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The Only Dreamer

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The Only Dreamer

by

Katelyn Long

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The Only Dreamer

For my Senior Honors Project, I submitted an excerpt from a novel length story about a family line with the inheritable ability to take objects out of people's dreams. In this young adult fantasy, Melody is a nineteen year old girl who struggles with the fact that her twin sister has inherited the ability while she has not. The excerpt introduces Melody's family and shows the tension that exists between them while hinting to the reader that there is something more sinister that drives Melody away from her home.

The novel explores morality and its gray areas, the difficulty that inherently exists in finding independence, and what would be possible if only you could dream it.

Self Analysis of the Work

The inception for this story began in an Astronomy class that I took for my honors distribution. While talking about the possible existence of a multi-verse, an image of two universes pressing against one another like bubbles popped into my head. Afterwards, I thought to myself, wouldn't it be interesting if there were different realities that touched edges? What if we could reach through them? What if we could pull things through? What if one of the realities was the dream world? Thus, *The Only Dreamer* started to form in my mind.

The story has changed a lot and I will continue to change, as stories do, until I've written a complete first draft. Even in revision, stories can surprise us. As I write more of the novel, the characters will change, something they have already done in the writing of this excerpt, and the plot will come together. I find that I like to have beats or scenes that I want to hit in the story, while I leaving room for thing to grow and for the characters to take me on their adventure with them. I find writing is the most fun when I'm experiencing the surprises and twists for the first time, just like a reader.

Initially I had thought that this story would be written in the third person point of view and past tense, but one of the most surprising things for me was that I had a hard time writing it that way. First person present tense fixed my writer's block and I decided that being inside the main character's head lent itself well to the story. As someone who prefers to read third person,

it was strange for me to be writing in first. However, I think it's hugely important to stretch your creative muscles by doing things you are not comfortable with or that you are not used to. The only way to improve is to push yourself and to try new things. This is one of the ways that my honors project has helped me grow.

Another thing that changed from the start of writing the excerpt to the submitted pages is the main character. The story features twin sisters and I had planned on telling the story from the point of view of Rikki, who is mentally unstable. However, I came to see that the story would be better told from the other sister's point of view. I feel like the reader will be able to connect better and also, with a more reliable narrator, the story itself will be clear. I might find that telling the story with a dual point of view, alternating between Rikki and Mel, will suit the plot better, but that's something that I will discover as I write and continue to get feedback.

Having this excerpt edited by four of my professors greatly affected the story as well. I had previously had only two experiences with my writing being edited in workshops. Professor Pope taught a class on flash fiction and Professor Wasserman taught Intro to Fiction Writing. I found these classes to be both nerve wracking and exciting. Sharing your writing with people is always a strange feeling. I am always excited to get feedback and nervous that they won't like it and having this project be scrutinized by four of my teachers was no different. I actually found that, at times, the pressure of this being my honors project and knowing that the drafts were going to be closely read made it difficult to write. I don't usually struggle with perfectionism in the early drafts of my writing, but for this I did.

My project sponsor, Professor Pope, recommended a writing craft novel by David Gerrold called *Worlds of Wonder How to Write Science Fiction & Fantasy* which was extremely helpful. The book is not only insightful and honest; it also gives writers exercises to help with

characterization, world building, and writer's block. There was a lot that I took away from *Worlds of Wonder*. In particular, the section titled "To Build a World" was very helpful. The section discusses what it takes to build a world with rules that makes sense; a believable world that readers can immerse themselves in without questioning. This section made me contemplate the world of my story, as well that the magic system in place. Nothing exists independently. For a story to feel complete to the reader, the author must know all of the pieces that make up the world. Because there is a fantasy element to my story, this was extremely important for me to be aware of. These exercises helped me develop each character's motivation and desires. For the interaction to seem real, I needed to know exactly what their past together was like and exactly what each person wanted. I needed to know who Mel thought she was, how she wanted the world to see her, and who she truly was.

Another exercise that was helpful was the suggestion to write out scenes with your characters to learn about how they would interact. The story features complex relationships within the family and exercises from *Worlds of Wonder* helped me figure out a lot of the back story that I hadn't yet thought of. For instance, one of the biggest plot twists in the story is that Mel wasn't born; she was taken from a dream. This came about as I played with the characters, writing scenes of conversation that most likely wouldn't make it to the finished novel, but which helped me brainstorm.

