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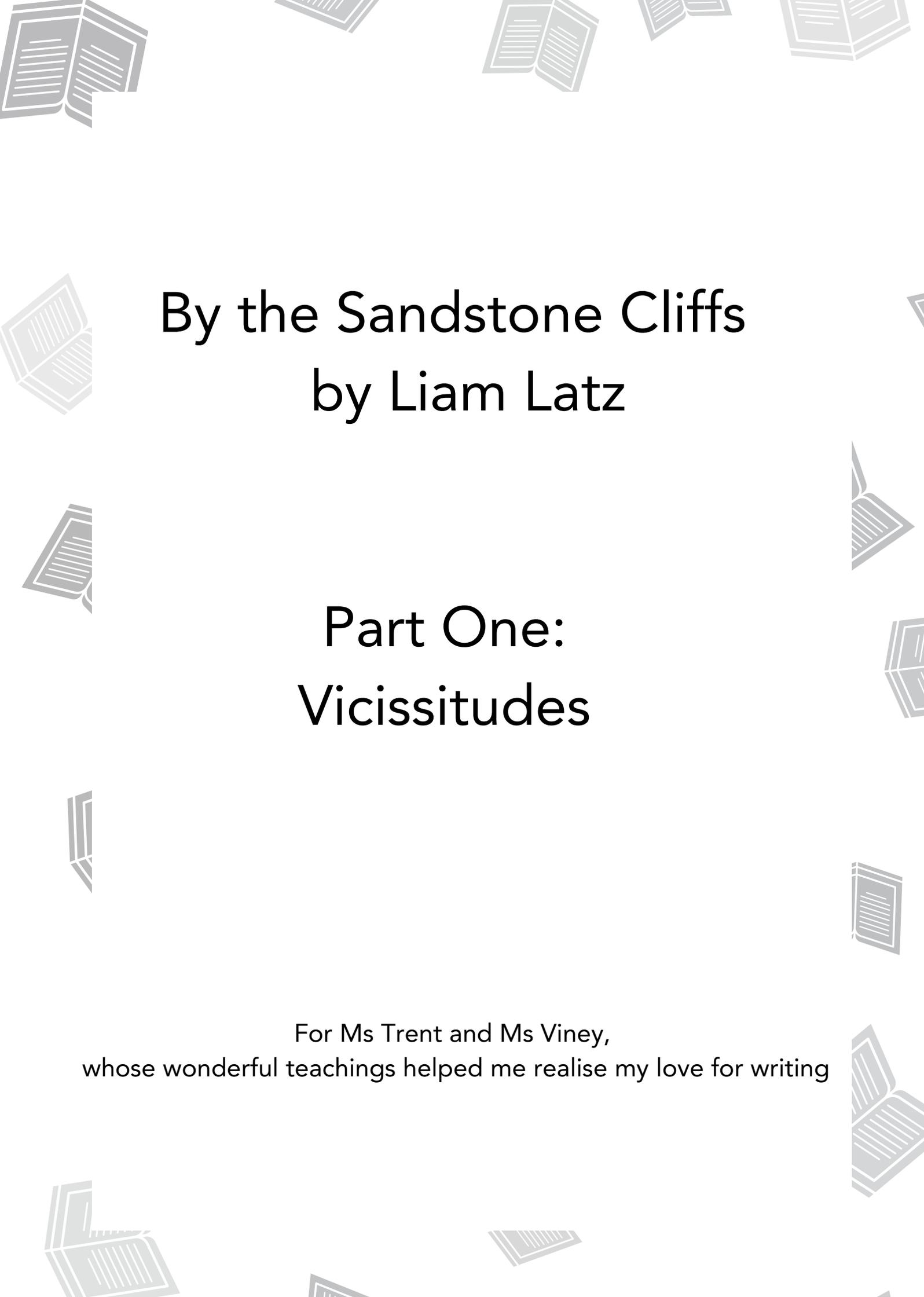
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The background of the page is decorated with numerous small, light gray icons of open books, scattered across the white space. The books are shown from various angles, some slightly tilted, creating a subtle pattern around the central text.

By the Sandstone Cliffs by Liam Latz

Part One: Vicissitudes

For Ms Trent and Ms Viney,
whose wonderful teachings helped me realise my love for writing



“People go
but how they left
always stays”

-Rupi Kaur



Keira

Mondays are the worst. Sport, English, and now I have to sit through an hour of Maths. And the fact that I barely got any sleep yesterday due to Dan's party that was on wasn't helping. Mr Meyer's making us do more text book work, as per usual, as he's never bothered enough to teach us himself. We're currently doing algebra, objectively the most boring topic ever. After doing a couple of questions spaced out with my messy handwriting I decide it looks like a decent amount of work and flip to a new page in my book to draw. It's not the finished product I care about - my old primary school books tend to have identical Saturn V rockets or ISS's on almost all of the pages - it's the act of wasting class time and doing something I enjoy instead of just sitting there doing nothing. I mess around trying to draw Mr Meyer but in the end it just looks like any weird male cartoon person. After highlighting the drawing with a fineliner from my pencil case I turn to Taylor - who's actually doing their work, they're not lazy like me - and ask for the time. They check their watch and say it's 3:14. Five minutes to the bell. My phone buzzes in my pocket and I pull it out. It's a message from Mom.

Keira I have an important call on,
make sure to be really quiet when
you get home.

It's nice weather out so I'd rather ride my bike than sneak around the house trying to be silent so I'll probably head down to the beach for a bit until Mom's call ends. I like the beach, it's usually pretty quiet. I pack up my stuff and message her telling her where I'm going. Taylor finishes packing up their stuff and turns to me

"Did you hear what happened at the party last night?" they ask

"No, what?" I reply, not surprised something 'happened' at the party.

"Abby punched Dan in the nose and probably broke it," says Taylor, somewhat excitedly. As if they find this kind of gossip entertaining.

"Wait, Abby as in Amity's sister? What was she even doing there? I thought it was just this grade that was invited."

"She probably just drove Amity there and came in for free food or something," says Taylor.

"And why did she punch Dan in the first place?" I'm assuming Dan was just being an idiot but punching him in the face is a bit extreme.

"I dunno what he said but, knowing Dan, he probably deserved it." The school bell rings and everyone starts to shuffle out of the classroom, quickly forming a bottleneck at the door.

"Anyways," says Taylor, "see ya tomorrow."

"See you," I say, and head towards the bike rack near the side of the school.

Riding helps clear my mind. I focus on nothing but pedaling and watching the road in front of me. Listening to the buzz of the bicycle tires on the asphalt and the spinning of the gears, my worries and anxieties whiz past me as I zoom down the street towards the beach. To get down to the beach there is a small pathway just before the turn onto Gibson Road and Dallas Lookout, winding down the side of the cliff. It's a bit awkward to get down there on a bike with the steepness and the weird angles, but after a couple of minutes I manage to reach the shore without falling over. I lean my bike against the rusty railing of the path and drop my bag beside it, pulling out my art book and pencil case. No one usually comes down here, which is why it's the perfect place to do nothing and just draw, and because I'm not wasting class time I'll actually draw something different. I head over to some rocks clumped together by the water and sit down.

The wind is starting to pick up and dark clouds are beginning to cover up the sun. It'll probably rain soon, and of course, I forgot my jacket. Typical Comea Bay weather, it was supposed to be nice today, I'm not sure why I'm surprised. I orient myself so that my back is to the wind, facing the cliffs. The cliffs extend for miles in each direction, with no end in sight. I start to sketch what I can see, starting with Dallas Lookout at the top, a small point near the edge of town that doesn't have much scenery other than the still ocean. It's right in the middle of Gibson Road, the only way to and from the second part of town, as most of Comea Bay is divided by the woods in the middle. You can't see much of Dallas Lookout from down on the beach so all I draw is a small amount of the wooden platform and the railing. Next is the cliff, nothing much, but with a couple of outcroppings or crevices here and there that are probably home to bird nests or some other creatures. But as I look down the beach I notice something odd. Something is right in the middle of the sand, it doesn't look like a rock, it's too flat and small and isn't sitting anywhere near the other clumps of rocks. I'm not quite sure what it is, it's not clear enough to make out from where I'm sitting, so I put my book down on the rock and head over towards it to investigate.

As I get closer the object gradually gets clearer. It's not an object, it's a person, lying unmoving in the sand. And it's not just any person.

It's Abby.

I run over and drop down beside her, a mounting panic in my chest

"Abby!" I shout, I shake her by the shoulders, she doesn't respond, she's lying on her back and her eyes are closed. "Abby!" I say again "Abby can you hear me!" she doesn't look like she's breathing. There's no rising or falling of her chest. I shake her again. No response. I check her pulse by placing two shaky fingers on her neck, then her wrist. Nothing. She's cold to the touch. Tears stream down my face and a sudden wind blows my hair into my eyes. What happened? Why was she down on the beach? There's too many questions that my mind can't handle. I look at her, her legs are bruised and lumpy and In her right hand she's holding something. I take it off her. It's a torn piece of fabric, a reddish striped pattern, unlike anything she's wearing. But then my fingertips feel fuzzy, and my vision goes dark. My mind is suddenly overflown with images, zipping by at speed. A jacket with a hole through the left pocket, someone wearing it - a male, Dallas Lookout - at night time, and a hand clutching the torn piece of fabric - Abby, falling down the cliff onto the beach. The images come and go in an instant, and all of a sudden I'm back on the beach. I drop the piece of fabric in shock, and it blows away in the wind. What the hell!? My mind is racing, trying to process what I just saw. Saw? Felt? I don't know what just happened, but I don't have time. I take out my phone and call the emergency services, hoping I have data down here. A voice asks what I need, I press Ambulance. As I'm waiting for someone to answer I glance up. It's still, almost tranquil, with the waves crashing against the rocks and the light breeze against my skin. Then I hear a man's voice on the other end of line.

"911 what's your emergency?" he asks.

"I- I'm down by the beach," I stutter "And I found Abby down here. She's not breathing. I think... I think she's dead." There's a lump in the back of my throat and I have to force the words out.

"Okay, can you tell me where you are? Then we can send a team down there" he says in a calm voice.

"I'm under Dallas Lookout," I say, "on the beach." I wipe a hand across my wet cheek. I can hear his keyboard clicking over the phone.

"You're on the beach?" he asks.

"Yes," There's a pause.

"Alright, there's a team on their way to you now, they're going to be there soon Okay? But I want you to stay on the line and answer a few questions for me. Can you do that?"

I agree and he begins to ask questions. I answer them as best I can but my mind is fuzzy.

Is anyone nearby?

Can you check her pulse? Her breathing?

Do you know what happened to her?

How long has she been there?

When's the last time you saw her?

All these questions I've already asked myself, and still don't have any answers.

After what feels like hours of polite interrogation I can hear a vehicle engine and the red-blue flash of lights by the top of the path.

But no sirens.

"I think I hear them coming," I say, my voice a little less shaky. Three paramedics, two men and a woman, all in navy blue uniforms are jogging down the path, one of them holding a stretcher. "They're here, I can see them."

"Alright, I'm going to hang up now Okay? Be sure to tell them exactly what happened."

"OK," I say.

"Goodbye Ma'am," he says, and the call ends with a low buzz of the disconnect tone. I turn off my phone and put it into my pocket. The paramedics approach and one of the crouches down beside me.

"You called 911?" The woman asks.

"Yes."

"OK, you come up to the ambulance with me, they'll take care of it," one of the men says. I get up and the man gives me a blanket, I only now realise just how cold I am. The constant wind is freezing and it's starting to rain. I wrap the blanket around me and follow the man towards the path. Looking over my shoulder I see the woman testing Abby's pulse and breathing, she looks at the other paramedic and shakes her head. The implications begin to sink in.

Abby's gone.

Gone forever.



One day later

I wake up to warm rays of sunlight shining through my bedroom window. I can feel the warmth through the sheets on my bed, pleasant compared to the coldness of the mattress. I lie there for a moment, letting my eyes adjust and just take it in. I lift my head up and glance at my alarm clock. Just after eleven. Everyone's at school by now, going about classes as if nothing's happened. I wonder if they even know. I drop my head back down on my pillow and let out a sigh. My mind has still barely processed what happened yesterday, all the blue-red lights, hushed conversations and questions with the police are all a blur. But one thing that wasn't a blur, one thing I remember vividly, was that piece of fabric. What I had seen holding that was surreal. A man wearing a jacket - a jacket that matched the piece of fabric - had shoved Abby off that cliff. The logical part of me says I shouldn't trust it, but I do, I only saw it when holding that cloth, I wasn't hallucinating. It was real. But how much of it was real? I'm unsure. I need to test it.

I sit up and pull a random book off my shelf. *Nature in Suburbia* by Max Caulfield, a nice photo book Mom bought me when visiting a gallery in town. "to help support local artists, (and inspire new ones)" she said when she gave it to me. I'll try and see if I can do the same thing as the fabric with this book. I hold the book firmly with two hands and try to focus. It's hard to when I don't even know what focus means. Nothing happens. I close my eyes and hold the book in front of my face, almost touching my nose, and really try this time. Just as I'm going to give up I feel something, almost like falling but the sensation stops within a second. Images flood my mind, but this time they aren't just detached places or events. They're photos, in particular, Polaroids. A deer, a butterfly, trees, the ocean, a lighthouse and a girl- Max. I drop the photo book and it flicks open to a page showing various photos of trees, several of which I recognise from what I just saw. Oh God, this isn't happening. Why can I do this? What is this? My phone buzzes on my bedside table, somehow not out of battery from all of yesterday. It's Taylor.

