

Stacked Deck – The Star

By
Spider N. Mann

An original muse escape
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ONE (SPLASH PAGE)

TITLE: THE STAR

Panel 1: POV is from the ground looking up at the sky. It's night and the stars are bright, but the focal point is one star far brighter than the rest. The roofs of suburban type houses and perhaps some treetops frame the shot.

1. NARRATION: Jiminy Cricket sang about them in that movie, the one with the wooden boy who gained a soul after acting like an ass.
2. NARRATION: Throughout childhood music teachers kept telling us how much they twinkled, over and over, until we almost believed as we sang odes to them.
3. NARRATION: We learned how to make one on paper with a single, continuous line as if their magic could never be broken.
4. NARRATION: We put them on our flags, deign our popular citizens to encompass their name and are led to believe they'll always show us the way.

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TWO (SIX PANELS)

Panel 1: A male teenager aged 18 stares at the reader. He has a look of forced lucidity upon him. Shot is tight upon his face, more eyes than anything, and the panel is page wide. He isn't the best looking guy but not ugly either; average poorer kid trying to rise above his station in life; he is drab in clothing, scruffy in appearance. His name is Neil.

1. CAPTION: THE QUESTION

2. NARRATION: I hate them. They ruined my life all because I decided, in a moment of sadness, to wish upon one.

Panel 2: We're outside of a high school at daytime, banners across the front announcing SENIOR PROM. Various kids and faculty are coming and going, cars are pulled to a stop and some are pulling away.

3. NARRATION: I had asked Pamela McGinnis to go to prom with me.

Panel 3: Close up on 18-year-old girl, smiling, as she talks with some friends. Friends don't have to be shown but at least their shoulders and some hair should be in the frame. Total epitome of the beautiful high school girl that everyone wanted but few got. This is Pamela.

4. NARRATION: To the surprise of everyone she said yes, which was the biggest thing that could happen to a kid like me.

Panel 4: This panel is a side-by-side full body comparison of the two; Neil and Pamela. She's "perfect" while he's the stereotypical nerdy mess. (The narration splits per side via semi-colon. Stuff about Pamela on her side, stuff about Neil on his. Last narration bridges gap between sides.)

5. NARRATION: She was gorgeous and had the well-to-do nuclear family; I was the kid from a broken home who struggled to eat five days a week.

6. NARRATION: She was popular for existing; I was popular in rumors of horrid things I'd supposedly done that never happened.

7. NARRATION: In high school we practice ostracization as if it were a religion. Services mandatory.

Panel 5: Neil is elated. Jocks are behind him, scowls on their faces, but he hasn't a care as he strolls by. One is John Pickers, who appears a few times later on. He's the BMOC, letter jacket, perfect hair, and the works. Total stereotype.

8. NARRATION: I spent the next few days a mix of emotion. Elated for the chance to have a beautiful girl seen in public with me.

9. JOHN PICKERS: grrrrrr

Panel 6: POV is from behind Neil but to the side enough we can see the side of his face. He is in his bedroom, looking out at the night sky through a window, and homework on a desk. He is worried.

10. NARRATION: Fearful that this was going to be *Carrie: Revisited*, a plot to destroy me publicly.

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FOUR (FOUR PANELS, SIDE-BY-SIDE VERTICAL SPLIT)

Panel 1: All panes on this page are split: one showing Pamela and Neil doing different things to get ready for prom. L(ef) is Pamela, R(ight) is Neil. Each pane also has a desk calendar date on it that ticks off the days.

L: Pamela is buying a pretty but expensive prom dress. Perhaps show a high price tag hanging off of it. Date: OCT 12th

R: Boy is digging a ditch. He is filthy, stink lines coming off of him. Date: MAY 3rd

1. NARRATION L: Her family having wealth mine was envious of, she had bought her dress earlier in the year.
2. NARRATION R: I was working odd jobs around her neighborhood to afford a tux rental.

