



The Vaguest Notion

2012-2013



The Vaguest Notion



A publication of the Division of Humanities
in collaboration with Rickman Library

Editors: Jenna Doud, Kaitlyn Dunagan, Dillon Groves,
Keonna Palmer, & Cassy Woodall

Faculty Sponsors: Dr. Paul Schleifer & Erin Washington

Cover Photo by Jonathan Stegenga

Copyright© April, 2013
Southern Wesleyan University

The Vaguest Notion is a trademark publication of Southern Wesleyan University. It is a magazine celebrating the creativity harbored at SWU. The respective authors of each literary or artistic submission retain exclusive rights to their work, and any unauthorized reproduction or display of those works is an infringement of copyright.

Table of Contents

Untitled Photo	Jenna Doud	pg 3
“The Swinging Door”	Michelle Cison	pg 4
Untitled Photo	Jonathan Stegenga	pg 5
“Colorless Walls”	Nick Shear	pg 6
“The Face of a God”	Jared Wigington	pg 7
Untitled Photo	Jonathan Stegenga	pg 8
“Flying”	Dr. Paul Shotsberger	pg 9
“Modern Cassandra”	Dr. Paul Schleifer	pg 10
Untitled Poem	Addai Lazo	pg 11
Untitled Photo	Sofia Gomez	pg 12
“Shall a Beam”	Nick Shear	pg 13
Untitled Photo	Anna Argot	pg 14
“Hour Glass”	Perry Gutierrez	pg 15
Untitled Photo	Amanda Williams	pg 15
“could i be?”	Ashley Cooper	pg 16
“Nicaragua One”	Dr. Paul Shotsberger	pg 16
“God is Real”	Kristina McKinley	pg 17
Untitled Photo	Meagan Williams	pg 18
“the difference”	Ashley Cooper	pg 19
“Icefall”	Sofia Gomez	pg 19
“How I Met God”	Grace Merkert	pg 20
“Pump Pump Pump”	Will Henderson	pg 21
“Nicaragua Two”	Dr. Paul Shotsberger	pg 23
“Cody”	Tessa Morrison	pg 23
“this isn’t just poetry”	Ashley Cooper	pg 24
“The Explosive Silence	Josh Martin	pg 25
Untitled Photo	Anna Argot	pg 25
“The Dance of Redemption & Change”	Will Henderson	pg 27
Untitled Photo	Jonathan Stegenga	pg 28
“Paper Cuts”	Jared Wigington	pg 29
Untitled Artwork	Cherilyn Ramsey	pg 33
Untitled Photo	Sofia Gomez	pg 33
“Annie”	Yikisha Miles	pg 34
Untitled Photo	Sofia Gomez	pg 42
“Eoghan & Naif”	Cassy Woodall	pg 43
Untitled Photo	Jonathan Stegenga	pg 44
Untitled Photo	Amanda Williams	pg 48



Jenna Doud

The Swinging Door

The door
A simple rectangle
Hung on hinges
Swinging
Back and forth
Open, closed,
Open, closed,
The exit.
The entrance.

The wrong door
Opens
At the right time
And charging through
Find ourselves
In the wrong room
At the wrong time

A thousand new
Doors open
Yet we hesitate
Fearfully. Realizing.
That none are
Correct. For us.
For all.

Finally, look back
Hoping that the
Wrong door will now
Be right
Praying that it is open

Finding ourselves again at the start.
The simple door
Hanging on hinges
Swinging
Back and forth
Open, closed,
Open, closed.

Michelle Cison



Jonathan Stegenga

Colorless Walls

Slowly dripping down the wall
A droplet of hope begins to fall
In a barren room draped in white
Falling straight down, not left nor right
A trail it leaves as it goes
Where it's been clearly shows
Alive with vigor, with no part dead
Anxiously approaching what lies ahead
Of unknown origin did it come
Leaving wrath-some suffering feeling numb
Although only being minute in size
The lonely droplet catches eyes
The further it falls, its speed doth slows
To the colorless wall its time thou owes
Until it hastes, and movests not
Which once was grand, now merely a dot
With absence of more of this element
Vanity is found in the time that is spent
For the drop of hope that began to fall
Slowly vanishing from the colorless wall

Nick Shear

The Face of a God

The red god of war,
the all-seeing “Father of Nations,”
immaculately dressed in parade finery,
armed with cold steel in cold hands,
all wielded with a colder heart.
Always near, always watching,
one face in a billion places.

The old familiar lie,
believed by wolves in sharp uniforms,
denied by eagles across the water,
endured by a nation of bears
forced into sheep’s clothing
by the command of
one face in a billion places

Hungry for lost lives,
starved for blood.
Inhaling the smoke of war,
the charnel house stench,
the last breaths of the dying,
keeping vigil over the graves with
one face in a billion places.

Deified in the ages hence,
he drove his realm to madness,
reaching past his grave,
with frigid bronze fingers,
forging humanity's path
into the fires of its cremation with
one face in a billion places.

Solid, intolerable, unforgiving.
Obstinate, doubtless, certain.
Ancient, unyielding, infinite.
Grinding His loyal subjects
into nameless, unremembered dust
under the unblinking gaze of
one face in a billion places.

Jared Wigington



Jonathan Stegenga



“Flying”

Dr. Paul Shotsberger

Modern Cassandra

It's a gift, don't you see?

We deserve it after all these years

Of suffering and poverty.

It's free; it costs us nothing.

But what if it's not free?

What if there is something

Anchored deep inside this seeming

gift. Something unexpected,

malevolent, unwanted, some-

thing that will hurt.

Angry, she was shrill to those who heard;

her words were scorned by those who knew;

Choosing, they ignored her admonitions

to accept the seeming gift.

Amazed, they embraced what seemed so good,

and then it was too late. Her

Revelation, lost forever, drifted from their minds,

lapping up the promised goods,

Embracing in their ignorance

what they did not know. And they did not

care that she offered liberty.

