A Note from the Editor

Welcome to the twenty-third edition of Creative License, an award-winning literary and arts magazine published annually by and for the students of Georgia Perimeter College. This past year brought a big change to GPC. We are no longer GPC! As of 2016, we became Perimeter College at Georgia State University, and we are very excited about all the possibilities that being part of GSU will bring. A change that hasn’t occurred, however, is a reduction in the quality of Creative License. As usual, our students have compiled an edition filled with substantial, thought-provoking poetry, fiction, artwork, and photography. If you are fortunate enough to be holding this beautiful, glossy magazine in your hands right now, you can find more copies in each Perimeter College campus library and Student Life office, and with each campus Faculty Advisor and Student Editor. You can also check out the Creative License Website: http://depts.gpc.edu/creativelicense for an online version.

Because the quality of art reproduced in an online publication cannot rival the polished, high-resolution look found in the hand-held magazine, we hope to continue printing high quality hard copies of Creative License for limited distribution. But having Website access means we no longer need to worry about getting this magazine into the hands of every student in the college. Financially, it is not feasible. The online version complements the printed version as a valuable classroom teaching tool to promote learning and unity among the various campuses and centers of the college. It also provides a global introduction into the unique perspectives of Perimeter College students and their communities.

On a personal note, I want to acknowledge and thank the faculty advisors who put in countless hours each semester to make sure that all tasks are completed in a timely manner. Their dedication to serving our students can be seen on every page of this magazine. I also want to thank Keith Cobb, our former budget manager. Keith is no longer with Perimeter College, but he was instrumental in helping us publish Creative License for many years, and we wish him every success in his new endeavor.

Sincerely,
Deborah Byrd
Faculty Editor, 2016

The magazine accepts any original, previously unpublished art form that can appear in print: poetry, fiction, drama, art, photography, or musical scores. The magazine cannot pay for material selected for publication except with a free copy of the issue in which it appears.

For more information, contact the Editor (English Department of Newton Campus, 239 Cedar Ln., Covington, GA 30014) or a Campus Advisor.
In walks my mother slowly through the door of the apartment into the short hallway, the light comes on and she enters the living room. She looks like the Statue of Liberty to me. In her arms she carries a bundle draped in Baby-blues.

Before I see him, I smell him – skin saturated with Johnson’s Baby Oil and Cocoa Butter. Me and my siblings sit eagerly on the living room sofa waiting to see, touch and hold him. When I do – it’s love at first smell. He is encased in a dark brown sugary skin-bringing fresh baked cookies to mind.

As he grows, I am his protector and happy to be my mother’s helper. I prepare his bottled formulas, I wipe spit-ups and change diapers –the old fashioned cloth kind with the big safety pins used as closure device. My mother gave him life, but in my mind - he is my baby. He grows - his cooing, rhythmic and enchanting – like a song, sung without words.

He cut his first tooth on a rubbery baby blue teething ring – bitter to taste, gnawed to a nub. His first steps were monumental. In one - he walked a mile. Hard bottomed shoes steady his stride as he totters around. A stumble here, a tumble there, he persists and grows strong.

As a youngster he is the first one in the family to wear corrective lenses. He starts out left handed, but old wives tales, will not let it be. As a result he stutters and stammers. One of the many obstacles he overcomes before crashing into manhood.

Creative License

DEDICATION TO
Konita Key

Creative License lost a staff member and dear friend in 2015. For many years, Ms. Konita Key, assistant budget manager to our magazine, waged a powerful battle each February and March to ensure that the year’s issue had all the proper paperwork on file. Contracts, budget requests, payment requisitions, purchase order numbers, tax forms—you name it and Konita saw that it was handled correctly, in a timely manner, and always with that beautiful smile. The only battle she lost was the one to cancer. We miss her every day.

Brother Stevie
by Ruth Green

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The moon that grows on the horizon
The rain stays still in the burrow;
The mind seeping through the hole
To see blindness in sight, darkness
With no song but tomorrow
To ease in the field,
And cry out in symphony
In her voice it came
To the gloomy meadow, to her other
In their temple, solitude for love

Her voice is a quiet tone
Just in matrimony and malice,
Golden and evil
Nothing lies beneath it, like
Those soulless words
And each step of that light foot tapped
Leaving every bird to make its duty
Sound of every vocal
To see beautifully, her face

Such innocence belongs to the lake
And her visit to the still waters
To break the anger that had
Once been love
Ruins of a Day
by Hannah E. Maddox

His black, steel-toed boots make a hollow sound on the old wood church floor, echoing the hollowness of his heart. In his calloused hands he carries a stack of books on ancient religions and a disposable camera. He sits at the front, in the rows reserved for family- he does not belong there.

