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The People We Become

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The People We Become

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in Writing and Linguistics

By

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Under the mentorship of Professor Laura Valeri

ABSTRACT

The People We Become is a coming-of-age novella about Ezzie, a senior in college, who struggles to answer a question that many people are forced to face in their lives, “Do I sacrifice my dreams to help others?” Ezzie must make a decision to tell her best friend, Angela, that they are interviewing for the same internship at Vogue. If she gets the position, she risks losing her best friend and leaving her dying mother in Georgia while she pursues her dream of working for a fashion magazine in New York. The first person present tense narrative enables the reader to follow Ezzie’s journey, and to understand how the events that surround our lives affect the people we become.

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Chapter 1

Sunday afternoons are meant to be peaceful. Birds chirp, the sun shines, and I should be sipping tea on my penthouse balcony in the Big Apple. Too bad this isn’t New York, and too bad I’ve never seen a penthouse except in magazine covers at the grocery store. Instead, I am sitting at Starbucks in the self-designated creeper corner drinking coffee, trolling Twitter, and listening to the chirping of my best friend Angela.

“Ezzie, did you hear me? Should my colors be pink and cream or opal and cream?” She flings fabric swatches over my phone, almost knocking over my coffee that sits on the table next to us. Even a person that is not knowledgeable of the fashion world should know that opal is not a real color, but I let her speak because it is her big day, not mine. Besides, I am too busy watching two squirrels fight over Chick-fil-A fries outside of the window. I love our college campus, but our squirrels are one step away from starting the zombie apocalypse.

“Ezzie!” Angela snaps her fingers, breaking my trance. I look at the swatches she has stolen from my Textiles class swatch kit.

“Whatever you choose, I'll wear it as long as you don't put me in taffeta!” We laugh, but I make sure to point out which swatch is taffeta. Angela is a wealthy girl who wears the most expensive brands—she probably even shakes hands with Vera Wang—but fabric and fashion is not her strong point. Despite her horrible fashion knowledge and the fact that she has no idea how to plan a wedding, I always knew she would get married first—a man would sweep her off her Givenchy heels. Maybe it's the blonde hair or the way her gray eyes shine in the sunlight. I do not know, but her beauty lights the room like a catwalk—everyone stops and stares.
“Okay Ez, no taffeta, but seriously pink or opal?” Angela shoves the swatches onto my brown hands, “choose the one that you want to wear.”

I stare at the swatches. “Why are you picking wedding colors? He just purposed last week. Besides, it’s the beginning of our senior year. Let's live!” I yell loud enough for the old couple across the room to hear me. We have been planning our senior year for five years now. I could have graduated in four years, but Mom is sick, and I have to take care of her.

“Well, I didn't want to tell you like this.”

“You're pregnant, aren't you?” I whisper.

“Heavens no!” she yells. The old couple across from us scrunches their noses, grabs their coffee cups, and heads for the exit. Embarrassed, Angela looks at the ground and whispers, “besides we haven't done it.”

“That's nothing to be ashamed of.” I state.

“Anyways,” Angela grabs a bundle of papers from her purse, “Do you remember when I went to New York this summer?”

“Yea, I remember.” How could I forget? I was stuck in this small town cat sitting while my best friend pranced up and down Fifth Avenue.

Angela shoves a group of papers into my lap. Now, my lap is covered with fabric swatches and papers. “What in the world is this?” I ask.

“Well, my aunt did makeup for a model, and she knew a few people at Vogue. Things happened, numbers were exchanged, and bam! I've been selected as one of two people who will be meeting Anna Wintour herself in hopes of receiving an internship after college! Aren't you excited?” Angela's eyes glimmer like a child watching the choo-
choo train drive around the Christmas tree. I haven’t seen her this happy since her first date with Mike Darren at the local Vineyard.

“Wow,” is the only word I can say that sounds at least a little sincere. “Well, I have news too.”

Right when I open my mouth to tell Angela that I am the second person who has been chosen to interview with the queen, Anna Wintour herself, my boyfriend Jack Darby comes around the corner with Mike Darren, Angela’s fiancé.

“Hello, ladies,” Jack grabs my hand and kisses my cheek, while Mike and Angela greet each other with their eyes. They reminded me of the old couple in the movies—the one where the man cuts their cold steaks and he feeds her at the dinner table without saying a word, only connecting their wrinkled fingers and their eyes. I always thought it was a little creepy.

“What are you guys talking about?” Mike asks before drinking the other half of Angela's latte.

“The Big Apple, babe,” states Angela.

“The Job?” He smiles. Mike is tall with olive skin and perfect brown hair. He is smart, funny, kind, and empathetic. Angela once told me that she’s attracted to Mike’s personality, and the way he treats her like a princess.

“Yep,” Angela smiles. Mike leans over to kiss Angela on the forehead. I can sense something is wrong from the way Angela jerks away from his kiss. Mike stares at her, and turns towards me.

“Awesome, what do you think about it, Ez?” Mike asks.

“Wait a minute; wait a minute,” Jack interrupts, “the Big Apple? Job?” Jack takes
his long ivory hands and places them on my thigh. His touch reminds me of the first day we met in yoga class our freshman year. I took yoga because I wanted to relax, but he says he took yoga to meet me.

Jack looks at me with a smirk. “Lucy, you got some explaining to do,” he laughs.

“Our little princess is growing and heading to New York,” I say with a hint of sarcasm, but Jack is the only one who senses it.

“She is huh?” Jack asks, “What's the job?”

