

SCOP

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Works by Students of Southwest Baptist University

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2006 Creative Writing Contest Winners

Poetry

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Beyond the Other Door

Brittaney Whittenburg

Six tall doors surround you,
Their scarred, ancient faces looming over you.
“Consequences.” “Consequences.” they whisper,
But their skeleton keyholes offer no glimpse
Of the mysteries beyond them.
You touch an age-greened handle, then jerk away;
It shocks you with its possibilities.
Frightened, you choose another
And scramble inside.

You hear a soft *thud*:
The door has slipped closed.
You fight with the handle—you need to go back!
“No chance!” the door hisses.
It has locked tight.

Shaking, you creep into the dark unknown
Until your choice is far behind you,
But you know your heart still quivers
Beyond the other door.

Arrogance+Manipulation+Lack of Consideration= Self-Centered

Jessica Stone

In general, many qualities of human behavior tend to stem from a rather high dosage of self-centeredness. In fact, today's society actually promotes and encourages self-centeredness. The book Beyond Feelings: A Guide to Critical Thinking discusses the topic of self-centeredness, saying that self-centeredness "is now considered an imperative" (Ruggiero 9). Self-centeredness is displayed in all facets of life, from school to the workplace to social engagements. This selfish perspective disguises itself beneath several different behavioral characteristics. Characteristics such as arrogance, manipulation, and lack of consideration for others can serve as masks, covering the underlying issue of self-centeredness. These characteristics appear in real life as well as in the world of literature. The two literary characters of Jim Smiley and Editha Balcom provide an accurate depiction of just how humans can display their self-centered personalities. Jim Smiley in Mark Twain's "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and Editha Balcom in William Dean Howells' "Editha" show three remarkably similar characteristics in the way they think and act toward others.

The first quality the two characters have in common is extreme arrogance. Jim Smiley overly asserts his confidence in the way he constantly bets on any and every situation. The entire story of "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" recounts instance after instance of gambling situations that Jim Smiley initiates. Smiley bets on situations from animals fighting to a woman passing away. Twain writes about Smiley, "Why, it never made no difference to him—he'd bet on any thing. . ." (993). His willingness to lay down money on so many situations shows that Jim Smiley is quite confident in his gambling abilities. Not only is Smiley a betting man, he is also a winning betting man. Twain describes Smiley as being "uncommon lucky; he

most always c[a]me out winner” (993). While Smiley’s winning streak undoubtedly plays a role in his arrogant nature, the reverse could also be true. Perhaps Smiley’s readiness to bet and his success in gambling originate from his high level of arrogance. Author Vincent Ruggiero suggests that a “lack of confidence impedes performance,” insinuating that a high level of confidence must improve one’s performance (9). This idea definitely seems to be the case with Smiley. The more he wins, the more arrogant Smiley becomes, and the more arrogant Smiley becomes, the more readily he bets on a situation.

Like Jim Smiley, Editha Balcom also displays a high level of arrogance. Editha Balcom displays her overly confident attitude in the way she expects her fiancé, George, automatically to forget his own life and dreams in pursuit of her dreams. In the story “Editha,” the title character completely obsesses over her desires for her fiancé to go to war. Editha’s arrogance shines through in the letter she writes to George, practically demanding George to join the army, or else risk losing her love. The arrogant tone of the letter seems quite symbolic of Editha’s nature. One author explains that “[a]rrogance is a state in which we are convinced that we have the right to be above others” (al-Halveti). This idea of arrogance seems prominent in Editha’s behavior with George. Editha obviously thinks she has some power or some right to be in authority over George or else she would not try so desperately to convince him to go to war. The fact that Editha demands so much out of George shows her arrogant nature.

The second behavioral characteristic Jim Smiley and Editha Balcom share presents itself in the form of manipulation. Constantly convincing others to buy into his betting pool usually creates a winning environment for Jim Smiley, as well as displaying his high skills of manipulation. In order for a bet to take place, at least two people must be involved. The situations on which Jim Smiley places bets do not seem to stem from the initiative of another

person. In every instance in the story, Smiley negotiates the bet. However, Smiley doesn't just come out and boldly say, "Hey, let's bet on how far this frog can jump." Smiley takes the sly, and somewhat deceptive, approach, clearly showing his manipulative abilities. In betting on the jumping frog, Twain says that Smiley hides "the beast in a little lattice box...", an obvious sly attempt to cause people to wonder (994). At this point, a stranger to the town walks up and asks, "What might it be that you've got in the box?" falling right into Smiley's trap (Twain 994). The situation goes on to develop into a betting scenario. At this point, Smiley's manipulative plan becomes obvious. A psychological article by Dean Hepworth explains that one definition of manipulation is "to manage or influence by artful skill for the purpose of suiting one's purpose or advantage". This definition seems directly to apply to the situation with Jim Smiley. Smiley manipulates people into betting against him in an attempt to win whatever prize they agree upon. According to this concept of manipulation, along with how it coincides with Smiley's character, the theme of self-absorption is obvious once again.

