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The Molloy Student Literary Magazine

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All submitted work will undergo a review process initiated by the Managing Editor prior to a decision being made regarding publication of said work. Given sufficient content, *The Molloy Student Literary Magazine* is published twice annually in Spring and Fall.

Interested contributors from the currently enrolled Molloy student community should send work via e-mail attachment and brief cover letter (including a two-sentence biographical statement) to:
Dr. Damian Ward Hey, Managing Editor, *The Molloy Student Literary Magazine*: dhey@molloy.edu.

Enrolled students who are interested in becoming members of *The Molloy Student Literary Magazine* staff may e-mail letters of inquiry.

Excelsior!

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The Molloy Student Literary Magazine

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Diversity
Cassandra Palmer



The Ugliness We Reap

Helen Daly

A child hunches hungrily in a corner
Awaiting his moment to grab some bread
A baby pup cowers from his master
With the scars he bears upon his head
A young girl walks the streets at night
To make the money for her pimp to keep
For this is the ugliness that we reap – as society sleeps.

A homeless, hungry young man robs a grocery store to eat

Armed with a gun, he shoots the store-keep.

He runs away but is cornered by police.

And dies in a bloodied heap on the street – as society sleeps.

An old woman has used the last of her SS check;

Finds change in the room as she hunts and pecks.

Goes to grocery and what she can afford is but a speck,

So she buys a can of pet food to sustain her from death –

As society sleeps.

A young, tired mom and her babies are on the street

They go to the shelter but there is no place for them to sleep

So they find a dark lot and sleep on the concrete

And the woman she cries, their futures are bleak... as society sleeps.

Little girl lost, her heartbeat nearly gone

Confined to a bed, respirator turned on
Waiting for a transplant that never will come
Her mother sits by helpless, no insurance for one...as
society sleeps.
200 school girls kidnapped by Boko Haram
Terrorized and survive horrors as best they can
While a White House hash tag is the US's stand
No hope on the horizon for youth in this land – as
society sleeps
It is the price we pay of a world so cold and unkempt
The price of a society whose morals are bent
And the payment must be made for an unknown debt
All to be collected by an unknown lot, before they draw
their last breath, at death
And its death, they do pray for, the ones who pay
With each societal slap, they feel anger and dismay,
A looming downward spiral of "area gray"
With no glimmer of light to lead the way.
So open your eyes, people, awaken to the light
It will not be long before you see their plight
Of brothers and sisters living through the incessant night
Who are waiting for a sign that there is meaning to their
life
By opening your eyes it is not to take the blame
But to act upon what you can to make positive change
Take the slowest steps, to make modest gains
It is this way it grows, the moral brain.
And yes, the brain, you see is connected to the heart
Maybe if you can think it, you will feel it smart

And take a collective ahhh, we have done our part...
But you see, my friends, there is no stopping once you
start
The collective conscience when awoken must see
That the blindness we battle is within thee
While it's easier to turn our heads and say, "not me"
There will be a day of judgment, just wait and see
For while you buy your cars and vote your pocketbook's
ideal,
Tread the path of the greedy thinking you've got a great
deal,
And keep your mouth shut and think that the atrocities
aren't real,
You have given up your humanity for a price – and your
soul for a steal
So open your mouths and hearts while there's time; don't
fall into the societal line.
But rather, stand tall in a line all of your own, defend the
downtrodden with the new conscience you've grown.
And dream, sweet one, dream, of the new day coming,
when people follow you,
And the minority voice is loudly humming.
Make change when you can and never forget
That baby steps often are a giant's first steps.
You see, like a cancer, the blindness does creep
Spreads from parent to child, with generational leaps
Only a good dose of reality's touch, awakens them from
sleep
For this is the ugliness that we reap – as society sleeps.

One Amazing Person: Kathleen Anne McBride
Mary AKT Gallagher

I was born an introvert. From the time I was born I had a really hard time moving beyond where I felt most at ease, which was, namely, in my own head or with the people closest to me. I preferred observing things, where I could judge but be safe from judgment, and I was never on the spot.

That's how I preferred things, but it's not how they turned out. Another thing I was born with was a rather pushy cousin who was also my best friend. Katie was my senior by a mere twelve days and had poise and self-esteem in abundance. She loved the spotlight and was gifted with the creative mind and sense of humor to make the spotlight love her back. And if we weren't so close, I would probably still be really shy and awkward because I wouldn't have been able to get a word in edgewise even if I'd wanted to.

But she was extremely generous with her attention (once she had it) and while she never forced me into the limelight, she did show me that it was a safe place to be and that the world didn't come crashing down if you made a mistake while someone was watching. Katie staged performances that were mainly just ruses to keep us from having to leave toward the end of a party, but they were elaborately enacted ruses. Most often, we performed our own version of Cinderella, in which the

title character had a daughter – I don't know how that happened – played by our cousin Maggie, who didn't want to be evil but didn't want to be a servant, either.

I was Cinderella, always, because Katie insisted that The Wicked Stepmother was way more fun to portray, and that she had enough on her plate with directing anyway. (Directing entailed a lot of whispering loudly, “C'mon! It's your turn! Come out! They're getting bored!”) She had her big brother Patrick fake a waltz with me to be Prince Charming. (Until recently, I hadn't given him credit for being a nice guy and dancing a girly dance for a girly play.) I always chalked it up to Katie, and her special ability to bring people together and have everybody have fun.

Through the talent shows and the plays and the renditions of Britney Spears' “Oops, I Did It Again” I developed my own sense of confidence and stopped having to borrow from Katie. I realized I liked to sing, I liked it a lot, and I wasn't half bad at it. And I grew in a way that would have been impossible for a girl like me to do without that steady, loving reassurance that always pushed but never too hard, embodied in this cousin that was more like my sister.

A lot of what I am today comes from Katie. Scratch that – a lot of what I am *proud* of today comes from her. I am a writer because of her; she gave me inspiration and an exuberant personality to write about. Family is a huge part of my life because *she* was a huge part of my life. When I speak or dance in public, I am only able to do so

because she showed me how to be brave, and how to have faith in myself. When I am kind to people (which I will admit freely is not as often as it should be) it is because she did so many good things for me that I want to be that person to someone else. I want other people to feel as great as she made me feel.

I've learned countless things from her: how to be strong in the face of adversity; what to do in a lightning storm (jump out of the pool, run in her mom's room and hide under the covers together); how to torture your cousin's fiancé (make him be the grandpa when playing house; try to poison him by crushing mints in a glass of water); how to do a pencil dive; and how to laugh at myself. But I think the first and perhaps the most important lesson was how to believe in my own abilities, which is a total cliché, but still necessary, and it was an ability I lacked.

The One Amazing Thing in my life was the fact that I knew Katie; that she was my best friend and that I got to be hers; and I have been blessed by the time that I spent with her. She pulled the best parts of me to the surface, and she made my childhood an adventure for which I will always be grateful and will never forget.

The First Feminist Wave

Vincent Rocco

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" was written and published during the first large wave of American feminism and has been a pillar in the feminist agenda over the years. The feminist community has the general understanding that Gilman's short story was one of the first attempts to address women's struggles and roles. Both Wang Fanghui and Susan Lanser have made direct connections between Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and fundamental feminist issues. Other scholars, such as Jonathan Crewe, have claimed that through Gilman's use of captivity and fundamental social conditioning, she has expressed pro-feminist ideas, stating, "...[The Yellow Wallpaper] largely concerns the historical determinants of the protagonist's race-class-gender predicament and the contexts of Gilman's pro-feminism" (273). These studies lead to one absolute understanding of Gilman's short story: Gilman published "The Yellow Wallpaper" to address the traditional male-female gender roles.

