



Honors College Theses

4-12-2022

Between Us: A Short Story Cycle

Kelly C. Wilcox
Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wilcox, Kelly C., "Between Us: A Short Story Cycle" (2022). *Honors College Theses*. 731.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses/731>

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Between Us: A Short Story Cycle

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

By
Kelly Wilcox

Under the mentorship of [Laura Valeri](#)

ABSTRACT

“Between us” is a short story cycle that alternative between the perspectives of two sisters, Skylar and Harmony, and their love interest–Michael. This thesis explores the various ways in which people differently respond to grief and the impacts grief has on lives, relationships, and families. These stories also review the roles race and identity play in the loss of a parent, specifically when the mother is of one race and the father is of another. This thesis contains the first two stories of the longer, in-progress collection.

Thesis Mentor: _____

Prof. Laura Valeri

Honors Director: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

April 2022

Writing and Linguistics

University Honors Program

Georgia Southern University

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and give my sincerest gratitude to my mentor, Prof. Laura Valeri, whose guidance and advice made this work possible. Her mentorship provided the necessary inspiration to keep me confident and motivated throughout all stages of my writing process. I'd also like to thank Prof. Christina Olson and the students of HONS 4610, who offered countless comments, edits, and suggestions to make my ideas a reality. I appreciate everyone who took the time to read each draft as I wrote—and rewrote—this thesis.

I would also like to thank my friends—both old and new—for encouraging me to be bold and share my stories. Specifically, I want to thank Alex Gholston and Frank Caturano for being my writing partners and shoulders of support.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for supporting me as a writer since I was young. I want to give a special thanks to my mom, Della Wilcox, and sisters—Melissa Wilcox and Dr. Jessica Williams—for their endless support, inspiration, and love. Thank you all for believing in me. <3

The Last Step

I was sitting on the last step of my new apartment staircase when Michael arrived. My hands—sticky with sweat after unloading my car at the bottom of my staircase alone—nervously pulled my hair into a thick ponytail. My eyes scanned around for Skylar, partially expecting to stumble across her since she was the type to cling to her boyfriend’s every move. Then again, she wasn’t the type to help her sister move in either.

Michael’s laugh teased me as he walked towards me with a hand extended. His calloused fingers wrapped around my hands as he yanked me off the ground; our bodies almost crashed into one another. My feet managed to stop me just before pressing into him; our eyes locked. I stumbled on my words as I looked up at him, pulling my hand out of his.

“What’s wrong, Harmony? Do I make you nervous?” He teased. My instinct was to clarify that I was just caught off-guard—nothing more. Then, I thought about how willing Michael was to help me move in, and how Skylar was M.I.A.

I didn’t invite him over intentionally. In fact, I only messaged Michael to see if he knew where my sister was—which he didn’t. Despite my lies that I could carry everything alone, Michael surprised me anyways by coming to help. He rolled up in an old 1975 all-black Monte Carlo that his father said he could have if he fixed it up. The silver duct tape securing the front bumper crookedly in place added just enough character to “Darkness”—the name he gave his car—that it was charming. I admired Michael’s Adam’s apple that highlighted his masculinity along with his unkempt hair and stubble down his cheeks.

He had been dating Skylar for almost two years now, but when had we spoken before our conversations were usually short; sometimes nothing more than a glance was shared between us. However, there always *was* a glance.

“Ha ha,” I mocked, turning away to hide the blush that spread across my cheeks. Avoiding him, I grabbed the smallest container in my pile. Michael rolled his eyes with a grin before grabbing the largest container; I pretended not to notice as he fumbled to lift it alone. We proceeded to take everything upstairs one by one until our hair clung to the back of our necks and our arms were sprinkled with bug bites. We were sitting on my bare floor with water amongst the mess of things—clothes, containers, toiletries, books, makeup—when we were able to speak.

“I’m sorry about Skylar not helping,” he sighed, swishing the water in his cup. I stifled a laugh in response to him apologizing for *my* sister.

“I didn’t expect her to come anyway,” I muttered as I began to unpack the container beside me.

Despite having added the date to our shared family Google calendar, everyone in my family was surprised the night before my move-in day, claiming to be too busy to help me move in and wishing they had known. Daddy had work as usual; Paige had her weekly hair appointment—which is a stepmom thing, according to Skylar. Skylar simply admitted she didn’t feel like it. “It’s too hot,” she moaned without looking away from the guitar laying across her lap. “Plus, I literally got you a birthday gift this year.”

To be fair, Skylar *never* gave me birthday gifts anymore. You would think that sharing a birthday with France’s independence would be fun, but mine never was. Dad told me and Skylar once that July 14th should be a day of celebration of life, but Skylar

spent the day mourning the anniversary of our biological mother's death—Dad took off work and stayed in his room. Skylar used to celebrate my birthdays with me; every year we would paint together, leading to one of my favorite hobbies. However, after she found out about how our biological mother died, she gave me one last unforgettable eleventh-birthday gift with her words: “If it weren't for *you*, we'd have *her*.”

We never painted again.

I spend most birthdays wishing people didn't consider this day a holiday, wondering if maybe I just shouldn't have been born. Maybe Skylar and Daddy would spend July 14th together if my birth mom lived instead.

On this birthday, I got a teddy bear from Skylar. Sure, it was originally a gift from Michael for her and because it's pink she didn't want it, but I still cherished the gift. I sleep with it every night.

Michael's fingers toyed with the fabric of that pink teddy bear as he pulled it from the container between us. I watched his eyes analyze it before lighting up with recognition.

“Hey, did Skylar give you this?” His eyes flickered up to catch mine.

“Actually...” I began with the intention of lying to protect Skylar. I imagined a detailed story of how I saw it on sale after Valentine's Day or how an ex gave it to me. Still, as his eyes drilled into mine, a different lie surfaced: “I saw her trying to throw it away, so I took it. Was it from you?”

I twisted one of my curls as Michael considered how to respond. I imagined he must have felt some sort of embarrassment, considering the pink gradient that spread

across his cheeks, but he chose to ignore it by simply saying, “Makes sense for her; Skylar hates the color pink.”

“Well, pink is my favorite, and I think it’s inconsiderate of her. When someone cares enough to give you something, you should appreciate it.”

“You do appreciate it, don’t you?” Michael extended the bear out for me with a grin. I took it, returning the warmth and cuddling it as we spoke.

