

Spring 2019

Sunland : linked stories

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SUNLAND
LINKED STORIES

A Thesis
Presented To
Eastern Washington University
Cheney, WA

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

By
Benjamin P. Murray
Spring 2019

THESIS OF BENJAMIN P. MURRAY APPROVED BY

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**FROM THE DESK OF ROBERT SUNLAND, OWNER OF SUNLAND
AMUSEMENT PARK**

Spokane, Washington

July 28th, 1966

Dear Colleagues,

Park open! With thunder and screams of joy raging from Northern Idaho, the epicenter of the radiant happiness can be felt throughout the region, and in time, across the world.

Before I get into the particulars about the park, I must first say thanks, enormous thanks, to all those who have supported this venture. There are countless faces in the crowd.

Some have joined later on, while others, a small portion, have been there from the start. I would like to take this time to thank by name those who have given up many hours, weekends, late nights and too many drinks in order to see this massive creation come to life! If I miss you, please don't be offended, at the time of writing, I'm four martinis in, for I've just heard the news moments ago!

Wallace Rudin, thanks for all of your timely and sage advice in regard to finances. Sam Parr, our noble liaison with contractors and the like, thank you. Danny Nois and Deanna Gore, many thanks for all your hard work in securing and negotiating the land purchase. A whole heap of gratitude to my family, my wife, and my son, Horatio, for their constant support and entertainment. Kailee Muir, Jane Van Joel, Rachel Pascito, Sierra Francis, Clare Horovitz—a round of applause for coordinating, securing and, overall, devoting your life these past years to an uncertain project. Of course, to Linda, a strident supporter and limitless grace under pressure to help me navigate all my meetings, hotel arrangements and many times, a dinner companion on late nights—a hearty thanks to you too.

Now, to Sunland Amusement Park! Our opening day is only a month away. Many of our positions in the park have been filled, and rides are finishing final testing. Attached you will find a map of the park scribbled and painted by yours truly. Sunland has eight attractions at opening, with plans in the future for expansion. Based on our early projections of attendance, those expansions could happen sooner than predicted. For that detailed outlook, refer to the last page of this packet.

The main attraction is *Tornado*. Completed in two years of construction by a work force of two hundred, *Tornado* is a 2,780 feet long wooden track roller coaster. It features two underground dives—the first from 88 feet and the other at 68 feet—providing a thrill this region has never experienced. Already, we have reporters from the area looking to do an article on the construction and the presence that *Tornado* creates with its seven peaks rising above the park and the surrounding pines. While the ride will be a blast, the track is also fitted with lights. A sight truly spectacular to see at night driving home!

Our other contender in terms of construction length and labor is the log flume. Built under the plans of Nance York, famous ride creationist and pioneer from back east, this ride has you travel through three “biomes.” With forest, jungle and cave environments to enjoy, the river scuttles your log to a motorized ramp. There, after climbing 30 feet, you’ll plunge down into a controlled moat to return to the station. Many of the parts used for the ramp are one-of-a-kind, as York has told me. If the ride doesn’t thrill, the ingenuity will!

While the sight to see might be *Tornado* at night, the unmistakable presence of the Ferris wheel will have you spinning cartwheels. While construction only took six months, the Ferris wheel, internally called “Sunny,” dominates the central part of the

park. Nestled on the crest of a hill, “Sunny” stands as a tribute to the hard work of all who took part in the creation of Sunland. With 14 cars, the whole family will have room to enjoy the views of the park and wilderness after a thrilling day of riding attractions.

Included on the opening day, Sunland boasts *Scrambler*, Merry-Go-Round, a Mini golf course, Bumper cars, and a kids’ area with a 15-foot-tall spiral slide with bright red and yellow paint.

Just before opening day, we will have the park open exclusively for the workers, investors and their families.

You’ll see me around the park giving talks and answering questions about the rides and such. Make sure you stop by and participate in the fun!

Coordinate with Greg and your department heads.

Thanks again to you all, and may Sunland last,

Robert Sunland,

Owner of Sunland Amusement Park

P.S. Linda, meet me at the Spokane Club around eight. We need to talk—I’ve already ordered staff to plant tulips all over the park. What else do you want? L, R.S.

WE START WORK

We start work at 7:00am. All of us push through the old and rusty wrought iron gates to the park. There is no more sign, just the supports and rigging. That's how it is all over the park; signage all down. Except for Coaster Alley. Coaster Alley's sign hangs from hoops over the walkway. The walkway we walk under, the two of us, looking for our assignment. Today will be a long day. Showers from the previous night leave all surfaces, those vertical and horizontal, those angled and curved, puddled and streaked. One of us avoids the pooled water in the potted walkway. One of us marches through, eating a banana. That one, the one who marches, the one who eats a banana every day, fist bumps the other one with painted nails. We get to work on stringing the lines, those bright color coordinated lines—red, orange, red, yellow, red, white, white—to wooden supports. The supports, the ones we are working on, have worked on, and soon will not work on, bow and tremble, as if the wood itself is trying to revert to when they were trees. To think, eight decades ago a man and a machine cut down so many trees for families for entertainment. That is what one of us thinks. The other one, the one who finishes the banana and tosses it behind us, so far behind us that it strikes the work truck, thinks: this must be what it's like to prepare for Christmas, to string up lights, to light, to light, to light. The first one coughs, pulls a cigarette out, and strikes. Soon, the smoke will dwindle in cold November air.

MARTY: SUNLAND, HERE WE COME

The first thing I noticed when we tumbled into our car for Sunland was a spider on the car's headliner above my seat. Before I put my right foot in, I saw it, a tiny smudge of black, stationary. I hesitated, my foot hovering, my hand on the seat, eyeing this thing. Then everyone closed their doors, buckled, and talked about what they wanted to do at the park, what rides were cool, scary.

That's when Jason looked over at me, rolled his eyes exactly like Mom does. "He's already scared. Look, he can't even get in the car."

I pointed up at the spider, which began to move, seeking the open air; it looked as if it was charging, galloping across the headliner, a wild steed in search of wider fields, bigger plains.

"Come on, honey, get in. It'll be fun. You don't have to ride the big rollercoaster if you don't want too." Mom blew her nose.

With a nod, I climbed in as the spider fled. For a moment, I thought we'd shared a glance, a meaningful look. Its abdomen was black with white freckles, legs like tiny needles that worked frantically against the headliner's fabric. I closed the car door, saying goodbye to the adventurous spider. I wanted to ride *Tornado*, the one Dad had always talked about. The thing was, doesn't wood deteriorate over time? And, how old was it? And, wasn't there an accident there, when Dad worked there years ago? Do you think spiders, I said, venture far from home?

"What was that?" Dad said. He started the car, patted the steering wheel. "It's been some time. But you all want to go, right?" He turned around to look at Jason, then Mom, then me in the rearview mirror.

We all nodded.

He turned up the radio, finding Neil Diamond, and released us onto the road.

We left our neighborhood, passed the high school, passed the first light, accelerated onto the highway, and settled into a cruise, heading for Sunland.

About halfway there, answering a question Mom never asked, he turned the radio off. For the first time on the trip, I heard the hum of rubber and road, of cars passing with little hushes, as if they were telling me to quiet down. I liked silence; everyone at school called me Silent Marty, even though it didn't rhyme. But they were nice about it, only saying it to me in whispers in the hall, at recess, eating lunch while I tore open Ziploc bags of chips and crackers, bags covered with messages from Mom: *Don't forget to ask a question today!*

Mom said, "Is it that time?"

Jason had fallen asleep, his mouth hung open, surely inviting other spiders. His earphones were jammed in his ears, and from them I heard the muted tones of Green Day, and that lonely boulevard.

Dad glanced at Mom, then Jason, then me, and took a deep breath. "The sun is sinking in the west..."

"The cattle go down to the stream..." Mom tilted her head, smiling.

"The redwing settles in the nest," Dad returned.

"It's time for a cowboy to dream." Mom closed her eyes, and then they both sang.

"Purple light...in the canyons...that's where...I long to be..."

"With my three...good companions...just my rifle, pony and me..."

"Come on, Marty! Join in!"

I shook my head.

“Its fun! It’s a family tradition!”

I looked out the window. Outside, through the gaps between cars in the other lane, fields sprouted, and between those plants, I imagined snakes of all colors and sizes, slithering in the dirt. One snake, a bright red one, bit a watermelon. The watermelon yelled, rolled down a hill with the red snake rolling along with it. They collided with a fence, and a farmer said, I’ll be damned.

“Why is he like this all the time?” Dad had given up the tune and was now focusing on the road ahead. He gripped the steering wheel, his hands turning red and white, like candy canes.

I’m nervous, I said, I’m sorry. I’m just excited for the rides.

“Well, you missed out on some fun.” Mom, moving her purse to her lap, pulled out a piece of gum. “Maybe we’ll sing it on the way home.”

Dad turned the radio back up, mumbled something to Mom, and leaned back into the seat. It bulged out at me, straining the grey fabric, exposing the ribcage of metal supports. Was there a heart in the seat? Lungs, stomach? I figured, probably not, but I could imagine, resting inside whatever material used for car seats, a lumpy and lonely heart suffocating with wires and springs.

I decided it was time to wake Jason, so he could be fresh and ready to go when we got there. I reached over to his hand, which was palm up on the middle of seat, and pinched his thumb. He recoiled, frowned at me, and without raising his hand from the seat, flipped me off.

WORK FORM

SERVICE# 1001

DATE: June 20, 2005

LOCATION: *Tsunami*, load station

REASON FOR VISIT: Regular maintenance, and to check on vital components after first series of test runs

LABOR DESCRIPTION: Pulled and inspected each brake sensor for continuity, adhesion to backing plates. Sequence braking pattern to fully stop train at station. Rebled and checked hydraulics per specs acquired from Horizon, specifically from Tim Mason, lead designer.

PARTS USED: Half a dozen new brake sensors required replacement due to train's aggressive arrival at station. With new braking pattern in place, sensors should not have any problems in the future. Will check daily their operation. Half can of adhesive to attach sensors. Five quarts of hi-temp hydraulic fluid. All parts in accordance with suggested replacements from Horizon manual and letter from Tim.

NOTES: I admire this rollercoaster. I like smooth steel rollercoasters. I'm hesitant on one aspect of this new ride—the braking system. We've tested the ride numerous times with dummies and g sensors and it is smooth overall. That's how steel coasters should be. Yet, even though brakes for coasters are generally jarring, this ride's brakes seem both sluggish and sticky. The response from manual control is fine, if there is someone manning the controls during operation, but as with many rides here at Sunland, automation is the norm. When the brakes engage, which is triggered by an older design choice of flapper, mechanical switches, the brakes engage in quick succession. I'm not too sure why it is acting this way now, but I plan to investigate before we open this

coaster for guests. Horatio, when we meet next, I think we should talk about postponing until I've had the opportunity to compile a full report. Tim dropped off his designs earlier today and I'll look them over. Wheels on coaster eight need adjustment, but within spec.

VERDICT: *Tsunami* testing operational

SERVICE COMPILED BY: Dan Taylor, First Mechanic

MARTY: BUMPER CARS ARE FOR KIDS

The first thing I noticed—besides the looming wooden supports of *Tornado*, a dark run of tracks rising and falling in the corner of the park, which Dad said was the old decommissioned roller coaster *Tsunami*, the Ferris wheel rotating like an absurd windmill, hundreds of people and kids like me loitering—was the entrance to Sunland. Above and across the iron gates was a banner that read *50th Anniversary*. That’s older than you, I said, to Dad, who walked ahead of us. With each stride, his legs seemed to click, or clink, and when I pointed it out to him at the ticket booth, moments from entering this wonderland, he said, “These bones. Don’t get old, Marty.” He winked and handed me and the rest of us tickets. I knew he was kidding around; on the drive here, he had pulled from his shorts his metal flask, engraved with our family’s crest. Each click was the flask’s presence against something else in his pocket.

Jason branched off, yelling from twenty feet away, through a family grouped around a fountain just inside the entrance, that he had planned to meet some of his friends from school.

“Alright, be careful!”

“He’s fine. He’s old enough.”

I watched Jason bound off around a corner of the footpath and wondered whom he was meeting. Probably friends who played football with him. Mom and Dad headed in the opposite direction. She held a hand for me to hold, which I ignored. I ran to them, pressed between their legs, and said, What’s first?

“I think the merry-go-round is this way,” Mom said. She seemed annoyed that I hadn’t held her hand; she pushed me on the shoulder.

I exaggerated the impact, bumped into Dad, expressing my pain by grimacing.

“You baby,” she said, laughing, and soon, I laughed too.

Dad gripped my other shoulder, steering me away from a crowd that had decided to stop in the middle of the path.

I noticed, as we moved around the people, the bumper cars. They were underneath a metal roof, with brightly colored cars, moving like water striders on a dark, concrete pond. Let’s go there, pointing at the commotion, at the sound of small engines whining and purring.

Mom pushed us toward the line of people waiting.

Dad said, “Bumper cars are for kids,” as if he meant it in passing to a stranger going the opposite way on the footpath, or to Mom, or to himself, or to the younger kids in line.

One of those kids ahead of us in line was dressed all in black. She, I could tell by her face, which turned to look back at something in the park, was dressed as a nun. I knew this because we had watched, as a family, *The Bells of St. Mary’s* not too long ago, when I had a cold and was tucked under a blanket on our couch in the living room. Jason had brought home cans of chicken noodle soup, while Dad brought home Gatorade from Albertsons. Bullies, he had said, you’ve got to stand up to them. I nodded, causing a stream of green gunk to waterfall from my nose.

The line moved, and we were next, along with the nun. She kept looking back at me, eyeing my hair, then my shoes, then, as if they bored her, met my eyes.

Her face, speckled with freckles, was surrounded by white fabric, like a static scarf wrapped around her head. It was so unusual, so strange; I had thought nuns were from the past, old. Her nails were painted red and white.

“Was that him?” Dad said, leaning against the wooden railing that separated us from the bumper cars. They moved about the concrete, screeching like demon owls.

“Dear, no, I don’t think that was him.”

“It was. I know that walk. I watched that walk for years, hanging up paintings all over the park.”

“Forget it. Come on, bumper cars!”

The cars idled. People dismounted, high-fived each other, tussled hair, acting happy. A woman in a yellow shirt opened the gate, and we moved with the line, following the nun, and what I guessed were her mom and dad, and another woman, who drifted close to them, hovering like a hawk.

“I just, I need to say something.” He left us, ducking under the railing, and marched away.

Where’s Dad going, I said, still following the nun.

Mom held out her hand. “I don’t know, honey. Let’s go find him.” We knelt under the railing, excusing ourselves to everyone. As we walked, I glanced back to find the nun settled in a yellow bumper car, her hands on the controls, her expression blank as the sky. An orange car sat in the corner, empty, as if waiting for me. Its hood was scraped, punched, and slapped with scuff marks from all the battles it had fought. It was a tortoise that had survived the civil war, moving with purpose under fallen tree trunks, sinking in rivers, avoiding musket shot and cannon fire, biting toes of confederate soldiers and mailing those toes to family members across the country; that was my bumper car, my favorite color.

OLIVIA PRACTICES

As she moved through her steps on that black, cold stage of *Fantasm*, in front of the empty seats that reminded her of smooth river stones covered with night's velvet touch, the ones she used to sit on and write countless lines of poetry for uncaring water, she counted in her head each foot's placement on the worn planks. She could tell by hearing alone; each plank gave a small protesting squeal when her heel drove into its surface. She nimbly walked, throwing her hands above her head, miming the part where she would throw her assistant onto the painted black crate. From there, she whipped around to grab plastic shackles. But, as if a ghost or a spirit had struck her back, as if Brenda had returned to her after six months away, she faltered, erect with her breath held for no reason other than it had become perfunctory. She struck her right hand out, palm open, sending her phantom assistant—for he was late again for morning rehearsal—toward the giant wheel on the left side of the stage.

For the wheel was covered with black drapery. From underneath, she felt the intensity of the thing itself, and she knew from experience, when she tore off the covering, the black and red painted surface stole the stage.

The wheel, the central object and helpmate of her performance, had been delivered to her house of magic back in the early 80's when she still commanded respect and crowds and money. Horatio, young and full of bright lights in his head, had found the board on one of his art trips to Germany. After bartering with the widow, he confessed, over a bottle of rum in his office, that he had paid too much for the thing, and so, if she was willing, he would like her to use it somehow in her act. And so, years later, she still incorporated this seven-foot round, spinning monstrosity. She pulled off the board's cloak and paced back ten steps to the center of the stage and faced it.

She withdrew from her black robes her throwing knives. They were a gift from Brenda. She had said, when Olivia opened the box to find the knives nestled in deep purple silk, something for your act. Even as Olivia grasped one in her right hand, felt the weight of the steel, the black handle against her skin, she remembered feeling as full and empty as the first time she'd lifted one from the box, as if her stomach plunged into an ocean cave, only for another wave to erupt and shoot foamy splashes on rocky crags.

She mimed throwing each knife. Throw, throw, throw, throw. One under each arm, one between his legs, and one, depending on the timing and rotation of the board, for it dictated her pace, to the left or right of his head. In her decades here, performing card tricks, rope tricks, giant ring tricks, water submersion, disappearing acts, lions and tigers in cages hanging from specially built beams in the roof, fire displays in all shapes and sizes and colors, audience participation tricks involving placed objects and pre-written messages, she had never struck an assistant on the board. There had been times, especially with Darryl, that she'd come close to his groin and arms, and afterwards he'd curse at her in low tones, like an old radiator, spouting off phrases that he must have thought would hurt her. She ignored those rants as she ignored the thinning crowds. She ignored Darryl's persistence on letting him star in a show or two. He had been learning by watching her, hadn't he?

