

Beckett Farkas

Prolepsis

It is the perfect day to sleep in. The Colorado winter wind blowing in quick, short bursts, whistling through the soffits of the third-story apartment roof. Day after day, Chase wakes up, showers, dresses, and goes to school. Each of those days his first thought, even before climbing out of bed, is to get back home and finish sleeping. It's 6:57 a.m., and Chase's eyes have just opened. His dream—like a fond memory of skydiving, forgetting to wear a parachute and then realizing you don't even need one—plummets into reality with the sudden panic that he has slept through his alarm clock, *again*. Chase looks at the giant, bright-red numbers gleaming from behind him; he has in fact woken up three minutes early. Chase folds the corner of his pillow underneath the indentation of his face, plops his head back into it, and pulls the warmth of the comforter over his pale shoulder, into his neck, with a grunt.

"You up? *Get up*, Chase. There's no gas in the car to drive you."

The alarm sounds with the loud chatter of forced morning enthusiasm and cheap studio sound effects. Chase's dad, Mike Downers, warns Chase again to wake up, then returns to his Wednesday morning: cigarettes, coffee, news. Chase peels himself out of bed, irritated with the day's beginning. He hammers his finger into a large, black button on his alarm clock, silencing the voices. Everyone is talking about the information age, complaining about a deteriorating infrastructure and frantic about an economy that has left them all in an obscurity bog. Chase has only just begun to understand it; that awkward age where logic steps into the Tilt-A-Whirl of teenage hormones offers him no clarity. He grabs a damp towel from a plastic coat hanger nailed to the wall. He pushes the towel into his nose and smells deep into the fabric for any odd smells, shrugs, and wraps the towel around his waist. Already, Chase is wishing he was back in bed. He gets into the shower and soaks in the heat of the water, building it up inside of him, preparing him for the day. He tries not to think about the homework he didn't do, the reading he wanted to do, and the sense of purpose he is supposed to have. Chase plays the reel of concerned parental figures in his mind while the water turns his hair into trenches: good grades, good job, nice house, pretty wife, and most of all, be happy with what you choose because you're pretty much stuck after that. Though, those same well-meaning parental figures all seem to carry an entirely different dialogue with each other: downsize, inflation, decline, politicians, and most of all, nobody's happy. Drunken people seem happy. Chase smoked weed a few times, and that made him happy—short lived as it was.

Chase often pondered the reasons for drugs, for cigarettes, beer, marijuana, vodka, whiskey, cocaine, heroin, lithium, Prozac. A year ago he thought of them as a weakness, a sort of gangrenous infection that eats at good people, and now he is beginning to think of them all as a means for those

people to cope—a vile remedy. Chase opens the bathroom door, and a strong scent of Pert and Irish Spring pours into the chill of the hallway in a cloud of steam. Shivering, Chase puts on last Monday's acid-wash jeans, fastens the belt that is still bound within the loops, and scratches off a tiny bit of mustard from his pant leg. He reaches over the river of clutter flowing from his closet, and, blurry-eyed, yanks a best-guess matching shirt from a hanger. Socks, shoes, belt, zits, and Corn Chex—not enough milk to get them all wet. He thinks of the politics that his dad and brother used to argue about, the economics that seemed to drive it all, and the feebleness in trying to get on top.

Chase sits at the wobbly pressboard Walmart dining table placed directly behind the living room couch where his dad is still watching the news. The frost on the sliding glass door creeps back into the corners of the frame while the sun slowly rises above the top of another apartment building across the courtyard. The smoke from Mike's American Legend Red cigarette billows and thickens the already permeating cloud in the apartment living room. When they moved into this temporary apartment five years ago, Chase had thought that this living room was perfect—he looked over the empty room with little bits of fluff scattered over the new beige carpet and imagined a spacious environment fit for sunlight and relaxation. He didn't know yet how to do the math in his head: dining table, chairs, couch, TV, TV stand, bookshelf, and an end table for Mike's ashtray. The room quickly became a narrow path with awkward, unmatched surfaces to pile junk on.

