

Ask the Doctor, He Might Know!

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**Abstract**

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This is the culmination of my own creation, a piece that represents what it means for me to be a writer, and what it means to be a person living, and dying in the world.

# Ask the Doctor, He Might Know!

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## **Section One: Seamus**

**One:**

Centered in an otherwise empty room lays a body. Without movement, the being appears to be that of a naked man.

Seamus currently resides in the dark with small portions of light making their way in through a back window.

A hole in the left-hand wall breaks for an entrance.

Upon arriving, Guy notices the body and walks toward it, stopping, then staring.

His head tilts, and his eyes shift. He looks to the nonexistent audience, then to the body, then back at the audience. He leaves his gaze to rest on the body.

Out of his pocket he pulls a phone, takes a photograph. The flash lights up the darkened space.

Away flies the memory as he shuts the phone.

Moving his eyes back to the audience, he smiles and exits out a hole in the right-hand wall.

The body stays put.

## **Two:**

The hospital rooms have usual white walls, white floors, with dark blue bedsheets to offset happiness.

Mom sits and lays, unmoving with hands crossed. The bed's ability to move halted by brakes.

Mom leans up and pulls from her pillowcase a wall-mounted clock. She reads the numbers, follows the hands.

She finalizes reading and hurls the clock.

Toward the ground it goes, meeting face down, bouncing, then shattering the glass. Numbers now completely obscured.

Outside, Dad sits with book in hand. Stains cover the pages. In the single chair he waits, no pages turn.

His eyes lift to the sounds in the room, but he does not stir. His eyes shift, falling back on the book. Still, no pages turn.

No one checks on her, and no one bothers him to check.

### Three:

At the doctor's office *he* sits, alone. Mom had other errands to run.

Form after form *he* fills out *his* information, skipping that which *he* doesn't know. Kindergarten has yet to teach *him his* insurance information.

As *he* waits, a group walks by carrying a body. Each person holds an end as the body flails, deceased but moving.

*His* eyes follow the distraction and move back to work.

Across *his* vision again runs a woman holding a baby. She keeps it near, checking behind her as she goes. *He* looks once more.

Finally, a woman walks by with a yellow umbrella kept open. She closes it, then drops it to the floor. Bubbly laughter fills the space as she begins to stomp her feet.

She continues walking, leaving the umbrella behind. *He* doesn't raise *his* head to notice.

*He* finishes the forms and gives them back to the lady that greeted *him*.

*He* waits.

#### **Four:**

*He* steps inside a now empty house.

The front door was pried open with a bent pitchfork and a window to the door's right shattered.

*He* walks further in to assess the damage.

Curtains are pulled off rods, clothes thrown about indiscriminately.

Swarming the fridge are 19 or so guinea pigs searching for something to eat. On door handles, beeswax prepares for a sticky interaction.

Further in *he* looks.

On the floor, an orchid plant is smashed. The pieces of a vase now in corners and a note that was attached no longer is. Dirt covers the grey carpeted floor with large footprints forcing the stain deep.

*He* stands at the beginning of *his* home, contemplating, and waiting for someone to pick *him* up.

### **Five:**

A coffee shop full of people beginning their mid-afternoon is left with an open table. To either side sit two chairs, designed for conversation or inquisition.

Two cups of coffee rest on the table, neither flavor distinguishable from the other.

From the left, Guy enters with a smile. *He* enters from the right, matching the smile. Toward each other they step with eyes locked.

Reaching out, hands meet one another, shaking with light grips. Their respective smiles grow.

Joseph walks behind them, squeezing his body past and bumping into the table as he does so. The coffees lean to either side, then slip, then fall.

The contents spill out and begin dripping, filling the chairs with liquid.

The two step to the table and sit. Coffee stains their clothing, but their eyes don't move from each other.

They stay for a while, not talking.

Staring and smiling. Eventually, they leave together to start their night.

## Six:

The room is blank except for a painting of Guy and Seamus together on the back wall. Nothing more occupies the space but scuffs on floors from wooden legs.

There is a slight buzzing in the air. Every other space is filled with silence.

Through a door enters Guy, then Seamus. Each look to shout, but don't. Instead, arms flail and fists curl.

From the floor Guy takes a cup and throws it *his* direction. It smashes. Seamus takes one too, throws it. It too smashes.

Ceramic meets hardwood but leaves no dents.

*He* throws the last cup which smashes. The broken pieces spread.

Guy throws his arms in the air, dismissing the disgust. He leaves through an entrance without any more commotion.

*He* shakes *his* head, walks toward the backwall, and leaps from the high place through the crashing panes.

Pieces spread.

## **Section Two: Angela / Evangeline**

## One:

Under two sets of sheets on a bed sleeps an unmoving person. Above *her* head rests *her* left arm, *her* right arm to the side. The window is open and a blade missing from the now still ceiling fan.

Morning light punctures through the grated window screen.

A pair of eyes peer over the windowsill's edge. Liam's vision pierces into the bedroom and he notices the body. He shimmies out a box cutter and begins slicing.

The slits penetrate the screen and cut out a small circular hole. He rips at the sides and it becomes larger. He shoves his body through.

*She* still lays in place as he rips back the sheets and notices the fan blade at *her* feet.

He shrugs.

Grabbing for a cellphone, he calls a number. Then calls another line, an emergency vehicle will arrive.

He turns to the window and closes it, locking the upper lock. He begins walking through the front door, leaving it open and nodding toward the unknown audience to follow.

## Two:

Mom sits in bed holding the child while Dad stands by and stares intently with a smile. Gentle faces meet a new face.

Tears of happiness fall from their eyes, splashing on their new child's forehead.

The baby's name comes to their tongues, ripped from a book full of them. One that seems perfectly fitting for a girl like *her*.

Behind a curtain the nurse curses. They pay her no mind. She scribbles and scratches at the birth certificate, writing nothing close to the chosen name.

Evangeline, good enough.

The couple continue to smile as family members trickle in.

Balloons bang and beat against the doorways, echoing as they enter. Cakes and cupcakes are brought and split amongst the passersby.

Crumbs fall to the floor, crushed and ignored.

### Three:

To zoos and museums, the family travels, looking at the wonders with quiet consideration.

Mom's passion is mixed with Dad's enthusiasm for all things new. *Her* interest builds as *she* feels the need for more knowledge.

Book after book *she* rips at the pages, pulling out all that is interesting and forgetting the mundane. Fiction doesn't pull *her* like it did before.

*She* spends *her* days wanting to know more and more. *Her* aspirations soar to new heights, all that *she* wanted before is now doubled with the opportunity to become someone important:

A bull rider? A plant herder? A mail woman in a distant and unknown land?

*She* can become anything *she* wants to be, helped by attending a private middle school.

*Her* teachers push *her* forward, helping *her* to learn all that *she* pleases.

Nothing will slow *her* down, so long as *she* doesn't let it.

#### **Four:**

Employment anywhere suits *her* well, something front facing requiring self-determination:

Waitress at Russel's Diner and Grill.

Snow trickles on a cold midwestern afternoon and flakes cover the diner windows. A family enters, the bell ringing to let staff know they've arrived.

Inside they walk, dressed in speedos and one-piece bathing suits.

They ask for directions to the lake, explaining that they were meant to go last summer, but time got away from them and they were hoping to go now. Their floaties squished on the counter as they leaned in close for the answer.

*She* goes through the instructions, but they won't accept the answer, pushing back and assuming it was West, not East.

A moment passes and *she* accepts *her* "mistake," allowing them to travel wherever they wanted to go.

