

AN ENCHANTED FAN FICTION: SWIFT MEETS MILLHAUSER

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors College of
Texas State University
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

by

Skyler Kidd Jennings

San Marcos, Texas
May 2019

AN ENCHANTED FAN FICTION: SWIFT MEETS MILLHAUSER

by

Skyler Kidd Jennings

Thesis Supervisor:

Cecily Parks, M.F.A., Ph.D.
Department of English

Second Reader:

Meg Griffitts, M.F.A.
Department of English

Approved:

Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.
Dean, Honors College

ABSTRACT

“An Enchanted Fan Fiction: Swift Meets Millhauser” combines central themes found in both Taylor Swift’s song “Enchanted” and Steven Millhauser’s novella *Enchanted Night* – loneliness, nighttime and magic. Two different worlds become one in an enchanting tale inspired by the artists’ works.

The main component of the thesis is a creative work aiming to prove that Swift’s talent for storytelling is as strong as that of critically acclaimed novelist Millhauser, undeserving of the stigma placed upon it. Because this story is based on existing creative work it falls into the genre of fan fiction, also stigmatized. An introduction discusses why neither should be stigmatized, provides key background information and addresses copyright issues.

Told over the course of one summer night, the two protagonists, Adam and Taylor, face personal struggles while the Moon watches over them. Short sections and poems tell their story as they navigate a night spent in the woods for the town’s yearly tradition. Wonder, fantasy and mystery follow the two on their journey.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Taylor Alison Swift. Eight-year-old me had no idea that the girl I listened to on the radio would be inspiring my undergraduate thesis. But, what can I say? I was enchanted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have to start by thanking my mom, Gwendolyn Ann Kidd Jennings, for everything I am today. Without her, I wouldn't be who I am. She raised me to be creative, compassionate and courageous. There is no way I would've chosen this as my thesis without her instilling the confidence in me to always be myself. I love you, Mumma Bear.

Next, I want to thank every professor, TA and faculty member at Texas State that has ever crossed my path over the course of these four years. I received all the academic support I could've never imagined receiving at a big university. I have heard many horror stories from friends who went to other universities feeling like a number, not a name, at their school. At Texas State, that isn't possible.

Next, I want to thank my friends. Especially Chris Cantu, who pushed me to go with my gut when I was deciding which thesis to pursue. He was honest and helpful when I felt torn between a thesis that fit my degree and one that fit my heart. You rock, Chris.

Finally, I want to thank my wonderful thesis supervisor Cecily Parks and my second reader Meg Griffitts.

I first met Cecily when I took her "Wild Nights, Wild Nights!" honors course in the spring of 2018. Her classroom was always filled with a calm, comforting energy. It was in her class that I cried while presenting a personal item that related to night. My first feeling was embarrassment, until a classmate came to hug me and I looked up to see only sympathetic faces in the crowd. It was a truly special environment. This environment continued into our mostly-weekly meetings this semester. I had a work injury that caused a lot of delay and frustration, but she always reminded me that I would get it done and everything was okay. She never let my anxiety fester.

I first met Meg after Cecily encouraged me to reach out for her input on my thesis. Cecily knew Meg was a massive Taylor Swift fan like me. From day one, she was on board to get a story out there inspired by Swift's immense talent. Not only that, but Meg was a genius when it came to helping me write my first ever short story. She would point out a seemingly obvious plot hole or mistake that I couldn't believe I didn't catch. My thesis wouldn't be well-rounded without her eye for writing. She challenged me to do better, in what I can only describe as the perfect constructive criticism.

Thank you to everyone,
Skyler

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
AN ENCHANTED FAN FICTION: SWIFT MEETS MILLHAUSER	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
JUNE 21 ST	4
A MASTERPIECE	5
SHE IS ME.....	6
REBELS IN THE NIGHT	7
ABIGAIL.....	9
BRIGHT WHITE MOON.....	11
BENJI.....	12
THE HOWL	15
GHOSTS.....	19
WALLS OF INSINCERITY	22
INTO THE WOODS.....	26
OUT HERE	27
ANGEL.....	29
NOT ALONE.....	31
BLUE EYES.....	32
TWO TEENS ALONE IN THE WOODS	33
WHO ARE YOU?.....	34
THE GOSSIP	38
CHOCOLATE DAISES.....	42
THE PENNULTIMATE SINGER.....	46
ENCHANTED.....	49
SUPPORT SYSTEM.....	50
BREATHE	53
FRENZY.....	54
THE CONVERSATION	55
I'M HERE.....	59
LINGERING QUESTION	62
THIRTEEN FLOWERS.....	64
PASSING NOTES IN SECRECY	66
THE NOTE.....	67
SEE YOU AGAIN	68
ECHO YOUR NAME	69
WHEN THE NIGHT ENDS.....	70
LITERATURE CITED.....	71

I. INTRODUCTION

The best songs for Taylor Swift, to write or listen to, are embedded with personal details.¹ In her essay about pop music for *Elle UK* in February 2019, Swift compares her songwriting to that of an author writing a book.² She says she loves the kind of writing that places you into a story, like F. Scott Fitzgerald's.³ "Sprinkling personal mementos and shreds of reality" into her music is her way of placing listeners into her songs, whilst preserving her memories.⁴ When an artist does this, it allows the listener to connect with them.⁵ Then, their work finds a spot in the listeners' memories, too.⁶ "Just like a good book," Swift writes to end the essay.⁷

It's Swift's personal approach to songwriting that inspires this thesis. When reading *Enchanted Night* by Steven Millhauser, small, seemingly unimportant details drive the emotions of the reader. The story grabs onto the reader, pulling them along as the characters navigate their storylines. Swift achieves this, too, in her songwriting.

After reading *Enchanted Night*, it isn't hard to connect the feelings evoked from the novella with those from Swift's song "Enchanted." Both works of art tell their tales of loneliness with such intense detailing they seem to tell the same story. Stories that seem as though they were written with the intention of belonging together. They were, however, not. Swift released "Enchanted"⁸ in 2010, and Millhauser published *Enchanted Night*⁹ in 1999. Despite being written in different times and mediums, they mold together wondrously.

¹ Taylor Swift, "For Taylor Swift, Pop is Personal," *Elle UK*, February 28, 2019, <https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/a265446099/taylor-swift-pop-music/>.

² Taylor Swift, "For Taylor Swift, Pop is Personal."

³ Taylor Swift, "For Taylor Swift, Pop is Personal."

⁴ Taylor Swift, "For Taylor Swift, Pop is Personal."

⁵ Taylor Swift, "For Taylor Swift, Pop is Personal."

⁶ Taylor Swift, "For Taylor Swift, Pop is Personal."

⁷ Taylor Swift, "For Taylor Swift, Pop is Personal."

⁸ Taylor Swift, "Enchanted," track 9 on *Speak Now*, Big Machine Records, 2010, compact disc.

⁹ Steven Millhauser, *Enchanted night: a Novella* (Crown Publications, 1999).

Swift's characters find a home in Millhauser's setting. This thesis, a piece of creative work, is an example of this viewpoint.

With this viewpoint, this thesis also strives to encourage its readers to evolve their opinions about Swift's writing. Millhauser is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, and Swift is a Grammy-winning singer-songwriter. Yet, the general public's opinion of the latter artist isn't as revered as that of the former artist. Swift's name is too often associated with the persona of a serial-dating woman, who lives to manipulate people. By the end of this thesis, one might see how Swift's songwriting is as creative and inspiring as Millhauser's writing.

Since this thesis is a creative work inspired by two other creative works, it falls into the genre of fan fiction. Fan fiction is often stigmatized for being a rip-off, non-creative piece of work that spoils the original work. Like many people's opinion of Swift's songwriting, fan fiction is unfairly criticized.

The authors of fan fiction don't write because they aren't creative enough to write. They write because their creativity is sparked by someone else's, and they must write how they imagine the characters. The fictional characters in this thesis are developed from the fictional characters in Millhauser's novella and Swift's song, but they are not the exact characters. They have their own stories and their own personalities. The way Swift imagined her characters and Millhauser imagined his setting will differ from what is imagined in this thesis, though they share similarities.

With all this said, the two main characters – Adam and Taylor – invite you into their little love story. They will explore elements of grief, loneliness and anxiety. But, they want you to remember the central element: love. Love is the key factor to any relationship, be it a romantic one or not. Adam and Taylor's stories would not exist without the love that surrounds their lives.

Some elements in this thesis are direct quotes from Taylor Swift's song, "Enchanted." This will be noted with an asterisk, *, at the end of the section title in which the song lyrics are used. At the bottom of the same page, will be an asterisk, *, sourcing the song. All characters in this thesis are fictional, and do not attempt to depict any real people. This thesis is for educational purposes only, under fair use, and will not be used to make money off the copyrighted works.

II. JUNE 21ST

A warm summer night,

In a small Pennsylvanian town.

What's to come,

As the Moon reigns above?

Two pawns isolated in fear,

Will She let them draw near?

On this warm summer night.

III. A MASTERPIECE

His eyes open in a flurry of confusion and fright, trying to focus on their surroundings as they adjust to the dark room. It had only been a dream, but it had felt so real. Because it *was* real. It *had* happened. A year ago, today.

The glass shards rushing toward Adam's face a year ago are now dust particles staring at him from across the room. Nothing's been touched for a whole year. Life just stopped on the opposite side of his bedroom. Complete stand-still.

The moonlight-illuminated dust looks like a tiny army. Reminding him of all he'd lost that night a year ago. Because it was *his* fault. *His* idea. *His* motorcycle.