He told me about his first semester in college to help me prepare for mine. He explained that he switched majors three times since then and had to retake government twice, yet surprisingly did really well in biology. I nodded my head, leaning in closer with each word he spoke. He answered question after question, happily filling me in on the details of his life until the sun fell from the sky.

“Sometimes, I consider dropping out,” he admitted after an hour. He explained how he was really good at fixing up the inside of his car—the exterior not so much. I agreed as he revealed a plan to switch to a technical school or forget a degree altogether and work on cars. There was a part deep inside me that flinched at the idea. I definitely understood why he was Skylar’s boyfriend and not mine. Skylar didn’t need a clear plan; I did. Still, I found myself clinging to each word he spoke, agreeing and encouraging more conversation. His eyebrows rose every time he spoke about a passion—like playing guitar or fixing cars—and he crossed his arms when he disagreed with something.

There was a moment during the night—I had been rubbing the chill bumps off my arms—when he pulled off his hoodie and passed it to me; my jackets were still packed away. I thanked him, allowing him to feel as if he had done this grand thing for me. However, I’d be lying if I didn’t admit to enjoying the abundance of cloth draped around

me; I couldn't place the scent, but it distinctly smelled of Michael and whatever cologne he doused himself in daily for the past year and a half. Most guys would hand me their coat if I puckered my lips and batted my lashes, but never did a man—even my father—notice for himself that I was cold and care enough to help without my having to demand it from him first.

“You know, you might never get this hoodie back,” I teased with an inviting grin. Michael's eyes trailed down to where his hoodie ended midway down my thighs before returning to my face. I challenged this look with an eyebrow raised and my head cocked to the side. I watched as his tongue rolled against the inside of his cheek with a smirk as he stumbled upon a response. Then, in an unfortunate twist of fate, his phone screen lit up with Skylar's long, braided hair that was partially tucked beneath a beanie, her sad eyes hidden behind a raised middle finger, and the name “Mini-Me” followed by three hearts across the top. Michael took a step back; air fell from his lungs. “I should head out,” he muttered, silencing his phone. I considered asking if he needed to answer her, but I knew that was the reason he was suddenly rushing out the door. So instead, I nodded my head in agreement and led him to my front door.

Later that night, he messaged me to apologize for running out so quickly. He confessed to having forgotten to pick Skylar up from work because he had gotten caught up in our conversation. The mention of Skylar's name should have soured my mood, but I still couldn't expel the butterflies that lingered in my stomach and crawled to my throat when his message appeared. “No worries!” I sent. I wanted to remain light-hearted and easy, not nosey or pressing like Skylar always seemed to be. Her conversations weighed tons.

Skylar can't just smile and let things be. She has to question and push everything. Paige tried to teach us that there is power in silence. "Announcing your every thought isn't impressive or bold, it's stupid," Paige says. "Life is about survival. Smart mice hide; dead mice squeak." But if Skylar is curious about something, she's going to ask—no matter how personal. If she disagrees with something someone says, they are going to hear about it—and exactly why they're wrong, too. If Skylar plans to do something, she'll shout it to the rooftops to make sure everyone is listening. She's always talking, building more and more on top of others until she's finally just too much. She never listens, especially to Paige. Instead, Skylar only trusts Michael or herself, always stuck in her own head and thoughts. I guess it makes sense why she's a philosophy major—whatever that is.

As an elementary education major, I both secured a practical future with fulfilling work. My love for both children and animals was the only consistent emotion I could rely on. They provided a dose of serotonin like no other; the feeling of nurturing something—loving something—made me feel complete. I know my life had to include my passion for caring for others, and I am setting my future up in a way that paved the road to success. Skylar can't say the same.



When Michael invited himself over to collect what he left at my place, I answered my front door wearing the jacket—the hood loosely laid beneath my curls. He came in with confidence, pulling me towards him by the front of his hoodie without introduction. I stumbled forward while his other hand wrapped around the small of my back. His calloused fingertips grazed the indented dimple beneath the jacket; heat resonated from

that point of contact. “You know what I came for,” his smoky voice poured from between his lips. I felt myself shrink beneath his gaze as chill bumps formed even with the jacket on.

“Actually—” my waist escaped from his grip and I extended my stride further with each step in an attempt to accentuate my legs, “I need your help with biology now that you’re here,” I lied, even though I knew my GPA was a 4.0 and his couldn’t have been higher than a 2.8. I led Michael towards my bedroom now proudly unpacked and decorated. My desk displayed three framed portraits: one of me and Paige, one of me and Chewy, our family dog, and lastly one of Daddy and my biological mom in a Bay Mount University frame. After all, our parents met on this campus which is why Skylar and I chose this school. Skylar believes I only came here because she did—because I “always have to out-do” her, and she “can’t have anything without me taking it”—not even a mom. Her completely narcissistic attitude only made me want to prove her *right*. If she’s going to label me as this bad person, why should I work so hard to prove I’m not? Plus, the only thing she had that I didn’t was with me alone in my bedroom observing my wall.

My wall contained a few acrylic paintings I had made of flowers and sunsets as well as a One Direction concert poster—Michael and Skylar had actually driven me to the concert when I was in high school. The poster was the only thing in my bedroom that didn’t match the baby pink and gold color scheme I carefully chose for my bedspread, accent rug, shower curtain, and table-top decorations. Michael’s eyes rolled as he entered the room, followed by, “You gotta be kidding me, Harmony.”

“What? You don’t like pink?” I giggled, my hands proudly pointing to each tiny detail of the color.

“No, no. It’s pretty cute actually.” As he spoke, his eyes trailed down my body. Since I had been focused on showing off my bedroom, I assumed he didn’t notice me watching him. But when his eyes looked up and met mine, he only smiled and stepped closer. “The hoodie’s pretty cute too,” he sighed, his fingers flicking the dangling ties in the front.

“Yeah?” I muttered, feeling myself shrink yet again. Normally, I would laugh in a guy’s face, lean in just enough to make him imagine the taste of my lips, and then pull away. But with Michael, I only grew smaller. That is, until he spoke again, pulling the strings tightly as he did.

“Yeah, it’s cute on me.” His words laughed at my nervousness, and I felt my face heat up. I scoffed and attempted to push Michael back but his hands reached out and pulled me back by the extra length of the sleeves. “Don’t worry,” he said, “it’s cuter on you.” My fingers found their way around my curls; my lips found their way between my teeth when his thumb pushed my chin upwards to face him.

