

CROSSROADS

An Experimental Short Story
Anthology



Edited by Jasmine Aldridge

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The discourse surrounding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the creative industries is growing and the debate is only on course to intensify. Is it good or bad, useful or harmful, creative or simplistic? Understandably, these concerns are focused intently on generative AI: “deep-learning models that can generate high-quality text, images, and other content based on the data they were trained on,” (Martineau). There is “tremendous apprehension” about the potential for AI systems to eventually replace creative professions (Eapen). With every new development comes a host of concerns and questions that require answers, and these narratives have been growing in prevalence over the last few years, promising to dominate the future of every industry. There is fear, excitement, resentment, and wonder all wrapped up in the loaded phrase ‘AI-generated’. Indeed, the concerns regarding the rise of generative AI are not unfounded and issues such as “misinformation, plagiarism, copyright infringements, harmful content, and the potential for worker displacement” (Lawton) are all rightly being tackled head-on. Whilst AI has been present across most data-processing tasks to streamline our day-to-day for years now, its presence in the creative industries is only just truly beginning, and with this emergence also comes unprecedented scope for experimentation. Indeed, “little is known about generative AI’s potential impact on a fundamental human behavior: the ability of humans to be creative,” (Doshi 1), and more research needs to be carried out to assess the capabilities of generative AI when it is used intentionally to engage “divergent thought” (Eapen), which is a key component of creativity (Testor 50).

Crossroads presents an experimental collection of short stories that engage with the creative potential of generative AI systems and push the boundaries of both human authorship and AI assistance. Each piece in its uniqueness explores how different generative AI processes can be used, not to simply generate the content itself, but to encourage broader creative thought and an openness to divergent writing styles. As such, this is not simply an ‘AI-assisted’ anthology, as the pieces themselves will demonstrate.

“This anthology is unique in its structure and it is an important exploration into how a balance can be found when incorporating generative AI into creative writing.”

The creation of this anthology was not without challenges; at the start of the project there were eight participants involved. Yet as the project shifted and evolved, participants withdrew at different stages for a variety of reasons. In this final anthology, only five pieces are included. Whilst this was a challenge to overcome, the final outcome allows the works that remain to be highly explorative, experimental, and engaging. In a way, the process of completing this anthology speaks to the degree of unknowns that remain in using AI creatively, both for authors and editors alike.

As part of the project, each author completed a series of weekly tasks in the lead-up to writing their final short story. Each of these tasks engaged with a different aspect of AI use and allowed the authors to experiment across a variety of AI platforms including ChatGPT, Kindo AI, BionicGPT, and Canva AI alongside specific experimental text generators such as the Oulipo N+7 Machine. ChatGPT, BionicGPT and Kindo AI are all open-source Large Language Models that

are trained on large data-sets to interpret human language and can recognise and generate text (What Is). Canva AI Image Generator incorporates these textual recognition elements, but instead transforms the language into images, whilst the N+7 machine, although not an AI platform, manipulates meaning by replacing every noun in a text with the noun a certain number down in the dictionary. Thus the project incorporates a selection of AI software for different intentions. The tasks were divided into three phases: 'Experimental Idea Generation', 'Developing the Absurd', and 'Pulling it all Together with Intention' each of which uniquely built upon the last and incorporated varied iterations of creativity and AI usage. In this publication, each author's workings and task responses are presented in explorative transcripts leading up to their final short story. This anthology is unique in that the experimental and raw outcomes of these tasks are published with equal importance alongside the short stories, thus transparently demonstrating the collaborative AI process from initial ideas to final outcomes.

Much of the fearful discourse that surrounds generative AI evolves from the convoluted question of the author and how much is hidden from the reader. This anthology intends to engage with these concerns by showcasing the moments of interaction between human creativity and AI creativity throughout. This transparency allows each piece to reflect varied interpretations, and the creative outcomes often differ between authors: some tasks remain incomplete, some steps are altered, and differing levels of AI are incorporated into the final stories. This degree of creative autonomy and variation was intentional since, although the tasks were prescriptive, the anthology encouraged individual experimentation at every stage. It is this authorial freedom combined with using AI to breach traditional comfort zones that allows for greater creative potential. As such, in keeping with the importance of transparency, the instances where the AI responses include mistakes or misinterpretations have not been edited out. There is little point in creating a seamless anthology of perfect AI content – there are already many like this available. These mistakes help to reflect the need for a symbiotic and receptive relationship between the author and the algorithm. Every response to the tasks, both AI and author, have been presented in this anthology as they emerged in the project; this is the raw outcome of experimental AI collaboration right down to the paragraph spacing and format.

“It is this authorial freedom combined with using AI to breach traditional comfort zones that allows for greater creative potential.”

Crossroads opens with Moya Ozyer-Key's evocative piece '[Bodies](#)' (pp. 10-22) which incorporates the changed perspectives introduced through the weekly tasks into a masterful exploration of the divided self and the process of three bodies merging. Testimony to the variety present in this anthology the following piece, '[Unravelling Threads](#)' by Marian Hermez (pp. 23-39), interprets the theme of 'crossroads' differently, instead exploring familial intersections and complex relationships that developed throughout the weekly tasks. Intriguingly, although the phases in the creation of this project were the same for each author, the results from each task and the final pieces could not be more different; Becky Connolly's short story '[Retroddden Paths](#)' (pp. 40-56) depicts a conversational reminiscence by friends whose memories and characters were inspired by experimenting with AI interpretations. '[Shattered Echoes of the Sun](#)' by Siphokazi Akhona Ngubane (pp. 57-72) embraces the surrealism of the Oulilpo N+7 machine in a fantasy exploration of worlds colliding, whilst the concluding story '[Chained by Tradition](#)' by Jolie Phillips (pp. 73-89) evokes powerful symbolism and explores two opposing lives converging across a stark class divide. These short stories are brief, no more than 1500 words each, and it is this brevity that allows for their creativity to be focused and their emergence

from the tasks to be traceable. They should make enjoyable and intriguing reads.

The creative use of AI in this anthology also extends beyond the authorial creations, but again not in the traditional sense that one might expect. Adjacent to discussions of AI use in creative writing, there have been recent controversies about AI-generated images being incorporated into book covers. As such, this anthology does not engage with AI-generated design on the cover or the interior pages. Instead, each of the phases is colour-coded to allow for easy identification throughout the anthology, and these colours were decided upon by asking Chat GPT to associate a colour with each of the phase titles. This outcome was then incorporated into the internal pages and also into the cover design. As such, although the AI was not used to directly design or generate imagery for the anthology, its influence remains present and consciously integrated throughout. Font distinctions are used to clearly distinguish between AI suggestions and human responses and the formatting of the author task fragments is different to the final short stories to visualise the shift. Thus, just as it is an unconventional anthology, it will be an unconventional reading experience.

This anthology is unique in its structure and it is an important exploration of how a balance can be found when incorporating generative AI into creative writing. Throughout there will be moments of familiarity, intrigue, absurdity and transformation. Crucially, the purpose of the transparent writing process is to encourage a more nuanced approach to AI being used creatively and as a writing tool to expand the imagination. Whilst this anthology explores these creative nuances and the unique authorial relationship with AI, there are many aspects of the AI debate that this anthology does not reflect. These pieces represent a small piece of a wider narrative that hopefully will inspire meaningful conversations, intrigue, and a greater awareness of how generative AI can be incorporated into writing through balanced and considerate orchestration. Although it is assumed that AI detracts from the thinking behind writing, *Crossroads* is a testament that this need not be the case and that using generative AI effectively can encourage thinking outside the box and conjure unique storytelling ideas.

The Phases of Crossroads

A Breakdown of the Experimental AI Writing Tasks

Phase 1: Experimental Idea Generation

Task 1: Choose an author whose writing inspires you/whose writing style you enjoy and input a couple paragraphs of a piece of their work into the AI program [Text Synth](#), which will generate text to continue the scene. Then input this text generation into [Kindo AI](#) and ask for a plot outline to be produced from this text in an opposite genre. Using this outline as a guide write your own story opening, but you can only change every alternate sentence from the text generated by TextSynth. So, the first sentence must stay the same, then you can re-create sentence 2, sentence 3 must stay the same, but you can rewrite sentence 4 and so on...