Editha Balcom thrives within the categories of self-absorption and manipulation. Editha Balcom's conniving manipulation drives George to go off to war. The letter Editha writes to George clearly serves as a tool of manipulation. The entire content of the letter proves Editha's motives. Editha's letter reads, "I could not love thee, dear, so much, [I] loved I not honor more. ...There is no honor above America..." (Howells 1025). Although completely aware of her own tactics, Editha attempts to be somewhat subtle in her transmission of her desires. However, to the reader, the tools of manipulation become quite obvious. Other than the letter, Editha manipulates George through her argument of why she thinks he should go to war. Editha claims that the war is justifiable, stating, "God meant it to be war" (Howells 1024). Taking this side of the argument simply further reveals Editha's manipulative nature. She knows that George's

previous occupation was that of a preacher. Thus, any argument Editha uses in God's name will be difficult for George to refute. This argumentative attempt serves to display Editha's conniving skills of manipulation. Author Joseph A. DeVito explains one aspect of manipulation or persuasion. DeVito states, "Appealing to emotions, needs, desires, and wants is among the most powerful means of persuasion [a person] possess[es]" (228). Appealing to emotion is exactly how Editha attempts to persuade and manipulate George. Editha hits this concept of persuasion with full force, going straight for George's emotions, which actively displays her manipulative nature.

Thirdly, Jim Smiley and Editha Balcom both display the characteristic of acting severely inconsiderate. Jim Smiley makes rude and inconsiderate comments without bothering to care who might be offended by his coarseness. At one point in the story, the wife of Parson Walker, a townsman, becomes ill and is in grave condition. The Parson's wife's condition eventually improves, leaving the Parson quite thankful. However, Smiley's severe insensitivity in this situation shows his lack of consideration for others. When hearing the news that the Parson's wife is going to live, Smiley coyly comments, "Well, I'd resk two-and-a-half she don't anyway" (Twain 993). By this comment alone, Smiley makes it clear that he is completely oblivious to the feelings of others around him. His inconsiderate nature is obvious in the fact that Smiley doesn't care what he says or who hears him; he simply says what he is thinking. Smiley is so self-absorbed, that his level of sensitivity practically doesn't exist.

When pushing for George to join the army, Editha fails to consider the possible negative outcome and who might be affected. This lack of consideration for others that Editha displays shows itself throughout the story. Perhaps the most defining example of Editha's lack of consideration is solidified in the fact that George does indeed die at war. Just before George

leaves for the army, he makes a solemn request for Editha to follow through with. George asks, should something happen to him at war, that Editha take care of his mother. Editha complies, but not without stating, “But nothing will happen! Nothing *can!*” (Howells 1028). It is evident at this point that Editha has not allowed herself to consider the negative possibilities of what fighting in the war might mean for George, or anyone else for that matter. Editha quickly dismisses the notion of death and allows her sense of pride in her soldier to reign supreme. Obviously, all Editha cares about is the fact that George finally sees the situation her way and obediently follows through with her wishes. In her pursuit of convincing George to join the army, never once does Editha consider anyone else’s feelings. She determines to do what she wants to do. Editha displays no concern for George’s life or how his life or death might affect even his mother.

Jim Smiley and Editha Balcom both exhibit three main negative qualities: arrogance, manipulation, and lack of consideration for others. These three characteristics really just serve the purpose of masking the underlying quality of extreme self-centeredness within these two characters. The selfish nature each character employs occurs throughout both “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” by Mark Twain, and “Editha,” by William Dean Howells. However, the selfishness of both Jim Smiley and Editha Balcom is not necessarily prominently recognizable because of the fact that their arrogance, skills of manipulation, and inconsiderate nature succeed at disguising their self-centeredness. Jim Smiley and Editha Balcom serve as realistic reminders of a society who promotes and accepts self-centeredness.

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The Prodigal
Briannon Scott

Now walking down this dusty road, my thoughts
About me spin in ever dizzy rounds.
My life, they say, is in my shame; now caught,
The past pursues like starved and angry hounds.
My filth-encrusted hands still bear the mark
Of rings full laden with their golden pride.
Clad in these rags, now threadbare, torn and stark,
Colors, like friends, have long since left my side.
Ahead the road turns softly on its path.
The home that it once served me to deny
Stands there, I falter now for fear his wrath.
Cannot forget and can no longer hide.
But he takes me with love that I'd once known
And holds me close, My child, you're welcome home.