### **Five:**

On a campus *she* doesn't belong to, in a library *she* hadn't been to before, *she* gathers books for reading.

A man sits, legs crossed, a book open and a mug of tea on the table next to him. His eyes move back and forth along the page.

*She* smiles at him, but he doesn't notice.

He pulls out the tea bag and places it in his jacket pocket. As he does so, he looks up and smiles at *her*.

*She* notices.

They talk for hours as the lights begin to shut off and windows barred. Other goers are chased around in a large-scale hide and seek, while they stay seated and unbothered.

With light gone and darkness covering their conversations they maintain the chatter. Into the night they discuss their connections, their likes and dislikes.

He walks *her* home when the night is finally done. *She* thanks Andy for his time before leaving.

## Six:

*Her* and Andy adventure together to museums and zoos, to bookstores and family gatherings. Separating only for the brief times there is no choice.

He kisses *her* good morning, turns on the fireplace, and leaves for a weekend trip, promising to bring *her* a gift from a few states away.

*She* sits and waits for weekend's end, no call, no show.

In bed *she* waits, longer and longer as days pass, those then becoming weeks. A fire breaks out in the living room, an alarm set off. The brigade enters, puts it out and leaves a note for *her* when *she* finally rises.

He makes no return, but *she* doesn't stir from *her* place.

In the darkness, the ceiling fan rattles. A single blade has come loose. *She* moves only to remove it from its place and place it somewhere safe.

The waiting never ceases.

Slowly, *her* head begins to tire, and drifts toward a pile of plush pillows. *She* lays down to sleep for a short time.

Eyes shut as fresh air now blows through the open window.

## **Section Three: Emma**

**One:**

A red-doored barn looms tall among rolling hills.  
Inside is quiet, except the slight roar of twenty-six  
chickens clucking.

*Her* hands rest, palms open, lying face down in a pile  
of yellowing hay.

The smell radiates.

Emma's body shifts without any attempt to, the body  
nestling deeper and deeper.

Chickens continue pecking, roosters bark.

Continued silence outside as the barndoor remains  
unopened. Chickens begin digging a hole into the  
ground.

They hold tiny shovels between their claws, making  
for an exit.

*She* cannot stop them, the body does nothing but  
shift.

Finally, *she* finds a place to rest.

Silence fills the now mostly empty barn.

## Two:

A midwife helps to lend a hand. She takes care of the process and the baby when *she*'s born. Wrapped in a small pink blanket, warmed, and beginning to cry.

Mom and Dad stay in bed, waiting for *her* to be brought back. The family dog sits and waits for the new companion.

The midwife cleans *her* toes, getting in between each digit. A softened toothbrush is used to scrub away what doesn't need to be there anymore.

She comes back and presents the child, now wrapped in a new pink blanket. With her walks a priest, dressed for vacation. Cargo shorts and a short-sleeve white button-down. He still wears the clerical around his neck.

Mom and Dad accept *her* gratefully, showing *her* off to the dog.

The priest does his final tasks, blessing the new baby with a few droplets of liquid from his soda bottle. He nods his head and exits.

They give *her* love and affection, making sure *she* knows that *she* is to be special.

### **Three:**

A weekend trip and getaway into the city, housed by *her* Aunt and Uncle. The downtown is nothing like *her* rural living.

They make a stop at a local ice cream shop meant to be the best in the city.

Upon entering, they are greeted to a slew of flavors they had never seen before. Among them are choices of kidney bean and horseradish, said to be sweet and savory.

The ice cream scooper suggests their stomachs might not be up for the challenge.

A few healthy living humans come barging in, holding large sticks in their hands. They shout at the employee to shell out all their raw produce.

Into bags they place the vegetables to be taken back and kept for themselves.

They run out of the building and the employee turns back to the family, who have yet to complete their order.

Each get a small cup of kale and shrimp ice cream and leave the area immediately.

#### Four:

Tending to each customer, *she* scans the products and places them in one of the few bags without holes.

Into the store a couple of hipsters walk, each dressed up and ready for their outing. One has a cane but no limp and another has an eyepatch under a pair of glasses.

They come through *her* line when ready.

Their baskets contain little but kombucha and vitamins, and they speak about planning to vacation forever into the future.

An inviting sound, with a less than inviting attitude.

*She* asks if *she* can join, but they scoff at *her*. All of them look *her* up and down, shrugging as they do so.

Out of the tallest woman's pocket she takes a stack of index cards. Atop them it suggests these be "rejection-based" business cards.

With a nod each, they exit without paying.

*She* doesn't notice as *she* reads the card which tells *her* plainly that *she* is not hip enough to be a hipster, a thought *she* had hoped never to ponder.

### **Five:**

At the family home, a few government men approach, hands in their pockets. A leaflet dangles from one of their shoulder-saddled briefcases.

They hand over the pamphlet that reads about crop swapping, an exchange of produce for another.

Long winters and harsh summers give life to the idea.

Dad looks to Emma, *she* nods. He shakes on it, and the men come back with their vehicles. They hand out small seed packets and a few bottles of water to each person.

Instructions explain the process: throw the seeds onto dirt, pour a dribble of water, and wait.

Down from a hill their neighbor rides on his tractor, yelling from his seat.

He drives through and smacks their hands, sending seeds and water flying. His protest of swapping comes through loud as a boombox speaker blasts the noise over long distances.

The men show back up and escort him away.

His tractor is left in the middle of their field, halting any progress of farming.

## Six:

Late at night *she* enters the barn and prepares for feeding. The only light is by a small candle in *her* right hand, wax beginning to drip.

The feed is stored high on a shelf, so *she* grabs the ladder and places it for climbing.

A strong footing on shifting hay.

As *she* reaches, *she* feels the gaze of chickens looking up at *her*.

*She* turns to smile at them, and feels the ladder move from beneath *her*. It wobbles for a moment before finally giving out.

*She* feels *herself* falling toward the ground, unable to catch *herself*. As *she* hits, *she* loses breath, but feels the chickens gather around *her*.

There *she* stays, maintaining no movement.

The hay holds for a time, letting *her* rest upon the top without weight.

**Section Four: Charles**

**One:**

Puffs of thin-grey exhaust exits the car's tailpipe. The engine rumbles, and headlights make their way through thick fog.

The passenger-side window rattles with a knock, then another.

Helen cups her hands to the window and looks through. There is no movement coming, no chance of startling *him*.

*His* hands remain at *his* sides.

Helen rattles again, this time at the front of the car.

She tugs at the front bumper, pulling hard and removing it from its place. Next, she removes the engine, then the steering wheel.

Now with full access she stares at *him*, *his* body stays fully upright.

She shakes her head at the sight of things and reaches for *his* hands. She places them one over the other on *his* lap and closes *his* eyelids.

Finally, she leans to *him*, kisses *his* forehead, and walks away on foot. A proper final goodbye.

*He* remains to be found again.

## Two:

In her arms she holds *him*, eyes meeting between Mom and child.

No separation can come between the two with handcuffs around each wrist keeping them together.

Through a doorway walks a male nurse who attempts to grab at *him*, wanting to take *him* somewhere. He insists on care. Mom pushes him away by his face.

Another man comes to tug at *his* feet, but she bats away his hand. Again, care is their primary objective.

They suggest doing tests on the boy, but she doesn't care, nothing can be wrong in her mind. Cradling *him*, she tells of love and forgiveness for whatever else might come.

The boy still stares, unable to agree or disagree.

Unlocking the cuffs, they claim *him* away in the name of safety. Tests will be run to get a sense of *his* ability to live.

Now, alone she sits, waiting for results and her son.

