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### I am Me and You are You

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Trinity College  
Hartford, Connecticut

Thesis

I am Me and You are You  
A collection of short stories

Submitted by

J. Dillard Taylor  
Class of 2012

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for  
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

2012

Director: Professor Irene Papoulis  
Reader: Professor Ciaran Berry  
Reader: Professor Sarah Bilston



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	05
Forward: Who You Are Isn't Always Real.....	07
Mirrors.....	11
What's In A Name?.....	35
How to Get the Lonely Girl or: The Sound of Silence.....	51
Betelgeuse.....	59





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## Who You Are Isn't Always Real

The fear and doubt that comes from not knowing or understanding who you are and what forms your identity is an angst that most people can sympathize with at one point of their lives or another. Our identity is the starting point with which we interact with others and how we expect others to interact with us. When the structure of our identity is questioned, everything becomes unclear. Thus, we continuously spend much of our time trying to define ourselves in any way we can, as well as using others as referencing points to further these definitions. The concept that identity is an unstable construct is an idea that numerous other writers and artists have grappled with, and, now, is one that I have also tried my hand at understanding.

I began to seriously explore this issue in my work after an encounter with the work of Spalding Gray, whose art came in the form of spoken monologues about his life in a deeply personal, reflective and revealing manner. I spent my junior year of college studying abroad in Ireland and one of the reasons I choose to go there, albeit one of the smaller motives, was to fulfill a pilgrimage. Spalding Gray had visited the country in 2001 and while there was involved with a car crash that left him with traumatic head injuries. The experience awakened a deep depression within Gray, and he took his life just a few years later by jumping off of a Staten Island ferry into the East River in the middle of winter. I wanted to visit the site that ignited the catalyst that more-or-less led to his suicide. While attempting to find the fateful crash site I met an Irishman doing his own research into the matter, who revealed to me that much of Gray's version of what happened was utterly false.

This dissonance between Gray's artistic retelling of events and the actual reality of matters infected me with anxiety. In his art, Gray's approach was to create a close connection with his audience by using intensely personal matters as a way to ensure such a bond. These subjects were purported to be completely true, but, as it turned out, in reality the art did not truly repeat what actually happened. Gray's art in effect, as I would find it, came to present not the exact actuality of Gray's life fact for fact, but instead presented the idea of his life in a manner where the truth was preserved in its deeper meaning. Much as the same idea that Tim O'Brien works toward in the piece "How to Tell a True War Story" from *The Things They Carried*, in that it is impossible to tell the true story of something as chaotic as war, or life, by presenting it as a series of facts because the true,

overall meaning is then lost in the strict adherence to fact. My own work follows a similar trajectory in that, more often than not, absolute reality is rejected in favor of less realistic landscapes that provide me with the necessary platform to work toward larger ideas of identity and truth.

Some of my work's aesthetics were heavily influenced by the Polish author Bruno Schulz, a tragic figure of the Holocaust. Schulz's poetic, surreal, and dreamlike language from his collection of stories in *The Street of Crocodiles* was the sort of landscape I needed to use to construct the world I wanted to explore. Questioning what was real or not in the story, or if that even mattered, played hand in hand with the idea of questioning the importance of the narrative truth versus the honest meaning of the art itself. The result is that the characters in my stories discover the actual truth of the story matters less than if the idea of the story itself is true, just as I also discovered this myself in the process of writing, which helped to calm and settle my relationship with Spalding Gray.

Another artist I found myself becoming infatuated with while was writing was the author Jorge Luis Borges. Borges and I have an interesting relationship, at least in regard to his influence on my writing in that he is less of a direct influence on style, form, or my ideas, but that we both look toward similar subjects and ideas. Works such as "Pierre Menard, Author of Quixote" among other pieces are interested in the idea of identity in a number of different facets, whether it's questioning the role of an author in creating a work of art, to the identity of the voice of the author, and by what means it is shaped and formed. Much of Borges is questioning the idea of what an identity is, the instability of it as a concept, and the difference of self-formed identity versus the identity created by an audience or other's perception.

What I love about Borges is that he went after grand philosophical and existential ideas in such a direct manner. Reading Borges not only gave me inspiration in the form of knowing that such an influential author was also interested in similar ideas as I am, but also clues in how I could approach particular topics. It wasn't that Borges gave me the answers I was looking for, but rather it allowed me to hear the same question I was asking phrased in another way that allowed me to gain deeper insight into my own line of questioning. For instance, Borges begs the idea in "Borges and I" that Borges the real-live person gives reason for Borges the writer that is present in his stories to exist, and said Borges narrator-persona justifies the existence of the real-life Borges. This concept led me

to ask is, does the artist live forever through their own work, even if the author's presence in the art is not directly true to the actual artist's life, or is the artist that is present in the art the one that lives forever?

The subject of identity formation is one that is also asked by the late David Foster Wallace. Wallace was concerned with how people make connections and form identity in our contemporary world, which seems to focus less on using actual experiences to form identity and instead the sharing of mass-cultural experiences to create a self. His novel *Infinite Jest* has characters becoming absorbed into a television program to the point they become completely comatose and basically cease to exist. His nonfiction essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" on the other hand directly assaults the real-life implications of the overuse of irony in modern, or postmodern, television and literature, and how it effectively scorns people portraying themselves in an honest, sincere way. The short story "My Appearance" by Wallace achieves the same notion through a fictional encounter with David Letterman on his talk show. The narrator of this story, a famous fictional television actress, is begged to lie about herself during her interview with the late-show host so that she cannot be antagonized about her real self.

My interest in this is in the overwhelming nature of the current Information Age. Agents such as Facebook give people the possibility to virtually construct identities that have no actual bearing on who a person actually is, but how they wish to be perceived, or perhaps how they think others wish to perceive them. The question I find myself asking, following the same vein as Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and others, is if identity is self-formed or defined by others, and, if the latter, what happens to the self if no one else exists to define it? I believe it to be obvious that there can be no true answers to such questions, but I do attempt to explore the issues through my own course. My characters are denied the opportunity to express themselves, are denied definitions by others, are overwhelmed by opportunities to arbitrarily define themselves, as well as falsely using mechanisms for self-definition to mask their fear of their true identity. Who people are and what they can be shift more easily than they can concretely defined. Subsequently, with the loss of the self often comes the loss of reality as we know it, and it is here in this Twilight Zone-esque plane where my adventures take place.



# Mirrors

*For Spud*





*The words formed themselves as individual droplets until they became a running water which ran into a shining sea that was clear enough to see your own reflection in, if you let yourself, for just a moment, be taken in by the beauty and the mystery. Each word was a mystery, crafted to be carefully unwrapped, explored, and loved. Truth came from the imagination. There was no limit to weigh upon a soul, if the inclination was there then, behold, it was so.*

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I set my pen down from these words, and wondered where they came from. What did these words mean, I wondered. It's a strange feeling, to try and create with words a kind of reality. A vague attempt at converting analog to an unconvinced digital. I recall an artist, though I can't remember the name, explaining it was the attempt to silence a great, black, empty abyss with your thoughts and feelings, to beget life where there was no existence previously. This notion scared me beyond my mortal bones. To play as God as one is attempting to do. It is then that I get lost in my thoughts, their intensity overwhelms every part of my being. The moment the tip of my pen touches the processed paper and the ink soaks through, the abyss rushes forth like a flood, and before my instrument has the chance to lift up to the next word, that flame has famished to ashes. Could my voice fill that void? When I opened my throat to speak, what sound would come out?

There I sat, at my desk, its hard wood as solid as the frame of my skull resting upon it. Loud as a photograph. Collections of papers in varied states of messiness arrayed themselves around the center where my head and notebook laid. Three or four semi-used mugs sat around me, some filled with leftover tea bags, and others burned with the sorry smells of earlier evening's regrets. My hands reached through the crumpled paper messes, some of the

leaves fell to the floor with a silent spin, and spread out in an empty hope that a moment of rest would find me better composed.

As I rested my eyes, my mind traveled around the room. I floated over the cracks in the floor and stacks of tattered books that were littered in piles of various relevance and half-hazard attempts at organization. There by my bedside rested *Street of Crocodiles*, and next to it laid a collection of Borges. Another stack of books rested just below the only window in the room that faced south, and was seldom open to the air outside. The light of the two standing lamps in the room reflected off the glasses that rested on the fleshy bridge of my nose. The window faced south and filled the room with light. The southern direction gave me the most sunlight each day, from the moment it rose over the curve of the Earth, until it cried its orange and bloody tears and was replaced by the stars of the city.

Once, in a desperate hope, I filled my little apartment with mirrors facing every which way. As the sun filed itself down to a nub, I slammed my window shut and covered it with another mirror, myself covered in reflective tin foil, so that the room could remain infinitely lit. When I went to bed, I turned off the lamps, and the sunlight vanished with a snap. I never repeated the experiment, but I trusted one day the mirrors would find use again, and I kept them covered with gentle cloths to keep their innocence preserved.

Sometimes when I rearranged the stacks of books in the room, they would be re-piled in front of the window, and on a few occasions they completely blocked it. Even though I had my lamps, the notion of being unable to have natural light to work by killed my inspiration, and I lost all my inspiration to a haze of melancholy that lasted as long as the piles remained in their places.

I tried my best to keep my memories clear of where I lived. I feared greatly that if I lived within a room that was soaked with memory I could not escape beyond its clouds to find somewhere greater, a place of pure clarity. There were no pictures that hung from my

walls, no decorations. Once I let a friend come by and see my apartment, a mistake, and the friend questioned why I didn't have anything personal on display, why I felt I had to hide who I was behind a façade of Spartan lifestyle, a blank state. I was terrified. I felt I had already displayed too much of myself even in this. I wanted for everything to be clean, so that my home was as clear as my mind from influences. I wanted to be who I was, not as how I saw myself, but as I really was. To see clearly I wanted to be completely undistracted by my immediate surroundings. I wanted to think I understood something in a way that other people could understand. Something beyond who I am. To be not a voice without words, but words without a voice.

A week ago I had walked around the neighborhood near my apartment. Mostly factory buildings, their smokestacks reached deep into the sky, though their plumes were long since alive. I could hear the sounds from the machines of yesteryear, and I was lost in thought when I bumped into an old friend who I had not seen in what felt like a lifetime. When I walked into him, quite literally into his back while I watched the stones beneath my feet, I felt not only the shock of walking into another human being, but one I happened to know, which was furthered by the nostalgia I felt for seeing a friend after so long. I greeted him with great exclamation and joy, but he received it only with confusion and queer reserve. He seemed to have no recollection of me or my existence. He then asked for my name.

I stopped. I asked myself, do I respond, do I give him who I am. If he truly does not know me, can he ever remember me or know me now from this one instance of serendipity? I thought about it, while he continued to ask me questions. He asked me for what did I stand for, and for what purpose did my dreams take me. His face morphed and became a ghastly color, the look of some pale phantom from a past I couldn't remember, and his pupils silvered until they were like mirrors that reflected the inner workings of my soul. I stood aghast at his questions, and with a terrible fear for what this man became in front of my very

eyes, I ran away from him. He stood there, on the corner, by the run down shop that has been closed since before I moved there, and as he disappeared from view, I could hear him yell at me to speak up and decide. The howl of his voice followed me all the way home.

Ever since, I haven't been able to sleep, troubled by the thought of that phantom that I thought I once knew. The mirrors in my apartment seemed to grow larger with my anxiety, and the clothes that covered them began to fall off. I had to go out and buy ever larger covers for them, such was my fear. I wondered why the man did not know me, or if it was even a man, but perhaps an apparition of my own mind. Perhaps I never knew him, either. The questions that phantasm posed to me burned holes in my mind and spirit. I doubted my own existence, and was tempted to step in front of the mirrors once more, but my fear held me back from those answers. I couldn't do it. I couldn't look myself in the eyes. I feared there would be nothing there to look back at me, or, worse yet, it would be too great and would overtake me in my entirety and I would disappear inside that labyrinths of mirrors I had set up around my room. The thought of destroying all of the mirrors tempted me at one point, but then I would be surrounded by their millions of little shards, which horrified me to the point of convulsions. I feared I had locked myself into a prison cell of myself, of which I knew of no key to aid my escape. I even contemplated using the window as a form of escape, but I could not be sure my flight would be enough to save me or would doom me to another void.

So there I sat in my confined space, and waited for an explanation to come to me from within, a defined answer that would lead me out of this depressed state. The mirrors loomed larger and larger before me, and I held an ever intensifying hatred of them and what they represented. I decided to explore my options, and came to a conclusion that if I could somehow define myself without it being me, then I would escape. Which has led me to write

in my journal. I am not a writer, but a lost man. I am missing in a world whose eyes see only themselves, where I wish to see anything but.

As I sat there, pen in hand, and waited for the words to overcome the inner silence, a slip of paper was pushed underneath my doorframe from the hallway. I heard no footsteps from the hallway, and so waited a few minutes before I went to grab the sheet. When I picked it up, I found an advertisement for a production at a nearby theater. The management at the apartment is quite complacent with letting the unknowns come into the building to do what they wished, freely and uninterrupted, and as such I had become dulled to a constant flow of intrusive advertisements that found their way under my door and became a part of daily life. Somehow I found these meaningless acts somewhat comforting, that beyond their attempts to commercialize into the realm of my home, I liked to pretend they were an effort to communicate with me directly. From wherever they came from, like lost message bottles floating in a sea.

On the advertisement sheet read, though somewhat blurred because of the poor quality of its ink.

*Behold! The Gray Group Presents its most famous performer, the Artist you know and love for her daring works of narrative truth and desperate honesty. In a final act of courage, she will reveal to you, her loyal and attentive audience, her deepest and utmost secrets yet. A monologue of such dedication and naked truth that you will question your own sense of reality. Who are you and who is she? Come see a dazzling performance that challenges the unlimited potential of truth in art! Limited single performance only, this Saturday.*

I stood holding the paper for some time, reading its vague description repeatedly. I laughed, and started to crumple the paper in my hands before I stopped. I thought about what it said, *truth in art*. The idea, I realized, shook me. It was an abomination, the notion to release yourself completely, without a hint of fiction. To know yourself and the reality

around you with such certainty, that you could present it with the courage to call your worldview truth. To sing a single song through the vast noises of life, and hear only that tune. It's preposterous, I cried out. You cannot document an entire life's experiences, facts and details will be left out, disappeared. It was a false prospect. But they never disappear, they are always a part of their person, festering away in some forgotten nook or cranny of the soul, wrecking their minute chaotic potential upon their host, slowly over the years. To deny this is to deny it all.

This gave me such energy, that I thought I had found my answer. The spots on my apartment walls shifted and rolled about. The cockroaches in the ceiling stopped their scurrying about, paused, and waited for my response. I stood there, energized more than I had ever felt before. I looked to my window, and wished to shout out to the world that I have found the answer, and as I walked over, my hands shook with such excitement. I grabbed the bottom of the window and was about to pull up, my entire body was tense with fervor, until it hit me, that I had, indeed, denounced the falsehood of the foolish and meaningless attempt to depict reality in such a straightforward manner, but I didn't know what else to say. My voice was caught in my throat. I looked at the covered mirror that rested on the window pane next to my hands. I heard a loud humming coming from the mirror, and it began to vibrate. I stepped back, the sweat rolled down my body, my temple convulsed as I saw the phantom man appear in the window's reflection. He looked straight ahead at me, I could hear his yelling from the street from before, and demanded me to state who I am. I dropped to my knees, and screamed. The paper flyer fell from my hands, and, upon it hitting the floor, it unraveled itself. There, on my knees, I stared at the advertisement. Its words sunk into my soul. I decided to go, it was for the next evening, to reject it.

The city lights that filtered through my window that evening formed the shapes of human shadows, though whether the shadows were of the phantom or my own I had no idea. I closed my eyes and slept.

