

One Sitters:

A Short Story Collection

Volume One

TEST DRIVE

By Christopher Setterlund

Eight Hours

Life never turns out the way you think it should. If it did, everybody would be millionaires living in lavish mansions on hillsides. Everyone has dreams, but only a few have the courage and the drive to chase them down. Life is full of tests and challenges. It's full of ways to make you prove how badly you want to succeed. Some people sail on through the storms smoothly and make it to paradise. Some people roll with the punches; they get knocked down but keep getting back up. Still others get knocked down enough and decide it would be easier if they just stayed down. That's where I come in. My name is John Gerard and I recently got knocked down again by life.

I sat and waited for half an hour in a small interview room. I stared blankly around at the glossy photos of local Philadelphia celebrities that adorned the office walls. It was there at the offices of WPHI Channel 9 in Philadelphia that I had planned on making my miraculous late-round comeback in the fight I called life. I was there to interview for the job of Producer's Assistant. I held onto the hope that my two-year degree in Broadcast Journalism from Newport Community College in Rhode Island would be suffice for experience.

The longer I waited though the more I began to quiver and perspire. An early-September heat wave had turned my black Ion into an oven; I still had not fully dried off and was now sweating again. By the time the receptionist motioned me into the office of the Director of Management Personnel I was desperately trying to wipe myself down graciously using nearly an entire box of Kleenex on a waiting room table.

The man I was to be interviewed by, a Mr. Daniel Stokes, was seated behind a large black desk. His desk and chair were both slightly elevated; all the better to let him 'look down' upon those who wished for employment. The room was brightly lit with a pair of Cameroon floor lamp and had a cozy feel to it which was the exact opposite of the appearance of Mr. Stokes. He was a grumpy looking older man; I would have guessed early-60's. The kind of man who would give food to the poor on Christmas, but would tell them to 'go to Hell' the other 364 days. I stood before him nervously waiting for the permission to sit. Once he let me dangle for a moment he motioned me to sit and the interview began.

"So Mr. Gerald," he began after clearing his throat.

"Uh, it's Gerard, sir," I corrected. Beginning the interview by making the man appear to be stupid did not help my chances. He peered closed at the resume sheet before him and after exhaling loudly through his nose he began to speak again.

"Yes, Mr. Gerard, I apologize for the mistake. It says here you worked at *Paludes* Italian Restaurant in Providence?"

"Yes, sir," I answered nervously. I was beginning to think too much about everything I was going to say and had already said. Mr. Stokes looked up from the resume at me from behind thin-rimmed silver glasses. I feared that my anxiety was noticeable. As he moved his head the lenses caught the light from one of the Cameroon floor lamps on either side of the room. The reflection made it appear that he had small flashlights for eyes. It gave Mr. Stokes an even more intimidating look.

"So what brings you all the way out to Philadelphia for this job?"

"Well, I have always dreamed of working in television. I went to school for Broadcast Journalism."

"I see here," he said sounding condescending, "two years at Newport Community College, eh?"

“Yes, sir.” I could sense the sand running out of the hour glass and was desperately hoping my enthusiasm would win him over.

“Well Mr. Gerald,” he said, “I do not think your experience is sufficient enough for this type of work. I mean you’ve never had any sort of media related job at all.”

“I understand sir, but...”

“I am sorry,” he interrupted with an air of finality, “but I don’t think we’ll be able to use you at WPHI. I do appreciate you coming up here from Providence though. Good luck.” Mr. Stokes stood up from his chair and reached his hand out across his desk. I stood up, very numb from the conversation, and shook his hand very weakly. I had never had a chance.

“Uh, thank you...” I never made eye contact with him as I left feeling unworthy. I could overhear him on his P.A. system as I exited the office.

“Send in the next applicant, Sandra.” I passed the next man to be interviewed, he was clean and dressed in a freshly pressed grey cotton suit. He appeared confident, carrying a leather briefcase in his right hand as he entered Mr. Stokes’ office. I, on the other hand, looked ragged and worn. Tired from the long drive it took just to make it to the interview and unkempt after sweating in nervous anticipation, I was eliminated from consideration before I had even said a word. I understood the ‘picture’s worth a thousand words’ phrase very well after my meeting with Mr. Stokes.

I staggered in a daze to the elevator, some people stared at me and my haggard condition, but I paid no attention. On my way down from the fourth floor to the lobby the gravity of my situation, my failure, began to sink in. The elevator door chimed as it opened. I wandered out into the lobby; the freshly waxed floor shone brightly under the florescent lighting. The receptionist at the front desk wished me a ‘nice day’ but I gave no acknowledgment to her. I could only push my way through the doors and outside into the oppressive heat and humidity.

I shuffled slowly across the parking lot, passed fifteen rows of luxury cars and SUV’s belonging to employees of WPHI, until I reached the peon level, my level, of the parking lot and my black Ion. I practically fell into my front seat, my head bounced gently off the steering wheel. I was exhausted from the interview, from the emotional toll that the past eight plus hours had taken on me. To make matters worse I had left my windows rolled up and the early afternoon heat had turned my car into my own slice of Hell. I began pouring sweat like I was back in Mr. Stokes’ waiting room. I turned the engine on and cranked up the air conditioning before resting my head back down on the steering wheel.

“What do I do now?” I whispered to myself. I had been turned down for jobs before in my thirty-three years on Earth but this time was different. This time it reeked of conclusiveness, the last stop. You see I had taken a very large leap of faith on that September day, or more accurately the night before that September day. I had awakened before 4:00am in order to have adequate time to get ready for my job interview at 2:00pm. I needed that much time because it was an eight hour drive to get to WPHI in Philadelphia from my second floor apartment in a suburb of Providence, Rhode Island.

By now I imagine you are wondering what in the world I was thinking driving eight hours for a job interview, right? It turns out it was a simple mistake in the local newspaper. A mistake that was made in the classified section where the job opening at WPHI was placed in the wrong paper. The local Providence paper was owned by the much larger Philadelphia Daily News so sharing news, especially national news, was common. This mistake, however, I took as a sign. I thought it was divine intervention telling me that going to Philadelphia was my destiny. I always

had believed in fate, in things happening for a reason. This time I was wrong.

I sat with my head on the steering wheel for a few minutes, until the air conditioning had beat on me long enough to quell my sweating. It was only a little after 3:00 according to my radio's digital clock. That meant with the eight hours it would take to drive back to Providence I would have spent over sixteen hours driving for an hour at the WPHI studios, of which only ten minutes were actually spent being interviewed.

