



VOICES

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Kevin's Game

John Lyons

When my family moved from my old home into a freshly built one, the construction crew left behind a ready supply of wooden planks, stray nails, and red bricks. Myself and a friend of mine, named Kevin, would take these bricks and venture into my backyard, turn on the hose to produce a stream, and build our own bridges out of the baked clay, pushing them into the mud to see how they would react to the flowing water. I would spend hours, from sunrise to sunset, crafting the most elaborate structures for the stream to flow around, through, or under. It was my and Kevin's my favorite game: building silly structures in the soft dirt of my backyard.

They were a burnt red, these bricks. Strong and dry. They were the first building blocks in a house or, in our case, bridges over a hose-constructed stream. They could become anything, but they all looked the same from, quite literally, square one. Just a cluster of building blocks that we turned into just about anything.

But when I went to Kevin's house, bricks were used as toys in a different game. He took me to his garage one day and produced a red brick from under a table cluttered with construction tools. To this day, I don't know if he snuck that brick from my house.

Kevin and I were very different people, yet we spent time together thanks to a mutual appreciation for the same video games, at first anyhow. I recall he had an

affinity towards fire. Once, he lit a baseball ablaze for the sole purpose of watching the flames react to the concrete as he kicked it around his driveway. He would go into the woods and do the same to sticks, leaves, logs, and he would often use a pocket knife to dig etchings into trees. We were fourth graders at the time, but he spoke like a football coach. He said a lot of words I had promised my mother that I would never say.

"My neighbor told me there's a shit load of chipmunks in his yard," he said after first showing me the brick. "I wanna go check it out."

"Why?" I asked, cautious not to push the boundaries too far. He might not have wanted us in his yard.

Sensing my timidity, Kevin said, "He asked me to go back there. I go into his yard all the time. He asked me to go back there and help out with the chipmunks. We won't get in trouble."

I shrugged. "Alright, if you wanna."

I don't know if Kevin had ever played whack-a-mole, but as we sat beside the chipmunk holes, I caught a similar tone, only this game was less electric and sporadic. It was calmer, more predatory. Kevin sat crouched over the holes like a wolf spider, waiting for its pray to pop up. He held the brick in his tensed hand, and stared forward at the holes. Having grown up in southeast Wisconsin, he knew that a chipmunk would show itself within a minute or two, so

long as it doesn't see anything outside its front door. Kevin made sure to crouch at an angle so that he could see the chipmunks, but they couldn't see him.

I knew what he wanted to do. I sat frozen, staring at the grass as he anticipated seeing something's head. But at the same time, not even looking at me, he wanted to calm my nerves.

"He asked me to kill these chipmunks for him, John. Calm down. We're doing him a favor."

I scanned the yard for creatures, merely seeing a blank, grass-covered square of a backyard, before a sharp pop and a thud on the grass drew my eyes back to the hole. I looked down. He got one.

Frantically, he dug the brick into the chipmunk's hole so that it could not escape into it. The little guy struggled, its first instinct to try and retreat back into his home, but in the time the chipmunk took to lug itself around and begin his crawl towards safety, Kevin had stood, circled the brick-blocked hole, and put his face less than a foot away from the dying creature, who was sniffing the brick as if to say, Where is my home?

In the first whack, no blood came from the ball of fur. It was clear its legs no longer worked as they should as it struggled to move around, and that some of its interior organs were failing him as he writhed in a way that suggested that he would die now regardless of what Kevin did, though in a slow burn if he didn't finish the job.

He held the chipmunk under his shoe as he removed the brick from the hole. Now, there was a clear place that the chipmunk could escape to. Kevin knew that as soon as he let the flailing fur ball under his foot go, it would run straight for his house. And that's what it did. Anticipating it, Kevin lifted his foot off the helpless animal, before catching it as it began to move towards home by slamming the short side of the brick against its body. Then again, and again.

I was horrified. From where I was sitting, on the ground looking up at Kevin as he stood, I couldn't see the blood as it escaped the chipmunk, but I could see the splatter against the brick. When recalling his attack, I am most disturbed by the fact that he kept pounding on its body after it was clearly dead. If he was doing this as a favor for his neighbor (and I wasn't sure if such a favor had been requested), then he wouldn't have had so much fun with it.

One of the chipmunk's friends must have heard the noise, and the screams inaudible to human ears, and retreated from a nearby hole in the yard to investigate. Kevin saw this and quickly chucked the brick into the hole

so that it could not reenter. For maybe seven minutes, he proceeded to chase that chipmunk around his neighbor's fenced backyard, laughing about how difficult it was to catch.

Eventually, the chipmunk's friend found himself under Kevin's boot as well. At that moment, he turned to me and gave me the brick.

"You do it," he said.

I refused, saying that I didn't want to kill anything.

"Oh my god, don't be a pussy," he said. "You ever go fishing?"

I had mentioned to him in the past that I'd gone fishing before. He remembered. I nodded.

"This is no different. Hell, some of the stuff you catch fishing is much bigger than this, and you kill that right?"

His logic made sense. It somehow distracted me from the difference between hooking an animal and crushing one with my bare hands.

"I think my neighbor said he'd pay us," Kevin said. "He really has too many of these things in his backyard. He's going to kill them anyway. He gases the holes so that they suffocate. I'd rather get killed quick, wouldn't you? You don't want to be a pussy, do you? It's fucking cool doing this stuff, I mean, Noel goes hunting, and she kills deer!" Noel was a girl in our class. She didn't actually kill deer yet, but she went along on hunting trips with her father.

He handed me the brick.

"Go for it," he said.

I looked at the squirming fur beneath his foot, and as he stood above me, looking down at me and the creature, he convinced me to smack it once with the brick. I grew too uncomfortable after that, looking at the pain I had caused and the blood on the grass. Unlike the previous animal, by the very first hit this chipmunk most certainly bled. I didn't kill it, but it would have died even if Kevin hadn't swiped the brick from me, called me a pussy, and nailed the thing in the head as a final blow.

"There," he said, "We did this old fucker a favor. Honestly, the chipmunks too."

He looked at me, most likely seeing how disturbed I was by his actions despite my attempts to hide it. He sighed and shook his head.

"Oh knock it off, John."

And with that, he tossed the brick over the fence to grab later and started for his own backyard.

"Wanna play with my BB gun again?" He said, and once he had decided on a different game, I knew this violent



episode had concluded. We shot at soda cans, the BB gun strong enough to punch a hole in tin let alone flesh, until my mother came to pick me up.

That night, I cried about it to her. I was religious as a boy. I prayed that God forgave me for the life I had taken. In retrospect, people kill things all the time. People kill things then eat them. I never once questioned the morality of eating animals three times as intelligent as that chipmunk. I still wonder what my actions that day say about me as a person, and what they say about Kevin. I hear stories about him from time to time. He got in trouble with the law, or so I hear, for unscrewing a stop sign from a four way intersection. I guess he wanted to see what would happen if someone didn't stop, when they should have. And to the best of my understanding, he hit a woman once, or maybe did more than that, but in a town like ours few would discuss such things if they were to happen. I doubt I would have

heard about it. No one ever knew about Kevin's behavior when we were children. So why would I know about it now? No one ever knew about the behavior of many. And the victims, over time, grew to things much larger than chipmunks. The abuse they received was different. But the size of the silence remained constant.

I went to my backyard today, which is far away from the city and state of my childhood, and saw a squirrel. Not quite a chipmunk, but it was close enough to make me consider Kevin's actions. I approached it, crouched down on the ground, and perhaps he was visiting from some city or street, because he did not seem afraid of me. He inched closer, so close that he was able to sniff my shoe, the fur of his tail like a dirty dandelion. And then he looked up, with those black, eggish eyes, and I whispered to him, "How about that, Champ? It looks like you made it out of there, too."

The Field

Faviola Santana

It was four years since we moved from the United States to Baja California, Mexico. Mamá had decided to be the strongest of her seven siblings and move back to her hometown to help Nana, our grandma. It's hot, I thought. I was only five years old, but the sensation of the sun hitting my skin was almost a sizzling feeling. I was in the yard playing by myself because it was the day of the week when Mara went to school and I didn't. She would be upset if she knew I ate tamarindo dulce for breakfast.

Mamá was at work, leaving me to roam free, as if our town was the friendliest and safest place for a five-year-old to be. My uncle kept me company. By company, I mean him blasting musica and fixing his car. Frequently, I would bother him to the point that he'd raise me onto the roof of his car to see the view.

However, that day I felt cheerful, so I ran down to the soccer field beside our house. Since our family owned the field, games would regularly be in progress because we didn't charge an entrance fee. My mother thought it would be better for the community to have a place where families could picnic or have a carne asada, instead of making a profit. As I ran, in my mind I saw my mom, Mara, and I in the field, sitting underneath a blanket my grandma had made. My mom was passing sandwiches that she had made the day before for the fresh fall weather. It gave me a warm feeling to think of my parents there, gossiping

and exaggerating that Jose Maria or Lupita were going to be future doctors or lawyers. The children did not have a worry in the world but played with innocence.

Perhaps it wasn't the field I enjoyed so much, but the memories it provided. The field was a secret space that couldn't be vandalized, or contaminated with cigarette smoke or litter because it was for the community. The field was respected.

I don't typically blame anyone for taking away my five-year-old dream. But I do blame the Shadow Man who came to our house and waved money in our faces as if it's all we ever cared about. He said if we took el dinero, we'd be happier and live better lives. You see, companies had been harassing my mother and grandma to sell the soccer field for a long time. They would write letters and explain that they would be "doing us a favor" by taking it from us.

We had moved to Mexico because my grandma's diabetes was deteriorating. I didn't know this then, but it was as if we were slowly waiting for her health to collapse to finally leave. After the Shadow Man's visit my grandma's health worsened and she soon became hospitalized. She spent quite a long time there before we all wore black and said our goodbyes. I think this took more of a toll on my mother than it did on my sister and I. We couldn't comprehend the idea of death. We took the Shadow man's money and went back to Los Estados Unidos.

Mystic

Lily Goodman

My dad and I have this long-running joke that we like to visit depressing places like teeny-tiny, American towns right on the verge of no longer being places any longer—ones undoubtedly considered bleak and dismal, particularly to those of us who regularly experience the vibrancy of places that prosper.

My dad is the one who taught me how to find the life in places that on the surface don't have much life to them at all, and I realized as I got older that in bleakness I could often find beauty. But it's no normal beauty; it's the kind that stops you in your tracks and implies something more, but you can't quite figure out what that "more" is. It's the kind that makes you want to cry because even though there is almost nothing in front of you but overgrown grass, gravel paths leading nowhere, wrinkled, metal signs, and whistling wind, that "nothing" is something.

This has become something special between my dad and me: to visit a depressing place and to discover an appreciation for it, and to revisit it in our memories whenever we're reunited with one another, and then to find another depressing place to start the process of appreciating it all over again.

It's not all that simple or great, however, because I do have to wonder sometimes what it means to claim appreciation for what you deem as another person's day-to-day bleakness. I wonder about this each time my dad and I visit another depressing place and it begins to feel more and more like a hobby for us, and I always feel a little guilty about it. And yet, for reasons I don't even understand, I've never told my dad that I feel guilty, and we continue to visit them.

So basically, there is nothing—that's an exaggeration.

There are some houses, some trailers, some 225 people whom you don't really see much of, but who are apparently around somewhere. There's Pale Moon Cocktail Lounge that you don't really drink cocktails at anymore, just beer, and the owner will make you a frozen pizza for three dollars if you ask for it. There are dogs that look like they're hungry, ravaging at each other's necks—but they also seem like they belong to that man over there standing on his porch smoking a cigarette—so why are they so hungry?

Main Street is nothing but boarded-up buildings. You can tell it used to have a life with stores and taverns and a church and a grocery store, but those are dead now and have been for a while, replaced with, well, nothing—a bunch of nothing with boarded-up windows, crumbling brick walls with mostly illegible spray-painted writing—except for that one wall with spray-painted writing on it telling everyone to stop vandalizing the buildings, except clearly no one is listening.

It's... you know... quiet... living around here, Nancy says. She's in the midst of eating a Pale Moon frozen pizza with her significant other of thirty-eight years. They're engaged and have been for all thirty-eight years. He says he doesn't have much to say. So Nancy keeps talking for the both of them.

It gets a little hectic every once and a while. You got crowds in other towns that come here. They're into drugs. Yeah. You know. Thieving. Breaking into houses. But for the most part it doesn't happen. People are nice here and everyone knows everyone.

I hear drugs are a good way to distract oneself. And it would explain the houses here that don't look like they're fit for the nuclear family. The roofs are gone with the windows blown out. Lots of smoke damage. My dad thinks

something was cooking in them. It wasn't dinner.

This is—there used to be a coal mine here. Called Sunshine. And you can see, if you look off when you leave here—if you look off in this area over here, you'll see a ridge, and that's the old coal mines.

The mining towns—there were small mining towns all over this area. If you go driving down dirt roads—if you know the areas, he can take you out around Rathbun Lake, and tell you about towns that are under water. When they built the dams, they—they buried the towns. 'Cept here. Nancy laughs. *Not here—yet.*

Nancy had just about finished her pizza. Her fiancé sat staring, not at me or her, not at anyone or anything in particular. Just at nothing.

The wind was whistling and whirling outside. It's all you could hear. Whistling metal. Hitting metal. Metal of cars, scrap metal, metal signs, metal trailer homes, metal roofs, wind chimes.

Aside from the violent wind, it was a sunshiny, nice day in April and no one was outside taking it in.

We sat in my dad's Volkswagen Bug. We weren't sure where to go. We had already gone to Pale Moon. My dad studied a map of Iowa in his road book of America. The sun was beating down on my forearm through the window, making it itch.

I wondered what it was like when all those people who lived in the towns couldn't live there anymore because the land was drowned. Though the mining had slowed down by then, according to Nancy. Coal wasn't so great anymore. People didn't want to live where it wasn't so great, where there was nothing there to prosper from. Besides, they probably left long before the foundations of their livelihoods had been made into a lake. Still, I can't help but find it sad.

The grass was so green and fine and dancing with the wind. A spotted mutt rested on the side of the gravel road next to a field of corn. There was a lot of corn. But there's always a lot of corn out here. It could be your only scenery for miles.

We started back towards home. I looked in the side view mirror at the silver 'welcome' silo twinkling in the sun. Its red writing faded and flaked, even from afar. I felt odd sitting and observing what was nothing more than remnants of what used to be. Nancy didn't mind it, she said so. She said it was her life, plain and simple. But I couldn't believe she didn't mind it. She just wouldn't admit to a stranger from Chicago that she did. Right?

I peered down at my phone. I had no signal and no way to distract myself, so I watched miles of corn crops pass by the window instead.



He Is Dead

Ayotoluwafunmi

"I am the wife. I am the wife of fifteen years. I am the plumpish wife, the pretty wife, the loving wife, the smart wife, the American wife. I am eternally his wife." -- Elizabeth Alexander

He is dead. He has been for a few years now. I'm not really sure when he died or when he started dying. It may have been in his early childhood, when observing his parents' relationship, or it could have been during his teen years when he lived as he pleased. It might have been in his adult years, when he also lived as he pleased but aimed to be wealthy and for a life his parents couldn't give him. The process of his death could have started at any time because he was born with a disease: greed. Greed isn't uncommon. It is a normal condition in certain cultures, but my Bible tells me not to be greedy or envious of others. He was greedy and envious, and this caused another illness to grow and fester inside him. An illness his own father had. It is true; the sins of the father are the sins of the son.

