

The Artery 2022



© 2022 English Student Association. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by reviewers, who may quote brief passages in a review. Published annually by the English Student Association of Lakehead University in cooperation with the Lakehead University Student Union

ESA President	Madison Maki
ESA Vice President	Taylor Onski
Artery Editor-in-Chief	Sena Honke
ESA Orillia Representative	Cristina Morriello
Artery Associate Editors	Nicole Pacion
	Alexandra Dowhoszysa
	Cristina Morriello
	Madison Maki
	Taylor Onski

Cover Art: “Moonlight Melody” by Faith Cordeiro

Table of Contents

President's Address
Vice President's Address
Letter from the Editor

Muddling – Devansh Arora

Poetry

my body knew it was not home – Melanie Larson
Damaged – W. A. Reid
High and Low – Devansh Arora
Sort of – Sophie Kuhn
Morning Coffee – Raghad Elgamal
Dine with Death – W. A. Reid
The end – Raghad Elgamal
The Disposition of a Seedling – Kelsey Douglas
The Language of Flowers – Sophie Kuhn
Song of Spring – Sophie Kuhn
Alice – Raghad Elgamal
Fragments – Sena Honke
The Innominate in Thirteens – Part 2, The Shaman's Sentries – Andrew Brigham
Passionfruit – Kelsey Douglas
Art Sickness – Devansh Arora
Tuition – Jen Kesner
The Apartment In My Brain – Kelsey Douglas
To be Governed – Raghad Elgamal
Growing – Sophie Kuhn

Bedraggled – Benita Jude

Prose, Drama and Essays

Truth in Television – Emma Maki
Spirit's Light – Brannoc Hannah
My Best Friend Mike – Jordyn Weir
A Morning Person – Alexandra Dowhoszya
Eloisa Saraphina Montello, Love Doctor – Cristina Morriello
Bruces – Greg Rhyno
I am a Time Bomb – Devansh Arora
The Broken Memories of Lavinia Howlett – Hailey Kemper
The Arrival of Moon Baby – Cristina Morriello
Dream-to-Reality 3000 – Katya Arifin
The Semantics of Linguistic Negation – Brannoc Hannah
The Lemon Tree – Jordyn Weir
Six Word Story – W. A. Reid
She Shouldn't Have Winked – Jen Kesner

The Pharmacists Game – W. A. Reid
The Blank Sheet – Jordyn Weir
Dearest Oscar – Madison Maki

President's Address:

As I sit here reflecting on the past year, I cannot help but think that this year did not pan out the way most of us were hoping. The past year was still full of uncertainties as we continue to navigate through the pandemic. I wish I could say with certainty that next year will be better, but I cannot. There is still a cloud of uncertainty surrounding us all.

However, there is one thing I can say for certain: creativity will always thrive, and community will always prevail. I was truly humbled by the sheer amount of talent within this little literary community we have; there is so much heart in all these pieces that it is impossible not to be touched in some way or another. Creative writing has always played an important role in my life, and sometimes the only way I feel I know how to truly express myself is through writing. And during these emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausting past few years as we navigate through the pandemic, I know I am not alone in this sentiment. Witnessing how passionate the writers and artists were about their work was a welcomed reminder that literature provides a hopeful light for us all during these unprecedented times.

With that being said, I wish to thank all of those who submitted their work - it was a joy reading your pieces. Your enthusiasm and dedication to both your work and *The Artery* was more than I could have hoped for when I first stepped into this position.

To this year's ESA team: Taylor, Sena, and Christina - it was so much fun working with you, and I am grateful I was able to share this experience with you all. I could not have asked for a more supportive team. I wish to give a special thank you to my cherished friend Sena, who crafted this edition of *The Artery* with determination and zeal. All I can say is thank you, thank you, thank you.

And finally, thank you to our readers. Your dedication to *The Artery* is deeply appreciated and makes this entire experience so rewarding. I hope you enjoy the 2022 edition of *The Artery*. I hope that it gives you a little reminder that you are not alone in this, as it did for me.

My last piece of advice that I want to leave with you is this: keep writing.

Madison Maki

Vice President's Address:

A goal of the English Student's Association (ESA) is to allow anyone the opportunity to share their creative expression. We hope to have you readers enjoy the creative expression of all these talented artists and have them inspire you and your creativity.

On behalf of the entire ESA executive team, authors, and visual artists, we thank every one of you for sharing your works of art with us. Creativity is not always easy. There are edits, eraser marks, and deleted words. But there is also growth, light bulb moments of finding the right idea, and the satisfaction of knowing you made something and put your heart and soul into it. Thank you for going on that journey and allowing *The Artery* to be your work's home.

To my fellow executives, I could not have been prouder to share this experience with you all, and I cannot wait to see what creative endeavors of yours take flight in the future, and maybe one day, we will get to read them as we are about to read *The Artery*.

To our Orillia representative, Cristina, your enthusiasm and passion for literature is inspiring. Your joy to welcome opportunities for aspiring authors to share their love of literature and story brought us all closer together. Thank you.

To our editor-in-chief Sena, you did it! Your creativity and drive to make this vision of *The Artery* a reality is here and exquisite. You created and pioneered spaces for artists of all kinds to share their work, from our Halloween Short Story Contest to *The Artery*. All your hard work paid off and made something beautiful. Thank you.

To our president Madison, job well done! You took on quite a feat managing the ESA, but you fulfilled our goal of giving opportunities for creative expression with your leadership. You brought great ideas to the table and made this year a smooth run for us all. I remember you ensuring us this was a safe space, and we could go to you for anything. Your openness to remind us we are human made this experience even more enjoyable for us all. Thank you.

To all the creatives out there, never stop creating. Your wonders with words and art make a beautiful collection of moments that will leave readers in awe of your talents. We cannot wait to see what you come up with next!

And finally, to you reader, thank you for supporting student creativity and talent. We hope you enjoy the amalgamation of visual and written creative pieces in this edition of *The Artery*.

Taylor Onski

Letter from the Editor:

Welcome readers, writers, and all who enter here. After this difficult year, I'm very excited to present the 2022 edition of *The Artery*. When I decided to put my name in the running for the position of Editor-in-Chief, I will admit I was extremely nervous. But this has turned out to be an experience that I will cherish forever. I have been so lucky to work on this project with some of my closest friends, which has made the experience more fun than I could've imagined. *The Artery* has always been a place for Lakehead to celebrate the heart and soul of our community, and I've put my heart and soul into this edition for you all to enjoy.

This year has been difficult for everyone. In many ways, 2022 was worse both better and worse than the past few years. We, as students, creatives, and humans, have struggled with online learning, and have struggled to make the transition back to in-person learning, while the fear of a return to online learning loomed overhead. We have overcome things that many people could never imagine, and I hope everyone recognizes the strength and courage it takes to push through the difficult times, as we have. We are all stronger than we give ourselves credit for.

I'd like to thank everyone who submitted their writing and art this year because, without you, this magazine would not be possible. It has been a blessing to engage with every single one of you by reading your work and pushing you to be the best we believe you can be. You have inspired me in so many ways, and I hope that this book can be something you cherish for years to come.

I also want to thank all the lovely people on the editing team who helped edit all the submissions we received: Nicole Pocion, Alexandra Dowhoszya, and Cristina Morriello. The work you put into this project helped make this process so much easier on the executive team, which we truly appreciate. You are all such talented individuals who I loved working with, and I wish you all the best in any future endeavours.

To our Orillia Representative, Cristina Morriello, I'd like to give a huge thank you for continuously being the positive influence on the executive team. Your passion for writing and literature more generally inspired all of us to keep our chins up when this project felt overwhelming, and we were lucky to have you on this year's team. Thank you for all your help, and I cannot wait to see what great things await you in the future.

Finally, I want to thank the ESA President, Madison Maki, and the ESA Vice President, Taylor Onski, without whom this project would not have been possible. You have supported not only the English Student's Association but *The Artery* throughout the year in more ways than I can count. You are truly two of the most amazing people I've ever met, and I'm so lucky to have spent this year working on this project with two of my best friends.

In solidarity,

Sena Honke



“Muddling” by Devansh Arora

my body knew it was not home

Melanie Larson

my body knew it was wrong
before i did

sinewy and warm
my heart
pounded against its cage
desperate to warn

but where was the threat?
i was safe in my home.
but where was home?

the attic bedroom
the closet under the stairs
the space beneath the bed

my heart knew this was not home

home does not need to hide
under the bed
in the closet
or in the attic

my body knew this was not home
before i did

Damaged

W. A. Reid

Damaged, shattered, broken,
These things you made me be.
There is nothing I haven't been,
Except what you needed from me.

I could confess to all these feelings,
Though none could turn back time,
A time where they made sense,
A time when you were mine.

Everything is different now,
Since you walked out that door.
You made it look so easy,
To leave me there, lying on the floor.

Yet somehow, some way, despite all these facts,
I can't help but find myself, wanting you to be back.

High and Low

Devansh Arora

In the beginning, I was a little bug,
Then I grew up because time is a thug.
I grew a couple of wings,
My heart was ignited and my spirit danced,
I flapped my wings and flew to the sky
To the paradise that lies so high.

That place was no heaven,
But it was no hell as well.
A stage play crowded with caricatures
Where a human came after a man.
My mind tried to catch the heat
And my passion tried to set the fire,
All that to stay high.

Now came my wish to reach further higher,
Why is it abolished by the justice of my heart?
All my passion created this wild firestorm,
But it still doesn't feel warm,
Why does my heart now seek condolence
At the sight of the glaciers
That lies on the land so low.

Mama warned me after I began to flap my wings.
Not to forget the mighty one blessed me with feet,
Not to forget those seasonal smells of chilling nights,
And those wrenching talks non-existent in the high paradise,
Not to forget that I was born somewhere low.

But I did,
I lost my faithful path,
I failed both paradises of high and low
And I drowned myself in the pool of grief.

Sort Of
Sophie Kuhn

When he says you're sort of pretty

Tell him he's sort of right

Like how the sunset

Is sort of kissing the horizon

And flowers sort of bloom in Spring

Unfurling their petals

Only to be plucked

Delicate decorative things

Sort of wasted on him

Morning Coffee

Raghad Elgamal

I find myself missing you
Missing you
Missing the softness of your lips
The warmth of your skin
The featherlight feeling of your cheeks
Onto mine
Mine a word
Selfhood and self-destruction
I seek to lose myself in you
What a loss
A word, I seek refuge in you
Why
I ask too many why's
Why
Why is missing you a coping mechanism to my void
A void that I fill with no result
Void
Void and valid
I am aware of my valid feelings
Emotions that carry me away at times and return me ashore
Returns me ashore, wanting more
More and more
The cycle of seeking familiarity
I want closure
A closure that I probably won't get in my lifetime
Closure
The end?

Dine with Death

W. A. Reid

I imagine death so much,
It feels just like a memory.
So why does it go for lunch,
With everyone except for me.

I swear it will in time,
I know that it is meant to be.
But if only it would come and dine,
It would feel less like a felony.

Take me away, up to the stars,
Where I won't be the shell of me.
Let me fly high, way past mars,
Let my arms become feathery.

I imagine life so little,
It seems more like mockery.
A curse provided from the devil,
So evil, to live is just symmetry.

Death doesn't discriminate,
It takes all like a sanctuary.
Death doesn't hesitate,
Has no time for any beggary.

It says I'm just too young
But I can see it often, distantly
Taunting me with its tongue
Teasing me in this suspensory.

Death is not a dream,
No absent-minded reverie.
It allows no time to redeem
So why does death welcome,
Everyone except me?

The end

Raghad Elgamal

Amidst the cycle of chaos
Hold on to my arms
I feel it ending
It will end

.

I wrote one too many letters to you
I gave you too much time and energy
To reach out
Only for you to reply
Yes, you replied
The end

.

What do you mean?
I can't continue on without you
I saw your hand reach out for paper and pen
And in writing you condemned me
To the scribbles of your words
And poetic prose

.

You
Wrote to me
The end

The Disposition of a Seedling

Kelsey Douglas

You look across the room.

What do you see?

Plant pots are scattered across the auburn floor,

Mixed into the disarray of clothes and loneliness.

The lucky bamboo sits caged,

While the aloe grows freely in its best mom ever mug.

The spearmint grows rapidly in its narrow confinement,

Growing almost too quickly for your eyes to keep up.

The row of orchids overtakes your line of vision.

Some are blooming, some are budding,

Some stems are barely hanging on.

This is like you, most days.

You wonder how something so pure,

So beautiful,

So full of life

Could deteriorate so quickly, especially when compared to others.

But with some water, some rest,

Some love and some time

Just like these plants, so unique and special,

So too will you grow.

The Language of Flowers

Sophie Kuhn

I speak the languages of flowers

Pressing softly in the breeze

Perhaps, maybe

A gentle windblown kiss

Watercolour whispers swirling

In the sweet scents of Spring

Song of Spring

Sophie Kuhn

The feeling of moss beneath my feet

An eager return to Summer's heat

Where bumblebees and violets seem

No more familiar than a dream

The clunking sound of uprooted trees

Falling down to ancient wooden knees

If I could capture the Song of Spring

I would bottle her with a Monarch's wing

Alice

Raghad Elgamal

I remember the images of the green fabric,
an image of an orient rug hung
Above the green holster of your bed
High enough to be out of reach
I remember the magic I felt looking at it
The static energy of the dancing women
I remember their bare skin, bellies and sheer pants
Eating fruits, smoking and dancing

They seemed so magical,
familiar and unfamiliar
Familiar in a house full of doors
Doors that constrained my existence
Doors I walked in and ran in
I was an Alice

Every door I walked into
I am faced with the same image
Faced with who I am to become
Harem women
I remember their bare skin, bellies and sheer pants
Eating fruits, smoking, and dancing

Every step I take,
I am faced with their noema
The perceived as perceived
I look at them,
And they look back
Piercing my existence
A pierce that urticates
A prism of subjectivity
I cannot escape it
I am her
I & her
I

Fragments

Sena Honke

Scuffed floors

Aged paint

Shadowed corners

Lighting faint.

The ends of her hair trailing just round the hall

Her voice as she whispers, she shivers, she calls

A verdant musician, the loveliest speech

She seems so much closer yet just out of reach.

Black heels

Blonde hair

A silk scarf

Thin air.

An unknowable woman wrapped in shadows and mist

Her back as she walks and the veins on her wrist.

Dark eyes and lashes, a mischievous glance

Always running and turning, a breath from a dance.

The Innominate in Thirteens – Part 2, The Shaman's Sentries

Andrew Brigham

And left at dawn in guilt and pain,
Of all that had been heard,
Patrick's ousting of the wyverns,
And the enfields' grounds disturbed.

The fading of the fae forts,
And such loss of leprechaun.
The horrors that were told, the last knight,
Of all things gone so wrong.

All the selkies swam away,
Or refused to shed their coats.
While merrows chose a life in depths,
Those uncharted by the boats.

What boiled and bristled the broonie,
To withdraw from all our homes,
Wasn't caused by left out clothing,
Nor the missing creamer bowl.

With the absence of the clúrachán
Came the spoiling of the spirits.
And the dryads forged so far away,
To places none dare visit.

The malfunctioning of the magic,
The collapsing of the charms,
That had started the extinction,
And the industry of harm.

The chronicles still scribbled down,
What do they mean today?
If all the wonders in the world,
Have simply flown away.

But soared with sight, at such a height
Two ravens watched their ward,
Which they'd surveilled for many years
Bringing whispers to their lord.

They had heard the Story Holder,
Well aware of its strange spell,

And knew this time was coming,
They had waited for the tell.

For one, was Thought and Fortune,
In Memory, the other, Desire and Luck.
They were sentries waiting patiently,
For their charge to get unstuck.

Thought flew, to go and whisper,
Desire stayed to spy from far,
There would always be one watching,
The child must always have a guard.

But in sundering, there's a danger,
And one prophetic that comes to pass.
The Royal book murmurs of this moment,
A raven vulnerable at last!

And left at dawn, and left for good
The hero's heartache to explore,
To find if all of nature' magic,
Is lost to Nevermore.

Passionfruit

Kelsey Douglas

Passionfruit, they say you either love or hate it.

For me, it's both.

Eating this passionate fruit takes skill

And comes in many stages.

At first glance, it's smooth

With its fire red outside and sunshine yellow inside.

Just like you,

Flying into my life

Like an eagle soaring through the sky,

Lighting up my world

And filling it with passion.

The first bite is always the sweetest.

With a touch of tang, leaving me wanting more.

But it's almost too sweet

And doesn't prepare me for what comes next.

My eyes begin to water,

My mouth puckers and I can hardly speak.

