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This document contains two texts. First one is the Round 1 Finished Work Entry on the theme of “Opposites”. Second one was done on the day of the in-person final 8th June 2024, as a Freewrite/First Draft activity, associated with an Emotion.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

discovering voices

First Text: Round 1 Entry

Purgatory

When I woke up my head was pounding so badly that I immediately curled up into a fetal position, hoping to shield myself from the loud noises that consumed the room. It took me a few moments to realize that the sounds were actually coming from within. I stood violently, holding the sides of my head with both hands, my face scrunched up tightly.

After what felt like an eternity, silence took over. For the first time I was at ease enough to take notice of my surroundings. The room I had woken up in was unlike anything I'd encountered before. There were no windows and no doors, which made me wonder how I'd managed to end up here in the first place. Everything was the same color. A white so bright and intense that it was difficult to discern the dimensions of the room. The walls blended seamlessly into the ceiling, giving the impression that the room was round. Upon closer inspection I realized that wasn't the case, but the white was starting to hurt my eyes so I shut them close and sat down once again.

I could tell I was drifting off to sleep, but I didn't care enough to stay awake. There was no way out of here, so I thought I might as well rest while I was at it. All the previous stress had left me more exhausted than I'd originally realized.

The second time I woke up a gentle hand was shaking me lightly. I blinked a couple of times before standing up cautiously. The creature before me was humanoid, but with just enough odd features that calling it a human felt wrong. Its eyes were completely void of any color, although describing them as black would not be accurate. With its longer-than-normal fingers, it pointed towards a chair. I understood this as a request for me to sit down, so I complied.

We were now inside my father's office. A place I'd visited on very limited occasions.

“I don’t wish to be rude, but is there a possibility you could perhaps explain to me what is going on?” I inquired, afraid of offending the creature. The being stared at me for a second, its gaze so penetrating that it made me shy away in discomfort.

I fidgeted with the hems of my sweater while I waited for the creature to give me a response.

“You are here to be judged.” I stayed quiet, expecting it to keep talking, but no more words were uttered by it. It seemed like the being thought it had given me every answer with that single sentence.

“Judged? I’m afraid I don’t understand. Last I remember my sister and I were on our way to visit our parents. Everything else is a blur.”

“You never made it to your destination. Something happened on your way there and now you’re both here, being judged.”

I thought back at the moments prior to the white room and my father’s office. I remembered being in my sister’s car. We were on our way to my mother’s birthday, an event my sister had refused to attend in the beginning. During the ride we’d gotten into an argument that had resulted in her getting distracted and taking her eyes off the road long enough for us to hit a pedestrian. The impact caused the car to swerve right into the curb.

“We died, right?” I asked.

“Yes.” The creature replied as it laid a big white binder on the desk.

“And where am I now?” The question left my lips having come out way bolder than I’d intended. I laid my head down and sank my nails deep into my palm.

The creature didn't seem to take notice of this, replying as if I'd asked the most normal question in the world.

"A transient place where I'll make a decision about your future. You were previously brought into what we call 'The Gathering Room.' There we compiled information about who you were during your lifetime and we will now use that data to decide how to proceed ."

"The white room," I thought to myself. "So, if it's okay to ask, you will now be choosing whether I go to heaven or hell?" I asked.

The creature pondered for a minute.

"Yes, something like that. It is more complex than what your kind can understand, but it is easier if you envision it that way." After answering me the being went silent for a very long time. I thought it rude to interrupt it while it scanned over the archives of my life. When it looked like it had come to a conclusion, it stopped and looked at me, the same penetrating stare I'd gotten to know earlier.

"I'm going to tell you something that humans can never seem to understand. If you get upset and lose your temper, I'll stop offering you the courtesy of explaining what is to happen from now on and will simply send you off."

I nodded in agreement, knowing I'd never dare to act in any way the creature might deem rude.

"When we gave humanity free will to live their lives however they may choose to, we knew this would affect how we judged them in the afterlife. Your place of rest is determined by how you perceive good and evil rather than by how society would classify you. If you thought that what

you did while living was good, then we judge you based on that. On the contrary, if you thought that you were causing harm, then the verdict we come to will be determined by that."

I thought about the information I had received, knowing this meant that very bad people would get to live in eternal rest if they never regretted what they did.

"Every single choice you made was done with the feeling that you were doing it for the wrong reasons. The volunteering work you did made you feel like you were doing it to make yourself look better. The favors you did for others left you wondering if you were doing them so in the future those people would owe you something."

I knew what was coming, so I calmly stood from my seat and waited to be escorted out.

Upon my standing, the creature stopped talking. I supposed it had understood that I knew very well what it was trying to tell me.

"Someone will be here shortly to take you."

