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A Collection of Suitable for Publication Short Stories

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Rhett Milner
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Abstract

The start of this creative project came about as a challenge for myself to both polish and refine pieces of short fiction I've worked on during my time at the University of Nebraska at Omaha while also becoming involved in the deeper world of publication and literary magazines. The form of short fiction I sought to delve into was a contemporary branch of literary realism, often in the style and footsteps of Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, James Baldwin, and many others. The next step I took was searching for literary magazines in which my work could be published. Literary magazines are either print or digital collections of short stories meant for connecting readers and writers without the need for the publishing of a collection. The decisions that go into which short stories are submitted to which magazines are multi-faceted and were discussed with my mentor. Finally, each of the short stories I selected needed revisions, some major, and some relatively superficial. I had to circle back, time and time again, to my motivation for why a short story is written one way and what sort of audience I intended to reach with it.

Literary Realism in Short Fiction

Short fiction in the context of literary realism originates, according to some, with the French novelist Honoré de Balzac's novels and short stories (Ramos). The genre is characterized by being focused on mundane people in normal lifestyles with a hidden complexity and an allegiance to everyday life. They are often description heavy, character-focused, and less

concerned with symbolism, allegory, or other sweeping literary elements akin to Romanticism so much as they are with the description of the everyday. The genre traveled from France throughout the rest of Europe and the United States and influenced prolific writers from Flaubert, Dickens, Eliot, Joyce, and Tolstoy to Hemingway, Steinbeck, Twain, and Crane (Ramos). The genre continues through its subsets and branches in modern and contemporary short fiction in writers such as Raymond Carver, Richard Ford, James Baldwin, Flannery O'Connor, Joyce Carol Oates, and Tobias Wolff, especially what's coined as "dirty realism," which focuses on blue-collar life, coarse language, and characters with inferior morals compared to typical protagonists in literature.

Short fiction, on the other hand, was created in its modern form, some believe, in 1827 with "The Two Drivers" (Boyd). Short fiction sought to convey a story in as little time as possible, combining deep character change with a sparse word count and what would later be considered minimalist language. The goal of the short story, unlike the novel, is to tell one complete narrative arc without using more than 10,000 words on average. Short fiction and literary realism proved from the beginning to pair extremely well together, as the sparseness of short fiction allowed the focus of detail in literary realism to have a stronger punch. In a similar way to realism divorcing itself from long-winded romanticism, the short story divorced itself from the rambling, multi-faceted novel.

My interest in literary realism and short fiction originated originally from a desire to write genre-heavy novels. My starting point originated from a place of intrigue, with the supernatural, technological impossible, or the utterly fantastical hooking my attention and focus. However, as I grew during my time at the Writer's Workshop, I began to understand that if I were to embark on such tremendous projects, I'd be hopeless if I did not have intriguing

characters with a plot catered to their motivations, weaknesses, and personalities. Slowly but surely, I began to see that the characters I created were by far the most interesting elements in the pieces of short fiction I wrote, and eventually I began to write literary realism to satisfy my ability and interest. My skill as a writer was able to grow with short fiction because by controlling a narrative on a smaller scale, I began to understand how to control a narrative altogether. I also found that the things I found most interesting about life and other people translated the best into literary short fiction. Therefore, a focus on character within a realistic setting and commonplace plot served as a catalyst for improving my skills as a writer. Not to mention, what makes a short story, or any piece of literature, interesting or dire is language. If the language is used properly and with the right intentions, no matter how ordinary the material might be, it'll be no less entertaining than a sweeping epic.

Literary Magazines

Literary magazines are important in the world of fiction writing in a number of ways. Perhaps most importantly, literary magazines are able to connect readers to writers with relatively low cost on both ends of the arrangement. This way, readers are able to find authors they might enjoy without financial issue, and writers can find a place for their work without querying agents or publishing larger works. They also “bring together art and aesthetic, and create a sense of community for writers of all backgrounds” (*The Publishing Post*). For my own personal goals, landing at least one of my stories into a literary magazine is a clear next step following all I've learned in the writers workshop and in the time period after I've received my BFA in Creative Writing.

