

The Devil Travels Backwards

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A man is tormented by the death of his family as he tries to confess his love to a friend.



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â On the darkest of days, if we choose to forgo opening our mouths, to speak, and enlighten others of our ensconced pain, that pervasive gloom shall ensue our only enemies.â ---RIP Jack and Judith Bellington

Jarras was not intimidated by the slope that lay before him. Grass all around him was pendulously nodding in a gentle breeze. Arms crossed in admiration, he gazed with a *vignette* frame at a half-shaded meadow where the slope leveled. The meadow was chartreuse green and clear of woods except a heaven-teasing tree in the center; the tree emblazoned a wet-wood, black-bark color and flaky texture, while the tendrils had grown in such an oddly wicked way that Jarras wondered if oozed sap had solidified themâ just as gel in fussy hair fastens a desired, possibly strange, coiffure.

At Jarrasâ feet was a trail of orange flowers sliding downhill to where it traversed the width of the meadow. The path evoked the allure of the yellow brick road in *The Wizard of Oz*. Sadly, Munchkins with squeaky voices werenâ t wadding around like obese penguins, and there wasnâ t a pretty lady in a light blue dress with ruby slippers named Dorothy. No, sir, there definitely wasnâ t that. *But* there was orange. Still, in spite of the allure, Jarras had never followed the orange path down to the meadow. Each time he had tried to reach the meadow, he was transported away against his will.

When patience and devoutness finally bolstered his confidence, protecting it from the moral illusory that tempted him to veer in doubt of his actionsâ of the love he feltâ and of the sacrifice he contemplated and executed, Jarras would be ready to enter the meadow. That very notion had been the prerequisite. And this time was different, he thought. Although his life was bombarded with uncertainties, Jarras knew he was in love and would do anything to sustain his growing affection. Love supplied him with an exotic challenge, one he craved and survived on. Love punished him to a swain position, though; there, he stood.

Casting long shadows of Jarrasâ s skinny frame on the bright half of the meadow, the low sunlight warmed his back as he peered for a great length of time, a duration matching the effects of hypnosis. Flashbacks came and went at the speed of a poorly constructed montage in an 80â s boxing movie. But, Jarras had thought hard, just as the sun mulls its relinquishing to the moon for hours.

Suddenly, he shifted to face the brightness of the sun and inadvertently diluted the yellowy sunlight to an orange hue. The color appealed to him. But the radiant, austere-orange of the sun was still more yellow than the crowded orange flowers sliding down the hillside and into the meadow.

Defined orange, the purest of shades, indulged Jarrasâ obsession. Yet, then, the sun was too yellow without a stain of red to balance and capture his fascination. Wrenching around, Jarras faced the hillside again. The precipice was unkindly familiar, eliciting memories of unfinished business, of unresolved tasks he had made up his mind about long ago. *Déjà vu* was part of his curse; he frequently awoke and was warped to the same place, that same meadow. A burdened mind does not stray far from the roots of its problematic gravity. Jarras knew he ought to follow the orange trail that traverses the meadow, and he had concluded that dreams ago. Feeling prepared, antsy, Jarras timidly leaned forward so much so that he could have tumbled over; a soft wind nudged him forward, and he cascaded with the flowers. His ankles brushed soothingly on the supple orange pedals as he settled to a carefree jog amid the mid-shin-high flowery drape. Physically, Jarras could just mildly perceive the exertion; whereas, emotionally, he interacted with the momentum carrying him with ease.

Jarras undeniably adored orange. Orange *was* her. Orange *was* Guinevere. Nonetheless, the significance of Orange was not solely bound to her alone. Orange embodied *his* love for her. Orange appeared as the finest of

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colors to him. It had neither the blind vivacity of yellow nor the shameful chaos of red. That thought digressed at the capricious weight of a peculiar wind which straddled Jarrasâ slender body, a rather silent and coalescent wind slanting grasses around him, swooshing with vigor that solicited him to travel the orange path towards the lone tree, which obstructively grew in the middle of the orange path. Jarras succumbed to the excitement and ran for the odd tree, thinking of her and how she used to whisper secrets in his trusted ear in such brilliantly shady solitude found under a large tree on a sunny day.

