

VISIONS OF ALINE

By

Allison King

A Master's Thesis

Submitted to the Department of English

Liberty University

In Fulfillment of the Requirements

For a Master's Degree

13 August 2023

Dedication

*For all the misfits in the world who have ever made mistakes. May we seek God to grieve, grow,
and get better.*

“And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Acknowledgments

First foremost I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him I owe everything to, and my gratitude and awe of Him cannot be expressed in words. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my mentor and professor, Dr. James Latta for his kindness, encouragement, and feedback throughout this sixteen-week process. Without his guidance, I would not have a completed thesis. Additionally, I'd like to offer my appreciation to Professor Ruth Ronk, for being my secondary reader. Her taking the time to read my work, and offering honest, thought-provoking feedback has been invaluable to me. Additionally, this endeavor would not have been possible without Dr. Sarah Rice, who helped me with the thesis process.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to my family who have supported me unconditionally throughout this process of long study nights, nerve-wracking due dates, and seemingly endless assignments. Thank you, mom, for doing my laundry when I had twenty-page papers due and giving me hugs when I shed tears of exhaustion. Thank you, dad, for always saying you are proud of me. Thank you, Poppy, and Nana, for praying for me every single day. Thank you, Ashley and family, for shamelessly bragging about me, even though I do not deserve it. Thank you, Jason, and Skylar, for sending encouraging phone calls my way. Without my family, I would not have been able to live out my dream, and for that, I am endlessly grateful. Gratitude should also go to my friends, who I shared all my crazy story ideas with. Their patience, listening ears, and willingness to read first draft material is commendable.

Lastly, I would like to thank my characters who live rent-free inside my head. Without all of you, my life would be so silent and boring. All your stories have shaped me into who I am today: a passionate dreamer. Thank you for sharing your stories with me.

Table of Contents

Artist Statement: The Hope of Getting Better.....5

Critical Paper: A Novel Rooted in Foreshadowing.....14

Annotated Bibliography.....30

Description of Thesis Sections.....37

Thesis: Visions of Aline.....38

Works Cited.....138

Artist Statement: The Hope of Getting Better

The manuscript I have chosen to write for my thesis is a coming-of-age genre novel titled *Visions of Aline*. *Visions of Aline* is a story I have not been acquainted with for long, but it's only taken eight months for me to realize I wanted to pursue writing chapters of the manuscript for my thesis. The story follows the senior year of two high school rivals from opposing social classes. My Protagonist, Joey Astor is a high-class teenager suffering from Schizophrenia. Feeling like an outcast from the real world, he notices Kaleb right away on his first day at the public high school as a freshman. The antagonist, Kaleb Kane is a low-class bully who does not seem to fear anything, while being feared by all. To cope with his situation, Joey comes under a strong delusion caused by his illness that makes him believe he has the attributes of Kaleb. This causes Kaleb to hate Joey, because the rich kid keeps desperately trying to steal the one title he has. This sparks a four-year long rivalry between the two. While trying to resolve the rivalry before graduation, the two realize the title they are fighting for is pointless and that they are worth more than the labels they and others have given them. My impetus for writing *Visions of Aline* as my dissertation stems from the belief that the characters have important stories that are worth developing the backgrounds and literary contexts of, and putting in the process of researching, while creating a vision of the coming-of-age story that shows the importance of being found in Christ and all the potential he has prepared for us, despite our past or labels.

I became motivated to write *Visions of Aline*, because I believe the characters have stories that are important to tell. More than just a coming-of-age story, the plot has a psychological element to it. While trying to prove who truly deserves the title of the most feared bad boy in town, Joey and Kaleb decide to have five illegal street races and whoever loses the

most admits they are wrong. During the last street race, a crash occurs on an old, condemned metal bridge. The crash causes the bridge to collapse, which tragically ends with several high school students losing their lives. Joey ends up in a mental hospital and Kaleb gets a ten-year prison sentence. Five years after the accident, a psychologist, Dr. Mitchell, approaches everyone who was at the crash site. She presents them with an opportunity to take part in an experimental treatment of collective hypnosis she hopes will cure those involved of their trauma and mental illnesses. Agreeing to go under mass hypnosis, the perpetrators and victims alike go back in time within their minds six months before the crash happens. Without any memory of the accident or what happened afterwards, the patients are given a second chance within their subconscious to make better decisions, and realize they still have much potential for good. Within this plot, I believe there will be great opportunities to bring in thought-provoking and essential conversations. Discussing topics such as growing up, who we are as individuals, why we cling to the labels we and others give ourselves, and whether there is always room to change and grow for the better, will be my focus. This concept is important, because it is a subject I observe often within the youth of our present day. A lot of peer pressure in various mediums is pulling at youth today. Because of societies obsession with labels, adolescents can revolve their whole persona around a title given to them by themselves or others. Labels have power, and they control both Joey and Kaleb in the beginning of the story.

I also believe my impetus for writing *Visions of Aline* stems from the desire to explore the subject of coping with one's own mistakes. Often, youth can be cancelled by their peers and society after mistakes, causing them to spiral. After causing the fatal accident on the bridge, both Joey and Kaleb are left lost. Without hope for a future, they become recluses from society, and give into their insecurities and anger. It is essential to write about characters in fiction that do not

always make the right choices. Making mistakes is a part of life. Displaying a story of how characters can deal with the consequences of their actions and rebuild a better life by asking for forgiveness from God, others, and themselves is needed more in society than ever. My wish to write about Joey and Kaleb getting the chance to rise above their labels, while also realizing they can rebuild from their mistakes with the help of God and their community motivated me to get started with the writing process.

The background of Visions of Aline truly started within the chambers of my mind. Wanting to author this story in the most authentic way possible, I spent most of these past eight months developing not only the plot, but the characters, their individual stories, and how their stories weave together as one. It was important to me that each character has their own stories, background, strengths, and weaknesses. Joey and Kaleb are not the only characters presented with the chance for change. Every character is given the opportunity to grow for better or for worse. So, before I began writing, I wanted to establish the paths of each character. This required a lot of patience, as I wanted the layers of the characters to naturally develop. Creating a Power Point, making step by step plot outlines, and writing out character bios all helped me get to know my characters and the story on a personal level. As the writing process has begun to occur, I have come to know these characters on an even deeper level. It is my belief that for a story to succeed in presenting its message, it must have strong character development. This is something I am striving to do within the writing of this novel, and the background of this story, by starting with the motivations and needs of the characters.

Along with developing the characters and their stories, my process for the work has been to research as much as possible, so I can further understand the subjects I am writing about within Visions of Aline. This story heavily focuses on mental health. My protagonist, Joey has

schizophrenia and has been dealing with the mental illness his whole four years of high school. It is an aspect of his life that motivates the core plot of the story. From the beginning, it has been important for me to present a truthful version of the struggles Joey has with schizophrenia. For research, I have read about schizophrenia on credited medical sites. More than simply understanding the illness better medically, I also read and watched videos of people's individual experiences of living with Schizophrenia, and how they cope with it in their everyday lives. These personal testimonies from individuals have been astronomically helpful when it came to me being able to understand schizophrenia on a deeper level. Just hearing their stories, and their desire to be seen as the same as their peers truly made me respect those who have to live with such a challenging illness every day of their lives. Their stories really resonated with me, since I sensed those same aspects within Joey. After he was traumatically bullied by his childhood friends because of his illness, he wanted nothing more than to be seen as normal. Joey takes on the persona of Kaleb out of pure fear of being looked down upon and hurt again. In his mind, if he is the most feared at school, then he will not ever have to deal with being laughed at again. The research of mental health, specifically schizophrenia, has been so helpful and essential to developing Joey as a person and how he sees the world.

More than just researching mental health, I have also been required to put great emphasis on researching automobiles. Kaleb is a car enthusiast. Too poor to own a car, he started stealing others for joy rides when he was only fourteen. His love for illegal street racing, working on and modifying cars caused me to have to explore a world I knew next to nothing about. From researching how to drive a manual transmission to watching documentaries on the underground world of street racing, I have been slowly learning more about a world that was once foreign to me. Within the story, Kaleb begins to race legally as an amateur in The International Motor

Sports Association, also known as IMSA. Knowing Kaleb would be legally racing within the story, I had to do extensive research on the diverse types of legal racing, and which one would be the most realistic for Kaleb to be able to partake in. Because of my research in both illegal and legal racing, along with automobiles in general, I am becoming more confident in accurately writing this aspect of the story. By researching automobiles, I feel as though I have been able to get to know Kaleb on a more personal level, since cars are the only aspect of his life that brings him any happiness. Whether it be mental health or automobiles, both major aspects of research have helped me understand the story better and my characters.

While mental health and automobiles have been the two major aspects of research within *Visions of Aline*, I have also had to do research on many other aspects of the story. I have delved into the research of hypnosis since it is a strongly mentioned topic of the latter part of the story. More than just heavily mentioned topics from my story, I have also had to research smaller aspects of my novel. From studying horseback riding to bee farms, I have had to research several subjects, so I could write scenes of the story in the most accurate way possible. As a writer who used to hate research when I was younger, I have grown to appreciate the process, especially within the fictional aspect of writing. While some subjects may seem daunting, I have learned that one must use it to create not only a richer story, but one that is accurate and credible. By being willing to research these various and vital subjects, I have been able to start the writing process with confidence. The process for this work of fiction started with the research, and will continue with more research and rewriting, as I strive to create a better story with each draft.

The background and research have all gathered to create a more concrete context of the work. For historical context, my story is set in modern time, but there are some aesthetics inspired by various eras. With the automobiles, there are many cars from the 1960's to the

current time that appear within the story. Gaining much inspiration from books such as *The Outsiders* and films such as *Rebel without a Cause*, I want to create an aesthetic and dialogue style that is slightly inspired by the 1950's and 1960's. This psychological element of the story enables me to be able to morph a modern reality. I wish to do this in a subtle way that is not too obvious, so as not to reveal the plot twist to the reader too soon. However, I believe using historical context in this way will increase the suspense and intrigue of the novel.

For the physical context of the story, *Visions of Aline* is a novel set in a town called Hawthorne. The town is split by a river that rushes right through the middle of it. On the northeast side of town resides the high class. Some of America's most successful business owners live there. On the southwest side of town, resides the low class. These neighborhoods are filled with people who work as housekeepers, chauffeurs, landscapers, nannies etc. for those within the high class. With the classes being quite separate, the high-class adolescents have private academies they attend, while the lower classes go to public schools. The physical context of the story is important because it sets the basis of the story, and the background from which the characters come from.

The situational context of the story begins when separate worlds collide. At the end of middle school, Joey gets kicked out of the prestigious private boy's academy after having outbursts caused by his newly diagnosed schizophrenia. Walking into public high school halfway through his freshman year with his best friend Jace, Joey immediately notices Kaleb. Kaleb is a vicious bully and rebel who breaks as many rules as possible, gets into fights, and is a kleptomaniac who steals cars for leisure joyrides. Kaleb is the most feared bad boy in school and has quite the reputation the whole town gossips about. Viciously bullied at his private school by those he used to consider his friends before he started having terrifying hallucinations and

delusions of schizophrenia, Joey comes under a grand delusion caused by his illness where he is convinced, he is the most feared bad boy in town. Joey starts to mimic Kaleb and genuinely believes the low-class student is the one copying him. This becomes the basis of their rivalry. After the fatal accident occurs, and those involved go under mass hypnosis, the experiment starts to inspire change within the students and others affected. When Joey's hypnosis begins to experience glitches, the subjects find themselves inside of a Hawthorne that resembles the symptoms Joey has from his schizophrenia. This leads the subjects with a horrible foreboding that something bad is going to occur. The situational context is important to the story because it shows the cause of the plot. Without the rivalry between Joey and Kaleb, there would be no story or conflict to resolve.

As for the cultural context of the story, *Visions of Aline* represents a diverse northern American town that is near the east coast. Because of the story being set during a hypnosis subjected to alters, the culture is often inspired by various eras within the construct of buildings and clothing, as mentioned above. When it comes to religion, each character has their own beliefs about God. A character, Elizabeth is presented as a Christian who holds her beliefs close to her heart, while other Christian characters, such as Aline, are presented as those who keep silent about their faith. Joey is an atheist, who does not speak about his disbelief in God, along with many other characters. Kaleb does believe there is a God but is convinced the higher power does not love or care about him. The religious and personal philosophical contexts are important within the story because they support the character's motivations and beliefs. As the story progresses, some characters grow stronger in their beliefs and others begin to doubt and change. Because of these beliefs being presented, a reader should be able to see these individual philosophies grow, change, and become grounded or unraveled throughout the story. Within the

cultural, physical, situational, and historical contexts for Visions of Aline, I am striving to create a cohesive story where all these elements can come together to create the goal of completing a novel that is both compelling and organized.

My vision for Visions of Aline is important to me as a Christian scholar, because at its core it reflects how God wants the best for and from us. Within the story, characters such as Joey, Kaleb, Aline, Elizabeth, etc. all go through change and growth. All are presented with their full potential, and how God can use their lives for good, despite their mistakes of the past. Oftentimes, people try to be the master of their own fate, but human beings are not meant to take the steering wheel. After the crash, Joey and Kaleb must learn to lean on God to push against the negative labels people have given them in both the past and the present. They must learn to humbly accept a new, Christ-given persona and work towards a better future when they wake from the hypnosis. This is an important subject for everyone to contemplate within their own lives. It is easy to get stuck in a rut of accepting the labels people give us or ones we give ourselves. While it is difficult to not give into our own sinful nature, it can be even harder to accept the plan God wants for us, and to give our best to the world and the people in it. I believe youth could benefit from a story that challenges the way they think about themselves and others, and how they can take those labels and build upon them to create a better version of themselves.

More than just to challenge, it is my vision that Visions of Aline provides a source of hope to those who are chained to their past mistakes. Because God always knew we would make mistakes in this life, he never meant for us to wallow in our guilt and become stagnate. Within the stories of both Joey and Kaleb, they are presented with the subjects of accepting the wrong they have done, asking for forgiveness, forgiving themselves, learning from their mistakes, and looking ahead to creating a brighter future. I would love for an individual to read these

character's stories and conclude that they themselves do not have to hold onto the guilt within their past, and that God is always ready to forgive. The overall key themes of *Visions of Aline* are rebuilding from ruins, finding hope, and getting better. These are subjects that I as a Christian scholar believe should be written, because we all can benefit from reflection and striving to move in the direction of a more positive future.

Visions of Aline is a story that has come close to my heart. Because of my love for the characters, I have come to the place where I long to share their stories through the medium of a novel. Their individual and collective stories are important ones to tell and would compel readers to examine the labels they and others stamp on them. I also believe the truthful subject of mental health is an important one to discuss. Joey endures a lot of labels because of his schizophrenia, along with other characters who live with similar illnesses. With the hope of getting better as the subject of this novel, I strive for this story to present the idea that one's life can still be full of wonder, happiness, and joy, despite the struggles that plague them. Throughout this novel, I wish to present the argument that people are simply people, and we are much more alike than we believe. Throughout this process, I also strive to do extensive research within all the subjects I need more knowledge of within the story. Accuracy in research is something I strive for within my writing, and that is why I am placing such emphasis on it. I believe by placing importance on research, I will be able to create a more vivid plot and three-dimensional characters. As much as the story feels alive to me within my head, I wish for that realness to be present to the readers within the written chapters of my novel. More than anything, as a Christian scholar my hope is that the readers are positively impacted by the overall theme and message of the story. My impetus for writing *Visions of Aline* as my dissertation stems from the belief that the characters have important stories that are worth developing the backgrounds and literary contexts of, and

putting in the process of researching, while creating a vision of the coming-of-age story that shows the importance of being found in Christ and all the potential he has prepared for us, despite our past or labels.

Critical Paper: A Novel Rooted in Foreshadowing

There are many important craft elements when it comes to writing and the art of storytelling. Without a plot, there would be no direction or goal. Without characterization, there would be no development to the protagonist, antagonist, and all the other characters in between. Without dialogue, there would be no communication between the characters to stimulate the heart and minds of readers. While these are all essential craft elements to writing fiction, there is another that works subtly just underneath the surface. It has the ability to create the eerie and addictive element of suspense in a story. With flashes of imagery, spoken words, and metaphors, foreshadowing shares tales of future pages, before readers even flip there. While other craft elements come together to create a cohesive story, foreshadowing compels the reader to keep turning pages by littering clues all along the way, until the mystery comes into full bloom. For my own thesis, I have chosen to write chapters of my YA novel, *Visions of Aline*. While I surely will need the other craft elements to construct my story, I believe that foreshadowing will be the important key to telling my story. Without it, I do not believe I will be able to create an essential element of suspense within the coming-of-age genre story. I believe experimenting with a heavy use of foreshadowing within my novel, *Visions of Aline*, is essential to its effective storytelling, because it will give an element of suspense and foreboding, move the plot forward, and mirror the characteristics of the protagonist, while complimenting the low fantasy elements created within the character's mass hypnosis.

To be able to experiment with foreshadowing within my thesis, I first had to understand what foreshadowing was and what it looked like. According to the article "What is Foreshadowing?" by Dr. Evan Gottlieb, who currently works at Oregon State University as a Professor of British Literature, "'Foreshadowing' is a narrative device in which suggestions or

warnings about events to come are dropped or planted” (Gottlieb 1). Within my thesis, I will be writing chapters of a novel from my story *Visions of Aline*. From the beginning, I knew I wanted to use foreshadowing heavily within the story. *Visions of Aline*’s plot is set within a mass hypnosis where the participants temporarily do not have any memories of their futures or the fatal accident that had occurred. All they know and can recall are the memories they have of their adolescence six months prior to the accident. However, Joey’s hypnosis experiences glitches early on. His subconscious starts to awaken and wreaks havoc by unleashing Joey’s schizophrenic symptoms. These symptoms invade his and others’ minds and eventually spread into every corner of the dream world. Within these schizophrenic episodes, Joey starts to see visions of the tragic future that inevitably awaits him. The readers are left in the dark about the future as much as the characters are within the flow of the story’s plot. The goal is for the readers to only receive the same dropped hints as the characters. Foreshadowing is an important aspect of *Visions of Aline* because it will not only just move my plot forward, but also help compel my audience to keep reading. Since I am looking to create elements of suspense, curiosity, and unease within the story, I knew foreshadowing would be a writing craft I would seek to use often. Because I knew foreshadowing was what I needed to create the overall desired feel of my story, I then had to fully understand how to use foreshadowing effectively.

More than simply learning what foreshadowing was, and the ways one can use foreshadowing within their work, I also learned about the diverse types of foreshadowing. According to the scholarly conference paper, “A use of Flashback and Foreshadowing for surprise Arousal in Narrative Using a Plan-Based Approach,” there are two distinct types of foreshadowing:

Foreshadowing, hints of what is to come, gives only implicit or partial information. If foreshadowing is completely implicit, the reader realizes its meaning only later in retrospect. If it is explicit with partial information, the reader is forced to fill in the information gap in their mental representation of the story. This kind of foreshadowing often serves to focus the reader's attention on a specific event. (Bae, Young 157)

Implicit, also known as indirect foreshadowing, is like a subtle breadcrumb here and there scattered throughout a forest. This type of foreshadowing is oftentimes much less obvious than explicit foreshadowing. Implicit foreshadowing flies under the radar of the reader's mind. Without any realization they have just scanned over a future warning or hint of what is to come, the reader does not typically understand the impending doom or projection behind the foreshadowing until after it has occurred. Explicit, also known as direct foreshadowing, is quite the opposite. More than just a subtle hint that something bad could happen in the future, it is a direct warning that openly hints that a plot twist or tragedy will be present towards the middle or end of the novel. Both types of foreshadowing have merit and can be used in different set ups and circumstances when necessary. Like chameleons, both implicit and explicit foreshadowing can be woven into dialogue, plot, narrative, and even within the title of the story. Its changeable nature makes it one of the most versatile writing craft elements. Because of my research based on foreshadowing, I was able to learn about the depth of foreshadowing, and all the different ways it could be used.

Foreshadowing is a tool a writer can use in numerous ways, but some might question why one would even need to insert foreshadowing within their novel. After all, foreshadowing is not a vital organ within the novel's skeletal body like plot, characterization, setting, or dialogue. One could simply leave out foreshadowing and still have a perfectly comprehensible novel. This is

true, and foreshadowing is not always prevalent within all works of fiction. However, one should heavily consider applying foreshadowing, if they are looking to create tension and suspense for an unexpected or crucial happening within the pentacle of their plot. Dr. Gottlieb further explains the use of foreshadowing by stating, “The most common purpose is to generate or increase narrative suspense or tension” (Gottlieb 6). If a writer is seeking to create anticipation and intrigue within their story, foreshadowing is more than an effective tool to get the job done. Carefully crafted foreshadowing can do just as much good within a story as plot, characterization, setting or dialogue, because it can become the driving force of these other craft writing elements. Gottlieb points this out within his article by discussing how foreshadowing strengthens the writer’s use of plot and narrative:

When a piece of foreshadowing shows up early in the narrative, then, it hints at or gestures toward something that is going to take place later in the plot: usually not by giving away precisely what’s going to happen, but by dropping a hint or make an allusion to *something* that’s going to occur down the road, so to speak. We’re being told about it *now* in the narrative, then, to heighten our anticipation and make us want to find out what’s going to happen. (Gottlieb 4)

Within my novel, *Visions of Aline*, I used foreshadowing through the narration of Joey in the very first scene. The tragic accident that occurs before the mass hypnosis takes place on the old Hawthorne metal bridge in his hometown. The condemned bridge is a place of comfort for Joey throughout his adolescence since it is a place where he does not typically experience schizophrenic episodes. Within the opening scene of the novel, Joey’s peaceful morning at the bridge is suddenly shattered by the bridge shaking, catching on fire, and him seeing an older version of himself. The most important part of the scene is that Aline, his friend, is there. She is warning him that

something bad is going to happen, she just does not know exactly what it is yet. By using first person, Joey narrates the story. The reader gets to experience all the protagonist's confusion and fear. He realizes Aline is warning him and that something bad may occur, but he is not sure if he is simply seeing things or if the visions are true. Joey and the audience are being told at the beginning of the story how everything goes wrong in the end, but the goal will be that they both are left teetering on the edge of not knowing what to believe. Joey's narration in the opening chapter of the story conveys a strong instance of foreshadowing, that will hopefully not only spark reader's interest but also move the plot forward.

