

In Naples, Florida, the sun **set** low and crimson, its final rays shimmered coolly on the waves tiding gently onshore the golden beach. I **held** my dearest Floella's hand within mine, enjoying the silence. I admired her features most when she beheld reverence for something genuinely awe inspiring. Whether it be art of a distinct message or nature's common process, her gentle green eyes **observed** with an air of wide eyed meditation. That with her rosy red lips near the same shade except bolder than her radiant locks that swayed in the wind as a cool late November wind gust blew. She shivered slightly and I, comforting her with my coat, held her close, wishing that it could have been a cooler gust, so I had an excuse to hold her more tightly.

Soon it was dusk and we made our way back to her car, a pink bug. There, she swirled leaning almost uneasily against the car, abated. I went in to kiss her, but she stopped me. I **looked** deeply in her eyes for an explanation during the pause, but all that I saw was my look of anguished surprise. "Icarus, you are sweet. You really are," Floella said, as if she gave a damn. "But we just have too many things going on in different directions. It is like you think one way and I'm thinking the opposite. And... do you understand?"

I nodded. She allowed me one last hug, and we parted ways. Though I rambled and cursed and filled myself with frustration, and though the red hot fury from rejection encompassed every manner of my being. At the bottom of my heart a base sentiment emerged, and I did understand because *it* whispered softly like the crisp silver wind under the then black sky. I understood her brilliance, beauty, and talent. And I loved her.

You have **sat** in class with that feeling of dread. The sort that you receive when you didn't do your homework, or you mouthed off to a teacher, or-or you suddenly felt what you always felt or always feel, that these grades, these meaningless letters on dead parchment can only mean anything to dead people. This parchment cannot **bring** anything but an artificial flavor to life, meaning schools are nothing but factories for the bureaucrats. I always thought this when receiving report cards. I often **wondered** whether this state of mind emerged only in the sense of bad sportsmanship towards my peers, or if I truly **cares** less. Or if the manner of my convictions mattered at all, as long as it held—*dearest Floella's hand*— truth.

Soon the bell rung, and at a determined pace I made for home, until I saw Floella walking as if towards someone. This someone, of course was a boy wearing a green hood jacket tied around his neck and a collared shirt as if dressed for a science fair. Floella jumped into his arms and kissed him for seconds that seemed like hours, and she played with his brushed and tidily combed hair for minutes that seemed like days. Then she walked away with him, hands held --*dearest Floella*—together. And she walked happily as if a hole in her heart had been filled—*frustration*.

Understand-- *it whispered softly*-- that at home nothing matters at all as much as that paper, as if God understood--*her brilliance, beauty, and*-- it as law of heaven and earth, or Fate signed off on its glory. Logically though, this must be true if you are **hemmed** in a school most of your life; you must have no other talents—*and I did love her*. So with this in mind, through the door I went, grinning slamming

my paper in front of my mother. She sat unmoved absorbing the television with the **reflection** of the screen in his dazed eyes and the dull grey hews reflecting off his skin, in no great hurry to respond to the great news.

I stormed to my room to find my work uniform. In the middle of the abyss, I hear “2 A’s 3 D’s and an F?! How the hell do you get 2 A’s 3 D’s and an F?!”

“2 P.E. classes, 3 pretend teachers, and one crackpot in menopause,” I said in my head but did not say aloud.

“Did you hear me? People with these grades—are lucky to even work at McDonalds. The only way you’re getting into a University is if you’re **cleaning** one.”

“I would be the smartest janitor ever. Then, I could go win Janitor Jeopardy, good idea,” I thought but did not say.

I found my uniform. I stormed through the family room without pause in to the garage and outside. I **slammed** my key in the ignition, and my car rumbled beneath my feet. My mother **approached** the window, “If I expected this crap from you, you would have been aborted.”

“If you would have laid off the Budlight you wouldn’t be laid off and laying in your own crap every night,” I thought to myself, and by the look on her face I happened to say out loud as well.

Never work at a fast food restaurant. Unless, you love the feeling of hot grease like a behemoth’s breath in your face, with its spittle stinging your cheeks (though, at least it wasn’t my eye.) And the aroma of lard and meat and grease so revolts my diaphragm that I habitually take half breaths. The oil, humid in the air, clings to my face like a layer of saran wrap. But this with tolerance brings – *an artificial flavor to life*— cash in the pocket. I looked up from my work at the tapping of my shoulder.

“Bring the table outside one large fries, please Jason,” my manager said.

