



Hedera helix
2009

Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta

*The National English Honor Society
for Two-Year Colleges*

Volume VI



Hedera helix
2009

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The National English Honor Society
for Two-Year Colleges

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Sigma Kappa Delta serves two-year college students who achieve academic excellence in English. Members need not be English majors but must demonstrate an interest and proficiency in literature and writing. ΣΚΔ offers members opportunities for

- Scholarships
- Awards
- Leadership
- Competition
- Publication
- Travel
- National Conferences
- Networking

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Hedera helix – the scientific name for English Ivy and the national plant of ΣΚΔ, symbolizing resilience and individual growth. In keeping with the Greek spelling, we use the lower case “h” for helix.

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Editor's Note

The theme of the 2009 national Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta, "Memories," seemed to be a recurrent theme in this year's writing and photo submissions. Who among us doesn't have a wonderful story of a long ago (or recent) memory? Write them; recreate them through photography.

These stories speak to the heart of who we are and the lives we live, as you will see in the stories and pictures included in this volume of *Hedera helix*.

Each year, we receive more and more entries, and that is our goal: to encourage two-year college students to communicate feelings and thoughts and to do so creatively. Sponsors, please encourage your members to submit their outstanding writings and photos to next year's contests; members, write, edit, photograph, and send us your best. We delight in sharing them on these pages.

Jan Anderson
SKD Editor of Publications



2009 SKD Contest Winners

Literary Journal Award

The Muse

Theta Beta Chapter

Calhoun Community College

Sponsors: Jill Chadwick and Leigh Ann Rhea

Essay

(Tie)

Paulette Renee Bergstue

*The Modern Inconveniences
of Cell Phones*

Calhoun Community College

Christopher Hooie

Crying Bear

Calhoun Community College

Poetry

Barbara Logan

Life

Amarillo College

Literary Analysis

Christopher Hooie

Hope IS Human

Calhoun Community College

Short Fiction

Tandi Quisenberry

Numb

Amarillo College

Photography

1st Place: Cheryl (Gale) Opuszynski

Moment of Love

Atlantic Cape Community College

2nd Place: Claire Powell

Snow Path

Calhoun Community College

3rd Place: Claire Powell

Iron Fence

Calhoun Community College

The Dr. William Johnson Sigma

Tau Delta

Transfer Scholarship

Brianna Lovell

Theta Beta Chapter, Calhoun Community College

Dr. Don Perkins Service Scholarship

Christopher Hooie

Theta Beta Chapter, Calhoun Community College

Dr. Susan Lejeune

Service Scholarship

Jennifer Dunford

Theta Beta Chapter, Calhoun Community College

Service Scholarships

Devin Michael Kennamer

Epsilon Alpha Chapter, Northeast Alabama
Community College

Jordan Zachary Hendricks

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Community College

Rachel Allyson Spurgin

Epsilon Alpha Chapter, Northeast Alabama
Community College

Chapter Activity Award

Theta Gamma Chapter at Blinn

College,

Bryan Campus

Lea Williamson, Sponsor





1st Place: Cheryl (Gale) Opuszynski
Moment of Love
Atlantic Cape Community College



2nd Place: Claire Powell
Snow Path
Calhoun Community College



3rd Place: Claire Powell
Iron Fence
Calhoun Community College

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My Life | 17**

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Life

I saw the old porch today
 where we spent
 that whole summer
 sitting on the dark bench
 planning our futures
 and what was to be.

We would lead brazen lives—
 squander our riches
 on frivolous things,
 ride a raft through
 a cold raging river,
 yell at matadors flinging
 their sharp swords,
 watch jungle tigers
 sleeping in their lairs,
 climb mountain peaks
 and etch our names in stone.

I have traded
 my passport for life.
 Children now swing
 from the tree in the yard.
 Laundry and dishes fill my day.

When time allows
 I stare out the window
 and slip back to that summer
 on the porch.

Barbara Logan

Phi Beta Chapter
 Amarillo College

◆ 2009 Poetry Winner





Crying Bear

Every four years, the Boy Scouts of America holds a national jamboree for scouts from all over the country to gather in fellowship and camaraderie. The jamboree is most often held at Fort A.P. Hill, a United States Army base located in northern Virginia. Since the base is close to Washington, D.C., many troops at the jamboree also take a trip to our nation's capital and other nearby historical sites.



In 1989, I was lucky enough to attend this event; in addition, my father was scoutmaster of our north Alabama group. Because of the sheer number of boy scouts in the nation, the troops who attend the jamboree are usually made up of boys from various troops located in their own areas. In my case, there were many scouts and leaders from the north Alabama area.

Like many other troops, we toured Washington. Such an experience! The majesty of the city, the monuments, our government, and the historical significance of the capital and surrounding area were not lost on many of us. One evening, after a short driving tour, we visited the Lincoln Memorial. Adjacent to old Abe lies the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, better known as "The Wall."

The Wall lies off the left hand of Abe. Standing in front of Abe's statue and facing the Washington Monument, visitors can glimpse The Wall through a small stand of trees. A small path leads from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to the beginning of The Wall, which first appears as a small black granite triangle recessed into a small hillside. The tiles become more visible as visitors travel along the path, and names begin to appear, listed by the year of the servicemen's deaths. Soon, the growing tiles reach their full height, and The Wall turns slightly to the right at an angle and continues. Each black granite slab is much taller than the average person and holds hundreds of names. The total number of slain servicemen on that wall is 58,195.

I was thirteen years old the year I visited The Wall. I was no longer a boy, but still not quite a man, and this visit had an immeasurable effect on me. I was simply awed by the experience. After a few pictures and a bit of time running my fingers across name after name, I decided to make my way back up to Old Abe and find a seat for the fireworks show we had been told was coming. A friend of mine was standing at the end of the wall, just standing there, looking lost. I gave him the "nod," the old shake of the head acknowledging his presence. He gave me the other "nod" to acknowledge mine, and then he gave me one other "nod," the one that conveys "look over there."

