

MICHAEL GOLVACH

WHAT  
I DID  
THIS  
SUMMER

BY  
DAVEY FITZ



BY Michael Golvach

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*What I Did This Summer by Davey Fitz*

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## **Dedication:**

For My Readers

~

For Allowing Me To Occupy A Small Space In Your  
Lives.

~

Thank You.





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# What I Did This Summer

**by Davey Fitz**

This summer I stayed a district away from home at my favourite uncle's house. Actually, to be honest, I'm not really sure he's related to me. I think my mom just calls him uncle because he helps out by watching me when she has to go away. I'm not even sure she's ever really met him. He said I should start out this paper by writing that I really hope I get a good grade on it. I told him I didn't think we were allowed to do that. But he insisted, so I put it in here. It's not the first sentence, like he wanted, but I think he'd be happy it's in the first paragraph. He also said I shouldn't write that I think this sort of essay is too childish an exercise for a teenager to still have to do before the beginning of the school year, but I'm putting that in here too, so you'll know what I'm writing is honest and true.

I learnt a lot of things living at my uncle's over the past few months. For instance, when I first got there and wanted to watch some television he said to me: "Look around you, Davey. Look at your world. Are you surrounded by things you love? Why not?" I didn't understand what he meant. Except, I thought maybe he meant the world is a beautiful place and I needed to live in it, not just watch moving pictures of it, to really experience its true wonder. He would never explain himself. I think it's because he figured me out a long time before I really understood myself. Or maybe he just guessed correctly, based on what he knew of my relationship with my mom. He knows I need my world to have some sense of certainty. But he insists I'll be better off if

my world is a puzzle. A riddle. Something to work on, inside my head, when he isn't around, which is almost all the time. I'm not really sure why my mom thinks it's a good idea to have him look after me when she's away, but I don't have much say in the matter and it gives me the freedom to do whatever I want when I'm living with him. Except watch television, because he doesn't own a TV set. Or any lights. He doesn't own a lot of things most people do. My bed is usually a mattress on the floor in an otherwise empty room.

I think the most important lesson I learnt this summer with my uncle, I learnt on my own. While I was feeling truly alone. While he probably assumed I was sitting around my room trying to figure out whatever confusing response to a simple request he'd left me to ponder. I had a few friends in his borough and, even though my uncle and my mom probably wouldn't approve of me spending time with them, it's not like either of them were around to complain. As long as I made it back home by night, no questions were asked. If anyone was there to ask them.

My friends and I spent most of the summer doing nothing of real consequence. That's what summer's for, I think. I got to watch television with them, so that made me happy. But it also made me sad, I guess, because they liked to watch the news and that made me think of what my uncle had said in response to my initial plea to waste some time sitting in front of a TV set. The stuff the news reported on every night wasn't good. And it wasn't fun, like most of the times I spent doing stuff around town with, or without, my friends. It was all depressing. And it made me not want to watch any more. Mostly, it made me realise that, when I was watching the television with them, I felt like I wasn't surrounded by anything I loved. My friends were there, sure, but the terrible things the news people showed us were happening all over the world—even in our little part of it—made it seem like maybe my world wasn't really that beautiful a place after all.

But my uncle, for all of his strange and evasive behaviour, had managed to get that philosophical muscle working overtime inside me. And sometime around a week or two into my vacation, I started hanging out by myself a lot more, after my friends and I got done doing what we did for fun. His little questions even got me wondering if what I considered fun was really that great, because what my friends and I did for fun wasn't legal and, if we ever got caught, we'd get in a lot of trouble. My uncle told me not to put that part in this paper, either, since he said it might put him in a fix too, but I thought I should, since it directly relates to what I learnt and he's never going to read this far into my essay anyway. I could be wrong. I can't predict what he'll do from moment to moment. But I'm positive I won't be there in person to hand in this assignment and get whatever grade I deserve.

