

Shorts and Techniques

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Short Fiction Piece (Backstory)

He was small yet mighty.

The baby's fingers curled tight around his own. The digits were tiny, the grip pathetically weak, but the sight of that thin connection between them rivetted him. His eyes roamed over the bundled form of his son, taking in the perfect little being nestled in the plastic cot.

It was not nearly grand enough for him. Not even close to what he deserved. This was his *son*. He should have mountains bowing under him; oceans parting before him. Instead he was stashed away in a tiny room smelling of sickness and death.

But the child was warm, and comfortable, and *alive*—and that was all he had hoped for ever since she had first come to him, belly still flat and with a smile that broke his heart all over again.

“What have you done?”

He stilled at the voice, head tilting just slightly away from the slumbering child. There was a rumble of ancient anger in those words, but despite it all, he only felt relief. “Thank you for coming.” He offered stiffly.

The other marched forward, stopping at his shoulder. His presence filled the room, pressing into the walls and threatening to crumble the flimsy constructions. The air hummed with electricity, potent enough that he could taste it.

His son whined, low and pitiful, at the disturbance. Only a few hours old, and already so sensitive.

A hand reached out, and he clamped down on the other's wrist, halting it from where it was outstretched towards the cot. “Control yourself,” he ordered, “or I will.”

The blistering energy remained for only a second before it receded, sulking in its silence.

He waited, staring into the other's eyes for a long moment, searching for any hint of malice. He found nothing but cool apathy.

He released him, attention falling back to his son. “I need your help.”

The other's gaze moved from him to the child, and he had to restrain the violent snarl that wanted to break free at the hidden threat lurking on that face. “No.” He said, chin raised. “I won't do it. You knew what would happen if you did this. You knew it was against the rules.”

He laughed, harsh and brittle. “Since when have I ever played by the rules, brother dear?”

His brother watched him. “It needs to die.” He said plainly.

His humour shrivelled, eyes narrowing as the lights above them began to flicker. “*He is my son.*”

“He's an abomination.” His brother snapped, fearless and bold even as his hand dropped to hover close to his hip. “He was never meant to exist. If the others find out—”

“They will not.” He stated firmly; words clipped as he reigned in his own boiling rage. He let out a measured breath, eyes fixated on the hand grasping his. “No one will ever find out about this. I will not have my child murdered. Not by *any* of them.” He dipped his head, lips falling into a stern line.

“I need you to help me keep him safe.”

His brother hissed in frustration, golden hair falling into his eyes as he ran a hand through it. “I can’t. You hear me? I *can’t*. I’d be breaking my oath. I’d be going against everything—every rule, every belief. I’d be risking my very life. I can’t, not even for you.”

“I’m not asking for me.” He said softly, reaching down to gently scoop his son from his place. He turned to face his little brother. “I’m asking for *him*.”

His brother’s mouth twisted, but he did not retreat when he approached him.

“Does he look like an abomination, brother? Does he deserve death, purely because of my actions? You would blame an innocent for something he had no say over?” He could see the indecision warring in the other’s eyes and pressed forward.

He pushed the infant into his brother’s arms; his faith rewarded when the other held his son securely, the weapon at his belt untouched.

“Help me save him. Help me with this one task, and I will never again ask anything of you.”

His brother looked up at him, jaw clenched and eyes piercing.

Reflective Analysis of Technique:

For my short piece I primarily focussed on the technique of backstory, with some incorporation of dialogue to help create and foster the ideas and themes I wanted for the reader. This piece revolves around two characters, brothers, that share a complicated past with each other. Through the use of dialogue and subtextual references, I allude to a number of important elements that are central to both the characters and the world this story takes place in. Within this piece I bring to the reader's attention several points of tension without overtly stating why these are issues. The main being: a forbidden relationship, resulting in a forbidden child; an overarching antagonist in the form of these 'others' that pose a direct threat to the newborn child; the juxtaposition between the brothers' personal beliefs and ideals, with one representing order and obedience, and the other representing chaos and rebellion; as well as the struggle of familial loyalty.

These core themes are all revealed in subtle ways, with almost no real substance for the reader to draw from. The whole piece therefore creates this mystery surrounding the circumstances that the characters have found themselves in, showing a sense of danger and urgency to their actions. By keeping the reason for this strained brother-relationship a secret, the readers are forced to draw their own conclusions from the dialogue and actions of the characters, effectively engaging them in the story and invoking an interest in the whole history of the brothers, and what this history could mean for the newborn child. The uncertainty of the whole situation is what intrigues readers.

