

/lit/ Writing Competition*

{ February, 2025 }

Featuring stories from GiovanniDrogo,
Hogan, meteor, BicFlair, Emilia, Beineberg,
Logan, Pancakesyrup, ChineseDracula,
VampDaddy, MaMaMi, Abes, Z. N.,
mintjulia, jeff, ineptia, & trippo

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Organized by yodo (aka Emilia)

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Edited by ineptia

[* held the first Saturday of every month]

[TABLE OF CONTENTS]

> <i>The Myth of the Machine</i>	1
—GiovanniDrogo	
> <i>The Town</i>	11
—Hogan	
> <i>I swear I saw the breath leave his body</i>	21
—meteor	
> <i>What you need to know is that I'm in trouble, and I'm too scared to be alone</i>	30
—BicFlair	
> <i>The Day I Made Someone Disappear</i>	39
—Emilia	
> <i>My Dear Friend Jenny</i>	50
—Beineberg	
> <i>Phantom Hunger</i>	57
—Logan	
> <i>Emma</i>	63
—Pancakesyrup	
> <i>A Week From the Diary of Sasake Yume</i>	74
—ChineseDracula	
> <i>Taste for Blood</i>	81
—VampDaddy	
> <i>Secret Spot</i>	89
—MaMaMi	
> <i>My Immortal</i>	96
—Abes	
> <i>Zachary</i>	105
—Z. N.	
> <i>Weavers</i>	113
—mintjulia	
> <i>A trillion lifetimes of agony compressed into a singular, blinding instant</i>	120
—jeff	
> <i>Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection</i>	128
—ineptia	
> <i>The Fear of God</i>	140
—trippo	
POLL RESULTS.....	151
END NOTE.....	153

/lit/—Sat, Feb 1, 2025 08:00:17

Ok writers here we go!

Theme Requirement: The work must explore the boundaries between reality and illusion.

Character Requirement: The work must feature a female character who is an unreliable narrator.

You have until Monday 3rd February Midnight Greenwich Mean Time to post your submission.

* * *

No word limit but anything more than 2,500 words will start to drag imo

00:10 GMT Tuesday I will post the link to the Poll.

You will then have until Friday 7th February MIDDAY to read, GIVE FEEDBACK, and vote!

Good luck everyone

—yodo // No.24153972

The Myth of the Machine

by Giovanni Drogo

>I felt it first as a slackening in my pelvic floor. Waves of dissipated tension radiating from what felt like the bottom of my spine. Taillights started streaking in front of me, leaving long red trails that swirled into a tunnel. Nothing I hadn't seen before . . . but I knew I at this point I may have misjudged my dosage.

—You were on drugs?

>Yes sir, but really, it was nothing I couldn't handle. Since I was on the road, I didn't have a scale on hand. So, I eye-balled it, and went a little overboard. But you have to understand I was only trying to break up the monotony. And the messages were clear. I was only supposed to be in Ohio for two months, working on the lithography installations. I got extended to four months. I was working the nightshift, twelve hours a night. Very little human contact that wasn't behind a faceless cleanroom suit . . . I was living in a world of white silhouettes. Intel had a lot riding on the mega-fab. With all of the tension around Taiwan, TSMC was in a weak position and Intel needed to prove they were capable of operating a foundry. Apple and Google had already signed contracts. Chip production was shifting back to the states and everyone was desperate to meet the demand. So, Kumagaya-Yoshimi Semiconductor—my company—extended all of the work contracts for us technicians, and authorized unlimited overtime. I was working seven nights a week. It was by choice. I could have stuck to the normal four on, four off schedule, but what can I say? I was compelled to work.

—Was it normal for a field technician to work seven nights a week?

>It wasn't unheard of. Especially on shorter one-month assignments. Guys like to make the travel worth the money. If you aren't working overtime, the only extra pay you're getting is in per diem. But I wasn't doing it for the money. I only wanted to work. To exercise moral discipline through a total

acquiescence to the banality of ritual and labor. It was going well for the first two months. I was comfortably in my routine. Fixing the machines all night. Spending all night with the machines in the humming air, under the yellow lights. I lost myself. I felt a flattening of my potentiality. The Machine is old . . . you do realize this? It has had thousands of years to perfect the incorporation of fresh components. It knows all the tricks to virtually lobotomize people. This mega-fab was only one manifestation of The Machine. The pyramids were built by The Machine . . . not to mention pre-historic social structures. It's an entity, and I started to become aware of its malevolent components. How it automatizes people. How it grinds them down until they are as smooth as a mirror.

>The cleanroom at the Ohio fab is one mile long and one half a mile wide. The space is unbroken by walls. Rows of machines stretch down the open space and seem to curve down at the horizon. There is one strip of aluminum flooring splitting the cleanroom down the middle. Technicians in white jumpsuits are always scurrying up and down this silver strip before turning off down one of the countless rows of machines. It can be disorienting. The ceilings are thirty feet high and covered with crisscrossing tracks that carry thousands of robots. These robots carry the wafers between the different machines. Photolithography is only one step in the process, you see. Each wafer is carried to dozens of machines that perform their own specialized tasks. The robots never leave the ceiling; they unfurl thirty-foot elastic tongues down to the machines and retract the wafer-boxes back to the ceiling before zipping away. Each robot is labeled with a number, and yes, I was being delivered messages via those numbers.

—Ok, Ruby, could you tell us again exactly how these robots were sending you messages? When did you first start to receive them?

>I've already explained it to the police officer.

—Yes, I understand Ruby. I just want us all to be on the same page. Were these messages coming from 'The Machine'?

>No, I don't think you do understand. There needed to be a balance, a correction. Of course the messages were from The Machine, but it was only operating in everyone's best interest. What will be left in the world when we are eclipsed totally by The Machine and lose all subjective contribution? We have become over-domesticated. It is a process The Machine has been overseeing since the first neolithic caveman sat down and started scraping flint rocks together—and here I am today, essentially doing the same thing; patiently

applying myself to monotonous work, simple motions, advancing slowly, almost imperceptibly . . . it is ritual pushed almost beyond human endurance. Now, this isn't to say work is all bad. Ritual regularity and repetition help man control chaotic outpourings of the unconscious, but like I said, it's about balance. And The Machine is sensitive to this. So, I was chosen as a vessel for the correction. All night long I would sit with my machine, caressing it, listening to it, and I would watch the robots going by overhead. I started to recognize patterns in the sequences. Certain series of numbers would pass in regular intervals. I began to record them in my notebook at the start of my third month in the fab, and by the end of the month I understood what was expected of me.

—And what was The Machine asking you to do?

>To restore balance, of course. To stop production. To contaminate the system. A significant enough delay in the production cycle would bankrupt the company and many of the contractors. It would have a global impact. Really, it was The Machine self-flagellating. It isn't all malevolence. It works in ways we can't comprehend. But the messages were clear enough to me. I only needed to introduce impurity into the system. Copper has special properties that allow it to easily diffuse through silicon. It is used in many processes during chip manufacturing, but needs to be closely monitored and controlled to avoid contamination. Putting a copper wafer into a non-copper machine will lead to millions in damages and repairs and lost profits. Putting copper into the air itself would be catastrophic. The Ohio fab was sacrificing itself.

>So, I needed copper powder. The Machine wanted to breathe copper into the cleanroom. You can buy all of the raw material at any hardware store. It's a simple reaction between copper chloride and iron. I filled my bathtub with the copper chloride and a bucket of nails. The reaction generates a lot of heat so I added a few gallons of water to slow it down, too. After a few days of processing the copper powder I had enough to fill my backpack. I wasn't getting much sleep at the time. I had to do all of this work in the twelve-hour intervals between shifts.

—I see . . . and what did you do next?

>I did what I was told to do. All environmental variables are tightly controlled in a cleanroom. The air inside the fab is extremely pure. There are less than ten particles per cubic meter of air. A room like this one we are in now has millions of particles per cubic meter. All I needed to do was introduce the

impurity into the ducts after the filtration system. It was easy. There isn't much security during the day and there is even less at night. People don't ask questions. The air in the fab moves from the top down, cycling through the cleanroom and then through the perforated floor tiles to the sub-fab before being exchanged for fresh air. I took my bag of copper dust and walked along the catwalk at the top of the cleanroom, amongst the robots, stopping to pour copper dust into every duct that was pushing air. And soon the white metal in the fab was coated rusty orange. It was everywhere. Alarms started blaring from thousands of machines. They were screaming for help. They were dying. Every screen had an error message. White silhouettes on the silver highway were running between machines. I sat on the catwalk and watched the robots flying by, and The Machine spoke to me as it died, saying it would be reborn.

—Does the machine still talk to you, Ruby?

>Yes, of course. This interview is a part of the correction. Talk to me and know thyself, Machine.

-the end-

'The Myth of the Machine'

Critiques

Anonymous // No.24161101

>>24155147

Quite liked this one and it actually made me think and go back to read portions of it again once finished. Strong opening line, I really like the description of "pelvic floor", and the final line was pretty killer too. I understand that Ruby's version of events is that the Machine instructed her to destroy it to prevent humanity from becoming useless? Maybe a little bit too exposition/explanation of the science and broader situation, but I certainly like this.

Anonymous // No.24161742

>>24155147

I like this one, though it felt a bit too "explainy" to me. I admit, my eyes glazed over for a bit.

Anonymous // No.24161919

>>24155147

Wow. Reading all of that was painful. Exposition after exposition. With the starting line I thought it was a sex story and what I got was technobabble to the max. I'm very sorry anon

1/2 // No.24162313

>The Myth of the Machine

Felt like a bit like a Nolan movie. Well written, I feel like the vibe you were going for was to allow multiple interpretations of what The Machine was/is. Felt

more the illusion/reality divide than the unreliable narration, and yet the whole story felt more like a dream. Also felt like the story kind of didn't really go anywhere with that ending.

Anonymous // No.24162376

>>24155147

I think the most interesting part of this story for me was trying to figure out who exactly she was talking to. It's not the cops. It's not her employers. It appears to be a group ("us"). Also a higher authority ("sir"). The vibe is that of a shrink. It reminded me of the tv show Person of Interest, the scenes where Root talks with her psychiatrist while imprisoned in a mental institution. The description of the fab really sold it for me. And there are some really good lines ("To exercise moral discipline through a total acquiescence to the banality of ritual and labor.", "I felt a flattening of my potentiality."). However, I do feel like there isn't enough tension here. It's just a straight recounting of events without any real present conflict.

ineptia // No.24163307

THE MYTH OF THE MACHINE

GiovanniDrogo

>>24155147

1.

>Kumagaya-Yoshimi Semiconductor

>authorized unlimited overtime

"KYS" :(

There is a 19th-Century book called Erewhon; inside, there is a sub-book [set of] chapter[s] titled "The Book of the Machines."

You should check it out bec. your story and the way you characterize technology eerily reminds me of it in a very good way.

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter_23

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter_24

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Erewhon/Chapter_25

>photolithography

"light" + "rock"

>scraping flint rocks together

"light" + "rock" also :0

>regularity and repetition help man

This is totally subjective, but I feel—Ruby being the prompt-mandated female character [who's also a high-level engineer/technician]—she'd probably opt for "humanity" here instead of being so sex-specific?

She also uses "human endurance" right before [which works]; "man", idk, also [just] sounds, like, too grandiose?

Also, "white silhouettes" = faceless [flattened-potential] workers[]; I guess I'm trying to say "man" is too particular/specific for her dichotomy between "us" and "the machine".] [Unless she's regurgitating some philosopherspeak—which was kinda the gist I got from the "banality/labor" line.]

[I'd say it's a sign of a very good piece if one word like this makes me think about it so much :)]

2. Ruby's exposition and recounting of her crimes is—at least to me—appropriately dry/calm/collected/clinical (she's basically devoted herself to soul-erasing menial labor) but why not do this to make her un-humanity stand out more[,] at the same time as spicing up the delivery[/pacing]:

Give the interviewer some more emotion!

Create a contrast between the calm-insane & the animated-rational.

>Ok, Ruby, could you tell us again exactly how these robots were sending you messages?

"Now, lady, you said the "tongue-machines" were talking to you? Like, really? 'Cause that actually kinda makes sense."

3. It's a fascinating psychosis to personify an object—an idea, really—into something you have a masochistic relationship with & then to justify "hurting" it because, well, that's what it wants. Gives me hope it's all Ruby's intricate rationalizations for getting some humanity back. At first I didn't think she should have been on drugs—being in that kind of environment (I think) is enough, but it served as a good indirect explanation for how/why she got caught (if she, like, crashed her car or something) plus [another] attempt at [her] [improperly?] balance[-ing] [things].

You obviously did a lot of research [and reflected terrifyingly-beautifully] on a really cool subject—I have to ask: Is Ruby's name significant? Are, like, Ruby-crystal lasers necessary to make these chips?

>-the end-

"end of audio file" [or something similar] could work [instead] --> she just said she's conversing w/ TM.

[Rose alludes to fraught geopolitics stirring up the Chip War—would love to hear her cynical take on it all]

{REPLY} Anonymous // No.24163767

>>24163307

thanks for the feedback and close reading, anon. I will definitely check out erewhon. It looks like it's right up my alley.

Rubys name, unfortunately, has no significance to the story.

I've been writing a little feedback for all the stories, but you've convinced me to be a little more thorough in my critiques.

Emilia // No.24164133

>>24155147

The Myth of the Machine.

First Impressions:

The prose could use a lot of editing. I appreciate the time constraint of the comp though, just wanted to point it out for the future.

For example,

>Taillights started streaking in front of me, leaving long red trails that swirled into a tunnel.

How about: Taillights streaked in front of me, long red tails swirling into a tunnel.

This general rule, of trying to remove the fat, like all the 'thats,' 'was,' and 'hads' and stuff, can be applied to the rest of the piece. But like I said, time constraints and all.

Technicians in white jumpsuits are always scurrying up and down this silver strip before turning off down one of the countless rows of machines. White jumpsuits scurry up and down this silver strip, between countless rows of machines.

A lot of telling in the beginning. This may be a consequence of the voice

you have chosen, but it reads bland.

I really like the spiritual aspect in your prose about the ritual regularity and work. Nice. Interesting perspective that gives depth.

I sometimes forget this story is written like a conversation. I think the voice should be different if it's a conversation.

Final Impressions: I'm not sure how this fits the brief? There is a kernel of something interesting here. I think if you wrote a story from within, it could be really interesting. I'd like the drama to take place alongside the white coats, as opposed to it being reported.

trippo // No.24166867

>>24155147

Interesting to see that you and I essentially alighted on the same format for this prompt with the post-incident interview idea (though mine doesn't have an explicit interviewer). I like the slow drip-feed of information throughout (what's she talking about? what's all this tech jargon? what's the Machine?) and it builds up well to a climax with some great imagery of copper dust coating everything as the factory shuts down. I appreciate that part of the point here is that the Machine is inscrutable since it's implicitly an delusion – but as a reader, I'd still have liked to see Ruby provide greater rationale for her actions beyond just simply "sacrificing the fab". But again, she's meant to be delusional, so I get it. As a final stylistic point, I don't believe you needed to capitalise that definite article there when you say "the Machine". You cover a lot of ground with this one. Good work.

mintjulia // No.24167858

>The Myth of the Machine

I enjoyed how cold and matter-of-fact this felt. I felt some kind of inevitability running through the text. Quite dreadful.

ChineseDracula // No.24168486

>Myth of the Machine

The first paragraph of this gave me the expectation of her causing a car

crash due to being high, but that never came and the drugs weren't really touched on again in the story, only serving to set up unreliability of the narrator. Would like to see them reappear a bit more. I like the ideas/twist brought forth at the end that the machine is more than just technology, but a sentient system of society. This piece kind of reminds me of the later chapters of Harassment Architecture.

The Town

by Hogan

At the end of the world it is always hot. God promised the next time He destroyed the world he would do it by fire, but I have never seen a naked flame. We have nothing to burn, only things to lose – in this land without wood there are dilapidated buildings made from log and timber. The only thing burning I can see is the sun above, dominating an empty sky day after day, casting endless heat upon the vast and empty plains below.

It's why I'm usually inside, and there are a lot of options in this town. Sheds, houses, and storehouses are scattered across the plain in a general clumping, before the marks of civilisation ebb away into the dry beyond. Some parts are made from brick, including the watchtower. When we're finished we like to climb its winding stone stairs and look out over the plain; the empty land that stretches on and on while colour fades from the sky. She keeps a lamp for the way back down.

Some days I don't know where she goes or what she does and it feels like I'm alone on this planet, but she's always nestled away somewhere. There's nowhere else to go; nothing out there to hunt or find. We like to make use of the full range of abandoned buildings in this town; the Mayor used to live where we sleep – I wish I could remember his face.

I have had a lot of trouble with my head since the accident. I'm sure I was born here, although I cannot remember the house – I only know which one it is because Rose told me it held my things. My mother died in childbirth and my father died before the end of the end, and I know these things because they have their own graves. The town buried them in plots marked by crossed stakes in the ground, themselves symbols of the lost art of stonemasonry. Rose had come to town shortly before my accident.

They interrogated and feared her, and those who minded our stores loathed her. With her stories the town leaders debated whether to send an

expedition outward – if Rose had walked here then clearly people lived elsewhere; it never went because nobody figured out a way to transport food. These things I remember in patches and flashes that come sometimes, among them my father’s excitement for a world that carried on outside, as well as the first time I saw Rose.

When I woke up much had gone. Her soft white face lingered over mine and a cool, uncalloused hand touched my head. I blinked open slowly with a powerful headache, aggravated by her joyful sputtering.

“What happened?”

“You’ve been asleep for a few days,” she said, and then she sobered. “Something has happened.”

There is no doubt the building I spend the most time in is the Library, although it was not built for such things. I have seen from a note on a book inside it belonged to David, who left behind swathes of neatly ordered literature when he died. Here remains the total work of every major contributor to world literature, at my fingertips, because what remains here is all that there is of world literature. If there’s somebody missing, well, I’ve never heard of him – and who is there to tell me otherwise?

When I’m done reading I leave the Library and go to the Sanctuary, the only place where she is not to come and visit. My work lives there, and perhaps some books I’ve taken with me piled up in the corner. Stored in the drawers below is what she found after the end came – two enormous piles of blank paper and a single black pen. I double-side every page and write in handwriting so small my palm aches, with the fear that my pen, encased in white plastic so I can’t see the cartridge below, will run dry.

Reading great literature is essential to writing great literature. She doesn’t understand that; sometimes she thinks I’m plagiarising. She doesn’t read anything but she listens to the poems I write, and sometimes I disguise the poems and stories of others because I know she’ll like it or I want to see what she thinks; my only misjudgement was when I read out the Revelation. Those stories are mine alone, and I have worried about what will happen to them when I die.

Death used to worry me more. Despite the confusion my waking day had chilled my blood with dread. She guided me through ghost streets, the only

inhabitant on the earth, holding my hand and talking slowly and asking me questions to work out what I could remember and what I couldn't.

"My father ..." I said, "yes. I remember," although the only thing that sticks out in my mind around his death is a crowd of people surrounding a hole in the earth. Rose had to tell me how he died.

"But what about everyone else?" I cried, the lots of houses overwhelming me by their emptiness. "What happened?!"

She took a deep breath and narrated. "Another woman arrived two days after your father died. She was talking to the Mayor on the edge of town when you fell. That night we'd done everything we could for you and now we had to wait, and everyone except me came to see the new woman. Things were exciting again. She'd come in a different direction from me, and people were sure there had to be more out there.

"Everybody died of plague over the next two days. That woman did first, she wilted in the sun complaining of a fever, and then it seemed everyone was sick. I wouldn't let anyone in to see you because we couldn't feed you anyway. I sat with you for four days, and when I came out everyone was gone."

Her voice had become soft and reflective and I knew her feeling was fragile, but I was too overwhelmed to speak. I rubbed my eyes. We had already gone inside some buildings, and I saw even the corpses were taken away.

"I buried everybody in a big ditch out past the watchtower," she answered. "You woke up that evening. When I left you to sleep I went and laid down and wept like I've never done in my life."

We built our routines from there, until one morning a long time after we went out to admire the plain. I looked sideways at her, shoulder to shoulder in the shadow of the watchtower.

"What are you doing today Sam?"

"I think I'm going to skip the reading."

She made a noise.

“I’m feeling inspired,” I replied. “I don’t know. What about you?”

“Oh, I’ve got some preparation to do,” she said. “I’ll be home when you get there. Love you.”

Then she kissed me on the cheek and turned. I watched her go and then I went too, along an unusual path; I wanted to walk past that other building which stimulates me so much – the church.

The church was built on another planet. It is taller than the watchtower because its stone spires reach up into the sky, shaped and moulded by artisan hands whose craft has been lost with their names. It stands with coloured glass still in its walls and has a fine green carpet within. Upon its altar long ago I found the last Bible in the world rested open, the epistles of Paul sounding out without audience. I remember when I brought it out and stored it in the Library, Rose cried out with surprise as if she’d been burned.

I feel that after me and Rose, the church is the next-closest living thing in the village. I was drawn in by its energy, where an enormous cross stood over pew and after pew and decay waited, even though the church had been abandoned before the plague. Only one person had ever gone in there – Mojo – an emaciated man with knotted and shaggy brown hair who lived there alone. I don’t know anything more about him, but my memories of him are from before my fall.

I found his body that morning, laid on its back and with his arm across his stomach and wide open eyes. He was not killed by plague; Mojo was starved to death. I paced around the church and found two more – nobody bore sign of cannibalisation. I turned and hurried through the church doors with the feeling these were a people under siege.

I sat in the Sanctuary for hours to think about it, and did not write for the rest of the day. It was on my mind when I walked home. Rose was bringing things to the table when I came in. I kissed her and following the niceties I asked:

“Have you ever been in the church?”

She glanced up at me, and her face had not changed a whit. “No. Why?”

“You’ve never been in there before?”

“I guess not. Why? Is there something in there?”

I stopped and thought. “No. Not really.”

Though our house was hot and decaying she was warm and soft, the softest thing left in the world. And when she saw me she smiled and kissed me, and asked questions about my day, about my work. And I stopped and thought that tomorrow, tomorrow, and all days after would look much like the days before – reading in the morning, writing in the afternoon, hot supper and love in the watchtower in the evening.

I remembered what she promised that day I woke up, that she would take care of me. I looked into her eyes and she smiled, and glanced down at the table. I saw two tall glasses of fresh water, the cold still visible on the glass.

“Look,” she said. “Meat for dinner.”

I put Mojo and the plague from my mind. I believe everything she tells me.

'The Town'

Critiques

Anonymous // No.24161742

>>24156509

I love me some post-apocalyptic atmosphere, the beginning was really engaging. I feel like this story was really scatterbrained, but that might just be me not getting it.

1/2 // No.24162313

>The Town

This too felt more like the whole thing was a fever dream with little exploration between the reality/illusion duality. Pretty literary read though, well written too. But overall too vague for me to give something more specific.

Anonymous // No.24162019

>>24156509

This is definitely easier to read than the last one. Its an apocalypse story but descriptions feels vague, I guess? Unreliable narrator amirite? I wished you showed it through subjective vs objective lens. I loved the part where he imagines he's living normally with Rose but then Rose said meat for dinner. I love the emotional whiplash it caused. Like come back to reality narrator! The last part is a masterpiece of its own.

Anonymous // No.24162376

>>24156509

Love the contrasts. Heat in the beginning. Cool glass of water at the end. However, I found the opening overusing the "cinematic" voice too much. Like you

have too many "quotable lines" crammed in the first paragraph. It reads like a collection of shocking opening lines. You should've just picked one and distributed the rest throughout. The ending is very ominous and the irony of him fudging his stories is delicious.

ineptia // No.24163321

The Town

Hogan

{>>24156509}

1.

>God promised... He destroyed... he would

[just make sure to capitalize that second "he"; I'm actually an advocate for typos (accidental or intentional), but just not in the first line because that's where you set the tone.]

>sometimes I disguise the poems and stories of others because I know she'll like it or I want to see what she thinks

This is beyond sweet ;)

>tomorrow, tomorrow, and all days after

"tomorrow, the next day, and..." [?]

>the cold still visible on the glass

honestly more of a minfuck than the "meat" being glasses of water!

And you even hinted at something amiss [a LOT] earlier[:]

>a cool, UNCALLOUSED hand touched my head

[moisturizer scavenger]

What's "really" going on is tough for me to sus out, but I'm using this line as the key:

>she guided me through ghost streets, the only inhabitant on the earth.

So did Rose die and she's Sam's hallucination? An imaginary palliative [at the end of the world] to make dying more comfortable? [I] [u]nderstand why Revelation would be disquieting then.

2. Unless you mean Rose is the only inhabitant besides Sam— Waittaminute I think I got it: So did a plague "really" wipe everyone out? or Did Rose's "people" invade the day Sam "fell" (injured in the attack[?]), Rose spared Sam because she loves her or something? Rose's group moved on, but she stayed behind w/ Sam?

And/Or is Rose just crazy as relates to the water being "meat"? Lots of

ways to come at it—sorry if all these are wrong, but it's a neat-subjective because of how open-to-interpretation the end of the world is.

3. U[NLESS] the whole apocalyptic scenario is a warped TBI-perception [TraumaticBrainInjury] of reality, of course.

I would have preferred the symptoms of the head-injury affect the style/substance more --> getting vertigo; having multiple memories; relearning how to read or write --> this last one would be a perfect analogy for "picking uup the pieces" of the shattered world. I really loved how the pen being full of ink symbolizes a prayer for the light persisting, almost like the oil in the original lamp central to Hanukkah.

[Lastly,] I'd dive more into the literature Sam loves so much --> A couple lines of A. Pope could be a [solid] light in the darkness you've [so effectively] established[, one buttressing or against whatever's going on between Sam & Rose—just what the nature of their relationship is].

["Apocolypse" from Greek literally means "a revealing", i.e. a "Revelation." I read a little of the other anon's thoughts on your piece, how you 'need to be more definitive with what's really going on,' but I say lean into the ambiguity—terrible possibilities on top of bad possibilities—to me at least, you've created a setting on the cusp of a true revelation, where all t. secrets are about to be laid bare (church-Mojo; Rose's memories; ink running out), & t. about-2-hit calamity-calamity (what you called "the end of the end") is too disturbing to even read—like Sam's "Revelation".]

{REPLY} Hogan // No. 24163365

>>24163321

Ahh thank you so much for engaging with my story. You have by far come the closest to work out what's really going on there was no plague. Yes Rose loves Sam and spared him, and killed everyone when he was asleep. Her bad reactions to anything biblical was me trying to apply that she has some kind of demonic power, which is why she couldn't kill the people in the church and had to starve them out. There's also a hint she's bullshitting with the "uncalloused" bit, because later she says she buried everyone in the town that evening -- your hands would be very calloused after that. Sam is beginning to realise this at the end but decides it doesn't matter because with her he's happy enough anyway.

Thank you everyone who read my story, I meant to reply but didn't have much to say until now.

Emilia // No.24164133

>>24156509

The Town

First Impressions:

Great first line. Contains a lot of drama in it already. For example, 'it is always hot' suggests that the world has ended before. It suggests also the narrator knows this and has experience of it.

