

Didactic Themes in *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Someday, Someday, Maybe*

and

Three Original Short Stories

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Didactic Themes in *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Someday, Someday, Maybe*

Didactic themes that are “designed or intended to teach or make moral observation”¹ go back to the very origin of literature. The great epics of ancient Greece, Rome, and early England depict life lessons through the portrayals of heroes in difficult circumstances, often showing improper behavior as being punished. The Roman poet Horace laid down specific rules governing the form and content of literature in his *Ars Poetica*, while Ovid provided advice for lovers in *Ars Amatoria*. This tradition continued through the Middle Ages with morality plays and the proliferation of literature in the Renaissance. As literacy increased in the centuries that follow, so did didactic literature.

A sampling of three novels from the last 150 years reveals a variety of didactic themes. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, and Lauren Graham’s *Someday, Someday, Maybe* all “teach” their audience in different ways, and all use narrative empathy to help convey their messages.

Many writers choose to incorporate an overall moral theme into their stories, and often this moral theme creates narrative empathy that “may precede character identification”² on the part of the reader. This narrative empathy causes readers to feel the emotions that characters experience, and then to identify with the characters themselves. This process can be seen through either a change in a character (a character overcomes an internal challenge) or through an environmental change (an action takes place that impacts the character). Character development plays a substantial role in the moral theme

of any story. Readers yearn for the formation and correction of characters to whom they have become attached and often identify with these characters.

In his book *On Moral Fiction*, John Gardner talks about the use of morality in the arts. Moral themes are important to help the reader feel the emotions of characters. He states, “moral art holds up models of decent behavior; for example, characters in fiction, drama, and film whose basic goodness and struggle against confusion, error, and evil in themselves and— in others— give firm intellectual and emotional support to our own struggle.”³ Readers are able to identify with characters through their struggles and successes. Gardner also notes that “when characters behave out of character, readers notice” (Gardner 117). When reading a book, the characters become a part of the reader’s life. They feel pain for the characters, cheer when the characters complete an accomplishment, and can even feel a sense of betrayal when a character fails. William Casement discusses the importance of literature that promotes moral learning, particularly when looking at the role didacticism plays for both texts and readers, noting that “didacticism is the view that there are universal moral values and that they can be conveyed through literature.”⁴ This morality can be seen in the lessons characters learn through actions and words, and is an important part of everyday life; consequently, moral themes spark an interest when reading didactic fiction. Readers yearn for a sense of closure, a sense of well-being, and a clear purpose for a story. Nora Hämäläinen discusses moral fiction’s growth, perception, and theory, but one of the most important sections in her book, *Literature and Moral Theory*, talks about the role of the emotions in moral fiction. She mentions how moral fiction has evolved, noting “the late years of the

twentieth century saw a broad revival in picturing the emotions as a central part of morality.”⁵

This essay will analyze the didactic theme of self-identification in three novels: *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *Someday, Someday, Maybe* (2014), and each work’s didactic viewpoint will be suggested by analyzing the lessons that each main character learns. These lessons portray specific crucial realizations in the character’s lives and in turn have universal relevance beyond the pages of books.

In Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), didacticism is shown through the various character elements Alice faces throughout the story. As a result of these character interactions, Alice learns about life and her own identity.

First, the Cheshire-Cat represents reason within Wonderland. The Cheshire-Cat wears a smile, even in the chaos of Wonderland, and appears when Alice is, or is about to be, in trouble. During a game of croquet with the Queen of Hearts, Alice feels uneasy until she sees the Cat start to reappear: “It’s the Cheshire-Cat: now I shall have somebody to talk to.”⁶ This is important for Alice’s self-identity and the didacticism in the story, because Alice is living in a world of adult-like characters and she is often confused about where she should go and the people around her. At some points of the story, she starts to doubt herself, but the Cheshire-Cat represents the most important part of Alice’s ability to reason with herself. He even encourages her to accept her state of being:

“But I don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad.”

“How do you know I’m mad?” said Alice.

“You must be,” said the Cat, “or you wouldn’t have come here.” (Carroll 39)

Alice has seen the chaos that takes place in Wonderland, and she previously has seen the chaos of the adult world. Cheshire-Cat makes a point to tell Alice that at some point everyone goes mad. Alice sees certain “adult-like” characters misbehave in various ways, although these characters should portray adult characteristics, such as the ability to clearly reason and fairly judge.

Cheshire-Cat ends up being the primary character to lead Alice through Wonderland, helping Alice find her way. Alice asks him where she should go, to which he replies, “That depends a good deal on where you want to go” (Carroll 38). Later in the conversation Alice says to him “so long as I get SOMEWHERE” (Carroll 38), telling him that she doesn’t care where she goes as long as she doesn’t stay where she is. He replies, “Oh, you’re sure to do that, if you only walk long enough” (Carroll 38). Alice finds herself thrown into a strange world with strange creatures, and she asks the Cheshire-Cat where she should go. His reply is both literal and figurative. In Wonderland, it does not matter where she goes, because she will, and does, end up somewhere, but his reply also triggers Alice’s figurative longing to be told where she should go. She finds a sense of reassurance in him: if she only sticks it out, she will end up where she should be. The moral theme of *Alice in Wonderland* is evident in this scene between Alice and the Cheshire-Cat; Alice goes through Wonderland as a lost little girl, but she does eventually navigate through the chaos and find her way out.

Readers are able to identify with Alice through the shared feeling of being lost and stranded. Human beings have an internal need to be comfortable and avoid change. While reading *Alice in Wonderland*, the reader can identify with Alice’s fear of being in

surroundings and among a group of characters she is unfamiliar with. At one point she is “so much frightened that she ran off at once” (Carroll 20). She is thrown into a world where she does not know anyone, she does not know where she is, and she does not know how to act. This makes the reader feel sorry for Alice and share her sense of fear.

Second, the Queen of Hearts is stubborn and has to have things a certain way, and when she does not get her way, she becomes angry. For instance, she becomes angry when the deck of cards goes around painting the roses red, even though they do this to avoid her anger. She insists that they paint the roses red, but she becomes angry when they do so. Alice provokes this anger further when she disagrees with the Queen’s sentencing of the deck of cards. In Chapter 12, after Alice becomes a giant, she stands up to the Queen of Hearts, angering her by saying, “Stuff and nonsense! The idea of having the sentence first!” (Carroll 71). When the queen tells her to hold her tongue, Alice refuses, saying, “I won’t!” (Carroll 71) to which Queen of Heart’s response is “Off with her head!” (Carroll 71). The Queen of Heart’s reaction is quick and impatient. Again, the Queen of Hearts is an adult-like character but acts in a way that a child would, automatically threatening Alice. The reader can identify with Alice’s courage to stand up to an irrational authority figure.