Throughout *Visions of Aline*, foreshadowing is used to move the plot forward. The plan is to drop several hints and allusions throughout the novel. These allusions drop the hints of what is to come, but it also helps the flow of the novel from chapter to chapter. Foreshadowing being used as a launching pad for revelations of what truly happened and steppingstones to character development will not only strengthen the plot of the novel but will also cause it to be more compelling. Without the allusions, not only will the trauma of the characters not feel as believable, but the plot will not be as compelling. I believe foreshadowing is a vital component to my novel's success, because it will create an atmosphere of mystery and suspense, while also giving hints of the inevitable future that is to come. Some may ask why foreshadowing needs to be used at all within a story. While a writer does not have to make use of this craft element, I believe it will become a vital tool for me through the writing process to create not only a piece that is true to my protagonist, but also to create suspense, while strengthening the narrative and moving the plot forward.

Foreshadowing has been a tool that writers have used for centuries. Classic literature is filled with brilliant uses of foreshadowing both implicit and explicit. My favorite novel,

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley has uses of both types of foreshadowing within its story. Shelley's classic is a story of horror, so it must have been natural for her to want to create a strong element of suspense to capture the attention of her audience. Shelly's use of foreshadowing began right within chapter one. By using direct foreshadowing, she told of how a simple moment from Frankenstein's childhood was the reason for his abominable idea to create a living being with his human hands. This example of foreshadowing within the novel came from the article "What's foreshadowing?" by Evan Gottlieb, and he explains the instance of direct foreshadowing within the first chapter that states:

If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced . . . I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside. . . . *It is even possible, that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin.* But the cursory glance that my father had taken of my volume by no means assured me that he was acquainted with its contents; and I continued to read with the greatest pleasure.
(Shelley qtd. in Gottlieb 9)

This is an example of direct foreshadowing because it shows the origin of Frankenstein's demise. Because of his curious state and not being discouraged by his father, he ended up leading himself down a road to destruction.

Shelly did not only use direct foreshadowing, but she also used indirect foreshadowing that hinted to the novel's future happenings. One of her uses of indirect foreshadowing was also in chapter one where Shelly wrote:

As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak, which stood about twenty yards from our house; as so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. . . . The catastrophe of this tree excited my extreme astonishment, and I eagerly inquired of my father the nature and origin of thunder and lightning. He replied, 'Electricity' . . . (Shelley qtd. in Gottlieb 13)

Shelley used an indirect use of foreshadowing in this paragraph by explaining how Frankenstein would bring to life his monster in the future. Her readers would not understand the importance of this reference to the lightning struck tree until later within the story. Indirect foreshadowing is a way to connect the dots within one's story and to make the whole novel feel cohesive and satisfyingly creative. Shelley used both direct and indirect foreshadowing within Frankenstein to cause her reader's curiosity to spike and cleverly give out future information. Without foreshadowing, her story may not have been as suspenseful or compelling to some readers.

More than just uses of foreshadowing in the novel's text, many classic works of literature have foreshadowed right within the book's title. Agatha Christie was a mystery and crime novelist that was famous for this. Titles such as *Murder on the Orient Express* and *Death on the Nile* are some of her titles that hold a very direct foreshadowing. Someone does end up getting murdered on the Orient Express. There is death on the Nile River. Titles such as these would often seem too obvious, but for the mystery genre Christie was writing, it worked out splendidly. Knowing there was peril within the pages of these books and that there were mysterious murders to be solved, only sparked interest within those who love the genre. For some, the foreshadowing within the title made them take home the book and read it. Foreshadowing is often thought of as this complex

tool when it comes to fiction writing, but it can often be simply stated in the form of even a title, and still works its magic on the audience.

Classic literature has endless, fine examples of how to effectively use foreshadowing. Writers such as Shelly, Christie, and countless more were teachers of how to effectively use the craft element. Their influence enabled modern writers to use the craft element in a compelling way, within every genre of the fictional world.

Foreshadowing is not a tool that is new within the Young Adult genre of literature. There are many examples of how different authors have used foreshadowing to create a subtle, yet significant nod to the future happenings of their stories. I believe foreshadowing is especially important within Young Adult novels, because it helps adolescents look for patterns and clues within literature that the author has placed for them to seek out. This craft element can cause these younger readers to further enjoy the journey of the story. More than simply bringing about a more intellectual and enjoyable experience, foreshadowing organically encourages younger readers to keep reading longer and with more incentive. There is nothing that motivates readers more than the subtle hints of foreshadowing. It has the ability to capture the reader, before they even realize they have been snagged within the world of the novel's characters and plot.

Some of the most popular YA novels have foreshadowing within the lines of their pages. One example of an indirect foreshadowing is in Susan Collins' famous YA trilogy *The Hunger Games*. In the first book of the trilogy, Peeta and Katniss are having a conversation the night before the hunger games begins. Peeta tells Katniss, “‘I do not know how to say it exactly. Only...I want to die as myself. Does that make sense?’ He asks. I shake my head. How could he die as anyone but himself? ‘I do not want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of

monster that I am not” (Collins 141). This does not seem to foreshadow at first glance, since Peeta remains his kind and empathetic self throughout both *The Hunger Games* and *Catching Fire*, despite all the horrors he has been through. It is not until *Mockingjay*, that Collins reveals the foreshadowing she had in mind the whole time. In the last book of the trilogy, Peeta’s mind gets conditioned to torture, and he becomes violent and unstable. Not able to remember clearly, he becomes a version of himself that is not truly him, a monster. This was the aspect of the games and being controlled by the capital he feared most, and it was not until *Mockingjay* that his fears were realized. This type of long-winded, indirect foreshadowing holds an impact, because it shows the intent of the writer. More than just being a gut-wrenching realization for the reader, it also shows the depth of planning within the plot and characterization of the writer. This is important because it strengthens the plot of the story. It also allows the readers to feel for the characters on a more personal and emotional level.

Another example of foreshadowing that is more direct can be found in the heartbreaking YA novel, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. In the beginning of the novel, the character Rudy is clearly smitten by the protagonist, Liesel, and wants to kiss her. She refuses him and the book states, “Rudy forewarned her. ‘One day, Liesel,’ he said, ‘you’ll be dying to kiss me.’” (Zusak 55). Different threads of dialogue of Rudy wanting to kiss Liesel is scattered throughout the novel, keeping his early declaration fresh in the reader’s mind. However, it is not until Rudy dies in a bombing of their neighborhood in Germany during World War II that Liesel begs Rudy to wake up and kiss her. This is a foreshadowing that delivers more of an emotional and immediate punch because Liesel is begging Rudy to kiss her like he is always wanted to. Liesel was dying for him to kiss her, but he could not because he was dead himself. This is also a more direct foreshadowing, since the novel was narrated by death. Throughout the novel, there are many

instances of and remarks about death, specifically deaths that were to come. While the foreshadowing is less subtle, it is no less startling to the reader, because of the emotional delivery of it. When tied to emotions and not just shock value, foreshadowing can truly impact the reader in a significant and unforgettable way.

These examples of foreshadowing in both classic literature and YA novels have been significant to my own research, because they have helped me understand further all the ways and in all the circumstances I can weave in foreshadowing within my story. These moments of foreshadowing have been impactful within Young Adult literature, because of their fine execution. Because they were structured well, placed correctly within the story, and well thought-out within the planning of the plot, the writer's effort for effective foreshadowing was not in vain. As I write my own chapters of a novel for my thesis, I will also place significance and time into the placement of my own instances of foreshadowing, both implicit and explicit, and within several craft elements of writing.

During my research, the element about foreshadowing that has stood out to me personally, is how significantly a writer could use it within their written work. Within the layers of storytelling, some foreshadowing's could be direct with nods to significant happenings with the story, while others may hint about a mere moment in the future one may not notice until their second reading of the work. Within my own novel, I have been seeking to create foreshadowing that ebbs and flows throughout my work. While my use of foreshadowing points to the happening of a giant accident that turned into a tragedy, I am seeking to create a branch effect that stems from my story's rooted, foreshadowing tree. I am hopeful this will lead to an avalanche of realization when the core of the foreshadowing is revealed. An example of this is one of my characters, Elizabeth. She is a character that has one of the more unfortunate outcomes

of the accident. After the tragedy occurs, she is in a coma, and has not awakened for five years. On the verge of her family deciding to take her off life-support, the psychologist, Dr. Mitchell, convinces her family to allow her subconscious to partake in the mass hypnosis with the others involved in the accident. Early in the story, Elizabeth exhibits odd behavior and actions that do not correlate with her true personality or decision-making skills. As the story progresses, the characters believe Elizabeth's symptoms are tied with what Joey, Aline, and others see throughout town. It is not until they wake up that everyone realizes the episodes Elizabeth was having were due to the side effects of her being in a coma while under hypnosis. While every foreshadowing has one root cause within my story, I am working to create smaller fragments of foreshadowing that branch out from the root's cause and creates an effect of sudden understanding for the readers of the odd events that have happened within the novel. As I have studied the useful effects of foreshadowing, I have learned there are multiple ways to use this tool of writing. Believing the plot of my story can be a perfect vessel for this craft element, I intend to use it in numerous ways.

The use of foreshadowing within my novel for my thesis is of greater importance to me than simply what I have learned from my research. Because of my research of foreshadowing, I am not only able to apply it, but also experiment with it. Within my thesis, I decided to challenge the use of foreshadowing within my own novel. While foreshadowing is mostly used as a breadcrumb, I wish to try using it as more of yellow brick road. Within my research, I have found instances where foreshadowing has been used as an obvious hint of future happenings. The book by George E. Duckworth *Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment* explains the critiques of early plays by stating:

In their treatment of intrigue the playwrights range from preparation and vague foreshadowing to definite announcement of the trickery before it is put into effect. Many plays (e.g., *Asinaria*, *Miles*, *Poenulus*) have been criticized for the excessive amount of information given to the audience prior to the deception. Such repetition of information and instruction enables the spectators to understand clearly the later action of the play but it also serves to heighten their anticipation and to increase pleasure in seeing the executed events take place. (Duckworth 221).

Throughout my research, many articles and books have explained the power of the subtle nature of foreshadowing, but as Duckworth explains, there is equal merit in the direct use of it as well. I agree with his statement in theory, because I believe within my own novel, a more direct approach to foreshadowing suits both the characters and the plot.

My protagonist, Joey, is a character who is anything but subtle. Suffering from his symptoms of schizophrenia, he is convinced that the world he sees, hears, and believes in of hallucinations and delusions is real. Because the multiple instances of foreshadowing Joey experiences throughout the novel are often misinterpreted as his symptoms of schizophrenia, it makes sense within the novel to make these instances of foreshadowing more grandeur and obvious. Joey's symptoms have never been subtle, so his experiences of foreshadowing should not be either. While Joey suspects there is a foreshadowing to his hallucinations, since Aline and other characters experience them too, he does not fully realize why others are experiencing his world, until he wakes from the hypnosis. While these instances of foreshadowing are bold in the form of Joey's hallucinations, they still hold a sense of suspense, since Joey has a very hard time differentiating between his world and the world everyone else sees. With other characters, such as Aline and Elizabeth, not able to understand why they are experiencing and seeing Joey's world, they start to look for answers to stop the foreboding future they

start to suspect. It is not till they awake that they realize they were not able to ever really change anything, besides their perspective of what occurred on that fateful night. In this context, I believe it is appropriate to experiment with a type of foreshadowing that is more blatant in its delivery.

Along with Duckworth, another book further explains why I believe foreshadowing should be so significant to my thesis. In Gary Saul Morson's book *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, he explains, "Foreshadowing robs a present moment of its presentness. As we have seen, foreshadowing lifts the veil on a future that has already been determined and inscribed. Somehow, a specific later event is already given at the time of an earlier event. Thus the sense of many possible futures, which we experience at every present moment, is revealed as an illusion" (Morson 117). The key word of Morson's explanation of foreshadowing is illusion. The foreshadowing in *Visions of Aline* is just that, an illusion Joey and the other characters cannot change no matter how hard they try. Throughout the story, the characters do grow and change, but when they wake, they realize they were not able to keep the tragedy from happening, just like they were not able to stop it within the hypnosis. This is an important aspect of the way I chose to use foreshadowing within my thesis, because the whole entire story turns out to be a foreshadowing of a reality the characters cannot remember when they were asleep. Many moments within the story point to a gloomy future, and it is within the foreshadowing where my characters are compelled to change and grow. The present was constantly being stolen with the story, because, as the audience should realize towards the end of the novel, the present already past the characters long ago. The present they are living in cannot feel truly theirs, because in reality it is not. Because of these facts, I believe it is plausible to experiment heavily with foreshadowing within my novel, including direct and pointed foreshadowing and by creating the sense of illusion within the present of the story.

While some may argue a heavy use of foreshadowing might take away from some of the mystery of my thesis, I believe by experimenting with a heavy dose of it within my novel, the opposite will occur. A scholarly article titled “Against Foreshadowing” by Michael Bernstein offers a perspective of a heavy use of foreshadowing by stating, “At its extreme, foreshadowing implies a closed universe in which all choices have already been made, in which human free will can exist only in the paradoxical sense of choosing to accept or willfully – and vainly – rebelling against what is inevitable” (Bernstein 347). Because of Joey’s subconscious wreaking havoc on the hypnosis world, the characters start to get visions of the future as his subconscious warns him and the others of what is to come. Within the suspenseful snippets of the unknown, some try to change and shift their future, while others, too scared of the unknown for change, cling to the reality they know.

Kaleb is a character who starts out as the antagonist of the story. The most feared bully in school who breaks all the rules and is on his way to a jail cell soon if he does not straighten up, does not want to change his ways in the story. However, when he is introduced to the world of legal racing through The International Motor Sports Association and people believe in him and his abilities, he starts to change for the better. Despite the odd things happening around his hometown, Kaleb strives to become a better individual within the hypnosis. Kaleb nearly changes his whole entire persona and is filled with relief that he did not turn out as bad as everyone said he would. It is not until those around him start to experience the same symptoms as Joey and other foreboding instances of foreshadowing, that he starts to rebel against the doomed future that is to come. Joey is the opposite of Kaleb. The protagonist uses the delusion that he has the attributes of Kaleb as a crutch to cope with the traumas of his past. Even though everything is going up in flames, and his friend Aline is warning him about a horrible happening in the future, he cannot compel himself to change. The thought of having to be his own self and deal with the subjects and people that hurt him is too difficult. Joey does

everything in his power to keep the rivalry between him and Kaleb alive, even though Kaleb has moved on. Kaleb is trying to move on to avoid a horrible future, while Joey is trying to cling to the way things have always been.

The instances of foreshadowing are trying to warn the protagonist and antagonist that both their efforts are futile, because the time they are experiencing has already been lived through. Within *Vision of Aline*, I am seeking to use foreshadowing in the most extreme nature, as Bernstein wrote about, where the world of hypnosis is a closed one. The character's choices of the past have already been made, and any human free will only does exist in a paradoxical sense (Bernstein 347). The point of the instances of foreshadowing is not to change the circumstances, but the hearts and minds of those who were involved in the accident. When everyone wakes from the mass hypnosis, the realization of the foreshadowing all starts to make sense. Kaleb realizes the future he thought he avoided actually happened. He is in prison and made the kind of mistakes everyone always said he would. Being thrust back in the real world is a hard adjustment for him, since he felt as if he lost everything he gained. He must learn all over again to accept the consequences of his action, while also remembering his potential for good. Joey realizes the future he clung to was actually destructive to him and others. Even though facing the real world was a fear of his, he was able to take the first steps to accepting the truth when he woke up. Because of the instances of foreshadowing, he realizes how much he genuinely wanted to embrace the people and himself of the real world. In the end, he was the one warning every one of the tragic accidents and calling for a change he himself had to learn to accept. Without the use of foreshadowing in an excessive sense, I do not believe the story would have as much of an emotional impact. Therefore, I believe this experiment is worth pursuing.

Without my personal research of foreshadowing, I may not have decided to experiment with the writing craft element to such an extent, and genuinely believed in the idea that it would work well

within the context of *Visions of Aline*. The textbook *The Art of Research: A Field Guide for Writers* by Philip Gerald makes an excellent point about research. “Research is an adventure, unspooling in its own dramatic arc, and like any good drama, it engages you not just intellectually but emotionally, leading to moments of recognition—who we really are, who our subjects are—and the reversal of expectations and fortunes. And it can result in powerful feelings of catharsis” (168 Gerald). Within this research of foreshadowing, I believe it has pushed me both intellectually and emotionally. This research has brought to light for me the importance of foreshadowing. Because of my research, I believe my experiment with foreshadowing will work. It not only makes sense within the context of Joey’s schizophrenia and the possibility of reality becoming muddled within a world of hypnosis, but it also makes sense to use foreshadowing heavily from an emotional standpoint. The tragedy on the bridge was one that impacted each individual. The foreshadowing shows the readers and the characters just how much of an emotional trial the accident was. Joey and Aline’s visions of the wreckage are what end up compelling characters to grow and change. Without foreshadowing, these characters’ true nature could not be revealed. Without their true natures being revealed, there would be no opportunity for character development. More than anything, I believe the experiment of foreshadowing will not only help the flow of the plot but will reveal the true nature of the characters. Because it will bring out an honest story, I believe the experiment of foreshadowing will be essential to the success of the story.

Foreshadowing is a writing craft element that is often overlooked or not given as much praise as plot, characterization, and dialogue. However, throughout the writing of my thesis, *Visions of Aline*, I will experiment with the heavy use of foreshadowing, and prove how in certain stories, it is a craft element that is just as vital as the other craft elements within writing.

Without heavy foreshadowing in my story, I do not believe it will showcase such an emotional and suspenseful journey for the readers. I believe experimenting with a heavy use of foreshadowing within my novel, *Visions of Aline*, is essential to its effective storytelling, because it will give an element of suspense and foreboding, move the plot forward, and mirror the characteristics of the protagonist, while complimenting the low fantasy elements created within the character's mass hypnosis.

Annotated Bibliography

Bae, Byung-Chull, and Michael R. Young. "A Use of Flashback and Foreshadowing for Surprise Arousal in Narrative Using a Plan-Based Approach." *Interactive Storytelling*, Springer, Berlin, Hiedelberg, 2008. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-540-89454-4_22#citeas.

Part of the Lecture Notes in the Computer Science book series, Byung-Chull Bae and R. Michael Young wrote this conference paper to describe their efforts to develop generated flashbacks and foreshadowing through a computational method. The conference paper focuses on the surprise cognitive response flashbacks and foreshadowing creates for readers.

Within the text, Bae, and Young go in depth to explain the divergent functions and types of foreshadowing. The conference paper explains the difference between implicit and explicit foreshadowing, and how they work differently to create varieties of suspense, surprise, and hints for the readers. The paper explains how implicit foreshadowing is a limited hint to the reader, where the audience often does not understand the intention of the writer until the end of the novel. Explicit foreshadowing is a more obvious hint, used to spark the interest of the reader, and have them guess the true meaning of the foreshadowing as the pieces connect within the story.

"A Use of Flashback and Foreshadowing for Surprise Arousal in Narrative Using a Plan-Based Approach" strengthens my critical paper, because it helped me understanding foreshadowing on a deeper level. Because of this paper, I was able to differentiate between implicit and explicit foreshadowing, how the two functions worked, why they were important, how to use them effectively, and the overall effect they should have on the reader. This was

used as a launching pad in my critical paper to explain the different types of foreshadowing, and how I would use both implicit and explicit foreshadowing in my thesis.

Bernstein, Michael André. “‘AGAINST FORESHADOWING.’” *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, edited by Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, Edinburgh University Press, 2003, pp. 346–53. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrd5m.59>. Accessed 11 June 2023.

The book by Michael Andre Bernstein looks at the first-hand stories of the victims imprisoned in the annihilation camps by the Germans in World War II. The article also expresses the need to historically preserve these stories. The book seeks more historical understanding of those imprisoned.

While this book seems like it would offer nothing about foreshadowing, but Bernstein explores the writing craft element in his argument about the written accounts during the holocaust. He explains how one can use foreshadowing in an extreme way, by implying that one’s story is already encased in a closed universe.

Bernstein’s explanation of foreshadowing was essential to my research. Because I am looking to creating a thesis that uses foreshadowing heavily, it was helpful to explore what a version of extreme foreshadowing would look like within the written world of a story. Bernstein’s book helped me understand foreshadowing further, while also helping me decide just how heavily to use foreshadowing within my thesis.

Collins, Suzanna. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic Press, 2008.

The Hunger Games is a young adult novel published by Scholastic Press. It follows the story of the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, and how she was forced to compete in the

hunger games, a competition where teenagers must fight to the death until only one remains.

The novel is one filled with suspense and instances of foreshadowing that keep the reader guessing what will happen next. The story also has instances of direct and indirect foreshadowing within the novel. Both methods foreshadowing help capture the reader's attention while helping the audience create connections with the characters and story.

I use a specific quote from *The Hunger Games* to show an example of implicit foreshadowing within a young adult novel. This quote helps strengthen my argument that implicit foreshadowing not only has its place within the writing of young adult novels, but that it can also create an emotional response and later realization, while showing signs of great organization within story planning.

Duckworth, George E. "Foreshadowing and Suspense." *Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment*, Princeton University Press, 1952, pp. 209–235. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x17rs.11>. Accessed 11 June 2023.

Chapter 8 of the book *Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment* by George E. Duckworth titled Foreshadowing and Suspense explains how foreshadowing has been used by various playwrights within their plays throughout the centuries.

Duckworth explains how these uses of foreshadowing have created the bases of how to weave suspense into storytelling.

In the eighth chapter of the book, Duckworth explains how even the excessive use of foreshadowing, while usually looked down upon, can be highly effective, and can create suspense in a way that will keep the audience on the edge of their seats. Duckworth

makes this argument by explaining how early playwrights would be criticized for their excessive use of foreshadowing, but only explains how their excessive use was actually pivotal in creating an engaging element of suspense.

I used the argument of Duckworth to strengthen my own. For my thesis, I decided to experiment with heavy uses of foreshadowing. By using Duckworth's point that excessive foreshadowing can work within the art of storytelling, I was able to make my own case for the explicit uses of foreshadowing within my own thesis.

