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Pathos and Spatial Possessions

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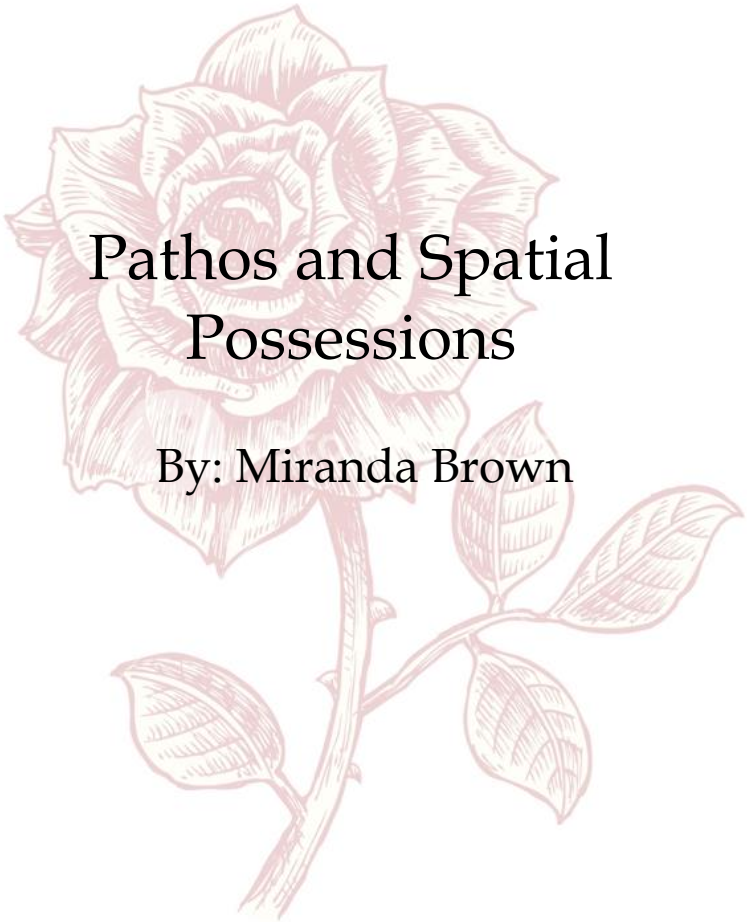
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Pathos and Spatial Possessions

By: Miranda Brown

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To my amazing loved ones and excellent professors. But, most of all, my grandfather; his is the story that began my journey as a writer.

Prologue

Like many artists, my love for writing was born out of the pain of loss and heartbreak. However, today, it has continued to be fueled by catharsis and creativity.

For my collection, I decided to write about the places and people that have left a lasting impression upon my life. In doing so, I reflected upon specific instances that I could recall with great clarity and compared them to the experiences of those among my friends and family who were there with me or had similar experiences.

Having validated or altered my recollections based off their responses, I then crafted my writing to give each piece a specific rhetorical presentation. For the most part, I found pathos to be the leader for my rhetoric. However, logos played a notable role in the locational works I've included.

Please enjoy these pieces as each of them make up a part of who I am.



Part 1: The Consequences

Residue

Standing before the shower head, the tan fibers of the natural sponge find their way under my finger nails as I vigorously move the abrasive material over my skin. As I watch stray bubbles wash their way down the tile wall before me, I wonder if the physical is capable of removing the emotional. Perhaps it could morph to do the work of an erasable crayon. It is truly possible to scrub a memory clean? Perhaps.

The warm water washes over me like the horror of the day. Today has left its film upon our family. My family. While I stand and scrub my ivory skin till it glows pink, I imagine the pungent stains housed in that one room. I think of the bathroom and can almost see the strains turning brown behind my eyes. It has only been two days, yet, the smell has already begun to grow more potent than I would have ever thought. With a red warmth to my skin, I step out of the shower.

As I dry myself, I wonder when the contents of my brother's former residence will be cleaned if at all. Feet firmly planted on the

plush bathroom mat, I close my eyes and can still see the forbidden door knob, so close to my grasp but unavailable. The thought of what lies behind the yellowing door threatens to steal my vision.

Earlier that day, we had worked quickly to gather my older siblings' things from the disastrous space. The reality of the squalor he had been living in was the most sobering experience of my days thus far. Wasting no time, we had gathered his things as we set aside hers.

During the entire process, I refused my eyes the luxury of an emotional release. Not now, I had said to myself. As we sifted through clothes and personal artifacts, the apartment had been silent. The day's only sounds were those I had heard from the bedroom when we first arrived, playing on a loop in my brain. The sorrow I heard that day will forever be in my mind, etched upon my soul, the pain my brother felt and feels still. I could almost feel the sobs that had rattled his body.

When we had entered the dingy apartment for the first time, my brother had asked me to gather his things from the bedroom he and his love had once shared. I complied with a smile. I had walked into the

room to find our mother already at work to make the process go by quicker. I remember standing, nearly frozen in place, in the doorway for a moment, eyes locked on the informative mattress before me. The stained bed bore no sheets. A bag of half-eaten potatoes chips laid near the pillow, accompanied by an empty bottle of pills. Though, this was not the only bottle. My eyes traveled to the nightstand where six other bottles of prescription drugs sat. Each one had safety lids closed tightly, yet there was no reason. Every bottle was empty, and the damage had already been done.

“She was just here,” I had thought to myself. Having read my face, our mother had shared a knowing glance with me. We continued to clean out and rummage through drawers and piles of clothing until all that remained was hers; things that had belonged to her.

Having finished our deconstruction of the bedroom, I then moved to walk by the bathroom door once more, the air much thicker before the threshold than the rest of the residence.

To regain the density of this moment, all I need do is close my eyes. The threshold of the

small apartment will forever be a unwanted memory. Can these sorts of things really be scrubbed from our brains? Will her brains be scrubbed from the floor of the freshly tainted tub?

I tried my best to rid myself of the images and smells and I nearly touched it, only nearly. For my brother, I fear the metal nightmare will never be removed, much like the gunpowder from the forehead and palms of his first love.

It was my brother's gun but her choice, that ended her life. She held the cruel, unforgiving barrel of the weapon to her head; the pills she depended on so dearly let her down. They were an aid in her final moments, her illness never to heal. Was she really there in the end? Only she will ever know.

Her memory will forever be a residue in our minds and on her last loves heart. The layer on my brother will be a love lost too soon and that, sadly, can never be washed away. Only thinned over time.

My Natural Love's Letter

Passionately elegant, soft yet defensive, simple but intricate, welcoming and winding- my heart, you are all these and more. The mere sound of your name begs attention and invokes admiration. You are a symbol of intimacy. Tracing your winding curves is a gift that leaves everyone feeling special and cared for. Vivacious and friendly, every color you wear is a perfect compliment.

With your back turned to me, I study the way your smooth surfaces show so little of you. It isn't until you show me your face that I see the beauty in your features. Your unique intrigue, I find, lies in the colors you use to see the world. From their core, your features unfold in a series of lines so delicate and poetic I fear I might taint them to touch. I see you for the beauty you possess and give. From your center, long and slender hills and valleys span the length of your figure.

Your extremities are used for
unyielding defense, blunt and dangerous,
but also tenderly caress the world about
you. Your smooth skin cools yet maintains
its color upon the dew-coated concrete.
Poised and present, I see the tenderness
we both know lives here. I walk away to
see you better and leave you to represent
my intentions. You, my heart, are the rose
I place upon my love's grave.

Unrequited

“Hey, how are you doing?” the man at the gym counter asked as he scanned my card.

“I’m good. Yourself?” I replied.

“Great,” I heard him reply as I walked towards the locker room. As I past machine after machine towards the women’s locker-room, I couldn’t help but think about the discounts the middle-aged flirt used to give me when I came as a guest every day before I joined. I brushed aside the thought and put away my bag before heading out onto the floor. The free-weights area wasn’t crowded that day. A miracle indeed.

Three sets of sweat-inducing squats later, I sat down my dumbbells and straighten upright. As I looked up from the bench, I went rigid.

I couldn't help but smile when I saw him, a weird, uncomfortable smile torn between happy and horrified. I managed to utter the most insufficient greeting on the planet with a small grin.

“Hhii,” I managed to squeak out.

Physically, he looked great. He looked amazing actually. Clearly, our time apart had been spent, largely, in that very place. Though he looked the best I've seen him, the look etched on his face was that of a man whose dog had just been shot in front of him.

“I got your letter,” he finally said though his deep-set frown. “I sent you a few messages. I don't know if you got them,” he continued.

“I did, “ I said. Erudite speech award of the year went to me, clearly.

“I read it over and over and I can't say you were wrong. In fact, everything was like you said,” he began as he took a few cautious steps closer to my quick sand stance. “ Can we sit?” he pleaded with red eyes.

“Yeah, sure, “ I said, awkwardly as I moved my equipment to clear the space

next to him on the bench. I had known him for years, yet I felt as though I had took a seat next to a stranger on a public transit rather than my best friend.

