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ENG 313 – Introduction to Creative Writing

My Corner

Daylight shines through the sunroof on 18-year-old Ben Domingo and the love of his life, 25-year-old Jake Samuels. It's their only day off together and the weather turned out beautiful after days of heavy rain. They are cruising through the quaint coast of Hāmākua, slowly making their way to Hilo from Laupāhoehoe. The two were stopped at Honoli‘i, where they took a quick dip in chilly morning waters to wake themselves up.

"Buckle up! Chop chop, sir," Jake says as he turns the ignition. "We're gonna be late for breakfast and it's already 11 AM. We might as well call it brunch." He sips his mediocre gas station coffee. Jake indicates his impatience with Ben by quickly tapping the steering wheel.

"Hold on, hold on! I'm posting our cute pic," Ben exclaims as he shuffles through Instagram filters, "Is this one cute?"

"I really don't care, babe." Jake weaves in and out from their tight street parking spot.

Ben glares at him, leans in, and gives a peck on his cheek. "Well ok, I guess I'll just choose a filter that makes me look hotter thank you. How about that?"

Jake smirks and responds with his own sarcastic eye roll as he turns on to the highway.

Zooming on Hawai‘i Belt Road and reaching Hilo Bay, to their left is the shimmering waters of the Pacific. Rolling waves gently kiss the dark pebbles of the bay, occasionally blessing the couple a spray of salty water. On the right, Ben weaves his hand through the wind,

mimicking the waves as he admires historic downtown and all the buildings that have kept their shape through all the years. Ben is already familiar with his home, but he loves pointing out things that Jake still hasn't learned about Hilo.

"Make this right and then a left, love," Ben excitedly declares.

"Ok, my love," Jake responds sneeringly. "You know you're not the driver, right?"

"Who else is going to tell you you're gonna get lost? That's so embarrassing – getting lost in Hilo." Ben proceeds to mock him and then points out the Pacific Tsunami Museum. "A couple of years ago I gave a presentation there for school. We just came back from Japan and were sharing our experiences as delegates and how the 1946 tsunami has affected Laupāhoehoe." Ben stops as he has a fleeting flashback to that day. "It was pretty cool."

"Sounds cool. Maybe we'll go there sometime. Both Japan and the museum," Jake winks. "Let's just get me some food before my stomach starts eating itself."

"You're too much. Anyways. So, what is this new breakfast place that you wanted to try? I'm pretty sure I know everything that's here."

"Oh, you're gonna love it if we actually make our reservation. They've got souffle pancakes, all kinds of omelets, fried rice…" Jake went on and on as if he was reading off of the menu.

Ben was trying to pay attention to what he was saying but Jake's voice was fading, and the scene was going dark and blurry. Jake's ongoing commentary of this menu went mute and before he knew it Ben slipped through the passenger seat into a small room. The only light illuminating the room was coming through a crack between double doors. Without his glasses, he couldn't make out the room he was in.

What's happening? Ben thought. He was confused and he couldn't feel his body and move. It was as if he was tied up by invisible ropes and mouth shut with invisible duct tape. His eyes felt like they were glued open, and he was positioned with his body forward to the door.

The walls started slowly closing in and the sound of banging and explosions outside of the room ringed his ears. *Boom. Boom.* The wall behind him closed in and Ben felt it pushing him to the glow.

Jake? Jake! Ben cries out internally as he is uncontrollably and forcefully pushed forward.

My love, help! Ben's eyes widened and his pupils were dilated as he got closer to the illuminated crack. His eyes were being seared and he felt even more compressed. Ben thought that this was the end of it all. In a matter of a few seconds, Ben didn't experience the flash of his life at the end; all he could see was the final image he had of Jake. He remembers Jake's matching sharp wit from the driver's seat and infatuation with the restaurant menu. Although he couldn't smell it, for a moment he could even imagine the scent of Jake's cologne that occupies the car.

Ben quickly refocuses on the situation and groans at the pains of pressure on his body and the burning sensation in his eyes. At this point the darkness had been fully taken up by the light and the bangs were deafening.

This is it. I love you, Jake.

#

Bang. Bang. Bang. Ben's mom has been pounding at his bedroom door all along.

"Boy! Wake up, eat dinner now," she exclaims after giving three final slaps to the door.

Ben wakes up perspiring and annoyed; the confusion of what was happening made sense now given that it was all a dream and the variables that existed.