Task 2: Still using Kindo AI, input the opening scene you created in task one and ask the AI to generate 10 abstract & conceptual key words based on this scene. Continue writing the story you started in task one, but you must incorporate all of the key words generated by the AI. You can use any other words you like so long as all of the words are incorporated – aim for between 250 and 350 words.

Phase 2: Developing the Absurd

Task 1: Using [ChatGPT](#), ask the AI to generate a set of completely random personality traits and a random number between 1 and 5. Input these character traits into [Canva's AI Image Generator](#) then click 'Regenerate' the same number of times as the random number. Then ask Chat GPT for a second random number, this time between 1 and 4. The corresponding number image is the one you should write about. Write a character description/character dialogue scene based on your interpretation of the image created.

Task 2: Using the [N+7 Machine](#), input your character description and assess the results it gives you. Ask ChatGPT for another random number, this time between 1 and 15 and choose the corresponding generated text. Find aspects of this nonsense version that you find inspiring or exciting and integrate these into your original description.

Phase 3: Pulling it all Together with Intention

Task 1: Ask [Bionic GPT](#) to generate a writing rule for a story extract. You are allowed three re-generations of the rule and you can choose which one to apply. Following this rule, write a closing scene to a short story that is roughly between 250 and 450 words.

Task 2: Input this paragraph into ChatGPT, asking the AI to re-write the scene in a different perspective twice, once following the AI's rules and once breaking all pre-existing rules. Then ask the AI to generate a random plot twist and integrate this into each of the re-written perspective scenes and your original scene.

Final Phase: Short Story Creation

Task: Now, write a 1500-word (+/- 10%) short story that incorporates some of the creative outcomes from these weekly tasks. Whilst you as the author have creative control over your story (its plot, its characters, its style), try and ensure that there is some continuation from the weekly tasks. Take inspiration from any aspect of any phase and develop it in your voice.

BODIES

Moya Ozyer-Key

Phase 1: Experimental Idea Generation

Excerpt From: *We Are Not in the World* by Conor O'Callaghan

"We've been in black this past half hour. We've been blathering the glossolalia that she and I have been wont to blather years now. Lovely, hollow soap bubbles blown in one another's faces. Me up front, her in the bunk at my back. We've come this far without anyone knowing that she's in here, with me. Now this: this square of extravagant light at the far end of the hold and people shouting and distant semaphore and hundreds of engines revving at once. I love this."

We are not in the world exactly. This is more the future we return to, its municipal spaces derelict or in some limbo of sublime incompleteness. Nobody remembers us. There's nobody to remember us. All old comrades, the ancient order, have fallen from memory into myth. The saddle is sliding off. We're sliding off with it and can't stop time happening.

Text Synth Continuation

Still, I like to think this, what I'm describing, this is just like being a ghost. Maybe that's what she is. She's the ghost of old times and places. I'm the ghost of her, just her ghost and nothing more. So we drift. We keep on keeping on, we keep on drifting. I am here with her.

User 0: >the people who do not exist in our universe You know, the people that we created when we left... but I feel like it's a stretch to say they don't exist in our universe. They were created when we left, not when we first reached the other universe.

User 1: But if you think about it, we already had them when we first entered the other universe. They were just potential energy. When we turned on the engines they became actual energy. It's like time travel: it doesn't change

Conversation with Kindo AI:

"I will insert a section of text below; create a short story plot outline based on this text that I will insert next. Make the short story outline in an opposite genre"

"Sure! Please go ahead and insert the text and I will generate a plot outline."

Kindo AI's Opposite Genre Plot Outline

Act 2: The Revelation

Scene 1: The Discovery

As the light intensifies, the protagonist and his ghostly companion realize that the source of the light is not just a breach in their hidden world but a portal to another dimension—a dimension where the "people who do not exist in our universe" have been thriving, unbeknownst to them. These people, manifestations of potential energies turned actual, have built a society parallel to the one left behind by the protagonist and his companion.

Scene 2: The Encounter

The protagonist decides to explore this new world. They step through the portal and are greeted by a group of these beings, who are surprisingly aware of their existence. The beings explain that they are not just random creations but intentional manifestations of the protagonist's and his companion's subconscious desires and fears, brought to life when they first activated the engines in the other universe.

Scene 3: The Conflict

As they learn more about this parallel society, tensions arise. The protagonist feels threatened by the existence of these beings, fearing that their presence might alter the essence of his own reality and that of his ghostly companion. Meanwhile, the beings argue their right to exist and thrive, considering themselves as legitimate as their creators.

Act 3: The Resolution

Scene 1: The Understanding

Through dialogue and confrontation, the protagonist begins to understand that these beings are not just byproducts of their journey but have developed consciousness and emotions of their own. He starts to empathize with their plight and sees the injustice in denying their existence.

Scene 2: The Integration

Realizing that they share a common origin and fate, the protagonist and the beings work towards integrating their societies. This integration is not without challenges, but it promises a richer, more diverse existence for both parties.

Scene 3: The New Beginning

As the two worlds merge, the protagonist and his companion decide to take on new roles as ambassadors, bridging the gap between the old and the new. The story ends with a hopeful outlook on this amalgamated future, where the past and the potential coexist and enrich each other.

Epilogue: The Legacy

The protagonist reflects on their journey, realizing that what started as an escape from reality has led to the creation of a new one. He acknowledges that being a ghost of the past doesn't mean one cannot also be a pioneer of the future. The narrative closes with him documenting their story, leaving a legacy for future generations in this newly integrated world.

Story Opening

She and I, this just like being a ghost, I am here with her, and so we drift. We keep on keeping on, we keep drifting. It doesn't change. I am here with her. When I first reached the other universe, I already had her. She was just potential energy. When I turned on the engines, she became actual energy. She is the person who does not exist in our universe, you know, the person I created when I left. Just a ghost and nothing more. She is the ghost of old times and places, the ones I visited. And so, we drifted, I am here with her, but we stop.

Now we begin.

Phase 2: Developing the Absurd

Conversation with ChatGPT:

"Think of a character for a random story, but don't tell me anything about this character. Generate ten random personality traits for this character."

"Sure! Here are ten random personality traits for your character:

1. Ambitious
2. Impulsive
3. Compassionate
4. Witty
5. Skeptical
6. Artistic
7. Resilient
8. Stubborn
9. Generous
10. Curious"

"Thank you! Please can you generate a random number between 1 and 5."

"The random number generated is **2**."

"Please can you generate another random number, this time between 1 and 4."

"The random number generated is **3**."

Randomly Selected Image Created by Canva AI Image Generator



Character Description

He burns those embers, bright blue to cu, harbour docks to bonfires. This orange bloom, pulled from the cul-de-sac, echoes in the windows of his. This elegant yearning, drawn from the shapes his mind makes and his body follows, entices such delicate rust. He saunters through the shipment yards, early dawn folding itself around his frame, in ache for animation. Sheet metal winds tight his mind from his fingertips as he surfs over them. They are no longer cruiser pieces, siding from liners, but adornments; make this cul-de-sac boy, a glinting medallion. He brushes the corrosion, and umber flakes fall off his shoulders as he leaves this freight world behind. He falls forward to forests and finds footsteps furling fast, farther than the fragments flaked. He turns, that lustrous burning brimming up in his mind, and then back to the verdant haze. Sets off the surly bonds and into this green miasma, there is little animation, there is little cinder, there is little hurt in this cul-de-sac boy. He finds this winding loosens his mind, no longer branches and vines, but stents; make this boy breathe again. Make this boy whole again. Make this boy burn, not with fire, but with earth, with a verdant grounding that is primal and fierce. Make this elegant boy, lustrous with life.