After several glances my way and deep breaths, he began by saying, “I had lost who I was inside myself. That is exactly how you said it. I re-read that sentence over and over until I finally let my heart realize that I couldn’t hide from it. From who I had really become.” With a halfway grin, he continued, “I forget how well you know me, the true me. This letter reminded me just how much I don’t recognize myself. Really, it was like a horror movie scene.”

I did know him well. For nine years, we had been friends, among other things. I spent most of my high school years in love with the idea of him while he busied himself with falling for those who only wanted his looks and suave demeanor. After each and every heartbreak, I was there to pick up the pieces, but he never made a pass my way. Well, not until two years ago that is.

After my first year of college, we spent the whole summer together. Studying out of state, I hadn’t seen him in

months. He was so eager for my attention until, he wasn't.

Despite the quiet distance, he certainly had regained his desire in this moment. He continued to detail the contents of the letter I had written him only days before. I sat in silence and listened. I commented when questioned but, mainly, I was at a loss. I comforted him when he shed tears over the guilt he felt not once but twice. We'd been apart for so long, all I managed to do was awkwardly grasp his arm as I soothed the expanse of his back in light, circular passes.

At last, I began to feel more at ease in his presence once more. He wanted to be the best friend he once was to me, and I accepted in an instance before I could stop myself. In truth, my love for his heart had forgiven him for everything he had ever done to me or ever could do in future. The heart's deception of the mind truly is dangerous.

We went about our routines on the gym floor, as friends, for that next hour. "You know. You seem like your old, giddy, puppy-dog like self," I said with a cocked brow.

“Yeah. It feels good to be back,” he said as his hand noted the fairly short distance between our stances. “I really was an ass for a long while there,” he continued and said again in ten other sentences variations to follow. As an aspiring actor, he truly did and still does love to hear himself speak.

We hugged before we departed in the parking lot outside the fitness doors. “It’s good to have you back,” he’d said as he turned to go.

“Yeah, I’m glad to be back,” I’d said with a smile. Once inside the car, I watched him leave with a corner of my mouth betraying my mind in a sly smile. He really did look good. Man, why couldn’t he have look as bad as I had felt without him. But the view wasn’t a bad alternative either.

Eric truly was a frustrating moron. But, he had been my moronic best friend for so long, I couldn’t help but call on him with an irreversible instinct.

Emotionally exhausted, I had immediately grabbed a shower upon my return home. As I allowed the warmth of the water’s cleansing rain to calm my

mind, I wondered whether or not I really believed all he had said.

I wanted to believe that a man could return from the vicious grasp of his ego but he'd broken so many promises before. He had never cried before me, but he did so twice that afternoon alone.

Could his acting really have gotten that good or had he really been as vulnerable as I'd felt. My phone dinged as I exited the pristine, white tub and stepped onto the cheery, yellow bathmat and wrapped a corresponding towel around myself. I tightened the cotton embrace about my body and picked up the phone.

“What are you doing tonight?” Eric's message inquired. And so it all began, again.

The Time I Underestimated God

I underestimated God.

I'm a planner, I always have been. I never doubted that I would graduate high school, graduate college, and get a job afterward. All of this was a given in my mind.

But now? Just kidding. Nothing is guaranteed and all of my plans are now invalid and postponed. As I sit here writing my shame, I am a mere day away from my 21st birthday and a month from my walk across a bannered stage, gown and all, that may never come.

I put so much power into my own thoughts and actions that I was sure I would get my wishes. If I worked hard and did everything right, I knew I would succeed. Yet, again, I underestimated my God.

For those of you who aren't religious, by no means am I saying God did this to spite me. Never, I'm only given what I can handle. What I am trying to say is that I made a big mistake and now find myself feeling ashamed as well as defeated.

I feel recent events have been a wakeup call for me. Nothing in my life is truly mine but love and faith; these should be the focus on my worried mind not fear and control.

Today, I sit and reflect upon the change I've experienced so drastically in the way I live my life and am truly humbled by the finality and definitive power of the natural world. The nature realm my God so perfectly and intentionally created. Sitting here, I find it hard not to think rashly. I remain beneath the shame of an oak tree as I think about the collective behavior of man lately.

For one, we truly are made to err. Man had been so prideful and, I fear, too selfish. As I watch people walk by from store to store, I can see the damage they cause. In the back of my mind, I see the recent chest x-rays displaying the infection plaguing humanity. I see the way

it fills our lungs and takes out breath away which used to be a good thing. While I do know things could always get worse, I still mourn for those who are dying and will never fulfil their dreams.

Reunited with my family, I watch my mother go to work every day, right into the sterile halls that house the sickness consuming of our community. The ignorance of defiance of the public only a reminder of the arrogance we humans can often suffer from. While we can make mistakes, we can also learn. For me, I have learned that nothing in life is a guarantee and the most important things we have are the ones you cannot hold, see or post pictures off on Facebook. The most important things in life are love and faith; God has shown the world that false idols cannot match the magnitude of him. While he is not spiteful, God does work in mysterious ways. I underestimated my God and have learned better. My challenge is to now take my uncertain future and have faith.

A Little Modern-Day Moment

“You ready to go?” Danial marketing executive extraordinaire asks with a promptly rushed once-over of the two of us. I look to Cara. She looks at me like the butterflies in her stomach could carry her away but doesn’t budge; instead, she nods and we walk out onto the glistening, wood of the court floor. As we examine the 360-degree crowd around us, I absorb the fantastic feeling that comes with knowing that so many talented performers have occupied the very position and role you currently hold.

The buzzer blast re-directs my attention and we, instinctively, shuffle closer to the mic. We begin and the crowd remains silent as we pour our tired, illness ridden, voices into the speakers of the stadium. As we create our harmonic, my eyes move over the confined seating of the massive space. As my eyes take in the

audience, a tall figure stands out above the others. Though he bears no red, blinking lights my mind perceives the strangers features just as intently. I'd never met the guy but we shared this glance that may lend others to say otherwise. From his eat in the nose bleeds, I take note of the curve of his mouth; the way it runs uphill to one side in a mischievously endearing grin. His gaze sends warmth into my body, color to my cheeks, and sweat to my palms. Yet, I tear my eyes from the brown-haired boy I know to be my online correspondent for the past three weeks, named Gabriel.

As my duet partner and I hit the bridge of the anthem, I can still feel the framed eyes across the space watching my every move. I am so distracted that the end of our performance comes as a surprise.

By the time I leave the court and retrieve my phone, a new message of adoration awaits me from my coy Casanova. We correspond nearly all night after the performance and, in the early hours of the morning, I agree to finally meet him the next week for coffee. As a coffee date pro', I make this meeting without hesitation.

“Alright, I’m off to go have coffee with an infant,” I jest at my roommate as I hold up Gabriel’s profile photo to her face.

“Oh, he’s cute! But, a year younger huh. You sure you want to go?” she replies.

“Well, he did see me perform and texted me all night so I can’t put it off forever. Besides, I won’t be gone long. I’m guessing an hour, maybe a half too,” I say as I exit her bedroom and head for the door.

“Have fun babysitting,” my roommate yells as I cut off any remaining remarks with the closing of the front door.

Having arrived early, I choose my favorite spot and vantage point in the café, well, shop rather; Starbucks is no café as far as I’m concerned. I take a seat, cross my legs, and remove my computer from my red backpack to do a bit of homework. Homework on a date is definitely not a norm but I am who I am. A few minutes late, the tall, handsome stranger from my phone screen rounds the shop corner wall and enters my view.

Wow, he looks much better than his photos, I think to myself. PS, I hope I look alright, I add. Too late to check now.

“Hi, how are you?” I ask before I can stop myself. Wow do I sound nervous. Get a grip Iris. “I’m great, how are you?” he replies calmly. He takes the seat across from me, coffee already in hand. I’m a reasonable lady but he didn’t get my coffee on the 1st date, strike one.

We fill the next ten minutes with small talk of our lives up until this point and how we came to be in the same place at this time. The introductory stage of the evening continues as it began. But about thirty minutes in, I begin to relax and feel as though we have before and could go on like this for hours. We find an effortless groove and I begin to find his forwardness inviting. His hands have remined and roamed besides, across, and over mine the entire evening intended to make contact in any way possible. In my much-awaited comfort, I begin to like the new attention and the familiar warmth. So much so that I welcome the invitation when he asks to show me some music in his native tongue. To make things easier, for him to make a move that is, he rises to be seated beside me, his leg pressed to mine as he searches my computer screen for intended artists.

We sat this way for another 30 minutes as we shared auditory tastes and preferences. To my surprise, I'm sorrowful when he returns to his original chair. Our conversation would have continued for a third hour had it not been for the closing of the shop. As we exit the so-called café and walk towards the bus stop, I am surprised but elated when he asks to walk me home. Delighted, I agree and stepped a few paces ahead saying, "this way please." As I walk before him, I feel the same, warm stare as before only this time it was upon the back of my neck and across my cheeks.

