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# Fandamonium

She's A Yankee Fan from New York.

He's a Red Sox Fan from Boston.

## A Novel

(Because it can't possibly be real)

By

Mike Grutza

1<sup>st</sup> Edition

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**Dedicated to JoAnn**

**&**

**TAMA**

**Tracy**

**Amanda**

**Matt**

**Alex**

## Before The Curse of The Bambino

### Was Broken

Until the Curse was broken the world remained pretty much the same for many millions of people. They were miserable. Once the Curse was broken, their world changed forever. They had been delivered.

Before the Curse of the Bambino was broken the Boston Red Sox suffered for almost ninety years. After it was broken, the New York Yankees feared their suffering had only begun.

For decades, the city of Boston, fans, followers, and (in spite of their denials) players and management of the Red Sox approached each new season with a mixture of anticipation and dread unique to the Red Sox at that time. At the conclusion of every season Sox fans mourned their losses, bemoaned their plight, and rued their seemingly cursed existence. They resented the championships of their rivals.

While Sox fans suffered, New York reveled. New York Yankees fans celebrated their successes, toasted their heroes, and basked in sustained glory. They pitied their unfortunate rivals.

Then one day it ended.

Red Sox fans now look back on their previously tortured history with a nostalgia derived from the triumph of adversity overcome.

It was preordained that the Yankees, like any great empire, resolved to rise again, avenge their honor, and restore what they view as the rightful order of things.

The time before the Curse was lifted represents an extraordinary slice of sports history impossible to repeat for at least another ninety years.

This story takes place in the years just before the Curse of the Bambino was broken. Names have been changed or fabricated, players invented, games imagined, even the dead have been resurrected, incidents manufactured, and dates rendered vague.

What follows is fantasy.

Actual events did not unfold as recounted here, but they just as easily could have...

## Top of the 1<sup>st</sup>

### After the Fall

Oh my God, they did it again, she thinks as she stands lost and alone in the midst of fifty-six thousand two hundred seventy nine disciples. The faithful assembled in the stands until delivered or damned.

“How much more can those people take?” she says to everyone, but no one hears her question over the din. Emotion and noise conspire to overpower her senses as waves of cheer, scream, laugh, and a stray sob or two surges up and out of Yankee Stadium in the Bronx and reach all the way to Back Bay, Boston.

Her body responds to the noise as it resonates within the Stadium to remind her she has experienced these sensations, emotions and feelings before: heart races, adrenaline flows, and urge to shout in ecstasy are not new. She recognizes the thrill of how it feels to win big...yet again.

How fast the pleasure of the moment dissipates proves to be the new sensation. For only a few seconds, joy coursed through her body when her team carried her a step closer to baseball's Promised Land: the World Series. The thought that this may all be very unfair to “them” in some way took hold in her consciousness almost two seconds after her team won. Rarely, if ever, has victory felt ominous.

In the midst of the bedlam, she catches sight of a small boy no more than ten years old, with freckles and red hair tinged the color of late autumnal leaves. The baseball cap atop his head appears three sizes too big and he cries as a woman – hopefully his mother - offers consolation. The cap sports a stylized Boston Red Sox letter B while mom wears a Yankee jacket, also several sizes too big for her frame. The woman who stares at them wonders if the oversized cap and jacket belong to the same bigger person; the boy's father and woman's husband, but ponders how such conflicting items can belong to one man? The cap and jacket hate each other and remain permanently at odds. Do the parents always fight? What happened to the man? Did he implode in a frenzy of simultaneous self-inflicted love and hate?

The boy cries as two hundred and seven miles away a similar scene unfolds with a man instead of a boy and no one present to console him. The man sits alone in his apartment and sinks deeper into his apparently malfunctioning lucky seat on the couch.

While the woman in New York observes events, she also cares about the man in Boston, more so as he sinks further into his couch. They share a deep and complex history. She fears for him, worries about his reaction and debates the wisdom of her choice to attend this game without him, or at a minimum, leave him alone when the preordained outcome was sure to disappoint him yet again.

The woman watches as the elation of the celebrants near the boy and mother overwhelms and encircles them and they disappear from site. The sound resonating inside the Stadium touches everyone. The woman wonders how the mother in the Yankee jacket welcomes her victory hug that simultaneously squeezes the life out of her son.

The Stadium noise loses some life force as the last strains of the fifth replaying of “New York, New York” fades over the public address system. The organist plays the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s Messiah and the crowd roars back to life with renewed energy.

Moments ago, her hometown team - the disputable pride and joy of certain parts of the city of New York and the planet Earth - defeated the archrival Boston Red Sox. The game ends in typical fashion with an unlikely victory for New York that concludes the latest chapter in a century long battle. Once again, the Yankees go to the World Series and the Red Sox go home.

The woman witnessed one of the greatest games in history and feels the enjoyment drained away by the man hundreds of miles away. She begins to resent his presence in the middle of this mass euphoria. Concern begins to yield to indifference as pangs of annoyance surface and thoughts of his misery impede, if not ruin, her celebration.

She looks in the direction of the boy and mother as the crowd enveloping them dissipates to reveal empty seats. She wonders if they snuck out or if the crowd somehow absorbed the mother and consumed the son. Her thoughts shift from irritation at the man in Boston to concern for the boy in The Bronx.

Two hundred and seven miles away, but closer in terms of awareness, the man who ruined her celebration now broods in his questionably lucky seat. His television shows Yankees jumping around the field with cheering cops, grounds crew, and what appear to be beer vendors. He watches, surrounded by ghosts and demons spawned by decades of disappointment. He silences the television, but the echo resonates in his ears and grows louder since hitting the mute button. He convinces himself he cannot hear The Bronx and searches for the white noise of silence that usually reverberates within his head.

As he watches the silent celebration with emotional detachment imposed by geography and allegiance, he experiences the pain of loss imposed by the exact same geography and allegiance. The silence develops into an audible disturbance as offensive and oppressive as the din from The Bronx. An unseen blanket, woven of equal parts disappointment and resignation and embroidered with a blood red Boston B, unfolds over him to stifle and smother instead of provide warmth and reassurance. This, he remembers, is the feeling of losing big...yet again.

This man, a native Bostonian, stands as a member of Red Sox Nation (dedicated and loyal fans to the bitter end...or ends). The woman in The Bronx pondering his condition, a born and bred New Yorker, has always been a Yankee fan. Their respective parents established loyalty and allegiance on Day One, offering no chance for young minds to explore options or exercise free will. They identify with and support their teams on levels that far exceed hometown interest or love of the game.

At present (and as has been the norm for nearly a century) New York celebrates while Boston wonders what went wrong – again – with New York’s autumnal dominance very much intact.

