

THE PROFESSORS: APPROACHING STORYTELLING FROM A
NARRATIVE AND VISUAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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HONORS THESIS

Submitted to Texas State University
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
graduation in the Honors College
May 2020

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2020

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DEDICATION

To Love and its becomings.

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Reset

I sit them all in a square of chairs. I lean them back onto each other's laps.

I grab the knife.

I slice. I pull the chairs out from underneath them, carefully.

I ask Lucy, "Will that do?"

I tell them to stand.

She looks at them with savory eyes, smiles.

They all fall down.

We season them. We cook them. We eat them.

"Thank you for participating," I say.

"They're really good!" says Lucy.

They stare at me, desire in their eyes.

We eat in silence.

I stare back at them, smile.

The knives screech across the plate with each cut.

"Welcome to Physics 101."

"What was their reaction?" Lucy asks.

"Today, you will learn almost nothing."

"They loved it!" I reply.

"I mean, come on. It's the first day!"

"There was an uproar like I'd never heard before when they fell."

They laugh.

Casey was the first pet I ever had. I was five, maybe six, years old when she died. Well, we don't know if she died. Casey was a dog—a beautiful, black Labrador with a white tuxedo of fur on her chest. She was my best friend, if I'm being honest. I didn't have any friends as a child, but who really does? A five-year-old couldn't possibly have the capacity to make a friend that matters. We would play in the yard most of the time. It was a big yard with one tree. The tree was one of those you paint pictures about: the ones with the large base and the twisty arms that go horizontal, not vertical. Vertical trees are hard to look pretty. It was probably an oak tree. It was toward the center of the yard. Casey liked that tree. We'd run around the tree like a boy and a dog do—the two things in the world that can't run out of energy. The grass was usually vacuumed well, unless Dad was thinking about Mom too much. We lived in one of those “rich kid” neighborhoods where the grass had to be. Casey was a selective barker—you know the type. The good type. The type where, when they're barking, you *know* something is up. Usually, it was to tell us that she needed to go pee. I remember the last time I saw Casey. She barked that day. Well, it wasn't as much a bark as it was a squeal. I didn't mean to hurt her. She bit me on the finger, and it felt like when Mom used to pinch me for being a baby because I was a baby. So, I hit her in the mouth. Casey, not Mom. The next morning, I woke up, and Dad told me that Casey was missing. We did standard protocol and made flyers for a missing dog. They didn't work. The tears eventually came from Dad, not me. He was definitely sadder than I was about it. He was a pretty emotional guy. It's true what they say about you growing up to be just like your parents. Having only one makes it even worse. I was still really sad about it. I love dogs. Anyway, I think I saw Casey by the river one time when Dad and I went fishing. It wasn't the first time I had saw her. I'm sure of it.

Don't let

the little voices

get you,

Jordy.

They'll cry,

they'll scream,

"Let me out!

Let me out!"

But you

don't let them

tell you

what to do.

Am I

clear

with you,

Jordy?

You are

my greatest

subject,

Jordy.

You have

not failed me

yet.

Her tongue presses into the side of my neck—below the jugular—and she sucks into my skin.

“Careful,” I moan.

She giggles airily and consumes my neck harder. I try to push her away, but her mouth is like an octopus tentacle stuck to the glass of my neck. She bites softly, and I throw her to the ground.

“What the fuck, Lucy!”

She stares at me from the ground with timid eyes. *He’s like a vulture, staring through me.*

“I’m—I’m sorry, Jordan. I-I thought you liked—”

“You know I bruise easily,” he says sternly. His eyes don’t leave mine. I think he might hurt me.

“I have students,” he continues. His eyes twitch then go hard again.

“I know,” I croak.

It’s silent for thirty seconds. At least it feels that long. I wish there were a clock to pick up the silence. I guess I could make one up in my head. Tick, tick, tick.

He smiles, finally.

“It’s okay,” he says, the way he does where I think he means it. I try to grin.

“I’m gonna use the restroom,” I say, and I move. He continues to smile as I walk away. I pick up my pace.

I slam the door as quietly as I can behind me.

“Everything okay, Luce?” Jordan calls. I wasn’t quiet enough.

“Yep,” I reply, sliding my back down the door. Let me out.

I'm scared.

I do love Jordan.

But I don't understand him.

I hope he can't hear my crying.

He told me everything that he's lost.

His old dog, Casey, comes up mostly.

His exes are what I question the hardest.

"Lost" is what he usually calls them, but how?

Maybe once in an accident makes sense, but he's told me of three.

You don't *lose* your child by accident. You don't lose your partner by accident.

How can the three people Jordan loved most be "lost" and never return over *one year*?

There's no *way* it can be coincidence. It's impossible. It can't be, it can't be, it can't *be*!

Or maybe it can, and I'm wrong, and I'm just overthinking everything completely.

It is devastating that Jordan has dealt with these losses in such a short time.

Maybe I could try to help him cope with it more than I have been.

It's got to be hard to not think about all these... losses.

Am *I* wrong for thinking Jordan might have...?

There's no way. He couldn't do that.

His heart is way too big to...

I don't want to cry anymore.

I don't want to be the next.

Please, no.

Not lost.

“My dad,” I begin to Lucy, a grin creeping on my face, “used to take us here all the time when I was a kid.” Lucy looks at me with her bottom lip pouted—the I’d-marry-you-right-now-if-you’d-ask lips. My cheekbones rise further, and I huff out of my nose. “We’d go fishing over there.” I point to the creek.

“Did it always smell this... pungent?” Lucy laughs, clamping her nose like a toddler about to jump in a pool.

The smell of death was always a trademark of the place.

I smile and laugh.

Anthony barks, then whimpers, beside us. He’s staring at a tree less magnificent than the one in my childhood home, but it’s similar. I crouch down to his level.

“What’s the matter, Ant?” I ask him like he can answer. He knows what I’m asking. He backs up slowly, continuing to whimper.

“There must be a deer or something over there that’s scaring him,” Lucy guesses. She crouches down and asks the same question to Anthony.

I leave my partners behind and approach the tree. They stay, Lucy stroking the top of Anthony’s head. “Be careful,” she calls out.

The leaves crunch with every step. The smell grows even more pungent. That was a good word to use.

At the base of the tree, there is a mound of leaves that couldn’t have gathered naturally. It must’ve been made.

There is something in there.

I crouch down again and brush the leaves swiftly. They float with the wind in the air like careless birds. Where they were, a face. Familiar. Purple with stone eyes.

You've done it

again,

Jordy,

you have.

I can't

tell you

enough

of how

proud

I am

of you,

Jordy.

By far,

you have been

my greatest

subject.

Are you proud

of what you've

accomplished,

Jordy?

It is

only

the beginning.

We found Anthony at a shelter. Not Lucy and I. Bridgette was my partner, at the time. A nice girl. I sure miss her. He was only a little over a year old when we got him. He was one of the few that didn't bark. He just laid in his dog bed like the good little boy he is. I remember his little eyes peeked up when we came over to his cage. Bridgette asked what his name was. She called him like he was a baby, and when his ears perked-up and his tail started to wag, Bridgette's heart melted. So did mine. And we took him. The shelter told us he suffered from separation anxiety. Don't we all, Doc? We said that wouldn't be a problem. Bridgette would be home most of the day to keep him company. Didn't think about what would happen to poor Anthony if you left, now, did you Bridgey? Anthony's almost three now. Been through two other girlfriends. On the fourth. I really think this one is going to last. Lucy loves you, Boy. And she loves me, too. She must. I've never hurt Anthony. I never would. He's the one of the true beauties of the world. I wish I could give him a friend, but I've never found another dog good enough for him. I'm bad at giving things chances. So disheartening. I'm trying. There's beauty in pain, don't you think? I think so. What is it they always say? "We wouldn't know joy if we didn't experience pain." I really do feel like I turn into my dad more and more every day. He used to talk about pain all the time. Mom died when I was a toddler. That's probably why Dad was so sad all the time. It wasn't a huge deal for me. I don't think Dad ever got over it. That's the difference between him and I. Death doesn't scare me. It doesn't even hurt me anymore. How fucked up is that. If Anthony died, though, I would be sad. Dogs don't deserve to die. They don't deserve anything bad to happen to them. I wish we had a tree in our yard. I miss that tree. The wide one. The one Casey liked to pee on. I bet Anthony would like to pee on it, too. I'm sorry, Lucy. I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm sorry.