Mr. Ogunwusi grew up with his father, mother and five siblings. He grew up watching his father not behave like a father. That was his norm, his reality. It may also have been the beginning of the end for us. About twenty percent of the Yoruba people in Nigeria have royal blood, and Mr. Ogunwusi had just a bit. He was royalty, and he knew it, but he didn't have a royal life. He struggled because as a Nigerian man, he knew he had to support his future wife and children. This burden of responsibility fell on a man who didn't have much, but he knew what he wanted and he was going to get it through whatever means possible.

I knew him, or at least I thought I did. He once told me that he believed in God, but his actions contradicted his words. When he was a young adult he acted and spoke like a lover of Christ. This is what attracted my mother, a naïve woman who loved and feared God. According to Nigerian Christians, it is important to be with and marry people who believe what you believe, for iron sharpens iron.

Mr. Ogunwusi's marriage to my mother may have been when he started dying, for he was acting. He wasn't true to himself. The act that had attracted my mother soon began

to fall apart. My mother told me what her father told her: personality is like smoke. It can't be contained, and sooner or later it will present itself. I pictured a kettle when she told me this. A kettle lets smoke out of its spout steadily and consistently. That's the way kettles are and it's the way people should be. Mr. Ogunwusi was a rice cooker. His smoke was caged in for a long time and there was no way for us to see it.

For a number of years, Mr. Ogunwusi struggled and grew in wealth. His new family lived like any upper middle-class Nigeria family; his children went to great schools, his wife took care of his home and his house was a home to his maids and cooks. It's hard to know when things went wrong for him, why his smoke was finally revealed. In the few short years I knew him, I found him to be a respectable and upright man. I didn't know of the skeletons in his closet. To me it was an overnight transformation. He went from being my father to a man I didn't recognize. The first time I became aware of his cruelty, I was only thirteen years old. He tried to kick me and my sister out of our home for going to a church he didn't like. He was trying to punish my mother by punishing us. This new man was still my father. He will always be my father, as I will always be his child, for his blood runs in my veins. But I came to hate him. When his lies and secrets came out in the open, I saw him in a new light. He suddenly looked old and wicked. I can't imagine the pain and misfortune he caused to others and how they must look at him now. Someone who once shone in my eyes turned into a monster. His deception didn't hurt him as much as it hurt those around him. I was deceived as to what type of person my father was, I thought he was a lot like me, happy and joyful, but I found cruelty rested deep within him.

I was called by my father into his room. On the way to his room, I thought about my day and how I wished things were different. Earlier in the morning, my parents were arguing. The entire house could hear them screaming at

each other but we couldn't hear what they were screaming about or why they were screaming. I just wanted my family back to the way it was before: peaceful, happy and normal. It was a useless wish because deep down, I knew that my family wouldn't be happy if my father was home. I wished he would go away for a while or change back to the man he was.

I knocked once and was invited into his room. I walked into the orange fluorescent lighting. It smelled like his dark musky perfume. The room was warm, but the aura inside the room was negative one thousand degrees. I folded my hands together and looked between my father, who sat on his bed dressed in an expensive shirt, shoes and jeans, and my mother, who was dressed in the red flowery caftan I bought for her on a whim while in Kenya. I could tell how the conversation would go by looking at my mother's face. She is very protective of me and my sisters and we are just as protective of her. She wasn't looking at me. She was looking at the ground, with her left hand supporting her face and her right arm on her lap. I knew this wasn't going to end well, and I wanted to escape but I was locked under my father's command. I couldn't leave the room unless he allowed me to. My father's eyes were yellow and bloodshot. He looked tired but alert. His face was set and determined, and I knew he was going to ask me a series of questions but I didn't know how damaging they would be. I didn't notice the look of victory in his eyes, I was too busy wanting to avoid the horror that I was about to face. He looked at me and cleared his throat. I stood straighter and looked at him and sent my mother little glances. I tried my best to be composed. Only thirty seconds had passed. My father turned his body to me, giving me his full attention. He was a fat man. I wanted to laugh in that moment. It was funny how he looked like a black version of Jabba the Hut from Star Wars. I was almost smiling as he handed me his Bible and asked me to read Ephesians 5:22. I was puzzled but looked at the words in the book. The smile that wanted to touch my face was quickly wiped off. I looked up at my mother who still wasn't looking at me and I looked at my father who was staring at me intently. I knew where this was going and I wanted no part in this conversation. I read, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head." I stopped reading and looked up again. He then asked me, "According to the Bible that your mother loves to read so much. Am I the head of the home?" Quietly, I answered yes. He asked, "If I am the head then should I be making good decisions that will help my family without objections?" I answered yes. I couldn't

say no. The questions he asked me flowed perfectly in accordance with what I had read. He was a smart man, and a businessman, and he knew how to get what he wanted. He wanted his daughter to humiliate his wife. He asked me a few more questions, and these questions made things worse for my mother and better for him. It allowed him to feel justified about his actions, and I had helped him without wanting to.

In the seven minutes I was in his room, I wanted him to disappear from my life. Less than seven months later, he was gone.

I remember that awful day as the day I finally hated my father. He had done many things that would make most people hate him by then, but he was my father, so I still loved him. After that day though, I hated him with every fiber of my being and yet he is still my father. Even though he separated from my mother and remarried a few months later. Even though he is once again a father to some unfortunate boy. But even now in 2017, as he lives with his little family away from us, he is still my father. I have imagined him to be dead multiple times. I know of his sins, sicknesses and faults, yet I can't hate him. I talked to him in July 2017 and told him I loved him, and I half meant it. My faith tells me to forgive people so that God may forgive me and the world shows me that there are many men out there just like him. Some are even worse.

I remember when he left I cried for days. I got what I had wished for, yet I was so unhappy. I found that he had been cheating on my mother for a long time and that he had been unhappy in his marriage with her. I found that he was abusive to my mother, emotionally and financially. I found out many things about him, but there is a part of me that can never totally hate him. He is a part of me, as I am a part of him. I haven't seen him face to face since he left, but I know what he is doing and where he is. I found out because I wanted to know what his life is like without us. I have spoken to him twice since he left, but he has never looked for me. So maybe I am the one who is dead. I am dead to him while he is very much alive to me.

Every time I look in the mirror I see his features on my face – his smile, his teeth, and his eyes. He continues to live and it torments me because I always hope that one day he will come back and apologize to us. The family who still prays for him.

It has been hard letting him go. Allowing myself to think of him as dead instead of alive and away from me. I have wondered how to mourn for someone who isn't dead.

Shark Bait

Anna Ivarson

Breathe, Anna. Just breathe. I repeat those four words to myself in the hope that they will keep me somewhat calm. Cautiously, I inch myself onward,

one foot in front of the other. I'm at the edge of the boat. My feet betray me as they descend the ladder into the hollow depths. I glance down at the water before I make the plunge, and I freeze. There is a gap between the boat and the cage. The gap can't be more than a few inches wide, but it feels as wide as the Pacific itself as a multitude of sharks leisurely circle beneath me and the boat. This isn't me. I should be on the boat. I don't participate in activities that put my well-being on the line. Every fiber in my being is telling me to climb back up that ladder. How did Andrew convince me to do this? Why did I let him? There is no more time to think as the waves are already crashing over me. I'm in the Pacific. The cage drifts from the boat. There is no going back. I am swimming with sharks.

One year earlier, on a sunny July afternoon, my family was eating dinner on our porch. It was my parents' nineteenth wedding anniversary. Instead of reminiscing about the years they had spent together, they were looking ahead to what was ahead. They wanted to commemorate the milestone of their twentieth anniversary with a trip. At dinner they announced that the next June we would be flying to Hawaii as a family to celebrate. My brother Andrew nearly fell out of his chair. He had just spent the entire week glued to the television watching the Discovery Channel's Shark Week. It is safe to say that he was ecstatic about our upcoming vacation and the possibility of seeing a shark.

Even though it was my parents' twentieth wedding anniversary trip, we were each allowed to pick out one activity for the family to do together. My mom decided on snorkeling on the Nepali Coast, my dad chose visiting the Pearl Harbor Memorial, and I picked inner tubing in

old irrigation canals. When Andrew declared his chosen activity, he couldn't contain his enthusiasm.

"I want to swim with sharks!" he blurted.

My mouth dropped open. "Andrew, are you insane? We can't swim with sharks! It's dangerous and unpredictable."

"Anna, it's fine! Hundreds of people have done it! It's one of the biggest tourist attractions in Hawaii."

"I don't care what hundreds of other tourists have done. This particular tourist is staying as far away from sharks as possible."

"Why? They won't hurt you. Why are you afraid?"

"You don't know that for sure. Haven't you been watching Shark Week? Sharks can be vicious if they want to be. If it's me against a shark, I will lose for sure."

Unlike my crazy thrill-seeking brother, I am a logical, analytical, and organized individual. I love to make plans and I love to know outcomes. I will usually look up movie endings or read the last chapter of a book first because I want to know how they end before I begin. I like knowing everything will work out, or, if it doesn't, I want to be prepared. Swimming with sharks would take me far out of my comfort zone. Andrew knew that I wasn't the biggest fan of sharks. Shark Week did not excite me the way it did him.

In fact, Shark Week had cultivated a fear of sharks in me. According to *The Guardian* newspaper, Shark Week engages in "fear-mongering, while also grossly overstating the threat sharks pose to humans" (Nevins). Technically, people are more of a danger to sharks than they are to us. Sharks are "fatally threatened by us: a report in *Marine Policy* found that humans kill about 11,000 sharks an hour, or between 100 and 273 million a year" (Nevins). However, in Shark Week sharks devour unwary tourists at the rate of three per episode. Media outlets portray sharks as menacing in a way that scares a lot of people, including me. Andrew knew that to convince me to go he needed hard facts and evidence that it would be safe. I was not going to end up being shark bait.

Months later, Andrew was still relentlessly pestering me about swimming with sharks. He threw statistic after statistic at me, like the number of shark attacks in Hawaii in the last ten years, and the types of sharks in Hawaiian waters, as well as reviews and safety ratings of the tour company. His research chipped away at my walls. Everything he found indicated that we would be safe and that the tour is a once in a lifetime opportunity. He even found a photo on the tour company's website of little

children swimming with sharks. I saw the photo and it made me angry with myself. *If four-year-olds can swim with sharks, so can I!* For days, I mulled over Andrew's findings. He had the data supporting his promises of safety and fun adventure.

Although his research piqued my interest, Andrew's emotional and heartfelt appeal to family values were what persuaded me to get in the water. He said that if I were to swim with the sharks I would be creating lifelong, irreplaceable memories with my family. He reassured me that the best part of vacationing is not relaxing but going on new exotic adventures with the people who matter the most.

I realized that even though trying new things can be frightening it can be manageable with a reliable support system. According to Dr. Lickerman, the director of primary care at the University of Chicago, trying new things fosters "a spirit of constant self-challenge; this self-challenge keeps people humble and open to new ideas" (Lickerman). Andrew challenged me to leave my comfort zone in pursuit of adventure, and I listened.

After forty-five minutes, it is time to get out. The crew gently reels the cage in, making sure to keep it steady as we float past eight sharks. I am gripping the side of the cage but not out of fear. Do I have to get out? Must I leave? I had come within an arm's length of an eight-foot Galapagos shark. Was I scared? No, I was fascinated and awed. The sharks swam by us apparently not caring or noticing that we were there. They were not aggressive but majestic creatures who cut through the water with ease. They were not as menacing or terrifying as portrayed on television; they were mysterious and complex creatures that should be freed from their Hollywood stereotype.

I am back on the boat. I look at Andrew:

"Thank you. If it wasn't for you, I would have missed an amazing experience."

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The Present

Devin Van Dyke

Eric's smartphone shrilled to the tune of "Charge of the Light Brigade" as he rolled over and promptly went back to sleep. Laura delivered a rather hard love pat and said, "Eric, get up! I don't want to miss breakfast because of your panicked tardiness." Laura was contented at having delivered the warning. She resumed snoring.

After two minutes of music, Eric sat up in bed, silenced his phone and said, "You're right. I'll get you an energy bar before I shower."

Laura opened one eye and replied, "I'm not sure if that's good enough."

"Okay, I'll open it."

"I will not eat with my hands!"

"Hey, I don't care if you only have three weeks left carrying that very heavy sphere-like thing on your normally flat stomach. Be a little bit kinder to me, please, and be happy with breakfast in bed."

He was in the shower and out before his wife Laura could finish breakfast. She was using a knife and fork, eating the energy bar from a saucer, having levered herself up against the headboard. Eric dressed while they talked about what to have for dinner, as well as fun stuff he could do with the child, whether it was a boy or girl. Then he stared at his smartphone and said, "Laura, I downloaded an app that synchs our phones so that when we text a message that starts with the keyword "Baby" the other phone will chime with "The ABC Song." That way I can tell it's you telling me how much you appreciate my doing all the housework, cooking and cleaning practically every day for the past six months. See? If you want to talk about a baby-like thing, start the text with the word "baby" and I'll

know before I even read it."

Sitting on the side of the bed, Laura stretched her arms high above her head as she replied. "That's sweet. I get the impression that maybe you think I should try to think about something other than the baby? But what if it's an emergency, like say my water breaks or something?"

"Then start your text with the word 'Emergency,' and call me. I'll hear the ubiquitous siren warble, then we're talking if I can answer, or you can just continue your text if I don't pick up. I've set my phone to override vibrate if you text 'emergency.'" Walking around to her side of the bed, Eric sat down next to her and ran his hands over her large belly. He rubbed his hands in a small circle on the very top and said, "Hey, you in there, I'm going to work in a minute so look after Mom, okay?"

"Don't give our child so much responsibility so soon. How about I look after him for a couple of years or so first?" She smiled at their near-daily dialogue about how child would watch over his parent rather than the other way around. The exchange was one of those little things that had evolved between them in tandem with the pregnancy. There were always variations on the same theme. It was a way to make up for their separations when Eric went to work or to night classes at the local junior college.

Sporting black rimmed glasses, Eric was dark skinned, but with Caucasian features. His dream was to become a lawyer, and to build his family while both working and studying. Laura was on board too. They planned on her going to college later, when they could count on his money from lawyering to pay the ever-increasing costs that older children accrued.

They kissed briefly and Laura said, "You'll text me on break, right?"

Eric replied, "ABC song and all." Then he was off to work, disappearing through the sliding glass door. The window-mounted air conditioner started to hum, and cool air filled the room. She switched it to high and the sound of wind chimes hanging in front of it filled the air. Laura said to an empty room, "It's going to be a hot one again."

Laura bathed and then indulged in what she called her pre-lunch snack consisting of yogurt and fresh fruit. Then her mom called and told her "I had three painful miscarriages before you took hold. I wouldn't be surprised if the same thing happened to you and Eric." This was not a conversation Laura wanted to have. She finally had to beg off the phone because she was already so freaked out by all the stuff that could go wrong. The older neighbor on the downhill side started up his lawnmower. Its roar could be heard all the way into the bedroom where Laura went to rest and daydream while waiting to hear from Eric or feel kicks from inside.

At ten on the dot the ABC song sounded from Laura's phone. They exchanged a few pleasantries and Laura told him she would look up some good movies he could grab on his way home. She moved onto the couch and started reading a magazine on her iPad, and thankfully the noise of the neighbor's mower finally cut out. A sudden but insistent pain shot across her stomach. A minute later, it repeated itself. She sat bold upright and teetered a little bit as another round of pain jolted her. She pulled up her dress to see if she was bleeding. Another shot of pain, but no blood. With her heart racing, a sense of panic set in. She reached for her phone, but the battery had died.