I stumbled upon a response before Michael quickly shifted the conversation back towards the biology I mentioned before, dropping his hand and forcing me to pull up a homework assignment to pretend as if *I* didn’t know what preeclampsia was. All he really did was show me how to look up the answers on Google. I watched as he led me in the wrong direction with certain questions—and even had the audacity to say I was wrong when I attempted to steer him correctly—and I still allowed the situation to play out because I liked how close we had to sit to one another to share my laptop screen.

I also liked that he looked into my eyes when he made up a bullshit explanation. It was exciting yet innocent. He was definitely feeling *something* towards me which is all I wanted, right? But when his gaze outlined the shape of my lips, I felt myself leaning into him. Time slowed; my heart rate increased. And then I realized that my desire for Michael wasn't *just* caused by siblings' rivalry—I liked him.

And in his eyes, I saw Skylar.

My body shot off the bed and moved to the opposite side of the room under the lie that I just remembered I had to do my math homework too. I searched around my desk for imaginary papers for a moment in an attempt to clear my head, but all I could see was him and Skylar... Michael with Skylar.

I sent Michael home with his hoodie in his hands.



My lungs collapsed as a breath escaped between my lips. My fingertips lightly traced the edge of the sheet music which laid across the front of the baby grand piano I sat before. Bay Mount University's Manford Hall—home to their music and performance art departments—has been a second home to me since I was twelve. Originally, Paige enrolled me in their student-led piano lessons because, as she told me, I “have such beautiful, long fingers that would play the piano perfectly.” Even though I stopped lessons after a few years, their department chair welcomed me to use their equipment at any time. Here, I fell in love with classical piano; the same genre I was told my birth mom used to play. It was in the moments when I closed my eyes and let the notes drive my fingers that I gained the most clarity.

Chopin's "Nocturne, Op. 32: No. 2." This title teased me as I repositioned my hands on the keys. "One, two, three-" I counted off before beginning again. I began slowly, smoothly at first. Yet, as I attempted to trill between notes, my years of piano experience failed me, and I slipped onto out-of-key half-steps. It was impossible to lose myself in irregular tempos and sharp, staccato failed attempts at quality music.

I huffed in frustration once more before my palms slam down onto the keys. A sharp discordance of notes filled the room while I packed the sheets into my music binder. My fingers continued to trip on the rhythms; my foot abruptly cut off the sustain. Muscle memory? Suddenly nonexistent. I couldn't focus enough to read the music as I went along *and* manage to play perfectly, and I have to play perfectly.

Anything was a welcomed distraction at this point, but the incoming text from Michael was my favorite: "Are you busy?"

My fingertips lifted from the keys as I stare into my phone screen. Determined to maintain my distance, I ignored his message and began to play again. However, within a few seconds, my phone lit up again.

"I really need someone to talk to right now."

My hands reached to respond, yet I hesitated. For a moment, I considered ignoring his message again—to go back to playing the piano... Then again, I could barely get the notes out anyways.

"Of course," I replied, biting my lip in anticipation.

His next message—which was the length of a short book report—detailed his recent fight with Skylar. He explained how she always wanted more attention, complaining he seemed distracted when they were together. I told him to focus and be more present, but

Michael insisted he just couldn't concentrate lately when he was with her. When I asked him where his mind travels to when he's with Skylar, Michael responded with "you, Harmony."

I was who he went to when he needed someone to talk to. *I* was the one he spent his time thinking about. *I* was the one he wanted. Gravity dispersed and I felt myself floating on air. The sensation, however, was interrupted by the daunting creep of skepticism. Insecurity responded to his message, "That's dangerous." My heart froze and my chest tightened when his response highlighted my face. I read his message again. Then, once more: "Your saying your not?"

It was cheesy. Perhaps a bit too on the nose for my taste. He could have put a bit more creativity into this wording—or at least his presentation since he typed "your" in the place of "you're"... twice. Yet somehow, I managed to ignore these idiosyncrasies and excitedly linger on the message a little longer than most. I pondered the perfect response, debating whether to encourage his words or dismiss them. I stared into the faces of my parents in a tiny photo tucked into the back flap of my music binder, my birth mom happily posed with Daddy just one year after having Skylar—it's the happiest either has ever looked in a photograph. I eventually responded to Michael.

"Come find out."

My thumb slammed the delete button, but the message was already sent. I considered slamming my head against the practice room door a few hundred times in hopes of knocking common sense into my head, but I figured it wouldn't work anyways. Plus, the damage was done. I had sent the message, crossed the point of no return, and done so headfirst. Maybe he wasn't interested at all; maybe he was far more faithful than

I had assumed. Maybe Skylar was reading over his shoulder or—better yet—she was setting me up with the messages. Or maybe he would come over and—

“I can’t. At work.” My heart sunk deeper each time I read his response. My fingers entangled in my hair while my eyes began to boil over. Michael, he didn’t want—

“But I’m off Friday.” His second message came through three minutes—or, more accurately, lifetimes—after his first. Unsure how to respond, I set my phone down and avoided replying.

A nervous yet excited grin spread across my cheeks as I bridged my fingers forward to stretch them. I repositioned on the keys, took a deep breath, counted off, and began to play once more. As I played, I swayed, my hands gliding across the grand piano as if connected to it. My eyes now were closed.

As the week progressed, I spent countless hours rearranging my paints, cleaning my bathroom, washing my hair, completing homework—anything but sleeping, thinking about Michael, or replying to his text. It wasn’t until Friday that I even allowed my mind to wander back to his face, voice, and eyes. After ignoring his message proudly without failure, it was the check engine light that decorated my dashboard that caused Michael to return to my mind. And like fleas, the thoughts were hard to get rid of. I almost laughed as my impulses to text Michael back conquered my willpower, asking if he would come over and check my car. He said he’d be there in five minutes.

This wasn’t the first time I’d had to ask Michael for car help before. Paige and I had a dead car battery in a mall parking lot. Daddy said he couldn’t afford the time it would take to leave work and help. This was his typical response to anything Skylar or I asked him. His bedroom was his entire house; the rest was for “the girls.” My friends

always labeled me as lucky growing up. Since Daddy spent all his time inside his room or at work, he never knew what I was doing outside the house. I used to nod my head with a smile I wouldn't have if I didn't wear my retainer religiously and agree. Still, if their cars broke down, their dads would be there for them while mine simply offered to pay Michael to come in his absence.