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The next day, I left my apartment for the theater. Though it was nearby, it was on a street I had never seen before, slipped between two nondescript buildings. More of an alley, as a street it seemed to hardly exist, it was so narrow no car could drive down it, and the width had no consistency to it and seemed to change every few yards. As I left the previous street and walked towards the theater, all the sounds of the city seemed to disappear behind me. With each footstep everything quieted until it was a distant dream in the past. When I found the theater a few minutes later, I turned around and my eyes followed the path I had just walked and found only a quiet fog, which I gazed into some time before I looked back at the theater. There was only a plain plaque outside the door, with no sign of any décor to allure passerbys in any fashion. Even with the sign by the door, I doubted I had found the right place, and considered continuing forward. It was made clear this place was for those who came for a particular reason, it would not be found by happenstance or even casual search, an exact address was required. I hesitated once more before I grabbed the door handle, and caught my breath, then pulled the door open and entered.

Inside was a short dark hallway, adorned with more of the pamphlets advertising the event. I looked around for a ticket booth, but there was none to be found. Just ahead of me I saw a man, one I had not seen enter before me, who waltzed into the adjoining room, to which I followed. I peered into the next room, and saw what I recognized as the stage. I turned behind me to see if others were about to follow, but I saw no others that had entered



after me. My eyes caught the shape of my feet for a moment, and with that pause, I entered the stage room.

I walked up to my seat, and found my chair in the middle of the stands, which were, so far, mostly empty. When I sat down I took notice of the stage just below and in front of me, a couple of yards away, a dozen at best. The space displayed was itself mostly bare, save for a single small desk in the very center of the stage. The desk was lit from above, the light coming in from the sides. Very basic, nothing fancy or exciting, just the essential amount to give shape and context to the coming piece to be performed for us, the audience, in only a short while. I was early. A soft glow focused around the desk, it radiated outwards until it became a fuzzy edge, it yined and yanged with the surrounding shadows. It was in these shadows I could see the outlines and dimensions of the stage, its form and shape then definite even through the darkness adjoining the border of the center light. Even as I did so, I felt like I was not only looking at the bare physical stage, but that when I stared into the shadows it would reveal something more, something greater. That there was an infinite abyss in that darkness, and if they only turned up the lights up bright enough, we, the audience, though there were still so few of us by that point, filtering in by pairs, single persons, and small groups talking amongst themselves and taking their respective seats, that we might see an ending, or neverending, presence before us.

I let my mind go further. My eyes explored other elements in the room that were before me from the confines of my seat. To the right of the stage, coming towards the seating of the audience, was one of those bright red emergency exit signs, but its bulbs were on the verge of being extinguished, and so the sign flashed in and out of existence, so for brief moments of time it disappeared and the room had no exit. I wondered of the implications of this and what events might befall us that evening. Above there was a gentle whirl from the air vents blowing, I remember, pushing and circulating the air around us, fresh and ready for

inhalation. Time passed. The empty seats were filtered and became fewer and fewer, until only a small sum remained, mostly on the edges to the aisles on either side, or a chance seat somewhere in the center unoccupied. Scanning the crowd, the voices revealed the tension of an audience waiting for its show to begin, wonderment of what awaits them. As I waited, I began to notice that those in their seats had a remarkable similarity to the phantom man I had met just over a week ago, which at first I played off as my imagination, but soon confronted as possible reality. I downplayed the anxiety this gave me, lest this stir the phantoms that seemed to surround me to reconvene the previous inquisition. However, none of them made any attempt to speak with me, out of ignorance of my identity, respect of the space we inhabited, or perhaps I was mad and mistaken. Throughout them were quiet voices, murmurs about the performance about to be staged before us. Others were quite wordless.

The limited chatter dimmed as a solitary figure emerged from the rear of the shadows of the stage and progressed towards the center. As the light melted the lingering shadows that caressed the person, the body that emerged was that of a woman, at once neither truly old nor young, the age dissipated with the style of her walk. She had a sense of purpose, a determination that wasn't about the appearance of seeming determined or dramatic, but a desire to reach the intended point in a clear fashion. Her feet moved no faster or slower than necessary, the sounds of their snapping across the floor were crisp, and as the fullness of the heel reached the floor the rest of the foot followed in its distinct respective order. She took her seat with a gentle grace, slid the chair back, eased herself down, and pulled back up to the desk, her elbows rested comfortably on the desktop. Her hand reached out for the pitcher of water sitting on the desk, and she poured herself a glass that was just under a third empty. With a careful eye she glanced across the room, drank from her water glass, and scanned the faces that watched her with anticipation. She read us, I thought, she read us, sized us up,

who and what we are. It was the unspoken, untapped energy she looked for in the room that wafts about from a waiting audience. To frame us is what she wanted, I decided, to take the living energy and capture it into a distinct moment and let that become something else entirely.

She set her glass back on the table, a slight condensation built along the outside of the glass, and then opened up the notebook in front of her. She stared at the pages in front of her, flipped through a few, studied the ink on the paper between her hands, and thumbed the edge of the pages between her thumbs. From my seat, I couldn't see anything in the notebook, it was too far away, but I trusted it was her words upon the page, a story she wanted to tell us, a part of herself she wanted to give away, sweet, sweet release. I wonder how it read to her.

Just a few seconds later, her eyes came back to meet our waited gaze. A great silence filled the spaces between the people, phantoms or not, enveloped them in their entirety until the only existence in the room was the glow from center stage, the desk, and the artist who sat in the chair there. Then she spoke.

"I am twelve years old. I am a precocious child, I tell myself, and, like every child of this age, particularly little girls who are of my disposition, I am completely unremarkable in my knowledge that I am without a doubt in my mind or God's eye that I am for-sure, one-hundred-percent, without-a-doubt, verifiably, wholly unique and utterly alone in this, or any other, universe. And lord help any soul who tries to tell me anything to the contrary. I am the girl-soldier, fighting for myself and anyone who stands in my way for the quest of truth, to prove that I am always right and that, before I experience my first teenage year, I have a quite complete and inexhaustible wisdom of the universe's inner workings. As often happens to children at my age, and continues for years and years for many, forever for some. Anyone who disagrees with me is clearly a maniac not to be trusted, which ends up being most people,

including, but not limited to, family, teachers, classmates, friends, and best friends, who, subsequently, are substituted out at a fairly high and quick turnover rate. I am objectively a pain in the collective ass of everyone who knows me.

“I make it my personal goal to make sure each and every teacher whose classroom I walk into knows that I am there in the most obnoxious way possible. I don’t know it, but I am the exact bane of existence to many of my teachers, making more than several teachers question a change in careers, and at least one to doubt their own humanity, and to have an existential crisis after I take a piece of cake he makes for our class and mash it into his briefcase when he isn’t looking. I think it’s hilarious to hide it in there because I don’t like coconut cake. For me it isn’t personal, well, except for they don’t get me. Like, get, me. For all of their time telling me and the rest of the class how special and important each of us are, I don’t understand why we are treated all the same. If I have the ability to take over the world, to conquer everything, to dream big, become an astronaut, and then the president, or vice-versa, then why do I need to learn how to dissect a cow’s eyeball? Or learn about the importance of something that happened half of a century before I was even in my parent’s minds. They want me to think for myself, and I do, I think I want to go outside, and be free and have fun and run.

“For my parents, I know it is even worse, because I have objective proof that they hate me and want me to suffer at their hands because they want me to do my book report instead of letting me watch television instead for another hour. I think how oppressive they are being, to me, and how incredibly unfair it is, to me, that there’s the possibility that there are parents out there, somewhere in the great wide blue yonder, that don’t make their kids stay inside doing work, and that these magical and loving parents have children who are truly happy and become successful because they don’t have to spend their lives being angry with

anything. That is the life I want, to be happy and without the burdens that come from those who are not me and don't understand what it means to be me.

"I decide to run away. Not literally, run away from home, but escape from everything around me. I start going to the movies every day. The ticket taker is one of those disabled people, with the gimpy hand and is kind of slow, so I can sneak in when he's ripping someone else's ticket. I go to movie after movie, whatever was showing. But I only stay for the previews. They're the only things I want to see. They're brief snippets, tiny lives encased in their own little universes completely apart from the rest of reality, but still here they are in our world, existing. Sometimes they exist more than I do, I think. I love that trailers have only a minute or two to find their audience, sell that audience their worth, make the audience desire the film and want to see it, and then to make them wait for months for the actual film to come out. For me, being in the big dark room, it's like paradise, with everything and nothing alike. We disappear, we become nothing. The lights are taken off of us and focused on something different for a change. I'm not being watched and looked over, examined. I love the way the lights dim and fade to black, it's the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel, as the movie screen lights up, filling our eyes and minds, whisking us away into a great beyond. Watching so many trailers, I see what works and what doesn't. The best trailers are walking into a room and falling in love at first sight, and all the complicated feelings that follow, worrying if the rest of the movie will live up to those expectations you set up. Your imagination takes over and builds these myths, the lives and stories of the characters in these trailers, what you want them to be, and they're all perfect and all-fulfilling. What movie can live up to these dreams? Who can?"

I was taken aback. This was something unexpected from the story I had imagined. This sounded like the words of a dreamer, lost from her own pragmatic landscape, escaping into an otherworldly realm. I sat up in my seat and leaned forward, my eyes rapt with

attention, a slight trickle of sweat seeping down the back of my neck and along my spine. I was hot with anticipation. Perhaps this was not the performance of a historical diary that I expected it to be, maybe the ethereal had snuck in and seeded the words of a nameless unconscious to sing beneath the speech from beneath the surface. I listened with newfound attention. I wondered if I had fallen in love with this woman on the stage, and the image she had given me of herself.

“Sometimes, I decide to spend my day in front of the mirror. I like looking into my reflection, the image of me staring back at myself. It’s a curious phenomenon, mirrors are. They show us exactly as we are, nothing more, nothing less. I put my hand up to my reflection’s hand and we almost touch, sometimes I swear I can feel the heat emanating from the other side. The idea that we can replicate ourselves exactly, detail for detail, is something incredible to me, and is why I enjoy getting lost in myself in the mirror. Instead of a diary, I tell my daily stories to my mirror. I watch my face, my lips, my eyes as I talk, how each movement begets the next. With wonder, I feel myself falling in love with the stories I am telling myself. I hear how I am growing and changing from day to day, the trials I face, the excitement and adventure, and I know how each will end, but the way I tell it makes it brand new, even for me as I sit there and tell myself what I am doing. The mirror becomes the best friend that never leaves me, that always listens, that always says what I want it to say.

“On a particular weekend, my parents take me to my grandmother’s house. My grandmother has been living alone for nearly thirty years, my granddad died years before I was born. She has a very small house, but she keeps it so clean, and it’s full of millions of trinkets. I always hate going because it means a nearly two hour drive there, with my parents, and a two hour drive back, with my parents, which is an endless source of suffering because we listen to their music, which is older than mine so it’s automatically uncool and uninteresting and lame and I do not want to be in that car with them. Those are hours I

could be being with whoever my best friends are that week, making fun of last week's not-friends, hanging out at the mall because that was the thing to do for whatever reason it was the thing to do, or just sitting in my room alone listening to my music which I like because it's my music. And being at my grandma's means having to sit in a stale house that smells of old, and the couches and chairs feel old too, and my parents make me feel that by even squirming in them I'm somehow ruining their fabric and making it dirty. And because everything is old, it moves in old time, which is slower and longer than real time, which is how old people live so long when you're a kid, because they need the extra time to move so slow. Or maybe they move so slow because they have the extra time to move. I also have to be very polite, mind my p's and q's, and wear an uncomfortable dress, which my grandma will tug at and make lots of comments about how pretty I am and how I'm becoming such a becoming young lady. She tells me how I remind her of my mom, or how I look like her when she was my age, and shows me a picture of her when she was twelve. I smile because I'm told to smile, but my inside face is anything but, it is a very angry face because I am one unhappy kitten. Our pictures look nothing alike to me, and I find this deeply unsettling, if she sees me looking like her when there is no single feature I can see that is remotely similar. I try. I look really hard. I keep looking and looking."

She paused for a moment, and took a deep breath.

"On this particular weekend I am in what my parents call a mood. The day before, my best friend Clara, who shall remain last nameless informed me that she liked this boy that I also happened to like, Brian, I don't know his last name, and that I should stop liking him. She also told me I was a lesbian, so I didn't need to like him or any other boy. I am not, and was not, a lesbian, but it hurt so much to have someone I trusted say something so mean to me, in a way I couldn't even begin to comprehend at my age. I spent the night before crying until I passed out. My eyes have a faint redness to them from the previous night's tears,

which I try to hide, and, apparently, I do, because my parents don't seem to notice in the least bit, talking in their usual way all throughout the car ride to my grandma's. I sit in the back, in my own world, not wanting to be in the car, not at my grandma's, not wanting to be with my friends, if I had any, maybe not even at home, maybe not anywhere. I just sit, listen to the drone of my parents chatter, the rolling of the car along the highway, and the sound of my own thoughts grinding into themselves.

"We walk into my grandma's house as normal, and go to sit in her living room sofa, my mother next to me, my father in the leather armchair to my left, across from my grandma's quilt covered rocking chair. She had a rocking chair because she was that kind of grandma. We sit, and they talk, about me, about my grades, I listen and don't say anything, about my grandma, my parent's work, and I sit there, my legs dangling back and forth, my mind a million eons away. After a half an hour or so, they all get up to go into the kitchen to do something, maybe to cook, I'm not paying attention. While I sit there in my own world that was falling in on itself, my eyes happen upon a book on my grandma's shelf. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. By Harper Lee. I don't know why I happened to see this particular book at this particular moment on a shelf full of books, many of them larger, more impressive, with bigger sized titles. Maybe the word KILL caught my eye, being in such a particular mood as to think and dwell about such subjects. Something arouses me.

"I stand up and walk across the carpeted floor slowly to the shelf, where the book rests at eye level for my twelve-year-old self. I stare at it for a minute, reading the title over and over. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. My hand reaches out to feel the spine of the book when I hear my grandma call out "What's caught your eye there, my dear?" My hand darts back to my side and I look towards my grandma, standing in the doorway. She smiles at me, gracefully, and comes towards me in a way that can only be described as a grandmotherly saunter. My grandma leans over a little, being not much taller than I am,



turns her head, and says, “Oh, I see, Ms. Harper Lee is it? Well now, that’s a fine choice. Have you read this before?” I shake my head no. “Not even for school?” she asks. I shake my head no. “No? Never? To Kill A Mockingbird? Goodness, now, what are they teaching you in these schools then. My my. Come here child.” She pulls the book from the shelf and walks over to the sofa, sits, and pats the spot next to her. I stare at her for a minute, I’m not sure what to do. I dread spending time with my grandma, because she’s old, especially when it’s one on one and I have to directly interact with her and answer her. I look around the room to see if my parents are here, maybe they’ll come in and interrupt my grandma so I can escape from this.

“I stand there for a moment longer, then follow my grandma’s beckoning, and walk over to sit beside her. She opens the front cover and flips to the title page. “This, my dear, is one of my favorite books. Do you know what it is about?” I shake my head again no, but I’m curious. She holds the book close to me so I can see the pages, the ink seems faded, but the words still seem to have a shine to them. “This is a book about growing up in the South many years ago, when many things were different in the world. The voice, dear, is a girl about your age who gets into lots of trouble and has adventures with her brother and friend. The girl in this book gets picked on because she isn’t like other girls, even though she isn’t really any different from anyone else. She’s just who she is.” With this, she turns, looks down at me, smiles. I look at her face for a moment, her wrinkles disappearing into something else and I see my grandma as an entirely different woman. I see her entire life, her whole history, a book of genesis, exodus, psalms, revelations, and love. Her hand rises to caress my face, gently, and I close my eyes and rest my cheek in her palm. Her hand smells like old soap, and for some reason it makes me cry. It starts as a trickle, then rushes into a flood in my grandma’s palm, so she pull me into her side, buries my face into what’s left of the breasts my grandfather must have loved and treasured and idolized.

