FANTASY REVISITED:
A WRITER'S ESCAPE FROM THE BINDINGS OF REALITY

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INTRODUCTION

I’ve struggled long and hard with myself trying to make my own definition of “good writing”. I’ve put myself in every situation possible trying to force something meaningful and beautiful to come to me. I’ve sat by the water’s edge, I’ve watched the sun rise and set, I’ve sat at coffee shops for hours studying people and waiting for one small action from anyone to spark something inside of me. While these do sometimes work, for me nothing ever noteworthy would pop into my imagination. It was after years of doing this that I realized creativity cannot be forced. Beauty, pain, sorrow, anger...anything that fuels the story, I feel, must first fuel the writer. Of course moments throughout my day to day life fuel my writing. Anyone I meet or see, whether it be an old friend or an old man who has trouble lifting something at the grocery store, has the potential to leave a seed with me. That’s how I see them, my ideas. They are seeds that I save up in my mind or on receipts and napkins. I have to wait for the time to be right and when it hits I pull out my bag of seeds and grow them into something more beautiful. The smallest thing, in passing, may not send me running, looking for my pen. However, late at night when I remember the events of my day and of everyone I’ve encountered, at least one will fill me with the curiosity to know more. I say that I have to wait for it because I cannot simply make myself write. When I truly feel emotion, when it radiates from my toes to my gut, that’s when my writing is at its best; because then it is at its most honest.
I feel as though that's one mistake I've made throughout my life as a writer. When I pick up a book and read a poem by Sylvia Plath I have to force myself to remember that whatever I'm reading was not written in a day. I've scrapped countless poems and story ideas because they didn't seem good enough after a first draft. Going back to what I said earlier, I've now learned that these ideas are small and just seeds. It takes a lot of time and attention to make them grow into what they could someday be. I believe a lot of my frustration comes from being so eager. I've loved writing for so long, and as mundane as it sounds, I just want to be good.

From the time I was a young child, around eight years old, I've held a deep love for the art. When I wrote my first poem my teacher, Mrs. Karen Pack, told me she really believed that if I tried hard, and if I wanted it bad enough, people everywhere would read my writings someday. Up until the time I was eighteen I had only written fiction when it was mandatory for school. I considered myself strictly a poet. I found a lot of interest and thrill in trying to condense a meaningful moment, emotion, or thought into a short poem using all of the perfect words. However, once in college I realized the great love I had for writing longer works of fiction. Developing a character is by far the most powerful experience for me. From one small idea or characteristic, a real person is created with personality, physical attributes, family, a past and you get to make their future anything you choose. There is really nothing that can compare to creating a beating heart within a person and a pulse that runs through a story, keeping it alive and exciting. Finding the perfect word, I've finally learned, is not just for poetry. That's one thing I always envied
about my three favorite writers Edgar Allan Poe, Sylvia Plath, and Emily Dickenson.

As a brooding, angry sixteen year old I would obsessively study the lines of “The Raven” and wonder just how he could do that. How every line could be perfect and every word could mean something. I found it absolutely fascinating how Emily Dickinson could say so much with so very few words. Still, every hyphen, ever pause and every hesitation added to exactly what she was trying to say. I would read Sylvia Plath’s “Daddy” with such jealousy. Every time I’d tried to write something angry I only sounded like a whiny child, so how could she do it with such eloquence? One thing I DO feel I share with these linguistic marvels is the nature of their works. The three of them were much darker in their writings, breaking down comfortable walls and attacking issues that not everyone seemed to be so okay with talking about. With Poe, there was certainly a paranormal aspect to his writing, and I could comfortably say a lot of my fiction falls under the realm of Science Fiction and the paranormal.

I’ve tried over my stint in college to find my niche in the writing world. Slowly though, I found my place wasn’t writing about Appalachia or overt Feminism, or any of the numerous other subjects I attempted. I’ve learned of something through my countless creative writing classes called a “haunt”, meaning something that, no matter how you try, you fall back to writing about at the end of the day. Some people may write themselves out of their haunts and move on to new ones, but I’ve never been able to do so. Whether I’m sitting in a class doing writing exercises or on my front porch smoking a cigarette, if an idea for a poem or story comes to me it has always been either about the paranormal or my father.
My dad passed away almost three years ago. Before his death I had struggled with our relationship for years and I wrote about it all of the time. Now, though, I feel guilty for all of the angry words I’ve said in the past and most things I start writing about him are never finished. My biggest obsession is writing about things in a paranormal realm. I’ve always loved the idea of escape and that is what writing about other worldly things has given to me. Writing has been my way to duck out from the real world around me. Things often seem too stressful and unfair and I like the idea that in a different kind of world, I can make my own rules. Through doing this, I truly think it’s aided me in growing as a person. Typically my stories center around one female, always young, and always faced with some moral dilemma or other problem and it always centers on the fact that something about her just isn’t normal. She has to work through the problems that trouble her in a different way than anyone else would because of her special nature. Making up another reality and having someone to deal with day to day life as a vampire, warlock, or immortal seems to give me strength to fight my own real battles every day. I usually don’t even have the intention to write them, but that’s what they always seem to turn in to. My biggest worry is that I know Science Fiction isn’t always taken seriously. Still, my love for creating fantastical creatures in other realities trumps the fear I have of rejection.