When having a number of people edit your work, I found that you will inevitably receive mixed reviews. From this, I've learned how important it is to know your audience as you write. If your target audience is young adult, you might get negative feedback from someone who doesn't usually enjoy it. However, if you took their advice during revision, you're probably going to end up with something that neither group of readers would like. Were I ever to consider

publishing, either as an author or as a career field, it would be necessary to understand that it's a business and books are being marketed and sold to groups of people. I feel like it is important to write the story that I feel needs telling, but to also be realistically aware of the market. Because I did initially study business at the University of Akron, I feel I am more aware of the business side of the publishing industry than many aspiring authors. This affected the story because as I wrote I felt constantly aware of what my readers would see. Just because I'm picturing a scene doesn't mean that the readers will. Every word needs to be perfectly chosen in order to convey meaning. I couldn't worry about what the people who only like adult mystery novels would be thinking because then my target audience of young adults who like fantasy wouldn't be getting the story that I wanted to create. They would be getting my story twisted for another audience.

Throughout the course of writing this excerpt and working on the story, nearly everything has changed. The evolution of the idea, the brainstorming when everything was new and shiny and every idea is exciting, was one of my favorite parts. It was a learning experience to see how the story changed even further while writing. The characters change, the plot changed, and the point of view changed as I wrote and received feedback. The only thing that remains perfectly intact from the original spark of the idea is the ability to take things from dreams. I'm excited to have this story begun. Being able to work on it and receive one on one help from professors was an invaluable experience and the development of the novel is something I am very proud of.

Influences

As someone who has been a voracious reader for many years, I can say that my writing has definitely been influenced by many authors. I realized I loved writing in fourth grade and I remember how reading books inspired me to write. My attempts throughout elementary and middle school fell far short of being worth reading, but they were extremely important for me, as a young writer because they helped me digest what I read. By reading a book with a character I liked, I was able to try to write my own strong characters. When I read books with fantasy worlds that amazed me, I was inspired to try to write my own. I was able to develop my writing ability by doing this and it was something that I loved.

The first series that started me writing was Terri Farley's *The Phantom Stallion* series. It was a middle grade series about a girl living on a ranch in Nevada and my first short stories were also about a girl living on a ranch out west. While originality wasn't very present in these stories, I did learn about how to make your writing flow. Reading over my stories and editing them helped me with grammar and made me realize that I would get stuck on one good word and use it over and over again to describe everything. This is something my brain still tends to do. Once I type the word iridescent it just wants everything to be iridescent.

The next series that hooked me was Erin Hunter's *Warriors* series. It was about four clans at war with one another, trying to survive the harsh seasons while defending territory. The things that attracted me to these books were that the characters were cats. These books were the first middle grade books I read that didn't take place in the real world. In this world, these clans of cats had human intelligence and there were prophecies and pilgrimages. There was also heartbreak, death, murder, betrayal, growth, courage, and plot twists that blew my mind. These books showed me some of the most intense emotional turmoil and best character development that I have ever read. Even today, I would say the first six books have one of the best plots I have ever read.

I have always read a wide selection of genres, however I have found that as I've gotten older, young adult has stuck with me. Recently, in the realm of young adult, I have read many exemplary novels that demonstrate a level of literary splendor that satisfies my cravings for complexity and style. The first book to come to mind is Laini Taylor's *A Daughter of Smoke and Bone*. This young adult novel is one of the most spectacular books I have ever read. Taylor's command of language is mind boggling. After reading her trilogy, the analogy that came to mind was eating dark chocolate or rich desserts. Her writing is a treat from start to finish. Every word is perfectly positioned and her writing is poetic and strong. The description of setting is flawless and makes me feel as though I have visited Prague and Marrakesh as well as fantasy world of Eretz that she has created. Reading about the human experience through unique characters and extreme circumstances is my favorite thing about fantasy. I have always felt that I live everyday life, why would I want to read about it too?