Dr. Paul Schleifer

“I’ll wait what I don’t know is coming
I aspire to inspire what others counter
I do anything without anything
I am an empty vessel seeking to be filled
Waiting on the day where I can say
Something that didn’t come from me
But came from something inside of me
The voice that suggests to ingest what I detest
While figuring out what I hate is what I have been loving
Seeing what was there beginning to disappear
My shadows of fear begin to work with me instead of against
While my vivid portraits of the painting of life portraying my pale withering
might!!!
I FALL UP!!!!!!!
While glazing to the Red-Ember Eyes
Seeing what was not there beginning to Appear”

Addai Lazo



Sofia Gomez

Shall a Beam

Shall a beam light life's way,
Or shall it shine upon an eternal grave?
Shall the songbirds awaken the soul,
Or shall it whither amongst the vole?
Shall the moon's illumination shine,
Or shall its flicker whence resign?
Shall the sea its tempest cease,
Or shall the maelstrom's wrath release?
Shall a burden last merely an hour,
Or shall it consume, possess, devour?
Shall a field be abundant with grain,
Or shall it be barren amidst the plain?
Shall a tree vivaciously live,
Or shall its leaves to the insects give?
Shall a heart endureth love,
Or shall it break, and die thereof?

Nick Shear

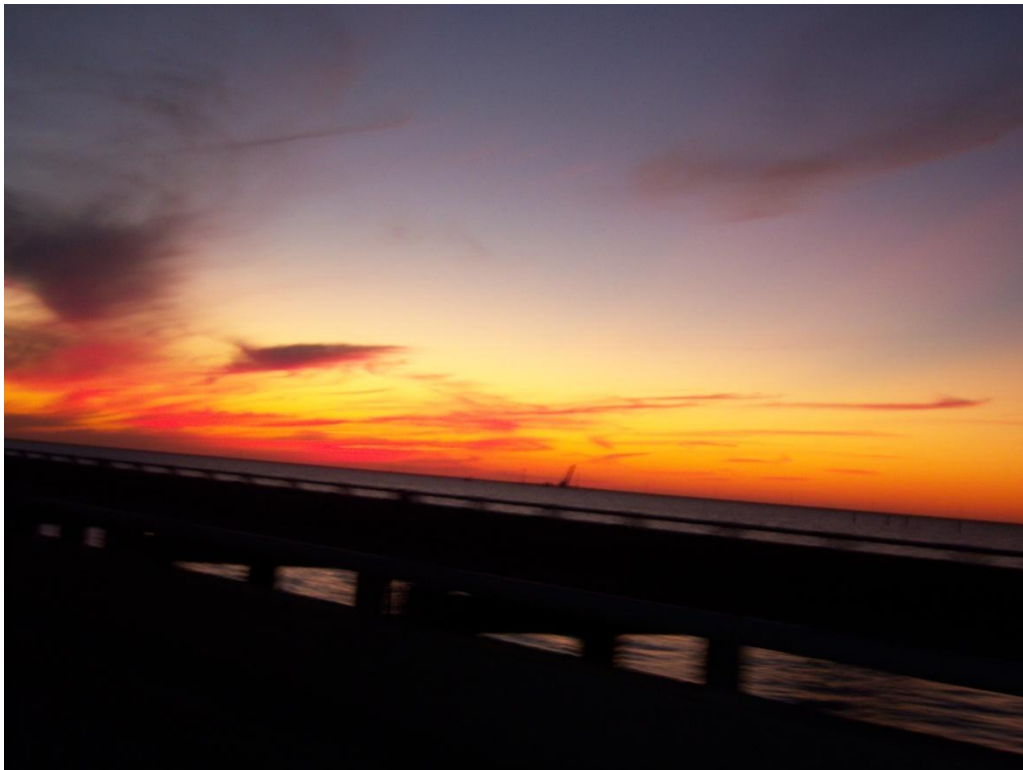


Anna Argot

Hour Glass

There stands an hour glass before me. With every grain of sand that falls so does my heart fall for you. Every day, hour, second that passes I realize just how much I care. Alas there will come a time were the sand will finish falling and I will have to move on. When this time span comes to an end I hope you realize despite the pain I will feel that your happiness is all that matters. Never the less the only reason it will hurt will be my own fault due to a fool's hope. A hope that maybe one night the sands will stop flowing and one night will never have to end.

Perry Gutierrez



Amanda Williams

could i be?

you died for me
you rose for me
you saved for me
for us
for humanity
you were the chosen one
the only one that mattered
you knew me
my heart
my path
you carved me out
shook me up
let me into the light
you saved me
when i couldn't save myself
can i save others
you were tortured
beat
abused physically and mentally
could i be tortured for your message?
could i be the one to spread your word?
could i be?
tortured for Christ

Ashley Cooper



Nicaragua One
Dr. Paul Shotsberger

God is Real

Your names to me are bowl, container, bucket, and vessel; not any old vessel, but a vessel of the truth. As a child, I'd doubted God's existence, in my maturity I noticed, He creatively used you.

Humans! Friends, family, classmates, and associates, I realize God is real when you breathe. I realize God is real when I feel joy, experiencing a presence going beyond human capabilities.

For so long I'd placed my trust on man. Until the evidence I retain shows me clearly: no one can love me like God can.

You humans, you all change. Yesterday, I looked at God and today, I realized, tomorrow He'll be the same.

People deceive with straight faces, like there is no proof. I see God's face, the creator of The Way, The Life, and The Truth.

My family comes in, goes out; they keep me company, and then leave me lonely. God then whispers softly, "I'll never forsake thee," as He holds me.

My friends vent to me, giving me loads of issues as though I don't have my own share. As I interceded on their behalf, God reminds me that He'd never give me no more than I can bear.

It's funny because, when I was running low, everybody seemed to hide, but it was only so that I'd understand all of my needs He'll supply.

When I was about to be set up for the kill, needing a lawyer and a doctor, no one, but God showed up, protecting me, yelling, "No weapon formed against you shall prosper!"

When I was hurting, heartbroken, depressed with tears that wouldn't cease, I turned to John 14:27 and read that He is my peace.

I remember I did God wrong, against His name I sinned. Unlike a person would do so easily, my heavenly Father forgave me and let me back in.

When I feel dumbfounded, I know that He is all knowing. When I feel blinded by life trials, I know faith in Him is all showing.

When I feel weak, I know that you all just might be weak too, I know that when I am weak He is strong, I won't even waste time coming to you.

When it seems like everybody is chasing me, just ready for the tackle, I know that there is no better place than to hide but in His tabernacle.

And when I'm tired and ready to give in, He plays in my head the death and resurrection of my savior, the one who died for humans, every girl, boy, lady, and man.

If that isn't enough, God, who created us to do things we put down, finds it not robbery to keep us alive and around.

He allows us to fail, which with Him is against all odds, but to be broken just to be fixed, just so that we can realize who is and isn't God.

