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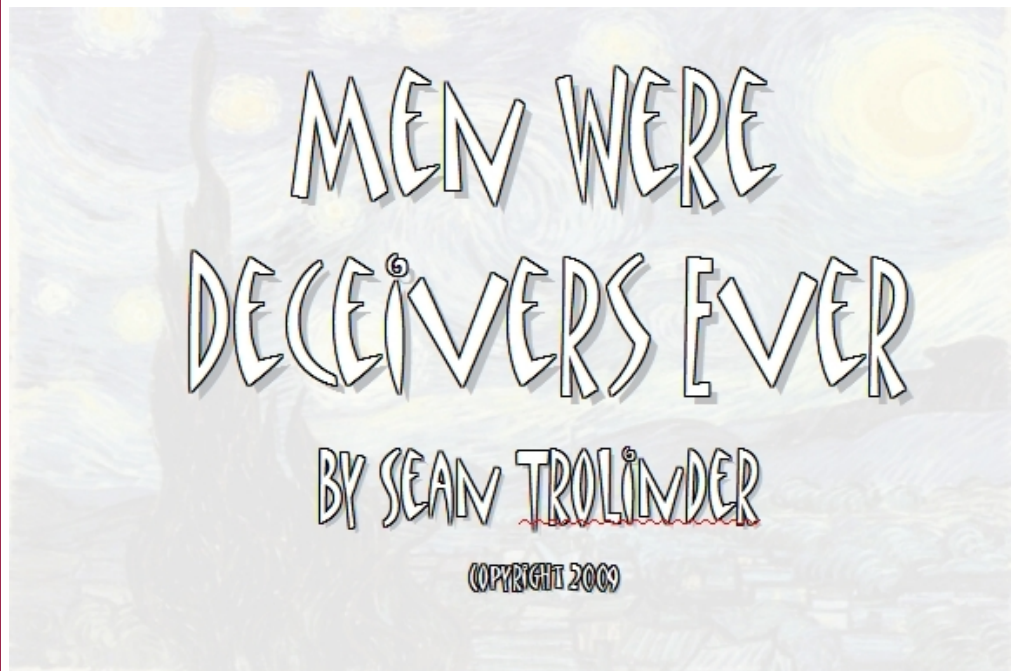
Summer 2005

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*Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more.*

*Men were deceivers ever.*

*One foot in sea and one on shore,  
to one thing constant never.*

*But sigh not so, but let them go,  
and be you blithe and bonny,*

*converting all your sounds of woo into hey nonny, nonny.*

-- Balthazar, William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*

Giovanni walks into the room with a secret. His complexion is smooth, yet his eyes are rough. The arcs that shadow underneath his eyelids are like wrinkles after a rock smashes into the center of the lake. He is wearing a maroon collared shirt with grey stripes moving horizontally.

His hands are small and his fingernails are short, yet uneven as if chewed on by a rabid dog. Between his armpit and right hand is a green binder, where he's been carrying a letter – a letter that expresses his deepest emotions for the girl who sits on the opposite side of the ellipse, Marisa. He grabs a set next to the door.

Marisa is reading *Much Ado About Nothing*. Her eyes are a deep blue. Her fingernails gloss in hot pink, and she wears a tennis top of the same color. Beside her chair is a tennis racket covered in a leather case. She rests her head against her left hand; her right holds the book within a foot of her face. She twirls her brunette hair and yawns.

Giovanni, who has been staring at her all this time, swings his head to the left. Daniel Costanzo walks in wearing a white fleece sweatshirt with red Greek letters displaying ÖÓK. Daniel has short black hair, skin the shade of fried rice, and a smile that would make a flower bloom. He takes a seat next to Marisa, and he whispers to her. She does not reply.

On Giovanni's desk is a copy of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Though he has read the play three times, he picks up the book, flips to a random page and

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reads. His left hand clutches the side of his desk and his arm shakes. He peeks over his book to the empty seat next to Marisa, but readjusts his focus on Daniel. The sight of Daniel watching Marisa's fingernails causes Giovanni to ease his grip on the play. It slips, flips forward, and crashes on the floor. Giovanni blushes, but no one notices.

Dr. Olgeman enters the room with a stack of graded papers. The class knows that it has become his custom to pass out the papers with the highest grade first, and he begins by handing Giovanni his composition on *Henry V* with a giant 'A' on top.

Marisa is the second person to get her composition back, but she does not even acknowledge Giovanni. Giovanni, still staring at Marisa, crosses his legs. Still no attention.