The Mexican Compliment

Kristi DeHaan

“¡Ey mamacita [hey little mama]! ¡Qué piernas [what legs]!” The tall blonde flips her head around and sees a middle-aged Mexican man squatting on the curb, his eyes fixed on her lean figure. Completely disgusted by the man’s open gawking, the girl returns his googly-eyed gaze with an icy glare, gives him the bird, then stomps away, fuming inwardly the rest of her walk home. A different woman with a light complexion and a somewhat stocky build finds herself in a very similar situation, listening to the same calls from a Mexican man. She, however, has worked with a business firm in Guadalajara for several years and has become very accustomed to the men’s tradition of watching women walk down the street and throwing out such “piropos” (translated from Spanish as “compliments”). Instead of being insulted by the man’s frankness, this woman smiles slightly and walks with a bit more bounce in her step. Upon arriving at work, she giggles with her female coworkers about what a man on the street told her this time and speculates on what she might hear on the way home.

Both of these women exemplify different levels of cultural awareness. Because of her cultural ignorance, the former assumes that the aggression of the Mexican man is negative in nature and the woman takes offense. The latter, on the other hand, has a cultural context on which to base her judgment and knows that these seemingly suggestive comments are mere compliments; she capitalizes on them to boost her self-image. In view of these two extremes, where must the American Christian woman stand? Should she remain ethnocentric and not even try to comprehend this aspect of the Latino culture? Or should she completely embrace it as a social practice that is not inferior to what she believes is correct? The answer is neither. Despite the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences, Christian women should not compromise their personal values in order to accept those dissimilarities.

The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines compliment as “a remark that expresses approval, admiration or respect.” In American culture, the respect aspect of a compliment is almost always present. One rarely considers a flippantly voiced expression of praise (like “Hey, hottie!”) a genuine compliment. “Compliment” is a word reserved for a more sincere, admiring comment. “Piropo,” translated into English as “compliment,” evokes a different connotation than its American English counterpart. This Spanish word possesses the connotation of a flirtatious remark that is more akin to meaningless flattery than to a sincere expression of praise or approval. In the title of one of his illustrations, Victor MacClure describes the essence of a piropo in a simple and straightforward manner. He entitled his illustration “Piropo – The Compliment in Passing.” Indeed, as women walk past them in the street, Latino men often whistle or throw out piropos like “¡Qué ojos preciosos!” (“What beautiful eyes!”), “¿Cómo te llamas?” (“What is your name?”), and “¡Mamacita!” (“Little mama!”) to show their admiration of the lady’s physical features. American Christian women will more greatly appreciate, rather than scorn, this common Latino practice of giving piropos when they understand the differences in perspective from which these “compliments” are delivered.

Upon understanding this difference in fundamental meanings, a Christian woman must in turn examine the Biblical principles that define her personal values. The Bible calls Christians to desire godliness above all else. God even promises in 1 Timothy 6:6 that “godliness with contentment is great gain.” Thus, if the pursuit of godliness, rather than the pursuit of self-glorification, is a woman’s ultimate goal, the piropos of men will offend her, despite her understanding of the word itself and its cultural implications. The Christian woman will want others to acknowledge the deepest essence of her inner person, not just her frail exterior that is

subject to imperfection and degeneration. By allowing God to define her self-image and by being content with who she is in Him, she will see the piropo as mere flattery that does not address the life issues that really matter to God.

A young Christian lady from Missouri strolls the streets of Mexico City, her beautiful, sharp features catching the attention of those around her. The thin woman hears the piropos tossed in her direction yet continues walking without acknowledging them. She understands that the men of the world find her physically beautiful, but inwardly she works to remind herself that it is not her body that matters most but the condition of her heart before God.

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The Bible. New International Version.

Death by Degrees

Michelle Felder

He will not come.
I know this,
Yet my eyes are drawn—
Sentinels upon the door,
Dying with the minutes
Till I am a foolish corpse.
Tomorrow, my tormentor—Hope—
Shall drag me back,
And I shall be alive once more,
But not as much
As I was yesterday.

I Am Bobby Jones and I Don't Like Corn

Charlotte Holman

I grew up on a small farm in southwest Iowa. I don't like corn. Don't ask me why; I just don't like it. I just don't. I've tried it; I don't like it. My dad grows corn; his dad grew corn, and all my friends' dad's grow corn, but I just don't like it. We eat it with every meal here: creamed corn, corn on the cob, corn casserole, baked corn, corn fritters, corn pudding, corn cobbler, and sweet corn. I am Bobby Jones, and I don't like corn.