Last, the White Rabbit’s eagerness to never be late represents the sense of being rushed, a reality of the adult world. Adults are always in a hurry and strive to be on time. The White Rabbit is always flustered and causes Alice to be flustered as well. In one instance, the Rabbit frantically demands that Alice help him: ‘Why, Mary Ann, what ARE you doing out here? Run home this moment, and fetch me a pair of gloves and a

fan! Quick, now!’ And Alice was so much frightened that she ran off at once in the direction it pointed to, without trying to explain the mistake he had made” (Carroll 20).

The White Rabbit also represents Alice’s ticking clock of adolescence. Since Alice is thrown into a world of adult-like characters, she is forced to leave her adolescent ways and engage in more adult-like scenarios. She is able to see what it’s like to be an adult and how short of a time it is to be a child. Alice begins her journey in Wonderland by varying in sizes: first big and then little, and she ponders on growing older, saying, “Shall I never get any older than I am now? That’ll be a comfort, one way—never to be an old woman—but then—always to have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn’t like that!” (Carroll 22). In the short time Alice is big, she starts to wonder what it would be like to be an adult, and her fear leaves her. The White Rabbit startles her, but “she was now about a thousand times as large as the Rabbit, and had no reason to be afraid of it” (Carroll 22). She begins to see what it is like to be bigger than everyone else and how quickly one can go from being little to being big.

The character of the Duchess believes everything has a significant meaning and shares this with Alice. For instance, Alice mentions to the Duchess that not everything has a moral, but the Duchess replies, “Tut, tut, child! Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it” (Carroll 50). This seems puzzling in the chaotic world that Alice has been thrown into, where nothing makes sense. Alice then comments on the game of croquet they are watching. The Duchess doesn’t miss the moment, saying, “and the moral of that is— “Oh, ’tis love, ’tis love, that makes the world go round!” (Carroll 51) and later states, “and the moral of THAT is— ‘Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves’” (Carroll 51). The Duchess ends their conversation with

profound nonsense: “Be what you would seem to be—or if you’d like it put more simply—Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise” (Carroll 52). Alice tells The Duchess that she wishes she could have written that sentence down, as it is the only way to remember it. This puzzling moral is more puzzling because she never asks for her advice in the first place.

Didacticism emerges through the struggles Alice has with her own identity. The Caterpillar himself asks Alice, “Who are you?” (Carroll 27) and Alice cannot find an answer. Alice is a child, but in Wonderland she is shown direction toward development. Alice’s learning environment is addressed by Anna Helle-Valle and Per-Einar Binder, who note “the characters of Wonderland are all marked by a lack of understanding and empathy.”⁷ Alice is learning about the “true” reality and the world of Wonderland, and she is offered little sympathy by the characters. Alice’s search for identity is also difficult when this identity is “sometimes put in check mate by logically valid counterarguments” (Helle-Valle and Binder 17). The characters noted above, most importantly the Queen of Hearts, engage in arguments with Alice, but in doing so they take away her sense of self and identity, which she must recover on her own. Furthermore, Alice follows a didactic path through the story. She learns life lessons by interacting with characters, and these interactions often portray her longing to be out of a chaotic world. She is a child and the characters surrounding her behave like children while giving the illusion of being adults. Aihong Ren discusses the power struggle that exists between Alice and these characters, who “will not allow a child to challenge their position or threaten their power.”⁸ Alice

often finds herself in conversations with these characters, but ultimately they repress her. The lesson of growing up is seen within Alice and the struggles created through her interaction with them.

The Great Gatsby, written in 1925 by F. Scott Fitzgerald, describes the “American Dream” through the portrayal of the main character, Jay Gatsby. Gatsby throws late-night parties, owns a large house, and has plentiful wealth. Those surrounding him see Gatsby as the man who has it all, but he struggles with his own identity while he projects the facade of a happy man, holding on to a former love and trying to hide his criminal past. *The Great Gatsby*’s didacticism emerges through the lessons of patience, friendship, and acceptance, represented by the three main characters.

Nick Carraway, Gatsby’s neighbor, represents Gatsby’s present personality and lifestyle. Nick knows Gatsby as a wealthy social butterfly. He does not know his past, though “even Nick is able to detect the ‘real’ Gatsby through the pose at their first meeting.”⁹ Throughout the story, Nick remains the only person Gatsby fully trusts. Nick knows that Gatsby is lonely even during the glamorous parties. He becomes a friend for Gatsby, but there are times when it appears that Gatsby simply uses him for his own purposes. Gatsby appreciates Nick and the man that he is, but Gatsby also has his own problems and he drags Nick into both the good and the bad parts of his life. This reflects a didactic theme of taking friends for granted, which leads to conflict. Nick struggles to know why Gatsby acts the way he does, telling him “I don’t like mysteries and I don’t understand why you won’t come out frankly and tell me what you want.”¹⁰ When Gatsby dies, Nick remains his one true friend. In fact, only Nick attends Gatsby’s funeral, and he feels a sense of sorrow for Gatsby, saying, “I wanted to get somebody for him. I want to

go into that room where he lay and reassure him: ‘I’ll get somebody for you, Gatsby. Don’t worry. Just trust me and I’ll get somebody for you’” (Fitzgerald 180). The strong, yet strange, friendship between Nick and Gatsby suggests lessons about real-life relationships, where loyalty is the most important characteristic.

Didacticism reigns in the scenes between Daisy Buchanan and Gatsby. Gatsby tries to become the man Daisy needs, so he tries to hold on to the identity he has created: gentle, calm, and caring. Through her, he tries to rewrite the past, but Nick cautions Gatsby about moving too quickly, telling him “You can’t repeat the past” (Fitzgerald 110). Gatsby wants to believe that he can recreate the love he had shared with Daisy, telling Nick, “I’m going to fix everything just the way it was before” (Fitzgerald 110). Even though Gatsby is not the same man he was before, he tries to live his life with her the same as it once was, and a lesson emerges about trying to relive the past. The relationship between Gatsby and Daisy can be seen as a classic love story, but Daisy is selfish. Gatsby tries to rekindle the love between himself and Daisy, and believes their love is still greater than all other considerations, but Daisy stays with her husband, Tom, and has no plans of leaving this life, and after Gatsby’s death, Daisy does not even attend his funeral. Gatsby portrays the folly of still believing in a love long past.