Maybe it was time, she thought, as she paced behind the curtain and settled in front of her makeup station. Maybe it was time to pass the torch. To give up. She sat on her low stool in front of her small cracked mirror lined with amber bulbs. Her face showed the years of showbiz.

The door to her right opened and closed with a small burp, and in the moment when the door was at its most open, she saw the mid-morning sun burning down on the pavement just outside, and before she could fully see Darryl striding in, looking fresh and able and clean as new sheets, her eyes alighted to the painting next to the door—the painting that had been there for years, hung with care by Horatio.

“Happy birthday, Olivia!” Darryl moved to the closet next to her and started changing into his black costume, which was an old black morph suit with red stripes along the ribs and throat. Even in the semi-dark, she saw the spandex waning from all the years.

Was it the strangeness, the weirdness of it all, which kept her here at Sunland all these years? Yesterday, it seemed, she was planning elaborate set pieces and new terrifying stunts with Brenda at the basketball challenge. She and Brenda always competed to see who could make the most shots in two minutes. Brenda always won, for she was taller, spindly like a sunflower. Her high score was 29, Olivia’s, 20.

“Thanks, Darryl.”

She turned back to her mirror with the painting’s image imprinted on her vision.

She heard the first signs of life on the other side of the curtain. Guests were filling in. Would there be one in costume? A priest? A nun? Jesus? It had been a month or so since she last witnessed one of her true fans. Or, maybe it was someone mocking her.

The more she blinked at herself, covering her blue eyes over and over, the more the painting faded, but she no longer needed to see it to recall it. It was a clown’s face—in red and blue, with big bulbous eyes and mouth. The face was at an angle, as if the clown wanted to ask an inappropriate question. On the clown’s head was a tiny brown

hat. The background was black, and in the darkness the painting blended into the wall; or, when she was done with her last show of the day, with the lights all dim and ready for sleep, the painting bled through the wall out at her.

“You ready to rock?” Darryl stretched and moved to his position behind the curtain. He was ready for their choreographed fight scene, where she grappled with him as if grappling with a demon from a dark place, and she was an angel.

The clown asked, though only Olivia heard, “You’re wearing that again? You turn fifty, and you wear the same thing that you’ve worn every day since I moved in. Have you seen my friends?”

“Almost.” She finished applying makeup—deep black eyeliner. She fitted her silver rings on all her fingers except her left hand’s third. She walked to her spot behind the curtain and felt for her trick rope. The first half of the show she would perform a series of tricks with it. At one point in her career, she knew each move and their corresponding names. But now, after she witnessed the erratic passage of time, whipping past her face in chunks like so many yellow dotted lines on all the highways she’s traveled, the slow anguish of seconds in hushed voices, her knowledge of names had vanished. Her muscles memorized their names, internalized their accents, consumed their unstressed nuances, just as her crusade to fathom why Brenda hadn’t stayed; or why Olivia hadn’t asked her to stay for one more moment. She closed her eyes and chanted with deep breathing, “Hocus pocus, I’m Dayze. Watch with your eyes and be amazed.”

WE HEAR THUDS AND WHACKS

One of us, too soon to be tired, sits against a vertical support. Fifty feet above this one's head, the track still intact, a sparrow flies. The other one admires the bird's deft movements, the agility of wings and feathers. This one sits next to the other, and we bump fists. Quiet in our work area, sounds return-echo like a great spring clapping. We hear the blows of many sledges—thud, whack, thud—we hear increasing and decreasing varieties of saws—skreee, skreee—and we feel, through the bottom of our boots, through our pants, because we are sitting even though the ground is cold-frozen, the movement of machines. The movement of destruction intended machines—giant plows, aching, arching cranes. Multiple times a day, we'll hear and shudder against the explosions of dynamite. The sparrow circles over us, knitting between supports its known its whole life. One watches while the other talks and gestures with gloved hands. *Since it's late in the season, we won't have to wait long till she's given the go.* With graceful turns, the sparrow circles more. A violent laugh of dynamite rocks our work truck, and the sparrow exits. We rise and bump fists. We know how much effort to give and it is always enough. What we do is always just enough. One smokes a bent cigarette; one staples the rainbow line to wooden supports, which unspools from a red box labeled: DET CORD. Following behind the one who staples, finished with the cigarette, one attaches containers of propellant at every other support.

**FROM THE DESK OF ROBERT SUNLAND, OWNER OF SUNLAND
INDUSTRIAL EQUIPMENT**

November 1st, 1964

Spokane, Washington

Employees of Sunland Industrial Equipment,

I write to you all from the padded and worn chair in my office to tell you of great and important news regarding our company. In the past, I deferred to my second in command, Mr. Youseph, to relay necessary information in the form of memos and other means of communication. On rare occasions, I would spend time at my desk, taking leave of my other responsibilities, which are numerous, to directly address all of you. One of these rare occasions presents itself now, and not in a way that I had anticipated.

Before I fully undress the situation and concern of this letter, I want to congratulate all of you for your hard work and dedication, for your time away from families, for your commitment and honesty in every transaction with other companies and within our halls and warehouses, for late nights fulfilling orders, for your earnest vision on improving our company's profits. This company, which has become more than a group of employees punching in and out, has become a family of its own.

Unfortunately, in some cases and instances, a family falls apart for no apparent reason; or it falls apart because of infidelity, of financial strife, of medical problems, of too much time spent away from each other. The time has come, although abruptly, for Sunland Industrial Equipment to dissolve.

Why, you ask? Blood. Let me tell you a tale, and by the end, when we all are in the know, we can handle this like a family: together.

Our bones produce blood cells. We learned this in science class. New blood cells sprout like flowers in spring. The process never ends. Even with the tumult of cells generating over and over, even with cells replicating and dancing about before succumbing to their own devices, we don't feel that frenzy. We carry on with our day, with our night, with our plans for next week, next month, next year, until the question is concerned with retirement. That was my thought process as well; where would my wife and son vacation in the summer after running this company? All I can say, with sincerity and scorn a truth that I've tested as of late: money can't buy everything. I first heard that saying from my father years ago as a child.

Back to blood. I noticed, for months now, that my gums bled while flossing, but all last month, they bled while brushing. I changed toothbrushes. I changed how I brushed. I changed toothpaste, even though I knew it wouldn't help. With embarrassment, I visited my dentist. Then I was referred to a specialist. Then, I was recommended to the hospital for blood work. After some time had passed, my results were presented in an office on the second floor of Sacred Heart, with six other doctors. Each stepped to the front of the large wooden desk when they spoke. They pointed at charts, diagrams, at deformed little red blood cells, at hollow bones, at timelines, at possible courses of actions. I was in a haze. They said that was a symptom. What rang forth through the fog and delirium of truth was the timeline. As we move toward the holiday season, I relish the opportunity of celebrating with you all, for it may be the last time. Leukemia, blood cancer, they say, races fast in the body.

With this diagnosis, I spent time with my wife and son. With their support, guidance, and love, I wish to avoid any radical and intrusive procedures and/or

operations. I love nature, the blooming of lilacs, the ripening of red apples, the blossoming of tulips; only this time, those actions are happening within my body. Think, a garden ever expanding!

It was during this time with my family, that I also made the decision to dissolve Sunland Industrial Equipment. You will all receive your checks until the end of this year. After that, I wish you the best of luck and composure. Of course, I will offer myself as a reference, if I'm around. Or, perhaps you may be interested in my last, great, venture?

I grew up as a child during World War II. I grew up in the lingering shackles of the Great Depression, in the economic boom of post war, in the golden age of the fifties. Times change, cultures shift, and yet, through all of these periods, constants remained. One of those, for myself, was work. Always work. For my child, Horatio, for others in our area, I am drawing up papers, contacting contractors, communicating with local government, to ascertain the feasibility of opening an amusement park. My family visited Disney, and because the park was beautiful and entertaining, we were overwhelmed in the most generous and meaningful manner. I highly recommend visiting if a chance should arise; or, you could play a role in the creation of my amusement park. The plans are tentative now, but I hope the park will contain a number of attractions for guests of all ages, of all economic status and demeanor. This park, which I've named only temporarily Sunland Amusement Park, would be the first here in the Inland Northwest. It would overshadow Natatorium. It would draw crowds from all over, and I extend a hand to you all, if you are interested, in joining me in this venture.

More details will follow. Ever since my diagnosis, I've become engrossed in writing, something I didn't do much of in my past.

To our potential future and beautiful ends,

Robert Sunland

Owner of Sunland Industrial Equipment

P.S. Linda, please disperse this letter to all in the company. Please, as usually, give this a good read—it's been some time since I've let myself write with so few constraints about a subject so close to my heart. And, as always, I'll join you at the Spokane Club. L, R.S.

WORK FORM

SERVICE# 1005

DATE: June 21, 2005

LOCATION: *Tsunami*, loading station, sub-level controls

REASON FOR VISIT: Check brake positions when coaster enters pre-brake location

LABOR DESCRIPTION: Pulled and inspected brake sensors for continuity at terminal level to determine if latency is from poor connection at terminal base in sub-level.

Resealed leaking hydraulic hose at caliper on right side of braking line. Tightened wheels on coaster eight and retorqued other retaining bolts and hubs for all wheels per spec according to Horizon manual and Tim's suggested marks.

PARTS USED: New hydraulic hose with specialty fitting with nylon inner sealing ring. One tub of hi-temp grease. New bolts for wheel 20 through 26, with lock washers.

NOTES: I stopped here first thing this morning to see how the braking operation was performing. Immediately noticed when train arrived at braking line that actuation was hesitant. I suspected, since I couldn't see any problem at surface level loading station, to check connections at the control terminal service panel. After checking each connection both visually and with multimeter, I determined that there was no drop in voltage that would cause hesitation with braking. We ran the coaster through normal operation of a ride each four minutes based off our estimates of a packed, full capacity day. On each return, the train passed and actuated the flapper controls for the brakes, but they didn't engage until half the train was in the loading station. I haven't yet studied the design of this braking system, but I plan to do so over the next couple days. Given my initial reportings, there must be a component that I've missed that is causing the hesitation. But it's more than that: when the brakes do engage, they engage at full pressure. This,

according to the data provided by the dummies, and written by Tim, show that the braking operation could cause injury to a rider's neck, head, and extremities. Tim also mentioned that this is unusual, that his design, for he worked extensively with this system, shouldn't behave in this manner. I told the testing crew to let the coaster sit for a couple days or so until I have a chance to look over the design. Besides, there's an old superstition that leaving a coaster idle for three days is good luck before it is given the green light. My old mentor had said that before he retired last year. I guess that worked for *Tornado*, and that coaster is doing fine.

VERDICT: *Tsunami* is placed on idle until further notice, pending investigation of braking system overview.

SERVICE COMPILED BY: Dan Taylor, First Mechanic

OLIVIA'S FIRST SHOW

She performed her rope tricks as one would perform the ritualistic act of filling up one's car. Her hands moved on their own. It wasn't even an empty theater; there were more filled seats than not. And, after every trick—cut and restored, three into one—she looked past the bright lights that reflected off or were absorbed in the dark painted planks of the stage, and saw eyes blinking like owls. That was when, while setting up the last rope trick, she saw the nun in the front row.

Olivia threw the rope, now straight and in one piece, where moments before it had been knotted in an impossible knot. The rope fell in the darkness at the corner of the stage, inside the folds of the curtain. She strode to the center of the stage. In the background, Darryl shifted causing the curtain to murmur, waiting for his cue.

Not only was it a nun, it was a child. In spite of the darkness, her white coif blazed like a group of stars in pre-dawn. In fact, the more Olivia examined this crowd, the nun became a sun, and the audience's eyes became stars shifting in and out of existence. She read somewhere online that astronomers tried to identify if a star had planets by how they wobbled or blinked in telescopes. She felt in her stomach a strange nothingness at the thought of something so small and insignificant could mean that there were massive bodies enduring beyond us.

“Welcome, all, welcome. I'm Olivia Dayze, and I seek to vanquish the evilness that permeates in this world!” At that, two preset Bunsen burners clicked on at both ends of the stage. The flames swayed and spat and cast a warm hue on the crowd. The little nun girl bent her head, and from Olivia's place on the stage, it looked like the child was praying.

“I feel the true darkness approaching. We must stand tall against this last vestige of terror. Let us capture this fiend and perform our ritual to send it back to its dwelling. What say you?” The last time anyone from the crowd had cheered or clapped was two years ago, when she still believed in what she did, when she still believed in a meaning that had alluded her for decades.

Darryl emerged from the right side of the stage, pouncing like a cougar on all fours, yelling gibberish at her and brandishing a curved, wicked black plastic knife. The little nun bent farther down, so that her face was parallel with the floor.

“There, the dark beast!” And, like her practice this morning, the choreographed dance she had created decades ago when the stage was natural and not painted black, she and Darryl engaged with exaggerated punches, holds, and sweeps. She swung at Darryl’s head; he ducked and tackled her legs. They landed in a precise position: him on top, straddling her. He growled and brought down both hands toward her neck. She blocked his hands with her arms, rocked her hips into Darryl, causing him to topple off. In the process, his knife was knocked aside, and now they scrambled to gain its advantage. She threw her foot out to trip him, but Darryl was a step ahead, so her foot met with air, and he stood around the knife like a dancer waiting for the music to start, looking back at her in confusion. He kicked the knife in her direction and pretended to fall. The crowd laughed.

While they fought, dramatic generic music blared down on all of them. Lights zoomed over the crowd, and the little nun pressed back in her seat.

She gained the knife and pushed him to the wheel, where she pulled the cloak clean away. “Now it’s time for you to go home!” She strapped his limbs and hands to the board. He whispered to her now, “Sorry about the knife. Got caught up.”

“It’s fine,” she whispered back. “Don’t do it again.”

“But, who cares?”

With a firm tug, she ripped the wheel into action. It spun at an almost comical speed. She’d never spun the board this fast, and when she returned to her spot on the stage to begin the knife throws, she had trouble noticing her marks on the outside rim of the wheel in relation to the thin line on the planks. It was on this stage, in this room, in this park, where she’d first met Brenda, who’d come to one of her shows in late summer. Her black hair was in a braid, coiled along her back like a tail. Olivia had finished with her last show of the day and was signing playing cards and bibles. Some tucked their signed cards into the pages. Brenda walked up to her, presented the instruction card from a brand-new deck and asked her to sign it. Olivia told her it wasn’t even a playing card, which prompted Brenda to say that she wasn’t playing. But, she continued, If you wanted to play or take a break, I’m over at the basketball challenge. After that, Olivia challenged her with free throws nearly every day. It was here in *Fantasm*, where they had their last interaction.

Now, the wheel was slowing down to a manageable gait. She steadied her throwing hand, taking the weight of the knife into her fingers, palm, arm, shoulder, all the way to her back foot. In one movement, as graceful and violent as a spider spinning a web, she flung the knife. It landed with a thud next to Darryl’s head. She spirited the other three knives, each finding its respectful spot. Darryl slumped on the board.

She paced to his side. “Look! The beast sleeps. His presence is gone!”

The crowd clapped in an obligatory way. The little nun shook her head.

“Trying to make me sick?” Darryl breathed.

“Shut up. You’re dead, remember?”

“I’m so sick of the same thing. Let me do the next show.”

Olivia strode to center stage to sit near the edge for photographs or signatures, even though she knew those days were past. No one came up. The little nun still shook her head as she was whisked away by adults, which Olivia assumed were her parents. She hadn’t seen her own parents since she was a kid. The only memories she has of them were at the farm where she grew up with her grandparents, which even now she calls home, having inherited the property some years ago, minutes from Sunland. There’d been a spring day, because she remembers lilacs, and her parents placing her in a padded wooden barrel, pushing her down a hill, rolling and rolling on wild grass, and her laughing and laughing and laughing and never wondering if it all would stop.

MARTY: IN THE SHADOWS, SPIDERS AND SHARKS ROAM

The seats were stiff, covered in dark, scratchy fabric, mimicking the atmosphere of the room. On the stage in front of us towered a woman dressed in black and red. She messed around with a bright, tan, piece of rope, contorting it between her fingers, wrists, and hands. As she performed the endless loop of twirling and untwirling of the rope, music warped the air around us like ripples in a pond. The ripples, I suspected, watching the woman, were caused by a stampede of hooves outside. I was on a safari; zebras and antelope galloped between brush and jumped fallen trees. Then the animals, covered with dirt and mud, entered this room, circled the woman on the stage, forming an impossible barrier. Soon, the air pulled toward her, and I felt weightless. Jason had said that's what to expect from *Tornado*—a feeling that gravity had given up, caught a breath, then redoubled its efforts.

“She’s good, isn’t she?” Mom nudged my shoulder with hers, nodding her head at the stage. She wrapped her arm around the back of my seat.

Where’s Dad, I whispered. I felt her arm tense, then relax. At that moment, the woman held up the rope, intact, although she’d cut it in half a second ago. The crowd around us remained quiet; maybe everyone reacted the way Mom had, by tensing. Then, I felt ashamed that I hadn’t reacted to the woman; after all, she was entertaining. Her fingers were like spider legs creating a web out of the rope.

Then the show changed. All the lights cut out, except for three, which trained on the woman, a dark object on the corner of the stage, and a figure, which seemed to materialize from nowhere. This figure held what looked like a knife and moved like a primate, slashing and clawing at the woman. They danced; I couldn’t tell if they were angry or in a mating ritual, common to a lot of animals I had read in my books.

“I’m sure he’s around. You know him, once something’s on his mind.”

He was probably looking for Jason. That made sense; we each had someone. One of the lights skimmed the tops of people’s heads in the front row while it tried to follow the action on stage, and when it panned, I saw the top of the nun’s costume. She was there, near the action, and we were here, at the back.

