The Endless Road

On Writing The Road Less Travelled

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

It was inspiration and a lifelong passion for stories that prompted the writing of this novella called *The Endless Road* (about 28,000 words) and an essay called *The Road Less Travelled* (around 3,000 words). *The Road Less Travelled* highlights the process gone through in order to create *The Endless Road*.

*The Endless Road* is about a girl named Lia. After creating a good life for herself in London, attending university and landing a beautiful girlfriend, life seems pretty good for this young woman. The arrival of Lia’s ex-lover, Juliet, throws everything into a downward spiral. Gradually, it is revealed that Juliet and Lia share a dark past together and how the girls took extreme measures when their families tried to break them apart. A murder is committed and temptation presents itself in the form of a stunning detective named Grace Morgan.

*The Road Less Travelled* documents the evolution of *The Endless Road*; how it progressed from a mere idea to a novella. The essay furthermore explains how decisions were made regarding plot, character and setting. *The Endless Road* was inspired by a real case which took place in New Zealand in 1954. The method chosen for writing required painstaking research and the results are described in *The Road Less Travelled*. At the heart of *The Endless Road* lies the question what might drive two girls to commit such a heinous crime? This is not the story of the victim or the detective; it is the story of the murderers.
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Now hollow fires burn out to black,
   And lights are guttering low:
Square your shoulders, lift your pack,
   And leave your friends and go.

Oh never fear, man, nought’s to dread,
   Look not left nor right:
In all the endless road you tread
   There’s nothing but the night.

A.E. Housman
1 The Endless Road
By
Hildur Guðbergsdóttir

“Hello, Lia.” Juliet’s voice echoed off the walls and invaded my consciousness like cannonfire.

I was standing on the top step in the rickety ladder propped up against the bookcase, doing my best to maintain my balance as I battled quite the fear of heights.

My mythology teacher had sprung on us an unexpected paper earlier that morning, due the next day, which meant I had been forced to go to the library after school to hunt down a copy of *Morte D’Arthur* by Sir Thomas Mallory. I had just reached out to grasp the book and was trying my best to not to look down when her voice disturbed my quiet solitude.

The dust from the old copy of King Arthur fables made me sneeze and thus I dropped the book but she caught it easily. I carefully climbed down the ladder and was finally faced with the woman I had left behind six years earlier.

“Is this a dream, Juliet?” I whispered as if to nobody in particular. “I have imagined this moment so many different times.”

“You had better wake up, then,” Juliet returned with her sarcastic tone so familiar to me. Then, her azure gaze grew softer as she reached out and cradled my cheek with her hand. I leaned into the touch instinctively, and before I had realized what I was doing, I had thrown myself into her arms and was abandoningly inhaling the scent of her
golden tresses which fell down her shoulders and cascaded down her back. Juliet seemed startled for a moment, before she tightened her hold on me.

A kaleidoscope of images flashed before my eyes. A pair of girls running on the beach, sitting in a hammock reading together and lying on the grass writing into notebooks. I didn’t allow the darker images connected with the woman in my arms to invade my mind. I refused to allow the past to spoil this one moment where I was free from the chains I had continually carried for six years.

After some moments, I pulled from the embrace and allowed myself to drink in the sight of her, much like a traveller in the desert does when he has come upon a spring where he can rest and drink. She lifted an eyebrow in question in a familiar gesture, wondering whether I liked what I saw and I blushed down to my toes. Juliet still had the power to render me speechless.

Tense silence elapsed for quite some time before I broke it. “I keep imagining that you must be a mirage which will dissolve before my eyes at any second.”

“To me, you happen to be the greatest mirage of them all,” Juliet returned.

“Nevertheless, I’m glad to see you.”

Juliet again raised an eyebrow. “Are you? I didn’t think you would be.”

“Of course I am,” I returned with a smile, but now that the situation had been accepted, the ramifications of her presence became clear to me. “You must have a thousand questions to ask me.”

“Strangely enough, I have only one. Are you happy in this life, Lia?”
“Yes, I am.” Juliet nodded but I knew her well enough to sense that she had been expecting a different answer.

“But you expected it to turn out differently, didn’t you?”

“Of course I did. But someone once told me that great people fight against all obstacles in search of happiness. I overcame the obstacles.” I walked to the desk where my books were stored and began shoving them into my backpack.

“And you have found true contentment?”

I turned back to Julie in order to answer her question. “In coming to understand that life does not revolve around the happiness factor, but the obstacles. They mould us, shape us, makes us who we are.”

“Yes, they have,” Juliet concurred. “It is more about the journey as opposed to the destination. Do you ever think of the past?”

“No.” I finished gathering my things and closed the leather backpack.

“Whyever not? I think about the past all the time. Do you remember that time we went bathing in the old pool? Or when we went out to the old castle late one night? Have you forgotten our first kiss?” This serenade of memories was accompanied with a nostalgic look and I could almost hear the film music in the background.

“They are in my nightmares each and every night, but if I were to allow myself to begin reminiscing, I would never return.”

“It cannot be that effortless.”

“For me, it has to be. Otherwise, I would not be able to survive.” I slung my bookbag over my shoulder and then walked past Juliet on my way out. She followed behind.
We stared at each other over the steaming cups of coffee. Neither of us had spoken anything of significance since leaving the dusty safety of the old library. Yet, within the resounding silence was the glorious knowledge we had been reunited once more.

Due to the people around us talking, the piercing noises of the coffee machine and the incessant ringing from the register, it was apparent to both of us that we had now entered the real world. The past, present and future had collided and become one.

I took a gulp of my coffee and gazed at her over the brim of the cup. She had not changed during the six years that we had been separated. Her hair had grown a shade darker, and she had lines along the forehead I longed to chase away, her azure gaze had grown weary. Her eyes held thousands of years worth of knowledge and a desire consumed you to solve the mystery that this woman embodied. Had she perhaps been present at the erection of the pyramids, seen Joan of Arc win the battle of Orléans or even sailed with Columbus to America? Even now, as she looked upon me, I felt a wish grow within me to solve the mystery, even if I already happened to have all the answers. I gulped another sip of coffee and choked, gasping for breath until I had regained my equilibrium. I placed the cup down on the saucer and she smiled, as if in triumph.

I decided to pose the first question. “How did you find me?”

She arched an eyebrow in response, a habit I remembered from old times. “I have many talents.”

“Why have you come?”
“You didn’t look surprised when you saw me earlier.” This was not a question, rather a statement of fact.

“I knew you would come.”

My companion gazed around the busy café, at the people laughing and sharing a cup of coffee, the dog who barked outside because he had been left there by his owner, and the child who threw a tantrum at the counter because the exhausted mother had refused to buy cake for her.

“They have absolutely no idea, do they?”

“What are you talking about?”

“They have no idea how fucking fragile life can be. They think they have all the time in the world and that is the greatest delusion of them all.”

“No, that was the idea of you and me,” I promptly returned, before rising from the table, with my companion on my heels. I walked to the backdoor of the establishment and threw it open to enter the empty alley beyond. Juliet was following close behind me and the door slammed shut behind us.

The fury within me rose to a fever pitch when we were alone. I turned and spoke to the woman who had followed me in accusatory tones.

“You have no right to do this, Juliet!”

She remained silent, did not offer an explanation or try to plead her case. She knew I needed to finish speaking before amends could be made.

“You cannot turn up in my life after six years and expect to rewind the clock. What we had is gone and we can never have that back. We can’t relive the past.”

“I know that,” concurred my ex-lover as she stood before me.

“I can finally sleep at night without nightmares. I can finally laugh without feeling guilty. I have finally found peace of mind, and you would take that away from me?”
“Yes,” was her simple but profoundly simple reply. “Do you believe you are the only one who has suffered for the last six years?”

Juliet reached beneath her shirt and pulled out a necklace. It was a small golden cross with an emerald stone located in the middle. She thrust it into my face as if demanding whether I remembered or not. The necklace was a gift from my father on my thirteenth birthday, a sign of love and devotion I had bestowed upon Juliet. She reached for my hand and placed the necklace in my palm. “Since you have found your elusive peace of mind, by all means, never let it go.”

My hands enclosed around the precious object and I immediately realized its importance. She had kept the necklace despite the obvious privations and difficulties in doing so.

I grabbed her wrist to prevent her from leaving and she turned. Our eyes met and it was decided that she would stay for the present, despite the risks entailed in such a venture.

♦ ♦ ♦

We were sitting on my sofa, my head in Juliet’s lap as she stroked my dark, curly locks. I knew true contentment in that moment.

A loud knock interrupted the blissful moment, and with a growl, I rose from the couch and threw open my door, prepared to berate the person who dared to interrupt our reunion. On the threshold stood my best friend, Ruth, her face as white as alabaster. The words of reprimand quickly vanished when I saw her dishevelled appearance. “Has something happened?”

“Come quickly,” Ruth finally managed to utter after some effort on her part. “It’s Ava.”
As soon as I heard the name, I quickly grabbed my coat from the stand beside the door and noted numbly that Juliet had come into the lounge and followed in my wake as we made our way across campus to the Lillian Penson Hall occupied by Ava. Ruth seemed unable to answer my repeated enquiries as to the true state of matters, she merely ignored them and walked on as if possessed, her jaw set in grim determination.

We entered the building and climbed the stairs to the third floor. A group was assembled by the door and I barged past them into the apartment. It was arranged in the same manner as my own. The kitchen was glaringly empty and I could not find Ava in the adjacent living room when I peeked in there. I walked slowly down the small hallway which led to the bedroom. The bed had been made in the neat manner of Ava, and yet she was nowhere in sight. It was only when I looked into the bathroom that the mystery was solved.

I stopped in the doorway, gazing with horrid fascination at the scene in front of me. Ava lay in the bathtub which was filled with water, and I noted with horror that her wrists had been slit, giving the water a sickening red hue. Her blue eyes were wide open, staring at the ceiling above, seeing nothing. Whiteness had already begun to appear underneath the skin, signalling that she was dead, yet her lips still retained the seductive red colour that had first drawn me to her.

I turned but walked straight into Juliet, who wrapped her arms around me in a comforting manner, as I hid my face in her chest. I felt her small gasp of astonishment when she looked beyond me to the scene in the bathroom. At this moment Ruth appeared, about to enter the bathroom to check the vitals of her friend, but a reprimand from Juliet abruptly stopped her dead in her tracks. My ex-lover warned my friend not to enter the scene and thus contaminate it. Ruth obeyed Juliet, like most people do.
Juliet took charge, and ensuring that the police had already been called, assigned Ruth to make certain nobody entered the bathroom until they arrived. She undoubtedly decided that we should keep out of sight, since she began directing me back to my apartment without a word or giving me a chance to voice a protest.

She had grabbed my hand and held it with an iron grip. It took me quite some time to extract myself. Juliet stopped to turn and face me. I could feel the anger rising within me. I needed revenge, and I knew my ex-lover was fair game.

“This is your fault!!”

“How is this my…” Juliet tried to respond but never got the chance because I ran into her and began beating her chests with my fists, feebly at best. She withstood my attack, standing there patiently until most of the anger had been spent. She tried to embrace me but I pushed her away. Juliet made another attempt and this time I allowed her to wrap her arms around my waist and pull me close. I did not embrace her, standing with my arms firmly at my sides. I merely rested my head against her chest and finally found disturbing peace.

“I wasn’t there when she needed me because I was with you.” My words were hardly distinguishable, buried as my face was in Juliet’s coat.

“I know. You couldn’t have saved her.”

“How the hell do you know?!” I pushed Juliet away angrily.

I walked ahead of Juliet to the apartment. When we entered, I mutely sat down on the couch, my anger spent, while Juliet took a seat in front of me on the sofa table.

“Who was Ava?” she finally questioned me after minutes of silence.

“She was my girlfriend,” I returned, deciding not to withhold such crucial information. I had expected a violent reaction, and yet she
exhibited none, merely looking at me with her inscrutable gaze. She did not offer me false words of condolence.

I was about to offer a few words of apology, some feeble explanations as to the discovery she had made, and yet no words passed my lips. Juliet merely gave me a nod in understanding.

There was another resounding knock on the door and we both arose at once. Juliet sent me a warning look and walked out of the living room, down the small hall and closed the door of the bedroom behind her. Only then did I feel safe enough to open the door. Standing on my threshold was a woman with long midnight hair and piercing blue eyes that seemed to read all the secrets of my heart at a glance. She was unusually tall for a woman, dressed in a long trench-coat. Beneath I could ascertain black slacks, a jacket in the same colour and a white shirt. She waved a badge at me before returning it to her pocket.

“I’m Detective Grace Morgan. Are you Sarah Winters, Ava Summers´ girlfriend?”

I nodded in consent and pushed the door open in wordless invitation for her to come in. I headed for the living room and sat down in my former place on the sofa. The detective followed behind me and sat down in an easy chair on the other side of the coffee table without invitation. I was struck by the grace of her movements.

“I’m sorry for your loss, Miss Winters.”

I nodded again to show my appreciation, but did not make the effort to thank her.

“I’m afraid I must ask you a few questions, if you will permit me.” Grace took a small pause before continuing in a more sympathetic manner. “The medical examiner has concluded after an initial examination that Miss Summers committed suicide.”
I cleared my throat before voicing a protest. “She would never do that.”

“Have you witnessed a change in her behaviour recently? Has she become withdrawn, or seemed preoccupied for some reason?”

“Ava was not depressed…” It was all I could manage to say before grief overcame me. A tear stole down my cheek but I stubbornly wiped it away. I had no intention of displaying my grief to this stranger. I reached out and grabbed a picture of Ava from a table, to show this cop she had been a real person. “I never noticed any signs that Ava was depressed. She was full of life, loved school, her friends and me. She was constantly making plans for us to go travelling. Does that sound like a depressed person?”

Grace leaned forward in her chair. “When someone feels cornered, alone, they often take what seems to be the easy way out. They are engulfed in darkness, it fills their soul. They are people looking for the lighted candle within the darkness of a cave where there is none.”

“When you gaze into the darkness, the darkness also gazes into you.”

Grace nodded in response.

“She would have come to me if she had been contemplating suicide.” I tried to sound more confident then I felt.

“Are you certain?” Grace’s gaze never wavered as she looked into my eyes. I was the first to look away, down onto my hands where they rested in my lap. I buried them there so Grace didn’t see that they were shaking. Sitting in such close proximity to a person of authority brought back some unpleasant memories.

“I have the distinct impression that I never knew Ava at all.” It took all my strength to utter this response, to not lose my composure.
“We all have secrets, Miss Winters.” For a moment, I thought she knew my secret, that my past had now collided with the present to inevitably poison the future.

I suddenly began to shiver noticeably and Grace began to watch me openly. “I believe that since the first examination indicates suicide that I do not need more for now. I will return in a day or two once you have gathered your thoughts and processed what has happened.”

Grace arose from the chair and I did the same. She extended her hand in greeting and I shook it warily. “I shall inform you when a full autopsy has been made.”

“Good evening, Detective.”

“Good evening, Miss Winters.” With that, she turned and headed out the door. It was only when the door had closed safely behind her that Juliet retreated from her safe haven.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. If she took her own life that is not fault of yours.” Juliet reached out for me, but I retreated from her touch.

“Of course it is,” I returned bitterly, in an angry tone that made my partner flinch. I grabbed my jacket and walked into the hallway, slamming the door behind me.

Juliet said nothing in reprimand when I came home at 2 a.m., drunk like a skunk and smelling of cheap perfume. She merely undressed me and helped me into bed, retreating herself to the vacant bedroom normally occupied by my now absent roommate.

I awoke in the middle of the night, my mind still hazy from the booze and illicit pleasure taken earlier in the night. I regained consciousness enough, however, to assert that the interruption had come from the other bedroom. On bare feet I made my way to the room where Juliet slept and found her in the throws of a nightmare.
A fear stole through me when I realized by her whispered pleadings that she was reliving the day it had all changed, when we had been torn apart by a single tragedy. Out of old habit, I climbed into the bed, sat up against the headboard and took her into my arms. She immediately calmed, as in bygone days. The knowledge that I had been the cause of her distress caused me great hurt, mixed in with a strange feeling of tenderness. As I held her in my arms and kissed her golden hair, I made a solemn promise that I would never inflict such injury upon anyone again, least of all her. Juliet would never again suffer through my intercession.

A few hours later I awoke and moved back into my bed before Juliet could have come to realize the truth.

♦ ♦ ♦

I awoke early the next morning to the sound of my phone ringing on the nightstand. I sleepily picked it up and answered, but quickly awoke when I recognised the voice of Grace on the other end of the line. *How in the hell did I recognise her voice?*

She kept the phone call brief, telling me she was now in the area and wanted to see me outside. I asked why.

“How do you know that?”

“The shoes standing in the hall last night were too big for you.” Her voice did not sound judgemental.

I had little choice in the matter and therefore assented. As I pulled on random clothes, I quickly wondered whether she knew the identity of my guest, and thus me in turn. Yet, I was quite certain that Grace would have confronted me at once if she knew the truth.
There was a wagon located not far away from my apartment on campus, where an old Indian bloke sold bad coffee and even worse sausages to make ends meets. I found her there, ordering two cups of coffee. Without a word, she handed my cup over after she had paid, and when I took a sip, I noted that it was filled with milk and sugar, exactly how I liked it.

