

How is this gothic?
You start way too many sentences with "A"
1

(From Chickpocalypse and the Remarkable Praline Redemption Device)

There was a wealthy man who lived on a farm. He had seven grown children, and they all lived independent, productive lives and they all got along swell. One day, because he asked them to, they came out to the farm and helped him plant an orchard of hazelnut trees. It was hard work. And demanding. But nobody got mad at anyone else, and they sang Bavarian folk songs in harmony. Their dog, Esmerelda, lay in the shade and watched them work. She sniffed at the air in that way dogs do that makes you wonder what could be in the air at this moment that's so interesting.

And when the trees were planted the wealthy man's children asked him why he wanted hazelnuts. But he wouldn't tell them, no matter how much they pressed.

"Your father will tell you when he's ready," said the wealthy man's wife, ~~whom~~ people called Mosey.
"He has his ways, and they've worked out very well for this family."

Horace P. Hooper had achieved wealth and notoriety in consumer products. Surely you remember the bean-bammock? Perhaps you have owned one, ~~lost yourself in scrunchity-soft comfort, just as~~ ^{said you would} announcers on television commercials had urged you to do. The bean-bammock was Horace P. Hooper's concept. He built a company around it. Then he sold the company while the fad was at its height and prudently invested the proceeds.

So, it was true. Horace P. Hooper had his ways and they had worked out well for his family. But it's not true that that's what Mosey said about the orchard. She said something else.

It's also not true that his children sang Bavarian folk songs. They lived in the mountain ~~south~~ and they didn't know any. They didn't know any Appalachian folk songs either, and they didn't know how to sing in harmony. Furthermore, the seven people who helped Horace plant that orchard up on the hillside that day weren't even his children. They were grown-up versions of the Von Trapp family singers from the beloved family musical Horace watched on TV with his seven real kids when they were younger, and if you think that children imagine for themselves TV parents, and parents don't imagine for themselves TV children, then just you go out and have some ~~real ones for yourself~~ ^{what mountains} ~~so it's~~ ^{clarif}.

~~It's also not true that Horace's children got along.~~
~~Horace's actual children still lived on the farm, they varied wildly in aptitude and disposition, and they rarely assembled without squabbling. They had in common a degree of industriousness and an unwavering belief that their financial wellbeing was preordained as a matter of birthright, and, unshackled as they were from any concern over their own subsistence, they were free to devote themselves instead to whatever pursuit happened to engage their disparate interests, and to make, at best, only cursory efforts at their own support, and this only so long as such activity validated the aggrandized notions they had of themselves.~~

Horace did his best to understand his children, but it was all he could do to even hear them. His ears were failing him. His children scolded him for failing to take care of himself, but he couldn't hear them do it. He was barely able to participate in conversations with his family, and the most basic points had to be repeated continuously for his benefit. After a family intervention, he finally visited a doctor. He sat in the waiting room ~~ruefully~~ contemplating the years of operating farm equipment and evaluating affairs on his factory floor without ear protection. He hoped his impairment wasn't too far advanced. What the doctor told him horrified him. He could hear just fine. He was only deaf when his family was talking to him.

So the Hooper progeny ignored him back. He gave them money. All were comfortable with that arrangement.

The children busied themselves with matters of self-fulfillment and artistic expression. They applied themselves to furthering causes and glorifying God. Their mother, unlike their father, was an engaged listener, and as they conceived new enterprises and purposes for themselves, they presented them to Mosey for the entertainment value in her disapproval. This she supplied in abundance. Mosey approved of working at an hourly rate. She approved of buying at deep discounts. She approved of suffering privations in the interest of thrift. She did not approve of all this. This distilling of moonshine whiskey, this spreading of the gospel unto all the world, this counterfeiting of designer tomatoes, this harnessing of the mystical power of the earth, this reenacting of civil war battles, this hiking of the Appalachian Trail, this penning of quasi-literal southern gothic fables, this construction of a 30-foot concrete knotty-head fish, this building of a praline redemption device, and these Mosey denounced each after the other as unproductive dalliances that would come to naught but rejection, blindness, lawsuits, blisters, damnation, amputations, avalanches, cease and desist orders, abductions and ruination.

Dinner
Table

~~re write~~ When she was right, ~~which~~ ?? subject at family gatherings, leaving whoever's turn it was no longer entertained by Mosey's disapproval but now abashed and chastened by it, squirming in their seats, defending themselves as best they could, while his or her siblings looked on with not an ounce of commiseration, but rather, with enjoyment and an incongruous sense of vindication.