Tom Buchanan, Daisy’s husband, brings out Gatsby’s anger. Gatsby has spent much of his life aspiring to high social status. Tom has the one thing Gatsby wants: Daisy. Because of this deep-seated desire, Gatsby holds anger inside that he desperately tries to hide, but he fails. During an altercation with Tom, Gatsby lashes out, becoming so angry that even Nick notices the rage inside of him: “He looked as if he had ‘killed a man’” (Fitzgerald 134). Gatsby’s self-identification as a worthier man for Daisy is wrong,

and ultimately the truth comes out. He restrains himself, but this initiates the fall of his character. When Gatsby is enraged with Tom, Daisy becomes frightened. During this moment Daisy sees the man Gatsby has become, and a wedge becomes evident between Gatsby and Daisy.

The Great Gatsby portrays a didactic position through a character's views of love and hate while hiding his true self. Gatsby's illusion collapses after the characters "make their way through the world Gatsby has created" (Balkum 126). Gatsby has created an exceptional world filled with money and acquaintances, but he is a lonely man who has built up this life only to hopefully impress the woman he loves. Gatsby hides his true self from Daisy and he "works hard to create a setting for Daisy and to assemble the proofs of his worthiness" (Balkum 126), and in doing so he attempts to give his whole self to Daisy. He "idealiz[es] himself and Daisy to an extreme degree"¹¹ and "he unthinkingly assumes that he need not tell Daisy the factual truth of who he actually was when they met five years earlier and who he is now: a criminal" (Mitchell 391). Gatsby hides his true self from Daisy, the woman he is supposed to love, and dies a lonely and lost man. He is forgotten by the woman he loved, and ultimately he lived a life through a lie, pretending to be somebody he's not, a worse fate than losing the woman of his dreams. Those tempted to identify with Gatsby's need to hide his true self may get a sense of the unfortunate consequences from the novel.

Someday, Someday, Maybe (2014), by Lauren Graham, also includes didactic themes portrayed through characters and actions. Franny Banks wants to hit it big with her acting career, but she quickly learns that acting requires dedication and sacrifice, and she puts pressure on herself to gain this dream, telling herself, "I'd promised myself that

I'd get up early, memorize a sonnet, take in a matinee of an edgy foreign film. I'd do something, *anything*, to better myself, to try as hard as I could not to *fail*.”¹² Wanting to fit in with the movie-star lifestyle, Franny attends parties and gets involved with a celebrity, but she struggles to reconcile her true self with her desire to become an actress. She earns a part in a movie, but it requires her to be naked, and she tries to push through her feelings of insecurity by telling a friend, “I need the money,” (Graham 242) to which her friend replies, “You can't do a job just for the money.” (Graham 242). She finds companionship within her male roommate, Dan, but he does not fit in with a glamorous movie-star lifestyle. The work he does is compared to “some juvenile rite of passage” (Graham 223) and he is consistently seen as a joke. Franny's identity crisis comes to a head when she must decide between the good-looking movie star and her roommate. Readers are able to identify with Franny's strong desire to fulfill her dreams while learning the difficult truths about what it takes to fulfill them.

Franny's movie-star boyfriend, James, represents the goals Franny hopes to attain. He is well-dressed, admirable, and represents the social stature that Franny strives for. Franny changes her behavior when she is around him, because she strives to be a part of a new world. When she and James first meet, she stumbles on her words and tries to act as if she is successful as he is. He asks her if she will be going to acting class and she tells him, “I have to pick up some scripts, too, actually” and later says “I have ...ah...stuff, you know...with all my uh, agents, also” (Graham 47). Franny ignores her true self, depicting herself as more important than she really is. She continues this dishonesty by denying her unhappiness. She seeks affection from James, becoming almost a completely different person when she is around him, and cannot believe the attention he gives her,

telling herself, “I didn’t know what to say the first time he said that [I am amazing], and I still have no idea how to respond. My face is burning” (Graham 194). Franny sees James as better than her, and she does not believe him when he tells her he loves her. She comments, “this is probably the one and only thing James could say that would stop me in my tracks, the one and only thing I was not expecting to hear from him” (Graham 252). Over time, she starts to see James for what he really is and she starts to realize that his lifestyle is not really what it seems. He invites her to the premiere of his movie, but is ashamed to show affection towards her in public, and when she questions his lack of affection, he replies, “Well, no, I mean, it’s probably not a good idea. There’s just a ton of press here, that’s all. The movie’s getting a lot of coverage” (Graham 299). Franny starts to question their relationship, saying, “There’s something wrong, something feels so wrong somehow” (Graham 300). She also starts to see the movie-star lifestyle as artificial, something she no longer wants to be a part of: “I don’t care about waving and smiling and having my picture taken with him” (Graham 300). Franny slowly starts to see what it takes to succeed and does not like it. Franny shows that dreams can have unexpected negative consequences, a relevant lesson for many readers.

Franny’s roommate, Dan, represents Franny’s “real” world. He sees her when she is at her most vulnerable: with messy hair, crying, and eating. Didactic themes appear when Franny sees through the fake world she had tried to be a part of and lets her true self shine. Franny learns that money and fame are not the most important things in life. Rather than judging her life through the friends, success, and self-worth that she has only recently gained, she starts to identify as a regular girl who is just trying to achieve her dreams. Dan helps her to see that “there’s always hope” (Graham 314), and he becomes

the one person she can lean on and who is always there to help her. Slowly, Franny starts to realize she has romantic feelings for Dan. By the end of the novel, she has a chance to get a job in a different state, and she immediately thinks about moving away from her father and her friends, adding, “And Dan” (Graham 334). She singles Dan out, realizing that she will miss him when she leaves. Here readers can identify with Franny and the realization of the significance of a certain individual.

The three novels examined here, Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, and Graham’s *Someday, Someday, Maybe*, all project didacticism through the conflicts and resolutions of their main characters. Through their trials, these characters discover something greater about themselves, in the process demonstrating for readers lessons in better self-understanding. These messages are not always conspicuous, but they do serve as a means of suggesting life lessons through the entertainment of literature.

End Notes

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4. Casement, William. “Literature and Didacticism: Examining Some Popularly Held Ideas” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1987, p. 101.