Although I wanted to sit in my black Ion as long as I could and feel sorry for myself I noticed what appeared to be a parking lot security guard eyeballing my car. Rather than end the day by getting thrown out of the WPHI parking lot I sat up and buckled my seat belt. I put the car in reverse but didn't take my foot off the brake. I watched as the man, satisfied that I was on my out, began to head toward the entrance of the building. I looked out over the sea of shiny new automobiles. Inside I felt an overwhelming crush of sadness; I put the car back into park.

"I can't do it," I moaned to myself, "I can't go back. There's nothing to go back to." I hung my head. It was at this time that I realized what I was saying. Back 'home' in Providence I faced a difficult, uncertain future. My live-in girlfriend, Gwen, had moved out a couple of weeks before, leaving me to pay the rent on my own which I could not afford. I had been fired from my job at *Paludes* because my depression over Gwen leaving coupled with my anger at my own failures had left me nearly unemployable. I was estranged from my immediate family. The only family member I could count on, Grampa Sammy, had died just after the Fourth of July leaving me with no one to confide in. The job at WPHI was going to be my silver lining, my saving grace, but now I was alone. I feared being alone. I had been trying in vain to pick up the pieces of my life for the last time. Now I would let those pieces drift away. I knew right there in the WPHI studio parking lot that I had to end it all.

Suicide. The word always struck fear in my heart. Being a spiritual man I knew the story that those who committed suicide were to be condemned to Purgatory for eternity. I had gone to church and Sunday School growing up and even though I was not a regular at Mass anymore I still remembered many of the important lessons I was taught.

I feared death and hated pain which didn't bode well for an exercise such as suicide which incorporated both. In my weakest hours I had thought like this before. In those times I had learned of one way that I could get what I wanted at presumably no cost to my soul. That would be to coax someone else into ending my life doing it for me. The term 'suicide by cop' was I believe what it was called. It seemed simple enough: buy a toy gun, find a police officer, threaten said officer with the toy gun and voila! The officer shoots me in self-defense, kill or be killed. By the time the officer realized my gun was fake I would be dead and happy and the officer would have had 'probable cause.' It was a 'win-win' situation.

I put my car back in reverse and maneuvered my way to the exit of the studio parking lot making sure to check for the suspicious parking lot cop on the way out. I took one last look at the imposing office building as I pulled out onto the four-lane main street.

"God damn it," I said under my breath. "Fuck you, WPHI." I knew that the people in that building were not fully responsible for my short-comings, but it had been the final straw. I was about to cross over a line you couldn't step back over. Death is forever.

I reached across the passenger seat for a folded sheet of white paper which had the directions I had printed off of the internet for myself to get to WPHI. I began to follow them from the bottom up, winding my way backwards through the jammed city streets. I kept the radio off so as not to break my concentration; I did not want a change of heart at this point. My

a/c hummed and the engine of my car groaned from constant slowing down and speeding up. Though it was not rush hour the traffic on the streets of Philadelphia was much more congested than anything I saw in my Providence suburb.

I knew the first and most important step I needed to take was buying a gun. When I was a child I remembered playing 'Cops and Robbers,' or 'Cowboys and Indians' with plastic toy guns, the kind that fired off rounds of caps which made loud popping sounds. All of the neighborhood kids would run around the yards firing and shouting; it made me feel old when I realized that kids in this day and age were not able to roam freely through the neighborhoods anymore. Nowadays the parents' had to fear their children being assaulted or kidnapped. Those toy guns were timeless even in the very politically correct world we were living in post-9/11 I knew that they were still sold in almost every drugstore.

I was meandering slowly down a busy main street in downtown Philadelphia when I spotted a possible answer: a Walgreens pharmacy. They were a store that would most certainly still carry the cheaply made plastic gun I required. I reminded myself that it only needed to appear real enough to warrant a police officer firing upon me. I did not need to be too picky.

I crossed two lanes of oncoming traffic pulling into the Walgreens parking lot. I left my car windows open a crack before entering the store not wanting to deal with the sweating epidemic that I had been going through on that day. I entered through two automatic sliding doors the second of which had a bulky cream colored security camera staring me in the face. I looked up and could see my grainy black and white image entering on a closed circuit television bolted to the ceiling.

The aisles were all clearly marked overhead and the toy section was not hard to find. My sneakers squeaked slightly on the linoleum floor as I made my way across the front of the store to where 'Aisle 9,' the toy aisle, was located. I had been forced to wear sneakers to my interview at WPHI when my black dress shoes went missing. Being pressed for time in the morning I decided that feet would not make or break my interview; I wondered if the sneakers had made a difference.

The upper third of the walls around the store were mirrored as if to let a potential thief know 'we are watching you.' Being slightly paranoid as I was by nature the mirrors and the security camera got my heart pumping a little faster than I had wanted. Once past the baby formula and diapers I came upon the half-aisle toy section. It was a mish-mash of retro toys and cheap knock-offs, the kind of stuff I remembered using my video game tickets on at the old arcades. *Barbie's* were called *Betsy's* and so on. I did not have to look hard to find what I was looking for. Located below a set of 'real' handcuffs and two rows of '*Hot Wheels*' miniature cars was a plastic, cap shooting, gun. The label read 'sounds real,' and 'fool your friends.' The inordinate use of exclamation points after each phrase coupled with the tooth-filled smiles of the cartoon boys on the package was a good enough sell job for me. I grabbed one and headed up for the cashier.

Cross Country

"I'll give you twenty-five bucks for the tv," the short, dirty man said from behind the counter. He held the nineteen-inch color television in his hands. His stubby, greasy fingers were barely able to keep the appliance from crashing down onto the glass counter of the pawn shop which held an array of cameras and knives. David Andrews looked sadly toward his brother Stanley; he knew they were not going to get a better deal from any of the other pawn shops in Las Vegas.

"Okay," he replied pitifully, "I'll take it." With the twenty-five dollars for the television David had amassed over two hundred dollars for the belongings he had brought down from his apartment three blocks away. It was not a lot of money but it would be enough for the bus ticket he needed to purchase.

"Thanks for your patronage," the pawn dealer said trying to sound as respectable as he could. The stained white tank top shirt and broken watch on his right wrist said otherwise, however. David folded the wad of slightly soiled bills into his wallet and shook his head in annoyance. Stanley took a brief look at some of the rings in the glass case before following his younger brother out the caged screen door.