What if he got lost? What if, out there in the park, searching for Jason, he was attacked by sharks? There was a water ride somewhere; I had surveyed the park from a map Dad had given me. He had said, as he dropped the map on my desk in my room, on top of my homework for Mrs. Blanks, that this was his copy of the park’s map. He had stolen it on his last day. Scribbled in neat handwriting were his notes; on a ride in the corner of the park was a note that read: *cowards*. Another note, in red, was scribbled over the mansion just outside the park, where, according to the map’s key, lived the owner of Sunland.

The woman tore off a black covering, revealing a giant, round board as tall as a horse. She strapped the figure to it and spun the contraption; it whirled silently. She stepped back, paused, and then threw knives at the spinning figure. Each knife whacked loudly in the room, echoing behind and in front of us. Mom’s arm tensed, as well as mine. With another whack, I imagined the snapping shut of a Mako’s mouth on Dad’s arm, him spinning around wildly, bumping into crowds of people out there in the park, spewing blood like a hose, before ripping off the shark and shaking his index finger at it. I leaned toward Mom, thinking that I would tell her my fears, but the woman had thrown the last knife.

The lights turned on as the woman bowed. I whispered, That was fun, because I wanted to keep the stillness; I liked the quiet in the room. It felt like a rainstorm had passed, and the grass was fresh and wet; birds sang songs, waiting for any shadow.

WE EAT IN OUR WORK TRUCK

At break, we sit in the work truck. We eat sandwiches. Mustard and ketchup and bits of bread tumble down our fronts. The one who smokes remembers that day all those years ago. All those years ago, a list of memories: a show of darkness, this ride full of guests, a ride on the Ferris wheel on top of the world, and a brother, a brother seen long-not-to-long ago for a funeral. A funeral for a father. In the truck, we are quiet. The only noise is from the blower motor blowing warm air in our faces and feet. Our lunch break is late today. Today will be a long day. We sigh, and the sigh fills the cab and the windows fog for a moment. We draw smiley faces on the door windows. We smile at us, and at the world of demolition occurring like mold growth—slow and all consuming. Bumping fists, the one that remembers, recalls imaginations, and never knew that this is what reality provides: long hours, short pay, tall dangers of falling supports, failing equipment, and a reminder of all that could have been on the face of the other one, the one that now opens the passenger side door and closes it, if only the other recognizes the shared knot of past life. We toil at our work as our boss drives around and we hear the clicking of a pen on a clipboard, *faster, faster, night fall approaches.*

FROM THE DESK OF ROBERT SUNLAND

November 5th, 1964

Spokane, Washington

To my son, Horatio,

I know you won't read this until you are older, much older. At the time of writing, you are four. I don't know what to say. I don't know if I'll be around to explain to you my condition, my infirmity, my echoing pain inside that frizzles like silent fireworks.

Leukemia is a dreaded thing.

I've spent my entire adult life working, selling, contracting machines. Excavators and backhoes. Giant heavy pieces of metal moving and sifting through dirt, the same dirt that I myself will soon be under. Doctors are the best at giving definite indefinite answers.

I want to impart some judgement, some advice before I go. Don't work yourself into the ground. I have. I can't say it has helped my spiritual life; I can't say it has helped my emotional life. It did, however, help buy things. Stupid things. Things that I've used maybe a handful of times before they sat in the garage, or the storage shed, or in the attic for bugs and heat and cold to attack their fibers and plastics. I'm not talking about things that we need to survive, especially in this day and age. You'll need a car. Depending on when you read this, and I don't know when that'll be—maybe never, maybe these letters will get thrown away too? Maybe they'll reside in our attic for years and years until one day, maybe some summer, or spring, hands will reach and discover in an old shoebox these dusty pages.

But my car, my Chevrolet coupe is yours. A word of advice—before going anywhere for the day, peek under the engine. Look for leaks, puddles, spots. I say this

from experience. Your uncle Frank—and I'm sure the two of you will get along just fine—once forgot to tighten up the oil drain plug after changing the oil. Me, being young at that point and full of life, unaware of the ravaging blood pumping, started the coupe right up, and got about halfway down Garfield Ave when the oil light popped on and the damn thing ticked like mad, and steam clouded around the hood, and when I got out to investigate, what did I see trailing behind me like a slick dirty serpent? A nice steady line of fresh oil. Ask Uncle Frank that story. He knows how to really tell it. The drunker he is the better. I'd wait till Thanksgiving when he should be three drinks in around turkey time.

But you'll need things. Some things. A house. Sure. That is important. In fact, maybe around South Indian Trail. By the time you've read this, those houses shouldn't be too beat up. I should know—I had a part in their construction. Maybe you'll see an old newspaper about our development. Maybe your mother has a stash hidden somewhere in the house. I can never tell with that woman, your mother. That's what keeps things interesting. When you've figured someone out completely, where do you go? When you can anticipate her every move, her every demeanor in relation to the season and hour, what are you left with? A living, organic time-piece?

My time is limited. That's for certain. I've set in motion the proper paperwork to dissolve my company, or rather our company. You see, Horatio, my father was a stern man. Very stern man. He prohibited your uncle Frank and me from having any toys. No candy. On occasion, when we had worked long enough in the field, on the house, on the shed, with the cattle, with the chickens, with farm equipment, with the corn, with the canning—we were allowed a coke. This wasn't bad; it was good. Your uncle and I

learned much from your grandfather. Hard work can pay off. And it has for me. And for you. I may not be around to spoil you as I had planned, but maybe this next and last business venture will give you something to entertain yourself for many years. It may even secure for you, your family, a sustainable future of wealth.

Ah, I'm sorry, Horatio. Sometimes I get distracted. But, here, let me tell you my venture plan.

Sunland Industrial Equipment has done well. I'm humbled by how profitable the company has been, and that money can still talk, even after the company's death. With that capital, and with some friends' investments, I'm opening an amusement park. Yes. An amusement park with a rollercoaster, a merry-go-round, a Ferris wheel, and perhaps some other rides. I want to pass on a legacy of fun, of family—some qualities I found little of in the dirt, both as a child and as an adult. It's still in the planning phase now, but the future is looking bright.

Hopefully, by the time you read this, the park will still be open, thriving. There isn't much in the way of competition. Natatorium is our nearest competitor, but they are on the way out. Who knows, by the time Sunland is opened, they might not exist. Such is the way the world works.

I feel so relieved to finally write this down and address this project with you, Horatio. Some days are good. Today, I can't wait to come home and kiss your forehead. I wonder what your mother is preparing for dinner tonight. Last night was spaghetti, your favorite. Is it still?

I'll see you soon. With love,

Your father

P.S. Tell your mother I love her, even when things got difficult, even when there were more rainy days than sunshine, even when late night forced me to sleep in my office, my last thought before sleep was always her angled face. Sometimes, when I can't sleep, I think of the time we first met in St Joseph's cemetery, on a bright cold day in May...

WORK FORM

SERVICE# 1028

DATE: June 26, 2005

LOCATION: *Tsunami*, brake station

REASON FOR VISIT: Restart of *Tsunami*'s protocols, testing of braking components

LABOR DESCRIPTION: None.

PARTS USED: None.

NOTES: I returned to determine if the flapper joints were properly lubricated and connected to linkage per Horizon manual and Tim's handwritten alterations, but I found the rollercoaster in full operation status. Guests were lining up to ride it. I went straight to Horatio's office and asked him why *Tsunami* was open. Hadn't he reviewed my notes from earlier? He said he had a conversation with Tim. They felt confident in the ride's brakes, as long as I was maintaining them. I said Horatio that is fine, but there is something wrong. Something with the design of the brakes themselves. He said that we needed the ride open. We were already late with the rollercoaster, and what we needed now, what the park needed now, what he needed now was a ride that was successful and operational before he flew off to Paris for an art conference. I didn't feel comfortable with this. After that, I spent the rest of the late morning watching the guests stumble off the ride, rubbing their necks. Tim was nowhere to be found. I couldn't reach him. Will monitor the ride carefully. Maybe the rollercoaster will settle. Maybe the brake pads will wear with the ride and it'll get better. Rides are like tables, my mentor had said, once a leg gets wobbly, the rest follow. I hope he's wrong.

VERDICT: *Tsunami* open to guests, first time, checks skipped and overruled by Horatio Sunland and Tim Mason.

SERVICE COMPILED BY: Dan Taylor, First Mechanic

OLIVIA'S CHALLENGE

She held in her hands a basketball. It gleamed in the afternoon sun. She saw on its surface the fingerprints from the person before her, as if she was investigating a crime. She didn't want to place her hands on those exact spots. Far off in the distance she heard the spray of the log flume, the careening of a coaster accompanied by the screams and yells of guests and she shot the ball at the hoop. Damien stood nearby with a timer. She was half way through the basketball challenge, where she threw as many balls as she could at the hoop in two minutes. She was trying to beat Brenda's score of 29.

"You got this, Olivia!" Damien said, his eyes shifting like a cat between his timer and the hoop.

She dribbled the ball for no reason other than to settle her thoughts and arms and legs. Behind her, behind the wooden fence that separated the half court and the path was the little nun. Olivia hadn't seen her when she walked up to the cart full of basketballs, most of which were underinflated, but when she started throwing them, she saw the little nun standing there on the other side of the fence staring at her, holding the fence posts with her two little hands. Her nails were painted red and white.

Olivia threw the ball and it arced toward the net. In its travel, which she followed, she saw past the ball, the hills outside Sunland. They were green with pine trees, and beyond those hills was her farmhouse, inherited from her grandparents, now long gone, dead. She was a child, rolling down a hill, hearing her parents laughing with her, and then one day they were gone. And then it was Grandmother's blankets, Grandmother teaching her how to can food, Grandfather building her a bedframe. That was the thing about growing up with your grandparents, everything became slower. But she did learn how to throw knives. Grandmother knew how to throw knives since she was a child. That was

when Olivia first felt okay since her parents left, dead. Her parents were kind, like old fall leaves in a corner on her patio. She knew what happened to them. In fact, most of the world did. That's what happens when planes fall out of the sky. They didn't die in the air, they died on the ground, was what her grandfather had said to her when she watched the news, even though they told her not to. It's not the speed that gets ya, it's the sudden stops.

She grabbed another ball, aimed with her arms, and threw it at the hoop. The little nun stared. Damien held the timer. She reached for another.

Brenda had said early on in their relationship that she loved the way Olivia threw knives. It was what attracted her the most: the threat and control contained on that stage. Brenda worked the basketball challenge, had showed up to watch Olivia's act, had brought her hot chocolate every day, even though Olivia couldn't stand hot chocolate, and asked what she had planned for the rest of the night. Olivia had said, taking in the sunset on her back patio. Brenda asked, where was home, and Olivia paused, smelled that dreadful hot chocolate steaming out of her cup, and replied her farm over the hill. Brenda had never been on a farm, and so she invited herself to Olivia's, and they talked through the sunset as it burned the pastures brilliant and stark, and the barn cast its shadow for miles and the pine trees bent and bloomed, and robins sang, magpies dove at her compost pile, and the barrel, her padded barrel from childhood that sat against a fence post, red with paint, hoops rusted from rain, and kissed.

Olivia dove her hands for another ball.

Damien said, "Fifteen seconds."

The little nun hovered behind the fence, and behind her were her parents—that's what it looked like.

With a jerk of her hands and arms, the ball tilted toward the net. It landed inside, rattled around the hoop like she used to do in her barrel, and descended.

“You're at 26, Olivia. You can do it! Try and hit thirty.”

She reached again into the cart, diving farther into the rickety metal cart for more basketballs.

Her heart pumped. An eagle sailed overhead.

On her grandparents TV, the news had shown a farm like theirs, except it was strewn with hundreds of feet of wreckage. The plane had nose-dived into wheat. What was odd to her at the time was that there was a red tractor not ten feet from the remains of the nose. It sat there like a loyal dog waiting for its owner to return home from work.

When Brenda heard her tell this story about her upbringing, her catastrophic heritage, she had cradled Olivia's head in her hands, supported her head and hair, until it was morning and outside their bedroom window was a hummingbird with an iridescent beak. For a moment, before she fell asleep in Brenda's hands, she felt as if the world had stopped spinning, as if she was finally out of that barrel.

Then Brenda left last Christmas. Olivia didn't know where she went.

“One more throw, Olivia!”

She hurled her last shot. It missed, bounced off the rim, off the backboard. It bounced a few times under the basket before it rested, nudging a clump of tulips—red, green, blue, yellow, yellow—growing around the edge of the back fence.

“Twenty-nine! You almost did it. Maybe tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah, maybe. Damn, that was close. Personal best, though.” She clapped her hands together to keep her blood flowing. She turned around to leave the basketball challenge. She walked through the exit-gate, and as she did, she saw that the little nun was gone. She had wanted to ask her her name. Did she like being a nun? How old was she?

The exit door swung shut. Walking toward *Taco Now* for lunch, she passed through the park and was swallowed by the dailiness of her life, of her heart beating, of her hands dry and clammy from those basketballs, of her failure again to beat Brenda’s score.

WE SIT IN OUR WORK TRUCK

We are on break. We are on break in our work truck. The only heat pours in from vents in the dash. Eventually, the heat will fog up the windows, and the all cold November landscape consisting of: wheelbarrows, crate of various sizes and colors—big blue, small red, crumpled orange, broken yellow and an endless sea of discarded black totes—all in a scattered formation on frosty ground will vanish. This one looking at the roller coaster and the steep slope that we are working, the one who eats bananas before the day starts, remembers a day long ago when the park was open and vibrant with echoes of shouts and whoops from loving families. This one now cups the heater vents, recalling memories as they crawl out of the darkness of some forest, of some brown bag broken open for a moment, before a stitching can close it up. The sensation of isolation and claustrophobia of a nun outfit, of pure white around the periphery, of two women, one a mother, one a friend, and between them a man, a father who likes so much and loves so much that with so many lines on the ground and in the air that originate from his heart, he can only dance for so long before tripping. In the forefront of memory, a shy boy waiting in line for a ride, the bumper cars, looking back. In that look, this one, the one who now exits from the driver side of the work truck, closes the door like a personal car, looks up at *Tornado* and sees for the first time today the latticework of a generation of wooden supports and beams holding the track, the steep slope, and the continuation of line that must be stapled, propellant hung.

**FROM THE DESK OF ROBERT SUNLAND, OWNER OF SUNLAND
INDUSTRIAL EQUIPMENT**

November 20th, 1964

Spokane, Washington

To Wallace Rudin,

Wallace, I know you are on vacation in California, but I wanted to send you this letter, so by the time you get back, we can either start together, or simply have dinner sometime.

Wallace, before anyone else has a chance to intercede or make differing remarks, that your management of this company's finances has been exemplary. I know working at a company that has a considerable amount of paperwork and financial girth can be intimidating. But I knew when it came time to pick the head accountant for the company, I needed only to look within our ranks. Your predecessor, Mr. Lofton, had thought highly of you, of your money handling skills, the way you were able to advise both the board and me on potential problems and boons—qualities and preferences I encourage and expect.

I know you received the “going away package.” And that is true and earnest; however, I'm writing to see if you would be interested in my next and last venture project. As far as details go, there are not too many to divulge, and the exact numbers and figures are forthcoming—should you choose to accept this offer, we would be working closely together for the foreseeable future. By no means, however, do I expect your continued diligence after my walk through the dirt and into the void. Even now, as I write this letter, I feel the saturation in my arms and legs, the profound acceleration of white blood cells and the deformed red ones.

My wife insists that we pray every night before bed. We kneel, and she leads us through a prayer. The first time I resisted. Then she cried. Then she said, "Give me this. I don't know how else to help." After that, I kneeled. And to be honest, Wallace, I tried to pray. I tried to have a conversation with God or a god. The thing is, it's a very one-sided conversation. In truth, I get more feedback from our son. He's four now, and sometimes after I arrive home from work, I sit with him on our front porch while he draws, colors and paints. I must say, he may end up a talented artist.

But, maybe this fake praying is good for at least one thing—it calms her down. I think that's really the goal. When you're dying, the people who need help the most are the ones around you. Isn't that strange, Wallace? My blood pumps with defect; my cells are all out of whack; my vision blurs to where I have trouble typing. You'd think God could help me at least see for Christ's sake. Fine, I'll die. But let me see till I'm in the ground. That's just decency. And the headaches. These goddamn headaches.

I'm sorry, Wallace. *Linda, note to cut these two previous paragraphs out before we send it to Mr. Rudin. Thank you.

Wallace, at the end of this year you will be either unemployed and seeking a similar job elsewhere, or you could be elbows deep in my project. It will be quite different from Sunland Industrial Equipment. My plan is to build an amusement park here in the Inland Northwest to service the terrible need for family fun. This park, and mind you the plans are still very much in flux, will have a full-fledged wooden rollercoaster, a Ferris wheel, log flume, and many other rides at the opening of the park. As of right now, talking with contractors, engineers and the like, our estimated window for opening should be in the spring of 1966. Quite urgent, I know. I don't know if this urgency is powered by

my regular motivation, or the pressure of a shortened life. A part of me wishes to see the park open. I'm imagining lights. Lots of lights. I want this park to dazzle the senses. In essence, I'm asking if you would like to stay on and assist me and my small group of investors, contractors, etc. in creating the best and only park of its kind in the area. I can't promise the park will be profitable—you'll help decide that I'm sure. But it will be unique. That I can promise. And, I can promise to a certain extent your continued pay.

Think about it, Wallace. This could change the lives of the community. We are thinking somewhere North of Spokane, but still deciding on the right parcel of land to buy. If you choose to accompany me on this quest (for why not a quest? Are we not as heroic in our risks?) to provide the best entertainment around, your work will start shortly. Possibly within the month.

I hope you will see this as an emergent opportunity for you. Think of your family, Wallace. I know you'll want to have a means of income.

Kind Regards,

Robert Sunland

Owner and Operator of Sunland Industrial Equipment

P.S. Linda, darling, read this through, and send it immediately to Wallace. We'll need someone who is versatile and competent. L, R.S.