Stuck in traffic on the Major Deegan Expressway in front of the Stadium, Madison thinks about Trey again and *almost* feels guilty. He wanted to be left alone tonight and she respected his wishes. She remembers the sad little boy and recalls her sad little man. The unease that initially surfaced after the game returns and grows as she mulls “left alone.” She calls him, but the sound of his phone ringing resembles bursts of distant static except for what sounds like a beep. She decides an indecipherable message is better than nothing since it demonstrates intent and says she hopes he feels okay.

In Boston, Trey does not think of Madison. At the moment, her presence in his life is represented by a weathered and worn Yankee cap hanging forlornly in a distant corner of his apartment. Trey cannot see the cap in the corner from where he sits any easier than he can see the actual Madison in The Bronx.

He pretends to not know how to feel and convinces himself that an intense mixture of envy and anger directed at New York should mingle with pride in Boston and continued lust for the pleasure a championship brings. He feels disappointment and betrayal, but he cannot honestly say he feels surprised.

Somewhere down there in New York, he supposes that his elated girlfriend dances, celebrates, and gloats. She laughs at despondent Sox fans while he broods alone. He turned down the ringer volume on his phone and answering machine before the game so he could concentrate and seems to recall he smashed them at some point. Madison will probably call, but he does not feel like talking.

He grows dizzy and splashes water on his face from the bathroom sink. He dries off and stares into the mirror at the B adorning the front of his cap; B for Betray or Believe? *We Believe* we will be *Betrayed*, he concludes.

He studies the face in the mirror to determine who returns his stare since that don't look like him. He removes his cap to assess how much he aged during this particular game and check for new grays.

In spite of a Red Sox accelerated aging process, he remains a handsome thirty six years old. He descends from a long line of Boston Irish stock and stands a few inches shy of six feet tall. He has black naturally curly hair and remains thankful for no sign of male pattern baldness or receding hairline in spite of the Sox. His face appears a day and a half late for a shave; enough scruff to notice, but not look untidy. Madison finds his hair and scruff sexy, saying he looks like he just woke up after a “sex nap,” the required dozing period between “at bats,” but well before “the last out.”

His facial features: sharp nose, deep set midnight blue eyes, and mouth - positioned to convey disinterest - mirror his brooding disposition. Smirks come easier than smiles, backed by cynicism and occasional condescension.

His dark hair, deep blue eyes, and calculated detachment conspire to form a good-looking shield masking the devilish boy within.

He speaks with a detectable, but not pronounced, Boston accent. He maintains good physical shape, but is not heavily muscled. Madison finds him sexy in a quiet, wise-ass way; a dark soul who grows sexier and better looking when he broods and engages in mischievous behavior.

A fatigued ache settles within his body, held securely in place by the blanket of oppression that descended earlier. He flops in his living room inside his apartment on Marlborough Street, in Back Bay, on the border of the Public Garden; a classy and desirable place to live. Trey knows he belongs in Back Bay.

His building occupies ½ Marlborough Street and architecturally speaking, presents the ugliest exterior on the block: a brown slab shoehorned between a stately townhouse and an art deco apartment building. Most people cannot find Trey's building, mistaking the address for 12 or 112, but rarely understanding it as ½. Trey lives on the ninth floor and tonight he wishes he lived on a lower floor in case he can't stop himself from taking a leap out a window.

The Red Sox calendar hanging on the refrigerator displays October and illustrates the month with a picture of catcher Carlton Fisk coaxing his famous home run into fair territory during the 1975 World Series. October remains Trey's least favorite month during his most hated season. Autumn means "The End" as winter looms in the approaching months, uncaring and arrogant to the causes and consequences of his Fall. Nothing good begins in autumn: a chill sets in, leaves die, and blind faith goes unrewarded with spring far too distant to provide hope. Trey, much like his beloved team, has never been a Mr. October.

Trey now tries to avoid the TV, an accomplishment considering the monolithic sixty inch screen dominates the room. The furnishings within his sizeable apartment consist of standard issue discount furniture warehouse offerings. Trey thinks his apartment contains an air of playful sophistication while Madison says it only shows he should have applied more effort during the selection process.

It should come as no surprise that guests in Trey's apartment tend to miss the furniture as they wander his five rooms to peruse exhibits of Red Sox memorabilia. Pennants, posters, hats, toys and a bit of everything Red Sox related inhabit shelves, bookcases, and displays. Friends refer to his place as "The Shrine on Nine." The walls hold dozens of photos including family snapshots taken at Boston's Fenway Park. Uncles, cousins, and grandparents pose with Red Sox stars from over the decades. Trey's family has attended ball games in Boston since the Red Sox were the Pilgrims and played at the Huntington Avenue Baseball Grounds.

His library includes baseball related literature arranged smartly on polished pine bookcases. He never reads the books, but does like the look and intellectual air they impart in balancing the memorabilia.

Trey knows for a fact smart people and literary types follow the Sox and despise the Yankees. He thinks it wise to surround himself with trappings that signify his wisdom via pledge of allegiance to the choice of the literati. The Red Sox read like a classic novel while the Yankees shout out advertising copy. Scholars and professors study the Red Sox while the Yankee's shiny trophies attract illiterates; Boston rises as a great public library where Sox loyalists read and write while New York hawks tabloids at a ramshackle newsstand where Yankee fans loiter to gaze at the pictures while drooling.

A print of President John F. Kennedy represents the only non-baseball image in Trey's gallery. A solemn and bowed JFK stands alone in a contemplative pose, turned slightly to the viewer's left. Trey's friend Duff says JFK looks so glum because, "The Sawx lost again." There are times when Trey browses his apartment like a museum patron enjoying favorite works. Tonight, Trey resembles the JFK of the painting: pained and pondering.

Lamps provide ample light, usually casting a warm glow laden with reminiscence. Tonight, the lighting bathes everything in faded sepia tones suggesting age and distance as once fond memories appear tarnished and lackluster. The action figures, miniature bats and bobble heads feel childish.

Trey uses a lengthy list of lucky places, procedures and practices to prevent angst. His ninth inning rally spot varies based on whether the Sox play at home or away and he employs situation specific

hats and jerseys. He eats a lucky meal of lobster, baked beans and brown bread with a steady supply of Sam Adams beer.

Presently, he feels asinine in his lucky spot wearing his lucky hat and lucky jersey with scraps from his lucky dinner on his commemorative lucky plate over the lucky place mat on the lucky rally corner of the fortunate coffee table; all this useless luck, he thinks.

The shell from the lobster lies on its back in the middle of the plate. He feels a lot like the lobster: empty inside. Lobsters are a symbol of New England and Boston, so Trey feels the message obvious. Perhaps New England consumed itself and lies littered with empty shells. Would the game turn out different if everyone in New England consumed a New York Strip Steak? Maybe we did it to ourselves again, he thinks.

He makes matters worse by knocking over a full bottle of Sam Adams. He sits and watches as the beer spreads out over the coffee table and onto the floor.