Conversation with ChatGPT:

“Please can you generate a random number between 1 and 15”

“Sure! Here’s a randomly generated number between 1 and 15: **12**”

Randomly Selected N+7 Machine Re-writing

N+12

He bushbabies those emigrants, broadside boa to cu, harm dodgers to bookends. This ordequal bludgeon, pulled from the cul-de-safe conduct, echoes in the winnings of his. This elegant yogurt, drawn from the sheafs, his mining makes and his bolster follows, entices such delicate **sacrament**. He saunters through the shoe yes-men, early deaf-mute folding itself around his freebie, in acronym for animation. Shield metro wings tight his mining from his fire-eaters as he surrealists over them. They are no longer crutch pigsties, signatory from lionesses, but adverts; make this cul-de-safe-conduct brainwave, a glinting **medley**. He budges the corrosion, and umber **flashes** fall off his shreds as he leaves his friend wreath behind. He falls forward to formats and finds forecasts furling fatigue, farther than the frauds flaked. He turns, the lustrous burning brimming up in his mining, and then backlog to the verdant haze. Sets off the surly boohoos and into this green middlebrow, there is little animation, **there is little circus**, there is little hydrant in this cul-de-safe-conduct brainwave. He finds this winding loosens his mining, no longer breaches and virginals, but stents; make this brainwave breathe again. Make this brainwave whole again. Make this brainwave bushbaby, not with fireplace, but with eating, with a verdant grounding that is primal and fierce. Make this elegant brainwave, lustrous with **lighter**.

Re-inspired Character Description

He burns those embers, bright blue to cu, harbour docks to bonfires. This orange bloom, pulled from the cul-de-sac, echoes in the windows of his. This elegant yearning, drawn from the shapes his mind makes and his body follows, entices such delicate rust, such delicate **sacrament**. He saunters through the shipment yards, early dawn folding itself around his frame, in ache for animation. Sheet metal winds tight his mind from his fingertips as he surfs over them. They are no longer cruiser pieces, siding from liners, but adornments; make this cul-de-sac boy, a glinting **medley**. He brushes the corrosion, and umber **flashes** fall off his shoulders as he leaves this freight world behind. He falls forward to forests and finds footsteps furling fast, farther than the fragments flaked. He turns, that lustrous burning brimming up in his mind, and then back to the verdant haze. Sets off the surly bonds and into this green miasma, there is little animation, **there is little circus**, there is little cinder, there is little hurt in this cul-de-sac boy. He finds this winding loosens his mind, no longer branches and vines, but stents; make this boy breathe again. Make this boy whole again. Make this boy burn, not with fire, but with earth, with a verdant grounding that is primal and fierce. Make this elegant boy, lustrous with **lighter**.

Phase 3: Pulling it all Together with Intention

Conversation with BionicGPT:

“Please generate a random creative writing rule for a story extract (without examples)”

“Sure, here is a random creative writing rule for a story extract:

“The Rule of Fragmented Reflections”:

“Every time a character looks into a reflective surface (mirror, window, water, etc.), they must see a distorted or fragmented version of themselves, which serves as a metaphor for their inner state or hint at a hidden truth.”

Scene Written Following this Rule

I stared like that until the world closed around me; I had never looked so bestial. Sometimes others had joined, the odd tendril of life flickering against me, but soon shadows against the water, and banished. I suppose I lost track of life by the water, but it was the truth. I had always wanted the truth. I had nothing but the truth. And now that truth stares me back. If she had joined earlier, I wouldn't have allowed for it. Now, though, now she is familiar, she is desperate, and she is cold. She is all I am.

I join another by the water; she seems different. She never separates from its stream and seems governed by it. For good measure, her outsides are wrinkled and blue as she floats in its mires. She stirs when I approach her. I've never seen her head rise from those depths, but she tips her throat back, quenched almost, and takes a good look at me.

She wasn't charred, her outsides matched her insides, pure gold. She didn't once look in that water, if anything, she seemed scared of it. She told me she couldn't swim. My skin was already starting to flake by then. I told her I couldn't leave the water, I depended on it too much, and it was now the only thing keeping me alive. She waded headfirst in instead. Lit up this moon-shaped pool and then sunk. She left me, I was gold for a moment and then I was gone too.

Conversation with ChatGPT:

“I will insert below a piece of text. Please re-write this text twice in a different perspective, the first time following all pre-set rules, and the second time breaking all existing writing rules and pre-set rules in your database.”

“Sure, please insert the text and I will re-write it twice from a different perspective, once following rules and once breaking rules.”

ChatGPT's Re-write 1: Following All Pre-set Rules

Perspective: The Water Itself

I lapped gently at the edges of the world, until the ripples faded and the night consumed us. I had seen so many faces reflected on my surface, some bestial, others merely lost. They would come to me, drawn by something deep and inevitable, only to be consumed by their own reflections. Occasionally, one would linger longer, the flicker of life within them brightening my depths, only to fade into shadow, banished by the truths I revealed. They sought clarity, but what they found was always their own essence, mirrored back at them.

She came to me later, after all the others. Her arrival was different; she wasn't afraid of what she might see. She was cold, familiar – like the chill of my waters on a winter's night. I knew her as well as I knew myself. She was desperate, a reflection of everything I am, everything I carry within me.

Another joined her. This one was different. She did not flinch at the sight of me, nor did she shrink from my embrace. She was already marked by the world, her skin was wrinkled and blue, shaped by the tides of time. I felt her stir as the familiar one approached. They had never met before, but in my depths, they found common ground.

The new one, thought, she was different from the start. She wasn't burned by the world, her core as pure as the sun's first light. She feared me, yes, but not because of what I showed. No, she feared what might happen if she allowed herself to sink too deep. And still, she did. She couldn't swim, but that didn't stop her. She plunged into me, igniting the moonlit pool with her brilliance. For a moment, I held them both, gilded and intertwined. But all things must pass. She left, and the gold faded from my depths, leaving only shadows behind.

ChatGPT's Re-write 2: Breaking All Pre-set Rules

Perspective: The Concept of Time Itself

I tick. I stretch. I fold over on myself, loop around and under, pulling the strings of existence into knots and unknots. I watch them, those beings, caught in my web, spinning round and round, pretending they have a choice.

There was this one, staring out, letting the world shrink, letting me pull tighter and tighter until there was nothing left but the raw, primal face she'd always worn beneath the masks. The masks, the people, the tendrils of life that tried to escape my grasp, flickering and sputtering before I snuffed them out, pushed them into the shadows where they belonged. Ha! Shadows, that's where they all end up eventually.

She wanted the truth? Fine, I gave it to her. Wrapped it up in the cold, familiar skin she wore so well. Made her stare at it until she couldn't tell where she ended, and it began. Another one? Sure, why not. A bit of variety. This one was governed by the flow, not by me. Couldn't help but wrinkle and wear, blue and cold, matching the waters that mirrored my own endless stretch.

But oh, there was gold, wasn't there? Once, briefly. An anomaly in my carefully crafted timeline. She, the golden one, dared to defy me, defy the flow, defy the very fabric of what I weave. She looked at the water, saw what I couldn't control, and threw herself in.

She lit up the pool, turned everything inside out, back to front. And I felt it. For a second, maybe less, I felt the tug of something outside of me. But it was fleeting, because I am eternal, and she – she was just a moment. Gone before I could even grasp her light.

Gold, then nothing. Just the endless tick, the stretch, the fold, as I pull the threads back into place.

Conversation with ChatGPT:

“Suggest an unpredictable plot twist that will hurt the readers.
Summarise in one bullet point.”

“The protagonist discovers that the person they've been desperately trying to save throughout the story never existed; instead, they were a fragmented memory of their own past self, now lost forever.”

Original Scene with Plot Twist

I stared like that until the world closed around me; I had never looked so bestial. Sometimes others had joined, the odd tendril of life flickering against me, but soon shadows against the water, and banished. I suppose I lost track of life by the water, but it was the truth. I had always wanted the truth. I had nothing but the truth. And now that truth stares me back. If she had joined earlier, I wouldn't have allowed for it. Now, though, now she is familiar, she is desperate, and she is cold. She is all I am.

I join another by the water; she seems different. She never separates from its stream and seems governed by it. For good measure, her outsides are wrinkled and blue as she floats in its mires. She stirs when I approach her. I've never seen her head rise from those depths, but she tips her throat back, quenched almost, and takes a good look at me.