Panel 2: L: Pamela's parents are presenting her with a receipt for a limo rental. Date: NOV 8th

R: Boy is scrubbing dumpsters behind a building. Date: MAY 4th

3. NARRATION L: Her parents were renting a limo
4. NARRATION R: while I was scrubbing dumpsters to trade out for a hotel room because, really, if you had one chance you'd take it, right?

Panel 3: L: Pamela is applying makeup. Date: MAY 15th

R: Boy is washing an expensive car. Date: MAY 15TH

5. NARRATION L: Ulterior motives? I'm not ashamed to admit I had them. If you ever were into girls in high school you know you were planning the same thing.
6. NARRATION R: Or at least thinking about it in your nightly masturbatory schemes.

Panel 4: L: Pamela is on the phone, happy and pretty and clean. Date: MAY 30TH

R: Boy is on the phone, apprehensive and dirty and disheveled. Date: MAY 30TH

7. NARRATION L: She insisted I meet her parents before the actual night.
8. NARRATION R: I spent the next four hours cleaning up, which was more time spent on myself than had been spent before.

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FIVE (FIVE PANELS)

Panel 1: Neil is shown in the mirror, shaving

1. CAPTION: THE DINNER
2. NARRATION: Whatever facial hair I had went away

Panel 2: Neil is still in front of the mirror, carefully planning where scissors are going for the next cut of his hair.

3. NARRATION: I trimmed my hair as much as I could to make it presentable

Panel 3: Neil is cleaning his clothes by hand, using an old scrubbing brush, in a laundry room. A sign on the washer & dryer says "BROKEN – DO NOT USE"

4. NARRATION: spent two hours cleaning my clothes by hand

Panel 4: Neil is pacing back and forth (motion lines) with consternation shown on his face. His mother is sewing his clothes by hand.

5. NARRATION: and pacing while my mother patched the holes in them.
6. MOTHER: ...and make sure to say "Please" and "Thank you"
7. MOTHER (CONT): don't wipe your mouth on your sleeve
8. MOTHER (CONT): elbows off the table...
9. NEIL: *skull & crossbones, tornado, etc above his head to show frustration*

Panel 5: Neil, Pamela, and Pamela's parents are having dinner in an elaborate dining room with hired help standing around. Neil looks nervous, Pamela is smiling, Father is stern and looking at Neil with a piercing side gaze, Mother has a fake happy face on.

10. NARRATION: It went well enough; even though I knew her parents believed this a momentary distraction for their princess.

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SIX (FOUR PANELS)

Panel 1: Close up on Neil and Pamela at the dining table. We see a large thought bubble that takes up almost the whole frame. Pamela is constantly smiling in these. Neil should be small at the bottom. This is the theme for all panels on this page. B means Bubble.

B: Pamela and her parents are dressed to the nines, walking by Neil. Neil is a beggar on the street with rags for clothes and an almost destroyed cup begging for change. Faces on Mother & Father are uppity, noses in the air. Pamela is smiling overly sweet as she drops a dime in his cup. Show the dime falling but not entering the cup.

1. NARRATION: She was being nice to the kid who wasn't as privileged as they were, making points for college admissions.

Panel 2: Neil's face is a bit sadder at the bottom of the panel.

B: Pamela is in a humane society adoption type setting with her parents. Parents have the same look on their faces as previous panel bubble. Pamela is pressed against a glass cage, smiling large. Neil is inside the glass cage, looking dejected and sad. There are various glass cages throughout the background showing other male and female teenagers in them in various emotional states from sad to happy to disinterested to trying to get Pamela's attention. Big banner says "Adopt-a-Loser Event Today"

2. NARRATION: Adopt-a-loser. One hundred points.

3. PAMELA (B): This one!

Panel 3: Neil's face looks even sadder at the bottom of the panel.

B: Pamela & parents are at the front of a college entrance. An older man, Dean of the college is there (a button on his breast saying "DEAN" to denote as much), shaking her hand, welcoming her. Parents have uppity smiles of contentment. Pamela is the same.