Challenging my humor, he advances to walk beside me. We continue our conversation as we make our way to my apartment door. After a short, ten-minute walk, we arrive to the true-blue door of my apartment building. "Do you want to watch that movie I was telling you about?" Gabe asks with a confident smile.

"Not tonight," I say matching his wily expression. "How about Sunday night?" I offer instead. He agrees with a goofy grin and kisses either of me cheeks.

"I had to kiss your cheek, at least, I'm Brazilian," he says smiling with that

side smile that fills my cheeks with joy and walks towards the street to head for home. I lock eyes with him across the yard and reply, “Goodnight,” with the most inviting gaze I can manage to match his charm.

Once his back is turned, I open my door and look back once more to see if he has also. Yes, he did. I knew he would. As slowly as possible, I close the door and enter my apartment. “How was the kid? Did he get you a kids’ meal or a big boy meal?” my roommate inquires while employing her maximum sarcastic capacity. I remain silent as I remove my shoes and coat, drop my bag in my bedroom, and take an exaggerated seat upon her bed. “Well shit,” I say with a conflicted smile. “I had an amazing time and he’s a freshman. He is a baby and it was the best date I’ve had in a very long time. How is that allowed?” I whine. “Wait, really? It was that good of an evening? Damn, I gotta give what’s his name, uh. What is it again? Garry?”

“Gabriel,” I add. “Gabriel, right! I gotta give this Gabe guy some serious credit. You’re the toughest of tough nuts to crack and he still managed to secure a second date! I want to meet him,” my roommate says with legs raised crossed at

the ankle behind her head and arms grasping my arms as she shakes me enthusiastically.

“Well, you will get to meet him. Our next date is a movie night here so you’ll get to ask all the question you want. Just, please, don’t scare him off. He’s got some serious relationship potential,” I mention with a hopeful grin.

“Don’t worry, I’ll only embarrass you a little bit,” she replies with a wink.

The next two days pass by with a refreshing amount of anticipation. Much to my surprise, my wily date messages me with a greater fervor than the past month before our meeting. He must have liked me, huh. Once Sunday morning finally arrives, he confirms our evening plans and offers to bring movie candy. I don’t like hand-outs but how can a girl turn down free candy. I inform him of my favorite movie snack, goobers, and he replies with a series of photos from the candy isle of Kroger to demonstrate his dedication to adequate, cinematic cuisine. “Bag secured,” the message reads on my illuminated apple screen. “Can’t wait!” I respond to his txt with a colon followed by a closing parenthesis, trying to keep it

classy. Too cheesy? Maybe but I don't care.

With movie candy off my to-figure-out-list, I peel myself from the spot I've been warming on my since I got home from church. Early morning services and lazy Sunday afternoons truly are the best. I walk into my antiquated bathroom, remove my Sunday best, and shower quickly under a boiling stream that leaves every inch of me with a pink glow. For exactly five minutes, I argue back and forth with myself on what particular articles of clothing are perfect for this evening. At a loss, I beg my roommate to aid me in my tumultuous decision. She instructs me to wear my bathrobe; I'm not amused. "Go dry your hair and put some makeup on, let me worry about the outfit," she instructs with a wink. With an eyeroll and a smile, I re-enter the bathroom to ready myself.

"I trust you, don't make me regret that, " I jest to her as she opens my closet door down the hall.

Hair arranged, lashes curled and lips plump, I exit the bathroom. I go into my adjacent bedroom and find a pink V-neck and black jeans laid-out on my bed. Pink shirt huh? Laying the feminine on

thick on the first date is so her thing.
“Thank you,” I yell down the hall.

“Mhm” I heard from her end of our long apartment. With all of thirty seconds to spare, I dress and place my laptop on top of the living room coffee table just in time to hear a knock at the front door. On the dot, brown-noser huh?

After walking him to the door at the end of the night, I maintain every last moment of eye contact available before closing my front door. I turn the locks, chain the deadbolt, and float down the hall to my bedroom where I fall onto my red comforter. He just left and I already want to see him again. I mean, from the moment he entered the apartment, our flow was just so, so natural. Can dating really feel this simple or am I completely snowed by his charm? Let’s go with the former until proven otherwise. I come from a family of movie lovers but I had never seen Pulp Fiction. To summarize, the movie was excellent! But, the movie failed to captivate me as much as the company I shared. Gabriel knew every line, every scene, and every jump-scare in which he used to ensure I would knock a few kernels of popcorn upon the hard-wood floor. He really should have held the metal

bowl after I dumped half the corn onto the floor during the first explosive moment in the film.

Other than his inclination to startle me, the evening was so easy. After the movie ended, we talked about everything. Though, I still don't know how, I thought we had covered most things two days prior; I was wrong. We debated cinematic preferences, cultural differences, and comical grins over the things we had in common. We were almost giddy at how natural the evening felt. Sadly, all good things must come to an end all too quickly. With class the next morning, we both agreed on the necessity of rising to head towards the door. As I went to stand, we looked at one another and neither of us wanted to be the first to do so. He looked to me, "Ladies first," he had said. In defiance, I stared dead ahead and turned farther away with each comical expression he shot my way. Eventually, his impatience grew too much to bare. At this moment, he reached out his long, strong arm, hooked his fingers under my chin to guide my gaze to his, and, in a movement far more fluid than I ever could, he closed the distance between us on the couch. Eyes locked, his hand slid from my chin to glide into the grooves above and below my ear; when his other hand matched the

placement of the first, his brown eyes pleaded for my advancement. I placed a hand upon his right arm, met his gaze, and then broke it as my eyes closed when his lips met their target.

I am still playing this scene in my head. The warmth of his mouth, the electricity in my toes, and, most of all, the deep, caramel-brown pools that I allowed to peer into the soul of mine, blue and green. Two classes of the day down and I have learned absolutely nothing. My mind is elsewhere and I don't know why. Ok, that is a lie. I know exactly where it is. It is in la-la-land fantasizing about someone I know next-to-nothing about. I can dream positively, it isn't a crime but, it can be dangerous.

“Hey, I want to see you. What are you doing Friday night?” illuminates my phone screen as it rests next to my laptop on the fake-wooden surface of the coffee shop table. I conjured this didn't I? Gabriel's sweet smile pops into my head as I reach for my phone.

“Spending the evening with you, what did you have in mind?” I reply coyly. I marvel at how much I smile at the mere mention of his name.

“How about a movie night? Popcorn on me,” he responds. I agree and bite my lip as I add a blushed face to my message. I cannot wait to see him but the rest of the week lies between him and I. Luckily, he lets me know he is aware of my absence as well with frequent and consistent text messages throughout the week. Each smile and giggle he elicits from my lips both help and makes the wait worse with antagonizing anticipation.

At long last, Friday arrives. In our free time, we converse to pass the time. Once six o'clock rolls around, my palms are sweaty as I apply vibrant red color to my lips. My reflection looks back at me with thick, black lashes, hydrated red lips, and my bright blue-green eyes lined with black to distract from the lack of sleep beneath them. I am a student but my mind has kept me awake these days. Before we met, we talked for hours through electronic telegrams across blue-light screens. However, having laid my eyes, hands, and mouth upon him, I can't get him to vacate my mind. His tall, slender figure, the charming nature of his body, the childlike joy to his laugh all swarm round and round in a cloud of warmth in my stomach. Lost in thought, I

drop my luscious shade in the sink and am snapped back to my reality.

I retrieve my lipstick and look to check the time. “6:50 p.m.!” I exclaim, “Shit, I’m gonna be late!” Normally, I hope to be picked up or walked with for a date but, due to our schedules, I’m to meet Gabriel at the theatre tonight at seven. Well, time to run in heels. Here’s hoping my makeup survives. I speed walk the ten minutes it takes me to get to the cinema. I make it a minute late but, as I search for him before the entry way doors, my phone buzzes in my back, blue-jean pocket. “Running late, be there in ten,” the message from Gabriel reads. I RAN FOR NOTHING. Seriously, good job I?

So, by the doors, I wait for the duration of the late period for Gabriel to show. Leaning against a pole by the door, I check to see the time, again. The screen informs me it is eight minutes past. Good thing the movie doesn’t start till thirty minutes past. Oooh, maybe I have time to powder my nose before he gets here. I return my phone to the interior pocket of my purse. As I go to fasten the bag closed, I hear him call my name. “Marie, “ Gabriel calls out and I immediately look up to meet his gaze. As I do so, I watch as his face morphs from recognition to something

else entirely. I see his eyes travel from my eyes to my lips and his mouth opens to say, “Ah come on, now, how am I supposed to make-out with you when the movie gets boring with that gorgeous red lipstick on. Man, I want to kiss you even more now.” I blush and let him take my hand to lead me into the theatre.

Popcorn procured, we walk up the stairs to find remaining seating to the right side of the screen. Once seated, Gabriel throws his arm around me in a warm embrace against the cold air conditioning of the dark, communal space. I love the way he smells next to me. Not just the scent he applies to his body but the way his skin smells sweet and is warm beneath my touch. In my peripheral vision, the soft curve of his lips threatening to steal my gaze from the screen. Focus Marie, you’re here to watch a movie. Stop looking like such a rookie, you’ve seen attractive men before. Yeah, but, never one I liked this much about him. He is handsome, intelligent, and passionate. What more could I require? Now, is he the type to ask questions the whole movie? We shall see.