Early on during the story, as John's nameless wife begins to become settled into the new house, the nameless female protagonist feels unsatisfied with her current room, claiming, "I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window...but John would not hear

of it” (203). This illustrates that John’s wife is being conditioned mentally to submit to the will of her husband, which is identified as a feminist issue. Through several other moments during the short story, Gilman makes a point in addressing John’s captive and constraining control over his wife. Jonathan Crewe proposes that Gilman uses this theme of control and restraint as a way to show the male dominance in the time period which the protagonist was living. Crewe states the following:

The sovereign imagination (canonically that of male genius) will rapture constraining forms, both social and literary, or bend them to its purposes; the subject imagination will in contrast remain captive...inasmuch as “The Yellow Wallpaper,” is taken to confirm this general truth...Such a view of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” is, however, implied by nothing more than the title of the volume. The critical essays in the volume largely concern the historical determinants of the protagonist’s race-class-gender predicament and the contexts of Gilman’s pro-feminism. (273)

Through Crewe’s statements it is clear that Gilman is attempting to address the issues with the traditional male-female gender roles. This particular passage is specifically referring to the issues of male dominance over women, clearly illustrated through Gilman’s continual use of control and restraint as themes.

John's wife inspects the house, and more specifically her room, which he picks for her – again depicting John portraying the male dominate role in the traditional male-female environment. As Gilman's narrator writes, it is clear the room was used to imprison people, but John's wife does not perceive it in that way, rather she states, "It was a nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls." Gilman uses this scene in the story to demonstrate not that John's wife is insane, but rather that she has become conditioned to the point where she will ignore the reality in front of her.

A fundamental argument is now realized as regards the narrator's sanity. If John's wife were insane, she would not be able to reason, and draw conclusions based on her surroundings, which she clearly is capable of doing. The fact that the wife will ignore the absolute factual reality staring her in the face, shows Gilman's attempts to show that the wife is exhausted from a life-time of being controlled, and is becoming miserable with her reality. Due to this, she has been conditioned to substitute facts with a reasonable alternative reality that pleases her. This substitution of reality directly relates to her figurative imprisonment, which is in accordance with the traditional male-female gender roles.

Throughout the story, Gilman depicted John's wife as helpless and child-like in the way John treats her, which directly relates to the male-female roles of the

time. Men were to provide everything for the women, but in doing so, the men controlled all aspects of women's lives. One particular quote clearly illustrates Gilman's employing this tactic; "And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head" (207). Through this quote it is clear that Gilman is trying to demonstrate that John treats his wife as helpless and childlike, again coinciding with the traditional male-female roles of the time. John carrying his wife upstairs and reading to her could be compared to a father carrying his daughter and reading a bedtime story to her. Because there is such a child-like innocence to John's wife, it is clear Gilman is attempting to establish John's control and restraint over her, just as a father would have control over his daughter. Again, this is agreeing with the male-female gender roles of the times, of which Gilman is attempting to address.

John is a logical and scientific man while his lovely wife has the mind of a writer: child-like in her innocence, filled with imagination, as well as creative. John consciously attempts to deny his wife the ability to express her artistic emotions, considering her creativity as nothing more than juvenile and impractical. This is illustrated as the wife states, "There comes John, and I must put this away – he hates to have me write a word" (204). The wife, even as creative and imaginative as she is, hides her writing whenever John comes near. This shows Gilman's use of captivity and control as themes,

as John is playing into the traditional male-female gender roles, controlling his wife.

The simple fact that John's wife is nameless speaks volumes in addressing the male-female roles. Gilman leaves the protagonist nameless to show that women had neither voice nor their identity of their own during this time period. Wang Fanghui stated; "... [The Yellow Wallpaper] is urging people to reflect on women's roles in the domestic sphere..." (202). Fanghui is referring to women being associated with the lesser, and having no real identity. Rather than be an independent person, woman is seen under her husband's or father's control. Gilman demonstrates this by purposely leaving John's wife nameless, suggesting the wife is nothing without John.

Throughout the story, Gilman showcases the lack of effective communications between women and men, and the lack of attention women were showed by their husbands. Gilman displays this through her writings of the dialog between John and his wife. John continues to interrupt his wife, never allowing her to finish a thought, believing her opinions and thoughts to be useless regardless of what she were to say. Over and over again Gilman is seen writing a dialog reflecting this lack of communication between men and women, such as, "Better in body perhaps--" I began, and stopped short, for he [John] sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word" (208). This is only one of many instances in

Gilman's short story in which she purposely has John cut off his wife, showing the lack of communication that actually takes place between the two, due to John's male dominant mind-set. This again goes along accurately with the male-female gender roles of the time, of which Gilman is attempting to address.

Continuously throughout the story Gilman uses the theme of captivity. This captivity refers to the figurative imprisonment of women by men through men's dominant positions in the traditional male-female roles. The theme is seen through the captivity of the wife herself, by her husband, as well as the imprisonment of the fictitious women within the wallpaper. It is discovered that the wife sees the imaginary women, when Gilman writes, "At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candle light... it becomes bars! The outside patterns I mean, and the women behind it is as plain as can be" (209). Again, much like with the interruption of the room, Gilman uses the made-up women behind the "bars" in the wallpaper not to indicate the wife's insanity, but rather the captivity of women by men, reflecting the traditional male-female gender roles.

Clearly there are ample sources and evidence to reinforce the argument that Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," was written in order to address the male-female gender roles. The argument is indicated strongly through simply understanding Gilman's purposeful styles of writing; having John interrupt his wife over and over, as well as having John's wife remain nameless,

stripping her of any identity. Gilman uses the themes of captivity and control, as well as the imagination of John's wife to depict a woman who is figuratively imprisoned. By extension, Gilman's depiction illustrates all women's imprisonment resulting from the traditional male-female gender roles.

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Birth, Death, Readers, and Authors:
The Separation of Literature in the Digital Age
Roger Smith

Annie Abrahams in her digital interactive, literary piece entitled “Separation” invokes the idea in the minds of her readers that there is a lack of humanity within the construct of digital literature. This lack of humanity can further be evaluated with the analysis of separation between authors and readers of literature in this digital age. Critics such as Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes are known for the theory of absence, or the death of the author in literature, whereas others exclaim an importance of authorship and that the writer lives on within texts. The belief that the author must die to give birth to the reader also illustrates the separation of humanity in the digital read as it proposes that the two cannot coexist. However, that is not the case. By analyzing these primary texts and using secondary scholarly articles, this essay will exhibit the humanized interconnection of reader and writer as two active roles within digital literature constantly communicating through the means of intent and interpretation.

In his essay “Authorship and Authority,” Nickolas Pappas speaks about authorship and the difference between authors and readers and the separation primarily focusing on point of view. William Page in his essay entitled “The Author and the Reader in Writing and

Reading” talks about the relationship and intent between both the reader and the writer, whereas Theresa Enos, in her “Reports of the ‘Author’s’ Death May Be Greatly Exaggerated But the ‘Writer’ Lives on in the Text,” offers more insight by establishing a deeper distinction between the author and the writer and further refutes that all are part of the same melting pot embedded in the gravy of rhetoric. When rhetoric becomes an integral part of the conversation of readers and writers and the coagulation of both in the examination of digital literature, it is important to draw insight from Kristie S. Fleckenstein’s essay “Who’s Writing?: Aristotelian Ethos and the Author Position in Digital Poetics”. Finally Janet Swaffar, in her article from the South Central Review discusses the same human limits presented by Abrahams’ primary text, in which readers are confronted.

What is observable in all of this analysis is the premise that writing and reading, though they commence from diverse point of views, are both crucial in literature. The separation between the two does not reject the other, but proves their coexistence, and that there actually is no separation but the writer and reader functions are cohabitants in literature interacting with one another thus humanizing the digital literary experience through emotion and action.

Digital literature is dehumanized because it takes the physical book out of the reader’s hand, and places the interaction of reader and author at bay with the

addition of the computer. Hyperlinks, images, and the divergence of digital literature create a separation but not one where the reader is separated emotionally. In the short description of Abrahams' "Separation," it says it promotes the paradox that "separating from the computer is painful, but to write with it again is painful as well". This idea is the epitome of this analysis in that it displays the human traits of pain, the dualism of one act though separated, as well as the unity of said act. Here pain is describing neither birth nor death, however we can assimilate the human emotion to the digital literary experience accordingly.