4. NARRATION: Welcome to Yale, admission stamped and guaranteed.

Panel 4: We pull back a bit and see that the thought bubble is coming from Father, not Neil. Father has a look of fantastical longing on his face. Mother and Pamela are still as they were; Pamela smiling and Mother with fake happy face on. Neil is still sad, now playing with the food on his plate listlessly.

B: An older Pamela is at a podium, big smile, and arms in the air Nixon style. Words stating "1st President of Earth" are big above her head. Her parents are behind her and to the side, the first true smiles of happiness on their faces we've seen.

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SEVEN (TWO PANELS, HALF PAGE EACH)

Panel 1: Page wide panel showing progression of events. Make height to half page.

Neil is mowing the lawn in front of his dilapidated house, sweaty but determined

Limo is in Neil's driveway and Pamela is exiting, the driver holding the door; the lawn is all cut and Neil is nowhere to be seen

Pamela meets Neil's mother; Mother is ecstatic. Pamela has a handbag (this is important).

Neil pins corsage on Pamela, his face nervous as he does so. Neil is wearing a white sport coat and has a pink carnation in the breast pocket because, yes, that song just played and it fits.

Limo leaves, Mother is at the front door waving, Neil & Pamela's hands are outside the window waving

(Narration text fits with each event)

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 1. CAPTION: | PROM PROMISES |
| 2. NARRATION: | I made sure the front of the house was looking as good as it could be. |
| 3. NARRATION: | She picked me up in the limo. |
| 4. NARRATION: | She met my mother. |
| 5. MOTHER: | OHMYGODSOCUTE! |
| 6. NARRATION: | I pinned the corsage with no collateral damage done. |
| 7. NARRATION: | Then we went to the most fateful night of our lives. |

Panel 2: Same style as above.

Teenagers dawdling around a prom, banner proclaiming "Senior Prom", subtitled "6pm-10pm". Music notes floating about.

Teenagers slow dancing with six inches between them. An elderly matron is standing watch with a scold on her face and her arms crossed, a measuring tape unraveled to 6.5 inches in her hand.

Clock showing early time (7pm) as some teenagers leave bright eyed

Clock showing late time (10:45pm) as some teenagers leave weary

Pamela whispering into Neil's ear, clock showing 8:15pm. Neil has a look of amazement on his face

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 8. NARRATION: | The dance itself was nothing special. |
| 9. NARRATION: | Most everyone dawdled around |
| 10. NARRATION: | Some slow danced with the requisite six inches between them and an Enforcer hovering |
| 11. NARRATION: | Some left early |
| 12. NARRATION: | and some stayed late. |
| 13. NARRATION: | Pamela and I left midway, her having whispered in my ear: |
| 14. PAMELA (whispering): | I'm going to make your dreams come true. |

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EIGHT (FIVE PANELS)

Panel 1: Pamela and Neil walking in a small town downtown setting, down a sidewalk. It's nighttime, full moon. Her arm is in his, her cheek rested upon his shoulder. She is smiling large with love. He's relaxed and accepting that he has found love.

1. NARRATION: My shoulder felt as if it could burn off from the heat of her cheek rested upon it.

2. NARRATION: She smiled so big the radiance lit our way.

Panel 2: Same shot except from behind and they're farther down the sidewalk. We see the HOTEL sign in the distance and the moon in the sky.

3. NARRATION: The moon, full as if we were living in a paperback, could have taken the night off if it had wanted.

Panel 3: Side view as the pair walks towards the check-in of the hotel. Remember, they're all smiles and in love.

4. NARRATION: She was all the light I needed.

Panel 4: The couple enters the hotel room, scene is from inside the room facing the door as they enter; Pamela is inside the room while Neil is pulling the key from the door. It's nice but nothing grand.

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Panel 5: Pamela and Neil are on the bed. Near Pamela's side of the bed is a table (not an end table); her shoes, accessories, corsage and handbag are on it. Her handbag is open and pair of sneakers are poking out. He is down to his shirt and pants. She has her knees up to her chest, laughing, hand on her forehead. He's lying next to her, laughing as well.