### Three:

At a birthday party for a boy *his* age, six-year-olds run about, screaming and playing. *He* joins them for an hour or so.

When the dust settles, everyone comes in for cake and ice cream.

Hungry children take slices without mercy. No sharing, no one giving up a piece for another person in want.

*He* receives nothing. No slice of cake, no dollop of ice cream.

Among broken tables and bent chairs now lay a pile of full children, plates and forks and napkins strewn about the ground. Each in a food coma of their own doing.

As *he* sits on a bench looking at the group, a young girl sits next to *him*. Helen sets down a plate with a half-slice of cake and a small bit of vanilla ice cream.

Two plastic forks rest.

They split the piece and share conversation as the other children finally begin to stir.

They won't join the others again.

#### Four:

At an early hour Mom brings *him* news, a death in the family, her own brother.

*He* listens, but without care, as *he* holds in *his* hands the newly deceased goldfish. Johansson was *his* first pet, *his* only, and nothing can be more important to *him*.

Mom understands and calls everyone over. Neighbors begin huddling around the room, waiting for their chance to mourn the beloved animal.

Reporters and journalists pour into the room, holding microphones to mouths.

The fish says nothing, but *he* praises its companionship, all that it had done in its life. Imaginary, but no one cares to decipher this.

Hours pass as people begin to finally leave, each signing a booklet of hope and prayers.

In a box the fish stays, waiting for burial.

No one attended *his* uncle's funeral. Everyone forgot as they mourned Johansson, and no one sends a card anyway.

Mom and son wait for the priest to finally arrive.

### **Five:**

Life in the Community College dorms breeds boredom, but in that *he* finds friends. People with time to spare and lives to live.

A night out doesn't come too rarely, but *he* takes every chance to enjoy a break from procrastination.

Down the road, they see a white Ford Focus full of dames. Lights flash and inviting waves are offered.

The driver pulls up to a red light and puts the car in park, stepping out, followed by the rest of the occupants.

*He*, too, gets out and smiles toward the Ford.

A six-seater with eight occupants, two must get out. *He* offers, and so does another.

The Ford takes off while their original vehicle rests still at the stoplight. A man comes with a rope and ties it around the front bumper. Pulling, he tugs away their ride home.

They walk, making conversation until they reach the dorms.

*Him* and Helen walk up the steps and separate.

**Six:**

The office closes for the day as the 5 o'clock alarm sounds, ringing in the ears of those still stuck inside.

*He* leaves, briefcase and phone in hand.

Helen picks up and thanks *him* for the notice, about twenty minutes away without too much traffic.

*He* hangs up the phone and turns on the ignition, twisting the light's switch and removing the emergency break.

Bright green lights flood *his* vision forward.

*He* squints, but it doesn't help *him* to see. A projector whirls loud enough to be heard from inside. Images appear on the side of *his* work, made to be ten to fifteen feet tall and wide.

The images show foods: pizza and chips, take-out from last Thursday, pasta Helen is cooking for dinner.

*He* stares intently, recognizing each familiar dish.

In *his* moment to think, *he* finds *himself* daydreaming too hard.

The car sits, idling for hours.

## **Section Five: Jane**

**One:**

Jane sits, back still resting against the dinning chair.  
*Her* head is flat to the table, narrowly avoiding the  
plates before *her*.

From the back room *her* wife enters carrying the  
roast chicken and sides.

No blood and no tears, only a yelp.

Plates crumble from their fall to the floor. Across the  
ground, dinner lands facedown.

From the corner a small robot vacuum sucks away  
the food.

Anne thanks the bot, then screams once more.

The robot leaves.

She yanks the tablecloth away, the wine tumbles and  
splatters against the walls. Red wine drips.

She waves off the robot.

*Her* body stays, so she lays the tablecloth overtop.  
She exits the room, planning to come back when she  
can to deal with the outcome.

## Two:

Born to a single mother unable to take care of *her*, *she* is adopted out immediately, picked up by an elderly couple looking to finalize their family.

They hold *her* in their arms, feeding *her* spoonfuls of baby formula before they leave for home.

Into the car they buckle *her*, having purchased a car seat the day prior. Strapped to the bench seat in back, another two around *her*, and finally the seatbelt crossing the entire seat.

The journey is a few hours long, daunting with a new child in the back.

Arriving at the first red light, a pedestrian waits to cross. The numbers count down until they hit two, then they begin walking across to the car.

The light turns green, but Mom tells him to wait.

The pedestrian walks to their window and hands them a small sheet of paper with an A+ printed on the top. They passed the hospital's safety test.

The light stays green as a car behind them pays no attention and slams into their rear at 30 miles an hour.

The car seat stays put.

### Three:

The first inning begins with a short beratement from the opposing team. Dad doesn't mind and encourages *her* not to either.

He took up coaching mid-season, prepared to inject an amount of fun into a too rigidly structured game.

The home team is up to bat first. Play after play, it becomes obvious the other team is cheating.

Rubber bats bend at the handle, unable to hit a single ball into the outfield. The ball itself disintegrates on impact, made from papier mâché.

*She* gets to the plate and prepares for the play.

A ball thrown in and a soft bunt from *her* bent bat sends the ball rolling gently towards the left of infield.

With a single step onto the dirt *she* falls face first, looking down at *her* shoe which did not come with *her*. Gum had replaced spiked cleats.

*She* complains, but he shrugs off the facts. Dad reminds *her* it's a game, and not to let them or *her* take it too seriously.

They lose 19 to 0 in a forfeited match in the 4<sup>th</sup> inning.

#### **Four:**

*Her* parents sit in their seats, Dad in his chair and Mom across the couch. The radio plays in the background.

They look up at *her* as *she* prepares to speak.

*She* finally is ready to come out to them, to explain to them who *she* really is.

Dad nods his head and smiles at *her*. Mom waits to respond, taking in the information. She cannot fathom the truth.

She goes to the refrigerator and pulls out a few days-old milkshake, hoping to cool herself off. She becomes heated easily by distressing news.

Both provide *her* with a hug after an hour of listening.

Their responses vary, but love is conveyed no matter the topic. The future is now changed between them all.

The doorbell rings and mom grabs the pizza, reminding the driver that he was too late and the pizza was now free.

With Mom gone, *she* thanks Dad and Dad smiles at *her*.

**Five:**

*She* sits at the counter of a bar downtown called Royal. A gin and tonic sits before *her*, barely sipped.

A woman taps *her* shoulder and offers a better drink.

Gratefully, *she* accepts.

Two cranberry vodkas sit on the counter, mostly drunk and another on the way.

They chat for hours and share numbers with one another. Her apartment isn't far, so they go for a bit more drinking and chat.

On arrival, a plate of cheese and meat waits for them, put together by the neighbor. He waves to them through the passthrough.

He is all too eager for her to finally meet her match.

They take what is provided with a thanks and he shuts the passthrough between apartments.

The night lapses, then another. *She* never leaves, and Anne doesn't mind.

Only a few weeks pass before *she* moves in.

**Six:**

Forty years of marriage looms behind them.

Anniversary nights used to require more work, but years later they only require a nice dinner and a bouquet of someone's favorite flowers.

Home from the store, Jane brings in a set of tulips, Anne's favorite.

In the kitchen she cooks, roast chicken, potatoes, and a side of anchovies. The timer goes off, and she rushes to the fridge, grabbing out of it a set of steaming soup dumplings.

Steam radiates from them, so she throws them away.

She hears the door and turns to see Jane behind her, smiling.

At the table *she* sits and waits for the courses to arrive, all the while chatting through the slight distance between dining room and kitchen.

Jane asks a question, but before hearing the response *her* eyes go dark.