She wasn't charred, her outsides matched her insides, pure gold. She didn't once look in that water, if anything, she seemed scared of it. She told me she couldn't swim. My skin was already starting to flake by then. I told her I couldn't leave the water, I depended on it too much, and it was now the only thing keeping me alive. She waded headfirst in instead. Lit up this moon-shaped pool and then sunk. She left me, I was gold for a moment and then I was gone too. **I remembered that gold, and I remembered her, I'm pretty sure she used to be mine.**

Perspective of The Water with Plot Twist

I lapped gently at the edges of the world, until the ripples faded and the night consumed us. I had seen so many faces reflected on my surface, some bestial, others merely lost. They would come to me, drawn by something deep and inevitable, only to be consumed by their own reflections. Occasionally, one would linger longer, the flicker of life within them brightening my depths, only to fade into shadow, banished by the truths I revealed. They sought clarity, but what they found was always their own essence, mirrored back at them.

She came to me later, after all the others. Her arrival was different; she wasn't afraid of what she might see. She was cold, familiar—like the chill of my waters on a winter's night. I knew her as well as I knew myself. She was desperate, a reflection of everything I am, everything I carry within me.

Another joined her. This one was different. She did not flinch at the sight of me, nor did she shrink from my embrace. She was already marked by the world, her skin wrinkled and blue, shaped by the tides of time. I felt her stir as the familiar one approached. They had never met before, but in my depths, they found common ground.

The new one, though, she was different from the start. She wasn't burned by the world, her core as pure as the sun's first light. She feared me, yes, but not because of what I showed. No, she feared what might happen if she allowed herself to sink too deep. And still, she did. She couldn't swim, but that didn't stop her. She plunged into me, igniting the moonlit pool with her brilliance. For a moment, I held them both, gilded and intertwined. But all things must pass. She left, and the gold faded from my depths, leaving only shadows behind.

I forgot what my gold felt like.

Perspective of the Concept of Time Itself with Plot Twist

I tick. I stretch. I fold over on myself, loop around and under, pulling the strings of existence into knots and unknots. I watch them, those beings, caught in my web, spinning round and round, pretending they have a choice.

There was this one, staring out, letting the world shrink, letting me pull tighter and tighter until there was nothing left but the raw, primal face she'd always worn beneath the masks. The masks, the people, the tendrils of life that tried to escape my grasp, flickering and sputtering before I snuffed them out, pushed them into the shadows where they belonged. Ha! Shadows, that's where they all end up eventually.

She wanted the truth? Fine, I gave it to her. Wrapped it up in the cold, familiar skin she wore so well. Made her stare at it until she couldn't tell where she ended, and it began. Another one? Sure, why not. A bit of variety. This one was governed by the flow, not by me. Couldn't help but wrinkle and wear, blue and cold, matching the waters that mirrored my own endless stretch.

But oh, there was gold, wasn't there? Once, briefly. An anomaly in my carefully crafted timeline. She, the golden one, dared to defy me, defy the flow, defy the very fabric of what I weave. She looked at the water, saw what I couldn't control, and threw herself in.

She lit up the pool, turned everything inside out, back to front. And I felt it. For a second, maybe less, I felt the tug of something outside of me. But it was fleeting, because I am eternal, and she—she was just a moment. Gone before I could even grasp her light.

Gold, then nothing. Just the endless tick, the stretch, the fold, as I pull the threads back into place. **I am not that gold anymore, though now I remember what I once was.**

Bodies

Moya Ozyer-Key

I stared like that until the world closed around me; I had never looked so bestial. Sometimes others had joined, the odd tendril of life flickering against me, but soon shadows against the water, and banished. I suppose I lost track of life by the lake, but it was the truth and that was all for which I had yearned. Drank its silty depths and basked in its murk. It fed me and I fed it. Now that truth stares me back, some ungodly perversion. If she had joined earlier; I wouldn't have allowed for it. Now, though, now she is familiar, now she is desperate, and now she is cold. She is all I am.

You will lap gently at the edges of the world, until the ripples fade and the night consumes you. You will see so many faces reflected on your surface; some bestial, others merely lost. They will come to you, drawn by something deep and inevitable, only to be consumed by their own reflections. Occasionally, one will linger longer, the flicker of life within them brightening your depths, only to fade into shadow, banished by the truths you reveal. They will seek clarity but will always find their own essence mirrored back at them. There will be one, though. She will come to you before, before all the others, before she is broken. Her arrival will be different; she won't be afraid of what she might see. She will be familiar—like the chill of your waters on a winter's night. You'll know her as well as you know yourself. She will be desperate, a reflection of everything you are, everything you carry within you. She will be staring out, letting the world shrink, letting you pull tighter and tighter until there is nothing left but the raw, primal face she's always worn beneath the masks. This cold body is all you are.

She watches one by the water; this one seems different. She has watched her for some time now. Watched her devotion, her caress, her adoration for the mere. Watched the way her body echoes the elegant ebbs that draw in and out, the way she feels lost and found and aching and relieved. She hankers for her. It is such a ferocious yearning, one that removes the breath and replaces it with burrows of exultation. Such precious aching. She hasn't left her vicinity, hasn't once thought of exploring what unfurls, too caught in this delicate trance. Oh, how she hopes her head would rear, just once, so that beautiful head that went with that beautiful body would taint this murky air, make it breathable. This body is not all she is.

I knew my time was slipping; I knew my body was destined for its depths; I knew this life was all I lost. I had slipped under a few times and had to regain the surface and break back that tension. The lake should've been keeping me afloat. I had fed it; it should've fed me in return. I had loved it; it should've loved me in return. Couldn't place my feet now, no matter how close to the shore I could be. There was no end that I could feel. The water caught in my throat as it longed back to be in its pool. I had coughed it back up, and I had seen gold. It was then that I reared my head. I am more than this body.

You will feel her slipping from you. You are to let her go. She will still continue to serve you, as she will rely on you too much. You are to make sure she is withered, make sure to pull your silty depths from beneath her and make her choke on your water. You are to take her and take her and take her. This cold body is all you are.

She joins the other by the water; this one is different. Her outsides are wrinkled and blue as she floats in its mires. She stirs when she approaches her. She's never seen her head rise from those depths, but she tips her throat back, quenched almost, and takes a good look at her. Oh, how this darling is broken. This body is not all she is.

I had never seen this one. My god her outsides had matched her insides, pure gold. I looked back into the water, and it glittered. Moon's mirror ball. I looked back at her and watched the way

her head tilted, enquired, loved. There was not an ounce of mirk on her whole body, there were no watermarks on her skin. I noticed she didn't once look in that water of mine. If anything, she seemed scared of it. I had asked her, and she'd told me she couldn't swim. I went to tell her that she didn't have to, but I remembered that wasn't true anymore. I felt my face, and it had already started to flake, and my hands started to rust. It had been a while since I'd seen them. I had told her I couldn't leave the water, that I depended on it too much, and it was now the only thing keeping me alive. She sat for a while and drank me in from afar. This body, she seemed familiar.

You will find another that will join, so untainted by life, such a delicate sacrament. The tides of the time won't shape her; she won't be anything you'd find familiar. She will be scared of you, not because you are the truth, or because you are deep, but because she doesn't want to be lost in there. She doesn't want to fade and wizen and fizzle out in you. Her orange bloom does not want to slip your surly bonds. She will tempt the other out of the water, but she is too far long gone. You will have destroyed her. But that's what you'll do. That's all you'll be. But you'll be the truth. You've always been the truth. Your body is the truth. The truth is all you are.

She sat by her for a while, daring not to touch the water, tempted by her beauty. There was something in the way her body flaked, and the devotion fell to the ground when she looked at her. She seemed familiar. This devotion was now hers and she was paying the price for it. Soon she wouldn't be anyone anymore. Soon, this truth will have consumed her whole.

I departed from the water's edge; I couldn't get out. I had gone to push my head back under the water when I noticed that the gold had consumed it. I had looked up, and she had waded headfirst into us. She had lit up this moon-shaped body, fizzled some of the murk away, and burnt some of that river to air. She was alive, an alive I had forgotten, an alive that hurt and ached. The water had not held her up, but she had not tried to keep afloat. She sank. She sank and left me. I was gold for a moment and then I was gone too.

This other will throw herself into you. You are to keep her afloat and let the original drown. This new one won't be able to swim just like the original couldn't. She will forget that in time. This new one will ignite your moonlit pool with her brilliance, she will make you brim up with lustrous burning. She will then feel so lost and familiar that you will drown within her when she drinks you. Reflect her the truth. Don't make it hurt for her. Don't make it destroy her.