"I'm up!" Ben shouts at his mother as her footsteps trail softer and softer as she walks back to the kitchen. "Mom, you go any harder and you'll be breaking down that door soon. He's not that strong anymore." Ben references the fracture that already exists on it as collateral damage of a brotherly brawl between his two older siblings, Kody and Connor, that happened many years ago.

"Yeah, yeah. Just come out and eat now!"

"Okayyyyyyy!" Ben responds disgruntledly.

He shuts his eyes back shut and pulls his blanket over his face, giving himself a moment to recollect what has just happened.

So, it was all a dream and I am not going crazy. The world is crazy. My family is crazy. I'm fine.

"Holy shit," Ben whispers to himself with relief.

He pulls his sheets off of his body, revealing his shirt damp with sweat. Ben slowly rises from another long afternoon nap and turns to his clock that reads 5:58 PM. He notes a singular gleam of the sunset pouring through a peak in his curtains onto the wall adjacent to his bed. Beside this orange glow, the walls of his corner – Ben's nickname for his bedroom and short for his little corner of the world – are off-white and somewhat blue toned.

Ben rubs his eyes and blinks a few times, slowly revealing the mess he's created in his corner. This disorder compiled in the mere 2 months since the COVID-19 pandemic started and he scans his room clockwise in disgust. Contaminating the corner's grounds ahead of the foot of his bed are clean laundry mixed with and defiled by dirty unwashed garments. Beyond this

Russian roulette game of what is clean or not to wear, is Ben's closet that's a catch all for everything and anything. On Ben's right is his nightstand, where somewhere beneath his cellphone, a heap of unopened mail, ENG100 paper drafts, and empty chip bags, are what used to be day-to-day essentials like his wallet, rings, and car keys. Lastly, to his left and across the room is the only window within the four walls of his corner. Looking out of it one can see his 64-year-old father's garden which is almost always bountiful with fruits and vegetables: tomatoes, eggplants, green onion and lychee and avocado trees, to name a few. Sometimes the pungent smell of Papa's store-bought fertilizer is brought in if the leeward winds creepily whisper them through the screen.

Ben's phone buzzes and he hears two bird chirps as the notification. Excited, he reaches over to his bedside table and snatches his phone. This maneuver results in a few pieces of paper flailing to the ground and joining the party of clothes on the floor.

He knows it's a text message from Jake and is pleased to see that the first notification up top is from JS.

(Jake) *Hi love. Up from ur nap? Taking break soon*

Ben notes the time, and it is 6:01 PM.

(Ben) *Hey handsome just got up. Can I call u?*

(Jake) *Yes plz*

Ben searches through the amalgamation of paper on his nightstand and finally finds his Air Pods and pops them in his ears. At about the moment that he starts a Facetime call to Jake, Ben's mom starts calling him again.

"Ben, come eat now. You are leading prayer!" Ben's mom declares from the kitchen.

The outgoing call sound still rings in Ben's Air Pods as he starts hearing movement of people outside of his corner – it's probably Papa and his brothers racing to the dinner table. Ben is eager to make the call happen before he must leave his room.

Why aren't you picking up your phone, you're on break? Ben thinks to himself loudly as his legs shake out of nervousness. What was seconds seemed like forever. Ben looked over at the door anticipating another pounding on it from his mother. The call pick up tone sounded shortly.

"Hey love. Sorry I was trying to get to a spot where I could be alone in the staff room. I'm sorry." Jake assured him. "How are you?"

"Hi baby. I'm ok. Some weird dreams, but I'm ok." Ben responds. "Missed your face."

"Aww I missed your face too. I wish I could hold you right now."

"That sounds amazing – It's been weeks already."

"I know. It seems like time is moving so slow, but also fast."

"Yeah, right. How's work?"

"Work is work. The clinic has been slower. Less people to take care of, but I hate wearing this goddamn—"

Ben's mom pounds on the door again, interrupting Jake mid-sentence.

"Boy, come out now. What are you doing?" Ben's mom is adamant at this point and starts turning and shaking the locked knob. "Why is this door locked? What are you doing?!?"

"Coming! Hold on. Umm. Cleaning up a little!" Ben makes up an excuse on the spot.

"Is everything ok?" Jake says in the video chat.

"What's happening?!" Kody calls from the dinner table impatiently.

"I'm trying to get him!" Ben's mom exclaimed. "Open up!"

“Shit, I'm sorry love I have to go. I love you,” Ben responds to Jake quietly, but hurriedly and answers his mom. “Ok, all cleaned up.”