The sour stage fills me with dread

Especially when the fruit is frozen,
Making the sourness too much to handle.

I have to walk away,
I have to leave the fruit on the counter,
Or in the doorway,
Or in the car,
Out of my life because I can't function
In a world that looks like the inside of a lemon
Rather than the fruits of passion.

The final stage is blue,
Resembling the colour of the seeds within it.

I always hate
How the seeds get stuck between my teeth
And refuse to leave
Just like the memory of you.

As the fruit sits on the counter,
Or the doorway,
Or the car,
I watch it rot

Slowly turning the colour of midnight,
When fruits are most enjoyed,
Decaying like a zombie on Halloween night.

When I'm finished with the fruit,
I'm left with a bitter aftertaste
That I can't get rid of
No matter how much gum I chew.
The sharp, pungent taste

Leaves me wondering
Why I chose to partake
In a passionfruit
Or the fruits of passion
In the first place.

Art Sickness

Devansh Arora

I got passion in my eyes,
Even after all those failed tries.
Working for hours, still ain't tired.
Just bleeding on paper feels like wielding Mjollnir
As if I am the God of Thunder.

I got fury in my fingers,
They ain't going to stop without making a difference.
All that this world needs is to remember
The lost legacy of humanity
And the way of accomplishment is simply something artsy.

This passion, this fury, is not a fashion.
It's a chronic disease,
An inevitable sickness of art.

Tuition

Jen Kesner

The pressure, it builds in my head
It pounds against the walls.
The crying, the screaming
The ground that breaks my fall.
The disappointment and work
How much it really costs.
The stress, the anxiety
The familiarity with life is lost.
The new places, the new people,
The struggle to make a friend.
The hate, the dread
From people who love to condescend.
The pressure, it hurts
It makes me want to leave
The paper that I came here for
Is what I first need to achieve.

The Apartment In My Brain

Kelsey Douglas

In a sweaty, crowded room

An angel stood

With glistening, snowy wings.

She touched the air,

The room went

Silent.

A brash eruption

From the lonely apartment

Emerged.

Clamour filled the air.

Whirlwinds of pain and panic

Ensued.

The demon with a wild

Glint cried,

Make.

It.

Stop.

Silence falling,
Chaos filling,
Worlds spinning,
Colliding,
Like the ghosts of my past.
Water and oil
Opposing each other
Fighting to stay afloat.

Two monsters live

Rent free in my brain

Causing disruption wherever they go.

The demon shrieks

Attempting to overcome the

Silence.

The angel is stronger.

She places her hand

On the demon's arm,

Hushing him.

“I know you’re scared,

Let me stay awhile.

You must be tired.”

To be Governed

Raghad Elgamal

To be governed
I am governed by the spaces around me
I don't know where I am
Can I ask you where I am?
Would you be able to tell me?
Or would you turn around?
I reach out to you
I seek your attention
Every moment in the temporality of time and space
I gaze upon you
Her sense, her eyes
A gaze that reaches deep into my soul
It extrapolates my whole being,
leaving me with nothing to extend beyond
and everything to conclude upon
Even now, I am scared
Empowered and disempowered
A witch and a bitch
I do not remember how it felt
To be loved and cared for by her
I do not remember the touch or caress of your skin

Growing
Sophie Kuhn

Once I asked my sister
How she got the claw marks
That danced across her hips

Like bolts of lightning
Stretching skin
Across hollow bones

Now I have my own,
How beautiful it is to grow



“Bedraggled” by Benita Jude

Truth in Television

Emma Maki

The dimly-lit warehouse was awash in swirling fog, periodically pierced by blue spotlights swishing back and forth as though controlled by magic. Ray Murdoch walked through the fog, absentmindedly reaching up to adjust his suit jacket as he went, with a confident stride and a slight smile that didn't quite reach his vacant blue eyes. He came to an instinctive stop in front of the blinking red camera light without having to look down at the duct tape X marking his spot on the floor. After being in the television business for a certain number of years, one didn't have to think about these things anymore. It all just came naturally.

"Hello and welcome back to *Past the Point of Plausibility: Truth or Trick*. I'm your host, Ray Murdoch." He paused briefly—only for effect. He didn't need to take a pause to remember his lines; they were all right there in his head, on the tip of his tongue. "For tonight's first story, let's take a look at the town that was attacked by an army of trolls."

When the program was edited together later, this would be when it cut from Ray's narration to mock-up footage recreating the event in question. Even now, standing in this cavernous metal box and staring into the blinking red dot just above the camera lens, he could picture the imagery the studio might select. Grotesque creatures with grayish skin, all wrinkled and covered in pus, reaching out with yellow-clawed hands to snatch up unsuspecting children and do terrible things to them... it would certainly be frightening if it were true. But of course this story was completely fictional. If it had really happened, Ray would have known. He'd have seen it.

"If you earnestly thought that was real, you'd be mistaken," he said with a shake of his head. "This one was the writers playing a trick on you."

He paused again for a moment, though he had no real reason to. A strange cold feeling took hold in his gut—something he'd never felt before when recording an episode. Ray cleared his throat and twisted his face back into its usual placid smile before jumping into the next story.

"What about the tale of the high school girl who was pulled down a well... by a giant centipede? Was that real, or am I just pulling your leg?" Another pause for effect—and that feeling tugging at him again, like his subconscious was trying to warn him of something—then a subtle nod. "It's the truth. A similar thing happened in Japan."

The blue lights swept across the warehouse, and for just a moment they illuminated the cameraman's face. A shudder ran down Ray's spine, but then he blinked, and just as suddenly he couldn't remember what he'd just seen that had elicited such a reaction. Though the cameraman's face was perpetually shrouded in shadow, Ray could make out most of him—the figure of an ordinary man, in a suit much like his own. Nothing to be afraid of, surely. He'd know if there was. He knew everything—saw everything—in his mind in perfect clarity, as though someone had reached inside him and put it there. There was nothing to be afraid of in this workspace that Ray had called his home for as long as he could clearly remember.

“...And what about the group of kids who spent the night in a haunted house and got more than they bargained for? Was that real?”

Now this story was an interesting case, because it said in the script that it was made up, but Ray could picture it as vividly as though he were there in a past life. He could see the faded and peeling paint on the house’s rotting boards; feel the chill from the lack of insulation, and the sensation of those walls pressing in on him as he glanced nervously around. He could hear the floorboards shift and creak beneath his feet with each step. Even now, standing in the warehouse perfectly safe, there was a residual tightness in his throat.

He could swear he remembered holding his breath as he turned to peer around a corner, squinting to see through the murky dark. Then there was the smell of sulphur mixed with rotting meat, and a writhing mass of something long and ropelike but unmistakably fleshy shambling across the floor, moving toward him far faster than a thing like that should be able to move. Then an ear-splitting shriek, the sharp taste of blood, and...

The only thing Ray couldn’t quite picture was how the story ended. Not that it mattered, since the script dictated that none of it had ever happened.

“Not this time,” he recited. “It’s...”

A total fabrication, the script said. Even when he hesitated, he could already hear himself speaking the lines with perfect clarity. His obedient voice echoed through his mind (or was it outside the confines of his mind, physically in the room with him? No, that was impossible) almost loudly enough to drown out the memory of him screaming as tentacles pierced through flesh and a body slumped to the ground inches away from him. Ray’s heart thudded, telling him to run as he had then. But his feet stayed anchored, perhaps knowing that he wouldn’t get far if he tried. He hadn’t gotten very far back in that house, when he tried to run. Or rather, he surely wouldn’t have, if it had really happened.

“It’s... the writers...” He was going off script and he knew it. Even as Ray’s head swam, he could still hear his lines being spoken with a casual confidence, overlapping with his own stammered attempts to deliver them. “This one was...”

The blue lights circled back around, this time shining directly into Ray’s eyes. He flinched and took a step back, only to find that the fog solidified around his ankles to hold him in place. Finally, he couldn’t take it anymore. Whatever the consequences, he refused to lie.

“It’s true!” he shouted at the top of his lungs, loud enough to be heard over his own recitation of the script and the memory of his screams combined. “It really happened! I was there, I-I saw it...”

“Cut,” a stern voice from off camera interjected.

Ray turned to see where the voice came from, only to realize that it was from directly ahead of him—the cameraman. He came to a second realization a moment later: his own voice

reciting the script had suddenly gone silent as the cameraman got up and slowly walked over to him.

“Not this time,” the cameraman said in Ray’s voice. “It’s a total fabrication.”

The blue spotlights came to rest on the cameraman’s face. His skin was gaunt and pale, missing the rosy cheeks that Ray had often been praised for (though he couldn’t quite remember by whom) but making up for the lack of colour in his complexion with bright, thick streams of scarlet dribbling from his nose and ears and slightly open mouth. His hair was long and ragged, hanging over one wide, bloodshot blue eye. The other eye, just above the camera he still clutched tight in his half-skeletal hands, was a glowing red dot—the very one Ray had been staring into ever since arriving at the warehouse.

“What about the story of the television personality who forgot his lines?” his not-quite-double went on, his smile widening to reveal a row of teeth that looked just slightly sharper than usual. “Did the cameras keep rolling? Or did he have to go off the air?”

Before Ray had time to come up with an answer to that question—if, indeed, it was really a question at all—the glowing red light flashed in his face, bright and deadly as a bomb going off. When his vision cleared, he wasn’t in the warehouse any longer. Maybe he’d never been there at all.

Instead he was sprawled on his back in a dark, dingy hallway, surrounded by dust and cobwebs and the overwhelming stench of death. His heart, rather than pounding in fear, was slowed to a crawl; it only grew slower as the cold sensation of fear crept deeper into him. The only modern item in the room apart from himself was a TV mounted on the wall above him. He stared up at it for lack of the ability to move, even just to turn his head and look away. On its flickering screen, a face much like his own was displayed, with rosy cheeks and clear blue eyes and hair pulled back in a tidy ponytail. The only difference was that the man onscreen wasn’t bleeding.

“It’s the truth,” the man on TV said with a knowing smile. “A similar event occurred. I saw it.”

Spirit's Light

Brannoc Hannah

Pelthair was standing at the back of a gathering of about twenty people on the village circle of Cleso- Enda, his arms crossed. At the northwest edge of the village circle, elder Yldeihan was addressing the village people. Around the village circle were hide huts and wooden houses, partly rimmed with frost, blocking most of the wind that gently moved people's hair and clothes. Frost coated the village circle and the grass outside of Cleso-Enda—*like the glaze and icing on one of Aizel's pastries*—crunching beneath people's shoes as they shifted. Pelthair shivered. The air was cold from nighttime. The sun was high fully above the eastern edge of Holaria bowl, east of the village. Its light warmed Pelthair's arms.

The sun always rises.

At the center of the circle was a stone well, lightly frosted, though a few waterdrops trickled down the sides. It had a tiny, light brown roof of planked wood from which a rope connected to a wooden bucket that was resting on the near edge of the well. North of the village was the river Qeicyn, which descended into Holaria bowl a few dozen paces away, rumbling modestly to Elder Yldeihan's quiet, raspy, worn voice. "...someone must rescue Kyen. He is a strong one, but even the most brave will fear." Elder Yldeihan smiled, eyes concerned. "Who will go?"

At the right side of the circle, Caiva said, "But elder, know you what lurks there?"

"I know not, but it matters not. Kyen must be rescued." He gazed from right to left at the village people, then inhaled. "Who will go?"

People whispered for a few seconds. Pelthair raised his right hand. "I will."

Elder Yldeihan gazed rightward towards Pelthair, eyes old and blue. He nodded. "Hm. Thank you Pelthair."

The others were looking at Pelthair. He shrugged.

To his left, Qeicyn river splashed down a steep incline into Holaria bowl, as did many other rivers. Most ended at the inestimably deep hole that was near the center of Holaria bowl. In the valley—more than fifty feet down—were many deciduous trees, leafy bushes, plants and insects. A light breeze rustled the treetops, among and between which dozens of blue birds were flying, two at the forest edge near the bottom of the incline. The incline and bowl were cracked; these cracks were many feet wide some places, and flora grew within these cracks, pushed around by the wind. Along the cliffs were caves. A northern breeze blew cool mist across his face, smelling wet and leafy.

He faced northwest, to just north of the village. People were watching from between the houses and huts of Cleso-Enda and from near the cliff's edge. Many of them waved at him, among them

elder Yldeihan. Pelthair waved. Bag behind his back, he shimmied down, hands extended towards the incline and body leaning forwards. A little less than a minute later, he stepped down onto a path.

Perhaps Kyen entered one of these caves. Perhaps he was taken into one or decided to have an adventure. Too curious...too fearless. If he's not anywhere around here, he may be at the bottom of Holaria, in the small forest.

Pelthair entered one of the caves.

Something that few people would dare do. I must be brave.

In the right wall was etched a wavy circle. Left and down from there, intermingled figures of lines were pointing at the circle. In the left wall was etched a beast that had a savanna creature's body, a head that was part feline and part vulpine, long, human limbs and a long, thin, sharp tail. Its teeth were sharp. Figures of lines were cowering left of the beast.

He lit a candle that was in a glass contraption that had a flimsy frame. He explored a few caves, some of them with tunnels, but did not travel far within them, for fear of getting lost. In some caves were chalices, trinkets, silvered wooden boxes and lockets of various shapes—rectangular, square, circular and triangular. In one cave, he found a trail of blooddrops that led into a tunnel. His steps echoed as he walked. A few dozen feet in, the blooddrops led rightward into a wide and shallow cave. Within, Pelthair stood near the right wall. The cave was a few dozen paces long to his left. Across from the entrance was a figure, lying on the bumpy stone floor. Pelthair approached.

This may be Kyen.

He shook the figure, who groaned then raised himself into a sitting position. It was Kyen. His brown eyes became attentive as candlelight flickered around the cave.

“Pelthair!” Kyen said, voice frightened and relieved. “What are you doing...where am I?”

Pelthair laughed. “We’re in a cave, and I’m here to find you. What are you doing here? Did you come here yourself?”

“No. I think some creature, weird, took me, but I’m not sure. I woke up here.” “Hm. Let’s get you home. We’re all worried about you.”

Pelthair pulled Kyen to his feet.

Pelthair was struck to the ground, dropping his bag and candle. He felt needles pulsing through his brain. He writhed and wailed.

Please stop. Please stop. I can't—Angels in a blazing light. Purple lightning across the sky. A light blinding to all eyes. Swirls of color. The shapes rise and coalesce. Mandibles like no others,

eyes that are holes into the color. Nothing can stop it. It wills and wants. Safe now, wandering, but it soon rises.

Pelthair gazed at the ceiling, brain throbbing. He leaned upwards. Candlelight was flickering across the walls.

Brother, I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. The sickness took you and mother and father, but I was too busy working in the villages to see you one last time. I didn't know it was that bad....

Pelthair exhaled. "Kyen" he said softly and quietly, voice cracking. "Kyen, are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. My head is light, but I think you got hurt like me before. Actually, I don't know if I did." Kyen laughed nervously. "Are you okay?"

Pelthair sighed. "I'll be fine. maybe. Let's get out of here."

He rose. A ghostly figure's floating form was shifting in the cave entrance, with no discernible shape. All three stayed still for moments. The figure's wisps curled about a small area.

Pelthair: "Kyen, let me carry you." He curled his fingers towards himself twice.

He picked Kyen up, candle-holder held in right hand and bag across his left shoulder. He charged forwards. The figure dissipated as Pelthair ran through it. He ran up the tunnel, to the outer cave, then exited into the afternoon-lit bowl. He was breathing heavily. Kyen's forehead and face were pressed against Pelthair's shirt.

Pelthair: "We're out."

The sun was almost halfway down to the western horizon. On the edge above Holaria bowl, a northern breeze blew mist across Pelthair's face, eyes, forehead, nose and mouth. It tasted and smelled of autumn leaves.

Kyen was light, Pelthair's left arm around his shoulders and right arm under his knees. Pelthair walked into Cleso-Enda. Velleh, Cyhrin, Eima and Ghethin were talking together outside and saw Pelthair and Kyen, then approached them. Soon, everyone of the village was gathered on the village circle. People were cheering. Many of them hugged Kyen and Pelthair. Elder Yldeihan was smiling, as were Kyen's parents.

Their smiles are the most precious thing that I've seen for a long time.

Elder Yldeihan crouched before Kyen, hands on his knees. "Hello Kyen. Glad to have you back. How are you feeling? Where were you off to?"

Kyen's eyes were somnolent, and his body was sagging. "I - I don't know. In a cave, really. There was a thing...then Pelthair got me out."