I was named after my granddad Robert Jones, a hearty man with a big laugh. He grew up in New York City, but instead of becoming a stock broker like his dad, he wanted to "get in touch with the earth" or something and decided move to Iowa and be a farmer. Of course he chose to grow Iowa's staple crop, corn. He met his wife in Iowa, a school teacher named Emma, and they raised their family on this modest farm of 400 acres. My dad is the oldest of five kids and the only one who loves farming as much as granddad did, so granddad gave the farm to dad after he retired. Dad happily left the Pamida he was managing to farm. I have only one sibling, a little sister named Elizabeth; she loves corn. Elizabeth is the favorite of the family.

My parents have always known that I don't like corn; they were the ones who gave me my first taste of it. It was always our family's dark secret that we never spoke of to anyone. While they were never ashamed of me as a person or a son, my parents were always ashamed of the fact that they had not succeeded in raising a good Iowa boy who eats his corn. This skeleton in my closet did not come out until the 1996 Corn Festival.

I was ten years old that year, and Tommy Sikes's birthday fell on the same day as the Corn Festival. Tommy Sikes was my best friend, so it would seem suspicious if I avoided the party which was, lo and behold, held at the Corn Festival. My parents reluctantly allowed me to go, but I had to promise to eat any corn presented to me no matter how much I didn't like it to protect my family's honor as a respectable corn farming family.

The party was fun at first. We conquered the corn maze, rode the ponies, and watched the combine derbies. The party was almost over; I had almost made it through the Corn Festival without being confronted by corn I had to eat when it happened. Mrs. Sikes bought everyone a big roasted corn on the cob. She didn't even ask if we wanted any; she just assumed we would eat it and like it! Panic flooded through my entire body as she handed me my corn cob. What would I do? I had been instructed to eat the corn no matter how repulsive it was, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. The smell, the very thought of it made me want to vomit. Thinking about it now brings back the sick feeling. I just sat there staring at the evil vegetable in my hands, the embodiment of my shame. I could not bring myself to eat the corn.

"Bobby? Is something wrong with your corn cob, Bobby?" Mrs. Sikes asked. She had noticed the look of disgust I gave my corn cob.

"Um..." I struggled to think of a good excuse not to eat my corn but nothing came to me. "Um...Mrs. Sikes ma'am, I'm sorry but...I...uh...I...don't like corn." I hung my head in shame. Everyone at the picnic table stopped eating his corn cob and stared at me. I looked at each one of them hesitantly. Mrs. Sikes's mouth just hung open in shock. The other boys scooted away from me. Tommy just stared at me with a look of disgust and betrayal. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to disappear.

"Surely, honey, that's not true," Mrs. Sikes stumbled for words. "Have you tried corn?"

"Yes ma'am, and I don't like it."

"Well maybe you just need to try it again. Go on, and have a bite."

“I would rather not ma’am; I think I might be sick if I do.”

“Well! I have never met a good Iowa boy who didn’t like his corn. That corn is what supports your way of life, young man. You should be more thankful, and give it some respect. That corn keeps a roof over your head, and you can’t even bring yourself to taste it. You can’t even give it a second chance.”

“I will if you really want me too Mrs. Sikes, but I would really rather not.”

“No, no, it’s alright; I don’t want you to be sick in my van.” She picked up her purse, and we headed back to the Sikes’s house. Our parents picked us up there, and as each parent arrived Mrs. Sikes whispered something to him or her on the way out. I can only imagine she was telling each one about the incident with me and the corn because some would gasp and cover their mouths, while others would glare at me or sadly shake their heads. I was the last one to leave. When my dad arrived to pick me up, Mrs. Sikes gave him a piece of her mind about the way I was raised.

“Imagine, a boy raised in Iowa not appreciating corn!” she scolded my dad. My dad apologized profusely for any emotional damage my dislike of corn might have caused the other kids and then made me apologize to Tommy for ruining his party. Tommy would not even look at me.

Once we were in the car dad was silent.

“I’m sorry Dad,” I whispered meekly.

“Why didn’t you just eat the corn Bobby?” Dad just stared at the road.

“I tried Dad. I really did, but I thought I might barf if I did. The smell was making me sick.”

“Just a few bites, that’s all we ask, and you couldn’t even do that. I don’t know what your mother will do when I tell her. I tried to raise you right, to be a respectable Iowa boy; I don’t know where I went wrong. You just don’t like corn. You’re a nice boy, a good boy, you just don’t like corn. Why can’t you like corn?”