Literary magazines, though having increased substantially in numbers in recent years, have actually been around for centuries, with “*Nouvelles de la république des lettres* in 1684 to the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802” (*The Publishing Post*). However, as technology and the internet have allowed the world to become more connected, so too is the community of writers, allowing magazines to exist entirely online without needing a traditional printing press to create and distribute content. This being the case, specific measures need to be enacted to ensure that a publication a short story is being sent to is both credible and worthy of the time and investment. Firstly, if a publication is connected to a university, it’s a good sign. University-affiliated magazines are not only reliable but also prestigious, as they operate with a community of writers in a deeper sense than other publications can. Of the thirty magazines selected to have stories sent to, some of the university-affiliated publications include *Broad River Review* (Gardner-Webb University), *Pennsylvania English* (University of Pennsylvania), and *Cumberland River Review* (Trevecca Nazarene University).

Other ways of determining the legitimacy and credibility of literary magazines is by relying on the online community of websites in the world of publishing. Plenty of authors, editors, and websites routinely post rankings of literary magazines based on merit and prestige. Another website, *Poets&Writers*, has a list of over 1200 literary magazines that are both legitimate and credible. It should be noted, that though the number of literary magazines is quite high, generally only about 1% of submissions received during a reading period get published. However, once five or six stories have been published, it’s a good indicator that if I were to send a collection of stories to a publishing house, there would be a good chance of it making it to publication. So, naturally, publishing as many short stories as I can is the natural next step. With

the aid of a group of readers, along with Professor Clouther, I made a number of changes to each of the selected short stories.

Alaskan Lights

“Alaskan Lights” is a story wherein a young man and his wife are invited by the husband’s more successful former roommate to a dinner party in the midst of the man’s dissatisfaction with life and his apathy for his wife. The narrator is Tyler, the husband, and the conflict of the story is his desire to be freed of his unhappy marriage without betraying the woman he once loved as a best friend. The themes of the story revolve around commitment, envy, comparison, and success, both financial and relational. By the end, Tyler recommits to his wife’s happiness in an intimate but non-sexual consummation.

The story originated as a quick piece of a married couple walking home after an awkward dinner party, starting at the end of the story. I formulated a beginning, developed the characters, built up the settings, and added several characters by the time I worked on it with a class in the context of the Writers’ Workshop. In the story at that time, Tyler transgresses by gawking at the other female guests at the party during a swimming scene, which upsets Brenda, his wife. Through his understanding of how he’s made his partner feel, he’s distraught and asks for forgiveness. They embrace in reconciliation, which is where the story ends.

Responding to the feedback given by the group, I understood the story was missing crucial pieces of information, Tyler was lacking action as a protagonist, and the voice wasn’t strong enough. Upon revision, I specified the professions of the characters and made sure to establish that Tyler doesn’t have nearly as good a job as Brent, his former roommate. I also

added information about Tyler and Brenda as a couple, like how dating started for them. I placed the burden and initiation of reconciliation onto Tyler so that he'd have more action as a protagonist and showed the distance between him at the start of the novel and at the end. I did my best to strengthen the voice but felt limited in some certain way. I thought it was because of my lack of experience in a marriage but later found the restriction loosened when I switched the tense of the story to present-tense, a change I found to be invaluable. It was in this kind of state (but before I made the switch to present-tense) that I submitted it to Professor Clouter and received his further advice.

The main issue with the piece seemed to be coming from Tyler's motivation. As my mentor stated, marriage conflicts are familiar, and the burden is on me to make it unique. Brenda, also, doesn't seem to have much wrong with her in terms of what Tyler is telling us. This led to a number of issues. Firstly, Tyler showing apathy toward a rather genial character isn't going to win him any sympathy points with the audience, and the way the story is built, Tyler needs sympathy because he ends up in a sympathetic place, yet, as it stands, Tyler still seems like a jerk and not enough happens in terms of realization. The second issue is that Tyler's motives seem unclear and so do his problems.

