His Name is Stephen

Getting Creative with Writing

B.A. Essay

Stella Júlía Ágústsdóttir

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Stella Júlíja Ágústsdóttir
Kt.: 050276-3849

Supervisor: Anna Heiða Pálsdóttir
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Summary

This paper is my B.A. thesis written for the English department at the University of Iceland. The paper is a venture into the creative writing world and contains an original novella and an exposition about the process of writing a novella.

The first part of the paper is the novella *His Name is Stephen* which is a psychological thriller consisting of over 10,100 words. The novella follows a young woman named Janice as she tries to cope with the death of her brother at a young age and the loss of her son later in life. It becomes evident that Janice is unable to cope with the difficulties surrounding these events and is institutionalized. It explores how the mental breakdown of a mother can affect a family and tear it apart. The husband, Mike, loves his wife, but feels conflicted by his desire and need to protect their son from his own mother. Likewise it explores the inner workings of a woman dealing with delusional episodes and how she can escape from reality.

The second part of the paper consists of an exposition which follows the path of a writer during the writing process. This part of the paper is just shy of 4,000 words and is followed by a detailed character sketch. The exposition shows how an idea grows into characters that follow a plot creating a story.
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Chapter 1

Grabbing for her keys, Janice Blake was already running before she even stood up. She knew that she only had a few minutes or she would miss this chance. After weeks of planning and observing she finally had the opportunity to make the first move. It all had to go as planned as she knew this would be her only opportunity.

It seemed so surreal when she thought back on that chance encounter six months ago. Coming out of the hospital, after visiting a coworker she looked across the courtyard and felt as if she had seen a ghost. There was her ex-husband walking hand and hand with a young boy. It was strange how someone she did not even know existed six months ago, was now the person that invaded her every thought. She could not focus on anything other than him. He had barged into her being and there was no way she was going to let him disappear.

As she turned onto Main Street she saw the yellow school bus crawl to the corner. The red stop sign shot out to warn everyone of the precious cargo which was about to disembark. She frantically looked around her and she began to rehearse her line one more time. Before she could get halfway through he emerged and her heart leapt into her throat.

“David! David!” she called to the young boy, as soon as the bus was safely out of view.

David turned and looked wearily at her. She realized that to him she was still a stranger even though she loved him more than she could even bear.

“David, your dad sent me to pick you up.” She smiled and hoped that she could only keep him from panicking. If he did not leave with her now, she knew she would probably never get another chance.

“You know my daddy?” he said with his head cocked to one side just like her brother had done when they were younger.

“I sure do, see I even have pictures of your daddy and I together.” She handed him two photographs of her and Mike from another lifetime. “See, this is before he shaved his beard, and this one is after.”

David studied the one where Mike had a beard and her belly was swollen with life. He chuckled and his steely spine relaxed to a natural stance. “Daddy looks funny with a beard.”

The smile on her face changed from the rehearsed one to one of real happiness. She knew it was going to work. Instinctively she reached for David’s hand and he gladly let his new friend
lead him up the street. “Your daddy’s car is still getting fixed so he wants me to bring you to your Uncle Al’s car shop. I was almost late because I had to go there to get your booster seat.”

She lied to the young boy effortlessly. She felt a hint of guilt, but the desire to possess young David squashed the guilt. Besides, the boy had been lied to his entire life. From the moment Mike had pushed her down the stairs and into a coma everything had been a lie. Quivering with the anticipation of finally making things right, she buckled David into the painstakingly identical booster seat to the one in Mike’s Volvo.

As they pulled away from the corner she became less aware of her every heartbeat and was able to breathe without willing herself to do so. Reaching for the brownies she had baked last night, she finally was able to experience the moment she had dreamed of since that line turned blue on the E.P.T. stick. “I made you some of my mom’s famous brownies.”

David smiled though his eyes seemed to yearn for something. Reaching forward as Janice handed him the brownie he said “I don’t have a mom.”

Janice gripped the steering wheel tightly as if she could squeeze her anger out of it. She knew he had been lied to, but those words coming out of his mouth shot through her like an arrow. She drew a deep breath and realized that she had to keep going to ensure that no one would ever lie to him again. This was no time to let her emotions take control. There were still too much to do before they were safe. She had barely just finished the first phase of her plan.

Diligently following every driving regulation, she was careful to not to draw any attention to her and David. She glanced at the clock on her dashboard. Her timing was perfect. She hit the call button on the phone hidden in her left pocket. After two rings she clicked on her earpiece. “Hello? Yes we are on our way now. Probably only five minutes away.” She waited a few seconds before speaking again. “Oh no, that is such a hassle Mike. Why don’t I just take him with me and you pick him up when you are done? No need to have him sitting there for hours.” She paused one more time. “Sure,” and turning to David she asked, “Hey David, would you like to come with me and get some ice cream and go check out my boat?”

David’s eyes widen with excitement. “You have a boat? I want to see it!” He was squealing with delight.

“I guess that is a yes.” She said into the phone. Not that anyone was listening. David was too excited about the prospect of seeing a real boat, and she was talking to herself. She made some final statements which sounded like she was saying goodbye and hung up the call just in
time to make the left turn out of the city rather than the right turn which would have taken them
to his Uncle Al’s.

It was all coming together perfectly. She congratulated herself for her patience and
meticulous planning. Is she had rushed to try and get David six months ago, she is certain she
would have failed. By giving herself time to observe and plan there was a real hope that she and
her son would be able to get away. Having watched him bring a different toy boat for weeks to
show and tell at school she knew how to distract him. She felt the anger beginning to rise again.
Mike had deprived her of knowing what her son loved most. She had to resort to spying them
from a distance for months to guess at what he liked. She felt the hardness of the steering wheel
against her hands as she squeezed tightly. No matter how tight she squeezed she was not able to
extract the blood she desperately wanted.

David noticed nothing as he was still in awe of the idea of seeing a real life boat. “What
kind of boat do you have? I like boats. I have a lot of boats at home. I even have my favorite boat
in my backpack.”

Janice took a deep breath and realized that she almost blew it. His backpack. She must
remember to check his backpack. She tried to remain calm as she realized that something so
simple could ruin everything. Not checking his backpack to see what he had in there could throw
off the whole plan. She began to mentally go over the checklist once again. Everything had to be
perfect.

**Chapter 2**

They had been driving about thirty minutes when David finally dozed off. She observed him
through the rearview mirror and decided to give him a few more minutes before pulling over.
With the boy sleeping soundly she was able to go through the mental list of what needed to
happen next. No matter how smoothly things had gone thus far, she realized that the slightest
mistake could mean that she would fail and possibly lose David forever. After six years without
him she knew she would never be able to go on living if she lost him again.

These last six months had been enough to make her insane. She fought hard to keep her
sanity, and she would fight even harder to keep Stephen. Calling him David seemed so wrong.
She had been adamant during the pregnancy that she did not want to name her son David. She
had always known that she would name her son Stephen, after her little brother
Looking back at the sleeping boy she knew that she had been right. Stephen was his name. Everything about him reminded her of her little brother. His curly and riley blond hair stuck out just like her brother’s had. His cheeks had just the same amount of rosiness as Stephen when he was alive. She knew his eyes were the same color of brown that always seemed to be pondering some great question when he looked at you. For Mike to have named him David was just one more way he had tried to wipe out her presence from this earth, and Stephen’s life.

Now she had the opportunity to fix his name. It would just require a little time and following her plan. And it was all working out perfectly. She drove a little longer then turned off the main highway onto a smaller road. She began to slow down, keeping a close eye on Stephen to make sure he did not stir as she pulled the car onto the side of the road. The lump in her stomach was almost crippling her, but the determination in her heart kept her going. She left the car running, fearing that if she turned it off he would wake up. As quietly as a preacher’s daughter trying to sneak out of the house after curfew, she got out of the car and walked to the trunk.

She had practiced this a million times. Opening the trunk without making noise was not an easy task. At one point she almost thought about trying to buy a new car which would make this one little part less stressful. However, realizing that any changes in her life could draw attention to her she decided to just practice over and over again.

She thought back to the hours she spent in her garage opening the trunk over and over again. Sometimes when she thought she finally had it figured out, it would open with a pop or a click that she was certain would wake a sleeping boy. The frustration would begin to grow and she would slam it so hard that she was certain she woke all the sleeping boys in the neighborhood.