5. NARRATION: We spent an hour chatting about things we saw at the prom.

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NINE (FOUR PANELS)

Panel 1: All the following panels take place at the prom.

One teenage male is punching another. The one being punched is going down. A teenage girl is trying to stop the puncher from punching but is too late.

1. NARRATION: Kenny Grant getting punched out for making a move on Tom Morrison's girl

Panel 2: Male teenager, even more nerdy and unwanted than main character. Male is puking on a female teenager's dress. Female teenager, pretty but not glamorous, is furious.

2. NARRATION: Eddie Baker trying to find anyone to dance with only to puke on the dress of the girl once he'd succeeded

Panel 3: A Goth girl is crowned Prom Queen on a stage. Her face is a mix of amazement and distrust.

3. NARRATION: We laughed uproariously when the local goth girl Feronia was crowned Prom Queen.

Panel 4: Jock teenager, all perfectly groomed, with a look of disgusted shock on his face as he stares at the Goth girl on the stage.

4. NARRATION: We weren't laughing at Feronia at all. We were laughing at the look on John Pickers' face...

5. NARRATION: ...when he realized he wouldn't be standing with Pamela.

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TEN (FIVE PANELS)

Panel 1: Back to the hotel. Neil and Pamela are kissing, her leaning over him.

1. NARRATION: Eventually we moved to the reason we were there and I can tell you it was glorious.

Panel 2: Neil is taking off his shirt. Pamela’s dress straps are below her shoulders, on her upper arms.

2. NARRATION: Sure, there was the usual stumbling of those who hadn’t done it before...

Panel 3: Neil is now topless, on top of Pamela. His hand is on her hair; pulling it accidentally, she is grimacing.

3. NARRATION: ...but we made it work...

4. PAMELA: Ow! My hair!

5. NEIL (small): sorry

Panel 4: Outside the hotel room, the curtains are drawn but the light is on. No shadows of the two show in the curtained window.

6. NARRATION: ...and when it worked we both enjoyed it.

Panel 5: Pull out farther. We see the hotel on the right of the panel and a convenience store across the street on the left, blocked from street level view by a stonewall. A man is walking to the entrance of the convenience store.

7. NARRATION: We weren’t looking to get married or even have a long relationship.

8. NARRATION: We just wanted to enjoy each other’s company in the moment we had created.

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ELEVEN (SIX PANELS)

Panel 1: Pamela is getting up from the bed and pulling her dress up; Neil is tying a condom off over the opening of a trashcan. Boxers or briefs, your choice.

1. CAPTION: CRACKLING AFTERGLOW
2. PAMELA: Be right back
3. PAMELA (CONT): have to use the bathroom.
4. NEIL: Okay.
5. NEIL (CONT): I'll see what's on TV?

Panel 2: Neil is lying on a hastily remade bed, TV remote in his hands as he is flipping channels.

6. NARRATION: I scoured channels, not really looking for anything to watch.
7. NARRATION: I was biding time until she came back.

Panel 3: Pamela is back in the frame, putting her sneakers on. The back of her dress isn't zipped. Neil has a worried look on his face.

8. NEIL: Wha..?
9. PAMELA: Don't worry; I'm not leaving you. I'm going across the street.
10. PAMELA (CONT): I need something to drink, maybe a snack. You want anything?

Panel 4: Neil is sitting on the foot of the bed, zipping the back of Pamela's dress.

11. NEIL: Do you want me to go with you?
12. PAMELA: It's only going to take a few minutes, then I'll be back and we can *enjoy* ourselves again.
13. NEIL: Okay...

Panel 5: Pamela is in front of the hotel room door, it's open behind her. She is putting the corsage on her wrist. Neil is standing in front of her. She is smiling at him.

14. PAMELA: For good luck.

Panel 6: Same as previous panel except the door is closed and Pamela is gone.

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TWELVE (SIX PANELS)

Panel 1: Neil is lying on the bed watching TV.

