



# CREATIVE WRITING PORTFOLIO

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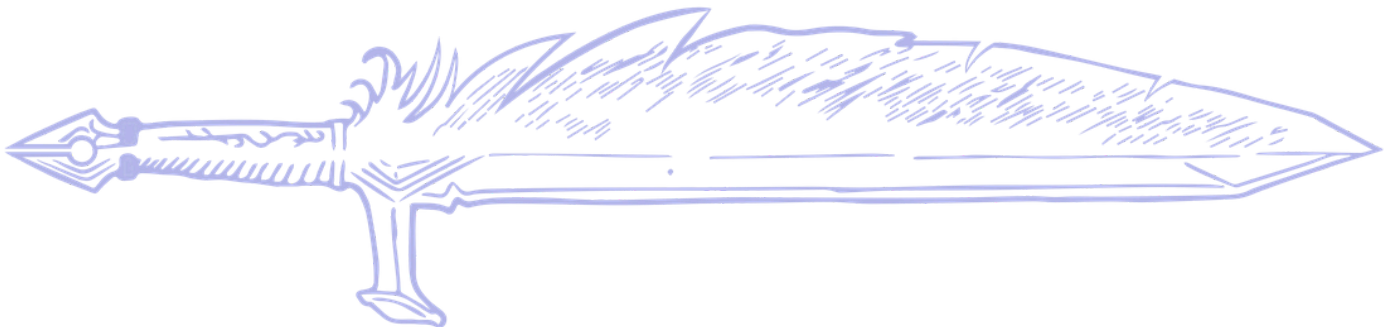
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# Unconditional Love

(College Poem, 2021)

They see me, as they've always seen me.  
A perfect daughter, at times misguided silly but forever  
their sweet precious little girl.

I am a culmination of their best traits.

His gorgeous blond locks her little button nose.  
His creativity her smarts.  
His oily skin her perfectionist nature.  
His blue eyes in her crinkled eye smile.

I share these traits of my mom and dad

as I share their DNA and family traditions of Orchid Salad on Thanksgiving.

They have never pushed me that is why I must push myself

Push to be the best

friend, cousin,  
daughter, student.

I push until I break.

It is when I break that I ask for help.

his tolerance for pain I might have gotten her ability to heal,

but none of that matters  
if I continue to push myself  
to perfection's edge  
and fall.

They say that I am growing up too fast,  
that it is okay to not be perfect,

that I need to slow down,  
that they are not asking for perfection,

They just ask that I remain their happy little girl

Their sweet precious little girl,  
for as long as possible.

I can do that, I tell them.  
I can fulfill their one request.

## Attack

Inspired by “The Next Right Thing” from *Frozen 2*  
([Personal Project, 2023](#))

She has known this feeling many a time  
Before.  
When she is alone,  
feeling forgotten  
The hand of all-consuming darkness  
rests on her shoulder.

It is cold.  
This empty, numb feeling  
That creeps up in her  
before enveloping her in itself.  
Every time she welcomes it,  
Thinking: “This is the end.”  
She is prepared to leave this life.  
For the pain to wash away. Every time.

The lights in her eyes go out.  
Without thought, she has always followed this feeling.  
But has never gone to where it calls home.  
In her gravity of grief in each of these moments,  
She is able to hear a singular thought  
in the back of her mind.

Yes, you *believe* hope to be gone  
You *think* you are lost,  
But no matter what has brought you this low,  
You *must* go on and do the next right thing.

She holds this small glimmering thought  
firm in her mind  
as she takes one deep breath,  
then two and three.  
With each breathe  
The hand of darkness reseeds  
The empty numbing feeling departs.  
Until finally, the chill stopped.

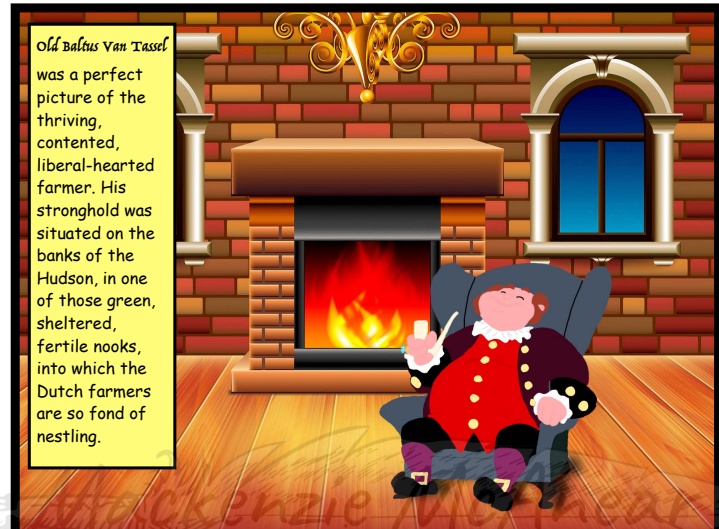
*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow: Comic Adaptation*  
(College Assignment, 2021)



His schoolhouse was a low building of one large room, rudely constructed of logs; the windows partly glazed and partly patched with leaves of old copy books.



It's true to say, he was a conscientious man that always bore in mind the golden maxim, "spare the rod and spoil the child."—Ichabod Crane's students indeed were not spoiled. He administered justice with discrimination rather than severity, taking the burthen off the backs of the weak and laying it on those of the strong.

