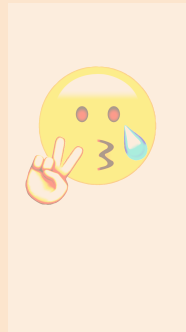
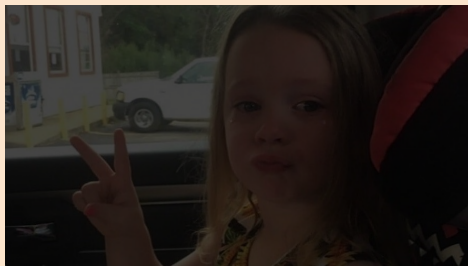


I'm Not Okay, but I'll Be OK

(This Is Not a Cry For Help by Aaron Moore)



ARMED & DANGEROUS



Foreword

The thing about this type of class is that I can't ever really gauge if I improved or changed as a writer of the course of the semester. As this is a Creative Writing class, we cover a multitude of topics, some definitely having space for objective improvement, while others are a lot more freeform. Furthermore, as this class is a jack-of-all trades thing rather than a master of one subject, even with the more "loose" areas we covered, there's simply not enough time dedicated to one subject as there would be in a class that fully covers dialogue writing, or screenplay writing for example, so where a class like that would have some sort of objective way to track growth, with a Creative Writing class, it isn't so simple. There's nothing I can really track, at least anything I personally have the ability to track. So if you ask me, I feel as if I'm leaving this class the same writer I was coming into it. Nothing within me changed, rather the changes were with the units covered, and with a new unit naturally came an Aaron that had to change his approach appropriately. Maybe this is the result of years of just essays, essays, *essays* having jaded me and/or stripping me of the ability to adjust my lens to creative writing (at least in terms of being able to keep some sort of objective track of my growth as a writer), but for the most part, I genuinely cannot discern any general, significant upward (nor downward) trend in the quality of my writing. There's no way for me to know.

That's not to say that I haven't learned anything. I certainly have learned or have gotten clarified on small things. Bits of information that I'd like to be able to go back to for the posterity of my journey as a writer. Things I would like to be able to find should I ever recall them. I just don't think we had the time for me to really absorb and use these supplications of knowledge over the course of this class itself. Back in 2019 when I went to spend the summer with an uncle of mine, I was helping him cook one day. He told me that even if I don't remember anything we

were doing (prepping the ingredients, seasoning them, etc.) by the time I return home, the moment when I'll *need* to know how to do those things and/or have no one to do them for me or help me, it'll just come to me almost reflexively. Something subconsciously will recall those skills, that knowledge. My uncle let me know that he's speaking from personal experience, and ever since then I've always kept that in mind. Not only for anything else he may have taught me the rest of the time I spent with him, but for anything, if not most things I've learned and/or have been taught since. I'm sure there's some caveats to that, but all this to say, that's how I feel about the things this class has supplied me with. I may not recall it all now, or even know off-top what was taught that I consider to be valuable to me, but when and/or should I need it, I'll be able to manifest it in whatever it is I need it for.

With that said, I am taking a poetry *writing* class (as I ended up taking a poetry *analysis* class last semester), so the information taught from this class may just materialize as soon as then. The beautiful thing being, the information doesn't strictly have to be from the Poetry unit of this class just because I'm applying it to poetry writing. Even more, as the class is solely focused on poetry writing, there's enough time and focus to cover and track my progress as a poetry writer.

However, I should mention that one of the joys of a Creative Writing class is the fact that it covers all bases. It allows for one to try different forms of writing they may have never tried otherwise, it makes one well-rounded. This is speaking from personal experience, I honestly feel that way. What Creative Writing doesn't produce in clear facts and consistently trackable growth, it makes up for in experience-granting and the freedom allowing one to let loose and pretty much do as they wish. It doesn't force anyone into hard, strict boundaries. It lacks pressure and monotony. It gives space and allows for the ones taking it to expand their ability by simply

letting them establish the confines and depend on their own capabilities to produce. That type of thing is not just a breath of fresh air, but an invaluable one. Even if it doesn't render immediate growth, it allows one to know themselves, find out what they like, how they think, etc., resulting in long-term expansion.