Suddenly, a thought popped into my mind. I thought back to my sister, my polar opposite. The one who cheated on every boyfriend she got and spent her weekends drinking away while I rescued stray animals. The woman who had refused to visit our mother on her birthday even though she hadn't seen our parents in months.

"My sister?" I asked, turning around one last time.

"You already know the answer," the creature replied.

I felt at peace, knowing she would spend eternity in the bliss of paradise. I'd never wished but the best for her. It only seemed right that after living such different lives we would be enjoying such different versions of the afterlife.

Second Text: Free Write / First Draft 8th June 2024

"LURKING IN BROAD DAYLIGHT"

(Fear)

This was the outcome I had predicted before foolishly deciding to leave my home. I had hoped that the darkness of the night would offer me its protection, however, there was still enough light that he dared to follow me. I hadn't wandered far, I walked with a steady pace towards the closest market I could find, trying to make it back before he even noticed I'd left my apartment. Nonetheless, I quickly realised that the man was right behind me. I took a few turns, trying to lose him, but when I turned so did he. Changing directions was also fruitless, it always was.

I made my way into an alleyway and sprinted towards my house, not looking back to check if he was still there. Some of my supplies fell onto the ground, but I paid them no attention, I had only one objective in mind and my determination drowned down everything around me.

Once the building was in sight, I allowed myself a quick glance behind my shoulder to confirm what I already knew. I climbed up three flights of stairs, knowing that taking the elevator would be a very stupid move. I didn't want to risk getting trapped in an enclosed space with that man.

With the key to my apartment in hand, I ran down the hallway and unlocked the door in record time. Only after locking myself inside did I let myself breathe a sigh of relief.

My eyes scanned over the room, making sure everything was exactly as I'd left it. The windows were taped with duct tape, although you couldn't see it because heavy curtains were hung over them. I had mirrors placed in every corner, so I could always look behind my back.

I grabbed the towel I kept near the entry and used it to cover the hole between the front door and the floor. It took me a few seconds to get used to the complete void of light I liked to live in, but with a few blinks things were back to normal.

The groceries that had survived my jog were still inside the plastic bag the cashier had put them in, so I made it into the kitchen and began putting them away.

I had no recollections of a life without the man that followed me. For as long as I'd walked this world, so had he. He hadn't been able to catch me yet, because I had always managed to outrun him, but he had never failed to try.

Early on, I discovered he only materialised during the day, which is what led me to believe he was afraid of the dark. Ever since my discovery I had tried to leave my home less and less.

After the last encounter with the man, I lived in peace inside the comfort of my apartment. My days were dull, I did not watch television or have any contact with the outside world. I mostly just sat in the dark, knowing this was the only way to keep him away. I continued to live this way until one event changed it all.

I was putting more duct tape over the windows when I heard a knock on the door.

I freezed, trying to stay as still as possible. The person on the other end knocked again, so I carefully tiptoed towards the entrance.

Another knock.

And another, until a voice called my name. My palms were sweating and my hands were trembling. I did not recognize the voice. Instinctively, I reached for the gun I kept hidden away on the desk next to the door. Looking through the peephole I was met with a face I had never

seen before. There, I could see a man dressed in all black, a large coat covered most of his figure. The knocks grew louder and he kept chanting my name over and over again. The sweating had spread all over my body and the pounding of my heart did not allow me to think clearly. My mind shut off and I only regained consciousness when I opened my eyes and saw the pool of crimson that emanated from the head of the man I had just shot. I looked to my surroundings, checking if he was who I thought he was. There, standing next to the body was my stalker, rejoicing on the fact that he had driven me to take an innocent life. I shut the door immediately and went to hide under the bed. I didn't notice the sound of the sirens coming from outside or the knocking on my door until there were policemen inside my home pointing their guns at me.

I complied and let them take me, knowing that there was no safer place to be right now than inside a police station. The images of the incident never left my mind. The contrast between the red of the blood and the grey of the carpet was something I could not shake away.

My trial was short, I pleaded guilty and accepted all charges. The more I thought about spending the rest of my days locked up in prison, the more appealing the idea became. I knew I wasn't a monster, but that man had turned me into one. The guards mumbled a few instructions before leaving me inside my cell, some explanation as to why I had been placed in solitude. Frankly, I zoned off for most of the explanation, focusing on the light post right outside my window. When I turned, the guards had already left. I screamed for hours, so much that sound stopped coming out from my throat. As nighttime grew closer, I got confirmation of my worst fear.

I could feel him before I saw him, a presence I had become an expert at recognizing. I tried to ignore him, begging whoever was out there to take me to another cell.

I could hear their laughter, but no one came to my aid.

"That nutcase is afraid of his own shadow," I heard a guard tell another while they passed right by me, ignoring my pleads.