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## By the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept

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By the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2023



Thank you to Joseph O'Neill for all of your encouragement and guidance, to my parents and grandparents for your boundless love, support, and knowledge, and to Miriam for being my best friend forever and ever...

Oh, and to Ben, my little brother.





**The cover of my book is a photograph taken in 1988, at the Grover's Mill Pond. Fifty years after Orson Welles declared an alien invasion, Thomas Jay Warren decided to build a monument, and thirty-five years after that, I needed a book cover. For many years, I drove past this book cover every day, but it never seemed as big as it looks here. In the bottom left corner it says,**

***For a brief time as many as one million people throughout the country believed that Martians had invaded the earth, beginning with Grover's Mill, New Jersey.***

**In front of the monument stands a big red barn, and behind it, maple trees shadowing a small pond.**

**I know a spring in the deepest forest. And there a redhead grows. Under the maple trees, birds come there to drink.**

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*For Jerry*

**By the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept**

*Part 1*

## Running Home

Hysterical Ted Crybe is turning away, Ted is running, streaking through the damp ground of the shrubben creek, sprinting down the jagged sidewalks, and with all his remaining strength left in his injured little body, trying not to step on any of the cracks. The air is still smelling of yesterday's storm, the clouds parting for today, dogwood trees like wardens standing on either side of his passageway. The stream, to the left of Ted now, gurgles and wraps its tide into bows. He is writing letters to his loved ones in his head hoping they should receive his kind telepathy should he pass on his way home, apologizing on behalf of his deranged sister, recounting how Alice raised the glass above her head and down onto an innocent family of burrowing rabbits, him falling into her crossfire, the bottle slashing through his bony arm.

*Dear Bunny, I love you I love I love you! And I would have made you my wife if not for my evil sister! Yours forever—no—Goodbye forever, Ted Crybe.*

*Dear mother, I'm running to you as fast as I can. I'm trying my best not to step on any cracks but please forgive me if I do. Your son, Ted Crybe.*

Ted Crybe, turning, running, crying his little heart out, was, in fact, not dying. But still, Ted was at war. His body tied in knots, his stomach rubber banded, dipped in a vat of blue.

## **Walking Home**

Ted walked now. He approached his house slowly. Slowly he climbed the single stair at the base of his front porch. The stench of yesterday's rain saturated his eyes. Solemnly he came forward and opened the door. Mrs. Crybe looked at the bawled face before her, soft like a field of grass, red like the sky, and small. Ted looked at the tired face that blessed him, soft like a field of grass, and huge.

Ted Crybe held out his red arm. Here. His tears may as well have been red, too: all the pressure in his forehead trying to hold them in. Here I am.

It would be nice if he could lie next to her on the couch. He was cold. Tell her everything: tell her eyes all of it. She was the engineer of their youths.

Although Ted wanted to tell her everything, he couldn't. His ability to talk often switched off in front of his parents. He lived mostly with his mother, and ever since his parent's divorce, he had a hard time speaking to anyone. His words were now sacred, whether he wanted that or not.

## Drifting

*Can't go without dirtying feet  
Tell her a story to sleep*

He repeated in his head over and over again. He was so tired.

*Can't go without dirtying feet  
Tell her a story to sleep  
Can't go without dirtying feeeet  
Tell her a story to sleeeep*

And then he was asleep, a deep deep sleep marked by the breath he lost while running and the water he lost while crying.

## Ted

Ted woke up before Alice and, with his eyes closed, grabbed a glass of water from beside his bed. The sun shone through his bedroom window. He drank half the glass and set it back down. He rubbed his eyes four times. Five times he rubbed his feet together like a cricket. The numbers aren't important right now. He reached his arms above him as far as they could stretch, and stepped out of bed. He floated to the bathroom to get more water.

Sometimes the water came too quickly from the faucet, so it would have to rest in the glass for some minutes. The creamy calcium molecules had to settle first. Ted had just made the mistake of twisting the faucet too far clockwise when he heard tiny footsteps mounting the stairs. He crawled back into bed.

It was early in the morning when he heard the smell of the rain outside and smelled the sound of the puddles. Well it had to have been very early because the cat was scratching at the door to be let in. Right on cue. Each morning was a life or death scenario: help me help me skrrrch skrrrch on the door. And he let the cat in to say good morning, and it stood on him and stared him in the eyes for a full minute. It nudged Ted's face as if to say it's not so bad, then left.