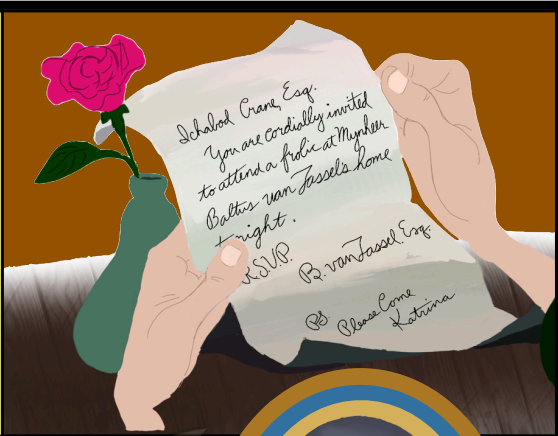


Old Baltus Van Tassel was a perfect picture of the thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer. His stronghold was situated on the banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks, into which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling.

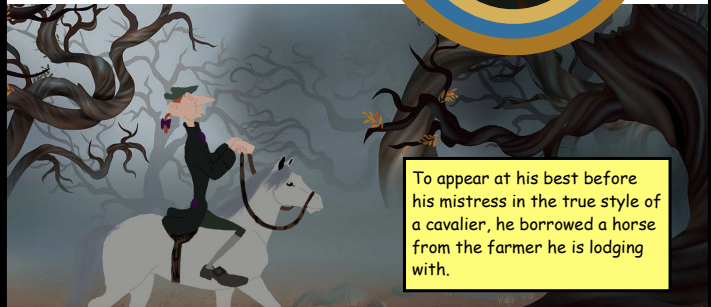


A great elm tree spread its broad branches over the farm. At its roots bubbled a spring of the sweetest water, in a little well, that then stole away through the grass, to a neighboring brook, that babbled along among alders and dwarf willows. Near the farmhouse was a vast barn every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with treasures of the farm.

The next evening, a messenger entered the schoolhouse with an invitation for Ichabod to attend a party that was to be held that evening at Mynheer Van Tassel's. Ichabod hurried the students through their lessons without stopping at trivialities.



The gallant Ichabod now spent at least an extra half hour getting ready, brushing and furbishing up his best, and only suit of rusty black and arranging his locks by a bit of broken looking glass that hung up in the schoolhouse.

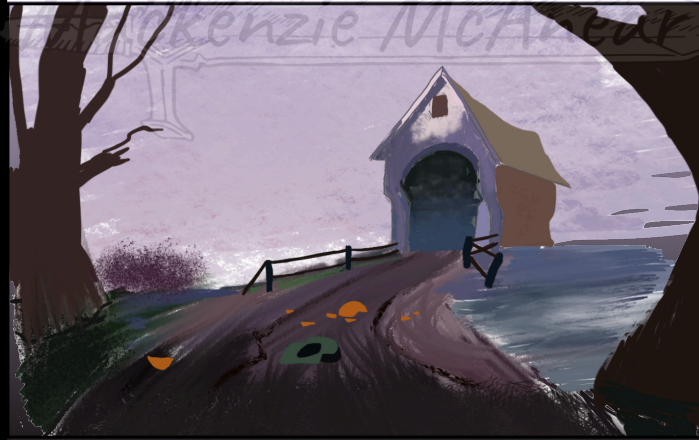


To appear at his best before his mistress in the true style of a cavalier, he borrowed a horse from the farmer he is lodging with.



Ichabod cast a look behind to see if his pursuer should vanish, according to rule, in a flash of fire and brimstone. Just then, he saw the goblin rising in his stirrups, in the very act of hurling his "head" at him. Ichabod endeavored to dodge the horrible missile, but too late. It encountered his skull with a tremendous crash!

He was tumbled headlong into the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider passed by like a whirlwind.



The following day tracks of horses' hoofs were found traced to the bridge, beyond which, on the bank of a broad part of the brook, was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod, and close beside it a shattered pumpkin.



When the dancing was over, Brom Bones told the tale of the Galloping Hessian. He affirmed that on returning one night from the neighboring village of Sing Sing, he had been overtaken by this midnight trooper; that he had offered to race with him for a bowl of punch and should have won it too, for Daredevil beat the goblin horse all hollow. Still, just as they came to the church bridge, the Hessian bolted and vanished in a flash of fire.

It was the very witching hour of night that Ichabod, heavy-hearted and crestfallen, pursued his travels homewards, along the sides of the lofty hills which rise above Tarry Town, and which he had traversed so cheerily in the afternoon.



## A Light in the Night

(College Short Story, 2021)

Carmen Blackwood stands in the afternoon light of Phoenix, Arizona, the wind whipping her blonde curls into her face. She pushes her hair back and readjusts the bags slung over her shoulder. She waits on the porch outside a light brick, one-story house, her house. The wind kicks up the top layer of dust on the ground and settles it on her Converse. Some dust granules make their way into her tattered jeans and rest on her grey hoodie. She looks up from knocking the dust off to see the front door open to reveal Aida standing in the doorway, wearing a green sundress, and matching sandals. She smiles at Carmen and looks over to Graham, still on the phone. He is talking in an urgent whisper and glances at Carmen as if just noticing her. Carmen freezes at the sight of him; something about the way he looks at her vexes her. He quickly ends the call and puts his cellphone in his trouser pocket.

These are the Blackwood's, Carmen's parents.

"Well, come on in, er-um, Honey, make yourself at home." Aida says, smiling, showing off her pearly whites. Carmen gazes at her mother and notes how her olive complexion compliments her brown eyes and flowing black hair. Carmen rubs her own olive-toned arm.

Carmen's dad strides out of the house to collect her belongings and says, "Hello, Earth to Carmen. You there? Come on, I'll put your stuff in your room while you get settled."