A swarthy crow, giggling and flying upside down and backwards, swooped above the meadow, circled the lone tree and perched on the odd limbs, facing Jarras. Rubyâ s reflected in the crowâ s eyes, disturbingly enough to hypnotize Jarras to a stop yards away from the tree. The crow discontinued giggling and raked without loss at him for several minutes. By flapping its wings, the crow dismounted from the limb and flew into a cloudy horizon, where the sun had been. Jarras inspected the odd tree again. The base of the trunk was large and the roots disrupted the earth and the fluidity of the orange path.

If the tree is removed, perhaps orange will grow stronger and spread to here and unite the path, Jarras reasoned. The whole world grew a shade darker as if the grayness had branched out over all. But the subtle change was not unusual to Jarras, for it is where he already residedâ it is where he had suffered for so long. He felt his hand grip a long wooden handle, which materialized into a shovel. In his opposite hand Jarras suddenly clenched a bottle of poisonous substance that would kill the roots of the giant treeâ :

HUM! HUM! HUM! A black cell phone on a three-legged nightstand next to a bed erupted with fierce vibrating bursts as the front screen beamed with cobalt glow behind the white-lit time. Vibrations continued until the phone edged over the side of the nightstand and crashed onto the dusty hardwood floor beside an uneven stack of books. *CLUNK!* Jarras flinched himself awake to the clatter. He reached for his phone to turn the alarm off as routine would normally demand. Seeing the vibrating glow on the floor, he grabbed the phone and flipped it open.

â Helloâ

â May I ask to whom I am speaking with?â a lady with a young voice said politely.

â Jarras.â She definitely has some kind of scriptâ probably works for some charity organization, he thought.

â Hi Jarras, my name is Dana and Iâ m calling on behalf of Bowdoin College Alumni Relations and I would like to take this time to ask if you are still interested in submitting pledges for next year?â

â Ohâ you must be looking for the *other* Jarras â |uh â |he moved a couple of month ago. Iâ m coincidentally Jarras ... uh â |last I knew, well â | Dana, I think he is still residing in *Thanatopsis*.â

â *Thanatopsis*, is that out of state? Like â |would you happen to have his new address?â

â Depends on where you are now, Dana; it is right next door to *perdition* for me!â Jarras calmly said, pulling the phone from his half plugged ear while a cold hush sent only buzzes from the other line. He pressed end and closed the phone. Even if Dana were in the bedroom, the absolute darkness wouldnâ t have permitted her to see the childish grin on Jarrasâ face as he replayed the conversation in his head.

Jarras threw back the covers back and sat up, his shoulders touching the icy brass-rod backboard. He quietly listened to the distant aural drone that seemed miles away in his plugged ear. Allergies induced swelling and irritation in his ear throughout autumn, but the sound would not be so obvious if his house did not preserve the piercing silence that one might encounter underwater.

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After four minutes of sitting, the air in the room had cooled the sweat on his skin. Dreams always caused Jarras to sweat. He opened his phone again, using the light to find the matchbox on his nightstand. His right wrist was sore, a chronic ache from masturbation and working with computers, but he managed to ignite a flame, passing it to a candle on a brass basin, also on the nightstand. The candle was a creamy vanilla color with hardened wax drips down the sides and a, glossy pool in the brass gutter circling the basin. Jarras bent over to smell the burning citrus aroma, slowly spreading its light and scent in the dark, musty air of his bedroom. He lifted himself out from the warm, somnolent haven of multiple blanket layers, threw on baggy gray sweatpants that didn't match his thick velvet-knitted socks rising to his knee caps. Tossed a dark blue sweatshirt over his head, shoved his arms from flanked rest through the sleeves and tipped the hood over his head. With the hood up, Jarras appeared to be a monk. He grabbed the candle and shuffled out of his bedroom and toward the study across the upstairs loft. Candlelight illuminated the handrail of the loft and the (pool of darkness where the downstairs ought to be.) darkness that shrouded(pooled) the first floor downward. He halts for a moment, and looks down over the ledge, searching for a lanky, penetrating ray of sunlight. Satisfied with having found it, he continues into his study. Inside, the screensaver sequence programmed on his computer flashes slight light onto his face and body as pictures of him with his younger sister, his parents, him standing by his colleagues on the Consulting team, and sexy poses of his cat he thought were funny flew across the screen simultaneously. He types his password where the computer demands. Waiting for the light blue log in ring to send a beep and direct him to his profile, he stares off at the blackout curtains draped over the window.

He opens his email and sees a new message from his supervisor.