I am writing, at the end of the day, for me. It’s never been something I just felt like I should do. It’s been something I was driven to do, nearly every day, for sixteen years now. The ideas come to me and I have to let them out, I have to put them on paper. If I don’t tell the story then who will? I’m not afraid of rejection anymore.
because I’ve faced enough of it. Everything I’ve written that I stand behind I truly love with all of my heart. Someone can tell me it’s not “good” all they want to, and you know they may just be right. But good writing to me signifies honesty, trust in yourself, and a true love for the art. I write because I love it. I write because once I create a character, I feel their voices NEED to be heard. I write because it’s the best way I’ve ever found to express beauty, hate, love, and pain. I write because there is no other way for me, just no other way.
Excerpt from Bewitching Arrangements (A novel in progress)

Chapter One

She awoke with all of the blood vessels in her head feeling as if they would explode at once. Holding her temples to suppress the pounding, she sat up and looked around her. She realized the shivering pulsing through her body was a result of the soaking wet clothes she sat in. It was still raining as she sat up, looking around at the backdrop of this nightmare. Curling up with her knees under her chin, she examined the close walls of the alleyway. The bricks were dark and wet and the dumpster a few feet away smelled of garbage; a pungent mix of rotting onions, chicken and mayonnaise. She ran her hand through her auburn hair getting it away from her face, pushed back to the wall and used it to pull herself up. She was sore, and as she slid up her sleeves it revealed bruises, one in the shape of a large hand wrapped around her forearm.

She stood for what felt like hours, trying her hardest to remember anything…any small detail as to what had happened. However the more she thought,
the more scared she became. She had no idea who she was, where she was, where she’d come from, or how she had gotten into the alleyway. As hard as she tried she could not remember anything. Alone and helpless she couldn’t help but to feel angry.
Still, as much as she wanted to lose it, to fall lifeless on the ground, to scream and cry and damn whatever God there was for letting this happen, she wanted answers more.
She felt a tickle on her neck and when she lifted her hand it brushed upon a necklace. She removed it and looked at the locket carefully. She struggled for a few moments to open it, a combination of the stubborn clasp and her shaking hands. As soon as she read the inscription, something clicked in her mind. "My dearest Evelyn" she whispered, as her named flooded a brief lived relief through her veins. "My name is Evelyn." She fingered the locket, realizing not only its precious engraving but also that it was the only clue; the only thing to lead her to the answers she needed.

A sudden determination came over Evelyn as she secured the locket around her neck. She trembled as she searched the ground around her but nothing was there that appeared to be of any worth. Checking her pockets she brought out a wad of money. Counting it a few times she confirmed that it was two hundred dollars. That was surely enough to get her away from here, she thought, even though she had no idea where to go. But something in her mind, be it instinct or insanity, let her know that she needed to be somewhere else.
Evelyn could hear voices from around the corner. Knowing that she had to start somewhere, she smoothed her rain soaked clothes and made her best attempt at fixing her wild auburn waves. She walked around the corner and down the alleyway into the street. She tried to avoid meeting eyes of the few people who saw her, disheveled, walking out of the dark crevice between the buildings. She spotted a stand on the next corner down and though maybe a newspaper could help her. She walked up to the stand and grabbed the first paper that she saw. Scanning the top she read, “The Seattle Times” and printed below it Tuesday, June 14, 1960. “Okay“, she thought, “I know the date, but I still can’t remember anything. I know I’m 21, my name is Evelyn, and I know I’m in Seattle. So why can’t I remember my parents, my life… short term memory loss? Yes! Maybe I got into some kind of accident…”

“Hey lady!” Evelyn realized that the salesman had been yelling at her. “You can’t just read and then walk away, you have to buy it!”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” she stammered “Of course. How much is it?”

“10 cents”

Evelyn found some coins in her pocket then looked up at the man behind the stand. She froze. Quickly images from the man’s life flooded her mind. His first car accident, when he got married, when his wife died two years ago, the sadness he felt
standing in the rain trying to make a living, but barely making it by. She felt such
sympathy for him that tears flooded her eyes and she kept staring, letting more of his
life sink into her mind.

“Lady, are you going to be okay? Do you have some kind of hearing
problem?” She quickly felt a mix between anger and sympathy. He was such a snippy
old man, but only because life had treated him so roughly. She supposed that anyone
that had been through so much had an excuse to be grouchy now and again.

“Actually, here,” she paused then reached back into her pocket and traded the
nickel and dime for a five dollar bill. She didn’t need money if she didn’t even know
where she was headed. She reached it out with a smile.

“Keep it,” she smiled.

“Well... umm... thank you ma’am,” he said sheepishly, obviously ashamed.
Evelyn turned, and as soon as their gaze was broken, she realized what she’d just
done. What was she, she wondered to herself. She didn’t feel like a monster, but
something wasn’t right. Humans can’t read minds, maybe she wasn’t human. Hell she
could have been Dracula’s sister for all she knew, although she wasn’t thirsty for any
blood. She walked slowly over to a bench, sat down and began to rub her temples
again. As crazy as she felt for believing it, she had to test this new found trick. She
glanced up, and found a woman across the street. She stared until the woman met her eyes, and instantly she was hit with an image of the woman’s husband and a pretty little red headed secretary. It wasn’t until then that she noticed the woman’s tear stained face. She suddenly felt guilty and intrusive, and with a faint smile she diverted her gaze to the sidewalk. She had no idea what the time was, so she decided to try once more. She felt eyes on her as one man waited for the bus to come, standing next to the bench.

“Pardon me sir, but do you have the time?” She flashed a bright smile. The man looked down at his watch.

“It’s about 8:30, ma’am. Shouldn’t a lady like you be home at this hour, or at least accompanied by a gentleman?” Their eyes met and instantly she was terrified. This man was nothing but a nasty old pervert.

“Actually I’m only resting for a moment, thank you. I read in the paper there is a train station around here. Is it close?”

“Yep,” he gave her a sickening smile and bile rose in her throat, “it’s right down that street. You need some company?” He winked and she was sure she was going to be sick.
As she rose she said, “That’s okay, but thank you for the time.” Evelyn was relieved as she saw the bus pull up. The man tipped his hat and climbed aboard.