Peering through the window to see that Stephen was still asleep she braced her hand as she slid the key in the lock. This was the quietest way to open the trunk. Placing her left hand on the trunk in order to ensure that it would not just fly open she slowly turned the key. Even though she had done this a million times before it seemed as if it were even slower now. Taking one last breath before releasing the lock she said a silent prayer.

Without a sound the trunk opened and she was able to reach inside and grab the bag identical to the one Stephen had at home. Inside were clothes which were identical to his own.
Washed in the same detergent and softened with the same softener his father used. Everything was the same, down to the favorite toys, and teddy bear.

Placing the bag on the beaten dirt behind the car she quickly opened it and rummaged through the items looking for his favorite boat. Finding the boat, she looked at it with contempt. It was as if Mike knew of all her careful planning and had set her up to fail. Only this time she was in control and would not fail. She placed it on the black asphalt making sure it would get run over by the car as she backed up to turn around. She grabbed the bag and quietly closed the trunk.

Stephen was still fast asleep as she placed the bag next to her in the passenger seat of the car and backed up to turn back towards the highway. She knew he would be hungry once he woke up. She also realized there was probably many people searching for him back near his home. She only hoped she could get to the pier before people started broadcasting his image on T.V. The headlights of her Corolla lit the way and as she looked back she saw the tiny crushed pieces of the blue toy boat and smiled. By this time tomorrow, Mike’s heart would also be smashed into fifty pieces.

Just as they pulled onto the highway Stephan started to stir.

Chapter 3

Sitting in the back seat, Janice was getting restless. How long was it to Granny’s, anyway? Looking over at her little brother she wished she could fall asleep like him in the car. The car just made her anxious. She saw the blond curls caressing her brothers face and she gently pushed them away from his eyes. As she felt his soft hair, she began to hum.

It was always the same song, but no one knew what song it was. Not even Janice knew where it came from but she did it a lot. It often annoyed her parents, especially when she did it as they tried to watch television or talk.

“Janice, dear, please stop that humming. Your brother is sleeping. And stop messing with his hair. You will wake him” her mother said, the sternness coming across strongly in her tone and even more so on her face. “Look at a book, or color or something if you are bored. You are a big girl now, already eight years old, I should not have to tell you this stuff. We are almost at Granny’s house.” Janice snatched her hand away from her brother. She hated when she was scolded for loving her little brother.
Janice looked out of the window. Her mother’s definition of almost was certainly not the same as her own. The only thing she saw out the window were tall trees and the occasional green sign with big white letters. She grabbed her backpack and found a book to read. Soon they would be at Granny’s and her parents would be busy and she could play with her brother all by herself. Just the way she liked it.

After almost an eternity they finally turned into town and Janice started to recognize her surroundings. There was the pool with the winding slide. And up ahead she knew they pass the toy store where she got her favorite red kite. Pass the light and then make a right at the ice cream store. She remembered when she was just five how her parents seemed to marvel at her memory of how to get to places and would laugh when she would tell them the way. They would drive past some big trees in the woods and then over a bridge that was by the park. And Granny’s house was right there two houses down from the park. Now she felt like they were almost there.

Pulling into the driveway was more difficult than usual. Besides Granny’s old Cadillac there was a van and another car that Janice did not recognize. She decided it would not matter. She was, finally, at Granny’s and could, finally, wake up Stephen. Tapping on his arm as a woodpecker taps on a tree she whispered quietly, “Stephen we are here. Stephen wake up. Wakey, wakey. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen.” and when he did not wake up she shook him. “Stephen! We are here!”

“Janice. That is not nice. There is no need to yell to wake your brother.” Her mother scolding her again made Janice feel like a bad girl. The look on her mother’s face as she bent into the car to wake her brother only confirmed her feelings. She had waited so patiently during the long drive to not wake her brother and now she was still being yelled at after they arrived. She could never get anything done right.

Slamming the car door behind her Janice turned and stormed up the steps to Granny’s house. Granny was always nice to her, even with Stephen around. Opening the door, she was shocked to see three kids sitting near her favorite spot next to the fire place. There was no fire but Granny always had a basket full of dolls and cars and books right there by a big window. Her mother came in behind her holding Stephen. “We are here,” she sung.

A flood of people came out of every direction of the house. Kids and adults and even her grandparents. It seemed as if the house were vomiting people. Janice inched back towards her mother and squeezed between her and her father that came in behind her. There was so much
kissing and hugging and laughing that Janice felt like she was being attacked with unwanted love from strangers. Everyone was making a huge fuss over Stephen and his hair. She noticed her mother did not scold any of them when they touched his hair.

A strange lady kneeled down and took Janice’s hands. “Look at how big you are. I cannot believe it has been this long. How old are you now, sweetie? Eight?” And before Janice could say a word she stood up and started talking to her mother again.

Shrinking back even further, Janice felt like she had to get out of the mad house. This is how Alice must have felt in Wonderland, she thought as she crept out to the porch unnoticed. Closing the door ever so quietly behind her she snuck down the driveway and walked to the park. She just had to get away from all those people.

The sun was shining brightly but the park was empty. She walked up to the slide and climbed the stairs. She sat down and with one push she slid down the slide. A scream pierced the quietness. She hopped up as she reached the bottom. The metal slide was on fire, and had burned the backs of her legs making her legs feel just as she did on the inside. She moved to the swing and swung back and forth until someone came looking for her hours later.

Chapter 4

Wiping the sleep from his eyes, Stephen looked around with a confused look on his face. As he caught Janice’s eye in the rearview mirror, she smiled. “Did you get a nice nap?”

“I did not even know I was sleepy.”

“Probably just all the excitement of getting to go on the boat. You even slept while your dad brought you a bag so you could sleep on the boat. But only if you want to.”

“Sleep on the boat, and on the ocean? Can I really?”

She laughed. He was truly excited about their adventure. “Of course. Your dad brought your pj’s and toothbrush and everything.”

“I can’t wait to tell Miss Thompson.”

“Who is Miss Thompson?”

“My teacher. She is the best. She loves boats just like me. I really like to show her all my boats. She knows all about boats.”

“Well, you will have a lot of stuff to tell the next time you see her.” Just another small lie. But all for his own good. “Hey, are you hungry?”
“Yes.”

“How about hamburgers? Do you like hamburgers?”

“I love them. They are my favorite but with no onions.”

“Well, since you’re awake we can go up to a place I know. They have some pretty good hamburgers.” It was not the way the burgers tasted, but how remote and old fashioned that made it desirable. She happened upon it when doing a test run a couple of months back. She sat and talked to the owner for a while. The place had no television or radio. The owner had never been online in his life. He still got his news from the papers, and with her son in tow she needed to make sure that was the case.

They pulled up to Bill’s Burgers and finally got out to stretch. After almost three hours in the car they were both a little stiff. Grabbing his hand, she felt the love flow from her heart throughout her entire body. Holding his hand like that made it all seem so real. Only he started to run towards the door and pulled his hand away with him.

When she caught up to him he was standing inside looking at all the decorations. There were anchors and wheels from the helms of old boats.

“Wow.” He was in awe. Food was no longer the first thought on his mind. It was all about the boats.

Having heard the bell from the door, Bill came out from the back dressed, as usual in his captains outfit. “Well, hello. Janet, right? Is this the little guy you told me about?”

“Hello, Mr. Bill. Yes it is him. Say hello to Mr. Bill.”

“Hello. Is this all your stuff?”

“Why yes, little man, it sure is. Go ahead and look around.”

“I told you he would love it. Can we get two burgers, fries and drinks?”

“No onions.” Janice chuckled. Even in awe Stephen made sure he would not get onions on his burger. He was more like her brother than she ever imagined.

“Sure thing.”

As Bill went in back Janice found a booth for the two of them. Watching as Stephen looked around she loved how his eyes grew in amazement taking in all the sites. There were pictures of boats which seemed to attract most of his attention. Being as close as they were to the cape it made sense that Bill would have a nautical theme.
“Hey, why don’t you go in to the bathroom and pee and wash up before we eat. I heard even the bathroom looks like a real boat.” She pointed towards the restroom and he ran in excitedly.

She put her head into her hands, and realized she was exhausted. The day and all of its excitement had taken so much out of her.