Gerard, Philip. *The Art of Creative Research: A Field Guide for Writers*, University of Chicago Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4780601>.

Created from liberty on 2023-07-01 17:57:45.

The textbook for the WRIT689 class, Philip Gerald's textbook *The Art of Creative Research: A Field Guide for Writers* was written to give writers essential tools and advice when it comes to researching. From creating detailed plans, the different methods one can use within research, and how to fact check, Gerald leaves no stone unturned when it comes to explaining the different ways one can effectively research.

Throughout the textbook, Gerald explains how to electively learn about, apply, and use research. He explains how research can elevate one's story. He also explains how good research can stir the minds of readers in both an emotional and intellectual way.

His quotes about research are essential to my critical paper, because it strengthens my argument that the research, I am doing for my thesis is not only important but essential.

Without researching the subjects, I do not know much about within my thesis's plot, the

story would not be able to reach a point where it could be creatively and intellectually impactful for the readers and myself as a writer.

Gottlieb, Evan. "What is Foreshadowing?" *Oregon State University*, 2023,

<https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-foreshadowing#:~:text=A%20classic%20example%20of%20this,novel%2C%20Frankenstein%2C%20from%201818>.

The article "What is Foreshadowing?" by Oregon State University's British Literature Professor, Even Gottlieb, is an article that explains the basis of what foreshadowing is. He delves even further into foreshadowing, by showing examples of how foreshadowing is used within classic literature.

Gottlieb does an effective job of giving the definition of foreshadowing, and how it enhances one story. He also delves in deep into examples of foreshadowing, making it clear to the audience on how to use the craft element properly. Gottlieb gives specific examples of quotes from the classic novel *Frankenstein*. He breaks down these quotes, and then shows how they are used for effective foreshadowing.

This article is essential to my critical research paper, because it provided me with the definitions needed to explain what foreshadowing was within my paper. The article is also essential, because it offers examples of how foreshadowing was used within classic literature. This helped me research on the uses of foreshadowing within literature history.

Morson, Gary Saul. *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*. Yale University Press, 1994.

JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bmv0>. Accessed 11 June 2023.

In the journal article, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, Gary Saul Morson goes into a deep explanation and study about foreshadowing. He shows how foreshadowing creates an illusion for the readers. He also explains how foreshadowing can manipulate time within a story.

Within the journal article, Morson dives deep into the breakdown of how foreshadowing works within a story. He explains the ethics of foreshadowing and how it affects the way we perceive the world. He also gives examples of how foreshadowing is used in fiction, and how it is used opens a discussion of morality and the lessons of life.

This exploration of foreshadowing is important to me as a student researching foreshadowing, because Morson offers more than a surface level of discussion of foreshadowing. He delves deep into the craft element, and helps one understand foreshadowing on a deeper level. This has been essential in my own personal application of foreshadowing within my thesis.

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

The Book Thief is a young adult novel about the protagonist, Liesel Meminger's time with her new family in Germany during World War II. The book is narrated by death, and follows the story of Liesel growing up, bonding with her new family and her friends both German and Jew and developing a love of reading and writing.

Throughout the book, there are many instances of foreshadowing by the narrator death and through the dialogue. This creates an eeriness throughout the book that something bad will happen later in the novel. The foreshadowing also creates stronger bonds

between the characters and the reader, causing a more lasting emotional effect for the audience.

The Book Thief is important to my critical research paper, because it provides me with a fitting example of explicit foreshadowing within the novel. This example is shown with my paper as a reason explicit foreshadowing is effective in young adult literature. I also use it as an example of how one can use foreshadowing to not only create suspense, but also show the development of characters and stronger emotional ties between character and reader.

Description of the Thesis Sections

For my thesis, I will be writing 100 pages of my Young Adult fictional novel, *Visions of Aline*. Since I cannot submit the whole novel, I will submit the first 100 pages of the story in mostly chronological order. I have decided to do this, so that my professors can get a strong feeling of the style of my writing, who the characters are and how they might develop, and the basis of my plot.

The 100 pages I will be submitting will be the first act of my story. While a couple of scenes were cut due to page limits, I will work on creating a sequence I believe to be cohesive and without plot holes. My goal is to create a thesis where my professors can gain an overall picture of my characters and who they are. I would also like them to read the beginning of the novel, because that is when the plot of the story is best described. Within the first chapters of my novel, the motivations, interest, and desires of my characters are revealed. I believe this to be of utmost importance because my characters all have strong wants, and I would like to highlight the basis of their motivations. I also will work to create vivid images of not just the antagonist and protagonist, but also secondary characters who hold importance within the story. I will work to create a plot that is strong and compelling, while also being enjoyable for the reader.

Within each section I submit for feedback, I will work hard on revising and striving to create a piece of literature that is entertaining, while also having a message that points to the hope and goodness of Christ.

Visions of Aline

Chapter 1: Joey

The Hawthorne Bridge

Both worlds are loud in sight and sound, but when I'm up here all is silent.

My legs dangled as I sat at the edge of the old, condemned Hawthorne metal bridge. I leaned my torso against the rusted and hollowed out railing and looked down at the rushing river twenty feet below. My reason for driving here every morning before school was never quite clear to me. Why someone like me found the dilapidated bridge made of broken-down sun burnt brown support beams and a rotted wood two lane road appealing always puzzled my thoughts.

Maybe it was because of the strong current below flooding my ears. Maybe it was because of the gusty, icy morning wind that swirled around like a ghost and invisibly slapped my sleepy face awake. The bridge would always groan and creak against the elements, but the sounds and sights here made my racing mind calm. I was alone there. For half an hour out of each weekday morning, I was entirely alone and high above my divided hometown.

More than just my parents and clan not being able to find me, nothing within the worlds disturbed me here. I hated the chatter of the real world because it collided, quite violently, with my world. My vision sees what people claim to be invisible. My ears hear things when others only recall a hush.

They think I'm wrong, but they are.

"Joey." The voice was like a thunderstorm, and it turned the blue-skied morning grey.

I turned around so quickly, I lost my balance and had to hang onto the rickety railing for support.

“A-Aline?”

It was her. She had long, black hair that had been woven into a singular side braid and wore all navy and black attire that covered her nearly from neck to toe. Her limited showing skin was tan, and her brown eyes pierced me with seriousness.

I always told myself not to question what I saw. It was others that didn't have the right vision. They were the ones who truly didn't see what was in front of them. In that moment though, dreaded doubt spread inside me like a flood swelling up during a rainstorm.

Aline shouldn't be here.

“Get off the bridge.” Her voice struck like lightning and shocked me into standing.

“Huh?” I peered, trying to see if any part of her wasn't truly real.

“Didn't you hear me? Get off the bridge.”

“What are you –”

“Get off the bridge, Joey!” A sudden, eerie darkness rippled through her eyes. “Don't you know something bad is going to happen?!”

In an instant, the storm inside her seemed to leak out like a crack springing up in a dam. The old bridge, that was lazily creaking in the calm, morning wind, was suddenly shaking like an earthquake was upon us. We didn't have earthquakes in Hawthorne, though. I reached for the railing, but the trembling of the bridge became too brash. My knees buckled, and I collapsed face first onto the wooden road of the convulsing bridge.

“You’re going to make a mess of everything. Stop lying to yourself. You’re going to get people killed!”

I clasped my hands over my ears as the voices screamed. Each voice was different. Some were deep and low gurgles, and some were high pitched wails. They all shouted hate and scattered my brain. I never heard voices at the bridge, and my gut twisted in knots at the thought of losing my one oasis. I felt like I could throw up at any second, with the jostling of the metal bridge, and the hatred within my thoughts.

This couldn’t be real, but I had made the decision a long time ago to believe what I saw was reality.

I attempted to stand, but the shaking became more violent. It Shocked my bones and kept me down. The rusted railings were being ringed right off the sides of the bridge, and pieces of the wooden road were chipping away and falling into the rushing river below. As a beam beside me plummeted down, I watched helplessly as it dove into the water. The river was usually filled with dark blue fluid, but now it was thick shades of red as bodies floated along with the current. I thought I would really hurl this time at the image of the limp and pasty bodies smacking against the jagged rocks that hovered ominously just above the surface. The giant metal support beams that kept the architecture afloat above the river started to break apart. Their groaning’s nearly engulfed the voices as the beams started to lean and separate from the rest of the metal half-dome structure.

We were going to die.

Lying face down and clinging to the bridge for life, I managed to look back at Aline. There was no fear in her eyes or trembling in her stature. She just stood, focusing straight ahead.

Her right arm lifted, and her index finger, that was now as pale as the dead bodies floating below, slowly pointed towards the other side of the bridge.

With the earthquake still shattering me, I followed her gaze. Far across from us was the image of another person. I strained to see as a pang of familiarity stabbed my chest. Slowly, I was able to stand, despite the chaos of the bridge collapsing. It was a man. He was a few years older than me, and he was standing stoically like Aline. My sneakers gingerly shuffled closer towards him as the violent swinging of the bridge tried to capsize me. The leaning and breaking support beams caught fire. Fear flamed in my eyes, but the man remained stiff and emotionless. So, I continued to inch my way closer towards him. With every step, he felt more familiar to me until I got close enough to realize why.

He was me.

The man was Joey Astor, but instead of eighteen, he looked twenty something. My blond hair was cropped short, and his was grown out to his chin and messy. My skin was blemish free, but his was pink colored with raised and distorted flesh running up his whole right arm and neck. Wisps of the swirling scars fanned up to the edges of his jawline, and I wondered how damaged his torso was underneath his short sleeve t-shirt.

He looked as if he had been enflamed like the bridge was now.

With the heat engulfing the atmosphere, I noticed one final difference between us. My blue eyes were clear, but his were glassy with tears that threatened to saturate the bitter features of his face. He was no longer stoic but busted with all the pain life could offer.

“We were wrong.” The hot tears spilled and streamed down to the scars of his chin. “You are so, so wrong.”

I blinked, and the image of myself vanished. The metal support beams were upright once more, and the fires had been extinguished. The bridge was no longer shaking, and the wooden road had been nailed back in place. I ran to the reestablished rusted railings. My knuckles turned white they gripped the railing so tight as I leaned over to get a good look at the river. It was blue once more, and the bodies no longer were floating in a watery grave.

“Aline?” I turned to where she had been, but her presence was gone as well.

I was all alone with the once again blue morning sky. I wandered back towards the middle of the bridge that was still lazily creaking against the whispering wind. Sweat poured from my forehead, and my hands shook violently.

I’m not wrong. I couldn’t be.

Chapter 2: Joey

The Poser

The cafeteria was crowded, but I didn't hear any human chatter. The voices were whispering so loudly in my ear, I could only bear to think about Aline. Why was she at the bridge but not at school? I could still feel the heat on my skin from the vanishing fire. My stomach still churned at the vision of the dead bodies floating down the river. The school day was tinted red as I stared down at my white and black sneakers. The cafeteria was slowly filling up with water. Everyone around me was calmly eating their lunch. So, I knew they weren't seeing the same truth as I was. Soon my shoes were completely submerged. What if the bodies started to lazily drift their way in?

My fingers trembled violently as I shifted my thoughts to the older me. Maybe that's why I wanted to find Aline so badly. She saw the bridge collapsing and the other me. Maybe she knew what it all meant, but no matter how many hallways I looked down at school today, Aline wasn't found.

"Did you take your medication today, Joey?" Jace's voice shattered my transfixed state that was focused on my still shaking hands.

"Sure, I did." My voice was dry like sandpaper as I lifted my gaze towards him.

I hated the way his eyebrows withered in concern. Jace felt like my third parent sometimes. Now the rest of our northeast clan was staring at me.

"Do you need anything, Joey?!" Sammy, who was sitting on the other side of me, yelled in my ear. I hated the way he was always ready to drop everything for my sake. What a suck-up.

Zach and Dexter stared blankly as they waited for me to reply to Sammy, but I just shifted my gaze over to our rivals.

The southwest clan.

What a bunch of trash they were. Their leader, Kaleb Kane, was the worst of them. His naturally reddish-orange short hair was slicked back, and his long, thin body sunk nonchalantly into his chair. His pale arms were crossed tightly against his rib cage as he talked to his clan with a honey stick hanging loosely out the side of his mouth. While I hadn't even touched my lunch, he had already scarfed his down. His desperate ways reminded everyone he was one of the poorest people in town. I hated him more than anyone else. Just the sight of him caused my tremors to strengthen.

Without speaking, I got up and made my way to the southwest clan's table.

"Where are you going?" Jace's voice held a tone of worry that reminded me of my dad. Still, it did not stop him and the rest of my clan from getting up and following me.

Kaleb's attention shifted from his clan of Tang, Ricky, and Prince, and onto us. He squinted his nearly black eyes in my direction and scoffed like he was amused I had the audacity to approach him.

"Did Aline move back to town?" I looked down at him like I was on a pedestal.

Kaleb's mouth twitched as he peered up at me. "How would I know?" His voice was as sharp as the biggest knife in a butcher's block.

"You're her cousin." The shaking in my hands intensified as the water rose over the ball of my ankles.

“As if that means anything.” He laughed, and his clan followed his lead. Leaning deeper into his chair the comical look on his face grew. “Last I heard she’s still wherever she moved to. Why? Do you think you saw her or something?”

I gritted my teeth as my gaze broke from his.

Kaleb’s laughter rose in volume and echoed through the bustling cafeteria. “For real? You think Aline’s back after she just moved away?”

With all the student’s attention on us now, Kaleb propped his scuffed black combat boots, with the leather peeling and flaking in places, on the side of the table and used the leverage to push his chair out. Standing up, his sly eyes peered down at me wickedly. I hated how he was taller than me now.

“That’s a schizo for you.” His words were just loud enough for me to hear as he and his clan turned their backs on us.

“At least I’m not some piece of white trash who poses to gain attention.” My words could be sharp as knives too, and I knew it was much easier to slice through Kaleb’s thin skin than it was to make me bleed.

Kaleb stopped dead in his tracks. He cursed under his breath as he twisted the soles of his boots into the linoleum checkerboard flooring. The short-tempered red head lunged towards me and yanked at the collar of my jean jacket.

“When are you going to get it through that numb skull of yours?” I laughed a little inside at the image of his eyes blazing with rage. “Just take your meds and realize you can never be me.”

“Just tell yourself whatever you need to hear, and there’s no hard feelings, really.” I looked him up and down like his hands on my jacket revolted me. “I get it, Kaleb. I wouldn’t want to be you either.”

Kaleb gritted his teeth with so much force, I thought they would shatter. “That’s it!” He shot his fist up in the air.

His clan stepped up, and so did mine. Mirroring Kaleb, I made my own lifting fist as well. As the water reached my calf muscle, I knew it wasn’t the kind of day to hold back. Our shoulders were about to release the punches that were aimed at both our faces when a voice shattered the tension of the moment.

“Both of you stop!” It was Elizabeth.

I rolled my eyes. What a surprise. Still, as annoying as Elizabeth was, her call for our violence to stop saved us a trip to the principal’s office. As soon as the words left her mouth, the main cafeteria doors opened, and the middle-aged Principal Welch, with his short and decisive steps, hustled in. The clans dispersed and went their separate ways. I gritted my own teeth as the tremors within my hand worsened. If I were honest, I hoped throwing a punch would have made the rising water disappear, but, of course, the coward Kaleb blew away like the trash he was.

Trying to imitate the town’s most daunting bully must be tough for him.

Chapter 3: Kaleb

My Anger

People say they get angry, but I seriously doubt anyone has felt the kind of rage I live with every day.

I nearly kicked the cafeteria door down as I left my clan behind and entered the empty hallway. My hands balled into tightly clenched fists as I started to pace back and forth. I told myself to breathe, but it didn't work. I repeatedly slammed my boot into one of the red lockers that was hugging the hallway wall. The whole time I kicked it, I wished the metal was flesh. As its thin door dented, I wished I were snapping bone.

Then I saw a lone freshman wandering the vacant and shadowy corridor. My prey. The puny freshman's eyes nearly bulged out of his skull as his gaze caught mine. He must have seen the fire in me. Without wasting a moment, I raced over to the kid. Grabbing my second shirt collar of the day, I got a good hold of the student and slammed him against the row of lockers.

"Pl-please..." Sweat saturated his dark hair as his round glasses fogged up. "K-Kaleb please..."

I hated begging more than anything. It just made me want to punch him harder. The kid's bulged out eyes slammed shut as my raised fist came into view. I was about to twist my arm as I swung. I was about to knock the wind right out of the kid's rib cage. The impact would cause a purple bruise to form that looked like his insides were rotting. Before I could land the blow though, a sickeningly soft hand gripped my arm.

"Kaleb, stop." It was Elizabeth.

Of course, the savoir of the wimps and losers had to follow me. Her long blonde hair was pulled back into a tight ponytail, and her green eyes shined seriousness behind her rectangular glasses. Her preppy outfit of a green sweater and plaid, knee-length skirt made me wonder why she didn't go to the boarding school with the other girls from the high-class side of our town. Her black stockings were pulled up to her knees, and I always hated the sight of her clunky black Mary Jane buckle shoes the most. She was painfully average, and her actions, of never missing a sermon on Sunday morning or giving what cash she had in her pocket to a homeless man on the side of the road, were as bland as her face and dress code. What a goody two shoes.

“Get out of here!” My voice nearly shook the hallway.

“Absolutely not.” She cut those righteous eyes at me.

It was almost hurtful the way Elizabeth wasn't afraid of me. She just zipped right in front of me, like a second grader cutting in line at the water fountain. I raised my eyebrows as she placed a reassuring hand on the freshman's shoulder, and his trembling eyelids slowly opened.

“Are you okay? Did he hurt you?” I nearly gagged her voice was so sweet.

“No. No. No.” The boy waved his arms back and forth. “He didn't hurt me at all.” Then the kid snatched himself away from Elizabeth's hold and ran off into the cafeteria. When the kid was out of sight, she instantly turned to face me.

“Kaleb, this temper of yours —”

“You need to learn to mind your own business.”

“You need to stop picking on people half your size.” She took a confident step closer in my direction. “Do you realize how scared the freshman are of you? I heard one kid purposefully

failed last year to prevent going to the same school as you. He's repeating eighth grade because your reputation as a bully is so terrifying."

"What's your point?" I tried to push my way past her, but she blocked my path.

"My point is that you're misplacing your anger."

I stared at her blankly.

"I'm just saying you shouldn't take what Joey says to heart so much."

I groaned from the core of my torso. "You know, you've been preaching at me a lot more lately."

"It's not preaching, Kaleb." She tried to give me one of her signature, hopeful smiles, but my hate-filled straight-faced let her know I wasn't in the mood to be inspirationally encouraged.

"I know what Joey accused you of frustrates you –"

"He's constantly calling me a poser. How would you like someone accusing you of trying to be them every single day?"

That was my reality ever since that cursed day halfway through my freshman year of high school. Joey and Jace came walking into our public school, after Joey got kicked out of the prestigious boy's academy, Grainger. Hawthorne has always been quite an odd place. The northeast side of town was filled with the rich, and I mean really rich. Some of the wealthiest business owners in America lived there. They had mansions the size of football fields, maids to clean their homes, drivers to chauffeur them on their daily commute, and private planes to fly them to their next big meeting states away. There were country clubs, golfing, horse shows, and a big ISMA car racing community that cheered for the winners of their stupidly expensive

hobbies. Kids who grew up in those football field sized houses went to private schools; the local Grainger for the boys, and Adderley, the boarding school an hour away for the girls. Joey must have been a real pill to get kicked out of the private school, because his dad was one of the richest in town. He owned some famous architect company that constructed skyscrapers in big cities and multi-million-dollar homes locked away behind gated communities. Somehow, even his money wasn't enough for Joey to stay enrolled.

So, the schizo was forced to come here; Hawthorne Public High School.

There wasn't much to the middle class of our town. There were a few members of the in between scattered here and there, but mostly the landscape was divided into the high and low classes. Our school was full of kids whose parents worked for the rich. Maids, chauffeurs, cooks, nannies, landscapers, and seamstress were just the surface of jobs the rich were looking for those lower than them to fill. Whether you came from a middle or lower class in Hawthorne, you were most likely licking the boots of rich families and their children.

That wasn't the case for me though. I looked out for myself, and my reputation warned people not to mess with me. I was surviving just fine when Joey came through those doors our freshman year. He targeted me from the start and was convinced I was trying to be him when the opposite was true.

“But Joey deals with Schizophrenia.” Elizabeth's voice brought me back into the present reality.

“Yeah, I'm aware.” My gaze shifted expressionlessly towards her. “Thanks for sharing your endless wisdom.”

Of course, I knew people with Schizophrenia could have delusions. I knew they could believe they were anything and anyone, and I just happened to end up as collateral damage. Of all the titles Joey could have believed he claimed, he had to insist mine was his.

“He’s blinded by a delusion. What he believes isn’t real.”

“Well, it’s real to him.” I tried to brush past her again but was cut off once more.

“So? Let him rant.” She pleaded. “You both have created this rivalry over a title that’s so toxic. The whole thing is idiotic.”

It was my turn to take an aggressive step towards her. “How so?”

She pursed her lips like she was Principal Welch. “Being the most feared bad boy in town isn’t something to be proud of, Kaleb. All you do is start fights, mercilessly bully people, commit petty crimes, and let your anger get the best of you. I just don’t understand it. Why do you have to prove that everything they say about you is true?”

“Just stop.” I successfully passed her this time as my blood began to boil.

Why did she always have to bring up all the subjects I hated? Her presence has caused me to do nothing but doubt myself since we were kids. I knew what I was doing. I knew who I was. Why did she always have to challenge me? Why did she always see me like a broken-down engine in need of fixing? I was already running just fine.

“What about graduating?” She really didn’t know how to stop. “What’s going to happen if you get expelled again?”

I started walking. “Since you’re the top student in our school, why don’t you tell me?”

“Also, not ending up in jail would be a beneficial goal to have as well.”

“At least in there I’d be away from you.” I turned around on a dime and stared her down. She just stared at me right back as fearless as ever. “If you followed me out here to make me less angry, it’s not working.”

“I’m just saying...” Her voice was a whisper now as her short stature looked up at me. “Both of you have been competing for this pointless title for years. You’re seniors now.” Her eyes searched mine, and I felt guilt spread through me. “Why does being crowned the most rebellious and feared mean so much to you?”