Contradiction here?

>In this land without wood, there are dilapidated buildings MADE FROM log and timber?

Do you mean to say without forest? Or woodland?

You need to restructure your opening, can't place the characters. The unraveling of the dystopian surroundings is a little too disjointed, imo. I'm not sure why, but it just feels like there's too many threads to follow.

Final Impressions: I do love that ending of the meat for dinner. It's great; however, the setup doesn't fit the punchline. If that's the end, then the idea of hunger, the idea of starvation, should be hinted at, as opposed to the biblical stuff, which I get because of the revelations and end-of-world semantic field. But for microfiction, it almost needs to be like a joke with an ending like that, a tight setup, misdirection, then BAM—mojo on the table for dinner.

I do think you could benefit from interesting verbs. Take a look at your verbs and see how they're all pretty standard. this guy being amongst great literature—to see that played with in the prose could have really elevated this story.

trippo // No.24166867

>>24156509

>The Town

Great opening paragraph. Love the descriptions of the post-apocalypse. You lay out the setting and circumstances very well – I really quite like the image of the small town in the heat of these unnatural plains. You don't need to explain

what caused this apocalypse and the story works better for you leaving it out. However, I don't know if it's just me being an idiot or if it was actually the intended effect, but I found it a little tricky to keep all the various flashbacks straight and reconstruct the chronology of events. Perhaps part of that is down to it all being narrated in the same tense from the same narrative position. I had to re-read a few sections and I do get it now (I think), but still, it might benefit from being a little clearer about when you're jumping between timeframes.

mintfulia // No.24167858

>The Town

I liked this feeling of finality, like a resigned wasteland. I think I resonated with the general hypnotic tone more than the specific characters.

Chinese Dracula // No.24168486

>The town

Really liked this one. You do a good job of evoking the imagery of a scorched earth without having to give much detail. I was a bit confused as to who the unreliable narrator was Sam (who could be a boy for all I know) since their memory is gone or Rose, because she's narrating past events to Sam that we see later conflict with the reality. This story left me with a lot of questions, but in a good way.

*I swear I saw the breath leave
his body
by meteor*

I swear I saw the breath leave his body.

The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Why is it impossible for me to see the breath leave? There is a soul.

I wanted to name my grandson after a saint. I sometimes wander into the grocery store and steal the passion flowers for him, but I don't remember where his grave is. So I place them at a park bench near my house. Once I tried to plant them beneath the shade of a hickory tree but it was very late at night and I was caught by a police officer. He turned off his flashlight and took me by the hand and gently asked me if I wanted to go home. I said I don't have a home anymore. I ventured to feel his clean shaven face, and I wanted to tell him he reminded me of my son. I was touched by his kindness, and I'm sorry to say that I wept.

Most of the time I am high or drunk. I didn't tell the officer this but I'm sure he understood my bloodshot eyes. Why didn't he take me in? Is it because I am old and not good for anything anymore?

I write letters beneath a pull switch bulb in the old abandoned gas station beneath the ramp. I write such beautiful letters. My penmanship is flawless. My prose is level and lyrical, and sometimes it even convinces me of absolution. In the letters I deglove my soul, and I end them with I'm sorry, son. I'm so sorry.

In addiction, there is the temporary suspension of the quotidian, but that is ancillary. It's nearly orthogonal to what addiction truly is: a narrowing of being, a life in a tunnel or in the gullet of a snake, looped into itself, consuming itself.

“Let’s go back,” says the officer. “It’s OK,” he says. His voice is fragile and it frightens me.

I want to get out of the car. But I don't want to be rude, and my hands are shaking. There's a liquor bottle in my coat's pocket but I don't want to take it out in front of him. I'm ashamed to do that in front of this nice, polite officer who looks so much like my son who will never forgive me.

There are monsters in my past. My father. My husband. I can remember beatings so savage that I'm certain I have died in them and what I am now is someone else altogether.

But I drink to excess in order to remember my grandson. Because in the bottled dream I can touch his face and know it again uncorrugated by burning water. I can unhear the scream and return the pale smoothness to his palm.

The officer's eyes are in the rearview mirror. There are little tears in them, of pity or of sympathy, but I hope he will drop me off at the shelter. I don't recognize these roads, but for me, such details are difficult to order and keep apart. I have to be careful in my reminiscences, not to wander into dark chasms by a coincidence of association.

I don't want to be in this car. I don't want to look at those eyes. I feel the terrible patience we had to endure as they wrapped the child with bandages. Why? my son wanted to know. Just that. Not that I was making tea. Not that I had put him to sleep. Not that I was sure I had set a kitchen timer that would wake me up. Why? His wife was muted, white with horror at what life lay now before them, her hands clasped too tight even for prayer.

I drink to excess because it feels good. Because at least it doesn't feel bad. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

The officer is saying something about a birthday, but I feel a mounting panic and a pressure beneath my eyes.

“Let me out,” I say. I try the door. “Please. Let me out.”

“We're almost there,” he says, pleading with me. “It's OK,” he says.

I keep trying the door, banging my hands against the window until they begin to hurt. I don't want to remember that scream. Please, God. That immense silence, the mouth, the hand swelling and blistering, and the steam rising from the water on the floor, no, please God, and then the endless announcement of his pain.

Please, God, kill him. I will burn in hell. To have thought this while they raced him away to surgery, one of the orderlies straddling him on the gurney and driving needles into him, I know I will never be forgiven. But if he is dead, his breath shall join with the Father's, who art in Heaven, who gives his beloved sleep, who saw the spikes driven into his only son. The shepherd shall lead him beside still waters.

I am weeping now, and the car is still. The officer's head is in his hands. I beg him, softly, to open the door. I shouldn't be here with him. I don't want to remember.

"OK, ma," he whispers, wiping his nose.

He comes around and opens the door for me. The place he's brought me to seems so familiar. The trim lawn and the cul-de-sac and the white pillars on the stone porch. There is a shadow at the bay window, the dark outline of a child's hands pressed against the glass. In a moment, he'll lean back and wave at me. The light behind him will fall on his face and that terrible hand, and I'll see him.

I turn away before that happens. I don't know him. I fumble in my coat's pocket.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I'm so sorry." And then I'm warm again. I feel my grandson's sleek tiny paw in my weathered hands. I am reassured by his ghost. He is dead. I saw the breath leave his body.

'I swear I saw the breath leave his body' Critiques

Anonymous // No.24161101

>>24156608

A lot of emotion in this one that I like. At the end I felt like you began to capture guilt well, and at the same time convey the feeling that there's something wrong with this woman's mind. Some choices in prose I'm not such a fan of. I feel the "Why didn't he take me in? Is it because I am old and not good for anything anymore?" is too blunt, and then contradicted by boasting about beautiful penmanship and prose, which I feel is overall jarring to the general mood. A lot of the early section, like when she meets the cop, is too blunt for me.

I also don't like sentences like "In addition, there is the temporary suspension of the quotidian, but that is ancillary. It's nearly orthogonal to what addiction truly is ..." Too much going on. Maybe just my opinion.

By contrast I really like everything in the section from "To have thought this while they" to "The shepherd shall lead him beside still waters." Really nice.

Anonymous // No.24161742

>>24156608

This one felt close and intimate without feeling overly dramatic, I like it. Lots of details that really help sell the feeling. Things are understandable without being bluntly stated. This one might be my favorite so far. The only real note I have, is that this doesn't really feel like an unreliable narrator, just an indirect one. But I can forgive that.

Anonymous // No.24162069

>>24156608

Heres a drunk person who remembers family who died, Ive assumed that person is a he, then its a woman! Holy f! I thought grandpas usually get drunk not grandmas! But I really love the callback in the end (I saw the breath live his body). Like the narrator is switching between dementia and not dementia state. I wish the distinction was more clear though. Overall, I admire your premise and how it melds with the theme, a grandma with dementia, remembering or misremembering the past. This is the 3rd story I read, and it keeps getting better and better.

1/2 // No.24162313

>I swear I saw the breath leave his body

Probably the most poetic and literary of the bunch. But still kind of similar to the first two in their faults. To me there doesn't seem to appear a deeper exploration of the prompts.

Emilia // No.24164139

>>24156619

First Impressions:

The setup of the old lady, the juxtaposition of the old lady being high, immediately signals unreliability. I am not going to trust anything this narrator says. Let's see how it goes.

In addition, there is the temporary suspension of the quotidian, but that is ancillary.

I think that line is ridiculously overwritten. Even if you're trying to speak in the voice of this person, it sticks out to me as the author saying, 'I know big words!'

I like the image of the ouroboros. I think it's something you want to do—great imagery with simple language, instead of overwritten language trying to do the work.

The 'I don't want to be in this car' is just too much telling. I would want here for the emotion to be shown.

I didn't get that sense of claustrophobia and confusion that would make her then go on to say, 'Let me out, please let me out.'

The officer is someone she knows, a grandson/son? You have this biblical

imagery that feels totally out of place. At once a pious woman but who also justifies her addiction? If you must bring in this biblical stuff, that cognitive dissonance between addict brain and pious brain should be one of the main drivers of internal conflict and strife.

Nice, okay, it's the son. Nice move, but I could see it coming from a mile away.

Final Impressions: Nice approach to the prompt. However, it could improve with some focus in the story. She feels responsible for a past transgression and is now a drunk in denial. But the 'I saw his breath leave the body' feels like it could be in another story. Not sure if I took out that line, from beginning to the end, that it would change the drama of the piece. Whose breath? Maybe I'm missing something obvious, but it feels like a cut-and-shut story. Again, that ending—for the gut punch to hit home, should proceed from a relevant story.

{REPLY} Anonymous // No.24164282

>>24164139

Not sure if you other people missed but the grandson is alive. See: the mention of the birthday by the son and him appearing at the window. The grandma would rather believe he's dead than that he's alive, disfigured and maimed for the rest of his life. It's not that she's pious, but that she's using religion (as she's using alcohol) to support the delusion that absolves her of guilt. It's something I've seen often in AA meetings..

I know most people hated that line you pointed out. But I'm not going to change even a single word of it. I like it. I chose each word carefully to express something precise about addiction. I'll die on that hill.

Thanks for your critique!

ineptia // No.24165770

I SWEAR I SAW THE BREATH LEAVE HIS BODY

meteor

>>24156608

>>24156625

1.

>Most of the time I am high or drunk.

>My penmanship is flawless

There is an opportunity here for a striking contrast between being de-facto uncoordinated (Delirium Tremens) and finding control+equilibrium at meditatively writing[/trying-to-"atone"] --> just add a quick phrase about her hands [normally] "doing things I don't even realize" or something.

>In the letters I DEGLOVE my soul

A++, meteor—using a word like this poetically at first[, it] subconsciously primes the reader for its grizzly & visceral irl denotation [later], or at least adjacent medical/trauma imagery.

>The officer is saying something about a birthday

I agree with some other anons that the police officer being the son is readily-apparent, and I think this works really well because us as readers go "hmmm, uyeah, I got this figured out" -->

2. letting us lower our guard[s] before you hit us with [the] reveal the g-son's still alive—but that latter reveal went over my head big-time on 1st read (and probably others ans well?) because of the tortured/self-medicated perspective of the MC --> it makes us implicitly doubt the g-son @ the window[/ghostly-handholding]... But, if you more "concretely" hinted how the g-son was indeed alive, it would be clearer. Way on the other page, the birthday quote doesn't inherently point to an alive g-son; a "birthday party", on the other hand, might. Here's another kind of clue you could leave while also exploring/utilizing the car-interior's setting: Traces of the g-son --> maybe a medical bracelet from a skin-graft appointment, or "a brand new soccer ball".

3.

>In addition, there is a temporary suspension of the quotidian... [not writing it all]

I could read prose this perfect all day long—But! For your MC to almost-out-of-nowhere produce this refined/stylistic kind of string of thought—imo—was the most jarring took-me-out-of-the-story thing in your whole piece, because at no other point does the g-mother use this kind of diction+imagery --> What I think you should do, which also preserves this gem you wrote [which is] so encapsulating of her painful situation, is to have a [faceless] [memory-]member of AA/NA to have spoken it, and have the grandmother (so "out-there" she doesn't even ken her own son,)) to cling to it; as something

stuck in her mind] --> embrace its dark flavor of words, even though she may not totally understand them.

Also --> harken back to police officers @ the accident scene[; we get a bit of the lead-up & the event itself, but often it's personal aftermath—talking to first responders; head-swimmingly pacing alone outside an ER—where things actually "hit" you. Of course I mention police officers arriving on scene to tie the past to her present illusion.]

[Stellar story!]

[I remembered:

>Please, God, kill him.

I'd not use "kill" here at ALL—"take him up to you"; "put him out of his misery" better approach what she really means.]

trippo // No. 24166867

>>24156608

>I swear I saw the breath leave his body.

Quite brilliant IMO, short yet effective. You even manage to squeeze a couple little plot twists in. A bit wordy in places, which doesn't seem to fit the narrator's drunken character. If it were any longer you might have been teetering on the edge of repetition with the narrator's self-flagellating, but as it is the brevity of the piece is perfect. I honestly don't have anything more to say, other than that I loved the line "I deglove my soul" and that I now know what 'orthogonal' means.

mintjulia // No.24167858

>I swear I saw the breath leave his body.

This was really good, so evocative and haunting. I enjoyed the form of it, the way the narrator's mental processes blended with each other in this obsessive way, underlined by the repeated phrases. That's my jam.

ChineseDracula

>I swear I saw the breath...

Good job at portraying a derranged protagonist. I liked the twist towards

the middle. The paragraph about the letters feels out of place in the story. It's kind of a one-off and the story is still fine without it. You followed the prompt well.

*What you need to know is that
I'm in trouble, and I'm too
scared to be alone*

by BicFlair

Mr. E. Reading
112 Seaside Avenue
Brewerton, New York 10012

What you need to know is that I'm in trouble, and I'm too scared to be alone.
Really, I need your help, could you come over soon?
I thought I'd write you a letter before I file an official police report, I'm sure you
can sort it all out without getting the force involved.
That's it, I do need your help, Eddie; you see, I think someone is living in my
house while I'm not there, one of the builders perhaps.
That sounds crazy, doesn't it?
Enright estate, you remember it?
Now that the rebuilding is complete and the builders are gone the floorboards
won't stay down.
From morning to noon, they come up, and they creek in the night, and they
rattle in the wind, and in the attic, strange noises at all hours of the night.
Really, it's getting to the point that I've started wearing earplugs just to stop the
noise from disrupting my sleep.
Obviously, it goes without saying—it's a new house, the wood just needs to settle
a little and the noises will stop.
Maybe that's it, maybe not, maybe I'm just acting crazy again.
Anyway, I've started dusting the hallways with powder so that I can check in the
morning for footprints.
Powder, like baby powder? I've been doing it for a few nights now and no dice.
Last night was the strangest of them all, and actually the reason I've written to
you.

All I can say – and believe me, I’ve rewritten this a thousand times now – is that someone was moving around in my room while I slept.

Not exactly; I didn’t see anyone per se; I heard floorboards creaking and breathing; I was really afraid that if I looked, they would rape me or something.

Could you swing by the house, Eddie?

Hell, I’ll even pick you up if you don’t want to waste money on gas.

Every night is the same.

That feeling like I’m being watched sometimes I wake up, and the room is different, and things have moved, and clothes are kicked across the floor.

That latch is tough; you remember that, don’t you? Then explain how the door can be open in the morning and a light can be on in the hall.

Even if I have to file an official report, I’m happy to do that if you just come and have a look.

Did you get my last letter about the mirror?

Oh, it was really awful. And I’m sure I saw something in that air vent through the reflection just the other night.

Now, I know it’s impossible. I thought I saw Jack in it, and he was reaching out to me from inside that walk-in cupboard. The one you hid in...

Oh, but you should have seen him.

Then, last night, when I heard that intruder in my room I thought I saw him walking across the lawn, he loved to stroll down by the water.

Can you come as soon as possible? I’ve started having horrible dreams. Like I’m watching myself from the cupboard while I sleep.

Only that I’m not sure I can take another night here alone, you can sleep in the guest room if it’s too much for you.

My ceiling keeps shaking at night, as if there’s someone up there, and sometimes dust falls down onto the bed.

Eyes, I remember the hue of his eyes in the mirror.

I woke up the other day down by the river, Eddie.

And I was on the pier just where he went in, they left the police tape where they found him, you know?

My God, I can’t take another night here; I can’t call the police for an emergency, can I?

And does it count as an emergency if the intruder hasn’t done anything?

Let yourself in when you get here Eddie, keys in the same place as always.

Really, I haven’t been feeling right lately, even when I’m out of the house. I’m tired and lonely and the world kind of feels like a horrible dream.

Each morning, I wake up and watch my body move without me; I've started taking those pills again just to try and stay focused. Actually, I don't know if they're helping. It's like I'm watching through a veil, and on it is projected a horrible lie, but I can't seem to lift it or look away. Do you know what I mean? You can only imagine how mortified I am in writing to you. Like pictures Eddie, pictures projected onto my wedding dress, pictures that I can't unsee. Don't let me down Eddie. I'm so afraid and I don't know why, could it really be him? Exactly on the dot, at twelve, I hear the attic creaking like clockwork and the creaking like someone's moving around, and the banging starts again. And I'm scared. I'm scared someone is going to come down in the night and really hurt me. Please, I'm saying please now, could you please come over? Did I never tell you how sorry I was for not telling you about Jack in the first place?

Trish.

PS: Please read and reread this letter, Eddie. I want you to find it for yourself... But I don't know how to help you. My life is in all directions, up and down. I am not alone.

*‘What you need to know is that
I’m in trouble, and I’m too
scared to be alone’
Critiques*

yodo // No.24156709

>>24156702

Ohh I love a story told through letters. Very nice way to approach the unreliability. Thanks. I'll be giving full feedback to everyone once submission deadline is over

Anonymous // No.24161101

>>24156702

Why is there a space after almost every line? It cuts off any rhythm you might build and prevents you from creating any emphasis when you need it. I think the epistolary idea for this prompt was pretty clever, but I don't think paranormal was the way to do it because it comes out like a lot of telling.

A nice addition at the end to make things a little more interesting, and I also liked the opening question of the second letter because it implies there's more that we're missing.

{REPLY} BicFlair // No.24161743

>>24161101

>Why is there a space after almost every line?

It wouldn't work some other way, but if I explained it outright, it would lose the fun... Writing should be fun. It's supposed to be that she's writing it in a

hurry, and if I made long sentences, you would lose this effect.

But just for you, I'll tell you... You little scamp. It's an acrostic

{REPLY} Anonymous // No.24161910

>>24161743

Personally, I liked your story a lot.

It stood out to me because of its format.

It really was a nice way to tackle the theme of this comp.

Helps that your voice is very engaging for its simplicity, and like you said, immediate.

Initially I thought the "trick" pulled could have been more subtle, but I guess not everyone would have caught on.

t. voted for you

{REPLY} BicFlair // No.24162081

>>24161910

I was originally just going to leave it at the first three words, but I didn't make the work count so I added the rest. I agree with you; sometimes, less is more. Thanks for the vote brotha.

{REPLY} BicFlair // No.24162089

>>24162081

First four words* even.

Anonymous // No.24161742

>>24156702

This one's alright, a pretty straightforward interpretation of the prompt. The spaces after every line were a bit clumsy to read.

1/2 // No.24162313

>What you need to know is that I'm in trouble, and I'm too scared to be alone

This one kind of feels like trying to develop the reality vs illusion prompt more thoroughly but it stills feels insufficient to me. The ramblings of a paranoid/schizophrenic character are a good way to do this but maybe in the epistolary format it's more difficult to actually see the divide between reality and illusion (and since we only get the perspective of the narrator as well). Maybe if it included a response from the other character but perhaps then it'd be too long.

Anonymous // No.24162825

>>24156702

Simple but I liked this one, felt like a good old fashioned creepy pasta. Even the repetition was nicely spaced out going from plea to rightly sounding like a lure.

Emilia // No.24164139

>>24156702

First Impressions: This letter should be being written after a police report has been written, and the police report is either ignored or something.

I love the baby powder sprinkling. I actually used that myself in another story! Cool showing of paranoia, instead of telling.

I like how it turns into, 'I think there's an intruder,' to, 'when I heard that intruder.' Great showing of mental instability. I like the voice of this narrator.

Final Impressions:

Very strong voice. Great approach to the prompt. But it feels very loose; it could be so much tighter to take this from a good story to a great story. For example, no one sends a letter in an emergency asking someone to come over

'now.' We live in the digital age. I think this story would be amazing if the framing was, 'I've contacted the police, and they're not doing anything. I've tried calling, but you have changed your number. I tried emailing, but I think my internet isn't working—must be to do with the intruder.' Basically, forcing that wedge between reality and illusion more and more.

ineptia // No.24165815

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IS THAT I'M IN TROUBLE AND I'M TOO SCARED TO BE ALONE

BicFlair

>>24156702

1.

>Please read and reread this letter, Eddie. I want you to find it for yourself... But I don't know how to help you. My life is in all directions, up and down.

Unfortunately I didn't notice the acrostic until you pointed to it in-thread, but I can tell how fine a line you were balancing on between hinting and giving-it-away-ing with this post script. I have a few ideas on how to more subtly prime a reader to notice your steganography ("hidden message") if you'll allow me --> "Enright estate"; the postal code; adding a return address --> What if Trish & Eddie had some kind of inside joke where they grouped Enright Estate into an acronym like EERI (Enright Estate, Rhode Island)? Or if the return address numbers were all "911"s? -->

2. If you plant the seed at the start that these characters know how to operate on stenographic levels, then readers will be more attentive and exhaustive at the end when you tease a hidden meaning --> getting to the end of something and THEN being asked to vaguely think on new levels is scarcely successful --> we need to see some small example of kryptos first before we can be directed to reproduce it on a larger scale.

>Maybe I'm just acting crazy again

This is actually my favorite line because it can produce a reading that, no, this isn't some supernatural planchette-ing, but the psychic unspooling of someone very unwell -->

>someone was moving around my room when I slept

An orderly doing bed-check @ a mental institution? [An "estate"?)

3.

>I thought I saw Jack in it... the walk-in cupboard. The one you hid in.

>I've started having horrible dreams. Like I'm watching myself from the cupboard when I sleep.

Effectively scary stuff! You've taken multiple threats and the savior and blurred them all together, even if Eddie is [actually] good.

>I remember the hue of his eyes in the mirror

>'body moves w/o me'

Gave me the possibility this Trish entity—being dead—is now (quite successfully) possessing people; maybe even leading them to their deaths via the river.

>Pictures presented onto my wedding dress

[So,] Love triangle between Jack, Eddie + Trish? (JET)

I do think the "wedding dress" reference is a bit too Victorian-horror-tropey w/o getting a line/scene of said wedding and why it matters so much to Trish.

>[Last line b4 "Trish" signature]

I like the ambiguity of just whom Trish married-vs.-affaired with—if one or both of the partners hurt-or-worsed her --> or neither!!!

[I don't completely understand Trish's aversion to calling the police but—Oh wow, looking back, I've really stretched this all into a million directions, when now I'm getting more certain it's all probably a lot more simple... Regardless of the true "lore", the spooky-goings-on through earnest presentation were terrific!]

[If a horror-piece gives you chills then it's a success in my book, and you've got me Snow Miser over here :0]

trippo // No.24166867

>What you need to know is that I'm in trouble, and I'm too scared to be alone.

A great little idea executed very nicely. You could probably spin it out into a longer story featuring further correspondence beyond just the one letter, if you were so inclined, but there's no real reason to – it's good as it is (and besides, trying to make multiple different acrostic letters would end up pretty constraining). Love how unashamedly gothic horror it is, which gives it a very different feel to the other stories here. Also enjoyed how you've played around with the idea of who the narrator really is.

mintjulia // No.24167858

>What you need to know is that I'm in trouble, and I'm too scared to be alone.

It was fun to discover the ending, and even without that I felt like the format affected the way I read the text in an interesting way, focusing on the fact that it was a progression of thoughts, these singular, scattered scenes.

ChineseDracula // No.24168486

>BicFlair

I got very excited when I noticed the acrostic, since it reminded me of a ghost story I read back in middle school where a character does the same thing. It's a very creative way to expand the narrative, but I had to look up what a panchette was and that took me out of it a little, also what does it mean for something to be written from a panchette? It took me a second read to figure out who the Jack character was, but then I picked it up along with the extent of Trish and Eddie's relationship. Subtle. Good job on this one.

The Day I Made Someone Disappear

by Emilia

It's not like being asleep. Or having your eyes closed – it's not black. It's nothing. And this nothing is the treacle I wade through, searching for something but with no direction, no markers except a deep swooshing noise like waves lapping on the beach. An oil slick of colour flares up as the lapping quickens and grows louder like the rising beat of a drum. These periods are all I can hinge my existence on. I wonder if I am the universe and each flare of slicked colour is the colliding of suns, the creation of galaxies. And with that thought, suddenly, I am very far away.

But it's the pain, the pain brings me back. I'm sick with that wretch you get leaning back in your chair, that split-second when you tip too far, that kick – but it's stretched out so it's constant, so I'm stuck in it, reaching for something to hold, something forever just out of reach.

Ping, a mobile phone. Wheels growl on linoleum. Porcelain's rattle and clink. This tension maps a shape. For a moment, I'm just a lump of sense impressions like a slug in the dark.

She should have woken by now.

She's probably still in shock.

Poor thing.

Emilia, can you hear me? The voice has a face. A personality. An African nurse with impossibly smooth hands. I try to form the oil slick into something recognisable. Treacle thins into fog, allowing only the most basic thoughts. I have a mouth and a tongue, a dry tongue and I taste bad breath. Above the taste, a head.

Now, I'm aware.

Sweat gathers where my bruised thighs touch. Hair rustles against starched pillow.

Emilia, speak to me. The nurse is closer now, coffee breath. It centres around this point. Speak to me. Coffee breath and weak mints. Emilia, speak to me. A hinge in my life, the swinging door that cannot be closed.

My mother's voice, *Emilia, speak to me.*

—
“Hell of hack today, don't you think Emmie?” Mr. Crowley said, dismounting.

Emilia didn't move. Mr. Crowley hobbled around his horse to hers. “Dotty was on good form.” He stroked her nose and gave her a kiss. “Yes, you were.”

“It's too slow,” Emilia said. “I want to go fast and do the gallop.”

“You can't run before you can walk.”

“I can walk.”

“It's a saying, Emmie.” He tapped her calf. “Jump off now, come on.”

“I'm not stupid. I can walk, trot and soon I'll canter.”

Mr. Crowley laughed and began to unpack Spirit. “I'm sure next week you'll win the Ascot.”

“Yes, I'll win,” she replied, not knowing what he meant but knowing that winning is something she liked. “I always win.”

There was something keeping her on the horse. A warm moisture between her legs that at first felt like sweat but now – she tried to think. Had she wet herself?

“Can you show me how to look after them? What do you do now, before going into the stables?”

Emilia ungracefully dismounted. “Bridle off, saddle off, then rope on the halter.”

“Always remember lead rope on the halter, well done. Let's take them in then.”

“I want to go inside now.” I've wet myself, she thought.

