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ENG 361
Short Story #1

Primitive Hearts

--DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES ENTRY #00000001--

Criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot. That's what Batman says anyway. Me and Batman both needed to find an animal that would strike fear into the hearts of the wicked. He chose the bat, I chose the dog. My uncle Katie has a dog named Little One. It chased me and bit me once. I was so scared I thought my head was gonna blow off. Plus my sister gave me a dog mask. That should scare those stupid criminals. I know there's some crooks down on Willowood. They painted bad words on the basketball court, and I was punished for saying them. Those crooks is gonna pay...

--END DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES, ENTRY #00000001--

Wylie sat down in front of the television, and laid out the materials he needed: his sister's old Halloween mask, a rusty pair of scissors, his dad's dusty magic kit, safety pins, a tool belt, some contact paper, an old t-shirt, a Penicillin picture book, and a Hi-C (he had made himself thirsty gathering the supplies). He slipped his dirt caked fingers into the scissors, and cut out a picture of a dog foaming at the mouth. He laid down a piece of contact paper and stuck the sloppily cut image on it. He covered it with another sheet of contact paper, and cut around the picture again. He accidentally cut the dog's tail off but he didn't care (Only sissy dogs have tails anyway). He used safety pins to attach the emblem to his t-shirt, and slipped the t-shirt on.

Now it was time to stock his utility belt. He opened the old magic kit (which he wasn't supposed to have), and dumped out the contents. He already knew what he needed: flash paper, smoke bombs, and throwing knives. He stuffed the tricks into his utility belt and strapped it on. He squeezed his big head into the small mask and ran down the long, narrow hallway to the bathroom.

"Take that crooks," said Wylie as he snatched a knife from his belt and waved it at the superhero that stared back through the mirror. But something wasn't right. The costume was totally awesome, but something was missing. He wasn't sure what it was, but he was sure that it wasn't that important. What was important was taking down those crooks. The crooks on Willowood were going to pay for their crimes against humanity.

--DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES ENTRY #00000002--

I got to the basketball court at midnight and waited for the Joker's hoodlums to show up. It has to be the Joker: He's the only one crazy enough to commit a crime this evil. I waited in the underbrush, knowing that criminals are stupid and always return to the scene of the crime. I waited hours for those young punks to get there, and they never came. This must have been some crazy plan of Joker's to throw me off. Well played, Joker! I'll be back tomorrow.

Love, DOGBOY!

--END DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES, ENTRY #00000002--

--EXCERPT. DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES ENTRY #00000003--

Crime Fighting is a lonely job. Sometimes there are weird noises and I get scared and I want to go home but I know I can't because if I did then the criminals would take over the world and then they would kidnap Mom and Daddy and then I be all by myself. So, I brought Gameboy. I had just gotten to the 42nd level (four levels higher than my sister ever got to) when I heard voices down the street. I put the Gameboy under some orange leaves and got my smoke bombs ready. Four big kids in shorts and tank tops walked onto the court. I had to wait because I wasn't sure if they were the crooks or just some citizens. I waited for awhile. Then I got a good clue. The tall, fat one said one of the bad words that were painted on the court. I knew I had my crooks. I tossed the smoke bombs in front of me and stepped out into the smoke. It hurt my eyes and I coughed a little bit. It wasn't any worse than when Aunt Roza came over, though. Plus I'm a hero, and heroes have to be tough. The smoke made the crooks say more of those bad words. He also said good words like holy and mother.

When I got out of the smoke, they started laughing. This clinched it! They were Joker's boys. I grabbed my daggers, and told them that they needed to stop preying on innocents. They kept laughing. That stupid Joker! Did he need to give them so much Joker juice? I put one dagger back in my belt and put some flash paper on the blade of the other one. The crooks started walking to me, telling me to give them the knife. I said no way. I lit the flash paper and threw the dagger at the tall, fat one. A superhero always takes down the powder-house first. It went into his shoulder, and the flash paper sizzled.

--END EXCERPT. DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES, ENTRY #00000003--

“Alejandro fell down,” Al said, “His skin was burning. The kid was screaming something about justice and jokers. He grabbed the other knife. I told the guys to get it away from him. When I pulled the knife from Alejandro’s shoulder he passed out. I put my hands down hard over his cut, but there was too much blood-- I couldn’t hold it down. This is so fucked up, man!”

“What were you kids doing out that late,” said Uncle Carlos, “You boys are a buncha idiots.” The veins in Uncle Carlos’s neck were pulsing blue. His eyes fluttered open and shut fast enough to break the sound barrier. He turned to Alejandro, who lay unconscious and blood-stained on the couch. “Look at him. And a kid did this?”