“Vogue!” Angela yells. Mike gives Angela a piercing glare, and plants his hand onto her thigh. Angela grabs his hand and falls back into her seat. “Oh, I’m sorry. I did not mean to be so loud,” she says.

“You’re just being your regular self.” I chime, but Angela does not hear me. Her eyes are glued on Mike’s.

“Really? Ez just--” I kick Jack before he lets the words creep out of his mouth.

“Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hit you.”

Angela laughs, “Ez is what?”

“I watched the New York cycle of America's Next Top Model, that's all.” I sip my coffee and stare at Jack.

“Oh okay,” Angela goes on talking about how much she wants to be in New York. My best friend is engaged to the man of her dreams, planning a wedding, and interviewing for the same job I am—the job of my dreams.

The clock strikes 12 o'clock noon. “Well, I guess we should start heading to the library now,” Mike states. He grabs Angela's books with his left hand, and locks his fingers with hers with his right.
“Bye, you guys. We'll see you for dinner. *The Walking Dead* premieres tonight.”

Angela shouts as she walks away.

Jack and I remain stationed in the creeper corner. “My lady, we also have somewhere to be.” I stare at Jack not knowing what he is talking about, or where I need to be. It is Sunday; I’ve already skipped Church, and Mom is having brunch with her friends. For once in my life, I have nothing to do and no one to take care of.

Jack pulls out a picnic blanket from his book bag. “Would you mind having a picnic treat with me on Sweetheart Circle?” Jack bats his eyelashes like a three year old girl.

“Yes,” I laugh, “you're such a goofball.”

Jack grabs my hand with his left hand and the picnic basket with his right. Our fingers do not interlock, but I hold his hand tightly, never wanting to let go.
Chapter 2

We walk out of Starbucks and onto the cobblestone walkway that covers our campus. The sun teases my brown skin, and the wind kisses my face as we walk by one of the lakes on campus.

Once we reach our picnic destination, Jack unravels the picnic blanket and places it on the ground. My back drops hard to the ground. I tuck my hands behind my head and gaze at the clouds.

“If you lie to the side and turn your head, you'll see a cloud that resembles the McDonald's logo,” I say. Jack follows me to the ground and watches the clouds with me. We lie like children with our backs touching the blankets forming a barrier between our skin and the short green grass of the park. A couple reads books in a hammock across from us. Their bodies force the two trees to form a heart. If love is hammocks and reading Gertrude Stein, then we are the inferior to its conditions.

“So it looks like a 'M'?” Jack mocks. We laugh. I've never seen his hair glisten under the sunlight like cinnamon sprinkles on my morning bun.

“Well, that's less poetic.” I laugh and punch him in the shoulder.

For a moment we are in silence, and my mind is thinking about life after graduation.

“Are you going to tell Angela about New York?” Jack asks. His eyes never leave the clouds. “You know you really should tell her, or something.”

I turn to look at him. “I already tried.”

“You didn't try hard enough.” He is right, but I’m not going to let him know that. Angela and I have a long history of things being taken. I'd already taken her shoes in
grade school, but I’m pretty sure taking my dreams can’t be her revenge; those things aren’t even equal.
Chapter 3

When I was three years old, I stole a pair of shoes. They weren’t just any shoes. They were black patent leather shoes with a black strap that hugged the top of the foot. My white ruffled church socks would look great with that, I thought. But there was one problem. The shoes weren’t displayed neatly on a shelf at Payless. The shoes were tightly snugged onto Angela Cassavas’ feet. If I were Junie B. Jones, I would call her my arch nemesis, but I’m not; therefore, I’ll call her the goody two shoes of my nightmares.

“It’s nap time!” Mrs. Arnold yelled. “Everyone grab your blankets and choose a spot. And remember, no talking.”

I stared at Angela as she grabbed her blanket out of her backpack and placed her shiny black shoes in the cubby next to mine. “That’s it!” I thought. At the age of three, I was planning a shoe heist like I was the infamous John Dillinger.

I grabbed my blanket and lay beside the cubbies with my eyes glued to the shoes.

“Sweet dreams everyone.” Mrs. Arnold turned off the lights as every preschooler snuggled in their blankets. My cat eyes scanned the room for five minutes trying to sense any movement before I threw my plan into action. While all of the children slept, I carefully slid my arm out of my blanket and reached in the cubby for the shoes.

The first time, I pulled out a pair of brown sandals that had bubblegum attached to the sole. “Gross,” I whispered. I quietly let my hand fumble through the cubbies for ten minutes when it happened. My hand caressed the smooth skin of the patent leather shoes—so soft, so heavenly. Without moving my torso, my hand retrieved the shoes and slid them under my blanket. “Close your eyes, Ezzie,” I whispered, “it’s nap time.”
Chapter 4

We crowd around the television at Angela's house to watch the premiere of *The Walking Dead*. Angela's house is perfection. She has a 65' Samsung 4K television mounted on the living room wall in her four bedroom, five bathroom house that only she occupies. One day I asked her why she had such a big house. She told me that each room served a purpose. The largest of the bedrooms is her master bedroom, but the closet is too small, so she turned the smallest bedroom into a walk-in closet. The third bedroom is her office which is starting to collect dust because Angela doesn’t do her own work anyway. The fourth bedroom is really my bedroom that she'd given me for whenever I found myself needing an escape.

“This food is delicious,” Jack states as he walks both of our plates into the kitchen. “Are you sure you cooked this Angela?” He jokes. Everyone knows Angela's cooking skills are low.

Angela laughs and wraps her arm around my shoulder. “We all know my right hand girl cooked for us,” she giggles. I laugh with her and make the mistake of looking into her eyes. *I really should tell her,* I think, and the glance Jack gives me from the kitchen door confirms it.

