

Subject: Engl225H.001 Fragment [REDACTED]
Date: Thursday, October 27, 2011 6:50:05 PM MT
From: [REDACTED]
To: Stephen Gibson

The darkness of the tunnels terrified Aileen. It didn't matter that she spent every curfew in them, it didn't matter that she was with her mothers and sisters. The dark was unnatural and it made her stomach twist with fear. "Why can't we sleep in our house?" she cried as the curfew warning blared across their dessert city, Hesper. Her mother shushed her sharply and gestured an apologetic bow to the men within hearing distance. Kneeling down she slightly lifted the purple veil off her eyes. "I know you are afraid of the darkness, but it is only to help us sleep." Aileen's watery eyes met her mother's as she spoke in the same soft whisper. "We're not supposed to be in the dark, that is why it is always light." It was the same struggle every curfew and Mais was losing patience. "Why must you always fight me, Aileen?" Her whisper bit the air with frustration. "I have no more say in this than you. Do you want to be locked in the tunnels during the surface hours too? No. That is why you will do what I tell you, I will keep you safe." Mais dropped her veil, which dangled at the tip of her nose. Aileen wondered if it tickled. She could feel her mother's stare on her face, so she force out a "Yes, Ma" knowing she was waiting for the reply. She watched as her mother's plump, violet colored lips turned up into a slight smile. Satisfied, she tugged at Aileen and they hurried along the street towards their sector's elevators.

The closer they got the more anxiety swelled inside Aileen, so she tried to distract herself, as she often did. She thought about the surface hours before the last curfew and how she had played on the sand dunes with her best friend Caul. He was a boy still, so they were allowed to play when he got home from school. She smiled as she pictured him tumbling down the side of the dune, landing in a bewildered heap with sand falling from his straight black hair. She remembered laughing so hard she had to hold her ribs together. Caul had greeted her laugh with a victorious grin. He loved to make Aileen laugh, since she spent so much time being serious.

The last curfew warning blared, bringing Aileen back to the present. Women were rushing along side them with their daughters. Their brightly colored veils flapped against their noses as they hurried towards the elevators. She thought about the day she asked her mother about the veils. "Don't ask so many questions, it will only get you into trouble." was her mother's curt reply.

The Hotel Deal

Douglas Davids saw a large man in black and white dining tux waiting for him in the lounge room, the plush couch bending under the man's belly. The meat of him circled his waist like the curve of a pear. Sebastian Russcetti was the biggest man Douglas had ever known to be alive in his late fifties. He was also the only man Douglas had ever seen pay the equivalent of three mortgages for a Greek vase that he had seen at an auction he didn't later remember anything about. *Money is like lint to this guy*, Douglas thought as he straightened his tie. *He just empties his pockets when he feels the slightest bulge build up, then moves on.*

A duo of shadowy men swooped in from the side pillars of the hotel lounge's entrance. Douglas' mouth went dry, his feet heavy, and he understood there was no backing out. He already knew this, of course. No one called down to Little Italy to deal with Russcetti was getting out of *that* meeting. But Douglas had vainly hoped in his heart of hearts that the Crime Lord would be absent and he could slink away to his nice apartment, maybe finish that detective story he had been working on; instead of sweating cold bullets in his palm that clung to a briefcase heavy with papers Douglas was sure would land him in solitary for the rest of his life if they fell into the laws' hands.

A walrus of a man, Russcetti's mustache bunched up as he smiled at Mr. Davids, eyes lighting like he had just noticed the messenger.

Danny moved north from school to help her forget. But after almost falling out of bed because she was dancing in her dreams for the third night in a row, she realized something.

She wasn't very good at forgetting. The only problem was she was remembering two entirely different guys.

There was a line down her face from a wrinkle in her pillowcase when she flipped on the bathroom light, but she disregarded it and bent to drink from the faucet like she did when she was a kid, ignoring how silly she must look. Her auburn hair was still curled from the day before, and it fell in graceful waves down her back. She started to brush her hair, ignoring the fact that she was just going back to bed. It felt good, and it made her think of him.

Erik was Danny's boyfriend of almost six months when he moved to go to grad school. She had known that was coming, though. The thing that surprised Danny was that he never mentioned taking her with him. Almost from the moment they met, they had been inseparable. And, silly as it seemed to her, one of his favorite things to do was brush her hair. His green eyes would light up every time, and he would kiss her neck softly, just once, when he was done. Her world spun every time.