“Here you are little lady,” Bill said as he placed their order on the table. She jerked her head up. She could not have fallen asleep. She shook off her weariness and smiled at Bill.

“Thanks.”

“You seem a little worn out. I hope you are not taking a long drive after this.”

“We are heading out towards the city. I just need some food in my belly and some strong coffee before we hit the road. If I get too tired I will pull in at the HoJo’s and we will just call it a night.”

“That is a good idea. I will bring you some fresh coffee, and set you up with some to go as well. Let me know if you and your boy need anything else.”

Stephen came over to the table and finally seemed to realize just how hungry he was. Sitting down he grabbed the burger and took a huge bite. “Ms. Janice? That man thinks your name is Janet. And he called me Stephen.”

“Yeah, he is a bit old and gets a little confused sometimes. I told him over and over again my name is Janice, but he always forgets. I think it is just easier to let him call me Janet. I think he misses the ocean and being on a boat so much it makes his mind a little funny sometimes.”

“Oh. I guess I will miss it too after we leave your boat. I hope I don’t forget people’s names.”

“I think you have to be on the boat a really long time before that happens. He is just so sad that he can’t be on the boat. I think it is fine if we just pretend and let him call us Janet and Stephen.”

Stephen took another bite as he thought this over. “Yeah, I think so. If it makes him not be so sad he can call me Stephen.”

“You are a good guy, Stephen.” They both chuckled. It would start off as their own private joke. Before long she hoped he would forget all about his old name and his old life. She felt hopeful as it was only a few hours into their adventure and he was already exposed to his real name.
They ate up and chatted about nothing. While this could seem like any dinner between a mom and her son, it was their first one. She would always remember this moment. She would remember how the orange vinyl in the booth had a tiny rip right above Stephen’s left shoulder. She would always remember how the burgers tasted. She would remember how they laughed and talked. And she would mostly remember how for the first time in a long time she was happy.

Chapter 5

“What, exactly, were you thinking?” Her mother was scolding her again. That look on her face always made Janice feel as if she were such a bad girl. She looked down at the ground as she shuffled her feet back and forth. “Well? Do you have nothing to say for yourself? Everyone was worried sick. We were looking all over for you? For the first time, in God knows how many years, the whole family is here and you go and run off? You can sit up here until dinner and think about what you did. And there will be no dessert for you tonight.” Her mother huffed, and slammed the door as she left.

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she sat on the floor looking around the empty room. She heard laughter and talking from all the people downstairs. She knew now that the kids were her cousins and the adults were aunts and uncles. She still felt overwhelmed by having all these people around when she was not expecting it. Why was everyone so mad at her? None of them wanted to talk to her and she was just in the way.

There was nothing for her to do in there but look at the pictures on the walls. There were pictures of her mom smiling when she was a young girl. She rarely smiled like that anymore. There were plenty of pictures of her and her brother. She picked up a framed picture of them from the dresser. Her brother was sitting next to her and she was stroking his hair. He looked like an angel in the picture.

She took the picture with her to the bed and sat there just staring at it. Just as she was thinking about how she loved her little brother more than anyone in the world, the door creaked opened.

“Janice? Can I come in with you?”

She smiled and felt truly happy for the first time that day. They sat on the bed together and Janice rubbed her hands through his hair. “You know, bubby, I love you more than anyone.”

Her brother looked up at her and smiled. “I know sissy, I know.”
Chapter 6

Pulling away from the diner, Janice began to feel the heaviness of her task take over her body. She knew that they had another hour before they could pull off the road, but as the anticipation of the day’s mission had kept her awake the night before she was starting to feel extremely tired. Stephen was preoccupied in the back seat with some of his favorite boats which they had dug out of his bag at the diner. Driving felt like a chore. She just wanted to get to the boat so they could settle in for the night.

Turning her focus to the road she willed herself to stay awake. Rolling down the window and turning on the radio she hoped this would help. Getting into an accident would draw unwanted attention to her and Stephen. Fiddling with the dial she found a country station and listened to the heartbreak of Carrie Underwood. If only Carrie knew what true heartbreak was. Losing a man in is nothing compared to losing a child.

A bright light shining into her eyes and a loud honk brought Janice back to reality. She gripped the steering wheel as she veered the car back into her lane. She must have dosed off. She grabbed the coffee that Bill had given her and took a big sip. This was not the time for mistakes.

“Hey, do you have a favorite song?” she asked. Talking to Stephen would help keep her awake and focused.

“Yes. My daddy and I always sing “Watching You”. It is by Rodney Atkins. I like it because it is about a little boy and his daddy.”

Listening to him singing a song idolizing a father was not exactly what she had in mind.

“Do you know that song Janice?”

Shaking her head in false denial she replied to him. “No, I sure don’t. Maybe one day you can teach me.” That was just one more wound in her soul and each word felt as if Mike was pouring salt into it. It would be a long time before she would get over the years that had been stolen from her.

A sign for their exit brought her needed relief. She could finally get off the road and settle in for the evening with Stephen. She pulled on to the exit as Stephen resumed singing and Janice looked forward to one day replacing Mike as his hero.
Chapter 7

“I am really worried, Doctor. She has been just staring aimlessly at the wall for hours. She is completely unresponsive.”

“All her blood work comes back normal. According to her chart she was given all her medications as prescribed. There are no notes from her session yesterday that should cause any alarm. Have you gotten anyone from psych to come take a look at her?”

“Yes. Doctor Hansen came earlier. He even commented that the session went well yesterday and they discussed the upcoming visit. According to him, she seemed to be able to grasp everything as it was explained. He was even pleased that this time it was much easier for her to handle the visit.”

“Well, I am afraid that if her condition does not change we will have to postpone the visit. Order a more extensive blood panel and to see if we are missing anything. Call me as soon as the results are back in.”

“Look, she is doing it again. The only movement she has made all day is grabbing at the rails like that.”

The doctor picked up the chart and looked it over. Nothing seemed to explain why she regressed so quickly. All the progress the patient had been making over the past six months seemed to have gone down the drain over night.

“Page Dr. Hansen and advise him we need to have him look at her before two. If he feels that we should cancel the visit then we will have to notify her case worker and family and reschedule it.”

“I think…”

“I understand you are concerned but this is not our call. We have procedures to follow and need to do so.”

The nurse looked over at the nightstand and turned on the radio to a classic country station. Once the nurse left the room and the patient started to relax. As the doctor left the room, the patient whispered, “Stephen.”

Chapter 8

Things at Granny’s had finally calmed down. After a night of Janice staying out of sight, no one seemed to be angry anymore, but all the extra people made Janice really nervous. She had been
looking forward to playing with Stephen at the park all alone, but now there were extra kids with them. Cousin Tim and Lisa always wanted to come with them. Stephen liked playing with Tim and Lisa and Janice felt left out.

While she was always asked to play with them, she really felt like they were taking away her time with her brother. She could not understand the feelings or describe them in words but she knew she wanted have him to herself. Every night she looked forward to bedtime. She and Stephen got to sleep in the same room. After her parents said good night, Janice would get a book and start to read to Stephen. He always fell asleep next to her.

She would watch her beautiful brother sleep and stroke his hair. The last thing she would remember before falling asleep is a feeling of calmness from finally having her brother all to herself.

Waking up was always disappointing because it meant she had to share him with the rest of the family. She resented how much her cousins wanted to play with them, especially Tim.

The mornings when the kids all came around she wished she could make them all disappear. Sometimes she was lucky and she and her brother could play by themselves. And that is how it all started on that Tuesday morning. She and Stephen were alone at home with Granny. Granny was busy in the kitchen making pies and cooking, and she was allowed to play all by herself with Stephen. What a wonderful morning it was going to be for the two of them.

“Granny, can I take Stephen to the creek to play with his boats?”
“You two have to be careful and stay in near the shallow waters. Do not take your brother anywhere by the bridge, the waters get deep there.”

Happy to have her angel all to herself Janice grabbed up his bucket of boats they played with in the creek and walked with her brother to the park.