He takes his seat, and I shudder as I turn to face him, The abuser, the asshole, the glorified sperm-donor — my father. I turn from his haunting blue-eyed gaze, turn in my heels and look at the boutonnieres and bouquets. Today is my brother’s wedding day, and it is not the day for this kind of fear.

But when he stands from his seat, smiles in that twisted way, And takes my picture, with his disposable camera. I wonder what the photo will look like. Will he see the hatred smeared across my face; will he see the anger? Will he understand?

I turn from his haunting blue-eyed gaze, turn in my heels and look in the rows reserved for family. He does not belong there. In his calloused hands he carries a stack of books on ancient religions and a disposable camera. He sits at the front, in the rows reserved for family- he does not belong there.

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He turns off and closed the automatic doors and went about my business. I did not know why people were screaming, nor did I care. I’d gotten to work at one in the afternoon and I had a headache from dealing with angry coupon-ers all day. Those people can be vicious.

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They’re a bit more vicious undead, though. But we’re not there yet.

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The Burning of Fool’s Paradise  
by Kaila Glass

Then, Light found its way into my abyss.  
It was radiant and warm, though its radiance blinded me on the spot,  
And its warmth burned my flesh nearly to ash.  
It hurt me because I did not accept it.  
I did not allow Light to give me hope or happiness because I thought it impossible;  
I was married to the Dark and favored its familiar emptiness.  
But I could not ignore its words and wisdom.  
Light’s voice became music to my ears, the melody that would lull me to sleep  
And wipe my tears when I mourned Good Mother’s death.  
When I allowed myself to take in Light’s beauty, I saw so much more.  
It was my grandmother. It was my aunt. It was my stepsisters. It was Love.  
And they helped me to climb.  
And they bandaged my wounds.  
And now, when I find myself plummeting again toward the abyss’s beckoning bed,  
I am strong enough to say, “I want to live.”  
I am able to elevate myself back into Light’s open arms.  
I had gathered the great strength needed to burn Fool’s Paradise to the ground.  
I watched Good Mother and all her lies go up in flames  
And sink to the ocean’s endless depths.  
I had once thought that I was broken beyond repair.  
No, I am simply bleeding. I simply need to write and cry.  
I simply need to use my pain and hardship to create beauty.  
I compromised a happy childhood for brilliance beyond my years  
And I am completely content with that.

I was not raised, but dragged,  
By a creature with empty eyes,  
A soul so frigid to the touch,  
A malicious appetite that knew no bounds.  
She preyed on everything whose eyes glow bright,  
But takes a special liking to the taste of my vulnerable heart,  
My woeful, bitter tears.  
Every word she uttered, she’d catch in midair  
And sharpen them with her unholy talons until a single touch  
Would draw blood.  
She never missed her target.  
She never once failed to pierce my heart.  

Here I am, bloodied and battered,  
Cold and alone,  
Left with nothing but the childish fantasies of what could have been,  
What should have been.  
My belief in the fantasies, in the Good Mother, were the only things  
That kept me from my early grave.  
But when the fog cleared and the Good Mother’s mask fell and crumbled at my feet,  
I found myself stranded on Fool’s Paradise.  
Without my knowing, I’d lived there for thirteen years.

Light, as well as time, did not dwell at the bed of my abyss for several years.  
 Reality and fantasy melted together in my confused, battered mind.  
I abandoned my search for happiness,  
And often I’d plan for my timely escape.  
Though, when Love, in its purest form, did call my name,  
My plan was put on hold, as I followed it this way and that.  
I knew not at the time that it was Love I sought after,  
That it was Love that I lacked and craved,  
For all my life, I’d thought that the emptiness that I’d seen in that creature’s eyes  
Was Love. Surely, it had to have been, right?  
No.  
Merely another childish fantasy.
Holding You, by Julissa Rodriguez
Painting, Acrylic and Glitter

Balance, by Sara Santamaria
Sculpture, Block and Wood
American Girl, by Samantha Jackson
Drawing, Color Pastels

Soviet Patriot, by Blair Williams
Mixed Media

Skateboard, by Asa Wochatz
Mandeville Lakefront, by Amanda Boone
Perspective, by Crystal Turnblom