Aida takes Carmen's hand and leads her inside. "Come, I'm making lunch. We have a lot of time to make up for."

*Home.* Carmen usually talks to herself because she... Well, she doesn't know *why* she talks to herself. She can't remember what happened in the last nine years, except that she got an excellent education, lived in a nice place, and hasn't seen her parents since she was four.

Aida blocks Carmen's view as they walk in, then moves to the side to show off a colorful banner hanging above the television that says, Welcome Home Carmen, in bubble letters. She smiles brightly and motions for Carmen to sit on the lumpy beige couch while she goes back to the kitchen to finish preparing lunch. While the living room walls are a light eggshell color, the lighting, paintings, and colorful throw pillows make up for it in spades.

Graham enters the room and settles on the couch, one seat away from Carmen. His body takes its natural place amongst the decorative throw pillows. A ding sounds and Graham pulls out his phone. His relaxed expression is replaced by a serious one as he types out a message. After a whoosh sound, he shoves his phone back into his pocket. He opens and closes his mouth, trying to strike up a conversation with Carmen. She notices that he has hazel eyes like hers, minus the golden flecks. He rubs a hand over his red stubbled jaw, which matches his stylish auburn hair. She twirls a short blonde curl between her fingers, wondering where it came from, if not her parents.

Graham finds his words. “So, how do you feel? You’re probably glad to be back home, huh? I know it might be a little scary, not knowing what happened for nine years of your life, but it’s nothing to be worried about.” He looks at Carmen, searching for something, but his search is cut off when Aida enters the room with a food platter.

“Graham,” she says emphatically, “don’t pester her just yet; she’s just come back to us.” Aida cracks a smile before setting the platter down on the coffee table. She moves her attention to Carmen. “He is right about one thing, though. Honey, are you okay?” She sits in one of the dark teal armchairs across from the couch, crossing her ankles and placing her well-manicured hands on her knees. She leans toward Carmen, “You haven’t said a word since you’ve arrived. Is something wrong?”

Carmen is unnerved by Aida’s soul-piercing stare. She fidgets on the couch, wiggling her way into a well-worn indentation. Without lifting her eyes to Aida, Carmen says, “No, no, I-I’m fine. Just a little... disoriented is all.” She grabs a few things off the platter and gets up. “I think I’ll just go to my room.”

Graham stands up, “You want me to show you where it is?” Carmen cracks a smile as she passes him. She backs out of the room, saying, “No, I think I’ll be fine. It’s a small house, I doubt I’ll get lost. I’ll call for you if I get stuck in a broom closet.”

Carmen walks out of the living room and down a wood-laden hall situated next to the front door. She finds a half-opened door with her name scrawled on it in green stick-on letters. When she walks in, she finds her bags on the bed. She places the food on the desk, takes off her hoodie and shoes, and places them in one of her bags.

She takes the time to look around the room. The floor is carpeted, with piles of toys in every corner. The walls are pale green, with large dragonfly stickers flying up the wall on either side of the window that views the neighbor's brick wall. "Guess they didn't think to update the toys," she says as she looks from a toy lion, unicorn, dragonfly, and picks up a brown stuffed bunny and rubs its soft ears between her fingers. The silky ears spurring a memory.

She begins to reminisce on a long-ago memory, dulled by time on Christmas Eve when her mom presented her with the brown bunny that she named... Mr. Bun. Excited that she remembers something, Carmen goes to pick up another toy, a puppy resembling a Beagle. *Spot! Ah, I remember you.*

She looks around the room some more. The desk and a wooden dresser are situated to the wall left of the window. A framed picture of Aida, Graham, and a little Carmen dressed up, sitting on the couch in the living room, is set atop the dresser. Above the dresser is a hanging mirror trimmed in white. There is only one other photo in the room, which sits on the wooden nightstand next to the bed. Carmen kneels in front of it to get a closer look. Pictured is Aida in a hospital gown, smiling down at Baby Carmen in her arms, with Graham hovering over her left shoulder looking down as well.

She spends the rest of the afternoon in her room, picking up each toy, in turn, to unlock memories from her past. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes a scary memory would appear, which confused Carmen. *My childhood wasn't frightening. What was that?* It only happened twice but didn't scare her enough to question it.

Someone knocks on the door, and Carmen turns around to see Aida standing there looking awkward. "You should get ready for bed, little missy." Aida smiles, but her eyes do not.

Aida opens the top drawer of Carmen's dresser. She walks over and peeks in. "It may be too big on you, but that's the point," Aida pulls out an oversized blue nightgown, holding it up to Carmen's shoulders, "we can go shopping this weekend, okay? But, for now, my old pajamas will have to do."

Carmen changes into the nightgown before dinner, then gets tucked into bed by her parents. It takes her mere moments to fall asleep, with Mr. Bun in her arms.

...

In the dead of night, Carmen wakes up screaming and drenched in sweat. Graham rushes into her room to find her sobbing.

“Carmen, what happened? Are you okay?” He takes a seat on the edge of her bed as sobs take over her screams and sweat with cold mottled skin. He helps her lean against the side of the bed.

Carmen whispers to herself between heavy, ragged breaths. “I was alone, so alone. Alone and hurting everywhere. I couldn’t do anything about it.”

Aida walks in the room wearing a robe over her pajamas with a serious, calculated expression. A few seconds later, she comes back with a wet washcloth and places it on Carmen’s forehead. “What happened? You’re shivering.”