During my first few weeks in town, while I was hanging out with my friends and we were having fun, I met a girl I liked a whole lot. I'd seen her many times before, over the years, on other summers with my uncle and on days when I didn't have school and my mom had to go away. And I always remembered seeing her, even though I was sure she never noticed me because we didn't have the same friends, I was never in town on any sort of regular schedule, I didn't want her to meet my uncle, or see my room, and she was way too pretty to just go up and talk to. My friends would make fun of me whenever she was around. They were being mean, but I felt sure they were trying to help me out in their own way.

They started out calling me a chicken whenever I couldn't get up the guts to talk to her but, as we got older, they began telling me she had a stupid looking face and she was fat and ugly and I could do a lot better. It made me angry when they talked about her like that, but it also made me feel special. And it made me feel lucky. Not to have friends like them, but to know the one girl who could stop my heart with a glance in my direction might be meant just for me. If she looked as repellent to the rest of the world as she looked attractive to me, that

had to mean something really good. It made sense to me, anyway, and I didn't care much about what the rest of the world thought as long as I could look at my world and see myself surrounded by at least one thing I loved.

Her name was Melody. And I suppose, if she's still among the living, that hasn't changed. Although I'm pretty sure the last time I saw her was the next to last time anyone ever did.

She was stunning. Skin as white as milk and orange-red hair that looked darker in the sunlight. Covered from head to toe with a nearly invisible soft white fur. A little heavy around the sides of her lips, but the whiskers were incredibly sexy and not masculine at all. Very small breasts. Long, skinny-fat arms and legs. Hips that looked wide, even though they weren't broader than her waist, and an ass that looked wide too, and flat, even though it was fat at the bottom. Her upper thighs were big and soft, perfectly shaped and fluid and the lower half of her stomach was an adorable pooch belly. Most of these imperfections, if anyone were to consider them imperfect and not impossibly arousing, she kept tucked away in body slimming undergarments. Hosiery she wore from the waist down instead of the revealing lacy panties all the other girls wore underneath the extra short skirts they dared us not to peek up while making sure to give us every opportunity. She wasn't textbook beautiful, but that made her all the more appealing. I think, if I can be sure of anything, I fell in love with her the first time I saw her. Back before she slowly began crumbling under society's ridiculous definition of glamour and she still wore her gorgeous body with pride. With a confidence that was more perfect than any subjective standard ever could be.

And over the past summer, when the things my friends and I did for fun expanded into moving drugs from dealer to dealer, we finally began to mix in the same social circles. But by the time I really met her, she was already dating some older guy named Dan, which, after all that time, hurt bad enough. And the guy she was with dealt drugs for some big hitters, and a few of my buddies told me he pimped

her out from time to time. Only to show everyone he could, they said, because he could just as easily finalise any drug deal with a handshake or a gun. And that made me sad and angry at the same time. Because they said I could have my favourite girl now, if I still wanted her. Just like everyone else who was interested in buying whatever her boyfriend was selling. For a long time, before my friends told me that, I was convinced they were looking out for me when they talked down about her. Trying to keep me from getting my heart ripped out by some girl I was too scared to approach anyway. And, before I found out she was seeing someone steady and they told me the real deal, I honestly felt like my world was starting to fill up with things I loved. Or, at least, one thing I could love.

I tried not to get too close to her after that, no matter how desperately I still wanted to. Even though, as the days passed and we stayed out hustling more often, I'd see her here and there. At a party or on the streets with her friends. On the rare occasion when I couldn't run away and hide, I'd ignore my bruised and battered ego and talk to her and she was very friendly, very well spoken and proper, and also very shy. That confused me, because my friends talked about her like she was a piece of property and they told me she was like all the other girls, except easier. Yet I never felt that from her. Whenever I saw her and we'd notice each other, I felt a sadness that wasn't coming from inside me. But my friends had poisoned my mind to a degree, and their voices were always in my head fighting with my uncle's. Telling me she wasn't a thing I loved. That she was just really good at seeming like one.