The wall-mounted heater changes gears like an old Ford, rattling a painting of George Washington on the wall. Chase's older brother, Robbie, found the painting leaned up against the dumpster downstairs—back when Robbie still lived with them. Chase and Robbie look exactly like their dad: dark brown eyes, straight black hair, big white smile, and thin, chiseled features. Except Robbie has a long, powerful nose, just like Grandpa Quannah had had. Robbie joined the Air Force a little over three years ago and has only been back to visit once.

Three years from now Robbie will come home with a diagnosis of cancer in his liver. The Oxycodone will cost hundreds of dollars, and they will hardly be enough to dull the pain—the morphine from the hospice will help, but Robbie's mind will be gone. The power in the freezing apartment will get shut off when there isn't enough money—not even when Chase quits his first year in college to start renovating apartments under the table, nor when he buses tables after hours at Denny's, will it ever be enough to pay the bills or buy the pills that only slightly seem to help. Robbie will be dead within four months of coming home. Chase and Mike will each in secret be glad to see the suffering finally end. The VA will respond to Mike's letters that plead for aid, though not until several months after Robbie's passing. The VA's reply will be to recommend further paperwork be given in a timely manner.

Chase's tired eyes drag at the front of his brain, pulling him toward his dry cereal. The stink of cheap cigarettes clings to his clean shirt and skin, establishing itself as the dominant smell. Chase props his head up with his free arm and stares hard into the depths of the myriad of oddly shaped stains on the carpet. The darkest ones are always small and perfectly round while the biggest ones stretch as long

as a foot. Chase thinks of the shading scales in his art appreciation class last year. How he was always late, always tired, and how he was always made to feel pathetic and weak for not being full of zest; as though the morning news team from his clock radio was at every corner, waiting to twist their faces at him with disapproval. Chase always had the hardest time drawing anything “fresh,” as the teacher would say. The artist’s clock always seemed to tick louder and louder like the marching of the school band trying desperately to keep in step. The occasional horn bleating out of key while the conductor barks frustration and disappointment at the marching kids trying to keep in line; the music always seemed to suffer.

“Yeah, no shit!” Mike yells at the TV.

Chase looks at the eighty-pound Sony television set just in time to see and hear something about a debt ceiling, congress, and more after these messages from a blue-eyed man driving a glistening black Lexus. Chase’s dad has recently given up on flipping through the want ads. For the past month he has been spending his whole day on the computer, as Chase understands it, scrolling through his new CareerBuilder account and tirelessly nit-picking over every detail that might be regarded badly by some phantom job manager. Three weeks ago he started to hound Chase about things on his account that stopped working and how Chase must have *fucked it up*. Last week, Mike could barely remain seated while he shared with Chase his *game plan* on how to handle upcoming interviews and what he will fix with the second, maybe third, paycheck—depending on the electricity bill, rent, and starting pay. Mike didn’t turn the computer on yesterday. He doesn’t know what to do and Chase knows it.

In six years, Mike will be diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. He will ignore it for another few years until the congestive heart failure becomes un-ignorable, and it won’t be until he has a mental breakdown that he will take the Abilify which will be said to have exacerbated his type 2 diabetes. Chase will do his best—again. Mike will need to lean hard on shopping carts just to be able to go shopping for food with his EBT card, else the weight of his own body while walking will exhaust his lungs within twenty feet. Mike will finally get disability after almost four years of convoluted and endlessly redundant paperwork. The extra money will keep the water and the power from being shut off every few months. Chase will find a job changing oil, brakes, and air filters. He’ll finally make a little better than twelve bucks an hour.

Chase picks up his unopened book bag from the same place he put it down yesterday, opens the front door, and turns on the computer.

“Love you, Dad.”

“Love you too, Son. Don’t forget your jacket.”

Chase pretends that he didn’t hear him; he doesn’t want to tell him that his jacket was stolen from his locker last Friday. Or that he might have left it at the lunch table. Or that he might have left it on the bleachers during third period: gym class. No, Chase is almost positive it was in his locker, and now it is not.