I stand on the counter in front of the class with my famous red cape, knife in hand.

I get up quickly.

When I land, my free hand punches the ground, one knee down. Superhero pose.

I stare at her with savory eyes.

Same routine as before. They sit timidly in the chairs.

I cut. One by one by one.

The girl's eyes are frantic.

I drop the knife. *Clunk.*

They try to stand, can't.

She lies.

I stop.

Shit. Holy fucking shit.

Run. I run, I run, I run...

No breath.

Grab the matches. Grab the gas.

Twenty cuts. Maybe more. Definitely more.

Around the house and inside. Kitchen, living, bathroom, and bedroom. Keep on pouring.

Go, Anthony. Run. Away, away, away.

Lock the door. Lock them all.

I'll hold you to the end.

Light it, light it, light it.

Tears. The first time.

What have I done?

RESET

by

Cole Plunkett

FADE IN:

EXT. YARD - DAY (1998)

JORDAN, about a seven-year-old boy, is chasing a DOG. There is a large TREE in the middle of the yard. Jordan falls onto the ground and laughs...

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING (2020)

LUCY, in her mid-twenties, laughs as JORDAN, now about twenty-nine years old, sneaks up behind her and grabs her by the waist while she's chopping a potato.

Lucy drops the knife on the counter as Jordan lifts her up. He twirls her around. Lucy laughs. Jordan sets her down.

A DOG walks to Jordan. Jordan pets the dog.

He stops petting and turns to Lucy, chopping the potato again.

Jordan lightly grabs Lucy's wrist as she's about to cut into the potato. Lucy stares at him, shakes her head, and waves him off. She goes back to chopping.

Jordan grabs Lucy's wrist again, with force. She drops the knife. Jordan picks it up. He kisses her. She smiles...

INT. LECTURE HALL - MORNING

Jordan smiles standing in front of a group of four STUDENTS who are all sitting in CHAIRS. Each of them is lying on the lap of the person behind them...

EXT. WOODS - MORNING (1998)

Jordan is smiling as he and his DAD walk through the woods to a

RIVER

DAD shows Jordan how to fish. Jordan throws his FISHING LINE...

EXT. WOODS - EVENING (2020)

Jordan acts like he's throwing a fishing line as he, Lucy, and the dog are walking through the woods. Jordan points to the river. He holds his hand out, indicating he was small. Lucy pouts her lips.

Lucy scrunches her nose and holds it. Jordan looks at her and scrunches his eyebrows.

Jordan looks around. He walks toward a large PILE of LEAVES. He holds out his hand toward Lucy and the dog, signaling for them not to follow. Lucy crouches to hold the dog...

INT. LECTURE HALL - MORNING

Jordan crouches to the legs of each chair and cuts the ZIP TIES connecting them.

He stands up when he's finished and laughs to himself..

EXT. YARD - DAY (1998)

Jordan rubs the dog's belly, giggling as the dog kicks its leg repeatedly. Jordan rubs deeper, laughing louder and louder.

The dog squeals and bites him on the hand.

He screams. He smacks the dog on the nose. The dog whimpers..

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (2020)

Jordan moans as Lucy sucks on his neck on the COUCH. Jordan tries to push Lucy back, but she gets more aggressive.

Jordan pushes Lucy off the couch. He rubs his neck. Lucy has wide eyes on the ground.

Jordan walks away...

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Jordan walks away from the students with a chair in his hands. The students balance on each other.

Jordan motions his hands up, signaling for the students to stand. They try, but they all fall...

EXT. YARD - NIGHT (1998)

Jordan stumbles with a KNIFE in his hand. A dog barks...

EXT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (2020)

A dog barks while Jordan opens a drawer. He clumsily pulls out a KNIFE.

He walks to the couch, where Lucy is lying. He stands above her with the knife...

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Jordan stands on a counter, wearing a red CAPE and holding a KNIFE. He has a HICKEY on his neck.

He jumps down and does a superhero pose, aiming his head down. He looks up.

He stands and bows. The class applauds.

He holds up four fingers with the hand not holding the knife. He grabs FOUR CHAIRS and positions them in a square. He ZIP TIES the legs together.

He places the students in the chairs and lays them on each other's laps, knife still in hand.

He cuts the zip ties.

He pulls the chairs from underneath the students. They balance on each other. He waves his hands up for them to stand...

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT (1998)

Jordan picks up a DEAD DOG. He places it on the ground and covers it in LEAVES...

EXT. WOODS - EVENING (2020)

Jordan crouches down and brushes the leaves over. A DEAD FACE is revealed. He puts a hand to his mouth.

He looks at Lucy and the dog, hardly breathing...

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Jordan stands frozen, hardly breathing, with his eyes wide as the students stand up from their fall.

He bursts out of the classroom...

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Jordan barrels through the door. He yanks the BED COMFORTER off Lucy's body. Lucy's body is covered in blood and cuts...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jordan carries Lucy's dead body to the

BEDROOM

He tucks her into bed, then stares at her with a smile...

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Jordan stands completely still, tears escaping his eyes.

EXT. YARD

Jordan pours gas around the perimeter of the house. He leaves a trail going into the

HOUSE

He pours gas onto the furniture until he runs out. The dog barks. He points for the dog to run away. The dog obeys.

He closes the front door.

He takes out a LIGHTER from his back pocket. He ignites it and inflames the trail going out the door.

BEDROOM

Jordan closes the door and locks it. He walks to the bed. He sets his back against the headboard.

Fire inflames the room. He pulls the covers over him and Lucy. He spoons her. The dog whimpers and scratches at the door.

FADE OUT:

END

Bridal Crowns

I never liked my lecture on local courts, anyway. So, when I saw my students on their phones, doodling the Mona Lisa, and flirting each other into oblivion, a personal anecdote didn't seem so... wrong.

"Class," I interrupted, sterner than usual. Their heads popped up like a communal jack-in-the-box. Dave and Jane even stopped making out in the corner long enough to look at me. "There's a story I want to tell you." That loosened their shoulders. "A personal one," I made sure to add.

I had never seen so many eyes in a classroom in my life.

"When I was nineteen-years old in my—oh, it must have been my sophomore year in my undergraduate—I looked a lot like I do now. Hell, I probably even wore this shirt a few times back in my hay day."

I smelled my shirt for dramatic effect. Many of the students' eyes scrunched, and their heads pivoted away just enough to show how uncomfortable they were.

"Oh, yes. Woodstock all over it," I joked. I hoped they knew it was a joke. At least a few of them had to have laughed. I didn't look *that* old, did I?

"I also had these *huge* prescriptions that I would never wear in public. Mr. Brown used to be too cool for that."

A student travelled down the end aisle out the door with his blocky Beats (that's what they call them, right?) pounding his ears. Dave and Jane were making out again.

"The most important thing, though, about this story," I hurried, "is a girl named Scarlet."

The name sounded plastic in my ears.

“Scarlet and I resided in the same dorm that I am sure many of you are roomed in today. We used to call Hall Three “Animal Farm”, but not because it had communist rule.”

Not even a nose huff could be heard in my Political Science 1310 classroom, even with my slightly exaggerated pause.

“I liked to play a game with Scarlet in the dorm where, every time I spotted her in the lobby, I would slick my hair back even firmer, then pass in front of her, saying, “Hi, Scarlet,” every time—you know, because it would be *way* too easy to just introduce myself.”

Finally, some halfway decent laughs.

“Scarlet thought it was *terribly* funny, and it eventually got to the stage where I’d pull my hair back *while* passing in front of her, and then casually say to her, ‘Oh, hey, Scarlet.’ Nearly had her on the floor every time.

“Once I got tired of making a fool of myself, I attempted the *unthinkable* of asking her on a date.”

Perhaps a chair in the room squeaked, and some of the students may have even leaned forward with their elbows on the desk and their faces in their hands.

“It was quite difficult to find the right place and time to ask my crush such a serious inquiry, but it ended up happening in the most romantic of places: the cafeteria.”

The laughs kept coming now. I felt like a stand-up comedian.