WORK FORM

SERVICE# 1029

DATE: June 26, 2005

LOCATION: *Tsunami*

REASON FOR VISIT: Visual inspection of brakes

LABOR DESCRIPTION: No need for labor as the brakes look to be in good working order.

PARTS USED: None, but I did enjoy a red slushee.

NOTES: I came by today in the blazing sun to look at my design. Dan keeps calling and looking for me around the park as if I live here instead of Horatio. As I suspected, the brakes are working fine, right in the middle of my own mathematics. I don't know if it is because Dan is new here or if he's not used to new rides, but this is how all new coasters brake until they are broken in. It's a common prevailing law in rollercoasters. I'd wager that *Tsunami* will last decades with proper upkeep. Perhaps Horatio should look into more experienced operators.

VERDICT: *Tsunami* is working beautifully. I saw, before I wrote this up, a young lady exiting the coaster smiling and laughing. Whatever Dan says, this ride will draw people from all over.

SERVICE COMPLIED BY: Tim Mason, Lead Designer of Braking Systems for
Horizon Entertainment Group, LLC

FEEDING OLIVIA

Brenda had said on a Tuesday in April, before the park was in full swing, that the only thing in life that mattered was a healthy, messy taco. Olivia kept that tradition alive today.

Olivia bit into her soft taco and looked up at the sign above the small, and sometimes mobile, taco stand. She didn't know how they moved it—there were no wheels to be seen underneath, and for being so small (only two employees could fit inside the wooden structure at a time), it would be a chore to move on the footpaths around the park. Last month, the stand was in front of *Tornado*, which she was told by Horatio, had done poorly, considering that most guests didn't want to slam tacos after enduring the scariest ride in the park.

Along the path from the basketball challenge, she admired the broken fences that guarded the track to the log flume. Between bushes and tulips, she saw the fake river where guests rode in logs.

Olivia took another bite. Beans and cheese fell from the tortilla onto her paper plate. She knew she was late getting something to eat, but she still hoped she wasn't too late for her collision course.

Okay, she thought, not much of a collision course. More of an opportunity. Usually around this time she could watch Horatio walk past *Fantasm*, and depending on his walk, determine how things were going on with the park. Not that she cared, but over the years, Horatio seemed to have had a manic sense of time, and she often thought about how Kant would take walks around his town at such a precise time, that everyone knew what time it was. Or had that been Descartes? Briefly her mind went back to her philosophy class in college. All she could recall was the professor's long nose, and how

when he wrote on the chalkboard, his nose would touch every so often and leave oil marks.

She took another bite.

Lately, Horatio's walks seemed more agitated—his gait halting, his heels sticking to the ground longer than needed. His hands were always in his pockets now, no longer swinging by his sides. Perhaps what had startled her the most were his eyes. Over the years she had seen them as sailors would the North Star. They, brown and on the surface unremarkable, told the inner life within. Even with the addition of his glasses, she saw the star and shine diminish: the brown color heavier and, when she was sitting close to the footpath, the red lines on his eyes deepen like the cracks forming under basketball hoop.

She took a sip of her ginger ale. She saw the roof of *Fantasm*, the tarps still there from when it had rained last.

Olivia shook her head. Save for the young couple eating behind her at a table, the other two tables were empty. That's when she noticed the little nun from her first this morning, and what Olivia thought must be her family at the stand ordering.

In the daylight, the little nun seemed even smaller. Her black little shoes planted on the asphalt, the flowing nun's robes black as night, and she still wore the white coif. It wasn't so much that the outfit stood out, which it did; it was the whiteness of her headpiece. With her in Olivia's foreground, the little nun's ensemble clashed vividly with the background, the footpath's wooden fencing that curved toward the bathrooms and the Ferris wheel, the small brown bushes, and the random tulips—yellow, red, off-white—that popped up with a certain vitality. After her last show of the day, Olivia would

sometimes walk aimlessly around the park and try to count all the tulips. The highest she had ever gotten was 153.

And then the little nun was in front of her. For the first time, Olivia took in her face: bright blue eyes, a small nose and mouth, and the most freckles she had ever seen on a face. They sprouted from cheek to cheek, concentrated on the soft tip of her nose, found their way down her chin, and some courageous adventurers made their camps on her temples and forehead. It was such a delightful shock that Olivia simply said:

“Hi there, freckles.” And then she said, on recovery, “I saw you at my show earlier. Did you like it?” Olivia finished her taco and swallowed it down with some more ginger ale. The little nun’s family, which looked like a father, a mother, and maybe an aunt were waiting for their food by the window. They looked to be in deep conversation. The maybe-aunt gestured toward the sky. The father nodded and also pointed up. The mother watched the Ferris wheel rotating slowly through the trees behind the taco stand.

“Yes,” the little nun said. She looked down at the ground and then back up. “I don’t like demons.”

“I don’t either!” Olivia said. Then she didn’t know what to say next. “I saw you praying. I think you helped me close the gateway.” She thought that might cheer the little nun up. She saw the little nun’s eyes water. “You were very brave.”

An eagle soared over them, casting its shadow on their table.

The child looked up at the sky and said, “Will you pray with me?”

Olivia glanced back at the child’s family. The father nodded more and touched the maybe-aunt on her arm. The mother stared at the father. The maybe-aunt laughed and threw back her head as if taking a shot of whiskey.

“For you, just this once.”

They held each other’s hands and bowed their heads. The child’s hands were small, her nails perfectly trimmed and painted—they alternated red and white with each finger. On each knuckle were more freckles, little galaxies swirling on the clearest night sky.

Olivia looked at her own hands. More wrinkles were appearing at the joints. She looked up, examined the footpath to see if Horatio was there, and whispered, “I must confess, I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything at all.”

WE CHECK OURSELVES

As dusk approaches, we check our equipment. The boss told us to check our equipment, for tonight will be the night for raze and blaze. So, we check our tools. We check that they are there. We have a list on a clipboard. This is how our checking occurs: one of us, the one with bright painted nails reads from the list. The other one, who smokes slower now, for the day is coming to an end, for it is at the point of transition from day to night, responds yes or no. So, one asks:

Pliers? Yes.

Hammers? Yes.

Gloves? Obviously.

I'm just going down the list, Marty. I know, sorry.

DET CORD? Yes, still have half a spool.

Should be enough—hard hats, vests, ear plugs? Yes, yes, yes.

As we check off the list, the still air reverbs with vibrations of falling steel. The Ferris wheel staggers, and in a presumed open space, topples over. The crash shakes their truck, the lines on the beams tap, tap and the propellant canisters wobble like Christmas ornaments. From all that noise, a single long yell breaks through like a ray of sun through a blanket of clouds, incites a series of shouts, and then quiet.

Sounded like Billy. Yeah, it did.

Something happened—do you think something happened? I don't know.

Should we check? They've got it, I'm sure it's nothing.

Staple gun and staples? Yes.

Propellant canisters? Yes, plenty, plenty.

Check off list—wait that can't be right—it's asking whether we have this sheet. Idiots, all of them.

Radios? Yes.

We should radio about the Ferris wheel, about that yell. Suppose to keep silence, there's a lot of demolition today.

Okay, okay. We good?

More shouts and, in the distance approaching like a train whistle bouncing off trees, a siren. It arrives, and somehow is louder than the Ferris wheel crashing, louder than the yell, louder than the silence after. A moment of quiet, a moment of sirens again, and then quiet, quiet as the ambulance pulls away, and we can see through the rusty wrought-iron fencing, there are no lights, only headlights and taillights and the creaking of tons and tons of wooden supports. We check off the final items on the list. We check our pockets for pieces of paper from our loved ones that say, "Hope today will be a good day."

WORK FORM

SERVICE# 1098

DATE: September 3, 2005

LOCATION: *Tsunami*, loading station

REASON FOR VISIT: Morning inspection

LABOR DESCRIPTION: Performed various checks on chain drive, control box, condition of wheels, walked the track for debris, and examined the condition of the brakes.

PARTS USED: Brake pads, hi-temp grease, solder and other shop equipment.

NOTES: Over the course of any normal operation, a ride will endure numerous and usual wear and tear directly associated with load. Load is derived from the number of times the train travels the track and the weight it carries. It's simple physics. I've noted in past reports my concern with the braking system of this ride to Horatio, Tim Mason, and other workers in the park. They, the workers, all agreed when they examined the brakes, that something had to change. What I didn't expect was a mass layoff. What we provide is safety for all rides. I don't know what Horatio is thinking when he fired almost all of the operators here. Obviously, this was a decision financial. But you can't have a park operate without a dedicated staff on hand to fix problems as they arise. I don't care that he also promoted me to Lead Mechanic. I don't care if he says next we'll get that servo or that gear—it's been months. When I look at *Tsunami*, which is chugging along, I worry for riders' safety. Tim has told me that the ride is fine. He's designed the brakes. These brakes are on rides all over the world. That may be, but there is something wrong with them. I get complaints all the time from riders about the jarring stops. Tim's wife is pregnant again. He told me that this ride is so safe that he would let his pregnant wife ride

it. In any case, the guy is an idiot. What's he hiding? I don't fear writing in these reports.

I know Horatio never reviews them.

I replaced the brake pads because they had warped and were starting to crack. Will check back tomorrow.

VERDICT: *Tsunami* is operational

SERVICE COMPLIED BY: Dan Taylor, Lead Mechanic

FROM THE HOME OF ROBERT SUNLAND

November 26th, 1964

Linda,

A week has passed with no response from Wallace Rudin? I write this letter, instead of calling, because my wife wants me to rest and enjoy our view of the Spokane River. So, I write this letter now, in the failing light of day. I dare say, writing is a bold and romantic act, is it not?

I worry about our predicament with this venture. Building a profitable business from scratch was difficult, but building an amusement park is like trying to start a fire with rain-drenched wood and no kindling. Talks run short at city hall. No one seems to know where to direct us. Either contractors do not know how to tackle these complicated designs, or they return suspiciously low bids, or they are competent and established and offer an insane number. I know if we secured Wallace, he would offer tremendous support and insight.

I worry Wallace will keep us waiting. He is a strong applicant elsewhere. A part of me wishes him all the best, to run from this crazy idea of mine, to find a position with a reputable company, to find someone special. In all my time with Wallace, he's never mentioned his personal life. Does he have a wife? A girlfriend? A companion at all? Where does he go after work? Never has he attended any social gathering of ours. Perhaps, I wish that if he were to accept my offer that we may finally get to know each other better. Work colleagues are all I have, except a certain singular number of individuals.

Linda, doctors are both saints and devils. They tell you your inner demons, your inner infractions, your inner deformities with as much certainty as I see what color the

floor is underneath me. They fill your head with monsters that tear and grapple with your flesh; or they only shed light on the monsters, for they resided there before the doctor's illumination. I'm haunted. I can't sleep through the night. My bones ache a deep ache, like tremors rippling from a countryside well. I can handle the discomfort and pain; my doctor has written a script for a wonderful little pill, Valium. I must say, I don't ingest drugs of any kind, but this pill works wonders. Recently, I asked my wife for a gimlet, and when I drink and take those pills, I feel more relaxed than I've been for years. I can't describe it; my skin feels both alive and dead, my tongue moist and dry, my toes curled and limp, my eyes awake and tired. We should try it sometime, you and I, while I still can breathe and walk. Yesterday, Horatio spent the whole morning on the porch with me. I was deep in a Valium and sidecar, and so the horizon, with the sun limping into the day, cast shadows in all direction. Horatio painted the sunrise, and I cried. He looked at me with no words, but I knew he'd never seen me cry; he was startled. The rest of our time on the porch that morning we spent in silence. I didn't think children so young could be so still.

If Wallace does not return a call or letter, let's move along. Mr. Lofton created a contact list for me before his departure from the company. I'm sure someone on that list would jump at the chance to build a world-class amusement park. Let's give Wallace another week. I hope to be in the office by that time, and from there we can move forward with selecting a replacement, even as it stings my chest.

L,

Robert Sunland

P.S. My wife checks the mail now—use discretion.

OLIVIA'S CHRISTMAS GIFTS

When Olivia let go of the little nun's hands, she felt as if the whole world had slipped off a table. She heard in the background the splashing of the log ride. She heard farther off the careening of wood and metal as the train on *Tornado* breached for air in between two underground sections like a supercharged blue whale. And, as she watched the little nun stand with her family, she thought of the last time she'd seen Brenda. She made her way back to *Fantasm*, and even though it was sunny, she thought she saw snowflakes falling between pine tree branches.

It had been Christmas. Horatio always threw a Christmas party for all the workers to celebrate the past year and get ready for the upcoming one. And, because of the snow and the cold, the party was at *Fantasm*. Olivia sat next to Horatio on the edge of the stage and they looked out over the small mass of people dancing, drinking bright red punch, and singing with abandon the random songs that played over the speakers hidden in the ceiling. Horatio and Olivia slouched into each other, and at the end of every song, they cheered with the rest of the wild arms and hands in the center of the room.

"To my workers!" Horatio boomed past his plastic cup. "To my wonderful employees!"

"To the snow! To this wonderful establishment," Olivia trailed off into her cup then downed the rest of the punch. She could taste a hint of fruit punch behind the vodka.

That's when she saw Brenda. She was dancing at edge of the crowd with Dan Taylor, the head of maintenance. Her body, which was partly covered in an assortment of missus Santa Clause pieces, moved into him with each beat of "Drummer Boy." Olivia eyed her for a full minute, or maybe thirty seconds. Olivia's drink was empty before she

decided, or rather her body, or maybe another personality altogether, turned her head toward Horatio and planted a wet kiss on the side of his mouth.

Horatio didn't seem to notice right away. He sat motionless. Only when Olivia put her right hand on his cheek did he finally turn. She worked her lips with his, bit his lip, explored his mouth with her tongue. As she did this, she squinted at Brenda, who was now in a full embrace with Dan Taylor—they were doing everything except fucking. Olivia pushed Horatio away and slid off the stage. She broke one of her heels but didn't care. She marched with lopsided steps between the crowd of happy dancing people. She threw elbows and split up partners who were in her direct line to Brenda.

“To this punch! Let's sing the night away!” Horatio stood on the stage and started dancing by himself, his drink spilling here and there, before he slipped on his own puddle, sending his feet straight in the air. He landed with a dull loud thud on his back. The workers nearest shouted, “All's well!” which was a saying all the workers knew because that's how they started each day at the park. Horatio raised his hand and gave a thumbs up.

“Hey!” Olivia shouted into Brenda's ear. “Did you even try to find me before you started rubbing on him?”

“What?” Brenda still moved with the music, and Dan Taylor was motioning with his hand at someone in the crowd. He wanted another drink.

“Did you try to find me? I've been on the stage waiting,” Olivia yelled in Brenda's ear. “Why are you dancing with him?”

“Would you want me to dance with a woman?” Brenda looked around in mock concern. “Or would you want me to kiss someone? Like you were?” She turned to face toward Dan Taylor and put her hands on his chest and kissed him on the cheek.

“I was just trying to get your attention. You were dancing with him first.” Olivia started to move with the music. She felt out of place, out of time. She always did this—think more of something than what it was, jumped right to conclusions. “I just thought—”

“You just thought what?” Brenda stopped moving and stood in front of Olivia.

Now that she wasn't moving, Olivia could see her clearer. It was like those times when she crawled out of her barrel as a kid and tried to stand. She'd wobble around the thick grass of their pasture while her parents ran down the hill to meet her. By the time they got down to her, she could see them with a certain high definition, as if the jarring of vision and back to normal enhanced what was supposed to be clear all along—their matching flannel shirts and brown pants flecked with mud and dirt.

Brenda folded her arms. “Because I was dancing with some guy, that means I want to fuck him? I don't like guys, which I know might be hard for you to understand being new to this thing.” She waved her hand between them. She shook her head. “I don't want to hide out in your bedroom all the time. I want to be up front. I don't want to hide. Can't you see that? Be honest with yourself. You're honest with me when we're alone. Just be honest with yourself. It'll be okay.” Brenda reached out with her hand.

“I'm scared. That's being honest. This is new.” Olivia took her hand.

“Let's be scared together.”

“I can't.” Olivia dropped her hand, moved closer. “Please, I just need more time to figure things out.”

“I can’t.” Brenda stepped back. “I can’t be with someone who isn’t honest. I don’t want to be a secret plaything. I’m bigger than that.”

Horatio had found his feet again and was throwing candy into the mass of dancers. He shouted over them all, “Peace be with you, my friends!”

“Please just a little more time.”

Brenda backed away. “You break my heart, Oli.”

Later, Olivia would find out from Brenda’s friends and others like Dan Taylor and even Horatio that Brenda had left that night, two days before Christmas Eve, abandoning her post at the basketball booth. Olivia figured she drove that night all the way to her home in Vancouver, Washington, and returned to her mom. Maybe had she finally found a home.

“And peace be with Sunland!” Horatio boomed and fell face first onto the stage, while the crowd around Olivia boomed, “All’s well!”

WE WATCH SHADOWS

Sun is gone behind hills. Shadows merge into other dark spots, and we are at the end of our line, the beginning of another section of lines. We are about to connect the lines. This is one of the last steps before the show later tonight. Before ignition, like we are sending a rocket into space. Like we are doing something that grand, that massive of a departure in hopes of exploration. Rather, we check off boxes so that we can all go home. So that most of us can go home. One of us, the one with the painted nails, hurries to connect the wires together, to complete the circuit. The other one fumbles with propellant canisters. Crows fly overheads. They look like smudges. Smudges on a coffee table that spins, because the distance between the crows never changes, just the orientation. That's when, in the midst of completing the loop, the radio breaks silence.

Cindy. Marty. Once you're done with connecting the line and propellant bags, meet at the Coaster Alley sign. We'll take a count of all personnel, and check twice given today's event, over.

Finished with the last wire connections—red to red, white to white, and so on—that one answers the radio.