The total black he noticed the last time he looked out the window has been replaced by pre-sunrise deep blue. On the early morning news, a bald man in his late fifties walks up to the camera, sticks his face in the lens and screams "AHHH!" That guy gets it, Trey thinks as he recognizes the scream: frustration laced with knowledge of the inevitable. When the Sox lose in standard apocalyptic fashion, fans do not cry "No," since they know something has to go wrong. They cry "AHHH!" at the revelation of methodology. Sox fans know the executioner lurks nearby with the only question being firing squad, chopping block, lethal injection, or gas chamber? The bald man's cry bears no audibly similar trait with the silence of losing that deafened Trey earlier, but both are products from the same factory; the place where they make Red Sox misery.

The current misery began a few hours ago when Trey thought he was watching Game 7 of the American League Championship Series between Madison's hated Yankees and his beloved Red Sox. What he actually viewed was Fate unveiling its newest contrivance for executing the Red Sox season.

Anything *could* have happened, but this *did* happen: the score stands Boston 6 and New York 5 in the bottom of the eleventh inning. The Yankee leadoff hitter, Danny Hoffman, draws a four pitch walk to reach first base and the next two Yankee batters strike-out swinging.

First baseman John Ganzel, a former Most Valuable Player and hefty slugger, bats with two out. He takes the first pitch for strike one and swings at the next pitch, hammering it foul directly into his right knee. Ganzel collapses in pain as trainers and coaches race to the field. After a few moments, trainers carry Ganzel off the field, clearly unable to complete his at bat.

The Yankee manager ponders his next move. He needs a pinch hitter to step in with two strikes, two out, and risk being the last out in a playoff game that sends the hated archrival to the World Series. He thinks he has used every position player, pitcher, or pinch hitter available. The pitching coach informs him one rookie relief pitcher remains in the bullpen; the only Yankee literally left standing.

Louis Leroy, a hard throwing strikeout pitcher, goes by the nickname Lou Roy, and has never had a major league at bat in his life. The Yankees summon Lou Roy from the bullpen to complete Ganzel's at bat. The Yankees and their fans everywhere brace for the doomsday scenario, the Red Sox passing the

Yankees on their way to the World Series. Horrified Yankees and their fans hope the Chicago Cubs, the National League opponent in the World Series, will break Boston's heart.

In Boston, fans are split over believing what they see and believing what they know; the glimpse of the Promised Land may be a mirage. A few fans dare to dream as the Sox stand a single strike away - not even an entire out - just one strike away!

Lou Roy steps into the batter's box and takes a few practice swings, batting from the right side and visually confirming he has never done this before in his life. At six foot five and two hundred pounds, he presents an athletic appearance, but looks younger than his twenty-two years. The extreme close-up from the low centerfield camera captures the terror on his face.

Lou Roy steps in to face one of his idols, Red Sox closer Thomas James "TJ" Hughes, the greatest closer in Red Sox history and one of the hardest throwers in the game.

On the mound, TJ hides his grin, masking his face with his glove. The Sox players in the dugout and bullpen are giddy with excitement and anticipation. The fielders shift about and fidget at their positions. Lou Roy waits in the batter's box as a sure out and TJ needs one strike to finish this thing off. Everybody watching knows TJ will blow a ninety-eight miles per hour fastball right past Lou Roy.

TJ, too excited, overthrows the ball. The pitch bounces three feet in front of home plate, scoots past the catcher and rolls all the way to the backstop behind home plate. Hoffman, waiting on first, takes off at full speed and keeps running all the way towards third base. The Sox catcher, Barrows, finally retrieves the ball and has a chance of throwing out Hoffman at third. TJ, Trey and New England scream "Hold the ball!" Barrows bluffs throwing to third, but does not. He decides not to risk an error allowing the Yankees to score the tying run when Lou Roy - the certain strike-out victim - waits at home plate with two strikes against him.

The silence in New England eerily foreshadows the silence in Trey's apartment as much as the rumble growing inside Yankee Stadium presages the thunder to rattle Madison.

TJ berates himself on the mound while Sox infielders seek to calm and refocus him. He curtly dismisses them and takes deep breaths to slow his pounding heart. He wishes he could make the sign of the cross like batters do before stepping into the batter's box and wonders why pitchers can't bless themselves before they throw a pitch.

TJ convinces himself Hoffman will not try to steal home so he goes into his full wind up to deliver the pitch. Every batter knows what to expect; a fastball right down the middle as hard as TJ can throw. Lou Roy has two strikes against him and does not want to end the Yankee season with the bat resting comfortably on his shoulder with a called third strike. Lou Roy tries to make contact and slap the ball away; if he can foul it off, TJ has to throw another pitch and the Yanks receive another chance.

Lou Roy swings as hard as he can, but too late to drive the ball with authority. He makes contact and lofts the ball to the opposite field along the right field foul line, unable to catch up with the pitch. Contact does not sound impressive and the ball floats towards the foul line in right field.

The Sox right fielder drifts back towards the corner where the walls converge, three hundred fourteen feet from home plate to form an angle between fair and foul territory separated by the foul pole. On the mound, TJ bops up and down anticipating the catch to end the game and send the Sox to the

Series. Lou Roy staggers two feet out of the batter's box, drops his bat and puts his hands atop his helmet, unsure of what to do next.

The Sox right fielder, Harry Lord, realizes the ball will either hit the top of the wall or carry just over the seats at the base of the foul pole. He cannot tell if it will land in fair or foul territory and knows he has to attempt a catch; if the ball hits the pole it is a homerun and the Yankees win. Lord leaps at the wall digging his right cleat into the soft padding for grip and propels skyward with perfect timing. His reach extends several feet over the wall with no fans to interfere as police keep them back; Lord has the ball to himself. His momentum carries him into fair territory. His body slams onto the top of the wall with significant force at exactly the same second his outstretched left hand catches the ball. After he hits the wall, simultaneously making the catch, he slides down like a cartoon character smashing into a cliff with left hand outstretched above him as he descends. The top of the wall and protective screen designed to keep fans from the edge strip his glove off as he goes down. He crumples onto the field as his glove falls behind the wall into the stands on the fair side of the foul pole. He shakes off the collision with the wall and vaults back over to retrieve his glove, which is now in the stands in fair territory.

While Lord reaches for his glove, which landed two feet behind the wall on the walkway, a policeman standing ten feet from the glove picks up a baseball rolling his way. While he hangs on the wall, Lord grabs his glove and the policeman scoops up the ball, both thrust their arms into the air at the same time.

The umpire racing down the foul line signals homerun since Lord never had control of the ball and it popped out while the glove, ball, and Lord's arm reach into homerun territory.

Lou Roy waits just outside the batter's box with his hands still on his helmet like a kid who broke a neighbor's window. He apparently won the game, but remains unsure if he is the hero, in trouble, or both.

On the mound, TJ calls for another ball to continue pitching while catcher Barrow stands with hands on hips. Red Sox players stay at their positions and refuse to concede their defeat.