“He was a little *híbrido*, man! When the guys went to take the knife away he threw those smoke beans in their faces. Things must be poison. The guys were out. I was trying to keep Alejandro from bleeding to death. I couldn’t get to the kid. He told me to tell my boss about him... I dunno what was going on there, man. Made us look like a bunch of *perras*...”

“Well, this ‘little *híbrido* ain’t gonna hurt the Vega family anymore. Come on, we’re going back to Willowood and we’re gonna figure out who the hell this kid is.”

“But Uncle Carlos,” said Al, “what about Alejandro? He’s still unconscious. He needs a doctor.”

“He’ll wait. The police would just send this kid to juvie, and you boys never learned nothing there. This kid’s a coward. He needs to be scared.”

* * *

Wylie slept that night. Justice had been served. He was a hero.

He dreamt that he was in his secret hideout in the vines behind his house. It was a hovel, a plain clearing cut out of the brush, but it was his secret. When he picked up a cape a snake started wiggling out of it and slithered around his base. It made him jump. A power beyond his control pulled him into the air. He exploded through the web of vines and watched as the woods quickly shrank beneath his tennis shoes. Soon he could see the top of his house, then the tops of all the houses in his neighborhood, and then everything started looking like a map.

He could see the entire country beneath him. “Oh nuts,” Wylie thought, “I’m up too high! I’m too high! I need to stop.” He stopped. He was hanging in midair, rocking back and forth like a marionette with no puppeteer. The entire world was spread out beneath him. If he looked hard he could still see his house, but it made him a little dizzy when he did it.

An intense buzzing seared his brain. It was louder than anything he had ever known. It made him want to throw up. But it wasn’t just one noise, he decided. As he tried to push it out he realized that it was *every* noise. If he listened real hard he could hear his sister’s heart beating. It made him wanna go home. As soon as he thought this he started slowly descending straight down back to his point of origin. What a breakthrough this was! He could control it! He could go anywhere he wanted any time he wanted...

Wow!

He decided to go to Disney World. His parents promised him that they were going real soon, but he couldn’t wait. He rode the rides and played the games and

had a real fine time. But all the fun he had didn't make him miss home any less. He wanted his family.

With a run and a jump he took off into the expansive blue sky and headed home. He came back down through the scarred ceiling of his outpost and alighted gently upon the ground. The snake was still slithering around the hideaway. Wylie wasn't scared. He could fly! A snake was no big deal. He ran up to the snake and grabbed it. He started to swing it around and around in the air like King David's slingshot. He was about to snap the snake like a whip when it wriggled out of his hand. The snake did several flips in the air and wrapped itself around Wylie's neck. He heard a lot of cracking as the snake squeezed... wasn't able to breath... fell down... blacked out... misty...

Wylie woke up screaming. What if Mommy had heard? He was sweaty and shaken. The dream had felt like real life. He thought he was dead for sure. He didn't want to die, he was a little kid. But he was also a hero, and heroes have to be willing to die for justice. He decided to do what any kid would do when faced with a problem this big.

Wylie wept.

--DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES, ENTRY #00000004--

I had a really weird dream last night. I got super powers and went to Disney and a snake killed me. I was really scared when I woke up, but I'm brave now. It reminded me what I forgot on my costume, though. I need a cape. When I was flying in my dream I had a cape, and it looked really cool. I'm gonna use the one that was on my Batman pajamas because it matches my shirt and because a towel would look fake.

I don't know where I'm gonna find the Joker's gang again. They're crooks, which means they're all wimps. They probably wouldn't go back to their hideout after a crimefighter was there. Maybe I can find some other criminals tonight...

--END DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES, ENTRY #00000004--

Uncle Carlos and Al had been at the basketball court for hours looking and hiding and hoping the kid would show up.

“Kids are stupid,” Uncle Carlos had said, “He’ll come back to see if anyone’s still here.” At least that’s what Uncle Carlos hoped. The red, radioactive Florida sun rays penetrated his polo shirt and got trapped against his skin.

Al and Uncle Carlos had also been searching for something the kid might have left behind. Al wondered over to the dried blood of his brother, and saw a little bundle of bushes at the edge of the court.

“Uncle Carlos! You check over there yet,” Al said.

“Nope, give it a look.”

He slinked down under the bush and sorted through the dead leaves. He pulled up a handful and rubbed them between his fingers. Cigarette butts. The next handful yielded a toy car and a bubble gum wrapper. Eventually he pulled out a handful from the back corner and uncovered a Gameboy lying on its face. He picked it up, rubbed the dirt off on his shirt, and gave it a look-see. There was a sticker on the back with a picture of a koala bear reading a book. The label also had some text on it: “This book belongs to.”

