THE DEATH OF LILY

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by

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Prologue:

An Obstructed View

Her body was found in her studio apartment at the Graybeard Suites. She lay on her back on the cheap, tan and burgundy flecked Berber carpet. She wore tight blue jeans and a light gray zip-up hooded sweatshirt. She was barefoot. Her long, dark brown almost black hair was sprawled out on the floor, allowing plain view of her face. Her skin, now very pale, made the bruises on her neck and throat and the broken blood vessels in her eyes (the eyes were open upon discovery) more pronounced. The investigator indicated that the cause of death was most likely suffocation from strangulation, perhaps only hours earlier. More would have to be determined by the coroner.

Among her personal items were one large suitcase full of clothes; one smaller suitcase containing papers and brochures from Athens University, several books, and a notebook with writing in it; a laptop; a small black purse containing a wallet, two hundred dollars cash, a cell phone, a pack of Djarum Black Clove Cigarettes, a lighter, an empty bottle of perfume, two pens and a pocket size notebook; and finally four pairs of shoes in the bottom of the closet. Other than the disheveled comforter on the bed, the apartment seemed undisturbed.

The sky was overcast and looked like a dirty window that had been smudged with a damp cloth obscuring the glass; the gray clouds spread in different directions. The trees’ leaves were devoid of green; shades of red, orange, and brown filled their branches and littered the ground. Police cruisers had awkwardly parked in front of the apartment. Their blue and red lights bounced off the stucco façade of the building. It was cold. Enough so
that the exposed flesh on the officers’ hands were pink. Those who weren’t taping off the area around the apartment were rubbing their hands together. They knocked on tenant doors. Someone must have seen something or had a piece of information to offer.

In the parking lot investigators talked with the owner of the apartments and questioned the man responsible for reporting the dead woman. The man appeared despondent and frustrated. He explained that he worked at the university as a Professor and Department Chair of Philosophy. His name was Dr. Harvey Buchanan. He told the investigators that he had been seeing this woman for the last couple of months, and that he had no idea who had done this, or, for that matter, what exactly had happened. The more he explained, the more they asked. And as their suspicion grew, so did his frustration. People stood outside their apartments and in the parking lot watching and wondering what was going on. This kind of commotion rarely occurs in such a small college town.

It wasn’t difficult for the police to identify the woman. An officer looked in her wallet and found a New York driver’s license identifying the woman as twenty-eight year old Lily Zephyr. The owner of the apartments confirmed the name he had on the lease, but this only confused Dr. Buchanan; the name was unfamiliar. He told the police he had to make a phone call. They told him that he could do so down at the station. He asked if this was necessary. Of course it was, they told him. He didn’t argue, but stepped into a police cruiser with the questioning officers. This all took place on the last Tuesday in October of 2009.
Part One:

Philosophical Investigations
I’m surprised that someone like yourself would travel all the way to New York City just to sit and ask me questions. I’m sure it would’ve been easier just to do this over the phone and save yourself the airfare and the cab ride from LaGuardia. Hey, as long as you can write it off. I’d take the trip too, although it can be pretty stressful if you’re not from around here. Either you learn the subway routes and schedule or you pay the cabbie who’s likely swerving around cars and honking his horn and substantially increasing your heart rate. If you’re not from around here, you might be better off popping a Xanax before you enter the city. It can be pretty daunting.

Now I always do my best to comply with law enforcement, especially in such, well, you know, unpleasant circumstances. Honestly, I can’t believe she’s dead, such a nice girl and all. She might have had some unusual traits about her, but I really did like her, and she was Will’s girlfriend at one time. I mean they were serious about each other until things kind of went south. They parted in the worst way. But please, let me get you a cup of coffee. It’s the least I can do since you came to see me. No, really, it’s on me. This place has the best coffee. Organic. Fair trade. Made with love. I grew up drinking this stuff, and trust me, nowhere in the city can you find a cup of coffee this good. Nowhere.

I’ve known Will a long time. We may have grown apart (for reasons I will get to), but he was still my best friend at one time. And Lily, well, I guess I would say that I loved her also at one time. I guess the best place to start with is when they met, which
was the summer of 2005. Will and I had just graduated with our masters, his in philosophy and mine in psychology. I took a job at a big firm in Manhattan as a consultant working with performance management, while Will taught a few adjunct courses at NYU and worked night and day to finish his book, something about the death of philosophy. He had been living with me during the last couple of years of college in my apartment in Washington Square. I don’t really know how Will was introduced to Lily. I think she might have been a friend of someone we knew or maybe she was some unlucky guy’s date. Either way, we had gone to a party not too far from my place. Now I’m outgoing and I love being around people. Put me in a room full of them, and I’m sure I’ll either have people laughing, or I’ll leave with more friends than I came with. I just love being around people, you know. Will was just the opposite. He kept to himself. He seldom engaged in conversations with people unless it involved something about culture or philosophy or ideas. I suppose he knew what he was interested in and left it at that. And even though he had trouble, well, I guess it’s not trouble, just his personality.

Anyhow, even though he didn’t excel at being sociable, he had no problem talking to women. Never did. You could even pin him as a girlfriend kind of guy. Ever since we met in undergrad at NYU, he was serious in his studies and with philosophers and literature, and he always had some girl he was dating. Sometimes serious, sometimes not.

So Will and I went to this party at our friend’s loft in Greenwich Village. The guy was a friend from school, a guy I hung out with quite a bit. His family had money and in turn set him up in this amazing apartment. The place was huge and he had shit all over the walls: artwork, instruments, photographs, and whatever. It was all kind of humorous
and kitschy, everything was a conversation piece. The guy had a great sense of humor and never took anything too seriously, plus he threw the best parties. I was talking to a few people, and I think Will was in the kitchen of our friend’s place with some people. I notice this girl looking at a painting. She was medium height, thin, and had long, dark brown hair. She wasn’t with anyone at the moment. Now don’t get me wrong, I prefer hanging out with groups of people, but sometimes you see the perfect moment and you know you’ll regret not taking it. So I looked at the person next to me, I can’t remember who exactly that was, and asked if he knew who was the girl in front of the painting. He didn’t. I excused myself for a moment from the group. I walked over to her and stood about six inches away, looking at the painting as she was. I asked her what she saw. She looked at me. I glanced at her and smiled. Then we both looked back at the painting. She said she saw a sad kitten in a white ruffled collar. I thought I’d display some wit and said I saw an eighteenth century advertisement for cat food. I waited, gave her a stupid grin, and then I introduced myself. She said her name was Lily. She had a small pointed nose and blue eyes. Not bright blue eyes like most blondes or some black Irish, but eyes that seemed almost transparent as if her iris was filled with ocean water. I asked how she knew the host. She looked toward the kitchen, and slyly told me that she had wandered in with a group of people she didn’t know. She was crashing. She was also admiring all of the outrageous stuff the guy had. And I don’t fault her curiosity. Our friend has unusual taste and lives in a beautiful place. He once told me that because he didn’t have a creative bone in his body, he was going to fill his apartment with things that best mirrored the life of his mind. That was complete bullshit, but I had to keep a conversation going in a
somewhat interesting direction if I was going to keep this girl’s attention. She questioned
the likelihood that an old painting of a kitten in a ruffled collar was part of what makes up
this guy’s mind. Her sarcasm was cute. I shrugged and told her it was better than a still
life of a cheese Danish. I offered to grab her a drink. She wanted red wine.

I went to the kitchen to pour her a drink and get another beer for myself. When I
went back out to where I had left her, but she wasn’t there. I scanned the room, but I
didn’t see her. I walked over to a couple of people I had been talking to. I asked if they
saw where the girl went that I was talking to. No one knew. Now, this apartment is huge.
You walk in the front door and it’s a big open room with a fireplace and wood floors. To
your left is the kitchen and then a staircase that takes you to the second floor where there
are three bedrooms, but to your right is another huge room with a fireplace and there’s a
little study/library and French doors to a balcony. It is truly an incredible layout.

So I walked into the other room and still no sign of her. I made my way toward
the balcony, thinking she might have gone out to catch a view of the neighborhood. But
when I passed the little library, I just happened to glance over and who do I see? Will and
Lily. Will was leafing through some book while Lily sat on a desk. He looked happy, and
she appeared interested. And here’s my moral dilemma. Do I hand her the wine and play
the “I’m-already-talking-to-this-girl-get-lost” game, or do I let Will continue to entertain
her? I entered the room with a big smile and introduced them with all the irony I could
manage. “Will, I see you’ve met Lily. Lily, this is William Thierry, one of the smartest
guys I know.”
They both looked at me a little confused, maybe surprised. I don’t quite remember the emotion (oh, fickle memories). I handed Lily her wine and Will, the beer. I told Will not to get too attached. I left them to discussing boring things while I joined the rest of the party outside the prison of books so I could drink and be merry and talk about framed paintings of kittens in ruffled collars with women of dubious intentions. Well, that’s what I told them as I left.

I went back to the kitchen and grabbed another beer for myself and found a group to mingle with. I can do that, jump from one group to the next unlike Will. Maybe that’s why I left them. Will was comfortably talking with some stranger, but then again, he does things like that. He’ll randomly do something out of character. I might have been a little jealous. She was pretty and mysterious, maybe a little erratic or adventurous, perhaps because I knew very little about her except for appearances. Who doesn’t like that every now and then? It leaves a lot to the imagination. Maybe that’s sometimes better. Then again, I’m a born and raised New Yorker, and I don’t believe in fate or destiny. With the amount of people in this city, what makes one person more special than another? Aren’t I just as likely to end up with the girl across the hall as, say, the girl who lives in an efficiency in Spanish Harlem?

Anyway, later on in the night I got a text from him saying he had left (I don’t know how we didn’t see each other up until that point). So I finished out the night there and left around three in the morning.

The next day I woke up around nine. I hate sleeping in. I made a pot of coffee like I always do. I was leaning against the counter when I heard Will’s door open. I turned
around expecting Will but instead met eyes with Lily. She wore only a tight black tank top and underwear. She made a shy, almost embarrassed expression that quickly turned into, I don’t know, maybe that look you get when you realize you know someone, sort of surprised but also kind of familiar. She said she didn’t expect to see again as she turned and walked toward the bathroom. Hell, I didn’t think I’d ever see her again either. I think I remember her walking sort of sensually, almost teasing me with what I didn’t get. Then again, I’m probably just making that up. But she was gorgeous. Then again you wake up to some attractive half-naked woman and you’d probably think she was the most beautiful woman you’ve ever seen. It’s all about circumstances. I was surprised—surprised that Will had made it that far with her. I figured she’d have lost interest, left the party, and Will would have gone home and sulked or read or something like that. I was truly impressed.

I crept over to Will’s room while she was still in the bathroom, and peeked my head in only to see Will asleep and wrapped in his blanket. Their clothes were scattered on the floor like the molted feathers of a bird. I turned and walked back to the kitchen to pour myself a cup of coffee. When she returned from the bathroom, in the midst of walking back to Will’s room, I asked her if she wanted some coffee. She stopped short of the door, hesitated and accepted my offer. That was the moment I knew what kind of person she was. One-night stands sometimes have the potential of turning into something more, but not with girls like her. Things don’t end well with girls like her. The ones who wander from place to place, giving short answers, not really saying much about themselves, flirting and ending up in the rooms of men they hardly know, walking around
barely clothed and pretending that they have some abstract connection with everyone.

But all preconceived thoughts and assumptions aside, I liked her. I liked that she didn’t care that I could basically see the outline of her body, even after she had spent the night with my best friend. I kind of wanted to know more about the girl in the black underwear. I didn’t just want to know more about her, I wanted her to stay here in the kitchen with me as long as she possibly could before going back to Will’s room and burying herself in his bed. It probably sounds crazy, but I wanted to pretend that I was the one who had taken her home, that she was actually walking into my room and getting back into bed with me. So I poured her a cup of coffee while she sat at the kitchen table, which was really just an old tile counter with a couple of worn leather seated bar stools in front of it. I asked her how she took it. Black.

I don’t know if she felt like she owed it to me since I was the one to talk to her first, but she sat on one of the stools, and we talked until Will woke up. She collected her things, dressed, and left not long after that. And that was the beginning of their yearlong relationship.
On a late Saturday afternoon in mid-October, William Thierry sits in an old, brown paisley armchair in the living room of the home of Dr. Harvey Buchanan, Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Athens University. Will’s attention is divided between Harvey’s incessant rambling about the usual academic quandaries and Harvey’s wife, Anne, gracefully, yet diligently preparing dinner. Given the fact that Will’s chair is angled more toward the doorway into the kitchen—perfectly framing Anne’s body—than it is in Harvey’s general direction (Anne’s deliberate repositioning?), he has been fighting to give this man his undivided attention. The problem is not the subject matter, albeit Harvey can ramble at times making unnecessary digressions and opinions seem just as relevant as the actual information he attempts to communicate, but the angle at which Will must turn his head or shift his body to make the appropriate eye contact and gestures. And although he is seated directly across from the couch Harvey usually occupies (even though the goddamn chair seems different today), Harvey is a man who takes to pacing when he talks about something troublesome. Will feels like a tourist as he tries to follow the man. And for the last ten minutes, the man has been walking from his empty space on the couch to the bay window that looks out into the front yard, full of fallen leaves of maples and oaks, and back to the couch.

“Do you hear what I’m saying, Will?” asks Harvey.

“Of course, Harvey, but you’re practically sprinting around the room. My neck can’t take the back and forth.”

“Sorry. I just can’t get my mind off of it.”
Harvey stands still, near the window off to Will’s left, long enough to sip his drink. Will looks back at Anne who has yet to acknowledge him since he has arrived. That’s fine with him. Because the way she moves or even the way she stands and does nothing is enough. He just watches her in her tight, light green t-shirt that shows off the curve of her small breasts, her flat stomach. The black leggings hug her thighs and ass. Her shoulder length auburn hair yanked back in a ponytail. All signs that she taught yoga today. Usually, by now, she would have changed into jeans and a long sleeve shirt or something like that. Maybe she’s teasing me, he thinks. It’s like she’s choreographed a dance that Harvey is too busy to notice. Her slender frame shifts and pivots as she places the necessary items on the counter. His eyes follow the curve of her breasts and ass each time she turns slightly to the left or to the right, opening a cupboard or pulling out a drawer for a utensil. And his thoughts put her in the nude as she reaches for something a little bit out of reach in cupboard. She stands on the tips of her toes to grasp it, and the next moment she’s doing yoga stretches, her small pink nipples and lack of pubic hair.

Her—

“Will,” says Harvey.

Will jerks his head in Harvey’s direction, finally acknowledging something he has said.

“Doesn’t that make you the least bit anxious?” Harvey stares at Will, his black eyebrows raised and a slight look of impatience.

“I’m sorry, Harvey. I was just thinking of something I needed to change for my lecture at the conference. Now what was it that should make me anxious?” Will grabs his
bottle of Killians from the end table to his right and puts it to his lips, but realizing it is empty, he sets it back on the table. *I hope he didn’t see that,* he frets.

“I said, I just met with Dean Murphy yesterday. He said the board met and the university has decided that if the program isn’t turned around somehow, then they will discontinue the philosophy major.”

“What? When was that decided?”

Harvey sits on the couch, facing Will. He empties his bourbon with a final gulp and then hunches forward, resting his elbows on his lap. “Apparently it’s something they have been thinking for a while. And it’s always about numbers. Enrollment in our program is low, and the other departments are bringing in more outside money.”

“So what does that mean for us?” Will feels uneasy. He shifts in the chair and then shifts again, crossing his legs.

“I don’t know. He wouldn’t tell me exactly what that meant. All I know is that we need a damn good turn out at this year’s conference. Maybe that’s proof enough that we’re viable.” Harvey stands, his tan khakis wrinkled on the knees. “You want another beer?”

“Sure,” says Will.

Harvey walks to the kitchen, passing Anne. Will notices the man’s slight limp, a trait Harvey cannot hide too well when he is tired and stressed. Will leans his head on the back of the chair. The upholstery feels rough on his neck. His eyes follow the curves and patterns in the plaster ceiling, and he wonders how this will play out. Sure it’s only the beginning of his third year at Athens, but he never pictured his position would be in
jeopardy when he hastily left New York for Ohio. Harvey had offered him a two-year visiting lectureship practically the day after Will came to the university to do a reading from his book in April 2007. The move had been a choice Will made with assurance. He needed some distance from what had happened with Nick and Lily. New York was his home and even now he longed to be there walking in the rush of people or riding the subway north to Central Park, but he needed space to work and time to think without the constraints of his past, the suffocating miasma of his former life. Still he committed a second term to a school that would be losing their philosophy program. Will signs. *How did I not see this coming?*

The sound of Anne’s knife cutting causes him to picture her delicate, nimble fingers touching different vegetables, slicing lean cuts of meat (probably chicken), measuring just the right amount of water to boil rice in the way a conductor orchestrates a symphony or a person folds origami. The *tsst* of a beer bottle pulls Will away from his daydream. He lifts his head and sees Harvey, in the place where Anne was, pouring Knob Creek into a short glass of ice. He replaces the cap and keeping his hand on the bottle, grabs the now full glass of bourbon.

“Anne, would you bring Will his beer?” he asks.

“Sure,” she says.

“We still have Laroche to speak at the conference,” Harvey says, walking out of the kitchen. He sets the bottle of Knob Creek on the rectangular coffee table, the dark walnut wood marked with the past drink stains and wear. Anne follows him out of the kitchen, her bare feet barely making a sound on the oak floor apart from a few creaks.
She smiles and hands Will a Killians. He thanks her as she turns and walks back into the kitchen.

_She may be almost forty, Will thinks, but she’s got a body like a twenty-five year old._ He glances at Harvey who stands, staring out the window. The sun is hidden behind the clouds.

“There are two hundred and fifty people who have purchased passes. And we have all the expenses covered. That’s twice as many people as last year and we didn’t nearly have the budget we do this year. If this goes well then maybe they’ll reconsider.”

Will doesn’t respond immediately. He just thinks about how Laroche criticized his book, the book that got him this job and put him on the radar, a book that addressed the issue of the declining numbers of academics and the obsolescence of ultra-specific philosophies; his cataloguing of the Great Philosophers, each making a claim that philosophy would eventually negate itself. His book was meant to be a beacon, shining light on the problems that plagued the study of philosophy, or perhaps a rope that would pull philosophy out of the pit it had fallen into. But the book he had written looked more like a noose being tied for the programs at universities who thought very little of the study of philosophy. Athens was one of those universities. Laroche didn’t care about that; he doesn’t care about that. He’s a fighter by nature, a man who prides himself on being right and proving his stance. He lives in Paris for Christ’s sake, a welter of intellectual thought! He only concerned himself with Will’s book once it gained some popularity, writing a book that pragmatically refuted the issue and nearly criticized every point Will
had made. *Perhaps he’s here for the money alone,* Will thinks, *then again, where else does he have the opportunity to further humiliate me.*

*Chop.*

The sound of Anne’s knife resonates like the shot of a Starter’s pistol. Startled slightly, Will glances in her direction, but she is out of sight.

*Chop. Ch-ch-ch-chop.*

Harvey catches sight of Will. A muffled “shit” leaves Anne’s mouth. She stops chopping.

“You alright in there?” asks Harvey.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just cut myself.” Her voice is quiet and sounding somewhat distant.

“That’s what she gets for cooking that healthy shit,” Harvey whispers to Will. He grins. “She’s always cutting herself, and it takes her forever to make anything. I tell her to grill some burgers or get a pizza, but she never listens. Instead I get turkey or black bean patties and pizza that tastes like salad and cardboard.” Harvey points to his bourbon. “This is really the only thing that tastes good in this house.”

Harvey returns to talking about the conference and the usual politics of academia, but Will is unable to comprehend his words. He stares in Anne’s direction. She opens a drawer and pulls out a box of Band-Aids, but it slips from her hands and hits the floor. Her body is again framed by the doorway. She bends over to pick up the box; the lines of her underwear protrude slightly through her workout pants. She brushes a piece of auburn hair from her face that has fallen out of her ponytail. Bent over, she looks back and
makes eye contact with Will. They smile. Will looks back at Harvey and swigs his beer. 

*What the hell did she ever see in him,* he thinks.

Harvey’s lips rapidly move in timed patterns, yet Will is unaware of what the man is saying. He’s studied the man so thoroughly for the last two years that he doesn’t have to be completely attentive to know what’s going on. He knows every physical feature and behavioral quirk. From the mild balding in his short cut, well combed, more-salt-than-pepper hair to the way he ever so slightly limps his right leg from the knee surgery he had a few years back. His strong jaw always absent of stumble or facial hair of any kind together with his constant pairing and wearing of buttoned down plaid or solid colored shirts and dress slacks or khakis; those are the symbols of Harvey’s professionalism. And Harvey’s young, but not too young (only fifteen years) and beautiful wife in their old colonial are proof of his togetherness, his achievement of the American Dream. Will is aware of this, but he’s also aware that people eventually wake up from dreams. And the reality of their situation is a harsh and lingering feeling, one that Will is not yet ready to address.

Harvey is now standing and moving both hands, only resting his mandible for a quick sip. His face is flushed and it’s only three-thirty. Again, he walks to the bay window and peers out. Will takes another gulp of his beer and sets it on the coffee table in front of him. He stands.

“Mind if I use the restroom?”

“Yeah, sure.” Harvey continues looking out the window.
Will walks to the bathroom on the first floor and shuts the door behind him. In front of the toilet, he unzips his pants. A stream of urine hits bull’s-eye in the still water. He stares at the small, framed, eight by ten black and white photo hung mid-wall above the tank. Aside from the mirror above the sink, it is the only object hanging on the naked pale green walls, like a candle in a dark window or a single stain on a white blouse. It’s a print of some path or walkway in Central Park. Will knows the area. At the furthest point of the path is a person out of focus. That part of the photo has always had a mesmerizing effect on him. And even though he knows the photo is a print from some artist Anne met when she visited New York in college, it still intrigues him. He can never distinguish whether the person is approaching or walking away. Every time he looks at the photo he tries to figure it out, like he might find meaning with fresh eyes and have a different vantage point, but every time, he comes to the same understanding as when he first observed the picture: he doesn’t know. And every time he sees the photo, which is almost every visit to the Buchanan’s home, he can only think of Lily walking away from him as he lay on the ground writhing in pain, his arms shielding his face as he is being kicked by some meddlesome stranger. On Lily’s face is a combination of fear and satisfaction, as if the moment excited her. This was the last view of her he saw. The image so vivid in his mind that it feels like she’s with him looking at the picture.

But this time, he wills himself to picture Anne squeezing his hand as they walk along the path parallel to West Dr., past the Strawberry Fields and onto the shore of the lake. They sit on the ground, a spot hidden by small trees and tall grass. He kisses her hard like he has before; she kisses him back. He runs his hand through her hair, warm and
looking redder from the sun. They look out at the water that moves ever so slightly under Bow Bridge. His arm is wrapped around her and she is real, and she feels good. On the bridge is a figure of a woman he can’t quite distinguish. Her back is turned to them, her dark hair pours over her shoulders. Will shakes himself out of the trance and sees the photograph once more. *If only I could take Anne to New York,* he thinks. *But New York isn’t an option. It may never again be a place he can call home.* *I’m on to better things.* He zips up his pants and washes his hands. A strange feeling lingers in his mind.
Sure, I know Harvey. Hell, I know a lot of professors from the university. I’ve been working here for fifteen years, and I’m not just the bartender. I manage Moe’s Place, and I have for the last five years. I’m here everyday from noon until eight or nine o’clock at night. I really love it. I love being around all different types of people, so I pay attention to who comes in here. Whether it’s the families who want a decently priced meal (we’ve been one of Athens top ten spots to eat for at least as long as I’ve been managing), guys that come here after work each day, a couple times a week, and even once a week, I know them. And that’s why people come here: good food, great drink selection, and a nice place to be.

But the professors come in here all of the time. Literally from the moment we’re open until last call, you’ll see a professor in here with a drink. Mostly they’re in couples or groups. I guess it’s the first place they think of when they leave that stuffy classroom. I never went to college, but I can imagine a teacher can only take so much before they need a break, somewhere they can “hide” that’s different from that environment. Harvey, well he comes in here a few times a week. Usually on Friday, he’ll come here with his wife, Anne. Nice girl. She seems a little young for Harvey, but good for him. Nice body too. How he got a piece of ass like that, I’ll never know. He tells me she’s a nutritionist at that health store or whatever in town and she teaches yoga to old people at the rec center; no wonder she looks so good. Harvey is more of a red meat and hard liquor kind of guy, which always made me wonder how those two met and are still together. I’ve always
thought that the opposites attract thing is bullshit, but I guess in some cases, like theirs, it works. He’s a little cynical and kind of arrogant but a fun guy to talk to. He’ll also show up like Tuesday or Wednesday and have a couple of drinks. He’s a good guy.

Before those two got married, right after Harvey’s first marriage, he was in here every day and he stayed long past the time I left. I would have liked to stay and keep talking with the guy, but I have kids I want to see before they go to bed. It made me wonder if he had any friends outside of the college or even any friends at all. Sure he would show up from time to time with other faculty members for what I supposed were either get-togethers or casual meetings. There was the hottie with the eye patch, the old chubby guy with the curly hair who dresses kind of weird, the young guy that Harvey would often mention, and a couple of others. They all came in about once a month. If the weather was nice, they would sit at a big table out here on the patio, but they mainly took a table on the first floor. Other than the young guy and the old guy, Harvey didn’t really talk about the others. It sounds to me like those were his only two friends.