Hey Keira, i heard what happened. I just wanted to check up on you and see if you're Ok

I think I'm Okav

Can I come over to your house after school? I need to tell you something

Of course whatever you need

I need to tell Taylor what I know, what I can do, but not over the phone. I doubt they'll believe me so I'll have to go over to their house and tell them, and provide some sort of proof. But there's still a lot of time to kill until they get out of school so I should probably get up and do something. My book should be in my bag and I left my art book by the beach. I'll have to ask Mom where they both are, they might help me calm down. I put the book back on my shelf and get out of bed, I realise I'm still wearing the same clothes from yesterday. I pull on some new ones and head downstairs. Mom's sitting on the kitchen counter typing on her computer. She looks up when she notices me come down the stairs

"Keira, you're awake, how are you feeling? Are you Okay?" she asks, pulling me into a hug.

"I'm alright, I was going to go over to Taylor's house this afternoon if that's OK?"

"Of course it is, do you want me to drive you there?" she says

"No, I'll ride, it isn't far," I say

"OK, you hungry?" she asks, heading over to the fridge and pulling out a plate of pancakes, placing them on the counter "I made breakfast but you were still in bed sleepyhead! I'll have to reheat them."

"Thanks Mom," I say, giving her another hug, "do you know where my bag and art book are?"

"Your bag and that are in the front of the car," she says. She reaches over and grabs the keys from the kitchen counter next to her computer and throws them over to me "You go get them and I'll heat up these pancakes, yeah?" Mom then turns and starts unwrapping the plastic wrap over the pancakes.

I head over to the front door and pull it open, a waft of warm air flowing over me, making me realise how much cooler it was inside. I look over at the car, laying dormant in the driveway. It's rarely used since Mom works mostly from home and I tend to ride my bike everywhere. I notice that the road is covered in a thin layer of mist, the sun must be evaporating all the rain from yesterday. It's quite mesmerising, like watching a fire, seeing the clouds of water vapor floating up and dissipating into the blue sky. I force myself to look away and focus on what I'm doing, I head over to the car and unlock it, pulling open the door. On the seat is my bag, my art book and my pencil case. I open my bag, put my art book and pencil case inside and slide it on my back.

I head back inside to the smell of reheated pancakes. I put my bag on the floor next to the counter and sit down. Mom's just about finished cooking them and places them back on the plate.

"Four pancakes, coming right up!" she says, sliding the plate across the counter and stopping directly in front of me, like some bartender trick. "Actually, make that three," she says, snatching the top pancake off the stack and taking a bite "I don't work for free you know." I give her a smirk and start eating the remaining pancakes. Mom sits down and continues typing on her computer. We eat in silence, with nothing to be heard but the keys on Mom's computer and the birds and distant cars outside. Once I'm done eating I bring my bag upstairs and drop it on my bed, sitting down next to it. I open it and take out my art book and pencil case as well as my book and place them on my bed. Opening my art book I come to a realisation, I'd left it on the beach yesterday, and it's ruined from the rain. I flick through the pages, some aren't too bad, not as damaged from the rain, but others were completely wrecked. All my hard work, wasted. I pull out all the worst pages and shut what's left of the art book and flop backwards onto the bed, letting out a sigh. The remaining pages won't last long. I guess I'll have to get another one. I grab my laptop from my desk, open it and chuck it onto my bed. I have more important things to do. I need to figure out what is happening to me, and why I can do whatever I did. Have I always had it or did I just figure it out yesterday? What is it called? What can it do? I open up a browser on my laptop. Time to find out.



Taylor

We all squeeze through the hall doors and are told to sit down. The year group was called to the hall over the intercom, for most of us the reason is obvious, it was all over the news. There is some quiet talking but for a room full of a hundred kids, it's completely silent. Just the shuffling of feet as we all sit down on the wooden floor of the hall. The principal and around 4 or 5 other teachers are standing around the outside of the huddle of kids. The principal, Mr Lynch, turns on a microphone handed to him and starts talking.

"It is with great sorrow to inform you, that a year 12 student attending this school, by the name of Abby Bauer, was found dead on the beach yesterday. We understand that there have been rumors that Abby's death was by suicide. The cause of her death has not yet been determined and therefore we do not know whether or not it was due to suicide. We ask that you do not contribute to these rumors as there is the possibility of spreading information that is wrong, making the death all the more difficult to cope with for Abby's family and friends. As more information becomes available, we will do our best to share it with you..." Mr Lynch starts talking about counselling and support stuff but I get distracted when someone taps me on the shoulder. I turn around and see a boy, Dylan, I think.

"Your Keira's friend right?" He asks. I nod. "Someone on office duty said that she was the one who found her body, she called the police."

"Shit, thanks for telling me," I say, and turn back around. Keira? Oh God, the news mentioned a schoolgirl found her but I had no idea it was Keira. No wonder she's not here today. I pull out my phone and message her. She says she's alright but I seriously doubt it. I can't imagine how awful something like what she went through must be.

Keira messages again, saying she wants to come over to my place to tell me something. I wonder what? Keira's not very open about her feelings but I'm sure she just wants to get away, to do something. I put my phone away and look around the hall. It's a lot more talkative than before but still reasonably quiet, a couple of girls by the edge of the group are crying. Unsurprisingly Amity's not here today, God, she must be going through shit too.

It must be horrible, losing a sister. I wish I had her number so I could message her, but she probably has already had enough of that. The teachers dismiss us and we all head back to class. Inside History class it's like a different environment than what it was when we left. The annoying boys in the back decide to shut up for once and the teacher's speaking in a calmer tone. Talking about American and Australian freedom rides. It's only period two and I've got schoolwork to do. I better focus.



Several hours later

The school bell rings at the end of the day and I finish my work, pack up my stuff and head home. My house is only about ten minutes walk from the school and it's nice and warm today, unlike yesterday. It would have been a pleasant walk if it weren't for all the stuff going on in my head. Keira is probably at my house by now, assuming she left on her bike when the bell went, I wonder how she's feeling. She didn't really know Abby - or Amity - but finding someone's dead body would really do a number on you. I messaged Mom and Dad at lunch and told them what happened so hopefully they'll be extra nice, if they even talk to her that is. After a while of walking I near my house and see Keira's bike propped up against the wall next to the front door. I head inside and see Dad at his desk on his computer.

"Hey Dad," I say.

"Hey, how was school?" he asks, not looking up from whatever he's typing.

"Alright," I say, "do you know where Keira is?"

"She's in your room."

I head down the hallway and I hear Morgan shout from his room

"Your friend's in your room.." He probably has headphones on and has no idea how loud he is.

"Very helpful," I shout back. I stop by my door when I hear a voice inside.

Keira's. I open the door, she stops her pacing around the room and turns to me.

"Taylor! I-" she trails off as I pull her into a hug.

"I was worried about you, are you okay?"

"I'm alright, I'm just thinking..."

"Out loud?" I joke

"Yeah," She laughs "Listen, I need to tell you something." She heads over and shuts the door to my room and then sits down on the edge of my bed. "Okay, I know what I'm about to say is gonna sound crazy, but you need to trust me."

I sit down beside her but she immediately stands up again and starts pacing the room. She's clearly stressing over what she's trying to tell me. It's worrying.

"What is it?" I ask

"Okay..." she lets out a deep breath "When I found Abby, she had this piece of cloth in her hand," she says, "and when I touched it, I found out I could see that object's past, or history. I could see its memories." She pauses, looks at me.

"You what?"

"Ok I know I sound nuts but you have to believe me," she pleads.

"So what you're saying is, you can see what an object sees, if you touch it?" I ask.

"Yes, exactly. Do you have anything in your room, like a photo or something that you know I've never seen before?" Keira asks, "I can show you."

"You're serious?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"Keira," I say, "you just found someone's dead body yesterday. Are you sure you're alright?"

"Just get me something and I'll prove it to you" she says.

"What? Why?" I say.

"Just, humor me," She says.

"Okay okay" I get up from the bed and head over to my closet and, after a couple of seconds of rummaging around, I pull out a photograph. I hand it to her, it's a group photo of my extended family. The camera is angled downwards and is slightly blurry from motion. Everyone's faces are a mixed expression of surprise and laughter.

"Tell me where this was taken and why the picture is all blurry," I say.

She takes the photo and sits down on my bed. She lets out a deep breath, holds the photo in front of her face, closes her eyes, and then just kinda sits there.

"You good?" I ask, this is seriously concerning and confusing. She's as still as a statue. I wave my hand in front of her face, she doesn't flinch. After about 5 seconds she opens her eyes again

"You were at the pier and a fly flew into your mom's mouth and she dropped the camera. it took the photo while it was falling," she says confidently.

Shit. Surely she just heard it from one of my parents, or Morgan? It's a funny story, but I'm sure Keira's never seen that before, It was hidden away in my closet.

"Who told you that?" I ask.

"As I said, I can see the object's past," says Keira, dead serious.

"You're kidding," I say, throwing my hands up, what is wrong with this girl? She's clearly not Okay.

"I did research at my place," she says, "it's called Psychometry."

"Psychometry? So you're some psychic now? Someone died yesterday and you're pulling tricks like this?" I say.

"I'm not pulling any tricks!" She exclaims, "I don't know what's wrong with me and I don't know what happened to Abby." She flops down on the bed and tucks her legs up to her chest.

"I don't know anything."

"Hey," I sit down next to her and put a hand on her shoulder. "I know this is hard, but you have to tell me what's going on."

"I don't know what's going on," She says. "I don't know why I can do what I do. All I know is that it started when I found Abby." She sits up on the edge of the bed

"When I found her down by the beach, she had a cloth in her hand," she says,

"When I touched it, I saw someone, he had the same jacket as the cloth, and he shoved Abby off the cliff. He murdered her."

"Who?"

"I don't know, I couldn't see," she says.

"Can you tell me how you knew about that photo?" I ask.

"Ugh it's hard to explain, I already told you, when I touch things, I know about them. How about I do it again, because I know you don't believe me."

She's right, I don't. I get up and walk over to my desk and reach under it, grabbing a small box. Inside is a mess of cards, whether it be from Pokemon or Yu-Gi-Oh! or just playing cards, I have no clue, it's a mess. I used to collect a bunch of them when I was in primary school. I hadn't met Keira then as she moved from another town here in 7th Grade. And she doesn't really do small talk so I'm sure she's never asked about this kind of stuff. I hold the box and walk slowly over to her so the contents don't make noise as they slide around and hand her the box.

"What's in this?" I say, "If you can read its memories then it'll remember me putting stuff in it." Keira holds the box in her hands and does the same thing where she closes her eyes for a couple of seconds. After she opens them she hands the box back to me

"Cards," She says, "playing cards, Pokemon and-" she pauses "Yugi Oh? Oh, and there's also a cockroach in there."

I open the box and look inside, cards, as she predicted, and lo and behold, a cockroach. Luckily it's dead so it doesn't scurry around when I see it but it's there nonetheless. This is too much, I don't understand. There's absolutely no way she knew that. She doesn't even know what Yu-Gi-Oh! Is.

"Oh my God," I say, sitting down next to her, "you have fucking superpowers."

"You believe me?" she asks

"This doesn't make any sense," I say, "people don't just have superpowers. Do they?"

"I know it doesn't make any sense, but I have them." says Keira

"I know what we have to do," I say.

"What?" she asks.

"We're gonna use it to figure out what happened to Abby."

"What?" She asks, confused.

"Your powers," I say, "you can use them to find out who killed Abby, we can catch this guy!"

I stand up and grab a small whiteboard I use for assignments and rub it out. Keira seems to know more than I do so I'll try and get on the same page.

"Alright, what do you 100% know about what happened to Abby?" I ask, "I'll write it down."

"Okay. Um... the suspect was a guy," she says "and she was pushed at night time." I scribble it down on the left side of the white board under the title 'what we know'.

"The jacket he was wearing had a hole through the left pocket." Keira adds. After a couple more we move on to 'what we don't know'. The end result is a half filled brainstorm.



"By now it's around 4:30. Keiras positioned herself on her back with her head hanging over the edge of the bed, chucking a tennis ball - I have no clue where she got from - up and down. I'm swivelling on my desk chair.

"So... what's the plan?" I say.

"First," she says, "we find out what Dan said to Abby."

"And how do we do that?" I ask.

"We either ask Amity or Dan."

"I think we should ask Amity first and, you know, see how she is," I say. I'd guess she's not doing well, I'm not even sure that pestering her with questions about her dead sister is a good idea.

"OK, we'll ask Amity first and if she doesn't know then Dan obviously will because he said it," says Keira.

"OK," I say, "Then what?"

"Umm... I don't know," she says with a sigh.

"One heck of a plan Keira," I joke.

"Oh come on!" she laughs, "Surely Amity will know other stuff too, we'll just ask her."

"Fair enough," I say, "you think you're gonna come to school tomorrow?"

"I think so," she says.

"Alright, so we'll ask her tomorrow, at lunch?" I suggest.