One of our leaders, Mr. Ausie Clement, was beginning to walk along the wall. Mr. Clement is a Vietnam Veteran. The best description of him is that he looks like a bear: about five feet four, barrel-chested and thick limbed. His jet black hair has long since acquired many gray and silver streaks. His large face sprouts a beard that matches his hair as if it were an extension of it. He wears glasses and walks with a cane, the latter apparently due to bad knees from an old war injury. At the time, he was dressed as we were, his khaki shirt adorned with a few insignia, olive drab shorts, and olive drab knee length socks trimmed red at the top. Mr. Clement sounded a lot like an old bear as well; he in-



serted many grunts and growls into his replies to oft asked questions of young men. Mr. Clement had a heart of gold; however, as he was always prepared to teach any young man anything he knew, he always had time for those many questions.

My friend and I stood watching as he walked along that wall, leaning heavily on that cane. We slowly followed at a distance, quietly, so that we would not disturb him. He appeared as if the whole of the world rested on his shoulders. Occasionally, he reached out his left hand and ran his fingers across a name, similar to a child running extended fingers along a chain-link fence. After several minutes, he came to a particular slab of granite and stopped, staring up at it. When the wall was completed in 1982, there were no computer databases to search for the location of a particular name. Mr. Clement had done so the old fashioned way: he had either looked it up in a book or he had been here before and found it.

Mr. Clement then did an unexpected thing. He leaned the cane he relied on so much against that wall and just stood there, staring, completely unaware of us or the other hundreds of young scouts milling about. I stood in reverence and awe as I watched him silently reach up to a name a few inches above his head and trace that name with his fingers. With one hand on that name, he moved his other to his face, hiding his eyes as tears began to run down his cheeks. He stood that way for an eternity, or so it seemed, for time has a way of fooling the mind. The dozens of people passing around me ceased to exist; all else passed from my mind as I watched solemnly to see what would happen next.

After a moment or two, he lowered both hands. As tears still streamed down his face, I watched a bent and seemingly broken man rise up, straighten those bad knees, and give a perfect salute as crisp and neat as if he had just completed his military training. He held that salute for a moment, finished it, and collected his cane. My friend and I melted into the crowd as he passed, wanting nothing more than to allow him his personal moment in peace.

I have often wondered what passed through his mind. What happened in that jungle all those years ago? Then, as I aged, it dawned on me that those men had, in effect, given their lives for him. That particular name must have been a close friend of his, and Mr. Clement's agony must have been a result of knowing that his friend had died while he had lived. In that jungle, surrounded by death and destruction, they had clung to the only thing they had: friendship. Friendship built by entrusting their own personal survival to those around them on an every-minute-of-the-day basis.

In a moment, I had been able to witness a lifetime worth of education. William Wordsworth says that we have "spots of time, That with distinct pre-eminence retain a *renovating virtue...*" and that by which "...our minds are nourished and invisibly repaired," and that they "lift us up when fallen." I cannot improve upon that statement, but perhaps I have given an additional glimpse of it. I have learned that wisdom is mainly a component of our life's experiences. Snippets of time, recalled again and again, from which we learn anew every day.

Christopher Hooie

Theta Beta Chapter
Calhoun Community College

◆ 2009 Essay Winner (Tie)





My Worst Christmas Ever

"I hope you know what you're getting!" These were the words my mother-in-law said to me on my wedding day. These words summed up her opinion that I was not quite good enough to merit the prize of marrying her son. On my family's annual Christmas trip to her house in 1999, my clumsiness seemingly confirmed her opinion of me. During my worst Christmas ever, I learned that my opinion of myself is more important than my mother-in-law's in spite of ruining her new bedspread, antique tablecloth, and Christmas Eve dinner.



When I arrived at my mother-in-law's house that year, I had a foggy brain and shaky legs after riding in a van for sixteen hours with three cranky children, one even crankier husband, and one restless dog. After eight trips from the car to the house to move our belongings inside, I headed upstairs to find any horizontal space on which to crash. My mother-in-law insisted that my husband and I stay in her bedroom, so I drug my body and my bags into her room since I was too tired to argue about the sleeping arrangements. I closed the door behind me, threw her bedspread on the floor, and collapsed onto her bed. When I woke up the next morning, I slid out of bed and staggered toward the bedroom door. That was the awful moment at which I realized that not only had I thrown the bedspread on the floor the night before, but I had also thrown my bags on top of the bedspread. Unfortunately, one of these bags was my cosmetic bag, which was lying beside a puddle of beige liquid foundation that oozed from the bag's zipper. I grabbed a wad of tissues and wiped off as much of the makeup as I could. Since I could see no trash can in the room, I had no choice but to try to get to the bathroom down the hall as stealthily as I could in order to throw the tissues away and get cleaning supplies to sneak back to the bedroom. I was not stealthy enough because my mother-in-law saw me and my wad of tissue in the hall. After telling her the tale, I swore I could clean the makeup off the bedspread. As nicely as she could under the circumstances, my mother-in-law replied, "Well, it's only a bedspread, but it *is* a new bedspread." I had been at my mother-in-law's house less than a day, and I was already a loser.

After the bedspread fiasco, I determined to be a stellar daughter-in-law for the rest of the visit. Being stellar, in this case, meant helping my mother-in-law serve the perfect traditional Swedish Christmas Eve dinner to about fifteen people. Setting up for this dinner entailed bringing down the two extra table leaves from the attic and pulling the ancient dining room table apart to insert them. Somehow, I found a way to do this job single-handedly by alternately pushing and pulling on the ends of the table about a dozen times each. The next part of the setup was the most sacred—the placing of the antique tablecloth on the dining room table. My mother-in-law brought this down herself from an upstairs closet, but I was the one who had to position the cloth on the table so that the portions which hung over each side were equal in length. I finished the perfect placement of the tablecloth, and I noticed three burning candles in a flower arrangement sit-



ting on the buffet. Thinking this would make a nice centerpiece for the table, I blew out the candles, picked up the arrangement, and walked toward the table. When I reached the table's edge, I stumbled and dropped the arrangement, spilling hot red candle wax on the antique tablecloth. My mother-in-law, who had been upstairs most of the morning, chose that moment to come downstairs and into the dining room. I promised her I would be able to scrape the wax off the tablecloth and leave no trace of the spill. She replied through an unconvincing smile, "Well, if you can't clean it off, maybe I can put a dish over the spot, *but* there's no guarantee I'll be able to do that the next time the tablecloth is used." With those words, my hopes of being stellar died.