## Alice

The unbearable trap of the cul-de-sac left Alice climbing over the fence beyond the blacktop-bowl, into the neighbor's yard behind the train station where the train would barrel through every hour the rumble of it just reaching, absorbing into the Crybes's floor. Maelstrom to buzz, drained into carpet. The trains and buses and floors stole the attention then. Because now Alice and Ted are going to school, the bus windows vibrating too, hurting Ted's skull but he won't lift his head off of it because the cool touch soothes him. Alice would sit in the seventh row where the wheel pushed up into the floor, a dome for her legs to bend into her chest.

Peeking out from her grey sweater were her silver hands. Their pallid glow gently nested on her lap, the smudge of pencil on the trunk of her pinky finger on her left hand, red and grey, blemished from her secret life.

Ted knew that her hands held mysteries but for the most part let it be. She was not a thing he felt he needed to understand, but still he distantly marveled in her silver glow.



## **And Today the Young Crybes Ride to School**

Ted looked seriously from the condensed window at the blurry streets of Central Jersey. Always at least one woman peeking out behind her blinds, taking interest in the bus stop ritual. Kids stepping onto the bus with their schemes of the day. Then passing the station where people waited, jogging their feet. North Post. Wallace Road. Grovers Mill. Around the pond with the martian landing site plaque. The snapping turtles balanced on the logs waiting for the bus to pass and then falling in right after it does.

Today the bus, turning away from the school, faced a detour, passing Rabbit Hill Road, where the only real mansion in town stood.

*Where is he taking us?* Some said aloud but everyone thought.

They all pressed their faces against the windows and when they finally took them off, the glass was dotted with tiny nose marks where the condensation rubbed off.

But it's not important what happens at school. Because school did not help Ted get to the bottom of things.

## **Jack Jiorle and the Bus Driver**

- *Hey, where are you taking us?*
- *To school.*
- *This isn't how we go!*
- *The bridge is closed on Cranbury Road.*
- *Why's the bridge closed? He asked, worried.*
- *I think they're building sidewalks or something.*

## **War of the Worlds**

The town was famous for something that never happened. The bridge, now fraught with construction workers and tampers, wheelbarrows, and hammers, lay right on top of the alleged historic site, where aliens made their first point of contact. On October 30, 1938 the radio drama was broadcasted, the first of its kind.

*Ladies and gentlemen, I have just been handed a message that came in from Grovers Mill by telephone. Just a moment. At least forty people, including six state troopers lie dead in a field east of the village of Grovers Mill, their bodies burned and distorted beyond all possible recognition. The next voice you hear will be that of Brigadier General Montgomery Smith, commander of the state militia at Trenton, New Jersey.*

Neither Ted nor Alice, or any of the children knew about the martians. The parents didn't really know either. Most residents of the town moved there in the 1980s or 90s, long after the report. Very few residents had lived there for more than 30 years, and only the very young children or the very old farmers could say they were from there.

## At the Creek

The creek was as wide as it was long. Ted believed that the staggering puddle to be an exotic oasis. The creek was a mirage except real. Ten by ten, twelve by twelve, one, two, three deep and perfectly glistening. The water was thousands of diamonds that he could be near just to think about how beautiful they were. On the day that Alice had tormented those bunnies the creek was at its deepest, and it looked very beautiful and different because the mud made it look darker, even added a peculiar green glow.

It had just rained, and the six bunnies were burrowed into the muddy walls of the bank. The bunnies were grey specks in their brown pockets. Ted could have loved them forever. When he spotted them he crouched down, waved to Alice, and shushed her. They both crouched over the bank of the creek like it was a warm fire. After a while, the water was still, so it was time for something else to move. Alice grabbed one of the baby rabbits and put it inside her water bottle. Ted shouted. *Stop Alice! Stop!* Alice did not mean to hurt the bunny but now that Ted was mad she couldn't help herself from waving the bottle over his head and playfully running around the creek with it as Ted waved his little arms. The bunnies were not only babies but they had the name of Ted's great love and classmate Bunny. Everything he knew he held dear was at stake.

## **First and Foremost**

The first rabbit got his nose out of the burrow and Alice and Ted held their breaths. The second rabbit crawled out of the hole and Alice caught him with her hands on its belly, and squeezed it with one hand and held out the bottle in the other moving it towards the rabbit, and the rabbit let out a squeal as it fell against the wall of the glass, and Alice held the bottle above her head to the sky, and then ran around like crazy and tried to dodge her brother chasing the bottle and yelled, but he caught up. Ted had to get the bunny because you can't steal a baby from its nest, but he was so tired he couldn't grab it. He could hardly breathe. Alice still ran crazy and Ted had slowed because he had slashed his arm on the base of the glass and it was too sad and then he finally gave up. He lifted his arms above his head and then bent over while Alice ran ran, running towards the forest mouth. He tried a second time but the mud was getting in his way. The third, fourth and fifth rabbit sensed danger, but the sixth mother rabbit held them.

