

In Restless Character
A Short Story and Writing Analysis

Emily Buechner

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Michael Babcock, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Nicholas Olson, M.A.
Committee Member

Edward Martin, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Brenda Ayres, Ph.D.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

Creativity is a communal activity, as it is gathered and formed by people from varying experiences. Discovering originality stems from the blending of multiple known ideas into one cohesive work, and this requires artists from every background. In this paper, I explore writing to evaluate the nature of creativity in the English field, explaining certain techniques that writers must learn, identifying struggles they must overcome, and including tips from editors on publishing fiction. The main portion of this project is a short story entitled "In Restless Character." The story revolves around a young couple traveling on tour with an amateur band. The thesis concludes with an analysis of the strengths of my project that create a competitive edge, a discussion of the story's theme, and target market for "In Restless Character."

To Ben,

I choose you every day.

In Restless Character

A Short Story and Writing Analysis

Creativity is the process of making something new. For those who desire to use their creativity, this process is discouraging because so many things have already been created. Originality becomes a battle to find a subject that remains untouched. However, Salman Rushdie, author of the 1981 Booker Prize-winning novel *Midnight's Children*, gives a theory for "how newness enters the world" as written in his 1992 essay "Imaginary Homelands." In this essay, he explores the negative and positive consequences resulting from the co-mingling of cultures, and he comes to the conclusion that the merging of two or more things unlike will bring forth something undone before, though the pieces previously existed without co-habitation. When these pieces rest upon one object or person, they have inadvertently created something new out of old things. This is how newness enters the world. For the field of English, creativity means combining pre-existing ideas and experiences into one project and creating an original piece of writing. In order for writers to advance in their field, they must understand basic techniques in the mechanics of writing, some struggles that they may face, and how to succeed in the publishing arena.

Unlike other fields, the technique of writers rests on creating a work of art without easy access to sensory tools. Artists appeal to sight, musicians appeal to sound, chefs appeal to taste and smell, clothing designers appeal to touch and sight, etc. Writers must show readers their creation using concrete details to evoke sensory recognition and refrain from simply telling readers the story through vague descriptions. In her guide to narrative craft, Janet Burroway writes that "Your job as a fiction writer is to focus

attention not on the words, which are inert, nor to the thoughts these words produce, but through these to felt experience, where the vitality of understanding lies" (22). Burroway dedicates an entire chapter of her book to exploring this theory of evoking a "felt experience" for readers. This means that instead of readers simply reading the facts of a story, they are immersed into the story, enabling them to form their own experience in reading the story. Learning how to create an experience for readers is vitally important for the writer to practice and seek to master, and she gives several tips on how to stir the imagination of readers by showing them the story.

To create vision in a story, writers must use significant detail, true illusions, and active voice, as well as several other methods. Strong detail convinces readers that the events occur as the writer tells them. Additionally, recognizable detail produces emotional experience that readers relate to their own life events. One form of detail that readers can recognize is the inclusion of the character's physical feelings, such as pain, hot or cold, smell, or other sensory details. A second method of visual storytelling is the use of metaphor to create true illusions. Burroway states that, "the techniques of every art offer us the tension of things that are and are not alike" (30). This tension can be evoked through metaphor and simile. Metaphor is useful for visual storytelling because it further challenges and stretches the imagination, but "A bad metaphor fails to surprise or convince or both—and so fails to illuminate" (Burroway 31). The job of the metaphor is to illuminate, revealing more of the story to readers through their imagination. Finally, as in much of writing, active voice is necessary to polish the story. In creative work, active voice creates a presence for readers in the story, making them a part of the world in the story. Once in the world, they see the world through the detail and metaphor described

above, and they must fill in the detail using their imagination. These three methods are just a few of the ways to create vision through the written word, but they are some of the most common and necessary ways to spark the imagination.

Writers view connecting to readers as valuable because they know the significance of reading as a source for inspiration. Reading is usually what inspires writers to write in the first place, and they understand that their writing has the potential to create or desist new writers. Writers must artistically reveal their creation by using language to spark the imagination of readers into creating their own new work as a result of the creation that they are reading. Susan Sontag writes in her article concerning writing,

Reading usually precedes writing. And the impulse to write is almost always fired by reading. Reading, the love of reading, is what makes you dream of becoming a writer. And long after you've become a writer, reading books others write — and rereading the beloved books of the past — constitutes an irresistible distraction from writing. Distraction. Consolation. Torment. And, yes, inspiration. (n.pag.)

For writers to grow in their skills, practice must be paired with study. The effect of a writer on readers encourages the imagination of the readers to naturally create their own original idea by taking the ideas of the writer and combining them with their own ideas, and the cycle of creation continues.

One of the main struggles for writers begins before words are on a page. They first put themselves in a creative state of mind where they can find the pieces needed to create something new. This requires an acceptance of the story brewing in their heads,

despite its downfalls. All great novels start with the first sentence, and often that first sentence is not very wonderful. Many writers have accurately described their first drafts as "word vomit," meaning they just let everything they think and feel about the story out on the page, cleaning up the mess later. The use of "vomit" is appropriate because, to put it graphically, when sick people finally throw up all the junk that has been churning inside them, only then can they begin to heal. Similarly, when writers release the story that they have been contemplating, they finally purge themselves of the emotions buried within their story and are now able to hack away the junk. Kurt Vonnegut described this process in a *New York Times* interview, saying,

When I taught at Iowa, then Harvard, then City College, here is what I tried to get away with, *only in effect*, not actually: I asked each student to open his or her mouth as wide as possible. I reached in with a thumb and forefinger to a point directly beneath his or her epiglottis. There is the free end of a spool of tape there. I pinched it, then pulled it out gradually, gently, so as not to make the student gag. When I got several feet of it out where we could see it, the student and I read what was written there. (n. pag.)