Barthes, in his essay "The Death of the Author," introduces the idea that "the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author," but why is it impossible for the two to coexist? If separating from a computer and writing with it again are both painful, the emotion remains constant, and thus the pain never truly dies. Pappas states that an "authors' desires drop out of the picture- not because they cannot be known, but because the authors' desires or intentions do not determine the outcome of [the] reading," (325) but they don't die. The author's desires, voice, intent, all remain and coexist at the same time the reader is interpreting. In Abrahams interactive piece, the reader is forced to separate from the poem and advised to stretch different muscles to reduce the physical strains of reading at a computer, however the methods she introduces also creates an annoying level of pain which agrees with the

recurring theory that pain, emotion remains constant. When Swaffar states "readers confront human limits to assimilate 'nonlinear' texts," (116) she is exhibiting the same sort of separation as Abrahams' stretching techniques, however these only physically create a rift between man and machine, text and reader, rather author and reader. From an emotional standpoint, the two remain interconnected.

When talking about interconnections, there is an importance in discussing the writer and the author. The question of death of the author, the existence of the writer, and birth of the reader must be evaluated and decided if any actually happen, and the affect it has on the text. This problem is expressed in Abrahams second line of her poem as she states "not knowing how to differentiate between you and me." The reader and the writer and the relationship between the two have as complicated connection as the writer and author. We must first define the terms author, writer, and reader, and realize the distinctions between them if any. Barthes claims the author owns the work, is the originator, and is its father, as stated in his lines the "author is thought to nourish the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it" (145). According to Theresa Enos "the author performs a function, the writer an activity." Enos continues discussing how "Barthes sets up a useful dichotomy between author and writer: The author's role is "priest"—intransitive; the writer's role is "clerk"—transitive activity" (340). In this case the

author need not be accompanied by anything and stands on his own, where as the writer is dependent on something, such as the reader, and further demonstrates the interconnection between the two. If they are in fact connected, then as the reader delves into the literary work, the writer must remain active and alive. Foucault contests that “it does not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form... [and] will disappear,” (222) and this separation between author’s existence and the text is caused by the reader’s birth. William Page agrees with this theory and says, “once the author has produced surface structure or writing, the reader can enter the process and the author’s part is complete. The reader must be able to sense or perceive the writing while the author no longer need be present” (Page 177). Enos opposes these views and contends the writer and reader have a relationship that proves they coexist when she declares that the “interconnectedness of the two can be strengthened if the “tyranny of the reader” is replaced, not by the author as authority, but with the reality that ethos is a rhetorical construct, requiring both the writer’s textual presence and the reader’s interaction with this living, active presence” (341).

As the discussion leads towards ethos and rhetoric, we have to realize that the author or writer is attached to the text, and “carries with it what’s in the text, that is, we think not of the individual but the ideas in the text. The link carries with it a certain ethos. Ethos

is what brings the writer to life,” (342) as Enos reports. Fleckenstein suggests, “Ethos is not located in the speaker or in an audience or in a site. It is dispersed throughout the ecology of speaker, audience, scene, and city-state.” We can relate this to mean writer, reader, the digital text, and the cyber space community. If ethos brings the writer to life as the reader is reading, their coexistence is further exposed. Abrahams also demonstrates this coexistence in her lines “We are exchanging constructing, developing/to-get-her fusion, adaptation.” This line shows the constant relationship between reader and writer almost like a conversation between the two. Page calls the “communication in writing and reading [a] dynamic process” (171) and speaks about the quality of its “imperfect isomorphism” (171).

This morphing of reader and writer, which illustrates correlation between the two separate elements of a text, are further related through interpretation of the reader, and author/writer intent. “What the reader does [in some] cases therefore renders the author’s intention irrelevant” (Pappas 325), and this changes the conversation between the two, however does not deny the conversations existence or the communication between reader and writer. The isomorphism is further expressed in Fleckenstein’s essay as she speaks of rhetoric and the interactivity of digital texts by stating it “adds a third and fourth dimension to a reader's choices,

creating... not the reader but the writer-reader: the wreader.”

Fleckenstein introduces the idea that “The traditional paradigm of artwork and audience is being challenged and rewritten. No longer is the audience a PASSIVE viewer but in web-based art becomes an ACTIVE participant in the artwork. The process of interaction between artwork and audience requires choices to be made by the viewer.” This solidifies various arguments made as well as the thesis by interchanging the words art and artwork, with the word literary text, as well as the words audience and viewer with the word reader. This theory will now display the reader as becoming an active, integral part of the text especially in digital literature. “The author distinguishes between the conventional reader (the linear one) and readers susceptible to an extended textual world of multidimensional reading but he rejects the view that electronic texts as vehicles arrange information “in a fashion more closely related to the arrangement of information in the mind, where great leaps and sudden bridges juxtapose and unite the unexpected” (Swaffar 117).

Whether or not the author accepts the idea that the interactivity of digital literature is more related to the free association of information in the reader’s mind, it is, as well as it increases the reader’s activity in the text. Enos informs readers in her essay “Rhetoric implies action, which cannot be separated from either social

concerns or relations between writer and reader” (340). In “Separation,” Abrahams has the reader click at a slow pace and interrupts the bridge of information if the reader clicks too fast. Those interruptions along with the stretching activities offered within Abrahams’ digital text are unexpected actions that keep the conversation between reader and writer active, and allow both to exist in the now. Pappas further assists in the weaving of this idea by stating “To take a text as an action is to undertake to relate it to other actions, to account for its features by appealing to theirs, and for their features in turn by appealing to its own” (326). This also further develops the humanistic conversation theory between reader and writer via digital text.

Text messaging is a means of communication between two people, as is a literary text. Humanity has been so used to speaking to each other physically, just as we are used to literature speaking to readers through means of the conventional book, whereas now in this digital age, people communicate via electronic means. Within a conversation, one person speaks, the other listens, both parties are still actively involved in the conversation. The same can be said for the conversation of digital literature between the writer and the reader. There are multiple views in which to assess the discussion of reader and writer and the relationship between the two. The writer clearly has something to do with constructing a means of starting a conversation with the reader, and as the reader begins his or her journey

into this conversation. Foucault introduces the author function, and Enos the writer as an activity, the reader, the interpreter who relates the text to the activity of their own lives and minds, mean whilst the presence of the writer still exists through ethos. The reader and writer are both alive. The author never having actually died transcends his voice into existence as the writer where he and the reader coincide simultaneously on a parallel axis actively participating in a conversation of narrative.

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Ask for Things

Mary AKT Gallagher

“You don’t talk to me.”

I coughed on my cherry tomato. “Excuse me?”

“Sorry... You need a napkin or something?”

“Um...no. No. I’m okay.”

“Are you?”

“Yeah... Um, what’s the matter?”

“I just don’t...get you, Maeve. I don’t get you.”

I finally swallowed the tomato. “I’m sorry, I don’t understand-”

He sighed. “Don’t apologize. I’m not asking for an apology. I, just...” He sighed again. “Tell me about yourself.”

I smiled, with my brow furrowed, in what I hoped was the perfect expression of innocent skepticism. “What?”

“We never talk about you, always me. And later I think, ‘wow, I’m a blowhard’, until I remember that I’ve tried to ask you questions about what you like and stuff, and you change the subject. So talk to me.”

“Um...okay... I like *you*.” I smiled. “A lot.”

He raised one eyebrow. I’ve always wanted to be able to do that.

“That’s nice,” he said. “What else?”

I shrugged. “I’m not great under pressure, Will.”

“What pressure? I’m just asking you an easy, informal question.”

“I dunno... I’m not good at talking about myself.”

“But it’s *me*, Maeve. Why can’t you talk to me?”

My eyes darted down and I shook my head. “Why are you asking me this now? What’s the problem?”

“The problem is that you keep deflecting. You answer a question with a question, like you did right there, or you shovel food in your mouth like you did a few minutes ago when I asked you what music you liked... Jeez, Maeve, all I wanted was to know what station to switch to... Or you laugh it off until you think I forgot that I asked you a question – and that’s just a dis to my intelligence.”

I chuckled, although I’ll admit it was a bit forced. “Okay, I think you’re looking at this *way* too closely-”

“And then there’s the laughing it off. Props to you, Maeve, you’ve hit the avoidance trifecta; used ‘em all in one conversation.” His voice loses the sarcastic tone. “Look, *I* like *you* a lot... Or at least the parts you let me see.”

I smirked. “Great line,” I muttered.

“Been working on it all day,” he responded immediately. That’s one of the things I’ve always loved about him – his quick wit. It amazes me how fast his mind works. But his tone sobered and I could tell he was not about to abandon the subject. “I’d like to know more about you, and I’m wondering why you don’t want me to. And it honestly worries me a little bit.”