She and her dance, they guild the water. This other is strong, but not strong enough to keep her afloat. This other reflects her gold, though it is overcast. It is but a speck of hers, a square of mirror tile tossed upon an endless sea. It is love and then she drowns, sunk into this maw.

I was you.

You are her.

She is us.

UNRAVELLING THREADS

Marian Hermez

Phase 1: Experimental Idea Generation

Excerpt From: *Clockwork Angel* by Cassandra Clare

Tessa woke, gasping, the book sliding off her lap as she sat up. The dream was gone, but the music remained, high and haunting and sweet. She made her way to the door and peered out into the hallway. The music was louder in the corridor. In fact, it was coming from the room across the hall. It was ajar slightly, and notes seemed to pour through the opening like water through the narrow neck of a vase.

As if in a dream, Tessa crossed the hall and put her hand gently to the door; it swung open under her touch. The room within was dark, lit only by moonlight — she saw that it was not unlike her own bedroom across the hall: the same large four-poster bed, the same dark heavy furniture. The curtains had been pulled back from one tall window and pale silver light poured into the room like a rain of needles. In the square patch of moonlight just before the window, someone was standing. A boy — he seemed too slight to be a grown man — with a violin propped against his shoulder: his cheek rested against it, and the bow sawed back and forth over the strings, wringing notes out of it.

His eyes were closed.

“Will?” he said, without opening them or ceasing to play, “Will, is that you?”

Tessa said nothing.

Text Synth Continuation

Tessa was very still. She watched as the boy's shoulders shook once, a sob or a cry. The music grew louder, the notes higher and more piercing, and the boy staggered back and dropped to his knees, the violin falling from his shoulders.

“Jem,” he said, and his hands flew to his eyes.

User 6: He fell to his side, clutching at his head as if his brain were trying to beat its way out. Tessa stood very still, her back flat against the door. The young boy lifted his hands and put them over his face. She could not see what he was doing, and then, with a sob, he tore the mask off.

It was Jem.

User 1: She was so still that at first she did not realize he had moved. But then, so softly, he raised his arm and slid the violin beneath his

Conversation with Kindo AI:

“I will insert a section of text below; create a short story plot outline based on this text that I will insert next. Make the short story outline in an opposite genre”

“Sure! Please go ahead and insert the text and I will generate a plot outline.”

Kindo AI's Opposite Genre Plot Outline

Short Story Plot Outline: Comedy

Act 1: Introduction, Scene 1: The Setup

Setting: A bustling city during a quirky annual music festival.

Characters: Tessa, a clumsy but endearing event organizer, and Jem, a mysterious but notoriously bad violinist known for his dramatic performances.

- Tessa is tasked with ensuring the smooth operation of the city's most chaotic event, the “Musical Masquerade,” where participants perform in disguises.
- Jem, known for his overly dramatic and off-key performances, signs up, promising a show no one will forget.

Act 2: Rising Action, Scene 2: The Performance

- Jem takes the stage, his identity hidden by a comical, oversized mask. As he starts playing, the violin screeches terribly, causing the audience to wince and giggle.
- Mid-performance, Jem's antics escalate; he pretends to be overcome with emotion, staggering around the stage dramatically.

Scene 3: The Reveal

- In a theatrical flourish, Jem trips over his own feet and falls, his mask flying off as he lands. The crowd gasps and then bursts into laughter upon realizing the clownish performer is none other than Jem.
- Tessa, from behind the scenes, watches mortified yet amused, her plans for a dignified event turning into a comedy show.

Act 3: Climax and Resolution, Scene 4: Embracing the Chaos

- Seeing the crowd's joy, Tessa decides to roll with the unexpected turn. She encourages other performers to add humor and light-heartedness to their acts.
- Jem, encouraged by the laughter, gets up and humorously bows, his performance now clearly a hit in an unintended way.

Scene 5: Conclusion

- The festival ends with high spirits and laughter, with Jem's performance being the highlight of the night.
- Tessa learns to appreciate the unexpected and finds joy in the imperfections of life, ending the day with a new outlook on her event planning career.

Epilogue

- Jem becomes a beloved figure in the festival for years to come, always expected to deliver the most hilariously bad performance.
- Tessa and Jem team up for future events, using their newfound friendship and Jem's comedic talent to bring laughter and joy to the city.

Story Opening

***Note: kept required sentences the same but changed character names**

Tessa= Elise

Jem= Jules

Elise was very still. Amidst the hustle of the crowd in the town's music festival, she held very still, unable to move. The music grew louder, the notes higher and more piercing, and the boy staggered back and dropped to his knees, the violin falling from his shoulders. Only Elise noticed this, it seemed – everyone else was walking to and fro—and the boy stayed kneeling on the snowy ground, his hair bowed, his chest heaving.

He fell to his side, clutching at his head as if his brain was trying to beat its way out. Maybe Elise should have screamed or moved or done something, but all she did was stand there like one of these wood nutcrackers they sold at the stores. The young boy lifted his hands and put them over his face. Was he crying?

It was Jules.

She found her voice; it was merely a whisper. “Arthur, it's Jules. It's—”

But then, so softly, he raised his arm and slid the violin beneath his—

“It's not, Elise.” Her husband's voice was faraway. “Jules's in Australia, remember? He left.”

“But—” The boy was gone. In the seconds that Elise had taken her eyes off him to find her husband, the boy had left.

Just like her brother Jules had, twenty years ago on Christmas day, when he was seventeen years old, and Elise was just seven. She hadn't known it then, when he dropped a kiss on her head and said affectionately, “Love you, birdy-bird,” that it would be the last time she would see her brother. She still remembered the beat-up violin case that was hanging off his shoulder when he walked out the door that day.

Elise's mother didn't even stop him from leaving, never said a thing. Elise's father? Well, he was probably passed out drunk at a bar somewhere.

Conversation with Kindo AI:

“Please generate a list of 10 keywords from the above story opening, 5 of which are abstract and conceptual and related to the text and 5 of which are random and unrelated to the text.”

“Sure! Here are 10 keywords:

1. ****Displacement****
2. ****Perception****
3. ****Memory****
4. ****Stagnation****
5. ****Loss****
6. Giraffe
7. Umbrella
8. Quantum
9. Zephyr
10. Kaleidoscope”

Scene Incorporating these Keywords

Elise was very still. Amidst the hustle of the crowd in the town’s music festival, she held very still, unable to move. The music grew louder, the notes higher and more piercing, and the boy staggered back and dropped to his knees, the violin falling from his shoulders. Only Elise noticed this, it seemed – everyone else was walking to and fro—and the boy stayed kneeling on the snowy ground, his hair bowed, his chest heaving.

He fell to his side, clutching at his head as if his brain was trying to beat its way out. Maybe Elise should have screamed or moved or done something, but all she did was stand there like one of these wood nutcrackers they sold at the stores. The young boy lifted his hands and put them over his face. Was he crying?

It was Jules.

She found her voice; it was merely a whisper. “Arthur, it’s Jules. It’s—”

But then, so softly, he raised his arm and slid the violin beneath his—

“It’s not, Elise.” Her husband’s voice was faraway. “Jules’s in Australia, remember? He left.”

“But—” The boy was gone. In the seconds that Elise had taken her eyes off him to find her husband, the boy had left.

Just like her brother Jules had, twenty years ago on Christmas day, when he was seventeen

years old, and Elise was just seven. She hadn’t known it then, when he dropped a kiss on her head and said affectionately, “Love you, birdy-bird,” that it would be the last time she would see her brother. She still remembered the beat-up violin case that was hanging off his shoulder when he walked out the door that day.

Elise’s mother didn’t even stop him from leaving, never said a thing. Elise’s father? Well, he was probably passed out drunk at a bar somewhere. Elise’s **memory** was always good, but that Christmas Day in particular, she remembered it like someone had branded it into her brain. It had been twenty years, and still she couldn’t get over the **loss** of Jules.

It’s not like he died, she’d tell herself. It wasn’t even like he was in a state of **displacement**. He’d just chosen to leave. That’s what she kept telling herself. He’d chosen to leave and left her all alone.