What I like about Harvey is that he always talked with people. He didn’t seem pretentious in any way, or think he was better than anybody. That’s how we’re most alike. We knew a lot of people and we will talk to pretty much any one no matter who they are. The way I look at it is that everyone has something to offer or something you can relate to. You just have to talk to find that out. And with that in mind the more people you talk to, the better chance you have finding someone you can really relate to and even be good friends with. Harvey would always say that bars and the streets are where philosophy was born, one of the few places where all kinds of people come together and talk about ideas
and culture. When you hear someone like this guy, who seems to be a pretty intelligent and important, say something like that, it makes you feel like you’re exactly where you should be. Harvey’s pretty much been the same guy as long as I’ve known him. Except for one time.

There was this time he left with a girl. Jesus, it was so weird. It was some time at the end of July last summer. He was having a drink by himself as usual. Like I said, it wasn’t unusual for Harvey to talk to people at the bar. Usually people he knew, but sometimes just random people. This particular evening, a young girl, probably late twenties, with dark brown hair—really cute by the way in somewhat unconventional terms: dark hair, light skin, small breasts, thin, and a little pointed nose—sat next to him and ordered a glass of red wine. I think I remember hearing her introduce herself as Elli something. I don’t know if that was short for Eleanor, Ellen, or maybe Elizabeth. I can’t remember the last name or even if she gave a last name. What I do remember is the way they were acting. They were clearly flirting, but not the regular “she’s cute and paying me attention so I’ll act all sophisticated and dopey at same time” kind of routine. You see that move played out a lot here with guys. It was casual. She said something to him first. He and I were talking about work and she told him that he needed a vacation. That got the two of them talking.

This girl, or rather woman—Elli—said she was suppose to meet someone. She was from out of town, and was here working with one of the insurance companies. Apparently she traveled a lot with her job. Anyhow, Harvey was really into her, saying things that might have been cute if he wasn’t in his fifties and married. It just came off as
pathetic to me, and I didn’t know what would become of the thing. She was clearly too young, but, then again, Anne is younger than him. She was eating up his passes, or what seemed to be passes, or maybe reeling him in. Body language doesn’t lie even when you’ve had a few drinks, but it can be somewhat confusing.

I wasn’t able to eavesdrop on the entire conversation, and honestly I left to talk to someone at the other end of the bar so I didn’t have to hear them. It makes you uneasy when someone does something completely out of character. You don’t know how to react. You can’t really be yourself. They both stood with little hesitation. Harvey said goodbye and she smiled. I wanted to stop him, I really did, but he’s a grown man and what could I say to change his mind. In his position, I don’t know, I would have probably left too. Can you blame the guy?

Now I know I’m probably assuming that the worst happened with them. I don’t really have any proof. But when you spend as much time as I have in a bar, you know who is and who isn’t going home together. The signs are always the same. Young, old, gay, straight, religious, nonreligious, it doesn’t matter. Attraction is attraction. It’s not something you can fake, especially if you’ve had a couple of drinks. Trust me, I may not be book smart like Harvey, but I know people. There may be different varieties, but the patterns are all the same. People are people. It doesn’t matter what you believe or how you look at it, we’re all pretty much the same.

So the next time I saw Harvey, I asked about the girl. He said he walked her to her car and went home to Anne. I’m sure I gave him a look. I’m not very good at hiding facial expressions. He stared back at me and then smiled saying, “Do you really think I
would cheat on my gorgeous wife? And besides that, I really don’t need a scandal at the moment.”

I took his word, even though it didn’t set right with me. I wonder if it was worth it, going off with her. Because as we both know, it did become a scandal. When that girl turned up dead in her apartment, and Harvey was the one to find her. I’d like to say he didn’t do it, but I just don’t know. If she was really from out of town, who else did she know? You see weird stuff like that on TV all of the time. A guy is trying to save his job and marriage by offing his mistress. I’m not saying that she was his mistress, but stranger things have happened. If I were in his position, I sure wouldn’t want some fling fucking up my life. He had a lot to lose. And that was months after he met her. It just doesn’t make sense. You think you know someone. I want to say he didn’t do it, I really do. It’s hard for me to wrap my head around something like that.
Nearing the end of the class period, Professor Thierry—as most of the students know him except for 27-year-old philosophy major Jack Ballard who just calls him Will—draws attention to the stack of glossy sheets of paper he holds in his left hand. Sitting in the first row of the stuffy little classroom a little to the left so as not to appear too interested, or as the other philosophy students like to call “up Thierry’s ass” (especially one Stephanie Green), Jack looks more studious than the others with his legs crossed, hand on chin, and still taking notes of dubious importance. The twelve students stare at Will, some with eyes glazed over and others intent on acknowledging every detail of his existence down to the way he folds and pushes the sleeves of his black shirt up past his elbows. Blood sugars are low and attention spans are short as the minutes creep away this Wednesday morning and the hour hand of the clock staggers on the edge of eleven.

“She are flyers for the fifth annual Athens Philosophy Conference,” he says loudly, trying to compensate for the rattle the old heater makes. “They detail the list of speakers and the schedule for the entire weekend, this weekend, October sixteenth and seventeenth.” He hands a small stack of three or four flyers to the first person of each row. “I know the department has been plugging this thing for a while and some of you are attending and others may be volunteering to help, but I figured it best that you all have a copy in your hand. As you know, according to the syllabus, you each have to attend one discussion and type a one-page summary about it.” He turns around and walks back to the table of his things and sits on its edge, facing the class. “I know that might sound like extra work but since the topic for the conference this year is ‘Where is Philosophy Now?’
and our seminar topic is ‘Death of Philosophy,’ you’ll get a first hand look at what contemporary academics and theorists are saying about this. I encourage everyone to attend the conference in its entirety, but I know that not everyone wants to give up an entire weekend to philosophical pontificating and mental burnout.” He pauses and smiles. Some students snicker, some give halfhearted grins. “There are a limited number of free passes still available in the department if you want to go. Otherwise just give your name to the person running the door. Is that clear? Any objections?”

From the back of the room, not quite the last seat, Stephanie Green raises her hand. Will expects her usual inquiry into the obvious or already addressed.

“Yes, Stephanie.”

“So is there extra credit for going to the whole conference?”

“No there’s not extra credit, but it’s my understanding that attending the conference is a requirement for the president of the Philosophy Club.” Again some students laugh.

Stephanie frowns. “I know. I’m going to be there. I was just seeing if there was an incentive for the rest of the class.”

“How considerate. If it’s any consolation, it’s a nice addition to your extra curriculars when you apply to grad school.” He pauses and surveys the classroom. He wonders how many will actually go on for an advanced degree. The once pale flesh of Stephanie Green’s neck and chest is slightly flushed from minor embarrassment, but the redhead is still the poster child for know-it-all overachiever. “If that’s it, then I’ll hopefully see you all this weekend at some point.”
Students gather notebooks and book bags, handbags and other miscellaneous items. They talk amongst one another about other classes, professors, where they’re eating lunch, this weekend, and general going-ons.

Will quickly and economically packs his folders of papers and notes into his brown leather messenger bag, intent on leaving the room as fast as he possibly can. With peripherals, Will notices that Jack is taking an exceptionally long time to gather his things and exit the classroom. Will considers a hasty departure, like he has on other similar occasions to avoid unnecessary and redundant exchanges of less than satisfactory ideas, but he is a professor and like every other professor he feels the inherent need to guide his pupils, to some degree, which unfortunately comes in the form of enduring their useless and often annoying bullshit via after class chats, office hours that are usually disregarded and replaced with random office visits, and slightly ambiguous and unfulfilling emails. They come with the same problems, and he replies with the same answers. When they leave his course, he thinks they would have been better off getting a business or communications degree. When they leave the university, they are only insignificantly smarter than when they arrived and a bit more mature. *Not like at NYU,* he thinks, *where students actually give a damn.*

Will grabs a cheap eraser and proceeds to erase the blackboard, but all the little foam rectangle does is smear the chalk, making the surface appear cloudy. He rubs his hands together to get the dust off, careful not to smudge his shirt or gray pants with chalk. He turns, grabs his bag and slings it over his shoulder. As he walks to the door, he feels somewhat relieved. He has avoided yet another innocuous conversation and waste of his
time. But before he can get his foot out of the door, he hears the phrase, “Excuse me, Will.” Will turns around to Jack’s awkward half-smile.

“I wanted to run something by you.”

“I know I said you can call me Will outside of class, and class is over, but could you wait until we’re out of the classroom to do so?” *One beer with the guy and he thinks you’re his best friend.*

“Yeah, sorry. I just, I don’t know. Sorry.” Jack appears hurt; his look is vacant.

“So what’s up?” Will glances at the clock. Eight minutes after eleven.

“Well, it’s about Dr. Buchanan,” Jack says.

“What about him?”

“I’m kind of worried about him.”

“In what way?”

“I think he might have a drinking problem.”

Will sighs and thinks, *this is what I get for letting him believe we’re friends.*

“Let’s talk about this in a more appropriate setting like my office. Say maybe twenty minutes?”

“That sounds good. I have to grab my pass for the conference. I’ll see you in twenty.”

Will exits first and makes a left out of the classroom. The hall is narrow, but at this time of day, James A. Gordon Hall is practically an empty shell on the first and second floors. The plaster walls layered with coats of paint now the color Antique White; the once dark oak trim that framed the doors and tall windows and bordered the floor is a
light gray. The florescent lighting only makes the hallway look longer and narrower than it really is.

Will makes his way down the single hall that meanders around the perimeter of the building and coils around the auditorium at its center like a snake. He thinks about why Jack is so concerned with Harvey’s drinking. Harvey tends to drink periodically throughout the day but he’s never been unable to perform his job. Will climbs a set of stairs to the second floor and continues walking. If Jack has noticed Harvey’s drinking, he thinks, I wonder if others notice the same things. It’s not that you couldn’t tell from Harvey’s appearance that he drinks a lot. The red face is a dead giveaway and sometimes he smells of alcohol, then again the dead giveaway might be the latter. The man does drink a lot of bourbon. Will recalls a professor from NYU when he was in graduate school. He had taken classes with the guy since he was an undergrad. The man came into almost every class drunk, but it’s practically the stereotype for the troubled philosophy professor trying to understand the world but falling into vices in the process because the uncovering of truth can be a daunting task and sometimes one needs a type of lubricant to go on. It made for a lively discussion. The NYU professor was less likely to accept whatever answer a student gave, and that was true of any level class he taught. The man would laugh at students’ wrong or poorly thought out responses. The man would argue with stubborn students until he was purple in the face. Sometimes he would rant nonsensically for an entire class and the students wouldn’t know what the hell he was talking about. But there was that one time, and Will remembers it so vividly, when the NYU professor came into class, staggering. He never came to class with anything, but
walked to the front of the room and began talking. This time the man looked like had
been wearing the same clothes for days: tan trousers with undistinguishable stains, a shirt
that was buttoned in the wrong places, and a tweed jacket that was so wrinkled that it
looked like it had been balled up and used for a pillow (who knew tweed could look so
bad?). He hadn’t shaved or washed his hair and looked completely haggard. The man, as
he was talking, went to walk down the aisle between rows of desks and lost his footing
and fell ass over teakettle into a couple of empty desks. It was more shocking and less
funny to the students. A few tried to help him to his feet, but he had split his head open
on the edge of a desk and blood was on his face and the floor. Embarrassed and
disoriented, the NYU professor yelled a string of profanities and walked out of the room.
The students immediately reported it to the department and the dean, as that seemed like
the only appropriate response to such a bizarre situation. Consequently, the NYU
professor was fired before the end of the semester. Will can’t stand the thought of the
same thing happening to Harvey even if he also believes the man drinks too much.

Will enters the department, but Sylvie isn’t at her desk. There is some young girl
who looks up at Will all doe-eyed.

“Can I help you?” she asks.

“Where’s Sylvie?” he asks, looking confused.

“Sylvie Shepard? She’s in the Philosophy Department across the hall.”

“Goddammit. I walked into the wrong door.” Will turns to leave and then looks
back. “Sorry.”
The girl giggles softly. Will walks out the Modern Languages Department and sees the small, black plastic sign at eye level on the door across the hall that reads in white letters:

PHILOSOPHY DEPT.
CLASSICS DEPT.

*I’ve been here two years, he thinks, and I still get turned around in this place if I’m not paying attention.* He hates the thought of having to do this two more years. Walking in this building, staying in that house, pretending to be fine with living here. But with Jack’s concern about Harvey still lingering in his mind, Will enters the department.

“Good morning, honey,” says Sylvie Shepard, the department secretary, from her desk behind the dark gray Formica topped divider. She stops typing and stands, leaning over the divider to check out Will. She brushes aside the bangs of her short blonde bob, gesture she always makes before talking to Will. Her hair is flattering but it draws unnecessary attention to her nose. “There isn’t one day that I see you that you aren’t dressed up in some cute sweater or button up shirt, and your hair always looks effortless. If I was single and a little younger, Will.”

It was true that Will’s hair looked effortless, mainly because the lack of effort it took him to do it every day—towel dried after his morning shower, a nickel size dab of gel, and about thirty seconds of running his fingers through his hair. But Will can tell that Sylvie just likes to flirt with him and has since he arrived two years ago. Perhaps it’s Will’s boyishly good looks or the fact that he shows her just as much attention as she does to him.
“You’re too kind, Sylvie,” he says. The department is quiet and the four office doors behind her are shut including Harvey’s. “Harvey’s not around is he?”

“No. He was going to lunch. Didn’t say where. Do you want me to leave him a memo?”

“No thanks, I’ll catch up with him later today. If you need me, I’ll be in my office.”

Will heads to his office and with the decision to cancel his Thursday class, he does not have to formally deal with another student until Monday, except for this largely unnecessary meeting with Jack. It’s likely that he just wants to sit and talk about other things. Then again, his concern could be legitimate given Harvey’s stress lately. And what if Jack has already mentioned any of this to Tom or Elizabeth or the dean. It doesn’t matter how close they are to him, if someone in academia can find a reason to gain something at another’s expense, they’ll do it without thinking. God, I hope that’s not the case.

Will passes several offices as he makes his way down, yet again, another hall and around the corner. The building is just a series of halls and turns. Clearly everyone is out to lunch. He passes one office with its door open. He glances into the room and makes eye contact with Dr. Seymour Rausch sitting at his desk. Will raises a hand in a half-hearted wave and continues to his office, second to the last door on the right. The brief encounter gives Will the impression that Seymour was posed, waiting for someone to pass. Will takes his keys out of his pocket and fumbles for the right one. He opens the
door, enters, and quickly shuts it. He tosses his bag on the cheap, gray polyester armchair facing his desk.

Depending on whom you ask, Will’s office isn’t typical in the ways of other colleagues’ offices. In the initial design and décor, it’s essentially every other office in the building, maybe even the campus: off-white painted walls; tight gray berber carpet with flecks of dark green, navy blue, and burgundy; a white metal desk complete with landline phone and a black ergonomic swivel chair, an accommodation made possible by the university in the early 2000s; and book shelves that line adjacent side walls. What distinguishes his office from everyone else’s is its sterility, or lack of personalization. Professors and non-tenured instructors alike, even Sylvie’s little space in the department has pictures, books, junk, or something that signifies “my space.” Not Will. His space has a lack of something. There are few books on his barren shelves aside from the texts he currently teaches. There’s a book about the love relationship of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir that Harvey bought last year for Will’s birthday—a book he has yet to read—and then the university handbook of faculty conduct. Aside from a few personal items like his bag, a jacket, his laptop, and of course his name on the outside of the door, no one would suspect it to be Will’s office. There have even been times where people had asked him if he was leaving to teach at another university, just from the lack of flair. The irony is that Will’s position is temporary, another two more years and he’s back to looking for another job.

In the black swivel chair behind his desk, Will opens his laptop and navigates to his university email. There is a message in his inbox from Jacques Laroche with the
subject RE: Concerning a position at your university. He clicks on the email to read the man’s response.

There’s a knock at the door.

Will jumps slightly. “Come in.”

The door opens and Seymour pops his head in. “I need to speak to you.”

Oh shit, thinks Will. “Just a moment.” Will closes his laptop as Seymour simultaneously shuts the door. Taking into consideration that he and Seymour have never gotten along or agreed on much of anything, Will is slightly perplexed by this encounter. In fact, the two men have had only three formal encounters since Will came to the university, all of which were very negative experiences for Will. The first time was at a faculty meet and greet for Will. Harvey asked if anyone would like to say a few words to welcome the young visiting philosopher. Seymour stood and said, “Yeah, I have something to say. I think this is a mistake.” The second time Harvey and Seymour were having a conversation about a painting of Nietzsche Harvey had purchased to hang somewhere in the department. Will walked out of his office and Harvey asked him what he thought of the painting. Will replied that it was a better likeness than Munch’s painting. Seymour said, “You don’t know a goddamn about the likeness of Nietzsche,” and stomped out of the office. It just so happened that Munch’s painting was one of Seymour’s favorite, and he had a print of it over his fireplace. The third time Will asked Seymour if he would join him for lunch, a gesture Sylvie had suggested in order to soften the beast. But she warned him not to stare at Seymour’s unusually long fingers; he can get self-conscious about it. Seymour agreed to go to lunch with Will saying, “I’ll join you
for lunch as long as you can promise that you won’t undo everything we have worked
toward.” Will didn’t know what to say, and so feeling like they got off on the wrong foot,
he couldn’t think of anything other to say than “sure.” They had a pleasant lunch that day,
but Seymour kept catching Will studying his hands, making it difficult for both of them.
Since then their interactions have been brief.

Maybe it was the difference in age, Seymour being somewhere in his late forties,
and Will a measly thirty years of age, or perhaps it was just a matter of timing. Then
again it could have been the disparity of Will’s MA to Seymour’s PhD. Anyhow, this
may have been the first instance Seymour has ever entered his office. With all that in
mind, Will asks hesitantly, “What’s going on, Seymour?”

“I know what’s been going on, Will.” He walks to the chair, but noticing the bag
occupying its seat, grabs its back, his long fingers grasping the fabric like the talons of a
vulture. He remains standing, but leans in towards Will. Seymour is tall with short sandy
blonde hair and wears a light blue long-sleeved shirt, the one Sylvie told him brought out
the color of his eyes, and a pair of tan slacks. In that pose, Seymour reminds Will of the
vampire from Nosferatu minus the baldhead and fangs.

“What are you talking about, Seymour?” Will leans back and puts his hands
behind his head, locking his fingers.

“Don’t act like you don’t know. You’ve been doing it since you got here. I didn’t
realize it at first, but it’s clear now.”

“What have I been doing? I really don’t—”
“It’s clear that you’re hiding something, something that most people aren’t aware of, say actions and situations of a somewhat scandalous nature. It involves Harvey. Maybe even Laroche. Some people think that others won’t notice when they’re sneaking around and trying to undermine the flow of things.”

Will’s heart rate quickens. “I, well, I really don’t know what you’re talking about. What flow?”

“Yes you do. But that seems to be who you are, Will, intent undermining a system that works. Your philosophy, your being here, and the conference—you come in and pretend to have all of the answers, and you do it so well. But I guess if you’re going to manipulate, you ought to be good at it. You may fool them, but you don’t fool me. You may be able to manipulate them, but I can see right through you.”

*Will we ever have a normal discussion about anything?* Will wonders.

“I’m not dancing around this anymore. I know you’re weaseling your way into a tenured position.”

“A tenured position?”

“Don’t act surprised. It makes you look like a jackass. I know this whole conference thing is supposed to be the catalyst that convinces everyone you deserve a tenured position at Athens, but not me. I’m going to uncover you.”

“Seymour, that’s not even possible.”

“I’ve had to work so goddamn hard for this position, and you think you can come in and pretend to be this prodigy, Harvey’s *wonder boy*, who will solve all of philosophy’s problems, the university’s problems. You don’t know what it’s like to
actually work for something and achieve it based on what you do. I’m not fooled, and I’m going to expose you. Whatever I need to do to make sure you don’t stay here any longer than you’re supposed to.”

“Seymour, I assure you, there is no way I am trying for a tenured position. When my renewal is up, I’m leaving. That is if the department even exists by then.”

Seymour looks as if that statement caught him off guard. “That’s just a rumor that’s going around.” He hesitates. “Don’t change the subject. I mean, Thierry, I’ll be watching you so closely that I’ll know your next move before you even do. You’re not as smart as everyone thinks you are. You’ll never get the position.”

And before Will can tell him to leave, Seymour turns and walks hastily out of the room, leaving the door to Will’s office wide open.

Tenure? Will thinks. This was what that conversation was about? Will is somewhat relieved, but also wonders what nonsense Seymour will do. This man is literally insane.

Despite his dumbfoundedness, Will is somewhat worried. The paranoia of a normal person is enough to bring a person to nausea, but the academic’s paranoia is a whole other beast altogether. The thought of Seymour constantly monitoring or following Will, fucking with his life, is cause enough for his elevated blood pressure. The last thing Will needs is to be watched or have Seymour tampering with his belongings, his office, his home. Will attempts to shake it off. He opens his laptop to finish reading Laroche’s email. Again, there is a knock at his door. He looks up. It’s Jack. Will completely forgot about meeting with the student about his “concern.”
“Hey, Jack,” Will says, closing his computer. “Did you hear any of that?”

“Hear what?”

“Nothing. Shut the door and have a seat.”

Jack closes the door and sits on the chair Seymour had just been clutching. The young guy places his bag on his lap. He looks a little nervous. Will leans back in his chair and crosses his arms. He doesn’t want to take it any further than this, but Jack clearly has an issue.

“So what exactly is the problem again, Jack?”
To be completely honest, I’ve hated William Thierry since the day Harvey Buchanan introduced him to me in the March of 2006. I had no prior knowledge of the man except he was the person who was “attempting to kill philosophy” as Harvey had jokingly put it. I hadn’t read his book, wasn’t even aware of the man, and so to me he was another person on Harvey’s schedule for the year. And as usual with guest readers or philosophers, we (Harvey, Tom, Elizabeth and I) burn up an evening with dinner and drinks in order to make our visitor feel more comfortable or welcomed. If the department wasn’t paying for it, I probably would have stayed at home.

There wasn’t anything unusually off-putting about Thierry aside from his age and experience. He was twenty-seven, had published a book, and although he was soft spoken, he had an answer for everything. I don’t care how well read you are. If you don’t have the years of scholarship, you shouldn’t pretend like you’re an authority on everything. Frankly he was quite plain: average height, gray sweater and dark gray slacks, short dark hair that was gelled up. He could have been anybody and that forced Harvey to do what he does best, talk and schmooze. Every one of us had the opportunity, if you want to call it that, to get a few words in with him whether we wanted to or not. I’m aware that I have some level of obligation for things of this nature, but it seems superficial given our profession. We are scholars and truth seekers, not socialites. So after we had dinner with him at one of the restaurants in town, I went home until his reading.
Around seven, I made my way back to the university to listen to what Thierry had to say. I was not eager to sit and listen to him babble on for an hour, but I wanted to find out why Harvey was so enthusiastic about the man. I know what it’s like to be excited to have someone you admire come and read at your university, especially when you are the person who facilitated it. I’ve been that person several times. But I couldn’t understand what Harvey saw in such a young and inexperienced person. The event was at the Burns Theater in the Student Union, an auditorium that holds somewhere around three hundred fifty people. The place has been near capacity when we’ve had the ability to bring in world-renown philosophers. But the place was packed for Thierry, some no name kid from New York. I must have missed something.

So I made my way through the clusters of people and found a few open seats my colleague Elizabeth had saved near the left side of the auditorium. She waved me over and I sat next to her. Harvey introduced Thierry as “the man who would save philosophy by killing it.” People applauded. From that point on I knew I was in for a load of bullshit. If this guy was so brilliant and innovative, then why had I not heard of him? Harvey continued in his gifted, if that’s what you want to call it, way of talking up almost anything (the reason I believe he became the chair). What he was doing on stage was nauseating. I mean, introduce the man and sit down. But he named off his alma mater, other universities where he had read, and how well his book was selling. Just because the guy sells a lot of books doesn’t mean what he wrote is of any value. The public largely neglected most brilliant writing during the writer’s time. Time and scholarship is what
determines the value of most things. Thierry was popular because people love the 
explanation of impossible ideas.

Finally, Thierry read. Nothing he said was original. He read a few excerpts from 
different chapters from his book, The Death of Philosophy. He mentioned Heidegger, 
Rorty, and Derrida. All his writing was doing was elaborating on their work, picking up 
where they suggested philosophy should no longer do what it was doing. The field of 
philosophy needed to become something else, it was no longer relevant to a postmodern 
society. I was disgusted with the whole event.

The next day I had an email in my inbox from Harvey.

Dear Faculty,

If we are to continue to be a program that grows, produces work of the highest 
quality, and provides a curriculum that prepares and encourages students to move 
further in their careers of philosophy, then we must continue to be progressive and offer 
something that other universities don’t. What I’m alluding to is the area of study that Mr. 
Thierry touched on last night: Decline or Death of Philosophy. Although it is not an 
official subfield like Phenomenology or Ethics, it will soon be with the research and 
theory that are in the works. This is where I believe Mr. Thierry will be of great 
importance to our university and program. He is a pioneer in this field and will add more 
credibility to what we are doing and keep us competitive. In short, I am proposing a two-
year Visiting Lecturer/Philosopher position with the option of renewal for Mr. Thierry 
that will begin next fall. I have support from the Dean Murphy of the College of Arts and 
Sciences.
I realize we do not currently have funding for permanent faculty positions, but Thierry is essential in order for us to be at the forefront of this research. That is why I was able to secure the amount necessary from outside donors to make this possible. We have space in the department, and could use a fresh set of eyes and ideas. With his book gaining popularity, other individuals will be writing to refute or otherwise study and write more on this topic. It could be ground breaking, and we must benefit from it. Please come to my office or feel free to shoot me an email regarding this information and addition to department.