5. Hämäläinen, Nora. *Literature and Moral Theory*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p. 34.

6. Carroll, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland*. Christian Books Today, 2016, p. 49.

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7. Helle-Valle, Anna, and Per-Einar Binder. "In Wonderland: a Phenomenological, Developmental and Self Psychological Analysis of a Child's Playful Encounter with a New Reality." *Nordic Psychology*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2009, p. 17. Hereafter cited parenthetically in text.

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10. Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Alma Classics, 2016, p. 71. Hereafter cited parenthetically in text.

11. Mitchell, G. (1991). The great narcissist: A study of Fitzgerald's *Jay Gatsby*. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 51, no.4. 387-396.

12. Graham, Lauren. *Someday, Someday, Maybe a Novel*, Ballantine Books, 2014. p. 12. Hereafter cited parenthetically in text.

13. Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction*. Vintage Books, 1991.

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Preface to Short Stories

John Gardner, in *The Art of Fiction*, maintains "that all we need for our sympathy to be roused is that the writer communicates with power and conviction the similarities in his characters' experience and our own—then it must follow that the first business of the writer must be to make us see and feel vividly what his characters see and feel."¹³

Gardner's consideration of the reader's sympathy has inspired me to write stories that show raw emotion, and much like the works mentioned above, I have used moral themes to increase self-identification on the part of my readers. For the first story, "Unwanted Decision," I drew inspiration from *Alice in Wonderland* and the idea that people can be thrown into situations or a world from which they try to desperately escape. The main character tries to please her family by following through with a previously arranged engagement, and she has to fight her way out of it. For the second story, "A Visit From the Past," I was inspired by the idea from *The Great Gatsby* that two lovers can reunite after a long time apart. The last story, "Senior Prank," is inspired by *Someday, Someday Maybe*; the main character tries to uphold his standard of being the "popular guy" as Franny strives to uphold her dream of becoming a successful actress. These stories all suggest life lessons through the characters and their journeys.

Unwanted Decision

“You don’t have to do this.” Jason’s voice carried across an empty courtyard gaining the attention of a beautiful, proud young bride, satin dressed, her porcelain shoulders exposed. She was the perfect portrait of everything he could have wanted, silhouetted against the tranquility of water and sunrise.

Jason stumbled, caught off guard by her beauty, and recovered gracefully. Katherine’s pale blue eyes smiled at his attempts to play off the momentary falter. She pushed her hair from her face, encouraging thick locks to move like small curls of melted chocolate flowing through her delicate fingers, and used the moment to arrange her thoughts.

“I know,” she said, her eyes wet and wanting. Jason joined her on the marble bench and took her hand in his.

“You look beautiful,” he said, never removing his eyes from her face. A blank stare crossed Kathrine’s face as she looked through and beyond him, here but really there.

“Thank you,” she replied, her voice a bit hollow.

He sighed. “You don’t have to—” She cut him off with a wave of her hand.

“I know.”

“You could just—”

“I know.”

Katherine regained her focus, sighed.

“Does he know?” Jason asked.

“No.”

He looked down at their hands. “Will you tell him?”

“No.”

“Do you think—”

“I think we can stop with all of the questions for now.” Katherine stared out across the lake and removed her hand from Jason’s grasp. A single duck glided across the lake, leaving its partner to feed on the shore.

Katherine nodded towards them. “You see those ducks over there?”

Jason nodded.

“Aren’t they beautiful?”

Jason smiled and nodded again, “But not as beautiful as you are.”

“Hmm.” Katherine watched the ducks intently, studying every move. “I wonder what that’s like.”

“What?”

“Being free. Being happy. Being able to do as you wish. No chains. No remorse. No gestures. Nobody to hold you back. Just spending an entire lifetime in the water. Wading. Playing. Being free.”

Jason ran his hands over his face, through his hair. “You don’t have to do this, Katherine.”

She sent him a grim smile. “Yeah, you said that already.” Her gaze left the ducks as she looked down at her engagement ring. She twirled the teardrop diamond around with her thumb, back and forth, back and forth.

“You think I’m making a huge mistake, don’t you?” Katherine turned her head to look at Jason.

“Do you want the truth?”

“Yes.”

Jason nodded. “Yes, I do. But it doesn’t really matter what I think.”

She smiled again, this time bigger. “Yeah, it does.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re always right.” Katherine grabbed Jason’s hand and weaved her fingers into his. Gently, she lay her head on his shoulder. Jason was always her rock, her knight in shining armor. He was always there to tell her the truth, to protect her, to guide her, but they both knew he could not protect her from this. This was her destiny, her life, and he had no part in it.

Katherine closed her eyes hoping to open them to a different day. One when all of this heartache would be over. She knew better than that. There was no way out for her.

Jason leaned over and kissed her head, breathing in the flowery scents of her hair. With his head pressed against hers, he began to sing. Katherine’s heart raced and swooned with his song, their song.

She opened her eyes. “You know what would be nice?”

“What?” He mumbled.

“Staying like this forever.”

Jason kissed her head again, closed his eyes, breathed deep.

“Katherine?” Another voice broke the silence between them and they lifted their heads to see Mary standing before them. “It’s time.”

They let go of each other and stood up. Katherine ran her hands down her dress and then turned her attention to Jason’s tuxedo. Satisfied, she moved towards Mary, and they embraced.

“You look so pretty today, my baby.” Mary brushed her hand through Katherine’s curls, fixing them, giving them a mother’s touch.

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Well.” Mary smiled at them both, a mixture of sadness and warmth. “Let’s get this show on the road, shall we?”

Mary turned and headed away from them on a cobblestone path lined with old oak trees towards the sound of laughter and music. Holding hands, Jason and Katherine followed.

The cathedral was dressed in colors of red and gold. Red rose petals covered the long aisle. Gold ribbons were tied to every pew, each pew filled with people she didn’t even know.

“Okay, Katherine, sweetie, you can come with me. Jason, I think your parents have a seat saved for you. Katherine, come along now, dear. Let’s get you all ready.”

Katherine held onto Jason’s hand until the last second. Her mom had her arm around her, walking beside her, and Katherine turned her head around to see Jason standing there with empty eyes.

“Let’s get your flowers. The girls are already lined up. Aren’t you excited? Oh, my baby! On her wedding day!” Mary gave Katherine her bouquet of red and white flowers. “Okay, we’re all ready.”

Katherine and her mother walked to the front of the church where the nine bridesmaids were waiting behind closed doors. Katherine walked up to her father.