“Janice, I love playing with my boats.”
“I know Stephen, and today we get to play with them just by ourselves. We do not have to share with anyone. Won’t that be fun?”
“But sharing is good. Mommy always says we should share our toys.”
“I know. But isn’t it more fun when it is just you and me?”
“I always have fun with you, sissy. But Lisa is so funny. She is always telling jokes. And Tim is fun to play with. He likes boats, too. Just like me.”
“Well, I like it more when it is just you and me. I think you are the most fun boy in the world. And I think your jokes are much more funnier than Lisa’s.”

“Knock, knock.”

The two of them walked hand in hand laughing at all the jokes Stephen was now telling.

Chapter 9

Pulling up to the private dock, Janice felt like she had pulled off the great escape. She was certain that they would be able to get away. The boat was moored to the pier and everything was set inside. So far, it seemed like no one was looking for the two of them, though she knew that there had to be a search for David back in town.

She knew once the picture of the little boy hit the papers that Bill could possibly recognize him. She hoped, though, he would think it was just that her son looked a lot like the missing young boy. He had already seen pictures of him from previous visits and it would have been odd for a boy to respond to a new name within hours of being reported missing. Besides, Bill really liked her and would have a hard time imagining her grabbing a young boy off the street and driving with him out to the country.

“Oh my god. Janice this is a huge boat. Is this your boat?”

“Yep. This is it. It is not that big.”

“I thought maybe you had a rowboat like my friend Donny’s dad. We went on that on the lake once. But this is a real boat. I can’t wait to tell all my friends.”

“You think they will be amazed?”

“I think they will not even believe me.”

“Well, we will take some pictures so no one can ever say you were not telling the truth. Let’s go take a look around.”

Grabbing the bag with Stephens things, the two of them walked onboard. “Safety first,” she said dressing him in a life jacket.

“Can I go up to the front?”

“Sure thing, buddy. The front of the boat is called the bow. We are going to have to teach you names of everything. Just stay away from the rails. I will put some of this stuff away and show you all the safety stuff we need to go over before we get underway.”

“Underway? You mean we are going to go out in the ocean?”
Janice could not help but laugh. The boy’s eyes grew as big as the helm at the front of the boat. “Only if you want to. If not we can just stay here and look around.”

“No way! I want to go out on the ocean. Maybe we will see a shark, or a dolphin or a whale. Man, this is so much cooler than the rowboat on the lake.”

His little feet skimmed the deck as he rushed around the boat as he explored this new exciting adventure. He had no idea that Janice planned that this would be his new home for the next few months.

Chapter 10

The sun was beating down on them and the water in the creek was warm. They laughed and splashed the water at each other. Their shoes and socks sat abandoned on the hillside and the shore was strewn with boats and buckets.

“Sissy, I wish we had a creek by our house. That would be so much fun.”

“I know, we could go everyday and play with the boats. Just the two of us.”

“Or sometimes with our friends, too.”

Janice scowled. Even as they were having the best time of their lives, Stephen always wanted to bring in someone else. It was as if he did not think she was fun enough. Just as she was about to push the negative thoughts of others ruining their fun she heard her cousins calling.

“Janice, Stephen, where are you? Janice? Stephen?”

“Oh Tim and Lisa are looking for us. They can play with the other boats.” Stephen easily climb up the embankment to look for their cousins.

“Stephen, don’t go. We can play hide and seek and let them find us.”

“That is silly. They have to know we are hiding if we are going to play hide and seek.”

He sat down and began to put his socks and shoes on. Janice felt a bubble of desperation growing inside her stomach. She was having so much fun with her brother alone, she did not want it to end. Why could they just not let them play by themselves? They could play with each other. She did not want to share her brother.

Stephen stood up and began make his way up the rest of the embankment when the desperation finally took over Janice. She ran after him and tackled him. Just a few more minutes of the two of them before she had to share him. “Ouch,” she said rubbing her knee. “Stephen, let’s wait and jump up and scare them.”
She looked down and saw a slight trickle of blood on her knee. As she rubbed her knee the bleeding stopped. It was nothing, just a small scratch. Looking down at the ground, she saw the big rock that she had hit her knee on. Stephen was still lying next to it. He did not say anything or even move.

“Stephen, stop being silly, let’s hide.” She grabbed his arm but he did not move. Looking down at him lying there motionless she notice a dark wet pool seeping from beneath the rock.

Frantic, Janice pushed at him even harder. “Stephen, get up.” She was screaming now but nothing happened. The world was calm around her and she could only hear her own heart and breath leaving her mouth.

His foot was in the edge of the creek. The water moved slowly and seemed to be kissing him to sleep. Stephens head was lying on the big rock she had hit her knee on. The curls at the nape of his neck were no longer blonde but matted together with a thick brownish red liquid. Janice felt the desperation in her stomach now taking over her entire body and she stood up and ran.

She ran away from her cousins calling her name. She ran away from her crowded grandmothers house that overwhelmed her. She ran away from it all, towards the bridge and the deep water that her grandmother had warned her not to go near. She could only feel the desperate longing to have her brother with her, and that feeling overcame everything else, including the sharpness of the rocks that penetrated her bare feet as she ran away from everything.

Chapter 11

“Well, I still think we should cancel her visit.”

“That is a bit premature. We also have to remember that the visit is not only for the patients benefit, but also the family. No matter how difficult it may be, family often needs to come in and see their loved ones for their own piece of mind.”

“Do you really think that this will help them? And the little boy, he has a hard enough time dealing with the fact that his mother is in the hospital and the things she put him through, and you think this will do him any good?”

“That is really not up for us to say. The family is all in counseling. His doctor seems to think these visits do a lot to help him with his recovery, so why should we question that?”
“Doctor Hansen gives Janice way too much credit. Common sense tells you that this is not healthy. Just look at her. Not a peep all day, nothing but thrashing around and grasping at the bed rails. What if she hurts someone? What if she hurts the boy?”

“Come on, Nurse Jackie. You are being over dramatic. It is not like she is ever alone with him. His father is there, we are here, the nurses are here and the doctors. What do you think she is going to do, overpower us all and run away with him?”

“You guys just don’t give that lady enough credit. She is a lot smarter than any of us know. And she has run away with him before.”

“Yes, but that was then. Now she is here with us and getting the help she needs.”

“Yeah, a lot of good that is doing her. Just look at her right now.”

As the orderlies turned she grasped the bedrails and whispered “Stephen. Boat.”

Chapter 12

They prepared to get underway but Janice had this strange feeling that they were not alone. Her eyes darted around the boat and realized that there was no one near them, and it was just her overactive imagination and paranoia getting to her. That was easy to explain, considering she was about to prepare for a sea voyage alone, with only a young kidnapped boy with her.

The sun was setting and it was time to get as far away from Mike as possible. The greater the distance between them the better. She needed to get away fast. The feeling of being watched was growing stronger and she did not like it.

“Well, what do you say, shall we take her out on the water?”

“Yes. Yes. Yes.” Stephen was so excited that each exclamation caused his little feet hurl him into the air. It was so overwhelming to see the look of joy on her little boy’s face. Her happiness was dulled by the realization that she had missed so many years of that wonderful look.

“I am going to need you to listen to everything I tell you when we are out on the water. You can be my helper.”

“Are you the captain?”

“I guess I am.”

“Nobody else? Just you and me? I did not know a lady could be a captain.”
Janice let out a chuckle. Clearly her ex-husband had not bothered with teaching their son that women were capable of anything. “A lady can do pretty much anything a man can do. They can be a captain, or a pilot, or a doctor.”

Stephen mulled this over and seemed to have no objections. “I guess we can’t both be captains?”

Janice looked down at her little boy and smiled. “Of course we can. We can both be captains, and we can even both steer the boat. We will just take turns.”

And then she saw it. The look of not just excitement but she was sure there was love in his eyes. He looked at her in such a way that she knew that nothing that happened after that moment would ever compare. He was her son and she loved him more than she could ever imagine. Just as that realization washed over her body she was sure she heard her ex-husband call her name.

Chapter 13

She was cold. She sat huddled beneath the bridge and let the tears run down her cheeks. The cold metal of Stephen’s boat digging into the flesh of her hand as she unknowingly squeezed it. She no longer heard anyone calling her name. The noise of the sirens that had sounded shortly after she ran away from the horrible thing she had done, had long since stopped. The sun was setting and she was cold.

Rocking back and forth Janice thought she would just have to live there under the bridge. She could never go back home and never ever face her family. She knew Stephen was gone. She could feel it in her heart and body. Her throat ached from wanting to scream. The fear and the cold took over her body shaking it uncontrollably. She had destroyed her angel and she did not know how she would ever go on living.