Vonnegut draws attention to the struggle for writers to let out their stories. Strange and disgusting, this description captures how it often feels to pull out the creativity from within and discover originality. Though the result is often messy and in need of disposal, writers may then begin to uncover the gem hidden behind all the dirt.

Beginning to write is daunting, and writers must leave room for failure and not let their insecurities slow them down. In order to write freely, writers often proceed

expecting nobody to read their first attempts. If they were to worry over people criticizing what they write in their most basic stages, they might never write. John Updike said in an interview that appeared in the *New York Times*, "Don't internalize your critics, Henry. It's death to the creative spirit. It breeds fictional tirades" (Bech). Writers must not mar their creative process by evaluating their first attempts through the eyes of their greatest critic. Viewing the first horrific ventures into a new project as private work allows them to take the first steps to a story that they will be proud to show readers. Basically, when they begin writing a first draft, they should not censor themselves. The way the story happens in the first draft will always need re-writing and re-thinking, but once the story comes out of their minds and on to the page, they can begin to create a project worth reading.

Another issue in writing technique that specifically faces Christian writers is the desire to create stories that have realistic appeal while balancing the pressure to create stories that do not offend an audience of Christian readers. A realistic writer must tell stories full of offensive characters and unpleasant events. Addison H. Leitch writes in her essay regarding reality and Christian literature that readers can trust secular writers to tell a story realistically, but a Christian writer is often viewed as one who will pass over hard details (194). Readers desire realistic characters because they understand the desires and struggles of the people they are reading, and for Christian writers to write a realistic character means that their audience will be able to immerse themselves in the story. Realism has a greater purpose than to just portray the world: it reveals the flaws that must be changed. Those flaws are sinful and unappealing to Christian readers, but just as a Christian must be convicted in order to repent from sin, a realistic story can be used to reveal problems in the world that must be addressed.

For Christian writers to write a realistic piece in order to produce change, they must set aside their own restraints and allow their characters to undergo difficult and sometimes unethical situations. In addition, readers must allow for the characters they read to make them uncomfortable if the character is to be a believable human being. For Christian readers to embrace realism, they must accept stories wherein the characters are not always moral. The miracle sometimes does not happen, and the lost person might not even accept salvation. These stories have a chance to enhance the readers' lives by pushing them to create change in the world they live in.

Furthermore, for Christian writers to convey the evangelistic message to a secular audience, they must use elegant craft and a mastery of style. If a story ultimately portraying the gospel is flat and unappealing, then the message is often overlooked. If the writer allows their piece to be under-quality writing, it will not be circulated for general appreciation. James Wesley Ingles writes in his essay on Christian novels that, "Stylistically, some of the religious novels of our time resemble the first draft of a college composition" (344). With this quality of writing, the reputation for Christian writers plummets and allows the focus to be placed on non-Christian works, and the Christian message sought to be evoked from the story fails to appeal to readers.

Flannery O'Connor's story "A Good Man is Hard to Find" uses the techniques of visual storytelling necessary for a written work, and she balances her faith with her realistic approach to characters in a manner worth emulating. O'Connor balances character thought with other uses of characterization such as verbal dialogue, description, opinions from other characters, etc. She also approaches a story's moral gently instead of flatly making her point. Her moral is not revealed clearly by her writing, but is instead

inferred from analyzing the reading. Even in the last scene of the story mentioned above, which is the pivotal moment in the story, readers are left mulling over the theme and purpose that O'Conner intends because she does not outright declare a purpose through her writing (Bausch 627). Flannery O'Conner reflects the idea that a story's theme should not be directly given, but should be "evoked from within" (Burroway 347). She allows her story to evolve into its theme through its own maturity, not writing her story to fit around a theme she plans. Her experience and success in publishing fiction qualifies her for study and imitation.

For writers of short stories, seeking publication of their works requires persistence and maturity. Often they must compile their stories in to a collection to seek publication. Otherwise, writers seek journals that publish individual short stories and submit as much as possible. Both methods pervade challenges, and writers must learn to work well with editors in order to make their start in both aspirations. In his letter to an unpublished writer, John Farrar critiques a certain writer's temperament as unsuited for what a writer ought to be (Farrar 76). In the course of the letter, he explains how her manipulation, impatience, and insufficient experience as a writer do not coincide with the necessary requirements for a published author. He describes her as sometimes over-zealous about her writing skills and unwilling to adhere to the format that he wanted her to follow. As Gabriel Morley writes in his article with tips for getting started, writers must be professional with their potential publisher and show him or her that they have the discipline and responsibility to follow through with their contracts. Having finished work and previous publication amongst short, professional articles gives writers an edge and perhaps a more willing ear from an editor (Morley 170-171). *The Writer's Market Guide*

to Getting Published includes a section on selling short stories. The advice given tells writers to research the journals they wish to submit their work to by reading previous stories that the editor has chosen, and they urge writers to revise their story as much as possible before submitting. When writers do submit, following the guidelines of the editor is vital to getting a second look (Writer's Market Guide...). Writers must show respect for an editor and their experience must be reflected in their stories.