## Counting

Ted was always calculating little things in his head. He was an anxious rationalist deep down. Because he had to ensure the okayness of things. Or no one else will, he believed. On his way to school they passed three green lights and two reds. Now usually they always catch five reds. The reds linger approximately 17 seconds longer than the greens last, although it's hard to say because no one ever stops at the greens for him to count. Sometimes people would ask Ted's mother what he was doing as he sat there staring with wrinkles by his nose bridge. *Oh, Ted? He's just calculating.* And they would say, *What's he calculating?* And she would shrug.

## The Bottom of Things

The Crybe family car was littered with things such as *receipts, pennies, plastic bottles, books*. The *floor* led to the *floor*, and it appeared much *closer to the eye* than it actually was. Its carpeted *bottom* was a collection of more than just *trash*. The *bottom* was a *pit*. *Voices* traveled along the doors and windows with *strong intention*, as Ms. Crybe *strained her neck* to pass the children *stuff*.

Ted was waiting for his mother to say, *Quick, take it, before I get a stomach ache*, as she strained her arms backwards holding out a sleeve of crackers.

As they turned onto *Route One*, Ted was *testing some things out*. Just things like *velocity, acceleration, and torque*. Of course these were just *feelings*.

In the *car* were Ted, Alice, Mr. Crybe, and Mrs. Crybe. They were driving, as a *family*, to Mrs. Crybe's parent's *home*.

The *radio* was being switched between *Magic 98.3* and *Dr. Laura*, and the volume was being lowered and raised at *specific moments*. Sometimes the volume was lowered for *advertisements*, but most of the time it was lowered by Ms. Crybe, who had an *oncoming migraine*.

## Finnegans Lane

They arrived at their grandparent's house. Sometimes Route One feels like forever.

Their home was a two-story beige shingled house on the corner. Orange and yellow shag carpet covered the interior. Along the walls hung reproductions of paintings of Israel, family photos, and fireman memorabilia.

Everybody there adored Alice, or at least believed in her to fit their very specific potential. At their grandparent's house she was a queen. Ted would sit in the kitchen eating hot dogs while Alice would get her hair brushed, her eyebrows plucked.

*Did you know Houdini was eight years old when he left home to shine shoes?* says Ted's grandmother now from the bathroom, to let him know his potential. As if anyone would allow him to do that. Kids used to be adults and now they are princes. Ted would leave home to shine shoes in an instant if he could get past the door.

Under the Wailing Wall sat the potato salad, garnished with flower shaped bell pepper slices. Next to a pair of old brass candlesticks were the salt and pepper shakers. You add your own seasoning because everybody likes it different.

After Ted's parents parted, his grandmother would say, *I can't believe your parents let you run around like that. Are you sick? I think you're sick. Look at you. You're a stick.* And after the mandatory shower she would say *Ah, you've changed color.*

Ted's grandfather was showing him how to wash his hands.

After that Ted and Alice were sent out into the front yard to pick weeds. There were a great many petunias, which Ted would bring to his nose one by one and breathe in so they would stick to his face like a star.



## **Marigolds**

Marigolds stuck up in circular mounds of topsoil across the front lawn. Weeds sprang up for twenty feet along the yard, disguised among the bluegrass and fescue. Alice and Ted were crouched with shovels by the flowers. Their grandmother and grandfather, covered by the porch, sat alongside the children keeping them at work. Plastic buckets packed with dirt and dandelions on the ground with a pair gloves and scissors beside them. Ted was shoveling then became distracted by his cuticles that had browned from digging. He did not feel well. His grandmother raised her hand to her eyebrows to block the sun and focused on Ted and noticed his eyes focused on his hands. She walked over to Ted and held the back of her soft wrinkled hand to his forehead to take his temperature. She brought him inside. Then it rained.

## **Cold**

Ted was sick and felt so alone. So un taken care of. In adulthood he would not remember the profound sadness his mother felt when he had even the slightest cold.

## **Washing Hands**

Ted washed his hands so effectively that he was often asked who taught him how to wash his hands. As if the onlookers knew it was a process so particular that it could have only been passed down from one person to another, and not invented. They were correct in their assumption that Ted's skill was acquired from a master.