P.C. Cast was another significant author that influenced my writing. After reading her novel *The Goddess of the Sea*, which appealed to my middle school self purely because it was

about mermaids, I was inspired to try writing my own full length novel. The way that P.C. Cast's novels mixed magic into reality was something that I had never seen before as a young reader and what it inspired me to write ended up being over one-hundred and twenty thousand words. While that novel, written in eighth grade, was not very good, it was the first time I'd ever tried to tell a full story arc. The experiences taught me a lot about plot and about character development. In this way, P.C. Cast has greatly affected me as a writer, but her stories and her writing have also been an influence. Her willingness to write what she loved and to delve into all of the emotions that I felt awkward approaching at that age showed me that an author is someone who shows the story in its entirety. The reader will only see what the author puts onto the paper and if there is an area you felt that you skipped over while writing or felt uncomfortable digging into, you should probably go back and dig deeper.

Libba Bray, whose writing method seems to be very similar to mine, was also a huge inspiration. Her *A Great and Terrible Beauty* trilogy was one of the first books I'd ever read that was first person and present tense (my two nemeses) and that I really connected with. Her command of language is superb and her ability to write historical fiction in a way that I, as a teenager, could both picture and enjoy was wonderful. I have read every one of her novels and her ability to write about vastly different topics has influenced me to always keep trying new things. From beauty queens crash landing on an island to New York City in the 1920's, Bray's stories are always beautifully written and full of wit and humor.

As a college student I was not able to read for pleasure as much as I was used to doing in high school, however the selection of novels that I read in my English classes were a source of inspiration as well. In particular, Virginia Wolfe's writing captivated me and I have gone back and reread *A Room of One's Own* twice now. In terms of flow and elegant word choice, I have

read no other author that matches Wolfe. Reading classics throughout my English classes brought me back to the foundation of writing. There is something about the proper writing that can always be found in classics that appeals to me. The sentences are varied and the vocabulary is enriching. The characters found in classic literature are, of course, marvelous as well. The books that become classics do so because they give insight into the human experience through characters that could be real people.

For me, the writing style of a novel is the first thing that hooks me and the most important when I pick up a book. Character and plot are necessary to have a great story, of course, but both of those change. The writing style will be the same all of the way through. So when I pick up a book, the writing style is what pulls me in. Another author whose writing style I thoroughly enjoy is V.E. Schwab. I read *Vicious*, an adult novel that tells the origin story of two super villains, while I was in college and read it in a day. Her writing is a great example of how important it is to make your characters as complex as real people, but to me her writing style kept me just as enthralled. If you cut corners in your characterization, your readers will not connect with them. If your prose is choppy and rough to read, people will tire of trying to decipher your writing.

Writers draw inspiration from nearly everything. Human interactions, books, movies, hobbies; all of these things can be influential. The writers who had the largest influence on me will always be fresh in my mind. Without them, I may not have ever decided that I needed to try to create something as wonderful as what they did. Seeing brilliant writing always moves me to write my own stories and as I work to improve my writing during graduate school, I'm sure these authors will continue to influence me along with new authors I discover as I make it through the mountain of unread books I have waiting for me.

Chapter 1

All family time is bad, but dinner is the worst. When I go over for dinner, my parents come crawling from their offices, work fresh on their minds, and nothing makes our conversations tense like when mom and dad have work on the brain.

The enormity of the house, something I'd never really noticed when I was younger, is always freshly startling when I first walk inside. A mansion with a foyer, a sweeping staircase, perfect expensive accents, all of it is so different from my small apartment across town. When I first left, the apartment seemed cramped and sad compared to what I'd left, but now, a year later, this house feels huge and empty.

"Mel!" my name echoes around the marble floors and painting clad walls as somebody crashes into me and suddenly I'm hugging, my face buried in blonde hair so different from mine in every way. My twin sister is the only thing that I miss about home.

"How are you?" I ask as Rikki releases me and at the same time says, "I missed you."

We grin at one another and then we're walking towards the dining room. Instinctive family dinner time behavior. Mel arrives, Mel wants to leave, Mel will not be distracted. Every time I visit I try to avoid seeing the new decorating and meeting new pets because all of those

things lead to the same thing; seeing the basement. Rikki doesn't try to pull me deeper into the house or offer me a tour while we wait for dinner and I'm both surprised and relieved.