And now he's staring at a still-life painting that memorializes his tragedy, commissioned by his parents. The untouched comforter, ruffled in a hurry as she'd left the bed, is a collage of pinks painted so perfectly you can feel the fluff just from looking at it. The books that litter her nightstand a messy smattering on the canvas. The only thing missing, is the subject.

Her.

IV. SHE IS ME

She's supposed to be waking to the sound of an alarm marking midnight. Instead, she's lazily muting it as she tears her eyes away from the bright-white, nearly-full Moon. She'd tried to fall asleep, she'd really tried. But when sleep didn't come, she gave in to the restlessness and focused her attention on the Moon. The intense spotlight wrapped around her like a sleeping bag. A cocoon of peaceful wonder.

Does she see me, thought Taylor, is she aware I'm staring at her? Like she is me? Does she ever feel lonely, up there, despite the stars around her? Is she wondering if we're the same?

The Moon brings her comfort. They can stare at each other in silence and somehow understand the other completely. They're both lonely.

She is me.

V. REBELS IN THE NIGHT

The moment he steals the keys out of the safe his parents keep in the laundry room, Adam feels lost in a trance. His mind is focusing on anything and everything except what he's about to do. The sound his boots make against the hardwood floor. The creaking of doors as he opens and closes them. The rumbling of the garage door. The accompanying worry about the ears on the other side of the house hearing it. The soft sigh of relief that passes through his lips after a few anxious moments come and go without the sound of angry footsteps traipsing through the house. Success.

And when he turns, he's face-to-face with his past.

Standing there, in the middle of the cold, grey garage is his motorcycle. With the garage door up, the moonlight sneaks inside to illuminate it. The light bounces back against the red metal to cast a crimson shadow on the cement floor. It reminds him of what happened that night. The night a different type of crimson covered the ground.

"Let's go! Hurry up before they catch us," his sister shouts in a whisper as she runs toward the motorcycle. *Am I dreaming*, he wonders, as he stares at her circling the motorcycle.

"Sis?"

"We're just three rebels tonight, aren't we?" she grins, pats the motorcycle's seat and looks back at him. "It's called a Honda Rebel, right? From 1985?" she questions with her brows raised, expecting an answer.

He nods his reply as if it's the start of that fateful night a year ago.

His thoughts snap back to his sister as she mounts the motorcycle and says, "You going to finally let me drive?" She's wiggling her eyebrows up and down because she already knows the answer to the question. It's always no.

“Are you crazy? Skootch back, sis,” he says, deciding to just enjoy whatever this is – dream or memory.

She giggles as she moves back and smiles so wide the Moon aims Her gaze right at it, blinding him momentarily as he gets on the seat. The motorcycle roars to life, enticing his sister to join in with a loud holler of excitement. As he turns to yell at her for being too loud with their sleeping parents in earshot Adam is startled back to reality.

There is no one behind him.

Rebel, party of one.

VI. ABIGAIL

Her phone lights up on the nightstand and Taylor is pulled away from the Moon's trance. The screen casts a dull blue light across her bare, white walls. She hasn't had time to paint them yet. Her old bedroom was a soft purple, covered in posters from A Great Big World, her favorite band. She misses the comfort the band's familiar faces brought. Now, she's all alone. Her and the Moon, who is so far away up there in the sky.

The phone pings again, a reminder notification that she has an unchecked text. Taylor knows it must be from her new friend. Her guess is confirmed when she reads, *Pick you up in five!* It's from Abigail, the red-headed girl she'd sat next to in English class on her first day of school here.

Last month, when Taylor's parents told her the family was moving, she hadn't been sure it would be easy to make friends in a new school. The middle of the semester was a tough time to find your spot within the social food chain. She was certain that by the time she'd arrive, there would be no room for her to squeeze in anywhere. But she'd sat next to Abigail. And Abigail talked to Taylor like they'd been friends since pre-school. Without warning, she'd leaned over and cracked a joke about Taylor always getting the best seat in the classroom. Even though it was her first day, and the only empty desk. Abigail talked to her like they'd been friends their whole lives, and she loved that.

It isn't enough to fight off the worry, though. Worry that she seems too eager to be Abigail's friend, yet not eager enough. Worry that Abigail might drop her when she realizes Taylor really isn't as great as she thought. Worry that Abigail might think Taylor wants to drop her.

This social uncertainty brought on by Taylor's anxiety controlled a lot of her thoughts and decisions. And it almost had tonight. It would've felt a lot easier to just decline Abigail's invitation tonight and retreat into the comfortable company of her mom.

Beyond excited for tonight, Taylor types out in reply to Abigail, committing to going out before her mind convinces her to find a way out, an excuse. Just like it always did when the anxiety won.

Taylor pulls back the covers of her bed and reveals a light beige dress brocaded in silver sequins. She'd put the dress on earlier in the hopes that wearing it ahead of time would help keep her from backing out of going. A reminder, from her past self to her future self, that she'd wanted to go.

The dress itself had been picked out on a shopping trip she'd taken with Abigail, when they were searching for outfits to wear tonight. The way Abigail had reacted and complimented Taylor made her confidence surge while wearing it. And she needed all the confidence she could get if she was going to get on that stage.

Taylor gathers her things and slips on shoes before she opens the window, the warm summer air hitting her face. She's trying to be as quiet as she can so she doesn't wake her parents, who wouldn't be thrilled to find her sneaking out after midnight. She glances down at her dress and memories of Abigail's grinning face flash into her mind.

Taylor takes this splash of confidence and jumps over the windowsill, closing the window behind her with a soft thud.

VII. BRIGHT WHITE MOON

*At the corner of a block,
On a grey sidewalk,
Stands a girl illuminated by
the bright white Moon.*

*She's paused for a moment,
To glance at the Moon.*

*It's a peaceful sight.
All alone in the sky.
Not a care in the world,
For this bright white Moon.*

*It rules over the night,
Silently.*

*And then there's a car's soft rumble.
Breaking the quietness
In the tranquil town
Of the bright white Moon.*

VIII. BENJI

Harshly whipped back to reality and alone on his motorcycle, Adam begins his midnight drive. There's nobody else milling about his neighborhood as he passes the dark, quiet houses. The homes of former friends. Friends he'd cut off a year ago, today.

He hadn't been able to handle the guilt, the judgment, the look in their eyes. The feeling of everyone knowing his whole world had crashed and burned that night. Had ended. He hadn't wanted to disappoint anyone, especially friends who were trying their best.

Like Benji, he thought, as he passed the pale-yellow home of the Carters. Benji, who had come over every day after the accident even when it meant just watching Adam do nothing. He would sit in a chair, carefully stationed at the end of Adam's bed. He'd do homework, or read, and watch as Adam grieved. Until Adam pushed him away.

Literally, had pushed him out of the door. Slammed it in his face and ignored his pleas. "I'm worried about you, man, please let me stay," Benji had begged. Adam didn't reply and locked the door instead, thinking he could lock out any negative thoughts at the same time. No one would be there to stare, pity or judge. All he could think about when he was with people was how they knew him as the guy whose sister died. He had enough reminders of that on the other side of his bedroom.

But Benji hadn't given up. He'd tried to visit every day. When Adam's parents weren't around, the door remained closed and Benji switched to phone calls and texts. Adam didn't understand why Benji never gave up on him. How he could repeatedly forgive Adam's slammed doors and unresponsive phone. But he had.

And Benji was the reason Adam had decided to venture out of his bedroom. When Adam woke up this morning to a voicemail from Benji inviting him to sing a tribute for his

sister tonight, he felt an unwavering urge to accept. Benji had never given up on him for an entire year. Benji was arranging a tribute for his sister.

“Benji is good,” Adam whispers to himself.

“Not as good as me, of course,” his sister giggles in his ear. Adam nearly loses control of his motorcycle as he turns, startled, and looks at his sister with wide eyes. “Watch the road, you idiot! And I’m not the one allowed to drive,” she mutters and rolls her eyes.

“You’re back,” he says in awe, focusing his eyes back to the road in front of him. There is a purple sedan a few miles in front of him now. This hadn’t happened a year ago – all of this is completely new. It isn’t a memory, and it doesn’t feel like a dream.

“I’m never gone, silly,” she replies, squeezing his torso from behind as she holds on to him. “Hey, look, there’s a car in front of us,” his sister points her finger by the side of his face.

“Yeah?” Adam confirms.

“So,” she says as she drags the ‘o,’ “let’s do our wolf pass on them.”

“That’s dangerous, no,” Adam sternly replies.

“Come on, live a little,” she whines.

“This is why mom and dad let me buy a motorcycle and you’re stuck piggybacking if you want to ride it. You can be so impulsive.”

“I’m brave,” she counters. “Now, please, it’s a tradition, we used to do it all the time. When did you become so boring?”

“I became more safety-conscious,” he grumbles and she whines his name in response. “Okay, okay, you win. For the sake of ending your whining, which is starting to become a safety hazard. But keep your hands around my waist the entire time,” Adam gives in.

She whispers, “And on three, two, one.”

IX. THE HOWL

Taylor turns away from the Moon to face the purple sedan as it squeals to a stop. The passenger door opens and Abigail's bright red curls demand attention. As she leans over the center console to hold the door open, Abigail grins and whisper-shouts, "You're so going to love it!" Taylor eagerly nods her head before ducking into the car. She's buckling her seatbelt as the car begins moving and Abigail immediately starts talking a mile a minute about how excited she is for tonight.

"So, in art history today," Abigail begins, cackling at her own thoughts, "Selena told me she was going to sing tonight."

"Why is that funny?" Taylor laughs as she responds, pulling her gaze from the sleeping houses they're passing.