“I don’t mean to do that, Will. I- I just really don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He sighed. “Okay, I’m just imagining things.” He looked into my eyes intensely and I wished I knew what he was looking for so that I could have it there for him to find, but I didn’t. So I gazed back as levelly as I could and hoped he couldn’t see the anxiety that was building with every askance look he gave me. He nodded grimly, and his eyes darted down to the gear shift of his car. “Okay. I guess that’s it.”

I bit my lip. “I-” He looked up.

“Yeah?”

“Will, I don’t- I’m sorry, but I don’t know... I don’t know what you *want*.”

“Look...don’t look at me like that, Maeve... I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. I just...I get the feeling that you’re not completely- you know, comfortable with me, and I don’t know why.”

“That’s not true, Will- I always have fun with you.”

“That’s not what I mean. I mean that I don’t know...you don’t seem to want to *tell* me the kind of things a guy should know about the girl he’s dating. The kinds of things that make you...you.”

“Like what?”

“Like your favorite color.”

“I...maroon.”

“Maroon... Thank you!” He threw up his arms in an exaggerated gesture of exasperation that made me laugh. He’s so goofy sometimes that it catches me off-guard,

and I forget that he is the person he is, and fall in love with him a little bit more. And when that happens I love it and hate it at the same time.

“I didn’t realize colors were so important to you.”

“They aren’t. It’s just the first time I’ve ever heard you directly state an opinion, and that’s something to celebrate.”

“Why does it matter so much to you?”

“I don’t know, I just don’t know how you feel about anything. It seems like you don’t think it’s okay to have an opinion around me, and I guess...I hate the idea that I make someone that uncomfortable. Especially my girlfriend.”

“You don’t make me uncomfortable.”

“I think I do. You always seem so tense, and you walk on tiptoes around me. You’re like a really polite houseguest.”

“I’m sorry-”

“Please don’t be sorry! I’m just telling you what I think and asking you a question. You’re not supposed to feel guilty.”

I sighed, feeling like there was nothing to say. “Okay.”

“Okay, meaning you’ll answer?”

“I’ll...try.” My eyes closed.

There was a short silence, until he said, “If you don’t want to, it’s okay.”

I looked at him, wishing like anything I could understand *what* he wanted from me. “But you just said—”

“And then I saw your face get all red and nervous and realized that you must really not want to tell me about yourself. I’m not trying to get you to do something you don’t want to do. I’m just...trying to figure out what’s wrong, if I’m doing something wrong. Because...you don’t ask for things, Maeve. You don’t ask me for anything, ever. And I don’t know what I’m supposed to take from that. Do you not like spending time with me?”

“*No*... No. I love spending time with you.”

“Then what is it? Why does it always feel like you’re trying to fade into the background? Why do you seem so anxious all the time?”

“I—” My throat caught as I looked from side to side, and all of a sudden I felt like all the air in the car had disappeared. An anxiety attack felt imminent, an overreaction, I know, but it was still happening.

“Maeve, I’m sorry, I just... I hate feeling like I make you nervous. What am I doing wrong?”

I looked at him while I took deep breaths to loosen the tightness in my chest. His eyes are perfect—clear and symmetrical with wide blue irises and very few red lines, but enough to look natural. And at the moment they were filled with concern for me, and I knew that pretty soon he was going to ask if I was okay, in that gentlemanly manner that — pardon the cliché — makes my heart melt

every time. And I also knew that I would have to tell him the truth, in spite of the potential consequences; in spite of the fact that I was nowhere near ready to let go of him yet, even if that was what he would want once he knew how desperately clingy and imperfect I was on the inside, compared to him. I owed him the truth, no matter how small and insecure it would make me look.

I sighed again, shudderingly this time, bracing myself. “Are you all right?” he asked me.

“I’m fine...fine.” I smiled, and I took his hand the way I’ve always wanted to, but was never brave enough to make myself do it before. “You didn’t do anything wrong, Will, I promise... I have had so much fun with you these past few months. And I like you so much. It scares me how much.” His face was unreadable, and I looked down at our intertwined fingers, a picture that is inexplicably beautiful to me. “It really scares me. Because...you’re just so- perfect. You are. You are so smart; you have so many friends, and even more people who just like you from a distance. You are confident, you’re...*really* good-looking.” I blush, when I shouldn’t. I mean, I’m going out with the guy, so obviously I find him attractive. But it still embarrasses me to say so. “You’re on every sports team there is-”

He laughs. “Not Quidditch.” I look up and laugh at the unexpected interruption, and it puts me a little bit more at ease because now I know that he’s not silently staring at me with the mixture of pity and lack of comprehension I was afraid of.

“Not Quidditch... But everything else. And you’re clever, and you’ve got people skills. You’ve got everything going for you, and you are so incredibly out of my league. But when I didn’t know you at least I could think you weren’t a nice guy. Like maybe you were arrogant, and maybe that was your flaw. Maybe the popularity went to your head. And I could feel a little superior, because at least I had something over you. But then you joined the stage crew for the play, and I got to know you... And I found out you were a nice guy. A really nice, *sweet*...wonderful guy. And that clinched it—you were perfect. And it’s hard not to look at myself and wonder what...what on earth you see in me.” I looked at him again, saw his eyebrows creased with that pity I didn’t want, and heard him exhale. And I tried to prepare myself for the fact that I was going to lose him. Because no guy finds an inferiority complex sexy, I can guarantee you that. Being “comfortable with herself/in her own skin” is at the top of every “What Men Want” list in every woman’s magazine in the world. And even if the physical attributes are what they really care about, and they answered the questions like that so as not to seem shallow, low self-esteem would still be an unattractive quality. I accept that.

So I resigned myself to that fact as hard as I could, and kept on with the story so my embarrassment would end as quickly as possible. “...And you asked me out and my heart stopped beating for a minute, because I really just- *never* thought that would happen. But I

figured that I could have fun while it lasted. So I said yes. Then you just kept...kept on being *you*, and being so unbearably wonderful, that having fun while it lasted was no longer an option because I...liked you so damn much, and I didn't want it to end. So that's why I don't – what did you say? Have opinions? - I don't have opinions and I don't ask for things because that's the best way to keep you from finding something about me that you don't like. Because I'm too realistic or cynical or whatever you want to call it to think that this could possibly last if you really got to know me. It sounds crazy, I know, but I guess- that's just me." I bit my lip, and he blinked a few times, and his mouth was open in a way that seemed like he hadn't really registered everything I was saying yet.

But I continued, because I had to tell him everything before I lost the courage that was already incredibly spotty. "And then I realized really quickly that it was going to be so hard to let you go once whatever happened ... happened and we broke up. It would be *so* hard to let you go, and I didn't want it to get any harder, so I tried as hard as I could- I'm still trying as hard as I can- to keep my distance, just so that when you don't-want to be with me anymore, it won't hurt as much as I know deep down it's inevitably going to... It's just self-preservation, Will."

He looked at me like he'd never met me before, and I closed my eyes, but not before a tear slipped out. I wiped it away with my sleeve and prayed to God that he

couldn't see it. It's bad enough that he already knows how vulnerable I am and how low my sense of self-confidence is; I don't want him to think I'm a cry-baby, too. Which I am. It's just one of the many things I was hoping to keep from him as long as possible.

I smiled through the embarrassment, which hurt because of the tightness in my throat. "Hi, I'm insecure," I said. He laughed, which was surprising, not only because it was a really bad joke, but because the tension from my confession was still smothering both of us. Then he stuck his hand out.

"Hi, I'm Will." I grinned, kinda halfway, because I wasn't exactly sure what he was doing. But I took his hand. Because I trust him implicitly, and probably always will, no matter what happens.

"Hi, Will."

"Guess what, Insecure? I interrupt people, I'm a klutz off the field, and I snore. Really loud." He looked to the left, and thought a minute, then said, "I'm not a good public speaker, and I'm kinda OCD about chewing evenly on both sides of my mouth. And my mom says I watch too many horror movies. But that's debatable... And there are probably a billion other things I don't even know about." He leaned forward a little bit, and picked up my chin with a cold hand until my head was level with his. "But I am *not* perfect. And I never expected you to be. And I like you anyways."

