



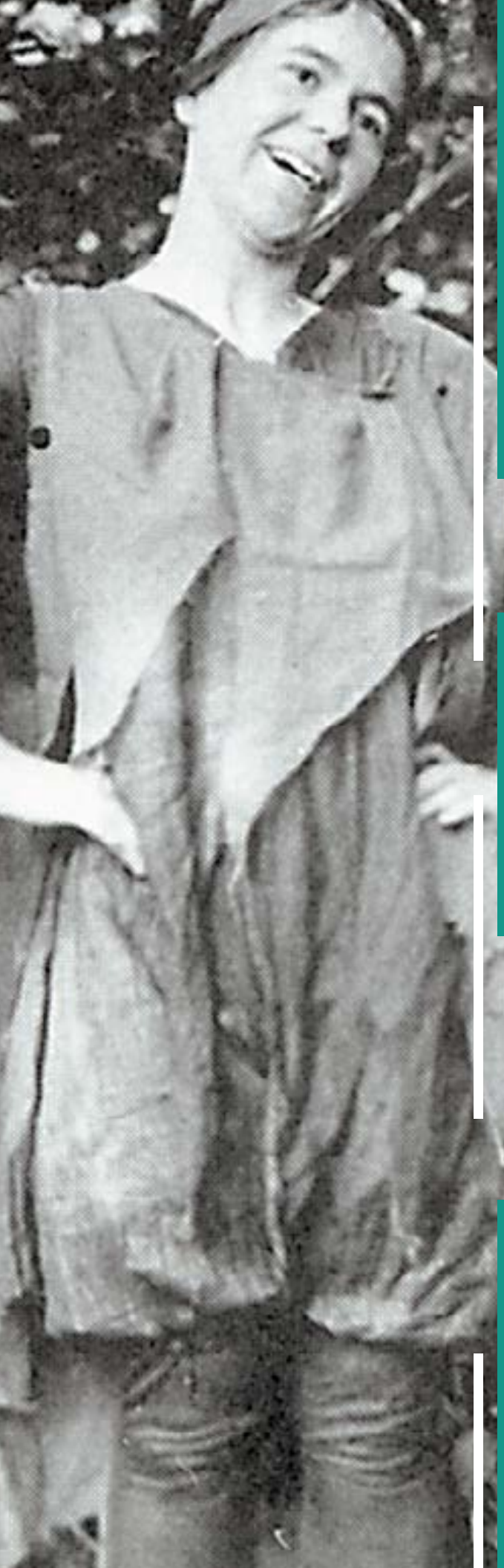
LAKE ERIE
COLLEGE

DAWN POWELL PRIZE IN CREATIVE WRITING



KATE CARTER AWARDS

FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE CORE WRITING



DAWN POWELL PRIZE IN CREATIVE WRITING

About Dawn Powell

The award's namesake, author Dawn Powell, attended Lake Erie College from 1914 - 1918 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. During her time at LEC, Powell edited and wrote for the College's literary publication and was active in theater. By the time of her death in 1965, she had written 16 novels, nine plays and numerous short stories.



KATE CARTER AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE CORE WRITING

Named for Professor Kate Carter, who was a creative writer, a poet, an artist and a much loved and long serving adjunct professor in the Lake Erie College Department of English, these awards honor Professor Carter's legacy of academic rigor, student engagement, thoughtful mentoring and commitment to excellent writing.

About Kate Carter:

Kate Carter was an award-winning poet and recipient of an Ohio Arts Council Fellowship in Poetry. She received her MA in Creative Writing from Antioch University McGregor and taught in the Psychology department at Antioch UNiversity New England and the English and Women's Studies departments at New Mexico State Univeristy. She is the author of two chapbooks of poetry, *Covenant* and *Lodestar: Night Sky*.

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DAWN POWELL AWARDS

DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR POETRY, UNDERGRADUATE

FIRST PLACE (TIE)
MACKENZIE MEEKER

“IPHIGENIA TO KING AGAMEMNON”

Father, my father, King Agamemnon
Why have you slit my pearly throat?
My innocent blood coats my bridal clothes.
The mortal body crumpled on the pyre;
My young soul ascends into the fire.
Mother, your wife, the Queen, Clytemnestra
Feathered me in kisses and glittering Jewels.
Oh, how mother and I were jolly fools.
Mother with her gentle fingers braiding my hair.
Weaving in words of a Hera prayer.
I was to be married to the strong warrior Achilles.
What an honor for a young girl of only thirteen.
The wedding was on a glistening beach, yet
The water was still and bleak.
The hefty war boat that homed your men;
How stagnant the sails had been.
Achilles, my husband, was nowhere to be found.
My young blue eyes met the body of a sharp blade.
My mother cried my name;
Iphigenia, Iphigenia, Iphigenia.
The wind, once stagnant, had begun to make haste.
How the bleached white sails began to race.
You lunged at me with only a glance,
You pierced my throat;
the blade burned my flesh.
Father, my father, King Agamemnon
Why have you slit my pearly throat?

DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR POETRY, UNDERGRADUATE

FIRST PLACE (TIE)

NATHANIEL WHITE

“VELVET”

It’s a velvet touch that demands the most of you. It demands you be of its kind. Even if
the hair
and the eyes
and the lips
and the words tell you otherwise.

The touch makes you deathly aware. Of differences
of desires
of the gaps in your
world of how can you be so blind. Velvet red velvet makes you
understand how tears and blood can look different and taste
altogether the same.

The velvet mornings that come wrapped in clouds make a thousand I love yous feel like
the hollow ringing between your ears.

It’s the way you feel so far when you touch me and the way you only feel close
when you leave Velvet red velvet
red like a paint like a stain like dye in this blue
blood in this pool of clear hues. It knows me not to be of its kind. It’s a velvet touch that
demands
all of you. It leaves nothing left behind.
of you
of me
of us
of any



DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR FICTION, UNDERGRADUATE

FIRST PLACE
MACKENZIE MEEKER

“THE BURDEN OF GRIEF AT A FUNERAL”

An overcoming presence greeted me on the day of my grandpa's funeral. A figure lurked in the corner, an entity that had become part of me, Grief. Grief wandered over taking a seat next to me, they smiled at me with the whitest teeth I had ever seen, which drew such a weird contrast between their complexion, a color I couldn't place. Grief's long fingers wrapped around my forearm. Their touch felt ice cold compared to the warmth of the bodies in the room. They turned to me, and their cracked lips began to move, but I couldn't hear them. All I could focus on was the black depths of their eyes. It was as if I was looking into space itself, but all the stars had died out. Grief's long limbs clouded my vision as their legs swiveled up and down. Grief continued to speak, but all I could focus on was the harsh funeral home lights that dared to melt me down like a wax candle. The air felt stale; my throat begged to cough away this dry feeling. I looked at Papa resting in his coffin and sipped the gross coffee from the funeral home. The paper cup burned my hand and reminded me this was all too real.

I finally heard Grief when they began to laugh. They laughed and the sound of breaking glass pierced my ears. This unnatural noise electrocuted me out of my rapidly formulating thoughts, and my brain was zapped into silence.

The silence broke, and Grief's speech filled every corner of the room.

"I really cannot thank you enough."

Grief looked like someone who had won the Powerball jackpot. For a second, their black holes of eyes looked bright.

"Why are you thanking me?"

"Well, you see, I am always on the lookout for expanding my business; it is hard these days to find a willing, healthy heart from a young miss such as yourself!"

My heart. This thing took my heart, and now it's thanking me like a maniac.

"I am sorry, you took my heart?"

"Not yet, for now, you signed the contract that gives ownership of your heart to me.

I dug the toe of my black flat into the nauseating pattern of the wake room floor. "I refuse! I am not giving you my heart!"

“You signed it with blood. You can't back out now!"

Blood? When the hell did I do that? Did this thing cut my finger open when I wasn't looking? That makes no sense; I can't be a human without a heart. A human without a heart is like a car without an engine. It doesn't make sense. This doesn't make sense,

"I need my heart. You can't expect me to function without it?"

Grief's facade cracked briefly when its thin lips slightly dropped to the side. Grief's sunny demeanor faded.

It was the longest mere seconds of my life.

"Well, you don't want to feel anymore now that your Papa is gone."

Grief's statement left me suffocated, and I felt these words poisoning my skin. I was so itchy, I couldn't stand it. He sucked a big breath in and squinted at me.

"It doesn't matter what you want anymore."

I gasped and looked around, hoping no one noticed me. Everyone was unaware of this stranger who was patronizing me.

Grief is all inside of us; waiting for the moment, they can genuinely break us down like acid. I felt like I was going to melt through the floor. I never imagined such a monster would be sitting next to me.

I let Grief win and was paying for it, but I can try to worm my way out of it.

"Now that's just cruel; I don't remember giving you consent."

"I asked you when I sat down, and you gave me your finger willingly."

"That can't be right!"

I wasn't even aware. But I remember how the long finger clenched my forearm and reached my hand.

"Now, don't be such a sour puss and accept that I got your heart fair and square. Grief barred his opal teeth once again with a smile that was so inhuman, I shivered in the hot room.

"You ought to have been paying attention."

I could see my hand was bleeding, and it had gotten all over Grief's leg. My blood was on my own pants, and for a moment, Grief and I were connected. We participated in a blood oath to which I had no consent. I would rather die than be connected to this monster. God, how I wanted to escape. There was no one left to save me. I thought I had a chance to save myself, but now I have dug my own grave.

"You are no good, monster."

Grief sighed and grabbed my bloody thigh.

"I ain't no monster; you are just foolish."

I stared at Grief wide-eyed, and the anger was beginning to sear every nerve in my body. Grief continued on their tangent.

"You ought to understand that a young girl like you is bound to be taken advantage of." I could feel Grief moving their hand up my arm and the minutes of my human existence was beginning to fade.

Grief breathed into my ear, and I couldn't feel the hair on the back of my neck stand up in protest.

"Now, my girl, this is gonna be so painless; it'll be like none of this ever happened." Grief paused momentarily, and the room began to spin into a tornado of blurry faces and a melting pot of colors.

"Nothing will ever hurt you again."

Grief's long fingers pierced my bicep as his lips were still on my ear. I could feel the blood begin to drip down my arm.

"Now, patience girl, I will need more blood from you."

"It's just like a little what y'all humans call tax for your heart here."

I couldn't even feel anymore; I couldn't care less about what Grief wanted. They could have my left leg if they so pleased. Grief was taking the core of what made me human, and it was fading away. Every drop of blood that dripped on the dreary floor was one more step to becoming nothing, absolutely nothing. Their lips moved to my cheek and felt like icicles cutting my skin: Grief's hand resting on my sternum.

"I am about to bestow upon you a gift that only a select few humans receive!" Grief smiled so wide that I thought their face would rip apart.

At first, when Grief dug their fingers into my chest, I felt nothing. I simply thought that was it, but then I felt everything. It was as if a forest fire had started in the room, and no firefighters were coming to save me.

The searing pain in my chest felt like a million bees hacking at my skin.

My sweat dripped off of me onto the bloody floor.

With my buzzing hands, I clenched my teeth and held my head in place.

"I..am...I..Dying..?"

Grief held my heart in their hands and began to lick it. Grief turned to me with my blood all over its face.

"No, you are gonna be going through a transformation!"

"A..What..."

Grief sounded out transformation like I was stupid, but it's hard to understand when your head is splitting in two.

“A Tran...ssss...forrrr...mationnn.”

“Oh..how..long..”

Grief petted my heart in its hand.

My heart. My heart was in this creature's hands, beating like it was taking its last breath. "What..are..you.."

"Oh, hush now, Grief cooed”

Grief took my heart and held it to their chest. My life was absorbed into their flat chest and left behind a ring of vermillion. The funeral home looked like a crime scene. I had witnessed my homicide, but the world hadn't gone black; I was still here. I was feeling every human emotion and pain at once; I was contributing to my final moments on earth.

Through my frayed neurons and lack of working vision, Grief grabbed me once more. "Now listen here and listen good." I will take these memories of you here, papa, and bear the brunt of your pain."
"That's my business; I take away the pain and bear it myself."

Their voice, now loud and impatient."You may think I am a monster, but you should see me as a hero." Grief stood up on their long skinny legs and wiped the last of my blood that they had bathed in. "Listen here girl, you're gonna go to the restroom and clean yourself up." I looked down at the crimson reminder of my pain that had flooded the ugly floor. The monster walked away before turning and smiling.

"You'll like what you see in the mirror."

I was met with one more chilling yet bright smile. They turned to glance at Papa once last time, and for a moment, the creature finally had nothing to say.

I stood up and felt the dizziness consume me. I dug my nails into the wooden chair and hunched over. I felt my shirt clinging to my entire useless mangled torso. The drying, sticky blood made bile collect in my throat. I made my way past the tumultuous crowd and found the restroom. The smell of the funeral home was caked in this restroom and the smell of death was everywhere. I looked into the mirror, and I couldn't see myself. I looked completely different; I looked like Grief. My eyes were sunken and black. My lips were thin and cracked. My complexion didn't exist. I was now so long-limbed that I feared I would clobber someone by accident. God, what if someone comes in and sees me? I fell to the floor and felt the cold, wet stone underneath me. I wanted to sob, I wanted to scream, I wanted somebody to blame. Nothing came out; I had become nothing.

I stared at the floor and felt a hand on my shoulder. It was a frigid hand I knew well. "Now look at you, ain't you such a pretty girl!"

"I thought you left?"

Grief looked at me for a moment. It was so hard to read their eyes.

"You are coming with me,"

Grief dragged me up by my long arm and wrapped his own arm around my shoulder. "You are now my business partner!"

"What?"

"Don't worry. Your real body is still sitting in the viewing room."

Grief patted the top of my now hairless head.

"The version of you ain't gonna feel nothing ever again."

Grief stared into the mirror behind me.

"You saved your human self from the ultimate pain of losing your dear papa, and don't worry, you'll forget everything about your human life eventually."

I stared at Grief, dumbfounded at what my life had become.

I didn't belong here anymore; I didn't have a choice.

I took Grief's hand, and felt warm, even soothing; they led me to the doors. The light surrounded us. I thought I was crying, but it was just the rain that was kissing my face. I now understood that I had become the burden that I feared so much. I abandoned my emotions and physical toils of this earth, I was now Grief.

Grief and I now burden's together.

This was the burden of Grief at a funeral.

DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR FICTION, UNDERGRADUATE

SECOND PLACE

VINCENT VITALE

“BRACE”

David (the son)
Siobhan (the caretaker)
Phoebe (the mother)
Paul (the father)
Adam (the friend)



Act One: Scene 1

(On stage we see a minimal set. Two rooms divided by a door. In the one there is a bed next to a backlit window. Under the window sits a small table and chair. Next to the door on the bedroom side is a wooden chest which is stacked high with books. And on the upstage side of the door there is a visible cross on the “wall.” In the corner of the room sits an untouched wheelchair. On the other side of the door sits a kitchen table, and kitchen wall phone on the proscenium arch. Behind the table is an upstage door presumably leading to another part of the house. And the wing door functions as the house's front door.)
(When the lights come up we see Paul sitting at the kitchen table with a newspaper and a cup of coffee. David in the other room is sitting up in bed and looking out the window.)

