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Alternative Worlds: 3 Short Stories

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ALTERNATIVE WORLDS: 3 SHORT STORIES

AN HONORS THESIS

By

Kathleen M. Perry

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
for the Requirement for a Degree with Honors
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The following thesis consists of my personal writing and objective writing. First, you will read about my writing process and how I plan to connect this project to my career as a teacher. The format of the stories are as follows: The first version is the “final” version. The versions following are drafts from oldest to most recent. After the stories, I have included my Writer’s Journal. I used the journal as a way to reflect on my work as I completed it.

Before you begin reading, thank you for indulging my writing. I hope you enjoy reading it as much I as did writing it.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

I've always loved writing. It gives me a chance to create the world buzzing around in my head just begging to be listened to. Writing these three stories gave me a chance to finally write something exclusively for me. I didn't have to worry about the grade I would receive on them. I barely worried about the comments I got back; I knew they would help me create my best work. Editing is something I never really enjoyed. Throughout my schooling, I typically finished a writing assignment and turned it in. I never proofread. I usually didn't send in a rough draft ahead of time. When I received my grade and the option to revise, I usually kept the original grade. I didn't have the time or motivation to edit my work. I had other assignments calling my name. That changed throughout my thesis process.

"Migration"

While writing the first story, "Migration," ideas kept flowing into the story as I wrote. I often had to stop writing to write down ideas I had for the ending. I had the idea of government regulated human migration for a while, but I never had the time to write out the story that kept plotting itself in my head. Some days, I found it difficult to stop writing; I knew that channeling that type of energy would produce a captivating plot.

The inspiration for "Migration" came from a "what if" question I thought of while walking to class one day. I asked myself: "What if the world stopped travelling around the sun," "What if we didn't have a change of seasons?" I took these questions and

immediately started formulating answers; “Migration” was born. I started with sketching out the world without seasons. Soon after, I realized I don’t know enough about how the Earth moves in space to craft the logistics realistically. I didn't want my information presented inaccurately, so I started doing research. I needed to know what sides of the Earth face the sun in Summer and Winter to choose which countries will experience permanent Winter or permanent Summer. Once I figured that out, I could begin crafting the rest of the world. I set the time period (future), the countries I wanted to include, and the rules of this world and how Migration would work. I even drafted how the weather changed as someone Migrated. Once the logistics got ironed out, I began working on the people to fit into this world.

I modeled the two protagonists, Emily and Lina, after myself and my best friend. I didn't do this intentionally, but the more I gave them life, the more I realized they reflect my friends. I molded the parents after stereotypical parents in a nuclear family, and I molded Cole after some boys I knew in high school. When I first thought of these characters, I took the time to outline them on paper. I talked about their personalities, their relationships with one another, and how the rules of the world affected them. However, when I started bringing the characters into life in my story, some of the characteristics I originally gave them went away. The story started to take control and I felt the characters becoming their own people. I put myself into the shoes of my characters and found myself going back when I made them do something out of character. I did my best to keep their personalities consistent throughout the whole story; this was difficult because sometimes I would want one thing, and the story called for another. Once I felt I had the whole world set, I started outlining the plot. Once I started

writing, I ditched what I initially planned. It felt natural to write outside of my outlines, I knew that the story would take me where it wanted to go.

The biggest concept concerning writing I learned throughout college is that you have to let the story write itself. I found the story heading in directions I didn't plan for. Instead of forcing my original ideas, I came up with new ones; I followed the story rather than leading it. This produced more authentic characters, a stronger story, and a believable setting. I made sure to apply this practice to all of my writing in the future.

For the government and laws in “Migration,” my influence came from dystopian novels with unreasonable governments. I also grabbed some influence from people’s opinions and speculations on the current state of the American government. I wanted to create a world where the laws were justifiable and necessary, but seemed completely unnecessary at the same time. I looked at novels like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins; *Divergent* by Veronica Roth; and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury— all novels or series that conceptualize different styles of dystopian worlds. *The Hunger Games* takes place in a country where teenagers have to fight to the death to keep the population in check. The government in *Divergent* segregates the people by their personality. In *Fahrenheit 451* the written word and books are illegal. I looked at how their governments worked and took what I could to formulate my own. I took the aggressive, but peaceful personalities from officers in *The Hunger Games* and transferred that into the “Linemen,” or border guards, in “Migration.” Fortunately, my characters never had to deal with them first hand. In the beginning of my story, Lina witnesses someone who wasn’t able to cross: “Some weren’t so lucky; a few lines over, I heard the saddening low tone that keeps someone from Migrating. I’ve heard the reject sound a few times before

but I can't help staring at the awkward situation" (Perry 1). Before she has the chance to describe the encounter, her family rushes her along. Also, in *The Hunger Games*, an underlying sense of fear of the officers translates from the characters to the readers. Although my characters never had to deal with the "Linemen" themselves, they knew the consequences if they broke the law. The punishment was broadcasted everywhere throughout Migration day. On the radio, Lina and her family hear:

On a less happy note, please remember that refusing to Migrate or traveling between Seasons outside of Migration Day is highly illegal. Report any suspicious activity to local authorities. Also, highly wanted Cole Posik has not migrated in several years and has not been reported dead. He is 5'11" with brown hair and thin build. Do not engage with him, he is highly dangerous. If you see him, please alert local authorities. Otherwise, Happy Migration! Travel safely and responsibly! (Perry 2)

I saw how the laws in those worlds were "normal," but outlandish to the reader and brought similar rules into my own setting to make it seem like everyday conversation between my characters.

When I finally finished "Migration," I couldn't wait to share it with my advisors. I eagerly sent them an email with the story attached and waited for their reply. I knew that I wouldn't get comments back for a bit of time and that I should spend some time away from my work, according to Stephen King. In King's *On Writing*, he writes about the importance of time between drafts. It allows a fresh mind to look at the work it produced some time ago. It allows the author to forget what they wrote and greet the text as a new reader. As hard as it was to wait to receive the feedback from my advisors, I understood

how crucial the time spent away is. I usually don't have the chance to spend weeks away from a piece of writing because of due dates and deadlines in the world of academia. As a student, it can be stressful to be told to step away from something but also have a hard fast deadline for the assignment. Also, from my experience, students don't want to take the time to step back and then look at a piece again after being away for a while. They want to finish a piece, turn it in, and be done. Because I have been in the students' shoes and will soon be in the teacher's shoes (as an aspiring educator), I can use my experiences to inform my own practices. Since I have had the chance to write my own story, and took the time to step away from it, I can show my students the importance of taking time between drafts. King writes:

If you've never done it before, you'll find reading your book over after a six-week layoff to be a strange, often exhilarating experience. It's yours, you'll recognize it as yours, even be able to remember what tune was on the stereo when you wrote certain lines, and yet it will also be like reading the work of someone else, a soul-twin, perhaps. This is the way it should be, the reason you waited. It's always easier to kill someone else's darlings than it is to kill your own. (213)

Re-experiencing a story I have written after six weeks of not thinking about it allowed me to see the story in a totally different light. It let me see the inconsistencies and what my characters are really like. My students will see that I have done this once before, and although difficult, it is doable.

During my break from "Migration," I worked on my second story. I got involved in a totally different story and a different set of characters that I'm going to explore deeper in a little bit. Once I received feedback from my advisors, I immediately began

implementing their suggestions. Making my characters more realistic proved a challenge I didn't anticipate. The comments I received suggested the characters didn't feel like real people. I changed that by observing real people. I reflected on how my family interacts with each other, how my friends interact, how strangers interact. I started eavesdropping on conversations and put real people into the story. Lina and her dad have a conversation about which season they prefer to live in and her dad states "I actually don't mind Winter that much. After a while, Summer gets too hot. And all of the fun things to do get boring after a while" (Perry 17). This is something that my dad would say on any given day.

Going through and making the revisions I did, made my story really come to life and I got even more excited to share the work I had done on it. I can bring this into my classroom to show my future students the importance of the drafting process. Bringing these types of models in my classrooms will allow students to see how to revise and edit the content of their writing. I will touch more on this subject at the end of the critical reflection in the section titled: Pedagogy.

"The Survival"

My inspiration for "The Survival" came from a dream I had. I usually don't write down my dreams, but in ENG 270 (The Act of Interpretation) we had just started our paper on Sigmund Freud and dream analysis, so I started the habit. When the dream ended, I immediately wrote down as much as I could remember. Instead of analyzing the dream, I began drafting a story. Unfortunately, I never finished a first draft because school got in the way. Doing an Honors Thesis gave me the opportunity to finish the stories I started and left behind. I started the writing process for "The Survival" a little differently than I did for "Migration." Instead of mapping out the plot and the characters,

I simply started writing. I took what I had from my dream and ran with it. I wrote what came to my mind and what made sense to me, but I quickly learned that this method wasn't going to work out for me. When I felt lost in the story, I needed to start thinking ahead to where I wanted it to go and what I wanted the characters to do. I started thinking more holistically about the whole story and outlining on paper what came next. This helped my writing immensely. I knew the points that I wanted to hit in the plot and could craft the story to get to those points. Sometimes, the whole plot would change, and that would be okay, too. As a teacher, I can encourage my students to start writing in any way that benefits them the most. If you have to start by just spilling words onto the page and editing them later, do that. If you have to outline everything first, that's okay, too. I want my students to simply be writing, the formalities can come later.

While I wrote, I had more problems with my motivation than with writing the plot. As a reader, I found myself asking questions about the plot and not answering them. I knew that I should go back and make the story more connected, but I didn't. I figured I could just revise it later. I found myself making contradictions and being too lazy to solve them. I got lazy with my writing, but I found myself too invested in the story to change anything about that. I decided that what I wrote was fine and the questions didn't need answers. Luckily, when I got back to school, I was pushed to make those corrections.

Looking back at my journal, I enjoyed writing "The Survival"; I thought my idea was the greatest. I liked it more than "Migration." After hearing the comments of my advisors, I realized how much work I needed to do to get this story where it deserved to be. I knew that the contradictions I made would not go unnoticed. I learned how difficult creating suspense can be. I never show that my characters were in real danger. I made the

suspense scenes too short, while keeping the rest of the plot strung out. I didn't know what to do about it. I became invested in my next story and pushed "The Survival" to the back of my mind. I ignored the comments my advisors gave me and barely started a second draft. I love writing, but not the writing process.

Editing something that you loved so much at first proved difficult. Improving the world you thought was perfect comes with challenges. I had to rewrite entire sections of the story, and I didn't know how or want to put in the effort to do so. So I didn't.

When school started again, I still hadn't looked at "The Survival." I knew I had to, but my studies started getting in the way. Luckily, I had some great advisors who pushed me to do the work when I needed to. I set up weekly meetings at the Writing Center on campus to workshop pieces of "The Survival," and after the first meeting, I could already feel the story getting re-energized. My advisors presented me with questions about the characters, setting, and plot that I hadn't thought about before. I found ways to create more tension in the writing and more personality in the characters by making a few simple changes throughout the text.

I revamped the characters with more personality. I put them in more danger, and I added tension and feelings of the uncanny, using Freud's essays on the topic. Freud defines the uncanny as "the class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (825). Freud also quotes Daniel Sanders in saying: "everything is [uncanny] that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (Freud 828). I wanted the setting to feel familiar, but far away from anything the characters would actually know. Even more so, I wanted the reader to experience these feelings along with the characters. I did my best in setting the story in a place that most of my

audience would recognize: a college campus. But I changed a few things about the location: I made it abandoned, changed the interior of the buildings, and presented the feeling of always being watched. As Kasey, my protagonist and narrator, walks around she notices how much has changed, but only slightly:

I started walking, I thought I knew where I was, but now it didn't feel as familiar. The lay out of the buildings and roads felt like someplace I knew, but the sky didn't feel right. It looked down on me with a face of distrust. I didn't see anyone else walking around, but I couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. I tried following the road to where I thought the library would be, but when I turned the corner, the familiar brick building had changed. (Perry 1)

I also focused on creating tension with the words and feelings presented through my characters. To do this, I focused mostly on word economy and sentence structure. Using short sentences and fewer words, speeds up the act of reading and therefore, the action. In the first draft of “The Survival,” I wrote:

Through the door to my left, I could hear voices approaching. It sounded like two people having a serious conversation. I couldn't make out everything they said but I heard “don't be stupid” and “I don't wanna be the reason you get killed.” The handle on the door started to turn.

“Shit!” This place has nowhere to hide. No furniture, no other doors. A door swung open. (Perry 1)

The sentences are long and clunky. If Kasey was actually worried about these people finding her, her thoughts would present themselves more urgently. After revisiting this passage, I changed it to:

Through the door, voices approached. I froze. Nowhere to hide. No furniture, no other doors. I had no idea who would walk through that door. Do they know I'm here? Are they going to kill me? Help me? The door swung open before I figured out what to do. (Perry 1)

The fragments allow the reader to pick up on the action and tension of the scene. It reads more frantically than the original text.

Looking back, I found myself trying to mirror some scenes and feelings from *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss (the protagonist) was chosen to fight to the death against twenty-three other young men and women in a government enforced "game." The fight takes place over an extended period of time and only finished when one person remains. In a custom built arena, square miles in size, Katniss must fight for her life. While my characters are walking through the woods and trying to stay safe and warm, I kept in mind how Katniss felt while in the arena. She wasn't interacting with other characters, but the reader experienced her stress in trying to survive.

I know that I "finished" "The Survival" for the sake of the thesis, but I know that I can do more with it. I would do more with it given I had more time. I love how much this story has evolved and I can't wait to share that with everyone. I hope to keep working on it beyond what I've done here. I hope to instill these kinds of feelings in my students

when they write. I know that some students get done with a writing assignment and call it “finished,” I’ve done that. But I want my students to see that they can work on their assignments after they’re “done.” I can use the first draft of “The Survival,” with all of its rough edges and abrupt ending, as a teaching model. I can show the students that even though the bones of my story are in place, you can’t get into any meat. Then, I can show them the second draft of “The Survival.” They can see all of the changes I made, while still keeping the story I originally started with. Using my drafts of “The Survival,” I can show my students how to bring energy back into their writing and motivate them to continue working well past the due date.

“The Turning”

With my third story, “The Turning,” I tried something new. I wrote the story in a journal format; I had never done this before. I wanted to give it a try because I like how personal a journal can be and I liked the idea of the reader filling in the gaps between the entries. It reminds me of reading a comic book; the white space between the panels (the gutter) is where the real story takes place. The space gets filled by whatever the reader thinks happens in between the panels. I wanted to create a similar effect in the journal. I also wanted to experiment with genre and character voice. Journals allow the reader to see into a personal and private version of a character. Often uncensored, the character’s voice really shines through.

I got the inspiration for “The Turning” from multiple sources. Since the setting is a zombie-apocalyptic world, I took aspects from a video game: *The Last of Us* produced by Naughty Dog. The idea of having an observer tell the story came from a novel I read by Patrick Ness: *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. In Ness’s novel, the action happens

mostly to the people outside of the group telling the story. I enjoyed reading that mode of storytelling, so I decided to try it myself through a journal. The reader only sees one perspective. The hardest part was not giving away too much and only giving the reader a little bit at a time. I wanted to give them hints at the romantic relationship between the narrator and Laura, the girl mentioned several times throughout the journal. I wanted them to feel tension when the narrator felt like something was wrong. I wanted the reader to feel the same loss at the end of the story. I tried doing that by building and building to the impact point and then ending the journal with no resolution. I want the reader to finish reading and want more.

After the first draft of “The Turning,” I got responses similar to the one I got for “The Survival”: there wasn't enough tension, and my character didn't have her own voice. To do this, I really needed to get inside my character's head. I needed to become the narrator. I try to journal as often as possible, so I know how naturally thoughts can come across the mind and find their way on paper. I even journaled throughout the entire process of writing this thesis (see “Writer's Journal”). I tracked my progress and reflected a bit on the work that I did each day. The journal my character is writing is a bit different. They don't reflect on the work they have done; instead, they use it as a way to talk about their day and their feelings on a situation. To be able to do all of this, I needed to create a second mind within my own and allow that to happen. I could polish later. First, I could spill words onto the page.

For the second draft, I went back through and added anything I could to make the story richer. I added side thoughts and followed a more stream of consciousness style of writing. It helped bring the journal, and the character to life. If my character mentioned

one thing, I made sure to let the flow of the journal entry bounce around from topic to topic, similar to how thoughts form in our heads. In one entry, my narrator talks about fixing the camp, leaving the camp, and farming all in one go:

We fix what we can with what we have and that ain't much. We would probably have more if John let us fucking leave. He's a pussy sometimes. One time we went to an abandoned town to find supplies. I'm surprised John didn't drop dead when someone gave the idea. Those are where the real danger is. The Bleeders sneak up on ya too easily. But those towns have some real treasure. We found a generator once. Real miracle that we got it back to camp without gettin killed. It's not running yet though. Still haven't figured out how to work it. It might need gas and we just don't have any. I'll be out in the farm. It's where I am every day. It wasn't much when we got here but I've turned it into a little something. I grow and harvest what I can but the Bleeders take what they want from us. (Perry 6)

In my head, these characters were easy to mold. Since I modeled the zombie-apocalyptic setting of the story to reflect some scenes in *The Last of Us* (the video game I reference in my reading list), I could take some personalities of those characters and plant them in my own characters. I added the protective characteristics of Joel, the protagonist in the game, into the author of the journal. At the end of the day, Joel's only goal is to protect Ellie, a young girl he's been tasked with smuggling across the country. Joel does everything in his power to make sure she is safe. In *The Last of Us* Joel has a job to do, but sometimes his feelings get in the way. Similar to how the narrator knows that he can do nothing to help the situation, but tries to anyway. Also, my narrator in "The Turning" feels that their purpose in life is to protect Laura, whether she needs it or not. I took the logical stances

from Maureen, a leader of the rebel group in the game, and planted them in John. Maureen gives Joel the job of smuggling Ellie, although she has raised Ellie up until that point. She knows that getting Ellie to the proper people is crucial to the wellbeing of the world because Ellie is the cure to the disease that turns everyone into zombies. John knows that the narrator struggles with what's going on, but has to do what's right for the whole camp, similar to Maureen. He looks at the situation from a more logistical mindset. I wanted the camp to feel as normal as possible, similar to Tommy's camp in the game. Tommy is Joel's brother and a part of the rebel group that Maureen leads. Joel visits Tommy's camp because he knows that it is a safe place to stay while he and Ellie plan the rest of his trip. I added children who help in the fields and the kitchen, and camp wide dinners. I felt like this gave the story the feeling that this isn't in the best place in the world to live, but the characters living there try to be as normal as possible.

After conversing with my advisors about "The Turning," they gave me the idea of handwriting the story. I turned the idea over in my head, worrying if I would have enough time to write out the whole story in longhand. My advisors told me that it might help me build a greater connection with my character, and Stephen King wrote in the author's note of *Dreamcatcher*, "This book was written with the world's finest word processor, a Waterman cartridge fountain pen. To write the first draft of such a long book by hand put me in touch with the language as I haven't been for years" (868). Hearing this and continuing to turn over the idea of writing in longhand, I decided to give it a shot. Doing that made such a difference in the language, tone, and the implementation of the genre of journals. I felt more and more like my character with each word I scribbled onto the page. The story felt real. It felt like more than just words on a page. I could picture the camp,

John, Laura, and the narrator, and the threats more vividly than when I just typed it all up. I knew that if I felt this way about the journal, my readers would feel the same way.

For my future students, I can make the same suggestions about experimenting with genre and typing versus handwriting a story. I can show them that it does make a difference in the outcome of the plot and the characters because I have my drafts of “The Turning” to show for it.

Thematic Analysis

Now that I have “finished” the stories (I put ‘finished’ in quotes because nothing is ever really done), and I have reflected on their theme and content, I found that they all have an underlying theme of survival. I don't really know how this happened. I didn't plan for the stories to have the same theme, even though some members of my committee advised that the stories be connected. When I was told that I should plan to write stories that share an underlying theme, I shrugged it off. I didn't want, or plan, to write for other people. The whole time I wanted to write for myself. So I did. And somehow, a shared theme popped up in all three: Survival. Freud would say that this occurred at the hands of the “unconscious,” a term he uses when trying to describe the formation of dreams and dream-thoughts (298). Although I only dreamed about one of the three stories (The Survival), the theme found its way into the other two. Our unconscious often presents us with some sort of wish that we need fulfilled, usually in dreams; often we are not aware of this wish until we dig deeper into the dream (Freud 148). However, in my situation, the theme didn't appear in a dream, it came through writing. If I look at the theme of the short stories as a sort of dream, I can conclude that my unconscious has some sort of wish concerning survival.

Looking at “Migration,” my characters don’t experience survival in the way that my characters in my other stories do. Lina, Emily, and Cole just want to live in the world they were born in. They don’t want to have to worry about the government breathing down their backs. Cole, especially, has to worry about survival more than Lina and Emily. He is knowingly and willingly breaking a law that has a punishment of death. He has to make sure that he doesn’t get caught so he can keep living his life. All three of them risk their lives when they meet up at the end of the story. They may not be physically fighting, but they want to be free in a world where that’s not entirely possible.

In “The Survival” the threat presents itself as much more real than in “Migration.” Kasey, Char, and Liz find themselves fighting to survive almost every day. Even on the calmer days, they still have to worry about food, warmth, and safety. When they leave the comfort of their shelter, they really have to be on alert and occasionally fighting for their lives. Like Cole, Emily, and Lina in “Migration,” Kasey, Char, and Liz want to be free and out of the world they live in; maybe even more so.

Like “The Survival,” “The Turning” presents its threats right away and more visibly than the other two stories. Immediately, the reader learns about the Bleeders and the dangers of living in such an exposed area of the world. The narrator continually writes about their concern over Laura being in harm’s way. They also express how they just want to get out and be a part of a safer, happier environment.

Survival, at its roots, is the driving point behind human, as well as animal, instinct. The reason we do what we do is to survive and carry our genes into the next generation. For me, a senior in college preparing for the “real world,” survival is much more than passing my genes down. I need to make sure I can get a job, have a place to

live, and afford the cost of living. My body has adapted to irregular sleep schedules, eating meals at weird times, and writing papers under pressure, all of which full-time students need to do to survive in school. My mind translated these struggles, and many more, into the narratives in this thesis. However, my characters aren't dealing with completing assignments, their lives are on the line. Which is, sometimes, how it can feel as student when your degree and career are on the line.

Pedagogy

Going to the Writing Center has helped me immeasurably throughout part of my thesis. I took advantage of it mostly for the revisions of “The Survival” and my “Artist Statement.” I regret not going in to use those resources prior to my senior year. I always forgot that we had a writing center, and my professors didn’t push us to use the resources on campus. I didn't realize that The Writing Center Staff don’t focus on editing your work, they focus on asking questions and provided suggestions on how to improve your writing. In your appointment, the tutors ask you what you want to work on and they focus on those aspects of the writing. You get to discuss your work with someone and get a fresh perspective on the writing you do for class, or anything else. For me, it brought me a little bit out of my comfort zone. I usually don't share my personal writing with other people. When I write stories, I tend to keep them to myself. I’m afraid of what people will think about my words. Those feelings of insecurity went away when I started reading my work to the tutors and having them read my work. It felt good to talk with someone about how to re-energize my writing and improve how I articulate my thoughts and feelings.

After a while, one of my advisors, Paige Mitchell, encouraged me to start coming to the Writing Center on a weekly basis. This helped me get on track with my writing, meet with my advisor regularly, and block out time during the week to actually work on my thesis. It has been incredibly valuable to have that time. Overall, the Writing Center has been immensely beneficial in helping me improve my writing and I hope that I can bring the tools I got from them into my own classrooms.

As an aspiring educator, I see how important building relationships with your students is. In college, it can be difficult for professors to do so, but I am fortunate enough to have small classes where I can get to know my peers and my professor. Taking what I've learned and experienced from the Writing Center (and some other classes), and bringing it into my own classroom when I start teaching will help me build strong relationships with my students. I can do this through implementing one-on-one conferences with my students.

From my experiences as a student, having a quick conference with my teachers on my work made all the difference. According to Goodwin and Hubbell, good student-teacher interactions are critical to academic success. Students who develop good relationships with their teacher “were more likely to demonstrate better behavior and higher academic achievement in subsequent grades” (Goodwin and Hubbell 80). In those conferences, I could ask questions and clarify the expectations as well as get asked questions about my work that I didn't think about before. You can clear up any misconceptions or miscommunications you had about the expectations and really get down to what you want your work to look like. As a teacher, you get to know your students even more than you would if you just lectured them all year. It helps you learn

about how they might be struggling or if the workload is too heavy or light. You can individually assess the needs of each student and figure out what you need to do, as their teacher, to help them succeed in every way possible. Goodwin and Hubbell explore the importance of seeing your students as individuals instead of one whole group. Asking your students their opinions on your teaching and assessments is the biggest way to show that you care about them (Goodwin and Hubbell 85).

Once the relationships are built in the classroom, the environment and vibe of the class changes. Everyone feels more comfortable in front of their peers. They won't be as timid when it comes to sharing their work. The classroom turns into a place of support and love instead of a room full of teenagers listening to someone lecture every day.

Providing models for work students are doing is crucial to their success. Sometimes, students worry most about what the teacher wants and how to fulfill the standards for the teacher and the school. Other times, they just don't know where to start or the assignment doesn't make sense. Having an example of what the work should look like when finished clears up some issues. Because I have gone through this process of writing short stories, annotating a bibliography, journaling throughout the process, and reflecting on the project as a whole, I can bring all of these experiences to my students. Paul Prior writes, in his article "Tracing Process: How Texts Come into Being,"

Writers are not only inscribing text. They are also repeatedly rereading text that they've written, revising text as they write as well as going back later to revise, pausing to read other texts (their own notes, texts they have written, source materials, inspiration), pausing to think and plan." (497)

Having students look at other pieces while they work on their own writing allows them to gather ideas and inspirations. Telling a student to write a story without having them first read a story is like telling a kindergartener to take a college exam; it won't work.

Students need to see examples before even thinking about how to start writing. They need to look at a written story through the eyes of a writer. Using my published thesis as a model, I can show my students I've done this before and have credibility behind the assignment. I can offer advice for when they get stuck on their writing and explain how I got over similar humps while writing. Similar to how my advisors helped me, I can ask questions about plot and character that would provoke a higher level of thinking in my students. My students will have models and examples of how to break down their characters and keeping the plot and conflict continuous. I'll encourage them to look at their favorite authors and steal what they can. I'll advise them to eavesdrop on conversations so they can get a sense of how real people talk and improve their dialogue writing. I'll help my students in writing in different styles and genres. Getting out of your comfort zone as a writer can be scary, but the only way to improve is to keep trying. When I wrote "The Turning," I didn't quite know how to write in a journal style. I try to journal on my own, but conveying the story of a character that doesn't exist proves to be difficult.

In that situation, I would encourage my students to become their characters. I'd have them map out every little detail about their character's look and personality: How do they like their coffee? Favorite music? Hair color? Where do they live? Family situation? The list could go on and on, but to get a realistic character, it's a must. Once you get your characters fleshed out, you can start writing. Advising my students to let the characters

tell the story, I would let them go. I don't want my students to feel like they have to write for me. Writing is such a personal act; I want my students to write for themselves.

Drafting, with any kind of writing, is so important to the success of a piece. Encouraging students to produce multiple drafts of their writing can be difficult. I never wanted to rework a piece in high school once I turned it in. I started focusing on the next assignment. I can assume that some of my students might be the same way. It will be my job to change their minds. Donald M. Murray explains the writing process as “never finished. It is delivered to a deadline, torn out of the typewriter on demand, sent off with a sense of accomplishment and shame and pride and frustration. If only there were a couple more days, time for just another run at it, perhaps then...” (614). Writing is never truly done. My stories included in this thesis are far from finished. Having that to show to my students and encouraging them to write multiple drafts will improve the writing in my students.

Overall, my thesis challenged me in ways that I didn't expect and ways I enjoyed. Having never written stories of this magnitude before, I feel incredibly accomplished to see the growth from one draft to the next. I have something to show my future students if I am fortunate enough to teach a creative writing unit or class. I have the experiences of writing these stories and the energy to keep developing them into strong pieces. I can't wait to see where my writing and my teaching takes me in the future.

MIGRATION

(1)

We pulled up to the line and got out of the car. The temperature had raised at least 20 degrees since we left. Going to Summer always gave me hope for shorts weather. Luckily, we got Robert's line and it moved quickly. When I had to cross, I brushed my hair to the side and heard the familiar beep of the scanner behind me. Permitted to cross, I walked back to our car and waited for the rest of my family. Some weren't so lucky; a few lines over, I heard the saddening low tone that keeps someone from Migrating. I've heard the reject sound a few times before but I can't help staring at the awkward situation.

"Lina, come on, we have to go," I got in the car and focused on our destination: Summer.

The snow makes living in Winter worth it. So it sucks that this year rarely had any good snowfall. And on top of the nasty weather, I had to go to school. But now, I have nothing but beaches, sun, and vacation for the next six months, I could not be more excited. The farther south we got, the temperature rose. After about an hour, we had to pull over so we could change; sweaters and jeans do not mix well with 80-degree heat. We also grabbed some snacks, I always go for Dr. Pepper and Peanut M&M's.

"You guys going hot or cold?" asked the clerk as he rung in our snacks. He looked like he'd rather be outside and his nametag read "Mike."

“Hot. Can’t wait to get to the beach!” David practically shouted, he only cared about girls in bikinis. I’m not sure why; the first few weeks of beach season means pasty white skin. After being cooped up trying to avoid the cold, no one is tan.

Mike chuckled half-heartedly, giving us our snacks he wished us a happy and safe Summer.

“You as well, sweetie. Hopefully you can get outside soon,” my mom smiled. She always treated cashiers with kindness, something everyone should do.

We headed back to the car and continue driving south. The heat intensified and although the AC in the car tried to cool us down, the scorched air still dared to enter the vehicle. My dad turned on the radio, he always liked hearing the population updates during Migration.

“Another great year for Migration! This is 97.4 QWERT with your Migration updates! Sunny weather ahead for those heading to Summer! The beach will be crowded so be prepared. For those going cold, bundle up! The winds are whipping and there might be some snow in your future! As far as numbers go, things are about the same as last year! Lookin’ good! Remember, if you are having a child, or one of your immediate family members has passed: report it! The line-men are happy to help you if you need it.

“On a less happy note, please remember that refusing to Migrate or traveling between Seasons outside of Migration Day is highly illegal. Report any suspicious activity to local authorities. Also, highly wanted Cole Posik has not migrated in several years and has not been reported dead. He is 5’11’ with brown hair and thin build. Do not engage with him, he is highly dangerous. If you see him, please alert local authorities. Otherwise, Happy Migration! Travel safely and responsibly!”