Moving Nowhere Fast, by David Alexander
I am greeted the moment that I start up the walkway
Towards the cast aluminum storm-door with its peeling white
Paint. The thinning, geriatric cat sounds her low harmonious purr,
Asking for food and water because the hissing, gray possums
Have eaten all that was left out earlier on this foggy morning.
My Nanny no longer catches the salt and peppered menaces,
Or drives them to the river behind her home to release them
Once again into the wild. So I go up the walkway and back down,
Carrying Meow Mix in a plastic bin in one hand and a water bottle
In the other. The Astroturf, which covers the walkway that my Papa
Built, is smooth now. Years of footsteps have leveled
Its surface so that it no longer makes the satisfying
Plastic crunch beneath my brown boots like it did
When my Papa first installed it on the wood walkway well over
Fifteen years ago. The same wood ramp that he walked up
After his heart attack, refusing to use his wheelchair.
My Papa was a strong-willed, Southern man’s man.
He was all khaki overalls and John Deere hats with tired
Cornflower blue eyes. This porch that he built has invited
Many an in-law and even more children, grandchildren,
And great-grandchildren. I am but one of many.
The walkway creaks under the weight of my left foot,
And I step back, letting a carpenter bee pass in front of the cornflower
Blue eyes I inherited along with the same tired gaze.
The bee took flight after the creaking disturbed his drilling
A pile of pale yellow sawdust sits under the hole
It made in the railing, another home for one of many.
As I turn to watch the carpenter bee fly and land on the trellis,
The snowball bushes come into view, their sweet fragrance wafts
From the other side of the homemade carport. The golden pothos
Is now overflowing, but it’s been growing in the same pot
For years on end. Its vines spread on the clear glass patio table
Which is covered in the tabby cat’s paw prints- all the color of red
Georgia clay. The Astroturf is worn down, but still green, greener
Than any grass I’ve ever seen. And when the carpenter bee buzzes,
I continue on through the storm-door with its peeling white paint.
Menthol cigarettes and expensive whiskey
and became familiar with your passion

She smiles and robs me of breath
I used to think it was so exotic
for turning light things dark.

by Madison Strickland

Wind beats through us both

The Sniffer
by Madison Strickland

Menthol cigarettes and expensive whiskey
That is how you taste.
I used to think it was so exotic
when I was young.

Before I knew you
and became familiar with your passion
for turning light things dark.

We Are Careless; We Are Broken
by Hannah E. Maddox

I'll be at the Hilton in forty-five minutes, the one
on your exit. Meet me in the parking lot.” Her
words slither through miles of black telephone
lines and make their way into my ear. It is one
of the many things I love about her- the way she demands
tings of me. Sometimes she demands things I can't give.
But I do try, I always try.

"How long can you stay? What should I wear?" My words
are hurried, she never spends too long on the phone.

"I don't care- wear whatever, see you there." And with
a click the first conversation we've had in more than two
weeks is over. This is what our relationship has been
reduced to for the past seven months.

I look at the time on my phone; it is 9:27PM. Her words
echo in my ear. “Wear whatever.” I know what those
words mean; it means we are staying in for the night. We
are not going out to dinner, not going to the movies, and
definitely not walking hand in hand around the square in
town with its gardenias and magnolia trees. We've never
done those things, but I imagine it would be nice to be
with somebody who does things like that. But I'm not
with someone like that, and we are staying in, again.

I stretch my legs and arms into the air, and a groan
escapes my mouth before my limbs fall back to the gray
bedspread. I drag myself out of the queen-sized bed.
My feet lead me toward my closet, but I change my mind
and take a few steps backwards to the chest-of-drawers.
From inside the second-to-bottom drawer, I pull out a
triple-digit price makes me shake my head. I rarely wear
short, black satin slip- what she would call slutty lingerie.

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I decide I'm going to call her back and ask her to come
to my place. It's not that much farther down the road, and
this way, maybe, she will stay until the morning. I imagine
her coming to my apartment door, not bothering to ring
the doorbell. She's never seen my apartment, but my guess
is she wouldn't be looking at the furniture much. There
would be sex, of course, but also falling asleep together
and then waking up with her still next to me. My finger
presses the unlock button on the side of my phone, and I
be the driver's seat of my black hatchback,

Sliding into the driver's seat of my black hatchback,
I pull my phone from my pocket and check the time
again. The white characters read 9:49PM. It is a fifteen
minute drive from the wrought-iron security gate of my
apartment complex to the Hilton beside Interstate-75. Just
about twenty-five minutes until I get to see her for the first
time in nearly a month, but it feels like it has been so much
longer than that.