1. NARRATION: I stayed on that bed for what felt like an hour before going to the bathroom myself.

Panel 2: Neil is in the bathroom, washing his face in the mirror.

2. NARRATION: I washed up, folded my clothes and put them in the dresser under the TV.

Panel 3: Neil is lying on the bed again, this time the TV is off. He has the look of someone lost in deep thought. (For the rest of the panels on this page and all of the next, change the lighting around as you see fit.)

3. NARRATION: I scoured channels some more, eventually turning the TV off.

Panel 4: Same as previous panel.

4. NARRATION: I took in the silence, flashing back to the acts her and I had performed

5. NARRATION (CONT): wondering if after tonight we'd continue or just make it a wonderful memory to look back on.

Panel 5: Same as previous panel.

6. NARRATION: Something to smile about in our old age and make our future spouses wonder what we were thinking about

7. NARRATION (CONT): when that bit of wistfulness would spread across our faces.

Panel 6: Same as previous, except the look on his face is one of insecurity.

8. SFX: **CRACK!**

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THIRTEEN (FIVE PANELS)

Panel 1: Same as previous except Neil is cocking his head to one side to listen, trying to discern the sound.

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Panel 2: Same as previous except Neil is cocking his head to the other side to listen, trying to discern the sound.

NO COPY

Panel 3: Same as previous except Neil is sitting still on the bed, no emotion.

NO COPY

Panel 4: Same as previous except Neil's face is one of shock and concern.

1. SFX:

CRACK!

Panel 5: Same as previous except it's just the bed. Neil isn't in the frame.

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FOURTEEN (SIX PANELS)

Panel 1: View from inside the hotel room looking out the window. Neil is holding the drape closest to the door open, looking out in the parking lot; all he sees are cars.

1. NARRATION: I couldn't tell what the sound was through the door, and all I saw...

Panel 2: Same as previous except Neil's head is facing in a different direction.

2. NARRATION: were silent cars belonging to students we were feet away from earlier...

3. NARRATION (CONT): the rest owned by a bunch of Lomans on business trips.

Panel 3: Same as previous except Neil has his face pressed against the glass, his free hand up to the side of his eyes, as if trying to get a better view by blocking the light that exists.

4. NARRATION: Maybe some tech guys in for conferences opting for cheaper accommodations.

Panel 4: Same shot as previous but the drape is closed; Neil is no longer in front of the window.

5. NARRATION: More than likely one or two not-married-to-each-other adult couples committing the same acts Pamela and I had.

Panel 5: Neil is sitting on the foot of the bed, looking towards the door. Staring at it.

6. NEIL (THOUGHT): She'll will be back soon.

7. NEIL (CONT): She'll let me know what's going on.

Panel 6: Close-up on Neil's face. He is worried.

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FIFTEEN(SIX PANELS)

Panel 1: Cross-section of Neil's head, showing us his inner thoughts. This is for the next three panels. Move around to show different perspectives of Neil's cross-sectioned head: left profile, front center, right profile.

In his brain we see a car backfiring.

1. SFX: **CRACK!**

Panel 2: In his brain we see a large, dying tree branch breaking.

2. SFX: **CRACK!**

Panel 3: In his brain we see a shadow of a drunk person cast on the stonewall. A bottle is shattering on the shadowed portion of the wall.

3. SFX: **CRACK!**

Panel 4: We're back in the room. Neil is pulling his clothes out from the dresser that's under the TV.

4. NARRATION: I couldn't wait any longer and got dressed, making sure I grabbed the key to the room.

Panel 5: Neil is walking in-between the cars in the parking lot, looking at one as he passes. The stonewall is at the other end of the parking lot.

5. NARRATION: No one was around, least of all Pamela.

6. NEIL (THOUGHT): She should've been back by now...

7. NARRATION: I made my way to the convenience store.

Panel 6: From in front of Neil: Neil is walking beyond the stonewall into the street. Flashing lights of red and blue cross his face and the wall. His face is stoic; nothing has registered yet.