Out in right field, Lord remains draped over the wall, arms outstretched on either side with legs dangling straight down.

Hoffman approaches home from third base and crosses with the tying run. He screams to Lou Roy, "Go touch'em all and we win!"

Lou Roy looks at him and blinks several times. "What?"

"The bases," Hoffman shouts, "Run around the bases!"

With that last statement, Lou Roy lowers his hands from his head and beams the widest smile ever seen inside Yankee Stadium. He charges off at full speed instead of the traditional homerun trot.

As Lou Roy races around the bases, Yankee players charge out of the dugout. A few try to catch up and run with him, but he proves too fast for them and most wait to receive him at home plate. The Red Sox, in a last act of defiance, do not move until Lou Roy touches home plate. Once official, the Red Sox make their way off the field. Several players try to hide the fact they are crying while others do not care who notices.

The centerfielder, Cooney, walks over to the fence in right field where Lord hangs and pulls him down. Blake, the Sox third baseman runs out to help Cooney with Lord, who has collapsed. The three Sox players with dirty uniforms walk in from left field resembling a wartime photo of soldiers supporting an injured comrade.

Watching the six-hundredth sixty-sixth replay, Trey's expression resembles those worn by his Red Sox at Yankee Stadium. Sox players began moving after a moment or so, but Trey remains motionless hours later, he muses that Lou Roy did not hit a homerun; he hit a home ruin.

Judging by the light outside, it seems to be around the time he usually wakes up to get ready for work. Trey works as a video editor for a small production company and does not feel like going to work today, having been awake for almost twenty four hours. At this point, going to work today will be a lot like his night, staring at TV's and watching replays whether they are actually playing on the screen or not.

His boss and coworkers know him as an ardent Sox disciple and cannot possibly expect to see him at work today. He calls to confirm his absence with a voice mail message, knowing no one will be there yet to pick up the phone. The answering machine kicks in with the thick New England accent of Jean Haywood, the receptionist delivering the standard instructions on what buttons to press.

He waits for the beep to leave a message, but hears Jean say, "If you know your party's extension please feel free to dial it now. If you are Trey Boylston, please press star, two, zero, zero, three for a special message."

He complies and listens to his boss deliver a custom plea. "Trey, we need you for an edit session this morning. I tried calling all night to make sure you were okay, but your phone seems to be out of order. I am sorry the Red Sox lost; this is a new low and we at Back Bay Productions are fans too, but, we have responsibilities. Thank you and we look forward to seeing you later."

Morning sunshine streams cheerfully through the windows, much to Trey's annoyance. Maybe it's because he's tired, but, he liked it better when it was dark.

He glances at the TV in time to see the six-hundredth sixty seventh replay and decides things have indeed sunk to a new low. He ponders how there can be so many new lows.

Trey experienced his share of sad and devastating events during his life with one situation so painful he never allows himself to think or talk about it. He has spent years trying to get past the darkness of specific memories and build on simple pleasures with little success. Perhaps the time has come to embrace darkness, revel in it and put it to work righting old wrongs, and the Yankees winning so much can only be wrong. Sox fans wallowing in self indulgent misery can only be wrong. The hell with them, Trey thinks, all of them.

He should already be at work, but at least he will show up; a quick shower and he'll be fine. As he works shampoo through his hair, he realizes he may have figured out the Red Sox problem. At the end of the season, the team has not generated enough happiness to go around for the fans; conversely, the amount of happiness generated by fans determines the future fortunes of the team.

The Yankees seem to have it both ways. Fans expect to win and automatically generate happiness for the team, while the team wins and generates happiness for the fans. If Sox fans cannot enjoy their

team because they get so caught up in the misery, that leaves more unclaimed happiness for him to grab. If he helps ensure the fans unhappiness he may guarantee his own happiness. “Brilliant,” he says out loud and does a little dance in the shower.

Trey knows his history. In the beginning, the Sox ruled the baseball world winning the first World Series and at some point being banished from the championship garden. A serpent in the form of a New Yorker offered Big Apples laden with cash which Boston ownership accepted to betray their deity and mortgage the souls of Sox fans for generations. Trey’s crusade begins today in the perfect climate: Boston, the day after the Yankees eliminate the Sox...again.

He will foster, nurture, and encourage the misery he encounters and where he finds none he will create it. His fellow fans have come to expect misery and display it like baseball stigmata. They love to root for the underdog and need to lose to exhibit their devotion and prove their penance. They’d love it if some Yankee turns the Charles River red or parts the waters of the Frog Pond; it only supports their cause.

Other teams generate books and articles about the time they “won it all”. Red Sox writers create books about losing and blame jinxes, dead old fat guys, weather, local depression, regional hysteria and group psychosis. “I’m not part of that anymore,” he says. “I’ll become Trey the Anti-Baptist and hold their fucking heads under so long they drown in their own misery.”

As he exits his apartment, Trey picks up the newspaper left by the doorman. The front page displays an image of two Yankees rejoicing at home plate, caught in mid celebratory jump with their backs to the camera. Ganzel wears 19 and Pratt, the second baseman, wears 18. The picture shows them appearing to hover in midair next to each other with the numbers on their backs, 19 and 18, in perfect alignment. The headline reads “What Curse?”

Trey looks up to see newspapers in front of every door all the way down the hall to the elevator to form a symmetrical garden of identical questions asking “What Curse?”

Trey flips open the newspaper and a timeline spread across two pages recounts the legendary and infamous Curse of the Bambino. Scores of baseball, Red Sox, and Yankee fans believe Boston to be cursed for selling Babe Ruth to the Yankees after the 1919 season for \$120,000 and a cash loan with their home - Fenway Park - as security. Boston last won a world championship in 1918 when Babe Ruth played for the Sox. No one has ever directly linked or heard The Babe utter, much less formally place, a curse on the Red Sox. Someone discovered or invented The Curse mythology years ago and every bad hop, accident, odd occurrence, and misfortune seems to prove the Bambino still hexes away. Babe Ruth, his Curse and the year of the last Sox championship – 1918 – are branded onto all gullible members of Red Sox Nation.

The elevator comes and goes as Trey closes the paper and stares at the headline. Up until this second, he tried not to believe in The Curse, but what are the odds of players wearing 19 and 18 photographed as they hover spectrally in mid air after a pitcher (like Ruth started out) hits a home run (which Ruth is famous for doing) to right field (his old haunting grounds) in Yankee Stadium (the House That Ruth Built)?

He steps onto Marlborough Street and into the sunshine, guessing the temperature somewhere in the high forties and wishes it would rain. New England’s sons suffered a cataclysmic defeat; how could the sun be shining? This proves God’s robe has pinstripes while the weather demonstrates beyond any

doubt that He gloats. Sox fans need a miserable day after a miserable night; this will only make them feel better.