I raised an eyebrow in question in her direction.

Grace shrugged in response. “I’m simply that good a detective.”

“You aren’t that good,” I responded confidently.

Grace raised one hand in a gesture of admitting defeat. “I may have questioned Ruth about you.”

“Why would you do that?” I had, by now, become truly intrigued and wanted to know the answer.

“To get a sense of your character.” Grace moved to stand in front of me, close enough for her scent to wash over me.

“What progress have you made so far?”

“Very little. But I intend to learn all of your secrets before the month is out.”

“You may want to take care, Detective Morgan. There are some secrets that should remain buried.”

“I cannot imagine you have any.”

“We all have them.” I found myself quoting her words from the night before. I knew I had to take care not to fall. To do so would mean danger not only to me, but also to Juliet.

We began silently walking around campus, taking in the beauty of the morning. There were few people about, seeing as how early it was. Only a jogger and a couple with hangovers headed home from the nightclub passed us as we made our way across campus.
Grace broke the silence. “I need to know more about your relationship with Ava.”

“What do you want to know?”

“How long have you been together?” Grace threw her finished coffee into a trashcan and drew up a small, black notebook and pen. She noted down the answers which I gave her.

“Three years.” I finished my cup and threw it away.

“When was the last time you saw her?”

“When I broke up with her two days ago.”

Grace looked up from her notebook and stopped writing. She regarded me curiously. “Miss Winters, I got the distinct impression last night that you cared deeply for Miss Summers.”

“I do,” I corrected her stubbornly.

We were standing in front of the main university building and I led Grace inside. There was an unused schoolroom on the first floor and I went in there with the detective on my heels. Grace closed the door behind us and regarded me silently as I stood by the window, looking out at the green gardens outside, the warmth of the sun on my face.

“I cannot help but wonder why you would therefore break up with her.”

I turned at Grace’s words. I took a moment to gather my thoughts before putting them into words. “Because she had been distant for quite some time. Always messaging someone and absolutely refusing to allow me near her phone. Then, on the night we broke up, Ruth told me she had seen Ava with some other woman the day before in some coffee shop.”

Grace pulled out the book again. “Did she get a description?”

“No, because the woman Ava was with was sitting behind some partition. Yet, it was obvious they were more than friends. I simply decided to make it easier for my girlfriend and break up with her.”
“Thus, the guilt written all over your face can be understood. You fed the innocent lamb to the wolves.”

My feet suddenly could not support me any longer but Grace hurried to my side and led me to a chair. I sat down, rested my elbows on my knees and hid my face in my hands.

“This is all my fault…” I muttered.

Grace apparently caught my words because she grabbed my wrists and pulled my hands away so that she might look into my eyes.

“No, it’s not.” Her azure eyes shone with conviction. “If Summers chose the wrong person to associate with, you couldn’t have done anything about it.”

“Yes, I could!” I shot back.

“What could you have done?”

“Protected her from what I know is out there.”

*People like me.*

♦ ♦ ♦

After a long shower, I changed my clothes and was sitting in the window-seat in the living-room with a steaming cup of coffee in my hand when Juliet appeared in the doorway. She stood there with her arms folded, regarding me silently for long moments before breaking the silence. I had watched the dawn come in and was now focusing my attention on the tired students hurrying to class.

“What’s going on with you?”

“Nothing.”

She sat down beside me in the window-seat. “Talk to me about Ava.”
I had forgotten how it felt to have someone care about you in such a manner, and therefore, the words were on my lips before I could prevent them from being uttered. “When I first arrived here, I was unsure and wary, frightened that someone would find out my true identity. I therefore kept to myself during the first semester, only going out occasionally to hunt for some woman and bringing her back here as a sexual release. After all, perhaps I’m a loner but not a nun. I always kicked them out in the morning and never contacted them again.”

“Until you met Ava?”

“Yes. I met her in a bar one evening, and as it turned out, she and I had a lot in common. Instead of bringing her here to get into her pants, I stayed at the bar, talking with her until the early hours. I had not felt a connection like this since…”

“…you met me?”

I nodded in response. “Ava in turn introduced me to her circle of friends and I was no longer alone in the world. I had a family of sorts, a dysfunctionally hopeless one, but a family nonetheless. Everything I cared about vanished in a single moment of anger…” I tried to speak, but the words would not come. Juliet reached out for my hand and squeezed it, understanding written all over her face.

It was only then that the terrifying truth dawned on me. We shared a mutual legacy of love lost, shattered hopes and murdered dreams. By a single act of defiance, we had ruptured our bond with the rest of humanity, strengthening the bond we shared, drawing us ever closer into the delusion of our own making, where we were not only the puppets, but also the puppeteers. I quickly drew my hands away, as if burned.

After a short silence, Juliet spoke. “It’s only natural that you should mourn Ava, you loved her after all.”
“Therein lies the problem. I never did.” I pulled up my knees, resting my forehead against them. My hands came up to shelter my face from her scrutiny.

“You never loved her?” breathed my partner as she reached out and grabbed my wrists so that she could look me in the eye.

“Of course not,” I retorted. “How could I love anyone after you? You destroyed me.” I arose from the window-seat and turned to walk out of the room.

“Did she know?”

I turned to face Juliet when she spoke and saw that the colour had drained from her face.

“Of course not,” I sighed. “All she knew was that I had been in a relationship before where I had been burned. I spared her the gory details, of course.” I could imagine how that conversation would have gone if I had ever tried telling her the truth. In the beginning I had considered revealing to her my true identity, after experiencing her understanding and compassion. Yet, a part of me knew that the truth could never be revealed. If I could not understand or make sense of the past, how could I expect Ava to do so? “We made an agreement early in our relationship. She would love enough for both of us.”

“That’s not the girl I knew.”

“The girl you knew is gone, Juliet.”

“For you to choose to enter a loveless relationship…”

I did not allow her to finish what she had been about to say. “Me and Ava were perhaps somewhat of a question mark at times, but what I have with you is what?”

Juliet could not formulate the answer to such a question.

I turned around, went into the bedroom and grabbed my books before heading out the door for class.
The sun was high in the sky by the time I emerged from the stifling classroom and into freedom. I was standing on the steps outside the building, speaking with Ruth and some of my fellow classmates, when Grace appeared. She had changed from her jogging clothes from earlier into a white shirt and a black suit. She was also wearing sunglasses, which glinted in the sun as she gazed in my direction.

“Miss Winters, may I have a moment of your time?”

I nodded in response and left my friends behind, following her to the parking lot where she informed me that she would prefer it if I accompanied her to the station. With no choice other then to comply, I assented and entered the white Toyota. We were silent during the ride to the station and soon enough, I was sitting on the wrong side of an interrogation room with Grace sitting across from me.

“First of all, Miss Winters, I must inform you that the M.E. has concluded that the death of your girlfriend was not accidental.”

My mouth felt very dry and I tried to swallow the lump building there while I waited for the detective to continue.

“The medical examiner conducted a toxicological examination of your girlfriend and she found high levels of ketamine in Miss Summers’s system.”

“Surely, she could have taken the medication herself,” I pointed out. As I spoke I realized she had anticipated such an answer.

“The doctor has concluded that she could not have inflicted the cuts upon her wrists. They were the wrong way. Besides, after such a doze of the medication, she would have been unconscious and unable to inflict injury upon herself.”
“Someone drugged her, put her in the bathtub and slit her wrists, leaving her there to die?” I felt how my world was slowly collapsing around me for the second time in my life.

_Please God, not again!_

Grace leaned forward over the table, until she could have reached out and touched me, and for a moment, I thought that she would do just that. “I think you did it.”

“Why in the hell would you come to conclusion like that? The detective exam must be peachy these days if any idiot from the streets can pass and call herself a cop.”

“An idiot would accuse without any evidence. I, however, would never do that.” She drew from her pocket a small brown leather-bound book and threw it down on the table in front of me. “Do you recognise this?”

I did. It was the diary Ava had kept and she always refused to allow me to read it. “It’s her diary. I’ve never read it. She respects my privacy. I do the same for her.”

Grace continued her interrogation. “In it she details how you would be unfaithful to her with various other women.”

“I will admit freely that I was not the perfect girlfriend, but surely that is not a crime!”

Grace sat down in her chair again, and crossing her legs, filled her voice with pretentious sympathy. “What happened, Miss Winters? Did she threaten to report your immoral activities to your superiors, to blacken your reputation? If there was coercion present in the matter, I might be prepared to accede on your behalf with the prosecutor.”

“I did nothing to hurt Ava!” I beat with my hand on the table in frustration, knowing all the while that she was playing with me, and that I was falling for it.
Grace raised an eyebrow, a triumphant twinkle in her eye. She lived for these moments. “She also mentions secrets you have kept from her, secrets from your past.”

The colour drained from my face and I fell back in my chair unable to speak.

“My question is, Miss Winters, how dark are those secrets? Would you be willing to kill in order to prevent them from becoming public knowledge? It seems clear from the diary that Miss Summers was unaware of the exact nature of those secrets, but a woman like her would undoubtedly have made inquiries. You must have found out and murdered her to keep your past where it belongs.”

“I should perhaps consult an attorney before we proceed any further.” I could sense that Grace seemed adamant to convict me for the murder of Ava, despite the circumstantial evidence.

The detective stood up from her chair and moved around to my side of the table, leaning over me and putting her cheek against mine as she whispered in my ear. “Make no mistake; a lawyer can’t save you now. I can hold you here for a day without any reason whatsoever. By the time I’m done with you, you’ll be confessing to the murder of Martin Luther King.”

With that, two policemen appeared in the doorway and Grace moved away to allow them to each grab one of my arms and escort me out the door. When she spoke, they stopped for a moment so that I might hear her words. “I will discover your secret, Miss Winters.”

With that, they pulled me out of the interrogation room and placed me in a cell.
I paced the floor of my cell for hours, watching as the sun set outside the bars. After what seemed like an eternity, the door of my cell was opened and in front of me stood a policeman dangling the keys, and beside him stood Juliet. I growled low in anger when I saw her and trampled past her without a word of greeting. “It is nice to see you too,” she quipped before taking on the process of getting me released.

It was only when we were standing on the steps outside the police station, that I allowed myself to ask the questions which had been formulating within my mind. “How did you know where I was?”

Ruth stepped out from the shadows of the station and I had my answer. “When that detective turned up at school, I figured trouble lay ahead and went to find Juliet to ask her advice.”

“Thank you,” I responded before turning to my partner. “How exactly did you manage to get me released?”

Juliet merely shrugged as if she was speaking of the weather. “I only spoke to that charming detective and gave you an alibi; after all you were with me the evening that Ava died.”

Ruth interrupted our exchange by stepping close to me and putting a hand on my shoulder in a reassuring manner. “We both believe that you had nothing to do with Ava’s death.”

I could only nod in consent, since my own conscience could hardly exonerate me of all wrongdoing, even though I was perhaps not responsible for the murder itself.

After a short conversation which only lasted a few minutes, Ruth seemed to understand our need to be alone, and made up some trifling excuse for leaving. With a kiss on my cheek and a promise to call in the morning to see how I was doing, she was gone.
I stared after her for long moments before turning back to Juliet, preparing to berate her for her foolishness. “Why did you do that? Do you have any idea as to the danger you were putting yourself in?”

“Where you go, I go, remember?” Against this logic, there seemed to be no satisfactory argument, and therefore I allowed her to sling her arm over my shoulder as we walked home, inhaling the familiar scent of her body and the brown leather jacket she was wearing.

On our way back to campus, we had to walk through a park, and since the afternoon had emerged into a beautiful evening, we sat down on a bench beneath an elm tree and watched as the sun sank below the horizon and the stars began to appear in the sky.

“Why did you do that?” I repeated my question from earlier.

“I was not about to let you rot in prison, particularly to serve the ambition of a policewoman who sees this case as the way for a promotion.”

“How do you know this?”

The self-confident Juliet blushed at my question. “All those law books I read in prison finally came in handy. I may perhaps have met the charming superior of that Morgan woman down at the station and explained to him the circumstances of your interrogation. In other words, that there seemed to be few pieces of evidence which would justify your being brought in. Captain James agreed with my assessment of the case and called in the detective, giving her a good talking to, but was about to agree with her once she had explained the particulars, the diary and such. I overheard their conversation, by accident of course, and gathered from this exchange that her ambitions have overridden her common sense on more then one occasion. However, when I stepped forward and provided you with an alibi for the evening of the murder, they had no choice but to release you.”
“You were playing a dangerous game, Juliet. If you had been recognised…”

“I know.”

I arose from the bench and began walking restlessly in front of my partner. “They will automatically convict us once they discover my true identity. This time they will lock us up and throw away the key. Do you remember the condition for our release?”

“We were never to meet again.”

“Should my identity and yours in turn, be discovered, we will serve another fifteen years in prison.”

“I care very little for such trivialities.”

I stopped in front of Juliet and stared at her, aghast. “Surely, you realize that you must take the next flight home? You have as of yet not been identified, and might escape detection. I can’t say the same for me.”

Juliet shook her head in refusal, and I noted how the last of the rays of the sun illuminated her blond locks, giving her an ethereal, almost supernatural look. For a moment in time, I thought was faced with Sekhmet, the goddess of war, or Aphrodite, the goddess of love who had won the golden apple of beauty from the shepherd Paris. Her azure eyes shone with determination, but when they alighted on me, they assumed a softer aspect.

She arose from the bench, reached out and placed an errant curl back into place behind my ear. “I have spent the last six years behind bars, and were I to enter another, I would merely be exchanging one prison for another. Now that I have found a brief speck of freedom in the cloudy sky, I’m not about to let it go easily.”

Juliet leaned down to place her forehead against mine. Her hand cupped my cheek and I could feel her breath against my lips. “Where you go, I go, remember?
Juliet crawled through my window late that night and climbed into bed with me, pulling the sheets down to cover both of us. I had my back facing her and she settled down beside me, moulding our bodies together until we were spooning, and put a hand around my waist. Her warm, comforting presence finally broke my resolve, and soon enough, I began weeping silently.

Juliet reached out to turn on the light, and gasped when she saw my face. I had a black eye, fractured lip, and an enormous bruise had begun to form on my cheek where my mother had hit me with a book.

“She did this, didn’t she?” asked my partner through gritted teeth.

I did not reply to the question, seeing as the answer was obvious.

“One day, I shall leave my mother behind and go someplace she has never even heard of.”

“Why not go now?”

I sat on the edge of the bed, running a hand through my long, dark locks. It seemed impossible to explain to my idealistic lover that I could not simply leave my younger sister Alice behind to the mercy of the monster. As for taking her with me, I was too young to be able to provide for both of us. My only hope was to wait for another two years, until I turned legal and then I could file for custody of Alice. It was imperative that I acquire what education I could so that I could make decent wages, thus leaving now before I had finished my GCSES was out of the question. That was not the explanation I offered to Juliet, however, seeing as she would never understand.

“I couldn’t leave you behind.”
Juliet came up behind me on the bed, putting her arms around my waist and laying her cheek against mine. “I could go with you,” she whispered into my ear.

I arose and turned to face her. “You would do that for me?”

Juliet reached out to cup my bruised cheek with her hand, stroking it gently with her thumb. “Where you go, I go.”

My former melancholy had been forgotten, and I laughed out loud, a sound heard all too rarely. I threw myself down upon the bed, taking Juliet with me, and after I landed on top of her, I claimed her lips with my own.

At that moment, I no longer feared the future because I knew Juliet would be there at my side to help me face it.
After our stroll in the park we lay down together on my large bed, each keeping carefully to her side, and the sheets like a wall between us. I had my hands under my head and was staring at the ceiling when my Juliet broke the silence.

“You understand that you need to find the killer before the police come for you?”

“I know.”

“We need to find viable suspects, perhaps if we were to gain access to her online activities…”

“Ruth knows all there is about computers. She could gain access.”

Juliet rolled over to her side, resting her head in her hand and gazed down on me. “Then you must reveal the truth.”

It was obvious that Ruth needed to be informed due to the fact that she would ask why the police were not competent enough to handle the case. She would never consent to illegal activities such as breaking and entering without understanding the true cause.

“Can she be trusted?” Juliet questioned, voicing her thoughts aloud.

“We’ll find out,” I countered.

Early the next morning we were standing on Ruth’s doorstep, and I was knocking on the door, my nervousness palpable in the air. She came to the door, still wearing her pyjamas and her dark locks all in a tangle, sleep still at the edges of her eyes. When she noticed us, she blushed red and grabbed a sweater to cover up, inviting us in, but not before shooting my partner an appreciative glance.

Ruth invited us into the living room and sat down on the couch. Juliet took the armchair opposite her and after some thought, I settled myself on the arm of the chair. Juliet instinctively placed her hands on my hips.
Ruth quickly awoke when she saw the gesture. “I knew it!” she exclaimed triumphantly.

Juliet and I looked at each other in awkward embarrassment before Juliet nudged me and I arose to sit on the sofa table to face Ruth. “We need your help, Ruth.”