Elder Yldeihan stood. “Anyway, we can discuss later.” He smiled and held Kyen’s hands between his hands. He looked at Pelthair, then walked a few paces towards him. “You’ve done a good deed, Pelthair. Let us celebrate.”

Pelthair nodded.

Shortly before sunset, young Gheiren Ghethinsdaughter ran into the wooden gathering house where many people were talking, laughing, feasting, drinking and smiling. “Look, look! Outside!”

They followed Gheiren out. Above Holaria bowl, blue light and amber light were intertwining, along with burnt orange, light red, dark red, purple, grey, brown and yellow in a partial hemisphere. The people of Cleso-Enda went east out of the village. Pelthair sat on the grass. Qeicyn was flowing a few dozen paces to his left. The partial hemisphere’s colors shifted constantly, the top always blue and amber, while the other colors spiralled and flowed below and around the top. Elder Yldeihan was standing a few feet to Pelthair’s left.

Pelthair trailed his hands along the dewy grass. “It’s a nice day for the Spirit’s presence.”

Elder Yldeihan nodded, gazing at the colors. “That it is.”

My Best Friend Mike

Jordyn Weir

I stand here in front of his door. I have seen his door throughout my entire childhood; yet it all of a sudden seems so intimidating. This is the very door that me and him would run through after school to play Minecraft in his basement when we were young. It's the door that has always been a friendly gate to a warm welcome and family friend game nights. And now, it is the door that could lead to my future relationship. I began to walk closer as my sweaty palms gripped the railing leading towards this door of destiny. All I can do is wonder, how I was so sure this morning that today was the day I'd tell him? My worry makes my mind swirl with thoughts of doubt and second guessing. What if he doesn't like me back? What if our friendship is ruined?

What if things get awkward? Is it just me or is the door getting bigger? Maybe this is a mistake! Should I turn back? In my tornado of inner thoughts, the door swung open.

Standing there with his perfect grin and kind eyes he jokingly said, "There you are! What took you so long Lucy? Star Wars waits for no one!" He grabbed my hand and brought me inside.

"That's it, it's now or never" I thought.

With a sudden burst of courage, I quietly said, "Actually Star Wars may have to wait just a moment more. I have been meaning to talk to you about something."

He turned completely around to face me and softly said, "What is it?"

I stuttered nervously through my smile as I said, "I have feelings for you."

Engaged as ever, he looked at me with wide eyes. The only sound I could hear was my beating heart hitting the front of my chest. He grabbed my hand and pulled me closer as he said behind a smirk, "You have no idea how long I have been waiting to hear you say that."

A Morning Person

Alexandra Dowhoszya

I was describing to my friend how in my grandmother's house, the mornings were so warm and bright. I told him about how both the kitchen and the upstairs bathroom had windows that faced the sunrise, and how in the morning the sunlight would flood the rooms. I can still picture the warm sunlight pushing its way past the curtains and bringing warmth and a stillness to the kitchen that can only be had on quiet mornings. When it's just you and your grandmother that are awake early, and she has her cup of tea, steam aglow, and you eat tomato slices sprinkled with salt off of a little green dish, a circular plate with a deep lip. The whispers and idle chatter, eyes drifting up to the shelf above the cupboards where she kept her special teapots. And in the bathroom upstairs, as you got ready for the day, gripping the glass knob (the light always refracted and shed rainbows on the floor) and closing the door behind you to have a shower, the sunlight followed you still. It would push its way through the curtains and through the floral shower curtain, and as the water washed over you there was such a calm. The dark-pink, almost-coral wallpaper, pressed to look like decorative square tiles, held the glow of the sun as you dried yourself off with a soft, worn towel the same colour as the wallpaper.

I told my friend, "I could be a morning person in a house like that."

But I could be a morning person in another place too. I could be a morning person in a house with him. I can already picture the silent mornings. We're two peas in a pod, and we already often have the same thought, saying the same thing at the same time, voices tumbling over each other. I'd imagine we'd come to many a silent agreement. Nods and small smiles over steaming cups of tea, sugar bowls pushed across the table making a slight scraping noise, the pop of a cork being pulled from a glass jar of tea or cinnamon. Perhaps the sound of a record placed on the phonograph with its tell-tale crackle, so that it might play softly under the hiss, pop, and clatter of an idly cooked breakfast. Light reflecting off of Grandma's silver tea set and onto the walls and ceiling like a scattered constellation. I could get out of bed in the morning if I lived with someone I loved, if waking up early meant seeing more of them. I would shower faster, get dressed faster, so that I might spend more time in our shared space. I think I would do everything faster, so that we would have more time to do nothing together. I can already picture the gold-plastic-edged mirrored trays with mugs on them, carried from kitchen to couch, the whole way trailing steam aglow. I can picture light reflecting off of mirrors, making coloured glasses glow from their perches, gently fading the spines of our beloved books lovingly tucked away on shelves and stacked in happenstance places. I can picture the sunlight pooling on the floor, shadows eddying behind the Chinese screen with its motif of birds, trees, and flowers. I can feel the warmth of a cup of tea in my hand, of a body pressed to my side, fingers skimming soft worn pages. The only sounds the murmur of a reading voice, the crinkle of turning pages, and sips of tea. I can picture the sunlight, because whether or not our windows face the sunrise, I can't imagine anything but warmth and brilliance if we were together. I can feel the calm and the stillness, like holding your breath when you see something so beautiful your body would rather stretch this moment out for as long as possible than worry about keeping your lungs full of air and your heart beating.

I could be a morning person in a home like that.

Eloisa Saraphina Montello, Love Doctor

An excerpt from a novel
Cristina Morriello

July 2014

“Eloisa, I can’t believe you actually bought that ridiculous pillow,” Federico says as we edge closer to Juliet’s mansion.

I look down at my new pillow which is pink and heart-shaped and says *Romeo and Juliet* on it. “I like it. It’s cute. I’m gonna put it on my bed.”

“And now I’m questioning your taste in decorations,” Domenic says as we make our way through the crowd.

“What’s wrong with my pillow?” I ask. I feel a little antsy like I always do when I’m in a huge crowd.

“Everything,” Gabriella says. “It’s Shakespeare. Shakespeare is a waste of time.”

I look over at Margherita, who is usually on my side. This time she laughs. “Sorry, Eloisa. Can’t help you there. Shakespeare stinks.”

“I kind of want to read Shakespeare,” I say quietly, looking down at my pillow.

Domenic laughs. “Can you spell geek? I can! And it’s spelt E-L-O-I-S-A.”

“Actually, geek is spelt G-E-E-K,” I point out.

“Kids, leave Eloisa alone. If she likes that pillow, more power to her,” Mom says. I look over at her and smile.

“Oh, and by the way,” she continues, “I loved Shakespeare in high school. Does that make me a geek?”

Federico, Margherita, Gabriella and Domenic do not reply.

When we get closer to what everyone is congregating around, I see it. The Statue of Juliet. It’s a silver statue of a young girl, and one of her breasts is gold. Everyone is putting their hand on that breast and taking pictures. Some of the people are being so inappropriate that I have to look away. They do realize that’s a statue of a thirteen-year-old girl, right?

“All of you have to take pictures with Juliet,” Mom says as we edge closer to the lineup, where people are expectant of their turns with Juliet.

I laugh. "Who are the geeks now? You, you, you and you," I point to each of my siblings in turn.

"You know that when you take a picture with Juliet, you have to put your hand on her breast," Margherita says.

Now things aren't so funny. "I do?"

"Yes," Mom says. "It promises you true love."

"Ugh," I say. "I'm fourteen. I don't want true love. Ever. If touching Juliet's breast promises me a book publication, I'd be all for it."

A young couple nearby laugh hysterically at what I just said. I look over at them, taking in their appearances. The young black man is very handsome. He's wearing a blue polo shirt and khaki shorts. The woman has deep olive skin, curly brown hair, and I can see her bright blue eyes from a short distance. She's wearing a green maxi dress.

"Sorry," the man says. "I just really thought what you said was funny. And relatable. When I was fourteen I didn't think much about the future."

I'm interested. "Are you a writer too?" I think about how Janet, my OT, always tells me to keep the conversation going.

"No, I'm an accountant," the man says. "But you must have a lot of ambition if you're thinking about being published at such a young age."

"Thank you," I say.

We watch the statue. I turn to my siblings.

"Now who wants to go first?" I ask.

"The Shakespeare nut will go first," Federico says.

I sigh. "Fine."

I might as well go and not give anyone my cause on why I should go last. We're all stubborn; we could argue all day and there's a huge line waiting. I walk up to Juliet.

"How's it going, Juliet?" I ask as Mom directs me to put my right hand on Juliet's you-know-what. "I'm going to put my hand in your personal space. I apologize in advance, because I don't want to do it. I'm not interested in true love or marriage, but my parents hope I'll have a big Italian wedding one day, so this will get their hopes up."

I put a huge, fake smile on my face as Mom takes the picture. When she's done I remove my hand, wiping it on my pink dress.

“Now that’s done and over with,” I say. “Oh, I might as well introduce myself now that I violated your personal space.” I shake hands with the statue’s still one. “Eloisa Saraphina Montello. Delighted to make your acquaintance.”

I stand down and watch as my siblings take pictures with Juliet. Afterwards, we can explore the mansion.

“I feel bad for that poor statue,” I say as I follow Margherita and Mom up the stairs. “Getting touched like that day in and day out.”

“Eloisa, you do realize it’s a statue, right?” Mom says.

I huff. “But still,” I look around the mansion. “I want to say Juliet’s famous lines when we get on the balcony.”

“Why?” Margherita asks.

“Because I do. I made people laugh and I touched a statue in an inappropriate way against my will. I’m feeling brave. I’m feeling courageous.”

“Excuse me!” we hear behind us. We turn and see that very same man that I made laugh.

“Hello again, sir,” I say, not meeting his eyes; eye contact is not my friend.

“Hi. I was wondering if you could take a video for me, if that’s alright with you.”

I look over at Margherita and Mom. “Sure,” Mom says. “What is it?”

“I should introduce myself first. My name is Peter.”

“I’m Saraphina, and these are my daughters Margherita and Eloisa,” Mom does the introductions for us. I hold out my hand because you always have to shake hands with someone you’re introduced to, and Peter laughs, taking it.

“Nice to meet you,” Peter says. He pulls out a tiny box out of his pocket. A ring box. “I plan on proposing to my girlfriend. Her name’s Lyra. She loves Shakespeare- (I have to give a triumphant look to Margherita as Peter says that) -and when she’s standing on the balcony, I want to propose. Is it possible that one of you can film the proposal from the ground?”

I’m not good with phones. I don’t even have a phone. I suck with technology. Technology hates me, and the feeling is mutual. I look over at Margherita and Mom.

“I’ll do it,” Margherita says.

Peter clasps his hands together, smiling, “Thank you so much. This means the world to me.”

“I’ll come with you,” Mom says. “I want to get a video of Eloisa on the balcony. And I can help you with Peter’s video, Margherita.”

Margherita rolls her eyes, “I know how to work a phone camera better than you, Mom.” But she smiles.

“Good luck,” I say to both Peter and Margherita as they walk with Mom to the grounds below the balcony.

“Thanks,” Peter says. “Is there any chance, Eloisa, that you could try to get Lyra to the balcony?”

Umm. I feel a little nervous at that request, talking to a stranger. I have ASD; I’m socially awkward on a good day and I can’t make eye contact. But Peter is really nice, so I say, “Sure. No problem.”

“Thank you again,” Peter says.

“No problem,” I repeat shakily, and they leave. I wish Mom stayed, but I know she wants to take a picture of all of us on the balcony.

I try to take a few deep breaths and get my act together. I hurry through the mansion to find Lyra. I do near the top. I take in a deep breath.

“Hi,” I say.

She turns to me. “Oh, hi!” she says. “Miss Publication,” She laughs.

“Well, my parents wrote Eloisa on my birth certificate,” I say, laughing. “But Miss Publication is a good name too. Maybe it will get me luck in my future endeavors.”

“Eloisa. I’ve never heard that name before. It’s pretty. I love it.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m Lyra.”

“Nice to meet you,” I say, and we shake hands. “That’s a really pretty name.”

“Thanks.”

I take in a few deep breaths. Despite me not looking her in the eyes, things are going well. Just keep at it, Eloisa. And DON’T let the cat out of the bag. Or spill the beans. Whatever expression floats my boat.

Wow, I’m getting cheesy right now. Keep talking, Eloisa. She’s still looking at you.

“I’m really excited to, uh, get to the...” DANG IT ELOISA NOW’S NOT THE TIME TO FORGET THE WORDS! “The balcony! The balcony, I’m excited to get to the balcony.”

Lyra smiles. “Me too. I love Shakespeare. My boyfriend Peter is down on the ground. But I’m going to wait for him.”

No! That's not what Peter wants! Don't fail your mission! If I forgot the words before, now's the time to think outside the box. Something I do on a daily basis. "Well, why don't you... go up and surprise him? I mean, you're wearing a really pretty dress. You look like Juliet. So you should give it... a go."

Lyra looks at me, nodding. "That's a good idea. He'll be so excited to see me, I hope. I'll go up." She takes a few steps, and I breathe a sigh of relief. That was easier than I thought. I'll give myself a mental pat on the back now and then a physical one when the mission is completely accomplished. But then Lyra comes up to me. "Do you want to come up with me?"

"Um... sure," I say. I follow Lyra up to the balcony. When we get to the entrance to the it, I look at her. "You should go first. Get a Juliet moment all to yourself."

Lyra smiles at me. I look down. "Thanks, Eloisa." She smiles again and goes onto the balcony. I did my job, now it's Peter's time to shine. And Margherita has to test her skills as a camerawoman. I stand back.

"Peter!" Lyra calls. "Peter, hi!"

As much as I'm a hater of romance, I've never seen a proposal in person before. I can't see it from here. But when I hear Lyra bursts into tears, I guess that it happened. Peter is down on his knee with the ring out. People are cheering.

"Lyra Marie Harrigan," Peter calls out. "Will you marry me?"

"Yes! Yes! A million times yes!" Lyra says through tears.

Everyone is clapping, and I stand back. When Peter shows up two minutes later, he puts the ring on Lyra's finger and the two share a really, really long kiss that makes my face heat up and makes me look away. I really don't belong here.

I'm about to step on the balcony when Peter stops me. I turn to them. "Congratulations. You two make a great couple." I know that's the right thing to say.

"Thanks," he says. When I look up and see that he means it for both the well wishes and for helping him.

Lyra catches on. "You KNEW?"

I want to say "no," but I'm a terrible liar. Lyra comes over and gives me a hug. I'm feeling uncomfortable but I let her.

"Thank you," she whispers. "Thank you so much."

"You're welcome," I say.

I don't go on the balcony yet. I let Peter and Lyra have their moment on it. I wait ten minutes afterwards, pacing the mansion. I take everything in. I definitely will have one of my

book characters come here one day. It's nice despite violating the statue of Juliet's personal space.

When the balcony clears up, I have to burst onto it and yell, "*Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?*"

Bruces

Greg Rhyno

I was out of town when I found out about my uncle. Shane was letting me crash at his place for a couple days while I thought things through. I hadn't seen Shane in ages, but it didn't really matter. That's just how things were between us.

Shane picked me up from the Greyhound station and asked me straight off if I wanted to go bowling. I didn't really care one way or the other, so I pitched my duffel bag in the backseat of his car and said sure.

It was Friday night, and the Bowl-a-rama didn't close till late, so we wound up getting pretty deep into the two-dollar draft. At some point, Shane asked if I wanted to talk about what happened with Alex, but there wasn't anything to talk about. It was just good to get out of town for a couple days.

I kept throwing gutter balls, but Shane bowled three strikes in a row and this animated turkey moonwalked across the scoring monitor.

"If you roll six strikes in a row," Shane said, "it's called a 'Wild Turkey.' This place'll give you a free shot of Wild Turkey if you do it."

In the parking lot, Shane figured he was too drunk to drive, so we hoofed it back to his place. When we got there, he fixed us up with another couple beers and we searched around for something to watch on Netflix.

I was expecting Lebowski to make an appearance. Shane's cat was scared of almost everyone, but for whatever reason he was always twisting around my ankles or curling up on my lap. Sometimes, when I stayed over, Lebowski would jump up in the middle of the night and knead the blankets beside me. Sometimes, he'd get me with those sharp little claws. Shane hadn't mentioned him yet, and I hadn't noticed his litterbox in its usual spot, so I figured maybe I shouldn't ask. Just in case.

Eventually, we found a movie we both wanted to watch. Shane fell asleep about halfway through, but I stayed up. I kind of had to. I always need to see how things work out. When it was over, I switched off the TV and stood up. Shane's jacket was still on the chair where he'd left it, so I draped it over him.