Packing up the phone charger, she grabbed her purse and waddle-walked out the door to the car. It took three tries to start it. She got hit with more pain and tried to relieve it by pushing back hard on the seat. She focused on staying quiet and calm to lower her stress. When she arrived in the ER parking lot, her phone had charged up enough that she was able to text Eric with "baby" and tell him where she was.

Eric's phone vibrated for the third time before he was able to break free from his boss and see about Laura. He just knew it couldn't be anyone but her. He stared at his phone in shock, then said to his boss, "Hey Don, Laura is at the ER."

"Well I guess you better get on down there, huh?"

He made good time ER-bound at first, but then he hit

three reds in a row. He got caught behind a street cleaner on the two-lane street where passing was prohibited. He texted Laura and got no response. The street cleaner made a right turn and thankfully he had a clear shot to the hospital. He couldn't help but see that the road didn't seem to need cleaning.

The flashing neon Emergency Only sign was visible in the distance. A siren rose in pitch and volume directly behind him. As he pulled over to stop, he thought it was an ambulance, but when it didn't go by he noticed the flashing lights ten feet behind him. He checked his phone before the cop was out of her car.

She loomed over his passenger window and knuckle-knocked on the glass. He rolled it down and he kept his hands where they could be seen. "Produce your license and registration please."

"My wife's at the ER. I didn't know I was doing anything wrong."

Jarmeni was a veteran of the Iraq war, and didn't think all those sheets or drapes or whatever they wore over there made you any cooler than regular issue uniforms. She had joined the police force upon separation from the army. She missed having an employer supply rounds for live-fire practice. She thought traffic enforcement was okay, but she wanted to be a detective and really make a difference. She longed for the regular shift solving crimes would mean. If she was on day shift, she could hit the gym with more of her fellow officers and seriously challenge them to toughness tests.

"My pregnant wife is in the ER—I don't usually drive too fast." He passed her his license and started rooting through the glove box for his registration.

The officer stepped back away from the car and examined the license, and then talked quietly into her radio. She shoved the license into her shirt pocket, buttoned it shut, then walked back towards the car, and stood five feet away. Eric's flustered search of the glove box was not yielding results. Jarmeni had her right hand resting on the top of her gun and her left hand was fidgeting with her nightstick. She said, "Sir, are you going to produce that registration and insurance verification?"

"I'm really nervous because I don't know what's up with my wife." Jarmeni stood right in the window, right in Eric's face. As she looked in the car she saw a few discarded carry-out bags and other detritus scattered inside the car. Gripping the steering wheel with both hands, Eric had reddened eyes with sweat beaded on his forehead.

She walked around to the other side of the car, stood in the window and in his face said, "It doesn't appear you have a valid registration card sir."

"Oh yes, yes I do ma'am."

"Stay seated in the car with the engine off and both hands on the wheel."

"What about my wife? She is pregnant and I am only five minutes away. Something really bad could be happening."

"Sir, I need you to follow my lawful requests. Do you have any sharp objects on you?"

Another police car drove past, and then executed a U-turn, finally parking in front of Eric. An officer wearing mirrored sunglasses got out and stood by his trunk, facing Eric as he keyed the mike on his left shoulder. He stood there planted as if readying himself for some unforeseen life-threatening situation. Jarmeni walked up to him and kept her back towards Eric. They talked between themselves for a couple of minutes. They walked over to Eric who was now sweating and breathing faster.

Eric's phone loosed a low-volume perfect reproduction of a siren. Eric took his right hand off the steering wheel. An ambulance came up from behind with lights and siren going full blast and kept on going. Jarmeni said, "Sir, you need to follow my commands and keep your hands on the steering wheel." And then she said to Jackson, "See what I mean? He won't stay focused on what I'm telling him to do."

Jackson replied, "Just like all those rag heads over there, huh?"

"One and the same." She continued. "Sir, how about you step out of your car and Officer Jackson here will attend to you while I search your car in an effort to find your registration?"

"How can me not having a lousy piece of paper mean you get to search me and my car? Can't the computer tell you I got valid registration?"

"Step out of the car, sir."

Eric stepped out of the car and each officer took a wrist. Plastic zip-tie cuffs were applied and he was stood up against his trunk. It was then he noticed the dog in the back of Jarmeni's car.

Ten minutes later Eric started his car and drove off with a fix-it ticket.

Eric parked crooked and practically ran through the ER doors. He walked up to a receptionist behind a sliding glass window and asked where Laura was. A nurse appeared momentarily and told Eric while he was escorted into the ER, "It was no big deal really—she had what's known as practice labor pains or false labor. It can be scary. It's kinda like the woman's body is getting ready for the main event. It's different from real labor because the time between contractions is random or haphazard. With real labor pains the time interval steadily decreases and contractions increase in intensity."

They got to a closed door and the nurse said, "The doctor already spoke with her, so any time the two of you are ready to go home, stop at the receptionist and sign some stuff."

Laura was sitting on the examination bed and she stood up and embraced Eric. Laura said, "Your turban looks messed up."

"I got pulled over on my way here."

"Were they nicer this time?"

"Not really. I forgot to remove the registration from the envelope and then your emergency text came in and so I—"

Laura began where he left off—"was too overwhelmed to quiet and calm yourself enough to think like the lawyer you will be some day."

Eric looked down at her belly and then he took her in his arms and said, "If I made one little mistake just now I might have been—you know – hauled off in cuffs and left you facing whatever went wrong without me. It's too crazy to get my head around—and a whole lot of America has no idea how scary jail is. How can that be all right?"

Laura replied, "You don't think everybody should have the opportunity to spend time in jail so they know what it's like, do you? You're just being sarcastic. Eric, let's start with the things we can change."

"You are correct, my wise wife. I will open the registration envelope and clip the registration to the visor and check to be sure I have it before I turn the key."

They were ready to leave. As they approached their cars Laura said, "Hey you can't be serious about everybody going to jail, right?"

"Well—it should be a surprise."

Emotionless

Kuann Fawkes

The act of being drained emotionally
Feelings locked up. Thrown away the key.
Expression of one's self has become a challenge.
Four letters, one word
Love
I loved, and loved more than enough
But is enough really enough?
Forgive me, for I am clueless
Forbid me
From knowing love the way I knew it before
Anymore, I know not how to love, but I still love.
I do not remember what it feels like to be truly happy.
Think of a dying rose and of a love only periodically.

And this,
Is the norm
Emotions slowly fading.
No reaction to anything because everything is too different
And if jealousy is love and hate at the same time,
I am on strike three at commandment ten.

I cannot save me from myself.
And who is to blame? Nobody but
Myself.
I do not know how to let this new self feel wanted or needed
How to feel at home away from home?
Where is my safe zone and ...
What is comfort from discomfort?
Here we go again,
Eight letters, three words
"I love you"
And they mean nothing,
Anymore.
I am from a place where dreams are better than reality

I am on a leveled playing field
Not upon a pedestal,
Not at the eye of the grass
What is it to feel?
These things I have forgotten.
I have not the answer
For I am numb.

Strolling

Elijah Thompson-Acquah

An intense heartbeat is what you feel as you exit the plane. You are grouped with fellow classmates who are privileged enough to enter a new world. This is the summer that you have decided to travel outside of the United States. This is a pivotal milestone for your education as a university student. This is a moment in history where you can live in a land of endless possibilities.

However, before you start on your assignments and wander around in new territory, you must go through the customs process. Departing the country requires several documents including a flight itinerary, a financially notarized letter and proof of medical insurance. You had wondered how the process would work out. You were told at the last minute about these requirements.

It is a struggle to obtain your information. You are living in your aunt's house for the first week of summer. If you resided in your hometown, you could efficiently meet with your bank to notarize your letter and efficiently print out your documents. Unfortunately, you are stuck in a city that is hundreds of miles from your own. Thus, you worry on the inside about what will happen to you during the customs process.

This comes from the idea that everything can be taken away from you when you are close to the finish line. Without these documents the entire trip could be scrapped. You had planned for a year to escape your mundane life to experience an unprecedented fantasy. However, this news makes it seem less of a possibility. You hear thoughts that you've screwed up, that you are unprepared for this important event. You hear your mind saying that it's impossible to gather all your information before the date of departure. You feel your chest burning inside, feel it vigorously pump blood through your heart, feel it flowing through the rest of your body with self-indignation and despair. You can see your mother disappointed in you because she has worked so hard for you to afford this program.

However, your mother says, "Do not worry. It's written for you to travel abroad for the summer. Besides, I'm supposed to worry about you, not the other way around."

You take that thought to extinguish your burning heart. These words of encouragement are there when you and your mother quickly travel intranationally before internationally. You can stay in a condo in your hometown for a few short days. A relative who owns the place is not there because he has problems with his heart.

It takes hours to get a twenty-minute ride to a printing station and your bank. With your patience dwindling, you must spend a short amount of time settling yourself before leaving. "This could've been done weeks ago," you think to yourself.

But regardless, you now have your papers. This fact calms you a little. The pressure eases on the eight-hour flight to the land of Erin. But it begins to seep back inside you when walking off the plane. As the gray clouds pour, your body shivers.

The pain intensifies as you pass distorted reflections of yourself on smudged windowpanes. It reaches its trembling peak when you're standing in a lengthy line of immigrants.

The ambience is stinging you. Seconds become minutes. Whispers become uproars. Walls of green paint surrounds you because apparently this place is very patriotic of this bright color.

You keep thinking about whether you should hold your extra documents in your hand. You do not want officials to be suspicious of what you have. You ask yourself, "Are they necessary to have alongside my passport?" You constantly pull out and put back your extra documents into your backpack.

Thoughts contradict each other. While you wonder, you look around with swift turns of your head. You notice that the line is growing. More people are landing into the airport and getting in line behind. The line itself seems to be slow to change when you look ahead. The best thing you can do is tightly hold onto your passport tightly. You are getting closer to having either the time of your life or the most embarrassing confrontation that anyone could ever create.

Once you finally approach the immigration officer, you stare at his face full of gravity and gloom. He is bald with wrinkles all around his head. He wears a monotonous uniform like his workmates, and he sits in front of a black computer behind an invisible glass prison wall.



"Why are you here?" he says as you hand him your passport.

"I'm part of a writing program provided by my university," you answer.

"How long are you going to be in the country?"

"Until the 15th of July."

He stamps your passport, hands it back to you. "Welcome, sir," he says.

He signals for you to move on, and then you exhale a huge sigh of relief.

The worst part is taken care of, you can now meet up with your classmates. The congenial camaraderie amongst your classmates eases the transition between the two countries. Besides jet lag, you can all see that the entire trip has been quite harmless. The grandiose greenway in the airport beneficially leads you to the bus that is awaiting you at the outside curve.

And so, you enter inside the heart of the effervescent green land.

Walking out of the airport, you experience this vivid world through a new set of eyes. The landscape appears as if God had kissed the land. The clouds vibrantly shine through the rays of sunshine with creamy white colors. The grass is green with a sparkling glaze. The colors do not assault your eyes or trap you in a compressed, zig-zagged line. The air is crisp and fresh, void of any odorous contamination.

You and your classmates enter the bus for your trip to the residence halls. You all sit in your woolly seats. You shoot the breeze with your friends and relax while enjoying the ride.

The bus travels at a steady pace, allowing you the opportunity to appreciate the ambience of the downtown area. It rolls through Grafton Street, where you see an ocean of tourists sailing upon polished bricks. It is then that you realize that American food chains have also spread across the Atlantic.

You are amazed to see buildings familiar from your

home country appear right in front of you. One of them is a McDonald's standing out with a shiny green and silver palette, not red and yellow like in America. The restaurants are two stories high and ten yards wide. You would think that three elephants could fit inside them. You just can't believe that this country has larger versions of American fast food restaurants in their culture. It's like you are still at home.

Alongside the restaurants are houses that are identical but each with a distinct feature. They have colorful doors, or rather a blossoming rainbow of Georgian gateways. These doors signal the uniqueness that exist inside the brick-layered houses and across the downtown landscape. White, red, blue, yellow, green: a variety of colors stand out from uniformly texturized buildings.

The buildings are not surrounded by street names. You cannot see any green signs at intersections. Lifting yourself up a little, you look around for street signs. There are none in sight.

The street names are in a blue rectangle on the side of the buildings. The blue signs each have two lines. At the bottom, there is simple English that describes the specific street. On top of the English names are a couple of words that look similar to the English name but are confusing. The new world familiarizes you with the language. Street becomes sráid. Road becomes bóthar. You don't know how to pronounce any of the words at the top, and you become a mearbhall.

These differences place you in culture shock. Everything is misplaced because they are not what you usually visualize. You capture this scattered imagery from your bus seat, and the detail leaves you familiar but bemused.

Your heartbeat is slow, and your shoulders are sleeping. You can feel the warm welcomes for your soul from afar. From what seemed to be about to turn for the worst, your life is about to expect the best. Travelling in a fantasy land, strange but familiar, will help create stories for yourself and your world.

S.T.A.Y.

Faviola Santana

Click, click. The parked Volvo security alarm sounds. “Rox, Dad’s home!” Emmett warns. Roxanne quickly stuffs her mattress. “Where’s dinner?” their father exclaims. Without walking downstairs Emmett yells, “Fridge! Mom made lasagna!” Their father walks to the fridge and takes the sealed lasagna out. After almost inhaling the food, relieved that his sixteen-hour shift is over, the exhausted father walks upstairs and gets into bed. Roxanne and Emmett both exhale with relief. Their father wouldn’t be bothering them tonight.

They wake to the smell of pancakes and syrup. “Mom!” they think. Pushing and elbowing each other down the stairs to the kitchen, their smiles disappear as they see an unrecognizable discolored face. It’s almost as if the right side of her face can’t decide to be blue or black. He did it again. Emmett feels a kick in his stomach and Roxanne loses her appetite. There’s no point in asking, she’ll lie to not make the situation worse. They finish their breakfast, thank their mother, and leave for school.

An awkward silence fills the car. Emmett doesn’t want Rox to see him cry. Pulling up to her middle school, he breaks the silence, “Don’t worry about it. Please try to have a good day,” he says, forcing a smile. “Thanks, Em. Oh, I almost forgot. Becca is giving me a ride home,” she lies. “Alright, text me when you get there,” he responds.

As he watches Rox enter the building, Emmett’s

eyes swell with tears which fall down his scarlet-freckled cheeks. He doesn’t know how much longer he can take it. Especially for Rox, it’s so hard for her to go through all of this. He decides. “No more.” He accelerates out of the parking lot. For once in a long time, he knows where he is going.

Emmett secretly watches his father arriving, his father’s exit from the gigantic red firetruck. He remembers his dad putting him on top of that same truck when he was five. Things were different then. As he watches his father and his team prepare for another drill, an idea pops in his head. He turns on the car and drives forward.

Later that night Em and Roxanne’s mother hears a knock on the door. It’s Ronny, their father’s best friend. “I’m so sorry, Anne,” he whispers. “What do you mean? Why? What’s... going on Ron?” she asks. “The house fire was too strong. We... we told him not to go in... but there was a child inside. He managed to save the little boy but by... by the time the ambulances got there... it... was too late for him. I’m sorry Anne, I should have stopped him but he insisted...” Ron rambles on. She closes the door, not letting Ron finish. She doesn’t care, she doesn’t think twice or deny the feeling. She doesn’t feel remorse, or sadness, those words aren’t in her vocabulary anymore. But for once in her life she doesn’t feel scared and vulnerable.