A helpful tool that writers can use to polish their stories for publication is a writer's workshop. Having a detached reader critique a story allows writers to understand how readers see their story. Two benefits of going to a workshop as opposed to a friend are the advantage of an unbiased opinion and the critique of a fellow writer who understands technique. These groups are found not only in the community, but are also often available to students in the form of a creative writing course. Young writers have the benefit of the professor's trained eye and the freedom of a class that does not add pressure to publish. Kurt Vonnegut advocates creative writing classes in his *New York Times* article, saying, "A creative writing course provides experienced editors for inspired amateurs" (n. pag.). Though some argue that writing cannot be taught, the proper use for a writing class is providing experience for young writers. Using workshops and creative writing courses to receive advice and criticism from other writers furthers the maturity of writers and raises their standing amidst prospective publishers.

Writing technique expands across many areas and spans numerous books. Creative theory, the struggles of writing, including writing for a Christian audience, and publishing are only a few topics that are important to consider when writing. Visual storytelling and the early writing process require extensive practice and study, but each

technique is rewarding when used skillfully. The controversy between strictly Christian writing and Christian writers who write for the general public unfortunately bans too many strong Christian writers from the Christian market simply based on their realist content. Understanding the value of realism in Christian works opens up the door to writing that can influence readers for the glory of God. Finally, breaking in to the world of publishing calls for mature writer willing to take criticism and follow the advice of editors. The analysis portion of this paper will continue after the inclusion of the project to allow more clarity in the analysis as well as the enabling of reference.

Project Summary

Jen and David are in love, and then they break up—still in love. Jen faces a choice between the man she loves and a first step into the dream she has had as long as she can remember. Jen and David have just graduated from college, and David is starting a new job as soon as the tour is over. They plan to marry within a couple years. The pair is invited to tour with a band and Jen is close friends with the members, but David is not. Along the way, Jen becomes closer with the band members and David becomes more alienated. The climax of the story is when Jen is offered a position with the band and the consequences of her decision ensue.

Along the tour, readers are introduced to the four boisterous members of the band "Vince and the Prices." Vince is the lead singer and rhythm guitarist, and he is a veritable lady's man. Rick, the lead guitarist, is his best friend, slightly overweight, and always "just friends" with pretty girls. Fitzwilliam is a British bassist who has celebrity status in America because of his accent, but is really just a drug addict. Xane is their Chinese drummer who doesn't speak a word of English but has a soft spot for Fitzwilliam.

In Restless Character

They smell vaguely of incense when they stumble out of the dirty van. With matching grins and interlocked fingers, Jen and David slowly walk back to Pittsburgh Penny Pub where, just a few hours earlier, they had watched a bar-full of unsuspecting customers passively appreciate the grungy, yet passionate, rock 'n' roll offered by their compatriots. They had been working for the band just over three weeks now, running the merch table, packing up instruments, and the rare, but welcome, passing on of the band's contact info. The couple's private party served as the night-cap for the most successful show of the band's summer tour, which meant for them that Vince, the band's charming lead singer, had gotten not only a redhead for himself, but an open bar for the entire band. To escape from the rumpus, they had found themselves heading for the parking lot, where their blissful bower lay in the form of the paint-splattered tour van of Vince and the Prices. Though not the likeliest of places, the band had gutted it out and left nothing but the driver's seat. In place of the bench seating, large throw pillows lay strewn about the body of the van, along with various lightweight instruments, making the van the perfect escape for the young lovers.

Jen and David have been dating for over a year, and now, freshly graduated from college, their minds had already begun the process of envisioning the remainder of their lives together. This paints a lovely life in their minds, being that the road they travelled had seen its fair share of potholes and construction, yet they tumbled through the dirt patches pretty well in-tact. Now, David finds himself traveling with a band he didn't even know two months ago. Jen put in a good word with the band, most of whom she had known for years. Plus, his musical know-how allowed the band to agree to at least pay

him for the gas he spends on the road with them, and maybe a little extra when they do well at a gig.

As they re-enter the bar after their brief respite, the band sits in accomplished drunkenness. With the exception of Fitzwilliam, who is found alone at the end of the bar away from prying eyes, they are engrossed in the re-telling of their latest masterpiece, or so they saw it.

"Gentlemen," Vince says as he assumes his leadership and stands erect amongst his bar-mates, still maintaining a possessive grip on the hand of his latest lady. "Tonight, we have built a thriving empire!"

Xane gives a lively toast of agreement, as queued by Rick's positive reaction. Although he more often than not doesn't know what his fellow band members are saying (or anyone in America, for that matter), he has learned how to go with the flow of his company's emotions. Enjoying himself at the bar, he calls to Fitzwilliam, in not a word of English, not wanting him to miss the party. "Fitzwiriam, zài zhèlǐ dédào! Wǒ rènwéi Vince shì shuō hǎo dōngxī!"

Fitzwilliam jumps a little at being noticed. "Oh, nothin', mate, I'm just takin' a breather."

Vince slumps back onto his stool, and he and Rick hold each other up in order to laugh at Fitz, finding entertainment in the slightest twinge of humor. "Oh, leave it, man, we know you got your stash over there!" Rick is even blunter than his usual honesty after seven drinks, though he couldn't tell you it's been that many.

Fitzwilliam crouches slightly over the counter and puts his shoulder between him and his bandmates. "Bugger it! I've been clean for days!"