I was given several choices to fix this issue. The most urgent was in developing Brenda, and by the advice of my mentor, allowing her to call out Tyler in a way that matches what the audience ought to be thinking. Another necessary change was in making Tyler's transgression more dire, as at the moment, his gawking seemed too trivial to upset a wife of four years. Therefore, I used his sadness and misery to prompt a talk with his wife in which the dissatisfaction of his marriage could come into the light. Once in a workshop, I heard it said that this story was not so much about marriage as it was about discontentment. I tried to hold on

faithfully to that reading. A final criticism was that what the story needed was a really good scene. To meet this, I added a prolonged discussion between Tyler and Brenda discussing the party but still had an element of disconnection between the two.

At the moment, it still isn't where I want it to be perfectly. Tyler could still use growth, and the conflict could still be more pronounced. Nevertheless, I still planned on sending it out to *The Puritan*, *Broad River Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Pennsylvania English*, and *Cumberland River Review*.

Green Like River Rocks

“Green Like River Rocks” is the story of Ellen, a middle-aged woman who finds that her former lover from thirty years ago was recently killed. She decides to attend the funeral. Inspired by a story my mother told me, I began writing the first drafts of this piece in first-person with a focus on the voice of the narrator. As Ellen makes her way to Pasadena for the funeral, she reminisces on the time she spent with Larry, her past boyfriend, and contemplates what life might have been like if she hadn't chosen to leave him, while also picking at the forces in her life that made her feel that the decision was necessary. The themes I focused on were memory, grief, and maturity. The piece ends when Ellen spots Larry's son, who has his same eye color and realizes a piece of Larry will go on in, what she considers, to be the best possible way.

Relatively speaking, the first draft was strong in language but lacking in conflict. Some readers felt confused as to whether or not Ellen was still in love with Larry, and neither I nor the draft could give a clear answer. I also hadn't done enough work in showing why Ellen left Larry in the first place, or the grounds for which she made the choice. And the biggest question still remained unanswered: why was she going to the funeral in the first place?

I decided I wanted Ellen's favor and affection toward Larry to be platonic and not romantic for a number of reasons. Attraction toward a dead lover after thirty years struck me as uncomfortably melodramatic and unrealistic. However, she still needed a strong enough reason for her visit to be believable, so I decided to give her selfish motivations. If a past boyfriend died early, there would be a sinister understanding that the right choice had been made all along, which was the core of what I first found intriguing within the story. There is also a moment in which Ellen meets Larry's widow, and they share a moment of understanding. Upon revision, I found the conversation too sentimental and instead vied for the widow to have no idea who Ellen was. All in all, I wanted Ellen to be both disappointed and consoled in ways she or the audience wouldn't have been expecting. Her wrestling with her motivations for going served as a solution, both to understanding her character more and in establishing internal conflict. It was in this state that I showed it to Professor Clouther, and we discussed its merits and shortcomings.

The primary issue was the fact that though Ellen was middle-aged, she was surprised and naive about Larry's passing and in her own internal thoughts. I was fortunate to have my mentor point this out, as I was trying to inhabit the interior of a person of a very different age, and the story was suffering because of this disconnect. The fix was relatively easy. I simply moved the story back twenty years, where Ellen and Larry were in their mid-thirties. This change allowed a lot of growth. For instance, not only was Ellen's reaction more believable, but it also expanded on the tragedy of the situation. Larry's death was more untimely, and the deep sadness it caused provided a more sensible reason for Ellen to attend the funeral.

Like "Alaskan Lights," this story is in first-person present tense. Both stories were written nearly concurrently, and they have similar merits and failings. Both pieces have a strong voice, but their characters remain vague, and it was difficult to implement believable conflict

into the situations I had grown attached to. I do think this piece is more ready than “Alaskan Lights,” though the voice in that one has become stronger. I was still more than willing to send it to the following publications: *Bennington Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Labyrinth*, *Baltimore Review*, and *Black Fox Literary Magazine*.

Brad Dunning, Former Starting Center

“Brad Dunning, Former Starting Center” began as an imitation exercise I wrote in the Fall of 2019 and is actually the earliest of these selected short stories. It follows Brad one year after his senior year in high school, where he got arrested on a DUI and lost his athletics scholarship to the state university. The story involves him growing in relationships both with an older friend who got stuck in the same scenario and with a girl one year younger, currently finishing her senior year while being committed to the same university Brad lost his opportunity to go to. It’s first-person past-tense and, unlike the earlier two, takes place not in one day but over the course of several weeks. The themes I focused on were shame, both in a personal context and in a community, along with friendship and contentment in life.