“Hey Ang, can we talk for a second?” Her face looks puzzled.

“Of course, I need to walk Toodles anyway.” Angela grabs Toodles, her black French poodle, and we head out of the door. The streets are dark, but I can hear raccoons run from dumpster to dumpster, and I glance at a great horned owl watching us from the streetlamp.

“What did you need to talk about?” Angela asks as we walk barefoot on the
August grass.

“Do you remember New York?” I ask.

“Of course! Isn't it exciting?” She yells.

“It really is and--”

“I have to figure out what to wear, where to stay, where to shop... Oh my goodness this is so exciting. You're coming with me right?” Angela's face lights up in the moonlight. She smiles at me like she just won the top prize at Chuck E. Cheese.

“Well, I--” my phone starts ringing. I dig through my purse to retrieve it. *Mom calling*, the screen reads. I try to answer, but I miss her call and five others from her.

“Crap!” I yell.

“Is everything okay?” Angela grabs my shoulder.

“Yea, look I really have to go, but we'll talk later.” I run down the street to get back to my car, “tell Jack I'll call him tomorrow!” I yell.
Chapter 5

I race down the road, praying a cop will not stop me. Turning on the town’s dark roads isn’t scary. The scary part is racing down dirt roads in the rain. My car, a white 1999 Grand Prix SE, has no business traveling down muddy dirt roads, but I have no choice. Our house is located off into the woods. Sometimes, I feel a sense of isolation. We live in a one level brick house. The land used to belong to a family of farmers. After the decline in the economy, they decided to move on to do more profitable things. When Mom saw the house, she knew it was meant for her. It was old, beat-up, and alone like she'd been for so many years. That house became her soul-mate and my Hell.

I quickly unlock the door and rush inside of the house. The house is silent. Maybe, she is asleep.

"Where have you been?" Mom coughs. "You didn't go to church." She comes around the corner using her oxygen tank as a walker. The wheels screech and causes my ears to ache.

"I know, Mom. Angela came back today, and I had to have lunch--"

Mom's cough interrupts my excuse. As she coughs, I look around the house. The smell of mothballs and peppermint candy flood the house. Mom used to talk about how much she hated that smell, and how she never wanted her house to smell like that when she was older. She spoke like that before she got sick. She spoke like that before Dad died.

She places the oxygen mask over her mouth and takes a few breaths. She sighs before opening her mouth to speak, "Don't you dare talk back to me. I'm sick, and you are out here roaming the streets with whomever you want." Mom starts breathing heavier.
She grabs her chest, then her oxygen mask. I grab her free hand and guide her to the nearest chair.

I look at the counter for her medicine when I notice a full bottle of Prozac and half a blunt stationed on her nightstand. I grab the blunt off of the nightstand. “Really, Mom? You’re wearing an oxygen mask!”

Mom stares at me and takes off her oxygen mask. “It’s my medicine. It’s the only thing that makes me forget the pain.” She grabs the blunt from my hand, “The oxygen helps me breathe, but this helps me handle the pain.”

Mom lights the blunt and puffs it, making sure to blow smoke in my face. She wobbles her way to her bed. Ever since Mom was diagnosed with cancer, she gradually started losing her mind. At first she would sit in silence for hours. Between the ages six and nine, I forgot I had a mother; I only had my father.

My father was a tall, muscular man. At the age of 35 he started going bald, but he tried to keep his beard of black hair on his chin. My father loved my mother, and she loved him even when they were separated by her silent spells. Life was hard when Mom found out about her cancer, but life became Hell after my father's accident.

“I wish Dad was here,” I mumble as I head to my bedroom.

“Don’t we all,” Mom says. “Don’t we all.

I go into my bedroom, and analyze my vision board. It is red and black with “VOGUE” written in big letters across the top. My fingers caress each letter. I have to leave. I have to go. But what about Ang? What about Mom?

When I was six years old, Mom started coughing at midnight in January. Her
faced turned blue, and Dad called 911. I stood in Mom's bedroom doorway, holding the
doll she'd hand sewn for me. We were poor, and I wanted a doll, so Mom grabbed old
dish rags and made me my own rag doll. I squeezed the doll tightly as I watched Mom
struggle to breathe. Her hand reached out to me, but I couldn't touch it. It was too blue.

I lay on my bed for hours holding my rag doll, and repeating the memory of the
first night I saw my mother dying in my head. Tears fall from my eyes as raindrops start
banging against my window. There is so much rain. It reminds me of the time I drowned
in a pool outside of my Baptist church when I was nine years old. They called the process
baptism. I called it dying.

Religion was a major part of our family. After the diagnosis, it'd become the only
normal thing we had left. Our weekly routine became hospital, school, and church. We
were no longer a family; my father and I marched like worker ants to ensure my mother
had everything she needed to live at least one more day.
Chapter 6

When I awake the next morning, my head feels as if it’s been beaten with a cane. I roll over to check the time on my alarm clock. 9:45 am. Shit? I’m going to be late. I hop out of bed and run into the bathroom. I cannot be late for my first day of class. I cannot be late.

My morning routine is not simple. I wake up, go to Mom’s room, make sure she’s still breathing, help her out of bed, wash her, dress her, help her take her medicine, cook her breakfast, then, I start my day. Waking up late throws a hammer into the operation. Now I have to take care of my mother, do a hoe-bath on myself, and throw on a pair of sweats that are not stinky.

“You look like shit,” Mom says. “Who the hell raised you?”

“I did,” I mumble as I walk away.