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and then waking up with her still next to me. My finger
presses the unlock button on the side of my phone, and I
be the driver's seat of my black hatchback,
I close my eyes and lean against the door of my Honda. The sounds of the highway attempt to send me to dreamland, but soon I hear the rumble of a diesel engine, and “Fear You Ate” by Shakes Revenge. There is only one person I know of that listens to that song, especially at that volume. She’s here.

Part of me is excited, but another part of me is doubtful. I’m excited because I get to see her again, even if it’s just for a few hours. I’m doubtful because of the way we’ve been spending our time together lately - all moving, no talking, all sex, no feeling. Her truck comes to a halt in five parking spaces away. The door slams, heavy boots pound the asphalt and lock click, followed by the familiar double-deep of the truck’s horn announcing that the car alarm is activated.

I’m nervous, more nervous than I usually am around her. But as I chew on my lower lip, she comes around the front of her truck, and the hesitation takes a back seat to a very far back seat. Jeans hang heavy on her slight hips. Her pockets are filled with keys, a bulging leather wallet, a pack of clove cigarettes, and two cell phones. Her worn-out brown leather belt barely holds up the destructed denim. I have bought her new belts several times, but she always insists on wearing the same one she has had since high school. She is, and has always been, a creature of consistency and careful control.

Her strides seem slow, but they are filled with purpose. Long legs cover the several parking spaces in what I think is only a few steps. Her work boots thud against the concrete, probably a half-size too large. Everything, except the consistency and careful control.

She stops about a foot short, pulls out a cigarette, and waits. She stares me down with her steel grey eyes. I’m at a loss for words, and actions are an even further matter. After nearly half a minute, she lifts her eyebrows curiously. Out of habit and the formal instruction, I open the back door of my hatchback and grab her old, green BIC lighter from the side door pocket. When I turn back around to hand her the lighter, she has silently closed the small distance between us. My breath catches in my throat, and I wonder how she is able to excite me so easily. She flops on her side of the bed, her bare feet stretched so the tips of her toes graze the carpet.

You don’t go in, or just fuck around out here in the cold?” she asks. I look away with a slight grimace. It is not the time to say that we aren’t twenty-two anymore, but the idea of having sex in the back of my Civic is, admittedly, a little intriguing.

“We should go in,” I whisper, knowing that she wasn’t really waiting for me to make a decision. She frees her arm from my waist and walks towards the lobby doors with a certain concentration, leaving me a few paces behind her. She never was one to hold hands or show affection in daylight or at all. From experience, I know to follow her silently, loyalty.

When she asks for a room with a single king bed, the male receptionist eyes us with a smirk. In the past, she would have told him to fuck off or to mind his own business, but she doesn’t do that sort of thing anymore. She doesn’t say much of anything, especially not anything resembling a romantic gesture.

“You’ll be in room 541. Have a nice evening.” Continental breakfast is seven to nine. Elevators are to your right, and check out at eleven.” The way he eyes me is almost a challenge, and I shudder even though it’s warm in the lobby.

I put my hand on her tanned arm, but she shrugs me away and walks towards the elevator. I follow her, careful not to look in her direction. I try to distract myself with the furnishings, the wallpaper, and the fake flowers. The elevator’s arrival is announced by a ding, and we step on. She presses the button for the fifth floor, and the doors close.

I don’t look at her, I’m still upset that she brushed me off in the lobby. But when she whispers something, I nearly have time to lift my head and ask what it was that she was just muttering before it’s all teeth and tongue and I’m lost in surrender as her hands roam around my back and underneath my coat. Cold fingers skate from the middle of my back down my spine then around to my hips. The bell signals we’ve arrived at our floor, and her hand is gone as quickly as it came. I am left annoyed.

“Patience,” she says, seemingly unaffected. My breathing slows again, and the doors open up to the fifth floor. Again, she leaves me in her wake, and I follow, ever faithful. Frustrated, but faithful.