He told the truth about one thing. The train station was just right down the street and around the corner. She had to ask for a couple of directions, but interacting with a few random strangers helped her learn more about controlling whatever power it was she had. She’d learned from the lady that she met that a diner across town just got shut down. Somehow rat poison got into someone’s food. She made a mental note to never eat at Ben’s Grill if she ever came back into town. The man who had given her the last tip had just lost his wife to a heart attack. He was a sad old man with sad old eyes. His hands were shaky and he walked a little bent over. Somehow though, there was a glimpse of hope he saw in his grandkids, and that made her feel better for him. She went up to the office and tried to think of somewhere remote. For now, she just wanted to be alone. The first thing she saw was a train to Montana that made a stop in Cooke City. It sounded good enough. Evelyn bought her ticket and boarded with no baggage, and only a small feeling that she’d made a good choice. Cooke City, Montana had to hold something good for her. She was meant to be there. She’d gotten lucky with the time, only having to wait thirty minutes before the train left the station, and it was hardly crowded, to say the least.
The train rolled out and she could hear the engine hissing like a den of hungry, angry snakes. She was thankful that the rain had stopped, and her clothes had dried a bit. Her shirt was a bit wrinkled but her long skirt didn't look too bad, and the dark color hid the imperfections. She could only imagine what people thought of her. Actually she didn't have to imagine, she could find out for herself, but she didn't want to at this point. A "lady" wouldn't be out this late, especially alone, especially on a train that led to scenic nowhere. At that moment she had a painful realization. What was she missing by not remembering her past? What had her mother been like? Had she had her eyes or her smile; her laugh? Did she have her father's nose? She must not have had a husband, there was no ring. But maybe she had a boyfriend. A handsome, dark haired man that would find her one day. The past two hours had been a whirlwind, and Evelyn realized how exhausted she was as a yawn escaped her lips. She pulled the travel pillow up behind her head and quickly drifted off to sleep.

It wasn't long before wonderful colors filled Evelyn's mind. An exhausted sleep was leading to very extravagant, nonsensical dreams. Hours later, after the rest of a deep REM sleep had finally begun to set in, Evelyn had the dream. She could see a man from behind, he was tall and well-built and a wonderful green aura surrounded him. As he turned she drew closer, but his face was completely blurry. She could make out nothing of him but his eyes. They were a piercing, ice blue and in them she
could see the intensity and knowledge of hundreds of years, and in a flash it was
gone. She awoke, startled, jumping in her seat. Evelyn glanced up to the front of the
car where an antique clock hung on the wall. To her surprise she realized that it was
nine o’clock am and she’d slept eleven hours on a train car. An employee walked
down the row and Evelyn stopped her, “Ma’am, can you tell me how much longer it
will be before we make it into Cooke City?” The attendant smiled at her, as Evelyn
met her gaze. She was thinking about how the conductor had just hit on her and she
was tired of the old pervert. Evelyn felt sick for a moment. She’d only had this gift
for all of half a day and she already learned more about the world (and the perverts in
it) than she’d even really cared to in the first place.

“Sure can, sweetie. We’ll pull into the station in about another hour and a
half.” She smiled a weak smile and then kept walking down the car.

Evelyn sat back and started to think about the dream again. She didn’t know
what anything meant anymore, and she had no idea who the man was in her dream
but she suddenly felt obsessed. This was a sign. She would meet this man in her new
town. She was sure of it. She couldn’t get those brilliant blue eyes out of her mind.
Her soul was linked with his, and she would stop at nothing to find him.
Cold Feet and Wet Knees

Just as I rounded the corner of my apartment I watched my neighbor pull his car door closed revealing a large dent in mine.

"Doug, what the hell?!" I shouted after him, but he paid no attention as he sped off out of the lot. As if my poor car needed any more character, now my passenger door had a nice love tap with red paint in the center. Irritated, I threw my last bag in my car and climbed behind the wheel preparing for Christmas vacation.

The drive was long, but beautiful; three hours of winding roads that seemed to narrow as I went. I always blasted my music when I drove, but today I let the silence settle around me. The only obstruction was the bit of wind pouring through the crack in my window. It was freezing outside, but I can't stand to be in a stuffy car. I drove through a mountain that had been cut to make room for the road and ice sheets surrounded me on either side. The sun was setting and the orange light glinted off of them, reminding me of a warm summer day at noon. Slowly I drove the stress away. Going home for a few weeks would surely put my mind back where it needed to be. I rarely listen to rap, but sometimes, when I drive I like to play it and sing along, pretending I'm "gangsta", mostly because it's ridiculously funny. I found my favorite album by my favorite artist and pretended to live large for the continuation of my drive.
A warm familiarity fell around me as I pulled into the holler. I turned down my music, and continued the road almost to where the houses end. I pulled into my Mom’s driveway just after 9:00pm, and, excited as I was, exhaustion was taking hold. I’d had two finals that day, six that week total, and after driving for three hours my comfy bed, inherited from my Granma sounded like fluffy cotton Heaven. I hopped out, grabbed one bag with my essentials in it, and left the rest until morning. I sat on the deck and played with our German Shepherd Hobo for a few minutes and then went inside. My mother’s house always smelled amazing, usually like some home cooked meal. She’d made dinner but I apologized to her, saying I was too tired and that we would catch up in the morning and I would have left overs the next day. My lime green room hardly even felt like mine anymore. Nothing in it had changed; I suppose I’d been the one to do that. I slipped on a baggy t-shirt from the pizza place I’d worked at the previous summer and some cotton shorts, yelled goodnight to my Momma, and lay down in my bed. I’d missed most, of all things, my zebra comforter. For some reason, in that moment, it made me think of The Lion King, and I giggled slightly as I thought of the theme song and fell asleep.