"Alright," she says, there's a pause, however Keira's still throwing the tennis ball up and down.

"Well... I'll probably get going now," says Keira, breaking the silence, "thanks for understanding." She gets up from the bed, places the ball on my desk and heads over to the door

"I still can't believe it Keira, you have superpowers." It's honestly insane, and Keira, of all people, how did this happen?

"They're not super," She corrects me, "but yeah, I can't believe it either."

We head past the living room and out the front door, Keira grabs her bike and walks it to the end of the porch.

"I guess I'll see you tomorrow," she says.

"I guess so," I say, "oh and Keira?"

"Yeah?" She looks over her shoulder at me.

"Let's meet tomorrow after school and see what your powers can really do, yeah?"

"Sounds good," Keira says, and heads off down the street on her bike.



Keira

I arrived home yesterday with a slight headache, no doubt from dehydration with all my bike riding. However it's still lingering even at period 3 the day after. Taylor and I made a plan to talk to Amity at lunch, which is in about ten minutes, and I'm trying to focus, but I can't shake the feeling that people are looking at me, talking about me. We have Mr Dour as our substitute so the loudest anyone can get away with is a whisper so I can't make out what anyone's saying but I swear it's about me. 'The girl who found the body'. I'm sure Amity feels the same way too. Luckily I managed to grab a back seat so I haven't needed to do much work this period. After a while of staring off into space the bell rings. I meet up with Taylor and we head off to talk to Amity.

We find Amity eating lunch with Stella outside the canteen. Stella gives her a nudge when she notices us approach

"Hey Amity," I say.

"Hi."

"I'm sorry about what happened," says Taylor. She says nothing, obviously just wanting to know why we're here.

"And I'm sorry you had to find out that way Keira," Stella pipes in.

"It's alright. We just wanted to ask you, what did Dan say to Abby on Sunday night, that made her punch him?" I ask.

"Why do you want to know?" she asks.

"Well we think..." says Taylor, looking at me, then back at Amity, "we think that Abby was... murdered."

"Yeah no shit," Amity says bluntly, taking us both by surprise.

"What?"

"Abby's car has been missing since Sunday," Stella explains.

"And I know my sister," says Amity, "she didn't jump."

"

"That makes sense," says Taylor.

"But you don't know what Dan said?" I ask.

"No I don't," Amity says. I turn to Taylor.

"I guess we'll have to ask Dan then," I say to them.

"I guess so," they reply.

"We're going to find Dan and ask him what he said to her," I tell Amity and Stella.

"Wait," Amity says, "I'll come with you." She gets up, says a few words to Stella, and walks next to us.

"Where do you reckon Dan is?" Taylor asks.

"Behind the Maths rooms I think," says Amity, and we set off. Stella smiles and gives us a wave as we leave, she's nice.

We find Dan where Amity had predicted. He's with Brandon and a couple of other boys.

"Dan," Amity says, and he turns around. There's a bandage on his nose from where he was punched.

"Ladies," he says, Taylor gives him a look.

"We want to know what you said to Abby on Sunday night at the party," I say.

"Why do you care?" He asks, "You think it's funny I got punched by a girl?"

"She's my sister dumbass," says Amity, "tell me what you said to her."

"Who said I said anything to her?" says Dan.

"Why else would she punch you?" Amity says.

"Could be for all sorts of reasons," He says in an annoying tone.

"Just cut the bullshit and tell me what you said to her," She says sternly. Amity has always had a short temper, pissing her off is never a good idea.

"Let me rephrase it for you," says Taylor, "what did you say, in general, that made Abby punch you?" Dan looks at Amity, a worried expression on his face, then turns to Taylor.

"What's in it for you, enby?" he says, Taylor scoffs.

"That's not a derogatory term, you idiot," they say.

"Just answer the question Dan," I say.

"I didn't say anything to Abby, I said something to someone else," says Dan, "Okay? Now leave me alone." The bell for the end of lunch starts to ring.

"This is about Stella, isn't it?" says Amity.

Dan looks at Amity "What, No!-" he says, but before he can continue she walks up and shoves him in the chest, making him land hard on the concrete floor.

"Fuck you."

"What the hell!" he shouts, Amity walks past us.

"Go to class," she says, before disappearing around the corner.



Amity

Fucking bigot. I don't even want to know what Dan said, it'll just make me want to punch him even more than I already do. This is my fault. If I hadn't gone to that stupid party none of this would have happened. No. This is Dan's fault. Fuck. I don't know what to think. I tuck my legs closer to my chest, I'm sitting against the brick wall of the back of the library, I couldn't stand going to Maths, it's not like Miss Wilson would give a shit anyways. Dan had scampered off and Keira and Taylor went to class. No one else is around. Just me and my thoughts. I shiver, a sudden cold breeze has come out of nowhere, as if it's some bad omen looming over me. Dan knew fuck all. We're still not any closer to figuring out what happened to my sister. All he managed to do was piss me off.

"Hey Amity," a voice says softly, I turn my head.
Stella. My savior from my own thoughts.

"Hey Stella," I say. She wraps her jacket around me and sits down beside me, resting her head on my shoulder.

"I take it you're having a sucky day?" she asks.

"Just about sums it up."

"Tell me, did you talk to Dan?" she asks, taking my hand, "What did he say?"
I let out a sigh.

"Yeah we did. It's just... Dan doesn't know anything, about what happened to Abby," I say.

"How would he not know anything?" Stella asks, "He's the one who said it."

"Oh he knows, it's just the little shithead didn't tell us," I say, but just because he didn't say it doesn't mean I don't know.

"Well then," says Stella, with a sudden cheery attitude, getting up and pulling me onto my feet. "I'm assuming neither of us want to be here, so, do you want to head over to my place?"

I give her a kiss, "Sounds like a plan."

When we'd gotten to Stella's house her mom was already home. Luckily she's super nice, she didn't mind us skipping school and even said she would call and say that we were out sick, just as long as we promised to catch up on work (for some reason we forgot to tell her that that's not how calling out sick works). Stella has this old mini record player in her room, which she's currently fiddling with while I'm laying on her bed. It's cute how she fangirls about bands and songs I can't even remember the names of, and sings while trying to get me to join in even when I don't know the words.

I try to memorise them, because these records are important to her, so they're important to me. However she has so many it's quite hard to. She also has this supernatural ability to pick out the exact song for the current mood. She's put on some Beatles song (I don't know which they all sound the same). I'm really glad Stella's here, I don't know if I would have coped these past couple of days without her. She's able to make the worst of times bearable, and I love that about her. Stella finished with the record player and Flops down on the bed next to me.

"How Are You coping?" she asks worryingly, "are you okay?" I pull her into a hug, tears welling up in my eyes.

No.

I'm not okay.

"Hey, it's alright," she says reassuringly, giving me a kiss on the forehead, "I'm here... I'm here." A tear rolls down my face - which Stella softly wipes away - that opens the floodgates to all the tears pent up since Monday. All the feelings I've kept from everyone, from myself.

I lay there, in Stella's arms, sobbing into her shoulder.



Keira

After school, Taylor for some reason decided that the woods would be the best place to test my powers. It isn't too far off from school, so I walked my bike there with them.

"So what Dan said is irrelevant?" I say.

"I mean, apart from being a jerk to Amity and Stella," says Taylor, "yeah, it doesn't help the case"

"Well, we now know that Abby's car has been stolen, that's something."

"Yeah, what's up with that? Why would they steal her car?" They ask.

"Maybe they didn't expect her body to be found so soon, and maybe make it look like she ran away?" I guess.

"Could be." We walk in silence for a moment.

"Why are we going to the woods again?" I ask.

"There's all sorts of junk in there!" They say, "surely something that ends up in the woods has an interesting past, plus no one will see you use your powers."

"What kinds of junk?" I ask.

"I dunno, let's find out," they say.

"I don't know why we're doing this," I say, "my power's not very exciting."

"Well, at least it's practice. Maybe the more you do it the better you will get at it, maybe pick out more details?"

"Maybe" I say.

We walk a fair bit into the woods and I prop my bike up against a tree so that it's out of sight and drop my bag next to it. Taylor puts their bag near mine and we head into the woods. The woods aren't very large, it's a small section of land surrounded on 3 sides by houses. But it's still big enough to get deep into it and not see any roads or cars, yet again, it's almost impossible to get lost. There are a couple of small clearings that I'm sure little kids like to play in. We come across one. There are a couple of logs laying down around the centre for sitting on, an abandoned campfire lays in the middle.

"So," says Taylor, "If we don't exactly know how this works, then let's find out." They crouch down by the fire, "If you touched this log, would you see the campfires past or just the wood?"

"I'm not sure," I say, "I'll give it a go." I crouch down on the opposite end of the campfire as Taylor, placing my hand on one of the logs. I close my eyes.

The fire is roaring, it's night time. Three people are sitting on the logs around the fire, laughing and drinking from green glass bottles. Suddenly my hand gets hot, really hot. I pull my hand away with a yelp, but the pain disappears immediately.

"What's wrong?" asks Taylor.

"Nothing, my hand just got really hot," I say.

"Hot? Like from the campfire?"

"Apparently so," I reply.

"Huh, that's cool, so you can like, feel its feelings too?" Asks Taylor.

"Your guess is as good as mine, I know as much as you do," I say.

"Well, what did you see from it anyways?" They ask.

"People, drinking around a fire."

"With this?" Asks Taylor, holding up shards of green glass they'd picked from the dirt.

"Yes," I confirm.

"Well you should use your powers on these then," Taylor says, "How did they get smashed?"

I take them off Taylor, holding them gingerly in my hand, not wanting to cut myself. I close my eyes. A rabbit is running through the bush, dashing frantically from side to side. The people are pegging the glass bottles at it, none of them are hitting it, but instead smashing against the trees and ground. I open my eyes and place the glass shards back on the ground

"They were chucking them at a rabbit, the poor thing."

"Jesus, is it ok?" asks Taylor worryingly.

"I think so," I say.

"Stupid teenagers," they say, kicking the dirt and glass shards at their feet.

Watching the glass shards flick off near the edge of the clearing, something catches their eye.

"Is that-" asks Taylor, trailing off as they walk to the edge of the clearing.

"Woah," they say, pulling out a shovel from a pile of leaves, it's covered in dirt but otherwise it doesn't look too old. They turn around and show it to me.

"You definitely need to use your powers on this," says Taylor, "there's gotta be some weird stuff buried out here."

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" I ask, I think Taylor and I have different views on 'weird'.

"What could go wrong?" says Taylor jokingly, "just a sketchy shovel in the middle of the woods, come on." They give me a nudge in the shoulder.

"Fine, but just this one and then we're going home, it's too cold out here."

"Fair enough," they say, handing me the shovel. I take it from them and hold it firmly with two hands, I take a deep breath and close my eyes. This time it isn't as much images as it is a scene itself, like I'm watching it from a movie screen. A hole dug in the foliage. The shovel lies in the dirt nearby.

A man is carrying something over his shoulder. A man wearing a red jacket. The man places whatever he is carrying into the hole. And then it grows clearer.
A person.
A boy is lying at the bottom of the hole.



Amity

"Hey Amity. Amity, get up," says Stella, shaking me lightly by the shoulders. I must have fallen asleep at some point. I sit up and rub my eyes, they feel sore.

"What time is it?" I ask, looking around the room. Stella had put the record away and outside the window it's getting dark.

"Around 6:30" she says, "but that's not important, you need to come see this." She grabs my hand and pulls me off the bed and towards the door.

"What's this about?" I ask Stella.

"You just need to see it." She says, I follow her down the stairs towards the living room, still half asleep. Stella's mom is in the kitchen.

"Hi again Mrs Laskaris," I say.

"Oh hi there! I was wondering when you'd come down. Will you be joining us for dinner?" She asks with a smile, "I can set another plate."

"That would be lovely. Thank you," I say, still being pulled along by Stella. We stop in front of the TV, still on, Stella grabs the remote and rewinds it to the beginning of a news broadcast. She sits me down on an armchair and presses play on the remote.

"Watch."

"News just in today 18 year old Jackson Grey was reported missing earlier this evening. The young man has been missing since Sunday night with his last known whereabouts being leaving his home in his car.

This is another strange occurrence for small town Comea Bay with the mysterious death of Abby Bauer on Monday night which is still under investigation, a cause of death has yet to be released. Some say these are related but there's nothing connecting these incidents at this time..."

Stella pauses the TV.

"Jackson... he's..." I look at Stella.

"You think they're related?" she asks.

"they have to be," I say, "there's no way that something happening to just the two of them is a coincidence." She nods.

"We need to talk to Chris."

By the Sandstone Cliffs by Liam Latz

End of Part One

Part Two coming late 2021 / early 2022

Excerpts from an ongoing project by Liam McGlynn

Interlude II

Myranda watched as the soldiers marched beneath her window. A man, with such a presence and aura that he seemed to glow in the low dawn light was at their head as they passed through the gatehouse of Whitespire. Her father was down there somewhere, and she scoured the scene below her, desperately trying to get one last glimpse of him but these men all looked the same.

Her da wouldn't be riding, she knew, with those who wore shining plate and white plumage atop their helms. And so she sat beside her window and waited as the column marched on.