At this point, I optimistically set my sites on cooking the Swedish meal since cooking was something I knew I could do well. In fact, after about two hours of cooking, I had done nothing wrong. Nothing, that was, until I spilled the main ingredient for the crowning glory of the Swedish meal. I spilled the powdered gelatin for the Snow Pudding dessert on the floor right beside my mother-in-law's foot. This time, she did not even try to veil her dismay. She just said, "Well, that's *it*, then. I guess there'll be no Snow Pudding this year." As she was speaking, my cheeks and my ears got hot, and I felt a dull pain in my chest. In one day's time, I reinforced my mother-in-law's justifiably low opinion of me, and I killed Christmas.

The arrival of my friends and family for the dinner was a welcome and happy event after a horrible day. In spite of all my blunderings, the Christmas Eve meal was a success. During the meal, I made a trip around the table with the Swedish brown beans to see if anyone wanted a second helping. When I walked past my ten-year-old daughter, she told me that I looked pretty and that my earrings were sparkly. Next, I passed my fourteen-year-old son who told me that the food that year was better than the food the year before and that I had done a good job cooking. My twelve-year-old son then grunted, "Yeah," which was high praise, indeed, coming from him. All of a sudden, the insecure pang in the pit of my stomach disappeared. I finished that trip around the table and walked into the kitchen just before the hot, teary feeling welled up from my throat and into my eyes. At that moment, my mother-in-law's opinion of me did not matter at all, and my opinion of myself was at an all-time high.

By the end of the day on Christmas Eve, I had ruined my mother-in-law's bedspread, tablecloth and dessert. However, I had only ruined them temporarily. Somehow, I had managed to clean the makeup off the bedspread completely with some soap and shampoo, scrape the cooled wax off the tablecloth without leaving a trace, and find more gelatin in the pantry for the Snow Pudding. Most importantly, I had managed to raise three children who loved me. I felt pretty good about myself as a result, and I never again let my mother-in-law's opinion of me matter more than my own.

Paulette Renee Bergstue

Theta Beta Chapter

Calhoun Community College

2009 Essay Winner (Tie)



The Modern Inconveniences of Cell Phones



The theater is dark and quiet, and just as the detective is about to reveal the identity of the killer, someone's "SpongeBob SquarePants" ringtone starts playing loudly in the front row. This serves as a perfect example of how the modern convenience of a cell phone can be a terrible inconvenience. Cell phones are modern inconveniences because using them inappropriately causes health hazards, upgrading them frequently generates needless expense, and answering them constantly creates annoyances.

Cell phones pose hazards when people use them inappropriately. The hazards that first come to mind are the vehicle accident injuries and deaths that result from talking or texting while driving. Because these activities leave one hand free for driving, many drivers believe that using cell phones in vehicles poses no danger. However, talking on the phone while driving impairs a driver's ability to the same degree as excessive levels of alcohol consumption do. Texting is the more blatantly dangerous activity while driving since texters usually have to look at the cell phone screens at some point. Not only are cell phones hazardous to physical health, but also these devices are hazardous to the mental health of people who use them inappropriately. One of these mental hazards is addiction to talking or texting. This kind of addiction compels some phone users to answer each call or text message immediately at any time, at any place, and during any activity. This almost constant cell phone use causes stress since these users spend very little stress-free time away from communication with co-workers or friends or family members. This stress is damaging to their mental health as well as to their physical health since mental stress has adverse effects on physical health.

In addition to causing hazards, cell phones generate needless expense when users frequently upgrade them. Since cell phone service providers frequently offer new models of phones and upgrade incentives, many cell phone customers cannot resist these temptations to purchase better phones with the latest technology. Some of the newest phones on the market have usage plans that cost over one hundred dollars each month. These expenses are in addition to the initial purchase costs of the phones, with some of the newest models costing as much as three hundred dollars. Upgrades to these more expensive phones are unnecessary expenses because users often upgrade even though their existing phones work well enough for their needs. While some cell phone customers upgrade their phones for the sake of new technology, others pay to upgrade frequently for the sake of being seen with the most expensive phones. These pricey phones are status symbols that some people use to flaunt their wealth in the same way they use expensive sports cars and designer clothes. Although expensive phones are symbols of financial status for some people, these devices are symbols of fashion status for others. Users who are most likely to use cell phones as fashion statements are young girls. These girls pay to upgrade their phones for no other reasons than the new phones are prettier or come in brighter shades of pink.



Besides generating expenses, cell phones create annoyances when they interrupt activities in public as well as in private. Few things are more annoying than hearing ringtones in a restaurant or a movie theater. As if these silly tunes are not annoying enough, the people answering the phones make the situation worse by speaking much more loudly while on the phone than they normally speak. Not only is cell phone use in public a source of annoyance, but also the use of cell phones in private settings is annoying. Some users have jobs that require them to be available to answer calls, text messages, or e-mails at any time. This continual cell phone use becomes an annoyance when this behavior interrupts activities with the users' friends or during private times with their families. When these users interrupt conversations or activities with other people in order to answer business calls, they make these other people feel unimportant. These annoying and constant links to co-workers and work issues blur and sometimes obliterate the lines between the work lives and the private lives of cell phone users.

Even though the ability to talk on phones anywhere and anytime is often helpful, the cell phones that make this convenience possible become nuisances when people use them in inappropriate ways and at inappropriate times. Not only can cell phones be nuisances, but they can also be detrimental to the health and the wallets of the users. However, since these devices are here to stay, cell phones are modern inconveniences with which everyone must learn to live.

Paulette Renee Bergstue

Theta Beta Chapter
Calhoun Community College

November on Gibson Street

Paul Miller never liked November, though he always tried. It seemed meaningless to him. The weather, cool and refreshing in October, became harsh and bitter. November was too insignificant, in his opinion. Halloween season passes and Christmas begins, with absolutely no transitional phase. It is simply a month to give procrastinators more time to buy Christmas gifts. He despised Thanksgiving, as well. His mother, the only person who attempted to bring his estranged family together, had died eight years ago, and he had barely spoken to his family since. Therefore, any family-oriented holiday was not a friend of his.

All of these things cross Paul's mind as he drives down Gibson Street, a historic street lined with extravagant homes and manicured lawns. His modest green truck looks shabby amongst the doctors' and lawyers' Cadillacs, Volvos, and Beemers parked in the cobblestoned driveways. These are not the types of homes Paul would ever hope to afford or even desire. He has always described himself as a simple man, and he truly likes the life he has created for himself.