Cheers,

Harvey

It seemed foolish to send out such a letter. Harvey had already set this whole thing up long before Thierry visited the university. I should have known by his bubbling enthusiasm. If only Harvey could focus that kind of energy on our program all of the time. I thought about replying to the email, but resorted to walking across the hall to his office to discuss this issue. His door was open. I knocked.

He looked away from his computer screen and told me to come in. I tried to begin the conversation as levelheaded as possible, but I didn’t have it in me. I didn’t shout, but in a stern tone asked what the hell that email was about. I understood the guy was new and had ideas that excited people, but fads come and go. I tried to get this across to Harvey as plain as I could, but he just shifted in his seat, and I could tell I was in for a speech that was merely meant to pacify me. He began by telling me we had been friends
for a long time. Of course we have. I wouldn’t have stayed here as long as I did if I didn’t, to some degree, like this place and the people. So I stopped him mid sentence, and pointed my finger right in his face, although I didn’t stick it directly in his face. I might have been a few feet away. Anyhow, he looked surprised, and so I told him to put sentiments aside. If he wanted to throw money at the thing that looked like it would bring back the quickest return, then fine, I wouldn’t get in his way. I told him he was acting more and more like an administrator. He clearly had the mentality for it.

Again, he tried to calm me, ease my mind by being “frank” with me. He used vague language like the jargon of businessmen. He said this was a sudden move and not the usual protocol, but he needed to grab him before someone else did. If he could get Thierry under contract before he gets any other offers, then we’d be set. Harvey tried to convince me that the work was important, and that people would be reading philosophy again because of it. That was just bullshit in my mind. So what if he was a twenty-eight year old sensation from New York, our department did not need some child whose ego was fed by a book deal and Harvey’s ambition. Maybe he had promise, but that would only be tested by his diligence and the work he produced from here on, his scholarship. I told Harvey that this was a discipline not an industry, and if we treated it like an industry, only few would benefit. And then what follows an industrial boom? That’s right, a wasteland, barren and uninhabitable. I told him I didn’t want to be a part of that. I didn’t want to be part of the guy’s theory. But Harvey gave little concern to how I felt. He just told me to picture the next two years. If Thierry is at the forefront of this movement, if that’s what this is, then he’ll receive more attention. If he receives attention, our program
gets more exposure, and in turn, we get more enrollment and funds. He tried to wave the carrot in my face by telling me that I would solely teach classes on Nietzsche and German philosophers. But I’m not naïve, even if that is my dream. I don’t want to benefit from some guy who blends the ideas of others and calls it his own work. And then Harvey tried to parallel Wittgenstein’s work with Thierry’s. That’s when I had enough. Trying to compare this inexperienced hack to one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century was a sin in my mind. He went on to say that the department wouldn’t lose money if he turned out to be a bust, but I was done. Harvey made up his mind and nothing that anyone said otherwise would matter. I left his office, telling him to do whatever he wanted. I went back into mine and slammed the door. I may sound like I’m overreacting, maybe even being somewhat childish in my outbursts, but passivity is suicide in academia, and I wasn’t just going to stand by.

That next fall he joined our faculty. He had a 3/2 load. He taught a couple of lower level philosophy courses and then a course he developed on his subject. This seemed appropriate for him, and because his office was small and his salary meager, I had no final objections on the matter. I kept a close eye on him, although I did not care what he did. In his very plain way he taught each day and went home to one of the university rented houses for faculty. He didn’t do much outside of that. He was single and seemed dedicated to his work. He often met with Harvey and had dinner with him and his wife, Anne.

It came to my attention, via Sylvie the department secretary, that by the end of his first semester he had three essays on his subject in the process of being published by
well-known journals. She told me that they were part of the new book he was working on. She was so interested in what he was doing. I assumed it was more of an interest in his youth and good looks than his work. But that’s a little harsh. The woman does have a bachelors in philosophy. She tried for a doctorate but couldn’t handle the work. I shouldn’t have said that. Anyway, I could hardly believe it. He had published more that first semester than I had in the last two years, and that was very frustrating.

Harvey was right. By the end of that first year the university had grabbed people’s attention. There were more lecturers interested in speaking here, more applicants for the program, and more donors interested in giving Harvey their money. Thierry even gave a few interviews, mentioning Athens University as ‘an overlooked but thriving well of philosophical thought.’ Everything seemed to be coming together as Harvey said it would. As more attention centered on Thierry and his death philosophy, less was given to the other areas of our program. Everyone else seemed fine with this unfolding, but I was not fine. I knew something like that was bound to happen. I was frustrated.

I attempted to write more and research more, but as I submitted essays for publication or suggested certain events or activities pertaining to my field of study, they were rejected. People weren’t interested. That second year, the Death of Philosophy grew and more people were writing about it. What did I have to say about it? What now do I have to say about it? Does a man at the gallows use his last words to talk about his executioner? No, his words are always addressed to the society at hand, the audience. Plus, I don’t give a damn about whether or not people see philosophy as something that will end, something that will die. People have been proclaiming the death of this and the
death of that anytime the rise of some other medium occurs. The rise of colonialism proclaimed the death of indigenous civilizations, though there are still those types of societies, albeit in smaller concentration, in parts of the undeveloped world. The rise of film and later television proclaimed the death of the novel, a structure that is still being created and produced in rather large quantities every year. And there are so many other examples.

Life is a constant transformation of things. Ideas, concepts, structures, people, society, etc. Philosophy is just one of those. It is not dying, nor will it ever. Thierry is merely taking an incident, a hypothetical expression that has been thrown around for ages and writing a fable about it. People are buying into this fable as reality because it is simple and exciting. I imagine he doesn’t even believe in his own theory. How could he? It’s like telling your mentors that although they’ve had a few good ideas, they really have no leg to stand on. Then again, we write about our obsessions, our own experiences. Our own perspectives of the world shade our life’s work.

So you’d like to know if I’m bitter. Yes, I’m bitter. Imagine working your whole life on something, your entire life spent building a legacy, and in the process, your work is not only neglected but also destroyed. He is demolishing what I’ve built in order to put something else there, something cheap, fake. No, better yet, he is taking a Polaroid picture of this well built structure and then setting the photograph on fire. He hasn’t destroyed the structure but only a cheap, imitation of it. Thierry doesn’t have the ability to negate the study of philosophy, because when all of his work has finally lost the
interest of everyone, our philosophy will again rise out of the ashes like a phoenix, unscathed by his words.

I am a Nietzsche scholar, I know what this image looks like. Nietzsche proposed God was dead and that metaphysics died with it. He in essence said philosophy was dead because at the time metaphysics and philosophy were one and the same. So if I were to jump on the bandwagon, excuse the cliché, then I could in fact write a great deal about Nietzsche being a proponent of transforming our discipline, the first to make this presupposition. But these are theories and they are tied to the men that have said them, and then placed in history for others to read and study. They are trends, and I’m not excited about this trend of philosophy. Perhaps I’m putting myself in an awkward position by going against this ideology. Perhaps stubbornness and pride is in my blood. But I refuse to succumb to something just because of its popularity. In many ways I feel like my father.

My father Oskar was a German immigrant who learned the plastering trade at seventeen and managed to join a company in Leipzig in the fall ’34. He had nimble hands with unusually long fingers, good work ethic, and was a perfectionist—three traits I see in myself, one more obvious than the others. He worked in that city for nearly four years. That would then make the year 1938. It was that year that he decided to leave Leipzig, leave Germany, and even Europe as well. The Third Reich had been in power for nearly five years, and though he believed in many things, he did not believe in fascism. His entire family, our entire family supported National Socialism and Hitler’s dream of resurrecting Germany since its undoing in the first War. My father attempted to reason
with his family, but they ridiculed and even threatened him, saying they should turn him into the authorities for treason. He was ultimately shunned for this reason and left alone. But as history shows, he made the conscientious decision. He left for America because he had heard of the opportunity and safety the country provided for people.

On his journey, he met other Germans who inevitably left for similar reasons, and once arriving to New York, he followed these individuals to the Upper East Side (at that time, there was a dense German population). He only knew a few words of English, but taking into account his previous experience in Leipzig, that didn’t hinder his joining the German Trade Union of Plasterers. He was able to make a living despite the time period, and when the second War was over he was a journeyman with high wages.

Plastering was fine during this time, but as the 50s came to a close, drywall began to replace plaster and his troubles began. The material was new, inexpensive, easy to install, and less time consuming. The finish product was similar in look but different in structure. In his stubbornness, my father would not accept what seemed cheap and fake. It was a fad and a poor substitute, an invention some idealistic person created to make money. The more it grew in popularity, the more he refused to be a part of it. Soon, sometime in the mid 60s, drywall completely replaced plaster aside from the restoration of historical buildings. Most plasterers changed trades or joined maintenance personnel. He didn’t receive a full pension, and had to continue to work small jobs as a painter into his mid-eighties where he died with literally a eight hundred dollars to his name.

In many ways I feel like my father regarding the change in our profession. It seemed like another fad, a cheap imitation, even a meta-theory. The decline came when
people became aware of the possibility of a decline. They warned us, but we didn’t listen, and our reluctance to take control of this philosophy gave Thierry and others the opportunity to run with these “new” ideas.

I did my best to not become my father. I worked hard in school and went to college. I looked at the world differently, and because of that, studied philosophy so I could change people’s minds, help them think about and see the world differently. I didn’t want to go into the trades like my father or my brother in New Jersey. I didn’t want to work my entire life and end up with nothing. Every day being too tired and too frustrated to spend a decent moment with my family or doing something I loved. My father hated his job, most likely his life after plastering. I never wanted to feel that way about my profession or my life. I think I would be less angry and upset about this whole movement if it didn’t affect our careers, didn’t put our lives in jeopardy.

Like my father, I’m slaving away for the sake of an idea that seems to be close to extinction. I can continue to teach the ideas I’ve studied and developed, but they’re in danger of being history. And for what end? The philosophies we have built on for centuries (millenniums!) have been stripped away; no, they’ve been abandoned and replaced with something easy and smooth to the touch. What are ideas worth if there is no one to teach them to? If I had not inherited this stubbornness from my father, maybe I would also not be in this trouble. I’ve become part of Thierry’s fable, a fable about death and the obsession with the finite. A fable in which a man is not only killing ideas but also destroying people’s lives as well. He is likely to be the worst thing to have happened to Athens in years.
The drive is nearly an hour each way, a small irritation she keeps to herself. Her white 90s Volvo wagon plugs along the turnpike at sixty mile per hour in the cool, autumn weather. And although the drive itself is quiet and stress free, Dr. Elizabeth Harlowe just wants to get this task over as soon as possible. The task is, as a favor to Harvey, picking up the distinguished French philosopher and cultural critic, Jacques Laroche, from the city airport. Elizabeth obliged Harvey’s request mainly because the guilt she felt for not participating in the conference. She also let everyone in the department know that she was taking part because she dubbed this year’s conference the Boy’s Pissing Contest. She’s looked at the list of speakers and damn near three-quarters of them are men, with a few ambiguous names, like Hilary and Ashley, tied to English universities. This alone gave her the idea to write a paper about men and their inherent need to destroy or conquer (i.e., the death of philosophy) and women creating new ideas, but she decided to shelve it, and work on it another time when she wasn’t across Northeast Ohio. Harvey also promised her a course release in the spring if she did this.

But chauffeuring some pompous asshole while Harvey is likely getting drunk in his office postponing any real work is not the way she wanted to spend two hours of her day. All he is, she thinks of Laroche, is an arrogant prick that criticizes others for having a shred of thought different than his. If anyone has had some degree of success or popularity, Laroche has argued something against that person that is if it serves his needs. The latest article he published, a critique of late 20th and early 21st century philosophers and the folly that arise from their schisms and ultra specificity of philosophical fields,
made Elizabeth want to vomit. *He’s an intellectual parasite,* she thinks. *I don’t care how intelligent he is.*

She stews in her thoughts, and with each one comes a new one, she is so full of contempt for this individual that she wonders how she will even greet him, let alone what they will talk about in the car. *French men are so arrogant and British as well.* It’s going to be an awkward car ride. Elizabeth isn’t worried. She has a delightful personality outside of her thoughts and the classroom. She found she has to be authoritative if people were going to take her work seriously, take her seriously. She realized that that often translated into a certain kind of rudeness, something that felt unnatural but necessary. With that aside, she is rather kind-hearted, trusting and, by all means, a nice person.

If that isn’t enough, Elizabeth is a gorgeous woman by societal standards. She stands five-feet six-inches with long blonde hair and a body meant for a swimsuit. She usually wears jeans and a pair of tall boots, either black or brown, and sometimes a blouse, other times a sweater. Very rarely is she in a skirt or dress, but if the occasion really and truly calls for it, she will oblige. There is one characteristic that offset her appearance. At one time she had beautiful bright blue eyes that glistened like sapphires in the summer’s light, but presently, she wears an eye-patch over her left eye.

At the age of ten, Elizabeth was knocking icicles off low-hanging gutters with a broomstick. She had always been quick to move out of the way until one day when her mother shouted, “what are you doing?” just as she knocked one loose. There was a great deal of blood and screaming. When she had had proper attention at the ER and was bandaged up, her mother scolded her for acting like a foolish little shit and said that a
man would never love a girl with an eye patch. Her mother said her looks would never take her as far as they could have. Perhaps that was the day she turned to philosophy, having spent what waking hours were left wondering why a man would not love her because of a piece of fabric that covered her eye.

Elizabeth made it work for her. She appeared tough to women and mysterious to men. She never had a hard time making friends or finding a boyfriend, though there were children who, through their ignorance, prejudice and inability to accept differences, ridiculed her eye patch. The name calling usually had to do with pirates but as she grew older the insults revolved around dick-jokes and oculophilia. The cruelty of adolescence.

In college, she had a few serious boyfriends, but, as her mother had said, they ended with superficial excuses about her lack of an eye. Eventually she accepted it and decent people accepted her. She accessorized her eye patch with certain pairs of shoes, boots, shirts, patterns, and holidays. She had a collection of over one hundred different eye patches. At her current adult age forty-six, she has resigned her patches to muted colors of brown, black, maroon, hunter green, and charcoal, colors taken more seriously. She basically said, “Fuck it” at some point, “this is who I am.”

So now, Elizabeth’s final thought is this: *I don’t actually know what this man is like as a person.* That thought makes her reconsider all of her assumptions about this guy, like questioning the rumors your friends have said about a person you consider asking out. Not that she is all of a sudden interested in this man, but because she is only moments away from meeting him for the first time, she is feeling a little anxious. So much so that she flips down the visor and looks at her hair in the mirror. Just as quickly as she glances
at herself, she thinks how foolish she’s being. She puts the visor back and brushes the blonde hair off her forehead. *Maybe he isn’t a pompous ass in person.*

She takes the airport exit off the highway. A few turns and she’s at the entrance of the parking deck. She grabs a ticket from the automated machines and finds a parking spot. Next it is over the skywalk where she stops to view traffic below in a constant manic state, cars pulling up to the entrance of the airport and people scurrying out with luggage. She continues down the escalator to the lobby of the airport.

Elizabeth realizes the time is two thirty, which puts Laroche’s arrival here fifteen minutes ago. She walks to the black screen with white text indicating arrival and departure times. Sure enough, his plane is on time and he should be by gate C. She does her best to hurry in a dignified way, the short heel of her brown boots clicking. Despite her lack of regard for the overpaid opinion generator, she doesn’t want her behavior to reflect poorly on the department.

At the exit of the designated gate C, there is a small wave of people; Elizabeth examines the faces but no Laroche. A second wave of people arrive, a little larger than the first group. Again, no Laroche. So she waits. And a half hour slowly rolls by. She wonders if she made some kind of mistake.

Just before she reaches full-blown doubt, a single individual walks out of the exit. He is about average size, maybe a bit shorter, and he wears a cream color, long sleeved dress shirt, the sleeves of which are rolled to his mid forearm, the top two buttons undone. He has on blue jeans and a pair of black casual dress shoes that clearly have wear. He holds a black blazer draped over his left arm and pulls a small black suitcase on wheels.
down the small slope. His hair is a mixture of mostly light brown with a touch of gray that is combed back exposing his large forehead, a product of the receding hairline. His face is stern, almost stoic.

“Jacques Laroche,” she says as she approaches him.

“Yes. And you must be Elizabeth.”

Before she can say another word Laroche is in her face and kissing both cheeks, his left hand touching her arm.

“It’s a pleasure to finally meet you,” she says, wondering why she just said that.

“Likewise, Harvey has said such wonderful things about you, though he did not mention that I was to meet such a beautiful woman on this trip.”

“Is that so?” She smiles at the flattery, but fails to acknowledge his comment about her beauty.

“Yes. He seems to hold you in high regard.”

“Well, we should get going. The ride back to your hotel is about an hour.” They turn and walk toward the escalator, Elizabeth slowing her pace for the man.

“So, was your plane delayed?”

“No. It seemed to arrive on schedule.”

“Was there a long line at baggage claim?”

“I wouldn’t know. I had a carry-on. I always hate the idea of losing my luggage or having it fondled by strangers.”

“So, then why did you leave the gate nearly forty-five minutes later?”
“I stopped for a drink at the airport bar. It was overpriced. And have you had the drinks on the plane? They’re atrocious.”

Elizabeth stops. “So I waited forty-five minutes so you could have a drink?”

He looks slightly dumbfounded. “I would have asked you to join me if it was possible.”

She stares at him and crosses her arms. *I knew he was a prick.*

“Well, now that you mention it,” he says, “I suppose it might have seemed somewhat inconsiderate. I’m sorry you had to wait so long.”

“Let’s try to avoid things like that.”

They make their way back through the airport, over the skywalk and to the parking deck. She leads him to her car and opens the hatch. He compliments her taste in automobiles and places his luggage in the trunk. They get into her car and before she can pull the car out of the garage and get onto the turnpike, he is talking. Elizabeth finds it odd how much he has to say, especially to a stranger like herself. She’s always noticed people in her field to be either very quiet and awkward or talkative and overly philosophical. Laroche is merely making small talk, but so effortlessly.

“You know, I don’t think I’ve ever been to the Midwest, let alone Ohio,” says Laroche. “New York, many of the Ivy League universities, Los Angeles, Virginia and Chicago.”

“Chicago’s part of the Midwest.”

“Is that so? Could have fooled me. An oasis in the land of nothing.”

“Well, that’s a little harsh.”
“So far I’ve seen farmland, forests, strip malls, and developments and we’re not even twenty minutes into our trip. I enjoy the countryside as much as anyone else but this seems rather awful.”

“It’s nothing to write home about but it’s not terrible. Although it seems that the towns that are best are those with universities. Otherwise, what you said seems about right.”

“So, how is Athens?” he asks.

“I’ll give you the tour when we get there.”

“Describe it to me. I want to know what you think about it. I always find it interesting, what people say about their home town.”

This is going much better than Elizabeth thought. She may even like the man. Maybe Harvey knew this would happen, knew the two of them would hit it off. She never took Harvey as being that perceptive of people. Maybe he was taking a chance with their interaction because who can really predict how two people will interact for the first time?

“Well,” she continues, “it’s a small college town with a rich history, and a quaint downtown. There are pockets of beautiful, old homes in neighborhoods around the university. The town is sprinkled with trees. The campus has a wonderful layout, which you’ll see when we walk around. Also, there are lovely little shops and the people are friendly. I moved here about nine years ago, and eventually bought an old house and settled in.”

“I take it you really like living there.”
“I do. The whole Midwest living doesn’t bother me. I grew up in Indiana and went to Boston for college and grad school. I’ve had a taste of city life and I prefer to live in a place that is similar to where I grew up. But I do like Athens.”

When they reach Laroche’s hotel, a Holiday Inn on the edge of town, they don’t drop off his things and go on a tour of the city, at least not right away. Elizabeth is set on waiting in the car for him while he leaves his suitcase and freshens up.

“No nonsense,” he says. “I would hate to make you wait in your car here by yourself. Walk with me to my room, I will only be a minute.”

“Okay.”

She turns off the car and takes the key out of the ignition. She follows Laroche to the first floor, room 107. He takes the key card and swipes it in the door. They walk inside and the door shuts behind them. Laroche sets his suitcase on the floor and tosses his suit jacket on a nearby chair. He turns to Elizabeth and wraps his arm around her waist and gently holds her head, and kisses her. Caught of guard by the gesture, Elizabeth kisses him back, wrapping her arms around him. His lips feel good though his mouth tastes of cigarettes. He moves his hand to her butt.

This is unprofessional, she thinks. She wonders why she continues to kiss him, why she didn’t spend more time with him. But then what difference did it make, really? She’s an adult who has experienced a great deal, enough to write essays about feminine sexuality and a woman’s existence in the world. She knows who she is in many senses of the phrase. Maybe it was how surprisingly different she found this man to be. The self-proclaimed French polemic of the twenty-first century. A man so hated yet well regarded
in the public eye, or that percentage in the public who knows who he is. Despite her conflicting thoughts, she feels good in his arms, her lips touching his, the way his hands feel on her neck and ass. She’s missed feeling this way.

The two swiftly remove their clothing. Buttons and belts, shirts and underwear. It has been a while since she was with someone, and her body aches. She is careful not to show it. He is a man full of passion, kissing her breasts as they bulge from her bra, which he immediately removes with the brush of his fingers on the middle of her back.

She pulls away from his kiss and slips her underwear off. He slips his white boxer shorts off revealing his semi-erect penis. He is uncircumcised, a thing Elizabeth hasn’t seen since college; it excites her. She puts her hand to her maroon eye patch, ready to take it off.

“No,” he says. “Leave it on.”

They practically fall into bed a tangled mess of flesh and sweat.

Their bodies are contrasts not achingly opposite but comfortably off center. He is shorter than her by a few inches and his body lacks muscle definition. He has a small gut, which isn’t a result of gluttony but rather a steady diet of French cuisine and red wine. Dark blonde hair covers his forearms, legs and chest. Elizabeth on the other hand has a smooth toned body from regular exercise and good genes. The only hair she has is a small tuft of brown pubic hair. Her breasts are large and her stomach flat. Her shoulders are tan from a season of gardening.

When they finish, Elizabeth lies on her side and slowly runs her fingers in zigzag lines over his chest.
“So tell me how you came to wear an eye patch.”

“If I tell you about that then you have to tell me something about yourself.”

“What exactly?”

“Anything I want.”

“Why? That doesn’t seem fair.”

“You asked me something that I wasn’t prepared for nor agreed to be asked. So in essence, you asked me whatever you wanted. Aren’t I entitled to the same thing?” She looks at his face. He acknowledges her look and grins.

“I suppose that is fair.”

“During the winter time,” Elizabeth begins, “when I was little I used to knock icicles off the low hanging gutter on my parents garage. One time, when I was hitting them, I thought I heard someone calling my name. So I looked around, saw no one, and looked up when one hit me and I lost sight in that eye.”

“Did you scream? I mean, did anyone know what happened?”

She sits up and leans on her elbows. “I screamed so loud and with so much force that I lost consciousness.”

“That’s horrible for a child to have to endure so much pain for something so absurd.”

“Absurd?”

“What is the chance that you would look away because you thought you heard someone calling your name, only to look back and be struck in the eye with an icicle?”

“I guess that was the chance I took doing something potentially harmful.”
“But did you think ‘I may be struck in the eye by one’ every time you played that game?”

“I suppose not.” Elizabeth lays on her back, her breasts covered by the blanket. She mouths something momentarily and then says, “So why are you here? I mean, honestly, why did you come to our small conference in Athens, Ohio? This just doesn’t seem like a place you’d think twice about.”

“That is not the question I was expecting, but that is fine. First and most importantly, Harvey paid me a lot of money, more than I would expect a mid-level university to offer.”

“That’s no surprise.”

“Secondly, I want to lay this whole subject to rest.”

“How so?” Elizabeth props herself up, leaning on her elbows.

“I think that this area of study is a waste of intelligent minds. It is solipsistic to spend most of one’s time and thoughts on critiquing the position or future of our discipline. We don’t need anymore philosophy about philosophy. It’s not even that. It’s more like prophecy, and we are not prophets. I addressed the subject and now it is time to move on. If Thierry is to continue his work on that subject, that is his matter. But I believe it is foolish.”

“That’s going to upset a few people.”

“Did you become a philosopher to make people feel good? I most certainly did not.”
Once dressed, Elizabeth goes to the bathroom. She slides her eye patch to the side and runs the cold water. She splashes her face a few times and dries with a clean white towel. She looks at the mirror, at her eye, an eye that was once beautiful and blue and functional. The iris is dark, though the pupil is cloudy, like the murky water of a stagnant pond. She closes that eye and blots her eyelids with the white towel, making sure it is dry. She repositions her eye patch and joins Laroche near the bed.

“Harvey wants us to stop by his office and then he plans on take you to dinner.”

“You’ll be joining, yes?”