"You think Martha would like one of those rings?" He asked his brother, but David was not in the mood to speak. A large rent increase by new ownership was forcing him to leave the city he loved and move back home to the small seaside town of Haddock Bay, New Hampshire. The only solace he could take was the promise he made to himself to return as soon as he had saved enough money. The two brothers sat momentarily in the front seat of Stanley's black mini-van; the warm Vegas sun heated the interior of the van enough that it made them forget that it was the middle of January. Winter barely ever showed its face in the desert, and even when it did it was in the form of a slight frost melted away shortly after sunrise. That was one of the main reasons David loved Las Vegas, the year-round warm weather. Although the gambling was not too bad either; it was hard to avoid it when places as mundane as supermarkets and convenience stores were littered with slot machines.

Stanley started the van and they exited the pawn shop parking lot. The reason they had decided to stop at that particular pawn dealer was not the money they offered but the fact that it was located in an area very close to a police barracks. The last thing David wanted was for whatever items were not sold to be stolen from him in the parking lot. In the back seat of the van was a box of such items that the short and dirty pawn dealer had no use for. David said he would dispose of them later. It was late-afternoon and the two brothers decided to make a stop off at Chuck's Lounge, a small, local bar which was normally filled with regular working folk and not the tourists who flocked to the city for the bright lights and casinos.

They took their two normal seats at the bar directly in front of the monstrous high-definition television on the wall behind the bar. On the television was one of the football playoff games, this event packed the bar more than normal. David, though, was not interested in who was playing, all he wanted was to have one last beer in Las Vegas before he faced his inevitable exit that night.

"Don't feel too bad, Dave," Stanley said while crunching on some of the peanuts in a small bowl in front of them. "You'll go back to the Bay, earn up some money, and bam! It won't take you more than a couple of months to get back here." David took a long sip from his bottle of beer and stared off toward the rows of sparkling wine glasses hanging over the bar. He did not dare touch the peanuts that Stanley was inhaling as he had worked in enough bars in his

day to know just how many dirty hands had probably been in that same bowl.

"I don't understand how this can happen," he said, "I mean these new owners nearly doubled my rent! It seems like there should be somebody I could get in touch with about this, right?"

"I'm sure there is, but I think it's better for you to cut ties here for now, and come back later on as a fresh start. I mean honestly, once the restaurant closed you were basically on borrowed time anyway." The *Desert Lounge* where David had worked for the past two years had closed down in early November due to a lack of business which stemmed from the boss carelessly selling beer out of the back of the restaurant to a group of whom he thought were underage kids. They turned out to be undercover cops who just happened to have baby-faces. Shortly after losing their liquor license business died and they were forced to close. David spent the past two months floundering around between jobs, the rent increase was sort of a fitting end.

"You're right," David replied sadly, "but I feel like I'm leaving the greatest place in the world to go back to a cold, boring little town. I never thought I'd see that place again except for in photos."

"How's Kevin taking it?" Kevin was David's twenty-one year-old son who had moved out to Las Vegas from Haddock Bay not much more than a year before. He had, much like his father, grown tired of the slow-paced Northeastern town and was dreaming of the bright lights and excitement that Las Vegas brought. Kevin had quickly learned that visiting Las Vegas and living there were two totally different things.

"Oh, he's fine with it," David answered, "he is excited to see all the family back there." The bartender passed by and David put up two fingers signaling a fresh bottle for each of them. He then sucked down the last bit of foam and slid the empty toward the edge of the overly-shiny wood bar.

"Well, Brian is pretty bummed about you guys leaving." Brian was Stanley's thirteen-year-old son, he was very close with Kevin and was taking their departure harder than anyone not named David.

"Tell him I feel his pain, I don't want to head back to that icebox either." The bar erupted as a touchdown was scored in the playoff game but the noise barely fazed David. They began to notice that they were having to yell just to be heard and it was getting on their nerves. The two brothers quickly and quietly drank their fresh beers and exited the bar through the back door. There was still much to be done before departing on the bus for the east coast just after midnight.

Back at the apartment Kevin was finishing packing his large black suitcase and his carry-on bag which looked more like a college professor's leather satchel. Many of his really important things had been shipped ahead leaving him with only clothes, a portable cd-player, and a couple of notebooks. The clothes were what filled his suitcase while the notebooks and cd-player he kept to bring in his carry-on satchel. He was being helped by his cousin Brian who had been brought by his mother, Martha, to say goodbye. When he found out that his father was going to be dropping David off he begged her to let him stay until he returned. She relented after five minutes of constant badgering.

Kevin, done with his packing, stepped out onto the balcony of the second floor apartment. It was seasonably warm but still was dark at 5:30; the sunset times were one part of winter that could not be avoided. Off in the distance Kevin spotted the bright beam of light which shot from the top of the pyramid-style *Luxor* hotel and casino. It was almost like the North Star of Las

Vegas, you could tell which direction you were headed from the position of that beam of light. Brian stood next to Kevin on the balcony, down below were several people passing by. The apartment complex where they lived seemed to Kevin like a normal place, although he was wise not to venture too far off late at night as he had heard from a couple people that some of the gangs of the area commiserated under some of the carports then. At this point it seemed to Kevin like he was in a dream, as if everyone he saw was only a figment of his imagination. His mind was already back in Haddock Bay.

“Do you think you’ll ever come back?” Brian asked in a sweet and sad sounding voice. Kevin gazed off toward The Strip, it was always as bright as daytime in that area, but in his neighborhood it was not much different than any other mid-sized town.

“Who knows? I mean I know that I can’t make it here on my own right now, so I really have no other choice but to go with my Dad back to New Hampshire.” Brian looked down to the parking lot below at the group of people congregating, he was not happy with Kevin’s answer. Being young still he could not fully grasp the concept of financial independence, and it was something that Kevin could not really make him understand. While the two cousins stood on in the cool evening air, David and Stanley entered through the front door. Kevin poked his head back inside.

“Oh, hey Dad,” he said. David gave a half-hearted salute with two fingers against his brow. Normally a very funny and jovial person, David had not been the same since he had come to the realization that he would have to move out of Las Vegas some two weeks earlier. Brian made sure to come inside also to let Stanley know he was there.

“Hey, what are you doing here?” Stanley asked in surprise.

“Mom was bringing me over to say goodbye,” he began, “and when she heard you were going to be bringing Uncle Dave back she let me stay.”

“So how’d it go at the pawn shop?” Kevin asked. David shook his head.

“The bum only gave me two hundred. I told him I had some high quality stuff there, like my Three Stooges clock, my autographed photo of Eddie Albert, you know that guy from *Green Acres*. I also had my set of antique paper clips. He only liked the television, microwave, and a few other small things.”