The sky had that greyish sort of pre-light it gets just before the sun starts coming up and I was a bit mad at myself for trading a dumb movie for feeling like a bag of shit the next day. I headed into the spare room, took off my glasses, and crashed on the futon; I didn't even bother to get undressed.

It seemed like I'd barely closed my eyes when I heard my phone ding. I must have slept a little, because the sun was already punching through the venetian blinds and doing nothing good for my head. I picked up my phone and tried to read the screen. There was a message from Alex.

Sorry to hear about your Uncle Bruce, it said. Hope you're doing okay.

Well, no one says 'sorry to hear about so-and-so' when so-and-so's just sick, so I knew it had to be bad news. I thought about calling my folks but decided not to. It was still early and to be honest, I was still a little drunk. The last twelve hours were sitting down hard on my chest, and I was just wishing I'd never looked at my phone in the first place. All I wanted to do was go back to sleep, but I couldn't. And it wasn't just because I knew my Uncle Bruce was dead. It was because I didn't know which Uncle Bruce was dead.

The most likely candidate was the Bruce that married my Aunt Carol. He was the oldest of the two, and he'd already had some heart trouble. He had grey hair, parted neatly and combed to one side. He dressed kind of old, too—tailored shirts and sweaters, sometimes a sport coat—the way people did in black and white movies.

If you went somewhere with him, people always stopped to say hi. He ran the only funeral home in town, so I guess sooner or later, everyone had to pay him a visit. When I was six or seven, he let me and my little brother ride in the back of his hearse. I don't think I really understood what the old Buick was for, I just remember thinking how fancy it was, with curtains on the windows and so much room to stretch out.

This Uncle Bruce didn't say much. He played it as straight as you'd expect for an undertaker, but he always had a strange sense of humour. Maybe seeing that many dead people changes the way you see the world.

When I was fourteen, my parents had Aunt Carol and Uncle Bruce over for dinner. I was trying not to spill gravy on my good clothes when my uncle said to me, "I heard you've been having trouble with your hands."

He was a master of the vaguely uncomfortable non sequitur.

"Your hands," he repeated. "Your mother said you've been getting eczema."

Sure, I told him, my hands were getting pretty bad with the cold weather.

"I got something for you at the drugstore," he said, reaching into his pocket. "For your hands."

Before I could ask what it was, my uncle pulled out what looked like a big plastic tube of Colgate. He reached across the table and put it down next to my dinner plate. It took me a moment to realize it was KY Jelly.

I tried to find the joke in his face, but my Uncle Bruce just went on quietly eating. I didn't want to seem ungrateful, but if I made a big deal about it, I was basically crowning myself jerk-off king of the dinner table. So, I just said thanks.

"Bruce gets dry skin this time of year," my Aunt Carol explained. "He says that's the best thing for it."

"What is it?" my brother asked.

I saw my mom smile nervously at my dad, and I shoved a piece of bread against the laughter or horror, whatever was rising up in my mouth.

The other Bruce was an engineer and a volunteer firefighter. He was tall with broad shoulders, and all summer he'd have a sunburn on his neck and arms. He had dark hair that had thinned out on top, and someone, possibly my Aunt Sandy, cut it into a flopping comb-over that was rarely combed over. He usually covered up the whole mess with a foam and mesh hat that read Abitibi Pulp and Paper.

Bruce the Moose owned some property just outside the town line. He built his own house, grew his own vegetables, and his clothes were always covered in dirt. He kept a tin of Skoal rolled up in his t-shirt sleeve and when I was younger I always thought he was packing his gums with garden soil.

Uncle Bruce called us 'honey,' which sounded kind of strange coming from a big man. We'd have these family baseball games on his back acre and when I got up to bat he'd say to me, "Come on, honey, hit that son of a bitch as hard as you can."

He built a sauna in his basement and when we went over to visit in the winter, we'd watch him light the furnace with a tiger torch. After, my dad would come down and the four of us would sit naked and hunched in the small cedar room, breathing molten air through our teeth, while my uncle threw one ladle of water after another onto the hot stones. When it got to be too much, we'd run outside into the snow and steam like campfire logs someone pissed on to put out.

Once in the summer, our two families rented a little place on a lake and we stayed there for a week. A bunch of stuff went wrong. The outboard died on the boat. There was a weird stink in the cottage. The worst was when I jumped in off the dock with my glasses on. By the time I realized what happened, it was too dark to find them. My folks were out a couple hundred bucks and I was going to have to spend the rest of my vacation squinting.

That same night, my mom and my aunt went out for a walk, while my uncle and dad stayed up talking over beers. The kids were all supposed to be asleep, but I was just lying there in bed when they got into some kind of argument. I wasn't sure what it was about, but I kind of figured it was about me. How I wasn't responsible enough. How I was always losing things. Eventually I heard chair legs scrape the linoleum and the screen door slap back against its frame. My uncle said, "*Shit*," to an empty kitchen.

The next day, while I was moaning about my brother taking all the good cereal from the Kellogg's Variety Pack (there was only Corn Flakes and Rice Krispies left), Uncle Bruce walked in the door soaking wet with a diving mask on the top of his head like a Navy Seal.

His silly hair was sticking every which way, and he was holding up my glasses like a trophy. "Morning, honey," he said. "Look what I found in the lake."

When I dragged myself out of bed, Shane wasn't on the couch anymore, and the door to his room was shut, so I figured I was the first one up. I felt strange being alone in someone else's house, so I went and sat on the front steps for a little while. It was sunny outside, and I could hear a little bit of traffic coming and going a couple streets over. When I called my mom, she sounded all cheerful, but I could tell it was fake. Around the time my dad got on the line, I told them about the message from Alex and my dad told me which of my uncles had died. My mom said they had wanted to wait until I got home, so they wouldn't spoil my weekend away. They still didn't know about me and Alex, and I didn't want to get into it.

After I ended the call, Lebowsky came trotting along the side of the house toward me. He climbed the stairs and started rubbing his face against my leg, but he was filthy and smelled bad so I pushed him away and went back inside.

Shane was finally shuffling around the kitchen, squinty-eyed and joking about being a lousy host. He cracked open the fridge to see what there was to eat.

"Scrambled eggs okay?"

I said sure, and asked if we could get some coffee started. I didn't tell him about my Uncle Bruce. I didn't want to make things weird and besides, it's not like we were all that close anymore.

I am a Time Bomb

Devansh Arora

Rubbing my eye and ruffling my hair, I get out of my bed and place my palm on the cold glass window before doing anything else. I can feel that it is going to happen today. I don't know what I can do to prevent it. I can almost hear it's ticking. *Tick... Tick...*

Down the street I see a man slipping on snow and falling on his back. He shrieks in pain and gets up after a moment. I see his face and recognize him as he rotates his head to place his aviator hat back on his bald, bumpy head. It's KC. He used to live near my old home. I am surprised he is still alive. I am sorry, I didn't mean to say that, I mean, think that. *Can I unthink a thought, please?* He is still in his fifties and I don't want him to die anytime soon. I just wonder sometimes what he is living for... I remember all the shrieks and screams busting out of his house when I was a kid, then his wife cheated on him. They separated soon after that and he got sick. I don't know what happened to him but he got very sick and bald and his skin got paler. *I don't want to think about him.* His son used to live with him. One day all the shrieks and screams came back but the feminine voice that was once there was suddenly replaced by a masculine one. The next day his son burst out of the house and never came back. *Stop!* Some say the fight was about the son taking drugs. Everyone says that he died in an accident four years ago and KC didn't recognize his dead body in his disbelief. *I don't really need or want this recap of his life. Please stop!* Some say he is delusional. I am not sure. The last time I saw him at a drugstore a few months ago, he terrified me. He looked too pale to be a human. I could feel the cold in his breath as he spoke. I swear it was his ghost. *I was terrified. I don't wanna end up like him. I don't wanna end up like that. I don't wanna end up like him.* He said someone gave him an address of a place where his son is living, so they are going to reunite very soon. I said that I was happy for him. *I am feeling so blue.* A few days later I found out from my father that it wasn't his son's address. He also said that I shouldn't think too much about that "mental old man." I am afraid.

This is what people call me. "Mental." Only if he knew. God! Stop!

Tick... Tick...

My father has been acting weird lately. I mean, since I moved out. I hope he hasn't found anything about the OCD and anxiety disorder thing. Anyway, he is acting like a... father, I guess? And that's so unusual for him. *I don't want to think about him.* We were living in the same house without talking for months and even when we did talk it never went very well. To be honest, we were on the urge of punching each other during our last in-person conversation.

Please! I already feel like crying. He almost smacked my face against the wall. Now, all of a sudden he cares about what I am doing and eating and if I am fine or not and he is not being an asshole to my mother and he has been saying "I love you" to me a lot lately. I just don't respond to that, I just stay silent, I just wait for him to say something else. I don't know what to say. Those words sound so bizarre in his voice, almost like he is speaking an entirely different language. All the memories are flashing in my head as tears make their way through my cheeks. *It needs to be stopped. Maybe a puppeteer is playing with my mind. I need to stop him!* I wish I controlled what I think about and when I think about it.

Tick... Tick...

TICK... TICK...

Wait, no. That shouldn't be happening. *She is not my therapist. Am I even into her or am I just pretending to be into her to make myself feel better? Better how? TICK... TICK... What am I even talking about? Shut up! Shut it all up! It's the perfect chance to go to her and try to start a conversation. She doesn't care. I am probably just a random guy from her class.*



TICK... TICK... TICK... TICK... TICK...

Oh god! It's happening. It's happening. I AM A FUCKING TIME BOMB. I am getting sweaty, so take my coat off and throw it on a chair nearby. My hands start to quiver. I start rubbing the side of my neck. This is a disaster. *Fuck!* I feel like I have no skin on my body. FUCK! This is the worst panic attack in a while. I go to the restroom, and take the tiny plastic bottle of my pills out of my backpack. *Lorazepam*. Yeah, this is the one that I need right now. Only one pill left. My hand is shaking as I am taking it out of the bottle. Where is the pill? I lost it. FUCK! It was the LAST ONE! I am so stupid. I am an idiot. I can't stop scratching my neck. What is this? My fingernails got some blood on their tip. Oh god! I am hurting myself. I... I... I... I...

I... need help.....

The Broken Memories of Lavinia Howlett

Hailey Kemper

My name was Lavinia Howlett. I say was, because as of Monday September the 14, at exactly a quarter after two in the morning, I am no longer of this world.

It was only a little over a month ago that I walked my broken, tired body into Myrtle Pond, keeping below the water until my head went light and the world around me faded to black. It was not a suffering kind of death but more of a sweet release. I still remember the jolt of ecstasy I felt as my body went numb. I was entirely ready for the sharp sting of the grim reaper's scythe and for my miserable life to finally be over. The location where I met my fate was only a short distance from my estate. The estate that I shared with my husband. Or should I say, his estate that was only considered my own when I became his property.

I was only a month past seventeen when my father introduced me to the man I would soon call my husband. Lord Edmund Howlett was a tall, daunting figure of a man at least 20 years my senior. His face already showed signs of aging and his dark hair was flecked with silver, reminding me of fresh snow on a pine branch.

He was a long-time business partner of my father. Very wealthy and very respected. He had apparently taken an interest in me when I first came out in society at age fifteen. I always did my best to avoid the company of older men, but you can only ignore leering eyes and perverse smiles for so long. And now I was to be married to one of these men.

My wedding day was the worst day of my entire life. I was squeezed into a gown much tighter than I'd ever worn before and draped in a veil so heavy I thought it might push me right into the ground. I slowly walked down the aisle like a sacrificial lamb, cursing that the veil upon my face was so thick no one could notice my desperate, pleading face.

All hope of this all being a horrible dream was put to rest the moment the priest announced us man and wife. The rest of the evening was a blur. I remember a few well wishes, about a dozen "what a beautiful bride and what a lucky man" statements and many kisses on the cheek from family members I barely knew. All I remember is one brief moment where my new husband pulled me aside at the reception. He brings me out to the hall, gripping my wrists, pulling me close and forcing me to face him. What he said brought tears to my eyes and chills down my spine.

"You are mine now. Other men tried to claim you, but I succeeded. From this day forward you are my wife. My property and nothing more. Any complaint, any disobedience will be dealt with accordingly. I will teach you to know your place."

Our marriage lasted for almost three whole years, each one more miserable than the last. I was never allowed to leave his sight. Everything I did was dictated by him. If his work

consumed him, the house staff was tasked with watching over me. I felt like a prisoner in my own house and marriage, afraid to make any wrong move that might upset him and seal my worst fate.

I did my best to play the role of the perfect lady of the house. I put on fake smiles as I greeted guests, ordered the servants the way I was taught to and reluctantly performed my “wifely duties.”

It was not until I discovered my husband’s unfaithfulness that I truly felt hopeless. Any hope I may have had about making this arrangement work quickly disintegrated the second I intercepted that letter. Flowery script from a woman named Felicity Delacourt, describing my husband as a noble, loving gentleman that she was not worthy of. I almost laughed upon reading that line. Either this woman was entirely deranged, or it was a side of him that he never cared to show me. As much as I despised him, he had no right to disrespect me like that. It was horrid enough that I was his prisoner, but he could not even pretend to be a loyal spouse.

His mistress was even younger than I. At least sixteen years with long fair hair and large innocent eyes. She was pretty enough but she could do much better than my husband. I never confronted him about his affair. I could not risk angering him. It was not until he started leaving for his long “business trips” that I realized my reputation was truly at risk. I knew what he was doing. I knew he was seeing her. However, I did not know that rumours had already spread throughout the city. Several times I would walk along the busy streets overhearing the conversations of passers-by around me.

“Do you see that young woman there? Poor thing.”

“I heard she was caught with a member of the kitchen staff and drove her poor husband away. It’s her own fault really”

“That’s what happens when you wed such a young thing. Husband couldn’t control her, so his eyes began to wander.”

“I don’t see what the big deal is. All rich men have mistresses. That whore needs to learn her place.”

I could not believe what I was hearing. No one had ever spoken of me this way. I was sick, frustrated, and embarrassed all at once. All those people thought it was my fault that my husband was a scoundrel. None of them knew the truth. All they knew was that when a marriage falls apart, it must be the wife’s fault. I was the one who failed, and it was to be expected that my husband would move on.

I was no longer invited to dinners or events. I faced scrutiny each time I left my home and Edmund was not even attempting to hide his affair anymore.

This was when I decided I could not go on. Edmund was on one of his “business trips,” a perfect time to rid myself of my grief. I left a note on my dresser explaining my

torment, my hopelessness and my anger at the world. I put on my robe and left my room. I descended the staircase as quickly and quietly as possible. I could not risk any staff knowing of my absence.

I made my way across the street to Hayfield Park. The pathway, was so bright and vibrant during the day yet so dreary and sinister in the darkness of the night. I walked into the freezing water, deeper and deeper until my head was under the surface.

All I remember next was lying in a secluded room. I opened my eyes and took in my surroundings quickly realizing that I was in a hospital room. My ears perked when I heard my name spoken outside of the room.

“Lady Lavinia Howlett is gone,” said a voice of whom I assumed to be a doctor. “We will be seeking arrangements for her immediately.”

A sigh escaped my lips. Finally, I made my grand exit from my pitiful existence. No longer would I be bothered by Edmund, Felicity or society's prying eyes ever again.

So that brings us to now. At this moment I am waiting outside my husband's estate, an invisible entity overlooked by the world. I had often heard that ghosts are spirits that have yet to pass to the afterlife for they have unfinished business in the living world. The moment I realized I was still trapped on earth I knew what I needed to do. The only way to put my spirit to rest was to destroy the very thing that destroyed me. I needed to kill my husband.

It is half past 11:00. Edmund should be asleep in bed by now. I entered the house and moved towards the kitchen. I had never spent much time in here while I was alive, so it took me a while to search the wooden cabinets and locate the knife drawer. Once I found it, I pulled out a large silver knife. It made a satisfying swish as it brushed past the various other utensils. I held it triumphantly in the air, watching the metal glistening in the moonlight.

I gripped my hand tight around the weapon and made my way towards the grand staircase. Just as I reached the first step, a portrait in the foyer caught my eye. It was hanging just above the fireplace, the exact spot that a portrait of Edmund and I was located. Only now the face staring back to me was not my own: it was Felicity! I stared in disbelief at their jovial faces, anger rising throughout my body. It seems that Edmund wasted no time remarrying as soon as I was gone. With me dead he could be with the woman he truly desired, even if his last wife had only been gone a short while.

