

A hand is holding an open book, with the pages showing faint, illegible text. In the foreground, a variegated pothos plant with green and yellow leaves is positioned over the book. The word "Wordplay" is written in a large, white, cursive font across the lower half of the image, overlapping the book and the plant.

Wordplay

ENGLISH '57 SERIES

FALL 2020 COLLECTION

Acknowledgments

Without our dedicated writers, *Wordplay* would be an impossible feat. I would like to graciously thank all the writers who have contributed their poetry and prose for this Fall 2020 collection. Sharing any writing is so powerful and personal, thank you for opening up your hearts and allowing our readers to experience your abundant creativity.

I would like to thank all the Writing Lab consultants who worked so diligently to help our writers: from developing their writing voices, strengthening their stories, and offering virtual spaces for open and supportive discussions.

Thank you to Megan Kraege, our TLC office manager this semester, for your kindness and attention to detail. You keep the TLC running as smooth as ever for learners and tutors alike.

Finally, the Writing Lab owes its operation to the expertise of Emily Wisinski, our Writing Lab Director. Thank you for upholding a space for our university to be extremely proud of and grateful for. Thank you for building a community of passionate tutors, and a community for any students involved to be able to learn and grow. We appreciate your own compassion, generosity, and support.

tip a pot over, the plant will still rise
 roots curling for a foothold in paper, these spaces in the lines
 are cracked concrete, seeded with new growth
 unfurling skyward.
 hold out your hand
 let the syllables and fragments
 tumble through your fingers
 spilling into a new earth.

This is Wordplay.

Editor: Kala Buttke

Cover Design, Cover Photo: Kala Buttke

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Poetry

Samuel Ludke

“Working with Samuel this past semester has been a lot of fun. Each week, he submitted an original poem that he wrote which showcased many themes related to world issues and current events. I was extremely impressed and blown away by his work each and every week! I found it very fascinating to hear why he wrote his poems, what he wanted the reader to take away as they read it, and understand the unique process in which he wrote his poetry. Samuel is a powerful poet and dedicated writer, and it has been a blast getting to see all of the wonderful writing that he has created.”

- Klaire Brault

Customs

Customs denying my brother

Can't turn me away

Let me take sides

Brother on the boat getting angry

Just waiting for the green card

President up in arms

Don't you worry brother

Bright future awaits you

Don't you worry brother

I'll be waiting there

Iron lady in the harbor

She passes judgement upon you

Never forgetting where you came from

Can't even start anew.

Rheya Heiden

“Rheya and I dedicated this semester to working on poetry. Coming in, Rheya really wanted to ensure that she built a solid foundation for her continued work in the genre – which I find she’s achieved and then some. Working with Rheya has been more than a pleasure in this regard, as her passion for and interest in her work, along with her continued effort to improve each week was refreshing to see as a consultant. I believe that the collection included, which Rheya selected, does well to showcase the talent and growth I saw this past semester. I hope Rheya the best in her endeavors in poetry and anticipate – and hope – that she’ll continue her work throughout her life. Thanks, Rheya!”

- Jared Burkart

Friend

An afterthought put out of proportion

She knows the uncertainty

A battle amongst glances

Who looks away first?

Is the only one saved from harsh words

All spoken to give deception

What started as forever

Ended with an explanation

She would not consider

Days go on empty

Pity yourself before it consumes

Your tongue dry, mouth chattered

Views at peaks higher than words

Cutting through the mountain built

Reaching the deepest rupture

Expressed from seeds thought never to bloom

Ever there is a time to consider this strand

Worn too thin by wasted efforts to comfort

Momentary lines of light

Change with stars which change with seasons

She watches them shift through

Flooded eyes

Similarities with constellations

Now provide different interpretations

If she sees none

Then neither will I

An apology is not required

Optional for anyone who tries

To blend using a brush

Manifesting a color that will never exist

One thing is worth the attempts

To make art out of something mottled into brown

Painting truth that she would be here only for me

though she would not know

Friend

Fear the expression for what it is

Is nothing but laughter

Held in a quiet room

Where someone has often cried.

School Bus Ride Home

Streaks of yellow hues fly past the windows
Stained by years of smudged fingers
Home could be sung from the mouths
Tickling the minds
These children wanted out, though a short
Ride home seemed infinite.

Too young for the back, too old for the front
This cab compared itself to the wilds
A hierarchy participating
In only the cruelest form of submission

To steal a protectorate, only idiocy
Suicide mixed with a love for masochism
It would not take long for restored balance
Kids watching fresh rivers of salmon
Stream from swollen pools
Bears had already eaten them whole
Leaving silent ripples in between
Rows of downed pines

What they left would be ravished
Another day, likely tomorrow
Little fish learnt in the art
Of communication through shifting glances

Home will come, that they know
Beaten inside minds so fragile

Just able for one thought
Some greeted directly from the channel
Others basking in shaded structure
Unable to assess the day's danger.

When Alone

Right now, shivers protrude into
My thoughts gnawing deeper
All I can do to stop them
Nothing
And nothing was what I was assaulting
To deserve a deep-rooted paranoia
A chorus of high pitched shrills
So loud the ears blocked the sound

There must be noise
Without the buzz of worrying wings
From ceiling fans
The violent shakes would return harsher
Knowing, I will be here alone for another forever
Only as long as an hour

Return soon back to me
But I will not ask in moments sitting in a chair
Inside a room filled with so many empty spaces
Can it be helped when the mind goes blank?

Right now, my heart races
I worry I would do something

And act so brutally selfish
Thinking of a finale

But do not evoke that from me
That I am self-absorbed
I would feel more like a burden
The thought of it could push me over the edge
With the comfort only darkness would know

Wilting right before me
I saw myself erasing the realities
Caught between paranoias
A moment where all I could grasp
Was the insightfulness
Just observable if I would resurface

Bring back the voices
Anything to barricade the windows
Why are the windows so big anyways?

Millions of orbs may perceive a flatline
They watched it stutter
While the ringing became deafening

And suddenly
The rumbles pulled from my cat's
Pleasured purrs
Draws the high pitch away

I wondered

Maybe she heard the noise
Which kept me sharp
Eyes glancing behind the lens

Every so often lights flashed
Shadows danced
And you were home
Telling me about your day

Always failing to witness
Demented resolves
Of when I am alone

T. G. De Guelle

“It has been a pleasure working with T. G. this semester. I loved seeing all the descriptions in his writing every week and working with him to get everything just perfect. He really entrances the reader with his words and portrays incredibly strong feelings in his work.”

- Kim Bronk

Dead Year

Two months remain
Of dreadful Dead Year.

An Age encompassing
Change or caution,
Inspiration or idiocy.

An eon encouraging
Hatred or heartwarming,
Divisions or decisions.

Dead Year nears closing,
But still I question.

I question about the Dead,
Faded like snuffed candle-flames
As wicks remain severed by
Neglectful greedy chandlers.

I question about the Year,
Destined to endless hellfire
Unhindered by helpless
Hands of healers.

I question about the Dead Year,
Months became bogs of
Depression and destruction
As swamps remained
Undrained and uncontrolled.

Only two months remain
Of this dreadful Dead Year.
Still I question if this Dead
Will take yet another Year,
Adding more pain to
Already depressive phrase:

“When things go back to normal...”

Joann's Doorstep

A tense painful journey
Ended at Joann's doorstep.

As we gazed upon Her
Captivating land,
 Plentiful in danger and
 Numerous in beauty,
My aches met attendance as
Your curiosities saw completion.

As I nursed wounds,
 Bountiful heavens released
 Frigid transformed treasures,
 Decorating Joann into dreams
 Of golden adoration.
We witnessed Her metamorphosis:
 Transfiguring Herself into
 Storybook settings,
 Cliché comedies, and
 Hallmarked happiness.
Joann's domain ensnared us:
 Frozen drops danced across
 Her still surface.
 Excited ripples shimmered
 Her reflective fabric.
 Autumn's majesties defended
 Her untamed perimeter.

Time was a frozen tranquility
Until you fled,
 Fulfilling forgotten duties and
 Abandoning Joan's performance,
 I alone pitying Her.

Joann's life separated in your flight.
Still I watched your consequences:
 Drops left; clouds darkened.
 Ripples halted; cold creeped.
Joann cursed your treason.
Still I defended your retreat:
 Winds slashed; snow pelted.
 Ice stung; sleet blinded.
You fled from Her abode.
Still I sat at Her doorstep:
 Separate and fearing,
 Silent and freezing.

I looked at Joann now:
 Her surface unkempt,
 Her fabric uncontrolled,
 Her perimeter unguarded.
Saw not Her romantic setting
 Of charm and appreciation,
Instead Her haunted image
 Of hurt and betrayal.

Joann now produced potent nightmares,
 Scaring my tortured emotions into
 Following your fleeing footsteps,
 Abandoning Her doorstep and
 Leaving Her alone in despair.

A tense painful journey
Ended at Joann's doorstep.

Nichole Hougard

“The poetry and novel Nichole worked on throughout the semester was so fun to read. I was always interested in what she would bring in next and how her novel would continue. The poem she chose to include in *Wordplay* was one of my favorites she wrote this semester because I love the nostalgic mood it had. I think it is a poem that a lot of people can connect with and that is what I love about Nichole’s poetry. Nichole was so fun to work with and I hope one day I will see her novel published.”

- Haley Steines

Thunder Clapped Remembrance

The last warm day before fall.
Summers grip slipping away,
Pushing me to forget how harsh it was to us.

Holding me at the edge
In your strong arms,
As you tuck your head close to me.

Soon after it began to rain
But we didn’t run
Until it poured.

Laughing and breathing hard when we got to the car.
I gave you back your soggy hat,
Stripped my wet flannel off.

And drove you home.

My red flannel hanging underneath your farmers’ hat.
Your wet hair prickling in the heat of the car.
The thunder rolling down the mountain behind us.

I wonder sometimes if it was chasing us away,
Forbidding us from coming back
To the place we fell in love.

Colton J. Bahr

“Colton is a very excellent poet. His pieces every week made me take a look at everyday interactions in a different light. In his piece, *An Evening Where Nothing Happens*, he captures the void that we have been living in since March in a real way. His imagery and attention to detail help you feel exactly what he was on *An Evening Where Nothing Happens*.”

- Paige Allemann

An evening where nothing happens

I drowsily drift toward dream land
In a futon that looks and feels like coal.

They don't make beds for the frugal
Only faulty futons.

For dinner
I carelessly cooked chicken
It was subpar.

Wasting my days like the food in my fridge
My time is useless.
My mood is rotten like the food I don't eat
My drunken day brought a sobering witching hour

Forcing myself awake for a friend who feigns friendship
I didn't know he was a physical therapist
He's good at standing people up

I think he needs a new watch
Time will tell
I won't be waiting though

These nights repeat

Jacqueline E. K. Davis

“It has been such an incredible honor being Jacqueline’s tutor this semester in English 157. She has written some of the most amazing poetry I have ever read—they are personal, dynamic, and truly beautiful. The complex language she uses and the way she is able to captivate and enrich the reader is remarkable, allowing one to make their own personal connections to her poems. I am so incredibly fortunate to have been able to meet with her every week, analyzing and discussing these masterpieces that deserve to be seen by everyone. Jacqueline is an extraordinary writer who truly has a gift of writing poetry, and I am proud to see that she submitted just a sliver of her work on Wordplay. In every session, Jacqueline impressed me with her dedication and excitement about all of her poems, and I am confident that she will continue to be a successful writer in the future.”

- Hayley Bird

ALL DAY SHE IS BLUE

I have been on a picnic date
 with the most beautiful girl
 for as long as I can remember.
 All day she is blue.
 I don’t quite know why
 but she says that’s the way she’s been
 for a long time.
 She says don’t worry
 because at night she reveals all her secrets
 but you’ll have to stick around to be a part of it.
 So I lay in the grass and look up at her
 and at first she is blue
 but I lay there for a while staring at her
 until she blushes
 and I watch the colors dance across her face.

What was once blue fades
 into the pale yellow of primrose
 and quickly turns to the deep golden

of autumn's changing leaves.

This gold warms into a clementine's hue
and suddenly tufts of sweet rose dance into sight
as she shares with me her shades of fuschia and baby pink
and all the shades in between.

Her honeyed specks of light drop
into the deeper realm of violets,
from violets to midnight blue,
and in the sparkling midnight air
she reveals all her secrets,
galaxies of them,
and I realize what she has hidden in the dark
is just as beautiful as what shines in the light.

ALL DAY SHE IS LONELY

I have been on a picnic date
with the most beautiful girl
for as long as I can remember.
Today she is sad and gloomy and grey.
I don't quite know why
but she says that's the way she's been
for a long time.
She says don't leave
because it's scary to be alone when things get dark
and I see she's started to cry
letting one tear drop drip down at a time
and at first it is just a sprinkling
but I lay there with her for awhile

to wait with her until the tears stop.
But when they don't,
things only get worse.

What was once grey fades
into the deep dusty black of charcoal
and quickly turns to a spectacular array
of branching flashing lights.
This illuminating performance gives way to drums
banging so loud you'd think you could see the vibrations
and I can feel my heart shaking in my ribcage
as the percussion dies out.
Her teardrops cover my face
and her sorrow drips down to my fingertips,
from my fingertips to the fertile earth
and between Herculean gusts and screeching breezes
I stay with her through the storm,
scourges of them,
and I realize what she has to endure in the dark,
is worthy of some company.

Astarte Kunz

“Working with Astarte this semester has been great! She was already an extremely strong writer when she started the course, and she only improved as the semester progressed. Together, we worked on enhancing her tone, word choice, and descriptions in each of her pieces, finding the perfect balance to fully engage her readers. Her aspirations to become a writer or editor have pushed her to refine and revamp her style to better capture the attention of her audience, and her hard work will surely pay off in the future. Here are a few of her original poems that exemplify her hard work in this course!”

- Brilyn Brecka

Moon

She was like the moon,
Pale, lovely, but stoic.
She had untold tales.

Sleep

How do you sleep with yourself?
When the glass of broken dreams crunches under your feet,
Does the sound make you uncomfortable?
How do you you sleep with yourself?
When the souls of lost youth follow your every step,
Do they haunt you as you walk?
How do you sleep with yourself?

Alexander T. Miller

“Mondays at 2:00pm quickly became one of my favorite times of the week because that is when I met with Alex Miller! From asking me for suggestions in our first session because he didn’t know what to write about to submitting a finished piece for Wordplay, Alex has made incredible progress this fall. His energy and enthusiasm were contagious as he came to each session ready to learn and share. One of my favorite things about Alex is that he was patient with his work. He was able to recognize when something didn’t exactly sound how he wanted it to, and he was disciplined enough to take the time to find that perfect wording he wanted. Our sessions were full of lively conversation that always led progress on the piece we were focusing on that day. My advice to Alex is to simply keep on writing!”

- Bridget Kauzlaric

American Dream

America, in my eyes, is a dream.

America began with an ambition for freedom

A dream of determining your own success

America: built from scratch, fueled by hopes and dreams.

A melting pot of people from all around the world.

America is the dream of a better life, the pursuit of happiness

A place where separate opinions create conversation for change.

When push comes to shove, we come out stronger than before

Being American means looking adversity in the eyes without backing down

America is the opportunity to be heard and live your best life

America isn’t perfect but that’s where opportunity blossoms.

America: the land of the free, home of the brave.

Pachia Moua

“Pachia is an extremely talented poet. Emotions and passion come easy to her. From the start of our sessions, she has brought in beautiful, heartfelt pieces of art. Pachia's writing was near perfect so we focused on, what we call, 'makeup.' We played with formatting, fonts, bolded words, etc. Because of Pachia's skillful writing, we were able to have joyful, creative sessions. She was absolutely lovely to work with and has a bright future ahead of her.”

- Tesa Peel

Dead Rose

Like a flower,
 your petals **wilted**.
 You once **bloomed** beautifully,
 your colors **vibrant**.
 Your **elegance** so bright
 that I refrained myself
 from plucking,
 but everything is so
different now.
 I see how your thorns
 have **thickened** and
 your petals have already
 started to fall.
 The once amazing,
 bright pink now so
 yellow and brown.
 It makes me *retract* and I
 start to walk away from you.
Why is it that I am only seeing
your true colors now?
 I should have walked away
 the moment I noticed the small

thorns that were **hidden**
from the naked eye.

Like *Aurora*,

I wanted the thorns to prick me
so I can be put to sleep since
you were once someone I
cared for, but now you are
just a *dead rose* to me.

Your thorns have already
pricked me and I'm still awake
in this regretful reality.

It is too late to fix you now.

I have **watered** you endlessly,
but like gardeners say,
if you water them too much,
they will begin to wilt.

By overwatering you with care,
I ended up **slowly** killing you
instead with *carelessness*,
and I did not intend
any of it to happen.

I guess that is just how life is.

We die when someone
overwaters our
flowers.

Ride and Die

Here I am
trying to determine
where I stand in
everyone's
life.

I think of myself
as the *outlier* when I'm
put with groups.

I'm mixed in
and somehow I stand
out the most.

The friends
I have during my
time here has shown me
that I'm *different*.