“Hear that kids?” My dad perked up. “Cole Posik, tall, brown hair, thin. Keep an eye out for him, but be careful. Apparently he’s dangerous.”

“What? Oh, yeah, I heard that. Don't worry, I doubt we'll see him. Apparently he travels whenever he wants,” Why would anyone not Migrate? It gives me a nice change of pace.

“Why does he think he can do that? Why can't he wait the six months like the rest of us?” My mom sounded like she got cheated out of a sale at the market.

“Maybe he doesn't like the rules and wants to do whatever. I don't think he's as dangerous as they say.” My brother piped up.

“Don't get any ideas David! He's dangerous and that is that!” My mother got very defensive over this subject. She didn't want anything to happen to us.

“Don't worry mom, I was just thinking out loud.” It got a little awkward after that, but the tension died down after a few minutes.

The flat drive allowed us to see all the way to the horizon distorted with hot, rising air. I counted the red cars that drove north for the season. David counted the blue. This time, I won by 4 with a total of 42. As we got closer to the coast, the traffic picked up. Excitement filled the air, even though we could barely hear the people outside over the AC on full blast. Cottages lined the road, each slowly filling with families. When we finally reached ours, I couldn't be happier. The blue-gray siding welcomed us into a living room bathed in natural light. The seashell picture frames full of the past hid under a thick layer of dust and the smell of the ocean leaked in, tempting us to visit.

I helped my family unload the car and immediately went to my room to change. I planned on meeting Emily at the beach as soon as I got here, I haven't seen her since last

Migration. I needed to get out the door before my mom stopped me to do any chores that needed to be done.

“Lina! Where are you going?” I wasn’t quick enough.

“I thought I told you that Emily and I were going to meet up when we both Migrated?”

“Don’t you remember? We always go to the beach as a family when we get to Summer! A nice family gathering!”

“Weren’t we all just together for hours in the car? Isn’t that a ‘family gathering?’”

“No. Wait for everyone else please!”

I stepped back inside, went up to my room and sat on my bed, setting a small cloud of dust free. I called Emily.

“Hey girl! How did your Migration go?”

“Lina! Everything went swimmingly! I can’t wait to see you! Whose line did you get at the border?”

“We got Robert again. He always makes the process super easy and quick.”

“Nice! You guys always get lucky at the Crossing with him. We got some new guy, super awkward about the whole ordeal. He was like ‘I’m, um, going to move your hair out of the way so I can get to the, um, barcode.’ It was weird. But anyway, are you ready to hit the beach?”

“I’m ready for the beach, but my parents insist that I wait for everyone so we can all go together.”

“But didn’t you all just spend a few hours in a car together?”

“That’s what I said! I’ll still be there though; I just don’t know when.”

“That’s fine. Just text me when you get there. I can't wait to hear about your Winter experience!”

“Neither can I! See you there!”

“Peace!” I hung up and wandered to the fridge to find a quick snack before we left.

“David! How long does it take to get ready?” my mom shouted up the stairs.

“Not long at all,” He appeared from his room as if he were waiting for someone to call him out.

“Perfect, we’re all set! To the car!” My parents always got excited about little things like this. We have Migrated for my entire life, and for my entire life they get excited about the change.

“Why the car?” My brother and I wined, “we were just in it for hours!”

“Fine, we can walk. The beach really isn't that far. And since Migration is underway, there probably won't be any parking,” my dad complied.

We make our way towards the beach and I make sure to take the lead. I start walking down the road towards Emily’s house, hoping my family follows. They do. I sneakily send a text to Emily. Our meetup needs to look like a coincidence since my mom is so particular about family time.

Looking around, you would have thought the apocalypse came. People lined the streets all the way to the beach and back. Coolers, towels, and flip-flops made their way to the sandy coast to soak up the sun.

We turned down the street Emily lived on and I got a little nervous. I didn’t want my mom to think I wanted to ditch them for Emily. I do enjoy family time, but I see

family all the time. I only see Emily during the Summer because we don't go to the same school. No one said anything as we walked down the street. We passed Emily's house, and almost as if she heard her cue, she met us in the street.

"Hello Demsni family! How did Migration go?" Emily and I shared a secret code, we knew exactly how to make our interactions seem coincidental if needed.

"Emily!" My mother gave me a suspicious look, but didn't say anything. Sometimes our plans aren't foolproof. "It went smoothly, as it always does. How 'bout you?"

"Same old, same old. This time, the people in front of us had a small issue. Nothing to be upset about. We all got over in the end."

"Well, I'm glad you made it over safely. We better get goin,'" My mom turned to walk away and Emily and I exchanged looks. My dad came to the rescue.

"Debby, doesn't it seem a bit rude to leave Emily behind?"

"John, you know the first day over the border is a family day."

"And you know that Lina has been waiting six months to see her best friend," Dad always had my back. He could convince mom of anything.

"I suppose Emily can join us, as long as you spend some time with us, I will be okay with it." Emily and I exchange relieved looks, our plan worked.

Every year, the beach gets more crowded. A rainbow of towels and umbrellas stretched across the coast line. A symphony of radios, all playing different songs, filled the air. Finding an open spot on the beach presented a challenge. While walking towards the water, I almost got hit with three footballs and a frisbee. After a few minutes of scouting out semi-decent spots to settle down, we spread our towels just out of reach of the tide. Emily and I set our stuff down and started walking towards the surf.

“Lina, wait just a moment please,” I totally forgot: the beach safety lecture. “See that rainbow umbrella down there?” She pointed down the coast. There must have been at least 10 rainbow umbrellas in that direction.

“Which one? There are so many.”

“The tallest one, don't go farther down than that one. The currents will pull you over and you won't even notice,” she pointed in the opposite direction. “See the lifeguard stand? That's the other side of the 'fence.' I want you guys to stay in between the umbrella and the lifeguard stand while we're here. Here's some sunscreen and always remember--”

“Don't talk to strangers,” David butted in as he took the sunscreen from her hand. We get the same speech every time we go somewhere as a family. After 20 years of being her children, we hoped that she trusts us to remember not to talk to strangers, but she keeps reminding us.

I grabbed the sunscreen from David and lathered up. Once my face and arms were properly protected from the sun, Emily and I went down to the water. If you want to meet new people, you can't spend all day laying around and tanning, the most interesting people are near the water. Little kids splashed around in the ocean with their parents, a

dad and his son made a rather impressive sand-castle with a moat. The happy atmosphere captured the excitement and tension of Migration day. People were either laughing, shouting, or singing, it was as if nothing could go wrong.

Summer's association with good feelings gives people a reason to live through Winter. "How was winter for you?" Emily waded calf deep into the water.

"Oh you know, school and staying inside. Seasonal depression, but now that I'm here, I feel so much better. It's crazy that we graduate next year."

"Yeah, I can't believe it. I have no idea what I'm going to do after. And I totally understand, being cooped up for six months straight. Maybe I should get into skiing or something, help fight the depression."

"Emily, for as long as I've known you, you've never been into sports."

"You're right," she laughed. "But you never know! Maybe skiing is my thing!"

"Yeah okay," We laughed and walked a bit deeper into the water. "Adding skiing on top of school is a lot though, especially if there are weird boys involved."

"Whoa, back up. Weird boys?" Emily stopped me from walking away. "Did someone try to date you in Winter? Why didn't you tell me?"

"It wasn't that big of a deal! It was just some guy who always wanted to partner up with me in class."

"That's not weird, he just thought you were friends," Emily seemed disappointed that this guy wasn't weirder.

"Yeah, and that's fine. The weird part was that he smelled like Pringles all the time. And, like, I enjoy Pringles, but I don't need to smell them all the time. Especially from a person."

“You’re right, that is a bit strange, but people can’t always control their smell. Maybe he just wanted to get to know you more?” She always tried to avoid judging people, one of her best traits.

“I guess, when you put it that way, I might’ve been a bit mean to him. But it’s over now, I probably won’t ever see him again. I’m not worried about it.” While we talked, a group of guys tossing a football inched closer to us. One of them threw the ball and it landed near us. Emily picked and gave it a hefty throwback to the group. I think she impressed them.

“Thanks!” yelled one of the boys as he caught it. We silently hoped for an invitation to play with them but it never came. We left the water and made our way to the shops that lined the beach. Signs advertising “Migration Day Sales!” lined the windows and doors of every single shop. Cheesy t-shirts, sunglasses, and sea glass art overflowed from shops onto the street. I almost succumbed to the temptation of the sales, but I resisted with the help of Emily.

The sun dipped low enough to kiss the horizon and the time to leave came near. We headed back to where my family set up camp to gather up our things and head out.

“Oh thank God!” my mom nearly jumped at us when we returned. “I’ve been worried sick looking for you two!”

“Why couldn’t you stay within the boundaries your mother set for you?” My dad wasn’t on my side this time.

“I 100% did not pay attention and completely forgot about the boundaries,” I lied. I wanted to explore more than 20 meters of beach.

“Just don't do it again!” My mom scoffed and shook out the sandy towels. I hadn't expected to get off so easy.

(2)

Back at the house, we had dinner: spaghetti and meatballs. That simple meal became our tradition to have the night of Migration Day. I think it all started because we didn't keep food in the house while living in Winter. The lack of conversation at dinner allowed me to do some planning for the summer. I knew Emily and I were going to hang out a lot. Maybe I could hook up with a friend from school. I had a whole six months to catch up with people I don't usually see. We didn't talk because we had spent all day together, we had nothing new to share with each other. I cleaned my plate and placed it in the sink.

“Thanks for the spaghetti, Mom. It was as good as it always is. I think I'm gonna head upstairs and relax for the rest of the night.” I took a shower to get the salt out of my hair and laid down in bed. The clock read 9:30; an early night for me. I pulled out my phone and started reading through the news. Since Migration ends around 6, all of the news sites had updated statistics on population.

This time, more people went Summer than Winter, but only by about 1,000. Last year, the opposite happened, but that makes sense, it was the same group of people. I heard that people used to go on vacations. In my history classes, we learned that people could travel whenever they wanted because the Earth used to revolve around the sun. The seasons changed naturally. I also heard that vacations cost a lot and were a hassle. I bet everyone saves so much money because of Migration; it's like a vacation, but forced.

I kept scrolling and I saw that Cole Posik name again and again. The line-men really wanted us to keep an eye out for him. In one of the articles I clicked on, they had a few pictures of him. He looked young, younger than me. They must have used pictures from school because one caption read “Taken in 2087.”

Cole Posik: a dangerous 23-year-old, originally from Australia. Last known Migration occurred in 2091 and his current location is unknown. He has brown hair, is about six feet tall, and has a thin build. Posik has been known to cross between seasons at free will, without the Linemen seeing him. While it is unknown if he is armed or not, authorities have deemed Posik as dangerous and advise locals to stay away from him. There is a cash reward for any information regarding Posik’s whereabouts, please contact your local authorities if you know anything. Remember: free travel is highly illegal and can be punishable by death.

I wondered what Cole must feel every time he crosses illegally. Scared? Rebellious? Free? I fell asleep thinking about him.

I woke up at 10 to the smell of chocolate chip pancakes and the sizzle of bacon. Compared to waking up, at six for school every morning, I felt refreshed after sleeping in. I stumbled downstairs and put together a plate piled high. I made sure to get a bit of syrup on the bacon when soaking the pancakes, the sugar offsets the saltiness.

“I read some more articles about that Cole guy before I went to bed last night,” my mom mumbled through a bite of pancake. “Do you think we should be worried John?”

“I don't think we have anything to worry about, Deb. He's just a kid, how dangerous can he be?”

“Very dangerous, apparently. The authorities want everyone to stay away from him”

“I don't think it's that big of a deal. He just doesn't want his travels restricted by the government,” I piped up. “I heard that Migration's a very recent law, still being developed and changed today. There used to be something called ‘vacation,’ way back when.”

“First of all, Lina, the concept of vacation isn't from ‘way back when.’ I remember going on one when I was a kid and I'm not *that* old,” my dad sipped some coffee. “And second of all, Migration was put in place to keep populations spread out when the seasons stopped changing. If we could all travel whenever we wanted to, no one would live in Winter and Summer would be way too crowded.”

I could always count on my dad to give some kind of “I'm not *that* old” lecture. He was right though; it took a few years for the government to decide on a solution for population density. Migration was the only reasonable solution.

“Your dad is right, Lina. And besides, this Cole kid disrupts the order of things by not Migrating with the rest of us. It isn't fair that he can just do whatever he wants. These rules were put in place for a reason. Just promise me you won't turn out like him, for me?”

“I promise. And besides, I don’t mind Migrating. It provides a nice change of pace, almost like vacation!”

“Thank you. Would you like some juice?”

I nodded, and with that, the conversation ended. I could tell she didn't want to talk about it. For the most part, I told the truth. I didn't mind travelling North and South every six months, but some part of me did want to see the rest of the world.

Emily and I met up for lunch at Inland, our favorite cafe. It was just far enough away from the coast that people didn't care to visit it, especially right after Migration. Everyone goes right to the beaches and the shops hugging the coast. So instead of dealing with annoying strangers all day, we decided to avoid them altogether. Emily ordered a club sandwich and I got a citrus salad. We got our food and occupied some window seats facing the street.

“Did you hear about that Posik kid on the news? Cole, I think?” I took a bite of my salad, the sweet fruit reflected the weather outside.

“I think so. He’s the one who doesn't Migrate right? I’m surprised we don't hear about more people like him. He’s been wanted by Linemen for a long time now.”

“Yeah, that’s him. My mom got all worried this morning that I would go rogue or something. Like I’d join him and stop Migrating.”

“Why would she think that? You say all the time you love Migrating! It gets you out of the house and seeing new stuff!”

“You’re right, I don’t mind Migrating. But what if I get bored of traveling between two places for my whole life? What about the rest of the world?”

“Are you saying your mom’s right in thinking that you’re gonna go rogue?”

“No! Not at all! I’m just curious! Aren’t you? Don’t you wanna know what the rest of the world is like?”

“I mean; I guess? I never really thought about it before.” Emily wiped her mouth and took a sip of water. “So, how was school? Something interesting had to happen during the six months we were apart.”

“Well I already told you about the Pringle’s guy. Um, I feel like so much happened and now I can’t think of anything. What about you?”

“My math teacher was a total dick.”

“Damn, you never say that!”

“I know! But he wouldn’t help anyone on anything! He would always say ‘humans are naturally good at math, figure it out.’ and I’m sitting over here like ‘this is advanced calculus, I have no idea what I’m doing!’”

“You chose to take that class; I almost don’t feel bad. But that does suck, teachers are supposed to help you understand the material, not leave you on your own.”

“Yeah, I eventually got help from someone in the class, so it wasn’t a huge deal. But still annoying. Also, I just remembered, my mom broke her leg trying to ski this time.”

“Oh my god! Is she okay? You said that so casually!” I couldn’t help but laugh, I did worry though.

“Yeah, she’s fine. All healed up now. No need to worry.”

“I thought you said you didn't like skiing or it wasn't your thing or something.”

“It's not, I never said *I* went skiing, just my mom and my dad. They felt like trying something new.”

“I'm sure it was fun until she broke her leg.”

“Yeah, they said they enjoyed trying something new,” We kept eating and people watching until only crumbs were left on our plates. “Want to head back to the coast?”

“Sure! It's really nice outside,” We cleaned off our table and threw our trash away. Outside, the warm air meshed with the cool breeze coming off of the water. People still hung out at the beaches because all of the houses were empty. It looked like a brand new ghost town. No people, no cars, no overgrown plants. Just vacant. But if you listened hard enough, you could hear everyone in the distance.

The sun watched over us from its pedestal in the sky and made sure to keep us warm when the wind picked up. We knew that we were close because the sound of families and friends enjoying the day got louder. Instead of going into the water, we walked barefoot on the sand. Usually, it's too hot for that, but today the warm sand filled the space between our toes.

“What do you think he's like?” Emily asked after a few minutes of silent walking.

“Who? Your math teacher? I thought you said he was a jerk?”

“No, that Cole guy, I wonder what he's like.”

“I didn't think you cared about him. You didn't seem interested at lunch.”

“I mean, I'm not. For some reason, he popped back into my mind. Do you think we've seen him? The descriptions of him are kinda vague.”

“Yeah, I know a lot of ‘thin, tall, brown haired’ guys. It’s possible, but I can’t imagine he goes out in public all the time. He’s one of the most wanted people in the world right now.”

“He could’ve changed his look, maybe he put on weight or something. It’s not super hard to disguise yourself.”

“Maybe we have seen him then. Kinda weird to think about,” I paused. “What do you think he did about his barcode? If anything?”

“I didn’t even think about that. I mean, people would still know who he is, right? Would they really need to scan him to make sure that it’s him?”

“I feel like they would need to though. It’s the only real way to identify someone. How else would they know for sure?”

“Hmm, I don’t know. What would he do with it? You can’t get a tattoo over it, it’s illegal. I guess the only way would be to…”

“Cut it,” Emily finished my sentence. “He would’ve had to get a scar there. Somehow.”

“Ugh, that seems painful. I can’t imagine trying to cut through my barcode. I can’t believe someone would do that.”

“I see what you mean. Some criminal is walking around without anyone knowing that it’s him. He probably has a massive scar on his neck,” Emily laid back and closed her eyes. “Maybe his hair covers his neck. Someone walking around without a barcode would be kinda obvious.”

We stayed on the beach until sunset. Having no responsibilities felt amazing. We stayed until the light vanished from the sky, it felt like forever— in a nice way.

(3)

I awoke to my mom hovering over my bed.

“Wake up sweetie, we’re going somewhere special today!” I groaned and rolled over.

“What time is it?” I barely had my eyes open, it didn't look like the sun had risen yet.

“Time for you to wake up! We are going to Circus today!” Circus was this huge amusement park about two hours away from the coast. It had been about a month since Migration and we had all settled into a routine. Every once in a while my mom liked to break the routine. Everyone goes there at least once in their lifetime, in my experience; I have been about 10 times. I still love going, but I don't love waking up at the butt-crack of dawn to get there.

“Wait, really?” Wide awake now, I rose to a sitting position, my mom still a little too close for comfort.

“Yes! Now get ready! I have to go wake up David.” She left, and after a minute or two, I heard David wake up. I looked at my clock 6:27 AM. As much as I wanted to go back to bed, I knew if we didn't get to Circus early, it would be full to the brim with people.

After I got dressed, I went downstairs and had a quick breakfast. While I munched on my cereal, my dad emerged from the bathroom.

“Hey Lina, Mom got you too?”

I nodded with a mouthful of cereal. Giving me a look of sympathy, my dad yawned; he’s as much of an early bird as I am.

“Oh well,” He poured a cup of coffee. “At least we’re going somewhere exciting!”

“True, true. We could be Migrating back to Winter. I’d much rather take Circus over going back there.”

“I actually don’t mind Winter that much. After a while, Summer gets too hot. And all of the fun things to do get boring after a while.”

“I guess; I just prefer being outside. When I’m in Winter, I feel like I can’t go outside without freezing to death.”

“You just have to bundle up,” he took a few sips of coffee. I finished eating my cereal and slurped the milk out of the bottom of the bowl. David came downstairs and looked like he needed about 10 more hours of sleep.

“Hey son, get some food in you. And try to perk up; you love rollercoasters.”

“Hmm,” David poured some cereal into a bowl and started munching. The only morning person in this family is my mom. I don’t know how she does it.

Once everyone woke up a little bit and got their things together, we piled in the car. This time, the destination provided a bit more excitement. We turned on the radio and listened to the news for a bit; just to see if any more updates on Migration had been reported. After a few days, all of the reports said the same thing: “watch out for Cole Posik,” “More people went Summer than Winter,” “report suspicious activity.” After realizing that we heard the same thing during Migration, my mom switched the radio to some music.

By the time we got to Circus, we could barely find a parking spot. The park had just opened and a line already stretched around the gate. We had no choice but to extend the length of the line. The air was full of chatter that only grew louder as we approached the entrance to the park. The wooden roller coasters rattled above us and screams of people went upside down on the loop-the-loop. The sweet smell of cotton candy and fried dough mixed in with the grease of hotdogs and french fries. I couldn't wait to get a seat on the newest coaster in the park, "Twisted Sun", and judging by the looks of the line, neither could anyone else.

I started toward the line, I needed to get at least one ride before the end of the day.

"Lina, you know the drill. Wait just a minute, please." How could I forget? The "safety speech" from mom. "David, Lina, don't talk to anyone creepy while we are here, okay? And I want you to meet me right here at 5 PM. I really don't want to be stuck in traffic when we leave. Okay?"

"Yes, mom," David and I replied together.

"Alright! Let's go have fun!" This time, I set out for the line without getting interrupted. While in line, I got to watch the coaster go at least 10 times. It starts with a massive climb, at least 5 stories up. Then, after a grueling second at the apex, a near vertical drop accompanied with screams of enthusiasm and terror (mostly terror). The track immediately rises back up and gives the riders barely enough time to prepare for the second drop. A second tow cable pulls you back up to the top of the coaster and lets you go into a four-layer spiral back to the ground. After the spiral, you shoot back out onto the track and take an easy ride, by comparison, back to the start. I could not be more excited.

The coaster only seats 20 riders at a time, so the line didn't move the fastest. After 20-ish minutes, I could see the boarding area. The caterpillars in my stomach grew into butterflies; I've ridden on countless roller coasters, but I still get nervous.

"Any single riders?" The attendant shouted down the line.

"I am!" I shouted back. He gestured for me to come to the front of the line, perks of going to places like this alone. I sat down in a middle seat, seats in the front are for the true adrenaline junkies. The seats in the back get whipped around too much to be comfortable. In the middle, you get the most comfortable you can get on a rollercoaster.

"Damn, this thing really gets up there," the person next to me sounded nervous.

"Yeah, I heard about five stories," I turned to see who sat next to me. I didn't know him, but his hair had a bronzy glint to it. I didn't get to look at him too long because the coaster took off down its track. After the coaster came to a stop, we got out and I headed to the next ride I wanted to go on.

"Hey, so what's your name?" I heard behind me. I turned around to see who was talking to me.

"Oh hey, I'm Lina. Should I know you?"

"I'd be surprised if you knew me, I don't think we go to the same school. You're just really pretty, I felt like I had to get your name."

"Oh, thanks," I blushed, "What school do you go to?"

"Uh, Midwestern," He paused, "I graduated last year."

"Oh okay. I go to Eastern and I graduate next year; we probably haven't crossed paths before," He looked awkward. He kept shifting his weight from side to side and his

eyes kept darting around. He would push his hair out of his face and then shake his head so it fell in front of his eyes. “What’s your name?”

“Um, Kyle,” He stuck out his hand for a handshake.

“It’s nice to meet you Kyle,” We shook hands, “Well, I gotta go, my mom gets worried easily if I don’t find her,” I lied. I just wanted to get to another ride.

“And you as well,” He walked away and went to another ride. I made sure to walk in the opposite direction.

I ended up going to the Ferris Wheel to end the day. I always liked seeing the whole park at night from above. While admiring the neon, flashing lights, my phone buzzed.

To: You, Dad, David

From: Mom

30-minute warning! We will meet by the South Entrance in 20 minutes to leave!

I stepped out of my seat when I reached the bottom and made my way to the bathroom. As I passed a ring toss tent, I heard a familiar voice behind me.

“Hey! Linda!” I turned to see Kyle walking my way.

“Hi, it’s Lina. There’s no ‘d’ in my name,” I corrected.

“Oh, my bad. Lina, how was the rest of your day?”

“Um, it was good. Are you following me?”

“No! I’m not trying to. I just saw you heading this way and thought I’d say hi. I don't typically see familiar faces cause of my job.”

“What’s your job?” He didn't respond right away, like he had to think of something to say.

“I do,” He paused, “Freelance journaling. For a small newspaper. I like to do small stories during the year, once Migration is over. Helps me enjoy the little things.” He started shifting his weight again.

“Sounds cool! Get a good story today?”

“Nah, I have today off, wanted to get some ‘me time.’”

“Nice. Well, I have to get going. See you around,” I went into the bathroom without waiting for a reply.

(5)

It took us a few minutes to find our car. The maze of a parking lot didn't offer any kind of map to help to figure out where you parked. After walking through endless hallways of cars, our SUV made itself known to us. We piled in and headed back to our coastal home. Emily started texting me before I got home.

To: You

From: Emily

Hey girl! How was Circus! I’m jealous you got to go, my family never does anything fun.

To: Emily

From: You

It was fun! I met this weird guy tho. I'll call you when I get home

After an hour, the sun began to set and we watched the golden sky turn dark over the ocean in the distance.

When we got home, I said goodnight to my family and I ran up to my room. I dialed Emily's number before I reached my door. It rang once before she picked it up, she was waiting for the call.

"Lina! How was Circus! I was just about to call you! It's getting kinda late!" Emily liked to know exactly what happened during my days. She gets her excitement from other people's lives.

"I know, I know, we got stuck in a bit of traffic and I fell asleep. But I'm here now!"

"Who was the weird guy you mentioned? Pringles kid? Maybe he is kinda weird."

"No! Someone way more awkward."

"Who? Do you go to school with them?"

"He said he went to Midwestern-"

"I go there! Maybe I know him!" She interrupted.

"I know! That's why I wanted to tell you about him. His name is Kyle."

"Kyle? I don't think I know any Kyles. Did he give you his last name?"

"No, but he was super awkward. Kept looking around like he was looking for something."

“Hmm. Sounds interesting,” She stopped talking. I heard rustling on her end. “I have a yearbook from this year! He’s probably in it, maybe you can come over tomorrow and we can try to find him.”

“Yes! And we can hit the beach after! I’ll head over around 11, we’ll look for this Kyle guy, have lunch, then do whatever.”

“Sounds good, see you tomorrow!”

(6)

In the morning, I got ready to hang out with Emily. My mother didn't plan anything for the day because we just got back from Circus. I told my family my plans for the day and headed out the door.

Outside, a few fluffy clouds floated across the blue sky while the sun warmed the air. A slight breeze found its way to land every few minutes, giving you a taste of the ocean. I took the same route to Emily’s house I did on Migration Day. This time, she didn't come out in the road when I walked by, so I knocked on her door. Her mom answered.

“Hi Lina! How are you doing? Come in, come in.” Her mom always welcomed people into their home, no matter the day. I loved being with them.

“I’m good, thank you! How are you?”

“I’m doing swell; the weather is just magnificent today. Are you here for Emily? She’ll be out soon, she’s just in the restroom.”

“It is beautiful today, and no worries, I can wait. I’m in no hurry.”

“Okay, would you like anything? Water? A snack?”

“No, thank you though.” Emily walked into the living room.

“Hey Lina!”

“Hi Em! You got the yearbooks?”

“Yup!”

“Let me know if you girls need anything!” Her mom shouted as we ran upstairs.

Emily had a yearbook from every year she spent at school so far, so we should be able to find this Kyle person in at least one of them.

“You said he graduated last year?”

“Yeah, so we should look in your first year. He’s about a year older than us,” We flipped through the pages and found the sophomores. Looking through the list of names, we didn’t find anyone named Kyle.

“Maybe he’s older?” Emily guessed and started flipping to the next section of students. In the juniors, we found two Kyles. “Is this him?”

“Um, I don’t think so. He had different hair. He’s not the other one either,” I stopped to think. “Why would he lie about what school he went to?”

“You said he was super awkward. Maybe he’s paranoid about someone stalking him or something.”

“I guess. That’s so weird though. If he was paranoid about strangers, why would he talk to me in the first place?”

“I don’t know, Lina. Maybe he wanted to impress you?”

“I don’t know how going to Midwestern would impress me? He did say I was really pretty. That’s why he started talking to me.”

“Wait a second! You didn’t say that! That’s totally why he was so awkward. He was nervous! He probably just said the first thing that came to his mind.”

“I guess,” I chuckled. “I’m hungry. Should we go get lunch?”

“Sure! Let’s go to Starfish, I heard it’s pretty good. Right on the coast.”

“I love that place!” We put the yearbooks away and went downstairs.

“Where are you girls off to?” Emily’s mom asked from the kitchen.

“Out to the beach! Gonna grab lunch and hang out for a bit,” Emily responded as we rounded the corner.

“Okay, have fun! Be safe!”

“Bye mom! I’ll be back later!” We headed out the door and continued to the beach. I couldn't figure out why we didn't find Kyle in any of the year books. Maybe he has something to hide.

We got to the beach earlier than expected so we decided to hang out on the sand before getting lunch. At the beach, the density of people since Migration day had gone down significantly. This time, we had no problem finding a spot and laying out our towels. The warm sand provided us with a heated bed to lay on while we talked. With the white noise of the ocean as our background, Emily asked me again about my interaction with Kyle.

“So how did you guys meet?”

“I was in line for a rollercoaster. There was only one seat left and I was in line by myself, so we ended up sitting next to each other for the ride. He started talking to me before the ride started. I thought it was just small talk, but when we got off he kept talking to me. I thought I would know him, but apparently not.”

“What did he talk to you about?”

“Not much, just small talk mostly. School. Work. But I don't know if he was telling the truth. He had to think a lot about the answers to questions.”

“If he was lying, it makes sense that we couldn't find him in my yearbooks. What did he say he did for work?”

“He's a freelance journalist. That's what he said anyway. He didn't say what newspaper or blog though. It's just so weird.”

“Do you think you'd see him again?”

“I doubt it. I kinda hope not, to be honest. He was kinda creepy.”

We got hungry after a bit of hanging out on the beach and decided to make our way to Starfish to eat.

When we walked in, only a few tables had customers. The coral colored walls added to the summer theme of the restaurant. In the kitchen, a blender went off, creating a summer-time treat. Every time the door opened, the smell of the ocean blended with the smell of turkey-sandwiches. The simple menu made ordering a breeze.

Emily and I got our lunch, a turkey avocado club sandwich with a berry smoothie and a chicken Caesar wrap with a water, and grabbed a table close to the windows. Emily and I always liked people-watching. You never knew who you were going to see and you could learn a lot about someone by watching them interact with other people. By the time our lunch was reduced to crumbs, I saw a familiar face walk by the windows.

“Emily, I think that was Kyle,” I turned around to see him walking away.

“Wait, really?” She followed my gaze. “Let’s go talk to him!” Before I could respond she had thrown her trash away and walked out the door. I had no choice but to follow her.

“Kyle! Kyle!” Emily shouted down the street.

“Emily, stop! You don't even know him!” I ran after her, but Kyle didn't turn around. “Kyle!” I shouted. He still didn't turn around. I’m sure that this person is Kyle. “It’s me Lina! From Circus!” I was closer to him now, he had his hair in a bun; I couldn't really see his barcode though. He finally turned around. He is Kyle, thank god.