I used to question, "Daddy, why would you allow people to hurt or harm me, your child, one of your prized possessions?" He replied to me, "So I can show the victim and also the criminal that I am God. Did you learn your lesson?"

With guilt in my heart, a new scenery of life in my mind, something genuine, whole I now feel. Like you, I am human. My human limits and imperfections show how God's wondrous glories are real.

Kristina McKinley



Meagan Williams

the difference

the moment when life becomes do regular
when everything becomes the same
a routine
a reminder of yourself to be regular
nothing is different
even if it was would anyone notice
notice a change if it was only inside
my heart
my soul
it changed but wasn't noticeable
is it so that you only want my outward appearance
my looks
the way i wear my hair
that is what you notice
and to think i was different

Ashley Cooper



Icefall of January or February 2013
Sofia Gomez

How I Met God

It was not in any great cathedral;
No angels singing ecstatic hymns,
No chariots of fire swooping low.
It was a small office, a small woman with
A soft voice that seemed almost afraid.
I told her my story, or a snippet at least
A smile plastered to my face, as always.
She proposed a prayer, as if I could refuse.
Eyes dutifully shut, my palms outstretched,
She mumbled the same useless jargon;
Clichéd words to an absent father,
Whispered rumors to an old family friend.
But then she clenched my hands tighter
As if she could feel me slipping to doubt.
She prayed *at* me then, as I have never heard:
She told me of my anger and pain
Of my distrust and hate, and she told me
It wouldn't last.
He would hold me in his hands and brush away
All of the bad into a dustpan
And take it to the dumpster himself.
Then her grip lessened, and she addressed Him again
Not shouting to someone in another room
But whispering a secret in His ear.
After amen, when she slid away,
I opened my eyes, and before me
Perched the LORD, pure and embodied.

And that was the hour I first believed.

Grace Merkert

Pump Pump Pump (A letter to society)

Here the tragedy in this society
No high class priority
Everybody does their own thing
Everybody loses their own game
Trying to pursue sex drugs and fame.
The outcasts, the punks, and the emos
The church looks at them and say they gotta go.
Where is the love coming down as grace like rain
Take away this suffering and pain and all this torture and shame.
My heart is the heartbeat of my chest, pump pump pump and you know the rest.
It's like an arcadian fire that is never put out.
A wild grizzly bear that will attack without a second doubt.
Pump pump pump
Tragedy will end.

All the kids in public schools
Trying to obey their parents' rule
Only to be crushed by their father's realistic mindset
Quenching the thirst to be imaginative.
Even quenching the desire to be conversative.
Parents, you want to help this generation?
Stand up and make a proclamation
Stop killing imagination
Pump Pump pump
Tragedy will end

To all the kids who are picked on because they are fat, addicted, or trapped.
I love you and that is true
From my own pumping heart to you
My compassion is for you
I want to let you know that you are loved
You are beautiful and there is hope like a dove.
Pump pump pump
Tragedy will end

My heart burdens me every time I see another cut on that tree.
The tree is you, you can grow
It's only your choice to water and sow
You're picked on by your high school classmates
Every time you eat lunch or on a date
All you hear at home is hate hate hate
You curl up in the corner and I want to love you.
I want to help you.
Pump pump pump.
For you

Parents, be responsible for your mission,
You signed up for this now here's your vision.
You had a child and now here comes the storm.
Crackle Crackle Snap Snap
Now they are off and in a dorm.
Just trying to make it in the world and out of the norm.
Next thing you know they are in a retirement home.
Eating fried chicken and corn.
Didn't make a lot of sense that last part,
But it doesn't matter cause it was from the heart
Those were the days where I would be chilling in the grocery cart
Going through walmart and looking at auto parts.
Next day you are yelling at your parents for being old farts.
Unless you never had that experience and you shall surely see.
I love you and I hurt for thee.
Your look in the mirror and all you see
Is a failure trying to be free
I can comprehend that
Cause matter of fact.
That's me.

Will Henderson



Nicaragua Two
Dr. Paul Shotsberger



Cody
Tessa Morrison

this isn't just poetry

this is me

in words

in writing

the form nobody can judge

but just read

understand

grasp with both hands

so much more different than me physically

this isn't just poetry

this is the cry of my heart

to be understood

wanted

loved

protected

but to you

this is just poetry!

Ashley Cooper

The Explosive Silence

Silence is a thing often taken for granted,
By the masses of the world at large,
Too often is silence found in the wilds,
While more often it is needed at home.
Silence is a thing best suited for a crowd,
And sometimes for the boisterous few.
Silence has always been a good friend of mine,
And it certainly should be for you.

I do not speak of silence in general,
That which pervades the classrooms of school.
That silence is a manufactured thing,
Something that should never be seen.
The silence I mean is the stillness of the lips,
The avoidance of useless prattling.
This kind of silence is a beautiful thing,
For it allows the growth of thought in the mind.

I do believe it was a story I read,
Only a few years ago in school,
The tale was called Gulliver's Travels,
And this one story caught my eye,
Even though I was hardly in the mood.
In one adventure told in this book,
This story that so caught my eye,
The narrator stumbled on an ancient land,
Filled with horses far and wide.
These horses could speak and showed great skill,
In teaching the mind of the quester.
And the most important wisdom of all,



Anna Argot

Was of the art of diligent speaking.
Whenever one horse met another,
They would both pause and bow their heads.
Both of these souls would consider their words,
Before attempting to speak their minds.
It was in these precious moments of thought,
That wise words were chosen over fools.
Upon reaching an intelligent consensus,
The two horses would begin to speak.

So as I continue to ramble this way,
And give you all of my deepest thoughts,
Know that this came from great deliberation,
And I did not go off half-cocked.
Silence is key before the simplest talk,
And so many arguments can be avoided,
If only more people would think before acting,
In the most foolish variety of ways.
So whenever you speak to a friend or other,
Take careful thought in what you say,
Because if you shoot off your mouth like a twit,
Few good things can come of it.
Like the great majority of souls in this world,
We only have limited time,
To speak our minds in the truest ways,
Let us be like the horses far away.

Josh Martin

The Dance of Redemption and Change

Dance with me Lord.
Show me the first steps and I will let you lead.
You set the pace and the tempo. Just don't let me go.
Step one, step two, show me what to do
in this exhilarating life of mine.