[enter Phoebe]

Phoebe- *(placing down a plate of breakfast)* Here you are dear. *(kissing Paul on the forehead, walking into David’s room where the door stands ajar.)* Here you are David. *(placing the food on the table, David never looks at her.)*

(Closing the door she then goes and sits next to Paul.)

Paul- How is he doing today?

Phoebe- Much the same as usual unfortunately. The doctor promised we should be seeingimprovement by now.

Paul- Phoebe, if he was going to get better it would have happened a long time past. Besides, we have a lot to be grateful for. I had a friend at work who’s daughter is still in one of those machines down in Cincinnati.

Phoebe- But what are we going to do about his legs? He still isn’t able to walk at all. And I don’t know how much longer we can keep him away from school.

Paul- Don’t you worry about that. I’ve been down to see his teachers and they all say the most important thing is for him to stay in bed, get healthy, and read to his heart's content. *(he slides his half eaten plate to her)* And please Phoebe eat something. It isn’t going to help anyone if you keel over from malnutrition. *(as she begins to eat Paul finishes his cup, stands up, and kisses her on the head.)* I’m off, say goodbye to him for me.

[exit Paul though off stage and then the through the wing door]

(Once Phoebe finishes eating she moves all of the kitchen dishes off.)

Phoebe- David, I’m going to be off to work soon. *(noticing he had only mixed around the food on his plate)* I expect you to eat that before Ms. Siobhan arrives, understood?

David- Yes mother.

Phoebe- Oh it is a lovely day outside. Maybe you can ask her to wheel you out onto the porch? Then you can get some fresh air and sunshine.

David- I am not going in that thing.

Phoebe- Now David, it is no good being stubborn. Can’t you atleast try? You’re only expected to use the thing while your legs regain strength.

David- “Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”

Phoebe- I wish you would stop quoting that passage, it’s macabre. Well, do you have everything you need?

David- Can you grab me my copy of Invisible Man from on top of my trunk?

Phoebe- *(She grabs it for him)* Now then, have a good day while I’m gone. *(kisses him on the cheek, whilst leaving…)* Love you. **[exit]**

David- *(with a click of the wing door)* Love you too. *(lights fade.)*

Act One: Scene 2

(Lights come up. We see David reading his book.)
David- *(puts a bookmark in the book and sets it on the table. He then throws over the covers off his legs. He swings himself over, as if to get out of bed.)*
(At the same time while he is doing this we can see Siobhan walking to the wing door and going through.)

[enter Siobhan]

Siobhan- I'm here David. I brought you some fresh fruit from the market... *(David is trying to get himself back under the covers but is struggling to move quickly.)* ...Your mother told me you liked oranges so I tried to grab a few. We should really try and go outside today, the weather is truly lovely. *(she goes and opens David's bedroom door and sees him midway getting back in bed)* What on earth David! What were you trying to do? You could have fallen at on your face. *(she helps him swing his legs over)*

David- Thank you.

Siobhan- Now, what exactly were you trying to do?

David- I needed to go to the bathroom.

Siobhan- What do you think I'm here for? Why do you think your parents have asked me to check on you in the middle of the day?

David- I thought I could manage it on my own.

Siobhan- By the looks of you you were managing very well. *(she walks over to the bathroom door and opens it. Then comes back and rolls David's wheelchair to his bedside)* Here, get in.

David- I'm not getting into that thing.

Siobhan- Fine, then what are you going to do? Lay in bed and piss yourself?

David- No, stop arguing with me. Just help me to my feet, and help me get there. *(getting David to his feet)* "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

Siobhan- *(David is to his feet)* Your mother needs to get you a new book. *(She has David's arms around her neck and she trudges him towards the bathroom door.)*

David- Unfortunately he isn't one for writing new works.

Siobhan- Ha ha, a comedian born every day. *(We can see her setting David on the toilet. His legs are visible from the doorway. She pulls his boxers around his ankles and closes the door as she exits.)* Are you sure you don't want to go outside? It really looks like a sunny day.

David- I don't want to.

Siobhan- Please then David explain it to me, why are you so obstinate? *(David knocks on the door. She goes in and helps him pull his underwear back up. With a flush and the sound of a sink we see them emerge.)*

David- Because Siobhan I don't want people to see me like this. I would prefer to remain until I can walk out that door on my own.

Siobhan- *(whilst walking him back to his room)* And if that day never comes?

David- *(as getting put back in bed)* Then I guess I am to remain in this bed for the rest of my days.

Siobhan- *(she goes and grabs an orange and throws it to him)* At least eat this stubborn.

David- Thank you.

Siobhan- And before I leave think of this Mr. Hollieness "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." Proverbs 28:13

David- I don't like Proverbs.

Siobhan- All the same. Anything else?

David- Yeah actually, *(grabbing a letter from his table drawer)* can you give this to Adam on your walk home? I don't want him to be worried about me.

Siobhan- He doesn't write back much does he?

David- Not yet, but I suppose he will soon. Probably busy at school. **[Siobhan pats his hand and exits]** *(When Siobhan exits the wing door, we see Adam with his bookbag walking past the door.)*

Siobhan- Oh, Adam! Hold on a second. *(Adam stops walking)* Here, this is for you from David.

Adam- Oh, thanks.

Siobhan- Mabie you can pop your head in and say hello to him? I know that would bring him so much joy...

Adam- No, sorry, not today. I have too much homework to get to.

Siobhan- Maybe some other time then?

Adam- Yeah, maybe. Bye. *(He turns and continues his walking.)*

[Adam exit]

Siobhan- Goodbye. *(she turns and goes out opposite)* **[Siobhan exit]** *(Lights fade, blackout.)*

Act One: Scene 3

(Paul is back at the kitchen table. David is looking out his window which light has waned. Phoebe comes rushing in with a dinner pyrex.)

Phoebe- *(at David’s door)* Dinner is on the table. Are you coming out to eat with us? Or are you going to eat in here?

David- Here.

(Phoebe goes back to the table and makes three plates of food. She carries one in to David.)

Phoebe- I really wish you would come out and eat with us.

David- And how exactly do you expect me to do that?

Phoebe- David, we got you a wheelchair for a reason. Can’t you just use it this once so we can spend some time with you?

David- No, I can’t. I’m not going to be some little baby that has to be pushed here and there! I’m not going to do it!

(Paul rises to his feet and walks into David’s room, avoiding eye contact.)

Paul- Now David I know you are upset, and I know you're angry, but you can at least try. All any of us want is for you to get better. But until that time comes you must stop arguing with us. As your mother said, we got you that chair for a reason. Now take your lot on the chin and get your butt in that chair.

David- *(looking at the wall)* No.

Paul- I wasn’t asking David. Get your ass moving.

David- I can’t! *(David throws the blankets off his legs)*

(When he does that Paul turns to face the door, so as to not look at his son's legs.) Look at me! Look at me for once! This is the first time you have spoken to me, let alone been in the same room as me in months. And you don’t think I don’t notice when you give mom the slip every single breakfast so you don’t even have to say goodbye to me!

(Paul turns and looks at David)

Paul- Do you think this has been easy for us? For any of us?

David- For mom, I can tell it’s hard. I wouldn’t know for you because you act as though I’m not here, you act as if I’m dea...

Phoebe- Stop! *(Phoebe, clutching her chest, runs out and sits down at the table, bracing her hand on her chair.)*

Paul- I can’t even believe you right now. Don’t you see what you just did? Your mother has been crying herself to sleep every night over this. And every day she wakes up and puts on a brave face to take care of you. Well, say something!

David- What do you want me to say dad? I can’t easily apologize for it. Do you think I wanted to get sick? Do you think I want to be stuck in my bed day after day? Do you even know how embarrassed I feel that I need help to go to the bathroom? Or to have to wait to ask someone to get me a book that is just across the room? And you know what, I guess you grow a sentimental perspective of the things you can’t have. But this isn’t something tender for me, it is my fucking life!

Paul- I’ve had enough of this! *(sliding over the wheelchair)* You are getting out of that bed right now! *(Paul slides his arms under his son trying to pick him up. But David screams out in pain, so he stops trying.)* You know what, have it your way!

[exit Paul]

(Paul storms out of the room, slamming the door, and walks off stage. Phoebe stays seated at the table. And David lies in bed, whimpering in pain.)

(Lights fade, blackout.)

Act One: Scene 4

(It is afternoon time. David sitting up in bed can be seen with a book in one hand, while the other he begins to run his back with. He grimaces and stops.)

[enter Siobhan]

Siobhan- Hello, David I’m here. *(she peeks her head in his door)* How are we feeling today?

David- Fine I guess.

Siobhan- Do you need to go to the bathroom before I give you your lunch?

David- Yes please.

Siobhan- Don’t worry, I’m not even going to fight with you about the chair today. *(She moves over his covers and slides his legs off the edge of the bed. As David’s feet lower to touch the floor Siobhan places her hand on his back to support him. She notices he grimaces in pain.)* Are you okay?

David- Yes, I just really need to pee.

Siobhan- Okay... *(carries/draggs him like before)* You know you aren’t the lightest thing in the world. *(she sits David down as before and closes the bathroom door.)*

David- *(from inside the bathroom)* Matthew 7:1-2 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Or in secular terms don’t be a pot telling the kettle its black.

Siobhan- If it wasn’t for the fact that I find you amusing I would take that as an insult. Done in there?

David- Just about.

Siobhan- So what do you want for lunch? Does a salad sound good?

David- Fine by me. *(She goes in and gets him off the toilet, flush, and sink. And helps to trudge him back to his bed. When she moves to shift his legs back on he grimaces again.)*

Siobhan- Now David you have got to tell me what is wrong. Twice now you have been in pain when I’ve brushed your back.

David- *(reluctantly)* Alright. *(He turns himself sideways so his back is mostly towards the audience. He raises his shirt to show a large red sore.)*

Siobhan- Oh my God David! This has got to hurt badly. Good thing we caught it early.

David- It was starting to feel sore a week ago. And then when my dad tried to move me it flared up severely.

Siobhan- Do you know where your mother would keep peppermint salve?

David- Top right drawer in the bathroom.
(Siobhan goes and grabs it from the bathroom. She returns and applies it to David’s back. She then pats his head and walks off stage. After a moment she re-enters with two plates of salad. She pulls out David’s table chair and sits down next to him to eat together.)
You know I don’t say it often. But thank you, really, it means a lot to me that you come to make sure I’m alright.

Siobhan- What are godmothers for. *(They sit and eat for a moment.)* David, can I ask you a question?

David- Shoot.

Siobhan- How come you are so religious? I’ve known a lot of people in my life, and I don’t think I can think of one who wouldn’t be shuddered by what you have gone through.

David- That is a simple one, Jeremiah 29:11. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Even if I don’t understand why, there has to be some reason for this. I just try to have faith in that that's all.
(They finish eating. Siobhan collects the plaits and walks them off stage. Returning and standing in David’s doorway.)

Siobhan- Anything else before I head out?

David- Another letter for Adam. *(he hands it to her)*

Siobhan- You know, you are an extraordinary young man. *(She kisses his forehead and walks out through the wing door.)* Adam!
(She catches him just before he leaves through the fare door. She catches up to him.) You know who this is from. Don’t drag on his hope. *(She hands him the letter and she walks off the other direction.)*

[exit Siobhan]

(Adam looks at the letter for a minute and then walks off.)

[exit Adam] (lights fade, blackout)

Act One: Scene 5

(It is breakfast. Paul is at the table. David is still sleeping in bed. Phoebe walks in with two plates of food. She sits Paul's down, and then she tiptoes in and places David's on his table. Returning to her seat before waking him.)

Paul- *(after a moment of silence)* Good breakfast.

Phoebe- *(after another moment)* So this is how it's going to be? Were just not going to talk about it? He wasn't lying, you know. That was the first time you have been in to see him sense his late August. And now look, it's November.

(silence)

Paul- I can't get it out of my head. What he said to me, "I guess you grow a sentimental perspective of the things you can't have." Instead of being there for him, caring for him, loving him I been a fucking coward. I delude myself into believing everything is alright. That if I don't acknowledge the problems that face us, that face him, then they aren't real. What kind of a father does that make me? What kind of a man, does that make me?

Phoebe- *(reaching over to hold Paul's hand)* That makes you human. No one can understand how they will react when this type of thing hits a family. It hasn't been easy for me, but I have held strong so that we can all learn how to be strong again. We both work so that we can save, save to take care of David.

Paul- I just hope he doesn't hate me.

Phoebe- *(gets up and hugs Paul)* He doesn't. There is not an ounce of hatred in that boy's body. And even if he doesn't understand now why we are doing what we are doing, I know that he will be grateful.

Paul- How did your call go with David's doctor?

Phoebe- Fine, a lot of medical mumbo jumbo that I'm not going to bore you with. But he did suggest a new option, well an option that we originally said no to, but I think we should reconsider it.

Paul- I was hoping it wasn't going to come to it but I think you're right. Anything at this point is good for David, especially if it is an improvement on his quality of life.

Phoebe- I was hoping you were going to say that. It is a relief honestly.

Paul- Why?

Phoebe- Oh, because I already told the doctor to order it for David. His birthday isn't too far away at any rate...

Paul- Why would you make a purchase like that without consulting me?

Phoebe- Well, are you pleased?

Paul- Yes.

Phoebe- Then the matter is settled.
(Paul gets up from his chair and walks over to David's open door.)

Paul- *(whispering to Phoebe)* He's still sleeping.

Phoebe- Why don't we go and check on him? *(Phoebe gets to her feet and she and Paul walk halfway from the door towards David's bed.)* He is so precious when he is sleeping.

Paul- Not a care in the world.

Phoebe- I wonder if we should leave him food for when he wakes up.

Paul- At this rate it won't be long before Siobhan comes... God bless you David, I just hope he knows we are doing the best that we can.

Phoebe- I'm sure he does. Love you, sweet dreams. *(she kisses him on the cheek.)*
(Phoebe and Paul tiptoe out of David's room and Phoebe quietly shuts the door.) I was wondering Paul if you wanted to walk with me to work today?

Paul- It would be my pleasure my lady.

[exit Paul and Phoebe]

(Paul and Phoebe walk arm and arm off stage, walking out of the wing door, and then off.)

(Once off the audience can see David slowly sit up in his bed. He looks towards the door and touches his cheek. Then he lays back down.)

(lights fade, blackout)

Act One: Scene 6

(When the light comes back up we see Siobhan sitting at the kitchen table reading David's book. David is in the bathroom taking a bath.)

Siobhan- How is it going in there? Don't forget to scrub behind your ears this time.

David- That was one time, one time Siobhan and you have never let it go.

Siobhan- And you have never forgotten sense. But seriously, how is it going in there?

David- Good... *(pulls drain plug)* I am going to be done in a minute. These are my favorite days.

Siobhan- Why is that?

David- Because under the water allows my legs to float. And even though I can't move them, under the water gives me the feeling of moving them on my own again.

Siobhan- That's a way of looking at things on the bright side. What has got you in such a cherry mood today?

David- Well we've got Thanksgiving coming up, and then there is my birthday the day after. And I'm hoping maybe because it will be a holiday break of some sort that Adam will pay me a visit.

Siobhan- Well... that is forsure a lot to look forward to.

David- And don't tell my mom or dad that I overheard this but I think they are getting me something special for my birthday.

Siobhan- Your secret is safe with me.