“Sure, if Harvey doesn’t mind.”
What don’t I know about the events that occurred. Ask anyone of the students or faculty, and they’ll tell you that if you need information about the program, professors, and occasional gossip, I’m the person you come to. Department secretaries know everything. Granted, I don’t know everything about the murder, but my position allows me to witness more than I think I want to at times. Yet I feel somewhat of a responsibility to know as much as I can. I’m the person everyone has to go through regarding any sort of department paperwork or protocol. I have a system, and I’m good at my job. At a certain point in time most things will go through me. Believe it or not, I could be doing what they do—Harvey, Elizabeth, Seymour. I’ve done the course work, but I thought writing a dissertation was a waste of time. That’s just how it is.

Although I single handedly keep the department running, I also must deal with people’s lives and all their issues. What I mean is that people either talk by me or directly to me about almost anything. I think if I liked gossip, I would be thrilled, but it can be hard sometimes. I don’t want to know everyone’s business. I guess that’s a burden you must acknowledge if you are in the role of someone who must either listen to or help other people.

Here are a few things that might help, but you probably already know. I’m almost certain, that Harvey was having an affair, but it hadn’t been going on for too long, unless you consider a few months long. He began these “meetings” around the end of the
summer, maybe the end of July, and he had told me they were for the conference. They were usually on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, but when the school year started, they would happen on whatever random day he wrote down. I became suspicious when I never heard anything from the other parties involved. Usually I get people confirming or cancelling or whatever.

In the past, I would have to do some kind of paperwork, but nothing was ever involved. And there were even a few times when I would call because Harvey would mention a name of the person he was meeting, that person would answer and either the person wasn’t aware of the meeting or just wasn’t there. So I would cover and pretend it never happened, meaning I didn’t tell Harvey. I don’t know why he wanted to set it up like this. It often seemed like more trouble than it was worth. Maybe he wanted an alibi in case his wife Anne suspected him of anything. It seems to me that if you don’t want anyone to suspect anything then don’t bother making up stories that you can’t prove. Don’t say anything to anyone. I would think that someone who lives by logic and reason could not be capable of such illogical things. It’s supposedly not in their nature, philosophers.

And truthfully, I’m pretty good friends with Anne. We’ve been somewhat close since they’ve been married nearly five years now. She tells me it’s because I’m the only interesting thing about this department, the only person who isn’t constantly talking about philosophy. If the department has an event, she calls me to see if I’m going before she decides whether she’ll join. So keeping this from her felt wrong, but I had nothing other than conjecture to go on. And if that wasn’t enough of a burden, I had the moral strain of
keeping a secret of hers. She and Will were having an affair. Their relationship began a few months after he arrived. She told me that she initiated the whole thing. I don’t blame her. Will is a looker. He always looks so put together. There’s no comparison between Harvey and Will. If I was Anne, I might have done the same thing. Then again, I would have never married Harvey if I were her. He’s nice, but he’s not husband material. I was her friend, her only friend in this place, and I wasn’t about to betray her confidence.

All of that being said, here’s what I know about the murder, or at least what I think I know about it. I’m not quite sure if it will help or not. It’s makes me a little uneasy, and I don’t really know how to interpret it, but since I saw the face of the dead woman in the newspaper, I’ve been doing my best to remember everything as clearly as I possibly can. Without a doubt, that woman came for a campus visit in the summer. She had said she was a transfer student looking to matriculate. That may sound strange since she looked older (late twenties?), but I never forget people who are interested in the history of our building, Gordon Hall.

But first, admissions deals with campus tours for prospective students. If there are a number of students within each tour that are interested in a specific area of study, the university will send them to the department of interest, and someone will give them a little more insight about their future here at the university. Stephanie Green is in charge of talking to students interested in Philosophy. You may want to talk to her if you have more questions about that.

So the reason I remember the girl that died is because she was very curious about the design of Gordon Hall. I don’t know if you noticed, it would be hard not to, but the
building layout is very weird. It has three floors, a small lecture hall in the center, and classrooms, but it’s set up like a maze. You probably entered through the front and just followed the hall around (it makes a U-shape). The first floor isn’t all that strange except that there was only one entrance when it was built, so rather than making a loop on the first floor, it coils. The only way to get to the auditorium is if you walk all the way to the end of the hall near the stairs. A back entrance was added mainly for convenience. The second floor and third floors are somewhat unusual because the stairwell stops on the second floor and you have to walk to another part of the building to get to the stairs. Once you find the steps to the third floor, you’re fine. If you pay attention to where you’re going, you have no trouble finding us. Every so often you find people who end up turned around, wandering the halls to find their destination. Usually new students, but sometimes I have even come across faculty who lose their sense of location. They get turned around on the second floor and head up the other side of the steps and end up walking into the other door. It’s an easy mistake if you aren’t looking.

The folks of Athens U had nicknamed it the Lab, short for labyrinth, since its construction in the late 1880s. It might be the most unique thing on campus. The university adjusted aspects of it for safety reasons, but it’s structurally bizarre, one reason why the university won’t just demolish it and build a new one. The reason arose because some time in the late eighties, the university was in the process of condemning and demolishing the building. One of the professors of Architecture spent a few days examining the building and its history. He talked with the Athens Historical Society, which led them to bring the issue to the city. The city deemed it historical and a piece of
unique architecture, preserving its construction. The university was allowed to make the
necessary changes so the building met fire and safety regulations, as well as some
cosmetic adjustments (new paint, benches, flooring, etc.).

So we’re on the third floor with the Classics Department on one side or the
Modern Languages department on the other. The university basically took the
departments with the least amount of students and faculty and threw them in the most
confusing place on campus, aside from financial aid in Admissions. Sorry, that was a
lousy joke. But we really are like the hunchback in the bell tower, although everyone at
the university eventually makes his or her way to Gordon Hall, either for classes or out of
curiosity.

When I began working here, in the building, I was interested in the place, but it
wasn’t until students inquired with persistence that I wanted to know more. I’m just that
kind of person. I need to know about things, and not the simple Google or Wikipedia
search. I research and research and commit information to memory. Like I said, I could
have a PhD if I wanted. I wanted to know the history of this place, the ins and outs of the
architect and architecture in order to better inform these kids with their questions.

On the wall that faces the front door, when you enter the building, is a plaque that
provides some background. It essentially says, the building was commissioned by James
A. Gordon, a wealthy business owner in Athens, in 1885 and was designed by Italian
architect, Paolo Mezzanitti. Its structure was meant to embody the idea that knowledge
was something you had to find. The plaque goes on to talk more about Gordon and his
contributions to the university and the modifications they have made to the building.
This wasn’t enough information for me; I felt like they were robbing me of some rich history. So I went to the library—this was before the Internet and electronic catalogues—and paged through documents about the university’s history, but came up empty-handed. There was more about Gordon and early pictures of the university, but nothing about the building or the architect. So I thought I would try looking up the name in the architecture section. I found one book called * Obscured View: Architecture of the Avant-Garde*. Set up like an encyclopedia, it listed hundreds of architects who had designed and built structures that were considered bizarre for their time. There was a page about Mezzanitti containing his birth and death, his home in Italy, a description of his style, and a list of works by name and city where they were located. I found it interesting, at least I now had an image of the man who designed this place, but I still wanted more.

The book was edited by a man named Martin Fuller and was put out on the University of Massachusetts Press. In my spare time, for fun I suppose, I contacted the press and got the author’s information—phone numbers, addresses, etc. He lived somewhere in the Boston area. I called him and told him who I was and where I worked. I was frank with the man. I told him about how much I liked the book, and I’m sure it came off as an attempt at flattery, but I figured a little flattery couldn’t hurt. I said I wanted to learn more about Mezzanitti. There seemed to be a mystery unfolding of this building. I likened it to discovering that your house was part of the Underground Railroad, but not knowing who lived there at the time or what happened to the people. I always find it intriguing when I learn someone from history had visited one of the small towns in our
part of the Midwest. It makes you feel connected or possibly part of something larger, like we actually matter.

The man, Mr. Fuller, said that everything about Mezzanitti was in Italian, and he had to have someone translate it for him. And because the architect was just a no name from Italy, few people would even care. This was the reason why he had catalogued the architects in this book. He had tried to pitch writing a biography about this architect or that one, but no one cared about them. He said he was working on another book about Italian architects and had roughly one hundred and fifty pages of information about Mezzanitti to reference. He told me I would find a handful of pages that talked about his time in Athens and the design of the building. He said it’s more complex and almost cryptic than I would think.

He said he would send an envelope with a bundle of papers in about a week. Knowing that someone was truly interested in the material was worth the postage. When the package arrived (it took nearly a month), I really thought he had forgotten, I read it in one sitting some evening after work. I wanted to know more about the building and Mezzanitti and why the school had nothing about either one of them. About five pages of the bundle chronicled the architect’s time at the university designing the building.

Mezzanitti was a prankster in his time. This was only one of three buildings he had ever designed—most of his work was done in landscape architecture, gardens and parks. When he designed anything, he intentionally made it confusing in several ways. He’d arrange doors in odd places; he’d put a staircase to nowhere, windows in the center of a building. He did the same with the gardens, but people noticed less with those. In
Athens, when he designed the building, he gave a set of designs to the building committee and a second set of designs to the builders. No this was in 1885 so there weren’t the regulations and inspections you have today.

I find it interesting, and I know I’ve already gone too much into the whole obsession, I mean I would call it an obsession. You occupy a place for as long as I have, being asked hundreds of times why this place is so bizarre, and your mind wonders. You want to know. So you begin to build your own narratives and histories on you mind, and eventually, the place becomes mythic and clothed in mystery. So doing discovering the truth about this building sort of demystifies it, even though the real story may be more interesting than the ones concocted in your mind. I don’t have the luxury of immersing myself into a particular kind of academic research like the professors here. Office work can only keep you occupied for so long. Once you have a system in place, it’s just a matter of keeping things running smooth on that system. I desire knowledge and a chance to impart that knowledge to others. I’ll even Xerox the pages from Mr. Fuller’s research so they have something to read. Other times I just tell the students about the history, but it’s the reputation I have that keeps students asking me every year if I can tell them why this place looks so unusual. It’s what brought that woman to me.

Toward the end of the summer, the woman identified as the deceased took part in a campus tour group with students interested in attending the university. More specifically, she was interested in majoring in philosophy. I don’t think I would have remembered her if she hadn’t been so interested in seeing the building and knowing about our faculty. I was working at my desk in the philosophy department when the small group
came walking by. Stephanie Green led them to a conference room to talk about being in our program. I distinctly remember the girl just approaching me, leaving the group as they went into a conference room. She was enthusiastic about seeing this place. She wanted, like all the students that approach me, to know how a building like this came to be built, but she really wanted a tour of the place. I told her I would finish up what I was doing while they were in the meeting with Stephanie and get her a handout she could have. So they went into the conference room, and I grabbed the Fuller papers about the university that I keep in my desk. I know it sounds strange to keep them in my desk, but you never know when someone will want something tangible to show others. I copied the papers and waited until the students finished their meeting with Stephanie. Finally, they left the room, a few at a time, and the woman came to my desk. She asked if there was really a story about this place or if that was just an exaggeration. You and I both know there’s a story behind it and I’m not shy about telling it, so I grabbed the papers and handed them to her. I told her to put it in the folder she got at orientation and then asked her if she wanted to take a small tour. She said that it felt like they had just been turning corners and walking down halls, and that a tour would be nice. As I began to guide her out of the department, she stopped my and asked if I would show her around the department. She was eager to learn where her future professors’ offices were located.

So before we left the department to really take a look at the building, I took her past professor’s offices and gave her a little description of each person. Harvey happened to be in his office, which was one of the first offices, so we popped our heads in to say hi. Harvey looked up from his desk. I tried to be as brief as possible because Harvey can be
kind of, I don’t know how to put it, too friendly with attractive women, and this girl was very pretty: petit with beautiful dark hair and just lovely milky white skin and a cute little pointed noise. I could just imagine Harvey drooling all over her and scaring her off.

There was a time, early on when I began working here, and Harvey was new and newly divorced that he would not stop hitting on me. I was a little naïve at the time and he was charming despite his constant pursuit. He asked me out and finally I agreed, and we went on a couple of dates, but he just wasn’t my type. So after I turned him down a few more times, he finally stopped asking me. But I introduced her to Harvey. She slyly waved and smiled. He stood from his desk and walked to her. He extended his hand. She reached for his. Then he cupped her clasped hand with his other hand and shook gently, telling her it was a pleasure to meet her. Oh, and that’s right, she introduced herself as Elli. He vocalized his hope that she would choose our program. He didn’t take his eyes off of her. And then he gave his spiel about how many people in current times regard Philosophy as a dead discipline, and that it was a breath of fresh air to see young, new faces in the department. He glanced at me and I made wide eyes at him because I knew what he was doing. Even though he was married to a beautiful and extremely fit woman like Anne, he was still a pig whenever he had the chance to be. Harvey will never change, and the sight of him being interested in a woman this young at his age has become increasingly nauseating. I told Harvey, thanks as he let go of her hand, and we continued to walk through the department.

I pointed toward a short hall and told her that Dr. Rausch, Dr. Harlowe and William Thierry’s offices were that way. She continued down the hall to look at the
office doors, I assume, because they were all shut. I hadn’t planned to walk down that hall. She looked at each door and the name on the door. I remember her touching Will’s name attached to his door. She slowly ran her finger across its letters, which I now realize was kind of a weird thing to do. Then she turned toward me, her face expressionless except for her blue eyes. They seemed to hold something back. Then she asked me about Will. I basically told her that he was a visiting lecturer/philosopher, and he was only here temporarily. I probably went on a little too much about him, but then again who wouldn’t? Seymour maybe. He’s just a genuinely nice guy who says the sweetest things. And I like the attention he pays me. He’s not like Harvey. Will’s flirting is harmless, even though sometimes I think I catch him looking at me. What woman doesn’t like that kind of attention? Some days I’ll flirt with him. But I continued on about how I think she’d really like him because he was young and very smart and had a lot of enthusiasm about philosophy. She mumbled something too quiet for me to make out, and we continued through the rest of the building.

Come to think of it, I saw her again but very briefly before the day they found her dead in the Graybeard Suites. I don’t know why I didn’t think of it, but then again I see a lot of people at the university and our encounter had to have been only a minute, if that. The last day of the conference I was leaving the Student Union to go home for the day when I ran into her. Not literally, of course, but she was walking in the direction of the auditorium where the lectures were being held. I said hello, and I think I caught her off guard because she seemed extremely anxious that we ran into each other. I asked her if she was here for the lecture and how her classes were going. She told me that she didn’t
get all the paperwork done in time to start that fall, but she would be taking classes in the spring. Excellent, I said. Then I told her she should probably hurry if she didn’t want to miss the talk, and that I looked forward to seeing her again. And then we left each other.
Harvey leisurely strolls over to the College of Arts and Sciences joined by Dr. Thomas Dylan, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy. The walk should take both men roughly eight minutes to make. Harvey has made the brief journey so many times he can’t remember, but he knows the route well, much like walking to the bathroom in the middle of the night. However, Dr. Dylan, or Tom as most call him, takes the liberty of slowing the duration of the walk to seventeen minutes, an amount of time Harvey can hardly fathom. With each stride taken, Harvey says in his mind, always only in his mind, *Hurry up you lazy, old shit.* Tom has been at the university for forty years and even passed the Department Chair Torch to Harvey five years ago (with the unanimous vote of the other professors, of course). Harvey respects the man. He’d never seriously say anything like that to the guy. Harvey just resigns Tom’s sloth to his reluctance to speak with Dean Joseph Murphy or his all around portliness.

At the age of sixty-eight Tom is a barrel of a man. Roughly the same height as Harvey but seventy-five pounds heavier, Tom is clean-shaven with a mop of gray, wiry hair on his head. For what seemed to be the last twenty years, which is as far back as the staff, faculty and administration can remember, Tom has always worn slacks and a sweater, and a pair of white low top Chuck Taylors. Each year he begins the fall semester with a new pair and truly wears the hell out of them. As for his sweaters, one could infer by the design that he hasn’t purchased a new one since circa 1987.

He wasn’t always fat, some might have even called him thin or fit when he joined the faculty forty years ago, but somewhere around the age of forty-five his habits or
preferences or whatever you want to call it changed, and he developed a taste for black tea with heavy cream and sugar and éclairs. On Fridays, he would bring two-dozen éclairs to the office and set them on the bureau in front of the secretary’s desk. As people enjoyed the treats, Tom would partake as well, and throughout the morning he would polish off five or six. By the afternoon he was napping in his armchair in his office. Thus began his routine til this day.

Despite his jovial demeanor he has always been a satirist at heart, his sense of humor dark and morbid and his conversation nearly always tinged with irony. In recent years, with the birth of diploma mills and for-profit universities, the higher education conundrum made him into a cynic and misanthrope. When Dean Murphy, the very same dean the two men are currently on their way to visit, told Tom during his time as Chair, that the university was reducing the budget for the philosophy department Tom replied, “That’s horseshit, Joe.”

“I’m sorry,” said Dean Murphy, “but the president is restructuring. He’s taking funds from less lucrative departments and redistributing it to those that truly profit the university.”

“And his goddamn pocket.”

“He wants to change the face of the university. He’s putting the money into programs with the highest enrollment of students. When businesses and alumni see how beneficial and successful these programs are they donate money, a lot of money.”
“Cushion the pockets of the administration, slap a coat of paint on the place, and throw in some new benches and saplings. And the Humanities are the ones that suffer. Un-fucking believable, Joe.”

“I’m sorry, Tom,” said Dean Murphy, “it’s out of my hands. I’m just the messenger at this point.”

“Bullshit, Joe. You know as well as I do that you could do something if you really wanted. You just don’t want to make any waves and compromise what you have, you coward.”

This conversation wasn’t a secret to Harvey. All these years Harvey had listened to Tom tell him how things ran, what he had to deal with, and what he predicted would happen to the university as well as the Humanities. Harvey knew the lengths to which Tom fought the devaluation of education and the administration’s agenda of corporatizing the university model.

“Murphy is probably going to tell us that Wal-Mart finally bought the fucking place,” says Tom. “Wal-Mart University, Athens Branch.”

Harvey shakes his head and sighs, “Shit, Tom.”

They enter the building of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Harvey holds the door for Tom. They take the elevator to the third floor, and turn left down a long hall. The walls are dark red and there are silver-framed prints of stock photos and paintings with single words under each picture like “Compassion” and “Tranquility.” They reach a door on the right labeled Office of the Dean. Harvey enters first, then Tom. The secretary
is nowhere to be seen, but there is a young girl at the desk next to the closed door of Dean Murphy’s office. Probably a student worker.

“Can I help you two?” she asks.

“We’re here to see—”

Before Harvey can finish, Tom says, “No,” and proceeds to walk past her, opening the door into Dean Murphy’s office.

“Sorry, he’s…” Harvey shakes his head and grins, “just being himself.”

“Joe, has your office gotten bigger or have I lost weight?”

Dean Murphy looks up from his computer. “I doubt you’ve lost weight, Tom.”

“Fuck you.” Tom laughs.

“Tom, you never were one to mask your feelings.”

Harvey walks in and shuts the door.

“Harvey,” says Dean Murphy with a false sense of surprise. “Why don’t you both take a seat?”

The two men sit in the burgundy chairs facing his desk.

“These chairs feel brand new,” says Tom. “I bet you don’t let the students sit in them.”

“Yes, they are new.”

“So, these are the perks you get when you sell your soul?”

“How are you both?” asks Dean Murphy.

“Cut the pleasantries and get to why we’re here,” says Tom.
Dean Murphy looks at Harvey, his expression seeming to beg for some sign of congeniality.

“Fine but busy, Joe. Elizabeth is picking up our speaker for the conference, Jacques LaRoché. But Tom is right, let’s just get down to business.”

“Alright. The board has met and they deemed the philosophy department an unviable part of the university. So at the end of the year the university is discontinuing the major and closing the department. This decision has already been put into writing. I’m sorry.”

“Final nail in the fucking coffin,” says Tom, throwing up one hand. “Big surprise.”

“Joe, that was not the impression you gave me this summer,” says Harvey. “You said if we could prove the program was viable we could continue. What about the conference?”

“Continue with the conference, but it won’t have any effect on their decision.”

“That’s the opposite of what you told me before the semester,” says Harvey.

“And then we had five people enroll in the philosophy program. Five, Harvey. Do you know what that says to the board of trustees? It says waste of time, money and facilities.”

“So the fact that I secured funding for the conference and Laroche, one of the most important philosophers of today, and that doesn’t mean anything. I realize enrollment is the lowest it’s ever been, but this is going to be our best conference. It’ll draw in a lot people and new students, and it will give us the publicity we need to really
get this program going. And now you tell me none of that matters. Maybe you could have
told me before I arranged all of this so I wouldn’t have wasted my goddamn time.”

“When the Agriculture Studies, Business, Engineering and Education Studies are
bringing in the majority of students, Philosophy pales in comparison. It’s economics.”

“What about faculty and staff?” asks Tom. “The students?”

“I’ve thought about that. Tom, here is retiring, you could move into an
administration position, making more money. Dr. Harlowe and Dr. Rausch would stay on
to teach a few courses.”

“What exactly do you mean by a few courses?” asks Harvey.

“Well, we need to keep Logic and Ethics because these are essential courses. Dr.
Harlowe could transfer to Women’s Studies where she could continue to teach her
feminist philosophy. Dr. Rausch is a Nietzsche scholar and could teach a history course
about him. I know people would be interested in taking that as an elective.”

“And the rest of the staff and faculty?”

“We can transfer Mrs. Shepard to another department. As for the adjuncts and non
tenures, they’ll be let go.”

“This is ridiculous,” says Harvey. “So then this is set in stone. Either adhere to
your plan or leave.”

Dean Murphy shrugs but the expression on his face says, “This is how it is.”

“You really know how to charm ‘em, Joe,” says Tom. “Was there a reason to
bring me here for this?”

“I felt that since you’ve been here for long—”
“Longer than you.”

“I know. I didn’t want you to be on the out of this information.”

“Joe, I saw the writing on the wall years ago.” Tom stands. “I’ve been fighting this kind of shit for years. I was on boards, challenging peoples’ authority and trying to keep this place from becoming what it currently is. I’ve never fit in here but that’s fine with me. I never intended. It’s just sad to see that you’re part of the machine that is killing this place.”

“Well, if you would have had a position like mine then maybe you could have actually made a difference.”

“Fuck you, Joe. You have to be a hollow man to have your position.” Tom walks out of the office. He quickly pokes his head back in, “Harvey, I’ll see you tomorrow.” He gives Dean Murphy the finger and leaves.

“For being such an eccentric guy, Tom was always way too serious,” says Dean Murphy.

“No, he’s right. This is bullshit.” Harvey pauses, sighs, and slouches in his seat. “Honestly, Joe, I don’t blame you. But what’s left? I’ve been trying to make this program something that people would recognize. I brought on Thierry and now Laroche is speaking. I really saw the program going somewhere. Now there is no point for anything.”

Dean Murphy leans back in his chair and crosses his legs. “The hype around Thierry has sort of died down. Maybe with the release of his next book he’ll gain the attention you need.” He leans forward slightly and says in a lower voice, “I say keep doing what you are. Try to make this conference big. Draw attention to the department.
Have students protest and write letters. Get people to support you who are outspoken and important. Make a lot of noise. Maybe the university will have a change of heart.

Whatever you decide to do, you have to tell everyone in the department what I told you. As far as we know, that’s what stands. Again, Harvey, I’m sorry.”

Harvey stands. “It’s whatever, Joe.” He walks out of the office and down the hall to the elevator. It’s surprising that Tom is nowhere to be found; maybe he walked back to the department. Harvey takes the elevator to the first floor. His stomach aches, a mess of gurgling acid, most likely a developing ulcer. Before he begins his walk back, he takes his cell phone from his pocket and dials a number.

“Hey there,” says a woman on the other line.

“I need to see you.”

“When?”

“Now.”

“I can’t now. I’m working. What about tonight?”

“I have a dinner with colleagues.”

“Tomorrow?”

“I have the conference this weekend.”

“Then I guess we’ll have to wait until next week.”

“Take a break. I want to see you.”

“I’ll call you later, okay? I need to get back to work.”

“But—”

Nothing.
Harvey closes his phone and walks in the direction of Gordon Hall. He needs to calm his nerves before the dinner with Laroche and the other faculty. He needs to prepare himself for a conversation with one of the most intelligent minds of today. The air seems cooler now. Could they have been in Murphy’s office very long? He glances at his wristwatch. Three thirty-five. They had only been inside the office for about thirty minutes. The dinner reservations are for four thirty at the Italian Restaurant in town. Harvey quickens his pace to get out of what he believes to be the cold.

In his office, he opens its bottom drawer of his desk. Inside is a small glass and a bottle of Maker’s Mark on it side, half full. He takes both the bottle and glass in one hand and shuts the drawer. He sets the glass on his desk, pulls the top off and pours half a glass. He quickly drinks the bourbon. He pours another half glass and replaces the cork on the bottle. He sits in his chair, leans his head back and closes his eyes. What seems like a moment later, he hears a knock. He opens his eyes, blinks a few times and rubs his eyelids with his thumb and index finger.

“Seymour,” he says. “Can I ask you a question?”

Seymour steps into his office. He looks at the whisky and the glass. “What exactly?”

“Sit for a moment.” Seymour hesitates and then sits in the chair facing Harvey’s desk.
“Have you ever felt your life’s work has been in vain?” asks Harvey, looking at Seymour. He takes a sip. “I mean, do you ever wonder what value do others place on your work?”