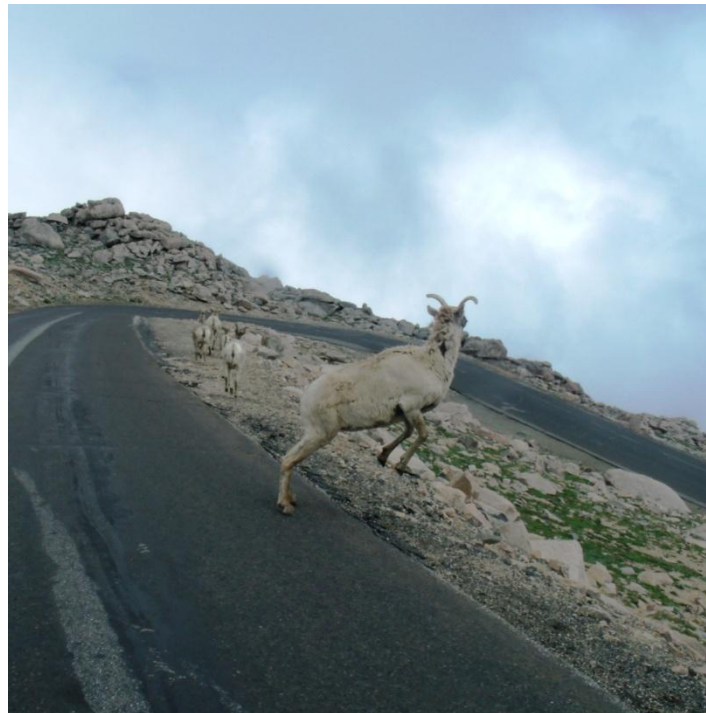
You made me an adventurer at heart oh God
An Indiana Jones at heart.
The core of my being is a heart that is 4 times as big than any normal homosapien near
far or even apart.
The intelligent design you put in my flesh is remarkable
You make the ground shake and make my eyes sparkle.
Look at them you see they are greenish brown from the crap that these eyes have seen
But when Christ enters in, all that is redeemed.

Throughout the life of this boy you see in front of you
He has been through more then you may have ever knew
But through the pain, trial, and shame
Comes a man burdened with a calling that calls your name
My passion is to love and love is my passion
I'm not talking the love of Reggie Bush and Kim Kardashian
Taking my compassion and let it come smashin and crashin on your fashion.

Who is the Will Henderson that goes across campus and says he is awesome
He is a man who is just a blossom that says he is awesome.
A blossom to bear into a great oak tree cause I have been set free
We grow everyday one day an oak and the next day we are on our knees.
Praying praying oh God take this away! I don't want it this way! Cause you gave me
today!
You give tomorrow and the air and the sun.
But Truth is, you're not done.
You're not done with me, you're not done with today.
You're done with our past and everything was washed away.

Generationally, I am the Kevin Bacon of today
Educationally, I am the Martin Luther King Jr. of tomorrow
Operationally, I am the Benjamin Franklin of the days to come
All these cats have one thing in common, they had a dream to dream.
A dream to dream about dreamers who dream.
Those dreamer's dreams became reality who have become our generality of today's
actuality
So what is your life and who are you?
Are you striving to live for God and make a change or are you pushing through life that
will end in fatality.
Remember, one step two step will get you through.
just get up and move.
And dance with me Lord.

Will Henderson



Jonathan Stegenga

Paper Cuts

By Jared Wigington

Just a few short weeks ago, my grandfather lost a long battle with dementia. Diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in the early 2000s and later with Alzheimer's two years ago, his passing was not swift or painless. Death is no stranger to the human race. From a young age we are taught that all life ends, and we experience it more often than we would care to think. It would be hard to find someone who hasn't seen a squashed insect or a desiccated shrub or a bit of road kill, much less something more severe. Some choose to ignore it. Others obsess over it. The "happy" medium between dismissal and fixation is undoubtedly the healthiest and most prevalent acknowledgement of death. It's the one that I adhere to, and it has served me well. I am no stranger to death either.

My father passed when I was in the tenth grade. He had gone away on a business trip to Columbia. He was a cell phone salesman and a telecommunications wizard; there are even a few cellular towers scattered around the upstate with his name on them. He lay down for a quick nap before a conference and never woke up. His heart just stopped. Though he had suffered a heart attack due to a birth defect a few years earlier, he had submitted to dieting and exercise and was in the best shape of his life. He was alone when he died, but I suppose the argument could be made that we all die alone. He was 42 years old.

Having a parent die when you're in high school is a curious experience. My world felt like it had stopped and, amazingly, the rest of the student body temporarily conspired to pick up the pieces. They united under a common banner of pain and loss to support the bereaved. Even the bullies stopped their torments for a while and began to slip glances of pity into the school-wide regiment of downcast stares and awkward silences. High school kids don't like to be reminded of death, especially not the death of parents. It is too real too soon and comes with too many long reaching implications. But after a month goes by and their parents are still there, they forget and they move on. Then you're left alone and expected to

be okay because everyone else is. You can't blame them, but it doesn't make the hurt go away.

When my father died, it was sudden and tragic, but somehow not as powerful as watching my grandfather waste away. My dad was edited out of my life. Somewhere, there was a quick stroke of a celestial pen and he died. He had gone on a trip and never came back. It happened out of sight, and was over before anyone even knew he was in distress. But sometimes people don't just die. There are worse fates than death.

It would be incorrect to say that my grandfather died. The simplicity of that four letter word does not encompass what happened to him; he was destroyed. Over the course of two years, he was robbed of his ability to work, drive, move, remember, and, eventually, think. Everything that made him human was taken before the end. His body quit on a Thursday morning after spending a week in a vegetative state. Put that way, it all sounds overwhelmingly cruel, but it is true. Death is cruel. Death is merciless, inscrutable, capricious, and tenacious. Death waits for no one and it can't be avoided. Death is a fact of life. That must be why we're so good at dealing with it.

As a species, humans have devised thousands, if not millions, of ways to cope with death. Nearly every culture has its own version of funeral, and those that don't have borrowed one. The Judeo-Christian rites of burial are a common way to set a body to rest and it allows the grieving to acknowledge the finality of physical death. Funerals have a way of plucking ephemeral memories from our subconscious and folding them into little origami for us to marvel at. Pretty paper cranes fly around in our heads and bump into the sides when they run out of room leaving little cuts to remind us why some things need to hurt. But even little paper cranes need to sleep sometimes. The paper cuts stop, and the memories melt down into a bittersweet cocktail and evaporate back into a roiling maelstrom of emotion.