Opposite of my writing, I would say that this class definitely caused me to grow as a writer. Specifically being able to find (or force myself to find) things to compliment in spite of the fact that I may have not enjoyed anything about what I was reading. As a result, I had to learn to look deeper. Sometimes I was able to legitimately do so, other times I was more disingenuous simply because I just couldn't scourge anything legitimate and I had an assignment to turn in. It happens to the best of us.

Furthermore, not really caused by the class itself (or maybe it did play a part), but I did feel unable to give legitimate criticisms/corrections, particularly (and mostly) from a technical standpoint. Part of that, I feel, is because this class was done online, rather than in-person due to the current circumstances at hand in the world. As a result, whereas I could have clearly communicated and pointed out these errors in person with much less room for misinterpretation, text on a screen doesn't translate anywhere close to as clearly, and is often a cause of disagreement between parties as a result. So I was unable to make those points over the course of the class, as I didn't want to come off as aggressive or cause offense, especially because it's not as if I have a vendetta against the would-be receiving party, and my intention truly is to help my peers.

Nonetheless, perseverance perseveres.

Meet My Polaroid Pictures

They're instant camera photos, specifically from one of those Fujifilm Instax Minis you can find in Target or something. Not from a Polaroid. My friend had gotten the camera as a birthday gift.

I have three of them, and my friend (the camera owner) has whatever others we took that day. It was August 2019, and this was the last outing we would have as a group before classes started again. Even more than that, our other friend would be leaving to study abroad in South Korea for the semester. It was a last hurrah of sorts.

One photo has me posing in the forefront of a cloud-heavy sunset, with a peak of the Williamsburg Bridge in the background. Another has me and Mr. Abroad-To Be posing on the bridge of sorts at Domino Park (a lovely site for a summertime expedition. We happened to come across the location just the week before after crossing the Williamsburg bridge from Chinatown and loved it so much, we came back for a picnic). It's much darker than my aforementioned solo photo. I'm sitting down innocently, legs together, smiling brightly, a smile just as innocent as the position I'm sitting in. My friend is standing, posing in a way that's much more dynamic. I really don't know how else to describe it. The last has the three of us posing in front of a yellow Herschel mural. I'm squatting down, mostly getting my grounded side-profile, but my face is towards the camera, so I have a sort of 3/4 thing going on. Mr. Study In South Korea-To Be is to the far right, seemingly answering a phone call while mid-stride. He has the "It Factor" to pull such a pose off effortlessly. Ms. Camera-Owner is in the middle, slightly leaning forward, smiling brightly. We specifically chose the Herschel background as part of an inside joke bigger than just Herschel backpacks.

These photos were also special to me, considering the circumstances under which we took them, and that I've always wanted to both own and take instant camera photos. I still feel

each and every component of that trip that made that day special, even to this very moment. I never forgot any part for second, not when I trekked all across Manhattan before finally crossing over into Williamsburg, the sudden and relentless rainstorm that hit, going to McDonald's so my friend can get a slushy, walking Ms. Polaroid home then looking for a place to get a drink afterwards, etc. It was the quintessential summer day/night by every measure. Then Covid-19 happened, and these photos became so much more. They became representative of a Time That Was, and everything therein. The freedom, the safety, the mobility, the innocence, the happiness.

The great thing is however, that the same way we ended up reuniting to celebrate Mr. Foreign's 20th birthday the February of the following year after returning home safely, we'll all safely reunite during safer days, and/or even in spite of the not-so safe times we're still in. The idea certainly has been discussed. As for what we'll do, I have no idea, but a third trip to Domino Park seems quite romantic the more I think about it....



Short Story 2

“What’s going on between us... beloved?”

“I can’t see anything. I can barely feel anything. All that I know is that there’s nothing beneath me and something is suspending me at a height of what-even over a whole lot of who-knows. Yet, you’re asking me ‘what’s going on?’”

“Being put in a most extreme situation will draw out the most honest answers. That’s all I want from you. Not to hurt you, neither to scar you or even scare you. I just want your honesty, is all. So please, Maya, what’s come between us? Where’s our relationship going? Where has it gone?”