Then there was Andy. Danny told herself she was not allowed to think about him, but thoughts of him had been plaguing her for the past three days. Ever since the wedding.

On the corner of a treeless avenue, standing atop the town's only hill, was an old schoolhouse—though it was no longer a school. Rendered obsolete several years before by the construction of a new school across town, it was purchased, in public auction, by a local businessman, who had it converted into an apartment complex. Over one summer, and with much noise and dust, each former classroom was remade into a residential studio: all the blackboards were torn out (some with the chalky vestiges of math problems and spelling words still visible); the alphabet-themed wallpaper was plastered over, then painted a standard white; the teachers' desks, the bookshelves, and the art-project bulletin boards were all removed, replaced with identical bed-dresser combos and basic kitchens (refrigerator, sink, countertop); the room numbers became addresses; the school-bell was dismantled. And, before fall arrived, the metamorphosis was complete. Briefly successful—its novelty initially attracted many well-off college students and divorced businessmen—the original owner later sold the building to the government, who designated it as a public housing project. Very soon the schoolhouse charm faded (as did the grounds and the quaint, red-brick walls). Indeed, within a year of the change, the building had become a tenement, populated wholly by misfits: drug-addled parolees, kinless seniors, and over-burdened mothers with filthy children (who were often left alone, till nightfall, in the school's old playground).

Subject: 225H.001 [REDACTED] (fiction)
Date: Thursday, October 27, 2011 3:58:23 PM MT
From: [REDACTED]
To: stephen.gibson@uvu.edu

Halloween Short Story

Once upon a time there was a pumpkin named Wallace. Wallace was part of a large family among which he was the most grotesque. Discolored and covered with boils, he never was very popular and whenever the humans came by to purchase pumpkins he was never chosen. Being purchased was a great honor for any pumpkin because it meant that they would be going to the Island of Festivity where it is said to be so beautiful that even the birds remain silent in awe. Each day the farmer inspected each pumpkin to make sure they were in tip-top condition after which he would give them all a psychological analysis. Out of all of the farmer's pumpkins Wallace concerned him the most.

"Tell me about these dreams you've been having," the farmer asked as he chewed on his pencil nervously.

"The dreams remain the same as they always have, even after I took the fertilizer you prescribed. In the dream I get gruesomely murdered, hollowed out, and my carcass is put on display for all to see. I have strange things carved into my body, runes or something, and it gives others great joy. Strangest of all, I'm glowing."

"Wallace, I'm deeply worried about your state-of-mind. Are you willing to take a Rorschach test?"

"Haven't Rorschach tests been discredited for many yea..."

"I think it would be interesting for you, a pumpkin, to take it."

"Okay, if you think it will help."

"I never promised such a thing, I just think it will be at least mildly amusing."

The farmer took several dirty napkins out of his pocket all of which were stained with oil, food, or soil. After shuffling through them he found one that he thought to be aesthetically pleasing and held it up. The napkin was stained with grease to the point that parts of it seemed transparent.

"Wallace, what do you see?"

"A dirty napkin?"

"No, say something funny for heaven's sake!"

"Oh... A cat?"

"A cat!? My goodness, the imagination of a pumpkin is truly something to behold."

The farmer retrieved yet another napkin from his pocket, this one stained with a *Five Guys* logo.

"What do you see now?"

"I don't want to do this anymore."

The End.

Subject: English 225H.001 [REDACTED] short story for no flinchy

Date: Thursday, October 27, 2011 12:48:38 PM MT

From: [REDACTED]

To: stephen.gibson@uvu.edu

Untitled (so far)

In a cheap hotel room in Oakland, a bald man sat slouched in a worn-out chair and tongued a dirty pistol. The room had been his for less than an hour. The beds were still made. The glasses next to the ice bucket were still wrapped in plastic.

Directly outside of the room, Ryan and Barrett leaned cross-legged against the hallway wall. Ryan checked his watch.

"I hate this part," he murmured, eyes darting to the elevator.

Barrett chuckled a throaty laugh and slid down the wall into the lotus position, her leather pants clinging to her thighs like they were spray-painted on.

Back in the hotel room, the man with the gun opened the drapes, letting sunbeams trickle into the room. For a paralyzed second, he arched his back for a final glance at the cornflower blue sky, licking the barrel of the pistol.

The silence was deafening.

The man heaved a sigh that left his chest cavernous, then pulled the trigger.