I looked at him, not really sure I could believe him, and asked, "Even though I'm crazy?"

He laughed. “Even if you were.” I grinned fully now, and another unbidden tear fell, that I was sure he could see because his hand had forced my face into the light of a streetlamp.

“But-”

“What?” He let my face go. “You really think I’m that kind of person?” I was confused.

“What kind?”

“The kind that would hold it against you for feeling self-conscious sometimes. Do you really think that I would like you any less than I already do if I found out that you weren’t as confident as I am?” He shook his head. “Which, incidentally, is not nearly as confident as you think.” I laughed, which seemed to gratify him, and he smiled again- that amazing smile. The way he said it sounded so funny, but he had hit the nail on the head- that was *exactly* what I was afraid of.

“And do you really think,” he murmured, squeezing my hand, “that I have such poor taste in people that I would hang out so much with someone who is as...faulty as you seem to think you are?” I looked down at my hands and slowly, hesitantly shook my head. He did too. “No. Like I said, I like you. I think you’re great. Even before you were apparently trying so hard to *make* me like you.” And I laughed again. I seem to do that a lot with him.

“How ‘bout that?” I murmured, trying to make the atmosphere a little lighter; feeling guilty for making him feel like he needed to compliment me and build me up.

But then I looked up again and saw that he didn't really appear to mind, and figured maybe once, just *once*, I could let the guilt go. And I did. It was surprisingly easy to do.

“How ‘bout that?” he repeated, and looked at me with that smile that I always used to think could break his face if he wasn't careful, and an expression in his eyes that I'd never seen in anyone's before. Not when they were looking at me, anyway.

And I liked it. *A lot.*

Master Woo's Summit

Julie Montalbano

Long before the grasshoppers hopped and the woodpeckers pecked, there lived the most curious little creatures on Earth. Each one was tinier than the head of your grandmother's smallest straight pin, and they all looked identical, apart from the stylish little hats that adorned their curly-topped heads. Each hat signified a special talent or skill. No matter what shape or style hat the little creatures wore on their itty bitsy heads, their brilliant and beautiful eyes always looked eager to help and to please the leader of their great camp. His name was longer than the alphabet sang thrice, so I shall refer to him as Master Woo.

Master Woo and his followers were sweet little creatures, and they swam, crawled, and flew around meadows, brooks, and hills doing what they did best. Ming Sing knew how to sing happy tunes to brighten the sun on a cloudy day. Thistle Whistle could gather all the herbs needed to cure any little sneeze. Boxey Troxey knew how to punch the stars in the galaxy with enough zest to produce the most glorious firework shows every year for their annual critter celebrations! Each critter knew his assigned task so well that he could do it backwards. Together, they could do amazing things!

Master Woo had the most natural way of getting his troop to perform all their little tasks without one

snippet of a fuss. In fact, all the other families of critters on Earth, from the faraway hives of the Yellow Jackets to the giant hills of the Red Ants, admired the way he led his camp. King Yellow Jacket and Queen Red Ant often scratched their heads in wonder of how Master Woo led his kingdom in such a peaceful way. They decided to call a meeting of the heads of critters on Earth, all three hundred of them, to learn the secrets of leading his critters in a peaceful way. They sent Master Woo a golden invitation with the request and honor of being the speaker of their summit. He, of course, accepted the honor and began to pack his tiny leather bag with his favorite critter snacks.

Master Woo requested Wumpet Trumpet to summon all the curious critters in his camp with his brassy bugle call. All the tiny critters gathered together near Master Woo's garden in their finest little hats. Master Woo announced his departure and bid the critters a friendly farewell. He gave them no instructions other than to enjoy their peaceful existence among one other until his return. Just before leaving, Tidy Midy tidied Master Woo's round white cap on top of his little balding head. Everyone patiently waited for Ming Sing to begin the first verse of their good-bye song, and they giggled in anticipation of Miss Jig Wig's accompanying happy dance. Ming Sing sang,

Good-bye, Master.

Good-bye, Friend.

Good-bye, Master,
Until we meet again.

Everyone joined in singing the refrain of the song. Master Woo quickly unpacked his leather bag and threw all of his favorite snacks to his crowd of friendly followers. As he flew away, the critters jigged Miss Jig Wig's jig, and they waved good-bye to him. Nothing satisfied Master Woo more than seeing his critters happy and content. As he journeyed to the other end of the continent, his little critters finished their jig and tidied his garden. They returned to their usual duties and continued to live peacefully in their critter camp. It would be days before they would see Master Woo again.

When Master Woo arrived at the leadership summit, all of the heads of the kingdoms bowed before him. He quickly bowed down to each of them as well. When Master Woo stood up, he noticed the brilliant colorful surroundings. Flags representing every kingdom were hung around the summit. Kings and queens, dressed in their most beautiful garments, stood together in harmony. The sky was light blue, and the lake was calm. These sights brought a sigh of happiness to Master Woo's little heart. Suddenly, he felt a soft pat on his back. Queen Red Ant summoned him to the podium for his anticipated speech; however, Master Woo requested her permission to have all leaders sit together along the perimeter of Lake Summit. She, of course, agreed to his plan and instructed the leaders to follow it. Master Woo instructed each leader to bring a

tiny pebble to the lake with them. Kings and queens began searching for pebbles, and those who found more than two pebbles shared them with others. Finally, they all sat and waited with their pebbles.

Master Woo said, “Greetings, my friends and fellow leaders. I am honored to be your speaker. I would like to begin my speech with silence.” No one quite understood why he requested silence, but everyone respected his wish. A few heads bowed down in silence. Then eyes began to look around. One minute passed, and no one spoke. More eyes shifted from side to side. Master Woo smiled at each leader, and each leader smiled back at him. Then, with a little chuckle, Master Woo rolled backwards and jumped into a snappy little pose. Everyone began to laugh. Then, he said with another chuckle, “It’s your turn!” One leader looked at the other with a bit of confusion. Confusion was followed by more smiles. Before long, everyone was having a grand time acting silly.

After a few minutes of being silly, all the leaders settled down. Master Woo referred to his pebble as he spoke. “We are each holding a pebble, and no pebble is exactly alike. Just like pebbles, we are all different from each other.” The leaders listened to him intently. “We each have strengths in how we lead our little kingdoms. I will begin by telling you my strength as a leader. First, I believe my kingdom needs to balance fun with work, and I believe work should involve the gifts of my critters. I believe each of my critters has a gift to share

with my kingdom. My strength is allowing my little critters to use their gifts to make my kingdom better. When each of my critters is happy, my entire kingdom is happy.”

Master Woo threw his pebble in the lake, and he reminded the others to watch the ripples it made. “As I watch the ripples grow from my pebble, it reminds me of the critters I touch each day. Like the pebble, we can all touch so many of our followers.” Everyone clapped upon hearing his words. Then, one by one, each leader took a turn to tell the others about their strengths. After each leader spoke, a pebble was thrown into the lake. Clapping could be heard at the conclusion of each speech, and the sound of the applause echoed for miles.

President Wasp had an idea after the last leader shared his strength. “I have a brilliant idea! Let us each take the strengths of one another to lead our own kingdoms! We will surely have the most wonderful world if we do!” His idea appealed to the entire congregation. Everyone agreed to be more like the other. Master Woo wrote down a long list of their cumulative strengths. There was quite a buzz around the lake. Leaders were reminding each other how they led their kingdoms. “Don’t forget to have your critters march in files,” commanded Queen Red Ant.

“Remember to work with sounds of buzzing,” said King Yellow Jacket.

Master Woo was just about finished copying the list of leadership traits for the others, but then, he

realized the plight of his poor grandfather. “No!” he shouted. “Even though we can all learn from each other’s strengths, we must remember to lead with our individual strengths.” Everyone stopped, and many of the leaders looked confused. Master Woo asked everyone to sit quietly as he told them the sad story of his grandfather’s reign.