“I don’t know dad; I’m sorry.”

“We still love you son, know that much; we will always love you whether you like corn or not. We are just disappointed that’s all.”

When we reached the house 30 minutes later, my dad took my mom into the bedroom and told her what happened. I’m pretty sure she started to cry. That night I had to write a letter to all the boys at the party and to Tommy, apologizing for the trauma I had cause them by my refusal to eat the corn. But my letter could not, in their minds, make up for what I had done. That day I had sealed my fate as a social outcast for as long as I decided to remain in Iowa.

Since I lived in a small community, it did not take long for word to spread that I didn’t like corn. I was no longer invited to birthday parties. When I went to the grocery store with my parents, little children would cry and hide behind their mothers’ skirts at the sight of me. When we walked down an aisle at the store, some patrons would simply avert their eyes, but those more squeamish would hurry to the next aisle. When we would go out to eat, my parents would have to order for me because the waiters refused to acknowledge me. The buffet line would quickly scatter if I approached for my food. When I wasn’t out with my family they were treated with all the friendliness that I too once experienced. It wasn’t my family the community shunned, only me. My family never stopped loving me, but they were ashamed of my dislike of corn. As long as we avoided the subject, life at home was good. That didn’t stop the nightmares

though. I dreamed that the town was coming in the night to tar and feather me or string me up. Sometimes I was burned at the stake with ears of corn for fuel instead of wood. That was the worst. I would wake up in a cold sweat and realize that no angry mob was coming with pitchforks and torches to hurt me. Then I would go back to a dreamless sleep.

At school I was shunned by my classmates. During P.E., I was always the last one picked to play kickball, and at recess they wouldn't even let me play. Even the four-square kids refused to be seen with me. I half-heartedly punched at the tetherball alone, and on really lonely days, I sat on the swing sets far from the laughter of the other kids. One day as I was sitting there on the swings, wallowing in self-pity, one of the special education kids came lumbering over to me.

"Why you swinging by yourself?" he asked in his clumsy speech pattern.

"Because no one wants to play with me," I answered, staring at my shoes.

"How comes?"

"I don't like corn."

"That's silly." The boy smiled and let out a giggle. "What's your name?"

"Bobby."

"I'm George." Suddenly the special ed. teacher called his name.

"Mrs. Riley is calling you George."

"I don't want to go back there," he whispered, embarrassed and frightened all at once.

"Why not?"

"Because I ate the glue again, and Mrs. Riley is mad at me."

"Why did you eat the glue? Doesn't it taste bad?"

"No, it's really good. I likes it. That's why I eats it."

"It's not good for you."

"But I likes it."

"It can kill you, George, if you eat too much of it." When I said that, he got very scared and clutched at his throat. "Oh no! George, glue is good and nice, as long as you don't eat any. You aren't going to die from a little bit."

"That's good." He looked very relieved.

"You shouldn't eat anymore, though."

He shook his head violently in agreement.

"George," Mrs. Riley had caught up to him. "Is this your new friend?"

"Yes."

"What's his name?"

"Bobby." George was very excited to have a new friend. "He don't like corn!"

"Well, that's ok." Mrs. Riley wasn't even phased. "We don't stop being someone's friend just because they are different do we?"

"Nope!" He smiled at her.

"You need to say goodbye to Bobby now, George," Mrs. Riley said gently. "Recess is over, but you can play with him tomorrow." George took her hand and waved at me awkwardly as he walked away.

George took his teacher's advice and did come and play with me every day at recess from then on. I even attempted to teach him tetherball, but he wasn't quite coordinated enough in elementary school. After a week of recesses spent together, Mrs. Riley approached me.

“I praised George for not eating the glue today during our craft activity, and he told me that you said it was bad for him. Did you?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“He really likes you, Bobby. You are his only real friend, and he listens to you.”

“I don’t know why.”

“Would you like to help me with the other children during recess Bobby? You don’t have to if you don’t want to, but I think you have a gift for it.”

“Sure I can help out Mrs. Riley.”

“You don’t judge them like most people Bobby; you seem to understand George.”

“No one else will be my friend because I don’t like corn. George doesn’t care about that. Why should I care if he’s a little slower than most?”

“You’re mother raised a nice young man Bobby Jones.”

“Thank you ma’am.”

