

JUST ANOTHER DAY

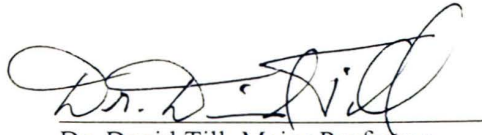
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JENNIFER M. PASSERO



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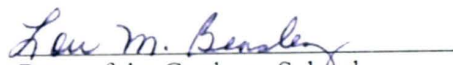
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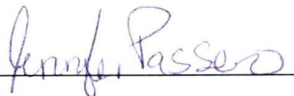
  
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# **Just Another Day**

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts Degree

Austin Peay State University

Jennifer M. Passero

May 2004

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Beverly and Anthony. Their love and encouragements have been planted inside me, tall and sturdy, a sunflower opening its brown eye to peer at the sun as it rises higher above the dogwood trees. I thank my parents for being my support, my trellis, as I bloom and continue to grow, inch by inch. I know I will always have them to lean on.

I must recognize the women that have wrapped their hearts and arms around me. The women that listened to me, taught me, and held me when I needed them. Shana, Mitzi, and Tiffanie; I should not be this blessed to have friends who nurture, as much as you ladies do. All I can offer to the three stones that glisten on the banks of the sea is thank you. Your beauty and spirits have inspired me, and I would not have made it without you.

Grandpa, when I felt that I was not going to make it, and I was overwhelmed, I thought of you. I strive to have your intelligence, and your drive to succeed. Guess what? I did make it. I hope you see that I look up to you, and I hope I made you proud. Grandma, you have a heart that beats for everyone around you. The beats pulsate through me, reviving me during my times of need.

## FORWARD

*Just Another Day* is a collection of poems and one non-fiction piece. My writing is inspired by all aspects of my life. I draw most of my creative energy from nature. Something about the open air triggers my creativity. Traveling has influenced my writing. I am intrigued by, and compelled to write about other parts of the world that are not my own. I have also been affected by September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. War troubles me, and at times I find myself consumed with it. When I find myself at a loss for words, I draw bits and pieces from the lives of people around me. I am fascinated with other's experiences, and I feel closer to them when I write.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Loop.....	1	Embrace.....	14
Pull.....	2	Tony.....	15
Black Bears.....	3	Biological Father.....	16
Waving the Flag.....	4	Findings.....	17
Out at Sea.....	5	Waiting.....	18
Nourish.....	6	As The World Turns.....	19
Connection.....	7	Falling.....	20
Belvidere.....	8	Temptation.....	21
Spring Smells.....	9	Bake.....	22
Cross Country.....	10	Florida.....	23
Laundromat.....	11	Suspended.....	24
Rut.....	12	Paused.....	25
Just Another Day.....	13		

## LOOP

For solace I sat on my grandparents screened in back porch  
I watched the beetles bump off the screen  
the moths clung to the black mesh  
butterflies with spots of yellow and purple floated by  
sailing on the wind  
the hummingbirds feasted on the nectar in the bright red feeder

I realized there were laws to nature  
life was connected and linked like geometrical circles  
the circles keep turning and rotating on their own axis  
life doesn't slow down to pick me up  
a lost hitchhiker trying to find my way  
I either jump in the rotation  
or I am left  
deserted behind.



**PULL**

The tulip had one petal  
red like blood weeping  
from a pricked finger  
tarnished with wilt  
brown layered on top of red  
devouring the last drop of color

It sagged  
holding on tightly to it's stem  
gripping with fierce teeth  
decay ate like an invisible parasite  
on this last breathing petal  
suffocating it like a moth  
trapped inside a heated car

Wind rips through the tulip  
the petal waves  
attached by one thread  
in the tug of war game  
the wind wins as the  
petal is torn away  
to tumble through the  
yellowed grass.