David- I'm done in here. *(Siobhan gets to her feet and walks into David's room and rolls over his wheelchair. She locks it next to the bathroom door, walks in, and closes the door.)*

Siobhan- Thank you again for agreeing to allow me to roll you back to your bedroom today. It is a lot less stress on my back.

David- And mine as well. I didn't fancy on getting dropped again.

Siobhan- *(opens the door and puts David in the chair)* It was one time.

David- And it shall never happen again.

Siobhan- *(getting David back in bed)* Well how nice was that?

David- Very, thank you Siobhan.

Siobhan- Now about this book of yours, (goes and grabs it) I don't get it.

David- What's not to get? A scientist figures out how to turn invisible and then starts using it for not good purposes.

Siobhan- No I understand that, it's just it doesn't seem like your type of literature you know. *(We see Adam enter from floor door left. In his hands is a four inch thick stack of envelopes. He goes and places it by wing door and walks off floor door right.)*

David- I don't exclusively read the bible you know. I read everything and anything non discriminatory. You never know what people can come up with. I once, please don't tell my mother, read a romance novel where the leading lady was in a love triangle with two men at the same time.

Siobhan- Was that the one based in the Louisiana countryside?

David- Yes.

Siobhan- Oh David, that novel is quite unsuitable for a young man. Let alone a man of the Lord.

David- Enough with you.

Siobhan- That reminds me I better be off. I promised one of my girlfriends I'd pop by before four and it's already three thirty. *(As Siobhan walks to exit we see Adam walk up to the wing door and act as though he is about to knock it.)* I'll see you later David!

David- Wait!
(At this moment it feels as though the stage is frozen) Can you grab me my pair of socks? I brought them into the bathroom and forgot them.
(As Siobhan goes and grabs David his socks and helps him put them on, Adam slowly walks off and exits floor door right.)

Siobhan- Alright now, I really must be off.

David- Bye... Oh, don't forget Adam's letter. (she takes the letter)
(Siobhan exits and goes through the wing door. She notices the large stack of letters.)

Siobhan- Oh my goodness! You have got a lot of mail here.
(Siobhan picking up the letters reads the back and notices upon flicking through them that they are all from David to Adam, unopened.)

David- Who are they from?
(Siobhan, horrified by what she is seeing, slowly walks back into the house. Everything is deafeningly quiet as she enters David's room.)
(David happily looks at Siobhan's face, then hands, and back to her face; Siobhan does the mirror.)

Siobhan- *(slowly laying them on David's table)* They're yours.

David- Oh.

Siobhan- David, I don't know what to say. I am so sorr...

David- It's okay Siobhan, you can go. *(teary eyed)*

Siobhan- David I...

David- Leave! Go! Get Out! Leave Me!
(Siobhan is frozen for a second, then turns and quickly exits stage and goes out through wing door and exits through floor left.)

(David in tears turns towards the letters and picks them up. He flips through them pausing moment to moment. Finally as he picks up the one he had clearly sent that day he takes the whole stack and throws them as hard as he can right at the cross with a grunt.)

(lights fade, grand curtain falls, blackout)

Intermission

Act Two: Scene 1

(When the grand curtain rises we see David alone in his room laying in bed away from the door. The letters are still on the ground and the lights are slightly dimmer than before.)

(David slowly sits up. He looks down at the letters on the floor and then the cross on his wall. He then looks down at his covered legs and reveals them. He tries to move them but fails, covering his eyes for a moment with a ugh sound. David then looks back at the cross and shakes his head. He swings his legs over the side of his bed and pushes his feet into the floor trying to stabilize himself. He then pushes himself to his feet and is able to balance for a moment. However, when David attempts to take a step he falls flat on his stomach.)

David- *(looking at the cross)* Bastard!
(David is now on the floor army crawls himself forward, pulling letters towards himself as he approaches the "wall" with the cross. Once he gets there he pounds his fist on the floor as he tries to push himself up.)
God dammit! Why? Why me?
(At this line we see Adam walk in from floor right. He is nervously walking towards the wing front door.)

David- *(when Adam is floor center)* Help! Help me! Somebody! Anybody! (Adams at the door) Please! Help!
(Adam can hear from outside the door and rushes inside. He and David make eye contact. Adam pulls David to his feet and is holding him tightly. David is crying.) Adam, you came back.

Adam- I'm right here David, it's okay, I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I'm not leaving you again.
(Adam helps David to his bed. He then goes around the room and picks up all of the letters, setting them down on David's table, and taking a seat in the chair.) I'm So sorry David. I was staying away because... I really don't know why. Scared, maybe, I just didn't want to hurt you. And I thought maybe if I left you alone to heal then maybe that would be better. But when I returned the letters as soon as I left I knew what I had done was wrong. Because doing it hurt me, and if it hurt me it must have hurt you. And then when I saw you on the floor... I'm so sorry David... I...

David- *(reaches out and grabs Adam's hand)* All that matters to me is that you are here now. And that, you didn't give up on me. You picked me up when I had fallen.

Adam- Well I couldn't just leave you on the floor. *(they both laugh)*

(Adam stands up still holding David's hand and after a moment he leans over and gives David a hug.)
So...

David- So...

Adam- Do you have plans for Thanksgiving tonight?

David- Oh, so that's how it is? Disappear for months and then ask dinner plans?

Adam- I'm so sorry. I forgot myself, I'm so sorry. I can just go if you want. *(stands up)*

David- Sit down, I'm only teasing you. Siobhan is coming over to have dinner with us. Why do you ask?

Adam- I don't know, I was just wondering whether I could stay or not.

David- Oh, so it is all about the food. *(notices Adam's face of concern)* Just joking. Of course you can. But wait, don't you have dinner with your own family?

Adam- Not really, we celebrate during the holiday weekend.

David- That is amazing! Then you will be able to come over for my birthday tomorrow.

Adam- I wouldn't miss it.
(David taps his hand on his bed. Adam takes off his shoes and sits on the bed holding David. Adam grabs a letter from the pile and opens it. He and David silently read the letter letting out a small chuckle.)
(lights fade, blackout)

Act Two: Scene 2

(Around the table sit David, Phoebe, Paul, Adam, and Siobhan. The table has been decorated for Thanksgiving. They are all four joined in hands.)
Phoebe- Lord God, Heavenly Father, bless us and these thy gifts which we receive from thy bountiful goodness, bless the hands that prepared it, and bless the friends we are able to share it with. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Paul- It looks great mother.

Phoebe- I can't take all the credit, if it wasn't for Siobhan here I would have completely forgotten the mash potatoes.

Siobhan- And the gravy, and corn, and stuffing.

Phoebe- Oh, that too.

David- It's wonderful mom.

Adam- I think this is the best turkey I've ever had. Thank you so much for allowing me to join you all, mam, sir.

Paul- It's our pleasure son.

Phoebe- Any friend of David's is always welcome.

Adam- You mean I could have been eating this turkey since I was twelve. *(to David)* You have been holding out.

David- How is this my fault, I can't force you to ask "hey David can I come eat your mom's turkey?" However I shall take the high road. "But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults." Psalm 19:12

Siobhan- For the love of all mighty God David, no more bible verses. I feel like I'm at church and never permitted to leave.

David- Sorry. *(chuckles)*

Paul- So son what are you looking forward to most for your birthday tomorrow?

David- I don't know, I thought it was going to be a quiet birthday. *(pauses and looks at Adam)* But I think I'm most looking forward to being surrounded by friends.

Phoebe- I'll never forget your third birthday, you remember don't you Siobhan?

Siobhan- How could I forget.

David- Mom, please don't!

Adam- Please do!

Phoebe- David’s birthday party was an outside party. And all the kids were running around and having a good time. But then I looked around and I couldn’t see David anyware. I looked for a long time and then I went inside to see if he was there. Loe and behold he was eating his birthday cake by the fistfulls.

Siobhan- I had worked so hard on that cake. Good thing he hadn't found the extra one.
(Everyone bursts into laughter. After a moment David becomes noticeably dizzy.)

Adam- David, are you alright?

David- I’m fine I think. I have just become a bit light headed.

Siobhan- It is most likely the laughing plus the chair. It has been a long time since you sat in a hardback chair like that.

David- Mabie if I go down and lie for a moment...

Phoebe- I think that is for the best. Don’t want you to be shaky for your big day.

Adam- Here. *(Adam stands up and almost throws David over his shoulder. He carries him to his room and helps him get settled into his bed. While he is doing that Paul, Phoebe, and Siobhan are clearing the table off.)* Now you get some rest okay.

David- Are you leaving?

Adam- Yes... But only for a night. I will be here in a jiffy tomorrow.

David- I’ll miss you.

Adam- Then you better hurry up and fall asleep. Then it will feel like time has own when I return.
(He leans over and kisses the top of David’s head, and then russells his hair.) Get some rest, okay.

David- Okay.

(David slides down into bed and Adam walks out of the room shutting the door behind himself. Paul, Phoebe, and Siobhan are all standing between the table and the proscenium wall in conversation.)

Siobhan- Adam, come quick.

Adam- What is it?

Paul- For David’s birthday we have ordered him a special gift that needs to be picked up tomorrow morning and brought here tomorrow afternoon for the party.

Phoebe- And because we will all be here, and because it is a surprise we were wondering whether you could pick it up for us?

Adam- Of course, where do I pick it up?

Phoebe- James and Co. Apothecary, it is next to the butchers. They have a telephone so once you have it, call here and we can help you sneak it in so David is none the wiser.

Adam- Sounds good.

Siobhan- *(to Adam)* I’ll walk out with you. *(Siobhan and David say their goodbyes and walk off stage and out the wing door. Phoebe and Paul sit back down at the table relaxing.)*

Adam- *(pulling the door closed)* Are you baking the cake for tomorrow?

Siobhan- Yes I am. I am so excited for David’s gift aren't you?

Adam- He is going to love it or hate it. But I put my money on him loving it, eventually. *(they laugh)*
(They walk down the steps and are at center floor.)

Siobhan- Thank you for coming back to him Adam, I feel that he has his hope back.

Adam- He never lost his hope. Me re entering his life just validated why he continues to be hopeful.
(They both hug and say their goodbyes and walk off in their respective directions.)

[Adam and Siobhan exit]

(lights fade, blackout)

Act Two: Scene 3

(The lights come up and we see Phoebe pacing back and forth in the kitchen waiting for Adam’s phone call. David is in the bathroom taking a bath.)

Phoebe- How is it going David? Don’t forget behind your ears.

David- I won’t mom.
(Phoebe walks into David’s room and opens his trunk. She pulls out two shirts, two sweaters, and two pairs of pants.)

Phoebe- David, do you want to wear your white or cream colored shirt?

David- White.

Phoebe- Your navy or emerald sweater?

David- Emerald.

Phoebe- Black or brown pants?

David- Brown.

Phoebe- You are devilishly quick with your choices David.

David- Ecclesiastes 7:8 “The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.”

(Paul enters the kitchen with a bundle of presents in his arms. Phoebe is not paying attention and he sets them down on the table.)

[enter Paul]

(Phoebe notices the presents and in a hurried panic picks them up and walks them off.)
(The phone rings. Phoebe rushes and picks it up.)

[exit Paul]

Phoebe- Hello, yes this is she. No thank you, we aren't interested. (she hangs up.)

David- Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses?

Phoebe- Mormons.

David- Figured.

[enter Siobhan]

(Siobhan enters and places a birthday cake on the table. Phoebe doesn't notice her in her continual pacing upstage.)

[exit Siobhan]
(Phoebe notices the cake and in a hurried panic picks it up and walks it off.)
(The phone rings. Phoebe runs and picks it up.)

Phoebe- Yes? Oh thank you Lord. Okay, see you soon.

David- Who was that on the phone mom?
(both Siobhan and Paul enter confused and carrying their respective items.)

Phoebe- It was just *(seeing them and panicking)* your father and Siobhan.

David- What did they want?

Phoebe- To know how many potatoes to get for your birthday dinner.

David- What did you tell them?

Phoebe- A sack full. *(Phoebe shews Paul and Siobhan off both exiting through the wing door to help facilitate the ruse.)*

David- I’m done in here. *(Phoebe walks into the bathroom and shuts the door. She reemerges, hulling David to his wheelchair which sat next to the bathroom door. She wheels him into his room and gives him his selected clothes while putting the others away. David begins to put on his shirt when there is a knock on the door.)*
(While Phoebe and David were in the bathroom Adam has been dragging in a heavy brown paper wrapped box from the farthest theatre entrance from the wing door. He is the knock on the wing door previously written.)

Phoebe- You finish with your shirts and I’ll come back and help you with your pants. *(she walks out of David’s room, closing the door behind her. She walks and opens the wing door and helps Adam drag the gift inside. Before she closes the door Siobhan and Paul walk in also with the bag of potatoes.)*

David- Who was it? *(Phoebe closes his door.)*

Phoebe- Mormons.

David- Persistent people. I was hoping it was going to be dad and Siobhan.

Phoebe- Oh, them two, after the Mormons.

David- I wonder when Adam is going to get here.

Phoebe- After the Mormons but before you father and Siobhan.

(Phoebe finishes pulling up David’s pants. Siobhan has brought back in the cake, Paul the presents, and Adam the large package from James and Co. Apothecary. Phoebe opens up David’s door and rolls him out.)

All- Surprise!

Act Two: Scene 4

(This scene flows consecutively from the previous.)

David- What is all of this?

Phoebe- We thought we would do something extra special for your extra special birthday.

David- What makes this one particularly important?

Paul- Come on now, it is your eighteenth birthday. And you only get one of those.

Siobhan- Not to mention you are surrounded by family, and friends.

David- How did you all get all of this stuff in here without me noticing?

Adam- Trust me, it wasn't easy. But just so we are clear, you were surprised.

David- Of course I was surprised! I had no idea you all were going to pull out all of the stops. I am very touched, really it means a lot to me that this was done all for me.

Siobhan- Not just for you. We all get some cake out of this deal. *(laughs)*

Phoebe- Do you want to start with gifts David? Then we can eat cake a little bit later on.

David- Sounds good to me.

Siobhan- I'll go first. *(she grabs the top present)*

(David opens it and finds that it is a large quilt) I made it myself. It has all of your favorite colors. Plus it will fit perfectly on your bed.

David- I love it. *(he hugs Siobhan)*

Paul- This is from your mom and I. *(grabbing the middle present)*
(David opens it and we find it is a journal) We thought it would be good for a young man with so many thoughts to have somewhere to write them all down.

David- This is so awesome. *(he hugs both of his parents)*

Adam- This is from me. *(grabbing the bottom present)*

(David opens it to find Adam's letterman jacket)

David- But this is yours, you never are not wearing it.

Adam- Coach always told us to only give them to people that are really special to us. Also my mom is making me buy a new one on account of my arms being too long. *(He helps David put it on.)*
(David and Adam share a prolonged hug. Either David or Adam whispers Thankyou but it is unknown which young man it is.)

Phoebe- Well now, David, would you like to help me light the candles?

David- Mom what about that present? *(pointing to the Apothecary box leaning against the proscenium under the phone.)*

Phoebe- Goodness me, where has my mind been to? I almost forgot the most important gift of them all. This last gift is from all of us. We all pitched in and we really are hoping you will like it. Adam, will you assist me in opening it? *(Phoebe and Adam open the box and inside is a pair of double upright long leg braces with hip joint and pelvic band.)* Well, what do you think?

