Exercise #13

You can tell a person’s character by the way they knock. A timid knock generally indicates a timid person: a knock so faint, you question whether there was any sound at all. A light-hearted person will approach the door with ease, creating his own individual “rap-rap-rap” each time he or she raises a hand to the wood. And the worst of all is the demented knock: so loud, it could cause your eardrums to bang right out of your ears, and so filled with intent that the only possible outcome on the other side of the door is bad. And as I sat on the floor of my room, hearing the wood of my door crack like a tree in a summer’s storm, I held myself and wished that the twisted knock did not belong to my brother.

Things generally escalated pretty quickly when we got into fights, but never as bad as this. He’s always been bigger than me, but I’ve always been smarter than him, so I managed to match his physical strength with my wit. But as I saw the hinges of my door start to crack from the post, I knew wit could no longer save me from this one.

It had all started with a simple phone conversation. I was at the tender age when talking on the phone was cool, and I was in the middle of an intense discussion over which boys had cooties and which boys did not when I saw the familiar hunched shadow out of the corner of my eye.

“Sarah, I need to use the phone,” said a pubescent voice from the entry to my room.

“Use your cell phone, and get out of my room,” I said without turning, immediately continuing my conversations with my friends.

“But I need to call Dad,” his voice grew stronger, and I felt the hair rise on his neck.

“So…use your cell phone,” although I may have known he was bigger than me, I was never short on sass.

“Sarah, hang up the phone.”

“Use your cell phone.”

“Sarah, hang up the phone.”

“No, I’m talking to my friends.”

“Sarah, hang up the fucking phone.”

“Get out of my room!” I yelled, moving to him as ferociously as my nine-year old body could muster. I managed to push him to the outskirts of the door and slam it shut, and twist the lock before a storm of knocks banged on the door. And then, it was silent. I was safe for a while, but in silence, there is anticipation for sound. And in my case, sound meant danger.

Not too late after, I heard the familiar grunt.

“Sarah, hang up the damn phone.” I ignored him. “Hang up the phone.” And then the lock shaking started. And then the door started shaking. So I did what I normally did, sat down at the bottom of the door, hands pressed to the floor my feet digging into the crème-colored carpet until my heels started to burn. Then, he went away, and once more, I was safe. And, still on the phone. But without much time, he started slamming his body on the door, his large stature making the entire door wiggle. And I yelled for him to stop. I begged him to stop. But he simply pressed into the door and ripped the handle off the door.

Like something out of a *Saw* movie, the door swung open and his figure took over the space my door had once occupied.

“Give me the goddamn phone,” he screamed.

“Use your cell phone!” God, was I stubborn. He decided he had had enough and he started to approach me. I tried to block him, tried to counter his punches and slaps, and kicked him. My left leg went out to debilitate him, but he grabbed it. And there I was, still on the phone, upside down screaming and fearing for my life. He slammed my head on the ground, swooped down to pick up the phone, and left. I ran into my closet. Locked my room door, my bathroom door, my closet door, and cried. I cried because the very moment he started beating me, I no longer saw my brother. I saw a terrible monster that I could never, ever learn to respect. My friends called my house frantically, and my parents shortly received calls from parents reporting bloody murder. I don’t remember his punishment, and I don’t remember mine, but I do remember sadness. My doorknob still won’t lock properly, and every time I’m home, I still fear that my big, bad personal bully will come into my room and kill me. What a terrible, terrible shame.

Exercise #24

(From the Exercise 45)

* Marlene Evans is the sort of person who steals perfume samples at the Clinique counter.
* Marlene Evans is the sort of person to convince soliciting Jehovah’s witnesses to come to the Catholic side of life.
* Marlene Evans is the sort of person who prays out loud for people’s sins in church so they can hear just what it is they’ve done wrong.
* When she was younger, Marlene Evans was the sort of person to collect bird’s eggs and smash them into the ground.
* Marlene Evans was the sort of person who was voted “Most Meticulous” in High School.
* Marlene Evans is the sort of person to frown at babies.
* Marlene Evans is the sort of person who gardens just to watch her neighbors.
* Marlene Evans is the sort of person who believes in God because she’s never known anything different.