Room 541 is down the hall and to the right. Several feet ahead, always moving at a quicker pace, she arrives first and waits against the wall, leaving a boost print on the new wallpaper. She presses her hand out in my direction, the key card held like a clove cigarette, between two fingers. I grab the key and slide it in the door; the green light is followed by the click of the lock giving way. I go inside, tempted to close the door behind me to spite her for messing with me, but I don’t want her to leave after everything. The door shuts behind the pair of us. She looks the deadbolt. I go to the side of the bed, turn on the lamp farther from the door and open the fabric shades a couple inches.

“Close ‘em, back.” she says, not looking at me as she kicks her boots off. They fall haphazardly on the floor, bits of crusted mud crumbles onto the carpet. I close the curtains back and listen to the bed creak as she lies back. When I turn towards her, I can see her legs dangling from the side of the bed, her bare feet stretched so tips of her toes graze the carpet.

The doubt holds tight of me again, and the uncertainty melts away as she sits up on her elbows. She looks at me, really looks at me for the first time tonight, possibly the first time in a few months. I sit on the bed beside her, trying not to get too comfortable.

“Maybe I should go-” before I can finish my thought she pulls me down beside her. Her legs straddle my hips.

“Just shut up, okay?” It’s another demand, but, I think it’s good-natured, so I smile at her. She unites my coat and slides it off my shoulders. She is stronger than I am, more muscular, and more determined to get what she wants. I’ve always been her opposite- shy, quiet and unsure of myself. She’s here.

“Kai. Please, Kai.” Her name floats from my mouth, breathy, needy. Finally, her hand slips beneath my jeans. It’s been a few minutes since either of us have said anything; my jeans are on the floor, her head is between my thighs and my eyes are shut, twisted in a happy sort of pleasure. My mind flashes between how things are and how they should be. My body wishes under her touch, her rough caresses. I moan; she moans. We are lost in togetherness. She comes up to kiss me, leaving gentle bites on my chest and neck. I open my eyes, and I stop kissing her back. Instead, she pulls back and smiles at me as if she’s thinking of something.

“I love you, Kai.” I say, pursing my lips after the words have left my mouth. I nearly regret it. But for a moment, I feel like she might say it back because her eyes have some straining nostalgia glitter in them.

“I know.” Her usual gibb response is released from her thin, pink mouth. I suppose I hide my disappointment well, because she begins kissing me again. Her lips travel down my neck, biting my ear lobe softly below my ear. Her hand goes to the edge of her shirt, and I pull it over her head. She lifts her arms and throws the thin shirt on the floor with my jeans and coat. Her jeans are still on, but unbuttoned. Zipper pulled down, hunter green booties pecking from underneath her belt. She’s being laid tonight, which surprises me. She’s letting me touch her, letting me have hips grinding into mine. She bites down on my lip with a smirk. Her hand runs the length of my body, from the edge of my brown hair to my hips, her fingers dip beneath the top of my jeans. She kisses down my neck, then back up to my ear.

“Say my name,” she orders as her fingers wait tying with the zipper of my jeans.

“Kai…” I plead, her name rolling off my lips. My hand runs up her back and into her short, black hair.

“Louder,” she says as my fingers tug at her edge of the shirt, the one stained with red Georgia clay from her day-job as a construction worker. Jobs like that keep her muscular and tanned. I want to touch her, but she pulls away slightly and whispers her demand again. “M-mmm. Say it louder.”

“Kai. Please, Kai.” Her name floats from my mouth, breathy, needy. Finally, her hand slips beneath my jeans. There are no more words, just gasping moans, with hands moving and hips rolling. Her fingers are expert and move swiftly through flesh. Again it’s all teeth and tongue and want, but this time there is determination, too.

I still want to touch her, but she hasn’t let me that close to her in a long while. I try not to think about it; I try not to think about anything. But the more I try to empty my mind, the more it fills with Kai- memories of her, questions for her, thoughts about what she’s doing, who she works with during the day, and who she sleeps beside at night.

It’s been a few minutes since either of us have said anything; my jeans are on the floor, her head is between my thighs and my eyes are shut, twisted in a happy sort of pleasure. My mind flashes between how things are and how they should be. My body wishes under her touch, her rough caresses. I moan; she moans. We are lost in togetherness. She comes up to kiss me, leaving gentle bites on my chest and neck. I open my eyes, and I stop kissing her back. Instead, she pulls back and smiles at me as if she’s thinking of something.

“I love you, Kai.” I say, pursing my lips after the words have left my mouth. I nearly regret it. But for a moment, I feel like she might say it back because her eyes have some straining nostalgia glitter in them.