David- I...

Paul- If you don't like them we can return them. No biggy.

David- I...

Siobhan- We just thought they could help you feel more independent that's all.

David- I...

Adam- What are you thinking David?

David- *(emotional and in tears)* "This one shall bring us relief from our work and the toil of our hands, out of the very ground that the Lord has put under a curse." Gen... *(choked up)*

Adam- Genesis 5:29.

David- Well, don't just stand there. Help me to my feet and put them on me.
(Both Adam and Paul take one of David's arms, hoisting him up. While Phoebe and Siobhan make quick work of strapping them onto David's legs. Everyone moves back and David is able to stand freely.)

Paul- How do you feel son?

David- Over the moon. *(Phoebe comes in and hugs her son.)* Okay mom, enough emotions now. Take my hands and help me walk outside. *(Phoebe walks backward holding David's hands, Siobhan and Paul walk behind in case David falls, and Adam walks in front to open the wing door. When they get outside a warm light and light breese hit David's face.)* The world is beautiful, I've missed seeing it.

Siobhan- And it has missed you.

David- *(to Adam)* Help me sit. *(Adam helps David to bend his knees and then sit down together with their legs hanging over the edge of the stage.)* Has the sun always been this bright?

Phoebe- It shines brighter while you are here.

David- I don't remember air smelling this fresh.

Paul- That is what will happen when you are stuck away from it.

David- I don't ever want to leave.

Adam- Neither do I.

Siobhan- Well... the light is fading, and we still do have a cake to eat.

David- That will do it. *(They all laugh as Adam straightens David's knees and he and Paul help David to his feet. One by one they walk through the wing door backstage. David, the last to enter being guided in by Adam, looks over his shoulder and scans the world.)* Goodbye for now, hello forever.

(David finishes walking inside and the door closes.)

(lights fade, blackout.)

End Brace

DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR POETRY, ALUMNI

FIRST PLACE
KATY LEHMAN LANDISHAW

“MY BOOKS”

The books I live in
have buried me, given
me ready-made thoughts
with which I might agree

Or not. But where am I?
The phone rings - “Have you read-?”
“Oh, yes” I reply, “well, no, but it’s
here, in the stack by my bed.”

The stack unread, piled ever so neatly
(daring a cat to fly by)
and I look at it often, and listen
to hear a particular title cry

“Read me! Oh, I’m next, please!”
Then I become entranced,
as if some new suitor
has asked me to dance.

And so I remain a hidden me
responding to requests,
prowling among others’ words,
others’ worlds, at others’ behests.

But sometimes - when I walk alone -
I’ll hear a siren song;
words pop up, arranged by me -
they begin as a turbulent throng

Rushing to assemble themselves
into ideas that now will need
my pen, to set and cosset them
into the books that live in me.

DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR POETRY, ALUMNI

SECOND PLACE JOSEPH HUMPOLICK

“ONCE UPON A CHILDHOOD”

I once lived in a large pink house in Painesville, Ohio.
It was across the street from an elementary school.
The school had a large playground with swings and monkey bars.
It also had a basketball court and place to play kickball and baseball and football.
I had the greatest teacher ever.
Her name was Mrs. Mendoza. She taught fourth grade.
She was a special person.
She was kind and patient and nurturing.
We played baseball in the spring and summer and football in the fall.
And we took our flexible flyers to the hills of town in the winter.
And we played basketball and kickball all year round.
My father worked at a chemical plant that turned toxic chemicals into toxic products.
He belonged to a union and was paid well enough to support a wife and five sons.
One of his sons was disabled. His name was Charlie
We weren't rich and we weren't poor but we were happy for what we took for granted.
We assumed that what we had would always be there and that we would always have it.
And all of my friends felt the same and regret now that we always felt we would have it always..
We had a good life but we didn't know it until we got old and our memories have faded.
The plant my father worked at sent toxic chemicals into Lake Erie and toxic fumes in the air.
And it also put toxic waste into large pits that we called the soup ponds.
So the air smelled of sulfur and toxic waste but nobody cared.
And there was a park that I think was owned by the union that our fathers belonged to.
It had a clubhouse and a baseball diamond.
It also had a miniature golf course and a fishing pond and picnic tables.
There was also a miniature railroad in back of the clubhouse.
And there were outings and picnics and we went there often.
And at Christmas time the union threw a party.
A magician performed tricks and put on a show.
And our mothers got candy and we kids got presents.
And all of this was because our fathers worked hard for it and belonged to a union.
Our mothers shopped at the A & P on State Street or Fishers on Mentor Avenue.
They bought clothes at Carlisle Allen or Newbury's or Sears.
Our fathers bought hardware at Whaleys on Main Street.
And we kids got toys from Toyland.
Memories of Painesville.
A special place in my own private Twilight Zone,
A place within walking distance of a nap or a dream.
All I have to do is close my eyes for a moment and I could be there.

Toyland was a special place. It was on the corner of Main and State Streets.
You could buy model cars and ball gloves and train sets and lots of stuff there.
Best of all you could get cap guns and Mattel toys there.
It was heaven on earth for a kid.
And there was also Kresges and WT Grants and John Rich Jewelers.
And there was Isleys on Main Street.
The best place for ice cream.
Rainbow ice cream was a special treat.
Coconut and all of the tropical flavors of the earth on a cone.
On Saturday afternoons we went to the Lake theater on State Street.
For maybe 75 cents you could watch a Godzilla double feature
And still have enough change to buy a soft drink and a large Charms pop.
Milk was delivered by a milk man and bread was delivered by a bread man.
An ice cream stand on Richmond Street made tangy lemon cones.
Jeffries Broaster Kitchen on State Street and Prospect made fried chicken and wedge fries
And the best Italian submarine sandwiches anywhere.
And Tony's subway inn made the best pasta
And Angelo's made the best pizza.
And for a dime you could get a cherry phosphate at Thayers drug store.
Cleveland Trust and Lake County National Bank had buildings that overlooked a park.
My father drove a red Rambler station wagon with a push button transmission.
A JFK window sticker was in its rear window.
Many years ago they closed the plant that my father worked at
And left behind hundreds of unemployed workers and the open pits of toxic chemicals.
The pink house I grew up in became the parking lot of an A & P.
And now it is a parking lot for a post office.
The elementary school was torn down twenty years ago and replaced by another building.
Gone is the playground and the swings and the basketball court.
Gone is Jeffries and the ice cream shop on Richmond Street.
Gone is the Lake Theatre.
Gone are the banks.
Gone is Kresges and Whaley's and Thayers.
Gone is Isley's.
And gone is Toyland.
And gone is the Carlisle Allen department store.
And gone is the hospital I was born in and the high school where my mother graduated..
Gone is about anything and gone is everything that was what we grew up with.
Buildings were demolished for new buildings to be built that never replaced the old.
Urban renewal was what they called the destruction of what was important to us
And is now gone forever as if a bomb was dropped to destroy a nice city.
Yet I and many can tell you what used to be and where it used to be
And I and many can tell you something from long ago that made it special to us all.
And why I and many still have fond memories of it.

All I have to do is close my eyes
And there is Mrs. Mendoza giving a lesson on a spring afternoon.
And after school I go home to the large pink house across the street.
Then my brother Charlie and I join the kids of the neighborhood
And we play baseball or kickball or some other game
With kids who are gone now and with many who have lost their minds.
And on Facebook and at class reunions those of us who remember it well
Reminisce about what used to be as if it were still there and never disappeared.
I see my father driving his red Rambler station wagon in the driveway after work.
We’re having something from Tony’s or Jeffries or Angelo’s for dinner tonight.
Maybe we will go to the ice cream stand on Richmond Street or Isely’s after dinner.
Maybe I’ll see a movie at the Lake theatre this week.
Or maybe I’ll visit Toyland
Or maybe I’ll ride my Schwinn around the town and see places
That were special to me then and are special to me now.
Once upon a dream in a place called Painesville.



DAWN POWELL AWARD FOR FICTION, ALUMNI

FIRST PLACE
MIA STARNONI

“HEAD IN THE WALL”

“Sometimes you make me want to put my fucking head through the wall.”
From the corner of Leon’s eye, she saw Pip flinch. She felt bad almost immediately. She often forgot how cold she could sound sometimes, especially to people she actually liked. She had been cold for so long that she forgot how to be soft and warm. Like how normal people are. Leon sighed, embarrassed, and brushed her hair back roughly. She tried again.
“Sometimes I wonder if I even know you at all.”
That made him look at her.
“What?” Pip’s voice was small. Scared. Leon didn’t want that either.
“I just—” Leon swiveled around to look at him too. His face made her pause; wide-eyed and somewhere close to panic. Her stomach did a backflip.
Fuck.
She knew she was making a mistake. She did not want to have the conversation, especially where they were at. The two of them were sitting on the floor of a convenience store. They broke in—(is it breaking in if they found the key? Probably, but Leon wasn’t all that sure.) Their ‘friends’ were hollering and goofing off elsewhere in the store, their voices only quiet echoes to the two teenagers. While they were goofing off, Leon and Pip had only wanted food and had been silently raiding the chip aisle for the better part of half-an-hour. It had already been an awful night, one of the worst in Leon’s entire life actually, and that was really saying something. It had been Leon’s now...what? Fifth brush with death that week? She lost count a while ago.
Perhaps that was why she was starting the conversation. You only live once, right? But it was still absolutely fucking terrifying. They hadn’t talked about it for six years. They hadn’t talked in six years. Leon herself still didn’t even want to talk about it really. Never did.
But, there she was. Taking the shot. Biting the bullet. Finally crossing that line.
No more hiding.
She pressed on, “I just have no idea who you are now.” Leon said, fiddling with a bag of chips, eyes looking everywhere except at Pip, “When’s the last time we spent time together? Or even just talked. Like, just you and me?”
“We’ve been talking the last few days.”
“You know that doesn’t count,” Leon deadpanned, “Us running around dealing with the town, James’ dad, and motherfucking aliens has nothing to do with us or the fact that I have no fucking idea who you even are anymore.”
Pip blinked, “I...” he swallowed, “You know me.”
“I don’t.”
“You do!”
“But I don’t.”
It hurt to say. Leon never liked to acknowledge the fact that Pip and her had drifted apart. After everything she went through, her mom, her dad, the fucking aliens, losing Pip was the last straw. It had always been the last straw in her life. Pip meant everything to her after her mom died. To admit that he left would have crushed Leon. She knew it too. But, if she didn’t acknowledge it, then it didn’t happen. If she denied it, then he never left. No problem.

But now, ignoring the problem was too much to bear. Maybe almost being abducted switched a flip in her. Maybe Jake’s death did it. She wasn’t sure. But Leon took the plunge and now that she started, she didn’t want to stop. She was done being afraid and she wanted some fucking answers.

“You know, after my mom died,” Pip flinched again, Leon ignored it, “You just disappeared. You didn’t talk to me or Jake. You didn’t even look at me. Why? Why the fuck would you do that?” Leon was aware of her anger rising, but after six years, she really couldn’t hold it in anymore. “I know it wasn’t your problem, but I needed you! You were my best friend, my partner, my fucking blanket buddy! And you just disappeared when I needed you the most! Like, what the fuck Pip!? Why?”

Leon had never yelled at Pip before. Or even had gotten upset with him. She could see he was getting scared, upset even. So was she; she didn’t want to be upset with the only person she cared about anymore. It was just...so fucking hard. Her passive feelings about the situation had all but dissolved. If getting some answers meant hurt Pip’s feelings in the shortcome, then so be it. Leon watched Pip with hard eyes, waiting. He stayed quiet, eyes transfixed on the floor.

“I’m waiting, Pippin.” She bit out.

Pip gulped, his leg bounced rapidly as he did. Finally he spoke, “I don’t know...”

Leon blinked, “What do you mean you don’t know?”

“I don’t know!” Pip’s voice cracked six different ways as he spoke, “We were...uh, we were in different classes in middle school.”

“Different—what? So??” Leon hissed. It was such a petty reason. Leon hated the thought of it changing anything in their friendship.

“Are you saying you didn’t speak to me because we were in fucking different classes? Are you fucking kidding me?”

“No, no!” Pip’s hands flew to his hair, pulling at it, “It’s not just that! It was—”

“Was what?”

“Everything!” Pip threw his arms up, “Jake was with you every day! I barely saw you two! He was going with you to the hospital! He was able to sleep over at your place! I couldn’t! And with my parents getting divorced and moving around so much, I just—I didn’t even know what was happening with you anymore! I didn’t even know how to talk to you!”

A present pause came over the two. Pip had said a lot of things, but only one of them interested Leon.

“Your mom and dad got divorced?”

Leon couldn’t believe her ears. John and Kathy Pippin? Getting a divorce?

Never.

Leon would have sooner believed that her dog could fly. It was just...unbelievable. Leon’s mind jumped back to the Pippin household, a place she spent many years at, and remembered. She could see them so clearly in her head; the kind and cheerful parents of her best friend. The two seemed like the most perfect couple in the whole world to Leon. Better than her parents at least. Not that her parents were bad, but they argued from time to time and weren’t very lovey-dovey with each other either. John and Kathy were the exact opposite; always smiling, always sharing kisses. Leon had always wanted what they had in a relationship. So for them to get divorced of all things, it was beyond shocking to hear.

“How did—why did—?” Leon could barely string the words together, but Pip understood anyway. He let out a bitter laugh,

“Dad and the head producer at the Channel Zero station got, well, pretty friendly, let’s say.

A gasp was pulled from Leon’s lips. Her entire world felt like it had been tilted.

“What?” Leon said, voice tight, “Your dad? Your dad did that?”

Pip sucked his lips in and nodded. Even in the dim light of the flickering, fluorescent bulbs, Leon could easily see that his eyes were shining with tears.

“Yeah. Mom and him had been fighting for awhile before that. Money and shit, you know? With me, Toddy, Emma, and Lucy, dad’s paycheck wasn’t enough and mom didn’t want to work. She wanted to stay at home and raise us. So we...we were tight on cash for a while...”

“Oh, Robert, I—”

“Please don’t,” he said, “Don’t apologize for anything. It’s not your fault. It’s mine.”

Leon blinked, “What do you mean it’s your fault?”

The notion was ridiculous. Pip was far too intelligent to believe that. Or at least Leon thought he was.

“It’s my fault!” The outburst made Leon jump. She had never heard Pip sound angry before. Hell, she had never heard him yell before. He continued, leaving her jaw hanging open in shock, “I was selfish and wasn’t thinking about anything but myself! I should have been there for you but I wasn’t. I’m sorry. I...” tears slipped from Pip’s eyes, “I’m such a terrible fucking person...”

Pip’s hands flew to his face as he sobbed. Leon’s ears were ringing; Never in a million years did she think the conversation would go like this. For years Leon rattled her brain for why Pip had left her. Playing out multiple different conversations and versions as to why he had stopped talking to her. They were all cut from the same cloth;

“You seemed like you were handling everything fine without me, so I took that as you not wanting me around anymore.”

“Why is it my fault? You stopped talking to ME.”

“I didn’t like how sad you were, so I distanced myself.”

“I never really liked you anyway.”

But this? This was never a thought. Never even a possibility in Leon’s infinite pit of self hating narratives. Pip was the normal one; he wasn’t screwed up like Leon was. He had a good family and a nice home and didn’t have a fucked up life like she did. Pip was always a constant beacon of happiness and light to her. For him to be in the same dark pit as she was? It was...well, she didn’t know what it was. But it certainly wasn’t Pip’s fault.