Graham starts to explain when Aida cuts him off. “Graham, I was talking to Carmen. Carmen, honey, was it a bad dream?” When she doesn’t answer right away, Aida says, “What happened? You can tell me,” with a persistent undertone to her voice, and those eyes staring into her soul again.

*What’s her problem?* Carmen backs away from Aida and looks to Graham for comfort. Graham looks at Carmen with soft, caring eyes, which puts her at ease. She answers, “It’s just— it was a, uh... yeah, it was a dream. Just a really bad dream.” She eventually stops shivering, and the rest of her tears dry on her cheeks. She pulls her legs up to her chest, covering them with her nightgown.

Graham tucks Carmen back into bed, “Remember, it’s only a dream. Dreams can’t hurt you,” and kisses her forehead.

As he passes Aida, Graham starts to say something, but Aida holds up her hand and motions toward Carmen. Graham gives Carmen a quick glance and leaves. Aida turns around but stops with her hand on the door frame. She takes one deep breath and leaves the room without saying another word.

The night continues without another sound.

...

Carmen wakes up the next day at nine o’clock to a light tapping at her door. “I’m awake.”

Graham opens Carmen's door, holding a plate stacked with breakfast foods. "Hey sleepyhead, I'm glad you're awake. We just finished breakfast, and before putting it up, I thought I'd let you have some. I'm not sure what you'd like, so I just covered all the bases. I'll just set this on your desk." After he sets the plate down, his phone dings. He pulls it out and frowns. He says a quick "I love you" to Carmen before closing the door behind him.

*Well, that was odd.* Carmen brushes it off and stares at the piled plate. She walks to the desk and picks up the fork next to the plate. She hovers it over the assortment of food, going from the chocolate chip pancakes to the waffles to the eggs. Her fork lingers over an omelet before stabbing into it. She pulls back the desk's chair and takes a seat. While she eats, she goes through the drawers of the desk.

An hour and a whole stack of pancakes later, Carmen's search comes up empty, with nothing but school supplies in mass. After scarfing down all that food, she starts to feel sleepy and crawls back in bed for a quick nap.

Carmen's quick nap turns into seven hours of sleep filled with weird dreams and strange mutterings. While she sleeps, she mutters to herself. "Government... program... Weapons program... Weapon. Weapon." She jolts awake, "I'm the weapon!" She looks to her closed door as Graham and Aida come rushing in.

"We heard a scream," Graham kneels next to Carmen's bed, "Is everything okay?"

Carmen nods, not mentioning what she discovered, in the hopes that they didn't hear her.

Graham gets up, "Well, okay then. You pretty much slept the day away, so you might as well stay in bed. I'll bring you something to eat before you go back to sleep."

He and Aida exit Carmen's room and have a whispered argument in the hallway. Aida passes in front of her door, heading to her bedroom. Carmen hears Graham's retreating footsteps into the kitchen.

She pulls her knees up to her chest. *Time to worry.* Carmen realizes now that the scary memories she dismissed yesterday were real. What she thought were terrible dreams were actually memories. *I'm a weapon for the government!* Her mind whirls as she comes to grips with her new reality.

Graham comes in holding a plate and a steaming mug of something. “I’ve got a PB and J with a side of tea. The box says it’s supposed to relax you. I figured after last night, and just now, you might have a hard time getting back to sleep, so this should help.” He places the mug and plate on the nightstand and leaves, closing the door behind him.

Carmen takes a bite of the sandwich before taking the mug in her cold hands. She lets the mug warm them before lifting it to her nose for a sniff. *Earl Grey*. She smiles and takes a sip, swirling it around in her mouth before swallowing. She scrunches up her nose as the too-sweet aftertaste lingers. She takes another sip, downing the tea quickly this time. She gets up and starts to pace around her room in circles. *This is real. It’s real now, not just strange dreams and scary memories. It’s all real.*

She does this for a bit before she hears faint voices coming from the living room. She lays on the floor and puts her ear to the sliver of light coming from under the door.

“Oh Graham, we should tell her; she seems distant. Maybe knowing what happened to her—”

“No, Aida, and keep your voice down; she could be asleep by now. We can’t. We aren’t allowed to.”

Carmen sits up, intrigued. Her head starts to feel fuzzy, so she shakes it, and the fuzziness goes away. She lays back down to listen.

“You obviously didn’t see what I saw last night. The fear in her eyes. That is the fear of a child who is scared and alone. What if she talks about her experience with another kid? What will we tell her then? Graham, we are in dangerous waters here.” Her voice was coated in unease.

“I know, I know, but things are different now. America is not like it was back in 2050. If we defy the law that has withstood the test of time for fifteen years, then what do you think would happen to us? What would happen to Carmen?”

Carmen moves her ear from the door and sits up against it in disbelief. She shakes the fuzziness from her head again, along with the pins and needles that have appeared in her fingertips. *They know what happened to me. They’re my parents, they welcomed me back home*

*with open arms and all this time they have known what happened to me and they didn't do a thing to stop it!* She ducks her head back down to hear what else they were hiding from her.

“I know the risk that we would be taking, Graham. And I'm willing to take that risk.”

Graham lets out an exasperated sigh, and Carmen hears him slump onto the couch. The fuzziness comes back, stronger this time, and Carmen realizes what's wrong. *They drugged me! My parents drugged me!* She pulls her clothes and shoes out of her bag. She starts to put them on and stops when she notices the picture of her, Aida, and Graham sitting in front of the mirror. She looks at herself in the mirror for a long time before she shakes her head.