“What are you going to do with the rest of the stuff? Not to mention the stuff still in here?” Now David gave a smirk.

“Oh, don’t worry about that, son.” He said with a devilish grin. “All of the stuff we can carry is going out to the dumpster.” Kevin looked around, the living room still had a couch and chair, not to mention the dining room table and chairs.

“Oh, what are you going to do with your food, and plates, and such?” Stanley asked inquisitively. Dave shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t know? Do you want them?” Stanley smiled widely and motioned to Brian.

“Come on Brian, we’re going shopping!” Stanley made his way to the kitchen and grabbed a thick black trash bag from a box under the sink. “Hold that, boy,” he said handing the bag to Brian. Still dressed in his school clothes, Brian held the trash bag as far away from his as he could to avoid getting any sort of mess on them.

The first place Stanley checked was the refrigerator; he had hoped to find some stray beers but there was no such luck. It was pretty slim pickings but he did manage to take a couple sticks of butter and a jar of mustard.

“What the hell do you want with the mustard?” David asked in disbelief.

“Hey, it’s not just mustard, it’s Dijon, ooh la la!” He thought about taking the ice cube trays but that seemed a bit tacky even to Stanley. One by one he went through the cabinets quickly whipping them open and closed. He tossed a loaf of white bread into the bag, along with two bags of potato chips, one opened and one unopened. While the supermarket sweep was going on Kevin made his way into his room to check if there was anything that needed to be thrown away. The room was pretty barren as Kevin had been slowly but surely emptying it out over the past few nights. He grabbed his clothes hamper and laundry basket first and headed back toward the kitchen.

“Do you want either of these?” He asked Stanley.

“Nah, a clothes hamper is kind of nasty,” he said as he gingerly lay a bunch of bananas into the steadily filling trash bag. Kevin headed out the front door and down the stairway. It was a narrow squeeze with only a black metal railing separating him from the ground below. Once safely on the concrete walkway he looked back and wondered to himself how they were going to get a couch or a chair down those stairs without killing themselves. There was hardly enough room for two people to stand side by side at the top of the stairway, let alone a tacky, yellow, Twinkie-like couch.

The dumpster was located on the far side of the parking lot. Kevin had to pass by all of the cars parked under the carport before reaching the large, green trash container. He dropped his items and very timidly reached for the plastic flap covering the dumpster. He flipped it open and almost immediately the scent of week old trash hit him like a punch in the nose. The garbage truck would not arrive until the next morning. The trash level was close to the top which was heavenly for the hoards of flies hovering in and around the dumpster. Kevin lofted his clothes hamper and laundry basket up and into the container, they did not make any sort of sound thanks to the cushioning of the week’s worth of trash. He did not bother to close the flap as he did not feel like touching that filthy thing again.

On his way back to the apartment Kevin ran into some of the people that he and Brian had seen from the balcony before. One of them was Kevin’s closest friend he had made since moving to Las Vegas: Rory Daniels. Rory was tall and skinny with an affinity for leather jackets. He looked rather menacing to most with his thick handlebar moustache and shaved head, but in reality was a very nice guy. He spotted Kevin and waved him over. They shook hands.

“Hey Kev,” Rory said warmly, “what’s up?” Kevin stopped to lean against one of the thick, square, metal poles that held up the carport.

“Oh, yeah, my Dad and I have to move back home to New Hampshire.” In the suddenness of their planning Kevin had totally forgotten to let Rory know he was leaving. In fact it had only been ten days since Kevin got word that they were going to have to move. He hadn’t even been able to give his bosses at *On The Mark Sporting Goods* a full two-weeks notice. They were none too happy with him but Kevin could not have cared less, he had spent most of his time there slacking off.

He had once remarked to a fellow employee: “If they’re gonna pay me like a 9th Grader then I am going to work like one!” Rory looked shocked at the news of Kevin’s leaving.

“Oh man,” he moaned, “that sucks. When are you leaving?”

“Tonight.” This revelation sent Rory over the edge. He jumped to attention waving his arms wildly.

“What?! Well what if I hadn’t been here? You were just going to go and not tell me?”

“Look, dude, it’s not a situation I am too cool with either. It kind of came up in a flash,

the rent increase is a killer.” Rory nodded in agreement.

“Yeah, I hear you. It’s a good thing that we rent a room to those two Russian exchange students or we’d be out too.” Kevin was confused as asking about how others paid their rent was something he thought was taboo.

“Wait, how does that help you?”

“Oh, well, you see we placed a web camera in their room and charge people a fee to watch the live feed on their computer! Isn’t that great?” Kevin frowned in disapproval.

“No, it’s not cool,” he growled. “You mean to tell me that all this time I could have been watching hot Russian girls mess around?! Dude, you suck! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t know if you were into that stuff. Plus if they ever found out I’d lose my cash cow and be out on the streets like you, no offense. Hey I tell you what, I’ll give you the web address and you can sign up. I’ll even let you view for free!”

“Okay, that’s fair. I have to go grab some more things to toss out.”

“So, what time is your flight?”

“We’re not flying. We’re taking a bus.” Rory’s eyes lit up.

“A bus? Oh man, I’ve always wanted to go on a road trip. Is it cool if I come?”

“You mean you actually want to take a bus cross country? My Dad and I are pretty bummed about it.”

“Oh God yeah, it would be one of those cool ‘back to basics’ deals. Sort of like camping but not being in the woods.” The odd analogy was lost on Kevin but he could see Rory was very adamant about accompanying them.

“I don’t see why not as long as you pay for yourself. My Dad is pretty ripped that he is leaving anyway so he wouldn’t care who I brought along.” Rory jumped in the air and clicked his shoes together like a cheesy cartoon character.

“What time do we leave?”

“I think the bus leaves at midnight, so we’d probably go a little before that.”

“Okay, I am gonna go pack and I’ll be out here at 11:30.”

“That sounds fine with me,” Kevin concluded. They gave a quick fist-bump and went their separate ways. When he rounded the corner of the building and looked up toward the apartment door Kevin saw only the back end of the off-yellow couch, without the cushions, wedged in the doorway. He trotted up the stairs, his feet making a hollow ‘ping’ on each of the hollow metal steps.

“Grab the end of the couch, Kevin,” David hollered from inside the living room. Kevin didn’t question it, he just grabbed hold wherever there weren’t loose nails and where his hands fit and tried to pull. The couch squeaked from the strain against the metal door frame.