Nor would he be marching with the next, soldiers in crudely painted mail, becoming more and more eclectic in their equipment over time. And so she sat and maintained her vigil until the sun began to fade, waiting as the column marched on.

Finally, she could see the rear end of the host. Here is where he would be. With those who wore simple padded armour, and carried no heraldry. One of their number faltered in their march, just before her home and looked up to the second story window. He smiled at her and gave her a wave.

He had told her little of his journey, save that he was part of the greatest army since the Pale Elves of ages past, and that they were to set out and make their mark upon this world and that he would come home safe. But he had held her while she sobbed nonetheless, and wiped her tears away as he told her stories of their leader and his power, and assured her he would not be gone long. And as she watched the sun set, she believed him absolutely.

Excerpts from an ongoing project by Liam McGlynn

South They Rode

South they rode from Whitespire,
Silhouetted by acrid smoke of pyre.
Clad in armour of silver plate,
South they rode with the winds of fate.

One rode at the head of this host,
Leaving long behind kin and coast.
South they rode, seeking power,
And they found the Obsidian Towers.

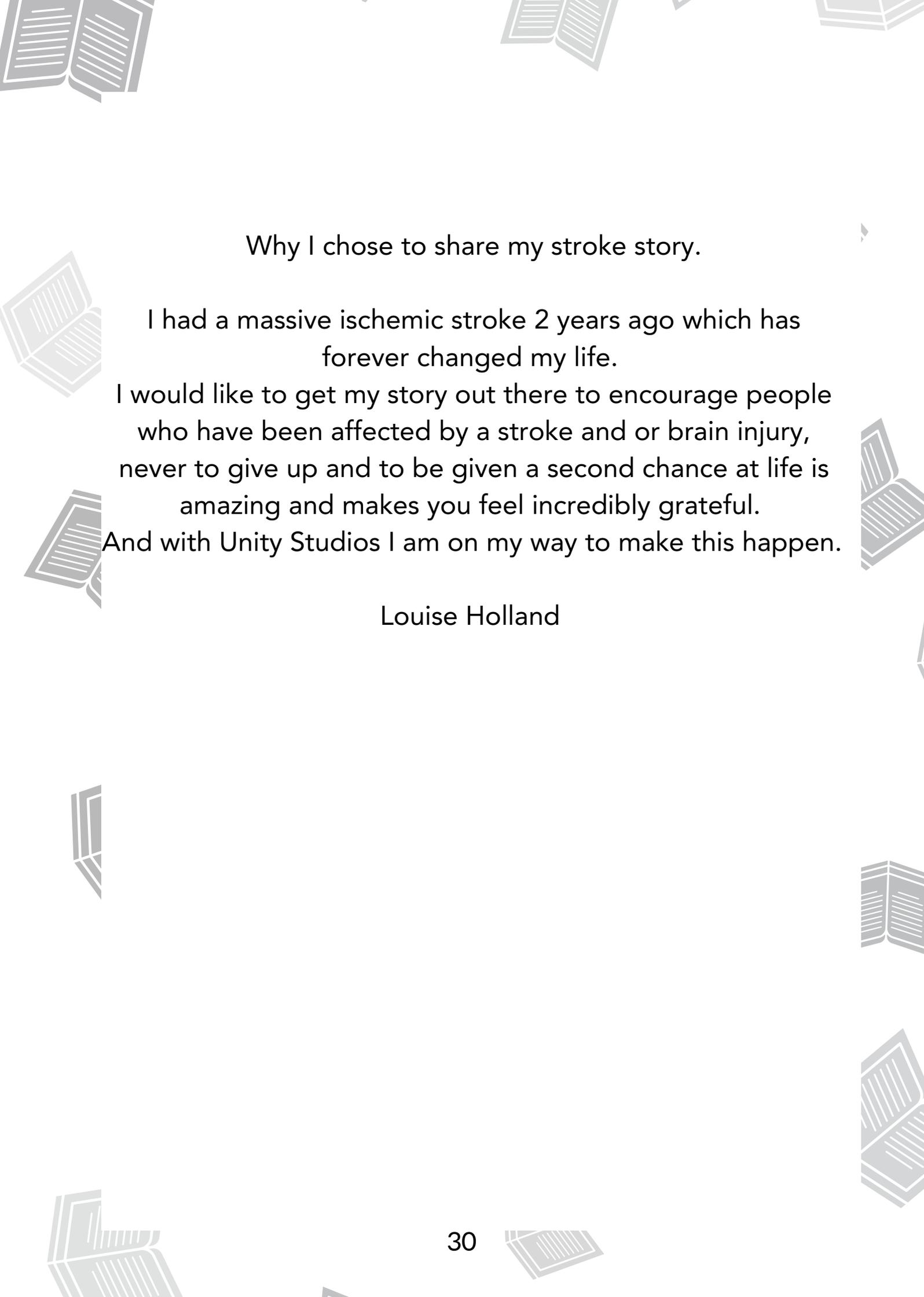
On cool dark stone hand was lain,
And imbued with the power of so many slain,
Opened a path to lands of everlasting light,
Where gods would learn of man's new might.

Excerpts from an ongoing project by Liam McGlynn

Stories of Creation: The God of Life and Death, Mudingugun

In the stories of creation, it is fitting that Mudingugun was the central figure to the beginnings of life. The first living creatures were made from clay, given by Bembul. This clay was dry and impossible to mould, and so Barrawal gave them water. They now resembled the creatures that Mudingugun would care for, but given enough time, these beautiful shapes would be lost and they would be naught but mud once more. And so it was that Yarraburra gave the power of the sun and wind to dry and bind these creations to physical form. Finally, Mudingugun breathed part of themselves into them, and thus life was created. But in the same moment, so was death. To Mudingugun, life and death were as one, and thus that which lived must once again return to death and give themselves to that which would come after.

All that die would go to join Mudingugun, and the god of life & death would keep them until they were ready to pass into whatever lay beyond, with their energy rejoining the world and begetting another life



Why I chose to share my stroke story.

I had a massive ischemic stroke 2 years ago which has forever changed my life.

I would like to get my story out there to encourage people who have been affected by a stroke and or brain injury, never to give up and to be given a second chance at life is amazing and makes you feel incredibly grateful. And with Unity Studios I am on my way to make this happen.

Louise Holland

An ongoing project by Louise Holland, My Stroke Story

Definition of the stroke i had :Ischemic Stroke

Most strokes (87%) are ischemic strokes.

An ischemic stroke happens when blood flow through the artery that supplies oxygen-rich blood to the brain becomes blocked.

My definition of a stroke.

Having my entire world turned upside down in the blink of an eye.

But let's go back a bit shall I.

It had been a tough few months at work leading up to my annual leave and I was excited about getting away for a while. My husband Dean and I had made plans a few months back to drive to Queensland to visit my sister Alison and her husband Warren and my nephew Jarred and niece Chelsea.

So we started our holidays on Friday night and planned to drive to Queensland in the early morning hours of Tuesday. Dean and I love to drive this trip in the early hours of the morning as there is very little Traffic to deal with, plus we love to play the spo to and our version of car karaoke.

So we set out on our way to Queensland, 10 days of fun here we come.

Although it's a long drive ahead of us, Dean and I enjoy the drive.

It gives us time to just be us and have no distractions and enjoy each other's company.

So we do our scheduled stops along the pacific highway to Queensland...coffee is the key.

With each town we bypass, we closely edging towards our holiday 😊

So by early Tuesday morning we were in the Gold Coast, just 50 minutes from seeing jarred and Chelsea, and my brother in law Warren. My sister Alison was going to be already at Work.

So I called Wazza to say we are only minutes away and to keep it a secret from my babies...also we're now both up to our fourth coffee and slightly buzzed.

So we pull into the driveway and my heart is going a million miles. It's Been over a year since I saw Jarred, Chelsea and Warren.

Seeing my sister would be later that day.

We were able to surprise jarred and Chelsea by arriving one day early, so to see their smiles was worth the drive through the night.

After a long absence from seeing my family it's almost like you have to get reacquaint with each other, but the feeling disappears pretty quick.

So we set off to the Gold Coast to play top golf which was a lot of fun.

To be continued

Why I Wrote This Book



I have for the most part of my life had a love affair for words. Words are potential treasures for me and rich colours of oil paint ready to be made contact on a plain white canvass.

So if this were my last day on this earth and I had something to say to the world, I would write this book.

The reality, very sadly was I have orchestrated my own 'last day' many times over and it certainly did not involve any book.

So came about my fifth admission as a voluntary patient in a psychiatric unit. It involved one woman of faith crying out to Jesus to show up in utter despair and the short days that followed.

There I met a dear roommate called Louise who, not knowing me or my life, asked me to pray to Jesus for her.

I lived to write this and to share the story of my life.

I don't intend on painting a grim, depressing picture of what is truly tragic about mental illness and what lies beneath it, or the tragedies of the greater world and mankind. I desire to offer a picture of truth that can potentially offer something else.

I wrote this book for Louise.
But I also wrote this book for you.

~ Katrina.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

1: My Fifth Admission

31/10/19

I have a confession to make. This story did not start with Louise. It started with me and a beautiful solitary beach. A favourite destination of mine for just about my whole life.

Before the end of October it was anything but idyllic.

I was prescribed medication to control my skin condition two months before. It was well known to expect my skin to flare up, among other side effects, before it became clear but I had no idea it would be this bad.

From tip to toe my skin was burning, itching and flaking off. I felt like I was in the fiery furnace of hell. I could only think of one of my favourite Biblical figures, Job, who, after losing pretty much everything, it was his skin condition that broke his spirit.

All I could do was lay on a couch for weeks near a fan. I spent three weeks like this occupying my time watching a well known television series. I was hooked into the plot and binged watched multiple killings and crimes. I should have known better, in my state, but eventually death became normal to me.

I had suffered various mental health issues for my entire existence, but I could never stand the nightmares. To have a nice dream would be like discovering a rare gem in a lifetime. Many people can hear me scream and yell and talk in my sleep. Sometimes I would even kick and punch furniture and fall out of bed.

October 2019 was a snowball gaining momentum down a hill fast, getting bigger and bigger by the day.

It culminated with my 17 year old son trying to feed my bird Solo fruit juice from a straw in a popper. It missed her little beak and ended up in my face.

The day was Thursday October 31st 2019. The last day of October. My plan had formed in my mind.

The sandy solitary beach. So welcoming, so comforting, so peaceful. It would be the last thing I would ever see.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

2: This Is War

31/08/21

This is what the LORD says to you: ' Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.

2 Chronicles 20:15 (New international version)

There is a real ugly state of my mind and soul that it is very easy to describe to a doctor at a psychiatric hospital when I am assessed to be allocated a bed.

Not so easy for you, dear reader. With another bout of depression present at the time of writing this chapter, I can safely go there to share that with you myself.

I had snapped when I wore juice on my face. The fuse was lit and I cried out to my home carer. She helps with cleaning and keeping me company, giving me emotional support on a regular basis.

I had my phone loaded with pictures of the ingredients of my beach time salad. Poison.

I thought since I was so smart, if life was so awful at least I could think of a way that I would succeed. Looking back, not many of my 'means', when told to doctors, police, nurses and psychiatrists all explained that I would not have finished or succeeded anyway. I was like a naive soldier, leaping up and over the trench to get across No Man's Land, only to be dragged back in by the people who cared, and whose job it was to help me.

But this was my fifth admission for suicidal depression. I was fed up. I have been treated for a number of psychiatric conditions since 2006 when my forty nine year old mother died suddenly and my seven year marriage ended at the same year. I tell friends and future therapists I could be a psychologist myself. As well as a pharmacist.

My life did not start well. I was born into an environment filled with domestic violence that never left my mind and dreams. My mother left the marriage with my brother and I, but she was hurt and affected too by the life that she lived.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

2: This Is War

31/08/21

Her own mother died in front of her at the age of seven. She needed to be loved and kept safe after that tragic experience. But sadly she experienced far greater suffering growing up with her father and stepmother then later marrying my father.

I was not an easy case for the clinical psychologists, case managers, occupational therapists and social workers but I thank God for them all. I got through and did the best I could. I never considered myself cured and if I dared to hope and believe that I would be completely healed I was disappointed many times.

Then there was parenting my two sons mostly on my own. That was difficult for them and for me too. I am grateful for Brighter Futures and all the agencies that offered free days out to the zoo, the centrepoint tower and even bus trips with other families doing it tough. I enjoyed that season of help.

One thing that I discovered as a parent today was that I never wanted to hurt my children the way I was hurt as a child. I never really had many examples of how to be a parent, other than professionals. I became an enabling type of parent with few boundaries. And kids are very smart and they were onto this before I figured it out.

Going back to that day of my fifth admission I will confess another mistake. I packed too much. I packed so many toiletries and clothes, a big dressing gown, coloured pencils and colouring books. I always go to the hospital with my Bible. After a few days I would like to read something to get back in touch with God again.

That last day of October 2019 I sat and waited in the Triage and Assessment unit for too long.

The team leader, who managed the waiting patients, always maintaining her composure and professionalism, offered sandwiches and tea and juice for the people in the waiting room. All I wanted to be is safe locked away in the Unit where the venom of suicidal distress would leave over days in the right environment. But all I could picture was that I was not safe, not getting a bed and stuck in No Man's Land on the battlefield.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

2: This Is War

31/08/21

After crying for hours, I watched the security guard constantly. He let people in and out of the locked glass door. At the moment he left his post I asked for my heavy bag of possessions with the excuse to retrieve belongings.