This time was much different though. Michael and I stood side by side with less than an inch between us. I followed his eyes and hands as they examined parts of my car I couldn't identify. I imagined being under the hood myself, his hands working their way all over me. I shivered at the thought, shifting closer towards him and searching to guarantee that we were alone outside by the last step of my building.

“I think it's just a faulty gas cap; everything looks good under the hood,” he assured coolly, backing away from the car and turning around. As he turned, his eyes met mine and my chest caught fire. My fingers went numb and every part of me tensed. His eyes explored my face until they rested upon my mouth; he licked his lips subtly. Gravity lifted once again and it was as if I suddenly wasn't in control of my own actions; my lips gravitated towards his.

Over the summer—when school was out and we could stay awake late—Skylar and I would sit on our bedroom floors with Build-A-Bears' mini dogs, little Webkinz, and Beanie Babies. To us, they were high school students. We imagined their lives, stories, and drama—an entire universe, one where we were happy and safe together, created between us. We spent the summer sharing this narrative in control of a universe where everyone got a happy ending.

When Skylar found out I was the cause of our mother's death at age fourteen, she threw all her old stuffed animals away. She said they meant nothing to her anyway.

Michael's arms pulled me in hungrily by my waist, quite literally knocking the breath from my lungs as an audible gasp escaped my lips. I wondered if Skylar enjoyed the taste of weed and mint—an odd combination to experience during a first kiss, yet not bad enough to ruin the moment. I was so stuck on the feeling of his breath ghosting my neck and the surprising softness of his lower lip as my tongue rolled across it that I forgot we were still outside at the last step of my apartment staircase.

“Michael—” I began as I pulled back for air, but before I could continue, he interrupted me.

“I'm sorry... we should go upstairs.” He closed the hood of the car, startling me and causing me to yelp. The adrenal rush was causing my entire body to feel as though I chugged every coffee special in the fall. My head shook too quickly as Michael turned away and headed up the stairs, leading the way to my door as if he lived there. As we ascended, I caught a glimpse of Skylar's face in the future:

The tears welled in her eyes when she would see that I—her beloved baby sister who could never be enough—had finally taken the last thing she had over me: Michael. Then, those tears descended past her cheeks, past her mouth where her lips quivered, and words of hate desired to flow. They rolled down her neck, landing on her throat, and I watched her swallow as she was unable to let her words break the surface and produce coherent sentences. Finally, her tears dripped off, crashing into the ground just like her world would when she learned what Michael and I spent the afternoon doing.

Still, I ignored the overcast.

Once we were inside, it was as if our bodies were wired headphones inside a pocket. His hands explored my tangles, my best features, and my worst. My words discovered what pet names make him purr; my eyes located the scar on his upper right thigh—I could only imagine the many reckless ways in which he could have created this permanent body modification. His lips traced down my body and then reversed, making my hips roll into him. I learned why people wrote songs about sex, wanted sex, fell in love through sex. Nothing ever felt as good as I did that afternoon—not from the physical actions, but rather from the validation I received.

Immediately afterward, Michael told me I was beautiful and felt amazing. He said my body was perfect, stroked my hair, and kissed my forehead. Then, he proceeded to ask me if I liked it. “Did you finish?” he asked as he stood up and began cleaning himself off. “Mmhmm,” I lied as I rose slowly, walking over to my mirror.

I tilted my head to the side, slowly approaching my full body mirror. My bare nipples stared back at me. I thought one was obviously larger than the other, but Michael didn’t complain. I reached up and cupped one of my breasts lightly; my other hand traced down my side and to my hips. I shivered at the memory of Michael’s hands gripping into my hip dips like they were some sort of good thing—a tool rather than an imperfection. My eyes trailed up next to the coils of curls that now sprouted every which way from my head with frizz as an additional accessory. Michael really loved to play with my hair—rubbing it, gathering it, pulling it.

Yet every feature of myself looked and felt distinctly the same. I wasn’t any curvier or brighter as they say women become when they start having sex. I didn’t feel I

reclaimed any power nor gained any confidence. I was still me, Skylar was still clouding my mind, and Michael was still grabbing his keys.

“Yeah... so I should head out,” Michael stated, drawing my attention away from the mirror. He was now fully dressed, grabbing his wallet, keys, jacket, and even the fast-food receipt that had accidentally fallen from his pocket. Few words were exchanged as I led him out and downstairs to his car.

Michael’s footsteps slowed as we reach the last step of my staircase. He turned to me and let his eyes sweep over my body once again; a subtle smile appeared, and his teeth tugged his bottom lip. His arm snaked around my waist and his dark eyes softened. “I can trust you, right?” he asked. I nod my head, still locked in by his arm. “Good,” he muttered before leaning forward; his breath ghosts my lips gently before he plants a kiss upon them.

I sat on the last step of my apartment staircase touching my lips lightly, watching Michael speed away from me in that black Monte Carlo just as fast as he arrived, leaving me to return to Skylar.

I looked to the sky as if my mother’s face would smile down at me through the clouds.

But it didn’t.

To Feel the Sun

I closed my eyes to feel the sun, and its rays instantly warmed me. I twisted so that one cheek pressed against his leg and the other faced the clear sky. The hairs from his calf and the sun both tickled my nose, causing it to crinkle as I pulled back. My body shivered as the vibrations from his chuckles trembled throughout me. I twisted once more, pretending to be embarrassed by his laughing, and I pressed my face into the loose hoodie he was wearing and wrapped my arms around his torso. Immediately, his fingers began to lightly trace my forearm and he bent down to plant a kiss on my temple. “What? It was cute, baby,” he teased in an apologetic tone. A smile spread across my cheeks as I turned to look up at him.

His hoodie angled across his shoulders with uneven strings; the hair atop his head was messy enough to help block out the sun. His outgrowing side fade proved he *really* needed to visit the barbershop soon—though, his appearance practically paralleled my own oversized hoodie draping over my torso and the long, overdue box braids that danced over my shoulders whenever I turned my head. The crows’ feet wrinkles formed when he smiled, and his crooked, “teeth with personality,” as he called them, lit up the sky even more.

When I was with Michael, gravity no longer existed—I’d float up with a breeze, past fields of flowers, and up through the trees. When I heard Michael’s voice, my smile raised me higher until my problems were but ants on the ground. When he held me, he lifted up through the clouds and past the stars. When he kissed me, I’d hold my breath—there’s no oxygen at the level he brought me to. When I was with Michael, everything

was finally open, clear, and warm. I was transported beyond the earth and into space. When I was with Michael, I felt the sun.