“Many moons ago, when my grandfather ruled my tiny kingdom, he was influenced by the individual strengths of the critters in his colony. Of course, in order to acquire any of their strengths, it was mandatory that he wore the hat that matched the accompanying strength. He learned to strategize first. The tiny red strategy hat was placed over his white cap. I must say that he looked quite handsome in the red and white attire. Next, he learned to encourage others. The encouraging hat was green, and it was slightly taller than the red one. He learned to organize, communicate, nurture, and achieve. With every new skill he learned, the hats kept piling on top of his little head. Finally, the hats became so heavy that my grandfather could no longer balance them on his little head. He toppled to the left and then to the right. His kingdom of critters flew around in confusion, for they did not understand him any longer. When he could no longer remember his own strengths, he began to weep. He wept, and all of the critters heard him. They quickly removed every hat until his little white hat was revealed. They brought him to the lake to see his tiny reflection, and he began to feel happy again. His

kingdom was revived, and his white hat has been passed down to me!”

The leaders sat around the lake and reminded themselves of their strengths. They honored each other for their hard work, and they each took another pebble to remind them of the summit. As the light blue sky turned into a peaceful navy blue, the leaders bid each other farewell until the next summit. Master Woo left the summit with peace in his little soul, and his tiny white hat could be seen in the sky as he flew back to his happy camp.

The Mask We Wear

Helen Daly

The world beats on at an enormous pace,
population explosion and environmental waste.
Jihad, warcrimes, and religious genocides,
waiting for the day when the turns will tide.
And we look within our nugget and what do we see?
gun crimes, hate, rape and poverty.
And sadness erupts at a rate, uncontrolled
to witness these things all the pain, untold.
While something within calls out for reprieve,
an unbearable feeling, an unspeakable need;
Silenced in time by the unbearable gray
which grows like a shadow as dark covers day.
It affects more than we know and takes more than we
count,
a resounding blast from the depths within life's
irrepressible mount.
It brings grief to the remaining unflawed, for today;
of those lost to the depths of depression's sharp blade.
And to feel through the numbness, would be such a task,
for solid steel layers cover an impostor beneath pains
smiling mask
A deep brooding darkness that cannot be peeled
to do so would uncover the wounds so concealed
Twas 100 times it had to be, I tried to extinguish the
sadness within thee

and beg you to hang on, persevere, and love me.
But me, was unseen in the mirror you held;
it told you the horror with pain would still dwell.
And while so many times, you pulled through and said
"no!"

The duality persona split into one dark ego.

It was that day the cloud was so dark and so deep
that I took my own life no more tears shall I weep.
And I'm sorry for those who are left and do mourn,
but look closely and see my soul tattered and torn.
By an entity so covert and convincing and strong,
it was never my will that composed this last song.
So please remember me and how I did try;
to slay all my demons and cope with the ride
Remember my sun, and my quick witted pace;
My gift to you all, a clown's funny face.

Five reasons why I love winter in Vermont

Angie Elkaray

Leaving New York State as we go up
For genuine Vermont maple syrup

My dad braved up as he learned to ski
It wasn't quite his cup of tea.

Isabella and Juan Camilo's cute show
My two visiting cousins sucking on snow

Having Sebastian take the fall
When I swung him a surprise snowball

Dancing to Salsa and Merengue
On a picturesque Christmas Eve day

Hummus Guy
Angie Elkaray

Walking down the street
In the beating September heat
I finally clocked out so I rejoiced
When I came across a voice

He was yelling from his car
Driving on northern boulevard
“I THINK I KNOW YOU
DO YOU KNOW ME TOO?”

I turned to walk away
I was almost halfway
He was a determined fellow
Driven, literally, to say hello

It must be a mistake?
But it was for me he hit the brakes
On oncoming traffic he maneuvers a U-turn
For this fool I was concerned

He wedged his transportation
Between me from the subway station
Now I was able to see
The stranger before me!

“Stranger danger,” to myself, I swore
But, damn, he looked like Vinnie from Jersey Shore!
He looks up and smiles
Using his charm to beguile

I wanted to leave
But he pleads
Quick, like a flip of coin
And my phone number was purloined!

Maybe I was a loon
To give my number to any goon
But he was cute
How could I refute!?

My electric toothbrush

Angie Elkaray

VooRR...Vzzz...VooRR...Vzzz
Fourteen VooRR at the bottom
Vzzz brushing VooRR in the mouth

VooRR...Vzzz...VooRR...Vzzz
Fourteen Vzzz more at the top
No wisdom molars VooRR in the back lot

VooRR...Vzzz...VooRR...Vzzz
My sonic toothbrush Vzzz the valiant hero
Leaving VooRR stains zero

VooRR...Vzzz...VooRR...Vzzz
Always Vzzz up or down
My brush VooRR never down and out

VooRR...Vzzz...VooRR...Vzzz
My teeth Vzzz are my mouth jewelry
VooRR I'm vying for a 24 carat smile
(but my love VooRR caffeine is worthwhile)

Then Sometimes It Gets Worse

Charisma Karnavar

Then sometimes it gets worse,
it gets to a level
that consumes every process
of sub and other consciences...
Compromising visible sanity
and the frivolous nature.
Brush it off with a half smile -no dimple-
and gaze
Into the nothingness of your heart
Empty, cold and black,
the blackest darkness expanding
over and over
until you just can't... tell
Don't feel like explaining
Thoughts that never made sense to you
Because in that moment
you realize there is nothing deeper
Skin to skin
Eyes on eyes
You're fine you're moving on...
Moving on to what?
The cyclone of thoughts necessary
For surviving the shallowness of the environment
Babble on! Tell them what you think is worthwhile
Well it's never worth it
Nothing is.

There Is A Hole in You
Charisma Karnavar

There is a hole in you
Much bigger than your mouth
A hole gaping
from the inside...
Out
Cement I embodied
To fill this hole back in
But it never stayed
To cover up your sins
Hang me up to dry
Leave me down below
With all the other things you used
To conceal your tainted
Soul.

Still Another Night

Joseph Ostapiuk

The lily,
the way the sunlight kicks off of
the rooftops at dawn
Nothing escapes my sight without
dreams of you
I go searching through the darkness for a
glimpse of your figure, your form, your face

But nothing satisfies these tired eyes
I drink upon dry rivers and starved oceans
I rave mad and wildly in search of your touch
like a candle dying through the night

The stars, they mock me
with their endless desolation
These spaces between lovers seem
forever etched into stone

Your voice falls from me
like a fragile glass through my fingers
such unworthy hands could never clasp
your angelic air

The music around me only sings
a melancholy tune

And all the night I wait for you to come
through this empty door
To open these dim vaults to your radiance
with showers of gold
But I'm a fool to think such miracles could ever be
Such dreams sink to the bottom of the sea

Waiting

Joseph Ostapiuk

Waiting I'll keep you
Through those long and unwanted hours
When you and I lay silently about the night
Like a ship at the bottom of the sea
Or some hopeless bird without a song
Looking for the sun at dawn
When it wasn't meant to be
For what can I do
My eyes to you can only be true
These tired and weary bones
Can do nothing for you
And this weak and feeble voice
Can do nothing to get you through
These washed and decayed hours by my side
Below the stars at midnight,
For I'll keep you like the Earth keeps the Moon
I'll keep you like the sirens keep their tune
And I'll keep you waiting,
Through times weighted misery
I'll keep you where such gentle eyes could never see,
And I'll keep your smile for when it ceases to be
And I'll keep here waiting,
wondering why
You'd wait here for me

Light at the end of a Tunnel

Jordanna Fenton

“I should have protected her. It was my fault.”

I sat rocking back and forth in my psychiatrist’s couch; I had said nothing more than that repeatedly, over and over, and over for the past two hours I spent with Dr. Stephenson. This was what our sessions were like every week. I’d come in with the confidence of a model, strutting, determined that this time around I’d tell my story; finally say something besides, “I should have protected her. It was my fault,” but I couldn’t. As soon as I sat in the vastly spacious couch covered in soft suede, I’d look around and feel the walls closing in on me, the bright three o’clock sun would turn into that of a dreary new moon, my expensive clothes would turn into skinny jeans and a short pink top with childish rhinestones, and my long freshly colored brunette hair would be swept into a messy pony tail. My lungs would tighten, choking on the smell of freshly spurred blood. The rusty smell would bring me to tears and memories of past pain and hatred for myself; it would ring and rape my soul, throwing daggers at my heart allowing me to crawl into fetal position like a child yearning for the comfort and soft touch of a mother.