I ran out of the TAC unit ready to leave the hospital. No where near the beach but this time I will try finally and succeed.

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

6: My Father's Little Writer

One night and the next morning I had a dream.

I found myself in a place that shall we say is like a Majestic Art Studio. I was my Heavenly Father's little writer.

I cannot describe what God the Father looks like as no one but Jesus Himself has seen Him. But we were in each other's presence which was glorious.

I was by His side and allowed to write anything I liked. I was His child- a little girl. A state of innocence that I have not ever known as a girl here on earth or in the childhood I had.

This is what the Little Girl Katrina experienced and the conversation she had.

I felt so happy and full of joy. I was free. I could sense in my Spirit the scenes where God the Father was creating the world with His words. I was so pleased and proud to have such a great Dad.

I was there as a girl- a happy girl with a set of paints for words. An artist. I was so content just there writing with paint.

He said He knew why I liked words so much. I was related to Himself -my Heavenly Dad, my Abba Father (the name Jesus calls Him too). He loves Words too. He is a Great Author.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

6: My Father's Little Writer

My Heavenly Father created me and was very, very pleased.

I asked, "Daddy. I really love the Bible so much. I love teaching little people and older people about your words to help them understand what it means. But I am no Rabbi or Bible scholar. I am just a little girl who loves Your Book.

"Yes I know" my Daddy answers

"My Spirit of Truth speaks to you just like all of My writers"

As a child who loves and respects their parent I said to my Father

"But Abba Father, I don't want to get You wrong"

Without knowing His face, I sense His full assurance and confidence in me

"You won't"

Excitedly and jubilantly I say to My Heavenly Father,

"And Daddy, I want to write stories about my life and my favourite Person in the world, Your Special One of A Kind Son, Jesus"

I felt like a very loved little girl who had the smile of Heaven upon her.

I never want to leave such a great place.

I am hesitant to write this, but Katrina the writer on this earth never had a real dad. He was violent and drunk. He never sat me on his lap to read a book. He did not like words. I have never had warmth, protection, love or encouragement from an earthly father. I had great sadness and missed out on what a child should have had. My mother passed away in 2006. Essentially I have no parents.

My broken parents never gave me the permission to create and write freely. I have that now. Unity Studios is a blessing from Heaven for me to write and be myself. All thanks to My True Father who looks upon me and allows me to make this possible.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

7: A Relationship With Death and a Tragedy Too Deep for Words

I have never liked the concept of a person other than myself ending their life.

At a very young age my mother took me to Fairfield Hospital to visit my uncle who took an overdose of tablets at a graveyard leaving a note that she was the best sister one could ask for. That was a troubled relationship so that letter meant a lot to mum. She kept the letter in her purse to show me for years and my uncle still lives today.

I grew up seeing the news on TV of famous, infamous and ordinary people finding their fate at their own hands by many means. I saw mass suicides, documentaries, movies and read books of teens leaving early. Today is no different but my reaction is the same - inexplicable sadness.

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

8: Katrina Prays for Louise

Jesus, I lift my eyes up to you, Our Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, and pray.

Jesus, You have already been glorified when You died upon that cross destroying the power of death, sin and the evil one.

You had the full assurance of love from Your Father from even before the creation of the world. You could step down from your Heavenly Home and exchange your majestic kingly robes for that of human flesh and become a vulnerable human being. A person that could feel pain, who cries, who feels feelings, who suffers rejection, sorrow and grief. A person that also felt great compassion for mankind. You are also God but did not draw on the full privileges and power that you could exercise as God. You wanted to come along beside us. God in disguise. You lived as a sinless man and an obedient Son to Your Heavenly Father. You did exactly what He told you to do. You told us exactly His words. We saw that You are God in the flesh as only God can perform healings, signs, wonders and miracles. You even raised the dead, that which no human can do. Jesus you also forgave people of their sins (again as only God does) and showed us that you have been there right throughout the Bible and confirmed what others said about You.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE 8: Katrina Prays for Louise

Oh Jesus, You are Love. Everything about You and Your life is love. No one has exercised the extent of love by willingly going to the most cruel and horrific death imaginable. A death on a cross reserved for the worst criminals, although you did no wrong. A sheep to the slaughter. You bore and atoned for the sins of every human being that will ever exist from the small to the big.

For the whole person's life. You took the place of the sinner and took the sinner's punishment. This level of emotional, physical and spiritual suffering, I cannot know. But Jesus you suffered the separation from Your Father. You cried on that cross. "Father, Father, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus, how terribly sad. Jesus, you and Your Father have lived forever together. Even lying close in His bosom. You are not 33 years old. You are ageless, eternal.

This was for all of humanity's benefit. So we would have the chance to have eternal life. A relationship of knowing God forever. And this is not just the knowledge of a person like we humans know it. Neither is it being religious or quoting Bible passages like the Pharisees did. Jesus, knowing You, the Father and the Holy Spirit is intimate knowledge better than a marriage relationship on earth. Such a beautiful, precious privilege. Knowing the true God, who created heaven, earth and wondrous things like animals, rainbows, flowers and mangoes. Who created us in His image and likeness. All of us are different and unique. You know us by our names. I cannot imagine right now what that would be like but I cannot help but desire that with all my being. I know that Heaven is a place that is perfect. I will never cry or be sick again. I will be everything that I was meant to be. Heaven will be a place that these eyes will one day be able to see. But Jesus, eternal life is knowing You, the very special, only begotten Son of God sent to be the Saviour of the world. And the Father- the One true God. That is what I truly long for.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE 8: Katrina Prays for Louise

Jesus, I pray for Louise right now. I wrote this book of my life story as an offering. You placed Louise in my life in the worst hour when I despaired of my own life. I gladly pray for her. She needed you too in her worst time being so sick in hospital with me. She is yours. There is a reason for this need. My deepest prayer is that she will know you too. Jesus you told us the importance of asking, seeking and knocking. You will answer, you will be found, you will open the door. Louise asked me to pray for her three times. Jesus, You too asked your disciples to pray three times when you were distressed and sorrowful to the point of death. They did not. They were asleep in their own grief. Jesus, I am not asleep. I thank you that you woke me up for this precious lady, to pray for her. Jesus, I pray that Louise, wherever she is, will know that she is loved by You. That you care for her, that you comfort her. That you give her peace for anxiety. I pray, Jesus, that Your perfect, pleasing will, will be done in her life. I would love to meet Louise and may this book and prayer reach her very heart.

I pray for everyone who experiences mental illness of many names, forms and severities. Oh Jesus, I have such a big heart of compassion and love for all these people. I feel I cry their tears too. This book and prayer is for them as well. I bring all these precious souls to your throne room. Protect them my Lord. Protect them by Your name. Let not the effects of mental illness have any harm on their lives or anyone's around them. This world is such a troubled place full of wrongs and evils. Don't remove them out of the world but protect them from the evil one. Let them hear your words and wash them and make them clean and set apart for you. Jesus let your wondrous words wash over me too for your special purposes in this world. Jesus, make me a worthy representative of You and Your name. I absolutely delight in telling people, anyone who wants to hear about You. Make these words real to them. I desire that just by telling Your words, that Your Spirit will move and quicken their hearts. Holy Spirit. You are the Spirit of Truth. The gift of the Father. We cannot see You, but like the wind blowing the leaves on the tree we can see what you do in people. Holy Spirit, you change people, you do what Jesus did on earth. You heal, you deliver. Holy Spirit, you tell us of our spiritual condition. Sixteen years ago, You spoke to me. My soul was filled with sin. My heart was sick. I needed a heart transplant. Only You could do that. I was so proud. Only a loving God, a perfect, pure sinless God could bring me to my knees.

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

8: Katrina Prays for Louise

Jesus, You decided that You and the Father would make a home in me. This is the most wondrous mystery and joy I have discovered. I have never been the same and you will continue to transform me until your work in me is finished. I am a new creation and Your handiwork.

Lord Jesus I desire all that I have seen in You, to be for all the people I pray for and so much more. Jesus when all is finished on this planet there are some things that will live forever. Souls, You and Your Word. How valuable are these. Also Lord Jesus, You say that Faith, Hope and Love remain. These are great virtues. Jesus let all that suffer from mental illness have these to hang onto.

Jesus, I pray for myself. Jesus pray your beautiful prayer "The High Priestly Prayer" for me. (Gospel of John, Chapter Seventeen). When I see you face to face, say those words you prayed at the last supper over me. Jesus if everything was taken away from me, if I was shipwrecked and could not even have a Bible or beaten up in prison or thrown in the lion's den. Just give me your prayer. That is enough for me. Jesus if I were too sick or old to read or had dementia please find someone to pray that prayer to me. If I lived the rest of my life and never got any healing or cure for Bipolar Mood Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety, Psoriasis and Chronic Back Pain, I can truly live and have joy because I know of this prayer. And You love me. Your love is so powerful -stronger than death. I can therefore live for the rest of my days.

Jesus I want to show others the most special truth that you revealed in your prayer. The truth that I have meditated over and over in my spirit and shared in communion with you. I have had the great honour to teach this to people, many who skip past this in the Bible.

*Holy and Righteous Father, You love me as much as You love Jesus.
Jesus, You pray for me to be One with, Yourself, Our Father and the Holy Spirit.
Complete unity, not just for me but for all that will be your true followers.*

An ongoing project by Katrina

A PRAYER FOR LOUISE

8: Katrina Prays for Louise

Jesus, you prayed these words as God the Son then this prayer is Amen. Will happen, guaranteed.

I have seen the most indescribably beautiful thing. Your heart. God's Heart.

Never will I deserve this Lord Jesus Christ, but gratefully I welcome Your heart with all of mine .

Amen. Come Lord Jesus.



I was a very sad little girl. Perhaps it was genetics from my family, or my environment around me or my brain chemistry and wiring.

But I always cried very easily. Many baby photos reveal a tear streaked red face. My old neighbour in Barton Street remembers me in that way- a three year old girl sitting on a gutter with mucus running down her face.

The world presented to me since and even before my birth was not to be trusted or welcomed.

Louise, I never told you this at the time we met in hospital. But I think it is okay now.

To never at least touch on this subject would undermine my story and my life of emotional pain and that of others too. Silence would also support the already deafening silence that exists surrounding suicide.

An ongoing project by Katrina

Several of the people involved in my life do not want to either be in this book or be named. I have on the other hand asked others in my circles and given the opportunity to only reveal stories and events.

Suicide may just as well be a swear word of a higher level. One that people cannot say. Or a disfigured person that would never be invited in a photo or an infectious person you would run away from.

A leper in the Biblical days.

As a child I have self harmed in the form of scratching and ripping off sores, slapping my face repeatedly. I have written in multiple diaries, spoken to teachers at school and peers who felt the same way too.

Feeling strong emotions that there is no hope for my pain or the bleakness of my life happens over a long time and is hidden. Or maybe others just miss it in the business of their own lives or just refuse to see it. One friend recently confessed that she became 'immune' so to speak over the years. Some of those close to me identify me as the person who is 'sick' or 'with problems' or 'not doing well'. I cannot help but feel more ashamed.

The worst question a loved one can ask in this state is "How are you?" I can tell 99.9% of the time that the question is not truly sincere or my real answer is not wanted anyway.

Not only can I not trust the world but those around me as well. I am alone. And that is really, really sad.

So my feet make more steps toward the edge of the unknown. And that is frightening.

My heart at the same time cries out, "Please someone care! Please do something, anything!"

But nothing happens.

An ongoing project by Katrina

There comes a stage where I am very out of touch with reality and I might as well lose the view of the shoreline in the middle of the sea and ready to surrender in enemy territory. This is a very dangerous, violent and unnatural place. This place or the (state of mind of this place) has been the source of countless nightmares stretching as far as I can remember.

Thoughts turn over and over inside my head that form very vivid and violent actions that are disturbing. I find myself attending my own funeral in advance and no one is there. I am there all alone grieving over myself. I feel depressed and grieved for Katrina.

The happier side of this story (or in my eyes the true miracle) is that I actually never tried to kill myself in my forty-five years of life.

What I have learned that for my own sake it is important to

Sever the relationship with death
Death is never to be trusted, welcomed or liked
When or how I die will never be my choice
I can never put God to the test.

I find great comfort and, yes, joy in sharing my story to an unlikely audience. A special kind of people that do understand.

Those who have lived and survived this kind of hell.

An ongoing project by Jouvah

Anomalous Woods (draft) by Jouvah Zheng

Deep within the forest, in the middle of the night, sounds of animals and insects echoes throughout the woods. It's a rather peaceful place to be in if you imagine yourself in this dark place amongst the trees. But it's not common for its inhabitants to encounter any human beings walking around the area. Nor was it even less common for those humans to ever leave again. Although maybe this time these new visitors might be the exception. . .

As the three high schoolers walk their way through the forest grounds, the girl at the front of the group who has noticeably blue coloured hair looks back to her companions and says, "I think we're heading in the right direction guys." Then she continues her pace ahead of them.

The companions the blue haired girl is referring to in particular, are two classmates of different and unique appearances.