He slows in front of a familiar house, one that he has seen many times, and thinks of Catherine. It is early morning, so he is not even sure if she is awake, but he imagines her, behind the house's walls, cooking breakfast for her husband, Robert, and their two sons. He pictures her directing her boys through their morning routine and kissing Robert goodbye before he leaves for the day. This is something Paul often does, wonder about Catherine's daily routine. Each time he does, he imagines that she is smiling and overjoyed with her life. He wants this for her.

Catherine is the woman he thought he would always have. When they first began dating as high school sophomores, he used to whisper in her ear, "You're going to be my wife one day." She would look at him, laugh, and say, "You would only be so lucky." This was something they always did. Both Paul and Catherine believed that they could only speak from their hearts if it was at a volume only the other could hear.

They got married fresh out of high school; in fact, they drove from their graduation ceremony straight to the nearest wedding chapel. Catherine whispered love poems into Paul's ear as he drove. He listened to each one and recited one to her in return. They were wed at a ramshackle wedding chapel nearly an hour from their hometown; the pastor had been marrying young couples like themselves for so long that he had lost any warm feelings he may have once had for the occupation. Upon instructing Paul to kiss his new bride, he turned to his wife, who sat patiently on the bench to the piano, which had been broken for many years, and said, "This had damn well better be the last of the day." The saying quickly became a joke between Paul and Catherine. Anytime they completed any task around the house, they repeated these lines and laughed.

After they were wed, Paul nearly always referred to Catherine as Mrs. Miller, and they both smiled each and every time he said it. She often talked to him about her fear of him falling out of love with her, as she had seen her father do with her mother. He would simply look at her and say, "The day I stop loving you is the day I lose all purpose." This always made





her fear subside.

They would lie awake at night and talk for hours. Catherine would tell him stories of the births of their future children. Those were Paul's favorite. They would try to decide on names for the babies, but Paul always agreed with the names Catherine loved. She would try to coerce him into choosing names he liked, but he enjoyed her's just fine. Paul would tell Catherine the stories of when he first began falling in love with her.

"The first time I thought it, you were walking beside me and I nervously reached for your hand. You didn't say a single word. You didn't even look up at me. You just locked your fingers with mine and smiled at the ground. It was then that I knew I was yours."

It was a marriage filled with love and passion. He was strong, thoughtful, and quiet; all of these qualities attracted her to him. She had a gift for joy, an infatuation for life that he found intoxicating. They were complete opposites, only similar in their overwhelming desire for the other. Love was never lacking in their marriage, but it wasn't always easy. Catherine was ambitious and independent. She never ceased wanting to become better than what she already was, to have more than she currently had. Paul was complacent to be exactly on the path he was on in his life, which infuriated her. Eventually, she began to resent this about him. He was also jealous of others in her life, fearing that she would find someone who would provide more for her than he could. The thought of losing her brought out in him a fear so great that it consumed him.

Paul knew that Catherine would someday leave him, and he never blamed her, in any way. His jealousy was overpowering her, and she refused to allow any man to hold her down, no matter how much she wanted to be with him. He would lie awake at night and watch her sleep, whispering her name into the dark, trying to hold onto her. He prayed to have one more day with her, thinking that he could change her mind, show her he could change if she would only stay.

Five years into their marriage, Paul was sitting in their bed, staring at a picture of the two of them, when he heard her footsteps behind him. He quietly sat the picture on the night stand and prepared himself for the words he knew were coming.

"I'm sorry, Paul," he faintly heard Catherine whisper.

"I know. It's not your fault," he replied. He stood, turned to face her, and saw her in tears, her luggage sitting in front of her, like a barrier, separating them.

"I thought this was it. Me and you. I thought this was going to be enough to last," she said.

They stood in the room they shared in the house they made their own. Paul remembered feeling that they were physically growing apart, as they stood there. Before, they were two people on the same path, and then they became two separate entities, no longer connected by their love for each other.

He took her hand in his and walked her out to her car in complete silence. She put her bags in the trunk of her car, and then stopped in front of him. She opened her mouth to say, "This had damn well be the last of the day," but found the statement suddenly irrelevant to her. She kissed him, before getting into her car and driving away. He watched her leave the driveway that used to be theirs, all the while cursing the November wind that kept pushing her further away.

Catherine Easton walks down the stairs and into the kitchen on the morning of November twenty-sixth. She always likes getting up before the morning turns hectic, with her husband in a rush to get to his patients at the hospital and the kids trying to be on time to school. She enjoys having some time for herself, but this morning is especially important to her. Today would have been her 15th anniversary with her first husband, Paul. She laughs to herself,



thinking about where all the time has gone. Twenty years ago, she was eloping with Paul. She remembers him driving to that run-down, pitiful little chapel and her whispering, "I love you," repeatedly in his ear. She was happy then. Now, she was married to Dr. Robert Easton, living in a gorgeous house with two beautiful children. She was happy, still, but in a different way. She loved her children, and she even loved her husband, but she could never help thinking of Paul.

Catherine puts on a pot of coffee for Robert to have when he wakes up, and then walks quietly into the guest bedroom. She stops at a mirror in the room, and looks at herself for what seems to be the first time in years. She is attractive, with a pretty face and small frame. She notices a wrinkle that she doesn't remember having previously been there, and then walks away from the mirror. In the closet, in the top right corner, she finds what she is looking for: a plain, wooden box, hidden behind many discarded boxes of the boys' old clothes. From the box, she pulls everything she has left of Paul Miller. There isn't much in the box, just a hat and a pair of gloves he left in her car many years ago, a book of poetry he used to read to her, and a letter he sent to her before her wedding to Robert. She reads the letter often now, but not as frequently as she once did. The pages are wrinkled and soft from the heavy use over the years. She unfolds the letter, one more time, and reads Paul's words:

Dear Catherine,

I write to congratulate you on your and Dr. Easton's marriage. While I cannot say that I am happy for myself, I am happy for you. He will be kind to you. I am sure of it. I truly hope you love him, but I understand if you do not. I pray you have a happy and blessed life together.

That being said, I cannot bring myself to end this letter without being completely truthful with you. I love you, Catherine. I haven't stopped loving you since the day you left. My days consist of trying to push the thought of you away from me, and at night, I give into my thoughts and I dream of you. I dream of you as I remember you to be, mine. Mine. I will always see you as mine and me as yours.