When I arrive at school, I meet up with Angela at Starbucks. We sit in the usual creeper corner to dish about our upcoming classes.

“Sorry I had to head out last night. My mom called and—“

“It’s ok,” Angela interrupts, “I know how it is.”

I nod my head and we both go silent. Angela is good at understanding my situation with my mother. She knows that it is difficult to take care of Mom when she is not taking her medicine.

“Ang, can I crash at your house tonight?” I pop my head up from my hands to look at Angela’s face, “I don’t want to go back to that Hell hole.”

Angela twiddles her fingers and says, “Well, Mike… I mean, I don’t think that’s a
good idea anymore. We’re engaged now, and Mike wants to turn that room, your room, into a man cave.”

I stare at Angela not knowing whether or not to slap her or simply walk away, “Excuse me!”

“I knew you would get mad, Ez.” Angela sinks down in her seat and continues to play with her fingers.

“I’m not mad. I’m just shocked,” I notice Angela is still sinking in the chair. “You guys are getting married. I understand.” I do not want Angela to be mad at me for one room. Heck, I haven’t even told her about the internship yet.

“Really Ez?” She jumps up from her seat. “I told Mike you might be mad. Thank you for understanding.” Angela grabs me and hugs me; that is when I notice a red mark on her neck.

“Ang, what’s that?” I ask.

Angela grabs her neck to hide her red spot.

“Is that a hickey?” I grin.

“Oh, yea. You caught me,” Angela stutters.

I stare at the mark closer. The hickey almost looks like a butterfly or fingertips—yes, fingertips.
Chapter 7

Angela and I continue to meet in Starbucks’ creeper corner every morning like we’ve been doing since freshman year, but things soon start to change. Angela starts to arrive to the spot later and later each day. Pretty soon, she stops arriving at all.

“Hey Ang,” I call one Friday in September. The date is September 27th—Angela and I celebrate our friendship anniversary every year on this date. “Ma’am, where are you?”

Over the phone, Angela breathes heavy, “I’m at home.”

“Are you ok?” I ask.

“Yea, yea, I just have allergies,” she sniffles.

“In September?” I ask.

“Yea.”

“Whatever. Do you remember what day it is?” I ask.

“Oh shit,” Angela snaps. “Do I have a test today?”

“No! It’s our friendship anniversary! It’s the 27th!” I yell through the phone.

“Ez! I’m so sorry,” she whispers.

“Wait, why are you whispering?” I ask.

“I have to go, bye.” Angela hangs up the phone.

In my hand, I hold a letter and a box of white chocolates. The letter tells Angela that I am also interviewing for Vogue. The chocolate is to make her feel better after I tell her.

I stand up from my chair in Starbucks creeper corner, and throw the box of chocolates and the letter into the trash on my way out of the door.
August and September come and go like Angela’s presence in my life. Before we know it, October hits us like hay fever. I spend most of my days trying to avoid everyone because I am tired. My mother is getting worse, and I think I am slipping into my depression again. I only go to school, work, and the library. Even in my absence, I can sense something bad is about to happen. I barely see Angela, but when I see her she wears baggy clothes, and piles of makeup. One day, I saw her with a black eye. She says a book fell on her face from the top of her bookshelf in her library. The funny thing is I’ve walked her house many times, and I’ve never seen books or a bookcase anywhere. Maybe Mike owns a bookshelf. Maybe Mike has a library. It’s really hard to know for sure because I don’t know much about Mike. I only know what Angela tells me, and I only remember what I think I saw over the summer.

I saw Mike at a house party. I sat by the bonfire, roasting marshmallows with Jack while music blasted through the speakers of a Ford F150.

In the distance, I saw Mike.

In the distance, I saw Mike talking.

No. In the distance, I saw Mike yelling.

He was yelling at a boy.

No. He was yelling at a girl.

She was around our age.

Twenty, I think.

But she didn’t look like Angela.

No, her hair was short.
Wait, she was short.
I think he grabbed her.
I think she cried.
I got up out of my seat.
I ran over towards them.
They moved.
I ran faster.
They left.
I don’t know what happened.
I might’ve imagined it.
I was drunk.

“Jack!” Angela yells across the campus walkway. Jack stops and walks towards Angela. I watch from a table of people selling cupcakes.

“Don't yell my name like that,” Jack chuckles, “People might be looking for me.” Angela is not in a laughing mood. Between making wedding plans and preparing for her interview with Vogue, she has not been getting enough sleep. Angela is grumpy and it shows all over her perfect olive skin.

“I need to talk to Ez! Where is she?” Angela yells.

“What is there to talk about?” Jack asks. I walk over towards Jack and Angela. Angela wears a baggy white t-shirt, her grey cheerleading pants from high school, and a pair of Uggs.

“You look rough,” I say. “Why have you been dressing like this? Don’t tell me
you’ve worn all of your clothes at least once so,” I pull out my gift card to Macy’s, “we have to go shopping again!” I do the cabbage patch two times, and then I give Angela a friendly punch in her right shoulder.

“Ouch! Why would you do that?” Angela snaps. Angela grabs her shoulder and stares down at the grown.

“Sorry, dude. I didn’t know I hit you that hard.” I say.

“You didn’t,” Angela blurts out. She tries to iron out her clothes with her hands in an effort to gain her composure. “Ez, can I talk to you?”

She knows. I know she does.

“Go ahead.” I stutter. My palms start sweating. She knows.

“Um,” Angela scratches her head and pulls me in close to her, “can we talk alone?”

“Of course,” I say. Angela grabs my hand and walks me to the nearest bench.

“I’m going to class,” Jack yells as he walks away.