8. NARRATION: I never heard them approach. It didn't even make sense. Why would the cops and an ambulance be there?

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SIXTEEN (FOUR PANELS)

Panel 1: Long shot. Neil is walking across the street towards the convenience store. Two police cruisers and an ambulance are at the front, parked askew. Two EMTs are working on a person near the front door. A cop is talking to a clerk.

1. CAPTION: CONVENIENTLY DEADLY

Panel 2: Neil walks through the following panels. We only see his body, never his face, he's out of focus, the way a person in a horrible situation feels like they're not really there. We're more focused on the background/foreground.

This panel is from behind Neil. We're focused on the EMTs in the distance; one is doing chest compression as the other counts out.

2. EMT 2: One...

3. EMT 2(CONT): two...

4. EMT 2(CONT): three...

Panel 3: From the right side of Neil. We see the cop talking to the clerk. Cop is female; her name is Lucy (put that on a name tag on her shirt near her badge). Clerk is your run of the mill convenience store clerk. Lucy is taking notes, the clerk is freaked out but telling her stuff.

5. LUCY: ...and then?

6. CLERK: Dude pulled a gun, demanded cash, then shot twice before I could do anything!

Panel 4: From the front. The EMT is still doing compression on the body, his partner counting. Neil is a few feet behind them now.

7. NARRATION: My voice stuck in my throat as the inevitable fear of loss crept in.

8. EMT 1: unf

9. EMT 2: One...

10. EMT 1 (CONT): unf

11. EMT 2 (CONT): two...

12. EMT 1 (CONT): **unf**

13. EMT 2 (CONT): three...

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SEVENTEEN (SIX PANELS)

Panel 1: Close up on Neil’s eyes. They’re extremely wide and staring right at the reader. He’s freaking out.

1. NARRATION: I can’t tell you if I screamed...

Panel 2: Same as Panel 1, but his eyes looking to his left.

2. NARRATION: ...cried...

Panel 3: Same as Panel 1, but his eyes looking to his right.

3. NARRATION: ...or broke down as sound and cognitive reason disappeared from my world.

Panel 4: From Neil POV, looking down on the EMTs. The one that was doing compressions has stopped, his gloved hands on his thighs, head bowed. The other one is checking his watch. We see the corsage hand of Pamela next to the EMT checking his watch; there is blood on it.

4. NARRATION: All my mind could process was the corsage...

5. EMT 2: Calling it...

Panel 5: From Neil POV, looking at the convenience store door for the first time. Blood is caked on the broken glass. The blood trails to where Pamela’s body is.

6. NARRATION: ...the blood...

Panel 6: Same as Panel 4. Difference is that the EMT who had his hands on his thighs now has a clipboard and is writing on a sheet.

7. NARRATION: ...and the EMTs, marking something on paperwork before putting their gear away.

8. EMT 2: ...we’ll transport to the hospital for ID.

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EIGHTEEN (SIX PANELS)

Panel 1: Each panel on this page should be blurry with only certain elements in focus. The idea is that we're seeing this through the eyes of someone who has been crying. All of them are from Neil's POV. The setting and element of focus will be stated in panel description.

Neil is in the back of a police cruiser, door open, Lucy leaning on the door. (If you couldn't fit her name badge next to her police badge before, now would be a great time to add it in.) Only Lucy's badges are in focus.

1. NARRATION: I remember the back of a police cruiser.
2. LUCY: We'll take you to-

Panel 2: A hospital room. Not the medical kind, but the small rooms they have for family and friends to meet with hospital personnel about the dying/deceased the family and friends have come to visit/brought in. Pamela's father and mother are in focus.

3. NARRATION: A room at the hospital.

Panel 3: (Neil is sitting in a chair next to the wall looking in the following panels; adjust the perspective.) Pamela's parents and Neil's mother arguing in a hospital hall. Neil's mother is pointing her finger at Pamela's father angrily. Neil's mother is the only one in focus.

4. NARRATION: Pamela's parents and my mother arguing in the hall.

Panel 4: Nurses walking by, one is looking directly at him, her face the only thing in focus. She has no emotion.