Las ratas callejeras / The Street Rats

Taylor Claman

PRIMER ACTO

Escena dos

Viviana cruza el escenario. La parte donde quedan Lupe y Miriam se oscurece y ahora Viviana se encuentra con un hombre que está tratando de hablar con Naiara.

VIVIANA: ¿Qué querés pelotudo?

(Girando la cabeza y notando el hombre de edad mediana con sus labios regados al oído de Naiara).

Oye, chamuyero. ¿Qué pensás que estás haciendo? Mi novia no quiere escuchar a tu mierda, así que ¡basta! ¡Andá!

CHAMUYERO: Tranqui, minita.

VIVIANA: No soy minita.

CHAMUYERO *(irritado)*: Piba. No me parece que sea tu novia. Obviamente no sabés que hace para ganar la guita.

VIVIANA: No me importa qué hace cuando no estoy con ella pero ahora estoy con ella.

(Mira a la piba. No puede leer su expresión).

Y quiero que te vayas.

CHAMUYERO *(inclinando sus repugnantes dientes tan cerca de los labios de Viviana como la distancia lo permitía sin tocarse)*: ¿O qué? ¿Me frotarás la ropa sucia, puta callejera?

VIVIANA: O llamo a mi padre que trabaja en una patota local y él puede cortarte los huevos y dejarte agonizando para que las ratas callejeras sucias se alimenten de tu carne podrida hasta el día de tu muerte.

(Toma la mano de Naiara).

CHAMUYERO: Chanta.

(Su mano se cerne frente a su pene).

VIVIANA: Probame, salame.

(Con la otra mano, busca su bolsillo y saca su cuchillo, que sostiene con fuerza con su borde plano contra su pierna).

Mi papá me enseñó cómo hacerlo. Puedo mostrarte si querés.

CHAMUYERO: No, está bien.

(Mirando al cuchillo y luego a las chicas).

Me estaba yendo.

(Medio se inclina ante ellas y se aleja).

Viviana hace un ruido a medio camino entre un gruñido de disgusto y una risita ante la cobardía del chamuyero. Se gira para sonreírle a Naiara pero está mirándose las manos entrelazadas. Viviana lo suelta rápidamente.

VIVIANA *(murmurando)*: Suerte.

(Comienza a regresar en la dirección de donde venía.)

NAIARA: Mi heroína.

VIVIANA *(dándose la vuelta)*: ¿Qué?

NAIARA: ¿No te gusta? ¿Preferirías mi amor?

VIVIANA *(sonriendo y sonrojándose)*: Sos divertida.

NAIARA: Ya lo sé.

(Caminando hacia ella).

Me gusta tu valentía...

(Ella arrastrando sus dedos a lo largo del brazo de Viviana.)

Pero él no estaba equivocado.

VIVIANA: ¿Sobre tu trabajo?

(Mirando a la mano de ella).

Me doy cuenta de esto.

NAIARA: ¿Y aún creés que deberías protegerme?

(Su mano se detiene entre el hombro izquierdo de Viviana y la clavícula mientras cruza frente a ella.)

VIVIANA: Claro.

(Susurra mirándole con atracción).

Porque sos muy joven.

(Quita la mano de Naiara y la deja caer).

NAIARA: No soy tan joven.

VIVIANA *(burlándose)*: ¿Y cuántos años tenés? ¿Doce?

NAIARA *(mirándola con gesto molesto)*: Quince. Q-U-I-N-C-E. Quince.

VIVIANA *(riéndose)*: Sos joven. Es obvio.

NAIARA: ¡No es obvio!

(Mirando por encima de su atuendo: medias, botas con gruesas plataformas, una pollera corta y un abrigo de piel).

No puede ser. Esta es la ropa de mi madre.

VIVIANA *(riendo más fuerte)*: También, obvio, boluda. Querés parecer como adulta pero se ve como la ropa de una viejita.

NAIARA: Comé mierda, dejame....

(Ella se aleja.)

VIVIANA: ¡Espera!

(Dirigiéndose hacia Naiara.)

Estaba bromeando, te lo juro.

Naiara se quita la chaqueta de los hombros y se inclina para atar los cordones de sus botas. Viviana se despide con un gesto y le da la espalda y se aleja.

ACT ONE

Scene Two

Viviana is already gone. She cuts her way through the vendors and crouches by the stairs of the local workers while they fix the overhang of an ice cream parlor. She makes her way through the whirlwind of tourists until La Diabla's holler can no longer follow her. Then she sits down.

(She hears what sounds like a window cleaner's squeal as he tries to clean the rest of the liquid off a dirty window, or what could quite possibly be a man making kissy noises behind her.)

VIVIANA: ¿Qué querés, pelutado?

(Turning her head and noticing the middle-aged man with his lips to the ear of a 15-year-old girl.)

Che, chamuyero.

(Walking as tall as her 16-year-old body can allow, shooing him away.)

What do you think you're doing? My girlfriend does not want to listen a tu mierda. That is enough! ¡Andá!

CHAMUYERO: Tranquí, minita.

VIVIANA: I am not a little girl.

CHAMUYERO: *(rolling his eyes)* Minita. If she's your girlfriend, and I do not think she is, obviously you do not know what she does to earn la gaita.

VIVIANA: I do not care what she does when I am not with her.

(Looking at the younger girl. She can not read her expression.)

But I am with her now. And I want you to leave.

CHAMUYERO: *(tilting his disgusting teeth as close to Viviana's lips as the distance allows without touching)* Or what? Will you rub dirty clothes on me, street whore?

VIVIANA: Or I will call my father, who works in a local gang, so he can cut off your balls and leave you for the dirty street rats to feast on your rotten flesh.

(She takes the hand of the child prostitute.)

CHAMUYERO: Chanta. You are lying through your teeth.

(He says but his hand hovers in front of his penis.)

VIVIANA: Probame, salame.

(With the other hand, she reaches inside her pocket and pulls out a knife. She holds it tightly and presses its flat edge against his leg.)

My dad taught me how to do it. I can show you if you want.

CHAMUYERO: No, no. That is fine.

(Looking at the knife and then at the teenage girls.)

I was just leaving.

(He half bows before them and walks away.)

Viviana makes a noise halfway between a scoff of disgust and a giggle at the cowardice of the man. She turns to smile at the other girl, who she finds is looking curiously at their intertwined hands. Viviana releases it quickly.

VIVIANA: *(muttering)* Good luck.

(She begins to return in the direction she came from.)

NAIARA: My hero.

VIVIANA: *(turning around)* What?

NAIARA: Do you not like that?

(The girl comes down from where she was sitting on the bench.)

Would you prefer mi amor?

VIVIANA: *(smiling and blushing)* You are funny.

NAIARA: I know.

(Walking towards her)

I like your courage...

(She drags her fingers along the length of Viviana's arm.)

But he was not wrong.

VIVIANA: About your work?

(Looking at the girl's hand)

I realize this.

NAIARA: And you still thought you should protect me?

(Her hand stops between the left shoulder of Viviana and the clavicle.)

VIVIANA: Sure.

(Whispering while her eyes run quickly from the girl's intimate lips towards the hair falling past her thick eyebrows and finally landing her gaze on her dark eyes, halting her stare)

Porque sos muy joven.

NAIARA: I'm not a little girl.

VIVIANA: *(mocking)* And how old are you? Twelve?

NAIARA: *(insulted)* Fifteen. FIF-TEEN. Fifteen.

VIVIANA: *(gesturing towards the girl's clothes, laughing)* Joven, I said. It's obvious.

NAIARA: It's not obvious!

(Looking over her outfit: stockings, boots with thick platforms, a short skirt and a fur coat)

It can't be. These are my mother's clothes.

VIVIANA: *(laughing louder)* Also, obvious. Boluda, you want to look like an adult pero se ve como la ropa de una viejita.

NAIARA: Comé mierda, dejame....

(She turns and walks away.)

VIVIANA: Wait!

(She takes a few steps towards Naiara.)

I was kidding, ¡te juro!

Naiara looks from where she stands on the corner, takes off her jacket from her shoulders and leans down to tie the laces of her boots. Viviana nods towards her, turns her back and walks away.

The Struggles of Early Morning Runs

Christopher Franke

Suddenly, I awoke to the obnoxious buzzing of my alarm. Working as quickly as possible, I grabbed my phone and stopped the noise, and then swaddled myself in my fuzzy blankets. As I settled back into the warmth, a ray of early morning sunlight peeked through the icicles hanging on the roof. I should go for a run, I thought. As I checked the weather I realized what kind of torture I was facing. It was a frigid 26 degrees outside in the middle of February. With memories of Chicago fresh in my mind, I slowly gathered my thoughts and sat up. What a mistake to wake up this early so I could fit a run in before class. As I struggled to get out of bed, my warm toes touched the cold floor of my bedroom. The contact sent a freezing shock from my toes all the way through my body and to my head, as if I had been kissed by a dementor. Shocked, I recoiled and returned to bed. My mind was swimming. Sleep was more important. If I stayed in bed until class, I could get another hour. If I got up for a run,



I would have to physically endure the brutal arctic blast as I stepped outside, but what would I gain? There were only seven more months before the Chicago Marathon. Would it hurt to delay training for a day? I recalled the experience of suffering through my first marathon. I'd vowed to never struggle like that again, and so I decided I would train. I would get out of bed and go for a run.

In my mind, I was in Chicago, Illinois on October 8, 2017 at 7:30am. Adrenaline was racing through my body as I prepared for the longest run I had ever attempted in my life, 26.2 miles. The first wave of runners had just crossed the starting line and I had 30 minutes before I did the same. Surrounded by a sea of people preparing to try for the same goal, I felt alone. I knew nobody. I was about to embark on a journey by myself. The next thing I knew I was crossing the start line with 15,000 other runners. The most difficult part of the race was my lack of experience. As I came up to the first water stop, there were endless tables piled with cups full of water and Gatorade. I realized that I did not know how to drink from a cup while running. As I attempted to take my first sip, the water splashed all over my face and down my black jersey. But, by the end of what seemed like a never ending first five miles, I had figured out how to pinch the top of the cup to leave a sliver open to sip my drink. This was my first of many struggles in my first marathon experience.

As the race progressed, my struggles did too. Many things confused me. Around mile thirteen, volunteers began shoving squares of cardboard in my face containing what appeared to be a half-melted popsicle. I didn't understand why anyone would give a half-melted popsicle to a person trying to complete a marathon. Did they want me to drink the slush to keep cool while attempting this enormous feat? Then I realized what it was. The cardboard was a plate for Vaseline and the popsicle stick was to spread it. The Vaseline was to prevent my clothes from rubbing my skin away. I could have used that, but I was too far past. I was not going to run back to grab a plate. By the time I got to mile fifteen, the blistering sun was beating down on my back and into my face as I weaved through the course. I could feel my skin getting warm as it does before I get sunburnt. Why had I not listened to my mother when she told me to put sunscreen on? Then I was passing another water stop where I saw a plastic kiddie pool with little duckies on it. I imagined taking a break and splashing around in the water. As I got closer, I could see that the pool was full of sponges. Volunteers were handing them to the runners. As they tried to hand one to me, I gave them a confused look and continued running. As I dodged sponges on the ground, I wondered

what they were for. Was I supposed to drink the water from it? Had they run out of cups? Had I not been informed of a water fight ahead? Again, I figured it out too late. The sponges were to wipe the salt deposits off my face and arms and cool me down.

By mile twenty, I was beyond exhausted. I was concerned that if I stopped running I would be unable to start again. Around that point in the race, my entire left leg cramped. All at once, mid-stride, my hamstring, calf, shin and foot contracted. I stumbled over to the side of the road and attempted to massage the muscles. The pain was excruciating. I realized I was no longer sweating and my body was encrusted with dry salt. That should have worried me, as it is a major symptom of heat stroke, but I was more concerned with the cramping. Eventually the muscles released their death grip and most of the pain subsided. Within a few minutes I was back running with only remnants of pain from the cramp. I began to think about why I had a massive cramp. I figured it could be many things – the hot weather, not eating enough before the race, not drinking enough during the race, or not training enough.

Clambering out of bed, I limped over to my closet to put on my running pants and a sweatshirt. I was starting to wake up from the dead. I crept into the bathroom and prepared myself for the freezing outdoors. I laced up my neon green running shoes, grabbed my headphones, and tiptoed down the stairs. It was impossible to sneak around the house, as every step I took elicited an echoing squeak. My three roommates could hear me as if I were playing hopscotch with all the people on our block. I glanced out the window. All I could see was ice and snow; just looking at it made me feel like an ice cube.

Opening my back door, I felt a wall of cold air hit my face. My clothing was not very warm because I was expecting to warm up during my run. The wind sent chills through my whole body. I shivered and finally gained the courage to take the first step outside. Every step caused a loud crunch from the snow piled up on our stairs or a crack from the ice. Another gust of wind blasted in my face causing me to reconsider my choice. I finally reached the end of the sidewalk and the beginning of my run. My first steps were slow and cautious, but once I got going, the cold seemed to melt away.

Then it happened. I hurdled a snow bank to get across the road and landed on a smooth, black sheet of ice. My forefoot hit first and the next thing I knew I was on the ground. Pain shot through my back. I lay there for a minute. How would I get up with this pain? How would I finish this

short training run? As I sat up, the world spun around me like I was on a very fast carousel. Eventually the pain subsided a little and the world stopped spinning. I got to my feet and tried to decide whether I should walk home or continue my run. *Then I remembered the pain and agony of the first marathon. I remember hitting the wall, having no energy left in my body, and it was only mile eighteen out of 26. My legs felt like jelly and would not move. I do not recall miles twenty through twenty-four. They were so painful my brain blocked them from my memory.*

I decided there was only one way to go and that was forward. I would continue this run even if it caused me more pain than the marathon I had suffered through. *My entire body was pain. I understood how Pheidippides felt. I thought I was dying as I crossed the finish line.* As I began again, the pain subsided. I focused less on the pains of my body and more on the beautiful park that I was running through. The trail twisted and turned, eventually finding the bank of a river. The river was calm, only ripples from the wind. The wind no longer chilled my bones, but gave me the extra boost to go faster. The grass was coated in a thin layer of white frost that crunched every time I stepped off the trail, a faint reminder of the freezing temperatures. The beautiful thing about running is the runner's high.

The world melts away as your feet rhythmically beat on the pavement. All life's problems—my poor exam grades, my stressful workload, my reckless roommate—melt away as the miles go by. *The feeling transported me back to Chicago as I remembered the world moving past me as if I was stationary.* Just as my problems melted away, the world melted away. It was just me and the trail.

I found myself back at my run-down house. The white paint flaking off the walls and the rotting, weather-aged window frames just barely served their purpose, but this was my house, a roof over my head and a safe place to sleep, despite the wasps that we found every once and a while. As I stepped back inside I found myself imagining the future: Chicago, Illinois on October 7, 2018. The marathon goes perfectly. I fully utilize all the water stops, the cardboard plate with Vaseline, and the sponges. Most importantly, I have no cramps. I cross the finish line with a time of 3:44:59, crushing my goal of 4:00:00. I finish so quickly that my friends and family are not waiting at the finish line to celebrate. I strike an awesome pose for the cameras as I cross the finish line. Next thing I knew I was trying to creep upstairs again. Each step reminded me that I had accomplished something that nobody else in this house had done today.

The Relation between Parental Autonomy Support and Child Academic Achievement

Maggie Yuqing Zou

This article synthesized relevant literature in the field of Educational Psychology to explore the relation between parental autonomy support (PAS) and child academic achievement. Through reviewing and analyzing documents published in the United States from 1980s to 2010s, the author concluded that PAS has a positive relation with academic achievement. This article is composed of five parts: My Question, Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion.