"Have you ever heard her sing," Abigail asks and continues when Taylor shakes her head no, "She's terrible! Can't hold a note at all, like me. And you don't see me going up there. Imagine, me, up there, singing. Like a cat stuck in a tree, screeching for help."

Taylor is horrified, "Well you should tell her not to, so she doesn't embarrass herself!"

"We did! She sang the chorus of "All of Me" loud enough for the entire class to hear! When she finished, we tried to tell her as nicely as possible and she just laughed and said she knows she can't sing but she wants to do it anyway, to get a nice laugh out of the crowd. You know her, class clown," Abigail chuckles. "Says she's going to be super dramatic about the whole thing. Perform as crazily as possible."

Taylor, feeling out of breath just from listening to Abigail, takes a moment to breathe before she responds, “Wow, I wish I had her confidence. To know you sing terribly and to use it to get a laugh.”

The car jostles them around as they cross the train tracks, the woods and the Moon dominating their views. “Well you’re an excellent singer so nobody will be laughing at *you* tonight. You are still planning on singing, right?” Abigail questions as she glances at Taylor.

“Yeah, I guess,” Taylor replies nervously, glancing back.

“For sure you should!” Abigail shouts as she leans forward in excitement, grabbing the steering wheel for support. “You’re so good.”

The day Abigail discovered Taylor’s talents flashes into her thoughts. Taylor had turned to the sound of Abigail standing in the doorway, hand still grasping the knob, shrieking. She’ll never forget the feeling of her heart pounding against her chest. Out of breath and seemingly unable to move any part of her body, she had just stared back at her friend.

“Wow!” Abigail squealed. “You’re an amazing singer!”

“Wh-what are you doing here?” Taylor stuttered.

“Your parents let me in, I wanted to see if you’d come with me to the mall but now all I want to do is sit here and listen to you sing,” Abigail’s words rushed out as she moved to sit on the edge of Taylor’s bed.

“Oh, I don’t sing in front of people,” Taylor blushed, blood still pumping through her body at an alarming rate.

“You just did!” Abigail shouted and bounced up from the bed. “Oh my gosh, of course!”

“What?” Taylor asked nervously.

“There’s this fun karaoke-style singing show in a few weeks. You *have* to sing!”

Abigail gripped Taylor’s forearms a little too harshly from excitement.

As Taylor had begun to panic, mind racing to find a way out of the situation she found herself in, she’d felt tears build up. She’d never sung in front of anybody because she’d never had the confidence. Abigail wanted Taylor to expose a secret she’d kept her whole life. She’d stood still, tuning Abigail out as she planned every detail of Taylor’s performance.

Abigail had failed to notice the lyrics in the A Great Big World song she’d overheard Taylor singing. *Cheer up! It’s a great big world and there’s no need to cry.*

“I’m just nervous, being new and all. I don’t want to give people a reason to laugh at me,” Taylor shrugs and looks outside. “I’m not like Selena,” she quickly adds, and the two girls share a laugh.

Suddenly, a motorcycle flies by the car, testing the limits of the one-lane road as it slides into the shoulder next to them. Taylor can’t tell who’s driving it, but the young man releases a loud howl as he drives by, catching her eye and then turning his head up to the full Moon. Taylor is wide-eyed as she shifts in her seat to observe the driver as he speeds down the road in front of them.

“Jeez, you’d think that after what happened he wouldn’t drive like that,” Abigail gapes as she stares at the motorcycle drive into the night, too.

“Who is he?” Taylor asks wide-eyed.

“I don’t remember his name, he was a grade above me when it happened,” Abigail absentmindedly responds. “I’m surprised he’s even coming tonight. Must’ve taken a lot of convincing.”

“When what happened?” Taylor questions.

“Poor thing, he was driving his sister on that motorcycle a year ago when they got hit by a drunk driver,” Abigail whispers, slowly shaking her head. “I wonder if he’s really going to sing without her.”

The two stare ahead at the road, the motorcycle no longer in sight, the mood instantly dampened. For the first time tonight, Taylor thinks she’s not the only one less than enthusiastically attending.

X. GHOSTS

Adam is grinning from ear to ear as they race away from the purple sedan, adrenaline coursing through his veins. He turns to glance at his sister before releasing another short howl. She returns a grin and says, “See, wasn’t that fun, rebel?”

“Just like old times,” Adam responds and focuses back on the winding road.

“I think you should take this note down, ‘Listen to sister more,’” she boasts.

“Ha, ha. Never.”

She squeezes his torso in response and lays her head down on his left shoulder. Without speaking, he knows what she’s thinking. *I love you.* They call it their “wolf cub sense,” but he knows it really trickles down to the time they shared together for nine months in womb. Growing up, they always felt like one half of the other.

The rest of their drive is silent, save the constant hum of the motorcycle’s engine. When Adam turns off the main road onto a dusty, grass-covered dirt road, the silence is broken. Booming music can be heard from speakers hidden in the woods, farther down the road. In a couple of minutes, they will be engulfed by teenagers and young adults.

Adam brings the motorcycle to a slow stop behind a row of parked cars and gently turns to wake his sister, expecting to be greeted by the top of her auburn head. Instead, his eyes meet the dark, dirt road. He quickly glances around, searching for her presence. He feels like he’s been chasing a ghost all night.

“Hey, man,” a voice calls, interrupting Adam’s frantic search. When his eyes find the source of the voice, Adam is relieved to see it’s Benji. The last time he saw Benji in person was a about a month ago, at graduation. The dark, brown hair he remembered Benji having is now almost to his shoulders.

“Benji, it’s been a while, man. Your hair really grew since graduation,” Adam says as he walks over to him.

“Actually, I haven’t cut it since November,” Benji clarifies. Adam immediately feels guilty for not noticing until now. Benji quickly throws a joke to cut the tension, “It started with laziness, but now I kind of like it. And speaking of graduation, I’m happily surprised to see you here. Just like I was then.”

“Well they practically handed me my diploma for free after I missed so much school, I felt like I should go to thank them for their patience.”

“And what about tonight?” Benji questions, raising his eyebrows.

“You invited me,” Adam replies matter-of-factly.

Benji gives him a look, “That doesn’t always work.”

“Tonight, it did. And, I mean, you’ve arranged a tribute for my sister. I can’t pass that up,” Adam shyly smiles.

“I’m really happy you’re here, man,” Benji says as he gestures with his head for Adam to follow him. “I hope you’re able to get up there and sing for her. I think it’d really help you in the healing process.” One of the things Adam always appreciated about Benji was his no-nonsense conversations. He always said exactly what was on his mind.

“Me too, but I can’t say I’m not nervous,” Adam admitted.

“You’ve never been nervous to sing before,” Benji points out.

“She was always right by my side, singing included,” Adam begins, “and I didn’t have this weight of a thousand pitying and judging eyes. I know what everyone is going to be thinking while I’m up there.”

“I know this is easier said than done, but don’t worry about them. You’ve got people out there supporting you.”

Adam gives Benji a sincere smile, “I know.” The way Benji looks at him in response, confirms that he knows what Adam meant with those two words. *Thank you, Benji, for everything.*

The pair continue down the narrow path, following the light-lined trees. Within a couple of minutes, they walk out into a spacious clearing and are surrounded by hundreds of people waiting in front of a small, make-shift stage. The music is significantly louder here, as they’re near enough to see the speakers now.

Adam follows as Benji leads the way, seemingly headed to a specific spot. It soon becomes clear where they’re heading as Adam recognizes a few familiar faces. Adam begins to slow his pace as anxiety overtakes his body, and he isn’t there when Benji reaches the group ahead and turns to announce their arrival. He’s frozen a few paces behind. Benji gives him a small nod of encouragement.

Adam looks around the group of guys he once called friends and notices the hesitation in their eyes. They’re nervous to be around him, too. They’re not sure how to act, what to say, either.

They look like they’ve seen a ghost.

XI. WALLS OF INSINCERITY

Shortly after their encounter with the motorcyclist and his mysterious howl, things return to normal in the purple sedan. Abigail starts talking a mile a minute and Taylor doesn't have any objections.

Abigail eventually pulls the car into an improvised parking lot at the end of a dirt road. There's a few people milling around their cars, grabbing last minute items out of trunks. Taylor watches as someone reaches on their tiptoes to grab a purse shoved in the very back. Someone else pulls out a water bottle.

"Everyone else should be here already," Abigail says as she puts the car into park, referring to Selena and a few of Abigail's other friends. Taylor nods and the two get out of the car.

She's glancing around as she waits for Abigail to grab something from the back seat when something red and familiar catches the corner of her eye. *The motorcycle*. Her shoes crunch against the gravel as she races over to it, leaving Abigail to catch up later. It makes sense that it's here, after learning its driver might sing tonight, but her mind had half-convinced her that she'd imagined the whole thing. She reaches up to softly touch it, needing to feel proof that it's there. She's still studying the motorcycle when Abigail stops next to her, announcing that she's ready.

"That guy did come," Taylor comments as the two begin to follow other attendees farther into the woods.

"I'll have to ask Selena if she remembers his name," Abigail decides.

When the girls walk out into the clearing, Taylor's comfort and confidence begin to shrink as she realizes how many people are here tonight. It's overwhelming. There are

hundreds of people standing in groups talking, waiting for the show to start. Since it's a yearly tradition to celebrate the start of summer break, it seems like nearly every youth from her new town is here. She's panicking internally, trying to act nonchalant externally, as Abigail leads them over to where Selena is standing with a few people. Abigail had mentioned it was a big deal, but Taylor hadn't realized it'd be this huge.