“I suppose your day isn’t going very well.”

“Yeah, I suppose you could say that. I think I’m letting the stress get to me.”

Seymour leans forward and places his hand on the desk, his fingers stretch across the wood surface like dead ivy vines on an old house. “I don’t mean to add to your stress but it’s four thirty.”

Harvey looks at his watch. “Goddamnit.” He downs the rest of his bourbon.

“Why don’t I drive,” suggests Seymour.
Will has taken liberties in obtaining both schedules and using them to his advantage. The first being the list of events for the conference via glossy handout, and the second, and most important, is Harvey’s personal agenda in increments of fifteen minutes, a technique he learned from a friend in the Psychology department that is supposed to encourage efficiency. Harvey, so proud of his time management, made a copy for Will and told him he could learn something from planning his days in a similar way. Having studied its contents, Will realized that Harvey’s entire day from 8 AM to 8 PM is not only jam-packed, but takes place entirely at the university. Harvey has filled his day with so many activities that he has no time for anything out of the ordinary. With all of that in mind, Will has planned to “get lunch” with Anne Buchanan somewhere other than the university.

Will enters the Philosophy department around quarter after eight in the morning. All is quiet and empty except for Sylvie rustling papers on her desk. She looks up and brushes her bangs aside. She’s wearing a beige blouse that is unbuttoned just enough that Will observes a fraction of cleavage.

“You look nice today,” Will says. “I take it everyone is getting ready at the Student Union?”

She smiles and leans forward, elbows on her desk as she talks to Will. In that position, her blouse loosens and he can see the curve of her right breast and the tan, sheer fabric of her bra. He does his best not to stare, but he’s convinced that she’s doing this on
purpose. Maybe because of the lack of people in the office, or maybe she’s attempting to take the flirting to a new level.

“Good morning, honey. Everyone except Tom who’s probably putting off going down there as long as he can. I, on the other hand, must hold down the fort all day. I’ll probably stop by in the afternoon.”

“That’s good. I’m just dropping off some things and then heading down to the Union to see what Harvey needs me to do.” He takes one more glance through the space in her blouse. “That’s a nice shirt, Sylvie.”

“Thanks. I’m glad you like it.”

He walks to his office, unlocks the door and enters. He flips on the fluorescent lights and takes out his laptop from his bag, placing it on his desk. He opens it, and the screen blinks out of sleep. He clicks on his emails, but there’s nothing new since Laroche’s last message saying that he agreed to read Will’s new manuscript in consideration for a position at the university where he teaches. Will taps the surface of the desk with the fingers of his left hand, then turns off and closes the computer. He grabs his bag and glances at its contents, eying the proof copy of his new book. He shuts off the light and locks the door of his office on his way out.

Athens Student Union is a collection of bustling energy as Will has observed upon every visit. Will enters the nearest entrance. He passes a Starbucks attached to a lounge equipped with seating, several televisions, and a black baby grand piano. The variations of sounds and the level of noise from this end of the building could drive a
person mad. The espresso machines’ incessant grinding of beans and steaming of milk, the splintered conversations of bickering college students over-stimulated on sugar and caffeine, each TV competing with the next to communicate some version of entertainment, all of which are accompanied by some random person of dubious skill and musical style, playing the piano. *Why anyone would want to spend more than the allotted time it takes to order a cup of coffee is beyond me.* Continuing on, Will passes the dining area, an enormous space full of tables and chairs on one side and places to purchase food on the other side. On the other end is a convenience store with overpriced goods, and a stairwell that leads to the second floor where the conference is being held or a lower level, an area Will saw only once on his tour of the campus his first day at Athens. The lower level is largely insignificant to anyone with a desire to spend his or her free time somewhere other than the university. It houses a bar, billiards, a small bowling alley, an arcade, music store, yet again another lounge with televisions, and strangely enough the Athens U Bookstore. Sans the bookstore, it’s a college student’s wet dream, or the university president’s reason why students don’t have to leave campus to have fun.

Will passes a modest number of signs on the second floor, not to mention the half dozen on the first floor, pointing people to where they must go for the conference—surely the work of Stephanie “I’ll-doanything-for-recognition” Green. Several students greet Will, all of whom are from his Death of Philosophy course.

Jack, Stephanie and a few others are working diligently on setting up display tables equipped with all of the accouterments: handouts, agendas, brochures for a variety of topics, blank name tags, pens with “5th Annual Athens Philosophy Conference”
stamped on the side, books for sale by speakers, and finally a table with a jumbo size
coffee maker and an assortment of donuts and muffins. One table in particular is
dedicated entirely to the works of Laroche (a bundle the university received yesterday
from his American publisher, which in fact included a twenty-four inch cutout of the
French Philosopher, too big to set on the table, yet too short to place on the floor; so one
of the students brilliantly taped the man’s cardboard likeness to the wall behind the table).

“Morning everyone,” Will says to the students.

“Good morning, Professor Thierry,” they all say, except for Jack who says, “Hey, Will.”

Will shakes his head and continues on to find someone more suitable with whom
he can talk. He turns the corner and sees Elizabeth and Seymour standing in the open,
conversing. Just behind them he notices Harvey talking on a cell phone, his free hand to
his forehead.

Will greets the two professors. Seymour’s hands are slid into the back of his pants,
thumbs tapping his waist, and he’s wearing a dark blue cardigan. Elizabeth’s dark orange
eye patch compliments her dark orange scarf or her scarf compliments her patch. Which
compliments the other? Did she get the patch before or after the scarf? Will wonders.
Will is unsure which to compliment or if he should say anything at all.

“That’s a nice scarf, Elizabeth.” He glances at Seymour. “Seymour.”

“Where were you yesterday?” she asks Will. “Why didn’t you come to the
dinner?”

Will hesitates. “I’m sorry. Something came up. I plan on making it up.”
“I’m sure you do,” Seymour sneers.

“Well it was almost a disaster.” She looks at Harvey still jabbering away on his phone. “Harvey drank too much. Seymour saw him with the bottle on his desk yesterday afternoon. Then he had about a bottle and a half of wine.”

“Do you know why he was drinking so much?” asks Will.

“I assumed it was the stress of all of this.”

“Though, he did seem kind of upset yesterday,” says Seymour. “You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, Thierry?” He glares at Will.

“I was going to ask you the same question?” asks Will, looking away. *I need to get away from this guy.*

“Thankfully, Jacques likes to drink as well,” says Elizabeth. “I kept offering him wine and he kept taking.”

“Well that’s good, I suppose,” says Will.

“Kind of. The only wine he would drink was this certain brand of Chianti that was sixty dollars a bottle. Harvey paid for it, but it was really an awful time.”

The exchange of words is brief as Harvey interrupts. “Morning, Will. I need to speak with you for a minute.” Will acknowledges, and the two walk away.

Seymour blurts out, “Just like a dog.”

Will looks behind him, but Seymour’s back is turned, his hands still in the back of his pants. *I bet those creepy long fingers are cupping his bare ass cheeks.* He looks back and Harvey is six feet in front of him. He’s clearly in overdrive, something Will should have expected after being part of the last two conferences. Other than Harvey’s in depth
research on Sartre and other Existentialists, the conference is the single most important event of his career. He contacts speakers, chooses the best papers submitted, solicits donors, and advertises the hell out of it. If Harvey is able to continue in the same direction for a few more years, this program could really be something. Will walks faster.

“Hey, Harvey,” he says, finally reaching the man. “What can I do?”

“You should have been there. It was great. I think Jacques is really warming up to Athens, to us.”

*So we’re calling him Jacques now, thinks Will. This could really be chance to warm up to the guy.*

“You really missed a good time. Anyhow, all of the morning speakers are showing up at nine. The afternoon speakers are supposed to be here at noon. The students are setting up the tables. I just talked to the caterers, and they should be here at eleven to set up. Could you make sure the students aren’t screwing up anything?”

Will parts with Harvey, as Harvey turns around and walks in the direction of Elizabeth and Seymour. Will stops just shy of the corner to check for his cigarettes. He overhears part of their conversation.

“I’m so stoked to hear Will speak,” says Jack.

“Why?” asks Stephanie. “We sit in class and listen to him talk for hours. How will this be any different?”

“Who cares about Thierry,” says one of the male students. “I just can’t believe that Laroche is coming to this shitty place.”

“Sorry this isn’t ULCA, douche,” says Stephanie.
“I can’t wait until the symposium,” says the male student. “that hack can’t hold a candle to the Laroche.”

Will rounds the corner. Someone makes a hushing sound. “How’s it coming?” He sees that the only male student other than Jack is in fact a heavy-set guy with a beard and thick-rimmed glasses, a student from his class.

“Fine,” says Stephanie. “I just have to unpack this last box of Laroche’s books. Then Jack the Barista will start the coffee.”

Will looks at Jack. “I work at a coffee shop,” says Jack, “but anybody can work these kind of coffee makers.”

“Sounds like you all have it under control. Do you mind if I leave my bag behind the table here?” He points to a spot where the others have left purses and book bags.

“Sure, no problem.”

“I’m going to smoke if anyone wants to join.” Will walks down the flight of stairs and out the door. The fucking nerve they have, he thinks. Students at NYU were never that disrespectful, and even if there were a few, they still had far better grades and work than these idiots.

***

Will sits on the end of a row near the front of the auditorium. Will glances at his watch. Quarter till noon. Harvey walks to the podium and addresses the crowd, which unfortunately, is less full than expected, roughly two hundred people.
“We are going to take an hour break for lunch. Because we are a little ahead of the schedule, the caterers are still setting up the food. So be patient. Within the next fifteen minutes they should be ready to serve.”

Harvey walks off the stage, and passes Will before he can say anything to him. Will quickly follows Harvey, whose limp is more pronounced due to stress. Will hopes to catch up with him, but even with the limp, Harvey has him beat. The man passes a few tables lined up against a wall, clearly tables for the food. Two young girls in black arrange burners and racks. Harvey continues into a conference room just beyond the tables, Will shortly behind him.

“How much longer will it be until the food is ready,” says Harvey. “We’re running ahead of schedule.”

“We’re doing what we can,” says a man in black pants and a black collared shirt, “You said lunch was at noon and we’ll have it ready by noon.”

“You said the food would be ready before noon.”

“It is ready, sir. We’re just arranging the tables and setting up in order to serve.”

“Well, I need you to do it faster.”

Harvey leaves without acknowledging Will. Will notices the man Harvey just addressed shaking his head and cursing under his breath. “Sorry,” says Will. Again he does his best to catch up with Harvey.

“Harvey,” Will says in a loud voice.

Harvey turns around.

“I’ll be back in a half hour. I have to stop home for something.”
Harvey acknowledges and turns, walking in the direction he began.

Will pulls his old black, two-door BMW into the driveway of his house. He kills the ignition, gets out and walks to the back of his house. Leaning against the back door is Anne, dressed in skinny jeans and a light green hoodie. He looks around, cautious of an unwanted eye, and approaches her. She smiles. Her hair is down, just about shoulder length. He holds her and kisses her on the mouth.

“Did you give him the book?” she asks.

“Not yet. The French Debutante has not arrived. But as soon as I see him.”

Will unlocks the door and they both go inside. They stand in the kitchen, and Will opens the refrigerator.

“Do you want something to eat?”

“You’re kidding, right.”

He looks at her, shutting the refrigerator door. Anne unzips her hoodie, revealing only a pink bra. “I don’t need food at the moment,” she says as she turns around and heads out of the kitchen. She ascends the stairs toward the bedroom like she’s done it a thousand times before. Will follows without haste.

When Will reaches his room Anne is standing next to his bed, hoodie discarded on the floor. She unsnaps her bra and takes it off. Her breasts are average but perky. He closes in, grabbing her around the waist and kisses her hard. She pulls his head towards her neck.
Anne lies on her side in Will’s bed, her head propped on her hand. The blanket is pulled to her navel. Will pulls on the pair of light blue boxer briefs he was wearing. The clock shows twelve thirty-seven. He’d rather lie in bed with Anne and fall asleep, his arms wrapped around her, her feet grazing his legs. He’d caress her smooth skin all afternoon if he could, run his fingers through auburn hair. Even though he is in this moment, the aching feeling that Harvey will somehow find out about them meeting creeps into his mind. As soon as he suppresses that thought the reality of Seymour’s paranoid threats becomes present. *What if he actually followed me home?* he worries. His heart speeds up and he tries to put his clothes on a little faster. *He’s not following you.*

“So do you think we’ll have a flat in the city or a small cottage just outside of town,” asks Anne.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” Will says, pulling a white t-shirt over his head. She mockingly frowns, clearly pretending to be hurt. He grins.

“Without a doubt I would get a flat in the city. Living here has convinced me that I need to be where things are happening. I need people and noise and culture. This place makes you stir-crazy.”

“Spending those couple of days in Paris when I was on vacation during college—” She pauses. “It’s a place I never stopped thinking about.”

“If this book does as well as I think it will, we might be able to have a place in Paris and New York.” In the back of his mind, he knows that won’t happen.

“The two most romantic cities in the world,” says Anne.
“I need to get back to the conference.” He pulls on his dark gray pants and tucks in his white button up shirt. “I think I should wear a tie when I speak tonight.”

“You’ll look cute no matter what you wear.”

He walks to the closet and pulls a black tie off a rack of ties and belts. He wraps it around his upturned collar and ties it. He grabs his light gray sweater off the floor and pulls it over his head. “How’s my hair?”

“Do you want me to lock up when I leave?” she asks.

“Do you plan on staying long?”

“I just feel so good I don’t want to move.”

“Sure, that’s fine.” He walks to the bathroom, turns the water on and splashes some on his face. He looks in the mirror while drying his face with a towel. He walks back to the bedroom.

“Come here,” says Anne.

Will puts his watch back on his wrist and leans close to her. She grabs the back of his head and kisses him.

“I love you. Your hair looks fine.”

“I love you, too.” He slips his shoes on. “Not that you should be worried, but makes sure no one sees you leave.”

“Okay? Why do you say that?”

“Well, Seymour approached me in my office making some bogus claim that I’m trying to fuck him over and get tenure. And then he told me he would be watching me.
He was going to expose me however he can. I really don’t know where that came from or what he means by that.”

“That’s really strange. I’ll slip out unnoticed, I promise.”

It’s ten minutes till one, and Will notices that more people have arrived. The students have deserted the tables of stuff and left the chubby guy with the beard and glasses. He stares at the phone he holds just under the edge of the table. He’s likely texting or playing some mindless game.

_Maybe if you took your eyes off your fucking phone, Will thinks, learn something about people, life._

Harvey grabs Will’s arm, causing Will to jump.

“Jesus, where did you come from?” he asks.

“Never mind that. Laroche arrived no more than fifteen minutes ago. You need to introduce yourself now since you blew off last night’s dinner.”

“Do I have any choice?”

“No.”

Harvey practically drags Will to where a large crowd of people have gathered. He pushes his way through the cluster of bodies to the small opening where Elizabeth stands only inches away form the distinguished philosopher.

“Jacques, I know you two know of each other, but I don’t believe you have formally met William Thierry.”
Laroche looks at Will and for a second or two says nothing. Will secretly crosses his fingers hoping their face-to-face relationship does not begin badly, though he feels the Frenchman is sizing him up.

“It’s good to put a face to the writing. C’est un plaisir.” He extends his hand.

Will grabs it and shakes lightly.

“No, Monsieur Laroche, the pleasure is mine.” How could I have just said monsieur? he thinks.

It’s not long before that the conference is back on schedule. People have returned to the auditorium for the next speaker. Laroche and Elizabeth sit in the third row back. Will sits in the first row on the end next to an open seat reserved for Harvey. All Will can think about is what Laroche is thinking two rows back, and when he can give the man the book. If I wait until tomorrow, he frets, he’ll think I’m afraid to give it to him. But if I hand it to him too soon, he’ll think I’m too damn eager. Harvey walks on stage and introduces the next speaker.

Finally, Will catches Laroche by himself and from the time he arrived to now, the man has had to engage in some trite exchange of words with faculty or random conference goers, not to mention Elizabeth shadowing him everywhere. Whatever that is about.

It’s now or never, he thinks.

Truthfully if Will is determined to give the manuscript to Laroche, he realistically has from this moment until the man flies back to France. And if he was so determined to
give the man the manuscript, away from prying eyes and competitive colleagues, he could drive to the man’s room at some ungodly hour proving his determination. Or he could offer to drive the Frenchman back to the airport when the time comes, allowing them time for discussion and whatever else. Those latter options seem ridiculous to Will. Professional settings call for professional behavior and showing up at someone’s hotel room at 2 AM would most likely give the wrong impression. Timing is everything as they say.

Will takes the first step and before he realizes it, he’s thanking Laroche for the correspondence, apologizing for missing yesterday’s dinner and asking if it is okay to give him a copy of the book.

“Why yes, let’s have it then.”

Will pulls around his messenger bag and takes the book out. He hands it to Laroche. The cover is white with a picture of a framed photograph in the center. The same framed photo that hangs in the Buchanan’s bathroom. Laroche looks at the cover of the book then places it into his leather upright briefcase.

“Interesting,” he remarks. “A copy of the copy. The publisher always has to make the cover more philosophical than the contents of the book.”

“I really appreciate this.” Take the insult and smile, Will thinks. You need this.

“Sure.”

Will turns around and catches Seymour scowling at him. Will averts his eyes and walks back into the auditorium hoping Seymour doesn’t bother him with the usual bullshit.
What Will doesn’t realize is that Seymour has been keeping a close eye on him, and since Will arrived this morning around eight thirty Seymour has followed his every move. When Will went home, Seymour drove past to make sure he was really there.

Seymour was thrilled at how close he was to see the exchange, to see every move, hear every word despite its brevity. For the aging man who holds a grudge towards the young prodigy, this is all the ammunition he needs. But rather than going to Harvey on the single most stressful day of the year, or even another day when the commotion of the event has died down, he decides to entertain the idea with Tom.

“Hey, Tom. Do you have a minute to take a walk with me? I need to run something by you.”

Tom who appears a bit on the drowsy side considering today is Friday, he has visited the donut table one too many times, and has yet to take a nap in his office, considers Seymour’s request by giving him a blank stare. Finally he responds with, “What is it?”

They walk to one of the conference rooms with an open door and enter. Seymour shuts the door.

“What are you doing, Seymour?”

“I have a strange feeling about Thierry and Laroche’s conversation.”

“How so?” he asks. “Actually, what are you talking about?”

“I’m walking to the refreshments table and I see Thierry hand him a book and tell him thanks for the opportunity. I’m wondering what opportunity he’s talking about.”
“Seymour, who cares? It sounds like Will wanted Laroche to read his book before it goes to press. What’s the problem?”

“A man that is supposedly up for early tenure shouldn’t be mixed up in compromising situations.”

“I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about. Will isn’t up for tenure. Where did you hear that?”

“I’ve heard things, and I know about the meeting you and Harvey had with the Dean Murphy. So we’re going to throw some inexperienced hack into a tenured professor position just because he wrote a pop-philosophy book. What about a proper search with a committee involved? I had to work my—”

“Let me stop you there. Will is not getting tenured. He’s not even a professor here. In fact his job is one of the few in jeopardy. And why? Because the dean and the university have decided to shit-can the department and the major. And it’s not because ‘philosophy is dying.’ It’s because of resorting to behavior like this rather than doing your goddamn job. You want to know why the university has declared our program obsolete, because we didn’t give them a reason otherwise. So, if Will wants to get in cahoots with Laroche, as you seem to be claiming, let him because he probably won’t have a job here by the end of the year.”

“So, it’s over? What about me?”

“The dean has a plan, but nobody is really going to like it. Let’s just say you, Harvey, Elizabeth and Sylvie will be fine. I’m retiring, so the hell with me. But everyone else, the adjuncts, the few lecturers and Will are fucked.”
Relieved, Seymour does his best to hide a smile.

“Wipe that shit eating grin off your face. It’s this kind of paranoid behavior that contributes to all of the nonsense and academic cannibalism around here. Oh, and by the way, keep this to yourself until Harvey has let everyone know. I’m going to my office to take a nap.”

Tom exits, leaving Seymour to bask in his victory despite how small and menial it is.

The time is quarter till nine when Will gets inside his home. He mentally checks off the small accomplishments for today, the greatest was finally handing his second book to Laroche. *Perhaps things will actually work out*, he thinks. *Maybe Paris isn’t too far off*. He feels hopeful about this. He actually believes this to be the biggest step he’s made the entire time he’s been here. That and the completion of his second book.

Will sets his bag on the kitchen table and locks the back door. He saunters down the hall and climbs the stairs. He made up his mind to go to bed early so that tomorrow is less taxing. As he approaches his bedroom, he can smell a faint odor of perfume, a mix of flowers and something sweet. At the doorway of his bedroom, the smell is almost as strong as if someone had just sprayed it. It’s a familiar scent. He turns on the light. The bed is a mess.

*I guess Anne didn’t make the bed on the way out*, he thinks. *Did she get a new perfume? Why would she spray it in the bedroom? It’s been a long day.*
He goes to the bathroom, brushes his teeth and urinates. He takes off his clothes, leaving his boxer briefs on, and discards them in the hamper next to the vanity. He goes back to his room, shuts off the light and gets into bed. *She had to have been wearing perfume because this pillow reeks.* He tosses the pillow off the bed and grabs the one next to it. The smell is not as strong. He closes his eyes and hopes that whatever happens, happens soon. *This smells like Lily’s scent,* he thinks, his last thought before sleep overtakes him.
Jacques Laroche  
*Telephone interview*  
*April 2010*

When I took that trip to the states to speak at Athens University, it was rather disappointing. The university was much smaller than I had imagined. Not that that is a bad thing, because it is not. England has small universities and France as well, but I mean the gatherings were small. It seems that people care little about academics. The intellectual community is small. I felt as if I was in the middle of nowhere, all farms and strip malls.

The university was nearly an hour away from the airport, and a woman professor who lacked a sense of humor greeted me. She disliked everything I had to say, but on the ride back to the modest hotel where I stayed, our conversation became quite amiable. She was pleasant but also possessed a chip on her shoulder or perhaps her guard was always up. She seemed ready to attack. I think that is what I adored most about her, the way she was positioned, ready for combat. That is the main reason why she will continue to have a successful career.

I was asked to speak at the Athens Philosophy Conference for two reasons. First, I wrote a book that refuted Thierry’s piece of garbage theory that explained the shelf life of the study of philosophy. Second, my name carries prestige, and with prestige comes a following. Like most events, the more people attend their conference, the more revenue they acquire for their program. Although from what I gathered, most of their budget went to pay me. If I had known the food would be as bad as it was, I would have gladly settled on a smaller fee perhaps. The foul odor of the food lingered for hours.
I had not intended to write a book about Thierry’s subject, and truthfully, I had not heard about it when it came out. I discovered who this man was one day by way of my colleagues at the University of Paris. One of them had received copies from the publisher. Apparently, they were published by the same house, and the book was what you call a hot topic. It became a conversation piece among other groups with whom I associated myself. So I read it. I needed to know why they were all so interested in this book.

It was something strange to the field of philosophy. Rather than being a real philosophical treatise, it was part statistics, part literature review, and part narrative. It was broken down into three sections. The first section was a catalogue of philosophers who had stated at one point in time or another that philosophy was either dead or dying. Nietzsche. Heidegger. Rorty. Derrida. And the list goes on. The second section was a collection of statistics and case studies. The statistics regarded philosophy majors in universities and post-graduation and consisted of enrollment, changing of majors, graduation rate, dropping out, employment rate, graduate education, and other aspects. The case studies involved universities that either discontinued the philosophy major or closed the department. The third and final section was an attempt at theorizing, in a clichéd narrative form, the “inevitable” death of philosophy. Thierry gave philosophy the feminine pronoun she and essentially wrote how she would eventually wither away and die.

For the philosophy major this may have been an interesting, even important book, but for an intellectual, an academic, the book was a three-part fallacy. Grouping together
random quotes and ideas from some of philosophy’s greatest minds may have appeared to give his argument, if you want to call it that, some validity. Just by telling somebody something doesn’t make it true or imminent. There needs to be solid proof and analysis or reason behind that. And there was not. The same could be said for the grouping of statistics. For every department that closes or student that changes his major from philosophy to say communications, there are several departments that thrive and continue to exist and students that graduate and go on to a life of philosophical scholarship. And the last section was merely pandering to people’s emotions and insecurities, their worst fears.

Coming from some no name American, I discarded the book and paid very little attention to what others were saying. But as his popularity grew in the realm of philosophy and his book sold more and more copies, I decided I must write a rebuttal that revealed his mistakes. I carefully wrote, with pragmatics and logic, an argument that discredited his while creating a new theory for the death of philosophy. I further developed his best ideas and negated his bad ones. I stated and explained that if philosophy continued its course of bastardizing that eventually what we call philosophy will be nothing more than the self help section at—what is that store?—Barnes and Noble. Philosophy thrives through its foundations and if those are discarded then philosophy will die, at least as we know it. As long as people have the desire to understand the world and the self, philosophy will exist.

