

## **Decibels Create Confusion Part 2**

By the time I got up, she stopped. Her face was resting in her hands and her quiet sobs were more deafening than the high shrills of her recent outburst. I asked her again why she was upset. What was she talking about? What do you mean that thing we just hit was your dog?

## Preparation

We lined up. There were three of us. We were representing the Hoffman Estates Boys Cross Country team in the open race at the Libertyville Invite. Apparently the coach didn't feel that the three of us were good enough to race against the regular varsity runners, so we were stuck racing the rest of the guys, the rejects whose coaches also had seven guys which they thought were better. We had gone over our strategy only once, but we all knew exactly what to do. It was a simple one. It wasn't going to be easy, just simple. When the gun goes off, we would run to the front. No matter how much it hurt, no matter how much we would have to sprint, we would get to the front. Then we would just push. We would push together, as one, trading off the lead position, for the remainder of the three miles. We would never leave each other. We wouldn't fall back. We had to be there, to motivate each other. It was only the open race, and no one really cared who won or lost, except us. This was our chance to prove to the coach that he had made a mistake. We were all top seven material and he put us in the open. We were out to prove him wrong. After the two mile mark, we would begin our surge. It would be painful. The past two miles have been hard work. *They* have been Hell, but after this point, it would feel like entering into the inner circle. Then, with about a quarter mile left, we would go. The final stretch was a large uphill into the shoot. We all knew this. We had run here before, many times. It was our favorite course and we would be damned if we didn't know the final uphill by now. It was an uphill curve, and it went through the forest. Because of how the path turned and winded, and because of the trees surrounding us, and even partially because of the fact that we were working so hard for the past three miles that we would begin to black out, we would not be able to see the shoot until the final hundred meters. When we hit this hill

we would go. We would turn on the after burners and just go. At this point we would all be in front so team was no longer a priority. When we got there it would be all about I, not us. Our calves would burn with the intense speed with which we would need to propel ourselves up such an incredible incline. This last segment would come down to balls. We would come in one, two, three. We were sure of it. We would hope, at least, for all of us to be in the top ten, but the previous option was much more preferable. We ran through this in our minds, over and over again. We would be ready. We knew what had to be done. As we stood in the box we looked over at the team next to us. They must have numbered upwards of fifty, maybe more. We looked to the other side and saw that the same situation existed on our right. We glanced down the entire line. Every team had a ridiculous number of runners, and we had three. They were at one extreme and we were at the other, but we didn't care. They looked like a bunch of pussies to us. We were tough and they were weak. We were men and they were boys. We had already run our warm up and our sprints and we already had our sweats off. We were ready. As we looked back at each other, we realized that we were all thinking the same thing. Some one needed to say it, and we didn't care if everyone else heard. In fact, we basically wanted everyone else to hear, to make us look even tougher than we already did. Finally, we silently, yet unanimously decided who would say it, and he did. With one more glance back at the opposing team, he said it; "Don't worry guys; it's just more for us to beat." The official walked out in front of the line and went over the starting procedure. He said that there would be two commands, runners set and the gun. We patted each other on the back as we jumped up and down and smacked our legs to keep warm. We got down in our stance and prepared for victory. Today was our day. We looked onward towards the starter. He raised the

gun in the air and exclaimed, “RUNNERS SET!” This was it. It was our time. We were ready.





## Slipping

He wouldn't listen. He never does. He just sits there with this blank expression slapped onto his face that screams 'Why are you telling me this? Did I ask for your opinion?' This time wasn't any different from the countless past experiences we've had. It's always the same; first he gets a dumb idea fixed into his head and we try to talk him out of it. Then he fights. He always fights. He has to get the last word in, the last insult, he has to try and save his dignity. I'm starting to wonder if he even had any to begin with. Then after the fight comes the reassurance, the reassurance that he's right and he knows what he's doing and that no matter how much we disagree, no matter how many times we bring up what happened last time, he's going through with it and nothing's going to stop him. The worst part of it all isn't the arguments or the disappointment or even the ideas themselves, but it's the fact that he's always right. Nothing bad has ever happened... ever. Sure there have been some close calls. Yeah he's had to spend a couple of nights in Juvi with some of the neighborhood friendly County Sheriffs. It's true that he even got kicked out of his house when he was sixteen, but nothing seriously bad has ever come from these escapades of his. No one died, no one even got hurt. No one has ever had to make an insurance claim or see a therapist afterwards... he was always right. But now he's nineteen years old and if he slips up it could mean trouble. He won't just get a stern talking-to and a slap on the wrist just to be let loose on the unsuspecting society once more. No, this time there could be serious consequences, big prices he'd have to pay. Perhaps that's why the arguing lasted as long as it did. It was either that or it was because we all knew that last week he broke up with his girlfriend after six months. At least that's how he said it went down, as a mutual agreement, but from what I recall she flat out dumped him. He took it pretty hard, too, but

didn't want anyone to notice. We noticed. It wasn't hard. This kid wore his feelings like a hunting vest, obvious and easily spotted from a mile away. Now that I think back on it I realize that it was probably a combination of many things, but no matter what it was, his idea was stupid and we all saw it, everyone but him that is. He went through his plan with us last night and he intended to pull it off today at about noon. It rained. He slipped. I saw it happen in slow motion. I froze in place and there was no sound anymore, no sounds but my heart pounding way up in my head. It hurt. It felt like it was trying to force my skull out through my ears to make room for itself. A half hour later I found myself in a white room with curtains and machines and all of these people that I've never seen before gazing down at what should be my friend lying in a bed, but it wasn't him. No, this was someone else, it had to be. This person wasn't smiling or cracking jokes, it barely looked like he was even breathing. This couldn't be him. The doctors told me that it was, but I refused to believe them. They also told me that, had it not been so wet out, he would have most likely missed the concrete by a couple of inches, maybe more, but it *was* wet and he *didn't* miss it, and here I am two hours later standing in front of the proof. For some reason I can't focus on anything, anywhere in this place. The only thing I can see is his name, etched into a little dog tag and tied around the big toe of his right foot. I can't take my eyes off of it. It's as if I'm telling myself that staring at it for just a little while longer will bring him back, or maybe it will help me wake up two days ago, before he ever considered doing something so ridiculous. It was so stupid. I don't even notice the two standing next to me until they slowly, yet forcefully, push the drawer containing his limp, lifeless body into a big, black hole and shut the hatch behind him. I finally look up and see the hundreds of identical steel chambers lined up and down the wall. It seems like it goes on forever. Then I get mad. I start hating everyone in this

god-forsaken place. I thought they were supposed to help people here, not just hide them when they die. Why does his tomb, his crypt look just like everyone else's? His should be different. He's not like them, he's better, he's special. Then it hits me. It hits me so hard I can't breathe. He may have been different before, but he isn't anymore. He no longer has any of the outstanding qualities that set him apart from the rest. He's gone. He's a corpse, and I'll never see him again... ever. Damn it, why didn't he listen? He wouldn't listen. He never did.