One is a teenage girl who's one year younger than her friend, has a short feminine hairstyle with freckles featured across her cheeks. She wears an unzipped light-grey hoodie, along with a pink t-shirt underneath it showing an image of a butterfly. In her hands is an old fashioned camera that takes physical copies of any images taken.

The other one is a tall teenage boy who's around the same age as his friend walking next to him, has a more boyish, short hairstyle compared to his friend and wears a blue t-shirt with a chemistry symbol on the middle.

"Are you sure you know where we're going Sam?" The girl said walking behind her friend. "Because it doesn't feel like we're making much progress since we entered the forest."

Looking back at her friend, the blue haired girl replies. "Oh come on Lisa," she said playfully. "You know I've always had a great sense of direction, even since we were young."

The boy walking next to Lisa looks at Sam with a doubtful expression. "I'm not sure I can believe that." He said whilst putting his hand on his chin.

An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

"I remember Lisa told me there was one time where you got lost and needed some help then."

Sam stares at the boy with an annoyed look, rebutting. "Quiet Adam, for your information I was five when that happened."

The three teenagers had been chatting like this along their way ever since they went into the forest around midnight, just after they met up and ate dinner together before they began their journey.

It all started after Sam heard some talks about people going missing every once in a while, with rumours she'd heard from her friend Ruth that they were last known to have gone to the nearby forest, trying to search for an abandoned lumberyard that had been said to be located within the area. Sam told her two closest friends, Lisa and Adam that they should try to search for the missing people by finding the yard themselves. They weren't too sure if the place exists, however after some convincing by Sam, they all decided to plan their course on how they were going to get there.

They agreed to tell their parents that they were going to Sam's house at night-time for a hangout. Then after they had dinner, they'd drive in Sam's car to the forest where they will try to track down any leads to where the lumberyard might be in the area. This is where they're now, as they've been searching around for any signs of human activity to no avail so far.

Lisa, feeling that it's time to speak up to her friend, looks at Sam with a firm expression and says. "Sam, you're sure the person who told you this rumour wasn't trying to prank you? I mean, we should have found a sign of somebody being in this forest, or anything pointing to a lumberyard at this point."

Sam looks towards Lisa and responds with confidence in her voice. "No need to worry Lisa, Ruth is someone I can trust when it comes to these sorts of rumours." She gives a smirk as she continues, "Why, she's the reason how I found out you and Adam are having a lot of 'outings' if you get what I mean."

Surprised by Sam's sudden tease, Lisa feels her cheeks starting to get a bit red by this point. Feeling embarrassed by her best friend, especially with Adam walking next to her. "H-h-hey Sam, don't think we were doing 'those' kinds of things," Lisa quickly replies awkwardly as her cheeks grow redder. "We only just study together and chat about movies, and other stuff when we hangout."

Adam, who's also blushing from Sam's tease, adds in by saying. "Yeah that's pretty much what we do on our outings, we're not really thrill seekers or rebels like you Sam."

"I wouldn't call myself a rebel," Sam replies with a smug look on her face. "I like to think I'm more of an... adventurous type, in what I do. In fact, there was that one time that Lisa and I-" She stops what she was about to say as her eyes catch something interesting in the distance. "Oh wait, I think that's the place." Sam says as she begins to run further into the forest. Looking back towards her friends, Sam shouted. "Come on guys!" Whilst keeping her pace as she continues through the undergrowth.

Lisa and Adam look at each other puzzled, wondering what has gotten Sam in such a hurry. Deciding that it's best they follow along, the both of them run as quick as they can to where Sam went.

It was not before long the two of them managed to reach where Sam went off. As they begin to slow their pace, Lisa notices her best friend standing in front of a metal fence gate, which seems to encompass the rest of the forest area ahead. Sam, looking behind her right shoulder to see Lisa and Adam, says to them. "Hey guys, check this place out. This has to be the old lumberyard we've been searching for."

As Lisa and Adam look through the gaps of the rusted mesh-panel fences, it seems indeed that she's right. Beyond the fence, they can see piles of stacked logs all around the area. Further along they notice a few structures of different heights and designs, one of which appears to be the main office block. Another one with large tall chimney pipes appears to be the wood mill. And the last noticeable building they can see appears to be the warehouse itself, where the workers would store the logs for shipment.

When Lisa and Adam finish their observations through the fence, they see Sam looking pretty pleased with herself. "See you two; I knew this place would be real." She says with a prideful tone. "My sources are never wrong when it comes to this sort of stuff."

The two of them looked at Sam with amused expressions on their faces. Then Lisa replies to her. "Well I guess we shouldn't have doubted you Sam."

An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

“Heck yeah you shouldn’t.” Sam says with a wink towards Lisa. “Now, does anyone see a way to get inside?”

Lisa turns to look at Adam as he begins to search inside his bag for something. “Actually, I think I might have exactly the right tool to get us in.”

After a few seconds ruffling through his belongings, Adam manages to pull out a bolt cutter from his bag. “Found it,” He exclaims with a hint of delight. “Now let’s take a look at the gate.”

They moved closer towards the gateway in front of them. From inspecting it, they see to their surprise that the metal gate is not held by any sort of lock at all. In fact when Adam tries to push the right door open, it easily gives way as it moves inward with a noticeable squeak.

“Huh, that’s strange,” Adam said in bewilderment. “I wonder why the gate wasn’t locked when they left this place.”

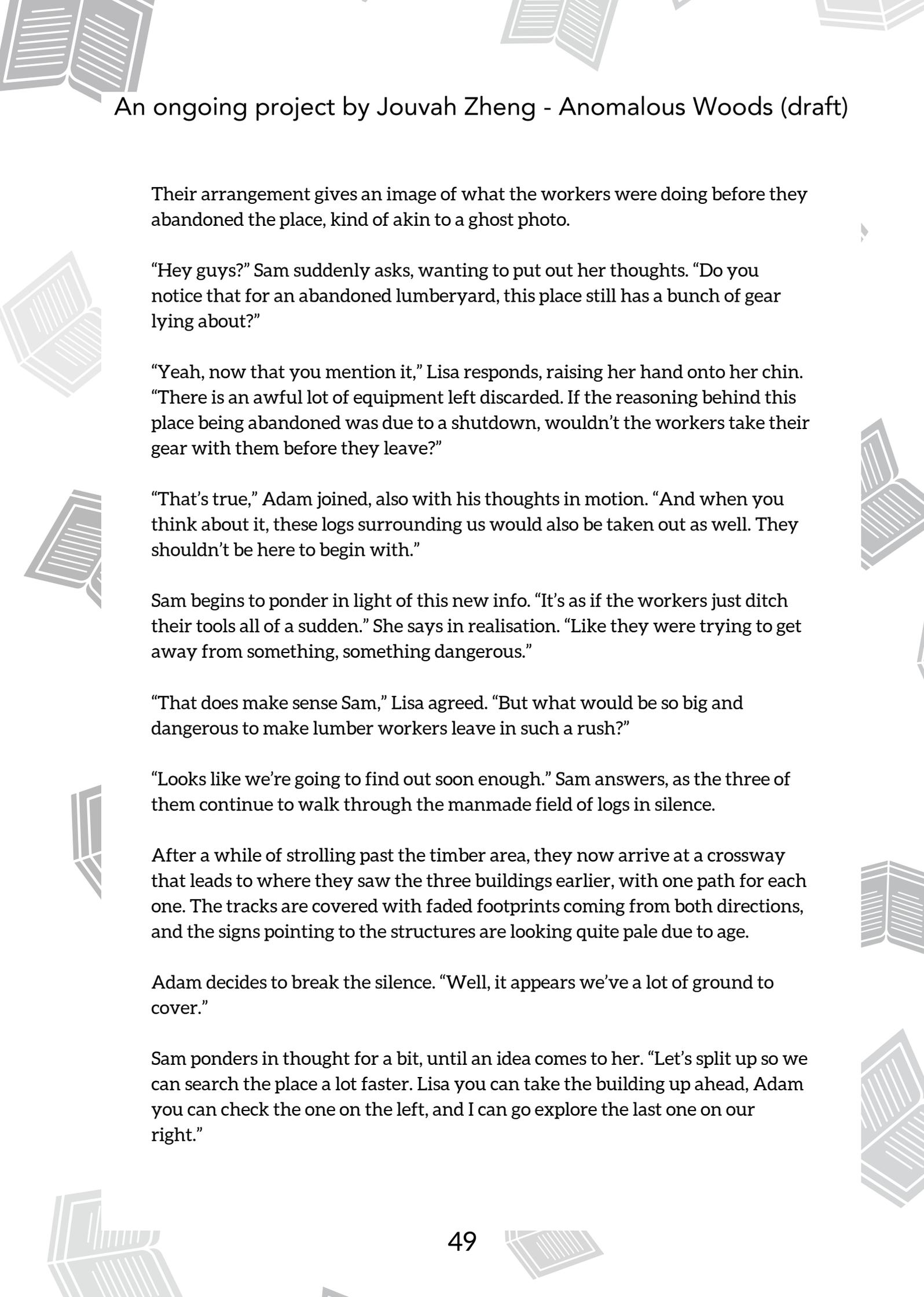
Thinking of a possibility, Lisa then replies. “It could be evidence that there were indeed other people who came here, and that they had to cut the lock in order to get inside. It’s just a thought though.”

“It’s possible,” Adam responds as he puts his bolt cutter back into his bag. “Though if that’s the case, shouldn’t we see the broken lock lying on the ground nearby?”

Lisa realises what he meant, and quickly looks at the dirt path underneath them. “Oh yeah you’re right,” She said almost hastily. “But that doesn’t make sense though, unless the people who worked here never locked the grates to begin with.”

“Alright I think that’s enough brainstorming between you two dweebs,” Sam says to her friends, feeling a bit impatient hearing them chat for so long. “Come on, I’m sure we’ll find our answers once we get inside.”

With the two nodding in agreement, they follow behind Sam through the opened gateway. As the three of them walk further into the lumberyard, they begin to notice some odd details about the place, much odder than they expected. Throughout the piles of rotting logs there’re several tools and pieces of equipment, like heavy duty saws and drills, scattered around the area.

An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

Their arrangement gives an image of what the workers were doing before they abandoned the place, kind of akin to a ghost photo.

“Hey guys?” Sam suddenly asks, wanting to put out her thoughts. “Do you notice that for an abandoned lumberyard, this place still has a bunch of gear lying about?”

“Yeah, now that you mention it,” Lisa responds, raising her hand onto her chin. “There is an awful lot of equipment left discarded. If the reasoning behind this place being abandoned was due to a shutdown, wouldn’t the workers take their gear with them before they leave?”

“That’s true,” Adam joined, also with his thoughts in motion. “And when you think about it, these logs surrounding us would also be taken out as well. They shouldn’t be here to begin with.”

Sam begins to ponder in light of this new info. “It’s as if the workers just ditch their tools all of a sudden.” She says in realisation. “Like they were trying to get away from something, something dangerous.”

“That does make sense Sam,” Lisa agreed. “But what would be so big and dangerous to make lumber workers leave in such a rush?”

“Looks like we’re going to find out soon enough.” Sam answers, as the three of them continue to walk through the manmade field of logs in silence.

After a while of strolling past the timber area, they now arrive at a crossway that leads to where they saw the three buildings earlier, with one path for each one. The tracks are covered with faded footprints coming from both directions, and the signs pointing to the structures are looking quite pale due to age.

Adam decides to break the silence. “Well, it appears we’ve a lot of ground to cover.”

Sam ponders in thought for a bit, until an idea comes to her. “Let’s split up so we can search the place a lot faster. Lisa you can take the building up ahead, Adam you can check the one on the left, and I can go explore the last one on our right.”

An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

"Whoa wait Sam," Said Lisa, taken aback by her friend's quick directives. "Are you sure it's a good idea for us to split up? You know that's exactly what ends up getting people killed in horror movies."

"I understand where you're coming from Lisa," Sam replies, taking a firm posture as she continues, "But this is the 21st century! We now have a solution right inside our pockets."

Raising his right eyebrow with wonder, Adam asks. "What exactly are you referring to Sam?"

Hearing this, she begins to reach into one of her pockets with her right hand. "Why this!" Sam pulls out her smartphone with delight, its back covered in punk rock stickers. "We can use our phones to keep in contact with each other when we find something interesting," She explains with an enthusiastic tone. "And in case one of us gets into trouble we can send a call and we'll try to get there to help out!"

"I guess that kind of solves that problem," Lisa said while rubbing her chin with her hand, still not entirely convinced by Sam's 'foolproof' plan. "What do you think Adam?"

Giving some thought on their situation as well, Adam then replies. "I'm not too sure about this as well Lisa. I have this strange feeling ever since we came here that there's something bad hidden in this place."

He paused for a bit, taking a look at the warehouse building for a brief second, then continued. "But we would be here until morning if we take our time exploring each building one by one, so it looks like we've got to go with Sam's plan if we want to figure out the mystery of this place without the additional time."

Sam folds her arms onto her chest, feeling pretty pleased upon hearing this. "Heck yeah, let's do this," She said with a smirk forming on her face.