“What’s going on?” I ask Angela. At this moment, I know that there is something else going on, something that has nothing to do with me or Vogue.

“Mike and I,” Angela starts. “Mike is,” tears start to flow from Angela’s eyes. I grab Angela’s hands.

“What’s wrong, Ang? You can tell me anything.” Angela begins to open her mouth when a shadow appears over us. It is Mike.

He touches Angela’s shoulders. “What’s going on?” He asks. He kisses her on the cheek. “Are you stressed about wedding plans, honey?”

Angela freezes, and collects her thoughts, “Yes, the wedding is stressful.” Mike
then leans over and whispers something in Angela’s ear.

“I have to go, Ez. We will talk later.” Angel gets up from the bench.

“Are you sure you don’t want to finish talking now?” I ask. I know something is not right between her and Mike.

“No, I’m sure. Besides, you need to go to class anyway.” Angela says. Mike grabs her books like always, but this time they do not interlock fingers.

“Ang, you know I always skip this class. We need to talk. Come on, let’s go talk.” My voice grows stern. Angela’s bruises from books in empty libraries, the baggy clothes, painful shoulders, and heightened anxiety have me worried. Whatever she needs to talk about must be done now, and we must talk alone.

Angela stares at me for a second as if she wants to say something. I think she wants to come with me.

Mike starts to walk away from Angela, “I’m going to the car. If you’re not there when I’m there, then I don’t know how you’re getting home.”

Angela stares at me.

“What the hell?” I mumble. “Ang, I can always take you home. Why is he being such a dick?”

Angela hugs me and whispers, “It’s ok, Ezzie. We’ll talk later.” Angela releases her grip and runs to catch up with Mike.

Angela hasn’t hugged me that hard since the day my father died.

When I was fifteen years old, there was an accident on I-20 east. It was a three car accident involving a tractor trailer. I was at a ballet recital at the local theater. We were doing Swan Lake, and I had the privilege of being the Swan Princess. As I danced and
twirled my way into standing ovations and flowers, my father was sliding into a fire-blazing tractor trailer. The police said the driver of the trailer lost control on the wet roads, causing him to crash into two cars and cause a pileup in the middle of the road. My father died instantly and left me with my sick, angry mother. At his funeral, I promised him that I would always take care of my mother.

I can't break that promise.
Chapter 8

I am in my usual library hideout when I receive Jack's text about the Pink Floyd Planetarium show. “Cool. I'll sneak in the food,” I text. I love sitting on the fourth floor of the library near the windows because people watching is calming. No one knows I am watching them, but they know someone or something has to be seeing their flaws. I count five people digging boogers by the art building. Three people digging in their behinds, five skateboarders fall, and one couple has a disagreement.

The couple having the disagreement reminds me of my meeting with Angela earlier. It also reminds me of Mike’s interruption. *It was all so strange.*

Every day I watch the same people do the same things outside of the window, but on dark nights, I watch my reflection in the fourth floor library window. I look horrible. My hair curls are messy, my eyes are swollen from crying, and my brain is tired from thinking and working. I am upset because I had to put my mother in the hospital.

Yesterday, I went into her room for our normal morning routine. Mom loved to sleep without her wires hooked up because she said they made everything uncomfortable, so every night we unplugged all of her cords. When I first journeyed into her room, I saw her take a deep breath. Usually her breaths happen in a tune of in-out-in-out, or one-two-tree, one-two-three like a ballet sequence. This time Mom just went in and out. This time Mom only went one and two. Her breathing stopped, so I called 911, and started performing CPR.

“You saved her life,” the doctor said when we arrived at the hospital. “You saved
I looked at my mother lying half-conscious in her hospital bed. *Mom can’t be saved.*

The loud rain brings me out of deep thought about my mother. *I should call and check up on her.* My phone buzzes again. It is a text from Jack. “The show starts in 10 minutes. Where R U?” It reads. I rush to the planetarium to meet up with Jack for the Pink Floyd show. The planetarium is located in the labyrinth they decided to name the Math and Physics building. Everyone gets lost in that building. Some days, I watch children go into the labyrinth and never come out.

When I arrive, I spot Jack in the back of the planetarium in our usual seats. We’d carved our names on the bottom of the seats because we wanted the world to know that those were our seats. The show starts, and I look up at the stars.

“I need to talk to my mom today.”

“You really do. How is she?” Jack whispers. The show has started, and he does not want to disturb the old couple beside us.

“Barely breathing, but she still finds a way to yell at me.”

“She’s your mother. She’s used to it. Are you still thinking about New York?” He yells. The people in front of us turn around and give us a funny look.

A tear rolls from my eye. “But she's sick,” I mumble. New York is my dream, but my mother gives me the mind to dream, the mouth to speak, and the life to live. “I can't leave her.”

“I don't know what it is about you and Ang and not being able to leave or say no.” Jack states before looking back at the stars.
“What are you talking about?”

“It’s just that you never want to disappoint people. You never want to live for yourself, and well, Ang never wants to hurts you. We all just want you to be happy, Ez.”

Jack and I sit in silence for a moment. “Something is wrong with Ang,” I say. “I do not know what it is, but she needs me.”

“More than you think,” Jack mumbles. Before I am able to respond, my phone starts buzzing like crazy. At first, I refuse to answer. I don’t want anything to ruin my moment.

“Are you going to get that? It's been going off for a long time.” Jack whispers. I sigh and look at my phone. It is the hospital calling. I run outside and answer the phone.

“Hello! May I speak with Ezzie Williams?” A kind voice asks.

“Hello, Is my mom okay?” I yell. After all of these years, I still am not prepared for anything to happen to my mother.