First period: English. Chase is glad to be on time today. The embarrassment of being the one who walks in late, for whatever reason, is palpable to the entire insides of a person. Ms. Berryman is wiping yesterday's lesson off the notebook-paper-sized clear plastic sheets. She places them one by one on top of the lit overhead projector. The science classrooms now all have brand new projectors in them—ones that the teachers put their books under and that projects their giant hands on the wall while they turn the pages. Ms. Berryman lectures about Tolstoy and how he tortured Anna Karenina until she couldn't bear it any more. Then she asks, "Why did Tolstoy do this, do you think?" Chase was used to teachers asking questions that nobody understood, but her questions were always a little extra uncomfortable. This might have something to do with her consistency in leaning a discussion toward bad men and the bad things they do.

In two years, Ms. Berryman will dump her second husband of eight years and spend the last year of her career getting just a little bit meaner to her students, particularly the boys that she thinks have an arrogant sense of entitlement. After a mandatory pay cut, Ms. Berryman will be fired for excessive word use against a certain big-hearted and heavy-shouldered Puerto Rican girl, Maria, who will speak out against Ms. Berryman's cruel verbal besiegement on Chase that day. Channel Five will talk about violent teens, and Channel Seven will talk about standards in the classroom. Chase won't fully understand the anger that gets directed at him by Ms. Berryman until he reads about Sylvia Plath in his first semester of college.

Chase falls asleep, as does his left leg. The bell rings. Chase grabs his still unopened book bag and makes for his next class. The faster Chase marches on, the faster he can get back into bed; his dedication and his limp from his still-sleeping leg are intimidating enough to clear a narrow path through the dense teenage jungle of repressed sexual desires and disdain for authority. He has to hurry each day to make it clear across the school to second period: History, Ms. Connolly.

Ms. Connolly has hair like silken fire—long and red with the blue eyes and brown freckles of an Irish lady. She is from Georgia but loves the winters here in Colorado. Most people native to Colorado have a slight southern accent, but not when compared to Georgians, though Ms. Connolly usually has no noticeable accent. Chase has always been fond of Ms. Connolly for her relentlessly kind demeanor and her large hips that would set adrift and sway the lengthy fabric of her skirt like an old ship in the deep sea.

As usual—from the hallway, Chase peeks through the small, squared window of the heavy metal door at the back of Ms. Connolly's class before opening it up. All of the students, including Ms. Connolly, are opposite the door, standing shoulder to shoulder and peering out the two long windows that together stretch the length of the auditorium-style classroom—not as usual. Chase opens the door, stands at its threshold adjacent to the enormous world map that covers most of the opposing wall.

"I saw them pull up just before I got here," Lucy, a skinny Filipino girl with shiny brown eyes and a Disney smile, says to Ms. Connolly. "There were only three of them just a second—*oh my God.*"

“Everyone, get away from the windows, get down!” Ms. Connolly says, then turns and shuffles hastily toward the phone on her desk.

Nobody listens. A few of the students crouch for a second, but give it up when it is clear that the order is being ignored. Chase pulls his book bag tight and jogs to the window where there is just enough space to push in between students, their eyes and mouths wide with disbelief. Chase’s presence goes unnoticed as they all watch the police cars continue to pile into the front parking lot of the high school.

“Get away from them windows! Hasim, git’em out them windows,” Ms. Connolly’s southern accent breaks through while gesturing the command toward Hasim, the Jordanian transfer student from France.

Chase watches Ms. Connolly nod and mouth the words “okay, okay... okay.” He notices an increasing level of tension in her voice with each repeating word.

“Damn it, Hasim!”

“Why? There is only the police now. They are running around,” Hasim’s face and jet-black eyebrows furl in protest.

The school’s announcement intercom lights up with a deep and intense voice.

“All students and faculty are to remain in their current classrooms; doors are to remain locked; no students or faculty are to stand near any windows or doors; this is not a drill; there is an intruder, possibly armed, on the premises; the school is on lockdown. I repeat: the school is on lockdown.”