With fierce determination, I hurried up the staircase, my mind racing and my palms sweating with anticipation. This was no longer a means to move on from this world, but to make him suffer. To put him through the same agony he caused me.

I entered the master bedroom, walking swiftly to the large canopy bed. I suppressed a groan when I saw them sleeping soundly, Edmund's arms wrapped tightly around Felicity.

Where was this tender love and care in our marriage? I gritted my teeth as I took the knife in both hands and raised it above my head. This was the moment. I was finally going to wash my hands of this whole affair and enter a sweet, bountiful afterlife.

Just as I was about to bring the blade down and plunge it in to his chest, Edmund stirred, and his eyes shot open.

“Lavinia?” He asked with a shaky breath, “What in god's name are you doing?” I froze in place, knife still above my head. How can he see me? He’s not supposed to see me.

Edmund quickly sat up, the movement waking Felicity. She let out a shriek of terror when she saw me and clung to Edmund’s arm. “What is she doing here?”

I brought the knife to my side and straightened my spine, staring down at them. “Edmund. When I was alive you made my life miserable. You abused me, humiliated me. Each day was worse than the last. And now not only will I leave this wretched life behind, but I will ensure that you will suffer the same agony that I felt for so long!”

Edmund and Felicity’s eyes widened with terror as I raised the knife over my head once more.

However, before I could meet my mark, several servants barged through the door. “We heard Lady Howlett’s scream. What’s the mat—?” A maid stopped mid-sentence taking in my form next to the bed, knife still in my grasp.

“Lady Lavinia. How are you here? Why are you here?” A butler, Benjamin if I remember correctly, choked out.

I smiled a grim smile looking over my newfound audience. “I am here to exact my revenge. I do not know how or why you can see me but at least now you can witness your cruel benefactor getting what he deserves. How satisfying it will be for us all.”

“But Lavinia, why?” asked Felicity in a small voice. “You are no longer married to Edmund. Why must you kill him?”

“By god!” I exclaimed in frustration. “Must I explain everything to you, cretins? I have unfinished business with Edmund. Until I rid the world of his foul presence I cannot move on to the afterlife. Now all of you! Make yourselves useful for once in your miserable lives and allow me to complete the deed!”

Everyone in the room seemed taken aback by what I had just said. They all looked to one another as if seeking answers by their faces alone. One young maid stepped forward, “Ma’am. I don't quite know how to tell you this but... you aren’t dead.”

I stared in shock like a hunted, wounded animal trying to process what I had just been told.

“What could you possibly mean?” I started with confusion. “I-I drowned in the lake. I felt my body go numb.”

“Yes, but after you lost consciousness, we found you and brought you to the hospital,” a young butler explained.

“Precisely! In the hospital I overheard the doctors pronouncing me dead. Their exact words were ‘she’s gone.’ How could I possibly still be alive?”

Edmund shook his head as he put on his robe. “No Lavinia. They were not pronouncing you were dead. They were pronouncing that you were unwell. You have serious problems and as proven tonight you are a harm to yourself and others. Come everyone, we must call Bellevue and have her sent back. She must have stopped taking her medication and found a way out.”

Edmund finished tying his robe around his waist and started toward the other side of the bed to help Felicity up. I desperately grabbed his arm.

“But Edmund. If I am not dead, how could you have gotten remarried?”

He gave me a disgusted look as he ripped his arm back. “You were deemed certifiably insane! I could not be married to a woman with such a tarnished reputation, who was to spend the rest of her life in an asylum. I was granted a divorce and married Felicity last week. The Bellevue staff informed you of this just a few days ago.”

No. No! This was not possible. I am long dead, not insane! I would have remembered if I stayed in a mental asylum.

“You’re wrong. You’re all wrong!” I exclaimed. “I need to go to the afterlife. I need to put this whole ordeal behind me. Edmund must suffer!”

I lifted the knife and ran towards Edmund. Felicity screamed as Edmund dodged the blade before it could pierce his chest. The knife fell to the floor as I was restrained by several servants. I hit the floor painfully as they used a dull rope to tie my hands behind my back. It scratched my wrists painfully as I struggled to break free. Edmund embraced a crying Felicity as they forcefully removed me from the room.

“Let go of me this instant!” I screamed desperately. “Where are you taking me? I need to go back and finish off Edmund. It’s the only way! It’s the only way!”

They led me outside of the estate to a large wooden wagon. In large letters across the outside, it read **BELLEVUE WOMAN’S INSTITUTION**. A doctor waiting outside unlocked the back of the wagon to reveal at least a dozen disheveled women in various states of distress.

“Please no,” I begged as they forced me into the wagon. “I can’t go. I don’t belong there. Please, you don’t understand. I need to kill Edmund!”

They closed and locked the door. The driver slapped the reins, and the horses began their trot down the road. I clutched the bars at the window watching the house and the servants fade from view.

“Please help me! I’m dead. I’m really dead. I was so close. Please stop and let me finish the job!”

But it was no use. They brought me to Bellevue. They strapped me into a straitjacket and threw me into a single person cell. I sat there silently for hours pondering what had transpired.

They were wrong. They were all wrong. And now because of them I can never move on to the afterlife. Edmund will continue to live happily with his new wife in his beautiful estate and I will be here suffering for all eternity. Never able to exact my revenge or seek a reward for all the harshness I faced in life. From now on I survive on broken memories and false hope alone.

The Arrival of Moon Baby

An excerpt from a novel

Cristina Morriello

August 1980

*“There was once a night,
Oh, such a night,
When the stars danced on a melody,
And when the moon shone bright,
It leaves centuries beyond with a memory.*

*Oh, what a night it was
When the moon blessed the world ‘cause,
It shone brighter than the whole wide world,
And on a bed of roses came a girl,
A little baby, beautiful she was.*

*The baby didn’t cry, she sung,
She had curly hair around her hung,
She was found by an old maid,
Who gave her a bed where she laid.
She found a new song she sang.*

*She kept the girl for herself, but just maybe,
Asked others the name, she said Moon Baby.”*

When a girl stepped off a bus in our small California town two months ago, we never expected how much our world would change.

Once she stepped off the bus, finishing her song, she put her plastic bag over her wrist. She ran a hand through her knotted hair and exhaled softly. She spat on the ground, then kept walking.

Compared to the girls my age around here, the new girl looked exotic. She had jet black hair, pale skin, and dark, charcoal gray eyes. In our California town, where everyone was blonde and blue eyed, save for a few exceptions- my best friend Aria, whose father, an Italian-born rocker whom she never saw, left her with frizzy, dark brown hair, brown eyes, and olive skin- the new girl stuck out like a sore thumb, but a sore thumb that was to be admired.

The girl ran her hand through her hair yet again and took careful steps. The first thing she did was survey the town. The glimmer in her eyes showed that she liked what she saw in the few things she did see, even though she showed nothing through her facial expressions. She found a rock to sit on and looked down at her worn jeans, blue sneakers, and tie-dyed "fate" t-shirt. She opened her plastic bag and looked through her few belongings. She cursed when she saw that she had no money. She stood up and walked down to the general store. She looked into the store through the window. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a small, black object. With an effortless flick, she opened it. It was a switchblade. Her father's switchblade, she once told me. That's the only thing I know about her father. She said nothing more and I didn't pry. With her, I know better than to ask.

The girl played with her blade, running her fingers over the sharp edge. She considered going in and taking prisoners. She'd do anything for food. She had spent the little money she took when she left on bus tickets before she settled on her final destination. Her stomach growled, but she knew she couldn't really hold people hostage-

Could she?

She slowly closed her blade, put her plastic bag behind a garbage can that was near her, and pocketed her blade. She looked at her shirt. Fate. Fate is not what brought her here, was it? This was her mother's shirt. When she left, she wore this because she wanted a reminder. At sixteen years old, the girl knew better than to leave while her mother was home. Again, that is what she told me. Again, I know better than to pry. "Gracie," she always told me, "You gotta know that if and when I'm ready to talk, ya know I'd come to you." Yeah, bull. We've known each other for two months, but still, she knew better than to talk to thirteen-year-old me.

But anyway. The girl walked in, ready to do anything for food. Even if it's a bag of Wonder Bread and a can of meat. She saw a pack of Joe Louis, and she made sure to dent the box, hiding it in the display.

She took a few steps towards the unsuspecting cashier and stopped. A rich-looking woman, in a blouse and skirt, her graying hair tied in a low ponytail, wearing pearls galore and tapping against her clutch was taking up the entire space in front of the cashier, even though she was small and thin. She was more out of place than the girl. The difference? The girl is on the defense. She knows, despite wanting to rob the general store, that she is an unknown. A girl who,

maybe deep down, is scared. The pompous woman- Mrs. Barnes, who goes to a country club outside of town- is on the offense.

“How do you not understand a simple question?” Mrs. Barnes asked the cashier, a boy with red hair who was wearing a backwards 49-ers baseball cap.

“I understand, ma’am,” the boy said. “But we don’t-”

“First of all, do not call me *ma’am*. I am not that old. And second, how do you not have caviar?”

The girl choked on laughter, and Mrs. Barnes looked at her condescendingly.

“My dear, you shouldn’t do that. It’s not ladylike and habits like that won’t get you a husband worth bragging about. But anyway,” Mrs. Barnes looked at the boy. “What kind of store do you call yourself, not selling quality food that won’t get you sick?”

“Um, we’re Mortimer’s,” the boy replied uneasily. “We have a wide variety of food for cheap.”

“Obviously. But you have no caviar.”

The boy looked down uncomfortably. “Ma’am, what exactly is caviar?”

Mrs. Barnes scoffed. “How do you not know what caviar is?”

The boy said nothing as the girl clenched her fists.

“I’m guessing,” Mrs. Barnes continued, “that you don’t know what caviar is because you’ve never seen it before. If you were rich, you wouldn’t be working at so-called Mortimer’s.” She straightens. “Ah, very well. I guess I’ll have to find it elsewhere. But just so you know, I’ve had many a business get shut down. Consider yourself lucky that you can still work at Mortimer’s in those awful clothes.” With that, she left, leaving the boy red in the face and the girl furious.

The girl said something under her breath, and it sounded a lot like “f-ing elitist.” She had a new idea now. She gave the boy a reassuring wink and left the variety store running.

It didn’t take long for the girl to catch up with Mrs. Barnes, as the latter was wearing heels. The girl stopped right in front of her, her breathing not heavy in the slightest.

“Well, young lady,” Mrs. Barnes said, “what do you think you’re doing?”

The girl stuffed her hand in her pocket, the pocket where her switchblade was, and said easily, “Give me your money.”

Mrs. Barnes smirked. “What, do you need money? Get yourself a job, my dear. Something not like Mortimer’s. If you clean yourself up a bit, I’m sure you’ll get something.”

The girl rolled her eyes and pulled out her switchblade, flipping it open with ease. Mrs. Barnes gasped as the girl held the blade closer.

"I'm not joking," the girl said evenly. "Give me your money or it will be a whole lot worse for you."

Mrs. Barnes looked around, ready to yell for help. The girl was not having it. She edged closer to Mrs. Barnes, until she had her up against the wall of a building. Mrs. Barnes whimpered nervously. *Not so tough now, huh, Miss Country Club?* the girl thought. She made sure to pierce Mrs. Barnes' eyes with her own.

"I'm not joking," the girl repeated. "Give me your money. All of it. Or I swear, I'll find a place to put this." She touched the tip of her blade to Mrs. Barnes' chest, making sure not to cut her.

"Okay, okay," Mrs. Barnes said, near tears. She fumbled to get her wallet out and gave the girl all her money.

"Thank you for your business," the girl said. "Now run. Run far. Don't tell anyone what happened. Because if you do, I'll find you. I always find my prey."

Mrs. Barnes ran faster than an Olympic sprinter, even in heels.

The girl took a few deep breaths. She put her switchblade back in her pocket. She didn't realize until now that her hands were shaking. She tried to slow her breathing, and re-entered Mortimer's. She pulled out the money and counted it as she walked up to the cashier.

"Here," she says, giving him a few bills of the three hundred dollars she just acquired. "For your troubles. It's all yours." She turned around and bolted out of there without letting the boy have a chance to talk.

She ran as fast as she could, down the street and through the alleyways. Her breathing sped up rapidly. And then, she stopped short behind East Ridge High School.

And she cried.

She didn't know why she was crying. Mrs. Barnes wasn't exactly a sympathetic victim. But she knew right then and there that she was a criminal, and that unsettled her. She cried for a while until she realized that there was no point in crying- you can't change the past, it's called the past for a reason- and made a promise to never cry again as long as she was here. But what the girl failed to realize was that you can't control your breaking points. They just happen.

She edged closer to the yard of East Ridge, ironically named, given we're in California, and put her hands on the chain-linked fence. Of all things, the girl was witnessing cheerleading practice. She rolled her eyes. The girl was not a fan of cheerleaders. They were too happy. But she couldn't stop gawking. Back from where she came from, the girl was fascinated with people she was not like. She used to people-watch with her mom.

She tuned out the annoying cheer and just watched. They were all in sync, in control. The girl wished she had control of her life. She looked at the girls, and one stood out to her. She stood out to me, too, because she was my sister Leda.

Leda was close to being head cheerleader, but as a junior, she couldn't be. That honour belonged to Nancy Grant. As for Leda, she had flowy blonde hair she held back in a high ponytail, and she was skinny. The only weight she had was muscle.

The girl didn't want to watch anymore, so she was lucky when the cheer coach called for a break. She was about to leave, but Leda saw her and approached. The girl rolled her eyes. She didn't like Leda already. She was a pretty cheerleader who was probably rich, in the girl's mind. She knew that Leda was going to come over to her to chew her out. Or so she thought.

"Hi."

The girl was surprised by the greeting. She ran a hand through her hair and looked at Leda. Leda was wearing gray sweat shorts and a white East Ridge High School t-shirt.

"Hi," the girl said, on her guard.

"I've never seen you around. Do you go to East Ridge? Are you interested in becoming a cheerleader?"

The girl choked out a laugh. "No, I can't. I don't go to school. I just got here."

"Oh. Well, there's not much here, but welcome."

"Thanks."

"What brings you here?"

"Um, I dunno. Wanted a change." That's all the girl told me, too.

"Maybe... do you want to go to Dairy Queen later?"

"Isn't that against your cheerleading diet?" The girl couldn't keep the snideness out of her voice.

"Well, that'll be our secret." Leda, unfazed, held out her hand over the fence. "I'm Leda Lynch."

The girl did not know why Leda was being so nice to her, but she had to think fast. There's no way she could use her real name.

She kept the girl for herself, but just maybe

Asked others the name, she said-

"Moon," the girl said, taking Leda's hand. "Baby. My name is Moon Baby."

Dream-to-Reality 3000

Katya Arifin

Lights up on a non-descript office, with three chairs. MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI, a middle-aged, balding man in a boxy suit stands onstage. Jangly, upbeat music, like a public service announcement from the 90s, plays.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

(to the audience)

Hello, I'm Jerry Schlewendowski, CEO and Supreme Leader of Schlewendowski Potato Farms. This is our corporate office. As you know, I started this business to find the meaning of life in a world where bad things happen to good people. That changed when I had to join my mother's sleep therapy clinic-slash-potato farm because, well, I was unable to find that meaning. (pause)
And I don't think I ever will.

A beat. He looks off into the distance.

No matter. Lately, some of our staff members have been having strange, incomprehensible dreams. Luckily, the sleep-therapy side of Schlewendowski Potato Farms has been developing an all-new product that might be able to help them out. Why don't you listen in?

George and Michael walk in. Note: Most of the lines are to be read in faux-infomercial style.

Good morning, George. Hello, Michael.

GEORGE

(yawning)

Morning, Mr. Schlewendowski.

MICHAEL

Hello, sir.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Are two you alright? You don't look too well.

GEORGE

I had those strange, funny dreams again, sir! I was tossing and turning - when I woke up, instead of feeling refreshed and awake, I was just confused!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Confused?

GEORGE

The dreams were so funny and weird! What am I going to do?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Well, you've come in on the perfect day.

Mr. Schlewendowski rolls out a shiny, silver machine with many buttons and electrodes.

After weeks of extensive development, Schlewendowski Potato Farms has finally perfected the Dream-To-Reality 3000!

GEORGE

You mean the machine that can turn our dreams into physical manifestations of themselves to allow for ease-of-interpretation?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Yes!

He turns to the audience.

After the federal investigation discovered we were using infant formula meant for babies in rural Alberta to farm root vegetables, we realized that it was time to lean heavily into our sleep-therapy clinic.