This is Cindy. Copy. Will be there in fifteen minutes. Over.

Thanks. We have food. Over.

We look at us, one tying off the last propellant canister, and think the same thing, maybe not in the same order—there's food, there's never food and Billy. Billy is missing this food. Somewhere, high above, though we don't look, crows caw, caw, and we think: maybe we'll save some for Billy. Billy might want some food later. Maybe, we'll take some food and leave it in the park where crows and other animals can feed and feel like being alive matters.

“The only rule for painting is to mind the brushes.”

-Wilfred Bulvin

If he'd known that Wallace Rudin had an appointment this morning, he'd have postponed his painting. He had started, as he did every Friday morning over the past ten years, by brewing a pot of coffee, toasting a bagel, pulling out cream cheese, and after all items brewed, toasted, and spread, he walked from his kitchen to his studio, which at one point was a sitting room, and sat in an enormous plush chair. And from this chair, he admired his paintings. There were completed paintings stacked against a wall, underneath a large window. A blank canvas on an easel waited for him. Outside, through the window, he saw his tall hedges, and over them the rides and attractions of Sunland, because his house, which contained this studio and his office upstairs, resided in the park's northern boundary. When he finished painting for a morning, he simply dressed and walked through a security gate, and arrived mere feet from *Fantasm*.

When Wallace barged in, Horatio was just putting down the first strokes of his project, “Winter Clowns.”

He knew even before he heard Wallace's raspy voice that it was Wallace, or Mr. Rudin, as he insisted he be called. It had been only two weeks since they had congregated in Horatio's office upstairs over a bottle of Kraken and talked about the state of the park's finances.

“Mr. Sunland, a moment, if you can. It's quite urgent,” said Wallace, as he leaned his head into the studio.

“Can't it wait, Wallace?” Horatio already knew from his voice that it couldn't wait, whatever it was, and since their meetings never took a lot of time, he decided to drop his brush on a small paint-covered side table and followed him upstairs.

“I have tried,” Wallace said, sitting down in a folding chair, “even in our last meeting to persuade you to heed my advice and warnings. I don’t know what to say, except that I’ve known this day would come, and it has.”

“What are you talking about?” Horatio leaned back, activated the massage feature on his chair and smiled. This chair was worth the investment. Wallace must be talking about Horatio’s next trip to Iceland. He had searched over the web for exotic art conferences and retreats and Iceland was the first one to come up. It was cheap too. For two weeks, he would receive generative painting sessions with fellow artists of prestige like him. He would have meals paid for, lodging paid for. The only other expense, besides venturing into the city to buy unique furniture and art pieces, was the airfare. He planned it all without Wallace’s help, and it was one of his more economical trips: \$120,000. “Is this about Iceland? I know you’ve been harping on and on about expenses, but this could be the ticket for opening up my next level. You agree, my painting has come along. Did I show you my latest one? The clown with icicles for eyes?”

The heater kicked off, and a silence permeated the office. Through the window, he saw cars parking in the employee lot. It was still early. An orange truck pulled in, and Dan Taylor got out, grabbed a bag from the bed, and walked with other staff.

“Horatio, we have no more money. We are broke. Done.” He emphasized each point with a jab of his hand.

“What? What are you saying? How can that be?”

Wallace stood and planted his palms on the table. Horatio saw the miles of wrinkles on his face like a map of some broken world, his eyes two deep dark shafts to the lava within. “How can that be? How can that be? I’ll tell you how! I’ve been telling

you for years to cut back on your spending. Look at your office for Christ's sake. You sit in a ten thousand dollar executive chair, surrounded by paintings from around the world, paintings, mind you, that you'll never accomplish, while you plan trip after trip after trip to all these places to learn art, to study under some crackpot named Bulvin, but all I ever see you bring back is more furniture, more paintings and pieces, more shit to fill up this house and your other one. You have no thought or notion of business in your small, dimmed mind. Your father would jump off Monroe Street Bridge if he saw how you ran this place." Wallace swayed and sat down. He looked both defeated and energized; his eyelids drooped with each blink.

"You said we had time. I have notes from past meetings. You said we had a year or two before we had to really change," Horatio said. He fished in his many drawers looking for notes and binders but could only find art magazines, craft magazines, numerous Twix wrappers, and bottles of rum in various states of emptiness. The sun streamed in now with full force, cast shadows across Wallace's face. Until now, he'd never fully seen the face in front of him for all these meetings. He saw the countless years of work in all those wrinkles, saw that even in this early morning, his suit was clean, put together with care. Did his wife help him?

Giving up on finding anything in his desk to help, Horatio said, "What if we sold some attractions, some of my furniture? That could sustain us, right?" He was reaching. Even he knew that.

"What, sell the log flume? Give it to another amusement park? What about *Tsunami*? Sell the coaster that killed ten people ten years ago? No, it's time. Beyond time for this place, and for me," he crumpled even further than before, and his frame became

more pronounced through his suit, which now that Horatio studied it, he realized was cheap.

All over the park, his employees were readying the rides for another day. But not just another day, Anniversary Day. Today was the fiftieth anniversary of the park's opening. He imagined what it would have been like to walk through the gates to everything new and brightly colored. His father, Robert, would lead the way as droves of people from all over paid for entertainment. He had heard from Wallace that there had been fireworks at the end of the opening night. He wanted to paint that scene someday.

“What happens now?”

“We have enough resources to pay the staff their last check. After that, gates close until someone buys this place. But I don't think that'll happen. The way the park is now, in disrepair, nobody will want this place or the rides.”

“But, we are on for today at least. The decorations are already bought; staff are coming in. We can be open today.” Horatio looked out the window again and saw the parking lot full. Good, everyone should be here today. Today, he'll make it memorable for everyone.

Wallace stood. “If you're open today, that's another day you have to pay for. And let me tell you, as your new ex-financial officer, you don't have the money.” He paused next to the folding chair, his back to Horatio. “One more thing”—he turned back around, withdrew a thick wad of envelopes from his inner suit pocket. “I found these the other day when the maid moved our dresser around. They'd fallen behind it.” He tossed them on the desk.

They nearly fell off, but Horatio intercepted them. They were old, dusty. He saw his father's name and realized they were letters. "What are these?"

"Letters addressed to various business partners, including me. But there are some addressed to you. I have no use of them, and besides, they belong to you." He moved to the door, tapped on the frame. "Just give the staff a heads up. That's what I would want." He left, shoulders slouched.

Horatio sensed his footsteps on the Persian rug in the hallway. "What will you do, Mr. Rudin?" he called.

A moment passed, and Wallace's voice echoed from downstairs, "Rest. Lord knows I need it." And he was gone.

Horatio poured himself a glass of Kraken and admired a humming bird beating its wings outside his window. As he took a third sip, he heard his door open, and thought Wallace had come back with another idea. Someone knocked on his office's doorframe. It was Dan Taylor, dressed and ready for work.

WORK FORM

SERVICE# 1099

DATE: September 3, 2005

LOCATION: *Tsunami*

REASON FOR VISIT: Overview of *Tsunami* operation

LABOR DESCRIPTION: Observed Dan Taylor, newly promoted Lead Mechanic, work on maintenance.

PARTS USED: None.

NOTES: I wasn't technically authorized to enter the park before hours today, but I wanted to see how Dan Taylor treated the ride. In my years as designer, I've seen mechanics and operators sabotage rides for reasons that I don't understand. In Oklahoma, I saw an operator throw forks into launch gears. In California, I saw wheels fly off in mid-travel because the mechanic loosened bolts little by little. In Texas, a married couple worked at night by the light of flashlights to replace bolts with pencils. I don't get it. Maybe some people want to see the world in chaos. Dan Taylor moved about the ride at a practiced pace. He replaced the brake pads in accordance with procedure. He walked the track methodically. I don't think he is one of those people. From my point of view, which was on *Tornado's* third hill, he seemed a competent worker. I'll file a separate report for Horatio. It's interesting that he hired me on to spy on Dan. But this is only till June 2nd. By then, I'll have a steady flow of work at Horizon and I'll never have to deal with this crazy place again.

VERDICT: *Tsunami* operational, and in relatively good hands.

SERVICE COMPILED BY: Tim Mason, Lead Designer of Braking Systems for Horizon Entertainment Group, LLC

FROM THE DESK OF ROBERT SUNLAND

Spokane, Washington

April 8th, 1966

Horatio,

I had thought building and owning an industrial company for many years took a toll on my body, but I was wrong. I had thought constructing an entire amusement park from scratch, from my own drawings on blank slips of paper, which originated from deep within my mind, was difficult, but I was wrong. I had thought, most recently, that dealing with a smokeless fire within my veins and arteries was catastrophic, but I was wrong. No, Horatio, my greatest daily death isn't from those maladies; it is from my knowledge that you and I will never see each other grow old.

I read in the paper this morning about a woman digging a tunnel to the center of the earth. There's even a picture of her and her husband beside an enormous pile of dirt and rock in their back yard, I presume, given the fencing in the background and the tulips drooping with fresh rain. To think, a woman digging deep into the soil, in mud and muck, in their backyard, in mildly cold weather, in an attempt to reach lord knows what. The article declined to state whether it was truly to China, or simply a stunt. This is happening right here in Spokane! Not only that, Horatio, their house sits two houses down from us. I read that article this morning; while your mother served me orange juice and toast with steady hands, she leaned over and read with me. Your mother, if you haven't noticed yet, has the most wondrous reading voice. Looking back now, I think that's why we were married. The wedding was beautiful. We had it at St. Paschal's. There's something about churches that frightens and enlivens my spirit. Perhaps you'll feel the same way some day. For me, it's always cold and warm, bright and dark, mountains of colors through the

stained glass and devoid of hue around the Father. It's the comfortable hard wood pews, the static air that hesitates to move, the single and multiple breath of each person in conversation with themselves in the form of prayer. Now that my blood flows with infirmities, little pieces of shrapnel that plunge and tear and coat my inner walls, I look to a higher power. But all I see are stars or clouds or planes, planes, planes; all I see are the branches of our willow trees, the cherries from our cherry trees, the mingling of squirrels and robins and the occasional raccoon, bringing life onto life. I feel sickened by it.

I don't mean to dissuade you from a life of religion or spirituality, Horatio. In fact, if you feel the power and grace coursing through you, then by all means, bow down, genuflect, revel in that nature within nature. The nature within me isn't the same that runs through you or your mother. Mine is a disease; yet, by eating healthy, by taking vitamins, by the grace of fresh air on this porch, I live. But the blood boils out. I can hear it hissing like a thousand teapots whispering. Each day, the whisper grows louder, louder, where at night, when I try to sleep, with my eyes closed and the world of the nocturnal lumbers out of its slumber, the hum grows vibrant like the approach of a train, until one day, until one night, until one more breakfast with your mother, until one more afternoon with you, Horatio, out on the porch, until one more stroke from your brush on the canvas, until one more sunset with a gimlet in hand, I witness the train's arrival at my station and escape into the sound of a long whistle.

Horatio, do you think a man can be forgiven? Do you think, when you are old enough to understand, that a man can love twice, and at the same time? Can a man plunge in multiple directions with the same strength and assurance as into one direction? The nature of life, the nature of growing old, the nature of dying and limping onto that train at

high speed, for if one were to succumb to death at an old age, the slower the train, the easier for boarding, is punctuated by the lashing of each limb to a car and subjected to each car's acceleration. I ramble, but life pulls you in different directions until you chose which of your limbs you can live without.

One day, Horatio, you may hear rumors about me. Some of which are true. I am a man destined to an early death. I am a man self-built. Your grandfather, Humphrey, was also hardworking. But when your grandmother died, he turned inward, he turned to alcohol, he turned to late mornings and late nights. He turned into a shadow. For me, he turned from reality and into a nightmare. There was one night—I was about your age, six, seven—when he appeared by my bed. He waited for me to wake, and when I did, scurrying from whatever dream I dreamt, he lifted a sack of potatoes, and asked if I had put away the chickens. In my dreary, dreamy self, I answered incorrectly; I told the truth. I hadn't. Potatoes hurt, Horatio, but don't leave deep bruises. Is that why, when an opportunity arises, I incline to answer with yes, with love? Is that why, all those years later, I fell in love with your mother, and years later, with Linda? Or, was it because I knew, subconsciously, that I was destined for a short life, and wanted to make the most of it?

You are here now, on the porch with me. The sun shines through our willow branches, our cherry branches, onto your blank canvas. What will you paint today? I don't disturb you until you've made some marks, indicating, at least for me, that you have an image in your head. Does that image flourish in the mind, animated? I wish I could see your imagination; I wish I could share in it. I hear your mother calling for you. You're probably annoyed by it, but soon, all too soon, you'll wish for that call. There you

go, back inside. That's what I want to be, Horatio, a fresh stretch of canvas, in the sunlight, in midmorning, on a porch with a white swing, with a view of the river, stitching the land together with blue thread.

Maybe I'll pay that woman from the article a visit. Maybe what I need, what anyone needs, is a deep hole in the ground.

Love,

Your father

P.S. I think you should try something besides nature, Horatio. Maybe something fun, like clowns?

“The only rule for painting that I know is that symmetry bores.”

-Wilfred Bulvin

Horatio looked at Dan Taylor’s hands resting on the edge of the desk. Even though he hadn’t started work today, only just left the parking lot, his hands were smudged with dirt and grease from the past thousands of days wrenching on bolts, nuts, and connectors. His work attire, a one-piece jumpsuit freshly laundered, was the color of dandelions. Before that color, the mechanics and staffers wore orange. It was after several reports and complaints from guests that the switch was made to yellow because everyone thought Sunland was staffed by convicts. And his face, slight brown beard trimmed probably weeks ago, hid his round chin. Overall, he reflected the park’s health. The thing that kept distracting Horatio for the moment was Dan Taylor’s hand, his finger, his wedding band. It gleamed as if he dunked it in solvent every night before bed. It was the loudest thing in the room, and Horatio thumbed his index finger rings.

“Mr. Sunland, here are my reports of the attractions. Everything looks to be in order for today. The only thing that I need to check before we open is the chain drive on *Tornado*. As you’ve noted in my reports, the slack tensioner is on the way out, and until we get that remanned, the chain will jerk more and more.” When Dan talked, his hands lifted from the desk about an inch and made micro gestures with the tips of his fingers as if he were giving sign language to invisible bugs.

“Great, great, I’ll make sure I review this later this morning.” Horatio patted the report. He never gave them a look, but maybe today he’d go through the report before adding it to the top of the pile under his desk. “*Tornado* will be fine though, for today at least?”

Dan adjusted his sleeves, looked down at the hardwood floor, “Yes, Mr. Sunland, it should be fine. It’ll just be a little jerky on the catch. I would recommend we fix that soon. Today I’m going to adjust the slack length first and that should help.”

Horatio nodded. “Thanks, Dan. I really appreciate the hard work you do for the park.” He smiled, which he always did after meeting with Dan. He liked Dan. In another world he could see himself becoming a man like him. He could see his hands gloved in grease and a gold ban peeking out like sun through a thick forest. Then, when he saw Dan still looking down, he stood and stuck his hand out to shake. He rarely ever touched hands. It wasn’t because of germs, but because he didn’t want to get attached to people. But he also might not again have the chance to shake this man’s hand, this person who had held the park together for years.

Dan Taylor stood a moment after he did, and with slowness of a man under water, took his hand and shook. He hovered behind the folding chair. For twenty seconds, he waited behind the chair, looking out the window at the employee parking lot. Nothing moved; no birds flitted by, no butterflies warped, no bugs or flies flying. And that stillness seemed to seep into the room. He placed his hands on the back of the folding chair. “Mr. Sunland, one more thing.”

Horatio sat back down and waved his hand to indicate that he was listening, paying attention, though half his mind was already trying to figure out what to bring to Iceland.

“Sir—”

“Dan, you don’t have to call me sir. And for that matter, you don’t have to call me Mr. Sunland. That was my father. Just call me Horatio.”

Dan's hands became redder and redder. He was grasping that chair for dear life. "Horatio, I know last year we didn't get bonuses because we didn't hit our goal for attendance. But I was wondering...if I could get a raise. I've just, I'm asking because I'm sure you've heard that Ella is pregnant." He paused at this, and looked at Horatio, then back down. "And, we could use a little more. You wouldn't believe how much there is to buy."

Outside, a lone sparrow rested on the window's ledge. It must've been admiring itself.

What was he supposed to say? That the park's done for. There's no more money for anything. Horatio interlaced his fingers and nodded for a minute. "What kind of raise? How much? You know how tight the budget is this year." Why was he even leading him on?

"Seven percent. I think that's fair."

"Let me see what I can do. Give me till the end of the day to go over the budget. Can you do that, Dan?" Horatio nodded, pointed toward the door. "I can't make any promises."

Dan released his grip on the folding chair, about-faced, and stomped with his work boots through the door, down the hall and out the front door with a soft click. His handprints left on the back of the folding chair looked as if they'd never fade. Horatio looked at them and thought and thought and didn't know what to do next. He noticed the clock on the wall, imported from Italy, and considered the day. It was still early; there was enough time to make today memorable.

WORK FORM

SERVICE# 1126

DATE: June 2, 2006

LOCATION: *Tsunami*

REASON FOR VISIT: Catastrophic braking failure

LABOR DESCRIPTION: Damage control.

PARTS USED: None.

NOTES: When I arrived at *Tsunami* in mid-morning, I can't describe the scene that was in front of me. I had gotten the call around 11 a.m. over radio from the ride operator.