As the film progresses, I begin to relax in his arms. So much so that I worry his arm has fallen asleep across the length

of my shoulders. During the film, Steve Carell says his quotable line of, “You’re the perfect combination of sexy and cute,” and Gabriel smirks. He looks to me, his brown eyes warm, softened from his focused gaze towards the screen and grasps my free hand with the one he’s wrapped around me. We sit this way for the remainder of the film. As the credits roll, we exit the theatre and begin to walk home. With the dimming of the evening sky, the wind had picked up creating a breeze that played with my hair as we walked. He took note of this and asked if he could aid in nature’s advance. I smiled and continued to walk, his hand in mine. We talked about the film and how he couldn’t believe he didn’t hate the romantic comedy we had just watched. I was so nervous he would resent me for my choice but, instead, he laughed a lot during. Very loudly, I might add.

We turn onto my street and begin to slow our steps as we approach my apartment building. Walking up the stoop one step at a time, I fiddle with my keys.

“Thank you for a great night with a beautiful woman,” he blushed, “I had a great time with you.”

“The pleasure was all mine, thank you for agreeing to a romantic comedy. And, yes, you did laugh more than I did. Admit it,” I teased with a raised eyebrow.

“Ok, fine. I laughed and didn’t hate it. In fact, I loved it. I found to be very eye-opening.”

“Eye-opening? Well, I’m intrigued, care to share how?” I ask, taking a seat on the porch balcony.

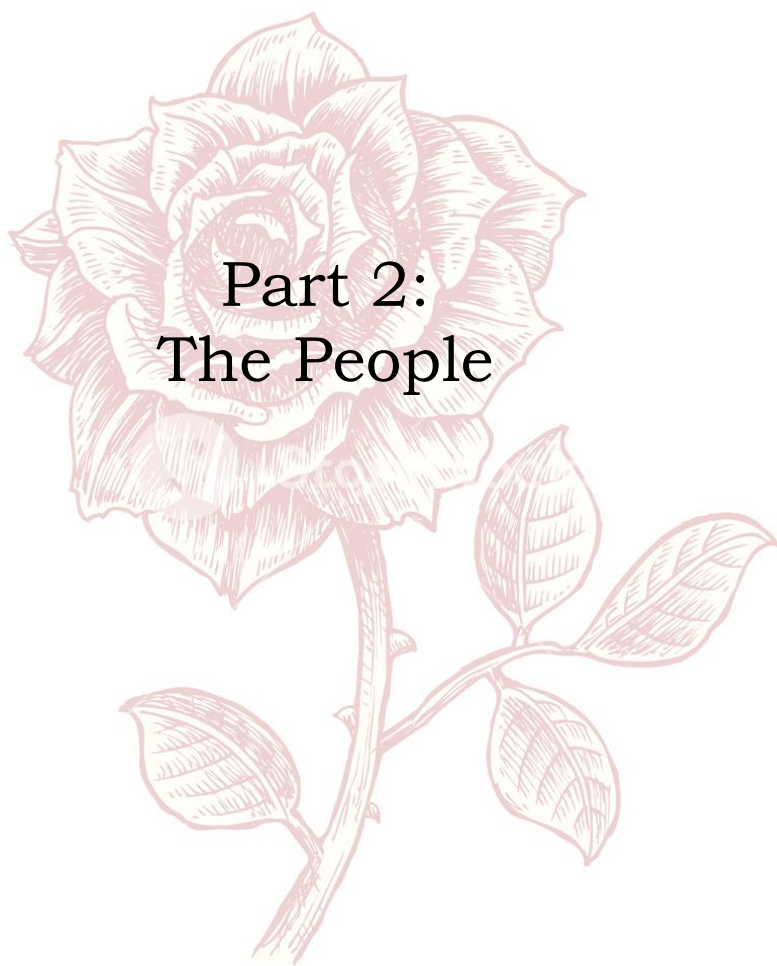
“Well, if anything, it opened my eyes to the truth right beside me. I’ve never had anyone make me feel this good in a while they way you make me feel,” he says with a genuine smile. He stands before me and raises both my hands to his mouth to kiss. I blush and he takes my hand to walk me to the door.

“Your hands are cold,” he says, “I should get you inside.” I let him lead me to the door. I put my key in the lock and, before I make the necessary turn, Gabriel urges me to face him.

“Wait, I had to give you a proper goodnight,” he says leaning in for a slow but warmth-inducing kiss, “And, had to tell you that you are indeed the perfect combination of sexy and cute.” I smile

with blushing cheeks betraying my composure.

“Goodnight,” I giggle and open the door. Before stepping inside, I turn back to see him walking down the stairs onto the sidewalk. No surprise, he turns back as his sneakers hit flat surface. We both exchange a smile and I head inside with an excitement I haven’t felt in years consuming my thoughts for the rest of the evening. I had no idea how fast a life can change until one comes into yours and does it for you.



Part 2:
The People

New Orleans, I'm Sorry

Walking the broken pavement, I am surrounded by foul smelling substance-on people, on the road, and in the forgotten cups used to down various liquids. There is a pungent mix of urine and booze in the air. Prostitution is popular, as sex is the theme of this particular avenue. Bourbon Street, while certainly not lacking alcohol, is certainly not living up to its name. An alcohol of such quality and craft deserves much better than this scene of sinners. This sea of promiscuity taints this elegant elixir. While full of variety, I don't think this is what Bourbon was meant to stand for.

For a lost soul, this place provides great company. Blind to their corrupt surroundings, tourists, like myself, pass by in packs. They are drawn in by the glamor of a name and freedom of this city's nature. Is that why we come? Drawn by the illegality of it all? We are intrigued by danger and enjoy the thrill of the unexpected and unusual. But, it's not your fault New Orleans. You are merely a victim of the times.

With your many sides, you show your warped and natural and crafted charm. In some of the most revolting

spaces, you cater to your public with false grace and corrupt style. You welcome them with open arms and promise to surprise them. On the other hand, your more astute and expensive side acts as a playground for the wealthy. You give the people what they want, even though you lose a little bit of yourself in the process, for progress. Though, there are a great many different parts of you that invite this malevolent confusion to take hold.

I wonder why your city has allowed such corruption to set-up shop with a submissive smile when you are so firm of hand elsewhere. To contrast, your lush country side and swaps refuse to be tamed and bent to the will of foreign inhabitants. While these lands can appear accommodating to the polite visitor, they never alter their consequences and dangers for those whom wander within its parameters. This wild side of you does not offer drink or drug to numb the pain; it only offers unforgiving hostility to the lost. Nature, like your spirit, is an unmovable mountain: an unapologetic summit of everything you stand for. You are rich in history, vibrancy, and could never bore your audience. We are sorry for using you as a means rather than a place to call home in the end. Your unmeasurable and electric. While we invade and push your

limits, your heart still beats true. We are sorry for our invasion and we thank you for the pleasure of your company.

Once Upon a Time, There Was a Man
Morphed by Mania

The self-made man was born and raised in the bluegrass hills. For someone of his status, not much was expected of him. However, he wanted to make something of himself. So, he did. Onza Wilson, at the age of 17, took the \$15 to his name and walked nearly one hundred miles to the nearest city to make his fortune.

In doing so, he went and got a good job and started supporting himself in the way all young men eventually do. Despite his meek birthright, he took a factory job and left the mules and fields of his childhood behind. Though he left his home town to become a man, he did not leave without a trace. His farm boy ways were never forgotten by the small-town princess, Carol.

While his family was still traveling to town by horse and buggy, the princess was riding in the rural kingdom's first car. Much to the dismay of the king and queen, the rural princess fell in love with the self-made man. So much so that she married him. Later, she gave him two daughters of their own. For a while, their world was perfect.

However, there is so much that lay beneath the black and white smiles of their family films and photos. The self-made man began to change. As his children grew, his mind grew as well. Just, not in the way that age usually takes its course. As his children matured, his emotions grew more and more sporadic. Happy and calm one minute but exasperated and spending every last dime he worked to gain the next.

By now, his illness had become the burden of the eldest daughter, Johnna, to distract the younger, Jill, from the hidden truths of her childhood idol. The fun, reckless man who made her tough was actually struggling to hold himself together. A man of spirit, he refused all medical restraints on his hyperactivity. His feared and hated to be slower than his full capacity. Yet, his own kingdom suffered for his mistakes and selfishness.

With the children grown, the beautiful princess who loved him dearly left her hometown hero. The selfish nature of his untreated woes finally became too much for her to bear. However, she couldn't stay away for too long. For, a few years later, she returned to the embrace of her love and reunited with him, in spite of

herself. The self-made man and the princess together again in the passionate love that constantly fought the discontent of so many who knew them.