Jarras,

We tested the network early this morning and it worked perfectly. Thanks for staying up so late to help us restore it. We can't thank you enough for all your help. It has been a real pleasure working with you on this project, and surely Cheapo Depot Corp. will look to you for further networking assistance in the future.

Regards,

Mike K., Senior IT Director

Jarras closed the tab and opens Facebook. With the project finished, he finally had a Saturday to himself; actually, though, that's exactly how he had planned it. With two weeks to go before Halloween, he desperately wanted the time off. Guinevere loves Halloween. He loves Guinevere. He *loves* Halloween. Two nights ago, he had talked with her for several hours, and she invited him over to watch a Halloween movie, if he was free.

Jarras scours the statuses, pictures, and links until he finds hers. One of her posts includes several pictures of her 4th grade class dressed casually for their autumn party.

â In love with autumn! Haha. OMG! Got Chubbs a costume, having him try it on later. It's freaking ADORABLE! he's Godzilla! Best watch out. RAWR!â she had posted.

Jarras clicks on the word â likeâ and the thumb up changes to, â 5 people like this.â He browses the identities of the four other people who also liked her status to see if there was a person he didn't know.

â Fuck, Eric liked it before I didâ Jarras notices, leaning closer to the screen, squinting, and angry. His right wrist tightens as he leans and the pain ruptures his concentration. He winces back into the office chair

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and massages the pain away for a minute. He closes the Facebook tab and opens a file called *Orange Letter*. Microsoft words opens and a few lines of text darken the white paper on the screen. He reads them over. Agonized by the improper conveyance, he clicks the X in the top right corner, pulls open a drawer in the desk and removes a black notebook and pen. Opening the notebook to a blank page past the frays of an uneven tear, he clicks the pen to a black inky tip and scribes his thoughts. After finishing a paragraph he stops to read it.

â Dearest Guenevere,

Years have passed us and our impenetrable friendship with blinking speed. Yet in the privileged times I have been fortunate to spend lounging, playing, talking, dining and in retreat with you, time never broke the fun guarded silence in my thoughts, just you and the splendor you encaseâ to share with the few people you adore, camped at length.â

â Since Guinevere is perfect, the letter has to be perfect,â Jarras reasoned. Frustration bears on him as he struggled to find the right words. He dropped the pen and crinkled the paper into a scrunched ball. Standing, he threw the paper ball out the door to where it hit the wall with a thump, bounced off the wall and shot into the downstairs abyss. A distant thump echoed up the loft. Jarras redirected his frustration at his office chair which he launched at the wall in rage. He took hold of the candle basin, almost spilling the hot wax, and stumbled back to his bedroom, kicking a pile of books beneath the side of his bed as he entered. The Bible was atop the pile. Pages of the Bible fluttered as it slammed into the dresser and fell open to Leviticus on the floor. Yellow eyes opened from the foot of the bed where the rolled back covers did not disrupt the intactness (;) and a dark figure (bolted) jolted for cover in the crawlspace beneath the bed.

â Oâ shit â ! Mittens, itâ s okay buddy.â

Jarras lets the teary seduction in his voice out as he called for the cat. The cries for pity naturally lured the cat out from hiding, as Jarras had discovered. He puts the candle down, sits on the bed, and sobs with regret. Innocence is something he appreciates, Mittens is innocent, so is Guinevere. Jarras puckers his lips to make a kissing sound and calls out the black catâ s name again. Mittens unfolded from hiding was equivalent to solid darkness lunging into candlelight. and into the parcel of light emitting from the candle losing wax, inching closer to the base, closer to nonexistence. Jarras pet Mittens and spoke softly in reassurance. Glancing at his phone, Jarras realized it was time to get ready.

He brushed his teeth, and then combed his brown hairâ curling his bangs around his forehead (Guinevere likes the look). And he puts on his black square-rim glasses on that Guinevere had told him he looked cute wearing. He swaps his sweatpants and sweatshirt for comfortable fitting blue jeans, a plaid long-sleeve collar shirt with chic autumn colors and a tan jacket overtop that he zips down. He checks his appearance very carefully, as best he could in the candlelight, then heads downstairs.

At the back door downstairs, he slides the small round stub into the slot at the resistance of the nearly straight gold chain. His hand slips on the first try, irking his wrist again. Once the catches were in the track, he moves the outside part of the stub from left to right until the chain jingles and then settles in a U shape to the door frame. In the candlelight he notices his hands are so pale that Goosebumps show among the white cracks of dry skin. Sanguine shows through his paleness, which is repulsing to him. Red may irritate him. But the sight of sanguine is deranging. Sanguine sends his thoughts in a tangent. It symbolizes the time he killed the tree in the meadow. He freezes and thinks of the day before when he went to visit his parents for the first time in more than a year.