“Look, they’re running around the building,” Chase says, leaning in close to the window and pointing down the length of it to the corner of the building. Two more cars show up, and four officers get out. They meet up with three other policemen who appear to be listening to another policewoman shouting and pointing in various directions. The distorted pitch of her voice occasionally makes it through the thick glass. Chase holds his breath to try to discern the words which at best sound like they’re underwater. Two policemen pull rifles from their trunks and position themselves behind the front ends of their cars. Another unmarked police car arrives with its lights flashing from behind its tinted windows. The driver exits the vehicle and crouches next to one of the men with a rifle, each of them occasionally pointing in different directions and nodding.

“Okay,” Ms. Connolly claps her hands hard and loud. “Away from the windows, NOW.”

The students immediately disperse.

“Everybody move to the front of the classroom behind my desk! Just duck down, okay – sit on the floor,” she exclaims, her forehead now bone white and her cheeks bright red.

She moves quickly from her desk, past the world map toward the door. She kneels several inches below the window in the door, rising slowly to peek through. She shifts her gaze from left to right before turning the latch slowly on the doorknob to lock it. The students rush quietly toward the front of the class. They quickly fill the space behind the desk, leaving many still exposed, including Chase and his rival Marquis, a slender boy with wide shoulders and sharp musculature. From opposite sides of the desk, they share a long and serious stare into the dark of each other’s eyes—glaring into the depth of

some primal heart that lies dormant within. Their faces are serious. Not a single thought goes toward their history; the blows exchanged over a comment made laughingly about Chase always smelling like cigarettes. The look they share now says one thing: whatever happens, I got your back.

Ms. Connolly will go on teaching for many years. She will take a special interest in the students of this class, namely Marquis, Lucy, and Chase; Chase will perceive this as a little piece of humanity finding its way into the hearts of everyone—many petty differences that once made sense will be set aside and only ever regarded jokingly. It will be as though there were no other way to approach such seemingly programmed segregations. He will often wonder if he is the only one who notices these things so directly.

Time erodes; for Chase, minutes become hours. Hours become tension. Tension becomes anxiety. Anxiety becomes discomfort. Discomfort becomes irritation and impatience. The police cars remain the same. The men with rifles are off their knees and on their butts, peeking past the bumpers of their cars toward the school. Chase daydreams of things he had never thought of before: Lucy's lips, his dad's old job, playing basketball with Marquis years ago. Chase shakes his head to startle his brain back into a ready state only to have it wander again. The occasional sound of police radios and authoritative voices in the hallways are increasingly less shocking as time passes and passes.

"I gotta pee, Ms. Connolly," says Mila, a tall, thick-chested and wide-bellied girl. "I'm not playin'."

Everyone laughs; the break in the monotony is welcomed. Chase starts to realize that his sense of differentiating people has been trapped in a realm where skin and shape make far too much of a difference to his decisions. He now finds himself increasingly concerned for the well-being of Marquis where only yesterday he thought he hated Marquis. He can't quite understand how this mode of thinking had gone unquestioned for so long.

"Me too, Ms. Connolly. The bathroom isn't far," Lucy exclaims, looking nervously toward the door.

"Okay, let me check, it's been long enough for me to check, I think." Ms. Connolly peeks again through the window of the door. She turns back around. "Anyone else have to go?" A slew of hands shoot up from behind the desk.

Ms. Connolly makes for her desk again, slower this time. She pauses a few times to look outside, but before she can reach her desk, the handle of the door violently rattles. The classroom gasps. Ms. Connolly puts her back to the world map and quickly shuffles up the wall toward the door. Before she turns, Chase sees a panic in her eyes like that of a wild cat crouching and swiping at the spear of a hunter. The doorknob rattles again, followed by two hard and fast knocks. Ms. Connolly presses her face to the window. She exhales hard and unlocks the door. It's Mr. Giordano, Economics.

Mr. Giordano wears pressed shirts and shiny ties; often one of the two will have pinstripes. He is just below average height and is balding heavily. This doesn't stop him from combing and gelling the sides of his black-and-gray hair backward. He has a very delicate silver-and-gold watch that can only be

seen after he unbuttons and flips the cuffs of his sleeves up to the middle of his forearm. Mr. Giordano will sometimes wear gold jewelry, and he will sometimes mention in passing that he doesn't like to wear his gold to school because he doesn't want to give students the wrong impression.