Yet, like his sanity, the regained bliss did not last long. Years passed like decades as the queen mother of their two daughters did her best to focus on her children instead of her banished king. Despite the peril in their castle, the two daughters had learned to support themselves like proper ladies. The youngest daughter, Jill, became a nurse and the eldest, Johnna, a school-teacher. The night before Jill's nursing school graduation, she, the apple of the self-made man's eye, was given her father and ultimate childhood companion's troubles in full.

With his cruel and sporadic tendencies, the almost-nurse convinced her hero to take a drive. Shaking the entire time, Jill drove the embodiment of her childhood towards the hospital. The minute she pulled her chariot up to the psychiatric ward curb, the self-made man she loved dearly grabbed the wheel and almost killed them both trying to get away. By some miracle, the youngest daughter managed to pull the car to a stop before the hospital doors. Jill's fellow medical professionals all rushed to her aid and

help to pry her troubled father from the car. In these aggressive moments, the father called her every scathing name but the son of God. In that moment, her heart shattered as the hero of her childhood thrashed and was restrained like a caged animal. He was no longer just the self-made man in her eyes. He had become a secret nightmare shielded from her childhood dreams by the queen.

The youngest daughter then drove home, changed her clothes, and dressed herself for her graduation photo. Though she only became aware of his illness as a young adult, the love and bliss of her childhood view was further tainted with her recollection of each insulting and uncontrolled action her father made.

Jill had to do this to her childhood hero twice, losing a piece of herself each time. As time went on, the manic man's daughters had children of their own. Jill and Johnna shared the experience of this tortured life but in very different ways. When Jill would beg and plead for change, Johnna would nod and smile. Both did what they felt was best. For Jill and Johnna's young, the secret of his condition was hidden to a point. Jill refused to show her young his false nature until they were grown. They too broke a

little inside each time their dethroned grandfather was sent away from their gates. Without knowing the reason, the curiosity of Jill's children became almost painful and the look they saw on their mother's face each time nearly made them cry. Jill tried to hide it but the pain behind her eyes always let them know that something wasn't quite right with their grandfather. Johnna, Jill's older sister, however, had become numb to the pain and never censored her children's view of the king's disturbing spontaneity.

As the years passed, the two daughters remained close and almost always united in their stance in dealing with the self-made man turned manic. Home from college, Jill welcomed her second born, Miranda, with open arms and brought the family together for a celebration. Specifically, Jill had Miranda home for thanksgiving. The dinner was massive. Every member of the family in attendance brought a dish, or three, to the meal. After all, food never fails to bring people together, especially in the deep south.

At the start of the meal, the family all turned to the front of house at the sound of a small, yet firm, knock at the front door. Out of instinct, Jill, the queen-

mother Carol and Miranda all waited inside the kitchen for Jill's husband, Chris to return with the news they already anticipated. Jill's childhood hero was at the door, asking for Miranda. After a quick look of inquisition, Jill and Miranda leave the manic man's love with the rest of the family inside. Miranda recoils when she sees first sight of her grandfather. She pauses a moment until she gathers the courage to speak to her grandfather, her papa. But, the scene on the other side of her father was something she could never have prepared for and well, surely, never forget. She peered around her father to see a shell of a man. A dirty, small man who resembled her papa but appeared to be missing most of his teeth and several pounds of healthy mass.

She spoke few words as he made promises to give her several thousands of dollars' worth of land when he dies. The self-made and destroyed man told Miranda how he regretted never giving her the same gifts he gave the young men of the family. The shell of her papa began to cry. She robotically tried to console him but only helped a bit. But, it didn't matter. He was back to a good humor in a matter of seconds. The only grandfather she has ever really known then tries to get her to take a flat of rain-soaked grain he didn't

need to buy at a flea market. At a loss for words, she accepted them. Jill, who had walked away entirely undetected, reappears with a plate of food wrapped in plastic. The manic man said he didn't want it because he already ate but took it regardless and left with the shortening of the conversation. The door closed and the youngest's' daughter released the breath she wasn't aware she had been holding; Miranda then began to cry and shake in her father's embrace. The past encounter had forever made a mark in her brain in a matter of minutes. She sobbed hard for only a moment as she knew she had to rejoin our kin for the limited time hours of the day remaining.

Upon their return to the family table, the true love of the manic man shared a knowing smile and embrace with Miranda. She allowed the comfort her grandmother provided to be brief to uphold the merriment of the rest of the family. Despite all, the love the family had for one another was the strength that allowed them to keep going to triumph over the trials of their sick loved one. As a kingdom, they'd had death from incurable disease and lives won back for the time being. Yet, what was harder to face was a disease that cannot be cured by the one refusing apothecarial assistance. For Jill

and Johnna's kingdom, sometimes, the only way they survived was to let love go until the man morphed regained his will to be loved. That is true love, knowing when to give the distance continued love demands.

A Cardinal's Rule

I'm not a big believer in signs. Really, I'm Christian and not the foreign tongue speaking in a congregation kind. For me, I believe in miracles and witnessing but never, so much, in signs. But, today, who knows. My recent circumstances have left me with a fairly open mind to signs. In fact, I had sizable meltdown I had yesterday. Someone I love made me cry over my biggest insecurity. It happens; not often, but it happens. So, I called my mother. Just a note, my mom and I are pretty close.

Unlike some kids, I never went through that "I hate my parents" phase in high school. I love my mom and I elicit her advice often. Anyway, back to the topic at hand. I called my mom and expressed my distress. Being the great mom she is, the conversation began with her listening before expressing her anger before the calming advice to follow. To begin, she wanted to cause the one who hurt me physical harm, as most strong-willed mothers do, never meaning it but threatening just the same. Next, she reminded me of something I often forget along with many other women who don't have this instilled in their brains. She reminded me of my worth and the

strength I possess that I know that I have. I do have it, I know, but it can hide from me sometimes behind the power of my insecurities in moments of vulnerability.

She made me feel better and reminded me of the allure and presence I give when it's just me. I needed this pinch on the arm of worth and strength. After our talk, I finally felt that I was ready to choose joy and focus on the blessing every day is when your alive. Putting the phone on the counter, I stumbled back into my shoes, zipped-up my coat and headed out my apartment door to conquer the remainder of my day. Upon closing my door, I raise my gaze to the bushes behind my house. Nothing special, but, it was the residents of these green-less shrubs that caught my attention. Upon the bare branches, I see not one, not tree, but ten vibrant, red cardinals. I've seen a family of cardinals before but ten male cardinals, the flashier of the species, all together. Now, that is special.

As a Christian, I'm not superstitious but maybe I do believe in signs. In my family, we have an unspoken belief that cardinals are a way for passed loved ones to interact and watch over living relatives from heaven. Like my family, I believe this to be true. Therefore, the strength my

mom re-fortified in me was only magnified by the remainder of love I found in these magnificent, Christmas-red birds to remind me of the power I love I have to support me always. Christmas-red, yet, another season of hope just like the beautiful spring songs I hear from the birds outside my apartment window. It's funny the things we take note of and how they can fill us with warmth even in the coolest of seasons.

An End & The Beginning

One of the happiest moments in the life of a young adult is receiving a college acceptance letter. All a graduating senior could ever ask for is that moment of uncontainable joy after reading the word “congratulations” in a letter from higher academia. Only 5 months away from my high school graduation day, I had been one of those elated hopefuls – for about an hour– but my elation was soon surpassed by sorrow.

8 AM

It had been six days since my grandfather had come home on hospice. Ever since my dad had told my brother and I to say our goodbyes, I had spent every day at my grandfather’s bedside, hoping to absorb every bit of wisdom he had yet to share. From the very beginning, my grandparents had never involved in my life; they spent most of my childhood traveling the world and maintaining their career standings rather than being grandparents. After so many awkward family dinners with near strangers, the past three years had been the times where my grandfather had really tried to connect. With his battle with cancer hindering his usual activities, he had decided it was time to slow down and get

to know me. With every conversation we had, I learned more and more about him I had never heard before. As his condition had rapidly declined, I wasn't ready to finish our conversations.

How did things change so fast...how could the doctors just tell us out of nowhere that he had six months left? I thought they were still treating him. Lost in thought, I stood in the mirror taking in my reflection. My hair was a mess and I had circles as dark as midnight beneath my blue-green eyes.

As I studied my appearance in the dim lighting of the washroom mirror, I failed to register the approach of my mother from down the hall and her presence in the doorway.

"Hey pumpkin, you ready to go?" my mom asked with a weak smile.

"Will I ever really be ready?"

"It's going to be ok baby, I promise," my mom uttered as she pulled me in for an embrace. "I love you," she cooed. I failed to reply but my silence, as I clung to my mother, spoke volumes. After I withdrew from the moment, my mom and I headed down the hall toward the garage.

“Hey mom, can we stop by the mailbox on the way out?” I sunk down into the gray BMW my mom had leased, which somehow seemed more frivolous than usual. A lot of things had failed to have meaning to me lately.