Exercise – Foregrounding

The lightning struck the ground. Once. Twice. Three times. No space between the hits. The static in the air made the hairs on his arms rise. There was a low buzz in his ears. Unending and undeterred by the chaos occurring in front of him.

He stayed where he had been thrown. The initial blast had been hot enough to blister the skin of his face. He felt raw.

The glow in the air finally died. Only it wasn't gradual. It was more like a light switch being flicked off. There one second. Gone the next. Vanishing in the space between blinks.

Dylan picked himself up on shaking limbs. There was a strange energy running through him. Some distant thing inside him resonating with whatever was lingering in the dusty warehouse. It licked at his ribs and scratched at the backs of his eyes.

His gaze never strayed from the gorge torn into the cement before him. It was an ugly thing. Like the scars on his back—the ones dug so deep they transcended muscles and nerves and touched the very core of his being.

Small pieces of rubble littered the scorched ground and they rattled and crunched as he stepped closer.

He could hear a noise like thunder coming from beneath him.

Behind him the others were shifting to their feet. Dylan paid them no mind. They were less than nothing to him in this moment.

The necklace in his hand was heavier than before. The jewel pendant hung low with a barely perceived swing to its movements. The gold chain bit into the flesh of his hand.

He took another step. The noise his boots made echoed. Claire called for him. But it was like her voice came to him from a half-forgotten memory.

Dylan stopped. He looked down. The world trembled.

The precipice loomed before him. Falling had never looked so tempting. Falling was in his blood.

Exercise – Silence

He took a breath and dropped forward, reckless in the way only the trusting could be.

He was submerged. The cold was encompassing, seeping into him with a vengeance, and he flailed.

It hurt in a way he hadn't expected, and he pushed himself upwards. His head smacked into something smooth and big, and his mouth opened to let out a cry that was nothing more than a rush of trapped air he could never reclaim. His hands came up to brace against the icy surface above him, feeling how it stretched all around him.

He tore his eyes open, but only saw the sheet of black that surrounded him. The sensation of intrusion crept along his spine. The weight of voices eons older than his own stating *you do not belong*.

He tapped the wall above him once, twice, testing without knowing why. He couldn't hear anything, not even his heartbeat, though he could feel how it hummed in his chest, flickering like an ember.

This, he realised with a sudden clarity, had been a mistake.

He beat against the wall again, his hands skittering along its smooth surface. It was like hitting marble. Ineffective—except for the pain radiating up his arms and the burning in his chest.

His movements grew weaker and the wall slipped away from him.

He closed his eyes.

And opened them, back under the water, hands braced and lungs full.

Exercise – Dialogue

His eyes opened.

The fingertips that had been trailing over his bare chest stilled atop his sternum. The blue-painted nails dug briefly into his skin, creasing it enough to leave faint marks before pulling away.

“Bad dream, *iubi*?” A sultry voice purred against his clavicle. Soft lips brushed against him before teeth—far too sharp, far too deadly—nipped at his flesh. Her hand moved lower, playful and light, but coaxing and filled with intent.

He tilted his head enough to catch her red eyes. She stared at him for a long moment before leaning down to nose at his jawline. He didn’t bother answering, merely stretched his neck to give her more room.

“I could make them stop.” She whispered to him like it was a secret and not an offer she had made countless times. “One little bite. No more sleep. No more dreams. You’d be free.” The tips of her teeth grazed along the side of his throat, right above the steady beat of his artery.

His lips twitched. “You already know my answer.”

She ignored him. Her body moulded against his, her skin leeching the warmth right out of him, greedy down to her core. “You would be *magnificent*.” She hissed, eyes burning bright. “One of *mine*. Absolutely and unreservedly.”

Her grip was strong as she pinned him down, sliding her way on top, her thighs bracketing his hips. He settled his hands on her skin, thumbs tracing loose patterns. “I’m already yours.” He replied.

Some of the intensity melted from her features, but there was still a hint of it lurking behind her eyes. “You are, aren’t you?” One of her hands reached up and cupped his cheek, as hard and cold as a marble statue. “My paramour. My *iubi*. So strong and stubborn.” Her hand fell away, resting over his heart with curled fingers that could easily rip him apart. “One day I won’t take ‘no’ for an answer.”

His smile was pleasant and sweet. “And when that happens I’ll hate you, absolutely and unreservedly.”

For a second, he could see the debate playing across her face, hidden in the flutter of her lashes and the lines of her mouth. His hands tightened their hold on her, and his magic began to crackle along his hands.