Exhaustion crept in to replace the fear and she laid down on the grass. There were rocks digging into her side, but she made no effort to move them or her body. The pain of the rocks felt like a tender kiss compared to the pain she was feeling inside. She pressed her body closer into the rocks hoping that the pain would somehow make it all go away.

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“Janice! Janice! Janice!” The sound of people calling her name woke her. The sky was black and she could see nothing but a few stars. The sound of the water from the creek swam
past her making the night seem even spookier than normal. For a few seconds she had forgotten the terrible thing she had done and almost called out to the people looking for her.

Just as she opened her mouth, the agony came back and the sound died somewhere on its way out of her mouth. She stifled back the scream that was welling inside her. While she could still stop her mouth from making noise, she was unable to keep the sorrow from causing her eyes to shed tears. Her body shook as she cried and cried for the loss of the thing she loved most in the world. Her arms were wrapped around her legs and her head rested on her knees.

Lost in her sorrow she was startled when a white light sliced through the darkness under the bridge.

“Janice, oh Janice.” Her father came running to her and grabbed her up in his arms. “Baby, why did you not answer when we called for you?”

Janice was unable to fight back the agony any longer and let out a loud scream and sat sobbing in her father’s arms as he carried her back to the house.

“It is okay. Oh, sweetie it is okay.” Her father consoled her as let out a sigh of relief. Janice did not realize it at the time, but that look on her father’s face was in knowing he had only lost one child that day. The pain of losing one child was unbearable. Two was more than anyone could handle.

Walking back to where the rest family was Janice just cried and tried not to think about what would happen when they began to punish her for Stephen.

**Chapter 14**

The feeling of paranoia began to rise. Logically she knew Mike could not be anywhere on board, but she felt that she desperately needed to get away with Stephen as soon as possible. She felt like he was somehow closing in and was going to catch them before they got the chance to get away.

She finalized the preparations for getting underway, which was a tricky task to do alone. She had practiced the act of releasing the mooring lines, but with such precious cargo on board she felt more anxious than when she made her first attempt at this. Luckily, the boat did not move much and the waters were calm.

“Sweetie, now I am going to go onto the dock and throw those lines onto the boat. You can just stand here and we will get all set to go.”
Stephen looked so excited and had no sense of danger or urgency to him. She wished she could feel the same way, and fought back the feeling of anxiety. This was it, this was the moment she had been planning for and working so hard to accomplish. All that was left to do was to get out on the water and they would be safe.

Releasing the mooring lines, she ran onboard and pulled the gangway onboard behind her and rushed towards the helm. Stephen followed excitedly behind her.

“Are we going now?” Stephen looked over the rails and watched as they pulled away from the dock.

“Yes, sweetie. We are now underway. Do you know what that means?”

“No.”

“Underway means that we are now at sea and no longer tied to the dock.”

Stephen ventured to the bow and watched as the boat sliced through the water. “I cannot wait to tell my daddy. Janice, when is my daddy coming to get me?”

Janice felt her heart skip a beat. This was the first time that he had indicated that he expected their adventure to end. She had, foolishly, hoped that they could just sail away and he would slowly forget about his former life. This was clearly not going to be the case.

“I don’t know. We can give him a call if you like.”

“Maybe later. Right now can we go faster?”

Janice gripped the helm and happily obliged the young boy’s request.

Chapter 15

“Okay, I see your point, and realize it may be traumatizing but it could just as easily bring her back.”

“I think you all are being foolish. She is in some sort of daze. The way she grabs hold of that bed rail makes me think she is off somewhere deep in her mind. Bringing her family in is just going to traumatize them more and make no difference with her.”

“Well, we appreciate your opinion, but this is really a decision for you to make. We will warn her family before they come in, but other than that, the visit will go forth as scheduled.”


“See, she is not just out of it, she is hallucinating about her brother. It can’t be good to expose her son to this.”
“It could very well be her brother, or it could be her son. She often confuses the two of them. She never dealt with the death of her brother and when her son was born it brought back all the feelings from her brother’s death.”

Chapter 16

Granny’s house was no longer a happy place. Janice could not find a single corner that did not remind her of her brother. So far no one had blamed her, but she knew the truth. She could not look her mother in the eye, and felt as if a cloud of doom was following her every move.

Janice felt trapped. Every breath she took was a task. The guilt she felt with each breath oppressed her and made it impossible for her to find happiness or even pretend to smile. She spent most of her time trying to hide from her parents and clutching to the toy boat that she had with her when she was found under the bridge.

One day, as she sat hiding under the dining room table she overheard her family talking about her. Stephen was already long buried and it seemed as if everyone else was able to accept the fact that he was gone. Maybe she was the only one who really missed him.

“She needs to talk to someone.”

Her mother sighed and wrung her hands. “I just don’t want to push her too much. She is so closed off, and if she can’t talk to me or her father then I don’t know how she will be able to cope with an outsider.”

“You have to understand, this is what a therapist is trained to deal with. She needs to find a way to cope with her grief.” Her aunt voice was riddled with frustration.

“I think things will be better when we get back home. It is just too painful for her to be here so close to where it happened. Maybe some distance will help her to overcome this and talk to us,” her mother said in a very insecure manner.

“She still is not even able to say how Stephen fell down? Or why she hid from us rather than coming for help?”

Her father had enough of this bickering between the two of them and finally spoke up. “We will take care of it as we see fit. For now, we are just going to let her deal with her grief in her own way. I don’t want to hear another word about it before we leave tomorrow morning.”

Her aunt walked away shaking her head. Her parents did not hear her but Janice did. “Letting an eight year old deal with this by herself, you two are just asking for trouble.”
Janice found peace in the kitchen sitting next to her grandmother eating the brownies her mother made the night before. They were the only thing that brought her any real comfort.

Chapter 17
Despite the fact that the water was calm, Janice had a feeling of great uneasiness. She was an experienced sailor, and had spent many summers out on her family boat as child, after the death of her little brother. Nonetheless, she could not shake the feeling that something was wrong and the two of them were about encounter some trouble. Looking out towards the open water there was nothing to indicate that there was anything but smoothing sailing ahead but Janice could not shake that feeling, no matter how hard she tried.

“The water looks brown, not blue,” said Stephen.

“Yeah, it never really looks very blue to me in real life. Maybe if we go far enough we could find a place that has really blue water, or even green.”

“Green water? Janice that sounds so icky.”

The two of them laughed and Stephen moved away from the bow and joined her at the helm. Janice was certain that the boy was experiencing a bit of a letdown. It made her think of Christmas as a child. Nothing ever lived up to the expectations of a child. Over the years the expectations begin to be less and less, until it gets to the point where you never expect anything. Maybe that was the problem, she was expecting too much and it meant that she felt like she might encounter a huge disappointment.

Stephen started to wander around the boat exploring and taking in the sights and sounds. Before she knew it she could not see him.

“Hey sweetie. Where are you?” She kept her voice calm. When he did not answer she looked around frantically and called out, “Stephen, Stephen, where are you?”

There was no answer. She let go of the helm and looked around. There was no one topside.

She cut the engine and scrambled across the boat looking around and calling out “Stephen! Stephen!”

Her heart was racing but there was no answer. She felt that all too familiar feeling of dread. “Stephen!
Turning around she saw him standing by the lifeboat. He had a very peculiar look on his face, and cocked his head to one side. “My name is not Stephen.”

With that everything seemed to go blurry. He was standing there but it seemed like they were in a room and not on the boat. She shook her head and felt like this was all a dream. Something was not right. “Stephen,” she whispered it this time, and felt like somehow he was slipping away from her.

Chapter 18

“My name is not Stephen.” Mike hugged his son as the pain of rejection crept into his eyes. Mike felt the pain, too, as David pushed him away and backed away from the bed where his mother lay.

“Stephen! Stephen!” Mike watched helplessly as his wife grasped the air frantically seeking some invisible being that he knew was long gone. As he looked away and saw his son tremble in fear he knew it was time to let go.