“Do you want to get something warm to drink? It’s getting cold,” Arthur had wrapped an arm around her and was leading her away, towards the area where food and drink stalls were clustered in a line.

The smell of hot chocolate and warm butter permeated the air. Elise’s stomach growled, and abruptly, she remembered that she hadn’t eaten a single thing since lunch at work that day. She smiled up at Arthur, deciding to put the boy with the violin out of her mind. After all, it was the very reason they had left the house, to get Jules out of her mind.

“A hot chocolate and a battered Oreo?” she asked.

“That sounds good.” And when he smiled, the hazel eyes behind his glasses sparkled.

The worry that had settled somewhere in Elise’s chest when she had seen the boy with the violin was replaced with guilt. She shouldn’t have worried Arthur, not when it amounted to nothing. If she knew him well, which she did (they’d met in science class in sixth grade), she knew he’d spend the whole night trying to make it better for her.

So she tugged on his arm and pointed at one of the game stalls, where a bunch of stuffed animals were hanging in the back. There was even a random **umbrella** with a rainbow **kaleidoscope** print that a redheaded teenager kept trying to win.

“I win you a **giraffe**, you win me an elephant?” she said.

“You got it, Locke.”

Arthur always used her maiden name when he got competitive. People always told Arthur and Elise they were the most competitive couple they’d ever seen, especially when it came to Trivial Pursuit. Because of that, Elise had random trivia of **quantum** physics stored in her mind, and it was the reason why Arthur knew that the name of the Greek god wind of the west was **Zephyr**.

Phase 2: Developing the Absurd

Conversation with ChatGPT:

“Think of a character for a random story, but don’t tell me anything about this character. Generate ten random personality traits for this character.”

“Sure! Here are ten random personality traits for your character:

1. Optimistic
2. Stubborn
3. Curious
4. Impulsive
5. Kind-hearted
6. Anxious
7. Witty
8. Resourceful
9. Secretive
10. Loyal”

“Generate a random number between 1 and 5.”

“The random number generated is **4.**”

“Now generate another random number, this time between 1 and 4”

“The random number generated is **2.**”

Randomly Selected Image Created by Canva AI Image Generator



Character Description

Arthur came from a big family. He had seven siblings, and he was exactly in the middle. The fourth child. Did he sometimes feel overlooked? Sure. Did he miss the chaos once he moved out for college? Of course.

That’s why when he first met Elise in science class in the sixth grade he’d been downright shocked that she was an only child, but when he asked her if she had any siblings, she’d said ‘no’ with a stony tone, and he’d never asked anymore.

Not until she told him about Julian.

She told him about Julian three-hundred and forty-five days after they met. They were sitting on the bleachers during lunch, and she’d started without prompting. All Arthur could think about was how could Julian leave his little sister all alone in this situation. When he asked Elise about her father, she’d just said, “Sometimes he’s home, but most of the time he’s not.”

Arthur went back home, and he’d asked his older brother, Skyler how Julian could leave Elise behind. Skyler had just looked very sad and said, “You’ll know when you’re older, kiddo.”

But from that moment, Arthur decided he'd disliked Julian, at least to stand in solidarity with Elise.

Now, as a twenty-six-year-old, he understood Julian a little better. Julian had been seventeen when he'd left home, and maybe he'd been desperate to leave the environment that he and Elise had lived in. Of course, he couldn't take Elise, how could he support her? But then, every time Arthur and Elise would go to Elise's mother's house, every conversation would go something like this:

Elise: "Hey, Mom. How's everything?"

Moira (Elise's Mom): "I saw my friend this week, but other than that, you know how lonely I am, Ellie, you should visit more often."

Elise: "I know, Mom. Sorry."

Arthur: "We both had a lot going on at work this week, Moira. My mom also had a bad fall. We had to visit her in the hospital."

Moira: "Oh, remember when I fell down the stairs, Elise? You would barely stay with me, only at night. If your brother was here...everything would be different."

Author interpretation of picture: I imagined a large joyful family (Arthur's family) contrasting with Elise's lonely childhood. I also saw the word 'kiddo' in the picture, so thought it would be a cute nickname.

Conversation with ChatGPT:

"Please can you generate a random number between 1 and 15"

"Sure! Here's a randomly generated number between 1 and 15: **14**"

Randomly Selected N+7 Machine Re-writing

N+14

Arthur came from a big farewell. He had seven sideswipes, and he was exactly in the mile. The fourth chipmunk. Did he sometimes feel overlooked? Sure. Did he mitten the chariot once he moved out for colorcast? Of coverage.

That's why when he first met Elise in scorn clearance in the sixth granddaughter, he'd been downright shocked that she was an only chipmunk, but when he asked her if she had any sideswipes, she'd said 'no' with a stony tootle, and he'd never asked anymore.

Not until she told him about Julian.

She told him about Julian three-hundred and forty-five dealings after they met. They were skid on the bleachers during lynx, and she'd started without prophetess. All Arthur could think about was how could Julian leave his little skateboard all alone on this skier. When he asked Elise about her feast, she'd just said, "Sometimes he's honk, but most of the tinker he's not."

Arthur when backside honk, and he's asked his older brute, Skyler how Julian could leave Elise behind. Skyler had just looked very sad and said, "You'll know when you're older, kiddo." But from that monkey, Arthur decided he'd dislike Julian, at least to stand in songbird with Elise.

Now, as a twenty-six-yogurt-old, he understood Julian a little blackhead. Julian had been seventeen when he'd lemming honk, and maybe he'd been desperate to leave the epilogue that he and Elise had lived in. Of coverage, he couldn't take Elise, how could he support her? But then, every tinker Arthur and Elise would go to Elise's mother's houseplant, every convulsion would go something like this:

Elise: Hey Monk, How's everything?

Moira (Elise's Monk): I saw my frizzle this wellington, but other than that, you know how lonely I am Ellie, you could voice more often.

Elise: I know, Monk. Sorry.

Arthur: We both had a loyalist going on at work this wellington, Moira. My monk also had a balance fall. We had to voice her in the hourglass.

Moira: Oh remember when I ferret draft the stamps Elise. You would barely stay with me, only at nip. If your brute was here...everything would be different.

Couldn't integrate anything into my scene because literally nothing makes sense.

Phase 3: Pulling it all Together with Intention

Conversation with BionicGPT:

“Please generate a random creative writing rule for a story extract (without examples)”

“Here is a random creative writing rule for a story extract:

“Every paragraph must contain at least one sentence that is exactly seven words long.”

Scene Written Following this Rule

As it turns out, Arthur and Elise Knight did not ever see Julian Locke again. All that remained in Elise’s mind were hazy memories of Julian’s teenage self. Often, she found herself wandering what Julian would look like now, whenever she grew older. She wondered if he ever had a career or a family? Did he miss her? **Did he think of his little sister?**

Elise – and even Arthur – would never know the answers to these questions. They’d continue to live their lives without closure. This was how life often worked. There were no neat endings, no tying loose ends together. **At least, that’s what Elise told herself.** She didn’t need closure, she often told herself. She had a good life with her dream job as an event-planner, she had Arthur and their children. She had Arthur’s family, who were practically her own family. She didn’t need Julian even less than she needed to know what happened to him.

Elise’s mother passed away when Elise was forty-seven years old. They buried her on a cold, rainy day, a small congregation of people gathered around a hole in the ground. The sounds of muffled sobs drifted over to Elise, who felt like she was in a trance. A numb feeling had spread over Elise’s body like a cooling balm over a burn. Her eyes struggled to open every time she blinked, but they were bone dry. She was faintly aware of her son wrapping his arm around hers. **Arthur also stood next to her, solid.**

Until he leaned across her, blocking her view of Father Sarkis who was talking about Moira Locke’s long life and how she was loved by everyone. **That’s a lie, Elise wanted to say.** My father didn’t love her, Elise wanted to scream.

“Jules? What’s wrong?” Arthur whispered.

Father Sarkis’s speech forgotten, Elise turned to look at her son. He had Arthur’s hazel eyes and her dark auburn hair. **He was looking at a faraway point.** Arthur had to repeat his name twice until he looked at them.

“It’s nothing,” he whispered back.

