

Dylan Connors

Professor Diego Nguyen

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## Final Portfolio

### **Part 1: Revision**

#### **Writer's Statement**

Hello Reader,

For the first part of this portfolio, I decided to revise the short story that I had submitted for the last workshop. I wanted to change some of the characters up, as well as add things and delete what was unnecessary.

My first revision was changing up both Alex and Evan's characters. After the workshop and reading comments from my peers, I realized that maybe Alex had been unnecessarily mean and rude so I wanted to change that. So instead I made Alex better and more respectful towards Evan, but also still the friend who let go sooner than Mia did. I also made Evan less of an angry character and instead tried to focus on making him maybe more of just a tired and sad character. I still wanted to focus on the fact that their friendship wasn't working anymore but in more of a natural way, versus bringing up unnecessary conflict.

I also aged up the characters in the first flashback just because I thought maybe some of their earlier conversations were a bit too mature. I still wanted them to be young kids though so after talking to some friends, I aged them up to 10 instead of 7, hoping it would fit a bit better. I also just changed up the dialogue and cut out some unnecessary sentences as recommended in the workshop. I tried to make the sentence structure flow better and be a bit more readable.

Finally, one peer comment mentioned how it was hard to tell when the flashbacks started, so I italicized those scenes to make them stand out better. I also changed the conflict at the end and, while there is still a little tension, again, I tried to make it sadder and put better emphasis on them letting each other go. I felt that by trying to make it more natural it was more realistic so it wasn't Mia being forced to let Evan go with the original argument. I also changed the title from "We Don't Talk About Our Youth Anymore, It's Gone" to "Finally, She Said Goodbye" just because I honestly didn't like the first title and I felt that this one fit better in regards to Mia's character and her perspective.

All in all, with my revisions, I tried to make the story make more sense and give better characters. I hope I have accomplished that with this process.

Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoy it!

-Dylan Connors

## Finally, She Said Goodbye

### Dylan Connors

The café was cold and Mia held her coffee closer to her, the anxious bouncing of her leg creating tiny ripples on its surface.

“He’s late,” she said, looking at Alex sitting next to her, his face lost in deep thought. He had never been good at hiding his emotions but for once Mia didn’t know what he was thinking.

Alex looked up from his own cup, “Let’s just give it another 15 minutes.” Mia sighed, “It’s been a year” “He could be busy for all we know. Maybe he forgot?” Another sigh and Mia rubbed her forehead before saying “You know he didn’t forget. We’re all he has left and we love him.” Alex hummed in agreement saying, “I sure hope he knows that.”

They continued to wait in silence. And then the café’s bell rang, a warning that someone had entered. Mia looked up and before she had a second to compose herself her eyes locked with his. Evan was here, he actually came. He gave her a small smile and hope sparked in her chest. It was the same smile they had grown up with. For a minute she saw him, who he used to be.

*They were 10 years old again, they were best friends again. Alex, a little golden boy whose hair glowed like a halo in the sun, ran up to Evan. He was drawing in the mud with a stick, Mia next to him, mesmerized by the swirls he created. It was still summer and they were in the routine of meeting up while their parents left for work, too worried about making enough to scrap food on the table to grasp the idea that their kids were too young to be left alone. But nobody cared. Not here.*

*“Evan! Evan!” Alex shouted, “Look at what I got!” He was waving a plastic toy car into the air but it might as well have been gold from the way Alex beamed at it, so proud to have something to call his. “That’s cool,” Evan mumbled absent-mindedly, “where’d you find it?” Alex beamed harder. Evan never realized how much it meant to at least pretend to care but that’s who he was. He was good. His heart was warm.*

*“It was just on the sidewalk!” Alex replied.*

*Evan looked up at him and gave him a smile. Alex beamed even harder. “Look!” he continued, “Now I don’t have to borrow one of yours when we race!” Mia knew what a big deal this was. They weren’t the kind of kids who got shiny new toys. They were accustomed to growing up with hand-me-downs and maybe getting lucky on Christmas. Evan never minded sharing, but they all knew how much it meant to Alex to have something of his own. Something that didn’t require sharing.*

*Evan kept smiling and Mia knew it wasn’t forced, “Good cause now I don’t have to purposely give you the bad ones so I can win.”*

*Alex laughed, “Funny cause I recall still winning,” “Oh yeah?” Evan said, “Well we’ll just have to see about that! Let me go get mine!” Mia had sat back and watched the boys interact and laugh with each other. Watch the proud boy Evan had been, his carefree and kind spirit.*

She only prayed that there was still a trace of that boy in the man in front of her now. That he hadn't become a stranger compared to the person from the past. She felt Alex sitting beside her, knowing he was anxiously anticipating who would make the first move. She supposed she should speak first.