Daniel is one of the last to get his composition back – a frown comes over his face.

“Lazy frat boys,” Giovanni says under his breath.

Marisa puts down the book and squints at Daniel – noticing he isn't looking at her face, but rather her fingernails. “What?” she asks, hiding her hands under the desk.

Daniel snaps up to Marisa's eye level. “Oh, I'm sorry. I was just thinking.”

“About what?” She sees Daniel's paper on the desk. It's a C-. Daniel fumbles through his black book bag and pulls out his copy of *Troilus and Cressida*. “Nothing. It is not important. Listen, I didn't read the final two acts. I was wondering if you could catch me up.”

“Read it yourself.” Marisa pulls one of her hands from under the desk to scratch her cheek.

“I'm trying,” he says. Daniel, slyly yet surly, reaches out to cover her hand as it lands on the desk. “It's just...you know. I'm going through some things.”

Marisa pulls her hand back. “Whatever. This is what happened.”

Marisa opens her notebook, she draws a line and Daniel is so close to her hair. Daniel breathes – her perfume smells like jasmine and strawberry.

Giovanni get out of his seat, grabs his things, and is about to take a step across the room when suddenly Dr. Olgeman clears his throat. “So... '*Troilus and Cressida*'. What did you all think about the end?”

Giovanni sits back down. He is the only one that raises his hand. Dr. Olgeman points at him. Giovanni says, “Obviously *Troilus* is crushed. His distaste for *Cressida* at the end is so bad that he rips her letter.

Does anyone else feel cheated that we never know what she wrote?”

There's no reply.

“Excellent,” says Dr. Olgeman. He flips to the final scene in *Troilus and*

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*Cressida* as he gets out of his seat and enters the ellipse. Dr. Olgeman paces back and forth, blocking Giovanni's line of sight. The daze on Giovanni's face is light. He smiles. Marisa is his Helen of Troy; however, with each reverse step by Dr. Olgeman, his smile becomes more of a frown. This is not the day to give her the letter. After all, what does he have to offer over Daniel?

The process is this every class period. The letter intended to be delivered, never fulfilled. Marisa never acknowledging and Giovanni watching – irritated by Dr. Olgeman's pacing and Daniel's flirting. Secrets, blockage, failed sight.

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Dr. Olgeman clears his throat and assigns everyone the first three acts of *'Much Ado About Nothing'*. He closes the play and walks out of the ellipse – the class is dismissed. He pats Giovanni on the back. "Well done, Mr. Tinlo."

Giovanni scoops his notes into his hands and pats them against his desk. He opens his binder and stares at the letter. The letter is folded once, showing wear at the edges, and says 'To Marisa' in cursive handwriting. He places his notes in the flap with the letter.

As Daniel stands up, Marisa is two steps ahead of him. He zips up his black bag and runs toward her. Giovanni steps in front of him as he was trying to beat Marisa toward the door. His chest slams into Giovanni – causing the binder and Giovanni to fall onto the ground. The papers in the binder scatter across the floor.

"Sorry," says Daniel. His foot pushes the notes as he steps in front of Marisa. "I was wondering if you're doing anything tonight?"

Giovanni pushes himself up and scrambles to pick up his notes.

"Yes. Why?" asks Marisa.

"My brothers are hosting a party at the house. Care to come?" Daniel gets down on one knee and picks up the two pieces of paper behind his foot.

Marisa glances at Giovanni. "Hey, do you want to go to a party?"

Giovanni opens his mouth, but Daniel says, "Well actually he has to be part of the frat to come."

"Oh, so why am I invited? I mean, I'm not in a sorority."

Giovanni shakes his head. "Forget it," he says and grabs the papers from Daniel's hands. He leaves the room.

"Oh great," says Marisa.

"What?"

"You don't have to be such an asshole."

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“I’m not. It’s just – these events – I can’t –”

“Can’t what? You can invite random women, but no guys outside your fraternity. What is it really Daniel? You tell me?” She turns around to leave the room.

“I would, but my brothers –”

The door slams. Daniel is about to leave, yet hesitates. He sees a folded note. “To Marisa?” He opens the letter, sits down, and reads.

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The room is bright and many men and women are playing pool as Marisa enters Gino’s Billiard with her friend Lindsey. There is row upon row of green pool tables, but each one is full. Marisa looks over to the bar: black counter with silver stools, but the bar is too full. She takes a step forward, but hesitates. She sees Daniel. He is sitting there, talking to a slim figured red-head wearing a loose white top and tight blue jeans.