I'm not sure what I hope to gain from this. Or perhaps what I hope to lose, whether it be you coming back to me, or you and the ghost of you leaving me behind. Maybe I'll find peace. I hope the same for you. Remember, you have been loved.

*Yours,
Paul*

Catherine finishes reading the letter. With every ounce of her being, she wishes that she and Paul could be together. For the first years of her life as Catherine Easton, she tried to love them both. She tried to be wholly and completely Paul's and Robert's, but it was too difficult. It was impossible to be committed to Robert with Paul so much in her thoughts. She decided she had to love Robert with her mind and body and to love Paul with her heart.

Catherine hears footsteps in the rooms above her. She replaces Paul's items and places the shoebox back on the closet shelf where it is safe. She wipes the tears from her eyes, puts on the smile her family knows and expects, and then walks out into the kitchen. It is time to start the day.

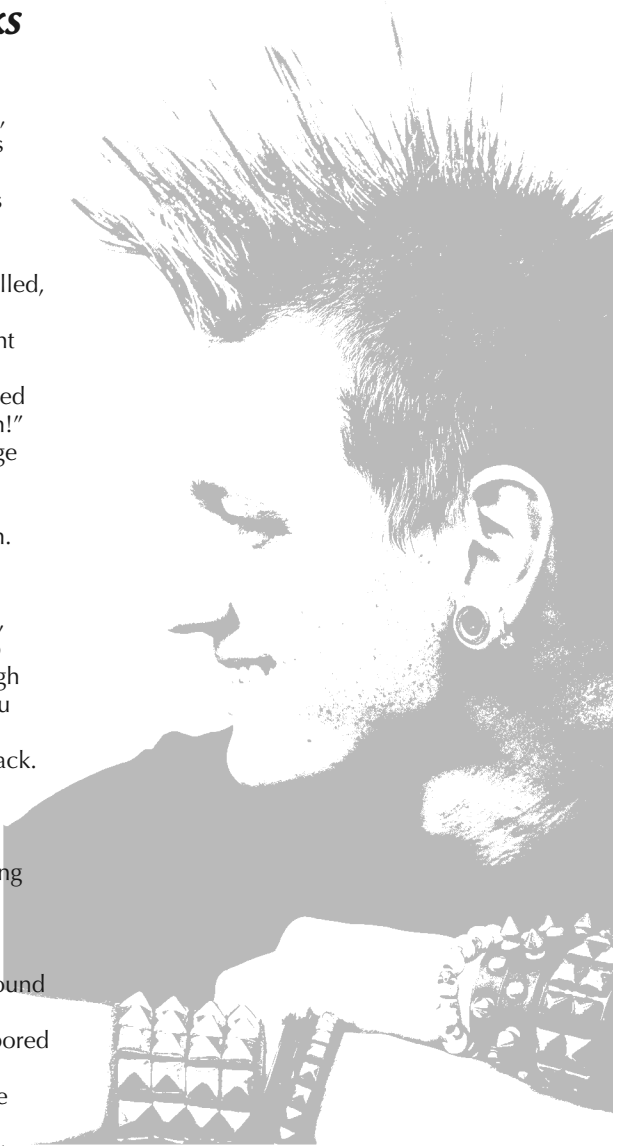
Bailey Lovell

Theta Beta Chapter
Calhoun Community College



Circus of Freaks

Keep your chin up kid,
 You're feeding our ways,
 With your 0-gauged ears
 And teal hair for days-
 Because everyone needs
 the weird, the punk
 the Goth and the geeks-
 Or as they used to be called,
 A circus of freaks,
 You're the horrific delight
 And the indulgent fright,
 Because we all really need
 The "eww" and the "ahh!"
 The weird and the strange
 The sweet but the odd,
 and the lovely deranged
 Like the bearded woman.
 they all stop and stare
 At the kid in his neon
 Or your mohawked hair,
 But we need you, we do
 No matter how they laugh
 Because they stare at you
 with eyes so bright
 While looking at your back.
 "Did you see that?"
 Or
 "Did you notice this?"
 That'll give 'em something
 to tell to their friends!
 So tattoo your face
 And stretch that nose!
 Because without you around
 Everyone knows
 It'd be bland; we'd be bored
 We'd try to replace
 The amusement we once
 got from your face.
 No! the boots they aren't
 too tall!
 But the make-up you have on
 is all too small
 Go for bigger! Try for extreme!
 And soon you'll discover
 The secret American dream.



Rachel Greathouse

Theta Beta Chapter
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The Day That Changed My Life

It was a warm autumn evening, around sunset, when it happened. I was outside on my driveway practicing my sword technique with a boken, which is a wooden sword. I had been practicing for a while with my swings and wanted to work on the accuracy aspect of sword play; the only problem was that I had no target. All of a sudden I found what I needed. From the corner of my eye I spotted a faint light that I identified as a firefly. Without so much as a second thought, I struck down the helpless creature, and with it, everything I thought I understood about the way the world operates. It's amazing how a seemingly insignificant event can change a person's life forever.



After I struck the insect, I spotted it on the cold cement of my driveway. It just lay there, helpless as its light slowly faded away until it was no more. As I stood there staring at the now lifeless creature, I felt something that I had not felt in years, a tear rolling down my right cheek and falling from my chin to the ground. I kept asking myself why I had killed the firefly. After a while, I finally derived an answer: it was because of social conditioning. We're all taught from birth that there is a hierarchy with the value of life, and insects are at the very bottom.

I made a decision then that I would think about how every action I take will affect the other people or things around me. When one starts to think in that manner, he or she can become much more aware as to how we, as humans, hurt one another without even realizing it. This happens simply because most people do not think about the consequences of their actions before the actions are taken. Sometimes, if I catch my friends making a decision based upon social conditioning, I will ask them why they did it. Whenever I do that, I can see the emptiness in their eyes as they pointlessly search for a reason for their actions. I do that to try and pass on the lesson that was given to me by an insect, of all things.

I can remember how I stood on my driveway, staring at the firefly, when I decided to make it the new symbol for my life. It stood as a symbol not only to remind me to think about my actions, but also to remind me how valuable life is. After I made that decision, I felt an overwhelming peace come over me. I leaned down, picked up the firefly, placed it into a small hole that I'd dug with my finger, and then covered it with the moist soil. That burial also served as a symbol. It symbolized me burying my old belief: that life could be ranked based upon size or species.