“Now, it is hard enough to ask a girl out when she is alone, but it is an entirely different equation when she is with her friends. Luckily, I did not have to say anything at

all. Scarlet asked me if I would want to go to a party that weekend when I approached her table. Well—I guess I forget to mention—her and her peers were already discussing the details of the party when I got there, so it was the polite thing of her to do, but no matter the case, I gave her the answer any desperate, barely-more-than-a-teenage-boy would give.”

I held a slight pause to gather my thoughts that were already formed.

“The party. It was a fairly decent night.” An understatement. “When I showed up, fashionably late—as *you* all should; never show up to a party on time, but you already know that—Scarlet was sitting on a couch in the living room with her hands on her bouncing knees. She was wearing a yellow dress with ingrained flower designs and tall, black heels. Her long, brunette hair fell perfectly in front of her shoulders, and her makeup—well, she was never one that really needed it.” How could I remember so vividly? “Her smile was closed. It was a smile that was fighting to leave. She was surrounded by men that wanted to take her upstairs, and some women that probably wanted to do the same.

“I was aloof in the corner, playing my best game of hide-and-seek with the girl I loved.”

It slipped.

“Every time I looked at her, she was either staring at decorations on the wall, or she was scratching her wrist. It looked like she had a tattoo on it.

“Eventually, she told the group she wanted some air.

“As she was walking toward the door and, consequently, me, my organs caught on fire, but I finally mustered the courage to tell her—”

“Hi, Scarlet.”

Scarlet, with her face pointed at the ground, motioned her head up slowly. Her amber eyes first glimmered, asking to release waterfalls. But once they registered who she was looking at, they loosened, and I thought I could see some happiness in her smile.

Then, she walked right past me. All the hope brimming inside my chest immediately disintegrated into sorrow... until she pulled up a hand to slick her hair back. Turning around and looking into my eyes, she mocked in my voice, “Oh, hey, Mathew.”

I didn’t mean to smile so widely, but it was impossible to restrain. No words came out, but a laugh instead. The best part: she laughed, too.

“How long have you been here?” she asked after our fit.

“I—uh—actually just got here,” I said. You know the truth.

She smiled. Her eyes drifted while I rambled nonsense, and the loose ends of her mouth came back down when her eyes landed on something she didn’t much like. She tried to save herself by saying, “That’s great!” Her voice was faulty. “Well, I was actually about to go grab a cup of jungle juice. I can show you where it’s at, if you want. I hear you can’t even *taste* the alcohol.”

I laughed as upbeat as I could and replied, “Yeah. That—that’d be great.”

We didn’t talk once on our short way to the kitchen. Instead, I focused on how short her steps were—how lifeless they were.

“What’s your favorite drink?” she asked when we got there, turning around, looking me in the eyes, flaring my heart.

“Uhm—”

I wasn't much of a drinker. I preferred the green stuff.

"I really like Pepsi," I jested.

She laughed like I was Eddie Murphy, then contorted her face in a jokingly posh way and said, "I'm more of a Dr. Pepper gal, myself," in a British (or was it Australian?) accent. I smiled my dumb smile again.

She poured both of us drinks into red solo cups, and then we stood awkwardly in the middle of the kitchen... alone. A few people passed through, violently loud.

I finally said, "There is no way there is alcohol in this."

"Right!" she affirmed.

We talked a little more about meaningless shit, and then she suggested going outside.

So, we did.

The students' eyes were glued to me.

"I expected there to be a group of smokers on the porch outside, but it was only Scarlet and I on that night. There was a beautiful view of a river and a bridge overlooking the porch. Back then, in the days before the air became so foul, the stars would come out every night, and that night, they gleamed across the river.

"Scarlet leaned across the railing, and I kept my distance a few steps back. I made a lame comment about the view, but Scarlet said nothing in return. When she turned around, I understood why."

Her cheeks were wet, and her eyes were puffy red. The makeup she was wearing splotched down her cheeks.

I didn't know what to say, but she spoke before I even had a chance to try to think.

"I'm sorry for being this way," she said, snorting in snot.

"No, don't—don't apologize, Scar—"

She ran up to me and gave me a hug so tight, all the anxiety in my body seemed to cease.

"I wish I could say I'm doing this because I'm drunk, but I'm not," she said with her face muzzled into my chest.

"Scarlet, what's wrong?"

She released me and looked up into my eyes.

"My boyfriend..."

My heart dropped as her eyes floated back down and more tears dripped to the ground.

"I'm—I'm so sorry. Is there—is there anything—"

"It's okay," she assured. She looked back up and gave me a hopeful smile. "This is all I need right now."

Then, she squeezed me again, to the point I was too constricted to put my arms around her. She sobbed and sobbed, and I knew I'd need to wash my hoodie tomorrow.

Eventually, she backed away from me and rubbed her fists into her eyes. She wiped away the makeup on her cheeks.

"Thank you, Matt."

I was Matt now.

We all have a story that, when said out loud, you're not quite sure why it holds such magnitude in your life. You try and retell it to a person in a million different ways, but it never comes out how it should. And that is how it should be. Because if it did come out perfectly, all its power would vanish.

I did not realize how interested I became of the tiles on the floor—the way one of them slanted just enough to throw off the consistency—so I diverted my attention to the still decently sized crowd of students.

“I don't know why I'm telling you all this.”

“Keep going, Mr. Brown,” one said.

“Yeah. We *have* to know what happens with Scarlet,” another begged.

They wouldn't say that if they knew better.

“The following morning, I was greeted by a note flying at my face. My roommate threw it at me and told me that it was underneath the door.

“It was from Scarlet, thanking me for the night. She also asked me if I'd like to meet up with her. You all know the answer to *that* question.”

I felt my heart knocking with the door.

The door opened, and Scarlet stood, confused at first, then ecstatic, her cheekbones protruding like they were framed by a Renaissance sculptor. Her hair was scrambled, but it was better that way.

“Hey, Matt! I'm glad you came. How's your head feeling this morning?”

“It’s yelling at me for some water.”

She laughed.

“Why don’t you come in, and I’ll give you some.”

You can tell a lot about a person by the organization of their room. What I assumed was Scarlet’s side was almost neat, but it was just cluttered enough to tell that making her bed wasn’t the first thing on her mind that morning. Roommate’s side was a complete mess, but it probably always was.

“Where’s your roommate?” I asked.

“Who knows,” she shrugged, handing me a bottle of water.

I tried making myself comfortable by sitting on the white, fluffy rug in the center of the room, but as soon as I did, Scarlet asked, “Want to grab some breakfast?”

My body went upright so quickly, I got a little lightheaded.

“Yeah! Wh-where were you thinking?” And before I even finished that sentence, I said, “I’ll buy.” It was my parent’s money, anyway.

“You don’t have to do that! But, what about that new café in town?”

“That would be great!” Whichever one she was talking about.

We were so damn awkward.

“We got in her gold Chevy Malibu.” A pause. “I bought our meals, even though she kept insisting that I didn’t. I also bought many more meals for her after that, with the money I didn’t have. But it never felt as if we were on a date, as much as I tried to think of it that way.

“Nevertheless, we clicked, and after that breakfast, you couldn’t separate us. There’s not a single memory I have where we *weren’t* together.”

I could tell my voice was getting higher—childlike, almost.

“Our favorite thing to do was sit in her dorm room and critique bad films. We did this with her VCR.” If they even knew what that was. “There was one film in particular that we—well, I—slandered that holds a pleasant value in my mind: *E.T.* Anyone in here heard of it?”

There were murmurs from the progressively dwindling crowd in agreement, though I doubted many of them.

“Terrible movie,” I said.

“It’s a classic, Mr. Brown!”

“That doesn’t mean it can’t be terrible. Anyhow, we watched this film, and—I might add—Scarlet *sincerely* enjoyed it.”

“He’s so cute!” Scarlet exclaimed, sitting cross-legged next to me on a rug, eating from a bowl of popcorn. She wore jean shorts and a very flattering yellow crop top. She told me she often wore yellow to highlight the tattoo of a Bridal Crown Daffodil on her wrist.

“You really think that—that *hideous* thing of a creature is cute?”

“Yes!” she pointed to the screen, “Look at the little dress he’s wearing! And the hat!”

I laughed. “If you say so.”

“I couldn’t stop peeking at Scarlet the entire time we watched the movie. Every time she laughed, my heart became a million hot-air balloons, and I couldn’t help but smile. I think it was the first time my feelings for Scarlet really came into fruition.”