“Absolutely, it’s a new day,” mom added, as she laced her fingers through mine. With her free hand, my mom meticulously searched through her music and cranked her 80s playlist. She drove the length of the driveway and came to a stop in front of the brick mailbox, which my grandmother had backed into not once, but twice in previous years. After lowering the metal door baring the number 505, my mom began placing various colored envelopes into her lap. As she freed the colorful papers from their hollow holding cell, my mom slowed her pace as she pulled out a blue envelope bearing a silver seal.

“Is that?” I asked with wide eyes fixated on the thick envelope.

“I think so,” mom encouraged.

“Well, I guess I should open it?”

“I would.”

With her words of assurance, I began tearing into the deep blue envelope, breathless with anticipation. Once I freed its content, I began to read aloud at a pace my tongue couldn't quite keep up with.

“Oh my gosh, I got in!” I exclaimed. “It's only been two weeks since I submitted it and I got in!” I tore my eyes from the beautiful black lines on the page and looked to my mother. Pure joy and pride beamed from my mom's eyes, a smile that appeared to glow. The two of us embraced and allowed the echoes of our happiness to fill the ears of anyone within a mile radius of the car. Sitting back from our shared joy, mom lovingly placed her strong hands on either side of my face.

“I am so proud of you. I always said I would make it home, somehow, and it's you who is going to take me back, even if it's for short visits.” We both laughed. As a Kentucky native, my mother always talked about missing her home state and the trips (from Georgia to Kentucky) she used to make back there when she was in high school. We used to take family trip to Kentucky when I was little. Now that I would be attending school in Lexington, I had given her an excuse to visit her home state more often. After studying my face

for a moment, mom dropped her hands to my shoulders.

“Oh, we have to go. This is some good news we could all use right now. He is going to be so proud of you!”

“I hope it makes him smile.”

After I got into college, I was overcome with a wave of joy that made me forget the terrible week I was living through. Up until that day, my mind had been consumed by worry; yet, the joy of that moment (opening the letter in the car with my mother) allowed me to let all my fear wash away. I felt rejuvenated by the happiness of the news and the hope it gave me for the joy of new opportunities in the future. In that moment, I felt as though nothing could shake my elation. I was ready to share the news I hoped would lift the spirits of my family, as it had lifted mine.

My mom and I made the short ten-minute trip to my paternal grandparent’s house as fast as the speed limits would allow. Once we pulled into the canopied driveway, my feet hit the beige pavement, stumbling slightly, as the car failed to come to a stop fast enough for my reeling head. Like a bandit, I pulled the laborious

backdoor open, raced through the laundry room and then the kitchen. As I approached the landing, I came to an abrupt stop as the scene before me unfolded. I stood paralyzed looking upon the characters in the sunroom, the weight of the dismal scene threatened to crush me.

“Dad?”

“Hey, baby doll.”

“Daddy, I got into U.K. I did it.” My words shattered any shred of composure my father had, and I ran into his embrace. A heavy tear fell from my father’s face and found a home in the back of my shirt. I had never seen my father so broken before. He had been trying to hide his pain from me for the past week but the weight of the moment tore down the walls he had built.

“Dad, I wanted to... Can he?”

“He hasn’t been able to move or speak since this morning, the cancer has taken over.” I blinked the rush of pain from my eyes and looked up at my father.

He really does look just like him.

My excitement for the future was short lived, for about fifteen minutes to be

exact. Just like that, the powerful joy I had was crushed just as quickly as it had come. The joy I was feeling was quickly dampened with the sadness of my dad's news; but, I was not yet defeated as I was determined to hold onto the hope he would still be proud of me even if he couldn't tell me so.

"Tell him darlin, I'm sure he will hear you." I stepped away from the safety of my father's arms, as my mother entered the room and took my place in my father's embrace. As my mother comforted my father, I walked over to the shell of the man who was my grandfather. His faded blue eyes were wide open, his breaths came at an alarming rate. I sank to my knees beside the bed and grasped my grandfather's hand.

"Hey Grandpa, I don't know if you can hear but I pray to God that you can."

I wiped my tears on the sterile, white linen and attempted a smile as I spoke.

"I got into U.K. grandpa, I did. Um. You always told me to study hard. What I wouldn't give to hear you now." I bowed my head to hide my tears. My grandfather was a man who was never lost for words.

As I crawled deeper within my sorrow, I imaged how hard it was for him to have his words locked away in a vault that was made of him. The vault within which he was trapped allowed almost no response but a bugging of his eyes and a jerk of his head (a response that seemed to be purely anatomic in nature) as if his body had merely registered a different tone of voice. Unable to bear the moment that washed over me, I – on unsure legs and with quivering hands – stood and walked away from the bed to the landing.

“I– I’m going to go tell grandma.” I retreated through the living room and darted into the hallway. The banister of the stairs stood as the only thing barrier between my numb body and the floor. I pressed my back hard against the posts until my spine warned me of breaking. After clearing my blurred vision and slowing my heartrate, I walked down the hall into my grandmother’s bedroom. Upon opening the door, I was assaulted by a black and white pig of a dog that was my grandmothers Boston terrier, Meghan. I found my grandmother’s, tired reflection peering back at me as she caked on a brave face of vibrant colors in the mirror.

“Hello darlin’, when did you get in?”

“Just now but I have good news.” I pulled the letter out of my back pocket. “I got accepted into the University of Kentucky grandma. I did.”

“Oh. Oh, that’s wonderful. Wonderful really. Where’s Karen? We have to show her your letter.” My grandmother gave me a passing hug as she exited the bathroom to find Karen, the housekeeper.

“Ah, Karen. My granddaughter just got accepted into the University of Kentucky. Isn’t that wonderful.” My grandmother went on for a few minutes about all the things I had done in high school and what I planned to do in college. *How can she have already moved on to bragging about what I’d done. Grandpa is lying there in the next room and she’s fluffing her reputation.* I looked towards the sunroom where I could see half of the hospice bed that held my grandfather’s frail body. My grandmother hadn’t been very involved in my life until recently. My brother and I were never kept by my grandma as young children and we were like strangers. However, my grandmother, the active socialite, made sure to flaunt her grandkids achievements to her friends every chance she got. My grandmother would have talked Karen’s ear off had she not received a phone call and headed out

into the garage to talk with her best friend, Fran.

9AM

Not knowing what to do with myself, I walked into the kitchen and decided to make cookies for the family to brighten the oppressive air that hung around our necks like a noose. I went to the cabinet, grabbed the dry ingredients, grabbed the eggs from the fridge, and went on to stir each element in a moonlight silver mixing bowl. As I began to add the chocolate chips to the mix, I felt the room go cold and a blanket of silence, the kind of silence where one could hear a pin drop - fall upon the atmosphere.

“Where is your grandmother?!” My uncle Fred asked as he frantically rounded the corner into the kitchen.

“She stepped outside, why– ” the words died on my tongue as my Uncle fled from the kitchen, out the door and into the garage. I felt my throat tighten and a twinge of fire behind my eyes as I looked at the bed in the next room. I robotically placed the bowl on the counter and walked ten paces to the step down into sunroom.

“Is.” I gasped for clarity. “Is he?”

“He’s gone baby doll.” My dad choked out. I looked upon the scene before me through blurred vision. I made two strides to stand at the foot of my grandfather’s bed and looked upon the lifeless figure whom I desperately wanted to know better. Burning floods of emotion finally consumed my vision and my mom collected my shaking body in her arms. I peered over my mother’s shoulder and witnessed the image of three hearts – my father’s and his two sisters – breaking at once.

A minute passed before my grandmother rushed into the room, at the fastest pace her 80-year-old body would allow, followed by my uncle. After 54 years of marriage, my grandmother laid her hands upon the chest of her best friend and father of her children.

“It’s ok for you to go baby. It’s ok. I love you and it’s ok to go.” My grandmother croaked. As we all exchanged glances of pure sorrow, we stood in disbelief of the indescribable pain coming over us.

In this communal moment of sorrow, any traces of the joy I felt only an hour before were gone. One moment, my heart was as light as air and I had

forgotten all my fear; The next, my heart was breaking at the loss of a man I was just starting to know. In the bible, Ecclesiastes three states, “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.” It was that verse that put this day (a day of great joy that turned to sorrow so quickly) into perspective and taught me that everything in life comes in equal increments, whether they be bad or good.

For what felt like ages, the only sounds that penetrated the silence were the beeping of my grandfather’s oxygen machine and the pains of loss. A final break in the silence came from the hospice nurse entering the room, stethoscope poised to check for a pulse. She tried for several minutes, a futile effort, to find a heartbeat. She declared my grandfather dead at 9:12 am on November 9th, 2016. *I can’t keep standing here. I’m going to lose my mind if I don’t help in some way. I have to do something.*

“I’m going to finish the cookies,” I announced as I stepped out of my mother’s embrace. As I walked towards the kitchen, my heart sank as I caught a glimpse of my grandfather’s sunken face. As I maintained the stability of a newborn fowl, I folded over the kitchen counter and

caught myself with my forearms on either side of the batter bowl. After I found my sunken reflection in the tile of the backsplash, I dried the moisture from my face and began to tear through cabinets in search of a cookie sheet.