David scurried further behind his father. His body seemed to shrink a couple of inches and his eyes hid behind trembling eyelids. Mike knew he hated these visits. No matter how many happy stories he told David about a funny and loving mother who baked brownies and taught him all about sailing, they never matched with the terrifying woman who lived in the cold stark hospital. The pictures at home that Mike shared with David of a warm and laughing woman barely resembled the person lying in the hospital bed. At home David loved hearing stories about his mom, here in her presence he was terrified.

“Janice, it is me, Mike. David and I came to visit you.” Mike spoke in a timid voice. His heart felt as if it was weighed down by an anchor. Seeing the woman he loved tormented like this made him wish he could erase her past. He felt helpless and almost hopeless. A part of him would not let go of the hope that the woman he loved was somewhere trapped inside of the empty shell before him. No matter what he said or did he knew he could never defeat the demons she had been carrying around for a lifetime.

“She has been having a really rough day. It seems as if she is mixing reality with some story she has imagined and cannot escape it. The doctors have not been able to get her out of this trance.” One of the nurse’s said as another knelt to David’s level.
“I think I have a lollipop at my desk. Do you think your dad will let you come with me and see if we can find it?”

Mike looked down at his son and the relief the boy felt for the possibility of an escape washed over his entire face. The nurse looked nice and happy in her colorful scrubs and the promise of a treat seemed like a much better way to spend the time. Mike realized a lollipop was much more enticing than watching some strange woman thrash madly around in a hospital bed.

Chapter 19

Out of nowhere Janice heard a haunting sound. “Janice, it is me, Mike. David and I came to visit you.” She frantically looked around but saw no one. She must be losing it, her ex-husband could not possibly be onboard with them. With that thought it seemed as if the ocean swallowed the boat and she was standing all alone and the crisp ocean air changed to an oppressing antiseptic smell.

She was no longer standing on the deck but lying down in a strange bed. The room was small and cold. She could see nothing but dingy white tiles with grey specks above her head.

“No! No! I had him. You can’t take him away from me.” She began to fight against the restraints and Mike’s heart crumbled into a million pieces. Seeing the woman he loved like this made him feel like a broken man.

Realizing that nothing could be done he walked out of the room, closed the door behind him and sunk against the wall. As he approached his son chatting happily with the pretty nurse he decided this would be their last visit. Janice was too sick and it upset David too much.

Sighing he took a deep breath and walked down the hall to the social workers office.

“I can’t do this anymore. I can’t make him come here.”

The social worker stood up and approached him.

“There is no point. For years I have been coming here. I bring him and she still calls him Stephen. She does not know the difference between fiction and reality. David is upset and scared of his mother. And rightfully so. She took him and tried to drown him and I still came here to visit. I know she is sick, and I love the woman that she used to be, but that woman is not my wife
or the mother of my child. ” Once he finished Mike turned and walked to the nurse’s station to get his son.

“Come on David. Let’s go get some ice cream.”

The staff knew he would not be back. David was gone, and they were relieved. No child should have to go through this. The music from radio in Janice’s room played a Rodney Atkins song and Janice just whispered: “Stephen.”
Exposition
Learning While Writing
1. Introduction

Creative writing is not the same as essay writing. While there needs to be some research done to ensure that a creative writing piece is believable it requires much more than that. Sitting down to complete my BA thesis in creating writing I encountered a lot of obstacles which plague many writers. I intend to discuss some of these issues in my exposition. Through the guidance of my advisor, along with the help of some of the experts, I began to be able to open my soul and create an alternate reality. The creative writing requires that the writer be able to take herself out of their own world and immerse into another world. When committing to complete my BA thesis on writing a novella the amount of work required never dawned on me. As hours turned to days I found that some of the aspects were almost overwhelming. The actual process of writing *His Name is Stephen* required focus on the writing process, characters, flashbacks, and editing, among other details. Once the novella was completed it was time to sit down and attempt to convey the process that transpired to complete this task. Writers, when developing a work of fiction, are creating a group of characters and experiences that do not exist, except in the mind of the writer. The development and the imagination that are required of writers can be somewhat overwhelming. However, when approached in an organized, yet chaotic, manner the writer is able to complete a story which creates a whole new world.

2. It All Starts With an Idea

Once the end of any BA study approaches the beginning of the thesis looms. As most students and professors will attest to, this is often viewed with dread and fear. While the BA in English gives students many opportunities to practice their writing skills, it is still a huge leap from a five to seven page paper to a thirty page paper. Sitting around with some of my peers this fall and discussing the upcoming thesis I felt I was not displaying the appropriate amount of anxiety. Writing is something I enjoy and do not only in school but for pleasure. As the winter approached I already knew what I wanted to write and had sent Anna Heiða an email hoping to get into the creative writing course which she would be teaching. At the time the class was full but Anna Heiða assured me that if I was willing to research and approach the creative writing process with an academic mind in place that a creative writing thesis was possible.

As January approached and it came time to start the process of writing a creative writing thesis there were numerous obstacles. To begin with the idea which I had spent time developing
turned out to be insufficient and it was at this point that the fear began to overtake my rational and creative mind. Staring at a blank document for days, or writing something only to delete the entire thing made it difficult to fathom ever completing an entire novella. Frustrated, I abandoned the writing and decided to approach it from another angle. Armed with books and articles on creative writing I sat down to begin to research what I was doing wrong. Somewhere there must be a formula that writers follow when beginning on a project. Unfortunately, all my research revealed the exact opposite. “If there are no rules, or none worth his attention, where is the beginning writer to begin?” (Gardner 17). Coming across this statement gave me hope as I realized that creative writing is not dictated by rules and formulas but a process that varies for everyone. While this revelation settled my qualms, I decided that I was still not ready to begin the process of writing my novella.

After doing more reading and research it became clear that the process for writing was something that I needed to reorganize. Inspired by Anne Lamott’s book *Bird by bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* I began a ritual. Every day, as suggested by Lamott, at the same time I began to focus on writing. I would write and attempt to find a focus for my thesis. Using the technique from Lamott, instead of focusing on the entire novella I began to see small scenes and attempt to write them. Lamott describes this as focusing on an small picture frame and filling the contents of that, rather than trying to paint the whole canvas. This technique helped me to find small things to write about, but none of them warranted an entire novella. The ideas just were either too vague or too complex to meet the requirements. However, as I was committed to this process I found that by setting a routine and focusing on writing everyday at the same time helped to focus my mind and prepare me to be creative.

By setting a routine of writing in the evening and reading in the morning, I felt certain that a brilliant idea would strike me. Having found Anne Lamott so helpful, I decided to listen to her words and continue going. She explains how most writers will develop many shitty first drafts before finding something that the writer will deem worthy enough. Lamott describes how a writer will oftentimes write pages and pages of something, only to find that all of it is garbage except for one tiny sentence. That sentence can then be developed into a paragraph and finally into an entire story. This is exactly how the idea for *His Name is Stephen* came to me. After an evening of writing almost eight pages of gibberish which had no plot or connectivity there was an idea of waves gently caressing a young boy sleep as he died. While this idea seemed morbid, I
found that the image stayed in my mind and made a lasting impression. After having played with the idea of writing fantasy, which is one of my favorite genres to read, I realized that the psychological thriller was the story that was locked inside of me. A writer will often dance “around a subject because he is not ready to handle it, psychologically or emotionally” (Lerner 20). Writing about a young boy dying, his sister killing him, and a mother having a mental breakdown was not my story but the one I wanted to tell. Using that idea I begin to write small frames of the story to come up with the larger picture which developed into my novella *His Name is Stephen*.

### 3. Bringing Life to a New Person

One of the first aspects that a writer needs to consider is the development of characters. In any work of fiction there can be numerous characters. The writer needs to have a clear idea how to introduce each of them, what role she play, and just how important each character is to the development of the story. By being aware of these aspects it one is able to create characters that grab a hold of the reader and pull them into the story.

Creating a character requires the writer to have a good idea of the person she is writing about. It is important to have a concise physical picture of each character. Even if every curve or detail is not described to the reader, there needs to be consistency in the way each character is described. Physical appearance is not the only important aspect that must keep in mind. For instance, every person eats, sleeps, and has waking hours and while many of these mundane tasks do not need to be explicitly expressed in a story it should be something that is clear to avoid making mistakes in the story.