5. NARRATION: Flashes of nurses, doctors...

Panel 5: A hospital employee with a food cart pushing it past, not looking at Neil. Food trays on the cart are in focus.

6. NARRATION: and other hospital personnel coming and going in a broken rhythm.

Panel 6: No longer POV, we are close up on Neil's eyes. Everything is blurred except the tears coming from them, streaming down his cheeks.

7. NARRATION: A song trying to be sung but never coming together.

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NINETEEN (FOUR PANELS)

Panel 1: A funeral. It's daytime. Sunny. Neil, his mother, Pamela's parents and Lucy the Cop are there. Coffin is above ground in the cemetery blocking all named participants from hips down. No hands are showing due to the coffin. Neil and Pamela's mother have tears. Pamela's father is emotionless. All are dressed in normal funeral attire, Lucy in full funeral dress uniform.

1. CAPTION: SWIMMING STYX

2. NARRATION: I'd like to say it was a beautiful service but everything I saw was under water...

3. NARRATION: and everything I heard was a thousand miles away.

Panel 2: Neil is larger in the frame, from torso up. His head is a bit lower; tears still coming, stern sadness on his face. Multiple ghosts of hands/arms are around his shoulders, some wrapped from one to the next, and others just resting on one shoulder or the other. The coffin top is at the bottom of the frame but being lowered. Neil's mother is no longer there.

4. NARRATION: Hands momentarily rested upon my shoulder bore no weight.

Panel 3: Same as previous panel except the ghost hands/arms are now around his torso and neck in various hugs. The coffin top is almost completely gone from the bottom of the frame. Pamela's parents are gone now.

5. NARRATION: Shorts hugs were too long and long hugs were too short.

Panel 4: Same as previous except ghost hands/arms and the coffin are gone from the frame. We see Neil is holding the bloodstained corsage tight in both hands. He is standing all alone.

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All characters must be diverse. No whitewashing. This includes foreground and background characters. Unless a character is specified a certain race/status, be diverse.

TWENTY (FIVE PANELS)

Panel 1: Graduation on a high school football field, POV is from behind so that we see the stands. The class is on folding chairs on the field, parents in the stands watching. It's night; stars are out, spotlights are on John Pickers (Page 9, Panel 4) as he is at the podium delivering a speech. Flashes of cameras from the parents in the stands are random.

1. CAPTION: CONGRADUATION
2. NARRATION: A month later, graduation came. That's when it happened.
3. NARRATION: John Pickers was delivering the farewell speech and mentioned Pamela.

Panel 2: We turn away from the stands, zooming down the aisle, and focus on Neil. He's a few rows back but seated on the aisle, with a look of hateful anger on his face.

4. NARRATION: He was dedicating his speech
5. NARRATION: his life
6. NARRATION: his career
7. NARRATION: to her.

Panel 3: Tighter on Neil. Rage is on his face now.

8. NARRATION: I silently raged in my seat, wishing for the sky to fall upon him.
9. NARRATION: He deserved death far more than Pamela ever had. The hell he had put me, and others, through for four years...

Panel 4: We move behind Neil's head, just to the point we can still see the side of his face. He's looking at the starry sky.

10. NARRATION: I let the rage subside. Nothing would come of harming him. Nothing good.
11. NARRATION: I looked at the night, with a million stars yet nary a cloud, and just stared at them as John droned on.

Panel 5: We move past Neil's head and are seeing just the sky. Random stars are shining brighter than others.

12. NARRATION: I thought about old myths. One in particular that said each soul would rise from the body
13. NARRATION: and become a star in the sky, then wondered which one could be hers.

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TWENTY-ONE (FIVE PANELS)

Panel 1: We're moving fast through the universe, starlight streaking by, as we focus on one star in the center of the frame.

1. NARRATION: My gaze landed upon a particularly bright one and chose that one to be her. I talked to it.

Panel 2: We're stationary around the star. An outline of Pamela's smiling face is forming in front of it.