"Yeah right man, I saw you with that joint before the show!" Rick retorts, attracting a glare from Fitzwilliam's end of the bar.

"Yeah, well, at least from my pills, anyway. What's it to you, eh?"

Xane, unaware of the content of their conversation, makes a guess and chimes in, "Méiyǒu yòng xiǎng liú zài nà biān, nǐ zhīdào wǒ bǐ nǐ qiáng, yǎ xiǎozhī!"

Fitzwilliam relaxes his shoulder apologetically. "Mate, I donno a bloody word of Asian, you know that."

The bar tender, whose back is to the group, scoffs and mumbles, "No such language as Asian, stoner."

Xane abandons his seat and marches towards Fitz, his eyes dancing with mischievousness. Fitz anticipates what's coming and stealthily rakes his plunder into a cloudy ziplock bag. Taking him by the wrist and shoulder, Xane drags Fitz to the stool he previously occupied and claims the seat adjacent. "Nǐ bù huì wán, jīn wǎn! Wǒmen zhèngzài qìngzhù!" Fitz is victim to the drummer's hearty pat on the back, coughing a little at the unexpected jolt.

Vince turns his attention back to the redhead sheltered about her shoulders by his right arm. "Don't look now, but I think it's our turn." He subtly gestures towards Jen and David, who are still by the entrance, taking in the scene.

Rick notices them. "Hey lady, bring yourself and your man over this way!"

Jen laughs and tugs on the cuff of David's shirt, accepting the invitation. She seats herself next to Xane, and David assumes the outermost stool. She playfully taps Xane's arm with the back of her hand. "Xane, you played awesome today! You really drove the

vibe!" Xane blushes under her approving gaze, the color partly caused with the help of four drinks, which was already budding some rosiness in his cheeks and nose.

Fitzwilliam guzzles a shot and slams his glass on the counter, his eyes expanding to twice their usual diameter, inciting another of Xane's firm pats and a dose of his infectious laughter. Feeling in better spirits, Fitz initiates another wave of self-congratulating comments.

"Me mates, did you notice to all that top-notch bass playin' comin' from my side of the stage? I was absolutely brilliant on those riffs, if I may say so me-self." He hiccoughs.

David nods dutifully and twiddles with his glass while Jen practically balances hers on her lip to get the last drops. Satisfied, she straightens and motions for another round. "Fitz, I completely agree. You were a bass god tonight!" Fitzwilliam raises his hands and shrugs innocently, humbly accepting the compliment he elicited.

Vince winks at his lady, and the redhead takes her turn. "Oh, Vince, you know you were the god up there tonight." He puffs up his chest and turns victoriously to Jen and the guys. Jen shakes her head and chuckles, lifting another glass to her lips.

Rick addresses David, who phlegmatically observes the camaraderie. "What'd *you* think, David?"

He squirms a smidge. "Oh, well, I noticed you guys all hit that final note together that had been givin' ya some trouble. And that chord progression you added really brought some drive to the bridge. And, if I may say so, Rick, your harmonies were really tight tonight. So yeah, you did pretty great!" He slightly raises his glass and takes a favorable swig.

Rick lets out a single laugh and stares at his glass and mumbles some vague appreciation, causing David to squirm further. He tries to redeem his statement. "I've seen you guys improve tremendously over the last three weeks. That's a good sign for a young band!"

Jen gives his knee a comforting rub and turns to her friends, trusting the liquor to smooth out the wrinkles. She lightens the mood. "Yeah, I remember when I first heard you over a year ago, you guys sucked! In the best possible way, of course."

They let out a roaring laugh at the lovely lady. Vince takes friendly arms. "Nah, there never was a day."

His redhead flirts, "I couldn't imagine, hun!"

He plants a kiss on her cheek and takes his queue. "Ain't it time we retire, dollface?" She bats a green eye. He turns to his band. "And with that, I take my leave. Goodnight, gents!"

As they stumble towards the door, Rick stands and raises a glass. "To the handsomest devil I know and his lucky lady!"

The band lets out a unified, "Huzzah!"

xxx

Xane cracks open his eyes and dazedly surveys his environment, discovering that after their drinking had escalated, they had relocated to their trusty van. Looking around, he sees David slouched against the wall of the tour van, close to the back door, and Jen rests her head on his lap for a pillow. Rick, his baby-face squished against a pillow and laying belly-first on the floor, is snoring like crazy. Vince is curled up in the bean bag and his nose is turned upward, and Fitzwilliam is in the front seat sitting perfectly straight

but backwards, his nose and mouth protruding from between the headrest and seat, limbs wrapping around the back of the seat. "Engrishmen," Xane scoffs. And wipes some moisture from his chin.

Dreading to wait for them to awaken without encouragement, he starts to nudge Fitzwilliam. "Fitzwiriam! Tā de zǎochén. Qǐchuáng!" Nothing. He shakes harder. "Fitzwiriam!!"

Fitz produces a faint muttering. "...bloomin' nuts. Not morning." Xane bucks him up with a thump on the back, pushing him further into the back of the seat. Fitzwilliam awakens with an "Oomph!" loud enough to stir a few of the slumbering assembly.

Xane looks around hopefully. He begins to nurture their slight notions to open their eyes by greeting them, "Juéqǐ hé guāngzé!" As they show promise and begin to rouse, Xane resumes his corner of the van and massages his temples.

David is the next one to fully wake, but is helpless due to his rumpled girlfriend resting against his leg. Vince is startled awake when he realizes what's missing from the van. "Man, where's my redhead?"