“Come on now, Emmie, you have to keep these boys good and clean.” He moved into the stables, holding both lead ropes in one hand. She stayed outside.

“What's this called?” he asked, turning his head, looking about for her.

“I told you before I'm not stupid. I want to go inside.”

“You need to learn.”

“You can't tell me what to do. You're not my daddy.”

“Don't be rude, now, Emmie. Don't make this hard.”

She loudly crossed her arms. She was stuck in decision. She wanted to run inside but the invisible rope of authority and rules and doing-what-you're-told lassoed her in place.

“You're making this hard.” Mr. Crowley rubbed Dotty down, humming a hymn as he did. “Going to be a dandy brush kind of job, don't you think?”

“I need to go toilet.” Her voice wobbled.

Mr. Crowley raised his big grey eyebrows and in the musty light of the

stables, took on an equine appearance. “Do you really?”

“I really really.”

“Are you just saying this to me so you don’t have to clean the boys?”

“No.”

“Imagine if you didn’t bath, you’d be all dirty wouldn’t you?”

“I’m not dirty! You’re stupid!” And she ran away from the stables, back into her house, through the door, swinging on its hinges.

—

I haven’t thought about my horse in so long. I don’t tell people I used to ride. I’m such a cliché. But I remember Dotty, my appaloosa, I remember the sound of her feet clopping on the tamped mud paths behind our house. It’s not like having a dog. When you feel a horse’s trust, it grips you – ties you in a bond stretching back through time.

I’m not that girl anymore, am I? I drop my t’s. I pretend I’ve never been skiing. No, I’m not that girl, I’m now a woman, a woman who allows other people’s opinion to shape who I am. Who am I really? Am I that same girl, waiting on horseback in the yard with old Mr. Crowley? Is that girl the same as this one, in a hospital bed, with the pity of the world on my shoulders?

Mr. Crowley had been a good instructor. He had these eyebrows thick and coarse as brush. Almost as long as they were wide; grey, peppered with a ginger tint. They moved about like caterpillars trying to wriggle free. I wonder where he is now. I hope he found peace in the end.

Emilia, are you awake? The nurse. If I keep my eyes closed maybe none of this ever happened. Maybe I can live forever in a world of oily forms suspended above the world with no now and then, no today or tomorrow. No last night. No morning after.

Do you know where you are? You were very drunk when you came in.

All Mr. Crowley had done was try and get me to groom Dotty. I knew how important it was. I loved running the body brush with the grain of Dotty’s caramel neck, down to his vanilla and chocolate-chipped body. But I’m a spoilt bitch, you should know that by now.

My hand twitches. The nurse leaves the room with slow heavy steps.

Mr Crowley, in the stables. My mother, in the doorway. I’m there now, it’s not the past, I’m there in the mudroom with the hinges screeching on the old wooden door and blood on my fingers and my pants and mother breathless as me. *Emilia, speak to me!*

The jodhpurs were new. Expensive, mother had reminded me. I was such a lucky girl. But they were ruined, I'd ruined them somehow, got blood on them, wet myself with blood, I thought, and panic gushed out of me. I was overrun by what it meant. I was only ten. The part of my body most secret, that changes and feels and opens as if it has a mind of its own. Blood dried on my fingertips as mother got down on one knee and begged me to say something. *Mr.Crowley. In the stables.*

The tension rose – I thought I was in trouble. Those jodhpurs were new and stained and in the movies blood was murder and killing and bad and I wasn't bad, I thought. And suddenly - fear. The word sex broke into my mind. Nights on the stairs listening to mother and father arguing, words thrown like plates that crash into the wall and shatter. They'd been shouting about babies, about sex, the word sex used like an axe, something about the X in the word my little mind flinched at. I knew it was serious. I knew down there was where it all centred.

“Mr. Crowley, in the stables. It was his fault.” I put into motion an unstoppable force. “He said I was making it harder.” These words congealed in my throat and now I hock them up like phlegm in the sink to bare its disgusting form. “He said I was dirty and needed a bath.”

I remember mother's scream. I remember her pushing me and running outside and I remember never seeing Mr. Crowley again. I remember I did that. I made him disappear.

'The Day I made Someone Disappear' Critiques

Anonymous // No.24161101

>>24156746

Quite like this one – the use of a child not understanding their words as an unreliable narrator is a clever approach and well executed, creative. And the feeling of listening in on something you don't understand was well inserted at the end too; I particularly like the "They'd been shouting about babies, about sex, the word sex used like an axe, something about the X in the word my little mind flinched at." Strong simile.

I guess my only thought is if this incident would trip someone with guilt for so long, over something they did without understanding at ten, that they're killing themselves with alcohol over it. That aside, well done. A favourite.

{REPLY} Emilia // No.24161139

>>24161101

thanks for the kind words anon :) re the 'present' of the story, it's ** not that she tried killing herself, it's she had now been raped which is why the guilt of the false accusation from her past re-surfaced. I tried to add a few hints to that in the description of her bruises and the 'pity of the world on her shoulders.'
** thanks again for reading :)

{REPLY} Anonymous // No.24161162

>>24161139

Ah yeah I didn't register that. Subtle.

{REPLY} Emilia // No.24161172

>>24161162

hopefully not too subtle. i've been told i under write in the past.

GiovanniDrogo // No.24164467

The Day I Made Someone Disappear

emilia

cool opening paragraph. nicely crafted image.

a well-done stream of consciousness coming to consciousness.

the story fits the prompt well while still being grounded in reality and not relying on drugs/psychosis/magic or whatever, which I like. It also has an element that actually plays off the female narrator component of the prompt, instead of just having a character that happens to be female.

believable dialogue with subtext

'But I'm a spoilt bitch' didn't like this line, felt out of place.

I liked it. it was well written and paced and really nailed the prompt. I do think the story could have been more explicit in the consequences Mr. Crowley faced. Something more drastic to motivate Emilia's drunkenness and self-destruction, and what I assume is regret. It reads like he just got fired because of young Emilia's lie. If it was clearer that the lie ruined his life or he killed himself or something it would make more sense why Emilia is still so torn up about the whole situation after all the intervening years. If the only consequence was Mr. Crowley getting fired and having to find a new job, I would think a person could forgive themselves for a lie they told as a scared girl having her first period.

'...the word sex used like an axe,' liked this line.

I think maybe you wanted Emilia to come off as a spoiled rich girl? if that's the case, that characteristic could have been fleshed out slightly more. I could see leaning into that more and having the lie come off as more malicious and calculated, instead of how I read it, as impulsive and reactionary.

losing the last two sentences would improve the ending.

{REPLY} Emilia // No.24164525

>>24164467

thanks so much for the feedback. Yeah I would love to extend this story and flesh things out actually to explore the character. I hope it wasn't missed, but the reason she's in hospital is because she got raped while drunk. the bruised thighs and the pity of the world on her shoulders i thought was enough, but clearly i was underwriting there, so definitely given something to think about it how i approach those revelations. I wanted it to be circular, like, her getting raped now causes her to remember that event that she buried in her memory. I agree with the spoilt bitch line, i shouldn't have addressed the reader. super helpful notes. thank you.

{REPLY} Anonymous // No.24164547

>>24164525

ah, yeah, I did miss that. Yeah working that in as a circular element is a nice touch.

1/2 // No.24162313

>The Day I Made Someone Disappear

I think this one is the one that got the unreliable narrator the best. Interesting story, reminds me a bit from Memento by Nolan.

3/3 // No.24162323

Overall, I'd say the unreliable narrator than the best was in *The Day I Made Someone Disappear*.

ineptia // No.24165849

THE DAY I MADE SOMEONE DISAPPEAR

Emilia

>>24156746

>treacle

>oil slick of colour flares up

Masterful opening + imagery-progression. I have one comment --> there is dissonance/contradiction between saying "no markers" + "no direction" and then comparing the pervading sound as "waves lapping on a beach" --> I feel even just including those words adjacently to being utterly adrift—while their inclusion only denotaionally points ot the adriftness's sound—[cumulatively] detracts from the overall effect; 'sinking groans of great out-at-sea undulations' might be something I'd use there for instance [which gets a sea-sound across but adds to the lostness].

>Ping, a mobile phone --> "PING—a mobile phone"

[more a snap back to reality]

>Emilia, can you hear me?... Smoth hands

As your MC comes to[,] she describes all the sounds she hears ("ping"; "growl"; "clink" + "rattle") but I feel you skipped over the tamber of the voices talking about/to her to jump straight to the visual "smooth hands" --> her mentioning "smooth voice" and then "even smoother hands" would more bridge her [expanding] cognizance/lucidity. Great writing makes me think this closely :)

2.

>Sweat gathers where my bruised thighs touch

:(Knowing where the story goes, [possibly] heartbreaking detail 4 her present.

>He tapped her calf

I feel like this contact-interaction could use just an adjective/adverb of more focus, ambiguously or unambiguously. Even the word "twice" would go a long way in highlighting[—preparing the reader's attention—] while at the same time being [wholly(?)] innocuous.

>What do you do now, before going into the stables
another innocuous, teacherly word could be "we" [--> also shapes more a
+ bond than an instructor-student dynamic.]

>"I want to go inside" "you need to learn"
If you're contrasting want-vs.-need, italicizing Crowley's /need/ works—
otherwise make them both "needs".

New subj: As Emmie stands there pleading, mention how she's
[unnaturally] carrying herself, her comportment, her askanceness/unsure-of-
herself-ness --> you wrote "wobbly voice" --> "wobbly knees" [too]?

3.

>"You'd be all dirty wouldn't you?"

>"I'm not dirty!" [runs]

A quick emotion line like "she flushed red" after he says that would really
drive the get-me-outta-here.

>[Swinging on its hinges]

Chance to blur into hospital doors [from t. "horse"-pital doors]

New subj: I love-hate this prompt because I second-guess everything by
default already, but now I'm not [not(?)] on guard because things really are
second-guessable but I can never really tell to what extent,[—]where my "truth-
view" of it begins and where the author's ends or vice versa. The imagery of
running the body brush for instance [placed so closely to the elipsis] --> Is this
me too on guard? Did nothing wrong really happen? Or is Emilia unreliably self-
narrating herself to be the one at fault? Warding off the damage she was inflicted
with [made-up] guilt she at least can control/[own]? [Ahh] Your story is too great.

ineptia // No.24165903

CONTINUED

>>24156746

>>24165849

>[Last lines]

The penultimate line maybe should harken forward to the hospital -->
nesting her "now" in this past mess.

[And now that I mention that, I don't think the 'The Day' part in the title is
super appropriatel because EVERY day for your MC is that day—she's not
revisiting/reliving that day (I think you even wrote a line like 'I'm really there
right now' or such) she's just plain LIVING it, trapped in it... Does that mean the

title should drop 'The Day'?—Just 'I Made Someone Disappear'? I don't know, but technically/definitionally it has less to do with the whole in-total "day" and more to do with her moment of inner judgment/turmoil to say those calamitous words to her mother --> "The MOMENT I Made Someone Disappear"; "moments" just seem more palatable than "days" when it comes to seismic... well, moments. I'm just thinking out loud at this point. I really enjoyed your story and you can unleash great imagery when you need/want to, while letting build-up moments breathe with such easy-paced space—a pressure-and-release-and-repeat-type style that's v. compelling.]

trippo // No.24166870

>>24156746

>The Day I Made Someone Disappear

Really good job on the intersection between past and present. Flitting between the two scenes feels unforced and natural. You've got a nice eye for similes and metaphors, which were consistently the best lines. Your dialogue was also good and I thought you captured the kind of one-sided banter you often get between an adult and child, which is key since a good chunk of this is just dialogue. The narrator's personality and history is sketched out wonderfully with only a handful of lines. My one major criticism I'd say is that you need to better figure out your formatting w/r/t paragraphs and line breaks. You're also perhaps touching on potentially dicey territory with the topic, but you handle it deftly enough to avoid any awkwardness here.

mintjulia // No.24167858

>The Day I Made Someone Disappear

I liked the sensory aspect of this, all these small impressions of the world around the narrator. Her stream of thought was interesting to follow and I could see myself checking out more of it.

ChineseDracula // No.24168486

>The Day I made someone disappear.

I really liked this one. The sensations and imagery of the near-death state

are so vivid and evocative. The blurb about domestic disputes also hit like a truck, along with the reveal of what she did. I do wonder if Emilia's all that unreliable of a narrator, though. I don't think there's enough of a reason to distrust her from the reader's perspective, she's very vulnerable, which is great for characters because it can give the reader interior access and make them sympathetic. The POV shift was a little jarring, and also we never really find out why she's in the hospital, and I think that takes away from it a little.

My Dear Friend Jenny

by Beineberg

Sometimes, in life, you meet people that are just... special. Something else. You see them, there in the crowd, the way they walk, the way they talk, the way they pick off a leaf that fell on their fluffy pink sweater, and something tells you that you are seeing something truly original. You approach them, you see that something behind their eyes, and as they toss their hair and tell you their name, you realize that you are looking at just the tip of an endlessly deep iceberg.

For me, that was Jenny. Even in high school, she was already so complete. There was a wholeness and direction behind her every move that I could have only dreamed of. Even when she was saying completely regular things—what she bought, where she went, how her boyfriend took her to the movies—with the way she said it, you could tell she meant more by it than anyone else. She meant more by everything. When she wore that pink sweater that all the other girls complimented her on, she soaked in the praise and then gave me a meaningful look because she knew that I knew that this fashion choice was not at all arbitrary. She wore pink as a subversion, as irony, as a mockery of expectations, and maybe, as an expression of her trapped intellect.

Every single thing she said was a joke, a piece of performance art, and I often was the only one to get it. That was my role. It did hurt at times. She'd be laughing with her friends, and I walked behind them like a lonely puppy, staring into their backs. She was so funny, so clever, yet I often felt like I wasn't allowed to talk to her much. But then she'd look back at me, I saw her eyes, and I knew that no matter what it looked like, I really was special to her. I'd smile at her, she'd turn back to her group, and I'd spend the rest of the day thinking about how lucky I was to know her.

Despite our deep connection, we did have our troubles. Looking back, it was all my fault. There's this one particular incident that still gives me shivers. It was my 18th birthday party. Well, it wasn't much of a party. I invited my parents,

but they were too busy to come. And besides them, Jenny. My dear, dear friend Jenny. She arrived quite late, I almost thought she wouldn't. But of course she did. She gifted me a lipstick with the price tag still glued on. It was a strong color, the "Pink Stunner," as the brand called it. Jenny must have known that I would have never worn a color like this. I tried to express to her that I knew that this was simply a joke, perhaps a jab at the beauty industry and how it often gives us things we don't truly need, and she laughed. And I laughed. And so we joked around, for once, just the two of us. This is one of my happiest memories.

But of course, I ruined it. I got a bit too happy, too playful. I saw a spray bottle on the table, probably left by my mother when she was cleaning. Without thinking, I grabbed it and sprayed what I thought was water right into Jenny's face. It was disinfectant.

She shrieked, and I apologized, apologized, apologized so much. I got on my knees to ask for forgiveness, but she was already getting up to leave. As she was walking out the door, she called me a couple really nasty things. But I knew she didn't mean anything bad by it. She never did. We were friends, after all.

After this incident, I wanted to atone, but she refused to talk to me. I could tell that I have hurt her deeply. We had a connection, and for once, she was having fun with someone who knew how special she was, but then I had to ruin it. So, so stupid. And for what? I'm quite sure that even if it was water, she would have stopped talking to me, because it was just so childish, so below her level. For the rest of the school year, I put notes on her desk, apologizing for what I had done, but she never responded. And she was right to do so.

I was sad that we didn't hang out anymore. I felt bad for her, not because I was so great or anything, but because I was the only one who truly understood her. At first glance, she seemed so happy with her other friends, but I knew she was dying on the inside. All because of my stupid mistake.

After high school, we went to different colleges. I didn't see Jenny for years, but I never truly forgot about her. The way she talked, the way she walked, the way she threw my apology notes right into the trash without a second thought. I never met anyone quite like her again; everyone seemed so bland and empty when put next to the memory of my dear, dear friend Jenny...

But one day, a small miracle happened. I saw her again in a restaurant with her new friends. Her face was a bit sharper and her hair a bit longer, but she

was still Jenny, through and through. I barely contained my excitement, holding off talking to her until her friends were gone. She didn't like it when I talked to her while other people were around.

I waited for a few hours, slowly eating my dessert and listening in on Jenny, being as fascinating as ever. She always looked so happy in groups, but I knew the truth. Eventually, she and her friends paid and left. I waited for a few minutes before following them. They hugged and separated. I approached Jenny. As I said her name, she seemed rather confused. She didn't seem to recognize me. Was it really that long? An odd thought bubbled up in my head, but I swatted it away. She wasn't the kind of person to forget someone. Maybe someone like her thinks about so many wonderful things that someone like me is just a small detail...

I tried to remind her. I told her about all the meaningful glances we shared, all the times she let me sit at the same lunch table, but she either didn't remember or pretended not to. Either was possible.

Finally, I told her the story of when she was at my birthday party. I pulled out the lipstick from my purse, still unopened. I shoved it in her hands. I told her how much it meant to me, that I kept it on me for years as a good luck charm.

She stared at it for a moment. Then she smiled, so cutely, so ironically, like she always did. She said she would never buy her friends something so cheap. She said that I must have mistaken her for someone else because she truly did not remember anything about me.

For a moment, I was stunned. But then I smiled. I nodded along. I understood the joke. This was all a part of a big, long joke.

Same as years ago, she turned around and walked away, and as I once again watched her back, I thought about, how she was truly growing into a woman beyond my understanding. I wished her the best.

'My Dear Friend Jenny'

Critiques

1/2 // No.24162313

>My Dear Friend Jenny

This one I think gets the idea behind the prompts better than most of the stories up until this point. It's a bit confusing actually to pinpoint if it's better on the illusion/reality divide or the unreliable narrator. It's a simple story, for sure, but with that simplicity it still does a better job than most others.

Emilia // No.24164148

>>24156858

My Dear Friend Jenny

First Impressions:

I like this framing of the narrator speaking about someone else—a bit like *The Sun Also Rises*, how it begins with him talking about Cohn. But are you describing charisma? Or vapidness? I think there's a lot of gaps you could fill. 'Something original,' 'something behind the eyes'—I think behind the word 'something' is actually where great writing could be. 'She meant more by everything'—again, I think you should do the work, which you do after, with the pink subversion. That's a great observation.

I love how the narrator unfolds as a sad, lonely person. This fixation on Jenny is where the magic lies in this story.

Final Impressions: The Jenny descriptions need to be much more detailed. I think you want to be super specific; you want to set this up so the narrator speaks with immense authority about Jenny. Her habits, why she does things, what she wears, who she talks to, how she looks when alone, what she does when no one is looking. This would then gut-punch the reader at the end. the drama really lies in that bait-and-switch. The beginning has to be this immensely specific detailing of Jenny, as if the narrator knows her intimately, more than Jenny knows herself, almost psychoanalyzing Jenny, knowing all the ways she works. That setup with the twist at the end would make this work great.

ineptia // No.24165943

MY DEAR FRIEND JENNY

Beineberg

>>24156858

1.

>Something tells you you are seeing something

[You have a] Great casual-style opening; but for all these "somethings" there needs to be "someone" to lead to [--> use the word "someone" at the end].

>You see something behind their eyes.

qualia [wrong word haha]; je ne sais quoi; ineffableness—just too many "something"s now

>endlessly deep iceberg.

Maybe add a genitive [idea] (ex. "of beauty") after iceberg --> iceberg of what?

New subj: Platonic infatuation—jeez you captured it very well here :(

>I invited my parents but they were too busy to come.

wtf.

>but I never truly forgot about he[r]

[replace "but" with] AND

>bland and empty when put next to the memory of my dear, dear (INFINITELY-FACETED) friend Jenny

[^]answer bland+empty w/ something more than justt "dear"

>but she either didn't remember or pretended not to

Fantastic line --> MC doesn't even realize their own delusion [even when they sound it out for themselves]

2. I think I love the optimism of your MC [the most] and the fact how unambiguously undoubtably self-deluded she is --> but SHE'S HAPPY! Fuck'n Sissy-fist (Sisyphus) amirite? And she [actually] grows and moves on from Jenny in her own way. Dang, you [seriously] got an emotional resonance outta me. Your writing itself could use some more flourishes [and variety] especially as your MC waxes poetic 'bout Jenny, but the sinewy-skeleton is there—it just needs a touch of flesh here and there to truly reader-animate.

One tip --> less sentences Subject="I"

>I could tell that I have hurt her deeply

"The hurt on her face stung my eyes."

A+ story+characters / C+ technical style } is another way to put it (the latter sometimes being appropriate for your MC) [please don't let that latter part discourage you!]

3.

>that I kept it on me for years

I'd omit this --> it's more pathetic if she just says it's her "good luck charm" with the reader reaching the on-their-own conclusion of this. so sad :(

I really, really liked your story. The smallest details—the parents being too busy—open up chasms of unseen neglectful explanations for your MC's emotional maladjustment(s).

I think your MC should have burst out laughing when gifted the lipstick --> it would really cement[, make manifest,] her missing social cues.

>I pulled out the lipstick from my purse, still unopened

I'm just musing how much more pathetic it would be if the [mint] lipstick had gone all runny/melty over the years so she's just holding a sticky pinkish plastic tube D:

[Just once, I think you should depict your MC ever-so-slightly suffering w/o Jenny in her life --> what does this character think about or do when Jenny's not in front of her? While she's waiting for her to arrive? I just wanted that one moment of her all alone in her room, or waiting at school hours early just to witness Jenny stepping off the bus—does she think about anything else in the meantime? Either way, just never sacrifice the boundless positivity! :)]

{REPLY} Anonymous // No.24165989

>>24165943

Oh wow, thanks for the in-depth critique! And thanks for all the nice things you said, it really lifted my mood. I do agree, I could have been more specific in a lot of ways. Handwaving things as "something something" is wayyy too easy.

trippo // No.24166870

>>24156858

>My Dear Friend Jenny

Not a bad story per se, but I feel it's begging to be developed further. IMO you should have played up the delusion some more. Obviously this is a story about an entirely one-sided friendship, but it doesn't really lead anywhere. The narrator has deludedly misinterpreted a childhood friendship and/or mistaken someone for an old schoolmate, or concocted an entire shared history with a random stranger in a coffee shop. I'm on board with that and especially the ambiguity. Whatever it is, this unsound woman is told she's wrong – and then she's just like "oh, okay," and the story ends. I don't know. Doesn't seem there's much reason for the narrator to be telling this story. Personally, I feel there should have been greater consequence to the 'reunion', or some grander revelation from the narrator to the reader in the conclusion, or perhaps make the incident something more dramatic than simply squirting disinfectant. Ultimately though, that's in your hands. I also thought your writing seemed too circular in places. Sentences kept coming back round to the same ideas or similar phrases. Perhaps this was a stylistic choice to convey the narrator's mental state, but I'm not sure it worked quite as intended. I did enjoy the way you built up the delusions of the MC w/r/t Jenny and her supposed attentions. There's the seed of a good idea here – you just needed to do more with it.

mintjulia // No.24167858

>My Dear Friend Jenny

This was quite sad in an entertaining way. It was easy to develop some distance from the way the narrator described this girl and watch it all unfold, like listening to a clueless friend describing their life.

ChineseDracula // No.24168525

>My Dear Friend Jenny

Excellent job on handling the prompt. You do well in making the narrator sound obsessive and derranged. The ending fell a little flat for me. Like, I wanted some last act of ultimate psychosis, but instead she's just accepting of Jenny walking away/denying knowing her, but maybe that adds to her delusion. Take out the elipses at the beginning, they don't improve the quality of the story, plus no one thinks in elipses.

Phantom Hunger

by Logan

Raw meat is perfectly fine for consumption, you know? Our ancestors ate it long before they discovered fire. They just started cooking it for convenience. Now that I think about it, convenience is at the center of it all, isn't it? That's why everyone went so insane so quickly. They were used to having it easy, living to see the next day being taken for granted, assumed, like it was owed to them and not something that you had to work for. Now that they have to struggle for every bit of comfort and wonder whether every meal will be the last one, is it any wonder they turned rabid?

Then again, after what I just ate, what right do I even have to judge people anymore? I'm pretty sure the knife under my collarbone isn't going anywhere any time soon. I don't know how I'm not bleeding to death right now. Maybe it got in at a perfect angle and didn't hit anything important, in which case trying to move it could be bad. On the other hand it staying there could lead to infection, not that I would know how to take care of the wound after the knife is gone. Oh well, moving it would hurt, so I'll just leave it there for now. The idea of it doesn't bother me as much as it probably should. Not as much as it probably would at the begging. I'm not exactly sure how the whole thing started; one day everything was relatively normal, and the next people are dying left and right, seemingly without cause, just to come back to life so they can start attacking and eating the living. Bona fide zombie apocalypse just like in the movies, except in movies there's always a group of people the main character would join and then they would work together to survive, and have interesting things happen to them. In real life, everyone either runs away or shoots at you on sight. Happened to me more than I can count by this point; it's a small miracle I wasn't killed yet by these psychos. I've seen a teacher from my school the other day, nice lady, would always let me bring my homework the next day if I forgot about it. She ran away as soon as she saw me. Even my own family turned against me, at some point deciding there wasn't enough stuff to go around; they actually tried to kill me. Before I realized what exactly was happening, we were fighting. Eventually I managed to overpower and knock them out; don't ask me how a teenage girl

managed to overpower two adults and one younger sister; I don't know, must have been adrenaline. I was so shocked I left as soon as I could without even taking anything with me. That would have proven to be a mistake.

Finding food has to be one of the hardest things to do when society isn't working. Actually, that's a lie; finding food is easy; finding food that's still edible is the problem. All the time I would run into something that looked like it was good to eat just for it to turn out to be spoiled each time, giving me no choice but to ignore it and look somewhere else. The rats were having a blast, though; they didn't mind the rotten stuff at all. The walking corpses would ignore them for some reason, only being interested in people. I got so hungry at some point I considered trying to catch one to roast it or something but decided against it. Even with my stomach trying to digest itself, I was too disgusted with the idea. I couldn't sleep; the hunger wouldn't let me. I got so desperate to find something to eat that I was wandering the streets day and night looking for something. Pretty risky course of action considering how often I found myself nearly surrounded by groups of the living dead, somehow managing to hide from them or otherwise avoid their attention. Nowhere near as risky as what I pulled just now, however. Zombies? They're dumb; not getting caught by them has become almost mundane compared to avoiding other people; they won't alert others in their vicinity; they won't pull out a gun or a knife on you the moment you show yourself. But I was so hungry by this point I couldn't care less; I decided I was going to walk up to the first person I could find.

I heard them first—a man and a woman arguing about something I didn't have energy to care about. Walking in their direction, I saw them before they saw me. The man said something—a goodbye, I think, and left with his back to me, not noticing my approach at any time. I began to follow him but then stopped. Hearing a cry, I turned around to see the woman. She was holding a bundle of cloth from which the cry was coming from in one hand and a knife in the other. She saw me; her eyes went wide as she said, "Stay back!" I recognized the look in her eyes—the same look my parents had when they decided keeping me around wasn't worth it. I had to make a choice here; I could turn around like she wanted me to, go back to searching, probably starving within a few days anyway, or try to somehow stop this crazed and armed woman from killing a child she already had in her own hands. I didn't want to do this, but ignoring that child right now would mean leaving it to die. I lunged at her as she stabbed the knife at my chest. No matter what, either me or that woman was going to be dead soon.