“Are you ready, my dear?” Her father grabbed her hand and wrapped it around his arm. He held tightly to the top of her hand.

“Dad, I—.” Katherine turned to look to her father.

“I know. Let’s just get through this, okay? It will be fine.” He smiled at her.

The music started playing, the doors opened, and one by one the bridesmaids walked down the aisle slowly, like a line of happy ducklings. Katherine could feel her heart pound, the pit of her stomach felt tense.

“Dad, I have to sit down.”

“It’s almost over, dear, we’re almost there.”

“No, Dad, I have to sit down now. I can’t. I can’t breathe.” Katherine let go of her father’s arm and sat on the bench just outside of the church doors.

“Katherine, everyone is waiting. Patrick is waiting for you. You have to get it together.”

“How?” Katherine stared at the ground.

“You just have to. Just breathe.”

Katherine looked up at her father. “No. How can you just let me do this? How? Why?”

“Katherine—”

“You know it’s not right. You know it. Why won’t you stop it?”

“This is how it’s supposed to be. You know that. This is what she wanted for you.” Her dad sat beside Katherine and put his hand on her hands. “This was always the plan.”

“It’s not love.”

“He doesn’t have to know that.”

“Yes, he does, Dad. Do you want me to marry into a lie? Is that what you want for me?”

“Katherine, this is just how it has to be.”

“No.” Katherine stood up and walked a few paces away from her father. She turned around to face him. “This is not how it has to be. This isn’t true love. I want true love, not love that was planned without me twenty years ago.”

“There was no way around this.”

“You could have told her no. You could have told her you wanted more for your daughter. You could have just said no.” Katherine felt a sting of tears building up in her eyes.

“I didn’t have a choice. This was your grandmother’s plan, not mine.”

“But I am not her daughter!”

“Patrick is a wonderful man, Katherine. He will take care of you.” Katherine’s father stood up and wrapped his arms around his daughter. He remembered the very moment it was decided.

“She will marry into the Richmond family. There is good breeding there. Is that clear?”

Why didn’t he just say no? Because he knew this was her destiny. Good breeding is important in a family in order to maintain a good name.

“Katherine, you’re right.” Her father let loose of his hug and looked her in the eyes.

“What?”

“You don’t have to do this.”

“What about the plan?”

“Who’s going to know? Patrick doesn’t know. Your mother doesn’t know. You don’t have to do this.”

Katherine wiped her tears and looked out the closed door window to see Patrick standing at the end of the aisle, waiting. She looked over to where Jason’s parents were sitting.

“Where’s Jason?”

“What?”

“Jason, he’s not in there. Where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

Katherine ran to the front church door to open it.

“Katherine.” Katherine’s dad reached out to her. “I have always loved you.”

Katherine smiled. “I know, Dad, I know.”

Katherine ran outside and down the stairs, but she could not find Jason anywhere. She ran to the oak trees and ran passed the cobblestone walkway and to the duck pond. There, she found Jason standing by the marbled bench.

“I didn’t do it.” She walked up to Jason and smiled.

“I know.” Jason grabbed Katherine and hugged her close, placing his hand on her head.

“How did you know I wouldn’t do it?”

“Because I’m always right.”

A Visit from the Past

Katie enters her office and flips a silver-plated light switch. The room fills with a soft, warm glow illuminating a shrink's couch and chair, both an olive shade of leather. A single bonsai tree graces a cherry-colored coffee table between them. Scents of lavender waft through the room riding on waves of trickling water. Katie takes a breath and savors the serenity of her work space.

With purpose, she moves towards her desk centered in front of a portrait window overlooking a small city. She hangs a worn, brown leather jacket on the back of her chair and takes a seat at the desk. The sun's rays bloom through the window, warming her face and accenting her chocolate hair with its golden light. She pushes a few wavy strands out of her face and clicks a tiny mouse bringing a screen to life. Just another day.

"Let's see," she mutters, pen between her pink lips. "9:00 Stewart, 11:00 Phillip, 2:00 Casey, and 4:00... a new patient?" Of course there was a new patient at the end of the day. "Great...", she mutters, turning her attention to a stack of case notes. A smile crosses her lips and fades again as she flips through them, reminiscing over recent patient breakthroughs.

Stewart, a middle-aged divorcee of ten years, needed help reentering the dating scene. Easy enough, you'd think, but Stewart wasn't interested in any of the new, tech-savvy dating services the Age of the Internet offered. He wanted a real connection. To feel needed, not notified. He saw Katie once a week.

Phillip was the polar opposite of Stewart. He couldn't keep himself out of love triangles. A product of early childhood divorce, he just couldn't stay away from married women. Katie spent most of her time attempting to convince Phillip that sleeping with

another man's wife was not going to fulfill him. At his recent booking, he told her that he had found another mate, and Katie hopes this time she was at least not wearing a ring.

Casey terrified her. The man had attempted suicide more times than there were hours in a day. Katie sighs, dropping the case notes. They sound like sand in an hour glass as they slide across her desk.

The hours whisk by as she moves from desk to chair, chair to desk, one break in her day leaving the room empty of voices and nervous human funk. Katie walks Casey from the room, arms interlocked at the elbow. He silently sobs, and she hands him a tissue.

"It's gonna be okay, Casey." She looks up at him and smiles. "I will always be here when you need me."

"Thank you," he replies. He wipes his nose and exits the room. A wall clock shows three-thirty. A sharp ringing abruptly shatters the temporary silence in the room. Katie sighs and walks back to her desk, picks up the phone.

"Yes, Dedra?"

"Dr. Johnson," she replies, "your four o'clock appointment is here."

"Thank you, Dedra. Send them in."

She replaces the phone on the receiver and sets her notebook down on the desk. The door opens and closes behind her. She turns and her eyes widen slightly, and her voice catches in her throat.

"Hi, Katie." A man of 5'9" with sandy blonde hair stands in the frame of the doorway and addresses her with bold blue eyes and a smile that could power a small city block.

“Derek?” She stumbles, shaken but aware. “What are you doing here?” It had been three years since she had seen him. The butterflies in her stomach tell her nothing has changed. She swallows hard. An uncomfortable silence stands between them. He clears his throat, runs his hand over the slight stubble on his jaw.

“I came to see you.”

He takes a step towards her, but Katie makes an awkward attempt to move through her desk to get away. A cup of pencils spills across the desk and her case notes scatter across the floor as she attempts to right herself. Derek bends down to pick them up.