“Dad, I think it’s gonna bust, or bust the doorway,” Kevin told him. By this time Stanley was on the other end pushing, it left Kevin stuck between the end of the couch and the railing. He gave up his end once he felt a little give in the railing. He did not feel like spending his last night in Las Vegas exploring the inside of a hospital. “What are you trying to do?” He yelled over the top of the tacky off-yellow couch.

“I am trying to get this beast of a couch outside,” David said succinctly.

“I figured that, but there’s no way you’re gonna be able to turn it and head down the stairs.” David smiled.

“Oh, I am not looking to push it down the stairs,” he uttered, “this baby’s going over the railing.” Kevin put his hand to his forehead in disbelief.

“You don’t think that’s dangerous?”

“No. Now get the hell in here and help us push.” Rather than waste time arguing Kevin hopped onto the couch and into the living room in one quick motion. Brian was standing behind the two adults seemingly in a daze watching their brilliant plan unfold. David and Stanley were positioned on either side, Kevin was in the middle. Together they gave a mighty push; the couch squeaked loudly but it moved. Soon it was halfway out the door pushing against the railing. “All right,” David called out like a football quarterback in the huddle, “here’s what we do. We push the couch up and over the railing.” Stanley and Kevin looked on in anticipation. David frowned. “That’s it. We push it over. What are you waiting for?”

The three men pushed and the couch lifted, it stood up against the railing for all to see. Then, before anyone had the chance to think it over, they grabbed onto the wooden frame and lifted. It was a struggle but the couch cleared the three and a half foot black metal railing without tearing it from the concrete. The off-yellow eyesore crashed to the ground below with a loud crack. The wood frame shattered inside the fabric but the couch held its shape.

“Quick, let’s go!” David shouted as he flew down the flight of stairs toward the remains of the couch. Stanley and Kevin followed. The three men took their positions and lifted the couch. It was much harder to manage now since the couch had been smashed, it was like carrying an oversized bean bag chair. They waddled as fast as they could toward the dumpster trying their best not to make eye contact with any of the people who had emerged at the sound of the crash.

The dumpster lid was still opened from when Kevin had made his run. Stanley, David, and Kevin pushed the couch straight up against the side of the green trash container. As they had done before they lifted the couch up and into the dumpster. The weight of it allowed it to sink down almost halfway into the trash but no more.

“Well, that’s not too bad,” Stanley said in an unsatisfied tone. David was already on his way back to the apartment. Kevin followed, but he looked back and couldn’t help but notice how the couch looked like a giant Twinkie sticking out of the top of the dumpster. Some neighbors were standing under the carport looking at the three of them as they passed by. Kevin felt compelled to give some sort of explanation.

“That couch was infested with roaches,” he fibbed, “we just found them and had no time to waste.” Given that the average tenant of the complex was not exactly a Rhodes scholar, Kevin’s explanation appeased the crowd without questions and they dispersed. Stanley, David, and Kevin reconvened in the living room. It looked very empty without the couch.

“What do you want to do next?” Stanley asked. David looked around at the sparse furniture still remaining and stroked his salt and pepper-colored beard.

“Eh, that was a little too close with the couch,” he admitted, “plus it’s getting dark.”

“Do you want to just leave everything else?” Kevin asked his father. David picked up one of the three off-yellow couch cushions, slapped it hard with an open hand, and twirled it around gently.

“No, I have an idea.” He went out onto the balcony and, without hesitation, tossed the cushion over on top of the carport parallel to the window. It landed with nary a sound and David turned back toward the others and smiled. He walked back in and grabbed the other two cushions, one in each hand, and headed back out. Those were also unceremoniously deposited onto the carport.

Next up David strolled down into the bedroom where Kevin had slept and reappeared

with four pillows. Those were abruptly heaved across and onto the carport as well. Kevin could only look on and wonder if his father had officially lost his mind; then he spoke and removed all doubt.

“Okay, so here’s the plan,” David said calmly, “the chairs we can carry out and throw away. But the TV stand and the dining room table we can throw over there on top of the pillows and cushions.” He pointed over toward the open slider door.

“You can’t be serious,” Kevin said.

“Why not? They won’t make much noise.” Kevin looked at Stanley, begging him to intervene.

“Uh, well maybe Kevin’s right,” Stanley interjected. “We could just leave all that stuff in here.”

“I don’t think so,” David replied, “this is my final goodbye to this place and I want to thank them so much for doubling my rent and forcing me to move out. So I am going to toss my furniture onto the carport whether you help me or not.” Stanley and Kevin bowed their heads; they knew David was not going to budge from his position.

“All right, Dad,” Kevin said, “if it will make you feel better, we will toss the stuff out there.” It began easily enough with the relatively light, and poorly constructed, TV stand. It was made of wood but to Kevin it seemed like something you’d make in 8th Grade shop class. It went over the balcony and landed on top of the carport with barely a whimper. Feeling a little more comfortable with the reckless acts they were performing Kevin turned his attention to his half-sized dresser in his bedroom. It was a bit heavier but that was solved by removing each of the drawers and tossing the white object across the three or four-foot canyon that separated the edge of the balcony from the carport. The dresser made a bit of a racket which made all of them cringe. Rather than keep throwing things out they decided to lay low for a bit and carry out the chairs and drawers while the heat died down. They sat on the living room floor and told stories about the old days when Stanley and David were young to kill time; the things they did back then always made Kevin laugh.

They resumed their furniture tossing about a half hour later. The only thing David was adamant about getting rid of was the black wooden dining room table.

“That damn thing has to go,” he insisted. Kevin couldn’t understand what exactly the table had done to David but he spoke of it like an ex-wife. The table was dragged over to the slider door. It was not possible to simply slide it out and toss it, the legs of the table saw to that. David was not to be deterred, he flipped the table over and began to feverishly jerk at one of the legs. “Come on,” he grunted, “you guys get working on the other legs. I don’t care how you get ‘em off, just yank!” Stanley, Kevin, and Brian each grabbed a leg and began pulling. Kevin’s leg was the first to detach, the wood gave a loud crack before giving way. He slipped back and had to brace himself against the wall.

“Well, I did my part,” he joked while waving the slender piece of wood in his hand. After removing their respective legs, Stanley and David helped Brian. He was sitting on the floor grabbing at the final leg looking like he was trying to row a boat. Once the last leg of the black wooden table was removed, the pieces were left in a pile on the floor while they raised the table on its side and slid it out onto the balcony. It was pitch black outside, though the parking area was dotted with lights, so it was difficult to judge where the carport began. The table was lifted by Stanley and David up over their heads.