When I opened my eyes, I was in the dark. The only light outside came from the moon, mostly hidden behind dark storm clouds, and the dimly lit screen of the cell phone holding Michael's attention. I yearned for the days of the past when Michael and I would sit on the balcony of my apartment to simply enjoy one another's company in nature—when being around one another was natural. Going outside now appeared as a chore for Michael. He huffed, reluctantly placing down his Xbox controller, with an under-the-breath, “fine,” after I asked for the fourth time if he'd join me out on the balcony. Though, considering the weight on my chest when I peer over the back of his phone and into Michael's inattentive eyes, I began to wish I came outside alone. At least then I could claim the loneliness I felt was intentional.

My fingers tapped the lighter against a nearby ashtray, clinking in a consistent rhythm. I shifted my head from one side of Michael's lap to the other. Still, his eyes stayed glued to his phone. My arms wrapped around him in an attempt to bribe him with affection; my nose pushed his jacket upwards, and my lips gently kissed his side. I looked up to see his eyes now closed, leading me to believe I would finally get a crumb of his attention, yet they snapped open when his phone vibrated. Once again, I had lost the battle against his screen.

“Michael,” I snapped. His eyes met mine for the first time in the past half hour. Staring into his dark eyes highlighted by his phone, I could see the reflection of my twisted lips and furrowed eyebrows. I hated the tension I felt.

“Huh?” he muttered cluelessly, only adding to my frustrations. Even with his eyes now looking at me, it was clear his mind was elsewhere despite my desperation. At that moment, his lack of attention reminded me of my dad. I hated that too.

I rolled my eyes, sat up, and crossed my arms—Michael’s bare lap teasing my presence. Burning holes into his, my eyes glared at Michael as I spoke with even more frustration lacing my tone.

“What’s so important on your phone? Since it’s interesting enough to have your attention all night, then please, share with the class.”

“I’m sorry,” he responded to my surprise. I still glared at him, confused at first, but then felt my heart soften with the look in his eyes “I know I’ve been a little M.I.A. lately, and I’m sorry. The beginning of this semester has really been hitting hard for me, but it’s been harder for a friend of mine. They’ve had a rough start, and it’s been impacting their mental health. I’m kind of the only one there for them right now.”

“A *girl* friend?” I correct.

“Does it matter?” he snapped back; his shoulders rose with tension.

I took a deep breath, pushing back the embarrassment, and responded slowly, “No, I guess it doesn’t.” My eyes averted to the ground. “Do I know this friend?”

“Look,” he began speaking faster, “we’re not even really friends; it’s just someone I shared a class with.”

“Oh. It’s just you’d think they’d reach out to someone closer if they’re having that tough a time, and I usually know your friends so-”

“Sky, I said I’m sorry.”

There was a moment of silence; my glaring intensified.

“Fine. You want my undivided attention?” Michael turned off his phone and slid it into my lap, “Here. I’m all yours, okay, baby?” His lips pressed gently against my forehead.

Not completely forgiving him, I kept my arms crossed, but my frown dispersed. I watched as Michael’s eyes jotted all over my face, then my body, reminding me of the extra weight in my face, stomach, and thighs he frequently compliments. His cheeks rose, and the crow’s feet returned to the corners of his eyes.

“Stop it,” I huffed, leaning forward to gently nudge him. Still, his smile persisted; he simply shook his head.

“God,” his eyes rose to meet mine, “I love everything about you.”

All the anger dropped from my body, and I couldn’t help but smile back at him.



My fingertips traced the wrapped casing of a vinyl record as I leaned against a display case. Exhausted from morning classes, and then an evening work shift, I was counting the seconds of the last hour in my shift. All around me shuffled a variety of customers—messy college students in their pajamas, bonnet-wearing mothers of three-year-olds, and old men with warts hanging from their necks. I couldn’t say I found working in your neighborhood town mall to be the most glamorous, but considering my dad paid my tuition, I couldn’t complain that I had to partially chip in on paying my rent either. Plus, I worked in a tiny book and record shop which meant the occasional interesting exchange with customers about my favorite authors or artists—a thought that prevented me from spontaneously quitting several times. On the other hand, my favorite

part of the job was how relaxed the management was due to the slow flow of customers. Therefore, Michael could hang out on the job with me.

When I first moved out from Dad's house and started working, Michael would visit practically every shift. Sometimes, he'd stay for hours, entertaining me and poking through merchandise. He liked to come in and connect his phone to the store audio system; he'd play underground rap artists, claiming we were putting the customers onto something new and ahead of the times. I'd laugh and play along, eventually learning the lyrics to all his favorite songs. Other times, Michael would stop by quickly to drop off food and snacks that came from anywhere *other than* the mall food court before going to his own job.

Michael still worked for his dad's auto mechanic shop even though he was in college; all he really wanted was to stay in Bay Mount and work on cars all day while discovering new artists. Music and mechanics—that's all Michael said made sense to him. All I wanted was to stay here with him, support him, hopefully, write poetry to expand the minds and educate the ignorance that seems to fill this town we grew up in—and be happy. When I explained this goal to Michael, he understood and agreed that he'd want nothing more for his future. It made me feel secure and hopeful, giving me a future to look forward to. Recently, a future with Michael was all I had. His dad suddenly began holding him at the shop longer, preventing Michael from visiting almost ever.

I straightened up and adjusted the name tag I was required to wear when I caught the glimpse of an entering customer, and specifically, the plastic shopping bag in her hand. Already annoyed, I looked to face the approaching customer, prepared to engage in the lengthy refund process. Unfortunately, I realized I wouldn't be so lucky tonight when

I recognized Paige by the signature over-shoulder-toss of her freshly done, chestnut-brown blowout that she got done every Friday morning. She followed this with an adjustment of the oversized Coach bag dangling off her arm and a friendly wave of her perfectly manicured hand decorated with the fat, shiny, four-carat diamond ring my dad mistakenly slipped onto her finger eleven years ago.

“Skylar, a pleasure!” Paige exclaimed as she approached me. I forced an obviously fake smile.

“Paige, wish I could say the same,” I responded in an upbeat, valley-girl tone. Her smile dropped to show her lack of amusement.