Of all the selected stories, I found the characters of this story to be some of the easiest to inhabit and the most interesting, despite the mundane circumstances in which they interact. Brad as a protagonist has experienced a fall from grace, going from a highly respected athlete to a normal person believing he’s been ostracized from his community. When Sidney, the current senior on her way to a college career, comes into his life, his desire to have a close friendship with someone from a cherished part of his life wrestles with his embarrassment and bruised ego. His older friend, Derrick, pushes him in the direction of living his life at present, but Brad is more concerned with shutting down his feelings and moving on from what he considers to be the

worst part of his life. All three characters had good foundations by the time I was finished with my first draft, but more had to be done to develop them. Sidney's motivation for spending time with Brad seemed mysterious and unclear, along with Derrick's drive to be Brad's mentor. Brad himself seemed to be overreacting to his situation, and his angst and frustrations could have been explored more.

Fixing Sidney in the text wasn't terribly difficult. Seeing as this story wasn't from her point of view, the obscuring of her motives wasn't a bad thing. But I had to know for myself for certain, even if I didn't put it in the text. A certain flaw of mine as a writer is my comfort in not knowing important things about my characters, especially on motivations. While I'm not charged with needing to know everything, motivations are a deal-breaker, and in order for the character to be real, I have to have a clear understanding of what moves them even if, and especially if, they don't know themselves. However, I wanted Sidney to have self-awareness because her maturity was important to the piece. Her motivation comes from affection and intrigue. Here was Brad who, after having fallen off the wire, still had a kind heart; indeed, his heart might have become more kind. The romantic ambiguity between the two was delightful to my first audience, so I decided to keep it, even unto my most recent draft, and romantic intrigue, though realistic, felt shallow for Sidney. Her character was attracted to his character, which I tried to implement more in the rewrites.

Derrick, his friend, had a different issue. His mentoring seemed out of nowhere, and while it was comforting to see a character care for another seemingly without strings attached, I couldn't buy it. Therefore, Derrick's motivation toward helping Brad came from a place of loneliness and in using Brad as a proxy for his own success, giving him depth and complexity. I tried to show this with Derrick pushing Brad toward a deeper friendship with Sidney, not quite

because he believes it would be the best for Brad, though it would be, but because it is something he himself would want and do. This causes a rift between the two characters that doesn't necessarily heal. In fact, the narrative leaves Derrick three quarters of the way through. This is about the state of the story at the time I sent it to Professor Clouther.

The story suffered from two major issues. The first was the story abandoning Derrick. While I found it to be realistic, Professor Clouther pointed out that Brad leaving him showed him in an unsympathetic light and like Tyler from "Alaskan Lights," Brad needs to end in a place of sympathy. The solution was to have Derrick move away on his own accord, giving him much needed agency within the story and allowing Brad to have a deeper dark night of the soul, which was largely missing from the original drafts of the story. The second issue was that Brad's fall felt over emphasized. No one was hurt as a result of his actions. Therefore, the ostracization implied in the text seemed out of place. In revision, I decided to place less weight on rejection from his town community and more on the self-loathing that would naturally come if an individual found that the future they were hoping for slipped away because of the irresponsible choices that they had made. The communal rejection, which I still felt was important, became focused on Brad's imagination of how Sidney felt about him. In a story where I didn't want to add more characters to fix the issues I saw, it was an invitation to give more complexity and depth to the existing characters. Therefore, when Brad finds that Sidney in fact accepts him despite his broken past, he's able to be self-actualized and sees past his wounded ego. With these changes, I sent it to the following publications: *Waxwing*, *Something Involving a Mailbox*, *Orca*, *Fourteen Hills*, and *Ruminate*.