“Oh hey! How’s it going?” He took his hair out, covering his neck. He seemed more relaxed than the first time we met.

“It’s good! This is my friend Emily. She goes to Midwestern too!”

“Cool! I don't think we’ve met before, kinda a big school,” Emily and I looked at each other. Mid-Western is one of the smaller schools of the area. “It’s nice to meet you,” He held out his hand for a handshake. She took it.

“Did you not hear us shouting your name? We weren't that far behind you,” I asked.

“I heard someone shouting, but I didn't think it was for me. I didn't hear my name or anything,” He tousled his hair and flattened it against the back of his neck. Something wasn't quite right here, I don't think he’s telling the whole truth. “Hey! I just remembered I’m meeting up with a friend tonight, gonna have a bonfire and a few drinks. It’ll be up on the Hills if you two wanna join. I gotta go right now though, see you later!” He continued walking down the street and didn't wait for us to reply.

“I don't know if I trust him,” I told Emily back at my house.

“What do you mean?”

“He heard us yelling but didn't stop to talk to us until we were right next to him. Also, I couldn't see his barcode. I can't help but think he's lying to us about who he is.”

“You couldn't see his barcode? Maybe it was covered by his hair? It was kinda long.”

“It was up before we got to him. He took it out when we started talking.”

“Hmmm. Also, didn't you think it was weird how he invited us to hang out but we barely know him? Also he thinks Mid-Western is some huge school,” She got a worried look on her face. “What if he's Cole? The guy in the news?”

“I don't think so,” I stopped to think, “Could he be? It would make sense why he's lying to us so much.”

“Should we call the cops? We know where he's going to be tonight. Speaking of, are we going?”

“I don't know, Em. What if he's not Cole, just some weird guy.”

“True, but what if he is and we caught the world's most wanted,” She paused, “We should go tonight. Find out the truth. If he really is Cole, we'll call the cops. If not, no harm, no foul.”

“But what if he's a murderer? I think it's a bit odd that I saw him at Circus, two hours from here, and the next day he's in the same town as me.”

“I feel like if he wanted to kill you, he probably would've by now. I think we should go, maybe get our questions answered. Best case: we make a new friend,” She waited for my response. If “Kyle” really was Cole, my gut tells me to call the cops. But

this could also be just some random guy trying to make new friends, albeit he's not doing a great job at it.

“What would our parents say if they found out that we were gonna meet up with some random guy at night; who may or may not be Cole Posik?”

“We don't have to tell them! So are you in?”

(7)

“Hey Mom, I think I'm gonna hang out at Emily's for a little bit. I don't know when I'll be back; probably kinda late.” I felt bad lying to my mom. She doesn't deserve it, but she can't know the truth.

“Okay, sweetie. You know the drill: keep your phone on you, let me know if you change locations,” she looked up from her book. “Be safe!”

“I will! I'll see you later,” I walked out the door and towards the Hills. I met Emily on the beach. The air cooled down as the sun kissed the horizon. The shops all closed down and the orange sunset reflected on all of the windows. A few people were out doing the same thing I was. The weather, although a little chilly, was great for a walk on the beach. Without the sound of beach-goers, the crashes of the waves sounded much louder than usual. The ruins of sandcastles spotted the coast and the tide just started to go out.

“Hey Em! You ready to go?”

“I think so,” The sun finally dipped below the horizon and we started walking up to the Hills. The Hills overlooked the ocean, I didn't go there often, but the view was

amazing. On a good day, you could see the curve of the earth. The long grass hissed in the breeze and provided nesting places to the seagulls. We watched a sailboat on the water until it got too dark to see it. We turned away from the ocean and saw a fire in the distance.

“That must be him,” I said.

“Well, let’s go,” Emily started walking towards the orange orb. I followed.

We didn't say anything as we approached Kyle and his friend. I was too nervous to, and I think Emily was as well.

“Lina! Emily! You decided to come! Wanna drink?” Kyle’s face lit up when he saw me. I think he wanted a hug but it was too dark to tell and we don't know each other *that* well.

“Hi, Kyle, and sure, I’ll have one,” I tried to relax as he handed me the bottle.

“I’ll pass,” Emily said as Kyle offered her one. It got awkward after our first interaction. The other person with Kyle finally spoke up and introduced himself.

“Um, Hi. I’m Matt, met Cole in Winter. We somehow saw each other again in Summer,” Kyle/Cole spit out his beer and punched Matt in the arm. “Ow! Wait, did they not know? Shit!” He got a scared look in his eyes. Emily and I exchanged looks. “Dude, I am so sorry-”

“It’s fine, just forget it,” Cole turned toward us, “Well, now you know. Sorry you had to find out this way,” He waited for us to respond. We didn't know what to do. “He’s right, I’m Cole. The one you’re thinking of. Are you gonna call the cops?”

“Um...” It was the only thing I could get out. “Only if you give us a reason to,” I looked at Emily, confused. He doesn't seem dangerous like everyone says he is.

“I don't plan on giving you a reason. I just wanted to hang out like normal people do. It's hard to find friends when the whole world is looking for you,” He paused, “Sorry for lying to you. I sort of planned on telling you, but I wasn't sure yet. You can't be too careful you know? You seemed trustworthy.”

“It's okay, do you mind me asking why?” I sat down on the grass and Emily sat next to me. The fire cast an orange glow on all of our faces.

“Why I lied? Isn't it kinda obvious? I didn't want to get caught. I guess I should tell my friends my aliases though, so they don't out me,” He smiled and nudged Matt. Matt didn't respond, I guess he felt terrible for revealing Cole's identity.

“No, not why you lied, I understand that. Why you don't Migrate, why you risk your life like that?” Emily was unusually quiet. I guess she wanted to know as much as I did.

“Oh, well, that's a bit more complicated,” He took a swig from his drink. “I mostly do it for my parents.”

“Your parents?” Emily asked.

“Yeah, line-men killed them for not Migrating. I was super young. Since I was a minor, they couldn't really do anything about me. So they put me in some orphanage. Every time I asked what happened to my parents, they told me it was to keep the order. Like my parents created some kind of chaos.”

“Oh my God. I'm so sorry,” Emily responded. I didn't know what to say.

“After a few years, I left the orphanage. I didn't like being told what to do, especially by someone who supports the law that killed my parents,” He stared into the

fire. “I figured that I could get away, so I did. I stopped Migrating. Sometimes I crossover whenever I feel like, but I mostly stay here. I like the ocean. It’s calming.”

“How do you stay hidden? I mean, with the whole world looking for you, it’s gotta be hard,” I asked.

“It’s not as hard as I thought, but still tricky. I usually tell everyone I meet a different name. I try to be as normal as possible. Sometimes it works, sometimes I need to be better prepared with my lies,” He took a drink, “Also, I keep my hair long, it covers my scar.”

“Scar?” I asked.

“Barcode,” Emily realized.

“Bingo,” He turned around and lifted his hair. There was a nasty scar where his barcode should have been. I guess I really didn't see a barcode when his hair was up.

“What a bitch to do, but I felt like it was necessary.”

“But now if you get caught, they’ll know it’s you-”

“Even if I did have a barcode they’d know. They just have to scan it and your whole life shows up.”

“True,” I took a sip from my drink and laid back in the grass. The sky was dotted with stars. A shooting star streaked across the sky. “Make a wish.”

“Mine already came true,” Cole said, looking up.

“What was it?” I asked.

“Well, if I tell you, it’ll turn bad.”

DRAFT OF "MIGRATION"

(1)

We pulled up to the line and got out of the car. The temperature had raised at least 20 degrees since we left. Going to Summer always gave me hope for shorts weather. Luckily, we got Robert's line and it moved quickly. When I had to cross, I brushed my hair to the side and heard the familiar beep of the scanner behind me. Permitted to cross, I walked back to our car and waited for the rest of my family. Some weren't so lucky; a few lines over, I heard the saddening low tone that keeps someone from Migrating. I've heard the reject sound a few times before but I can't help staring at the awkward situation.

"Lina, come on, we have to go," I got in the car and focused on our destination: Summer.

The snow makes living in Winter worth it. So it sucks that this year rarely had any good snowfall. And on top of the nasty weather, I had to go to school. But now, I have nothing but beaches, sun, and vacation for the next six months, I could not be more excited. The farther south we got, the temperature rose. After about an hour, we had to pull over so we could change; sweaters and jeans do not mix well with 80-degree heat. We also grabbed some snacks, I always go for Dr. Pepper and Peanut M&M's.

"You guys going hot or cold?" asked the clerk as he rung in our snacks. He looked like he'd rather be outside and his nametag read "Mike."

“Hot. Can’t wait to get to the beach!” David practically shouted, he only cared about girls in bikinis. I’m not sure why, the first few weeks of beach season means pasty white skin. After being cooped up trying to avoid the cold, no one is tan.

Mike chuckled half-heartedly, giving us our snacks he wished us a happy and safe Summer.

“You as well, sweetie. Hopefully you can get outside soon,” my mom smiled. She always treated cashiers with kindness, something everyone should do.

We headed back to the car and continue driving south. The heat intensified and although the AC in the car tried to cool us down, the scorched air still dared to enter the vehicle. My dad turned on the radio, he always liked hearing the population updates during Migration.

“Another great year for Migration! This is 97.4 QWERT with your Migration updates! Sunny weather ahead for those heading to Summer! The beach will be crowded so be prepared. For those going cold, bundle up! The winds are whipping and there might be some snow in your future! As far as numbers go, things are about the same as last year! Lookin’ good! Remember, if you are having a child, or one of your immediate family members has passed: report it! The line-men are happy to help you if you need it.

“On a less happy note, please remember that refusing to Migrate or traveling between Seasons outside of Migration Day is highly illegal. Report any suspicious activity to local authorities. Also, highly wanted Cole Posik has not migrated in several years and has not been reported dead. He is 5’11’ with brown hair and thin build. Do not engage with him, he is highly dangerous. If you see him, please alert local authorities. Otherwise, Happy Migration! Travel safely and responsibly!”

“Hear that kids?” My dad perked up. “Cole Posik, tall, brown hair, thin. Keep an eye out for him, but be careful. Apparently he’s dangerous.”

“What? Oh, yeah, I heard that. Don't worry, I doubt we'll see him. Apparently he travels whenever he wants,” Why would anyone not Migrate? It gives me a nice change of pace.

“Why does he think he can do that? Why can't he wait the six months like the rest of us?” My mom sounded like she got cheated out of a sale at the market.

“Maybe he doesn't like the rules and wants to do whatever. I don't think he's as dangerous as they say.” My brother piped up.

“Don't get any ideas David! He's dangerous and that is that!” My mother got very defensive over this subject. She didn't want anything to happen to us.

“Don't worry mom, I was just thinking out loud.” It got a little awkward after that, but the tension died down after a few minutes.

The flat drive allowed us to see all the way to the horizon distorted with hot, rising air. I counted the red cars that drove north for the season. David counted the blue. This time, I won by 4 with a total of 42. As we got closer to the coast, the traffic picked up. Excitement filled the air, even though we could barely hear the people outside over the AC on full blast. Cottages lined the road, each slowly filling with families. When we finally reached ours, I couldn't be happier. The blue-gray siding welcomed us into a living room bathed in natural light. The seashell picture frames full of the past hid under a thick layer of dust and the smell of the ocean leaked in, tempting us to visit.

I helped my family unload the car and immediately went to my room to change. I planned on meeting Emily at the beach as soon as I got here, I haven't seen her since last

Migration. I needed to get out the door before my mom stopped me to do any chores that needed to be done.

“Lina! Where are you going?” I wasn’t quick enough.

“I thought I told you that Emily and I were going to meet up when we both Migrated?”

“Don’t you remember? We always go to the beach as a family when we get to Summer! A nice family gathering!”

“Weren’t we all just together for hours in the car? Isn’t that a ‘family gathering?’”

“No. Wait for everyone else please!”

I stepped back inside, went up to my room and sat on my bed, setting a small cloud of dust free. I called Emily.

“Hey girl! How did your Migration go?”

“Lina! Everything went swimmingly! I can’t wait to see you! Whose line did you get at the border?”

“We got Robert again. He always makes the process super easy and quick.”

“Nice! You guys always get lucky at the Crossing with him. We got some new guy, super awkward about the whole ordeal. He was like ‘I’m, um, going to move your hair out of the way so I can get to the, um, barcode.’ It was weird. But anyway, are you ready to hit the beach?”

“I’m ready for the beach, by my parents insist that I wait for everyone so we can all go together.”

“But didn’t you all just spend a few hours in a car together?”

“That’s what I said! I’ll still be there though; I just don’t know when.”

“That’s fine. Just text me when you get there. I can’t wait to hear about your Winter experience!”

“Neither can I! See you there!”

“Peace!” I hung up and wandered to the fridge to find a quick snack before we left.

“David! How long does it take to get ready?” my mom shouted up the stairs.

“Not long at all,” He appeared from his room as if he were waiting for someone to call him out.

“Perfect, we’re all set! To the car! My parents always got excited about little things like this. We have Migrated for my entire life, and for my entire life they get excited about the change.

“Why the car?” My brother and I wined, “we were just in it for hours!”

“Fine, we can walk. The beach really isn’t that far. And since Migration is underway, there probably won’t be any parking,” my dad complied.

We made our way towards the beach and I make sure to take the lead. I start walking down the road towards Emily’s house, hoping my family follows. They do. I sneakily send a text to Emily. Our meetup needs to look like a coincidence since my mom is so particular about family time.

Looking around, you would have thought the apocalypse came. People lined the streets all the way to the beach and back. Coolers, towels, and flip-flops made their way to the sandy coast to soak up the sun.

We turned down the street Emily lived on and I got a little nervous. I didn’t want my mom to think I wanted to ditch them for Emily. I do enjoy family time, but I see

family all the time. I only see Emily during in Summer because we don't go to the same school. No one said anything as we walked down the street. We passed Emily's house, and almost as if she heard her cue, she met us in the street.

“Hello Demsni family! How did Migration go?” Emily and I shared a secret code, we knew exactly how to make our interactions seem coincidental if needed.

“Emily!” My mother gave me a suspicious look, but didn't say anything. Sometimes our plans aren't foolproof. “It went smoothly, as it always does. How ‘bout you?”

“Same old, same old. This time, the people in front of us had a small issue. Nothing to be upset about. We all got over in the end.”

“Well, I'm glad you made it over safely. We better get goin,” My mom turned to walk away and Emily and I exchanged looks. My dad came to the rescue.

“Debby, doesn't it seem a bit rude to leave Emily behind?”

“John, you know the first day over the border is a family day.”

“And you know that Lina has been waiting six months to see her best friend,” Dad always had my back. He could convince mom of anything.

“I suppose Emily can join us, as long as you spend some time with us, I will be okay with it.” Emily and I exchange relieved looks, our plan worked.

Every year, the beach gets more crowded. A rainbow of towels and umbrellas stretched across the coast line. A symphony of radios, all playing different songs, filled

the air. Finding an open spot on the beach presented a challenge. While walking towards the water, I almost got hit with three footballs and a frisbee. After a few minutes of scouting out semi-decent spots to settle down, we spread our towels just out of reach of the tide. Emily and I set our stuff down and started walking towards the surf.

“Lina, wait just a moment please,” I totally forgot: the beach safety lecture. “See that rainbow umbrella down there?” She pointed down the coast. There must have been at least 10 rainbow umbrellas in that direction.

“Which one? There are so many.”

“The tallest one, don't go farther down than that one. The currents will pull you over and you won't even notice,” she pointed in the opposite direction. “See the lifeguard stand? That's the other side of the 'fence.' I want you guys to stay in between the umbrella and the lifeguard stand while we're here. Here's some sunscreen and always remember--”

“Don't talk to strangers,” David butted in as he took the sunscreen from her hand. We get the same speech every time we go somewhere as a family. After 20 years, we hoped that she trusts us to remember not to talk to strangers, but she keeps reminding us.

I grabbed the sunscreen from David and lathered up. Once my face and arms were properly protected from the sun, Emily and I went down to the water. If you want to meet new people, you can't spend all day laying around and tanning, the most interesting people are near the water. Little kids splashed around in the ocean with their parents, a dad and his son made a rather impressive sand-castle with a moat. The happy atmosphere captured the excitement and tension of Migration day. People were either laughing, shouting, or singing, it was as if nothing could go wrong.

Summer's association with good feelings gives people a reason to live through Winter. "How was winter for you?" Emily waded calf deep into the water.

"Oh you know, school and staying inside. Seasonal depression, but now that I'm here, I feel so much better. It's crazy that we graduate next year."

"Yeah, I can't believe it. I have no idea what I'm going to do after. And I totally understand, being cooped up for six months straight. Maybe I should get into skiing or something, help fight the depression."

"Emily, for as long as I've known you, you've never been into sports."

"You're right," she laughed. "But you never know! Maybe skiing is my thing!"

"Yeah okay," We laughed and walked a bit deeper into the water. "Adding skiing on top of school is a lot though, especially if there are weird boys involved."

"Woah, back up. Weird boys?" Emily stopped me from walking away. "Did someone try to date you in Winter? Why didn't you tell me?"

"It wasn't that big of a deal! It was just some guy who always wanted to partner up with me in class."

"That's not weird, he just thought you were friends," Emily seemed disappointed that this guy wasn't weirder.

"Yeah, and that's fine. The weird part was that he smelled like Pringles all the time. And, like, I enjoy Pringles, but I don't need to smell them all the time. Especially from a person."

"You're right, that is a bit strange, but people can't always control their smell. Maybe he just wanted to get to know you more?" She always tried to avoid judging people, one of her best traits.

“I guess, when you put it that way, I might’ve been a bit mean to him. But it’s over now, I probably won’t ever see him again. I’m not worried about it.” While we talked, a group of guys tossing a football inched closer to us. One of them threw the ball and it landed near us. Emily picked and gave it a hefty throwback to the group. I think she impressed them.

“Thanks!” yelled one of the boys as he caught it. We silently hoped for an invitation to play with them but it never came. We left the water and made our way to the shops that lined the beach. Signs advertising “Migration Day Sales!” lined the windows and doors of every single shop. Cheesy t-shirts, sunglasses, and sea glass art overflowed from shops onto the street. I almost succumbed to the temptation of the sales, but I resisted with the help of Emily.

The sun dipped low enough to kiss the horizon and the time to leave came near. We headed back to where my family set up camp to gather up our things and head out.

“Oh thank god!” my mom nearly jumped at us when we returned. “I’ve been worried sick looking for you two!”

“Why couldn’t you stay within the boundaries your mother set for you?” My dad wasn’t on my side this time.

“I 100% did not pay attention and completely forgot about the boundaries,” I lied. I wanted to explore more than 20 meters of beach.

“Just don’t do it again!” My mom scoffed and shook out the sandy towels. I didn’t expect to get off easy.

Back at the house, we had dinner: spaghetti and meatballs. That simple meal became our tradition to have the night of Migration Day. I think it all started because we didn't keep food in the house while living in Winter. The lack of conversation at dinner allowed me to do some planning for the summer. I knew Emily and I were going to hang out a lot. Maybe I could hook up with a friend from school. I had a whole six months to catch up with people I don't usually see. We didn't talk because we had spent all day together, we had nothing new to share with each other. I cleaned my plate and placed it in the sink.

“Thanks for the spaghetti mom. It was as good as it always is. I think I'm gonna head upstairs and relax for the rest of the night.” I took a shower to get the salt out of my hair and laid down in bed. The clock read 9:30; an early night for me. I pulled out my phone and started reading through the news. Since Migration ends around 6, all of the news sites had updated statistics on population.

This time, more people went Summer than Winter, but only by about 1,000. Last year, the opposite happened, but that makes sense, it was the same group of people. I heard that people used to go on vacations. In my history classes, we learned that people could travel whenever they want because the Earth used to revolve around the sun. The seasons changed naturally. I also heard that vacations cost a lot and were a hassle. I bet everyone saves so much money because of Migration, it's like a vacation but forced.

I kept scrolling and I saw that Cole Posik name again and again. The line-men really wanted us to keep an eye out for him. In one of the articles I clicked on, they had a few pictures of him. He looked young, younger than me. They must have used pictures from school because one caption read “Taken in 2087.”

Cole Posik: a dangerous 23-year-old, originally from Australia. Last known Migration occurred in 2091 and his current location is unknown. He has brown hair, is about six feet tall, and has a thin build. Posik has been known to cross between seasons at free will, without the Linemen seeing him. While it is unknown if he is armed or not, authorities have deemed Posik as dangerous and advise locals to stay away from him. There is a cash reward for any information regarding Posik's whereabouts, please contact your local authorities if you know anything. Remember: free travel is highly illegal and can be punishable by death.

I wondered what Cole must feel every time he crosses illegally. Scared? Rebellious? Free? I fell asleep thinking about him.

I woke up at 10 to the smell of chocolate chip pancakes and the sizzle of bacon. Compared to waking up, at six for school every morning, I felt refreshed after sleeping in. I stumbled downstairs and put together a plate piled high. I made sure to get a bit of syrup on the bacon when soaking the pancakes, the sugar offsets the saltiness.

“I read some more articles about that Cole guy before I went to bed last night,” my mom mumbled through a bite of pancake. “Do you think we should be worried John?”

“I don't think we have anything to worry about, Deb. He's just a kid, how dangerous can he be?”

“Very dangerous, apparently. The authorities want everyone to stay away from him”

“I don’t think it’s that big of a deal. He just doesn’t want his travels restricted by the government,” I piped up. “I heard that Migration’s a very recent law, still being developed and changed today. There used to be something called ‘vacation,’ way back when.”

“First of all, Lina, the concept of vacation isn’t from ‘way back when.’ I remember going on one when I was a kid and I’m not *that* old,” my dad sipped some coffee. “And second of all, Migration was put in place to keep populations spread out when the seasons stopped changing. If we could all travel whenever we wanted to, no one would live in Winter and Summer would be way too crowded.”

I could always count on my dad to give some kind of “I’m not *that* old” lecture. He was right though; it took a few years for the government to decide on a solution for population density. Migration was the only reasonable solution.

“Your dad is right, Lina. And besides, this Cole kid disrupts the order of things by not Migrating with the rest of us. It isn’t fair that he can just do whatever he wants. These rules were put in place for a reason. Just promise me you won’t turn out like him, for me?”

“I promise. And besides, I don’t mind migrating. It provides a nice change of pace, almost like vacation!”

“Thank you. Would you like some juice?”

I nodded, and with that, the conversation ended. I could tell she didn't want to talk about. For the most part, I told the truth. I didn't mind travelling North and South every six months, but some part of me did want to see the rest of the world.

Emily and I met up for lunch at Inland, our favorite cafe. It was just far enough away from the coast that people didn't care to visit it, especially right after Migration. Everyone goes right to the beaches and the shops hugging the coast. So instead of dealing with annoying strangers all day, we decided to avoid them altogether. Emily ordered a club sandwich and I got a citrus salad. We got our food and occupied some window seats facing the street.

“Did you hear about Posik kid on the news? Cole, I think?” I took a bite of my salad, the sweet fruit reflected the weather outside.

“I think so. He’s the one who doesn't Migrate right? I’m surprised we don't hear about more people like him. He’s been wanted by Linemen for a long time now.”

“Yeah, that’s him. My mom got all worried this morning that I would go rogue or something. Like I’d join him and stop Migrating.”

“Why would she think that?. You say all the time you love migrating! It gets you out of the house and seeing new stuff!”

“You’re right, I don't mind migrating. But what if I get bored of traveling between two places for my whole life? What about the rest of the world?”

“Are you saying your mom’s right in thinking that you’re gonna go rogue?”

“No! Not at all! I’m just curious! Aren't you? Don't you wanna know what the rest of the world is like?”

“I mean; I guess? I never really thought about it before.” Emily wiped her mouth and took a sip of water. “So, how was school? Something interesting had to happen during the six months we were apart.”

“Well I already told you about the Pringle’s guy. Um, I feel like so much happened and now I can’t think of anything. What about you?”

“My math teacher was a total dick.”

“Damn, you never say that!”

“I know! But he wouldn't help anyone on anything! He would always say ‘humans are naturally good at math, figure it out.’ and I’m sitting over here like ‘this is advanced calculus, I have no idea what I’m doing!’”

“You chose to take that class; I almost don’t feel bad. But that does suck, teachers are supposed to help you understand the material, not leave you on your own.”

“Yeah, I eventually got help from someone in the class, so it wasn't a huge deal. But still annoying. Also, I just remembered, my mom broke her leg trying to ski this time.”

“Oh my god! Is she okay? You said that so casually!” I couldn't help but laugh, I did worry though.

“Yeah, she’s fine. All healed up now. No need to worry.”

“I thought you said you didn't like skiing or it wasn't your thing or something.”

“It’s not, I never said *I* went skiing, just my mom and my dad. They felt like trying something new.”

“I’m sure it was fun until she broke her leg.”

“Yeah, they said they enjoyed trying something new,” We kept eating and people watching until only crumbs were left on our plates. “Want to head back to the coast?”

“Sure! It’s really nice outside,” We cleaned off our table and threw our trash away. Outside, the warm air meshed with the cool breeze coming off of the water. People still hung out at the beaches because all of the houses were empty. It looked like a brand new ghost town. No people, no cars, no overgrown plants. Just vacant. But if you listened hard enough, you could hear everyone in the distance.

The sun watched over us from its pedestal in the sky and made sure to keep us warm when the wind picked up. We knew that we were close because the sound of families and friends enjoying the day got louder. Instead of going into the water, we walked barefoot on the sand. Usually, it’s too hot for that, but today the warm sand filled the space between our toes.

“What do you think he’s like?” Emily asked after a few minutes of silent walking.

“Who? Your math teacher? I thought you said he was a jerk?”

“No, that Cole guy, I wonder what he’s like.”

“I didn't think you cared about him. You didn't seem interested at lunch.”

“I mean, I’m not. For some reason, he popped back into my mind. Do you think we’ve seen him? The descriptions of him are kinda vague.”

“Yeah, I know a lot of ‘thin, tall, brown haired’ guys. It’s possible, but I can't imagine he goes out in public all the time. He’s one of the most wanted people in the world right now.”

“He could’ve changed his look, maybe he put on weight or something. It’s not super hard to disguise yourself.”

“Maybe we have seen him then. Kinda weird to think about,” I paused. “What do you think he did about his barcode? If anything?”

“I didn’t even think about that. I mean, people would still know who he is, right? Would they really need to scan him to make sure that its him?”

“I feel like they would need to though. It’s the only real way to identify someone. How else would they know for sure?”

“Hmm, I don’t know. What would he do with it? You can’t get a tattoo over it, it’s illegal. I guess the only way would be to…”

“Cut it,” Emily finished my sentence. “He would’ve had to get a scar there. Somehow.”

“Ugh, that seems painful. I can’t imagine trying to cut through my barcode. I can’t believe someone would do that.”

“I see what you mean. Some criminal is walking around without anyone knowing that it’s him. He probably has a massive scar on his neck,” Emily laid back and closed her eyes. “Maybe his hair covers his neck. Someone walking around without a barcode would be kinda obvious.”

We stayed on the beach until sunset. Having no responsibilities felt amazing. We stayed until the light vanished from the sky, it felt like forever— in a nice way.

(3)

I awoke to my mom hovering over my bed.

“Wake up sweetie, we’re going somewhere special today!” I groaned and rolled over.

“What time is it?” I barely had my eyes open, it didn't look like the sun had risen yet.

“Time for you to wake up! We are going to Circus today!” Circus was this huge amusement park about two hours away from the coast. It had been about a month since Migration and we had all settled into a routine. Every once in a while my mom liked to break the routine. Everyone goes there at least once in their lifetime, in my experience; I have been about 10 times. I still love going, but I don't love waking up at the butt-crack of dawn to get there.

“Wait, really?” Wide awake now, I rose to a sitting position, my mom still a little too close for comfort.

“Yes! Now get ready! I have to go wake up David.” She left, and after a minute or two, I heard David wake up. I looked at my clock 6:27 AM. As much as I wanted to go back to bed, I knew if we didn't get to Circus early, it would be full to the brim with people.

After I got dressed, I went downstairs and had a quick breakfast. While I munched on my cereal, my dad emerged from the bathroom.

“Hey Lina, mom got you too?”

I nodded with a mouthful cereal. Giving me a look of sympathy, my dad yawned, he’s as much of an early bird as I am.

“Oh well,” He poured a cup of coffee. “At least we’re going somewhere exciting!”

“True, true. We could be Migrating back to Winter. I’d much rather take Circus over going back there.”

“I actually don't mind Winter that much. After a while, Summer gets too hot. And all of the fun things to do get boring after a while.”

“I guess; I just prefer being outside. When I’m in Winter, I feel like I can't go outside without freezing to death.”

“You just have to bundle up,” he took a few sips of coffee. I finished eating my cereal and slurped the milk out of the bottom of the bowl. David came downstairs and looked like he needed about 10 more hours of sleep.

“Hey son, get some food in you. And try to perk up, you love rollercoasters.”

“Hmm,” David poured some cereal into a bowl and started munching. The only morning person in this family is my mom. I don't know how she does it.

Once everyone woke up a little bit and got their things together, we piled in the car. This time, the destination provided a bit more excitement. We turned on the radio and listened to the news for a bit; just to see if any more updates on Migration had been reported. After a few days, all of the reports said the same thing: “watch out for Cole Posik,” “More people went Summer than Winter,” “report suspicious activity.” After realizing that we heard the same thing during Migration, my mom switched the radio to some music.

4)

By the time we got to Circus, we could barely find a parking spot. The park had just opened and a line already stretched around the gate. We had no choice but to extend the length of the line. The air full of chatter that only grew louder as we approached the

entrance to the park. The wooden roller coasters rattled above us and screams of people went upside down on the loop-the-loop. The sweet smell of cotton candy and fried dough mixed in with the grease of hotdogs and french fries. I couldn't wait to get a seat on the newest coaster in the park, "Twisted Sun", and judging by the looks of the line, neither could anyone else.

I started toward the line, I needed to get at least one ride before the end of the day.

"Lina, you know the drill. Wait just a minute, please." How could I forget? The "safety speech" from mom. "David, Lina, don't talk to anyone creepy while we are here, okay? And I want you to meet me right here at 5 PM. I really don't want to be stuck in traffic when we leave. Okay?"

"Yes, mom," David and I replied together.