“She carries my weight tenderly on the couch, my tears even more so. She whispers in my ear that she knows, she knows. With a particular deftness, she lifts my face out of her body and brings it to face her own. I open my red rummaged eyes and stare into her the old orbs resting in her head, the light of distant stars all but faded away within them. “I want you to have this book of mine, my dear, I want you to have it and read it, for me. Please, dear.” I don’t know what to say, I don’t know how to feel, I don’t know what I’m feeling, so I just cry more. My grandma takes this as a positive sign, and places the book into my lap, using her arthritis ridden fingers to wrap my hands around the hardcover book. I pull the book into my chest, pressing it into me tightly. Thank you, Grandma, thank you. She just sits there smiling with all the love of the world. When my parents come in, they see my puffy red face, and ask what’s wrong. My grandma tells them I just got excited over the book she’s giving me. They look over my face with a disconcerted expression of their faces, not sure whether they can take the word of my grandma, so I give them an agreeing nod. This seems to settle the matter enough for them. Later, as we leave, I turn as we’re walking out the door to say thank you, and my grandma gives me a reassuring smile, a nod of her own, and a wink.”

The artist stopped, caught her breath, picked up the glass of water beside her, took another sip, and set it back down. Her notebook was flipped ahead a few pages forward, then a few more, then back another. She scanned the words below her, then, as if she found her place, she began again with her story.

“When I get home that night, I barricade myself in my room. Jumping into my bed, I pull open the book in my hands and begin to read. And read, and read. And read. And. Read. I pour over the words between my slender fingers, delving into the world residing in my lap. I find myself living in 1930s Alabama, going exploring with Scout, Jem, and Dill, fearing Boo Radley down the street, and loving Atticus like he is my own father. I fall asleep with the book spread wide, a blanket for my body. For the rest of the weekend my parents see me only

with the book in my hands, my eyes looking away from its pages only when I have to. I feel myself growing up with Scout. Her fights are my fights, and I fear for her life as if it were my very own. She speaks to me like we're sisters, and this is our private journal between us, to share our secrets, our fears, our hopes and dreams. Somehow, I'm no longer alone in the world, Scout is with me, talking with me, playing and laughing. Her curiosity makes me curious, and I start to wonder. About everything around me, and more. By Sunday evening, I finish the final page and close the covers.

"I decide then and there that I want to be somebody. I decide to chase a dream. The holy quest of a twelve year old girl who wants to be a seeker of the truth, to explore all the world and its infinite boundaries. I don't want to be alone is what I decide, I don't want to be scared of what's around me, I want to look evil in the eye and spit, and hold everything beautiful to my chest.

"I am now, before you, the spectacle of a person who has spent their life searching for such beauty. I look for the beauty in the world around us, and I tell it as it is. As they say. While others look to a great beyond and create art to fill what they feel is a void in the world, I see it already here, waiting to be found, explored, and loved. The love of seeing two strangers in a busy city kiss on a crowded street when I know nothing of their story beyond what I see in front of my very own eyes. To share the painful beauty of falling in love with someone I know I don't love, but loving him anyway because he says he loves me. Confessing my soul for an audience, constructing my own crucifix to hang from, to bare scars too fantastical to be fiction. To love in an unforgiving way."

She stopped all of a sudden, and I panicked. My heart skipped a beat, and I wondered if she would stop there, at that moment, and never go on ever again. The artist pushed her seat back and stood up. Her figure was immense in a way it wasn't before, and her shadow went in three or four directions at once. She started to walk about the stage at a slow pace.

Aimless. Or it seemed that way. Her feet brought her body around to the sides of the stage, where the light faded to a dull nothing. But the light seemed to follow her. I looked for a spotlight, but there was none, nothing was changing in the room. All around her the light followed, shifting the tide around her, throwing off the balance. As she approached the edge of the room, the abyss continued and she continued walking far outside the walls of the room's natural borders, and glided on her path of warm light. She wandered back, come to her desk again, the lights found their original harmony together, and she sat on the top of the desk. Picking up the notebook once again, she laid it in her lap and began thumbing through the pages at a lightning speed. Her voice spoke through my walls and rang all my bells.

"I have spent my life speaking stories and telling tales. I have opened my existence to the world's every inspection. I began to find myself in the corners of the stories I told. An adventure to Thailand and a great Buddhist temple there taught me I have existential crises when faced with religions or ideas about death that I don't understand. In the nook of a story about losing my virginity I revealed a person who feels hollow having sex with someone I love. The audience found out with me that having affairs makes me more exciting, makes me more complicated as a character. I could appear as a saint, and leave out the dirty deeds that scar my history. I was faced with a choice to display myself as I was, or to make myself who I wanted me to be. I chose the latter.

"Every song I have sung of myself, here on these bare stages that I fill with my memories and self, has been a lie. I have not muddled the details and fiddled with them to make you like me, or hate me, nor have I fictionalized accounts of my life. No, it is much more than that. It is all one great big lie. It's all made up. My grandma died long before I was born, and my grandfather was an illiterate son of a bitch who hated books. I was quiet in my

young school years, but I was never unpopular, or a bad girl, just ignored or unnoticed. It has all been a figment of my imagination. And now yours.”

My heart stopped, and every molecule of light on stage seemed to freeze in place, waiting for the next breath to further the atomic explosion onstage and reached forth into my own imagination.

“I constructed an entire history through these stories. For audiences, I told an entire life, from its conception to the very present, sometimes beyond into the future I imagined. I told stories of me telling stories, and stories of me telling those stories in turn. An entire lifetime was crafted, born from nothing but the absences of my own life, from beginning to end.

“I have told these stories for so long, and the more I told them, the more they became true, the more they became me. I was acting the part of myself, making it up as I went along. Each story and incident added depth to my character. As time went along, my own life started to disappear and I slowly became me. The other me. I know me better than myself. I remember some things of my own life, for sure, but it’s become I celebrate my own birthday before I celebrate myself’s birthday. The character I have created in myself has become me, and the stories I’ve told of myself have come to replace my own, and now I live in this shell of my own art. I used my own life to create another, and here is the ending. That life I choose to end, and let it live forever beyond me in the memories of all those who remember me. I may have already died, but then again I might also live forever.”

With that, she stood up, half-triumphantly, half-broken, wearied, and released. All the air was sucked out of the room. Once more, she scanned across the audience in front of her. The artist looked into the eyes of everyone in the room. Then she found mine. When our eyes made contact, they locked in together. It seemed to last for eternity. I think it was. I aged a thousand and one years in that moment, and I thought I knew everything she wished

to tell me. Then, with a smile and a single tear, she closed her eyes, turned, and with an incredible softness, she walked to the back of the stage and disappeared into the darkness. The lights above me rose, and I was sitting alone, empty seats filled the space around me. Maybe I had always been the only one there, the other listeners fled to the nether regions beyond me and I did not wonder why I could and would not follow.

I waited and waited, and nothing else happened. When the time seemed right, I decided to finally stand up, then walked down the steps from the stands. At the bottom, right before the stage, I turned to exit, but stopped. There in front of me was a mirror right before the exit. I stared at myself, and saw an image covered with grime and dust. I used the sleeve of my jacket to wipe the mirror, stepped back, and looked again. There I was. Me. Myself. Clear as day, in that dark room. I don't know what it was I wanted to see, but I realized then that the mirror would not be able to show me the shape I hoped for, whatever that was. Instead, I turned back around, faced the stage before me, and walked up the desk in the center. I sat down at its chair and pulled myself up. It felt just like any other desk, no magical or special feeling that comes with being the desk of theatrical stage. No, it felt very much like my own. And there I was. I reached out for the note book in front of me, closed, and opened it. It was all blank. I flipped through the pages, first slowly, then in rapid succession, all white, virgin from ink or lead. I remembered the pen in my pocket, decided to pull it out. I sat there holding my pen in my hand, and stared at it and the notebook.

Someone once asked me what I believe in, what made me who I was, what I thought about, what I loved, what my dreams were made of. So I wrote, and began to fill my pages in.

*The words formed themselves as individual droplets until they became a running water which ran into a shining sea that was clear enough to see your own reflection in, if you let yourself, for just a moment, be taken in by the beauty and the mystery. Each word was a mystery, crafted to be carefully unwrapped,*

*explored, and loved. Truth came from the imagination. There was no limit to weigh upon a soul, if the inclination was there then, behold, it was so...*

## What's In a Name?





I look up and watch as the clouds pass by, their puffy white shapes interrupted by the odd hint of gray. Sometimes I like to daydream about the lives of clouds. I get lost in how they roll by, like they know exactly where they are going without actually having a destination in mind. The birds flying about pepper the clouds, giving them freckles, while the sounds of nature call out like a peaceful romance. Looking at all of it makes me want to swim in sea-like skies, tumble through fields of green, and forget who I am. Sometimes I think the clouds look like they're spelling out my name in big puffy letters.

My wife tugs at my elbow sleeve, I turn and I look down to her sniffing self, her face red and puffy from tears. A little snot runs from her left nostril around the curve of her upper lip. She is tired, maybe exhausted. We stand in a mostly open field, broken up by clutters of rocks arranged in varied streaks and the occasional elm tree. In the distance are the calls of crows, while little sparrows and robins hop about looking for fresh earthworms to feast upon. The air is quiet, and everything sounds like a cool wisp of breeze. She longs for me to say something. So I do. I say, "I love you." I hope it makes her happy, and things will be all right.

"You're such a child," is all she says in return to me. She turns and goes to sit down on a small granite rock a few feet away, a heavy sigh following her. You can tell the rock used to be polished and have a real shine to it, but now it lacks any character and looks like any other gray rock you might find. The field we stand in is full of such rocks. She runs her hands through her hair, the quiet streaks of strawberry that used to flow through her otherwise brownish hair are now gray. Usually smooth and silky, now her hair is coarse. She catches a knot, and pulls a clump of dead strands along with it. I watch it fall toward the ground, get caught in the wind, and then blow away.

"I can't believe this is happening," she says. More sniffing.

“It’s going to be okay,” I whisper as I walk over to where she is sitting, “We’re going to find him, I promise.” I kneel down beside her and brush her hands away from her face. She smacks my hands and turns away from me again. Her gaze is on the ground at her feet. Mostly weeds and grass grown wild.

“What’s the point of even trying,” she says. I can’t tell if she’s asking me a real question or not. So I ask.

“Do you think it’s not?” I ask. She scoffs. Loudly.

“You would think like that,” she says with a brazen attitude to her voice, “God, you’re such a fucking child, I swear.” I think she might be upset. She shifts on her makeshift stool. “What makes you think we’re going to find it? Do you remember where to look? At all?”

“Just because he’s lost doesn’t mean he’s impossible to find,” I say to her, not sure if I am being reassuring or not, “I know the place is somewhere close by. If we can just find that place, we’ll find him. And everything will be okay.”

“Do you still believe that, John, do you?” she asks me, her eyes glowing red, I feel her anger rising, “How long have we been looking, huh? You’re trying to remember where a little boy, our little boy, was left, alone might I add, and you can’t remember a single thing about where that might be. If it wasn’t for your wanting to wander around and do jack all, always with your fucking playing around in the woods or video games, or...” She pauses for a breath, and I wonder what she’ll throw at me next. Another insult, or maybe she’ll just figure it all out and tell me what to do. I wait. Then, she asks, “John, are we going to wait forever, or will you find John?”

My name is John. My son, is, well, also named John. Named after me in a bizarre set of circumstances. I do not know where he is. I am not sure where we, my wife and I, are anymore, either, I think. Our marriage has also not been one-hundred-percent successful.

My wife and I have been like this nearly ten years now. We've become stuck in some awful place, wandering lost and going in circles in a purgatory we've created for each other.

\* \* \*

We met just after college, at some little party we were both at. I could say it was one of those cute little romance stories, where we fell in love at first sight, and after that it was all magical and fairytales. But it definitely was not that. That would be false. We met one night, kind of talked, but not much. Nothing much to mention anyhow. Then sometime later, I bumped into her again, at a bar, so we started chatting. She had just moved to Chicago for work after graduating a few months before. I had graduated about a year or two before, and had moved back home to Chicago to live with my parents. I liked living there because I got taken care of, didn't have to do laundry or make dinner, and because I was adult I could make my own rules. I could stay up late watching television or anything like that I wanted.

We hung out a few times after that because of our mutual friends. Even then, I can't say anything special or exciting happened, mostly because I don't remember her much from then. Then we hooked up one night, drunkenly, and didn't speak the next time we saw each other. I think it was because she was shy. Also, partly out of the insignificance of what we did, I mean it was just sex we had after all, and partly because of its significance, as I had been dating one of her best friends when we did it. As might be predictable, the relationship with the friend did not survive that incident. We saw one another off and on for a few months before she told me I should get a place of my own, and said if I did she would move in with me. So I did. I got a little apartment, and she moved in just like she said. She had a job, but I don't know what it was because it didn't sound very interesting. I worked in an office, which

wasn't exciting because I had to wear a stuffy suit every day, but they did give me lots of money, which, I have to say, is lots of fun to spend on stuff.

So we lived together, and things were pretty cool. We would go to work, come home, I would play video games or we'd have sex, she would make dinner usually, and then we'd go to bed. It wasn't very exciting, and we didn't talk very much all the time. Sometimes I didn't like it because she tried to tell me what to do, but I got to go out on business trips from time to time, which got me out of the house for brief periods, and I got to see lots of the country and fly on planes for free. One day we got into a fight while I was playing a video game because she thought I wasn't paying any attention to her, even though I had offered to play the game with her. She yelled at me and said I should go write a book or something instead. So I did. I thought it would make her happy.

I didn't think of myself as a writer before, but if she told me to do it she obviously thought I could, and I wanted to impress her. At first I didn't know what to write about, because I hadn't done any writing like that since middle school, but then I thought of the greatest story ever which I knew she would love because it would be about her. Kind of. Mostly about me though, because I know me better and they always say to write about what you know, and I know me like the back of my hands. Both of them.

I wanted to write about a man, living a life full of hardships and turmoil, in which he strives and perseveres like no other. He saves this beautiful young girl from being raped and stabbed and murdered and raped again, after which she makes love to him and promises neverending fidelity, as she dotes upon him. He treats her like a princess and a queen, and she falls in even deeper love with him, as he is perfect in all practical aspects and even the impractical ones. Except one, and that's the twist. He's not a regular man, but a man trapped in a boy's tiny little body. Even though he can accomplish all these great things and do so much good, he's stuck in this little body. He doesn't really know why he is or how it

happened, that's just the way it is. But she loves him even though he's in a little boy's body. Then he starts to grow, his body that is, once he starts taking care of the woman, and he thinks his body might grow to match the rest of him. The real drama, and perhaps the ultimate tragedy of it all, is that even though he does all these things, the woman breaks his heart, and his body shrinks back down to size. It's a sad ending, which is kind of like life, I think. And the man is still stuck in this body that doesn't fit him. Though it is a work of fiction, I must admit it had a certain air of autobiography to it, something I thought was a bit ingenious on my part. I also thought it would make a great movie, and I already know who would play me.

It was big step to take and I was admittedly nervous. Even though she only mentioned I should go write a book once, I could tell it was something she really wanted me to do, so I spent a lot of time and effort into it. I figured she wouldn't have said it otherwise, so whenever I wasn't working or off on business trips, I spent my free time writing. I wanted to be completely devoted to this as if it were my own child, since, in a way, it would be. It seemed to be a good idea, and she didn't complain about me playing video games without her anymore. I think she was happy with everything because she wasn't nagging at me as much anymore and pretty much left me alone to do my thing. She even stopped talking to me for a while which was cool and I could just do my own thing.