Still, my uncle's wisdom, or maybe it was insanity, always won out. Because I wanted to believe the world was a beautiful place. And I wanted to believe I was surrounded by things I loved. And love, as I understand it, has to work both ways. When it only works one way, when it's not returned, it's just infatuation, dependency or desperate need. I didn't want to believe my world merely consisted of things I was addicted to. I wanted Melody to be better than the drugs her boyfriend dealt, and my friends and I helped him move. I wanted her to

be something beautiful and I wanted my feelings for her to be something true. So I kept my distance, which kept me safe. Not knowing for sure if what my friends told me was true was better than having my heart broken. I thought.

But she kept showing up in my world. Maybe it was circumstance, coincidence. Maybe it was because the universe, or God or whatever it is that makes everything the way it is, was making sure we both found out what we really meant to each other in our respective worlds.

And I truly connected with her for the first time the last time I saw her.

It was a late afternoon when the sun was shining more brightly than I thought it should have been, after my friends had gone home and I was heading back to my uncle's. I only had a little while left before I had to go back to my mom's and I was feeling down. Melody was walking on the other side of the street in the opposite direction and when she saw me, I could swear her eyes magnified the light from the sky as she stopped to wave at me and smiled. I looked back at her, my expression blank as my hand raised to return her greeting, at once totally aware of how empty the street was and how beautiful she looked painted against its backdrop. I remember she didn't do anything in particular to make me slow my walk and stare back at her. She never did anything in particular, any of the times I'd seen her, to make my heart melt. She just was. Her smell, her skin, her hair, her strangely adorable body, her awkward social manner, the way she moved and the way she spoke. The fluidity of her features. All of those things, weaving together to form something greater than the parts, like magic.

Then she continued to walk, the skin of her face flushing pink as she looked down at the ground with embarrassment and brought her hands back together in front of her stomach. As I watched and wondered why she had suddenly broken contact, I noticed she was wearing a fine white dress that zipped up the back and was made of a sheer fabric that seemed to show her nipples. As her gaze darted back



up to meet mine and drifted away sadly again, I felt like she had seen something in me. That the way my eyes adored her made her sense I believed the things she knew my friends, and everyone, said about her. And, ironically, the look she threw my way convinced me the things my friends told me about her couldn't possibly be true.

I remember I crossed the street, to put myself directly in her path, very quickly but very cautiously. Like I was afraid if she saw me approaching her, she'd run. But when I said hello to her and asked her how she was, she looked up and fixed my gaze as she replied, questioning my motives or maybe questioning her assumptions. No shock, no surprise. I took off my jacket and wrapped it around her shoulders, covering her dress' top, even though it wasn't the least bit chilly out, and I asked her if she wanted to take a walk with me. My head didn't even have time to process the fact that I was asking her to do what we were both already doing before we saw each other—or that by covering her up I'd unconsciously confirmed I had noticed her breasts—in time for me to feel appropriately ashamed and embarrassed before she said yes.

She waited for me to lead, so I walked her in the direction I was originally heading. Back to my uncle's. The one place in the world I didn't want the girl of my dreams to see, ever. By the time I realised where I was guiding her, it was too late to change direction without seeming even more like a nervous little boy. But she walked with me and we talked about almost everything except what we really wanted to and, before I knew it, the sun was going down and we were standing outside my uncle's house.

As I tried to think of how to offer to walk her home, so she would be safe, she asked if she could come in and watch television with me. For some reason, I felt small when I explained to her that my uncle didn't own a TV set, but she said that was fine and she would love to meet him. And, even though I didn't want to, I agreed and walked her inside. She was quiet and strangely obedient. Much more reserved than I had thought or felt in any of our brief interactions before. And that

reassured me even more, because she couldn't be the way my friends said she was, and be the way she was around me. At least, I'd never met anyone who could act that well.