## **On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco**

Back at home, the television was on already—no one ever turned it off—centered between two wooden bookshelves. The children would watch whatever was on in front of them.

Ted once came upon a movie about two boys who use a computer to program the perfect woman. The movie was on the channel, and the channel was on the television, and the television was in the living room, and Ted was there. Already. He'd always remember the chance movie, but he could never remember the name.

Alice was always looking through the books on the living room shelves. She was twelve years old, three years older than Ted. She would often pick up one book of Chekhov plays because it had a big photograph of a cherry orchard on the cover. She would leaf through it, read some of it, put it down. She was fixated on finding the cherries, looking inside it from time to time. Once, she read this one act monologue play *On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco*. She had felt so moved by it. Alice had crossed a great frontier. Because she flipped to it, by chance, and could read it, and could understand it. Aside from the strange names she could recognize every word. It stuck with her. She would think to herself and wonder what kind of a man Nyukhin was. A man who was trying to say something but couldn't. Well, no, a man who doesn't really have anything to say at all. *What if there was a man with something to say?* She thought about this. A man who has something to really say must be so nervous.

## **Alice Writes a Play**

So, Alice began secretly writing her play. It was so hers. No one would ever expect it because she didn't seem like the type of child to write in private. Alice didn't keep many secrets because she didn't have to.

In her Chekhovian days as a young girl, Alice climbed through the gates of modernity. The stakes were high but to no end. She had her characters, her baby, and something to say.

Although the play might never be produced, she knew she could not rely on her actors to entertain her awkward encounters and speeches, or transform them into something pleasing. She could not rely on her readers to see her symbols.

What scared Alice was not that her family would read it, but that they would read it and not understand. Alice wanted to care and be cared for and to still be free.

## **Babylon**

*A New Play by Alice Crybe*

Characters in the play:

GRANT KERNAN  
JAMES CULLER  
SANDY COHEN  
RADAR KRENTCIL

JULIO, *The parrot*

LON, *The baby*

*The men might call him BABY LON, The parrot might call him BABYLON, in false echo*

## Act One

WOMAN'S VOICE: Hello Mrs. Johnson, this is True Green calling about our excavation services. We had one of our men drive through your neighborhood with our maps and noticed your lawn may be on top of some ancient artifact... Oh, yes, we understand, yep, yes...

*Phones ring left and right, stopping and starting, overlapping. The phones don't stop, but suddenly a baby starts crying. The curtain rises.*

*Before us the interior of an office building. This is just the top floor of four floors, where TRADEMARKS LLC runs their business. The first floor is a lobby, the second floor a call center for lawn excavation services, and the third floor is an abandoned law firm. There is a sign on the wall next to elevator doors on the right wall indicating this floor arrangement. We are aware of just how harsh this place is, with bright LED lights and no color. The only real color is the office parrot, Julio, who is perching in its cage on Sandy's desk in blues, reds, and greens. There are some swirls of smoke from the men's cigarettes. The wall which faces the audience is mostly bare, and has a nicely sized window, which shows a painting of a greyish sky, and outlines of buildings. There are four desks for four men, Sandy's and James' on the left, Grant's and Radar's on the right.*

*In the center of the room: a wriggling baby. The four men hunched over it.*

JAMES: WOULD YOU SHUT UP FOR ONCE!

JULIO: *(suddenly banging against its metal cage)*, Shut up! Shut up for once! Shut up for onceeee!

RADAR: *(gently poking the baby's forehead)*, Awww he's so cute.

JAMES: You shut up too, Krentcil. *Standing up*, What the fuck is this. Who did this? What sick person drops off their baby in an office in the middle of the night. I mean this is a serious prank. A serious prank.

SANDY: *(not quite sullen)*, I don't think it's a prank, James.

GRANT: What are you talking about Cohen?

SANDY: I mean, I think it's *our* baby now.