"Alright! Let's go have fun!" This time, I set out for the line without getting interrupted. While in line, I got to watch the coaster go at least 10 times. It starts with a massive climb, at least 5 stories up. Then, after a grueling second at the apex, a near vertical drop accompanied with screams of enthusiasm and terror (mostly terror). The track immediately rises back up and gives the riders barely enough time to prepare for the second drop. A second tow cable pulls you back up to the top of the coaster and let you go into a four-layer spiral back to the ground. After the spiral, you shoot back out onto the track and take an easy ride, by comparison, back to the start. I could not be more excited.

The coaster only seats 20 riders at a time, so the line didn't move the fastest. After 20-ish minutes, I could see the boarding area. The caterpillars in my stomach grew into butterflies, I've ridden on countless roller coasters, but I still get nervous.

“Any single riders?” The attendant shouted down the line.

“I am!” I shouted back. He gestured for me to come to the front of the line, perks of going to places like this alone. I sat down in a middle seat, seats in the front are for the true adrenaline junkies. The seats in the back get whipped around too much to be comfortable. In the middle, you get the most comfortable you can get on a rollercoaster.

“Damn, this thing really gets up there,” the person next to me sounded nervous.

“Yeah, I heard about five stories.” I turned to see who sat next to me. “Oh my god! Sarah!”

“Lina? Lina! Oh my god! How are youOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO?”

AAAHHHHHHHHHHH!”

Once we got off of the coaster, we had a chance to have a livelier conversation.

“Holy crap! That thing is as crazy as they say!” I could barely walk; my legs shook so bad.

“I know! I never really liked roller coasters, but that was something else. I can’t believe you’re here! How was Migrating? Everything go well?”

“Yeah! It went smoothly without any problems! Took a while though, the drive always feels longer than it actually is. I can’t believe you graduated! How does it feel to be out of school finally?”

“It’s kinda weird, to be honest. Like, I would have been out of school right now anyway because of Migration. But now I won’t be going back in Winter, it’s a strange feeling.”

“Do you know what you want to do? Are you going to find a job that doesn't require you to Migrate? Like teaching, or something like that. Or do you want two jobs? That would be cool! You'd have a nice change of pace every six months.”

“At first, I thought I would want a permanent job. I like living in Summer too much to have to leave. Especially now that I don't need to go to school, I don't have a reason to go back to Winter. But recently I've done some more thinking about my future, and it might be nice to have two jobs, one for each season. I'm not really sure.”

“I understand; I don't know what I want to do either. I feel like staying in one place all of the time might get a little boring. It's nice to have Migration shake it up every once in a while.”

“Totally. I think I want to take a year off before I start working. I don't want to have any responsibilities for a while.”

“I wish I could take some time off, longer than Summer. But I only have one more year of school before I can relax.”

“It will fly by, Lina. Make sure you enjoy your time while you can. You won't see everyone as often when you're out of school.”

“I know; I don't want to think about that too much though. I'm going to enjoy the time I have left in school.”

“Good. As much as I love talking to friends, I came to Circus to ride some rides. So, what should we go on next?”

We decided to go on the Ferris Wheel after riding various fast/exciting rides to mellow out a bit. My phone buzzed when we reached the top and could look out over the whole park.

To: You, Dad, David

From: Mom

20-minute warning! We will meet by the South Entrance in 20 minutes to leave!

“Ugh, my mom just texted me that I have 20 minutes before we leave. I should probably head out when we get off.”

“That’s fine! It was awesome to see you! Hopefully we can get together sometime!”

“Definitely!” We got let off at the bottom and went our separate ways. I suddenly realized that I hadn't been to the bathroom all day and I did not want to be stuck in a car for a few hours before I had the chance to go. I made my way to the closest bathroom, which happened to be pretty close to the Ferris Wheel.

On the way out, some guy bumped into me on his way to the men’s room.

“Oh! Sorry!” We turned to face each other.

“I didn't see you,” He laughed. He had a nice face and honey brown hair.

“Oh, it’s okay. I didn't see you either,” I blushed.

“I feel like I should get you something, a stupid stuffed animal or something. I feel bad for running into you. What’s your name?”

“You don't need to get me anything, I’m leaving anyway. And it’s Lina,” I broke mom’s number one rule.

“Lina. That’s a pretty name. I’m Cole.” He stuck out his hand. “Cole Posik.”

(5)

“Posik? Um, aren't you...”

“Wanted? Yeah, sorta. I don't really know why though. Seems like bullshit to me.” The newspaper descriptions barely got him right. He was tall and thin, but his hair shined like bronze in the sun. It framed his face in way that made him look even skinnier, but he wasn’t unattractive. His hazel eyes would change color depending on what light it them. Sometimes they were a subtle green, other times a dark brown. This guy didn’t seem dangerous at all.

“I’m mean, I guess. But I never knew a time before Migration, it’s my normal, you know?” I tried to appear as calm as possible, but inside I had no idea what to do. My parents would start to worry if I didn't find them soon and my gut told me to call the cops.

“Why should we be forced to move all the time? It’s such a hassle and just another way for the government to control us. I just wanted to leave whenever I want. I wanted to see the world.”

“That makes sense,” I needed to get back to my family. “Well, I gotta go. My parents are going to worry if I don't find them soon. Nice meeting you.”

“And you as well, Lina. I hope we meet again.”

“Bye,” I mumbled and walked away. My heart raced as I walked towards the South Entrance to find my parents. Thankfully, they hadn’t worried about me yet and we could go home.

It took us a few minutes to find our car. The maze of a parking lot didn't offer any kind of map to help to figure out where you parked. After walking through endless hallways of cars, our SUV made itself known to us. We piled in and headed back to our coastal home. I texted Emily as soon as I could. I needed some advice on what just happened.

To: Emily

From: You

Hey girl! You would not believe what happened to my while we were at Circus! I'll call you when I get home. About 7:30!

On the ride home, we watched the golden sun paint the sky as it set over the ocean in the distance.

We got home a little bit later than I told Emily, but it didn't matter. I needed to call her anyway. I ran up to my room and dialed her number before I reached my door. It rang once before she picked it up, she was waiting for the call.

“Lina! How was Circus! I was just about to call you! You said 7:30!”

“I know, I know, we got stuck in a bit of traffic and I fell asleep. But I'm here now! Guess who I met near the bathrooms at Circus!”

“Pringles kid? Maybe he is kinda weird.”

“No! Someone way more exciting than that!”

“The professor who skis around campus when it snows? I don't know Lina, just tell me!”

“Cole Posik.”

“What? How? Why was he there? Wouldn't people recognize him? Did you call the cops?”

“I don't know! I had no idea what to do! We just bumped into each other and he started to talk to me! He seemed so normal. And I had to leave so I didn't have time to interact with him that much.”

“What do you mean he seemed normal? He's a wanted criminal. One of the most wanted in the world.”

“I know that, but he didn't look dangerous. He looked like us! Only about 20 years old, jeans and a t-shirt. He's fighting the system, protesting against Migration. That's what it seemed like anyway.”

“What did he say to you? He wasn't dangerous?”

“He didn't seem dangerous, as far as I could tell. He said it was bullshit that the government was after him and he said he hopes to see me again.”

“How would he see you again? He doesn't know where you live does he?”

“I didn't tell him, so I don't think I'll be seeing him again. But who knows? He just goes wherever whenever. What if he shows up that the beach?”

“If he shows up at the beach, you have to tell me! I sort of want to meet him.”

“Really? You were just criticizing me about seeing him for two seconds and not doing anything about it!”

“I was not! I just wanted to know what it was like! Besides, it would be scary in a fun way to meet him you know? Like a roller coaster.”

“It wasn't scary, just a little nerve racking. But the stuff the articles say about him don't seem to be true now that I've met the real thing.”

“Maybe it was someone with the same name?”

“No, he talked about being wanted. Which I thought was strange. I figured we would be in hiding or something.”

“Wait, was he cute?”

“A little, much better looking than the pictures in the articles. They don't have anything recent enough to do him justice.”

“Now I really want to meet him,” Someone shouted something in the background on Emily's end. “Ugh, my mom needs something, I gotta go. But I want to hear more about him! Let's hit up the beach tomorrow and we can talk more. Bye!”

“Sounds good, Bye!” I spent the rest of the night thinking about him and what happened. I had more questions than Emily did. The biggest one that echoed until I fell asleep: Why wasn't he hiding?

(6)

In the morning, I got ready to go to the beach with Emily. My mother didn't plan anything for the day because we just got back from Circus. I told my family my plans for the day and headed out the door.

Outside, a few fluffy clouds floated across the blue sky while the sun warmed the air. A slight breeze found its way to land every few minutes, giving you a taste of the ocean. I took the same route to Emily's house I did on Migration Day. This time, she didn't come out in the road when I walked by, so I knocked on her door. Her mom answered.

“Hi Lina! How are you doing? Come in, come in.” Her mom always welcomed people into their home, no matter the day. I loved being with them.

“I’m good, thank you! How are you?”

“I’m doing swell; the weather is just magnificent today. Are you here for Emily? She’ll be out soon, she’s just in the restroom.”

“It is beautiful today, and no worries, I can wait. I’m in no hurry.”

“Okay, would you like anything? Water? A snack?”

“No, thank you though.” Emily walked into the living room.

“Hey Lina! Ready to go?”

“Yup!”

“Bye mom! I’ll be back later!” We headed out the door and continued to the beach. I could tell Emily wanted to talk about Cole, but she held herself back until we got to the beach.

We reached the sands and the density of people since Migration day had gone down significantly. This time, we had no problem finding a spot and laying out our towels. The warm sand provided us with a heated bed to lay on while we talked. With the white noise of the ocean as our background, Emily proceeded to ask me anything and everything about Cole.

“So, tell me again. What happened?”

“Like I said on the phone, we bumped into each other near the bathrooms at Circus. I didn’t think anything of it. We said sorry to each other, but he just kept talking. I thought he was some weirdo at first.”

“Okay, and did he introduce himself out of the blue? I feel like that’s a little strange if you’re one of the world’s most wanted.”

“No, he offered to get me something as an apology for bumping into me. Like a drink or food or something.”

“He asked you out?” Emily shouted. “Oh my god! What did you say? Yes?”

“No, oh my god, Emily. People are staring! I didn't say yes. I told him I had to leave, which wasn't a lie. He was just being polite. He did not ask me out.”

“But didn’t you say he hoped to see you again? I think he asked you out. I mean, come on! You are beautiful.”

“Thanks. And yeah he did say that, but I don't see that happening. How would he find me? He travels all the time and the world is huge.”

“Yeah, but who knows? If he found you once he can find you again.”

“I don't think he ‘found’ me, just bumped into me. He wasn't looking for me, if that’s what you’re saying.”

“True, but he could be looking for you now! We should keep an eye out, what did he look like?”

“He had brown hair, but it wasn't that dark. Almost like honey. His eyes were a hazel color, but if he looked away, they changed to either green or brown. They were really pretty now that I think about it. He was wearing jeans, which come to think of it, must have been uncomfortable because of the heat. And a t-shirt, but I can’t remember what was on it.”

“Was he attractive? He sounds kind of attractive.”

“Yeah, a little bit. Nothing too special thought. Like, he’s not standing out in my mind at the most attractive being I’ve ever seen.”

“Interesting. What if he’s here? What if he followed you home or something, and figured out where you live?” She started looking around like she could find him among all of the people here. I looked a little bit too, maybe he was here looking for me. “I don’t see him,” Emily sounded disappointed.

“You barely know what he looks like! You just have the brief description I gave you.”

“I bet if we started walking around, we might have a better chance at spotting him. Let’s go.”

“Why are you so interested in this guy? He’s really nothing special.”

“I’m interested because you met one of the most infamous people out there and you turned down a date with him!”

“He didn’t ask me out!”

“Admit it, you want to find him. Probably as much as I do!” I didn’t want to admit it, but yes, I did want to see Cole again. I wanted to ask him so many questions, learn about his life and why he does what he does. When we met, something about him captivated me. I didn’t fall in love; I just became more curious. The fact that I didn’t respond right away got Emily really excited. “You *do* want to find him! Let’s go!”

She got up from her spot, shook out her towel, and started walking towards the shop-lined roads. I had no choice but to follow her.

We keep walking up and down the road, every time passing different people. None of them Cole. I knew he wouldn't find me again; he was just trying to be nice.

“Em, I don't think we are gonna find him. We've walked up and down this street like 5 times. I don't think he's around.”

“Alright, we can take a break. Hungry?”

“Yeah, I was ready for lunch like 20 minutes ago.”

“Why didn't you say something! Let's go eat, you pick.” We walked back up the street and into a little cafe called Starfish. When we walked in, only a few tables had customers. The pale green walls added to the summer theme of the restaurant. In the kitchen, a blender went off, creating a summer-time treat. Every time the door opened, the smell of the ocean blended with the smell of turkey-sandwiches. The simple menu made ordering a breeze.

Emily and I got our lunch, a turkey avocado club sandwich with a berry smoothie and a chicken Caesar wrap with a water, and grabbed a table close to the windows. We sat with the window to my right and her left. It was Emily's idea, so we could both watch the passersby on the sidewalk. We stayed at the table long after our food disappeared. We didn't see Cole and I felt like leaving.

“Emily, I think we would have seen him by now if he was on this side of the country.”

“Are you sure you don't want to stay?”

“I'm sure.” We threw our trash away and headed back outside. We started walking back towards my house. We turned the corner into my neighborhood and ran right into someone walking the opposite way.

“Oh, I’m sorry! I guess I should have been lookin-- Hey! Linda!” Cole said.

“It’s Lina, but it’s okay. I didn’t see you.” I knew that behind me, Emily freaked out. I didn’t have to turn around to see the expression on her face.

“My bad, Lina. I guess we meet again,” He turned to Emily. “I’m Cole, sorry I ran into you guys. I should have been looking where I was going. I have a bad habit of staring at the ground.”

“It’s okay, I’m Emily. Lina’s best friend. It’s nice to meet you, Lina told me about you.”

“She did? All good things, I hope. It’s hard to get a good reputation when everyone thinks you are a criminal.”

“Yeah, nothing bad. She seemed to like you too,” Emily poked my back.

“Hey! I never said that, Emily likes to embarrass me. What are you doing so close to the coast?” I gave Emily a look. She smiled back.

“Simple, I like the ocean. It’s relaxing. Gives me an escape from the people looking for me. Oh! I just remembered, me and a friend are having a bonfire tonight. Up on the Hills. Would you want to join? I promise I won’t kidnap you, I’m not what they say in those bullshit articles.”

“Tonight? I’m not so sure, I barely know you and my parents, they would freak out if they knew I knew you.”

“I understand,” He seemed disappointed. “If you change your mind, just look for the bonfire on the Hills tonight. You’re always welcome, you too Emily.”

“Thanks! But I think I’m going to pass, my parents can be kinda weird about me being out at night. It was nice to meet you!”

“And you as well, maybe we can meet again.” And with that, he kept walking towards the beach. Emily did not stop talking until we got home.

“You have to go! You said you wanted to talk to him! Ask him questions about his life! You can't pass this up, even if you don't like him that much.”

“I don't like him! I don't know why you think I do.”

“Oh, come on! The way you talk about him, you totally like him.”

“Whatever,” I didn't have anything better to say. I might like him, but not enough to start dating him or anything. I don't want to live his life; I just want to know more about it.

“Okay, Lina. You better go tonight. And I better hear all about it!”

“Alright. Bye Em.” I loved Emily, but she could get annoying sometimes. Sometimes, I think she lives her life through me.

Maybe Emily was right, I should go to the bonfire. But what if he does kidnap me, only a kidnapper would tell you he didn't want to hurt you. What would I tell my parents? I could always lie and tell them I planned on staying the night at Emily's, she would go with it too. She wants me to hang out with Cole so she can learn more about him. She doesn't want to go with me because she is so sure a romance will blossom. Sure, Cole has a nice face and acts polite, but I've only known him for about ten minutes. I can't be sure that this guy won't kill me, after all, the reports say he is dangerous.

However, maybe Cole is right. Maybe the reports are bullshit and the government doesn't like the idea of someone disrupting the order of the things. Maybe all he wants to

do is travel and doesn't want the rules of Migration to tell him when and where to go. I want answers, and there is only one way to get them.

(7)

“Hey mom, I think I’m gonna hang out at Emily’s for a little bit. I don't know when I’ll be back; probably kinda late.” I felt bad lying to my mom. She doesn't deserve it, but she can't know the truth.

“Okay, sweetie. You know the drill: keep your phone on you, let me know if you change locations,” she looked up from her book. “Be safe!”

“I will! I’ll see you later,” I walked out the door and towards the Hills. The air cooled down as the sun kissed the horizon. I guessed I had about a half hour of sunlight before I wanted to go find Cole, so I wandered around a bit. The shops all closed down and the orange sunset reflected on all of the windows. A few people were out doing the same thing I was. The weather, although a little chilly, was great for a walk on the beach. Without the sound of beach-goers, the crashes of the waves sounded much louder than usual. The ruins of sandcastles spotted the coast and the tide just started to go out.

I didn't tell Emily that I decided to go and find Cole for two reasons: she would have wanted to come and she would have wanted to know everything as it unfolded. I planned on telling her, after everything was said and done. This was something I wanted to do alone.

I wonder how Cole will react to seeing me tonight. He seemed disappointed when I told him that wouldn't come. Maybe he’ll be excited, or at least happy. Maybe he won't even be there, he goes wherever he wants. Why would he stay in one place too long when he could get caught by someone?

Why does he travel? He can still see the world if he Migrates, the law never says you can't travel laterally. He told me that he doesn't like the government controlling him, he doesn't like someone telling him when and where to go. He's protesting Migration, but I never saw a reason to. Migration keeps the population spread out, while still allowing people to experience both seasons. My parents said that when the law got put in place, it was the best option for everyone; there weren't any problems.

I always thought that more people like Cole would exist, people who didn't want to follow the rules. Maybe there were afraid of the punishment, you could get jailed for not moving after six months. It wasn't worth it. But Cole isn't afraid, he doesn't seem to care if he gets caught.

I once overheard someone talking about Migration, "We are like birds," they said "Moving when the time is right. Moving to a more comfortable place." They were right. The government just decided when the time was right, and we all agreed with them.

The sun finally dipped below the horizon and I started making my way up to the Hills. The Hills overlooked the ocean, I didn't go there often, but the view was amazing. On a good day, you could see the ocean fall away to the curve of the earth. The long grass hissed in the breeze and provided nesting places to the seagulls. I watched a sailboat on the water until it got too dark to see it. I turned my back on the water and saw an orange orb in the distance- Cole.

As I walked, thoughts and questions buzzed in my head. *Is he alone? He said he had a friend with him. Is this friend real? I never saw Cole with anyone. What if he doesn't want to see me? What if it isn't him? I shouldn't have come. It's not too late to turn back. No, I can do this. It's going to be okay.* The smell of the campfire grew

stronger and the shape of the fire became easier to make out. I could hear Cole talking to someone, I didn't know who.

“Lina! You decided to come! Wanna beer?” Cole’s face lit up when he saw me. I think he wanted a hug but it was too dark to tell and we don't know each other *that well*.

“Hi, Cole, and sure, I’ll have one,” I’m happy that it was dark because I couldn't tell if I blushed or not. He cracked open the can and passed it to me.

“Lina, this is Matt. Matt, Lina. I met him over in Winter and we saw each other again after he Migrated.”

“Hi Matt, it’s nice to meet you,” He didn't say anything back, just lifted his beer in my direction.

“He gets shy around new people. No need to worry, Matt, she’s a friend of mine,” He sat down on the grass, staring at the fire that made his hair glow as much as the sun did.

“So um, how was your day?” I had only talked to Cole in short bursts, and most of that consisted of apologies.

“It was pretty good, actually. No one called the cops on me and I got to see the ocean. I had been looking forward to this for a while, to be honest. I love the ocean, it’s calm one minute and raging the next. Beautiful,” He kept looking at the fire. Its warmth combated the cool breeze and lack of sun. “How was yours?”

“Kinda boring, until now. I hung out with my friend, you met her. And then just hung out at my house until now. Nothing particularly exciting. Nothing like what your life must be like.”

“My life probably isn't like you think it is. I constantly have to make sure I'm not getting caught because the government doesn't let me do what I want to do. I have to do what *they* want.”

“But what about Circus? You didn't seem to be trying to hide while you were there,” I took a seat by the fire and took a sip of my beer. It was warm.

“Sometimes you have to take risks, going to a big public place like that was one of those risks. But I was willing to take it. No one recognized me, I wasn't surprised, they haven't found me in years.”

“You didn't hesitate to tell me who you are. Seems like you don't care if you get caught, and aren't you taking the biggest risk of them all? By not Migrating? After some time, there are some serious consequences for it.” I didn't want to offend Cole, but some of the decisions he's making aren't the smartest.

“That is true, not Migrating has huge consequences. But I haven't run into any issues, and I don't plan to. To me, it's more than not Migrating. Just because the Earth stopped revolving around the Sun doesn't mean that we suddenly have to implement these new rules.”

“What is it then? If it's more than not Migrating, what is it?” Cole took a big swig of his beer and fell back to look at the stars. I couldn't help but to follow his gaze. Billions of white lights dotted the black sky. Without the fire popping and the waves of the ocean in the background, it would have been completely silent. I could tell Cole was trying to formulate a response, not because he didn't know what to say, but because he's never had to put it to words before. Matt piped up from his spot on the grass.

“For me, it’s more of traveling when I feel like it. I get so settled in one spot, I don't want to leave. I like it here too much. Cole inspired me to stay here when Migration comes around again. If I get caught, it’s just my first offense, I’ll do what they say and try again next time. I know my family will miss me, but I want them to understand that it’s what I want. They might not and they’ll have to live with it,” I understood where he came from. He liked living in Summer. I did too, but I couldn't stand to leave my family alone like that.

“For me,” Cole sat back up. “My family didn't care that I left. They said ‘good luck, we’ll see you when we see you.’ They didn't worry about be, never have. When I told them that I didn't agree with Migration, they asked me what I was going to do about it. Well, I came up with my answer. I’ve probably seen my parents once in the past few years. I think they are in Winter right now, if my math is right.

“I would call them, you know. I don't mean to leave them out of the loop. But everything can be tracked nowadays. I wonder what they think, every time they hear my name on the radio, or see my face on TV. I’ve been labeled dangerous,” Cole wasn't dangerous, he just wanted to live. He missed his family, but he couldn't go back now. “I know that if I got caught I would be killed. I live with that fear every day. I don't let that fear control me. Yeah, I try not to get caught, but I refuse to become someone I’m not. I do whatever I can to avoid getting caught while still travelling. It’s exhausting. But it’s worth it.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m free”

THE SURVIVAL

(1)

I hear the door of a van slide open and the cold air from outside steals the air from my lungs. The sack is ripped off my head and a rough hand shoved me out into the cold. I fall face first into the snow bank on the side of the road, but it felt more like ice than snow and I scraped my hands trying to catch myself on the way down. By the time I could get up and brush myself off, the van had disappeared. I didn't hear the door close or an engine fade off in the distance. It was just gone.

I started walking; I thought I knew where I was, but now it didn't feel as familiar. The layout of the buildings and roads felt like someplace I knew, but the sky didn't feel right. It looked down on me with a face of distrust. I didn't see anyone else walking around, but I couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. I tried following the road to where I thought the library would be, but when I turned the corner, the familiar brick building had changed. On the outside, I couldn't see any windows and it only took up a small bit of land compared to the massive building I thought I knew. I walked up the steps and went inside. Thankfully the door opened.

On the inside, everything had changed. Instead of books and tables filling the space, the lights on the wall had exposed wires, wooden cabinets lined the wall, a locked case had a sign that said: "Keep out or die." Someone had been here before, and they drew a dead stick figure on the bottom. Every step I took echoed off of the cement walls

and the lights flickered occasionally. I saw a door to my left and headed towards it. Maybe I could find some supplies to keep me alive while I'm here.

Through the door, voices approached. I froze. Nowhere to hide. No furniture, no other doors. I had no idea who would walk through that door. Do they know I'm here? Are they going to kill me? Help me? The door swung open before I figure out what to do.

"Shit! Who the fuck are you? How did you find us?" The taller one shouted at me. He stiffened up and the girl he's with reached for something behind her back. I stepped back.

"I don't- I don't know," My eyes darted between the two of them.

"Not good enough," he drew a knife and started walking towards me.

"They didn't tell me anything!" I put my hands above my head. But he didn't stop walking towards me, and the other one had a gun out. I panicked. The only way out was the door behind me, it was only a few feet away, but it could've been miles.

"Char?" his friend said. "She really doesn't know." I looked over at her, she seemed scared for me, but she didn't lower her gun. Char took another step closer to me. "Char, back off. Can't you see how scared she is?"

"She should be. Where'd you come from?" He pressed his knife into my jacket.

"Charles, stop it. This isn't how you get information."

"Oh what do you know? I haven't seen you get any valuable info lately."

"We haven't seen anyone else in months!" She said, "I'm just saying, maybe we should believe what she says. She has no idea what's going on, look at her!" They exchanged glances and then looked at me. I didn't say or do anything. They were on alert.

I could tell they didn't know exactly what to do about me. I could feel it in the air. Were they going to kick me out into the cold? Take me in? Kill me?

“Alright, let’s go,” Char said. Liz lowered her weapon and looked at Char with a face of confusion. He gestured through the door they entered through. I had no choice but to lead.

Every now and then, I noticed a doorway leading to another part of the building. I couldn't imagine what the other rooms held. The hallway had so many bends and turns in it, how do they not get lost? We came to the end of the hallway, it opened up into a room. Liz pulled a chair into the middle of it. Char gestured for me to sit down, his face scowling at me.

I didn't argue.

“How did you get here?”

“I’m not really sure.”

“You know.”

I thought back to before getting in that van. But I couldn't. I couldn't remember the night before. I know I probably went to bed, but I woke up and got pushed out of a van. “I went to bed and woke up in a van. Something covered my head. Someone ripped it off and pushed me into a snowbank. Now I’m here.”

They looked at each other. They knew something I didn't.

“The same as us,” Liz said.

“We’re about as lost as you,” Char said after a pause. “All we know is that someone deserted us here and we had to survive. Sometimes, we see other people. We

tend to mind our own business,” He directed that at me. “We don't know if this is a game, an experiment, or what. But you're a part of it now.”

I didn't know what to think. A game? We sat in silence, letting me take in this information.

“What's your name?”

I didn't respond. I wasn't scared, I just didn't know.

“My name-- My name is--” What was my name? How could I not remember who I am? What happened before I was put in that van?

“Can't hear you,” He rolled his eyes.

“Um, Kasey,” I have no idea if that's my name or not. It came to my mind first.

“Alright Kasey, you don't have to trust us. I mean, we did almost kill you back there. But I recommend you stay with us. We've been here for a while.” Char relaxed.

“Do whatever you want, but staying here's probably your best shot,” Liz piped up from behind Char. They seemed to relax pretty quick around me. Maybe they realized that I'm no real threat. Maybe the more people they have in their group, the better chance we all have.

“I guess I'll stay with you.”

“So Kasey, what do you remember?” Liz asked as we walked back down the maze of hallways to get to the main room.

“Not a lot, I was blindfolded. No one talked to me.”

“Where were you?”

“A van? I think. I felt like I just woke up from a really long nap. Like when you don't know where you are, or what time it is. We stopped, the door in front of me opened. Someone ripped off my blindfold and shoved me out.”

“You see who it was?”

“No and by the time I got up and turned around, the van was gone.”

“You see where it went?”

“No. It was completely gone. Like, no sign of a van at all. It disappeared.” Liz sat back in her chair, trying to piece together all of the information.

“Shit.”

“What?”

“Just like us.” Liz stood up and paced around the room.

“What? You were put here too?”

“Put here’s a nice way to put it. We think some fucker stranded us here for fun. We always feel like we’re being watched. But it’s been a while and nothing has changed.” Char didn't say anything the whole time we walked back, he just led the way. We didn’t go back to the first room, instead we stopped in front of one of the doorways.

“We need to get you some supplies, follow me,” Char turned and went through the door. Liz and I followed. After a short hallway, we walked into a room that looked like they used it for storage. The hallway had a few posters on it, I didn't recognize them. They may have been movies, I wasn't sure.

“Over here’s our food. We take what we find, which isn't much. Don't even think about stealing any,” Char pointed to the other side of the room, “Through that door is all

our clothes. We have a rule 'bout clothes or anything you find: you find it, it's yours. Again, don't fucking steal."

Char pushed me to the side, and started moving the large rug I had been standing on. He looked at Liz for some help. Together, they moved a large rug to the side, and a larger piece of plywood hid underneath. I watched as Char and Liz lifted the plywood off of a large hole in the ground. The rugged edges opened up into a dark hole. I couldn't tell how deep it was. "Down here's all our weapons." He jumped down. Liz and I followed.

I couldn't see anything at first, but it smelled like my basement back home. I remember hiding down there when I played hide-and-seek with my brother. I would squeeze myself in between the bookshelves and the wall. He could never find me.

Someone pushed past me and turned on a light. The single light bulb cast an orange glow around the room. Our shadows made it hard to see what hung on the walls, but after a minute or two, my eyes adjusted. Looking around, I could see various guns hanging on the wall. I took a step forward and kicked an ammo box.

"Know how to shoot a gun?" Char looked like a skeleton under the orange light: his eyes were shadows and so were his cheeks.

"Not really." I had never shot a gun in my life, but it couldn't be that hard.

"Alright." He handed me a knife with a serrated edge, about the length of my hand. "For now, take a knife. If I see you with anything except a knife, it won't be pretty. We spent a long time collecting all this and I'm not letting some fucking stranger take it from me." I looked at the knife in my hand, I hoped I would never have to use it.

Char headed up the ladder, followed by Liz and me. They replaced the wood and the rug. "Through here, is our kitchen. Getting food to cook is rare, but sometimes we get

a deer.” The kitchen only had a small camping grill in it and a bucket. I guess they used it as a sink, both sitting on the floor. There was also a water fountain in the corner. I wondered if it still worked. Char and Liz walked into another room.

“Here’s where we sleep,” On the floor, a few rugs were stacked on each other to make a “bed” and some blankets laid on top. A few lanterns surrounded the bed and I didn't see anything that resembled pillows. Comfortable.

“At night, we take turns sleeping so one of us can be on lookout. Once your shift is up, you’ll come and wake me up and I’ll take over. If anything happens, stand your ground. Our lives depend on you. Open the case that has the sign on it, I wired it to set off an alarm when opened. Liz and I will wake up and meet you there. You’ll do the same if you hear the alarm,” Char pointed to the speaker in the corner. I could see a wire running through a hole in the ceiling. “Understand?” I nodded again. “You don't talk much do you?”

“You scared her Char, she’s worried about saying the wrong thing.”