I helped out with the special ed. kids during recess all throughout elementary and middle school. When I reached high school, I was Mrs. Riley’s teacher assistant for her special ed. class. After going to my locker and finding that Tommy Sikes (he had become our star football player and the biggest bully) had once again filled my locker with creamed corn, I would go to Mrs. Riley’s classroom and spend an hour helping George and other kids like him try to reach their full potential as people. Through George I got to know Suzie, James, Lucy (we called her Lulu), and Michael. George became my best friend when everyone else in school ignored and ostracized me. He wasn’t severely mentally challenged, just enough to need some extra help. Mrs. Riley told me once that she always thought all George needed was a friend to help him grow and that I had become that friend. He graduated high school and has become a tetherball master. George went to a college for the mentally challenged so he could have a chance at a better life than a group home could offer him, and I went to UCLA after high school, as far from Iowa and corn-lovers as possible. George and I stayed in touch through letters and later email as he became more confident on the computer.

I got my teaching degree in special education so that I could help those who helped me. When no one else would be my friend, George Thompson came to the abandoned swing set to be my friend. We were both shunned because we were different, but the things that made us different gave us an understanding of each other, and through that, we have become the closest of friends. Because of George Thompson I have come to know that corn is such a small thing in life; it doesn’t really matter. I am not a bad person because corn disgusts me. That is one of the unique things that makes me who I am. Mrs. Riley said I had a gift for working with the mentally challenged; that gift was my curse of hating corn. I am Bobby Jones, and I don’t like corn.

FEET OF JUSTICE

Nathan Ross

The stage slept as I grew hungry.
All the words had been spent.
All the sentences had been shaped,
reshaped, dramatized, and delivered.
First illuminated by an applause,
later hung-over from the praise,
my feet tapped out an improvised tune,
like delicate baby hands splashing the water.
Feet on fire, restlessness fueled by a badly informed
audience, who thought the performance had ended,
when in fact the thump, thud, whack, and smack marked the beginning.

The Cutting Edge
Stacey Davidson

Characters: Samantha Woman

Scene 1:

All the lights are out. A telephone rings. The lights come up on a desk that is upstage right. The telephone sits in the center of the desk. Samantha enters stage right and answers the telephone.

Samantha: Hello? (*Pauses*) Are you sure? (*Pauses and breaths deeply*) Okay, you know ever since dad died mom was never the same. Where did she pass away? (*Pauses*) At home in her bed. Okay, I will be there in a short while. (*Hangs up the telephone*)

Exists stage right

Scene 2:

Opens with Samantha, who enters stage right, facing the audience. Even though she is facing the audience she looks beyond the audience.

Samantha: Wow, it's been a long time since I've seen this house. The memories I have from this place. (*Samantha's face reflects a somber feeling*) The memories of pain, agony, blame, physical torment and mental anguish all come flooding back to me. It's funny how you forget the memories of a certain place until you visit it again. (*Looks directly at the audience*) I know what you are probably thinking, and, no, I was never physically or sexually abused. In fact my parents loved me very much; I just wish I would have seen it earlier. I can say without a doubt that I was the only one to blame. I put myself through hell for years in my own room. Even though my room was a hellish prison I felt liberated there. How can one possibly feel free in a prison? It all depends on what you go through and your view on life. (*Pauses and looks back at the "house"*) I wonder if it's still the same as I left it years ago. (*She takes a deep breath*) Well, there's only one way to find out.

Exists stage left

Scene 3:

Curtains open and there is a medium-sized room with a bed pushed against the back wall. A dresser sits against a wall with a small bookcase beside it. A corner of the room is vacant and can easily be seen. Samantha enters stage left through the door.

Samantha: Just as I left it. (*She walks over to the bed and sits on it*) The late nights I spent on this bed contemplating the unanswered questions of the universe. I could never fall asleep when I wanted to; my mind would decide to start thinking about things