The students all sit and listen to the teachers' loud whispering.

"They told me to move my class here." Mr. Giordano motions down the hall to two officers standing watch. "They said this wing is clear and it's okay to move them now."

"They need to use the bathroom," Ms. Connolly says.

"*Kids*," Mr. Giordano whips his arm in a semi-circle, motioning to the students. "Whoever needs to use the restroom, come with me now," he says, his whisper only slightly louder than it had been. The students finally unpack themselves from behind the desk; the ones in need exit with Mr. Giordano, and the rest take the opportunity to stretch their legs.

Chase watches his classmates, and he notices the complete change in everyone's behavior; how everyone is suddenly friends, how nobody really cares about being so close to one another while behind the desk, how on any other day these same classmates were mostly quite cruel to each other.

"They got a dude," Marquis yells, pointing out the large windows.

Chase moves next to Marquis. Together they watch six men wearing all black, laden with thick straps, wide buckles, and bulging pouches escort a short, heavy set, darkly tanned man. His arms are bound behind his back, and two of the six men are gripping his forearms, lifting them up high, forcing the captive to bend forward. He stumbles a few times, but the men practically suspend him by his arms, preventing him from doing anything but awkwardly shuffle forward. His short-sleeved button-down shirt is torn open, and his face is swollen and bright red.

Mr. Giordano opens the door and holds it for the returning students, as well as a flock of new ones being moved to this more secure location; all of whom make for the windows to see what is happening.

The room becomes increasingly louder as the moments stretch on. The classroom segregates into smaller packs of previously acquainted students all telling their tales before moving on to cooler topics, the recently made connections breaking off to conserve social status, like oil and water in a frying pan. Chase watches the dominant expand and the indifferent recede. He can almost feel the compulsion to situate one's self from the possible embarrassment of being caught out of place. He can see a small frown of worry and confusion in the faces of a few students as it all takes place. Chase locks eyes with Marquis; they both seem to be thinking the same thing before another young fellow Chase only knows from the basketball court slugs Marquis on the arm, pulling him out of the moment.

Mr. Giordano paces between the door and the window—controlling, assessing, and shushing the crowd when it gets too loud. Ms. Connolly is talking to a small group of students who are all chatting and pointing to places on the giant world map. Chase sits on a desk just behind Ms. Connolly with his feet in a chair—watching.

"Is that where you're from, Ms. Connolly?" Lucy asks while pointing at the map.

“Well, no, but my grandmother was.”

“Where’s Palopo?” Lucy asks with genuine interest. “My dad’s from there.”

“Is that in Indonesia?”

“Yeah.”

“It would be here,” Ms. Connolly says. “But, it might be too small for this map.”

“Where is the Gaza Strip?” Lucy asks, her eyes luminous with the reflection of the halogen lamps. “My Mom is Palestinian, and she says that Israel is stealing all the beach property in the Gaza.”

Mr. Giordano stops pacing to butt into the conversation. “It’s a pile of rubble; somebody needs to do something with it. Israel has the means to turn that ruin into money.”

Ms. Connolly looks at Mr. Giordano with her eyebrows raised as high as they can go.

“That’s a little harsh, don’t you think?” Ms. Connolly replies with a motherly tone.

“Life is hard. People need to stop letting themselves be victims, Mary.” Mr. Giordano paces to the door to peek out and then paces back again with his shoulders lifted slightly and his elbows cocked outward like his chest is thicker than it really is.

“Well, you can *hardly* excuse Israel for the condition of things in Palestine—don’t you think, *Angelo*?” Ms. Connolly says.

Chase smiles at the moment, suddenly recognizing that real people lay just beneath the surface of what they think is socially appropriate; it seems one only need but scratch at a loose corner to get inside. Ms. Connolly leans on her right leg and crosses her arms at Mr. Giordano, who has returned from his three-step patrol duty.