However Far We Fall

“However Far We Fall” is a story about two brothers, one lost and one trying to win him back. The narrative intersects between several different years as the brothers are teens and into adulthood. When his older brother becomes addicted to opioids, Chris is forced to become the successful son for his parents, but as his life progresses, he finds that he can’t have peace knowing his brother is suffering in a life that can’t end well for him. I was inspired somewhat by the story of the prodigal son but with an important twist. What if the older brother who did everything right is the next one to run from home, and it’s the younger brother that acts as the arm of the father in reaching out and calling him back home? I was also inspired by a striking image a friend told me once of an older cousin picking up a younger cousin and carrying him through the woods to safety during a tornado. I figured that just as people are given wounds in life that keep them from doing the good things they wish to do, couldn’t there also be positive experiences in one’s life that lay the groundwork of character and keep people from doing the wrong thing even if it’s much easier. The themes of the story follow this train of thought, family, love, and persistence to reach those we care about.

As someone who doesn’t have much experience with siblings, writing these characters in realistic and meaningful ways proved to be a challenge. This story also didn’t have the advantage of spending several years in my headspace, as I only began writing it at the start of this year, so it’s certainly one of the weaker selected stories. The relationship between Chris and James was jarring and awkward. The plot needed to advance through their dialogue, making their

conversations seem forced and predetermined. Without much revision apart from the first draft, I sent it in to Professor Clouther, and we discussed the next steps of the draft.

A primary issue with the draft came from my experimentation with slips in time. Jumping throughout the years felt arbitrary, and the story lacked a greater design that would have benefitted it greatly. Professor Clouther advised me to read “Runaway” by Alice Munro to study and analyze the jumping in time in that story and see what could translate well to my own creative project. Another issue was in James and Chris’s relationship, as was discussed earlier. While the two would benefit from more realistic dialogue, the point was made, which I agree with, that James is himself a mystery to the story, and his mystery is so cloudy that he becomes random in his personality, which doesn’t sit well with audiences of any medium. My mentor told me that once a reader finds that anything can happen, they lose interest, so I had to build James’s choices and character from the basic bottom floor into a believable and interesting character. His addiction to opioids, though enough to warrant a “prodigal son” narrative, didn’t seem to fit with the elongated period of life it needed to. Something deeper had to be the root, which we agreed was in James rejecting the “inheritance” of his parents and rejecting the world in which they wanted him to inhabit. Therefore, addiction became less of the conflict and left room for his alternative lifestyle to cause the necessary division. For help in this, my mentor recommended “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin to analyze, which I had read before but in a much different context. What James needs is a solid ethos behind his alternative lifestyle, which is also able to warrant Chris to try to bring him back with the audience’s support. I’m still trying to straighten out the wrinkles of this ethos, but I find a lot of inspiration in the beat lifestyle of the fifties, in which people were encouraged to be irresponsible, pleasure-seeking, and unhealthy in their habits. I also tried to make an effort in rewriting to show the cyclical nature of James’s addiction,

allowing the habit to last a long time, which is twelve years give or take in the timeline of the story.

There's still a lot of work that needs to be done with this story. While I am encouraged both by the reach I'm attempting and by the encouragement of my mentor, it's not in a place I would be confident in sending it out to magazines. Therefore, the publications I have selected to send this story out to have later dates to accommodate a longer editing period: *Florida's Author and Publisher Association General Submissions*, *Variant Literature*, *Up North Lit*, *Reservoir Road Literary Review*, and *Marathon Literary Review*.

A Winter Story

"A Winter Story" is perhaps the second oldest story of those selected and unfortunately is perhaps the weakest of the bunch. It follows Karl and Isabel, a young couple who are wrestling with maintaining intimacy due to distance. The story takes place over one night where Karl, back from his life in Pittsburgh, spends the evening with Isabel, whose growing frustrations only increase when she sees his indifference and begins to suspect he has lost his love for her. Karl's occupation in Pittsburgh keeps him there, but it's a city he loves, and his involvement with the nightlife there through a jazz band increases the distance between him and her as she's committed to staying in Salisbury for several more years due to her nursing scholarship. The first draft struggled from a lack of conflict, and the characters needed more depth and development. The relationship wasn't unique enough, and in order for the story to become successful, the audience had to have a clear grasp on what exactly their relationship is and why it's ultimately doomed. The themes I wrote with regards to this story were apathy, melancholy, and the death of a relationship.