“Oh my God. That’s the guy I told you about,” says Marisa, tugging on Lindsey’s frail shoulder.

“Which guy?”

“That one wearing the white sweater.” Marisa points at Daniel, while hiding behind her friend.

The red-head grabs her Michelob Light as she nudges Daniel’s shoulder, waving good-bye. Daniel nods his head.

Lindsey begins to pull Marisa’s arm as she says, “Let’s go talk to him.”

Marisa pulls Lindsey’s arm back and drags her toward a vacant burgundy booth. They arrive, a piece a vinyl ripped apart.

Lindsey puts her hand on her hip. “Oh come on. He’s cute.”

“And stupid,” says Marisa. Lindsey’s eyes arch downward. “That is the same guy who always needs help with the readings.”

“But it could be an act. He might just ask to make conversation.”

Marisa’s roles her eyes. She stares at a white overhead light; her mouth twitches. “Nope. Just stupid. He doesn’t even know the character’s names. Get me a Columbus Cocktail, and please, don’t talk with him.” Marisa sits in the booth – her hands fumble around inside her pink purse while she watches Lindsey.

Daniel grabs his bottle of Budweiser and sips. He watches Lindsey’s right thigh as she orders the drinks. He looks away right before she glances at him. She passes by him with a smile, carrying two cocktail glasses. She peeks over her shoulder and Daniel pays the bartender. He shakes his head as he grabs his beer again. He stares at the spot where Lindsey ordered.

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When Lindsey returns to the table with the drinks, Marisa watches the bartender point to their table. She sinks in her booth as Daniel looks over his shoulder. He salutes the bartender and exits the billiards.

“I thought his frat had a party tonight.”

“Why do you care?” asks Lindsey as she sips on her cocktail.

“I don’t. Just –”

“Come on. He’s totally hot. Did you see the way he looked at me?”

“No.” She looks over at where Daniel was sitting. The bartender is handing a drink to the hostess.

Lindsey takes a sip. “So the only reason you don’t like him is because he’s stupid? That never stopped you before.”

“I’m sure he just looked at you like a piece of ass.”

“You’re just jealous because I have an ass.”

Marisa jerks her drink up. Part of the cocktail splashes in her face. She sips and leans her head onto her right hand. “You know, some women like to be viewed as beautiful, not just sexy.”

“Give me a break. No guy really looks at us that way.”

“Well, there is one...” She sips.

“I don’t believe it. You never answered my question.”

“What?”

“You’ve dated ‘stupid’ guys before. There has to be something more.”

Lindsey sips her cocktail. It is half gone now. Marisa’s is nearly full.

“He’s vulgar, shallow, and has no morals. Anything else?”

“No morals?” asks Lindsey.

“He goes up to Professor Olgeman and says ‘My mother died,’ when he turned in his composition late. The idiot still only got a C minus.”

Marisa sips.

“Maybe she really died?”

Marisa startles and catches her throat. Her face is slightly red.

“Yeah...sure. On the same week Phi Sigma Kappa was hosting a huge party

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near the cove. Please.”

Lindsey frowns and gulps the rest of her cocktail. A hostess shows up at their table with another cocktail. “Complements.”

“From who?” asks Lindsey.

“He left. He wanted me to tell you to enjoy,” says the hostess as she leaves.

Lindsey giggles. She asks, “Where is the party?”

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Sitting in front of a dwindling bonfire, Daniel reads *Much Ado About Nothing*. The funeral of his mother took place ten days ago, yet reading, partying, and sleep couldn't shake the gloomy mood he was in.

It is late. Inside the house, sounds of women screaming and loud music made it difficult to find piece of mind. The bonfire is the only place that is quiet at 1:30 a.m.

The sound of glass clanking and metal cans skipping across the ground is heard as Daniel's scruffy fraternity brother, Bernard, makes his way next to Daniel. “Jesus, what are you doing out here all by yourself?”

Daniel puts the book down. “Trying to catch up with some reading.”

Bernard looks at the cover, “Much acho...Much Ado...”

“*Much Ado About Nothing*.”

Bernard's breathe smells of Bacardi. He sits in a chair next to Daniel.

“Haven't you read this one?”

“No.”

Bernard pats Daniel on the back. “You know what you need man? A woman. I know things are rough, but no use pouting about it. Put that shit away. I have about three fine ladies in there just waiting to suck your cock off.”