I told myself
I would never do the
things I did now.

Yet I still
changed myself to become
one of them.

And when I meet

my main group of friends,
it's almost as if they
don't *recognize* me
anymore.

I'm still the
same, but *different* in
their eyes.

I struggle to
decide who will be my
ride and **die** for.

Who will be the
ones I can turn to in
times of pain?

Who will be
trustworthy enough to
listen to my grief?

My main friends
are so far away and I barely
keep in touch with
them.

But the moment
I see them again, we
start off where
we left off.

As if we weren't
far away from each other and
nothing has *changed*.

I have this feeling
that one day I will have to choose
who are my *true* friends.

Who is my
ride and **die** for?
Each of them has impacted
the person I am
today.

Yet my heart
swings to the friends
I have grown
up with.

They have seen
the best and worst of me and
none of them have
judged it.

Maybe it isn't
so hard to choose,
after all.

Knowing I won't

be judged and knowing I
can trust them with
all my heart.

I've put myself
in a dilemma where I'm
pulled between *two* different
aspects of my life.

I think I just
need to accept that no matter
what happens, it's those
around me that
matter most.

Reviving

I'm drowning in an endless lake
that continues to **drag me down**
the more I struggle. *I feel so cold.*

My limbs feel like ice and it
hurts to move. *I feel like*
giving up. Everything will
be okay once I close my
eyes. Let the darkness consume
every bit of me as I continue to
fall further down the empty abyss.

But something brings me out
of my subconsciousness and
I see a light so bright

it hurts my eyes under the water.
My hand goes to grab the rays of
sunlight, but I can't grasp it.
It goes through my hand and I
push myself forward. *I want to
hold it.* It makes me want to breathe
again. I'm close to the surface. *I
can feel it.* Hope blooms in my
chest and my lips slightly lift.
How long has it been since I smiled?
Just when I get to the surface, a
hand grabs ahold of mine and
drags me out. *I gasp for air.* My
lungs burning badly as I try to
contain myself. I look up and I
see a boy. He stares at me with
his dark brown eyes and he smiles.
He says, "*You survived for another
day to come. I'm proud of you.*"
Then he pulls me into a hug that
feels so warm and my mind goes
blank. It feels warmer than the
sunlight and I hug him back
because *I've forgotten what it feels
to be warm again.* At least this
time I know I won't be dragged
into that dark, empty space in
my head. It threatens to **drag me
back**, but with the boy here,
I know I will be safe at last.



Prose

T. G. De Guelle

“It has been a pleasure working with T. G. this semester. I loved seeing all the descriptions in his writing every week and working with him to get everything just perfect. He really entrances the reader with his words and portrays incredibly strong feelings in his work.”

- Kim Bronk

The Symphony of Silence and Fear

Fear screams into music chambers devoid of life, lost hope, and unbounded dread. It repeats and repeats frozen meanings in chorus with symphonic knocks on doors to nowhere. Its chaotic tranquility runs rampant in the opera hall of the damned, forcing its majestic melancholy melody among the broken audience.

The music swells as the notes fly, until Silence smothers the sounds, enforcing its rule upon its new subjects. But in the newfound quiet, Fear resumes without voice but without end. The defiant act attracts Silence, yet it equally knows the painful truths about Fear: it cannot be stopped, it cannot be controlled, and worst of all, it cannot be wrong.

Thus commences the eternal battle between the absolutes on the stage: Silence controls the music, but Fear possesses the notes. And the poor conductor in crossfire tries to find the balance between the two orchestras, even if the audience has left him for dead. Harmony must be found, else the torture of the conflicting rhythms will consume him, converting the virtuoso into an instrument of darkness that sings hatred songs upon those he loves.

But even if the harmonic tones ring out with balanced intervals, the conductor is cursed to the sheet music of the infinite concert, for the silent music must always play its fearful notes.

Tyrant's Curse

A battalion of winds batter against my glass windows. Their forces radiate a neutral light of grey matter and dreariness. Each push remains futile as the glass repels with ease, yet their groans and aches seep through my protections like spies behind enemy lines. Their bemoaning reverberates inside my boney soul. I shudder, not in fear but in anticipation.

Every day I look out to my barren kingdom, devoid of growth and humanity. Some said the Gods had forsaken me to punish my numerous sins; others claim I salted the earths for purposeful greed. The reason matters not since I achieved my darkest desire of complete abandonment of all mortals. I have now condemned my legacy to be a mere footnote in the annuals of history, long forgotten by the material world.

Remorse, regret, or repentance never dared to cross my tortured mind; why would I change what was destined to arrive? My sins would eventually be judged, my crimes treated with imprisonment or damnation. If anything could have been changed, it would be my ability to walk as to be unable to follow down this dark path those many years ago; but even then, I know it would be pointless for all my paths are drenched in the dark. I am cursed to always be the harbinger of destruction upon this land.

So I wait for the winds and gusts that continue to attack. I wait for their eventual success to overcome my protective glass, shattering my final defenses I refuse to dismantle. And I wait for their cruel mistress Time whose harsh and deadly judgment cannot ever be avoided, no matter which dark path one had chosen.

Time remains the ultimate curse of the mortal tyrant's power.

Victoria Livingston

“Working with Victoria this semester was a great experience! It was the first full semester of online 57’s, and it was definitely an adjustment for consultants and learners. Even working through a computer screen, I felt like Victoria and I had really meaningful conversations about her work and were really able to connect over her writing. In each session, she’s truly shown how much thought and hard work goes into what she writes, whether it’s a personal narrative or a literary analysis. I am so impressed with all that she’s accomplished this semester!”

- Lucy DeLain

Going Back

Recently I visited my family back home for an extended weekend. It was nice to walk in and see faces I recognized. My mother changing the laundry over before opening her arms and ushering me into a hug, my father smiling from a wooden chair in the corner of the room, and my two younger sisters legs crossed wiping the summer dust from the fans before they were wrapped up and stored in the basement for the cold months to follow. There was a lack of excitement at my return that made me question if I had been gone at all. My room felt bare and foreign. The walls were naked except for a couple paintings that hung, isolated, on opposite ends of the room. I felt like the paintings took on an entirely new meaning as I stood, time frozen, at the doorway. The seagull didn’t glide on the salty breeze coming off the ocean but rather plummeted toward the crashing waves in such a taunting manner you’d believe he had forgotten how to fly. Stumbling. The boats parked against a sandy shore no longer soaked up the warm sunny afternoon, but sat like empty ribs, the byproduct of an ocean slowly receding. Lacking. There was a familiar hollowness in it all that reminded me to be comfortable.

My closet was like a cave on a pirates’ map. Tucked away in the back was a large box, the treasure! Only, it wasn’t a treasure at all. It was simply shoes, bags, and other miscellaneous objects that didn’t make the cut when I packed generally useless, insignificant objects. The cave I expected had winding tunnels and secret crawl spaces, but the cave was my closet and was more like a dead end. Dark, dirty, and cold.

I had died and only my spirit had returned to reconcile that the world as I knew it wouldn’t change too much. Nothing changes in small towns. It had it’s same shops, and regular customers. The cars followed the same roads and timely traffic patterns. I was part of a different puzzle trying to fit into a picture where I no longer had matching pieces.

Of course, this could all be based in a preset idea of how “coming home” should be and what in reality it wasn’t. A point of view that shaded my vision and made everything feel damp and desaturated. Damp like fog on a summer night around 6pm. I could tell my family also had their expectations for their straight A, well mannered, perfect daughter’s return from the big wide world and I can’t help but feel that they also saw me through some damp summer fog. They expected stories of struggle and strength and longing for home while the curiosity of being as far from it as possible grew bigger, but it wasn’t so. The big wide world followed me there and told

me what I had already known. I don't belong here. At one point I felt as though I did, when spring felt like something new and fall meant being outside as much as possible before the chill really set in. When the cracks in the sidewalk were new like a game of hopscotch and the woods behind the house was an adventure. I guess that's what gaining perspective does. It makes everything that was once very big seem like a miniature model version of everything else.

When I finally got away I was covered in grey paint that I knew I would have to scrub off once again. That car ride was one of the worst I had ever taken.

Brady Sorensen

“Throughout the entire semester, Brady displayed a sense of energy and excitement for writing that is hard to come by. Our sessions were never dull, and I enjoyed reading and discussing a new draft of his story during each one. I always looked forward to seeing what exciting new revisions Brady would bring in each week. Below you will find a piece of writing which is not only creatively exciting but is packed with little details which Brady analyzed and tweaked until they turned his story into a masterpiece. Never stop writing Brady, you have too many amazing story ideas!”

- Sierra Maatta

The Beast of Mayfield

It was early, on a late Autumn morning when I realized that the village of Mayfield, where I lived, had secrets that ought not be uncovered. Living in the shadow of my brother, I sought to make a name for myself and to use these secrets to do so. However, it was because of my own selfishness I paid the price for discovering the secrets that I found in the woods surrounding Mayfield.

“Wren! Wren wake up!”

I could hear my brother calling for me from outside, dawn had barely broken as his shouts stirred me from my sleep.

“What is it Obi?” I shouted back hoping to resolve the issue without having to leave my bed.

“Well, it’s hard to explain, there’s a problem and it’s something that you’re going to have to see.” Obi continued to urge me from my slumber.

“Alright, alright give me a minute, I’ll be right there” I was too interested to go back to sleep now anyway.

I got up and pulled on a shirt and pants not bothering to place the suspenders on my shoulders. My house was small compared to my brothers; the upstairs consisted of a loft where I slept, the downstairs was mostly just the kitchen with a small table and stove. The rest of the downstairs was a sitting room with a few pieces of furniture placed in front of the fireplace. After climbing down the ladder that led to the loft, I quickly stoked the coals in the fireplace and threw a log on hoping that it will be nice and warm by the time I returned. Before I left my home, I grabbed my wool coat, autumn had set in with cold and wet wind that cut to the bone.

As soon as I got outside, I could see my brother's house, it was more than twice the size of mine with a rather large swath of land devoted to his sheep. His house was large even for our village standards. It was our parents' house previously, now passed on, it was left to Obi to take over the family trade of a sheep herd. Mayfield itself was only a few miles wide with one main road used for trade and transport. The remainder of the village was surrounded by a very thick forest. Obi worked as a shepherd, quite well I might add, most everyone around the village would tell you that of the two of us he was the more successful one. I did odd jobs around town,

occasionally helping my brother with his sheep. Obi was several years older than me, so he had a head start when it came to getting his life figured out, however I still felt like a disappointment on occasion when the two of us were compared.

It didn't take long for me to notice what all the commotion was about; I could see the blood from several yards away. As I got closer it was the pure amount of blood that left me in awe. There were a few parts left over, a piece of a leg here and there, even some chunks of cranium. I had helped with butchering before, but this scene left me sick to my stomach. Observing some of the pieces with bite marks on them raised questions, this amount of damage would have needed to be done by a pack of wolves, but the bites didn't match any wolf bites I had ever seen, they were larger and more jagged.

"Holy hell Obi." I let out trying not to lose my nerve.

"By my count of my remaining sheep I lost a total of ten" Obi looked defeated, "I've lost sheep in the past one here and there, but nothing close to this amount."

Obi didn't continue to look downtrodden for long. He glanced over at his home where I could see his wife, Anna, watching us from the window, she was always nice to me.

"I'll not put up with this Wren, we are going to do something about this mess, we can't stand by as something of this nature threatens the village."

"And what do you suppose we do?" I panicked. "Look, Obi, this damage is more than just one wolf, it has to be at least a pack of seven or eight."

"If we do nothing then they are just going to get braver and before you know it, they will be taking men, women, and children from their very homes." Obi said with a fire in his eyes.

Obi was always strong, never doubting himself and willing to take risks, risks that always paid off in his favor. I could never figure out how he could be so confident. I've never known what that feels like I've always second guessed myself. Nevertheless, I knew when I could trust Obi, he was most always right.

Obi voiced his idea. "I'm going to call a town hall meeting, see if other people have had any similar problems. Maybe we can come up with a plan to do something about this."

The bell in the town's bell tower was ringing and within the hour every major business owner who held a place on the town council was seated in the town hall. Word had spread that it was Obi who needed help, and nobody would hesitate when it came to helping him in any way that they could. There were five members on the town council, a small number but still more than enough to represent our small village of no more than 100. Obi was on the council, however, today he came looking for help more so than offering it.

The meeting room was small with an even smaller table where the town council had squeezed the normal five members around with the addition of myself. It was still rather early in the day, so the room was lit with the help of the fireplace and a few candles placed around the table. The shadows of the council members ran up the walls of the dark room, looming, and eerie, fitting the situation that Obi and I found ourselves in.

The village mayor was the first to break the concerned whispers of the town council "Now, my good people, Obi has called us here today to discuss issues of wolves in the village.

He lost a fair number of sheep last night and needs to know if anyone here has seen anything strange around the woods lately.”

A few of the member talked amongst themselves for a moment until Al the local blacksmith, a large, deeply tanned man, spoke up. “There ain’t been wolves in this village for years!”

“Yeah” shouted Ed the towns doctor, although doctor may be a stretch “My Grandfathers Grandfather was the one who hunted the last one in this area.” he spat the fact as if any suggestion of wolves in Mayfield was a threat to his family's legacy.

Obi interjected “Look, I know all of this, I’m not questioning anyone, all I’m telling you is that I lost ten sheep last night, now what could possibly be the reason if not for a new pack of wolves having moved into the woods around our village.”

There was silence for a few minutes.

“It's the Beast” Marry murmured, seeming to hope that the rest of the council wouldn’t hear her. Marry owned the largest mill in Mayfield and was not known for superstition. “That thing is going to kill all of us.”

The three of them began to argue amongst themselves.

“That’s ridicules Marry, come now, I wouldn’t have pegged you for the type to start worrying over a children's story.” Al seemed a bit annoyed at the suggestion of the Beast. Al respected Obi and wanted to help him and using mythical monsters as an explanation was not good enough for him.

“Then what could it be Al?” Ed snarked “You said it yourself, ain’t been wolves for years”

“Just cuz it ain’t wolves doesn’t make it a magic beast” Al raised his voice over Ed’s.

Marry was offended “It ain’t no wives tale, I’ve had my experiences with it around the village just like every other trustworthy folk in this town” Marry stood up now as to level her height with Al while he sat. “Face it, we’re done for.”

Ed muttered to himself concerned with the matter. “The Beast of Mayfield, it’s finally come back for us just like Grandfathers stories said. Shat will we do, what will we do.”

“Now, now everyone let’s just breath for a moment.” the mayor spoke up in an attempt to settle concern “The Beast is just an old bedtime story to keep children close to the village at night.”

The mayors attempt fell short, Al and Marry argued as Ed got hysterical. One way or another something must be done whether it be wolves or a mythical beast, Mayfield cannot survive like this. I was surprised that Obi had yet to say anything, he always knew what to do. Maybe this is my chance to prove to the village I’m just as capable as Obi.

As the council squabbled their shadows now shifted and morphed on the walls to scenes of wolves and other worldly creatures. They ran about growing and shrinking with the wax and wane of the fire seeming to draw from the fears of those in the room. One shape stood out to me,

it took the form of a man but larger and with great antlers, unlike the rest of the shadows this one did not move it did not shift with the fire light, it stood still and watched me.

Just then Obi put his hand on my shoulder, giving me an encouraging look.

“I’ll do it” I stuttered, shifting my gaze from Obi to the others in the room “I’ll hunt the Beast.”

Everyone in the town hall grew silent for all of two seconds until they burst into laughter. Their shadows no longer took the shape of creatures but rather danced on the walls as if to mock me just like their voices did. They actually thought it was funny that I suggested that I hunt the beast. Even after all these years of growing up in this village, helping these people on a daily basis, I thought that they would have even the smallest amount of confidence in me. But they didn’t, I was still the screw up, no matter what I did it would never be good enough for these people.

“We’ll hunt it together” Obi spoke with pride as he stood next to me.

The towns council fell silent yet again, but not the least bit sorry for having laughed. It was decided that my brother and I would stake out the woods until we scare off the pack of wolves prowling the area or kill the beast that the villagers seemed so certain of.

I rushed home to pack my things. I would need enough to make it through the night, so I packed a change of clothes along with some bedding and a canvas tent. A few pieces of salted meat for rations for the night would suffice. I wouldn’t require too many tools for this, a hatchet and hand saw would be enough to cover the firewood we would need, I also took my rifle. Regardless of what we would be hunting I would need it. I finally have a chance to prove myself, but it is only because of Obi, why can't the villagers just trust me.

Obi and I didn’t waste any time in setting out. Despite wanting to prove that I could not only take care of myself but provide a service for Mayfield, I like Obi, wanted this to be over quickly. As soon as we crossed the threshold of the woods it felt different, overgrown and crowded but still exposed, like there could be anything behind that twist or turn. And the silence, one step into these woods and all ambience of the village was gone, as if Mayfield wasn’t even there to begin with.

The two of us hiked for a few hours until sundown was upon us. I set up the tent in a small grove where the trees thinned a bit and Obi gathered some firewood for the night. We both laid out our bedrolls even though we didn’t plan to get too much sleep that night. It didn’t take long to get a small campfire going, the sun wasn’t completely down yet, but it was already getting difficult to see.