*I can't be sympathetic. They do not deserve my sympathy. They drugged me, for Christ's sake! What kind of messed up world has to exist for my parents to have willingly given me up to the government, knowing what they were giving me up for?*

Carmen finishes packing. She looks out the crack at the bottom of the door to see if she can spot Aida or Graham. When the coast is clear, she gets up, grabs her bags, and walks over to the window, trying to open it. “Come on, stupid window! Move...up!” She says in an attempt to coax the window into moving. She kneels on the carpet and puts her right shoulder and palm against the window's edge, pushing. The fuzziness and tingling come back, and when she shakes her head and hands to clear them, they don't go away. She fights through it and feels the window budge.

“Carmen, what are you doing?” Graham says, his voice filled with fear.

Carmen jumps at the sound of his voice. Her eyes widen. “Um... uh... just trying to get fresh air, is all.” She continues to push against the window.

Graham's voice gets low. “I don't think that's what you're trying to do.”

Aida walks into the room, looking from Carmen to Graham. “What is our lovely daughter doing, Graham?” A strained smile etches across her face.

Carmen throws her hands into the air. She points an accusatory finger at Graham, then Aida, “I know what happened to me, and you've *always* known what happened to me. You didn't do anything to stop them from taking me! So cut the crap!” She goes back to opening the window and feels the fogginess spread in her head.

Aida, looking taken aback, says, “Okay young lady, that is no way to speak to your mother. It doesn’t matter that you haven’t been living under our roof for years; you are now, which means you will be living by our rules. We didn’t have a choice when it came to giving you up. It was either you, or all of us.” Aida lowers her voice, “I had to make the tough decision and hope beyond hope that you would be returned to us safe and sound.”

Carmen looks back at her mother, “Well, I’m back, but not for long.” She turns back to the window, struggling to push it up through the haze in her brain.

Graham rests a hand on Aida’s shoulder. “We were promised that you wouldn’t have any memory of what happened to you. This was never supposed to happen. You are stronger than they realized. Stronger than I realized.” He mutters to himself, “Should have put a higher dose in the tea.”

Aida and Carmen turn to Graham. Aida with a shocked expression, Carmen with rage and pain wracking her features.

“You. You drugged me. I knew it! But I thought, . . . you’re my parents, you’re supposed to protect me.” Tears start to make their way down Carmen’s face as she looks between Graham and Aida.

Aida takes a step toward Carmen. “I’m so sorry, honey, I had no idea. I should have . . . I shouldn’t have . . .” Her shoulders slump, “I should have done a lot of things.”

Graham speaks up again, his voice filled with defeat. “Sadly, the government can’t use what they can’t control, and since the tea didn’t work . . . Aida, darling, call General Talbot. Tell him we have a . . . malfunction.”

Aida stands her ground, unmoving, and puts on a brave face.

Graham steps in front of her, taking her smooth face in his calloused hands. “Aida, you must do as I say. If you don’t do this, it will put *our* lives at risk, not just Carmen’s.”

Aida blinks. “No.”

Graham sighs. “Do I have to do everything myself?” He walks past Aida and out of the room to call General Talbot.

Aida rushes after Graham, screaming and trying to pull him back. “No, no, Graham, she’s ours! She’s our blood; she’s ours now. They had their time with her. She’s supposed to be ours!”

Graham responds in a cold tone. “No child is ever just the parents’. You know that as well as I do. When that law went into effect, every child became a child of the government.”

Carmen pulls the window the rest of the way up and tosses her bags out. She calls out to Graham and Aida, “Well, too bad I won’t be around to greet ’em.” She props herself on the windowsill, ducks her head, and hops out into the chilling night air.

Graham dashes back into the room and reaches out the window, trying to grab for Carmen but seconds too late. “Damn it!” He seethes for a second before rushing out of the house to chase after Carmen.

Carmen runs down the eerily quiet neighborhood street, hearing nothing but three sets of feet running. She yells back, “You are crazy if you think I’m going to willingly stay with you after you just threatened me and are now *actively* chasing me!”

Aida appears moments later, running after Graham and Carmen. Aida calls out, “Graham, please stop. There must be another way!”

Carmen thinks to herself. *It’s sweet that she genuinely believes that, but Graham sure doesn’t. I am not having my mind wiped.*

The direction she’s running gets blocked by four army trucks spilling out with soldiers in uniform, holding plastic shields. She stops before she gets too close to them. Graham and Aida block her from behind, a few paces back.

Carmen yells to the soldiers, “You’re going to regret this!” She feels something ignite inside her.

General Talbot steps through the barricade of soldiers. “You don’t know what you are capable of, Carmen. So why don’t you just surrender now, and no harm will come to you or your parents.”

Carmen scoffs, curling her tingling fingers into fists, “No harm?” She lifts an eyebrow at the line of armed soldiers in front of her. “No harm, huh? Well, I’d like to see what harm is then, because *no harm* is such a walk in the park, right? Oh, but I wouldn’t know what that feels like because you stole me away from my parents after only four years!” Her fists and golden flecked eyes begin to glow. “Just like you did with countless other children. Well, that stops now.”

General Talbot steps back behind the wall of soldiers. “Everybody, go for cover!” A bright burst of light emanates from where Carmen stands. The light vanished as soon as it came. Everyone slowly gets up, blinking light out of their eyes in a daze.

Aida looks around as Graham helps her up. “Where—where is she? Where did Carmen go?”

The General ignores Aida and Graham as he speaks into his com.  
“Carmen Blackwood has activated. I repeat, Flare is awake.”