At the table outside, two boys in my class, Alex and Sam, were both smoking and flicking food at each other. Both dressed in collared shirts and polo shorts, and both with false gold chains around their neck. Their hair shimmered and reeked of hair gel. Not knowing which of the jerks asked for fries I sat it in between them upright. Sam, accidentally, I presumed, knocked the fries to the ground. I knelt to save the remaining clean- *The only way you’re getting into a University*- fries and place them on the table and turned to go back to work. Then, suddenly a voice said, “Get us some fresh fries.” And a container hit the back of my head, I stormed angrily, crushing the fries beneath my feet.

“What the hell is your problem,” I roared.

Alex blew smoke in my face then replied, “Nothin, dude.”

Without thinking I clocked him with my knuckles slamming him between the eyes. The goon across from him, Sam, scooted back in his chair making room to rise. By the time Sam rose I already threw a jab that hit his chin, and as I took a step towards him we traded blows. His punch hit me square in the forehead, and my knuckles dealt a blow to his left eye socket. Soon, Alex came from behind, jumping on me, and choking my neck. I fought him loose and threw him to the ground. His head slammed—*my car rumbled beneath my feet*— into the newsstands. Then, instantly the manager, livid, stood between me and my harassers. He approached— *If I expected this crap from you--* my nemeses delicately to ensure their well being, and suddenly threw me a look utter disgust and shrieked, “You’re fired.”

“Good,” I snapped throwing my hat to the ground, fuming. “Get him some fries.” I was relieved to be relieved of my employment. I hopped in my car, and sat-- in class-- with that ankle stilling cringe for returning home. No, I would not go home. I could go back.

When I arrive at Angus’s house, I circle the house and check the hunting shack where he usually sharpens his knives and cleans his guns. I was lucky to find him preparing to head out in the woods once more.

“Boar Season!” he proclaimed as he always did, like an eccentric mad scientist concocting some odd experiment.

“Every season is Boar season, “ I responded, recanting what he always told me.

“You wanna come this time?”

“Sure.”

“Well let’s get a move on before it starts getting dark.”

A light trail led us down to the marsh. Sullen bare trees with moss for ornaments served as the home for lone spiders as large as my palm. We tore through webs with sticks and weeds with machetes. Ankle deep in marsh, crouching, while staring down the barrel, Angus looked more comfortable than in a lawn chair. He gave me the Magnum, out of courtesy or concern I never knew, but it did entertain my feeling of purpose in the hunt. We crouched forward until Angus made the sign to lay still and quiet. A boar was spotted a few yards in front of us. It crept peacefully along the edge of a clear clean pond. With a cautious step, it faced the water and dipped its head in cool water. When its head rose again, Angus took the shot. A sudden yelp emanated from the boar, one that pinched our spines as well as our ears. “You know what to do.” I nodded, lifted the pistol to its head and shot once then waited in silence to see if I did my job. I did, and I was beholden for the quiet.

I helped Angus carry his kill back to the shed where he bled it and stuffed it in the freezer. In which time I began to prepare a fire. Angus came to the fire with a pack of Miller Lites. While we discussed happenings around school and other notable events I drank shyly at my one bottle while

Angus drank like a leaking sink. In another trip to the cooler to get another pack he shouted, "Ahhh man, I got something to show you!"

"What?"

"Look at this baby," Angus declared proudly setting his six pack down. He held in his hand a sawn off shotgun. He then clicked the safety off, faced the swamp, cocked, and fired. A boom sounded and the kickback caught him by surprised. He grinned like a fool and handed it to me, "There you go give it a shot."

"No, thanks," I replied.

"Whatever."

As Angus drank more and more, the night dwindled away. The warm fire eased my eye lids and drowsed my senses so I wished him a good night and I made my way to the guest bed.

I collapsed on the bed amused by how unusually long the day had been, but I felt a sudden spirit of silly **giddiness** that would not allow me to sleep. This excitement surfaced at a sudden click of comprehension, but not of mine, instead that of the boar. Upon the initial penetration of Angus' bullet, the swine immediately bellowed upon conceiving the basest and most burdening of mortal experiences, pain. Though as cruel and inhumane the experience might have been. I reasoned that this torment just as everything contains something fundamental to the process of the poor beast's existence. If a man numb to all pain tried to cross the sea solely by the merit of his arms and legs, he would sink to oblivion without noticing that his muscles forfeit. But sailors who know their mortal bounds cross oceans. And with my final bullet that boar crossed his ocean and realized that his path like mine is not a road, but an expanding plane (since it will, at least molecularly reside in something else and possibly all things). If this virtue brought the most peaceful end, I must emulate it at the expense of my sanity for the moral good. Whatever righteous ends require is worth the most trying means. For after the most dreadful nightmare, the white sun rises, bright and true just as through faint frosty white clouds, the polar work wrought by Khione to counter Hephaestian pieces. And thus, through her nightmare, she will make a new woman, a truer woman. Meditating upon all of this, I hugged my pillow and slumbered envisioning a world after the **construct** that *none ever really die*.

