

Dear Matt,

2/13-

I realize we haven't talked since you moved out of Atlanta four years ago, but I need to tell you something. More specifically, I would like to apologize to you. Five years ago, when your mother died in that tragic accident, I lost my mind. I experienced such great depression that I quit Atlanta and moved to the countryside. I sold all of my belongings and bought a manor on the outskirts of Applegate. I took up writing and documented the intense circumstances involving her death. The pictures I painted were my only escape from reality. What I had created was easier to live with than the harsh game of cards life had dealt me. The odds had never been in my favor, and now I lie here helplessly. I have found closure in my seclusion and have inevitably fallen ill. My body quakes at the slightest pressure put on my chest. My breathing has become as shallow as the creek that runs through the green manor grounds. You may be wondering why I contacted you now after all the years we have been apart. I have months -maybe weeks- to live. By the time this message reaches you I will have already departed as arranged by my nurse. I beg you not to try and determine my location, for it would pain me too much to see you. I was not the father I should have been. Leaving was not wise, but it was the best option I had at the time. In brief, I am proud of the young man you have become and wish I had been present to see you blossom as you studied chemistry at the university. In conclusion, I wish to go over the terms of my will. I leave you my newly bought manor and the greatest of my treasure, my collection of novels. I have already arranged my fortune to be donated to the Atlanta public library. We should give back to society and promote the advancement of education. And remember, live to inspire and be inspired.

Love,

Your father

My hands tensed; I was speechless. This was the first time I had heard from my father since my mom's mysterious death. I was disgusted, but more than that I was disappointed. The fact that my father had fallen into such a desolate state was painful. The thought of him lying on a sofa cringing as he gasps his final breathes through me into a loop and I quickly tried to erase the memory. The agony I was overcome with reminded me of the day he left Atlanta.

During the fall of my freshman year at Georgia Tech, I received the news that my mother had passed. I couldn't believe it. The stages of grief had taken their course. I locking myself in my room as I started with denial, then followed with tears that cascaded into clean pools on my counter top. The situation made me angry, I didn't understand why this was all happening to me. I would have given up anything to have my mother back. Loving her to pieces had shattered my heart into pieces. Laying in bed for one week, I felt worthless and like I would never get over the situation. Countless hours passed with me wondering if there was any way I could have saved her. In the end, there was nothing that could have been done. She I was consoled by the fact that she was was greatly loved and was missed. My face brightened that night as I thought of the bright future ahead of me, and I was excited to pursue my dream of being a chemist. Somehow I knew my mother would always be watching me, in a sense.

Emerging from my room for the first time in a long time, I was metamorphosed. Looking at myself in the mirror, I saw that a rugged countenance. I resembled the primitive cavemen studied in evolutionary biology. As I turned on my cell and flipped through the innumerable text messages, I saw my dad's name. During my isolate week my dad had drifted from my mind. I didn't stop once to think about how he was handling the situation. I was selfish on my isolate island. In utter shock of this occurrence, I boarded bus 55 towards Cherrywood.

After an hour or so, reached my destination. Peering into the windows of my past residence, I saw nothing but darkness. I rang the doorbell and no one came to receive me. I pulled my cellphone out and gripped it tightly, dialing his number. No answer. The number was no longer in service. My stomach dropped as I frantically circled the house looking for the slightest sign of life. The plants that encompassed the manor glittered in the black luster night. Returning here was my routine for the next month until it sunk in that he was gone also. One tragic event led to three deaths: my mother, father, and I. The hope I once had soon evaporated into a mist of disappointment and confusion. To this day, I wear the mask of the lonely traveler trying to make sense of the world.

Receiving my dad's letter felt as if I was seeing a phantom. My father rose from the dead only to be cast back down by this abstract illness. The idea of going to the manor was tossed

back and forth in my head as if a game of catch was taking place. This manor was taboo to me, and embarking on a quest to visit might have stirred up the emotions I had locked away from the past. Turning over the decision a few times, I realized I had nothing to lose. I flipped the letter over and took note of the return address on the envelope. 163 Hemingway Dr. Applegate Georgia.

I stepped out into the bright Georgia sunshine. The asphalt left my feet scorched as the 100 degree weather left me soaked. After five minutes my face felt like it was going to melt off so I rushed into my car I blasted the AC. Later, I turned on the GPS and discovered Applegate was one hundred miles east of Atlanta. Departing Atlanta reopened the pit I had so perfectly concealed, though the pain was mixed with curiosity. The excitement of adventuring into the unknown tore my heart at the seams. My chest pounded as I cruised down the highway of destiny.

One hour into my journey, the highway came to an abrupt end as its contents were dumped into the stagnant countryside like a great current of warm water mixing with its chilly counterpart. The hills of emeralds rolled into what seemed like eternity. Applegate was much more temperate and the scent of wild flowers filled me with joy. Chaotic Atlanta was replaced with the tranquility of the countryside. The stress that burdened me was lifted, and the mask I had sewn out of fear and emotion was liberated.

The rolling hills soon became flat and accompanied a putrid odor of rotten eggs. I had entered Applegate and in turn entered the swampy side of Georgia. The vegetation was much different here. It skirted atop the water and bobbed in the wind as if dancing to a familiar jig. Up ahead I caught sight of a three floor manor. As I pulled up, I squinted to read the address from afar. "163 Hemingway Dr.", I whispered softly to myself. I turned up into the driveway and observed the old building.

The manor stood three stories high and was rotting along with the swamp surrounding it. The grass seemed like it hadn't been cut in years, and the bushes were shaped like jigsaw puzzle pieces. Stepping out of the car, my feet sunk into the lawn as if I had stepped right into

quick sand. I trudged through the muddy lawn to the golden double doors of the manor. I knocked three times and still induced no response from whomever might have been inside.