## BLACK BEARS

She waivers  
between the conscious and the unconscious  
tucked away in a cave  
while the rest of nature withers and freezes  
until Spring arrives

Her fur is thick and lush  
like a ripe strawberry bursting with seeds  
she labors twin cubs in a foggy remembrance,  
a moon peering above the clouds to see

The cubs nurse and grow  
like sweet honeysuckle vines  
inching up fences and trees

With the dawn of Spring  
the cave births the mother and her cubs  
as they emerge dazed  
Spring tickles their senses  
and they prance around rolling  
each other through grasses and dandelions  
the cubs see their first tree with leaves  
waving crazily like disheveled hair

They tumble towards the tree  
with new elastic muscles  
they stretch and creep up the trunk of the maple  
and perch on the limbs  
like overstuffed birds with chocolate eyes  
looking out below

## WAVING THE FLAG

We walked down the streets  
that aligned the coast  
a barking filled the sea air  
we followed the playful sounds

The seals were out on the docks  
they sprawled like sunbathers on the beach  
they fought for the best spot on the floating wood  
pushing and nudging one another  
twitching their whiskers  
others slept only to awaken  
to belt out a quick bark  
then dozing back to sleep

One lone seal swam sideways under the water  
sticking his flipper out of the waves  
He attempted to join the others on their dry platform  
but was only met with barking  
and noses pushing him back into the water  
He continued to swim one flipper up  
his white flag waving  
surrendering.

## OUT AT SEA

Silver fish jump  
into the rippled gelatin water  
the white foam dissolves in the waves  
the sky and water join hands  
linking the clouds and swells of sea  
seaweed floats like pods  
as they ride the waves  
up and under, then up again  
the boat blades cut the water  
churning blue swells  
into ice cold streams  
the clouds shape palaces  
and cities of the unknown  
I reach my hand outward  
almost able to touch them.



## NOURISH

It was supposed to be 53 degrees on the mountain  
so the weatherman said  
We climbed higher and higher  
at first the shoulder of the road was bare  
exposed for all to see  
At 2,000 feet the snow was three feet deep  
dressing the ditches and trees  
4,000 feet the air was clear  
my ears closed then popped  
the snow grew thicker and deeper  
7,000 feet the truck slid on the ice around the curves  
the snow stood eight feet high on both sides of the road  
fresh snow began to fall  
covering the windshield  
The cabin on the right  
seemingly built into the mountain  
appeared to have only a roof and a path to the door  
the snow swallowed its surroundings  
gulping with every flake that fell  
Aaron pressed the brake  
the tires stopped but we kept sliding to a standstill  
We stood outside  
the wind ran faster through the trees  
and over our uncovered faces.

## CONNECTION

I left the truck behind  
on the side of the road  
next to the guard rail  
the bridge had caught my eye  
as I drove down the mountain road  
it was made of wood, splintered with rotting holes  
it hung crooked over the flowing stream  
the trees with normally brown bark  
glowed with yellow-green moss, trunk to limbs  
I sat on the edge of the bridge and undressed my feet  
I dangled my toes in the water  
until they were pale and shriveled  
leaves fluttered into the stream  
floating down the mini rapids  
from squirrels leaping limb to limb  
the sky grayed like petrified wood  
as the rain slipped through the tops of the trees  
and patted my head.

**BELVIDERE**

Prickled plants eat at my knees  
as I trudge down the wood chip path  
streams of clear water trickle over  
stones and through fish  
cows pluck the blades of grass  
and munch as their tails wag  
waving good-bye to buzzing flies  
the sun wades knee deep in the sky  
as the light fights through branches  
to dance on the grass  
lighting up the curled snakes and colored birds  
the honeysuckle is deafening and stout  
sounding like a stampeding heart  
the wind blows the crisp dried leaves  
they explode off the limbs and rain down  
I catch them with sticky fingers

## SPRING SMELLS

The wind blows my strings  
of strawberry hair in circles  
entangling them together  
as I sit on the wooden park bench  
dull from sandpaper rain  
I read about New Historicism  
footsteps shuffle by  
dragging lazy soles along to class  
as the faceless people leave  
their smells to linger behind

A girl slinks by  
ivy curving up trellises  
outmaneuvering the sunflowers  
baking in the sun

A boy gallops  
manes blow down  
pebbled streets as the sun  
naps behind blanket clouds  
and the moon sheds its sheets  
to awaken the night

A mother and child trickle  
wax over the edge of vanilla candles  
glowing in the cottage  
windows open, curtains flap  
rain drips on the sill outside

I've just read two pages  
not remembering a thing

I breath in, smelling the flowers  
of the dogwood tree behind me.