My Question

What is the relation between parental autonomy support and child academic achievement?

Introduction

Nowadays, the topic of student academic achievement has become more and more popular in the field of Educational Psychology. Academic achievement refers to students' achievement, accomplishments and performance in their learning processes. Practitioners and researchers continuously seek factors that could enhance students' achievements, because they play an important role in learners' future development (Diaconu-Gherasim & Mairean, 2016).

One dominant explanation is motivational factors. It is widely accepted that autonomous motivation results in greater academic achievement. The term "autonomous motivation" was originally coined in Deci and Ryan's Self-determination Theory. Compared with controlled motivation, autonomous motivation refers to behaving

with a full sense of volition and choice (Deci & Ryan, 2008). According to Self-determination Theory, individuals have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 1991), and the need for autonomy is the one that directly relates to autonomous motivation. Once the need for autonomy is satisfied, the autonomous motivation is instigated and sustained.

Many researchers explored the effects of autonomy-supportive versus controlling influences on motivation (Deci et al., 1991). Self-determination Theory interpreted those effects as social contexts, which contain external events, interpersonal contexts, classroom climates, and home contexts (Deci et al., 1991). Various social contextual factors either support people's autonomy or control their behavior, and autonomy-supportive ones are defined as those that encourage the process of choice and the experience of autonomy (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

Parental autonomy support belongs in the category of home contextual factors. It is defined as the degree to which parents encourage their children's independent problem-solving (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989) and experimentation (Vasquez et al., 2016), provide opportunities to make choices and participate in decisions (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Vansteenkiste et al., 2005; Vasquez et al., 2016), acknowledge children's perspectives (Vasquez et al., 2016), minimize using guilt- and shame-inducing tactics (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005) and controlling language and contingencies (Vasquez et al., 2016), versus externally dictate outcomes, and motivate achievement through punitive disciplinary

techniques, pressure, or controlling rewards (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Autonomy-supportive parents communicate with their children in an equal way, and always explain the reasons to children when they ask them to do something. Specifically, in the academic domain, they emphasize the learning process and not the characteristics or abilities of the child to do the work (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Autonomy-supportive parents find it important that their children no longer rely on them for advice and support but are able to stand on their own feet, act independently, and attain individuality (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

Methods

The author probed into research studies and meta-analyses that examined the relations between PAS and academic achievement conducted in the United States, and concluded the following observations.

Participants

Most research samples were selected from pools of middle and high school students, while the rest of them were from elementary school and college students (Vasquez et al., 2016).

Measures

Parental Autonomy Support. PAS can be measured in many ways, including through interviews with parents, and self-reporting by either the child or parent. The majority of samples reported either only the mother or both parents as agents of support, while the rest reported just the father (Vasquez et al., 2016). As for parent interviews, take the one conducted by Grolnick and Ryan (1989) as an example. Each parent was interviewed separately for approximately one hour by a two-member team consisting of an interviewer and an observer. They were asked open-ended questions about their support of their children's autonomy, both at home and at school. After interviews, they were rated on a 5-point Likert-type ordinal scale that consists of three subscales: values autonomy, autonomy-oriented techniques, and nondirectiveness. As for self-reports, they were mainly in the form of questionnaires. Researchers generally believed that it matters who is reporting on the autonomy support, and self-reporting by parents is not as objective as that by children (Vasquez et al., 2016). For accuracy, the result of the child's reporting is called child perception of parental autonomy support. A typical self-report by children was designed by Grolnick,

Ryan and Deci (1991), and contained items describing various aspects of parental autonomy support, like "some mothers are always telling their children what to do but other mothers like their children to decide for themselves what to do." Children evaluated their mothers and fathers separately on a 4-point scale.

Child Academic Achievement. Academic achievement has a variety of indicators which can be gathered from teachers or school registers, including performance on a specific academic task, non-standardized test scores, standardized test scores, course grades, GPA, homework completion, and homework grades (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Vasquez et al., 2016).

Results

Correlational research approaches that belong to the quantitative research methodology were applied to investigate the relation between PAS and child academic achievement. According to Gay and Airasian (2000), the degree of correspondence between the two variables was measured by a correlation coefficient, which is a number between -1.00 and +1.00. A positive correlation means that as one variable increases, the other also increases, while a negative coefficient means that when one variable increases the other decreases.

A large body of research suggested that parental autonomy support was positively related to child academic achievement (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Grolnick, Ryan & Deci, 1991; Deci et al., 1991; Strage & Brandt, 1999; Vasquez et al., 2016; Diaconu-Gherasim & Mairean, 2016). In Grolnick and Ryan's study (1989), for example, researchers concluded that the children of autonomy-supportive parents got better course grades and did better on standardized achievement tests. In Vasquez et al.'s meta-analysis (2016), the weighted average correlation was $r=0.11$ under a fixed-error model and $r=0.12$ under a random-error model.

Also, results indicated that the strength of the relation between PAS and academic achievement was stronger when PAS was reflective of both parents, rather than of just mothers or just fathers (Vasquez et al., 2016). For instance, in Grolnick and Ryan's study (1989), parental (the average of mother and father ratings), mother and father ratings were all significantly correlated with children's course grades, whereas only the parental rating was significantly associated with their standardized achievement. In addition, the relation between the two variables was

greater when the focus of parental autonomy support was general rather than specific to academics (Vasquez et al., 2016).

Furthermore, when it comes to comparing the degree of correlations according to students' academic levels, it turned out that autonomy support may have a stronger relation with their academic achievement in middle school and later into high school and college than they did during the elementary education (Vasquez et al., 2016). Additionally, from a longitudinal perspective, children with negative perceptions of confidence had greater improvements in academic achievement when their parents used an autonomy supportive style of involvement than high-achieving children (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

Discussion

Now the initial question—"What is the relation between parental autonomy support and child academic achievement?"—is solved. The brief answer is that they are positively related. However, there are some details worth discussing here.

Firstly, understanding who is doing the autonomy support is critical (Vasquez et al., 2016). Unfortunately, researchers often assessed the autonomy support of mothers exclusively and assumed that fathers' support was carried out in the same way, or they simply did not take into account how the autonomy support of mothers and fathers coexisted (Simons & Conger, 2007). But the degree and kind of autonomy support given to children may be quite different between mothers and fathers.

Secondly, there is a distinction between autonomy support self-reported by parents and by children, which can largely influence the results of studying its relation to child academic achievements. One noticeable finding was reported by Grolnick, Ryan and Deci (1991), who found that interview ratings and self-reports of paternal autonomy support do not correlate significantly with children's perceptions of their fathers' autonomy support. It seemed that most of the research studies did not consider much about that difference, because they did not refer to any reason why they chose one method instead of the other.

Finally, according to Vasquez et al.'s meta-analysis (2016), parental autonomy support seemed to increase all types of motivation, including extrinsic motivation. It was surprising that PAS was positively related to children's

extrinsic motivation about as strongly as it was related to their autonomous motivation. This novel finding conflicted with Self-determination Theory's hypothesis as well as many previous studies' results that autonomy-supportive events and contexts should be positively related with intrinsic and autonomous forms of motivation and unrelated or negatively related to extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1988; Deci & Ryan, 2008).

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What I Know to Be True

Linda M. J. Muller

Helen wore pink until Dar died.
After that only purple.
For eighteen years, she told me:
After I'm gone, don't forget. I loved Dar until the day that I died.
And she did.

But no one gets it right all the time.

With his typewriter
at the kitchen table,
Dar, cigarette in one hand,
watched Helen knead
and bake her family heirloom bread,
and wrote the recipe down for the first time —

Blue mimeograph copies of Helen's Holiday Bread
on pastel paper:

*Helen got it from her mother Mae,
who got it from her mother Liz,
who got it from her mother Rose.
But Lizzie's mother was Ellen.*

Sweet brown bread:
heavy with dates,
biological debts,
and idealized roots.

No one gets it right all the time.

Turbid with oil and absolution, covering
our crops, our homes, our graves, water
comes in sideways in the wind winding past the grave
sacramental bread and whiskey
split for sharing at the wake of their son
whose last day was also his first.

From the front pew at Saint Joe's,
descendants of one of the other four children who outlived Dar
and Helen, we anoint one mystical vine and its branches.
We are heartily sorry; detest all our sins.
We examine our grievous quaking faults; search the desert
sky and await a resurrection.

The common ordeals and personal tragedies,
crack open the crust of abundance for us to see the purified silver
and gold of new generations, the firmament of family albums.

Or maybe that's wrong too. How will we ever know?

We structure our beliefs around
bricks and stone and stained glass
and Irish eyes, blue skin, black coffee,
big feet, hairy backs, broken arms,
Dad's smile, Grandma's diamond ring,
holiday bread and a photo of the mimeographed recipe for it,
a bicycle spoke bracelet,
testicular cancer, breast cancer,
granite stones with blank dates.
Dates filled in.

Clay feet.

Copper angels.

Stone wings.

Plans for Thanksgiving leave time
for leavening and baking, stuffing,
cookies and bread,
the family photo, football,
dirty dishes,

naps,

a walk to the park.

We citizens of parentage and wedlock, adoption, brotherhood, and sisterhood.
We ardent apostles of ancestral lands,
We inherit the potions and proverbs comprising a theology of family festivities and movable feasts,
where
we practice and test fondness and devotion.

By Easter, Helen's bread
will have risen. Baked and sliced
for sandwiches of leftover ham.

For one breath, we've gotten it right.

Reflecting our truth and love, our faults
and flaws, our grudges and glories,
descendants and ancestors, the giver
and the gift, what we have done and what we have failed
to receive,
each morning moon washes bright our biographies
but leaves marks on the binding. Lest we forget
keepsakes and heirlooms —

a bedroom set, gold flatware, Dar's
watercolors, Helen's
rosary, missed
embraces, calcified
tears, tipsy denials, depression
glass, gray hair at seventeen, arthritis,
perfect handwriting, china dolls,
a saint's name, an aunt's name, the name of a lost son,
one brown fleck in gray-green eyes, and the dough
and butter stains on
Mom's first replica of
Dar's version of
Helen's Holiday Bread.

These sacred reminders, raised scars
for us to touch and tend
and never forfeit.

Can this be true?

Compilation of all our forebears,
each of us always more and less than our chromosomes and customs:

The habits and heritage
of warriors, sinners, and snakes,
of carpenters, farmers, and saints,
of seamstresses, teachers, and nuns,
of shopkeepers, accountants, and priests,
of janitors, wardens, and maids,
are bygones to examine, weigh, and pardon.

I dig into past transgressions of long ago parents of parents of people I never knew. Watching me judging them from heaven or hell, do they judge in return as I forge my own failings and fame? If I cannot make them demigods, neither can I make them daemons.

If this is true, have mercy.

Accolens eleison.
Amicis eleison.
Familia eleison.

In the depths of faith tested by the rising of timeless heartache:

The sacrifice of a mortal love sprung from flames
of fatal flaws and incurable humanness –
Radiating recognition of each new absence –
Laden in light of ancient kin –
Brimming in western dawn –
We ascend the bluff edged in ether and moss
to daughter our days. Our misted celestial elders
veiled in twilight dreams crescendo into breadth of heaven.

He Was My Friend

Hannah Sinclair

I don't consider it rape. I did give consent—eventually. Throughout my life, I've constantly been told to not give into peer pressure, but I have always associated this with saying no to drugs and alcohol. I understood that being pressured into doing things you don't want can be damaging to your self-worth and overall mental health. Nevertheless, sadly, I gave into the pressure to have sex with a man. I felt guilty about saying no because I was unconsciously participating in a social system where women should please men and men are entitled to sex.

My phone vibrates with a message from him: *Please come hang out tonight.* I'm conflicted. It's almost 2AM on a Saturday, and my only options are to stay in bed and miss out on whatever is going down, or sneak out and have him pick me up. Do I want to have fun? Yes. Do I want to get in trouble? No.

My relationship with Kaleb wasn't anything special. We were friends. We fooled around a little bit in our freshman year, but nothing more. So why not? This was an opportunity to get a little drunk and possibly smoke some weed at a small gathering.

When we get there, I take off my shoes and enter a completely dark and silent house,
"Where's everyone at?"

"Oh, they're all passed out downstairs." This should have been my first warning that the night was not going to go how I expected. Where was the party?

"Well... is there anything I can have to drink?"
He giggles like a child, "Most of it is gone already!"
"I thought you said we could smoke and stuff." I am getting annoyed at this point. Why am I even here?
"I'll go look."

Kaleb hands me a beer and we make our way over to the couch. I take a couple of drinks and thank him, but instead of sitting down he just looks at me. I furrow my brow, "What?" He takes me by surprise and kisses me. I push him away and heat rushes to my face, "What?! No!"

Slowly, Kaleb inches his way towards me, and I inch my way backwards. Our chests are touch when the back of my calves hit the ottoman. He lifts my chin up with his hand. He says, "You had to know this was going to happen; you didn't think I actually meant just "hang out" did you?"

I forcefully shove him away and for the second time I tell the guy I thought was my friend "Stop it." He sighs and sits down next to me and takes another swig from his bottle. I can feel the tension in the air as he slowly begins to grow impatient with me. I scoot several inches away from him and hold myself close, hands in lap and legs crossed. I stare at my enclosed hands and shake my leg. Is this my fault?

Did I lead him on? Should I feel bad for saying no? The worst part is the humiliation I feel. I thought Kaleb liked me as a friend. As a person. I thought we were going to just hang out.

We eventually move to the master bedroom. I know this is a bad idea, but he was so eager to, so I do it anyway. We get comfortable on the bed and turn on the first episode of *Game of Thrones*. I don't even look at him. I stare completely forward, hoping he gets the hint. He doesn't. He puts his hand on my thigh and suddenly his breath is on my neck. I want to cry. I want to scream. I want to run away. But instead of bolting out of the room, I continue to stare at the television. He slowly begins infecting my neck with kisses; my stomach wrenches with every revolting kiss he plants. His hand is in between my thighs now, but I manage to get out "Kaleb, please stop."

He sighs exasperatedly, mutters some words that I don't catch, and leans back against the headboard of the bed. I can feel heat radiating off him. The knots in my stomach hurt from the feeling that is building up inside of me. Guilt eats me up as I come to the conclusion that it is my fault he is upset; I must be responsible for leading him on. Eventually, I give in. I let him do what he wants. Afterwards I am disgusted with myself. I still am unbearably disturbed by the memory.

Looking back, I realize that I was terrified of what would have happened if I kept denying him what he wanted. It's not that I thought he would force himself on me. But I was scared of losing him as a friend, and I was guilt-tripped into sexual activity because of the unconscious internalization of the belief that, as a woman, I should "be nice" and try to make other people happy. From a young age, women and men are exposed to a social program in which different sexual roles are taught. Women tend to be told to cross their legs when sitting so they don't disturb other people while men can sit as they please (Guessan, 3). Guessan Germain explains, "Because her [female] physique does not allow her to execute some tasks that require the use of force, the woman is wrongly and purposely considered as the weaker sex" (1). This internalization of being inferior created a space where I, as a woman, felt that I needed to

please my superior, a man.

Additionally, I never thought about why this man was so persistent. His constant pressure on me to have sex came from his assumption that our friendship meant my "no" was negotiable. This assumption is part of the normalization of rape culture by the media and other every day messages men get about what it means to be a man. Kaleb was a victim of hegemonic masculinity, a term coined by Raewyn Conwell (Jewkes). Hegemonic masculinity is "a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways" (para. 3). The media's portrayal of masculinity is sold with traits of dominance and violence against women. The *New York Times* states in 2011, 96.7 percent of American households with a television, so early childhood exposure to such stereotypes is common.