Before you put a character in a story, know how well that character sleeps. Know what the character eats for lunch and how much it matters, what he buys and how the bills get paid, she spends what we call working hours. Know how your character would prefer to spend evenings and weekends and why such plans get thwarted. Know what memories the character has of pets and parents, cities, snow, or school. (Burroway 95)

If the writer is aware of every little detail, and creates a character sketch during the writing process this can help to ensure that there are not inconstancies throughout the story.

One technique that many writers use with success is to create a character profile for the main characters in the novel. The purpose of a character profile is twofold: to assist the
A detailed character profile as suggested by the Lazy Scholar in How to Create a Character Profile is attached in appendix A for Janice.

Once the character profile for Janice was complete it was easy to refer back to it in order to ensure that the details remain consistent. I tangled with the idea of creating detailed character profiles for some of the minor characters but did not find that they needed as much development as Janice. While David is present for most of the journey with Janice, it is her idea of David that I present to the reader and therefore not necessarily reliable, especially given her state of mind. While there are very few physical details of Janice in the story, the image of her was always very clear. She is an average sized woman, with blonde hair and blue eyes. She is taller than most women, but not towering over them. As the story is focused mostly on an internal battle she has with herself, appearances of Janice play almost no role in the story. She is more focused on how others around her appear rather than her own appearance.

Unlike physical appearance Janice’s memories of the past are vital to the development of the story. Janice has vivid memories of the death of her brother, Stephen, which is the catalyst for all the future developments. As a writer it was not only important to know the details of the death, but her reaction at the time of the death. Likewise, it was important for me to know how the rest of the family reacted to the death of Stephen. I needed to be aware of the sounds, smells and little details which Janice was aware of during the time of mourning. By introducing the brownies that Janice’s mother made and having them comfort her and by making them be an aspect of her escape with David, I was able to project the connection to something which gave Janice comfort during a very tragic event in her life.

The development of the character needs to be able to entice the reader. The character has to be more than a flat description of words on paper. The character needs to have a personality, a life and something that they need. When Kurt Vonnegut Jr. wrote his eight rules for writing a short story, he claims “every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water” (On Writing 82). While he made this claim in regards to short story writing, it is relevant in all fictional writing. By giving each character a want or a need the story is able to progress in the characters desire to fulfill that need. In His Name is Stephen, Janice makes her need known early on in the story. She needs to rescue her son from the grasp of her ex-husband. This need is
something that is able to propel the story forwards. David is a child and his needs seem to be more basic. For instance, in chapter 4, Janice and David need to stop for food. Janice is aware of this basic need for her son, and has gone through a lot of planning to find a suitable place to fulfill this need. The want that leads David further into the story is his love for boats. This want helps the reader to understand David’s willingness to go on a journey with a complete stranger. By developing these wants and needs the story is able to progress forward.

While need and appearance play an integral role in character development, the reader needs to establish some sort of connection with the character in order to make them continue to read. Janet Burroway discusses in her book *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* that each character is often a blend of fantasy and real life but most importantly the reader must care what happens to the character and find them believable (Burroway 95). With Janice, the reader begins to care about the escape from the ex-husband as Janice reveals a violent past. Most readers can sympathizes with a battered woman and the desire to protect a child from this environment. While, there are some credibility issues in the begin of the story, this can be overlooked as Janice is in a frantic state. As the story progresses it becomes evident that the issues with credibility stems from Janice’s mental health issues but at that point the reader has established a desire to see the story to the end.

Considering the importance of characters in any story allowed me as a writer to develop a persona that the reader will be willing to travel with across many pages to come. Sol Stein expressed this sentiment when describing what he always hoped for during his time as an editor. “I wanted to fall in love, to be swept up as quickly as possible into the life of a character so interesting that I couldn’t bear to shut the manuscript in a desk overnight” (*On Writing* 49-50). In giving Janice such an interesting start where she is rescuing a young boy from an abusive man, Janice becomes a character that has a complicated past and the reader wants to see her make it out of this ordeal with David without being caught. Despite her horrific action the reader feels that Janice’s intentions are noble, and therefore the reader is willing to continue reading. At the start of *His Name is Stephen* Janice is characterized by showing how desperate and frantic she is trying to get to David. This sentence came about after considering more of Stein’s advice from *On Writing*. He suggests that a writer should have “characterization by an action, which is far more effective than characterizing by description” (*On Writing* 56). Janice is said to be running before she even stands up, which shows her hurry and desperation to get to her destination on
time. Stein also says that “one can describe a way of moving that gives us a sense of personality” (*On Writing* 57). By introducing Janice through motion it sets the pace for the entire story as she remains on the run for nearly the entire time.

### 4. Plotting the Events

Once the character grabs the reader, it is essential that the story progresses through the plot and actions. The plot develops by creating suspense in the reader. There are numerous avenues in which a writer can do both of these aspects. In addition to utilizing the characters to develop the plot the writer may use things such as suspense, a crucible or adversity to help develop the plot. By using all of these aspects the plot will begin to grow and entice the reader to continue to read.

After the characters have all been introduced the beginning of the elements of the plot should be well underway. The plot needs to begin alongside the characters and progress along with their introduction. While some people may feel that plot and story are interchangeable I feel that Sol Stein best distinguishes between the two by stating “I think of story as the idea or conception...Plot is the working out of the that idea in scenes that can be changed, shifted about, added to, or deleted” (*How to Grow a Novel* 77). No matter what genre of fiction a writer is working on, the suspense comes in when the reader wants to continue to find out what will happen next. As soon as the reader no longer feels a need to know more, the writer risks losing the reader’s interest. While characters grab the reader, the plot holds onto them, piloting them forward to the end of the story.

While writing *His Name is Stephen* I wanted find a way to create tension and suspense. In the first chapter when Janice abducts David, the element of suspense is introduced. The reader wants to know why she is taking the young boy, who she is to him, and if she will get away with her plan. Additionally, by introducing the medical staff, I felt the reader will begin to be intrigued by this development and want to find out their purpose in the story. I feel that by not revealing who the a patient is the reader begins to have questions which moves the story forward. The medical staff did not disclose too much information regarding the condition which adds another element of suspense. With the element of suspense added to the story the reader feels compelled to complete the journey with me, the writer.
In addition to the element of suspense, the idea of a crucible helps to ease the plot forward. Sol Stein explains that “A crucible refers to a vessel in which different ingredients are melded in white hot heat...Characters caught in a crucible won’t declare a truce or quit” (On Writing 94). In *His Name is Stephen* I viewed the car as a crucible for Janice and David. While on the outside there seems to be very little tension, the reader and Janice are both aware that the longer they remain alone in the car the potential for the plan to fail increases. During the time which Janice is placed in this crucible she is dealing with yet another one, her mind. Janice is in a fantasy world and the probability of that world being shattered creates tension. Her mind has created its own crucible where fantasy and reality are the different ingredients being melded together. By utilizing the crucible I felt that the suspense and tension was established and created a plot worth reading.

As the plot develops the reader feels as if the they are being taken along on a journey. The journey I wanted to take the reader on was that of the life and events which lead up to the hospitalization and mental breakdown of Janice. By using suspense and a crucible I was able to create adversity for Janice and develop the plot of *His Name is Stephen*.

5. **Back in the Day, When I was Young**

Another tool a writer has access to, is the use of the flashback. The flashback can give the writer the opportunity to present ideas that help to shape the character. Additionally, the flashback helps to create a grander setting and introduce situations that help to round out a particular character. The flashback can assist in explaining character traits or behaviors that may not otherwise make sense. By utilizing the flashback in *His Name is Stephen* the story gains depth and perception.

Although many writers and experts feel that using the flashback can deter from a story, in some instances it is needed and helps to carry the story forward. A flashback takes the reader away from what is happening in real time, right in front of them, and moves them to another time and place. This shift can, when not handled well, can cause a rift in the story. “The reason flashbacks create a problem for readers is that they break the reading experience. The reader is intent on what happens next. Flashbacks, unless expertly handled, pull the reader out of the story and tell him what happened earlier” (On Writing 143). Sol Stein explains that the writer must use the flashback to enhance the story, make it an immediate scene, make the flashback unobtrusive,
and the first sentence needs to be arresting. (On Writing 144). Keeping these key factors in mind I introduced the flashback into His Name is Stephen.