Jen keeps resting against David's leg, but responds as she slightly readjusts her position, "Doesn't she have a name?"

Vince pauses, and crinkles his eyebrows. "Uh, sure...it's Fiona."

Jen scoffs. "Just cuz she's got red hair doesn't mean she's Irish."

Vince loses interest. "Eh, whatever, I guess it was Mary."

"That was the brunette from the last show." Jen mumbles, still groggy.

Vince squares his shoulders. "Well, I didn't realize you were that interested in the girls I date. We can work this out. You can have 'em after I'm done with 'em."

She opens her eyes and lets out a condescending laugh. "Charming."

Vince leans forward. "No need to be jealous, hun. I'm not runnin' off to get hitched just yet." He smiles mischievously.

Jen laughs confidently. "I'm not worried." She turns her focus to standing up on her wobbly legs.

David quickly opens the van door and welcomes the noonday sun. The band shrinks back. Exclamations from the band members ensue. "Ah, man, close the door!" "Dude, come on!" "Nǐ zài xiǎng shénme?"

He shuffles out the back of the van and complies. "Sorry guys." He shuts the door as unobtrusively as possible. Since he chose not to drink the night before, he is naturally designated to find the ibuprofen and possibly some hangover food.

Jen stretches. "I gotta admit sleeping in here is way more comfortable than sleeping in the back of David's station wagon."

Vince raises an eyebrow and one corner of his mouth. "You oughtta take advantage more often. It does get real cozy in here..."

Jen laughs and lowers her eyes. "Tempting, but David would hate it."

"Ah, David, he's gotta lighten up. He takes things way too seriously."

"Vince," she sticks up her nose and says with a nod, "it's perfectly normal for him to want me with him."

Vince leans forward. "I suppose it's perfectly normal for us lonely gents to want you here, too, then?"

Jen stiffens and gives a single laugh. "Alright, that's enough of that."

He laughs it off. "Ah, I'm just pickin', dollface."

Rick chimes in, "Jen, you don't gotta do anything you don't want to, but we enjoy your company. Maybe you could consider riding with us on the road today, instead? It's always good to hear you singing with our music, and we always play a little on the way."

"Ah, Rick, you're a sweetheart." She nudges his knee. "But I can't. I can't leave David alone."

Vince raises a hand in defeat and picks up his acoustic. He fiddles quietly, while the rest, including Jen, sit and wait for somebody to push the subject a little further. Jen shifts on her pillow and awaits a response, examining their faces to figure out who will speak first. They all knew she would turn them down, but none of them wanted to be the person to tell her to ditch David.

Fitzwilliam's muffled voice comes from the opening under the headrest. "Bugger, you're always with 'im. He's a strong chap, he can entertain 'imself for a spell. And if 'e can't, tell 'im I've got a couple ideas for 'im to keep 'im happier than 'e has ever been."

Jen smiles and curls her knees up to her chest.

xxx

"Hey, Dave, can I talk to you for a sec?" Jen approaches David with her fingers twiddling aimlessly and her toes curling.

David leans out from the back seat of his car where he stores several guitars. He straightens quickly, delighted that she came his way. However, after dating for this long, he knows that look.

Grasping for a neutral subject to begin, Jen blurts out, "So, how's your head? Cuz mine's killer! One drink too many, I guess."

"Oh, yeah I figured maybe you guys would want some of the aspirin I got. I mean, I'm fine, but I noticed you all got a little carried away." He reaches into the door pocket of his car and hands her the bottle. "Maybe down the road we can stop for pancakes and coffee or something. I can buy."

Jen smiles, but turns a little red and guiltily takes the bottle. "Thanks, hun. Yeah, I do need some, and I'm sure the guys will appreciate it." She pauses, then chuckles lightly. "Though I didn't need any booze to help me enjoy my time with you last night...cuz that was some pretty great stuff." She winks, but he shrugs and blushes at the ground.

She shifts her feet. "So, I was wondering...I mean the guys were wondering, well, they have been kinda interested to hear me sing along with their music ever since they heard me sing. They asked me, ya know, all four of them, if we could jam a little today."

David lights up and gives her a hug. "Oh, that's great, Jen! I'm sure you'll love that. Will you warm up with them tonight at the gig, or somethin?" He returns to packing his car.

She squints and scrunches up her forehead. "Uh, I mean, well maybe. If they like me this afternoon, that is."

David turns toward her. "This afternoon?"

"Yeah."

"But, we're driving all afternoon."

"I know."

He stiffens. "So then, not this afternoon...cuz you'll be with me."

Jen looks at her feet. All the time they had been dating in college, she had never asked him something like this before. They were always together, and she honestly loves being with him. And he knows that. He had to understand...right?

She didn't realize how long she had been quiet. "Right, Jen?" She looks up quickly and tightens her lips. "Maybe not, I mean, I could ride with them today. Couldn't I?"

He crosses his arms across his broad chest and uncharacteristically puffs out. "You want to ride with the band all the way to Chicago?"

She, equally uncharacteristically, deflates. "It's just 7 hours, babe."

He scoffs and clenches his jaw. "I'm just not so sure I feel comfortable with that."

"C'mon baby, just relax." She knows that he's been feeling uneasy about her friendships with the guys. She relaxes the tension in her forehead, massaging his arms a little to coax out the paranoia she knew he felt.

He pulls his arms away. "So you prefer to hang out with them now, huh?" She shrinks back. "What? No!"