“Glad to see you’re the same as ever,” she huffed before reaching into her purse. “Anyways, I just came by to drop this off while out doing some shopping.” Paige’s slender arm extended to pass me an envelope.

“Dad couldn’t drop this off himself?” My arms crossed over my chest.

Paige rolled her eyes and her arms crossed in response. This was our usual dance. She’d start something, and I’d take the bait. I’d move; she’d moves. At some point or another, one of us had to give. But in matters of my dad and his lack of time for me, Paige always seemed to win.

“If you miss your dad,” she began, “why don’t you stop by the house sometime? You know we’d love to have you visit. In fact, I’m making chicken cutlets next Saturday for your dad and sister; you should come. You could even bring that mutt of yours—”

“He couldn’t even bother to call me? Or text? Nothing? All I get is a check and *you?*”

“Can’t you try and be a little appreciative of what your father does for you?” she snapped. “You know, when your dad gives Harmony money, she says thank you.”

My arms dropped at the mention of my sister’s name, but I knew better than to be surprised.

Growing up, all I wanted was to be like Mom. Every photograph I saw of her was more than a picture; it was a movie each picture telling a story of who she was. Through old photographs, I discovered Mom was a poet with a huge collection of books—her favorite authors must have been James Baldwin, Rita Dove, and Maya Angelou because Dad hoards almost all of their complete works in his office. I learned shoulder-length box braids and bandanas were Mom’s signature style; I’ve only ever seen two pictures with her natural curls on display. Still, she was gorgeous with or without her hair done; her body and features were just perfect. I saw these pictures and I wanted to be everything like the woman in them—everything like Mom.

Then, in some twisted joke of the universe’s creation, Harmony was blessed with our mom’s round hips, narrow waist, and perky breasts—not to mention the perfect cupid’s bow and thin nose—genetics copied and pasted directly from Mom to her. My body was just as round and shapeless as our dad’s. While we were both given our mom’s almond eyes, it only made one of us look “rare” and “exotic” to others. The only thing I got from our mom that Harmony didn’t was her comb-breaking thick, nappy hair that, like her, I keep cut short and styled into shoulder-length braids. For Harmony, her hair came out a mixture of both our mom’s and our dad’s—which was thin, wavy, and long. While I despise terms such as “good hair,” that was the main reference I heard from

extended family growing up when it came to Harmony and the long, loose curls she was born with. She is perfect.

Appearance aside, Harmony could do no wrong in the eyes of Paige and our dad. Dad saw Harmony as the last bit of Mom he has left and worships her as such. Paige adopted Harmony as her personal plaything, shaping and molding her to be the exact woman Paige wished she was. Since Paige came into our lives when Harmony was only seven—and I was eleven—Harmony easily adjusted to her motherly presence in our lives. I, on the other hand, proudly rejected Paige. I hated the attention and affection she gives Harmony, and I hated, even more, the praise and presence my dad gives her when he can hardly seem to spare any for me.

My jaw began to cramp from the tension, yet I refused to speak as she shook the envelope impatiently.

“Skylar, please, you are in *no* financial position to *reject* this. Take it.”

I huffed and snatched the envelope from her hands quickly. I forced myself to maintain eye contact with her and appear unphased, but I actually couldn’t stand this look on her face. With one eyebrow raised and a thin, twisted smirk, Paige looked at me like we had something in common.

“Thank you,” she sighed, but I didn’t respond. “How are you and Michael, by the way?”

“We’re fine, why?” I responded with hesitation, but she only shrugged.

“Just thought I’d ask.” Paige threw up her hands as she headed out of the store, but she hesitated just before leaving. “You know what? Go ahead and bring Michael with you to dinner next Saturday, too, so I can thank him.”

“For what?”

“Oh,” she glanced over her shoulder, “for all the time he’s been dedicating to Harmony. Apparently, he’s a really good biology tutor. Who knew?” she scoffed in a tone of amusement, clicking out the store in her red bottom heels.

For a moment, I felt nothing. Then, my fingers tingled as my throat began to tighten as my mind suddenly went from blank to processing everything at once. I resisted the urge to message Michael immediately, demanding to know all about his little tutoring sessions with Harmony. There was absolutely no way she needed any help from Michael nor any way Michael could ever tutor someone in anything other than—apparently—how to lie and hide things from your girlfriend. My blood boiled at the thought of Michael, who rarely even made time for me, spending any time with Harmony. I saw the way she looked at him, hungrily and longingly, but I never saw him looking back at her. I tried to convince myself not to assume the worst and find the silver lining, yet suddenly, too many things aligned.

For the remainder of my shift, I fumbled about the store; I dropped at least three gum packets on the floors as I restocked the candy up front. My fingertips were raw from biting my nails as I stared into the clock, counting each of my final ten minutes. I imagined countless first words to say when Michael would pick me up from work. I debated yelling—screaming even—right away or maybe, not speaking at all to see if he’d figure something was wrong and tell on himself. Still, as time crept on, anger grew and twisted until I wanted to vomit. The question of whether or not Michael was sleeping with someone else clouded my mind at first, but I eventually found myself obsessed with

two other thoughts: could Michael still love me if he also lies and cheats? And why, of all people, why Harmony?



“How was work?” I began coolly as I got into Michael’s car, though the force in my slamming of his car door told another story.

“Easy on Darkness; you know she’s sensitive,” he huffed, one of his hands gently caressing his dashboard.

I rolled my eyes too busy wondering if he was even at work to find his antics attractive.

“And work was good. I got a lot done.” As Michael began to leave the mall parking lot, he reached into his glove compartment to pull out a joint—his hands stretched across my thighs to do so.

“Your hands look awfully clean for a mechanic,” I noted.

Michael chuckled, still watching the road, the lighter flame highlighted his eyes.

“What? Mechanics don’t wash their hands? I keep them clean for you, you know,” he teased lightly, still not taking me seriously. Smoke filled the car.

“Anything else you’ve been up to? Extracurriculars? Side work? Tutoring?”

His eyes left the road to glance at me with my last word; his right hand just now grabbing the steering wheel. “Uh, not anything that I can think of off the top of my head. Pretty much the usual. How was work for you, babe?”

“Paige came in.”

“Ugh, I’m sorry. How’d that go?” He offered to pass to me, but, for once, I declined.