Because I felt responsible for maintaining our friendship and making Kaleb happy I gave consent to activities that I did not want. These actions have haunted me for years with feelings of self-hatred. But after looking back on the reasons why I gave in and why my friend was so persistent, I have realized that we both unknowingly internalized society's expectations for our gender. I am hoping that my story will help other women realize that they do not owe men anything. I hope no other girl, or even man, feels pressured to accept unwanted sexual intercourse. I hope our society learns that no means no, and it is not negotiable on any terms. Most of all, I hope the social system I fell victim to will change so that men and women will be treated equally.

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The Top of the Mountain

Annamarie Dotzler

DAY 1

The sun beat down on the car, creating rippling heat waves against the metal frame. It was scorching.

They had driven by flat, featureless land for hours, a blank sheet of paper stretching as far as the eye could see. Suddenly, Nadia sat straighter in her seat, eyes scrunching up as she peered more closely out the passenger window. Her hazel eyes lit up, a slow smile breaking across her face, sunshine after a rainstorm. Mountains! She could just barely see the peaks of mountains, hazy smudges of gray from the distance, set against the wide, blue Montana sky.

She felt happiness surge up inside her, like water gurgling up in a hot spring. She hadn't seen a mountain, a real mountain, since she was five. Her family had taken a trip to Colorado, the state her parents had lived in for nine years. The rustic cabin in the woods, the chill fall air seeping through her jacket as she and her mom watched an elk grazing only feet away from their front door. Clutching her mom in terror as they posed for a picture on a rock in the middle of a rushing stream, her brown hair blowing in the mountain wind. Holding her dad's hand as they hiked one of the mountain trails, the smell of pine all around them.

Shaking. There was someone shaking her shoulder, someone saying her name quietly. "Nadia. Nadia, wake up."

"I'm awake," she murmured, feeling disorientated. Nadia didn't remember falling asleep. She opened her eyes groggily to see Alena still driving and the setting sun sending brilliant colored rays shooting across the land outside the car.

"I just wanted to let you know that we're almost there. We're about an hour away now," Alena said happily, pushing a strand of blonde hair out of her face. "Finally," Nadia sighed, stretching. "After being in a car for 12 hours, my butt wants a long break." She picked up Alena's phone, seeing a text from her cousin. "Alex says he can't wait to see us and to be extra careful driving through the mountains in the dark. The wolves are more active this time of year," she read. Alena snorted.

"Such a caring cousin," she said, rolling her eyes.

Alex was the reason they were going on this trip. Alena's cousin had lived in Bozeman, Montana for about six months now, and had been asking Alena nonstop to come visit his town and humble abode. Since they had a long summer break from medical school, Alena had agreed to take a week off and visit her cousin, asking Nadia if she wanted to tag along. So here she was. A week of vacation. No tests, no papers, no studying until 2:00am, no working, just relaxing in the great outdoors with friends. It couldn't get much better than that. Except if they found some good coffee. Coffee *would* make it even better. The last hour flew by, and soon they were pulling into the driveway of a tan, red door condo as the first stars began dancing in the night sky.

Nadia got of the car with a groan, feeling vertebrae in her spine crack as she stretched out fully for the first time in hours. Rocks in the driveway crunched beneath her feet as she helped Alena unload their suitcases and backpacks from the trunk of the dusty gray Subaru. As they hauled their luggage to the door, a cheery yellow light switched

on in the entryway a second before the door swung open revealing the silhouette of a man. Alena shrieked as he raced down the steps and picked her up by her waist, luggage falling to either side. He swung her in a circle, laughing as she swatted at his shoulders. "Alex, put me down!" she said sternly, but Nadia could hear the smile in her voice. The scene reminded her of Christmases with her dad's side of the family. Her uncle scooping her up, pretending she was a guitar as he poked her stomach and made guitar sounds. Laughing, squirming, trying to get away, telling him she wasn't a guitar. Alex put Alena down, still chuckling. She slapped his arm one more time before turning to Nadia with a grin. "Nadia, I'd like to formally introduce you to my idiot cousin, Alex. Alex, Nadia."

Alex smiled as his eyes fixed on her for the first time. "Nice to meet you, Nadia. Welcome to the Wild West," he said cheerfully, shaking her hand. Nadia was slightly speechless as she looked up into his face. Temple length ebony hair framed a face tanned by hours out in the sun, softening a sturdy jawline. His eyes were lake blue, the color of the water when sunlight reflected off it. This was not the skinny boy grinning in the old pictures hanging in Alena's room. No. This was years of time, a growth spurt, and a healthy amount weightlifting if the ease with which he had lifted Alena was anything to go by. Alena snorted, picking up her scattered luggage. "The only wild part of the west is you, Alex."

They all laughed as Nadia replied, "It's nice to meet you, too. But tell me, is it true that you chased a brown bear up a tree once?"

He smirked, blue eyes crinkling. "Other than the fact it was a grizzly, yes. We had a slight disagreement over a berry bush, but we were able to work out our differences in the end."

"Come on, Alex," Alena complained with a hint of a smile in her voice. "We've been driving all day just to see you and your 'humble abode.' Are you not even going to invite us inside?" Alex laughed again before picking up Alena's backpack and some of Nadia's luggage, ignoring her objections. "Thank you for reminding me of my manners, cousin. Ladies, right this way," he said, leading them into the pleasant warmth of the house.

DAY 2

Nadia stretched as she woke up, looking sleepily at her cell phone. 8:36am, the screen read, a high of 85 degrees. Early. It was still so early. But it could be worse. For months she had woken up at 5:30am to get ready, go to class, study, and do more clinical rotations. Her days had sped by in a flash, one day ending only so another one could begin. But her best friend, her roommate, her alarm clock Alena Matly had always been by her side, ready to review for an exam or provide a much needed cup of coffee. She would never stop thanking God for putting



Alena in her life on a day in her 3rd year of medical school when she was ready to quit.

The heart monitor screamed at her, telling her that the patient was dying, that she was losing him. Other doctors and nurses raced into the room, joining her efforts to bring the man back. She was doing CPR, using all the

strength in her arms to get his heart to pump life-giving blood through his body. Being pulled away so they could shock him with the paddles. Being ushered out of the room, numb.

Time of death: 8:41am.

Alena had found her in the stairwell, crying. "I can't do this, Alena," she sobbed, hands clenched into fists. "I'm supposed to do this all day every day, watch people die, my patients. I can't. It hurts too much."

Alena sat down next to her, wrapping a comforting arm around her shoulders. "I'm sorry Nadia. I haven't seen

a patient die yet, but I know that you can't just hide in the stairwell. We're training to be doctors, and doctors save people. We feel pain because we're human, but we have to move past it so we can help all the other patients who depend on us."

It was what Nadia needed to hear. As they walked out of the stairwell together, Nadia knew she would hang onto

Alena's words like a lifeline in the days ahead.

AFTERNOON

When they had finally all gotten up (Alex was the last one to drag his butt out of bed) they had a leisurely breakfast. Alex not only brewed Fairtrade coffee (it had been delicious) but also made omelets, with ham, cheese and veggies, and provided fresh fruit, orange juice, and milk. After breakfast, they got ready to go for a hike before the sun really began baking the land.

Now they were one of the Montana trails. Alex had told them the trail was called the M trail because it wended past a gigantic M made out of white painted rocks on the mountainside, M for Montana State University. The trail began in the tree line, but was now exposed, trees replaced with small scrubs, wild grasses, and flowers. The view was already breathtaking. Nadia could see the part of the valley in which Bozeman nestled surrounded on all sides by mountain peaks. She could see pine trees stretching to the left, part of the downtown shopping district, and houses. Beautiful, lavish houses, with wide expanses of green grass. A pool, a 4 car garage, solar panels. The houses were beautiful, but couldn't top the natural beauty around them.

"Enjoying the view?" Nadia started. She hadn't realized that Alex had doubled back, letting Alena go on ahead. "Yes," Nadia said happily. "It's amazing. You can see so far into the distance. It's almost like you're seeing the entire world."

Alex chuckled. "I've thought that a lot myself. The higher up you are, the farther you can see, and the smaller your troubles seem." "But they never disappear completely," Nadia murmured quietly. Like medical school debt, piling up more and more every semester. Competition for residencies.

"No, they don't," Alex replied contemplatively. "But I think every trouble can be made better if you have a friend by your side. And views like this," he said, breathing in deeply, "are like friends themselves. They'll be there for you when you need them, and they won't run away from you."

"If the mountains started running away from me, I think I'd have more trouble than I'd know how to deal with," Nadia said jokingly.

Alex tipped his head back and laughed, the bright sunshine making his eyes a lighter blue, like the shallows of a tropical beach. "I agree with that. Well, we'd better catch up with Alena or she'll complain the whole way back that her guide up and abandoned her," Alex said, gesturing grandly to the trail ahead. "Ladies first. That way if you slip, I can break your fall."

"Or so that two people instead of one can tumble down the mountain," she said, but she went ahead, a warm feeling of happiness in her chest from being looked after.

They caught up to Alena quickly. She was leaning against a tree, shifting from foot to foot, the grasslands having shifted back to a forest of pine and maple trees. Nadia breathed in the smell of pine, listening to sounds of the forest muffled by the many pine needles coating the ground. The light had to fight more here to reach the forest floor, coming in rays between the branches, making dappled patterns and shapes. It was so peaceful, quiet. Like no one had ever walked here before. The path wound back and forth like a lazy river, flowing between the trunks of the trees. "It's peaceful, isn't it?" Alena said, coming up beside her. "If I could do all my homework here, I wouldn't mind it half as much. Well, maybe," she said, grinning, blonde hair flashing in a beam of sunlight.

"I'd definitely join you," Nadia said, smiling. Up ahead, she could see the tree line starting to thin out.

"Almost to the top," Alex said from behind them. "If you liked the last viewpoint you're going to love this one."

"I'm going ahead," Alena said with a grin. "You two go too slow. See you at the top." She raced ahead, leaving Nadia and Alex to trail behind.

"Was she this impatient when she was little, too?" Nadia said good-naturedly, nudging Alex's arm.

"It was worse, if you can imagine. Whenever all us cousins got hot chocolate at our family Christmas party, she always burned her tongue because she never waited for it to cool down."

"That sounds like her," Nadia said, laughing. As they reached the top of the incline, Nadia thought about Alena, how her impatience also made her kind of brave. She was always the first one to try something new, the one to plough through 60 lecture slides just to get to a part she enjoyed learning about. All her thoughts stopped dead as she saw what lay before her. A couple feet in front of her

was a steep drop off, but after that, mountains. She could see the entire ring of mountains surrounding Bozeman, white capped peaks stretching into the distance, could see the entire town laid out before her, like a child's play set, the trees like shrubs.

The only thing that made her pause was Alena. She wasn't there. Nadia, looked around, confused. She could only see the path they had come up from, and the plateau was too open for anyone to hide. She turned to Alex to find him looking over the drop off, eyes wide, face pale. She joined him, and as she saw what was below them, she felt her heart trying to beat out of her chest. Alena lay 12 feet below them, spread out on the rocky mountainside, unmoving. "Alena!" she screamed, terror freezing her in place. She couldn't breathe, was choking on nothing. She heard Alex calling 911 as she frantically climbed down the rocky face, down, down, down. Nadia reached Alena's side, immediately starting first aid on her while they waited for help to arrive, keeping pressure on a gash on Nadia's leg, making a makeshift splint for her arm, trying to wake her up, to get her to talk, blink, move, anything. Nothing. The helicopter came and took her to the hospital, leaving them to get down the trail as quickly as they could and to their car.

DAY 3

The heart monitor beeped a slow, steady drone. Nadia shifted position, but still kept her grip on Alena's hand, limp on top of the hospital bedsheet. The fluorescent lights in the room were so white, so sterile. Not at all like sunlight, not warm, not comforting. Cold. It was a cold light, like the ground beneath the arctic tundra that never unthaws, even in the summer time. Alena's broken arm had been splinted, cuts stitched, abrasions cleaned. She wasn't seriously injured, which was a miracle, but even though everything seemed fine, she still hadn't woken up.

"The doctors' said we have to leave for a bit again," Alex said quietly. "They want to run some more tests, see if they can find out what's wrong." Nadia nodded mechanically and followed Alex slowly out of the room. They were supposed to be on vacation, relaxing from the pressures of medical school, seeing the beauty of the Montana countryside. Not this. Not sitting helplessly in a hospital, waiting for her best friend to wake up, to come back to her. They went back to the little corner room at the end of the hall, empty except for a window, a black leather couch, wooden end table, and a couple of cushioned chairs. Nadia sat on the

couch, looking blankly out the window. She could see part of the parking lot, and the pine trees and mountains in the distance. She hated it. Hated the view of the mountains and trees, hated that Alena wasn't looking at it with her right now. Alex sat down next to her, balancing two cups of coffee and a bagel. He set one down in front of her, and she picked it up, clasping it tightly between her hands. Maybe it would warm her up, chase away some of the ice she felt flowed through her veins, a sharp stream of ice, ever since she had seen Alena's unmoving form.

"Hey," Alex said softly, bumping his knee against hers. She looked up into his eyes, twin pools of storm cloud blue. "It's going to be okay. She's going to be okay."

"How can you know that?" she said, her voice a whisper. She was a medical student. She knew that falls were bad from any height. The higher the fall, the more damage there likely was. But the doctors said Alena wasn't badly injured. She wasn't broken, couldn't be broken. She was the strongest person Nadia knew. If Alena was truly broken, then Nadia would shatter too, like an icicle dropped carelessly onto the hard ground. And there would be no one left to pick up the pieces.

"Because I have faith," he said, putting his hand over hers. "Faith in the doctors, and faith in her. She's one of the strongest people I know. She's fought so hard to get where she is now. I know she'd never give up on us when she's so close to achieving her dream."

Nadia choked back tears, intertwining her fingers with Alex's, trying to find something to anchor her, steady her. "Her dream, my dream. It's the same. It could just as easily be me lying in that hospital bed. We've come so far, climbed so high. Has it meant anything, have we really accomplished anything, or do we just have further to fall?"

Alex grasped her chin, forcing her to look into his eyes. "Of course it's meant something. You and Alena, you're learning how to save people's lives. You've dedicated your lives to that. It doesn't mean you have further to fall, it just means you have more opportunities to pick yourself back up and keep moving forward."

Nadia grinned slightly, letting herself lean against Alex, feeling his warmth seep into her. "That's what Alena always says. When we have a patient die, she says we should mourn them, but that we always have other patients who need us, so we can't just give in to despair, even if it's hard. But, I it's just, she's my best friend, and I can't imagine living life without her."

Alex put his arm around her, drawing her closer against him. "I know you're worried about her. I am too. But she's right, you know. You always have to keep hoping, keep moving forward. Or else you get stuck. You and Alena are a lot alike. You care so much, about everyone, and if they're in pain, you feel it too, and that's fine. That's sympathy, empathy. And it's okay if you fall, because there will always be people to help you up. People like me, if you want," he said more quietly.

She smiled at him. "Thanks Alex. I really needed that. I'll keep that offer in mind. If nothing else, you make a nice pillow."

Alex smiled slightly too, a smile just for her. They stayed like that, hands clasped together, Nadia resting against him as the sun edged its way below the horizon and the stars winked on one by one.