"How's school going?" Rikki asks, and I'm surprised she even remembers to do so. "I bet it's boring compared to here."

"It's ok. Still undecided." I could add details. I could tell Rikki about my classes, about the friends I've made, about the boys I've been on dates with, but I'm always hesitant to reveal more information than I'm asked for. The separation between family and self is hard to maintain and I've found that I can't shut out some of them, I need to block them all.

"Psychology." Rikki tells me like it's the only logical choice. She pulls out a chair from the long table and drops down like a wilting flower. She looks thinner I realize as I sit too. Already fair enough to disappear in snow, the thinness makes her look tired and ill.

"Nah." I pick at the white table cloth. "This is a shade or two darker than you are," I tease.

"*Naw*," she mimics. She pushes the table cloth around, causing wrinkles. "It's only a shade or two lighter than you, so shush."

I observe her as she creates and destroys tiny landscapes with the cloth. She looks like she could use a week of sleep.

Vases punctuate the center of the table and the fragrance from their red flowers wafts around the room. When did that smell become so sickeningly sweet?

"Mel," my name is said for the second time and my dad emerges, his grin brightening the room. My mom is close behind him.

I hug them both, my mom leaving a kiss on the top of my head, and we all sit, Rikki and I across from our parents, a vase of red at the epicenter.

Dinner passes with unnecessary extravagance and I'm waiting the entire meal for the work talk to start, but there seems to be some sort of truce.

"We've missed you," my dad says between courses, "but we've been too busy to see your apartment." My mom's eyes slide towards him and he smoothly changes the subject.

The conversation remains light and casual, filled with the kind of shallow comments made by strangers sharing temporary space.

Afterwards, I'm ready to leave. At this point if I walked through the huge front doors and drove away, I would consider this dinner successful in a way that no visit home had ever been before. I'm churning the words around in my head, trying to find the perfect order of 'good bye' and 'it was nice to see you' that will get me through the doors like open sesame, when I sense a shift in atmosphere.

"How about dessert in the living room?" My mom asks. She's terrible at hiding what she's feeling and the words sound like expectation.

"I should go," I say and lean towards the exit. My mom looks hurt and Rikki frowns. My dad, in contrast, begins to emanate a charm usually reserved for business meetings.

"Nonsense," he says with a smile. "You've only been here for half an hour and we haven't heard about how school is going yet."

I could still leave. My parents stand to walk to the next room, a room filled with soft chairs and sofas with the type of elegant floral prints my mom adores. I remember using the furniture to make a blanket fort with Rikki when we were little, complete with pillow walls so that we could make the fort a maze.

My mom calls for dessert to be brought in and I follow behind them.

The wooden side tables each boast a vase with the same flowers as the dining table, shades of red and tangerine. The large windows look out on a green lawn that slopes away from the house towards a thick green forest. It's nearly five-hundred acres of trees and small fields that stretches to the end of the land that my parents own. There's a stable off to the right that can't be seen from these windows, but I remember it so well I could find it with my eyes closed. There were only six horses before I left and I used to ride them through the trails in the forest. I wonder if they got any more, but I refrain from asking. That kind of question could lead to hearing about how they acquired the new animals.

I sit by my sister, across from my parents, and a maid brings a tray with four small white plates, forks, and a platter with a chocolate cake. It looks like heaven, perfect, chocolate heaven, but it also looks like a pawn piece on a chess board.

"Freya," I smile and stand to hug the maid as she sets the tray down on the glass coffee table. Her hug is warm and soft and she smells like vanilla and cucumber cream. When I pull back I see her familiar face and she seems genuinely happy to have me back.

"You look great," I say and I mean it. A woman in her late fifties now, Freya had been a maid in our house my entire life and she's never seemed to age a day. When your boss owns a multimillion dollar anti-aging company, I suppose that's not a surprise, but the ageless thing about Freya to me is her energy.

"Thank you, dear," she gives me another quick hug and then turns to the table, her right arm still around me. "I made your favorite cake."

Ah, yes. The pawn. A bribe. An offering.