“She was a delight,” I said sarcastically, “comparing me to Harmony as usual. Her name came up quite a bit actually. Apparently, she hasn’t been doing so great in biology.” I glanced over to catch Michael’s thumbs now tapping against the steering wheel. His eyes continued to bounce between his rearview and side mirrors, yet he avoided eye contact with me and said nothing. “She asked me to thank you for all the recent time you’ve spent tutoring her,” I added.

Michael hesitated—but only momentarily—as he picked up on my tone. “Now that you mention it, I have spent a couple of evenings there with her to help out, but—”

“So, you’ve been hanging out with Harmony behind my back?” I asked. Michael huffed, shaking his head to the side, and dropping one arm from the wheel. The way he leaned was too casual for the anger I felt rising within me.

“Baby, you know I helped her move into her apartment. No one else could, what was I supposed to do?”

My eyes peeled away from the surrounding streets—I could tell we were almost to my apartment.

“Yeah, and you know I didn’t like that. If I wanted her to have help moving in, I would have helped her.”

“So now I can’t make my own decisions? Should I run everything by you from now on?” He was now speaking in a dumbed-down tone that caused my muscles to tense as we pulled up to a stop sign.

“When it comes to my sister, yes!” At this point, my voice filled his car, yet the proceeding silence was just as loud. Neither of us dared to speak again until Michael was parked outside my building.

Michael took a long drag from the joint between his lips before speaking, “She asked me to help her with her biology homework; I only went over there to help.”

“Please,” I groaned. I yanked off my seat belt and fumbled with his car door lock. “Her grades pay her tuition; I hardly think she needs any help from anyone.” I shoved open the car door and climbed out—this time I was sure to slam the door with force.

“Okay,” Michael hopped out of his car and chased behind me, “But you know things have always been tough on her.” I stopped in my tracks now to finally face him.

“No, I know that things have been tough on *me* because of her.” Feeling the need to defend myself, I proceeded to talk despite my pounding heart. “Harmony has always taken *everything* from me. That’s all she’s ever tried to do since she was born. I can’t have anything without her taking it-” my voice drifted off for a second as I returned to reality from my rant and I realized, “... not even my own boyfriend.”

I turned my head to the side and analyzed Michael’s face. Before he could speak, I felt my heart crack. “Michael, are you... are you and Harmony... have you?”

But no matter how hard I tried; I couldn’t get myself to say it. Putting out what was left of the joint underneath his worn sneakers, Michael’s eyes locked onto mine.

“Have I what?”

I stuttered, hesitating as my cheeks burned hot with anger. My eyes stung hot with tears.

“Have I helped *your* younger sister as the only one who has been there for her lately? Have I worked my ass off to be there for you *and* your family while also maintaining a job and full-time classes? If you don’t want me around Harmony, you know, you could try being there for her yourself.”

His voice rose, causing mine to lower. I scoffed in an attempt to maintain the anger I wanted to feel, but my tears still remained on the brink of falling.

“Since when does Princess Harmony need help with anything, Michael? And since when have *you* ever been able to help someone with any homework?” I spat, glancing to the ground to avoid his eyes.

Michael shook his head with an eerie calmness, rubbing his chin as he overlooked the railing his body was propped up against. “You think I would fuck your little sister?”

My eyes jumped up to meet his. My nails dug into the palm of my hand until I could swear I was bleeding. I wasn’t, but I needed the pain to ground me before I fell into the cool darkness of Michael’s eyes.

He huffed, straightening his body once more. “After everything I’ve fucking done for you, you still don’t trust me.” He shook his head in disbelief. “I’ve never tried to control who you hung out with—ever. I’ve never accused you of cheating on me.”

A moment of silence passed, yet it felt like an hour.

“I don’t trust you,” I began, “because you’re a liar. You’ve been sneaking behind my back to meet up with my sister—who you know hates me. Why would I trust you?”

“So now I’m sneaking? I never lied about hanging out with Harmony.”

“So now y’all are hanging out?” I’m practically yelling at this point; I’m sure my neighbors were listening, laughing as I made a fool of myself.

“Come on,” his voice dragged out as if he was tired of having this conversation, “you know what I mean. I never lie to you; I love you.”

I crossed my arms, took my bottom lip between my teeth, and focused my attention back over the railing. “I don’t believe you.”

“Sky,” he reached out and took my forearm in his hand.

“Who picked you up every morning before class sophomore year, huh?”

I swallowed hard, still avoiding his eyes.

In sophomore year, I spent the first hour of every morning laying in bed, staring at the ceiling with heavy eyes and even heavier legs. I’d glance at the alarm clock, watching the time drain away until I had to go to school. I clung to my bed as if in protest of the day. I resented the sun for rising—or, at the very least, my heart for beating despite how many times I hoped it would stop.

When I met Michael, he explained how he used to feel the same way. He told me how he felt miserable whenever he was home after his mom cheated on his dad. Michael once described his dad as a “shallowed out shell of a man.” His mom was “the woman with it all” because she really did whatever or whoever she wants, and his dad will never stop loving and caring for her. So, Michael offered to pick me up each morning before class for breakfast. That way, we both got out of bed and ate—at least—one meal a day. Suddenly, I was jumping up at five a.m. to shower, plan the perfect outfit to appear as if I didn’t put effort into my outfit, and be ready to meet Michael under the giant oak tree outside my dad’s house. Somehow—through his daily company, support, and corny jokes—I found a home in him and the motivation to wake up.

“I didn’t fuck your sister, Skylar,” he sighed, still holding my arm lightly.

My throat tightened and tears finally overflowed. “I don’t believe you,” I spat again—this time softer—while my arms yanked away from him and wrapped around myself.

Michael scoffed as his head shook in response. His tongue rolled against the inside of his cheek with what could almost be described as a smirk.

In anticipation, I squeezed my eyes shut and tightened my arms around my torso.

“You know,” his voice began coolly—like the calm before a storm.

My eyes opened as the bitter, metallic taste of blood covered the tip of my tongue. Still, I continued to tug at my lower lip; my eyes refused to focus on anything besides the distant clouds.

“You’re the most insecure woman I’ve ever met,” he snapped. As he spoke, his voice also grew in volume—the bitter sharpness of his tone rose too.

Tears stung the corners of my eyes as my fingers began to fumble with my keys. Guilt consumed me—along with regret. I attempted to ignore him, yet I couldn’t help but latch onto each word he spat at me because he was right.