Purples and reds surrounded me. They neither pulled me up nor pushed me down but hovered around me like a thousand furious, hungry winds, waiting for my wrong move, waiting to suck me into the abyss. I was flying, and, for a moment, thought everyone in the world should be jealous of me. I was literally as free as a bird. Well, I would have been if not surrounded by these winds. Still, my feet, my
hands, no part of my body touched earth and I was suspended in glorious freedom. I had strolled here from somewhere, but I couldn’t remember where. But when I got to the cemetery, things became clear, that I wasn’t the normal girl I’d always believed I was. I could sometimes see the spirits, feel them always, and they imposed their emotions on me constantly. “Enough,” I screamed and they seemed to listen as the reds faded into the purples, the purples to black and then there was no more light. From across the way I heard a rustle and crunching of leaves, and a glint of crystal caught my eye. A figure lurked beneath the trees in the distance. For a moment I was scared, and then calm washed over me. The figure took one step toward me. Two steps. Three. And with each movement, light radiated brighter from her. “Granma?” She said nothing, but smiled as she faded away. A message ran through my mind, “You’re not alone dear. You’ll soon discover. You’ll soon discover”. In an instant she was gone. The phrase no longer repeated but I could not forget it. What would I discover?

I shot up, pouring sweat through my shirt and onto my jersey knit sheets. I looked as though I had run through a summer storm just to feel the rain on my skin. Granma had died ten years ago. I’d pushed her out of my head for the last five. Why would I dream about her now? The cemetery in my dream, in reality the one across the road, was the main stage for the dream. Still, what she had said, what will I discover? I didn’t think much of it really. Other than being exceptionally creepy, the dream let me see my Granma and meant nothing anyway. And, if it did, it was
nothing about what was in the dream. It’s funny how they’re supposed to work that way. I laid my head back down to find that my pillow was also wet with sweat. I took it and flipped it over to the cool side, letting the puffy down cradle my thoughts. As soon as my eyelids met the cemetery jumped back into my mind. This time it was much darker, more sinister, and I felt threatened by the very touch of the wind. The word “discover” still pulsated through my mind. If she were trying to tell me something, what in the hell was I supposed to find?

The morning sun shot through the window, amplified by the glass, giving the illusion that it could be warm outdoors. I felt the comfort spread through me as I stretched a hello to the day. As I set up though, I could see the snow melting outside. Good ole Kentucky weather. Don’t expect to have any nice walks or drives during your Christmas vacation. Still, I couldn’t complain. There were no sirens or car horns to be heard. Everything around me was so beautiful; the snow magical, the mountains dwarfing, my cat Ozzy snuggled up beside me, stretching as I stirred. The dog barked down stairs and excitement rushed through me. I needed this. I needed my family, my animals, my good old house, and a break from school. I got up without worrying about changing from my pajamas and crossed my room. I stood at my dresser, noting a new bulging red pimple and that my stomach was larger than it had been a few weeks ago. Promising myself to hit the gym when I got back to school, I began brushing my hair in the mirror, and seeing the window in the reflection, the dream shot back into my memory. My excitement drained from me and I felt suicidal. It was
abrupt and unwarranted. I was stressed from time to time but never once had I thought of taking my own life. It was as if some unseen force was imposing the thoughts on my mind, and for those ten seconds I wanted nothing more than to blow my own head off, and then, it was gone. “What the fuck...” was all I murmured to myself as I sat down on the bed again. Granma, had that been her, really? Was she in my dream? Maybe I hadn’t fabricated her after all. But that made no sense. My Granma was a sweet old lady who died of a heart attack; she wouldn’t want me to kill myself. So if not her... then who did? I shook my head and put it out of my mind. I would worry about it later, but for now my good mood was returned as I headed downstairs to see my Momma and get some breakfast. As I went, I hopped down each step and was welcomed by the scent of homemade biscuits and gravy.

“Mornin’ Mom.”

“Hey baby, how’d you sleep?” I hesitated at the question and then decided it was best to fib. Didn’t need mom thinking I was a fruitcake on top of all of the other things she has to worry about.

“Pretty good. Was the heat up though? I woke up sweating.”

“Yea, I keep it turned up for Bones. He’s so tiny, and he gets cold too easy.”

“That makes sense,” I trailed off. Bones was barking behind me and I turned around to give him a piece of bacon. Then, I fell off the stool. A dark shadow stood in the corner. Bones stood off about four feet and was staring him down. There was no
feature to be seen. It had no face, no defined body. There was a humanoid shape to it, but it was nowhere near human. I was suddenly freezing, and stationary with fear.

"Honey, are you alright? What are you staring at?!" I realized then that my mom didn’t see the mist, and as I stared it disappeared right in front of my eyes. My wrist hurt when I went to get up.

"Yea mom," I said, pretending to laugh at myself. What the hell was going on? "I just turned around to give Bones some bacon and I slipped right off the stool. Sorry."

"Well honey don’t be sorry, you get it from me you know. Sometimes I wonder if I should bubble wrap the house when we’re both under this roof. It’s like we feed off of each other’s clumsiness." My mother and I laughed together and I realized then more than ever how much I had missed her. I’d missed her too-tight hugs and the smell of Jasmine in her hair. She’d always been my best friend, and it was good to see her again; to sit around the living room and talk about nothing and everything all at the same time. She was right about my being accident prone, though. I couldn’t walk down the hallway without sliding or tripping or catching my hand on a nail in our old paneling. Still, this time it wasn’t my fault. I wanted so bad to cry and to scream and beg her to tell me she saw it, too. Still, we ate our breakfast chatting about this and that, my boyfriend, the bills, my joy that the semester was
over. It was so nice catching up with her, if only this wasn’t lurking in the back of my head.

After I ate, I ran back up to my room and sat at the window. I stared and stared at the cemetery, demanding something from it though I didn’t know what. It was so mesmerizing, the stones so old, stretching over a quarter mile of the holler in either direction. The beaten gravel road had just gotten covered with blacktop back in the summer. It would be a lot easier for Daddy to clear off with his snow blade, if he was still around. Sometimes I thought differently, but I was usually glad he wasn’t buried right outside. It hurt enough to see his grave, let alone having to see it all day long, every time I looked out the window. When I looked across the cemetery, toward the back where the creek trickled by, I saw a familiar tree that I hadn’t given thought to in years. It was the tree that Granma was behind in my dream.