Taylor's never felt relaxed in social situations. She made two friends in pre-K, table buddies as the teacher had called it, and she stuck with them for years. Her go-to stress balls. She'd run to them, throw all her anxieties their way and they knew exactly how to calm her. Then she moved here, without them. As a little girl she searched for more outgoing and socially-confident people to latch onto, for comfort. And now, that's Abigail.

But it isn't fool-proof. Having Abigail near her isn't always enough to curb her social anxiety. Maybe all those years she'd spent in the comfort of her two best friends had kept her from developing social confidence. She always knew she had two friends by her side, so she never pushed herself. But being here tonight, she knows she's trying.

"Hey girl hey!" Abigail shouts as she runs up behind Selena, jumping onto her back from behind.

"Ow, Abigail!" Selena says as she tries to keep her balance. Taylor catches up, a few paces slower.

Abigail hops off her back and gives her a quick hug before turning to Taylor, pulling her into the huddle. "Guess who we saw on the drive over," she teases.

The group looks at her expectantly, eager for the gossip. When she doesn't give it up quickly, someone asks, "Well?"

"Okay, so I don't know his name," she answers as everyone groans, "but, but, but," she holds a finger up, "it was that guy whose twin died last year."

“Wait, is he coming tonight?” Selena raises her brows.

“Yeah, we saw his motorcycle in the lot. And he nearly shoved us off the road on the way here,” Abigail grumpily mutters.

“What do you mean?” someone asks.

“He sped by us and howled at the Moon,” Taylor chimes in.

“Interesting,” Selena comments. “I think I heard about a tribute tonight. I wonder if he’ll be the one singing.”

“I’m not sure, but I know someone else who is singing tonight,” Abigail grins as she looks around the group.

“Yeah, and I can’t wait to absolutely knock everyone else’s performances out of the park, or more appropriately, the woods,” Selena smirks as she mimics swinging a baseball bat.

“Not you,” Abigail rolls her eyes, “I’m talking about Taylor.” She jumps up and down as she gestures to Taylor.

All the eyes in the group flash to Taylor as someone asks, “Really?”

Abigail excitedly nods and says, “Yes, and not as a joke like Selena. Taylor is such a good singer. Y’all are going to be shook.”

Taylor forces out a fake smile to try and calm her nerves, feeling uneasy with so much attention focused on her. “Yeah, good luck knocking my performance out of the park,” she says and follows it with a forced laugh.

Nobody sees through her façade as they laugh and move onto the subject of song choices. Even though she’s standing in a circle of people, surrounded by other circles of people, Taylor feels incredibly lonely. She finds it hard to imagine there’s anybody else here who’s as scared as she is. She can feel her confidence retreating and the anxiety taking over.

With Abigail's glowing review, people will be expecting a lot. And who knows how many other people she told? She doesn't like talking about herself, and she doesn't really like any attention on her if she can help it.

Looking for a place to hide out, Taylor takes quick note of her options. There's a concession stand, of sorts, with a small seating area for people to sit down and eat. All the tables are full, each one encircled with people, so it isn't really a good option. The Porta Potty would be an easy option if the line wasn't a mile long. And the photo booth area was not a place to go to be alone.

Taylor begins to conclude the only option is to stay put, when she spots an unlit path next to the stage. It's dark, but clearly worn down. Taylor slowly shies away from the group, and heads for the path.

XII. INTO THE WOODS

*Not wanting to be seen,
Into the woods went a teen,
Away from her friends.*

*Did the boy standing near,
See her and veer,
Away from his friends?*

*The Moon waits,
and watches.*

Just what...

is

She

Plotting?

XIII. OUT HERE

As she takes a step and crosses over from the clearing into the trees, Taylor stares ahead at the dark abyss in front of her. The trees are so thick and plentiful that even light of the bright Moon can't break through. She should be nervous, scared even, to be venturing off on her own in an unfamiliar place, surrounded by darkness. But she isn't.

Maybe it's because she can tell the path was worn down from once frequent travel. It reminds her that someone else had ventured down this same path at one point. She isn't completely alone, because someone had been here once. Someone had made the same decision as her once. It brings her comfort.

She continues to venture farther into the woods, glancing down often to make sure she's still following the barely-visible path. She can still hear the pumping music as it wafts from the clearing behind her, but there's another sound pulsing into her ears. It's a soft clicking, mixed with a buzzing noise. It takes Taylor a moment, but she realizes the origin of the sound: cicadas. They're joining the song. Mixing into the music. Creating a remix. Invisible contributors from the deep, black beyond.

Taylor continues along the path, unsure where she'll end up. She's not worried about being alone, rather, she's relieved to have left the hordes of people staring at her and their expectations behind. Out here, she's not the new girl. She's not the amazing singer Abigail hyped her up to be. Out here, alone.

Except she's not alone, she realizes, as she spots a clearing ahead. The Moon peeks through the lack of trees, illuminating a secret spot deep within the woods. Taylor gazes around as she breaks into the clearing, crossing the perimeter of trees. The bright, white moonlight softly touches everything.

There must be a thousand yellow flowers littering the clearing. A thousand, teeny, tiny, golden flowers. Each with eight petals gathered around a warm, auburn center. And they are everywhere. The sight brings an instant smile to Taylor's face, and she knows this sight alone was worth the long trek.

Taylor ventures into the middle of the smattering of flowers and lays down, careful to disturb the least amount possible. Her gaze moves to the night sky, and she takes a few deep breaths as she zeroes in on the Moon. She can still hear the music in the distance, if she listens hard enough for it, but her clearing is serene.

When she takes a particularly deep breath, Taylor thinks she catches a whiff of chocolate. Confused, she carefully plucks a flower from the ground next to her and softly strokes its petals. She's purposefully inhaling its delicious, chocolate scent when her fortress of solitude is broken.

A loud howl echoes through the clearing.

XIV. ANGEL

Adam is standing next to his friends as they wait in line for food. They're talking like he's not even there, and he's okay with that. He doesn't really want to talk, anyway. Not talking allows him time to adjust to everything without trying to socialize at the same time. It'd been a while since he'd ventured out of the house, and it'd been an exceptionally long time since he'd seen anybody but Benji. And the only person he wants to see right now, is his sister.

His sister.

His sister.

"Of course," Adam mumbles as he turns around quickly, searching his memories for a reminder. "Where is it," he questions out loud.

"Where's what?" Benji responds, thinking the question was directed at him.

Adam's head snaps back and he makes eye contact with Benji as he answers, "Uh, nothing. I'll be right back, okay?"

Benji nods his response as Adam leaves the group. He rushes to the side of the stage, hoping he's remembering correctly.

That's when he sees her.

His sister.

Except this time, she's wearing a halo. A bright, golden halo is glowing atop her head.

His *angel*.

She's walking down the path, slowly enough that he can follow her. He doesn't need to follow her, he knows where this path ends. After all, it is *their* path. But he doesn't want

her to disappear again, like she has been all night. He doesn't want to lose her again. Can't lose her again tonight.

So, they continue – Adam silently following his sister into the woods. He watches her as she makes her way into the clearing, hanging back to remain hidden. She's pacing the clearing, looking in awe at the golden flowers he knows she loves so much. When she lays down and picks a flower, he knows it's her before she even brings the daisy to her nose.

He cautiously leans into the clearing.

XV. NOT ALONE

There's a loud howl.

Taylor panics.

The nervousness she should've felt earlier at the thought of being surrounded by wilderness catches up to her.

She halts her movements.

Slows her breathing.

Closes her eyes, as the footsteps she failed to hear earlier pick up again.

XVI. BLUE EYES

“Sis?” Adam hesitantly whispers, after the angel laying in front of him fails to respond to his howling. He’s now thinking it’s too good to be true. That his eyes are deceiving him. That there is no way his sister is laying in their spot. That when she disappeared earlier it was for good. But he wants to hold out hope. She *had* visited him tonight, twice already.

When she rushes to sit up, he has his answer. Her halo was merely the glow of the Moon hitting her blonde head of hair. She jolts up, and faces him. Her blue eyes greeting his green ones only continue to confirm it’s not his sister. He’s quickly disappointed. And heartbroken.

It’s not his angel.

XVII. TWO TEENS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Two teens alone in the woods.

He chases a ghost,

She hides from fears.

Two teens alone in the woods.

He can't move on from his past,

She's wary of her future.

Two teens alone in the woods.

He meets her with sadness,

She meets him with surprise.

Two teens alone in the woods.

XVIII. WHO ARE YOU?

Adam is staring at her. *Her*, but who is she? He knows who she isn't. That's obvious. As he studies her for clues, the Moon casts a heavenly glow upon her, the dress she wears a blinding, sparkling white. He's struck with enchantment. Adam realizes as she stares back that maybe she is, too.

"Have we met?" Adam asks with a chuckle, curious to hear her talk. She's staring, and he wants to know why. Surely, he thinks, he doesn't look nearly as angelic as she does.

At first, she meekly shakes her head no. Then, she quietly says, "But your howl is fairly recognizable."

"That was the point," he says mostly to himself, then eyes her, "although I'm not sure how you know it."

"What?" she asks in breathless disbelief, and Adam realizes he might've sounded accusatory.

"I thought you were my sister," he answers, and watches her reaction. There it is, the pity. Her eyebrows scrunched, mouth parted. It was there for a fraction of a second before she tried to cover it up again. Adam turns to leave when she quickly attempts to recover, opening her mouth silently to protest his decision.

She sputters a few words out before she pointedly shouts, "Well, you were rather loud back there on your motorcycle!"