Exercise #25

1. Frank Mancini
2. Frankie, Frank, Jersey
3. Male
4. 22
5. He’s a good-looking man, slightly skinny but with broad, muscular shoulders. He’s got a thick brow with dark skin, but mocha-colored hair that make him seem less intense. His eyes look like a sunburst, a mix of brown and auburn and gold. But his best feature is his smile, large and warm.
6. He’s currently majoring in English at USC.
7. He’s a student, although he works part time down at the library.
8. He doesn’t have a lot of money, and most of his tuition is covered by scholarships, but he makes ends meet.
9. He dates girls, yeah, but education is still most important.
10. His mother still lives in Santa Monica, and he visits her at least once a month. The Italian breed still run through his blood although he doesn’t sound like them and certainly doesn’t dress likes them.
11. He doesn’t have an accent, although he does still use words from the surf buddies he used to hang around.
12. He has all kinds of different friends: being raised in a diverse area of town and then going to private school makes you appreciate all kinds of people. However, he still doesn’t mix with the blacks. Nobody mixes with the blacks.
13. He lives in an off campus house with three other guys. They don’t have cars, but the other guys do have bikes and boards that get them exactly where they need to go.
14. He owns a typewriter and a bike, a treasured watch his mom gave him for graduation, and a briefcase. One good suit hangs in his closet, but the rest is all pretty casual. That’s what Ms. Martin always told him: all you need is one good suit.
15. He likes to play football, and he enjoys surfing, although he’s no good at it. He plays the drums as well, something he picked up in high school but hasn’t really pursued or practiced. Frank also loves to write, and he’s the Editor-In-Chief of USC’s newspaper.
16. He loves T.S Eliot and Hemingway. He loves reading even though he isn’t very fast at it. He keeps all of his books in his closet, a secret gem of literature.
17. He believes there’s a god, that things happen for a reason, and that people are generally good.
18. Frank hates politics. Absolutely hates it.
19. He’s has been down and dirty with a couple of girls, two in high school and one here, who he also dated for three years. But their romances all just fizzled, which is fine for Frank, who despite his love of literature isn’t much for the four-letter word.
20. Eventually, he wants to teach English in a boys’ high school, much like the one he grew up in. A family would be nice, but if it happens, it happens, and if it doesn’t, there’s no harm or foul. He also wants to buy a new house for his mom, somewhere nice where there isn’t very much clean up or house work.
21. He’s a Lutheran, although the rest of his family, aside from his mom and him, are Catholic. His mom just kind of stumbled into the church looking for guidance, Frank on her back, and the people were so nice it just stuck.
22. Frank doesn’t believe in ghosts or ghouls or any of that mumbo jumbo because he believes that everything is rationally connected. After being the child of a single mom with no real reason why his father left, it’s kind of hard to see the fancy anywhere.
23. Frank is afraid of failing his mother, which is perhaps the only reason he does what he does. Certainly, he’s afraid of letting himself down, but when the final judgment comes, it will be momma who’s on his brain.
24. He’s generally a laidback guy, likes to crack jokes here and there but has no problem not being the center of attention. In the classroom he’s rather studious and sits in front because he knows how important it is to get your money’s worth out of everything you do.
25. Sometimes, Frank doesn’t assert himself. He was once a shy guy, which he eventually got over to become laid back. However, in moments of conflict, he simply reverts back into the walls.
26. He’s friendly and understanding. He’s got an unexplained “special” about him, something that people just gravitate to for personal warmth.
27. Frank’s roommates are allergic to cats and dogs, so he has no pets. He also killed all of his goldfish as a kid, so he ruled that out as well.
28. Frank loves the Beatles and the Beach Boys. His favorite book is *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway.
29. Frank doesn’t write a journal, but when he has to for classes, his language is very honest, an endearing quality that echoes in his character.
30. Frank writes letters to his mom weekly. Although most kids his age write for money, he writes to show her how her money is being spent. He loves her very much, and every word drips with careful consideration.
31. Frank’s got nice handwriting. You can still tell it’s a boy’s writing, but the curl of his y’s and the shape of his s’s make it pleasant to look at.
32. Frank’s favorite food is quite simply a hamburger, French fries, and a shake. His mother never cooked much, and when they did eat together, it was always at a fast food restaurant. So for Frank, fast food is his comfort food.
33. Frank is an Aquarius, although it doesn’t mean much to him. The stars aren’t important for him: it’s the big man behind them that counts.
34. Frank has a wonderful skill for teaching. He’s incredibly receptive because he was so shy, so he picks up on certain things that most people would let slip right through their hands.
35. Frank’s oldest friend is still Paul Martin, although they talk less and less every year. He’s got a sturdy group at USC though, Billy, Scottie, and Gene. And Starla. Oh man, Starla: the one girl in his group that can talk like the boys but look nothing like them. At all.
36. Frank talks to his aunts from time to time who still live back in New Jersey. His grandparents are both dead, so his two aunts try to keep the family alive. His one aunt lives alone in Jersey, but the other is married with six kids. They’re the real Italian family: dolled up with dark hair and even darker features. His uncle even wears a gold chain around his neck.
37. Frank doesn’t have any enemies because he’s never really been in personal conflict. Avoidance, as he says, is a survival skill.
38. Frank is the guy that people can talk with on a small scale, but can invite to a party and have a nice time. He’s laid back, but knows when it’s time for business. Over all, Frank is just *nice*.
39. Frank wishes that he would assert himself more and occasionally stick to one of his guns instead of letting him friends walk all over him. Last week they asked for five bucks to buy beers and they still haven’t paid him back. And man does he need that money.
40. Frank has one scar across his left knee, stretching from the inside of his leg all the way to the top of his kneecap. Once when he was a kid he was learning how to ride his bike. His mother wasn’t home, but he was determined, so he hoped on the bike and crashed into a tree, sending him from the bike knee first. Well, his mother wasn’t very happy with him, and he got 200 stitches and a bad story to go with it.
41. Frank doesn’t have any tattoos or piercings. And he never ever will.
42. Frank doesn’t really have a salary because all of the money he earns in the library goes to his tuition. A bummer, but his mom still sends him fifteen bucks a month, which he makes go a long way.
43. In Frank’s fridge there are the usual suspects: beer, cheese, homemade bread from Gene’s mom and a random bag of carrots. His medicine cabinet is near empty because he was blessed with tough Italian blood so he never gets sick.