Trey notices a pale looking guy in the second story window across the street. The man in the window seems to be upset and laboring to breathe, resting his hands on the window sill and leaning out for fresh air. Trey decides the guy to be about fifty years old; he is thin and wears a zippered hooded sweatshirt over what appear to be blue pajamas. Trey crosses the street and walks up to the thick sculpted stone fence separating the building from the red brick streets. Trey examines the garden at the foot of the building as dead or dying flowers litter the ground, probably slain by autumn chill. Trey prefers to believe the Red Sox killed them as he remembers no flowers grow on baseball fields. The guy in the window looks sad and stares off into the distance.

“Jump,” says Trey.

“What?”

“Jump,” Trey says. “You watched the game last night - so did I – it was wicked awful! I’m gonna throw myself off the Pru. Come with me. You’re only on the second floor and you need some height to get the job done,” Trey says, referring to the fifty-two story Prudential Building.

“Not depressed,” the guy says through an audible wheeze, gesturing to his chest, “asthma attack.”

“Asthma attack, heart attack, Red Sox...same thing,” Trey says. “You know it’s only going to get worse. What happens next time? A Yankee Stadium beer vendor knocks one out of the park or the grounds crew rallies for a couple of runs in the ninth?”

The guy takes a few puffs on his inhaler and some color returns to his face while the labored breathing eases. He slams his window shut, locks it and pulls the shades closed.

This may be easier than I thought, Trey thinks.

Trey usually walks to work across the Public Garden and Boston Common, drawing inspiration and solace from the greenery and statuary to emerge near Tremont and Park Streets to follow a portion of the Freedom Trail. He eschews all this today, fearing greenery and the Freedom Trail imply optimism. He decides to risk riding the T and heads for the Inbound Green Line at Arlington and Boylston Streets, hoping mass transit runs on time today since he does not.

Green Line trains resemble trolley cars with the tracks at ground level so passengers must step up to board them as they would a bus. Green Line cars have a retro feel, but use and routine have worn away much of their quaint charm.

He makes a right at Arlington and heads for the station a few blocks down at Boylston. He searches for rioters and angry mobs, perplexed that cars remain right side up and he wonders why they have not been flipped over and set ablaze.

Trey’s friend Duff drives a train along the Green Line and he does not feel like dealing with the long winded dissertation Duff surely has crafted in regards to the game. If the gods of mass transit do not abandon him the way the Gods of Baseball tagged out the Red Sox, a train will roar in, pick him up, and run express to his stop at Government Center.

Down by the tracks, fluorescent bulbs supply cold patches of stark illumination while darkened bulbs and those flickering in a losing fight for life supply shadowy recesses perfect for despondency. A dank, wet basement smell combines with the chilly fluorescents to convert the underground station into a dungeon with impatient inmates forced to confront their crime of daring to believe things would be different this time.

Trey wonders if anyone else hears the buzz of negative current emitting from commuters as it hums through the station. Yesterday, he felt their excitement and today he can hear their misery. Trey looks around and imagines himself a great magnet, one of those horseshoe shaped red magnets popular in old cartoons, pulling away the dormant happiness from all these distracted mopes. He stares at people he finds especially distraught or unhappy looking and extracts what little joy they have left inside and merges it with his own. He strides to the edge of the tracks and screams at the top of his lungs, "YANKEES SUCK!"

Most people are startled, but a few smile. After a few seconds a voice chimes in "YANKEES SUCK!" and another three or four join to chant in unison as Trey stalks around until a different voice interrupts.

"No, *this* sucks."

Trey whirls in the direction of the voice and sees an older gentleman on the opposite side of the station across the tracks on the Outbound side. Trey recognizes the look on the guy's face, having seen it in his bathroom mirror hours ago. The guy wears a grey suit that has seen too many meetings and too few dry cleanings and his beige overcoat hangs over his left shoulder held in place by two fingers hooked under the collar. He holds a weather beaten imitation black leather briefcase with a faded peeling "GO SOX!" sticker across the side facing Trey.

"We lost again, we always lose and they always win. Hell, if it's not them, then somebody else always wins!" the guy says.

"You know what? You're right, everything sucks! We all suck. Do yourself a favor and step in front of the next Outbound!" Trey says.

"B'zar" says the guy, using Boston code for bizarre, as he walks to the other end of the station while people on Trey's side inch away from his general area. The only person not inching away and - in fact - advancing turns out to be a police officer.

"Take it easy buddy, we're all upset," Officer Callahan says.

Trey stares at Callahan, who stares back. Callahan looks calm, but his stance and tone of voice signal his intent and ability to deal with whatever approach Trey elects to take. He guesses Callahan has about a four inch and thirty pound advantage over him, to say nothing of the club and pistol on his belt.

"Can I borrow your gun?" Trey says. "Don't worry, it's not for me."

Callahan has the same look on his face the guy across the platform just had. "Exactly what is that supposed to mean, sir?" Callahan says.

"Yankees Suck," Trey says.

“Yes, they do, now what’s your story? Why do you want my gun?”

“I really don’t. That guy just pissed me off and I was joking around. Did I mention the Yankees suck?” Trey says.

“How much the Yankees suck has nothing to do with you yelling in the T, starting arguments with commuters and requesting firearms from police officers,” Callahan says.

“I’m upset about the game last night, and some guy across the platform yells out ‘You Suck.’”

“So you want to shoot him?”

“No, I was just trying to be funny.”

“He didn’t say ‘You Suck,’ he said ‘This Sucks.’”

“Did you hear them play the Hallelujah Chorus last night in Yankee Stadium? They stole that from Fisk after his homer in ’75,” Trey says.

“Threatening to shoot people is not funny,” Callahan says as a train rumbles into the station and Callahan gives Trey his best cop stare; head tilted sideways and forward with a facial expression daring Trey to try something stupid.

Trey looks at the arriving train and turns back to Callahan, noticing his left hand wrapped tightly around the grip of the nightstick resting in its holder. The train rolls to a stop and opens the doors in front of Trey and Callahan. Commuters dash on and off and must navigate around them and cast wary gazes as they pass. Trey’s complexion changes to a deep red as he begins to sweat. He realizes Duff may be driving his train through the station and see him standing here detained by a cop. Trey’s stomach hurts with an expanding ache that fuels his needs to go to the bathroom.

A train arrives and departs on the Outbound side and Trey’s conversation buddy refrains from stepping in front as it pulls into the station. The doors close and both the trains depart the station with dozens of sets of eyes judging Trey.

They now stand alone in the station as Trey turns to Callahan, opening his mouth to speak, but stopping when he notices the impatient look on Callahan’s face.

“Okay,” Trey says, “I’m sorry. I was being a wise-ass. I’ll keep my mouth shut and just go to work.” Trey feels reprimanded and too embarrassed to make eye contact.