## CROSS COUNTRY

I haven't seen him in five years  
he said he hasn't changed  
since then I've gained 20 pounds  
a jar stuffed full of peeled tomatoes

I sit on the bus squeezed next to a stranger  
a letter sealed in an envelope  
I swirl my ring between jittery fingers  
as the raindrops slide down the windows smearing my vision

He sent the ring Fed Ex  
right after he proposed  
on the phone two weeks ago  
Now I leave the clouded mountains of Virginia  
for the flat sands of California  
I sold the house that I raised my kids in  
the house where my hair faded from auburn to gray

The sunrays wade in the gray clouds  
drying the last few drops of rain remaining on the windows  
as the bus pulls into the station.

## LAUNDROMAT

I sit on a plastic table  
 sagging from age and my weight  
 watching clothes spin  
 in a heated rainbow  
 kids scream  
 yell  
 shut up, I wish they would  
 loud  
 in and out the door they run  
 through the parking lot  
 animals that need to be caged

A girl walks up in a tight white tank top  
 and jeans that cling to her round ass  
 "May I borrow a lighter?"  
 I hand her my yellow one  
 she smokes Reds  
 she is only seventeen  
 so she said to the young  
 smooth tobacco-skinned woman  
 with three kids of her own

Clothes spin slow and slower  
 a ride comes to an end  
 slowly, stop  
 kids scream  
 running in circles  
 peering at my silk underwear

"Thomas we have to go!"  
 The seventeen-year-old yells to her brother  
 who wanders around without his shirt on  
 hot stifling air  
 warm, hotter  
 Thomas looks at me  
 a grin plays at his lips

Done folding I juggle my clothes  
 and walk out the door  
 hot, yelling kids

Thomas leaves with his sister  
 she hands back my lighter  
 with fiery fingers.

**RUT**

Have you ever wanted something so bad  
that hangs on the tip of your tongue  
like a vowel that waits to drop from the sky  
into the field plowed by the countryman and his son  
who can vote but can't quite think for himself  
on the tractor that bumps over weeds and hay  
passing white cows patched with black  
as they graze in the grass left to chew their cud  
he thinks there is more to life than this farmhouse  
but he's tied to his roots and the farm  
his great granddaddy built in the 1800's

## JUST ANOTHER DAY

He slumps on the littered cluttered stoop  
he observes the eloquent passersby  
his linen beard flows from his chin  
faded by age and dirt  
it sways in the spiteful wind  
a red knit sweater clings to his sagged shoulders  
as the winter air attempts to unravel it  
a woolen black cap lays tattered  
at his swollen exposed toes  
full of dull scratched coins  
he draws forward with a gritty smile  
he clasps his cap in his ashy hands  
as his coins rustle inside



**EMBRACE**

I laid in the bathtub  
on my stomach feet curled up  
dangling under the faucet  
as the steamy water poured out

Four candles burned in each corner of the tub  
Mitzi sat on closed lid toilet  
her black shadowed profile swayed  
on the inside of the white shower curtain that was drawn shut

The oils from my healing massage lingered  
behind memories of my childhood  
seven-years-old exposed and small  
with braids trailing over my shoulders

The water stopped running  
but sweat dripped and rested on the curve of my lip  
I blew the candles out  
I sat in the darkness.

**TONY**

He's set in the front of the room  
surrounded by sweet flowers of all origins  
pictures of his childhood are taped to poster board  
and propped on stands  
throughout the room  
his boxing gloves, worn and creased  
hang from the corner of one stand  
I catch a glimpse of his swollen profile  
as he lays taut in the light blue box  
cushioned in white

He's a Frankenstein  
poorly sewn together  
they'd cut his scalp  
through his wavy brown hair to run tests  
his face is a plump ripe pear  
his ears feel real yet he's a plastic doll  
painted in thick gobs of brown make-up

I want his molasses eyes to flash open  
but they are a closed sealed door and  
his lips are pursed hiding a secret

I squeeze his hand, looking for answers.