The class ‘awe’d’.

“But, I will admit, I did become engaged at the end of the movie. I don’t know exactly what overcame Scarlet in that moment, but she did something that I will never get to experience in this lifetime again.”

Cold, slightly buttered hands grasped my face and forced me to look into amber eyes as I sat crisscross applesauce watching *E.T.* Her mouth became slightly agape, and she forced her lips onto mine. They formed lousily together—her lips below mine—but we were electric.

And then, not a word was said.

“We finished the film and never spoke of the kiss again. Everything stayed just as it was before.”

All that could be heard was the thud of the clock ticking.

I eventually began again.

“At the end of the semester, it became harder to find time to hang out with each other. We sometimes got together to study somewhere on campus, but that was about it. So, I wrote her a note one day and placed it below her door, asking if she’d want to meet—just to hang out, no studying—at a coffee shop on some Wednesday afternoon.”

I forced a laugh that ended up just being a puff of air escaping my mouth. I couldn't look at the students.

I checked the clock, and it read a minute past the end of class.

"You can all go now," I said, staring back at the crack on the ground. "I wouldn't want you to be late to your other classes."

Not a single chair moved.

Please. Save yourselves.

Nothing.

"I was going to surprise Scarlet," I forced myself to continue after enough silence. "I dressed in these brown pants and this white button-up shirt that was wrinkled, and I wore tan suspenders. The bright blue shoes I wore completely clashed with the outfit, but it was a running joke between the two of us."

I tried to laugh again.

"I brought an *E.T.* card with me that I found at some emo store I liked to go to. I wrote inside it: *You're almost as good looking as E.T. in a dress. I guess, in other words, I should say, 'You're out of this world.'*"

It was so vivid in my mind, I could read the font as I said it.

"I also brought Bridal Crowns."

I took a deep breath.

"I waited in the corner of the coffee shop fifteen minutes early. My hair was so slicked back, it was painful.

"She wasn't there at the time we planned."

My eyes welled.

“Ten minutes later, either.”

The tears were knocking harder and harder to be released.

“So, I went to the bathroom.”

“She’ll be here, man. She’ll be here,” I told myself in the mirror, arms extended on the sink, leaning my face as close to the glass as I could. “She’s just late.”

I tried to go pee again, but nothing came out.

“Why you so nervous, Matt!” I yelled at myself, then looked around me, worried the people in the coffee shop could hear me.

I walked back to the mirror.

“Scarlet,” I began, “if I am a bird, you are my wings—oh God, no, no, no. You can’t say that.”

I tried again.

“Scarlet, I have never been as happy as when I’m with you.

“Better? I don’t know!”

“I stood in front of that mirror for what felt like an hour, and I never got it right. But it didn’t matter.”

The first tear dripped. Then another. Then another. They flowed down the crooked line.

“When I walked out,” I said, each word coming out slower than the next.

My eyes fixated on the television screen.

A car crash. A gold Chevy Malibu.

Two deceased.

“She was...”

I thought the words would come this time.

I sat silently, listening to the door of the classroom slam shut repeatedly.

Then, hands grasped my wet, trembling fingers. A group of students stood before me.

“I just wanted to give her the flowers.”

BRIDAL CROWNS

by

Cole Plunkett

FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY (2020)

MATHEW BROWN, a professor, is writing on a CHALKBOARD. The board is filled with names, dates, and other information.

Mr. Brown stops writing and turns around to his STUDENTS. Most of them are disengaged.

Mr. Brown sets the CHALK down. He grabs an ERASER and speedily erases the entire board.

Mr. Brown throws his hands into the air. The students put everything away.

Mr. Brown sits down in a CHAIR, crossing his legs.

INT. DORMITORY LOBBY - NIGHT (1983)

MATHEW BROWN, now a college student, walks through a door, into the lobby. He sees a girl, SCARLET, from afar, walking out of the dorm. He picks up his pace to catch up to her.

He passes her and runs his hand through his hair. He then looks back at her and gives a head nod. Scarlet laughs and waves.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Mathew is pushing himself out of a RIVER. FRIENDS are with him.

The group walks on the edge of the river. Scarlet and a group of her FRIENDS pass them.

Mathew waves at Scarlet. Scarlet waves back and smiles. Mathew flexes his arms, and Scarlet laughs.

Mathew's friends push him, and the groups walk their separate ways. Mathew looks back at Scarlet. She doesn't return it.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mathew walks in. He looks around the room. He spots Scarlet in the front row. They smile at each other.

Mathew walks up the aisle and sits in the back row. He peeks at Scarlet every so often.

Mathew gets up and moves to the front row, but not next to Scarlet. Scarlet looks over at him and grins.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY (2020)

Mr. Brown is sitting with elbows on his knees. The class is halfway engaged.

INT. CAFETERIA - NIGHT (1983)

Mathew sits at a TABLE with his friends. Everyone is laughing except for him. He's nervously tapping his foot.

Scarlet sits at a table with her friends. They are laughing.

Mathew nervously walks over to Scarlet's table. He stands for a few seconds before anyone notices.

Scarlet looks at him and smiles. Mathew nervously grins, then he clears his throat.

Scarlet hands him a FLYER. The flyer indicates a PARTY.

Mathew smiles. He waves at Scarlet and walks back to his table.

His friends pat him on the back. Scarlet notices and giggles.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Mathew walks into a PARTY. He stands by himself in a corner.

Scarlet is sitting at a COUCH, surrounded by PEOPLE. She looks uptight and is frequently staring off toward the walls. She is also scratching her wrist, which has a TATTOO of a FLOWER on it.

She stands up and points to her seat then a door. She walks toward the door with her head down.

Mathew perks up as Scarlet's walking toward him. Scarlet walks past him, and Mathew slumps his shoulders.

Scarlet runs a hand through her hair, turns toward Mathew, and nods.

They laugh together. Scarlet is still staring off in the distance as they stand.

KITCHEN

Mathew and Scarlet sip on red solo CUPS by a counter. A loud GROUP walks in.

Scarlet walks off toward the door. Mathew follows.

EXT. BALCONY

Scarlet leans over the edge of the balcony. Mathew stands a generous amount of feet away.

Mathew takes a step toward Scarlet, and she immediately turns around. She has been crying.

Scarlet runs up to Mathew and gives him a hug. He is stuck awkwardly.

Scarlet lets go of Mathew and fishes for a NOTE in her pocket. She pulls it out and hands it to Mathew. She covers her face with her hand.

Mathew reads through the note. He drops it and embraces Scarlet.

They release, and Scarlet smiles at Mathew, wiping away tears.

INT. CLASSROOM (2020)

Mr. Brown is sitting, smiling. The class is also smiling.

Mr. Brown stands up.

INT. MATHEW'S DORM ROOM - MORNING (1983)

Mathew is asleep. A NOTE lands on him. He wakes up and reads it. He grins.

INT. OUTSIDE SCARLET'S DORM ROOM

Mathew knocks on the door.

Scarlet opens it, looking disheveled. She smiles. So does Mathew.

Scarlet holds up a finger, indicating for Mathew to wait, then walks back into her room.

Scarlet comes back out, looking much more cleaned-up, PURSE around her shoulder.

EXT. PARKING LOT

Scarlet leads Mathew to a GOLD CHEVY MALIBU.

INT. RESTAURANT

Mathew and Scarlet sit across from each other at a TABLE, both with WATERS. The restaurant is crowded.

They look through the MENUS. Mathew occasionally peeks up at Scarlet. Scarlet is invested in the menu.

Scarlet catches Mathew peeking and she giggles. Mathew avoids eye contact.

The WAITER arrives. Mathew signals for Scarlet to go first. She grins.

LATER

Mathew and Scarlet are laughing, empty PLATES in front of them.

The waiter comes by, drops off the BILL, and takes the plates.

Scarlet reaches for her wallet, but Mathew puts MONEY on the table before she has a chance. Scarlet frowns. Mathew waves his hand and smiles. Scarlet grins.

INT. DORMITORY LOBBY - DAY

Mathew is walking toward the exit of the dorm. Scarlet sees him and rushes to catch up. She passes him and runs her hand through her hair. She turns toward him, and they both laugh.