"Wouldn't have anything to do with Vince would it?"

She takes down her defensive attitude to make him believe her. "Sweetie, come on. It's not like that. We're friends, but I'm friends with all of them."

David is still on offense. "Oh, come on! I've seen Vince hitting on you"

"He is not, he's just like that. You'd have to know him the way that I do to realize."

David scoffs angrily. "Yeah you two know each other real well, don'tcha?"

"Oh, now, what's that supposed to mean? This isn't like you! Can't we discuss this calmly?"

"I can't be calm about this! He likes you! I know when a guy likes a girl!"

"Dave, he doesn't like me, I swear!" She puts her hands on his shoulders.

He paces with clenched fists. "Jen, I know how much you love music, and there's no way I wanna get in your way for any reason, but Vince just messes with me! I can't take it!"

"Dave, just trust me, babe." She stares into his eyes honestly. He sighs. "Just this once."

xxx

Back in the van, Jen assumes her previous position, her knees drawn to her chest, chin on her knees. Fitzwilliam hasn't moved and his muffled snoring is heard from inside the seat. Vince is sitting like a king in his bean-bag chair, delegating tasks to Rick, while Xane stacks his drums in the old grounds of the passenger seat.

Staring at the scene, Jen thinks they all look so relaxed and worry-free. Nobody cares if they leave on schedule or not. Xane and Rick don't even care that Vince and Fitz aren't helping pack up. They seem to have an understanding that everybody does their part in the end. But more importantly, they let each other remain themselves. They know each other, even if Xane can't speak English. They have accepted each other. And they make her feel like a part of the balance somehow.

With the van now loaded, they pile in to the back of and make ready for their journey. Fitzwilliam is still unconscious in the front seat, but he is designated to drive on this trip (however poorly he holds that responsibility), so Xane proceeds to physically pry

him out of his slumbering position and turn him around in his seat. Fitz remains lifeless and groggy throughout the battle. However, Fitz's legs straddle the back of the seat, making it difficult for Xane to set loose his long legs from the back-facing position. Xane doesn't let his pride inhibit his actions, and instead of struggling through a near impossible task to reach no success, he finds it natural and honorable to take arms with trustworthy men and do a job to its maximum capacity. "Hēi, Vince hé Rick, bāng wǒ zhège chángtú shībài zhěle yīzi, bǎ tā de zhōuwéi, jiāng yǎ!" He says with a smile. And so, understanding his plight, the three rock artists join forces for the betterment of their fallen comrade, not to mention their own well-being.

Once in front-facing alignment, Fitz begins to slouch forward on to the wheel, being that he is still mostly asleep. However, the move works in his favor, because when he makes contact with the wheel, he inadvertently leans against the van's horn, which jolts him back in to reality. Once fully awake, he looks down and sees Xane's expectant hand, flat palm to the sky. Fitzwilliam droops his shoulders and scoffs, then digs in his jacket pocket and places two plastic bags in Xane's hand. He pleads innocence. "Come on, Xane, of course I wouldn't do 'em on the road." Xane wrinkles his forehead and gives a half smile, then returns to his spot on the floor. Fitz revs the van, giving it a little gas to get going. Hitting a few bumps in the dirt parking lot, they make their way for Chicago. Fitz lights a joint. Xane follows his nose and turns to Fitz; his eyebrows raise and his jaw goes slack. "Nǐ sāhuǎng xiǎo báo de nánrén!"

Xane throws the joint out the passenger-side window. Fitz tries to distract him. "Well now, Xane, since we're on the road, you gotta get more practice in. Hit me with that alphabet again."

Xane hears 'alphabet' and whips his head back toward Fitz. He chews on his lip briefly and confesses, "Wǒ méiyǒu yánjiū." Fitz is unaffected. "Xane, I donno whatcha said." Xane's face goes flat and he firmly shakes his head no. Fitz chuckles. "You're never gonna learn the glorious English language if ya don't practice!" He smiles playfully up at Xane.

"Speaking of practice..." Vince draws their attention and picks up his acoustic. The rest of the band mates all smile, and Xane finds his seat once again.

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"Well, gang, we've heard enough don't you think?" They all nod back at Vince with confident smiles. He turns to Jen. "Well, dollface, how would you like to sing with us tonight?"

Jen blushes and looks at her toes, they wiggle from being noticed. The choice was simple—a no-brainer. Everything inside her knew that this was something she was meant to do. And now, she had a chance to prove it. She sits pensively for a moment, then loosens. "Hell yeah."

They all are pleasantly shocked by her enthusiasm and Xane gives her his famous slap on the back. Vince sits silently, but grinning ear to ear. Once the crew calms down, he begins his next statement. "The only problem is, if you want to be a part of the act, you're gonna get more pay. And then something else will have to go."

Jen is innocent. "Like what?" Vince becomes very political. "Well, we all know our instruments really well, and we don't really need help putting them up..."

Jen starts to understand. "Wait...you don't mean..."

"fraid so." Vince nods solemnly. Jen is silent while she sits there in shock.

Vince tries to coax her. "Jen, it's only for the rest of the tour. It's no big deal. He'll understand." She turns to Rick. He looks at the floor. She looks at Xane. He's tapping away on the closest pillow, hearing a beat in his head. When he sees her expression, he stops, and looks around bewildered. "Děng yīxià, zhè shì zěnme huí shì?" Fitzwilliam looks back from the driver's seat. "Xane, be cool, mate." Xane starts speaking wildly in mandarin and motioning for him to look back at the road. "Alright mate, chill," at the same time raising his hands in a modest surrender, causing Xane to react even more.