Peering into the house I saw a variety of furniture covered in white sheets. I walked around the back to see if I could locate a gardener or a caretaker. I waded through the thicket of bushes and into an enclosed garden with tall hedges. The garden consisted of flowers of all sorts. I had never seen such a plethora of flowers. The scents tickled by nose and I was captivated by the beauty nature had to offer. As I suspected, a gardener was knelt down by a pot of plants patting the soil around a newly planted tree. She turned around and I saw her glamorous countenance that radiated the beauty of surrounding garden.

“May I help you?” The mysterious woman exclaimed.

“Ummm yes I am Matt the owner of the manors son”, I said in a secluded tone.

“I’ve been waiting for you!” She said with a tone of excitement.

She led me inside the house by hand and sat me down at the kitchen table.

“Thirsty?” She questioned.

“No thanks”, I said cautiously at the uncomfortable situation.

“I just need your signature here”, she pointed to a line at the bottom of my father’s will.

My father had told me about his will, but this was the first time I had ever seen it in person. It was evident that the will was written frantically as it was hand written and not thoroughly proofread. I took a quick glance at it and signed the document. The mysterious woman pulled away and tucked the will away in her skirt. She then proceeded to walk towards the front doors.

‘Where are you going?!’ I screamed after her as she walked.

“My commitment is up. I no longer work for your father”, she told me with a face of sympathy.

“Good luck.”

That was the final thing she told me before leaving me all alone in the manor. I sat for a great time pondering what to do with the manor and all its contents. I could sell it off along with all the furniture, but I wanted to have a good look around before deciding anything.

The first floor consisted of a kitchen, two living rooms, one bathroom, and one dining room. All of the furniture was covered in white sheets like a light coat of snow. The furniture was nearly a century old and held a great deal of value. The second floor was entirely made up of bedrooms and bathrooms with shiny marble flooring. These rooms reminded me of the lavished life and what a wealthy future could do for me. The third floor was even more luxurious. Golden chandeliers, libraries, and my father's study.

I entered the library and began to explore the endless rows of books. He had all the classics from *Native Son* to *Pride and Prejudice*. I got lost in the endless cases and found myself transfixed on one particular section of the library. My father's favorite novels were collectively stored on the same shelf. One book caught my eye: *Frankenstein*. I had read this book in high school, and my father had shared it with me when I was a boy. He loved the adventure and the moral of the tale. The moral of Mary Shelley's is that knowledge can be dangerous and that knowing can lead to our ultimate demise. This novel always fascinated me but the most fascinating element that struck me as a child was the Romanticism and the fact that nature is a refuge anyone can turn to in times of trial.

I brushed the dust off the old book and opened the front cover. Inside was a tiny slip of paper. I carefully unfolded the slip of paper and tried to make out what it was from. The faded scrap of paper consisted of the floor plan of the manor and the materials used to construct it. I mentally traced my steps through the blueprint until I realized I had missed a room. I followed the map in an attempt to locate the room, but it was a lost cause. A towering bookshelf stood where the entrance to the room labeled "attic" should have been.

I wandered off until I realized a peculiar floorboard and as I walked away from the bookshelf the floor made a hollow noise. Crouching down on my knees, I investigated the floor. I pressed my ear to the floor and tapped it with my fingernails I confirmed the floor was indeed hollow. I tugged one of the floorboards and caused it to get loose and so I could lift it out. Board by

board, I created a hole in the floor and uncovered a stone spiral staircase much older than the house by a least a decade. I grabbed a candle off the main desk of the library and lit it using the lighter I never leave the house without.

I descended slowly down the damp steps, attempting to grip the stone walls so I would lose my balance. Fifteen minutes later, the steps led me to a dark room. These steps extended deep below the house at least a few hundred feet. Bringing the candle close to the objects in the room, I discovered muskets, and worn clothes. I could never mistake these artifacts. After taking an extensive Civil War history class I identified these artifacts as confederate provisions. I concluded that this manor must have been the abode of a confederate general and his family.

I walked further into the back of the room and found a golden chest. What other treasures could this cavern of fantasy hold? The chest made several clicks as I slowly lifted the lid. The chest was filled with nothing more than papers and letters. Under further examination I saw my mother's names scrawled on the letters. I took a deep breath and opened one of the faded envelope.

*Dear my sweetest Abby,*

*Happy 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Whenever I gaze into those pools of blue that fit perfectly on your face. I see us on the beach back when we first met. You were studying micro bacteria brought in by the tide and I was a clueless business major. You had me starstruck the first time I saw you. I knew you were the woman I wanted to marry. My love for you will always endure-*

The rest of the letter was too faded to read. I was startled because I had never seen this side of my father. The love he had for my mother was ungraspable and impossible to even imagine. Sifting through more of the letters, I found a poem written by father entitled *Nature:*

*Nature*

*In the deepest feeling of agony there is always joy,*

*Flee to me for my arms are wide open,*

*Be not saddened by your cloy,*

*For your soul was meant to be reopened,*

*Indulge in my vitality,*

*And take refuge in vines and flowers,*

*Quit from your reality,*

*And trust in my ability to empower.*

I let the poem sit in my thoughts for a while and realized the greatest lesson of my life is to love and be loved. My father loved me unconditionally and left me this great fortune. The treasure that was right there that I sought in my hands. These tangible emotions were priceless. I discovered that I discovered that we stem from nature and return to nature. I decided I'll leave nature with a new disposition. I now seek to inspire and to be inspired.