“I suppose it could have been someone from the village” Obi broke the silence.

“What?”

“You know, killed my sheep”

“No one in the village would do that to you Obi” it was actually a little insulting that he would think that, he doesn’t even realize just how much everyone respects him.

“You’re right, it just doesn’t make any sense, how could something like this have happened. What do you think of all this talk of the beast Wren? After all you are the one who suggest we hunt it” Obi let out a bit of a chuckle.

“I’ve never been one to believe in fairy tales, and I suggested the I hunt it, I didn’t ask you to come along.”

“I didn’t realize that you wanted to do this alone, you know I was only trying to help you in the town hall, stand up for you.” Obi was being condescending now.

“Right, because without you I would be helpless right, you’re the big brother so you have to step in.” I couldn’t stand when Obi got like this, he loved to make it seem like we couldn’t possibly be equals.

Night had truly set in now, our small campfire was our only source of light and the darkness of the woods encroached, wrapping its tendrils around the edge of our camp. It was cold, even huddled close to the fire I couldn’t keep from shivering. The pit of my stomach twisted in knots as a feeling of dread like no other began to set in. For a moment I couldn’t remember what had brought me here to these woods, for a moment it felt like I belonged here.

“Wren, Wren!” Obi was shouting my name “What is it, you went quiet, did you just hear what I heard?”

“Hmm?” snapping out of my trance my vision cleared. I didn’t feel quite so cold anymore and it no longer felt like something was trying to slither its way into my head.

“No, what did you hear Obi?”

“It sounded like steps, heavy ones.”

Just then I felt the ground shake, slight but enough to know that whatever stalked where the light could not reach was massive. I could hear this creature prowling on the left side of the tree line until suddenly and silently the sound shifted to the right. It was fast enough to make me question if this thing was real or just in my head. With no warning the creature leapt from the shadows right for Obi. He went down fast as the monster tore at his shirt. I grabbed my rifle; this was up to me. I aimed and prepared to shoot but couldn’t, it felt like something was stopping me, like someone was holding my trigger finger back.

Finally, *CRACK* a shot rang out, sharp and ear splitting, but the sound soon got eaten up by the still trees in the night. There was a shot, but it wasn’t from my gun, I had never even touched the trigger. It was Obi, he had a pistol between himself and the creature, an extremely massive wolf. He shot it right through the heart, it was over, and I couldn’t help but tremble. My legs were shaking so bad that I almost fell over, I had to sit down.

Obi stood up, “HAHA, well that was something, its ok Wren I took care of it” he boasted “It was only a wolf in these woods just like we thought, now we can go back to the village and tell the people it’s taken care of. Look at yourself, can’t even stand up, well that’s ok Wren it’s all over no need to be afraid anymore.”

“Haha, right” I said quietly “You did it Obi.”

“Thats right.”

In that instant that familiar feeling of dread took hold of me again. I couldn't hear, it sounded as if my head was submerged underwater, my vision turned red and as if not in control of my own body I leveled my rifle to Obi's back, I tried to scream, I tried to stop myself by I couldn't. For the second time that night a shot rang out and was silenced by the woods again.

The crack of my rifle snapped me out of whatever it was that took hold of me. It didn't take long for me to come to realize what I had done. How, why, what had come over me to do such a thing.

I began to panic but stopped. I couldn't shake this feeling of being watched. "Who's there!" I shouted.

To my surprise there was no response, I could have sworn that I felt something. I collected myself and without wasting any time, I worked fast, I ripped off a piece of Obi's bloody jacket and dragged his body to a nearby bush, no sense in burying it, no one bothered to come out this far into the woods anyway. I packed up camp and doused the fire leaving myself a torch. The walk out of the woods that night seemed different than walking in, but by mid-morning of the next day I had made it back to the edge of the village. It was strange I didn't remember how long it had actually taken, it could have been hours or minutes. I remember walking but it seemed like something was pushing me farther, was it just a feeling of fear so strong that couldn't stop my feet from moving one in front of the other or was there something there, something physical that made me leave, my memory of that night was hazy.

Just as I had arrived back in town the bell began to chime; the council was about to meet for their weekly hearing, I rushed over to the town hall. Bursting into the meeting room I was covered in sweat and dirt.

"Good lord what happened to you Wren?!" With concern in his voice the Mayor stood up from his chair.

And so, I regaled the town council with my tale from the woods. "It was late into the night; Obi and I had begun to drift off while watching the fire. We weren't prepared when we were jumped by a massive wolf three times the size of Al. It tackled Obi, I jumped up and took a shot at the monster and it went down right on Obi, I pushed the hulking thing off but he was gone, the wolf killed Obi." I showed the council the piece of Obi's jacket that I kept.

"My God" The Mayor was in shock "This is truly devastating, we lost a good man, and I can't imagine how you must feel Wren, but thank God you were there, thank God that you struck down that monster."

The next few days went by quickly, I was the hero of the village after all, more praise and thanks were sent my way than I could have ever imagined. Due to the situation, I inherited my brother's sheep, they were mine now, I finally had a trade that the village would be proud of. This was all I ever wanted from life.

In this short time, I felt as though I had finally grown close to the rest of the villagers, I talked to many of them daily and they now sought my advice, asking for my wisdom. One person who spoke to me more often than not was Obi's wife, Anna. We spoke of the days when Obi was still around, we laughed and cried at our memories. Anna's friendship was something

that I greatly valued now, it felt like it was all I had left that reminded me of Obi. I understood and shared Anna's pain at the loss of Obi however, I did not regret what I did out in the woods.

Anna would often invite me over for dinner, she made the best roasted turkey.

"Haha, do you remember the time that the mayors hat got blown up into that tree?" Anna told stories of Obi, hardly able to get them out without laughing. "Obi was convinced that he could climb that tree and get it himself."

I remembered fondly as well. "That tree was massive, you and I both knew that there was no way he was going to get that hat, at least not without hurting himself"

"Well to be fair he got pretty close, luckily the wind blew it back out before he could get high enough to fall." Anna smiled remembering the tale but eventually returned to reality as the smile left her face. "You know Wren, sometimes I feel like you are all I have left of Obi"

"I know exactly what you mean. The three of us spent a lot of time together in the old days"

"You've always been a good man Wren, even before you saved the village, I know the rest of the village might not feel the same, but I know you a lot better than they do" Anna spoke with pure honesty. "I hope you don't feel guilty with everything that you got because of Obi's death, you deserve it."

"I don't feel guilty." And I didn't.

"Good, it's just a shame that you didn't get a chance to show the village how strong you were before Obi's death. Obi thought very highly of you, always talking to me about you, he would have been proud of what you did."

"Yeah."

A month had passed since that night in the woods, winter had now set in. A new year and a new life to go with it. At least that is how it seemed until a feeling that I knew all too well came over me, it was the same feeling that I had gotten when I was in the woods that night with Obi. When I opened the door to my house was when I felt a feeling so horrid, I dare not described it, I saw at the edge of the village, right where the woods began was Obi standing in the freshly fallen snow. He wasn't looking at me though, he was looking towards the rest of the village. He remained standing there for a few seconds and then he began to walk towards the town hall.

I watched and waited until I saw Obi enter the town hall, I saw Ed run out and get everyone's attention and soon the whole village had flocked towards the town hall, but no one came to get me. Finally, after a time I went myself, in the main room of the building, a large room with vaulted ceilings, stood Obi with everyone from the village around him. They were hugging him and shaking his hand and saying how they had missed him so much. No one had noticed that I had even walked through the door, and still Obi did not even look at me. It seemed strange to me that I was the only one who noticed that his jacket was not torn where I had taken the piece from, in fact Obi wasn't even dirty his clothes were clean, no dirt, no mud, no blood or bite marks from the wolf. And still no one had even questioned how Obi had survived out in the freezing forest for a month, no this did not make any sense.

I returned home. How could this be happening, everything that I had ever wanted was mine and then just like that it was all taken away. It was too strange, how could Obi be alive it had been a month after all, is he alive, is any of this real, is this really my brother returned from the dead, recreated, or is this all just a manifestation of my guilt, how could I have killed him. He was condescending but he loved me, didn't he?

Even though I had now made good friends with some of the villagers it made sense that the rest of the village would forget about me again, after all it was as if the prodigal son had returned. But why hadn't Anna come to talk to me, we were so close, would she really just forget about me so quickly, no this is all far too weird, there has to be something else going on here, this cannot be real.

It is difficult for me to sleep now; I awake in the middle of the night without being able to return to my slumber. On most of my restless nights I wonder what happened out there on that night Obi and I were attacked, I play it over and over in my head, what did I do out there. Some nights I look out my window to the woods and when I do I see Obi standing on the tree line staring out into the forest, even stranger is that there are never any foot marks in the snow.

After a few days I couldn't stand it anymore, I needed to know if this was actually my brother that had returned from the woods or just something that took the shape of him. I decided to go back to where Obi and I made camp that night. I set out early one night, I didn't bring anything with me because I didn't want to be weighed down with too much gear, but it was more than that, I felt the urge to go back there so strong it was like I was being forced, I couldn't control it, I had to go back. It was well below freezing when I started the hike to the camping spot with a brisk walk, I was eager to get there. Soon my walk turned into a jog and my jog nearly a sprint, a hike that took Obi and I several hours originally took me only about an hour despite tripping and falling in the deep pockets of snow that now littered the woods.

When I had arrived at the camp site it felt different, rather than the woods usual oppressive atmosphere, this felt welcoming, as if this grove in the woods was waiting for me or calling me back. The rest of the woods shook with the sharp wind of winter, but in the grove, I could feel no wind. I looked around, I didn't need a light, the full moon was over head and plenty bright enough for me to conduct my search. It was cold, a light layer of frost covered everything, and unaffected by the wind small snowflakes drifted slowly to the ground. The moonlight and frost gave the grove slight blue hue, but the shadows remained as black as ever. I saw a pile of ash where the fire had been, it looked crystalized by the frost and next to that two impressions from where Obi and I sat talking that night. One thing I did notice was that the body of the wolf that had attacked us was gone. I approached the bush where I had stashed Obi body, it took me awhile to muster the courage to check it, and when I did, my heart sank. There Obi lay, just as I had left him that night, only now his body was badly decayed, it was still recognizable as Obi but a horrific version of who he once was. I fell to my knees, as awful as the last few days in the village had been, everyone ignoring me, a part of me wanted it to be real, I wanted Obi to walk back into the village like a hero, even if it meant I was a nobody. But I couldn't shake the thought, if Obi was here then who was it that came back to Mayfield.

I sat there for a time until I heard something quickly and quietly approach me from behind. It was so fast and silent it was as if the creature had been manifested by the shadows in the camp. The shadows once as still as the air that night now began to grow and slither to my feet and gripped my legs as darkness enveloped the clearing. That feeling I knew all too well had

returned, a terror so true that my sweat felt like ice on my skin, I turned to face what the cause of this feeling was and as I did a truly horrifying site beheld me. The creature that stood before me was nearly nine feet tall not including its horns which were massive, almost like a deer's antlers but gnarled and tangled like an old tree. Where eyes should have been mere hollows stared at me so black they seemed to absorb the light around them, the skin of the beast was ashen and rough like bark. Chunks of its flesh had peeled off revealing what I could only assume was this beings' organs which looked like masses of yellow and bile colored festering, throbbing tissue and digestive tract. Its mouth opened like the muzzle of a rabid dog and it let out a deep guttural bellow that made my teeth chatter. As desperately as I wanted to get away, I couldn't stop looking at this beast in front of me, this was it, this was the scourge of the village. The longer I looked the more I felt my mind sinking into madness, I felt my very sanity begin to unhinge.

The Beasts jaw began to move up and down as if it was speaking. The sounds that it made may have been words, but if they were, I could not understand them. The words that the Beast spoke sounded old and primeval, they warbled out of his mouth in such a way that it didn't even seem like the structure of a normal mouth could make the sounds that I heard.

I tried to cover my ears as the Beast's words seemed to speed up my madness, but the words, they weren't coming from the beast's mouth, they sounded like they originated from my mind.

I screamed "What do you want from me!"

The words of ancient origin stopped now. The Beast looked at me and cocked his head to the side as if pondering my words. When it opened its mouth for the second time, I could understand it, its voice was deep and so smooth it sounded unnatural.

"When have I ever asked for anything from you." The beast spoke in an elegant manner. "I have only given what you desired."

"What are you talking about, I haven't asked you for anything"

"Oh, but you have Wren. You came to my woods, into this forest of the unknown looking to make a name for yourself, to prove yourself. But you didn't have the strength to do it yourself, so I helped you, I gave you the ability to do what had to be done to get the life that you wanted."

As the Beast's words hit my ears, I could hardly believe it. "You, you made me kill my brother"

"I merely gave you the strength to do what you really wanted, you wanted Obi dead, you wanted his life."

"Don't say his name!" Knowing now how this all happened finally made it hit me, Obi was really gone forever, and I was the cause. I spoke through choked back tears "I never wanted any of this. And it was you in the village, pretending to be Obi."

"Yes." The Beast smiled a toothy grin as if satisfied with his work.

My anger now boiled over. "So, you enjoy ruining the lives of people."

“When you have lived for as long as I have you must find something to keep you occupied.” The beast spoke with a level of smugness. “I never get tired of seeing how you pathetic creatures react to my gifts, you never know what you truly want until you have it.”

“Gifts” I scoffed. “You are so full of yourself; you know nothing of us, are way of living, yet you speak as if, as if...”

“HAHA, as if what? You and your kind are specks of dust to me, you bend to my will. I am the only being with true strength.” The Beast seemed to revel in his definition of strength.

“You have no idea what real strength is, you haven't worked for anything. True strength is helping others, it is giving back to your community because you know what it is like to have nothing.” My thoughts turned to Obi now. “Obi had true strength; he didn't deserve any of this.”

“As if I care what you think.” The beast spoke unfazed by my pain. “It doesn't matter your life will soon be over as well.”

The Beast began to approach me as it did, I began to smell a putrid odor which seemed to originate from his gaping maw. My head felt like it was being filled with leaches whispering secrets in ancient tongues in my ear, it felt as if my skull was going to burst from the words and screams I now heard in my mind. This thing was not of this world, it was death taken form, to die at the hands of the beast would be a truly gruesome end. Yet somehow it seemed fitting for what I had done.

“You there!” A shout cried out from the distance and I could see the faint light of a lantern.

As quickly as the Beast came it sunk back into the shadows. The strain on my mind from its control over caused me to lose consciousness. I didn't awake until several days later, I was told that Al and Ed had pulled me out of the woods that night, they found Obi dead and I passed out. They seemed confused as to why Obi's body was so decomposed, after all they were still under the impression that they had seen him earlier that night. I tried to tell them what happened, but no one believed me except Anna. But maybe she didn't have a choice, I don't think that she could live with the fact that one of her childhood friend and Obi's own brother could do such a thing under their own free will. She needed to believe my story so that she wouldn't lose me as well. Nevertheless, the villagers told me that my mind has lost its reason and I agreed with them. So it was decided that I would be sent away from Mayfield.

Anna visits me from time to time at the hospital where I now reside. She is my rock in these times where I now question my very sanity. Being told that what I know to be the truth is merely my addled mind replaying the horrors of losing my brother is exhausting. To be quite honest I don't know if what happened in the woods is the truth, but what I do know is that it was out there in those woods that I lost everything that I held dear. It was Anna's weekly visits that kept me going and kept me hopeful.

“Wren, it's so good to see you.” Anna tended to start her visits with a hug. “How is your recovery going?” She sat down in a chair next to me and the late afternoon light cast our shadows onto the wall of my room like wisps of weary souls.

“It's going well.” I really was confident in the improvements I had made. “Since coming here everything has seemed pretty normal, I feel as though my mind is clear again.”

“Wonderful.” Anna smiled and then it faded. “Perhaps it is good that you get some time away from the village.”

“Yes, a lot of bad memories.” I looked down at my hands finding it difficult to keep eye contact with Anna.

“Even though it’s only been a few months I’ve talked to your doctors and they say that you are doing so well I wanted to give you something.” Anna reached in her bag and pulled out a box and handed it to me. “Here.”

When I opened the box, a bittersweet nostalgia came over me. In the box was Obi’s old jacket. It was folded neatly, and Anna had sewed in a patch where I had torn it that night in the woods.

“This means a lot” I smiled at Anna, enough to show my gratitude.

“Of course, I just didn’t want to forget to give it to you, because well, I’m thinking of leaving the village myself.” Anna looked anxious at the thought of leaving the village. “It just doesn’t feel like home anymore, it’s strange now, I don’t think I can stay.”

“What do you mean?” I knew what she meant but I had to hear her say it.

Anna glanced around as if someone might be listening. “It’s just that some more people have started to go missing around the village and the mayor and Al and Ed are brushing it off, almost trying to cover something up, I just don’t feel safe anymore.”

As Anna spoke, I could feel an uncomfortable twisting in my gut but tried not to think about it. “That’s terrible, but I’m sure that the mayor is just trying to keep everyone in order.”