## Our Epic Love Story

(College Flash Fiction, 2022)

January 9, 2015

Hello you, you firey red head with your pink tinted sunglasses in gold frames. The way you walk around the store like you're not lost, like you own this Home Depot. I love how you pick up color swatches at random and yet they always seem to compliment that pale complexion of yours. Oh, and how that teal hoodie falls off your shoulder just so, mmm. You are a goddess unfit for this world, but you would fit perfectly with me.

January 10, 2015

Desdemona. My sweet, fiery Desdemona. I heard from Jess in the breakroom that your name is Desdemona Ray from Tennessee. I hope to meet you soon Desdemona Ray from Tennessee. In the meantime I will learn what I can about you on my own.

January 12, 2015

Your apartment is big for someone who is a struggling artist. I saw through your window that you are a sculptor, nice. I enjoyed watched you work yesterday in your sweat-stained overalls, welders mask, and your hair up in a messy bun which you rock.

January 15, 2015

I have changed my work route to go by your apartment every morning. Just to see your face makes my day a little brighter. However, your boyfriend—if he even deserves that title—sucks. I don't blame you though, you can't see how he controls you with his actions, holding you back from your truest potential. But I can see it, and I don't like it. I don't like his hands on my Desdemona.

January 19, 2015

You seem offley unconcerned that that “boyfriend” of yours (Ian was it?) has just up and “left” you. I’m glad, he was taking up too much of your time, time you should be spending with me.

January 20, 2015

Hi Desdemona, I’m glad we finally got to meet. I was the guy who helped you pick out metal rods for your upcoming art piece. You seem much freer and more confident in yourself since Ian left. Now if I could only get that self-absorbed friend of your out of the picture.

January 21, 2015

You forgot to close your curtains tonight as you undressed for all the world to see. For me to see. Why would you let yourself be put on display like that? You should not let others see you this way, only me. I can just imagine your supple skin under my touch as I lay you back on that raggedy rhubarb couch of yours. Your skin tastes like metal and sweat, I enjoy it.

January 24, 2015

Sarah has got to go. I’m sorry, I know you will miss her presences in your life, but she is toxic and no good for you. Just like how Ian was no god for you, but I’m good for you. We have grown closer and you seem to be spending a little more time than usually at Home Depot. If I could just remove Sarah from the picture then you will finally be able to realize your full true self, and I will fall in love with you all over again.

January 30, 2015

It was a horrible tragedy the way that Sarah was found dead in her own home, but it was just another case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time when her house was broken into and robbed. I will be the shoulder you can lean onto for comfort through this trying time, and maybe soon I will become a more important part of your life.

February 14, 2015

Today is a big day for us Desdemona. Today is the first holiday we will be spending together as an official couple and I couldn't be happier. It is fun to snoop around your place as you watch me, instead of me sneaking around while you're not home. It feels right this way. We feel right.

March 5, 2015

Damn it Desdemona, why did you have to go snooping too? We were on the right track; we were getting into a comfortable rhythm in our relationship but then you had to go screw it up by looking around for Ian and becoming your own detective in Sarah's death. I love you still even as you are rotting in the ground beneath my feet as I shed tears for what could have been an epic love story.

## Editing in Creative Writing

(Personal Project, College Essay, MLA style, 2022)

What do experts talk about when they talk about editing in the field of creative writing?

Creative writing is used as a source of entertainment for the general populous and as an escape from the real world. It is also a freeing space to write in because the rules for creative writing change and differ from author to author and story to story. Editors must be careful which rules they follow for any given piece. I was drawn to this writing field for its openness to the rules of editing, the differences between editing, beta-ing, and proofreading, and why they are essential aspects of creative writing.

The simple definition of editing is "looking at each sentence carefully, and making sure that it's well designed and serves its purpose," as the University of Toronto defines it. This first section will show the importance of editing in creative writing, and the many roles editors must play when editing. Katya Johanson states that there are two aspects to editing; the first being "it involves understanding the stages of production that a book must go through, knowing what parts it must include and the format that they are to be presented in, and the rules underpinning writing, such as argument structure, grammar, spelling, sentence structure and punctuation" (Johanson 47). The second which she says is "less tangible" is "learning when to enforce these rules, how to enforce them and when to ignore them. It is this aspect that makes editing an art rather than a science" (Johanson 47).

Editing takes on dual roles; the first role is a surrogate for the reader. Editors go through the manuscript playing the part of the reader, so they are experiencing it, and as the editor, making corrections as needed so that, as the reader, what you are reading and experiencing makes sense and is coherent. You are following through and coming back with the messages that

the author intended. Editors make sure that the flow makes sense, that things are not out of order, and that if they are, it is the editor's job to set things right and draw the author's attention to inconsistencies. Ultimately, editors ensure that once they hit the last page, they completely understand what they just experienced, that it made sense and had a logical flow. Returning to the concept of the dual role, editors stand in for the author because they have to understand the author's intent. Editors need to make sure that whatever meanings or messages the author wants to convey come across in the manner they intended. Sometimes, the best edits are the ones that are not made. Upon first glance, editors may find that does not make sense to the reader-editor, but it does make sense to the author-editor. Editing is the most common occurrence in writing, and this section portrays what is done in the role of editing.