Now, it was not until Dr. Harvey Buchanan contacted me about speaking at their conference that I had any prior communication with William Thierry. Once I had
chastised his book and had written a more precise and logical theory around the death of
philosophy, I moved on. I began my next book as I always do and dwelled very little on
Thierry or that subject. I am a cultural theorist in essence and to focus on one topic for an
extended period of time that has limited effects on the present culture is to neglect
important events and trends that continue to occur. What philosophy professors are
concerned with is the miasma of philosophy itself and rarely with what is occurring in the
culture. They are constantly talking about Philosophy with a capital “P.” They regurgitate
the words of so many others, but rarely come up with their own ideas. And that is fine.
They are educators, but disciplines cannot survive on education alone. Their disciplines
must progress and continue to develop and grow. The death of philosophy affects very
few and all it poses as is the Apocalypse for philosophy, the eschatology of philosophy. It
satisfies the inherent need for the finite. Maybe the death wish. Maybe entropy. Maybe
the American idea of “going out with a bang.”

Anyhow, William Thierry is like many philosophers of the past who seemingly
dedicate most of their life’s work to refining and redefining a given topic or theory. I
would say that is a large portion of twentieth thought. I realized this when he contacted
me some time after I had committed to the conference. He sent me an email saying he
was nearing the end of a second book about the same subject, one that completely re-
contextualized his ideas to the degree of being something completely different. He
likened himself to Wittgenstein saying, “Like Wittgenstein, I have written a book that
completely negates my first. I believe this will be my Philosophical Investigations.”
At first I laughed when I read that, and then thought it rather arrogant to compare himself to one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century. I understood what he meant. He claimed that the first book was a reaction to research he had conducted in graduate school. He confessed his first book was written with a mixture of energy and haste. He sent me a synopsis of the second book, which was a more pragmatic approach (much like my book). I will say it seemed promising. The writing of that paragraph alone was better than all of the writing combined from his first book.

The second part of the email inquired about obtaining a position at the university in Paris where I taught. America was a place of dreams, but France was a place of thought. America is also a country of amateurism, and I assumed he had enough of that sort of climate. I really cannot blame him. The American mindset is one of work and productivity, but the quality and materials are shit.

He gave me his book while we were at the conference. I read it on the flight back to Paris. It was better, much better, but it felt as if he had written it for me. I may not linger long on a particular subject, as I have said, but I know my thoughts, what I have written. This book steals many of my ideas and attempts to recast them in a way where philosophy is not dying in essence, but we are intentionally killing it. I should have felt flattered, but flattery is not a philosophy we teach at the University of Paris. So I promptly told him that unfortunately there was not a position for him at the university. I thought about writing a bad review of the book including how he borrowed heavily from my book. Then I read not so long ago that he had killed a woman. I cannot remember exactly where I read the article, perhaps the New York Times. My initial thought was,
‘there goes his career,’ but there is a certain celebrity that often accompanies a man of ideas who has killed someone. Particularly given the nature of the relationship with the woman and with Harvey Buchanan. It is the situations we see in pulp fiction or film. Two people of similar circumstance that come to mind are Louis Althusser and William Burroughs.
It is Saturday morning, the morning of the symposium. And despite the occasion, their routines stay the same.

Harvey staggers through into the kitchen, rubbing his temples. He puts the coffee on and takes a long, loose shit while skimming the headlines of the *New York Times.*

Upstairs in the Buchanan household, Anne sleeps with the covers pulled over her head. She dreams of the elderly dressed in panda costumes doing yoga, and though her body feels heavy and dense, she attempts to instruct them. A dream she wakes up from every Saturday morning, a sign she might be thinking too much about her job.

A few street over, Seymour sits in his veranda, drinking coffee and reading a book about Nazi Germany. He pictures his young father plastering the walls of a building, spreading the brown undercoat over the lath, during which he can see two young SS soldiers standing on the corner of a street smoking cigarettes and laughing. His young father frantically spreading the mixture, proving his worth as a tradesman, the man most likely feels some sort of satisfaction from being part of the construction of a place that will most likely be destroyed from a bombing. Seymour’s thoughts drift to the family he left behind in New Jersey, specifically his brother who works as a painting contractor, a man whose hands are like their mother’s, short and stubby—the hands of a working people.

Elizabeth wakes up in a bed, quickly realizing she’s in Laroche’s room. There is the sound of water running from the shower. She gathers her things and tells him through the door that she will be back at ten to take him to the conference. She drives back to a
house that is far too large for one person, though it has been her home in Athens for nearly ten years.

Tom has purchased a dozen chocolate éclairs from the donut shop in downtown Athens, and now he currently sits at his kitchen table, in a white undershirt and khaki pants eating a pastry, drinking a cup of hot black tea and reading *Tale of the Tub*.

Finally, there is Will who just awoke from a dream, or what he believes to be a nightmare, his heart racing and his head and chest covered in sweat. Upon waking he remembers what the odor was. It was a specific perfume Lily used to wear, one she got from a small store a few blocks from where they lived in Washington Park in New York City. A mixture of lavender and vanilla or fruit. The scent of the perfume is so faint in his room that he feels like it was just a sensory memory, something in his brain triggered by the dream.

He sits up and feels his full bladder. The time is five thirty. Will walks to the bathroom to relieve himself. As he stands in front of the toilet, he thinks of the dream, does his best to recall the details.

In the dream, he is walking in Athens, but everything is closer together, cagey. It’s darker than usual and Athens feels more like a maze. He turns the corner and notices a woman in a black trench coat walking on the opposite side of the street, her long dark hair hiding her face. They walk in unison, practically like a mirror image or a mime. He turns the corner to walk down an alley and sees the back of what looks like the same woman. As he walks, she walks in perfect tempo, step for step, like she’s an extension of him. He follows her until she turns the corner. He hurries to catch up and when he turns
the corner she is there. He takes the street until it reaches one of the main roads. He ends up in the dead center of town. On each corner of the intersection stands a woman, four total. They are identical to the one he was chasing, and their backs are to him. He first shouts “Stop following me” and then “What do you want?” but no one replies. He follows the main street toward the university. He looks back at the intersection and the women again are walking in opposite directions, exactly as he is, though one is following him in sync with his movement. He crosses another intersection, no one. The streets are barren. There are no people around except for the woman behind him. He starts running, but he’s not sure where to go.

And then he’s standing at the front door of Gordon Hall. He walks inside and it looks more like a fun house maze than a strange old building. He thinks he’ll find solace in his office if he can just get there but the halls twist and turn. There are random sets of staircases. He takes one but they all look the same. The feeling of falling is ever present. He passes the paintings of the philosophers. They are all of Harvey, but each one looks like a version of a different philosopher. In one he has a stern look and moustache like Nietzsche. Another glasses, a pipe and fisheyes like Sartre. Still another he has white side burns and two huge tufts of white hair like Schopenhauer. The eyes of the paintings literally follow Will. There is the crackle of chamber music playing throughout the place, like something from a phonograph.

Finally Will reaches his office. The light is on, and he can see inside. The door is glass. A woman sits at his desk reading a book. She holds it in a way that occludes her face. The book is his book, *The Death of Philosophy*. He tries to open the door, but it’s
locked. He kicks it once, but nothing. He kicks it again. Nothing. He looks for something to throw through the glass, but the hall is empty. He goes to kick it a third time, but the door opens right before his shoe connects. He loses his footing and falls on his face. But it’s not carpet. Long blades of grass or weeds surround him. He stands and realizes he’s in a field of white flowers, Queen Anne’s Lace. The sky is overcast and the scene is unfamiliar, maybe a melding of several places. He can see in the distance women, the ones from before, closing in on him. They seem far off, but approach quickly. They’ve become hundreds maybe even thousands. They’re like ants swarming on a granule of sugar. But something is off. When they get closer he sees they are faceless, each face nothing but pale smooth skin.

And like before, he awakes just as they reach him.

Will walks back to his bedroom and picks up the pillow he tossed on the floor the night before. The perfume’s scent is strong enough to make him wince. He sets the pillow on the bed, puts on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, and heads downstairs to the kitchen. He reaches inside his messenger bag on the kitchen table and pulls out a pack of Turkish Golds. He walks out the front door and sits in the Adirondack chair. He lights a cigarette, leans his head back and exhales. He realizes he should have put on a sweatshirt.

He’s had the dream twice before, both times within the first two months of living in Athens. *And nothing until now?* he asks himself. Perhaps it was the perfume he smelled last night or the stress of the conference and Laroche.

He glances at the ashtray as he flicks the ash of his cigarette into it. Wait. He turns slowly to the table. In the ashtray amidst his butts is the black filter from a Djarum Black
clove cigarette. He picks it up and smells it. Definitely a clove. He sets it down. Lily’s brand. There’s no fucking way. He can taste her mouth—the sweet, smoke on her tongue.

The scent in his room, the dream, and now the clove cigarette. This is odd, he thinks. Not possible. How does she know where I live? And she had enough time to smoke a cigarette. Could she have been in my home?

He takes a hit: deep breath, long exhale.

“No,” he says. “I’m a logical person. She may know where I teach, but she doesn’t know where I live. She has not been in the house.” No one from New York does.

He takes another hit.

This is stupid. I’m a person of reason. The perfume was probably Anne’s and in the stress of everything yesterday, I just didn’t notice. The cigarette could have been from anyone. Jack has come over here before. Maybe one of his friends smokes cloves. And the dream is a fucking coincidence. That’s all.

“The absence of reason and logic leads to superstition and conjecture.” He looks at the street, and the other houses nearby. And paranoia. There’s nothing going on.

He takes another hit and exhales.

“Just a fucking coincidence.”

The day goes much like the day before. Will listens to people either give talks or read their papers. He observes Harvey running around like a fool. Will is a bit on edge despite his attempts to reassure himself that nothing strange is happened. He wants to talk to Laroche, but he is unsure of how to begin. For the second day in a row Elizabeth has
not left the philosopher’s side. Although she might be a kind of guide, Will thinks there is
something going on with them. Elizabeth and Laroche stand next to his table of books,
talking to two men. Figuring he’ll just start with the basics, Will proceeds in their
direction. He can hear the two men’s incessant chatter, and see Laroche’s apparent
irritation. Elizabeth notices Will, and the two share a look. She taps the Frenchman and
points at Will. Laroche acknowledges and turns away from the men without another word.

“Thierry, it is good to see you.”

“How is Athens treating you?”

“Well, it seems to be a quaint town. Your colleague here, Elizabeth, has been
rather helpful in showing me around and making my stay as pleasant as possible. If only
France had more women like her.”

Will looks at Elizabeth who appears to take offense from the comment.

“I’m going to get some coffee,” she says, “Does anyone want anything?”

“No, thank you,” says Will.

“The coffee is shit,” says Laroche.

Elizabeth leaves without acknowledging the remark.

“So Thierry, that is French is it not?” asks Laroche.

“Yes it is.”

“What part of France?”

“Actually I’m French-Canadian,” says Will with a degree of hesitance. “My
grandparents were from Quebec.”

“Do you know anything about your French lineage?” Laroche pauses.
“Not exactly. I’d have to ask my father about this.”

“So do you speak French?”

“Yes but not fluently,” he says, feeling ashamed to be talking to the man.

“Oh. Well, Thierry. We will need to continue our conversation later. I have to attend to something.” He nods his head and walks away from Will.

What just happened, thinks Will. You should have lied.

The panelists of the symposium, William Thierry, Jacques Laroche, and a man from Yale (his name Will forgets), have been discussing for nearly thirty minutes, and Harvey moderates the whole thing. The stage lights are turned up all the way, a mistake made by the person working the lights. And although none of the men complain, Will is feeling the heat and visibly perspiring on his forehead. Harvey stands at a podium with a microphone, and the three men sit at a table with three microphones; Will on the left, Laroche on the right, and the man from Yale is center. Will said something to spark Laroche’s need to correct, and unfortunately it is in a direction Will didn’t want it to go, a position he hoped neither man would put the other in.

“Well, that’s where I think you’re wrong, Mr. Thierry, the humanities will never be a lucrative part of a university. The reason they thrive is because of donors, endowments and people of the profession with some notoriety. The Arts and Humanities suffer without these forms of support. The oldest and most reputable schools will likely have thriving humanities programs, more specifically philosophy. Mid-level and state universities will have to struggle to keep these programs afloat because they do not fit
into the business model that has and continues to corrupt most U.S. universities.

Intellectual thought is the antithesis to the corporate model. So, I think the teaching of philosophy rather than philosophy itself is becoming an endangered species.”

Will’s armpits are damp, but his neck feels hot; his shirt collar is collecting perspiration. The heat from the lights is distracting. He’s getting nervous, realizing Laroche will dissect Will’s words or even argue his blunders for the sake of being right. He takes a drink from the glass of water at his podium. He looks to the front row where Anne sits. She looks gorgeous in her black dress with her hair done up. She catches eyes with him and they share a look, which Will interprets as pity, due to his current situation.

“I think you’re right in that respect, Jacques,” says Will. “But consider Latin. It’s a dead language, but most universities teach Latin in their language department. Why?

Because it serves a purpose. It’s the basis for many languages and it’s still pertinent in logical argument and legal terms. Latin has its own set of rules, like logic, that must be taught. But as other languages developed and splintered off, Latin’s usage and necessity declined until it was pronounced dead. But it is still taught. Philosophy attempts to use logic but because it has splintered off into so many different specialized areas, what we know as philosophy is looking like other areas of study: literature, history, science, and mathematics. And it’s being taught like those subjects. So I see it dying like Latin and being taught like English, French and Spanish. Similar but different.”

There is a lull in the conversation and Harvey clears his throat. He reads along from a paper.
“I believe the next question I have falls in line with the answers you all just gave to the last question. One of the most well respected colleges in England ended their philosophy program and closed the department. Another college in Philadelphia did the same. If this becomes a trend, we could see a sort of chain reaction occur where universities are ending majors and closing departments, which creates a surplus of philosophy professors but a limited number of jobs, essentially making these individuals obsolete. Students see this and despite their desire to pursue a philosophy degree they don’t, because the likelihood of getting a job is nearly non-existent. The student enrollment decreases, and the departments in turn are closed for lack of enrollment. Say hypothetically speaking, this continues until there are only a few colleges in the world that offer philosophy. Does this seem like a likely scenario? And if so, are there ways to prevent the inevitable or is this the fate of the discipline? Dr. Fowler from Yale, you may answer first and then Thierry and finally Laroche.”

“Well,” says the professor from Yale, “if we look at Weston College we’ll see that although their philosophy department was shut down and the major was discontinued, a semester later everything was reinstated. The reason this happened in such a brief period of time or even at all is the fact that people realized what a travesty it was to not have one of the oldest disciplines as a part of the curriculum. The Liberal Arts were founded on philosophy. People realized that they missed one very important subject, one that feeds the mind like science and mathematics and nourishes the soul like literature and the fine arts. So what they did, the students and faculty of the college as well as those from other colleges and professions, is they banned together and wrote letters to the
college and protested the travesty. The college immediately responded to the uproar and realizing their enormous mistake reinstated the major, the department, the faculty and staff of the department, and the students who were majoring in it. So much like other countries in Europe and parts of Latin America, when people collect for a purpose, it is powerful and changes things.”

The man finishes his thought, and Harvey attempts to finish the notes he is writing. A quick glance at his paper reveals, “ban together,” “student protests,” “written letters to the university,” and others, all of which are better options than anything he has in mind for Athens. Harvey looks up and thanks the professor from Yale and moves on to Will.

“Professor Thierry, you may respond to his response or begin a new thought altogether.”

“With regards to Mr. Yale’s social up rise or unrest, it’s a nice anecdote and I think it works for politics and social change. But if you look at the history of philosophy on a timeline you’ll see that there were lulls in free thought and then there were eras where people were creating amazing philosophy: the age of enlightenment, the Germans of Weimar Republic and the postmodern and post-structuralist movements of the sixties and seventies. Societies were divided and a greater amount of the public accepted such ideas, especially academics and intellectuals. Universities are where some of the best writing and thought is produced. When the focus of education shifts from acquisition of knowledge to acquisition of money, there is a problem, clearly. But when this occurs it not only stifles creative thought but also the education provided students.
“When individuals are placed in a position to choose their careers, money and productivity are their consideration. How much will I have to pay in order to learn a skill? How much will I make with a job that uses this skill? Right there the humanities enrollment is greatly reduced.

“What I believe it goes back to is proving that philosophy is lucrative and that the department is viable and will benefit the university. Plus this day and age, it’s about finding your niche, but then again, isn’t that what higher education is about at its core. Formulating a new idea and developing the idea into a unique piece of work is at the core of the humanities as well as using that work to advance and benefit humanity.”

“So you really believe,” says Laroche, “that your death of philosophy rhetoric will benefit all of humanity? Even the folks in Papua New Guinea, who know nothing about this subject and will never know anything about it?”

The symposium goes on in this fashion for another hour. Harvey pokes and prods each man for something he can use to attempt to save the department. The poor guy from Yale is largely neglected, despite his concrete examples and practical answers. He is stuck between two men who are having a conversation without him. Will is being trumped by Laroche, who is the man of the hour despite Will’s attempts to validate his theories. Harvey calls an end to the discussion section and tells the crowd that they will resume with the audience Q & A in roughly fifteen minutes.

Each man goes his separate way: Yale to the restroom, Harvey to talk to more people, Laroche into a room designated for the speakers. Will on the other hand, walks with his head down to his seat, grabs his bag and proceeds to the nearest exit. Outside he
takes out a Turkish Gold and lights it. He weighs his answers in his mind along with the responses given by Laroche.

*What a prick, he thinks. I gave strong intelligent answers and he just shits right on top of them. But I’ve got to be respectful and not make him look like a fool, so he’ll read my book.*

He inhales deeply and blows the smoke out of the side of his mouth. With his back to the Student Union he looks out on campus. He sees the half demolished building formerly known as Simon Hall. A chain-linked fence surrounds it. There was nothing special about the building. It wasn’t historical or ornate, nor did it house anything in particular. Just an ugly building full of rooms. What Will loved so much about that building was the view he had enjoyed from this very spot the last two years. On this side of Simon Hall, there were six large stained glass windows. Each window had a figure from the humanities. Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Dante, Homer & Chaucer.

It was like staring at a wall of saints in a Catholic church. It was one of the few times he ever felt reverent towards something. They were on display not for their fame, but for what their work did for humanity. Will knew his work would only amount to a fraction (if that) of what they did, each man in his only part of the Western world.

But they were gone, the openings where the windows used to be were remnants, and only three of them were completely in tact. He knew the building would be down by next week given the workers’ progress.

The day they shattered the glass Will was standing in the same spot. He watched despite his disapproval of the whole scene. The donor of the stained glass figures has
long since died, and despite some minor protest the university deemed the cost of
salvaging the windows (removal, cleaning, framing, hanging, upkeep) too expensive.
And that was that. Will finishes his cigarette and walks back inside the Union hoping the
second half of the symposium is better than the first.
Part Two:

Faceless Woman
Lily Zephyr came to town much like a gentle breeze that blows in the dead of summer, rustling the leaves on the trees and causing the Queen Anne’s Lace to sway. She was subtle, unnoticed by many, but swift in her approach, efficient. She had a plan and a destination in mind. She knew what she wanted, and she had the means to make it happen. She knew it would take some time, and although she was neither patient nor perseverant, she was focused. She focused on him.

It was a humid start to August in Athens, Ohio and the small college town was dead. The streets were nearly empty save a few parked cars and random people meandering in their summertime destinationless ways. Sure there were get-togethers and small festivals and farmers’ markets on weekends, but Lily wasn’t concerned with these activities, not unless he was there, walking from booth to booth from table to table, lingering to study something that caught his eye, a basket of ripe strawberries or a watercolor from a local artist.

She had called ahead, nearly three weeks in advance, to reserve a room at the Graybeard Suites apartment complex, one of the few places in town that rented month-to-month, a place she had found on the city’s website. She pulled her old, white Honda Civic into the parking lot where a large white sign with navy blue writing and a gray bird indicated her destination. It was a two-story Days Inn that had been repainted light gray. There were several cars in the lot, many in similar condition as hers. The unfamiliarity of the place combined with the amount of tenants, whether semi-permanent or not, gave her the feeling of anonymity.
The man she met at the leasing office of the complex was perhaps in his late sixties with long shaggy brown hair and a beard that was almost fully gray. He wore sandals, faded blue jeans, and a button-down flowered shirt. He told her that the students he rented to threw great parties, and that she wouldn’t have to worry about finding something to do. The lease was the only documented instance of her departure from New York to Athens, the only piece of paper with her signature. The rent was a meager five hundred dollars a month, utilities included, and she had enough to cover roughly six months into the future if necessary. If everything played out as she had imagined, she would be back in New York within a couple of months, back to her normal life, perhaps a new life.

Her boyfriend Nick wasn’t happy when she left. In fact, he hadn’t a clue where she was going. She had told him she’d be gone for a while, maybe even several months. She gave him an excuse often heard in relationships, the semantics of which are often dubious at best: time and self-discovery. She knew he would accept because she knew he cared about her. Sure, the notion of breaking up could arise, but that wasn’t an option, at least not in his position.

* * *

Her apartment was modest. Although the man at the office said he had remodeled everything, it looked like a hotel room. The room had a twin size bed, a small round table in the corner with two chairs, a loveseat, and a kitchenette, which consisted merely of a mini refrigerator, a small two-burner stove and oven next to the sink. Once she settled into her place, she set her sights on Athens University. From a prepaid cell phone, she
dialed the number for admissions. Once connected, it was only a matter of touch-tone options before she was talking to an admissions assistant, most likely an eighteen or nineteen-year-old student, about scheduling a campus visit. They set the date for the following Friday. She told the girl she was interested in majoring in philosophy and wondered if she would be able to talk with someone from the department the day of her visit.

“Of course,” the girl answered. “I’ll let their department know you’re interested. On the day of your visit they will have set up a kind of informal meeting with a current student or professor.”

Lily thanked the girl and ended the call. She grabbed her purse on the urge to take a walk and see a little bit of this town. She wanted to know what his new home looked like, to walk the streets he walked. Maybe she would spot a little café or a bench under the perfect tree, places he would have gone to in New York when he wanted to think or write. Where are you Will? she wondered.

* * *

She felt foolish sitting through all of the presentations about how great and exciting college life would be at Athens and how this part of the country was teeming with so much to do. She laughed to herself as she thought about all of the time she had spent with friends at the universities and colleges in New York, though she only ever attended CUNY for a couple of art classes. And this is all they’ll ever know about college. Lily had been here less than a week, but she felt that she had been caught in some type of limbo, one where people believe that a night of television is “something to do.” But she politely
collected the handouts and placed them in a folder with a picture of the university’s main entrance, a large stone archway with the university’s seal painted on the concrete below. In bold, white typeface on the bottom right were the words Athens University. Find Your Niche. She thought it rather strange to use the word niche for a marketing slogan.

Despite feeling out-of-place and rather bored from presenters attempting to feed the masses with the usual emotional nonsense about higher education, she was glad to learn the layout of the university with the help of a tour guide. Unlike the wide-eyed seventeen-year-olds who were eager to catch a glimpse of the college experience (although in the summer it is difficult to do so), feel a little more “grown-up,” and could give two shits about the location of one building to the next, Lily observed and noted where they went in relation to where she was staying. She made notes on the map she was given earlier that day. It couldn’t have been more than a five-minute walk to the campus, then roughly within ten minutes to any place on campus.

As the routine tour came to an end, prospective students were directed to current students who could better inform them about the major they were interested in. A girl with red hair, a fair complexion, and slender physique introduced herself, but Lily hadn’t paid attention to what her name was just the way in which she carried herself, like the girl was overcompensating for an insecurity of some sort. The girl with red hair led a group of seven or eight including Lily from the Student Union where the visit was being held down a long stretch of brick walkway that extended several hundred feet to James A. Gordon Hall, home to the Philosophy Department. The girl told them that the building’s layout was a little weird, but manageable.
“Expect to get lost a couple times, or make the wrong turn your first year here,” the girl said. “Hell, I know a couple of people who still wander the halls from time to time.”

Lily scribbled on her map. They entered the building, following the redhead, and twisted around hallways and up a flight of stairs and down another hallway and up what seemed to be a flight and a half of stairs until they were in a very short hall on the third floor facing a door labeled “PHILOSOPHY DEPT. / CLASSICS DEPT.” Someone asked why the building was like a maze, and the girl with red hair replied that the secretary knew all about that if anyone was really interested in hearing about it. She continued their brief excursion to a conference room inside the department walls, and told them more about their future in Athens University as philosophy majors.

As the conference room cleared and the redhead had finished what was really just a self-involved recollection of her achievements at Athens, Lily was ready to find him. She wanted to know where his office was and where he lived and what he did in his spare time in this middle-of-nowhere place. All she had to do was ask, but in a natural way, not too prying. *Calm, cool, and not so obvious. You need to seem genuine.* She walked to where the secretary sat. The woman smiled at the other students that passed her desk on their way out, wishing them the best.

“I heard you’re the person to talk to if I want to learn more about this oddly designed building,” said Lily.

“Uh oh. Who told you that?” said the secretary, mocking suspicion. She looked to her right then to her left.
“Oh, I’m sorry. It’s just that—” Her behavior caught Lily off-guard.

“I’m only kidding,” she said. “People make it sound so cryptic when they say I know its history. It’s just a silly obsession. Have you seen the whole building?”

“No.”

“Then why don’t we walk around and I can tell you a little more about it.”

“Do you mind if we begin in the department?” Lily asked. “I figure if I decide to enroll in the fall, I’ll have an idea of where people and places are.”

“That sounds good. My name is Sylvie, by the way.”

“I’m Elli.”

They shook one another’s hands, and Sylvie led her around the department, first stopping at the office directly behind her desk. The door was open.

“Hey, Harvey. I’ll be away from my desk for a few minutes giving this prospective student a short tour of the building.” She looked at Lily. “You will be seeing a lot of Dr. Buchanan if you decide to be here.”