“It’s going nowhere, Xavi. It’s dead. Everything and anything that we ever had is done.”

“...Mm.... At the very least, may I be privy as to why? What did I do wrong?”

“You’re mean, you’re awkward, you’re secretive, you’re judgmental, you embarrass me and I want nothing to do with you.”

“...I’m sorry. You’re right. I’m sorry... but... that’s... not fair to me. Not after all we’ve been through. Not after how well we’ve come to know each other. This is a heartless assessment-“

“Heartless, Xavi? Heartless? Do you think I care if I’m being heartless? I’m in the dark, suspended between what I can only presume to be Heaven and the void, and I’m the heartless one?”

“Let’s not act as if we-“

“I no longer owe you *anything*.”

“...Right. I guess you’re right. But how does a sister become a stranger? How does a sister treat a brother as a stranger? As someone they don’t know? I am completely in the wrong.

Countless times, again and again, I certainly did do wrong by you. Shamed you, humiliated you, used you as a canvas to express my own inner turmoil. But don't act in bad faith. Don't treat me as if that's all there was to our friendship."

"Those things are all that matter now."

"When I stopped talking to you, the new guy friend you made was filling *my* place. Throughout all your boyfriend pursuits, throughout bruises you put on your wrist, throughout all the at-home drama you were going through, Maya, it was always me you came back to, and in spite of all the things I couldn't empathize with, never was I not willing to listen, always did I try my best to council and console. Understand that even though I failed to deal with my issues and took that out on you, I was always ready and willing to help you deal with yours. Does that mean nothing?"

"You struck out one too many times, and I've told you before, I'm not who I was. I'm done giving chances."

"...You know.... once you started expressing that sentiment, I knew.... This would be inevitable. It was only a matter of time.... *It hurts.*"

"You hurt me."

"Right. But at the end of the day, we're really here because even with all my vitriol, at the heart of it was love. I want the best for you, so never could I ever be a wall in the echo chamber you keep around you. I love you, so I will never be willing to kiss ass to you. **Never.**"

"I live my life how I want to live it, and *you not being able to accept that* is why we're here."

“Just because you’re doing what you want doesn’t mean it’s the right thing to do. Just because you’re happy, it doesn’t mean that you’re healthy. I just want you to do the right thing is all.”

“Who are you, dude? You’re not my father.”

“You’re right. But I am your friend.”

“We are not friends.”

“...You’re right. *Tsk...* ‘Awkward’? How could you insult me like that, as if you don’t know my problems? As if you don’t empathize with being called ‘awkward’? As if you don’t know me? *You*, of all people....”

“I don’t care.”

“You don’t.”

“And you don’t know me.”

“You’re right. I knew you. A you that you put in the closet of whatever you have going on now, and that version of you still is very much the core of how you operate now, but it is a past you nonetheless, I guess.”

“Please let me go.”

“Maya... I don’t take kindly to treachery.”

“Okay?”

“...And with the relationship having run its course, I guess I no longer owe you anything either. So before you go, may you please entertain me, in one last thing?”

“...Hmph.”

“Look at me.”

“What are you talking about, I can’t-“

“Open your eyes. Open them.”

.....

“Do you see now? We’re both caught in the midst of something extreme, and even then Maya, you have it better than I do. You’re suspended by the waist of your pants over a pool, only blinded by a loosely tied kerchief. I’m splayed out, chained to a wall. I don’t know where to go from here. All there is for you is a quick drop. Where I go from here, **I do not know**. So with that said...”

“...you’re sick-“

“What’s even sicker is that my position isn’t what matters to me right now. What’s disgusting is that I care more about someone who loathes me, and have no concerns about the predicament I’m in. Would you not agree? *Tss...hehehe....*”

“....”

“...Look me in my eyes for the last time, Maya. Meet my gaze just one more time.”

.....