I was working on my book at home in the evenings while I did my usual office routine during the day. Once, I had been at a conference in Colorado for about two weeks, and, before I left, things at home had been rather tense, lots of yelling and fighting on her part, and all of that nonsense. While I was away, I had honestly thought that maybe I might face some sort of repercussion for being away for so long, especially when she was so upset with me, but I had to do my job, and it also gave me a chance to get some good skiing in, which anyone would agree is hard to turn down. But, when I returned home, she was quite different.

She didn't want to fight anymore, she had quieted down, and was much nicer towards me. The only fight we had in about a three or four week period after I returned was when she got upset when I wanted to go to the pharmacy with her. I offered to go so I could give her company, and so I could buy some candy for myself, but she got really mad with me and said I needed to let her do things on her own. So she was mad at me for not spending time with her, and then got even more mad when I tried to. But, she made up for that little argument with wonderful sex later in the night. She even cried a little after, she said because she loved me. I asked her if she meant it, and she said yes. I told her that was cool. I didn't even have to ask her to thank me later for throwing out the garbage that night with all the stuff she had gotten from the pharmacy.

I had just gotten really into my novel, and became so wrapped up in the writing that I barely noticed anything around me, and then she informed me that she had taken a pregnancy test and that it came out positive. I asked if that meant she was fine. She told me it meant she was pregnant. I nodded in agreement, since I had noticed she had put on a little weight recently, and agreeing with her was probably the best decision so I wouldn't get in trouble by calling her fat. Again. She asked what we should do. She wasn't sure if she should keep the baby or not. I told her that I was sure she would make the right decision in the matter, and continued to write since that's what she had wanted me to do in the first place. A few months later, we had gotten married by then by the way, I found out she had decided to keep the child.

He was born just as I was putting the finishing touches on my novel, which I'm sure contributed to my sanity being a wrecked bundle of nerves. In all of the commotion and excitement and fear and fun at having this little life that I helped to create join us, she told me, I ended up shelving the manuscript. Quite literally, I put it on the shelf in our apartment, and there it sat and began to collect dust as time passed on, never quite forgotten,

but laid aside for other duties. I wanted to get back to it, but the business of being a newly minted father carried heavy responsibilities, some of them heavier than others.

When John was born, after what felt like an eternity of labor for the both of us, especially me because I had been awake for nearly two and a half days, with a brief power nap here and there to keep my brain from exploding in my head. I was exhausted when she delivered, after which she completely passed out. Being the only one of relatively sound mind, I was the one who filled out the birth certificate forms, and, in doing so in my sleep deprived state, filled in the boy's name as my own, thinking it was another fill in the blank with my own information. Naming the boy after me had not been a choice my wife and I talked about, but, faced with more paperwork to change it, decided to keep it, and I was particularly proud to have this child named after me. It felt venerable, and ideas of grandeur in me imagined a family line with a high Roman numeral count after it. So, my wife came home from the hospital with two John's in the car, and, although she was quiet and mostly asleep, I thought she was the happiest woman in the world.

Shortly after the baby was born, my wife was diagnosed with post-natal depression, kind-of, so beyond taking care of the baby I had to also take care of my wife who was never far from night terrors and tears. I had to talk her down from thoughts of suicide. It was a rough time, to say the least. But I did really good, I thought. When she was quiet and needed to be alone, I gave her the space she needed, but always made sure she was safe. I fed the baby, bathed him, changed the diaper, everything you could think of, and loved it as much as possible of course. I made dinner for all of us every night. My first instinct would always be macaroni and cheese, because that's what I always liked to eat before, but I would always decide on something else instead, like pasta carbonara with salad or something fancy like that. I thought she really liked pasta, it was her favorite dish, and so if I made it, maybe she



would be happy. If she was happy then things could get back to normal, and everything would be good again.

\* \* \*

“What are we going to do, John?”

I turn back around to look at my wife. The gaze of her eyes pierces me, even through all the puffy gunk trailing out of them. I look to the ground again and sighed deeply. “Well, I guess I should keep looking, shouldn’t I?”

There is a cold silence blowing through the air. I can feel the tension striking out from my wife, and I wonder how much longer it can last until the blood drained out of her voice.

“I guess you should,” is all that she says.

As the uncomfortable quiet continues, I stand waiting for some sort of signal or the offer of a helping hand. Maybe she’ll tell me what I should do. Maybe she will apologize. I think how wonderful that would be, if she would say sorry for everything that’s happened, how happy that would make me. If she could try to make amends for some of the pain she’s caused then, well, maybe everything would be a little smoother and easier going. That said, I wouldn’t forgive her, ever, for the things she’s done to me, but it would be nice to hear her say she’s sorry, if only so I could know she’s hurting too, on the inside a little. I’d feel things were a little fairer if I could know for certain that she has something human about her, instead of her just blaming me for everything. Some groveling, a bit of humbleness, acknowledging all I’ve done for her. I would take great enjoyment at such a scene and could sleep happily afterwards.

“Are you going to fucking do anything or not?” she snaps at me loudly and coldly. Five minutes has passed. Though she contains it within her, the rage is clearly swelling just below the surface. Not the sign I have been hoping for, but it is clearly the only signal that I am going to get.

My feet lead me along a narrow dirt path, darting around clumps of the granite rocks. I touch the tops of the ones closest to the path as I walk, and play a sort of addictive counting game in my head. I think about turning around to see what my wife is doing, but I know it will only lead to being yelled at again, such is my fate. She tends to blame me quite a bit. At my old office job before I was fired, she took it as my fault that I had to attend business conferences all the time. I told her it was for the best. It made me look great at my job, since I was willing to go to conferences no one else wanted to attend, and I got a little bonus pay for each one I went to for the company. Plus, I told her then, it meant that when I was on the road for a week or two at a time, she only had to cook and clean for one, so really, when I was gone things were a lot easier for her, which she was never able to understand. I know men and women are different and everything, but really, I think this is simple and easy to figure out. Apparently I was wrong, in her opinion.

My foot catches on something mushy below, and looking down expecting to have stepped in dog poop or something worse, I see flowers instead. Crushed below my careless foot. I lean down and pick it up, a lily, its head still mostly together even after my fat foot weighing upon it. I’ve always had a weird distaste for lilies, I always associate them with dead people because my parents always went to lilies to give at funerals. For some reason though, holding it in my hand right now, scentless, I’m finding it strangely comforting. Its petals feel so soft against my cheeks and nose. The wonders nature can produce make me fall in love. It makes me wish I could just lay in big open fields, relax, play, and enjoy without worrying about everything. I just want to watch clouds and play videogames.

This makes me stand back up to my feet, and I look to the horizon to shout. At the top of my lungs, I yell, “John! John! John, where are you?” Over and over, I shout. I run down the path, yelling and screaming. I feel like a maniac for this, but I have to run, I need to do it for myself, like there’s a great big bubble in me that’s about to burst and incinerate my insides. So I run. I let the cool air around me fill in my lungs, and the cold expansion turns to heat as I release my breath and yell my own name, calling out for the lost child. The echoes of my feet pounding against the path mixes with my screams, and filters throughout the sky and field around me. I don’t even care if my wife can hear me or not. As far as I am concerned, I am totally alone right now, just yelling and searching. And I yell, “John! John!” to no one but myself.

After going on for some time, whether it’s just a few minutes or closer to an hour I’m not sure, I stumble a bit and have to catch my breath. My cheeks feel rosy red and I’m panting like a dog. My hands are cold. I look around me and I don’t recognize the area I’m in, but the path is still under me, so I feel connected in some respect. To my left is one of the small granite pieces that have been adorning the landscape around me. With need to rest for a minute, I take a seat on top of the rock. Running my hands through my hair, I feel the sweat on my scalp. My bony fingers feel like stranger’s hands on my head. I drop my head to my chest.

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I know the boy is not mine. The facts of life couldn’t be any more obvious. While I do not have the greatest perception of any individual, as I would not be able to say by mere looks alone if the boy were of my seed or not, there is one difference between myself and the boy which is indisputable, and clears him of my blood and name, and to which any judge with a

hint of sanity would uphold. To state it pure and simple, the boy does not carry his name properly. He simply isn't a John the way I am, and if he were my son he most definitely would. The fact that the naming process was a bit flustered and rushed is of no matter, as I think anyone would concede this modest matter, and leave it at that.

To be fair, there were other clues that she left around by accident and carelessness. I'd come back from being gone to find messy sheets on the bed at home, all those sorts of details made by an incompetent cheating lover. Sometimes pairs of boxers in the closet that I didn't remember buying. She even had the ineptitude to try to hide a phone conversation with a mysterious male voice right in front of my face, clearly speaking to a man she was going to meet once I left for my business trip, all while staring right into my eyes. I even asked her what her little call was about, and she had the gall to say it was her therapist. Clearly a code word on her part, trying to be clever, but for me it was a definite clue since I didn't remember her ever mentioning a therapist or anything like that to me before. Part of me thinks she wasn't even trying to be sneaky, but, then again, I am exceptionally perceptive in unusual ways

My wife has never been able to connect with me, because she never spends the time to get to really know me, which is really quite sad since I think I got to know her so well. I don't think she'd be able to tell you a single fact about me that you couldn't get from a quick glance. Granted, I can't say I know her interests all that deeply, or, well, honestly, even her history isn't all that well fleshed out between us, but I will say I feel like I know her beyond all those mundane details.

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Overhead a flock of birds fly by and I marvel at their simplistic beauty. A flying v-formation, with one side slightly longer than the other to give it that perfectly natural look to it. I smile. The beauty that life is, I ponder. I think to myself, that out here, in nature, with no one around, only this field of rocks, I can be anyone and no one. I don't need to be anyone, it doesn't matter, I can just, be. Though, as I think about it, even nature isn't totally perfect. It's nice to have all this around me, but even then, after a long time it gets boring. Like after two or three hours out here, I'd be out of my mind. I'd totally lose it and go nuts. It needs something else, like a video game or something. That'd be really cool, if you could play it on a tree or something.

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A year or so after the baby was born there was a very unfortunate period that our family, as society would define it, went through in which a number of dark events unfolded. My wife was in the very worst part of her depression, which, I confess, was never officially diagnosed, as I took a class on abnormal psychology back in college, and, having felt I had handle on this sort of thing, I did the diagnosis myself. The case was classic in my opinion, didn't even need to look at a textbook for it. Baby was born, she was upset, case closed. What's the point in bringing her to a doctor who would say the exact same thing that I already know, plus you have to pay a doctor. That's kind of why I wanted to be a doctor when I was younger, because I can tell what's wrong with people really well, and to be paid just to tell people what's wrong with them. Seeing as how she had this problem, that I figured out all on my own, I took it upon myself to take care of everything, which I did. Even on the days she couldn't get out of bed, I took care of her, fed her, and the child, which was still my own blood as far as I knew at that point.

Then the day came where my wife revealed the truth. Not to me, exactly, or even on purpose, but out it came all the same.

She had been lying in bed, asleep, taking one of her many nightmare-plagued midday naps. I went to another room to do some work, when, after a while, I started to hear crying coming from her room. I tip-toed back to her, and when I peered around the door frame, I saw my wife, in tears, holding the baby up in the air, just in front of her face. As the tears rolled down her cheeks, I could make out her disgruntled whispers. Under her breath, I could hear repeating over and over, “little bastard.” My first instinct was to intervene, but something inside of me held me back instead. Perhaps it was some of queer curiosity, a perverse pleasure in wanting to know what she was doing and to watch it from afar like a voyeur. So I waited, hunched over, and peered into the scene that was unfolding before my eyes. As she mumbled with the child in her hands, something clicked in my head, and it was then that I realized that the boy’s name didn’t fit him, and everything was made clear. She was still crying when I entered the room, and she looked up at me, the bastard child in her hands still and quiet. He barely made a sound. I tried to smile, and say that everything would be all right, but when I tried to speak my voice cracked and broke. Her hands trembled, and when she spoke her garbled words barely made any sense. The only sentence I was able to make out was something to the effect of, “I hate this.” For a split second, I thought she had meant my novel, which didn’t make any sense, why would she bring that up now, of all times this was rather inappropriate, but then I realized she meant the baby she was holding. I tried to keep smiling, as I closed the door, and I said, “Everything will be all right.” I must confess that, since then, the years have blurred my memory, and I find it hard to relate any memories of the boy since then, as they’ve seemed to vanish from history.

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Above me, a crow caws. Or maybe it's a raven, or a vulture. I'm not sure to be completely honest, all those black nasty birds are exactly alike in my book, how people can tell them apart is beyond me. The sun is going down towards the west, it's getting late, and I should be getting back to wherever it is that I was. I give a deep sigh, and stand up. The rock below me shifts a little when I get up, and so I turn to give my impromptu chair a quick look over. On the rock's face, facing me, I can see something's been engraved. I look a little closer, and, using my hand, I can feel words. There, on the rock, I read my own name, in bold letters, and below it a date that I can't quite make out. Looking at the granite piece before me, I'm not sure whether to laugh, smile, or cry. I remembered then that this was the place I was searching for and had forgotten about.

The bird in the trees above departs, leaving with a laugh as the wind starts to blow again. Everything is quiet, though I can't say if it's beautiful anymore. I stand there, wondering if it's inappropriate to climb into your own grave, or if I should instead continue to wait forever, while big puffy clouds pass by overhead in what looks like the shape of my name.

How to Get the Lonely Girl

Or:

The Sound of Silence





You see the girl standing there alone at a party. You watch the way she holds the cup in her hands, clutching it tightly, too tightly, close to her chest. Her smile is high and lifted. And weak. You watch it falter when she doesn't make eye contact with anyone for long enough. It fades into a thin line you recognize as fear. You can tell she's lonely by the way she stands. You know what loneliness looks like, and you know how to hide it. You know you can win this one and add one more mark to your count.

Walk over to her. Smile. Smile like you mean it. Look into her eyes intently and hang on her every word like it really means something to you. Laugh when she says anything remotely funny. Smile even harder after. Let the conversation make its own natural flow. Ask her what she likes. When she asks you, tell her, you like music. It's a safe topic, everyone likes music. Ask her favorite bands. Tell her they're your favorite too. Mention you saw them live and how great they were, even if you don't like them. Especially if you've never heard of them before. Continue to chat with her. Make her smile. Get her number before you leave. Do not give her yours. She's already in bed with you.

When you call her later tell her you had a great time chatting, and want to see her again. Soon. Suggest meeting at a coffee shop some time. Tell her you want to get to know her better. Find out everything you can about her. Stalk her Facebook if you can. Google her. When you meet up, chat for hours. Promise to meet up again. Do not promise anything else. Call her a few days later, set up a date, and make it at her place. Do not promise to bring her to yours. Never bring the girl to your place.

When you meet her, bring a present. Do not bring flowers or chocolates or anything that will make you like all the others. You want her to remember you, even though you'll forget her. Surprise her. Make her a mix. What real person gives a mix tape, cd, whatever, on any early date without really knowing the other person? No one actual does, but you will anyway. Fill it with her bands. Make it about her life story, the life story you don't know.

And never will. Do not imagine a life with her, and, if you must, then imagine all the fights you would have and how you would hate her by the end. You know you would. Make a note to go with the mix. Write down some thoughts for each song. Why you chose the song or the band. What it means to you, what you want it to mean to her. Tell her everything without saying anything at all. Make it all up, as long as you believe in it enough to make her a believer. Say the things you would want to hear. But never actually believe yourself.

Spend time looking through your music library, or at least make it look like you spent a long time. Pick songs she's heard before, but make her hear them in a totally new way. Pick songs she's never heard before, but make her hear them so it's like they're her old favorites and she already knows them by heart, inside and out. Do make sure to put at least one song on there that you detest, so much that you cannot stand it. You want it so years later, whenever you hear it, it reminds you of the girl and the lies you told her, and you're filled with an emptiness that you just can't describe to anyone. Including yourself.