“How many times have I told you? Drunk women are not my thing.”

Bernard stands up and shoves Daniel, “Are you a fucking queer?”

“No, I'm doing horribly in Shakespeare because my mother is dead you fucking asshole!” Daniel throws his play on the ground.

“But you quote that shit all the time,” Bernard says picking up the play.

Daniel pouts as Bernard cautiously places the play in his lap. Bernard says, “I'm sorry. You're a good guy and I'm an ass for suggesting it.”

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Look here,” Daniel looks up, “What ever happened to that girl...Marie?”

“Marisa,” says Daniel.

“Yeah. Didn’t you invite her?”

Daniel stands up and throws some sticks into the fire. “I did. Stupid decision.”

“Why? I thought you liked her?”

Daniel pouts and pops his neck, “She’s cute, but now I know I’m no good for her.”

“What are you talking about? Sure you are.”

Daniel pulls out the letter from his pocket. “No I’m not.”

“What’s that?”

“A letter from a guy that is good for her.”

“What? Let me see that.”

Daniel pulls back his hand, “No. This is only for Marisa.”

“But you read it, so don’t give me that bull-shit.”

“I had to be sure. This guy would treat Marisa like a queen if given the chance.”

“You can’t tell a person by the way he writes a letter,” Bernard says.

Daniel it back into his pocket. “I’ve seen this kid in my class. He reads and keeps to himself. He’s just one of them shy types – seems harmless.”

“Yeah, and the quiet ones are also the type that come to class intending to shoot up the place. You ever watch the news? This girl, she wants you, not some nobody.”

Daniel shrugs. “I just wouldn’t feel right being with her knowing someone actually cares for her a lot more than I ever will.” He looks at the copy of the play. “There’s a skirmish of wit between them.”

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The Highmore Building, the University’s English department, is a towering six stories built of red bricks. It is a cloudy Friday morning when Giovanni marches into the building with clenched fists and drowsy eyes. He approaches an elevator and pushes the up button.

The previous night Giovanni searched his binder and apartment, high and low, for his missing letter. It became clear around midnight that Giovanni would have no other choice but to search Dr. Olgeman’s classroom on

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Friday morning.

Once inside the elevator, Giovanni presses '3' and begins whistling "My Girl". The elevator stops and makes a clink sound on the third floor.

He jogs around the corner to room 309. He pants as he looks through a dark rectangular window on the door. He grabs the knob, but is unable to budge the handle. He tries leaning on the door, but to no avail.

Giovanni grabs his wallet from the back pocket of his cargo pants. He takes out his driver's license and tries to slide the card between the crack of the door and the latch, but the latch fails to budge.

"Excuse me," says a janitor around the corner. There are sounds of wheels squealing as a tan custodian cart comes into Giovanni's view. It has rust welling up on the side of a tray where several squirt bottles are kept. "Can I help you?"

Giovanni hides his license behind his back and slides it into his pocket. "Yes you can, sir. I was wondering if you could open this door. I left something in there yesterday."

The janitor pushes his cart aside. He slides his access card along the security pad. Giovanni opens the door and the lights come on revealing the classroom with the chairs still somewhat in an ellipse, but are more smashed into the middle.

Giovanni gets on his knees and searches under his desk. Nothing. He looks behind him, and the janitor is not around. He moves three chairs over to the middle to widen his view. Still nothing. He looks at the chairs again. His hands begin shaking. Suddenly, he begins kicking the chairs randomly, still finding no paper. It is not on the desk near the laptop, nor is it located near where Dr. Olgeman sits. He stops for a second, and breaks into a sweat. He stops twitching. Giovanni looks over toward the corner near the entrance and sees a brown metal trashcan. He stands over it, and then looks out the door. Nobody is in the hall. He pulls the trash can out a few inches, and gets on one knee. He pushes a foam coffee cup and banana peel over to the side of the can and shuffles his hands – sounds of paper scrapping. He stands up with both hands clenched. A tear pulses out his right eye. Giovanni kicks the trash can and watches it soar clear to the opposite end of the ellipse. It clashes with the window, but fails to break it. He slams the door and sprints to a nearby stairwell.

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Monday afternoon, Daniel is walking out of the Highmore Building toward a full parking lot. He gazes at a 2005 white Pontiac Bonneville sitting around a no parking corner, waiting to take somebody's spot. Daniel laughs until he sees Marisa walk in front of the car. The driver asks her a question and Marisa nods her head.