2. NARRATION: Telling it how I wanted a hundred things to have been different but mostly wishing...

3. NARRATION: ...wishing I could live it again.

Panel 3: Pamela's smiling face has completely replaced the star in space.

4. NARRATION: Live the happiness we had created with each other.

5. NARRATION: Live the hope that had been conceived that night.

6. NARRATION: But mostly to stop her from leaving...

Panel 4: Pamela, full body, now in the frame. She has her prom dress on, arms stretched out towards the reader as if she were telling them to come to her, smile still on her face.

7. NARRATION: ...at least for a little bit.

8. NARRATION: Long enough to miss the robber.

9. NARRATION: Long enough for the robber's bullets to miss her.

Panel 5: Pamela is puckered for a kiss, her face filling the frame, eyes closed.

10. NARRATION: Unfortunately that star granted my wish.

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TWENTY-TWO (SPLASH PAGE COLLAGE)

Panel 1: This is a splash collage. We're going to replay certain events from this story. The background/overall image is Neil's face with a starry background, but faded just enough to allow the memories to be shown. His face is shock; the kind of shock where realization/information overload happens. The events depicted all over his face are (feel free to use different versions/shots of these scenes):

- Asking Pamela out
- Cleaning the dumpsters
- Meeting Pamela's parents
- The prom
- Sex/Love with Pamela at the hotel
- The bloody corsage at the convenience store
- The funeral

Narration to be placed over this:

1. NARRATION: I now spend my days reliving that night.
2. NARRATION: Except I've learned, after thousands of repeats, that I can't change anything.
3. NARRATION: It all happens the same as it had before.
4. NARRATION: The worst part? I don't know it's repeating until I see that star.
5. NARRATION: In that moment everything becomes clear, all the memories come back, and I know...
6. NARRATION: ...I know I'm going to be stuck in this infinite loop of sadness once more.

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TWENTY-THREE (SPLASH PAGE)

Panel 1: This is a replay of the opening splash page, except I want to add cracks throughout the sky, as if broken glass, signifying that Neil is starting to break out of the cycle.

1. NARRATION: Jiminy Cricket sang about them in that movie, the one with the wooden boy who gained a soul after acting like an ass.
2. NARRATION: Throughout childhood music teachers kept telling us how much they twinkled, over and over, until we almost believed as we sang odes to them.
3. NARRATION: We learned how to make one on paper with a single, continuous line as if their magic could never be broken.
4. NARRATION: We put them on our flags, deign our popular citizens to encompass their name and are led to believe they'll always show us the way.

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TWENTY-FOUR (FOUR PANELS)

Panel 1: A replay of the second page. This time we're stopping at four panels and changing/adding one thing to the last panel. We're also changing most narration. More cracks appear during each panel.

Neil stares at the reader. He has a look of forced lucidity upon him. Shot is tight upon his face. He isn't the best looking guy but not ugly either; average poorer kid trying to rise above his station in life.

1. CAPTION: THE ANSWER
2. NARRATION: I hate them. They ruined my life all because I decided, in a moment of sadness, to wish upon one.

Panel 2: We're outside of a high school, banners across the front announcing SENIOR PROM. Various kids and faculty are coming and going, cars pulled to a stop and some pulling away.

3. NARRATION: I'm now stuck in a moment with no chance of moving on with my life.

Panel 3: Close up on Pamela, smiling. Total epitome of the beautiful high school girl that everyone wanted but few got.

4. NARRATION: I don't get to fondly look back upon one night of happiness and let a wistful smile overtake my countenance.

Panel 4: POV is from behind Neil but at an angle we can still see the side of his face. He is in his room, looking out at the night sky through his paneled window, and homework on a desk. He is worried. A single star shines bright through the window. The panes on the window are cracked, matching the cracks of the last two pages; nothing else in the panel is cracked.

5. NARRATION: I only get to curse that star...
6. NARRATION: ...for one infinitesimal moment...
7. NARRATION: ...just like it has cursed me.

THE END