*She* tries to grab a breath, but there isn't one to take.

Eyes shut, and mouth closes, head unsure of which direction it wants to fall.

## **Section Six: Alex**

**One:**

The shower door moves gently back and forth on its hinge. *Their* body lays on the floor, fully dressed in a pair of slacks and a green sweater.

An employee comes to check on the disturbance called in. Finding the body, the employee watches for a moment, taking in the scene and any potential evidence.

*Their* cellphone was in *their* pocket, but short circuited almost immediately upon touching the water. The shock left room for an electrical current to flow through.

The employee leans over the body for the shower's handle. Water stops running.

Pulling a towel from the next stall over, the employee hands it on *their* hook, preparing it for use.

The employee uses their shoe to push the body further into the stall.

Closing the door, they mark the shower as "occupied," leaving *them* to finish before being found again.

## **Two:**

Dad fiddles with his fingers as he waits for Mom to give birth. No one is allowed in the room for fear that the baby might not make it.

A nurse rounds the corner at full sprint.

She stops on her heels and stares at Dad for a moment before smiling and gesturing for him to follow.

Hurriedly, they run to the room and open the door.

In Mom's arms swings a baby, Alex, a family name. They smile to one another, and embrace.

In a box by the window lives a tiny golden pocket watch, the last gift by Dad's dad. A balding nurse reaches for the gift and snatches it up.

Sprinting, he makes it to the door before a maintenance man throws out a leg, sending the crook to the floor.

He hands them the box and congratulates them.

They offer their happiness with an extension of godfathership, retracting it from the boy who gave them bagels earlier in the day.

The maintenance man accepts his newest position.

### Three:

Young kids dress in costumes of ranging colors: titanium white and pink, aqua and phthalo green.

The dance recital is held once a year, a special time for children and parents alike. Concession sells popsicles and dairy free cheese balls for unreasonable prices.

*Their* turn to dance comes, and *they* take the stage with Grace and Elegance.

The end draws nearer, and the crowd is restless

Music begins to fade out and the curtain begins to close as the audience stand, half clapping, half heaping different fruits to the stage.

Vegetables mean bad, so they brought grapes and pineapples, hoping they could give praise without too much on their part.

Fruits splatter across the stage and *they* take a bow, thanking the audience with waving hands.

Dad and Mom clap for *them*.

No more fruits are available to be thrown as the next dancer begins and the hours of endless dancing leads to a slightly hungry crowd.

#### Four:

When October rolls around, high schoolers ask their dates to homecoming. A friend of *theirs* was asked via pepperoni on a pizza, another by a bullhorn in Geometry.

*Their* invitation never arrives.

The day of homecoming comes up and *they* wait, eagerly hoping *they* might offer last-minute admission.

A bus pulls up in front of *their* window.

Out steps another friend, one whose partner isn't in town for the weekend.

They extend an offer, suggesting *they* have to get ready before *they* can attend. *They* accept quickly, not letting a second chance turn *them* away.

On top *they* layer a floral printed button-up under a satin maroon blazer. A black-tie falls from *their* neck.

A pleated skirt covers *their* legs to *their* knees to keep the weather from taking control of *their* evening. A pair of causal sneakers make the outfit less formal and prepare for any rain that might come.

*They're* asked to dance a time or two.

### **Five:**

Cats in apartments with nothing high to sit on grow restless, so *they* go to the lumber stores to buy the materials.

A few pieces of 2x4 and a flat piece of oak for the base.

Mr. Miles comes down isle 5 and greets *them* with a handshake and a smile. He asks what *they're* up to and offers to lend a hand, and some useful equipment. *They* accept the offer.

Down isle 4 *they* hear a commotion as a man swings around a ten-foot-long board, knocking into other pieces of wood.

When he finally swings it too far and knocks over another patron, security comes barreling.

Tackled to the ground he refuses to let go of the board until they tell him it'll be free if he leaves now. A good enough deal for the maniac in the isle.

*They* thank Mr. Miles once more and exchange phone numbers.

*They* leave through the side door, trying not to make eye contact with the man who sits trying to figure out which bottle of soda to buy from the miniature fridge at the checkout.

## Six:

A quick workout and shower cool *them* off. Stress and anxiety build as time ticks down toward the interview.

At *their* locker *they* pull out clothes and get dressed.

Others walk around, but the distinct sound of geese fills the mostly empty room. Through the doorway *they* see a gaggle of them walk by on tiptoes trying to be sneaky.

*They* put on *their* shoes and grab *their* phone and wallet.

Through the door *they* see the tail end of the mother goose who waddles along with her babies.

*They* chase after them, hoping to stop them from getting caught by employees making the rounds. The geese have a route mapped out that leads to the showers.

Water begins running.

*They* enter the room and feel their flats begin to lose traction.

The geese all watch in wonder.

Everyone leaves but *them*, as water still flows.

## **Section Seven: Isabella**

## One:

On a hill of green stays a small blue tent fallen into itself. On the edge of the entrance lies a lump of unmoving mass. Stakes meant to hold the structure in place no longer there.

Half a body outside the tent, half inside, dressed.

Time caught up with Isabella, and *her* body continues to exist alone. Wind chills blow across *her* belongings, they flutter.

Helicopter blades wisp around in circles. The brush beneath *her* flattens with force.

From the craft a woman repels down. Dressed for a cold spell, she approaches the body. Reaching down to touch the no longer living human, she takes out a thermostat and tries her luck.

No luck. Much too cold to tell the internal temp.

The woman grabs at the sides of the tent and begins to fold. Each corner drifts into the next. The body configured to fit perfectly in the middle.

With a string the woman ties up the wrapped self and grabs the rope to the helicopter. She looks outward toward a false onlooker in the stands, shushes them, and is hoisted away.

The body is left behind.

## Two:

Midday birthing brings unique people.

*Her* birth mother has *her* and then leaves off the balcony down a rope made of bedsheets. Someone else must care for the child if she isn't around to do so.

A young couple, two women in search of a child. Ava and Samantha lean down to the child on the bed.

*She* looks up to them and cries.

They wrap *her* in a blanket and take *her* to the front desk. The lady there sees no objection to their taking of *her*.

From behind a curtain the rustling of people and stomping boots drown out whatever it is the lady says.

Their signs read about the price of parking, complaining that \$3 for an hour is insane.

They don't pay any attention, thanking the lady, and taking the baby with them.

The protesters continue as the lady in the room giving birth asks them to please leave. Their response is less than savory and she has the baby surrounded by angry workers and a man with a megaphone.

### Three:

Slide and Tumble Water Park is the latest attraction in town. Boys and girls flock to the scene of their newest summer activity.

*She* waits in line with *her* friend as minutes pass by.

The flag boys hold up the red sign, no one can yet go. Then, they spin it quickly behind their backs, green shows, and kids beginning sliding until spun again.

*Her* turn arrives, but is halted abruptly.

Up the steep stairs climb a few men dressed in business attire. Each of the three wear different colored suits, all finished off with bow ties and cufflinks.

The sign turns green, and the men shoot down the slide. They remain silent, but their hands flail as they go.

At the bottom, each stand, straighten their suits, and walk toward the exit.

Their briefcases are given to them by the attendant as they leave.

Finally, the red turns to green and *she* is allowed to slide. The time goes by slowly as the summer sun bakes the already fading plastic.

**Four:**

*She* hunts for the right set of flowers at a shop down the road from *her* work.

When *she* finds the right ones, *she* rings the bell.

A sharp noise exits the casing and fills the entire store, sending children into a panic and forcing other patrons to cover their ears.