“I only scared her ‘cause she scared the shit outta us. Don’t worry Kasey, I’m not gonna kill you. Just don't fuck up.”

“Okay.” I wanted to trust him, it was just going to take some time. “How often does something happen at night?”

“It’s rare,” Liz said, “especially now with winter. Don't worry.”

We walked back to the room with all of the food in it. Liz and Char picked some boxes and a can off the shelf. It looked like crackers and cereal, I couldn't see what the can was.

“Carrots or corn?” Liz asked, holding up two cans. Char had gone back to the kitchen.

“Um, carrots.”

She put the corn back on the shelf with the other cans. “When we got here, Char wasn't like this. He was terrified. Didn't know what to do. We got dropped off together and helped each other a lot. It was scary. Hell, it was terrifying. We ran into someone, like you did. It was clear they'd been here a while. We almost died.

“When we found this place, Char began to relax a bit. After a few days, we realized that we were on our own, no one was coming. We claimed this place. It took quite some time to get it this full of supplies. Never had any problems, no visitors or anything. Until you got here. I think Char's worried something's changing. It's strange that after months of not seeing anyone, you show up.”

“You guys comin', or what?” Char shouted from down the hall.

I followed Liz to the kitchen. Char divvied up the crackers and cereal. One portion looked a bit smaller than the others, Char handed that one to me. Liz used a knife to open the can of carrots and poured some out onto each plate. It wasn't much, but I was hungry.

We ate in silence; the only sounds came from the crunching of the cereal. I didn't know if I should talk or not. Sound bounced on the cement floors and walls, anything you did could be heard. When we finished eating, Liz and Char started cleaning up.

“How dark was it when you got here, Kasey?” Char asked as he put the empty can on the shelf with some others.

“Not sure. I could still see, but the sun had gone down. Why?”

“Trying to gauge what time it is, I don't want to go outside if I don't have to,” Liz and I exchanged glances, maybe he's still scared of the world he's in. “And it's probably been about an hour since you got here, so I'm gonna guess it's between 7 and 8.”

“Should we just go to bed? Kinda early,” Liz said.

“Nah, we can stay up for a bit. Poker?” Char asked me.

“Sure, sounds like fun,” If I had to live with these people, I should at least know them.

“Not if you lose,” Liz said. She saw my confusion, “We play poker with actual bets, mostly 'cause we don't have chips. So, if I win,” She looked me over. “I want your jacket. Looks warm.”

“Oh, um. Well, if I win, I want some mittens or something. I'm freezing.”

“Sounds like a bet,” Liz dealt the cards and we played.

I got to keep my jacket.

(2)

“Kasey, Kasey, wake up.” I opened my eyes to Liz standing over me.

“It's your turn to be on watch. Come on”

I rolled out of the bed, onto the floor, and stood up. Liz's lantern was on the lowest setting and my eyes struggled to adjust to the light. Now that the main lights of the bunker were off, it felt more like a cave than before. I felt miles underground. I followed Liz's dim lantern all the way to the front room. We didn't talk and I noticed how quiet this place was. Besides our footsteps, there was no electrical hum from the lights. When we finally got to the front room, Liz turned the lights on.

“We keep a few books in here,” She opened a cabinet. “I like to read on watch, it helps pass the time. Have fun!” She started to leave, “Oh, one more thing: the case with the sign on it, that’s our alarm. When you open it, an alarm goes off in the other room, and we’ll come help. Nothing’s in the cabinet,” She turned around and continued walking down the hall and I watched the soft glow of her lantern retreat down the hall.

I walked over to the cabinet with the books and picked the most interesting one out of the bunch: *Nightmare Hunters*. Only about 200 pages, I figured I could finish it and then wake up Char. I didn't know what to expect while I sat here for a few hours. I was nervous, but Liz said that most of the time nothing happens. I sat down against a wall and started reading.

About halfway through, I thought I heard something outside. I put the book down and listened. It sounded like some people outside. I couldn't make out what they were saying. They started jiggling the handle on the door. I froze. Liz said nothing usually happens, but of course, my first night on watch: something happens. I reached for the knife in my pocket, but it wasn't there. I forgot I took it out before I went to sleep. Whoever it was pounded on the door. I jumped about 10 feet in the air and lunged over to the case. I opened it. I heard the alarm in the bedroom.

“What the hell?” Char asked with his knife drawn, Liz followed close behind with her gun. “I swear to god if you opened the case just to see what’s inside,” He jumped toward me.

“I heard someone outside! They were talking and then they pounded on the door. I don't know what they wanted. I didn't open the door,” I was shaking. Char wanted to kill me twice today and someone tried to get in.

“They gone?”

“Don't know,” I listened for any movement outside. I couldn't hear anything.

“Well, only one way to find out,” Liz said, nodding at the door. She adjusted her grip on her gun. Char went to open it.

“Ready?” He asked. I stepped behind Liz. She nodded. He swung the door open. Liz pointed her gun into the night. I closed my eyes and waited for something to happen.

“Anyone out there?” I asked, my eyes still closed.

“No,” Liz lowered her weapon. I opened my eyes and we all relaxed a little. “Just this box.” She bent down and picked up a box, no bigger than her head. Char took it from her, and looked at it for a bit. He looked concerned, but didn't say anything about how he felt.

“Let's deal with it in the morning. I'm too tired for this shit,” Char said, he was annoyed that I pulled the alarm for a box. “You two go to bed, I'll start my watch.”

“You sure? I still have an hour left,” I asked. He didn't respond, but if looks could kill.

In the morning, I woke up next to Char. Liz must've finished out the night. I rolled off of the bed and headed to the front room. I felt my way through the dark. I figure it must've been morning, but since all of the lights were off my body couldn't make sense of the time.

Once I got to the hallway, I could see the glow of lights coming from the front room. I walked in, Liz was sitting against the wall, and the mystery box sat next to her.

“How's the rest of your night?”

“Good, I fell asleep right after Char said I could go to sleep. You?”

“Decent, I decided to read this again” She held up *Nightmare Hunters*.

“I liked it,” I stood there for a second, not sure of what to do. “You open the box?”

“Hell no. It could be trap. Plus, if I didn't wait for Char, he'd fuck over us both.”

I chuckled. “Should I wake him up? So we can see what it is?”

“I'll get him. He's not a morning person,” She put her book down and disappeared down the hall, turning on the lights as she went.

I looked at the package we got last night. The box, a little dinged up from being outside, was held together by tape. I didn't expect it to be so light; it felt empty. I heard Liz and Char coming back, I put the box down.

“If we open that box, we're going outside. Might be a trap and this place ain't worth it,” Liz was right: Char was not a morning person, his bed head stuck out in all directions and he looked like he might kill someone if he got annoyed. But then again, he always looked like that.

Liz and I nodded and we got some more layers on. Char took the box and we followed him outside. I hadn't been outside since I was thrown out of the van. The still air felt warmer than last night. Char handled the box with care, not wanting to set anything off. We walked about 100 yards away from the bunker and Char set the package down in the snow. He pulled out his knife and cut the tape holding the top flaps of the box together. I took a few steps back. We had no idea what could come out of it. He held the flaps down, opened the box and jumped back. We all waited for a reaction Nothing happened. The box remained, unmoved, in the snow.

“If someone set a trap, it would've gone off.” Char said, we relaxed a little bit.

“So what’s in it?” Liz asked. Char picked up the box.

“A map,” He pulled out a folded up map. I leaned in to look at it.

Liz joined us. “Let’s go back to the bunker. I’m freezing.”

On the short walk back to the bunker, no one said anything. Before we went inside, I thought I saw someone duck behind a tree. I didn’t say anything. I wondered if it was the same person who dropped off the box.

“How would anyone know we’re here?” I asked when we finally got inside.

“That’s not important right now. It was probably whoever dropped us here. What matters is what’s on the map,” Char spread the map out on the floor. I didn’t recognize the area it mapped out, but a red circle surrounded a mountain.

“Mt. Dalvons,” Liz read the label. “Does that mean anything to you?”

“No. Should we follow it?”

“Could be a trap, I’m not risking my fucking life for some map to a mountain. Someone might be baiting us out,” Char said. “We shouldn’t go.”

“Why not?” asked Liz, “What if it’s a way out of here. What if it’s a way to finally get back?”

“Do you even remember life before here?” They both raised their voices, I didn’t know what to do. I could remember bits of my life before, couldn’t they?

“No, but I know I had one! We should go.” Char didn’t respond. I don’t think he knew how to. What if we could go back to our lives before this place? Silence hung in the room.

“It’s lunch time.” Char got up and went to the kitchen, leaving the map on the ground. If there was a door, he would’ve slammed it.

“What do you think?” Liz stood up, “Should we go?”

“I’m not sure. Why would someone trick us with a map? Where did it come from anyway?”

“I don't know.”

“We shouldn't leave Char out.”

“No shit. We can decide tomorrow.” She folded up the map and we went to get lunch with Char.

The only sounds during lunch were the scrapings of a spoon against a tin can. It reminded me of home: when I would have tuna sandwiches because we couldn't afford anything else. Liz and Char didn't look at each other for the rest of the day. I didn't know if I should talk to either one of them; I didn't want to reopen a wound. Why couldn't they remember life before? Had they been here too long? Char got up and left before Liz and I finished eating. I heard the front door open and close, he must've needed a break from everything. Liz finished her food and left me alone in the kitchen.

I spent the rest of the day, waiting to see if anyone wanted to talk. No one did.

In the morning, we ate some canned peaches Char found after he left yesterday. Having some decent food and a night's sleep allowed us to get a fresh perspective on what to do about the map. Char and Liz started talking again, and things almost seemed back to normal. I joined them after I cleaned up the peach can and put it with the other empty ones.

“What's the plan?” Char asked. Liz and I shared a surprised look. Yesterday, Char didn't want any part of this excursion.

“I think we have to. Why would we get a random map? It was clearly meant for us,” Liz said.

“We going?” I asked. I didn't want to be the deciding vote again.

“Thinking about it. From the scale on the map, Mt. Dalvons is about 25 miles away,” Liz explained. “Giving us ‘bout five miles a day. The snow’ll keep us from going too fast. Maybe seven on a good day. We don't know much about what’s out there, don't want to go too fast.”

“That gets us there in 5ish days,” Char said, “Since we’d be moving, we’ll need more food than normal.”

“We can do it. We could even get food along the way?” I wanted my voice to be heard, I finally felt like I could talk normally with them again.

“I’m not saying we can't do it. I’m saying we have to be prepared to be hungry.” Char looked back at the map. Hungry wasn't new for me; I would barely get more than one meal a day back home. “It’s been awhile since I’ve been more than a mile from this place. This will take planning.”

“I think we should go,” piped up Liz. “What if it’s a way out? What do you think?” She looked at me.

“If it’s safe, yeah why not? But what if we die there? Or get killed on the way?”

“That’s a risk,” Char looked at me, “Is it worth it?”

I didn't know what to say. I had only known Char and Liz for a few days and now they want me to make a potentially fatal decision. They had lived here for a while, and they trusted me to tell them to leave based on the possibility that we could get back to our

normal lives. I want to go back to that life, and I know Liz wants that, too. “We should go. If we change our mind, we can always come back.”

“Alright,” Char looked at Liz, “You in?”

“Hell yeah”

“Let’s get packing then.”

(3)

In the morning, Char grabbed all of the food (which honestly wasn't a lot), Liz took the clothes (we needed to stay as warm as possible), and I took the ammo and the tarps to make a tent. We each had our own gun, even if Liz was the only confident shot, and our own knife. When we stepped outside, the wind stung our faces; the same wind as when I got dropped off. The sun looking down from the blue sky offered no warmth today.

“Everyone ready?” Char asked. Liz and I nodded. He locked the door of the bunker, and we started on our adventure.

The snow was halfway between our ankles and knees, slowing us down. We took turns in the front, carving out a path for who went behind us. The pants I had on were already soaked, and the biting wind didn't help. I hoped it would warm up soon.

When we got to the tree line, less snow covered the ground. With the trees for protection from the wind, I finally stopped shivering. Now that we could walk side by side, we speculated what the mountain held for us.

“What if there’s nothing?” Liz asked.

“Come back” Char answered, “If there’s nothing for us there, why stay?”

“Maybe we’d meet other people. Could team up, find a way out?” I said.

“If we don't get killed first. I don't trust anyone else. We only trusted you because you were oblivious to what's going on.”

“What if it *is* a way out? What're you gonna do if we go back to our lives?” I hoped that I could get back home, I could feel my memories of it fleeting. I knew that anywhere was better than here.

“I'm gonna find my family,” Liz paused, “If still have one.”

“I'm getting the hell away from here. I want to get as far from this shit hole as I can. Then I'm gonna get some real food. I'm talking steak, vegetables, no more stale crackers and canned shit. After that, I don't know. I've been here for so long, and as much as I hate it, it's all I remember.” I couldn't imagine how Char feels. He's been here for a while, and like Liz, he doesn't remember life before. We just know that it's out there, somewhere. We can feel it.

“We goin' in the right direction?” All of the trees looked the same and there wasn't much of a path to follow. I felt like someone could easily find us, the snow on the ground was deep enough for us to leave footprints. Char either didn't know, or didn't want to mention it.

“Not sure. I have the map, and if we've been goin' straight all day, the trees *should* thin out tomorrow,” Char pulled out the map and made sure he was correct. His breath fogged in front of him. He let Liz wear his scarf because she kept shivering. She didn't complain though, didn't want us to worry too much about her. “I would climb a tree to make sure, but it's too icy and the branches aren't low enough.”

“What if we aren't going in the right direction?” Liz asked.

“Well, the trees won't thin out,” Char paused, “We might be lost. Try not to think about it.”

We kept walking, using our tracks behind us as a breadcrumb trail. We snacked on the food we brought with us, and when the sun dipped below the horizon, we found a place to sleep through the night. I wasn't too keen on sleeping outdoors in the middle of winter. We didn't have anything besides a blanket or two to fight off the cold. Before trying to get to sleep, we changed out of our snow-soaked clothes. Thankfully, the clothes we brought stayed dry and could keep us warmer for the night. Char took the first watch and set up just outside the tent. Liz and I cuddled close together under the blanket, sharing each other's warmth.

On the second day, we woke up, packed up camp, and kept walking. The wind blew the clouds off and the sun warmed up the air, but not by much. I still couldn't feel my hands or my toes. By the beginning of the third day, the trees had thinned out and we could see the mountain in the distance.

“Thank God!” Char sounded relieved, we all were. Now we didn't necessarily need the map because we could see where we needed to go. We came to the conclusion that getting to the Mt. Dalvons meant getting out of here. We didn't know for sure, but the feeling was enough to keep us going.

The wind picked up a little bit and a few clouds blew in, blocking out the sun. I pulled my hat further down on my head, almost covering my eyes. Liz adjusted her scarf, covering her mouth so only her eyes could be seen. Char put some gloves on and looked at the map again. We huddled around it to see how much we had left, and being so close to each other warmed us up a little.

“We should be there soon.” As he said that, an arrow whizzed by my head.

“What the hell?” Another one hit a tree next to Liz.

“Oh fuck!” Char shouted and ducked behind a tree.

Nothing happened. We waited for more arrows. For someone to come out. For something.

“You see anything?” Char whispered. I poked my head out. Nothing.

Liz drew her gun. Her eyes darted around. Looking for a sign of anyone.

“We need to keep moving.” Char started back on the path, “Keep your guard. We don't know where they are.” We kept walking. Every few seconds Char would turn around to check our six. Liz kept her gun out. I had my hand on mine.

“It's been a long time since we've seen other people, Kasey. The mountain is a trap,” Liz explained. “We shouldn't have come.”

I wanted to tell them about the person I thought I saw back at the camp, but I got interrupted.

“Too late now.” As Char said that, a branch snapped ahead of us. We froze.

“Yeah, it's too late now.” A voice spoke from behind a tree. A tall figured stepped out in front of us, they had a bow in their hands; it wasn't drawn. This person wanted something. If they were going to kill us, they would have by now.

“Who the fuck are you?” Char lowered his gun.

“Why do you care?” No one moved.

“You tried to kill us”

“You're walking in *my* woods”

“*Your* woods?” I said.

“I been here since I got dropped off. And you better watch it, you're lucky I didn't kill you back there.” He took a step forward, drawing his bow.

“You're lucky we haven't killed you yet,” Char rose his gun.

“Why are you here?”

“Why should we tell you?”

“I can decide if you leave.”

“We're going to Mt. Dalvons,” I interrupted. I didn't want Char getting killed. We made it so far.

“Dalvons? There's nothing there.”

“How do you know?” Liz asked, stepping forward. She had her gun out. Ready to fight back.

“I've been there. It's nothing. Just rocks and ice.”

“Then it shouldn't matter if we leave.” The mystery man stepped to the side, but he kept his bow drawn. We passed, slowly. Lowering our weapons as we went. We didn't want to start anything.

Walking out of the forest, we kept our eyes wide. That guy might be following us.

“Who was that?” I said after a while.

“Don't know,” Char responded, “Don't stop moving, we still have daylight left.” After what felt like an hour the sun started to dip below the horizon. Shadows of scattered trees stretched on the snow that blanketed the ground. When it got too dark to properly see, we set up camp.

“What did he mean ‘there's nothing there?’” Liz asked

“I don't know Liz,” Char was annoyed. He didn't feel safe anymore. After a pause, Char went inside our makeshift tent and didn't say anything for the rest of the night. I stayed outside and talked with Liz about the plan for the rest of our journey.

“What if that guy's right?” I asked.

“It'll be a bit before we find out, we might have to go around the whole mountain before we know for sure. Char might even want to climb it.” Liz answered. She didn't sound like she wanted to climb a mountain. She looked up. I followed her gaze, stars speckled the sky, flickering against the black. The Milky Way dusted a path through the sky.

“Do you think they're still out there?” I asked, still looking up.

“Who?”

“Our parents, families, friends. Them. The rest of the world.”

“I like to think so.”

Halfway through the fourth day, it started snowing. The flakes coated our hats jackets, and covered our tracks behind us. It melted against our body, soaking our clothes and weighing us down. We kept moving, shaking off what snow we could and Mt. Dalvons grew larger.

“How much farther?” I asked through chattering teeth. My wet clothes didn't dry and the snow didn't let up. Char pulled out the map, along with some crackers for us to snack on.

“Bout 10 miles. Should be there,” Char folded the map and put it back in his pocket.

“What if have to climb the mountain?” Liz asked.

“That’d add another three or four days,” He paused, “I don't think we should climb. If we get there, find nothing, we’ll go back home.”

“You sure?” I asked, “You won't try?”

“Yes. I’m sure. We don't have enough food. We’ll barely have enough to get back.”

The snow eventually stopped. The world seemed at peace with the untouched blanket of white. It could have been a normal day, in a normal place. We saw some deer tracks and followed them for a bit. We heard some movement towards our left, hoping it was the deer, we followed.

We lost the deer tracks and came across what looked like human footprints.

“Is that the guy?” Liz whispered.

“These are ours,” Char responded, “I didn't see or hear him. Don't worry about it.” With no sign of the deer, we kept walking towards the mountain. We heard another noise.

“You see that?” I said. I pointed. Char drew his knife and Liz, her gun. We stepped forward. I noticed more footprints. We cautiously followed them. I looked ahead and saw two people walking ahead of us.

“Shit! You think that’s the guy?” Liz asked. She lined up her sights.

Char looked closely at them. “Don't think so, he was alone. Remember?”

“You think they’re going to the mountain?” I asked, “Maybe they got a map too?”

“Not sure. I don't think they noticed us. Let’s keep it that way.” Char said. We kept walking. Keeping our distance.

After breakfast, the ground began to slope upwards. We were close. Excited to see what Mt. Dalvons holds for us, our pace quickened, but the uphill pitch slowed us down.

We lost sight of the people we saw last night and hadn't seen anyone else since. By midday, we were almost crawling, trying to keep our balance while going up. The snow didn't provide a solid ground for us to walk on and we kept slipping with every step we took.

“What the hell?” Some rocks were stacked on top of each other. Someone did this.

“It's a cairn,” Char said, walking towards it.

“A what?”

“A trail marker,” Chair explained. “We must be close!”

“Over here!” Liz shouted. She found another one. She collapsed.

“What the fuck? Liz!” Char ran over to her. I drew my gun.

No response.

“Liz!” Char flipped her over. “Fuck! Someone shot her. Shit. Shit.” He pulled his hat off and pressed it over the growing red spot in her stomach.

“Holy shit,” I looked down my sights. I couldn't see anyone. I stood guard while Char helped Liz.

“Liz. It's gonna be okay. You're going to be okay. Look at me. Look at me.”

“Char, I don't see anybody! We're need to move now! Shit!” We lifted Liz up. Trying to get her to her feet. She fell back down to the snow.

“I'm not leaving without her!”

“We have to go!” I still had my gun out, ready to fire. I cared about Liz. I cared about my life more.

“Fuck you! I’m not leaving her!” He knelt down next to her. “Liz, c’mon, don't do this. You’re strong, get up...” I heard him crying. “This is your fault!”

“My fault? What ar-”

“You show up and the next day a fucking map comes? Then you agree that we should go on this adventure not knowing what could happen!” Char shoved me away from Liz. “You find this pile of rocks that lead to safety, but Liz is dead! She’s fucking dead! It’s your fault!” He pulled his knife out.

“Char, I don't know what you’re talking about,” I backed away from him. “You think I wanted her to die? I don't know anything about this place! The map was supposed to be a way out of here! I want to leave as much as you do! If we stay here, we’ll get shot too!” Neither of us moved. Char looked at Liz. She wasn't moving.

“I can't leave her,” He started crying.

“Char, I don’t- I don't think we can bring her.”

He picked Liz up. He refused my help. We started in the same direction we were going. “I’m not leaving her.”

He didn't give me any time to follow. I kept my distance. I kept my gun drawn, frequently checking the surroundings. After passing a few more cairns, he disappeared behind some trees. I thought I heard a door open and close. Following his tracks in the snow, I came up to a door cut out of the side of the mountain.

Opening the door, I found Char kneeling next to Liz inside. He didn't try to get away from me when I walked up to him.

“Char, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” I didn't know what else to say. He turned to me. His eyes were red from crying. Before he had the chance to respond, a voice echoed through the room.

“You survived stage one.”

DRAFT OF “THE SURVIVAL”

(1)

I got dropped off at my university, but things weren't the same. It was so cold the air was blue and the wind stole the air from your lungs. They didn't tell me anything, just pushed me out of a van and drove away. At least they dropped me off in a place that I knew, I'd be dead otherwise.

I started walking, I thought I'd head toward the library but when I opened the door, everything looked different. It looked like a fallout shelter. The lights on the wall had their wires exposed, wooden cabinets lined the wall, and a locked case had a sign that said: “Keep out or die.” I knew they didn't drop me off at school. I knew I shouldn't stay here but I needed supplies. I rummaged through the cabinets, finding nothing useful. I jiggled one of the locks on the case. It didn't come loose and I didn't want to get murdered over it.

Through the door to my left, I could hear voices approaching. It sounded like two people having a serious conversation. I couldn't make out everything they said but I heard “don't be stupid” and “I don't wanna be the reason you get killed.” The handle on the door started to turn.

“Shit!” This place has nowhere to hide. No furniture, no other doors. A door swung open.

“Shit! Who the hell are you? How did you find this place?” The taller one shouted at me. He went into defense mode, and his friend drew a gun on me.

“I don’t know, I don’t know”

“I don’t know isn’t good enough. I need a reason or we kill you. Show me your identifier!” he drew a knife and started walking towards me.

“I don’t know why I’m here! They just pushed me out of some van! They didn’t tell me anything!” I put my hands above my head. *What did he mean identifier?* But he didn’t stop walking towards me, and the other one didn’t lower her weapon. I panicked, but I didn’t move. If I moved, they would kill me.

“Identifier,” He demanded, within arm’s reach of me now.

“Char?” His friend said. “She really doesn’t know what’s going on,” She lowered her weapon, but only slightly. I looked over at her, she seemed scared for me. When I looked back towards Char, he was right on top of me.

He rolled his eyes and pulled out a little trinket. It was about the size of a finger but much, much skinnier. The top of it had thick blue and white stripes of different sizes on it. He only gave me a second to look at it before looking back at me. I have no idea what he’s talking about and my ignorance might get me killed.

“Char, give her some space. Can’t you see how scared she is?”

“She should be scared. Didn’t any ever tell you to knock before you come in?”

“I thought this was the library from my school, how was I supposed to know it wasn’t?”

“Library? School? Where are you from? This ain’t that world, alright. Here, you survive or die, and you have some identification. So why don’t you show me?” He pressing his knife into my jacket.

“Charles, stop it. This isn’t the way to get information.”

“Oh what do you know? I haven’t seen you get any valuable info lately.”

“We haven't seen anyone else in months!” She rebuked, “I’m just saying maybe we should believe what she’s saying. She obviously has no idea the kind of world she’s in.” A few moments passed and he sheathed his knife.

He walked over to the cabinets, grabbed something, and came back. It was a cup full of those trinket things, except they were all different. A few were the same as the one Char showed me, but all of the others had different colors and symbols on them. I didn’t dare touch any of them. I didn’t want to provoke him again. His friend still had her gun drawn.

“None of them?” He was confused now. Probably just as a confused as me. He looked at his friend, then looked at me.

“Put your gun down, Liz.” He put the cup back in the cabinet. Something tells me I’m gonna need one of those to survive here. “Follow me.”

They went through the same door they entered through and I shuffled after them. No one said anything and we walked for what felt like forever. It’s a maze down here. How do they not get lost? We took a right turn and finally came to a stop. I heard some locks release and we stepped inside. This room didn't look any better than the first. Liz shut and locked the door behind me while Char brought a chair to the center of the room.

“Sit,” he demanded. This room had a few more locked cases in it.

“What’s going on? Who are-”

“Shut up. Just listen,” I froze. “We call what’s going on here ‘The Survival.’ As far as we know, it doesn't have a name and everyone we come across has called it something different. Some others we have run in to call it ‘the killing.’ I’m Char and this

is Liz. Those might not be our real names but that's not important and we don't trust you. You should consider yourself lucky that we didn't kill you on sight back there. We've had way too many close calls in the past to just let you stand there all confused like you were," He didn't move when he talked, not even his eyes. "What's your name?"

I didn't respond. "Jesus, Char. You scared her into not talking," Liz seemed like a mother figure to him, but they looked the same age. Siblings maybe? Or a couple?

"My name-- My name is--" I blanked. What was my name? How could I not remember who I am? What happened before I was put in that van?

"Speak up I can't hear you," He was getting irritable. I needed to come up with something fast.

"Um, Kasey. Mine name is Kasey," I have no idea if that's my name or not. It came to my mind first.

"Alright Kasey, if that is your real name. If it's an alias, that's fine, you don't have to trust us. But you probably should since we didn't kill you back there." Char relaxed. This place must be so safe and so well hidden that they don't need to worry. "You need to pick an identifier. Although you would've been assigned one when you got here, that doesn't seem to be your case. You don't know shit about what's goin' on here."

"I recommend you pick the same as us. We've been here for a few years now. Made it this far," Liz piped up from the behind Char.

"I guess I'll play on your team. You seem like my best chance of survival."

"Good choice, but if you think we are gonna protect you, you might as well choose another team because that ain't happenin'," Char left to go get one of those charm things. Leaving me alone with Liz.

“So Kasey, what do you remember?”

“Not a lot, to be honest. I was blindfolded and no one spoke the whole time.”

“Where were you?”

“A van? I think. It was like I just woke up from a really long nap. Like you don't know where you are, who you are, or what's going on. Then we stopped, the door in front of me opened. It was so cold I couldn't breathe. The snow, ice, or whatever it was, was biting my face. Someone ripped off my blindfold and shoved me out of the van.”

“Did you see who it was?”

“No they were behind me. And by the time I got up and turned around, the van was gone.”

“Did you see where it went?”

“No. It was completely gone. Like, no sign of a van at all. It disappeared,” Liz sat back in her chair, trying to piece together all of the information.

“You didn't see the van or the people at all? Not even a glimpse?”

“Nothing.”

“Just like us,” She breathes. Liz stands up and paces around the room.

“What do you mean? You were put here too?”

“‘Put here’ is a nice term for it. We say forced, but it's been years. We haven't seen anyone new in years.” The locks on the door start to move and Liz shifts to defense mode. I move to get behind her, I wish they would give me a weapon. The door swings open and Char walks through. We both relax at the sight of a familiar face.

“Take this. If you meet others, they won't be so forgiving if you don't have it,” Char hands me one of those trinket things. It has the same pattern as the one that he

showed me. “Don’t lose it.” I put it in my pocket, the only clothes I had were on my body, so I don't think I’ll be losing anything.

“We need to get you some supplies, follow me,” Char turned and went through a different door than he entered. Liz followed without hesitation, I got up from my chair and caught up with them. The hallway only fit two people side-by-side, so I trailed behind, trying to hear what they whispered to each other.

“Char, she got here just like we did. Pushed out of a van and left to die. We have to keep her alive.”

“We don't have to do anything Liz. We need to worry about ourselves. So what if she came here like us; what happened to us happened years ago. They could be dropping off new guys every day, we just aren't around to see it.”

“But she was dropped off alone, doesn't that seem a little strange to you? We came together, and so did everyone else we’ve met.”

“And everyone we’ve met has died, so it doesn't matter if you get here alone or not,” Char glanced back at me. “We keep our supplies in this room, if I find you in here alone, it won't be pretty. We have to ration things, especially now that we have a third person. Don't get greedy.” I nodded. Char opened a few locks and a door swung open.

How many locks are in this place, I thought, they have at least three on every door.

“On the right wall is all our food, on the left is all the clothes we have found. Some might fit you, others might not. We take all we find, just in case. And down here...,” Char looked at Liz for some help. Together, they moved a large rug to the side, and a trapdoor hid underneath. They probably didn't need the rug to hide it because of its

seamless fit to the floor. Char lifted the door and jumped down. Liz and I took the ladder. "...Is all of our weapons and ammo. It ain't much, but it's more than we need."

Liz turned on the light that hung in the middle of the room, casting an orange glow its contents. The room could comfortably hold two people; it was a little cramped with three. There were about four pistols, two rifles, and a handful of knives hanging on the wall. Ammo boxes sat on the floor.

"Know how to shoot a gun?" Char's features sharpened under the shadows from the light.

"Not really," I had never shot a gun in my life, but it couldn't be that hard.

"Alright," He handed me a knife with a serrated edge, about the length of my hand. "For now, you'll take a knife. Maybe Liz can teach you how to shoot one of these days," I looked at the knife in my hand, I hoped I would never have to use it.