I then briefly explained what had taken place at the police station, how Grace’s ambition might have blinded her and how they might thus be overlooking obvious clues. I then told her how I needed her to break into Ava’s computer and find any leads which might be of importance.

Ruth frowned once I had finished my explanations. “Why is it so important to find the killer?”

“I need to find the person responsible before the police discover who I truly am.”

“I’m almost afraid to pose the question, but who exactly are you?”

I took a deep breath, it was now or never. Juliet urged me on. “Tell her, Lia.”

“My given name was Cecilia Smith.”

Ruth gazed over my shoulder at my partner, as the colour drained from her face. “Are you Juliet Masters?”

She nodded in return.

Ruth looked at us both. “You are The Screaming Girls?”

Juliet and I exchanged a glance before answering in the affirmative.

Ruth arose from her seat on the sofa and walked out onto the small balcony adjacent to the living-room. Juliet motioned for me to join and withdrew to the kitchen to allow us a semblance of privacy.

I put my hand on her shoulder. “I’m no longer that person, Ruth. That you must believe. I was an arrogant teenager who believed herself
entitled, and was capable of terrifying things. Cecilia Smith died six years ago.”

“I know.”
I walked to stand beside her at the railing and sent her a questioning glance. “How can you be this sanguine about my revelation?”

“Because I can relate to what you went through. I followed your case in the papers and understand a little about lovers being kept apart by their families.”

“I didn’t know.”
“I made certain nobody did. When I was fifteen I fell in love with a girl called Diane from my high school, very much like you did.”

“What happened?” I asked, fearing to know how the story had ended.

“My father discovered me one day in my bedroom with Diane. We were kissing. They told me they weren’t opposed to my loving a girl, but Diane came from a humble background and this they were blatantly against. They sent me to a boarding school within the week and I never saw Diane again. Therefore, I may not know how it feels to kill your mother, but I know what it feels like to be denied the right to love.”

“Be grateful Fate saved you from such an encounter.”

“Therefore, you put into action what many only dream of.”
I couldn’t formulate a response to this. Ruth turned away from the view in front of her, placing her back against the railing, resting her hands there and looking at me with a penetrating gaze. “This is not merely about catching Ava’s killer, is it?”

“No,” I replied truthfully.

“Good. Count me in.”
After rigorous planning over the breakfast table, we finally decided on a strategy regarding entrance to the crime scene. Leaving Juliet behind as the cavalry to distract the policeman holding guard outside, Ruth and I snuck inside via the backdoor. I had been into the building several times covertly during the days when Ava and I were first dating and did not care for anyone to know. Ruth quickly hacked into Ava’s computer and discovered correspondence between my girlfriend and some woman called Chase.

Seeing that as a good starting point, we headed after lunch down to a bar called The Broken Sailor, a place which was often mentioned in Ruth and Chase’s messages to one another and which was apparently their usual hangout. We figured that if we should find this Chase character anywhere, it would be there.

As we entered the bar, there were only two old and battered drunks sitting at the bar nursing their drinks. I motioned for Juliet to head into the back alley, in case Chase might be here after all and try to make her escape. I only noticed a female on the premises which could be Chase when I gazed behind the bar, a small woman with a crew haircut, earrings in her nose and earlobes, wearing black clothes and crosses tattooed onto her cheeks. She probably had some other tattoos in less savoury places.

I nudged Ruth, pointing her to the main entrance with the unspoken yet implied demand that she should secure it. I walked up to the bar and leaned over it to get Chase’s attention. As soon as I asked her a question to validate her identity, she sent me a wary look, jumped over the bar and ran as fast her legs could carry her. It took me a moment to realize precisely what was happening, but I was soon in fast pursuit, her attempt to escape adding fuel to my suspicions.
Chase headed for the back exit, but thankfully, Juliet was prepared, and knocked her down with a well-aimed blow.

“Where the hell did you learn to do that?” I exclaimed.

“You learn a lot of things in prison.” She shrugged.

“I only learned how to pick locks and forge passports.”

Chase was about to rise so I had no option but to sit down on top of her and hold her wrists with my hands so as to prevent her from getting up. Ruth arrived, out of breath and regarded the spectacle in front of her.

“Under other circumstances, this might be considered as truly hot!”

“I’m not telling you cops a damn thing,” the woman writhing underneath me exclaimed. I arose from my position and she gave me a harsh blow in the face, sending me reeling. Juliet grabbed Chase, pushing her up against the wall of the alley.

I looked the troublesome woman in the eye. “We’re not from the police, wiseass. I’m Ava’s girlfriend.”

As soon as she heard these words, she stopped fighting and calmed down. She looked me up and down. “I knew she had a girl. I thought the police had discovered the two of us and were coming for me.”

“Why would you run though?” I asked her for it seemed obvious that someone with nothing to hide would not run. I motioned for Juliet to let her go.

“I may perhaps have a shady past, including an open charge for breaking and entering, but that is merely a…”

“...misunderstanding?” supplied my partner helpfully, standing behind me with her folded arms.

Chase nodded.

I briefly explained what had led us to her door. “Do you suspect I had something to do with Ava’s death?” She reached into the pocket of
her coat, but we all told her to stop. “I was not even here on the evening of the murder. I was visiting my boyfriend in Glasgow.”

I sent her a look but she shrugged. “So, I get around. Is that a crime?” She sent me her best puppy dog look with her brown eyes, and I might almost have fallen for her lies if I was not a competent liar myself.

I reached out into her jacket pocket, took out a receipt and looked at it. “Chase brought a ticket for Glasgow four days before the murder and only came back last night,” I informed my two companions as I returned the receipt to her.

“That should prove me innocent. How about you and I have some dinner tonight?” Chase winked in my direction but Juliet and I turned and walked away with Ruth following close behind.

♦ ♦ ♦

After having lunch at a small café, we decided that perhaps a new approach was in order. Neither Ruth nor I had seen Ava on the day of the murder, and thus figuring out her movements might be critical in establishing a timeline. The police might already have done this to some degree, but without the help of those closest to Ava, it would have been difficult to establish her favourite haunts. To add also, many of the bars and restaurants were college hangouts, where the cops were not popular, but the faces of Ruth and me were well-known and thus would be more welcome. We also decided to pay a visit to the park where Ava used to run and the library she frequented.

After establishing our assigned tasks, Ruth went into the East End in order to visit the library and some acquaintances to see if they had seen her on the day she died. Juliet and I stayed closer to the college, traversing the pubs and restaurants frequented by the students, and would
end our quest in the park. We were to meet at Ava’s favourite place, the bench by the pond where she liked to throw bread to the ducks and swans swimming there.

Three hours later, we were at the assigned place, however with me somewhat altered in appearance seeing as I was now sporting an enormous black eye due to a blow delivered by some student who did not appreciate my questions. Thankfully, Juliet had stepped in and diffused the situation, calling on the bartenders to restrain the offender and allowed them to release him once he had calmed down. I had, however, insisted on continuing our search for answers, as we had yet to meet anyone who had seen Ava on the day in question, and Ruth had called my cell phone to inform me after speaking to the university office that Ava had not shown up for class on the day of the murder. It was only with difficulty Juliet managed to convince me that enough was enough and suggested we should head to the park to meet Ruth. She was still furious with me by the time we reached our destination.

“What the hell is going on with you?”

I did not grace the question with a response.

“This is about more than Ava,” stated my ex-lover as she sat down on the bench and watched me standing not far away. I was facing away from her, watching the ducks swimming on the pond. “This is about redemption for your former sins.”

I turned to face Juliet. “What if it is?”

“Then you are on the wrong path.”

“It would seem that Remembrance is yours. It is the reason for why you are here, isn’t it?” We had yet to discuss the true reason for Juliet’s presence, neither of us had dared to address the issue.

Juliet ignored the comment which hit too close to home. “And the path of Oblivion is the better option? I don’t believe in kneeling in church
or that praying for forgiveness will bring redemption. You will be seeking absolution which never comes.”

The anger filled my voice as I spoke, and I had to press my fingers into my knuckles to keep from hitting her. “And chasing ghosts, mere phantoms of the imagination is the better option? You are chasing a mirage, a dream that never existed.” The Lia Juliet wished for so ardently had never existed.

I sighed and gathered my faculties, calming myself down before joining my partner on the bench. “You must understand that redemption is the only way for me to change my destiny.”

“Do you believe that you have an evil destiny?”

“I bring death and destruction upon all those I encounter.”

“Not me. Whatever I did, it was by my own choice. You had no hand in the matter.” The tone in her voice was firm when she pronounced the words. “Surely you must see that by punishing yourself in such a manner, you are allowing her to win. She still has a hold over you, keeping you in a prison of your own making.”

“How would you suggest I proceed?”

“Live your life, if not for yourself then for her. She sacrificed her life and if you don’t use the gift freely given, the jewel will lose its lustre. Slowly, it will stop shining.”

“What do you mean a sacrifice freely given?”

“I think on some level, she understood our intentions, and that was the reason for her agreeing to accompany us that day. Your mother’s life was not happy, and thus she was contented to be released from life. She knew you would have a better one without her.”

“This may sound bizarre, but I often miss her.” I would never have admitted this to anyone other than Juliet.

“She was your mother,” replied Juliet steadily.
“But we killed her!”

“Does that change the fact that she was your mother?”

I had no response to this question.

After a moment of silence I spoke again. “Everytime I have found even a remote chance of pleasure for the last six years, I have run like the wind. What right have I to smile, to laugh? I don’t deserve happiness.”

Even with Ava, I never let my guard down. It was simply too dangerous. I looked away from Juliet’s penetrating eyes, fearful of the truth written there.

My partner reached out, took my chin with her hand and guided my face back towards hers so that she could look into my eyes. “Don’t I deserve happiness?”

Those deep azure eyes gazed into mine and for a moment, we were one.

The loving moment was interrupted when Ruth appeared between the trees, seemingly oblivious to the fact she was interrupting. I pulled away from Juliet as if burnt and after finding that my friend had had no luck, the same as us, we decided to call it a day and head home.

♦ ♦ ♦

When we arrived back at my apartment, I noted that the door which I had locked was wide open. I carefully slid inside and was soon tackled from the side and went down on the floor. Quickly, however, Ruth and Juliet had the intruder subdued and pulled him off me, each one grabbing an arm. When they turned on the lights, however, it was immediately apparent that the stranger was in fact Chase. I arose and signalled for the girls to release her.
“I didn’t do this.” It was only then that I looked around and noted that my pristine apartment had been reduced to a hole in the wall. Clothes lay scattered around, picture frames, vases and statues had been broken and books had been pulled from shelves. Drawers had been pulled out and the contents emptied onto the floor. It was as if the intruder had been looking for something in particular but was not quite certain of the location of the object in question.

“I know,” I replied as I surveyed the wreckage that was my life.

“How?” questioned Chase.

“Because you would be original enough not to get caught.” I regarded her through narrowed eyes. “Why are you here to begin with?”

Chase briefly explained how she had discovered my address through mutual friends and had come to offer her assistance in our venture to find Ava’s killer.

Juliet stepped forward. “What difference does it make to you?”

Chase did not answer the question posed by my partner. She, instead, addressed herself to me. “Ava once told me that you have no family.”

I nodded in response.

“Well, that means they are your family?” She indicated Ruth and Juliet.

“Yes.”

“Ava was my family as well as yours,” Chase maintained with flashing eyes. Thus, it was settled that she should stay.

As we began tidying up the place, Chase commented that perhaps there was a distinct problem with our approach to the matter. “After all, it would seem that perhaps the person in question seems to be focused on you and not Ava.”
“Do you mean to say that perhaps Ava was hurt because of me?” I couldn’t even wait for the answer Chase would give; instead I walked out onto the small balcony adjoining my living room and stood at the railing. Juliet followed suit, closing the double doors behind us.

After a moment of silence, she finally spoke. “You believe what you spoke of today, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Is that the actual truth or a mere convenient lie?”

“How so?”

“I wonder whether you invented this as mere protective armour from the more explosive truth.”

“I’m your Lia no longer.” There was a time when she understood every thought within my head. That time has passed.

Her reaction to my statement was surprising. She laughed, a cold hard laugh. “You still do not understand, do you?”

“What purpose would understanding serve?”

“To understand that it is fear which governs you and very little else.” I knew there was more she wished me to understand, but I was too terrified to address the matter.

“I can state with a fair amount of accuracy that there is nothing which frightens me anymore.”

“You can’t allow yourself to need me.”

“Why should I when what we have will end tomorrow?” I retorted.

“Everything else I ever cared about was taken away from me.”

“And you can’t face that again.”

“It has taken me six years to learn to forget.”

“And I would have you remember.”

“We have no future. We don’t even have tomorrow.”
“We have tonight,” returned my partner, as she leaned against the railing, careful not to touch me in case I were to run away like a skittish colt. Should she make her move too early, I was likely to bolt. Instead, Juliet allowed her eyes to convey what words couldn’t.

Ruth, always impeccable with her timing, peeked through the balcony door and addressed me. “We’ve finished the cleaning.”

I smiled at her despite myself. “Then I must offer you a bountiful repast in return.”

We went inside and several hours we spent together, bonding over white wine and bad Chinese food, the only thing left in my fridge. After a few glasses of wine, however, the food no longer tasted ghastly. Ruth and Chase had each appropriated an easy chair in the living-room, while Juliet and I shared the couch. We swapped stories, Chase telling us about her biker friend with whom she had made a bet and won. In return, she won his motorcycle and the toughened criminal cried when forced to part with his most beloved possession. Chase, who was in one of her benevolent moods, had allowed him to keep it. Suffice to say, she had never had problems with getting laid since. Ruth told us about Agnes, the girl in her class who was desperately in love with their middle-aged professor and did anything to get into his pants, things like getting him coffee and memorising the schoolbooks by heart. The real mistress, however, was a tall brunette who sat in the back of the class next to Ruth. The professor always gave the girl high marks for her “efforts.”

Juliet and I said very little, quite unusual for me who always had to be the life and soul of the party. Occasionally, we would exchange a glance and a fond smile when something Ruth or Chase imparted brought back memories of our own past. We didn’t share them, however, since they belonged to us alone. At some point during the night, I rested my head on Juliet’s shoulder and fell asleep under the soft humming
conversation. Soon enough, I was taken into strong arms and carried to bed.

I awoke at dawn when the first rays of the sun shone into my bedroom because Juliet had forgotten to pull down the blinds. She was lying facing away from me and I suddenly felt a rush of desire remembering the conversation we had had the evening before. Her words rang true indeed, that we might not have been given the future, but we had the present. It was a gift which should not be wasted. If this was the only chance given to me, damn it I was going to get laid!!

I kissed the back of her neck and Juliet slowly came to consciousness. Before I knew it she was lying on top of me and leaned her head down towards mine. Granted, I can inform that it was awkward at first; we bumped foreheads, noses and teeth because we weren’t quite sure any longer how to go about this. Soon enough, however, the memories came back to me and Juliet was clinging to me with such ferocity that I was quite certain she had remained celibate since the last time we met.

As she held me afterwards while I was still recovering from the orgasm which had rocked my body she whispered into my ear that she loved me. I had no reply to such a statement, nor did she seem to expect one. Juliet lay down and I rested my head in the nook of her shoulder, as of old. Her arms were wrapped around me and I drew non-existent images on her bare abdomen until sleep overcame me once more.
Edinburgh, Scotland, 22nd of August 2009

I waited in suspense, between sleep and wakefulness, until the guard came to escort me out into the yard. A strange calm then stole over me and I proceeded along the halls which had become familiar to me now after three weeks of incarceration. I paid little attention to the whoops and shouts some of the women directed at me from their cells. Due to the callousness of my crime, however, there was an invisible line they dared not cross and when I moved to a table during meals they ran away like elephants from a lion. A book was all the company I needed anyways. Regardless, the authorities had decided to take no chances and segregate me from outings in the yard with others.

The guard let me into the yard and then left, locking the door behind her. Juliet was sitting up against the prison wall, waiting for me. Once a week we were allowed to have our daily outing together, since the case against us had already been built up by the Crown and there were no longer any risks in us consorting with one another. These were the moments which had kept me sane since the trial had ended while we waited for the sentencing and helped me adjust to the new sphere of life I had entered.

The setting sun glowed in her hair and there was a strange fever in her eyes. I sat down beside her and she pulled me into her arms. I rested my head in the crook of her shoulder as I had been wont to do through the duration of our relationship. She gently stroked my hair and the silence between us was comfortable.

My apology, when it came, was feebleness at its best. I had been practising what to say for the duration of two weeks. When the moment
finally came, all I could manage was; “I’m sorry for involving you in the murder. I should never have done that, Juliet.”

Her hand stopped in my hair and for a moment, I thought she might pull it. I had anticipated a multiplicity of reactions. Laughter, however, had not been one of them. After a moment she began to stroke my hair again. “You should have apologised while it still could have made a difference. It’s of little consequence now.”
I awoke early, before Chase, Ruth and Juliet had stirred, and went outside to have a smoke. Sitting outside on my stoop, smoking a cigarette was Grace. I wasn’t surprised to see her there. She immediately offered me a cigarette and I reached down to light my cigarette with hers.