“You’re probably right.” Anna sighed. “Well, I’m sorry to have worried you, I’ll see you next week.”

Anna got up to leave and as she did, I walked her out, we hugged goodbye and after she had left, I hung Obi’s jacket on the hook of my room’s door. The now evening sun cast wild shadows on everything in my room. The jacket’s shadow was strange, it seemed to almost stare at me. My heart sank as I realized that it took the shape of a tall man with large antlers and a wolf like maw.

Ava Freeman

“Getting to learn more about Ava and her writing style through our ‘57 sessions this semester has truly been a pleasure! Ava has opened my eyes into the world of creative writing, something that I had very little knowledge on prior to working with her. Through our various discussions of word choice, paragraph structure, story inspiration, emotions, and many other topics, I have learned the true depth of creative writing. One aspect about working with Ava that I liked was that she took ownership of her writing and showed confidence in it. I also really enjoyed Ava’s ability to create emotions that the reader could feel within her short stories, as well being elusive with some details to leave the reader wanting more, both of which I feel can be found in the following piece called ‘Snow’.”

- Lydia Arnoldussen

Snow

The sky overhead is a dark cluster of clouds, a black and gray churned up mess and it’s snowing, collecting on my jacket and dotting my glasses with hopes to annoy me later. In reality, it’s not that late, but with it being winter, the sun gave us its farewell hours ago. Without it, everything is cold and dark, and I’m left standing outside the house.

I’ve only been here a handful of times and, at least half of them were spent in the safety of the car, staring out the glass in muted silence. I would either be dying from heat or freezing from cold, depending on the time of year, neither of which were all that fun to think back on. But today isn’t like those old days. There’s no reason to stay bundled in the car, hunching my head, hoping not to be seen by the owner.

The snow is still falling, turning my once black jacket into a now speckled one and I’m left leaning against the family truck, staring at the house. It’s a two story, white with a black roof. There’s a little porch that pours out into a small yard which then merges into the alley’s dirt road. It’s not exactly what I would call charming.

My family has already gone inside, leaving me to my assessment and I do. I stare long and hard. The house is practically smothered in snow and, even from here, I can feel the weight on my chest, the one I know will only grow when I will have to leave the safety of the outdoors and go inside. Into a place that I know is drowning with boxes, papers, and hundreds of things that still need to be dealt with and sorted.

I shift my weight as the top floor windows stare back at me, they’re dark, unlike the first floor that beams out yellow light across the snow, trying to beckon me closer. But it’s easy to resist. The light, while illuminating, is a sickening shade of yellow. It keeps me from coming closer, rigid as I shove my stiff hands into crowded pockets, fisting them and rubbing at the skin.

The back door suddenly opens. More light. It’s pouring down the three steps, reaching out towards me and I’m met with my father’s searching gaze as he peers into the dark and white world of winter. I stare back at him. There’s a mutual silence in our gazes and I can see he’s just as uncomfortable as I am, being back here. He *was* the one who led the funeral, unlike me who hadn’t been able to make it.

The door shuts and he’s coming over, the snow crunching in that muted type way that only snow can underneath our feet. He’s then standing beside me and I am quick to wrap my arm around his and press closer, seeking warmth as we both look at the house.

“Cold? He asks gently, not looking at me.

I give a nod, sniffing and rubbing at my nose, finding it numb under my fingers.

“C’mon,” again, his voice is gentle, and it doesn’t take much for him to pull me towards the porch, up those three stairs and into the sickening yellow light of my late grandmother’s house.

Jadzia Harrell

“During this semester, Jadzia has shown great attention to detail in all her creative pursuits, especially in the following short story. Jadzia made it a priority to explore story-telling elements, like alternating perspectives between many interesting characters, and even did research on varieties of alcohols that best suited these unique personalities. I hope you enjoy her lush and theatrical work just as I did during this semester.”

- Theresa Yonash

Murder by Three

-H-

What a world this is. To think I was able to gather them all here under one roof without much difficulty. Could this get any easier?

It seems too easy. Do they know? Do they suspect something?

No, no they couldn't. I crafted this night to perfection. Nothing could go wrong.

But what if it did? What if I make a mistake? One simple slip-up could ruin the entire night.

No. I must stay confident. I meticulously planned this for over a year. I just have to follow the plan accordingly.

I smiled at my three guests and down my third glass of scotch. I put on an air of ease. If I remain calm, they won't suspect a thing.

Glancing at the clock, I see that it is three minutes till three. Time to put the final phase of my plan into motion. I then get up from my seat and go to the liquor bottle on the counter.

After filling my glass, I then turn to face my esteemed guests. Giving them one last smile, I took a big gulp of the scotch.

-V-

I can't believe this fool invited all of us for drinks at his place. I mean, how clueless is he? Oh well. As long as I get some free drinks to relax from my job as a pharmacist, that's all I care about.

Work has been rough lately, with all the late nights and horrible customer, but this night will make all that work worthwhile.

I glance over at our host and give him my signature sweet smile, to which he returns. Can't let him think that he bores me.

I then give a seductive look at the other young gentleman in the room. His dark brown hair was greased back and his muscles filled out his button-up nicely. Hopefully our plans for after this haven't changed. He catches my gaze with his chocolate brown eyes and smirks at me. It seems nothing has changed. Oh what fun I'm going to have after this boring little meet up.

Next to him was an old man that was our host's uncle. I never liked that old southern bumpkin. With his thick southern drawl and his quick way of speaking, it was sometimes hard to understand the man. He was a gambler and a snob. And I know he doesn't like me.

But that doesn't matter. I took a delicate sip of my red Merlot as I peered around the room.

My seductive partner got up from the couch and strode to the table next to our host for some more bourbon. As he took the third bottle on the table, I noticed that something was wrong.

-J-

Geez, can he get any more corny? My friend of many years is the biggest air head I know. He can't see that I'm fucking his girlfriend and I'm making a business deal with his bastard of an uncle behind his back. The idiot.

Her green eyes sent me a seductive glance when he got up from the couch to get another glass of scotch. Oh the after party will be fun. I guarantee that. I will make her my little red-head bitch.

I know I can be an asshole at times, but as the saying goes, "survival of the fittest." And he lost this game. He's just a stepping stone for my success. Although, if he were to find out ahead of time, it could spell trouble for me. But I can handle that.

The old bastard was easy to convince. He needed money for his gambling and for the expensive booze to fill his beer belly. I caught his dull blue eyes glancing around the room as I took another sip from my glass, finishing the last of my bourbon.

My idiot friend was taking another swig from his new glass of scotch as I got up to refill my own glass. As I approached, something seemed to be a bit off about him.

-U-

My stupid nephew. He has a good business head on his shoulders, but no common sense. Can't even see that he is being duped by his own uncle and his best friend.

When this business deal goes through it will ruin him. I almost feel sad, but I need the money. I gambled most of mine away and this deal with his friend and business partner will give me a good chunk o' cash. I just can't have the boy finding out about the other thing.

I have never seen that boy drink so much in my life. I'm surprised he was able to stand to go refill his fourth glass of single malt scotch. I believe it was Highland Park, if I read the label right. Got to admit, the boy has good taste in liquor, can't go wrong with this here Jack Daniels, but I prefer a nice Garrison Brothers Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey.

In the corner of my eye, I see his Jessabelle of a girlfriend and his no good friend giving each other a look. I know that look well. I said it once and I'll say it again, my nephew is a darn right idiot. I don't know how he hasn't noticed that they are screwing each other, they're not even trying to hide it anymore.

My nephew's devious friend follows him to refill his glass of Knob Creek bourbon. As he pours the bourbon into his glass, he glances at my nephew to say somethin', but pauses. I look at my nephew and knew that somethin' ain't right.

-D-

It was a beautiful sunny, spring day. The birds were singing and the gentle breeze was cool on my neck. It's not your typical day for murder.

I was in the area when I got the call from dispatch. So I quickly headed to the scene to make sure I was there first before any of the other rookie cops. I have seen dumb cops ruin crime scenes throughout my fifteen years on the force.

When I arrived, the first thing I saw was the body. He was lying face down next to a broken glass of some kind of liquor. With a glance I could tell that the man was poisoned, since there was no blood or wounds on the body.

I then took a look at the three guests. A woman with crimson hair was crying in the arms of a young man with slicked back hair. She was a dame, had all the right curves, but she could never compete with my lovely wife. The way that she held the young man I could only presume that he was her boyfriend. The young man's face was like a marble statue, cold with little emotion. He didn't once look away from the body as he rubbed the young lady's back comfortingly. Then there was the old man. He was sitting in a chair, face pale and his hands were shaking as he held on to his liquor glass like it was a life line. He kept shifting in his seat as his eyes looked everywhere but the stiff in the middle of the room.

From what I could see, this was no accident. There was no one else in the house besides these three, which put them on the top of my suspect list.

As I examined the body again I couldn't help but notice that a lot of things didn't add up. From what I was able to gather the young man had called the police minutes after the victim collapsed, but his body seemed too cold for being dead for a few minutes. On top of that, the body is face down, which tells me that not a one of them tried to perform CPR. Why was that? The young lady was a pharmacist, she would have had some medical training.

I decided to take a look around the room to see if I could find anything to note. The victim was in the middle of this study room. Behind him there was a medium sized, brown table with four different kinds of alcohol on it. On the victim's left there were two comfy crimson arm chairs with a small round table, with two coasters, between them. Behind the chairs there was a window that, upon closer inspection, was locked with the drapes drawn open to bring in some natural light. To the right of the victim there was a small, crimson couch with dark wooden trimmings that matched the two arm chairs. Against the wall there was three bookcases the color of espresso filled to the brim with books of different sizes and colors, and to the left there was the door that I came in at.

Taking one last look at the victim, I saw that it seemed he was pointing at something across from him. That was when I noticed the large desk. It looked to be made of cherry maple, polished to a nice shine, not a blemish on it. The warm, brown rolling chair behind it looked plush and well used. I went around toward the chair and saw that there were four drawers, two on each side.

I tried opening the top drawer on the left, it was locked. No cigar. I then tried the one below it. Yahtzee! It opened. Taking a look inside, I found that it had a couple of photos. And not just any photos. These photos were clearly of the young man and the young lady in the room being... intimate. Clearly these photos were evidence of an affair. I glance up at the two as I set the photos gently on the desk. The young lady had stopped crying and glanced at me from the apparent safety of the man's arms.

I, then, tried the top drawer on the right. This one gave with no resistance. Looking inside I found some papers. Taking them out to inspect them closer, I find that they are contracts and detailed plans. These were some damning papers as they described in great detail how the young man and the uncle would take over the business and cut the victim out of the equation, basically destroying the poor man's career. When I glanced up from the papers I noticed that the young man had been watching my every move.

Setting the papers on the desk next to the photos, I then check the last drawer. As smooth as butter I was able to open it and its contents seemed to be bank statements. Upon a closer inspection, I saw that there are a lot of miscellaneous assets in very large amounts. After another brief glance I was able to put two and two together. The uncle was stealing from his nephew, and not just from the nephew's business, but from his personal account as well. Should this continue, the poor man's life would be ruined. The old man had started fidgeting in his seat again.

With all this evidence laying out before me, I could only uncover the truth of this whole murderous affair. Apparently, our victim had uncovered all these truths and was going to expose them all for their treachery. Somehow, one of them found out and they knew they had to stop him before all their plans were ruined. The brains behind this heinous act was the young man, the uncle gathered them all here for drinks, and the young dame supplied the poison. There was only one question left unsolved; where was the poison?

If there was one thing that I learned from my lady, it was that any good woman has what she needs in her purse. I strode over to the couch where the young woman's black handbag was located. As I expected, she put up a bit of a fight. As my adorable wife has shown me in the past, you do not touch a woman's purse. A few of the rookie officers held her back as I went through

her bag. I pulled out keys, a ruby red lipstick, and a compact mirror. Finally I whipped out a small bottle. On the label it read: Cyanide. And there was the loaded gun.

I handed the vial to one of the officers to bag as evidence, as the others took the three criminals to the slammer. My work here was done. Now, all I had to do was go home, kiss my wife, and pick up my payment.

-H-

So in the end, all three were put on trial for murder. All according to plan.

Did that foolish uncle of mine really think I wouldn't notice all the funds that were being withdrawn from my accounts? I personally check them every night, how could I not notice?! He could have made off with thousands of dollars and spent it all on his ranch in North Carolina and on his alcohol addiction. Now, he can sober up in the slammer.

Then there is my so called "friend". I knew that jerk was ambitious. His one problem was that he could never come up with the ideas on his own. The minute I noticed that he was talking to my uncle, I knew he was up to something! Had he succeeded, he would have destroyed my business and would have been running a business empire. But now he can try to be the top dog in prison.

And the love of my life. Her betrayal came as a surprise to me. That vixen was only after money and looks. It truly broke my heart to find out she was sleeping with that jerk of a best friend. She would have played me for a fool, leave me to my heart break, and have a comfy life with her new lover. Joke's on her, now she is in jail surrounded by women, maybe hoping for a guard to notice her.

The sweet taste of revenge was well worth all the time and struggle I put into this plan. It all went better than I could have hoped.

It was hard to find and acquire the potion that Juliet took in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet", in all honesty I wasn't too sure it was going to work. I could have died.

But I didn't care. Should I have really passed, the detective would have gone through with our plan regardless.

He was easy to manipulate. He was very sympathetic to my plight. He also wanted to start a family with his wife and I gave him the funds to do so. Had I not gone to him for help, he would have been struggling to feed his family on his meager salary.

Sitting here in his home, sipping tea, I gave him his third and final payment. The first payment was to get the paralysis poison I asked for, the second was to pile all the evidence on those three so they could be convicted of my murder, and this third payment was to keep quiet.

I waited patiently as he counted out the money to make sure I wasn't swindling him.

With a nod of his head, I stood and slowly walked towards the door. The drug was still in my system, so my muscles were a bit stiff.

Now for my next plan.

To start a new life.

I can't let anyone know I'm still alive. It would ruin my perfect revenge.

I shall head to Sweden to start my new life. Even if someone was looking for me, they would never think to look for me there.

I palmed my American passport and one-way ticket in my coat pocket.

Stepping up to the door way, I took a deep breath and smiled.

Time to begin anew. One more step out the door and I leave my old life behind.

In three.

Two.

One.

Kody Hellenbrand

“The first thing I noticed about Kody’s writing was how raw and personal his stories are. Reading his writing feels a bit like peeking behind a curtain and in on the parts of someone’s life that they rarely share. Throughout the semester, Kody and I worked on refining his sentence structure. It is amazing how far he has come. I am so proud of him for publishing one of his pieces and hope, now that he realizes creative writing is a skill of his, that he will continue to pursue his abilities and grow his literary skills.”

- Casey Ptacek

The Rewards of Freedom

Most feelings are hard to put in the context of words, and we often don't know how to label how we feel, but one feeling I know all too well is anxiety. A shadow that is forever present lurking in the background, waiting for the chance to emerge, eager to make its presence known and disrupt my thoughts. Anxiety is like a flood; you try and prepare board up all the windows, doors, and any other entrances making sure there is no possible way for it to get inside. All it takes is one little crack or hole in your armor for it to all come flooding in an overwhelming wave of doubt and insecurities, ruining everything, and just like a flood, once it's started, it's hard to stop. When I experience this sensation of emotion, it feels like a weight on my chest, making it hard to breathe; my heart starts to race, and my stomach begins to turn and twist, making the looming task ahead even more prevalent and real.

I hate this feeling, gnawing at me, weakening my body, trying not to allow it to surface as I shove it down and try to focus on the task at hand. The worst feeling in the world is when you fail because of anxiety. The anger and frustration this causes in my chest feels like a bomb about to erupt, and the tears in my eyes feel like acid running down the side of my face; the embarrassment and shame of being in front of others knowing I didn't produce my best result, fills my head. It feels like everyone's watching me; I feel like I want to hide, where no one can see me and I'm left alone to unfold my emotions.

The hardest part about this is it never goes away. Every day is a battle to keep calm and have my emotions under control. It often feels like a giant wave approaching when you're swimming in the ocean. Sometimes you can make it to shore, and the storm passes, but sometimes the waves come too fast and are too big to out swim; they come crashing down, descending on your back suffocating and engulfing you in its current, throwing you around like a rag doll. You're left to watch this feeling helpless as the tidal wave of emotions tears through your body, ripping your self-esteem into shreds. Afterward, you feel exhausted and shaken never wanting to feel that way again but ultimately knowing it could eventually happen in the future.

Despite these feelings, I push forward and remind myself that I'm stronger than my doubt and insecurities. The greatest rewards are often on the other side of fear, and the confidence I feel within myself after I face my fears is one of the many reasons I continue to fight my anxiety. Every time I beat it, I get stronger, headed towards the direction of freedom and peace of mind.