“Why?” She asks, her brain lining up the follow up questions. “How are you even here? I thought you were in Ohio? What are you doing here?”

He flashes a grin and stands. “I took a few weeks off to come visit my family. I thought I’d look you up and see where you worked. Maybe see you. Give it a shot.”

“Well, you need to leave.” She points to the door and then crosses her arms. His eyes lighten, face softens. Katie breaks eye contact and stares at the floor.

“But I really want us to talk,” he replies.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. I really think you need to leave.”

“I’m sorry.” He holds her case notes out in front of him and as she reaches for them, he takes a step forward. She doesn’t move this time. “I didn’t handle things well. I didn’t know what to do. I wasn’t ready for what we were turning into. It scared me.”

Katie lifts her eyes slightly towards Derek. In his eyes she sees their first kiss, a passionate connection of two dazed and confused college freshman. Young and in love, they had toured every part of the university grounds, pausing in one place or another to

engage in passionate pastimes. Very fond memories of the university library played through her head: Derek, back against a bookshelf, Katie leaned against him, flirting, reading poetry to one another, holding hands.

Katie breaks free from the intoxicating thoughts as Derek leans in, tenderly alighting his lips upon hers. The space of a few seconds stretches for hours. A warm sensation spreads from her back down to her legs, mingling with the resurfacing memories. She firmly places her hands on Derek's chest and pushes away from him.

"This isn't the time or place." She lets a sigh loose, feeling the thumping of her heart, a prisoner begging to be released.

"I have two hours, right?" Derek smirks.

Katie narrows her eyes and shakes her head. "Derek, why are you here? Why come here, where I work? You can't be here."

"I knew that if I just called or texted, you would have probably ignored me."

"Well, you're right about that."

"Katie." He pauses. "I was scared to death. You were engaged and I didn't know how to handle that. I didn't expect for that night to turn into what it did."

Katie turns her gaze to the window. "Well, it's fine. I got past it."

"I don't see a ring." He nods towards her naked ring finger. She rubs at its absence.

"No." She stares at the ground for a few seconds then Derek. "It didn't work out."

"Did you tell him?"

"No. I just called it off."

He places his hand on Katie's. "I'm ready now." She pulls her hand away. "I wasn't ready before, but I am now."

"Derek, you can't do this. You can't just come here like this and expect things to go back to the way they were."

Tears line the corners of her eyes, large enough to reflect the light but not enough to fall. Derek sighs, his gaze softens as if seeing her for the first time.

"I was so fucked up, Kate. I wasn't ready to be in a relationship."

"But you were okay with having sex while I was engaged?"

"That wasn't all my fault. You can't put all of the blame on me."

"I know." She shifts her eyes from Derek to the window and back again. "Is that what you came here for? To apologize? Well, apology accepted, but you can't stay here."

Katie pushes away from the desk and moves to open the office door. Derek catches her hand in his and squeezes gently. Katie freezes, unsure of what to do next.

"Just give me a chance," he says. "Give me a chance to be the guy that you need. I have been with a lot of girls since I've been in Ohio, but for some reason all I can think about is you. And I never thought I'd be that guy who couldn't stop thinking about a girl, but I can't stop thinking about you and how I screwed things up. I want to give us a chance, a real chance." He caresses her arm. "Don't you think there's a reason why we came back to each other every year after I moved, when I would come home for the holidays? We never gave up, but I just wasn't ready then."

Katie looks down at their intertwined hands. "I moved on. It's been three years and I've moved on. You need to move on. I am done talking about this." She pulls her hand free of his grasp.

“You told me you fell in love with me,” he replies.

“I just loved the sex,” she snaps. “I don’t even know anything about you. We know nothing about each other.” Her hands are intertwined with his again, yet she has no recollection.

“We could just start over,” he coaxes. “No sex.”

“You really think we could do that? Every time we get together, we have sex, Derek. All those visits made on campus. We always met up at night. It’s like we knew what was going to happen and we wanted it to happen, but we wanted to make sure nobody saw us.” She pulls away and walks to her desk, takes a seat in her chair. Derek follows.

“You can’t tell me you didn’t enjoy those times. The fear of getting caught sort of became a rush, didn’t it?” He sits on the edge of her desk and stares at the ground.

“You always acted so nonchalant afterwards. I never felt like I meant anything to you.” Katie shakes her head and fidgets with the clip holding her hair up. “Why now?”

“I’ve missed you,” he replies. “I told you, I was a mess. Hell, I don’t know. I didn’t want to think that we were turning into something more than a one-night stand, and last Christmas I texted you to see if you wanted to see me and you said you couldn’t. I sort of thought that was it.”

“I didn’t like the fact that you were okay with me cheating on my fiancé, but you weren’t okay with cheating on your girlfriend the time before. You kissed me, and that was it. I knew something had changed, because we met up in the daytime.”

“I wanted to see you last Christmas.”

“And I didn’t want to fall into that pattern.” Katie swivels her chair back and forth, her eyes beaming. She stands and crosses the room.

“We could try.” Derek steps away from the desk moving towards her. “We could give us a try. No sex this time.”

“No sex at all?” Katie turns to face him, smirking.

“Well, not unless you say you want to.” He closes the distance between them and pulls her close, placing his hand behind her neck as he kisses her. Katie feels heat rising in her cheeks. Abruptly, she pulls her mouth from his and inspects the icy blue pools staring back at her.

“You now have an hour-and-a-half.” She reaches behind her and locks the door.

“You better make it count.”

Senior Prank

The senior prank was the one part of his own senior year that Richard looked forward to. The prank defined the senior class, but even more importantly, it defined the master behind the prank. Every class preceding the senior class would talk about what kind of prank was pulled and how hard it was to invent. The previous pranks were well-planned. One year, the seniors let loose a hundred crickets inside of the high school building, and they could be heard even years later. The year before, bushels of hay were laid out throughout the hallways and the desks were all placed in the football stadium. Those pranks were easy and typical. They did no harm. Richard had been planning out the senior prank since his freshman year. He knew the history he would make when he first concocted the plan to play out the senior prank on Headmaster Davis.

“How sure are you that we won’t get caught? What if she sees us?” James whispered to Richard. Logan and Eric were sitting across from them at the lunchroom table.

“We won’t get caught. No senior has ever been caught in the senior prank.” Richard looked down at his food, and never looked up between bites.

“Yes, but no senior has ever pulled the prank on the headmaster either.” James stared at him, but he remained concentrated on the food in front of him.