Grace took a long drag from her cigarette, blew the smoke out in an impressive circle and then addressed me. “I see you have not wasted time in finding a replacement for Ava.”

“What business is that of yours?”

“What if I made it my business?”

“I don’t see that there was anything I could do to interfere.” Grace looked my way but quickly averted her gaze.

“Do you see anything you like?” I wiggled my eyebrows suggestively.

“You know what I like watching,” she growled.

“Do I?” I returned with a teasing smile. I was in my element at this moment, confident and assured, whereas with Juliet I could never quite measure up. I pondered thoughtfully and then spoke after taking a long drag from the cigarette. “Is this some witty pastime where you try to get me to confess, or is it because you are genuinely interested?”

“Can’t it be both?” Grace supplied as she wiggled her eyebrows. She turned and walked away, knowing that I was transfixed by the swaying seductiveness of her hips. Before she vanished out of sight, she turned. “If I were you I’d ditch that blonde. She seems like bad news.” With that, she was gone.

I finished the cigarette and headed inside to rouse my friends. I met Ruth in the hallway and she looked at me strangely as I bid her good morning.

“Don’t meddle in dim-witted endeavours which will cost you Juliet,” she warned me.
“Avoid meddling in things that don’t concern you.” I walked past her into the apartment and noted that the others were sitting in the kitchen, drinking coffee. Nobody had considered making breakfast, so it was decided that Ruth, eager to get away from me, and Chase would go out to buy fresh fruit and newly baked bread since food in my kitchen was practically non-existent.

I grabbed eggs from the refrigerator and began frying them on a pan. Once Ruth and Chase had left Juliet turned to me. “Shall we discuss what happened between us this morning?”

“What difference does it make?” I returned as I fried the eggs. I felt grateful that I had to face away from her and thus she could not see the anguish written across my features.

Juliet went to the kitchen cupboard, pulled out some plates and placed them onto the table. She leaned against the counter with her arms folded. “It makes all the difference in the world.”

I turned to face her. “We still can’t be together.”

“And what if we could?” Juliet returned quietly.

“I would say that you are even more of an idealist than I perceived at first.” I mimicked the action of Juliet of crossing my arms over my chest. “By all means, tell me how to go about such a venture.” There was no mistaking the sarcastic tone in my voice.

“We might escape somewhere where nobody recognises us.”

“And then they’ll find us,” I returned. I was of the opinion that humanity is not forgiving when it comes to past transgressions. All it took was for one person to recognise us and the game would be lost. “What kind of life would that be, constantly running, afraid of being identified?”

“Ours,” returned my partner. I understood her implication, that for the first time, we would be able to live our lives without interference from
others. Hope sprang into my heart and I strangled it at birth, fearful to rear it at my breast lest it should bear fruit.

My daydreams were broken into by the smell of burning eggs and I yanked the pan off the stove and threw it into the sink. I turned in question to my partner. “What happens after happily ever after?”

Juliet raised an eyebrow at my question and I explained my reasoning. “Once we have grown jaded with each other, as will often happen after the fairytales have ended, what shall we do?”

“Why would you imagine that such a scenario might occur?”

“Maybe sooner, perhaps later, you will begin to hate me once I have cost you everything you hold dear.”

“You already have,” returned Juliet.

“Don’t you hate me for it?” I asked truthfully. “There are times when I hate you for inducing me to commit murder. If it hadn’t been for you, I would never have considered it.” I enunciated the words, slowly, carefully, there was no blame in my voice. I was past all that.

“How can we get past such an obstacle?”

“We can’t.” I sat down upon the table and opened my legs so that Juliet might stand between them and she did so accordingly.

After a moment of silence, she spoke her thoughts. “There are times when I wish things had been different. That we were different.”

“I know.”

Chase and Ruth soon returned with their cargo of victualage and we sat sown to breakfast, plotting our next move as we ate. I had considered Chase’s comments from the night before, that perhaps we were looking at the case from the wrong perspective. I told them about my proposal, far-fetched as it was.

“When I first arrived here in London, there was a guy in one of my classes called Danny. He was socially inept and seemed to have no
friends, quite the same as me, which is probably why he gravitated towards me.”

Ruth here continued my narrative as she stuffed herself with baguette. “After Lia met us, she would sometimes bring him with us on our nights out, and having all those girls around him made him look attractive. Danny became particularly interested in Ava when he met her, and tried and tested every method to get her to go out with him, not taking a no for an answer. After she and Lia got together, he’d always be there when they went somewhere, whether it was to a concert or out to dinner. It began to alarm them both.”

“Yet, nothing happened until our friends convinced us to report him to the campus police. It was found he was mentally unstable and moved into a psychiatric ward.”

“He can’t have anything to do with the murder,” supplied Juliet, stating the obvious with her mouth full.

“No, he can’t,” I concurred. “But seeing as he was only committed a week ago, he might have seen someone hanging around Ava who did not belong there.”

“What leads you to reach that conclusion?” Chase cut in.

“Because the person who did this must have known about Ava’s schedule,” answered Juliet.

“Exactly,” I seconded as I exchanged a meaningful glance with Juliet. “Regardless of the motives, whether the perpetrator was fuelled by passion, obsession or something much darker, he inevitably went about his business with terrifying precision.”

“Why do you say that?” piped Chase in again.

I poured myself coffee and drank the hot beverage before I responded. “As you know, Ava was a busy person indeed with an active social life. Her comings and goings were not regular like clockwork. The
person responsible had to have been watching her for quite some time to establish the timeframe for the attack. He would also have to know that her roommate is now in California and that she was home alone.”

“It takes a cold and calculated person to drug someone, put them in the bathtub and watch them bleed out,” Juliet supplied and a shiver ran down her spine.

“It takes a monster,” Chase answered before stuffing a roll into her mouth.

“Monster is a relative term,” commented Ruth, receiving a questioning glance from the Goth chick next to her.

“What Ruth is saying is that life is filled grey areas,” I elaborated as I turned to Chase. “Crime must always be placed into the larger context of the society and situation in which it takes place. You would never blame a woman who killed her husband if he was hurting their child or if a stranger was trying to rape her.”

“Murder is always murder,” stated Chase, her dark eyes boring into mine.

“The world can’t be viewed in such excessive terms. Aren’t there dark aspects to the world as well as to the human psyche? Aren’t we capable of the most immense cruelty as well as insurmountable love?”

“There’s a difference between an affair, perhaps and taking the life of another person.” Chase stated.

I quickly jumped in with my response. “It’s the first commandment in the Bible that thou shalt not kill. Yet, the Bible doesn’t preach the truth that once you have broken one rule, be it societal or personal, it is easier to break the next one, and then the one after that. One day you look in the mirror and no longer recognise yourself.”

“Sounds you have a dark side,” commented Chase.

I laughed. “You have no idea.”
Ruth and Juliet exchanged a glance of shared understanding.

“All I’m saying is that for most people, murder is a severe way out of any trouble,” I continued. “But life doesn’t always offer us choices. Someone who has been pushed into a corner and feels like he has no other option may choose a path he might never have traversed otherwise.” I could still remember the haunting feeling of desperation, of the sense that I was drowning and how I had prayed for several nights beforehand for another way out. Juliet touched my shoulder and I was recalled immediately to the present.

After some discussion back and forth it was decided that although it would be a long-shot at best, we would go to see Danny at the asylum. After Juliet and I had dressed, we all filed into a taxi and headed over to the other side of town where our destination was located. Since Ruth and I were familiar with him, the plan of action was for the others to remain outside while we went in. We found him in the garden and Danny seemed pathetically pleased to see us, so we walked with him in the unusually warm September sunshine, as he asked after our mutual friends from school. Danny was obviously unaware of who had filed the complaint with the campus police. He seemed strangely serene and friendly, until we learned from eavesdropping on the nurses in the break room that he was on medication to make him more pliable. We spoke with him as if we had simply been dropping by on a routine visit, and a pang of guilt invaded my mind when I witnessed his pleasure at seeing us. Clearly, he had little contact with people outside the facility. There is also in man the inherent wish never to be forgotten by his fellow men.

Danny began boasting of the paintings he had done since he had come in. It had always been a passion of his, and now he had the time to indulge the interest. He showed us to his room and he had genuine talent at capturing faces. There was one of me and eleven of Ava. The rest
comprised a group of sketches of our friends, except for one which held a face I didn’t recognise. I picked it up and glanced at the features, feeling them to be strangely familiar without being able to place them. Danny told me that this was a girl he had often met at the bars he had frequented with me and Ava. I wanted to run immediately to the others and tell them about our discovery, but he would have been offended. Therefore, I was grateful when an orderly came in fifteen minutes later to tell us that visiting hours were now over. She took Danny out of the room to take him to art class, and I used the opportunity to sneak the sketch of the unknown girl under my coat before we left.

Once outside, Ruth and I informed the others of our discovery, but neither of them recognised the woman in the picture, despite the fact that it was an excellent drawing.

At first, I was quite at a loss as to what to do until I had a sudden flash of genius. Once we got back to the university, I went to see one of my professors and showed him the picture, asking him whether he recognised the young woman. He put on his glasses and looked at it only for a minute before saying it was Shauna Williams. When I asked him who she was, the professor commented that she had sat behind me for the last four months in his class. She was one of his rising stars, “a brilliant student like myself,” he commented, before asking to be allowed to get back to grading his exams. He kindly didn’t comment on the fact that I had not been in his class an hour earlier when I should have been. I went to the cafeteria and came across some of my classmates, and while they remembered Shauna, she had kept to herself and not spoken to any of them. I met the others back at my apartment, the centre of operations, and told them what we had gathered so far. All of them seemed as surprised as I was that someone with no personal connection to me or Ava could be responsible for her death.
We were sitting stupefied by the kitchen table, wondering as to our next move and considering how we had more questions as opposed to answers, when there was a hard knock on the door.

I arose to answer it and the sight of Grace greeted me as I opened the door. Behind her stood two police officers. She barged past me without a word and marched to the table where she addressed my partner. “Juliet Masters?”

All the other woman could do was nod. An audible gasp could be heard from Chase, the only person in the room not acquainted with the truth.

The detective advanced menacingly towards my ex-lover. “Miss Masters, you are under arrest for the murder of Ava Summers. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law…” She proceeded to read the Miranda rights while the men stepped forward and cuffed Juliet.

As they led her outside I finally recovered from my stupor and ran after Grace who had followed in the wake of her prisoner. I grabbed her arm and forced her to turn around. “There’s no way that Juliet had anything to do with the murder of Ava.”

“Juliet has already killed for you once, Miss Smith. What makes you so certain that she hasn’t done so once more on her own recognisance?”

I went pale and released her. “When you came this morning, you were warning me, weren’t you?”

Grace did not reply to the question, instead she merely asked that I come down to the station, and walked away.
I walked to the station but no longer noted the shining sun or smiling faces. They blurred and became nothing more than mirages on the edge of my consciousness. All I could think about was Juliet and her arrest. It seemed to me Grace would not act precipitously a second time. There had to be some kind of evidence showing her guilt, but what could that be? Without being aware of it, I spoke to the policewoman at the front desk and was shown into an interview room. Grace appeared within moments, a triumphant smile on her face.

“What the hell’s going on, Grace?” I inquired as she sat down in the chair opposite to mine.

The dark detective didn’t respond. She merely turned on the recorder on the table, informed me that this interview was being recorded and asked whether I would prefer counsel to be present. I refused.

“First of all, Miss Smith…”

“I see you’ve learned my true identity,” I commented.

“We received an anonymous call early this morning informing us of the truth. We have, however, had our suspicions about Miss Masters for quite some time. It was when we received the call that motive was established.”

“Pray, inform me as well.” It seemed unfathomable to me that Juliet would murder a woman with no connection to her.

“The same reason she killed for you before.” Grace leaned over the table, closer to me. “Mrs. Smith threatened to part the two of you. You and Miss Masters couldn’t bear to be apart, and thus conceived the plan to murder your mother.”

I could feel the anger boiling inside me and pointed to the box on the table, labelled with our names. Clearly, she had been reading up on
the old case. “Does it say how she abused me, slapped me around? Is that in your files?”

At this unusual turn of events, Grace lost her momentum, but only for a moment. Undeterred, she continued. “I believe that Miss Masters arrived here after being forcefully parted from you for six years, hoping to seek you out and persuading to return to her. That is indeed her mission here, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” I confessed.

“Thus, couldn’t she have grown blind with jealousy, fury and rage when she saw that you had a girlfriend? Ava was an obstacle, as she would deem it. Wouldn’t Juliet take measures get rid of this obstacle?”

I felt the colour drain from my face and suspicion began to gnaw at my bones like a hungry dog. I remembered my own words from earlier that morning, that if someone is pushed into a corner, he is often capable of things he would never otherwise do. If Juliet had seen me with my girlfriend, had she perhaps felt threatened by Ava and been uncertain as to whether she might win me back? Might she not have taken matters into her own hands?

“I don’t know,” I finally whispered.

“There seems to be no evidence linking you to the murder of your girlfriend since you were seen in the library on the day in question, and personally, I wish to believe that Miss Masters took it upon herself to kill Miss Summers. The M.E. has concluded that she was frozen for two hours after death, thus making it difficult to establish the time of death. Probably she died earlier then would at first appear.”

I stared into the azure depths of Grace’s eyes. “Surely, there is, however, evidence linking Juliet to the murder?” It was as apparent to me as it undoubtedly was to her, that Grace would never risk another arrest
without sufficient evidence. She would never have obtained an arrest warrant otherwise, either.

“Yes, there is. Did you ever wonder why Ava was never seen on the day she was killed?”

“Yes, I have yet to find the answer to that mystery.”

“It was because she was with your girlfriend.”

It took me a long moment to process the information. “Can I see it?” Wordlessly, Grace pulled out a photo from a folder on the table and threw it in front of me. Ava and Juliet were sitting together, having lunch. They were laughing. I stared at it, hardly comprehending what I was seeing. Then I wanted to strangle her.

“I suppose you will want your lawyer now,” said Grace quietly.

“Do you want me to testify against my Juliet?” I remarked aghast. I finally through the daze of confusion could see her game. She was feigning support hence turning me into a player on her team.

“She violated your trust, took away a cherished person in your life…”

I laughed grimly. “Juliet is the cherished person in my life. You don’t see it, do you? Even if she did what you say, she did it for me.”

“I understand that you must love her…”

“What Juliet and I share is far beyond love.”

“What exists beyond love?”

“Death,” I countered. “It ties us closer than life ever could.” Wordlessly, I arose from my chair and since Grace did not protest, I took that as my queue and permission to leave. Whatever Juliet might have done, whatever she would do in the future, I couldn’t be responsible for placing the woman I loved in prison for the second time.

Some say love is madness. I maintain that it is terrifying sanity.
I learned from the policewoman working the front-desk that Juliet had just been arraigned and would be detained, pending bail set at 100,000 pounds. The judge had apparently considered her a flight risk, seeing as she had relatives and friends abroad.

I entered the September sunshine, and my eyes were dazzled in the same manner as when I had seen Juliet for the first time all those years ago on our first day at high school. On the steps stood a figure quite similar to my lover, tall with those same piercing blue eyes and long blonde hair. For a moment, I thought it was Juliet but once my eyes grew used to the brightness outside, I understood who it was.

“Mrs. Masters!” I exclaimed, and in truth it was Juliet’s mother.

“Hello, dear,” she responded. Elizabeth Masters had not changed at all in the six years since I had last seen her. She was still impeccably dressed in a tailored green suit, with red highlights in the blonde hair and red lipstick which never left her side. Dressed to kill, she looked like the conqueror of the world. “You and my daughter were lovers, and you killed together. I think we are past using last names.”

“How did you know where to find me?”

“A girl named Ruth told me where to find you. In other words, I still have connections in high places.”

“The Police Commissioner?”

She nodded. “The question might be what you are doing at the police-station?”

I explained to her briefly how Juliet had been arrested, sparing Elizabeth the details for a later date. Once she had heard the present whereabouts of her daughter, she marched into the station and demanded that Juliet be released, effective immediately. When I followed behind her, I noted Grace standing behind the reception table. I walked over and explained that Elizabeth Masters was there to bail her daughter out. Grace
nodded and walked in the direction of the cells to fetch her prisoner but came back a few minutes later empty-handed. I walked forward and she grabbed my shoulder to keep from reeling.

“What is it?” I questioned.

“Juliet’s gone,” she finally managed to utter. I exchanged a glance with Elizabeth before turning back to the detective.

“How could you lose her?” I practically yelled at her, making several people in the busy lobby turn around to look in our direction.

The hold Grace had on my shoulder was even tighter than before, and I thought for a moment that she might crush it. “The duty officer told me that a young woman had come to him in uniform, with the necessary paperwork, and proceeded to move her to jail. When I couldn’t find Juliet in her cell, I called the Department of Corrections. They never sent a request for a transfer.”

“Wouldn’t the transfer require your signature?”

“She had it. A fake one, anyways.” It seemed obvious to both me and Grace how cunning my unknown nemesis must be.

“You mean to say that this unknown person simply walked in with the proper paperwork and walked out with Juliet?”

Grace mutely nodded. “I’ll find her, I swear.”

“I seriously doubt it,” I returned before walking out of the station with Elizabeth beside me.