She takes a look at Lisa, noticing her biting her bottom lip, a sign Lisa makes when she's feeling anxious about something. "Hey don't worry Lisa," Sam says to her with certainty. "If Adam's okay with it, then I'm sure we'll be fine. Besides, even if you or our resident 'doctor' here gets into trouble, I'll be there to save your butts before either you two can shout."

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An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

"Fighting the urge to laugh at her best friend's way of comforting, Lisa then gives a faint but noticeable smile and says. "Alright, I trust you Sam. But I'm still not entirely sure about this."

"Relax Lisa, it'll be fine," Sam replied with a casual tone. "When's the last time I've gotten you in trouble?"

Both Lisa and Adam stared at her with deadpan expressions, with their right eyebrows raised slightly.

"Okay fine, there were a couple of times or more that I've gotten you in trouble Lisa," Sam responds while rubbing the back of her head. "But otherwise, my ideas have been working out pretty well for us so far. I say we'll be out of here, coming out as town heroes by tonight!"

Seeing that Sam's looking pretty confident in herself, the two of them decided it's best they don't try to argue with her any further. "Alright, whatever you say Sam," Lisa replies with a light smile on her face, looking amused at her friend's display of ego. "Well I guess it's time for us to start our search then."

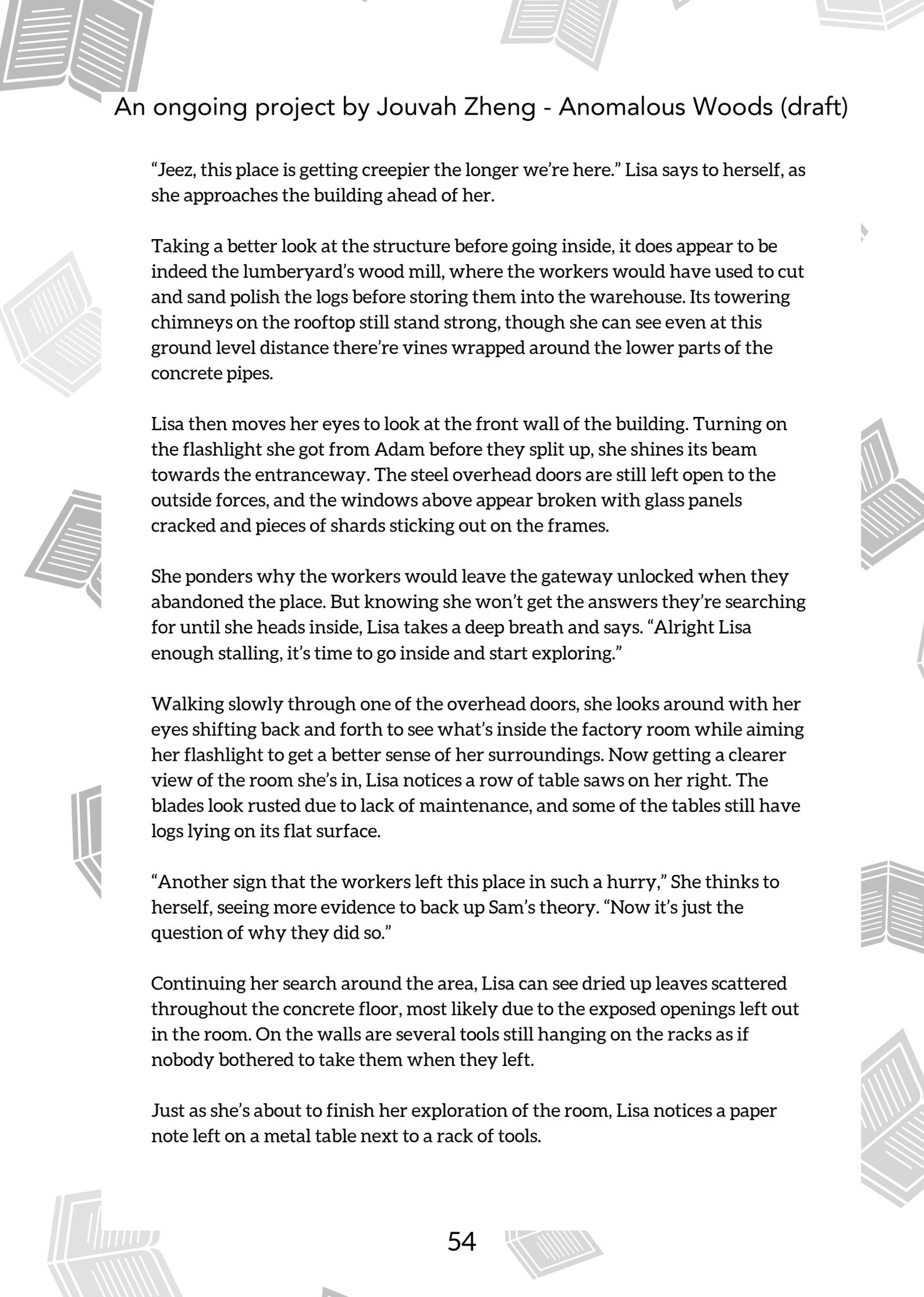
"It appears to be so," Said Adam, feeling positive about their arrangement but still can't shake the thought that something bad might happen to them. "Let's try to finish our investigation by the next hour and come back here to regroup. If one of us finds something dangerous we should all head back to the front entrance and contact the police about what happened here."

Both Lisa and Sam nodded in agreement to their overall plan. Then after a bit of further discussion of which building they'll go explore, the three teens head off to begin their search for clues behind the closure of this lumberyard.

As they walk down the crossway towards their target location, something creaks behind one of the log piles at a distance.

Something tall, and dark, watches the high schoolers walk closer to its hunting ground. Not knowing they're being stalked the moment they entered this place.

Someone, hungry, is waiting for the right time to strike, and kill its new prey.

An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

“Jeez, this place is getting creepier the longer we’re here.” Lisa says to herself, as she approaches the building ahead of her.

Taking a better look at the structure before going inside, it does appear to be indeed the lumberyard’s wood mill, where the workers would have used to cut and sand polish the logs before storing them into the warehouse. Its towering chimneys on the rooftop still stand strong, though she can see even at this ground level distance there’re vines wrapped around the lower parts of the concrete pipes.

Lisa then moves her eyes to look at the front wall of the building. Turning on the flashlight she got from Adam before they split up, she shines its beam towards the entranceway. The steel overhead doors are still left open to the outside forces, and the windows above appear broken with glass panels cracked and pieces of shards sticking out on the frames.

She ponders why the workers would leave the gateway unlocked when they abandoned the place. But knowing she won’t get the answers they’re searching for until she heads inside, Lisa takes a deep breath and says. “Alright Lisa enough stalling, it’s time to go inside and start exploring.”

Walking slowly through one of the overhead doors, she looks around with her eyes shifting back and forth to see what’s inside the factory room while aiming her flashlight to get a better sense of her surroundings. Now getting a clearer view of the room she’s in, Lisa notices a row of table saws on her right. The blades look rusted due to lack of maintenance, and some of the tables still have logs lying on its flat surface.

“Another sign that the workers left this place in such a hurry,” She thinks to herself, seeing more evidence to back up Sam’s theory. “Now it’s just the question of why they did so.”

Continuing her search around the area, Lisa can see dried up leaves scattered throughout the concrete floor, most likely due to the exposed openings left out in the room. On the walls are several tools still hanging on the racks as if nobody bothered to take them when they left.

Just as she’s about to finish her exploration of the room, Lisa notices a paper note left on a metal table next to a rack of tools.

An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

She walks closer to take a glimpse of what it says, and feels a slight chill in her spine when she reads the top part of the article.

It's a personal entry left behind by what seems to be one of the missing people, though there's no name written on it to be exactly sure. It seems however that the note was made some time ago, as the writing looks a bit faded, probably due to rainfall that must have come through the broken windows above. It also appears that the paper has some odd black spray-like marks on the bottom, though it could be from the pen the writer was using.

Picking up the letter gently, Lisa then begins to read the rest of its contents.

'It's been nearly 2 hours since Jake went missing, and there's still no sign of him yet. Natalie and Mark told me we should check the warehouse next to see if we can find either him or anyone else for that matter.

Honestly, I think we should get the hell out of here as soon as possible. Ever since we got here, I've had this odd feeling there's something lurking around this place. I swear I heard a bunch of stuff being knocked over when we were walking through the halls earlier. It definitely wasn't the wind, that I'm sure of.

As much as I don't want to leave Jake behind, I'm starting to think that whatever's here has already taken him. And the longer we stay here the more likely we'll end up like him next. Hopefully if anything happens to me at least my friends will be able to find this note.'

As she finishes reading the note, Lisa realises that her hands have started to tremble while putting down the letter. Placing it back on the table, she begins to ponder what the writer was referring to throughout his note.

"So it looks like there's something in this place that's causing people to disappear," She thought to herself, doing a quick scan around the room in case there's something watching her at this very moment. "But what could it be? Is it some sort of wild animal, or maybe even a serial killer on the loose hiding around here?" Then Lisa shook her head in disbelief at that last thought. "Okay, maybe that last bit might be too much. Man I'm starting to think like Sam at this point, maybe after this we should take a break from watching horror movies for a bit."

An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

Whilst calming her nerves down, suddenly a loud strange noise that sounds like a low pitch wailing echoes from out of a doorway nearby, like some sort of beast trying to call out in search of someone.

The suddenness of the growl causes her to jump slightly upon hearing it.

"What the heck is that?!" She quickly thought to herself.

Looking towards the direction of where the sound came from, Lisa slowly takes a few steps forward to the doorway at the end of the room. As she focuses her ears on listening for any further noises throughout her surroundings, the young girl reaches to the front of the entryway.

The door sways slightly opened towards the inside of the dark hallway behind it, with a cool breeze lightly blowing through the gap of the doorframe. Lisa feels a lot colder than before, which is odd considering how calm the wind is outside.

She leans her head forward near the gap between the doorway, her ears straining to listen for those strange noises to come forth once again. As an unnerving silence begins to fill the room around Lisa, making her feel more uncomfortable about her current situation.

A few seconds pass, with no signs of whatever's making those noises earlier behind the doorframe. Knowing she can't take any further delays, Lisa slowly pushes the door open, and walks into the hallway to continue exploring the rest of the wood mill.

Despite the row of windows located on the left side of the hall, it's surprisingly still dark to look around without a proper source of light. Shining her flashlight towards the end of the hallway, Lisa takes a slow pace as she glances throughout the area for any more traces left by the missing people.

As she continues walking down the hall, Lisa notices another note lying on the floor up ahead. Taking a look at the dirt crusted letter, she quickly realises the message on it has a more straight-forward, and disturbing implication.

'There's something hiding in this place, I need to get out of here before it's too late.'

An ongoing project by Jouvah Zheng - Anomalous Woods (draft)

Upon reading the end of the sentence, Lisa sees some more notes scattered nearby. What's noticeably different with these ones compared to the earlier notes are the writings on each of them, with the first letters she found had a somewhat neat writing style to them. However these notes featured a sketchier handwriting than the previous ones, some of which are harder to read as a few of the words looked messy and crooked. Nevertheless, all of these letters contain a more unsettling message than the last.

'It's stalking us. Hiding in the shadows.'

'Get out, run. Run while you still can.'

'That thing bitten my shoulder. I don't think I can last much longer.'

'LEAVE. IT'S TOO LATE FOR US.'

'RUN!'

She can feel the tension rising after going through one note after another. Her heart starts to beat faster than ever before as drops of sweat begin to fall down her forehead.

That's when Lisa notices a large, dark like figure scuttling on its four slim legs at the end of the hallway, making an odd wet noise as it went.

"What in God's name did I just see?!" She thinks, as she can feel her knees begging for her to give into the fear.

Something in the back of her mind is screaming to herself that she should get out of this place immediately and warn the others of what she saw. But maybe finding out what that thing is might be the key to solving this mystery.

"Either way, it's a death wish for me to go after that... thing," Lisa thinks, gulping at that last word. *"Still, maybe it's just an animal and it won't attack me if I just stay quiet."*

Taking a quick glance of the hall in front of her, she gives out a sigh and resumes her pace. *"Here goes nothing."*

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She takes a few cautious steps towards the corridor on her left, peaking out to see if the T-section of the hallway is clear. After checking both directions, with no other signs of any life-forms lurking about, besides the trail of black gloop-like footprints down where that thing went. Lisa moves out of the corner, and continues walking cautiously to where it might be hiding now.

As she follows the tracks, Lisa wonders what kind of animal would make these sorts of footprints. As they don't appear to have been made by any known creatures she could recognise. It almost makes her wish that Adam is here with her to help out identifying these track marks.

"As well as providing some nice company at this point." She thinks to herself, as a light blush starts to glow on her cheeks at the thought of that idea.

The footprints end at a doorway that appears to lead to another room, possibly a break area for workers. The door itself is open wide, letting Lisa see the silhouettes of the chairs and tables inside. As she gets closer, a strange noise can be heard from within, which sounds like a soft, deep breathing that's probably coming from the thing she saw earlier.

Taking a peak around the corner of the doorframe, Lisa slowly begins to move her flashlight to get a better look of the room's interior. However, as the light beam starts to shine on an odd shadowy outline appearing on the left side, she realises too late that the silhouette belongs to that thing from the hallway before.

It's taller than anything she has ever encountered.