“Okay, so, I’m already crazy enough apparently. This kind of stuff I’m seeing and feeling... it just isn’t normal. I want to know what’s going on. So if there’s something here and you’re telling me that I should go over to the cemetery, let me know. Show me.” It sounded like a demand in my mind but came out barely as a whisper. I felt silly sitting around talking to myself, but stranger things were happening. I sat there and counted sixty seconds in my head and nothing happened.

“Right. Well I tried, I really did. Guess I’ll go watch TV downstairs. You had your chance to be clear and you passed on it. So please, who or whatever you are,
leave my family and I in peace." I stood and slid on my slippers and started to walk. As I reached for the crystal door knob just above the hole for the skeleton key, an abrupt chill shot through me and the only thing I could hear was a resonating "please". I turned and smiled out the window as tears welled in my eyes. I didn’t know what was happening. I felt overwhelmingly sad. Not for myself but for someone else, for someone across that road.

“Okay, I’m coming.”

I got dressed and bundled up to head out into the snow. It was a feat in itself getting myself wrapped up in leggings, jeans, two pairs of socks, and a t-shirt, sweater, coat and snow boots. My coat still had the tear in it from last winter when I’d helped Dad haul coal for the old coal stove in the back of the house. Eventually it had gotten warm, and then when he passed I didn’t have the heart to mend it; I guess it was a memento of sorts. I wanted to remember him forever.

A lot of the snow had melted since I’d first glanced out my frosty bedroom window this morning. Earlier the snow had been soft and billowy; the yard had looked like a field of cotton balls you could barely resist jumping into. Now, it wasn’t deep at all, only an inch or so with pointy, dead grass peeking out here and there. The morning sun was bright and it made the ground glisten, but the warmth was only an illusion. I headed downstairs and told mom I was going out for a walk and I’d be back in a bit.
The bright sunlight stung my eyes as I opened the door. It was an odd sensation on my face. The cold air bit and nipped at my nose as the cheerful sun slightly warmed my forehead. Out of habit of being on campus I checked the road before I walked across it, even though I would hear a car if it was coming. I walked through the rusted, black, cast iron gate to the cemetery and headed back to the tree that had been in my dream.

My grandmother and grandfather had moved to my house right after getting married. It was much smaller then and as their family grew their house did with it. My Grandfather had a lifetime of scars and calluses from building onto their home, but in the end it made the place truly theirs. My mom grew up there and when she got married they moved to a smaller place and gave her their lifetime project. Their hair was getting greyer by the day, and arthritis was beginning to have a harsh effect on Gramps. With all the children gone and raised, they didn’t see the need for such a big home for just the two of them. I had all but just forgotten about the times my Granma and I had played over here, fishing for minnows for Gramps to use as bait on the good days when he could hold a fishing rod. She’d come over, mostly on lazy Saturday afternoons and bring a picnic basket full of my favorite two sandwiches, chicken salad and friend bologna, and we’d stay out until the darkness fell. After that we’d sometimes go back over to the yard and chase lightning bugs till I was too tired to run anymore. I walked up to the massive old oak and was astounded at its girth. Most trees around here that big had fallen over. I circled around the tree, nearly slipping
into the creek. The ground was eroding away and the roots were exposed, some trash from high waters buried between the trees anchors. Something small caught my eye and I was shocked by what I found on the back, closest to the water.

Right below the lowest branch was my Granma and Gramps’ initials in a heart. It was like something you see in movies. A precious couple in the 1940’s carving their mark into eternity; him wearing a US Army uniform and her with pin curls in her hair. It was hard to believe; love like that hardly existed anymore. Suddenly my head began to swim a bit and I distinctly heard the word “discover” in my ear. What was it with this damn word?

“I get it,” I half yelled, “I’m supposed to discover something! What am I supposed to discover?!?” Then something else caught my eye. Below their precious heart was an arrow. It was very small and pointed down. Just then another soft voice in my head said “dig”. So I slid my gloves off, bent over, and began to rake the dirt with my hand. It was hard because of the cold and snow but not frozen. Small rocks stabbed at my hands and hard balls of mud pulled at my fingernails. By the time I was about a foot down, and I was bleeding from my pinky and index finger, my hand scraped something plastic. Pulling it out I found that it was a book inside of a large, plastic sandwich bag. My knees were numb, pressed in the ground, and my jeans were soaking wet. It looked like a journal. The binding was cracked from apparent years of being buried during harsh summers and cold winters. The leather was bent
on the cover and pages were torn, marked and yellowed with time. This obviously wasn’t a book that was new when it was buried. I opened it and read...

“Alison, if you’ve found this book, fate has taken the right course. If this is anyone else, please stop reading. You most likely won’t, but trust me; you’ll pay for what you learn. Alison, you’re old enough to know now, but you’ve probably suspected it your entire life. Strange happenings here and there, seeing things that weren’t really there, believing in the boogie man even at fifteen.” I paused. I’d thought about it on and off, but I’d always been pretty practical. Everything I’d ever seen I had explained away on my own. “You’re not crazy, honey, but you are special. This is Granma Pearl. Not even your mother knows the secrets that I’m about to tell you. She never showed the spark that you had as a child. I knew you had adopted the gift. I’m sure you’ll be able to do much more research with all of the new-fangled technology they have nowadays. Know that I am always with you and I always have been. Do you know what it means to be empathic? It means you can feel the emotions of others simply by a look, a word, or just thinking about them in the strongest cases. It can be done with both the living, and the dead. I know you probably think I’m just a crazy old lady, but trust me when I say that you are going to be exceptional. I’m not, nor have I ever been, a witch. I found out my abilities from my mother and my grandmother. It runs in our family. You may even have psychic abilities, Medium abilities, premonitions, and plenty of other things. No reason to be overwhelmed though, it’s all in the book here. If you choose not to carry on this tradition, please
know that I understand but I can’t say I won’t be disappointed. It will be nice to hear from you again. You’ll learn how in due time. It’s all in the book. I think you’ve probably already accepted the gift. You came looking for the book when I sent for you. You’re going to be amazing, dear, I promise. Love, Granma Pearl.”