I don't really have any memories of my grandfather from before the sickness. The one that I do have from that point in his life is a subtle, low-pitched hum, like the sound of an air conditioner or generator in the distance. I'm ashamed to confess that it's a background sound, one that you acclimate to and take for

granted. Sadly, his own quiet, dependable strength worked against him, and I can only remember his health in the ambience. I do remember the Parkinson's though.

When I first realized that my grandfather was sick, I was forced to notice him as a mortal. Before then, he was one of the universal constants along with gravity, time, and magnetism. You don't really scrutinize gravity, it just is. But with Parkinson's, it felt like the universe was ... off. Something had shifted the primordial laws of creation and not for the better. I remember when he had to retire from his work early because his mobility and hand-eye coordination made him a danger to the other men on his production line. For a proud man like my grandfather, it was a disgrace. Even with medication, the effects only got worse.

He began losing the things that he cared about. He had a rich singing voice, and, despite losing a finger to a metal press years before, he was a talented guitar player. Parkinson's ensured that he could never play music again. He soon lost the ability to drive, to mow the lawn, and to work in the small garden where we got so many of our vegetables from. He couldn't abide television, so he would sit in a chair and listen to gospel and bluegrass music on the local AM radio frequencies. When the Alzheimer's came it took even that away from him. He simply couldn't concentrate long enough to sit and listen to a radio broadcast.

You know the rest of the story. Movies and TV shows are populated with the heart rending re-enactments of the final stages of Alzheimer's disease. We've all seen or heard about the memory loss and the hallucinations. To experience it firsthand is really only different in its proximity; this time it is someone you know and care about. What they normally don't show is that it doesn't stop there. Alzheimer's isn't satisfied until every last brain function has ground to a halt. It makes your body forget how to keep itself running. It is not a rapid process, and after an excruciating year and a half, my grandfather, my Papa, "died."

At 1 o'clock in the afternoon on Sunday, September ninth, we gathered in the hated church of my childhood to finally send off a man who had hurt for so long. The people who gathered there were family, friends, old coworkers, and fellow churchgoers. They were blue collar men and women from the deepest parts of rural upstate South Carolina; they were the people who didn't have cell phones,

or computers, or satellite TV. But they were real and flawed and just the right people to observe his funeral. They were his people, and he was theirs.

In the middle of the service, the congregation sang an old bluegrass song that my grandfather used to play on his guitar back when he was able. The main vocalist was a woman who sang with a squalling voice not unlike a dying cat. When the chorus came around, the entire congregation picked up the tune, bawling, rumbling, and screeching out the words with unflinching familiarity. Everyone but me, that is. I didn't know the words, so instead stood silent in the cacophony. It was magnificent. The music was wonderfully terrible, played by people who had never learned the correct way to play because they had never been taught; it had seeped into their spirits like the silt of the old Oconee streams and creeks, and it had cut channels across their hearts and minds that one could only appreciate if they had lived it. I hadn't lived it, but I had through my grandfather. In that moment, I knew what pain, and hope, and poverty sounded like. And I felt the paper cuts.

I hope that they don't fade, but a part of me knows that it is inevitable. Focusing on death takes away from life, and I hope that there is still plenty of life left for me to experience. By committing the words to the "page", I ensure their existence, and I know that I'm just a few clicks away from the paper cuts, lest I forget why things need to hurt sometimes. It is a small comfort, but one worth pondering. I just hope that the next time something like this happens I'll know the words to the song.



Cherilyn Ramsey



Sofia Gomez

Annie

By Yikisha Miles

“So, honey. What do you think?” Mr. Thomas asked his wife.

Sadie Thomas stared at her husband’s eyes the color of almonds and his sweet smile that could brighten her darkest hours. The question he asked was just as big as the moment when he proposed. It would be a decision that would change their lives forever. “To give a child a home is something I’ve always wanted to do,” Sadie replies. “She will be loved and nurtured. The way all children should be.”

Mr. Thomas smiles, loving the radiant look in his wife’s blue eyes, and golden hair like the color of the sun. “So, we are going to give her a home? A home that’s filled with love and devotion?”

Sadie nods, loving the feel of her husband’s embrace. “We will give her all of that, dear. And so much more.”

“What’s my new family going to be like?” Annie asked her social worker, Ms. Johnson.

Ms. Johnson was a short, plump woman with orange hair and red freckles that ran across her face. For the past five years she was the only mother Annie had ever known. The young, thirteen-year-old with dark eyes and black, curly hair often spooked the other kids in the orphanage.

She was a witch!

A monster!

Eerie and creepy!

Annie was happy to be leaving the orphanage, but she was curious about her new family.

“The Thomas family is a loving family with two older children of their own,” Ms. Johnson explains, as she packed the last of Annie’s things.

Annie frowns. "Then why do they need me if they already have kids? Won't I just get in the way?"

Ms. Johnson turns to Annie. The young girl she had come to know and love had been through a hellish childhood. She still couldn't grasp all the horrible images Annie kept bottled up about that tragic night. The night she watched her family get butchered.

Ms. Johnson pulls Annie into a hug. "You won't get in the way of anything, hon. The Thomas family wants you to be a part of their life. They want you as a second daughter."

"Daughter?" Annie repeats. "You mean I will have big sister?"

Ms. Johnson nods. "A big brother as well."

Annie smiles.

"I can see that you're warming to the idea of this new family."

Annie slowly nods. "We'll see. First, I must see what they look like. What kind of home they live in. Then, I'll know if I like them."

Ms. Johnson laughed and turns back to Annie's suitcase. On top laid a brown bear with one eye missing. A slash mark across its stomach revealing the white cotton used to stuff it. She never understood why Annie kept that horrible toy around. Annie takes the bear and cuddles it. "Mr. Whiskers keeps me safe. Don't you, Mr. Whiskers?"

Ms. Johnson hurriedly snaps the suitcase shut and escorts Annie from her old bedroom.

"Well, she certainly is a quiet child," Sadie Thomas observes Annie sitting in the backseat of their old car. She clutched the teddy bear closely to her heart.

"You just give her time," Ms. Johnson advised. "Annie, poor child, has been through a lot."

Mr. Thomas nods. "Yes, we read about what happened to her parents in the paper. Who would do such a thing? In front of a child at that?"