"It didn't work out the way I wanted it to," said Cletus, Mosey's third, who was learning now to eat with his left arm. "But I am content in knowing that I have stood with my confederate brothers."

"I'd give you every minute of contentment I ever had to save you an arm," said Mosey. "You'd get about 10 of them. They're scarce when you're raising seven young'uns."

"I'll take those 10 minutes!" called Buford.

"If you'll get that still off the farm," she answered.

"Harm's been done already," said Blind Marnie.

"There's contentment for each of us in the state of Texas," declared Tennyson Jack, wisest and comeliest of Mosey's children and her favorite by far. "We can book tours of the Alamo. Maybe someone will get lucky and fall on a bayonet."

"Hush, Jack," Mosey told me.

"Wincy, help Cletus cut his pork chop."

She did not.

Deacon Dan reached for a serving bowl and spooned a portion of what was in it onto his plate. Deacon Dan kept Jesus in his heart and a firearm at his side. He spoke with God and only to God.

"Lord, the way this family carries on," he said.

Settled Left
the dinner
table

Just 2, ↓

"What about you dad?" asked Buford. "You got any contentment to pitch in? If we have to get by on Mosey's, that'll only come to a little over a minute for each of us."

Horace silently consulted the green beans and cornbread on his plate. None expected that he had heard any of this. They were surprised.

"More than 10 minutes," he answered.

Horace had often wondered if it had been a mistake to sell his company. Maybe he should have diversified into new product lines. He was an inventor with 14 patents in his name. He prototyped a number of devices he hoped would make family farms more profitable - a nick-free sheep sheerer, a grape de-seeder. Some of his concepts found themselves in consumer products made by others. Horace wanted to bring something into production under his own direction, so he brought his stub-shaft powered bean harvester and a nine-foot-tall bag of cleanly harvested lima beans to the Chicago Agricultural Expo.

"Come back tomorrow with something simpler," some venture capitalists told him. "Make it telegenic."

He returned the next day with just the sack, only now, the beans in it were of expanded polystyrene, and it was sewn and grommeted on each end and suspended between support structures.

"The bean bammock!" he proclaimed.

He was in production by the end of that fiscal year.

what fiscal year?

When he sold his company, he had thought he'd now become the family man he'd never had time to be before. But that was not the case. His ears were too well trained at not hearing. His checkbook had become too reliable a surrogate for expressing his love. They had lost themselves, all of them had, in scrunchity soft comfort. Horace had allowed this. And worse, he had too often allowed the regret and concern he carried in his heart to hijack the love that was in it before it could find a place in his eyes.

He should have kept his company, he thought. Then there would still be something at the center of this family. There would be something real for them to come together around or fight over. Either way, at least they would have focus.

have had?

Horace P. Hooper was not a contented man. But he didn't go to the Alamo. He planted an orchard. He planted it by himself with a Farmall crop-row tractor. Esmerelda the dog watched and sniffed at the air.

"This," he told his family. "Is something that will continue after I'm gone."

"This," he said. "Is something that can sustain you. All of you. It's something you will all have together."

Here's what Mosey actually said about Horace's orchard:

?

"Hazelnuts aren't worth the bother of getting the shells off. You should have put out some raspberries. The kids could've picked them for pies."

The years passed. Esmerelda grew old and died. New pets came. The children moved away and moved back again. The orchard grew. And, finally, the day came when Horace P. Hooper looked out at his orchard and said, "It's ready."

intro & Grinwald is here.

"Finally," said Blind Marnie. "Now maybe you'll tell us what we're going to do with all those hazelnuts."

"Tomorrow," he said. "When Bandigo gets here."

"Good Lord! Bandigo?" asked Deacon Dan.

"He's coming from Italy."

Then Horace P. Hooper died. *Died dead.*

Only Grimwalt, the ~~new~~ dog, had any idea what was happening. The wind told him. Dried lilies, billowing down and ... something metallic. He lifted his nose, tilted his head just so, and sniffed. Silver. The metallic smell was silver. That was death coming for Horace P. Hooper and Grimwalt could see it.

Dogs can see with their noses, you know. Or, more likely, you don't. You probably think of a dog's nose as an improved version of your own nose. That's true to the same extent it's true that a diamond is an improved version of coal. Your nose is as different from the nose of a dog as it is from the nose of an elephant. More so, in fact, because an elephant's nose is a mere instrument, whereas a dog's nose is an instrument of magic. It gives the air shape. It turns the wind into what you and I might think of as images.