"Hello Evan," she whispered, scared that if she was too loud she would interrupt the peaceful silence they found themselves in. "It's been a while. Thanks for coming." He looked down, taking a seat in front of them and clearing his throat. "Yeah well you asked me to come so, here I am." His voice was raspy and he smelled of cigarettes. Darkness lined his eyes, a damper to the image of a hopeful boy. Mia pushed the thought away.

"So how have you been? What's been going on?" A careful question, allowing him to talk first and avoid what he wanted to. Avoid the topic of school. It's not that they couldn't talk about it. But they had to be careful to not make it look like they were rubbing their education in his face. Evan had never minded, never complained. But the guilt still lingered. Maybe they could ask him about his job, but not before confirmation from the clerk on the corner that he was still doing well. There hadn't been time to go to the drug store.

"Nothing much, everything's fine I guess." a vague response but at least he was talking to them. "I was surprised when you called, it's been a while since I've seen you two. I know you've been busy." A bystander would've heard the accusatory tone of his voice, but Mia refused to acknowledge it. *He's just tired* She thought. *Remember, he's been through a lot.* Alex tensed beside her and she knew he was thinking the same. There was an awkward silence and Mia was surprised when it was Alex who had been brave enough to break it.

"So..." he said, "how's the job going?"

Evan cleared his throat and Mia prepared for a horrible aftermath to Alex's bold question but all he said was "It's good. Just got a promotion. Store manager now, pretty big deal I guess."

"It is a big deal, Evan!" Mia exclaimed, "That's great! We're so proud of you!"

"Maybe now you can have some time off and come visit us!" Alex added.

At this Evan stilled, "Um, I don't know," he said, "I'm not suited for city stuff. A bum like me should just stay in a place like this."

Mia sighed, "Evan, please tell me you don't believe that."

"Nah, it's okay, I know my worth. I know where I belong." With that Mia watched the spark in his eyes get dimmer and dimmer

"Evan, please don't. Remember he's not here to hurt you anymore."

Alex quickly added, "We weren't going to forget you today Evan, you know what day it is."

“Of course, I know what day it is! I’m surprised you remember.”

Two years ago today, Evan’s father was laid to rest in the old cemetery, barely more than a metal plate to mark him. Two years ago, they had all died, and Mia and Alex had risen up from the grave. But Evan was still 6 feet under, left to pick himself up from nothing. Mia often found herself wondering how they had gotten here? How did their golden trio become tarnished and left only the broken pieces of the two remaining behind? But she knew the answer. As they got older, Evan became more distant, quick to cut them off and leave them behind. However, Mia often laid awake at night dreading that maybe it was her and Alex who had cut Evan off instead. They were kids on the edge of growing up. But then Evan’s father had told him he was worthless when he was eleven. His mother told him he should’ve never been born at fourteen. Maybe Evan had been changing then but it was before he had allowed it to crush his youth. Before it had become an excuse to stop hoping for more. His father’s death had been the final nail in the coffin.

*That summer, he and Mia sat on the rooftop of his house. The distance already almost fully crept between them. Alex and Mia were going to college in the fall and Evan would stay here and it had caused problems. Alex had asked her to try and talk some sense into Evan. Alex had already begun to let go of Evan but Mia refused and agreed to give it one last try. She also hated it because she didn’t want to stop trying and hated it even more that Alex was right to try and move on. So she gave him all she could, a desperate truth.*

*“I love you” she whispered to him, a final attempt to keep him here, to convince him not to give up. A sweet summer breeze blew, ruffling her hair in anticipation of his reply. It felt wrong for everything to be so beautiful when they were falling apart.*

*He was quiet for a while before looking into her eyes. “I can’t, you know I can’t,” he said. It was more than a rejection. It was the definition of defeat, it was Evan accepting his fate. His ten-year-old self would’ve slapped him. But he had still stood up, helped her down, and walked her home. He held her hand and even when he let go, an obvious final goodbye, she refused to let go. He would work on the same corner store he claimed would never get him anywhere while she and Alex moved on. They wouldn’t talk about it. Wouldn’t talk about how he had gained his father’s temper and his mother’s soft eyes. A weary soul, a walking contradiction. But still, Mia had refused to believe all was gone.*

She still refused, even as she watched Evan’s face slowly turn into a glare towards her and Alex. They hadn’t treaded carefully enough.

“Did you two just call me up because of today just to pity me and feel better about yourselves?” he asked them and Mia was horrified to sense some anger bubbling up.

“No of course not!” Alex said, but the guilt was written all over the situation.