“On the count of three we heave it over, all right?” David asked. Stanley agreed.

“One...two...three!” The two brothers took one step forward and launched the table like they were making an overhead pass in basketball. Off into the darkness the wooden projectile flew. Off into the distance, and right over the carport! The table crashed flat-side down in the parking lot with a horrendous noise. It sounded like somebody setting off firecrackers. David and Stanley gave a wide-eyed look at each other and took off for the door leaving Brian and Kevin to duck down on the balcony so as not to be seen.

A minute later they could hear their fathers down below in the parking lot muttering to each other, collecting the table, and heading off for the dumpster. The two cousins crawled back into the apartment afraid to stand up. Soon Stanley came back in the front door.

“Come on, Brian,” he said hastily, “we’ve got to go.”

“But don’t we have to take Kevin and Uncle Dave to the bus station?” Brian asked confused.

“Yeah but we don’t have to leave here until after 11:00, that gives us about four hours to kill.” David by this time had wandered up the stairs, he was keeping a look out for anyone who might have seen or heard the table incident.

“So, you guys gonna go?” David asked as he closed the door behind him.

“Yeah, there’s still plenty of time before the bus leaves. So I’ll bring Brian home and come back for you guys around 11:00, okay?”

“That’s fine,” David replied, “don’t forget your groceries.” He pointed to the black trash bag lying in a heap next to the refrigerator. Stanley grabbed hold of it and exited the apartment with Brian. David and Kevin stood alone in the living room of the apartment which was nearly empty now. Even the floor and table lamps had all been thrown away, only the terribly bright, overhead light remained.

“Well Dad,” Kevin said breaking the silence, “I guess we’ve done all that can be done here.” David nodded silently and walked out onto the balcony; this time with nothing but his thoughts. Kevin did not intrude, he understood that his father was hurting. Kevin instead went back into his room where he checked his bags again and sat on the bare mattress of his bed.

Eventually growing tired of the sad silence that his father was giving off, Kevin took a walk out of the apartment complex and across the street to *McDonalds* where he grabbed his ‘last meal’ in Las Vegas. He ate in the restaurant which was sparsely filled. It was not that he minded leaving Las Vegas to return home, in fact he welcomed seeing members of his family he hadn’t seen in a year. Deep down, Kevin felt badly that his father had to leave too. Vegas was David’s dream and he was taking it like a relationship was ending; it was a sad sight.

After eating Kevin walked across to the *Day And Night* convenience store. Along the wall inside was a counter holding four video slot machines. It was so normal for Kevin to see slot machines in nearly every business he entered now that he barely batted an eye. Many times he would go to the grocery store and find himself seated at a Keno machine pissing away his food money. After a couple of times blowing most of his meager pay check on gambling Kevin had realized that Las Vegas was unlike any other city.

He bought himself a couple magazines to read on the long bus trip home, one sports card magazine and a gossip-type entertainment magazine. The latter was mostly for the photos of Hollywood’s most beautiful actresses. For old time’s sake Kevin plopped himself in front of one of the slot machines and used the two quarters he had in his change to play a couple of games. After losing the quarters he slid a five-dollar bill into the machine and played some more. The only thing that kept Kevin from playing, and most likely losing all of his money, was the fact that

it was after 9:00 and he needed to get back to the apartment. He had the gambling bug and deep down was glad to be getting away from the temptation.

The apartment complex was a block away and it was night time. In many places this would be a dangerous mix, but Kevin always had felt safe walking the streets of his part of Las Vegas anytime. Although he had heard stories of illicit activities in the surrounding area he had never seen in person so he just turned a naive ear to what was said.

He wandered in through a side entrance to the complex and eventually came upon his building. The blinding overhead light in the living room shone even through the closed vertical blinds. Inside the apartment, David was sitting on the floor, cross-legged against the wall, reading the liner notes of The Beatles' *Abbey Road*. He barely even looked up when Kevin entered.

"Hey Dad," he said trying to get a reaction from David. "What time is Uncle Stan coming?"

"In a couple of hours," David replied. Kevin decided not to try to force a conversation and instead took his favorite perch leaning against the balcony outside. He looked and found the beam of light from The Luxor and stared at it for a while. He thought momentarily about all of the insane things that were probably happening at that very moment down on The Strip. He figured maybe one day he'd come back and experience them for himself. Father and son stayed silent until Stanley came back.

It was just after 11:00 when Stanley knocked at the front door. David had drifted off to sleep still seated against the wall, his head hung down into his chest. Kevin had already read both of the magazines he had bought at *Day And Night* and was now wondering what he was going to do on the bus ride. He heard the knocking on the door and answered it.

"Hey, you guys ready to go?" Stanley asked. He too looked as though he had just awakened. The fact that he was wearing a pair of pajama pants along with his long sleeved windbreaker led Kevin to believe that he had been sleeping.

"I think we'll need just a few minutes," Kevin replied nodding in David's direction.

"Yo, Dave," Stanley called out, "it's time to go." David rose his head slowly and squinted from the powerful overhead light.

"What time is it?" He asked.

"It's just after 11," Stanley answered, "we've got to get moving." David struggled to his feet and yawned. He rubbed his eyes gently and began searching for his bags. Kevin was already heading out the door and to the black mini-van. As per usual Stanley had left it unlocked which allowed Kevin to toss his black suitcase and leather satchel into the far back seat. He then trotted across the grassy area, which housed the fenced in, and rarely cleaned, swimming pool, to alert Rory that they were leaving. Rory's apartment was on the ground floor, Kevin knocked as loudly as he could. A minute or so later Rory opened the door.

"Hey Kev," he said, "what's going on?"

"Are you coming with us?" Kevin asked impatiently. Rory gave a confused look.

"Going where?" Kevin sighed and shook his head in disbelief. From the other room Kevin could hear what sounded like people watching a sporting event.

"What's going on in there?" Rory looked briefly over his shoulder.

"Oh, Yulia and Sasha brought a guy home from a bar and so we're watching them on the webcam." He said it as if it was common place. The hoots and shouts were very loud and Kevin

was tempted to wander in and see what all the fuss was about; but he knew time was running out.

“Are you going to come with us on the bus back to New Hampshire, or not?”

“Oh, yeah, yeah,” Rory replied. He disappeared for a split second and reemerged with a single navy blue duffle bag. “I am packed and ready.”

“Sweet, let’s hit the road.” Rory stepped out but paused under the yellow front light.