The noise of the gunshot penetrated the hotel room door. Ryan jumped.

"Jesus!" Ryan fiddled with his cuffs and collar while Barrett stood up and produced a key card. She creaked the door open in time to see the man's dead body slide into a tidy heap.

"Leave him on the floor?" Barrett asked Ryan, who shrugged and coughed uncomfortably.

"I don't know. Set design is your job," he forced out.

"Hmm," Barrett paused and pulsated her finger against her lip. Her killer eyes pierced past her bangs like gunpowder blue arrows. Her black hair fell down her bony back like a shawl around her pale frame.

"Back up in the chair, I think," she finally answered. She yanked a pair of rubber gloves onto her hands. Ryan kept his bulky arms folded, shuddering.

"What's his story?" he said, gesturing to the dead man on the floor. "Barrett?"

"Depressed," Barrett said nonchalantly, opening her black satchel and pulling out a crisp white envelope and a photograph.

"I know depressed," Ryan jeered. "They're all depressed. Why else would they..."

"Ryan," Barrett said, her voice icy. Despite the differences in stature--Ryan was a meaty, tanned specimen of six feet with carefully highlighted and gelled metro-sexual hair, and Barrett had the threatening menace of a ballerina--he seemed to cower beneath her.

"Enough," she said. "You've been working for me for a year. You know the job. Get it done. In the chair. Unless you would like to join him?"

Ryan unbuttoned his sleeves and pushed them up, his forearms so large they nearly split the seams. After placing his own rubber gloves onto his hands, he lifted the man into the bloodstained chair, neatly positioning the carcass facing the window. "Sorry," he muttered. "Sometimes I just wonder, you know? What their stories were?"

Nodding, Barrett said, "I know you are a sentimental fool, Ryan. That's why you are the muscle chump, and I am the boss."

She turned her back to Ryan and continued with her setup. The photograph was placed in the dead man's limp hands. It showed a fifty year-old woman in a red power suit and blonde French twist, waving to the camera from a flowery American flag parade float. The envelope was addressed to Senator Becky Smith.

Ryan nudged the gun back underneath the chair of the bleeding body. The hotel phone rang shrilly. Barrett gave the gristly scene one final survey.

"All right," she said. "Time to go."

Quickly, the pair hightailed it out of the room, the phone still desperately ringing. The origins of the gunshot echo had, at that point, been speculated on by every level of the hotel. The police had been notified by the front desk: possible suicide in 408.

Safe in room 406, Ryan straightened his shirt and put on his sport coat. He washed his hands tidily and utilized a lint roller. Barrett peered at him while she dialed a cell phone.

"Getting ready for the ball?" she commented.

Ignoring her, Ryan asked, "Did you enter the scrambler code?"

Barrett shook her head. "Unnecessary. The media doesn't care where their sources come from. All they want is the scoop."

The line picked up. "Good afternoon, Oakland Examiner, how can I help you?"

Barrett spoke. "Have I got a story for you."

"Name?" The receptionist was cheery, and Barrett snickered.

"Forget the name. Courtyard by Marriott. Downtown. Room 408. You're the first paper I've called, and I have a long list. So send your reporter here fast."

The receptionist scoffed. "What makes you think we'd be interested?"

Barrett licked her lips and said, "A death involving Becky Smith, California senator."

She hung up and called nine more local newspapers, each time sticking to the same concise script. Ryan prepared himself a chef's salad with lemon-raspberry vinaigrette, which he offered to his partner.

"No, thanks," Barrett said as she sipped her cold thermos of green tea.

"I don't I've ever seen you eat anything," Ryan mentioned between bites. His face contorted foggily. "Seriously. In the year I've been working for you. Never."

"What about it?" Barrett queried. With her two rail-like arms, she grabbed her charcoal turtleneck and pulled it off her body. Her back faced Ryan. He balked at her gaunt build, skin so white it was nearly lavender. Her ribcage and spinal cord bulged beneath her flesh.

"Nothing," Ryan admitted, noting that despite her helpless-looking demeanor, he had once witnessed Barrett tear out a grown man's entire dental set with her bare hands while he flailed, loudly dying.

Barrett removed her pants without shame and tuned out her partner's wishy-washy narrations of the day's proceedings. She was used to his affected introspection. He was weak--a former Christian, still tangled in the web of the hypothetical moral fuzziness regarding his career. She kept him around because he was cheap, loyal, and could lift their fattest clients when needed.