A man in khakis and a light green collared shirt looked up from his desk. He stood and walked toward them.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you…”

“Elli.”

“Elli, I hope you choose to matriculate in our institution.” He stared intently at her.

“You know, so many people in current times regard philosophy as a dead discipline. It’s a breath of fresh air when we see new faces in the department, people who are really interested. I really hope you choose Athens University. If there is anything I,” Lily
noticed Harvey glance at Sylvie as she made wide eyes at him, “excuse me, we can do for you, please let us know.”

“Thank you,” said Lily.

They left his office, continuing through the department.

“Dr. Buchanan can be overly friendly to people sometimes,” said Sylvie.

Lily just smiled and Sylvie pointed to offices, providing the designated name of the professor to whom each belonged. And then they stopped outside of his office. She stared into the window of his door. She knew she would see him soon. Like he had never left.

“Do most professors stay away from their offices during the summer? Like William Thierry for example.” She pointed to the black nametag on his office door. She ran her finger over the lettering.

“Well, Will is a visiting lecturer and philosopher, so he stays away from the university most of the summer. Dr. Buchanan, the man you just saw, and I are usually the only ones here. Sometimes the other professors will turn up randomly for whatever reason.”

“He sounds like someone worth meeting,” said Lily. “Too bad he isn’t in his office.”

“He’s young and smart and just a sweet guy to be around.” Sylvie barely masked her affection toward the guy.

“So I take it the professors don’t live nearby?”

“Almost everyone in the department lives in the neighboring streets.”
They turned around and walked back to the entrance of the department.

“So it’s a pretty close knit group of people?” asked Lily.

“Some people have their differences, but I believe given our relatively small size, people are close. Sometimes we’ll even go out for drinks after events and such. The faculty, that is. Well I shouldn’t be talking to you about that.”

“It’s fine. I may look young, but I’m closer to thirty than I am twenty.”

“I would’ve never guessed.”

“No one does. So where is a good place to go for drinks?”

“We go to Moe’s because the food there is so good. It’s never too crowded. There are two floors. Then again, we usually go pretty early in the evening. Dr. Buchanan likes it so much he goes there a few times a week.”

“That’s neat.” *Neat?*

They continued walking down the stairs to the second floor.

“Now, about the history of the building.”

* * *

Lily wore a black dress and lipstick the shade of cranberries when she went to Moe’s for the second time. She ordered the same drink, a glass of pinot noir, and sat in the same seat, third stool from the end of the bar. What was different about tonight was the bartender. He was a stocky guy, possibly in his late forties, with a bald head. Some of the customers addressed him as Ray.

Lily looked good, sexy even, and she was aware of it. She didn’t want to draw too much attention, her dress was loose fitting and she wore black flats. Tonight was about
mystery and leaving something to the imagination. Her dark hair shined in the dim light of the bar as it lay in waves just below her shoulders. She waited. She had in mind what was in store for her, for the night, what she must do to set this in motion. Was she ready? Perhaps. She had to be. She wanted to be close to Will.

The first time she came here had been the night of the campus visit. She had worn a tight t-shirt and jeans, the clothes she had on that day. She was merely scoping the place out, getting a feel. A trial run. There were few if any expectations that night. She had ordered a glass of wine, and roughly twenty minutes later ordered something small off the menu. Her food was surprisingly good for a bar. Once she had finished, she left. On her walk home she wondered if this was what it felt like for Will, to feel out of sorts in a place so quiet and devoid of motion. Did he think about her his first night here?

This time was different. It was take one. A rather defining moment. Perhaps she would meet him or someone else who would become an important part of this. *What would I do if he walked through that door this very moment,* she thought. Maybe she would pretend she didn’t see him and wait until he noticed her. Or she would leave, and as she passed him, he would catch the scent of her perfume, a smell he would never have forgotten. But these were only scenarios she worked out in her mind to pass the time, possibly even preparing herself for the real thing.

And then Dr. Buchanan walked in, his hair combed back in a mix of black and gray. His eyes, his face seemed tired. He wore gray slacks and a navy blue button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled halfway up his forearms, revealing a silver watch. He moved
slowly to the bar, the heels of his shoes clicked as he walked on the worn hardwood floor.

Lily noticed a slight limp as he made his way to the bar. He sat one stool away from Lily.

“How’s it going?”

“Long day, Ray. Just glad to be sitting down and having a drink.”

“Maker’s Mark?”

“Make it a double with some ice.”

Lily sipped her glass of wine. She casually turned away from Harvey, enough so she wouldn’t draw his attention and he would recognize her as the student from orientation. There were two other people at the bar, a counter that comfortably seated eight people. Although it was six o’clock on a Wednesday, the booths along the walls were full of people eating food, whether families with children or couples just chatting away. Lily wondered if any of these folks were professors from the university; maybe someone other than Harvey knew Will. A half dozen black round tables with chairs were empty in the center of the place. They would probably fill as the night went on. Two servers, young girls probably college age, busily advanced from booth to booth, replacing drinks and taking orders. They booth wore short jean shorts and green t-shirts with white lettering on the back that read “Moe’s Place / Try Our Damn Near Famous Burgers.”

There was pop music playing in the background, but Lily didn’t notice a jukebox of any sort. She took another sip of wine.

“So you mean to tell me that the university is gonna shut you down?”

“That’s it in a nutshell, Ray,” said Harvey. “And really think we’re on the verge of doing something big. I hired the young guy with the notable book, and I arranged a
French philosopher to speak at this year’s conference. I was under the impression that the university was satisfied with the progress I made. But it’s always about numbers.”

Lily listened to their conversation. She wanted to know what Harvey knew. She wanted to plumb his mind of all the experiences he had had with Will. She wanted Harvey to take an interest in her. Harvey looked tired and somewhat vulnerable, and he had finished his drink rather quickly. He might order another, or maybe not. She thought about the way he looked at her and what Sylvie meant by what she briefly said about him. She couldn’t wait any longer.

“Sounds like you need a vacation,” she said.

Harvey and Ray both looked at her. She flashed her deep blue eyes at them.

“And maybe another drink,” she said.

“You’re telling me,” said Harvey. “People think being a professor is glamorous. It isn’t. You begin underpaid and overworked. You barely make enough to pay your mortgage, let alone any debt you’ve accumulated from student loans. At my age, you have your hand in so many other things like committees and boards and the general bureaucracy of it all. There’s about one year right in the middle of your career where you really are happy and fulfilled. That’s usually the time you’re on sabbatical.” Harvey laughed and shook his head.

She smiled at Ray, and looked back at Harvey. “Universities are the new corporations.”

“It sure goddamn seems like it.”
“At least you help people,” she said. “I just travel around the country and inadvertently wreck people’s lives.” She was sure he didn’t recognize her. He made no gesture that did.

“So what’s your game, hon?” asked Harvey.

“I’m one of the people that make it harder for you to claim something on your insurance. And if by chance you are able to claim it, you aren’t getting nearly what you should. But it’s the corporate model.”

“So then you’re not from around here.”

“If I was I think I’d have to be more careful walking to my car at night.” She sipped her glass of wine. “I’m originally from New York. I mean I still have a shoebox of an apartment on the Lower Eastside that I’m paying for regardless of how little I’m there. I’m here for a while on business.”

Harvey emptied his glass. He glanced at Ray, but the man was attending to a couple at the end of the bar. His gaze returned to Lily. “How long?”

“Long enough.” She smiled. “A few months.”

“Did your work put you up somewhere in town?”

“I’m staying at the Graybeard Suites.”

“I see they weren’t going for luxury. A lot of students there too.”

“In the small towns they never are. It was central, they rented month-to-month, and it was decently furnished. And as far as the clientele is involved, our company doesn’t bother with finding out demographics of the places where I stay. They pick the
hotel or apartment and I go. Sometimes I have a say, but I’ve never been to Athens, Ohio. It’s nothing special, but I’ve been in worse.”

Harvey looked again in the direction of Ray. Lily hesitated, thinking what she could say next. She couldn’t miss a beat. *Be consistent. Play it cool. Keep him hooked but wondering.* Then a thought popped in her head, one she had the day she checked in. Harvey put his finger up to grab Ray’s attention.

“So what’s the deal with the name ‘Graybeard Suites’?” she asked.

Harvey turned toward Lily and grinned. He began with something about the place being bought by one of the Athens’ townies, some burned out hippie. One of those guys who somehow, by luck, manages to find people foolish enough to invest in his projects despite his inability to successfully run a business. She watched him talk so effortlessly like the confident professor he likely was. She wondered what he thought about Will, what he knew about Will’s current life in this small town. Harvey continued on about how the old hippie was actually a guy he remembered when he went to college at Athens. The guy played guitar outside of the bars. When he bought the place, he intended on naming it Graybird Suites, but evidently he had smoked too much pot the day he was registering the business with the city, and when writing the name, had noticed someone in the office with a gray beard. This was just what Harvey had heard from a few people from around town, but Lily laughed and touched his arm and assuring him that she couldn’t believe that could actually happened. A few weeks after the place opened, Harvey continued, a city official told the guy the sign didn’t match the name he had
registered. So instead of paying the fee to change it in the registry, the guy just changed the letters on the sign.

“That’s funny,” Lily said, smiling. “And I thought the guy with the beard wearing the Hawaiian shirt at the rental office was good old Graybeard.”

“No. He grew it after the sign was changed. I guess to fit the persona.”

“You ready for another one?” Ray asked Harvey, finally returning from the other patrons.

“Let me get this one, Harvey,” said Lily. “That way I won’t be drinking alone in a strange town.”

“Nonsense. I should be buying you drink.”

“You get the next one.” Her grin was playful.

“Fair enough. But only if you tell me your name.”

“Elli,” she said hoping that didn’t spark a memory in his overworked alcoholic mind. “My name is Elli.”

Their conversation carried on for about an hour. Harvey had moved to the stool that previously divided them. They laughed. They flirted. Their commonalities were few, but Lily had chosen that pretext: arouse his interest, but don’t flatter him. The words she chose and the topics she talked about were a surprise to her. Never before had she been able to carry on such a successful impromptu conversation with acquaintances let alone a stranger. Then again, they were lies. Lies built out of omissions and half-truths. There was little, if anything, at stake on a personal level for Lily, but in the scheme of things to come, this was everything. It meant she would be a step closer.
Finally when there was a lull in the conversation, and a substantial amount of alcohol in their systems, she considered her next sentence. She knew it had to come, but it filled her with anxiety and the possibility of regret. What was regret, but just hindsight’s muddying and second-guessing of the past? She felt a knot in her throat that accompanied an ache in the bottom of her stomach. What would she be committing if she consented to, or more precisely, what would she be offering this man of possibly fifty-one or fifty-two that he wasn’t already aware of when he moved a seat closer to her?

Fuck it, she thought.

“Wanna come back to my place?”

The expression on Harvey’s face was one of being caught off guard, while simultaneously entertaining the thought. He glanced over to where Ray was standing. The man’s back was turned, and he was engaged in a conversation with another guy, clearly out of earshot. He looked back at Lily.

“I don’t know. It’s been a long day, and I need to get back home.”

“I’m just asking you to keep a girl company, no pressure.” And Lily figured by home, the man meant wife, but she didn’t want to say anything that might make him hesitate even more. Te less involved, the better.

“Okay, but leave first.”

Lily stood and walked toward the door. She smiled and winked at Ray as she walked by. He waved, but his face expressed something like suspicion. And then she was gone.

***
That night, Lily and Harvey slept together for the first time. The experience was one of speed and intensity. She had reservations about the whole thing, although they were few, which kept her from committing to the act one hundred percent. Sure she may have led him to the apartment, and, once inside, had been the first to react or put into motion, but she did so as a means to an end. If she could give him something he felt was worth coming back to again, then she might have some kind of pull over him. She wanted to get close, but not too close. She wasn’t after Harvey. She pictured herself next to Harvey and on his other side was Will. She needed to keep just enough distance between her and Will for the time being until she realized what she would do. And Harvey, she had the feeling, was a man that could get her to Will in a way that would truly have an impact, a lasting effect. But in this moment she was ready to let Harvey do to her what he wanted.

She saw the ring on Harvey’s finger, the one he clearly did little to hide, and the way he constantly glanced around the bar like a lookout waiting for that person with the lingering eye. The idea that this handsome, alcohol soaked fifty-something year old man was married didn’t bother her in the least. She had been with married men in the past or men with girlfriends, and knew something had to be lacking. Then again, men with money, some degree of power, and time on their hands just seemed to be bored and looking for excitement. The image of a middle-aged woman who was deadwood in bed came to her mind.

Despite taking the lead, she felt and discerned what he wanted. She thought it necessary to not only give him what he didn’t have, but give him nearly more than he could handle. The pace, quick and the passion, strong.
It was no time before they were naked, and she was riding him, grinding her flesh on his. At some point, he rolled her over and continued; his arms quivered as he seemingly struggled to be on top. He breathed heavy and softly bit her neck, his stubble scratching her clavicle. His hips dug into hers and she moaned, but was careful not to overdramatize it. *Pretend he can pleasure you,* she thought.

The only light in the room came from a street lamp’s glare through a small separation in the curtains. She opened her eyes and looked at his face. It was distinguished-like in the dark, the good features accentuated, almost exaggerated like a stone statue or a bust. She couldn’t see wrinkles or redness, the products of age and excessive drinking; the wear and tear from living was lost. The smell of bourbon on his breath might have been nauseating if she herself had not been drinking. His neatly combed hair was disheveled from the way he made love. It was as if he was losing himself in her. That was fine. She looked down where their waists met and noticed Harvey’s small gut covered with a light patch of mostly black hair, and for some reason found it endearing. There was something about this man that actually attracted her in some way.

When they finished, Harvey lay on his back and Lily on hers. She told him it was so good in a hushed tone. She didn’t want to flatter him too much, but silence could leave a person wondering the strangest things. Harvey’s chest rose and fell in a more moderate pace the longer he lay there.

“I want to see you again,” he said after a moment.
She was surprised to hear this so soon, although she had anticipated the possibility. She turned and looked at his face. Even in the faint light, she could see he wasn’t looking at her or in her direction, but rather at the ceiling. She wondered what he was thinking, if all philosophers thought the same thing after sex. Did they attempt to make some larger meaning out of it, or did they find the whole act too human to even put into words? She thought about Will and what he would do after sex. He’d put on a pair of his boxer briefs, grab a cigarette and a lighter and go sit on the sill of his window. He’d open the window just enough to let smoke out and light the cigarette. He’d look out the window a moment, the window overlooked Bleeker St., and then would tell her something about love. He’d smoke his cigarette, and say something like “no two people are meant for each other, which is why we should treat every romantic relationship as if it was the most important.” She didn’t always agree with what he said, but he seemed sage-like in those moments.

“I’m busy for the next few days,” she said, “but how about some time next week…in the afternoon.”

Soon he stood and turned on the light. He looked at Lily, his eyes gliding over her body. She assumed it was to see what he had had. She glanced at his penis, still flushed and somewhat swollen. She watched him gather his clothes and dress. He asked her for her number so he could take her out. She told him the number to her prepaid cell phone. He grabbed his cell phone from his jacket pocket and had her repeat the number while he typed it into his phone. Then he left.

***

“Hello.”
“Miss me?”

“I almost didn’t pick up. You’re number’s blocked.”

“I know. I picked up a cell phone before I left. It’s private.”

“Where are you?”

“So…do you miss me?”

“Of course I do. I haven’t seen you in almost a month. Really, where are you?”

“I told you. I’m traveling.”

“Where, Lily? Where are you traveling to?”

“I’m not traveling to anywhere. I’m already there. In Paris.”

“Paris?!”


“We could have gone together.”

“I told you I need to do this by myself.”

“I…I can’t believe this.”

“Don’t worry. I’m fine. I’m just staying in a hostel and seeing the sights.”

“I’m not fine. You say you need to get away with no real reason other than you want to travel, and now you’re in Europe. How are you affording this?”

“Don’t worry. It’s not expensive. I’m coming back, you know.”

“But when?”

“Soon. I love you. You know that, right?”

“It doesn’t seem like it.”
“I do. I told you, I just need to do this.”

“For how long?”

“I don’t know. I’ll be back sometime soon. I’ll call you again.”

“How soon?”

“I love you, Nick.”

* * *

Harvey took her to the city the next time they went out. He told Lily the restaurants were better, and they were, but the city was also thirty-five minutes north of Athens, and they would be less likely to see someone he knew. He picked her up in his burgundy Volvo SUV and took her to a reasonably priced restaurant, always paying cash. They called this a date, and continued to go out more frequently.

Lily enjoyed going out with Harvey, and she knew he couldn’t get enough of her. She was well aware of what most men thought of her once they got to know her. She was the woman men daydreamed about when they were driving in cars with their wives. The woman that made them forget about their children. She could not be kept. And Harvey was a distinguished and intelligent man who liked to drink and take her to nice restaurants. He was honest about his life and not so bad in the sack. But it was all held together by false pretense. She was here for information and control, not him, and if she could gain those, then she could accomplish what she set out to do. She wanted some kind of closure. And then back to her life, a real life, rather than this simulation. This wasn’t even an affair. Maybe he felt it was on his end, but he didn’t know her intentions
or the truth for that matter. She was determined to keep up the façade no matter what happened.

And then one day Harvey brought up Will. Sometime in early September, either during a dinner or sometime after sex, while Harvey smoked a cigarette by an opened window in her apartment. Harvey had made a habit of talking about his career, from the classes he taught to the money he received from donors to the meetings he attended to even the books his colleagues kept on their bookshelves. Lily listened with full attention to what Harvey had to say because at that moment he reminded her of Will in his apartment. Maybe she was intrigued by the amount of detail he recalled no matter how boring or seemingly insignificant the topic. She was flattered, as well, by his honesty. Nothing seemed like bragging or bullshit. He once said she was the only person with whom he cared to talk about absolutely anything. This should have meant something to her, and in another life they might have made this work, maybe. But it meant nothing. She had a purpose, and it couldn’t be lost in the fleeting emotions from one graying man’s obsessions or flatteries. She was reminded of this when he spoke of Will.

“All I’m saying is that Will is really making it seem like the whole conference depends on him, when in reality he’s just playing a part. All he has to do is not screw up and he’s done everything expected of him.”

“Do you tell him this?” asked Lily.

“Elli, if only I could tell him that. At this point in the game, he’s so full of self-doubt that all I do every time we're together is encourage him like a goddamn motivational speaker. ‘You’re the smarter one. You wrote a good book. It’s your time to
shine.’ And that’s just not true. People are there for Laroche, the guest speaker. That man is smarter. That man wrote a better book. That man is French. And that’s really what it boils down to. But now that I’ve told the faculty that there is a possibility that the university is closing the department, Will thinks it’s up to him to save it.”

“Maybe you should be straight with him.”

“I don’t know. He acts so stressed all of the time. That might just send him over the edge. I have more stress than that asshole, and you don’t see me acting like a crazy person.”

Lily thought about that. And then she asked Harvey to tell her more about Will. He seemed such an important person in his life. And Harvey did tell her about Will and that beside Tom from the department, Will was one of the most goddamn important people in his life. Will gave him something to look forward to. He was the best thing to happen to the department, and it made Harvey optimistic about the future because he felt that finally his program would do something notable. Lily smiled even though she felt sad that she wasn’t a part of this, and although her boyfriend Nick was one of the nicest and most confident people she knew, he would never be Will. Lily asked Harvey how Will ended up here, and so he told her everything leading up until now. He didn’t linger too long in details but gave her the gist. He caught her up on the last two years of his life, enough so that when he was finished, she had an aching feeling inside, more so than before. He had accomplished so much since he was in New York and she wasn’t a part of it. She wanted to be a part of it. She wanted to be next to him, but not yet.

***
Lily walked into Moe’s one Friday near the middle of September. She had seen Harvey’s SUV in the parking lot as she passed in her Civic. She got the idea to pull into the lot and see who Harvey was with. It wasn’t a strange kind of curiosity in the sense that she wanted to catch him doing something. She wanted to see who he usually spent time with on a normal evening out, if he wasn’t alone. Inside at the bar, she ordered a glass of her usual and took a menu. She opened it and glanced over its selections. She looked behind her and scanned the crowd of people. Sure enough she saw him in the corner of the room in a booth, Harvey and his wife, Anne. At least she assumed it was his wife. Harvey had never exactly described the woman but only mentioned her in passing. The woman was much younger and more beautiful than he had made her sound: short auburn hair cut just above the shoulders, thin with soft features, small breasts covered by a white cardigan, and a subtle smile that made her look easy-going. *Come to think of it,* she thought, *Harvey said very little about her.* Lily watched them as they talked and ate their dinner. There was something in their body language that suggested neither one was fully acknowledging the other. Although she could not hear their conversation, she knew the signs. The way they only looked at each other when they were talking. The way his wife continually looked around the room from face to face like she’d rather be a part of another party. Once the two women met eyes, and Lily played it cool. She didn’t look away immediately but allowed their gaze to last for a second longer than she would have. Then turning away, she took a sip from her glass. They didn’t look happy, perhaps only content. Lily had one thought: *Maybe she’s fucking someone else too.*
When Lily was finished with her meal and glass of wine, she paid the check. Harvey and Anne were finishing their drinks. Lily got an idea. It came so quickly, it filled her with a kind of momentary manic shiver. She stood and walked out of the bar and to her car in the lot. She got in and waited. About fifteen minutes later, the couple walked out to their vehicle. They left the parking lot of Moe’s and Lily followed. She didn’t know where they were going, but if they were heading toward the university, it had to be home. Harvey had never told her where he lived, most likely for fear of the two women meeting. Lily assumed this much.

The SUV turned down the street that bordered Athens U to the east. They made a left onto Walnut Street. Lily did her best to follow as far back as possible in her old Civic. About five houses in, they made a left into the driveway. Lily passed slowly, making sure she could identify the house the next day. But she wasn’t concerned with Harvey’s house as much as she was with Will’s. She remembered Harvey saying Will lived on the same street. So she drove to the end, unable to figure out which house was his but determined to make the trip as many times as she had to in order to find him. And she did.

Two days later, she was driving. She had gone down Walnut St., but there was no indication of what house he might live in. So she drove around town, thinking she might see the town. When she realized after about a half hour of driving that there was really nothing to see but some yellow and orange on trees and the same small, harmless neighborhoods, she drove back. She went the same direction on the street as before, passing Harvey’s house and then slowing down to what seemed to be a crawl. The day was warm, but she didn’t see people in their yards. Perhaps on Sundays, families were
eating lunch after church or visiting their grandparents. On a front porch she noticed a
guy sitting in a chair, reading. The closer she got, the more distinguishable his features
became. The guy looked younger with short, dark hair. She could tell he was smoking a
cigarette. And nearly a house a way she realized it was Will looking exactly as he did the
last time she saw him. He was lost in his book as he blew the smoke from his mouth. And
realizing how slow she was driving, she sped up until she reached the end of the street.

* * *

“This is not the way I wanted it to be, she thought. I could have pulled into his
driveway and we could have greeted each other properly, like friends do. The ache inside
her was more apparent now. She hated that she rushed this moment. It wasn’t fair to have
had to wait all of this time only to see him for a moment. She pulled into the Graybeard
Suites and parked her car. She wanted to go inside and just go to sleep and dream about
what it could have been like if she would have just pulled up to his house and said hello
and hugged him. With her face next to his, she could have said, “I’m sorry.” But she
wasn’t sorry. She just wasn’t.

* * *

“Nick.”

“Lily?”

“I miss you.”

“It doesn’t seem like it. Are you still in Europe?”

“No, I’m back in the states.”

“Where?”

“Maine.”
“Maine? Why are you in Maine?”

“I have family here.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“Do you miss me?”

“Why do you ask me that? Of course I do. I missed you the moment you told me you were leaving. When are you coming back? Are you even coming back?”

“Of course I am. I told you I would. I just want to spend time with family I haven’t seen in years.”

“I don’t know why you had to do this. It’s like I don’t matter to you. I don’t know why I’m putting up with this.”

“Because you love me, and you know I’m coming back.”

“I’m not sure that you are coming back. I’m just assuming I’ll never see you again.”

“You will.”

“When?”

“Next month. I’ll be back next month.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Can I at least have your number? I want to be able to reach you. I don’t want to have to wait another month.”

“I don’t know.”

“I just want to know that I have the ability to reach you.”
“You know I’ll see you soon.”

“Please.”


“A New York number?”

“I picked it up before I left.”

“Is this the same one you used in France?”

“Don’t be upset. I told you, I’m with my family in Maine. I’ll be home in a month.”

* * *

“So how is everything with Will?” Lily asked. They were driving to the city to have a late afternoon lunch, about fifteen minutes into the trip. Lily wore a black cardigan over a maroon shirt. Her dark blue jeans clung to her legs as she sat on the tan leather seat of Harvey’s vehicle. Harvey had on a light jacket, tan khakis and a navy button up shirt. He had already been drinking that day.

“Will seems good. A little more prepared. I talked to Laroche through email. His hotel is booked, one of the professors will pick him up from the airport, and I’m busy sifting through shit.”

“So when is the conference?”

“The weekend after next, which means I probably won’t be able to see you.”

“That’s fine. I figured that might happen.”

Lily’s mind wandered for a moment as she saw the road that crossed under the freeway and went into a wooded area off in the distance. She considered where that road
led, and if someone were trying to get to it from the freeway on which they were traveling, how that individual would go about it. Was it possible? Then she thought about the streets that dead end and then begin again on the other sides of buildings, sometimes streets apart.