and wouldn't stop. After a few hours of my mind wandering I would fall asleep. The next day I would sleep in for hours, and my parents would then tell me that I needed to go to bed earlier so I could get up in the morning. They finally gave up and just thought that I was lazy, so I let them think it. They wouldn't understand; no one would understand. They would probably think I was crazy, so I kept it all bottled up inside. *(Gets off the bed and walks to the corner. She sits in the corner)* Ah, my old friend, my corner of the universe where I had total control. *(She runs her hands along the floor)* The marks are still here. I figured my parents would have covered up the floor when I left. *(She looks at the wall beside her)* I can see they painted the wall; of course I would have too. *(she looks over at the bookcase)* I wonder if it's still there, my inspiration. *(She gets up and walks over to the bookcase and pulls out a book titled Quo Vadis and opens the cover and smiles)* I can't believe they never found it. I knew I was good at hiding things. *(Looks at the audience)* You are probably wondering what could be so important that I would have to hide it from my entire family. Let me show, so you can see why. *(She pulls out a box of razor blades and shows the audience)* This little box may seem unimportant to you, but to me it was my life. You might have figured out by now that I was a cutter. For those of you who don't know what a cutter is then let me show you. *(She pulls up her sleeves and reveals a series of scars running up her arm and across her wrist)* I started in this very room and that very corner. *(She points to the corner)* I started by cutting the floor out of frustration. And I was too afraid to cut myself, but soon that fear gave way, and I was free to cut myself. The hours I spent on these arms relieving my pain for whatever reason I could think of. Then I took relieving my pain to a whole new level. Instead of small cuts I went for bigger slashes. The cold metal sent shivers up my spine in anticipation of what was about to come. The rushing of blood from my body was exhilarating. All my problems and cares seemed to flow right out with the blood. *(Pauses and looks at the book)* Don't you like the title of the book I chose, Quo Vadis? It's about Nero, a Roman emperor who thought he was a god and made sure everyone knew it too. I chose this book because it made me research cutting, and I learned all I needed to know about cutting myself. Nero invited people to open their veins for him, in other words commit suicide. I found it interesting that Nero's guards, who had to watch the victims carry out the order, would tell the victims to cut themselves long ways instead across the wrist. The reason for this because the victims would bleed out faster. After I read everything I could about Nero my whole perspective on cutting changed. I realized I was cutting myself in an insufficient manner. It was all clear and with that came new learning experiences. *(She puts the book back and rubs her arms)* But with every new experience my prison grew bigger. I had to wear long sleeve shirts all the time so that no one would find out about how I passed that time. When I was just cutting across the wrist I could wear sweat bands, but that didn't work for very long. I had to keep it a secret because no one would understand. So my prison moved from my room to the whole world. Even now, I am a prisoner to these long sleeve shirts. Like I said earlier, I have no one to blame except me. I was not only the prisoner but was also the judge and the guard. I dealt out the punishment and then had to punish myself.

The worst thing about this is that everyone thought I had the perfect life, but I didn't. I had a life that I didn't want, but everyone else desired. The frustrations and unhappiness of life all started when I was a teenager. The reason was mainly because of my size. Back then I was fat, and everyone else around me was thin. I really didn't notice my size until my sisters started to lose weight in high school, and everyone noticed them. I had people asking me when I was going to go on a diet and start looking like my sisters. That was the first cut I ever received in my life, and it hurt. Then to pour salt on an open wound my sisters would always complain that they were fat, even though they wore a five size jeans. Shortly after that my cutting began. I can't blame it all on weight, that was just the cherry on top of a sundae of other problems. I was being teased at school for reading and wanting to learn. I was spit on, tripped and pushed around, even when I was a senior in high school. I would just walk away because I knew I couldn't do anything about it. I wasn't very popular, but with group projects I seemed to be the most popular person in the class. I always ended up doing most, if not all of the work. But as soon as we turned in the presentation I became the unpopular girl again. The same people who worked with me would call me a bookworm, smarty pants and an overachiever. I admit it; I was a book worm but only because I could escape from this world and into another world where I could be happy. I don't understand why they called me smarty pants because I wasn't that smart; I just worked hard. I needed to get good grades, not only because my parents expected it, but because it would get me something to be proud about. People kept telling me that high school was suppose to be the best years of your life. Well, not for me. I was tired of being picked on, expected to act a certain way, and being judged constantly. I was tired of it all. (*She pulls a blade out from the box*) Look at it, the way the light bounces off of the blade and makes it look so beautiful. Can't you see why I was fascinated with this simple blade? This blade never judged me, never made fun of me and never had any expectations of how I should act or what I should do. (*Almost in tears*) Why couldn't people just leave me alone? I never did anything to them to deserve their undivided attention. I took the best I could, but they picked away at my soul, and no one came to my defense. I just wanted the pain to stop. Was I just that good at hiding my pain or was my purpose in life to make other people happy while they made me feel terrible? Why couldn't I be happy? Why wouldn't the pain stop? (*Her voice clears*) The cutting made it possible to stop the pain, even though it was only for a short amount of time. I cherished those minutes when the pain seemed to go away, and my soul returned to normal. (*She smiles slightly*)

You want to know the funniest part of my life. People would come to me for advice and to get their troubles off of their chests. I listened to them and gave them advice as best I could. They usually took my advice, and things seemed to work out for them. I was everybody's ear, but nobody was mine. It's not because they wouldn't, it was because I couldn't let them be my ear. I would look in their eyes, and then nobody would want me to be their ear. It seemed to be one of the few purposes of my life, and I could lose it. I began to be stretched thin, so I

found myself telling people to pray about it, like that would do any good. People always told me that God could solve anything, but he never seemed to solve my problems; so I took it into my own hands. I figured that meant that I wasn't good for Him too, but I soon realized that truth. God never helped me because I never asked Him to help me, and I never let Him.