They walk out of the dorm together.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Mathew is walking with his group of friends on the edge of the river. They pass Scarlet and her group of friends.

Mathew and Scarlet stop and talk to each other. Both the friend groups wait, but Mathew waves off his friends.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mathew and Scarlet are sitting next to each other in the front row, actively taking notes.

INT. CLASSROOM (2020)

Mr. Brown is walking around, throwing his hands all over the place. He has a huge smile on his face.

The students are laughing and aweing.

INT. SCARLET'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT (1983)

Mathew and Scarlet are sitting on the floor, watching *E.T THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL*. They are eating popcorn. Scarlet is engaged in the movie. Mathew is peaking at Scarlet every so often. He sees her wrist has a BRIDAL CROWN DAFODIL TATTOO.

Scarlet points at the TV and awes. Mathew looks confused. Scarlet points at her outfit and her head. Mathew laughs.

LATER

Mathew is fully engaged in the movie, Scarlet less so.

Scarlet slides over and kisses Mathew on the lips.

INT. CLASSROOM (2020)

Mr. Brown is sitting back down. The class is smiling and aweing. Mr. Brown has only half a grin.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY (1984)

Mathew is sitting at a TABLE. He is dressed nicely, but his SHOES clash with the outfit. There are BRIDAL CROWN FLOWERS on the table, and a CARD with E.T. on it.

Mathew checks his watch.

INT. CLASSROOM (2020)

Mr. Brown's eyes are aimed at the ground.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY (1984)

Mathew stands up and walks to the

BATHROOM

Mathew stands at a URINAL, but nothing is coming out.

He washes his hands. He messes with his hair. He takes a few deep breaths...

INT. CLASSROOM (2020)

Mr. Brown takes a deep breath.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY (1984)

Mathew is watching a TV. The news is highlighting a car crash with a totaled gold Chevy Malibu.

INT. CLASSROOM (2020)

Mr. Brown is in tears with his head aimed at the ground. Many of the students have their mouths wide open.

A STUDENT grasps Mathew's hands. Mathew looks up and sees all his students standing in front of him. He wipes away his tears and tries to grin.

FADE OUT:

END

The Quinzicals

My mother's name is Moira. Her husband is Quadrey. Their last name is Quinzical.

My name is Quincey. I was born to Moira and Quadrey Quinzical on Friday, February thirteen, 1976. Well—actually—I was born to Quadrey Quinzical and Moira *Quellentine*. My parents were unmarried at the time I was birthed. Had I been born on February fourteen, the names of my parents would be Moira and Quadrey *Quinzical*, and Quinzical only. They aren't devout Catholics.

I spend a reasonable amount of time with my parents, but it could be more. Moira Seven doesn't work on Wednesdays and Saturdays, so those days aren't available. And the days when I must go to the store. I hate going to the store. The cashiers always give a weird eye when checking out my list, and people always take a step away from me in line as if I don't wear deodorant. I do.

I'm not quite ready to introduce Moira Seven to my parents. Soon, hopefully. I just need the courage.

"I'm leaving, Quincey," Moira Seven says from the front door, wearing her purple scrubs.

I walk to her, and we peck each other on the lips before hugging. I could crush her bones if I want.

"Have I ever told you that you look great in purple?" I say.

She drops her head and blushes like an embarrassed child.

"Every time I wear it," she replies. "I love you to death, Honey Bunches of Oats."

“Promise?” I say.

Quincey Quinzical fiddles with a gold ring while staring out the front door. He waits for Moira Gaylewood’s red PT Cruiser to drift away from the replica of his childhood home.

He runs to the bathroom he and his girlfriend share—outside their separate bedrooms—and takes a key out of the bottom drawer on his side.

Quincey inserts the key into the basement door.

The smell of it is never pleasant, even for biology professor Q, but the pure joy that elicits from his skin in the form of goosebumps of getting to see his parents—his *dear mother!*—always instantly eradicates any negative feeling he could possibly feel from something so minor as a fume. It is also quite frigid. Because of the meat freezer, of course. Oh, and there is a gun on a desk to the side.

“Do you want some food, Mommy? You’ve got to be *starving!* I’ll make some popcorn.”

Life is better when Moira Seven is gone and I’m with my parents. Sometimes, I think about getting rid of her so I can spend *all* my time with my parents.

(Pop. Pop. Pop.)

Moira Seven is my first girlfriend. I found twenty-three of them on the online dating site I used, and I went on a date with every single one of them. Well, I would have, but I stopped on Moira Number Seven.

She was Date Number Three on Day Two of my originally planned week-long dating spree. She was perfect.

(Pop, pop, pop)

I planned all my dates at the bowling alley. On that day, Moira Number Five was first at 12:00 post meridian. She was close—no question.

“If you could meet one person in history, who would it be?” Moira Five asks.

“Freud,” Quincey replies, prepping to bowl, ball centered in front of his face.

“Of course,” Moira says as Quincey releases the ball. “The *greatest* psychologist—scientist, if you will.”

Quincey turns with a smirk, bowling a strike.

“Of course.”

But she beat me in our second and final round of pins, and I couldn’t have that.

Moira Number Six arrived at 3:03 post meridian when she should’ve been there at 3:00. I wasn’t always particularly fond of my father—his greatest quality is that Moira Quellentine loved him—but he did offer me an important piece of advice: “Always show up at least five minutes early to your occasion, and—if you really care—be there fifteen minutes early.”

“Will you leave?” Quincey demands.

“But we have one more game le—”

“I’ll bowl for you.”

Moira Seven, however, showed up to the lanes at 5:22 post meridian... *thirty-eight minutes* before our date was supposed to begin. Of course, I'm a man of my word—as she is, but a woman—so we waited to start the date until the official time of 6:00.

(Pop pop pop)

During this time, I continued to hash up my skills in lane thirteen of twenty-six while she sat in a wooden chair behind the pool tables. I knew it was her because each time I laid my eyes on her, she would shrivel in her seat, and her face would convert to the color of a ripe mango.

It was a relatively silent date—the best kind. We played our two rounds of pins, her complimenting my every move, just like Mom would, while I proved to her my remarkable bowling skills. I don't think her teeth were ever covered by her lips the entire time we played.

(Poppoppop)

I called Moira Number Eight to tell her to not bother coming to the bowling alley at our scheduled time of 9:00 post meridian. I had found my Moira.

(Popopopopopopopopop)

What struck me most deeply about Moira Seven was how closely resembled she was to my mother. Black hair that was shorter than mine; skin as pale as a vampire's; deep, dark brown eyes that have a specific beauty that can only be seen by the ones that love them most; and a body that could probably be snapped if they wore a dress that was a size too small.

(Pop... pop... pop...)

Beauty. Pure, utter beauty.

(BEEP! BEEP! BE—)

Quincey Quinzical sits between his parents on the couch. He feeds Quadrey and Moira by forcing the popcorn down their throats. With the same hand he uses to prod the popcorn through his parents' mouths, he eats some of the popcorn himself, licking his fingers afterward so he isn't wasting any food.

He also feeds them Kool-Aid. It gets sticky quickly, but he makes sure to clean the mess with his shirt. He recycles the shirt back onto his body.

Quincey is playing *The Shining* this morning—his favorite movie. His favorite scene in *The Shining* is the bathroom scene with the lady in the tub. He makes his mommy cover his eyes with her hand when the nude woman arises from the tub, but he always manages to peek through the hand like shutters in a window. He has always been more interested in what the woman becomes, really.

After the movie, it is nighty-night time—Quincey's least favorite part of the day.

After Quincy returns his parents, they pray together, and they talk about how lucky they are to still have each other. And he gives his mother a goodnight kiss.

“How was your day, Honey Bunches of Oats?” Moira Seven says—she always says—every time she enters through the doors of my home and sees me sitting on the couch.

“Fine,” I always am. “Nothing spectacular happened today,” I always continue.

“That’s great, honey!” she always ends, and then our actual conversation always begins.

“So,” she starts in a tone like one of a parent who is about to tell their child they have a surprise for them. Unfortunately, I know the surprise, and I am not fond of it. “Are you excited for tonight?”

I make my way to the kitchen to pour a glass of red wine.

“Elaborate,” I reply.

“It’s our date night, honey!”

“Oh yes, oh yes. That’s right. But don’t you have work in the morning?”