Callahan asks for ID and Trey feels like crying. Another train approaches as Callahan copies details from Trey’s driver’s license onto a notepad, finishing as the train comes to a stop. The doors open and Callahan extends the hand holding the license towards Trey. He carefully takes his license back. Callahan gives it a little tug Trey interprets to mean, “I know who you are and where you live, so watch your ass.”

Trey steps up onto the train, relieved to see Duff nowhere in sight. As the doors close, he mouths the words “Yankees Suck” to Callahan, who responds by raising his nightstick to his hat and taps the brim.



## Bottom of the 1<sup>st</sup>

### Madison's Avenue

God help him now, Madison thinks when she notices the steeple of a church in some Connecticut town off I-84.

Her car radio churns out generic top forty crap and she fails to recognize the tunes. She does not consider herself a big music fan, especially while driving, since it distracts her from thinking about things, including herself.

She zips along in her Pepper White Mini Cooper, an official color offered by the manufacturer. Madison loves the name more than the actual color. What appears bland actually contains spicy hidden elements that surprise to reveal a deep zesty flavor: vanilla with hot sauce.

The morning after last night, she feels the effects of post-game cocktails and rolling into bed at exactly 3:33 am. Like the trooper she considers herself, she hit the road by 8:30 am. Partying with friends kept Trey off her mind and restored the thrill of the game. Every time she replays the ending in her head, the adrenaline rush returns and sustains her through many more miles of monotonous driving. Adrenaline, a bucket of hazelnut mocha turbo caffeinated something-uccino, and a banana nut muffin help sustain her.

She makes this drive at least once a week, sometimes twice. She traverses up to six major highways and ten local routes. Resourceful and good with maps, Madison does not do *waiting* and *traffic* well together as she seeks new shortcuts on roads less traveled.

Hazelnut combines with banana nut to form a pleasing aroma. Madison often combines pleasant smelling, yet simple scents to create a larger fragrant atmosphere. She calls this "araccidental" therapy: accidental aroma therapy. She never plans the scent or knows how well it will mix, experimenting with combinations at work, home and during her Boston and New York shuttle runs. Food, scented candles, flowers, and anything with a strong scent will be combined depending on circumstance and location.

Madison herself always smells good. Her father tells her she radiates the scent of a beautiful day: sunshine, flowers, and blue skies proportioned in the ideal aromatic arrangement. Madison creates her scent with lotions, soaps, and oils without sweet or sugary traces.

Last night's trepidation regarding Trey has not disappeared; it has been relegated to the back seat. Instead of worrying, she decides her presence is essential in Boston since she knows what Trey needs better than Trey.

She zips along about ten miles an hour above the speed limit in the right lane and ten to fifteen above in the left lane since the police usually concede the extra speed in the passing lane. Whether or not

this is true does not concern her today on I-84 past Hartford and approaching Vernon, Connecticut - the Point of No Return - more than halfway to Boston.

Madison likes Boston and loves New York, telling Trey the only thing wrong with Boston is that it is not New York. After the Sox suffered at the Yankee's hands in 2003, she suggested to Trey that the Charles River be renamed the River Styx to acknowledge the hell Boston goes through every year. A few years ago, while she was walking along Commonwealth Avenue, a passing motorist asked directions to Fenway Park. Madison instructed the motorist to go down River Avenue to 161<sup>st</sup> Street and they would run right into it. The happy motorist went on his jolly way unaware that the supplied directions would take him to Yankee Stadium if he were in the Bronx and not Back Bay. Fenway Park is nice, Madison thinks, but it is no Yankee Stadium.

Trey thinks Madison pretty. He prefers pretty girls since they are friendlier than beautiful girls who work too hard to stay beautiful, pay too much attention to their needs, and are standoff-ish. Madison likes to flirt and conducts herself in a manner that allows men to play along while understanding they have no chance whatsoever of scoring, but wind up enjoying the "game" without feeling teased or misled as to her intentions.

Madison does not spend much time at the beach, but her skin color appears the perfect shade of tan deep into the Fall and somehow manages a head start during spring. The secret resides in the fact that the sun's rays do not burn Madison; rather, she absorbs them and displays them from within to add not only color, but life to her skin. She has an expressive angular face designed for supporting smiles and her high cheekbones specify elegance. Deep brown hair, often mistaken for black, proves alluring when worn up or down and emphasizes the vivacity in her emerald eyes. The dark hair, especially when positioned around her face, transforms her eyes into green lasers that Trey finds so persuasive they hurt to look at for extended periods. Full lips and a small pert nose rest with natural precision on a charismatic face designed to invite interest and dare men not to notice.

Soft, well broken-in jeans continue their reign as key component of her wardrobe and properly used, they double as business casual attire. She favors Puma running shoes and prefers flat footwear, aware her five foot eleven inch height intimidates, although Trey, almost imperceptibly shorter, does not seem to mind.

The primary fashion accessory for most of her thirty three years remains a variation of Yankee baseball cap. She spends considerable time at the beginning of every baseball season securing a new lucky hat. Trey ridicules her for buying a lucky hat rather than determining its worth based on results during a minimum of one season. Madison points out to Trey every season that an evaluation process doesn't seem necessary when it comes to lucky Yankee hats since they all work to some extent.

In addition to the perceived luck quotient within a hat, the other major requirement demands the proper gap in the back by the headband to insure her pony tail pulls through in the cutest manner possible. Her caps, exactly the perfect size and shape for her head, make her even more adorable. She places rubber bands around the brim for a few days to shape them properly so when the time comes to wear one, the brim forms the top of an oval frame curving around her face. Madison does indeed have a face worth framing.

The flow of traffic slows and Madison evaluates her options. I need a new Madison's avenue, she thinks, referring to the approach she uses to get what she wants; a talent for creating avenues of opportunity. The extent of Madison's corruption peaks at self-promotion with occasional *shameless* self-promotion. She generally limits her manipulations to minimize the impact and expense to others, unless

of course they cross her. As Trey likes to say when he encounters that little scheming thing she does, “So that’s the new Madison’s Avenue.”

The new Madison’s Avenue exits I-84 to pick up State Route 83 south to I-384 east which becomes U.S. Route 44 east to State Route 89 north to link back up with I-84 at Exit 72.

Madison’s new avenue seems to have different speed limit requirement as evidenced by the State Police car with wailing siren and flashing lights pulling up behind her. Madison turns on the Mini Cooper’s flashers to signal her cooperation and pulls on to the shoulder. With practiced dexterity, she removes the Yankee cap and slides it under her seat; if he sees her moving around too much - like stashing the cap in the glove compartment - he will know she’s up to something. She turns off the engine, stares into the driver’s side view mirror and waits to catch a glimpse of her pursuer. She stifles an already discreet smile once he emerges from his cruiser. A handsome, strapping six footer no more than 28 or 29 years old approaches her car. Madison rolls down her window and waits until he merges onto her avenue.