“I was wondering, Harvey. What would you say if I told you I wanted to go to the conference? Not the whole thing. Maybe a part where you talk or lecture...like the symposium.”

“Why would you want to do something like that?”

“You talk so much about it. I would like to see what’s become of your planning, especially since it’s going to save your department.” She hooked her arm around his arm and squeezed it tightly.

“I don’t know if that’s such a good idea. There’s going to be a lot of people there.”

“All the more reason I should go,” she said. “I’ll blend in. Nobody knows who I am anyway.” She moved her right hand onto his thigh, her fingers inching up the inseam of his pants until her hand was on his crotch. “I’d really love to see you in action. I wouldn’t be there all that long.”

“I’d love to say yes, but I don’t think it will work.” He looked at her and then back at the road ahead. “With all of the shit I’ve had to deal with concerning the university and this goddamn conference, I want you separate from that. I want to leave all of that nonsense knowing you aren’t and won’t have to get tangled in it. I like the part of my life you exist in. I love my career, but not enough to expose you to it.”

Lily let go of Harvey and sat back in her seat. She stared straight ahead.
“I don’t know why you sound so emotional about the whole thing,” she said.

“You clearly don’t want me there. I get it. I won’t go.”

“Don’t be upset, hon. After the conference is over, we can see more of each other.”

“If I’m still here after that.” She noticed Harvey glance at her. He probably shot
her a look, but she didn’t care. “I just mean I don’t know how much longer I’ll be
working here. It’s been three months and that’s usually the duration of a project. I might
be leaving any day now.”

“Shouldn’t you know how much time you have left?” asked Harvey. “I would
think a person in your position would be privy to that knowledge.”

Harvey’s inquiry caught her a little off guard. She wasn’t considering the
specifics of her façade when she spouted off her empty threat. Consistency, you idiot.

“Of course I know how much work I have, roughly. It was just an empty threat,
Harvey. I just want to make the most of this before it ends.”

Although she spoke the words, she didn’t mean them. Lily had other things in
mind, but in order to execute them, she needed to be more proactive. She needed to know
about the lives of these people. She had to connect with Will in some way.

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Lily was determined to appear at the conference, and she wanted her presence
acknowledged. What a waste of time to show up and have no lasting impact on anyone.
She had already spent what seemed to be over two lonely months in a place she neither
liked, nor enjoyed. Cooped up in this shitty fucking apartment in this shitty town in the
middle of nowhere, she thought. I’m stuck fucking a guy nearly twice my age and still no
chance at Will. She wanted to cry, but she knew it was a waste of time. Much like these last few months.

She sat at the head of her bed, legs crossed in lotus position. Flipping through the channels only made her want to turn the television off, which she did. She sipped a cup of licorice tea. *I should be in his house, begging him to take me back. Tell him things will work out this time.* She believed things would work out this time only if she broke it off with Nick and just agreed more with Will about how she didn’t always need to be out and doing things that would be constituted as wild or compromising situations. But did it matter what she did if she truly loved him?

When he had left New York, she had been much more forceful. She had spread vicious lies, had someone bruise her in ways that resembled abuse, and she had even confronted his coworkers and members of his family, giving them reason to doubt Will. And he wasn’t there to defend himself because he had already left, or already decided to leave. She didn’t want him to leave her. But after that day in Central Park when they fought, and Will had been beaten up by those guys, she just left him there. She knew she should have said something, but she was so mad that day. It wasn’t her fault that someone wanted to stand up for her. At least someone was actually willing to come to her defense. At least she still had Nick.

She couldn’t be forceful or as confrontational as before, because this time it would likely have little effect. She wasn’t a part of his life anymore. People didn’t know her. Sure, she knew Harvey, and with a little more time, she could probably make him do anything. What she realized with him was his connection with Will. Would he really
betray Will? Maybe if Will had done something to him. But people clearly loved him here. He was settled into a small job in Ohio and if she did anything, everyone would know about it. She played with ideas in her head, what she could have done. She could have arrived at the beginning of the school year, and hung around the university. She could have followed him home on occasion, visited his places of leisure, met some of his friends and coworkers, or even spread the obligatory rumor. Hell, she could have enrolled as a student in the classes he taught: fifteen weeks of staring into her eyes and pretending that everything was normal. *Why didn’t I do any of that?* It could drive a person crazy, and this time had to be different. She had made it nearly impossible for him to stay in New York when he said he didn’t want to be with her. Hell, he didn’t even really tell her to her face that he didn’t want her. He just left. And she didn’t want crazy. She wanted despair, paranoia, no way out.

She pulled out a photo from her purse. It was a polaroid of Will and Lily that she had taken when they were lying in bed in his apartment one night. He had been reading and she grabbed the camera, pushed his book down and told him to smile. In the photo, Lily was smooshing her face into Will’s cheek. She looks at the photo and puts it back into her purse.

It had to be subtle, yet intrusive. But she couldn’t be there. She had to seem more like a presence, something ghostlike or ethereal. Will had no idea she was here, which made her feel like she had accomplished nothing. She sat on her bed, head resting back on the wall. She closed her eyes and continued to think. And then the idea came to her, subtle and simple. His home, his office, the conference. She knew where she needed to be.
* * * 

The first day of the conference could have been very boring for Lily, but she made use of the gathering of philosophers. First, she took a stroll around the university. It functioned as usual. The only differences were the signs posted for the conference and the reserved parking near the student union for the attendees.

She wore tight, dark blue jeans and black slip-on shoes; she had a black shirt under a maroon cardigan; she smelled of sweet lavender. It was mid-October, and the air was cold. Occasionally a breeze blew her long dark hair. She walked near the parking lot but didn’t notice Harvey’s SUV. She gazed at the Student Union but nothing caught her eye. She continued following a walkway that eventually led to Gordon Hall. Once she was there, Lily went to the back of the building where the parking lot was located. Sure enough, there was Harvey’s Volvo right next to what she believed to be Will’s old, black BMW. That is if he still had the thing.

Lily walked into Gordon Hall through the back entrance. She walked quickly down the hall and took the stairs to the second floor. When she got to the stairs leading to the third floor, she stopped. She felt nervous, but she needed to do this. She took the stairs to the third floor and entered the philosophy department. She expected Sylvie to be sitting at the desk, she had even concocted a story to tell the woman about getting a form to whomever, but there was a young guy sitting at the desk.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

“Where’s Sylvie?”
“She’s at the conference, but she should be back within the hour. Do you need to leave a message?”

“No. I’m just dropping off something for Will.”

“His mailbox is over there.” The young guy points to his left at the row of faculty mailboxes.

“I’ll just slide it under his door.” She turned and walked quickly down the hallway and around the corner to his office. She pulled out the picture, kneeled and slid it under the door. She stood and walked back to the front desk. She thanked the guy and left.

Once outside, she left campus, crossed a street that led to Main Street, and started down Walnut Street. Her pace was steady, neither quick nor leisurely. She glanced at Harvey’s place as she passed. The two-story colonial with tan siding and white trim was clearly vacant. The yard was well kept, which signified pride in one’s property, or at least the time to landscape, but it didn’t hint at the individual that lived there.

Lily didn’t dwell too much on Harvey or his house or his life. There was little about him that concerned her, but the closer she came to Will’s place, the more anxious she became. Why did she care so much?

She stopped when she arrived at the walkway to his front porch. His front yard was small, making his house seem too close to the sidewalk. A few concrete squares connected the sidewalk to his porch. She saw a sun-bleached, wooden Adirondack chair next to a small table made of the same sun-bleached wood with an ashtray in the center. She walked onto the porch and sat on the chair.
In the ashtray were a few butts. She pulled a pack of Djarum Blacks from her bag. She took out the cigarette and lit it. The small object crackled as she inhaled. She blew the scent of cloves out of the side of her mouth and tapped the cigarette on the brim of the ashtray. The idea of someone seeing her did not bother her. When she finished, she left the last bit burning in the ashtray, and then walked around to the back of the house.

Like she thought, there was a back door, which looked like the original. She tried the doorknob. Locked. She glanced around. From her vantage point, she was out of sight from windows of neighboring houses that might hold curious eyes. She took a credit card from her bag, and hoping the door wasn’t bolted, slid the card between the edge of the door and the jam. Stiffly, she jabbed the card in the direction of the latch and feverishly turned the knob until it clicked. The door popped open, and she quickly stepped inside.

In front of her were two sets of steps: one that clearly led to the basement, and one that was probably the kitchen door. Ascending the three steps, her heart beat fast and her palms broke a sweat. She wiped her hands on her pants and turned the knob of the closed door. It creaked as she opened it into the kitchen. She peaked her head around the door, looking in all directions.

The kitchen was simple and plain: cream colored walls, white appliances, light oak cabinets, an old green linoleum floor, a table with two chairs, and extremely clean. The kitchen led to the dining room, which was void of furniture. She crept softly through each room. To her left was the living room with more cream-colored walls and light oak floors, but this was clearly the room he had guests sit. There was a boxy, brown leather sofa and an armchair to match positioned around an oval shaped coffee table. On the front wall
was a fireplace with bookshelves on each side full of books. A single lamp stood in the far corner. *So this is how you’re living these days*, Lily thought. Even for a single guy, these were rather stringent surroundings. She passed the front door and turned to walk up stairs.

The second level had two bedrooms and a bathroom. The one bedroom had a handful of brown boxes, some open and some taped close. *Packing or unpacking.* Will’s bedroom door was open like the other room. Again, it was clean and plain like the rest of the house. The only furniture was the basics: a chest of drawers, a queen size bed, and a nightstand with a digital alarm clock on it. The bed was made, and there wasn’t a ruffle in the gray comforter.

Lily sat on the bed. She bounced, checking its firmness. Then she stood, placed her small bag on the nightstand, and pulled back the covers. She lay down on her back and pulled the covers up to her chin. She turned on her side and caressed the mattress. She turned once more, and on her stomach, put her face in his pillow. She breathed in deeply through her nose. The pillow smelled faintly of him, as if he had just left the bed. In a way, it turned her on. She put her hand down her pants and touched herself as she dug her face into his pillow. She wanted him to be here with her the way he had been before. He wanted him to touch her, to be inside of her. She thought of the relationship that never officially ended. And if they had been married, they would only be separated. Why couldn’t she live in this house with him?

Once she finished, she lay there on her stomach and turned her head to face the window. She could see the branch of a red maple tree; some of its leaves had turned a
bright crimson. The leaves looked like flames and if the wind blew, the flames would scatter and scorch nearby houses and set fire to other trees until all of Athens was burning. She grabbed the other pillow on the bed and pulled it close to her. She closed her eyes and dozed off.

She popped up, startled. She looked around frantically until she saw the red numbers of the clock. She had only been asleep for a few minutes. Finally, she got up leaving the covers disheveled. She reached inside her bag and pulled out a bottle of her perfume. She sprayed it on the bedding. Vigorously she pumped the little bottle with her index finger until she lost patience and snapped the nozzle off. She dumped the remaining contents of the bottle on the bed like a priest anointing with oil. The room filled with the aroma of sweet lavender.

Lily left the room and walked downstairs, through the house to the back door. She locked and shut it behind her. She made her way down the driveway the same as she had come.

* * *

The next day was a very different process. First, she showered and got ready around noon. Next, she called the philosophy department and was told the time of the symposium. Then she went for a walk downtown and smoked a few clove cigarettes. She felt strange having walked through Will’s house and lay in his bed. It left her with none of the feelings she used to have in his apartment. In this small town in the middle of nowhere, she felt alone and out of place. She didn’t feel like herself. The lack of motion and noise in her life made her feel anxious and stir crazy. Eventually she wandered into a small café
where she ordered a turkey croissant and a bowl of tomato bisque. Once she finished, she walked back to her apartment and waited.

Lily arrived late to the symposium. She had taken the opportunity to look beforehand at the auditorium where it was being held and decided it was too small for her to arrive safely early and just sit and wait. She wanted to be noticed, but only from a distance. The auditorium was known as Burns Theatre and was located in the Student Union. The secretary had told Lily that the symposium was the last event of the evening, scheduled for 7 p.m. So around seven-fifteen, Lily strolled into the Union, grabbed a cup of coffee from the Starbucks, and walked to the closed double door with a sign above it labeled “Burns Theatre.” She sipped her coffee and quietly opened the left door and slipped inside.

The lights had been dimmed in a way that highlighted the stage. Lily lingered in the back so as not to draw attention to herself. She sipped her coffee. Harvey had finished saying something and introduced Will to begin the discussion. Lily didn’t pay much attention to what they were saying. Seeing Will for the first time in over two years produced mixed feelings. She wanted to run onto the stage and kiss him on the mouth and tell him how much she ached to be with him. Then she wanted to throw her cup of coffee in his face and tell him what a son of a bitch he was for leaving her. For never saying goodbye. Oh the look of surprise and sadness on his scalded face. Finally, she saw an open seat about five rows from the stage. She waited as Will stared at the audience while he talked. He then looked at a man on the panel of people. At this moment, Lily calmly
made her way down the left side aisle until she came to the row. She excused herself as she shuffled past each person until she arrived in her seat.

The men on the stage talked for nearly forty-five minutes. Lily watched both Harvey and Will, but she didn’t hear a thing. Her thoughts were elsewhere: the maturity of Harvey matched the virility of Will; the combed back graying hair and broken capillaries in Harvey’s cheeks; the shapely dark eyebrows and soft young skin of Will’s face, the way her hand felt in his short gelled hair. *Would they physically fight each other if the circumstances called for that?* When a swell of applause began, Lily became aware of her surroundings. She looked at Will again whose face looked distraught, the way it had when he caught her with Nick.

“There will be a ten minute break,” said Harvey, “and then we will resume with the question and answer portion of our evening.”

The men walked off stage as the lights were turned up. People’s chatter filled the room, some stood, while others remained seated. Lily wondered how she could get their attention, even if only just a look, without having be the one to do it. She looked at the young man sitting next to her.

“Excuse me.”

He turned his head toward her. “Yes?”

“How exactly does the Q and A work?”

He made a strange face as if implying, “You don’t know?”

“I came in late,” said Lily, “so I missed the introduction.”
“You raise your hand and someone brings you a microphone. Then you ask a question based on the first half of the symposium. It’s that simple.”

“This probably sounds strange, but I have a question and I’m hoping you might be able to ask it for me. I get extremely nervous in front of crowds, especially of this size. I forget what I’m going to say and become a stuttering mess. It’s so embarrassing.” Lily smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

The young man she proposed this to couldn’t have been older than twenty-three. She thought he seemed nice enough.

“Sure. I don’t mind as long as I don’t have to try to explain anything.”

“No. You shouldn’t have to do anything other than ask my question.”

“Okay.”

Lily had read Will’s book, even though she hadn’t been listening to the men talk, so she had something in mind.

“The question is theoretically, what is the end of philosophy? And direct it to William Thierry.”

“That’s it?”

“Yes. That’s it.”

* * *

“We’re going to begin with the question and answer portion of this evening.” Harvey took a sip of water from the glass on his podium. “This will be roughly a half hour to forty-five minutes depending on the number of questions and the length of their answers. I apologize if we cannot get to them all.”
Lily looked at the guy next to her and whispered, “Please try to be first.” He nodded and raised his hand. The auditorium lights were turned up, and every face was visible in the audience. Lily was glad that she would have to do very little on her part for them to see her. She may have been a face in the crowd but would soon be the pretty face next to the guy asking the first question.

“You, sir, in the…” He trailed off as he pointed to the man next to Lily. “Blue.” Harvey was no longer looking at the man who had stood to ask a question, but locked eyes with Lily. She smiled and he noticeably sighed. From what Lily could tell, he was even chewing the inside of his cheek.

“This question is for Professor William Thierry,” said the young man in blue. He continued with the question.

Lily’s eyes moved from Harvey to Will, and sure enough he was staring at her, clearly dumbfounded. It appeared that all expression and color had left his face. The young man finished the question, but Will stared at Lily as if in a trance. She didn’t waver in her expression; she was as stoic as ever. With Harvey, the smirk was necessary. It signified playfulness and not malice. But with Will, it was something of a different nature. She felt a sense of heaviness as they looked at each other. It wasn’t necessarily heavy, but rather dense. So dense that it would take all her will to turn her head. She felt as though they were the same person connected in a way. Discretely moving to Will’s home in the Midwest, the affair with Harvey, walking inside Will’s house like she was his lover, and always being at arm’s length from Will knowing full well that she could see him if she wanted were all pieces of this weird puzzle. And finally in his presence,
their surroundings faded like an old tube in a black and white television. The look. That’s all it was, and it put Will in a catatonic-like state. *I’ll always find you*, she thought.

“Will, I hope you can answer the man’s question,” said Harvey, “seeing as you developed the theory.”

There was laughter.

Will came to and glanced at Harvey whose eyes were the size of saucers, and then back at the young man in blue. “I’m sorry. Do you mind repeating that?”

The man repeated the question and Will and the French philosopher discussed the matter for a brief five minutes. For the rest of the session, Will kept looking at Lily. She knew she had him. She had made her impression.

When the Q and A came to an end, Lily exited the auditorium as hastily as possible. *If this is going to work, she thought, we can’t meet just yet.* She left the Student Union through the closest door. The air outside was cooler. She brought her cardigan close to her body and walked in the direction of her apartment. After a few steps, panic seized her. What if he actually tries to follow me? She began running and reached a pace she didn’t think she was capable of. And she ran, bag bouncing off her back. She neared the edge of campus and turned onto Main Street. It was only a few more blocks and she’d be away from it all.

***

The next day around ten in the morning, Lily’s phone rang. It was Harvey.

“Hi there,” she said.

“What the hell, Elli?”
“You said you wouldn’t be surprised if I showed up. You could have fooled me.”

“Well I was. Believe me. You could have really fucked things up if someone recognized you.”

“But no one did, because no one knows me. You should calm down. I left as soon as the Q and A was over. No harm done.”

“It didn’t make my night any easier.”

“I finally got to see you in action. So what happened to you protégé? He clammed up.”

“Will? I don’t know. He was fine during the discussion, even though the Frenchman was at his throat. I really don’t know. One minute he’s fine, the next he’s speaking like he’s on a delay.”

“Maybe he saw a ghost?”

“That’s one way of putting it.”

“Did it ruin your night?”

“No. I think all in all it was a success. Though he did act strange the rest of the night or what was left of it for him.”

“What do you mean?”

“He was really out of it when we got to Moe’s. You could say he seemed edgy or paranoid.”

“Hmm…I wonder what spooked him.”

“Maybe stress. Anyway, when do I get to see your pretty ass again?”

“How about right now? I’m still in bed, and I’m wearing nothing.”
“I don’t know if I can make it over now. Anne wants me to eat lunch with her aunts.”

“The offer stands all day.”

“Maybe.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

* * *

“Hello.”

“Lily, what’s going on?” Nick asked, nearly shouting.

“Nothing. Are you alright?”

“Where are you? You said you’d be home by now.”

“Calm down.” Lily got up from her bed and began pacing around the apartment. She chewed the nail of her index finger. “I’ll be home soon. I’m still in Maine.”

“Bullshit. What’s going on?”

“Don’t yell at me. Nothing’s going on. I’ll be home in a few days.”

“I was just on the phone with Will, and he said he saw you. Several people saw you.” He paused, but Lily hesitated. “Well.”

“. . .I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Will thinks you’re in Ohio. In Athens.”

“That’s... absurd.”

“He doesn’t happen to think so. He’s acting all nervous and weird.”

“I haven’t seen Will in years. You know that.”

“He thinks you’re stalking him, fucking with his head.”
“Well I’m not. I’m nowhere near Ohio or him.”

“I don’t like this. It’s really weird. I haven’t talked to the guy since he moved away, and he calls me out of nowhere claiming that you’re stalking him. That you’ve been inside his home.”

“I’m not fucking stalking him, and I’ve never been in his home.” She took the phone and hit the bed several times before bringing it back to her face. “He always does this. He makes me out to be the weird one.” She started to cry.

“Well he’s questioning me like he’s a cop and asking me where you are and what you’ve been doing. I can’t even answer those questions.”

“You don’t believe him, do you?”

“I really don’t know what to believe at this point. You up and leave because you need to get away and travel. I don’t hear from you for months at a time. I don’t even know if you’re with your family right now.”

“So what are you saying?”

“People who love each other don’t do this. And maybe you should just stay where you are. Maine. France. Ohio. Wherever it is you are.”

The last conversation she had with Nick had drained her of the hope she had of returning to a life she once lived. She figured there was little chance to repair things with Nick. But it was Nick that told her that she needed closure with Will if she would ever move on with her life. Nothing felt closed. It all felt wide open. She was not grounded. There was nothing she felt connected to. She felt like a vague idea at this moment, floating. Even though she had been living apart from Will for the last few years, he never
left her mind. In her thoughts, memories, dreams, and nightmares and everywhere she went, she wished he were there with her. He haunted her as she now haunted him. And that’s how she came to be with Nick. Will’s best friend, he was the person who knew him best. He was the person who anchored her in the past and in her present. It was the way she could always be close to him. Now she was close to Will and far from Nick, but it all felt lost, and she felt alone and estranged.

What was the point? She had felt good, as if everything was coming together. Why hadn’t she thought that Will would call Nick? She assumed the wedge that had driven them apart also cut all types of communication. Clearly she was wrong. But it had to be getting to Will, or else he wouldn’t have interrogated Nick with so many questions. This was the progression of things that would bring it all to the end. An end where Will listened to Lily’s feelings and would realize that they were meant for each other, that the two years apart had actually been begging the two people to reunite. This was the point. Or was it eroding away and turning into shit? Would she do something that would push him away forever? She needed something drastic, something that would send everything on a collision course. She had to push him over the edge.

She called his phone. She got his number from Harvey’s phone. One evening when he was at her apartment, he used the restroom after sex and she found Will’s number and entered it into her phone. It was simple, but necessary.

It rang and went to voicemail. She did her best to settle herself so her message would sound somewhat intelligible. After the tone, she didn’t say anything for a few seconds. Finally, she spoke. “Will. It’s Lily. Uh…I’m at the Graybeard Suites in Athens.
My room is 203 if you want to catch up. If not, that’s fine, but I think it would be really good to see you. Bye.”

She felt nauseated. She didn’t want to be so direct, but what choice did she have? If they were going to be knowingly in each other’s lives again, then either she would have to put herself out there or he would. The phone call assured her that this was now an imminent possibility.

Harvey was supposed to come over later in the day, so Lily thought a shower would take her mind off the call she had just made. There was so much going on in such a small space, she couldn’t believe after all this time of moving slowly and somewhat methodically, she would just let it all explode or implode. Something was coming apart.

So she undressed and took a shower. She let the water run over her pale body, the heat of the water flushed her skin. She stood there for several minutes just feeling the hot streams of water hit her flesh. Then she washed her body and shampooed and conditioned her hair. When she was finished, she turned off the water and wrapped herself in a white towel, and blow-dried her hair. She dressed in tight blue jeans and a light gray zip-up hooded sweatshirt. She didn’t bother to put on socks or shoes because she hadn’t planned to go anywhere. She went to the kitchenette and took a box of licorice tea out of the cupboard. She poured a mug of water from the tap and placed it in the microwave for two minutes. When the timer went off, she put a bag of the tea in the hot water and let it steep. She didn’t know if Will would call her back, but he seemed to be interested that she was here. Maybe after she saw Harvey tonight she would up and leave. Perhaps if she were to never confront Will, her elusiveness would leave a lasting mark.
And then there was a knock at the door. She waited, unsure, thinking that Harvey wasn’t supposed to be at her place until later. She walked to the door, unlocked and opened it. In the doorway stood Will.

Part Three Synopsis

This part is a continuation of part one. Similar in structure, it follows the shift between first person monologue and third person narrative. The section begins with Anne lamenting her and Will’s interrupted plans of moving to Paris because of the murder. She accuses Lily of being at fault for all of this, even though Lily is the one who lost her life.
She tells the story of what really happened between Will and Lily and the beating he endured in central park because of her.

The third person narrative follows Will more closely in this section. His realization that Lily is near mixed with his fear that she is going to ruin his life again has made him extremely paranoid. He’s locked himself in his house for an entire week, disregarding his job and friends, doing his best to figure out how and why she is here. Harvey and Anne approach Will at different moments in time in order to help him, but his mental instability makes them each skeptical and Anne distraught. After that week of solitude, Will goes back to class, but recruits student Jack Ballard to help him spy on Harvey after he follows the man to the Graybeard Suites. Jack sees Harvey and a dark haired woman (Lily) in the apartment and is only able to relay vague information before Jack leaves because of the whole situation. Will tells Anne that Laroche declined to have him come to Paris. Will receives a call from Lily and in the same day goes to her apartment to finally confront her. She tries to reconcile things but Will is too far gone for reconciliation. He demands that she leave, but she tells him she’ll always know where he is. And through a series of threats and continued arguing, Will finally kills her. He thinks of running away, because he realizes he’s the only one who knows he’s here. In the end he gives himself up.

There are more monologues from a few students who have witnessed Will’s later instability during this time and note specific instances of that. Harvey gives the reasoning behind his relationship with Elli/Lily. Elizabeth gives the state of the department after the whole ordeal has occurred. The reader learns that the enrollment increased and the
philosophy program continued because the attention brought on by the scandal and the murder. Tom gives the final monologue and chapter of the book, which tentatively addresses the absurdity of what went on in this group of people.