It's covered in some sort of gloopy black-like mush all over.

And it's definitely not an animal of any kind.

She feels like she wanted to scream at the immediate sight of it.

She did.

It's been a few minutes since the three of them split off, and Adam's already wishing that he has some company to keep the feeling of loneliness away. As he walks down the halls of what used to be the office building for the lumber company stationed here, he starts to think to himself.

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"I'm starting to regret that we agreed on Sam's idea," Breathing out a sigh, he continues walking forwards. *"I kind of wish I asked Lisa if we could team up together, in case she was feeling uncomfortable going by herself."*

When they went off to go and explore the rest of the lumberyard earlier, Adam chose to check out the flat roof structure on the left of the crossway. Upon reaching there he noticed that the building, though not in the best state, was not completely in disarray, as the windows next to the door are mostly intact with only a couple of cracks on the glass panels. Along with the fact not much plant life had grown around the area other than some tall grass nearby and a few small vines encircling the brick footings underneath.

What he found very odd so far was that the front door, though closed, was not locked. Almost as if the people who worked here were in such a rush to leave the place they didn't bother to properly lock it. As he entered through and into the building, Adam deduced he was now in the main lobby area of the office, with rows of cubicles lined up on each side of the room in front of him.

This leads back to the situation Adam finds himself in now, as he walks past the multiple files of empty office desks, trying to search for any kind of clues that could explain the cause behind this lumberyard's abandonment.

As his eyes glance around the room whilst shining his flashlight, he notices the computer screens at some of the cubicles are knocked down onto the floor, along with some other items lying about like pens and paper. There are also a few odd markings that look like small blackish coloured sludge marks located on both the ceiling and the carpet tiles, like some kind of animal had run and crawled around the lobby.

Seeing an opened door at the end of the hall, Adam quickens his pace to reach it. Upon arriving, he sees a sign on the door, revealing that it used to be the manager's room. Walking through the entrance, he finds the area to be in a similar state to the rest of the office, with the major exception being the tall glass windows at the back of the room, shattered beyond repair as a huge jagged hole, which looked as if someone threw a heavy table onto it, lies in the centre of what's left of the windowpane.

"Well... that's not a pleasant sight to see," Adam notes to himself as he can feel the sweat starting to form around his forehead. "I guess this confirms my fears that there is something lurking in this place."

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Taking a few steps towards the broken windows, he then feels a piece of paper underneath his right foot. Reaching down to pick it up, Adam discovers that it's an old memo document written by the manager of this site. It seems to be addressing a rumour of something living in the forest, sounding bad enough to cause some disruption among the workers.

"To my fellow employees,

There has been a rumour being passed around by some of you that the cause of the recent disturbance happening throughout the yard is due to some strange creature wandering in the forest nearby.

Well I'm here to address today that this rumour is false; there've been no signs of any animals other than some small critters like birds and rabbits in the area, and definitely no signs of a black goo covered creature lurking in the woods.

Remember you're here to work, not gossip about some 'horriifying monster' that I'm sure one of you made up just to make your shift more entertaining to pass the time.

On that note, please ignore any signs of disturbances that may occur in your workstation. If reports of any disruptions still arise, please inform your supervisor about these issues and they will sort it out. I'm sure whatever's causing these strange noises are just the birds or some rats banging on the rooftop.

I hope everyone is having a productive day and getting some well earned rest.'

Having finished reading the letter, Adam ponders on what the manager was trying to say throughout the memo.

"Now that was some very strange details," He says to himself while rubbing his chin, now deep in thought of the information he had read. "The manager focused a lot on addressing this 'rumour', along with these disturbances mentioned here. But if the rumour is about some sort of creature lurking around the forest, then what kind of disturbances was he referring to?"

Seeing that the managers' desk is in front of him, Adam walks around to the back of it in order to try to find some more details about this strange rumour and the disputations that were happening here before the workers left.

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“On the desk lies several more document files placed on the right side of the table, with an inactive computer monitor located slightly to the left. He tries to locate and turn on the PC tower underneath the desk, but it seems like there’s no electrical energy circulating through the office building anymore.

“Most likely the power generators are currently off after these past years without any maintenance.” Adam says out loud, now turning his attention towards the sheets of files still lying on the desk.

Going through each of the documents, he then sorts out a few which appears to have been made after the first letter that he found earlier, with the new corresponding file placed on the left side of the table. Reading the top part of the note, he notices the date it was written on is set after a week the previous file was made. It seems the manager had a different message to tell in contrast to his last one.

‘To my fellow employees,

After nearly a week of investigations, it appears that the source of these disturbances that have been occurring throughout the site in the past several days are due to a group of bears wandering in the forest nearby.

We do not know how they got inside, as our supervisors couldn’t find any signs of forceful entry through the fences. But rest assured that we’ll be calling in animal control to find and lead these bears out of the premises.

For now, please maintain caution when travelling to and from different workstations on the site. Continue to notify your supervisors with any reports of further disruptions, and keep a safe and positive attitude when working.

I do regret to inform everyone however that the rumours of some of our workers going missing recently are, unfortunately true. Despite the possibility they may have been attacked by the bears hiding within the buildings, we’re trying to search for them as best we can, and we hope that they’re doing okay so far.

I hope everyone is having a productive day and remember to stay safe now ya hear.’

Puzzled by this letter’s message, Adam begins to shuffle through the files on his right as his mind continues to ponder at the manager’s change of tone in the recently read document.

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“So the manager told his employees in this memo that a sleuth of bears had entered the lumberyard and were causing the disturbances throughout the place,” Speaking out his thoughts as he picks out another file and places it in front of him. “But unless someone purposefully opened the gates to let them in, how could they enter inside the yard without anyone noticing? Much less so of these supposed bears attacking people and causing them to go missing, shouldn’t there be obvious signs of a struggle between the bears and their victims throughout the site?”

As Adam starts to read the next letter, he feels his heart beating a bit faster than usual as he quickly realises the drastic change of tone in this memo is now a panicked evacuation notice.

‘To my fellow employees,

It is with my deepest regrets that this beloved lumberyard of ours is to be closed at this very moment, due to the presence of a dangerous entity lurking within the area.

I hate to admit it, but those rumors from the past few weeks are true. There is a disturbing monster that was wandering in the forest nearby, it is the one causing those disruptions from before and now it has been hunting us day by day when we least expected.

All staff members present are to evacuate from your workstations immediately in a calm and orderly fashion to the entrance gates outside. If you’ve left any belongings in your lockers or the break-rooms, please leave them behind.

I’ll signal those in the power generator station to turn on the emergency sirens once this memo has been sent to your supervisors. This will notify everyone to leave the site as soon as possible.

I’m sorry for everything that has led up to this.

Goodbye.’

It took awhile to compose himself, as he can almost hear his heart beating at a rapid pace throughout reading that last memo. Adam steps away from the desk, now trying to absorb all this new information he has discovered.

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“Well there goes any possibility that whatever’s lurking here is just some territorial animal,” He says while breathing out a sigh, feeling a bit both distressed and curious at the same time. “So it looks like we’re dealing with some sort of humanoid gloop monster that’s been hiding in this place for some time now. And so far from what I’ve found, it seems like it purposely hunts people for either food or sport.”

Looking down at his right pocket, Adam then grabs his Smartphone and taps on the call app on the touch screen. “I better let the girls know about this.”

Just before he’s about to call in Sam about his discoveries in the office, he has a glimpse of an image on the edge of a file that’s buried underneath the pile of documents still left untouched on the desk. As he pulls it out of the stack, whatever thoughts Adam had earlier about their situation has now taken a turn for the worse. It appears the note he found is a printed out email with a concerning picture attached at the bottom.

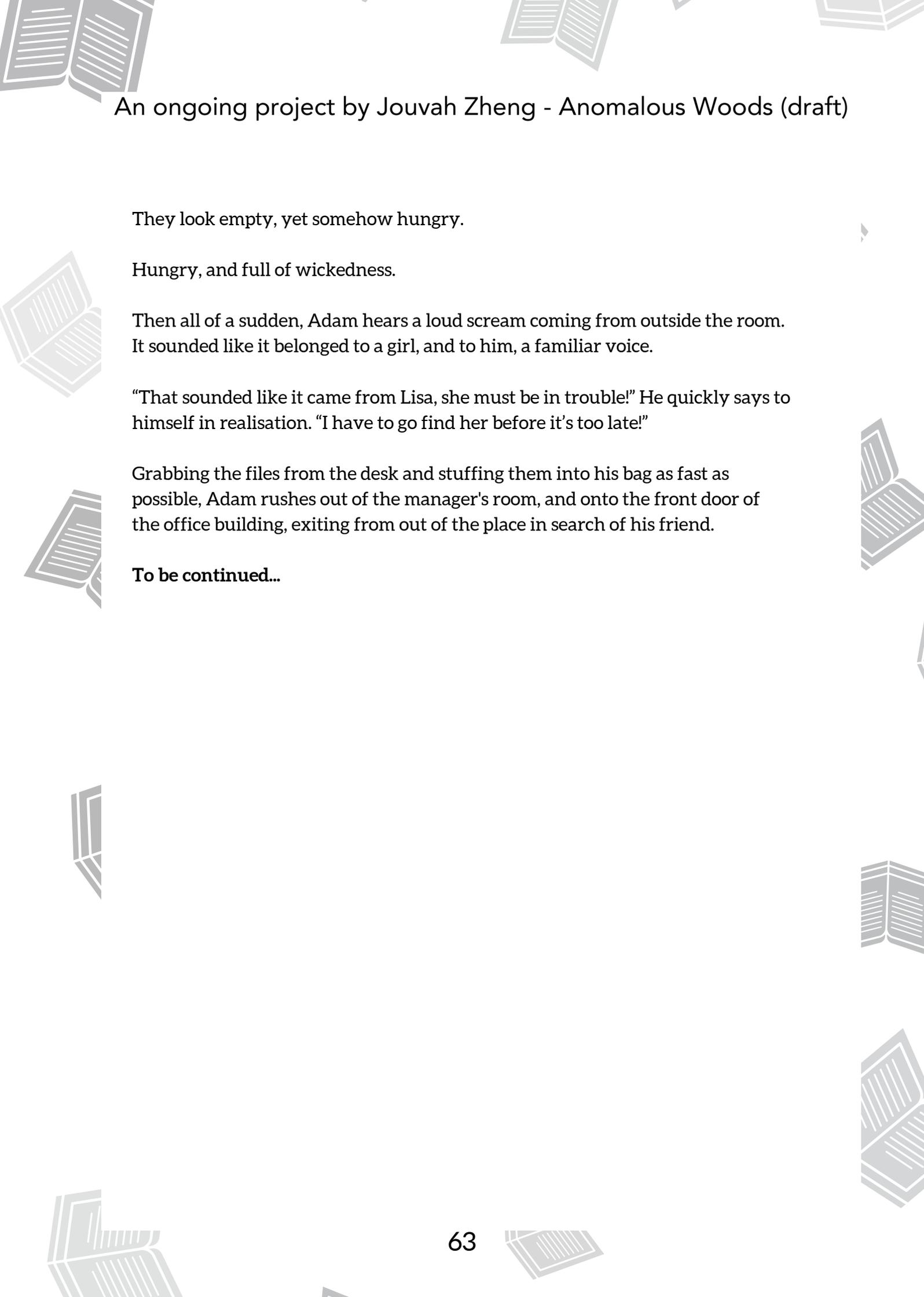
‘Why the hell did you send me this creepy image yesterday! If you think this will convince the authorities that we’ve nothing to do with our workers going missing, think again! Look, I’ve already done my part to provide the police investigators enough evidence to show that something like wild bears are the ones behind these disappearances. Now all you need to do is send an evacuation notice to any workers still present in the yard to get out of there. You can even save yourself some trouble by getting someone to turn on the emergency sirens right now.

You don’t need to be concerned about revealing the truth, just get everyone to evacuate, take your car and meet me at our usual spot. I’ll keep in touch with you.’

Already the message itself would be enough to tell Adam that he and his friends are now in a dangerous predicament. But it’s the image at the bottom of the file that spells out how much danger they’re really in. The picture in question seems to be taken in some part of the factory area during the night, making it quite hard to see all the details in the whole photo. However, there’s enough in the image quality where he can distinguish a strange figure hiding in the darkness.

It stands as tall as the metal pipes located next to it, with the light from the camera flash reflecting off its black gloopy like skin. It looked like it came straight out of a horror film he and Lisa had watched before.

And he can see its eyes; they too are shining in the camera’s light to show those white dots on where its face is

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They look empty, yet somehow hungry.

Hungry, and full of wickedness.

Then all of a sudden, Adam hears a loud scream coming from outside the room. It sounded like it belonged to a girl, and to him, a familiar voice.

“That sounded like it came from Lisa, she must be in trouble!” He quickly says to himself in realisation. “I have to go find her before it’s too late!”

Grabbing the files from the desk and stuffing them into his bag as fast as possible, Adam rushes out of the manager’s room, and onto the front door of the office building, exiting from out of the place in search of his friend.

To be continued...

Unity Studios are privileged to work with these exciting up and coming writers.

No doubt that this publication will be first of many publications for for the authors highlighted in this Unity Studios Showcase Booklet.



Reach for the stars
and fly past the moon!