*Maybe it's something about the room or something about the business gone rotten, but none of the men object to the idea that one way or another, this is their baby now.*

*James Culler is still holding his black briefcase. The phones ring on, but these are not the sounds that bother him. He is hunched over as though it were his natural state, a regular to the bent position. He is the biggest player in the business, by far. He is a serious man of forty-four with a face patched together of several others. Actually, all the men today look patched up or sewn together, exhausted from a long month of nearly no profits.*

*Next to him is Grant Kernan, a serious yet still mostly innocent man. He has had a strange looking face since the day he was born, the face of a wrinkled baby. He is much older than the others at sixty-five, and has learned, as the other men haven't yet, the importance of listening.*

*Radar Krentcil is hunched over but it is more of a youthful squat, balanced on the back of his heels, his arms by his knees. He is the only man of the four to have a wife, and he is the youngest. Faithful man—to his wife, to his job, to his morals.*

*And then there is Sandy Cohen, who is new to Trademarks LLC. After losing his job at True Green downstairs, the other three men advocated to have him on the team for his careful eye and thoroughness. Despite this careful eye, he goes with the flow of things and accepts whatever is thrown at him without questioning it.*

*The parrot stops suddenly, and bending his neck upwards, he opens his beak and sings a regular, short, sweet, beautiful, non-mimicking, tune. He has never done this before. So the men pause for a moment, then...*

GRANT: Well the kid's not staying with me, that's for sure.

JAMES: Me neither.

SANDY: Not me.

RADAR: He can be the office baby! It'll be great boys. Whaddya think?

LON: (*wriggling*), Wrrrrrrgggaaaagggg.

JULIO: Wrrraaaaaagggg.

JAMES: Don't you think we should find its mother, give it back to her maybe?

GRANT: I don't know James, whoever got rid of this thing is probably not taking it back.

JULIO: Mother! Mother! Take it back! Take it back!

JAMES: Well if it's not going back, we're all going to have to deal with it. Each of us has got to play a role.



*James goes into a drawer and takes out a roll of paper. He reels it out and cuts it with a pair of scissors. The men tape the huge piece of paper to the wall, so big they need all hands, and it nearly covers them like blanket ghosts. Two get the top corners and two tape down the bottom corners. A true team effort. Sandy writes out the days of the week along the top of the paper and turns back to look at the men. It's hard to know where to begin. Even the paper seemed like the greatest and most monumental step of progress possible.*

GRANT: Maybe Julio can watch him at night. Ha! I'm just joking.

*They start writing a schedule of who will spend the night and when, because this is the office baby now, and this is where he will live. And so this is also where the men will live... sometimes.*

RADAR: What should we name him?

GRANT: I've always wanted, if I ever had a boy... to name him Lon.

JULIO: La-la-lon!

JAMES: Sure, Grant.

SANDY: I like Lon.

GRANT, *smiling*: Baby Lon, huh.

*The men disperse to their desks. They go home, and they come back. They come and go, but one man is always present. Days pass, and we can tell because the lights are up when the sun is up and dark when the sun is down, and the men shuffle in and out in conjunction with the lighting. The window changes rapidly. In the matter of minutes, for our viewers, days have gone by. Time lapse sort of thing. On the first night Sandy goes to buy a mattress and a crib. On the second day, Grant's sister comes to bring them baby supplies, a blanket, diapers, etcetera. Soon the office is disheveled, with beds and food and cigarettes and papers. The dirtyness does not overpower a sense of homeliness, though. But the lights are still harsh and it is an office after all.*

*The lights come up. The sun shines through. It has been just more than a week with Baby Lon. The men are at their desks on the phone, typing, smoking, while the baby sleeps in his crib. Curls of smoke fill the room as they hit the sunlight. The curtains fall.*

## Act Two

*The curtains rise. It was Sandy's night to watch Baby Lon.*

*Sandy, Lon, and Julio seem to wake up simultaneously, Sandy rubbing his eyes, the baby letting out a low pitched gurgle, and the bird craning his neck backwards as his wings expand and settle—they breathe in and out the new day. Nice birds, not Julio, sing songs outside the office, off stage. A stretching period of inhalation and exhalation. Grant files in, then James. Finally, Radar enters, holding a notepad.*

RADAR: Gentlemen, I mean, uh, guys, I have something to say. *A pregnant pause. He wrestles with his jacket and briefcase, then brings the notepad to his nose.* Well, my wife has... no—I have something to say. My wife has brought up the use of tobacco in the office. And well, I know you already know this, but cigarettes are no good. They are no good for your health, no good for us. And with the baby here, I really don't think we should be smoking. It's harmful. *Another pause, I'm being strictly scientific here. And I hope you can understand that. Radar bends over as if struck by pain. He starts panting, and taking deep quick breaths. He takes a few steps back and forth, recovering, and hands to his face, thinking.* Whew. Got a little dizzy there. Where were we? I once read that Ulysses S. Grant smoked 20 cigars a day. And that was before they started adding all that junk to it. I mean pure tobacco, pure nicotine. Can you imagine how powerful that was? I mean, smoking is a powerful thing, for powerful men. And who are we? We follow leads that take us nowhere and drive Hondas to work. We make one sale every few weeks if we're lucky. We're certainly not fighting a war here. And now we have a baby. Fellows, we have a baby. Don't you see? We're mothers! We are not powerful men. Not to mention, Ulysses Grant died of throat cancer! Do you see what I'm saying here? *A pause.* Why are you smiling? I'm talking about a baby. Our baby. Baby Lon. I'm talking about secondhand smoke. And I'm talking about power, which... which..Who knows what that smoke will do to our boy? This is very serious stuff! My wife says this is no environment for a baby. Environment! *He waves his arms all around himself to indicate the surrounding atmosphere.* Don't you hear that on the television? They're all talking about the environmental tobacco smoke. We have got to do something!