Adam halts his movements and turns to face her again. This time, she's wearing a look of determination. She's trying to steer the conversation away from his pain. He has to give her credit, most people choke up and stay quiet, nervous to continue any kind of conversation. "Purple sedan?"

“Uh huh,” she nods her head vigorously, crossing her arms.

He’s questioning how he forgot those gorgeous blue eyes looking back at him, huge from shock. “Sorry, I was having a moment,” Adam laughs.

She silently nods and responds, “Just don’t do it again, you almost ran us off the road.”

“Agreed,” he says as she goes to sit back down. She brings the flower back to her nose and he crosses the clearing to join her, accepting her silent invitation. He thinks it’s funny, really, since this is *his* clearing, after all. His and his sister’s.

“Why do you do it,” she politely asks.

“Do what?” He asks, hoping she’ll notice his hesitance to talk about it and move onto a new subject.

She eyes him softly and says, “You know what.”

Adam doesn’t answer right away. He’s not sure he can trust her, he has no idea who she even is. He doesn’t recognize her from around town, doesn’t know her name, her agenda for asking him to spill his feelings. Then, he realizes that she’s the perfect person to talk to, because he *doesn’t* know her. She doesn’t know him. There is no judgment in her eyes.

“It was me and my sister’s thing,” he vaguely answers, before she gives him another look to continue. “My mom called us her wolf cubs. We embraced it,” Adam shrugs.

She breaks eye contact with him before she quietly confesses, “I heard what happened.”

Adam hastily stands and turns away from her. He knew it was too good to be true. She’s not as unaware as he hoped. He hears her shuffle around to watch him from where she’s sitting and he grumpily mutters, “Of course you did. The whole town did.”

She mumbles in defense, “Well I *just* heard. I’m not from here.”

“And where is it that you’re from?” he faces her again, hoping to steer the conversation away from the most painful event in his life. He’d rather they talk about her.

“Suburb of Pittsburgh,” she answers, seeming to sense his discomfort.

“Why are you out here, alone?” he asks honestly, concerned for her safety. And since he doesn’t know her, his, too.

“I should ask the same of you,” she admits.

“Well you already know who I am,” Adam shakes his head, disagreeing. “You could probably guess.”

She pauses and replies, “Do I?”

Adam is taken off guard by her question, “What?”

She looks up at him from her spot across the clearing. “I don’t really know you. But I’ll admit I might know some second-hand information about you.”

He takes a deep breath, “The people at school still gossip about me?”

“Not really,” she says. “If you hadn’t rushed by our car I doubt the topic would’ve come up. And I swear she wasn’t trying to be hurtful when she told me.”

“They never intend that, sure,” Adam says and sits back down, “but it doesn’t mean it still doesn’t hurt.”

“I know,” she agrees, “that’s why I’m out here, by myself.”

He looks at her, his interest piqued at the idea of moving away from talking about his life and learning more about her, “What do you mean?”

“Some people have so much self-confidence that they forget others don’t,” she begins, pulling her hands together and fidgeting. “My friend, she means well, but she doesn’t see it. She doesn’t notice that I don’t like talking about myself, that I don’t like attention on me.”

He nods, encouraging her to continue.

“In Pittsburgh, my friends just knew. They knew when I was uncomfortable and they let me be. But Abigail doesn’t.”

“Did you tell her?” Adam asks.

“What?”

“Did you tell her, how sometimes you need her to back off, give you time?” He looks at her with wide eyes, for emphasis.

“Well...” she looks away. “No. But shouldn’t she just know?”

“Not if you don’t tell her. You can’t hold it against her if you never tell her.”

“I’m not holding it against her though,” she says matter-of-factly.

“Hiding out here isn’t holding it against her?” Adam smirks at her.

She looks back at him, dumbfounded, like she’d never considered this. “But she’s my friend, I don’t want to lose her.”

“You’d be surprised at how understanding a friend can be,” Adam smiles, thinking of Benji, who’d been good to him even when Adam wasn’t in return.

“Do you speak from experience?” she wonders.

“Yeah,” Adam nods, “I do.”

XIX. THE GOSSIP

Taylor studies the man sitting next to her. She never expected to be spilling her deepest fears to a stranger in the woods, alone, after midnight. Ever since she moved, she's been careful how she steps, trying to avoid any eggshells. She's worried that any misstep will result in losing Abigail. Taylor loves Abigail's confidence, her passion, her love to love others. It makes her hesitant to talk to Abigail about any grievances, because she wants to keep their friendship.

But, Taylor realizes, this green-eyed stranger is right. Not talking to Abigail for fear of losing her would only lead to bad energy festering and might result in losing her anyway. Her old friends only knew exactly how to push or avoid her buttons because they'd grown up together. They'd witnessed her anxieties first-hand throughout the years.

The truth was, she had gotten lucky in finding their friendship so young. Taylor had tried to treat her friendship with Abigail the same, unintentionally expecting her to get her like her old friends had, just because Abigail had *seemed* to right from the start. Taylor realizes now she put such a heavy expectation on Abigail.

She's eager to sort everything out with Abigail, to make their friendship stronger. Abigail can remind Taylor to embrace attention and be confident. Taylor just needs Abigail to recognize when she should back off a bit. So far, she'd just been hoping and assuming Abigail would catch on by herself.

And it's all because of this stranger, Taylor is reminded when he glances sideways at her, that she realizes her own fault in her friendship. She's not sure why she was able to open to him so easily. Was it because he didn't know who she was? He wasn't expecting anything of her, except maybe the fact that she'd gossiped about him. But he wasn't thinking of her as

the new girl, as the shy girl, as the girl who Abigail boasted can sing. She was just a girl in the woods.

She doesn't know his story, either. Not really, anyway. She has a vague understanding, but it isn't confirmed, and it certainly isn't from his viewpoint.

"What are you thinking so intensely about?" he asks suddenly, looking at her, eyebrows creased slightly.

Taylor smiles and answers, "I was just wondering when you were going to set the story straight. Tell me who you are, so I can get my info directly from the source."

"Why, so you can bring the gossip back to your friends?" he scoffs.

"I would never," Taylor says seriously. "Besides, if they already know this gossip like you say everyone does, they wouldn't find it interesting anyways."

He looks at her, "Like that's true."

"I know, I was just trying to break the tension," she softly says. She looks him right in the eye when she continues, "I won't tell anybody, I don't even know your name. And you don't know mine. That's why I trusted you with my secrets."

"Two strangers, alone in the woods, spilling our darkest thoughts," he chuckles.

Taylor giggles back, "What a marvelous idea." For a few moments, they hold each other's stares.

"What do you already know?" he quietly asks, an unsure quiver in his voice.

"I thought we already established that I don't know anything. Second-hand knowledge might as well be zero knowledge, in the grand scheme of things," she jokes before getting serious, "Just start wherever you feel most comfortable."

He slowly nods his head and then murmurs, “Tonight was the first time I’ve been back on that motorcycle. That stupid hunk of metal and I made it out fine besides some bumps and bruises.”

“Why tonight?” Taylor genuinely wonders.

“I should say, ‘It’s because it’s been a year,’ that, ‘It’s time,’” he begins. “But really it’s because of Benji.”

“Who’s that?”

“My best friend. He arranged for a tribute during the final slot, after everyone gets their turn on stage tonight,” he answers, smiling softly.

“A tribute?” Taylor asks like she’s got no idea what he means. She doesn’t want to be the one to bring up his sister, though.

He looks down, at the flowers, as he says, “My sister.”

Taylor nods, not daring to make a sound at such a vulnerable moment for him.

“Growing up, we were constantly singing for our parents and friends... anyone who would listen, really. So when we heard about this event, back in junior high, we were all over it. We came every year. And the last few woods years we’d sneak out of the house, on that stupid motorcycle I bought,” he mutters, shaking his head, like he’s scolding his past self. “Last year, we were driving back home when someone hit us, a drunk driver.”

Taylor can feel her eyes watering the more he talks.

“So Benji set up this tribute for the end of the show, since it’s the first one without her, and he wants me to sing it. I think there’s a backup singer if I don’t, but he’d rather I do it.”

“Are you?” Taylor questions, as soundlessly as she can.

“I don’t know, maybe,” he glances around the clearing, scanning it like he’s searching for something. “We’d always listen to the show here though, before singing.”

Taylor sits up instantly, now fully aware of this place’s significance to him. She understands now who carved the path with their feet. Why the grass started to grow back.

It’s because she died.

It’s because they stopped coming.

XX. CHOCOLATE DAISES

Adam watches her drop the flower she'd picked earlier, "I'm sorry," she rushes out of her mouth.

"It's okay, really," he smiles. "I'm glad it could become someone else's getaway."

"I still feel rude. You came here to be with her in spirit and I ruined that," she hangs her head down slightly.

He doesn't respond right away, wondering if he should share with the blue-eyed stranger just how rude *he* was, to follow her. Surely, she'd be creeped out. "When I saw you walk down the path, I was struck into this hopeful trance that you were her, so I followed you," he finally admits.

"I'm sorry," she says, wide-eyed.

"For what?" he laughs, confused. She isn't insulted.

"Well you wanted me to be her, and I wasn't. That must've been disappointing."

Adam gives her a half-smile, "Only partially true." He sees her blush, and then continues. "We used to come all the time, after we first discovered it. Sometimes every weekend. She loved the flowers," he nods towards the flower she dropped. She picks it up and Adam says, "After she died, I didn't have a reason to come back."

"Until tonight," she whispers, carefully clutching the flower between her fingers.

"Until tonight," he confirms.

"Still," she starts, shaking her head, "I shouldn't have picked any of them. They're not mine to pick."