* * *

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At dusk, he had enjoyed a scenic drive outside of town on a road brushing the Maine coastline. It ends at a stop sign where an intersecting road runs by. Across from the stop sign is a gate. The wrought iron gate has a gothic appeal. Three miniature demons twirl around poles in jazz-like celebration with one leg and arm lifted in dance, hands clasping strings tethered to the pole on each pivot of the double swinging gate. With holy grounds so close, it is a paradoxical mold in Jarras's mind. Then again, he recalled a quote by the Persian dervish poet, Rumi. "Whosoever knoweth the power of the dance dwelleth in God."

Beyond the gate is a solemn, one lane road with dirt furrows that align to tire tracks, with a grassy plot between. The narrow road bends around a small fishpond filled to beautify the site of an old quarry mined long ago. Contrary to how it might reflect dense olive green of the forest in summertime, the pond was sheeted in yellow and brown leaves. The steering wheel glided in his grip, his hands sweat more profusely the farther into the woods he drove. When the woodlands split into a clearing, Jarras glanced to the immediate right where a few stones leaned with a few other felling, all of which had unsmooth texture unlike the polish guise of modern gravestones. Grass was cut neatly in and about the gray, crimson, and tan shapes, shallow compared to the tall trees that looked like autumn colored hills rolling afar. The caretakers gray truck was parked on the far side. Bouquets of flowers rested in front of numerous graves. Jarras applied the brakes and the car slid on the slack of loose dirt and rocks beside a sign indicating plot J. A bouquet of flowers he purchased earlier occupied the passenger seat. They were pink and caused him to think of her lips for a second. He remembered the first time she wore shiny pink lipstick. Glossy rails flew the pink oval track of her elegant smile, and his eyes couldn't resist coasting in endless circles yearning at the same time to know the exact taste of her tongue and inner mouth. The rollercoaster was eye amusement and he hung onto the bars until he was dizzy and sick. She discovered makeup in 6th grade. Beige globs showed up at first, and made for an ideal resting place for her glasses, since she preferred to lower them until they looked studious, to ward off preying idiots.

Jarras shut the car door. He scavenged for row thirteen, and found Jack and Judith Belington. He looked around to check for others, then laid the bouquet and unfolded a piece of notebook paper with frayed left edges from his pocket and kneeled. An old Latin phrase jutted in his head as he had skimmed the words one last time.

â De mortuis nil nisi bonum!â (Say only good about the dead). He swallowed to clear his throat and read sincerely, as if he were surrounded by his whole family at the funeral all over again.

She never had to say son what are you doing;

The Killer heard just the cows outside mooing;

Jack was metal adept but died swallowing irony;

Judith died cleaning the floor just as he so wryly;

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Buster always yelped for another measly bone;

The Killer stole enough from his body to clone;

Sacrifice indulged is pointless if success isn't next;

For all else shall ensue worthless and vexed;

Since then the Killer does not see color quite the same;

Sanguine resides as fate for love and the

destroyer's fame;

Orange surfaced a shade lighter that isn't quite red;

So the Killer could see all inside him wasn't living dead.

A year had passed since Jarras had stood in that same spot there with the bulk of his grieving family dressed in mournful, formal black attire, listening to a short prayer meant to ease the mysterious circumstances of his parents' deaths. He thought about what had happened, reclined on his back and pondered.

Guenevere is so calm, so coherent, so

The ground suddenly crumbled under Jarras and he fell through a hole, watching the brownish-orange sunlight on the names of his parents' grave disappear amidst cavernous gloom a palpable rush of melancholy caught him. He crashed onto a pebbly floor while the hole above healed, snipping the vestigial shafts of Halloween-orange, autumn daylight.

Having landed on his shoulder, Jarras was slow to get up.