The woman was dead. The child was also dead. Not as a result of the fight, mind you; what was left of that child was dead long before I got here. Whether something else got to it before and she simply went insane as a result or she herself couldn't bear her hunger, I didn't want to know. I have done something with the woman's body that I don't know whether I will be able to live with. Ironically enough, what I had done will allow me to live for longer. As it turns out, raw meat is perfectly fine to eat, albeit not easy on the teeth. I don't remember the last time when I felt at peace like I do now. I don't remember the last time when I slept. What I've done is reprehensible on all fronts; I'm not sure how much I can claim to be better from all the people I considered insane. Then again, why should I try to be better than they? What had anyone done to deserve any effort on my part? Everyone is insane; the whole world is insane. Strangers try to shoot me; people I knew run away from me; my own family tries to kill me. Why shouldn't I only do things for my sake? And what about that woman? How did she survive this long alone with a child? She must have killed some people too; she probably ate them as well. I bet she tricked them into thinking she was a lonely, innocent mother so people would lower their guard, only for her to stab them.

Suddenly, I heard a sound, taking my attention away from my ruminations and my meal. I could hear the steps of a single person. Someone was coming from the direction the man from before left, maybe even the man himself. If he saw me right now, he could jump to conclusions. I was getting up to leave when I changed my mind. It's better to explain things to him now than let him create his own version of events. I decided to go where the sound was coming from.

'Phantom Hunger'

Critiques

Anonymous // No.24161113

>>24157516

I don't want to be a stickler about it but no unreliable narration actually happens in this story, it's sort of set up for after.

Feels a bit amateurish to me. I don't find rapid fire questions of the audience to be effective; I feel like you get one if you preface it with some interesting thought. Everything from "I'm not sure exactly" to "by these psychos" reads amateur to me; I wouldn't reference what happens "in the movies," and I wouldn't bring up how this started if I didn't have something interesting to add with it — silence is often most interesting anyway.

2/3 // No.24162319

>>24162313

>Phantom Hunger

Entertaining/interesting idea but I found it way too predictable. There's no telling, only showing, so points for that, but I think almost everyone reading it can see immediately where it's going shortly after the beginning. Didn't really see a deep exploration of either prompt either.

Emilia // No.24164148

>>24157516

Phantom Hunger

First Impressions:

Narrator speaking with a knife currently plunged in them. Cool. Let's see where it goes.

POV of a zombie. Cool.

Final Impressions: I caught onto the twist a bit too early for the rest of the

story to have an impact. Once that veil was lifted, it was like seeing Oz in the machine.

I think to make this better, make the first half a lot more about the emotions. The actual 'showing' of the feeling, not just the exposition, not just unreliable 'telling,' because once the game is up, the telling becomes very monotonous. I would suggest getting into the hunger. What it feels like. Extend that feeling of hunger. Extend the desperation. Maybe she should actually eat a rat, and it makes her even worse. Have her find food at the midpoint of the story, so it's like, 'Yes, a win for the MC!' But the food, which is actually good food, like canned peaches or something, to the POV tastes like dust; it just goes 'straight through her' —then, in desperation, the POV could talk about giving in. Maybe eating a corpse she found, and that was good. And then this would take the reader on the journey of alone and hungry > finds food > something happened to the food? > desperate enough to try and eat human > oh shit, actually a zombie.

So yeah, the beginning with the raw meat could be a great setup if there is like the danger of cannibals as well as zombies. So the description of the dystopia sets up this dog-eat-dog world. She hides from zombies and the roaming gangs of cannibals.

trippo // No.24166870

>Phantom Hunger

Really neat take on a zombie tale. Enjoyed the juxtaposition between the conversational tone and the content of the story, though would perhaps caution that you border on being too overly casual in places at the risk of undercutting what's actually happening. Also, the last paragraph randomly both shifts tenses and switches from addressing the reader to a 1st person narrative, which jars pretty badly as a final note. I'd like to see more of this sentient zombie apocalypse.

{REPLY} Logan // No.24167870

>>24166870

Thanks, it feels a little surreal to read what someone thinks about it.

{REPLY} trippo // No.24168992

>>24167870

That's the fun of writing groups. Writing for yourself is great and all (and honestly perhaps ideal), but it's a whole other thing entirely getting to share it with people and see what they think. A dedicated group usually means good criticism, too -- I mean, I love my family and all, but if I share a story with them then the most feedback I'll get is "I liked it!"

mintjulia // No.24167858

>Phantom Hunger

I thought the narration was decently funny. But I'm not sure if it was meant to be.

ChineseDracula // No.24168525

>Phantom Hunger

The twist is good in this, but I realized it halfway through and it caused me to disinvest a little. I think there's a way you can write this story where the twist is understood right when it's needed to be, or have the reader know that it's possible she's a zombie at the beginning, but she denies this throughout the story, and that adds to her unreliability.

ineptia // No.24168621

PHANTOM HUNGER

Logan

>>24157516

1.

>Phantom Hunger

I wish this neat title was incorporated somewhere in your piece, optimally tying in to the convenience-theorizing you do in the opening --> How our mechanisms/intake-systems for consuming [m]ay change or break down (e.g. a loss of "convenience") but a residual craving will always remain, no matter your

form—a "phantom hunger"—something like that --> I wish the ending of your piece re-touched-on or concluded these broader "ruminations" instead of [just] the more physical/immediate ones, [I mean] on top of [just] consumating her zombie-hood.

>I decided to go where the sound was coming from

2. You started your MC's description w/ such a unique encumbrment --> the knife jutting out of her; this whole story is kinda like the [tale] of her "getting" that knife, earning her zombie "wings". It's such a striking accessory/addition that I feel it needs to stand out more --> if you end on it, it can be the "lynchpin" of your story --> "I decided to go where the sound was coming from, FOLLOWING THE NEW SHINY BLOOD-SMEARED HANDLE STICKING OUT OF ME."

>I couldn't sleep; the hunger wouldn't let me
Such clever and efficient explanation!

I wish you kept on with this, how the hunger—because this is what it just "does"—maybe also makes your MC "slow"—too tired to even blink, for ex.

3.

>her eyes went wide as she said, "Stay back!"

Not to nitpick, but—on top of "cried" or "shouted" probably being more appropriate—you wouldn't really command/shout/plead/beseech a zombie, would you? To me, she'd just gasp "Oh God!" or "Oh shit!" because real "alive" humans at this point in a zombie apocalypse would have stopped even countenancing zombies as [entities] words are even capable of deterring. I hope you get what I mean here --> it also works better for your MC's POV bec. it paints her as [a] "something" & not a "someone" --> a something that language from/and a pleading mother couldn't [stop]. The mom could even go: "No! Not one of /them/..." to make both characters feel [even further] isolated[/seperate].

[New subject:] Is there any beauty you get to see from a zombie POV? [I wish I didn't need to sleep all the time (walking is also, like, one of my favorite things to do). That zombie bod probably grants you harsh-climate resistance too --> wouldn't it be cool to see what it's like to stagger through a thunderstorm without shivering? Embrace more of the tactile qualities of the world through your zombie's eyes—you've already got the social-cues/subtle-peculiar covered. Flesh-munched thumbs-up :)] [

>I have done something with the woman's body that I don't know whether I will be able to live with

I don't think your MC has to worry about the "live" part x_x I think you

should expand this sentiment, make her guilt strike at the last bits of her "humanity" only for her to "oh, well," or "damn, hunger equals sated..." and have it finally, completely wash away.

T. zombie-victim rationalizations work great!]

Emma

by Pancakesyrup

In a windowless police interview room, the female officer opposite Emma pushed a mobile phone out into the middle of the lacquered imitation wood table and pressed play. It was only the two of them in the room. Emma then heard her own voice on the loudspeaker. At first she heard the fairly sober account of a horse race. It didn't last.

“The race is leaving along like a chalk, like humming on the green. Ha-ha, wow. It is really humming here and there are horses between the horses, if you see what I mean. I'm not sure who's winning yet - the crowd is kind of melting into one.”

At some point Emma convinced the commentator to get her a drink. She then locked him out of the booth. His subsequent banging at the door caused her druggy dissolution to devolve into a distressed paranoia and her babbling, which the crowd had hitherto ignored, became a frightening exhortation to evacuate - and the crowd, conditioned by modern habit obliged. First slowly, then unstopably. People spilled over onto the race track, in some cases narrowly avoiding a clash with the horses. Some had managed to go out the front gates into the road.

The door being smashed down interrupted Emma's singing and the recording came to an end. The officer swallowed what was nearly a smile, reached out and pocketed the phone. Emma, head bowed, had begun to sob, and the interview was paused to bring in a cup of tea. By the time it got to her it was already cold. She drank it anyway and slowly recollected herself.

When the officer felt Emma was ready she pressed on with her questioning.

“At the time of arrest you were clearly under the influence of something. And this is probably no surprise to you but your umbrella handle, the one you

hollowed out and filled with spirits, the one you've been caught on CCTV bringing into the event, the one that was found in the booth with you after causing the crush, has now been confirmed by the lab to contain traces of LSD. So please - I would like to get your version of events that day."

Emma profaned slightly, put the mug back on the table and began.

"Honestly, it's the first time I've ever done anything like this. I don't mean, like, ruining a whole event for everyone." She smiled at herself in self-deprecation. "I mean, it was the first time I've ever done anything that posh, you know, wearing a dress, going to the races and all that. I remember just being taken away by it all. I met Renwick on a random night out at uni and he said he could get me free tickets. So I think his family owns it, or knows the jockeys or something. He hasn't spoken to me since. Anyway, it was a parasol, not an umbrella, and yes I did sneak it in but the drugs definitely weren't mine".

Emma felt the eyes of the officer on her. They were large, wide eyes, slightly prized apart, like the eyes of a horse or the Gallagher brothers. She continued.

"We got in, me and Renwick, got a drink at the bar before the queues and met up with his friends already on the lawn by the track. More people crowded onto the lawns, the races began and in the middle of that all that's we formed a circle all poured our drinks out into the glasses. I had the parasol. Renwick had his tippie inside a fake pair of binoculars. Another girl's handbag had a secret compartment sewn into it which she popped and emptied like a cask. Everyone had their little trick. And it didn't matter whose drink belonged to who, anyway, 'cos we all finished off each other's for a laugh. And I'm certain that's what has done me in - someone else, or even everyone else there, had filled their own one with LSD. So it was all getting passed around, and that's how the traces got into mine. And that's when Renwick took me to the commentator booth. He said I'd won a raffle or something, to give guest commentary."

The officer regarded her skeptically, swinging her long chestnut ponytail to and fro. "And when the other commentator left for the toilet, you locked yourself in and that's when the trip started?"

"Correct, madam."

“And you all drank like that, not just you but everyone sharing their drinks, but you are the only one who reacted in this way?”

“Yeah because I’d never took anything like that before.”

The officer moved forward in her chair and placed her elbows on the table. Emma saw the natural fibres glisten and ripple in her regulation fleece. There was something sinewy about that tight fit.

“Let me get this clear,” said the officer, looking serious, “are you implying in any way that someone spiked your drink?”

Emma's gaze snapped off from the fleece.

“No, of course not. Just that it was an honest mistake, is all.”

“How do you think people will react when the girl, who was quite plainly under the influence and single-handedly caused a near-fatal crush and cancellation of a beloved British institution, accuses everyone else at the event of being on drugs? Do you think they will believe you?”

Emma found it hard to move her lips. Instead stared at the female officer’s long and luxurious ponytail. It flapped about independently in pretty little orbs of motion.

“Let me tell you something else you might not be aware of. No other vessels from that day - smuggled or otherwise - have been found to contain any traces of drugs. At all. None except your parasol. When we watched back the CCTV, the only people we saw holding your parasol were you - and Renwick.”

Emma laughed at the coincidental mention of Renwick, because at that mention a jockey-sized version of him was riding the neck of the officer and striking violently at her shoulder with a leather crop.

“What’s so funny?” asked the officer, sternly.

Emma closed her eyes and shook out her head. Renwick must have jumped off.

“So,” said the officer, “if you are convinced drugs had anything to do with this, and not that your apocalyptic calls on commentary were down to just having too much to drink, then we will definitely have some questions for Renwick.”

Those bright blue horse eyes! She was the horse! With Renwick - they are horse and jockey. She must have seen herself on the CCTV? Renwick was riding her. That’s what he said. She was there. Emma looked over at the door in the room. People were trying to get in. A lot of people. Some of them were dying. It wasn’t Renwick's fault.

“I feel sick,” blurted out Emma.

“So does Renwick, and his family, Emma. What happened last week was a tragedy. A tragedy that wasn’t their fault. They told me they want a quiet end to this. They aren’t looking to be vindictive. In your position, I think it would behoove you to go along with it. Don’t you?”

“Yes. Yes I do. It's my fault.”

Nausea overcame Emma. She reached for the empty cup of tea and moved as if to wretch into it, but stopped, admiring the galaxy of tea granules at the bottom. The galaxy of tea granules, liquid spectators of a porcelain island galaxy, of a barrow hippodrome.

She swirled the last of the tea water and watched it bunch up in every corner. Her mouth gaped in helpless realisation at something. She looked up at Officer Horse, who had crossed her hooves.

‘Emma’ Critiques

Anonymous // No.24161113

>>24157522

Why would someone being an idiot on commentary cause a mass evacuation and a crush? The hallucinogenic imagery at the end was amusing, but, how was she on drugs if she was arrested a week ago? Why would the commentator leave someone he doesn't know in the room alone?

Maybe I'm thinking too hard about it. Not such a fan of this one — too straight and yet not making enough sense.

2/3 // No.24162319

>Emma

I think this one also gets both prompts relatively well. A simple, entertaining read, and imo a more proper exploration of both prompts than most of the rest. Not much else to say. Well done.

3/3 // No.24162323

The story that got both prompts done well enough, probably Emma.

Emilia // No.24164152

>>24157522

Emma

Emma? Horses? Horse races? Posh? Feels like lots of pieces of my story in this story. Weird.

Okay, so this story is totally different to mine, but I can't shake the uncanny similarities!

I can't really give feedback on this one. Feels weird to. Also, what is going on? The story doesn't really make sense. And I can tell it's not meant to make sense, but things that are not meant to make sense are meant to make sense in how they don't make sense, whereas this just feels like it doesn't make sense. Does that make sense? Sorry, I couldn't give you more.

trippo // No.24166872

>>24157522

>Emma

Quite liked where this ended up going. The slow descent into hallucination is handled subtly and you paint it well. There's a strong contrast between the more mundane descriptions in the beginning vs the LSD visuals coming in towards the end. I'm curious as to what your idea behind this plot is – was she really spiked? was it her own LSD? or is it some strange psychoactive quirk where anything she drinks is suddenly a drug? As a minor point, I do feel the title could be changed, but otherwise all nicely done.

mintjulia // No.24167858

>Emma

I like that I really had no idea where this one was going to go, and even now I feel a bit confused, but in a good way. Maybe I just don't have enough energy right now to piece it together, but I enjoyed it for what I assumed it to be. Many questions remain.

ChineseDracula // No.24168525

>Emma

A lot of information gets compressed in the third paragraph about what exactly happened at the racetrack to cause the accident, and I as a reader was wondering throughout the story what she could have possibly said to get people to react the way they did, which once you do something to cause the reader to ask a question, it's best to have the question answered right away. I do think you handled the prompt well though.

ineptia // No.24171128

EMMA

Pancakesyrup

>>24157522

1.

>In a windowless police interview room

To make your opening more dramatic, use some formalism: Have the first line be the playback of the horse-race recording, THEN reveal that it's being played inside a 'windowless police interview room' [btw I think "interrogation room" sounds more serious].

>At some point Emma convinced...

Pluperfect "had convinced" would be more clear as to when you mean.

>tipple inside his fake pair of binoculars

I find it so appropriate that the LSD was potentially casked inside an object that changes—warps—perception!

>The interview was paused to bring in a cup of tea

During this moment, Emma is alone in the room --> just like she was alone in the commentary booth. You should highlight [t]he solitude/alone[-ne]ss [of her here] behind a[nother] shut door.

2. Going on, I've been in sportscaster booths before, and it really is like a [small] windowless interview room except one whole wall is see-through --> You do a great job morphing & harkening-back to aspects of the horse race in the present w/ details you chose (sinew-fleece [like a horse? or a jockey's outfit?]; ponytail; jockey-riding; and [strikingly] the door & the [crowd-granules in the] teacup—those were truly amazing)—but you ought to also capture Emma's wonder/delight/awe at [at-first being inside the] commentary [booth] --> give her a positive[, happy] hallucination to start off with so that they can progress[—descend—] into making less sense until ending on [downright] scary --> having one of the walls become see-through for a sec would make Emma feel less confined, and show (not tell) to the reader how much she liked the experience at first! Maybe also [what she's wearing—prison clothes?—changes to] the dress.

3.

>"So," said the officer... we will definitely have some questions for Renwick. [not writing the whole paragraph]

This paragraph was extremely confusing. You wrote earlier

>clearly under the influence...

>accuses everyone else at the event of being on drugs.

As if there is still any doubt Emma was on [non-alcoholic] drugs (LSD) or [was] just intoxicated. I did a quick search, and LSD is urine-detectable 72 hours later --> it doesn't make sense to be able to find traces in a suspect's parasol and neglect to drug-test the suspect herself.

[New subject:] Renwick[']s family obviously in-some-way runs the race; probably escorting Emma up top to impress her. Why did Renwick leave the booth? If you want an excuse that echoes getting the police-tea he could go out to get some water for [himself and] Emma—to more blend the two rooms she's in together.

[You wrote the crowd-stampede produced a near-fatal crush, but then you have Emma hallucinating the people at the door "dying" --> I think you should keep it less complicated and either have it so there definitively were or were not any casualties. If it was NEAR-fatal, you need to spotlight specific kinds of injuries—if it WAS fatal, spotlight the victim(s).]

Pancakesyrup // No.24171384

To those that kindly gave a critique of "Emma":

>>24162319

>>24164152

>>24166872

>>24167858

>>24168525

>>24171128

Thank you! Very good and valid remarks. After I finished I thought it was a horrible, tangled thing and I wasn't feeling the magic come out in my prose. Agreed that set up and certain ingredients could be much improved. I think I had some extra time to shape it up and buff out the key parts of the ambiguity but I just wasn't feeling it and sent it. I didn't realise I could have slept on it and finished it the next day (a countdown in the OP would be handy for people like me who can't tell the time).

Basically, the premise was that Emma caused a crush with her drugged out commentary, and her explanation and defence for what happened that day, if

continued, would implicate the entire event and social set. All of them were dabbing but Emma got over enthusiastic. She was encouraged in her idiocy by Renwick, using his connections to get her in the commentary booth for a laugh. The police officer, a part of the social set (and, if I remember, alluded to being there that day), needed her to be a lone druggie. Emma realised this under the new wave of intoxication and was willing to take the fall or at least give up her excuse, and Renwick wanted her to because she was still going to be their drug source.

Or so I remember.

{REPLY} Anonymous // No.24172483

>>24171384

I voted for your story; I think it was for sure difficult to pick but imo you captured the spirit of both prompts the best.

A week from the diary of Sasake Yume

by ChineseDracula

2024-04-15

I killed my boss today.

It was after a client dinner, and he and the clients were knee deep in sake by the end of the night. They had been teasing me all night about my slow pace, and my boss decided to bring up the story from my first week when I underestimated my tolerance and embarrassed myself in front of a different set of clients, losing their contract as a result. They all laughed. I pretended to.

I guess it wasn't enough for him scold me in front of the rest of the office if I dare show up two minutes late, or make me the designated unpaid overtime, or make lewd comments about my skirt length when he thought no one else was listening. When he's not putting on a good face for others, his favorite passtime is taking me down a peg. This was last straw of many that had been accumulating over the past two years.

I made up my mind about it while they laughed. Before the clients left, I told them I'd ensure my boss made it home safe. When we got to his penthouse by the nice part of Shibuya, I guided him over to the bathroom. I took a knife from his kitchen, got undressed, and stabbed him until he stopped writhing on the floor. I made sure to face his head away as I did it. I didn't want to give him the final benefit of seeing me in my underwear. I let him bleed for a while before sawing his limbs, throwing them into a trash bag, cleaning the bathroom and myself, and then hauling the bag into the building's incinerator chute.

People will wonder why he's missing tomorrow, and they'll know I was the last person to see him. I'll have an alibi: I escorted him home and then took out his trash for him before I left.

2024-04-16

The boss showed up for work this morning. I'm sure I killed him, but there he was, in his usual meetings and making his typical rounds about the office. I think I would've preferred to be interrogated by the police than see the man I dismembered last night alive and well. I didn't know what to expect when called me into his office in the afternoon, but it definitely wasn't receiving praise on the client dinner the previous night. I think I must've looked very pale, because he asked me if I needed to go home early. I said yes, and he told me to be sure to make up the hours sometime this week.

I've just gotten back from his penthouse. I went there once the sun went down and rang his door. He was hesitant to let me in, but I said it was something important that couldn't wait until tomorrow. When he let me in, I knocked him out with a hammer and threw his body over the balcony. I left fast out a back entrance to the building before the news and EMTs showed up. If anyone asks, I'll say he tried to rape me, but I managed to escape, and that I hadn't been there when he jumped.

2024-04-17

He was alive again today. I nearly had a heart attack when he wished me good morning. He's never done that before today, acknowledge me in such an informal way. He smiled more today than he ever had in all the time I've been working here. He slipped me a note after lunch inviting me to drinks that night. I brought rat poison with me, and waited until he went to use the restroom to pour it into his drink. It must have been the beer, but for some reason he looked and sounded more handsome than I had ever thought in my life. I'm not sure why I started to regret spiking him as the night went on. He started to feel sick so I suggested we walk outside on one of the quieter streets. I waited a while to call for help when he started to cough up blood.

He looked at me like a traitor while I stood over him, watching him die. His eyes had an angelic quality to them. They entranced me, and when the light faded from them, I felt sad. The police asked questions when they showed up. I can't remember the lies I told. They'll probably get me for this one. I'll be fine with that as long as he's dead.

2024-04-18

I don't know why I thought it would work this time. He kept giving me glances during the morning. At lunch, he pulled me into the custodian's closet and started kissing me. I didn't pull back for what felt like a minute until he started to try and unbutton my blouse. I pushed him away and said something about not while at work. I felt hot all afternoon.

He waited for me after quitting time, and walked me to the train station. The conversation was nice, and almost distracted me from my hatred of him. He rode the train with me as if he was coming to my apartment. When we got off at the station, he said something about how I should go ahead and quit before he proposes so HR won't raise eyes. I pushed him into the oncoming train. People were there to see it this time. Maybe if others witness it, it'll be permanent. I can't wait for the police to knock on the door and take me away.

2024-04-19

He was laying next to me when I woke up this morning. I got up and made coffee and breakfast for the both of us. I straightened his tie and kissed him before he left for the office. There's a picture of our wedding on the shelf in the kitchen. I feel sick. Sick and happy.

'A week from the diary of Sasake Yume' Critiques

Anonymous // No.24161113

>>24157698

Pretty neat idea. Creative. Some careless errors and I'm not sure there's an unreliable narrator here, technically, reads to me just like a fantastical story. I like it, it was charming.

2/3 // No.24162319

>A Week From the Diary of Sasake Yume

Really enjoyed this one. Reminds me of American Psycho a lot, I'm guessing you were going for that vibe. May sound weird but it actually took me a bit too see if this one gets illusion/reality or unreliable narrator better. I'm going more with the former, in fact, I think this one is the one that probably got it the best. I may change my mind later and think it gets unreliable narrator better. I can't explain too well why the two prompts seem to blend together here so I can't tell with much certainty what it actually does better. But I found it really good overall.

3/3 // No.24162323

With the best reality vs illusion development it's kind of difficult to say but if I had to pick one, probably A Week From the Diary of Sasake Yume.

Anonymous // No.24162376

>>24157698

Probably my favorite of the bunch but the ending was disappointingly anti-climactic.

Emilia // No.24164152

>>24157698

A Week From the Diary of Sasake Yume

First Impressions: Strong hook. Of course, I'm primed to now figure out how/why she did not, in fact, kill her boss. Let's see.

I like this repetition of the killing.

Final Impressions:

I don't have much to say except I was left a little disappointed. So the boss is the husband all along? I feel like with a revelation like that, I should be able to go back and point to lines in the story and go, 'OOHH, THAT'S what that was!' But I can't really. It almost feels inverted. I feel like the first night should be the last night and vice versa. Begins with being out at dinner, her trying to subtly kill him with rat poison. Then it gradually escalates to the chopping up. I feel like this would better express the idea of maybe a wife slowly going mental and wanting to kill her husband. Overall, a good story, but I was left a little disappointed with how promising the start was.

mintjulia // No.24167858

>A Week From the Diary of Sasake Yume

I enjoyed the matter-of-fact tone of the story, it felt like everything fit into this quick, cyclical nature. I wonder what motivated this story, it felt quite sad and calm to me despite the subject matter, as if the narrator was giving up bit by bit.

ChineseDracula // No.24168525

>A Week from the Diary... Self-critique

I wrote this in a little under 2 hours, because I thought the deadline was closer than it was, which is why it feels rushed/there's little mistakes/the ending

is unsatisfying. I tried to imply at the end that she was pregnant but I thought I was almost at the deadline and couldn't find a short way to give the implication apart from morning sickness, but the way it's written, it's hard to pick up on. I don't think a supernatural explanation can be ruled out of why the boss is still alive, which is not what I wanted to go for. I'm also not sure what I wanted to go for in general, lol. I named her Yume since I originally wanted to imply that there's some dream element going on in regards to her killing her boss, but I'm not sure the text reads that way. The closest thing I can think of as an interpretation of this peice is that her killing her boss is a metaphor for sex, but that's a ret con. This story has no meaning other than an attempt to satisfy the prompt. At least I have a complete narrative arc.

ineptia // No.24173953

A WEEK FROM THE DIARY OF SASAKE YUME

ChineseDracula

>>24157698

1. There is a short-story anthology book called "Strange Wine" by Harlan Ellison (IHNBIMS)—in it (pg 71–85) is "Killing Bernstein", which presents an almost identical premise to your story. I'm absolutely not implying anything here—the two diverge in very different directions—but it's extremely fascinating to me how you and Ellison both fashioned a killing-your-coworker-every-night-but-they're-there-at-work-the-next-day-type story! The wish-fulfillment aspect of ridding oneself of an antagonistic coworker, only to be upended by an almost Kafka-written Sisyphus story, where raging against the establishment-made-flesh only serves to reset it for the next work day[, is] a nightmare of a [repressed] daydream [probably buried deep within a lot of cubicle-crucibled folks' psyches across the whole world].

2.

>I'll have an alibi: I escorted him home and then took out his trash for him before I left.