I had helped Freya create this masterpiece recipe when I was five. I had been a fiend for chocolate and I'd ordered more than I had helped, as Freya added chocolate fudge and chips to the batter and then made the thick, dark chocolate icing that would go between layers, and lastly the chocolate ganache that looked like molten holy goodness. I hadn't offered much advice aside from 'more chocolate!' but she still said it was my creation and it's a memory I have quite a fondness for.

"Thank you," I say, making it sound genuine even though I'm curious to know whose idea it was.

I glance at my parents as I put a slice on a plate and take a fork. I can't read them.

"It looks amazing," my mom says to Freya with a smile, "but it's a bit too rich for me. I'll take some tea, if you don't mind."

"Of course," Freya hurries from the room.

I take a bite as my dad asks, "So, Mel, have you decided on a major yet?"

My mouth is full so I shrug.

"What classes are you taking?" He sounds so nonchalantly interested. As if he's not going to judge my answer.

There is only silence until I swallow and then I have to decide whether to be rude and continue eating or speak. "History of Rome, a Shakespeare class, a medieval history class, and intro to psych," I answer. I've never been good at being rude.

Rikki whispers, "Psychology," beside me like a prophetic ghost.

"History and English," my dad muses.

"And psych." I take another bite.

“You should be taking science and math classes,” my dad says as if it’s the only practical solution to a business proposal. “Things that will be useful.”

“History is very useful,” I say. I want to snap the replay, but I refrain.

He looks at me pointedly, “You know what I...”

“I took Calculus last semester and I hated it,” I cut him off because the conversation is about to go there. “It’s not like I’ll use math in real life anyway.”

“The point of taking math is not because you’re going to ‘use it’,” my mom says. “It’s like a workout for your brain, it teaches you to think logically.” I’ve heard this many times, all throughout high school as I complained about math. The only reason I was able to take calculus last semester, my first semester, was because my mom diligently worked with me to excel at it. Rikki and I were always encouraged to love science and math, though for different reasons I suppose.

Freya sweeps into the room and offers my mom her tea. “Does anyone else need anything?” There is a chorus of ‘no, thank you’ and she leaves again, smiling at me as she does.

My dad is about to try again, from a different angle. I can see his mind working. I’m not one to explode or yell. I don’t like to fight at all. But I am one to get up and just walk away.

I glance over at Rikki who’s sunk into the couch with her legs tucked beneath her, plate and fork held up by her chest like a weapon and shield. Her gray eyes meet mine.

In a normal conversation, I would try to divert the attention away from myself. I would ask a question about work, or hobbies, or life, but all of those questions lead to the same thing in this house. And I am so tired of talking about the family business.

“Mel,” he starts and I hear it. I sense it. All nineteen years of my life I’d listened to my parents’ obsession. Only for the past three had I actively begun avoiding what they thought should be my obsession too. I was born into it, after all.

As much as I loved them and as much as I missed my sister, this separation needed to happen. Their life wasn’t my life.

“I have to go,” I say. My words come out polite, as if there is no tension. I leave my half eaten cake on the table and stand.

“Now, don’t be that way,” the voice of a father sad to see a daughter leave, but I see anger for the briefest of moments. The cracks are beginning to show.

I walk towards the door and when I straighten from slipping on my shoes Rikki is beside me. “You don’t have to go,” she says, her voice coaxing. “You could stay the night? We could go riding in the morning?”

It’s tempting. Standing alone with my twin, things start to look different. The thought that maybe I could spend a night here, relax, and have fun doesn’t seem quite as ridiculous. I think of my room, as it was when I left it almost a year ago, and I think of *our* room, as it was before I demanded my own when I was fourteen.

The impulse to open the door is in my hand and I know I should go. If I go now, I’ll avoid a fight. If I stay, I won’t.

Rikki grabs my hand with the hopeful joy of a child, “I miss spending time with you. Twins shouldn’t be apart this much, it’s not healthy.” She must see I’m verging on convinced because she adds, “We got two new horses. One’s a Friesian.”

The door grabbing urge leaves my hand and she’s won. All the years of happy memories are too hard to let go of.