Underneath this text was some sloppily written cursive: “Wiley Esperenza, DOGBOY.”

He ran it over to his uncle.

“Wylie Esperanza. Esperanza? Aren’t there some Esperanza’s over on Oakview? I think there are,” Uncle Carlos said.

“Wiley’s been found out,” said Uncle Carlos. His eyes were wide open and his tongue flicked his two front teeth.

“Uncle Carlos,” said Al, “are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” said Uncle Carlos, “This is right.”

The clouds ran in front of the sun, and Uncle Carlos felt liberation.

* * *

“Oh my god. There’s an animal over in those bushes,” Kara said.

“Is Kara scared of a lil’ bitty animal,” said Todd.

“No, I was just wondering how drunk I was. Ha!” She sat on the hood of the car and took off her jacket. “Tonight was so much fun. I had a’ great time.” She punched him in the arm.

“Kara?”

“Uh-huh?”

“Didja’ ever wish I wasn’t your buddy?”

“No! Why wouldn’t you be ma’ buddy?”

“No, geez, that’s not what I meant! I meant, didja’ ever wish I was your boyfriend?”

Todd looked deeply into her eyes. He could feel the warmth emanating from her alcohol-fueled body. He wanted very badly to kiss her... that is until she started laughing.

“What,” he said.

“‘Funny Todd,’ tha’s your new name! Y’are so silly sometimes...”

“I don’t want to be your ‘friend’ anymore, Kara. I think I’m falling for you.”

The muscles in her face drooped. “You’re serious?”

“Yes.”

“Todd, sweetie, you’re my friend, okay? I don’t wanna screw that up.”

“I’m not your friend... I’m your boyfriend.”

“No you’re not, Todd. Quit it!”

He moved in closer to her, forcing himself into her personal space. Into her *very* personal space. He started caressing her back and moved in to kiss her. She struggled, but he knew once they kissed she would realize they were supposed to be together. They had to be together. He kissed her. She wasn’t kissing back! His first instinct was to retract his advances and make up some drunken excuse. Todd wasn’t weak, though. All that would do is show weakness and Kara would never want a weak man. He kissed her harder. She squirmed and squealed and hit his arms, but he couldn’t stop. Kara tried to relax her body so she could slip out of his grip. Todd thought she was giving in and started to push her back onto the car. His hand glided over her small breasts and started wandering further south.

Todd felt a slicing pain in both his ankles. He fell backwards, flailing his arms. His head bounced off the pavement and he passed out, a crimson puddle forming beneath him.

“Oh my god! Oh my god,” said Kara as she jumped off the hoof of the car.

“Good evening, Mam,” said a small child in a cape and cowl as he wiggled out from under the car, “Tell the world this crook has paid... thanks to The Fantabulous DOGBOY!”

“But you couldn’t be more than seven...”

“I’m ten thank you very much. And age doesn’t matter when you’re a superhero! It’s been cool saving you! See ya’ later... and tell people! I’m DOGBOY!”

Kara fell hard against the hood of the car. Todd’s blood was everywhere... he’d been attacking her... his ankles were cut open. A kid cut his ankles open! A kid! Todd body started flail about. His skin reflected the streetlight and his eye sockets were entryways to empty rooms. She bolted through the yard to her parent’s window and pounded on the glass.

* * *

--DOGBOY’S CHRONICLES, ENTRY #0000005--

The war against crooks goes on. I’m tired a lot, but I don’t care. The police were in the neighborhood after I stopped this creep from roughing up a girl. I bet they know about me now. They must be so pumped! I wonder if they’d give me a badge... I also

stopped this bully from beating up a little kid. He was 5. I just punched the bully and he ran away crying. I didn't even have to use my utility belt. I'm the best superhero ever. I'm gonna write Batman and tell him what a good job I'm doing. But I won't tell him my secret identity... Not until we fight someone together. I think the crooks should be scared now. I think I'm gonna sleep tonight. Maybe Mommy will make us some nachos. And then we can all sit down and watch TV together! And maybe she'll buy me some comic books... the newer ones with bad words and bigger fights! I need to keep up with the news. I'm a superhero now!

From, DOGMAN!

--END DOGBOY'S CHRONICLES, ENTRY #00000005--

“Don't these people ever come home?” Uncle Carlos had been watching the Esperanza house for three days now. Nobody was in the house; he had already broken in and searched. There was a light on upstairs, but nobody was using it. What if it was the wrong kid? Maybe the Gameboy didn't belong to that little bastard. He leaned back against a smooth rock and said “Its four-thirty now. Five o'clock and I'm leaving!” He gathered up his sweat-stained shirt and his insulated 44oz. cup filled with black decaff, and headed back towards home.