"Dan, Dan, *Tsunami, Tsunami, failure.*" I ran to *Tsunami*. Guests were running and walking away from the entrance line. I heard people screaming. This one girl in green was on the ground yelling and yelling and beside her was an ice cream cone. Vanilla ran all over the pavement. I rushed past those leaving. The operator came to me and said, "I'm calling 911." I said wait, let me see. I made my way to the loading station. Here's what I can say: The brakes had failed. The flapper mechanism, that Tim Mason vouched for over and over again, broke. The linkage snapped at the joints, and when that happened, the hydraulics never engaged. This caused the train to enter the station at high speed. Because the track was never designed for high speed arrival, the train presented too large a force. The train simply left the track. While the brakes failed, the specific wheels that Tim Mason encouraged, slipped. This caused the train to exit the track right after turn one, before the chain drive. Horatio had insisted on trees and fences around the ride. Painted blue fences that depicted a giant wave were crushed, penetrated, and demolished by the thousands of pounds of train. I told the rider operator to call 911. Here's what I can't forget: The gurgles and screams and pockets of silence from the

riders on the train. It was a light load. I saw limbs in supports and fence posts. I saw body parts strewn across grass and pavement. What I first took as hi-temp grease was blood and gore. When the fire department showed they used saws and jacks and jaws to release bodies from mangled metal. Horatio is out of town for an art conference. Tim isn't anywhere to be found.

VERDICT: *Tsunami* closed—ten people dead.

SERVICE COMPILED BY: Dan Taylor, Lead Mechanic

OLIVIA'S LAST SHOW

Olivia grappled with Darryl, her assistant, on stage. The lights dazzled with varying degrees of brightness from above. Their fight scene was choreographed in four sections—they were on the second.

Darryl had stormed the stage from behind the curtain as usual, with little emotion bleeding through his morph suit. The audience tonight, for it was her second and last show of the day, gasped and some even pointed when Darryl pounced on all fours into the stage light. Right on cue he threw the first volley of punches, each she dismayed by either blocking with extravagant effort or dodged entirely by lunging in the opposite direction. She was satisfied with their fighting, but she always wished she had more time and energy to spend on elaborating their sequences. Her best excuse had always been Brenda.

Darryl backed off, indicating that she had time to speak her incantation to weaken him, a dark demon.

But she didn't know if she wanted to prolong the show. Was Darryl trying to trip her up by allowing her to say all these weird phrases? Was that how he was going to take over her show? By digging her own grave with useless sayings and over-the-top diction? In the 80's and 90's, her shows were extravagant, but they soon diminished. She had favored cutting acts and tricks to get out earlier to spend more time on her farm with Brenda.

She might as well indulge him, if that's what he wanted: she would try one more time to fully inhabit herself on stage. She would stretch into herself, like a swan arching its neck.

She turned to the crowd and said in her loud stage voice, over the peaks and hills of the crescendoing music, “What a vile creature! I may have awakened you with my rituals of magic, but I can just as easily contain you again!” She squared her stance and raised her hands and began to chant. Her assistant hovered on the other side of the stage, and started to shake the moment Olivia sang out, “Corpus magneto, radiant whip. Return to your demonic cellar this instant!”

She clapped her hands together and a giant encompassing black cloud exploded from the ceiling. Darryl renewed his assault on Olivia by brandishing a plastic knife. They grappled, swung, ducked, threw, and swept each other across the stage as they had rehearsed. This, however, was new; they felt connected by their fabricated movements and with each punch thrown and avoided, they improvised. She threw a knee, which he avoided. He reached for her arm, which she blocked. Somewhere in their improvised fighting, the third part of their sequence arrived and vanished like the cloud over the audience. On the right hand of the stage, the giant old wheel that Horatio had brought home to Sunland was covered. It was almost time, she thought, for its unveiling.

The knife crossed her torso within an inch. She pounced on his arm, shook the knife free, and in one fluid rehearsed motion, removed and planted the dark animal onto the wheel.

The crowd responded by sipping on their drinks and eating snacks. She thought she heard someone clap, but she mistook it, as she did almost every time, for one of the fans turning on to blow fog onto the stage.

“You’ve mistaken me, beast, for a weak opponent. But now it is time to send you back to the dark realm. Who’s with me?” She adlibbed this last part. She didn’t know

why, but she said it before she could stop herself. “This is a task I can manage!” Even though she had said these lines for years in different variations, they came back to her like tulips after winter.

She strapped Darryl in, and produced from her hanging pouch the knives, the very real knives, Brenda had given her. The wheel had taken such a beating over the years that every day Darryl would tear off the black lining and replace it to cover the many grooves and slits. Even though the board was mangled, it appeared clean and fresh.

This was the last sequence in their fight. She looked into his eyes, whispered, “Eyes open. Worse when they’re closed,” and grabbed one of the pegs on the side and wrenched it down. The wheel spun at a high rate. This was crucial for two reasons: it gave Olivia time to make her way back to her mark on the stage for the right amount of distance, and it also allowed enough time for the spinning disk to slow down to where she could throw her knives.

“Let’s send this beast home,” she said and, with her feet at the precise position and angle, she took a deep breath and closed her eyes for a count of three.

One...she pictured her throws landing on the wood with dull whacks.

Two...she hoped, oh how she hoped that the crowd would cheer, would scream, would stand and applaud, just this once, and then she’d be happy.

Three...she felt her skin begin to glow with heat. She felt, in her stomach, a slow pull toward her spine. She yearned, if she dared to use that word, for one more chance with Brenda, oh Brenda. A conversation, Horatio had said one time in passing on his way to wherever in the park, can make all the difference.

Olivia's grandmother used to practice throwing knives by the river. Olivia liked to tag along with her, and when Olivia sat on a rock, with the river gurgling, she watched Grandmother toss knife after knife at the base of a dead pine. The pine had been struck by lightning as some point. Its top half was gone after twenty feet or so, and what remained of the trunk was split by single, deep gash in the tan skin. Grandmother threw knives. She threw hatchets and shurikens. She threw the weight of her life into that dead pine. Olivia asked if she could try some throws. Months and years later, Olivia learned the proper way to hold a knife, how to look at a target, how to manipulate a knife that was off-balance. Then they tested each other, until one day, Grandmother held an apple on her palm for Olivia's knife.

Olivia opened her eyes, saw the board and her assistant spinning at a slower rate of speed, counted the pegs on the side to determine the amount of rotation, felt her muscles react before she could follow the arithmetic in her head, and sailed the knives, one after the other in a hail of metal toward the contraption. *Whack, Whack, Whack*, and then on the third launch, he yelled in pain. She hesitated, but he stopped yelling and said, without any rehearsal or notice, "You'll never get away from this!"

She hesitated but threw her last knife. "Begone, beast!" She let her voice fill the space in the room with the fog covering the stage. Darryl came to a stop. Her third throw had landed on his left palm. Blood trickled down the black fabric of the wheel. The blood pooled in an ever-expanding puddle. As she watched, it grew from a penny to quarter, a half-dollar to a silver dollar. He motioned with his head for her to come over. She had never wanted to hurt him, at least not too much. As she jogged over to him, her legs felt light, her mind focused, her heart thumping with steady chaos.

“Are you okay?” She leaned close to him.

“Finish up. Don’t ruin this moment.” He smelled like sweat and fear and beer.

“Are you sure? You’re bleeding.”

“I can manage. I can still move all my fingers.” He slipped off the wheel, bowed to the audience, and vanished back stage.

Olivia faced the crowd and didn’t hesitate to bow. If she hadn’t gotten any reaction earlier, she might as well try and wrap things up here sooner, and get home sooner to her empty house, and start munching on leftover (spaghetti with vodka) sooner, and scroll through her Facebook feed sooner, and go to bed sooner to start maybe the next twenty years here at Sunland without notice and fade, as had Darryl, into the black. As she straightened from her bow, she looked over the crowd and was taken aback. Everyone in the audience was standing, the children were quiet, even the newborn in the second row held with clutching arms seemed to sense a newness in the air. The baby had one arm free and was grabbing at something.

As well-choreographed as the show had been, the crowd returned in kind and let loose cheering, clapping, yelling—someone in the back gave a thumbs-up—people were stomping on the floor, and over all the mayhem, Olivia heard from the middle of the group, “What a show, what a show.”

She bowed again and again. She shook her head, walked to the edge of the stage, sat with her legs dangling, and produced a Sharpie. Watching guests line up to meet her, she expected the little nun to be here, but she wasn’t.

“Thank you, thank you,” she said. “If anyone wants autographs, pictures, now’s the time.”

Later, nearing her car in the employee parking lot, she might see Sunland lit up for the night. The *Tornado* would have a string of changing lights the length of the ride. The Ferris wheel would turn slowly with orange, blue, and bright red lights twinkling in and out of existence with each pass behind its supports. And even here, a five-minute walk from the employee entrance, she'd hear the merry-go-round chiming its tune without a care. Then, she'd think about shooting stars and how Brenda always liked this time of night. It's not too dark out yet, Brenda would say, there's still enough light left in this day. Fireworks will go off, marking the park's fiftieth anniversary. She'll admire the bright burst of colors, like tulips animated and glowing from inside her car. That's when she'll see the letter under her windshield and spend the rest of the night reading and reading and reading the lines from someone she once kissed, someone she'd see next week to resign, to enter her wooden barrel again.

“Only a novice paints in one medium.”

-Wilfred Bulvin

From his office, Horatio called over the PA system to tell everyone to meet at the park entrance for a staff meeting. He hadn't been sure if everyone heard, but as he stalled in front of *Fantasm*, he saw droves of staff in yellow shirts walking toward the entrance, some nodding to him, some waving, some ignoring him as if he blended into the background. He stared at the magic house's purple doors and remembered last year's Christmas party and her lips, the bruises he discovered the next morning from falling all over the stage.

Her assistant Darryl strode to side door, waving at him.

Horatio called out, “Did you hear? Staff meeting.”

Darryl nodded before vanishing inside. The door closed with a sharp snap.

He had tried calling, but she never answered. They met again in April for the start of the season in his office and she hadn't brought it up. But maybe today he'd say something about it. He wanted a chance to talk with her. He knew she liked rum.

He wanted to walk through Coaster Alley and see how Dan was getting along with that slack tensioner or whatever he called it. A part of him wanted to lend a hand, to learn something intimate about the park, about a ride. But he knew that would put him at risk of being late to the meeting. He was many things, but he was never late. So he headed left, toward *Scramble Eggs*, *Merry-go-round*—all the while thinking of how he should break the news that the park would close after today.

Eyes. Lots of eyes, all on him. He stood on a low brick wall that was a bed of tulips—red, yellow, red, red—and took in the eyes—brown, green, blue, brown, brown—before he said, “Thank you all, thank you for coming. I just wanted to say a couple things

before we open up for today.” He noticed that when he talked, the more they stared. It disturbed him. “First, I think we all deserve a round of applause for being open for fifty years!”

The mass of yellow shirts clapped with mixed enthusiasm. He saw so many faces, but she and Dan were not here. He was transported back to when he used to lead pep rallies at school. He swallowed. He wanted to be anywhere else.

“Fifty years ago, my father, Robert, opened this park. Back then, we only had a handful of rides. Today, we have the most attractions in the area. We are the premier place for fun.” He clasped his hands together. “We have been”—his voice trailed off, and he felt the world, the park, close in on him. He heard the highway behind him groan with every passing car and truck. He heard the tulips brush against one another. He heard the breathing, all the breathing, of his staff in front of him. Behind them, the mass of the park seemed to sigh. It was as if he were at the ocean, standing on the beach. Each wave was a memory: Conversing with Wallace in the earlier days about where to put the bumper cars, meeting some of the staff in *Fantasm* to drink and play cards, watching the news of the coaster accident over and over again because he wasn’t at the park, and he didn’t note the continued problems with the braking systems because he was in France on an art retreat, because he wanted to be better, to be a better painter, because the park could run itself, couldn’t it? The waves kept coming.

“We have been open for fifty years. That doesn’t happen without dedication and loyalty. That doesn’t happen without each and every one filling a role.”

Someone gave a *Whoop*. Where was Dan Taylor? Horatio blinked. He saw, among the living yellow shirts, people from his past. He saw his father standing in a tan

suit. He saw his mother, Patricia, in a floral dress. They did not hold hands. He saw the people who'd died in the coaster accident. They stood, on what legs they had, and swayed in unison. He blinked, and they were gone.

“I've gathered you all here to say that, and to say....” Horatio clapped his hands together once, rolled his neck and breathed deeply. The park will close after today. You'll all be out of a job. The economy. Something about the economy. Something about stricter regulations. Something about how the park is on unstable foundation. Geologists came and inspected the ground—it's changing. Anything besides the fact that your leader has led this park straight into the ground.

“And to say let's have a great day! Fireworks later tonight!” Horatio got down from the low wall and walked into the crowd. He was feeling alive now. “Bonuses! Look out for your bonuses!”

The crowd cheered.

“It's been a great year! Let's keep it going! We're getting a new ride next summer!”

Hands came down like rain to pat his back.

“Let's get to work. Let's open Sunland Amusement Park!”

And the gates opened.

WORK FORM

SERVICE# 1128

DATE: June 4, 2006

LOCATION: *Tsunami*

REASON FOR VISIT: Aftermath report

LABOR DESCRIPTION: None.

PARTS USED: None, except digital camera.

NOTES: Between the firefighters, police, staff in orange shirts, and the rainbow color of park goers, it was difficult to stay as one person and not feel absorbed into others two days ago. I remember, not things, but sounds the most. Things that a picture can't capture, only hint at. Tim Mason showed up the day after, went straight to Horatio's office, who had returned from his art conference in Paris, and it looked like he hadn't slept a bit, and tried to explain that the failure was not his brake design. In fact, he tried to say that it couldn't just be his design. It had to be other failures that led to the death of ten guests. I was there to hear all of it. I was just outside in the hall, waiting for my turn. In the end, Horatio fired Tim Mason as consultant and even called his superior right there in the office, in front of Tim. I guess Tim hadn't told his boss. That was the end for him. That was his death. And he deserved it. It wasn't as if I purposefully neglected standard maintenance procedure over time. It wasn't as if I skipped steps over the winter. Brakes are brakes. *Tsunami*, a coaster of sophistication in track runout and car comfort, failed. I watched Tim leave the office. He only looked at me, unblinking, in a daze. Then I went in. Horatio said it was Tim's fault, not mine. He needed me to stay on. Snap. That's the sound the camera makes, even though it isn't an old one. Snap. That's where the train left the rails, bent and eventually tore through metal. Snap. That's where

the wheels couldn't hold the tons of metal and people on the track. Snap. That's where the front car struck the number 9 support, crunched past and through into grass and dirt and fence. Snap, snap, snap—that's the sounds that guests told me later, the sounds the ride operator said to me over a mug of whiskey, that's the sounds of bone breaking and shattering. Snap. I don't know what's going to happen to the park. Horatio says we might be closed for good—at least for the year. I wouldn't mind if it was longer. My girlfriend, Ella, she says her dad could get me a job cutting wood. Maybe that'd be better. It seems like everything snaps, even trees.

VERDICT: *Tsunami*, park closed.

SERVICE COMPILED BY: Dan Taylor, Lead Mechanic

ROBERT SUNLAND: FROM SACRED HEART HOSPITAL

December 25th, 1972

Spokane, Washington

Dear Horatio,

I know you're not here right now, being with your mother for Christmas, but I wanted to write you a letter again. It's been years since my last. Someday when the time comes, maybe you'll sit down and read them. I hope your mother doesn't throw this letter away.

I will say this: you're turning out to be a fine young man. I'm proud of your dedication to schooling. Your teachers tell me that you always ask questions. This is good. Sometimes I wish that I had asked more questions than answered hollow queries. And such a star on the track! Who knew! I wasn't an athlete. But your mother, Patricia, was. She used to run too. On one of our first dates, she showed me some of her medals and trophies. She loved the long distance of it all. Once she even cajoled me into running with her along the river. I knew then of two things: she was the love of my life, and that I hated running.

The doctors here tell me that the end is near. Every other word seems to be about "comfort." We can make you "comfortable," Mr. Sunland. More pillows for your "comfort," Mr. Sunland. Are you cold, Mr. Sunland? Do you want more blankets? Would that make you more "comfortable?"

And I tell them, the nurses who lean in close to prop me up, check my faculties, "The only comfort I desire now is good long rest."

I had hoped that I could write a series of letters on how to go about life. I realized quickly though that being there in your life while I had the opportunity was better. When I had the chance. That's something you'll understand the older you get—chances come

slower. Where once you could see a dozen fish swimming in the river, now maybe a couple dash amongst the round rocks. Or in my case, the drugs come fast and are mixed with others. Now, it's just a steady drip of comfort.

Horatio, I only have little to tell you. Patricia is a good woman. She has always been there for you, and in a way, and this hurts to admit, she is the one who deserves to live on. Not me. Of course, I can buy you things. But that's not what this is about.

Horatio. Don't chase after my dreams. Set your own. Develop your endurance in track. Go to college. Become an Olympian. Compete. It's not about the medal at the end. It's about shedding the little personas we mask ourselves with every day. Or become an electrician. Join the Navy. Travel the world. Learn another language. French. German. Spanish. Help someone for no reason. That's what it is about, don't you see? If everyone lived like this—considerate, earnest, honest, kind—would there be shorter lines in Sunland?

Something strange. Whenever I think of my father now, your grandfather, I remember stealing some cookies from the bakery down the street. Sun shone down between the branches of the oaks that lined the street. My feet pattered, and I had nicked three chocolate cookies. My father wasn't to be home for some time, so I propped myself up against the railing on the porch. I saw our neighbors in their front lawn talking. I couldn't hear what they said. Behind them, more people walked on their lawns. A dog barked behind me somewhere. That's when my father, your grandfather, appeared on the steps, hat in hand.

I ate one cookie. The chocolate had melted on my fingers. The strangest thing, though, he wasn't angry. Instead, he knelt beside me, elbow resting on the railing and

snagged a cookie. The neighbors' voices grew louder, someone hooted, and from behind, the direction of the dog's bark, a person yelled-singed off in the distance.