To this day, I often think about that evening and how much it changed my life. I make it a point to always consider others whenever I make a decision. I also try to keep in mind that animals' lives are important as well. I am not a vegetarian now or anything like that, but I do not believe in senselessly killing anything. Every life is precious, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. The firefly taught me that lesson. Fireflies still hold a very special place in my heart. Every time I see that faint, glowing light, the feelings I felt that evening once again flood my heart, and I am reminded how much I have changed. I will never forget that evening, that firefly, or that grave, and how much it means to me.

Nathan Stone

Bevill State Community College



Sentenced

Now I am a voice on the phone,
a signature on a letter,
a picture on a mantle.

I cling to the hours between dusk and dawn.
The Darkness does not judge me for what I have become.
Its Sandman befriends me with dreams of who I once was.

Confined, arrested—
I will serve this sentence and keep the secret
of this embarrassment that guards the cold steel door.

What if I escape
To step outside and let the wind graze my cheek?
Fear will not let me fly.

Barbara Logan

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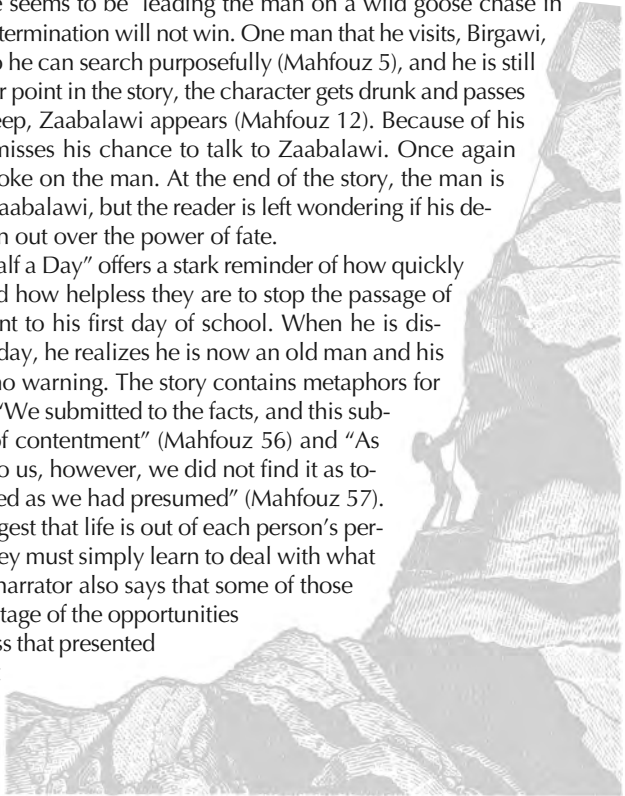


Naguib Mahfouz: Fate vs. Personal Determination

The author Naguib Mahfouz wrote many short stories which are celebrated throughout the world today. The outcome of his character's lives is often determined by a common theme of fate versus personal determination. Does fate determine what happens to the characters, or does their own personal determination lead them through life? Several of Naguib Mahfouz's stories suggest that people's personal determination has less control over their own lives than fate.

In the story "Zaabalawi," Mahfouz writes of a man who is determined to find the meaning of life while fate keeps this goal just out of his reach. In the beginning of the story, the narrator is determined to find Zaabalawi because he will have the cure for "that illness for which no one possesses a remedy" (Mahfouz 1). The man has tried everything within his own power to get well and nothing has been successful. This suggests that no matter what the man does, fate determines what will come. As he searches for the mystical Sheikh Zaabalawi, he is constantly turned away with few or no answers. Some people have not seen or heard from Zaabalawi in years. Others have seen him recently but still do not know where to find him. As the character goes along searching fruitlessly, fate keeps pulling Zaabalawi further away from him. Even though he is determined, he cannot find Zaabalawi. Fate seems to be leading the man on a wild goose chase in order to prove that his determination will not win. One man that he visits, Birgawi, even offers him a map so he can search purposefully (Mahfouz 5), and he is still not successful. At another point in the story, the character gets drunk and passes out, and while he is asleep, Zaabalawi appears (Mahfouz 12). Because of his drunkenness, the man misses his chance to talk to Zaabalawi. Once again fate has played a cruel joke on the man. At the end of the story, the man is still determined to find Zaabalawi, but the reader is left wondering if his determination will ever win out over the power of fate.

Mahfouz's story "Half a Day" offers a stark reminder of how quickly life passes people by and how helpless they are to stop the passage of time. A young boy is sent to his first day of school. When he is dismissed at the end of the day, he realizes he is now an old man and his life has passed by with no warning. The story contains metaphors for how life can be such as "We submitted to the facts, and this submission brought a sort of contentment" (Mahfouz 56) and "As our path revealed itself to us, however, we did not find it as totally sweet and unclouded as we had presumed" (Mahfouz 57). Both of these quotes suggest that life is out of each person's personal control and that they must simply learn to deal with what life brings his way. The narrator also says that some of those around him "took advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves" (Mahfouz 57). This suggests that opportunities appear when fate desires and that people should take





advantage of these chances. The overall metaphor of the story is that all of life passes as quickly as half a day. As life passes, man must simply go along for the ride, and fate will lead the way.

Another story by Mahfouz that suggests the power of fate over personal determination is "His Majesty." The young man in this story tries to change his life for the better and thinks he is on his way to doing so; however, fate has a different plan for him. At the beginning of the story, the young man is a street urchin and a nobody until one day fate hands him a break. People suddenly start to think he resembles the king, and because of this he starts to become somewhat famous. He starts to dream and believe that perhaps he is the son of the king. These hopes come to be because of what fate has given him and not because of any hard work that he has done. When authorities jail him to stop rumors that might develop from his fame, fate continues to take him in a full circle. He is released from jail after a short time, and he reaches new heights and dreams. All of this happens simply because of his looks and because fate wanted it to be so. The young man does nothing out of the ordinary in order to suddenly find fame or fortune. The final blow of fate comes at the end of the story when the young man has reached the height of his happiness and is feeling better than ever. The authorities once again feel threatened by the young man, and they decide that "the most appropriate thing is for him to disappear completely" (Mahfouz 136). At a time when the young man comforts "himself with the thought that God has not created him with this appearance without some profound purpose" (Mahfouz 137), he disappears and is not heard from again. Fate makes him believe that he has a great purpose, but then takes everything away in one fell swoop. His fate, it turns out, was to live a short life with a short amount of fame but no real success.