With nothing better to do for now, we returned to the apartment. Ruth and Chase withdrew once introductions had been made, sensing that there was unresolved business between me and Elizabeth.

I watched her as she sat on the couch, feet tucked demurely under her, every inch the lady. There was a time when I would have given everything for her to be my mother.

“I’m sorry,” I began.
Elizabeth arched an eyebrow in a gesture reminiscent of her daughter. “You are apologising for what now, dear?”

“If it hadn’t been for me, Juliet might never have become involved in this chaos.” It was as evident to Elizabeth as it was to me that the kidnapping plot had been set in motion in order to send me reeling, to steer me off course. I was the only connection between the two women.

“You don’t understand, do you?” She gave a small laugh. “Juliet has always been involved. I remember the day when she came home from her first day in high school. She sat down in my lap, wrapped her arms around my neck, laid her head upon my shoulder and said: ‘Mummy, I have finally found someone whose will matches my own.’”

“She said that?”

“My Juliet has always been too stubborn for her own good. Whatever happened on the day of the murder, she was a willing participant in the events which took place that day. I’ve never doubted this fact.”

“You’ve come to accept that your daughter was responsible for the murder of an innocent person?” I stared at her aghast from my seat on the arm-chair opposite her.

“Your mother was far from innocent,” reminded Elizabeth gently. “There was indeed a time when I hated you and I blamed you for destroying my family. What I didn’t realize was that we were well on our way to ruin long before you came into the picture. Henry and I had long since stopped loving each other. It was therefore not out of the ordinary for Juliet to search for acceptance outside the walls of the home, neither was it remarkable for her to find it in you.”

I went into the kitchen to prepare tea for us, and as I waited for the kettle to boil the water, I thought back to the day when the final decision had been made.
Wick, Scotland, 17th of June 2009

We met in the park close to my house, as arranged, once the clock in the church tower struck midnight. Juliet was seated on our bench beneath the oak tree, a streetlight shone directly into her eager face as she saw me approach.

“Well?” she questioned as soon as I was within earshot.

Instead of responding, I sank dejectedly onto the bench. She had to question me again before she received a response. I finally managed to frame one, intently regarding the hands which I had folded in my lap. “My mother said she would never let me go, particularly with a dyke like you.”

Juliet was quiet for a few moments before responding. “Yet, you need her consent to leave the country…”

“Don’t you think I know this?” I turned to face her. “I had planned on waiting until I was of age to leave and had a proper education, but I can’t stay here for another two years, even for the sake of Alice.”

“Then, there is only one option left open to us.”

A sudden fear gripped me. “We can’t…”

“Don’t presume to think that you are tied to the monster by any bond whatsoever, Lia. You owe her nothing after sixteen years of hell.”

I sighed. “I may not owe her much but I cannot kill her.”

The sky blue Juliet’s eyes flashed dangerously. “We can make it look like an accident.”

“But she’s my family,” I protested weakly.

“I’m your family.” Juliet added forcefully.

“We must be mad for considering it.”

“Perhaps we are terrifyingly sane, the only one who are.”
I glanced in the direction of the St. Fergus Church located on the other side of the street. “What we’re considering is against the laws of men and God.”

“I don’t fear either.” Juliet looked in the direction I was staring. There was defiance in her gaze, as if she would slaughter the angels and their army if they dared get in our way.

“Perhaps we should,” I argued, fearful of the wrath of God preached to since I was a child in that very church.

Our eyes met.

“Perhaps they should be afraid of us,” Juliet supplied before I laid my head down in her lap and she gently stroked my hair as I shivered despite the warm June night.
I returned to Elizabeth with her tea and she gratefully took a sip. Then she took a long look at me. “I made a conscious choice about three years ago. I could hate you for the rest of my life and see you as the destroyer of my family, or I could accept the role my daughter played in the murder of your mother. I forgave you and Juliet in turn, but what was more important, I forgave myself.”

“None of our actions had anything to do with you.”

“Didn’t they?” responded Elizabeth sceptically. “I was too preoccupied with my new paramour and the details of my divorce to note my daughter felt abandoned by her family. I was too heady with romance to understand that all she had ever known was about to fall apart, and she needed me by her side. She felt like the family she had known all her life was abandoning her, which was why she clung to you with such ferocity. She wanted to play the knight in shining armour to save you in order for you and her to be together.”

“You are an incredible mother!” I exclaimed.

“There are some who might maintain that had I spent more time taking care of my daughter and less time allowing her freedom, the murder would have been avoided.”

“It would’ve happened with or without your intervention.”

“I know that. The question is, do you?”

I looked at her questioningly.

Elizabeth continued. “You seem to spend your life in mock regret, mourning an event which has already taken place and you had not the will or courage to stop.”

“I keep thinking…”

“Well, stop it!” Elizabeth cut me off abruptly. “You must learn to forgive yourself and understand that sometimes these things have their own momentum, they take on a life of their own.”
“I’ll consider your advice. You know, I’d almost forgotten what it feels like to have someone…”

Elizabeth arose from the sofa and sat down in the arm of the chair where I was located. She placed a hand on my shoulder. She finished my sentence for me. “…to have someone care for you.”

We stayed quiet for a few moments before Elizabeth spoke once more. “To be frank with you, I didn’t come here to offer you advice.”

I looked up at her. “Why did you come?”

“To persuade you to release Juliet.”

“Juliet is her own woman. No bond ties us together.”

“Either you are lying to me or to yourself. “ Elizabeth sat down on the sofa table directly facing me, she was sitting merely inches away. “On the day you and Juliet were sentenced to five years in prison, I made a vow that I would always be there for her. I have kept that promise until this day, and I intend to keep it until the day I die.”

“And this concerns me how?”

“Surely, you of all people can understand the stubborn streak within my daughter. Should you encourage her, she will only cling to you all the more fiercely. She must be made to understand that this can’t go on.”

“Whyever not?” I could not see that we were hurting anybody with our flirtation.

“You can allow the fire between you and Juliet to burn, but in the end all that will be left are ashes.”

“You have no idea…”

“I have been the victim of love. I still carry the mark. It cost me everything I hold dear, and trust me, when you must surrender all that you know, having someone to embrace at the end of the day matters little
when nothing else is left. My Bill is a good provider and I lack for nothing but Frederick can ensure Juliet’s future…”

I leaned forward to gaze into Elizabeth’s eyes. “What have you done?” I breathed, instantly recognising the look of guilt on the other woman’s face.

Elizabeth arose from her seat on the coffee table and walked over to the fire place, turning away from me and leaning up against the mantelpiece. After some minutes of silence, she finally spoke. “It was a desirable union on both sides…”

“You need to clarify what you are saying, Elizabeth.”

She turned around to face me with flashing eyes. “Frederick would have guaranteed Juliet’s future.” Gradually, the truth of the matter came out. My ex-lover was indeed engaged to a man of some means, a successful young lawyer named Frederick Meyers. He ran a thriving law practice in New York, and his family belonged to the upper echelons of that society.

Elizabeth made the revelation in slow, yet steady tones. She knew there was no reason to hide the truth from me, so she confessed to having convinced Juliet to accept Frederick when she could sense the reluctance of her daughter towards the match.

“So, you would therefore sell your daughter’s future in order to retrieve your own wealthy past when you were married to a successful scientist like Juliet’s father?” I could not help remarking at this unusual way to live your life, and I could not help but remember how vehemently Juliet had spoken out against my relationship with Ava.

Elizabeth finally turned, her eyes flashing. “This was not about my injured pride!”

“Except it was,” I returned steadily. “Your first marriage was for convenience alone, and how happy was it? You ended up getting
divorced to marry a man who had nothing. You would have your Juliet make the same mistake?”

Elizabeth grabbed the chair closest to her for balance. “What have I done?” she whispered, as if she was only now coming to the realization she may have forced her daughter down the wrong road for the right reasons.

“You were merely doing what you thought best for Juliet,” I soothed.

Elizabeth sank into the chair and hid her face in her hands. “The realization of what I had done finally dawned on me when I witnessed Juliet sleeping the night before she disappeared. She had been distant for some weeks, refusing to talk which is unusual given how close we have become. I was walking past her room that night and saw that she had left her nightlight on, so I went in to turn it off. On the bed, however, lay your old class picture and with a start I realized that she had been looking at it. I thought I had thrown it away years ago, and didn’t even know that Juliet still had it.”

“Therefore when Juliet disappeared the next morning…”

…I knew where she would be,” Elizabeth finished. “You don’t seem surprised at this revelation,” she added as she looked at me sitting composedly on the couch.

“I’m not.” Strangely enough, the thought of Frederick did not intimidate me. I knew where Juliet stood. “The fact of the matter is that I care more about bringing Juliet safely back. I’ll worry about her future later.”

When Ruth and Chase returned, we briefly explained Elizabeth’s identity, and how we had discovered Juliet’s disappearance. We sat around for long moments, pondering how we might discover her whereabouts, until Ruth pointed out that should Grace be so inclined, she
could get the number of Shauna Williams traced. I returned to the university office and after some flirting with a pretty secretary, managed to finagle the number out of her. That done, I marched down to the police station and demanded of Grace that she trace the number. After initial reluctance, protesting that she could be fired for such shenanigans, Grace finally succumbed after I threatened to tell her superiors exactly how the case of Ava’s murder had been handled. After calling tech support who traced the call, Grace returned to me as I waited for her in her office.

“The phone is now located in northeast Scotland, someplace called…”

“…Wick,” I finished for her, all colour draining from my face.

“How did you know?”

“That is where it all began.”

I arose from the chair I had been sitting in, and walked past Grace on my way to the door, but she grabbed my wrist before I could leave. “Be careful,” she warned me. I nodded, grabbed my coat and left.

I returned to Chase, Ruth and Elizabeth. Juliet’s mother would not hear of another scenario than her covering the fare for the three of us girls to Scotland and without question, she gave me the money since Ruth and Chase wanted to accompany me. Besides, it would have been folly to go alone. I asked Elizabeth to come with us.

“I can’t do what needs to be done. I know you will.”

♦ ♦ ♦

During the train ride to Inverness from London I sat eerily silent by the window, gazing out at nothing. Ruth and Chase sat silently opposite me, whispering to one another, clearly trying to grasp what might await us at the end of the journey. Even though I had a suspicion which had
dawned into knowledge, I didn’t deem it fit to enlighten them until I was certain.

Our train broke down once we reached Inverness in the evening and therefore we over-nighted in the town before continuing on by bus the next day. The drive took us three and a half hours.

We reached our destination on the second day and checked into the small hotel close to the flower-shop. As we walked through the town, following the river down to the sea, a bizarre feeling came over me. A part of me was pleased to see my hometown again, and another feared to be recognised. The changes I had made to my appearance after prison, held, however, and I walked on the cobbled sidewalk unmolested. We turned by the souvenir shop which sells all kinds of small items and as we rounded the corner, the house greeted us. We had to walk past it since it was the quickest way to our destination. The house was painted white with a black roof, the place where I had lived for most of my life. Harbour Place had been converted from an old warehouse to run-down flats with yucky green carpets and a heating system that continually broke down in winter, leaving us in our woollen sweaters, shivering inside the house for weeks on end to avoid the cold. My parents had been unable to afford moving us to another apartment, since all extra money from the dole went into financing the next bottle of vodka. I stood staring at the house, my hands fisted against my sides as I struggled to regain my composure. The past was unimportant. What mattered was here and now. Juliet needed me. I walked past without glancing back at my childhood home again.

It took us about 15 minutes to reach the edge of town and another thirty along a desolate road which curved through the fields before we finally reached the ruins of the castle. The road followed the sheer cliffs on our left side, and for the life of me I couldn’t go to the edge and look
down even though this was what Chase and Ruth did. I feared to see the sight of my mother lying dashed upon the rocks after my having pushed her. I remembered viewing it with horrid fascination shortly after the event had taken place. Now, I would not look into the abyss even if I was offered all the riches in the world.

The castle had once been a fort built to protect the surrounding countryside and the sleepy village not too far away. Centuries ago, my forefathers had come to Scotland from Scandinavia to claim this place as their own. Now, it was a bleak spot, allowed to decay at will and become a haunted ruin. The roof of the fort had long since collapsed, and only three of the walls were standing to some degree. The castle had been built on a rock-face which jutted out of the surrounding countryside. Once there had been outbuildings where the servants had lived and where the animals had been kept, however, there was nothing there now to indicate this except a grassy mound. This had been my father’s favourite place and it had been his habit to bring us here each Sunday after church, come hell or high water. The only times he had not gone was when it was snowing and the road was therefore impassable. It was one of the reasons why I had killed my mother here; to destroy the sanctity of this place. No wonder Daddy had come here a year after the murder with a gun to blow his brains out.

“This is where your father...,” Ruth began, but couldn’t finish the sentence.

“I knew it the last time he came to visit in prison. He hugged me and he had this look in his eyes. A man with nothing to lose.”

Ruth placed her hand upon my shoulder. “Your father chose his own path. You didn’t hold the gun to his head.”

“I might as well have,” I countered. “In a single stroke, I took not one, but three lives.”
I walked along the rocky mound and finally reached the castle. She was sitting on the stone in the middle of the ruins, smoking a cigarette. It had been our favourite spot when we were children.

“Hello, Cecilia,” she greeted me nonchalantly before putting out the cigarette with the heel of her boot.

“Hello, Alice,” I countered, trying to show composure I didn’t possess.

“How was your trip?”

This innocent question, asked with a smirk, was all it took for me to explode. “Where the hell is Juliet?”

“Come now, don’t be like that,” my sister purred. “Unfortunately, your Juliet couldn’t make it to the party. She would have interrupted our little reunion.” Alice watched as Chase and Ruth advanced slowly. “Tell your friends to retreat, otherwise something might happen to me and you’ll never find Juliet alive.”

I lifted a fist and beckoned them to retreat away from us, but not so far as to be useless if push came to the shove.

“Tell me one thing, little sister.”

Alice lifted an eyebrow in question. “Now, you have me intrigued.”

“Why go to all this trouble? I’m certainly not worth it.”

“That’s true, you aren’t. Let us simply say that I’m a masochist and leave it at that, Lia.”

I waited silently for Alice to elaborate. At length, she finally did. She threw her head back and laughed when she saw the genuine look of puzzlement which was apparently edged on my face. “You don’t understand at all, do you?”

“I’m afraid I don’t. Apparently you stalked me for a year, attending the same classes…”
“…and you didn’t even note that I was there,” Alice quipped.

“You didn’t want me to,” I countered. Only now I noted her altered appearance but it was apparent why I had never recognised Alice. For the first, the chubby kid had disappeared and a slim, young woman was in her place. Her hair had been straightened and dyed blond whereas when we were children pictures showed both of us with dark and curly hair. Also, she was wearing green contacts when her natural eye colour had been blue like our mother’s.

“You know, a part of me was hoping that you would see through the deception and would stop me in time to save Ava.”

I felt the anger rise up within me, however it was imperative that I remain calm and delay Alice by talking while I considered the situation and tried to find the means to escape. “You took a life for a life.”

My sister smiled crookedly. “Apparently your small bourgeoisie mind keeps you from seeing the forest for the trees.”

“Hate is at the crux of the matter.”

“You believe I spent five years planning this brilliant escapade simply to make you suffer? How petty of me!” The sarcastic tone in her voice was obvious.

“I could never blame you. After all, I took away your mother.”

“Yes, you did,” my sister conceded. “But I forgave you for that the day after the murder.”

“Then why did you…”

“Because you left me!” Alice snapped harshly, making me flinch at her words. “You were all I had in the world and you left me behind!”

“Father was still alive…”

“Father was already dead for a year before he had the guts to shoot himself. After that I went into care. Do you have any idea what happens there?” Alice’s eyes were flashing with old resentment and anger.
“I thought I was protecting you by killing mother…”

“You were looking out for your own interests, seeking the means to escape. You cared nothing for the mess you left behind!”

I walked closer to her and carefully placed my hand on her shoulder. The touch revolted me and it took all my willpower not to push her away. I looked down at the white, delicate hands and remembered that these had been the instruments of Ava’s destruction. “I’m here now. Allow me to make amends. Let Juliet go free. This is between you and me.”

Alice shook my hand away. “This was never about you and me, that is the whole fucking problem!”

“Pardon me?”

“Ever since you met her on that first day of high school, all you could think about was her. Your family faded into the background even though you and I had been close all through childhood…”

“That is what happens with siblings,” I protested. “They grow apart…”

“Not us!” Alice shouted. “I’ll bet that you have forgotten all about me.”

“Of course I haven’t forgotten.” It was imperative that I played along and acted as if I was completely on board with her psychotic plan. I had to make her believe that my dearest wish in the world was to be reunited, since that seems to have been her plan all along. “How could I forget when we used to curse and swear until mum beat us black and blue? I remember me breaking that vase, the only expensive thing we owned, and you taking the fault for it. You were locked in the cellar for a week. I remember climbing onto the roof of our house so that we could peek into the window of the neighbour to see The Simpsons, since we never had a television.”
Alice looked at me, something dangerous flashing in her eyes. “How did it feel to kill her?”