Daniel sprints across the street – a red El Camino almost hits him – and he yells, "Marisa! Hold on!"

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The driver of the El Camino flips Daniel the bird.

Marisa's lower lip curls under her top. She looks away, and then smiles. The Bonneville honks. Marisa's finger points at the Bonneville.

"Please, one second," she says and turns to Daniel. "Are you trying to kill yourself?"

"No." Daniel flips his black backpack around his shoulder, still in jogging stride, and unzips the lower pocket. He pulls out a wrinkled letter and hands it to Marisa. "A note for you."

Marisa looks at it, blushes and drops her chin. Daniel is now so close to her face; she breathes in heavily. He smells like Candies cologne.

Marisa brushes her hair off with her right hand as she slides the note into her pink book bag.

Marisa smiles at Daniel. "Thanks..." she says.

"You going to read it?"

Marisa focuses on her book bag. Her mouth begins to shiver and she slides her hand in one of the back pockets of her shorts.

The Bonneville honks its horn and Daniel looks over his shoulder. "Hold on!"

Marisa says, "I'm sorry, but I got to go. We're holding up traffic."

"It's only traffic," says Daniel stepping in closer. "This is important."

Daniel places his hands on Marisa's shoulder and their eyes meet. She turns around speed walking to her car. "I'll see you in class tomorrow. Do the reading!"

Daniel watches Marisa slam the door of her silver Sonata as he sidesteps out of the Bonneville's way. He shrugs his shoulder, frowns, and walks back toward the Highmore Building. Marisa drives to the parking lot exit and stops her car as she sees Giovanni walk in front of her. He is staring at the ground and pouting. She nudges forward; the car is close to his body.

Giovanni's eyes look grey as charcoal and he has a dazed stare into Marisa's windshield. Giovanni starts walking backwards – his eyes do not deviate from Marisa. He sighs, turns around, and he sprints across traffic toward the Highmore Building.

"What is it with boys and traffic?" Marisa asks.

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Giovanni races around the Highmore Building, three blocks up, and stops to rest near the fraternity houses. He pants, placing his hands behind his head. Sweat covers the neck of his shirt. He sits on a curb watching four giant houses, three of them built with red clay brick. The lawn smells like freshly cut grass and shrubs. A bird chirps, and Giovanni closes his eyes and

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smiles. When he reopens them, his gaze falls on the fourth house. It belongs to Phi Sigma Kappa, with a giant ÖÖK in red above the entrance. The house is Victorian – its first floor made of white stone.

As he turns his head away from the fraternity homes, he sees Daniel walking at the opposite end of the street talking on a cell phone. “Son of a bitch,” mumbles Giovanni.

Daniel’s eyes are blood shot red and the sun glazes his lower eyelids. He turns his back and wipes his face – Giovanni is close.

Giovanni’s face is volcanic red; his fists clenched, and sweat dripping from his forehead.

“I’m so sorry Dad. I just thought of Mom. I’ve got to go now, but I’ll call you back.”

“Daniel,” says Giovanni. Daniel closes his flip phone.

“Hey Gio.”

“It’s Giovanni. Did you happen to see a folded up white paper last Thursday in class?”

“You mean your letter for Marisa?”

“You read my letter?”

Daniel steps back. “Oh come on now...”

“Where is it!” Giovanni steps within inches of Daniel.

“I don’t have it.”

“Where!”

Daniel looks over Giovanni’s shoulder. “I don’t know.”

“You lying sack of shit! Give back my letter!”

“I can’t. I gave it to Marisa.”

Giovanni steps back and opens his mouth saying nothing. He sighs, places his hand over his heart, and begins a quiet cry. He turns his back on Daniel.

“I’m sorry Gio. I don’t know what to say.” Thunder claps overhead.

Giovanni’s arm is shaking. He watches his fist. He swings around and tries to hit Daniel in the eye. Daniel ducks and tackles Giovanni. Giovanni sprawls on top of Daniel and applies a headlock. Giovanni shouts, “You had no fucking right.”

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From the far distance, Bernard's voice yells, "What the fuck is going on over there?" He rushes outside the Phi Sigma Kappa home.

Giovanni releases the headlock and Daniel looks over his shoulder. Giovanni punches him in the gut. Bernard is sprinting toward him as Giovanni runs away.

"Come on, let's get him," yells Bernard, sprinting past Daniel.

"No, let him go."

Bernard stops and runs back to Daniel. "Who was that?"