But the pain was a broken worry, for as he investigated his surroundings, the pain turned off. Fucking hell, Jarras thought, the dwelling fit the description his father had once given him of the depression-era boiler room at Hillbury Elementary School a torridly steamy room offering no escape. It was a minute before Jarras realized what had happened. With reality slowly developing, hitting him, the blue of a flame wavered with the howling pass of an abrupt wind and digressed his thoughts to the burgeoning luminosity. More

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flames appeared. Candles flickered to the change of air flow on large candelabras that hung amidst dark stalactites in the corridor. Although Jarras could do many things, one thing he could not do was question his existence. Forward was the only travelable direction. Jarras hesitantly followed the narrow corridor of the chthonic-type dwelling. The corridor was as dark as it was fuggy with hot, dampened, sheets of sticky vapor coming from ahead. He adhered to a curve that disguised a large chamber.

In the middle rose a sanctimonious altar, levitating over the dark-soiled surface of glowing orange cracksâ branching out like lightning. Two bodies, gray and unidentifiable, lay on the altar. Jarras crept to the altar, trembling in disbelief. On the altar were the motionless gray skin bodies of his parents. He gasped for oxygen amidst the heat. He wept. Wicks fostering the candlelight blew to dry and smoky funnels as a cavernous gust circulated the light into fireballs. A sanguine energy sifted the fire into a rotary of ophidian flames that ceded to a terse mystical blue hue as it grew and then receded. A bloodcurdling set of ravaging vipers spawned and slithered astray in the chamber, revealing the obscured size in detail. Jarras fell backwards on to the ground, feeling burns all over his body; he scratched every place he could. Lava rose from unseen depths in the corner of the chamber where a fissure zigzagged in the soil, glowing orange, forming hills of the (volcanic), crusty black overcoatâ spewing more hemorrhages (by the)each second. Straying flames soldered to ringed gales that spun rapidly and then poured into a lava forged cavern. The fiery mash rekindled with rehashing ousts of sparks. Red paired eyes unlocked through the twirling, fiery blur. Jarras felt his eyes burn and scald and his hands blister; he coiled. Fire lessened to expose a black prickled skin flecked with luminous orange slivers of unhardened, glowing lava. Lava formed a caduceus shape beside the wider and denser figure. Jarras stared up as a sapphire orb was crowned atop the pike. The soil within three of Jarrasâ s lengths in each direction riddled with hollowed passages from where muffled dirges resounded. The figure completed. Jarras rubbed his eyes to look clearly. Footsteps away from him harked a demonic deity looming in unconcern with a dreadful, immortal glaze of unmoved condemn, insomuch that it sieged neither the translucency of an apparition nor the bodily substance of the undead. Red cinders sluiced in the eyes, fizzing into tears and blurring Jarrasâ s. Claws of flames disrobed him to nakedness, lifted him off the ground, causing him to welter on his toesâ †

Jarras awoke to night. He shivered as he stood up and tried to cope with the afterimages of his dream. Stretching his neck, his eye spotted an unfamiliar glow. A blaring red pair of eyes lingered on the road beside the fishpond, eyes that could easily be mistaken for taillights. But Jarras peered at them with disdain, for he knew them so well, for he knew the torment that accompanied them. Beelzebub rose amid the dark energy and traveled backwards out of sight.

â The devil travels backwards,â Jarras concluded. â What better way to admire your despicable work than to permanently look back.â

The incident had been daunting, even to the point of rattling Jarrasâ s resoluteness. Nevertheless, the thought evaporated as he picked up the candle basin and searched for his shoes. The first floor of his house is shelved-in by a slew of shelves covering each wall in byzantine arrange. Bookshelves tower from carpet to ceiling, in front of the wide living room window that could illuminate most of the rooms on the first floor alone. He built the shelves to allow electric outlets, light switches, cables, and the thermostat he rarely adjusted.

The house was dark apart from the window embedded in the front door. Daylight beamed through and down on the carpet at an angle. Jarras knew the angles by heart; one glimpse and he can estimate the time. The thermostat indicated the temperature outside was fifty-five, chilly enough for a light coat. Jarras grabbed a pair of black knit mittens from the lime green stand by the front door and then he crouched to get his messenger bag lying below the stand. The crinkled paper ball he threw from upstairs was beside the bag. Jarras picked it up and unfolded the crinkles, reading it in the light from the window. After considering the words, he decided to take it with him, just in case the right words arrived later. Realizing he forgot something,

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he ran upstairs with the light of his cell phone and fetched a pen. When he returned downstairs, he set the candle basin on the table next to the front door and blew it out. Then he stuffed a handful of tissues that he snatched from the tissue box on top of the stand into his pocket.