“How did it feel to kill Ava?” I countered, as easily as I could.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “It felt like freedom, like coming home. I need no longer to follow the rules which govern others.”

My sister stood there for a few moments before opening her eyes once more. “Why did you kill her?”

“Because she was a threat to you and me.”

“That was the reason you wished to believe. Didn’t you want to know what it was like to kill someone?”

It was a thought I had not allowed myself to consider in years. I finally had to concede to the truth, however, since I knew Alice could tell if I resorted to lying. “Yes, I did.”

“Did it feel good?”

“Yes.”

“Your bad blood runs through both our veins. It links us together, makes us one.”

“You went through all this trouble merely for my sake?”

“Yes.” Alice walked up to me and I flinched as she reached out for my cheek and cradled it with her hand. “I had to prevent outside interference, surely you can see that?”

“You saw the bad influence Ava had upon me and wished to prevent that?”

“Exactly. When I saw another obstacle had been dropped into my path, I understood Juliet would need to go as well.”

“Why would you kill her?” My sister had denied that killing Ava and kidnapping Juliet was a part of some psychotic plan to exact her revenge, yet I struggled to find a different motive.
“Because I love you!” Alice burst out.

It took my bewildered mind a few moments to gather the fragments, to piece them together and create a complete picture. “You mean…” I finally managed to stammer.

“Yes,” Alice replied. “I said bad blood ran through our veins. We’re one and the same, you know. That’s why Juliet had to disappear.”

Slowly, but surely, I began to comprehend the problems following this revelation. I had planned on playing along and had managed to do so thus far, however, my natural revulsion overcame my better judgement and I moved away from her touch. Alice reached behind her and suddenly pulled out a revolver. “It’s a shame you feel this way, Lia. I reckoned on it, however, and thus you and I come to an end. After all, I can’t allow you to reject me without punishment.”

When Ruth and Chase were about to advance, Alice shot a warning shot to prevent them from coming any closer. My sister pointed with the barrel of the gun towards the edge of the cliff and I did as requested. Clearly her intention was to shoot me and allow the body to drop over the edge, much like our mother had done. She pulled the trigger but the gun didn’t work, so she pulled the trigger again and again, playing Russian roulette while I stood there shaking, unable to react. I couldn’t help but wonder if my mother had been through the same myriad of emotions before Juliet and I pushed her from the edge of the cliff.

Suddenly, the sound of a gun echoed on the cliffs. I closed my eyes and I waited for the searing pain which never came. When nothing happened, I slowly opened my eyes and saw my sister had fallen down on the ground a short distance away. Behind her, I noted a figure with massive dark hair. Smoke was still coming from the gun she held in her hand. It took me a moment to realize that it was Grace.
Reflexively, I bent down beside the body of my sister and put her head in my lap. Alice opened her eyes and it could be clearly seen that the gunshot Grace had inflicted was not fatal. She weakly motioned for me to bend down and I did so. She whispered into my ear; “I buried her.”


Alice tried to respond, but before she could, I suddenly felt the earth give way beneath us. In the confusion which followed, I lost my hold on her. Before I realized what had taken place, I was in thin air, grappling for the edge of the cliff just above me. I managed to grab it and quickly found two hands gripping each of mine, pulling me over the edge. Grace dragged me to safety.

We retreated from the edge and took a breath. After some moments, I carefully climbed to the edge and looked down onto the jagged rocks below where my sister lay sprawled out. Alice Smith was no more. Strangely enough, I could not even find it in my heart to grieve for her. My mind was swimming with thoughts on Juliet. Was she indeed buried alive as Alice had said? For how long?

I hastily informed the others as to the state of matters, and Grace began rapidly to organise the search. She concluded rapidly that Alice would not have buried her prisoner not too far away from the castle ruins, in case someone might stumble upon her and try to exhume her. We therefore split up to cover more ground and after an hour of agonizing search, we finally found signs of where the earth had been disturbed. We set to work with no other tools except for our bare hands. It was hard work in the hot autumn sun which now shone down upon us, but sooner than expected we reached something hard. Digging along the corners, we discovered that it was a wooden box hastily put together. The thought occurred to me that Alice had probably not been able to bury the box deep in the ground due to her working solo. Thankfully, Alice hadn’t
nailed the lid shut, so we removed it and inside lay Juliet, lifeless, covered in dirt and grime.

She wasn’t breathing so we all grabbed a limb and carried her to the grass where Grace proceeded to give her mouth to mouth while I pushed down on her ribs. I sent up a prayer to a God which I didn’t even believe in, asking him to please spare the one thing in this world that I cared about. After what seemed like an eternity, Juliet coughed and took a heaving breath. Never before had I been filled with such joy. I ran to Grace and embraced her tightly, thanking her silently for her intervention, before sitting down and cradling Juliet’s head in my lap and running my fingers through the dirty blond hair.

“What took you so long?” Juliet whispered hoarsely.

“What kind of hero would I be if I didn’t wait until the last moment?”

We looked at each other and smiled.

Grace called the police and they quickly arrived along with a crime scene team who climbed down to where Alice’s body was located. Since nobody could have survived such a fall and we were not injured, an ambulance was deemed unnecessary. After taking our statements and the medical examiner concluded that nothing seemed to contradict them, we were free to leave. In this, Grace wielded her badge and asserted her influence. The M.E. furthermore examined Juliet and allowed her to leave, seeing as she had not been buried in the box for a long time.

Ruth, Chase, Juliet and I were taken by car back to the village, while Grace remained to help with the crime scene. Before I stepped into the car, Grace grabbed my hand and squeezed it tight with my ex-lover looking on. Juliet’s face was unreadable.
Two days later, I gazed over the barren landscape a final time before turning and heading back to Wick from the castle along the bleak, asphalt road. I had needed to see the place one final time. Of course, I was not alone. Juliet followed behind me, neither of us saying anything, afraid to break the silence that loomed like a monster between us. She had explained that her meeting Ava shortly before the murder had been mere chance. We reached a dirt road, which wove its way down the sheer cliffs, onto the rocks below. I followed the road, and was standing on the shore, looking out at the sea, when Juliet came and stood beside me.

“It’s over,” she finally commented before slipping her hand into mine.

“Yeah,” I responded as I felt her long, tapering fingers wrap around mine. The warmth of her skin was almost reassuring. I turned to her. “Somehow, it doesn’t feel like it is.”

Juliet leaned down and captured my lips with her own. Her familiar scent washed over me, mixed with the salt from the sea and the pervading aroma of seaweed which littered the rocks.

It was only now, through the haze of arousal that I noted the natural pool not too far away, separated from the sea by a small wall of rock and the cave beside it. Without much warning, I dragged her in there and pushed her up against the cave wall. Her laugh echoed off the walls. Darkness had yet to pervade the cave, and thus there was enough light in the mouth to see my fingers undoing the buttons of her shirt as I heard the sea break onto the rocks outside, forming and shaping the landscape.

My lips found her neck and I slowly kissed my way down her neck to her exposed collarbone. I sucked on the warm skin until she gasped and her fingers wrapped themselves into my hair. I pulled her jacket from
her shoulders, and threw it away, but a strange sound when it landed
distracted me and I turned to see a book lying on the floor of the cave
next to the jacket. I pulled away from Juliet and walked over to pick it up.
It was a book of poems, written by A.E. Housman. He had also been my
father’s favourite poet and therefore, I knew him well.

I opened the book and saw it had belonged to Juliet’s father by the
inscription. Since my father had possessed the same volume, my fingers
instinctively found the poem I had been looking for;

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Her strong enchantments failing,} \\
\text{Her towers of fear in wreck,} \\
\text{Her limbecks dried of poisons} \\
\text{And the knife at her neck,} \\
\text{The Queen of air and darkness} \\
\text{Begins to shrill and cry,} \\
\text{'O young man, O my slayer,} \\
\text{To-morrow you shall die.'} \\
\text{O Queen of air and darkness,} \\
\text{I think 'tis truth you say,} \\
\text{And I shall die to-morrow;} \\
\text{But you will die to-day.}
\end{align*}
\]

I could hear a different laugh echoing from the walls, cold, ironic,
mirthless. The thought entered my head unspoken.

Mother has won again.

Juliet came up behind me and kissed my neck, anxious to continue
from where we had left off. All I could do was stare at the page.

When did my life become a competition with a ghost?
It had grown dark by the time we reached Wick and we headed for the bed and breakfast where the others were waiting for us. They immediately surrounded us and questions landed on us like grenades. In the snug kitchen, the lady of the house served us dinner and we sat together for hours, discussing the final ending of this incredible tale. I could feel Grace’s eyes resting upon me, yet she contributed little to the conversation. It was late when we retired for bed, some of us worse for wear than others after all the red wine being consumed. I had taken care to keep Juliet amply supplied with alcohol, and my efforts had been rewarded. She was asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow. I lay in bed next to her, listening to her sleep until the clock struck midnight. I arose and went to the kitchen where I found Grace.

She was making hot chocolate. I watched in silence as she melted the chocolate on the stove, added the milk and stirred. Neither of us felt the need to break the comfortable silence. After Grace had poured the liquid into two cups, she led the way into the sitting room, where a fire was blazing in the fireplace. It was the custom of the landlady to keep this room warm and inviting during the night so that her guests might find refuge there, should they be unable to sleep. Grace sat in one of the ottomans in front of the fire, curled up and took a drink from her cup, before pointing me to the chair beside her.

Grace was finally the one to break the silence. “Does she know yet?”

I took a contemplative drink before responding to her question. “No.”
She did not ask me when I was planning on telling her. She merely inclined her head in acceptance.

“When were you planning on telling me, Grace?”

The other woman raised an eyebrow in a gesture which had become all-too-familiar. “Telling you what, Lia?”

“How you have used, manipulated and lied to me.” I was angry on the inside but the tone in my voice was surprisingly cold and indifferent.

Grace nearly choked on the chocolate she had been drinking. “What?!”

Her surprise took some of the fight out of me. Nevertheless, the path had been chosen and I must traverse it. “I heard the cops talking about you at the scene. How there is nothing you hate more than murderers. How you’ll do anything to put them behind bars.”

All Grace could do was stare at me dumbfounded.

“I never understood your willingness to participate in finding Alice, and your arrival here in Scotland. A part of me wanted to believe that you felt more for me than mere friendship, and that was the reason you went to such lengths. Now, I’ve come to realize you had a different set of motives altogether.”

“Such as?” Grace finally found her voice.

“Someone like you would hardly be ignorant of the terms of my and Juliet’s release. If it was discovered that we were together once again, our parole would be revoked and we would go back to jail.”

“You think it was my plan to worm my way into your confidence and gather evidence against you?”

“By all means, tell me I’m wrong.” When Grace made no move to respond, I placed my chocolate onto the table near-by, arose from the chair and headed out the door. It was only in the doorframe that I felt a
warm hand encircle my wrist and forcefully pull me back until I was face
to face with the fiery blue irids of the cop.

“I came to Scotland because I love you, goddamnit. Surely you
can’t doubt that after all that has happened?”

“Of course I do!” I shot back angrily.

Grace did not give me a chance to react before she grabbed me by
the shoulders, and kissed me with all the fervour she could muster, the
passion she could never quite have put into words. I quickly pulled away
and turned my head away, but not before she caught the fire in my eyes.

Once I had gathered my equilibrium, I turned back to face her.

“Why are you so intent on catching every killer that you come across?” I
didn’t want to know the answer, but somehow I felt I needed to.

Grace motioned for me to sit down on the couch, which I did, and
she joined me. “Call it self-loathing and leave it at that.”

“You should know me better than that, Grace. I don’t surrender on
such easy terms.”

The dark-haired woman took her hand in mine. “It isn’t something
I have ever shared with anybody.”

“That is the breath and scope of the relationship I share with
Juliet,” I contributed. Grace sent me a frown, as if trying to tell me she
didn’t really want to hear anything about my ex-lover. She would rather
not be reminded of the fact that she had competition. Her look grew
harsher as I continued. “I share something with her that I’ll never have
with anyone else.”

Grace lifted an eyebrow and I responded to her silent question.

“We committed a murder and that ties us together. I’ve never been quite
sure of the exact nature of the bond, whether it is dark, but it is there
nonetheless. Trying to deny it would be pointless.”
Grace released my hand. “Is this you telling me that I don’t have a snowball’s chance in hell?”

She walked over to a small side-table, grabbed a whisky bottled stored there, and poured a generous amount into her cup of chocolate. She took a drink before laying it down and turning back to me. It took me a moment to realize that she was waiting for a response to her earlier question.

“I think you misunderstood what I was talking about,” I pointed out logically as I patted the seat next to me on the couch. She joined me again, and I elaborated. “I meant that as difficult as the experience was for me, Juliet helped me pull through. We were together often during the trial, and she helped me come to peace with what happened, simply by being there. Even after we were separated, it helped me to know that someone out there knew what I was going through, understood. When I got a good mark on an exam, I knew Juliet would have understood the strange mixture of hate and elation I always felt. Perhaps sharing your secret would be helpful. Perhaps you would feel less lonely.”

“How do you know that I’m lonely?”

“Because I know you,” I returned confidently.

Grace shot me a glance as if she was about to contradict that statement. “What if I told you that you don’t know me at all? What if I told you that you and I are more alike than you thought?”

“In what way?”

She took a lock of my hair and began weaving it around her thumb and forefinger, as if she was contemplating my words. When her confession arrived, I nearly missed it because it was only a whisper. “I’m a killer too, Lia.”

“What?” I breathed.
Grace released my hair and turned towards the fire. The light played on her face as she recounted the happenings from her past. “I was twelve when my father first began raping me. It started off innocently enough, he would slap my shoulder as we did the washing-up or tuck me into bed like he used to when I was a child.”

I wanted deeply to muster words of sympathy but they wouldn’t formulate, so I merely sat there dumbstruck as she recounted her tale.

“My mum was always the breadwinner due to the fact my father couldn’t hold down a steady job. One night, she went to a convention in Manchester, and my father used the opportunity to force himself on me. It hurt like hell that first time, but I got used to it after a while. It was when he began bringing his friends home that I could no longer deal…”

“Why didn’t you tell your mother?” I reached out for her hand and entwined our fingers together to let her know that I was there. Grace squeezed it absent-mindedly, still living within the memories of her past. Yet, she seemed conscious of the fact that I was there.

“Because I thought she wouldn’t believe me. My father threatened that if I didn’t do exactly what he wanted he’d divorce my mother. With two young brothers, I didn’t want to be responsible for breaking up the family. So, I stayed in that hellhole for the sake of my mum and brothers.”

“You were stuck in the same situation that I was. You felt cornered and you had no way out.”

“Exactly. I couldn’t live with the abuse any longer, and yet there was no way to end it. I felt like this would be my lot in life, until one night as he was raping me, it occurred to me how different life would be if he was merely gone.”

“You therefore began planning how to get rid of him.”
Grace nodded in response before turning to me. “I still remember that rainy day when the police came to the house and told me and my mother that he died in a car accident on the MI5 freeway. My mother was a nervous wreck.”

“Merely wishing him dead does not make you a killer.” I still couldn’t believe that Grace had been involved in causing the accident.

She arose from the couch and stood in front of the fire, resting her hand on the mantelpiece. She stayed like this for long moments before turning to face me. “I cut the breaks on his car.”

“The police didn’t plough through the wreck?”

“The car my father was driving rammed into a truck coming from the opposite direction. The truck was carrying fuel and the whole thing exploded. Thankfully, there was hardly anything left, not enough to ascertain the true reason for the crash. One look at my dad’s mile-long felony record, and the police decided he had been drinking and driving. It wasn’t worth the manpower to investigate such a deadbeat.”

“You’ve been living with this all these years.”

“Now you know the reason why I’m so hard on killers.”

A thought occurred to me and I gave a frown. “Why did you become a cop with a past like this?”

“My past is the reason for my becoming a cop. Call it atonement, if you will or even retribution. The work is the one thing that keeps me feeling normal.”

I tried to suppress a harsh, ironic laugh but failed. “You and I will never be normal.”

Grace was about to comment when Juliet appeared in the doorway, her blond hair like a halo around her face, annoyingly beautiful even when she was half-asleep. Through the half-open door she could only see me on the couch. “Babe, are you coming back to bed?”
She was soon wide awake, however, when she entered the room and saw that Grace was also in the room, standing by the fire. She quickly apologised, stating she hadn’t meant to interrupt our conversation.

“I’ll be there in a minute, Juliet,” I responded as I arose from the couch. I wanted nothing more than to stay and discuss more fully the topic I had merely touched upon with Grace. Instead, I followed Juliet, sending Grace one final glance before exiting the room.

♦ ♦ ♦

We took the train back to Inverness the next day and flew from there to Gatwick. Elizabeth, eager to see her daughter was once again happy to foot the bill for all of us girls. Grace would remain behind for another two days to see to the transportation of the body south to England and wrap up the case. On the plane, the easy atmosphere of the evening before had vanished, exorcised by the sudden realization that the future was hovering over our heads like a guillotine. Juliet and I, sitting together, in particular, participated little in what was taking place around us, merely exchanging a glance with one another on occasion before I returned to my occupation of looking out the window, and Juliet to her book. Chase and Ruth, seated across the aisle from us, were constantly whispering to one another during the half hour plane ride.