My father, your grandfather, looked me in the eyes, then up at the neighborhood and said, "It's over. The war. It's over." He ruffed my hair and ate his cookie.

I ate mine too, and we both watched the neighbors talking and walking and dancing and more dogs barked and barked.

I thought, how wonderful. I thought, yes, the war is over. My father won't hit me anymore. My father will play catch with me. My father will buy us gloves. "It's over?" I said.

"Yes, what a day."

The street lived that day. That's how you should feel every day. Try to, at least. That's how I'm going to go.

I love you, my son.

Your father,

Robert

P.S. Ride the Tornado for me, will ya?

WORK FORM

SERVICE # 8992

DATE: July 28, 2016

LOCATION: *Tornado Roller Coaster*, lift hill control box

REASON FOR VISIT: Slack out of adjustment. Causes whiplash for riders, strain on chain and associated components

The park and all of its rides are under a constant state of disrepair despite my best efforts to keep everything nice and running; the park is led by a man who can't paint, who can't delegate, who can't find within himself the brain cells to figure out that a park, an amusement park, must have rides that are there for amusement purposes; the park is limited in terms of repair from lack of funds, staff, and spirit; the park has slid down a steep slope with no end in sight except for a certain and unavoidable death in the future or near future; the park should have died with the passengers on *Tsunami*; the park's owner should step down, close the park, and pay the staff a reasonable severance and return to nature; the park and the owner should both return to nature; the park is what I need to stay alive a little longer; the park is my pay check; the park will pay for my child.

LABOR DESCRIPTION: Shutoff power to chain drive. Opened control box cover.

Located adjustment bolts along mechanism. Used ratchet, socket, and torque wrench upon locating adjustment bolts to new position. Tested chain tension upon adjustment.

Returned power. Operation within specifications.

Frequent stops and breaks could be avoided if the owner believed in the park as much as he believed in painting horrible and disturbing clowns; frequent stops and breaks could be lessened if money were ever spent for ride upkeep as much as art conferences for the owner.

PARTS USED: No parts used to replace any components.

NOTES: It's days like today when I'm reminded of *Tsunami*. I sometimes still hear the screams and echoes everywhere. On a day like today, with the sun spilling like water on surfaces, I forget where I am and start running toward *Tsunami*, or I'll take off and run to Horatio's or the parking lot. I'm 38 now. I'm too old for this. It was ten years ago. It must end someday. It must end someday. It must end someday. My baby will be born and will never ride a coaster. My baby will be born.

VERDICT: *Tornado* operational.

The ride will run for today; it might run for another week, but the problem will only create more headache for me; the ride will run, but at the cost of amusement; the ride will run, just like *Tsunami*; the ride will operate today and carry passengers on a journey of about 98 seconds; the ride, since it is of wooden construction, will jostle with the coaster's movement along the track, and scare people; the ride will need major overhaul within two years because of rot forming on structural supports; the ride's verdict should read closed.

SERVICE COMPLIED BY: Dan Taylor, Head Mechanic

“The only rules for painting are the ones you tell yourself.”

-Wilfred Bulvin

Horatio found Dan elbow deep in a steel box situated under the first hill, or load hill, or launch incline, depending on who he talked to, and announced his presence by saying, “Hiya, Dan!”

Dan recoiled, banged his elbow, which was covered in black grease, and responded, “Horatio. Hello.” He glanced at Horatio and returned to whatever he was doing in that steel box.

He noticed the heavy chain running through the box and followed it as far as he could before it got lost in the beams and supports. On the other side of the steel box, the chain wrapped around a giant gear under a spigot of lube that poured over the gear and collected in a trough. In all, it was simple and elegant. He felt moved by how something so simple could move thousands of pounds of steel and stay cool. “You adjusting that tensioner? For the slack?”

“Yeah. It’s hard to reach, but there’s a trick to it that I learned last year.” Dan’s elbow moved rhythmically. His face was blank, as if most of his mind was in his hand that was doing whatever it was doing.

“Anything I can do to help?” Horatio lingered five feet from him. He wanted to get a better look at the guts of the steel box but didn’t want to get in his way.

Dan seemed to ignore him until he said, “Actually, could you do me a favor? Could you throw the active switch on the chain drive? It’s up on the loading deck. Big red throw switch. When I give you the signal, throw it.”

Horatio nodded. “Sure thing.” He walked around to the service stairs and climbed each step with purpose. He was doing something now. He was helping. On the deck, he

put both hands on the podium that held all the controls of *Tornado*. The surface of the metal was flushed with wear marks from decades of use. Little notes had been scribbled on the metal; he leaned in close to read what some of them said—*red, green then red again—brake on—chain catch—DOES NOT WORK—ignore—ignore—green and red twice*. “Okay, I’m here.”

Some moments passed in silence, and he was beginning to wonder if Dan had heard him, but then Dan’s voice from below echoed off the wooden roof, “You see the switch, right?”

“Yes,” Horatio said.

“Okay, throw it now.”

Horatio threw the switch, and a red light came on. From below, a grunt and groan issued and the machine sprang into action. He saw the chain trudge along the track up the hill. From stillness, the chain seemed to move with urgency. It was too fast. It had to be too fast.

“There we go! That should work for today at least,” Dan Taylor said.

“Good. Good.” He moved back downstairs to Dan. He saw him screw a steel plate over the exposed guts of the steel box, his right hand tucked underneath his left arm. Was his hand hurt? “That was fun!”

“Yeah, not too bad,” Dan said.

Horatio said his goodbye, and said that he was still considering his raise, but mentioned that he couldn’t make any promises. With the chain working, a steady hum filled the air that mixed with the guests roaming the park, standing in line for this ride or that one. The day was getting better. The day had a lot of wax left in it. Where else

should he go? He wanted to paint. He might paint for a bit, check on the status of the art retreat in Iceland. He headed toward his house, and the first screams of joy rose.

MARTY: TACOS NOW ARE THE BEST TACOS FOR ME

We all met up at *Tacos Now* around lunchtime for some tacos. Mom and I had found Dad hanging around the Ferris wheel, flask in hand, looking up at the top-most seat. Without a word, he followed Mom's touch on his arm, and we all headed for the taco stand.

Jason sat at a table, scrolling through his phone. His friends, he told us, were going to hit *Tornado* soon. He wanted to join them, but Mom insisted we all enjoy some food together.

"We never get to eat together anymore," she said.

"We all eat, don't we?" Jason continued to scroll with his thumb.

"I'll get us all something." Dad waved for us to sit down. He lumbered to the stand, tapping his pockets as he went.

I sat down next to Jason, Mom in front of him, leaving the empty seat for Dad.

"Aren't those tulips amazing?"

Jason and I followed Mom's pointing finger to a wood fence with tulips of all colors growing in the dirt—red, green, blue, blue, green. They looked nice, I thought. They looked like birds roosting, tropical birds curled in sleep. I imagined them waking, opening their petal wings for flight, singing like a chorus of bells; each color a different note, until Jingle Bells poured from the sky, snowing on all our heads.

"What about that painting, though?"

Mom and I looked to where Jason pointed, at the taco stand. Underneath the small eave, hung on the wall next to the menu, was a painting. It was completely yellow, except for a series of black lines that made a face. In the center was a red circle, and above that, two white and blue circles. It felt uneven, incomplete; it looked as if the painter had an

assignment and was only checking off the boxes of what the painting had to contain. But, it was unmistakable; it was a clown.

Weird, I said. I turned back around to the empty seat in front of me. The whole park seemed to grow beyond our table. In the near distance was *Tornado*. I could see several peaks and lows, and as I stared at the ride, a train roared along its track. The passengers jiggled like cardboard cutouts of people, their hair whipped back from the speed. A single scream pierced the relative calm of afternoon, and I knew it was from that ride. The rollercoaster's track reminded me of a snake's sloughed skin—brown, textured, and old.

“You ready, Marty?” Jason had finally dropped his phone on the table and was eyeing me. In this light, I saw the start of facial hair on his jaw.

I nodded.

He nodded too, and then picked up his phone again.

Dad arrived back at our table with a couple trays. “Dig in.”

Who did you see, I said. I grabbed a taco and took a bite. I pretended it was a giant pill bug, and the shell was its shell. Inside, its guts were lettuce and tomatoes and cheese and sour cream and meat. It didn't put up a fight; it was already dead and had been for a long time. There had been a funeral with music from a worm-string band.

Mom answered, “Oh, someone from the old days, when you were just a baby.”

I didn't know how to respond, so I said, I hope you see your old friend.

Dad looked at Jason, then Mom, then me, and shrugged. We ate until the trays were empty, and sat for a while, taking in the park, the summer day, and the cascading sounds of people entertained.

“The only rule for painting well is an endless supply of rum.”

-Wilfred Bulvin

On his way back to his house, Horatio admired the bright yellow balloons strung around every other lamppost. Now, he was trying to write a letter to Olivia. He wanted to explain, at least in part, as to why she would find herself without a place to perform. Also, he wanted to tell her that he was interested in her. More than that—he liked her company. In his years as owner, he had had numerous hookups and limited relationships. They never lasted. Often, he would be with a woman for a week or two before he found someone else. It wasn't a compulsion; he simply wanted to explore. He felt he shared a similar passion with Christopher Columbus. That's how it was for some people—some were meant to meander through relationships and some were meant to be with one or two people their whole lives. Neither was better than the other, just different.

This was what he had written so far:

Dear Olivia,

Let me start by saying how much you mean to the park. Without your commitment to entertainment and magic, Sunland might not have been around as long as it has. That being said, the park is officially closing tomorrow. I wished I could've given you and everyone else more of a notice, but with the complexities of finances and market saturation, it was a shock to everyone involved, including me. I tried to tell you earlier about the park, when we met briefly at the smoking garden, but I couldn't bring myself to tell you. I feel like a disappointment, which is furthered by the fact that I can't even let the staff know. I'm a coward. But at least I'm a coward with good intentions. Doesn't it make the same amount of sense to shield you and the others from this misfortune? Better,

even, that I alone contain this disease. In that way, I'm rather brave for holding onto this depressing and distracting information.

Do you remember that Christmas party where you and I kissed? I think about that night often. I think about you and your energy. In truth, I'm into you. I think you and I could be together and for a while. I can't stop thinking about how our energies could be together. It's like we are two paintings that, when in sequence, we complete, we satisfy. An example are the two clown pieces I painted at the start of the season. They're in the restroom by Fantasm.

I'll leave this someplace where only you can find it. I know you have questions, and maybe an answer.

Yours, if you are consenting,

Horatio Sunland

Owner and Operator of Sunland Amusement Park

He didn't like what he had written. If he had had the time, he would have preferred painting something for Olivia instead. He felt he was only able to communicate truthfully on canvas. Where should he hide this for Olivia?

Outside the window, a hummingbird hummed. Its feathers glistened as if it had flown threw a waterfall. Beyond the hummingbird, he saw clouds build.

He thought about leaving the note backstage in *Fantasm*. Or, possibly leaving it on her car somewhere. Screams were heard even through the closed window like scattered leaves in a windstorm.

He'd leave it on her car. She'll find it there, and by that time, he'll be ready for her answer.

MARTY: TERRITORY

We left our table and started for *Tornado*. We walked beside people, beside families, beside wooden fences footed with tulips, around potholes, between small children crying, over discarded plastic cups and straws and maps and half-eaten hotdogs. I almost tripped over a pool of vomit, brightly colored red and blue. In it were stars and rivers full of fresh trout. They were spawning, evading the strikes from a bear hunched on a stone. I saw this as I stepped over the mess.

We walked by the Ferris wheel, a central beacon for the park. We walked by the log ride and a basketball court challenge. We walked until we stopped, or rather, Dad stopped. We lingered behind him as he talked with a man. This man, with glasses and green eyes, had hands covered with red and black paint—some looked fresh.

Mom held Jason and me back by holding our arms. Her hand was tight, a grip like Dad's.

“What is it?” Jason asked.

“Just, wait.”

I tried to listen to what they were saying. This must be the friend Dad had been searching for. He waved his hand, pointed at the man, took a step forward. The man seemed to want to leave; he kept thumbing behind him, as if to say he had to be back. They were like two animals, meeting for the first time. I wondered how an elephant would react to a polar bear. They would probably sniff each other, circle around and round until a groove wore in the earth, until they had worn their paths down so deep, they couldn't see each other anymore. But they could still hear each other, so they never stopped.

I wanted to go over and help Dad. I took a step, but Mom held me back. Her face was expressionless; her eyes squinted against the sun.

People moved around us, as if we were rocks in the middle of the path for ants. They sensed our presence, communicated with other workers, and found the best path around us. They crinkled when they crawled. Some had pieces of food in their mandibles. One had a bowl of blue ice cream; another had a corndog. They moved in unison, so after a while of my imagining, the ants became a river. Squids drifted in the current, touching all the sticks and rocks on the bottom. In the water, they looked more like animated clouds or cotton candy. An eagle landed, using its talons to grip my shoulder. When I looked in its eyes, I saw a great fire beyond a black foreground. And then appeared the nun, working in the background, covered with grease.

Dad stood in front of us, sweating, eyes darting back and forth. He kept reaching for his pocket but decided to cross his arms instead.

“Do you feel better?” Mom asked.

He said nothing, only motioned with his hand to follow him to *Tornado*.

Jason popped his ear buds in, and I listened to the static sound of Shinedown reverberating from his ears.

WE RENDEZVOUS

We drive the work truck back to our rendezvous, the sign for Coaster Alley. We meet the rest of our crew. They have names like: Cynthia, Greg, Danny, Sam, Rachel, Clare, Nance, Deanna, Jonathan, Chris. Names that we might forget over the course of a life time, but presences that can't or won't be forgotten. Behind us is this: all those faces with names, topped with hard hats with various stickers from all over the Inland Northwest; our trucks with lights on, all on illuminating the backs of their heads, bearing light on the distant support beams of *Tornado*; the dark outlines of cranes hundreds feet high; the dark outlines of broken-down wrought-iron fences; the highway with beads of light moving with careful ease; the hills and trees darker than the sky; the sky birthing the first of millions of stars—all different levels of brightness and color; a plane, a satellite, moving at differing speeds in cyclic destinations and never landing, always in the sky, always in travel, always in mid-flight. In front us is this: a metal box with two switches—one yellow, one red; a hand, ungloved and scarred with years of hard labor that look like veins in granite, hovers over the red switch; wooden beams in the distance decorated with colored lines and hanging ornaments of propellant, like shiny orange pears; small LED lights hanging at random high points all around the coaster, the only light except for our trucks and flashlights and the full moon. The ungloved hand hovers a moment more, *let's do this*, before thumbing the flip. DET CORD explodes in an instant like a volcanic whip. Wooden beams shatter and splinter. Vibrations feel like massage chairs on our feet and an air-wave bounces all over our faces and features. One of us drops a flashlight. One of us covers their ears. One of us doesn't blink, doesn't smile. That one thinks of the time when opportunity was open and now it is closed. That one, with painted nails, knows this

place and land can't be brought back. Then the propellant ignites, and flames erupt, erupt, erupt.

“Transformation in line length is key to any successful painting.”

-Wilfred Bulvin

Walking through clumps of friends and families enjoying the sunny day, intending on dropping off her note at her car, he recognized a face from the past. He tried to pass, but the face stopped, and he had no choice but to engage.

“Horatio, is that you?” said the face.

Horatio could ignore the question. He could pull out his phone and start talking. Something about how the contractors messed up the newest project. Something vague. Something to get him to walk, without imprisonment from this face and voice, to the next hundred feet of path where a family was blocking most of the pavement. But the face spoke again, and for reasons that were too deep to understand, he stopped and smiled, and before it could register in his mind, he spoke the name with confidence, as he used to before the accident. All he wanted to do was make this day memorable for everyone.

“Tim! How the Hell are ya?”

They’d stopped walking and stood about a foot and a half apart. They didn’t turn fully to each other; rather they kept a slight angle between them, as if they both knew that the conversation might go awry and wanted the least resistance in an escape. Horatio noticed behind Tim, who wore a Hawaiian shirt and tan shorts, squinting with bloodshot eyes, a woman he assumed was Tim’s wife, bless her, and two kids: a surly looking teenager who could probably beat up everyone here, and a boy who looked as if he had been pulled out of a dream and was now realizing where he was for the first time.

“I’m doing alright,” Tim said. He reached out with his right hand for a handshake, and then his face recoiled, and he switched it to a fist. “I remember you don’t like to shake hands.”

Horatio bumped his fist and said, “How long has it been? Ten years?”

“What? Since you fired me, or since the *Tsunami* accident?”

Horatio dropped his head for a second. “Ten years. Yes, wow. I can’t believe it’s been that long. What have you been up to? This must be your family?” He wanted to steer away from their last interaction. The last time he had seen Tim had been in his office, before it was renovated, to fire him for his poor design of *Tsunami*’s braking system. He had no choice. A definitive decision had to be made. He had to be the one to make it. Wallace wouldn’t help.

“Ya know, ever since that day, I’ve had no career. No offers from other firms. You want to know what I’ve been doing since? Do you really want to know?” Tim paused here, looked back at his wife and kids, leaned in closer, even though they were still far apart. “Ya know, I’d been fine with you firing me if it was really my fault.”

Horatio took a step to his left to try to regain the distance they initially had, trying to think of some way out of this. “Tim, Tim, Tim, we all know it was a fault in the design of the brakes. The investigators identified in their reporting that that was the cause of the accident.”

“Here we go again.” Tim raised his voice. “Here we go again.”

Passing guests looked at the scene developing and walked along. The two of them were like stones in a shallow stream, everything and everyone rolled by. “If your trusting, dim-minded idiot of a fucking maintenance worker, Dan Taylor, had performed the necessary checks before okaying the ride for the day, those people would be alive today.” Tim reached into his pocket and pulled out a metal flask. “Don’t tell me. He’s still working here, isn’t he?”