“They should have done something with it if they wanted to keep it. At some point a profit has to be made,” Mr. Giordano replies, his hands rising up with a shrug.

“What a delightfully convenient ideology—I guess you’re okay with what happened to India, Ireland, and North Africa? And how about the Native Americans, then?”

Chase drops his still unopened book bag and leans forward to put his elbows on his knees. The conversation suddenly taking place, yet clearly out of place, fascinates Chase more than any lecture ever has. The content, although interesting, isn’t what catches his interest; rather, it is the people he thought he knew suddenly having emotions and delightfully sarcastic mannerisms. Chase watches their fluster with increasing fascination.

“You don’t need to know history to know what has happened, and what will happen is my only point,” Mr. Giordano shrugs again. “I don’t like it any more than you do.”

“So, when is China going to own America then?” Chase asks with a childish grin he hasn’t used in at least a decade.

Ms. Connolly smiles wide and looks adoringly at Chase. “They can’t do that, Hon, that would be an act of war, and that would lead to U.N. involvement, and U.S. allies would get involved, and the precious little economy won’t much like that.”

“They already do,” Mr. Giordano says. “Land is constantly being purchased and sold—and yes,

the American purchasing power makes up for twenty-five percent of the Chinese economy, so there is little chance for war—don't let the TV scare you, Chase."

"Can't we just stop selling our land to them?" Chase asks, genuinely interested in Mr. Giordano's air of unwavering certainty.

"Think of them as corporations, Chase. We don't want to stop them, we want them to build on our land and generate revenue within our cities."

"Yeah, and they just keep on evading taxes." Ms. Connolly's face suddenly starts to look tired, and her tone slows down. "We just keep on buying stuff that breaks within a year, sending all of our money out of the country, leaving us stuck with a worthless pile of broken junk."

"It's not as simple as that," Mr. Giordano says.

"I think it is," Ms. Connolly replies before breathing deep and sighing.

"We shouldn't talk about this now; I think we've scared poor Lucy enough." Mr. Giordano smiles slyly and excuses himself to check the door again.

Chase and Lucy look at each other with a sort of lost and helpless desperation, like that of a puppy locked out on a patio as the sliding glass door slams shut.

Mr. Giordano and Ms. Connolly never finish their conversation. Chase will have them both as teachers in the next few years. They will both be impressed with his sudden and immense commitment to learning. They even, after a while, grow fond of his constant desire to speak with them without social restraint. They will both write letters of recommendation for his college applications, though the community college cares little for such things.

"They're all leaving," Marquis informs the class.

Most of the police cars, one by one, begin backing out of the school parking lot. The flashing lights all turn off in a chain reaction.

The rumors at school in later months tell of the man who had been arrested, how he is the father of a girl at the school, and how he had once been the best weed dealer in the area before he got busted. It will be said that the girl's mother, in a spiteful fit of anger at the father, called the police and reported that he wasn't supposed to see his daughter and that he had a gun. It will turn out that he didn't have a gun. He will, however, spend another three months in holding while legal papers get sorted. The rumors won't know what happened to the mother; they'll only speak of the girl and how she switched schools almost immediately.

Chase goes home early that day. He puts his book bag down at the front door, goes into the kitchen, and opens the fridge. The empty jug of milk that Chase begrudgingly put back this morning drags his mind away from the fog of chilled air that slowly falls out from the depths of the humming refrigerator. The events of the day play in short bursts of alternating complexities: police and family, money and poverty, lust and self-respect. The framework of the interior of the fridge clicks and creaks as it slowly thaws. Chase closes the door and looks across the living room at the yellowing walls and filthy carpet. When did we stop, he thinks; when was it that the downtrodden gave up the battle for equality?

These questions hadn't come to him in some time. Chase thinks about how certain Mr. Giordano was about the sheer indifference of financial progress. He tries to figure a way out; if not for everyone, then at least for himself, his dad, and for Robbie. Chase throws the empty milk carton into the garbage. He clears the torn envelopes and coffee-stained bills from the dining room table, opens his book bag, then tries to figure out where to begin.