*As Radar says his final word, "something," the curtains fall.*

## Act Three

*The curtains rise.*

*Through the window, the golden light of the sky falls upon the skyline of neighborhoods and strip malls in the background. They are now black silhouettes of buildings in the sun. The pregnant sun hovers in a volcanic haze over the men's eyes. It is setting. Sandy, James, and Radar say goodbye to Grant and Baby Lon, and walk through the elevator doors, which swallow them like a mouth.*

*The men go home, and they come back. They come and go, but Grant never leaves. Days pass, and we can tell because the lights are up when the sun is up and dark when the sun is down, and the men shuffle in and out in conjunction with the lighting. The window changes rapidly. In the matter of minutes, for our viewers, days have gone by in a great lapse. And all the while, it is Grant who stays with Lon and Julio.*

*The lights come up. The sun shines through. The elevator doors spit out Sandy, James, and Radar into a new work day.*

JAMES: (*gently*), Hi, Grant. How're you doing today?

GRANT: Morning, James. You know, achey.

JAMES: You know, you don't have to do this Grant. You have a home. Go home! Go home Grant. *A pause, then, more gentle than ever,* Go home.

GRANT: This IS my home. Don't you see? I'm sixty-five years old James. No wife, no kids of my own. These weasels are all I have. Baby Lon, Julio. This is all I have. This is everything.

JAMES: Look out there Grant.

JULIO: Look! Look out! Squaaaggh.

JAMES: What do you see?

*James points towards the window, the whole golden world outside of it. He walks over to the window, then back to Grant, then slowly makes his way to Julio in his cage. He slowly unlocks Julio's cage, and the door creaks open. While looking at James, the bird mimics the creak of the metal hinges. Rrrrrraggk. Rrrrrraggk. Julio raises his wings and flies out of the cage, circles*

*around the room, and perches on baby Lon's crib where he is sleeping peacefully, next to which Grant sits on his office chair that he has pulled over.*

*Radar and Sandy, sitting at their desks, look over quietly at each other, then at Grant and James. Radar's phone rings, and he lets it ring without picking it up. Nobody speaks with their mouths. Suddenly Lon begins to make little noises. Grant picks him up and holds him in his arms. Tight. Eyes closed. Julio takes off again, circling frantically.*

JAMES: Even the bird, takes off from his cage, flies around; you cannot sit in this room all day!

*James says this, not fully convinced. The remainder of the day is quiet, as they accept their fates. The sun outside the window sets half way, and the work day is over. The men file out, nodding goodbye to Grant as they exit.*

*As soon as the elevator doors close, Grant floats toward the window and slides it open. After a pause he takes out a half smoked cigar.*

JULIO: Babylon Babylon Babylon!

GRANT: Oh, be quiet Julio.

*He exhaustedly raises the cigar to his lips and brings a lighter to it. He puffs a breath of smoke and looks towards Lon, peacefully sleeping in his crib.*

*Julio circles the room. He is screaming, and flies out the window.*

JULIO: *(his crows fading in the distance)*, Babylon! Babylon! Babylon!

*Babylon, Babylon, Babylon, Babylon, Babylon, continues in the distance as Julio flies towards the buildings, beyond the window, to the sun, into his freedom. Grant picks up Baby Lon and holds him as he watches Julio fade into the sky.*

*The curtains fall. THE END.*

*Part 2*

## **Glowing House**

Ted turned away from the trees and focused his eyes for a moment on the grey glowing silhouettes hunched in the leftmost window of his mother's house. Then, glancing up at the dying moon and back again, he walked towards his house which lay heavy on the grass. He wanted to go straight to his room. Ted's mother and grandmother and sister were in the kitchen, mourning. As he passed them, they all made the same slouched and widened faces, as if they were too focused and too distracted at the same time and by the same thing. Alice cried, and the grandmother wiped her face. He knew that they were all thinking the same thing, too, as all the women in his family do when they are sad. It was a sadness that set him apart from the rest of his family, he knew. And although Ted was sensitive like them, he knew some vaporous sort of spiritual ribbon tied them together in mourning, which he could neither understand nor participate in.