I didn’t respond to her because I couldn’t. The only thing rushing through me was that sour emotion I knew all too well, and the only thing I wanted was a honey stick, even though I just finished one at lunch.

“Don’t you think you should end this rivalry before high school is over?”

Like a cure, the guilt within me was suddenly replaced with ambition. All this time, Joey and I had been racing around in circles with no finish line in sight. Why haven’t I ever thought of ending it before?

I nodded. “We might actually be agreeing for the first time ever.”

Turning around, I made my way back towards the cafeteria. Elizabeth was probably shaking her head in disapproval.

Well, I could never make anyone happy.

Chapter 4: Joey

The Deal

“Hey, Northeast!” Kaleb burst back through the cafeteria doors and got everyone’s attention as he rushed towards me. Lucky for us, Principal Welch had left already.

“What is it, poser?”

As he approached, everyone from the northeast and southwest clans gathered as the floor stopped filling with rushing water.

“You say I’ve been pretending to be you? Fine. Let’s finally prove who is right.” His teeth bared. “I won’t let you ride off to your fancy college thinking you were right.”

Kaleb was the gas lighting type. He was always claiming he had a clan first, was the original bully, the street racer, and the one with the worst reputation in Hawthorne. He was living through an illusion like so many other people in town. Only I knew the whole truth, possibly Aline too, and I was more than ready to prove to him, to everyone, that my world was the real one.

“Fine.” I lifted my chin high into the air. “What are the stakes?”

“Five street races. Just you and me. You bragging about what a great driver you are has annoyed me worse than anything. If I’m really the poser, you should win easily.” His dark eyes gave a hard stare. “Whoever loses the most races has to break up their clan and admit he’s wrong. Fair?”

Dexter started to ring his hands with anxiety, and Prince stiffened in disapproval at Kaleb’s stakes. Everyone from both clans either shuffled their feet, or their mouths hung wide

open at the potential loss of not winning the street races. The ceiling of the cafeteria suddenly flamed, the orange and red burst of heat spreading to all sides above me.

“You’ll never win. You’re the poser. Remember, you are wrong, wrong, wrong!”

The voices were ringing so loud within my head, I had to fight to focus on Kaleb.

“You play fair?” I raised my eyebrows.

“You scared?” Ricky stepped up to be closer to Kaleb.

I scoffed at Kaleb’s shadow and ignored the trembling within my fingers. “Never.” I nearly spat the words. “When’s the first race?”

“Tonight, at the abandoned mall on the outskirts of town.”

“Tonight?” I hated how Jace’s doubt made me seem like a coward and caused the flames on the ceiling to crackle and spark.

“Tonight.” Kaleb’s was so decisive. “If Joey doesn’t show, he forfeits.”

Then Kaleb turned and started making his way out of the cafeteria, with his clan close behind. All the students looked at me for an answer, but I found myself not able to speak.

“Runaway now. Aline said something bad would happen.”

“We’ll be there at midnight, sharp!” Sammy answered for me.

Kaleb never looked back. He just slowly nodded his head as he pushed a student out his way, so he could exit the cafeteria freely.

I hoped he could feel me menacingly staring into the back of his head. “We’ll see who’s the poser.” My voice was a heated whisper, and I didn’t care who heard it. “It isn’t me. It isn’t me.”

Chapter 5: Joey

The Therapy Session

“How was your day at school, Joey?”

I hated these sessions I was forced to sit through twice a week. Dr. Nolan had been my psychiatrist since my last year of middle school. Apparently, he was the best when it came to handling kids with schizophrenia, but as he sat down across from me in my dad’s study, he seemed as insignificant as a bug.

“The same as every day.” I lazily looked over at his ridiculously studious style of a pressed gray suit, combed to the side salt and pepper hair, and square glasses.

“Any symptoms?”

“No.” I lied, and before I could stop it, my hands started to tremor. Of course, he noticed. The studious bug always noticed everything.

“You can tell me if you had a hallucination.”

“She wasn’t a hallucination.” I snapped as my hands shook more violently.

“Who is she?”

I bit my tongue for a moment, until I sighed. “Aline. I saw her today.”

“Aline...” He rubbed the back of his pen against his temple. “She was your classmate, right? I remember you saying she moved away.”

“She must have moved back.” I fidgeted in the leather chair. “I know what I saw, okay.”

“I have no doubt you saw Aline. As you know, in these sessions we just try to determine whether what you saw is part of the real, tangible world or the world you see.”

“My world is real.” My hands were shaking uncontrollably now. “What I see, what I believe is real.”

Nolan pursed his lips in his horrible, thoughtful way. “Have you been taking your medication properly?”

“Why does everyone keep asking me that?” I sunk deeper into my chair. “I’m taking it.”

“Perhaps, we should up your dosage so you can be more comfortable.”

I thought about a larger dosage of medication, and a chill ran up my spine. The medication made me feel like I was looking out of a foggy lens or walking through wet cement. It took me out of my world of truth, but it did not make me more present in the false world. With the medication, I was simply stuck in a purgatory of realities.

“No.”

“Joey...”

“I said no.” My yell rang through the study, its echo bouncing off every wall.

My outburst caused the burgundy and royal blue paisley heavy curtains to catch on fire. The books resting peacefully on my dad’s tall, dark bookshelves began to melt away, and water started to seep through the leather couch Nolan was sitting on. I placed my attention on my shrink, who didn’t notice a thing. For someone who was supposed to be smart, he sure never saw the truth. What a waste of money. I bolted out of my chair and made my way towards the exit of the room.

“Joey, we are not done here.” He called after me.

“Martha!” I opened the doors to the study and yelled out for our live-in maid. “Martha, get over here and let the doc out.”

Her short and stubby stature hurried into the foyer that was adjacent to the study. She was out of breath already as she dragged the kitchen mop behind her.

“Joey, there’s still half an hour left in our session.” Nolan’s calm voice sounded like the voices that whisper all those lies in my ear. Maybe that’s why I couldn’t stand him.

“Get out.”

“I’m only trying to help you.”

“I said get out!” I didn’t like having tantrums like a child, but it seemed to be the only way I could ever get anyone’s attention.

Like I knew they would, my parents rushed into the foyer beside Martha.

“What is going on here?” My dad looked from me to Nolan.

“Tell the doc to go home.” I slouched against the doorframe of the study. “He’s making me feel like some crazy person again.”

Nolan stood up from the couch and started to make his way towards the rest of us. “Now Joey, I never said you were crazy.”

My mom confronted Nolan before he could make it out of the room. “How dare you make my son feel uncomfortable.” She always acted with wild motherly protectiveness.

“We’ve talked about this Dr. Nolan.” My dad never had feral protective parental instinct, but he also only knew how to follow in the footsteps of my mom. “I wasn’t lying when I said we could replace you.”

“Mr. Astor –”

“My son said to get out of the house. Now get out.” My mom’s snappy voice cut off Nelson’s hope to explain.

“Come, Dr. Nolan.” Martha now had found her breath and was trying to smooth everything over with a smile that twitched at the edges. “I’ll walk you to the front door.”

Nelson sighed heavily and shoved his notebook into his briefcase. He gave my mother a sharp look as he clicked the case shut and started to make his way out of the study. Before he could pass through the doors, he stopped short and leaned into my dad’s space.

“I know you want me to hold my tongue, but as a medical professional I must warn you that Joey’s symptoms are getting worse. If we do not get his hallucination and delusions under control, he’s at risk of ending up in the hospital again. He needs to come to terms with his illness, and you and your wife’s indulgence of his visions will not help him.”

I watched the curtains burst completely into flames. How dare that bug talk about me like I wasn’t standing in the same room as him. Who did he think he was to tell me what was and wasn’t real?

I refused to look at Nolan as he walked past me and into the foyer. Insects didn’t deserve an ounce of my attention. I just kept focusing on the blazing curtains in my dad’s study until I heard Martha close the front door.

In an instant, my mom clung to me like a leech, her arms attaching as if she had suction cups on them. “Don’t you ever feel insecure, Joey.” Her face nestled against mine, and I pushed against her in vain to gain a bit of space. “Your father and I love you just the way you are.”

My dad, unable to ever be original, copied my mom and hugged me tight too. Standing between them, I figured I would suffocate at any minute. I watched the fire spread throughout the whole study and felt the shaking in my hands intensify.

I wished I would just burn too.

Chapter 6: Kaleb

My Pride

Jeff Parker's car garage was the only thing lit up in the moonless darkness. It was a cloudy night that threatened rain, but there was no way my clan wouldn't show up to the abandoned mall. For that reason alone, we were on the rich man's property first. We had already climbed the *Private Property* signed tall chain link fence and had our sights set on the next challenge.

"Do your thing, Tang."

"You got it." His boyish smile grinned like he was an eight-year-old given a million bucks to blow at an arcade.

Tang was the oldest of us, but you wouldn't ever know it. That idiot failed his senior year on purpose or so he said. Now he was repeating it as a nineteen-year-old. I knew he flunked, because he didn't have a clue about what to do with his life. As he raced up to the security guard booth in front of Parker's garage, his dark brown hair waved in the potential storm's wind. Tang was a lot like the wind when I thought about it. He just blew this way and that and was about as loyal as the changeable weather. He always claimed to be your best friend but would never stick his neck out for you. He cared too much about saving himself and would watch someone peel you alive before he threatened the wellbeing of the skin on the bridge of his nose. Some people might have found Tang's fickle habits annoying, but I always figured I wouldn't go out of my way to save him either. We had been tied together more by circumstances than an actual freindship anyway.

Like me, Tang had a messed-up home life. His single mom was a druggie before he was even thought of. Luckily for him, the only time she ever managed to stay clean was when she was pregnant with him. She's told us hundreds of times how the only thing she found to kick the drug cravings was that lip quivering, sweet, powered orange drink Tang. She consumed gallons of it until he was born. So, when she held him for the first time in the hospital and the nurses asked what her son's name was, all she could think of was Tang. Unluckily for him, his mom went right back to nursing needles and powder, leaving Tang often to fend for himself. I remember the early days of us running into the woods behind the trailer park to get away from our caregivers. Not wanting to get beaten by one of his mom's many boyfriends or see her laying out on the floor like a zombie, he hung out with me constantly. We got into trouble quickly. Tang's only talents were lock picking and being stealthy, and they were skills he had mastered very, very well. He could break into any business or home without ever being noticed. We got away with a lot when we were kids, and now we were getting away with even more. The only real difference between Tang and I was he could fight the urge to punch holes in walls or mercilessly attack a trembling freshman with foggy glasses. Tang always fled before anything became too controversial, and that's why he never gained a reputation like I did.

Sometimes, I felt a little jaded how he was always able to squirm out of any punishment, but I decided a long time ago to accept Tang the way he was. Besides, I would never be able to successfully break into Parker's car garage without him. I was pretty good at breaking into places too, but I used nothing but the best when it came to this place.

Ricky, Prince, and I watched as Tang broke into the security guard booth. The middle-aged Pete slept on the job so soundly he was drooling all over his uniform. In a blink of an eye,

Tang's energized body zoomed around and disarmed all the cameras and security alarms. When finished, he pumped his arms up in victory like a mischievous little kid.

"Like taking candy from a baby." Tang clasped hands with me after he raced back outside to where we were.

"When do you think old man Parker will figure out his security guard is Sleepy from *Snow White*?" Ricky laughed.

"Probably when he finally gets back to town." Prince took a long inhale of his cigarette.

"That's why I'm racing against Joey, before he gets back." I cracked my knuckles.

To say Parker was well-known in Hawthorne was an understatement. Jeff Parker was even richer than Elizabeth's grandparents, who nearly claimed the whole town. He owned car racing teams in IMSA and other teams that competed around the world in sports car and rally racing. The man seemed to be about as obsessed with cars as I was, but we were from different worlds. Still, that didn't stop me from exploiting the often away multi-millionaire. This garage was the holy grail filled with his personal car collection that wasn't used for racing. That is, until I showed up.

We, the southwest clan, walked up to Parker's garage like we owned the place. Once at the front door of the entrance, Tang pulled out his lock pick again. I didn't blame Parker for not giving Pete the keys to his garage.

"Wait." I snatched the pick lock out of Tang's hand and then eyed Ricky with raised, serious eyebrows. "Just like I taught you."

Ricky nodded, took the pick lock from me, and wedged the metal pins inside the keyhole of the door handle.

Tang may have had a childish quality, but Ricky really did look like a baby. At sixteen, his blemish-free, pale face jolted against his black hair and blue eyes. His hair hung low, halfway over his ears, but it didn't hide how young and lost looking he was. Ricky was from the southwest side of town like Tang and me. There was a difference between Ricky and us though. The kid had good parents who seemed loving and hard working. Maybe that's why Ricky was so lonely. As an only child with a mom and dad working from dawn to dusk as a maid and landscaper with other side jobs, Ricky was often left to eat dinner alone. I knew his parents were trying to give their only son a better life, but it didn't leave Ricky any less bitter about their absence. He told me it was the same before they moved here a year ago. For some reason, the kid took an instant liking to the clan and especially me. He wanted to know how to drift a car, how to pick a lock, and how to wander the streets at night without feeling lonely. He was tender and sensitive. I usually hated that type but not Ricky. Without thinking, I took him under my wing, because he saw me as his big brother. If I was honest, I was a little afraid of him turning out like me. He wasn't like Tang or I. Ricky had the kind of life one could make something out of. I probably should have stiff armed him, but I guess I kept him by my side out of selfishness.

He just reminded me so much of Maddie.

The doorknob clicked, and Ricky grinned up at me with his pearly white teeth. He was always searching for approval, and I gave him a nod.

Prince slipped past us. Opening the door opened wide, we all walked into the garage.

Ricky rubbed his arms. "Goosebumps every time."

Parker's garage was like no other. Turning on the lights, the white walls illuminated like the building was a five-star hotel for cars. Everything was spotless and in its place. Tall, royal blue tool chests lined up against the left wall and inside they held the best tools money could buy. I may or may not have used my fair share of them. The shiny grey flooring showed the reflection of the fleet of cars lined up one right beside the other. Pristine models from various eras of Lamborghini, Porsche, Maserati, Ferrari, and more all shined under the spotlights. There was a baker's dozen cars sitting together in one room, and they were the kind of machines enthusiasts dreamed about. Goosebumps was an understatement.

"Which car will you take to beat Joey?" Prince took another inhale of his cigarette.

"Hey." I snapped. "I told you no smoking in here."

He exhaled the smoke in my face. "Make me." He sucked on the lit cancer stick again.

I snatched the cigarette right from his lips and broke it between my fingers. I hated people who smoked, drank, and did drugs. I never got why the world was so dependent on substances. People acted like you couldn't be an adult without partaking in such things, but in my lifetime, I've never been around any adult who could drink, smoke, or use needles in moderation. They just made nothing of themselves as they filled up another glass or took another inhale. To me, substances weren't a sign of maturity but the exact opposite.

Prince was the only clan member I budded heads with. He was a rare middle-class kid, and his parents owned a grocery store in the middle of town. I'm surprised I let him in our clan since he wanted to join Joey's first. Joey had refused, which ended up with the northeast clan getting into a brawl with the lone Prince in an alley way behind the high school. I remember watching the whole fight two years ago. Prince's black hair jostled from its perfectly slicked to

the side position as his bare knuckles fearlessly cracked against the jaws of Sammy and Zach. He broke one of Jace's ribs, and his reckless black eyes laughed with amusement. It wasn't until Joey dealt him a wicked blow to the temple that Prince finally was forced to surrender.

Seventeen now, Prince hadn't lost a fight since. He learned from me how to perfect his swings and timing. Now he was nearly as good as me, and he looked to create even more chaos than I did. I can't tell you why Prince was always stirring up trouble in his calculated way. He didn't have any troubles at home or any worries I knew of at all. Like trying to fill some sort of boredom within the pit of his sick stomach, Prince held no respect for anyone and would take whatever he wanted with no thought of the people he hurt. I had to say, I liked that about him. What I didn't like was that his philosophy meant he didn't respect me as leader and would often fight me tooth and nail about everything. He knew I hated drinking, smoking, and doing drugs. So, he abused all three just to annoy me. He knew I was used to people following my orders. So, he refused them. Prince was the only kid in town I thought would end up in jail before I did. Unlike Tang, Prince wasn't his real name. He got the nickname because of his looks that could be cast in some sort of romance movie. He really was pretty for a dude, and he made sure to manipulate all the girls in school with his beauty. I could never tell if he was okay to have as a friend or if I hated his guts.

“Can't you listen for just for once in your life?” The hot ashes of the broken cigarette started to burn the skin of my fingers.

“Hey...” Tang tried to sweeten the bitter atmosphere with a laugh. “I vote we take the Lamborghini for a spin. It's a historical night, after all.”

I couldn't help but chuckle at Tang's stupidity. "I bet half the school will be at the race. Driving in something as high profile as that Lamborghini will land me in jail before I'd be able to give Joey that beating."

"All these cars are high profile." Prince was the one chuckling now, like I was the stupid one.

"Which one are you eyeing, Kaleb?" Ricky gave me a reassuring nod.

I slowly walked to the far-left corner of the garage, where a car with a tarp over it was parked in the shadows.

"What's under there?" Tang rushed past me. "An old Lamborghini?" Tang and his endless love for Lamborghinis.

"I'm racing the 69 Camaro SS."

I pulled the tan tarp off the car. Its once orange paint job had been long since brunt from the sun and was now being overtaken by the darker color of rust. Its two once white stripes on the hood were now greyish, and the upholstery inside the car was torn in several places. I had taken out the back seats to maximize the speed of the car, so the inside now looked hollow.

"This hunk of junk?" Prince sneered.

I rolled my eyes at Prince's disapproval.

"You've been sneaking in to work on it. Haven't you, Kaleb?" Ricky always had groundless faith in me, but he was right to believe me this time.

For countless hours, I've been sneaking around researching about the best tune ups and modifications I could do to the engine of the car. I broke into garages and stole from various auto

shops around a forty-mile radius. I got around to these farther destinations through stealing cars for a day, jumping some to life from the junk yard, or by taking a joy ride with the clan in Prince's 1988 black Toyota Supra. It was true, I didn't have my own car. As someone who saw the machines as the only escape in life, it rubbed me the wrong way a bit to be without one in my name, but I liked the freedom of having different rides all the time.

I always figured I'd know when I saw the car that was meant to be mine. This 1969 faded orange Camaro SS was mine. I have never put so much blood, sweat, and time into a machine before. After successfully stealing what I needed to make my car run and race, I worked most nights on it till dawn. Tang would help me break in without the cops showing up and then he would leave. When I worked on cars, I wanted to be alone. Sure, it took way longer, but I was too much of a control freak. I might have let Tang, Ricky, or Prince tinker with a junk yard car or one we stole for a night from a random neighborhood, but it was different with the 69. It was mine and every piece of it was going to be built with my hands. A lot of posers only liked racing cars and hired lackeys to make their machines go faster. All money, and no pride. All I had was pride as I walked around the ride that always reminded me of myself.

"No one knows about this car. Parker's probably even forgotten it exists back here. By the looks of it, Joey will never believe how shiny it is under the hood." I smiled slyly and whispered to the car more than anyone else. "We'll have the element of surprise."

Chapter 7: Joey

The First Race

It was just after eleven when I heard my front doorbell go berserk. Someone must have allowed Sammy to ring the doorbell again. So much for being incognito. Before I could get down to the bottom of the stairs, I saw my dad answer the cries to be let in.

“Boys...” My dad soaked in the wide-awake sight of Jace, Sammy, Zach, and Dexter. “What are you doing here so late on a school night?”

“We’re here for Joey!” I swear, Sammy was the most hyped-up person on planet earth and his addiction to Monsters and Red Bulls didn’t help. I couldn’t believe Jace let him drink a couple on the way here.

“He knew we were coming.” Jace tried in vain to calm the atmosphere down.

As I reached the last step, I saw my dad’s shoulders stiffen and observed his head slowly start to shake. Before he could say another word, I knocked my shoulder with him.

“I have a race. I’ll be late.” I brushed past him and joined my clan on the porch.

“A-a race?” My dad’s eyebrows withered. “You don’t race though.”

“Of course, I do!” I was the one sounding like I had too many Red Bulls now.

Sure, I didn’t go to meets like Kaleb and his clan did, but how could I? Those trashy people were beneath me, and I wouldn’t be caught dead at a track. Only high-class goody two shoes would take daddy’s sport cars to the track. My clan and I would jump into our cars and dare people paused at stop lights to race us. We’d go into parking lots or on the streets to drift and mark up the asphalt with donuts and spin outs. We were rouged, and we didn’t need the

money. So, why would we race against those who were beneath us? Tonight, all that would change, and people would see just how lethal my driving could be.

“Joey, you’ve had a long day, and I don’t think –”

“What?” I took an aggressive step towards my dad. “You going to tell me no?”

“No, he’s not.” My mom appeared behind him.

There she was; the one in charge. Getting to that race would be a piece of cake now.

“Katherine...” I was surprised my dad managed an edge in his voice.

“He’ll be fine.” She ruffled her long blonde hair. “Don’t you dare distress him.”

My dad sighed and hung his head low in defeat.

I turned to leave with my clan but unfortunately wasn’t fast enough. My mom’s clinging suction cup tentacles wrapped around me in a hug that was so tight and unhinged.

“You go win your race.” She whispered in my ear. “You’re not the crazy one.”

Resisting against her embrace, I was about to inform her I knew I wasn’t the crazy one, when I saw the other, older me standing on the lawn. His blue eyes glistened against the porch lights. They were still filled with tears and those burn scars were still horribly distorted.

Was I really not the crazy one? Was my mom so unhinged because of her memories of me in the hospital restless and screaming? I shuttered at the whole scene and broke away from her. No. I didn’t have anything to do with her coddling state. She said herself I wasn’t crazy, and moms always told their kids the truth, right?

“Don’t wait up.” I didn’t look back at her as I ignored the sight of the other me.

I couldn't help but hear my mom go back into the house. As soon as the door shut the yelling started. My parents always yelled about me, but didn't they know I was just fine?

"Man, I wish I had parents that would let me do whatever I wanted." Dexter must not have heard my parents' argument, and looked around my world like it was paradise. "I had to sneak out."