**BIOLOGICAL FATHER**

Mom sat on the couch  
with her feet propped up  
on the two plush pillows  
that you bought for her  
her belly protruded out  
from her white cotton pajamas  
while Rob, her new boyfriend,  
rubbed her swollen feet

You barged in  
an intruder  
pistol in hand  
charging at Rob  
you pulled the trigger  
shot him twice in the chest  
Not caring that Rob's blood  
stained Mom's white pajamas

You turned around  
stormed out the door  
left the screen door  
to clack back and forth  
against the frame  
as Mom hunched on the couch  
she listened to your tires pop  
the gravel out into the night

## FINDINGS

Another Apache went down  
matchsticks lighting the desert

His sergeants picked him to sift through the wreckage  
*Find whatever you can Jones*

He walked away from camp alone  
leaving his boot trails in the sand

He stood knee high in liquefied flesh  
he found the remnants of a nose

He said it resembled a mushroom cap  
rotting on a sunny July day

I imagined the smell ripe and strong  
echoing the calls of vultures

He said he dug and rummaged  
until every ounce of flesh and metal was covered

Back at camp he showered until the water went cold



**WAITING**

He can't call at two in the morning  
bored and cramped in his room  
surrounded by metal cabinets, and tiny beds  
with the ratty mattress poked out behind a fleece blanket

He can't drive the hour to Nashville to visit me  
to go downtown to drink Purple Haze  
while we jump around to the music that plays on the jukebox  
and sing into each other's pool sticks mocking our favorite 80's artists  
in between our shots of eight ball

He can't pass out on my living room floor  
after our night of cold beer  
to snore and sweat while my dog  
licks his cheek

He can't eat my chicken dinners  
with buttery mashed potatoes and sweet corn  
and chocolate cake for dessert

He can't give me a bear hug  
with his thick arms that wrap me up  
to swing me in dizzy circles

I can write long letters  
decorated in colored heart stickers  
and send it to the land of sandstorms  
and of gunfire

He can open these letters in his tent  
and I'll toast my mug of Purple Haze to him  
and play our songs on the jukebox

## AS THE WORLD TURNS

The living are a soap opera  
the dead watch us as they sit  
on plush red couches  
eating buttery popcorn  
and macadamia nut cookies

The dead know our deceptive words  
as they stream from our mouths  
lies we tell our slightly plump girlfriends  
or our balding boyfriends

They know our moves, our plans  
they see drunken men tripping,  
fumbling towards the vivacious blonde at the bar  
her fingers tipped with acrylic nails wrapped  
around the strawberry flavored wine cooler  
the dead chuckle knowing he doesn't stand a chance  
they see the shy girls coyly walk up to a guy  
as his girlfriend bounces back from the bathroom

The living struggle  
as the dead get refills of cherry coke and popcorn  
hoping they don't miss the next episode.

**FALLING**

I wake up on a tall building  
blackness crouches around me  
it crawls up my legs then my arms  
I'm on the edge unsure how I got there  
unsure how to get down  
the moon catches my eye  
it floats it hangs by strings it sways it dances  
to the record that plays in my mind

He appears right in front of me  
clothed in a black shirt and jeans with a hole in the thigh  
his eyes glow like a crooked wick that burns  
bright and hot they tempt me  
I reach out to grasp for his hand  
I clasp it and our fingers intertwine  
his hand his cold shivers trickle up my arms  
and down into my stomach  
he moves closer  
he grunts lightly and pants  
he breathes me in  
his nose moves up and down my neck  
I close my eyes  
I want him to devour me whole inside and out  
he licks my neck up to my earlobe  
then down to my shoulder blades  
he searches for the right spot

He bites in and breathes out  
I fall from the edge  
I twist and flip through the black air  
down to the cold churning of the explosive waves  
of his oceanic soul

## TEMPTATION

Rain beats drum through sewers  
sloshing down the tunnel  
footsteps echo  
black-booted strides  
following close behind

Pulsating smells  
pungent like rotting apple cores  
in the sun prance around me  
black spiders hide in the dry crevices of the concrete  
to escape the damp air  
gray rats float downstream  
to lead the way

I find him at the end  
in a red cloak that leaves traces of felt on my fingers  
hovered over a crystal table  
pouring liquefied dreams  
he asks me to take a sip.