The definition of an alibi means evidence they were elsewhere—you're missing both parts here: 1. There's no evidence 2. She's not claiming to be elsewhere.

[New subj:] Despite the intimacy of the diary format, I feel you didn't tap in enough to your MC's unique voice as she's essentially letting herself spill onto the page [over the course of the week from hell]. The first entry should contain

her giddiness at finally "doing this", while her second entry should capture her abject horror at the resurrection—think exclamation points then question marks.

>His eyes... angelic... When they faded... I felt sad

It's good you were able to set this in. If this is wish fulfillment, maybe include how she wishes he'd treat her [as well]?

3.

>I feel sick. Sick and happy.

It's difficult to say what exactly went wrong with her "plan". Maybe the intimacy required to kill someone can uncover likable characteristics in said victim, qualities that overtake and/or coexist-with maligned intent. Was all she really needed his respect/adoration? Or was it just the work environment that made her resent him so[, and made him such a pig]? Outside the boss/worker dynamic, people are more allowed to see one another as people. It's ironic how she finishes the story in a similar role as the beginning—tending to the boss—but now at least a part of her is "happy". I'm not sure you exactly pulled off the whole "fall in love with my sexual harasser boss" for me, but the dissonance your character's actions imply were interesting. You need a lot more development to get me fully on board.

[Also, the existence of this diary is problematic: Sasake is so concerned with covering her tracks, but doesn't this physical diary serve as a confession? If you could find a way to have her refer to it as an encrypted cyber diary, that would make it impenetrable, at the same time making it ever more secret and personal to her, like we're reading something ultra-restricted.]

[Over time, give the boss a full name too: Boss --> Human]

{REPLY} ChineseDracula // No.24175767

>>24173953

Appreciate the critique. I had never heard of killing Bernstein until now but maybe I'll give it a read. It was a last-minute piece, which is why it's underdeveloped, but this is all good stuff if I ever want to go back and flesh this out more, or if I ever want to try my hand at the epistolary format again.

Taste for Blood

by VampDaddy

He puts his drink aside, and kisses me, then he leads me to the bedroom where we splay out on a mattress on the floor. Soon he's on top of me and it's revolting; his worm-like lips slither across mine, and he occasionally thrusts his tongue into my mouth, like an eel probing the seabed. If I was capable of it, I would have thrown up right here and now.

Suddenly, he pulls back.

"Hey, are you alright? You feel kinda cold." he says.

His affection is equally disgusting. The sweet-talking tone with which he asked the question, his way of communicating some sort of sincere tenderness in what is otherwise a transient affair –it makes me want to gauge his eyes out.

"I'm okay," I whisper, with a feigned but timid smile "I've just been feeling a bit under the weather lately –I don't know why, maybe I'm catching a cold."

"We don't have to do this, you know?" he says, again with that disgustingly saccharine tone.

"Really?" I reply.

"Of course." and he gently begins to caress my hair.

I can't restrain myself any longer –can't stand his sickly sweetness bearing down on me– so I look deeply into his eyes. At first he mistakes my mesmeric gaze for something caring, something tender but soon he is gripped by a terrible dread. I can only imagine how he feels; first a sinking feeling in his stomach, some overwhelming sense that something has gone wrong, recognized by the most primal recesses of his being, who immediately begin to kick and scream and scramble for survival; then a feeling as if falling, tumbling head-over-heels, spinning round-and-round before his mind shoots through his skull, hurled off into an infinitely disorienting distance.

His eyes glaze over and he disappears; disconnected from this world –he goes limp and I drag him off the bed and start carrying him to the bathroom.

I picked him up at some worn-down dive bar. I sat close to him, shooting timid glances and playful smiles. Soon enough he approached me, and I even let him buy me a drink. He seemed revolting to me even then, but you don't have a

choice, not these days.

Feeding on the mature can only be described as abhorrent. The longer they live, the more taint they take on; nasty habits accumulate and when they don't it is natural decay that spoils the meal. I can taste every tumor, every cavity, every ulcer in your stomach; I can taste every cigarette you ever smoked, every drug you've ever shot up or snorted up your nose; I can taste twenty years of working a soul-crushing job and chronic sleep deprivation –and it is absolutely, totally and completely revolting. .

Anyway, I brought him back to my apartment. An old building where, over a hundred years ago, laborers lived within a stone's throw of the factories they worked in; where the steel and glass cityscape pours over into brown bricks and smoking chimneys; where warehouses and factories seem like they could stretch out forever, were it not for the river halting their expansive march –and that river is a good friend of mine. In its boundless generosity it takes everything; the toxic sludge of industry and dead bodies, it swallows them both. It used to be that you didn't need to bother with things like that, you would snatch one here and there, and leave them right where you drained them; you could nearly feed once per day and none would be the wiser, now I regularly starve.

I gently kick at the bathroom door to swing it open all the way and drag him inside. The bathtub is probably as old as the apartment itself; cast iron lined with porcelain –I throw his body in it, head first and leave his feet sticking out. I tie his legs together and hoist him up; I've made a pulley system just for this occasion; a shabby construction, but it's good enough.

I hoist him as far as he will go, and hang him over the bath. I take a razor, the type men used to shave with not too long ago but don't anymore, and slice his throat. The skin gives way to the blade easily, as if to say 'by all means, enjoy' and at once blood begins to pour from his throat; profusely.

I quickly thrust myself underneath the wound, my mouth agape The liquid cascades down his face and drips down like a grotesque miniature waterfall into my own mouth. It tastes sickening, yet even the most nauseating blood has something blissful about it and the cold, ever-present pit that is otherwise present at the center of my being temporarily abates while I gorge myself on the ecstatic fullness.

I stay like this until every last drop of blood has seeped from his body and into me -then the blissfulness fades. The coldness creeps back in, the little flame inside of me goes out and I feel nothing again. Then I begin to heave; my diaphragm contracts and I brace myself against the loose tiles of my bathroom

floor. I can feel it coming up through my stomach and then my throat, like a languid wave slowly encroaching the shore, and finally blood spews from out of my mouth.

The sun is starting to come up; a ray of light sneaks through the curtained window –it hits my skin and stings, but just a little.

'Taste for Blood'

Critiques

2/3 // No.24162319

>Taste for Blood

Really nasty story here, if you were going for that you achieved it so well done. But I don't really see any exploration of the prompts either.

{REPLY} VampDaddy // No.24162382

>>24162319

>Really nasty story here, if you were going for that you achieved it so well done. But I don't really see any exploration of the prompts either

What I was angling for was the question of whether she was an actual vampire or just crazy and murderer. Did she really mesmerize him with her vampiric gaze, or was his drink just spiked? Did she throw up because vampires find feeding on adults gross, or because she's human and that's what would happen if a human drank a gallon of blood? Does the sunlight sting her skin because she's a vampire, or does she mean it in some weird metaphorical way (although this is really a stretch, and doesn't work at all).

But yeah, I struggled to come up with an idea that really related to the prompts and I was aware of this even while writing; it just couldn't come up with anything better.

Emilia // No.24164152

>>24157699

Taste for Blood

First Impressions:

I love the line, 'I can taste every cigarette you smoked'

Take a razor, the type men used to shave with not too long ago but don't

anymore.

That seems like a line written by a modern person. I'm guessing this vampire is ancient, so would have much more to say about it, if anything. They would definitely know the name. They would maybe not like the new blue razors with the chemical smell and corrosive soap on the blade, etc.

Final Impressions: So, not really unreliable. Just not human. I wish that you didn't trip with 'vampdaddy' because that gave the game away. You should have played with expectations. To make this story good, you should really play to your strengths. That line about modern bodies being gross because of chemicals, that the older, the worse they are. This is great motivation for the vampire to seek the OPPOSITE of that—for example, a baby, a child, or something. Then, at the bar, she is seeking a man with children or something. And then that man can turn out to be a liar, a loser who pretends to be married with kids to get women? This will constantly keep us on our toes about who is lying. Because you could think that this woman is just a psycho, but then the sun burning the skin at the end would be the gut punch. Just some ideas from my perspective, anyway.

trippo // No.24166872

>>24157699

>Taste for Blood

You do a good job quickly painting the narrator with her cruel, biased observations about the man. I liked the paragraph about the apartment block and the brief history of the city and the river – pretty evocative. Similarly, there's a great idea in a vampire 'tasting' all the illnesses and depressions of someone's life through their blood. Way too many sentences start with an "I", however: "I can't", "I picked", "I sat", "I gently", "I stay". It goes a way to emphasising the narrator's vanity/solipsism, but you should vary up your openers more. I'm sorry that I don't have much to say here, but I thought it was good.

ChineseDracula // No.24168525

>Taste for blood

Good story. A little confused as to how she killed him with her mind, but otherwise its a neat story. Not sure if there's a lot of room for illusions/unreliability of the narrator unless your intent was to doubt that she's really a vampire, but I don't think we're given enough of a reason to. I like the

idea that the taste of blood characterizes a person's lifestyle.

ineptia // No.24176759

TASTE FOR BLOOD

VampDaddy

>>24157699

1. I think my biggest issue with your story is that—without knowing what exact prompts this story was written under—it's kinda impossible to definitively say, "No, she's NOT a vampiress," because she never explicitly claims a supernatural [lineage]; and she never outright says she's [not] just a normal human [either]. I see all (or hopefully most of) the really subtle and not so subtle red flags that show her as a non-vampiress --> as for subtle: like, it may seem she's got psychic powers, but the man was introduced by putting a drink down—I'm just inferring here that she poisoned him. The 'you're so cold' line could also be explained by his being poisoned. Not so subtle: Doesn't use fangs; chokes on blood; daylight stings but doesn't singe...

2. Now all these details are awesome, but without her explicitly claiming to be human or non-human, it's possible/[attractive] to take all these "quirks" of hers into an almost-vampire context—like, her commitment is so strong that I believe there IS actually something a little praeternatural about her, while to satisfy the prompt you really need[ed] to make it clear one way or the other. WAS it a poisoned drink[?] Or does she really have something going on mentally? --> Without the foreknowlege of the prompt, I'd say it's [deliberately] written ambiguously --> which IS really cool, but just not along the prompt lines. (There's a chance I'm completely reading everything wrong, in which case I'm sorry for wasting your time here).

3. I read your story multiple times because I like it so much, I like your misanthropic picky-eater character so much. I love how she refers to hundred-year-old activities as if they were yesterday—and how she regards the straight razor in this vein.

>in its boundless genorosity it takes everything

There are so many perfect prose examples that I'd run out of room if I "gushed" over all of them here --> I'll just tell you you're super good at this, great at wandering a character's thoughts all around, their mind digesting the world around them in such interesting and beautiful way, and that's saying something

with [a] character as visceral and grotesque as this one yours.

>gauge his eyes out --> (gouge)

Neat how it begins with his "sickly sweetness bearing down" & ends w/ hi[s] becoming a "sickening" "waterfall into my mouth"[—maybe just tack on the word "bitter" in the latter one so that there's a balance between the taste buds].

[I understand the scope of your piece is most concerned with your MC's survival, but I was really craving a line or two about her "living", about what she wants to do when she's not being forced to drink-dry dry-drinkers. The hardscrabble life can be so honed that the "point" gets overlooked—what is your vampiress's goal? Why does she tolerate imbibing such subpar plasmas? Just to undead-live? Undead-live for what? Maybe she has attavistic aspirations that the world will return to the good ol' days.]

{REPLY} VampDaddy // No.24178097

>>24176759

Thank you for the very gracious and flattering critique. I agree that I didn't adhere to the prompts very well. Other people have mentioned this as an issue as well, so it's not an unwarranted criticism (also, thanks to everybody that left a critique, even if I didn't give you a (you)). So that's something to take on board for next time, really try to stick to the prompt or else you're just writing a random short story.

{REPLY} ineptia // No.24179074

I'm glad you enjoyed what I wrote about your story! I'm sorry if I wasted some of your time though because I just realized you had already divulged a little of what your aims were here >>24162382, and, looking back at what I wrote, I was sooo needlessly repetitive and inefficient with what I was trying to say as relates to your character's perception. I didn't catch that post of yours because, while I have been reading some of the critiques and explanations here and there, I've intentionally kept some a mystery in order to come up with the most singular & "unspoiled" interpretation I can muster for each one.

If I could add anything to my critique, it would maybe be: Use selective descriptions of your MC's clothing, hair, furniture &/or decor to indirectly

broadcast the ideas/aesthetics she has a "taste" for, in the same vein as "beyond just surviving; what does she enjoy?"

I'm still thinking about how fascinating it must be to be so old (or to THINK you're so old) that urban development has changed the landscape around you, so much and so relatively quickly that in a blink of an eye it's like the ending time-lapse of Gangs of New York...

The oldschool, frowny-face, ground-down energy she carries midst all the bustle is just so lonely-feeling. I mentioned this on the first zombie story, but I'm sure there must be some beauty to catch in that kind of life, not needing to sleep (or at least not THINKING you need to sleep) and wandering the night ad māne.

Secret Spot

by MaMaMi

I'm in a big, open field on the side of a crumbling country road. The field itself should be about three and a half acres total, but because of all the overgrowth and shit there's about an acre of space left. It's been passed down for a few generations in my family, but ever since it was inherited by the incapable, insufferable fucking man-children that are my father and brother, I think its days are numbered. There's broken glass, mould and rats under every single fucking floorboard in the old house on the hill, even though the pair of retards have collectively spent years coming down here to apparently 'sort everything out'.

I'm with some old friends. In the past, when there wasn't so much black mould lining the walls, or mice talking underground, we'd run and roll around on the grass together, chasing birds and picking elderflower to make cordial. When I think back, I find myself missing the old me more than the old them – I was a lot skinnier. I'm fat now. I got diagnosed with an eating disorder last year. I can't run anymore and rolling would just be embarrassing.

My friends and I decided to make a campfire to cook some food: we brought some beans and pork to stew. I prod the burning logs with a stick and the white wood is pulverised into jagged glowing embers. A plume of dust poofs up into the air and smoke rushes directly into my face. For fucks sake. I just switched seats. My friends can tell I'm annoyed and they all giggle. My eyes are very dry and I can feel tears start to well up, plus some of the smoke I breathed in is irritating my throat. I get up and say I need to piss. Someone says something about how good the food tastes.

Walking up the hill to the old family house, I can hear the strained voices of cyclists shouting to one another, and I see muted car headlights whizz pass behind the thicket of blackthorn and bramble. I look back at the campfire. It's nighttime now, about 8:00pm, so none of the others see me. I decide to trudge back down the hill, but toward the rotting, short wooden gate guarding the entrance of the field. I heave myself over, almost slipping on the slimy rot but

making it to the other side. A few cars shoot past me and cool me down, as some sweat starts to trickle down my armpits and forehead. I walk a few yards down to a bend in the road. I stand at just the perfect spot by the bend. Distant headlights, slowly creeping over the horizon, are suddenly ten feet away from me. I can make out the scruffy beard and bored eyes of the driver. For a split second, this huge painted hunk of metal is pointing directly at me and I can picture it trampling the curb and shredding my body. Then, it smoothly turns away. I let out a nervous laugh. My skin feels cold now but my cheeks are burning. I feel sweat drip between my thighs and down behind my knees.

I start walking back.

Someone asks what took me so long. Someone else mentions how all the food is all gone and the rest giggle because eating less will be good for me. I tell them about my secret spot and how I go there every night to picture exactly what it would look like right before I kill myself, which, I say, I'm planning on doing a week from now. Their faces shrivel and squint – at first it looks like suspicion but the gleam of orange-yellow light in the tears dribbling down their pale, smooth, slender faces makes me realise they're crying. Then they start wailing. They plead with me not to do it. They stare at me and tell me how there's still so much to do together, how they were discussing moving in with me and how they all feel sorry for the shitty, abrupt, unexplained way they stopped responding to my text messages. They tell me that they know they'd been spending too much time with their new friends and that they feel awful for not inviting me. They offer me the rest of the food still in their bowls and I eat it all.

I make my way up to the house on the hill. I want to go inside but I know the smell of damp will make me throw up, so I squat and piss by the front door. I walk back down to the campfire and sit silently in my chair. I think the others are telling horror stories. There's enough food left to make myself a bowl, so I do – it does actually taste good; whoever said that was right.

'Secret Spot'

Critiques

Anonymous // No.24161113

>>24158031

My recommendation if you're going to continue writing is use past tense. I think it's just more compelling, and if you read it'll be more natural to you because almost everything you read will be in past tense.

I like the reveal about the spot — sudden and confronting. I don't really feel that if you told a group of people you want to kill yourself they'd start crying though, they'd be trying to be comforting. Also swear less so it's more effective when you do, but with that said

>"even though the pair of retards have collectively spent years coming down here to apparently 'sort everything out'"

kek

{REPLY} MaMaMi // No.24161284

>>24161113

thanks for the feedback uwu

>I don't really feel that if you told a group of people you want to kill yourself they'd start crying though

ah yeah, I was trying to convey something with that part. Try rereading the final two paragraphs, although it's my bad it didn't come through so strongly. She doesn't go back to sit with her friends the first time, she just imagines it. All the swearing and the general anger is supposed to point to her being a very bitter person, plus the references to the group of friends giggling is supposed to show her as an outcast even amongst friends. So she imagines that when her friends learn she wants to commit suicide they would break down and finally treat her exactly how she wants to be treated (plus give her lots of food since she is a

fatso).

There's some more implications with her pissing on the front door of the house but I'll leave that up to people's imaginations desu

2/3 // No.24162319

>Secret Spot

I think this one also gets illusion vs reality pretty well, better than unreliable narrator, at least I see it that way. The ending felt a bit underwhelming though, but other than that, good story overall.

Anonymous // No.24164053

>Secret Spot

MaMaMi

stop saying fuck and retard. cheap vulgarity is off-putting.

narrator is totally unsympathetic

sounds like some kind of sad wish fulfilment fantasy to me

Emilia // No.24164162

>>24158031

First Impressions:

I can hear....I can see...I look.

In first-person present tense, unless the narrator is literally talking to the reader (which, in this case, they are not), you are not actually writing a character; you are trying to recreate consciousness. Anything that is physical you describe, the narrator can see, by implication, because you are in first-person present tense.

>Walking up the hill to the old family house, I can hear the strained voices of cyclists shouting to one another...

This could become:

Cyclists shout from the road below as I walk up the hill to the old family house. Muted car headlights whizz past, yellow beams seeping through the blackthorn thickets.

In the night, the campfire behind me is a fallen star flickering. The night is black, and I am invisible. I trudge back downhill, toward the rotting wooden gate at the entrance of the field.

Final Impressions:

I'm struggling to see how it fits the prompt. Also, the problems with the POV are quite stark. Your prose should match the POV. I don't know what the ending is trying to say? Did the fat girl do something to the friends? Why does this girl go up the hill just to turn around again? The motivations are unclear. Sorry, but I think there is something here, but maybe you just need more time with it to make it real. Right now, it feels unfocused and unedited.

trippo // No.24166872

>>24158031

>Secret Spot

Unique way of tackling the prompt of 'unreliable female narrator,' which I appreciated. Everyone else (myself included) went for the covering up of some criminal act as the source of unreliability. It's good to see a different take on it. Rather than being someone villainous or vaguely despicable, the narrator's depressive/suicidal delusions create a good deal of sympathy in short amount of time. It doesn't quite gel with the overall bitter anger of the piece, though. Like others have said, the swearing in the opening paragraph is a little off-putting, but then also feels doubly out of place since there's little swearing in the rest of the piece. I liked this and your novel approach to the prompt. I think the only real issue here is one of tone.

mintjulia // No.24167858

>Secret Spot

You hit a nice tone that feels very dry and bitter, which seems to fit the main character. I enjoyed the brief descriptions of the environment and the narrator's gloomy view of it all.

ChineseDracula // No.24168525

>Secret Spot

Narrator a little unsympathetic but not too unreliable. It's a very blunt and irreverent piece and I'm not sure I'm a fan.

ineptia // No.24178126

SECRET SPOT

MaMaMi

>>24158031

1.

>overgrowth (land)... broken glass, mold, rats (house)... fat (body)

While 'a complete lack of maintainence' appears to be the root of all your MC's problems, I like how the fireside

>smoke rushes directly into my face

illustrates how bad luck is just as much, if not more, to blame for her misery. You can't control having an eating disorder; you can't control having a "pair of retards" as family[-]member custodians of your favorite spot; you can't even really control where the rats nest or which way the mold grows.

>how they were discussing moving in with me and how they all feel sorry for the shitty, abrupt, unexplained way they stopped responding to my text messages.

It took me a few reads to come to this possible illusion/reality/unreliable-narrator plot-point: There aren't any "friends" of hers 'round the campfire; their tearful reaction to her admission of her plain is—as another anon pointed out—not as realistic as [simply]

2. being comforting and sturdy for her [in that delicate moment]. It's also peculiar how they say they were just discussing the subjects[/solutions] she probably wants most in the world—the whole atmosphere of the scenario [& their responses] seems self-indulgent to her in this way, which makes the reality (I'm seeing) of her believing her "old friends" are there with her now, lamenting how terrible things have gotten[—]when the reality-reality is just her sitting alone at a campfire[—]really, very touching and sad.

>I can picture it trampling the curb

I've actually a bit of experience walking down dirt[?] country roads—having a "curb" is kinda outta place; a "shoulder" or a "borrow ditch" would make more sense --> and those words just congeal more with your other descriptions and focuses.

3.

>They offer me the rest of the food in their bowls and I eat it all

Okay, now I'm convinced the "friends" aren't really there --> on top of being conjured sympathy for your MC, they also serve as a mechanism for enabling her eating disorder.

>right before I kill myself

I don't think you should be this blunt—I think you should be blunter, letting the reader come to the s-word conclusion in their own mind as they read something like this: "right before I pick the perfect car going just enough above the speed limit to rush in front of"—It's so much more striking when the reader arrives at what you mean themselves.

>I can't run anymore and rolling would just be embarrassing

You zoomed in on the sweat her exertions produce, but someone who qualifies as an ambulatory wheelchair user feels lots of fatigue too [on top of just perspiring] --> when she finally gets to her [fireside] chair she should feel [immense] relief.

[You truly succeeded in painting a gloomy portrait of decay and delapidation, the colors running like melted ice-cream served fresh years ago but now years-spoiled. Should I ask for a line of the 'golden age' of this locus pre-"locusts"? Or is it better to imagine? Good job.]

My Immortal

by Abes

I'm laying down, gazing upon the infinite night sky. My husband lies next to me, in this lush, green forest. We had been hiking for a few hours and decided to rest for some time in an open clearing, a rare sight in the thickness of these woods.

Suddenly bringing me out of my reverie, he spoke; "You know how people usually say looking at the stars and planets at night makes them feel insignificant and small? I think they couldn't be more incorrect; they gloss over how not just people, but all creatures of Earth, big or small, strong or weak, intelligent or dumb, are connected. Hell, I might even say that non-sentient objects have a share in that connection too." I turned my head to him, smiling playfully. "How so?" "Well, what appear as different beings, with different motives, different levels, if you will, of awareness of consciousness, share a common attribute among them. They are all striving towards something. To live, yes, to remain alive. Not necessarily consciously, by the way. But you can see it clearly in their behavior. They all seek to carry out their will upon life. Most non-human animals, as far as we are aware, at least, do this for reasons of food or procreation. Or protecting their offspring, too. Lions will hunt gazelles for food, a male bird will dance, sing, and display its bright colors to attract a mate for reproduction, and plants will extend their branches towards the sunlight.

Through this behavior, as different as it may look among the many living beings on Earth, that carrying out of their will, the many become one. When hundreds of ants march along in line, carrying leaves or breadcrumbs with their jaws, the many become one. We could say in this sense, that they become one will. All individuality and multiplicity fade away."

I listened attentively, his words, despite the strangeness of the idea, were captivating and driving to something interesting. His philosophical inclinations had always attracted me, and he would often go into deep monologues of bizarre ideas and explanations, though I always appreciated them and paid attention, even if I didn't understand everything. He continued. "What seems to be the truly outstanding thing, is that in this sense, the many, by becoming one, become immortal. If some person walking along were to step on one of these

ants, that ant, in the sense I'm suggesting, never dies. His will is transported, and therefore his whole being, so to speak, to the other ants. Therefore, as long as ants live no ant perishes, but lives forever, through their collective will. We can say the same about pretty much any living being on the planet. And even more strangely, the same can also apply to non-living beings. It may seem strange to suggest something like an asteroid, for example, barreling through space, has a will, but even this non-sentient object imposes itself upon reality. It releases its force as if it were alive, like any other living being. So, in this sense, a non-sentient object like a meteor could have a will."

He seemed fascinated explaining all this, and for sure it was interesting, but it seems by now it was becoming too esoteric and unorthodox. Where was he getting all this from? He finished his rambling with a final revelation. "What this all means is that everything is one. Where we normally see multiplicity and plurality is only an illusion of the senses, the only thing that truly exists is a single cosmic, capital W will that reigns supreme." To push back a little, I decided to butt in with some questions. "Do we work like that though? We are human beings, we are not ants, plants, or meteors. Our actions go beyond trying to feed ourselves, reproduce, protect our kin. We do that too, yes, but we don't stop there, and these other creatures do. Perhaps, by adding humans into the discussion, reality becomes a competition of many different wills that struggle against each other, rather than a single universal, capital W will." He looked at me for a few seconds, then he smiled. "Maybe. Maybe that was all nonsense. But it does sound more poetic, doesn't it? That you and me, and all the human race, and creatures of the universe are one. We'd probably treat each other better if we believed that, wouldn't we?" I gaze into his eyes. "You and I are one. The two become one flesh. It's time to wake up".

"Mom? Are you awake?" I'm not in the forest anymore. It's not night, there are no stars, and he's gone. I lift my head up. I'm laying down in a strange room, in a bed I don't recognize and see a woman I don't recognize. "Who are you?" I see her lips quivering, her eyes well up. "It's me mom, don't you recognize me?"

I look at her closely, trying to recall if I know this person. Memories start rushing back. I know her. She's my daughter, isn't she? Her name is Sophia. I reply. "Yes. Sorry honey, I didn't recognize you for a moment. I think I've dreamt of your father." She comes closer, drying tears from her face. "Really? What was it about?" I start recalling things. I tell her about the forest, the ants, meteors, the competing wills and the cosmic capital W will. The eloquence of her father. By the time I'm done, I can tell her mood has improved. "That's beautiful, mom.

I'm surprised you remember all that, I usually forget my dreams immediately." I think for a moment. "Well, now that you mention it, I'm not sure if it was just a dream". Was it just a dream? Maybe I was remembering it particularly well because it wasn't just a dream. But I couldn't be certain. "I think I prefer his conclusion. He'll live through me and you, and through your children and their children. Through all the ants, plants, birds, and meteors flying through space. I hope he was right. I hope he was right."

'My Immortal'

Critiques

2/3 // No.24162319

>My Immortal

Probably the most original attempt at the illusion/reality divide. To give it this philosophical approach is an interesting take. That's probably the biggest strength. The ending was a bit weak though and the unreliable narrator prompt wasn't explored as well as the other prompt. The whole if it was a dream or not is kind of underwhelming.