At sixteen, Dexter was the youngest of us, but he always looked even sleepier than me. The kid came from one of the rare higher middle-class families, and his parents were looking to climb the ladder quickly. They worked for Jace's parents. Dexter was always groaning about how his parents practically worshipped their employers in hopes of getting a promotion to the high-class. Since his parents sold their soul to elevate, they expected their son to do no less. A good, no a stellar college was the key. Tutor upon tutor imprisoned the kid's mind after school, but even if he passed out from exhaustion, his studying couldn't get him to the top of his grade. His parents were always devastated with the test results, and that's when Dexter would snap. He started sneaking away to hang out with us. For someone so sleepy in the daytime, he somehow awakened at night. He would beg Zach to floor his modified dark blue 1995 BMW M3 to 100mph as he stuck his mop of brown-haired head out the window. Dexter would tell Zach to drift and do donuts. That skinny kid would nearly fling out of the car, but he would just laugh until he cried. Life seemed to be too much for Dexter, and I knew one day he'd drive right off the deep end.

My thoughts shattered at weight suddenly jumping on my back.

"Same here." It was Sammy who had leapt onto me. I shouldn't have been surprised. "Joeys lucky. His parents practically worship him."

You know, I never really found out what Sammy's parents or life was like. I knew he was from a middle-class family but that was obvious by the way he never showed up at the country club, horse shows, or golf tournaments. No one would ever think Sammy was seventeen. Zipping around like a toddler, his strawberry blonde hair whipped in the wind as he raced around, and his shining, hazel eyes always warned trouble would be caused wherever he went. On a constant caffeine high, he got drunk off energy drinks but often liked to mix them with alcohol too, a habit Jace always urged him to stop. He knew how to swipe a six pack of beer from a convenient store like a pro kleptomaniac. I will be the first to admit I didn't care too much for Sammy and honestly let him into the clan to be my lackey. He would do anything I asked of him without question, and I knew it was because he wanted to be like us high-class people. He talked about the finer things in life like it was a heaven he could climb to, and he was determined to ascend step by step even if that meant he got there by clinging to my ankles. I found the whole thing pathetic. Sammy wasn't trash, like Kaleb and his clan or a bug like Nolan. He was more like a loyal dog ready to do tricks on cue. Anything to take a ride in a fancy car or get invited to a rich party.

"Get down." I shook him off as we approached the garage.

Jace put in the code, and we watched the door lift.

"The Lamborghini or the Jaguar?" Zach whistled when he saw the two cars in the garage.

"What else? The Lamborghini." I scoffed.

Zach's whistling continued as we gazed at my 2001 purple edition Lamborghini Diablo. It was upgraded custom to my liking by a professional team my dad hired when I was seventeen. This was my car. I loved sitting in the driver's seat and breaking every speed limit. I liked

stirring up street races with random people at intersections. My ride would always win and tonight would be no different.

“Man, I wished I had your car like Dexter wished he had your parents.” Zach envied.

“Get a richer mom next time.” I mocked.

“Hey.” Zach kicked the bottom of his Jordan’s against the driveway, but I could tell he wasn’t really angry. Zach never got angry. “Stop bringing up my mom.”

At seventeen, Zach still didn’t have a clue who his mom was. He was practically dropped off on his dad’s door one day when he was a baby by a woman his dad hardly remembered. Raised in the high-class side of town, Zach never fit in with the rest of the preppy and snooty crowd. His genius dad wasn’t from money, but when he created some sort of revolutionary invention when he was in college, the man became set for life. It was just Zach, his dad, and the old guy’s long-winded party lifestyle. Zach’s dad was away more than he was at Hawthorne, and he constantly had new girlfriends. He didn’t think much about his only son. I guess that’s why Zach didn’t attend Grainger Academy or get any pocket money. Zach only got thrown an afterthought bone, like his 1995 BMW or his impressive sneaker collection, from his dad when the man thought of him. Zach was always like some less aggressive version of lone wolf to me. You could tell Zach was smart the way he observed everything. He got detention nearly every day, and I bet that’s where he mulled over all his thoughts. That place was practically his second home, and it probably had a warmer atmosphere than his first one. He was a quiet guy, and I liked how I could hear myself think when we hung out. I wondered if Zach saw any of us as friends though. He would just drive us around and go along with what the clan decided. He would just rub his cropped brown hair with a zigzagged shaved pattern on the left side of it and

push his tinted sunglasses up the bridge of his nose. What did he really think though, about us and about life? I wondered sometimes.

“Can we take the Jag, Joey?” Sammy ran over to the sleek silver Jaguar F-TYPE sports car my dad picked up this year. It wasn’t as nice as my car but that was because he placed all his funds into my ride. “Jace and Zach drove their cars here, but we don’t want to look poor making an entrance in only three cars.”

“You are poor.” I scolded my loyal dog.

“Not with your help.” He just laughed. “You know, Dexter and I aren’t ex-Grainger boarding school students like you and Jace. Come on, let us take it!”

Honestly, my Lamborghini Diablo, Jace’s early graduation present of a brand new royal blue Maserati Granturismo, and Zach’s souped-up BMW was more than enough to show up Kaleb and his clan.

“You know your dad wouldn’t like it.” Jace was always trying to be the voice of reason.

It was true Jace, and I were Ex-Grainger boys. I’ve been friends with him since first grade. He was always trying to keep me grounded in the reality he saw. Jace wasn’t really the street race, party, or thief type. If he hadn’t been my friend for so long, it wouldn’t have made any sense for him to be in the northeast clan. An old soul, he was always sharp and well put together. His dirty blond hair was never shaggy, and his brown eyes were deep in thought constantly. He was always trying to keep us out of any real trouble. When we’d try to find people to race against, he’d tell us to move along if the opponent seemed too dangerous. He didn’t like us stealing or getting drunk. I could never get him to swipe a single thing from a store, and I swear, I saw him help an old lady cross the street once. It wasn’t that Jace couldn’t be edgy in his

own way. He would floor his car faster than anyone through the streets of Hawthorne when he acted like he was annoyed with the entire world. I bet he had some lofty ambitions, and I was sure he wanted to give me advice about the way I was living. Even though I didn't agree with Jace on a lot of things, he did leave Grainger to come to the life-sucking grey cinderblock called Hawthorne Public High School with me and that was worth a lot. Sometimes, I wondered what would have happened if I had gone alone.

I shuttered and turned my attention back on Sammy. "Jace is right. The Jag is my dad's."

"Like that's ever stopped you from doing donuts with it in the country club parking lot."

Zach let out a rare smirk.

I smirked back. "Good point." I walked over and grabbed the set of keys that were hanging on the wall. "Take the Jag, Sammy. If I don't care, then my dad doesn't either."

I tossed him the keys and he caught them mid-air. "Thanks, Joey!"

"Enough with the gratitude." Zach walked out of the garage and made his way towards his ride. He put on his tinted black sunglasses even though it was nighttime. "Let's go and burn some trash."

"You ready, Joey?" Jace asked for confirmation one last time.

I was about to reply when a drop of water splashed. It started raining in my garage and everything besides my clan and I were getting soaked. Water rolled off the hood of the cars, and the tool chest made a tick, tick, tick sound as the steady shower bounced off it.

"You can't drive like Kaleb. Quit, quit, quit now! You don't belong in that race."

I fought the urge to slam my hands over my ears as the voices ticked, ticked, ticked within my subconscious. I balled my fingers into a fist as they began to shake with violence once more. Jace immediately cocked his head to one side as empathy showed clearly on his facial features. Why did he have to be so good at noticing the slightest change in my emotions?

“Hey, Joey.” He walked up to me as the rest of the clan made their way to their cars. “You sure you’re ready to go? Cause, if you’re seeing things, it might not be wise to race.”

“When have I ever been wise?” I made a laugh expel from my constricted lungs as my shaking hands loosened their grip. “Besides, I’m only seeing what you see.”

I briskly walked past him and slid into the custom purple leather seats of my Diablo. Closing the scissor door that naturally raised upwards, I felt a deep cold as I watched the indoor rain tick, tick, tick on my windshield. Even though I knew where I belonged, like a crooked painting on a wall or a navy and black sock being worn on each foot, something always felt off, and I was left with a chill in my bones no blanket or blazing fire could ever cure. I gripped my steering wheel as my car roared to life. Everything was going to change tonight.

“I’m ready.”

Chapter 8: Kaleb

My World

I wish I would have recorded the look on everyone's faces when I drove up in my rusty 69 Camaro SS with my clan following close behind in Prince's Supra.

As I cruised to where Joey and his clan were, I couldn't deny the energy that surrounded the abandoned mall. There were teenagers everywhere. Most of them were from our school, but there were no doubt a couple of rich kids. You could always tell by the luxury brands they wore, and their sports cars parked off to the wayside. No one had rides and threads like that at Hawthorne Public High School. Well, except Joey and Jace. Elizabeth could afford the high-class frivolous stuff too, but she never owned any of them. In her little goody two shoes mind maybe she felt bad for bragging about her family owning nearly the whole town, but Joey and Jace never had any problem showing off.

Within the huge crowd, it was clear the party had already started. Coolers were littered all around, and bonfires had been lit on the grassy ground outside the cracked and skid marked parking lot. Nearly every teenager I saw had a beer in hand and some already looked drunk. I rolled my eyes. They at least needed to stay sober enough to witness me beating Joey.

Despite my reputation, I never was one to party. I had enough of that scene as a kid when my old man would let Tang's mom bring all her drug addict and dealer friends to our trailer. I remember sitting in a dusty corner of the living room with Tang and a couple of spider webs. We would watch the crowd stagger around like babies taking their first steps, until they eventually tumble onto sofas, on the mattress in my room, or even on the hard, grimy floors face down. I

knew even as a kid that was the world I was born into. I was expected to be like them, but I never found myself willing or wanting to be reduced to a living corpse.

I just wanted to make my own sober, solo chaos.

Turning my attention to the northeast clan, Joey was leaning against his Diablo. Jace was slightly off to the wayside with his royal blue Maserati, Zach was beside him in his navy BMW, and Dexter and Sammy were standing against a silver Jaguar that no doubt didn't belong to them. They were showing off again.

I had to stifle a laugh as I parked right beside them. Their faces twisted in amusement, but I knew they were about to be in for the shock of their life. All they could see was the outside.

“Look at that piece of trash southwest bought!” Sammy was so loud; I could hear him through my running car I still sat in. “Did they pick it up from a scrap yard on the way here?”

“It looks like the hunk of junk couldn't make it one lap around the mall.” Dexter hiccup laughed obnoxiously as I got out of my car.

Prince parked his car off to the side. Getting out, Tang, Ricky, and Prince acted like they heard every insult that was hurled towards the 69.

“I told you we should have swiped the Lamborghini.” Tang gritted his teeth as he eased beside me.

“Shut up, Tang.” I hushed him as northeast came up to us.

I didn't want Joey to hear a single utter of doubt.

“Is that the closest fit to my car you could manage to steal?” Joey’s chin was held high. Arrogance engulfed him in the way his eyes peered at me, and his lips slightly uplifted in a smirk.

Joey was the kind of person who could not respect anyone who wasn’t as high-class as he was. I bet he thought of people as the ground beneath his feet. I couldn’t wait to smack that smirk right off his face and wake him up to real life.

I lifted my own chin, like I was from the country club too. “Shut up and let’s race.”

“What are the rules?” Jace was just behind Joey, like always.

“No rules, obviously.” Ricky tried hard to sound tougher than he was. Jace might have been the one behind Joey, but I had a shadow these days too.

“Three laps around the mall.” I stood tall. “Whoever crosses the finish line wins.”

Joey’s arrogant eyes peered at me for a moment. The air became quiet, and it spread throughout the crowd. The hush was haunting. It was as if something groundbreaking was going to happen, like an earthquake, but instead pelting rain began to fall from the night sky. Joey didn’t react, until he saw the clan members flinch and heard the squeal of a couple of girls who didn’t want to ruin their makeup.

I smiled wickedly when the state of the weather hit him. “Be careful out there. Novices tend to hydroplane their cars in the rain.”

Joey looked like he was about to lose grip of his emotions, but he somehow held back from lashing out. We nodded at each other as the rain started to saturate our clothes. Before we

became drenched, we both retreated from our stances, got in our cars, and prepared for the real standoff.

The first race.

Sitting in the 69 was the best feeling in the world. I cranked up the car and felt a rush of adrenaline as it roared to life. With the car in neutral and my foot on the brake, I gripped the gear shift. I could hardly stand the wait to get the car all the way up into fourth gear as I watched Tang shake up a can of orange spray paint and make a start and finish line in front of us. It really wasn't needed. I've done street races in weather like this and spinning out cars was a weapon I liked to use when water slicked the pavement.

Joey would never make it to the finish line.

Both clans stood on opposite sides of the starting line as the rain picked up. Other students gathered closer. They cheered as they embraced the rain and the growls of our engines.

"On your mark!" I heard Sammy's scream through my rolled down window.

"Get set!" Ricky matched Sammy's enthusiasm.

I looked over and found Joey already staring at me. The hate in our eyes made the winter night feel hot. Pressing down on the gas, my engine revved, and he did the same.

"Go!" Sammy and Ricky's voices yelled out together.

My eyes snapped away from the vision of my rival. Releasing the clutch, I pressed down on the gas and shifted out of neutral and into gear. My tires screeched as they sped away from the starting line. I didn't even look into the rear-view mirror as my 69 roared. I knew I was in the lead. As the rain pelted onto the windshield, I flew across the parking lot, with my 69 speeding

up into fourth gear in seconds. Picturing the gawking faces of my peers kept me focused. I wanted nothing more than to show them up. No one ever believed in me and tonight I would give them a reason too.

Approaching the first corner of the lap, I shifted down into second gear as the 69 started to curve. Quickly accelerating, the rear wheels started spinning out and the drift was born. Embracing the only feeling I liked of losing control, I lifted my foot off the accelerator and started counter-steering. The actions happened in a split second, but it was enough for my 69's wheels to smoothly glide on the soaked asphalt. I always imagined a roller coaster feeling like a drift, and the motion of the ride never failed to cause my stomach to explode with adrenaline-packed nausea. Allowing myself a look in the rearview mirror when the 69 shifted back into a straight line, I saw Joey drifting behind me as I brought my beast back into fourth gear. His Diablo teetered and nearly swerved out of control at the midpoint, but he managed to hold on.

Found his weakness now.

Successfully drifting around curve two, three, and finally four, I crossed the finish line of the first lap ahead of Joey. Without even having to put too much effort in, I was able to stay ahead during the second lap. I looked into rear view mirror again as I raced into the third and final lap. Even through the rain and darkness, I could see the loss of control spreading through Joey's face like an ugly and lethal virus. What was he even doing here anyway? This race was nothing like the ones I engaged with in the middle of the night on weekends. Those races were gritty and required the best of your abilities. You had to be smart about your strategy, but I could drive mindlessly in this last lap and still win the race. Joey wasn't even in the same league as me, and I had the sudden urge not to go easy on him.

I drifted around the first, second, and third corners of the final lap smoothly but as I approached the fourth, I slowed down. Knowing Joey would take the bait, he floored it and raced to match my speed. Neck and neck now, I turned my head to focus on Joey, and he did the same. He smiled like a villain in a comic book, but he didn't know who the true antagonist of this story was.

With the final curve coming up, I revved my engine into fourth gear and got my car as close to the right side of Joey's as I could. Easing into him, I shifted back down to second gear and then drifted. Like a twin, his car mimicked mine. With the rain still pelting and my tires slicking with the soaked roads beneath it, I delayed my counter-steering so my 69 would swerve wide with the drift. The back end of the 69 slid into Joey's lane. It was only a split-second delay, but the speed of the happening caused Joey to react. Focusing my attention on him, I saw his face pale and his eyes widened. Reflexes are a powerful tool to take advantage of. With no control over his instinct, he swerved the steering wheel of his car hard in the opposite direction of the way he was drifting to avoid a collision that was never going to happen in the first place. It looked like the rear of the rusty Camaro was going to screech into the Diablo, but I caught the wheel and adjusted the car's path before that could happen. Joey didn't know that though and by the time I started counter-steering, it was too late for him. He had swerved too hard against the natural drift of his car. I heard the squeal of his tires over the heavy sound of my engine. He was trying to repair his mistake but just by the sound I could tell he had overcorrected.

Then the inevitable happened.

Joey and his Diablo spun out right after I blazed past him. I laughed at the sight of his souped-up expensive ride loop like it was one of those spinning teacups at the county fair. The Diablo swirled until it came to a stop in the grass at the edge of the parking lot. I revved the

engine of the 69 and crossed the finish line as the only contender left in the race. After making a single donut, I screeched the rusty race car to a stop and got out of the vehicle.

“Southwest wins!” Ricky yelled out till his pale face became red.

My clan ran up and embraced me. They were all smiling, even Prince, but I didn’t share their same emotions. Maybe winning this race wasn’t good for my ego, but I held my chin the highest I ever had.

“Who needs a Lamborghini when you have a rust bucket and a mean-spirited red head?”

Tang, who was shorter than my tall stature, jumped up and looped his arm around my neck.

Bringing me down, he rubbed the top of my head with his fist.

I lightly punched his ribcage, so he’d let go of me as we approached the defeated. With the rain slowing to a stop, northeast all rushed over to Joey’s Diablo. Northeast looked like their pride was hurt, but Joey got out of his car nearly kicking and screaming. Like the baby he always was, a tantrum was all he was good for when things didn’t go his way.

“What’s your problem?” Northeast’s leader charged me and gripped the collar of my black leather jacket. “You nearly caused me to flip!”

I gritted my teeth. “There’s no problem. There are no rules, and if you really knew how to drive your vehicle you wouldn’t have overcorrected. You could have recovered and taken the lane to beat me.” I gripped Joey’s forearms, my nails digging into his jean jacket. “You didn’t do that though, and you know why? It’s because you don’t have what it takes to street race, Joey.” I ripped his hands away from my jacket’s collar. “You’re just a poser on and off the road.”

Speechless but still raging, Joey clenched his fist and tried to punch me in the face. Just like in the race, I was too fast for him and dodged his blow. Before he even knew he had missed, I brought my own fist forward and it collided with Joey's jaw. The hit was so powerful, it sent the rich boy staggering back into his clan, with doubt sinking into his face.

"This is the last time you'll underestimate me." I pulled my attention away from Joey and addressed the crowd, who still looked in shock at the thought of trailer park trash with a rusty car beating a silver spoon with a Lamborghini. "That goes for everyone here!"

Some of the crowd cheered, while others staggered back, like Joey, in fear of me. That's right. I'm the one to fear, not Joey.

"I'm not the poser!" Joey screamed as his clan dragged him away before he made even more of an embarrassment of himself. "I'm not."

I just shook my head and smirked as I turned my back on my rival with my own clan right behind me.

Chapter 9: Joey

The Return

The voices inside and outside my head were so loud today. Everyone at school was chatting and gossiping about how Kaleb had beaten me in the first race. With every remark, the voices became louder.

“You’re the poser, Joey. You’re the poser. You’re the poser.”

“Enough!” I couldn’t help but shout as I sat at my desk waiting for art class to start.

“Hey.” Jace elbowed me. “Breathe and don’t listen to them. You’ll win the next race.”

My eyes grew wide. “You hear the voices too?”

The regret in Jace’s face let me know he didn’t hear what I did. Turning my head, I spotted Kaleb and Tang. Kaleb’s desk was on fire, but he didn’t even flinch.

“Yeah.” Sammy was sitting on the other side of me. “Next race, you’ll beat Kaleb’s –”

“Good morning, class.” Our art teacher, Mrs. Faye, early thirties, slim and blonde-headed, walked in the classroom. I never paid any attention in my classes, but I minded art the least. “I have an exciting announcement to make. A former student has moved back.”

I was already doodling in my worn-out sketchbook and not paying any attention to what Mrs. Faye was saying. Suddenly, the whispers were back but they were not the ones found within my reality. They were whispers from the reality of the masses.

“Man...” Tang’s annoying voice jabbed Kaleb. “Isn’t that your cousin?”

“Look, it’s Aline.” Elizabeth’s best friend, Maddison, whispered.

“You were right after all, Joey.” Jace’s words jolted my head up.

It was true. Aline, with her dark navy apparel and braided, long black hair was standing in front of the class. Her tan face usually showed some kind of meekness, but she stood tall with an air of confidence these days. It had only been six months since I saw her last, but she seemed to have changed. I sensed the same thing at the bridge yesterday.

Was that just yesterday?

Her dark eyes locked on mine, and the classroom started to shake. No one else seemed to notice the earthquake, but mine and Aline’s fingers trembled.

Was she really the first person to see my reality? She was always a bit different than the others. A little too awkward and introspective, people thought the quiet and pessimistic girl was creepy or weird, but I somehow could always relate to her. Aline liked statistics. She liked to analyze things and knew morbid facts, like how long it would take the standard American home to be consumed by flames or what was the probability of dying in a car crash if one was going over 60mph. I could never decide if Aline was afraid of death or fascinated by it, but she seemed to own the guidebook on how not to fall into the fate of being a statistic. She was cautious yet calculated. Even if her silent and serious ways were chilling, I still didn’t think she deserved to be an outcast like she was.

The shaking in the classroom stopped, and Aline broke her gaze from me. She took her old empty seat in the very back, and class began.

I couldn’t stop feeling as if she were staring at the back of my head the whole-time class was in session. Our assignment for this week in art class was to draw a local landmark. As the hour passed, I drew the old metal Hawthorne Bridge like I was bewitched. All I could feel was

Aline's eye on me. All I could do was draw that bridge we met at yesterday until the side of my hand was grey with the residue of graphite. The shaking might have stopped, but the river rushed right outside the school even though it was usually miles away. I was so focused on my drawing, I didn't notice the bell ring and only realized class was over when I could no longer feel Aline's gaze on me.

Looking up, I saw her walking towards the exit. My pencil slid from my hand and clanged to the floor as I bolted out of my seat, leaving Jace and Sammy behind. I was about to catch up with Aline when Mrs. Faye called out.

"Joey, can you come here for a moment? I need to talk to you about something."

My shoes grudgingly came to a stop as I watched Aline walk out of the classroom.

"What?" I turned to face my teacher with more edge in my voice than I intended.