“Honey,” she drags with a hint of frustration, “you *know* I don’t work on Saturdays.”

“Oh yes, oh yes. That’s right.”

“Are you excited?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Yay! I’ll be getting *readyyy*.”

And before she goes to her room: “I love you, Quincey,” she says in the same way she always says it: like it’s the final time she’ll ever get to say it.

“I know you do, Moira.”

I smile, and she does too—teeth uncovered.

I cannot remember the last time I put on makeup. Wait! Yes, I can. It was two-hundred and fifty-five days ago—on the night I united with the love of my life, Quincey Quinzical. What a *lovely* day that was.

Quincey doesn't like to go out often. I'd say that it is his biggest flaw. Not that it's really a flaw at all. Some people just aren't "people people", if you know what I mean.

I really hope he wears that turtleneck again tonight. Not to say that he doesn't have a nice neck.

I'm Moira, by the way! Moira Gaylewood. Sorry for jumping in on the conversation like that, all willy-nilly. I just *really* enjoy talking to other people. I'm a "people people". A Leo. What can I say.

I want to go to Japan one day. I got this jar after I watched the original *Godzilla* movie when I was thirteen, and I've put a dollar in it every day to save up to go. The culture is just so *fascinating*! Way ahead of America, I would say. The 'United States' America, that is.

What am I supposed to put on first again?

Oh, this white powder is so obnoxious. It's perfect!

I love Quincey. Just the sight of him every day after work makes my heart flutter. I truly believe we were meant to be together forever; and, I *know* he can be a little blunt sometimes and seem like he doesn't care, but I really believe he feels the same way.

Ugh, I'm crying. How embarrassing!

This powder tastes horrible!

But don't you think so, too? That he loves me?

Oh my God! Where did this *unibrow* come from?

Moira fumbles with everything on the desk, searching for tweezers. After failing to find any, she leaves her room for the bathroom.

Quincey is in a deep sleep. A Rubik's cube lays on his chest, and *Beauty and the Beast* is playing on the box TV.

Moira digs through all the drawers on her side of the bathroom, unable to find any tweezers. She hesitates for a moment then scavenges through Quincey's side—all the way down to the final drawer.

“Moira,” Quincey calls, zipping up his blue Banana Republic pants. He's not wearing the turtleneck. “Moira?”

Quincey leaves his bedroom for the living room. Moira is nowhere to be seen.

Quincey knocks on Moira's bedroom door. He looks around cautiously before entering. He has never been in there before.

It smells so much of lavender, it can almost be tasted. The dark purple walls are covered with flags and pennants of different countries. Above her pink bed, the Japanese flag is framed.

Quincey tiptoes through a litter of extravagant dresses toward the closet. He stops at her desk.

Makeup cases cover most of the space—along with the jar—but what catches his eye is what is on the wall above the desk. A calendar is at the top. Every date before today is marked out and has a number that signifies a countdown, and today's date is vibrantly colored with the words “DATE NIGHT” on it. Below the calendar are pictures

of men and women. There is an 'X' in red sharpie through each picture. All except for Quincey's picture on the far right.

His eyes fall to a yearbook that is propped up on the corner of the desk. He snatches it and scans through the pages.

More pictures are marked out—even entire pages. The first page like this he encounters shows the girls basketball team. Most of the girls are pictured performing impressive feats, such as making a jump shot or pulling off a difficult dribble move. Moira's picture, however, shows her taking a hard screen, and the caption below it screams, "DETERMINATION".

The next page marked out shows a cafeteria. Moira sits in the corner by herself, eating a salad.

The last marked-out page Quincey sees is of prom night. While the king and queen, Quincy supposes, are doing their dance, Moira is pictured in the back, fallen on her rear. The people around her are silently giggling, some less obvious than others.

Quincey props the book gently in its original positioning. Then, he stands still, contemplating. A smile forms on his face before he leaves the room.

He scampers through the entire house, leaving no room unchecked. Except for one.

Then,

faintly, as if the voice were coming through one of those whisper phones you made as a child, I hear a cry.

I open the door to beauty.

My mother and father lie on the ground in their usual décor: my father in a standard, black and white tux, my dear mother in her favorite short, strawberry red dress. Moira Seven stands behind them in a white wedding dress—with a veil and everything—with her head aimed down. The desk sits to the side with its sole decoration.

“You like Japan,” I say.

She picks up her head. Her makeup is perfectly smeared.

“Yes,” she replies.

“You want to go there.”

She nods. She squats down and strokes my mother’s hair.

“Your mother is beautiful,” she says.

“I know.”

“I look a little bit like her.”

I nod.

“What are their names?” Moira asks.

“Quadrey and Moira.”

I find the ring in my pocket and roll it across my fingers.

“What a coincidence,” she mutters.

Moira stops brushing my mother’s hair and stares at me—fatigue in her eyes.

“Why didn’t you introduce them to me before?” she says.

“Never found the right—”

Her eyes release from mine and back to my mother, and she says in a voice so blunt, I think it is coming from a being within her, “Why did you never tell me?”

She stands up swiftly and walks to the desk. She picks up my silver, chrome handgun.

“Who are the people in the photos?” I say in a voice that probably isn’t mine either.

Moira whimpers. The gun dangles loosely in her hand.

“I was always the loser, Quincey. The freak. The girl who was going to grow up and own a bunch of cats.”

A violent sob escapes her mouth.

“I don’t even like cats,” she says incoherently, then inhales sharply.

“I know you don’t.”

“I know I’m weird, Quincey.”

She laughs and wipes her nose. Snot fills her forearm.

“But I think you are, too,” she finishes.

“Who are the people in the photos, Moira?”

Tears are fighting to leave her eyes. The gun dangles loosely in her hand.

“They’re my exes, alright! I’m sorry, Quincey, honey. I didn’t mean to yell at you—”

“Why are they marked out?”

She laughs—genuinely.

“None of them compare to you, Quincey!” I almost can’t understand what she is saying, she speaks so quickly. “None of them loved me like you do.”

This time, I laugh, and she laughs with me.

“You know,” I say, “I thought I wanted to kill you.” Her laugh sprouts even higher, and mine goes along with it. “But now,” I contemplate, “I want you alive.”

“Oh, it’s too late for that, Honey Bunches of Oats,” she laughs.

My stomach drops to the floor, and my mouth follows it.

“Wha-what do you mean, Moira?” I ask. I try to hide the worry in my voice.

She smiles my favorite smile. And the gun goes to her head.

“Moira, I don’t want this anymore. I—I…”

Tears finally drift down the corners of her eyes, but not too many. A new smile forms on her face—an ugly smile with crinkly cheeks that I love even more. The gun remains.

“Quincey?” she asks, barely louder than a whisper.

My collapsed throat is barely able to croak, “Yes?”

“Take me to Japan one day.”

I charge for her, but it’s too late.

The blood leaks onto the floor like a faulty fountain that looks to require maintenance, sputtering here and there, as it escapes Moira’s head. It permeates through her dress.

Quincey slowly approaches Moira, a few tears flowing down his cheeks, a hand behind his back. He gets down on one knee in front of her and reveals the ring to her.

He slips the ring onto her finger, and then they dance with no music playing. After they are done, he lays her down next to Moira Quinzical.

For the last time, he puts his father into the meat freezer; then his mother; then his fiancé.

There is one more spot available.

He grabs the gun and takes all but one bullet out of the chamber. Then, he enters the freezer with the rest of his family. He positions the head of the gun to his forehead, unwavering.

“I gave her your ring, Momma. She’s a Quinzical now.”

THE QUINZICALS

by

Cole Plunkett

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

QUINCEY sits between his DEAD parents, MOIRA QUINZICAL and QUADREY, with a BOWL of POPCORN on his lap. A PICTURE FRAME of him with his parents when he was a boy sits on a stand beside him. *THE SHINING* is playing on the TV.

Quincey shoves popcorn down his mother's mouth, licking his fingers afterward.

He pours KOOL-AID into his mother's mouth. It gets all over her.

He takes off his shirt to clean the Kool-Aid. He puts the shirt back on.

He grabs his mother's hand to cover his eyes. He peeks through.

BASEMENT

Moira Quinzical is on top of Quadrey in a MEAT FREEZER. Quincey bends down and kisses his mother on the lips. He gently closes the lid.