Emilia // No.24164162

>>24158232

My Immortal

First Impressions:

I like the mysticism of the husband. Makes me wonder how this will play out.

>But you can see it clearly in their behavior. They all seek to carry out their will upon life. Most non-human animals, as far as we are aware, at least, do this for reasons of food or procreation.

This is very thinly veiled 'author-speak.' This reads like you, the author, want to say something. The 'how so?' is a very Basil Exposition line. More like a tool to allow for the speech to continue as opposed to genuine dialogue.

"What seems to be the truly outstanding thing is that, in this sense, the many, by becoming one, become immortal.

Is this how a husband and wife speak when lying down looking at the stars? It feels like he's reading off from a philosophical treatise

>He seemed fascinated explaining all this, and for sure it was interesting.

Oh, really? Lol. Not sure about that.

Aren't they husband and wife? Is this the first time that she has heard her husband speak about his philosophy on life? It feels very much like you, the author, want to say something mystical about your view of the universe and are using these characters as marionettes. No offence but like, what's it got to do with the prompt?

Final Impressions:

Not sure what it's got to do with the prompt. Not sure what the story is. It's a sweet sentiment, and I urge you to dramatize that unique and creative-rich perspective of the world, but just having someone explain to the reader in a dream is the height of lazy fiction.

{REPLY} Abes // No.24164333

>>24164162

I appreciate your critiques, I think I agree with everything you're saying. I put too much emphasis on the philosophical aspect and not much thought into the rest, I think it shows.

GiovanniDrogo // No.24164351

>My Immortal

Abes

A nice vignette with some depth.

have you been reading Schopenhauer?

'The two become one flesh.' this line felt awkward.

I'm a bit confused about why she doesn't realize if it was a dream or not? Is it supposed to be implied she has Alzheimer's or something?

I like the little push back she gave about the possibility of individual will as opposed to a collective one.

'I hope he was right. I hope he was right.' I would just say this once, if at all. The ending works just as well without 'i hope he was right' tacked on at the end; the hope is implied in the sentence preceding that, and put more poetically. and saying the same sentence twice at the end felt sappy.

nice story overall. I like that it had an idea to explore.

{REPLY} Abes // No.24164461

>>24164351

It was a huge rip off of Schopenhauer, I was guessing someone would eventually point it out here. I thought about putting it on the story but felt that would've been out of place. Before the prompts were given I had been getting a bit into non-dual philosophies/religions and thought it would be an interesting way to approach the illusion vs reality prompt. I don't necessarily agree with that philosophy, but Schopenhauer's has an interesting take on a more rational monism/nondualism, so decided to write something about that. Thanks for the critiques, I appreciate it.

trippo // No.24166872

>>24158232

>My Immortal

I'm going to be honest – my eyes glazed over a little at the philosophical monologuing here. I know we're on /lit/, but I'm personally not one for philosophising. The philosophy itself isn't poorly explained or out of place, but it feels too lecturing. You give so much over to the monologue that there's little room for anything else and so you have to rush through this final reveal that she was dreaming of her late husband. It isn't helped by the lack of line breaks, which almost makes it tiring to look at.

ChineseDracula // No.24168525

>My Immortal

A nice little piece about pantheism, which I disagree with, but I think you did a good job. Do a new line when the speaker changes for readability.

ineptia // No.24178914

MY IMMORTAL

Abes

>>24158232

1.

>she's my daughter... Her name is Sophia

Whether a reference to "philo-SOPHY" or just plain-old sophía="wisdom" in Greek, I appreciated this [name] choice --> her parent(s) def. were/are philosophers or at least [deep] aficionados.

>I see a woman I don't recognize

Wouldn't it be more thematic for the REM-interrupted mother to first misidentify her daughter as herself? They'd [both] already most-likely look similar with the daughter de facto[*] sharing half of [her] mother's genes [*(unless she's adopted or a step-child, of course; but even if that's the case, the subject matter is more than ripe enough to blend their potentially different phenotypes)]. Blurring identities/[entities] is what your piece is all about—maybe something like: "I see myself in a reflection, through the clearest mirror that's ever existed; but this "me" is not just [my] reflection—[I seem like I'm... more?...] "Who are you?" [I'm asked.] I see my own lips quivering, scrutinizing myself, [and] my eyes well up. I reply: "It's me, mom, don't you recognize me?"

>she comes closer, drying tears from her face

-->

2.

This is just my own interpretation, but—in addition to the father being dead—is the mother dying? Why else would the daughter be moved to tears upon simply waking her mother up? Chemo brain is a real thing, unfortunately, and the pain killers a[n inexorably] [unwell] person takes near the end can produce scenes reminiscent of this one[,] where just waking up and [discerning] reality [from illusion] can teeter on tears. IF this WAS your intent, I picked up on it, but I don't think it's saliently presented enough to be the unquestionable reality for these characters[, for instance the 'room I don't recognize' could be a hospital room; it could be her bedroom but she's very sick; or it could be her bedroom and she's just groggy]. IF it WAS'NT, I'd consider it; the mother character doesn't even necessarily have to be terminal—maybe this is her waking up in the [ER] from a car crash or something similar[ly] traumatic. It would enhance the themes and the drama imo.

ineptia // No.24178918

CONTINUED

>>24158232

>>24178914

3.

>My husband lies next to me in this lush green forest.

You allude to plants & animals [& inanimates] in their dialectic* *(really more his lecture), but I think you're neglecting the scenic forest-setting you've [fittingly] selected for this glorified* *(not trying to be pejorative[ly designating here]) philosophy lesson --> You could really make the father's delivery more riveting and dynamic if he used and regarded the living & dead things around them [both] as movers of his ["]story["], zooming in on them physically and away from just [using] his words --> [For example,] Instead of:

>"When hundreds of ants march along in a line,"

Try: "You see those ants?" He asks [me], pointing to a [split-down-the-middle tree-trunk, its moon-lit body bisected neatly by a thin dark crack]. [I searched for his ants on the smooth bark's blue-brown surface, until I realized it —]this crack wasn't a [normal] crack—it was puls[at]ing—it WAS the ants, hundreds of them all marching in a perfect line up the tree—"A river of life," he said, [regarding my astonishment].

> To push back a little...

I like her offering an argument to the notions he posits, but imo he gives [up] WAAAY to easy[/early] to saying it all might just be bs --> Make me believe this is his [(]or at least her[)] [truest] wish [while INSIDE] the dream[—you don't spout that much Schopenhauer that passionately+convincingly and then just roll over @ t. first push-back [even if—maybe even especially if—it's your partner doing the pushing back]—if you want to bring the mother character into the discussion, then make it a real discussion, include her right from the beginning of the piece; make her a true interlocutor; it can still be about the father's memory, but it's a more vivid and engaging memory if the mother is a part of it, maybe she's even an indirect inspiration for WHY he thinks these things—like, replace ants or tree-braches or asteroids with a scene from their shared histroy --> make me care about them, make me understand why they're together].

[I enjoyed the potential subtleties of your piece, and felt your refined prose-style was generally appropriate, but overall I was left wanting a lot more (if you couldn't tell by how much I've written here lol); when I think of dreamscapes & philosphy, I imagine a lot more than just a conversation in a forest—you have a chance to tear down the walls of perception and have these characters BECOME an asteroid, to live a lifespan in a season in a day AS an ant, to reach up to the sky with arms sprawling out as tree limbs over the decades -->

definitively embody the title "My Immortal"; make this philosophy presentation an ontological can't-miss.]

[Finally, you excel at having understated-ness trigger big emotion (at least for me :)), but you need more spectacular moments to really let the understated-ness's stillness have the greater impact—like an asteroid—you want it to have.]

Zachary

by Z. N.

Zachary, I need your help. They sent me to the boondocks, and the boondocks house zombies. I've killed about a thousand by now. The first one appeared after I crashed my car. It happened deep in the forest that my tires spun out of control and barreled me down a mountain. The rain obscured the wormhole-dark. My headlights, weak in the fog, illuminated infinite depths.

"Zachary!" I called your name, but you didn't respond.

The lights of my car flickered and danced. They illuminated a corpse as I ran it over. Perhaps I ran it over before that, and it rolled over the hood.

"That wasn't very nice of you," the zombie said. At least it seemed to be a zombie. It had knocked on my window and asked me to roll it down. Now its rotten-apple breath hung in my face.

"I beckon," I said, "your pardon," I said, "as this is my first time here," I said. I said each line from three different mouths. Then a missile shot out from my wet vagina that homed in on the zombie's face. Its pupa-green, now exploded face.

"Zachary!" I called, but you didn't respond.

A second zombie soon arrived. This one had a gunshot front-center in its brains. I turned my hand into a miniature drill, then thrust it into the zombie's wound, elbows deep. His body swung around the torque of my arm like the blades of a new windmill.

"Zachary!" No response.

For eighteen years, I did things of the sort. No one counted, but by the candles of my cake, eighteen years had passed. When the zombies stopped their

assault, the dark lightened up, and around me a rural village materialized. Blood and gore caked the ground. Stone pavements colored red, not gray, supported my feet, as well as the bodies of men, women and children. I stood, the only one alive in a city of dead. For another eighteen years, I cried my soul black, then packed my bags and left. By the time I looked back, the village bustled with people.

"Zachary," I said as I washed myself in the nearby river.

'Zachary'

Critiques

2/3 // No.24162319

>Zachary

Too much going on here. Way too insane. Again, this feels more like rather than exploring a divide between reality and illusion it's just throwing as much insanity as possible without a deeper development of the prompts.

{REPLY} Z. N. // No.24162458

>>24162319

>Too much going on here. Way too insane. Again, this feels more like rather than exploring a divide between reality and illusion it's just throwing as much insanity as possible without a deeper development of the prompts.

Yeah, I wanted to have fun with it. I don't usually write stories like that, and I didn't even think I would participate because the theme was a little too foreign for me, but then I did, and it turned out like that. I don't regret it, though, since I learnt a lot from my mistakes.

Thanks for taking the time to write all this for everyone that deserved it more than me.

Emilia // No.24164165

>>24158470

Zachary

First Impressions:

I beckon your pardon?

First, it's 'I beg your pardon.' And two, is this a Victorian maid?

Wtf, a missile from a vagina?

I love the line, 'By the candles on my cake, eighteen years had passed.'

Final Impressions:
Ermmmm? What?

trippo // No.24166873

>>24158470

>Zachary

Reads like a video game. I didn't get the point so much, if there was one. "A missile shot out from my wet vagina" made me laugh. Not much to say.

mintjulia // No.24167862

>Zachary

I wish I understood it better. I was surprised by the ending, the sudden timeskips. I felt that it was all a reference to something recognizable, but maybe I'm wrong and it just creates a very unusual tone.

ChineseDracula // No.24168546

>Zachary

Incoherent but fulfills the prompt I guess. I think the last big paragraph tries to make it make sense, but it doesn't.

ineptia // No.24180996

ZACHARY

Z. N.

>>24158470

1. From WIKI:

>"Venerable Zachariah the Recluse of Egypt was an Egyptian Christian monk who lived during the 4th Century in Scetis, Lower Egypt. He is the patron saint of society's outcasts. He served the homeless and poor, and is remembered as a monastic father" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zachariah_the_Recluse).

[I'll get back to this, but for now, thinking a lot more primitively:] The fact "Zachary's" name starts with the last letter of the alphabet reinforces[, at least to

silly-brain me, just] how far away he is from your MC; [her being] overrun with "zombies", another z-word[,] could hint at how close she is to [finally] reaching him, or [instead,] [contrastly-illustrates] just how [hopelessly lost] she is [at the moment][—"I made it to "Z" but it's "Z-for-Zombies" and not "Z-for-Zachary!"].

[Okay, no more alphabet-talk, but I do want to say bravo for making something as simple as calling a name become] something like a prayer.

>each line from three different mouths

At first, it was attractive to me to make her a Hecate or a Gorgon—a triple-diety-type being (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triple_deity) cast out of psuedo-Olympus [and into the boondocks] for some real or imagined transgression—but the undoubtable "mortal-ness" of [your lovely]

>by the candles of my cake

make me opt for [her being*] alien, cyborg, or very out-there human [hybrid] -->

ineptia // No.24181002

>>24158470

>>24180996

2. *Am I saying she's ACTUALLY a B-movie curiosity? As much as I want to, I have to remind myself we're dealing w/ illusion-v.-reality+-unreliableness. So what's REALLY going on? Whether it's a mental disorder, drugs, the TBI from the car crash, or some combo, I believe your MC's perception of the world, and of other people, has been kicked into the phrenetic video-game/anime/fantasy-realm, and she's good and stuck there[; her confusion could even be caused by overindulgence in these genres à la Quixote].

My guess is that her neurological

>tires spun out of control and barreled me down a mountain

only she was also [actually] physically behind th[at] wheel [too] and [truly] plowed (or near-plowed) some pedestrians, whom she "[sees]" [as] zombies[—]

>At least it seemed to be a zombie

I was actually in a serious car crash last year, and while I didn't have triplopia (my solution for why your MC [inexplicably] "thinks" she has three mouths; <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/triplopia>) it REALLY fucks you up.

ineptia // No.24181007

>>24158470

>>24181002

3. I'm sure her "I've killed a thousand by now" is hy[p]erbole (I hope lol) and the poor [first] "zombie" (who was [in-reality] just a reckless-endangerment-shaming civilian) DIDN'T get his head blown off by a wet vagina missile—she probably just threw soemthing [innocuous] at him[. Btw, a "WVM" is the perfect intersection between hyperviolence-&-hypersexuality—like, what watching too many cartoons can to a mf's mind >u< , but joking aside, the] worst-case [scenario is] she actually had a firearm and shot him/her [:(], but I opt for the former because it would be more thematic for something as pathetic as [her] chucking [her] phone [or a tampon] at someone to equate to a

>pupa-green now exploded face.

[Like, kinda funny].

The same goes for the drill-fist --> at the most serious it would be a knife, but she's probably just ineffectually grabbing their shirt and twisting [>_>].

[Why did she say:

>This one had a gunshot front-center in its brains

? This could be her peception-contortion of a tattoo, a bindi, a bloody scrap from her running-amok, or just her imagining it from nothing—blood usually isn't "pupa-green", so she seems to have a vidya*-filter on when regarding people—the gunshot wound could just be how she "makes" a normal person into a zombie.]

Unfortunately for her ([&] fortunately [for everyone else]) her real-life rampage (whether it did draw blood or not) was [ultimately] frowned upon enough statutely-speaking to [eventually] throw her in jail. Jail? That's what I took the "rural village" to mean... -->

*Fun fact: Adjacent to the subject of bindis, the word vidya in Sanskrit means "clarity". Pretty ironic here.

ineptia // No.24181010

>>24158470

>>24181007

4.

>For eighteen years, I did things of the sort.

So you have her 'on the run' for 18 years after the accident, basically being a homeless, weirdo menace, a bone fide outcast—which is [another way] how I

connect her to Zachariah the Recluse—pestering and/or attacking "zombies" --> Maybe, after 18 solitary—"no one counted"—years of behaving like this, she DID "KILL" a thousand people, and by "kill" I mean probably just mildly annoy [lol].

But all that stops once she gets incarcerated -->

>a rural village materialized. Blood and gore caked the ground. Stone pavements colored red, not gray supported my feet, as well as the bodies of men, women, and children. I stood the only one alive in a city of dead.

Prisons famously only use gray stone because it's an emotionally neutral color. Men, women, AND children all in one prison complex [would be a little complex to say the least], so I'm rationalizing this

ineptia // No.24181012

>>24158470

>>24181010

5. line as her 'filling in the void'[, manifesting her default worst-fear reality onto] the blankness her [empty-]canvas-surroundings offer her.

Another justification I used for her now being in prison is

>the dark lightened up

--> You can't turn off the lights in prison (she also must have just been relying on natural lighting [in] the outside world, probably scampering about nocturnally, and I believe it's this [artificial] 'light-of-day' that lays bare her grizzly psychosis—her seeing indiscriminate death and bloodshed wherever she treads, with herself as the quintessential-outcast[/]lone[-]survivor[/hero] [in this now-super-unfun isekai of hers]--> not once has she even seen another ["]living["] person yet. [Is there just no one like her? And/Or is she just that messed up?]

Why does she call the "village"/prison RURAL? Perhaps it's a nature-based small-scale-type mental facility aimed at wellness & rehabilitation[, that, or it's a normal urban-compound and she just really liked playing Skyrim]. [The opening line

>They sent me to the boondocks, and the boondocks house zombies.

Could indicate she's been 'sent away' to a similar facility before --> that could be have been her impetus for her grand-theft-auto-ing an escape and starting this whole crazy odyssey.]

ineptia // No.24181020

>>24158470 >>24181012

6. And this [second?] rehabilitation at least partly succeeded, because, after another 18 years[, this time] "on the inside"[,] when it's time for her to be discharged/reentered-into-society, she looks back at the "village" and sees it "bustling" full of not zombies, not corpses, but PEOPLE!!! Yaay! [

>For another eighteen years, I cried my soul black, then packed my bags and left. By the time I looked back, the village bustled with people.

Though it's heartbreaking she seems to have hated/suffered every minute of it :(; it makes you wonder what the true cost of "conforming" people actually is, and whether whatever meager results all that suffering earns is even worth it --> in her case, I'd say ABSOLUTELY not.

>They sent me to the boondocks,

"They"—and I love how you nebulously set up these antagonists who are probably just good-meaning folks like her parents or hospital staff—probably only put her away because she's kinda annoying --> if she were actually blowing people's heads off she definitely WOULDN'T get 18 years of do-as-you-please vagrancy.

I know it's not like she was happy on the outside either, but there's got to be an in-between that doesn't cause her to have "cried her soul black" : (Definitely the most brutal part, and makes me kinda regret even cheering "Yaay!" that she sees people as people now because despite their appearing human, she still probably has nothing in common with them :(]

The Story ends on her symbolically cleansing herself at the river[—maybe the shower at her halfway house?—but, sadly(?), she still feels herself enough of an outcast to call for Zachary, still—maybe even especially—after all she's endured[—36 years of the deepest isolation you can imagine, but she still WILL call that name]. I don't want her to change or conform or abandon her individuality if [that individuality] makes her happy, but her warped[-]perception of the world has caused her (and others[?]) so[, so] much grief[. Nothing can "save" her but a true acknowledgement from someone like her and it's terrible to imagine.]

I really wish I could answer her calls and tell her [at the very least] she's not alone. My Zachariah has always been on my lips, even in the moments I've been anything but "by myself".

[Did you intend me to have this interpretation and go on this journey? I'd guess not, but I'm glad you wrote what you did because I used it to get myself there.]

Weavers

by mintjulia

Save for the sports cars zooming down the street it was a pleasant enough afternoon and I was sitting outside a local cafe waiting for a friend, adjusting the tiny, unreasonably wobbly table once in a while to make myself look busy.

"Hey there," Marie said. "I hope you didn't have to wait long."

"It's all good." I smiled and invited her to sit down. The waitress took our orders.

"A crazy thing just happened to me," she said.

Everyone who spent some time around Marie gradually came to the conclusion that she must be embellishing her stories for some kind of dramatic effect. She seemed barely interested in other people's personal lives, commenting on them with passing remarks before returning to the middle of her own tale. I did not mind assuming the role of an engaged listener.

Every time I saw her I was immediately reminded of university days, that nebulous time when we first met each other one city over. I remember one of our early meetings at a pizza place near the campus. It was the first time when I picked up on this storytelling quirk of hers. We were sitting down at a rather greasy table when she told me that her sister had recently been in a car crash.

I could feel my face assuming the conventional expression of worry as I thought back to some earlier conversation during which she had told me she is an only child. Still, I couldn't stop imagining a girl splayed out on the hood of a car, her bare shoulders touching the cold metal, one foot dangling in front of a headlight like a poor man's shadow puppet. The image was so vivid I knew it came from somewhere else. Right after I wrapped up my display of empathy I felt a wave of guilt, as if it was unbecoming of me to keep up the pretense, maybe moreso than of her to create it.

It had always been hard for me to react strongly to any life events. When an inebriated man nearly rammed his car into my legs a month earlier, I barely reacted, staring him down as he stopped in front of me with a dumbfounded look on his rough-shaven, kinda-cute face. I had talked to him twice before. Either way, I seemed to take pride in this approach to life, as if none of it could truly

reach me.

At one point during my university days I began to devote a part of my attention to actively predicting events just so none of them would sneak up and surprise me. The downside of that was that it really worked. When a friend would approach me in our dorm crying her heart out about a cheating boyfriend, I could barely force myself to reply, feeling more quiet satisfaction than any kind of empathy. Look, it's not that I didn't have it. I just knew what kinds of things happen in the world. Even if a giant spaceship appeared right in front of me, I would have some frame of reference for how an alien invasion usually goes. Relationship problems did not rank highly on my list of Things Hard To Imagine. My nightmares were filled with incomprehensible shapes devoid of human-made forms.

Most of the people I knew seemed quietly annoyed at this trait of mine, gradually moving away, keeping me at the distance of casual acquaintances. I wasn't someone they felt they could really confide in. At the same time they were becoming wary of Marie's tales. It seemed like we turned to each other for some kind of comfort. This is why as I sat in the pizza place and cringed internally at my own cliché response, she looked half-satisfied, as if it was really working, the most obvious reaction being the right one. Gentle tears landed on her smile as she told me that everything would turn out alright.

At the café we were in the middle of our usual monologue when she stopped abruptly, her stare trailing off into the distance. She had mentioned something related to trust, or the lack of it. I thought this time I would finally speak up. I looked her in the eyes and opened my mouth, adamant to get something out, but then I noticed her looking back at me in a way that suddenly struck me as aware, aware of too much, desperately trying to leave some things unsaid. Another car zipped down the street and right after that Marie began another tale and I let myself get swept up in it.

I had become so used to her stories that in a way it was comforting to hear a new version, a clear contradiction here and there. Our friendship was strong enough to allow for those. Come to think of it, back when she had vented to me about Michael, it was the only time I knew she was telling the truth. To an outside observer our conversation must have looked very typical, a sip of coffee here and there, exclamations, dramatic twists, me reacting with shock. It did not really matter that underneath it all we were both using lies to carve out some space for each other out of some common need. They were just different kinds of lies.

'Weavers'

Critiques

2/3 // No.24162319

>Weavers

Gonna sound weird but here I can't tell which prompt is done better but I can tell you got something right. Something is done pretty well but I can't put my finger on what exactly. I know this must be frustrating to hear for the author since it's so vague but I don't really know how else to explain it. But pretty good story overall.

Anonymous // No.24164053

>Weavers

mintjulia

nice prose. logical, coherent story. interesting characters. has some depth (being willing to entertain lies for whatever reason, being compelled to lie for whatever reason). good job.

Emilia // No.24164165

>>24159082

Weavers

First impressions:

I think the story should begin with 'Everyone who spent time around Marie...' That first paragraph is overwritten and doesn't do the next well-written paragraph justice.

I like this narrator choosing someone in their life to psychoanalyse and judge. It's really fertile ground for good storytelling, especially unreliably.

Predicting events—interesting. I wonder what you'll do with that.

Okay, so this narrator is a little big-headed, and I'm glad this is recognised:

“Most of the people I knew seemed quietly annoyed at this trait of mine.”

Final impression:

I think the voice is great—very competent. You’re clearly a mature writer. Also, lol at ‘weavers’—is this in reference to Trump ‘weaving’ with his stories?

I don’t think you really hit the prompt, though. Marie is unreliable, but no one really relies on her being reliable—not the reader nor the characters. Also, where is the exploration of reality versus illusion? The illusion of mundane problems being serious, whereas the narrator is outside of it? Maybe?

I think this is very well written but unfocused and doesn’t hit the prompt. It’s a character study of Marie ultimately, and because of this, I would have liked the narrator to be much more of a contrast to her. That contrast—that dissonance between Marie and the narrator—is where I think the magic of this story lies. If you somehow allowed the narrator to take on the personality of Marie or something, that could be cool. If somehow you allowed a switching—maybe Marie could start to distrust her? I don’t know. I just think there is a distinct lack of drama.

This feels like a vignette, a character study—a very well-written one at that, though. I think if you cast these characters into a proper story, you could be onto something for sure.

trippo // No.24166873

>Weavers

Strong opening, though there’s an odd effect of feeling that you have an opening twice over with the terse greetings and then the explanation about Marie. I feel that perhaps you could excise the very first line but keep the dialogue, and then launch into the main body of the story with the second paragraph. That way you get the best of both worlds without the odd double-start, though you’d have to find another way to establish the cafe setting. Still, it works, so I can’t complain. I enjoy the characters you’ve set up here with their co-dependency of being entirely undependable. The peek into the narrator’s detached mind is effective and you’ve come up with a good voice for her, but then conversely Marie doesn’t get much chance to shine. I’d have liked to hear more of her tall tales. Neat twist at the end – the introduction of the boyfriend’s

name caught me a little off guard until I clocked what it meant.

ChineseDracula // No.24168546

>Weavers

It's nice, but most of this story is told as a sort of reminiscence, I wonder if there's a way to pull the important information out of those middle paragraphs while keeping the story centered around the coffee shop conversation. Also, who's Michael?

ineptia // No.24183123

WEAVERS

mintjulia

>>24159082

1.

>adjusting the tiny, unreasonably wobbly table once in a while to make myself look busy

I love how this is a perfect encapsulation of your MC's "deal" --> She finds a problem and works to fix it (the same way she "prepares" herself to expect the unexpected) while only "performing" the act of righting the piece of furniture in order to "look busy", probably just for Marie's sake, so she feels a little less bad for getting there late [and] wasting the MC's time[, which is such an insignificant thing to do, but shows just how much your MC cares about Marie—Arrgh! So wholesome.]

[New subj:] Out of all the stories, yours is the best character duo. One normally wouldn't be able to get this level of fidelity out of the warped mileage an "unreliable narrator" story allows, but you've creatively circumvented that by fine-printing the prompt and fulfilling an "unreliable narrator character" in Marie[—who's a liar but somehow a lovely character btw—and designating the MC as the crystal-clear-er,] [though] I'd be lying if I said I didn't [also] read-in [unreliableness into your MC too, conjecturing] differing explanations or reasons for why your MC reacts the way she does. [-->]

2. [Personal bs incoming:] I've spent so much effort and time masking that it's hard for me not to think of my own motivations while reading your piece[—I'm usually okay seperating what I bring with me to a read, but your MC just

reminded me too much of myself for comfort]. [The lesser] of the reasons I ultimately didn't vote for this story was because to vote for it was in some way to vote for myself, and I'm not sure I'm there yet. [Personal bs over.]

The [greater] reason I didn't vote for Weavers—and mind you if this were a ranking it would still be my #2—was the setting up of the café scene only to [immediately] flashback to a pizza place only to [then immediately] flash back to the MC's [scattered] experiences

- >I was sitting outside a local caf[é]
 - >I remember one of our early meetings at a pizza place
 - >I thought back to an earlier conversation
 - >When an inebriated man rammed his car into my legs a month ago
 - >At one point during my university days
 - >When a friend would approach me in our dorm
 - >My nightmares were filled with incomprehensible shapes
 - >This is why I sat in the pizza place
 - >At the caf[é]
- MARIE marie ME marie MARIE
café pizza MC pizza café [-->]

ineptia // No.24183143

>>24159082

>>24183123

3. I've gone back and forth [so many times] wondering if this matroska/sandwich structure works or doesn't—are all the disparate micro-flashbacks and contexts too messy? Or are they deliberately part of the jumbled antecedent-experience the title "Weavers" so denotes? I really can't tell for sure. [BTW, I take "Weavers" as alluding to the last line --> "They were just different kinds of lies." Like, they both "weave" their own realities in thier own ways. It's very good.]