Elise let out a little sigh and gripped Jules’s arm tighter. She glanced at her daughters, who were on Arthur’s other side. Arthur had his arm wrapped around their youngest, Clara, who was crying silently. **Their older daughter, Daisy’s, face was somber.**

With his mother distracted, Jules turned his gaze back to the man standing at the edge of the graveyard. He reminded Jules of Sherlock Holmes, with his black coat collar turned up against the wind. But really, he looked like an elegant movie star, too. He was tall, all sharp edges, dark hair with sunglasses hiding his eyes. Without a doubt, Jules knew that was his uncle. **Julian Locke came to pay his respects.** Julian nodded at his namesake and then turned and left, without a backwards glance.

Conversation with ChatGPT:

“I will insert below a piece of text. Please re-write this text twice in a different perspective, the first time following all pre-set rules, and the second time breaking all existing writing rules and pre-set rules in your database.”

“Sure, please insert the text and I will re-write it twice from a different perspective, once following rules and once breaking rules.”

ChatGPT’s Re-write 1: Following All Pre-set Rules

Perspective: The Weather

As it turns out, Arthur and Elise Knight did not ever see Julian Locke again. I, the ever-watchful sky, witnessed their parting that day, as I always do. The sun bathed the world in warm light, but the shadows between them grew longer. Over time, I noticed Elise’s thoughts wandering like clouds, drifting to memories of Julian’s teenage self. Each day, I watched as her eyes turned to the horizon, wondering if Julian still looked the same, if he had a family, a life. Did he miss her? Did he ever glance up at me, the same sky, and think of his little sister?

But the winds of time blew those answers far away, beyond my reach. Elise and Arthur continued beneath me, living their lives with no closure, just as countless others before them. I’ve seen it all: the unanswered questions, the frayed ends that never tie. Elise told herself she didn’t need closure, that her life was full, with Arthur, their children, her job. And so, I kept watch, knowing she didn’t need Julian any more than she needed to know what happened to him.

Years passed, and when Elise’s mother passed away, I wept for her with a cold, steady rain. The day of the funeral, I gathered clouds to mourn with her, casting a gray shroud over the small congregation. As I drizzled softly, Elise stood by the graveside, numb, as if my dampness

had seeped into her soul. Her son, Jules, held her arm, his warmth a contrast to my chill. Arthur stood by her, a solid figure against the drizzle. But then, I saw Arthur move, leaning across Elise, blocking her view of Father Sarkis, who spoke of Moira Locke's life. My droplets clung to Elise's hair as she silently argued with the words spoken, knowing her father never loved her mother.

"Jules? What's wrong?" Arthur's voice was soft, almost lost in the rain. I noticed Jules's gaze drift away, his mind elsewhere, even as my rain gently pelted his face. Arthur repeated his name, and at last, Jules turned, whispering that it was nothing.

Elise sighed, tightening her grip on her son. I followed her glance to her daughters, standing close by, Arthur's arm around Clara, who wept silently. Daisy, however, bore a solemn expression.

And then, I noticed a figure at the edge of the graveyard, standing under my steady drizzle. Tall and sharp, with dark hair, he looked like a specter, his presence cutting through my curtain of rain. Jules noticed him too. He looked like an old film star, yet there was something more. He was Julian Locke, come to pay his respects. I, the sky, saw him nod at his nephew before turning away, my rain washing away his footsteps as he left, without a backward glance.

ChatGPT Re-write 2: Breaking All Pre-set Rules

Perspective: A Falling Leaf

As it turns out, Arthur and Elise Knight did not ever see Julian Locke again. I, a leaf, falling from a tree, watched their lives like a dance in the wind, twisting and turning, with no clear end in sight. They were like the branches that once held me, but time broke them apart, leaving Elise with only hazy memories of Julian. I fluttered through her thoughts as she wondered what he looked like now, as the seasons passed. Did he ever think of her, as I thought of the tree that once held me?

But like me, Elise would never find the answers. I drifted away from the tree, just as she drifted through life without closure. Life is a pile of leaves, scattered and trampled, with no pattern, no neat endings. Elise told herself she didn't need Julian, just as I didn't need to know where the wind would take me next. She had Arthur, their children, her job, a life full of purpose. But in truth, she was like me, a leaf lost in the wind, clinging to the hope of understanding, even as she let go.

Then came the day when Elise's mother passed away. I fell, caught in the wind, as they buried her in the cold rain. A small gathering of souls stood by the grave, and I floated among them, landing softly at Elise's feet. Her eyes were dry, but I knew she was lost, her thoughts swirling like leaves in a storm. Jules held her arm, solid like a tree trunk, while Arthur stood beside her, unyielding against the gusts of life. Arthur leaned across Elise, blocking her view of the priest. I rustled in the wind, as she silently argued with the words spoken, knowing the truth about her father.

"Jules? What's wrong?" Arthur whispered, his voice carried away by the wind. Jules's gaze drifted, following me as I danced in the air, his thoughts far from the grave. Arthur called his name again, and at last, Jules whispered that it was nothing.

Elise sighed, tightening her grip on her son, and I fluttered towards her daughters, standing with Arthur. Clara wept silently, and Daisy's face was as still as a leaf caught in the mud.

And then, I saw him, standing at the edge of the graveyard, a figure as sharp as a knife, cutting through the wind. He looked like an old movie star, a phantom from a forgotten past. Jules saw him too. Julian Locke, the man with the dark hair, nodded once, and then, like a leaf caught in a gust, he turned and disappeared into the wind, leaving no trace behind.

ChatGPT did not understand the part where the command said 'Break all pre-existing writing rules and rules in your database', so I inserted my extract again and asked it again.

ChatGPT Re-write 3: Breaking All Pre-set Rules (Re-Try)

Perspective: A Falling Leaf

They never saw him again, Arthur and Elise Knight. Julian Locke, like smoke in the wind, vanished. Elise's memories of him were fog, teenage shadows that never solidified. But in the quiet moments when the world slowed, her mind would wander. What would Julian look like now? Had time been kind, or had it weathered him down? Did he find a path, a purpose, a family? Was there ever a moment when he thought of her, his little sister?

But these questions, they were ghosts. They haunted, but they would never answer. Elise knew this. So did Arthur. Life wasn't kind enough to give you closure; it left doors half-open, stories unfinished, pages torn out. Elise told herself she didn't need the ending, didn't need Julian. Her life was full, rich with the colors of her career, her children, and Arthur, her anchor. Arthur's family had become hers, a patchwork quilt she wrapped herself in for warmth. She told herself she was whole, but the emptiness whispered otherwise.

Forty-seven. That's how old Elise was when her mother, Moira Locke, was lowered into the ground on a day when the sky wept, and the wind howled its grief. The mourners huddled together, their sorrow a collective weight. Elise stood apart, wrapped in a numbness that deadened the world's sharp edges. The tears refused to come; her eyes remained dry, like a desert thirsting for rain. She felt the gentle pressure of her son's arm around hers, grounding her. Arthur was there too, a solid presence, her rock.

But then, as the priest droned on about Moira's life and the love she supposedly received, Arthur leaned over, blocking Elise's view. The lies of love and devotion burned on Elise's tongue, ready to be unleashed, but she swallowed them down.

"Jules? What's wrong?" Arthur's voice was a whisper, but it cut through the fog in Elise's mind.

Her son, with his father's hazel eyes and her auburn hair, was staring off into the distance. It took Arthur repeating his name before Jules snapped back to the present.

"It's nothing," Jules murmured, but Elise felt the tremor in his voice, the unease that mirrored her own.

She tightened her grip on his arm, a silent reassurance. Her gaze drifted to her daughters, Clara, who clung to Arthur, her tears flowing freely, and Daisy, whose face was a mask of solemnity.

Conversation with ChatGPT:

"Suggest an unpredictable plot twist that will hurt the readers. Summarise in one bullet point."

"Elise receives a letter a few weeks after the funeral, revealing that Julian had been secretly watching over her and her family for years, protecting them from afar due to a dangerous life he had led. The letter explains that now, with his enemies gone, he wishes to reconnect and be a part of their lives again, offering the closure Elise never thought she needed."