Now, this new state-of-the-art technology vetted by nationwide scientists can finally help you understand your dreams by turning them into real-life beings to be observed and investigated. The machine then prints out an interpretation of your dream for you to read.

GEORGE

(to Michael)

Wow! We did come in on the perfect day! I'll finally know what all my crazy dreams mean!

MICHAEL

I wish I was like you, George. My dreams are always so boring and slow. They probably don't mean anything.

GEORGE

Don't worry, Michael. Since I'm the office clown, I'm sure that the Dream-to-Reality 3000 can show enough excitement from my dreams for the both of us.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Why don't we show the audience how it works?

GEORGE

I'll go first!

George sits down on the chair.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

We'll just hook you up to the machine with these painless electrodes.

Mr. Schlewendowski places the electrodes on George.

GEORGE

Let's do this!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Now, all you have to do is begin explaining your dream, and the machine will project a 3D model of it behind you.

GEORGE

So I was in my third grade class, and Mr. Latimer, my teacher, came in wearing a ballerina tutu! Then, he tried to pirouette while writing long division on the whiteboard!

A man in a pink tutu appears behind George. He spins and leaps in a mock ballet-style but trips as he pretends to write on a board.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

(laughing)

Wow, George, that's quite a scene!

GEORGE

I wonder what it means?

The machine prints out a slip of paper. Mr. Schlewendowski tears it off and begins to read.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Well, according to the machine, the pink tutu means that pink is your favourite colour.

GEORGE

Oh.

(pause)

Is that it?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Yes, that's all it says.

Mr. Schlewendowski shows him the paper.

GEORGE

Huh.

A beat.

Didn't know that about myself! Thanks, Dream-to-Reality 3000!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Michael, why don't you give it a go?

MICHAEL

I don't know, sir, my dreams aren't really that interesting. I don't know if there'd be much to interpret.

GEORGE

Give a go, Michael!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

George is right. With its patented Imagery Virtuoso-trademark technology, the Dream-to-Reality 3000 can decipher meaning from any dream.

MICHAEL

Oh, alright.

GEORGE

Awesome!

Michael sits in the chair. Mr. Schlewendowski attaches the electrodes to his skin.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Okay, Michael, whenever you're ready.

Spotlight on Michael in the chair.

MICHAEL

I'm sitting in a wooden chair in my pajamas. I am a little boy. The basement is dark and cold. I feel a chill coming from the lake. A slight breeze rushes through the ceiling-high window. I hold a single unlit candle in my hand.

As he speaks, a little boy in pajamas appears and sits on a wooden chair. He holds a single lit candle.

The room gets colder. I stare at the candle and will it to relight. A single tear rolls down my face.

The music stops. The spotlight on Michael disappears.

Should I go on?

A beat. George and Mr. Schlewendowski stare at Michael.

GEORGE

Well, good job Michael. A little dull, but I guess it's back to me now!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Michael, that was -

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, I know it wasn't that interesting.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

That was beautiful!

GEORGE

What?

MICHAEL

(happily)

Really?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

There was just something about it - let's see what the machine has to say.

GEORGE

(laughing, playing it off)

Michael, I wouldn't get too upset if it doesn't say much. I mean, you just stared at a candle the whole time. My dreams are probably more metaphorical and in-depth than yours -

Mr. Schlewendowski tears off the strip of paper.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

"In the darkness of this soul lies a single, flickering light. The solitary figure in quiet pain is indicative of a deep, rich understanding of the eternal suffering of the human condition, and the enduring trials of achieving inner peace."

GEORGE

What?!

MICHAEL

My dream said all that?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

At the end of this paper is a charcoal painting of sunset!

MICHAEL

Wow!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Michael, I must say, this is amazing. Your inner soul must be filled to the brim with creativity and existential knowledge!

MICHAEL

I don't know what to say! I guess I –

GEORGE

Wow, great, thanks Michael, that was awesome. Okay, back to me! Right, Mr. Schlewendowski?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Hm? Oh, yes, George, right. Your turn.

GEORGE

I'm sure that once I describe my dream even more, its meaning will be just as deep and interesting as his.

George shoos Michael off the chair and grabs the electrodes. The ballerina teacher reappears.

GEORGE

Okay. So I was in my class with ballerina Mr. Latimer who was doing long division on the board. Then -

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Michael, who was that little boy?

The ballerina teacher stops dancing.

MICHAEL

I'm not sure, sir, but I think it was me. Maybe. I don't really know what I look like. I didn't have any mirrors growing up. My mom always said it was the rude to stare. We used the backs of spoons.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

What happened next?

GEORGE

Well, then the whiteboard marker turned into a snake -

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

No, George, I mean with Michael's fascinating dream.

MICHAEL

Well, I -

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Wait! Put on the Dream-to-Reality 3000 first.

Mr. Schlewendowski takes the electrodes off George and places them on Michael.

GEORGE

Hey!

The little boy with the chair appears. The ballerina teacher walks off, dejectedly.

MICHAEL

As the tear rolled down my cheek, all I could think about was the little hole in my sock.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

(in awe)

The hole in your sock?

GEORGE

(disbelievingly)

The hole in your sock?

MICHAEL

I stuck my big toe through it and thought about how it looked like I had only one toe.

The little boy sticks his big toe through the sock and wiggles his feet. The machine prints out another piece of paper.

This is real cool, Mr. Schlewendeski!

GEORGE

Okay, that was nothing. You can't expect to get anything from that.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

(from the paper)

"Like the cry of a far-off wolf, or the sigh of an old oak tree waving its branches in the wind, or the lone whistle of the whippoorwill, the small opening of the foot covering signals a complex and multi-faceted comprehension of life's infinite capacity for wonder."

GEORGE

WHAT?!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Michael, these results are so much better than I had anticipated. Who knows what we could do with your dreams, with physical manifestations of these ethereal concepts and ideologies!

MICHAEL

Thank you, sir!

He grabs the paper from Mr. Schlewendowski.

George, your interpretation is here too.

GEORGE

What does it say?

MICHAEL

"You might have seen a snake once. It could have been in a book." And there's a bunch of symbols and characters that seem to make a -

Michael shrugs.

- kind of thing.

GEORGE

What, it can't even decide if I've ever seen a snake?

MICHAEL

George, maybe calm down -

GEORGE

No! I'M more creative and interesting than you! I'M the funny one! I'M the office clown!
The one with the rich emotional life! It's this stupid machine!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

As the head of Schlewendowski Potato Farms, George, I'm not particularly appreciating that tone you're taking towards the new product.

GEORGE

Who dressed up as a cloud on a bicycle for Halloween last year? Who made everyone watch while he did 38 handstands at that company-wide turkey dinner? Who made everyone watch while he threw up in the women's washroom after doing 38 handstands at that company-wide turkey dinner? Me! Me!

MICHAEL

Well, I do fun stuff too. I just don't do it in public. I just don't feel like I need to shout my interesting-ness out loud. My mom always said -

GEORGE

Shut up, you boring egg-white wash paint swatch! Give me the electrodes! You want interesting dreams? I'll show you interesting dreams!

George pushes Michael off the chair and places the electrodes on his body.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

No! Michael, we are headed towards a major breakthrough. We can't stop now. Keep explaining your dream!

Mr. Schlewendowski grabs one of the electrodes and puts it back on Michael.
Now one of the pads is on George, and the other is on Michael.

GEORGE

So the whiteboard marker had turned into a snake -

The ballerina teacher appears and is now beside the little boy on the chair. The teacher swings a rubber snake and hits the little boy in the face, knocking him to the ground. Michael gasps. Mr. Schlewendowski helps the little boy back up.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

No, Michael! Go on!

MICHAEL

Well, the big toe was sticking out of my sock, and I thought about how lonely it was, so I tried to fit in another toe but it just wouldn't go through -

GEORGE

And my teacher dropped the snake in terror! Suddenly his tutu ripped off, leaving him in these bright white boxers -

The boy struggles to fit his second toe through the hole in his sock as the teacher does a pirouette and rips off his tutu.

MICHAEL

I pushed and pushed -

GEORGE

Then raw potatoes began to fall from the sky!

MICHAEL

And the tears started to fall harder and faster until I was sobbing -

The teacher continues to do pirouettes and jetes in his underwear around the crying boy as raw potatoes fall from the sky. Smoke starts to come out of the Dream-to-Reality 3000 machine.

MICHAEL

I could see the edge of the toe sticking out -

GEORGE

And he used the ketchup in his boxers to eat the potatoes!

The teacher takes hundreds of ketchup packets out of his underpants.

MICHAEL

My tears fell on my feet, making it even harder to fit the toe through -

The boy contorts his body to try and fit the toe through the hole.

GEORGE

- all I could see -

MICHAEL

- were the other toes wriggling and wriggling as they -

GEORGE

- placed potato after potato in his underpants as he came closer and closer to my face -

The boy holds his feet, sobbing, as potatoes continue falling from the sky. The teacher maniacally dips them into his ketchup-filled boxers and eats them, staring directly at the boy.

MICHAEL

- the nail of the toe was starting to come through, and I could smell that my feet were like -

GEORGE

- moist waffles! His breath was like waffles -

MICHAEL

- I squinted my eyes shut -

GEORGE

- I couldn't bear to look at the potatoes stuck to his beard with gobs of ketchup hanging off them -

MICHAEL

- and I began to scream -

GEORGE

- and he began to scream -

MICHAEL

- and all the toes were screaming -

GEORGE

- throats hoarse with passion and fear -

The two dreams have melded together, the teacher and little boy face-to-face. The teacher has potatoes stuck to his face; the boy's eyes are squeezed tight in terror. They are both screaming. The Dream-to-Reality 3000 machine catches fire. It beeps crazily.

DREAM-TO-REALITY 3000

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

She's gonna blow!

MICHAEL

- and I thought -

GEORGE

- I'm never gonna get out of this alive!

MICHAEL

- when suddenly -

GEORGE

- when suddenly -

GEORGE & MICHAEL

I woke up.

The machine stops beeping, and the fire goes out. The ballerina teacher and the little boy stop screaming and leave. Michael and George sit in their chairs, panting. The machine prints a slip of paper. It is glowing.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

My god.

Mr. Schlwendowski grabs the paper and reads it.

That's it. What I've been looking for. The answer to suffering. The answer to pain. The answer to life itself. It's been here the whole time.

(pause)

It's you, Michael.

MICHAEL

Me?

GEORGE

Huh?

Mr. Schlewendowski goes to Michael and helps him up.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

You are who will save us all.

MICHAEL

Oh, wow!

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

I'm promoting you to head brand ambassador for the Dream-to-Reality 3000 so you can help people across the world reach their full dream potential.

MICHAEL

Thank you, sir!

GEORGE

No, no, no, no! It's me! It's my dreams! I'm the one! Here, I had another dream two nights ago -

George places the electrodes on his body.

My crush Samantha Weatherington was sitting at a bus stop with a turkey -

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

George! Stop embarrassing yourself. Your dream was boring. Forget it.

GEORGE

What?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Michael's dream had drama. Suspense. It had real emotion.

GEORGE

We're talking about the same toe dream, right?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

Sometimes the most exciting things happen inside of our heads. Your dancing ballerina teacher was nothing but a mere imitation of the true human experience. A façade. A distraction to tide us over while we awaited the true answers. But that's not what we do at Schlewendowski Potato Farms. Not anymore.

Mr. Schlewendowski pats Michael on the back.

I'll need you to clear your desk and move to the boiler room so Michael can have ample room to work on his dream presentations. Right away.

GEORGE

But sir -

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

George?

GEORGE

(dejectedly)

Right away, sir.

Mr. Schlewendowski and Michael walk off. George sits on the ground and eats a raw potato.

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

(from offstage)

And read the outro!

GEORGE

Do I have to?

MR. SCHLEWENDOWSKI

(from offstage)

READ IT!

George sighs.

GEORGE

(sadly)

The Dream-to-Reality 3000. Making dreams come true.

He continues eating potatoes as jangly 90s music plays.

Blackout.

The Semantics of Linguistic Negation

Brannoc Hannah

“You know that thing that we need to do? You know, that thing.”

“Yeah, you bet I know that thing.”

“Alright, let’s begin our plan right now. They’ll never know what’s coming.”

“Who won’t?”

“Them, you know.”

“Oh yeah, I know.”

“No.”

“Yeah.”

“That means that you don’t know. You said ‘yeah’ to my ‘no’, which means that you affirmed what I had already said, thus making you agree with me.”

“But I don’t agree with you.” “No, you do.”

“No, I don’t.”

“No, I mean you do agree with me, because I said no, which is negative, and I changed your ‘don’t’ into my ‘do’, thus making our charge meter positive through my negation of your negative. My ‘do’ is affirming that this meter is still positive. Then you agreed with me by negating your ‘no’ with your ‘don’t’. My ‘no’ after your last ‘don’t’ was for negating your subtextual misunderstanding, not our spoken conversation’s charge, just to be clear.”

“You’re wrong.”

“Am I though? Just think about it.”

“What if I don’t wanna?”

“Then I win.”

“...Fine. Let’s go back and think through our conversation thus far.”

“Yeah, let’s do that. Then we can continue planning our thing.”

“Cool. Okay, so we were talking about our plan’s subjects, with whom I am still unfamiliar...”

* * *

“But I don’t want to eat an apple!”

“Here we go again. Okay, so I presume that you mean that you want to not eat an apple—”

“No, I mean that I don’t want to eat an apple.”

“First of all, I did presume that, so don’t say that I didn’t, but also, I’ve heard you use that phrasing before, and from context, I’m pretty sure that you mean «I want to not eat an apple» in this case. One way to think about it is that if you don’t want to eat an apple, you might still be wanting to chew an apple or to consume an apple...although I guess if you say that you want to not eat an apple, you could still mean those other things, so perhaps this is a bad example.”

“I don’t understand anything you just said.”

“Anything *that* you just said. Another way to think about it is that «want to not» is specific, whereas «don’t want to» is more vague: what’s being negated in «I want to not eat an apple»’s case is eating an apple, so you want—which is positive and specific—to not eat an apple—which is saying that that prior verb’s action is to not eat an apple...although it could also be: you want to not—which is negative—then eat an apple, which is positive. Perhaps this is a bad example too. Actually, that first way seems correct to me. I’ll continue. What’s being negated in «I don’t want to eat an apple»’s case is or really you’re just saying that you don’t want to eat an apple. «Want to eat an apple» is negative, so that verb is being negated in this case. or something like that. This is getting confusing though, and I think that I’m doing a bad job of explaining. Do you understand this now?”

“No.”

“Okay, here’s another way of thinking about it. For «I don’t want to eat an apple», imagine a set of every possible action that uses want as a verb—which might even be infinite, I don’t know—but you’re removing wanting to eat an apple from that set, so that set contains every possible wanting action except for that one. For «I want to not eat an apple», that set contains only one element, which is wanting to not eat an apple. Although that element has a negative component, that element is still in that set. My proof might be sketchy, but I know that I’m right. at least, I’m more right than what you were saying. Do you understand now?”

“I think I’m starting to. It’s still a bunch of nonsense to me, what you’re saying, but I think I’m starting to get your point.”

“That’s a good start. Let’s rethink about everything that I’ve said so far as pertaining to this subject. This is important to understand.”

“so overall, assuming that this is correct, wanting to not eat an apple contains only one action,

wherein eating an apple happens to be negative, whereas not wanting to eat an apple contains every possible wanting action except for wanting to eat an apple. So saying «I don't want to eat an apple» is vague and has many possibilities, which is fine for certain contexts, as long as phrasing it that way is intentional, but oftentimes when people say that, they mean «I want to not eat an apple»; they should say this to begin with if that's what they mean, because this is more precise. «I don't think so» and «I think not» is another pertinent example that I could spend a long time talking about. And remember, my first attempted explanation about chewing/consuming an apple when eating an apple is negated is actually incorrect, I think, so forget that. Unfortunately, negation works differently for some other languages, though, which is sad, because double-negatives are such beautiful things – or, double-negatives are not not such beautiful things; there. Wait, that means that they aren't not such beautiful things, not that they are such beautiful things. How have I not noticed that before? Now I need to think about that for a while.”

“If you say so.”

The Lemon Tree

Jordyn Weir

WARNING: This story mentions sexual assault and suicide.

Oh, how I despise the boy with blond hair. His charming good looks, sunny smile, and snake eyes draw you in like a dog to a bone. If only I knew from the first glance the pain he'd cause. It was the beginning of grade 11 when I met him. He was the funny, social senior that everyone loved. Even the teachers adored him, and he wasn't even a top student. I, on the other hand, had just transferred from a private school in Peterborough, Ontario and didn't have many friends since most people sorted out their cliques by first year. Him and I were friends at first but things escalated quickly; we began dating only two months into the school year. He shone a warm amber light on my cold dark world.