**BAKE**

Stir in the ingredients  
the batter is creamy, moist  
it clings to the white plastic spoon  
I slide my finger through it  
taste it's sweet exterior  
continue to stir as the lumps  
disintegrate under the spoon  
and the forceful churns of my wrist  
pour the sleek  
silk batter into the buttered metal pan  
it spreads, sliding  
thinning  
overlapping  
in a volcanic rush  
I lick the spoon raw  
and toss it in the sink  
I insert the pan in the oven  
I wait.

**FLORIDA**

Music vibrated through rickety stools  
his hand slid up and down my silk pants  
it groped with the bass

We left hand in hand  
down the flight of splintered wooden stairs to the beach  
strangers made out on plastic green lounge chairs  
waves barged in on the beach  
the clumped sand was molded then unmolded

He leaned in and kissed me  
his tongue felt fat like a ripe cherry tomato  
he told me I was a good kisser  
I smiled and kissed his salted lips  
he pulled me down to the beach  
sand clung to my sweaty skin  
the wind blew my hair to his sticky lips

We two strangers lay on the open beach  
wrapped tightly together  
we passed smiles and kisses  
unsure what was to come



**SUSPENDED**

Filtered by the sheer curtain  
the moon lays it's light across our faces  
my skin absorbs  
the sweet smell of his soap  
our bare limbs rolled out  
like dough on a sheet  
kneaded together  
his lips light my skin  
like a wick  
my flesh melts into a puddle of wax  
molded by his working hands  
breaths sigh in harmonic flute tones  
air thickens in a white, hazy fog  
visions blur  
time hangs on like a frayed rope.

**PAUSED**

I stood there with an almost empty cup of beer. Sally and I had gone to another party. We had been roommates for three years vowing to always live together. She was off on a great manhunt while I stood in the makeshift living room of the fraternity house. Girls danced around me, and their butts shimmied to the music. It was loud in the room; I felt the beat vibrating through my rubber-soled shoes. One of the dancing girls tumbled and landed on the worn couch. She giggled as her beer sloshed over the rim of her cup onto her tight jeans. The guys weaved in and out of the girls, checking out their prospects while they fought the crowd to the back of the house to the keg of beer. What I realized was if I scratched the outer lining of my plastic cup with my fingernail, the waxy exterior scraped off and flaked to the ground. A couple bumped into my back their arms linked, and their body weight shifted back and forth as they wobbled by. The drinkers outside grew rowdy. Boots stomped on the wooden porch, and overly loud laughter swam, then drowned, into the heavy beats of the music. My eyes tried to focus in the dim room as I looked around the house and out the window. My sight settled on the hallway that led to the bathroom and the back door. It seemed to be a high traffic area. People waited in line to empty their beer bladders while others went to refill their cups and bladders on the back porch. I stared at the bustling people; I saw a familiar face. It was Jon. My body flared and I gripped my now empty cup with tense fingers. The music faded to a dull ringing in my ears. Jon noticed me, too. He did a hesitated shuffle, debating whether or not to come over to me. His legs led his body on a leash in my direction.

"Hey Jennie," said Jon. His eyes shifted over my face. He half smiled, and I noticed he had his braces off.

"Hello. What are you doing here?" I stammered.

"I came up to visit Brent since I had a break from school."

"What school are you at?" I asked, as my voice broke into a high pitch.

"UT Chattanooga," he replied. His legs swayed as his fingers fumbled with one another.

"Well, it was nice to see you," I lied.

"You too, Jennie. I'll see you later. I'm going to find Brent." He merged back into the crowd and was gone.

I stood stiff and stunned. I looked for a spot to sit, and I settled for the couch with the dingy fabric. Another couple was sitting to my right. They were babbling back and forth confessing their passion for each other. My mind rewound and paused to the day we found her, Lady, on the dusty green grass on the side of the gravel road.

\*\*\*

Lady was an 11-year-old German shepherd and collie mix. She was the size of a collie with the same golden hues, and she had a long snout like a German shepherd with the same perky ears. My Uncle Sammy dropped her off at our apartment when I was five and she was just a puppy. She moved with us into our first house in Illinois a year later. When we moved again seven years later Lady happily jumped into the truck ready for Tennessee. In Tennessee, we had a house built on five acres of land. The neighborhood was quiet with wooded areas and patches of lush green grass. Our closest neighbors were the Carvers, who lived across the street. They had two sons, Jon and Craig. Jon was a year younger than me, and Craig was three years younger than Jon. The three of us became friends quickly.