In response to feedback, I spent more time detailing how the couple met and let the subtext of the dialogue do more work. One major change is that in the first draft, the couple ends up reconnecting, but as time went on, I found that the story would actually be better off if the relationship failed that night, which is why the short story is taking place during that specific time. While it doesn't showcase my best writing, and while there is still plenty of character work that still needs to be done, I actually find Isabel to be one of my more interesting protagonists. While her uniqueness didn't come out in the text, I kept wondering why this woman showed so much compassion and mercy in the midst of her frustrations, and I wondered if this kindness of hers was actually a vice and I wanted to explore what it was costing her emotionally and mentally. I find it true in reality that people often swallow their own needs to meet the needs of others under the guise of altruism, but internally, they're exchanging care for attention they desperately want. Isabel's frustrations take on new meaning, and Karl can win some sympathy with the audience, if Isabel's character arc isn't necessarily ending a bad relationship, but putting to death a toxic trait of herself. Allowing the couple to break up gave me the freedom to see this play out. It also opened the door for another interesting theme to get rooted in, this theme being that when a relationship ends, there's usually a time of numbness, wherein the emotional weight of the loss hasn't quite hit. I was profoundly interested in Isabel dealing with this and trying to prolong this limbo space of emotion so that she could still treat the guest in her house with the respect and dignity she believes all people are capable of. The thought and exploration of this theme was half-formed when I turned a draft in to Professor Clouther, where we discussed it.

In agreement, we decided this piece wasn't where it needed to be. He suggested I put it on ice for a while, to which I fully agreed. For starters, I haven't decided on a title for the piece. "A Winter Story" is a proxy which I'm not a fan of. The story takes place in winter, and the

setting plays a role in the story, but it reminds me too much of *A Winter's Tale*. When I turned a draft in to Professor Clouter, the title was “Snowflakes,” which matched with the winter theme but as he pointed out, also refers to a derogatory term given to liberals by conservatives, making it a politically charged title that doesn't come close to belonging with the rest of the story.

Another issue with the story is that while I started the story with the relationship failing, ending the story with the relationship ending failed to provide the story with a crucial element. Quoted by my mentor, Flannery O'Connor once said “Short stories should feel both inevitable and surprising.” The doom of the relationship felt inevitable, but there wasn't much surprise. Furthermore, the characters didn't seem to have changed. The ways I wished to fix this in the story involved a pretty massive overhaul of the plot. Most of the story takes place before they break it off. However, because of the falling snow, both characters decide it would be best for Karl to spend the night, despite the awkwardness. What I believe works best for the story is having the break up happen toward the beginning of the events, while the majority explores Isabel sharing her roof with a now recent ex and trying to lengthen that period of emotional numbness. This new plot gives way to a unique relational circumstance, which is what I'm particularly interested in in this selection of stories. There was still a lot to work on, like in “However Far We Fall,” though it was certainly not as much to handle, and the magazines I've chosen to send this piece to are *Stonecast Review*, *The Forge*, *Redrock Review*, *Common Ground Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*.

Bullet

“Bullet” is the story of Woods, a former summer camp counselor attending a reunion after four long years of college only to be met with the incredible changes that his old friends

have undergone, the possibility of rekindling an old flame, and the choice before him to live the rest of his life in a dangerous new way. The writing of this story was a deeply personal matter to me. More so than any of the other protagonists mentioned earlier, Woods is the narrator that reminds me the most of myself. He has undergone similar stages of life and similar disappointments, frustrations, and melancholic catharses. While all of the other five stories are compact in their character rosters, I decided to try something new and integrated a wide cast of unique persons, both to see if I could handle it well, and also because I found that their presence would serve the story well. It takes place within half a day, yet is filled with Woods reminiscing about his time at college and his time at camp, where he interacted with all the friends he's catching up with. It's my longest of the selected stories, which provides a unique challenge of maintaining high quality throughout nearly 6,000 words and also finding a literary magazine that would be willing to publish it. Because of spacing, shorter stories often do better, and longer stories need to compensate for their length. The themes I wanted to focus on were nostalgia, disappointment, and the fear of being a failure in one's mid twenties.