I know I've read "sophisticated" [(not trying to be pejorative here)] stories that jump all around over the course of a conversation ("Solomon's Folly" by Leslie Croxford), [and while] it's not something [I've always been able to follow, I have sometimes enjoyed it,] but[,] in a way[,] your [layout] is even more sophisticated because [it's so much easier to follow and because—since] this is a short story[—]I can illustrate the very efficient and symmetrical structure you chose [w/ the sandwich].

I'm truly ambivalent (defined as "noticing the pluses and the minuses")

about th[is] pacing, so please forgive me for averaging [those pluses and minuses] out for voting purposes[,] but please do know what you wrote is great and basically unzipped me [multiple times] because this is my 3rd try writing this critique[—more of a mess really; I'm very sorry—] w/o getting overly emotional at the themes and characters --> [suffice to say] you're a great writer!

[I probably wouldn't have droned on so much about the flashing-back if there was, like, an anchor or a more impressionistic "blur" between events; I mentioned that "Solomon's Folly" was hard to follow when it does this, but it's much more engaging than simply lore-injecting. --> If there's an in-between between confusion and structure, I'd reccomend going for it when you've this much ground to cover. Thanks again :)]

*A trillion lifetimes of agony
compressed into a singular,
blinding instant*

by jeff

A trillion lifetimes of agony compressed into a singular, blinding instant. The collective suffering of the entire human race sharpened to an impossibly fine edge - a needle of pure, searing anguish driven straight through each synapse in my brain. Time ceases to flow, all that remains is now. I try to scream but nothing comes out. My throat is a raw, gaping wound, my vocal cords shredded into a fine, bloody mist. I am neither dead nor alive. I am undone. My body is a canvas of ruin, a grotesque sculpture painted in blood and bile. Bones jut through my flesh like jagged spears, muscles hang in tattered ribbons, and my organs spill out of my abdomen in a glistening, pulsating heap. Blood pools beneath me, thick and black, the stench of decay so vile it seeps into my pores, into my soul. I'm no longer human. I'm someone's plaything, a pile of meat and misery.

A voice? No... not a voice. A presence. It slithers into my mind, serpentine and merciless, coiling around each of my thoughts. It is calm, almost tender, and that makes me fear it more.

"Oh, good," it purrs, dripping with mock relief. "Do you feel that?"

I try to plead, to beg, to ask what's happening, but my mouth is a ruin, my words swallowed by the abyss. The voice doesn't wait for me to respond. It doesn't need to. It already knows what I would scream if I could.

"You're probably wondering why this is happening, Kate." it murmurs, its grip tightening around my consciousness like a vice. "But you already know, don't you? You remember."

And then the pain shifts. It's no longer just physical. It's deeper, sharper, as though invisible hands have reached into my chest and grabbed hold of my soul. I feel my awareness being pulled, stretched, torn apart into a thousand screaming fragments. Kaleidoscopic visions flood my mind, violent and unrelenting. A birthday party. The cake writhes with maggots, the candles are jagged shards of bone. My childhood friends laugh as they peel strips of flesh from my arms. My first kiss. His teeth sink into my lips, tearing them away in a single cruel movement, blood cascading down my chin as I try to let out a howl. A car crash. But it's not an accident. I'm behind the wheel, and I can't stop, can't slow down, can't do anything but watch as I plow into a crowd of people, their bodies exploding like ripe fruit, their screams echoing through my skull.

The voice is whispering now, soft and intimate, like a lover. "Do you remember?" it asks. "Do you remember what you've done? What you are?"

I don't. I can't. But the images keep coming, faster and faster, a fucking deluge of horror. A funeral. I'm in the coffin. I'm alive, trapped, suffocating, as dirt rains down on me, filling my nose, my mouth, my lungs. A hospital? No, a lab, and I'm on the table, and they're cutting me open, pulling out my organs one by one, holding them up to the light like trophies. My liver, my heart, my lungs are laid out on a tray, still twitching, still alive. I can feel them, even as they're removed. I'm a mother, holding my dead baby in my arms, screaming until my voice gives out. I'm a prisoner, strapped to a chair, electrodes clamped to my temples, my brain frying like an egg as they force me to confess to crimes I didn't commit. I'm a lover, watching as my partner is torn apart by dogs, his screams ringing in my ears as I beg to god for mercy.

And then, just as suddenly as it began, it stops.

The pain is gone. The visions are gone. I'm whole again, my body intact, my mind clear. I'm strapped to a cold, metal table, the sterile white light of the room blinding me. The voice is gone, replaced by the soft hum of machinery. My eyes dart around the room, my heart pounding, my breath coming in ragged gasps. A door hisses open and a man strides in. He's clad in a white lab coat, his face a mask of clinical detachment. His eyes, cold and calculating, sweep over me as though I'm nothing more than a specimen pinned to a board.

"Good," the man says, his voice flat, devoid of emotion. "You're awake."

I turn my head to face him, my mind racing. "What... what happened to me?" I ask, my voice trembling.

The man doesn't answer right away. He walks over to a monitor and begins typing something into the keyboard. "You were undergoing a new experimental procedure," he says finally. "A form of psychological rehabilitation. It's designed to help individuals confront their past actions and come to terms with them."

I shake my head, confused. "But... I don't understand. I didn't do anything. I'm not a criminal."

The man stops typing and turns to look at me, his expression unreadable. I open my mouth to protest, to insist that I'm innocent, but the words are caught in my throat.

He stares down at me, his eyes cold and calculating. "Don't play dumb with me, Kate" he says. "You know what you are."

I want to deny it, to scream that it's not true, that I'm not a monster. But the words won't come. I stare at the ceiling and shake my head, tears beginning to well up in my eyes.

The man nods, as if my silence confirms everything. "Alright," he says. "Then we can begin again."

And before I can react, before I can even scream, the pain returns, worse than before. The room dissolves into chaos, the walls melt away, the floor crumbles beneath me. I am falling, spinning, tumbling through an endless void of hurt.

*‘A trillion lifetimes of agony
compressed into a singular,
blinding instant’
Critiques*

2/3 // No.24162319

>A trillion lifetimes of agony compressed into a singular, blinding instant
To be honest, here at first I thought it got the illusion vs reality prompt pretty well but now I'm thinking maybe the prompt wasn't explored as thoroughly as I initially thought when reading. It seems to me that the divide is very clearly demarcated when the narrator stops being tortured, so we know what is real and what isn't once the torture resumes, without a sense of a blurring between the lines of what is real and what's not. Maybe I'm reading it wrong but that's how I see it.

Emilia // No.24164165

>>24159453

First impressions:

>Blood pools beneath me, thick and black, the stench of decay so vile it seeps into my pores, into my soul.”

Seeps from the pores, surely? Not into.

I'm struggling to see how the prompt has been tackled. Is this just dreaming? Not the biggest fan of gore stuff.

Okay, so she's being tortured by a demon or something? This feels like a Gaiman story.

Final impressions:
Glazed over this one because I just don't think it has anything to do with the prompt.

trippo // No.24166873

>>24159453
>A trillion lifetimes of agony compressed into a singular, blinding instant
Fantastically gory imagery in that first paragraph. On a similar note, also love the twisted versions of life's memories. Really well done on both counts. The lack of concrete explanation is good here, and works nicely with the idea of a scientifically-created Hell made for a sick form of shock rehabilitation. My only quibble with this is that I feel you don't quite create sufficient doubt as to whether this is a punishment the MC deserves or not. We're not given any reason to either doubt whether she's innocent as she says, or wonder if she really is a criminal. There's no real crime hinted at, unless you intend the car crash. The stage seems set to introduce that seed of doubt but you don't play with it so much. It's just left at "she believes and says she's innocent" and that's that. I think you could take it a little further. Brilliant for your descriptions alone.

mintjulia // No.24167862

>A trillion lifetimes of agony compressed into a singular, blinding instant
Nice and grimy. I enjoyed the gruesome descriptions and the hopeless ending, though I felt like some of these scenes flew by really quickly and it made them a bit numb after a while. It does seem like a tough act to balance, especially within the confines of a short story where you can't really devote entire pages to a single gory moment. Although I don't think that wasn't the point anyway.

ChineseDracula // No.24168546

>A trillion lifetimes...
Very evocative imagery, but there's some unanswered questions as to why she's there at all. I'm tempted to say she's being punished for running over a crown of people, but this seems like another thing thrown into the flashing

torture images. Fulfills the prompt in those regards.

ineptia // No.24183893

A TRILLION LIFETIMES OF AGONY COMPRESSED INTO A SINGULAR
BLINDING INSTANT

jeff

>>24159453

1.

>Bones jut through my flesh like jagged spears

>the candles are jagged shards of bone

The breadth and severity of all the words you've employed [are] staggering[!] and effective, however you did such a good job that hiccup-echoes like this one stand out all the more.

>[Blood pools beneath me, thick and black,] the stench of decay so vile

I'm going to fight you on this one: Nowhere else in your opening do you refer to putrefaction*—in fact, and I'm NOT trying to sound like a maniac-cannibal here or anything—but I can't imagine a more full-fresh or livingly-ripe type of aroma than my just-atomized blood, bones & organs [splattered everywhere—idk, "me" in this state would probably smell chemically-but-still,-on-some-level,-appetizing (0_0)]. I hope you get what I mean --> decay [shouldn't] even factor into [these] particles [and/]or cells which an instant ago were working healthily --> the fragrance would be macabre, yes, but would also be crisp-sweet --> again, you'd 100% gag and it would be a terrible smell, but not because something's rotten but because it's too [FRESH] [--> an olfactory-overwhelming of life's essence].

[* There's too much going on with "time stopping", and then her also being "a pulsating heap" and then her also-ALSO having festering blood; when you write as good as you do, you don't need to get carried away, because there are no deficiencies you have—description-wise or stylistically—that need distracting from at all :) Just pick a cool concept and keep viscerally drilling down into it, instead of continually appending to it]

2.

>The collective suffering of the entire human race

The "montages" of torment you erected were certainly disquieting, and while some snippets are undeniably modern-era (electric chair; driving a car) I

liked how other were more "today, or hundreds of years ago" (premature burial; inadvertent(?) vivisection), but I feel like I want more—I want these montages to truly (try to) live up to

>the collective suffering of the entire human race
and this means including scenes that are unambiguously from a long time ago while at the same time presented as universal "hurts" --> for example, have the

>mother, holding my dead baby
be "rocked [in]to inconsolable misery over the scrapes of wagon wheels."
[or "...by the muffled plods of the camel carrying them.]

I still think you should [still] keep some [chronologically-]ambiguous universal ones (kissing lovers), but so many people have suffered in such unique circumstances [throughout history] that I can't not advocate for more of a range.

ineptia // No.24183902

>>24159453

>>24183893

3.

>I open my mouth to protest, to insist that I'm innocent, but the words are caught in my throat

I never really know when the "unreliableness" is over, so forgive me if I'm going too far: Maybe Kate IS, like, a really, really bad person. Maybe her insistence that she's innocent IS bs, and the doc is right for telling her

>"Don't ply dumb with me, Kate"... "You know what you are."

And MAYBE: This (nightmarish) radical-empathy "treatment" is actually [succeeding] --> because Kat's vocal cords DO work:

>"I didn't do anything. I'm not a criminal."

but when it's time for her to [really] plead her case:

>I want to deny it... But the words won't come

>... tears beginning to well up in my eyes.

Almost as if an OFF button's been pressed somewhere in her mind, preventing her from "keeping up the act" because now she [more understands] what kind of pain she [has] potentially caused [folks].

[At the same time, maybe this is just the "procedure" working on an actually completely innocent woman.]

If it's not clear --> this procedure is NOT an ethical way to instill empathy + accountability[, regardless of whether she's innocent or guilty, but regardless-

regardless you've written a very "brutal"-iful scene that really hits a reader in the gut.]

[At first I was going to end with saying, "All this torture has to be in service of something; it can't all just be meaningless," but then I realized what it means to be human and the redundancy of that statement shone on me. If there's a way you can minutely tack this "we're-meant-to-suffer" sentiment on to the end of your piece in a non-blatant way, I think it would do a lot of work --> I'm NOT Kate; I'm NOT the doctor; but writing/reading should make me believe I could be either of those people, that I could be in either one of their spots --> place the indiscriminate pain of being alive onto the reader, and then remind them "we're not taking questions at this time" --> you've basically already done that—very chillingly—for me at least. Bravo, jeff :)]

Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection

by ineptia

Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection. They say humans don't hibernate during the winter, but, jeez, our insides sure do. If it were sunny out, and the sidewalk not slicked, I'd be out running right now, working on my half-marathon time, instead of plodding up, down and around these five seasonally-decorated levels (that's three levels for structure #1 & two levels structure #2). Should I have just joined a gym? Would that have kept my plumbing without hiccups? Probably, but exercising in a small space makes my, like, soul sick or something—treadmill THUMPS covering up heartbeat THUMPS: Not my style. Better—was my thinking at the first big snow-dump—to forgo kinesis altogether and focus on more sedentary disciplines—reading, writing, drawing, playing piano, maybe get in love with watching movies again... The possibilities of how to lazily-but-engagingly spend my time were endless, and I was fine abandoning my strict Instagram-body regiment, not "losing" my gains, per se, but just giving them a well-deserved break—what I'm running towards should cycle with the seasons; all it takes is to invert the horizon of the outside world into an interior one for myself. No school, no work, just a long winter vacation—maybe even my last—back at home before graduating. I was actually having great success exploring my new "muscles" by getting at what I thought was beautiful and/or worthwhile. I've always wanted to be sort of a Renaissance Woman (at least a Jane of All Trades), and as late in the game it may be to finally really know how poetry works, and despite its not really gelling with my aims for pre-med, when else am I going to get the chance? I can make a whole universe for myself from a few words or notes or lines, a world free from the endless (and mostly depressing) medical jargon of chondrosarcomas and ovarian hypoplasias, at least for a few weeks. Gross anatomy—as fascinating as it can be—IS called gross for a reason, after all. And it's not healthy for

anybody to focus solely on that kind of stuff anyway; a true ideal-world wouldn't have any of those visceral terms or their real-life equivalents—even less extreme things like blood-blisters and ingrown toenails—; a true, beautiful world would tick smoothly and flow—"Rrrrgh..." And then the colon cramps started, and before I even realized it, I had just spent thirteen hours tinkering with a subpar maiden-voyage chord-composition in MuseScore without really eating anything "good" at all the entire day: The perfect recipe for a colonic logjam. After a harsher-than-usual BM, I went out for a cautious walk (more like a minesweep) around my block, now coated white as a thrashed tongue—ice was everywhere beneath my feet, and what used to take three minutes to run to the end of my street now took fifteen minutes of pitiful penguin-shuffling. An anathema experience—to say nothing of the chill which was just as bitter—that made me feel dumb for even trying, "pretending" it was even close to being okay-enough outside... Repeat this cycle of desk-bound deep-diving into poor diet into abdominal cramps into progressively unsatisfying exertions, and you get the kind of scenario that drives a (not to brag, but: very) healthy twenty-two-year-old woman to mall-walk every day like a goddamn senior citizens.

Collection-walk, technically. "Malls" are an extinct idea—"collections," commercially and linguistically, are unmistakably the next link in the chain of concrete capitalistic cathedrals. I always loved roving through malls. In middle school, it was such a rush to out-of-the-blue see a friend, or eye a teacher in the wild, or just plain people-watch. As we got older and earned our licenses, my friend-group's default meet-up spot would always be the the local mall, and, solitarily pacing around Seamerstreet today, I've reminded myself of some of those more subtle moments of ours: Scrounging for change underneath vending machines to throw away into the fountain; a friend realizing they've forgotten their phone in a changing room, and the mad, adventurous panic of us all racing back to retrieve it; the sneaking around into the mall's then-closed-off mini-cinema, only to instantly regret it and become paranoid at having been security-camera-recorded and getting sent to prison... Fuck me, is this what it means to get older? To "reminisce" about our gooey teenage-girl stuff? I haven't even had contact with any one of them in, like, over three years now... That's different career paths, for you, I guess...

So, yeah, exposition or whatever over: Every day I walk around Seamerstreet for at least two hours in order my fucking colon doesn't turn into a stopped-in-traffic cement-mixer. I started off listening to audiobooks on my consumer-brisk circumambulations, treating the place like one big track, but I've

since relegated Brontë to the car stereo; I've grown fond of the "vox mallana"—the mishmash-overlay of one storefront's speakers' trashy pop-music over its neighbor's; the cooing of young parents to their unruly offsprings; the sneaker-skittering of grinning up-to-no-good teenagers probably getting more of a workout than I am... It's chill; I like it here. And also—yeah, it's no lake-front horizon at the park, but—Seamerstreet is MASSIVE. I was listening to this philosophy podcast, and there's this phrase about 'not being able to be in the same river twice', or something; it has to do with how the world is always changing. Seamerstreet is, like, a river of bloodstreams—it's rare to see the same person again. In that way, it reminds me a lot of university—I big ol' revolving-door organ. Replace the carrels and classrooms with shops, and violá—it's the same hemogloblastic story of deposit and withdraw, an exchange of paper and plastic for cloth and cologne, intakes on top of outakes, fluid-fueled as the hydroneumatics of the elevator-flanked fountain in structure #1, up and down and back and forth—clockwork.

I think thinking about things this way is the perfect in-between between vigorous exercise & lost-in-thought dreaming—a kind of blurry motion that pulls you in as much as you push from it... Speaking of pushing...

Out of all the small comforts in the world, (and yes, this includes women) perhaps none of them are more important than taking a good dump. Sweet equilibrium. Don't mess it up now by going for an Auntie Annie's Pretzel or anything, lol. God, fastfood's so disgusting to me now... Now that I know what it can—what it does to your...—I eye a family of some overweight collection-goers—I wish they could see what I see, see the interplay between balances in their own "collections"...

I find penny on the ground—heads-up; minted my birth year. I stroll over to the façade-marble aquamarine fountain-pool: "Please let everyone see what I see," I say in my head, and flip it in, breaching the membrane of the pool's surface tension and injecting its mettalic optimism into the sanguine-blue solution.

Immediately, just as the coin deliers a muffled clink at the bottom of the empty basin, something strange happens—the lights go dark. The bright, red-&-green-themed tinsel festooned all around extinguishes itself, replaced by a meager soft-blue light. I look up, and see the full moon hanging out above the glass roof, drooping its beams on me... and me alone. I'm naked, but there's no

one to see... No metrosexual IT guys on their dates; no wannabe-valley-girls wandering with their cliques; no sunglassed out-of-place Texas-hat-wearers... They're all gone. Seamerstreet's empty—shuttered. I another pain in my abdomen, sharper than before.

END

‘Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection’ Critiques

3/3 // No.24162323

>>24162319

>Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection.

Really entertaining and amusing read, the way you write is endearing and feels very natural, makes the narrator feel like a real person with no effort. The one downside is that the prompts aren't really explored at all until the end, and to me at least only the illusion/reality prompt, and done too quickly and without deeper development, so it feels kind of hamfisted. But ignoring the prompts, this one felt like the most enjoyable to read.

{REPLY} ineptia // No.24163351

>>24162323

Thank you, anon. It means a lot, especially your saying that last part at the end (I'm also still kinda recovering from what you said at the beginning 0_o).

>done too quickly and without deeper development

It doesn't feel right to put-into-words defend/concede how others read my piece (idk, I'm being a silly purist or something rn but I probably won't be tomorw), but I will say that the "done too quickly" part is spot on --> I wrote the whole thing in under three hours from when I believed time was up, and even had to do some other crazy things within that time. The fact that I can just "activate" and produce something somebody thinks is worthwhile, without my having time enough to even spellcheck, might actually some of the most important feedback I think I've ever received; it definitely boosts my confidence

—so time to fly into the sun.

But I will dearly take your critique(, and hopefully others to follow, all) into consideration, as, after this contest is over, I do plan to "swell" my piece and make a textbox/readaloud-audio Flash for /f/ out of it.

Thank you again, anon, not just for giving words on my words, but one everyone else's too.

GiovanniDrogo // No.24164351

>Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection.

ineptia

I think maybe you need to reign in your punctuation a little bit. I like ellipses and em-dashes too, but when there is and ellipsis, em-dash, parentheses, compound-word, ALL CAPS or colon on every line it can be a bit distracting. Not knocking it, I just think it would be more impactful and stylish to be slightly more deliberate with your punctuation.

slightly reminiscent of DFW in parts.

be more selective with word choice. words/phrases like: jeez, plumbing without hiccups, 'like,' dump, lol, etc..

I get using them if that is the specific character voice you are aiming at, but just something worth paying close attention too during edits.

Overall, I liked it. The little tangents are a strongpoint, I could imagine you stretching those tangents out into entire paragraphs or pages if you wrote something longer and it would sound good.

As a rule, I would take out all of the fucks, goddamns, shits, etc.. I think its hard to work vulgarity into good prose well, and when its done wrong it stands out a lot, to me cheapens the writing. It's clear you are actually putting thought into your sentences and writing good prose, so I would at least take a second to consider if throwing in a 'fuck,' or 'goddamn' as some kind of flourish is really worth it.

Same rule for alliteration. 'concrete capatlistic cathedrals'

I do the same thing, but I thinks its mostly a senseless flourish that more often that not comes off wrong.

im sensing some disconnect between the young lady's word choice. It just feels slightly out of place to me that a well-educated, go getter, med school, marathon running, poetry reading type of girl with a penchant for philosophizing would say some of the things she said. A bit of whiplash at points.

kind of gross you're making me read about shit and constipation...

a bit confused by the last paragraph.

i liked it, you've got style.

Emilia // No.24164168

>>24159895

Ineptia

First impressions:

I like the THUMPS prose play.

I feel like there's a lot of character exposition. A better way to do this is to have the character act—cast them in a drama instead of just having the character describe themselves, because it doesn't feel dissonant enough.

I feel like the story should begin at 'collection-walk.'

LOL—the 'so yeah, exposition over' felt like it was speaking to me. Not in a good way. At least you're self-aware enough.

I'm getting really bored. This feels like the beginning of a novel or something, not a short story.

Final impressions:

Feels like a story you've already written, maybe an excerpt from a larger piece, that you've submitted. Not sure how it fits the prompt at all. Way too much exposition for something so short. There is no satisfying end, no approach that gives me that gut-punch feeling, which I really think short stories need to do to separate themselves from novel excerpts.

I think the writing is good but really just quite boring for the context—a lot of exposition, a lot of telling. I feel like your prose is very well considered, but you just need to get a sense of drama in your writing, a sense of tension to bring the prose to earth. You can't just exist inside a mind the whole time, especially when the prompt is to explore reality and illusion, not just illusion.

{REPLY} ineptia // No.24165903

[Since I have some more characters to work with here, I'll also say thank-you! for your impressions on my own thing and give a short response:

>Feels like a story you've already written, maybe an excerpt from a larger piece, that you've submitted.

Truly, I both came up with the idea & wrote the whole thing within three hours on Monday of when I believed the submit deadline was.

I didn't even know this contest existed until the night before, as I was preoccupied with my own "contest" during that whole weekend >>24153544.

>Not sure how it fits the prompt at all.

An hour before the poll closes I'll post a "disclosure"/"spoiler" for what my thematic/prompt-specific intentions were for the piece.

>you just need to get a sense of drama in your writing, a sense of tension to bring the prose to earth

Great advice! I will search for this element to install into my piece—I've already got a few ideas that automatically hone in on what I was attempting to get at.

Thanks for critiquing me + everyone else :) I hope you appreciated my thoughts on your piece!]

trippo // No.24166873

>>24159895

>Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection.

On first look, I was going to say that you should break up that massive first paragraph but having since read it I realise it wouldn't really work any other way. Be careful with all these run-on sentences. Evidently the MC is meant to be quite rambling, almost ADHD, but in a couple of sentences seemed to lose track

of where exactly they were going. Similarly you use a huge number of dashes. "Constipation" would have been a fine title all by itself (though not necessarily the most attractive) and gotten across the backed-up nature of the story. There's been a trend of long sentence titles in these tales. Didn't feel I really understood the ending, but that's on me. Is Seamerstreet abandoned and she just hallucinated otherwise? As a final point: the random "lol" in the 5th paragraph was unneeded.

mintjulia // No.24167862

>Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamestreet Collection.
It's always fun to see how writers approach streams of consciousness, and I enjoyed reading this one, though at times I was surprised by how quicky it jumped between topics and scenes, perhaps in a realistic way, depending on your intentions, but still a bit disjointed. A lot of entertaining crunchy turns of phrase.

ChineseDracula // No.24168546

>Constipation
Not sure what to make of then ending, or how I feel about a poop story, but I feel like we're missing information on the back end. Like a few more scenes after the mall shifts would add some direction to the story.

ineptia // No.24168634

Once in a blue moon, you find an oasis in a boiler room --> So, midst all the surrounding pressure, thanks to all for being so cool!
Hope to read you all again next month :)

Spoilers below for what I was going for in my story, "Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection":

The key is the last line:

>I another pain in my abdomen, sharper than before.

(Think: 'Fight Club' --> "I am Jane's Uterus" / "I am Joe's Prostate")

There never was a "Seamerstreet Collection" (bustling or "shuttered") -->

She flipped her viewpoint "internally" and it was all her body.

That comforting, running-like-clockwork setting was her metaphorical ideal she created of her body actually working properly, when it actually-actually wasn't --> this was NOT (just) a story about "constipation":

She's coping with the truth that her body—or at least parts of it—are inexorably shutting down, just like a shopping mall, despite whatever she optimistically wants to call it—e.g. a "collection".

She uses her creativity, her nostalgia, even her own self-gaslighting, to create a beautiful and worthwhile experience for herself when she's unable to do the thing she default-loves --> running, maybe even attending school.

She, as a real person, is indeed gunning for pre-med, and excruciatingly knows all about the torture she's in for with whatever-it-is she's got:

>it's not healthy for anybody to focus solely on that kind of stuff anyway

THIS is the essence of the reality-vs.-illusion-/unreliable-narrator-ness that brings her to "Seamerstreet":

>a (not to brag, but: very) healthy twenty-two-year-old woman

>what used to take three minutes to run to the end of my street now took fifteen minutes of pitiful penguin-shuffling.

There is no "winter" forcing her indoors, slowing her down—it's a "dying season" inside her body.

How serious is what she's going through? I wanted to make that unclear—I added these lines to broaden/allow all the possibilities/interpretations:

>just a long winter vacation—*MAYBE EVEN MY LAST*—back at home before graduating.

>I've always wanted to be... / as late in the game it may be... / when else am I going to get the chance?

She's trying to tackle so many disparate disciplines at once, almost like her time's running out.