How this works, exactly, is something you can get a dog explain to you if you're one of those rare people who can talk to animals. You're probably not. I know of only two: Blind Marnie is one. She can talk to Ferdinand the Wonder Pig. Buford's son, Wes, is the other. He can talk to any animal who he knows by name. But since I'm not either of them, I can only imagine the air as a sort of stereogram — one of those pictures of patterns that clever computer people embed with a three-dimensional image that you can only see if you look at it with your eyes crossed in just the right way.

Not all dogs are equal in their ability to see images in the air. Some can't see them at all. It takes natural ability, and it takes instruction. Dogs help each other see what's in the air the same way someone might help you see the second image in one of those ambiguous images constructed to be two images at the same time. Someone might help you see that a frog can also be a horse by telling you that the eye of the frog you can see is also the nostril horse you can't see, and then, once you know the eye is a nostril, the horse appears as if by magic.

Esmerelda had taught Grimwalt, just as Grimwalt would teach the next dog. They sat outside the farmhouse one late December night and sampled the fragrances of Christmas.

"Smell the mistletoe and the cinnamon?" Esmerelda asked Grimwalt.

Grimwalt breathed deep.

"Yes," he said.

"That's the antlers on those queer horse-deer things. And the peanut butter balls and Wes's excitement, that's a great big sack."

"I can see them!" cried Grimwalt. "The strange drover and his livestock on the roof!"

"I told you," said Esmerelda. "They're up there any winter solstice that there's a child in the house."

*This needs to be past tense or
put before Horace or
Deacon*

One summer day, they sat for hours and watched historical antiquities promenade from the farmhouse. This was after Mosey told Wincy to clean the kitchen and she did not. The ant colony that found the dishes stacked in the sink became jubilant revolutionaries raiding some museum Wincy had visited on a trip to Europe with her senior class. Vases and basins and urns exited the kitchen, traveled a few feet into the yard and disappeared into the earth. There was a cat thing with a towel thing draped across the top of its head. There was a woman who had wings but no head. There was another woman who had a head but no wings and no arms either. All were made of bacon grease. → ???

Dogs see with their noses. It's true. Plenty of things aren't. Here are some of them: Horace didn't plant the orchard in just a day. It took longer. The Hooper young would not have picked raspberries. There would not have been pies. Parents don't imagine for themselves TV children, at least Horace P. Hooper didn't. He did not wish for children other than his own. Horace P. Hooper had his ways, and they were not this.

So it wasn't Horace's imagination that put seven strangers on the hillside with him that day, it was Esmerelda's nose. It was a spectacle the air created out of diesel exhaust and dug earth and some small want that came from within Horace. The wind found it and dressed it in lederhosen.

When death came for Horace P. Hooper, it came as a great white swan. Its eyes were silver and they shined like dusk on a faraway river. Horace P. Hooper saw the swan too, and he rose to greet it.

Esmerelda watched him leave with the swan, and thought, it's too bad that people can't smell love the way dogs can. His people would have understood him better.

"He just raised up from his chair and gazed up toward that orchard," Buford said, recounting the epochal events of that day. "That dog there, Esmerelda, she looked, too. We all looked, but there wasn't anything there."

"Then he just fell over. There wasn't time for anyone to even try to catch him."

"God Almighty, the sound of him hitting the floor!" said Deacon Dan. "To this day if I hear something heavy land on a wood floor, I come 10 feet out of my chair."

"Mamma heard it and dropped her phone," continued Buford. "She come running out."

When Horace P. Hooper died, he left behind a wife, who, as it turned out, had loved him. He left behind seven children who grieved for him as he knew they would, and he left behind the mystery of the hazelnut orchard. The children puzzled at it for years. Wincy tried a hazelnut butter recipe at the local farmer's market. It did pretty well but not well enough to be worth the bother of getting the shells off. An effort at a family praline brand only hastened the depletion of Horace's estate. The family gave up.

The day after Horace died, a crate arrived at the farm. Mosey had signed for it but she lost the paperwork. The family knew the name of the dog inside was Bandigo. They knew he was from Italy. They knew nothing else.

Bandigo emerged hesitantly from the crate. Grimwalt examined his anus for indications of duplicity or ill-intent, and finding none, took young Bandigo under his tutelage.