“Robert...” Leon scooted closer to him, “That is not your fault.”

“Yes it is!” He cried, “You needed me and I was so preoccupied with my own shit that I couldn’t help you! I wasn’t there for you! I was awful to you!”

“No, no, look at me,” Leon lifted his chin. Pip looked fucking miserable; face a mess of tears, snot, and guilt.

Six whole years of guilt and trauma packed into one beautiful face. Leon almost couldn’t stomach it, “You and I were both going through shit. Me with my mom and you with...that. I mean...I had no idea.” Leon breathed out. It was baffling. “I had no idea, Robert. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because your mom was dying! I couldn’t dump my problems on you! What kind of person would I be if I did that? ‘Hey, Gwen, I know your mom has cancer and is in the hospital, but my mom and dad keep fighting and it’s really stressing me out!’ Are you kidding me?”

“But I dumped my shit onto you!” Leon stressed, “It’s the same thing! Friends are supposed to support each other!”

“Your mom dying is a bigger deal than my parents getting divorced!”

“What the fuck, dude! Do you really want to play the trauma rating game?”

Pip gave her a look. Leon rolled her eyes and tried again.

“I don’t know about you, but to me it sounds like both of our lives were shattered. It doesn’t matter how! Do you understand that? My mom died, your dad cheated, and our home lives broke apart. The same thing happened to us.”

“It’s not the same...”

“Really? Then tell me how it’s different.”

Fear gripped Pip’s face. Oh. Leon had struck something, didn’t she? A cold realization hit her. She had Jake when her mom died. He let her cry and vent out everything she felt.

But who did Pip have?

Leon shook her head, now aware of what exactly she was asking of him, “Robert. What was going on in your house? What did they put you through?”

Pip’s mouth hung open, wordless.

“Please, help me understand.”

Pip’s mouth trembled, “There was so much fighting. And screaming. And crying. I...” Pip took a deep breath,

“I had to be the one that took care of my siblings for a while. Mom wasn’t...functioning quite right when my dad moved out. She had custody of us and...”

Pip shook his head, more tears falling, “Dad wasn’t interested in helping with us. He sent us money, but that’s it. He just disappeared. I, um, wanted to work at the station so he would actually pay attention to me. I...I’m so sorry.”

“No. Stop saying sorry! This isn’t your fault!” Leon grabbed his face, wiping his tears away, “None of this is your fault, Rob.”

“But it is!”

Leon’s heart could have broke. As much as she disliked herself, deep down she knew that her mom’s death at the very least wasn’t her fault. It was God’s or the Universe’s or just the cruel indifference of life. But Pip believed what he was saying. She could tell. How he got to that conclusion, she couldn’t understand.

“Pip, there’s no feasible way that could be your fault! It’s your dad’s fault. He made a shitty decision and ruined everything.”

“But they wouldn’t have gotten divorced if it wasn’t for me!”

“No it isn’t! How could that even happen?”

“Because I was the one who found out my dad was cheating on my mom!”

Jesus fucking Christ.

“I saw him! And her! A-and I told my mom! I told her because...because I thought I was helping. I thought I was doing what was right.”

“You did the right thing.”

Pip scoffed, “Yeah. Because ripping my family apart was the right thing. Putting my siblings and I through custody hell was the right thing. Giving my mom fucking depression was the right thing!”

He slammed his fists into the floor, making Leon flinch. Seeing Pip like this was wrong. It made Leon feel sick; not because he was yelling or causing a scene, but because he was hurting. Hurting very, very badly.

No. Fuck that. Leon wasn’t going to let Pip hurt like that. Like she had.

“Stop it.” Leon said firmly, “You did nothing wrong. Nothing. Do you understand that?”

Pip said nothing.

“Do you understand—”

“No I don’t understand!” Pip yelled, “I don’t understand because if I kept my mouth shut, then everything would be fine! Just—why!? Why did it have to be this way? Why couldn’t my dad not cheat? Why did my mom have to spiral? Why did I say anything? Why does everything in my life always go to shit?”

Pip sobbed openly, “I just don’t understand...”

Leon was rendered speechless again, but this time for a different reason. Because she did understand. She understood what it felt like to not understand. It was something she felt every single day since her mom died. Since she started asking the question, ‘why did this have to happen?’ The never ending feedback loop in her head that made her cold in the first place. Leon’s heart sank.

She didn’t want Pip to become cold like her. Pip was good. He didn’t deserve that.

Maybe she didn’t either.

“You know,” Leon spoke quietly, voice strained with an emotion that was too much for her to fully grasp, “My dad always tells me that when I’m older, I’ll understand.”

Pip looked at her, breath still uneven, “Understand what?”

“I don’t know honestly. I’ll just understand. And that’s probably true. I’ll understand why the world is the way it is and whatever. Why my mom died. Why your dad ruined your family. And sure, it’ll be nice to maybe finally understand it all one day, but the problem is that we’re hurting now. So...what are we supposed to do until then?”

The two shared a look. Pip shrugged and leaned back, his back hitting the shelves.

“I don’t know...” he whispered, “I don’t know either.”

Leon snorted, a small bemused laugh, “No one does I think. Just suck it up until the pain goes away, you know?”

“Does it?” Pip straightened back up, “Does the pain ever go away?”

Leon sighed, “No. It doesn’t.”

The two sat for a moment in silence.

It was quite a lot to take in.

Leon was certain nothing could surprise her anymore and yet...there she was.

Shell shocked.

“I guess you were right...” Pip smiled sadly, “You don’t know me at all.”

Leon said nothing for a moment. Leon regretted a lot of things in her life. Saying such a thing like that to Pip was one of the worst. But, some mistakes could be fixed. Leon grabbed Pip’s hand. He looked at her, a bit puzzled. Leon wasn’t used to fixing anything she screwed up, she never really tried before. But this was a good place to start.

“Actually, I feel like I do. I think I finally understand everything now,” Leon smiled, a soft, warm feeling spread through her. A feeling she thought she’d never feel ever again. “I understand what you went through.”

“I...you do?”

Leon nodded, “Maybe my dad was wrong. Maybe I’ll never understand why all these awful things happened to us. But, what I do understand is what you felt after.” Leon took a moment to hesitate. She had never actually said any of things things she felt. The things she actually felt. It was yet another terrifying thing to let out. But if Pip felt them too, then what was there to really be scared of in the first place? “You felt like you got consumed by a dark, endless pit, right? That everything good in your life had leaked out and left nothing in its place. That God had slighted you for existing in the first place and—”

“It was all your fault because you were just a bad person from the start.” Pip finished.

Tears pricked Leon’s eyes and she nodded again, “And that nothing would get better. Because people like us don’t deserve nice things or happy endings.”

Pip smiled at her, tears still rolling down his cheeks, “We thought we didn’t deserve each other. Because why would you want someone so messed up and broken?”

Leon laughed. Despite everything, she laughed. And it felt so fucking liberating.

“Yes!” She beamed, her own tears falling, “Why would you want to be with someone who was so fundamentally awful!”

Pip laughed too; the same laugh Leon had expressed. He shook his head, still grinning, “You’re not awful, Gwen. You’re the only good thing left in this fucking town.”

“Heh, not even close...” she brushed her hair back, “Maybe some of me is nice, like my music taste or maybe my eyes. But most of me is fucking terrible.” She giggled.

Pip reached out to grab her other hand, “Well, I like you. All of you put together. The good and bad parts. Both Gwen and Leon. It’s what makes you you. And you’ve always been my favorite person.”

Leon squeezed his hands, “You’re my favorite person too.”

“I think...” Pip started, Leon felt his hands start to shake as he spoke, “I think I’d like for us to be terrible people together again. Just you and me. If you want to be friends again, that is.”

Leon could’ve died laughing at that. Pip didn’t know the half of what she wanted. But, for now, that was enough.

“I’d love nothing more than to be your friend again, Robert Pippin.”

Pip’s eyes lit up, like stars in the night sky did. Bright and breathtaking and infinite. “Likewise, Guinevere Leonhardt.”

Leon didn’t hesitate to throw herself at Pip, hugging him tightly. It was still second nature even after all the years they had been apart. He returned it, almost enveloping her completely. She had missed that feeling. She had missed him. His warmth, his smell, his everything.

Everything.

All at once Leon realized what had just happened. She got her person back. For six painful years he was lost, and Leon had conceded long ago that she would never have him again. But here she was, buried in his chest, knowing everything there was to know about him. Her entire body shook as fresh tears leaked from her eyes. The feeling was overwhelming and indescribable. All the bitterness washed away, all the hatred and venom. Gone.

God had finally let his grudge go. He gave her Pip back.

It was almost too much, Leon mused to herself. Leon sniffled a bit and laughed, a particular thought crossing her mind.

“You know, you still make me want to put my fucking head through the wall.”

Pip laughed too.

“I know. I know exactly how you feel.”

Leon hummed thoughtfully in response, “Good.”

“Um...”

The moment that Leon had been waiting for nearly a decade for was broken by James. Of course. Leon pushed off of Pip’s chest to glare at him. James stared right back, face full of confusion. Leon scowled at the boy, a familiar cold feeling filling her chest yet again.

“The fuck do you want, Dottle?”

Pip snickered at the change of Leon’s tone, but she paid it no mind. It was almost scary, how drastic the change was inside her. Leon quietly conceded to the fact that she only had room in her heart for one person now, and it certainly was not motherfucking James Dottle.

“Well we heard screaming back here...”

Leon raised an eyebrow, “And?”

James shrugged and took a few steps forward, “I wanted to make sure you were okay. You sounded kind of upset, you know? Pip can be kind of a jerk some—”

“Save it,” Leon cut the boy off, “Robert and I are just perfect, aren’t we?”

Pip smiled, “Yeah, we are.”

KATE CARTER AWARDS



FIRST PLACE
GREGORY KENNEDY

“CLAIMING YOURSELF THROUGH INDIVIDUALIZATION”

written for Professor Rose Nemunaitis' EN 101

Dictionary.com defines individualism as "a social theory advocating the liberty, rights, or independent action of the individual." (Webster) Without the idea and execution of individualism, we would all think the same, move the same, and therefore would be synonymous with one another or "carbon copies" if you would. Individualism is what gives your opinions, likes, and dislikes and truly makes a person who they are. In Adrienne Rich's convocation, Claiming an Education, she shows how the women in the late 1900s set themselves away from each other and empowered themselves. Such is the idea of individualism. Individualism is discussed in psychology and how it compares. In this paper, I will show you the value of individualism, how it affects our day-to-day lives, and why it should embrace your true character. I also will talk about how I believe that individualism is a vital part of psychology and how the ever changing definition of it helps us shape society into the world we live in today and tomorrow. Individualism in psychology shows us where we can change the world just by speaking out and being the “odd man out” and really standing up for what you believe in.

First, I will discuss how individualism affects your day-to-day life, starting when your feet hit the ground. We begin with waking up. Do you wake up for work, classes, or something else? No matter what it is for, there will be certain factors that set you apart from another person, no matter if it is for the better or the worse. It can be little things like that or big things such as getting married late or early. Adrienne Rich says in her convocation Claiming an Education, "It means rejecting the attitude of "take-it-easy," "why-be-so-serious," "why-worry-you'll-probably-get-married-anyways." (Rich 4) This shows the even simplistic view of individualism that sets yourself away from the "average person" and someone who gives in to the social pressures. In Rich's convocation, she discusses women's mid to late-1900s struggles regarding schooling, marriage, jobs, and overall day-to-day life. Gut courses mean difficult courses and show your true effort. Her main point seems to be the idea of education, and as she states, "Claiming their Education." This means taking control and showing that the trends and norms of society control your personal choices. This has been shown in many cases in history; with this example, we will stick with powerful, individualistic women throughout history. I am sure the name Rosa Parks rings a bell for almost anyone. This is due to her powerful stance on a Montgomery bus. This eventually launched the Montgomery bus boycott, which eventually helped African Americans everywhere throughout the United States gain further rights. Parks was a powerful figure in the civil rights movement in the 1900s, all through her individualism. Her individualistic actions showed her strong passion as she stood up for the uncommon view. This led to amazing developments in American history, even though Parks was arrested due to her strong stance and keeping her seat on the bus. Even though, at the time, this action would have been considered taboo, Rosa's keeping to her morals changed American history. This shows that even illegal actions can be broken to show individualism, which can be good or bad, but let's keep it on the good side. Another great example of female individualism is Katherine Johnson. Johnson was highly influential in the NASA "Apollo Space Module" (NASA). Johnson broke many barriers within the job market and education of women and women of color in the mid-1900s. Johnson's individualistic ability to make it through education and the job market led her to make massive changes in American history again. She started as one of three African American students to attend West Virginia's graduate school, already overcoming significant hurdles to claim

her education and not even starting how she got the job she flourished in, which helped put a man in orbit.

Taking the easy way out is, most of the time, an embarrassment to the idea of individualism, versus taking the, as Robert Frost would say, "The Road Not Taken," which shows the true colors of individualism. Schoolwork is an excellent example of this, as taking challenging courses can be shown as an individualist tendency as you make the uncommon choice to set yourself apart from the average student. "Taking "gut" courses instead of ones you know will challenge you, bluffing at school and life instead of doing solid work..." (Rich 3) This continues with the beneficial aspect you give yourself by being individualistic, applying yourself in class, and taking classes you know will challenge you. These courses will help you continue to grow your knowledge and learning ability. This is an uncommon route because it is a difficult way out. These challenging courses may make your next semester more difficult, but when you've put in the hard work. You can not only get the satisfaction of a job well done, but you will reap the rewards from the newfound knowledge you have received from this course, and now you can apply the skills and knowledge to your daily life. "The difference between a life lived actively and a life of passive drifting and dispersal of energies..." (Rich 3). Rich talks about lifting a life passively. What does this mean? This means "being committed to our lives" (Rich 3). This tells us that we control our lives and value our future. Committing to our lives is no different than committing to a relationship. You stick to it and make a mental promise to that person that you are there for them and will work for your relationship. You need to ensure you do this for yourself and with the same level of dedication. This is a form of individualism as well. Showing yourself respect like this shows your commitment to yourself, which is very important as you value your future, where you make more opportunities for yourself.

We see individualism everywhere in today's society and the past. Tyler Burge writes in his paper Individualism and Psychology, "Thus individualism as applied to psychology must be revisionistic. It must be revisionistic at least about the language of psychological theory. I shall be developing the view that it is also revisionistic, without good reason, about the underlying presuppositions of the science." (Burge 9-10) This shows the idea of individualism that was thought about in the 1900s and is critical. Burge says that individualism should be able to be changed as it is ever-changing, just like the physiological nature of humans. Burge also argues that the root of science is another reason individualism is changing as science becomes increasingly popular. We accept beliefs, and slowly, the definition of individualism changes. This shows that individualism changes with society, so it will always have a practical use in society. No matter the period, individualism also remains steady throughout time. "Has been brought against the university by a group of women students demanding a stated policy against sexual advances toward female students by male professors." (Rich 3-4) This sadly shows the reality that is the same as in the 1900's. Today, we see the USA women's gymnastics team step forward one back one with accusations that their male higher-ups were making sexual advances. Thankfully, today, those male predators were convicted after trials and punished. However, we see the men still went to trial in the case Alexander v. Yale, which was ruled guilty and gave us most of the institutional foundations we have today for sex discrimination and sexual harassment. Sadly, issues such as this are as problematic as ever. However, problems such as large areas of women's suffrage, such as women's ability to vote, have been significant areas of reform for the United States. These examples greatly contrast how individualism has changed from the late 1900s for the good and the bad.