“I know.” Her usual gibb response is released from her thin, pink mouth. I suppose I hide my disappointment well, because she begins kissing me again. Her lips travel down my neck, biting my ear lobe softly below my ear. Her hand goes to the edge of her shirt, and I pull it over her head. She lifts her arms and throws the thin shirt on the floor with my jeans and coat. Her jeans are still on, but unbuttoned. Zipper pulled down, hunter green booties pecking from underneath her belt. She’s being laid tonight, which surprises me. She’s letting me touch her, letting me have
“No!” This time my voice is strong, unwavering as I push her away from me. “You’re... you’re married?!” It continues, but she just shuts up and turns over, back lying against the cream bedspread.

“It’s not a big deal. Now come here.” Kai tries to wrap her arm around me to pull me back to her, but I stand up, putting on my black satin slippers.

“You’ve got married? You should have told me.” I say trying to keep my voice low. I’ve never really been getting emotional. She’s never been emotional around me.

“I’m sorry, Holland.” Her voice is strong, unwavering as I try to make this all as difficult as you’ve always known it was.

“I thought you loved me! I thought we were going to be together! I thought...” I say, trying my hardest not to cry. The tears come anyways. “Just tell me the truth, please.”

My voice fades behind the quiet hum of the interstate.

“Yet you’re a reliable fuck, okay?” Kai admits, seemingly exasperated. A minute of silence passes. I try to gather my thoughts, but the disbelief sets in with more force than I expected. I crumble into the dark teal chair in the corner, pull my legs to my chest and start sobbing. “Christ, stop crying, okay.”

I grab my coat from beside the bed, but something black falls to the floor. A cell phone, I must have it already. I stand up, not bothering to button or zip them as I rush into the bathroom to vomit.

Minutes pass, and with my stomach now empty, I take one of the rough white wash cloths, wipe my face and look in the mirror. A shower would be nice, but Kai paid for the room, and she could come back at any time. I decide to try and sneak out of the lobby to go home. I don’t want to be here anymore.

I grab my coat from beside the bed, but something black falls to the floor. A cell phone, I must have it already. I stand up, not bothering to button or zip them as I rush into the bathroom to vomit.

Another few minutes pass, and I realize she isn’t coming back for me. I get up from the chair, suddenly afraid of making noise and waking up any neighbors. The tears have stopped, but I feel sick now. I pull my jeans all the way up, not bothering to button or zip them as I rush into the bathroom to vomit.

“Why are hotel rooms always so ugly?” I wonder aloud still holding my knees to my chest. An answer to my question pops into my head. Ugly things happen here.

Ten minutes go by, and I do not move. I strain my ears to hear the soft sounds of the lobby. Her black hair is just long enough to hang in her eyes, almost making her look wounded, especially with the way she’s holding onto that glass. Kai doesn’t look up when I sit down next to her; she downs the half full glass of vodka and holds up her hand to signal the bartender.

“Vodka, neat.” It’s yet another demand. She fills her glass. She sips it at this time, as if she’s waiting for something.

“Here,” I whisper. My hand reaches into my pocket. I take out the black cell phone and slide it across the bar to her. Kai looks at the phone for a moment, but doesn’t put down her vodka.

“Did you use it?” she asks staring into the clear liquid. There is no concern in her voice, no worry, not even a hint of emotion; it’s an indifferent question. Her marriage may have just ended, but I can tell that her expression hasn’t changed. She doesn’t care; she just examines the glass in her hand and takes another sip.

“No, I didn’t,” I admit quietly. I turn my head so I can see her clearly.

I felt so confident in my decision when I was in the elevator. I thought I was so sure of what I wanted, but when I look at her I realize that I don’t care either. We’re both broken, but we’re different from each other. She doesn’t care about anything, and I’m feeling right now that it is my place to do that. I decide against it. I slip the phone in my pocket and grab the second keycard and out the door. The clock of the lock is somewhat satisfying, as if everything is locked inside that room. I tell myself I’m just going to return the phone and say goodbye. I want to say goodbye.

It’s been almost two hours since Kai called me. What had seemed to be changing then seems to be controlling now. In that short amount of time so much has changed. I’ve changed, maybe not a lot, but enough, I think.

The elevator doors open, and I step back, provoking the white ground floor button and watch it light up with a yellow glow. I lean against the side of the elevator and contemplate the past two years I’ve spent with Kai- little adventures, many hotels, and lots of sex. I’m sure for her it is all meaningless, but it still means something to me. I’m just not sure what.