*She* mouths a quick apology.

An attendant appears, a smock and descaling knife in her hand. She shakes her head at the purchase, suggesting that she cannot ring up the flowers.

She leaves, and *she* now stands at a once again empty counter.

The other patrons acknowledge what has to happen, covering their ears and crouching where they stood.

*She* rings the bell again.

An older lady pops up from below the counter dressed in a sleeping cap and gown.

*She* is handed a packet of plant food and a small card that explains the best way to grow petunias. The attendant takes the flowers and throws them in the trashcan to *her* right.

### **Five:**

Twelve old women circle shoppers as they walk with walking sticks and a boombox blaring Casey Kasem's Top 40 hits.

All wear coordinated track suits in order to not lose any members.

The eldest wore red, next wore blue, and the youngest of them, Deloris and June, wore yellow to show their youth, both about 63 at best.

Air purifiers ran throughout the mall, but they wore smog masks just in case any got through.

Their marching caused many patrons to exit.

*She* was reading a message on *her* phone as the ladies walked by, each projecting out their elbows for impact.

*She* ran into each of them and was jostled around as they passed.

When finished, *she* fell to the floor in astonishment, only to have the youngest walker turn around and shush *her*.

*She* gathers herself and continues walking toward the Macy's One Day Sale.

## Six:

A camping trip of one's own sounds much more enticing after news of the latest layoffs at work.

*She* sets a weekend aside in mid-March, colder, but no one else would take *her* space on the campgrounds.

Without thinking, *her* backpack only contains a few tank tops and shorts. The weekends forecast reads backward, suggesting weather with a high of 73.

The cold weekend begins to seem less and less successful.

The food all went cold, and the drinks spoiled. Forks for spaghetti twirling were bent in travel and *she* found herself longing for a bit of comfort.

Nighttime loomed, so *she* hunkered down in *her* tent, hoping for it all to pass by the next morning.

But the weather maintained, and by mid-night *she* found *herself* much too cold to stay in the tent. *She* unzips the sides and lays *her* body half outside, hoping for fresh air to warm *her* up.

The breeze sends *her* back to sleep for the remainder of the night.

Morning sunrise comes and *she* does not stir.

## **Section Eight: Andrew**

### One:

The water surrounding Andrew is still, unmoving and without ripples. *His* head too does not move, leaning back, hair dipping itself.

A distant whistle is heard from the shore, someone unaware of anyone needing help.

Down steps of smooth cobblestone bounds a man dressed head to toe in a dry suit. His snorkel and goggles are strapped to his thigh.

Reaching the unmoving man, he notices belongings which no longer belong to *him*.

An unopened lunchbox.

The man pulls out some food, tossing aside a pudding cup and a week-old banana. Left is only a sandwich, turkey and provolone on rye.

The man sighs, unwrapping the sandwich and taking a few bites before throwing the rest into the dirt.

He gathers himself, pausing to look at the corpse and then outward toward a viewer who does not watch.

The man nods, then walks up the steps.

Andrew and *his* sandwich are left.

## Two:

A passenger train carries a worried Mom and Dad as they attempt to hurry to their destination. Contractions become too short to wait.

They call for a doctor, hoping anywhere someone is available.

Out from behind train cars approach people, each proposing why they should best deliver the baby.

A short woman with a PhD in Genetics suggests her field is most closely related, and a man with a MA in Political Science argues he knows more about the human spirit.

Mom cares not who births the baby, only that they do it successfully.

A few people gather, the man and the woman from before, another woman with a PhD in Aerospace Engineering and a woman who once nursed a baby squirrel back to health.

*He* comes out rather quickly, being pulled and yanked at until finally making *his* exit.

They hand Mom and Dad their child, proposing that it was their phenomenal training which did the job.

Mom and Dad leave the train at the next stop and catch the next home.

### Three:

While Dad is away at the office, Mom needs something to do, so she starts a restaurant for babies aged 9 months and up.

The customers are unruly and rarely know what they want to order.

Mom gets *him* helping, asking that *he* be in charge of making some meals while she cleans around the place. *He* accepts, and she begins to teach *him*.

She has *him* begin with the basics, but homemade baby formula is harder to make than *he* planned on.

Each time *he* drops in a hint of spice, meant to give it a little kick and put them to sleep quicker. Each time, the babies begin crying, throwing their spoons at the ceiling, only some stay stuck.

Parents trickle in and find their children wailing.

They berate Mom, and then turn to *him*, asking for excuses that *he* cannot come up with.

Mom has no choice but to fire *him*, giving *him* no severance package as *he* was never technically to be paid.

*His* resumé takes a hit at the young age of six.

#### Four:

Teenage kids all gather at a house party for no reason but it being the weekend.

*He* attends, but without want, only coming to fit in as best as *he* can. *His* friend offers *him* a mint, telling *him* to take it and relax.

Unknowing ignorance leads to ingesting something not quite made for *him*.

The lights flicker in *his* mind and then begin to turn colors all along the spectrum, some green and some yellow, reflecting off of windows.

People surround *him* and gently lay *him* on the ground.

A woman walks up to *his* laid-out body and leans down on one knee. She shows *him* her hand of tarot cards and offers a reading.

*He* accepts without knowledge of what it all means.

On the floor beside *him* she sets out *his* future, wincing at what she finds. *His* future looks grim, and so she leaves a note for *him* to find in the morning.

When *he* wakes, he finds a note without a single word or warning written in legible handwriting.

## **Five:**

*He* makes time for meeting *his* group mate at the bookstore, taking over a table to do their work.

Laptops lay on tables, untouched, as they chatter on about their days and weeks. *His* life becomes much more interesting when telling it to someone *he* is trying to impress.

At three on the dot, the front doors fly open and a group of people enter, dressed for a crime.

All of them demand copies of new books. Stacks and stacks are brought to them, each taking as many as they can hold.

Out the doors they storm, leaving the store in silence.

A moment later, the doors open gently and a group the same size as the burglars enter. Each hold stacks of new books from a bookstore. They walk to each customer and offer them their copies.

*He* declines any of their novels, but she gladly takes a copy or two, handing over her credit card which they snap a photo of and hand back.

The coffee shop attendant shoos them away, and they exit without a fuss.

*He* continues their conversation where it left of a few minutes before.

## Six:

Out on a lake for a work trip, *he* reads the day's local newspaper. No new crisis to worry about, no unfortunate weather report.

The once gentle waves begin to pick up, but *he* doesn't notice.

*His* coworkers get out of their tubes, gathering for a picnic lunch. They holler to *him*, but *he* doesn't notice nor respond.

An article caught *his* eye, one about *himself* and *his* startup.

Back and forth *his* eyes dart, reading each word carefully. The waves pick up more and begin jolting *his* innertube around.

Down the water *he* begins to slide, the environment shifting around *him*.

The coworkers call to *him*, but their voices are made to be silence. No one can catch *his* eye. They consider *him* a lost cause and go back to their eating.

Until *he* reaches a rock formation the innertube lasts. Jagged edges catch the lining and tear it, stopping it from floating any further.

With a thud the innertube falls into the water, dragging *his* head into the nearest dull rock.

## **Section Nine: Oliver**

**One:**

Warmed concrete creates radiating heat beneath a pair of lounging slippers.

In a reclining chair, Oliver rests, eyes closed and heart no longer beating. Up a pair of steps toward the roof the newspaper boy knocks, then opens a door for roof access only.

He tosses *him* the day's news, stories to entertain and some to concern.

*He* can't pay attention to all that anymore.

Now, without response, the newspaper boy recognizes a lack of life.