Tears welled in my eyes and then spilled down my face. The cold sensation brought me back to reality a bit, and I realized I was shivering. Really, I’d never felt this much of anything. For the first time in twenty one years I could really feel; feel every inch of my body, feel the ground and the air surrounding me like a shroud. I felt so happy. I had long felt odd in my family. I was a black sheep that didn’t understand, and that no one else understood. I realized then that it was everyone else that didn’t belong. I was going to take my Grandmother’s words, heed them, and practice every day I could. I couldn’t wait to see her face again. I giggled to myself a little when I heard a voice inside my head say, “See it’s already working, now that you’ve accepted. You better get inside, your mom’s wondering what you’re doing.” It would be our little secret. Just like the time I had the cookies before dinner, or I broke Gramps’ fishing pole; our little Secret.
I grew up in the south. In my small seaside town of Beaufort, South Carolina, life for most seemed almost too easy. It wasn’t overcrowded. My home wasn’t a tourist trap and the streets were lined with beautiful old homes and breathtaking greenery. Most people spent nights on their front porches, being lulled by the chirping of crickets while their children chased lightning bugs all around the yard. Shoes at the time seemed optional, and you could spend hours napping under an Oak tree around back. The tea was so sweet one glass could rot your teeth, and Sunday dinners were never optional. The two biggest things anyone believed in were family and God. My sister and I would spend summers on the beach, dreading that moment when the sun began to sink beneath the ocean on the horizon. There was a beautiful moment of stunning pinks and oranges, and the water sparkled like glitter in the rays of the setting sun. Then, there was only darkness. We would have to pack up and go home and remember we weren’t the perfect family we’d imagined at the beach all day. We were two children too afraid to chase fireflies for fear of making noise. Sunday dinners were uneasy, and Momma didn’t like sweet tea.

When I was born in 1927, they gave me the name Jackie. Growing up my mom was my best friend and my sister was my partner in crime. We fought together, played together and were always comfort for one another. Our family was divided. It was the three of us, and then there was my father. He’s the reason I left my home in
the first place. Even after the old bastard had died he haunted me. Everywhere I
turned I could still see his face, or feel his hands on me. His name was Daniel, but
once when I got mad I learned to never call him anything but daddy. The bruises
didn't fully dissipate for over a month. I said I was sorry, but I really meant to say “go
to hell”. He was an extremely strict and overbearing man, especially about church. He
was an Old Regular Baptist with an affinity for nasty sex and Jim Beam. People then
would have said “He's one of them there crooked Christians”.

The ideas of God and family seemed to leave us behind the year I turned five.
Daddy would sneak into the room that belonged to Judy and me. He would move like
a fox between our white twin beds and slide underneath the quilt my grandmother had
made for me. Before too long he started to molest Judy too, but we never said
anything. I was always sure my mother knew but she was just as scared of him as we
were. He made us promise not to tell anyone because it would hurt momma’s feelings
and if we did that to our mother we would certainly be punished. Mom would cover
up her battle scars from him as much as she could but there was always a tint of
purple or blue around her eyes, and marks of lingering fingers on her body. We lived
in fear of him every day for ten years until Daniel died when I was fifteen, Judy was
thirteen, and my mother was damaged beyond repair. After my dad died I slowly
began to find some joy in life again. I developed a love for classical music, singing,
cooking and most of all a passion for life. When I was eighteen I packed up my things
and moved to New York City. It was devastating leaving the only two people that had
ever really loved me, but I wanted so badly to become a teacher. I began studying at a
Sarah Lawrence and I got a waitressing job on the weekends. For the first time since
I was a kid at the beach watching the sun dance on the water I felt vibrant and alive.

By my second semester I was thriving in the city. I had some friends, money
in my pocket, my own little apartment, and a real sense of accomplishment. The only
thing I was having trouble getting over was my fear of men. Because of my father I
was afraid of getting close to a man at all. I'd never had a real date and the only time
I'd been kissed I nearly had a panic attack. So one night after a full day of sulking and
being lonely I decided to make myself go out. I didn't care how uncomfortable I was
or what kind of situation I got into, my life wasn't going to put itself on hold for me
and I wanted nothing more to start living it. When I went into that bar that night in
March nineteen forty six, my life would change forever. My mother, as all mothers
do, had always told me not to talk to strangers. If I'd only listened to her, I might still
be alive.

Now I'm stuck here, nineteen years old forever. In time my mother, sister, and
everyone I've known faded away. I've never wanted to be a monster and I control
everything as much as I can, and I've found a very productive way to feed. I'd never
really liked my name so after I heard the name "Layla" in 1992 I adopted it as my
own. I look in the mirror now and see this creature that is more beautiful than I could
have ever imagined being in my human life. I suppose I look the same but everything
just got enhanced somehow. My skin is like porcelain, my hair is more amber than
brown, and my eyes are so light blue they're almost clear. As I get ready for tonight I
hum to myself softly. I don’t even sing anymore. I’m so repulsed by the thought of
the dirty disgusting men that roam the streets of this city, men who see women merely
as objects; men who feel entitled to them and their bodies regardless of how the
women feel about it. I can do nothing but think about ridding the world of every last
one of them. My senses take over and blood is all that matters. Still, though, from
time to time, I miss the smell of my mother’s flowers and my sister’s shampoo. I
brushed through my hair one more time and went out into the night.