Beta-ing—or beta readers—is defined by NY Book Editors as "a person who reads and provides feedback on your manuscript before publishing." This section will demonstrate beta-ing or beta readers' role when it comes to works of creative fiction and why they are just as important as editors. Beta-ing is similar to the software world, where beta testers run software through its paces. They test it and flag any errors, such as instances where performing a function leads to a crash. So, like the editor, beta readers are in the role of the editor or the reader. They are using the software with its intended purpose and making notes of inconsistencies and crashes. Beta readers are more focused than editors in the role of the readers because they are like the test audience for TV shows or movies. Beta readers give the authors feedback on what works and what does not. They report back on again any inconsistencies, loose threads, or things that might have been introduced at a certain point and then dropped. However, they are not editors; they usually are not paid for their work; most of the time, they are friends of the author or adjacent

who is doing them a favor. The editor has a different mindset going into a manuscript. Editors focus on technicalities, whereas beta readers focus on whether the story makes sense and whether they would buy the book if they saw it in the bookstore. Beta readers are the closest analog to the end user: the reader. This section shows what beta-ing is, what capacity it is used for, and how it differs from both editing and proofreading.

Proofreading is the last stage in the editing process, where you check for "grammatical and punctuation errors, spelling mistakes, etc." (University of Toronto). Proofreading is also an essential aspect of creative writing, so this section will explain the purpose of the proofreading process in creative writing. Proofreading is the most fundamental basic technical form of editing. Back to computer software, a proofreader is like a computer coder, checking line-by-line to ensure the codes are written in the proper syntax, and everything is correctly placed and phrased so it runs without any hiccups when the software runs. A proofreader goes through a manuscript line by line for the most minute errors. It looks at the text under a microscope, whereas the beta reader is the bird's-eye view of things. The proofreader is down in the weeds, ensuring everything is proper and as it should be. The editor can sometimes be seen as an artist because they can take artistic license and suggest fundamental changes. The proofreader is mainly concerned with everything being spelled right, punctuated right, and sentences being formed right. The proofreader is not so much concerned with what the author is trying to convey the message, their feeling towards the story. Their purpose in reading is to check for proper grammar and sentence structure. They look at it from a more engineering perspective, while the editor also has an eye towards that; they also have that left brain, right brain approach, while proofreaders

deal with the more technical left brain stuff. This section showed that proofreading is essential in creating creative writing, just like editors and beta readers.

Creative writing is a tricky field to edit. That is why it is important to understand each step of the process, from the technical editing to the enjoyment readers will get from reading the book.

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## The Depths of *Home Alone*

(Personal Project, MLA format, 2025)

For as long as I can remember, my parents and I have watched the 1990 Chris Columbus Christmas classic, *Home Alone*. These days, we do not even watch it in the traditional sense—we quote the lines along with the characters and scan the background for small details we have never noticed before. Yes, there are other Christmas classics like *Elf*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, and *Christmas with the Kranks*, but none hit quite like *Home Alone*. Exploring what makes this movie so enduring might help explain what makes it so heartwarming, laugh-out-loud funny, and surprisingly wholesome, even decades later.

Released in 1990, *Home Alone* has become a staple of the Christmas movie lineup. Written by 1980s film titan John Hughes and directed by award winner Chris Columbus, the movie holds a lot of nostalgia for fans, young and old. The story centers on eight-year-old Kevin McCallister, who is accidentally left behind when his large family flies to Paris. This ends up being a blessing in disguise—when Kevin overhears two burglars, Marv and Harry, plotting to rob his house, Kevin takes action, setting up elaborate traps all over the house to stop them. This may be the most quotable Christmas movie ever, featuring unforgettable lines like “Keep the change, you filthy animal,” (48:46, 56:38) and “Look what you did you little jerk,” (10:13) to the iconic scream following the aftershave face pat. After years of rewatching, fans notice new details in the background, deepening their appreciation for the film.

Other Christmas classics like *A Christmas Story* and *Elf* are also filled with iconic quotes—lines like “Fra-gee-leh! It must be Italian,” (*A Christmas Story* 29:17) “You’ll shoot your eye out, kid!” (*A Christmas Story* 1:10:44) or “You sit on a throne of lies” (*Elf* 37:20) have stood the test

of time. Nevertheless, even with all their quotable lines, those movies do not hold the same comedic range as *Home Alone*. An adult version of Ralphie narrates *A Christmas Story*, and much of the humor relies on viewers having an advanced vocabulary or level of irony that children do not possess at that age. In *Elf*, a scene like Buddy pouring ‘syrup’ into his coffee gets adults laughing because they understand what the scene is really doing, but it likely goes over the heads of children. *Home Alone*, by contrast, nails this balance. Its jokes are simple enough for kids to understand, while also offering subtle adult humor that plays differently with age. No scene captures this better than when Harry, played by Joe Pesci, grabs the white-hot doorknob. His pain-induced gibberish is funny to children, but adults see right through it—they know he is holding back a string of expletives, making the scene even funnier. The ability to blend slapstick comedy with humor is what sets this movie apart from other Christmas comedies. As one critic put it “*Home Alone*’s success speaks to the tremendous behind-the-camera talent that elevated the film beyond ‘just a kids’ movie” (Pai). The timing, camera work, and acting put into scenes like this are what make this film what it is.

As a child, I admired Kevin’s sarcastic attitude and often imagined how I would defend my house from burglars if I were ever left home alone. Now, as a young adult, I cringe as he attempts to dodge punishment from his mom because I can see the parallels between Kevin and my younger self. Matt Grant says it best: “The emotional core changes as one gets older, appealing to both children and adults on different levels” (Grant 2016). This is part of what makes *Home Alone* so compelling—it grows up with its viewers. When I was younger, I did not see subtle expressions on characters’ faces. Now, I notice Kevin’s guilt when he mutters “I’m sorry,” realizing he has pushed it too far (11:55). It is not just a throwaway apology; it is the

night before an international trip during the biggest holiday season of the year, with the house in chaos, and tensions rising. His parents are overwhelmed with all the hustle and bustle, so Kevin acting out is the final straw. Putting Kevin in the attic is not just a punishment for him, but an attempt at peace for the reason of the family. This scene adds complexity to Kevin's character. He does not want to be a problem, but when acting out is the only way he will be included, that becomes his default.