Luckily, although it was more of a given, my uncle wasn't home. She didn't seem disappointed, or even nervous, as the sun continued to set and the inside of the house grew darker. Instead she asked if we could sit and talk in my room. Even though I told her we didn't have lights and my room wasn't really any more comfortable than the downstairs floor, she insisted. So we made our way upstairs and I showed her into my room with the dirty, lonely mattress that lay on the ground in the middle of it and a stand up mirror I'd found discarded by the roadside and propped up in the corner so I could have some idea what I looked like after I groomed myself. She hung up my jacket on the side of the mirror and sat down on the mattress, drawing her knees up to her chin, resting her hands on them after making sure her dress covered her properly, and she patted the space to her left, motioning for me to sit beside her. I could see in her eyes she knew why my uncle wasn't there. Why he never really was. But her eyes never judged me, and I sat down beside her as the cruel fading light made it harder and harder to see her beautiful face.

And we talked some more. She was very soft spoken and kind and seemingly not at all aware of her sexual attractiveness. Perhaps she'd heard the things my friends, and everybody, said about her over all the years. Perhaps she'd heard all of those ugly words all of her life, so often and so loudly she'd given in to believing they were true. Yet in that small amount of time we spent together she'd revealed herself to be more charming and articulate than any girl I'd ever had an actual conversation with.

I took her hand and kissed it on the top after I told her that maybe it would be best if she got home before it got too late. Not because I'm a gentleman, or I ever do that with anyone, but because I was alone with her for the first time in my life, and I wanted to taste

her and smell her as deeply as possible. So I'd have something to really regret as the end of summer drew near and the beautiful blinding light existing in my universe blew out like a matchstick flame.

She pulled me into her, then, tucking her legs under her dress, wrapping her arms around my neck and giving me a warm, comforting hug. I put my arms around her waist and returned the gesture. And as I felt myself drowning in a million past summers—a million opportunities to get to know her before she gave herself over to someone else—I felt the top of her hosiery and the indentation of her spine in her back. And when I drew my hands up to her shoulders she bit her lower lip and made a weak noise that sounded like pain. Through the sheer fabric of her dress I saw she had what looked like deep bruises running up the insides of both of her shoulder blades. And I wondered how I hadn't noticed them earlier, in the light of day. I wondered if I'd been lost in her eyes or ogling her body for the entirety of our initial connexion. Hoping it was the former and she wasn't beginning to peel away from me out of unease.

She relaxed her hold and put her face in front of mine. So close I could taste her heavy, delicious breath. My hand brushed her left cheek and, instead of pulling away like I feared she would, she rested her head on it, closing her eyes and experiencing its warmth. Then she took my hand, kissed the inside of the palm and placed it back against her cheek. And, as she closed her eyes again and rested her head on my hand, I could do nothing but watch her eyes roll under their lids and listen to the sound of her breathing and her comfort.

Then she told me she felt sorry for me, as she kept her eyes closed and kissed lightly at my fingers and thumb. She told me she didn't think it was fair I should have to squat in another abandoned house while my friends lived in regular homes. And she told me she believed me when I said I lived with my uncle, even though she'd never seen him, and she thought that was doubly sad. The both of us having to live with nothing.

I smiled at her with muted sorrow while she talked and, when she opened her eyes slightly to look at me, her face returned that affection. And she told me, as she let her eyes open fully and moved my hand to the back of her neck, that, if it made any difference, I hadn't ever really been living with nothing. Not alone. Not like I thought. Not in a world where I wasn't loved and cared for. Not since we were younger. Not since she first saw me. She told me that, yes, she'd noticed how I watched her, and the way I looked at her, ever since I'd started coming around town to visit my uncle. She told me she'd always hoped the world would make up some excuse to push us together. She told me that, when it finally had, she loved the way I talked to her and not down to her.

I opened my mouth to tell her I'd felt exactly the same way about her. For all of our days together. That I'd known I'd loved her since the first time I saw her and how beautiful she was to me, but she placed her other hand over my lips before I could speak, nodded, and told me she knew. And that knowing was enough for now. And, if what we believed about each other was true, the world would keep bringing us together until it was our time. As she spoke those last words, she began to cry. She didn't sob and moan like the distraught women did on the television news, but the tears that flowed down her cheeks were warm—not fake—and she had nothing to gain from me by shedding them.