DAY 5

Nadia breathed in the sweet mountain air. Her hair shifted in a breath of wind that rustled the pine needles in the trees. She hadn't planned on being outside today at all, but Alena had finally woken up that morning. Nadia had been so overwhelmed with happiness, all she could do was cry tears of joy. Alex had practically bounced around the room he was so happy, like an overexcited puppy, and Alena had been quick to tell him as much, to the amusement of the hospital staff. They had stayed with Alena all day, but this evening she had kicked them out and practically commanded they go spend some time outside.

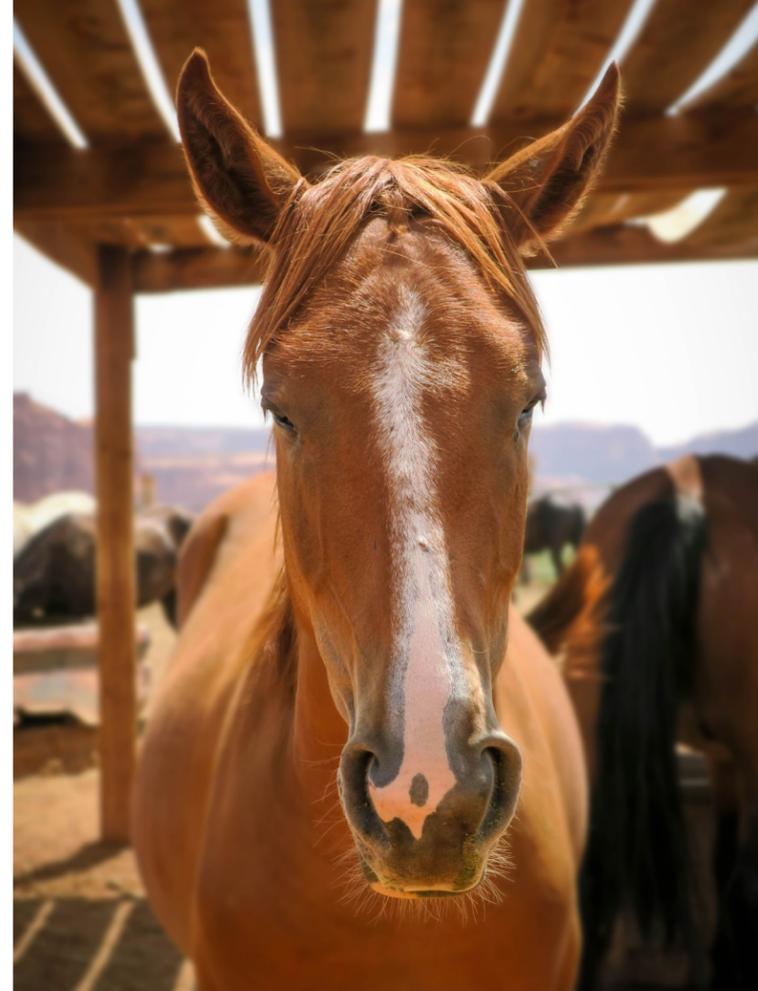
"We didn't come to Montana to spend all our time in a hospital. If we wanted that, we wouldn't have had to come in the first place," she had said sarcastically.

So Alex and her had gone outside. Outside and up the same trail that they had climbed what seemed like years ago. As Nadia looked over the drop-off, she clutched Alex's hand a little tighter. He squeezed back. "It's okay," he said. "It's okay now."

"I know," she replied. Looking over that ledge, she saw Alena, her career, her future. She saw it all. And she knew the drop was there, and that she could fall, but she wasn't afraid. "I know it's okay, because even if fall, there will always be someone to help get back on my feet," she said, smiling. They stood there, joined by their shared ordeal, watching the sun spill golds and reds and oranges across the landscape as it sunk towards the horizon to prepare itself for the new day tomorrow would bring.

A Chance Encounter

Levi Wright



Cinnitus picks another grape off the vine, cleans its pale blue skin on his white button down shirt, rolls it between his nimble fingers, and puts it into his mouth. His lips curl as his eyes focus on the horizon. Hills become silhouettes. The sky starts to become a quiet glowing red. Patting his chestnut horse on the neck, he takes a deep breath, grabs the horn of the saddle and brings his leg up to dismount. He winces from a day's worth of riding. Taking short steps to minimize how much his legs move, he leads the horse towards the city, barely moving his knees. Hooves click off the compacted road, passing tower after tower. From the tall stone wall guards in full armor look down. Feeling their gaze, he looks in the opposite direction. He almost feels guilty for taking the few grapes.

The rows of vines stop where an open pasture borders a wooden fence. Horses graze along a sectioned-off part of the hill. A sign reads "Stables Ahead," the letters chipped and fading from neglect. Seeing a small stone house, he follows the road. A candle in the window lights one room leaving the rest in darkness. He taps on the door a couple of times, looking around as he waits. A few stacks of straw sit on a wagon at the edge of the house with a pitchfork

leaned up against it. He knocks on the door, louder this time. He can hear scrambling inside and backs up a little. In the other direction a small olive tree grows by the porch. The door opens.

"Well met. I'm looking to store my horse for the night," Cinnitus says. The woman looks past him at the horse and then back to him.

"It'll be a copper piece. You need to pay up front. That's non-negotiable. We had a guy a while back drop off his horse. Came back early in the morning and left without paying. So one copper up front," she says.

"Okay, that's fine. I just need to grab some stuff." She stares at him through baggy eyes, showing no emotion. Cinnitus gives a half smile as he walks back to his horse. He unties his bag of coins and shoves it into his backpack minus one copper. He moves the coin between his fingers and then hands it to the women. "One copper."

"Marcus, grab your brother and take this horse into the pasture," she yells into the house. "They'll be right out." Cinnitus looks into the house and notes its state of disarray. The silent house fills with the sound of feet scrambling across wooden boards.

"Aren't you a little young to be traveling alone?"

"Um..." He scratches the back of his neck. "I just look..."

Two short, thin boys come running out. One grabs the reins, and the other starts to undo the wooden gate. The boy can't quite reach the top, so he climbs onto the first board. Cinnitus looks back, and the woman is gone. He twists his lip. Alone he continues on the road into the city.

The road follows along the wall and turns from dirt to brick. A stone archway just large enough for a carriage marks the entrance to the city. Two guards stand on both sides. Their armor, dull from lack of maintenance, has a dragon engraved into the bulky chest piece. Cinnitus can feel their gaze even though their faces are hidden. They make no sign of stopping him, so he continues past them, smelling a strong, foul odor. He walks a little more quickly, noticing a large estate at the end of the road. It stands above the rest of the houses, elevated, so the roof looks almost as tall as the city wall. The whole building is lit up, but beyond that, he can't quite make out any of the details as he continues down towards it. Suddenly, person in a grey cloak emerges from between two houses a couple feet in front of him. He lets out a gasp, stepping back a few steps and watches as the person walks by the stone and brick

buildings. His cheeks flush and he realizes how he must have looked, only now noticing that almost none of the houses have their lights on, no one is walking the streets, and the night is silent. He stops, blinks a few times and rubs the back of his neck. He walks a little faster towards one of the only lit buildings. The sign reads "Inn." The wooden door creaks as he pushes it open. His eyes dart around the room and settle on the man behind the counter. Cinnitus walks past empty dining tables and a fireplace that's only keeping the innkeeper warm.

"The stove's off," the man says, resting his elbows on the counter.

"Oh, um, well, can I get a room then?" Cinnitus says.

"It'll be a silver for the night. For an extra copper, I can make you up a meal too." Cinnitus realizes he hasn't eaten anything all day besides the grapes, and feels the pain in his stomach.

"Okay, yeah, I'll take both." He sets his pack down, grabs his coin pouch, pulls out a silver and copper coin and sets them on the table. They land louder than he meant, and he starts fidgeting with his collar. The owner raises a brow and then grabs a key from under the desk.

"You'll be in room 103. You can drop your things off, or just grab a table and wait until I make your meal."

"Great, thanks." Cinnitus moves towards a seat next to the fireplace where three charred logs lie on top of each other.

The wooden door creaks open once more. Cinnitus looks over his shoulder as the cloaked person from the street enters. He looks back. His face flushes. Hoping he didn't make a complete fool of himself, he sinks into his chair. The sound of footsteps hitting the ground move towards him.

"Is this seat taken?" asks a soft voice from behind.

"Um, no. You can sit if you'd like," Cinnitus says, looking up.

Sapphire blue eyes look back at him. She pushes her long, ink-black hair behind her ear as she sits down. She peels off her gloves, rubs her hands together and places her palms towards the fire. Her nimble fingers shake gently. The fire crackles fill the silence between them as Cinnitus tries to think of something to say.

"It's astonishing how quickly it gets cold after the sun goes down," she says.

"Yeah, it's, uh, astonishing."

"My name's Ophelia," she says outstretching her hand. Cinnitus shakes it.

She Rises, She Sets.

Favoiola Santana

“Cinnitus. Nice to meet you.”

“The pleasure is all mine. Are you just passing through?”

“Yeah. I’m heading to the coast looking for a job,” Cinnitus says.

“What kind of job?” Ophelia asks, looking at him with a smile.

“Preferably an inventor. I have a journal full of ideas I’d like to test out.” He rubs his chin looking off into the distance for a second. “I’ve been working on ways to produce energy. More specifically, electricity.” Ophelia cocks her head. “It’d open up a lot of opportunities for how people live day to day.” He looks her in the eyes feeling suddenly distracted, and then looks away. “I think at some point candles could be obsolete and cities could be lit through the entire night without having to refuel anything. I’m working on a device that can create a current that will run through a thin filament creating light for extended periods of time.” Cinnitus pauses looking into her eyes again, this time holding her gaze. “I mean, yeah.” He shakes his head back and forth as if having a conversation in his head. “Yeah, harnessing energy for everyone’s really the way to go.” Ophelia’s eyebrows knit together as she tilts her head to one side.

“What’s next? Flying?” She sounds skeptical. Cinnitus misses the inflection in her voice and continues.

“Yeah, I mean,” he says, looking away. “If birds and insects can do it, we should be able to harness those same concepts into some sort of machine and if…”

“Here’s your food,” the innkeeper interrupts, setting down a plate with a couple of pieces of buttered bread and a soup with vegetables floating in it. Cinnitus gives a small smile and then looks at the soup, his shoulders slumped. His hand goes first to the bowl but feeling no warmth moves to the bread.

“Thanks.” Cinnitus takes a bite of the bread. The innkeeper eyes Ophelia for a second with a raised eyebrow, and then walks back to the counter. “Do you want some?” Cinnitus says while chewing. He gives a smile with his cheeks full, making his already childish looking face seem even more so.

“No. Thank you,” Ophelia says, shaking her head. She takes a deep breath. “But if you wouldn’t mind, could you take a letter out of town for me and mail it? I know it sounds weird, but the postal system in town is just terrible.”

He gives a slight shrug. “Sure, I could do that.” She pulls the letter out from under her cloak and passes it to him under the table. “What’d you write?”

“It’s just to my family, to let them know how I’ve been doing.” Not wanting to open his pack again, Cinnitus sets the letter on the table. “Keep it hidden!” Ophelia says, snatching the letter off the table. Her eyes scan the room, pausing on the door for a second, and then snap back to Cinnitus. He looks at the door too, and then looks at Ophelia, reconsidering.

“Look, I don’t know what’s going on here, but I think it might be best if I stayed out of it.” She stares at him and then leans in closer.

“I need you to take this letter. I don’t know if they’re reading the mail, so I need someone to take it outside the city for me,” Ophelia says urgently.

“Who’s reading the mail?” He says, leaning in as well, talking in the same hushed tone. She takes another deep breath as if impatient to have to explain.

“The Queen. She’s paranoid. She keeps a close eye on everyone. I need to get this letter to my family to let them know what’s going on.”

“And what’s going on?”

She chews on her lip for a second, as she looks back at the door. “I don’t think it’s safe to talk here. I’ll tell you everything at my house tomorrow morning.” Ophelia stands up. She puts the letter back under her cloak and leaves Cinnitus with his cold vegetable soup before he can argue. He manages a few more bites of soup and then finishes the bread. His knee bobs up and down as he stares at the door. He wipes the bread crumbs off the table onto his plate and looks for a place to return the dishes. Not seeing one, he stacks them neatly and goes to his room.

He places his backpack at the foot of the bed and falls onto the quilt with an exhausted sigh, kicks off his shoes without bothering to untie them, and unbuttons his shirt as he lies on the bed. His eyelids grow heavier as his head is engulfed by the pillow. He blows out the candle and stares at the ceiling. His eyes drift shut as he thinks about how he will find Ophelia tomorrow. He rolls onto his outstretched arm. She never gave him an address or a way to find her house. He turns onto his belly. She never even specified the time of day. He adjusts his pillow, making it smaller under his head. Was she going to come and get him?

She rises every day at five fifty-six a.m. Never complaining that she’s exhausted, unprepared, or feeling inadequate to her children. She shines a buttery-auburn light through their two-story windows to let them know it’s time to get up. They pull the covers over their faces, ignoring the gift she gives them day to day. She doesn’t think much of it; perhaps they had a sleepless night. Looking north, south, east and west, she admires her garden, although some parts are greener than others. As she turns her attention to the Middle East, she watches her children struggle to communicate. She anticipates the day when the misunderstandings, wars, and bombings will end. Men, women, and children dying for senseless reasons, fighting for the same cause. Freedom. Sick at heart, she turns east and watches people break boundaries and invent technology that will forever change the world. She begins to feel better. She turns her attention south to find poverty and corruption. It’s getting worse, she thinks. It seems as if there is more bad than good. Her children are forgetting that life is more than just paper on trees. But it’s seven forty-two p.m. and she is feeling dizzy. She finds her bed and begins to set. She is never jealous of sharing her children with the night. And she never gets mad at her children for polluting the atmosphere, although it affects her deeply. Though her children are selfish and impatient, she will rise again tomorrow. Hoping that they will see their mistakes and learn to love one another.

Fernandina

Elizabeth Janey

There is Harris Teeter grocery store with sugar cookies in a plastic container by the door located in a subtropical climate, 4800 First Coast Highway. In a house down the street my fingers were shut in the bathroom door while I was playing hide and seek with Lily. I yelled for her to let go, she kept pushing back. I rolled down the stairs in that same house, summer salted Fernandina Beach Baby that would run away from her father, sand under feet. A forty-eight ounce glass jar of Cinnamon Spice Musselman's apple sauce was dropped in the middle of a Publix and the liquid spilled onto the floor. Amelia is a sea island chain thirteen miles long and four miles wide with six golf courses. Martha worked at the plantation where golf carts were rented out for long drives on putting greens, 39 Beach Lagoon Road. The Fernandina Beach Baby was being watching by the sitter and she kept gnawing on the bell kept around her wrist to make sure she didn't crawl away, she was fast. Splintered gray wood boardwalks kept the North Atlantic Ocean company and its waters smoothed the rocks in return, bringing fine grained pebbles to land for baby feet to walk on. The jellyfish swam onto the shore, their purple jelly bodies motionless the nerve net thrown out for a catch. An immortal creature burned from the sun their water body evaporated. A Ritz-Carlton Hotel hand towel stolen from the bathroom resides in the yellow painted house with metal shingles, and a white painted porch. The relatives came to visit and brought a green beach umbrella with them. They sat under it and let their skin soak into the sand as the ocean came and relieved them of the grit

Womanhood and Manhood in J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*

Cassandra Chia

The question "who am I?" and the process of forming and understanding one's identity begins during early childhood and often continues well into adulthood. J.M. Barrie's 1911 novel *Peter and Wendy*, a story about a boy who never grows up, encourages readers to reflect and meditate upon that question through its title characters. In changing the title of the play *Peter Pan* to the novel, *Peter and Wendy*, Barrie implies that the story is as much Wendy's as it is Peter's. We see these two characters react to growing up differently; by the end of the novel, Wendy embraces adulthood while Peter resumes his boyhood in Neverland. The novel presents two versions of adulthood that are mediated by gender: womanhood—motherhood, in particular—which is connected to the magic of childhood and, manhood which has lost that connection and been reduced to oppressive reality.