“Yes, Miss Williams is fine, Ezzie,” the woman states.

“Great! Well, what's going on? Did she tell you to call me?” I stutter. “She tends to do that when I haven’t called her.”

“It's about Angela Cassavas. You’re her emergency contact.”

When I was twelve years old, Angela and I became best friends. We were from two different worlds that weren't meant to collide, but we danced our way into each other's lives. Ballet was our friendship bridge. At first, it started as healthy competition for the starring roles that kept us apart, but Swan Lake built our friendship when the dance teacher split the role of Odette into the White Swan and the Black Swan. I got the role of the White Swan, and Angela got the role of the Black Swan. We danced together
all day and night until we were one in step and in friendship.
Chapter 9

I grab Jack out of the planetarium, and tell him that we have to leave immediately. Tears fly down my face, and my words cannot properly form.

“What's going on? Is it your Mom?” Jack grabs my hand and forces our eyes to meet.

“No,” I whisper, “but we have to go now!” Jack can sense my frustration, so he runs with me to the car. The best thing about our relationship is silence. Jack knows when to speak and when to stay quiet.

When we arrive at the hospital, I am greeted by a police officer and a doctor. I cannot comprehend everything that is being said. I only grasp a few words: fight, concussion, bruising, MRI, and Mike. I shake in my seat as Jack holds my hand.

“You can come see her now,” the nurse states. She escorts me to Angela’s room. She has a tube in her nose, bandages over her head, and a beeping machine.

I slowly walk into her room, hoping she will wake up, hoping this is another one of her horrible pranks. I approach her bed, and sit down in the chair beside her.

“Angela,” I say. I grab her hand, hoping that my touch could somehow awake her, but it doesn’t. So, I sit in a hospital room beside my best friend until I fall asleep in the chair, waiting on her to wake up, waiting on her to talk about Vogue one more time.

A week passes by, and Angela is still in the hospital. “We’re not sure if she’s going to wake up anytime soon,” the doctor says. “Do you see this spot right here?” He points to different colors on an image of her brain. I don’t know what I am looking at, but I see different colors. He says that she has hemorrhaging, or bleeding in the brain. He
says they will try to fix it. He says he’s not sure of the results, that there are many risks for this procedure. Angela’s mom holds my hand tighter. She flew in from New York City as soon as I called her about Angela. I can feel the blood rush out of my hand.

“So what are you saying,” Mrs. Cassavas asks. Her olive skin grows pale. *This doesn’t look good.*

“I’m going to do everything I can,” the doctor says. I feel Mrs. Cassavas hand escape my grip. She starts to fall to the floor like she is falling in one of those falling dreams. Her body drops, and I race to catch her. At least I am able to catch someone.

We give Mrs. Cassavas a glass of water and guide her to a chair. As she gains consciousness, my phone begins to ring.

“I’m sorry,” I say as I fumble through my purse. “I forgot to turn the ringer off.” I step outside of the room. I finally locate my phone, and see a number from New York City on the phone screen. *It’s either Vogue or one of Angela’s family members. Please let it be a family member.* I sit in a chair in the hospital hallway. “Hello.” I answer.

“Hi, it’s Miranda Livingston, calling from *Vogue.*” We would like to confirm your December 13th interview for our internship program.”
Chapter 10

After leaving the hospital, I go home to my Hell house and attempt to have a normal Sunday routine with Jack. He doesn’t know about my interview confirmation, nor does he know any updates about Angela’s or my mother’s condition. I like to keep Jack in the dark as much as possible, so that we won’t have to discuss anything; life is more comfortable that way.

Jack sits on the edge of my bed, and I am sitting at my computer desk doing calculus homework.

“I’m glad they caught Mike,” Jack begins, “a scumbag like that needs to go.” Jack’s voice turns into a whisper, “Hell, why didn’t we see it sooner?” I put my pencil on my desk. Jack stands up and walks towards me. He feels my sadness, and places his hands on my shoulders to console me. “I’m sorry Ez. How are Ang and your Mom?”

I continue staring at my math problems, “Mom’s still fussing, and Ang isn’t yelling.” *Maybe, if I solve these dumb math problems, mine won’t seem so impossible to solve.*

“If you need someone to talk to, you know I’m here, right?” Jack asks.

“*Vogue* called.” I blurt out.

“What? When? For what?”

“Today, for an interview confirmation.” I continue staring at the math problems.

“Well, you aren’t going now. Things are way too crazy.”

I stay silent.

“Ez, you aren’t going, right?”

I remain silent.
“You are going.” Jack sits down on the bed. “What about Ang?” He begins to yell. “What about your mother?” Jack stands up again. “They need you right now! I need you!” He spins my chair around. Now, I am able to face him. 


I stare into Jack’s eyes. He looks confused.

“Everything is going wrong. Everything always goes wrong, but I need this chance, Jack. I need a chance to live. I’ve never thought about myself first. Can I think about myself for one moment?”

Jack grabs me, and hugs me tight. I cry into his arms.

“I just want to be happy,” I whisper.

When I was eighteen years old, I wasn't a kid anymore. I had two escape routes: college or the military. At first, I thought about choosing the military. Not only would I get paid on a regular basis, but I would also have enough money to leave the house. Mom was getting better at the time. She wasn’t depressed, and her smile started to light the room again. One day, we sat in the living room watching I Love Lucy and she said, “Ez, I’m proud of you.” I smiled and hugged her. For the first time since Dad died, I thought I was happy.
Chapter 11

My hospital visits become more frequent throughout the months of October and into November. Angela’s mom is not in the United States at the moment, so I am her only family visiting. I am also my mother’s only family and I must visit her. I tend to visit my mother in the morning. I keep revisiting my impending internship with *Vogue* and my conversation with Jack over and over in my head. Every time I visit Mom, I want to tell her that I am interviewing for *Vogue*, but I’m afraid that the news might make her condition worse. Mom looks as if she is getting better these days, but the doctor says that her cancer is invasive, and that it is spreading to her brain.