And as much as I wanted to take her right then and there. As much as I wanted to pretend she wasn't temporarily promised to some other man who treated her like filth. As much as I wanted to do that, I couldn't find it within myself to compromise her expressed desire for me in order to satisfy my physical longing for her. Not when she was in a relationship with someone else. Not when she'd made herself truly vulnerable and given me the opportunity to be the sexually depraved bastard every adolescent boy hides away deep inside.

And not when I felt that my uncle was watching.

I kissed the hand she held over my mouth and she shivered as the room lit up slightly and the normally pungent smell of her skin began to reek even more heavily, mixing with a salty sweat. Then she removed her hand and she kissed me. Looking into my eyes. Making love to my mouth with her own. She kept her eyes open the entire time, watching me with wonderment as she bit around my lips, her breath so heady and warm I felt intoxicated, and she kissed my chin and then the tip of my nose. Seeing the awe she felt echoed in my gaze as she continued to taste me. And, in those odd moments when I could focus my vision, I could see she was lost. In the mirror I could see the bruises on her back that looked more like burns against the pale white of her flesh as she pushed my left hand farther down and encouraged me to explore the soft fat of her hips and thighs while she placed my right hand across her breasts and allowed herself to experience how much I truly loved the natural size and shape of every inch of her body.

And, as immediately as she had begun kissing me, she stopped. Looking around the room. Noticing, as I did, the darkness of the night and the glow of the moonlight that pierced through my bedroom window.

She stood up slowly and held out her hand. I took it and we walked back downstairs, to the front door and outside my uncle's house. I offered to walk her home to make sure she got back safely and she told me that, even though she didn't think it was a good idea, she would love me to do that for her. She looked up into my eyes once more and framed my face with her hands, adoring me as much as I'd been adoring her for all of our years together. As much as she claimed to have been adoring me all that time, as well. She took my hand in hers and we walked.

As we got closer to her boyfriend's home, I could feel her beginning to shake and she pulled a baggie out from the waist sash of her dress. It was filled with a brown powder and she took out a pinch and offered me a taste. And I took it, even though I'd never ever used

the drugs my friends and I moved before. As soon as I snorted the junk, she tossed the baggie away, even though it was still full. She said she was sorry she'd pressured me into using, she didn't do drugs ever, she hated them and what she'd done wasn't right. But I didn't really think much of it and, even though she already knew from watching my body's reaction to the brown poison, I assured her it was my first, and hopefully last, time and it didn't change anything about how I saw her. That made her smile and she gave me one last soft, slow, painfully lingering kiss on the lips as she let go of my hand and we walked the half a block to her boyfriend Dan's house.

When we reached his doorstep, as she was thanking me for walking her home and, I hoped, contemplating whether she could kiss me one more time, her boyfriend's front door opened wide and her body went stiff.

She apologised to him, like a reflex, which made me feel cold and abandoned, as she rubbed at her nose, visibly shaking with terror. Explaining perhaps a little too eagerly about how she'd been out a bit too late and I'd been kind enough to make sure she arrived home safely.

He questioned her about who else she'd been with and how she'd managed to lose track of time, as he motioned to us both and she passed me on the left. Her hands directed me to follow. Dan closed the door behind us and soon we were standing in his living room. As brightly lit inside his house as it was pitch dark outdoors.

Melody watched anxiously as her boyfriend stared into my eyes and grilled me. Asking me why I was such a nice guy all of a sudden. In my peripheral vision, I could see her eyes and face begging me to keep cool as she mouthed another apology. And I knew for sure everything she'd said to me on the dirty mattress in my room had been the truth. And, in the weight of her gaze, I could feel the shame she endured under the thumb of her boyfriend. The humiliation of being used as an incentive. And, though she tried to momentarily pretend it away for my sake, I could see she really had felt the same for me as I'd felt for her. For all of those years. That she still did.