I lived in the sunny state of California since I was little; I was born in Saint Rose Hospital, January 21, 1985 and two years later I gained a sister, Jessica Pearl

Thomas. Twelve years after her birth, something bad would happen, something that would scar me for the rest of my life.

“How was therapy, Honey?” My husband Michael asked softly, kissing my cheek. “The same as always. What’s supposed to change?” I said with a smile. He never knew about that day and he never will till later on in our marriage. Along with my husband, I, Elena Rose Sinclair, lived amongst the most prestigious and rich people in New York City. I worked in a large hospital and earned way more than your average doctor would. My husband Michael Sinclair worked at a wealthy law firm. We had no children only a rather huge apartment in upper Manhattan.

“So remind me... why do you go to therapy anyway? I married one of the most beautiful, perfect, smartest women in the world.”

“Yea, and this perfect wife of yours is hungry, are you finished cooking yet?” I’d say; trying to change the subject without him knowing.

“No, but seriously, I don’t see the point of you going every weekend and coming back with the same bleak answer ‘it was fine, or it was good’, what could you possibly need it for?” His eyes seemed to widen and a start of anger and sternness boiled at the end of his sentence.

“It’s work, Love, the constant feeling of pressure and, and the deaths around me, it has a toll on me and by the weekend, I don’t know, I just need to vent.” This is

how I started to cover for myself – by lying to the person I loved the most. I slowly made my way behind the tall granite counters to where he stood and wrapped my arms around his waist and kissed his neck, I watched as he skillfully flipped and tossed the meat and varied arrangements of peppers in the frying pan while I waited for him to reply. He was a live artist and the stove was his canvas, while the pots, spices, and spatula were his weapons of skill. I loved when he cooked.

“Why didn’t you tell me you felt this way about work? I know you love it but is it really worth the pain?” he turned to me and his once stern voice and widened eyes resided to his natural look of love and affection. This look made me feel whole, made me almost forget about everything and everyone. I loved him and he loved me. He embraced me and in his chest I muttered,

“Yes, I love my job, I love my patients, I love helping. It’s worth every long session with Dr. Stephenson.” I didn’t lie there, I do love my job it was the one place besides with Mike that I felt needed, loved, and important. It made living each day easier for me, because home and life was the least of my worries working in a busy ER.

“Every princess has her secrets.”

The air was thick and I was running, screaming for my life. My hands were stained and my hair was damp. I could feel the water from my hair run down my back and tickle the soft skin on my legs. I looked at my hands again and I had smaller hands in mine, the hands

of a baby, it was Jessica. I was four Jessica was two. We ran in circles from our mother giggling. She loved putting us in soft little pink dresses and ribbons in our hair. We loved when she gave us baths – so much that we would mess ourselves up on purpose so she would have to repeat the process all over again. Those summers at our grandmother’s lake house were the best. It was when Dad, Mom, Jessica, Grandma, Grandpa, and I would spent endless hours playing games and having fun, but things changed after grandpa had a stroke and died months after. Mom was distressed and grandma never allowed us back at her grand lake house. Eventually, Mom would get over it, but she wasn’t exactly the same.

The day of therapy came. I sat in my 24’ BMW at every red light and thought of every excuse in the book not to go “My dog died and my husband is very upset can we reschedule?” That was never going to work-- he’d call Mike and send his “condolences” like we even had a dog. Mike was allergic, and I was never good at keeping pets. I turned onto 52nd and Lexington into the vast parking lot of Dr. Stephenson and Dr. Barns Psychiatric Offices. I hated the name of his building. I slowly walked into the door and braced myself. My palms got clammy and my throat started to itch, but I was persistent in telling my story.

“Ah Ms. Sinclair, please sit down I’d like to introduce you to one of New York’s finest hypnotists Dr.

Rachel Barns. A strange eeriness came over me I wanted to bolt to the exit. But I stayed.

“Hello, I’m Elena Sinclair. Dr. Stephenson, I thought we had a scheduled appointment today?”

“We do, but I wanted to add a twist and this is where Dr. Barns comes in I wanted with your consent to hypnotize you in order to help you explain what you are here for, do we have the okay?” I was never into the whole hypnosis crap; I always thought it was an easy scam for vulnerable weak people, but I was one of those people. I passed back and forth thinking this could be it I can finally tell my story without actually freezing. But was I ready?

“Fine let’s do this, but hurry before I change my mind.” Dr. Barns laid me down on one of the reclining chairs and placed an old fashioned pocket watch from about 1880 into my face. I had seen one of these things in one of the many vintage stores plastered in the city – I knew she was a fake.

“Now Elena, I want you to follow this watch with only your eyes and count to ten.” I couldn’t believe this I was seriously going through with this.

“ 1, 2,3,4,5,6...,7...,8.....,9.....,10.”

“Now close your eyes and only listen to my voice.” Dr. Barns said slowly sounding like a lullaby. At the sound of her voice without hesitation closed my eyes I couldn’t even tell if I was seriously being hypnotized or if the soft hum of her voice was putting me to sleep.

“Elena, you are twelve years old, on the night of October 1997. Your parents are away on vacation and your sister and you are left behind at home with your nanny Maria. Can you see Pearl?”

“Yes... I see her. She is sitting on the floor in her room playing with my dolls. I hated when she touched my things without asking.”

“Tell me what happened that night Elena? Why is Pearl dead?”

Mommy was sitting in the small chair in front of her vanity mirror putting on makeup. I was so sad that she was going to leave me and Pearl behind. I hated the nanny. She smelled and never played any games with us. I ran into her room and climbed onto her lap, she lifted me and held me tight, embracing my face and staring into the mirror. I loved her so much, she was so pretty. She had long wavy brunette hair just like mine, but hers had an extra curliness, the type of curls that even in the hottest wheatear couldn't come out. I stuck my finger in it and pulled and released her hair and it always sprung back into place. I enjoyed that feeling so much. Her eyes were a soft emerald green and her lips always had a new color on them. Tonight they were a rich red. She reached for her lipstick and slowly drew it onto my face while I stared into her eyes I never liked the lipstick but I loved the way she put it on me.

“Mommy, do you and Daddy have to leave me and Pearl home. We hate Maria she's mean.” I pouted my lips and batted my eyelashes but I was getting

nowhere with that. It only worked on my Dad when I wanted a new toy or dress.

“Oh darling its only for a few days, and when we come back daddy and I will take you and Pearl out for the best ice cream and shopping.” She didn’t really mean the ice cream part she only said it so I would leave her alone. I loved ice cream with a burning passion but we weren’t allowed to eat it unless we went out.

“Fine but I’m not going to be happy here, all alone with only Pearl to play with.” I placed my hand on my forehead and pretended to faint on her bed. I was such a drama queen, and my mother never bought it. She got up and took off her robe to reveal a long tight fitting silky black dress, with a love cut top. It looked so great on her; I wanted to hug her but my Dad hurried her. She gave me a quick kiss on my cheek and ran to say goodbye to Pearl. And they were gone.

“Pearl where are you? Pearl?” I opened my room door to find her sprawled on the floor with all my dolls on the floor. Their hair was all messed up and she mixed matched all of their clothes. “What are you doing?” “Get out my room I hate you get out!”

“I was only trying to fix them, Elena, honest!” she gave me those stupid baby eyes but I didn’t care I pushed her out my room and slammed the door in her face. I could hear her loud obnoxious cry from the other side of my door.

“Let me in Elenaaaaa! I’m sorry please let me in I didn’t mean to!”

“I don’t care go away and leave me alone.” I spent the rest of the lonely night fixing my dolls hair and clothes back, I felt much better after I wasn’t mad any more. After all she was my little sister. It was about twelve o’clock when I climbed out of bed and run down the hallway into Pearls room. I slammed the door behind me and with the noise she suddenly rose out of her bed.

“Elena please don’t be mad at my any more. I’m sorry I was really bored, and stupid Maria wouldn’t play dress up I’m sor...”

