

He saw in out of the corner of his eye, the kind of slight movement you some times notice in your peripheral vision that you're not sure whether is real or imagined. It made him look at the tree, which at first glance seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary. He stared into the center of it, and thought that he noticed a deeper darkness there, a kind of black on black. He blinked, thinking that maybe his contacts were bothering his eyes. He opened them and everything was normal. He looked up at the moon as it emerged from the clouds, and reasoned that the light must have just changed a bit. He walked down the incline and onto the street. The night air was crisp and refreshing as memories floated through his head. He passed Doc Ikamiller's house, where he and Jett spent many summer nights drinking beers and watching the people go by. The porch was rather set back from the road, and the surrounding trees gave it a very private feel. The fact that the street looked almost the same as it did in 1976 gave him a very warm feeling, of a connection with the past, present and future of his life. Almost to his parents house, he light a black and mild, slowly inhaling the thick smoke while walking past the houses that had watched him grow up. He walked down steps next to the garage and onto the street, past a few houses and up the steps of his childhood home. I was there to greet him on the porch, and we sat and talked for awhile about how everything was going. He was living with his friend, Dominic, and was tiring of him surroundings. He doesn't really like dogs and the two in the house drive him crazy. The younger one, Bruno, was formerly raised up to be the bait for fighter dogs. I didn't think that dog fights were still happening, but apparently it's still big business. This unfortunate animal was used as target practice for the vicious dogs that headlined the fights. As a result of this, he is very shy and often shakes and pees on the floor. This is a pitiful and saddening sight, but also gets on Rich's nerves sometimes. He and I are both in the same boat, really. He hates working and doesn't want to do it anymore. All I do is work and study, and I often wonder if I am just chasing my tail. The things that really make me happy I can count on my fingers. I like to be with my family and friends, to write, to learn, to snowboard. I like to read and contemplate the nature of reality. I think that if money was not an option, I would do exactly what I am doing right now, that is writing. The reasons for this are many, probably the biggest being that I can share my thoughts, feeling, imaginings with countless people throughout countless years. It always struck me while reading a book; that years before my birth, someone had thought and feel just like me, and was able to touch my heart and affect my life so profoundly. Here is something that some total stranger that lived centuries ago in a completely different world wrote down one day, for probably the same reason that people have always put pen to paper, and his whole soul is able to jump from the pages into mine and change my life. I think that sometimes I write because it is easier to explain myself to the page, rather than to other people. It's often hard for me to adequately make them understand what it is I'm trying to say or how I feel. The words come out too quickly and I get tripped up; but enough about me, back to the story. We're talking there on the porch, sun setting behind us. He takes the occasional puff from his cigarette and we laugh about the troubles surrounding us. It's moments like these that make life livable. He has many horrible problems- a witch ex-wife, alcoholism, legal troubles. I have problems also. But it is here on this porch together that they don't seem too bad. We tell stories and walk to the store to get nothing in particular, usually I grab a hot chocolate and he gets a pop. We reminisce about old times and past adventures, and try to think of plans for the future. Dreams are discussed and aspirations

shared. Heaven knows if any of this has a point, but for the moment it's there and it's great. When we get back to the house duties resume. I will have to take care of Gabriel and he will talk to Dad. He'll do his laundry and I'll do some homework or write a paper. The dawn comes and life returns to autopilot. I get up, get ready and drive with Brandi back through the suicide city to work and school. Sit through boring lectures and drive home. Gabriel makes me smile as I walk in the door. He lets out a happy shriek and runs over to me, arms up as I swoop him up and plant a fat kiss on his cheek. We play around the living room for awhile and I feed him some rice cereal. I tickle his tummy and he giggles and rolls away. I love to be with him.

Well, it's Christmas Eve in 2002. We are getting ready to go over my sister Diane's to open exchange gifts and catch up. Later on we'll all drive to church in our Sunday best and listen to the homily and sing joyful songs. The church will be dressed up as well. There is always a big tree in the middle, with little paper angels hanging from the branches, each one with the name of a needy family or person. People take one off and buy that person a gift, and leave it under the tree tonight for them. This year my angel was an elderly woman named Dorothy. She is a shut-in and her family never visits her ever. Hers is a sad story. A pretty young thing, she married her sweetheart in her late teens, and he became paralyzed soon after. She had to give up her dreams and stay home all the time to take care of him. He hung on to about 65, then died-leaving her alone with no friends. Her ungrateful and self-absorbed family doesn't care about her, and she just sits in her house all day and listens to Elvis records. The reason I know this is because my mother gives her communion every Sunday and stays to talk to her. I often accompany them, and it's almost impossible to leave because she talks your ear off the whole time you're there.