Ms. Johnson studies Annie's quiet moment. Whenever she got like that, she was remembering a vital detail about her parent's murder. The doctors advised that Annie should be left alone and to draw her anger in pictures. Ms. Johnson had a few of the dark

paintings in her office. Should I tell them? She wondered. Should I let them know about Annie's dark side?

Sadie Thomas sees the concern in Ms. Johnson's eyes. "Don't worry about that precious gem. The Thomas family plan on loving her to death."

Ms. Johnson smiles and watched Annie through the glass window. The young girl turns back and a slow smile appears across her face. Ms. Johnson had seen that smile before, it was the same smile Annie had the night she was brought to the orphanage after she witnessed her parent's brutal murders. It gave the social worker the creeps and she now had doubts about not revealing all to the Thomas family as they drove Annie away. To a new home and a new life.

A Week Later

The Thomas family had come to know and love their new daughter. Annie, at first, seemed shy and awkward with her new surroundings, but that all seemed to be gone now. She was happy, radiant, and thankful to be a part of a new family.

Dale Thomas, Annie's new older brother, fell for Annie's innocence. She was a very bright child and seemed to know a lot about literature, Dale's favorite subject in high school. "I want to be the next Hemingway, you know. I want to take my place among the famous writers of our time."

Annie smiles. Dale's brown eyes would light up whenever he spoke about his passion. "Didn't that guy kill himself?"

Dale looks at Annie. "Yeah, but that doesn't mean I want to do the same thing. I just want to be a great writer like him."

"You will." Annie studies Dale's physical appearance; he had broad shoulders with strong hands and muscular calves. These items made him a great football player at his school. The girls went crazy for his angelic smile and charming personality to match. Annie wondered why none of these things mattered to him. "What if you don't become a writer, Dale? You can always be a great football player. Your dad is always saying so."

Dale brings his strong arm around Annie. "I never say no, Annie. I believe that if you want something bad enough, you'll do anything to get it. Plus, what's with this your dad thing? He's your father as well."

Annie looks away. "Chelsea doesn't think so. She's told Mrs. Thomas that she wants me to go back to the orphanage."

Dale realized his sister only spoke out of fear. For sixteen years she had been the baby of the family, and now Annie threaten to take all of that away. "Don't listen to Chelsea. She doesn't mean a word of that. She loves you. We all love you."

Annie returns Dale's hug. "I love you as well."

Chelsea had asked her parents time and time again to get rid of that creepy Annie. She was always holding on to that ugly bear of hers, Mr. Whiskers. Whispering to it and laughing. One night, Chelsea peered into Annie's room only to find the child arguing with her toy. "No, Mr. Whiskers. I won't do it! No! You can't make me! I won't hurt them!" From that moment, Chelsea realized she had a lunatic in the house. "You have to send her back, Mom! You have to!"

"Chelsea, stop it!" Sadie Thomas yells, as she prepared dinner on the stove. "You have this obsession with Annie and it has to stop! The child has been through enough!"

"Oh, I've read about her past, Mom. Her own parents were murdered, but oddly there wasn't any proof of forced entry and the only finger prints that were found on the murder weapon belonged to Annie! Explain that?"

Sadie Thomas sighs, and turns to her daughter. "Annie was just five-years-old, dear. She couldn't have killed her parents with that knife. The killer just put that thing in Annie's hands to make it look like she had done it or maybe she picked it up by accident. Whatever the reason, I know in my heart she didn't do it."

Chelsea shakes her head. Her golden locks, the same color as her mother's, moving side to side in fury. "You just won't listen! Annie is no angel. She's a killer and I won't stay in the same house with her!"

Annie suddenly appears in the kitchen the moment Chelsea turned to go.

Sadie Thomas prayed the child didn't hear the conversation. "Annie, honey. Are you hungry? I made your favorite for dinner, spaghetti and meatballs!"

Annie smiles. "That is my favorite. That was the last meal I remember my mother made before...before."

Sadie Thomas takes Annie and gives her some forks wrapped in napkins. "Why don't you go and set the table, dear? Dinner will be ready shortly."

Annie exits from the kitchen, avoiding Chelsea's glare.

"You see how torn up she is!" Sadie Thomas said. "You can't go around saying she's a killer!"

Chelsea folds her arms in annoyance. Her mother believed the sun rose and set on Annie. "I can't believe I'm the only one here who sees what she really is, a cold blooded kill-."

"Chelsea," Annie suddenly calls out, as she returns to the kitchen. "Want to help me set the table? It's going to be my favorite meal tonight."

A cold chill runs down Chelsea's spine. She couldn't take another second in that room with Annie. "Not on your life, kid!"

Annie watched her angry adopted sister storm out the back door.

Midnight

Chelsea returned home in a sea of fright and confusion. The front door was opened and a trail of blood leads up the stairs and into her parent's bedroom. A violent struggle had taken place. Sadie Thomas was sprawled across the bed, her eyes still open at the attacker that was now gone. Mr. Thomas was on the floor, beside his wife. Both had been stabbed to death. The trail of blood also led into her brother's room. He was also dead, a knife plunged into his chest. Running from his room and back into her parent's room, Chelsea picks up the phone and dials for help.

"Sheriff's Office. What is your emergency?" asked the calm operator, on the opposite end.

"THEY'RE DEAD!" Chelsea screams into the phone. "SHE KILLED THEM ALL! MY ENTIRE FAMILY IS GONE!"

"Who killed your family, Ms.?"

"My adopted sister! I know she did!" Chelsea recalls, remembering Annie's statement about spaghetti and meatballs being her mother's last meal. It was now Sadie Thomas' last cooked meal. Annie had asked if Chelsea would stay, but she refused. For that, her family was killed!

“Okay, ma’am. What’s your address?”

“Seventeen hundred, South Bundy Avenue.” Chelsea turns to her parent’s lifeless bodies with fear. “I don’t think they’re alive!”

“Are you in the room with your parents?” the operator asked.

“Yes.”

“I need you to check their pulse. They may still have a heartbeat. Can you do that?”

Chelsea swallows hard and wipes away her tears that ran down her cheeks. “Yes, I-I think so.” Forcing herself to look at her parent’s bodies, Chelsea checks both of them for any sign of life. Her worst fears are confirmed. “No, they are both so cold! She did it, she killed my family.”

“Help is on the way, dear. I just need you to stay calm and focused. Can you do that?”

