

# Futility college essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

A pair of crows caws angrily as a deftly aimed conker strikes the branch beneath them. Beady eyes track a mop of shaggy brown hair as it bobs, playfully, into the bushes. As it disappears under the foliage, they wing off into the wind, leaving a single, glossy black feather drifting towards the ground below.

As the feather approaches the ground, buffeted by the curling wisps of air, it is ignored by the boy. Dressed in a pair of old jeans and a grey jacket, hood hanging uselessly from his back, he looks in his late teens, certainly too old to be playing with conkers in the woods, anyway. He is rummaging around in the undergrowth, searching for more ammunition. There's not many around yet, the few that have fallen are still firmly encased in their spiny shells.

Through the bushes comes a gentle gurgling, the inviting noises of a cool, clear brook.

As he approaches the water, rustling leaves parting before his searching, something seems to catch his eye. A glint. Something shiny, half-buried in the mud of the riverbank. The boy moves to dig it out, wiping years of dirt from its uneven surface. It's a badge, and seems to have been lying in the earth for some time, it's scratched and worn.

As the boy runs his finger along its edge, he notices a design, embossed into the head. A crow, beak open, wings spread, as if just on the verge of taking flight. One might have thought it would fly off the metal, with its detailed plumage and the twinkle in its eyes. Somehow, this design seemed familiar. He's seen it, a long time ago..

. Hiking. So long ago, a blissful summer afternoon, with playful breezes nudging along the occasional white puff of cloud as the boy, much younger, stumbled along the rocky path, the verdant vistas of the Appalachians rolling out below. The father had taken them on a family hike, cool green light filtering on their faces as they pushed on towards the peaks of the hills ahead. Each ladybird that was passed received a thorough inspection, to the merriment of the parents waiting on the road ahead.

The mother was struggling a little, helped by the father; she was feeling uncomfortable with the growing baby inside her. The boy runs to catch up, retreating to the comfort of his father's hand until he sees the crest of the hill, and dashes ahead to examine the cliff edge. Panting, he reaches the top, and drinks in the panorama around him. The forests extend ahead him, fresh and inviting, as the river plummets from the peak of a distant mountain, leaping over cliffs and snaking through valleys in its ultimate path towards the sea. Nearer, it roars below, spraying the rocks and those plants tough enough to survive on the cliffside.

He sees a nest, resting on a branch a little way below, and begins to make his way down, ignoring the protests behind him. Slowly, carefully, he inches his way along the ledge until the prize is tantalizingly near, reaching inside to scoop out its contents...Suddenly he is grabbed on the shoulder.

His father furious, takes him up and begins to make his way back to the safety of the clifftop, despite the angry screams of frustration of the boy behind him. A hand reaches over the edge to try and help them up, but it is too far, just too far. Further and further they reach, trying to connect..

. Thud. A small pebble strikes the boy's head from above. Helplessly he watches as one, then two, and then three more dislodge themselves and tumble past him into the raging current below. Frozen with a chilling realization of the inevitable, he stands, mute, as the mother slips from her precarious perch and falls screaming past him and his father, further and further until she is swallowed by the white torrent.

As she falls, there is a stunned silence from the cliffside, with two gazes powerlessly following her down. Later, the boy sits beside the water, uncomfortable on the rocky ground, as the rain begins to fall, droplets splashing into the stream. His father and some police are retrieving the body from the reddened water. He has been largely ignored, his father taking the shock in stoic silence.

Retrieving the object from the nest, he fingers it, rubbing its shiny metal. It is cold to the touch, tempering the burning guilt inside. His mother died because he was too stupid to listen, too foolhardy to care. With a cry of disgust, he throws the badge down into the water, watching it get swept away downstream. Returning to his father's side, they stand in the building rain, sheltering under his coat as they watch the double corpse leave wrapped up on the back of a truck.

The boy returns from his reverie, staggered by the sudden recall. Since then, he's grown ever more distant from his father, withdrawing into his lingering guilt. He knows his father blames him for their loss, and he does as well. Why would anyone take him, a lonely teenager searching for the childhood he threw away, over two others who could have made other happy? He's

become lost in a mire of remorse, dismissing any and all opportunities he had. Returning home, he hears laughter from the window. Peering through, he sees his father, having dinner with a woman.

He's smiling, one of few times since the incident. Suddenly, his shame tightens into a resolve. He carefully places the badge in front of the door, and then stalks back out to the forest. Pushing on and on, as the light fades, for hours, until he reaches the cliff of years gone by. Silently he returns to the edge, and strides over unceremoniously.

The height rushes past, until it runs out and the world goes black. The next morning, the father discovers the badge outside his door. He grabs his coat and rushes towards the mountains. As he leaves, a lone crow, perched on the tree nearby, caws his departure to the world.