Her exact affliction could be anything, but she specifically brought up "ovarian hypoplasia" when referring to medical jargon (which could be "it" or just a symptom), and that presents as abdominal cramps/pain; in the end, the "Collection" being "shuttered" could be read as incurring barrenness.

ineptia // No.24168636

>>24168634

cont'd

The soft-blue light of the moon through the roof of glass on her being

naked—in my mind—could be a type of medical scan (the "fountain-membrane-metallic-injection" line was my thinking about MRI/CT-scan "contrasts" which are yucky dyes you drink that stick to things inside your body in order to be sensor-detectable (a metal like Gadolinium can be an ingredient).

Medical/anatomical metaphors are everywhere; I was even trying to do it with the elevators flanking the coin-pool, a kind of fallopian/uterus architecture.

Even the place-name "Seamerstreet" was supposed to evoke a "sewing-up" of a surgical incision (I have one from a broken bone surgery it kinda looks like a street).

I tried "injecting" medical words as much as I could in describing the "Collection" to link it to the body/organs/cells; she even refers to the overweight collection-goers' bodies as "collections."

But: I FAILED! I don't think anyone read it as this.

I was basically coming up with all these ideas as I was writing the piece, all under the span of three hours, all just to write SOMETHING to enter-in before the deadline of this comp I had just learned about the night before—I wanted to challenge myself and see if I could take a big swing, really make something this complex ex nihil in one sitting, and—while I think I was actually able to scare up some decent prose on-command, in some places here & there—the grand effect I was going for "seams" to have utterly, fantastically failed to connect... but that's okay! :)

If this had been a more simplistic prompt, I bet I would have been more tamped-down, more successful on the "interpretation" front given the constraints I found myself under. Now that I know about this neat venue, I'll be here bright and early for the comp come March. Yay.

{REPLY} trippo // No.24168992

>>24168634

>>24168636

Okay, that's interesting.

Now you've expanded on it I can see what you were trying to go for, but the problem with the implementation is that you just don't really hint at it at all in the story. An idea this wild and abstract isn't something the reader would naturally suggest to themselves. Similarly I don't think the name 'Seamerstreet' is something which would immediately suggest 'surgery' to readers, and as you say it's stems more from a personal association on your part. In spite of knowing

the prompt was about delusions and unreliability, I still just kind of took it at face value that this was a story about a harried young woman in an actual, physical shopping mall. There must be a way of implementing your idea/theme into the story more overtly without immediately giving the game away.

{REPLY} Anonymous // No.24169356

>>24168634

Wow, I would've never seen that. Maybe I read your story too quickly but it's awesome how you could write all this in such a short time and give it such sharply distinct exoteric and esoteric meanings. Leo Strauss would love this.

Fear of God

by trippo

You see, I didn't steal it. I didn't steal anything at all and that's God's truth. Not God's honest truth, though. Even God lies. Just ask Abraham. No, I shouldn't say that.

I'd never steal from them. I've been going there every Sunday since I moved to town, very diligently. I love-- loved Canon Siddeley like as if he was my own father. I suppose in a sense that's the point of the job, but you know what I mean, of course. I couldn't ever steal from him. Or anyone, for that matter. And really, who'd steal from a church?

Like I told you, I only came in that evening to say some prayers. I'd had a tough day and I wanted some relief. In fact the whole week had been tough. Usually I would have only stuck to Sundays, but that day I felt like I needed this. You know, there really is something about getting religion. If you'd have asked me when I was fifteen I'd have told you I'd never in a thousand years go to church. I'd never thought it could be so comforting.

That's the word. 'Comforting'. Like it's some peaceful blanket. Are you religious at all?

Okay. So I went into the church, I don't recall seeing anything off or out of place. Nothing unusual. In any case I don't remember much at all. Like I said, it had been a really tough day. Tough week. Just felt like all I could think of was myself. Didn't feel too well about it, which is why I came along in the first place, but I wasn't paying attention much to the outside world. I'd hardly made the drive over. Wasn't driving dangerous or anything like that, mind. Just felt so out of it.

Oh, what was wrong? Ah, well. I haven't even given it a second thought since. With all else that's happened now, it just seems so silly. What was it exactly? Right, of course:

It was at work. I work at a perfume counter, just in one of those small expensive boutique places. You probably have the name already. I used to work in Debenhams, the one in the shopping centre, had been there for years, but you know how that turned out. But anyway, my point is, I'm used to it. I know my job. What had happened was this other girl I work with at the counter had a real go at me that day. And I mean a real, proper, go at me, like she's any better than me. Only reason she thinks she can give me shit is because she was there before me, and because our manager gives me a hard time sometimes as well. Even though she's hardly even half my age! It's so ridiculous.

I'm sorry. I was... frustrated, that day. Guess I still am. It's a quiet shop most of the time, since we're a little out of the way, so this girl – Lucy Mitchell, her name is, if you want to look her up too – this girl just starts nattering on about everything I'm apparently getting wrong. And no one's coming in so she just goes on and on for literally hours. And all Lucy was saying about me was just regurgitated from what she'd heard our boss saying. Not one single original thought. Just accusations and nagging and hate. "You didn't clean this with the right spray, you didn't ring that up on the till right, I'm going to talk to Janice". On and on, almost the whole day. So yes, I had a go at her too when we closed. Quite rightly. It was the least she deserved.

I'm not ashamed to admit that. I regret it happened, yes, but I'm not ashamed about it. Besides, I've already cleared it all up with management. They know what happened and it's all fine now. But yes, that's why I was the way that I was when I came to the church.

I didn't see anything. I had my head down when I came in, just because I, ah... I didn't want anybody to see my tears. You know how you can get so bloody mad you just cry? Even when you're not even sad? It was that. I just kept my head down and went forwards. All I was focussing on was my own footsteps. That's all I heard. It's a good sound, with all the stone floor, brick walls, and that big old roof. Great sound. I just strode straight up to the altar. I didn't think about it much, or look up. I've been there enough times to know the place like the back of my hand. People don't mind me there. I'm a regular.

No, I didn't see the collection plate. I swear on my life. As God is my witness, I did not see the plate on the altar. At all. One hundred percent. I suppose it was there before, but like I said, I wasn't paying attention to anything

else. I just wanted to pray and calm down and then I was going to leave.

I... don't really want to tell you what I was praying about. It's between me and Him. That's kind of the whole point, you know?

Fine. Fine, okay. If you need to know, then yes, I was praying for some... solution to my job and that Lucy. I don't like working there but especially hate working there along with her. That's all. It was bitter, but that's all.

I really don't know why Canon Siddeley thought I was going for the collection. Like I said, I would never do that. The church, and him, before all this happened, has done so much for me. Without them, I don't know where I'd be. I mean, I dunno. I don't know what I think about it now. This whole situation is just... I dunno. Maybe Andy thought it looked like that 'cause of the way I was kneeling. I think he came out from the side room, you know, just to the left of the lectern. All I was doing was praying, but I guess it must have looked different to him, because I remember all of a sudden hearing these footsteps slamming against the stones right towards me. Nearly jumped out of my skin. Certainly that didn't help how I was feeling, let me tell you.

Well yes, Andy's a little old, but he's still a big guy. Look – I'm not exactly a very tall woman. It is intimidating. He's storming up In my state as well, can you blame me for how I reacted? Jesus, I actually thought it was some rapist for a second. Not that he was. It just-- it seriously gave me such a fright.

Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, it's been hard.

No. Absolutely not! I did not attack him first. He grabbed my arm – really quite forcefully, actually – and dragged me up by my elbow, hard, right back away from the altar. Of course I kicked out at him. I think that's how the plate got knocked to the floor and all the cash went everywhere. I panicked. He assaulted me, if anything. I know, I know, I'm not pressing charges, but I'm just saying, that's what he did. I think I've still got the bruises, and my legs are all scraped. Stone slabs hurt.

Okay. You know what I'm going to say, and I know you don't believe it. I can't blame you for that, at all – but it's the truth. So. I'll repeat it, for your sakes. I don't care if you don't believe it. But it's what happened. I certainly wouldn't come up with something like this by myself. Alright, I'll just tell you what I

already told the other two:

Andy – Canon Siddeley – is dragging me back down the church to the exit. He’s holding onto me tight. There’s nobody else there, even though I’m making a lot of noise. At this point I think Andy still thought I was robbing him, so he’s ranting about me, quote, “defiling this sacred house,” end quote. That’s all I can directly remember. I’m afraid I didn’t catch much of what he said. I was just focussed on struggling, panicking. He had a surprisingly strong grip for an old priest. He’s kind of shaking me back and forth, shouting down at me with this thundering fire-and-brimstone voice. He’s right in my face and I’m just terrified, honestly almost freaking out from all that’s happened, and I’m kicking back and forth and trying to break free but, he just keeps holding on. I think I may have clipped him a few times as well, not deliberately, but that only made him hold on tighter. I don’t know what came over him. I probably never will. We’re halfway down the aisle, he’s still dragging me backwards, when I kind of notice something weird with the cross on the altar. There’s sunlight coming through the window, quite a strong beam, like something out of a cartoon, landing on the cross and only the cross. I know I said I was out of it earlier, coming into the church, but I remember it had been so grim and grey the entire day. You’d know that as well. And Andy saw the light too, because he sort of trailed off on his ranting, so I know it wasn’t just me. He lets me go – sort of throws me to the ground – and he slowly walks back over to the altar. The cross isn’t just lit up. It’s actually glowing, now. I just half-sat there, trying to catch my breath. I stayed well away but I kept watching.

What happened next is the truth. I know it’s a cliché, but, God is my witness, it’s really the truth. You have to believe me.

So Andy’s right up to the altar. Obviously his back’s to me, so I can’t see what he’s saying or anything. I guess he was probably still pent up. The cross is really, really bright. I almost had to squint. Remember that photo of Notre Dame? After the fire? It was exactly that, except even more so. Andy stops in front of it for a second, like he’s waiting for it to explode or something, and then once it doesn’t he reaches out to touch it. I couldn’t see if he actually did, but as soon as he raises his arm this great shining light comes out of the cross and moves up above the altar. It was like, five metres in the air. This tiny little sunball came out of nowhere and lit up the whole church. You couldn’t even look at it. I-- I thought I was scared before, but this was different. I can’t explain it. It was like this royal terror. I wanted to get up and get right out but I couldn’t.

Ugh, God only knows what Canon Siddeley was thinking. He was right next to it, I think about as petrified as I was. I still couldn't see his face but – I dunno – I thought it seemed like it was talking to him. I didn't hear anything, but it looked like Andy was playing out half a conversation, in silence. I was still on the ground watching him out of the corner of my eye gesturing wildly, almost passionately, completely silent. And I don't know if-- if the light said anything but then after a minute, he – Andy – he just stops. And, and then the light went out. It was like a thunderclap or a bomb going off. It threw me back flat on the ground. The church seems way too dark now. And -- and then I get up, and Canon Siddeley is just a few feet away from me. I think the explosion threw him back too even harder. H-his head had hit one of the pews and split right open. Lord, it was just gushing. That's when I finally ran out.

Ohh, I sound almost crazy. I know what you must think. Same as my boss – all the religious people are crazy, right? But I'm not a liar. I know what I saw. Andy saw it too, if he was here to say it. Though you'd probably be investigating him if he was, considering what his replacement found out about the church funds. The gall of that man, to accuse me of stealing from a pithy little collection bowl when he was spending all that on himself. It sickens me. Honestly, it's a miracle he got what was coming to him.

'Fear of God'

Critiques

3/3 // No.24162323

Overall, I'd say the unreliable narrator than the best was in *The Day I Made Someone Disappear*. With the best reality vs illusion development it's kind of difficult to say but if I had to pick one, probably *A Week From the Diary of Sasaki Yume*. The story that got both prompts done well enough, probably *Emma*. Going to be hard to choose which one to vote for.

Emilia // No.24164168

>>24160034

First impressions:

Nice voice—easy read. Good rhythm.

Maybe a bit too colloquial, though, with all the Ohs and Rights and Okays.

I like the introduction of Lucy.

I do think the voice is a little too self-conscious. Who is the narrator talking to? I like the unreliability coming through, but I think the self-consciousness is a bit of a ham-fisted way to portray it.

Final impressions:

The more I read it, the more I ask: Who is the narrator talking to? In what position are you placing the narrator?

“I know you don't believe it?”

Who is you here? Because you introduce this 'audience,' it needs to be played with more. Otherwise, it feels more like this is writing to be read by a reader. I would have liked the introduction of the audience to be the tool that highlighted the dissonance between reality and illusion, as opposed to the self-consciousness being the main driver of her unreliability.

I think it's written well—the prose matches the voice, which is great. But I think it needs a third dimension. You've got a crazy woman who steals something and tries to deny it. You've got two dimensions here: the narrator and the truth. I think to make this story great, you need to add that third dimension, whatever it may be, so that the end packs a punch.

Because right now, I can tell pretty much from the beginning, okay, this woman is lying, and I can just read around her descriptions to find out the truth. And the ending just confirmed my suspicion.

trippo // No.24165174

>>24162323

>>24164168

Thanks for the critique, anons!

The story really just needed another pass to properly tie it all together, but I was right up against the deadline so I rushed through without an edit. If it's rambling and confused, that's exactly why.

I'd have gone back to build up the actions and character of the narrator more coherently if I had the time. Originally I was going to make the incident at work more dramatic/violent as foreshadowing what might be her potential to murder but ultimately left that more implied, which I think made the diversion a little redundant. My overall intention with the narrator was that she's the kind of woman who stirs up shit and then blames everyone else for her own faults and problems – don't think that quite came across in the final piece. Pleased to hear you liked the narrative voice well enough, though.

I'd be interested to know what each of you made of the climactic visitation, since neither of you mentioned it in your posts. Again, I would have gone back to the beginning and dropped some hints to it there if I could. As is, feels to me like it comes too much out of nowhere. I tried to play with the idea that perhaps there really WAS some sort of angel which came and smote the priest, and the woman actually isn't at fault vs. the more realistic version, being that she dashed the priest's brains out herself and is covering it up with a mad story – once more, not sure how well I sold either one. It's far from the greatest thing I've ever written but it came out better and more enjoyable a process than I

expected.

mintjulia // No.24167862

>The Fear of God

The buildup seemed a bit long, but I liked the counterplay between the colloquial style of narration and the subject of the story. I felt like the main character could have been fleshed out with a bit more detail aside from the main scene.

trippo // No.24168992

>>24167862

>>24168546

Thank you for the compliments, anons.

ineptia // No.24168634

I voted; I read all the stories at least twice~

Even with the "contest" about to be over, I've 9 critiques remaining, and I still intend on doing them and posting them in this thread within the next week (if this thread disappears then they'll be posted in /wg/).

Once in a blue moon, you find an oasis in a boiler room --> So, midst all the surrounding pressure, thanks to all for being so cool!

Hope to read you all again next month :)

Spoilers below for what I was going for in my story, "Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection":

The key is the last line:

>I another pain in my abdomen, sharper than before.

(Think: 'Fight Club' --> "I am Jane's Uterus" / "I am Joe's Prostate")

There never was a "Seamerstreet Collection" (bustling or "shuttered") --> She flipped her viewpoint "internally" and it was all her body.

That comforting, running-like-clockwork setting was her metaphorical ideal she created of her body actually working properly, when it actually-actually

wasn't --> this was NOT (just) a story about "constipation":

She's coping with the truth that her body—or at least parts of it—are inexorably shutting down, just like a shopping mall, despite whatever she optimistically wants to call it—e.g. a "collection".

She uses her creativity, her nostalgia, even her own self-gaslighting, to create a beautiful and worthwhile experience for herself when she's unable to do the thing she default-loves --> running, maybe even attending school.

She, as a real person, is indeed gunning for pre-med, and excruciatingly knows all about the torture she's in for with whatever-it-is she's got:

>it's not healthy for anybody to focus solely on that kind of stuff anyway

THIS is the essence of the reality-vs.-illusion-/unreliable-narrator-ness that brings her to "Seamerstreet":

>a (not to brag, but: very) healthy twenty-two-year-old woman

>what used to take three minutes to run to the end of my street now took fifteen minutes of pitiful penguin-shuffling.

There is no "winter" forcing her indoors, slowing her down—it's a "dying season" inside her body.

How serious is what she's going through? I wanted to make that unclear—I added these lines to broaden/allow all the possibilities/interpretations:

>just a long winter vacation—*MAYBE EVEN MY LAST*—back at home before graduating.

>I've always wanted to be... / as late in the game it may be... / when else am I going to get the chance?

She's trying to tackle so many disparate disciplines at once, almost like her time's running out.

Her exact affliction could be anything, but she specifically brought up "ovarian hypoplasia" when referring to medical jargon (which could be "it" or just a symptom), and that presents as abdominal cramps/pain; in the end, the "Collection" being "shattered" could be read as incurring barrenness.

ineptia // No.24168636

>>24168634

cont'd

The soft-blue light of the moon through the roof of glass on her being naked—in my mind—could be a type of medical scan (the "fountain-membrane-metallic-injection" line was my thinking about MRI/CT-scan "contrasts" which are yucky dyes you drink that stick to things inside your body in order to be

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But: I FAILED! I don't think anyone read it as this.

I was basically coming up with all these ideas as I was writing the piece, all under the span of three hours, all just to write SOMETHING to enter-in before the deadline of this comp I had just learned about the night before—I wanted to challenge myself and see if I could take a big swing, really make something this complex ex nihil in one sitting, and—while I think I was actually able to scare up some decent prose on-command, in some places here & there—the grand effect I was going for "seams" to have utterly, fantastically failed to connect... but that's okay! :)

If this had been a more simplistic prompt, I bet I would have been more tamped-down, more successful on the "interpretation" front given the constraints I found myself under. Now that I know about this neat venue, I'll be here bright and early for the comp come March. Yay.

{REPLY} trippo // No.24187160

>>24186188

>>24186194

>If the above are digs at Catholic orthodox rites & customs, like, bravo, Trippo—I was this close to consigning this whole Debenhams backstory to unnecessary, but these tough-to-notice details (if they are actually intentionally planted) bring the story full-circle.

Well of course I HAVE to say it's all intentional now, don't I? That's a brilliant analysis.

>If you have a character who talks cold, in order the reader isn't "freezing", conterpoint/contrast them with a character who talks hot. It's the opposite in your story—your MC is [so] overflowing[/boiling] with nerves and sporadic digressions, that intermittently hearing the measured retorts of a frosty

interviewer[/interrogator] would go a long way in making your MC seem more on-edge by contrast, as well as helping to introduce a structure and [some] cool-downs to your MC's tall tale.

This is some very good advice and a memorable way of putting it, so thank you. I'll need to keep it in mind for the future. I thought leaving the interviewer as an implication would be interesting, but I think you're right that it perhaps doesn't quite work as simply as that.

>Pressing charges against whom? "Andy" is dead, right? Does she mean the Church? If so, I think you should explicitly state that that's an option on the table for her

>is just so... [to borrow a word she used] cliché (again, not necessarily pejorative), like, sad and disappointing that that's all there is to her

>I always crave some small glimmer of hope or beauty or reform in narratives as [open-and-shut] bleak as this one. All I feel I'm walking away with is --> wow, how small of some people... If you could add any details [at all] as to why your MC is like this[,] that maybe could help

Absolutely agree with your points here. If I'd had the time for an edit, I would have tried to tighten up the characterisation and add some more depth/details to her. The narrator is slightly too two-dimensional as it is.

>congratulations on crafting a very odious character, trippo, someone who invents miracles to cover up the mundanity of evil.]

Thank you -- that's what I was aiming for.

POLL RESULTS

2 VOTES (WINNERS)

- I swear I saw the breath leave his body — meteor
- The Day I Made Someone Disappear — Emilia
- My Dear Friend Jenny — Beineberg
- A trillion lifetimes of agony compressed into a singular, blinding instant — Jeff

1 VOTE

- The Town — Hogan
- What you need to know is that I'm in trouble, and I'm too scared to be alone — BicFlair
- Emma — Pancakesyrup
- Weavers — mintjulia

0 VOTES

- The Myth of the Machine — GiovanniDrogo
- Phantom Hunger — Logan
- A Week From the Diary of Sasake Yume — ChineseDracula
- Taste for Blood' — VampDaddy
- Secret Spot — MaMaMi
- My Immortal' — Abes
- Zachary' — Z. N.
- Constipation—that's what brought me to the Seamerstreet Collection — ineptia
- The Fear of God — trippo

yodo // No.24169033

the results are in.

1st: Meteor, Emilia, Beineberg, Jeff
2nd: Hogan, Bicflair Pancakesyrup, mintjulia

If you aren't named, you received zero votes.

We had 12 votes come in. It's a shame not everyone who submitted actually voted, but we got some great feedback and i think the large spread of votes we have here, with no clear winner, just goes to show the level of quality with these writers.

Next time I will do rank voting with three top places to choose.

Also, i am the writer for emilia! i went anon for submitting to avoid any conflict in the lead up to the vote but as you'll see i've made everything transparent and didn't thumb the scale. I voted for My dear Friend Jenny in the end, i thought that story tackled the theme and prompt really well and made me want to see that voice cast in a longer story! Thanks to those who voted and gave feedback. It was a lot of fun and the quality was so high.

First Saturday of every month, we'll run it again. Friday the post will go up to prepare for the saturday.

END NOTE

Everything in this "book" came from these two threads:

- <https://warosu.org/lit/thread/24152404>
- <https://warosu.org/lit/thread/24166490>

The formatting of:

Anonymous // 1234567890

QWERTYUIOP

was fortunately NOT all* done by hand—I wrote a script to format the posts this way. For anyone who wants to easily emulate it, here are the steps I used to turn these two threads into one .txt, from which I selected posts to paste here.

*Of course the whole "{REPLY}" & "-----" thing was done by hand, as well as a bit of ommiting things in chosen posts which weren't critique-related).

1. Go the first thread, then select all (Ctrl+A / Cmd+A)
2. Dump the whole page's copied text into a .txt and call it "LitPosts_ONE.txt"
 - Do the same for the second thread—"LitPosts_TWO.txt"
3. Download Processing or any other javaScript compiler
4. Make a new folder & project--> I called mine "litFormatter.pde"/"litFormatter"
5. Move the two .txts to the project folder.
6. COPY/PASTE these lines of code I wrote into the empty .pde:

\\BEGINNING OF CODE

String divider =

"

_";

void setup(){

```

String[] threadNumbers = {"ONE", "TWO"};
String[] fullList = new String [threadNumbers.length];
for(int t = 0; t < threadNumbers.length; t++){
    String thread = threadNumbers[t];
    String[] lines = loadStrings("LitPosts_" + thread + ".txt");
    String[] eachPost = {};
    String all = join(lines, "Ω");
    while(all.indexOf("Ω ") > -1){
        all = all.substring(0, all.indexOf("Ω ") + 1) + all.substring(all.indexOf("Ω ")
+ 5);
    }
    String allCopy = all;
    int postStart = all.indexOf("Ω>>Ω");

    while(postStart > -1){
        postStart = allCopy.indexOf("Ω>>Ω") + 1;
        allCopy = allCopy.substring(postStart);
        if(allCopy.indexOf("Ω>>Ω") > -1){
            int postEnd = allCopy.indexOf("Ω>>Ω");
            String thisPost = allCopy.substring(0, postEnd);
            eachPost = append(eachPost, thisPost);
        }
        else{
            postStart = -1;
        }
    }

    int a = 0;
    while(a < eachPost.length){
        //println(eachPost[a]);
        a++;
    }

    //saveStrings("postsAsLines_" + thread + ".txt", eachPost);

    String neat = "";
    for(int i = 0; i < eachPost.length; i++){
        String copyPost = eachPost[i];
        String name = copyPost.substring(4, copyPost.indexOf(" "));

```

```

    String number = copyPost.substring(copyPost.indexOf("No."),
copyPost.indexOf("No.") + 11);
    String content = copyPost.substring(max(0, copyPost.indexOf("ΩΩ")+1,
copyPost.length()));
    String[] copyContent = split(content, "Ω");
    for(int p = 0; p < copyContent.length - 1; p++){
        copyContent[p] = "\t" + copyContent[p];
    }
    content = join(copyContent, "Ω");
    neat += name + " // " + number + "Ω" + content + divider + "ΩΩ";
}
String[] neatList = split(neat, "Ω");
saveStrings("OrganizedLitPosts_" + thread + ".txt", neatList);
fullList = concat(fullList, neatList);
}
saveStrings("COMBINED_LitPosts.txt", fullList);
}

//END OF CODE

```

7. Then simply press play. "COMBINED_LitPosts.txt" will appear in the project folder (as well as the the threads as seperate .txts for backup).
8. Done. Now all that's left is to select which posts to copy-paste into the .pdf.

With these few things in mind:

- Of course, the "divider" length can be added to or subtracted from to match specific font/page sizes etc.
- I kinda slapdashed this String-editor together, so it's not perfect (it probably looks laughable to anyone who's a pro at this kind of stuff)—One quirk it has is that if the name field has a space in it, the name will be cut short. E.g. "Z. N." becomes "Z. ", but luckily that was the only exception and it was easy to manually fix.
- I'm noticing an unnecessary indent is included in the line between the name+number & the post's content, but I'm chosing my battles and letting it stay for now.

A NOTE ON THE TECHNICALS:

- The body-text font is 12 pt PT Serif.
- The word-processing software I used was LibreOffice.
- The text from Rentry was most-if-not-all-ly copy/paste-ed into TextEdit as plaintext first THEN copy/paste-ed here into LibreOffice, so as to avoid yucky formatting artifacts. I say "most-if-not-all-ly" because I THINK I plaintexted over everything I initially directly transfered from Rentry, but, again, the formatting looks okay and I'm picking my battles—next time I know what the correct process is going to be.
 - The biggest liberties I took with the stories, in my capacity as an editor:
 - > Simply adding ">" & "—" to who's speaking in "The Myth of the Machine".
 - > Indenting the overflow lines of BicFlair's piece so the acrostic is more apparent.
 - I tried to preserve all the bold(?)/italics/text-alignment from the original Rentry compilation, but if I missed any I am sorry.
 - In-thread "I voted for" talk was largely excluded from the critiques, unless those statements served as a culmination OF a critique.
 - "Disclaimer" talk was excluded too—if you want a lot more of the conversations/backstories surrounding this competition, just go visit the threads --> I TRIED using my editor's perogative here to just keep it about STORY + CRITIQUE.

For the March Comp "book", I will share the .odt (basically the Word Document, editable version) of this .pdf, so that anyone can use this layout for anything. I am not sharing it now because I would be too embarrassed --> There's SO much sloppiness (hopefully ONLY) under the hood of my layout-sans-page-breaks here—I'd rather just do a better job first. I can clean up my code too. Lots of problems everywhere! But the first step in solving them is at least to know they're there, like --> Next time, be more concise/organized with the End Note!

Had a lot of fun making this, as well as critiquing reading, and—oh yeah—participating as one of the authors, sooooo long ago now it seems—the time I spent writing my piece vs. the time I invested critiquing and making this... is like comparing my legs to a milipede's. But I guess these words here are the tail end.

ineptia
2 / 25 / 2025