She smiles with triumph and says, "Sleep over!"

From the next room I hear my mom say, "I'm so excited you're going to stay for awhile," and then both she and my dad have joined us, her right hand holding his left arm near the elbow.

"This is great," Rikki takes my arm in the same manner and starts towards the stairs, her hand sliding to my wrist.

"Yes," my dad is all charming smiles, "This house just isn't the same without my favorite daughter in it."

The momentum of my steps carries me forward as those words register and I pause at the bottom of the first stair. The only reason it would ever be okay to say this in front of the both of us would be because it isn't true.

I look up at Rikki, three steps above me, and her eyes are narrowed. Her hand tightens on mine.

"On second thought," I slip my fingers from her grasp and stride to the door. I look at my parents; my mom's eyes are soft with disappointment and my dad is calculative and calm. This is the image of them that sticks with me as I close the door roughly behind me and walk towards my car; soft and sad, logical and calm. My parents.

And what am I? I think to myself as I yank my keys from my jeans pocket and click unlock. What percentages of them did I get? I pull the door open, sit as angrily as one can in a small Toyota Corolla without hitting a knee on the steering wheel, and seethe.

My favorite daughter. It was a thing he'd always said to me when I was little, when Rikki and I began craving independence. The thing about twins is that they're always getting compared. In the back of my mind I'd always assumed he said it to Rikki too, when they were alone, but when he said it to me I would let myself believe it. I'd looked up to him, been

susceptible to his charisma just like everyone else. He was my dad and I loved him and when he told me I was his favorite I would beam. It was like a shared secret. Once I'd begun pulling away, he'd started saying it in front of Rikki in an offhand way and it would always win me over. I craved the acceptance in a way Rikki never had.

It was just manipulation. Like the cake. And probably the horses too. They probably bought two horses just because they knew I was coming over. Two; the perfect number, one for Rikki and one for me, to try to get me to stay. Everything, from the quiet dinner to the final words had been planned.

I jam my key into the ignition.

Through the windshield, I see the small garden that sits in front of the mansion. There is a more expansive garden out back full of flowers, fountains, statues, trellises, and archways covered in vines. This one out front, however, is simple and ovular with coniferous bushes that look good year round and a small, three tiered fountain gentle enough for birds to rest on.

My hands fall to my lap and I take a steadying breath. I'm being silly, I realize, as the anger fades.

I strap my seatbelt on. There's no reason for them to be so desperate for me stay and Friesian horses are too expensive to buy on a whim for a visiting daughter.

I turn the key and the engine rolls over once and dies. I try again, but the car barely sputters. My anger rushes back to me as I try a third time.

"Not too expensive for a millionaire," I growl and shoot a venomous look towards the window where I notice the curtains are fluttering shut.

Chapter 2

“Our mechanic can come out tomorrow morning, first thing,” my mom says cheerfully as she gets off the phone. “He’s the best and he always makes us a priority.”

“Only because you pay him to.” I’m standing with my arms defensively crossed, next to my mom in the kitchen.

“Don’t be sour, Mel,” she says, as if I have a choice. “We haven’t had any time together since your winter break. Let’s just try to have a good time.”

I’d forced them to help me try to jump my car, but it didn’t work. She knows very well that I’m stranded and not happy about it. “I’m going to go hang out with Rikki.” It’s code for I don’t want to talk, but I doubt she got it.

Walking up the stairs is like ascending through memories. Memories of sliding down them playing temple explorers, a small treasure chest of real jewels waiting to be found somewhere in the house, of sneaking down the stairs to go play outside at night. The memory of convincing our cousin to sneak out with us when he and our uncle stayed for a week because we wanted to play witches and needed a sacrifice, which ended with Rikki *actually* stabbing him and a tense ride to the emergency room.

Also the memory of me stomping down the stairs, one backpack filled with things I cared about and a small suitcase with clothes, as I left to go live in a small apartment across town.

The stairs wind up to a landing with a large arched window and then curve with a second set on both sides. Either direction leads you to a hallway. To get to Rikki's room, I take the right set and it's the first door on the left of the hall. I don't knock.