As the reader starts on chapter three they are introduced to the first flashback. By having a chapter break to introduce the flashback, I felt that the progression from the present to the past was unobtrusive. The first sentence, by moving Janice from the driver of the car in the present to a passenger in the past, marks a change that captures the reader’s attention, therefore making it arresting. The scene does not have Janice telling her memories but is happening right in front of the reader. The reader can feel the impatience that Janice is feeling as well as the frustration that both mother and child are experiencing. Finally, the flashback gives the reader a feeling of connection to Janice by providing with crucial details about the death of her brother. I felt that the flashback was the only option to use to introduce the needed background for Janice.

The flashbacks in His Name is Stephen are an integral part of the story. Without the background information, the mental breakdown does not have an anchor. When the idea for a mother dealing with the loss of her son came to me, it was easy to fathom that as a scenario which would cause the breakdown. However, the idea of having a child which reminded Janice of her dead brother seemed to provide a more plausible situation. In order to introduce the tragic death and the role which Janice played, it was necessary to show them to the reader, rather than to tell the reader about them. The flashback allowed me, as the writer, to show the reader the beginnings of Janice’s withdrawal from reality. By having both Janice be a part of the death of Stephen it allowed me to introduce the beginning of Janice’s mental issues while allowing the reader to sympathize with Janice. The flashback scenes in His Name is Stephen create a gateway to the problems which plague Janice today.

6. And in the End

Finally, once a work of fiction is complete the writer will be ready to take the reader on a journey. While preparing for this journey each writer will come away with some new understanding about their writing which will hopefully allow for the writer to grow and develop. Each time that this happens, the writer becomes just a little better, and without it the writer will remain stuck. By allowing their story to teach them something, the writer creates something worthwhile, not only for the reader but the writer as well. Learning and growing is the final outcome of a successful piece of written work.
After having spent weeks on a single project and I found that I have learned a lot about myself as a writer. By allowing myself the opportunity to not only write fiction but to read about it, I was able to discover that many of the issues that affect me are common among writers. We all have insecurities when it comes to writing, and upon realizing this I gained more confidence. I was petrified to open the email from Anna Heiða after she read the first draft, and even put it off for a day or two. The idea of someone scrutinizing my work is acceptable, the idea of them scrutinizing my creativity is scary. Fortunately, the feedback was constructive and helped me to make improvements. This process has given me the courage to pursue a lifelong dream of writing.
Works Cited
Appendix A
Character Profile Worksheet

**Basic Statistics**

Name: Janice Blake  
Age: 33-35  
Nationality: American  
Socioeconomic Level as a child: Upper Middle Class  
Socioeconomic Level as an adult: Middle Class  
Hometown: Costal town in Connecticut.  
Occupation: None (In her mind she works as a technical advisor to a government agency which was her job prior to her hospitalization.)  
Income: None- was around $95,000  
Talents/Skills: Very avid and good navigator and able to operate a yacht on her own  
Birth order: Oldest  
Siblings (describe relationship): Stephen- Janice adored her little brother. He was quite literally the apple of her eye. She kills him by accident when she becomes too possessive of him.  
Spouse (describe relationship): Mike- Janice has begun to imagine he was violent with her and that is what keeps her away from her son. He is actually very loving and distraught over Janice and her mental breakdown.  
Children (describe relationship): David. Janice is preoccupied with trying to rescue David from her ex-husband that she feels stole him from her. David has no connection to his mother because he feels that she wants him to be something that he is not. He looks a lot like her younger brother, Stephen.  
Grandparents (describe relationship): Janice visited the grandparents with her family all the time when she was a child. She feels jealous and uneasy with other cousins around. Grandmother tries to be sympathetic when Stephen dies.  
Grandchildren (describe relationship): None  
Significant Others (describe relationship): None  
Relationship skills: She can be charming and fun. She is very likable and people do not get a
sense of how dangerous she is. She actually is very jealous and possessive and unstable due to having never dealt with the death of her brother properly.

**Physical Characteristics:**
- Height: 5´8
- Weight: 150ish
- Race: White
- Eye Color: Blue
- Hair Color: Blonde
- Glasses or contact lenses? No
- Skin color: Fair- some slight freckles from time out in the sun and out at sea
- Shape of Face: oval
- Distinguishing features: Wavy thick hair. No scars or distinguishing marks
- How does he/she dress? Professional when working, nautical preppy during her free time
- Mannerisms: Polite.
- Habits: (smoking, drinking etc.) Not a smoker or a drinker. She seems to have a bit of OCD
- Health: Physical health is good. Mental health is unstable and she is hospitalized and not aware of her surroundings.
- Hobbies: Baking, sailing
- Favorite Sayings: My angel- when talking about her brother
- Speech patterns: Very normal American. She uses correct grammar but knows that speaking to a child means you sometimes need to approach them at their level
- Disabilities: Mentally unstable
- Style (Elegant, shabby etc.): Preppy
- Greatest flaw: Jealous and possessive
- Best quality: Loving and smart

**Intellectual/Mental/Personality Attributes and Attitudes**
- Educational Background: B.A at UConn, M.A. at Yale
- Intelligence Level: Very intelligent
Any Mental Illnesses? Yes. She is suffering from Derealization
Learning Experiences: Father taught her to sail
Character’s short-term goals in life: Kidnap David
Character’s long-term goals in life: Live with David and to change his name to Stephen
How does Character see himself/herself? A victim but strong enough to fight back.
How does Character believe he/she is perceived by others? Weak by her ex-husband and likeable by most everyone else.
How self-confident is the character? She has some doubts but she is willing to do anything to get David.
Does the character seem ruled by emotion or logic or some combination thereof? Emotion
What would most embarrass this character? Failing to get David away from Mike. Getting caught before accomplishing her goals.

**Emotional Characteristics**

Strengths/Weaknesses: A planner. She is mentally unstable
Introvert or Extrovert? Extrovert
How does the character deal with anger? Not well. She acts out.
With sadness? She buries it until it boils to the top.
With conflict? Not well, avoids it.
With change? Not well. She prefers to have everything the way she remembers it.
With loss? Terribly. This is at fault of her parents for not getting her help when Stephen dies.
What does the character want out of life? To be a mother.
What would the character like to change in his/her life? That David is called David instead of Stephen and that he is not always with her.
What motivates this character? Her motherly love for David or sisterly love for Stephen.
What frightens this character? David remaining with his father and not having him in her life.
What makes this character happy? Seeing David smile and having him with her
Is the character judgmental of others? Not really she is so disconnected from reality she does not
have a clear view or perception of other people.
Is the character generous or stingy? Generous but not overly so
Is the character generally polite or rude? Polite

**Spiritual Characteristics**

Does the character believe in God? No
What are the character’s spiritual beliefs? None- she lost her brother at such an early age she is mad at God if anything.
Is religion or spirituality a part of this character’s life? No
If so, what role does it play? None

**How the Character is Involved in the Story**

Character’s role in the novel (main character? hero? heroine? Romantic interest? etc.): Main Character.
Scene where character first appears: First scene

**Relationships with other characters:**

1. Stephen- Brother: -- (Describe relationship with this character and changes to relationship over the course of the novel). She is very loving and very possessive of him. She wants to be with him all the time and feels resentment towards everyone else around them, including her mother. Janice kills Stephen by accident while visiting her grandparents when trying to prevent him from playing with their cousins.
2. David- Son: -- (Describe relationship with this character and changes to relationship over the course of the novel). David is her son that is young and loves boats. This love comes from when he was very little and his mom used to take him sailing though he does not remember this or any good things about his mother. David lives with his father now, after Janice has a mental breakdown and tries to kill him. David plays a part in her delusions which mostly consist of Janice trying to get away with David from Mike. This is a partial memory of when she tried to flee with him as a baby and nearly drowned him.
3. Mike- Husband: -- (Describe relationship with this character and changes to relationship over the course of the novel). Mike loves Janice but is having a hard time dealing with her illness. He
tries to maintain contact between David and Janice at the expense of David. Mike wishes nothing more than to go back to the way things were before Janice became ill. Janice has vilified Mike to explain David’s absence in her own mind.

How character is different at the end of the novel from when the novel began: At the start of the story it seems as if Janice is trying to get her son away from a violent father. At the end of the story it is evident that she is the one who is violent and she mentally unstable.

Additional Notes on This Character: She was comforted by her mother’s brownies after the death of Stephen