Elizabeth was waiting in the terminal when the plane landed on English soil. Juliet ran into the arms of her mother who hugged her tightly and I swore that I could see a tear run down the cheek of this severe woman. She mouthed “thank you” in my direction and I nodded in return.

Once we reached the apartment, it had grown quite late and therefore Ruth and Chase departed quite soon after to catch up on some sleep. I noted the look they shared as they walked out the door and knew
that my suspicions had been proved correct. I left mother and daughter to discuss the future and retired to bed.

The next morning I awoke to an empty bed. After dressing, I went into the living room and found Juliet sleeping on the couch. For the sake of appearances, she had decided to sleep out there. I kissed her gently on the forehead and breathed in her scent before grabbing my jacket and wallet and heading out the door to buy some bagels and coffee for breakfast.

After visiting the bakery, I sat down on a bench in the park only a stone’s throw from my apartment which served as my shortcut on my way to the shops. I sipped my coffee languorously and watched the joggers as they ran past, a kid playing with his dog, and a young guy playing with a Frisbee. The smell of the showers the night before hung fragrant in the air and the wind whistled through the trees. It was a cloudy, but warm day.

She appeared out of nowhere, and when she spoke my name, I nearly dropped my coffee. “Lia?”

I turned to face Juliet and invited her to sit next to me on the bench, knowing that the moment I was looking for had finally arrived.

Juliet took a seat and looked around at the sights surrounding her. “Have you made your decision?”

“Yes, I have,” I returned, trying to put more decisiveness into my voice then I actually felt.

I had expected Juliet to show a response once I broke the news to her. Instead, she just nodded and continued taking in the sights. The warm coffee in my hands abruptly turned bitter and I lost all taste for it. I would have preferred a tantrum to this understanding silence. My mind began questioning my motives, interrogating me to the point of exhaustion whether I had made the right choice. A sudden desire
overcame me, urging me to reconsider. I thought of the past, the laughter we had shared and memorable moments played within my mind like a movie without the sound.

“I never wanted it to end in this way.” It was all I could manage to contribute to the conversation.

“Yes, you did.”

“Why would you say that?”

“After all, a life has hardly been lived without at least one heartache. Some will have several, while for others there will only ever be the one.” I knew which category Juliet believed I belonged to by the bitterness in her voice. Apparently, she was under the impression that her ardent feelings were far from being reciprocated.

I turned to her and placed my hand on her shoulder. “It’s better this way.”

Juliet shook my hand away and glared at me. “Is it?”

“I can’t offer you anything except a life full of secrets and lies. You deserve more.” Instinctively, my thoughts flew back to the young man waiting for Juliet back in the States. Despite the jealousy which flared up at this line of thought, I soon quelled it when I remembered all the things he could offer her that I could not. Besides, as I had told Juliet before, if not him, she would spend her life with somebody else. I had to get used to the idea that it would never be me. “This is easier.”

Juliet arose from the bench and stood in front me with hands on her hips. “For you or for me?”

I arose and stood face-to-face with my ex-lover. “Why can’t you accept the way things are?”

“Because we spent our lives defying destiny and now it has to end like this because you’ll not even fight!”
“Out of all the stubborn, pig-headed…” I lacked the words but soon it didn’t matter because Juliet’s arms wrapped around my waist, drew me in and pulled me close. She then planted a kiss on my willing lips and under her expert touch I melted into her. When she pulled away, I read the truth in her eyes, conveyed as easily as if she had spoken the words. I might try to replace her, but nobody knew the secrets of my heart like she did. That was our blessing and our curse.

Juliet leaned down and whispered into my ear. “The best people fight against all the obstacles in pursuit of happiness.
Those were the words Juliet had used the night before the murder when she crawled through the window, as was her custom, and we lay in bed together, the warm air still heavy with the fragrance of our lovemaking.

After Juliet left, the suspense began building up and I felt something akin to the feeling one has the night before Christmas. The thought occurred to me that after tomorrow, my mother would no longer exist and that filled me with a mixture of dread and exuberance. Conflicting emotions stirred within my soul, on one hand I was aware of the relief I would feel once she was gone, on the other I was terrified that we would get caught. I had no plans to go to jail for the next sixteen years.

Despite the anxiety I felt, I fell asleep soon after Juliet left and slept soundly until awoken at six a.m. by my alarm clock. I washed my hair and put on some new clothes. After this, it was time to play the role of dutiful daughter. I prepared breakfast for the family, helped my mother clean up afterwards and even went so far as to bring Alice hers in bed. Once my sister and father had left the house, me and my mother scrubbed the abode from top to bottom and did the washing before making lunch in time for their arrival at the stroke of one.

Juliet arrived after lunch. Together we did the dishes in the kitchen. While my mother was upstairs getting prepared for our picnic, I felt Juliet’s arms wrap themselves around my waist as I had my hands full with the dishes in the sink. I turned and cupped her face with my soap-filled hands. She laughed and wiped the soap off her face and my hands with a towel. Then, our eyes met and the laughter died.

“Are you ready?” she questioned me.
“It doesn’t have to be this way.”

“Yes, it does, Lia.” We had discussed the ins and outs the night before and had reached the agreement that it was the only way we would ever be together.

My mother entered the kitchen, dressed in new clothes for the outing, and we took to preparing a picnic. An hour later we were walking out of the village and following the path onto the cliffs. We found a beautiful spot by the old castle, overlooking the sea, and set up the blanket we had brought with us and indulged in the food and wine. A languor soon settled over me and Juliet and we therefore decided to stay behind while my mother went for a walk along the cliffs seeing as it had been so long since she had been there and she wanted to take advantage of the warmth and sunshine.

After my mother was out of sight, I moved to rest my head on Juliet’s stomach. She had been lying not far from me.

I finally phrased the question that had been bothering me for quite some time. “What do you suppose will happen to us?”

“I don’t know,” Juliet responded as she ran her hands through my hair. “Does it even matter as long as we’re together?”

We stayed like this for a long time, silent and almost slumbering in the sun, listening to the song of the seabirds and the sounds of the sea breaking up against the rocks. Sometimes I even felt the spray on my face.

Therefore, we didn’t notice when my mother returned.

I only opened my eyes because a shadow fell over my face. I gasped when I realized that my mother was standing over us with her hands on her hips.

“I knew it!” she exclaimed as Juliet and I scrambled to our feet.

“Mother, we were just talking...” I tried desperately to remedy the situation.
“Don’t try that with me, young lady.” My mother walked up to Juliet in a menacing manner and soon enough, they stood toe-to-toe with one another. A battle of wills followed during when neither one was prepared to look away. “I have always afraid that you were a bad influence on my daughter, and now I know that you have turned her into a queer.”

“I didn’t turn her into anything,” pointed Juliet out reasonably. “She came to me of her own free will.”

“You made her believe that,” my mother spat out, directing her next words to Juliet. “When I’m done, your parents will know what a revolting abomination you are and you will never be allowed to see my daughter again. You are sick, twisted in the head and over my dead body are you ever coming near...”

The flow of her words was interrupted when I unexpectedly stole up from behind her and hit her over the head with a rock I had picked up from the ground. Nobody called my lover names!

Mother fell to the ground and lay fatally still. The two of us stood over her and gazed at each other in a frightened sort of manner. We had prepared carefully for the sequence of events we had presupposed would take place on our excursion. Our initial plan was to lure her to the cliffs and once she got close enough, simply push her over the edge. Now, we had not choice but to finish what we had started, otherwise she would reveal the whole, sorry truth of the matter.

Juliet therefore instructed me to grab her legs while she herself grabbed my mother’s arms. Thus, in a joined effort, we dragged and pushed her over the edge. We loosened some dirt on the edge to make clear that was the reason she had tripped and fallen over, and then ran back to town, screaming for help, exclaiming that there had been a terrible accident and placing the whole village in an uproar.
We missed the drag marks leading to the edge, left by the dead weight we had dragged between us, and that the stone I had used to hit my mother, had been left at the scene. We learned this at the trial.

Who again said that pride comes before a fall?
I returned to the present and the woman standing in front of me. Suddenly, my course seemed clear. I must finish that which I had started.

“Do you ever think about it?” Juliet asked quietly as her eyes wandered over the park.

I asked her what she was referring to and she turned to face me.

“The life we should have had.”

“Yes. In truth, however, life makes its own plans. In all our scheming, we never considered the scenario where we would be separated.” In our adolescent reasoning, we had thought we might perhaps end up in an institution for young offenders and that we would serve out the sentence together.

“I never thought we would be standing here,” said Juliet. “Now that you have written the ending, do you regret what happened? Do you wish you could turn back the clock and do things all over again?”

“That would be metaphysically impossible,” I responded, but could tell by the annoyed expression on Juliet’s face that she had been looking for a serious answer. “I don’t regret what has passed between us.”

“Because it’s the reason we are here.”

“Exactly.” I had been about to add another remark to the conversation when my phone rang and I pulled it out of my pocket to look at the caller I.D; it was Grace. I pressed the red button and put the phone back into my pocket but not before Juliet saw the name appearing on the screen as she peeked over my shoulder.

“I see you’ve made your choice.” The tone in Juliet’s voice could have frozen over a river in the middle of a tropical summer.
“Truth is, Juliet, that I’m done fighting! What’s the point when all it ever does is separate us?” I turned to walk away but Juliet grabbed my arm and forcefully pulled me back.

“There is something you aren’t telling me,” she stated confidently, her hand firm around my arm.

I finally managed to dislodge myself and could see in her blue eyes that she needed answers only I could give. “Juliet, I already lost you once. It was the hardest thing I ever had to experience. Don’t ask me to do it again.”

“Yet, you are willing to risk this loss with others,” Juliet pointed our logically.

“They aren’t you.”

“Then why settle for anybody else when I’m here?”

“Because I have no choice, goddamnit!”

“In life, there is always a choice…”

“Not for me, Juliet!” My voice grew loud enough for some people walking past us glancing in our direction, undoubtedly wondering as to the content of our conversation. I calmed down enough to lower my voice, understanding quickly that yelling wouldn’t get my point across. “I don’t want us to grow to hate one another. I deserve and want more than a life on the run. So do you. If you ever loved me at all, you’ll let me go.”

She reached out and pulled me into a hug. She had finally come to understand my side of the equation.

The next morning, we were standing outside my dorm, escorting Elizabeth and Juliet to their taxi to the airport. While Juliet loaded the bags in the car, her mother gave me a hug and wished me well.

Then came the hard part.

Juliet embraced Ruth and Chase in their turn before shaking hands with Grace in what appeared to be a truce. She pulled me to her chest and
I wrapped my hands around her waist, laid my head on her breast and breathed in the scent of her. We only came to our senses when the taxi driver began honking his horn and we pulled apart after she planted a hasty kiss on my lips.

Mother and daughter climbed into the car and I watched Juliet’s profile through the back window as the vehicle drove away.

Grace put her hand comfortingly around my shoulders as I noted from the corner of my eye that Chase and Ruth joined hands. I went into my pocket to find a tissue to wipe away the tears which were beginning to form but instead of the tissue I found a piece of paper. I unfolded it. There were only three words written there.

See you soon.
Wick, Scotland, 23rd of June 2009

I was awakened from sleep in my room at the Masters mansion by a hard knock on the front door downstairs. Soon enough, two policemen barged into the room to tell me I was arrested for the murder of my mother.

Standing behind the cops in the doorway were Elizabeth, Juliet’s father Ben, and the tenant, in other words, Elizabeth’s boy-toy Bill.

They gave me a few minutes alone to dress before apprising me of my right to counsel.

They led me out of the mansion in handcuffs. It was pouring down with rain but the two policemen had not bothered to get me a coat. Nor did I have a change of clothes.

One of them walked on each side of me as we made our way to the cruiser parked in the lot. That was the moment that Juliet appeared in the door. One of the policemen advanced towards her but she managed to duck past him and before the other one had a chance to react, she had her arms around my neck and was clinging on for all she was worth. The cop closer to me finally had to pull her off of me and his partner restrained her while I was bundled into the car.

I looked back at her and could see the tears running down her face. She was undoubtedly sure that this was the end.

Elizabeth came running down the front steps and handed the cop holding her daughter some of my clothes. She held Juliet tightly around the waist to ensure she would not interfere with the arrest.

Our eyes met and I nodded to her, she inclined her head in turn. It was an unspoken agreement that I would keep to myself Juliet’s involvement in the murder, maintain that it was a mere accident, and
Elizabeth would in turn destroy any evidence that could implicate her daughter.

The second cop entered the cruiser, got into the passenger seat and the other started the car. As we were about to drive away, I turned and could see through the rear window that Juliet had broken free from her mother’s grasp and was running furiously down the drive, chasing the car like all the demons of Hell were after her and that she could prevent them from taking me from her.

Some distance down the drive, she stumbled and fell into the mud. She quickly got up, however, and our eyes met. She knew now that it was a lost cause and stopped running. Instead, she gave me one final wave before the turn in the road came and she disappeared from sight.

During the time it took to drive to the nearest station, I contemplated what the future had in store. Now, I had been caught and would have to pay the prize. Would I ever have a chance at a normal life?

Once we reached the station, the two cops led me inside and I was photographed, my fingerprints were taken and I was searched. I was given new clothes to wear while the outfit I had been wearing while arrested was taken in for evidence. While combing through the pockets, the policewoman who conducted the search pulled out a slips of paper from the pocket of my jeans.

“What’s this?” she enquired of me.

“I’m not sure,” I responded. “What does it say?”

“See you soon.”
London, England, 22nd of May 2030

I walked into Barnes and Noble, located in Trafalgar Square. The bookstore was filled to capacity with people who wanted to see Daya Hayes, the former Juliet Masters, the famous crime author whose novels sold like hot potatoes. I glanced over the store and noted that a large area had been cleared of bookshelves in order to make way for chairs and a desk. Sitting on the desk, reading a poem aloud was a familiar form, albeit a little older then I remembered her. Juliet’s hair now had a few grey streaks in it, but I thought it gave her a dignified look and her eyes sparkled as brightly as ever. I had read in the papers about how she was one of a group of writers who were battling against the written word going completely digital, urging the public to pick up a book instead of reading them from a computer screen.

I was immensely proud of her.

Juliet was finishing reading a poem not of her own composing. It was by George Meredith and I knew it well. We had read it often together as teenagers. Her voice was steady as she read and echoed throughout the store;

“In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:”

I chimed in to finish the last line;

“We are betrayed by that which is false within.”
When I quoted very loudly the final piece of the poem everyone turned to see who had spoken. Juliet’s eyes searched for the unwelcome interruption and when she saw me, she turned visibly white. She threw the book away and walked across the floor with the purpose of Hannibal marching across the Alps.

A smile spread over my face and I prepared myself to welcome her but received a harsh blow to the cheek instead.

“What the hell are you doing here?” hissed Juliet, her eyes flaming with anger.

I rubbed my cheek. For the life of me I couldn’t fathom why she would greet me thus.

“I needed you see you,” I finally managed to respond, meanwhile noting the numerous eyes which rested upon us.

“Well, you could’ve called!” Juliet whispered angrily.

“Would you have answered?” I countered easily.

Juliet sighed and turned to face our bewildered audience. “Ladies and gentlemen,” she addressed them. “A small problem has occurred. Please talk amongst yourselves while we take steps to fix it.”

Without further ado, Juliet grabbed my sleeve and dragged me behind some bookshelves where we were safe from prying eyes.

“What are you doing here?” she repeated her question from earlier.

“Juliet, Grace died from cancer six months ago.”

My ex-lover covered her hand with her mouth. The shock on her face was obvious. “Oh, my God. You two have been together for the last fifteen years?”

I nodded. It was all I could do not to cry. I looked down upon the floor, until I felt a hand upon my shoulder. I looked up and saw azure eyes filled with understanding. It was only then that I found the courage to continue.
“It took two years for the cancer to take her, which gave me time to make some final memories, to say goodbye. A week before she died…”

I stopped but a squeeze from Juliet helped me to continue.

“A week before Grace died, she forced me to promise her that I would find you once I had recovered from the loss. She even hired a private detective to seek you out since you disappeared after we last met, and gave me an envelope with the information needed to locate you.”

Juliet’s hand fell from my shoulder. She looked at me aghast.

“Why would she do that?”

It seemed as if she was speaking more to herself instead of addressing me.

I was the one to respond. “Because Grace knew that I still loved you. She wanted us to have the opportunity denied to us all those years ago.”

Before Juliet had the chance to respond, a young man appeared from behind one of the bookcases. I pointed and Juliet turned around to face him. He was wearing a dark suit and thick, black glasses. My ex-lover introduced him as John Stills, her agent.

“Miss Hayes,” he addressed the woman in front of me. “Everyone is eager for you to continue.

Juliet nodded as if in a daze, and followed behind John through the maze of chairs with me in hot pursuit. She was walking so fast that I didn’t catch her until she reached the table where she had been sitting earlier. I grabbed Juliet’s forearm and forced her to turn around.

I finally spoke the words I had wanted to utter since I was a teenager. “You now hold all the cards. The question is, how do you want to play them?”