Lady adapted as well. In Illinois she was confined inside our fenced yard. Now she had five acres of land to herself. She seemed to enjoy the cleaner air and the animals that scampered by. Her nose twitched, absorbing the scents around her. When we were home Lady chose to lie on the cool concrete front porch. She roamed through the three-bedroom house when we were away at school, work, or running errands. Lady always came in to sleep at night. While Lady stood guard and relaxed on the front porch, I was out romping in dirt and trees with the Carver boys.

Sometimes, when the sun was lowering behind the treetops and the sky was illumined with pinks and purples, Jon and I escaped our houses after dinner and explored on our own. We visited the old barn or the creek that ran through the woods behind his house. I loved going to the creek. A huge tree fell across it like a bridge, and Jon and I always climbed out on it and sat, letting our bare feet hang suspended over the water. Our other place was the barn, which is where we headed that night. It was one story with a loft 20 feet above the ground. The only way to reach the loft was by climbing a wobbly ladder that was missing rungs on it. I decided to climb the ladder first since I had never been up there. Jon stayed at the bottom to hold the ladder steady for me. Halfway up Jon began to shake the ladder slightly. I scaled the ladder as quickly as possible, gripping it with white, strained knuckles. I safely made it to the top and glared down at him as his laugh was carried higher with the rising heat. He followed my lead, climbing the ladder carefully. I was tempted to push the leaning ladder away from the side of the loft, but decided it was probably not a good idea. He made it to the top before I did anything drastic. We sat on a damp hay bale that was springing loose from its banding. Jon's side of the haystack was lower than mine, and our bodies slid closer from the slant of the hay. We sat in silence looking out the



circular window towards the top of the barn. The sunrays were casting their colors across the farmland, and in the faint light an owl caught our attention by the window. It was sitting on the rafters, its neck swiveled at a 90 degree angle. It observed us, eyes radiating like half moons. The owl descended from his perch, and the flapping of its wings echoed as it disappeared into the darkening shadows. Jon turned to me and smiled. The quickly fading light glinted off his new braces. I returned his smile, enjoying the peaceful moment we were sharing. He surprised me by hastily kissing me. Then he turned his head towards the shadowy corner the owl flew into. I wasn't sure what to say, but the barn grew more eerie by the moment.

"We should probably go home. It's getting too dark in here," I said.

"You're right, let's go."

We climbed down the ladder; Jon first, and me trailing close behind like ants in their military formation. We walked back to our separate houses in silence as the moon ascended from the depths of the earth skyward. I noticed him glancing at me, but I continued to walk in silence.

"Bye Jon, I'll see you tomorrow," I said, saying the first thing I could think of.

"O.k. Jennie, good night."

When I walked into my house, Lady was curled at my Dad's feet on the couch. She heard me enter, and she met me at the door, tail wagging. After she greeted me by licking my hand she went back to her spot on the couch, and I headed to my room.

It seemed Jon and I had a mixed relationship. One moment we had a crush on each other, then the next minute we were fighting. One time I busted his lip open, and he returned the favor by leaving me with a huge bruise on my arm. I guess it didn't help that

Jon's pride was always hurt by his dad's taunting words. Jon's dad would tease him about me being more athletic than he was. I could always run faster or hit the baseball farther than he could, and I know it bothered him inside. Apart from our antagonistic friendship, our biggest goal was to find trouble together. We recruited the other neighborhood kids to join our adventures. In the summer we rode 4-wheelers or played football. One of us was always getting hurt. Several times I flipped backwards off the 4-wheeler while one of the Carver boys drove. They had given me a concussion. Once I even had to get staples in my knee. Between Craig and Jon, they lost teeth, broke bones, and sprained almost every body part. We were pretty good at terrorizing one another. One day we decided to play hide-and-seek with BB guns. When we spotted one of our opponents we had to shoot them. After I was shot in the butt once and a welt flared on the soft tissue, I decided to hide in the bushes until the game was over. I never could bring myself to shoot my friends or stand to be shot myself.