Jaime Logue

“This is Jaime’s third and final time with the writing lab and I must say that I am honored to have been able to work with her all three semesters. Every time we meet, her story and characters continue to grow and develop and the plot either continues according to plan or shifts completely a different direction that works just as well. You may not notice it as much in this excerpt, but Jaime really goes on to further develop her story’s characters relationships with each other and they are so complex yet simple at times in the best ways. Jaime also pleasantly surprised me this semester by branching out with things outside of writing her novel but also journals, poems, and other various short stories as well, showing her capabilities as a writer of multiple genres. It has been an honor to work with someone who has a brilliant mind like Jaime’s and I definitely better be getting a copy of her novel when it’s finished (Keep pushing through the writer’s block! You’ve got this!)”

- Heidi Propson

Salem Daisies

The Martin Household

In the car on the way to Sarah’s house the girls talked about everything from who was hooking up with who at their school to the latest celebrity scandal. I couldn’t really contribute much to the conversation because, well, I knew nothing about either. Abby was the one to contribute the most to the school gossip.

“Did you hear about Tessa and Hardin? They are totally hooking up! I did not see it coming but now that it’s happened it totally makes sense!” Abby is as bubbly as can be, her arms moving excitedly around the car.

“Oh, please Anna said multiple times that it was gonna happen, you just didn’t listen.” Sarah entertains Abby’s gossip for a little while but ultimately focuses on the road instead of the gossip.

Maddie sits next to me and she pretends not to be interested but I can tell that she really is. She is quiet, observant, anything she contributes is no more than a sentence or two.

We pull into the driveway, Sarah’s house isn’t as big as Sawyer’s, but it is still really nice, more modern too.

“I know it’s not the Mather Mansion but it’s home.” Sarah shrugs her shoulders flashing me a smile in the rearview mirror.

“It’s still better than all my other placements.” Sarah turns so that she can see me in the backseat of her car, and I realize I shouldn’t have said anything because damn I’m getting really tired of all of this pity. I don’t need it, nor do I want it

“Sarah please don’t give me that look I didn’t say that to get pity.” Sarah closes her eyes and turns back around in her seat.

“I know you didn’t, I just, I don’t know.” She shakes her head and gets out of the car, Abby and Maddie follow her. While I find myself sitting alone in a car for the second time today, the only thing different about this time is that the girls are actually waiting for me.

When I get out of the car, I keep my head down as Sarah leads us to the door and all the way to her bedroom. Sarah’s bedroom is what I imagine an average teenage girl’s bedroom to look like. Pastel colored walls, big bed with a nightstand on either side, a corner with a saucer chair, pictures of friend and family, anything I could ever dream for. I am snapped out of my observations when Sarah starts to speak.

“Girls set your stuff down and hurry up because dad is grilling today, and I don’t want Mars to eat it all.”

“Mars?” Why is Mars here we just left him at the coffee shop.

“Oh yeah, Mars lives next door, he’ll smell the grill and come right over.” Sarah rolls her eyes, something I can tell she is fond of doing, then she laughs, and it is so carefree, I’m jealous that she can live like that. But I shouldn’t be jealous, her parents loved her enough to keep her, mine didn’t, that’s not her fault.

Abby and Maddie set their stuff down on Sarah’s bed, but I keep my purse on me the only thing in it is my journal and a pencil, both too precious to me to set down. Sarah eyes it but doesn’t say anything. Then she leads us down to the back porch of her house. The porch is enclosed with wood and glass with a door that leads out to the backyard, which is beautiful. The fall leaves have the ground smattered with hues of oranges and yellows. Looking to the right I can see a tall man with graying hair standing over a smoking grill. I assume that this is Sarah’s dad and when he turns around, I no longer have to guess because they have the same eyes. Those eyes, I can’t put my finger on where I’ve seen them before.

The door opens pulling my attention away from Sarah’s dad, sure enough, just like Sarah said, Mars is entering the back door.

“I smell Mr. Martin’s famous grilled food, I think I’ll start with the steak and end with the chicken, having the corn somewhere in-between.” Everyone on the porch laughs including Mr. Martin who just entered in behind Mars carrying a huge plate filled with food.

“Now, now, Mars let’s feed our new guest before you dig in.” Mr. Martin sets the plate down on the table then searches the room for me. When he finds me, he freezes and then blinks a couple times giving me a weird look. Then he shakes his head and greets me.

“Hi, you must be Daisy, I’m Lucas Martin.” Mr. Martin grasps my hand and pats it. His green eyes search mine as if looking for the answer to a question he didn’t ask. Something feels weird, not bad, just weird. Releasing my hand, he waves to a chair for me to sit down. Mars rushes over to make sure he is seated right next to me.

“Mars,” Mr. Martin’s tone is stern, but you can tell that it holds no real threat.

“For that we will pass the plate around the opposite way.”

“That’s ok, I just wanted to sit by Daisy.” Mars looks to me giving me yet another wink and wraps his arm around my shoulder.

“I know I’m her favorite.” Mars squeezes me tight before releasing, I grit my teeth trying not to wince, I’m not sure it’s working. Everyone in the room chuckles, I’m glad Mars is here, he seems to know how to make any tension in the room evaporate.

This is the most lavish food assortment I have ever seen that wasn’t on tv. There are burgers, steak, chicken, corn, mashed potatoes, and more. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say that sleep in the inn was actually a month and half long and this is actually Thanksgiving. I know that isn’t the case though because come Thanksgiving I will have already aged out of the system by a month.

“Well, go on Daisy, pick some food so I can get to devouring.” Mars nudges my shoulder my cheeks redden as I realize that I have been sitting here for a while just staring at the food.

I pick the smallest piece of chicken I can find and then grab a half an ear of corn, after that I start eating. Noticing the silence, I look up to see everyone staring at me.

“What?” Their faces are puzzled, and I wonder what I did wrong. Did I take too much?

“Daisy, you can take more food, there’s plenty. You have barely anything on your plate.” Sarah’s voice is sweet, and I can tell she’s trying not to place pity in her voice but it’s there, I’m not going to let it phase me this time because now I realize that we’ve just grown up living different lives. By no means do I think I had a great childhood, but I’m starting to think that it was worse than I realized. There are those that had it worse than me though, those that don’t even have a roof over their head at all.

“Oh, I just well...” I should be honest, ‘*should*’ being the keyword.

“I had a big breakfast and lunch so I’m not all that hungry right now.” My response seems to appease everyone, but Mars and Sarah, both of them squinting, analyzing my face. I get nervous and I almost let my face break its cool expression, but I don’t, I just continue to eat.

Sarah starts to say something but before she can speak the sound of the front door takes the heat off of me.

“I’m home and look who I found sitting on the front steps.” a woman that I assume is Sarah’s mom walk, through the door from the kitchen with a pouty D.J. in tow.

“Nobody answered my texts.” D.J.’s pout is adorable, he looks like a begging puppy.

“And you couldn’t have rung the doorbell or knocked like a normal person?” Abby quips and it’s the first time she hasn’t been completely cheerful. Sarah elbows Abby before getting up to give her mother a hug.

“Of course, I could have but who does those things anymore.” as D.J. walks past he ruffles her hair causing her to squeal.

“UGHHHHH!!! I hate you Dean Jacobs!!!” Abby screeches and a smirk sprawls across D.J.’s face.

“More weight baby, more weight.” D.J. spread his arms signaling Abby to throw more at him using his famous ancestor’s words, but instead of responding Abby just gets up and leaves the room.

“They kind of have an on and off relationship, they are mostly off, but everyone knows that they are endgame.” Mars’ whisper is faint in my ear and I appreciate the explanation because that just confused the hell out of me.

After dinner all of us teens sit on the couch and watch Halloween movies. Mars, of course, claimed the spot next to me grinning from ear to ear as he did it. Sarah is on the other side of me with Maddie next to her. A reluctant Abby is snuggling up next to D.J. on the other side of Mars.

We’re halfway through the second movie of the night and I can barely recall any of it. Don’t get me wrong I love Halloween, thriller, horror, you name it movies, but right now all I can think about is how this coming Halloween means aging out of the system and no longer provided for in anyway. I should start looking for a job so I can support myself when the government no longer has an obligation to, this placement was the last-ditch effort to find me a home. I was actually supposed to be in a group home already, but Timothy miraculously found me this placement last minute. And by last minute I mean last minute, as in events took place, I was sent to hospital, I was released from hospital and sent to police station, I was waiting at the police station for a social worker to take me to the nearest group home when Timothy walked in with papers stating he had found me a new placement. Next thing I know I was in the car with Timothy heading to Salem Massachusetts, it’s hard to believe that that was only about 24 hours ago.

Mars wraps his arm around me his dark brows furrowed in a silent question, I muster up a small smile and look back to the television. After a while Mars still hasn’t removed his arm, usually I mind when a guy that I’ve just met does that, but Mars makes me feel safe. I look back at Mars to see that he is already looking at me. Did he even look away to begin with?

Issues

Sawyer

“YOU HAVE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME SAWYER!” I can practically see the spit flinging from my father’s mouth as he screams at me. As if I don’t already know that I’ve fucked up big time.

“YOU HAD ONE JOB TODAY!” He pauses rubbing his hand over his mouth and grabbing his jaw.

“You had one job and that was to make Daisy feel like she is actually *wanted* here. Instead, she is spending the night at Sarah’s because you couldn’t keep your anger in control” Pfft

“Why is it such a big deal that she feels wanted? And why lie to her? I definitely don’t want her here.” I don’t, it has been just my dad and I since my mom died when I was eight.

“There are a lot of things that you don’t know about her, she has had a really rough go of it. Stuff that would make even the strongest people we know drop to their knees in defeat.” He turns his back to me running his hand through his hair.

“Like what Dad?” He turns back to me something close to devastation in his eyes.

“Stuff that, as much as I think it would help you understand why I took her in, it is not my place to tell you, that is not a way for me to gain her trust.” This. This is why I have an issue with taking Daisy in, Dad refuses to tell me anything about her.

“Bullshit” It’s barely a whisper under my breath but it’s enough to make my father’s eyes fill with anger.

“Your mother was in the foster system, so the next time you decide to take your anger out on Daisy try and think about how it would have made your mother felt, both as your mom and if she were Daisy.” I freeze, my eyes widening, I didn’t know that about my mom.

“Yeah, thought so.” My dad turns and heads up the stairs to his room. Shit, I’ve royally fucked up.

Ghosts of the Past

Daisy

D.J. and Mars left after the fifth movie, almost everyone had been asleep except for Mars and I, Mars woke up D.J. which woke up Abby who was curled up closely against him. She screeched and shoved D.J. away which caused Sarah and Maddie to wake up. I hear Mars tell D.J. that he could crash at his place, hugging his friends and me goodbye Mars then had to pry D.J. away from Abby, he was kissing her, she was kissing him, a second later and it wouldn’t have been so PG anymore.

“Don’t worry, they confuse us most of the time too.” Sarah comes to stand next to me staring at Abby who is looking sort of dazed. Sarah goes to her friend and leads her to the bedroom. Maddie gives me a sad smile then follows them. I’m left standing in the middle of the darkened living room, the only source of light is the moon shining through the window.

“Daisy, you coming?” Sarah stands in the hallway waving me toward her. She leads me to her bedroom and points at her bed.

“When we have sleepovers, we alternate who sleeps on the real bed, tonight is your turn since you are new to the group. Next week is Maddie’s then mine, then Abby’s.” She looks into my eyes pleading for me to understand that this is how things work here and that she’s not giving me pity. I don’t fight her on it, and she looks relieved.

“There is a pair of pajamas there for you and the bathroom is right across the hall if you want privacy to change, if you don’t care, we’ve all seen boobs before.” I opt to change in the bathroom because I don’t know these girls well enough yet and not all my scars are internal.

Once I’m in the bathroom I lift my shirt to examine what will most likely be my biggest scar yet. I peel the stained gauze from my abdomen, clenching my teeth as the medical tape pulls at my skin. The flesh underneath looks red and angry, I grab some toilet paper and run it under water. Carefully I use the wet toilet paper to wipe off the dried blood from around the wound. I fold up the old gauze and place it into a plastic bag that I had in my purse then returning it there. I pull out a fresh roll of gauze to place on my injury taping it with medical tape, both the gauze and the tape provided to me by Timothy because the hospital wouldn’t.

After shoving down my pants I unfold the ones loaned to me by Sarah, the pants have cute little cartoon waffles on them, you know the kind with the big eyes and pink dots for blushing cheeks. I pull them up making sure the waist band doesn’t touch my freshly bandaged wound. Unfolding the shirt, I see just one of the cartoon waffles with a heart on its butter pad, it’s a tank top though

so I opt for my long sleeve tunic that I was already wearing, I just met these people, and I cannot trust people I just met with my secrets, the past has taught me that lesson very quickly.

I quietly make my way back to Sarah's room, when I enter her room, I see that everyone is already asleep, and honestly, it's a relief I need a break from all the drama that is my arrival in Salem. I slide underneath the covers and let sleep overtake me.

"You're a dumb little bitch, you know that?" My current foster father Earl spits and he hovers above my curled-up form. He's only five-foot five but the long knife he's holding makes up for what he lacks in height.

"Get up!" When I don't, he grips my arm, pulls me up and throws me back against the wall.

"You think I can let you live now that you've seen some shit? You would be fucking wrong, you see ma wife can't know anything about this, she's an annoying bitch when I'm with other women. So, you see I has ta kill ya" He's in my face now, breath reeking of alcohol and cigarettes. He wraps his grimy hand around my neck and then I feel it. The pain in my abdomen, it's sharp. I gasp for breath as his hand tightens around my neck. I try as hard as I can to pull his hand away but he's too strong, my eyes start to roll back and I can vaguely hear the sirens as I slip into unconsciousness.

Pachia Moua

“Pachia is an extremely talented poet. Emotions and passion come easy to her. From the start of our sessions, she has brought in beautiful, heartfelt pieces of art. Pachia's writing was near perfect so we focused on, what we call, 'makeup.' We played with formatting, fonts, bolded words, etc. Because of Pachia's skillful writing, we were able to have joyful, creative sessions. She was absolutely lovely to work with and has a bright future ahead of her.”

- Tesa Peel

Who I Am

The first thing I see is my reflection staring back. It's kind of creepy if you ask me. How everything you do – every time you move – it does the exact same thing. Yet, when I move and it moves at the exact moment, I wonder if it shares the same thoughts as I do about myself. I won't even lie about the fact that I'm the type to think that the glass is half empty. It's already hard enough to live a life like that daily. There are days where I stare at myself in the bathroom mirror and barely recognize the person staring back. The dark eyes stare back into mine and I see she's someone that has changed over the years and nothing has made her the same since. Everything I see through the mirror is an illusion. Her brown pair of eyes that seem to glow with disappointment and shame the longer I dwell into them. Her face rounder on the cheeks and a layer of fat just lightly showing under her chin. I see her gently touching her face. Her once smooth 'like a baby's butt' skin is now dry and rough like a desert. She used to praise herself for having clear, smooth skin. It was the only thing she wasn't insecure about but now it made her self-conscious. However, she's in the process of getting it back to the way it used to be. She moved towards her neck, her fingers lightly touching her pulse. She stared at the double chin that has been making her life hell these past years. Her jawline barely visible anymore because of it, and she hopes she will get rid of it soon. It was never slender or elegant to begin with, yet it still held a certain simplicity that didn't make her look too big either. At least she's okay with that fact. But what she isn't okay with is her décolleté. There's simply no dimension at all. She has seen so many women with protruding collar bones and slender bodies. It was an elegant look that she wished she had naturally, but it just wasn't meant to be. The feeling of despair dousing her like water. She continues to look down and evaluate her stomach. It has grown in size, and lately, she has been trying to wear loose clothing to cover her chubbiness. She remembers the many times where she believed her stomach was 'too big' when she was younger, but now looking at it, her past self couldn't even begin to compare it to herself now. And the last thing she despised the most out of herself is her legs. My God, she wished she was born with skinny legs but drew the short end of the stick instead. Her family, especially her sisters, naturally have thick bodies. But for her, over the years, it has thickened more than she wanted. She looks back at the mirror, back at me, and I realize she *is* me. It's crazy to even begin to realize how much a reflection can show one's true self, and for my case, I've only started to recognize the parts of me that I didn't see before.

At this realization, I begin to pull myself out of the cold water and give myself some warmth. I start to admire the way my eyes stare back with glowing confidence. I see how my cheeks are pink with dry patches, but with a slight healthy glow that I know will soon go back to its original

shape. Even though my cheeks were rounder now, I try my best to smile bright so that I can show myself that it's okay now. I continue to inspect my neck, my non-existent collar bone, and my thick legs. Each and every part of me is beautiful, I tell myself. I may not be happy about how I am now, but I can still work with it and change for me. Hope begins to bloom and every negative thought I once had dissipated. Every day, I will tell myself a positive thing I love about me, and maybe this will change my mentality. This is where change begins. The very first step. Destroy the negativity and allow the positivity to grow from damaged but surviving roots.

To Phauj

Nyob zoo os Phauj,

I miss you so much. Time has flown away from your hands and into mine. I'm turning twenty-one soon and it'll be the first birthday without you here to celebrate it. Every day, I reminisce the times you were here. Days where you sat on the living room sofa and napped while everyone was doing their own things. Even when I visit home now, I still feel like you're here with us. Your presence lingers around and I'm relieved by the thought because I don't feel alone when I'm home.