He stands before the window which is larger than the size of his face and positioned head high. His eyes were closed. Until Jarras moved into the light, he only saw the pervasive black. When he scooted into the light, rays from the sun pierce through the window and illuminate his eyelids with orange. Jarras opened his eyes in satisfaction and grasped the cold-gold, metallic color of the door handle and secured the strap of his messenger bag before setting out. He proceeded outdoors and thought more of Guinevere as he strolled through the autumn sights and smells of the neighborhood. The dry color of the dead leaves drifted his mind to her hair. A year ago she tried to dye it blond from its natural light brown color. Jarras preferred the light brown but told her blonde was vibrant like her personality, and remembered the cute blush she gave him afterwards. He walked further and diverts to the Facebook conversation he had with her two nights ago. He replayed the progress in his head. They talked about love on and off for at least two hours.

â She must realize that Iâ m attracted to her by now. Plus, the way she toys around when we hangout is like practically flirting. She likes to be close to me and cry when she is depressed. And she trusts my advice, which she considers preponderantâ thinks Jarras.

They had made plans for tonight two days ago but had not spoken since then. He was busy with work and fears texting her everyday would be suspicious and obsessive. He pulls out his cell phone. Types a simple message for her and sends it.

â Are we still watching Casper tonight? :)â he sends. Casper is her favorite Halloween movie.

The Jonesâ s fruit farm is a half mile walk from Jarrasâ s house. He knew the Jonesâ s family well. They attended his parentsâ funeral, in fact. He tended to visit a certain spot on the farm several times each fall since Guinevere showed him when they were twelve. None of the workers gave him a hard time when he walked onto the property. As he walked by the entrance beside the Jonesâ s house, he hears voices jittering about the hoarfrost that rimed the countryside that morning. Harvest approached. A warm fall had farmers enthusiastic and unwilling to harvest early though.

The clandestine spot is on a small cliff overlooking a dirty pancake of land. Uncut pumpkins sparsely sat on the pancake, ripening to soft untouched oranges in vine-tangled brown beds, where a number of thin bodied shapes had tipped to the side to mingle with dirt, and while no emotion is carved in their coating, others had akimbo shapes gesturing displeasure for the long wait. Muddy hillsides dart down and across from opposite directions beyond the patch, forming a valley where a ghost creek sleeved on cloudy days and cyan on cloudless days. Jarras loves the pumpkins. He thought of what to say to Guinevere. â I love youâ was insufficient. She knew he loved her. They often joked about it.

â In order for her to comprehend where Iâ m coming from I will need to emphasize that my affection is beyond just thatâ beyond a friendly illusion of loveâ Jarras reasoned.

Jarras pulled the black notebook and pen from his messenger bag. He took a deep breath, filling his breath with fragrant autumn air, and then finished the letter.

â â | Together we, knowing you will acquiesce to my rationale because it was you who first enlightened me with the fruitful metaphor, have ripened to an unforeseen level of warmth and comfort, of merry orange color. Though time is gone, inside my head it has been a merry-go-round, and with each rotation my eyes search for

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you in the redundant commotion life produces to distract me. Our emotions and attitudes have evolved through experiences both kind and harsh. The concept of a feeling has developed into more than a long essay on a controversial subject as you have taught me. Guinevere, my love for you is a bright orange pumpkin that has grown and ripened over the course of our relationship and I am finally harvesting it to openly present to you. So, I ask that you cradle my heart like a pumpkin with your care-grown vines he jots.

He looks at his phone. It's 6:15 p.m. and they agreed to meet at seven. He extracts a white envelope from the messenger bag, folds the letter and slips it in. Before he sets off for her house he had planned one last stop. On his way to the Jones's house, a buzzing jerk strikes his thigh. He pulls out his phone and flips it open.

"Yes, of course," she responded.

Adrenaline swept through him as he absorbed the simple phrase. Her happiness was like a drug, and Jarras got high from seeing her so elated. He read it over another time to sustain the excitement. After darkness had assembled over the pumpkin patch, Jarras walked the trails back down to the Jones's farm house by the entrance of the farm. Candles sat around silk curtains in the front windows and beyond the dark living room was a pale yellow room crowded with people. Jarras had been invited there after his parents' funeral. As he was about to knock, he paused. Near the steps to the front door was a pumpkin carved with a high smile and sharp, triangular eyes. A note was attached.