“How are we even going to pull the prank, anyways? Everyone knows Headmaster Davis stays in her office late the night before senior skip day. She knows the seniors always pull the pranks the night before and then we all bail out of school the next day. How are we going to get into her office with her in it?” Logan glanced towards Richard, shrugging his shoulders.

“I think the biggest question is how do we get her out of her office?” Eric smirked, like one who could see the light bulb going off.

“Well, Richard? You’re the master mind behind all of this? How are we going to do it? How are we going to pull this off with the headmaster in her office?”

“We’re not doing the prank here, you jackasses.” Richard looked each one in the eye.

“Ummm...okay...but I thought—” Eric ran his hand through his thick black hair and squinted his forehead, causing creases like an unmade bed spread.

“We’re breaking into Headmaster Davis’s house.” Richard looked down at his food, picking out the peas from the vegetable mix.

“What? We’re what? Richard, I don’t think you understand what you’re saying. Headmaster Davis’s house? That’s breaking and entering. That’s...that’s a federal offense. We could be arrested. Are you out of your mind?” James smacked Richard’s arm.

Richard looked up at James with a smile, “Senior prank, baby. An epic one.” He stood up and carried his tray to the garbage bin. He came back to sit down. “Look, nobody has ever done the senior prank on Headmaster Davis. Don’t you want it to be big? Our names would go down as legends of this high school. We could make real history here, guys.” With each sentence, he hit the table with his index finger.

“Richard, man, I don’t know about this. I’ve got a scholarship to Florida State. If we get caught, I could lose that scholarship. My dad would kill me.” Logan shook his head. He took the ACT once and scored a 32. The scholarship fell into his hands. His

father knew his son would walk in his footsteps and become the second greatest lawyer in Georgia.

“Look, if you guys want to be pussies and back out, then that’s fine by me. I don’t mind taking all the credit. But when we leave this hellhole, my name will be talked about, and where will yours be? Are you in or out?” They each looked at one another, waiting to see who would make the first move to consent.

“I’m in.” Logan nudged Eric’s elbow.

“I’m in, too.” Eric jumped to agree.

“What about you, bro? Are you in this with me?” Richard looked over towards James, almost embarrassed to ask him. The two of them had been friends since grade school after James found Richard hiding from the class bully in the boy’s bathroom garbage can.

“Yeah, man, I’m in this with you. Just don’t get me killed.”

“Not a problem. Alright, meet me at the corner Chevron at eight o’clock tomorrow night. I’ll drive.”

The next night, the four met at the corner Chevron right at 8:00 and piled into Richard’s car.

“Man, it’s going to be close to nine before we even get there. She’ll probably be home by then.” Logan fumbled with his phone.

“No worries. We’ll get you home before Jeopardy comes on.” James looked behind him to the backseat.

“Shut up, James. Some of us like to use our brains instead of our dicks.”

“Nice comeback. So that’s what you told Victoria before she left? It all makes sense now.”

“She was an idiot, not the one to marry.” Logan continued fumbling with his phone.

“Not the one to get you up?”

“Man, fuck you, James.”

“Dude, I’m just messing with you. She was an idiot anyways.”

“Is that supposed to be some sort of joke?” Logan fumbled through his phone some more.

“Hey Eric, you got yourself a fine ass.” Richard glanced back at Eric through the rearview mirror.

“She is great.” He looked out the side window and watched the moon shine bright in the dark sky.

“I bet she’s a catwoman in the bed, huh?”

“You think every woman is a catwoman in bed.”

“So?” Richard insisted.

Eric looked in the front seat. “So what?”

“Is she?”

“I don’t know.” Eric mumbled.

“What do you mean you don’t know?”

“We haven’t done it yet, okay? Damn.” Eric leaned his head on the back of the seat.

“So, what you’re saying is you’re being a pussy.” Richard shook his head.

“Would you just drop it? At least I have a girlfriend.”

“Oh! He got you with that one, Richard! Haha!” James buried his mouth against his fist.

“And at least I’m getting some ass.” Richard retorted.

“Dude, you’re getting every girl in the junior and senior class. You’re going to screw up one day and get a girl pregnant, and then what?” James shook his head.

“Well, then I guess I’ll have a kid running around.”

“That’s a scary thought for sure.”

The drive to Headmaster Davis’s house, which was only thirty minutes, seemed like it lasted longer. She lived by herself in a two-story white mansion, the kind that young girls could only dream of having. Rumor had it years before that Headmaster Davis remained alone because she loved money too much to be with a man.

As they got closer to the home, James saw the metal gate surrounding the well-lit mansion. Logan sighed. Richard stopped the car in front of the gate doors.

“How do we get past these gates? We don’t have a key.” James looked all around the gates.

“Don’t worry. They open automatically.” Richard stared straight ahead.

“Man, this place is pimped out!” Eric smacked Logan’s arm.

“Wait...how did you know—” James quickly turned to Richard.

“I just knew, okay?” He shook his head.

Richard parked the car beside a large oak tree and turned off the engine. They each grabbed a flashlight, and James grabbed cans of silly strings and bottles of honey,

placing them into his backpack. Slowly they walked to the front door, stepping on dried brown leaves with each step.

“Be quiet, now. Do you want someone to see us?” Richard moved his finger to his lips. He pulled out a credit card from his wallet and slid the card between the front door and the door frame. The door opened with ease and he motioned for the three to enter into the house.

“Are you sure she’s not here?” Logan looked upstairs and pointed to a dim light coming from a bedroom.

“She probably just left the light on. Come on.” Richard tiptoed up the stairs with James, Eric, and Logan following behind him. The stairs were laid with a bright red rug. At the top of the stairs, Richard grabbed the backpack from James.

“Ready to do this?” He handed each one a can of silly string and a bottle of honey.

“To the legends!” The four clanged their cans into one another.

“Let’s get started, gentlemen.” Eric smiled and then froze. “What was that?”

“What?” Logan listened and moved his eyes side to side.

“I thought I heard something.” Eric looked around the hallway

“You’re just paranoid. There’s nobody here.” Logan opened up the bottle of honey. Glancing to the bedroom, his eye caught the Headmaster. “Shit, guys, hide.” He nodded towards the Headmaster’s bedroom, and the four of them hid behind the corner.

“I thought you said she wouldn’t be in here, Richard,” James whispered and smacked him on the arm.

“She wasn’t supposed to be.... listen.” The boys listened closely. “Someone is in there with her.”

“What do we do now?” James started to feel dampness under his armpits.

