

## DANGERS OF STOCHASTIC BUZZARDS

Hayley Shay,  
has pages

I wake up to the feeling of pine-needles poking my bare neck and arms. I open my eyes and am greeted by the thousand ink black silhouettes of treetops, like hands obscuring the star-dotted sky. I blink. It is so silent.

There is no rustling of wildlife. No trickling of water from a nearby stream. No leaves crunching or tree branches creaking. It's as if all sound has been sucked out of this place. Where am I?

As if in response, a gust of wind comes twisting through the pine trees with a shrill whisper, carrying the sound of a distinct fluttering. The sound is soft and lilting, so soft it should be imperceptible. But in this dead quiet the fluttering rings as clear as an elk's cry cutting through the wintry forest.

I get up, brushing pine needles off my cookie monster pajama pants and the class t-shirt I got on induction that I've only ever worn to bed. I survey my immediate surroundings: no discernable paths or hiking trails around, just rows and rows of trees in all directions, marching onward into the darkness. I've only got one thing—one sound to go off of. I start walking.

With my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I can see at least ten feet out in front of me. It's enough to make sure I don't catch my foot on a branch or smack into a tree, but it's impossible to discern what direction I'm going in. I can just barely hear the sound of my footsteps as I make my way through the unending bed of pine needles. I occasionally stop and look up at the sky, the light from the stars barely squeaking past the gaps in the trees. I search for the moon, or some constellation—an anchor, anything familiar in this foreign landscape—but I just can't find anything.

But then the fluttering is clearer and sharper than ever, and it's coming from right in front of me, and it's a page. A cream colored page nailed to a tree, flapping wildly in the wind. I rip it down from where it's posted, bringing it closer to my face to see it. It looks like a page ripped from a legal pad, crumpled and crusted with indistinguishable stains. In black ink, an assemblage of letters and two illustrations are hastily scratched into the paper with sharp, sudden strokes, as if the writer were in a hurry:

A tree, a goofy looking bird, and the word "Follows."  
This is a prank. A stupid prank. Am I getting hazed?

I did sign up for the Denison Outdoors Club, and this seems right up their alley. Then again, the Denison Film Society watched the 1998 *The Parent Trap* a few weeks ago, and this feels a bit inspired by the mattress-on-a-lake scene. In my quiet contemplation of who could be responsible for this, a sound carried by the forest roused me from my thoughts. My stomach drops.

*Fluttering. Papers rustling.*



# THE MYSTERY CONTINUES

I feel fear and anger wash through my body. Here I am, in the middle of the forest, in the middle of the night, being made to go on some sick, auditory goose chase, for God knows what reason. In my rage and burgeoning panic I don't notice my legs moving. I tuck away the page in the drawstrap of my pants—something for Campus Safety to look at when I catch whoever put me here. I rack my brain for my most recent memory, anything that could elucidate how I ended up in the middle of the woods, but nothing comes to me.

My body begins to ache, my legs and shoulders dragging me down. I feel so tired.

I realize I didn't get much sleep last night.

That's right. I had to work on that essay last night. It was for my Writing 101 class. I was up late writing the whole thing.

The wind grew harsher and the cold of the night was penetrating my bones. Shivering, I increased the pace of my walking, following the fluttering.

Almost two-thousand words on the history of bicycles. It took me forever. There's only so many thoughts one can conceive and articulate about bicycles. I don't even know how many hours it took, but by eleven-thirty I was exhausted and fed-up. I couldn't write any more.

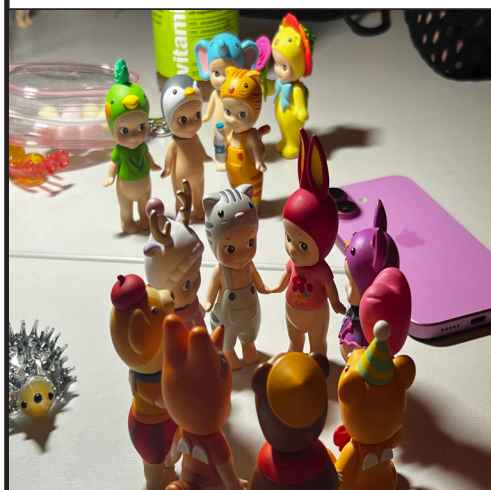
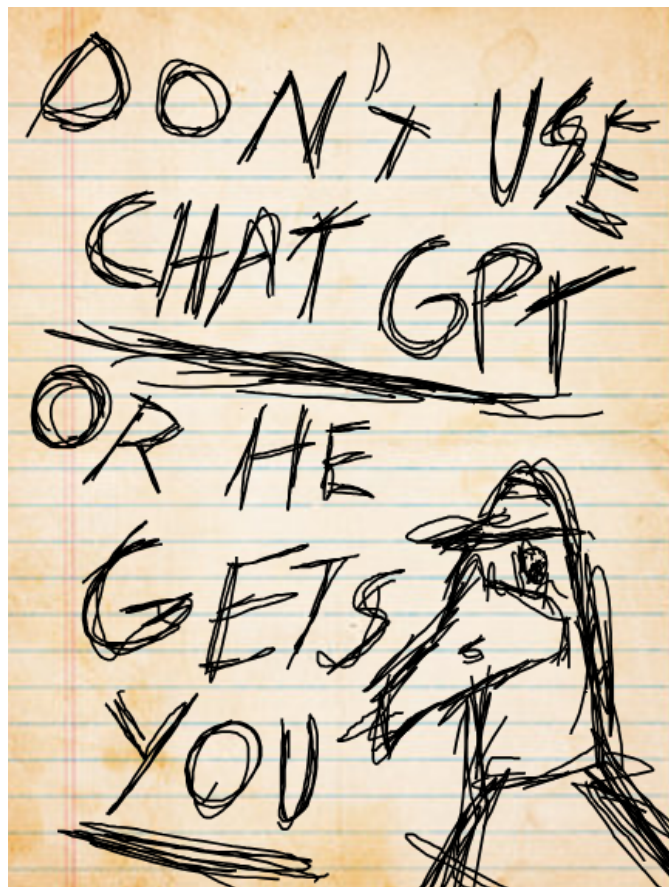
The noise of my footsteps was suddenly clear in my mind, and loud; I was hearing my steps reverberate through the forest. With each footstep, the sound of the fluttering grew, and grew, and became grating and insufferable. It pounded through my ears at the tempo of the blood rushing through my body. Fluttering, rustling. Fluttering, rustling. I ran.

I had ten minutes to turn it in, the final stretch. But there was still the conclusion left, and I could not produce a single more sentence about bicycles. I couldn't. I wasn't going to write that conclusion. Something else would have to write it for me.

The wind stopped dead; the fluttering ceased. All was still as my eyes landed on the yellow page in front of me. I ripped it down and trembled as I read over its words.

Ten feet out, in the darkness, his tall red body and broad yellow beak stood. I stare into his aching, soulless eyes. He whispers and it echoes through the forest:

Academic dishonesty is your sin and I your God.  
You wanted a conclusion; here it is.



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