Vince picks up his guitar and begins fiddling with it again. He starts singing a familiar tune, one of their popular originals, and Rick starts singing along. Xane uses a guitar case this time to make a more substantial sound. Fitzwilliam starts singing a bass lick in an octave far too high for a bass guitar. Soon, Jen can't stop herself, and she starts harmonizing the natural tune that she longs to add.

xxx

Their feet now planted in Chicago, the four bandmates take a beer break after finishing unloading their gear. Rick elbows Vince. "Hey, Vinny, you seemed to be getting real friendly with Jen in there. How come none of us get you that happy?" He and Fitzwilliam laugh. Xane laughs contagiously.

Vince deflects, "Well, none of you guys smell too good." Rick scoffs and laughs at himself while Fitzwilliam protests. "Being a man of nature, I resent that."

Vince retorts, "Yeah, if you call pot nature!" Fitzwilliam shrugs. "Well, of course I do!" Xane begins to lose interest in the gibberish and starts picking up the beer cans they had dropped on the ground. Rick starts back. "But seriously, Vince, you're not interested in her are you?"

"Nah, man, she's just a sweet gal." Fitzwilliam chuckles. "Yeah, a really hot gal." They laugh in agreement. Vince loosens. "Alright, alright, maybe I'd make a pass at her if she was single." And guiltily raises his hands. Rick knows his friend too well. "Vinny, since when has that ever held you back?" Vince shakes his head and takes another swig of beer. He finishes off the can and hands it to Xane. "Take care of that for me, will ya?" Xane struggles to hold all the cans and quickly makes his way to the nearest trash can.

While the Fitztick Night Club's entertainment for the evening unloads their gear, Jen makes her way out of the bustle and advances to David's station wagon. She hopes that the time he spent alone allowed him to rationalize and understand her excitement at the step she's taking toward singing with the band. Once she tells him the news about the offer, he should be able to understand the validity of the choice she made.

One look—furrowed brow, square shoulders, his body tense—and she knew he didn't understand. Instead of disappointment and fear, frustration and anger sprung from the spot within her where she had stored her private longings. But she knew that he needed love.

"David, I'm sorry I left you...please don't be angry anymore. I know that's not who you are." She drew near him with tenderness, laying her hands on his arm, asking him to let down his walls.

He softens his brow. "I know, Jen. But you really dealt me a hard blow."

She sighs. "I'm sorry I hurt you." As much as she wants to be in the band, this is one obstacle she does not want to face. But she can't get around it. "But, I did get to sing with them on the trip like I hoped. They really loved me, hun!"

He picks up a guitar from the back of his car and looks back at her with a slight smile. "So, what does that mean for you? Are you gonna sing now?"

"Well, that's the thing, they offered me a mic in the show tonight! And ya know, they even said if it goes over well, I can sing with them for the rest of the tour! I'm practically in the band!!" She bounces on her toes a little and squeezes his arm.

He cradles her face with his hand and gives her a peck on the forehead. "I'm proud of you, Jen." He leans in to the car and pulls out some cables. "Does this mean you'll have to ride with them more?"

Her hands loosen from his arms and she takes a small step back. "Well, I might not have to...well I mean...babe, there's something else."

—Vince intersects their conversation, and by the worried look on David's face, he takes his queue. "Hey man, no hard feelings. You're a great roadie! She'll see you again when it's over."

David raises his eyebrows and looks at Jen, then slowly tightens. Jen scrambles. "Vince, no, I haven't....David...sweetie...Vince says if I sing with them, they can't pay you anymore." She drops her hands and bites her lip.

His whole body changes moods. "What?!? Now, you want me to leave you alone with them?!" He points at Vince, who raises his hands a little to stay out of it. "Hey man, you got nothin' to worry 'bout. We'll take care of her."

David clenches his fists and jaw. "Yeah, buddy, I'm sure you'd love to wouldn't ya!" Vince backs up. "Hey, I don't know what you're talkin' 'bout." David steps closer to Jen to plead with her. "Jen I can't believe you would choose them over me!"

She shakes her head to protest. "No it's not them, it's the chance for me to actually be in a band!" David shakes his head. "No, if that were all it was then I'd let you go in a heartbeat, but, Jen, it's not even just him. I see the look in your eyes when he flirts with you. It makes me sick!"

Jen innocently looks at Vince, hoping for a defense, but he says nothing and won't look at her.

David is at his limit. He goes to his trunk, grabs Jen's duffel, and tosses it at her feet. "Have a good show. Don't call me."

She follows him to the driver door. "David, please don't do this!! You know I love you!" He ignores her and gets in his car. His old station wagon receives a beating as David forces it to flee the night club.

As his car passes her, Jen sees the bar manager approaching Vince. "Are you Vince?" He nods, still slightly amazed at what had just transpired. Rick, Fitz, and Xane are walking to see what he wants. The man in the headset tells Vince. "Hey, man, we're gonna have to cancel your gig tonight. My girlfriend really wants to play a show tonight, and you know how the ladies are. Gotta please 'em. Sorry." The band members drop their countenances in disappointment, but Jen's mouth drops open. Her first show is canceled, all because he couldn't tell his girl no. As tears win over her battle for composure, she turns back to see David's car blowing up a cloud of dust as he drives down the road where they came from.