Pick some songs from bands she likes. Listen to their albums if you know them already, otherwise only go through their greatest hits. Google their biggest songs. Choose songs with articles about them on Wikipedia. Do not choose their most popular songs that have been overplayed by radio stations everywhere and that you're sure she's been given before by past boyfriends. You can choose covers of the most popular songs if they're funny, or soft acoustic covers that sound romantic. Do not choose ironic covers, you'll look like a prick who is trying too hard and is full of himself.

Do make the songs about her. Do make them give her hope, about herself, about you, about the two of you. Make her feel good about herself, but also make her feel lonely, make her feel like she's missing something in her life, missing someone. Remind her that she isn't doing everything she wants to be doing with life, even the things she never thought of before

or never wanted to do. Let her think she could do those things with you. Let her imagine the things you yourself cannot afford to think about.

Give her a song to start with that'll make her want to twist and shout, look at a sunny day and smile through all the world around her. Do not let it mean anything. Let it be shallow and totally vain. Do not let the shallowness bother you, and don't let her notice when it does. Or, remark about how shallow it is, and tell her you don't care and that you can enjoy it anyway. Tell her you like happy starts to a mix because it gives you hope for bright beginnings in life. Look into her eyes when you say this. Smile like the bastards you know she falls in love with on television and in movies because she doesn't have anyone else to love. Become the one she wants to love, but do not love her back. Do not feel anything toward her but the simple desire of lust. Feel how good the mask feels, it fits you perfectly.

Tell her that you've loved these songs for years. Maybe she will say the same to you, and you can both exclaim at the crazy coincidence. For her, because of how lucky she'll feel that you are like her. You, because it makes your job so much easier. Do not feel the same as her, even if you do. When she asks you why you like them, tell her it's because they hold a special meaning in your heart, and then look off into the distance. She'll ask you what you are thinking about, and you'll pause and wait for a moment, and then look up at her, from her feet to her eyes, and you'll smile and say that you've been waiting for someone to share them with, but you've never felt comfortable enough to do it before but for some reason you feel like she's different from all the other girls. Smile again. Be sheepish with your smile, like you're embarrassed. Say that. Tell her sorry for sounding dumb. Make her feel compelled to say something nice in response. She'll laugh, maybe she'll hug you or turn red, and tell you that you're so sweet to say something like that to her.

Watch her as she reads the list and listens to the songs. Study her like you've never studied anyone ever before, and make sure she notices. You want her to smile through every

song. Maybe you want to take something more from her. More than just her body. You can crush her soul tonight. You will feel less hollow then. You know you could keep giving her the same old bullshit songs every other guy on the planet would give her, but why not give her that little extra something? You want to tug at her heartstrings. Do not let her think you're like every other guy. Slip in a slow song, a sad song, one full forlorn feelings and a desperate heart longing for understanding. Show her you want to be understood. You want her to see you as full of unreleased emotions. Convince her she is the only one who might be able to break through your high walls that you've built to protect yourself. You are a rock, an island. Hint at such unrequited potential to love inside of yourself. Allude to dark subjects like broken hearts, lost loves, loneliness, and romantic intuition in the same vein as Nicholas Sparks. Do not reflect the spirit of someone who is suicidal, the girl you are after does not want to deal with your reality. Subtly suggest the need for a healer, you know she wants to save you from yourself. Beg without words to be understood and loved.

Do not let her actually understand you. Do not let any of yourself show through. Do not feel anything for any of these songs. Feel anything but true feeling. Laugh at whatever sad song you choose, make fun of it internally, know through every inch of your veins that you are not the depressed person singing their emotions out for the world to hear and to share in their experience. Mock such feelings incessantly, until it hurts. You do not feel the same, you cannot feel the same. You can't let such things weigh you down or occupy your mind. Pinch yourself if you need to or pull a nose hair out if it helps your eyes water. Shed a tear, just one, for her benefit, not yours, and laugh on the inside because you know it works. She loves the tear, she wants the tear. Make sure she sees the tracks of that tear as it struggles through the curvatures of your face. Make her imagine scars that aren't actually there. Play off the tear like it's nothing, which should be easy, because it is nothing, right?

Give her a few more songs, just a few more, just enough to bring up the intensity of the mood a bit. You want her to want you, you want her to believe it's no cheap trick. You want your arm around her, so put it there, and you know she wants it too. Tell her you normally take things slow, that you don't want to rush any feelings the two of you might have, but that this time you have so many feelings already that you can't wait. Go in for the kiss. Believe in it without believing in anything. You'll know you have her when she lets go and releases herself to you. Do not falter. Take her in whatever manner's most suitable for you. Take from her what you need, and give her just enough so that she knows you love her even though you've never loved. Hold her after, hold her close, and let her fall asleep in your arms. Do not have your arm under her body. Make sure you're in a position you can get out of easily enough. After she's asleep slip out in the middle of the night. Do not leave a note, but leave your mix and its related message, and that's it. You want her to remember you, after all, even though you will never speak to her again. Find your way back to your place by moonlight. Take a taxi if you need to, you've earned it.

When you get back home, take a breath and relax. Take your shirt off, fold it or hang it up. Sit down and have a beer or a whiskey. Scotch, if you're that kind of guy, but really, are you? Do not fool yourself. Put on some music, your music. Do not listen to anything you've given to the girl that night, or any girls in the past. Listen to it, but don't hear it. Do not hear a word, not one single note. Sit in your chair and let yourself float. Let the buzz from the evening and your successful conquest coarse through your veins. Chalk another kill on the board. It was worth it. You feel full again for a moment. Feel good about yourself. Do not feel bad not listening to music with no one around you. Do not answer your phone when it buzzes at you. Do not check it when it doesn't. Do not think about the girl. Do not think about the life with her that you're not going to have. Or any of the others. Hear the world you've made for yourself around you. Listen. Do you hear it?



# Betelgeuse





*It started out barely noticeable, it was just a slightly brighter than a normal star. Unless you happened to watch stars a lot you wouldn't even see a difference from usual. I mean, how often do you remember actually noting when there's a really bright star in the sky? It wasn't until it started getting bigger after about a week's time, when it got to be about the size of the moon at daytime, that people in general took notice of it. During the day, it wasn't that bad, it was bright, yeah, but the Sun overtook it so much that it didn't do too much. Nothing felt warmer, so it didn't even change the weather or temperature at all, at least in a noticeable sense. At night, things changed a bit more. It wasn't as dark anymore. It still "became night" every night, so it wasn't like we had daylight all day and night long, but night just wasn't as night-y as before.*

*Maybe the biggest thing about the supernova of Betelgeuse was its timing. The star's explosion came right as the Mayan calendar theory was really taking off. For some reason, loads of people completely believed that the world was going to end sometime in late December, 2012, simply because the Mayan calendar ended there. Why people believe that the calendar of a civilization, that no longer exists and just disappeared into nothing, that just simply ends means it must be the end of the world is beyond me, but so it is. So when Betelgeuse exploded and started to fill the sky with light, about two weeks ago now, it went straight to the anxious centers of nutjobs everywhere. And if there's one thing crazy people love more than a conspiracy theory about the end of the world, that the government is obviously covering up as they always are, is a conspiracy theory that they can tie to another crazy theory about—*

There was a knock at the door. The girl typing at her computer paused, wondered whether she should stop mid-sentence to answer it or just hope whoever it was really didn't care enough to knock again and would leave before receiving an answer. Her hands hovered above the keys, palms rested on the brim of the laptop. The girl's body had a posture that was perfectly straight and tense from her writing. Her nostrils flared in and out between the bridge of her glasses resting slightly crooked near the front of her nose. She wrapped her ankles around each other like snakes twisted tightly together, and hoped whoever it was

really would just go away, all she wanted to do was to finish her blog post. There was another knock.

“Hey Cat! Come on out and play with us kitty! Meow meow!” The voice on the other side of the door palyfully yelled over, with another loud pounding at the door.

The girl, Catherine Rice, sat on her little wooden chair, with the partially collapsed back that gave with the slightest amount of pressure put to it, and sighed. She would not ignore her friend’s request, as much as she wanted her alone time, and got up to open the door. As she walked over she adjusted her pleated skirt. When Catherine opened up the door, in from the hallway wafted the smell of cheap beer and the smoke of poorly disguised cigarettes, and all of the other usual scents that come with the territory of a college dormitory. In the doorway stood with a Cheshire grin Catherine’s best friend, Melissa Schubert. Melissa stood nearly a half of a foot taller than her friend, and her green eyes glistened with a flare that spoke to the girl’s wild side.

“What’s up kitty,” Melissa said as she entered Catherine’s dorm room, “Why are you all holed up in here? On a day like this too. Really nice out with all the extra sun we’ve got right now.” She went up to Catherine’s bed and hopped up on top of it before she laid herself out.

Catherine sat back down at her chair, her knees pulled together. She looked out the window onto quad. Though the school had received quite a heavy fall of snow over the winter break, since the students had returned a few weeks prior the snow had mostly melted from the mild temperatures and the unusual amount of light. Outside, students ran about and threw slushy snowballs at one another. “Oh, you know me,” Catherine said, then, with a quiet grin, “I don’t want to get some sort of weird cancer from all the extra radiation. Besides, it’s warmer indoors anyhow.”

“That’s baloney, you goof,” Melissa said, “It’s great outside and you know it, you just won’t admit you want to be a little sheltered clam and hide. You know more than most people that the whole radiation thing is a load of junk. That’s what you say on your blog anyway.” She reached toward Catherine’s bedside table, picked up a magazine that was lying on top, and began to idly thumb through its pages.

“You actually read my blog?” Catherine asked.

“You bet girl. Always do,” Melissa replied. Catherine was a bit taken aback. She hadn’t given much consideration as to whether or not people read her blog, or even if her friends knew about it. She wrote it simply for herself, as an exercise to write, and putting it online made it feel more real than locking her words away in a journal forever. A small smile crept across her face, she liked knowing Melissa read her writing.

“Do you like it?” asked Catherine with a hint of sheepishness to her voice.

Melissa smiled at her, chuckled quietly, and said, “Yeah, I do, actually. I may not totally be up with some of the things you go on about, like when you review those random unknown indie bands that no one’s ever heard of and never wi—”

“They’re not unknown!” Catherine retorted, and then added, “Not all of them anyway.” The two girls laughed with each other.

“But yeah, I like it. It’s just so you, you know?” Melissa said.

Catherine’s hand went back to her laptop and she thought about finishing up that last little paragraph so she could put her post up online, but decided to be good and socialize with Melissa instead and so closed the computer. She wondered what her boyfriend Robert was doing. She checked her cellphone for any texts, but it remained dark and empty. She was disappointed and thought about how he usually texted her throughout the day, but then she saw the time and realized that he had class right then. Outside the window, people played, ran around, shouted and cheered, walked to and from classes. The glare from the sun

and the still-recent Betelgeuse reflected on the sheets of ice and the few remaining patches of snow on the ground out. Through the frames of her glasses Catherine watched the outside world with her gentle blue eyes.

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While the two girls sat and chatted, Catherine continued working on her blog post. Her fingers raced back and forth over the keyboard. The tips and taps of Catherine's fingers sounded like the dots and dashes of an old telegraph machine. She maintained conversation with Melissa, but her focus was clearly at the task in front of her, putting herself into her words.

*Serving as part of the right shoulder of the constellation Orion, Alpha Ori is one of the brightest stars in the Earth's night sky. Several facts about Alpha Ori:*

- *First, it is classified as a red supergiant, which means it is really freaking big, and if you put it at the center of our little galaxy, right where our Sun is, it would reach all the way out past Jupiter. That's pretty big.*
- *Secondly, it is really really bright. It's over 600 light-years away and it's still one of the brightest stars at night. Like, wow, it's really freaking bright. You know?*
- *Thirdly, its name. Officially it is Alpha Orionis, or Alpha Ori for short, which no one outside of the astronomy community really remembers anyway. But most people actually have heard its more common name, Betelgeuse. It comes from Arabic and means something like, "The Armpit of the Central Being" or something weird like that. No one is really sure. It's an old name. But anyways, it's a funny name and sounds different, so people like it. The name of the movie Beetlejuice came from it, which is what most people think of. So that's cool, right?*

- *Fourthly, and most relevantly, astronomers figured out years ago that it might go supernova. That's when a star, like our sun, basically implodes on itself because it runs out of fuel. Then it explodes with crazy energy, sending a huge blast out everywhere, and what's left of the star becomes a big, gaping black hole sucking up everything around it. Crazy. Because of how big it would be, the resulting explosion would be so bright that the Earth would get another sun for a while, kind of. Like, we'd have two suns in the sky, sort of like when Luke did his little despondent, pondering pose in Star Wars on Tatooine. They figured it might last for about two weeks, and linger for a bit, up to maybe a month or two. They said it might take a million years, but that it could theoretically happen any time. Like any minute. And then it did. It exploded.*

Catherine stopped at the sound of a turning door knob. Catherine's roommate entered the room. As with many college firsts, Catherine and her roommate were not perfectly matched, and as such certain tensions mounted up during those early months. Particular subjects of strain between the two young women included sleep cycles, room cleanliness, basic hygiene, political views, styles of dress, attentiveness to work, class schedules, regularity of attending classes, reasons for attending college, means for attending college, socioeconomic status, extracurricular activities, clubs, interests, types of friends, genres of music, reading comprehension, favorite television shows, movies, general intelligence quotient, drinking habits, volume while drunk, drug habits, means of socializing, sexual activity, volume while having sex, among other items. Yet, care was taken to maintain some sense of civility so drama of violent proportions between them was minimized.

"Hi," the girl said to Catherine as she walked toward her bed. Catherine replied with a small smile. The usual extent of their conversations.

Melissa, in contrast to her less socially graceful friend, and with less at stake in the whole situation, was much more apt to push for a friendly conversation to ease the awkward

and somewhat uncomfortable tension in the room. “Hey there, how’s it going?” Melissa asked of the roommate.

“Oh, it’s like, fine, I guess,” the roommate said with a tired drone, and dropped her bag onto her bed before pulling out her laptop. She sat down at her desk, in a chair without a broken back to it, and started to check through celebrity gossip websites, among others. The other two girls went back to chatting among themselves as the roommate sat at her computer and giggled to herself at what she was reading. The giggling became more and more incessant, until it started to overwhelm Catherine and Melissa’s own conversation.

Melissa sat up and stared over at the Catherine’s roommate. “What are you laughing about there, gigglebug? I can’t imagine some celebrity getting divorced for the umpteenth time being that freaking hilarious,” Melissa said with a smirk. Melissa then got up from the bed, and both she and Catherine looked over to see what the roommate was up to on her computer.

“Facebook stalking,” the roommate replied with another giggle.

“Ugh, Facebook,” Catherine snarked, “That’s such a garbage dump of gossip, I don’t know why you waste so much time on it.” She paused, then, added, “I’m glad I don’t have one.”

Melissa turned around to face Catherine with a disconcerted look to her face. “Cat, I’ve always wondered this, but never actually really asked, but why don’t you have Facebook? Like, are you kidding me girl?” Melissa asked, “Like, what’s your reason? Do you have a crazy ex who stalks you!” She walked over to Catherine, her face wild with playful excitement. Melissa continued, “Are you secretly in a witness protection program and have to hide your identity? Did you see somebody get killed? Is someone trying to kill you? Did you kill somebody? Who are you really? Tell me the truth, I demand it!”

“No, I am not in a witness protection program, goof!” Catherine said with a laugh, and stuck her tongue out at her friend. “Do I need a big reason? I don’t know, it’s just like, it’s not me. It’s too much I think. Too many people snooping into your life, I don’t like that.” She paused for a moment, “Plus, I’ve never been much into the whole ‘social media’ thing,” Catherine replied. She crossed her legs in her seat.