A kid on a bike sped past him. The kid stopped just a little down the road, threw his bike in the front lawn, and walked into the house. The Esperanza house.

“I'll be right back, Wiley,” Uncle Carlos thought. His mouth coiled, and he walked down the broad road.

* * *

Wylie pulled out his bottom dresser drawer and set it gently on the floor. This had to be done quietly. He didn't want to wake Mommy and Daddy. He pulled his costume out from the secret compartment under his dresser. He put on the shirt and mask and cape with great fervor. His hands shook as he tied the cape tightly around his neck. His face was slick, and it was easy to get the tight-fitting mask on. He was so excited. Tonight he was going to reveal himself to the police. Tonight he'd become a deputized vigilante. Tonight was the most important time in a crimefighter's life. Tonight he would be loved.

Wylie picked up his utility belt and tied it about his waist. He hooked it at the third hole because doing that made his chest puff out. He slipped on his crimefighting shoes (a pair of old water socks) and crept down to the bathroom so he could get a look at himself.

The superhero in the mirror was menacing. The nose had been ripped out of his mask so he could breathe better (It still looked like a dog). Dried blood mixed in with the powder blue of his cape. His shirt was torn and dirty. The DOGBOY emblem had been reinforced with a half dozen new safety pins. With a tuck of his shirt, Wylie certified himself a true hero and headed out of the bathroom to meet his true destiny.

His body stiffened and his gait ceased halfway down the hallway. He smelled cigarettes. Wylie knew Aunt Roza wasn't here. She couldn't be. He heard the stairs scream. Someone was in the house. He bolted into the living room and jumped behind the caddy-cornered couch. His lungs pounded like a locomotive. As they chugged away, he heard the fan in the bathroom click on.

Wylie quieted down as he ran out of steam. There was a clackity-clack in the bathroom. The fan switched off. He heard a man cough. Light from the kitchen bled into the living room. There were no footsteps, no clackity-clack.

Wylie dug his face into the deep shag carpet. Maybe if he hadn't done this he would have seen the man hovering over him. Maybe the glint of the brass knuckles would have caught his eye. But all he could see as the man pounded into the back of his head was a bright white, followed by a deep black.

* * *

“Come on, kid! Get up!”

The boy's world was made with shadows. He recognized the basic profile of his bed and dresser. There was a darkened form hulking over him. Shoulders broad, head square. His brain hurt. It felt like it was trying to fight its way out of his skull. He tried to remember where he was when he fell asleep and couldn't. He tried to remember his own name. He remembered he wanted his Mommy and Daddy.

Wylie heard his mind warble. He could see again. He still didn't know who the man was. The man's face was bloated and strained like a trumpet player's. The cherry of his cigarette was a beacon of light, exposing his features... throwing shadows where no shadow should live. When he inhaled the shadows on his face were pushed back to reveal his insidious smile. The man bent down and looked Wylie dead in the eyes.

“Hello, Wylie. My name is Carlos. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions, okay?”

Wylie did not respond.

“These daggers you had in your belt,” Uncle Carlos pointed one of the crimson, burnt daggers at the child, “Did you throw one at a tall, stocky kid down on Willowood basketball court?”

“Yeah,” DOGBOY said, “He was a crook. I made him pay. I’m a superhero.”
“A superhero.” Uncle Carlos started laughing. He doubled over he was laughing so much. He laughed so much that he dropped the dagger. Then he looked at Wylie and laughed. His eyes and mouth seemed like they were being held open by twigs. Wylie started laughing too. He didn’t know what was funny, but laughter is like a disease...

This guy had to be one of Joker’s hoods! Or what if it was the Joker himself? It was time for DOGBOY’s ultimate battle. If he took down the Joker Batman would like him so much. He couldn’t lift his feet to kick Uncle Carlos. He tried to punch him, but his arms were bound at his sides. He looked down. Joker had tied him up with Mommy’s clothesline!

The laughing stopped. The bicep in his arm ripped as a long, metal pole slammed against it. He watched his upper arm ripple. He felt a little throw up in the back of his throat. His mouth split open and a scream flew out.

“Stop screaming,” Uncle Carlos said, “Now, I have one more question. These little pellets... did you throw these in the faces of two boys.”

“I threw them in the faces of your henchman, Joker!”

“Oh, I’m not a Joker. You hurt my nephews-- You hurt three harmless orphans! What if you came home and your parents lay dead in the living room? Would you want some little fucking kid to throw a fucking dagger at you?”