Jon carried his BB gun with him one day when he and I went on a walk to the creek. At first he shot the blowing leaves from their stems, but then he shot a sparrow perched in a thinning bush. The bird tipped off the branch and fell to the ground. I gave him a slanted, squinty glare. His face fell and he shrugged his shoulders. The bird lay there; its wings were taut against the slick feathers of its round belly. Its beak parted slightly, frozen in a chirp. Jon and I kept walking, leaving the bird behind, stiff and alone.

Our summer ended and the Carvers waded in and out of my life. Our adventures were now reserved for the weekends only. We were all bogged down with school and our after-school activities, so during the weeknights we tried to keep in touch with one another. So the Carver boys and I flashed lights back and forth from our houses.



One weekend, the Carvers and I joined together to enjoy the quickly fading fall days. I had the chance to shoot a gun for the first time. The Carvers had a rich background of hunting, and all the neighborhood kids had guns since elementary school. We went behind my house and set up bottles and cans on an old, rotten sawhorse. Jon passed me his rifle and the rifle nuzzled to my right shoulder. I pulled the trigger, and the bullet rode through the barrel, sailing through the empty Coca-Cola can. The bullet split the metal, peeling it back around the hole. I smiled, proud of myself for hitting the can on the first try.

Several weeks later, on a Sunday, I was in the backyard with Lady waiting for one of my friends to pick me up. I looked for the Carver boys but they weren't home from church yet. Lady brought her chewed yellow Frisbee over to me, the one that had been lying by the back porch. She dropped it at my feet. Her tongue hung out of her mouth dripping saliva. I picked the Frisbee up and turned my wrist towards my chest and flung the Frisbee outward. The wind caught it as it sailed away from me. Lady followed it closely, sprinting faster as the wind blew harder. When I thought the Frisbee might get the best of her, Lady propelled herself into the air and snatched the Frisbee. I clapped and cheered for her as she brought the Frisbee back to me. We played for a few more minutes when I saw the Carver's van pull into their driveway and behind their house. I knew they would be out in a few minutes after they changed out of their church clothes. My friend pulled into my driveway as Lady caught the Frisbee again. I patted Lady's head, and we both ran into the house. I said good-bye to my Dad and grabbed my purse. As I ran to my friend's car I saw the Carvers were already wrestling in their front yard, and their dogs stood around them barking and prancing on the tips of their paws. I got in the car, and we pulled out of the driveway. I waved good-bye to Craig and Jon. Each boy waved a quick finger.

Later in the evening my friend dropped me off at my house just as the sun was winking behind the clouds. My dad was standing in the gravel driveway with his hand combed in his graying black hair. As soon as I slammed the door my Dad was already talking..

"I can't find her." His lips were dry and pursed.

"Who? What's wrong?" I jumped out of the car, scared of what was going on.

"Damn it Jennie, I shouldn't have left her outside. They were shooting guns.... But I only left for a few minutes to get cigarettes. I can't find Lady." He pulled his pack of Merit Menthols out of his shirt pocket and his fingers clenched the unlit cigarette.

"What happened?"

"I left Lady on the front porch when I went to the store. The neighbor boys were out shooting their guns. I only left for a few minutes. When I got back home, I couldn't find her, and I called for her but she hasn't come back. I drove down all the side roads and I still haven't found her." He paced the gravel, making the dust rise up.

"Daddy, calm down. We'll look for her later because we can't see out here now," I said.

"I'm going to drive around one more time." My dad left me in the driveway as he sped off in his truck.

I was worried about Lady, but dogs are known for roaming. I was pretty confident that she would be back by morning. Lady never stayed away for long anyways.

My dad must have stayed out for a while because I was asleep that night before he came back home.

Early the next morning my dad leaned over me, "Get up Jennie, you're not going to school."

"Well let me sleep then," I mumbled, as I rolled over.

"We're going to look for Lady," he said.

I was uneasy because I expected her to be back already. I quickly jumped up and put on a sweat suit and gym shoes. My dad was waiting for me at the front door. We walked to the truck in silence and simultaneously opened and shut the doors. My dad revved the engine trying to get the truck in motion. We lurched down the crunching gravel drive and headed down the road. We made a right at the gravel road closest to our house.

"I looked here yesterday several times, but we're going to find her," he said.

I nodded in return. He was driving slowly, peering over the steering wheel. I was looking out the window, dazed, and I saw Lady's golden fur. I pointed her out to my dad.