“Even if Dan Taylor had checked the braking position, the problem was still there. That was a design flaw.” Horatio felt himself pulled deeper and deeper in the conversation. He wanted out.

“Who okayed the design? Who skipped testing steps? Who wanted the new ride because Sunland was heading for a sharp decline?” Tim leaned farther and farther in, his voice returned to a whisper. Horatio smelled whiskey.

But he had followed all the required steps for opening a new ride, a new coaster. Any meeting, he was there with Wallace. He only missed a handful of meetings with Tim and his company, but Wallace had been there. In all indications, this was a state-of-the-art attraction that was mapped out and planned and built and tested enough times with dummies with monitors and screens reading out g-forces, and hadn't there been extensive testing of all operations? He had the reports on the creation of *Tsunami* and the incident report. There was a lot of extra paperwork each morning for the coaster, but nothing seemed to jump out at him in his office, and if there were something severe, wouldn't Dan Taylor had notified him?

“You had a flaw in your design. A bad thing happened. Don't try and pin it on me.” Horatio was walking now, away from Tim and his family.

“We both know that this blame is bigger than me, Sunland.”

He walked faster and faster, his feet touching the ground lighter and lighter until he was running past guests, people enjoying Slurpees and corndogs, and when he was out of breath, he found himself at the abandoned and boarded-up entrance to *Tsunami*. It was a spider web of steel construction. On the first hill, the launch hill, was a giant steel fabrication of a tsunami wave crashing onto a tan, weathered beach. The entrance path

wound its way through the mess of primer-painted steel supports, and when he looked down the path, which he hadn't done in years, because he avoided this part of the park, it grew darker the farther in the path wound, but he could still see the height requirement painted in bright red blinking out of the darkness on this sunny day in Sunland Amusement Park.

MARTY: *TORNADO* WARNING

My brother Jason and his two best friends waited in the line for the rollercoaster, talking about how they weren't scared of the first drop, about Hannah from ceramics, the second drop, about the football game next weekend against west valley, the third drop, or the coaster accident years ago. No mention was given to me, about how I had never been on a coaster before.

I kept looking around and tripping over my toes as we strolled through the aging timber supports, the screams echoing off in the distance, in close proximity as a train ripped along the rails. The beams shook, and, in the waning afternoon light, I could see dust or wood particles shimmering off. How long have these been running? Surely, any sensible person would have seen the rot forming and closed the park down.

The line moved up in chunks. I could see the faces of those boarding, half smiles. And in the exit path next to us, faces dripping with sweat, with terror. Jason turned around. "Hey, trust me. We do this one, everything else will be a cake walk."

"Jesus, Marty looks scared. 'Bout to shit himself," his friend said.

"You sure he can handle this?" his other friend said.

I looked down and counted the seconds it took for the great whirling machine to engage the train—the soft thud, the steady cranking of a giant fishing pole. Oh my god, we're bait.

"He's fine, he always looks like that after he eats cotton candy," Jason said. He grabbed my shirt and tugged me along, right up to the gate for the front car. "Just don't fucking puke on me."

His friends laughed and rolled their shoulders. Jason did the same and bounced on his feet. I tried to bounce too, my heels leaving the ground in little hiccups. Off to my

left, the train thundered on the track, and crossed in front of the sun. I looked back at Jason and met his eyes.

Maybe it was the train's crossing the light. Maybe it was the windblast that stirred his blonde hair and mine. Maybe it was all those years of playing catch in the back yard. Maybe it was building Lego castles on the kitchen table. Maybe it was camping and teaching me how to bait a hook because Dad slept in a sleeping bag full of empty bottles.

Or, maybe it was how his eyes shifted, like a snap of a camera. He looked at me for as long as it took the train to drop 191 feet and gazed at all that manic chaos of rivets and bolts and cables and chains and shrugged.

"Dude, this is going to be awesome," his friend said.

"Don't get sick, don't get sick," his other friend said.

"Fuck me." Jason pulled out his phone.

What, I said, my voice sounding like a burst pipe.

"I don't know, Mom just texted me 'Dad's sick, come back.'" Jason returned his phone. "What the fuck now." He pushed out of the line and said, "C'mon, Marty, let's go."

"We're almost on, can't it wait?" his friend said.

"It's like a forty-second ride," his other friend said.

"We'll meet you after the ride," Jason called back over his shoulder, already twenty feet away, not waiting for me.

I trudged through the line, through the pants and shorts and purses and sunglasses. Catching up to Jason, I slowed to his pace. He gave me a hard push on the shoulder and I recoiled and kept walking. I gave him a push and he didn't budge, but said, "Ouch."

When we reached the exit path where Mom and Dad were, Jason said, “I don’t think I can go on the ride. My stomach doesn’t feel good.”

Mom said, “That’s okay, let’s go on the Ferris wheel, maybe that’d help? It’s a slow one.”

“Yeah, maybe that’d be good.” He fished in his pocket for his phone. “I’ll text them where we went.”

I felt a pressure on my shoulders lifting to the sky, just as Jason had told me it would.

“I drove us all the way here, to this place, this place where I was fired from, and you can’t ride this rollercoaster because your stomach doesn’t feel good? Did you say that? Is that what I heard?” Dad leaned against a lamp pole. All around his head buzzed tiny bugs, as if he hadn’t bathed for days. A vein gorged itself on his left temple. “I drove us here. You all nodded, saying you wanted to be here. You bought the tickets online,” pointing at Mom, “you invited your friends to ride the rollercoaster,” pointing at Jason, “and you, you said you wanted to ride it, and not just because I said to,” now gesturing a hand at me. “I bet you feel fine, don’t you? It was him, wasn’t it?” He starred at me, or rather, near me. I got the sense that he was looking just above my head. “Why do you have to be like this? Why can’t you just have fun, participate?”

“I don’t feel good. Leave him alone.”

“Shut up. Do you want me to take you? Come on, let’s go. It’s a safe ride, I didn’t design it.” He moved to us and reached out to my arm. He gripped it and started pulling me toward the line for *Tornado*. I struggled against his grip, like a rabbit in a snare. I

twisted, shook, and used my other hand to try to pry his grip. But it wouldn't work; his hand was pure red, the veins white and web-like. Stop, I said, stop, I'll go, just let me go.

“Tim.”

He stopped, his gripped loosened, but I didn't run away; I never did.

“I think I should go home.” With slow steps, he backed away from us, walking into shadows casted by the pine trees. “I'll see you at home, I'll see you at home, I'll see you at home,” he mumbled.

In the silence, Mom said, “I feel like ice cream. Anyone else?”

Later, after we had talked with Jason's friends about getting a ride home, we ate our ice cream walking around the park, noticing all the tulips blooming in small spaces, and finding our way to the central ride of Sunland: the Ferris wheel. With Mom in the middle and Jason and me on each side, we would see the park in dusk. All along the track of *Tornado* were multicolored lights blinking in unison—red, green, blue, yellow. Our chair stopped at the top of the wheel, where we could see the black, murky pavement of the paths, dotted with clumps of families and friends, the electric blue line of the log ride, the metal roof of the bumper cars reflecting the setting sun, the dark outline of the forgotten rollercoaster crouching in the corner of the park with a handful of red, sad blinking lights, and the rising hills of the Inland Northwest, covered with pine trees and holding the landscape in place.

Years later, after the park closed and the rides razed, I would watch my dad gracefully descend into his grave. Jason would show up late to stand next to me, us alone in the bright fall graveyard beside the highway. Mom would be too busy in her new life in her new city with her new job with her new partner and their new puppy, Parker. She'd

either be in Oregon or Oklahoma, where she'd still send Jason phantom texts that he'd answer with phone calls.

I'd hear the cries of a magpie. I'd sense my brother Jason not moving. I'd hear behind us the highway—with each car, a corresponding sigh, a sigh, and then a semi, and one long loud sigh.

“Hunt the hidden, strike the canvas, and distort the norm.”

-Wilfred Bulvin

Horatio knelt by the height requirement of *Tsunami*. He'd been there for perhaps five minutes, having escaped from Tim and his family.

Behind him, he heard the footfalls of Dan Taylor. Recognizing this sound, those footsteps of his trusty head of maintenance, gave him an unexpected warmth. It was comforting to know a recognized thing in the mass of uncertainty. He continued looking down the entrance path, but the more he did, the less he saw. He knew, from the last time he'd walked this path, ten years ago, that there were red painted hand-rails on either side and red bricks inlaid into the pavement for texture. Back then, bushes had been planted to cover up the maintenance shack, gears, and chains; now, all that remained of them were bare branches, like twisted frozen ropes.

“Mr. Sunland, a moment?” the voice said behind him.

Horatio started; the voice wasn't Dan Taylor's.

“Mr. Sunland, are you alright?”

“Fine, fine, totally fine.” Horatio stood. Turning around, he took in the person in front of him. He was one of his workers, encased in a yellow polo. His hair was blonde, cut short. A pair of sunglasses hung from his shirt collar. His teeth were brilliant—whiter than his own teeth. “I was just reminiscing,” which Horatio realized was the wrong word to say. “Just, looking for inspiration,” which made the things worse.

“Mr. Sunland, for this evening's fireworks display, do you want us to use all of our stock? Or hold some over for our next celebration?”

Horatio put his hands in his pockets. In them, he felt his phone, a pack of gum (spearmint), and keys to his house and the main entrance to Sunland. “All of them?”

The worker shrugged and said, “I mean, we don’t have to use all of them. I was thinking we could save some money for next time. Cost effective, right?”

“All of them,” Horatio said. He clenched his hands. That’ll make tonight special, he thought. Give them all a nice, final, bang. What was it, do not go gentle into that night? “All of them, my good man, and make sure to have everyone in the park so that we can all view it. After all, it’s a special day. Let’s celebrate our history tonight!” Why’d he called him good man? He felt this was something his father would have said. “And let’s move it to nine tonight instead of eight.”

The worker nodded and bounced along the path. But before he had gotten more than ten feet away, the worker turned around and hesitated. Horatio noticed the mismatched socks he wore. He saw that one was black, the other white. They grew out of his sneakers like mold.

“Mr. Sunland, I’ve heard some rumors,” the worker said, his voice dancing with the wind. Behind him, hundreds of wooden supports vibrated as a coaster rang along the rails. “I’ve heard rumors that the park is closing.”

And then the strangest thing happened, and Horatio blinked a handful of times before he was forced to see, sprouting from the chest of the worker’s, a procession of spirits spinning out, forming into human-sized humans right in front of him. They formed a line between him and the worker. It was as if they were waiting for the bus, or they were all about to play a game of dodgeball. Starting from his left, he took in each face, and when he did, their names leapt to his mind the same way you remember what street you drive on every day.

Andrew Walters, in his thirties, wore a plain white shirt stained with blood. He had no hands. They were found three hours after the accident, in a field outside the park. Crows were first to find them.

Lisa Walters, in her thirties, smiling with no teeth. Her face was purple, the kind when you see it in nature, it throws you back. She never left the coaster. The safety bar was in her torso.

Amy Walters, unlike her mother, was ejected from the coaster, and found hanging from a horizontal support. At first, she looked okay, but when they had tried to get her down, they realized they would have to cut either her or the coaster. No one wanted to cut her Hello Kitty t-shirt.

Nick Jackson and Tommy Colton, both attending community college for nursing, were completely fine if you looked at them from the front, which is what Horatio was doing, but he knew that if they turned, he would see their extensive burns. They died in ambulances on the way to the hospital.

Brad Crassa and Marvin Molvinch did not know each other when they had shared a car on *Tsunami*. They now know each other, or did, for an hour or two at the hospital when their broken bones and internal bleeding were too much for their bodies since they were both in their fifties. They died within twenty feet of each other, and within three hours of arriving at the hospital.

Martin Dessel and Kristin Angel were dating when they decided to head to Sunland Amusement Park. Their first ride was *Tsunami*. It was like a movie. They died holding each other. That's how they were found. Their remains can be found at St. Joseph Cemetery. For months after Horatio had visited their graves.

Rachel Abott, sixty-one, was visiting from Indiana. Her family was too scared to go on the ride, so they said they would wait for her. Her family couldn't see the brakes fail, or the chain drive's servo burn out—but they heard, through the bushes surrounding the maintenance shack and station, yells, and three big bangs. Rachel Abott stood at the end of the line to Horatio's right. He looked back down the line, and that's when he realized that they were in the same positions as they'd been on the rollercoaster.

The worker took a step toward Horatio. "Is it true?"

He couldn't tell the worker anything. This wasn't the place or time. The day was going well. He made the decision for fireworks. All of them. The day would end well. He could paint late tonight, all alone in his studio, drink cheap wine, because he couldn't tell the difference between expensive wine and cheap wine, and he would finish his collection of ice clowns. "No. Now go, we've got work to do."

Through the bodies of the dead, he watched the worker walk. He wondered if his father had believed in ghosts. Had his mother, Patricia? Had they sat around the kitchen table late at night, drinking wine, conversing with spirits?

He wanted to apologize to the dead, especially since they were all here. But he couldn't speak, so he moved down the line to Andrew and Lisa Walters and tried to hug them. He passed right through, but he thought he could feel a hot-coldness, a moving-unmoving mass of condensed air, like a pillow, resisting his clothes, hair, skin, organs. He felt within him a nothingness, and when he retracted from his failed hug, they were still there, still looking straightforward, still in the middle of either a breath or an exhale or a scream or a moan.

TORNADO BURNS

Flames burn wood, burn nails and screws, burn twigs, nickels, dollar bills stuck between boards and a bloody handkerchief. Crows fly, though no one can see them soaring back home to pines and cedars outside the park fences. Since it is around that time of night, fireflies come out from their hiding spots and dance with the flames, which makes it look as if the sparks from the flames crescendo and waver and never burn out. While there was quiet before the switch was flipped, now there is nothing but the steady talk of fire, of orange and red and white and triangle shape bugles of ecstasy and pain of wood nailed together decades and decades ago. We bundle closer together, all of us, in front of this great conflagration, of this resounding testament to entertainment and pillar of joy. Now, with the flames reaching higher, with workers and extinguishers if necessary—although there is no way we can stop a jump of heat that bright, with us hushed, we can now see the enormity of the thing. How many hours, days, months, years even, did it take to make it? The one who enjoys bananas turns to the other one, the one who worked all day together, and gestures a fist bump. The flames reach higher, touch the steel rails of track and light up the park like fireworks detonating close to the ground and we all see: remains of *Fantasm*, *Taco Now*, Bumper Cars, Ferris wheel bent like a dead spider and miles of trampled grass and footpaths. We all see in the flames miles of laughter and crying and vomiting and silhouettes of shadows flying with sparks and all that stays when we leave are the fireflies echoing one another.

“There are no rules to paint—only your endurance.”

-Wilfred Bulvin

Fireworks shook the night sky above Sunland Amusement Park, and Horatio was in a chair on the grass field, or park, as the employees called it, leaning back to see all of the colors, sparks, and shoots. All around him were his employees, and to his right was Dan Taylor somewhere in the mass of yellow shirts. To his left, he sensed that Olivia Dayze was somewhere on a blanket. He envisioned her on her back, in her customary clothes of magic—tight and with black and red accents. A burst of green and red ignited the sky. People oohed at the sight and sound. Behind him were the park goers in the back of the field. He felt there were a lot. Thankfully, he didn't see Tim or his family in the crowd.

He saw at the edge of the crowd behind him, when he looked back to see if everyone was having a good time, a little girl in a nun's outfit. With each explosion in the sky, her face and outfit were illuminated. It was as if each firework was a small-flash sun dying, and in that sudden light, she was the moon, which reflected the firework. It was as if they were talking, the booms and the nun. It was as if they were fighting. In each explosion, depending on the color, her face changed. Her face moved from a smile to a grimace. Her hands came together. She no longer looked at the sky, but drooped her head and shuddered with each percussion.

Whistling rockets shot off like bullets. Their firework corpses fell to the ground in sparks like electricity. At the base of all the lights and sounds, was a small crew of workers lighting fireworks and otherwise controlling the chaos. Horatio thought there was a battle going on through the smoke and their shifting bodies, and behind the workers, the dead riders stood in a line, like earlier, but instead of looking straight ahead,

their heads were bent toward the sky. He couldn't tell from this distance and through the smoke, but he thought they were smiling. He wanted to paint this scene.

To his left, the place where he felt Olivia's presence, he scanned the bodies and heads. But he didn't see her. He looked and lifted his head from his chair. Still nothing—only a sea of yellow shirts. Her absence hit him in the stomach. The end was near; the fireworks were going off in rapid fire—red, green, red, yellow, yellow, red.

Maybe she was watching from a different spot. Maybe she was with her crew on the roof of *Fantasm*. He could see her on a chair, on the roof, looking at the fireworks and the crowd in the field. Did she see him? He thought she did, and he hoped that she was thinking about him as much as he thought about her, especially over these last months, ever since the Christmas party. He wished someone liked him as much as he liked them. Might she come down after the show and look for him? Or maybe she'd head to her car to find his letter. She'd open and read it. He might wait for her by the entrance to the employee parking lot where he could watch her read it. She'd smile when she read it. And then what? They'd embrace each other? Shake their heads at how crazy it was that they didn't get together sooner? It'd be like a movie, like Martin Dessel and Kristin Angel.

Yes, surely, she'll see the letter and find him, and they'll walk through the park, take it all in one last time. On their way out, they'll leave through the public entrance and make their way back to the employee parking lot. And when he leans in to kiss her, it'll all be okay.

A flash of red from the sky followed by a bang. His father had been there, at the end of the line of dead riders. He looked okay. He wanted to paint that scene. All of it, on

one canvas, his father, his park, his employees, the dead riders, Olivia Dayze, and above in static motion, fireworks bursting forever with repeated bangs and bangs and bangs.

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