Uncle Carlos brought the pole back again, and slammed it against the lower part of Wylie's arm. His arm was flung right into his gut, making him lose his breath. Wylie started to cry. The tears tore down his face. He could barely see through them. They hurt his eyes.

"Mommy and Daddy aren't dead! They're downstairs and they're gonna hear you and they're gonna help me. Mommy! Mommy!"

"I don't know where your parents are, kid, but they ain't here. I been watching the place for days now. You're the only one I ever seen leave. We're gonna wait for Mommy and Daddy. They need to be tutored." Uncle Carlos walked calmly over to Wylie's bed and stretched out.

He lay there for an hour or more, snoring and mumbling. Wylie's arm pulsed with pain. He tried to twist around and get it to tear off, but it fell out of the ropes. It looked like a limp piece of blue silly string had landed on his lap. He started to cry again. He hated crying. He pushed away the tears with the back of his hand...

His good arm was free! The ropes around his arms were slowly sliding down his torso. Wylie knew there was always a way out. Batman always escaped. He tried to wriggle up through the ropes, but his legs were tied too tightly. He grabbed the fallen dagger and cut the ropes away. Freedom! He ran to the open bedroom windows, waking Uncle Carlos from his catnap. Wylie jumped out. His bad arm hit the underside of the window on the way out. It hurt like heck, but it mattered little. He had escaped. He heard Uncle Carlos scream after him as he fell. But he was free. Falling. He heard the window

slammed shut above him. Pain in his throat. Stars all around him. Light. Freedom.
Memories.

* * *

It was an abnormally bright day. Perhaps this was due to the fog in the air reflecting light. Wylie didn't care. He was going on a trip with his family.

His dad stood at the back of the station wagon loading their bags the back. He was humming one of the oldies he always hummed. His mom was sitting in the front seat looking at a road map. Her black hair fell over the back of the car seat and onto Wylie's lap. It made his legs itch. He didn't care. He was going on a trip with his family

His sister was playing his Gameboy in the seat beside him. She started taunting him. She said she had just gotten to the 38th level on Tetris and that he wasn't as good as her and that he would never get that far. He didn't care. He was going on a trip with his family.

His dad finished loading the station wagon. They backed out of the driveway and headed towards the turn-around at the end of the broad road. Wylie's dad decided to play a joke on Mommy. The car accelerated and weaved across the street. Wylie knew that his mom would probably start yelling. He didn't care. He was going on a trip with his family.

His mom started screaming. At first they were just the screams of an aggravated mother. But when the car didn't slow as they got to the turn-around (and the edge of the woods) they became screams of panic. His sister started screaming too. And his dad. Wylie didn't scream. He didn't care. He was going on a trip with his family.

His parent's car went through the woods at such a speed that the trees looked like spin art. It rolled through the woods for twenty or thirty or fifty feet. Wylie felt a little throw-up in the back of his throat. His sister flew up and crashed into the ceiling. His parent's heads shattered the windshield. Wylie's seat belt wouldn't let him budge. He didn't care. He was going on a trip with his family.

His parent's car met the earth with a great force. His sister fell into the back cargo bay, and his parents lay still. Wylie felt okay. He calmly unclasped his seat belt, opened the door, and got out of the car. He set out at a gentle stride and headed home

He didn't care. He **was** going to go on a trip with his family.

* * *

Uncle Carlos awoke to the sight of Wylie running across the room. That little *hibrido* thought he was going to get away! Uncle Carlos leapt out of bed as Wylie flew out the window. The kid's broken arm hit the window on his way out. Uncle Carlos sprinted to the window, but it closed before he got there. He looked out the window. The backyard was empty; save for a swing-set and big bunches of vines.

He looked at the ground and cursed himself. How could he have failed to protect his own? How could he let a little kid get away?

There was a small piece of blue fabric stuck under the window.

"God almighty," said Uncle Carlos, "He's hung himself! I didn't want to kill him... Christ!" He pulled the window open with the force of a jet engine. The blue fabric rolled off the window ledge. On the ground was a small blue lump named Wylie Espernza (AKA DOGBOY!). He wasn't breathing.

Uncle Carlos tumbled down the stairs and out the front door. As he sped around the side of the house he felt terror. But more importantly he felt regret. He arrived in the backyard and stopped. There was the rusty old swing-set and the vines. There were flower beds along the back of the house and there was a raccoon picking through the garbage. There was an indentation in the dried and brittle grass. But there was no DOGBOY anywhere.

Uncle Carlos didn't care. He decided to go home to his family.