And it wasn't plainly obvious to just me. It hadn't been for a good long while. Melody had been right. As magical as it felt, walking her home and spending a few more moments with her hadn't been a good idea.

Dan smiled pityingly, looking at Melody and back at me. He gave her ass a loud smack, making sure I saw he was getting a good handful, as he told me how, ever since he'd known her, she'd been asking about me. Well before he decided her body felt way too good to let her looks ruin all the fun he could have with it if he turned out the lights and kept her drainage ditch of a mouth covered with pillows or buried in his lap. And he laughed as he wondered aloud why she'd really thought all of her asking, and incessant pondering, about how I was over all those years could possibly seem innocent to anyone. Then he made sure to let me know that, even though her infatuation with me was beyond annoying, he didn't let any of that get in the way of him catching more than he could ever ask for in a girlfriend: Dumb as a post. Afraid of her own shadow. See-through as Saran Wrap. Well aware of her place.

I stood there and listened to him as she begged me with her hands to let it go.

Then he began to really humiliate her, and I wished I hadn't been such a chicken around her when we were younger. That I'd never let her feel lonely enough to date someone like him. She didn't use. And she was a brilliant and beautiful girl, though the world she lived in had constantly insisted the opposite, probably for most of her life.

And my friends' voices were in my head, drowning out my uncle's. Asking me if I was surrounded by things I loathed. Asking me why.

Dan continued groping her harshly as he goaded me. Illustrating, with his hands, every vicious and needlessly cruel point he had to make. Twisting and turning Melody around, exposing the exquisite beauty of her body, as he ran it into the ground with his mouth. Listing out the inventory of things about her that made him

sick to his stomach: Her cottage cheese thighs and dumpy ass, just one big fat catastrophe. Her pudgy little gut. Her breasts that, according to him, were non-existent. Her skinny-fat arms and legs. The turkey-folds of flab in her armpits. The weak fatty consistency of her neck. The soft white hair that covered her entire body. The whiskers around her mouth and beneath her lower lip. The coarse hair that grew way too thick for his taste in her big long goofy looking nose. How, if she didn't smell like a horrible accident at a sardine cannery right then, he'd swear she was a ten-year-old boy.

As I watched Melody cringe, I interrupted him. Asking him, politely, to cut it out, trying to keep my cool. Getting even more angry. Angrier than I'd ever gotten at my friends when they talked down about her.

He continued to slip in the digs, reminiscing about how she'd doted on me even before she'd started to bleed, and how adorable it was that I felt such devotion for her, too. How I was actually blessed to never have kissed her, because she had breath that could melt glass and, if I got within an inch of her mouth when her hormones got going, I'd probably vomit. How bad the disaster area between her legs smelt when she got excited and soaked the forest of a front lawn she couldn't be bothered to trim.

He smacked her across the face and she pressed her lips closed as he clipped her one across the chin and backhanded her to watch her stumble. He looked over his shoulder quickly, pointing at her with his thumb, as he asked me if I really wanted that pug-ugly mess all for myself. He backhanded her again, even harder, and I began to move forward as she begged me with her hands to retreat. Then he looked at me and told me, even if I did still want her for whatever reason he couldn't possibly understand, it was just too bad, because she belonged to him until he decided otherwise.

My uncle's voice raged in my head and I fought to drown it out as the lights inside the house grew dim and I told Dan to knock it off. That it wasn't funny anymore. That it never had been.



He pulled a pistol from the back of his trousers and whipped Melody on the right temple with the butt, snapping her head backward and sideways into the wall and making her fall face down on the floor as she covered her head with her hands and cried out. He kicked her in the stomach as she whimpered in pain and looked up at me, her eyes begging for help. And he told me what my friends had told me. That I could have her if I still wanted her, just like any guy who needed a good spit and polish could, as long as I bought what he was selling or, at least, helped him move it. Like more than a few of my best buddies already had. Like he could smell on her breath every time she came back home after collecting his money from them.