"Come on," Char headed up the ladder, followed by Liz and I. They closed the door and replaced the rug. "Through here, is our kitchen. When we are lucky enough to use it. Finding food that needs to be cooked is rare, but sometimes we get fresh meat if deer wander around." The kitchen only had a small camping grill in it and a bucket, that I guess what used as a sink. There was also a water fountain in the corner. I wondered if it still worked. "Lastly, the bedroom."

We walked into a room slightly larger than the kitchen. On the floor, a few rugs were stacked on each other to make a "bed" and some blankets laid on top. A few lanterns surrounded the bed and I didn't see anything that resembled pillows. Comfortable.

“At night, we take turns sleeping so one of us can be on lookout,” Liz arranged the “bed” so two people could sleep instead of one. “Now that you are here, we can sleep a little bit longer, while having shorter lookout shifts.”

“Now, the shifts will be about three hours instead of four, letting each of us sleep for about 6 hours a night. Way better than before. While on lookout, you stay in that front room that we found you in. Once your shift is up, you’ll come and wake me up and I’ll take over. If anything happens, you need to stand your ground. Open the case that has the sign on it, I wired it to set off an alarm when opened. Liz and I will wake up and meet you there. You’ll do the same if you hear the alarm,” Char pointed to the speaker in the corner. I could see a wire running through a hole in the ceiling. “Understand?” I nodded again. “You don't talk much do you?”

“It’s because you scared her Char, she’s worried you’re gonna do something if she says the wrong thing.”

“I only scared her ‘cause she scared us. Don’t worry Kasey, I’m not going to kill you. Just don't mess things up in here.”

“Okay,” I wanted to trust him, it was just going to take some time.

“Okay. Now, how does some food sound?”

We walked back to the room with all of the food in it. Liz and Char picked some boxes and a can off the shelf. It looked like crackers and cereal, I couldn't see what the can was.

“Do you want carrots or corn?” Liz asked, holding up two cans. Char had gone back to the kitchen.

“Um, carrots.”

“Carrots it is. Look, honey, you don't need to be scared. He just wants everyone to be safe. It'll be okay,” she put the corn back on the shelf with the other cans. “When we got here, it wasn't like this. He was terrified. Didn't know what to do. Believe it or not, I helped him gain his footing. Don't get me wrong, it was scary. We ran into someone, like you did. It was clear they had been here a while; they didn't want to deal with any new people. They were ready to kill, just like we were when we saw you. But I talked to them, and somehow, they spared us and kept going.

“When we found shelter, Char began to relax a bit. After a few days, we realized that we were on our own, no one was going to look out for us. We claimed this place as our own. It took years to get it this full of supplies. Ever since we found it, we've lived here. Never had any problems, no visitors or anything. Until you got here. I think Char is worried that something is changing and we aren't being told about it.”

“Are you guys comin', or what?” Char shouted from down the hall.

“We're coming!” I followed Liz to the kitchen. When we arrived, Char had divvied up the crackers and cereal: an equal amount for each of us. Liz used a knife to open the can of carrots and fished out a few carrots for all of us. The meal didn't appear nutritious, but food was food and I was hungry.

We ate in silence; the only sounds came from the crunching of the cereal. Sound bounced on the cement floors and walls, anything you did could be heard. When we finished eating, Liz and Char starting cleaning up.

“About how dark was it when you got here, Kasey?” Char asked as he put the empty can on the shelf with some others.

“Um, I'm not sure. I could still see, but I think the sun had gone down. Why?”

“Just trying to gauge what time it is, I don't like going outside if I don't have to,” Liz and I exchanged glances, maybe he was still scared of the world he's in. “And it's probably been about an hour since you got here, so I'm going to guess it's between 7 and 8.”

“What are you thinking, Char? That we just go to bed now? We should hang out for a bit. Let Kasey get to know us more. What do you think Kasey?”

“Sure, sounds like fun,” If I had to live with these people, I should at least know them.

“Awesome!” She pulled a deck of cards out of her pocket, “I always have them on me, just in case.” We sat down and she dealt out the cards.

We played a few games of cribbage using a plank of wood and bits of metal for pegs. I won.

(2)

“Kasey, Kasey, wake up.”

“Wha-?”

“It's your turn to be on watch, come on, get up,” Liz stood over me until I sat up. “Come on, I'll show you how to not get bored while you're over there.”

I rose from the makeshift bed and rubbed my eyes. Now that all of the lights were off, I couldn't see anything. This place felt like a cave. I followed the light coming from Liz's lantern to the entrance.

“We keep a few books in here,” She opened a cabinet. “I like to read while being on watch. Once I get to about 250 pages, I know my time is up. Have fun!” She retreated back to the bedroom and left me alone. I walked over to the cabinet with the books and

picked the most interesting one out of the bunch: *Hunter of Nightmares*. The characters live in a society where nightmares come to life and they have to protect their friends and family. Only about 200 pages, I figured I could finish it and then wake up Char.

During a suspenseful scene around page 107, I thought I heard something outside. I put the book down and listened. *Tap tap tap*. I got up and walked toward the door, it sounded like something was messing with the lock. I went to the case with the sign and opened it, there was nothing in it. I could hear the alarm in the bedroom; Liz and Char should be here soon.

“What happened? Why did you sound the alarm?” Char asked with his knife drawn, Liz followed close behind with her gun.

“I heard something tapping on the door, like someone jiggled the lock, or something like that. I didn't open the door, in case it was something bad,” I pulled my knife from my jacket pocket and followed Liz to the door. She cracked it open and looked around. “Anything out there?” Char’s bedhead blocked my view.

“Not that I can see...oh, wait,” She bent down, “This was on the ground.” She shows us a small box and walks back to the center of the room. Char locks the door behind her.

“Don't open it here,” Char took the package, “It could be a bomb. We'll wait ‘til morning. For now, I'll start my watch. You guys go ahead and go back to bed.”

“I can finish my watch, Char. I still have like an hour or so left.”

“Just go to bed, I got this,” Liz and I headed back to bed, leaving the package in the room with Char.

I woke up with Char next to me, Liz must've finished out the night. I left Char to sleep a bit longer and found Liz reading the same book I read before I woke them up.

"From what I've read, I really like that one," Liz turned around.

"Morning Kasey, how was the rest of your night?"

"Good, I fell asleep right after Char said I could go back to the bedroom. You?"

"Decent, I decided to read *Hunter of Nightmares* again. It's probably one of my favorites."

"I like it too. I didn't think that this cabinet would have nothing in it," I walked over to it and fiddled with the handle.

"Yeah, we decided to put the sign on it to keep people away. If someone gets really curious, they open it and the alarm goes off. Telling us that they are here."

"What do you think is in the package?"

"I don't know; I haven't looked yet. I didn't want to accidentally blow up the place if it was really a bomb."

"I understand, thanks for that," I chuckled. "Should I wake up Char? So we can finally see what's inside?"

"I'll get him. He's not a morning person," She put the book back in the cabinet and disappeared down the hall.

I looked at the package we got last night. The box, a little dinged up from being outside, was about the size of a shoe box. Tape held it together and when I picked it up, I didn't expect it to be so light; too light to be a bomb, but we had to be careful. I heard Liz and Char coming back, I put the box down.

“If we open that box, we have to do it outside. I’m not risking this place for a box,” Liz was right: Char was not a morning person.

“Okay,” Liz and I agreed. Char took the box and we followed him outside. I hadn’t been outside since I was kicked out of the van. The wind didn’t steal the air out of my lungs this time, but the gray clouds still hung low. We walked about 100 yards away from the bunker and Char set the package down in the snow. He pulled out his knife and cut the tape holding the top flaps of the box together. He held the flaps down and threw the box away from us. Nothing happened.

“It would have been triggered by the opening of the box,” Char said, “It didn’t go off, so we should be good.” He walked to where the box landed and looked inside. “A map.”

“What?” I walked over to Char.

“A map, that’s all that was in here.”

“At least it wasn’t a bomb,” Liz joined us. “Let’s go back to the bunker and look at it. It’s kinda cold out here.” On the short walk back to the bunker, no one said anything. We all waited for someone else to start the conversation. *Why would someone drop a map off? Did other people get the same map,* I thought while we trudged through the snow.

“How did whoever dropped the package off know that we were there?” I asked when we finally got inside.

“That’s not important right now. It was probably whoever put us here. What matters is what’s on the map,” Char spread the map out on the floor. It looked like a map of the area where the bunker is. A red circle surrounded a mountain in the middle of it.

“Mt. Dalvons,” Liz squatted down next to me to get a better look. “What’s so special about that place.

“Maybe someone wants us to go there, maybe-”

“It’s a trap. What if someone is trying to bait us out of our safe house,” Char interrupted me. “We shouldn’t go.”

“Why not?” asked Liz, “What if it’s a way out of here. What if it’s a way to finally get back to our lives before.”

“Do you even remember life before here?”

“No, but I know I had one! I think we should go,” Char didn't respond. I think he didn't know how to. Liz was right, what if we could go back to our lives before this place? Even though it’s only been a day, I don't remember anything that happened before I got here.

“It’s lunch time,” Char got up and went to the kitchen, leaving the map on the ground.

“What do you think Kasey?” Liz stood up, “Should we go and risk it? Or stay here?”

“I’m not sure. I feel like if someone tried to trick us, it wouldn't be with a map. Where would they get the map anyway? But it could be a trap set by the people in charge of whatever this is. I don't know, but I think we should decide as a group.”

“Of course, I wouldn’t leave Char here. We can decide tomorrow,” She folded up the map and we went to get lunch with Char.

The only sounds during lunch were the scrapings of a spoon against a tin can. The tension between Liz and Char didn't die down and I didn't know if I should start a conversation or not.

I spent the rest of the day, waiting to see who was going to talk first. No one did.

During my watch tonight, nothing happened and I got to finish the book I started last night. The ending was predictable but I still liked it. Maybe I'll bring it with me if we decide to leave. Halfway through another book, I realized that my shift ended and I needed to go wake up Char.

“Char, wake up. Char!”

“What, what? Is it my turn?”

“Yeah,” he got up and walked down the hall; he really didn't like being woken up. I got back in bed and slept the rest of the night.

In the morning, we ate some canned peaches that Liz found when she went exploring yesterday. Having some decent food and a night's sleep allowed us to get a fresh perspective on what to do about the map. The tension between Char and Liz seemed to die down because they went to look at the map together. I joined them after I cleaned up the peach can and put it with the other empty ones.

“What's the plan then? Are we actually gonna go?” Liz sounded surprised, I was too. Yesterday, Char didn't want any part of this excursion.

“I think we have to. I did some thinking while on watch last night. Where would anyone get this map? Why would they give it to us? If we found something like this, we would keep it.”

“Are we gonna go to the mountain? Is it safe?” I asked. I didn't want to be the deciding vote again.

“We are thinking about it. From the scale on the map, Mt. Dalvons is about 25 miles away,” Liz explained. “We could reasonably do about five miles a day; the snow will keep us from going too fast. Maybe seven on a good day. We wouldn't know the area, so I don't want to go too fast.”

“That would put us at Dalvons in five days, six to be safe. I'm not sure if we have the amount of supplies to get us there,” Char said, “Since we'd be moving, we are going to require more food than we eat here.”

“I think we can do it; we'd find food along the way won't we? Plants, maybe a squirrel or two. It's not completely unreasonable,” I wanted my voice to be heard, I finally felt like I could talk normally with them.

“Kasey, I'm not saying we can't do it. I'm saying that we have to be prepared to not eat as much as we want. We are gonna be hungry for most of the trip,” Char looked back at the map. “It's been a long time since I've been more than a mile or so away from this place. We need to plan carefully. If we do end up going that is.”

“I think we should go,” piped up Liz. “Like I said before, it could be a way out of here. What do you think Kasey?”

“If we think it'll be safe, yes, I think we should go. But what if we die there? Or get killed on the way?”

“Well, that's a risk we'll have to take,” Char looked at me, “Is it worth it?”

I didn't know what to say. I had only known Char and Liz for a few days and now they want me to make a potentially fatal decision. They had lived here for years, and they

trust me to tell them to leave because of the possibility that we could get back to our normal lives. I want to go back to that life, and I know Liz wants that too. “I think we should go. If we change our mind, we can always come back.”

“Alright, it’s been decided,” Char looked at Liz, “You in?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s get packing then.”

(3)

In the morning, Char took the food, Liz took the clothes, and I took the ammo and the tarps to make a tent. We each had our own gun, even if Liz was the only confident shot, and our own knife. When we stepped outside, the wind stole the air from our lungs; the same wind from when I got dropped off. The sun looking down from the blue sky offered no warmth today.

“Everyone have their identifiers?” Char asked before he locked the door. I checked my pockets, the little trinket never came out of them. It never had to, but now that we were in the open, I might need it. Liz and I nodded and Char locked up home base, putting the key in his pocket, we followed him towards Mt. Dalvons.

The snow made walking slow. We took turns in the front, carving out a path for who went behind us. It wasn't too deep, only about a foot or so, but it was enough to make walking feel like crawling.

When we got to the tree line, less snow covered the ground. Now that we could walk side by side, we speculated what the mountain held for us.

“So what happens if we get there and there’s nothing?” Liz asked.

“We come back, what else would we do?” Char answered, “If there is nothing for us there, why would we stay?”

“Maybe we would meet other people. We could team up, find a way out?” I said.

“Only if we don't get killed first. I don't think I'd trust anyone else. We only trusted you because you were oblivious to what's going on. I didn't want you to get killed because you didn't know.”

“But what if it is a way out? What are you guys gonna do if we get to go back to our normal lives?” I hoped that I could get back home, even if I didn't remember it. I knew that anywhere was better than here.

“I'm going to try and find my family. They have probably been worried sick since I left. I would do anything to see my little brother again. What about you Char?” Liz asked.

“The first thing I'm going is getting the hell away from here. I want to get as far from here as I can. Then I'm going to get some real food. I'm talking steak, vegetables, no more crackers and canned shit. After that, I don't know. I've been here for so long, and as much as I hate it, I'm used to it.” I couldn't image how Char feels. He's been here for years, and like Liz and me, he doesn't remember life before. We just know that it's out there, somewhere.

“How do we know we are going in the right direction?” Surrounded by trees, we could have been going in circles all day.

“I'm not totally sure. It's hard to see any landmarks when all we can see is trees. But I have the map, and if we've been going in a straight line all day, the trees should

thin out by tomorrow,” Char pulled out the map and made sure he was correct. “I would climb a tree to try and find the mountain in the distance, but it’s too icy and the branches aren’t low enough.”

“But what if we aren’t going in the right direction?” Liz asked.

“Well, by the end of the week we won’t be at the mountain,” Char paused, “And we might be lost. I try not to think about it.”

We kept walking, using our tracks behind us as a breadcrumb trail. We snacked on the food we brought with us, and when the sun dipped below the horizon, we found a place to sleep through the night. We kept the same schedule for keeping watch. This time, the cold kept us awake, instead of thrilling novels.

On the second day, we woke up, packed up camp, and kept walking. By the beginning of the third day, the trees had thinned out and we could see the mountain in the distance.

“See? I knew we were going the right way!” Char sounded relieved, we all were. Now we didn’t necessarily need the map because we could see where we needed to go. We had come to the conclusion that getting to the Mt. Dalvons meant getting out of here. We didn’t know for sure, but the feeling was enough to keep us going.

The wind picked up a little bit and a few clouds blew in, blocking out the sun. I pulled my hat further down on my head, almost covering my eyes. Liz adjusted her scarf, covering her mouth so only her eyes could be seen. Char put some gloves on and looked at the map again.

“Judging by the scale on here, we should be there in about two days, right on schedule.” As he said that, an arrow whizzed by my head.

“Did you guys see that?” Another one hit a tree next to Liz.

“We’re being attacked! Get behind some trees, where are they coming from?”

Char shouted.

“Over there!” I pointed to the right and ducked behind a tree. Char went behind a tree next to me and looked down the scope of his gun.

“I don't see anyone!” He fired a few shots towards where the arrows came from. I couldn't see anyone.

“Quiet! They might be moving,” Liz also had her gun drawn, she looked down her sights and I listened for any signs of movement. I couldn't hear anything except for some birds and snow falling off of trees.

“It isn't safe here, we need to keep moving. Now,” Char started back on the path, “Keep your guard up, we don't know where they went.” We kept walking, and we didn't relax.

“It’s been a long time since we’ve seen other people, Kasey. Maybe the mountain is a trap. Get us all together to fight,” Liz explained. “We shouldn’t have come.”

“Well it’s too late to turn back now,” As Char said that, a branch snapped ahead of us. We froze.

“Yeah, it’s too late now,” A voice spoke from behind a tree. A tall figured stepped out in front of us, they had a bow in their hands; it wasn't drawn.

“Show me your identifier!” shouted Char, he pulled out his identifier and walked toward the person with his knife out.

“What do you mean, team? That’s not what those mean,” They pulled out theirs, the colors were the same, but the pattern was different from ours. “It’s who sent you here.”

“Who told you that?” Liz stepped closer.

“The person I was dropped here with.”

“They don't know anything about what’s going on here.” Char was getting more and more defensive.”

“And neither do you! Just walking around in the woods? *My* woods,” This person’s mood did not get better.

“*Your* woods?” I said. “How is this yours?”

“Simple: I’ve lived here since I got dropped off. And you better watch it, you're lucky I didn’t kill you back there.”

“And you’re lucky we haven’t killed you yet,” Char rose his knife to eye level. They drew their bow.

“Why are you here anyway?”

“Why should we tell you?”

“Because I can make the decision of whether you stay or leave.”

“We are going to Mt. Dalvons,” I spoke up. I didn’t want Char to get killed; we made it so far.

“Dalvons? There’s nothing there for you. I suggest you go back to where you came from.”

“Please,” Liz sounded worried, “If you let us go, you’ll never see us again. We don’t know what’s at Mt. Dalvons, but we know we need to get there.” No one spoke. We waited for a response from them.

“Fine, but leave now before I change my mind.”

“Thank you,” Liz didn’t wait for us and started walking toward the mountain. I followed and Char was the last one to leave the mystery man.

Walking out of the forest, we didn’t let our guard down. That guy could have been following us and waiting for the right moment to strike.

“Who do you think that was?” I said after a while.

“I don’t know, but we can’t be sure he’s not around,” Char responded, “Don’t stop moving, we still have some daylight left.” After what felt like an hour the sun started to dip below the horizon. Shadows of scattered trees stretched on the snow that blanketed the ground. When it got too dark to properly see where we were going, we set up camp.

“What did he mean ‘there is nothing there for us?’” Liz asked, “Did he already visit the mountain?”

“I don’t know Liz,” Char was tired of us talking about the guy, “He’s not our problem anymore, just take the first watch and make sure he didn’t follow us.” Char went inside our makeshift tent and didn’t say anything for the rest of the night. I stay outside a bit and talked with Liz about the plan for the rest of our journey.

“What do we do if that guy was right, and there’s nothing at the mountain?” I asked.

“It’ll be a bit before we find that out, we might have to go around the whole mountain before we figure out it’s nothing. Char might even want to climb it if he can’t find anything at the base.” Liz answered, she didn’t seem to like the idea of having to climb a mountain. She looked up. I followed her gaze and saw more stars than I thought possible. The new moon allowed us to see more than usual, and the Milky Way dusted a path through the sky.

“Do you think they’re still out there?” I asked, still looking up.

“Who?”

“Our parents, families, friends. Them. The rest of the world.”

“I like to think so,” She paused. “I’m sure they are out there. Somewhere.”

Halfway through the fourth day, it started snowing. The flakes dusted our hats and gloves, and covered our tracks behind us. We kept moving and Mt. Dalvons grew larger. Now that we were closer to the mountain, we could make out the peak and where the tree line was. We started to judge how high the peak was and decided that climbing the mountain would add a few days to our journey; we hoped we wouldn’t need to do that.

“How much farther?” I asked. I was in desperate need of a warm bed and the indoors; I think we all were. Char pulled out the map, along with some crackers for us to snack on.

“It looks like it’s about 10 miles, maybe less. Should be there by midday tomorrow,” Char folded the map and put it back in his pocket.

“What if we end up having to climb the mountain?” Liz asked.

“That would add another three or four days,” He paused, “I don’t think we should climb it though. If we get there and find nothing, we’ll go back home.”

“Are you sure?” I asked, “You don't want to see what's there?”

“Yes. I'm sure. We don't have enough food to get to the top and back. We'll barely have enough food to get back home if we don't find anything.”

After about an hour, the snow stopped but the clouds hung around. We saw some deer tracks and followed them for a bit towards the mountain. We heard some movement towards our left, hoping it was the deer, we followed.

We lost the deer tracks and came across what looked like human footprints.

“Did that guy follow us?” Liz said.

“These are probably ours,” Char responded, “I didn't see or hear him come after us. Don't worry about it.” With no sign of the deer, we kept walking towards the mountain. We heard another noise, this time in front of us.

“Did you see that?” I said, “Something just moved ahead of us.” Char drew his knife and Liz, her gun. We walked toward the sound and where I saw movement. When we came upon the spot, we saw more footprints. We followed them for a bit and saw two people walking ahead of us.

“Do you think that's the guy?” Liz asked. She seemed worried that he followed us.

“No, these two are wearing different clothes. And he was alone, remember?” Char said.

“Are they going to the mountain?” I asked, “Maybe they got a map too?”

“They don't seem worried about us. Let's not bother them,” Char put his knife away and we continued towards the mountain.

After breakfast, we noticed the ground beginning to slope upwards. We were close. Excited to see what Mt. Dalvons holds for us, our pace quickened. We lost sight of the people we saw by last night and hadn't seen anyone else since. By midday, our walking turned into climbing as we encountered more rises in the earth.

"Hey! Look at this!" I found some rocks stacked on top of each other. No way this was a natural formation.

"It's a cairn," Char said when he brushed some snow off of it.

"A what?"

"A cairn, people make them as trail markers," Char explained. "There must be a trail around here! Try to find another one!" We set out looking for another.

"Over here!" Liz shouted, we followed. Soon, we found a new one every few minutes. We were so close, then Liz fell down in front of us.

"Liz, Liz! Are you okay?" Char ran over to her and I drew my gun.

No response.

"Liz!" Char flipped her over. "Oh my god, someone shot her. Someone shot her." He pulled his hat off and pressed it over the growing red spot in her stomach.

"What?" I looked down my sights to try and find where the shot came from. I stood guard while Char helped Liz.

"Liz, it's gonna be okay, you're going to be okay. Look at me. Look at me."

"Char, I don't see anybody! We're need to move now!" I helped him lift Liz to a standing position, but she fell back down to the snow.

"We can't move; I'm not leaving without her!"

“We might get shot next! We have to go!” I still had my gun out, ready to fire. As much as I cared about Liz, I cared about my life more.

“No! I’m not leaving her!” He knelt down next to her. “Liz, c’mon, don’t do this. You’re strong, get up...” I heard him crying. “This is your fault!”

“My fault? What ar-”

“You show up and the next day a map comes? And then you agree that we should go on this adventure not knowing what could happen!” Char shoved me away from Liz. “You find this pile of rocks that might lead to safety, but Liz is dead! She’s dead! It’s your fault!” He pulled his knife out.

“Char, I don’t know what you’re talking about. You think I wanted her to die?” I backed away from him. “I don’t know anything about this place! I thought the map was a way out of here! I want to leave as much as you do! If we stay here, we might get shot too!” Neither of us moved. Char looked at Liz, who wasn’t moving.

“I don’t want to leave her,” He started crying again.

“Char, I don’t,” I stuttered, “I don’t think we can bring her with us.”

He picked Liz up and started in the direction we had been walking. “I’m not leaving her.”

He didn’t give me any time to follow. I kept my distance, but I stayed close enough to make sure he didn’t get hurt. After passing a few more cairns, he disappeared behind some trees and I thought I heard a door open and close. I followed his tracks in the snow, and sure enough, I came up to a door cut out of the side of the mountain.

Opening the door, I found Char kneeling next to Liz inside. He didn’t try to get away from me when I walked up to him.

“Char, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” I didn't know what else to say. He turned to me. His eyes were red from crying. Before he had the chance to respond, a voice echoed through the room.

“Congratulations. You survived stage one.”

“THE TURNING”

“Time to face the strange...”

6.18.94 1603

Laura and some others when out to find food at a warehouse a few miles away. I wish I went with them, but it wasn't my turn. I know we have to take turns but if people want to help, why not let them? John's gotta have it his way I guess. He can be a bitch sometimes but he let Laura and I stay here so we gotta do things his way. Anyway Laura and the others left at 1500 and its 'bout 1600 now. A bit longer than I expected. Something mighta happened to them. They never been out this long. I tried tellin' John I'd go look for them but he's telling me to stay. I hate that. Before I didn't need no one's permission to do anything and then we show up at this camp and we got all these rules. Bullshit. John says it's for safety. Bullshit. There's gotta be something I can do. I'll wait a bit longer and try to get out there if they ain't back yet. I can't stand the thought of something happenin' to Laura.

6.18.94 1711

They still ain't come back. It's been nearly 2 hours and John still won't let me go out there. As soon as I'm done here I'm makin' my way out. No one can stop me. When's he planning on calling it anyway? Can't wait all night. I thought I heard some Bleeders out there earlier. They could be holding Laura back. I saw them grab some guns and bats before they left so they ain't unarmed. But God knows how long they can fight. Laura's got it in her but she don't last long. I'm praying for her. We blocked the windows and got the kids inside in case something happens. It's hard for those kids. They don't understand. It might be better that way. Them knowing the truth might scare 'em too much. I don't know why someone would have a kid in this world. Those kids are too young to be in a place like this. Laura wants kids. She likes them. Think they can bring change and peace to this world. It killed me to tell her I ain't having a kid til them Bleeders are gone. But if she gets back in one piece we might be making some tonight.

6.18.94 1800

I tried going out there. John had a fucking fit about it. Yellin' and screamin' that I put the whole camp at risk. I can't stand him. I'm just trying to help and he bitches out. Sorry for trying to help. Guess I'm gonna let them die out there. Can't say I didn't try.

6.18.94 2017

John's lucky they made it back. He woulda had a fucked up face if I heard something bad happened. I'm so glad they're back thank the Lord. Seeing Laura's face was almost as good as our first time. She was relieved to see me too. Everyone looked shaken up. Some shit musta gone down. I'm gon' kill John for not letting me go with them. They coulda used all the help they could get. But everyone made it back. Everyone else wants to know what happened but no one's gonna talk about it for a while. It's fuckin scary when you fight Bleeders. You never know if you're gonna make it out

They had so much food. Oh man, there's nothing like seeing bags and bags of veggies after eating dirt for a week. We are guessing they got about two weeks of food.

Cucumbers, pumpkins, beans. It's a great haul. Worth the risk and the fight, some said.

We're glad they made the trip. Whoever went out gets first dibs on what to eat tonight.

Another reason to let volunteers go. There's never enough food in this shit hole. But with the beans and cucumbers I can get their seeds and start plantin new ones. Really get the garden going and won't have to risk our lives so much. Fresh veggies what a treat. The stuff they got is a little wrinkly. The cucumbers are about mush, but we're still gon' eat them. I wouldn't eat the pumpkins but someone might if they're desperate. We took stock of what they brought back and ate dinner. Someone was able to make some bread out of the wheat I'd been growing. The ones who went out got it all though. Laura shared her helping with me. I can't wait til we're alone later.

Laura told me they couldn't bring all the food back. I might try to get a crew out there. I don't give a shit what John says about it. It's worth having the food.

I can't believe Laura got back safely. Don't know what I'd do without her. But she's back. A little quiet though. I think she's just shaken up. Or she's waitin 'til later to tell me about it. But even then we might not be talking.

6.19.94 0803

Laura was a little timid last night but that doesn't stop me. Once we got alone I couldn't help myself. It didn't matter if I hadn't see her all day or for two weeks. Her sex was just as good. She didn't protest and I'm sure she had a good time. At breakfast she did more talking and told me about the mission last night. She said they got there safely. She said there was so much food just sitting there. They couldn't take it all. I heard a rumor that John wants to go get the rest. I better be on that team this time or John's gonna get it. Laura said they took what they could and left. But as soon as they got outside Bleeders were everywhere. The only thing to do was fight. I can't imagine fightin like that. And the smell. Christ Almighty. Blood and rotten flesh. She said she don't know how they got out without anyone dying or getting bitten. I don't know either. But that don't matter. They all got back safe. While she talked I noticed a scratch on her arm. I couldn't see it too clearly though. Probably just a mosquito bite. I told her we saw some Bleeders over here and I was worried that she wasn't gonna make it back. But she did. My girl's a fighter.

Today's a working day. As soon as we get the all clear from Johnny Boy. We gotta make sure the camp didn't take any damage last night. Sometimes Bleeders try to get inside. They bang up the doors and tear up my fields. We fix what we can with what we have and that ain't much. We would probably have more if John let us fucking leave. He's a pussy sometimes. One time we went to an abandoned town to find supplies. I'm surprised John didn't drop dead when someone gave the idea. Those are where the real danger is. The Bleeders sneak up on ya too easily. But those towns have some real treasure. We found a generator once. Real miracle that we got it back to camp without gettin killed.

It's not running yet though. Still haven't figured out how to work it. It might need gas and we just don't have any.

I'll be out in the farm. It's where I am every day. It wasn't much when we got here but I've turned it into a little something. I grow and harvest what I can but the Bleeders take what they want from us.

6.19.94 1224

Had some kids out in the field with me today. Those shinin faces help me forget about the hell around us. They seem to be interested in plants. At least they pretend to for me. I tell 'em all I know. It gets a little boring for them but I just get so excited to share my knowledge with someone. Plus, this garden is the only place John isn't up my ass about something. The kids get excited when the plants start pokin up through the dirt. I do too. It's amazing to see something you grew all by yourself actually living. Maybe that's why Laura wants kids so bad. She feels the same way as I do about plants. I taught the kids which plant needs the most water and the most sun and they do their best to remembering everything. We planted the cucumber seeds from the other day. Hopefully we'll see some growth soon. I feel bad for those kids. They should be running around. Playing. Acting how kids should act. But they're stuck in this hellhole. Having to worry 'bout their lives all the time. We keep what we can from them. But they know. It's hard to hide reality. Especially when it's trying to break in every day. They know they might not have tomorrow. Poor bastards.