I had never felt such happiness, especially at the hands of another person. Sometimes I still reminisce about all of the wonderful memories we'd share and all of the places we'd go before things turned bitter. In the daisy field behind his house, we would talk about growing old together and having a future; swearing that we would never stoop down to the level of corniness old couples had. We laughed under the bright sun about the ways our grandparents made the most boring things, like gardening together, seem as if it were the most romantic date in the world. I even remember his cheeky smirk as he suggested we plant a lemon tree ourselves that day so we could get the cheesy gesture over with. From fields of daisies to trees of lemon, why must everything I touch turn sour?

Now I see him: in the halls at school, walking down the road past my house, waiting at the nearby bus station, it never ends. He is a living, breathing reminder that happiness does not exist for people like me. I should have known better than to date a man with such high status. Despite his good looks and typical kindness, he let his obsessive worry of betrayal blind him from the truth; I didn't cheat on him.

Arriving at a Halloween party, neither he nor I knew it would be our last day in love. He went to grab us drinks as I went to drop off our coats in the bedroom at the end of the hallway. I placed the coats on the bed and turned around to see a tall man standing by the door. He did things to me that I could not bear nor control. My once boyfriend came in to check on me and witnessed what was happening. Bursting with rage he shouted, "you're cheating on me!" With tears in my eyes, I struggled to speak: to tell my truth, but he didn't listen. He stormed out of the house leaving me behind. It was then when I saw his yellow snake eyes shine through. I would never abandon someone I loved without hearing them out. I was fully alone and afraid because he could not see past his own shield of insecurity and doubt to see my pain and fear. With no way home and a loss of safety, a girl at the party offered me a ride.

This memory of the past hurts me to my core. It burns in my stomach like poison. I wish to die, but I will not let my ending be determined by a boy who chooses to believe a stranger

over a loved one. He's supposed to be my love, my projector and instead he turned away. If he really loved me, he would have listened; he'd want to listen. With my blood boiling past the pot, I rushed down to his house and dragged him by the ears to our beloved lemon tree. I watched the same terrified look of fear and helplessness that I once had come over his face as I pulled out a bucket of gas and a lit match. He started the fire within me and so I started a fire within him.

Boiling guts and hot lemon juice oozing over the tree's roots: his blood as sour as his soul. For the first time in my life, I feel satisfied and in control.

Six Word Story

W. A. Reid

“Wasted day. Wasted life. Dessert, please.” —Steven Meretzky

Sitting alone at a table made for two in the fanciest and arguably the most romantic restaurant in the whole city, a man waits. The food in front of him is as cold as ice, which has now melted in his drink, while he remains fixated on the table across the room. With his unwavering gaze he sits, thinking to himself, talking to and about himself in his own mind. He thinks back on the day he had and ponders on how he arrived at the position he is in now. He tells himself, rather cruelly, that he completely wasted this day away. He recalls the events of the day, which is simple to do because there were so few. He woke to the sound of utter silence, he groomed himself, he prepared his meal, ate, then went out to a meaningless job interview. Utterly depressed, he returned in a truly broken state, to sit down on his sofa. A wasted day in every sense. That was until he realized that today would have been his tenth wedding anniversary. Now he sits alone in her favourite restaurant. In that moment, his thoughts relax and halt their attacks on the poor shell of the person he once was. As this realization dawns on him, the voices of his inner thoughts return to remind him of what he lost.

They tell him, “You were Thomas Jonas Parker. You were a world-renowned psychiatrist. You were happily married with two children. You were well brought up and stable, and you blew it all.” As his thoughts retreat momentarily to allow him to fixate on this revelation, he finally accepts the nasty and ugly truth. His name means nothing because of the scandal. The completely false accusations of unfaithfulness to his family from some woman he had never met. His career dragged through the mud because of the alleged transgressions, his practice was lost. Now divorced and only seeing his children on weekends, his life has fallen apart, and he finally sees that for himself. He can finally see what everyone has been telling him for almost a year now. However, instead of realizing that he could fix it and get back what he had lost, he sinks deeper into his depression. A depression that swallows him whole like a snake to the small hopeless creatures it preys on. With this new low at hand, the voices return to keep him down.

They return with a simple message of “Wasted life. You... wasted your life.” This is more than a simple comment, this was the nail in his emotional coffin. With that thought fresh in his mind a steady stream of tears released from his empty eyes. No sobbing, no whimpering, just silent tears.

He remains sitting in silence for many moments before focusing back upon, her. He remembers what sent him down this spiral, this real roller coaster of emotions. It was her. His wife, or rather his ex-wife. He saw her and it broke him, the sight of her sent him down to the deepest and darkest depths of his heart and mind. All it took was one look. He had not yet realized she had arrived with another man, and he wouldn't realize until much later that night. He was so focused on her, he forgot to admire the beauty of his surroundings, for the building was extremely remarkable, and this was normally what he realized first when they came each year. The exterior made the restaurant appear as though it may have just been a hole in the wall, but the inside was so beautiful it made him think of an evening in Paris. The starry yellow lights overhead sparkled to illuminate a gorgeous mural of the night sky. The decor was enough to make one feel at home and the furniture was so comfortable it was like being held by one's

mother again. The strong yellows, purples, and pinks of the flowers popped against the monotone grey of the walls, which were almost completely covered in some of the most astounding artwork anyone has ever seen. As Thomas mauled this over, his tears stopped flowing and he wiped his eyes dry, just in time for the waiter to make his way over.

The waiter asked Thomas the following questions: “Are you all done there sir?”, “How was your meal tonight, sir?”, “Could I offer you another drink sir?” and “Would you like anything else, sir?” Thomas was relaxed but only enough to mutter out one-word answers so quietly the waiter was straining to hear.

Thomas only mustered enough might to let out; “Yes.”, “Good.”, “No.” and “No.” After all his self-abuse he had had enough. He didn’t miss the irony that the psychiatrist was the one who needed therapy now. After all the mental and emotional torture that went on in his own head tonight, he had worked up a slight appetite. His stare still glued to her, he watches as she gets up to leave with her new unnoticed man and as the waiter makes to return to the kitchen, Thomas calls out.

“Oh waiter!” The waiter snaps around on the spot and returns to Thomas.

As he approaches, he replies, “Yes sir? How can I help you sir?” In those short seconds Thomas failed to gain a greater understanding of his life. No last second epiphany, no eureka moment, no deep seeded revelation about life or what he wants or what he needs to do. Without losing track of her, he speaks to the waiter with an empty smile.

“Dessert, please. Surprise me.”

She Shouldn't Have Winked

Jen Kesner

Trigger Warning: Drinking and Driving, and Abusive Relationship

He took a sip of an underwhelming drink. It was the fifth underwhelming drink of the night. The drink tasted like hand sanitizer mixed with Perrier, but his problems needed to be erased.

His girlfriend had picked one of her useless fights with him again and he was sick of the pestering. His girlfriend was ruining his life. Why was he with her anyway? Her voice, her hair, the way she wore her cardigan off her shoulder. All of this made violence rush through his body. He was always so angry just thinking of her existence.

They were at his friend's house: him, his girlfriend, and 4 of his friends. She was talking, laughing, winking. Winking at his friend. Why did she wink? It wasn't at him. Why did she wink? He had enough. He threw his bottle across the table towards the group and slammed his hand on the table. He screamed. He got up and slammed both hands on the table and shoved the drinks off the table, causing them to smash on floor. He walked over to his girlfriend, slowly, glared into the pupils of her eyes and gripped her arm and pulled her up. She stared at him, tears flooding her eyes. Without a word, he pulled her by the arm through the living room, down the hall, into the foyer, out the door, and threw her into the passenger seat of the car. He slams her door, gets into his and slams his door.

"How could you embarrass me like that?" he said.

He was livid. He couldn't stand being made a fool of in front of his friends. They were *his* friends, and she was *his* girlfriend. She shouldn't have winked. He starts the car. He goes to pull out of the driveway and shot forward towards the garage. Forward two more inches and he would've driven through. He looked down and noticed the car in drive and switched to reverse.

"You almost caused a big accident," he said to her.

He pulled out of the driveway and stopped hard enough it could've caused whiplash. He threw the car into drive and sped his way down the street. He darted through a stop sign and the lines in the road had started to disappear.

"You shouldn't have winked," he said with rage in his voice.

The lines were blurring into the road and the road became a tunnel. Blurry figures started getting in his way. He swerved around them.

His girlfriend looks at the road signs: "50 km/h."

She looked at his speedometer: "104 km/h."

She looked down at her phone.

“Looks like I’ll get you home early,” he said with a chuckle.

His mind was speeding as fast as his car. He couldn’t stop thinking of how much she’s embarrassed him. How much she’s wasted his time. Memories of past fights were flying through his mind. His mind looked like one of those long exposure photos of traffic. Memories hurling past his eyes, wondering why he subjected himself to this in the first place. How could she wink at *his* friend? There was honking but he didn’t hear. It was blurry and everything was accelerating in his mind. She did it on purpose, she must’ve. Why else would she do it? She wanted to get his attention. The car seems slow, he pushed down harder on the gas.

She looked at the speedometer: “142 km/h.”

She looked down at her phone again. He turned to her in disgust and looked her up and down. “168 km/h.”

“How could you—” he said before an abrupt interruption.

The car was moving, but it wasn’t straight. It was moving backwards? Sideways? The car was moving, wasn’t it? The car was spinning, it was backwards. He looked forward and saw blurry images of a few things coming towards him. He squinted, he tried to focus but what was it? The images came to a stop in front. It took a minute, but it finally focused: it was other cars. His car was the wrong way and facing oncoming traffic. How did it get like this? He reached down to unbuckle his seatbelt, but it was stuck. He looked to his right and his girlfriend’s shoulder looked off. He tried his seatbelt again and it wouldn’t budge.

“Why aren’t you helping me get out?” he yelled at his girlfriend.

He clicked the buckle a couple more times and got out. He stepped out of his car, leaving his girlfriend behind. He looked to the right and saw a ditch two feet from his car. He felt relief. That could’ve been bad. He smelled something off, something thick. He smelled smoke. He looked at the front of his car and saw a fire. As if this could have gotten worse. How was he going to explain this to his mother when he got home? He walked to the front and noticed the front half of his car missing. Everything was still blurry, and he was confused on what happened. Was it a deer? Had he hit a pole? He felt a sharp pain coming from his hand and it starts to throb. He looked down at his pinky and ring finger looked broken. The pain set in; the anger continued.

Look what she’s done. If she hadn’t winked, if she hadn’t gotten me so angry, the car would still be in one piece.

He looked to see what he hit, but everything was so blurry. He heard sirens and his vision became clear. He looked across the road at this large, black, metal object. It wasn’t big enough to be a car, but there were two pieces. He walked closer. He couldn’t figure out what this object he hit was. It looked like something that could’ve fallen from the sky.

It was a car. It was split in two.

Panic filled his body. He wondered what kind of trouble he'll be in. He wondered what his mother would say. Would she let him drive the car still? Would she be able to get a new car? There was no way this car was drivable anymore. How was he going to get to work tomorrow? How was he going to drop his girlfriend off at home, so he doesn't have to hear her horrendous voice complaining anymore. He looked closer.

"Call 911!" says a voice in the distance.

"She's not breathing!"

"Help! Her head...I think you hit her head."

Panic flood the people in the road. Everyone was running to the other car and screaming. What about him? He broke his hand. Why was no one checking to see if he's okay? He looked in the first part of the car and there was no one there. He walked slowly to the second part and saw a young man holding a young woman. He walked closer. The young woman's body looked limp; she didn't look like she was moving. He heard the young man asking for help, but his fingers were broken, why would he risk more damage? He looked at the young man.

"Looks like you messed up big time," he said while laughing.

He spit on the floor in front of the young man and his lifeless girlfriend. This wasn't his problem. This wasn't his fault. He couldn't see. Everything was so blurry. It was the alcohol's fault —no, it was his girlfriend's fault. She caused him to drink those horrible drinks. She caused him to be angry and drive her home fast. Look what she did. She shouldn't have winked; she shouldn't have got him so mad.

The Pharmacists Game

W. A. Reid

Dialogue partially borrowed from The Hobbyist, story is redone by me. It is completely new work, but I decided to rewrite a story.

The clock strikes six; an alarm sounds as Kevin's hand closes down upon it. Kevin sits upward in his bed. He is a tall man, not too tall, but taller than most. He is fairly built and has a rather scruffy haircut. He waits a second, takes a deep breath, stretches, stands up, turns around and glances at his wife. He knows she will not be awake for at least another hour as she is fast asleep. Kevin moves creepily across the room towards a dresser table. He is startled by his wife's sudden readjustment and stares at her until she relaxes and returns to her still state of rest. Kevin returns his focus to the dresser where he fiddles around until he is holding a shiny object in his hand. As he stands there for a moment looking longingly at the surprisingly heavy object, it is clearly not clothing. He turns and makes his way to the bathroom, carrying the object as he goes. Fifteen minutes pass before Kevin re-emerges, now dressed in casual jeans, a gray T-shirt and light jacket and makes his way down the stairs of his house. Kevin exits his tiny house, gets into his truck and pulls out of the driveway.

Kevin is now driving along the country roads of his hometown, Victoria, B.C., listening to the radio as it changes from the hostess's voice to Tom Cochrane's song, *Life is a Highway*. He travels into a small town outside the big city with all the necessities. In view are a few different department stores, a hardware store, a bank, the corner store, the arena and distant baseball fields. They are all spread out in a pleasant manner, appealing to the eye for someone who was just traveling through. At the end of the road there is a small prescription pharmacy. "Dr. Do's Family Pharmacy" is visible on the sign hanging above the little building and the bright OPEN sign is on in the front window. Kevin signals, and then pulls into the 8-space parking lot and parks in the closest spot to the mailbox out front. He then exits his vehicle and makes his way hastily into the store.

As Kevin opens the door, a tiny bell rings. He walks into the store and starts browsing. After Kevin finishes walking the 6 isles of the tiny store, he finally makes his way to the back counter. He attempts to peek through a door behind and to the left of the counter and sees no one. Kevin pulls back and glances around. He sees a little bell with a sticker that reads "RING FOR ASSISTANCE." So naturally Kevin rings the bell, looks around, and still there's nothing. He peers back through the door behind the counter and there's again nothing. Kevin backs off again and suddenly to his right, behind the counter appears a gnome-like, gnarled little man who could have been any age from fifty to a hundred, in a white coat with a name tag that reads Dr. Do.

"How can I help you today sir?". Kevin is ultimately taken aback by the sight of the doctor because a small part of him did not want to be here in the first place. He was partially hoping no one would be present and he could just leave. Despite that, Kevin finds his voice and asks what he came to ask.

“I heard a rumour, to the effect that you-”, and Kevin turned his head and looked about him to make absolutely sure that he and the doctor were completely alone. They were, but despite that, Kevin still lowered his voice all the same to finish asking his question.

“ – to the effect that you have a completely undetectable poison.” The doctor nodded, came around the corner and locked the front door of the shop, then walked toward the doorway behind the counter.

“I was about to take a coffee break, come with me and have a cup.”

Kevin followed him around the counter and through the doorway to a back room, lined by shelves of bottles from floor to ceiling. Dr. Do plugged in an electric percolator, found two cups and put them on a table that had a chair on either side. The doctor motioned Kevin to one of the chairs and took the other himself.

“Now, tell me. Whom do you want to kill, and why?” Kevin is taken aback by the question, but quickly responds.

“Does it matter? Isn’t it enough that I pay for-”, Dr. Do interrupted him with an upraised hand.

“Yes, of course it matters. I must be convinced that you deserve what I can give you. Otherwise – ” Instead of finishing his thought, the doctor simply shrugs his shoulders with an innocent look on his face.

“Alright, fine, the who, that’s my wife. The why is a longer story,” Kevin says this begrudgingly and quite upset. Despite that he begins the tale.

“I love my wife. I truly do, but lately, we don’t exactly see eye to eye on almost anything. I want to continue moving on with my life, I want kids, I want to take my promotion and find where that takes us. But she wants none of that, and it seems she wants nothing to do with me anymore either. I hired a Private Investigator two weeks ago to tail her for a couple days, find where she’s going and find who she meets, while I’m not around or at work. I have reason to believe that she is, well, I have come to the conclusion, my wife, she, well she is not faithful to me. She is cheating on me.” As he said those final words Kevin had one solitary tear running down the side of his face. He finally let the words slip from his trembling lips. It was hard to say, and this was the first time he had said it aloud. Dr. Do then gets up and grabs a tissue from the side table and hands it to Kevin, who dabs his eyes and wipes his nose, then proceeds.