Juliet kept her voice low so that nobody could hear her except me, and believe me when I say that the audience was trying! “You want me to
“Put all that I am down in a game of cards? I have more to lose now then I ever did before!”

“Even more reason to place all you have on a single bet. That means you have everything to gain.”

“I could lose everything.” Juliet motioned to the audience, indicating that what she had achieved in the last fifteen years meant a lot to her.

“You’re wondering what they’ll think if they were to know the truth?”

Juliet nodded.

“So what if the whole world judges us? We’ll simply create our own.”

I grabbed her hand and placed it close to my heart, holding it with both my own before continuing.

“If those years with Grace have taught me anything: it’s how important love is. I’m done caring about what other people think. I don’t give a fuck anymore. I just want to be with you.”

“What about God? Aren’t you afraid we’ll end up in Hell?”

“We’re already there, aren’t we? Being together has to be easier than being apart.” I released Juliet’s hand and took her chin between my thumb and forefinger so that she would have to look at me. I decided to prompt her when no response seemed forthcoming. “What do you say about that?”

At first, there was no response in Juliet’s face and she pushed my hand away. Then she gave a smile. She reached out and kissed me on the cheek.

The writer pulled back and finally gave me her response. “I’d say that you certainly know how to romance a girl, running into one of her readings and interrupting.”
I smiled back. “Is that a yes?”

Juliet nodded and after assumed a more stern aspect. “Now Lia, sit down and allow me to finish the reading.”

I happily sat down in an empty chair John found for me, prompted by Juliet pointing in my direction.

As I listened to hear Juliet beginning to read from one of her own compositions, something about a woman stuffing a body into a refrigerator, a certain peace stole over me for the first time since I’d found out about Grace’s diagnosis.

I knew that I was finally home, whatever that meant for the future.

By the look and wink Juliet sent me, I guessed she agreed.
2. The Road Less Travelled

*On Writing the Novella*
2 The Road Less Travelled
An Essay by Hildur Guðbergsdóttir

2.1 Introduction

The greatest adventures in life often happen by mere chance. This happened to me when I was sixteen years old and the idea for The Endless Road fell into my lap. My old high school was built in such a way that the shortest route from the old wing to the new was through the library. One day I stopped by the shelf which held the crime books, and whether it was out of sheer boredom or for another reason I will never know, but I pulled out a book. It contained the usual crap on Jeffrey Dahmer and Ted Bundy, the serial killers familiar to most people.

Yet, there were also two pages on a case I had never heard of before. Two young girls, Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker, murdered the latter’s mother to prevent being separated. The Hulme household was collapsing, and thus Juliet was moving to South Africa. The teenage girls, fifteen and sixteen years of age, mistakenly believed that Mrs. Parker stood in the way of her daughter leaving the country along with her best friend and to prevent the impending separation, they took matters into their own hands. Not only did they kill her, they brutally slaughtered her, beating her to death with a brick inside a stocking (Glamuzina and Laurie, 18).

I read a book on the case written by Julie Glamuzina and Alison Laurie called Parker and Hulme: A Lesbian View (1991). In the book they maintain that the case affected lesbians in New Zealand for decades after the murder occurred. Lesbianism became synonymous with murder (Glamuzina and Laurie 165).
2.2 The Idea

At sixteen this case inspired me to begin writing a story about the two girls under the premise that they met again six years after the events, their love still intact. I read a comment by someone online who wondered what might have happened if they had ever met again. Would their mutual attraction still be at hand, and if so, what series of events might then transpire in turn? I wrote about three hundred pages and they are now lost. I moved on to other projects, as is my custom being a Gemini. When I needed an idea for the B.A. thesis, this story came back to me and I began writing, without knowing exactly where it would lead me.

As it often is with my stories, it often feels like I am being told the story and left to write it down by someone else, very much like the Grimm brothers. It is therefore often difficult to pinpoint where my ideas come from, because one minute I am contemplating the next part of a story, unsure of how to proceed, and then the next minute it is as if a fairy dropped the answer onto my pillow. I can quite recall one single incident back in 2008 when I was living in Norway and attending a writing class there. I had written an exciting story about a young woman who becomes enamoured of her dad’s best friend after her father is killed in a tragic car accident. The father actually does not die but turns up on his daughter’s doorstep when the relationship has become quite evolved. I had no idea where to go from there, until one night, when I was washing the dishes and the thought occurred to me that the friend should answer the door and the woman would hear a gun go off and that would be the end of the story. My whole writing group assented that I should keep it like this and not change the ending for something more defined. I left it up to the reader to decide which of the men survived.
In their book on Parker and Hulme, Glamuzina and Laurie explained the relationship of the girls. Thus, I immediately identified with these two young girls. Like me, they stood apart from the rest of the world. They created their own world, even had their own gods and saints which they worshipped. They believed they would not go to Heaven when they died, seeing as how boring it would be. They believed they would go to the Fourth World, a paradise of art, music and enjoyment (Glamuzina and Laurie 62). Hulme and Parker were at odds with everyone around them, thus driving them closer together. They had tumultuous relationships with their families and began to consider one another as family instead of their own blood relations (Glamuzina and Laurie 66). They used their imaginations to escape their boring reality which did not live up to their high expectations. This was all something which I could very much relate to.

I used the Internet for further research, anxious to know the ending to the story and discovered that the girls had only served five and a half years in prison for the murder. At 21, each of them was released (Glamuzina 109). Parker finished her parole in New Zealand, of which she was a native (Gillies 1). The English born Hulme travelled home with her mother (Gristwood 21). After several failed careers, Juliet Hulme became a crime writer under the name Anne Perry, the name of her stepfather, the man responsible for the crumbling of the Hulme household (Gristwood 21). She was “outed” in the early 1990s and thus the whole house of dominoes came falling down (Darnton 1). Pauline Parker was found in 1997, living in Kent working as a teacher. Both women now live in Scotland, Parker in the Orkney Islands and Hulme in a small village called Portmahomack (Gillies 1).


2.3 Setting

Some changes were made by me in the beginning. I realized that I could not set the story in New Zealand since I knew nothing about the country and had never been there. The next challenge was to decide whether or not to keep to the timeline. In my original draft, I did so, but finding credible evidence for life in New Zealand in the 1960s seemed fickle at best living on the other side of the world and all. Therefore, I decided to move the events to the present, enabling me to include various modern appliances, like cell phones, and a female detective, no doubt a rarity during the time the events in question took place. These decisions were quite easy to make and were done as I wrote.

The setting proved to be not too complicated to decide on. It’s seemed a logical evolution to move the setting to Hulme’s home country of England since I am quite familiar with the country. The story begins with Julie flying in from the States to see Lia. It was also important to find a perfect setting when the killer finally reveals her identity. I decided to use a setting I was familiar with, near the place where I used to live in Scotland. In the northeast of the country, on a peninsula called Caithness lies the small fishing village of Wick, founded by Vikings. Outside the village, on high cliffs within walking distance from Wick, lies an old keep, used in days long gone to protect the settlement from raiders. Little remains now except the stone walls, and unevenness in the ground covered with grass to testify that once there were outhouses there, most likely used to store food and animals. I decided to use the keep as the setting for the murder, and consequently, the ending. It was quite far removed from the actual crime scene which is wooded parkland where a stream runs through, but I decided it was well worth the change.
2.4 Plot

The Parker/Hulme case provided the inspiration, and my research into the case gave me a few more. The idea for the death of Ava was my own conceptive idea. I read some article several years ago about young kids in the U.K. who liked to do ketamine at festivals, strong enough to knock out a horse (Reardon 1). This was, as Sherlock Holmes might say, a simple process of elimination. She could not be hung, stabbed or beaten, seeing as Alice wanted it to look like suicide so only Lia would come after her and not the police. Therefore, this seemed to be the ideal solution, a drug which could knock out a horse, which you can easily get and make it look like an accidental overdose (Reardon 1). The idea for Ruth’s past came from an episode of Law and Order: Special Victims Unit, where a detective recounts how close she came to killing her alcoholic mother. The idea for the way in which Grace kills her father came from a story by Stephen King called Shawshank Redemption (King 15).

As for the changes I had to make to the actual story, there have been quite a few. I added one scene between Grace and Lia in the middle of the story, to create more of a rapport. Originally, the ending was not supposed to be long at all, the final scene was supposed to take place on the cliffs outside the village of Wick. I was urged, however, by both my professor and second-reader to expand the story and to give the reader more insight into what will happen to the characters once the story closes. I took the advice of Anna Heiða and gave Grace a background which explains her relentless pursuit of killers: she is one herself. I also took the suggestion which I received to the effect that I should make it look like they would be together, but in the end they are separated and Lia ends up with Grace. It is hinted at, however, that this will not be their final meeting. Indeed, at the end, they are reunited for hopefully the final time.
2.5 Characterization

The thorny problem I had to face was to decide whether to write using pseudonyms for the girls or whether to keep occurrences as close to the truth as humanly possible. While Peter Jackson did his best to tell the truth of the matter in *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), I believe each and every story inspired by real life is only one interpretation of the events which took place and the filmmakers are trying to portray. As an example of this, I have recently begun to watch the show *Reign*, a show about Mary, Queen of Scots, as a teenager in France. At first I could hardly watch due to the historical inconsistencies (women did not wear sleeveless dresses nor was there pop music in 1553) but once I put my own prejudices aside, I began to quite enjoy the show (Warner Brothers 2014). I therefore decided to maintain some facts as they had been, but rewrite others to suit my own purposes.

Of course, the main factor in my decision about truthfulness had to be the fact that I was dealing with people who were still alive. Hulme, because of her work, has been unable to escape the endless questions by journalists looking for their next scoop. She is not apologetic for the role she played in the demise of her best friend’s mother. She considers the life she lives now, doing no harm and good to all those around her, to be retribution enough (Gristwood 20). She even stated in a 2006 interview that she was unable to remember the woman she killed (Gillies 2006). I decided that I would give them different names and move the location, but due to the high media coverage of the case, and the film, it would have been impossible for me to disguise where my inspiration came from. I therefore kept other personal characteristics intact.

Therefore, I had the skeleton of the story given to me by the Parker/Hulme case. I decided to move the story to the present as opposed to 1960s New Zealand, seeing as that gave me more leverage. The
characters of Juliet and Pauline (Lia) were already clear in my mind given the knowledge I had acquired about their personalities. It seemed reasonable that Lia was a student given the fact Parker was one after the incarceration (Gillies 1). Seeing Julie as a newcomer and Lia to be a student, I needed someone who would interact with them from the investigative side of things, informing them of the progress of the case and made the revelation who the girls truly were. Grace’s existence is thus not difficult to justify and I based her on my favourite actress, Lucy Lawless. Obviously, this needed to be a cop or detective, and I decided she needed to have a romantic interest in one of the girls to keep from babbling to her superiors about her discovery. Lia (Parker) was chosen because there was more evidence for her orientation, is less evidence for Hulme being gay (Gristwood 21). I also conceived the idea of a group of gay friends surrounding Lia. In my original draft, there was a whole group of friends, including an African American and Chinese woman who were together but kept arguing. I decided to trim it down to only the girlfriend and best friend, Ruth, based on the actress Ruth Wilson, seeing as it would be problematic to have too many people in the story, especially when they served no fixed purpose. I needed Lia to inject herself into the investigation, and thus came Ava to the forefront. In my older draft Ava is actually alive and plays quite a part, with jealousy and all that follows. I figured the murder of Lia’s girlfriend would drive her to find the killer, seeing as she feels responsible. Chase kind of sprang out of my head and onto the page, a fiery spirit with an attitude. Perhaps she is some rebellious part of me that has yet to appear.
2.6 Romantic Entanglements

I had to decide in the beginning whether or not to portray the relationship between Lia and Juliet as romantic. Frances Walsh, Jackson’s partner in filmmaking and his wife who wrote the screenplay for Heavenly Creatures, according to Alison Laurie, has never believed the claims Hulme is now making about her past (Laurie 8). Hulme, however, maintains that the murder was merely service to a friend. Parker was supportive and kind to Hulme a year before the murder when the latter was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Hulme felt Parker was the only person she could turn to. Parker threatened suicide when she heard of her best friend leaving the country following the collapse of the Hulme household in 1954 (Neustatter 1). Hulme felt she would be responsible if she left the country without her friend and Parker would then take her own life. With the adults in her world occupied by their own petty dramas, Hulme had to make the choice between the life of her best friend, and Mrs. Parker, a woman she hardly knew. Hulme made the latter choice, not out of love but out of a misplaced sense of obligation (Stein 57).

This brings me to the decision I had to wrestle most with, and that was deciding whether to depict the Hulme/Parker relationship as strictly platonic or romantic. In the film, Jackson used “red herrings” when portraying the relationship between the girls, leaving it open to conjecture whether their relationship was sexual or not (Heavenly Creatures 1994). For me, that was simply not an option. I had to weigh and scrutinize the evidence before coming to a conclusion which satisfied me. After a careful examination, I deduced that it seemed highly unlikely for the girls not to be involved in some manner of an affair. Parker once commented to her doctor of how she cared for Hulme more than anyone else. When asked whether that wasn’t love, she replied that she didn’t know, but Hulme meant more to her than anyone else (Heavenly Creatures 1994).
There is also incriminating evidence in the trial testimony of Hulme’s parents, who recounted at the murder trial how the girls went for a ride on their bikes one day and forgot their windbreakers. They had to be driven back later to fetch them (Medlicott 257). This might imply something physical happened during the trip. There are also references to them making love as their saints would in bed (Medlicott 263). Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising I am more inclined to believe this version of events rather than the one concocted several decades later to bury the truth.

The focus of the book written by Glamuzina and Laurie has been on how the case affected several generations of girls who identified themselves as lesbians. Many of the girls who came of age in New Zealand from 1954 and onwards would learn of the case in whispered conversations in the playground, indeed that was how Laurie first came to know of the case (Glamuzina and Laurie 12). After the Parker/Hulme case made national headlines, people began to associate lesbianism with something evil, something which should be erased. Parents began paying close attention to their daughters and their friendships with other girls and young women kept quiet should their mind turn in this direction, fearing they might have criminal tendencies as well (Glamuzina and Laurie 165). Therefore, this case reverberated throughout the next generations. During the trial, it was often discussed whether the girl were simply “mad” or “bad.” Perhaps they were a little bit of both (Glamuzina and Laurie 87).
3 Conclusion
To conclude, I must admit that as a true writer should, I have always loved a good story. Nancy Drew, Emil of Lönneberga, Pollyanna and the character of Alice in Wonderland were all personal friends of mine. *Thousand and One Night* was my Bible and the fairytales by the Brothers Grimm were my Paternoster. Even today, I know nothing better than getting lost in a truly good television programme where I can identify with the characters or opening a new book and beginning to read.

Since the age of sixteen, I have wanted to become a writer and that is my goal now. Until recently, however, I have lacked the self-discipline needed in order to fulfil this dream. As an example of this, my cupboard is filled with notebooks with only a few written pages in each and my computer is filled with unfinished stories. The inspiration for stories comes to me quite easily; a more daunting task comes along when I must finish them. Generally, only a short time passes before the inspiration strikes for a different story altogether, and the old one is left behind. Through the experience of writing this novella, I learned the art of patience and perseverance. I experienced the joy of finally realizing a finished piece of work all my own, instead of looking at a book in the library, thinking I could do better and then never actually doing it. One major fault of mine is that I have always been quite cocky when it comes to my work. I know how good I am and do not need to be told. This in turn, has led to the causality that I am quite pedantic when it comes to my work: I cannot edit my own writing. As I sat down to write *The Endless Road*, I gradually adapted the process needed to become a writer. I learned how to take suggestions from others and fit in their ideas alongside my own to create a new work.

Not only did I improve in taking suggestions from others, I also stopped being secretive about my writing. For years, nobody was ever
allowed to read my stories. That has changed now with the existence of this project. My teachers and professors, especially Anna Heiða Pálsdóttir, have not only encouraged me to write but inspired me with their love of literature, and their friends, the characters of Jane Eyre, Marianne Dashwood, Willoughby, Janie Crawford and Caddy Compson, have now become mine. Of course, mention must also be given to the people in my life who have supported me through the process and in my journey to become a writer; my family, Gréta Ólafsdóttir who is a force of nature in her own right, my second reader Susan Muska, and Ingibjörg Þorsteinsdóttir who first convinced me to apply to the English Department at The University of Iceland. It is not a decision I have ever regretted.

Anne Frank, the girl who died in a concentration camp aged fifteen and left her diary behind for the generations to come, quotes a saying she often heard in the beginning of her writings: the paper is more tolerant than people (Frank 8). Aside from needing to write because it is as necessary to me as breathing, I also have an ulterior motive. I have never been interested in the hero; the villain is what fascinates me. What if one could use writing to give voice to the people that can’t express themselves? An exceptionally written book or an article can help bridge the canyon between ignorance and understanding, thus making the world a superior place to live in? The pen is indeed more potent and dangerous than any sword. There is no need to look any further than Anne Frank in Nazi Germany, John Steinbeck in the depression of the 1930s and Harper Lee in her fight against racism in 1960.

Hopefully, with the discipline learned and the support I have received throughout this process, this novella is merely the beginning.
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