From her place on the floor she begged me to stop fighting for her as he stamped on her back, threatening to break her in two. And she told me I wasn't the one who needed saving. Maybe not realising I had no idea what she meant. Admitting once again, to her boyfriend's delight, how she'd always felt about me. And, to his puzzlement, how she didn't want me to get hurt any more.

As Dan kept his attention fixed on Melody, taking so much pleasure in crushing her bared soul beneath his boots, I wrenched the gun from his hand, slamming my elbow into his jaw and sending him crashing to the floor.

My uncle's voice roared in my head again. Asking me the same questions, over and over. And it began to look like sunset inside.

Dan looked up at me and laughed as he wiped the blood from his mouth. Telling me how, no matter what I did, my precious Melody would be spending that night in his bed, making sure he was completely satisfied, and if I didn't walk away immediately, he'd have us both beaten down so badly we'd wish we were dead. And if I had the sac to shoot him, we'd both actually be dead. Real soon. Telling me she wasn't worth it. That my Melody was just a not-entirely-disgusting-yet pie-faced low-rent slut with a face and a body that were only going to get uglier and more bizarre looking with age. A plain piece of nothing that did who and what she was told. And that was all she'd ever be.

She looked up at me, as her boyfriend twisted her head in his direction, yanking the hair on the back of her neck as she begged me to leave. But I wasn't about to go. Definitely not without her. Not knowing she was with him and wondering how badly he must hurt her when no one was there to see.

Melody's mouth trembled open, continuing to plead with me to walk away, and Dan began slapping her around again as he pulled her hair harder and told me to get lost.

As she cried, I felt my fists begin to clench in anger. And the sunset turned to twilight.

From behind me, I felt my uncle watching again and I saw a shadow begin to darken the room. And that shadow grew. I tried to convince myself it was just the night. The sun going down. But the lights were all on and the blinds were drawn and that shadow consumed everything as it crept up my back. And as it overcame me and the world went dark, I felt nothing but hatred. Vengeance. Death. Pure evil.

And I will swear until the day I die that I released my grip on that gun. I let my hands go limp and felt it fall from my grasp. I heard it hit the floor. But the shadow grew darker. Enveloping everything in its black cloak of night. And, though I won't ever be able to explain how, it put that gun back in my hand and it pulled the trigger.

When the gun went off, it splattered Dan's head all over the walls. The pistol had been silenced, but the sound of his skull exploding and the echo of its grey matter smacking up against the walls was deafening.

Then the shadow disappeared. Dan's body was no longer there. The walls were sparkling clean and the gun lay at my feet. Safety on. And, in that moment, I didn't question where in God's creation the shadow had come from or where it, my uncle and the bloody, horrifying mess they'd created had gone.

Melody jerked back in shock and confusion, and I picked her up off of the floor, adjusting her clothing and straightening her hair. She hugged me tightly, pressing her head into my chest that grew warm with her tears as I shook with fear and reassured her as best I could, kissing her and holding her as she chewed on my shirt, completely traumatised.

We exited the house quickly, hand in hand, and when we got to the street she released herself from my grip. I stopped to scan her eyes, questioning. She looked petrified and helpless.

I told her we needed to leave, fast. That her boyfriend was, or had been, very well connected. She let me know she was aware of what he was. And she begged my forgiveness for putting me through the ordeal we'd just suffered. Telling me that what he'd said about her and everything I'd heard about her from my friends—all the things she'd done under his brutal direction—were true. Telling me that, if I could still stand to be with her, she would prove to me she wasn't what he'd made her do, and she would be mine, just mine, for as long as I would have her. And if I really thought it was the best thing, and I insisted she leave with me that instant, she'd follow me without question. She'd leave everything behind and go with me to catch a bus. Right then and there.