“Oh, this again. I understand and I lo—” Jake started but couldn’t finish; Ben hung up.

“We’ll see you at the table. Remember, you are leading prayer,” Ben’s mom concludes.

Ben relieves himself of the dampened shirt, throws it on the pile of clothes in front of his bed, and grabs one from that same stack. He checks himself in the mirror and pushes his wavy bangs back to look decent.

He hears the chirps from his phone again and immediately silences it before his mom hears it. Ben put his phone setting to Do Not Disturb and walked over to the bedroom door. With his mom on the other side of it, Ben pauses and discreetly takes a long breath in and out with a sigh.

Here we go again.

Ben swings the first door hinge, unlocks the knob, and opens the door slowly. As anticipated, his mom was there with a reddened, serious face.

“We need to talk,” Ben’s mom says strictly.

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Ben and his mother join the men, Kody, Connor, and Papa, at the dinner table.

“Benjamin, please bless our food,” Papa nods his head at Ben to begin the prayer.

“Dear heavenly father – thank you for another day of life. We come to you with admiration of your creation and with faith that we can come out of this pandemic unscarred. Thank you for your blessings up to this point and thank you in advance for the blessings down the line in the near future. With your shield we can remain in this house, as one cohesive, healthy, and loving family. We ask for your continued protection and strength. Lastly, we thank

you for the food and please bless Mom's hands for making tonight's feast. We pray for these things in the name of your son and divine king, Jesus Christ. Amen," Ben concludes the prayer.

"Amen," Kody, Conner, Papa and Mom affirm in unison.

Kody and Connor dug right into their meals while Ben's father and mother seemed wary of Ben. He tried to not make so much eye contact with them, but with no conversations being had at the table, Ben was nervous as there were blank stares.

Dinners during COVID are awkward like this. Usually, the Domingos have things to add to the family meal discussions and update each other on what has happened throughout the day, but with everyone staying home, there is nothing that others don't know unless hidden behind locked doors. Ben was aware of this but didn't know how to hide things if they were suspicious.

After almost 15 minutes of silence on the table Kody and Connor dismissed themselves to their rooms, leaving Ben alone with his parents.

"So, Benjamin… what's going on?" Papa asked.

"What do you mean? I'm fine," Ben replied promptly. "Is this because I was late to the dinner table, again? You know how I take naps throughout the day now."

"No, tell us what's really going on," Ben's mom snapped. "We know you are hiding something."

Ben just looked at both of them and down blankly at his plate that is still full of food. "There is nothing going on," he murmured.

Papa and Mom both nodded their heads in what seemed like agreement to what Ben says, but still in disbelief in Ben's authenticity. Ben understood that his parents had caught on to something; maybe something slipped when he was in his corner or maybe they'd placed an ear

on his bedroom door when he didn't know. His mind went round and round on what they thought could be happening, but he didn't want to say anything that would compromise himself.

"Benjamin," his father paused. "Please be honest with us. We noticed that something has changed. Is it the shut down?"

Ben thought about how he should respond.

Is it time to do it? I know they can't handle the truth. I can't change.

That last thought circulated in Ben's mind like a revolving door; he knew that he had to step out of it before his parents questioned him even more.

"Yes, I am having a hard time because of the pandemic, and I miss my friends. It's not the same just Facetiming or calling them. I miss going out and just living my life," Ben says, knowing that there is truth somewhere in that statement, minus Jake. "I'm not hungry, I'm going to my room."

Ben leaves the table instantly and doesn't take notice of his parent's reactions. He did not want to accommodate the conversation even more.

His eyes start to fill with water, and he feels his emotions taking over as he rushes back to his corner. He holds a hand to his heart and gasps for air as he tries to conceal the screams he feels inside from coming out. He enters his corner and shuts the door behind him. Ben finds his phone with more messages from the contact name JS.

(Jake) *I hope u are ok. ily. plz lmk if everything is ok?*

Ben lays his phone on the nightstand, facing the screen down, and takes a seat at the rest of his queen size bed. He feels small in his corner, yet the walls feel like they are coming in like the dream. His corner is his only safe space in the world now, but he is losing himself inside of it too. He turns to the mirror and looks at himself.

Where do I go? Ben thinks as he ponders the current situation he is in. He was given another chance to share who he is with his family, but can't. Ben grabs his phone and starts typing a message to Jake.

(Ben) *I couldn't do it again, babe. It's too hard.*

(Jake) *I know.*

(Ben) *I'll come out of it one day.*

THE END