“She’s sleeping with her yoga instructor. But the main problem is that the man does not know she is married. She removes her ring when she is around him. And now I am caught in a predicament.” At this time, before he was finished explaining his troubles, the percolator had completed its task and the doctor briefly interrupted to get the coffee for them. Kevin then proceeds to conclude his story.

“As I was saying, it’s because as awful as what he has done is, I cannot be angry with him, he does not know what he has done. But my wife on the other hand, she knows exactly what

she's doing. That is why I am angry towards her. She is killing me on the inside, and I cannot take it any longer. I love her, but I hate her more. And that is why I must... kill her. She has caused me so much pain that I can no longer stand to continue living in a world where she is happier than me. She doesn't deserve to be happy. That is why my only option is that I... I... I have to end it. End her I mean. I need your poison so I can kill her. Will you help me doctor?" Kevin is now attempting to hold back more than just tears, but full-blown sobs. He is succeeding. He readjusts and now appears stable, sure of himself and ready to move forward with his plan. Dr. Do nodded.

"Yes, I occasionally dispense an undetectable poison. I do so freely; I do not charge for it, if I think that case is deserving. I have helped many murderers."

Rather shocked by this Kevin responds. "Fine. Please give it to me then?" The doctor merely smiled at him.

"I already have. By the time the coffee was ready I had decided that you deserved it. It was, as I said, free. But there is a price for the antidote." Kevin immediately turned pale, but this was unrelated to the poison. However, he had anticipated, not this particular betrayal, but the possibility of a double cross or some form of blackmail. He pulled the shiny, heavy object from his waistband. A pistol. For any regular person a gasp would be the reasonable response, however the doctor chuckled.

"You daren't use that." As the doctor points to the shelves behind him.

The doctor proceeds to explain why, asking "Can you find the antidote among those thousands of bottles? Or would you find a faster, more virulent poison? Or if you think I'm bluffing, that you are not really poisoned, go ahead and shoot. You'll know the answer within three hours when the poison starts to take effect." Kevin is shaking, his whole body is quivering. He did not know what to expect, but he did not expect this. He decides he does not want to die.

"How much for the antidote?" Kevin asks with a crack in his voice.

"Quite reasonable. A thousand dollars. After all, a man must live; even if his hobby is preventing murders, there's no reason why he shouldn't make any money from it, is there?" Kevin growled and put the pistol down, but within reach, and he took out his wallet. He thinks that maybe after he had the antidote, he'd still use that pistol. He quickly counted out a thousand dollars and put it on the table. The doctor made no immediate move to pick it up, and Kevin became confused by the look on the doctor's face.

"And one other thing – for your wife's safety and mine. You will write a letter of your intention – your former intention, I trust – to murder your wife. Then you will wait till I go out and mail it to a friend of mine on the homicide detail. He'll keep it as evidence in case you do decide to kill your wife. Or me, for that matter. I'll get you a paper and pen, shall I?"

...

The Rolling Stones *You Can't Always Get What You Want* plays quietly on the radio in the back room where Kevin is sitting alone sweating and rubbing his hands together. The

doctor's final words to Kevin ringing in his head. The speech is being recalled as a series of events that follow the doctor's words occur.

'When that is in the mail...' the doctor begins his talk.

Five minutes later the doctor exits his pharmacy and begins his walk to the mailbox by Kevin's truck. He places the letter of confession inside.

'It will be safe for me to return here and give you the antidote.'

The doctor makes his way back to the pharmacy and the back room.

'Oh one other thing...' the doctor's speech continues.

A few seconds pass and Kevin exits the building, making his way to his truck.

'Although I do not absolutely insist on it.'

Kevin backs out of his parking spot.

'Please help spread the word about my... merchandise, will you?'

Kevin exits the parking lot, and begins traveling back to his house.

'One never knows...'

Kevin exits his truck, and walks slowly to his tiny house, stops out front, glances up at it, takes a deep breath and continues inside. He walks up stairs to the bedroom, where his wife still lies. He changes quickly, sets the gun back in his drawer and lays upon the bed again.

'The life you save...'

Kevin's wife rises as he dozes off. She gets up, already dressed now, heads downstairs, hops in Kevin's truck...

'If you have any enemies...'

She begins driving away, following the same path her husband did until she pulls into "Dr. Do's Family Pharmacy," exits the truck and proceeds inside the store.

'Just might be... your own.'

As the doctor's speech finishes playing in Kevin's head, across the city the tiny bell on the door rings as it swings open.

"Hello?"

The Blank Sheet

Jordyn Weir

My brain is blank while my eyes wander 'round
The question echoes in my head, but aloud, there is no sound
Empty eyes stare at an empty space
I ask myself 'why must I do this in the first place?'

Frustration grows like wildfire
For in my mind, the consequences are dire.
Thoughts of disappointment flow through my head
While anxiety continues my dread
What will my grades be?
What will my parents think of me?
The clock ticks louder and louder as my time begins to run out
Hurry!
Quickly!
Before it's too late!

There's only two more minutes to come up with something great!

Inside I want to cry
Why must time fly?

If only teachers could see
What in-class assignments do to me!
I must stay calm
Dry off my palms
For thought cannot occur
If my emotions continue to stir
Time is up
Unwillingly, I must give up.

I pray I won't have to speak
as I sit perfectly still in my seat
For all I have to share is a blank sheet.

Dearest Oscar

Madison Maki

This letter is an imagined response to Oscar Wilde's De Profundis, in which Wilde openly debases his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, after the collapse of their relationship and Wilde's imprisonment.

Dearest Oscar,

You say you have written for my sake. Well, dear Oscar, let me now write for yours.

I have read your letter against me, and while I found that it is full of false claims and discourteous charges against my character, I must admit I find myself in agreement with you in one manner: you blame yourself, as do I.

You blame me for standing in between you and your art, for exaggerated spending, for my vanity, for my intellectual shortcomings. You blame yourself for allowing me to degrade you. Did hate blind me? No, pure devotion to you did, as I did not see your malicious, scheming behaviour during the course of our friendship, nor did I ever think you would turn it onto me. Your letter would be, if any of it were true, a vicious attack against me.

You wish to kill my vanity? I was under the impression that you loved all things beautiful. Was it not you who wrote, "only the shallow know themselves"?¹ Yet, you claim I am the one who will find hundreds of excuses for myself. It seems even being confined in a cell, with nothing else to think about, you still cannot reflect upon your own character. What is this letter, then, if not hundreds of excuses? If I am to find one false excuse for myself, it is you who has already found two. If I have found one false excuse for myself, it is because you introduced me to said fault first. You attack me for the very characteristics you claim you love: the love of anything beautiful and delightful. And what is more delightful than eating fine food, drinking smooth wine, and looking beautiful while doing so?²

You did not give me a voice in your letter and thus was able to sculpt me into the villain in the play of your life. You and I both know that is not just. You see yourself as the prince of Denmark – you understand your own plights through Hamlet's tragedy. And I wanted to be your Horatio, loyal and true, but you cast me as your Ophelia.³ When I was no longer willingly to bend to your whim, and now that you can no longer enjoy my company, you attempt to cast me into the treacherous waters. While you may believe it was I that betrayed you, remember that it was your own ego that brought you to your knees.⁴

¹ From Wilde's "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young." This is a parody text, but Bosie here is taking the quote out of context to use Wilde's words against him

² Wilde discusses, and accuses, Bosie of being reckless and impulsive spending, as well as Bosie's affinity for a lavish lifestyle (69-72)

³ Similar to Ophelia who is defined and constructed through her relationships with men, Bosie's role in Wilde's life is defined through his relationships with men as well. Primarily, Boise is defined by his relationship with Wilde and his relationship with his father. Through this comparison, Bosie attempts to construct himself as the manipulated victim to Wilde's Hamlet.

⁴ Bosie is referring to Wilde pursuing a libel trial against Bosie's father

You did always enjoy a performance. You could not help yourself, even while your life was in danger on the stand. Did you think you could stage the courtroom, perform yourself out of the charges, and rewrite the ending? You see the world as a stage, but no one else had auditioned to play the parts.⁵

Tell me, what is it like, to look at a portrait of one's own face and see nothing of comfort? ⁶ ⁷

Life does imitate art.⁸

You repeatedly mention that you should have gotten rid of me, that you should have shaken me off. So then, I must ask, why did you not? And while I have pondered this question over and over during restless days and sleepless nights, I do think I have finally reached a conclusion: you needed me. You needed me for a Muse for your art.⁹ Your best works were born of me. *Salome* and your other successful plays brought your career to new heights, heights that, I must admit, were not seen before. I was there for the best years of your career. I inspired the best years of your career. In a way, I brought you everything you wanted. So why am I to carry the burden of enjoying the successes along your side?¹⁰ Yes, upon reflection, maybe I did ask for too much. But you were always inclined to indulge with me. I think you quite liked the lifestyle and the secrecy it allowed you to have. I think you enjoyed being a part of something that could spark a flaming scandal. I also think you enjoyed being a part of something so forbidden, so intense, so intoxicating. Well, I know you did, and I have countless letters from you, addressed to me to prove so. You once wrote that it was my letter *that gave you courage* and that it was *my love* that gave you *light of all your hours*. In that same letter, you encouraged me to write my *lovely poems*. I hope you can understand why I am a bit confused.

While you direct the blame onto me, and in sometimes a quite piteous manner, even for yourself, you must know that you are not so innocent. But I mustn't be too malicious towards you, considering your circumstances. I do believe, if I found myself in your unfortunate position, I would not be in the highest of spirits either.

I know you liken yourself, and our friendship, to the Greeks.¹¹ ¹² And in many ways, you are much like the ancients, but not those who you think you may be. You spend so much time with

⁵ The theatre metaphors used here reference Wilde's public reputation for artificiality (Grolleau x) and 'decadence' (Toibin xxi). To garner public sympathy, Bosie constructs Wilde's relationship to art and literature as deceitful and unfair, which falls into the common public perception of Wilde during his trials

⁶ A reference to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* when Dorian finally comes face to face with his portrait, only to find it a hideous, rotted version of himself. The novel was also used as evidence against Wilde in his trials

⁷ A response to Wilde's claim in *De Profundis*: "I could have held up a mirror to you, and shown you such an image of yourself that you would have not recognised as your own till you found it mimicking back at your gestures of horror, and then you would have known whose shape it was, and hated it and yourself for ever" (81)

⁸ Oscar Wilde writes "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" in his essay "The Decay of Lying."

⁹ A response to Wilde accusing Bosie of distracting Wilde from his art (Toibin xxvi)

¹⁰ Here, Bosie is clearly not taking any responsibility for his spending and actions. He is, however, taking some responsibility for Wilde's success during the time they were together

¹¹ At his trial, Wilde spoke to the 'love that dare not speak its name,' a line in Douglas' poem "Two Loves"

¹² Wilde references the ancient Greeks throughout *De Profundis*

your head in books that you forgot there was a world outside of them. You flew too close to a beautiful sun.¹³ If I am so deeply vain, Oscar, tell me, who still has their wings?¹⁴

I find it particularly peculiar that you have compared your artistic plights to that of Jesus.¹⁵ You have allowed me no voice in these letters of yours, and thus have given me no choice to become your Judas. Shatter your illusions Oscar,¹⁶ because life is not your play, and most certainly not a comedy. You say you wanted me to play one of the graceful characters in it, but I beg the question, did you ever ask if I wanted to play the part? You cannot blame me for enjoying the fruits of my youth. You claim I was the cobra, even daring to go as far as saying I was poisonous. But I do believe the poison comes from you. Remember, I was quite young when we met, hardly acquainted with adulthood. And, for your sake, as you have made your immense suffering quite clear, I shall not discuss too many details. But I do believe I should mention the curious friendship between you and Robert. He was a young school boy when you two developed the unusual companionship, you were already well acquainted with adulthood. I could provide many more examples of your anomalous fellowships with younger men, but most of what you attempted to hide has already come out during your trials.¹⁷ If one wishes to know, one simply has to pick up any newspaper and read it. Quite frankly, you should know better. How am I the poisonous snake, when it was you who brought me to your garden? How was I the one to poison you, before I had ever met you? No, I think the poison was already there. If I poisoned you, it is only because you put the poison in me first. You blame yourself for allowing me to bring you to financial ruin, but I believe if it was not I you spent your money for, it would have been another young man who caught your eye.

As much as you may masquerade behind your art and believe your genius is your armor, it seems you have found yourself in a situation that you cannot write yourself out of, so instead you put the burden on me. Your readers will notice, Oscar, that you often focus on petty and trivial things. You have detailed records of our spending and daily activities, but I do not recall you bringing this to my attention while I was supposedly doing the spending? And, dear Oscar, we both know that I was not the only one you indulged. You have friends all over who you entertained lavishly.¹⁸ You even go as far to be spiteful that I am writing poems, so I decided to

¹³ While Icarus did fly too close to the sun, this is also a play on the word 'son.' Douglas and his father's tumultuous relationship played a vital role in Wilde's imprisonment

¹⁴ I referenced Icarus, regarding Wilde, because I wanted Douglas to utilize Wilde's appreciation for the ancient Greeks by referencing a tragic Greek myth and figure. Icarus's fatal flaw is hubris. Douglas is responding to Wilde's claims of Douglas' own vanity but comparing and constructing Wilde as excessively over-confident and prideful. The comparison suggests Wilde met his downfall through his own pride

¹⁵ Throughout *De Profundis*, Wilde references Jesus and inserts biblical verses. Wilde constructs Jesus as an artistic figure, just like himself

¹⁶ Reference to Wilde accusing Bosie of having his own illusions, as well as admitting he himself had his own illusions in *De Profundis* (71-72)

¹⁷ There is evidence that Wilde engaged with young men and boys in sexual activity. In the Introduction to *De Profundis*, Toibín discusses Wilde's interest in, and attraction to, young boys (xvii-xviii)

¹⁸ Toibín writes that there were many young and underprivileged men in London who Wilde "lavishly entertained" (xix)

take a break and write this letter instead. But I thought you, of all people, valued artistic expression above all else? I hope this letter better suits your image of me.

You fault those around you who do not fit into your world of art, but perhaps it is you who should try to live in the world that those around you do. Even sitting alone in your cell, you still only think of yourself and your art. You made this clear to me when you said you were writing my life for me. *My* life. That is not yours to write. So you give me no choice but to write your life back to you.

You cannot treat people like your own characters, as if you can mold us all into the roles you want. You cannot. As I'm sure you know by now. I know you think I know nothing of writing quality work such as yourself. Was it not my poem that you spoke about in court? The love that dare not speak its name was *mine*. And that love bore you much inspiration for your art. You say that you needed an intellectual atmosphere, quiet, peace, and solitude. If you wish for me to find no false excuse myself, I must beg of you to do the same. If you refuse to acknowledge, if you refuse to accept the glaring truth, then so be it. You say I was the ruin of your art, that I stood in between you and your art. You wrote to me that it was *my* love and *my* adoration, and your love and adoration for me, that inspired you. But always remember, whether in your fits of anger or despair, when you curse my name and as you attempt to destroy my character, that I gave you your best art.¹⁹

I do admit, I do not regret experiencing the indulgent feelings between us. How amazing it was, to be a part of something that felt so deep and unadulterated, if even just for a moment. In some form, I am sorry for how the situation between us unraveled. It feels there is much left unsaid, and unwritten, between us. While I began this letter angry, and make no mistake, I do still feel that fiery heat within me, I find I cannot shake the feelings of melancholy that colour all my memories of you.

I feel as if I could keep writing but fear I must stop before I go too far. I know you told me to write without fear, but whether you wish to admit it or not, some things are better left unsaid. You may do well to remember that. It does not do well to dwell on the past and those things we cannot change.²⁰ You may do well to remember that too. And as I do not wish to put myself into a despondent mood by reminiscing about what used to be, I would like to leave you with these last words: I hope to you know one day.²¹ But please do keep in mind, that you do not yet know me either.²²

Your friend,

Bosie

¹⁹ Boise is often referred to as a literary Muse for Wilde

²⁰ Again, Bosie plays with silence and ambiguity by simply writing 'those things' rather than explicitly referring to the rapid decline of their relationship and Bosie's role in Wilde's arrest. By not naming these events specifically, Bosie is attempting to brush over his actions

²¹ A reference to Wilde's claim in *De Profundis*: "Remember also that I have yet to know you. Perhaps we have yet to know each other" (160)

²² A reminder to Wilde and the reader; the suggestion here is that Bosie is telling Wilde, and the public, that they do not know him