It is only fitting that we first draw some comparisons between Peter and Wendy's perceptions of growing up and adulthood. In the novel, Wendy is "one of the kind that likes to grow up" and seems anxious to start by playing a motherly role to Peter and the lost boys (181). She is never out adventuring with the male characters; instead, she embraces domestic duties of cooking, sewing, darning, sending the boys to bed and telling them stories. When Peter invites her to follow him to Neverland and she

hesitates, he tries to persuade her with the more boyish enticements of flying, “[jumping] on the wind’s back,” “saying funny things to the stars,” and “seeing a mermaid” (47). Realizing Wendy’s true longing, Peter then changes his approach:

[Peter] had become frightfully cunning. “Wendy,” he said, “how we should all respect you.” She was wiggling her body in distress. It was quite as if she were trying to remain on the nursery floor. But he had no pity for her. “Wendy,” he said, the sly one, “you could tuck us in at night.” “Oo!” “None of us has ever been tucked in at night.” “Oo,” and her arms went out to him. “And you could darn our clothes, and make pockets for us. None of us has any pockets.” *How could she resist.* (47, emphasis mine)

For Wendy, the opportunity to become a mother is ultimately what fascinates and lures her to Neverland.

In contrast, Peter is described as The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up. The term ‘Wouldn’t’ is significant because it implies Peter’s conscious refusal to grow up and become a man, as opposed to an inherent inability to grow up. When explaining to Wendy why he ran away the day he was born, he says: “It was because I heard father and mother... talking about what I was to be when I became a man... I don’t want ever to be a man... I want always to be a little boy and to have fun” (42, emphasis mine). Even though Peter actively pushes away the prospect of growing up, there are moments where he accepts it—but only through the safety of make-believe. For example, after Peter and Wendy play father and mother to the lost boys, Peter looks for reassurance:

“I was just thinking,” he said, a little scared. “It is only make-believe, isn’t it, that I am their father?” “Oh yes,” Wendy said primly. “You see,” he continued apologetically, “it would make me seem so old to be their real father.” “But they are ours, Peter, yours and mine.” “But not really, Wendy?” he asked anxiously. “Not if you don’t wish it,” she replied; and she distinctly heard his sigh of relief. (120-21)

For Peter, growing up is something to be avoided as he attempts to hold on to the swash-buckling adventures of boyhood.

Peter and Wendy paints adulthood as distinct for each gender. The different models of womanhood and manhood presented in the novel in the form of Mr. and Mrs. Darling influence Peter and Wendy’s opposing ideas and reactions to growing up. Wendy is a motherly child while Mrs. Darling

is a childlike mother. From this, we see that women in the novel are allowed to retain some sense of the wonder of childhood throughout their lives whereas men are forced to face the mundane tyrannies of adulthood. The female journey of growing up, as described in this novel, seems to be a natural intersection of girlhood and motherhood. We see a mother’s attachment to childhood primarily through the thread of story-telling. Stories are the bridge that connects a mother to childhood itself. Mrs. Darling tells stories of Peter Pan to her daughter, Wendy who in turn, tells her daughter, Jane, and Jane to her daughter, Margaret and so on. The novel creates the most beautiful reference for motherhood in Mrs. Darling. She is first described as “a lovely lady, with a romantic mind” with magical qualities: “Her romantic mind was like the tiny boxes, one within the other, that come from the puzzling East...and her sweet mocking mouth had one kiss on it that Wendy could never get, though there it was, perfectly conspicuous in the right-hand corner” (13). Then, Mrs. Darling transforms into a quasi-supernatural being when the narrator paints this peculiar sight of her tidying her children’s minds.

You would see her on her knees, I expect, lingering humorously over some of your contents, wondering where on earth you had picked this thing up, making discoveries sweet and not so sweet, pressing this to her cheek as if it were as nice as a kitten, and hurriedly stowing that out of sight. When you wake in the morning, the naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed have been folded up small and placed at the bottom of your mind and on the top, beautifully aired, are spread out your prettier thoughts, ready for you to put on. (17, 19)

Simply by performing her natural duties, mothers have powers of their own in the form of direct access to their children’s consciousness and minds. Mrs. Darling even dreams of “Neverland...and that a strange boy had broken through from it” (25). Evidently, mothers have a heightened sense that is attuned to the rich frequencies of childhood.

The novel is less forgiving in its portrayal of manhood. Boys, unlike girls, are separated from childhood completely once they grow up. When the narrator describes the confused map of a child’s mind, they briefly yet saliently mention ‘fathers’ as a source of confusion. In opposition to the beloved mother who tidies up and supplies maternal order, the father symbolizes tyrannical adulthood, and aggravates the already confusing torrents of a child’s mind. The pictures we see of men are associated with the more

practical and economic aspects of adult reality. In *Peter and Wendy*, the most prominent figure of manhood is Mr. Darling, about whom the most that could be said was that “he was one of those deep ones who know about stocks and shares” (14). Mr. Darling’s thought process when deciding whether to keep Wendy is tedious and mundane, a far cry from Mrs. Darling’s: “[Mr. Darling] sat on the edge of Mrs. Darling’s bed...calculating expenses, while she looked at him imploringly. She wanted to risk it, come what might, but that was not his way; his way was with a pencil and piece of paper” (15). Clearly, Mr. Darling is entirely removed from the swashbuckling of boyhood, jaded from his adult responsibilities of worrying about whether his neighbors talked or “his position in the city” (17). Never do we expect Mr. Darling to pay close enough attention to notice that Neverland is “near” (25). In incorporating financial terms—Wendy’s husband bought the nursery “at the three per cents from [her] father”—Barrie implies that finance is the language of all men (181). The narrator does not even dwell on the fates of the other lost boys, commenting that “[a]ll the boys were grown up and done for by this time; so it is scarcely worth while saying anything more about them” (181). Manhood requires a final and complete separation from boyhood; men are no longer able to connect with the beauty of childhood.

In conclusion, it is no wonder that Peter and Wendy make the choices they do, given the presence of such vivid pictures of womanhood and manhood. In *Peter and Wendy*, identity seems to be deeply rooted in childhood, a powerful and enriching time in life that should never fully be let go. Girls gain a certain type of power when they mature into womanhood while boys are trapped in the cage of practical manhood. In contrast, the novel presents the reader with a confined model of adulthood. Womanhood and manhood may be the one-dimensional versions we see in Mr. and Mrs. Darling; women possess the potential to connect to childhood, although they may only access it when they are mothers. In the same vein, while men have no such connection, they govern a completely different social power such as the ability to be “the breadwinner” (33). Having exposed these restrictive and gendered images however, the story encourages its readers to answer the pivotal question of “who am I?” with another equally important question: “who am I going to be?”

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What My Dad Wanted

Thy Le

I came home for spring break and was surprised to see Dad. “I moved back for two weeks,” he told me. Nobody ever asked why. He always chose to live away from our family but he came back to us—my Mom, my little brother, and sister—under certain circumstances. Five years ago, he decided to stay in Vietnam when our family had a chance to move to the U.S, but because of document issues, or maybe even because he changed his mind, he moved with us in the end. The day before we got to the airport, he sat down with me, crying. “My friend said that if I don’t go with you guys now, I won’t have the chance to see my kids anymore.” My eyes welled up with tears.

I was twenty-two when we arrived in Sioux City, a city that was more rural than the city in which we had lived in Vietnam. Sioux City was cold and smelled like dirt and rainwater. I was the daughter Dad loved the most. He kept a letter I wrote for him when I was in elementary school. In the letter I scribbled, “Dad, please give up on your affairs because I am growing up haunted by Mom’s yelling voice.” I remember that I was writing and crying. We barely had any

serious conversations, but when we did, they were intense and emotional. It was a night that he was out late, and I left the letter for him on my desk. Before I went to bed, I turned the desk lamp on so he would notice the letter lying in the warm yellow light. The letter was gone the next morning; I knew he read it. We never mentioned it, and Dad kept having affairs. I forgot about the letter for ten years, until one day Mom yelled at him because she glimpsed it inside his wallet and thought it was from one of his mistresses. He handed it to her and said, “Hey, look, it is a letter from my beloved daughter, don’t you see?” I was there, and saw my handwriting and the paper already turning yellow. It was the first time I saw him respond to my mother’s accusations. Up to then, he had frustrated my mother with silence, while she shouted for hours.

Their Divorce

They got a divorce after living in Sioux City for two years. Mom stopped yelling and loved us more; she laughed more often. Dad moved out even though my siblings cried and begged him to stay. Sioux City was small; he lived some blocks away from our home. I was the only one who took his side. I let him do what he wanted. I believed he loved his children but had reasons to no longer love Mom. I understood that their divorce was necessary.

When I saw him after I came home for spring break, he was living in a small basement room. Mom and Dad talked like friends. Mom yelled at him sometimes for not financially supporting the family, but not as terribly as when I was small.

The house was our maternal grandparents’ house. They bought it when they came here thirty years ago. The house was aging like my grandparents. Every week there was something that had to be fixed. The leaking bathroom sink, the broken heater, the cracked windows, the disintegrating wooden planks on the floor. Dad had been an electrician in Vietnam; he was the only one in our home who knew how to fix broken things. His room in the basement had one twin bed and an old television with a bulging screen and a bulky backside that stuck out more than twenty centimeters. It had never worked, but no one ever bothered to throw it away.

Dad was skinny and short. He smelled like a mix of coffee and cigarette smoke, the two things that he overly consumed every day. The smell was noticeable; it marked his clothes and his unmade bed. On winter nights after I came home from my part-time job, I would find him sitting

on the small wooden back deck, smoking, pondering something as he looked into the dark space of the garden.

When he saw me walking toward the door, he would say, “It’s cold today.”

I smiled at him, “Dad, you should stop smoking. Go to bed. It’s late and cold here,” and walked past him to the door.

Factory, Walmart, and the Casino

My parents’ divorce was peaceful compared to many divorces that happened among Vietnamese families in Sioux City. It was a city of family separation and gambling losses. Divorce hurt us; it rarely happened in our tradition. In this city, the factory, Walmart, and the casino were ubiquitous. People worked in factories for minimum wage. Those who cared about their lives spent money at Walmart; the others spent all of their money – their paychecks, their savings, thousands and thousands of dollars – at the casino, until their debt hurt their family, and then they stopped for a while before coming back again.

My Dad, my Grandpa, my Aunt, my Uncle, and my neighbors were all gamblers. At those casino tables and machines, they only had to say “yes” or “no,” or sometimes, nothing at all. The factory, Walmart, and the casino did not require them to speak much. At the casino, especially, life was easier, relaxed and welcoming. In this city, lost immigrants searched for hope, joy, and good luck at the casino, even when they paid for that satisfaction with much of what they could earn. Time does not pass at the casino. Gamblers tell themselves they have only come for a short time, but the stimulating warm and dazzling flashing lights on the ceiling make them forget days and nights. In the mornings it drizzles, and the sky is overcast, but the sun is supposed to come out later.

Mom’s Trip Back to Vietnam

Mom had been collecting gifts for her friends and family in Vietnam for five years, since we settled in the U.S. Even though she had no plan to go back any time soon, she kept saving them.

“Mom, you don’t have to buy gifts for everyone.”

“How will you pay for your overweight luggage?”

“Mom, these things would cost you a lot of money to get through the airport door.”

“They don’t need it, Mom, just give them some money.”

“They sell these things in Vietnam. And Mom, when will you go back?”

Despite our doubts, she hid those gifts from us and collected things day by day. She put them all in a large carton box under her bed. She bought Barbie dolls, lotions, perfumes, jeans, T-shirts, and anything that was on sale at Walmart. She collected our old iPhones, laptops, and clothes. Many sale seasons passed before she actually bought an airplane ticket. On the way to the airport, she stopped by Walmart and grabbed a giant bag of cherries, putting them into her carry-on purse, muttering, "In Vietnam, cherries are expensive. Your relatives will love them."

Mom worked at a nail store seven days a week from 8am-8pm. She never complained. But one time when my sister wanted to work at a nail store over the summer, Mom issued a warning, "You have to sit there for the whole day. It's really exhausting, think about it. Are you sure you want to do it? It's exhausting." My sister ended up not working there. Mom gained weight from too much sitting at work. Every time we teased her about her fat belly, she laughed, "I know. I know. Don't care about me. I should eat less." But she never did.

She only had two meals a day, lunch and dinner, before and after work. She woke up early to cook food for the whole family in the morning. She wore her cooking

outfit, my grandpa's old, orange, oversized bomber jacket and a discolored blue cap, her hair tied tidily into a bun underneath. She looked like a soldier with armor to fight the smells of chili oil, fried fish, Pho, burned garlic, and shrimp paste. At night after she went home, she took a late shower. Then she would go on Facebook to message our relatives, look at their photographs and upload hers for them to see. This was her everyday routine.

Once, she asked us to drop her off at the mall to go shopping, and to pick her up later. While alone at the mall, she texted my brother and asked him to help her order a drink. My brother sent her a message written in English, "Can you make her a Green Tea Frappuccino?" She showed it to the cashier when she needed a drink.

As Mom thought, our relatives and friends in Vietnam liked her gifts. They even quarreled and got jealous if someone else got more gifts. She gave Barbie dolls to the little kids, while the adults got other gifts and extra money. She paid for meals when they ate out because everyone disappeared when the bills arrived. They thought she had a lot of money; they did not know that she had saved up for this trip for years. Mom brought back dried gardenia (she loved the smell of it, she hated the smell of pine trees), dried pandan leaves, dried lotus tea, dried fishes, dried

shrimps, and photographs on her phone that she looked at before she went to bed. She had a lot of fun in Vietnam, and when she arrived back to Sioux City, she began to fill up her box with gifts again, for the next trip.

Homeland

My sister and I moved to another city to go to college. It was five hours away. On the way home for winter break, my sister asked:

"Have you ever thought about coming back to Sioux City after you graduate?"

"Yes."

"You've changed your mind? I thought you hated living there."

"I want to change things," I said and closed my eyes for a nap while my sister drove.

Five years after I graduate from college, I buy a new house for our family, where things are not broken, where Dad does not have to fix things but hangs string lights that drape over our house from top to bottom at Christmas.

I open a coffee shop for people in town, for those who cannot sleep, who had a long night at the casino, who wake up early on a windy day to drive to school, who crave milk and honey, who covet chats with friends on nights when it is too cold to get ice cream. I sell both American and Vietnamese coffee, so Dad will not complain about coffee in this city tasting like water. Mom helps me, so she does not have to sit all day in the nail salon and she loses some belly fat. Vietnamese people have a place to go besides the factory, Walmart, and the casino. In my coffee shop, I have shelves with a lot of books, English books—*The Dew Breaker*, *The House on Mango Street*, *The Bluest Eyes*, *My Antonia*. We build empathy and connection through stories. After coming back from teaching my morning ESL writing class at the community college, I spend time in my coffee shop reading and writing while the rich aroma of dried gardenia permeates the air. On the tables are pea green cactus, succulents, and aloe vera planted in teacups and mason jars. I sip a sip of lotus tea, and out the window where snow begins to blanket the city. It's nice to have gardenias any day of the year, even on snowy Mondays.



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