“I like, thought it was so like, weird, last semester when I like couldn’t like find you on Facebook,” Catherine’s roommate said.

“You are too much kitty Cat. I shouldn’t be surprised though,” Melissa laughed, “I’ll tell you though, I really don’t not being able to invite you to things on it.” Melissa then walked to the roommate and leaned over her shoulder to look at the computer screen. She too began to point and laugh with the roommate at something they were reading.

Catherine, at the other end of the room, sat in her chair and watched the two girls together. She cocked her head to the side as she watched, and said again, “I don’t get why everyone wastes hours, literally, every day just goofing around and doing nothing. I always give Robert a hard time when he’s supposed to be studying and he’s tooling around on Facebook.”

Melissa turned around and walked back over to Catherine’s bed, and, as she sat down, said “I don’t know, I think it’s pretty fun. It’s a good way to waste time when you don’t want to do work, and it definitely makes meeting and getting people so much easier when it’s all just right there in front of you.”

“Why online though?” Catherine asked, “That’s just so, weird. Isn’t it? Like, just having everything out there, in the open, for strangers? I didn’t need Facebook’s help meeting Robert.”

Catherine and Robert had met months ago, near the beginning of the school year. When they were walking in opposite directions along the quad they bumped into each other,



quite literally. After Robert apologized profusely, Catherine had then commented how he acted like Woody Allen when he was apologizing, and there on the quad as people walked around them, they had a twenty minute conversation on film and literature. They realized they were both late to classes then, but exchanged phone numbers. They met up the next day for coffee so they could talk about books together. For almost four hours they sat in a school coffee shop and chatted about their interests. He would ask her what her favorite bands were, she would reply she didn't even know how to answer that question, and from there they would discuss the futility of trying to develop a comprehensive list of favorite bands. Afterwards, they went on a walk and ended up seeing a movie that night together. Over the next few months they spent most of their free hours together, seeing movies, going to concerts together at nearby venues, or even just sitting in their room's together, reading.

"Um, you have your blog though. Don't you count that Cat?" Melissa asked with a sly wink.

Catherine smiled and stuck out her tongue again at her friend, "That's different, and you know it."

"Bullshit girl! How in any way is your silly little blog different or 'better' than having a Facebook account?" Melissa asked.

"Well, because, it is," Catherine began, "My blog is me. It shows who I am by what I post and write about. It's about expressing myself. It's not just some collection of random facts and things about me that don't actually show who I am."

The roommate, still at her computer and without turning around, began to speak, "Well, like, I guess, that like it makes things like easier, because like you can just meet people, like that. Without having to actually, like, meet them, you know? You can totally, like, know who all your friends are, because sometimes, like, it's hard to know who they all are when you

don't like know all of them, and Facebook like makes it easy to like know them without like knowing them. And, like, yeah."

Melissa stifled her laughter by burying her head into Catherine's pillow. Catherine moved over to where her roommate was sitting, with her faced glued to the screen. She leaned over her roommate's shoulder and stared at the laptop's glowing face. Catherine watched her roommate glide through the site's pages, one after another. She saw her friend's names and other people she knew. Updates on what they were doing, now and later. Everything was collected together and connected. Catherine squinted and stared, and the glow of the screen masked a faint blush on her face when she finally popped the question, "So would you think of me as a hypocrite if I got an account?"

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"Okay, here you go," Melissa said, "Now you have an account! All you have to do is start filling everything out for your profile."

"Okay," was all Catherine said in return. Her eyes scanned the screen's words, taking her time to digest everything in front of her, as her hand and finger shyly moved her through the website. Right away Catherine was proposed with a multitude of questions, so much so that she had to pause at almost each and every one. "What does this mean," Catherine pointed and asked, "that anyone can find me? Even strangers? Why does everyone have to be able to find me? Why can't it just be my friends?"

Melissa laughed at her friend. "Cat, how're your friends going to find you then? Facebook isn't going to just know who your real friends are like magic or something. Besides, how are you always going to know who your friends are? Isn't that how friendships start, anyway? You meet someone you don't know, and then you become friends."

Catherine sat there for a moment, pondering over the thoughts her friend gave her. She continued to scroll through Facebook's questions and personal forms. It asked her for her family information, and if she would like to list any of them on her page, or if she would like to connect to their pages directly. Her contact information. Email address, Skype account, instant messaging screen names, and personal websites. Her birthday, political and religious views, what languages she could speak, what ethnicity she was and nationality, and even what major life philosophy she most identified with. Her phone number, which could be hidden but not deleted once entered. What her gender was, sexual orientation, whether she was interested in a relationship, casual sex, or just meeting friends. If she was currently single, in a relationship, or, "It's Complicated." When she had her first kiss, first relationship, first love, and the ends of former relationships. If and when she had been separated or divorced. When she lost her virginity. Her family, her relation to them, her pets. Family deaths. It asked her to list everywhere she has lived in her life, what dates they were, and the addresses. Where she went on vacations. When she got her driver's license, and her first car. Where she worked, for how long, what she did, what she was paid. What schools she went to, what she studied, what classes she took, and when. Her grades. Major illnesses, diets undertaken, if she wore glasses or contacts, what bones she's broken and when and how. If she plays any instruments, if she has any tattoos or piercings, what sports, if any, that she's played, what awards she's won in life. Her first drink. It asked for her favorite music, movies, television shows, sports teams, video games, board games, books, animals, plants, even the people who inspired her the most, and gave vast lists for each category to pick and choose from. Facebook even gave space to list her favorite quotations, with the ability to properly cite and reference their authors and the texts or sources they came from. Did she want to subscribe to any major news sources through Facebook. Then it asked her to set up her profile picture. Did she then want to upload more photographs, of anything, into albums to

be sorted through. Did she want to tag herself, or any of her friends, in these pictures so that the tagged user could then be found and identified. Then tag the location where each picture was taken. Finally, it asked of Catherine how she would like to organize her security settings. She could limit each and every individual section or category with specific instructions: friends only, people on the same network, specific individuals only, no one besides the user, Facebook users only, or the whole public at large with Internet access. Catherine sat there and stared at all the options before her. After ten or fifteen minutes of looking through the questions, she closed her computer shut without answering most of them.

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*When Betelgeuse exploded, people thought that having the additional sunlight would really change things. With longer days, or at least slightly less dark evenings, people thought they would take advantage of Earth's new visitor in the sky. Maybe people would spend more time outdoors, after they get off of work or out of school each day, since it would be lighter later into the day. If not that, then the extra light would encourage a more active nightlife all around, with people feeling safer and everything. Everyone knew that the light wouldn't be enough to affect farming and those kinds of things, because the light just wouldn't be strong enough to do anything much, supposedly, but for more casual or mundane things it would be more than enough, especially for the northern hemisphere that was in the middle of winter and would enjoy the extra light.*

*But that didn't exactly happen. In fact, quite the opposite began to take hold in lots of ways. Instead of people going out more they started to hole themselves up indoors. Maybe it's the whole "age of the internet" thing that's driving a lot of it, but whatever it is people just sort of freaked out on a collective-unconscious-like scale. All day long and through every night people were sitting at their desktop computers, laptops, iPads, and phones, their eyes glued to the glowing screens instead of the new big one floating in the sky. No*

*one wanted to go out to the parks and bars to get together and hang out under the light of the late Betelgeuse. Rather, the connections were made through the tubes of the information superhighway. Typing away at their keyboards, everyone chatted, and got deeper and deeper into the whole online social media world, with Facebook at the forefront.*

*Westward the course of Facebook took its way, exploring further boundaries and borders. Before the information age, privacy was a carefully guarded gem, but it soon became currency and the more you gave away of yourself, the more you seemed to rake in return.*

Catherine stopped typing for a moment, and looked at the screen before her. She read through her blog post, and checked it for errors and typos. She knew she wasn't the best writer or blogster out there by any means, but she thought she was offering an interesting perspective on the whole Betelgeuse thing going on, especially as it was getting to the point where it was supposed to begin dying and fading out of the Earth's sky. It was a major event happening in her lifetime, affecting her generation, and she wanted to partake in it in a more direct fashion.

As her eyes darted around the layout of her blog page, Catherine felt an urge to go check Facebook. She opened up a new tab on her browser, and clicked to go to on. The screen loaded and there was a bright little red "1" at the top. She clicked on it, and up popped an invitation. "You're invited to Melissa's ALL-NIGHT Rager!!!" read the message. Catherine looked at the event's page and saw it was for this Friday night. Catherine had always felt she was awkward at parties and didn't know how to make casual conversation around people getting drunk off their asses, and so often stayed in instead of going out with her friends. Since she got a Facebook account, Catherine felt she was making strides in being more "normal" as she called it, something a little closer to the average college experience she thought she was supposed to be having, but was never really sure how to have, or if she even really wanted it. She clicked "Yes" to attending, and closed out the page. Catherine sat on

her chair in her room alone, and smiled a nervous smile. She thought about heading to bed so she could get up early the next morning to study before class. Just then her phone buzzed. Catherine reached over to her desk and picked it up. A text. It was from Robert. She smiled, and opened the text. It read, "Hey! saw u had fb now! awesome!" Her thumbs knocked out a quick response and she sent it off, and set her phone back down. Catherine looked around Facebook some more and answered a few more questions about herself. A couple of minutes later, her phone buzzed again. Another text from Robert. "saw u r going to M's party friday. Didn't know, saw on fb. Lets do it."

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The next morning after her class got out Catherine met up with Robert. He was standing outside of her classroom, chewing gum as he waited for her. She gave him a cheerful smile and a kiss on the cheek, as he took the gum out of his mouth, rolled it up in its wrapper, and tossed it into a nearby garbage can. "How's your day going?" Catherine asked, "I missed you!" she added.

They began to walk and talk down the sidewalk of the quad where Catherine's class was located. "It's been all right," Rob told her, "Nothing too special you know, just the usual shit-show. Got a paper due tomorrow that I completely forgot about because I just spaced."

"Oh I'm so sorry babe, can I help you at all with it?" Catherine asked her boyfriend. They turned under an arch to head toward Robert's dormitory. Their shadows were blurred and faded from the two bright lights above them in the sky.

"I'll be fine, just have to do it, you know. Don't you worry," he said to her. As they walked along the path, he told her, "So if you wanna go to this party tomorrow night, that's cool with me. I'm totally down. Glad you're starting to finally come out."

“Well, I always feel bad when we have to stay in because of me, and I always feel lonely when you’re out without me. At least this way I’ll be a little more comfortable with you there with me.” Catherine said, and held his arm close to her. The sidewalk they were on was full of students, sprawling about the campus in between their classes.

“Yeah, no problem babe. I’m glad you got a Facebook too, finally. What took you so long, huh? People were wondering whether I was making you up,” he laughed.

Catherine laughed with him. “Why didn’t they think I was real, or that we were real?” she asked him.

“Well, we’ve never been ‘Facebook official’ or anything, so you know, that makes people question things. Most people list their relationships on Facebook now, so it’s weird when people don’t. And it’s not very common at all when someone doesn’t even have a Facebook for people to check if they are real or not,” he told her.

Catherine stopped in the middle of the sidewalk where they were walking. “That’s just so dumb,” she said, “Why can’t I be a real person, with or without Facebook, huh? Why does it matter whether or not we’re listed as *being in a relationship* on stupid Facebook or not.” Catherine kicked the sole of her foot on the ground, and looked toward Robert with a confused look to her face. “Why can’t people just believe you when you tell them, why do they need to see some stupid proof of it.” She started to walk again and then continued, speaking slowly, “And it’s not like Facebook is any sort of legitimate authoritative source on everything anyhow. Like, how does anyone know what it says is actually true, huh? I could just make it up. Besides, whose business is it if we’re dating besides our own.”

Robert wrapped his arm around her, and said, “Babe, chill out. It’s not such a big deal. Why do you care what people know?”

Catherine paused for a moment and stared at her feet for a moment. She rubbed one foot against the side of her ankle before looking back to Robert. They were outside the door

to his dormitory. She shrugged, and said, “And why do you care what people don’t know?” Catherine waited for a moment with a tired look to her face, “Anyway, I need to go back to my room to grab some books to do work, I’ll see you later Rob.” She gave him another peck on the cheek before turning to walk back to her own room.

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Late the next afternoon Catherine was sitting in her room on top of her bed with her computer in her lap. She thought about trying another blog post on Betelgeuse, or something else, maybe to complain about her classes or what Robert said to her the other day, but she couldn’t muster up the strength to actually do anything. She stared at the blank screen for nearly an hour, trying to pull together enough interest to start writing something. Eventually her boredom passed the pressure point and her diligence toward her work wavered, and she relented and clicked on the icon to link her to Facebook.

Her profile page popped up in front of her, the bright white of the screen reflected upon the blue hue of her eyes. Little red notification flags rang out at the top of the, notifying her of every event she has been invited to, all the people who have made posts on her profile, people who have replied to her posts, if anyone has Liked a comment of hers, and so forth. She had several Friend requests as well, and she checked out who they were.

One belonged to a good friend from high school, Amber Winger, who Catherine had three years of choir with in high school. “Oh, Amber!” Catherine said, “I’ve missed you so much. I haven’t talked with you for ages. I wonder what you’ve been up to.” Amber made the cut and was accepted. Catherine looked through her friend from home’s profile, and as she did so, began to accept that Facebook had some merits. She did like being able to find out what her old friend was up to since they graduated high school together.



The next one was from a guy in an English class she had taken the previous semester, and though she felt kind of strange about it, as she only really knew him from class and they were at best only acquaintances, and nothing like what anyone would call actual friends, she thought. Still, she thought, he made intelligent comments at least, and was a nice enough guy. She accepted him as well.

A third Friend request appeared on her page, this time from someone she didn't recognize at all. She searched the catalogs of her memory for the boy's name, a "Jack Sheffield" but nothing rang a bell. A gander at his profile picture gave her little help in solving the mystery. He had decided to use a captioned picture from a movie instead of an actual picture of himself, so it was impossible to figure out who he was from that. Other searching proved futile, as most other information available from Jack was either useless or locked away from her view, which to Catherine felt quite ironic. She was unable to see the information from the person who was requesting her friendship, but was being asked to give all hers up on an act of artificial trust. My blog is different, Catherine defended to herself, it's not the same as this. Yet, she felt a strange sting of guilt, to so matter-of-factly deny someone this idea of being her friend with the simple and nonchalant act of clicking a button. Catherine recognized a few names of their mutual friends, mostly people from classes, and a few girls that she knew through Melissa. There was a moment more of hesitation before her finger slid the curser on the laptop to Jack Sheffield's name, where she clicked to accept him as a Friend.

Catherine sat for a few minutes in silence. Outside, the rays of Betelgeuse shone in through her windowpane and onto her bedspread. Today Betegeuse was exceptionally bright. The warmth of the dead star combined with the Sun's own rays filled the room with a sleepy sensation, and it tempted Catherine to curl up in her bed, read a book, or nap some before Melissa's party she was going to that evening. She squeezed her knees together in

anticipation. Taking her laptop off of herself, she set it on the bed stand to her right, and exchanged it for a book. Though she had enough reading to do for class, she wanted a break and something to read for fun, and in lieu of the Wife of Bath's tale from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, she instead picked Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*.

Years ago, when she was likely too young and impressionable by expressions of great romance and love, she had seen the film adaptation, and fallen in love with its story, and wanted to bring herself deeper into its world. The novel, she found, was nearly nothing like its film adaptation, though that didn't detract from either experience for her. Instead, the book offered her a very different kind of love within its pages. She read into the character's narratives, and found herself awestruck by their attempts to grapple with the chaotic world around themselves, something with which the young lady at college found somehow apt to her own experience. From Caravaggio the thief's struggle to reassemble his life after his betrayal and the disfigurement of his hands, the perilous romance between the nurse Hana and Kip the sapper, to the revealing of the true identity of the English patient and his tale of love, sacrifice, and loss. Catherine fell in love with these literary figures struggles as if they were her own, and made it a practice to read the novel whenever she, too, struggled with life and its many snares for the young and pure of heart.