He walks to the roof's edge and hollers to a few men below. Moving is their occupation, and someone and something needs to be moved.

Up they come, opening the same door and finding the same man.

They grab the back of the chair and begin pulling *him* toward the edge. Gently, they lower *him* onto a platform for a window cleaner on lunchbreak.

*He* doesn't get the chance to react.

There *he* waits, inconveniencing someone new.

## Two:

Twins to an unknown mother, *he* and *his* brother are dropped off at a convent.

Mother Olivia hears the knock and answers.

Two babies set into a basket and a blank note attached. A pen lay to its side, intended to be used for identification.

She closes the door on the babies, reopens it a bit, smiles and shushes a judging viewer, then closes it again.

Inside, she rushes around to babyproof the place.

Doorways and stairwells covered in barbed wire, while cabinets are nailed shut.

A set of kitchen knives left on the ground are wrapped in grey duct tape until barely visible, then placed back on the floor where they were before.

Finally, she opens the door once more.

The babies still lay there, looking up at Mother Olivia. She accepts them into her arms, leaving the basket out in the cold.

They begin to cry. She looks around for anyone to pawn them off to, but, finding no one, keeps them.

### Three:

Around the convent they run and hide, two little boys not meant to be around during prayer.

Both boys are dressed in habits, fully disguised.

None of the other nuns question their size, nor their place of origin, each accepting that they are there on a trial basis.

When Sister Paulette grabs one boy by the ear, the other scampers away into the night.

They swap places and switch identities on the daily.

Mother Olivia yells for Oliver and *his* brother arrives, then for William and *he* shows *himself*.

Into the special prayer room they go, hurried away from the other nuns. No one knows that they're not meant to be there, and Mother Olivia keeps it that way.

Inside a group of nuns sit, looking at the newly entered group.

Toward their direction the nuns all point, shaking their heads. One nun flips to a page in the bible, then throws it at them.

They dodge and make for an exit.

#### **Four:**

A letter in the mail indicates Oliver's acceptance into university via a basketball scholarship.

Mother Olivia questions *him* on what games *he's* been playing. *He* has never played a game of basketball and made no applications to any schools.

*He* shrugs off the success and accepts the invitation, holding it now in *his* hands.

From behind pillars and couches jump a crowd of people all hollering and throwing confetti into the air.

*He* jumps backwards, then notices a banner which congratulates *him* on *his* success.

From the staircase a few of the nuns begin booing as they walk down. Their thumbs pointed toward the ground.

*He* doesn't pay attention to their misguided hatred and thanks each person individually.

A basketball is given to *him* and *he* smiles.

*He* sets a goal to practice daily, but goals are rarely thoughtfully accomplished.

### **Five:**

After years of not seeing one another, *he* decides to accept *his* brother's invitation.

In a sleazy downtown bar, *his* brother sits facing the doorway. *He* enters and takes the seat in front of him.

From the bar comes a craft beer, *his* least favorite.

Conversation between them lasts only a few minutes before people start a ruckus at the bar.

In the middle of a few tables a group have set up a Slip N' Slide.

Down each go, taking off their shirts then shooting down the range of water, splashing it toward *his* direction.

*His* brother gets up to join them and offers *him* a spot, to which *he* declines.

William takes off his clothes and flies down the track. Splashing water and landing belly first on the dirty floor.

He puts his clothes back on and takes a seat once again across from *him*.

They finish their conversation and part ways.

## Six:

Cellphone service gives *him* only a single bar in *his* apartment, so *he* heads to the roof for better coverage.

*He* has a lot of money on the local horserace.

Up the flights of stairs *he* brings *his* chair to be comfortable in an inconvenient place.

The night sky is full of shooting stars and comets never to be seen again in *his* lifetime. *He* forgets to look.

Bet after bet *he* continues to lose. First hundreds, then thousands. More and more money quickly removes itself from *his* grasp.

At the end of the night *he* is eleven-thousand-dollars poorer, and much less happy than before. *He* throws *his* hands to *his* head.

Debt collectors hear of results and immediately begin beckoning.

Paper letters tied with rocks are thrown through *his* apartment window, but *he* is not there to see them.

Knowing this *he* decides to sleep the night on the rooftop, hoping the yellowing in *his* eyes is temporary.

## **Section Ten: Mary and Philip**

**One:**

In the bed together, Mary and Philip rest, their eyes closed, and hands clasped together.

Machines beep rapidly to let staff know of an error.

No more hearts beat, no more breaths need to be taken.

In walk a few nurses, each dressed head-to-toe in a color of their choosing. The door swings on its hinges behind them.

Quickly, they unplug each machine as the noise of beeping stops.

They take a step back, then a step in, all surrounding the couple, obscuring a viewer's view.

They all begin clapping, echoing throughout the room. Then throughout the theater, the venue. Their eyes shift, then their bodies, now facing an audience who do not exist with them.

Into the room walks the doctor to check on the situation.

The nurses stop their clapping and scamper away.

He stands, observing, then takes note of the time of death and leaves the room.

## Two:

A brief taxi ride away is the hospital, equipped and set up for Mom to give birth.

Contractions have yet to start, so family members break down the door and enter, all bearing gifts of different forms.

Each shows Mom and Dad the gift they have brought for *her*.

Uncle Richard brings an aluminum cheese grater, perfect for cheddar and brie.

Aunt Rachel brings a stapler with a container of paper clips meant to help the child hold onto *her* birth certificate and other valuable information.

Grandma and Grandpa bring a vase with no flowers, not yet sure that everything will run smoothly.

Mom accepts each gift and Dad places them all on the chair next to the bed.

In walks the doctor and out walks everyone else.

A little girl is born, one named Mary Anne. Plenty of nicknames to choose from, Mom and Dad agree.

### Three:

Through the woods and over large bridges and ditches *he* and *his* friends run. Tree branches hit them in the face as they dart through the forest.

Around a corner lies a tree fort not built by anyone they know.

Volunteers are called for, and *he* offers *his* services.

Entering through the door, *he* finds stores of candy bars and gumdrops. Candy wrappers lay strewn about the dirt floor.

Behind a curtain made of leaves and brush *he* hears chatter.

A party of squirrels dance in circles, unwrapping and eating the pieces of candy, throwing aside the wrappers.

The candy store is off to their left.

*He* grabs two handfuls and makes for the exit. Out the hole *he* falls, facedown into a pile of mud.

The boys pick *him* up and they run away.

An hour later *he* sneaks back and returns the goodies *he* stole.

#### Four:

Halfway through World War Two *she* decided to join the USO.

At *her* desk *she* pens them a letter, writing for a time and then scrapping that copy to begin another.

Over and over *she* throws the pages aside.

Ink spills across a page, then onto the desk and onto the carpet. *She* doesn't mind, *she* will clean it later.

Finally, *she* finalizes a draft and signs the envelope, hoping for a timely response. A stamp from Dad's collection will do.

Out to the post office *she* walks.

There, *she* approaches the man tending to the counter and hands him the envelope.

He reads the front, then looks at *her*, then looks back at the envelope. He shakes it, then nods.

He tosses the letter into the outgoing mail and pulls out another letter from behind the counter. This one addressed to *her* from the USO.

An acceptance already arrived.

**Five:**

*She* hustles *her* way around the ballroom, carrying chairs from one side of the room to another.

Only a minute until the men arrive.

*Her* booth is there for men hoping to seek a job after their time in the Armed Forces. A poster is placed to *her* side suggesting the USO are always there to help.

The door opens, and in walks a single soldier dressed for the occasion.

Upon recognizing the emptiness before *him*, *he* attempts to exit, but finds the door locked. *He* commits and walks to the first booth *he* sees.