"A man after my own heart."

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Marisa throws her purse over the ledge of her couch. She kicks off her shoes and peels off her socks. She enters her bedroom; a week's worth of laundry taking the place of the carpet buried underneath it. She strips down to her bra and panties, letting out a fart in the process. Her closet barely has any clothes, and she sighs at the fact that she has to give in to doing laundry for a change. She changes into a T-shirt and loose vinyl shorts.

She goes to the refrigerator and opens a beer. After two gulps, she burps and throws the cap into a full trashcan that smells like tuna casserole. The smell almost makes Marisa gag.

Marisa opens her purse and takes out the letter, gumdrops, and her cell phone. She reads:

Dear Marisa,

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

"Plagiarist," says Marisa. Her phone rings. She picks it up and the caller ID says Lindsey. "Hello."

"Hey girl. Up for some tennis?"

"It's about to rain."

"Let's go to the indoor court. Oh, I saw Daniel today. I tried to thank him for that drink, but I couldn't catch up. One moment, I'm right behind him, the next he's almost getting hit by a car. Then he talked to you..."

Marisa pouts, rips up the letter, and tosses it in a wastebasket. She cups her hand as if it were a gator's mouth, clapping it over and over until she hears Lindsey say, "You sure you don't want him?"

"I have to let you go. I need to do some reading. I'll call you in an hour."  
Marisa hangs up. She mumbles, "He's such a player."

She takes out her copy of *Much Ado About Nothing* and opens it to Act II,

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Scene III and reads:

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever;  
One foot in sea and one on shore;  
To one thing constant never.  
Then sigh not so, but let them go,  
And be you blithe and bonny;  
Converting all your sounds of woe  
Into hey nonny, nonny.

She bites her lower lip and surveys the room. "Grey eyes..." She giggles and says, "I can't wait to hear what Giovanni has to say about this one!"

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Tuesday afternoon in Dr. Olgeman's classroom, Giovanni sits with his arm twitching. The circle is pretty much full, but Marisa and Daniel are not present. Giovanni tries to steady his arm with his free hand and his eyelids sag because he didn't get any sleep Monday night.

The door swings open and Marisa, carrying her pink book bag as usual, walks to her end of the ellipse. She winks at Giovanni as she opens her copy of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Daniel enters the room, steps into the ellipse and watches Marisa reading. He smiles. Giovanni raises his book, so Daniel can not see him. Daniel decides to sit next to Giovanni today.

"You're mad at me?" asks Giovanni.

"No, but you pissed my brothers off."

Giovanni's grip grows limp and he drops his play onto the floor.

Daniel laughs. "But don't worry. I'll make sure they won't hurt you."

Giovanni picks up the play and catches a glimpse of Marisa's eyes.

"What's she like? You know, to talk too?"

"Why don't you find out yourself?" asks Daniel.

"But what would I say?"

Daniel shrugs his shoulders. "How about what you said in the letter? Be yourself."

"But I'm pretty sure she already read the letter."

Daniel sighs and says, "Have faith. My parents fell in love and got married because my Dad gave her a love letter." Daniel goes silent and tries to fight back a tear. "Trust me; you'll never win anyone being shy the rest of your

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life.”

Giovanni sits silently until Dr. Olgeman walks into the room. He gathers his things – speed walks across the ellipse and takes a seat next to Marisa. They gaze into each others eyes and Giovanni says, “Hello. I never properly introduced myself. I’m Giovanni.”

Marisa smiles. “I know you silly. You’re the smart aleck that answers everything in this class.”

Giovanni frowns. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be. I like that about you.” They both giggle.

“I noticed you like tennis,” says Giovanni nodding toward her racket. “I love it.”

“Would you like to play sometime?”

Marisa smiles. “I’d love too. You don’t seem like the type to like tennis.”

“Tennis is a secret passion of mine, but you probably got that from my letter.”

Her smile eases and jaw drops.

Dr. Olgeman closes his attendance book and steps into the ellipse.

Daniel, under his breath, muses, “O, what men dare do. What men may do. What men daily do, not knowing what they do.”

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**Sean Trolinder** lives in St. Cloud, Florida. A recent graduate from Kansas State University, Sean is now attending Texas State University's MFA program, where he is studying as a W. Morgan and Lou Claire Rose Fellow. His fiction has appeared in or are forthcoming in *The Aroostook Review*, *Yippee Magazine*, *Temenos*, *Oracle*, and *EDGE*.