We can see that historical accounts of individualism have dramatically shaped the America we live in today. Almost every change in American history was caused by someone or something breaking a social norm and showing their individuality. The ever-changing definition of individualism has helped progress society as we see it today. Individualism makes you who you are and sets you apart from everyone else, which defines your character. In summary, "Once we begin to feel committed to our lives, responsible to ourselves, we can never again be satisfied with the old passive way." (Rich 3) Commit to yourself and make yourself the highest priority because it's your life, and when no one is there for you, it's just you. No one should look out for you more than yourself. Take care of yourself.

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KATE CARTER AWARD FOR BEST WRITING IN EN 101

SECOND PLACE

MAYA MALONE

“COMBATING ENDEMIC MINDSETS”

written for Dr. Amy Kesegich's EN 101

Approximately half the American population, born in-country, never ventures outside the United States (Pew Research Center). Does this denote our culture’s lack of empathic understanding in divergent nationalities? I question how an American’s upbringing fosters the ability to remain present and actively-positively engaged in unfamiliar surroundings. How do we duel with deeply embedded personal histories--identities, when they conflict new perspectives? How do we balance suppression of ideals for coexistence and dogmatic behaviors that institute assimilation in order to truly “hear” a culture? By exploring the impressions travel constructs on an individual’s identity, one can better understand how the change in that identity can form rifts in post-travel relations. My journeys in Tanzania manifested the realization that comfort and security must be relinquished in order to terminate a perpetuation of cultural ignorance (Crucet 362).

Opening my mind to contrasting cultural ideals and customs enables words and images to shine in a new light. Seeking new cultures, I'm suddenly dangling off the cliffs of Kilimanjaro, summiting the tallest free-standing mountain in the world. 700 ft above sea level: forcing uncanny amounts of water down my throat; catching baby chameleons; bringing coffee to life with Chagga shanties and tribal dance; learning Swahili--the lingua franca of Tanzania; and scheming across muddy, jungle slopes with kaka (brother) Adam and Gasto. He declares we’re long-lost family, divided by years of fragmented, divisive legacy structures. I craved the opportunity to learn about the community in order to rectify generalizations and kept an open mind to hear history told from new perspectives. Instilling a spark of hope for humanity, the Tanzanians encouraged me to experience true, unadulterated kindness and joy, entirely lacking material possessions. I intrinsically needed to view Tanzania from a standpoint that stretched the limitations of a tourist. Labelled “stranger” in a place I so desperately wanted to be a part of, I endeavored to escape the confines of tourism and its restraints on appreciation of place--people. I needed to be thrown to the locals. I needed to experience the daily life-- needed to be able to see myself there. Skin tone often constitutes a sense of alienation as one navigates the deeply rooted belief that they could belong somewhere. I’ve always thought I could understand how my black American classmates felt in the classroom. I knew that I couldn't fully grasp what they were experiencing in their situation but I thought I understood. It wasn’t until I found myself stalked down the hidden alleys of Tanzania that I realized my perception of their trials preceding the trip was baseless. Walking down the sidewalk, littered with locals, I innately felt as if I didn’t belong--that I wasn’t supposed to be there. I stood out like a Zebra in a sea of antelope--a stark contrast to any other humans around me. I was alien to them. Some wonderful people on the trip reminded me of the similarities. Within ten minutes of hiking with Adam, a Tanzanian native, he told me to call him brother. During a fleeting waterfall hike, he was able to disregard our differences, pinpointing what made us human. Adam liked to say that we’re all Africans--all originating from the same ancestors, one big, currently divided family.

At my initiation, I unpredictably battled deeply entrenched fight or flight responses to my appearance in a new land. The initial response was that due to disparate tonal colors, I couldn’t possibly exist in that space--that location--that people. Escaping the confines of physical appearance, I had to seek and learn the similarities. I couldn’t burden

the mindset that similarities were either nonexistent or indiscernible. This required a stripping of falsified comfort and interaction with the people around us.

13,287 feet: through the mangle of jungle; past food-fighting monkeys; abruptly into the moorland scrub, I learn the value in slowing down to accomplish something greater. Pole Pole, slowly slowly, they say: experience the world around you rather than missing it on your way to a prescribed finish line. A myriad of contenders hike Kilimanjaro for the wrong reasons: to conquer the mountain--to beat it; make it to the top--say they've done it. These contenders correspond to the rudimentary principles of many tourists. "They were there to say they'd been there, to have it mean something about the person they thought they were" (Cruet 359). We balance the tightrope of allowing a culture to influence us--effectively succumbing to it--or utilizing the local's daily life as an edutainment for the expectations of what we'd gain by being there. When we tell ourselves what we want to bring back from a place--mentally or physically--before we've gotten there, it sets us up for broken bridges across our cultural ravine.

Suddenly everything drops off and we're soaring above a sea of clouds, shielding us from civilization below. The sun exposure pales in the face of vulnerability to foreign courtesies. Each culture has subtle or extreme variation in practice or gesture. In Tanzania you never just question a passerby--you connect with them, introducing yourself and asking how they are before asking where the nearest restaurant is. So innately different from American culture--starkly contrasting as abrupt and distant. It's fascinating--dangerous that an action perceived as polite in one culture could be a great disrespect in another. A couple years ago, I studied medicinal plants under a local Native American. He solidifies the reality of mirrored cultural practices that signify vastly different interpretations--it's a tangible homophone. In the American lifestyle I grew up in, offering water or food to house guests was respectful. Clint describes this practice as an extreme disrespect to his native tribe. The offering of food and water is synonymous with "you can't feed yourself" or "you're incapable of procuring necessities." He will lay out food and drink for his guests but omit phrases like "can I get you some water?" To discover the intricacies of a culture's developed "regulations," one must be able to make mistakes along the way. If you're not making mistakes, you're not doing anything--not laying your weapons down and trusting that a fellow citizen of Earth would assist you in rectifying that mistake--in learning. You're unwittingly barring yourself from discovering a culture. Making these mistakes comes with breaching the barrier--the training wheels of the comfort zone.

15,000 ft: the horizon begins to wrap around us; I ponder how Earth could ever be considered flat. Whoever determined that surely wasn't a mountaineer. As we twisted around volcanic sand castles, I discarded preconceived notions and uneducated judgments at sea level to talk about culturally taboo topics. They've never heard of California but America is "Obama Land." Our guide knows of Malcolm X but has never heard of Martin Luther King Jr--we ponder how the spread of information affected this--how it depends on who's telling it. Endeavoring to see anew biased information learnt in U.S. textbooks, I had one of the most influential conversations of my life, opening my mind up to a completely different way of thinking. I spoke with our guide about the discrepancies in media and information--how an extremely hurtful political leader in our country can inadvertently solve chronic issues in theirs. His knowledge of Mexicans--aided by his monthly TV viewing with minimal electricity--was a single story of drug cartels and illegal border crossing. The only information fed to him about Trump as president was that he was stopping dangerous narcotics from entering American borders. It's just like the Revolutionary war, he says. The United States showed us that independence was achievable--that Tanzania could fight and win too. Therefore, if the U.S. could limit drugs entering the country, so could they. He believes Trump had an expansive impact on drugs within Tanzania--that the numbers of people using, the amount entering was decreased exponentially. I'm appalled. I want to scream; how could such a harmful politician unknowingly create a positive impact internationally? Could this man not understand the pain Trump had caused? I stare out at the clouds we gradually overtake and suck in the thin mountain air. Reminding myself I could be exactly where he's at--that I have been--I calmly reengage. I endeavor to show him the other side; how unethical and degrading Trump was; I want to paint him a picture of the robust beauties of Mexican culture. He listens intently--asking questions, dismayed by his incomplete understanding. Our guide expected a certain open-mindedness from me as I was welcomed into his lifestyle; he offered me the same willingness and acceptance of new thoughts in turn. To have a relative

stranger be so innately accepting of a conversation many of my friends or family members would have utterly rebuked, incredibly impacted my understanding of humanity. We openly listened to one another, valuing the other's opinion. Moreover, we traversed trials of language barriers, working around unknown words. When patience through miscommunications should have been exceedingly difficult with socially prohibited conversation topics, I was startled by the ease in which we marooned impulsive protest. It's amazing how a conversation can go when somebody doesn't immediately respond with "no" or "that's wrong." To this day, I continuously examine how two strangers trudging up into the sky, weighed down by packs and altitude with minimized experience in the other's first language would achieve what most humans are unable to. Maybe it was the altitude and the limitations in language. Seeking temporary solace, shying away from a potentially frightening, undetermined outcome will never allow us to honestly "see" one another. If we maintain our iron bars of security, all our peers will ever see is a façade, a partial representation of identity. That's when single stories occur. I truly feel I was able to make an impression on our guide, allow him to see culture in new ways, just as he was able to utterly influence my comprehension of story. Everyone tells stories; the people they tell stories relay them. The world is a stupendous game of telephone, between those currently existing but also between those who came before us. We intertwine the tales of our ancestors with current relations in order to piece together our idea of the big picture. There's not one compilation that's correct but many divergently convergent stories. A progression of narrative that rings true for one may be vastly different for another. Finding the commonalities--entwining our web of lies and truths is where we meet as an ephemeral and ever malleable humanity.

Differences are safe to catalog, easy to articulate and cling to. Documenting stark differences can overpower similarities, paralleled in substantiality. They can become a blanketed bar of protection between oneself and recognition of similarities. Mid-journey, I allow myself to deviate from my later realization that comfort has no place in halting a continuation of cultural misunderstanding. For generations humanity has focused on our differences: races, backgrounds, origin. Our species has a devotion to categorization. This has minimized many people's ability to notice our similarities--what makes us relatable. 19,341 ft: We're prisoners, connected by a chain of hopes and dreams. My feet mindlessly follow those in front of me, those behind follow me. Face angled down, my lamp captures the shuffle of our guide directly in front of me. A line of headlamps--seemingly floating in the sky with the black mountain backdrop--greet my future plans and haunts my rearview mirror as we drag ourselves up the face of the cliff. We hike up into the sky. My bones turn brittle, my flesh numb. The sip of blue electrolytes I had just minutes ago seems to freeze in my stomach. Remember that scene in Pirates of the Caribbean, when the crew member bends his frozen toe and it cracks clean off his foot? That's all I can picture as I wiggle the ice blocks concealed by my ash-dusted boots. All I can do is chant right, left, right, left. If I had the strength to lift my arm above my head, I know I could touch the Milky Way. Its tantalizing glow seeps down around us prisoners. I could quit--I could fall and not get up. Maybe I almost do. That's when a newfound friend sidles up next to me asking if a song will make me feel better. His masked face molds into a scheming grin before the entire mountain bellows in a chorus of chant. He belts the native tongue into the night sky--threatening to swallow us whole. It empowers my feet forward, one in front of the other, further entrapping me in the mystical hold of the mountain. As the sun breaks over the endless horizon, we reach the fabled summit--we're on top of the world, so powerful yet so small and insignificant. It's there, I recognize my place--I look back and evaluate how I got there. I felt utterly possessed by the mountain, balancing personal initiative. Through farmland, jungle, alpine, and finally volcanic zones we ascended the mountain--pushed ourselves to the breaking point mentally and physically. With volcanic dust thoroughly seeping through our skin, we combated the eating issues, mood swings, and health concerns that came with altitude.

To succeed, I needed not to conquer the mountain but succumb to it: to leave preconceived judgments and conceit at sea level; to lay my mind bare to a great force of nature and let it fuel me. And in the end, it's not the mountain we conquered but ourselves. Others are dragged, half conscious, drugged with concoctions of altitude medications to the tip top. They're fighting for recognition or a title. Here I go assuming--the supporting idea of what not to do in this piece. This exemplifies how I don't want to think when endeavoring to bridge cultural divides.

I had to let this culture wash over me; I couldn’t go seeking a certain outcome. I couldn’t show up expecting to have gained or understood a specific something by the end. That would have predisposed me to the hindrance of seeing the place for what it was. I couldn’t let expectations cloud reality as the blanket of white clouds hid us from the surface and humanity.

Broken repeatedly and remolded, I ventured back to The States to find previous relations--peers that hadn’t been through the life-altering experience I had. “When you come back you have a kind of perspective that you didn’t have before that in some way problematizes your relationship with your family. You just start to be able to have a sort of double vision about them and who they are and how you grew up that can be really painful” (Crucet 354-355). Returning to the place I had grown up, had lived for most of my life, I had two selves: the one before Tanzania and the one after. They carry many commonalities and yet are drastically different. How do you relate to people that know a previous “you?” When peers get set in an idea of who you are as a person, it’s difficult to change. Many people ask how the trip was; what happened--how’d it go? I want to tell them about the monkey that stole my banana and proceeded to make faces at me or the fascinating jungle life, but I hesitate. I don’t want to hear their denials, their assumptions. Returning from a new place requires the same relinquishment of comfort that entering one does.

The vibrancy of Materuni’s waterfall-ridden slopes proves that Africa--the continent--is not just a desert expanse with primitive individuals as I’ve heard many assume. In spite of the various ways individuals will handle our respective situations, one veracity spans our journeys as a whole: renunciation of comfort and security. “... Not giving up that protection, I was helping him perpetuate his ignorance by choosing instead to ensure my own safety...something I could afford to relinquish, something we much in fact relinquish, if we have any hope of changing each other’s minds” (Crucet 362). Find the similarities. Drop the façade--the concrete packaging of your innermost self. Go into situations setting a tone. And most prominently, don’t be afraid to succumb to a culture--to release your barriers (comforts) and let it influence you.

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KATE CARTER AWARD FOR BEST WRITING IN THE CORE

FIRST PLACE (TIE)
MESA TOBIN

“A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT ESSAY”

First Place Tie Winner written for Professor Rose Nemunaitis' EN 201

In the film, A River Runs Through It, two brothers, Norman and Paul, find their purposes in life which lead down very different paths. As they grow up together, they learn where their strengths lie and that it is alright to become individuals while also maintaining a strong relationship with one another and appreciating each other's unique qualities and what they decided to pursue and devote their energy to. Norman takes more after his father, finding comfort in a more relaxed and academic centered lifestyle while Paul seeks stimulation, adventure, and excitement in all that Montana has to offer. These differences led to some conflict between the two but at the end of the day, they learned to come back together and not let their differences split them apart. My siblings and I had similar struggles; we are all very different and complex in our own ways and that oftentimes made things tense. However, despite our vast differences, we still managed to figure things out and work together when we needed to.