“You’re ungrateful, jealous of your sister, and angry because the world doesn’t cater to whatever the fuck Skylar wants. You’re self-centered. You think you’re so smart and have everything figured out. Well, guess what? You’re weak, Sky.”

I knew accusing him would cause a fight; I knew he would get upset as soon as I said something. I shouldn’t have said anything. I shouldn’t have pushed him. I should have stayed quiet, compliant, or faked ignorance.

I should have been more like Harmony.

“I love you, Sky, I do. But you’re fucking insufferable when you go around accusing me of some bullshit when I have done *everything* for you!”

At this point, I managed to unlock my front door, and slip into my apartment to get away from him as fast as possible. Outside, his voice towered over me, making me feel smaller and smaller until I almost couldn't breathe. I just needed to get away.

“And now you're walking away without another fucking word. Of course, typical Sky. Running away from everything. I hope you enjoy spending the weekend *alone*. I hope you-”

It wasn't until I was in my bedroom with the door shut that his voice was completely muted. Once inside, I slid to the floor with my back pressed against the door. Tears rolled down my cheeks and my mouth opened to scream, but no sounds came out. Despite hardly moving nowadays, Chewy managed to slide off my bed—his paws tapping the floor as he slowly treaded to me—and found his way over to lick my face gently.

My arms wrapped around my torso, and I rocked, trying to recreate the speed I imagined my mom would bounce me as I cried when I was young. Ignoring the dog, my entire body tensed, wracked with anxiety. My teeth ground slowly as my jaw locked. My breathing wouldn't calm. I forced my eyes shut tightly, though I could only remain that way for a moment. Anytime I closed my eyes, all I could see were images of Michael with Harmony. I felt foolish yet betrayed. I didn't believe him—not that he didn't sleep with her nor that he loves me. But what proof did I have when he's right? Almost everything else he'd done proved he loves me, yet I didn't feel loved. Maybe I can't feel loved; maybe that's what moms have to teach you.

I tried to focus my attention on other things because if I stopped and let the silence in, I could practically hear Harmony moan his name. My tears blurred the ink from my attempts at writing poetry, yet reading through my older pieces only reminded

me of how in love I was with Michael—and how badly I wished he was there to soothe me. Then, I couldn't help but wonder if he was right—if I am weak or jealous, selfish or insecure. So, I flipped open my laptop and textbooks. Unfortunately, my philosophy homework only made me more confused, causing me to question whether I was pre-determined to be alone in life or if somehow, I caused Michael to cheat on me—assuming he absolutely did. Because he did cheat on me... Right?

Quietly at first, then growing in volume, the only way I could calm myself was by humming a gentle lullaby—my mom's lullaby which is the only direct memory I have of her. Ironically, the only other person who knew about the lullaby was Michael. I never shared the memory with anyone else—I knew Harmony would just *love* to take it from me. In fact, I rarely even shared the song with myself. My mom's lullaby was once reserved only for the anniversary days of her death. It was the only time of year I allowed myself to feel that close to her—usually, it was too hard.

However, in order to manage the emotional aftermath I faced at that moment, I hummed to myself. I couldn't think about the many messages from Michael I must have missed since blocking his number after an hour of his constant messaging or the carefree, happy life Harmony must still be living. So, instead, I hyper-fixated on this lullaby—humming, crying, and rocking until my breathing slowed and the tears stopped. And, once I caught my breath, everything was clear.

I was going to take Paige up on her offer to go to Dad's house for dinner next Saturday. I would never get a clear answer from Michael. Harmony, on the other hand, is a succubus—proud to flaunt her newest feed, unaware she is the next prey. Plus, I wanted

everyone to know what Harmony did to me. I wanted Dad to finally get to see how much of a snake Harmony was.

I yanked my phone off the nearby desk and immediately dial Dad's number, determined to announce my upcoming visit. My lower lip rolled between my teeth as I waited through several rings. Just when I began to pull the phone from my ear, the cool, gravelly tone of his voice spoke up.

“Hey.”

My fingertips smeared away my tears as I sniffled and exhaled. “Daddy, I-”

“It's Geoff. Leave your message after the tone, and I'll return your call at my earliest convenience.”

Beep.

Works Consulted

Alvarez, Julia. (2010). *How The Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. Algonquin Books of Chapel.

Cohn, R. & Leviathan, D. (2008). *Naomi and Ely's No Kiss List*. Ember.

Egan, Jennifer. (2011). *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Anchor Books.

Ellisa, J., Dowrick, C., Lloyd-Williams, M. (2013). The long-term impact of early parental death:

lessons from a narrative study. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 106(2), 57-67. Retrieve April 24, 2021, from

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3569022/>

Green, J. & Leviathan, D. (2011). *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. Speak.

Institute of Medicine (US) Committee for the Study of Health Consequences of the Stress of

Bereavement. (1984). CHAPTER 4, Reactions to Particular Types of Bereavement. In M. Osterweis, F. Solomon & M. Green (Eds.) *Bereavement: Reactions, Consequences, and Care*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US). Retrieved April 24, 2021, from

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK217848/>

Sapadin, Benjamin. (2016). *Celebrating Short Story Cycles*. *New York Public Library*.

Retrieved

February 24, 2021, from <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2016/05/03/short-story-cycles>

Stansfield, J. & Bunce, L. (2014). The Relationship Between Empathy and Reading Fiction:

Separate Roles for Cognitive and Affective Components. *Journal of European Psychology Students*, 5(3), 9-18. Retrieved April 24, 2021, from <https://jeps.efpsa.org/articles/10.5334/jeps.ca/>

Style, Emily. (1996). Curriculum As Window and Mirror [PDF File]. *Social Science*

Record, 33(2), 21-28. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from

https://nationalseedproject.org/images/documents/Curriculum_As_Window_and_Mirror.pdf

Thompson-Spires, Nafissa. (2018). *Heads of the Colored People*. 37 Ink.

Torres, Justin. (2012). *We The Animals*. Mariner Books.

Warren, John. (2001). Doing Whiteness: On the performative dimensions of race in the classroom [PDF File]. *Communication Education*, 50(2), 91-108. Retrieves April

24, 2021, from

<https://www.sjsu.edu/people/shawn.spano/courses/c12/s0/Warren.pdf>

Yang, J. (2019). Windows but No Mirrors: The importance of representation in the media.

InLight. Retrieved April 24, 2021, from

<http://www.inlightmagazine.org/windows-but-no-mirrors-the-importance-of-representation-in-media>