Around 1000 we had to go back inside. Someone saw a Bleeder lurking about. He musta been awfully close to camp 'cause they're lurking everywhere. We just don't see them. Nasty fuckers though. I never want to see one again. I want to kill them all. They put Laura in danger. The put those kids in danger. They don't deserve to be on this planet. They ain't even alive. No one really knows where they came from. But they're dangerous. If they touch you, you turn. Oh shit I was just thinking about how Laura had that scratch on her arm. What if she's infected. Fuck I don't know what I'd do. I hope it's just a scratch and nothing more. Watching someone turn is like watching your parents go

at it. You can't look away but it's disgusting and you never want to see it again. You get real hungry and eat anything you get your hands on. They bleed from their eyes and mouth. But they can still hear and smell you. That's how they get ya. I'm surprised we haven't been overrun with all the noise we make here. But Johnny Boy keeps us safe.

6.19.94 1736

I saw Laura at lunch today. She seemed back to her normal self. That's good. I was getting real worried that yesterday shook her up for good. We didn't get to talk much. She was just finishin up as I sat down to eat. After lunch, I did some more work in the fields. The same kids joined me again. They were a little disappointed when none of the new seeds had sprouted yet. I had to explain that it takes some time. We watered the plants. The kids got so excited they started watering each other. I was worried about them wasting water but I had to let them have their fun. Mid-water fight I saw more Bleeders lurking about. I didn't tell the kids. They weren't too close to us either. Did put the whole camp at risk. I heard someone almost got taken. But I knew Laura was safe. I saw her by the Med-Tent. We ended up havin to go inside cause someone else noticed the Bleeders and gave the signal. People are worried that this place ain't safe anymore. But if we had to, where would we go? Laura and I just barely got here. We barely made it on our own. Not sure why Laura was at the Med-Tent. Maybe she's helping someone out. Or getting that scratch checked out. Hope she's okay.

6.19.94 2147

Laura's not back yet and it's just past curfew. I hope she's okay. I asked around and no one saw her leave the Med-Tent. No one ever spends the night there unless shit's really hit the fan. I hope she comes back. I was hoping to get her alone again. I found a new place we could do it. Mix things up a bit now that's she's feeling back to normal. Maybe she had watch tonight and didn't mention it. She'll be back soon then. The shifts aren't long. I need her body after a long day. It's the one thing that helps me relax.

6.20.94 0913

Laura either didn't come back last night or left before I woke up. I think it's the first one because I woulda woke up when she got in bed. I hope she didn't run away. We barely made it when it was just the two of us. How's she gon do when it's just her? I'm sure I'll see her today and see what's going on. I know I didn't do nothing wrong.

6.20.94 1307

I still haven't seen Laura and the day's half over. She's gotta be hiding something. No one said they saw her today. I know I didn't do nothing wrong. I know it. Why is she avoiding me?

John just told me Laura's looking for me and that she's at the Med-Tent still. Something must be really wrong if she's still over there. She must really be helping someone. Hope everyone's okay. Laura has always liked that doctor stuff. It was never for me. I never want someone else's life in my hands. Too much responsibility. Plus, some days, I can barely keep those plants alive. Guess I better figure out what Laura wants.

6.20.94 1433

Laura lied bout everyone getting back safe last night. I can't believe she fucking lied. To me. Of all people. The person who has been there for her through it all. She lied. She may have just been protecting me from the truth but if I knew right away. I coulda done something about it. We coulda left and found better treatment than was this shit camp has to offer. John knew the whole time the fucker. Why did she keep it from me? It took all I had not to hit her right there when I heard the truth. She better never try to sleep with me again.

6.20.94 1500

I'm sorry I got so heated. I just can't believe it. Laura got hurt and she didn't even want to tell me about it. I knew that I coulda helped her but now she says it's too late. John said that if it doesn't stop. We have to make it stop. Fucking John always being logical and shit. It'll stop. Laura's strong. She'll get better. I know it.

6.20.94 1907

After I left the Med-Tent John kept asking me all kinds of questions bout the past few days. He's always stickin his nose in other people's business. What does it matter if we fucked the other day? That's no one's business but my own. John needs to relax. If he comes around again It ain't gonna be good.

6.21.94 0934

The cucumber seeds started poking through the soil. At least something good is happening this week. The kids are real excited to see their plants pop up. I'm glad their happy. No one really knows what's going on. John made me swear to keep it a secret. Those kids were so eager to water the plants they almost washed them away. During lunch, I'm probably gonna go check on Laura. I can't stay mad at her. And I'd kill myself if something happened and I didn't try to stop it.

6.21.94 1347

I shouldn't have gone to see Laura. I'm risking my own life. But I had to see her. At least once more. I brought her some beans. I thought she would like to see some before things get real bad. If they get real bad. The nurses are already saying it's too late. She's gonna turn. I couldn't believe it. I knew it deep down. But I kept it so deep down I didn't know 'bout it. Someone telling me made it too real. We can't do anything to change it and we can't have a Bleeder at camp. We'd all die. Sometimes I think that might be better that way. Life sure would be easier if I didn't have to live it. The only way to stop her is to kill her. I don't know if I can let that happen. She's helped me through so much and I can't help her through this. We can't change the turning. But man, I wish I could.

6.21.94 2125

I can't sleep. I shouldn't be out here. Risk of Bleeders and all but I don't care. The only light's coming from my lighter. Which I should be saving but I need to get this out. I almost went to see Laura again. I don't know when'll be the last time. But I didn't want to wake her. She deserves some good dreams before she's gone.

It's hard sleepin alone. I miss her warmth. Her smell. Her hair. Her body. The way she breathes. I miss everything about her. I don't know if I can face this world alone.

6.22.94 1729

I worked all day today so I didn't get much time to write. I needed to distract myself from what's going on. But good ol' John keeps reminding me. He said she started bleedin today. I coulda gone my whole life without knowing. I can't imagine her in pain and bleeding like that. I hope she don't suffer too much longer. I told John I needed to say some goodbyes. He knew that I needed to. I could see the understanding in his face. The bastard, if only we got along like this all the damn time. But it takes a tragedy to bring everyone together. I'm gonna see her one last time. I don't know how I'm gonna handle that.

6.23.94 1044

Saw Laura this morning. Nothing in the world could prepare me for how she looked.

Fuck. What am I going to do? The nurse said she was complaining of being hungry. They won't feed her. I got to do something about this. I know I can. I'll find a cure. I'll save her. I'll save her. I have to. I just have to.

They told me she won't suffer.

6.23.94 1632

Toby told me to go and find John. Not sure I really want to.

6.23.94 1700

She's gone.

DRAFT ONE OF "THE TURNING"

"Time to face the strange..."

6.18.94 1603

Laura and some of the other women went out to find some food at a warehouse a few miles from here. They left at 1500. They are taking longer than I expected and I'm starting worry that something happened to them. I told John that I would go out there and look for them or try to help if they were in trouble; but he told me to stay safe here. I hope that everyone gets back safe. We are getting hungry here.

6.18.94 1711

It's been 2 hours now and they still haven't come back and John still won't let me go out there to find them. We could hear some Bleeders outside a few minutes ago. They might be what's holding Laura and them back. They left with some guns and a few bats, but I don't know how long they can fight. We started blocking the windows and getting the kids protected in case something happens. I hope they won't be much longer.

6.18.94 2017

Laura and the others got back safely about 2 hours ago! Thank the Lord they made it.

They brought back about two weeks' worth of food, including some vegetables. They might be over-ripe, but we're going to eat them anyway. After we rationed out the food they brought back, we all had a hearty dinner with bread and some mushy cucumbers. I heard rumors that there still might be food at the warehouse Laura went to, I might get some others together to try and find it.

I'm so glad everyone made it back safely, I don't know what I would do without Laura.

She's kept me safe for so long, and we found this place because of her. I'm worried about her though. Ever since she got back tonight, she's been acting kinda weird. I hope she's okay.

6.19.94 0803

I found Laura at breakfast and she told me about the mission last night. She said they got to the warehouse safely. She said there was so much food just sitting there, they couldn't carry it all. So they took what they could and left, but as soon as they stepped back outside, Bleeders were everywhere. She said the only option was to try and fight their way through the hoard. She said the smell was the worst part: blood and rotten flesh. She doesn't know how they got out without anyone dying or infected. They lost some food during the fight, but it was worth everyone getting back alive. The whole time she talked she kept scratching at her arm, but I couldn't see what she picked at. I told her that we saw some Bleeders here and that I was worried that she wasn't gonna make it back. But she did, by God, she made it.

Today is a working day, as soon as we get the all clear, we go outside and make sure the camp didn't take any damage last night. We fix what we can with what we have. We've been trying for a while to get a generator up and running. We found it a while back in a city miles from here. We got it back to camp with the one car we have and are determined to get some power to this place. Today, I'll be mostly working in the small farm we have. We try to grow everything we can here, but we usually only get a pound of food at the harvest. The Bleeders and other creatures take what they can from us.

6.19.94 1224

Today, I was lucky enough to have some kids working with me. They seemed interested in plants, so I told them all I know. I taught them what plant needs the most sun and the most water. Some even helped me plant the seeds from the cucumbers. Around 1000 we had to go back inside because someone saw a Bleeder lurking in the woods. They are nasty creatures.

No one quite knows where they came from but we found out quick how dangerous they are. If they touch you, you become one of them. And it ain't pretty. I've never seen someone turn, and I hope I never have to. I heard it starts with an intense hunger.

Anything you can get your hands on, you eat. From what I've seen, they bleed from their eyes and mouth, so they can't see you. I'm pretty sure they can smell you though, for miles. John told me they can still hear, and because they can't see, they use their ears to hunt. We use sound to get them away from the camp, throwing what we can away from the people to lure them away. If they get close enough to smell you, sound doesn't work anymore. They know where the food is. If you're lucky enough to survive an attack, you might become one of them.

6.19.94 1736

After lunch, I did some more work in the fields with the same kids that were with me before. We watered all the plants and had to go back inside because of more Bleeders. Rumors are starting to go around that it's not safe here anymore. We might have to leave, but we don't know where to go. While heading inside, I thought I saw Laura in the Med-Tent. I couldn't imagine why she would be in there. She said everyone got back safely last night. Maybe one of her friends got hurt repairing something. I don't think I saw her come out.

6.19.94 2147

I can't find Laura anywhere. We usually share a cot. I'm starting to think that she's avoiding me. I hope I didn't do anything wrong. Maybe she'll find me when she goes to bed.

6.20.94 1307

John told me that Laura was looking for me. I saw her come out of the Med-Tent this morning. She must've stayed the night with whoever got hurt yesterday. I know that she likes some of that doctor stuff. It was never for me, too much risk when treating someone. I didn't want anyone's life to end up in my hands. Some days, it's too hard to keep myself alive.

6.20.94 1433

Laura just told me that she lied about everyone getting back safe the other night. That's why she was in the Med-Tent for so long. She didn't really tell me what happened, just that someone might have gotten infected. But they don't know for sure. Laura says they don't want anyone else coming in the Med-Tent and that they'll set up a secondary one for the time being. I hope everyone turns out okay. I hope that no one actually got infected. That would be a disaster for the camp. Not to mention, we would have to kill whomever turns.

Since Laura spent so much time in the Med-Tent, I'm worried that she's infected now too. We don't know much about the disease. It might be a few days before it's contagious, or it could be contagious right away.

That must've been why she acted so weird that night. She didn't want me to get all panicked about our people getting hurt. She was just protecting us. I'm not upset.

6.20.94 1907

After dinner Laura told me she had to go back to the Med-Tent. I guess she has to help take care of whoever got hurt because she was there that night. She can give information on the attack that might help them care for the injured. I might go visit her tomorrow, but I don't know how she would take that. Maybe I could help care for whoever's in there. In the meantime, I need to check on the farm one last time before I go to bed. I have a feeling the cucumbers are going to start sprouting soon.

6.21.94.0934

I was right! The cucumbers have started to poke through the soil! This was amazing to see this morning. I already told half the camp and I can't wait to tell Laura. I can't wait to harvest them. It's going to be such a treat to finally have more than beans as a vegetable.

I had a few kids working with me again today. They were just as excited about the sprouts as I was. They were so eager to water them that they almost washed them away! Some beans were ready to go this morning so I took what I could before any Bleeders could get their hands on them. If I have time to, I'm gonna make my way over to Laura and make sure everything is okay where she is.

6.21.94. 1347

I shouldn't have gone to visit Laura. Everything would have been better with me not knowing the truth about the other night. I can't believe that she didn't tell me right away. I know she didn't want to hurt me, but she hurt me by hiding it. I can't believe her. I can't believe that she got hurt. That she got infected. I don't know what I'm going to do. She's going to turn into one of those things and there's nothing I can do to stop it.

6.21.94 2125

After dinner I went to see Laura again. I brought her some of the beans I picked from earlier today. She kept saying she was “hungry, so hungry.” I asked the nurse there what was going to happen to her. The nurse said that she was gonna turn and the only way to stop it would be to kill her. Kill her. I know we can't let a Bleeder live at camp, it would be chaos and we would all turn. But don't know if I can let someone kill her. I just can't. She's been around since the start of it all. She's helped me through so much. And now she's gone. And we can't change the turning.

6.22.94 0314

I can't sleep. I know I shouldn't be out here right now, risk of Bleeders and all. But right now, I don't care. The only light is the flood light at the entrance to camp and I using it to write. I almost went to see Laura again, since I don't know when'll be the last time I get to see her. But I didn't want to wake her. She deserves some good dreams before she leaves us.

It's hard sleeping alone.

6.22.94 1729

I worked all day today. I needed to distract myself from what's going on. At dinner, John told me she started bleeding. I didn't eat much today. But the cucumbers are still growing strong.

I told John I needed to say my goodbyes. He said he might be able to arrange something.

I just need to see her one last time.

6.23.94 1044

I saw Laura today. She didn't look like herself. Her eyes were red. No white left in them.

The nurse says she complains of being hungry, but they can't give her any food. The more she eats, the more violent she'll get.

I don't think she recognized me. I just needed to see her one last time.

They told me she won't suffer.

6.23.94. 1632

At lunch, Toby told me to go and find John. I don't know if I actually wanted to, but I went to find him anyway.

6.23.94. 1700

I found John. She's gone.

DRAFT TWO OF "THE TURNING"

"Time to face the strange..."

6.18.94 1603

Laura and some of the others went out to find food at a warehouse a few miles from here. I wish I went with them, but it wasn't my turn. I know we have to take turns. Equality and all. They left at 1500. It's about 1600 now and it's been a little bit longer than I expected. I'm worried that something happened to them. They've never been out that long before. I told John I'd go out there and look for them or try to help if they were in trouble; but he told me to stay here. He's always thinking logically. I understand, but I know I can help. What if they need help? There's no way for us to know that. I guess I got to trust John. It's the only thing I can do right now. I hope everyone gets back safe. We're getting hungry here.

6.18.94 1711

It's been 2 hours now and they haven't come back and John still won't let me go out to find them. When's he gonna call it? We can't wait all night. I thought I heard some Bleeders outside a bit ago. They might be holding Laura and them back. They took some guns and a few bats, but I don't know how long they can fight. Laura's a fighter, but she can't always hold on too long. I'm prayin' for her. If I have to wait another hour, I'm going out there. I don't care what John says. I'm not letting them get hurt. We blocked the windows and got the kids inside in case something happens. It's hard on the kids. They don't understand what's going on and we can't really explain it without scarin' 'em too much. I hope they're not much longer.

6.18.94 2017

Laura and the others got back about 2 hours ago! Thank the Lord. I almost walked out the camp when I saw them making their way back. They seemed shaken up. Something definitely happened. They ain't talkin' much about it though. I understand. It's hard to talk after. They brought back about two weeks' worth of food-a great haul. Their bags were full of veggies- cucumbers, pumpkins, some beans. The beans are the real treasure they'd last awhile. I can take a few of them and start plantin' more. I love gardening. Keeps me distracted from everything out there. The cucumbers might be a little wrinkly and soft, but we're gonna eat them anyway. The pumpkins are a little past orange. Not sure if I'd eat them but maybe I can get the seeds out of 'em and plant some new ones. We took stock of what they brought back, and ate dinner for today. Someone made flour from the bit of wheat we had growing outside and made bread. It wasn't much, maybe a bite each. But still, what a treat! We all went to bed with full bellies. Laura told me they couldn't bring all the food back. Still might be food over there. I might plan a trip and get the rest of it. It John lets me. He runs thing 'round here. I understand why he wants to keep us safe. But he doesn't let us take risks. Sometimes those risks seem worth it. Like that one time I stayed out late harvesting some food. I heard some Bleeder's comin'. I coulda died. But I didn't and I kept a few pounds of food from gettin' infected. I'm relieved everyone made it back safely, I don't know what I'd do without Laura. She's kept me safe for so long. We found this place 'cause of her. I'm worried about her though. Since she got back tonight, she's been acting kinda weird, quiet. She's usually talkin' up a storm. Would be tellin' stories about what happened at the warehouse. But tonight, she's barely said a word. I hope she's okay. I hope I didn't do anything wrong.

6.19.94 0803

I found Laura at breakfast. She told me about the mission last night. They got to the warehouse safely. There's so much food just sitting there, they couldn't carry it all. We'll have to go back at some point to grab the rest. Sounds like John's already makin' the plans for it. So they took what they could and left. As soon as they stepped back outside, Bleeders were everywhere. The only thing to do was to try and fight through the hoard. I couldn't imagine the smell. It's the worst part of those things. Blood and rotten flesh. She doesn't know how they got out without anyone dying or getting bitten. I don't know how either. Everyone seemed okay last night though. She said they lost some food during the fight. That don't matter to me. As long as everyone came back.

I couldn't help but notice that when she talked she scratched at her arm. I couldn't see what she picked at. Maybe just a mosquito bite or somethin'. I told her that we saw some Bleeders here and that I was worried that she wasn't gonna make it back. But she did, by God, she made it.

Today's a workin' day, as soon as we get the all clear, we go outside and make sure the camp didn't take any damage last night. Sometimes we get Bleeders tryinta get inside. Bangin' on the doors and tearin' up the fields. We fix what we can with what we have. We don't have much. Some salvaged wood from nearby abandoned towns. Those places are where the real danger is. So many nooks and crannies, Bleeders can get up on ya without you even knowin.' But that's where the real treasure is. We found a good sized generator in a building before was a real trouble getting it out. Luckily we got it though. We've been tryin' for a while to get it up and runnin' We got it back to camp with the one car we have and are determined to get some power in this place. Today, I'll be out

working in the small farm we have. It was here when Laura and I got here but it wasn't too much. I got it to where it is today. Which isn't much more, but it's somethin'. We grow everything we can but we usually only get few pounds of food at the harvest. The Bleeders and other creatures take what they want from us.

6.19.94 1224

Today, I was lucky enough to have some kids with me. Those shinin' faces help me forget about the hell around us. They're interested in plants, so I told them all I know. They get so excited when they see their seeds pokin' through the dirt. I taught them what plant needs the most sun and the most water. Some even helped me plant the seeds from the cucumbers we got last night. "Can't wait to see this pokin' up!" they kept sayin'. I feel bad for these kids. They should be runnin' around and playing. Actin' how kids should act. But instead, they're stuck in this hell of a world. Worried about their lives all the time. We keep what we can from them, but they know the truth. They know their lives are at risk. Poor bastards.

Around 1000 we had to go back inside because someone saw a Bleeder lurking in the woods. Nasty creatures. I never want to see one again. I would kill them all. But I ain't much of a fighter.

No one quite knows where they came from but we found out quick how dangerous they are. If they touch you, you become one of them. And it ain't pretty. I never seen someone turn, and I hope I never have to. John told me it starts with an intense hunger. Anything you get your hands on, you eat. They bleed from their eyes and mouth, so they can't see you. It's a horrid thing. They can smell you though. John told me some can still hear. We use sound to get them away from the camp, throwing what we can away from the people. If they get close enough to smell you, good luck. They know where the food is. If you're lucky enough to survive an attack, you become one of them. John said that hasn't happened for some time though.

6.19.94 1736

After lunch, I did some more work in the fields with the same kids that were with me before. They got a little sad seein' the new seeds hadn't popped up yet. I had to explain that they need time. Kids are so innocent. I would love to have some of my own someday. But I would never bring 'em up here. We watered all the plants. One of the kids started splashin' water at the others. At first I worried about wastin' water. But I let them have their fun. They gotta do that sometimes. It's important. And besides, the water that didn't land on someone else watered the crops. Mid-water-fight we had to go back inside 'cause of more Bleeders. I wish they'd just leave us in peace. Rumors are starting to go 'round it's not safe here anymore. We might have to leave. Where would we go? Before this place, Laura and I wandered around, barely makin it. I thought I saw Laura in the Med-Tent. I can't imagine why she'd be in there. Maybe someone got hurt during the day, fooling around and fall off o' somethin'. Everyone got back safely last night. So I don't know what else it'd be. I don't remember seein' her leave.

6.19.94 2147

I can't find Laura anywhere. I'm started to get worried 'bout her. Last place I saw her was when she went to the Med-tent. I can't imagine she'd still be there. Most people don't spend the night 'less somethin' is really wrong. Hope she's not hurt. We share a cot. It's after curfew and she hasn't turned up. Maybe she's out talking to John. Or on watch tonight and forgot to mention it. It gets busy 'round here most days with all the chores and upkeep of the camp. I miss havin' her next to me. Maybe she'll turn up after I fall asleep.

6.20.94 1307

John told me Laura's looking for me. I hope she updates me on what's goin' on. I don't like being so in the dark about it all. Even after all that we've been through. I hope she's not hiding anything. I saw her come out of the Med-Tent this mornin'. She must've stayed the night there. I hope that she's okay. I know that she likes some doctor stuff. It's never for me, too much risk when treating someone. I didn't want anyone's life endin' up in my hands. I didn't need some infection from someone else either. Some days, it's too hard to keep myself alive. But I keep going, for Laura. For John. For those kiddos that help me in the field. There are things out there bigger than me that are worth the pain some days.

6.20.94 1433

Laura lied about everyone gettin' back safe the other night. That's why she was in the Med-Tent for so long. I'm not mad. I'm upset she felt that she had to keep this from me. We've been through so much together. Why did she lie?

She didn't really tell me what happened, just someone might've gotten infected. They don't know for sure. I hope it wasn't Laura. I hope she was just helping out whoever it might be. Laura says they don't want anyone else comin' in the Med-Tent and that they'll set up a second one. I hope that it doesn't cause too much distraction in the camp. For as long as we've been here, we've never had an infection. We've been careful. Making sure nothing and no one gets too close to those bleeders. I hope everyone turns out okay. I hope no one got infected. I hope it's just a precaution. Would be a disaster for the camp. We'd have to kill whoever turns.

Laura spent so much time in the Med-Tent, I'm worried that she's infected now too. We don't know much about the disease. It might be a few days before it's contagious. Could be contagious right away.

Must've been why she acted so weird that night. She didn't want me to get all panicked about our people gettin' hurt. She's just protectin' us. I ain't upset bout that.

6.20.94 1907

After dinner Laura had to get back to the Med-Tent. I guess she's got to take care of whoever got hurt because she was there. She can give information on the attack that might help them care for the injured. I might go visit tomorrow. Maybe I could help. Probably not, I don't do that doctor stuff. I don't know how she'd take that. I need to check on the farm one last time before I go to bed. I've a feeling the cucumbers're goin' to start sproutin' soon. Those kids'll be so excited. Can't wait to show them what they planted is comin' up.

6.21.94.0934

I was right! The cucumbers've started to poke through the soil! Amazing to see thing mornin'. I already told half the camp and can't wait to tell Laura. Those kids were so excited to see the green in the brown dirt. Wish I coulda gotten a picture of their smilin' faces. Everyone deserves to be that happy. I can't wait to harvest them! It's going to be such a treat to finally have more than beans. They're so eager to water them they almost washed them away! I had to keep a closer eye on those kids. Didn't need them starting another water fight. Not today anyway. Some beans were ready to go this morning so I took what I could before any Bleeders could get their hands on 'em. Gotta keep those greedy bastards away from our food. They don't care bout nothing but themselves. If I've time, I'm gonna make sure everything's okay with Laura

6.21.94. 1347

I shouldn't've gone to visit Laura. I'd be better off not knowin' the truth. I can't believe she lied! She didn't tell me right away! I been avoidin' her all day now. I know she didn't want to hurt me. She hurt me by hiding it. I can't believe her I can't believe that got hurt. She got infected I don't know what I'm going to do. I should've gone to help. I should've ignored John and done what I thought was right. But now she's goin' to turn into one of those things and there's nothin' I can do.

6.21.94 2125

After dinner I went to see Laura. I know I shouldn't. I'm riskin' my own life. I brought her some beans I picked. I wanted to show her what I'd been doing during this whole thing. Bring some hope into it all She kept sayin' she's hungry. I asked the nurse what's gonna happen to her. The nurse said she's gonna turn. I almost lost my lunch when she said that. I couldn't believe it. I knew it deep down. But someone telling me made it real. The only way to stop it'd be to kill her. Kill her. I know we can't let a Bleeder at camp. We'd all die. I don't know if I can let someone kill her. I just can't. She's been around since the start of it all. She's helped me through so much. And now she's leaving. We can't change the turning.

6.22.94 0314

I can't sleep. I shouldn't be out here, risk of Bleeders and all. But I don't care. The only light's comin' from my lighter. I should be savin' that too. But I need to get this out. I almost went to see Laura again, since I don't know when'll be the last time. I didn't want to wake her. She deserves some good dreams before she leaves us.

It's hard sleeping' alone.

6.22.94 1729

I worked all day today. I need to distract myself. At dinner, John told me she started bleedin'. I didn't eat much today. The cucumbers're still growin' strong.

I told John I need to say my goodbyes. He said he can arrange somethin'. I need to see her one last time. But I don't know if I'll be able to handle seein' her like that.

6.23.94 1044

I saw Laura today. It was awful She didn't look like herself. Her eyes're red. No white left in 'em. The nurse says she complains of bein' hungry all day. They can't give her no food. The more she eats, the more violent she'll get. I just want to help. I need to find some way to stop it. I know it's too late, but I'm want to try.

I don't think she recognized me. I needed to see her one last time.

They told me she won't suffer.

6.23.94. 1632

At lunch, Toby told me to go and find John. I don't know if I wanted to, but I went to find him anyway.

6.23.94. 1700

I found John. She's gone.

WRITER'S JOURNAL

9 May 2018

Today I officially started writing the stories for my anthology! My committee meetings went really well and I am glad that everyone seems excited about my thesis. We talked about my writing process and the kind of books/authors I like. Which reminds me, I need to send out an email about my favorite books and authors. I will probably do that after finals week ends. So far I am on schedule and started when I said I would. I started writing "Migration" today. I'm still not sure how I feel about that title, but that's what is it right now. It's going swimmingly. I am attributing the ease of writing to the fact that I have already started this story and just need to type it up. Of course, I am editing as I go. Tomorrow, I plan to write up some more of what I have already written and hope to start writing new material by Friday or Saturday. I'm super excited to see I make of these stories!

10 May 2018

Another great day of writing! Now that I have started thinking more and more about what I want to do, ideas keep flowing. It's making the whole writing process really easy. I feel way ahead of schedule in terms of what I put in my outline. I hope to keep it that way because when I start working I don't know what will happen to my schedule. I haven't encountered any roadblocks yet and I attribute that to the fact that I have already written the part of the story I'm typing. I hope to start reading *On Writing* by Stephen

King soon, maybe tomorrow. Even though I am reading it in conjunction with my thesis, I hope to add it to my reading list. I also need to start my reading list. I might start compiling a list tomorrow because I don't have any plans. Things are looking really good so far, can't wait to see what the future holds!

11 May 2018

I am so proud of myself for writing everyday so far and being very ahead of schedule. I am about halfway through my first story. At this point, I will be able to get a second draft in the summer, which is super exciting. I have typed up everything I have previously written and now I am on my own. I know exactly where I want this story to go and I'm really happy with my progress. Now that I am away from my previously written notes, I am anticipating some writers block. I have a few ideas on how to get past that but I have never had a chance to use those tools. Hopefully, they work. I started reading *On Writing* by Stephen King and I am enjoying it. I am still in the memoir part of the book, but it's really good. I also studied a bit for the PRAXIS. I take it next week and I am hoping for passing scores. Until next time!

15 May 2018

So I guess I spoke too soon about writing every day. I'm pretty sure I did some writing on Saturday, but now I'm not so sure. A lot has happened in the past few days. I bought a car, which was very exciting, it was Mother's Day, and I have been studying for the PRAXIS. Studying for the text has become a bit of a priority because I am taking the test on Friday and I would really like to pass on the first try. However, I am still doing my best to write as much as I can when I can. I sent an email out to my committee giving

them an update on my writing and so far I have gotten one response back. I am continuing to read *On Writing* by Stephen King. I am still the memoir part of the book, but as soon as I finish that section, I will be reading more about King's writing process. For me, I have definitely slowed down in the writing. Since I am no longer following concise notes on where the story is going, I am finding it a bit difficult to lead the story where I want it to go. However, whenever I get an idea, I make sure to write it down. I now have a designated notebook for story notes. It is the notebook where the original Migration story was written in. The story is definitely going to reach the 20-page milestone I set, and mostly likely go beyond. I am getting the feeling it will be closer to 30 pages. I'm not super sure and I'm not going to force the plot. For my reading list, I am thinking that it will be started on Saturday. I don't plan on writing too much on Friday because I am taking the PRAXIS and I am going to a baseball game with my family. But we will see what happens.

16 May 2019

Today I did a little bit of writing. I feel like I am in a lull for the story right now. It's probably because I'm really excited about the part coming after the part I am currently writing. I am struggling to get the two parts to connect. I came up with a few ideas, so I wrote them down. We shall see which ideas I end up going with. I'm really excited for the end of the story and for the fact that this story will definitely be more than 20 pages. It's going to be the longest thing I've written and finished! I've been doing more reading from Stephen King's *On Writing*. I just finished the memoir part and am on to the writing part. The last few things he said in the memoir gave me some things to keep in mind as I write. 1) Your story has to move you emotionally. 2) Like your

characters. 3) Be at home with your writing/ know your characters. I'm not sure if my story moves me emotionally. Hopefully, as I revise and edit, that will change. The absolute last thing he said was to put your desk in a corner, not the center of a room. For King, it reminded him that his art supports his life, not the other way around. I don't really have a desk at home and my room at school is too small to keep one in the middle of the room, but when I get a desk, I'll put it in a corner.

19 May 2018

I *need* to get better at writing every day. I thought that I would have this story done before the 30th, but now I'm not so sure. I feel like if I really crack down on what's going on in the story I can get it done by the due date I set for myself. I finally got to the park that I'm really excited about writing! And I am realizing that this story is going to be much longer than 20 pages. It might be 20 pages single spaced. Which is insane; it is definitely the longest thing I have written. I feel like I did a good job of going through the lull and the edits I get will definitely help me develop the story more. I am finding out that I like to have at least an outline to go off of when I write. It helps me find a direction to go in. Also, I find myself to write more in the afternoon. I think it's because I get more bored as the day goes on and I need something to do. That something usually turns out to be work on my thesis. I am proud of myself for writing this much already. I just really need to keep it up for the rest of the summer. Also it's Saturday and I still haven't started doing my reading list. Tomorrow! I promise!