The other day, I came home to grab something from Mainou. I went to our bedroom where you used to sleep. When I was opening the door, I had hit something and I immediately thought of you. Crazy, right? When you were still here you would change right in front of the door, and whenever someone opened the door it would hit you. That instinct was so deep and vivid, I almost said, "Oh, thov txim os, Phauj," but I stopped myself because I had to remind myself you weren't there. You were never there. It was your cane on the ground that I had hit when I opened the door.

I always thought death would be the barrier between us, but I think it only brought us closer. Not because you're no longer here that things have been better, but because your death made us realize the true meaning of family. We now cherish the moments with one another, and everything is the way it is because of you. My life at the moment is full of assignments and I wish to have a couple days to myself so I can feel more at peace.

I'm sorry I haven't visited you in a while, but yesterday, Hli went to visit you and showed us your plaque. It was beautiful. I wished I was there to say hello and goodbye like I used to do. Next time, I'll make sure to bring you flowers and your favorite snacks. Kuv hlub koj os, Phauj.

Yours Sincerely,

Pachia Moua

Mythili Rajendran

“It was a great pleasure to work with Mythili this semester. Mythili’s creativity and spirit are very present in this piece. To see her story grow and develop throughout the semester was a reflection of Mythili also growing as a writer. I enjoyed brainstorming and world-building with her. Her inspirations from other fantasy works and films helped to fuel her creativity and I was happy to help her channel that. I’m proud of Mythili for submitting to this collection and I do hope that she continues to write, and grows the spark of passion that she clearly has for writing.”

- Kala Buttke

Dino and the Kingdom of Kijara

Once upon a time in a cute little town lived a boy named Abu. He was a kind hearted, caring, sweet little child in his family. Abu had a younger brother named Leo, they both are best friends. Abu and Leo played together, and studied together, they go for a picnic, beach, park, and everywhere together as their best friends.

One day when Abu was walking back home from school he found a cute little puppy dog. He thought that the puppy was really cute so he took the puppy dog home. When he went back home his mom and dad were questioning him a lot about the puppy. They asked him where did you find him? Who does he belong to and how old is he? Sweet little Abu answered all of it patiently. Later, that evening Abu was eagerly waiting for his little brother Leo to come home, and when Leo came home Abu was so excited to show the puppy and so was Leo to see the puppy.

Abu and Leo would get food, water and toys for their puppy to play with. One day when Abu was playing outside he heard a noise in his room. Tiptoed to his room to see what the noise, and he quietly opened the door when he found a Magic boy with wings and big ears with a tattoo on his forehead and the magic boy was sitting on his bed eating ice cream. Abu was shocked, and quickly ran to Leo to tell him all that he saw, Leo was playing in the ground and did not hear Abu calling him from a distance. Abu ran so fast and reached Leo, and said everything what he saw. Leo could not believe anything. Abu took Leo to their room to show what he saw but unfortunately, Leo did not see what he saw but he just saw the puppy in their room.

Leo said to Abu, “did you make up what you said or is that real”

Abu responded, “it was real I did not lie or make up anything that I just said to you”.

Leo asked him, “are you sure you weren’t dreaming”

Abu replied, “no I wasn’t” and Leo suspiciously started thinking and left with a deep look in his eyes at Abu.

The next day Abu and Leo were getting ready to go to school, and Abu saw the puppy was eating ice cream from his cup that he had placed it on his study desk, and Abu was wondering how did he get up on the study desk and asked Leo.

Leo answered “maybe he just got the chair and got on the table, started eating the ice cream”.

Abu was convinced by the answer, but still Abu had a weird feeling of a puppy eating ice cream. Later, that evening Abu did some research on puppies eating ice cream but found nothing and was feeling very suspicious about it.

Abu, and Leo walked into their uncles ice cream shop to know if he sells ice cream for puppies. Uncle laughed and said, “you kids are funny, who gave that idea?”

Abu responded, “our new puppy was eating ice cream this morning”.

Uncle responded, “Puppies don’t eat ice cream little boys”.

Abu and Leo were astonished to hear that. Abu told Leo maybe it’s a “magic puppy”!!!

Leo said, “Oh my god, yes! You said what I exactly thought about”.

Abu and Leo decided to keep a watch on the puppy and did not utter a word to their parents or uncle.

One fine morning when Abu and Leo took their puppy for a walk they came across Jammie the bully. Jammie and his friends threw orange juice on Leo’s face and poor Leo started crying, Abu got angry at Jammie and pushed him away but Jammie got more angry and hit Abu. The puppy got angry and bit Jammie, but the bite wasn’t normal. Jammie felt a deep burn in his skin and his hands started turning blue. Jammie said, “Oh my god somebody save me please, I am so sorry Abu and Leo please help me, please!”

When he said sorry his burn went down and his hands stopped turning blue. Jammie, and his friends, Abu and Leo was astonished.

Abu and Leo went home with their puppy and were talking, “what was that puppy? Are you the magic boy?”

The puppy showed his sad face and Leo ran to kitchen to get the ice cream for puppy and gave it to him, puppy showed a happy face and ate it. The puppy revealed his true form of the Magic boy. Abu and Leo were astonished and said “wow, this is phenomenal”.

The magic boy said, “hello Abu and Leo, I know you guys are in awe but yes it was me who made Jammie say sorry to you guys. I did that because you both are a very kind, sweet and loving souls who saved me and gave me shelter to live in your home when nobody cared about me. I just wanted to show my gratitude towards you both. Thank you guys!” Abu and Leo were so happy to see the magic boy they had a lot of questions for him.

Abu and Leo went on asking, “Are you an angel? Fairy god mother? Can you fly? Can you fight?”

Magic boy said, “Oh my, come on guys let me get some more ice cream if I should answer your questions”

Leo got some ice creams for him.

Magic boy answered, “No I am not a fairy or a god mother. Yes, I can fly. I am an immortal Alien to you humans. My mother is a human, and my father is from a different planet with magic powers, and so I’m a half human, and my name is Dino. I live in the magic world, I came to visit the earth and I fell from the sky due to the heat. Nice to meet you guys, I promise I will never hurt you or will never let anyone hurt you”.

“Nice to meet you too Dino, were so happy to have you with us,” said Abu and Leo. Later, in the night Abu, Leo and Dino went to bed in the same room.

Next morning they woke up Abu and Leo decided to go to play in the park, and take Dino with them. While they were playing, they didn’t realize that they were going to into the forest. They took this as a good chance for Dino change his form into a magic boy. They continued playing as a magic boy and didn’t realize that the time was passing by, and their mom called uncle to help her find the kids since their dad wasn’t home.

Uncle guessed that, “these kids must’ve gone into the forest. Let me go check in here.

When he came looking for Leo and Abu he saw the magic boy flying and chasing Abu. Unfortunately, uncle thought that he was some sort of a daemon trying to hurt his nephews and tried to save Abu and Leo from the wonder boy. Abu and Leo were shocked that uncle saw wonder boy,

Abu said “uncle, that’s our friend Dino. He won’t harm us don’t worry”

uncle said “Are you boys crazy? Playing with a daemon”

Abu replied “He’s not a daemon he’s from a different planet, our friend the puppy. Dino transform yourself into a puppy”, and as he said Dino did. Uncle was astonished.

Later, Abu explained about it all to uncle, and convinced uncle not to tell anyone about that, and it is a top secret of Abu, Leo, Uncle and Dino. Uncle agreed. Uncle took Abu, Leo and Dino back to home.

Their mom asked “where were you boys? I was so worried? How is Dino doing?”

“were all good mom don’t worry” said Abu.

“Yes they are”, said uncle.

Later, uncle came into the boys room and asked them to confess everything to their mom. The boys replied, “No, we won’t. It’s supposed to be a secret”

Uncle said to Dino, “Take us to where you came from”

Dino replied, “Sure, I could but my people shouldn’t see you guys, until I tell my family about it.”

After a while Dino flew with his wings, uncle, and the boys flew with a broom to his land Kiraja where it was filled with magic, and fantasies. It was a portal from earth to the planet Kijara.

They flew to his place invisibly, and uncle was in awe to see how beautiful his land was. There were golden trees with sweet fruits on and purple flowers all over, shining, shimmering

mercury flowing like a river, fresh grass and lilac purple, sun and the moon shining bright all day. Beautiful houses filled with all the luxuries needed for all the aliens in their land. Flying broom in every houses.

Far far away seemed a gorgeous glittering castle which was guarded by the wolf demons. Beautiful Unicorns, and glowing sunshine.

It was home for the Prince Dino. When they were close to the castle Dino said 'Welcome to my home, friends'

Abu, Leo, and uncle were in awe and said, "are you a "Prince?"

Dino replied, "Yes, I am the prince of this Planet. My father and mother are the king and the queen of The kingdom of Kiraja"

Abu, Leo, uncle were in awe again. They said to each other that there's going to be a lot of surprise in this land. They were on their way into the castle and when they landed Abu, Leo, uncle went into the castle but nobody could see them because they are invisible. Dino took them to the entrance of their castle where it looked beautiful, there was a tall towers it was chilly and beautiful to see. Crystal like Mercury flowing in the a pool and it looked miraculous. There was gorgeous flowers that did not exist on earth. A big ancestral statue hanging on top of the castle, and Abu asked, "Who's that"?

Dino replied, "that's my great grandfather, King Zander"

On their way they saw a glowing tree. Uncle asked, "Wow! That's a beautiful tree. What kind of tree is that?"

Dino replied, "Oh, that a magic tree, it grants your wishes if you truly wish from your heart. All you have to do is touch the tree and make a wish with love"

Uncle said, "That's AMAZING".

Uncle and the boys were mesmerized by what they saw, and they were curious to see what else was there for them.

They walked up the stairs where they saw the moon was really close to them, Leo tried to touch. Uncle said to Leo

"Leo, no! Do not touch anything"

Leo said, "Aw ok, I won't"

Dino took all three of them to his aunt's castle which was 3 hours away from Kijara, where he wanted them to meet his aunt. His aunt was stunningly gorgeous, and smarter, powerful, kind hearted, generous and the greatest princess, who took care of the other part of Kijara. Dino took his friends to his aunt, but aunt was very smart, she instantly felt the presence of someone and used her magic powers to make Dino and his friends visible. Dino and his friends were caught. Aunt was surprised to see Dino after a long time and gave him a tight hug and asked him where did he go all this while and Dino explained her everything. She introduced herself to Dino's human friends and she was very surprised, and happy to see all of them.

Dino said to aunt, “No one should see my human friends as it could be a problem in the kingdom of Kijara, as his people might think that they trespassed into the Kijara”

Aunt said, “Ok I will make sure no one sees them”

Dino had to go see his parents and tell them he was fine. In the meanwhile aunt uncle and the boys spend time, got to know each other and aunt showed around her castle, and her magic powers.

Dino met his parents in the form of prince and his parents were so happy to see him again after a long time. Dino explained the king, and queen about his human friends and how nice they were. The king and queen agreed to have them over at the kingdom and celebrate their traditional festival which is the “Festival of Lights”.

Dino came back to aunt and told her and his friends about everything and that their invited over to his castle for the festival of lights and celebrate with his family. The celebration was grand as ever with lightings, and candles all over the planet, people of Kijara shopping new clothes and gifts, kids flying around everywhere. The king announced that the prince is back and that he got his human friends to Kingdom of Kijara and that they’re going to stay over for the festival of lights. The king made decree that the guests need to be treated the best.

Dino, aunt, and his human friends came in their original form to the city of kijara, and there was a parade of people playing music and dancing for welcoming the humans into the kingdom of Kijara. Everyone was so happy and the boys were so excited. After they came into the castle the king and queen welcomed them with gifts, water and snacks. They spent talking for a bit and went off to shopping, and to see around the kingdom on the king’s dragon. There was fire crackers bursting all over the sky and shining sparkles like snow above from the sky. The day was filled with fun and joy. It was time for them to be back and get ready to have feast with the king and queen. The boys were excited to wear the traditional clothes of kijara, and have the traditional meals.

They went into the dining hall and was surprised to see the dining table was huge and flying up in the air. The boys and uncle used a broom to fly up to the table and was surprised again to see all the food up on the table. The king, queen, aunt, uncle, Dino and the boys and some other relatives were present to see the humans. It was a yummy, fantastic feast.

It was time for the boys and the uncle to go back to earth. Dino and the kingdom of Kijara was sad to see them go but Dino promised to the boys and uncle that he would come visit them on earth and they could come over to Kijara anytime they want.

Abu, Leo, and uncle went back to planet Earth and landed to their home where the time was still and started the moment when they said, “hello mom”

Their mom replied “hello boys, how was did your day go”?

Abu, Leo and uncle were thrilled to see that the time stood still for all the time that they were in Kijara, Abu thought about Dino and smiled. One thing they never forgot was about each other, and they lived happily ever after.

Taylor Schmidt

“It was great working with Taylor throughout the semester and seeing her creative spark and enthusiasm for writing. I am consistently impressed by the level of thoughtfulness she puts into her writing and her ability to share these complex connections. Time and time again, I am amazed at Taylor’s natural talent to descriptively detail characters and events through writing. Most of the semester, we spent looking at the chapters of a novel she is creating. It wasn’t until more recently that she brought this short story to a session. This original love story weaves fantasy elements and profound emotions while painting a wonderfully engaging storyline for the reader. I predict that this is only the start of Taylor’s publishing career as I’m sure she will continue to pen many more detailed, elaborate, and interesting stories in the future.”

- Halee Fritsch

The Kings of Night and Day

The King of Night sat in his boat of stardust, the dark waters lapping at the opalescent sides in gentle motions. Rippling waves rocked the boat from side to side with as much control and care as a mother lulling a babe to sleep. “Are there more colors here than this, do you think?” He asked, dark hair slipping from beneath the silver diadem perched atop his head as he turned to his companion. The ancient-looking man straightened, pulling his cloak more tightly around himself as he met the King’s eyes. The Man in the Moon opened his wrinkled mouth to speak, cratered cheeks pulling up into a smirk before faltering at the look in Night’s eyes. There was a deep sorrow there, but beneath that lay a whisper of something hopeful, a longing that could not be silenced. He took a breath, continuing as if nothing had given him pause.

“I see only what you have shown me, my lord.” The King looked around himself, sighing. Yet another attempt to lure the man into conversation thwarted without even an attempt to humor him. Night was well aware of the minimalism that surrounded them. There was beauty in the darkness, the kind that one could only catch in glimpses, but no colors beyond that which painted the sea of stars, the boat, the Man in the Moon, and himself. Everything was in shades of blue and grey except for the black sky and the brilliant white of the stars. Cold, dark, and achingly empty. The shadow of a smile stretched itself across the King’s pale lips. “What do you imagine they look like now? His colors?”

The old man turned his head to gaze up at the stars. “I suppose they are beautiful, my lord.”

This is the curse of the Day and the Night, the agony inflicted by their separation. Of course, the gods didn’t think of that before they split time in two, didn’t think of how they were condemning one half to eternity in darkness and the other to eternity in light— each to live forever without the other. They simply Willed it, and so it was done. There were, however, small moments shared between the Night and Day that helped to soothe the ache of their missing halves. Night’s eyes were drawn down to the Datura blossom pinched between his index finger and thumb. The young man stroked a finger across a petal longingly. Before, they had tended Day’s garden together, Night bringing shade and hanging constellations from the trees as Day crowned him with vibrant blooms and woven vines. Even now, despite the divide, his love had set aside a portion of his garden for him. The Day tended the flowers and sent them to the in-

between, knowing that only the Night would see them bloom. This was all that remained of their love, each half resigned to see the other in glimpses of the backs of their heads and gifts that they would never see.

The old man, having noted the silence of his companion, turned to face the King of Night. In that instant, the delicate flower crumbled to stardust. "It's beautiful, my lord."

"Yes, it was."

Each picked up their oar, and the Moon began to set once again.

There was once a space between Night and Day where the lovers could meet, if only briefly, to trade places. These were dubbed the Halls of the In-Between. For a time, these Halls were a bit of beautiful respite, where two halves of a whole could join once more, if only for a brief moment. These havens were a place where Night and Day could hold each other, share breath, and remember the time before. The gods, however, grew displeased with these temporary unions. The Day would rush across the sky to join the Night and then the Night to join the Day, cutting the time of the mortals short. The gods wanted their creations to have equal time in the light and the dark, and so commanded Day and Night to create Vassals to rule the Halls.

Night wept, and from his tears formed a tall woman with curly hair and flesh the color of the shadows of the trees. She was called Dusk. He clutched her hands and pulled her into an embrace, even as he knew that she would bring him unspeakable pain. Day walked through his garden and plucked an anemone from its fellows, forming it into a lithe youth with sharp features and a sharper tongue, but hair as light as corn silk and as soft as the summer breeze. He was named Dawn. Day took Dawn further along the path, teaching him the names of each growing thing so that he would never be alone. Night and Day sent Dusk and Dawn to guard the Halls, and the Gods wrenched the two lovers apart once again.