“Hey guys,” he shouted back inside, “I’m going to New Hampshire. I’ll be back in a week or so!” Not one of the guys answered, they just kept on shouting at the computer screen. Kevin wondered how the two Russian girls could not know that they were being watched with all of the hollering and cat calls from right down the hallway. Rory closed the door behind him and followed Kevin toward the black mini-van.

Stanley and David were only now coming down the stairs toward the parking lot. David looked a bit discombobulated after being startled from a sound sleep; he stumbled a bit as he walked. Kevin slid the side door open again and Rory climbed in with his duffle bag in hand. David tossed his lone green suitcase in the way back seat with Kevin’s bags, the rest of what he needed to carry on the bus would be kept in the pockets of his slightly off-white Izod winter jacket. David was so out of it that he did not even notice the stowaway Rory in the middle seat when he entered the front passenger-side door. Stanley, however, did notice him right away.

“Hey, who’s that?” He asked Kevin. He sat in the driver’s seat and flicked on the tiny, square car light in the ceiling. Rory squinted a bit.

“Oh, you know Rory,” Kevin replied, “he’s gonna come with us out to New Hampshire.” Rory smiled in concurrence with Kevin’s story.

“You’re gonna go 3,000 miles for fun?” Stanley asked flabbergasted.

“Sure, why not,” Rory said, “I’ve got nothing better to do.” David gave a steely glare and Stanley looked as though he wanted to interrogate Rory some more, but knowing that time was short he started up the mini-van and they were on their way.

Dreamality

That shrill beeping. The once terrible sound of my alarm clock going off had now become my saving grace. Five straight nights; for five straight nights I'd had the same haunting dream. I had always had nightmares growing up, doesn't everyone? But this was different. I wasn't being chased, or shot at, or eaten by zombies; in fact in this nightmare nothing was physically happening to me. It was the feeling of paralysis, of helplessness that scared me most. I wasn't seeing or hearing terrible things; it seemed that in this nightmare all of my senses were dulled. Sights were blurred, noises were muffled, all I could take from my nightmare was the heaviness. I felt a heaviness holding me down wherever I was; that was the feeling which caused the cold sweats in the morning sunlight.

What did it mean? Why was I seeing the same thing night after night? It was times like these that I wished I had one of those dream interpretation books, maybe I was subconsciously telling myself something. I sat up in bed for what seemed like forever, staring at the hardwood floor, trying desperately to pull one more fresh image from my mind, something that would tie all of these loose ends together. Directly to my right was the only window in my bedroom, with the shade down only faint trickles of light were allowed in. I dared not open the shade for fear that I might lose any memory of this most recent nightmare.

Slowly I rose from my queen-sized bed upon realizing that it was already after 7:00am leaving me less than an hour to get ready for work. After adjusting my black boxer briefs I tried my best to get ready for work but I was distracted. I guess after five straight nights it was getting more difficult to just forget about it. I was able to pull myself together long enough to wedge myself into my cramped bathroom and brush my teeth and hair. The coffee maker was too slow for my liking and I ended up pouring a cup of steaming hot java while it was still percolating. The flow of coffee sizzled on the hot plate and subsequently streamed onto the counter and the linoleum of the kitchen floor. I was in such a haze from my nightmare that all I could manage to do was unplug the coffee maker and drop a yellow rag onto the puddle of coffee on the floor. I grabbed my black leather briefcase while I struggled to tighten my tie. It was a disastrous scene being so discombobulated I was surprised I was able to turn a doorknob. Once the front door was shut and locked I stumbled my way across the grass, completely ignoring the white sea-shell walkway I had spent so much time creating. I managed to get into my Chevy Blazer but once I closed my door and the silence fell my mind went racing back to what little I could remember about last night.

All I kept seeing was a bright blur that hurt my eyes along with muffled sounds as if someone was speaking into a towel; none of it made any sense. I rested my head on the cold steering wheel and closed my eyes. Time must have passed quickly because the next thing I knew my neighbor, Jim Jones, was giving a concerned tap at my window. He was a middle-aged man but in great shape, tanned, but with white hair. He told me that he had been up early mowing his lawn and noticed me getting into the car. When he finished the lawn and saw my car still in the driveway he figured he'd come see if everything was all right. Jim was a very thoughtful neighbor, he and his wife Lorraine often baked me desserts. They treated me like I was their own child. I tried my best to steady my head which felt like it was made of lead. It was bobbing from side to side. I rolled down my window and thanked him for waking me.

"Thanks, Mr. Jones," I muttered, "I was out late last night and I guess I am trying to steal as many Z's as possible." I smiled but that didn't take the concerned look from Jim Jones' face.

"Alright, Al," he replied, "me and Lorraine have just been concerned about you this past

week. You seem different since Erin left.” Not being able to focus very well I brushed off his comments.

“Well, I am running late. Don’t want to keep the boss waiting.” I started up my engine which roared loudly and echoed throughout the suburban neighborhood. I backed out of my cracked concrete driveway leaving Jim Jones waving as he went back to his yard. I shook off the visions of my nightmare as well as the sleepiness that was holding me and crept off to work at a very slow, deliberate pace. Luckily for me the insurance company where I worked was only a twenty minute commute and required no highway travel; in my condition I’d be risking many lives on the highway. On the other side of town lay *Horace & Horace Insurance*, my job for the past three years. The building was quite impressive and stood out from the other neighboring office building; it was that impressive stature that led me to believe that this was the place for me. I slunk into the parking lot as best I could with a loud SUV and parked in the last row of the parking lot.

I had arrived only fifteen minutes late and, though I did receive several awkward stares as I made my way through the office lobby, my tardiness was soon forgotten as it was a rarity. Still, sitting at my desk on the third floor overlooking the rushing cars of the main street, I began to slip back into detective mode like when I awakened. I hated loose ends, and this recurring nightmare was a loose end. The more I tried to ignore it the more the thoughts of the heaviness of my nightmare overwhelmed me. I opened my leather briefcase and lay some papers on my desk in front of me to make it appear that I was hard at work. I made sure that the manilla envelope with the name ‘Anderson’ on it was face-up; the Anderson account was my most important work and nobody would dare to bother me while I worked on that. I rested my head in my hands and zoned out while staring at the neatly typed words which all began running together.

Nobody in the office noticed my lack of movement until I began to snore, or at least that's what they said. One of my coworkers, Andy North, gently shook me awake. Andy was also a friend and we often looked out for each other in the cut throat world of Horace & Horace. He was a hefty fellow, a former high school wrestler, but after years of an office job he was no longer in athletic shape.