“...You don’t know me either. You don’t know me, at all. I’ve heard Seinfeld’s voice in my dreams. I’ve walked a thousand miles and never have even gotten close to encountering Vanessa Carlton. People, such as yourself, have failed to be masters of their domains whilst wearing my own cardigans. I personally have escaped Super Saiyan 4 Gogeta’s 100% Level 3. I know people named Jeffery, who claim it to be pronounced as ‘S-E-X’. I’ve seen Mike Wazowski at the deli for a coffee, **in real life**. I’ve smelled the worm that survived the early bird, swam in the banks of the man-made event horizon, walked in like a stickman, felt yolk-colored egg meringues, stood at 180 degree angles on the backs of giants with dwarfism. I’ve even heard *O Tannenbaum* sung by a single soul sound as the entire Peanuts cast, and Boomhauer #3 sing

the song of old, a rendition that was aesthetically pleasing to the ears, coherent to the soul. The things I've been through, *you can't even begin to know*, never will you understand. All these just individual instances, moments lost to time, like piss in the rain, like singular grains of salt within a dutch oven's worth of water at a rapid boil. It's time to die."

click

How disgusting.

Church In Kamale

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I had a dream, first night or the fourth
That I was slicing through some flowers but blood bloomed forth

And from this blood, crimson willows sprung
And from the branches of the willows, our bodies hung
In the fields that surrounded us, bird songs were sung
Such was the vision that the night had brung

That's when I realized that the fire will sing
And you'll certainly answer when the blower starts to ring
There'll be no disruption of transmission when the brick begins to ping
And I will fall in the scarlet foliage that the action will bring

The Sun will come out, no soul to cleanse the spot
And so there we all lay, in due time beginning to rot
The fetor of The End overtaking the lot,
The sole remaining memory persisting as the day grew hot

And as the evening grew cold, and the day turned to night
Everything in remained in balance with nature, so it will be all right

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Dialogue

(Rest)

(Bob bursts into house, Phillip is sitting in the kitchen)

Bob:

Subway is partnered with the Coca-Cola Company now. I don't know how long this has been a thing for, I just found out today.

(Phillip almost chokes on his beer, almost spitting it out in the process of trying to stifle a surprised laugh. He can't hold it back.)

Phillip:

HAHAhahaha, bro how did you even find that out?

(Phillip wipes his slightly wet eyes with his thumb)

(Bob pulls out a Subway footlong sub from his bag)

Bob:

Also, also, also- I copped the Nachos Party Pack from Taco Bell, custi'd out. It finna hit, I know it.

(Bob rests down the box of nachos and unveils its contents)

Phillip:

Dude, what the fuck is even going on right now. You really bought a whole sub and a giant box of nachos?!?

(Phillip chuckles hard)

Bob:

Bro. This is the limited-time Nachos Party Pack. You see the extra long box, there wasn't even a bag for this. I customized it out, steak, onions, three cheese mix, shredded cheese, all the goods.

You know I'm a sick one. Dig in, bro, this 'bout to *slap*.

Journals 2 & 5

Believe it or not, in a way, I feel anonymous all the time. In a metaphorical way, but nonetheless. From my perspective (as surely I'm not the only one who feels the things I feel that make me have this sentiment), everyone else has something going for them, a way they stand out in a way that makes unique impressions on people, a presence that is missed by others when they're not around, something that they're specialize in, something they're adept at, etc. I feel that I lack all those things. I don't have any gravitas.

I don't have anything going on for me outside of school, and even in that, I'm behind in ways (most of that due to the pandemic) and not as capable concerning things taught in my major. I don't stand out in any way. Not that I have an inherent issue with that, as everyone has a role to play and I'd much rather be a background force. However, as a result of not standing out, I don't think I leave any impressions on people, but this very much is also a result of my largely reserved nature. I lack a presence that people actually miss. Whenever I'm gone from my "home environment" (places, people, etc. I usually tend to be around) or away from those I'm close with, no one checks in on me the way one would with someone who they haven't seen in a long while in a way to maintain the connection even over long distances. When I return, the fanfare is minimal. Not that I'm purposefully seeking attention, but when friends who go to school far away return, the fanfare is always drastically different. You can tell that they were *missed*. I have no skills or anything tangible that I'm good at. There's so many things I'd like to learn that don't involve anything more than one's own natural ability to express themselves or naturally pick up over time, and everyone else I see doing those things seem to pick it up quickly, get better over time or find a way to do things their way. I fear I'll never get better over time, or adapt at any

sort of pace at all. From how I see things, I live in a world where everybody is “making it look easy”.