Norman was a bit more of a simple, realistic person. Ever since he was a young child, he found comfort in religion, just like his father. He told Paul that he wished to become a pastor and continue his fathers work, forging a strong connection with his faith. Paul, however, explained to Norman that he wanted to make a profession out of fly fishing, not really caring that fly fishing wasn’t really something to make a full time career out of. He had his mind set on it and it was clear, even then, that he wasn’t one to waver. However, even with these very different visions of their future, they supported each other in achieving their goals. My older brother was a lot like Norman. He took after our father in many ways; working on cars, building PCs, and getting a job in his early teens. He started riding dirt bikes when he was ten and, just like our father, taught himself pretty much everything. He was ambitious and logic based and didn’t take no for an answer, not even from me. I was a bit different. I let emotion and my own morals fuel my decisions. I didn’t really base my views on anyone else's, making up my own opinions as I went. In fact, they were quite different from my family’s. I am not tech savvy in the slightest and connected with animals better than I could ever ride a dirt bike. While my brother spent most of his time in the garage, I was out in the woods with my dog or in the barn with my horses. Even so, we found ways to overlap. He would ride his dirt bike to the barn and would agree to sit on a horse if I would try his bike. We would go on trail rides through the woods together on horseback, then later laugh as my dog chased after his RC car. In exchange for my way with animals, I couldn’t figure out a computer to save my life, so he would fix it for me and try to explain its ways in a language I couldn’t hope to understand. Additionally, he is as much of a nerd with video games as I am with books. He would bribe me to play video games with him, just so he could beat me, in exchange for lending me some of his books from school or his notes from later classes so I could see what I was in for. It fueled his passion for his talent while I was entertained by his excitement. Sometimes, I would get frustrated by how easily things would come to him, such as math equations, conversing with people, and memorizing facts and he would in turn get frustrated by my not understanding his explanations. He would need to slow down, wait for me to catch up, and I would need

to put a bit more effort into figuring things out. However, I could read people’s emotions like words in a book, whereas he was blind to them. He would feel intense emotions, just like our mother, and everyone would know what they were, except for him. He would grow angry, though, due to not understanding when or why people were feeling or behaving in certain ways but in all honesty, he didn’t really care to know why. He was very black and white in his thinking and when he was in his head, there was no reasoning with him or telling him to slow down. However, we slowly learned how to navigate our ways of being. We are vastly different from one another, but it exposed us to new things and taught us how to work through them. We would slow down for each other, find new ways of explaining things, and we became better for it.

My younger sister is something else entirely. She changes like the winds and is just as wild and unpredictable. I can’t recall how many times she’s changed her idea for college; last I heard, it was anesthesiology, then physical therapy for elders, and she has now settled on fashion design. Whereas for me, I knew that I was going to work with horses for the rest of my life by the time I was a junior in highschool. She just graduated highschool last month. Her emotions are as visible as our mothers, showing everything on her face and not even trying to hide them. This is a blessing and a curse for herself and everyone around her. I can see what she’s feeling and am never guessing, but it also shows all of the inner turmoil. Just like our mother and brother, regulating these emotions has never been her strength. She feels everything, just like me. The only difference is that I am more private and closed off about it. Along with feeling everything with no shame, she says exactly what is on her mind with little thought to the aftereffects until they are taking place. She can plan years into the future depending on her ideas at that moment, but has little care for what may come in the next few minutes, hours, or days. This took me some time to figure out as I think in the opposite way. I need to know what will happen in the immediate future, and will wait for what will come years from now to fall into place on its own. However, like me, she cares deeply for animals. She has her horse and knows him better than she knows herself. And, like my brother, she is more gifted in math than I will ever be. It simply comes to her, it just makes sense. However, she is dyslexic and so reading and writing have never been her strongest attribute, but her mind can come up with beautiful poetry and her eyes and hands just follow suit a bit more slowly. She takes after our father in this way. She has always been a bit of a puzzle to me, and it seems that no pieces match up quite right. They fit in the end, but there are some that need a bit more effort to get into place, or wiggle in their spot if jostled too much. But, at the end of the day, she makes it work. Every day is a new version of herself, depending on how she went to bed, slept and woke up, but it is still her every time. This also took me a while to figure out. Not everything was meant to be personal with her, and it grew to be refreshing that she could just decide to put things behind her and start new again. While I will never fully understand how her mind works the way it does, I can appreciate it nonetheless. I don’t know for certain what her future will hold, but I never doubt that she will make it work in the way she wants it. That’s just who she is.

The three of us couldn’t be any more different from each other while also being so incredibly similar. We have a wide variety of strengths and weaknesses, but also many constants. My brother is a genius when it comes to technology. He is dual enrolled in Butler University and Purdue University and still manages to be at the top of several of his classes, have a great social life, and somehow, at the end of the day, get some sleep. My sister can envision what she wants and how to get there with no trouble. With any path she focuses on, she can come up with and tell me her plan and every single time, I know she can make it happen for her just out of sheer will. Anything she sets her mind on, I don’t doubt for a second that it will work. Anesthesiology? Obviously it will suit her. Physical therapy for elders? Of course, she is great with people. Fashion design in New York City? She will fit right in. She got all of her credits in highschool done in her first semester of her senior year and anyone else would still have to finish their whole senior year. But not her. She strutted into the main office, told them her plan to graduate a semester early, made it known she wouldn’t take no, and figured it out all on her own. No one in our family knew of this plan until it was done and set in stone. I know exactly what to do with the

animals I come into contact with. I was told by four professional trainers that my first horse was dangerous, needed to be given to someone else, needed to be beaten into submission, among many other horrendous things. I knew, though, that all she needed was time and kindness and an understanding hand and voice. Six years later, she is the best horse I could have ever hoped for. My second horse was said to be immature, rude, and untalented. In four years, I helped him become a smart, eager, and pleasant member of the barn we are at. He simply needed to know what was expected of him and all he wants now is to please. My german shepherd is afraid of what is in the dark of night and howls and barks like a hound when let out before bed. However, all I need to tell her is that no barking is the rule, let her see me look and check outside, reassure her there are no monsters, and out she walks with no worries. Despite our shortcomings, we have something unique in all of us that makes us who we are. We just had to figure it out for ourselves and see it in each other.

Just like Norman and Paul, it took time for my siblings and I to see each other for who we are and accept our differences. But, once we did, our relationships with each other grew so much stronger and allowed us to exist proudly as individuals. We, of course, are completely different people with minds that work in fascinating ways. That, however, is what connects us to one another. Norman followed his father in pursuing academics and challenging his mind. My brother is doing the same, indulging in mathematics, machines, and equations, while my sister and I do things a little differently. Paul made his own path, encouraging his brother while also proudly connecting with his passion in fly fishing and adventure. My sister and I are doing things similarly, with me working with incredible animals while my sister tosses caution to the wind and sees where it lands. In the end, though, we taught each other so much and helped shape each other into the people we are today.



KATE CARTER AWARD FOR BEST WRITING IN THE CORE

FIRST PLACE (TIE)
ELIZABETH BAILEY

“THE SONG WITHIN US”

First Place Tie Winner written for Professor Rose Nemunaitis' EN 201

My favorite Elton John Song was Crocodile Rock. Pops would play it for us almost every day on his Elton John Greatest Hits (CD) that he kept in the center counsel of his two-thousand and seven silver Cadillac Luxury. Crocodile Rock remained my favorite until I was old enough to realize that my life as the youngest and only girl in my six-person family was not as perfect as I thought. Crocodile Rock lost its spark, and so did my romanticized idea of a perfect family. Robert Redford's movie, based on the novel A River Runs Through It written by Norman Maclean, captures the trials and tribulations the Maclean family, like my own, faced through the growth of their two sons, Norman and Paul.

Though for years upon years, I felt embarrassed and wanted to bury away parts of my brother's journeys, as well as my journey in life, Redford's film has shown me that my life is not too far from normal through the story of the Maclean family. In a messed up way, I am lucky that my family was able to make it out of the hard times and resolve conflicts between each other. I feel the worst times are what made us as close as we are now. At the conclusion of the film, Norman and Paul's father, Reverend Maclean, proclaims in his final sermon before his passing, “We are willing to help Lord, but what, if anything, is needed? Lord, it's true that we can seldom help those closest to us. Either we don't know what part of ourselves to give, or more often than not, the part we have to give is not wanted” (Redford, A River Runs Through It). As proven in the Maclean family's life to be accurate, the Reverend's message also hit home for me and my family's story.

Growing up, my life centered around sports, music, Sunday service, and family time. Before we had moved to Painesville, Ohio, I grew up in a small home in the “country” side of Madison, Ohio, on Dock Road, where the size of your pond, woods, and shooting range determined how many people would invite you to cookouts during the summertime. My three older brothers always had the grossest ideas of fun, like swimming in the leach-filled pond, wrestling in the dirt, or, most commonly of all, fishing, much like the Maclean brothers, Paul and Norman, fishing stuck with my brothers their entire lives, even when my family eventually moved to the city of Painesville, Ohio. Luckily for my brothers, it is only about a two-minute drive from our house to the nearest river, so though they had to give up target shooting and mud-wrestling, our new location was not all that bad.

Watching my brothers play together always fascinated me growing up. They would do the most unspeakable things and be completely unbothered. With the age gap from the youngest out of my three brothers, Drew, and I being four years apart, my brothers and I never had much in common except for music. Even still, my brothers and I always seemed to understand each other; whether we liked each other's little quirks and annoyances or not, we were family, and age did not matter when it came to love and understanding.

However, my brothers grew up a lot faster than I did, and at the age of fourteen, I was no longer watching them play together; I was in the pitch-black backyard on a hot summer night breaking up a drunken fistfight between them, home alone, and I was scared. Years before the fight had broken out, my middle brother, Douglas, was in a life-altering four-wheeler accident that changed the course of everything for my family. He had to give up everything he had ever known, which changed him. It changed him so much that he was hardly recognizable, like my oldest brother Dylan, who had been in and out of rehab for drug and alcohol abuse at least three times by then but still was not sober. I barely seemed to know them anymore, and with my youngest brother, Drew, who was much closer to them than I was, away in the Coast Guard, my family and I seemed to be running out of ways to help them,

As Norman said, looking back on his first and only fight with his brother Paul, “That was the only time we fought. Perhaps we wondered after which one of us was tougher. But if boyhood questions aren't answered before a certain point, they can't be raised again. So we returned to being gracious to one another, as the church well suggested” (Redford, A River Runs Through It). My brothers never fought again. I wonder if it is because they regretted it or maybe because they realized how scared it made me. Nevertheless, like the Macleans, we returned to the church and sat there as a family that Sunday as if everything was alright, hoping that it would be. About a week after that, Dylan returned to rehab for the last time and has not used since. Douglas followed soon after when my parents finally realized that the psychological repercussions of his earlier accident had never truly healed, and he, too, was using alcohol as a bandaid for his pain.

This was the year my favorite Elton John song became Someone Saved My Life Tonight. As I would listen to it, I would think of my brothers. I would think about Drew and how the hard times would have been so much easier if he was still stuck here with me. I thought about Douglas and how someone saved his life that night when he was found in the woods, face covered by a stream with a five-hundred-pound vehicle holding him down. I would also think about Dylan, who, like Norman's brother Paul, needed to be saved from addiction but never asked for help. When speaking about her older brother, Jessie Burns, Norman's love interest, once asked Norman, “Why is it the people who need the most help... won't take it?” (Redford, A River Runs Through It). For years, I heard my mother and father constantly blaming themselves for things that they simply could not control, like Dylan failing to be sober after they sent him to so many different recovery centers and groups, wishing that they could just “fix him” and make it better. Yet, Dylan never truly got better until he wanted to. During all of those years, he needed help, and he would never take it until he wanted it for himself. Unfortunately for the Macleans, Paul never got the help he needed, which led to his death; he never wanted it.

Years later, I reflect on my life story and feel less sorrowful. I am ultimately relieved and glad that my family survived the most harrowing times with nothing but our love for each other and our faith that God has a plan for us all, and no matter what happens, it is never without reason. I am unexplainably grateful every day that none of my brothers faced the same fate as Paul Maclean, though I know that, at times, they thought death might be easier than playing out the cards they had been handed. Norman never got to tell Paul how much he meant to him before his death; I had not thought about that before. So yesterday, I called my brother, Douglas. We talked for a while, and I told him how much I loved him. I repeated this notion with all of my brothers, and I hope they know how much I meant it. I know that while we were in the thick of it, life would have been easier if we had stopped trying for Douglas and Dylan and, like Norman, in a way, did with Paul and had just trusted them with their own outcomes. I can see now how important it was to them that we did not give up on them. Because we never gave up, on occasion, Douglas, Dylan, and Drew still go fishing together. Dylan is working a respectable job and is living in Concord, Ohio. He has been sober for one year and seven months and has never looked back. Douglas is aceing all of his nursing classes at Jacksonville University in Florida, where he now lives, and Drew is working with the United States Coast Guard, currently stationed in West

Virginia. My parents and I are the only ones left in our now quiet home with our five dogs, and everyone is finally healing in their own time.

At the end of his last speech, Reverend Maclean concludes, “And so it is those that we live with and should know that elude us, but we can still love them. We can love completely without complete understanding” (Redford, *A River Runs Through It*). I still do not relate to my brothers. I realize that I never really have. But one thing we will always have is the song within us. Though my father, Pops, has since sold his beloved Cadillac due to brake issues, nothing has ever stopped him from bringing my brothers and I music, one way or another. Music is what permanently bonded us together from childhood to heartbreak, and until now. When the first cords of any Elton song play, we do not think about our pasts; we simply turn the volume up and let go. It is as if our souls are somehow connected to the chorus and to each other, and it has always been, and will always be, that way for my family. Like the Maclean’s fishing, the Music that runs through us is our peace.

A River Runs Through It, a film directed by Robert Redford, based off of Norman Maclean's novel, demonstrates the trials that families like mine, similar to the Maclean’s, face through the growth of their children. I no longer think of my family as either “perfect” nor “imperfect”, as I did when I was young. I have come to terms with the fact that we are, in fact, neither; we are just us. *A River Runs Through It* has shown me, more than ever before, that we are all a little indifferent, and that is okay. As long as my family has each other, I know that we will be fine. Elton John is my favorite artist, same as my brothers and father, and now I love all of his songs equally, just as I once loved *Crocodile Rock*, and I love all of my brothers, no matter the pain they have caused me in the past.

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KATE CARTER AWARD FOR BEST WRITING IN THE CORE MINORS

TAYLER WILBER

“NO WOMAN IS SAFE: FRIDGING IN COMICS, NEW AND OLD”

written for Dr. Jennifer Swartz-Levine's EN 329

In comic books, as well as other forms of entertainment, side characters often serve to drive the main character's narrative, progress the plot, and provide emotional depth. Over the past few decades, a controversial and malevolent trope has emerged, one that exploits the victimization of women; this is known as fridging. Fridging refers to writers killing off or injuring a female character to motivate a male hero, progressing his storyline with little regard for the woman’s character evolution or security. One might think that this is an older trope, as the twenty-first century has been more focused on women's empowerment and not forcing an exclusively masculine story; however, this trope gained popularity in 1999, continuing to be utilized in comics and comic-based films as late as 2023. Through the years, writers have taken advantage of female characters by using their demise to raise a male protagonist, causing what Comic Book Resources called an “ugly blemish on fan-favorite stories or making lesser ones look even worse” (Collins, 2018). From the character who started it all, Alexandra “Alex” Dewitt, to one of the most famous lovers in Spider-Man, Gwendolyn “Gwen” Stacy, and even a representation icon for the Pakistani-Muslim community, Kamala Kahn, no comic woman is safe from the chopping block.