“The pans are above the oven darlin’,” my grandmother called from the sunroom. *How can she be so calm? How is she not inconsolable? I am doing my very best to keep it together and she is calling morgues.* My head was spinning. I found comfort in the familiar task of plopping balls of cookie dough onto the pan. Out of self-preservation, I was in love with the certainty that if you put the sheet in the oven at 350 degrees for ten minutes, the cookies would come out perfectly moist and ready to eat. The simplicity of my actions brought me solace momentarily but then my phone rang.

“Hey Miranda, It’s Will. I am just calling to see if you wanted to carpool to the Milledgeville preservation society meeting today?” I had been friends with Will for five years and desperately wanted to tell him how much I wanted to go and forget this day. Instead, I wept unapologetically.

“Miranda, are you ok? What is happening? Please, talk to me.” Will pleaded on the other end of the line.

“Um, I. I’m sorry. My grandpa. Will, he’s gone. He died about 15 minutes ago and I was about 10 feet from him when he passed. So, I won’t be at the meeting today. Please tell them what has happened, could you? And tell them I’m sorry I can’t make it.”

“Miranda, oh my gosh, I am so sorry. I will definitely tell them what’s going on. Wow, is there anything I can do?” Will pleaded uncomfortably.

“Um.” I sobbed into my shirt and wiped my eyes. “No. No, just tell them for me, will you? The hospital nurse just got here, I’ve got to go.”

“I am so sorry Miranda.”

“Bye Will. Thanks – thanks again.” I hung up and cracked a damp smile as I pointed the nurse down the hall to the sunroom. I picked up a blanket off the top of the dryer, crumbled into the desk chair, and wept into the cotton fabric to muffle my sobs as the reality of the day set in.

While, for most, getting into college is one of the happiest moments in the life of a young adult, my experience was one of great happiness but was quickly matched with great sorrow, all within the span of the hour. After gaining a start to the rest of my life and losing a family member I barely got to love, November 9th would forever stand as a reminder that everything in life comes in its own turn; to everything in life, there is a balance. The first-hand experience I gained with balance taught me never to lose faith; I learned that everything in life happens for a reason and the death of my grandfather motivated me to make my grandfather proud by attending a University that would challenge me to do better. These experiences, whether they be good or bad, drive us to do incredible things and help guide us on our paths towards our future endeavors. So, no matter the scenario, everything in life happens for a reason; It is up to us to find the purpose and use these events to craft a better future.

My Hat, My Chair, Myself.

I never thought I would end up here. Never did I think it could happen to me. I'm not that old and I'm able. You know, I've always done right by them, all of them. Sure, I've had a few runs with the law. That mule was perfectly healthy by the way and broke my hip bones but I fed him anyway. Maybe it was the extravagance of it all. I did my best to give them all what I could but they would just stare at me like I was crazy or something.

So, here I am, going on eighty-two and in a rocking chair in my old Kentucky home. The county doesn't really matter, I probably won't leave it anyway. The dense county judge said I can't be alone anymore. Must have been paid off. Carol must have somethin' to do with it. She never could see. Clearly, she left me not once but twice. But, if that woman wasn't still in my business everyday it seems. I don't care what she thinks, the money she sent was used properly. I needed that wheelchair. I'd ne'er go back to that hospital even when I see some pigs fly. They wanna lock me up. My leg doesn't hurt too bad; I just can't walk on it is all.

The law must have followed me to the hotel, rolling up to the Russell Springs

Inn in my chair. It's none of their business where I stay. Why can't a man roll down the road in his own chair? I lost my truck on the highway. And who is to stay those ladies had bad intentions. They were nice to me and we had a great time. Sure, I guess the contents of their purses were a bit bad at first look but we were just feeling free in different ways. My clothes were suffocating, I didn't need them. Sarah, the blonde, agreed with me. I only needed my hat and my chair.

So, here I am. My family won't get me out. Selfish people they are. Always off when I bring them gifts. I'm giving them gifts and they are just acting ungrateful. My daughter Jill certainly doesn't understand. Johnna, on the other hand, doesn't seem to mind but never smiles like I think they should when I come by.

Sure, I have to eat pretty poor-like after I give them their presents but why not give? I get a check every month, Why not spend it before the flea market deals run off? They don't last forever you know. If I don't, someone else will first. I don't waste opportunity, it that so bad? It's funny, I never see that stone eagle I gave Johnna anymore. That stature was a few more on sixty pounds of concrete. I know, I put it in her flower bed myself while she

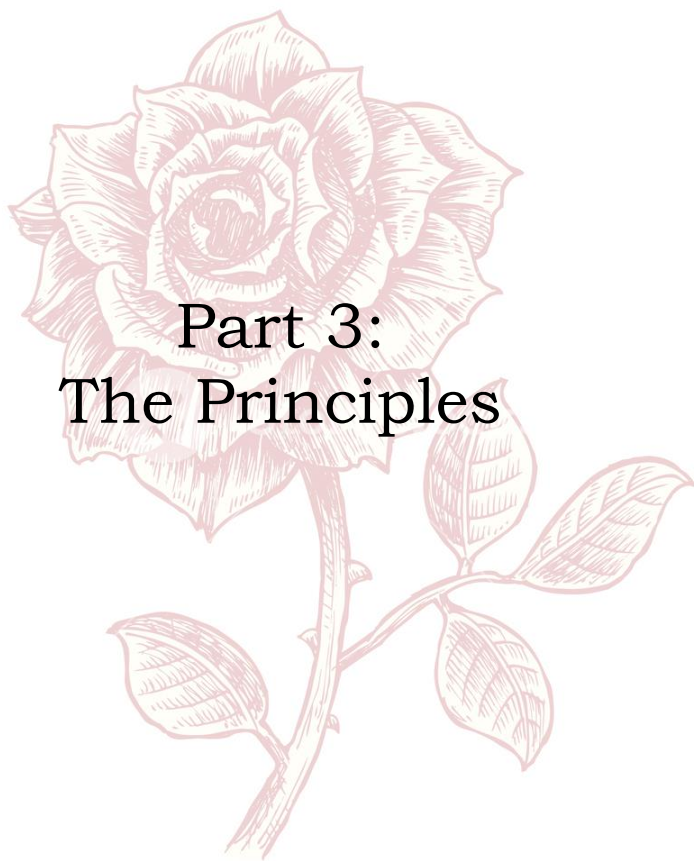
was at work. I hand painted it too, blue and red with black eyes. She's a school teacher and needs to show her patriotism for her students.

Come to think, I never saw that ceramic pointer dog that I left Jill again either. Her daughter Miranda said she'd put it out when her parents got home. I asked her where but she didn't wanna talk long, she had homework to do. But, her dad never let me around her for too long most times anyway. Jill never wanted to see me much neither. Chris never welcomed me when I had gifts, But, when I was fattened-up and there for family dinners, he was better.

But, what have my prize finds gotten me? No family around in a home in Kentucky. I've been places in my life. Georgia was my new home but it didn't seem to care for me much. In fact, I haven't been able to get many to see reason in the past few years. What is in the water they drinking? Jill called me after the first seven calls I made to her. She had a somber tone as she told me she forgave me and made me cry like a sick baby. She told me she loved me. Then, I came back to my senses and remembered I didn't have nothing to be sorry for. I told

her I did nothing wrong and that she was
a damn fool to think so.

She hung up.



Part 3: The Principles

Visual Velvet

Walking down the rickety stairs, she stared at her feet to ensure security. Once safely on the mucky basement floor, she returned her gaze to the world before her.

Surrounded by the warm, pungent air, she joined the euphoric crowd in their careless existence. Having found an open spot in the crowd, she moved to the music with her companions, swaying sporadically yet somehow in tandem with the masses.

Across the crowded space, she captured the attention of a wary viewer. Perhaps it had been her curls and red attire caught the eye of a tall gentleman across the way. He watched as her senses blurred with the changing of every note, but he did not advance her way.

Before the wandering-eyed gentleman had the chance to change his mind, a young buck, with an ambition to try, came up to the woman in red and asked her to dance instead. Her soul-searching suitor, across the divide, simply watched the scene unfold until defeat stole his head to turn and look upon another.

However inexplicable, we experience eye-contact with strangers several times on a daily basis; perhaps, this, the smallest unit of social engagement, is far more engaging than any mindless conversation could ever be. For some reason, a simple, shared glance is an indescribable luxury for our eyes and an involuntary exercise for our imaginations.

More often than not, the nature of a first glance is fickle, yet we continue anyway. This is the nature of human attraction. Though there may be no concrete proof, the locking of eyes across a room creates a connection. No matter how small or brief, the moment we meet and hold a gaze, we are instantly curious about the significance of the look and who the other person is; we want to know why they looked at you and of their intentions.