“We’re sorry Evan, we really are. But I swear it wasn’t just that,” Mia also said. “We really did want to see you”

They watched Evan let out a breath through his nose, “I know, I know. I’m sorry too okay?”

They all nodded but it was quiet. It didn’t feel okay because it wasn’t. Things hadn’t been for a while. Mia didn’t know how the conversation should continue after that. Finally, Evan stood up, “I’m gonna get some coffee, be right back.” They watched him approach the counter, order, and fumble with his too-thin wallet. Neither Mia nor Alex acknowledged each other about it. And when he returned the conversation picked up again. But it wasn’t a conversation between three best friends. It was casual topics and they never went deeper beyond the basics of how each other was doing.

When they were done, the three of them exited the cafe. Alex and Evan shook hands and the latter turned to give Mia a hug. As he pulled away she held on.

“I love you,” she whispered to him, another last attempt at hope.

He took in her face with sad eyes and for a minute he squeezed her again. The hope grew. He looked up at her, ready to say everything he wanted. But instead, he just said, “Goodbye Mia” before giving her and Alex a final smile and turning away.

Mia probably should’ve gone after him. But she was tired. Tired of the truth. Tired of realizing it this way. Tired of holding on. So she turned back to Alex forcing herself to be composed as she always was.

“He’s gone isn’t he?” Alex asked her, knowing the answer he had already accepted. She knew the question was more for her. She saw the defeat in his eyes. Knew that it reflected in her own.

“Yeah,” she whispered, allowing a tear to trail down her cheek, “he’s gone.”

## **Part 2: Writer's Practice**

### **Writer's Statement**

Hello Reader,

For this second part of the portfolio, I was drawn to the story titled "Lost" by Alberto Fuguet from The Flash Fiction Anthology. I was drawn to this story because of its themes about disappearing and being lost and wondering if people will look for you. This brought up more ideas about "fading away" or becoming a different person which I found really interesting. I also, beforehand, had an idea for a story about someone fading away to the point where no one remembers them and so when I saw this story, it sparked my interest in it even more. However, I decided to write separate poems instead of one story because I wanted to try and explore this idea in different ways.

With the first poem, I drew inspiration from the prose poetry format, and I really wanted to focus on my original story idea. With the story "Lost", I drew inspiration from the theme throughout it of "fading away" or "disappearing". There was also the idea of "roaming" and nobody caring in the story and it inspired me to have the narrator roaming so much so that people forget them. The second poem I'd say most closely relates to the story because it centers around the idea of running away. I was really inspired by the line "Sometimes, I even dream that they have found me" and used that as inspiration for writing about running away and wondering if anyone would care to find you. The third poem I'd say is another one where I went further with the idea of disappearing. It contains a lot of themes of "what if?" like the story "Lost" and wondering about why things happen or what would happen if things were different. Finally, the fourth poem is about disappearing, but instead of someone choosing to disappear or having the choice, it centers around being killed and the idea of being the reason someone is gone. About

the process of “disappearing” and the decent of what it’s like. But I used the simple metaphor of killing bugs because I feel like that is a very common thing, therefore the overall theme would resonate more deeply with a reader.

Thank you for reading!

-Dylan Connors

### **Becoming Ghosts**

The day you moved into your new dorm  
the first thing she told you was “we’re going to play ghosts.”  
Your mind saw the words come from your friend’s lips but it hadn’t  
been her who spoke. You thought nothing of it and moved in,  
ignoring the cracked walls and the rotting wallpaper. And when your  
roommate found a tattered white dress in the back closet  
you thought of nothing strange. It wasn’t strange that she asked you  
to put it on. It wasn’t strange that it wasn’t your roommate who asked  
you to put it on. It wasn’t strange when you fell asleep in the dress  
and her voice woke you, asking you to “play ghosts.” And you did. You snuck  
out and roamed the halls, dancing to your own silent symphony. It was there,  
as you danced, that time slipped away. That you slipped away.  
And when you came back there was a new girl in your bed,  
asking about who was here before. But no one can remember.  
Even you, as you stare at your old clothes, your old bed, and everything  
else no one bothered to replace, ask yourself who was here before?



## **Running Away**

There are often many calculations done

How much money?

What time does the bus come?

How long will it take for them to find me?

Is it all worth it?