Each cycle, Night would row the Moon across the sky to the Hall of Dawn and Day would ride in his Chariot to the Hall of Dusk. The two Kings loved the Vassals as their children, each seeing the other in their creations. Night spent the time he had in between journeys filling the skies with more constellations, creating stories to tell his love if they ever met again. Day planted flower after flower, hoping the colors would replace the aching in his heart. Then, one cycle, a thought came to the King of Day. He planted a tree that grew tall, with peeling bark as thin as parchment and as pale as moonlight. He plucked petals from his darkest flowers and burned them to ash, pierced himself with thorns to mix an ink from his blood. He tore a sheet from the tree and carefully wrote to the Night. "Why do you fill the sky with such beauty if the mortals only fear you?" He tied the note to the stem of an evening primrose and handed it to the Vassal of Dusk. That evening, the Man in the Moon watched his Lord read the note Dusk had been asked to deliver, watched as a true smile burst across his face, and wondered if this was what the Vassals meant when they spoke of the brilliance of sunlight.

And so the Kings of Night and Day fell in love once more.

Each morning, the King of Day would write a note to the Night, and each evening, the King of Night would pen his answer across the sky with stars. Many cycles passed in this way, hundreds of questions and hundreds of answers punctuating how alone they both were. The King of Night ferried the moon across the sky at the appointed time and spent the rest drifting beneath the blues and blacks. He stared into the depths and wondered how close he could get to drowning

himself before the gods pulled him back. On one trip, the Man in the Moon finally gathered the gall to ask him.

“Why do you gaze into the water, my lord?”

The King of Night paused, allowing the creaking of the oarpegs to fill the silence before stating simply, “It is lonely in the dark. I do not wish to see the stories that I cannot share.” The Man in the Moon looked at the King, seeing the ancient sorrow in his eyes that was far older than his own, and wondered. “Do you miss him so?” The steady noise of the turning of the oars stopped for a moment as a tear dropped from the eye of Night. “More than all the stars in the sky, and all the flowers in his garden. More than the depth of the sea.” The Man in the Moon set a gentle hand on the knee of the King, and they began to move once more toward the Hall of the Dawn.

One cycle, as the King of Night was turning to return to his boat after ferrying the Moon to the Hall of Dawn, he felt a delicate hand clutch at his sleeve. The King embraced the Vassal of Dawn, gently running his fingers through the adolescent's hair and taking in the scent of freshly turned earth that clung to him like a second skin. The boy leaned into him, allowing himself to bask in the coolness of Night for a moment before he spoke. “Look to the sky tonight when you return to the sea.”

“No note?” The King inquired, struggling to maintain his composure. His heart felt like it had been shredded, each stuttering beat a reminder of its battered state. Perhaps Day had finally tired of him. What use was a man of cold and darkness to one with such warmth and vibrancy?

The Vassal sighed, the pattering of warm rain on thin ice. “Look to the sky, father, and see.”

The two locked eyes for a moment, and the King's heart throbbed at the echoes of his lover he saw beneath the youth's green exterior. He turned on his heel, stepping once more toward the boat. Dawn let him.

The King of Night took his time rowing the Moon across the sky, keeping his eyes locked firmly on the bottom of the boat. Fear and self loathing twisted in his gut like serpents. He groaned softly, wondering what he had done to finally sever the Day's love. Of course, it would be his doing, rather than the work of the gods, that would finally be their end. The old man watched him with curious eyes, though something twinkled just beneath the surface. “Are you ill, my lord?” The King of Night scrubbed a hand across his face, as though he could wipe away the pain with one movement. “Not ill. Frightened.”

“What could possibly frighten you here, my lord?”

“An answer.” The Night looked up at last, his face contorted in grief. He knew now that he had been foolish to believe that he could keep Day. His eyes stung as he scoffed at his own naivete. He could see ten billion more cycles, and all he would ever have would be the monochrome sorrow of the night. This was his birthing blanket and his funeral pyre, his first cry and his death knell. He would only ever have the boat, the Halls of Dawn and Dusk, and the Man in the Moon. For a moment, he thought again about diving into the sea, swallowing up as much of the water as he could so that he might end this eternal darkness, usher in a world where Day ruled it all. It was in that moment, when Night finally decided to give up, that *it* appeared.

A streak of green, brilliant as any budding leaf, shot through the midnight sky. Another, this time orange as an oriole. Burst after burst of color began to flood the sky, painting a wide ribbon as varied and colorful as Day's garden above the two men. Tears began to run down the King of Night's cheeks in burning rivers as his constellations were joined by a rippling stream of hues. "What?" The word was half gasp, half whisper, a punched-out, ragged thing that cracked as it escaped from the King's parted lips. In that moment, he cared not for the gods and their wrath, nor for the mortals and their *equal time*. The Man in the Moon looked to him, a gentle grin warming his wrinkled face. "Go. I can pilot this boat well enough on my own. Go to him." And the King of Night was off, running atop the dark waters without once glancing at the depths below. Each step sent ripples across the sea, Night leaving far too soon as the moon continued its slow path across the sky. The King of Night threw open the doors to the Hall of Dawn, feet leaving trails of stardust in their wake as finally, *finally*, he reached the garden of the King of Day.

Day was sitting on a bench of stone, carefully twirling a daffodil between his fingers, but looked up sharply as Night burst through the doors. It was all Day could do to stand and open his arms as Night crashed into him, bowling him over. The lovers fell to the ground with a thud, ignoring the sharp bite of the flagstones as they clung to each other. They were both crying now, and from their tears sprung moonflowers, lilies, and roses of a deeper crimson than anyone would ever see again. "You gave me back the colors." Night croaked, stroking one shaking hand down the side of Day's sunken face. They drank each other in, each seeing their own suffering and loneliness reflected in the face of the other. Day shuddered, a rattling sob leaving his lips before Night captured them in his own. When at last they broke apart, Day spoke in a trembling voice. "I can't give you rainbows anymore, I tried, but I thought that maybe this... Maybe it could be enough."

"You haven't tired of me? I thought, when you stopped writing... Darling, I was so lonely without you." Night said. His voice cracked but he soldiered on, continuing softly. "Were you lonely too?"

Night could feel the moment that Day broke, digging soil-covered fingers into his indigo robes as he wept. The two grabbed each other tighter, aware that they could be ripped apart in an instant but unwilling to even chance letting go. They were whole again, for the first time in millenia.

The Man in the Moon continued to row himself across the sky, constellations shining like tiny suns as the waters reflected the aurora borealis above.

Night thought to himself "I would give everything I rule, everything I am, to see him smile again." He thought "This is the man that I love. I love, I love, I love, I love you." He thought "Nothing, Nothing could compare to this. You are warm. You are here. You are *mine* again." He thought "I am whole, I am free, we are together." Night said none of this. He had no need to. Instead, he lifted himself up on one elbow and looked around the garden. A cheeky grin spread across his face, tears still dripping down his cheeks, and asked "Are there more colors here than this, do you think?" Day laughed, pulling him into another searing kiss.

"So many more, and I cannot wait to show them to you."

Omary Rojo

“Through her writing, Omary Rojo paints an incredibly raw portrait of what it's like to grow up as a young woman in today's society. She tells her stories with total honesty and vulnerability as she covers a variety of difficult subjects, including bullying, self-image, and even the pandemic. Her ability to write in a way that makes even the most universal experiences such as boredom and stress feel personal, important, and valid is remarkable. Omary has worked incredibly hard this semester to tell her story in a way that truly reflects her and her experiences, and in doing so, she has made her writing (that was already great) even better.”

- Sara Kalkhoff

The Brightside

On May 13th, 2002, a little girl was born. This young girl had everything she ever wanted growing up. She was happy, she loved life, and she was always smiling. She was innocent, she didn't care what others said about her, she was in her own little world. Most importantly, she was happy. *Happiness*. What is the definition of it? Happiness is something I have not known for years. It seems whenever happiness enters my life it's brief. It can last a few days, a few months, but it never lasts for years. Ever since I can remember I have been like this. Almost 7 months to be exact that this darkness came into my life. It makes absolutely no sense to me or to anyone. I had everything in life as a child, and I still do. I have parents that love me, a roof over my head, friends, family, materialistic items which I have realized only contribute to temporary happiness. I've been fighting this battle for almost 7 years, I've won all these years against this treacherous thing, but I am so close to giving up. It's become so much harder to live life. “Just be happy” they tell me, but no one understands that this looming feeling, this dark thing that hangs over my shoulders everyday doesn't just disappear. “I don't understand how someone can be so sad” a friend once told me, she is so happy, a ray of sunshine. I responded to her “How can people be so happy?” Now I will take you to the beginning of where this all started, 7 years ago, in the summer of going into 6th grade.

To be honest, I don't remember much. All I remember is in 3rd grade someone had called me fat, it never really bothered me because I was never self-conscious. Things like that never bothered me because I was just happy. However, before 5th grade ended, I realized that I looked different, and that comment kept playing in my head from 2 years ago. Around this time as well, two deaths happened in my family. My aunt who had died of cancer and my dog who I watched stroke out. When these events happened of course I was sad, it's natural to be sad, but the sadness did not leave me, and neither did that comment. So, I started my journey to losing weight at only eleven years old, and it was not a healthy one. This also marked the beginning of my dark journey, and my biggest battle ever. *I'm fat*, I thought to myself. I would look in the mirror and despise myself. I started eating less and less. I started losing weight. My mother had no clue, and my father had no clue either that I was starving. Eventually she had noticed, but it was too late. Eventually I looked in the mirror and I was skinnier, yet I was not satisfied, since I could not see bone. At some point you could see my ribs, I was so thin that now my family was concerned, I was brought to the doctor and tested for anemia and looked at for anorexia. *Anorexia*, I thought to myself *I'll finally be skinny and look like the other girls*. This was a sad mentality for someone my age. I struggled with this for two years.... I was only eleven....

Eventually came my 6th grade year. This time I went back to public school after spending 3 years at a private one. My best friend Moriah, who I met in 2nd grade was there as well. However, when I first came up to her one day, she looked at me very weirdly. She couldn't recognize me, and she even admitted it took her awhile to realize who I was. This was because I had changed so much, I was now so thin, and I was just different. 6th grade was when everything really started, my personality changed, the darkness escalating. Like a metamorphosis, except this didn't turn me into something beautiful. It turned me into something dark, like I was going backwards in the metamorphosis, turning backwards instead of becoming a new beautiful thing, I became a mess.

At first everything was okay, besides the little feeling deep down inside me that I could not explain, and the terrible feeling that was brought by starving myself. *Everything was okay*. I finally reconnected with my best friend Moriah, I even made a new friend Jessica. And of course, I came into contact with my other friend Jessica who I met in 3rd grade. Both Jessica's play an important role in my life. Moriah as well. Anyways... During my sixth-grade year, I still experienced a lot of bullying... Looking back perhaps it was just little immature boys picking on a girl because he liked her and didn't know how to express it... but even if it was that the way the words were said, and the actions were done... it just hurt.

There was one guy in particular... we'll call him Ian.** Ian was basically one of those "popular" boys. (I emphasize popular because reminder, this was sixth grade, so we weren't that cliquey at this age.) To be honest I don't quite remember how we interacted, since we were not in the same homeroom, but our school was separated into A and B, this meaning A had gym and lunch I believe at the same time. Everyone in A had the same teachers as well and we simply rotated rooms when it was time to change subjects. Ian's most notorious nickname for me was "emo chick from the Incredibles" This was because I always had my hair in my face, and I wore black. Looking back it's pretty cool that people thought I looked like Violet, during the time it made me sad but now, I embrace it. Up to this day people still make the reference.

Majority of the bullying came from him at this time, to be honest I was more miserable than anything. I wasn't sure who I was or what I liked. At this age this depression wasn't as severe as it is now, but it was the starting point. Now this might seem odd, but ever since I was this age I noticed that my sadness would always hit stronger during a specific time. You would think it hit stronger in the winter, because that's when most people's seasonal depression/sadness hits, but no, mine was in the summer. Summer always made me miserable, in fact, it still does. Weird right? Normally summer is the time where everyone is most alive, happiness is in the air, there's not a care in the world. Teenagers are out till midnight being reckless and having fun in the sun with their friends. Me? I would be sad. I'll talk about my "summertime sadness" later on when it hits stronger.

Rebecca Spear

“It has been wonderful getting to know Rebecca as a person and as a writer throughout the semester in English 157. Rebecca’s passion for writing stories using characters and themes from TV shows that she loves makes it a joy to read. Although she uses similar characters in the popular show, *Grey’s Anatomy*, she completely changes it and truly makes it her own, providing a lot of humor, dialogue, and her own personal touches throughout the story. One of our main focuses this semester was to provide more detail and work on using dialogue, and I believe that Rebecca has soared above all of my expectations. She is a really talented writer, and she knows how to captivate the audience and make them never want to put the story down. I am very thankful for the opportunity to have helped watch her grow in her writing skills this semester, and I hope she will continue her passion in writing stories.”

- Hayley Bird

Greys Anatomy the other sister

Chapter One: Nathan

Nathan is mowing the lawn shirtless and he sees Lexie watching him. He stops and looks back at her looking up and down her body noticing her in leggings and a white crop top. “Hey Lexie, what can I do to help You” He says to her as she continues to stare off into space looking at him. Nathan continues to look at her thinking how beautiful of a lady she is and how lucky his best friend Owen is to have found her and married her first. Nathan has known Lexie for around 10 years at this point and he's never said it out loud, but he's been in love with her that whole time, even though he is married to Owen’s sister Megan and he loves her too, but Lexie is a completely different type of love compared to Megan. Megan and I have been through a war together lottery, Her missing at war, medical school and Megan's drug addiction. When Nathan and Megan first hooked up she was drop dead beautiful, but know all they do is fight and fight constantly . Nathan has had about all he can take of it. Lexie was a breath of fresh air. She is 5 foot 6 inches tall around 110 pounds long light brown hair with honey blonde highlights. She was kind and always so caring unlike Megan who was a complete and utter bitch to him. Megan had natural dark brown hair that she dyes red, has medium length hair and around 150 pounds and about 5 foot 4 we have one of our own biological kids her name is Teddy and one adopted son Farouk and I love them all to death, but part of me always wanted to know what else there was within the world. What other fish were in the sea. Who he was without Megan. All the sudden you hear Lexie scream “NATHAN WATCH OUT”.

Nathan snaps out of it and sees his head for the water and stops dead in his tracks. “Oh god thanks Lexie I was just in auto mode”.

Lexie giggles and walks closer to him “its okay Nathan, I do that all the time. But anyway i was wondering if you had any Ketchup i could borrow”. Lexie thinks about how she wishes she could just tell Nathan how she feels about him. She loved Owen a lot at first, but not so much. Her and Owen fight all the time and they have been getting worse and it seems like Owen only wants her to be his maid and give him intercorce. She feels like shes a sex slave to him whenever he wants it he gets it no matter what no if ands or buts about it.

“Sure Lexie it's in the kitchen”.

Chapter two: Lexie

She smiles and walks past “thank you Nathan”. She walks inside thinking about how Megan doesn't deserve someone like Nathan when all she does is treat him like crap all the time. She grabs the ketchup from the fridge and gets a little container out and puts the amount she needs in it and puts the bottle back as Megan walks in.

“HEEEEEYYYY GIRL” Megan walks to the wine rack and grabs a bottle of wine and opens it “you want a glass?”

“Um sure Megan, Nathan said it was okay if i grabbed some ketchup i was gonna leave like 2 bucks for the amount i took and bring the container back later” Lexie stands there watching Megan pour them both glasses of wine it was a bottle Cheval Blanc 1947 the cost per bottle is around 300,000 dollars. Megan may be a drunk nut; she had good and expensive taste.

“Lexie you don't need to worry about it. I promise it's not a big deal”. Megan hands her the glass of wine. She thinks to herself about how the way Nathan has started to look at Lexie she can see it in his eyes that he's slipping farther and farther away and closer and closer to Lexie. She can't imagine her life without Nathan. She loves him, but he don't love her the same way back anymore. They nearly exist in the same household, maybe sharing 100 words or exchanging in a week if even. He works nights and she works mornings at the hospital so they never really are home together. “Anyways Lexie i wanted to talk to you about maybe setting up a play date between Charlotte and Teddy this weekend i wanna take Teddy to Six Flags and thought maybe Charlotte would like to join us”. Charlotte and Teddy are both the same age and are the best friends you can't ever peel them apart from each other.

“Oh yeah that's fine i'll have to talk to Owen about it, but i'm sure that will be fine with him and Charlotte loves to hang with you and Teddy”. Lexie stands there and sips on the glass of wine. “Sounds good just text me so i know for sure” Megan puts the wine cap back on the bottle and puts it in the fridge to save for later.

“Of course Megan i'll go talk to Owen right when i get home and then with Charlotte to just make sure she actually wants to go.” she walks over after she finished her glass of wine and goes and rinses it in the sink.

“Well i'm gonna go work on a case for the hospital it was nice talking to you again Lexie”.

Megan walks away and goes to the master bedroom.

“Yeah ” Lexie grabs the ketchup and walks outside and watches Nathan who is currently singing *Pour Some Sugar On Me* by *Def Leppard*.