The trooper asks for license, registration, and insurance card with standard police intonation while maintaining a safe distance. Madison complies and flashes a full body smile despite being seated inside her car. The trooper maintains his businesslike approach until satisfied Madison travels alone in the tiny auto and she displays no telltale signs of danger or insanity. He returns to his cruiser to check her license and Madison knows her spotless driving record will deflate tension. The Trooper returns looking less edgy.

“Do you know how fast you were going, Miss?”

She notices the “Miss” and casually eyes his left hand searching his ring finger for a wedding band and detects none.

“Whatever the speed limit is?” she says, almost launching the smile off her face. The trooper wages a brief, but futile struggle not to return her smile and Madison knows the game is underway.

“Actually, about twenty-five miles per hour over it,” he says. “Can you tell me why you were going so fast?”

“Can I please get out of the car?”

“Sure,” he says, without taking the usual precautionary step back.

“Thanks, I’ve been driving for hours and I’m really stiff,” she says, stepping out of the car and noticing the trooper reacting to the aroma wafting from inside.

“Hazelnut,” she says, as she glances at his cruiser to notice a small generic Styrofoam coffee cup on his dashboard. She giggles as the traffic light on this particular Madison’s avenue turns as green as her eyes.

“I need to get to Boston as fast as I can to help out a depressed friend,” she says as she turns toward her car. “That hazelnut does smell good, would you like some?”

“What exactly is wrong with your friend that you need to drive so fast to get there?” he says.

“Actually she’s sick over the game last night, she’s a huge Sox fan and is so devastated she stayed home from work and refuses to get out of bed. I have a banana nut muffin I won’t finish, would you like some to go with your coffee?” she says.

“She must be quite a fan,” he says, “I was pretty upset at the outcome, but I made it to work today.”

A parallel avenue opens for Madison and she decides to head down both just in case. “It must not be easy being a Sox fan in Connecticut, the state is so divided,” she says.

“It’s not easy, my hometown, Booneville, leans towards the Bronx,” he says.

“Try being a Sox fan in New York.”

“You have New York license plates.”

“My car is registered there, but I’ve worked in Boston for years and they won me over.”

He remains silent for a moment and Madison understands she needs to change the yellow light back to green. “I’m sorry about the speeding thing, I was wrong and I promise I’ll slow down, but my friend really does needs me, you know how Sox fans in Boston are. Can you let me off with a warning in exchange for a nice cup of Hazelnut and half a muffin?” she says.

“Thank you for using the magic words, and are you trying to bribe me, Miss?” he says with a genuine smile indicating he’s been charmed.

She tilts her head to the side trying to look even cuter and says, “Well I am sorry, and it’s not a bribe; you’re a police officer and police officers drink coffee. I have more than I could possibly drink and the muffin is too big. I bet you have a coffee cup in that car, don’t you?”

“Are you sure you are not a detective?” he says as he retrieves his cup from the dashboard.

Madison reaches into her car to get the coffee and muffin, whispering “Yes!”

She fills the Trooper’s cup and hands over the remaining muffin. Passing motorists could have easily mistaken their actions for a date instead of a traffic stop. They exchange more pleasantries and she thanks him as she slides back behind the wheel. He closes the door for her and leans in very close.

“I’m going to radio ahead and have my buddies keep an eye on you,” he says, his head practically inside the car. “Smells great,” he says as he takes in one last whiff.

“I love Hazelnut,” she says.

“I meant you, Miss,” he says, “Slow down and have a safe trip.”

She tries to force herself to blush and actually succeeds a bit.

“Thank you, Trooper Harrington,” she says while looking straight ahead, proving she read his name tag a while ago and saved personalization as an option in case she needed additional measures. She starts her car and drives off, Madison’s Avenue indeed, she thinks.

If she played for her beloved Yankees, she would be the late inning relief pitcher called a Closer; the guy entering a game to shut the other team down. In life, she removes loose ends and closes out unfinished business. She shuts down co-workers, relatives, friends, business associates, and acquaintances based on her insistence that things be dealt with and settled at all times. Like a good Closer in baseball, she cares little - if at all - about the emotions and concerns of the other team. She gets the job done with the ruthless competency required to take control and finalize situations. While not quite a human Grim Reaper, Madison possesses a brutal gift for snuffing out actual or problems whether they require snuffing out or not. She loves late inning thrill rides with everything on the line and the chance to come in and clean up somebody else’s mess. The Closer never creates the mess they inherit and must end it before it gets any further out of hand. Her current favorite Yankee, Slow Joe Doyle, reigns as the second greatest Closer in Yankee history after Mo Rivera, Madison’s all time favorite.

Madison patterns her self image after Doyle and Rivera; laid back to the point of reflection until needed to put out a fire. Her father once warned her of the downside to being a Closer in life as opposed to a Closer in baseball; the risk of intervening in situations too early to cheat participants out of the natural resolutions life attempts to supply.

Madison thinks she makes a good friend and better girlfriend; she knows she would have made a great wife. Despite her appraisal of her innate Closer abilities, one terrible situation remains that she could never bring herself to close out and it defines Madison, Trey, their relationship, and the future.

If a stranger spends five to ten minutes with Madison and Trey it will raise speculation as to what such a fun girl sees in a stiff like him. Ten to fifteen minutes allows enough time to observe the subtle interplay, knowing glances, and inside jokes to emerge. Doubt evaporates at any point after twenty minutes when their deep connection becomes apparent in the casual contradictions that weave through their relationship without introducing obstacles. Trey’s measure stands as the counterbalance to Madison’s performance: his ellipsis to her exclamation point. Madison sings karaoke and Trey checks the lyrics for accuracy. Tremont ambles down a street while Madison promenades down her Avenue. People know what they get from Madison since she makes herself clear early in any situation. The same people have to invest time in Trey to get a decent return, but cannot determine with ease why they should invest, so they usually choose to withhold emotional funding.

When Madison started work in Boston, she met Trey at a game in Fenway Park. He broke up a fight between Madison’s brother and some Sox fans waiting in line for beer. Trey stumbled upon the brawl by accident and intervened for the chance to meet Madison. She thought his actions elevated him steps above typical Sox rabble. Her brother said all it really did was make him clever enough to find a way to break the ice and look like a nice guy while doing it.

Madison and Trey have been together since spring, 1996. One night several seasons ago during the seventh inning stretch of a Friday night game after too many beers and not enough precautions, she became pregnant. Madison was concerned about what a baby meant to their lives and careers. Trey embraced and welcomed the news since the unplanned pregnancy gave the impression of Fate’s intervention in their relationship.

Trey said, “Some pitches you swing at and others you take; we should take this pitch.”

Raised good Irish Catholics, Madison worshiped at Saint Lyle's on the Upper East Side while Trey sat in a pew at Saint Carlton's in Eastie. Trey had never given the issue much thought and Madison was pro-choice in her beliefs. The more she talked it over with Trey, the more they wanted to choose the baby.