As I looked into her eyes, I felt time slow and the moon made the night a little bit brighter. I touched her face with my hand as she relaxed her cheek against it and I told her that whatever she'd done, whatever she thought she was or ever had been, didn't change how I felt about her. That, in my eyes and in my heart, she would always be the same beautiful girl I'd loved from a distance for far too long.

I looked around my world as she smiled and kissed at my hand. And everywhere I looked, she was there. I was surrounded by things I loved. I could finally answer my uncle's riddle, or at the very least, render its closing question impotent and illogical.

I asked her if she was sure she could get what she needed from her parents' house and be back quickly. The light in her eyes burnt more brightly than I'd ever seen as her smile grew wide and she told me she could be back in a snap with extra money so we could get as far away as possible and I nodded my assent. She traced her hands around my face as I touched my fingers to her lips and she gave them a soft warm kiss. And she told me the only thing I'd ever wanted to hear: She was going to make me happy.

I let her know she already had, and a blissful smile drew itself across her face as she nodded and pulled me into her once more. Kissing me desperately one last time, then biting her lower lip, blushing.

We went our separate ways and, after I collected my things from my uncle's and said goodbye to the empty house, I made it back to our meeting place at the bus terminal in record time.

And I waited. Hiding in the shadows and watching when she didn't show up as quickly as I'd hoped. I waited for hours. And, when she still didn't appear, I cased the location and searched the crowded streets for days. Avoiding my uncle's watchful eyes, and the authorities who'd mistakenly classified me as a missing person for reasons I still don't understand. But she never arrived to meet me there. She never showed up anywhere, and I waited.

And, almost as soon as I'd realised something was wrong, the shadow had come back. It followed me everywhere. Keeping me hidden. Keeping me safe, as I searched for her in vain.

And when I'd called in every favour I was owed from every friend who wasn't too afraid to speak to me, and I tracked her down to every place they said she might be, no one I questioned could honestly claim they'd seen or heard from her since that bitter night.

And the shadow kept coming back. Consistently. Horribly. More and more violently.

As I continued to seek her out, I grew more desperate. Fearing for her safety. Fearing for her life. And a few of my impromptu interrogations nearly sealed my fate. They'd certainly gained me a

reputation as someone not to be trifled with. Everyone who refused to help me find her went missing. Consumed by a darkness I didn't fully understand and didn't feel it necessary to at the time. And their friends and loved ones began filling up emergency rooms all over the boroughs. Too terrified to talk, even if they could somehow rationally explain the young man who'd come to ask them questions about a girl named Melody and the blackness that followed him, swallowed them whole and spat them back out.

Yet, as far as anyone else knew, she had simply disappeared. Right along with her boyfriend.

And I, at least, never saw her precious, beautiful white face again.

And I, for certain, would never ever be sure if she was safe. Or where she was. Or if she even still was at all.

And I still spend every single day, even as I take a moment to finish writing up this ridiculous assignment, remembering Melody. Remembering that beautiful coming together—that silent and singular moment—and dying inside. Odds are I'm not okay yet. No matter when you happen to note my absence.

And when the summer was over and I returned to my mom and our empty shell of a home, I took a really good look at my world.

And I asked myself: Are you surrounded by things you love? Why not?

To tell you the truth, it doesn't make a bit of difference to me anymore. Not all questions are meant to be answered. Some are meant to bind us to a path. To break us and keep us broken.

Right now I should be balled up, crying like a baby. Because, this summer, I learnt I could realise dreams I never thought I ever would. I learnt how love was supposed to feel, and I experienced it fully. I learnt life is mostly cruel and unfair. I learnt that, if I'm ever really hurting and I need to feel Melody's embrace, the brown poison can take away my pain for a little while. But, most importantly, this summer I learnt, to depths I never fathomed possible, how not to care.

And if I don't get a good grade on this paper, my uncle says he will be very upset. So please give me an A. If you don't, his shadow will find you, it will take you and it will torture you without end.

It promised me.

And you'd better believe it's fuckin' serious.