A fourth story of Mahfouz's that keeps with his theme is "The Man and the Other Man." In "The Man and the Other Man," two men's lives are altered by fate as one is murdered and the other is haunted by the murder for the rest of his days. In this story, "the man" has no idea he is being followed by "the other man." Throughout the story, the man goes about his business and shops for hours, oblivious to what fate has in store for him. His fate ends up being an unexpected and quick death (Mahfouz 110-14). Although he was going about his life as if everything would be wonderful, fate suddenly steps in, and he is killed. The other man thinks that he has escaped unscathed, but when he returns to his hotel room, his fate becomes all too clear. He is haunted by the ghost of the man he murdered, and guilt overtakes him. His fate is to forever carry the consequence and guilt of his actions, and he is led into the night by the ghost of the murdered man (Mahfouz 115-16). In essence, the fate of both of these men is a death of one sort or another.

As exemplified in these stories, Naguib Mahfouz enjoys giving his reader some points to ponder and things to think upon deeply. His examples of fate being stronger than personal determination might even lead the reader to strive harder to control his own destiny and not allow fate to overtake his life. Whether fate or personal determination determines who a person will become may never fully be answered, but Mahfouz certainly gives some food for thought in his stories.

Cheryl (Gale) Opuszynski

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Keeping Up Traditions

The small flickering candles in the church have been extinguished, yet the night is only beginning. Ever since I was a child, this has been the most anticipated night of the year. The reasons for my excitement might seem obvious, for after all, it is Christmas Eve. However, my love for this one night a year comes not from the date on the calendar but from a few simple traditions my family holds. Our traditions may seem strange to the bird watching through the window, but to us, our lives would not be the same without them. Traditions are what tie us together like a big red bow on a present under the tree.

The tradition begins as we follow the familiar path to a simple white house sitting among a grove of pine trees. The house belongs to my grandparents, and it is the only place acceptable for tonight's celebration. The house is not ideal in size for the number of people to be stuffed inside its walls tonight. However, it is the only house that will do, for such is the tradition. One by one, we shuffle through the door, greeted first by the comforting smells of homemade cookies and meatballs wafting through the air, and then by the sound of laughter drifting from the other rooms. The photographs on the wall are like a wallpaper of memories, reminding us of those not with us tonight. Leaving the kitchen, we pass through the living room with its mismatched recliner chairs and my grandfather dozing on his corner of the couch. We keep moving toward the enclosed front porch, which is where we truly wish to be. The long narrow room, with its windows looking out onto the sturdy pine trunks will be the home of all the true magic tonight. The Christmas tree is at the far end, our presents tempting us from beneath it. It does not take long for the house to become crowded, and soon we are squeezed together like crayons in a box.

One of the first things to be done is the hanging of our Christmas tree balls. The balls lie shining in their small plastic boxes, waiting for each of us to find our name on one and trek toward the tree. At first glance, these simple ornaments look unimpressive and plain. Yet, when we look closer, we see a family. Each ball is sparkling with one unique name, a name which my grandmother fashioned by hand. The year that we entered the family, either by birth or through marriage, also shines back at us. Each generation has its own special color. There is a shimmering green, a brilliant blue, and a shining gold, which combine to make our family tree special. One by one, we hang our balls while pausing to smile cheerily for the camera. The tree itself





is always oversized and heavily laden with silver tinsel and striped candy canes. When at last each member is represented on the family tree, it is time to wait for a special visitor to arrive.

The anticipation starts to grow as we sit snugly together all around the house. Santa Claus must be close by, for he never misses a visit to this house on Christmas Eve. Suddenly, the tinkling sound of bells is heard outside the window, and he is there, waving to all the excited children, both young and old. Though most of us know it is an uncle or a cousin under that red felt suit and fluffy white beard, it does not matter at that moment. As he walks around the outside of the house toward the door, we all start to sing "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town". He strides onto the porch to the music of our song and plops down in the big chair reserved just for him. Each of us must go as our name is called and sit on Santa's lap to receive our present. One by one, we shout out names, each one echoing throughout the house, until the lucky person appears and heads toward his fate. Before we know it, Santa must be moving on, as he has many other places to visit before morning.

As we wave goodbye to our faithful friend, we know the night is coming to an end. We proudly show off our gifts and watch as the children make over their new treasures. Slowly, we start to gather our things and head toward the door, but not before we say goodbye and hug each family member. A hug before leaving the house is another one of our traditions, one that applies at all family gatherings. It is bitter-sweet to see the night end, knowing another year must pass before we repeat this special event. Still a smile crosses my face, for I know this night would not be the same without this simple house, one tinsel Christmas tree, and a man in a red felt suit. Next year, I will once again look forward to these family traditions.

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Hope IS Human

Hope. What images does the word bring to mind? We might think of a teenage boy hoping the next popular video game will soon be released to the masses, a lonely young man hoping the young woman he loves will fall for him in return, a grown man hoping that a return to college will change his entire existence for the better, or an old woman sitting beside her dying husband, hoping he will live a bit longer. Each of us could envision images that would define personal hope for us. In his book *Eight Habits of the Heart*, Clifton Taulbert considers hope one of the habits that enhances our lives. Hope is such an ingrained part of our thoughts that often we don't even realize it is there. . . Hope IS the essential human emotion. We find hope in our dreams, our futures, our children, and even in nature. We find these examples of hope in literature, sometimes as a central theme, sometimes in the background.

Hope can sometimes be the central theme in a literary work. It is powerful enough to stand alone, and often does. We find it a dominant theme in *Dream Deferred* by Langston Hughes. The *vision* of hope is often illustrated as a *dream*. Our dreams define us; where are we going, what will we be, or what will we do with our lives? Hughes asks us "what happens to a dream deferred?" In essence, what happens when we force that dream to wait? What happens when hope must be deferred or put on hold? Does it "fester," "stink," or "dry up" as Hughes suggests? Of course it does. If the realization of hope or a dream is not achieved, the hope or dream will consume our thoughts to the point of destroying us. This destruction is evidenced by the last line of the poem, "Or does it explode?" This work is a powerful example of what disregarded hope can do to us (732).