Quincey grabs a DEAD MOUSE from a bowl on top of a TANK. He throws the mouse to a SNAKE in the tank. There are MOUSETRAPS surrounding the tank.

A FISH TANK with green water is next to the tank. The FISH in it are floating DEAD at the top.

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Quincey and MOIRA GAYLEWOOD open and close their doors simultaneously. Moira is wearing a beautiful DRESS. Quincey looks decent. They join in the middle and peck each other on the lips. A PICTURE FRAME is above them of QUINCEY'S PARENTS when Moira Quinzical was pregnant with Quincey.

Quincey yawns and points at his watch. Moira slouches her shoulders and aims her head at the ground. Quincey caresses her face and grins. Moira smiles back.

LIVING ROOM

Quincey and Moira Gaylewood sit on the couch together, not touching each other. Quincey sits in the same spot he did with his parents. Moira Gaylewood sits where Moira Quinzical did. The TV isn't on.

Quincey stands up. He points for Moira to move over, to where Quadrey was sitting. She scooches over.

They continue to sit in silence.

Moira stands up. She walks to a SHELF with MOVIES in it. She sits and looks through them.

She gasps and shows *The Shining* to Quincey. He shakes his head. She sets it down and looks through the movies again. She pulls out *E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL*. Quincey nods. Moira squeals.

KITCHEN

Moira Gaylewood cooks POPCORN. Quincey walks into the kitchen and grabs a cup of YOGURT with BERRIES from the refrigerator.

LIVING ROOM

They sit on the couch and eat their snacks. Moira Gaylewood is smiling and laughing along. Quincey shows no sign of emotion.

Moira leans into Quincey and puts her arms around him. Quincey doesn't move. She smells him and slightly grimaces.

Quincey falls asleep. Moira continues to lie on him and smiles.

LATER

Moira Gaylewood stands up. She winces and picks up her foot. Below it is a TOOTH. She scrunches her eyebrows.

BATHROOM

Moira Gaylewood brushes her teeth then washes her face. She leans into the mirror and sees a slight unibrow.

She fishes through her things then digs through the drawers. When she gets to the final drawer, she finds a KEY.

Quincey is standing in the doorway, looking at Moira through the mirror. He shakes his head at her.

Moira puts the key back. When she looks back at the mirror, Quincey is still staring at her. He nods his head then walks out.

INT. MOIRA GAYLEWOOD'S BEDROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Moira Gaylewood lies awake in bed.

HALLWAY

Moira Gaylewood quietly shuts her door.

OUTSIDE THE BASEMENT

Moira Gaylewood tries to open the door, but the handle is stiff. She takes a deep breath.

HALLWAY

Moira Gaylewood quietly walks to her door. As she's passing Quincey's door, there is a squeaking sound. She briskly walks to her door and hurries in.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Quincey and Moira Gaylewood open and close their doors simultaneously. Moira is wearing PURPLE SCRUBS while Quincey is still in his PAJAMAS.

They meet in the midpoint between their doors and peck each other on the lips.

KITCHEN

Moira Gaylewood cooks eggs and bacon on the STOVE. Quincey pours a bowl of cereal.

DINING ROOM

They sit across from each other at a long TABLE, eating their respective meals.

LIVING ROOM

Quincey sits cross-legged on a COUCH, drinking a GLASS of milk. The TV is on.

KITCHEN

Moira Gaylewood packs herself a lunch in a bag. She leaves a note on the refrigerator that reads, "I love you Honey Bunches of Oats." With her bag, she walks toward the

FRONT DOOR

Quincey meets her. They peck each other on the lips. Quincey hugs her awkwardly. Moira walks out the door.

Quincey skips away. Moira quietly opens the door and sneakily follows Quincey.

LIVING ROOM

Moira Gaylewood watches Quincey sit with his dead parents and a bowl of popcorn from afar. Her eyes are big, and she limits her breathing.

Quincey sticks the popcorn into Moira Quinzical's mouth then licks his fingers. He pours Kool-Aid into her mouth next, then takes his shirt off to clean the mess. He puts the shirt back on.

Quincey screams and covers his eyes with his mother's hand. He peeks through.

Quincey stands up and grabs Quadrey. He drags him across the room.

Moira Gaylewood carefully scampers to

MOIRA GAYLEWOOD'S BEDROOM

She grabs a JAR labeled "JAPAN" from a DESK.

She listens from her door as Quincey is moving around in the living room and hallway. She quietly opens her door.

BATHROOM

Quincey puts the key back into the bottom drawer. Moira stands in the doorway with the jar above her head, reflecting off the mirror.

When Quincey stands, Moira is no longer standing there. Quincey walks to

QUINCEY'S BEDROOM

Quincey sleeps. A RUBIK'S CUBE is on his chest, and *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* is playing on his box TELEVISION.

MOIRA GAYLEWOOD'S BEDROOM

Moira Gaylewood packs a SUITCASE with her CLOTHES. She puts the jar inside.

Moira Gaylewood leaves.

INT. LIVING ROOM- EVENING

Quincey sits on the couch. He checks his watch and looks to the door.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Quincey waits outside his door. He checks his watch and looks over to Moira Gaylewood's door. He smiles and skips away.

LIVING ROOM

Quincey sits between his parents. He feeds his mother popcorn, pours Kool-Aid down her mouth, and covers his eyes with her hand, peeking through.

Moira Gaylewood watches him through the glass of the front door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Quincey sits on the couch. He checks his watch and looks to the door. He looks all around.

Quincey stands and skips away.

KITCHEN - LATER

Quincey empties RAMEN NOODLES into three separate plastic BOWLS.

LIVING ROOM

Quincey sticks a FORK full of soup into his mother's mouth. He accidentally stabs through her lip. He yanks the fork out. He eats some soup for himself with the same fork.

He pours the SOUP JUICE through his mother's mouth. It spills onto him occasionally, making him flinch.

LATER

Quincey has a piece of CAKE on a PLATE on his lap between his parents. He tries to feed it to his mother with a fork, but it falls apart.

Moira Gaylewood laughs from outside the glass front door.

Quincey grabs the cake with his hand and stuffs it down his mother's throat.

LATER

Quincey drags his father across the floor. Moira Gaylewood smiles as she watches from outside.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Quincey leaves his door open as he skips away.

LIVING ROOM

Quincey sits between his parents with an empty popcorn bag in his lap. He falls asleep on his mother's lap. Moira Gaylewood watches from outside.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Quincey awakes. He sits for a moment and twiddles his fingers.

QUINCEY'S BEDROOM

Quincey plays video games with his parents beside him. A CONTROLLER rests in Quadrey's hands. Quincey looks over to his father and smiles.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Quincey sits between his parents on the couch.

KITCHEN

Quincey pulls out a PITCHER of water from the refrigerator. When he closes the refrigerator, the note Moira Gaylewood that says, "I love you Honey Bunches of Oats," falls.

Quincey picks up the note. He stares at it for a while. Moira Gaylewood sits up straight outside.

Quincey drops the note back on the ground. Moira Gaylewood slumps her shoulders and looks at the ground.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Quincey leaves the door open as he walks out. He walks back to close the door then looks over to Moira Gaylewood's door briefly.

LIVING ROOM

Quincey slumps between his parents on the couch. *The Shining* is playing on the TV, but it is quiet.

Moira Gaylewood scrunches her eyebrows from outside as Quincey walks to

QUINCEY'S BEDROOM

Quincey sleeps. The box TV isn't on, and the Rubik's Cube is nowhere to be seen.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Quincey opens his door. He begins to walk away and then turns around. He looks around before hesitantly opening

MOIRA GAYLEWOOD'S BEDROOM

Quincey looks around. The walls are filled with PENNANTS and FLAGS of different countries. The JAPANESE FLAG is framed above her BED.

Quincey walks to a desk at the back of the room. A CALENDAR is taped above. MAY 1 is graffiti-ed vibrantly. "DATE NIGHT" is written across the box. Every date before MAY 1 is blank and crossed out.

PICTURES of MEN and WOMEN are taped below the calendar, including Quincey's. All but Quincey's is marked out in red.

He examines the calendar. His eyes move to the pictures. He scrunches his eyebrows.

A YEARBOOK labelled "CLASS OF '98" lays flat on the left corner of the desk. The cover is marked out in red. He grabs the yearbook. He rummages through it. Different people's PICTURES are marked out red.