*What was the difference between a forest and a house?*

Whatever that difference was, that was why he had to go straight to his room.

## Men

While the women mourned the men would walk. Ted's father drove from his apartment to be with his family. Fifteen miles. He found Ted in his room, laying very flat, his limbs spread brilliantly in all directions. He looked down at him on his bed.

*Your mother is wondering about you, he said. She would like to see you.*

Ted was silent. *Ted, are you listening?*

He was listening to the conversation in the other room which he could hardly make out. Ted's grandmother was speaking.

*We had to take a trip somewhere, I can't remember where... He had to buy land for some reason or another... We were in this town staying at a motel and he woke up... I think it was in the night and I said what is it and he said death, death, death is here...*

Two years had passed since Ted and Alice had found the bunnies at the creek. He was eleven now. And he was both tired and restless.

*Daddy, I know where there's baby rabbits, said Ted suddenly.*

*Okay, let's go find them, then.*

## **At the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept**

They exited through the back gate, made their way to the front of the house and into the woods. Ted's father, a slender man, with narrow shoulders and an awkward step, took the onus to guide Ted through this loss and therefore through the walk. Yet as they went, Ted was the one who marched ahead to lead him to the creek. The path was covered with deciduous trees: oaks, maples, and evergreens, whose branches draped and sprawled wildly. Ted could maneuver easily, weaving in and out of the obstacles. Each time Ted lifted a branch out of his way, his father was whacked in the face by the recoil. Ted laughed. It was not one of his calculations. The father laughed too, but each whack he also took as a gentle reproach to his parenting. He should say more. They both held their heads down as they walked, not out of sadness, but because that was how they, father and son, made their way through life. The ground told them where to go next. The evening breeze smelled damp. Their hair grew wet with dew.

*I don't know if they're still gonna be here,* Ted admitted as they came to an opening. The trees and bushes parted familiarly around the water. Things looked similar to how they were before.

*Do you remember where they were?* said the father.

*Yes,* Ted responded firmly.

Now crouched over the sprawling rivulet, heels sunk into the malleable ground, the search became a part of them. No beginning and no end. It was all this. Bent over the creek, they could have always been there.



## **The Fate of the Bunnies**

But the rabbits were not there. They didn't know, as most hunters do, that they should have waited until the first good snow cover to find the rabbits. The snow makes it easy to follow their tiny tracks. Hunting rabbits is not like hunting deer because there is no point system. Rabbit season usually runs from November to February, the coldest months. In the winter, rabbits are less likely to sustain parasites. A light drizzle may drive rabbits to frantically search for food. This is also a good time to hunt. But although the air was moist, it was not raining for the father and the son.

Rabbits are quite small compared to a human child. Their dens usually lie under bushes. As barometric pressure falls, rabbits become less active. Years ago Alice did not know that the drizzle would be good for hunting, she and Ted would have been there anyways.

## 23:4

Whenever Ted stayed at his mother's they often shared a bed. She often had nightmares, and yet she refused to ever turn off the television. She would sit up at four in the morning, either screaming or talking. If she screamed, she was still asleep. If she talked, she was awake and assumed that Ted was awake too.

Now, Ted's mother is in bed rewatching the footage of her father, Ted's grandfather's, funeral.

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

The rabbi said the reason for the prayer's association with sadness is nestled in its pronouns. The lord is *my* shepherd. *He* makes me lie down in green pastures. *He* leads me beside the still waters. When we get to *though I walk through the valley of the shadow*, we expect to hear the words for *he* is with me. But abruptly the psalm appears to veer off course and say *for you are with me*. If we have been speaking *about* God, then who are we speaking to?

*It would seem to me, by the process of elimination, that at this particular point, we are addressing ourselves to the person whose absence is most keenly felt at this moment, and saying to our dear friend and patriarch Harold, that the only thing that gives us any guarded optimism is that we will be able to make this journey through the valley of the shadow with the unmistakable conviction—the unshakeable conviction—that Harry is still with us—a warm, loving, vivid, and abiding presence—and that he will accompany us in this journey and beyond, and continue to be the wind beneath our wing,* said the rabbi.