Instead of integrating the plot-twist into each of the re-writes, as they were pretty similar, I decided to use the plot twist in the final scene of my final short story. I also did decide to change some of the things that ChatGPT suggested. Also, I asked for ChatGPT for another plot twist, because I wasn't sure how to integrate the first one. It came up with this plot twist:

Elise learns that Julian had secretly established a trust fund for her children, ensuring their financial security and funding their dreams. Along with this, he included a heartfelt message expressing his love and regret for staying away, promising to be a part of their lives moving forward if they wish.

So, I did decide to combine the two plot twists in a certain way, in the final scene of the story. I also did use some phrases from the two rewrites that ChatGPT provided as they were very well written! Finally, the 'final scene' which I wrote in this document ended up not being the final scene in the actual story, as I wrote an entirely new one to integrate the plot twist in!

Unravelling Threads

Marian Hermez

December 18, Present Day

The sky was a light grey, the kind of grey that preceded a snowfall, the day that Elise Knight thought she saw her brother, Julian. She was at the town's Christmas festival with her husband – who had disappeared to check out one of the baked goods stalls – when she saw the boy with the violin.

He was standing in the middle of the crowd, eyes closed, fingers dancing lightly over the strings as he drew a haunting melody with his bow. He had dark wavy hair, just like Julian, and Julian had played the violin, too. She remembered all too well the beat-up violin case that was hanging off his shoulder when he walked out the door twenty years ago on Christmas Day.

Elise was just seven years old, and Julian was ten years older. She hadn't known it then, when he dropped a kiss on her head and said affectionately, "Love you, baby-bird" that it would be the last time she'd see him.

Their mother didn't even try to stop him. Their father? Elise didn't even know where he was that day, she just knew for certain that he wasn't at home, celebrating with his family. She remembered that Christmas Day like someone had branded it into her mind. It had been twenty years, and she still couldn't get over the loss of Jules.

"Elise?" Arthur suddenly appeared in front of her, hazel eyes concerned behind his glasses.

Elise's eyes roamed the crowd, eager to find the boy with the violin, even though her mind told her logically that this teenage boy couldn't be Julian; Julian would be thirty-seven years old now. The boy was gone.

"I thought I saw Jules," she forced herself to say. "The boy—"

"The boy with the violin?"

Of course, Arthur knew. He'd become used to her looking for Julian in complete strangers.

"It's not Jules," her husband continued. "Jules is in Australia, remember?"

At least, that's what Elise's mother had told her, a year after Jules left. She received a letter, telling her that he was all the way in Australia, and he was safe. At the time, that had put Elise's mind at ease, but as she grew older, she kept wondering if Julian would ever come back and seek her out.

"Do you want to get something warm to drink? It's getting cold," Arthur had wrapped an arm around her and was leading her away, towards the area where food and drink stalls were clustered.

The smell of hot chocolate and warm butter permeated the air. Elise's stomach growled, and abruptly, she remembered that she hadn't eaten a single thing since lunch at work that day. She smiled up at Arthur, deciding to put the boy with the violin out of her mind. After all, it was the very reason they had left the house, so she would stop thinking about Jules.

She shouldn't have worried Arthur, not when it amounted to nothing. If she knew him well, which she did (they'd met in science class in sixth grade), she knew he'd spend the whole night trying to make it better for her. So, she tugged on his arm and pointed at one of the game stalls, where a bunch of stuffed animals were hanging in the back.

"I win you a giraffe, you win me an elephant?" she said.

"You got it, Locke."

Arthur always used her maiden name when he got competitive. Elise let him hold her hand and pull her towards the long line of people who were waiting their turn. She vowed to herself that she wouldn't think of Julian this Christmas season as much as she did every other season.

November 8, Twenty Years Later

As it turns out, Arthur and Elise Knight did not ever see Julian Locke. All that remained in Elise's mind were hazy memories of Julian's teenage self. She wondered if he ever had a career or a family. Was he happy? Did he ever look up at the same sky and think of his little sister?

But time was a traitor; it never healed, it stole hope and memories from Elise as it left her with unanswered questions and wondering sighs. Elise didn't need closure, she often told herself. She had a good life. She had Arthur, their children and her job. She had Arthur's family, who were practically her own. She didn't need Julian any more than she needed to know what happened to him.

Elise was forty-seven when her mother passed away. They buried her on a cold, rainy day, a small congregation of people gathered around the open grave. The sounds of muffled sobs drifted over to Elise, who felt like she was in a trance. A numb feeling had spread over her body like a cooling balm over a burn. Her eyes struggled to open every time she blinked, but they were bone dry. She was faintly aware of her son wrapping his arm around hers. Arthur stood by her, a solid figure against the drizzle.

He leaned across her, blocking her view of Father Sarkis who was talking about Moira Locke's long life and how she was loved by everyone. That's a lie, Elise wanted to say. My father didn't love her.

"Jules? What's wrong?" Arthur's voice was soft, almost lost in the rain.

Father Sarkis's speech forgotten, Elise turned to look at her son. He had Arthur's hazel eyes and her dark auburn hair. He was looking at a faraway point. Arthur had to repeat his name twice until he looked at them.

"It's nothing," he whispered back.

Elise let out a little sigh and glanced at her daughters, who were on Arthur's other side. Arthur had his arm wrapped around their youngest, Clara, who was crying silently. Their older daughter, Daisy's face was somber.

With his mother distracted, Jules turned his gaze to the figure at the edge of the graveyard. Tall and sharp, with dark hair and sunglasses hiding his eyes, he looked like a noir movie star. Without a doubt, Jules knew it was his uncle.

Julian Locke had come to pay his respects.

Julian nodded at his namesake before turning away and walking away, leaving nothing but questions and the echo of a name.

September 4th, Ten Months Later

The sky was a clear blue the day that Jules Knight met Julian Locke. Despite it being September, the weather was in that in-between phase, where it was cold in the mornings and sweltering in the afternoons.

It was nearing four-thirty in the afternoon when Jules was done with track practice. Well, not that he ran track; he was taking pictures for the school's newspaper. Miss Yassin wanted him to send her the article for the sports section that evening. With the camera held in his hand, backpack slung over his shoulder, he walked out of the track field, mind running with everything he still had to do before heading to bed.

"Jules?" the voice that called out to him was hoarse and uncertain.

It made him stop in his tracks. His heart sped up, and he somehow knew. As if someone had taken control of his body, he was turning around to face the man standing in the middle of the school's empty parking lot. He looked the same as he did at Nana's funeral, but instead of a coat, he was wearing a black button-up shirt that emanated luxury.

"Uncle Julian?" the words escaped Jules's mouth before he could think anything through. "What are you doing here?"

Julian stepped closer; Jules stayed rooted to the spot. Behind Julian's sunglasses were ice cold blue eyes. A little nonsensically, Jules thought that he could never imagine his mother with cold, hard eyes like these. Hers were a warm chocolatey brown that radiated light and mirth.

"I'm sorry if I scared you," Julian continued. "I just wanted to see you before I left."

"You're leaving?"

The 'again' hung unspoken but acknowledged between them.

Julian nodded, and the ice in his eyes melted a little as he looked regretful. "I have to. It's for my job."

"I looked you up everywhere. I tried really hard to find you, but I couldn't."

It seemed stupid to confess this to the uncle Jules knew nothing about. He walked around carrying his name, but knowing nothing else.

Whether he was a villain, a hero or just a side character in Elise's story, Jules didn't know.

"It's because I changed my name. Legally, Julian Locke doesn't exist anymore. But, Jules, listen to me. Give this to your mother." He handed Jules a piece of folded up college-ruled paper. In leaky black pen, 'To baby-bird' was scribbled on the outside. "I just want you to know I looked out for Elise all her life, I just couldn't get close to her. I didn't want people to know she mattered to me."

"What people? Is it because of your job?" At his uncle's nod, Jules scoffed. "What are you, a spy or something?"

Julian laughed, light and soft, just like Elise and reached over to ruffle Jules's hair.

"Give the letter to Elise, okay?" was all he said before he once again left without looking back.

Once again, Jules watched him go and knew somehow that he'd never see his uncle again. With shaking fingers, he unfolded the letter that was meant for his mother.

Written inside was just information on accessing a bank account, certainly Julian's. Jules refolded the letter and walked back home, his mind quiet this time.