The room looks like something from a fairytale, everything dark wood, lavender paint, and ethereal lighting. The focus is an enormous canopy bed against the far wall, a window on both sides. The curtains, a deep purple color, are drawn shut and the only light in the room comes from the dainty strands of fairy lights that Rikki has wrapped around the top of the canopy frame and from beneath the door of the bathroom.

A large wardrobe and an antique dresser are against the left wall and a full length mirror that opens for space to hang jewelry is in between, angled so that when the curtains of the left window are open during the day you'll be standing in full natural light. The right wall has a narrow shelf of books and trinkets. These are all things that were here before I left.

The only change is to the wall that stands in full view of the bed. The entire wall is covered by shelving from top to bottom and one side to the other. The spaces are varied in shape and the contents are a collection of weird. This collection has been growing and changing our entire lives. It's Rikki's collection of things she's stolen.

I walk over to the dresser and pull open the drawer second from the bottom. It's still the drawer where she keeps her pajamas. I don't know why I keep expecting things to be dramatically different. I've only been living elsewhere for a year. I shouldn't expect things to change just because I leave.

I select a soft pair of shorts and a large t-shirt. It's not nearly time for bed, but if I'm going to have a sleepover with my sister, it's going to be a proper one. Pj's, movies, ice cream. I might not sleep at all. Maybe we'll go outside for a midnight walk through the woods. Maybe I'll lock myself in my old room.

I haven't gone in there since I left. I'd taken the things I was most attached to with me, but my room was just as big and as full as Rikki's, except I didn't have a wall of stolen things. I wasn't sure I wanted to see it all. When I'd first left, I told myself I needed to get over being materialistic. I tried to think of myself as living like a monk or nomad, in a small place with few belongings. But things have memories attached to them and it's the memories that give me the hardest time. I can get over the beautiful carousel miniature that Rikki gave me for my birthday when we were ten, made of metallic painted wood, but I couldn't get over the memory that Rikki stole it from a girl in our fourth grade class or the memory that we would put it in the woods and pretend we found a something magical.

I'll wait and see about going into my room.

"Why didn't you call a cab?" Rikki asks as she emerges from her en suite bathroom. She's drying her wet hair with a towel and wearing a pair of shorts and a large t-shirt similar to what I took from her drawer.

I turn away from her question and look over the shelves. "You've been working hard, I see."

Rikki joins me, her eyes scanning over the trinkets with fondness. "Getting better all the time."

I nod and then ask, "What movie should we watch?"

Rikki notes the clothes in my hand and scowls. “Don’t tell me you want to have a boring sleepover.”

“What else would we do?” I ask. I regret the words when Rikki gives me a look that is all raised eyebrows and dares.

I let my annoyance show and hope that will be the end of it. I’m not playing thief.

“Mom wrote a book. About lucid dreaming,” Rikki changes the subject suddenly and walks over to the wall of shelves. She pulls an ancient looking tome from beneath a purple jar filled with wax and burning wick. She offers it to me and I drop the clothes to take it.

The book looks like it’s about to fall apart in my hands and I flip it over carefully. The cover is leather and there are no words for a title or an author that I can see. “This seems like an unusual marketing choice,” I say.

Rikki rolls her eyes. “That’s not mom’s book,” she says, “that’s something I stole.”

I open it. The pages are yellowed, but the print is impossibly perfect. The ink’s strange preservation stands out in harsh black columns of a language I’ve never seen before. Rikki is looking at me expectantly so I *hmm* with interest.

“Can you understand it?” I ask, flipping to the back to see if there is a translate-to-English section.

“No, but it’s not a real language, which is interesting. Right?”

I shut the book and nod. I want to say it looks like progress, but I refrain. I’m sure my dad was overjoyed with it. “So about the movie…”

Rikki sighs suddenly. “What is *wrong* with you?”

I try to keep my face neutral. “Nothing.”

“Why can’t we talk about things? I mean, mom and dad, sure. They’re crazy. But how can you not talk to *me* about it?”

“Because I’m sick of it,” I snap, my frustration overflowing. “I moved away so I wouldn’t have to ‘talk about things’ because I am *sick* of it.” I push the book roughly at Rikki who takes it with careful hands like it’s a precious, fragile thing.