Her expression cleared, and she dipped her head in consideration. “Would it really be so bad?” She asked.

“Being immortal?”

Her lips quirked. “Being immortal with me. I think we could keep each other entertained for centuries.”

“Probably.” He agreed, body loose and tone light. “But I’d still hate you, and I’d kill you eventually.”

“Yes.” She said, eyes soft and affectionate. “Yes, I dare say you would.” She sighed then and leaned down to press a gentle kiss to his lips. He pushed up into it, keeping it innocent and enjoying the simple pleasure.

A knock sounded at the door. She huffed, peeling away from him, seating herself on the bed. “Enter.”

The door swung open at her call, and neither of them made a move to cover themselves.

Henrik studied them from the hallway, his bloody gaze darting between them only briefly before settling on her. “Forgive me, Cristina. Michael Korl is here requesting an audience.”

Cristina’s head fell back with a groan. “That ungrateful bastard, what does he want now?”

Henrik shrugged, “He did not really say. Something about another dispute in his area, I believe.”

She rolled her eyes, pushing herself up and draping her gown over her form. “Of course, because heaven forbid the man learn to handle his own problems.” She tied her sash and turned to face him, eyes sliding over him. “Will you be staying?”

He shook his head. “I have other business to attend to. I should get going.”

Cristina nodded, absently brushing her black hair to the side. “Very well. I will see you the next time you decide to grace us with your presence. In the meantime,” she stepped closer to him, tapping a finger to his chest, “be safe. I know you do what you must, but it would be a shame if this stopped before I had time to convince you.”

He smirked. “Bye Cristina.” He said, and she straightened with amusement.

Exercise - Metaphor

That black mass. That looming figure with a laugh like dancing shadows. It had crushed him so easily, had wrapped its cold hands around his throat and pressed him down until all he could see were the spaces where its eyes should be.

He could not risk that that thing would return the moment his eyes closed. Not when he had no clue what it was, or what it wanted from him. Not until he knew how to fight it.

So, he stayed where he was, crouched between the furthest bed and a pillar, watching and waiting and prepared to pounce; until the first rays of light pierced through the windows.

Only then did he dare to slink back to his bed.

Exercise – Spatial Viewpoint

There was something intoxicating about knowing your prey was about to walk into your trap. A rush of power, of complete and absolute control over the situation. The boy had proven to be so challenging, that his impending victory tasted like rich wine on his tongue.

Tom could not refrain from reclining in his seat by the fire. From his position he had a perfect view of the door, and of the sleeping figure nestled on the lounge across from him. A book was laying opened, held lovingly in his long, pale fingers.

The silence of the sitting room was only broken by the reliant ticking of the age-old clock, and the occasional wispy breath of his game piece.

His gaze roamed over her relaxed body with clinical interest.

He supposed Amelia Evans was an attractive woman, her face hardly showing any signs of age even though she was approaching her forties. Her dark brown hair was thick and lush, and contrasted with her pale skin quite nicely. Strands of it fell into her face, cutting across her nose, the ends fluttering just slightly as she breathed. Beneath her closed lids, he knew were the same sharp green eyes her son possessed.

His own eyes drooped in amusement as he recalled the look on the boy's face when he informed him of his mother's condition. There had been no flicker of fear, or uncertainty when he learned she was in his care. Instead, there was blazing fury and a defiant sneer.

Truly, Jack and Amelia Evans had created an exquisite masterpiece. One he looked forward to seeing again.

As if summoned by the thought, the doors to the sitting room slammed open, the force behind them propelling them into the walls. The paintings on either side rocked at the collision, the thin strings holding them in place on the verge of snapping.

James stalked inside like a ravenous beast, body taunt like a bow string, eyes locked on him.

But just as quickly as the boy had entered, his eyes effortlessly rolled away from him and shot to his unconscious mother. James hardly paused before heading to her, for all intents and purposes dismissing Tom.

Unacceptable.

The boy crouched beside his mother's prone form and caressed her cheek with such aching tenderness it was sickening.

Exercise – The Secret Life of Pronouns

The room was still, quiet, suspended in the space between seconds. Stretching on like eternity.

Dylan looked at the figure by the window, squinting and trying to force his eyes to focus, to see past the flesh and bone and glimpse the thing lurking behind it all. But he couldn't. He couldn't see anything, and that, knowing that even with the power at his fingertips, that he could never hope to match the being across from him had a primal sort of fear rise in his throat.

His hands clenched and his body trembled.

"Hello, Dylan."