I arrived at Carter’s at around nine. The air was thick with smoke and stale
alcohol. In this part of town no one wears suits; you didn’t come out for a drink with
your coworkers. Two intentions were all that existed here. Women were looking for
love, and the men were looking for a good lay. I made my way over to the bar and got
a whiskey and coke. I couldn’t drink it, but I had to keep up appearances. I watched a
girl across the bar fluff her curly red hair, adjust her C cups and give a confident
smile to a man at a nearby booth. He was gorgeous; tall, tan, dark hair and blue eyes.
She made her way over, sat down at his table and held out her hand. He smiled, a bit
stunned by her beauty and forward nature. Still she’d put the hook in the water and
old blue eyes had definitely taken the bait. I could see them talking across the room,
exchanging the common courtesies. We all know better though don’t we? He’d have
her out of here and her dress by 9:45pm. “Damn, that was fast” I thought to myself as
they got up and left together. I put my glass to my lips and pretended to sip my drink.
The lies he’d probably spilled ran through my head. He drove a Porsche normally, but
it was off in Italy getting detailed. The Corolla was his brother’s. He was a doctor,
and the all-star football captain in high school. Still, he probably didn’t lie any more than she did.

A man sat down beside me then. Intentionally, I knocked over my drink to draw his attention.

“Can I buy you another?” He asked as I slowly turned to meet his gaze. He did have a set of gorgeous green eyes, I had to admit that.

“No, you don’t have to do that,” and I flashed him a shy grin.

“Oh no, I want to. My name’s Richard by the way, call me Ricky.” He turned to call the tender over to order my drink.

“Well, thanks Ricky” I said as the bartender sat another glass of whiskey before me. Flashing a more confident smile than before I looked back at him. “My name is Layla.”

Ricky was a real estate broker. Sure he was. He thought he was a professional at sweet talking too. He’d gotten up to go to the rest room a few times and each time he did I poured my shot out under the bar. There were things spilled everywhere already, so no one was the wiser. After he’d had a couple more, he leaned over to me and looked me in in the eyes, very confident “So you want to get out of here Layla?” He flashed a grin and I figured for tonight he would do. He fit the category of sleazy.

“Sure,” I said, and he leaned very close and gave me a light kiss.
“My friend drives a cab. Just let me get these drinks and find his number and we’ll get a free ride.”

“Alright,” I smiled at him, and laughed inside. Right, he was a real estate broker that was best buds with a cabby. Sounded like a lie, and a bad joke. As Ricky cleared out his pockets, I adjusted my neckline. A few minutes later we stepped out the door and Ricky and I hurried into the cab. Soon we were at his apartment. As soon as I entered I knew he had definitely lied about his career. The walls were drab with torn wallpaper, there was rust around the sink, and the smell of left over pizza filled every corner.

Tonight was more difficult than the others. He was more difficult. He reminded me so very much of Joseph...his cunning smile and slick attitude. When I began to act shyer than he’d expected, he took me back to the night I lost my life.

Ricky came up behind me and rested his hands on my shoulders. He lifted one arm slightly and began to caress the right side of my neck.

“Come on now Layla, don’t be shy sweetheart. We both know what we want here.”

His lips drew closer and I could feel his hot breath, wet in my ear. I tensed as I remembered what Joseph had said to me. I began to feel uneasy as Ricky’s voice faded into another that I hadn’t heard aloud in decades.
“What did you honestly think was going to happen? I met you on the street late at night. You agreed to drinks, and I talked you into coming to my apartment for even more drinks...” his voice was still clear after decades.

Ricky’s sudden movement brought me back and I realized he was speaking.

“Hello? Layla? I said do you want a shot of tequila?”

The charm...the wistful days of charm, the days of courting, romance, and wooing were over. I longed for champagne as the tequila sat in front of me. Glamour has been reduced to a fifty cent, plastic, hot pink shot glass filled with cheap tequila at two in the morning. 100 years ago I was drinking from possibly the most expensive glass I’d ever seen.

“More champagne?” Every word that fell from Joseph’s lips was more like a croon. I couldn’t help but to be drawn in, finding myself almost considering things I would never have conceived possible. Still, I was getting nervous with Joseph. The fun of the danger was fading and I was beginning to feel the fear.

Ricky rested his hands back on my shoulders, and he began to slide the straps of my dress away from me, I could hear his voice fading into Joseph’s whisper in my ear.

“A looker like you doesn’t come around often sugar. To be honest, I’m usually smoother about things. However, you, you have been pretty strong against
my...talents. I can see this won’t be easy, but you should know I always get what I want. I can feel the change in your body though. You’re fearing something is wrong, very wrong, with me and with this situation and you know what doll? You couldn’t be more right.” Joseph’s arm slid around to my throat and he applied just enough pressure to make me light headed. “You’re going to die tonight.” How could he sound so seductive, even when saying those words? My muscles rigid, I was too frozen to move as he whipped me around and before I knew what was happening I was pinned against a wall. He moved so quickly and against his strength I had no defenses. I’m not sure how long it took, but it felt like hours as his icy skin rubbed itself against mine. With every thrust of his hips I felt nauseated. When he finished he threw his head back and it was then I finally saw two canine teeth sharp as steel and as shiny as glass.

“What in God’s name are you?! Please, please don’t! You’ve gotten what you want now, just please let me go....” His head cocked to the side, one side of his mouth turned into a crooked smile and he let go of my neck. I fell to the floor, broken, bruised and ashamed. I pleaded with him again, trying to fight back tears but losing. He simply chuckled as he readjusted his wardrobe.

“Sweetheart, obviously you’ve heard of a vampire before.” I nodded my head yes, though not knowing for sure why I was even answering him. Nothing would matter at this point. As he lunged forward and pulled me back onto the wall I could
see the bloodlust in his eyes. I used my mind and my heart to say goodbye to my mother and sister, too afraid to speak their names in front of him.

With a movement so quick his head seemed to vanish, his lips were at my neck. He planted a soft kiss and then all that followed was pain. My blood had turned into fire, the flames licking every inch of me. Waking the next day, in an alleyway to the distinct smell of mayonnaise, chicken, and onions in the dumpster to my left, I was alone and I was newly immortal.