Mrs. Faye didn't seem daunted by the roughness in my voice. She was a hard one to catch off guard. As the rest of the students shuffled out of the classroom, she also kept Sammy behind with me. We both looked at each other. I couldn't remember vandalizing the art supplies. If she was going to accuse us of something like that, then I was fully prepared to blame it all on my dog.

"I want to offer both of you a great opportunity." Her smile was so toothy, it even showed her gums. "The state fine arts competition is coming up, and I want both of you to represent our school as the two senior artist."

"Really?!" Sammy was always loud, but I had never heard him so hyped up before.

“What?” I fidgeted my feet back and forth. I just needed to talk to Aline. “Why on earth would you want me to be in your competition? Find someone else.” I peered at Sammy who was beside me. “In fact, find two new students. Neither of us are interested.”

“We aren’t?” His lip drooped in a downcast frown, but it straightened up when he saw my stern gaze. “That’s right. We aren’t.”

“Boys...” Mrs. Faye sat down in her swivel chair, like she was going to have a long, lighthearted conversation with us. “I know you try to do your worst in school, but you both have talent when it comes to art.” She focused on my dog. “Sammy, I haven’t had a student paint as naturally well as you in years.” Then she focused on me. “Joey, you don’t think I notice you sketching during class, but I do. You have a raw talent for drawing landscapes and buildings.” She crossed her arms, but the gum-showing smile remained on her lips. “The reason I want both of you to compete is because you are the best artist in the grade.”

Her compliments stirred something dormant inside me. The whispers in my ears intensified, and the river water splashed against the window of the classroom.

“I’m no artist.” I dug my hands in my jean jacket pockets. “I hate being volunteered for things. Just stay out of my business.” I turned and started walking briskly out of the classroom.

Before Mrs. Faye could protest, I made it out into the hallway. Lockers lined each wall and there was a chatter of their metal doors clanging open and shut as students were preparing for the next period. The crowd was like a kaleidoscope of a school of fish collectively moving in different patterns and paces. Faces blurred as the crowds seemed to merge into one. The river water must have seeped into the school because it was starting to fill up the halls. Sneakers and boots were submerged as the water splashed up on student’s ankles.

“Joey.” A voice from behind made me lose my breath.

Turning around, I found Aline staring at me. “You’re back.” My voice was weak.

“Why did you turn down Mrs. Faye’s offer?” She eyed the sketchbook my graphite-stained hand was gripping. “I heard you’ve been racing against Kaleb.”

My stomach surged with twisting nausea at the memory of last night. “What of it?”

“Why are you racing, Joey? Do you even like it?”

“Of course, I like it.” I snapped but then I noticed the other me appear down the hallway.

“Is he here?”

My gaze was instantly on hers once more. “Who?”

“You know who. You.”

I sloshed a step closer to her as the water rose to my calf. “You see the other me?”

She swallowed hard. “I saw him on the bridge.”

“That was really you.”

“Of course, it was me. You believe what you see, don’t you?”

“Of course, I do.”

“Then act like you believe it. Look around you, Joey.” Brown eyes flashed emergency and shaking plagued her shoulders. “Something bad is going to happen.”

Ever since I met Aline, I realized she would be the first person to claim an apocalypse was coming. Between her statistics and naturally pessimistic nature, she was always worried

about new theories that could cause her or others harm. Usually, these calculations were concluded in solitude when we hung out together. She would only ever mention these doomsday thoughts while we were waiting for P.E. class to start or when we met up at Hawthorne Bridge. There was never much urgency as there was interest, but the Aline that came back seemed to have a bleak premonition of the future.

I felt the water rising.

“Everything’s fine.”

“Nothing is fine.” Now her whole core was trembling. “You need to stop the races. I don’t know why... but you must accept the truth you already know.”

“All I know is that I’m winning the next race.” An edge choked my dry throat. “You asked me if I believed in my reality. Well, I do.”

Her shaking stopped, and her classic stoic gaze blazed fire. “I never asked if you believed in your reality. I asked if you believed in what you saw.” She leaned in. “You need to realize why you’re so dead set on winning this rivalry, before the water rises above your head.”

The commotion caused by the river water and the kaleidoscope of students swirling with the current suddenly hushed. The world, be it mine or the one others believed in, became eerily still as the presence of Aline shook my bones with a chill.

“*She’s right.*” The whispers of my world swirled like the river water and shuffling students. “*Something bad will happen.*”

Would it?

The Doppelgangers

Our northeast clan was hanging out in the alley behind school, when southwest approached us. Kaleb was still holding his head high after the first win.

“Second race?” He raised his eyebrows. “You can always forfeit if you’re too scared.”

“Not on your posing life.” I was eager to dethrone him.

“Yeah, we’re never surrendering.” Sammy jumped up and down so violently, he kept bumping into the rest of the northeast members.

“Sam, take it easy.” Jace hung his arm around Sammy and focused calmly on Kaleb.

“When and where?”

“Three days from now at the Lewis Bee Farm.” Kaleb pulled a honey stick out of his back pocket and popped it into his mouth. “The place is vacant at night.”

“Fine.” I nodded my head in agreement. “Let’s meet at midnight, like last time.”

Suddenly, two cars rolled up and blocked each end of the alley way. One car was my Diablo, and the other me was behind the wheel. He stared at me from afar, with the inside of my purple paradise enflamed in the backseat. A rev of an engine caused me to turn my head. At the other end, the rusty orange Camaro was parked. There was another Kaleb behind the wheel than the one I was talking to. He didn’t really look older than the current Kaleb. Unchanged, his hands gripped the steering wheel, and his eyes blazed with focus of what was ahead. He looked angry, angrier than I’ve ever seen him. The front fender of his car was busted up, but what shocked me the most was that looking closely, I could see the sorrow behind Kaleb’s rage. His eyes were

hard and seemingly unfeeling, but they were welling up with liquid too. A single tear rolled down his cheek as he revved his engine once more.

“Hey, Kaleb asked if you were listening.” Ricky kicked me in the shin.

I snapped my head back to attention and gave Ricky a look that made him stagger slightly behind Kaleb. “What?”

“I said, sounds fair.” A mocking smile slowly rose on his face. “Please, at least try to make it a competition this time.”

He turned to leave before I could start a fist fight with him. I tried to launch at him, but my clan held me back.

“Let’s just go.” Jace gripped my arm. “Beat him at the race instead.”

My clan turned around and headed in the opposite direction of southwest, but I walked backwards with my focus never leaving Kaleb.

“You won’t know what hit you the next race.” My yell bounced off the walls of the alley. “You’ll lose, and it’ll feel worse than a sucker punch.”

“Yeah.” Kaleb lazily agreed with sarcasm coating his voice. “Cause your reality always comes true.”

I blinked and realized the Diablo and Camaro had disappeared. Squeezing my eyes shut, I tried to block out Kaleb’s words and the whispers in my ears. My reality would come true.

Chapter 11: Kaleb

My Good Deed

I'm not going to lie; I was feeling pretty good about myself as I walked home from school alone. Nothing eased nagging anger like seeing Joey spiral with doubt.

That's right, Joey. You aren't me. You never will be.

I always walked home along the rushing river that cuts right through our town. Passing by the old metal Hawthorne bridge was the line that let me know I was about to cross over from middle class Hawthorne to the low class. Like a habit, I looked up at the old bridge suspended twenty feet in the air. Usually the condemned structure was vacant, but I squinted my eyes when I saw a figure standing there.

Taking a step closer towards the edge of the river, I realized it was Elizabeth. Why on earth was she up there? Her grandma always had her running from tutors, academies, horseback riding lessons, and tennis matches without a break. I cocked my head to one side at the odd sight of Elizabeth standing still. More than still, she was standing up on the bridge so stiff and stoically. Like in a trance, she focused on the raging water below. Then her legs lifted and climbed over the railing. I was too stunned to move as I watched her hang over the ledge.

“What the...?”

Letting go, she fell without a reaction of regret and slammed into the deep river water.

“Lizzie!”

Finding my will to move, I sprinted towards the river. Without a thought, I dove into the frigid water. The strong current immediately jerked me along, and I had to fight to swim against

it. Gasping for breath as I reached the surface, I desperately looked for Elizabeth. My head shifted above the surface, searching this way and that. Then it shuttered to a stop at the sight of Elizabeth's Mary Jane shoes bobbing against the rough waters, with her lifeless, facedown body floating right along with them.

I pumped my arms and legs as fast as I could. My lungs burned, and my joints became stiff from the cold. With every breath, it felt like sharp knives were slicing into my lungs, but I kept swimming against the current. I had to reach her, and when I made up my mind to do something, there was hardly anyone on the earth as stubborn as me. Willing my body to swim harder and faster, I finally came into reach of Elizabeth. Outstretching my arm, my fingers were able to grasp onto the sleeve of her blouse. I stiffened a yell as I used my maximum strength to pull her body in next to mine. My left arm looped around her torso as I attempted to paddle us to shore. Land luckily wasn't too far away, since we had reached the turn of the river that was narrow. With what strength I had left, I grasped onto one of the boulders that jutted up from the watery surface. From the boulder, I swung my leg, and my boot landed on dry land. Pushing off on the rock, I managed to wobble up onto the shore while dragging Elizabeth with me.

Once safe, I laid her down on the grassy ground. She was limp. Her skin was so pale, and I felt sharp pain course within me once more.

"Lizzie?" I shook her shoulders. "Lizzie, wake up."

There was no response.

My hand lifted from her shoulder and grasped the side of her face. She was as cold as ice. My fingers slid down her frigid skin, until I reached just below her jawline. I held my breath as I felt for a pulse. There was none.

“Lizzie...” A million thoughts I couldn’t make out rushed through my brain as I collapsed down in front of her on my knees.

Without telling them to, my hands clasped one right over the other and as a team they began to pump her chest. I didn’t know how to do CPR, but I tried my best to recall the lesson we took in health class at school. I counted the beats aloud to steady my whirling mind. It was just too odd to see Elizabeth so still and stoic. She was always more alive than anyone I had ever met.

“Breathe, Lizzie! Breathe!” I was yelling at her in frustration now.

She never did as I asked.

Like an instinct, my eyes shifted to her lips that had turned blue. My hands released the clasp they had on each other and gently, yet firmly gripped Elizabeth’s face. In an instant, I opened her airway, leaned down, and pressed my lips onto hers. I breathed air into her stalled lungs. Releasing her for a moment, I took a deep breath and then pressed my lips against hers once more. The heat of my touch took the bitter cold out of her, as I gave her all the life I had.

“Lizzie, breathe!” I wheezed when I sat back up. My hand clasped again and started pumping her chest. “Lizzie, wake up! Please, wake up!”

I pumped her chest with the last ounce of will in my lethargic, freezing wet arms and then her eyes burst open. She instantly coughed up the water. I turned her over on her side, so she could regain her breath.

“Are you okay?”

I nearly collapsed. My whole body was shaking to its core, and my teeth chattered. The pain in my chest started to subside slowly as relief flooded through me. I shifted so that we were facing each other. Her body was shaking too, and her eyes were searching mine, wide and startled.

“K-Kaleb?”

Instantly, my hand reached out and grasped her arm as our shivering increased. I helped her slowly lift into a sitting position, as my other hand guided her up by gripping her shoulder.

“Where?” She looked around and then back to me. “What-what happened?”

What happened? My hands and lips that were burning hot from bringing her back to life suddenly erupted the rest of my body. This may have been the angriest I’ve ever been.

“You jumped off the bridge!” I snapped and let go of her.

Her skin that was finally gaining some pink turned pale again. “Huh?”

“What were you thinking?” I dug my heels into the ground and stood up as fast as my frozen and exhausted body would allow me.

My mind was racing once more. She jumped. She really jumped off that bridge. I tried to wrap my brain around it all as I paced back and forth and raked my fingers through my fiery orange hair. The pain came back in my chest with a vengeance. I thought I wouldn’t be able to catch my breath because the stabbing and twisting was so tight within me.

“I didn’t take you for the type –” My voice ceased when I caught a glimpse of her.

Her cloud of confusion slowly vanished and was replaced with realization. “Wh-what are you saying?” She managed to follow my lead and stood up as well.

“I’m saying,” I rushed over to confront her. “Who are you, who has it so good, to do something like that and make someone nearly die saving you?”

“That’s not what happened...” Her shaking body convulsed. “Yo-you, you have no idea what you’re talking about.” Her soaking wet body tried to race past me.

“Hey!” I grabbed her arm and made her face me. “I’m not done talking here.”

“Well, I’m done!” She tried to jerk her arm out of my grasp but was too weak to do so. Her eyes welled up with tears as they pleaded with me. “Please.... just let me go.”

The pain in my chest intensified, but I oddly lost my will to be angry. My hand slowly loosened the grip it had on her. Once released, she backed away from me and ran off in the direction of the main road.

I just stood there with my hands and lips still on fire and watched as she disappeared from my sight.

Chapter 12: Elizabeth

Hypocrite

I burst through the front door of my grandparents' mansion that I called home. Ever since the northeast and southwest clans were old enough to get behind a wheel, I've voiced my opinion of how I thought their reckless driving of running red lights and speeding well above the posted limited was an idiotically thoughtless practice that would end up with a horrible crash one day. I always tried my best not to be a hypocrite but as I drove home, I became one. As my drenched body shook violently, I sped. As my mind raced in a million directions, I accidentally ran a red light at an intersection, which caused three cars to screech their wheels and blare their horns at me.

Forcing myself to focus, I was now trying to sneak up to my room on the second floor without being seen. My freezing fingers gripped the banister of the staircase as I started to tiptoe up them. I was usually quite stealthy, but I found myself to be off balance and jittery as the fog around me refused to lift.

"Elizabeth?" When did my mom come into the foyer? "Are you okay? You're soaked."

"Oh." I grasped the torso of my blouse that was still dripping with river water. "I'm fine." I reassured quickly. "It-it was raining at school, and I got drenched on my way to the car."

My mom looked out the row of huge windows that lined the entrance of the mansion. "But it's so sunny out."

"I'm going to change, mom." I bolted away as quickly as I could.

Once in my room, the violent shaking in the core of my bones rocked me to my knees. Sitting on my bedroom floor, with my back pressed against my door, I tried to piece together the shredded memories of my mind. What had happened on that bridge? Truthfully, I couldn't recall.

Vigorously rubbing my arms that were full of goosebumps, hot tears ran down my icy cheeks. I raked my hands over my face and found my lips were hot like the tears I was wiping away. Why was that? Pinching the skin of my lips, memories of waking up on shore sparked.

"Kaleb." A sharp inhaled whisper escaped me.

Kaleb...his name kept repeating over and over in my mind as I sat down at dinner with my family. Freshly out of a scorching shower and clothed in my warmest attire, I felt the same awkwardness that plagued every dinnertime.

It was like everyone was waiting for a pen to drop, and my grandma was always the one to shatter the silence.

"Why were you late getting home?" I could feel her beady eyes, that were green like mine, staring at me as I picked at my dinner. "You missed your tutoring session. Remember, Law school won't reward a lazy student."

I'm sure her finger was wagging at me, but I couldn't seem to focus on her sharp words. All I could think about was Kaleb's muddled pleads begging me to wake up. All I could see was his worried face looking down at me when I came to.

"Elizabeth!"

"Huh?" Startled by her outburst, my fork clanged against my plate.

“You look unwell, honeycomb.” My dad, who I was sitting besides, looked at me with gentle concern. My grandma might have been the one who always dropped the pens, but my dad was the one who always picked them up. “You feel, okay?”

“I’m great.” I had to bite the inside of my cheek to prevent more exhausted tears from rolling down my face.

“You better be great. Midterms are coming up.” My grandma carved her steak with vengeance and a jaggedly bladed knife. “A perfect score is expected after all that tutoring.”

“Absolutely.” I managed to smile.

I was hoping agreeing would appease her, but I could tell my grandma wasn’t done with her lecture for the day by the way she was now eyeing my parents.

“I swore when you were born, Elizabeth, I wouldn’t let you end up like your mother.” She lifted her wrinkled nose high into the air. “You are going to be more than someone caught up in frivolous feelings, marrying a bee farmer, and became a housewife.”

My heart always cracked when she mentioned my parents in a bad light. What was wrong with being a bee farmer? What wasn’t commendable about being a housewife? My grandma had been a lawyer for the elite, and my grandpa was the CEO of Hawthorne & CO, a generational family company that made tack and accessories for equestrian sports. Between the two of them, they made millions and millions. Too bad their millions couldn’t buy harmony.

“I am determined you will make something out of yourself I can be proud of.” She was wagging her finger at me now. “Do you hear me, Elizabeth?”

“Of course, I hear you.” My voice was weak.

I thought about the words I yelled at Kaleb as we shook by the river. Did I sound like my grandma then? I continued to pick at my food as a hollowness expanded inside me. He really dived into that rushing river to save me. I always knew he was capable of something like that.

“Now, for tomorrow I have asked your tutor to come over for an additional –”

“Can I be excused?” I sat my fork down, not even realizing I interjected my grandma.

“Elizabeth.” My grandma scoffed. “Were you even listening?”

Was I listening? All I could see, all I could think of was Kaleb.

“I’m sorry, I just really need to go run a quick errand.”

“What kind of errand do you need to run during the middle of dinnertime? No.” Grandma shook her head decisively. “You’re staying here and studying tonight.”

“Please...It-it has to do with school.” I bit my tongue. I hated white lies about as much as I hated reckless driving. Why was I such a hypocrite today?

“Oh, just let her go, Beth.” My grandpa winked and gave me that dreamy smile he always had. “She’s technically an adult already.”

“Adults don’t run out during dinner.” Grandma stared grandpa down.

“I’m sure she’ll be right back, won’t you girl?” My grandpa was used to my grandma’s harshness and had reached the point in his life where he was ready to argue just a bit.

“Right back.” I nodded my head. “Please, it’s really important.”

“Come right back.” Grandma’s voice was flat, but I would take any kind of approval.

Bolting from my seat, I slipped on my shoes and ran out the door before she could change her mind. I had to see him, before the hollowness spread into every inch of my being.

Chapter 13: Kaleb

My Hell

My home wasn't one I was proud of. It sat lopsided at the backend of a trailer park. The doublewide was once white with an orange stripe. Now the outside had faded into beige with a burnt brown middle. My dad's bedroom window was busted out. I had duct taped some plastic around it to prevent the rain from coming in, but I could never figure out how to stop the leak in the kitchen ceiling, eventually resulting in a bucket to catch the drips. I stomped up the dry rotted steps to the front door, still fuming about the incident with Elizabeth at the river.

"You save someone's life, and they don't even say thank you." I jammed my key into the doorknob and tried to stealthily enter the structure I never considered home.

Hopefully, he would be crashed on his bed with a nasty hangover.

"You home, boy?"

I gritted my teeth and cursed under my breath as I closed the door behind me. This afternoon just keeps getting better and better. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see my old man stumbling towards me. I tried to walk to my bedroom, but he got in my face.

"Why are you all wet?" His grimy fingers, I'm sure he hadn't washed today started jabbing my chest. "Did you get in trouble again? Huh?"

I shielded my face away from his breath that reeked of alcohol "You're drunk."

Shoving the old man, he went stumbling into the rickety wooden kitchen table. Taking the opportunity, I rushed into my room and locked the door behind me. His angered and mumbled slurs could be heard outside my bedroom. Peeling off my soaked clothes and changing

them into dry ones, I waited for him to waddle away. Elizabeth wouldn't try to do anything stupid again would she? I took a towel that was hanging up in my closet and started rubbing my hair dry. Not able to get the image of her scared and confused face out of my mind, my hand violently raked over my head, until I slammed the towel on the ground.

“Who cares if she jumps off another bridge? I don't.” I sighed in frustration, but my ears picked up on the sound of silence.

Maybe my old man was passed out on the couch by now. Honestly, my old man wasn't an old man. That idiot got my mom pregnant at seventeen and now he was only thirty-five-years-old with an eighteen-year-old son. I only called him old man because the title dad seemed too good for him.

Thinking I could sneak out of the house now, I opened my bedroom door, but the old man must have been more sober than I realized. Waiting for me, his dirty hands instantly gripped my clean shirt and slammed my side and back against the doorframe.

“I've had about enough of your disrespectful attitude.” He pointed right in my face.

“Like you've done anything to deserve respect.” I let out a little, wicked laugh.

He pressed his elbow into my chest. “You wanna fight?”

I eyed the dusty boxing trophies my old man had won back in the stone ages that were sitting on the otherwise bare mantel. “I think you're past your prime.”

“Why do you never want to fight me?” His elbow put more pressure on my chest, making it hard to breathe. “You'll fight anyone on the streets but never your own father.”

Rage exploded in me at the sound of him calling himself a dad. “I only fight against people, not useless scum like you.”

“You little –”

What happened after that was a fog. His retired boxing champion fist cracked against my cheekbone. I hated to admit it, but my dad was a lot bulkier than I was. His punches always sent me staggering.

“If I’m scum, then you are too.” His speech hissed as I tried to clear my blurry vision.

My old man and the whole town thought the same way. Ever since I was a kid, I’ve been told I was the spitting image of him on both the outside and inside. To me, we were nothing alike, except for his rage that flamed eerily like mine. When violence engulfed his being, I knew I would be getting the treatment I so often gave out to innocent others.

His hand reached out and latched onto my neck. Smacking me against the wall, his slimy fingers started squeezing as hard as they could. My old man got stronger with alcohol in him and since there was hardly ever a moment, he wasn’t emptying a bottle, I always had to be careful. I wasn’t careful this afternoon though. My mind was muddled with the thoughts of that stupid goody two shoes trying to drown. I clawed at his hand, but he only choked me harder. As I fought to wheeze, I determined I should have let her die.

Now I was the one drowning above the surface.

A knock at the door echoed through the trailer. Surprised, my old man looked back towards the entrance of our hell. Taking advantage of the moment, I kned him in the gut as hard as my lethargic body could. He groaned and loosened his grip on my neck. Escaping his grasp

and seeing him fall out of the corner of my eye, I raced for the front door. With the knocks continuing, I opened it and was shocked by who was on the other side.

“Lizzi – Elizabeth?”

“Hey, Kaleb.” She wasn’t yelling anymore, like earlier today. Her voice was soft like she had fully regained her composure.