“We’re getting somewhere,” Rikki says. She hugs the book to her stomach. “We could really use you.”

Use you.

My movements are like a memory as I turn angrily and storm to my room. It’s directly across the hall from Rikki’s. I’ve locked myself in so many times that it’s muscle memory to do so now. As the door closes behind me and the lock clicks, I pause and realize that during my little tantrum I’d forgotten that I didn’t want to see my room.

Yet, here I am.

It’s roughly the same size as Rikki’s, but it’s filled with things. Dressers and shelves take up every inch of wall space. Up higher, where my normal shelves don’t reach, I had bought abstract paintings and hung them so that my white walls are barely visible. I’d stuck with warm colors and I remember waking up in the mornings with the sun rise casting my room golden and magical.

My bed is bare, stripped of its pile of comforters and quilts because I’d taken them with me. It’s too large for my apartment so the king sized blankets were moved to my new twin sized bed; a new nest of fluff that I’ve come to like better than my old one.

A loud knock on the door behind me makes me jump.

“Mel?” Rikki’s voice is muffled through the door. “I know what this is about. Let’s talk for real.” From frustrated to apologetic in the time it takes to cross a hall.

I don’t respond right away. I doubt Rikki knows anything about what I’m feeling. I take a breath to say so, but I must have waited too long.

She kicks the door violently, “You can be such a bitch.”

The door across the hall slams. It’s not just mom and dad who are crazy.

I spend the next few hours going through all my things. I find piles of journals that were all abandoned half way through and a shoe box of notes from high school. The time passes quickly and I find myself making a small pile of things I’d like to take back to the apartment.

When the sunlight is gone and my window is no longer a source of light, I flip the light switch and four sconces around the room come to life. They’re made of paper and metal in an abstract furling leaf design, another modern art purchase, and I sit on my floor, admiring my room.

Sleep will make the morning come faster, so I decide I need to hunt down some blankets. I contemplate sleeping on the huge mattress without covers, but it just makes me feel too exposed to sleep and so I venture into the hallway.

The hall closet is still stocked with extra towels, cleaning supplies, and blankets. I pull down three from a high shelf when I remember the pajamas I left in Rikki’s room. I could sleep in my clothes, or in my underwear, but ‘bitch’ still stings a bit and the thought of stealing from Rikki seems appealing.

I abandon the blankets at my door and sneak on the balls of my feet across the hall. The unlocked door swings open silently and I feel a thrill. Is it sad that stealing clothes feels like an

adequate form of revenge? Peering into her room, I know that if Rikki was the one orchestrating vengeance something would most definitely be destroyed. I'm lame in comparison, but at least I'm not crazy.

I see the shorts and shirt, tossed into a pile by the dresser I got them from. The little lights from the canopy continue to glow. I could make fun of her for using a nightlight at nineteen, I guess.

I grab the clothes and glance at Rikki's bed before leaving. Closer now, I see that the bed is empty aside from the disheveled blanket that seems flung aside.

Rikki went off on some escapade and I hadn't been invited. I shouldn't be hurt, I would have said no after all, but I miss the midnight adventures.

I turn to leave and squeak in surprise when I see my sister standing in the doorway.

"Trespasser," she whispers in a joking voice, the light from my cracked door casting the planes of her face in shadow.

"I know," I say as slip by her, "I'm just such a bitch."

"Oh, you're not still mad about that, are you?" Rikki turns as I go by.

"Not at all."

"Ok, well...I'm sorry."

I pause in the hallway curious. "Where were you just now?"

Rikki recedes into her purple haven and slowly closes the door, "Getting something to eat in the kitchen."

I know she is lying.

My room is warmly lit and I lock the door again. The blankets are queen sized, meant for the guest rooms, but they're more than enough. I open the curtains before I lay down, hoping to wake up to the sunrise.

I dream about the house that night. Everything is cartoonish and large, the ceilings are too high, the doors are distorted like fun house mirrors; nothing is really wrong, but nothing is really right. I can't see myself in the dream, but I know that I'm wandering through the hallways and dream Mel knows that she can't descend to the main floor because there is a menagerie of strange creatures down there and some of them like the taste of flesh.