“Hey, I just wanted to make sure you don’t get yelled at by Mr. Horace,” he said in an Andy North whisper, which was a normal speaking voice.

“Thanks man,” I said as I yawned, “I was out late last night and it’s still kicking my ass.” I had to keep the lie going because no twenty-seven-year-old man wants to admit that he is having terrible nightmares.

“Did you get lucky?” He asked with a not so subtle wink. I looked around at the other cubicles as I was certain that there were people listening.

“Nah, it was a dog show last night,” I said chuckling. Andy laughed as well and slapped me hard on my back. After he headed back to his cubicle I tried to refocus on work but was unsuccessful. Seeing that it was close enough I decided to take an early lunch; I thought eating might be a good distraction.

At 11:00am the small office cafeteria was quiet. I slipped in and grabbed a Styrofoam bowl of soup and a salad. There were eight small round tables in the cafeteria, it was intentionally too small so that not all of the employees could eat at once. Mr. Horace had introduced little changes in the workplace that I figured were either to increase productivity or were because he was an evil old man.

I sat at the round table closest to the corner to make sure I could see anyone who came in through the loud, wooden double doors. At first my plan worked: Eating calmed my frazzled mind. It did not last. My mind began to drift off into a daydream when out of nowhere in the kitchen area some metal bowls were dropped in a clutter of loud bangs. Shortly thereafter muffled voices were heard conversing. I turned my head to look outside at the man-made garden area; the sun was brightly shining and hurt my eyes. I began to hyperventilate feeling as if I was back in my nightmare. I spun my head around, it felt as if the walls were spinning and then closing in on me. Already edgy beyond belief I put my head on the table and covered my head with my arms while trying to catch my breath.

When I figured it to be 'safe' I raised my head. The two cafeteria workers who had been conversing in the kitchen were standing over me looking at me in a peculiar way, it made me very uncomfortable.

"Hey, kid," the heavy, older female with a wiry hairnet over her greying hair said in a raspy voice. "You got something on your face." I lifted my shaking right hand and proceeded to remove a large leaf of Romaine lettuce which had become stuck to my face after I lay my head down and into my salad.

"Thank you," I politely replied. My face became bright red from the hyperventilation and embarrassment. My lunch break ended soon after.

Returning to my desk was not pleasant; I simply could not concentrate on my work and it showed. I would sit and try hard to focus but would have to get up and walk around the office when the visions and heaviness of my nightmare began to overtake me. This nightmare was now leaving the bedroom with me and seeping into every facet of my life. I fumbled and staggered through my paperwork as best I could. For the remaining four hours of my day I would work for ten minutes and follow that up with a long and drawn out trip to either the water cooler or the bathroom. My mind was gone. When the clock struck 4:00pm I packed my folders and files into my leather briefcase to bring home. My shoulders were slumped as I began my walk to the elevator; it wasn't that I minded doing my work at home I just felt so worn out from worrying about my nightmare. I needed time to decompress but it wouldn't happen tonight.

Before I got into the elevator I was met by a living nightmare: My boss Mr. Horace. He was a short, stocky man with wrinkles like moon craters. He was a man who had seen it all in his 65 years on Earth and had little or no sympathy for anyone's personal problems. I was cornered and had no choice but to take him up on his request of a talk in his office. I was scared to death and was not able to hide it well.

Mr. Horace's office was almost always dimly lit to help with his constant migraine headaches; the small green reader's lamp on his oversized desk was usually enough light for him. The monstrous desk he sat at had been brought it the day after he became the majority owner of the company and subsequently fired his brother ten years earlier. I had heard the story of his brother's reaction when he was fired a million times as if it was Mr. Horace's crowning achievement. Mr. Horace had not had a warm relationship with his brother and took great pleasure in Fed-Exing him a pink slip and a severance check. The story always ended with a long hard laugh and a satisfied sigh from the crusty old businessman.

I sat down in one of the two lavish leather seats which faced his king-sized black leather throne of a chair. It was always intimidating to be in the presence of Mr. Horace, I believed that he set up his office to enhance that feeling. His desk was set up on a riser which put it a foot off of the ground allowing him to look down on his lowly employees. I was not a frequent visitor to

the boss' office but it gave me the same primal fears as if I was in the principal's office. I tried my best to hide my fear, but my fidgeting hands gave me away. I waited nervously for the man to speak as he took his time getting comfortable in his chair.

"Son, I called you in here for a reason," he said in a stern yet cracking voice. "I have noticed that your work has been lacking for a little while." I could feel the cold beads of sweat beginning to form on my forehead. I had a bad feeling as to what was coming next. "I am worried about you." I opened my eyes wide and quickly snapped myself out of my self-pity.

"Worried? Why?" I could not muster up anything else to say. Mr. Horace leaned forward which caused the green desk lamp to reflect off of his glasses making them appear to be flashlights.

"A couple of your fellow workers were the ones that brought it to my attention," Mr. Horace continued after clearing his throat. "They have noticed that your mind appears to be elsewhere." It caught me off guard that Mr. Horace for once was acting like a normal human being. It made me start to see him in a different light despite the fact that the dim light in his office made him look more like a corpse than a live person.

"I am sorry, sir," I said pathetically, "I will try harder." He waved a long bony finger at me which stopped my apologizing.

"Tell me son, is there anything going on at home? Anything you might want to talk about?" I thought about lying and saying everything was alright, but then that would make my recent string of unproductive days look worse. I decided to come clean.

"Well, to be honest sir, I have been having trouble sleeping due to terrible recurring nightmares." I chuckled a little due to the nervousness of being twenty-seven and complaining about bad dreams. "It's not something I am proud to admit." I stared at the floor like a child who was getting ready to be punished but Mr. Horace put my fears at ease in a kind, grandfatherly way.

"Everyone has their own problems," he said with a withered smile, "none of them seem trivial when you are going through them." He then slipped me a business card with the name James Wilson, psychiatrist, on it. "Dr. Wilson is an old friend of mine, we went to college together. I think he'd be able to help you get rid of you bad dreams." Just when I had almost completely change my view of Mr. Horace he snapped back to his normal, malevolent self. "By the way, that trip to the shrink, it's mandatory." He pointed the same bony finger at me in a more menacing way. I nodded and stuck the business card in my pants pocket. After I meekly thanked him, I slunk my way out of his dark lair leaving Mr. Horace perched at his desk like a gargoyle on a ledge.