Though her love for the novel was strong and it proved to be an invaluable resource for Catherine, at this moment she found it impossibly difficult to let the words set forth in ink in front of her to sink into her brain. Over and over she read the same sentences, but nothing stuck. They would pour forth and sink away just as quickly like footsteps in the sand before a busy beach, without a trace. She wanted to occupy her mind with something literary, something complicated and strong, but each word seemed a mountain just too far to climb on a tired day like this. Catherine found her mind led elsewhere, and increasingly to the computer just a few feet away from her body. The temptations of the internet,

particularly Facebook and its gateway to the dramas of her classmates and peers, called to her, as much as she denied it. For nearly twenty minutes Catherine sat on her bed and fought, and pretended to read her book, even turning the pages she hadn't read, just to fake some sort of progress, before the tired Catherine relented, and picked up her computer and opened it back to Facebook.

There on her bed she clicked around Facebook, and searched through pictures posted by friends new and old, and watched everything that was happening in their worlds. A thought eventually entered Catherine's head, and she then pointed her searches in a new direction. With a directed spirit she went to Robert's Facebook profile. Though she had friended him immediately after joining, right after she requested Melissa who showed her how the practice worked, Catherine had never spent any time actually going over her boyfriend's page. The prospect of going through Robert's profile at once both excited Catherine and sent her pangs of guilt, as though she were betraying some sort of trust by looking around his Facebook profile. "As if I'll see anything I don't already know," she said out loud to herself.

She browsed through Robert's Interests page, and glanced through all his listed favorite books, movies, and music. She smiled as she saw a movie or two they saw together on dates listed as favorites of his. Many of the things she read off of his page she already knew from talking with him for hours, especially last semester when they had begun to date. The two young lovers would sit out on one of the college's quads, on a blanket, and watch the clouds pass by as they talked. There was the occasional random thing that popped up on her boyfriend's Facebook that took her by a bit of a surprise. That was another thing, she thought, that she could give Facebook credit for, that at least for that some things you could learn about a person, even someone close, that she reconciled would only come up by happenstance.

While Catherine stalked through her boyfriend's profile, she eventually came across an item that took her by a slight surprise. Under Robert's religious beliefs, he was listed as being Atheist. Robert had told her previously that he was Catholic, though definitely not a staunch believer by any means, but that was simply raised Catholic and so that's what he was. Admittedly, he had confided in her that was struggling with calling himself a Catholic while not being completely behind the whole system of beliefs associated with it, but Catherine took some offense at his straightforwardness of listing himself as Atheist, without his so much as telling her something she thought had some relative importance attached to it. She wondered why he would hold back in telling her this, but clearly had few, if any, qualms about letting the world at large know. Catherine considered texting him to ask, but paused to wonder if that would be rude, not just to ask, but do so via text, which she felt was just so impersonal. After thinking about it for a minute, she decided that since Robert never bothered to tell her she felt justified in asking him that way. She shot him a text, "Hey babe! So you're no longer a Jesus freak ;) since when??" and set down her phone, and continued to look around Robert's page.

A few minutes later, her phone buzzed on her table, and she picked it up, "Hey. Yeah, sorry. Guess I forgot. Figured you'd see it on fb anyway," his text read. Her face scrunched up. She wondered what that was supposed to mean.

As she continued searching, she found other items that grabbed her attention. Some bands and movies he listed as being Favorites of his, when she knew for a fact that he either hadn't seen them yet or had directly told her that he disliked or even hated them. Catherine felt herself in a strange sense of dissonance. Thoughts flooded her mind, the paranoia of a confused and jealous lover who thinks they have found concrete evidence of their other's infidelity, as well as the jabs of hope that it was all a mix-up or confusion on her own part,

and that all was right with the world. Still, there she sat, lost in the glow of her computer's face, and stared blindly into the light.

It wasn't until her phone buzzed again that Catherine was awoken from her conscious slumber. She grabbed the phone and read the text aloud to herself, another from Robert, "Also babe, see you tonight at M's party? Cool. Wil b late, luv." She wanted to text him back and press the issue, but then noticed the time on her phone's clock. It was only an hour or so before the party, and she promised Melissa she would come over to help set things up. Catherine set the phone down and began to undress to shower. As she collected up her clothes from the pile they gathered in on the floor where they had dropped, she wiped her nose and walked into the bathroom.

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Outside, the sky was dim, but nothing near as dark as usual. The light of the dead star shone brighter than ever before, and the evening sky could barely be considered to be twilight, such was the glow from the supernova up in the celestial heavens above.

The party began slowly, as most college parties tend to, but as the night grew longer the small college dorm room filled up with students and booze. Melissa was in a tight party dress that covered little and expressed much without words, while Catherine kept herself in a tamer dress that covered much more of her assets, and thus expressed just as much without words as her friend. Of the two, Melissa could be found jumping from person to person, treating each conversation like the one before it, quick and casually, and always with the traditional college red cup accessory, full of a mixture of particular liquids she had little legal access to, save for the graces of a most understanding Residential Assistant. Said Residential Assistant provided assistance for Melissa in the form of purchasing alcohol and ignoring any

underage drinking, plus noise complaints and the like. This he did in exchange for the promise that he would be allowed to schmooze with any underclassman co-eds attending Melissa's parties. It was a symbiotic relationship that proved healthy for both Melissa's party habits and the Residential Assistant's sex life.

Catherine, on the other hand, could be found at most times throughout the evening in a number of different corners of Melissa's common room. She stood by, watching as people came, drank, mingled, drank some more, and stumbled out. People would brush past Catherine, red solo cups in hand, full of beer sloshing in and out of the cups. She smiled at them as they pushed past her, but never said anything more than a shy "Hi" as they passed. Music blared from speakers in the back of the room and filled the room, yet everyone still found the decibels in their chests to speak over it.

All around Catherine were people having conversations that she caught the briefest snippets of. "And like Mike totally did it! "I know right!" "I can't believe it either." "But, imagine!" "Yeah, I totally fucking bombed the test. I didn't study shit for it, but like, I fucking swear that fucking professor has it out for me or something. Fucking pretentious dickhole." "Did you hear about Betelgeuse?" "Dude, I am so blackout already, its fucking awesome!" "Yeah, they think it might stay longer than before?" "Oh my god, Emily, you look so hot girl! Love it!" "Where's the toilet, I really need it." "For what?" "You don't want to know." "Not just last longer, but, like, it's getting brighter, and not fading out like they said it should." "Thanks babe! You're hot too! I love your dress where did you get it?" "Thanks, Forever21, it's not as good as yours though!" "Don't say that, yours is totally hotter!" "No way, you're just like, saying that!" "Do they think it's going to do something big? Like burn us to a crisp or something? Or, like, turn everyone into gigantic cockroaches from all the radiation?" "Haha, sisters!" "No, well, maybe. They're not really sure anymore. It wasn't even supposed to do this. So theoretically we should be fine from radiation and

everything else, but since it's getting bigger instead of smaller..." The conversations got louder as more people piled into the room, and Catherine backed herself further and further into a corner.

She stood there in her corner, and watched and waited. She hoped Robert would come soon, so she would have someone to talk to, as well as to ask him about his profile, which bothered her still. She sipped quietly on her drink, a cup nine parts coke to one part of a splash of rum. She thought she felt her phone buzz from her dress's pocket, but when she pulled it out to check it, the phone was blank. A phantom buzz. Catherine stared at the quiet device, and wished it would give her a sign.

"Hey there, you! You're, you're, what's your name. Catherine! Catherine Rice, right?" a voice yelled from her right side.

Catherine turned around to find a red-haired boy standing next to her, smiling far too much for her comfort. "I'm sorry, do I know you?" Catherine asked the boy, confused as to how he seemed to know her name.

"What?" the boy shouted back her.

"Do I know you?" she yelled in reply, trying to talk over the music.

"It's me, you know, Jack," he told her. She stared at his face, but her mind remained blank. The name Jack kept bouncing around her head until it finally hit her. Jack. Jack Sheffield. The boy from Facebook, she thought. "I saw you were going to be here," he said, "It popped up on my newsfeed that you were going to attend so I thought I'd show up too."

She stared at him for a moment, her mouth hanging open slightly with a tint of incredulousness to it. "How do you know who I am?" she asked.

He laughed. "Well," he said, "It's kind of a funny story. So we kind of know each other, but not really? We've never actually met before, but I've heard about you. On Facebook, that is." Catherine stared at the boy, her eyes straight and intense. "So I was

looking through your profile and I saw that we were both fans of the Beatles!” Jack said to her. Catherine continued to stare, as if waiting for a punch line to the end of the joke. He continued, “And, yeah, like other bands too. And we both like The Hangover, and we’ve both been Disneyland and Disneyworld!”

“You’re friended me because we both like the Beatles?” Catherine asked, then paused, thought for a moment, then said, “Wait, how do you know I’ve been to Disneyworld and Disneyland?”

“It’s on your profile, don’t you know that? All your vacation photos were tagged with their locations and dates. And all that other stuff is just, like, there, you know.” He stood there smiling at Catherine, seemingly proud of his endeavors, then continued, “Oh, and also, I used to live in Cleveland too, when I was younger. How old were you when you lived there?”

“You’ve never even met me,” Catherine told at the boy, “Why do you know so much shit about me?” she asked, annoyed.

The boy slumped his shoulders. “Hey, relax,” he said, “I was just trying to make conversation, I didn’t mean anything by it. I just got it all from your Facebook acc—“

“What kind of weirdo are you?” she asked him, much more peeved now, “Who goes around friending people you don’t know? You’re a little pervert,” she told him with a cold glare. Jack backed away from her and then disappeared into the throng of people. Catherine stood there with the party going on around her. The sounds of people partying and the music surrounded her like a whirlwind, and Catherine felt like she stood in the middle of it, the eye of the storm. Her breath huffed in and out of her chest. Catherine’s hands pulled at her face, and smeared her makeup in the process. Catherine felt a hand grab at her shoulder and she spun around thinking it was Jack grabbing at her, but she instead found Melissa’s face staring into hers, a big drunken smile on her face.

“Hey kitty Cat, you okay?” Melissa asked Catherine, caressing her friend’s back.



“I’m just kind of freaked out. Some guy just came up to me and knew all this shit about me, but I’ve never met him before.” Catherine sniffled a little, and looked to the floor for a moment. She stared into the spaces beneath the floorboards under her feet, and was lost in everything that wasn’t there. From outside, the windows let in the bright rays of Betelgeuse, and they illuminated the party scene around Catherine in a slow-motion haze. Her gaze met her friend’s again, and she asked of Melissa, “What’s going on with everyone? I feel like the light is making everyone crazy.”

Melissa kissed the top of her friend’s head, and said, “I’m sorry hon’, I don’t know.” They both then turned to look out the windows and the light that streamed through. At half-past midnight, it was almost daylight outside.

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Catherine and Melissa gave each other a friendly peck on the cheek as Catherine took her departure from the party. “Good luck kitty Cat, and call me if you need anything,” Melissa said to her as she passed through the doorway, “And be safe!”

“Thanks, I’ll be all right, don’t worry. I just need some fresh air and time to think,” Catherine said as she walked out. She turned around, gave Melissa another smile, and then, “And it’s plenty safe out, don’t you fret. Remember, it’s almost daylight outside,” she said with a wink. Catherine turned back and then walked down the hallway. Thoughts filled her head which she tried to cover over with silence. She wondered where Robert was and why he hadn’t shown up to the party. In the back of her head, the bass of the music from the party still pumped loudly. Catherine turned the corner and started to head down the stairs, and rounded a turn in the stairwell, only to bump into Robert and two of his friends headed

upstairs. “Rob!” she shouted in surprise, “Where have you been? I’ve been waiting for you all night!”

“Hey baby,” Robert replied, and pulled off the sunglasses he had been wearing, “I was just about to text you that I was here. How goes it?” He pulled her into his body and embraced her. His two friends stood on either side of Robert, and both leaned against the walls next to them. One chewed gum, loudly. The other did nothing.

Catherine smiled faintly, though only for a brief moment. The smell of smoke lingered on his body. She pulled back, a worried expression worn on her face, as she gazed at the jacket he was wearing. It was a black leather jacket, with a bit of a shine to it. “Since when do you wear leather jackets?” she asked him, “And smoke?”

Robert laughed. “It’s a new thing, babe,” he said to her, “A bunch of my friends Liked a couple of pages on Facebook, like smoking and leather jackets, things like that, so I did, too. Do you like it? Or do you ‘Like’ it?” he said with a grin, emphasizing the Like. His grin made Catherine feel uncomfortable. With that, he pulled out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, took one from the package, slid it behind his ear, returned the pack into his jacket pocket, pulled out a lighter from the same pocket, put the cigarette in his mouth, and lit it. He blew a puff of smoke above Catherine’s head.

Catherine watched as the smoke dissipated above her, before she returned her eyes to meet Robert’s, masked behind a shield of smoke. She watched his smile toward her, with a careful look at the shape of his lips, the growth of stubble around his face. “You started smoking because your friends did?” she asked him.

He laughed again. “It’s not like that, silly,” he said, and scratched the back of his head. “I put it on my Facebook, because, well, it’s part of a look,” he told her, and avoided her eyes by looking upwards toward the ceiling.

“A look?” she asked him.

“Like, I’m trying to create a look for myself, you know, and so, like I’m crafting this image I want for myself, and Facebook’s the best way to do it. I can literally control like every detail. You know babe?” Robert’s two friends stood idly by, and sifted from side to side, either uncomfortable with the growing scene before them, or too apathetic to care one way or another.

Catherine stared at the man in front of her, the one she called her boyfriend. “So, you’re telling me, let me know if I’m getting this right, by the way, that you started smoking and doing all this other weird shit—”

“It’s not weird,” he interrupted.

“All this weird shit,” she continued, “So you could create ‘an image’ of yourself on Facebook? And you’re doing these things in real life, too? Is that right? Or am I just way off base?” Catherine’s right hand shook and twitched by her side.

“Babe, I think you’re freaking out over nothing. What’s the big deal?” he asked, shoulders hunched up. Robert’s two friends had by this point pulled out their cellphones and were locked into their own little worlds. Little lights lit up their otherwise shrouded faces. “You act like I’ve become some other person, I’m just being me. I’m deciding who I want be, no different from you.”

“But that’s just it!” Catherine said incredulously, “You’ve decided! You’ve chosen ‘yourself’, yeah, but you haven’t actually become anyone. You’re just saying who you are, and that’s it. Nothing more. No becoming involved whatsoever. You’re not actually someone different. You can’t just say you’re someone else and magically transform overnight. Can’t you get that?” Her voice began to panic. She continued, “I was at the party, and some creep came up to me and started harassing me with all of this stuff he knew about me, even though I never met him before, and I couldn’t find you anywhere, and I just want to get out of here.”

Robert took a long drag from his cigarette, breathed it out, then sighed. "Look, babe, I think you need to chill. Here, let's go back to the party, we'll get you something to drink, and everything will be fine. I promise," he said to her. They stared at each other's faces for a moment, until Robert broke the silence, "Hey, let me introduce my friends to you. This is Kevin and he's Jeff." Kevin waved his hand while he continued to stare into his cellphone, while Jeff looked up for a brief moment to make eye contact and wordlessly returned to his own phone.

Catherine coughed, collected herself to be polite, reached out her hand, and began, "Hi, I'm Catherine, nice to meet—"

"Yeah, you're Catherine. Catherine Rice. I know," Kevin said without looking up from his phone. Jeff nodded in agreement.

"Oh, so Rob's told you about me?" Catherine asked them.