Exercise #28

(Based off of “the Raccoon Run-In”)

1. At first, Janie just wants to get out of the Scouts. Then, she just wants to get the most badges. Then, she just wants to punch all the Ashley’s in their smug little faces. And finally, she just wants to get out of the Scouts. Overall, however, she just wants to fit into a group as herself, not as an Ashley and not as an other.
2. Once Janie gets into a situation, she’s the kind of kid who doesn’t complain, but just makes the best of what she’s got. So rather than fitting in for herself or to take the Ashley’s down, she does it for her parents and the sad shape her father’s face makes whenever he tells her about the good old days of old. Janie does it to keep her parents happy and her bottom spank-free.
3. Her desire to avoid punishment is found when she stops going to Scouts and instead goes to the art room, which keeps her parents happy because they thought she was still attending scouts. Also, when her mother asks her if she had a good time at camp she responds with yes because yes she did have a good time because she made herself have a good time for her parents. After her father told her what fun he had a camp, why would she want to live that down?
4. Certainly, the actions and the dialogue can be made clearer because it’s rather a narrative of the infuriating story of a girl who has to go to girl scouts. However, most of Janie’s thoughts are internalized, which is how we realize that she is not a deviant girl, just a girl looking to avoid punishment.
5. Her original goals, to enjoy Girl Scouts, camping, and general tomfoolery, were ruined by the Ashley’s existence. They keep her from having fun, and because she wants to avoid getting a beating, she is forced to come up with new ways to avoid them.
6. Her desire to avoid the Ashley’s creates this internal tension that all girls face: do I be catty back or do I smile and wave? Certainly, Janie chooses the higher road, setting back the Ashley’s from completely ruining her character and causing Janie to become a better more competitive person.