The term fridging originates from comic writer Gail Simone, who coined the phrase on her website *Women in Refrigerators*. Before becoming a comic writer, Simone was a comic lover first and foremost; she specifies, “In any case, having a uterus myself, I found that I most enjoyed reading about the girl heroes, or Superchicks. And it had been nagging me for a while that in mainstream comics, being a girl superhero meant inevitably being killed, maimed or depowered, it seemed” (Simone, 1999). After she read “Deadly Force!” (*Green Lantern* #54, Vol. 3) and witnessed the scene where the Green Lantern discovers his lover, Alex, stuffed in the refrigerator, Simone created a list of “women in comics [that have] been killed, raped, depowered, crippled, turned evil, maimed, tortured, contracted a disease or had other life-derailing tragedies befall her” (Simone, 1999) for the narrative progression of a male hero. This list includes women of all varieties, spanning from new, popular heroines to girlfriends of heroes, old and new. A list of men was also created on this platform known as *Dead Man Defrosting*, where the men “have been altered or appear to die... they usually come back even better than before, either power-wise or in terms of character development/relevancy to the reader.” Through these lists, it is clear that women have received the short end of the stick when it comes to their narratives being developed in comics.

Simone questioned why writers began using this trope and why it was so popular, considering its harsh qualities. One possibility is that comic book companies focus on male characters since most of their consumers are male; therefore, they do not have as much emotional attachment to the female characters. Consequently, female deaths are often viewed as more valuable for plot progression than their being alive. She claims, “...no one seemed to have a really good guess as to what the female percentage of the readership is... So, I have to assume that we're statistically only of marginal import. So, it's possible that less thought might be given to the impact the death of a female character might have on the readership” (Simone, 1999). This was not the only motive that she speculated,

also suggesting some of the women on this list were “spin-offs” of the original heroes, and therefore nothing more than “baggage.” Simone concluded her essay by declaring that perhaps male creators did not know how to relate to female characters, so they preferred to terminate them entirely instead of attempting to genuinely develop them. Nonetheless, this trope has continued to be applied to comic narratives frequently.

One of the most known instances of fridging and inspiration for the terminology occurred in the DC comic “Deadly Force!” (Green Lantern #54, Vol. 3) by Ron Marz. Introduced in 1994, Kyle Rayner was a relatively new persona for the Green Lantern series, after inheriting the power ring from former Green Lantern Hal Jordan. He is depicted as a young, respectable hero, and his relationship with civilian Alexandra “Alex” Dewitt only adds depth to his personal life. Dewitt is introduced in issue #48 of the series, acting as a physical and emotional support system to Rayner, offering comfort and assisting him in navigating his duties as Green Lantern; however, this relationship was short-lived, as Dewitt only survived to see seven issues of the series. In issue #54, Rayner returns home to find that Dewitt has been brutally murdered and, in a shocking and gruesome act, shoved into her refrigerator by the villain Major Force. Major Force, a recurring antagonist in the Green Lantern series, kills Dewitt solely to damage Rayner emotionally. The writers elucidate that Dewitt's death is meant to affect Rayner profoundly from the beginning of the issue; the first panel of the comic shows Dewitt in Rayner's arms, smiling gleefully. They make a note to tell the readers that the couple had just recently gotten back together, as Dewitt states, “No, really. For the first time in a long time I'm beginning to believe things are going to work out for us... Since we're back together and all...” (Green Lantern #54, Vol. 3). Later on in the comic, the couple decides to spend the night together, unknowingly, for the last time. After this, Rayner is called to fulfill his duties as a hero and leaves Dewitt home alone. At this point in the narrative, Dewitt meets her demise, as Major Force comes to her home, looking for Rayner. When she does not give him the information he requests, he attacks her, strangling her until she dies and shoving her lifeless body in the refrigerator for Rayner to eventually find. The writers play even more into setting Rayner up for emotional downfall by having Major Force leave him a note stating, “Surprise for you in the fridge. Love, A” (Green Lantern #54, Vol. 3). This note refers back to the beginning of the comic, just before Rayner leaves Dewitt alone, as she tells him, “... You run along and I'll have a surprise waiting for you when you come back” (Green Lantern #54, Vol. 3). As one can imagine, this situation enrages Rayner; he attacks Major Force without another word, adding to the overall plot of Green Lantern and launching Rayner's character development.

Today, many of the creators of Green Lantern #54, Vol. 3 “...admit the term [fridging] helped them re-evaluate how they handled female characters” (2021), as mentioned by Drew Mollo, an author at ScreenRant; however, DC Comics has done a poor job at proving this statement to be true. He follows this by stating how DC creators have decided to call out their company's past of fridging by bringing back Major Force in Suicide Squad, Issue #8 (2021). Writers specifically use the Suicide Squad's latest member at the time, Ambush Bug, a character who has “fourth-wall awareness,” to exemplify their disgust for the character. Mollo states, “Ambush Bug is aware of this ongoing discussion, but his criticism toward Major Force shows that the blame appears to be solely on the character instead of the writer or DC Comics as a whole” (2021). Rather than having Bug take a jab at the company or people who created the fridging trope, the writers forced the blame onto the fictional character. Mollo also mentions how some creators of the Green Lantern comic were “neutral or defended their story choices,” showing no remorse for the horrible trend they have created in the comic community. Unfortunately, this was not the last time DC creators would show no shame in their actions.

Another ruthless example of fridging occurs in Alan Moore's 1988 comic Batman: The Killing Joke, where Barbara Gordon, also known as Batgirl, is brutally injured in an attempt to drive the emotional narrative of the story. The storyline centers on the Joker's attempt to prove that anyone, even someone as disciplined as the Commissioner, Gordon's father, can be driven insane by a single traumatic event. This event happens fairly early in the graphic novel, as the Joker escapes from prison and immediately hunts down Gordon, shooting her in the

spine and paralyzing her from the waist down, all right in front of her father's eyes. After this, the Commissioner is kidnapped by the Joker and taken to a strange abandoned amusement park, where the Joker continues to beat away at his mental strength. If paralyzing his victim daughter was not bad enough, Gordon is utilized to enhance the Joker's sadistic games, as he strips her of her clothes and photographs her in writhing pain for her father's viewing horror. Throughout the graphic novel, Gordon's fate highlights the cruelty and sadism of the Joker, creating emotional hardship to break the Commissioner and providing Batman with yet another chance to be the hero and save the day. Gordon is reduced to a mere victim in the Joker's larger scheme — a tragic catalyst for the men's character development.

Following the publication of The Killing Joke, Gordon was permanently paralyzed as a result of the Joker's attack. While this handicap led to her transformation into Oracle, a key figure in the DC Universe and icon for women with physical disabilities, that never seemed to be the creator's original plan. In 2004, an interview published in Wizard: The Guide To Comics magazine headlined; Moore stated, “I asked DC if they had any problem with me crippling Barbara Gordon—who was Batgirl at the time—and if I remember, I spoke to Len Wein, who was our editor on the project... Len got back onto the phone and said, ‘Yeah, okay, cripple the bitch.’ It was probably one of the areas where they should've reined me in, but they didn't” (62). The creators did not care about what would happen to Gordon following The Killing Joke, as the statement “Yeah, okay, cripple the bitch,” clearly shows. However, unlike most women who were victims of fridging, Gordon got her redemption by becoming the leader of the Birds of Prey. While Gordon's evolution into Oracle is an empowering story in itself, it is essential to remember that this transformation solely arose from an unnecessary horrific event that occurred for the sake of elevating a male-driven narrative. Using women to break emotion out of male heroes only became more popular, as Marvel and DC continue to deal with multiple cases of fridging in their comic issues, new and old.

Despite Gwendolyn "Gwen" Stacy's intelligence and morals, her most famous quality is being Peter Parker's, otherwise known as Spider-Man, first love interest. Like many women before her, Stacy's character is taken advantage of to propel her male counterpart to greatness, and as such, she must suffer a terrifying death. Stacy's death resulted from a battle between Spider-Man and the Green Goblin in “The Night Gwen Stacy Died” (The Amazing Spider-Man #121). Upon discovering Spider-Man's real identity, the Green Goblin captures Stacy and maliciously throws her from a bridge, compelling Spider-Man to rescue the woman he cherishes. Unfortunately, his effort to save her using his web-slinging abilities tragically misfires, as his web jerks Stacy's body, resulting in a fatal neck injury. Despite his super-human powers and agility, Spider-Man is confronted with one of the most heartbreaking predicaments one can endure: the loss of a loved one while battling an adversary. The writers meant for Stacy's death to increase Peter's sense of guilt and rage from losing his parents and Uncle Ben, catalyzing his emotional evolution and progressing his story arc. Stacy's death has become one of the most famous comic death scenes in all of pop culture history; as Brian Cronin, an author at Comic Book Resources, notes, “More generally, the shocking death of a major superhero's love interest really brought home the idea that killing off major characters (especially love interests of superheroes) was a way to get loads of attention from readers, and so that particular approach has been done to death in the years since... it also created a sort of tent pole in the history of Spider-Man that will forever be acknowledged” (2023). Stacy may have been a fan-favorite character with intriguing qualities, but Parker's story is the main attraction, making her unarguably disposable. This scene worked so well in the writer's favor that they exploited Stacy to catapult Parker's storyline further not once but twice; her character returns in The Clone Conspiracy, underscoring how much of a void she left in Parker's life, as he exclaims, “She couldn't be real, could she?!” (Issue #1). Ultimately, this again falls into the fridging trope because she was only brought back as a plot device for Parker's story development, not her own. Marvel writers have continued to catapult Spider-Man, specifically Peter Parker, into the spotlight for years because of his popularity among the consumers, so much so that they have taken iconic characters, such as Kamala Khan, and dragged them to their demise in Spider-Man's comics.

Kamala Khan, a beloved young superhero also known as Ms. Marvel, has become one of the most influential characters in Marvel Comics since her debut in 2013. As a Pakistani-American Muslim teenager from Jersey City, Khan was a refreshing and much-needed shift in superhero narratives, offering readers a more diverse and culturally-motivated protagonist compared to the stereotypical big, strong, all-American super-man. Her death in “One Shall Fall!” (The Amazing Spider-Man #26, Vol. 6), however, has sparked significant controversy due to its relation to the fridging trope. In the issue, Parker and a team of heroes are battling the villain Rabin, someone who is explicitly targeting Mary Jane, Parker’s love interest after Gwen Stacy. The plot of the battle is that Rabin was sent by an all-powerful idol to capture and sacrifice the “scarlet woman”, making him into a “godly” figure and “the world [his] to slaughter” (The Amazing Spider-Man #26, Vol. 6). Amid the battle, Parker realizes that MJ cannot stand to fight against Rabin, so to save her and the rest of the world from coming to an end, he tells Khan to protect her. Khan protests and asks, “What about me?” to which Parker replies, “If he gets his hands on Mary Jane, the entire world is his. You can’t let that happen” (The Amazing Spider-Man #26, Vol. 6). Khan is determined to keep MJ safe and adhere to Parker’s request, so in a sickening twist, Khan uses her powers to transform into MJ, luring Rabin to impale her with his weapon, killing her.

The general audience was conflicted and, needless to say, unhappy about this sudden and rather uncalled-for end to Khan’s heroic journey, especially since the comic she died in was primarily focussing on someone else. People began to claim that this was another example of Marvel playing into the fridging trope, backing up their claims by mentioning how the comic that came after The Amazing Spider-Man #26, Vol. 6, the comic that was solely supposed to focus on Khan’s heroism, life, and ultimate death, still featured Spider-Man on the cover, front and center. The front cover of “Fallen Friend: The Death of Kamala Khan” features Khan heroically in the background while her friends, primarily Parker, look sad, weeping in front of her. By showcasing Parker’s emotional turmoil at the beginning of the comic, fans began to wonder if Marvel actually cared about Khan’s character and continuation of her story or if she was once again a victim of fridging. Readers also questioned “...the aforementioned fact that Kamala had barely even appeared in Amazing Spider-Man before she met her end within its pages...” as Spencer Baculi, an author at Bounding Into Comics, reiterates (2024). With the creators of Ms. Marvel being thrown to the flames, Cody Zigar, an editor of the comic, decided to speak out. On The Amazing Spider-Talk podcast, he states, “It was funny watching when the whole Kamala stuff was going down... He (Wells) had told me months before the plan, which was, Feige was like, ‘Hey, I don’t do this very often, but can you please do this to make things in line with Marvel because we have some stuff we want to do with Kamala,’ so he (Wells) was like, ‘F***, I’m the guy that drew the short straw? People are going to be very mad that I have to kill Ms. Marvel” (Zigar 2024). The plans Marvel referenced in the podcast eventually became a comic series released in 2024 called Ms. Marvel: Mutant Menace, which followed Khan and her journey as the latest member of the X-Men. This shift disappointed many readers, as they deeply enjoyed the authenticity and cultural aspects of the original Ms. Marvel; however, it proves that Marvel had plans all along for Khan. Today, it is still debated whether or not Khan was “fridged” in the Spider-Man series, as she died in a series that was not her own, propelled Parker’s emotions, and fitting into Simone’s definition of fridging by having “life-derailing tragedies befall her.” Nevertheless, one thing that is not arguable is how comic companies deal with female character deaths compared to male characters.

As comic book storytelling continues to grow in the 21st century, cultural shifts and increased awareness of gender equality seem to influence the industry. The rise of female interest in comics and the growing influence of internet culture and social media platforms created an environment where fans could voice their concerns and hold creators accountable. Within the past two years, controversy about Ms. Marvel has informed more readers about fridging, and many women are not holding back their opinions. Journalists, such as Lia Williamson, use their blogging platforms, like Adventures in Poor Taste, to express their displeasure for the lack of care about women’s characters in DC and Marvel comics, as well as calling to attention the effects fridging has on victim’s mental health:

“Some 1 in 4 women are victims of intimate partner violence (with 1 in 3 experiencing physical violence from a partner), and 1 in 5 women are raped. When women are killed so callously with zero regard for their characters in the fiction we read, it’s a reminder that our hobbies and the things we love care as little for our safety as the real world does. Even being in nerd spaces, I’ve been the target of sexual predators and men who refuse to learn the meaning of ‘No, I’m not interested.’” (2023). Readers have also noticed how writers treat male heroes’ deaths compared to female heroes’ deaths, using Ms. Marvel as a primary example. Williamson states, “No, death in comics is nothing new, but at least when Doctor Strange or Wolverine died they each got their own ‘Death of’ events that built up to that moment and showcased them... Ms. Marvel dies in just another issue of Spider-Man, not even an event or anything with her own name on it. Just a Spider-Man issue” (2023). Williamson, along with many other journalists, acts as a voice for comic-loving women of the 21st century, and their call for change begs comic creators to heed their words.

Fridging – the violent death or suffering of female characters to advance male protagonists’ – has long been a troubling trope in comics. While it may have been accepted or overlooked in earlier eras, the 21st century demands a shift toward more respectful and female-empowering storytelling. From the creation of a Dead Man Defrosting list to women using social media platforms to voice their opinions, fans have emphasized that fridging should not be tolerated in this day and age. It should not be utilized as a lazy or emotionally manipulative tool to expand on a male hero’s story; instead, the comic industry must continue to evolve with the rest of the world. By ensuring that female characters are provided the same respect and emotional depth as their male counterparts, the new selection of comics would allow more readers to resonate with characters and foster more exciting and inclusive stories.

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