"Nah," Jeff said, "We just met him earlier tonight. You're his girl, right?"

"Yes, I am," Catherine replied hesitantly, "How do you know who I am then?"

"Facebook," Kevin answered.

Catherine stood there for maybe a minute and stared at the three young men before her. She was tempted to scream, to slap one of them, to drop to her knees and cry. Without another word she walked between them and made her way down the stairs. Behind her, Robert shouted after her, "Are you coming back or what?" No answer. "Guess I'll talk to you tomorrow then?" Robert asked as Catherine turned the corner past them. At almost one in the morning, Catherine stepped outside the dormitory to walk back to her own room, and walked out into bright, fresh sunlight. She fumbled through her bag, found she didn't have her sunglasses, and used her hand to shield her eyes for her walk. Catherine looked around, and noticed there weren't any shadows left projected on the ground.

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*When Betelgeuse was first projected to explode, scientists, analysts, researchers, and the like all made their professional conjectures that the explosion and the resulting gamma rays and new semi-sun in the sky would all be completely harmless. Nothing to worry about.*

*But that's not what happened. What happened instead was very different. Yes, it started off exactly as they projected. Betelgeuse exploded, gamma rays hit, new bright object in the sky, day or night, got brighter over the period of two weeks or so, all that. It was supposed to last two weeks, then die off over a couple of months, becoming less and less bright as the explosion dimmed out. It didn't.*

*It got brighter. It became more noticeable during the day, and then at night it started making things almost as bright as daytime. And it didn't happen over the period of months or even weeks. It was over a few days. The amount of light just went up exponentially. Scientists don't know why. They think maybe Betelgeuse was bigger or more massive than they originally thought, but they're not really sure. Their being wrong only added fuel to the conspiracy theorist's fires. The brighter it got without a real explanation from science only pushed skeptics into believing that maybe the end of the world was near. You could only go out with sunglasses on, at first during the day, but eventually even at night you needed them if you didn't want to go blind. It was both the most frightful thing in imagination, but also beautiful. For some, at least. It seemed, it seemed...it seemed everything was illuminated. Nothing was hidden from view anymore. No more shadows, no more darkness. Everything was out in the open for everyone to see. Nothing could be hidden, not from the rays of light burning through the sky and cutting through night and day.*

*All that was left was—*

Catherine stopped. She didn't know what else to say. She wondered if there was any point to writing anymore. Her fingers sat at her keyboard, until her hands slumped and she

pulled them away and let them drop off the desk completely. She couldn't focus, not on anything anymore.

It had been two days since the party, and she hadn't spoken to Robert since. Her incident in the stairwell with him and his friends, as he called them, had left her shaken. That, in addition to the boy who accosted her at the party with more facts about her life than she felt it were possible to know without actually meeting someone. The only time she had touched her computer since then, because of her anxiety toward Facebook and everything it had brought up, was so she could try to post on her blog, and to look at news sites for the latest updates on Betelgeuse. Its supernova had overtaken everything in the news

The shades to her room were shut tight, yet still the light shone through and lit it like a summer day. Catherine had locked herself up in her room and refused to leave since the incidents at the party. There, she wandered between the interior walls, but her mind was out floating through space. On her bookshelf, Catherine picked up a photograph of her and Robert, together, from their first month of dating. In the picture, Robert had his arm around Catherine, over her shoulder, and they sat underneath a tree on the quad of the college, a smooth shade covering both their faces which held smiles. She held the photograph in her hands, in a frame she got for herself to hold the picture, and felt the glass under her fingers that covered the picture. "We didn't know anything about each other then," she said to the empty room. Her finger traced their smiles. She set the photograph back on the bookshelf, face down, and went back to her computer.

The first thing she did at the computer was to go to Facebook. She hadn't checked it since before the party, and it was full of notifications, messages, and friends requests from people she met at the party and didn't really know beyond a name and a vague face. Before she could go through any of it, an official message popped up. "Welcome!" it read, "Would you like to partake in the newest stage of Facebook? Introducing, Facebook Personality

Profiling! One simple personality profile test and you can determine all of your personality traits, and compare them to your friends! See how you relate to all of your friends, and know on a measurable scale how compatible you and all of your friends are to each other.” She searched for the “No” option, and clicked it. She wanted nothing less than for Facebook to know more about her than it already did. Catherine only wanted to see what Robert’s profile now looked like and what changes he made to the look he wanted to make for himself.

She navigated to her boyfriend’s profile and watched the page load, row by row of pixels filled in on her screen, lines of code that translated to life in a digital age. Finally, the page loaded and his profile pictured appeared before her. Instead of his face filling her pupils, she was greeted by an unknown image. It was the photograph of a man that bore no resemblance to her Robert in any form. She clicked on the picture to enlarge it, and it filled her screen. Feature by feature, she scrutinized the image, and looked for some clue that it was her boyfriend. But there wasn’t anything there. It simply was not a photograph of Robert in any way, shape, or form. For whatever reason, he had decided to use a picture that wasn’t him. She wondered if she had clicked the wrong Robert by accident, but she checked and it was her boyfriend’s name. So this is his whole ‘new image’ thing, Catherine thought to herself, and then grumbled out loud, “Asshole.”

She continued to pore through his profile in search of other changes. To her surprise, which was continuing to diminish every moment she held up her crusade for knowledge, she found he had changed most of his profile. Most of his favorite bands, books, and movies were completely changed, until there were only a few things left standing from before. It was as if he had tried to completely eliminate his past identity through a systematic change on his Facebook. Nothing was left untouched. Even his birthday and birthplace had been changed, instead of being born April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1993, he was now born on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1992, and he had chosen to be born in Santa Barbara, California instead of actually being born in Skokie, Illinois. The

more Catherine clicked, the more she found, and the less she understood. A red notification popped up from her bottom tray on her computer. It was a news headline, “Urgent!” it read, “Betelgeuse supernova reported to have increased brightness again to now dangerous levels. Stay indoors except for emergency purposes.”

Catherine leaned back from her computer. In front of her was a vault of information about her boyfriend. Now, though, she wasn’t sure what she knew, what was real or made up. She wondered if the light from Betelgeuse had made her sick and driven her mad. The image of the boyfriend she knew, the one she held in her brain and all of her memories, seemed to be cut out by the virtual reality in front of her. She wondered if she should delete him, her boyfriend, or block him from her account, and what would happen if she did. There she sat and pondered, as if waiting for an answer to find her like the cold, hard knock of a hand at her door.

Then the knock came, and Catherine nearly jumped out of her seat from being so startled. She wondered if she had begun to hear things. No one had come by the room lately, because of Betelgeuse making everything so bright. Even Catherine’s roommate had holed up with her friends in another dorm, not wanting to venture about on her own. Another knock at the door, louder this time. With a sense of caution, Catherine grabbed her cellphone, got up out of her chair and walked slowly toward the door. Her hand gripped the door handle, opened it, and she peeked her head around the corner. In front of her door in the hallway stood a young man, one who looked vaguely familiar to her, but she couldn’t place where from. Sunglasses covered his eyes, which helped add to his mysterious complexion. “Hello,” she said to him politely, “What are you doing here, do you need help?” The young man stared back at her, and raised one of his bushy eyebrows in a questioning way. She waited for a response, then asked, “I’m sorry, do I know you?”



The man laughed, and it shook Catherine. It sounded exactly like Robert's laugh. He pulled off the sunglasses to reveal dark brown eyes, and then spoke to her. "Does this help?" he asked with a short grin. A cold shock ran through her entire body, and her phone dropped from her hand to the floor with a solid clunk. The man had Robert's voice, exactly, in tone and everything. Then it hit her that he was the mysterious man from Robert's new profile picture. "Don't you recognize me, babe?" Her jaw dropped almost as hard as her phone did a moment before.

"What, what happened to you?" she asked in an almost stupefied horror.

"I told you, babe, I made my image. This is it. Fucking great, isn't it?" he said to her. The grin he wore became more boastful with every word that fell from his lips.

Catherine backed away from the door in disbelief. "What the hell do you mean? Who are you, really?" she asked him, her body in a defensive stance.

He laughed again. He stepped closer to her, and said, "What's so hard to believe about it, huh, babe? I told you, you know, exactly what I was doing. Set my Facebook to how I wanted to be, and that's how it is now. It's Facebook official." He continued smiling and entered her room.

Catherine's heart raced within her chest. She looked toward her computer and the picture on its screen, the picture of the man purported to be her boyfriend Robert, a picture of the very same man who was now in her room, who also claimed to be Robert. All signs pointed to yes, but everything Catherine knew to be reality told her it wasn't possible. Yet, there he stood, and his voice spoke to her like the one she knew. Catherine tried to speak, but her own voice seemed to become lost in her throat, with no words able to escape. As they stood there, with Catherine trying to speak, the room suddenly became brighter. Light further flooded the room through the windows, even through Catherine's thick blinds.

Catherine turned back toward Robert and faced him. Her eyes met his, and she collected herself to ask him a question. “So, then, Robert,” she began, “What happens if I delete you from my friends list? What if I block you?” She waited for a moment, and then added, “What if I delete my own account? What happens then?”

Robert shrugged. “I don’t know,” he said, “You’ll have to tell me yourself.” He watched her go to her computer and sit down at it, before he spoke again, “Just remember,” he said, and she turned to look at him, “You’re making a choice, right now, you’re going to be deciding who you are, with whatever you decide to do.”

She stared back at him, and then went back to work at her computer. Her fingers moved the curser on her computer to the upper right corner of the screen, where she started to click through the series of menus. From her account settings page, to another, and so on. Catherine attempted to navigate to the page where she could delete her account. One page led her to another, which then led to another, like a labyrinth of looping webpages. Robert leaned against Catherine’s bookshelf, his eyes peered over its contents, until he found the picture frame, and picked it up. As she clicked furiously on her computer, he studied the photograph’s content. She looked up at him, and said, “How do you explain that then?”

“You mean why I look differently in the picture?” he asked. She nodded her head. “Well, it’s pretty simple babe. It goes like this: people change. It’s that simple.”

“That much?” she replied. She shifted in her seat.

“You want to tell me you’re the same little girl that’s in this picture too?” he said in return, holding the framed photo, with a sly smirk.

Catherine scoffed at his remark, and focused back in on her computer. She poured over the options again and again. “Why can’t I find this stupid thing!” she screamed, “I just want to close my account!” Light continued to seep into the room, and as it grew brighter it became like a lamp that someone had turned on in the very center of the room. Light seemed

to fill every crevice of Catherine's room. All of her knick knacks, pictures, books, clothes, everything was covered with light. Nothing was left untouched, everything could be seen clearly. Still, Catherine worked at her computer, desperately searching.

Then she found it. Hidden in a mountain of text and buried on an obscure page was the option, "Delete my Facebook account." Her cursor hovered over the button. Underneath it read, "Warning: permanent action." She was ready, but her hand hesitated. She was about to delete everything of hers that she had set up, the hours she had combed over her profile and designed it to her liking. But she wanted it gone, she thought, she needed it gone. Her eyes narrowed and squinted. The light from outside had made it harder to read her screen. She turned to Robert, and asked him, "Is this what you want?"

Again, he shrugged at her. "It's your account babe, you do want you want with it. Just remember one thing," he said.

She waited for him to finish. The light was making him hard for her to see now.

"Once it's on there, it's on there. Everything becomes Facebook official," he offered her.

Her eyes sunk down to the floor. Catherine took a deep breath, and then released a sigh of relief. The muscles in her hand contracted so that she could click the delete button. Before her finger could move, a bright flash flooded the room, and everything became white.

There wasn't a sound when the explosion of light hit, but a completely silent wind that passed through everything. Each and every object was swept up in a wave that rushed forth from a heaven far away from the        that usually comforts the planet. In symbolic opposition to the black hole that was soon to form in the decayed carcass of Betelgeuse, the blast of light that swept across the galaxy        completely white in nature. It encompassed the full spectrum of light, and when        entered into the eyes of Catherine it illuminated everything        could be seen.

Catherine pulled herself up from the floor, grasped        blindly for her desk to steady herself, and eventually stood on shaky legs. She had fallen to the ground when the light hit, the light having become so strong it physically manifested itself momentum and weight behind it. Around her was a white, glowing fog. She hands through        and found it somewhat thick. It had density, yet,        light to the touch as        . "What is this?" Catherine asked out loud. Her voice        both mystified and terrified at what was around. She wondered internally        had died and had entered heaven.

"It's the light," a voice responded from somewhere around her. Catherine spun        searched for        source of the voice        its identity. The sound of        seemed to come from the fog        , both everywhere and nowhere at once. "It's me, if you're wondering," the        responded again, "It's me, Robert. Can't you see that?"

"Robert?" Catherine        , "Robert, where are you?        going on here?" A laugh surrounded Catherine, and        couldn't tell        an echo or        everywhere        at once. "Don't you see?" Robert's voice asked, "It's Betelgeuse. It's the end of Betelgeuse. She exploded, Catherine, and this is the result." "But what is it?" she asked.

“ light, babe. It’s pure, light. Pure in form clear in beauty.  
Clean, simple, white light. Isn’t it amazing?” Robert’s voice .

There a tense electricity coursing through Catherine’s veins. what  
sort of world she had stumbled into. Even with Robert’s reassurances that

alive, vague comfort. Catherine held her hand open. glowing fog  
floated in the palm of her hand. warm to touch. She asked, “Is this light?”

“ ,” was all that Robert’s voice replied.

“This is what light feels like,” she said to herself. She looked over her body  
her whole body was glowing, not in a radiated sort of way, natural soft  
aura hovering . Catherine softly smiled this wasn’t so  
bad.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” Robert asked . Everything light, everything was clear.  
Nothing dark, nothing scary, was nothing to hide from, nothing to hide.  
Catherine’s smile began to fade in the light.

“No,” she said, “No. beautiful.”

you mean?” he asked, pure illumination. Freedom  
Catherine! Everything is unveiled for us. no  
hidden secrets out of sight. you see this Catherine?”

“What we see What’s there to see? I can’t even see you  
she yelled turning around and  
around, not sure where to direct her She paused. skin felt warmer.  
felt the light become even brighter. she watched,  
eyes, flooded with light, trouble distinguishing own body.  
held hand in front began to fade

overwhelming light                      you wanted, Robert?                      to see everything?" she asked

replied, "Yes. Everything. Exactly how it is."

"Well then, look                      Everything!                      this is what you  
fucking everything!"                      screamed at Robert's voice, holding her hand up high, "So much  
clarity                      see what's right in front of your face!" Her voice                      . Tears

sides of her cheeks. The light captured in the water  
glowed,                      potential for                      beauty                      glisten                      shine, but because  
light's reflections and refractions had no                      ing to contrast with,                      only looked like little  
lights themselves.

grow brighter again as the wave passed deeper  
every second light                      eclipse more  
moments, Catherine                      no longer even see herself.                      lips disappeared  
vision. Catherine                      disappear into the light.

"What do you see?" she asked.

and then he asked, "What do you see?"

Then                      pulled herself                      floor                      second time.

“I’m not who you think I am,” he responded.

“That’s not even it,” she      “It’s not that you’re not who I think you are,      you’re not anyone.”

“What do you mean?” he asked Catherine.

“Shine a strong enough  
light through anyone, and we all look the same,” she told him.

the computer

why

“What about the shadows?” she asked him.

“What shadows?” was his response.

“Exactly,” she said.

The glow was incredible.

when the

“Maybe there isn’t anything left to be but a nonexistent shadow,” she said.

nothing

exactly like

“I’m ready,” she said to him.



She couldn't see his smile, but

none

on the computer.

could only see one

brighter than

She laughed too.

back, I guess you were right about one thing," she said.

The words she wanted to

say

“These words?”

“All I want

and then said, “

“I’m not like that” she said.

and but so

“Who are you, then?”

I

I

*I am*