“I forgive you, and I know my sister would, too,” Adam says and picks another one, handing it to her. “Besides, she’d love that someone else loves them just as much as she did.”

“They smell so good!” She exclaims, laughing as she grabs it from him.

Adam nods and says, “Chocolate daises. They only bloom at night.”

“I’ll cherish them, thank you,” she gazes at the flowers in her hands.

“You better, because you’re not getting any more. I don’t want my clearing to start smelling like grass,” he says, making a pretend horrified face.

“How are you ever going to monitor my flower picking?” She grins and pretends to start picking another.

“Guess I’ll just have to come back here every night, to keep you in check,” Adam counters, gently swatting her hand away. He’s a bit disappointed when she doesn’t respond to his flirtatious line, only offering him a blush. He wants her to say, ‘It’s a date.’

“So when this whole singing shindig is over, what do teenagers do for the rest of the summer?” She asks instead.

“Well when I was still in high school, there wasn’t much to do. It’s a pretty small town,” Adam answers, trying to think of what he and his friends used to do during the summer. “There’s a haunted bridge people like to graffiti.”

“A haunted bridge?” she exclaims, eyebrows raised.

“Yeah, it’s called Lacey’s Bridge, I think. There’s a pretty gruesome backstory,” Adam keeps the details short, hoping she’ll want to know more and ask. He doesn’t want their conversation to end anytime soon.

“Oh gosh, I’m torn between wanting to know and wanting to be spared from nightmares,” she scratches the back of her neck.

“It’s only creepy when you actually go,” he laughs.

“You’ve been?” She shrieks.

“Of course, what else is there to do here?” his laughs continue. “It’s actually not that far from here...”

“Okay, okay, let’s just, change the subject,” she holds her hands out, trying to put some physical distance between her and Lacey’s tale.

“I should take you sometime,” he says, again attempting to subtly flirt.

“Heck no,” she laughs, “I’d embarrass myself on so many levels. Between the ghosts and the questionable legality of spray painting it, I’d be freaking out the whole time.”

“Don’t worry, I’d protect you,” he grins, hoping she’ll catch on to him.

“Oh,” she blushes again, sending him a soft smile, “okay.”

“When we go,” he smirks, earning another blush, “what are you going to write?”

“To be honest, I’m not sure I’d have the courage to write anything,” she quietly admits.

“Why not?” he’s genuinely interested in what she’d want the concrete to permanently say and he won’t accept no answer.

“Like I said, I’d be spooked the whole time from noises. Either a ghost is going to pop out or a cop will emerge from the shadows to bust me. I don’t see myself leaving there without something bad happening,” she shakes her head.

“Then just imagine a perfect world, no ghosts or cops, just you, me, the bridge and a can of spray paint. What would you want the world to know about you, for years to come?” he gives her a hypothetical, hoping she’ll relax and answer him.

“Um,” she says, looking down at the ground with a blank stare, “maybe like a lyric or something?”

“You sound uncertain still, we’re talking about something that’s going to be there, forever,” Adam pushes.

“Well there is this one thing I was always drawing as a kid,” she begins, face a deep red now, like she is very embarrassed to divulge this secret.

“Come on, just tell me,” he says with a hint of urgency in his voice. He wants to know this information she’s so keen on keeping hidden.

She rolls her eyes before saying, “Okay, when I was little I was always drawing flowers everywhere. Except, the middle part, like the circle, had a smiley face inside it. Always.”

“That’s adorable,” he smiles honestly at her. “And obviously an important part of you to document forever on a haunted bridge,” he lightly jokes to relieve her nervousness.

“I haven’t even gotten to the best part,” she laughs now, “I called them Happy Flowers.”

They’re sharing a laugh when the music, nearly forgotten by Adam, fades out and the sound of microphone feedback takes its place. He hears Benji’s voice cut in, announcing the next singer and promising the tribute will start shortly. Adam makes eye contact with her blue ones again, a smile pulling at his lips.

He scrambles to his feet in the blink of an eye, and dashes back toward the path. When he reaches the beginning of the trail, he looks back at her, sitting in a daze. He thinks about saying something to her, telling her his name, maybe. But he decides against it. Right now, their conversation is anonymous. And he thinks he wants to keep the mystery going for a little bit longer.

So instead, he lets out a howl and sprints into the woods.

He is swallowed by its darkness.

XXI. THE PENNULTIMATE SINGER

She is enchanted. One second, he's sitting next to her. The next, their private moment has been infiltrated by an announcer with a mic. Finally, he's gone. From beside her, to standing on the edge of the clearing, to gone. *Gone. Just like that.*

Taylor didn't even have time to ask him about his name, or if he was going to sing. Or if they'd ever see each other again. She's sad she doesn't get the chance to find out what he would graffiti on the haunted bridge.

His howl is burned into her ears, his green eyes seared into her mind. She could only imagine what his voice would sound like if he decided to sing.

Sing. He's going to *sing*.

Of course.

He'd gotten up right after the announcer talked about the tribute starting soon. Taylor gets to her feet as fast as possible. She doesn't want to miss it if she's right and he really is going to sing. She makes sure her two flowers are secure in her hands before she sprints after him, into the woods.

Compared to her journey in, her journey out is filled with haste. She's desperate to catch up with him, or at the very least get to the audience before he takes the stage. The soft hum from the insects is forgotten; the bright, white Moon only noticeable because of the light it's providing.

Taylor doesn't see a trace of the stranger's hurried dash to leave her. No leaves are rustled from the wind in his wake, no sound of his footsteps echoing behind him. She's so focused on getting back to the stage area as quickly she can, that she doesn't take the

appropriate measures to slow down near the end. As a result, she runs directly into an audience member.

“Oof,” they mumble and catch her. It’s a guy, with long, dark-brown hair.

“So sorry!” she apologizes, gathering her balance.

“S’okay,” he smiles, a full, bright smile. He seems to recognize her and asks, “Hey, you’re Taylor, right?”

Her cheeks blush a deep red and she nods her head, “Y-yeah.”

“You’re next! I’ve been looking for you, for a while now. You’re the penultimate singer,” he nods his head eagerly, and Taylor looks down to the microphone in his right hand.

“Penultimate?” Taylor questions, confused.

“Second-to-last,” he explains.

“Wait, who’s last?” she starts putting pieces together.

“My friend Adam, he’s doing a tribute for his sister,” the guy she suspects is Benji, confirms Taylor’s thoughts. He sticks out his left thumb and points a few feet ahead. There, slowly swaying to the music, is Taylor’s green-eyed stranger.

Adam.

Taylor is so distracted by learning his name, and staring at his profile, that she doesn’t really pay attention to Benji lightly patting her shoulder until he nearly shoves her. She’s aware that Benji definitely notices her eyes were locked on his friend, and when she turns to face him, she’s dazed.

“Your turn,” he smiles, genuinely encouraging her.

“Wh-what?” she stutters, slightly confused.

“Hope you’ve got a song picked out,” Benji chuckles, handing her the microphone.

She hesitantly grabs it, nodding. She didn't have a song picked out, but she did feel inspired. Just as she realized she'd have to sing without music, the singer before her descends the stage. Benji takes the microphone from them and gives Taylor another reassuring smile and push, bringing the device to his lips.

“Okay everybody, let's welcome Taylor to the stage!”

Taylor grips the metal handrail as she takes a couple deep breaths, and slowly puts one foot in front of the other. The crowd gives a small cheer, following Benji's commands. Goosebumps begin to litter Taylor's skin, originating from her neck. It feels like someone is watching her.

She stops mid-step, and peers behind her. The rational side of her is telling her it's just one of the many people in the audience. The other side is hopeful she'll meet Adam's green gaze.

After searching for a few tense seconds, her hopeful side wins. There, right where she left him, is Adam. This time, he's dazed.

XXII. ENCHANTED*

There I was again tonight

Forcing laughter, faking smiles

Same old tired, lonely place.

Walls of insincerity

Shifting eyes and vacancy

Vanished when I saw your face.

All I can say is it was enchanting to meet you.

* Taylor Swift, “Enchanted,” track 9 on *Speak Now*, Big Machine Records, 2010, compact disc.

XXIII. SUPPORT SYSTEM

Adam is staring at Taylor. She's on the stage, singing so beautifully that he can't focus on anything but her, and her voice. There's no music, only her strong, never-wavering voice. Even the crowd is silent as she sings. No one dares to interrupt. The Moon casts a spotlight on her, demanding their attention.

She keeps her gaze forward, avoiding any contact with his eyes, save the moments she sings the word "you." It's then, that she cautiously, delicately, finds him in the crowd. Just as he begins to wonder if this song is a secret message for him, it ends. She stops singing and the crowd roars to life.

He watches as she softly blushes, and turns to exit the stage. She hands the microphone back to Benji, who's enthusiastically nodding like a bobblehead. Adam notices she blushes even more when a red-headed girl comes bouncing up the stairs to meet her halfway. As they hug, Adam spots Benji making his way over. Adam notes that Benji saw him staring, but doesn't mention it when he stops in front of him to hand over a mic.

"You ready?" Benji asks, his voice laced with a therapeutic calmness.

"I think, yeah," Adam breaks his watch of the girls and looks to Benji.

"What're you singing?" Benji leans close to whisper, no doubt trying to keep Adam from feeling too overwhelmed by the presence of the crowd surrounding them. They're all watching him, knowing the tribute is next.

"Something I wrote a while ago, to help me grieve," Adam answers honestly, the nerves in his voice clear.

"Are you sure?" Benji looks at him in surprise.