“What are you doing here?” My voice was harsh. Unlike Elizabeth, I was still angry.

“I had to talk to you.”

“Kaleb!” I turned around to see my dad start to twitch from his state on the floor. “Come back here.”

I shut the door quickly and stepped outside. “What were you thinking coming out here alone?” Absentminded, I took a gentle hold of her elbow, and led her down the steps. We didn’t stop until we were standing in front of her car. “What if my old man had been the only one here?” I sighed, looked up at the dusked sky, and fought the urge to yell. “You must really have a death wish today.”

When my gaze shifted back to her, I found her studying my face with concern. “Is he drunk again?” She took a step closer to me. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” I shielded the side of my face that was forming a fresh bruise and let go of her elbow. “You can drop the good girl act. I know you don’t care anyway.”

“That’s not true.” She sighed too, but it sounded out of guilt instead of frustration.

“Kaleb, I came out here to apologize about how I treated you earlier.”

I thought about how we yelled at each other. “Please don –”

“I will.” She took another step closer to me. “How I treated you was awful. I didn’t mean it. I was just confused after I came to.” Her gaze pleaded for understanding. “Still, that’s no excuse. You saved my life, and I didn’t even say thank you.” She tilted her head, so that my avoiding gaze had to look at her. “Can you forgive me for how I acted?”

“Whatever.”

A smile spread through her lips. “Thanks, Kaleb. I owe you one.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Sarcasm oozed from my voice as my old man started to make a very loud ruckus from inside the trailer. “Listen, if you’re done spewing sap, get out of here. I’ve got somewhere I need to be.”

“Where? I’ll give you a ride.”

“No.”

The ruckus inside intensified as my old man started yelling out my name.

“Yes. I have a car and you don’t.” She didn’t have to rub it in. “If you try to escape on foot, he’ll catch up with you. I know how fast and strong your dad gets when he’s drunk. I’ve witnessed it, remember?”

I tried for years to forget how my old man beat me to a pulp in front of her when we were kids. I thought he would kill me that day, and he might have if it wouldn’t have been for Elizabeth.

“Fine. Drive me then.”

After I opened her passenger car door grudgingly and slouched in the seat, we drove off. In the rear-view mirror, I saw my dad burst through the front door. Digging into my leather

jacket pocket, I pulled out a honey stick that came from Elizabeth's bee farm. Popping the top open with my teeth, I started sucking on the sweet, thick liquid as bitterness coursed through me.

I hated the thought of her owing me one.

Chapter 14: Elizabeth

Wonder

The sky was dark now as I drove the sulking Kaleb through town. I bit my tongue for the millionth time to prevent myself from asking why he always ate honey sticks from my family's farm.

"I heard you won the first race against Joey. You know, when I said you should end the rivalry between you two, I didn't mean in that way."

"I'm shocked you don't approve." He sucked in a fake gasp as he finished his honey stick, and I couldn't help but lightheartedly laugh.

He rolled down his window and was about to toss the plastic tube onto the side of the road when I rolled the window back up.

"No littering. Just put it in the cup holder."

He groaned but did as he was told. We went on driving in silence as we passed from the southwest end of Hawthorne to the middle ground, where those who weren't rich or poor resided. I always felt the most at home in this portion of town.

"Just drop me off here." Kaleb broke the silence when a convenient store came into view. I drove right past it. "Hey!" He yelled and looked back. "I told you to stop."

I looked over at him with a straight, knowing face. "You expect me to believe that's where you're really going?"

"It is where I'm going." He rubbed his bruised face. "Why won't you just listen to me?"

“Don’t get fussy.” I reassured. “I know exactly where you want to go.”

Kaleb pouted the whole way, and I had to stifle a laugh as we shifted from the middle ground of Hawthorne to the high-class side of town.

“Why are we stopping?” Kaleb acted innocent as I parked near Jeff Parker’s car garage.

“Come on, Kaleb.” I scoffed. “Even the school’s goody two shoes isn’t deaf to rumors.”

“You believe gossip?”

“Not usually, but Prince bragging about how the southwest clan broke into Mr. Parker’s garage to steal his sport cars and illegally race them does sound a lot like one of your plans.”

Kaleb clenched his jaw and looked out the passenger window.

“You know you’re going to get caught, right?” I didn’t care if Kaleb thought I was preachy. It seemed like a waste for him to end up in jail after his life had been so hard.

“Why?” He turned to face me. “Are you going to tell on me?”

“Of course not.” I tried my best to give him a hopeful smile. “I owe you, remember? I do wish you’d stop on your own though. Why do you need to street race anyway?”

“Someone has to make money in my household.” He suddenly became fascinated with the vision of his shoes.

“There’s so many other ways to make money, Kaleb.”

His face twisted in disgust. “Says the girl who hasn’t worked a day in her life. You know what everyone in town says. Who would hire me?”

I pursed my lips in defeat. It was true Kaleb had quite the reputation. Granted, it was one he created with his own wrong actions, but it would still be hard for him to make a change if he wanted to. No one trusted him, and everyone thought he'd end up just like his dad.

Everyone but me.

“Still, you could prove them wrong. You can do whatever you want.” I thought about the endless possibilities. “You're so smart.”

“You're the one always calling me stupid.”

“I don't mean you're stupid. I mean your actions are stupid.”

“Gee, thanks.” He rolled his eyes at me.

I couldn't help but let out another laugh. “You know what I mean, Kaleb. You can make scrap cars speed like lightning and get any engine to run. You're gifted, and a gift like that doesn't belong on the streets.”

“I don't want to prove anyone wrong.” He shook his head. “After I beat Joey, the people of this town won't have to worry about me stealing as much as one of their hubcaps anymore.”

“You're leaving.” My hollow voice rang out as his words sunk in.

He shifted in his seat. “You said it not me.”

“Oh. So, that's why you've been racing under the table so much lately. What are you going to do after you leave? Do you have a plan?”

“I'll make a plan.” His voice was snappy as ever. “Why do you care?”

“Mr. Parker will press charges against you for taking his precious cars for a joyride.”

“That’s why I’m leaving as soon as I beat that poser, Joey.”

“I wish you’d stay.” The words slipped from my mouth, and I became fascinated with my own sneakers as they kept coming. “I wish you’d graduate and make something of yourself. There’s plenty of opportunities to legally race here, and you still have some time to pull up your grades. Hey!” I shot my head up and grinned. “I could tutor and help you graduate.”

He just stared at me with a blank face. “Hard pass on the offer from the rich savior.”

“Come on, Kaleb.” I begged but it sounded an awful lot like nagging. “You know I can’t stand to see potential wasted.”

“Says the girl who jumped off a bridge this afternoon.”

His blunt words punched me in the gut. The smile was suddenly wiped off my face, and I sunk low into the driver’s seat slowly. “I-I told you...it wasn’t like that.” I tried to recall that moment which was so blank within my memory bank. “I accidentally fell.”

And it was an accident, right?

The air inside the car became deathly silent, until Kaleb’s voice shattered it. “Really?” His voice was so gentle it caught me off guard.

“Really.” I shyly looked back up at him.

Even though I couldn’t remember and the blank space within my life story sent a chill through me, I decided to believe I would never do something like that on purpose.

Usually, Kaleb’s brown eyes were hard and unconcerned with the world around him but, with the light from Mr. Parker’s garage beaming against his face, I noticed a rare softness of

worry glinting in them. I almost looked away; his disquiet features reminding me of the heat on my lips caused by him saving me.

He was so reckless when it came to saving. He was so sincere as a kid and even now.

“But you’re okay now, right? He swallowed hard.

I nodded my head as a soft smile formed on my face. “All thanks to you. I do owe you one, and I will pay you back, Kaleb. This isn’t even the first time you saved me, remember?”

Kaleb’s finger traced a scar that ran from the bottom of his thumb to past his wrist. “I didn’t save you as much as you...” His voice trailed off, but I understood what he meant.

We just stared at each other for a moment. These moments with Kaleb weren’t often. They were scattered fragments littered here and there over the years. To most, these moments with two people who didn’t see eye to eye on most things would seem insignificant, but I always remembered them with startling clarity. Why was that? I always wondered, and I wished I knew if he remembered and wondered about them too.

Without another word being said, he turned away from me, got out of the car, and slammed the door shut. I watched as he approached Mr. Parker’s garage, and I drove away when I saw him meet up with Tang.

I suppose, like all the other moments, I would be left to wonder once more.

Chapter 15: Joey

The Argument

“The night’s going be clear.” Jace eyed the dark sky as he stood outside my garage.

“Man, your car looks insane.” Zach whistled while he checked out the Diablo.

I got my dad to hire some expensive mechanics to modify my car to go faster, and the results made me feel more confident than I have in a long time. The rain shower inside the garage had become a drought, and the whispers could not be heard.

“Joey.” The frigid voice of Aline caught the attention of the whole northeast clan.

The optimism spreading through us as we got ready to head over to the Lewis Farm suddenly stilled and died at the sound of her voice. Aline was standing on my lawn with a pessimistic nature that threatened to bring the harsh weather back. Two vertical lines of fire sparked life on each side of her. The light from the flames bounced off her face, and I could see even more clearly that she was not pleased with me.

“What are you doing here?” My voice was laced with annoyance.

“You’re going to race.” Her bottom lip trembled, but she looked far from meek or sad. She looked angry.

“Of course, I’m going to race.”

“I told you not to.” Her serious gaze stared at me more intently.

“Why would Joey listen to you?” Zach leaned on the opened door of his BMW; his arms lazily hanging down. “I know you guys hang out, but Joey doesn’t even listen to his shrink.”

“Hey, I told you not to mention my shrink.”

“Right.” He held his hands up in passionless surrender. “No mention of my mom, and no mention of your shrink.”

“Joey needs to listen to me though.” Unlike Zach, Aline was very passionate. “I know more than Dr. Nolan.” A little closed-mouth smile lifted the ends of her pursed lips, but it wasn’t out of happiness or joy. It was wicked and spine-chilling, like she saw the very core of me and all the secrets I kept hidden within it. “There’s a fire, Joey.”

“Aline, don’t study too hard for midterms.” Dexter laughed as he leaned into Sammy, the red bull addicted ball of energy. “I know better than anyone, that it can make you a bit unstable.”

Aline’s cold expression never changed, but I felt the blood rush out of my cheek bones. “If you keep racing, all these flames, all these floods, all these earthquakes will become real.”

“How do you know?” I snapped, and my veins turned cold at the sound of rain tap, tap, tapping against my Diablo that still sat inside my garage behind me.

The muscles under her skin heightened and contorted as she tensed. “Trust me.”

“I trust no one.” I turned around to find my clan staring at me; the optimism now vanished from their atmospheres. They shouldn’t have been surprised by my words. They should have known I only trusted myself.

With the bad weather back, I shoved passed those who called me friend and got into my Diablo. With everyone either standing in the rain or the fire, I cranked my car and drove off. I didn’t even look at Aline as I passed her by, but I could feel her vision blazing a hole in the back of my head the entire way to Lewis Farm. My clan followed me, but Aline stayed behind.

She was where she belonged, and I was going where I belonged.

Chapter 16: Joey

The Second Race

Because of Aline stalling us, southwest was the first to arrive at Lewis Farm. The bee farm was owned by Elizabeth's parents. Everyone knew her grandma hated the place and had ordered her unwanted son-in-law to quit and become a suit working at Hawthorne & Co. I had to give it to the guy for never letting go of the farm.

The fields were filled with man-made beehives that were simply giant white boxes. On the far right of the property, an old farmhouse sat on a hill, but it had been vacant ever since Elizabeth and her parents moved into her grandparents' mansion. I bet that was her grandma's idea too. That old lady had more ideas than anyone I've ever seen. At least this one could be beneficial. Since this farm became sleepy and silent at night, with nothing more than the slight buzz of bees in boxes, the race could happen without having to worry too much about cops showing up.

"Hey, Southwest." I approached Kaleb, who was still towing along that rusty Camaro.

He may have gotten me the first time, but a surprise is only good once. I had placed the words and warnings of Aline to the back of my brain. I decided I wouldn't care about the fires blazing on the side fields of the farm or worry about the circular patches of rain that were pouring down within scattered pieces of the property.

Kaleb looked me up and down. "Want to surrender before you embarrass yourself?"

I only lifted my chin, like I knew he hated. "You can surrender all you want."

Almost a carbon copy of the last race, students from ours and surrounding schools were there. The crowd had grown this time as teenagers littered throughout the farm's property. Kaleb and I got in our cars and eased up to where the race was to begin. Tang shook a can of spray paint and created a start and finish line. We decided to race down the straight two-mile-long dirt road that cut through the heart of the farm. The road was wide enough for both cars but there wasn't much room to spare. This would be a race about speed, but the stakes were the same. So many things in life were carbon copies. Months, weeks, days, minutes, and seconds. They weren't so different. I guess it would be the same with these races, but unlike the usual mundane moments in life, these carbon copies sent a shock of adrenaline through me. I felt a need, a hunger to win. Being driven was something that hardly ever pumped through by blood stream, and it felt so good to be alive.

I was in my reality. The real world.

"Go!" Sammy and Ricky yelled, and I popped the clutch and floored the gas with perfect timing.

The hired help really did make my car go faster. I was flung back in my seat, but I managed to keep control of the vehicle. The distant fire was blazing right within my view, but I chose to focus on the finish line. With my Diablo in sixth gear, the car was blowing up dirt from the road as I flew to 150mph. I kept telling myself I was born to control a vehicle at this speed, but my hands shook as I gripped the steering wheel. I couldn't even look over at Kaleb, I was having to focus so hard on keeping straight. Flashes of sketching in my notebook or spraying graffiti on the southwest side of town, like I do sometimes with Sammy, made my brain daze.

"This isn't who you are. You're going to get yourself killed. The fires Joey, the fires."

No. This was my reality. I was the one who was feared. I was the one who was confident in the chaos I made. Pressing my Diablo to go faster, I almost lost control as the finish line came into view. I knew my car was better than Kaleb's. All I had to do was hold on.

And I did.

My heated tires zoomed past the finish line. I saw Jace and Dexter waiting at the end of the race with Prince, Ricky, and a slew of other teenagers. My clan pumped their fist, while southwest sulked low into the soles of their shoes. A smirk burst onto my face and with every gear I shifted down I shouted out in victory.

When I shifted my Diablo into neutral, I bolted out of my car, barely remembering to shut the engine off. Sammy and Zach had made it down to the finish line with Jace and Dexter, and they all raced on foot towards me. Sammy picked me off the ground, and for once I didn't care. Jace gripped my shoulder and gave me a nod, something he didn't give out easily.

"I can't believe you actually beat him." Zach clobbered me when Sammy put me down.

"You doubted me?" I placed him in a headlock.

"Of course, we didn't" Jace was forever keeping the peace between all of us.

"Hey, poser!" Kaleb slammed the rusty door of his Camaro shut.

There was always a common rage within Kaleb but sometimes he would stomp and punch like he wanted to end anything and everything within the world. This was one of those times, and not even the master peacekeeper, Jace could smooth out the ripples of rage that coursed down the skin Kaleb's bare neck and arms. Kaleb had long, thin, and unusually pale fingers but even in the moonlight I could see how red and swollen they were from racing as hard

as he could. It made my heart happy to see him suffering the way I did just a few days ago. He was far from happy though as he gripped the collar of my jean jacket with his teeth bared.

“What did you do to your car, huh?” He looked me up and down and scoffed like I was nothing but trash, even though he was one. “I mean, what did your dad pay to have mechanics modify your car to make it drive like that? I know you didn’t touch it.”

“Who cares who works on it as long as it wins?”

“If that doesn’t sound like a fake, then I don’t know what does.” His grip tightened on my jacket. “You don’t care about cars. You only care about winning.”

I just laughed at the trash. “That’s why you’ll never be able to be me, Kaleb. There are only so many parts you can steal to build a fast car. You can drive, but you will never be able to do what I can do.”

I allowed myself to look off into the distance. The fires were no longer blazing, and the circle patches of rain had evaporated. Aline was wrong.

“You’re nothing but poor poser.” My laughter increased. “Everything the town says about you is true.” My gaze turned serious. “You’ll never amount to anything.”

An angered yell split through Kaleb’s clenched teeth and just like a carbon copy, he punched me right across the jawline. Last week I had raged, but this week I just allowed my back to fall flat on the dirt road as my laughter returned. My clan helped me up, and I watched with satisfaction as Kaleb’s clan dragged him away. I was surprised a true fist fight didn’t break out but that’s when I noticed the neon blue and red lights and screeching sirens in the distance.

“Cops!” Sammy was always screaming out the obvious.

As my clan carried me along with the crowd of scared teenagers not wanting their parents to be called to get them from the police station, I laughed with a bloodied lip. Who cares if there were a thousand police? My world was true, and others were starting to sense it too.

Chapter 17: Kaleb

My Education

Using a random student as an object to propel the door open, I burst into the room. Our math classroom was always empty this time of day, and I intended to fully use the vacant space.

At my order, Tang, Ricky, and Prince each dragged in a student behind them. Like caged animals, the students clawed at our hands that held the collars of their shirts, while their shoes slicked against the checkerboard flooring as they failed to gain the traction needed for escape. I already knew their attempts to flee were pointless. I had learned from a very early age how to hold people hostage.

“Kaleb...please!” One boy yelled as his cheeks flushed red.

“We won’t tell. Just let us go.” Another boy was nearly in tears.

They were wise to beg for the sake of their body and sanity, but I was deaf and blind to their pleadings.

“Mr. Smith!” The third boy, skinny and shaking, cried out as the math teacher walked past his classroom.

Mr. Smith was as scrawny as the shaking kid, and he hated being a teacher as much as he hated conflict. I had targeted his classroom to use because the teacher was an easy one to threaten. I was much taller than him, and I had a determination he never did. The coward was crushed underneath my thumb of authority before he even knew what had pinned him down.

“Help us!” The fourth boy, chubby with curly black hair, reached out for the adult.

For the past twelve hours, the only thing growing on my face had been scowls, but a smile stretched my mouth at the sight of Mr. Smith's thin shoulders hunching forward as he rushed away from the scene.

I was so angry. No, furious was what I felt. Joey almost lost control of his Diablo several times during the race last night, nearly getting us both killed. He was lucky he was a good enough driver to race in a straight line. The only reason he beat me was because of what those hired mechanics did under the hood. Now he believed he was right more than ever. I kept hearing him tell everyone how he had proven I was the poser.

He had proven nothing.

Joey's action, his words, and his beliefs gnawed at me all day, until the fury I felt in the pit of my racing heart began to pulse and spread down into my arms and legs. It felt nearly uncontrollable, the anger and longing for destruction. Like an army of ants, thoughts of violence marched into the ridges of my brain and colonized there. When I was overtaken with a thirst for revenge on the world, I didn't even care what parts of it took the blows. Sometimes, it was a chair being flung into a wall. Sometimes, it was a drinking glass, or someone's phone being thrown onto the floor or stomped on viciously by the bottom of my shoe. I would slit the tires of random cars, light a match to someone's English paper that was due in five minutes, or steal pockets full of things I didn't have a use for from store owners who always looked down on me. I would throw a student, who was trying to go home after school, out of his car and drive the ride until it ran out of gas. More than all these reactions to my rage, I usually would end up doing the same thing my old man always did to me.

Nine times out of ten, I would choose to grip the collar of some student trying to mind their own business, drag them into the empty math classroom, and beat them to a pulp. People called me a bully, but I personally always thought the title was too clean for me. Bullies taunted and made lackeys out of those smaller and weaker than them, but I didn't care about any of that. I just wanted to break things, and my fellow students were nothing more than objects to me.

Slamming the boy with the flush red cheeks down onto the floor, I began to break him with my anger, and my clan did the same to those they dragged in. It was easy not to get caught. Early education in how someone can hide broken bones and bleeding wounds made it too simple to stay under the radar, even with my reputation. Don't go for the face, that's too obvious. I punched the boy right below his chest, and he wheezed and gasped for breath. He would get a bad bruise underneath his shirt, but no one would ever see it but him. I kicked his ribs not caring if I broke one, since it was a bone that was not obvious if split in two. I stepped on his thigh, punched his stomach repeatedly, and kicked his back till my foot became numb. Tomorrow morning, he would wake up with a scatter of black, blue, purple, and reddish pink bruises. He would hardly be able to walk upright with the state of his ribs and back. He would fight the urge to limp with the leg I twisted. He would fight the urge, because he would be too ashamed to do anything but walk upright and with a normal gait.

That's what people did when they had wounds that were invisible to the vision of others. No one wants to admit to the things that hurt them. Everyone just wants to pretend they've never been beaten in their whole lives.

"I know you're upset, but don't you think this is a bit overkill?" My punches halted as the voice of Joey stilled my raging, mindless violence.

I stood up straight and looked down at my prey. The boy had already been conditioned. His shaking arm shielded his body away from more beatings, but he was too paralyzed with fear to move. He was afraid that if he moved, I would hunt him down again. Instead, his watery and wide eyes searched mine rapidly, looking for permission to bolt.

“Get out of here.” I kicked him once more, and he and his friends scattered away, too hyped up on fear to realize how injured they were.

I turned around and faced my rival. His blond-haired head seemed bigger today, and his chin looked like it was trying to reach heaven. What a privileged rich kid. He won a single race and thought he was too good for the world.

“When’s the next race?” He nodded his lifted chin towards me.

The image of this crummy town flashed in the corners of my colonized mind. “As soon as possible.”

“Maybe the race should be for next year. You’d need that much time to make your rusty car half as fast as Joey’s.” Dexter eyed me with try hard confidence. He wasn’t fooling anyone. He’d pee in his pants if he got stuck in an elevator with me.

“Joey got lucky last time.” Ricky always took the bait of the try hards. I needed to educate him a bit more on that subject. “He’ll never be able to beat Kaleb again.”

“Oh yeah?” Zach stepped forward.

“Yeah!” Tang faced him.

“How are you trash ever going to make that rust bucket as fast as a modified sports car?” When Dexter’s parents weren’t forcing him to study, he sure was a pill, and he knew how to quit talking about as well as Sammy did. “You say Joey is delusional, but you are the same.”

I may have had a rage within the ripples of my brain and the veins of my heart that would come and go, but Prince was always in the mood to beat someone black and blue. He didn’t need the rage like I did, and he cracked his knuckles with a sober look on his face.