*They* introduce *themselves*, Philip to Mary, Mary to Philip.

Chatter for a minute ensues before the floodgates are opened and men and women enter, dressed for a fun weekend away from any other thoughts.

Music plays and *he* dances with whomever asks.

The end of the night brings a winding down of people, a carting off of drunks. But *he* approaches *her* at the end and offers *his* hand.

*They* have a dance together after *she* is off shift.

**Six:**

Mary and Philip entered the hospital together days ago, claiming to both have respiratory issues. Not uncommon for *their* ages.

*They* settle into a bed together despite the protest from a cranky nurse.

Under blankets *they* rest and rest.

Nurses come in and change bedsheets beneath *them* and exchange food trays for other food trays.

After a week, *their* movement becomes null.

The machines continue beeping, but begins to blink red and yellow lights.

Nurses rush in and exchange tubes, hoping that to be the solution. They grab more blankets and place them over the couple.

Machines begin beeping rapidly as heartrates tank.

The tall nurse looks to the other with concern, shaking her head unsure of what to do.

The other nurse nods her head:

“Ask the doctor, he might know!”

**the end**

## **Poetics Statement**

This thesis is a **prose-based performance-play about the cyclical nature of life and death**. The curiosity in writing about life stems from my previous poetry about love, where I focused on the connections between people and emotions. Just as some loves live and some die, people do too. These ideas led me into thoughts of birth and death, contemplating the possibility of complete indifference toward individuals, a world in which no one cares about the life being lived. Out of these contemplations came a character that I simply called *him*, conceptualized as a personification of existential sorrow, a sad existence that began without love and ended without care. From there, the project expanded into the exploration of ten lives, each split into six parts, intended to cover significant markers in the lives of these individuals. Importantly, the deaths of the character were created first, to which moments of life were added to provide the context and ask the question of whether to care, or not care, about their individual existences.

I wanted to create a body of writing that I felt was a culmination of my artistic learning and practice. It was an iterative process. My first attempt was a project that planned to revisit earlier research and writing on madness, which was framed between archival documents and recordings from both a doctor and a patient. I then began a set of conceptual exercises designed around an unseen performance of staring, spending 60 minutes with random objects with the hope of connecting more deeply with the mundane and often looked over. Finally, I settled on a project that I felt balanced between narrative and concept, framing an exploration of character and experiences, as well as delving deeper into existential contemplations of absurdity, sadness, and caring. Shifting to a new thesis concept was a stressful thought, but in contemplating what I wanted my first long-term work to be, I decided it needed to represent what I found to be most interesting to create.

This project was generative, revealing deep interests that I had, but was not aware of, like life and death. I began to think deeply about how I would represent these concepts with more intention. Since the original idea for the thesis project had come years prior, it made me think about the curiosities I must have had then, and what those thoughts would look like now. In them, I realized that I wanted to work with

the cyclical nature of humans, how we live and then don't, but all come to accept this as something we put in the back of our minds until it is forced to come to the forefront. In death, comfort is often found with those around us, but most of the time we don't think of all the lives ending within this moment and how similar those experiences might be to our own, whenever that time comes. When putting this into context with life I realized that there is an entire in between that lasts much longer than either birth or death. This is the **middle ground** within which I wanted to create.

I created the conceptual framework for the project based on a work I had written years prior: the story of *him*. Each piece was to begin the same way, someone would die, and from there their life could begin, tracked back all the way to their birth. Originally, I planned to only complete the one life, Seamus (the original *him*), because I thought that digging into the details of this one individual would provide for some interesting writing around what experiences lead to his death. However, I worried that the interest in his life wouldn't hold together for an entire work because by the end each absurd and unique moment would have had a somewhat similar or more important moment that overshadows the others. Instead, I decided to explore the creation of many deaths, all to be in a way unique from the last. In the end, I decided that I needed to find some important moments of each character's life to really emphasize the magnitude of death. These "important moments" are not necessarily the biggest times in a character's life, but rather events which give the character a bit more definition, an experience for the reader to understand more about the life of the characters. When these moments happen, they represent aspects of a life, but in no way encompass all that happens to an individual. Pulling these otherwise mundane moments and showing them upfront meant that everyone has their own life experiences, and therefore a reader is allowed a look into those bits and pieces and put together an understanding of the character's life.

I decided that it would be important to explore some aspects of each life, from the setting to their emotions, because humans are all complex even at their shallowest representation. Picking places for them to exist was important because it put into

context a background of the person's life, shaping how we view an artist in the city from a farmer in the Midwest. When crafting these sections I decided to emphasize the events and actions of characters by removing a lot of other often necessary aspects of storytelling. In removing dialogue and a linear plotline, my crafted characters were no longer easily defined by what they said, but rather by what they did and how they acted. As in the last scene of Seamus' life, a silent argument takes place leading to *his* death, but without words their movements, the strange and violent actions taken provide the context to the severity of the fight. This was able to push forward emotions into the events, providing then an understanding of necessity within the writing, but also within the life itself. When the body begins to sink into the hay in an empty barn, the reader is forced to reckon with the idea that they might not be found for a very long time, and that provides, for me, a moment of contemplation on the tragic ways in which most of these characters die. Then, with this concept, I was able to establish each character, their birth and death, and provide a reason to care, even minimally, about the lives you are reading.

Defining a character, for me, is extremely difficult because I don't have one set definition for what a character might be. Reflecting on my thesis work and the ways the characters in the project take shape, I would suggest that a character is the existence of someone created, a person, an animal, anything that was made for some reason. That doesn't necessarily mean I think they need a purpose, rather, they're made to fit into the writing because in some way the writer needs them to be included. Unlike films or television where extras are those who wander in the backgrounds and are not often important to the overall message of the show, a character in writing was created, therefore they exist with some intention from the creator. As the writer, I created these characters to live their lives, and for them that means completing and participating in whatever it is I have in store for them, whether that be a good life or one filled with sadness. This then to me means that in creating these people, their character is no different than simply the life I have for them to represent. Because of the functions of the text, my characters are fairly one-dimensional and not intended as illustrations of character complexity. They are however analogies for larger existential questions about the ways that context

defines the possibility of living. Without dialogue, without extra bits and pieces that really bring a person into reality, these are characters with something to do, but not much to say about what they're doing.

**The life of *him***, Seamus, was my point of departure for this project, and an anchor point that I used to remember what I wanted absurdity within the events of each life to look like. While predominantly realistic, I tried to build into each event a sense of strangeness, a feeling, at least for me, that everything is looked at not from the same viewpoint as the real world. It is all slightly off-kilter. The writing process was long and frustrating and often I found myself hitting a block and needing to find my footing once again. While the work seems heavily structured, it was this system that was most difficult to create. Crafting the lives of ten characters started to become less and less easy as I came to recognize that I couldn't have repeating scenarios as these are one-offs in a person's life, likely to be somewhat similar to others within, but never quite the same. The formula needed variation. With this idea, I was able to begin making a master list of the lives, or rather the deaths, and began creating via a strict set of criteria from there.

The **process of creation** began with an outline set up specifically into the six sections: how are the characters found dead, how are they born, what is an event from their childhood, what is an important event when older, meeting someone important, and then ultimately how they die. These steps were repeated for each character as a way of balancing the task of creation, as well as making sure that each life received equal treatment and consideration. This was important to me because I felt like the existence of these individuals needed to be the same, even if more dramatic things happen to one person than another. Without this, the lives wouldn't demand their own attention, which I feel would defeat the purpose of creating unique individuals and experiences.