“Yeah,” is all Adam says before he takes the microphone from Benji and begins walking to the stairs. He doesn’t want to lose the little confidence he has at the moment. When he left the clearing, confidence was rushing through his body. As the time got nearer to the tribute, it had dwindled.

Adam reaches the bottom of the stairs, the girls still huddled around his blue-eyed stranger. He overhears the red-head squeal compliments her way and is reminded that she isn’t a stranger anymore. Her name is Taylor.

He begins his ascent, hand on the rail for steadying purposes because his attention isn’t fully focused on making it up the stairs. Instead, he’s looking at her, Taylor. She finally notices his presence and quickly looks back.

He gives her a nod, and grins, “Taylor.” She responds with a bright red blush, and Adam sees how her friends don’t miss it. The red-head takes a massive breath of surprise, glancing between Adam and Taylor.

“Adam,” Taylor nods back. The red-head keeps her wide eyes focused on him. By that reaction, he knows she’ll demand they talk about him, later.

It doesn’t take him long to reach the top, and he goes over to the backup band to tell them not to worry about playing any music. He then heads for the center of the stage, sticking the microphone into its stand. He looks over to Benji, standing proudly and directly in front of him, always a constant beam of support.

Adam gives him a slight nod, and Benji brings his own microphone to his mouth, ready to announce the beginning of the tribute. Adam takes deep, soothing breaths. As Benji gives a small speech, Adam spots his sister.

She's right there, leaning against Benji, smiling. His two-person support system, together again. He knows now that she's a ghost only he can see, given that Benji doesn't look down at her touch.

With both of them watching, he sings the first lyrics.

XXIV. BREATHE*

Music starts playing like the end of a sad movie.

It's the kind of ending you don't really want to see.

Because it's tragedy and it'll only bring you down.

Now I don't know what to be without you around.

And we know it's never simple, never easy,

Never a clean break,

No one here to save me.

You're the only thing I know like the back of my hand.

And I can't breathe without you,

But I have to,

Breathe without you,

But I have to.

* Taylor Swift, "Breathe," track 7 on *Fearless*, Big Machine Records, 2008, compact disc.

XXV. FRENZY

Adam and Taylor are pulled in different directions. Adam is bombarded on the stage by Benji, tears in both of their eyes as they embrace one another. Taylor is yanked by her friend Abigail, who is eager to get home before her parents notice she's gone. And probably to interrogate Taylor about Adam, too.

Both teenagers are filled with an overwhelming amount of emotions. Taylor has conquered a major fear: anxiety. Adam has reached a new stage of grief: acceptance.

The audience looks like a pile of ants, trying to recover from the accidental step of a shoe. Some are still clapping, oblivious to the chaos around them. Others are sprinting for the exits, heading for their cars. There are people waiting in line for last minute food and drink, or to use the bathroom before hitting the road.

But Adam and Taylor are being lead different ways. Despite both teenagers wanting to reconnect, they don't get to.

At least, not in the frenzy.

XXVI. THE CONVERSATION

Abigail is steering Taylor away from the stage, the two intertwined by their elbows. Taylor tries to crane her neck to glance back, spotting Adam still on stage, tangled in Benji's arms. Taylor brings her focus back to Abigail as she continues to gush about her performance.

"That was so good, so good, so good!" Abigail shouts, twirling her and Taylor.

"Thank you," Taylor whispers, overcome with disbelief. She'd really gone up there and sung. And not only that, but she'd sung an original. That she'd just wrote in her head. That basically confessed her crush on Adam. *To Adam*. Before she'd made eye contact with him from the stage, her confidence had dwindled. Then, like she'd been struck by lightning, it'd ignited her and she knew she couldn't leave that stage without expressing her feelings. He made her feel confident.

"And don't think I've forgotten," Abigail teases with a grin, "I plan on having a serious conversation about that thing that happened on the stairs."

Mention of having a serious conversation triggers Taylor's own plans for driving topics. "Okay," Taylor promises Abigail and herself, determined to speak up for herself like Adam suggested.

Their shoes pound against the gravel as they speed-walk to the purple sedan. Taylor vaguely recalls they said their goodbyes to Selena and crew, but she's still in too much shock to really remember it. Abigail was set on getting out of the parking lot before it got jammed, talking about not wanting to waste any time sitting idle.

They reach the car and Abigail releases Taylor, quickly fishing the keys out of her bag and punching the unlock button. She's opening the door and sliding in before Taylor even

makes first contact with the door handle. Taylor ducks into the passenger seat, amazed at Abigail's swiftness.

"Wow, you really mean business, huh?" Taylor chuckles as Abigail begins to back out, already buckled.

"Oh yes," Abigail giggles back, "now buckle up before we hit the highway."

Taylor does as she's told and sneaks a quick peak out of her window, searching for a particular set of green eyes. There are a ton.

"Looking for someone?" Abigail wiggles her eyebrows, getting her car positioned in the steadily growing line.

"I guess you're ready to talk now, huh?" Taylor laughs, a genuine, loud laugh.

"Hey, I've got nothing but time," Abigail gestures ahead, to the waiting line of cars blocked by pedestrians.

"I met motorcycle guy tonight," Taylor admits.

"Really, hmm, is that what you were up to when you disappeared?"

Taylor turns in shock to look at Abigail, "You noticed?"

"I'm not dumb, of course I noticed," Abigail says, offended. "You're my friend."

"I didn't mean to imply that, I swear," Taylor rushes out. "I just thought I'd snuck off pretty quietly."

"Why did you sneak off, anyway?" The car moves forward a little, and Abigail turns to face Taylor once the car is stopped again. She looks hurt.

"I'm going to be honest, okay?" Taylor tests the waters. Abigail nods, a little confused, and waits for Taylor to continue. "I need a break."

"A break?" Abigail panics, "from me?" Taylor notices her friend is gripping the steering wheel tightly.

“Sort of,” Taylor answers honestly, causing Abigail more panic. She hurries to clear everything up, “But it’s my own fault, for not being an honest friend.”

“I’m confused,” Abigail draws her brows together. “What did I do?”

“Nothing, nothing, I swear,” Taylor brings her hand to her forehead, rubbing it. She’s stressing, because this isn’t going smoothly. “What I mean to say is, that I never told you how sometimes I get anxious, and by sometimes, I mean a lot. Especially when talking about myself, or tons of people are around.”

“Like tonight,” Abigail realizes, guilt filling her eyes.

“Yes, yes!” Taylor confirms, turning in her seat and softly touching Abigail’s tense arm. “But I never told you. I never mentioned how sometimes I need the conversation to be directed away from me. That I like to *listen*, in large groups. And I really hate talking about myself.”

“I’m so sorry, it really feels like my fault,” Abigail instantly blurts, tapping her thumb against the wheel.

“No, it’s my fault. For assuming you’d get it without me saying anything. And then getting upset when you didn’t,” Taylor removes her hand and brings it back to rest on her lap. “Because you couldn’t have known, obviously,” Taylor attempts humor.

“And then I basically forced you onto that stage,” she says in horror.

“I needed to do that, and I’m glad I did. Sometimes I need a little nudge. I’m just saying that sometimes, I don’t,” Taylor smiles softly.

“Okay,” Abigail still looks unsure about feeling guilty but agrees, the two of them sharing a nod.

Neither of them say anything more for a bit, listening to the near-silent hum of the radio. Taylor returns her gaze to out her window, searching again. Just as she remembers

that Abigail never got to hear the rest of her story with Adam, she spots him, taking brief glances at the faces he passes. The purple sedan is seconds from turning onto the highway when he looks back at her, too. Taylor sees him grin, then wink. He disappears as Abigail asks, “Do you smell chocolate?”

XXVII. I'M HERE

Adam turns and runs, making his way back to the clearing. He knows what he wants to do, but he doesn't know how to accomplish it yet. For now, he's starting with step one. It's hard, swimming upstream like a salmon, dodging and skirting around all the attendees leaving. But he's determined, and he uses that determination to egg him on.

He reaches the stage area, still littered with last minute stragglers. Benji is on the stage, assisting the band as they pack everything up. After the tribute, when Benji had hugged him, it had been exactly what he needed. It felt like he was hugging the epitome of comfort. Warmth, and reassurance that he wasn't completely alone.

When they finally broke apart, Adam wanted nothing more than to see Taylor. He had hastily searched the frenzied crowd for her, spotting her as she was entering the path back to the parking lot. Because he'd nearly run her off the road coming here, he knew what car she'd be in and he took off for the lot.

By the time he'd arrived, there were people and cars everywhere. He'd continued to search for the purple sedan, locating it just as it was about to pull onto the highway. Taylor's blue eyes were already on him. That's when his plan had evolved. It was too late to stop her and chat, so he'd have to find a different way to reconnect with her.

And now, that plan is in action. He sprints onto the old, recently re-traveled hidden path. The Moon still guides him along, providing just enough light to see him through to the clearing. He arrives at his destination, panting and alive with adrenaline. He pauses for a few seconds, trying to catch his breath, before bending down.

"You know I love you," comes his sister's voice, from behind, "so much."

Adam forgets his mission and removes his grip from the flower stems he was just about to pick. "I know. I do, too," he replies instantly, turning to face her.

She's standing a couple feet away, a smile gracing her lips, "I know."

"I could never forget you," he says, voice breaking.

"I know," she's still smiling. "But, living your life without me isn't forgetting. I want you to be happy."

"It's hard," he chokes out.

"It'll get easier," she comforts him, reaching out to grab his hand. Adam nods, knowing she's right. "You'll always have Benji," she points out, leaning down to get in his sight after he'd allowed his head to wilt. "And now you have Taylor," she cheekily grins.