Every time I visit Angela, I want to tell her about *Vogue*, but she can’t hear me. Sometimes, I talk to her about *Vogue* because I know she can’t hear me; sometimes, I can’t hear myself.

By Thanksgiving, Angela looks worse. She is awake, but she cannot speak. Something happened with her brain during the fight. The doctor told me, but I cannot remember.

They say that people go through a period of talking and smiling and being happy right before they die. These descriptions do not fit Angela or Mom. This will not happen in Angela’s condition. Maybe, she’ll wake up soon. Maybe, Mom will continue to get better. Maybe, I’ll have more time with them.

We spend Thanksgiving in the cold, grey hospital. The only decoration the room has comes from the decaying flowers I bought Mom weeks ago. I am sitting in Mom’s room listening to her complain about the horrible service and the shitty food that looks
like a combination of canned dog food and mashed peas. I ask the nurse if they can put
Angela in a wheelchair, so that I will be able to spend Thanksgiving with my mother and
best friend. The nurse says she shouldn’t. She says it’s against protocol, but she does it
anyway because I’ve become a hospital regular.

Angela sits silently. I imagine she is watching television, but she is still comatose
for the most part. Sometimes, I wish Mom was silent, and that Angela was talking. I sit in
the hospital room and watch Angela sleep. She’s probably thinking about beach houses,
French poodles, and pedicures.

“Ez, call that damn nurse again. I need some more fruit.” Mom wiggles in her
bed, trying to sit up. I rush to her side to adjust her bed pillows. “Ez, I have this. Go get
the nurse.” I take a deep breath and nod. I walk out of her hospital room, and towards the
nurses’ station.

“May we help you?” An old nurse with red curly hair asks.

“Yes, my mother wants more fruit. We’re in room 310”

The nurse smiles and nods. “I’ll bring it in a second,” she says.

I walk back to my Mom’s room, and instantly feel something strange. As soon as
I open my mother’s door, I see her vomiting blood onto the floor. I scream.

Everything else is a blur.

I think the doctor says the words “aggressive” and “cancer” followed by “cut,
blood, no longer” and “I’m sorry.” I almost fall to the ground, but Jack catches me. For
some reason, tears don’t fall. I’m silent.

“Maybe, I should take you home,” Jack says. He picks me up out of my crouched position and carries me out of the hospital.
Chapter 12

I didn’t give Mom a funeral because we couldn’t afford it. Her medical bills had to be paid, and the only money I had left could get her cremated or just buried, so I chose to bury her next to my father.

“Did you ever get a chance to tell her about Vogue?” Jack asks as he helps me unpack my bags at the Atlanta airport.

I place all of my bags onto the concrete ground.

“The doctor said my mom’s last words were, ‘Tell her to go away and never look back. Tell her I am proud.’ I guess she gained sanity at the last minute,” I state. I pick up my bags and put them on a dolly.

“Ez, I’m sorry,” Jack says. He walks up to hug me, but I turn away.

“It’s ok. I promise.” I walk towards the airport to embark on my journey to New York.

New York City is ginormous! I take a shuttle from the John F. Kennedy Airport to the Sheraton JFK Hotel. The room feels like the size of a closet, but the white queen sized bed makes me feel comfortable in this big city. I throw down my luggage and jump on the bed to watch television.

There’s a news story about a girl getting beat by her boyfriend, so I turn the television off. I pick up my phone and call the hospital to check on Angela, but there aren’t any updates, so I decide to go to sleep.

On the morning of my interview, I am nervous, but I know today will be a good day. I take a taxi cab to the Vogue office in New York City, New York. It’s almost a forty
minute drive, but I use my time to go over possible interview questions and my resume.

When I arrive at my location, I take a deep breath before stepping into the building.

The receptionist welcomes me, “Hello, ma’am. How may I help you today?”

I pull a letter from Vogue out of my briefcase and say, “I am here for an internship interview.”

The receptionist reads over my letter, “Can I see two forms of identification, please?”

I hand her my driver’s license and my school ID.

“Oh, Ms. Williams, right this way.” I follow the woman up an elevator and into a small office space. “Today, you will be interviewing with our interview committee. I’m sorry the letter said you would be interviewing with Ms. Wintour.”

I walk into a room with five people facing me. They smile, but I am nervous. The receptionist walks over towards one of the women and whispers something in her ear. The woman then nods her head at the receptionist and crosses out something on a paper lying in front of her.

The woman then motions me to sit down in a steel chair that sits across from them at a rectangular glass table.

“Hello, Ms. Williams,” she says. “Let’s get started.”

I walk out of the interview with sweaty hands. This is not how I thought it would go. Why are there so many people? I definitely didn’t get it.

As I make my way to the elevator, I hear someone yell my name.

“Ms. Williams!” I turn around. It is the woman from the interview. She says her name is Courtney.
“Ms. Williams, you left your portfolio.”

I grab my portfolio and keep my head down because I’m embarrassed by my sweaty palms. “Thank you,” I say.

Courtney nods her head and turns to walk away. The elevator door opens, and I turn to get on it.