Each section opens with a death, or rather with someone finding a body, and unfolds from there. The particular emphasis for each life involves establishing important details in the scenes where they are found, which can be worked back into the understanding of the situations they encountered in life. Some lived happier lives

than others, some have more family than others, but all are equally deceased, so their commonality shows through despite their differences. Within this process, I reached many points in which inspiration was necessary to continue crafting new experiences, locations, and background characters.

My **process for reading** is based in reading like a writer. I look toward other authors as a way to think through complex forms of creation, emphasizing mostly on conceptual aspects of their worlds. Each individual uses language in a unique way, and paying attention to these variations, and which catch my eye most, shows me the directions that might be of interest in my own creation. When reading, if I come across a form I enjoy, like columns, I might attempt to create my own version of their columns, shifting them so that they fit whatever I'm using them for. I notice smaller details in the ways writer's use dialogue, how they differentiate characters, and importantly, I attempt to recognize their ways of creation. Reading is important in growing as a writer, but reading is also necessary in understanding what makes the reading process most interesting, and in turn, what I as a writer find most compelling in a work.

The research behind this thesis is inspired by a writer who is especially important to me, **Italo Calvino**, and more importantly, his novel *If on a winter's night a traveler*. What drew me in was relatively simple, the reader of the story, me, is meant to embody the main character, the "male reader," which is meant to be the manifestation of our experience with the novel. However, this shifts slowly throughout the novel as points of view adjust and the overall adventure spins wildly out of control from our own experienced. This then changes the ways we engage with the novel, but no matter what, we are the second person "you" perspective. Becoming aware of the ways in which language can be used to engage directly with a reader was transformative for my work. This can be seen in my thesis through many facets, but none so clearly as that of the audience, a force that is unexplained and unknown, but which is engaged with in some scenes. I wanted to acknowledge those who are reading my work just as Calvino specifically forced his readers into the role of the reader.

I have also been inspired by the writer **Paul Legault**, whose work, “The Other Poems,” is a combination of absurdist sonnets utilizing strange characters and even stranger interactions. Legault’s work is likely the version of writing that informed my thesis most. His work spoke to the use of language as a way of creating ambiguity, while also driving forward interactions between characters. I used this understanding within my own work to emphasize the strangeness of dialogue-less meetings, conversations, and arguments, as well as utilizing a similar process of setting up a form and continuing it throughout. For Legault, this was setting up sonnets, and for me it was arranging the work so that each individual had six events, each different but with the main context staying the same. Legault has a much different way of having his characters behave, but I believe in twisting this idea I was able to find a good mode of communication for those individuals that I invent. They do not need to talk with one another because they can emote, and they can do these strange and absurd actions that mimic conversation but leave an audience or reader the requirement of translating for themselves. This is a concept I never intended so directly to delve into, but once created, I felt that it represented the miscommunication, or simply the difficulties of communication in life.

Finally, I was inspired by the playwriting of **Dario Fo**, who wrote in ways that work with Legault’s absurdism, but add the spin of longer pieces. Where Legault had 14-lines to create, Fo made characters, setting, and plot, all of which engage with the absurd events and scenarios he creates. These factors helped to influence my own understanding of what can be completed within a certain span of time. For Fo, it was important to create longstanding absurdity that continued throughout the entirety of a piece. While his work centered on dialogue to emphasize the strange nature of his worlds and people, mine removed this aspect, instead focusing on the side of non-verbal communication. Fo’s work helped me to understand the ways in which I could use these lives as the base of the concept, and then add in absurd events throughout to remind the reader that the world they’re engaging with is not as normal as they would’ve expected. I took this idea further when I decided to create multiple lives. Where before I was planning on extending the events of one life into 60 pages, I realized that the interest in life and death came from those two

events, and a general understanding of how those events happened. Cause and effect was more interesting to me than the entirety of a life because whatever we do in life does change our experiences, whether planned or not. Whatever decisions we make causes something else to happen, and so, I created characters who serve the purpose of living, having things happen to them, and then dying. It may sound morbid, but I found it to be intriguing, a character study that connects dots to form an entire life rather than being contained to a single situation.

When looking at my thesis project, it becomes evident immediately that **style** and **form** are two very important factors in the creation of this work. However, neither was explicitly on my mind when the project began. Both were discovered and refined during the process of writing as opposed to being planned out in advance. This allowed me the room to create the structures as I went and to come back to revise them at various stages in the process. The most important part of the process for me was to create using my own voice and to make sure that anything I wrote fit with my imagination of what I envisioned the work to become. I put words on the page without thinking too hard about their specific meanings or whether everything was grammatically correct, being more concerned with the feeling of the text. Throughout the process, I came to the realization that my work needed to be in my voice, and that I would have to create that effect intentionally, or it could start becoming a representation of someone else's style or tone. I am aware that creation motivated through inspiration can often create similar projects and risk feeling derivative, and I wanted to avoid this at all costs since this thesis was, for me, an opportunity to discover and develop a voice of my own.

The layout and **form** of my thesis is based in my own love for writing in columns, pushed in margins, and a fully justified text. I wanted to make sure that everything was easy to read, but that it also wasn't too straight forward to look at. It is a simple column in the center of the page, but that comes with constraints for the writer, and therefore constraints for the reader. I limited myself to only create enough content to fill a single page for each life event, and thus anyone who reads the text must come to understand these characters within these same six short sections. It

challenges the reader to take in what they experience, and to utilize this in filling out the rest of a character's life, or choosing to leave it as a set of fragments.

The finished thesis uses a strategy involving incomplete sentence structure and off-kilter phrases that are not meant to confuse, though I am aware that they might do that too, but to avoid an overly standardized form of language. It is not meant to be an easy read, rather, it's meant to be an experience. I further expand my own intentions into a series of implicit permissions I offer to those who read the work and those who might view the work as an audience: you are to experience, feel what you will feel, and then moving on or continuing to repeat through the work. The cyclical nature of everything does not end with life and death, but rather continues throughout the work itself, asking that you go through the work how you feel should be done. If that means you never finish the work, that is fine, if it means you read it once and put it down, great, and if you decide you want go through multiple times and notice the details you didn't catch the first time, all the better. In practice, I am not attempting to dictate how a reader reads, nor how a viewer views, but in doing so I am also fully creating the context—the existence of the text itself—within which the audience engages. Attempting to balance that switch between telling an audience what to think and letting them decide what they feel after experiencing the work involved a major shift of thinking for me, and one I am extremely glad I was able to develop.

Finally, in **revising the work**, I wanted to make sure that my emphasis on pronouns was clearly understood. The original text had italicized he/him/his pronouns, and in crafting new characters I decided I wanted to continue this concept. I wanted to work with pronouns because I felt a sense of curiosity and a need to understand better their use and what it means to use pronouns for ourselves and others. During my undergraduate studies at the University of Washington Bothell, I began engaging directly with the use of pronouns, both for myself and others, and this text emphasizes pronouns as a gesture towards the self-identification of characters, and as a reflection on my own growth as a thinker. The goal, for the entire project was to create a collection of unique and interesting lives, and I believe that this was

done by providing that room for each character to be their own and to live their lives as they see fit.

My thesis comes from a want to make something unique, to explore a type of project that I had never truly made before, and to expand upon my previous work writing poetry. Instead, I hoped to write a thesis that engaged the facets of writing I find most interesting, and that which I overlook on a daily basis. There are no doubt many more experiences to write and characters to create, but the collection I have now is ultimately the culmination of two years of work and is a project I am ever so happy to have made, no matter the stress, the hours thinking, and the countless rewrites.

## **Dedications**

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