He flips to a page showing Moira Gaylewood on the ground after taking a hard screen in basketball. Below it is the word "DETERMINATION". The other basketball girls on the page are pictured dribbling, shooting, or playing defense. The page is marked out red.

He flips to another page showing a cafeteria. Moira Gaylewood is sitting at a TABLE by herself. The page is marked out red.

He flips to another page of the prom king and queen dancing. Moira Gaylewood is fallen. Some people are laughing at her. The page is marked out red.

Quincey flips to the back. The signature pages are empty, except for one note that says, "Have a great summer! Mrs. Z."

He gently places the yearbook back. He stares blankly at the wall.

He looks at his unmarked picture on the wall. He slightly grins.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Quincey sits away from his parents on the couch. *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* is playing on the TV.

KITCHEN

Quincey grabs a cup of yogurt from the refrigerator. When he closes the refrigerator, he sees the note on the floor.

He picks up the note and stares at it. He keeps staring at it.

Moira Gaylewood sits up straight and smiles widely from outside.

Quincey hangs the note back on the refrigerator.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Quincey stands outside his door. He walks to the midpoint between his and Moira Gaylewood's door and kisses the air.

Quincey walks to the

BATHROOM

Quincey opens the bottom drawer. It is empty. Quincey searches everywhere else in the bathroom, hyperventilating.

OUTSIDE THE BASEMENT

Quincey slowly opens the door.

BASEMENT

Quincey slowly walks to the meat freezer. He hesitantly opens it. It is empty.

Quincey's eyes grow big, and he takes a deep breath.

Quincey slowly walks to the

LIVING ROOM

Moira Gaylewood sits next to Quadrey on the couch. Moira Quinzical is in her usual spot, and Quincey's spot is open. Popcorn is popping in the microwave.

Moira Gaylewood and Quincey stare at each other. Quincey has a hard look on his face.

The microwave beeps.

Quincey stays still. Then, he smiles wider than ever and skips to the microwave. Moira Gaylewood squeals happily.

FADE OUT:

END

Approaching Storytelling from a Narrative and Visual Perspective

There are few who have mastered the art of storytelling in more than one medium. Anton Chekhov was perhaps the most successful in delving into both playwrighting and short story writing, but the list does not go much further. The list becomes even tighter when one thinks of persons who have written successful prose and screenplays. Truly, it is difficult to think of *anyone* that has done this at the highest level in both mediums. This is largely due to the fact that prose and screenwriting exists on opposite ends of the literary spectrum; prose is highly dependent on the narrative while screenwriting is dependent on the action. Writing what is on the mind of a narrator is very much different than writing how a character acts, thus making it difficult to put in the time and effort to be masters of both.

The Professors is a collection of three short stories with adapted screenplays about the unordinary and sometimes extraordinary lives of a trio of professors. This collection attempts to challenge the perception that a successful prose writer cannot also be a successful screenwriter. The short stories are unique from each other in structure—particularly with the involvement of stream of consciousness and point of view variation—and the screenplays show how adaptation can vary depending on the structure and content of a story. The screenplays also do not involve any dialogue to emphasize the importance of showing and not telling. Lastly, each story deals heavily with the concepts of grief and abusive relationships.

“Reset” is the first story in the collection. The structure and content of both the short story and the screenplay are the most eclectic of the three stories. The story details the abusive relationship of Jordan and Lucy and Jordan discovering that he is a serial

killer. Each page of the short story is unique in its format, aiming for a poetic feeling. The first and last page are unique in that there are two separate events going on at the same time. To indicate this, every other line is flush to the left side of the page while the other lines are indented. If all the lines are read together, a third event can be conjured. The second and eighth pages are filled with a blocked paragraph to symbolize the stream of consciousness of Jordan. The third and seventh pages divide the sentences across the page, attempting to slow down the reading and create an eerie feeling. This eeriness is enhanced by making the words italic. The fourth and sixth pages are the only ones to have standard paragraph structure to set the story in *some* kind of reality. These are also the only pages where Jordan and Lucy are interacting. The middle fifth page is designed to appear as a spiral to symbolize Lucy's spiraled thinking contemplating the abusive nature of her and Jordan's relationship. These poetic elements are aimed to constantly leave the reader questioning what is going. There is much to be left to interpretation, though that does not mean that there are not concrete events happening.

The adaptation of "Reset" into a screenplay aims to give clarity to the short story. It is still nonlinear, and the scenes change quite rapidly, but there is a much clearer understanding of what is going on by being able to see the actions of the characters. Ellipses are used at the end of each scene to attempt to connect it to the scene following it. To help with this, the action at the end of each scene are very similar to the action at the beginning of each scene. An essential addition to the screenplay that is not in the short story is showing Jordan's realization that he killed Lucy by him flashing back to both burying his dog in a pile of leaves as a kid and carrying Lucy's dead body to the bed. This showcases the benefit of visual storytelling compared to narrative storytelling

in terms of seeing events actually happen rather than reading the thoughts of a narrator and trying to come to a conclusion.

“Bridal Crowns”, the second story of the collection, is about a professor named Mathew Brown who reveals to his uninterested group of political science students a tragedy he endured with a former lover he had in his college years. Though this story does not flip to the perspective of any outside character or narrator, it is structured as a frame, meaning the time period bounces between the present and the past, all while staying in Mathew’s first-person perspective. The reasoning for this was to physically immerse the reader into the story Mathew is telling his students. It also signifies how involved Mathew gets telling the story and shows the differences between the thinking of college Mathew and professor Mathew.

There are not many differentiations between the short story and screenplay of “Bridal Crowns”. They are by far the most similar in both structure and content compared to the other two stories. There are only two primary differences. The first more noticeable one is the addition of the river and classroom scenes between Mathew and Scarlet. These were added to better indicate the progression of their relationship to a viewing audience who cannot see the thoughts of Mathew. The second less clear difference in the screenplay is showing how professor Mathew’s positioning and movement evolves as he continues to tell the story—from stagnant to exuberant to somber. There are *some* indications of how professor Mathew acts differently as the story continues on, but it is much clearer in the screenplay. This is important for viewers to get a sense of the direction the story inevitably heads, based on the emotions of Mathew.

The third and final story of the collection, “The Quinzicals”, is different in its aboutness when looking at the content of the short story compared to the content of the screenplay. The short story and the screenplay follow both Quincey Quinzical and his unhealthy obsession with his deceased parents and Moira Gaylewood and her reaction to finding out about Quincey’s parents. How these events transpire in the end are radically different in the two mediums. In the short story, Moira gives her life in an attempt to satisfy both her and Quincey’s desires. The point of view flips between primarily Quincey and an unknown narrator, while also delving into Moira’s perspective briefly. This is done to: show the thought-process of both characters; show the actions of the two characters from an outside perspective; and to give an overall disjointed feeling of what is happening in the story altogether. Lastly, the short story is a representation of Quincey’s desires with his parents and Moira, *not* the reality of the situation.

In the screenplay, Moira takes more reasonable measures to negotiate the stance of her and Quincey’s relationship. Upon learning that Quincey keeps his dead parents in the basement and frequently brings them to the living room couch to “spend time” with them, Moira leaves. However, she continues to spy on Quincey and his antics, and when she sees that Quincey becomes emotionally distraught of her disappearance, she decides to surprise Quincey by being out on the couch with his parents when he does not know, and they live happily ever after in a way that fits their strange relationship. As far as the structure of the screenplay goes, Quincey and Moira’s routines both separately and together are the most important aspect in ultimately breaking these routines to create tension. Because of this, it is quite repetitive. Comparative to the other two screenplays, there are many more setting shifts, even though this is the only story that takes place in

one central location. Lastly, rather than representing Quincey's desire, the screenplay is a representation of the reality of the situation and what *actually* happens.

Not everyone will find enjoyment and appreciation in *The Professors*. Its radical experimentation will surely leave many confused, and it will undoubtedly be questioned for the directions it takes. The protagonists are often undesirable and unethical. The topics might be better left alone than explored. But maybe, just maybe, there will be someone that finds enjoyment in its eclectic and understands the major problems in the way many of the characters—primarily the men—think and act. And then maybe, they will understand why these stories are important to be seen, heard, read, experienced the way that they are.