Adam blushes, ready to protect his ego, "What are you talking about, sis," he rolls his eyes.

"Come on, you idiot. She's good for you. She and Benji are good for you. They make you happy, when I can't be here to do it myself," she smiles sadly.

"You're here now," Adam states, pulling her into a hug.

"I'm always with you," she hugs him back. "You don't share an entire life with someone, womb to teenager and just *lose* them." She pulls back and points to his brain, "I'm here." She then points to his heart, "And I'm here." She smacks him on the shoulder, "Always."

Adam hesitates before he mumbles, "You're right."

"Oh, I'm sorry, what was that?" she cups her hand to her right ear.

"You heard me," he scolds.

She giggles and nods her head, agreeing. "I did. Now," she leans down and inhales a deep breath of chocolate-scented flowers, "pick some flowers and get on with it."

“Get on with what?” he plays stupid.

“Your plan, go woo the girl,” she shakes her head. “It’s obvious enough, you have a crush on her.”

He doesn’t want to admit she’s right, again, in less than a minute, so instead he says, “Yeah part of wooing her will be hard. I only know her name. How am I supposed to find her?”

“Ask Benji, he always knows what’s up,” she replies in a duh voice, glancing at him from her still-crouched position.

He holds back on telling her she’s right, and bends back down. They share a smile as he begins to pick the flowers.

XXVIII. LINGERING QUESTION

Taylor and Abigail had spent the rest of the drive talking about her adventures with Adam. To her credit, Abigail had backed off after she initially tried to get every detail she could out of Taylor.

Taylor hadn't wanted to divulge too much of her and Adam's conversation, because it was sensitive information she knew Adam didn't want discussed. But she'd told Abigail all about how Adam had made her realize she needed to be honest about her feelings in their friendship. Abigail shared her thankfulness for that.

It was just after 2AM when the purple sedan had pulled onto Taylor's street, stopping at the corner so Taylor could sneak back into her room undetected. She made sure to thank Abigail for the ride and great evening before stepping into the quiet, warm air. She'd smiled and waved as the car rumbled by her, heading for the still-cracked window.

Now, she's laying in her bed, staring at the ceiling. She's thinking about Adam. She's thinking about what Adam is thinking about. She's thinking about *why* she's thinking about him. *Why* her heart speeds up, the very second, he pops into her thoughts. *Why* she wishes they'd had even a little more time together. *Why*, even at two in the morning, she wants him here with her.

It's enough to provide confirmation that she likes him. And she desperately wants to know, if he feels the same. Does he have somebody waiting on him? Who does he love? That lingering question keeps her up, she's wide awake.

A soft breeze squeezes in through her partially-opened window, grabbing her attention. It calls her. Almost pleading. The light of the bright, white Moon creating a path

on her carpet to follow. She reaches the window and pulls the sheer, off-white curtains framing it completely open and the Moon is fully revealed to her.

Taylor shifts the bottom of the window up, creating a bigger gap. The breeze picks up again, gently grazing her cheeks. She inhales deeply, loving the peacefulness and calmness of this town at 2AM. The smell of the wind, the note of sweetness, is comforting. Her eyes slowly close as happiness invades her soul.

Her mind races back to thoughts of Adam. Missing him. Their playful conversation. The quick remarks. The smattering of chocolate daises that surrounded them. Like the two that now have a permeant residence on her bedside table. That way, she can smell that heavenly chocolate smell, forever.

Her eyes shoot open.

The wind.

The sweet smell.

Chocolate.

XXIX. THIRTEEN FLOWERS

His sister had been right, again. Talking to Benji had provided him with the answers to all his questions.

“Her last name is Swift,” Benji had said. “She lives in Ed’s old house, on 89th Street.” Benji hadn’t even questioned Adam’s need for this knowledge, had just answered, almost intuitively. His best friend wanted to know where someone lived, so he told him. It was no surprise to Adam that Benji knew facts about Taylor. Like his sister had said, Benji always knows what’s happening in their small town.

So, Adam had rushed to his motorcycle, gripping the thirteen flowers he’d carefully selected for their beauty in his right hand, against the handlebar. By the time he was heading out, there were only a couple dozen cars left in the lot and he had no trouble getting out quickly.

Getting to her house had been easy, considering he’d been friends with Ed since middle school. Until last year, when Adam dropped pretty much everyone in his life. Ed had moved away sometime in the period from then to now.

He spots the pale blue house down the street and parks his Honda, concealing himself and his motorcycle behind some privacy hedges before hopping off it. He’s struggling to decide which window might be hers, when a soft flutter of fabric catches his eye. Squinting, he peers through the glass and sees her, laying face up on her bed. Her eyes are focused on the ceiling, deep in thought. It’s the perfect time to execute the next step of his plan.

Adam picks the longest piece of grass he can find, using it to tie the flower stems together after lining them up. He quiets his breathing, and moves toward the house. He

squats the entire way, not wanting to be seen and ruin the element of surprise. After placing the bouquet atop the dirt, he takes a moment to peak over the windowsill.

Now, up close, he can take in details. Her brow is slightly furrowed, top teeth pulling the edge of her bottom lip. She's still wearing her dress, so she must've gotten home not too long ago. He reluctantly pulls his gaze from her, aiming for her room. The walls are bare, a boring shade of white. Boxes litter her floors, and he knows she was speaking truthfully when she said she was new to town.

He hears her sigh, so he snaps his attention back to her. Adam gives her one more long study, before carefully moving away from the window and retreating to the bushes. A few seconds after he arrives, he sees Taylor get up, heading straight for her window.

She kneels, pushing the window open more.

She closes her eyes.

After a few moments, her eyes fly open.

XXX. PASSING NOTES IN SECRECY

On the ground, beneath her window, lays a bouquet of chocolate daisies. Now that she knows what they are, she recognizes them easily. Like a flashlight, the moonlight shines on it. It isn't a very big bouquet, but it's there. At least, she thinks it's there. She hesitates to grab it, aware that she could be dreaming. That she probably *is* dreaming. *How could he possibly know where she lives?*

Suddenly realizing that there's a chance that he *was* here, at her house, under her window, feet from her, she searches the street for any sign of him. When she comes up empty, she doesn't fail to notice the deep drop her heart takes from disappointment. The returning breeze reminds her, that she *does* have his gift. Even if she doesn't have him.

She stands on her toes and reaches down to grab the bouquet, careful not to disturb any of the thin, yellow petals. She's grasping it tightly, pressing it to her nose for a richer scent. She turns back to her room, planning on reuniting her two daises with the bunch. She delicately picks the duo up, pushing their stems inside the carefully tied piece of grass enclosing the bouquet.

Taylor halts her movements when she sports a piece of rolled up paper among the stems. Her task is forgotten as she trades the two flowers for the scroll. She walks back to her window after unrolling it, needing the light from the Moon to read the secret note. She sets the bouquet and loose two on the windowsill, guiding the note into the moonlight.

XXXI. THE NOTE*

These are the words I held back,

As I was leaving too soon.

I was enchanted to meet you.

*Taylor Swift, “Enchanted,” track 9 on *Speak Now*, Big Machine Records, 2010, compact disc.

XXXII. SEE YOU AGAIN

Taylor's eyes lift from the paper. She quickly scans the street again, hoping for a change. That suddenly he'll be right there, standing in front of her. His green eyes shining bright from the Moon. But he's not there, in front of her, or down the street. Nowhere. She glances down at his note again, praying that it's the very first page, not where their storyline ends.

A loud howl interrupts the quiet, still night. It's Adam. That howl is his way of signing the note, '*Adam.*' She smiles, and yells back her own howl. As it echoes down the street, she knows that she wants nothing more than to see him again.

XXXIII. ECHO YOUR NAME

Adam watches from his hideaway, carefully concealed by bushes. He sees Taylor's eyes scan the area surrounding her house. A soft smile pulls at his lips when he imagines she might be looking for him.

He holds his breath when she reaches down to grab the bouquet, and brings it to her nose. Air exhales through his lips when she turns away from the window. Now, all he can see is her faint silhouette, her back facing him.

Adam waits for her to notice the note he left bundled with the flowers, fingers nervously fidgeting. Suddenly, Taylor is back at the window, holding his note away from her body and tilting it slightly. He only has a moment to wonder what she's doing because her attention flies away from the paper.

Again, he watches as she searches the empty, quiet street. Again, he hopes she's looking for him. Adam knows he won't be found and that makes his heart race. Excitement for when they will see each other again fills his body. He doesn't want it to be tonight. He wants the anticipation to drive both of their actions and keep them wanting more.

So instead of revealing his location, he lets out his fourth howl of the night. A wide smile spreads across his face when she howls back.

Their howls echo down the street.

XXXIV. WHEN THE NIGHT ENDS

The Moon hears the howls, sees the two teenagers longing for each other.

The Moon knows her time is soon up, dawn will break and the Sun will invade.

The Moon is wondering the same thing they are.

What will happen, when the night ends?

When the night ends, does the magic halt?

When the night ends, does the intrigue remain?

When the night ends, does the story continue?

When the night ends.

XXXV. LITERATURE CITED

Millhauser, Steven. *Enchanted night: a Novella*. Crown Publications, 1999.

Swift, Taylor. "For Taylor Swift, Pop is Personal." *Elle UK*, February 28, 2019.

<https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/a26546099/taylor-swift-pop-music/>.

Taylor Swift, "Breathe." Track 7 on *Fearless*. Big Machine Records, 2008, compact disc.

Taylor Swift, "Enchanted." Track 9 on *Speak Now*. Big Machine Records, 2010, compact disc.