Hughes also brings us the idea of hope for a brighter future. In his *Theme for English B*, he speaks as a black student to his white instructor. He hopes to convey that his blackness does not make him different mentally or in his human desires. He states that, "...being colored doesn't make me *not* like/ the same things other folks like who are other races." He also hopes to get the white instructor to understand he likes things just like other people. "I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love. / I like to work, read, learn, and understand life." He wants us to understand that even though we whites are "somewhat more free," we are all Americans (972-3).

One of the things hope is closely associated with is time. We look to the future because we have it in front of us. We cannot go back and change the past however much we would like to do so. We, therefore, wish to make sure we do not repeat mistakes, and we hope to teach our children not to make those same mistakes. In *Ulysses*, Alfred Lord Tennyson tells his version of the mind of the hero Ulysses. Ulysses not only ponders his past and future, he hopes *for* his son. He tells us of him, "This is my son, my own Telemachus, / To whom I leave the scepter and the isle." He wishes for his son to be a good ruler, to "subdue them to the useful and the good." He hopes that Telemachus will be "decent not to fail / In offices of tenderness, and pay / meet adoration to my... gods, /when I am gone." He hopes he has taught his son well (746-7).

Human beings look for, and find, hope all around us. We even seek it out in nature. One beautiful example of where hope can be found is in *Loveliest of Trees* by A.E. Housman. In this poem, Housman talks of the hope he has to see the beauty of



spring blossoms for all the springs to come. He sees the “Loveliest of trees, the cherry now / Is hung with bloom along the bough.” He *hopes* to see many more such visions of the beautiful cherry in the future. He is still a young man, “...of my three-score years and ten / twenty will not come again.” He knows that given the average seventy year lifespan spoken of in the Bible, he has fifty yet to go. He also believes this too short a time is insufficient to view the beauty of nature and truly see it all. He tells us that “to look at things in bloom / fifty springs are little room,” to reiterate the point that there is never enough time to see enough of the beauty in the world. He hopes to convey that we should seize the moment to view that beauty whenever possible (792-3).

Yes, to *hope* is the essence of being human. Perhaps we can define it for others better on paper than aloud. We often feel the expression of it when we read literature as we imagine ourselves in the story or poem. Emily Dickinson may have said it best in her famous work, “*Hope* is the thing with feathers / that perches in the soul / and sings the tune without the words / and never stops at all.” How can we better illustrate it? Hope resides in our hearts and souls. We may not know what is coming, but we continue on life’s path anyway.

Primary Source

Arp, Thomas, and Greg Johnson, eds. Perrine’s Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense, 9th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2006.

Christopher Hooie

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2009 Literary Analysis Winner



Numb

His tiny little fingers run through her hair. She rolls over in the bed to see his bright eyes shining as he says in a sweet, blissful tone, "Momma, wake up!" She turns back over and nestles her face in the plush pillow, drifting back to sleep. He knows it is pointless to try again, so he crawls out of bed and tries to entertain himself. He has had to develop a vivid imagination. He sits on the floor with his truck and drives it over the dirty laundry that has been piling up for weeks. He rolls the truck up the mountains and back down again, occasionally wrecking into the sock pile. His tummy is growling, and he has a diaper on from the night before. "Momma!" he begins to cry, "Momma! I want my milk. Momma!"

She slowly gets out of bed and sits on its edge, rubbing her temples. Her head is pulsating and her eyes have not yet adjusted to the morning sun. "Momma!" he cries again. She coughs and gags as she says, "Why won't you just go back to sleep?" Cutting two lines of cocaine on her night stand, she thinks to herself, "Is this what it has come to?" As she looks around, she sees him in a drenched diaper, playing in the dirty laundry and rubbing his growling tummy. There is no end to this cycle, and she knows that tomorrow will just bring another pile of laundry, more bills, and more work, but not food. As she inhales the cocaine, her nose becomes numb, and then slowly her head numbs along with her thoughts and the cries of her baby boy.

As she stands up, she begins to feel a pain in her lower back and in her chest. Her breath grows shorter by the second. She struggles to make it to the kitchen. As she pours some milk that expired three days ago, she begins to feel too weak to even stand. "Chocolate, please, Momma?" he requests in a manner that only a monster could refuse. She has become a monster, and she can feel it taking over her mind, her body, her soul. She utters to him with cruel intentions, "You're so selfish. You always want more and more." Her eyes become cold; she knows it is her fault. "We can't afford for you to have chocolate every morning," she utters. As she looks down at him, she sees tears welling up in his eyes. He is not trying to make Momma mad; he just wants chocolate milk. The pain has become too much, so she grabs the chocolate and sits at the table to finish making his sippy.

Memories begin to flood her mind. They met while she was working as a server. She was on a catering job, and he was a missionary picking up the food her boss had donated to the city mission. At first she didn't even look at him. She had no interest in men. They complicate everything. Her boss walked by and said that she was in charge of gathering the donations. They were in the walk-in getting the last of the food when she looked up and their eyes met. A blue so deep the oceans couldn't compare pierced her soul and left her speechless. As he drove away, she felt her heart drop. He didn't even make it out of the parking lot before he slammed the car into park and ran to her. "I have to have your phone number," he said without thinking.



"I mean... can I get your number, please?" he restated.

Their wedding was on her grandparent's fiftieth wedding anniversary. It was a symbol of forever. After work one night, she bought a pregnancy test, and they danced in the bathroom when it read positive. He held her tightly as she began to cry. "We can do this. We will do it together," he reassured her, and they danced one last dance as he held her in his arms against his chest. As the months went by, they would lie in bed and try to pick names as they felt the kicks of the life inside her.

He left one morning to visit his mother in Dallas, and he never came home. When the call came she just said, "OK," and hung up. Everything she knew, everything she was, and everything she had become poured out of her wrists into the tub as she cried out to no one, "You said we would do this together!" She woke to the cries of a beautiful baby boy in the hospital. The doctor explained that she had lost too much blood, and they had to perform an emergency c-section but that everything was okay now. She held the baby in her arms against her chest and whispered in his ear, "We can do this; we will do it together."

She looks at him with tears in her eyes and tells him, "I'm so sorry I can't do this without him." She then cuts two more lines on the table and inhales one last time. She hands him his chocolate milk and falls to the floor with a thud. He sits on the floor while running his fingers through her hair as he drinks his sippy. "Thank you, Momma," he says as he leans over and kisses her on the cheek.

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