20 May 2019

I really need a better system for writing every day. My motivation is going down and I'm not sure why. I am worried that my depression is coming back and I really don't want that to happen. On the bright side, I have picked all of the books for my reading list! Yesterday, I cited them in MLA format. That is all I did yesterday. I told myself to work on my story, but I didn't. Watching "Miracle On Ice" was more important than working on my thesis apparently. But tomorrow I am cracking down. When I wake up, I will read more of *On Writing* and I will start writing. Maybe I am more of a morning writer and that is my problem. I am starting to worry about how other people will like my story because I'm not sure its believable. I don't think my character would do the things I want her to do. But this scene has been in my head for a while, and revisions and rewrites will help this story be. Tomorrow will be better.

21 May 2019

Writing in the morning seems to be doing a lot better for me. I think it's because I'm not restricted by time as much. I have the whole day in front of me and I can write as much as I want. And when I am done writing for the day, I still have the rest of the day to do whatever I want. I did one whole chapter today, but it wasn't super long. The rest of the story I have planned out in my head; the rest of the writing process should go swimmingly. I read some more of *On Writing* today. I finished the part about an author's toolbox. King says that every writer should have vocabulary, grammar, and style in their toolbox. He writes that grammar needs to be correct unless you really, really know what you are doing. I'm pretty sure I know my grammar, just not the titles for everything. He also talks about using adverbs and how he hates them. I sort of understand where he is coming from. He talks about how they add unnecessary fluff to a sentence or paragraph.

He uses the example of the dialogue attribution. He says that the reader will know how a characters simply by the context of the conversation. The author doesn't need to add all kinds of adverbs or adjectives to get their point across. King is a fan of using “he said/she said.” “Said” is just enough to say that someone is talking. I got a little confused at that part because I was told “said is dead.” I learned to find stronger verbs to convey my characters’ emotions. Now, I know that if I can't find another word that I can just use said.

Also, now that I have written a bit more in the direction I want to go. I think I believe my story a bit more. I just needed to sit down and see where the story would take me. I think I am liking the direction.

22 May 2019

Good news!!! I have gotten better at writing every day! I definitely writing during the day or in the morning way more than writing at night. I find that I have more time and am less tired to do work. My first story is coming along great! I think I am going to finish it tomorrow or Thursday! Right now, I am in another little lull but I know it won't take more than a page to get out of it. I read more *On Writing*. This time I am getting more into the “how to write” section of the book. King says that writers must follow two rules: read a lot and write a lot. Recently, I have been doing a great job of doing both of those things. I read right when I wake up in the morning, or I at least try to. I find that it helps wake me up. My writing also gives me something to do, instead of watching TV or scrolling through social media. It’s really nice to not be worrying about that kind of stuff. Also, my story is taking a turn I didn't expect! And I am going with it because I like it way more than my original idea. Instead of my character running away, she is just going

to hang out with Cole. I find this waaaaayyyy more believable than her running away with Cole. And this way, I still get to have the ending I really like and think the story wants. I'm really excited to see where this story goes. I can't wait to finish it!

23 May 2018

I feel so close to the end of this story, I am just struggling to build a bridge from where I am right now to the end. Dom gave me a really good idea and told me to write the ending and then go back and see how I can bring the two together. As I was talking to him, I kept writing and I think I am close enough to the end to just keep writing in a linear way. I think the end of this story will come tomorrow. I would finish it today, but I keep getting distracted. I want to be fully focused on my writing when I finish and I am not doing that right now. Otherwise, I think the ending is coming along great. When I finish, I am going to read it over and make any copy edits. I might add some more descriptions and make sure everything makes sense. Stephen King recommends waiting 6 weeks after you finish a first draft to go back over it, but I do not have that kind of time right now. I am going to read over it probably right after I finish writing it. After that, I will send it off to my committee. Hopefully, I will get more edits to make within a week. In that time, I'm going to start on the next story. I'm going to go eat lunch now. I'm nervous to submit the story, but I'm also really excited about it.

24 May 2018

I finished the first draft of "Migration"!! I know that I want to change the title but I have no idea what it should be. It feels really nice to have a finished work of a solid length (34 pages, double spaced). I believe that this is the longest thing I have ever

written and completed, including academic works. I am satisfied with how the draft came out, but I know that there is a lot of work to be done on it. I sent it out to my committee and now I just have to wait for revisions. In the meantime, I am going to take a 1-day break and then start working on a new story! Now that I'm in the swing of things, I have come up with a good method for my writing. I learned that I definitely do better writing when I have some kind of outline to follow. It allows me to think about where the story is going before I put in into words.

Also, I finished *On Writing!* The last bit of the book was about King's experience after getting hit by a bus while going for a walk. He also included 2 book lists, I might have to check out. The next book I am going to read is *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I have been wanting to read it for a while and now I have a chance!

26 May 2018

I took yesterday off because I wanted to have a clean break between stories before I began working on the next one. Today, I did a little bit of work, but not too much. Again, my motivation is down and I am worried that some depression is trying to creep its way back. I am fighting as hard as I can to avoid that. Like I said, I did a little bit of work. I started working on "The Survival." I just read through what I already wrote and then plotted the next few pages out. I decided that I want to outline a few pages at a time, because the story could change at any time and I don't want to have any preconceived ideas that aren't going to work out. Tomorrow, I am going to write out those pages and then plan the next ones.

27 May 2018

After a bit of procrastination and giving myself a reward for working, I finally did some decent work on my second story! This one is called “The Survival,” but I’m not sure if I want that to be the final title. I didn’t finish writing what I had planned out yesterday, but I did a good amount of work. I’m still not sure where I want the story to go or where it is going to take me, but I am along for the ride. I haven’t been hitting any road blocks yet and that it really nice. I know that I need to be working on my Reading List, but it seems so easy. I feel like I can keep putting it off. I know that is not a good mentality to have about it, but I have all summer. I need to focus on the stories, because to me, that’s the most important part. Other than that, I don’t really have anything else to talk about for today.

28 May 2018

I am struggling to write. It’s not that I don’t have ideas, it’s my motivation. I know where I want this story to go and I want to write it, but I am struggling to put the words on the page. I have been pre-planning though, so I know that this story is going to work out. I am liking this story much more than Migration. Something about it is more captivating, its more exciting to me. I am just struggling. Maybe I need a new writing location. Mostly, I have been writing on my bed, which has become more and more a place of procrastination. If I go somewhere else to write, I might be better at focusing. Other than this, everything is going pretty well. I have reached the halfway point of my 20-page goal and I think that this one will also go over those twenty pages. I am possibly going to Portland this week, which will be very exciting. I will make sure to write on the day I leave and the day I come back. I do not plan on writing for the full day I would be there. I am still ahead of schedule and I hope to keep it that way!

30 May 2018

I didn't write at all yesterday, I opened up my laptop and then it died. And because I am a lazy person, I played video games instead. Today, I only wrote a little bit, but I did write! Writing every day is getting a little harder. I'm hoping that when I get into the thick of this story it will get easier. The reason I didn't write a lot today is because I am going to Portland and I am really excited about it, I just want to get there. While I am in Portland, I am bringing my notebook in case I get any ideas and the story starts coming to life. Other than that, I don't plan on working on my thesis. When I get back on Friday, I will strap down and really start working. See you on Friday!

2 June 2018

So I didn't end up writing on Friday, but I did a lot of good work today! While I was sitting down, trying to figure out what I wanted to happen, the rest of the story came to me. Just like that. I immediately wrote down my thoughts and ironed out anything that needed it. I'm happy with what is going to happen, even if it ends up changing. I am hoping to have the story done by the 18th, but I think my deadline is the 21st. I found out that if I set a timer for 1 hour and give myself a reward after I write, I do way more work than if I just sit down and write. In that hour, I write one single spaced page. I know that isn't a lot (because I get distracted), but sometimes I write more. Some of that time is also used as planning, so I may not be typing things out. Like yesterday, I did more handwriting than typing because I got the ideas for the rest of the story and needed to write them down before I forgot.

This is unrelated but on my drive to Portland I did a lot of thinking about the other stories I could include in my anthology. An idea I've had for a while is to do a first person point of view of someone turning into a Zombie. While I'm not sure how this would fit into the theme of my dystopian anthology, I really want to include it. I don't think it would be a full 20 pages, but I like the idea. And I also thought of an epigraph for it: "Time to face the strange;" from "Changes" by David Bowie. I might experiment with that story next, instead of "Lights" just because I am more interested in it. Other than that, I'm not really sure what to say. Until tomorrow (hopefully)!

3 June 2018

Woo! My story is coming along great. I'm starting part 3 tomorrow and I know exactly how things are going to unfold. I don't feel like I am in a lull like I was with Migration. I know what I want the characters to say and do and its making the process way easier. I realized, while I was writing, that I have not done anything with my reading list since I figured out which books I want to be included on the list. I keep forgetting that it is also a part of the thesis, not just the writing of the stories. The reading list shouldn't even be that hard, so I need to buckle down and work on it like I do when I have to write the stories. I still get distracted when I write, but I stop my timer when I get distracted so I end up doing a full hour of writing, it just takes longer than an hour.

I also just remembered that Professor Mills, along with a few other professors, wanted me to connect what I am doing to my future career as a teacher. Right now, I see this as practice for when I teach my students how to write in a narrative style. I am having seasoned professors provide feedback and I can use their feedback as an example of how I should evaluate my students. Also, since I am doing this ahead of my students, if

I run into any roadblocks, I'll know how to solve them if my students run into the same problems. I am going to try and do more reflection on this as I keep writing.

5 June 2018

Today, I did about a half page of writing, which is less than I normally do; but at least I am writing. I also emailed my committee giving them a quick update on where I am in the process and where I am going. I told them I plan on having "The Survival" done by the 18th, which I think is very doable. Tomorrow, I am thinking about going to the library or to a coffee shop or something and really cranking out some good work. I want to really get started on my reading list so I can send my beginning of it to Prof Ladenheim. The summer camp I am working at is starting soon and I know that my writing might slow down even more when that happens. I am happy about where I am at and hope to stay ahead of the game.

As far as relating this to teacher, I know that since I am having motivation problems, my students might have those problems to. I need to come up with some solutions for that. The biggest one I use is a reward system. After I do a good chunk of writing, I reward myself with video games, snacks, etc. Another thing that might work for my students is finding multiple places to do work. I find myself getting more and more distracted the more I work in my house. When I can go somewhere else to do the work, I get more done. So that's why I'm going to try and go somewhere tomorrow.

6 June 2018

Today, I did another half page of writing and I worked on my reading list. The reading list is going to be a bit more challenging that I had originally anticipated. I wrote

a bit for a few of the books, but it is definitely going to take a few drafts to get the reading list where I want it to be. Thankfully, Prof Ladenheim has offered advice and assistance on it. As far as my story is coming, the action is really going to pick up in these last pages. I found that I needed to do a bit more planning before I typed up the plot, but I think I know where the plot is headed from here on out. Pre-planning the text is definitely helping me outline where the story is going and where the story wants to go. When teacher, I will advise my students to do the same. For me, I plan only a few pages at a time. I don't want to have expectations for the text too early on. Once I finish writing those pages, I think about the next few. Although I have a general idea of where the plot will end, I keep the middle of the story quite open. I let it come to me as I write instead of trying to force something on the page.

I think I like “The Survival” more than migration, mostly because of the action and the tension between the characters. I am really excited to see what these last pages bring to the plot.

8 June 2018

I am in a lull for this story. I know where I want it to go and what is going on. But I just don't know how to write out 5 days of walking through the woods. I know that I don't need to include all of the gritty details but I also know that I can't just jump to five days later. Maybe I can just finish day one and jump to day 3 because I don't really have anything planned for day 2. However, day 3 through 5 have some important action scenes I want to include. Other than that, I think I do better at writing every other day. I know that I should write every day, but sometimes that just isn't working out for me. The

important part is getting on a regular schedule. If writing every other day instead of every day works better for me, then my whole thesis will benefit.

That is something I can tell my students as well. They need to be able to do their best writing, and falling into a regular schedule will help them do that.

9 June 2018

Wow, I did a lot of good writing today. My characters are almost at the mountain and I know that I can get this done this week. I am really excited about this story and how different this one is from "Migration." I am excited for everyone to read it and to hear their comments on the plot and characters. I thought I was in a lull but I got passed it pretty easily and smoothly, and if the transition wasn't smooth, someone will let me know.

I haven't done too much work on my reading list and I really need to crack down on that. Maybe tomorrow I can get some good work done on it.

11 June 2018

So I did a bit of work on my reading list today and I didn't do anything on my story. The reading list is way harder than I anticipated. I have no idea what to say about the books I chose instead of a summary and when I read them. These are just books that I liked and were memorable for me. I know I need to be saying *why* I liked these books but it's hard to put it into words. I am the type of person who likes to have structure when writing something like this and I am currently flying blind. I feel like I need some more guiding questions to complete this task. I think I am going to send whatever I have to my

committee when I send out the first draft of “The Survival.” I hope that I can get some good advice on it.

12 June 2018

I did some more work on my story today, although I still feel like I am in a bit of a lull. I don't want it to feel like I am rushing the story along, when in reality, I have no idea what to do in between these points I have set. I know that I can have the story done by Monday, and that might be why I am delaying it a bit. I might try some advice that I got last time I was at a place like this: write the next part of the story and then find a way to connect the two. That way I am still writing and working, but I don't have to feel like I am stuck. It's sort of like backwards lesson planning. You have to know the ending before you can start writing the beginning and the middle.

I feel like my journals have been a little shorter than normal, but I'm not sure what else to talk about. I think a big part of it is that I finished *On Writing*, and I don't have another book that is aiding me in the same way. Right now I am reading Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*. I was first exposed to her work in ENG 271 and when I saw this book on my bookshelf, I thought I would explore it a bit more. She talks mostly about how man's freedom and existence is ambiguous. It's pretty interesting.

14 June 2018

I finished “The Survival”! I feel like the ending was a bit rushed, but I really didn't know what else to do. Maybe I can build a bit more tension during the scene where Liz dies. I might do that when I go through it for spelling mistakes or I might wait until I get comments back from my committee. On Saturday I am going to go through “The

Survival” and make sure everything makes sense. Then I am going to go through the edits for “Migration” and spruce it up a bit. Once I finish all of that, I am going to send everything to my committee; including my Reading List. I found that I really need some more guidance on the reading list. I don't really know what I'm doing with it.

The next story I plan on writing is something new that my committee doesn't know about. I am thinking about a first person point of view narrative of someone turning into a zombie. I feel like a journal format would best fit this type of story and it would be rather short; Less than ten pages, I'm guessing. I'm not sure if it fits in with the rest of the themes for my other stories, but I've had the idea for a while and I feel compelled to write it. This one would be a different experience for me because I am starting from scratch. The first two stories had outlines from when I first started working on them. I'm excited to see how it works out.

16 June 2018

Today I sent out my first draft of “The Survival!” I'm really excited to see how my committee reacts to this very different story from “Migration.” I also sent them my reading list because I am struggling. I also worked a bit on the edits for “Migration.” I think the editing process is going to be a drag compared to the writing process. I know that it is necessary, but I just feel that it's going to be a bit slower. I know that it will involve a lot of reading the stories over and over again and I know that I will get tired of it. But I really want to improve my writing, and just getting edits on “Migration” has helped a bit with the finishing of “The Survival.” I am really excited to hear the comments my committee has and I am also really excited to get started on my next story.

19 June 2018

Wow, my life just got a bit crazier than it has been. Yesterday, I planned on doing some work when I got back from my first day of work, but we lost power, so I couldn't be on Google Drive working on my stories. And by the time the power came back on, I needed to go to sleep so that I could be at work by 7 for today. Today was a bit less hectic, mostly because we had power today. I got back from work and settled at home for a bit, cleaned up, ate dinner, then sat down to do some editing. I realized that the editing for Migration might take some more in depth thinking and longer time than I originally planned. I'm not super worried about it, as long as I do a little bit every day, I should get a second draft to my committee soon. The biggest thing I need to do is develop Cole's character more. I am going to work on that tomorrow and Thursday. I think I am going to take the suggestion of making him the other single rider for Lina on the rollercoaster. That way their meeting is less abrupt and more of a coincidence than running into each other at the bathroom.

Today, I looked at all of the dialogue before the rollercoaster scene to make sure it flowed and sounded more like dialogue. There were just a few places, but it's the little things that help bring the story to life. Also, tomorrow I plan to start writing my next story. This includes planning the story out in my physical journal. I did some thinking about how I would present all of this information and realized that my actual journal is really important to this process. I think I am going to scan the pages of the journal into a presentation so they can be included in the defense. It would also allow others to see my writing process and character outlines.

I am hoping to get a second draft to my committee before I get comments on “The Survival.” However, I don't know when those comments are coming, so I will need to work diligently.

21 June 2018

Getting the motivation to work on the edits and work on a new story is difficult when working full time. But I am getting better at it and I worked on some edits today! I thought a little bit about the new direction I am taking “Migration” and I also brainstormed a bit about my next story “The Turning.” For “Migration” I am making Cole a bit more cautious about being out in public. I don't want him to be so forward about who he is and why he's doing it. That was just too unrealistic and made Cole less of a character. I also want to develop Emily a bit more but I think I'm going to worry about that when I finish the amusement park scenes.

For “The Turning,” I decided that I want the story to still be first person, but of someone watching the transformation happening. I read a novel by Patrick Ness that followed a similar pattern and I really enjoyed it. It's called *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. The characters live in a town where weird things happen to the kids they go to school with. Reading the story from a third party perspective made for an interesting story telling method.

As far as teaching writing, I am going to warn my students that editing is not fun. It's hard to get the motivation to work on something you worked so hard to finish in the first place. But when I was in high school, I heard that if something is not growing it is dead. This can be applied to anything in life, especially story writing. The plot will

always be growing and changing because the story is alive. I will use the saying to motivate my students to help their stories be more alive.

24 June 2018

Today I did about 45 minutes of work on two different things. I did a few pages of revisions for “Migration.” I’m not exactly sure where the story is going from here, I will have to refer to my notes for the next chunk of writing that I do. I gave Cole an alias, but I have not revealed it yet. I don't think I am going to change too much of what happens after where I stopped, I just need to make it line up with the prior story. After that, I did some work on my next story: “The Turning.” I think that this next one will be way shorter than the previous too. I also think that it will give me a nice break from these more in depth stories I’ve been writing. I am not too worried about when I get notes on “The Survival,” mostly because I am doing so much work on my other stories and working a lot at the summer camp.

I realized that I need to be doing some work on my reading list. I might do a bit of work on it this week, but I might wait for comments from Prof Ladenheim. The comments might guide me through the process a bit more.

30 June 2018

My job has me very tired throughout the week. I try to get some work done but I keep getting distracted or am too tired to sit down and write. But today was different: I worked on my story! I planned on doing a few things but only ended up being productive on “The Turning.” I wrote about a page and a half and it’s developing nicely. I am trying to focus on making my characters seem more lifelike and I’m trying to create a realistic

setting. I am liking writing in a journal style. I like giving the reader the ability to fill in the gaps between the journal entries. Although this story will be much shorter than the others, I am liking how it is turning out.

I also did a bit of work on Migration, but not enough to make a huge dent. I am finding it difficult to go through the revision process. I think it is because I feel that I finished the piece after the first draft. I know that is not the truth and I need to get past that.

Tomorrow I am going to do more work on my Reading List and Migration. I want to have a second draft out soon.

1 July 2018

I did a bit of work on my reading list, but I am still very lost on what I am supposed to be doing. I might wait to hear back from Prof Ladenheim to continue doing some work on it. I hope to do more work on my stories this week than I did last week. I especially want to get the second draft of Migration done.

7 July 2018

I just did a ton of work on my thesis. I started by working a bit on my reading list. I got a bit more advice from Prof Ladenheim on what the reading list is all about and I think that it's going to help me out a lot. I decided to add *The Last of Us* to my reading list because the story has influenced the way that I write and I keep coming back to that story. It also adds a bit of variety to my reading list because everything else is a printed text.

I did another page of writing for Migration. Thinking ahead, this story is going to shorten up greatly. It is going in a very different direction than the first time I read it, but that doesn't mean it's any harder to write. I am finding that I know where I want the story to go this time.

After I worked on Migration for a bit, I did a small amount of work on The Turning. This story is definitely going to be the shortest one I write. I am liking writing The Turning the most out of the three so far. The story and the way I am telling it is the most interesting to me. As a teacher, I can help my students experiment with different forms and formats of writing. I want them to look at their ideas from different perspectives and help them choose the right one for their story. I am really excited to get the rest of my anthology done and be able to share my writing experiences with my students. Having done something like this will aid in my ability to teach this kind of writing.

14 July 2018

Today I did a ton of work! I did some more edits on Migration and hope to have a second draft done tomorrow. I also finished The Turning! I think that I will be experimenting with how the text looks on the page for this story. The journal format for writing allows me the ability to do that. I also want my readers to have a bit of time between each entry. The white page provides a type of gutter where the reader can fill in the gaps in the story.

Also, when I finish a story, I find myself writing really fast. I know that I'm not rushing to finish the story; I think I just get really excited about reaching the end. It feels really good to finish something I have been working so hard on. I'm still technically on

schedule because I was supposed to finish my third story today. But I think I will go off schedule, I need to focus on editing the stories I have on the table. I know that I can get at least 4 stories but I need to take some time to edit what I have. This is something I can teach my students as well. I want them to be able to pace themselves when writing. I want them to be able to take a break without feeling like they will fall behind.

15 July 2018

I finished the second draft of Migration today! I know I didn't do absolutely everything on the list that I was sent but I feel that I did a ton of work on it. I'm hoping that I did some of the big fixes I needed to do on it. The ending, while a little similar, changed dramatically. I hope I make Cole seem more like a real person instead of a plot point. The ending also might be a little vague, but I know this story is nowhere near done. I sent an email to my committee and I hope to hear back from someone soon. Both Tammy and Melissa are out of the office for July so it's unlikely that I will hear back from them any time soon. I also sent them The Turning. I think like that story the most. The journal format makes for a really interesting way to tell a story.

Moving forward, I am going to take a break from writing new content. Prof Martin told me to expect the edits for The Survival this week, so I want to focus on the revisions for that story before writing something else. That way I'm not focusing on too many things and I can put more work into my reading list. I meant to work on that this weekend but I got caught up in finishing my stories so it didn't happen. Hopefully this week or next weekend I can get working on that more.

25 July 2018

My thesis has really taken a backseat since I finished *The Turning*. I got a response back from Prof Martin really quickly though. He gave me some things to think about and I am going to write about them here. This weekend I hope to do some serious work on my reading list. Prof Martin asked me about my feelings on Migration and the characters. For the most part, I am comfortable with a majority of the story. I know that there are some inaccuracies and some things don't quite line up. Some of those things are why not migrating is so dangerous. I know that I kind of leave that aspect of the story really vague. I think it's because I don't quite know why either. I need not migrating to be a big deal because that makes Cole so interesting as a character. If it was a minor crime, then Cole's character wouldn't be as interesting as it is. I like the scenes between Emily and Lina. They feel really natural to me and I owe that to the fact that they are based off of how my friends and I interact.

The biggest part I am uncertain about is the ending. I really like the scene of everyone on The Hills around the fire, and I want to tell Cole's story at that point, but I just don't know if that should be the ending. I am conflicted about ending the story there, or including an epilogue on where Cole is the next year; he might be arrested or still living the same life. I'm not sure.

I was also asked about the characters and how they might be the same person. I don't see that. I tried to make Lina and Cole different, but I can understand if Emily and Lina appear the same. Now that I think about it, maybe they are similar people. They are all teenagers looking to find their place in the world. Cole is trying to find his place and live the life his parents couldn't. Lina and Emily are looking for a bit of summer fun and find a sort of adventure to go along with it. In my original sketch of those three characters

I describe them all. Lina: enjoys Migration because it provides exploration and change, she has both parents, a brother, and uses Migration as a time for family bonding. Cole: wants to travel, good with the ladies, left his parents, rebellious, and seen as dangerous by society. I don't have a description of Emily. My description of Cole does not match up what we see in the story. I made him more of a down to earth awkward but free guy. I didn't want him to have a relationship with Lina or Emily because it felt cliché. I killed off his parents. The only things that I kept the same was the want to travel and the viewed dangerous by society. My description of Lina is a bit vague, but it matches what I have in the story. I tried to make her a typical high schooler and I think I succeeded there.

As for my central idea/ conflict, I'm not too sure about that. Maybe my central idea is freedom? I think Lina talks a bit about how her mom can be a helicopter mom. With Cole, the idea of freedom fits perfectly. In the second version of the story, we see Cole struggling to hide his true self. He wants to be free in society and not worry about getting caught or killed. Other than that, I'm not sure if I can answer the question any more. I'm going to do more work on these questions and hopefully have more answers on the questions about the central idea.

28 July 2018

I finally had some time to look over everything Prof Martin sent to me in response to *The Survival*. It seems that this story needs a ton of work in terms of plot and continuity. I'm willing to put in the work and I really, really want to but my committee doesn't think that it's worth it right now. It also seems that I need to work on my narration skills. In *The Survival*, I seem rely heavily on dialogue when narration might be the best way to move the story forward. I want to put the work into the story, but I'm not sure if

that's the smartest move. On the other hand, I am really looking forward to hearing their feedback on *The Turning*. I know that it is not without flaws, but I feel that it is better put together than *The Survival*. I think I am going to wait until we have our video conference before continuing work on fiction. In the meantime, I really need to strap down and do some work on my reading list, because it is nowhere near done.

11 August 2018

I can't believe I didn't journal after my video chat with Profession Martin. We had a great conversation about my stories, where I should go with *The Survival* and what I should do with everything. I just did a bit of work on my reading list and I think I finally figured out how to really get some work done on it. I will pick on book on the list every time I sit down to work on it and then just write about that book until I feel that I'm done. It seems to work out well and it's making the whole task way less daunting. I just got an email from the honors associates about the rest of my thesis project. I guess I need to meet with them at some point to just figure out where things are going and what to do. I don't think it will be too bad. Although I just realized that the school year is fast approaching. Especially since I am going up 4 days earlier than I thought. I know that I can get this done and tackle everything I need to. It will be nice being back at school because I will have all of my committee there.

14 September 2018

Wow, it has been some time since I've done a journal. This is due to the fact that it has been some time since I have done some solid work on my thesis. But today, that changed a little bit. Yesterday, I met with Prof Martin to talk a bit about my latest story:

The Turning. We mostly talked about revising it to have more of a character's voice. Today I did a bit of that, but I didn't go too in depth about it. I have a whole bunch of other homework I need to do this week as well. I have also been doing some work on my reading list. It is due on the 28th of September and I am almost done. The only thing that is stressing me out is that Prof Ladenheim will be out of the office next week and that's when I planned on sending it to her and doing revisions. I know that I'll be able to do it though. I am planning on having a committee meeting sometime within the next two weeks to just update everyone. I also planning on doing some solid work this weekend.

28 September 2018

I haven't been doing a ton of work on the stories, and I think that's why I haven't been journaling often. I've been focusing a lot of my work on the reading list, which I finally finished yesterday! It feels really nice to have a finished draft. It's one less thing hanging over my head. Now I need to start working on the Artist Statement and revise the stories one more time. I know that I can do it. I just need to buckle down and get the work done. I also need to create some sort of presentation for the defense itself. I'm getting nervous just thinking about it. I know that I am going to do great, but I can't wait to get it over with.

25 October 2018

I have totally forgotten to work on my journal, mostly because I've been doing so much work on my thesis and my other school work. I started working with Paige Mitchell on my one of my stories and it has been loads of help. She has given me advice to make the story more believable and realistic. Having an hour a week dedicated to looking

closer at my story has given me motivation to keep working on it. I've been super excited to go back through it and make it better than it was. I can feel my writing improving and I love that I'm excited about it. I'm a little worried that I won't get everything done in time for the defense, but I know that I can do it. I just have to keep working hard and striving to do the best that I can do. I know I can get the reading list done, but the Artist Statement is going to give me a bit more trouble; mostly because I know I'll need more than one draft. I got this, just need to keep working.

30 October 2018

I finished the second draft of *The Survival!* I'm super happy with how it turned out. I have some comments from Paige that I should probably look at but I'm not sure if I'll get to them. I really need to start focusing on putting everything together and finishing up my loose ends. Everything is due in 17 days and that's crazy. It's going to go by super-fast. I know I can do it, but it's going to take a lot of work. I really need to work on my reading list, I think I'm going to work on it with Paige tomorrow, I hope she's okay with that. Mostly likely there won't be an issue.

2 November 2018

I have finished the stories for my thesis! It feels really good to have a large chunk of that done. I also think I have finished my reading list, I'm just not sure what else I can do for it, so I think that I am going to call it done. So right now, the only thing I need to keep working on is my reading list. I also need to worry about formatting everything, but that will come easy (I hope). With *The Turning*, I went back through it and really tried to give my character more of his own voice. I never say the gender of the narrator, but in my

mind they are male. This is something I'll talk more about in my artist statement. My defense is in 28 days and counting, and I'm surprised I'm not more worried about it than I am. I know I'll get nervous; I think right now I'm just so overwhelmed with other stuff going on that I don't have the time. I hope I can get a few drafts of my artist statement in, that way it feels more secure to me in what I need. I know I can do this.

7 November 2018

I finally finished my reading list and the only big thing I have left is my artist statement. I'm feeling pretty good about it, the only thing I'm worried about getting to the 20 pages. I'm at about ten right now, but I'm running out of topics to discuss. I already talked about all of my stories and I'm getting into connecting it all to teaching. Hopefully Paige will have some advice for me going forward.

13 November 2018

I have finished! I think and I hope. I have written everything I need to have written and compiled it into its own Word Document. It feels really, really good to have everything finished. I'm so proud of all of the work that I have done. I can't wait to share it with everyone. If you are reading this: thank you for coming on this journey with me. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

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Kathleen M. Perry was born in Sparta, Wisconsin on July 19th, 1997. She was raised all over the country, as a result of having a father serving in the military, and graduated from Bow High School in 2015. Majoring in secondary education, Kathleen has a concentration in English. She is a member of Kappa Kappa Psi and Kappa Delta Pi.

Upon graduation, Kathleen hopes to move to Southern Maine and explore the many teaching opportunities available in Portland and the Greater Portland Area.