"There she is!" I yelled.

My dad slammed on the breaks, and we glided for a moment on the road.

Dad put the truck in park and flung his door open, leaving it creaking in the breeze. I went to open my door and my dad shouted at me.

"Stay in there, Jen."

I was staring at him through the passenger side mirror. Suddenly his face crumpled like a discarded love letter. I had never seen my dad cry, but he did that day. I



watched him pick Lady up and carry her behind the truck. He slipped her on top of the tailgate, and he wiped his eyes with his hand. He got back into the truck and shut the door.

“What happened, Daddy?”

“Lady, she...she was shot in the head,” his voice flicked with tears.

Tears trailed down my pale cheeks. We drove back to the house with our dog, Lady, curled in the back.

After that moment, my dad was furious with the neighbors. He told me I was not allowed to spend any time with them. Craig and his father did come over once to tell my family that they had no idea what happened to Lady, but Craig’s face showed another truth. His voice cracked, his eyes darted around the room, and he kept wiping his hands on his faded shorts. He would glance up at his dad, looking for reassurance. Craig was as big of an animal lover as I was, and both of us knew what his brother was capable of. Besides watching Jon shoot birds and squirrels out of trees, he once torched an animal. He had found a turtle and dipped it in gasoline and set it on fire. I knew Jon didn’t have much respect for nature, but never did I think he would shoot my dog. Craig and his dad left that day, and that was the last contact I ever had with the Carver family. Before we moved to another part of town I stared out the kitchen window watching the boys play football or whiz by on their 4-wheelers. I wished I was allowed to join them in their adventures. I also wished Jon would admit he shot my dog and apologize for it. All I wanted to do was hang out with them again, but I also missed one of my best friends, Lady.

My dad reacted a little different than me. He would cuss in our living room when he heard the neighbors’ 4-wheelers start up, and especially when he heard them shooting guns in their yard. My dad frowned at them from his truck whenever he left the

house. If they attempted to wave at him he would hit the accelerator and pretend they weren't even there. My dad debated whether or not to get Lady stuffed, but he said it would bring back too many memories if he had to walk by her lifeless body every day. So he decided on having her cremated. Shortly after Lady's death, my dad returned home with an urn. It was marbled with reds and beiges and it had a plaque with Lady's name on it. We felt like we did lose one of our own family members. Lady would always take turns sleeping in our beds, she greeted us every time she saw us, and she even ate dinner in the kitchen with us.

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The drunken couple next to me decided to move their discussion outside, and I sank lower into the tattered cushion when they stood up. I was torn between finding Jon and telling him how much I missed him and his brother, but more than half of me wanted to yell and demand the truth from him. I decided to do neither of those, but I did walk out onto the front porch to get some fresh air. I leaned my elbows on the rails of the porch and looked out across the lawn with scattered beer cans and cups. I noticed I was still clutching my empty cup and tossed it in the overflowing trashcan to my right. It bounced off a beer can and fell to the porch. I felt someone tapping me on the shoulder. I turned around and Sally was looking at me.

"What the hell are you doing here by yourself, and where's your beer?" she asked.

"I needed to get some air. It's hot as hell in there. So how's the hunt going?"

“Great! I’ve actually met two guys so far. The first one was so sweet to me, but I haven’t seen him since we got here. Then I met this other cute guy, and he’s been getting my beer for me all night,” she said.

“Well, where is he?” I asked, looking around.

“He’s inside but you can see him through the window.” We looked through the filmy window, and she pointed towards one of the walls. “There! That’s him, with the short, light brown hair.” I followed her pointing finger to a guy leaning on the wall with his legs crossed in front of him. I squinted hard to see, hoping it really was the dirty window I couldn’t see through and not Jon.

“Sally! That’s Jon,” I said, realizing my vision was fine.

“Yeah, I know,” she replied.

“No, it’s Jon Carver.” Sally stared for a moment, not registering who I was speaking of.

“Sally, my neighbor at my parent’s old house, the Carvers.” Sally’s mouth dropped, and she bit her lip.

“Oh shit, that Jon,” she said.

Even though it had been a while since I’d seen Jon, and he might have changed, I couldn’t unpause the picture of Lady dead on the side of the road.