## Naming the World

Ted had been given a diary from his mother which had special sections to fill out. He decided to write in it. His handwriting was neat but big. And he swooped his d's, y's, and g's like in cursive, but wrote his e's sharply to mimic how they looked in books. He opened the notebook, and on the first page it asked him:

What is your name?

*Ted Crybe.*

Where are you from?

*New Jersey, United States.*

How old are you?

*I am eleven.*

Then he asked himself some questions.

*We live in a house next to so many trees. In the trees there are birds. They are grey or brown and chirp in the morning. The ones with red bellies are called Robins. I can see grass out my window and the sun and at night there are stars if I go to my window and turn my neck all the way up. One time I saw constellations. Mommy and grandma and Alice are sad. I am also sad. But I think I am more okay. At school I learned about Charles Darwin. He liked birds. I think he had his own birds. Or maybe he had his own boat. He was a scientist. He says that birds tell us about humans. I don't know any humans like birds. I know a girl from school named Bunny. Whenever I see rabbits I think about Bunny.*

## Spit

The next day.

Ted's father stood next to him as he perched on a low railing in a parking lot. Suddenly his father made a feline sound, a scrunched up harsh noise in his throat, and spit a thick piece of saliva on the lot. The boy stared at the father, started up the gargle in his throat, and mimicked the spit. It was not thick, a drool at best, and it trailed from his mouth almost to the ground and sprung back up almost right back in. The father laughed so the boy did too, focusing on his father's mouth.

This quiet quiver in his throat, a quiet murmur in his chest, would tell him now, in his adolescence, of how he yearned for some vaguely strong sensibility he had only ever observed in his father. Then their shadows jumped as rain began to fall from the coalesced clouds. The rain tried to cover their shadows although the shadows and the wet and the blacktop were all different shades of dark and now the ground was a charcoaled scribble. Couldn't be covered.

Sometimes he still feels like a baby; he wants to put everything in his mouth. He imagines what the world would taste like. He had chewed the tops of his fingers so badly that it stung to even hold a pencil or wash his hands. He stood on his shadow.

They walked towards the store. Ted's mind wandered.

## Retracing A Letter from Bunny

*Dear Ted,*

*I was trying to describe you to someone a few days ago. I said: Ted is a boy in my class I can't tell if he likes me. I like him. He is nice and quiet and I like his handwriting whenever I look over at his desk. I saw him drawing a bunny once. I wonder if it was for me. Was it for me? I said Ted is different and I don't know the right word for him. One day in the fall it was right after summer the leaves were starting to fall and that was how I said you are. I said Yes that is Ted. He is not one leaf but all the leaves. The ones still on the trees, the ones in the wind. And the ones on the piles on the ground too. You are like all of the leaves, the green and orange and the brown crunchy ones too. What is the word for that?*

*Sincerely,  
Bunny*

## At the Store

Muddy pools of water encircled the store's door mat, and shoe-printed smudges of dirt tracked behind them on the floor. Ted walked through the door, walked through his mind and stood on the treetops stood on the mat stood on Yes. *Yes that is Ted*. The clerk swore to himself as a group of teenagers checked out. His eyes were small, his unshaven face red and covered with sweat. His fists clenched over the register as the group slammed the glass door on their way out, the bells above it letting out an alarming jingle. Hard day for everyone.

Ted tried to feel sad. Ted tried to feel happy. Neither stuck. The fluorescent lights pulled him in a thousand directions, down the aisles, head turned downward to the cement floor, then craned upward to the steel shelves, then back down again, then somewhere else entirely.

He suddenly longed for his mother's touch, a warm hug or even just a nudge on the shoulder. He pictured the blue violets on the stamp which stuck so perfectly in the corner on the envelope from Bunny. Five perfect petals around a perfect yellow circle. Two years he saved it. Ted's father found what he was looking for, led them both to the checkout, purchased his item from the faraway clerk, and drove Ted Crybe home.

## Splinters

*Well, I... I hardly know where to begin, to paint for you a word picture of the strange scene before my eyes... Well, I just got here. I haven't had a chance to look around yet. I guess that's it. Yes, I guess that's the... thing, directly in front of me, half buried in a vast pit. Must have struck with terrific force. The ground is covered with splinters of a tree it must have struck on its way down. What I can see of the... object itself doesn't look very much like a meteor, at least not the meteors I've seen. It looks more like a huge cylinder.*

The world had splintered off then and it splinters off now. Ted's world. Alice's world too. Their town was the world and aliens had gotten to it well before they had. They just got here.