“Ms. Williams,” Courtney calls again. “It’s not official yet, but welcome to the team.” Courtney walks back into the interview room and closes the door.

I scream and cover my mouth in an attempt to hold my excitement. I jump onto the elevator, and my phone starts vibrating. Without looking, I answer my phone, “Guess who’s the new—“

“Ms. Williams,” a woman interrupts. “It’s Ms. Jackie, Angela’s nurse. Angela is awake.”

My mouth drops open, and my phone drops to the ground as the elevator doors close behind me.
Chapter 13

_In dreams I keep falling down a rabbit hole, hoping I get to see the rabbit’s face. He runs with a ticking clock. Nowadays, the clock ticks faster. I think I am out of time._

When my flight lands at the Atlanta airport, I drive four hours to get back to the hospital. Angela is up and speaking. I run into her room with balloons and flowers. It is Christmas Eve, and I feel as if this is a great Christmas present.

“Ang!” I yell when I walk in the door.

“Ez.” She doesn’t yell. Her voice is raspy, but she smiles at me because she is happy to hear my voice. “Where have you been?” She asks.

I twiddle my fingers, “nowhere.” I say. “Besides, none of that matters, I’m here with you now. It’s great to hear your voice again.”

“Thank you, Ez.” She says.

We smile at each other, but she knows as well as I that we have some questions that need to be answered. I sit down in the chair beside her and ask, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I tried,” she says. Her voice sounds almost like a whisper.

“Why didn’t you try to tell me sooner?” I ask.

“I wanted to, but you were going through so much with your mom. I couldn’t.” Angela starts crying. I grab her hand and hold it to my cheek.

“You could’ve told me. You can tell me anything," I say. Angela takes her hand away from me.

"Like you could've told me about New York?" Angela asks. My face becomes
stunned. "I found out two weeks before the accident. I had my cousin snooping around for information about my competition. I didn't think she would find out that my competition was my best friend." Angela's heart monitor begins to beep louder.

"I thought you would be upset," I say. Angela slides over in her bed, and I climb into her bed to lie next to her. I hold her in my arms.

"At first, I was mad. Then, I was happy." Angela says. She cracks a smile and continues, "Besides we could've helped each other prepare and shit. Heck, we could've roamed New York together."

I crack a smile at Angela. "So you're not mad," I ask. "No," she says, "I'm proud of you for finally doing something for yourself, for following your dreams."

I hold Angela tighter. I wish the beeping would stop, but it gets louder. None of that really matters now. Angela is happy.
Chapter 14

Finishing the school year is hard. Angela isn’t dead, but she’s going through rehabilitation and therapy. Jack and I try to help her as much as we can, but she insists that she will hire a nurse to care for her.

When I pack my last box after graduation, I head to Mom and Dad’s graves. It is three o’clock in the afternoon, but the wind chills my body in the 95 degree weather. I stare at their graves positioned next to one another as if they are laying in a king sized bed for eternity.

“I’ll be back to visit,” I whisper. "I'll always come back."

“You better!” Someone yells. I turn around to see the random yeller: it’s Angela smiling in her wheelchair. Jack rolls her over towards me. I hug Angela while she sits in her wheelchair, and I give Jack a kiss on the cheek.

“You know I can’t stay away from the two of you,” I chuckle.

“We know,” Jack says.

We stand in a line with Angela standing in the middle of me and Jack.

“I’m proud of you Ez,” Angela says. “I’m proud of the person you’ve become.”

I smile at Angela and tears start to roll down my face. At this moment, we’ve changed. At this moment, we’ve grown. At this moment, I love the people we’ve become.
Reference List


Annotated Bibliography


This book of poetry helps me stay creative. Whenever I get stuck in my writing, I reference one of these poems in efforts to get my creative juices flowing. In general, this book helps me relax when I become frustrated. Also, some of the poems help generate scenarios.


The Blair Handbook is a writer's resource for different components of writing such as the writing process, revision and editing, and it also provides refreshers for common grammatical errors. In my thesis, this book helps with the revision and editing process because of the great tips it provides.


Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman’s Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia is a book that I reference to look at the way the author uses voice, and it is a book I use to brighten my day whenever I feel down. Gilbert’s willingness to take chances has enabled me to do the same
in my writing.


Joyce Carol Oates' *The Faith of a Writer: Life, Craft, Art* is an inspirational book that I reference whenever I get stuck in my writing. The first chapter of the book says, “I believe that art is the highest expression of the human spirit. I believe that we yearn to transcend the merely finite and ephemeral” (1). I appreciate these words of wisdom as well as the words of wisdom Oates provides throughout the entire book. It is a great book to consult when writer's block hits me on the head.


Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* tells the same stories over-and-over again while using different styles of writing each time. This book is a fun read while it also gives great insight into the different types of writing. I use this book as a way to look at different styles of writing when I am writing my thesis. This book helps me stay motivated and entertained in my writing process.


I first encountered Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* when I was in high school. My ninth grade English teacher
gave us this book to study as a way to enhance our writing. 

*The Elements of Style* helps me with basic rules of grammar. 

Sometimes, I will forget the simple things; therefore, this book is good for providing clarity when I am confused about certain topics or common errors. 


*Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* is a great read that provides insight into writing. This book does a great job of breaking down writing step-by-step in order to help writers write clearly. In essence, by polishing the foundations of writing, the end result should indeed be sharp and clean. The most effective chapter for me was the chapter dedicated to clarity because I have a hard time providing clarity in my creative writing. My problem is that I assume that everything is clear, but the clarity chapter helped me understand how basic things such as subject-verb agreement and proper nouns can help make points clear in prose writing (Williams and Colomb, 34).