A mere thirty seconds of Ricky kissing my neck had felt like a lifetime as I remembered Joseph. His similarities to the evil vampire that had taken away my soul set my veins on fire all over again. Ricky’s lips moved back to my ear and he whispered, “I think you know what time it is Layla. Maybe you should rethink going home with strangers.” He had the same scary sparkle in his eyes and that same crooked smile. I turned to face him more clearly, and rested my hand on his cheek.

“I have a question for you first, dear.” My hand slid to his neck and I gripped hard standing him up and pushing him over to an adjacent wall. He was willing to follow my lead, believing he was in store for some rough foreplay. I slammed his body to the wall with the strength of ten grown men. His eyes widened and I wondered if I’d looked that hopeless the night Joseph got to me. I smiled wide exposing my canines. I wanted to see the fear in his face, to feel it. Tears welled up and spilled over his bottom eyelids. I put my mouth to his ear...
"You know, there’s usually another step in this, but you remind me so very much of another certain immortal that it’s revolting. Don’t worry though. I won’t damn you to this life. Not because I have pity of course, but because there doesn’t need to be another one out there like Joseph. No, I’ll drain your veins dry and then leave your body to rot.” There was one sharp inhale, followed by gasps and a blood soaked two hundred dollar dress.

My feelings about that night were so much different than the one’s I’d had before. It fell in so nicely with the unease I’d had in my heart since I’d left the bar with Ricky. For the first time I felt actual remorse. I shouldn’t. This man was no different than Joseph. Though he wouldn’t have made me immortal, his intentions were just the same. He would have raped me; taken what he wanted…drugged me if he’d had to. He would have dropped me off somewhere to sleep it off and awaken wondering what had happened the night before. I would be alone and lost. I would be disheveled and an emotional wreck. Still, that didn’t sound too different than the way I felt leaving. Ricky bared so many traits that reminded me of Joseph that I felt as if I was back in that night. In my mind it was suddenly nineteen forty six, and I was human again. I’d forgotten what it was like to feel afraid, and to feel like a victim. Being here with Ricky had somehow let those memories flood my mind, and I couldn’t help but to feel like a piece of shit.

Ricky’s bloodless body lay at the edge of the wall, as blue as a still born baby, but for once I wasn’t satisfied with my revenge. I gathered my things, and to make
sure no annoying, continuous noise alerted the neighbors (or pissed them off) I unplugged the alarm clock and phone, and turned off his cell. I locked the front door and made my way out the window and down the fire escape with no one the wiser.

My walk home was short, and I made sure to keep my coat closed to hide the blood and make it at least look as if I were chilly in the night air as I strolled the five blocks. It’s the only way you’ll make it, you’ve got to blend. Arriving, I went into my building, up the stairs and into 6B. It was my own little box apart from the rest of the world; my own box that I paid someone else a grand a month to occupy. It’s really more like a pet carrier. I kicked off my Jimmy Choo’s right inside the door, and plopped down on the chez lounge in the corner next to the window. My mind was still nagging at me; for the first time I was repulsed by myself.

You always hear horror stories of the big cities. Rapists, thugs, thieves, murderers, shootings, robberies; I finally realized that I was the monster. All this time I’d been fighting to get back who I was, and the only way I knew how was to do to others what Joseph had done to me.

I looked around my cubicle of a home. There were red walls and a gothic collection of Victorian furniture, lace, and candle sticks. Poe lined my book shelves, and over the past five years I had gained a respect of Marilyn Manson. All of it was a facade. I was some Goth girl, sex kitten, mysterious, lady of the night wannabe. Ricky had brought back the feelings I’d had the night I’d died. I felt the fear and the pain and for a moment I remembered what it had been like to be human. My killing
had not ridded the world of anything. It had only fueled the fire. Such a monster
didn’t belong in this world. My days of wreaking havoc on the city’s predators were
over. I’d gone about fixing the problem the wrong way for decades. It was time to kill
the monster.

I kept a supply of things in my hall closet in a locked box for extreme
circumstances with unsuspecting prey. Most were easy to make a victim, but some
fought harder than others. I nearly ran to the closet and paused with my hand on the
door knob. I wanted so badly to cry, but nothing would come. The most overbearing
sadness in the world means nothing when even your tear ducts aren’t human.

I flung open the door and entered the combination on the trunk. I felt sick at
the sight of rope, knives and duct tape and reached for the small gas can in the corner.
Sometimes you have to destroy your evidence. I was evidence, evidence of a life that
should have never existed. I grabbed a box of matches and I walked slowly into my
bedroom. The same meaningless lie of a décor filled every room.

As I sat on my bed that I never slept in, I saw a crinkle of dried blood on my
leg. Everything had gotten too messy. All I’d ever wanted was to love someone and
to have them love me back. Nothing used to make me happier than children, but now
I detest them because I know I’ll never be able to have that family. I want to see the
good in the world but there just isn’t one. I just want to go back to that beach with my
sister and stay THERE forever instead of in this dark den of an apartment. I want to
have never been abused and raped, to never have been made immortal. As a human,
as a vampire, no one has loved me. No one would ever know that I’m a vampire that can’t cry but I want to every day.

Unsteady and shaking, I stood. I glanced out at the city through my bedroom window. I’d always focused on the horrors here. Since I’d been living this existence I’d forgotten about the thriving life in this place. It really never sleeps; neon signs flashing and cabs on hand twenty four hours a day. Maybe the good really had always outweighed the bad; I was just too jaded to see it. Monsters, things like me, they just didn’t belong.

I turned and soaked the bed in the gasoline and then poured the remaining fuel over myself. It was the only way besides the sun and I couldn’t bear to wait the two hours till morning. I lay down, appreciating the soft pillows for the first time. I struck the match and as my body began to burn it didn’t seem as bad as the burning from the bite that had taken my life. It should have been. It should have been worse. It was the only thing I could see that I deserved.