“It’s okay I guess. Just don’t touch my things without asking again, got it” I walked slowly over to her bed trying not to trip in the bleak darkness of her room. I felt around the walls of her room I could picture her room with the lights on. Her walls were a salmon pink just like mine. Her bed was large and had a huge princess base surrounding the exterior of the mattress. In the middle of her floor was a big shabby rug that spelled her name out we both played on it. I called it my Princess castle even though it was hers, but she never minded. There were shelves crowded with dolls and stuffed animals and art supplies. It was the typical princess certified room. I bumped into her bed while quickly skimming the interior of her room climbed in. She threw her arms around me, and there is where I resided for the night. The next day Pearl and I woke up to a loud crash of thunder. Pearl’s room was still dark at nine-thirty in the morning it was because of the storm. A flash of terrifying lightning dashed across her face and

scared both of us so bad that we ducked underneath the covers. I looked at her face and started laughing so hard. I still don't know what was so funny but it was.

"What's so funny, Elena? I don't get it." An expression of confusion abducted her face, but she couldn't help but break into a laugh herself.

"Oh nothing... lets go see what dumb ol' Maria made for breakfast." We both scurried like little mice into the kitchen and sat in front of plates piled high with bacon in the shape of a smiley face, chocolate chip waffles, and leaky boiled eggs.

"Mmmm, I'm so hungry." Pearl's eyes lit up with that silly glow that you always saw in all the cartoons when the dog found a pile of fresh hot food. It was so cute.

"Oh Pearl, put your tongue back into your mouth and eat it." She slowly picked up the fork and began to pick up a piece of bacon. "Wait. What if she poisoned it." I said in a whisper trying to play with Pearl's head.

"I don't know what poison taste like, Elena!"

"Shhh. You can't make her hear us, I'm the oldest give me a piece of you bacon and I'll test it, okay." I shoved her piece of bacon in my mouth and laughed "Baby."

"Hey you lied to me, gimme my bacon back, Elena, that's not nice."

"Oh take it. I was only kidding." She was so gullible. We had finished eating and decided to watch

cartoon because it was still pouring outside. We had fallen asleep.

I woke up to a burning sensation in my lungs. I couldn't breathe, and when I tried to open my eyes it stung badly. I felt for Pearl in the bed and shook her awake.

"Pearl! Wake up, wake up! Don't breathe too quickly and only squint your eyes." Pearl shot up out of the bed and grabbed my hand. We ran out the room and found Maria asleep on the couch. We ran down the long stairs that with every step seemed to be getting longer. The curtains in the kitchen quickly sparked with flames and they roared. I ran to Maria and woke her up. We all held hands and ran to the front door. The air was thick and my eyes were still burning from all the smoke. As soon as we got out the house Maria stooped on one knee and told me to stay put and to watch my sister and don't go back inside. I nodded at her and watched her run off to the neighbor's house. I turned around and didn't find pearl holding my hand.

"Pearl! This is no time to play games where are you. You know Maria is going to put you on time ou..." The front door was open again. It shouldn't have been. I know she had run back in there. My heart raced like a thousand racecars circling a track. I looked and the quickly burning house and ran into the front door. "Pearl!" "Pearl!" There was no sign of her in what was left of the living room which was nothing but expanding flames. I continued up the stairs dogging roaring flames

and crawling on my knees to take in what was left of the clear air on the ground. I had learned that in fire safety class. I had reached my room door and saw Pearl cradled in the middle of my room with a blanket filled with my dolls.

“Pearl, leave the doll and let’s go; we’re gonna die in here.” I could hear the flames from down stair coming closer. My room was turning into a baking oven the walls were caving in and heat waves seemed to blind my vision. Coughing, I tripped over to where Pearl was throwing my dolls into a bag shaped blanket. I slapped the sheet out her hand and tried to drag her but the smoke had whipped me I couldn’t breathe anymore and neither could Pearl. Her little face was turning red and sweat bullets dropped from her face like the rain in the thunder storm. She fell. I tried so hard to pull her but my weak nimble body couldn’t take the smoke infested air any longer. I felt my lungs burst and tears dropped from my eyes Pearl wasn’t moving anymore.

“Elena... Elena!” I heard the faint screams of Pearl but it couldn’t be she was lying in front of me. “Elena wake up fight it!” the voice only grew fainter. My eyes slowly shut and I took what I thought was my last breath. I failed that voice, I failed my sister, and I failed!

“She has some intensive third degree burns abut we’ve removed the damaged skin from her torso and legs and replaced it with some of the remainder skin from her tights.” I woke up with a horrible head ache and this annoying beeping noise wasn’t helping. My

eyes flickered open, like a new born baby waking up for the first time. I was re-born that day.

“Doctor, she’s up!” I saw my mom or a woman that looked like my mom. Her hair wasn’t combed and her perfectly done makeup was dripping from the woman face. She was crying. As the lady moved closer, I could make out the similar resemblances of my mother from this lady, my Mom. She kissed my forehead gently brushing her soft lips onto my cheek and embraced me in a too tight hug. I felt my chest tighten and that stupid beeping noise grew louder and faster.

“Ms. Thomas, you’re holding her too tight – her heart beat is climbing.” She pulled back and looked at me, and my vision went clear.

“Mommy!” I screamed like it was the first time I saw her in years.”

“Oh my darling baby, I’m here! I’m so glad you woke up I’ve been waiting”

“Woke up?” I didn’t understand all I was doing was sleeping. The last thing I remembered was falling asleep with Pearl. Mom looked at Dad and looked back at me puzzled.

“You mean you don’t remember?”

“Daddy what is Mommy talking about?” All was quiet. I only heard the distant voice of people calling doctors? I looked around and realized the hospital bed and the many tubes in me stealing my blood and replacing it with a weird clear-looking thing.

“You’ve been sleeping for four days,” I looked back at Mommy’s face she had new black circles under her eyes and her skin was pale and ghost-like.

“I don’t care where is Pearl I bet she’s dying for bacon and waffles just like me.” Again, the room went silent, but this time mommy got up and ran out the room sobbing like a baby. And that’s when I got up and walked over to Daddy. His head was in his hands and for the first time I saw him cry.

“Where is Pearl?”

“She died... in the fire.”

I didn’t process that the first time. “Died.” Then it hit me – the smoke, the screaming, and my dolls. A nasty feeling boiled up in my throat it was like I was trapped in a closet watching someone rip every organ from my body, feeling very pain and losing my sense. My head spun and my eyes swelled up tears ran down my cheeks, and that beeping went faster. I pulled hard and fast on the tubes and things in my veins sucking the life out of me. I ran. I ran fast and swift, dodging doctors and security guards. I couldn’t see too well because my tears were blocking my view. But I was outside; the cold October wind slapped me in my face and sent horrifying chills up the backless hospital dress. I didn’t care, and then there was black then pain.

“Wake up, Elena. Wake up. Ms. Sinclair, I’m going to count back from 10 and when I clap wake up.” I shot out of my seat and fell into the arms of Mike. Tears rolling down my cheek “I’m sorry Pearl I’m sorry, I

should have protected you it's all my fault." Mike cradled me in his arms and hushed me. I didn't want to open my eyes again, I was afraid to see a disappointed look on Mike's face for lying. I wished I would have burned in that house. Pearls didn't deserve to die.

"Elena, open your eyes, it's over, I'm here... Elena, please open your eyes, Love."

I opened my eyes but, instead of a look of disappointment, I saw love and a scarce trace of sorrow in his eyes.

"Ms. Sinclair, how do you feel, now?" I looked at Dr. Stephenson I shook the extra tears off my eyes.

"Like a princess whose empire should have died along with her sister's." I said this without crying. I had Mike; I couldn't cry even if I tried – his embrace was strong and comforting. I continued to talk, pouring out my feelings.

"My last choking breath"

I wore all black and tied my hair back in a messy pony tail. Mike finally met Pearl. We had taken a trip to see her. It had been the first time I went to her grave. I apologized for not saving her even though everyone told me it wasn't my fault. A small part of me still felt I let her down. But I knew Pearl had forgiven me because when I leaned on her grave and touched it, I felt her hand in mine again and a soft voice coo into my ear. That was the last time I choked on my breath. My heart was lifted of the heavy imprint that that October day had left. I was

free. A blessing had come to me. I was pregnant with a girl. I was going to name her Pearl and love her like I loved my sister. Mike grabbed my hand and we walked off into the rising sun. Freely, I lived.