"Bullet" was my last story to work on in the context of a workshop, and the consensus surrounding the piece was important. The piece had strong language and voice, and the conflict was present, though not as clear as it could have been. The existential drama Woods finds himself in is surrounded by the idea that he's missed out on some glorious parts of life. A number of the characters have made it, so to speak, while more of the characters feel a sense of dread. With everyone being in their mid-twenties, with Woods and his romantic interest, Kris, being slightly younger, I felt that the sense of young adult dread was interesting and realistic enough to work with as one of the story's core tenets. The class was somewhat divided, as they found the mid-twenties region to not be so heavy with existential dread. There was also a push

for Woods's life in Washington, where he went to college, to be expanded on, so that his depressive outlook could have some grounding in information readily available to the audience. Not everyone enjoyed the wide cast, but I decided to keep the characters at the expense of needing to put in more work on each character's unique role without overcrowding the plot. I continued to expand on Woods and his relationships with characters from both his college past and his camp past. Like "Alaskan Lights" and "Green Like River Rocks," I wrote "Bullet" in first-person present-tense. I found that as the events of the night unfolded, the audience could be better connected with Woods and his thoughts if they knew that he was also experiencing all of this for the first time. It was in this state that I sent it in to Professor Clouther for discussion.

This discussion was perhaps the most encouraging of all the stories. To my mentor, the prose was strong, the voice was dynamic, and the feeling of largeness was something I handled well. While he isn't a believer in going to writing school to "find one's voice," this story seemed to be me coming into my own. The draft, however, still had its share of issues that needed addressing. One of the lesser pressing issues was that the plot felt thin. Not much happens, and as nice as the reflections can be, much of it falls victim to overwriting. The solution was that Woods had to make a choice, one with the possibility of both big gain and big loss. He needs a moment wherein he can take ownership of his future.

This challenge both excited and terrified me. My first reaction came from a suggestion given by my mentor that he has plane tickets in his car, and he invites Kris to come with him to San Francisco, or something along those lines. I also took comfort in the idea that if you've written a solid first half, the second half will come about in a natural way. With these things in mind, I made this trip Woods embarks on as the last step before leaving his home state to venture west. In him is a desire both to see the Rocky Mountains and the Grand Canyon all in one go. He

has the motels booked and everything planned, but his excitement is hindered by loneliness. His solution comes at the end when he invites Kris to come with him, expecting her to say no and hoping that her ultimate and final rejection will allow him to cut ties with his past and start fresh. However, she says yes. And as the two get into the car, he realizes the person sitting next to him is completely different from his idea of her, and that this new Kris is much better than the image of her set up in his head. The publications I've chosen to send this story to are as follows: *Free Spirit*, *THAT Literary Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, *The Northridge Review*, and *Black Lawrence Press*.

Conclusion

Starting this thesis, I had high hopes that it would serve as an effective and efficient punctuation for my time at UNO's Writers Workshop. Before my time here, I had a sparse understanding of literary short fiction with regards to realism. Now, I'm hoping to begin to make contributions to the genre, both through understanding what literary magazines, and the larger world of publishing, are looking for with regards to literary short stories, and also in finding my own unique perspective and utterance on the mundane but magical moments of life.

Furthermore, I have always had a desire to rework the stories I had submitted in semester past, but understood that when it came to workshops, it's crucial to get as many first drafts written as possible since the deadline and promise of a readership has no small positive effect on the creative process, leaving many of my drafts to collect dust on my hard drive. So, when the opportunity came to rework and publish in the form of satisfying an Honors Capstone, I jumped at the opportunity. In retrospect, I could have reworked half of the number of stories and still had a significant challenge since the management of six stories over the course of one semester was a lot to wrestle with, especially with my other classes. However, the mentorship provided by

Professor Clouther proved invaluable. Not only did I come to a fuller understanding of six of my favored short stories, but I was also given incredible advice and resources in my understanding of publication, both in literary magazines and in the hopefully near future where I can begin to publish a collection. On top of all of this, my mentor also provided me with sound perspectives when it came to applying for an MFA program. While I didn't get into any of the five I applied for this year, I have high hopes for the coming years in which I'll try again, formed by both the resources my mentor provided me with and the adjustments I've been encouraged to make to my pieces of short fiction so that they might find a place in the print and online world of literary magazines.

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