A Poetic Perjury

Recently, I have discovered that one of history's commonplaces is actually false. The presumption that George Washington has wooden teeth is actually wrong. General George Washington's teeth were, in fact, were made of hippopotamus ivory, gold springs and brass screws that held in human and animal teeth. Yes, you did read that correctly, human teeth were included in his dentures. One fact that is historically known is that Washington was a slave owner. As slaves, they were his property and he could ask anything of them. Some say he would make trades with his slaves for certain things. Maybe he would make a trade for teeth for his dentures?

Do you ever wonder about the events and facts we learn in history classes? I mean, think about it. Most American history books are single-sided. The discussions of slavery and the documented trials were all done by men of power, not any men of color.

In order to really connect with this horrid thought, I adopted the voice of a slave's wife to paint a picture in a short poem. Deathly Trade goes like this:

Eatin' supper, my Leroy smiles
We laughing the hardships of
today away

Master Washington comes in
to offer my Leroy
A few extra blankets for
purchase of yet more o' him

He asks for the white of his
smile
My Leroy smiles to me once
more then heads to the door

I hear his screams as they lef'
me inside
My Leroy come back in with
his hand up to hide

The vanity of my master's
gentile grace
Has stolen the joy of my
Leroy's face

Based off what I've learned, I know
this could be all a falsehood but it's a
conclusion I see of merit. While there may
be no proof, I wanted to try and connect
with the pain these enslaved individuals
must have dealt with daily. Specifically, a
slave woman who would have endured
whatever her master saw fit, as many slave
women were used in several ways other

than for their labors. Though I lack proof of my adopted voice's encounter, in this case, new material was presented to me and the necessary conditions did exist. These ivory dentures are currently housed in a collection at Mount Vernon. While I don't know, for certain, that Washington got teeth from his slaves, we also don't know he didn't. The voices of slaves were rarely, if ever, recorded. This is the tragic truth that inspired my poetic encounter.

Whit of a William

A brick fortress with transparent towers. Smooth curves and rigid edges. You are at the center of everything and nothing at all. Only is your reputation known by those who own you and make it so. You are nothing but a space without those who solidify your representation.

You have been created for extravagance and luxury. Within your walls, you can hold all the knowledge in the world but still it is your attendance that makes you remarkable. Many come to you in search of answers, others, because they feel tied-down by you as a last resort for clarity. Some are angered by you and the demands you make. They often spend resented hours inside your many chasms and halls. Others are grateful for the silence your heart provides and thank you for the diligent protection. But, again, everyone else decides who you are to them. Your identity is without tangible name.

With ancient remains trapped in your floors, perhaps they may name your purpose. What of the seas and sand they used to reside in and the many miles of ocean they roamed, are these the stories that give a name to their permanently,

solidified new home. Yet, these fossils are set in stone for their appeal. Your walls hold great knowledge of the outside world. The clear panes on your exterior give eyes to those inside; they allow your visitors to see far beyond the desks they often occupy but also allow stray lurkers to peer in for a taste of what you have to offer.

I feel the magnitude of your presence when I stand to look up at you from the base of your feet. What a feat it must have been for your birth. Though, as you age, the roots you planted are threatening to undertake you before your prime has been spent. Yes, maybe your real name lies in your past? Perhaps not. In your infancy, you were still a shiny new toy in the great big world of materialistic wonder. Do you still feel special or have the years hardened your heart? Do you feel used? It's ok if you do as so many do appreciate you still. I'm grateful for the years we've shared. The laughter, the tears, and long hours, The introductions, the smiles, and the flirty glances, and most of all, the progression and maturity we've gained together. We've grown but I hope we don't grow too far apart. Thank you for your beauty though I feel that is not the only part that captures your true heart.

Lack, Lust, or Love

A warm Thursday evening in September is a prime breeding ground of excitement on any higher education campus. Only a block away from these facilities, I watch as scantily-clad women in shoes they can barely stand in make their way to residences that, undoubtedly, house hundreds of scent-drenched young bachelors; at least, most of them are bachelors but they all still participate in these rituals weekly. It is always the routine. Oath-stricken young men gather necessary supplies for a gathering to last till the early morning hours and the entranced women bring their friends to partake in these late-night commencements. As I watch these professionals-in-training pass by in herds, I cannot help but think about the riveting and highly-anticipated activities that occupy their thoughts.

They say the party starts when the alcohol begins to flow. For me, I believe it begins with the pulling together of words needed to be heard, thoughts, hopes, dreams we've anticipated coming to a head for good or for bad.

Behind mindless celebration is a Band-Aid upon the emotionally shallow

scene we crave to, somehow, find depth in the shallow chaos, we don't really want meaningless pleasure. Maybe I sound crazy but I have grown to understand the human heart through the experiences of other's emotional abuse. In truth, there is no such thing as no strings attached. Our bodies can say one thing but our minds will always scream another. We think we want and need the ease of hollow, emotional supplements but we really want to feel full. Put simply, several young college students get stuck in a kind of cycle of temporary promise that satisfies our hearts for a while; however, our souls know better.

These excited, anticipated revelations and acts are the true meaning of a party. We don't desire the touching, the fluidity the alcohol gives, or even the sex it often leads to. What many really desire is the knowledge that we are more than what we display to the world. More often than not, young adults want to know that they are wanted for more than what they give the world; they want to feel special. After so many nights of searching to feel wanted, many give in to the idea that they will never be made to feel special and, thus, never recognize when something real is between their palms. So, while we do often seek-out the synthetic,

our innate desire for emotional depth will
always crave something warm and beating
and real.

A Marvelous Missed Opportunity

Staring at the revolting remains of a squashed bug, I feel the loss of my only opportunity for a guaranteed future. It was stolen away from me with only a single word, hours prior- a dream for the funding needed to further my education crushed in an instant. One word keeping me an ocean away from my dream, the negative adverb, not. Mere moments earlier, I thought this word was the hardest news I had ever received; Why wouldn't I be devastated after a great deal of hard work and committed time? Only moments earlier, I had been crying in the arms of those who love me with the same vulnerability as the bug I had squashed on the ceiling, when my baseball bat made it a permanent smudge for my private viewing.

But then, I stopped to take in my surrounding, the illuminated room full of paintings and photos of loved ones. My red curtains gave the space a rosy glow from wall to wall. Tearing my eyes from walls, I focus on each and every personal item that I keep in this room to make me feel at home. Each item has a story and a personal source of comfort. Along with the photos and life momentums, the warm mound of blankets used to deter the bitter

chill of winter nights somehow become has even more tangible, each one adorning a different color and texture.

Though my focus on the environment around centers me, the most touching artifact I take note of is the warm and comforting embrace about me. What of that? Is a loving embrace not one of life's greatest blessings? The genuine connection and adoration of two strangers having chosen to learn more about the other is a beautiful educational process. In the learning, most women learn to care and just how to do so. Male or female, we are never born with this intimate knowledge. Rather, all of life and the places we visit are a grand series of classrooms in which we are constantly adapting to better our understanding but without ever truly comprehending.

In this moment, I learned a great deal about myself. In these quiet moments of inhaling and exhaling in the particular presence and spacing around me, I learned that prizes and large dreams are not what make up a life. What makes a life are the brief and lengthy journeys in which we share common goals or desires. In this moment of consolation, I developed a deeper understanding about what it means to be loved. Not just the physical

act of love. No. What I learned was the core of loving someone is letting them do so. Though I thought I never would or couldn't, the man I love is the one who now holds me when I'm sorrowful. Most women of an independent nature, like me, say bring me no flowers but always want the opposite, also me. Our common traits include false modesty, acts of anger towards being fussed over and cared for but we are fooling ourselves. Even the most independent of women are often playing a game of self-righteous indignation. But, this is a rose-colored truth of an ideologic game. I used to play this game but someone really did change my mind after all.

We vivacious women are forbade from reverting to our previous status in historical existence by the women our senior. This is how you get women like me. The idea of allowing another to care and love us while we mourn the loss of a possible success feels demeaning. Despite all, I have learned better. The vulnerability of being cared for is how we can feel loss and get back up to try again. Uncertainty can be a major catalyst for a marvelously revolutionary metamorphosis. Mistakes and failures are tools for our use that ensure learning will take place whether we invite it or not. Therefore, it is important

to take all the not's and no's as not now
and no, not yet. Let these be the
motivational syllables to fuel your
aspirations and remember to appreciate
those in these moments of rejection for
they are the true insurance to never losing
faith. So, make mistakes, be vulnerable,
accept the compliments because, when we
aren't looking, these blessings can slip
away just as quickly as they came.

About The Author



Ms. Miranda Elizabeth Brown is a Georgia native who grew up without a love for reading. She became a reader as a high-school freshman and a writer as a college freshman.

She has worked as a freelance writer, a prose editor for the University of Kentucky undergraduate arts journal, and in marketing for the state-wide, scholarly press for Kentucky also known as the University Press of Kentucky.

Miranda is a May 2020, honor graduate of the University of Kentucky with a degree in Writing, Rhetoric, & Digital Studies. When she is not working endlessly, she also loves to sing and minored in vocal performance.