“Pour some sugar on me ooh, in the name of love pour some sugar on me C'mon, fire me up pour your sugar on me i can't get enough”. He continues to mow the lawn and singing the song is one of his favorite songs. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Lexie and stops and turns the lawn mower off and starts walking to her.

“Oh hey Nathan i didn't mean to bother you i'm so sorry”. She thinks about how incredible turn on she was listening to him sing that song and he keeps walking closer and closer to him till he is less than 6 inches from her.

“Oh no it's fine i need to take a break anyway” he smiles at how sexually frustrated she's becoming. “ i see you found the ketchup okay”

“Yes Nathan I did thank you so much but I must be going. We are cooking dinner at home. I hope to see you around,” Lexie runs off trying to get away from that situation. She runs in the house and into Owen

Chapter three: Owen

“Hey there, beautiful” Owen picks her up and sits her on the counter. “I’ve missed you” he rubs her inner thighs. “I see you got the ketchup” he grabs and puts it down on the other side of the counter and rubs higher up on her thigh.

“Yeah” she bites her lip. She loves when Owen does this but she knows she’s not turned on by him but is by Nathan and all she can think about is Nathan’s abs touching her. She leans into Owen and whispers. “Let’s take this to the bedroom, handsome.” She’s hoping sleeping with her husband will get these thoughts about Nathan to leave.

“Oh hell yeah don’t need to tell me twice” he sweeps her off the counter and runs upstairs to the bedroom.

Lexie giggles softly holding onto him tightly.

Around 1 hour passes.

“I need to go into work soon Owen Nathan and I have that patient that we hope to send home today.” she cuddles into him stilling thinking about Nathan and thinking how having sex with Owen just made her more confused than ever before. That was the best sex her and Owen have had in a very very long time. It felt natural and not forced.

“Okay I remember you telling me that I’ll stay home and get Charlotte and Lexie fed and do housework”

“Okay handsome” she kisses his cheek and gets up. She walks to the closet and grabs a red dress and her black bow tie belt to match and black heels. She puts it all on. “I’ll be home as soon as I can Owen.”

“Okay Lexie have a good day at work” he blows her a kiss as she walks out of the room. He gets up and puts shorts on and walks to the kitchen. Him and Lexie have done well for themselves between Lexie being a world class Neurosurgeon. Then himself as a trauma surgeon. In the past year between both of their salaries combined they made around 1.4 million dollars. Then he also has his income from being in the Army as a trauma surgeon. Which happens to be an additional 120k. Him and Lexie both decided that money will go to their two kids Charlotte and Lexie for the future. He opens the fridge and looks at what to make for dinner then remembers they were gonna have meatloaf so he pulls that out and whips that up. Even though they have all this money they try to be extremely humble with it. They donate over 120k to different organizations every year 10k each month. He puts the meatloaf in the oven and cleans the dishes. Deep down he can tell Lexie is frustrated with him a lot. He doesn’t like to talk about his feelings so he just keeps them bottled up till he just bursts and then it always causes a huge fight. He knows he needs to open up more about his feelings but he’s worried that if he starts he will never be able to ever stop. He’s also worried that if he opens up about his feelings they will find out he has PTSD from being in the Army and they will have to be discharged and he doesn’t want that, he’s still in active duty and they call him into missions like 7 times a year. He likes to stay in active duty to keep his skill fresh and keep him on his feet, he also runs on the adrenaline it gives him. He finishes the dishes and then walks to the laundry and opens Charlotte’s dance bag and gets a huge whiff of it. He gags and zips it back up “CHARLOTTE LIBERTY HUNT get your ass DOWN HERE.”

Charlotte mumbles “fuck” then she runs down from her room “yesss daddy” she looks all cute with her puppy dog eyes.

“Why does your dance bag stink like spoiled milk?” Owen looks at her and she knows he hates when she looks at him like that cause she is just so freaking adorable.

Charlotte looks at the ground “well ummmm, you see I spilt milk in it and then my tuna sandwich spilt all over in it. I'm sorry. I'll wash it”

“Gross Charlotte if that happens again please wash it right away or tell us it's fine just don't let it sit in there like that it can grow mold and that can make us all really sick” he watches Charlotte put it in the washing machine “ go play when your done “ he walks to the couch and his cell phone rings and he answers and it the Army saying he is being put on a plane later tonight and the stay could be up to 9 months. He tells them okay and he lays down to take a cat nap before packing.

Chapter four: Megan.

Megan lay upstairs on the bed staring at the ceiling thinking about how she could save her marriage as she's really fucked it up this time. She was drinking last night and she went home with a guy and one thing led to another. Nathan told her last time she did that he wouldn't forgive her the next time. She was so scared to lose him. So she's determined to keep the bar dude a secret and very likely forever.

Nathan walks in and sees her “ hey sweetie i missed you last night i hope work was good?” Megan sits up, “oh yes it was thanks it was a slow night so i got some extra charting done.” Nathan sits next to her and rubs her back. “That's always good when it's slow. It's more relaxing, in a while I will need to go to the hospital Discharge that case me and Lexie had together last week so I have to go to the hospital with Lexie for a while. Is there anything you need from the store or anything?”

Megan thinks. “ you would buy what i want because it's Fireball and Titos, So no but ask Teddy before you go thou i guess”

Nathan rolls his eyes and starts to get frustrated. “No Meghan I will not buy alcohol for you. I am not going to feed your addiction. You need to stop and you need to get help. I can't take much more of this, you are digging yourself into an early grave. I don't want to have to do that to your daughter and you shouldn't either, I don't want to have to see her sobbing because her mother killed herself. I don't want to have to give her that talk that her mother is never coming home because she killed herself, so you need to go get help if you don't Megan we're done and that's it and I can't do this anymore so you choose what you want alcohol and drugs or you husband and kids .”

Megan curls up in a ball “ THEN GO ALREADY IF YOU HATE ME SO MUCH AND DONT LOVE ME ANYMORE.”

Nathan smacks her in the face “ SHUT THE FUCK UP MEGAN I DONT HATE YOU, BUT YOU ARE FUCKING KILLING YOURSELF MORE AND MORE WITH EVER DAMN DRINK YOU TAKE; AND IT KILLS TO FEEL LIKE I CANT HELP YOU GET PAST YOUR DAMN TRAUMA, BUT I CANT HELP UNLESS YOU FUCKING OPEN YOURSLEF UP TO ME AND YOU REFUSE. OUR DAUGHTER ASKS ME EVERY DAMN NIGHT YOU DONT COME HOME IF YOU ARE DEAD. DO YOU FUCKING UNDERSAND HOW HARD IT IS TO SAY I DONT KNOW IF YOU ALIVE OR DEAD DO YOU FUCKING COMPREHAND THAT MEGAN.”

Megan sits there in a ball holding her face and crying. “Just go Nathan please”

Nathan walks out and sees Teddy was in the living room crying as she wipes her tears away.

Chapter five Teddy.

Teddy tries to hide the fact that she was crying from her father.

Nathan walks over to her and sits next to her. "Teddy sweetie"

She looks up at him "yes daddy, what do you want i'm trying to do chores"

He pulls her on his lap and holds her " i know you were crying and you heard that argument but everything is going to be okay i promise how about tomorrow you and me go to the mall and do whatever you want and maybe we can stop at the pet shelter like you want and get that kitty.

What do you think about that sweetie."

She lays her head on his chest and tears fall again " sure daddy that sounds nice i like spending time with you your kind and you dont scream at me or throw things like mommy does

sometimes. Can we maybe dye my hair daddy? I want it black with green underneath, And are you sure the kitty mommy always says no won't that just make her more angry and mean."

He holds her and rubs her back " i like spending time with you as well sweetie, and sure we can go to a hair place tomorrow and talk to them about it. I just want you to be happy, as for your mom it's not gonna be a problem I promise. I also want you to know that no matter what happens between your mom and me that it's not your fault and it never will be. You are the most perfect daughter out there your mom would agree.

She yawns and cuddles into him. "Okay daddy" she falls asleep.

Nathan stands up and carries her to her room, lays her down and covers her up and turns the light off and shuts the door behind him.

Chapter six: hospital.

Nathan and Lexie arrive at the hospital the same time and they meet in Lexie's office.

Nathan takes a deep breath and is a little frustrated with what happened between him and Megan so he sits on the couch and stares at the wall. " do you have the stuff for the case Lexie"

Lexie reads his body language " um yeah but let's not worry about that okay it's not important right this moment. Are you okay? Do you need to talk? A hug what?" she sits down next to him.

Nathan sits there not thinking about what he's about to do. " what i need is you Lexie." he kisses her lips and lays her back on the couch and she removes his clothes and he removes hers.

Lexie pulls away " Nathan please stop what about Megan and Owen what about the kids we can't just do this like this its going to hurt them all Nathan i don't wanna hurt them or anyone else please nathan this is wrong this isn't the way to do this."

Nathan stops " please lexie i dont care about them anymore i just want you i fucking need you Alexanrea Caroline Hunt god i never ever wanna half to say Hunt again it needs to be Riggs i promise lexie im in love with you i will make you my wife soon and i will treat you the way you deserve"

Lexie says fuck it and then About four hours pass and they lay there out of breath waiting for one of them to talk. They continue to stare at each other awkwardly.

Lexie sits up "so umm that case we need to work on the case," gets dressed and walks to her desk.

Chapter Seven: Preview

A few hours pass and everything between Lexie and Nathan is a little weird and strange. They end up discharging the patient to go home and they at the time believed he left. Nathan went to

his office after he and Lexie discharged that patient they had been working on together. He sits there thinking about everything that just happened between him and Lexie. Every thought imaginable. Why did I just do this? What does this mean? I'm no better than Megan. He calls himself a cheating man whore. He decides to get up and go find a surgery to do hoping it will distract him from his own thoughts. He looks at the surgery board and finds a Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting surgery. He writes his name in and books or 7 and pages all his favorite nurses. He looks at all the interns and their records and pages two of the best ones and 1 that's an underdog resident. He walked to the oncall room to read up on the case before the surgery. Lexie is sitting in her office going through the neurosurgery budget. It is distracting her from everything that's going on. Her phone goes off and it's a text message from Owen.

“hey babe so the Army is sending me off again.”

She picks her phone up and opens it and texts back. “when do you leave?.”

He picks up and texts “tonight at 10pm.”

She reads the message and text “oh um okay. How long are you gonna be gone this time? I really wish you'd retire from the Army I hate when you're gone for so long. It's hard on me and kids, And it scares me you're not gonna come home one of these times and I'm gonna have to see two army men walk up to my door at 3pm and tell me you're gone forever and then for me to have to go and tell our babies that you died.”

He reads the message and thinks about what to say and texts “they said upwards to 9 months, but we know that means literally nothing. And I'm sorry but I can't retire. It's my life and I will not be controlled by you or anyone. You OF ANYONE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT.”

She reads it and tears fall and she text back “FINE WHATEVER LEAVE ME LIKE YOU ALWAYS DO I TIRED AND IM SICK OF ALL THE STUPID FIGHTING ME DO i hope you have fun Owen. Bye, “she throws her phone at the wall and curls up in a ball and cries.

Chapter eight : PEW PEW part one

All the sudden you can hear loud noises being. There was a mass panic throughout the entire hospital. Lexie jumps in her seat and sees her running in the hallway screaming GUNNNNNN!!!!. Lexie grabs her phone and calls a code silver. Then she logs in the computer and locks down the hospital door and then runs to her office door and locks it then pushes everything she can against the door and then turns the blinds down and goes to her desk and logs into the security cameras and then calls 911. She grabs her laptop and the phone and goes to her closet, shuts the door and sits there and talks to the 911 representative and tells them everything she knows. About the situation. The operator tells Lexie that S.W.A.T. will be there in 7 minutes or less. In the distance there are 6 more shots fired. Then the phone lines get cut off. Lexie starts to go into a full blown panic attack when you hear the shoots getting louder and closer to her and then there's someone at her door trying to get in. she holds her hand over her mouth and tears fall down her face. The shooter burst into her office and shot at the ceiling. He starts to rummage through everything. Then he shoots 3 shots into the closet and walks out. Lexie gets hit with two of them bullets and she faints and starts to have a flashback.

Chapter nine : flashback

In Lexie's first year as an intern at Seattle Grace hospital in Seattle Washington she's about to start boarding on the plane with some people she met with her older sister Meredith Grey, her

mentor and brother in law Derek Shepherd, the Head of Pediatrics Arizona Robbins, and then her best friend Mark Sloan. Before Lexie got on the plane she had taken a pregnancy test and it was positive so then she got an ultrasound and found out she was about 21 weeks pregnant with a baby girl. She was the only intern going on the case so she packs everything they could need including food, scrubs, the chart for the person they are operating on in New York City and then she grabs the heart organ that is going with them for the patient they are gonna help. Then she sees Owen and she walks over to him and smiles and grabs his hand “ hi Owen “ she talks like a shy puppy.

“We are about to leave, do you have time to talk? It's really important Owen “ Looks into his eyes and then he's called into an emergency surgery.

“I'm so sorry Lexie i gotta go we will talk later have a safe trip and call me when you land”

kisses her lips and he runs off

Lexie's heart breaks a little as she walks away holding the pregnancy test in her pocket and she sees the attendings and walks over to them and they are all ready to go so they get in the vehicles they are taking Lexie and Arizona are car pooling together. They walk to Arizona's car and get in and Arizona drives.

“How far along are you Lexie.”

Lexie turns and looks at her shocked “huh what how how did you know?”

Arizona turns and looks at her tiny bump “ oh i don't know many of you tiny bumps or the fact that you ate 21 candy bars for breakfast and then 4 pickles. Or the fact that i can see the pregnancy test from here. Or the fact that I'm also an obgyn . It's hard to say.”

Lexie rolls her eyes and flips her off “ smartass. But I'm 21 weeks. It's a girl.”

Arizona drives and smiles “ congratulations. Does Owen know? Have you had prenatals? Who performed your ultrasound? Is the baby measuring to size? How are you feeling? Who's your obgyn?”

Lexie looks at her like she is crazy. “ One no, Two no, Three me myself and i, Four Um sure? Five tired, Six me myself and i. And don't even think about giving me the TALK. i will take care of it after we get back.

Arizona pulls over and looks at her “ Lexie this isn't something to be like this about. There are so many complications that could happen. When we get on the plane we are going to an area and I will do an exam. I'm your doctor and one of your bosses and this isn't a question, This is an order and if you dont you will not step foot in OR till you get an exam.”

Lexie rolls her eyes as they pull into the airport “ yes mommy”

Time jumps about 5 hours

Arizona did the exam on Lexie and everything was normal and when they go to get up they hit some horrible turbulence and are forced to sit back down there and buckle up lexi's breathing gets extremely irregular so arizona gets up and squats next to lexie and rubs her hand “breathe with me Lexie in and out one to three its gonna be okay i promise.” as they breathe together the pilot on the intercom says “ hello.... this is the pilot here please” he swallows his spit “ remain seated and activate the emergency protocol”takes a deep breathe “as one of are motors has died and there is a gas tank on fire under the plan so we are making a emergency landing.” he hangs up and before they realize they have landed nose down to the ground and everyone but Lexie died. Arizona got stuck under the wing cut in half and bleed out and died. Derek had a brain injury and died on impact. Meredith was flug from the plane and died from the landing. And then

Mark Sloan broke his spine and was unable to move so wolves ate him. A few days later Lexie wakes up in a hospital in Kentucky. There's a bunch of doctors she does not recognize. "Where am I? Why am I here? Who are you people?" she tries to get up but can't because she is in a back brace and in extreme pain.

The doctor walks up to her "hey now don't move in doctor Tom Koracick I'm the head of neurosurgery here you broke your back in a plane crash 4 days ago we've repaired it with the help of our head of orthopedic surgery Doctor Callie Torres.

Lexie thinks "what about my baby I'm pregnant what about everyone else in the plane crash can I go see them?"

The doctor "the fetal surgeon will talk to you about your baby. But as for your friends they were all dead upon arrival I'm so sorry"

Tears roll down her face and she lays there.

Chapter ten: PEW PEW part two

Lexie stops the flashback and takes her scrub top off to stop the bleeding on her side she ties it off and crawls out of the closet in pain and she pages Nathan 911 to her office.

Nathan wakes up in the on-call room to the gun noises and he has a moment of panic where it brings him back to the war but he snaps right out of it and gets up and runs out into the hallway. He runs down the hall to help save the day even though he realizes how stupid he is for running to the danger instead of away from the danger all the sudden he's standing in front of the gunman and it's Lexie and his patient from earlier who they discharged "Mr. Clark? What's going on is something wrong?"

Clark continues to wave the gun around "SHUT THE FUCK UP!!!!"

Nathan takes a few steps forward "Mr. Clark actually it's Gary Wright? Can I call you that? Let's just talk it's not too late to stop and turn yourself in please let's just talk about this before anyone gets majorly hurt please Gary we can help you I promise it's okay." he continues to walk to him.

Gary points the gun at Nathan "STOP BEFORE I KILL YOU"

.....To be continued.....



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