At first, Trey fixated on the prospect of a son until he remembered Madison's passion for baseball and realized it did not matter. He slid into his father-to-be role with energy and excitement, appreciating Madison's concern over the baby's impact. Madison welcomed his involvement and spoke of the pregnancy in terms of "we." She was touched he would go through this considering their unwed status and impressed with how much he wanted to be a part of the entire experience. She loved him for not panicking or running away.

Much to her amazement, he brought up the subject of marriage first, formally proposing to her at a Yankees - Red Sox game at Yankee Stadium. Trey paid to have the proposal flashed on the big screen during the seventh inning stretch and tipped off a Stadium cameraman. Her reaction played on the giant outfield video screen in front of fifty-six thousand two hundred seventy nine people. The screen showed her cry and nod yes as they shared a passionate kiss and fans cheered them on, Sox and Yankee fans alike. A video clip of the event made it to local news stations in Boston and New York and even found its way to highlight shows as the "Play of the Week."

The sweetest memories of that night remain the newspaper accounts. A picture of them, her in full Yankee gear, him in complete Red Sox regalia, locked in loving embrace appeared in every local and a few national newspapers. Madison's favorite remains the New York Globe's account with the picture captioned "Happily Ever After?" Trey's favorite was the Boston Post's "Hub Man +Yank Fan = Wedding Band" over a picture of them kissing. Madison had several prints of the Globe picture scattered about relevant locations in her life and Trey used to have the Post's hanging on the wall in his apartment.

The Yanks won the game 7 to 6 in 11 innings, but for one treasured night, two passionate fans cared less about the fortunes of their teams and more for each other with the baseball world taking notice.

They decided the nuptials must observe some sense of decorum and concluded the best time for a wedding to be after the baby's birth. They embraced the idea of affording their child the unique opportunity to attend his or her parents' wedding. Their excitement shifted between baby and wedding plans.

The game plan envisioned a baseball themed wedding. Since he formally proposed at Yankee Stadium, they agreed the wedding would take place in New York. She would give birth in Boston and this meant the world to Trey. The surprise child he never planned until hearing the news from Madison would be a native of Red Sox Nation and linked via genetics to fandom of the One True Team. Madison had complete faith in superior Yankee genes and decided to let destiny take its course; what Yankee mother could not love her Red Sox son? Trey worried the child would get beat up by everybody at school if he or she could not decide and wore a Sox cap with a Yankee jacket.

Talk turned to names and grew awkward, but remained amicable. He ruled out Bucky, Derek, Mariano, Roger, Wade, Aaron, Yogi, Phil, Bernie, Mickey, Reggie or any combination of George and Herman.

She ruled out Carl, Tris, Pudge, Dom, Cy, Rico, Nomar, Luis, Dwight, Lynn, and any combination or variation of William and Lee.

They debated compromises that included the lineage of both, resulting in the options Williams DiMaggio Park and Carlton Thurman Boylston.

As soon as they settled on a name, she lost the baby.

She fell ill with stomach pains which intensified until she was admitted to the hospital. In less than two days, Madison and Trey altered their emotions from anticipation to dread and finally to grief. They took the loss harder than they ever imagined such news could have affected them.

They were strong for each other, but a significant portion of their ability to interact with ease and pleasantry had vanished with the miscarriage when tears dampened their souls and extinguished the light that shone during the pregnancy. They did not blame each other or find fault with a third party. Like the pregnancy, the miscarriage somehow just happened.

All their future plans had been too intertwined with the baby for them to revisit getting married anytime soon. At some point, *anytime soon* became never. They canceled the ceremony, but never really made a decision about the marriage and ignored the memories. They were so busy being strong they misplaced the pieces of themselves that attracted the other in the first place. They retreated inside to deal with the news, but were not well equipped to address it properly, so they changed. His dry wit turned acerbic and pithy remarks morphed into biting verbal jabs as “clever” became “nasty.” When life threw curveballs he fired fastballs back, but his aim was usually off and the wrong people started to get hit though Madison was never hit by one of Trey’s pitches. They had an unspoken understanding about how to treat each other from that point forward; enough pain existed to prevent them from inflicting any additional hurt upon each other. The tragedy introduced an emotional frailty that forced them to exercise great care to avoid emerging as the catalyst precipitating a breakup or breakdown.

Madison’s hyper careful handling of Trey allowed his bitter side to grow unchecked and excused. Trey’s acquiescence to Madison’s refusal to deal with accepting reality allowed her to live an increasingly unrealistic life. There were too many lingering questions requiring closure that she ignored, with the central issue concerning their ability to weather the tragedy and emerge a stronger whole. Madison worked hard to avoid further negativity and unhappiness. When faced with unpleasantness she shut it down quickly and without mercy. They never moved on, they just moved around; she went deeper into her career and he deeper into a distraction which became an obsession.

As time went on they regained the appearance of normalcy in many areas of their lives. They had an active social life, found better jobs and made more money, but sadness and disappointment lingered just out of sight behind career and obsession to prevent them from returning to the point they were before their loss. The tragedy forged a stronger connection, but not a stronger bond as they fortified their vow to never be “the one” to initiate severing their relationship.

Traffic flows unimpeded and despite a coffee break with the State Trooper, Madison continues to make excellent time in her dash to be there for Trey. She decides to wait until the Mass Pike to call. She contemplates a stop at work to check in, but that will push her behind schedule.

Madison works as web designer for APM, American Pilgrim Media, on Route 128 in Waltham, Massachusetts. She designs and programs websites, e-mail campaigns, and mixed media marketing assignments. The skill and competency displayed in delivering her award winning projects have placed her in the upper echelon of the field. She shows up at the office in Waltham at least once a week and then

does as she pleases as long as she completes her assignments with the stipulation APM knows her whereabouts at all times. Her company maintains offices in New York and possesses a lengthy client list covering the eastern United States. Madison's client base splits between New York and New England and she allocates her time appropriately.

APM manages considerable real estate holdings in the Boston area and she sometimes uses one of the company apartments in Beacon Hill when in town. Madison tends to use the company apartment more during baseball season to take a breather from Trey's inevitable rants and for serious Yankee rooting without offending him.

Back in New York, she shares a sublet with an old friend in Williamsburg, Brooklyn in a building her father owns. She likes dining out, going for drinks, dancing, clubbing, and shows. She especially loves the life of a Two City Chick.

Madison approaches the Massachusetts border and hears a single short siren yelp from behind the passenger side of the car. She lifts her foot up off the gas and turns her head to see a Connecticut State Police car rollup alongside. She glances at her speed and sees it hovering around seventy eight miles per hour, but the State Police car does not have lights flashing or siren blaring. She realizes a different Trooper than the one who pulled her over sits behind the wheel. This Trooper smiles and slowly holds up a cup of coffee in a "cheers" gesture. Madison laughs and returns his toast as he slows down, about to cross the border out of Connecticut.

"Damn" she says. "That worked better than I thought."