"Aren't you getting changed?" she demanded, bundling herself in a faded gray hoodie, dark jeans, and white Keds with no socks. Even as she attempted to play the part of an exhausted college student on a fall break sabbatical, she exerted quiet violence.

"No," Ryan reminded her, pointing at his suit. "I'm a businessman today, remember?"

"Then get down to the conference room. I'll see you back up here when the reporters come." She gathered her thatch of onyx hair into a tight chignon at the nape of her neck and adds a plastic watch with an obnoxiously large face to her wrist.

"All right, boss--" Ryan began. A scuffle in the hallway cut him off. He scurried to the door and scrutinized the peephole.

Subject: ENG 2250.001 - [REDACTED] - Short story for "no-flinchy"

Date: Wednesday, October 26, 2011 5:20:21 PM MT

From: [REDACTED]

To: DrStephen GibsonUVU

Spitting out a stale, rock hard mint from the bank, Jesse stands on the leaf-strewn sidewalk, halted by a red light, and shivers in the cold wind while chastising himself for not wearing a jacket on this late October day. The pungent fumes from the traffic agitate his already upset stomach. "I really need to ask Randy for a raise," he thinks to himself while looking at his bank deposit slip. The traffic light turns green and he quickly shoves his bank slip into the front pocket of his brown polyester slacks and walks briskly forward, oblivious to the crowd of people walking beside him.

Halfway down the next sidewalk he approaches a shoe repair shop and stops to look at his polished Florsheim wingtips with a hole in the right sole. When he began his job at the local TV station, eight months ago, his father had given him these shoes which he himself had previously worn. "Hand-me-downs from the old man," Jesse thinks to himself as he shakes his head disapprovingly. "They'd be almost as good as new if I had them resoled." He gazes momentarily at the grimy red neon sign of the shoe repair shop before entering. As he opens the door a foul wind of noxious chemicals overwhelms his senses. "Can I help you," asks a little man behind the counter, wearing a stained leather apron and a yellow-toothed smile. "Uh... no thanks, I think I'll just buy myself some new shoes," replies Jesse as he abruptly leaves the store and continues his walk on the cracked downtown sidewalks.

An hour later, wearing a new jacket, he throws his shopping bag from Gladstones department store on the couch of his living room, forgetting to lock the door behind him. After kicking off his old shoes he throws them in the garbage can of his kitchen, on top of a package of spoiled bologna and a rotten bunch of bananas. Enjoying the softness of the green shag rug as he walks barefoot to his couch he makes a vow to never wear shoes again.

His phone rings and he picks it up. A few minutes later he is startled by the voice at the other end of the phone. "Are you listening to me?," barks his dad annoyingly. Realizing that he hadn't been listening, Jesse focusses his attention to the phone conversation.

"Aren't you ashamed of your lack of motivation?"

"Not really, dad. I have steady, reliable employment and I enjoy what I do."

"But all you do is paraphrase what other people report. There's no creativity or ingenuity in your work."

"It's my first real job after college, pop. You have to start somewhere. I don't plan on doing this kind of work forever."

"You know you can have a higher paying job with greater prestige."

"I was wondering when you'd bring that up this week. It seems you bring it up at least once a week."

"But you're being foolish to write news copy for the local TV station when you could be taking the reigns of the business I've built up."

"Yes, we've had this conversation endless times, dad. I'm not interested in running your hardware store. I'm not interested in being a businessman. I want to be a writer. That's why I used my GI bill to go to college."

"You're not a writer, you're a paraphraser who adds flowery adjectives to news bulletins for the anchorman of the 6 O'Clock news to read."

"OK, I've given you your weekly time to complain about my life and assert yourself in changing the direction of my life course. I don't have any more time to waste today, dad, so I'm saying 'good-bye' and I'll talk with you again soon."

"Listen, son, don't you dare hang up on your old man! I still have something important to say to you ..."

Jesse immediately hangs up the phone and says to himself, "Not tonight, dad."

The doorbell rings and Jesse opens the door. "Are you ready?" asks his girlfriend. After kissing her he locks his door and they walk out of his apartment complex to her '67 Mercury Comet. Holding a pair of tickets she asks, "Are you sure you want to see 'Fiddler on the Roof?'"

"Sure," he replies as he brushes her strawberry blond hair with his hand. "I just made a personal resolution today to start breaking useless traditions."