That *voice*—

Dylan's lips struggled to part, whatever he wanted to say trapped in some corner of his mind as the figure turned to face him, and those eyes broke him open.

"I was wondering when you would find me." They continued, and the lack of inflection in their tone, the immobility of their features made him shudder.

Unfamiliar. Other. Wrong.

The more he looked the worse it was. He couldn't see anything on their face, not a trace of emotion. No wisp of anything that could pass for human.

He dropped to his knees, tore asunder at the revelation. The desperation in his chest pressed into his ribcage, drowning him.

"*Please.*" He choked out; head lowered. "*Please.* I need your help. I can't – I can't help him and, and I don't know what to do." His hands pressed into the wooden floor, nails digging into the edges of the planks, splitting his skin.

"Why would I help you?" The voice asked, still blank and unfeeling. And that was somehow the worst of it all.

Dylan's lungs burned, his back curled forward. "Just – *please.* You – you're supposed to help people, aren't you?" He demanded, head lifting, lips pulling back into a snarl. "Isn't that what you promise? To help? To *protect*? He's one of yours for *fuck's sake!* Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Exercise – Writing the Circle

Simon opened his eyes.

It was a gradual thing, regaining consciousness.

It started with the cold, all around him, pressing in on him, inside him. Like he was filled to the brim.

Next it was the sounds. Whispers he strained to recognise. Some were like half-forgotten dreams, or memories buried deep in him. Others were strange - alien - and frightening as they whirred and beeped, echoing through his head.

After, it was his thoughts. Nothing more than fleeting impressions at first - there one second, gone the next, slipping through his fingers.

But as those impressions solidified into something tangible, so too did the last few memories still in his possession.

And with those, everything else.

The light was the first thing to register, if only because it was so bright.

Simon squinted, eyes adjusting to the harsh glare swiftly. His body felt thick and sluggish, weighted down and bone-tired; but his mind was already reconciling itself as the most important information flooded him.

He was alive.

He had survived the crash.

His eyes immediately clamped shut, ignoring whatever else his brain was processing, because the rush of tears was burning him.

He was alive, but Jessica-

Jessica was *gone*.

Grief like knives pierced him, familiar in its intensity and brutality. Simon welcomed it, gladly handing the blade over and holding his arms open. He let it roll through him, clogging up everything and drowning him under its weight.

Jessica...

He wanted to stay here forever, on this little bed in this little room and just wither away - just count down the seconds until he could join her again and apologise.

Apologise for not being stronger. Apologise for not pulling her up right away. For not being smarter, or faster. For not going back to *find her*.

Apologise for killing her.

He had thought...when he crashed the car - he had been so *relieved* that it was over, that he could finally rest.

And now he was alive, back to this living nightmare in a world without his best friend.

Simon opened his eyes, and it was the worst thing that had ever happened to him.

Exercise – Stylistics and the Uncanny

Harry turned the corner of the alleyway, steps hurried and breath punching out of his lungs. The moon hung low in the sky, and even with its radiance, he found it hard to see through the thick shadows clinging to the rough brick walls.

He paused for a moment, head cocked and ears straining to catch a whisper of footsteps. A flutter of movement. Anything to indicate that he had been followed.

There was nothing.

He frowned. The cut above his brow still bled sluggishly, a trickle of red marring his pale skin as it carved its way along the side of his nose, slashing across his mouth.

He flattened himself, cautious, and started creeping his way along the wall, hands blindly feeling the grooves and gaps of the grime-coated bricks.

His foot kicked a discarded plank of wood, the sound ricocheting through the night like a gunshot.

Harry froze.

A gentle humming filled the air, some long-forgotten tune from his half-remembered childhood, distant and wispy like smoke. It sounded wrong though. Notes missing, pace disjointed, garbled like it was sung through sheets of metal.

His skin prickled.

He turned.

At the end of the alleyway a woman sat in the middle of the path with her side to him.

Her head was tilted down, long red hair spilling over her shoulder, the tips curling like flower petals. The ground she knelt on was waterlogged, saturating the ends of her white dress. Her hands, white—like snow, icy and cold—played with something idly, her fingers twisting and pulling and ripping.

Harry blinked heavily, and as he stared the woman's body seemed to ripple and bulge.

He took a step back.

Her head rose, light pooling across her features as she turned to look at him,

She was beautiful.

Her mouth opened, but the words she spoke were incomprehensible. Static erupted between them and Harry's hands flew to his ears to try and block the piercing sound.

He closed his eyes, backing away faster.