Chelsea found her entire body shaking with fear. “She killed her real family before, you know that? Everybody in town heard about it and now she’s killed mine. Why? Why would she do that?”

The operator had now dispatched the police to the caller’s home, but she now had a heavier problem on her hands. “Ma’am, can you tell me your name? Can you tell me the name of the person you say killed your family?”

Chelsea didn’t have to think twice about that one. “My name is Chelsea Thomas and the person that murdered my family is my adopted sister, A-”

The call ends with the blood curling screams of Chelsea begging for her life. “NOOO! DON’T HURT ME!”

The operator is horrified at what she hears. “Ms. Thomas, are you all right?”

Silence.

“Chelsea, can you hear me?”

Dead silence greets the operator on Chelsea’s end.

Ms. Johnson stood in utter shock as she watched each body bag belonging to each member of the Thomas home be brought out for the whole world to see. They had all

been brutally stabbed and no eye witness to the crimes. All but one had escaped: Annie! Where was the now orphaned girl again? She had seen her own parents being killed and now the nightmare had chosen to repeat itself. Ms. Johnson had to find her! She had to know if Annie was still alive.

“Damned mess I’ve ever seen in my twenty years! This place is cursed!” Chief Williams mumbles to himself.

Ms. Johnson runs up to the plump man with red hair and a beer gut the size of a watermelon. “Chief Williams! Where’s Annie? Please, tell me she isn’t here! Please say you found her alive!”

Chief Williams sighs as Ms. Johnson approached him. She had been a major problem over the years. “Ms. Johnson, what are you doing here? This is a crime scene and you’re a civilian. Please, get behind the yellow tape.”

“No, No! I came as soon as I heard. It’s all over the radio. Is Annie, okay? I placed her with this family only a week ago and now they’re dead!”

Chief Williams escorts Ms. Johnson from the Thomas house. “Now, Ms. Johnson, you and I both know you never placed Annie with this family. Annie has long been gone over a year now.”

Ms. Johnson shakes her head in confusion. “No, Chief. I-I did see Annie off with this new family.”

“Dear, don’t you remember?” Chief Williams asked. “I guess those meds the doctors have given you must have blocked out all sense of reality.”

Ms. Johnson looks at Chief Williams. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying Annie is dead. She hung herself last year when she confessed to killing her parents. She did it in your office, Ms. Johnson. At the orphanage. Since then, you have been under the care of Dr. Andrew Hicks. I think it’s time you gave him another call.”

Ms. Johnson couldn’t believe her ears. Annie was dead! She killed her own parents! “No, Chief. Annie is alive and the people that killed the Thomas family must have her. I have to find her!”

“The person or persons responsible for this, Ms. Johnson, are nothing but a copycat killer. This is the same house that Annie lived in when she murdered her family. That’s why you’re drawn to it!”

“Chief, we’ve found something!” Chief Williams is handed a teddy bear missing one eye and a slash mark across his stomach by one of his officers. The chief stares at the toy in the plastic bag it’s stuffed into with a creepy feeling in the pit of his stomach. “Okay, take it to the lab and see if we can get a fingerprint off it.”

Ms. Johnson watched the waiting officer take the toy away. “That’s Annie’s bear!”

Chief Williams grabs Ms. Johnson to stop her from running after the evidence. “Hey, Hey! Just calm down, now!”

“No, let go of me! That’s Annie’s bear! I have to have it! She will want it back once you find her.”

“Officers! Escort Ms. Johnson to the Springfield Medical Center. Dr. Hicks will be expecting her!” Chief Williams orders. The obeying policemen shove Ms. Johnson into the back of their squad car and turn on the sirens to draw out her screams as the car pulls away.

“No! You can’t take me!” Ms. Johnson screams in pain. “You can’t take me from Annie! She needs me, Annie! ANNIE!!!!



Sofia Gomez

Eoghan and Naif

By Cassy Woodall

A boy, a simple little thing, was walking along a simple little road, lots of dirt, trees, sunlight, birds chirping... you get the picture: disgustingly picturesque. Anyway he is walking along looking for something. Isn't that always the case? A boy loses something and has to go on a quest to get it back? Well, this is not one of those stories. You see, this simple little boy has lost his baby panther and he finds it fairly quickly. No, this is the story of a boy and his greed.

I found his little panther lost in the woods one day when I was making my rounds and gathering the fallen information from the plants. The poor thing was mewling in a dead tree trunk. It looked half dead. So I brought it some water and some berries. I knew it did not eat berries, I am not thick, but I could not go kill another animal; that would be terribly rude. Annoying little thing did not like all my effort. He turned his nose up at my berries but he at least drank the water. I left the creature there because, frankly, what else was I supposed to do with him?

I make my rounds picking up bits and pieces here and there and one piece shows a boy looking around desperately. I love lost things terribly, it is so fun to see the poor saps search and search for their lost thing; so I set out to find the boy. On my way I stop at the panther and leave some water and fresh berries (he will figure it out). As I am getting ready to leave I hear the boy calling in his ridiculously whiny voice.

"Matcha!!" hand cupped around his mouth, like that would help, he comes trampling through the wood, noisy thing, "Matcha! Where are you?!"

I watch the boy as he gets closer and I hear the panther stir behind me. I turn and the wretched thing gets up and leaps over me toward the whiny boy.

"Matcha! I was so worried! Master was getting suspicious. Better get you back quick." The boy picked the panther up and stomped back out the wood never giving me a second glance.

Ungrateful vagabonds the both of them! Feeling slighted I decide to track down this boy and his Matcha and give them a piece of my mind. The simple little fool left a trail a blind person could follow and I soon caught up to the ungrateful duo. Mustering all my might I call out, "Hey idiot!"

The boy turns wildly and drops the panther, how rude, "Wh-What? Is someone there?"

“Of course there is someone here; do you think the trees would talk to someone like you?”

Matcha is a little smarter than the boy and comes bounding up to me. I pat him on the head and watch the boy carefully as he begins to see me.

“AAAHHHHHH!!!! DEMON!! LEAVE ME ALONE SPIRIT! I AM GOOD I PROMISE BUT I WILL BE BETTER!” the ignorant youth falls to the forest floor trembling, cowering under his hands as though they could shield him from the world.

“Fool, I am no demon. If I was I would have taken your soul without saying anything. I would not waste my breath on the likes of you.” He turns his head slightly so he can see me. “And another thing I am clearly a benevolent soul, or your panther would not come so willingly to me. My name is Eoghan. And you, little imbecile, what is your name?”