Jarras,

When you called us about picking out a pumpkin for Guinevere we decided that we wanted to give you a present from our family. We've harvested and sold most of the nice ones, but we picked this one because we wanted to make sure you gave her a good one. We still think often about Jack and Judith and miss them a lot.

If we don't see you around, Happy Halloween!

Cindy

The pumpkin was perfect, Jarras assesses. He takes the envelope with the letter and puts it inside, expecting Guinevere to find it as she places a candle in there. Jarras walks briskly, planning to arrive early to her house, which is just three blocks from his. Throughout the course of the walk he imagines how she will react but ends up counting the excessive number of campaign signs in the front yards he passes.

Jarras suspends at the end of her driveway, staring at the front window of her living room where Chubbzilla, Guinevere's lard of a cat, was plopped on the window sill wearing a green shirt-thingy with purple spikes peeking aback in a line down his dorsal. Jarras laughed to himself. He led with the index finger of his right hand toward the front door and pressed on the orange glow of the doorbell. After he released, a ring resonated inside while voices chattered on the other side. One was that of Guinevere, but the other was manlier.

I bet she has the TV on, Jarras figured. Guinevere tugged the door open and her perfect smile, as humbling as it is warming, met his. Another set of hands suddenly assisted with the door. Eric's hands assisted her as she stood there.

"Bro!" Guinevere shouted, running to hug Jarras and the pumpkin under his left arm. Jarras secretly hated when she called him that because it implied they were so close that there was no chance they could be

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together, but everyone has pet peeves, and so he celebrated the fact that they were so close.

“Hey sis! *Quid agis?*” Eric it’s nice to see you again, *Futue te ipsum*,” Jarras said, respectively.

“Wow. Impressive, that makes two of you well-versed in French now ... doesn’t it,” Eric chuckled.

Jarras and Guinevere crossed eyes, simpers, but neither decided to correct Eric’s linguistic confusion.

“Any who, how’s it going buddy?” Eric asked, pretending to care.

“Gooder,” Jarras quipped. The word threw Eric off for a moment, long enough for Jarras to sift out the addicting smell of Guinevere’s citrus perfume. Guinevere snickered at Jarras while Eric seemed to have an English epiphany.

“That’s good man. Look, I don’t mean to impose. I was just in the neighborhood, saw Chubs, and thought I would pop by.”

Guinevere’s eyes converged on the pumpkin’s face.

“Oh my, what’s this?” she said, bursting with excitement, obsessing over the pumpkin like it was a fat diamond.

Jarras hadn’t said anything when Guinevere looked up at him, to see a indicative smile. “For me?” she asked, both hands over her heart. Jarras nodded.

“Oh my gosh! He’s so cute! Like an orange Chubbs! Okay! let me get a candle so I can put him up in the window!”

She headed for the kitchen. Eric put his arms around her and tickled her for a second as she tried to scurry away. She chuckled and playfully slapped him.

“Stop it now, you,” she teased, freeing herself.

“Chubbs really digs the window sill. Frankly, I’m not sure how he’ll take the presence of the pumpkin,” Eric joked.

Jarras did his best to conceal his desire to strangle Eric. He glanced at a campaign commercial on TV to distract his anger. Guinevere returns shortly with a lit candle. Jarras removes the round stem on the top and tilts the pumpkin toward Guinevere, who cavorts, waiting to insert the candle. Her hand carefully lowers into the pumpkin with the candle, seeing the note, she reacts out loud.

“Hmm. And what might this be, Jarras?” she says eagerly, the quiet candlelight and pumpkin orange in her eyes. She starts to pull the candle out, but Eric, still in a playful mood, tickles her abdomen. She cringes trying to bring the candle out of the pumpkin. The candle ejects from her hand and falls on top of the letter. The unexpected, extra weight tweaks Jarras’s right wrist and he loses grip of the pumpkin. The orange fruit hits the ground and rolls. Eric lets go of Guinevere.

“Look what you did!” Guinevere proclaimed to Eric in a joking, rather than serious, manner. She bent to fetch the pumpkin, balking when flames shot from the smile as the letter disintegrated. She looks up at Jarras, who stands overtop, watching his letter burn. Jarras thinks of the orange daises, imagining the sight of a forest fire engulfing the hillside and scorching the growth to black soot.

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“Oh my God!” I am so sorry Jarras. Guinevere says, putting her hands over her mouth, looking up at him. Eric tries hard not to, but laughs. Jarras laughs on the outside, but on the inside, he cries.

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