Story De-Brief

In order to give this story a competitive edge, I first focused on getting to know the characters and sought to convey their strength and depth. As the characters and their stories shaped in my mind, I formed a world for them where they had met each other, hung out at a local bar or ran into each other at school. I sought not to make them from people I knew but strove to let them become new friends—some friends I knew because I knew their past and their mannerisms. John Gardner wrote a guide to writing entitled *The Art of Fiction*, and he wrote, regarding truth in a story, that the writer "must shape simultaneously (in an expanding creative moment) his characters, plot, and setting, each inextricably connected to the others; he must make his whole world in a single, coherent gesture, as a potter makes a pot" (Gardner 46). Shaping characters inevitably shapes the plot and the setting because each is necessarily part of the other. In my pre-writing and pre-organizing, I created a world through the eyes and experiences of my characters. I could not create a plot first and place characters within afterward. My setting cannot even exist without the characters. Each exists in harmony with one another. In this way, I see my writing begin to take shape into a story that has a competitive edge in the marketplace.

In addition, I allowed my theme to form itself from the natural passions I hold that inevitably appear in my writing. I could not choose a theme and then write a story about such theme. Instead, once my story formed, I allowed its natural course to take place, and I found myself ankle deep in a topic that is of great importance to me. The theme came naturally as I explored the story. I did not shove a theme down the throat of my story, but I gave it room to breathe, and in the end, it naturally produced a moral that is important to the world as I view it. In her writing guide, Burroway emphasizes that a story's theme

should not be directly given or forced by the writer but should be "evoked from within" (Burroway 347). A writer must simply show the readers what happens, and the story will make its own theme if the writer has let the character, setting, and plot all work harmoniously. When writing my project, I was pleased to find that the theme came from within the natural workings of the story, and when I discovered how my story would end I was shocked to find a theme that surprised and affected myself as the writer. By allowing my story to work organically to tell its theme, I have a further edge in the marketplace for fiction.

After discussing my personal revelation of the theme, I would like to share the point in my story that I find so important. As I look forward to a future considering my possibilities in writing fiction, I realize the danger and challenge I face in keeping my relationships of higher priority than my aspirations. Hearing how hard a writer must work in the market to get published is personally challenging for me because I know that I will have to sacrifice so much time with the people I love. In order to build relationships, people must be willing to sacrifice their desires for the health of their relationships. This does not mean that people must be miserable in their careers in order to have relationships, but there must be a balance of each area. A huge insecurity for me in venturing out as a writer is knowing that I am not willing to sacrifice healthy relationships in order to publish my stories, and I wonder if the effort I am able to make will be sufficient. That is why I found Jen's struggle with wanting to follow her dream but having to do it in a manner that damages her relationship with her boyfriend so personal to me. When I finished writing the story, I realized that I longed to show this message to a pool of people who are following a personal ambition and letting their loved ones fall

by the wayside. Readers who understand her decision are those who struggle with the prioritizing of their goals and their loved ones.

As a result of this theme, I am targeting my story for a young adult audience interested in realist drama. I hope to particularly impact an audience filled with readers who have big dreams and want nothing to hold them back. I admire this quality, but recognize that it must be managed. I seek to appeal to my audience largely through the setting, which is what will often be the first thing described by word of mouth. The audience that will be drawn to my story will be mostly, but not stereotypically, an audience interested in music and intrigued by an urban lifestyle. Additionally, the use of characterization has the potential to appeal to an audience experiencing their own choices and learning how to balance the freedom they have with responsibility and foresight. The young, edgy band members in my story will be more understood by an audience who recognizes the appropriateness of their wild ways, as opposed to conservative readers who might see drugs, sex, and cussing as unnecessary, which is why I refrain from categorizing my story as "Christian," though the theme does portray Christian morals. These details are appropriate when exploring the setting and understanding the characters. Without such elements, the characters would be unrealistic. That is why it is necessary that my audience be those who realize the importance of realistic details. Overall, my target audience will be drawn to my story through the setting they recognize and the relatable experiences.

From my writing experience, I have grown in some areas of my technique that are reflected in this story, but I see my weaknesses revealed, as well. As I discussed earlier in this essay, I sought to employ some specific techniques that I learned from

Burroway's book. For example, I chose to write my story in present tense in order to create immersion for the reader. The story happens with the reader as they continue in the story, creating a sense of uncertainty regarding the turn of events in the story. However, I chose not to write the story specifically through the eyes of any one character and instead chose to write from the perspective of a partially-omniscient narrator. This is done so that the readers will have a more unbiased view of all the characters and not base their opinion on the narrator's. Also, the readers do not have to trust the main character to reflect the best judgment or reasoning in a situation, so the motivations of the characters are unclear. I recognize that my story lacks narrative tools such as illusion and metaphor since I lack great skill in the use of these devices. I also struggled with making everything purposeful. Not all of my choices in the story were done for any real reason, even something I could recognize in a re-read, and I wish to have more purpose in my decisions. Practice and experimentation is needed to grow these weaknesses into strengths, but I am excited to see some areas where I have grown.

Creating *In Restless Character* took my emotional energy and often required more of me than I knew how to give. In the end, as with every story I write, I reflected on the process and recognized my own growth. I also see many areas where I still must mature, and I hope I will never stop growing as a writer. Writing sharpens my mind and allows me to have a better knowledge of people and the world. The practice of writing fiction enhances who I am as a person, and I plan on writing for as long as God allows.

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