Jonathan Stegenga

“Naif... My name is Naif... Are you going to eat me?” the boy, Naif, was staring openly at me now.

“Well that explains everything! Do you have any idea how incredibly rude it is to leave without thanking someone for caring for your animals? And while I am on the subject, how could you lose him? He was half dead when I found him! When you finally came back for him you left a horrible trail in the forest. There is a road for a reason. You and yours are supposed to stay on it! Have some respect. I work hard to keep this forest together and I need the information the plants drop to let me know what is going on around the forest. And you...YOU trampled all over it with your huge, gangly feet!”

The boy lay there shaking, “sorry...so sorry. I had no idea.”

“Ignorance is no excuse. Next time you decide to take a trip in the wood, stay on the trail and thank those that choose to help you.”

“Yes, I will be more careful.”

“Oh sit up little simpleton and I will help you find the road.” I sigh heavily; people are so wearisome. I remember now why I stopped dealing with them.

The boy slowly climbs to his feet. I turn and head toward the road not seeing if he is following. I know he will; besides he makes enough noise that I can hear him coming from a mile away. We make it to the road and I point him in the direction he needs to go and hand him a gold nugget I plucked from between a tiger’s teeth and tell him to get the panther some food and water, I might not be a part of his world but I know a poor thing when I see it and this one was could have taken the cake. He stares at the nugget and takes it from me like it is a fragile egg. I roll my eyes and move back into the forest tired of the boy and his lack of common sense.

* * * *

Days turned into weeks and weeks into months and soon it was time to put the plants to sleep and rest myself.

I was helping the trees get ready for long sleep when the most obnoxious sound assaulted me: the beating of hooves and the turning of wheels. I race to the road to see what bothersome thing had decided to travel through the woods this time. I reach the road just as the group comes to a halt; and what a group. There was wagon upon wagon of simple folk, looked like a bunch of dirty farmers fresh from the fields and leading the whole entourage was one of the most impressive people I had seen. Sitting atop a stark white horse was a boy pretending to be a man: dressed head to toe in silver armor that shone in the sun, he looked like someone who gave all the orders. Sitting next to man-boy on a sad little mule was Naif, the fool with the panther. I looked around for Matcha but I suppose she did not make this journey.

“Are you sure that this where you discovered the gold?” the man-boy’s voice cracked with the changing of age.

“Yes,” Naif squeaked, “but I did not find it; a wood nymph gave it to me for Matcha.”

“Nonsense, why would a wood nymph have gold and why would they give it to you?” the man-boy sniffed in a bored manner. “Send the farmers out and tell them not to return without gold; I don’t care if they have to rip the whole forest down.”

I spring to action and fly at Naif, “How dare you bring this band of murderers and thieves into my home! I should have left you to the forest!”

Naif shrinks from me, “I am so sorry Eoghan. Master made me tell him where the gold nugget came from. I never got to spend it on Matcha like you said. It’s not my fault.”

I turn to man-boy on the horse, who stares at Naif like he is crazy, “Who are you talking to?”

“The wood nymph sir.” Naif begins to tremble.

“I see no one. How dare you lie.”

“He does not lie; you just do not have eyes that will see.” I snap, sick of the man-boy’s tone. I am awarded by seeing him turn white as I come into focus, “I want you and all of yours to leave this forest and never return. There is no gold here and if there was, I would never let you harm the forest for your personal gain.”

The man-boy regains some composure, “Dear wood nymph, we do not wish your forest harm; I only want what is rightfully mine. You see, this is my land and whatever is on it or in it is mine. You would not deny me my right.”

“Land belongs to no man; it is for everyone to share and my name is Eoghan,” I snarl, my temper very near breaking.

He raises his head a little higher and sits a little straighter, “and I am King Riffael and your tone should reflect more respect to me as such.”

“Ha! Respect a man-boy like you? Why should I? I speak to whomever however I want and I warn you here and now *King Riffael* if you enter this forest with greed and malicious intent in your heart I will stop you and it won’t be my tone of voice you need fear.” With that I turn and enter the forest again. I listen to see what happens and that fool of a king tells his farmer crew to hop to it and find his gold.

The anger boils up and explodes out of me. I see everything in different shades of red and black.

* * * *

When color returns to the world I am standing in a wreck of wood with farmers fleeing my field of vision. At my feet is the King breathing ragged and standing in front of me is Naif screaming, "STOP, STOP, YOU CAN'T KILL HIM!"

I blink; kill him? I would never take a life, I cannot. I try to tell Naif this but the horror of what I almost did chokes me and all I manage to do is breathe the word, "No..." I flee to the forest and I hear noisy Naif trying to follow me.

I finally stop running when I reach the spring that I usually rest by. I hear Naif breathing heavily behind me. "Go away Naif! I am in no mood for idiocy right now." I sink to soft ground and take comfort from the life the water has.

"That was awesome! Scary but awesome! Benevolent soul my left foot!"

I turn and look at the fool who quivered at my feet not two months ago, "What, I cannot take a life, any life and yet you think that was cool that I almost did?"

"Yes, I have never seen someone best master. I was always terrified of him but he bought me and I had Matcha to take care of, so I made it through. But now! You could end his reign of tyranny..."

"NO! I do not leave the forest. You cannot look for a hero in me; if you are so mad at him, take the throne yourself."

Naif bows his head, "I cannot. I have no strength."

"Then you will have to live with your master for the rest of your life. Now leave me."

"But.."

"LEAVE YOU LITTLE FOOL!!"

I hear him turn and trudge back to the road. I stand, shake my head and begin to help the trees prepare for winter.

Three weeks later I lay down for the winter rest knowing that with the spring comes new life and the return to the way things used to be.

* * * *

I feel the first warm rays of spring sun and I open my eyes. I stretch and stand. Time to wake up the forest. I travel around the forest slowly waking it up and just as I am coming to the road I see the simple boy and his lost panther strolling down the path.

Matcha spies me and sprints down the road. I brace for impact but he stops short, purring. I pet his head and smile but I frown as Naif joins us.

“Why have you returned?”

“I have decided that I will help you care for the forest. If you will not leave the forest then I will just come to you. I brought Matcha too.”

I squint at him, “Do as you wish but don’t think I will go easy on you.”

I turn and glide into the forest and hear Naif stomping after me with Matcha padding softly beside him...

The End



Amanda Williams