The elevator doors slide open, and I step out into the lobby. Kai is less than thirty feet away at the bar, a glass of clear alcohol in her hand. It’s probably vodka, her old standby. She told me she gave up drinking liquor right before we first got together, but that was over two years ago. I guess she’s picked it back up. I touch the phone in my pocket and start working up the courage to say my goodbye to her.
I woke up from bed and gasped. It happened again. Another nightmare. As thankful as I was that it wasn't real, I had to admit to myself that I was disappointed that I still hadn't figured out who she was. I had been having the same nightmare almost every night for three weeks now. Every dream starts out exactly the same. I'm standing in a clearing in the middle of a forest at dusk. At first, it seems like I'm alone, but then I see her. She always stands at the opposite end of the clearing with one hand outstretched and reaching towards me. In the other hand, she holds a small black knife with a menacing curved blade. As soon as I notice her she begins to walk in my direction and I see that a thin gauzy cloth covers her eyes. I turn and run into the woods along a path that leads to a small house. Then, usually, I wake up.

I wonder what the dream could mean for a minute or two, but as I look at my clock and see that it's nearly 4 a.m. I try and fall asleep. I can't see the image of the eerie girl and her knife out of my mind, and the image sends a chill up my spine. Still, I eventually begin to feel drowsy, but I can't help but feel like I'm not alone. I try to open my eyes.

As soon as I do, I see trees surrounding me and I feel the chill of nightfall nearing. I look around, searching for her, and I can make out her figure already slowly heading towards me. As I spin around to run the familiar path towards the house, I know that this dream is different. It doesn't feel like a dream. I keep running as fast as I can.

Finally, I get to the house and run up the porch's steps to the large front door. Before I try and open it though, I look over my shoulder to see if she's followed me. Even though I was running at full speed, she must have been only 20 feet behind me, gripping the knife so tight that her knuckles were white. I opened the door to the house and quickly slammed the door shut behind me. In the other hand, she holds a small black knife with a menacing curved blade. As soon as I notice her, she begins to walk in my direction and I see that a thin gauzy cloth covers her eyes. I turn and run into the closest room when I reach the top of the stairs, and I shut the door quietly in case she was already inside the house. When I turned to search the room for an exit, I saw before me I left me frozen with fear. It was her. She was standing right in front of me, holding the curved knife. But she wasn't moving. I reached for the door handle, and for some reason, she did the same. I stepped to my left side, and she moved in unison with me. It dawned on me that I was staring into a mirror.

After staring at it for a few more seconds, I walked towards the mirror until I was almost nose-to-nose with the reflection. I had gotten this far in my dream for the first time, and I had to know who the girl was. I reached my hand up to my own face and pulled away a cloth that wasn't there. The girl followed my movements perfectly, but when we brought our hands down, the cloth over her eyes was gone. When I finally saw her face, I felt like I was going to vomit. I had been staring at my own reflection. There was no other girl. Only me. But my reflection's eyes were gauged out, and the sockets were caked with dried, flaky blood. I opened my mouth to scream, but no sound came out. I shut my eyes tightly so I wouldn't have to look at myself anymore.

I snapped out of the dream, and felt immense relief when I saw I was in my bedroom. I sighed and lay in bed for almost 10 minutes with a terrible headache. There was no way I was going back to sleep tonight, not after this latest nightmare. But I needed to calm down. I decided to wash my face to try and forget the whole horrible thing.

I walked toward my bathroom sink, but I couldn't tolerate looking at my reflection, so against my better judgment, I refused to turn on the light. I quickly lathered my hands with soap, spread it on my face, and rinsed the suds off with ice-cold water. I reached for the towel on the counter top, and grabbed an object that felt unfamiliar to me. I wiped my eyes off with the sleeve of my nightshirt, and looked down at the small black knife with a curved blade that was clutched in my hand. I had been staring at my own reflection.

I'm standing in a clearing in a forest. A girl walks towards me, and she isn't there anymore when we bring our hands down. The cloth over her eyes was gone. When I finally saw her face, I felt like I was going to vomit. I had been staring at my own reflection. There was no other girl. Only me. But my reflection's eyes were gauged out, and the sockets were caked with dried, flaky blood. I opened my mouth to scream, but no sound came out. I shut my eyes tightly so I wouldn't have to look at myself anymore.

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