“We don’t have to have any more races, Kaleb.” He eyed me with a gaze as menacing as mine. “We could end this rivalry right here.”

“We could.” I lunged towards Dexter and slammed him into the wall.

“Hey!” Sammy was always yelling. He would yell even if he didn’t have a reason to.

“Their baby-skinned knuckles burst every time we fight.” I ignored Sammy. “They run away in fear...” I locked my raged gaze onto Joey. “Like a bunch of posers.”

“Kaleb!” Joey swung his fist but missed.

A real brawl broke out after that. Even though there was one more of them than us, I always consider the southwest and northeast fights to be fair. We didn’t need five like they did. I don’t know how long the violence went on. I don’t know how long I raged. There was no care to hide this fight. We went for each other’s eyelids, noses, and mouths. I rotated my punches to see Dexter’s lip bleed. Tang caused Jace’s cheekbone to swell, and blood was drizzling down Sammy’s head as he got a nice blow from Prince.

“You say I’m the unhinged one.” Joey approached me after I made Dexter crumble to the ground. “You can’t even accept you lost a race.”

Joey and I attacked each other, but we only got a hit or two in, when the sound of the principle running down the hall halted our brawl. I groaned in frustration and punched Joey's jaw when he wasn't looking. Leaving him staggering, I left the math classroom with my clan on my heels. Going through the side door, we were able to avoid Principal Welch.

I wish I could have Punched Joey harder and longer. The need to see him bleed, to suffer was overwhelming, and I would keep this rage until I raced him next time. He would not win again, because life was just like a fight. The toughest guy wins. Looking around, Tang was bleeding from his eyebrow, Ricky had a cut on his ear and a forming bruise on his cheek, and even Prince got a busted lip. I knew for a fact Sammy and Dexter were bleeding, Jace had forming bruises, Zach was stumbling like he saw stars, and Joey was a combination of everyone.

I was unscathed though. In every fight, I was never injured. Unless it was my old man beating me up, I did not shed a drop of blood or break in any way. Being broken didn't work for me, and like a reliable engine, I would be running just fine by the next race.

Chapter 18: Kaleb

My Payback

I kicked loose rocks that littered the edge of the sidewalk as I made my way home after school. My sore knuckles reached into my leather jacket pocket and pulled out a honey stick. Like Tang's mom craving that syrupy, orange powered drink when she was pregnant with her only son, I needed the taste of honey. The rage within me was dying down, and the other feeling I hated even more was starting to replace it. The honey was the only thing that helped. It was the only thing that reminded me I was more than my flailing and violent arms and legs.

As I chewed on the honey stick, I felt my mind ease. If I could make it home before my old man woke up from his hangover, then I could take a shower, grab a sandwich, and get out of there before he ever came to. Walking faster, I noticed the purr of an engine creeping up behind me. I expected them to rush right past as I was just about to make it to the main entrance of the school. Students and cars trying to get to their own, better homes were everywhere.

Instead, the car slowed down. I clenched my fist. I swear, if it was Joey, I would snap the side mirror right off his purple Diablo.

“Hey, Kaleb.” The voice wasn't Joey's, but Elizabeth's.

I groaned internally and kept walking. With my head down, I just wanted her to give up and drive by. What would people think if they saw me with that goody two shoes? My reputation would be ruined. I shuffled along with students but so did she in her car.

“Let me give you a ride home.” Her voice became louder as she drove even slower.

“Are you crazy?” My words were sharp and quick. Before the last word was even out of my mouth, I had turned my head away from her gaze once more.

“What’s the problem? You let me give you a ride the other night.”

I squeezed my eyes shut and walked faster. “That was different.”

“What’s the difference?” Her voice rang the loudest it had been, and students started to notice that the two opposites in school were speaking. “We went for a drive like two long time best friends.” Her words were drawn out and mimicked the effects of speakers.

“Just shut up!” A heated whisper burst out of me. With my head ducked, I ran around her car and jumped into the passenger seat before hardly any of our peers could notice.

I felt like I could tear off two side mirrors. I was so angry, but she just smiled like she was watching a comedy.

“I’m sorry. I really am.” She started driving at normal speed and left school. “That was the only way I could think to get you into my car.” She playfully cut those green eyes at me. “You’ve always been an easy tease for someone who bullies others.”

I stomped my sneakers onto the dashboard. “Just stop preaching and take me home.”

“Alright, person I’m indebted to.” Her smiley sarcasm really was too much today.

“I’m starting to think I should have let you drown.”

“Too late.” Her voice bounced as she laughed like she didn’t have a care in the world.

I scoffed but found my own smile slipping from my lips. I descended it back into a straight line before she noticed, because I would never hear the end of it if I didn’t.

A playful bicker ruled the conversation as we drove. I made fun of her driving, that really was the worst. She even hit a curb when we made a turn. Just laughing it off, she said I'd have to give her driving lessons the next time I was indebted to her. I thought about my future and how much I couldn't wait to stop driving around in circles. I wouldn't stay in this town long enough to owe her anything.

When we came to the right turn that would take us into the southwest side of town, Elizabeth went left.

"Hey, you took a wrong...." My voice died out as I realized we were heading down one of my most familiar roads. Slowly looking over at her, I noticed she wasn't smiling anymore. "Elizabeth." My voice was still and hollow. "Where are we going?"

She didn't say a single word. She only pulled into the parking lot of Parker's garage, within the cage of his tall, chain-link fence that was oddly open.

"Kaleb." She turned off her car and faced me. "Mr. Parker came back home early."

In an instant, Parker, a man in his late forties with brown hair that had grey mixed in with it, came out of the garage. Tall and in good shape for his middle age, his arms crossed as he peered at me sitting in Elizabeth's car. His blue eyes cut through me, like he wanted nothing more than to sentence me to severe punishment.

"You ratted me out!" I lashed out at Elizabeth.

"I did not." She kept her voice calm. "I kept my word."

"Yeah, right." I thought about running away from this crummy town. I was going to take the 69 and ride off into the sunset. Now everything was going up in flames.

“It’s the truth.” She insisted. “I told you Mr. Parker wasn’t stupid like you thought. He knew immediately someone had messed with his cars, and no one has a reputation like you.”

“And I’m sure you had no problem telling him he was right.” My fury with the whole situation kept rising the longer I sat in the still car.

“Kaleb –”

She tried to speak to me. She tried to explain, but I was too boiling with anger to let her. I kicked my way out of the car and took off in a sprint down the driveway of Parker’s property. The fence was closed once more, but that didn’t stop me. I jumped the chain link fence like I had a million times, but I didn’t get five running steps in before I was met with a bunch of security guards. None of them were Pete. He must have been sacked when Parker found out he let a bunch of teenagers repentantly break in. Parker’s hired help was no longer sleepy but wide awake. They were big guys with shoulders twice as wide as mine and many were even taller than me. They rushed their way closer, and I knew there was nowhere I could go.

“Come here, son.” Parker’s voice boomed.

I cursed under my breath. The guards escorted me as I walked back up the parking lot towards the garage. Elizabeth had gotten out of her car and was now standing in the middle of Parker and I. Staring down the old guy, I mimicked him by crossing my arms as well.

“We need to talk.” Parker’s voice held an authoritative edge. I could tell he was used to being obeyed.

“Don’t feel like it.”

“Just listen to what he has to say, Kaleb.” Elizabeth softly pleaded.

“Stay out of this!” My yell echoed through the outside air.

“Son, I wouldn’t be yelling at her if I were you.” Parker raised his eyebrows slowly.

“Without her, you’d be at the police station by now.”

I slowly looked over at Elizabeth. She gave me a meek but knowing smile. It was a gesture that was supposed to make me feel like everything was going to be okay, but it made me feel the opposite.

Standing in Parker’s garage with him and Elizabeth staring reminded me of the scene when I got suspended from school last year for bullying. The silence was suffocating. The disappointment on their faces made me want a honey stick, but I focused on the ceiling like I was nothing but bored with the whole situation.

“So, why am I not in jail?” My voice was as dry as my home’s faucets after my dad failed to pay the water bill when I was growing up.

“Drop the attitude.” Parker’s voice was sharp. “I came back home early from Europe and was surprised to find worn tires on half a dozen of my cars and a dent in the bumper of my Porsche.”

My gaze snapped to attention. I never wrecked any of Parker’s cars, but sure enough, in the distance, the silver Porsche had a busted taillight and a smashed in corner.

Prince.

That guy had been obsessed with the car since the first time we broke in. I ordered him not to touch it, but he listens about as well as I do. Now I was the one stuck taking the fall for it. My hands clenched into fist. I would give him a good beating.

“I’ve heard about you, Kaleb.” Parker took a step closer towards me.

“Who hasn’t in this town?” Boredom oozed from my voice like honey dripping off a spoon.

“Stealing whatever he wants. Bullying and getting into fights. Street racing. That’s what you used my vehicles for, right?” Parker peered at me. “Reckless, illegal races.”

I shrugged my tense shoulders.

“Speak, son!”

“Alright, fine! I stole your cars. I raced them. You happy now?”

“Not in the slightest.” Parker’s voice calmed, but the bottom of his shoes started to tap fast against the gray floor that looked as bleak as my current future. “Last night, I was determined to send you to jail. Then, when I went to a party down at the country club, Elizabeth overheard my plans to press charges against you. She pulled me away from my colleagues and convinced me to come to the most ridiculous compromise.” Parker placed his attention on Elizabeth, who was standing beside me, and nodded.

“Mr. Parker isn’t going to tell the authorities about what happened.” Her smile was back, like she had done something noble. “Instead, he wants you to race for him on his IMSA GTD team.”

“What?!” A mixture of emotions swirled inside me.

IMSA was a popular type of racing in this part of the country. We had a track an hour from Hawthorne. Everyone knew Parker had two racing teams for the sport. One for the LMP3 and another for the GTD category. GTD racecars were like modified versions of luxury brand sports cars that were created for the sole purpose of racing on the track. They were the slowest cars that competed in IMSA, but I always thought they looked the sleekest. With popping colors and the shell of a normal sports car, they looked the closet to the illegal street cars I raced against on the weekends.

“Taking spins in my vehicles isn’t a cheap hobby, but I might give you a chance to race for me legally.” He looked me up and down. “If you can handle it.” He sounded doubtful, like me sitting in one of his cars would bring him nothing but shame. “Whether you race for me or not, you’ll come by the garage three times a week. Elizabeth has agreed to be your accountability partner, who will make sure you come straight from school to the garage. You will help in any way I need you, from washing cars, cleaning the garage, to taking out trash. Then, if you’re a talented driver like Elizabeth insist you are, you’ll race for me on the weekends until you pay me back for your joy rides and, of course, the damaged Porsche.”

I scoffed at the guy’s confidence. “And if I say no?”

“Then you go to jail.”

“Send me to jail then.”

“Kaleb!” Elizabeth let out a little nervous laugh as she eyed Parker. “Just let me talk to him for a moment.” she reassured as she nearly pushed me into the back corner of the garage. “What are you thinking?” A fierce whisper escaped her when we were out of earshot.

“There’s no way I’m racing for that rich guy!” I yelled and didn’t care if the whole town of Hawthorne heard. “I only race for myself.”

“Kaleb.” The tone in her whisper became fiercer. “Use that brain of yours for once. Do you know how hard it was to persuade Mr. Parker not to call the cops on you?”

“I didn’t need your help.”

“Sure, you didn’t. Cause being locked up in a jail cell is so much better than being able to race and work with cars, like you love to do.” Her gaze softened. “I know you feel like you have to act tough, but you’re being offered a chance to race in the ISMA league. How many people would love to have that chance? I know you’re excited about the thought of racing in ISMA too.”

I would never admit it, but I knew more about ISMA than Elizabeth could imagine. The thought of being in one of the hours long races sent a warmth through me, like a fever dream. I didn’t belong there though, and I wouldn’t go unless I was forced to.

“I don’t care –”

“Just think about it.” If there was anyone who would force me, it was Elizabeth. “How far can street racing, fighting, and stealing take you before you end up in prison? Mr. Parker is not only offering you a get out of jail free card but also an opportunity to see another side of racing.” Her eyes pleaded with me like they never have before. “Not everything you do has to have bad consequences. You can live in an honest way with all the potential you have.”

“Is potential your favorite word?”

“I’m being serious. This is me returning the favor.” She focused down on her Mary Jane shoes. “You saved my life. Now, I’m giving you the opportunity to save yours.”

I never took orders from anyone but ever since that day when we were kids, I had the hardest time saying no to Elizabeth. I told myself one day I would outgrow it, but I still haven't been able to.

Sighing, I turned around and made my way towards Parker. "Fine. I'll do it, but under one condition." Parker met me halfway, and I heard Elizabeth's footsteps following behind me.

"What's that?" Parker's arms were still crossed.

"When I race for you, list me as anonymous. I can't have anyone knowing about this."

"I can't imagine how embarrassing it would be for you."

I gave him a hard stare at his sarcastic remark. After this nightmare, I'd skip town and start street racing again. There was no need for anyone to know about me submitting to Parker.

"There's one thing I want to know." Parker peered in the direction of where my 69 was. "What did you do to get the Camaro to run?"

I was surprised Parker even noticed. In a garage full of expensive cars, I figured it would take him forever before he realized what I did to the rust bucket.

I shrugged, deciding to keep some of my secrets close. "It wasn't that hard."

"Well..." Parker almost acted impressed, but there seemed to be a downcast expression just underneath the surface. "I haven't been able to get the car running in years."

"You just didn't try hard enough."

His downcast expression heightened. "What do you like so much about it?"

"I don't know." I lied. "It's just good car."

“You must have stolen a lot of parts to get it racing ready.” His face hardened.

“What, old man?” I wished he was still downcast. You playing cop for the whole town?”

His crossed arms tightened. “Along with paying me back, you’ll work for me until you pay back everyone you’ve stole parts from while I was gone. Oh, and street racing is off limits.”

“What?!” My whole body engulfed into raged flames. “You son of a —”

“The real cops are just a phone call away.” He cut me off as he waved his phone.

I looked back at Elizabeth and gritted my teeth. “What a payback.”

Chapter 19: Joey

The Floods & The Fires

“Joey?” The soft voice of Mrs. Faye approached me as I packed up at the end of class.

Enamored with the sight of the older me igniting everyone’s canvas on fire with a pocket-sized silver lighter, I was unable to complete my classwork. We were assigned to paint a picture of a basket of fruit, but between the clicks of his lighter, and the whispers of the unseen in my ear, I ended up painting a violently stroked picture of the old metal Hawthorne bridge.

“I know. I know. I didn’t do the assignment right.” I grumbled and didn’t even look up at her. “I’ll redo it, happy?”

“You don’t need to redo it.” She approached my painting and smiled. “You must have a personal connection with this bridge. I see you draw it often in class.”

“Not really. It’s just a quiet place to think.” I thought about what happened the last time I stood on that rickety bridge. Ever since I felt the quake, heard the screeching sound of metal, and saw the bodies limply floating in the water, I haven’t been able to make myself go back. The place I went to nearly every day had become a stranger to me. “Well...kind of.”

“You know, the deadline to sign up for the state art competition is getting close.” She sounded like she was speaking in a room full of sleeping toddlers during their nap time. Maybe that was how I seemed to a lot of people, nothing more than a flailing and whiny preschooler who could throw a tantrum at any moment, because you wouldn’t play make believe with him. “Can’t I convince you and Sammy to enter?”

I flung my backpack over my shoulder and headed out of the classroom. “Not interested.”

“You could draw the bridge.” She followed me as I walked. “You do the best with technical and realistic drawings. With a little guidance, you could have a high chance of winning the competition. It makes an incredibly positive impact on your résumé.”

“And why do you think I care about my résumé?” I stopped dead in my tracks. “That’s the last thing on my mind, and if you think that’ll make me want to sign up for some stupid competition, then you’re out of touch.” I whined like one of those bratty preschoolers and brushed past her. “Just leave me alone.”

After my tantrum, I met up with my clan in the cafeteria. Eating wasn’t a favorite pastime of mine. I’ll admit it, I’m pretty scrawny. Maybe that’s why my jaw was badly bruised from Kaleb’s blow, and my baby skin split every time I fought. Knowing I should eat more wasn’t a secret I kept from myself, but I could never make my appetite spike. The only thing I ever seemed to do at lunch lately was leave my food untouched as I sketched the old metal bridge.

“Joey.” I was awakened from my trance to find Aline sitting next to me, with all my clan members’ eyes on us.

I went right back to my drawing. “This table is only for the northeast clan.”

“You won the second race.” She stated the fact with as much enthusiasm as a plain piece of bread. “How did it make you feel?”

“Fantastic.” I replied overdramatically as I dug my graphite pencil into the paper.

“The racing part or the beating Kaleb part?”

“What’s the difference?” I sketched so hard; I feared I would rip the paper.

“It’s Aline.” Zach sounded about as enthusiastic as her. “She only talks in riddles.”

“Have you ever worked on a car yourself, Joey?” Aline continued to press, like she didn’t hear Zach’s remark at all. “The person you call a poser has. Why not you?”

“Because I’m not some poor piece of trash. I can hire my help.” I kept sketching.

“That doesn’t sound like passion to me.” I could feel her eyes on my sketchbook. “Why win a rivalry that only fuels a fake persona?”

“It’s not fake!” I finally looked up from my drawing.

I found her serious and determined eyes staring at me but then a terrible rushing sound caught our attention. Water suddenly burst into the cafeteria. The power of the current knocked the hinges right off the doors. The water swirled around, spraying the tables and students. The roar was overwhelming, but everyone was just eating their turkey sandwiches and bags of chip like they weren’t beginning to drown.

How could they not see something so obvious?

“Why is the bridge on fire?” Aline’s chilled voice jolted my eyes back to my drawing.

When did the flames get sketched there? I vaguely recalled my pencil creating the images of hungry flames licking the metal bars of the bridge and consuming the wooden road until shards of it began to fall away.

Feeling the water reach my knees, I saw an icy smile reappeared on Aline’s face out of my peripheral vision. “Why do you keep seeing floods?”

“Joey?” My knees might have been submerged with water, but Jace’s face was drowned with concern. “Have you been having hallucinations again?”

“I don’t see anything.”

“Liar.” Aline’s voice was so sharp, it caused the air at our clan’s table to evaporate. “You see everything, and you have a bad feeling about the racing just like I do.”

“Is this one of your statistic fears?” Dexter tried to sound unbothered as he crossed his arms, but they were trembling slightly.

Stop worrying about everything, Aline.” Sammy grabbed my untouched lunch and began to eat like a dog lapping up the scraps of his owner. “Learn to live a little, will ya?”

“Enter that art competition.” Aline’s blurt really gained the attention of my clan.

“An art competition?” Zach chuckled. “What is she talking about?” Dexter joined in on the laughter, and Sammy’s face got red.

“Follow me.” I slammed down my sketchbook and began sloshing through the waist deep water until Aline and I reached the dry and empty hallway. “What’s your problem?”

“What about you?” She stood stiff in front of me. “You know you can’t handle racing against Kaleb. Why do you think you’re seeing fires, floods, and bodies?”

“Because that’s how my life’s been for years!” I was in her face as I yelled. My gaze was raw and filled with emotion. “I’ve been living in an invisible underworld, but I’m done suffering alone. I’ll make everyone see the world I see. I’ll make them believe me.”

The air became still for a moment as her lips pursed. “But it’s not you, Joey.”

The lockers burst open. The metal doors flapped and clanged as fires erupted from the bellies of the metal boxes. Her words punched me in my empty stomach, and I feared they would bruise me worse than any blow I’ve ever received from Kaleb.

“I need you to find out who you really are.” She took in the grisly view of the hallway. “The whole town will burn down if you don’t. I’m not leaving until you sign up for that competition.”

I wanted to scream and throw things like Kaleb did when life annoyed him. How could she say my world was the problem? How could she suggest I be the one to change?

“Fine.” I agreed out of pure spite. “I’ll enter that competition just to prove you wrong.”

My shoes, that were still wet, squeezed out bits of water with every step I made towards the teachers’ lounge.

“Mrs. Faye.” I spotted her right away in the back corner sitting on a couch while looking at an art magazine. What a stereotype. “Is it too late to enter that art competition?”

She acknowledged me with wide, happy eyes and an excited body that threw her magazine to the wayside. “You’re just in time.”

“Okay.” I sighed. “Sammy and I want to be in it, or whatever. Just sign us up, alright?”

“I’m so pleased, Joey.” She popped up off the sofa and rushed over to where I was. “I forgot to mention, you and Sammy will have to participate in additional lessons after school with me as your mentor. Competition rules.”

“After school?” I was about to retreat, then I felt those eyes of Aline on the back of my head. Turning around, I found her staring me down. “That’s fine.” I agreed half-heartedly.

“Prefect.” Mrs. Faye grinned with her gums showing. “You won’t regret this, Joey.”

Stepping out of the teachers’ lounge, I stared Aline down like she did to me. “I know I won’t.”

Works Cited

- Bae, Byung-Chull, and Michael R. Young. "A Use of Flashback and Foreshadowing for Surprise Arousal in Narrative Using a Plan-Based Approach." *Interactive Storytelling*, Springer, Berlin, Hiedelberg, 2008. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-540-89454-4_22#citeas.
- Bernstein, Michael André. "“AGAINST FORESHADOWING.”" *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, edited by Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, Edinburgh University Press, 2003, pp. 346–53. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrd5m.59>. Accessed 11 June 2023.
- The Bible*. Authorized King James Version, Thomas Nelson, 1987.
- Collins, Suzanna. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic Press, 2008.
- Duckworth, George E. "Foreshadowing and Suspense." *Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment*, Princeton University Press, 1952, pp. 209–35. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x17rs.11>. Accessed 11 June 2023.
- Gerard, Philip. *The Art of Creative Research: A Field Guide for Writers*, University of Chicago Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4780601>.
Created from liberty on 2023-07-01 17:57:45.
- Gottlieb, Evan. "What is Foreshadowing?" *Oregon State University*, 2023, <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-foreshadowing#:~:text=A%20classic%20example%20of%20this,novel%2C%20Frankenstein%2C%20from%201818>.

Morson, Gary Saul. *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*. Yale University Press, 1994.

JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bmv0>. Accessed 11 June 2023.

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.