To disappear

I asked my mother if she would come looking for me

But she told me there would be no reason

I wouldn't get far

I'd be easy to find

I took that challenge and hid in the basement

And when my father found the letter he ran away to find me

And my mother was still asleep

So I learned to hide away while they could still see me

I often wonder if they notice

That my body is just a shell waiting to be cracked open

But I guess it won't matter if they ever decide to find me

If they took a knife and sliced me open

To reveal the nothing inside

I disappeared the day my mother told me I'd be easy to find

## **5 Seconds > 18 years**

When I was born the umbilical cord was wrapped around my neck and I wasn't breathing. I imagine the hush that came over the room. The panic in why wasn't the baby crying. My mom's frantic thoughts that maybe the doctor was right and the baby's head had been too big and she hadn't grown properly, already rejecting the comfort of the womb before she was born.

There's an eerie calm when you're faced with

everything you could've ever hoped for

Gone before you have the chance to even hold it

It was 5 seconds. 5 seconds in which the doctor decided if I should live or die as he detangled the cord from my limbs. Of course, he would choose life, I was only an infant. But I often wonder what would've happened if I had been allowed to fade away before ever receiving the gift of life. Would my parents be devastated until my sister is born 3 years later and I am nothing but a memory? Would they try to find me when they gaze at the clouds, searching for a sign my young soul reached heaven? Or would they simply not care. Of course they'd care you idiot. They're not monsters. But what if they didn't care?

It took 18 years instead of 5 seconds

But I guess doctors like to waste time

## **Killing Bugs**

A monster kills without thinking

There's no feeling

Just a decent into darkness

No consideration for the life in front of it

No wondering about its victims' final moments

No care for the escaping of their souls

As the life fades away from their eyes

There is no concern for

Whether they felt any pain or loss

I look at what remains of the insect

I smashed between my fingers

And wonder if I am a monster?

I'll be a hypocrite

When I do it again

### Part 3: Text Reflection

A text that affected my ideas about creative writing was the poetry book *Night Sky With Exit Wounds* by Ocean Vuong that we read at the beginning of the semester. Despite the fact that we had to read it for class, I was immediately drawn to this work and found myself excited to read it. The cover was intriguing and the context behind the poems made them resonate with me more. As I was reading, I loved seeing how Vuong played with format, imagery, and style within his poems. I found it served as a good inspiration for my own work.

I had never considered poetry much before. I never actively sought to write it or read it but after this class, I learned to love writing poetry. To me, it served as an easy outlet for what I was feeling or expressing my views on things and this book served as a big inspiration for that. Maybe because it was the first book we read, but I was afraid of being too serious in my writing for this class and after reading Vuong's work, I was no longer afraid of being too vulnerable or deep with my work. I saw how emotions were conveyed through his poems and it showed me a way of writing and describing things in a new way.

However, to contradict my point above, this book also made me realize that writing doesn't always have to be depressing or serious as it was in the book. With *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*, one thing I didn't like was that the overall tone was the same throughout the book. It was the same sad and kind of melancholic tone throughout all the poems. I think the author could've used this as an opportunity to diversify the tone he had throughout the whole book. I think it would've made the book slightly less boring to read and could engage the reader in different ways. It made me see that with my own work, while sometimes you can have a more depressing tone, you can also have more comical or happy ones and still convey the message you want to.

In terms of the formatting and style of Vuong's poems within this book, I liked how they opened up my mind to more than one way of writing a poem or even a story. I think when most people think about creative writing or literature they think of cliches like William Shakespeare where it's just straightforward sonnets and boring nonsensical writing. But with this piece, my perspective on creative writing changed. Creative writing really can be *creative*. It doesn't have to be just words you put onto a page with a simple rhyming format and one way of utilizing stanzas. The way you put the words on the page can also be used to express what a piece is about or the emotions conveyed in it. *Night Sky With Exit Wounds* was the first poetry book where I really saw someone experiment with that and it was very inspirational for my own work.

Of course, there are no "rules" when it comes to writing or what poetry should look like, but Vuong's book opened up more possibilities for me when it comes to writing than just the traditional format. It showed me new ways to write and illustrate words on a page. It's given me ideas and techniques that I have tried to utilize in not only my poetry but also in my fiction/non-fictional writing as well. There is no "one way" to do something and this collection of poems, as well as all the other poetry we read at the start of the semester, demonstrated that for us. I never saw how poetry could really convey things so deeply until I saw all the different ways you can write it, starting with this book.

Overall, I believe Ocean Vuong's *Night Sky With Exit Wounds* was a good choice for the first book to have us read for this class. Many people have certain views on what writing is or what it looks like and this was a good way to introduce how writing doesn't have to be like that. I've now realized that it's okay to experiment and play around with words and ideas. Even for those who aren't as into writing or wish to pursue it, I believe it's still good to change how they view it and their mindset on it. With this class, I went into it expecting boring prompts, being

told to write a certain way, and harsh critiques when it was done wrong. But that was immediately not the case and this book further demonstrated that for me.