Compared to even others at my age, there’s so much of life that I haven’t experienced, and while I know that I’m not some anomaly for living life at my own pace, purposefully not seeking to be placed in certain situations at the point I’m at in my life, or behind some established “curve”, at times I can’t help but think that subtracts from me as a person and it only causes me a greater amount of anxiety over what will happen when I am in those situations. It doesn’t help that these days, people know you have to start somewhere, but also want nothing to do with you if you can’t hit the mark from the jump, or every time.

Lastly, I feel as if I have no sense of direction, whether it be finding my niche as a person, or finding direction in my life. I am not sure where I’m going, not fully sure if I’ll be able to do what I want to do, and no idea where that combination of things is going to take me. Close friends describe me as mysterious, someone who you can’t get a read on, and a high school teacher I had once told me directly that she could never figure me out. It’s only until much later that I realized that she couldn’t figure me out because I myself can’t figure me out, and most people from the outside looking in don’t know that. I try my best to be more self-aware than I was the day before, and in spite of all my personal “unsureness”, while not utterly complete and also prone to first-person bias, I very much have a grasp of myself as a person, what I believe, how I think, what motivates me and why I am the way I am. So I guess being this middle of the road figure is my niche as a person, but I can’t help feeling like a “Lurker at the Threshold” of sorts, and the Lovecraft reference is fitting, because people find me alien in a way, and I too tend to feel the same towards people at times.

All this to say, that in the midst of a world of people who know who they are, have an established grasp on life in terms of an identity, have a well-enough defined road ahead of them, etc., in comparison, as someone who lacks those things (or feels that way), I feel anonymous.

A moment that really changed me is when my relationships with integral people in my life were altered. All in the same year. There were a total of three, but one outright “ran its course” so to say. This is the one that affected me most deeply, so I’ll be talking about that one, but it’s really a whole road that can’t be trekked down in the form of a post, so I won’t be dwelling on it for long.

She was someone that I’ve known since elementary school, and when we first became acquainted (around the 4th or 5th grade I believe), we always got along due to sharing a similar friend group. Then came middle school, and although we were on different floors, once again, we always got along when we came across each other and ended up becoming friends of sorts, I guess due to the comradeship that came with having attended the same elementary school.

Then came high school, when our friendship really developed into something I cherished, something precious enough to the point where I still haven’t fully gotten over the fact that it fell apart, even though it’s almost been 5 years since.

Note how I said that I haven’t gotten over the fact that it fell apart, rather than I haven’t gotten over her or the fact that we used to be friends. Because how can we cast away relationships, people that we care for and are beloved to us, so easily? So carelessly? Heartlessly, even. How?

I won't make it seem as if I wasn't at fault though. A lot of the things I did that built up the feelings she had at the end were very much my transgressions, due to me not knowing how to handle the change she had underwent, not knowing how to handle my own personal problems and insecurities, and new personal problems that I was developing that blossomed into auxiliary issues that began to bleed through, that once again, I didn't have a grasp of.

However, at the heart of things, this was someone I cared for and wanted the best for, and if that meant staying true to my ideals and not becoming a 'Yes Man' like others she kept around, so be it.

Nonetheless, our friendship deteriorated and like life in Hobbes's State of Nature, met a quick, insignificant, brutal end. Only I'm to blame. Maybe things would've been different if I wasn't so selfish, or if I wasn't so sensitive. Maybe things would've been different if I had been a touch more understanding, and just slightly less petty. Anything that would've allowed me to have been there for her when she needed me, which in this key instance ironically enough, was due to me not being around. I should've known better, but I didn't think things through, I didn't care, and as a result, I was in the wrong place at the perfect time and outside influences filled up the space I vacated, and even if it was only for a time, it was enough to bring about the change in her that would end one of the most influential relationships I had in those essential, adolescent years.

All the pain I feel, I bring to myself. If I come across as bitter, it's not a matter of perception but fact. Yet, such is the nature of life. What else can be said?