“I don’t know. We need to get out of here.” Richard peered around the corner, looked into the Headmaster’s bedroom, and found a familiar face. “What the hell?” Richard whispered, squinting his eyes.

“What? What is it?” James looked frighteningly at Richard.

“I think...I think it’s...”

BAM!

They each ducked down quickly. Richard pushed James into the bathroom, and Eric and Logan ran into the closet.

“What the fuck was that, man? What was that?” James punched Richard in the arm. They heard footsteps run down the stairs and Richard caught a glimpse of the perpetrator’s face. He froze, his face emotionless.

“Richard, who was that?”

“Let’s get the hell out of here!” Richard stepped out of the bedroom. Down the hallway Richard could see Headmaster Davis laying on the floor, a pool of blood under her chest.

“We have to get out of here, we have to get out of here now! Oh my god!” Richard grabbed James by the arm and pulled him down the hallway as he looked back, seeing the dead body. Eric and Logan ran out of the closet, catching a glimpse of the crime scene. Logan stopped.

“Logan, come on man, we need to get out of here. Come on!” Richard grabbed him by the arm and shoved him forward.

“Who the fuck was that, Richard?”

“Run, damnit!” They both ran down the stairs.

“What the fuck! Is she dead? Is she dead?” Eric ran beside Richard and out of the house with Logan and James not far behind them.

“What do we do? What do we do?” James grabbed his head with both hands.

“We need to get the hell out of here, that’s what.” Richard ran towards the car.

“We need to call the cops, Richard.”

“And tell them what? That we broke into Headmaster Davis’s house and witnessed her being murdered? Then guess what? We get charged with breaking and entering!”

“We can’t just leave. We can’t just...fuck! This is your fucking fault, Richard! Now what? What the hell are we supposed to do now? Our fingerprints are on the doorknobs. They’re on the stairwell. The cops are going to eventually come and check out the entire house. Our fingerprints will be found. Then what? What will be our reason, huh? The cops find her dead and we get hit with the charges.” James stepped right in front of Richard.

“They’ll find the man’s fingerprints in her bedroom. We weren’t in there.”

Richard covered his mouth with his hand. “I can’t believe it.”

“You’re missing the point! What the hell were we doing in there? That is what the cops are going to want to know.” Eric kicked at the rocks in the driveway.

“Richard, who was that? You saw the man. You can tell the cops who you saw.”

“I didn’t see who it was, okay?” Richard walked to the car and fumbled through the trunk. James followed behind him.

“Yes, you did, Richard. You stopped and you saw the man’s face. I know you did. Hell, you looked like you saw a ghost. Was it one of those Lightfield seniors?” James stood behind Richard. “Richard, who the hell was it?”

“I didn’t see who it was.” Richard pushed jackets and books around in the trunk.

“Come on, man. What are you doing? Who the hell did you see?” James shoved Richard.

“Lay off, James!” Richard turned around.

“Guys, what is this?” Eric picked up a gold watch from the gravel. “It’s a watch. Richard, this looks like the watch your dad always wears, blue face with a black rim. Isn’t this your dad’s watch?” Eric held the watch up and looked up at Richard. He walked over to Eric and snatched the watch out of his hand.

“I must have dropped it when I ran outside.” He walked back to his car. Eric, James, and Logan looked puzzlingly at one another.

“You weren’t wearing a watch when we got here. This is your dad’s watch. What was your dad’s watch doing on the ground?” James looked around the gravel and he looked back up at Richard, whose back was turned to him. “Oh my god. Your dad...your dad was here. He’s been here.”

“Shut up, James, you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It was your dad? Are you fucking kidding me? Your dad is who you saw, wasn’t it? Richard!” Richard turned around.

“What? What do you want me to say or do? I just saw my dad kill Headmaster Davis!”

“Why would your dad kill her, Richard? What the hell is going on?”

“Oh my god. That explains it.” Eric stared at Richard. “The gate. You knew the gate would open. How did you know that?”

Richard looked at Eric and quickly glanced at James. “I just knew.”

“No, nobody could have known that unless they had been here before.”

“Really? You want to have this conversation now? Can we carry on this conversation in the car, please?” Richard opened up the driver door. James walked up behind him and slammed it shut.

“What the hell is going on, Richard? I think you need to tell us what is going on. This was your idea, to come here and prank Headmaster Davis. We all agreed. We get here, you knew the gates would open automatically, we just saw Headmaster Davis get murdered, and then come to find out your dad is the one who shot her. What is going on?”

“Yeah, and you want to stand here and discuss this with a dead body in the house?”

“Talk, man!” James stood in front of Richard while Eric and Logan stood with their arms crossed.

“I’ve been here before.”

“Why?”

“I just have, alright?”

“Richard, damnit, just tell us the truth!”

“I’ve been here sometimes at night.”

“You don’t mean...”

“So what? Gotta get some ass when I can, right?” Richard nodded.

“Damnit, Richard!” James pushed Richard. “I never should have listened to you! Was this your plan?”

“No! I didn’t think my dad would show up here like this. He must have followed me one night and found where she lived. I don’t know.”

“So what do we do now? We can’t go to the cops. Our fingerprints are everywhere.” Eric stepped between James and Richard. Richard pulled out a can of gasoline from the trunk of the car.

“Then we won’t let them find any evidence. Then there will be no way it can get pinned on us.”

James shook his head, “No, Richard, no. You are out of your fucking mind! No way, man!”

“What else are we supposed to do? Do you want to go to jail? Do you? We set the house on fire and we leave. No fingerprints.” Richard set the container on the ground and unscrewed the top. James, Eric, and Logan watched as he poured gasoline onto the front door, the windows, and the side bushes.

“We are in this together. No backing out now.” He flicks the lighter and lights the front door. It quickly engulfs in flames. “Come on, let’s get out of here.” They each get back into the car and drive away.

Didactic Themes in *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Someday, Someday, Maybe*

and

Three Original Short Stories

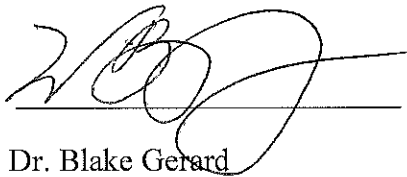
By Savannah Mathews

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
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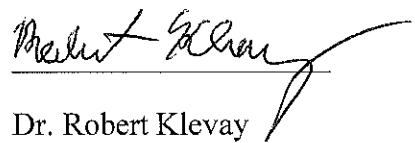
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