God just seemed to make my life more difficult at every turn. For years I had been contemplating suicide and ending it all, but I was always told that it was wrong. I was also told that suicide was selfish, but I knew better than that. People who commit suicide usually do it because they love their families and don't want to be a bother. I knew that I was a burden to my family, or so I thought, and I knew that no one wanted to have a burden around all the time. But when I started thinking about suicide my conscience would tell me that it would just cause more problems than help them. So I decided to just live my life and stay out of people's way. I continued to cut myself to relieve that pain, and this little box of razor blades was my hope. My hope came in a box that cost five cents. That tells you how much I thought my life was worth, nothing. I was a Christian at the time all of this happened, which seemed to add fuel to the fire. Here I was following a man who had bled for me and I was bleeding for myself. I know my mentality was all screwed up, and I will be the first one to admit it .

Then one night I had all that I could take, and it happened. (*She walks over to the bed and sits on it*) On this very bed I decided to bleed out. I may have decided to physically die that night, but I had died along time ago on the inside. That's the story behind these long scars. I had left my parents a note about my funeral plans and what I wanted done so that my parents didn't have to really worry about it. I didn't leave a suicide note because I didn't want to explain why, and I didn't want my parents holding on to it. I had everything planned out to the smallest detail, but I made one mistake that night. I was too eager to die. I made that mistake of cutting myself five minutes too early. I thought that everyone had gone to bed, but my parents had decided to stay up a little later than usual. I didn't want my family to see me die, so I knew that dying at night would be the best. I had lived my life alone, and I decided to die alone. I chose the cleanest looking razor and cut myself for the last time. I waited patiently as I felt death crawl up my body. My heart began to slow, and I began to slip into unconsciousness. Suddenly, there was a knock on my door; it was my mom. All she wanted to do was to say goodnight but instead walked in to see her daughter dying at her own hand. She saw the blood dripping to the floor. She ran over to me and grabbed my blankets as she tried to stop the bleeding. I will never forget the horror in her eyes as she yelled for me dad to call 911. I didn't have the strength to tell her to let me go. The words I heard her say were, "Samantha, stay with me please!" The desperation in her voice was evident to anyone. All she wanted to do was to be able to hold on to her daughter forever, but that was slowly slipping away from her in front of her eyes. But I didn't want to stay. I was tired of life, tired of being nobody. Couldn't she see that I didn't want to stay? The cutting wasn't a cry for help but a release from life. Then everything went black.

Eventually I woke up in the hospital with my parents right beside me. My parents blamed themselves, and I let them think they were responsible. The pain I put my parents through just added more fuel to the fire. On top of that I was on suicide watch at the hospital. I couldn't even go to the bathroom without causing a panic on the floor. I couldn't even eat with regular utensils because I might hurt myself. People came and visited me, but instead of making me feel better they made me feel like a freak on display. I was tired of that feeling, and I knew that I had to get out of the hospital. I knew the only way for that to happen would be to act like I had changed. It worked, and pretty soon I was on my way home from the hospital. When I got home, I realized that my door had been taken off its hinges, all my mirrors were gone and all the sharp objects had been removed. (*Gets off the bed and goes to the corner*) This corner became my best friend all over again. I fought my final battle here, and these scars remind me everyday of the past and are an inspiration to the future. You probably don't know how many people struggle with this curse. Some win the battle, while others lose the battle. What people don't realize is that it is the battles in life that make us alive. If we didn't have battles then we would need faith, hope or love. You can't prevent battle, just how you react to them.

There is a knock on the door

Samantha: Just like me to get sidetracked. Come in.

A woman walks in and greets Samantha with a big hug, like she hasn't seen her in a long time.

Woman: I figured I would find you here. Are you okay, Samantha?

Samantha: Yeah, I was just reminiscing.

Woman: I figured you would have forgotten about everything that happened a long time ago.

Samantha: You can never forget, no matter what happens. Enough about me, what about you? How do you feel?

Woman: I haven't felt this good since before dad passed away.

Samantha: Good, are you ready to go?

Woman: I've been ready for a long time.

Samantha: (*Puts her arm around the woman*) Let's go home, mom. Dad is waiting for you.

The lights go out as they exit

Inspiration

Jessica Stone

Finally the flowers arise.
Brilliantly colored flowers—
Scarlets, violets, canary yellows.
So beautiful and intricate
Fragile, yet persistent
As they bow in the wind,
Yet never snap and fall.