Kevin's behavior shifts dramatically depending on whether he is completely alone or surrounded by his noisy family, and this contrast makes the movie so interesting. Kevin is the youngest of five siblings, so he might be used to getting all the attention under normal circumstances. However, now there are four adults and eleven kids, all running around trying to get packed the day before they are set to leave for Paris. When Kevin rams into Buzz at the kitchen island, spilling milk and soda everywhere, his mom considers this the last straw. As a kid, I never noticed the detail that one of the napkins used to clean the mess accidentally covers Kevin's plane ticket, which then gets thrown away. Watching it now, I realize that this was a subtle foreshadowing that sets everything in motion. After this debacle, Catherine O'Hara delivers one of the most memorable lines when she snaps, "There are fifteen people in this house, and you are the only one who has to make trouble," before sending Kevin to the attic—aka "the third floor" (11:29-11:40). The emotional impact of this scene comes from both Kevin and his mother feeling misunderstood. Kevin just wants to be seen, but in a house full of people during the holidays, things are bound to get messy.

Director Chris Columbus also included moments designed to tap into childhood fears—things that might seem silly to adults but feel genuinely scary when viewing the film as a kid.

Take the basement furnace for example, which growls and hisses like a monster, or the creepy neighbor across the street, Old Man Marley. Even the visual choices support this childlike perspective. *Home Alone*'s cinematographer, Julio Macat, explains, "We thought about every shot in terms of the point of view of the kid... Because we thought that kids see everything in an amplified way, we made the lights in the house feel a little bit brighter" (Pai). These deliberate choices in cinematography and lighting help immerse the viewer in Kevin's heightened emotional world. Even now, the sudden upward zoom on the Santa Claus' head mounted to the front door still gives me chills. These touches show how *Home Alone* captures a child's imagination in fun and frightening ways.

Children are known to have wild imaginations, and John Hughes, who wrote *Home Alone*, was famously a kid at heart. The idea of a family accidentally forgetting one of their children, and that child defending his home with traps, is so over-the-top that only a child or Hughes, could dream it up. While the premise is far from realistic, this kind of fantasy taps into the child within the viewer. Kids love pretending they are in charge, and *Home Alone* is the biggest "what if" scenario a kid could dream up. Who else but Kevin would think that using paint cans or an iron dropped down a laundry chute would stop "The Wet Bandits"? Even when he is caught by the leg, Buzz's pet tarantula just happens to show up, giving Kevin the perfect tool for escape and triggering (arguably) the greatest scream in the film.

The church scene is one of the most powerful scenes in *Home Alone*. The ethereal voices of the children's choir underneath the solemn and reflective conversation Kevin has with Old Man Marley make the huge church a much more intimate place. The atmosphere is shaped by John Williams's moving score, which netted *Home Alone* two Oscar nominations, including one for

Best Original Song for “Somewhere in My Memory” (Pai). As a kid, I saw Marley as a sad, lonely man who missed his family. Now, I understand the emotional complexity—his sense of pride, fear of rejection, and regret about being estranged from his son. Both characters find themselves at their lowest emotional points in the movie here. In his immense youthful wisdom, Kevin asks, “If you miss him, why don’t you call him?” Marley replies, “I’m afraid if I call him, he won’t talk to me.” Kevin shares an analogy about overcoming his fear of the basement, and concludes, “My point is, you should call your son” When Marley asks, “What if he won’t talk to me?” Kevin replies, “At least you’ll know. Then you could stop worrying about it, and you won’t have to be afraid anymore” (1:10:53-1:11:48). In this quiet moment, Kevin takes a complex idea—how fear holds us back—and expresses it with such honesty and simplicity that it can resonate with audiences of all ages.

Following a nighttime storm that causes the power and phone lines to go down, the McCallister family oversleeps, triggering one of the most memorably chaotic sequences in the movie. The juxtaposition of Kevin walking around the quiet and calm house contrasts perfectly with the rest of the McAlister family racing like madmen through the airport. The shift in volume between Kevin leisurely wandering around the house and the roaring plane engine is so stark that it almost catches the viewer off guard. This clever contrast shows how alone Kevin is and how oblivious his family remains until they are already in the air. When Kevin wakes up and realizes his house is empty, he says, “I made my family disappear” with a mix of shock and excitement—as if the wish he made the night before came true (21:30). For younger viewers the sequence that plays—and this film in general—is “a wish fulfillment fantasy for kids (and their grown-up counterparts)” (Pai). What they would not give to be left alone in their house for a day eating

junk food, “watching rubbish,” and jumping on their parent’s bed (24:18). However, watching this movie back as an adult, the implications feel heavier. Kevin genuinely believes his wish came true, and it is never clarified if he finds out that his family just accidentally left him behind. Later in the film, Kevin stops by to see ‘Santa,’ and says all he wanted for Christmas is his family back. This scene shows he may still believe he caused them to “disappear”. At the end of the movie, when his mom finally returns and Kevin looks at her with puppy dog eyes, I have always wondered—does he want an apology, or is he trying to guilt-trip her a little because he realized at some point that they left him?

Ultimately, this blend of humor, heart, and childlike wonder makes *Home Alone* feel so timeless. It is more than just slapstick traps and holiday chaos—it is about family, forgiveness, and growing up just a little bit.

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