When I opened my eyes I saw a lion floating with wings that did not flap, but remained spread as if commanding all matter around it. It smiled like Mona Lisa as I asked, "Who are you what are you doing here?"

It left my question unanswered and instead asked, "Why is the snow white?"

"White is pure," I pondered aloud, sitting upright.

“So if the whitest snow swallowed the earth all its sins would be forgiven,” it replied with a bizarre face equipped with a girlish voice and smile.

“No,” I thought. “If that was to happen it would plague the earth. Snow is death. Cold is death, but white... white is pure. And I dare to guess that it must intend purity after death. At least this is what it has convinced me.” Then I pressed my head back against my pillow and glanced to see that the sphinx acknowledged my answer and vanished.

I slept better than I have in ages. I imagine that the night did not treat Angus equally as well. We ate breakfast in silence... then headed for school in his truck.

Once at school, Angus and I went on our different ways, I made to the lunch tables to find Juan. “The Puerto Rican Daredevil” as he called himself would do almost anything for cash. He had bold brown eyes, and wild black short hair.

“Hey Juan,” I started.

“Whactcha need, buddy,” Juan asked.

“I need the fire alarm to ring soon after school starts.”

“Got a test?”

“You could say that.”

“A ‘bird’ like that would cost you a bit to sing, friend. Sixty dollars.”

I opened my wallet and extracted three crisp twenties which he deposited smoothly inside his pockets. I made the gesture of appreciation, and made my way to my class in the portable.

As I sat down I realized high school has changed. The back of the class no longer harbors the delinquents. It now serves as a retreat for those that simply want to be left alone. After the bell to start heading to class rings, the middle swells with those that love to talk without telling, and learn without knowing. The front remains for the boldest that chide the teacher, and offer sarcastic remarks like a gift to cheer or torment the intended. Class begins with the final bell. But teachers have not changed much. Sometimes a teacher involves themselves so much that they forget about the class. This is especially so with the science and math teachers that intrigues themselves so with their problems they forget to solve them for others. So they never notice the girl texting her friends on the phone, the kid gaping wide eyed at the board, the boy reading EGM, or me frequently checking keeping a sawn-off shotgun unnoticeable in my backpack.

The fire alarm rang in the middle of our lesson, shrieking terror and widening the eyes of teachers and students alike in the hallway. The bell for terror shrieked like a terrified woman with black hair and a pale face howling higher, higher, higher.

We walked in clutters to the field where we were supposedly safe from a raging fire. My hands filled with cold sweat as the pale wretch screamed and clamored. My peace maker *whispered*. It was ready to seek the fiend that snatched my love, and take from it his everything. The shrieking heightened in my ears when I found him turned around in his hood. I saw him through a tunnel, where I soon saw him down my barrel. I fired once for the head, but the shot lowered my head making the precision of my shot unclear. I saw soon that the shot blasted his neck. He landed on the ground writhing in his pain. I fired more until he was limp. Until my heart told me he was dead, and my logic reminded me if he wasn't he would want to be. But the screaming within my head grew louder, screeching despair to the lowest depth. But then, I realized this was not his neck. This neck sloped beautifully. It bled swiftly, pouring the earth with Floella's soul, not Chris'. As my mind swayed drunk with despair, students and teachers ran squeezing to escape through a funnel through the entrance. Others dropped to the ground feigning as if they were the victim and I was the bear. I turned to see Chris, my intended target, crawling the fence. Everything else blurred around him. When I lifted the gun and fired. My knees quaked when he no longer moved, and I had made of him an unwilling martyr. Legs numb from the excitement of it all, I collapsed and smiled suddenly realizing that I was set-- *low and crimson*--next to the body of my dearest Floella. Then I poured myself a barrel full of lead, which I drank without an ounce of distaste.

And then it began. I was lifted from the ground to the air. And thus I saw my gray joyless body below lying with my sweet. Then suddenly it snowed slightly. And though, everything around me was gray, it snowed white. And though the white trickled before, it gradually poured so that as I drifted upwards all I saw was white. Then the movement stopped, and there appeared a faraway figure away with arms spread for a welcome embrace. I ran towards it and noticed that the figure became my Floella *in the white sun*. She stood at the beginning of an ocean with water reflecting white and her red hair wisping in the air. And the closer I got to her, the more defined her image became. And within yards her hair became snowy white. And within a hug's distance her eyes became black and she screamed until she reached the highest note one could fathom. Behind her the waves became black, swallowing us in complete darkness.

For an eternity Icarus ran again and again, convinced, that his Floella beckoned him for an embrace to her. But even in reflection during that eternity, he never realized her as a deviation of the true Floella, a chimerical perversion.

