“John?” Some familiar voice called my name. I turned to my left to see a crowd of communications students out talking on the balcony. “John!” Suddenly I recognized a girl on the far side of the group.

“Amy? Hey! Watcha doing here?” She made her way through the commies and threw her arms around me.

“How are ya? Oh, losing, I see.” I was playing beer pong when she found me. I had one cup up and the guys across the table had five.

“Yeah…no worries, I’ll get this one.” I tossed the ball and missed; just a little to the left. The first throw back to my side sunk in my cup. “Well, damn. Good game guys.” I shook the hands of the other team.

“So… you’re not too good at beer pong, huh?” Amy observed. Incorrectly.

“Not tonight, but I’ll have you know that game ended a streak.” She scrunched up her face like she didn’t hear. I gestured behind her, “Maybe quieter in the kitchen?” She nodded and turned that way. I followed her distractedly. There were a lot of people in the living room, and I said a quick ‘hi’ to a few I knew and got pulled in by the tv for a second; someone had put on *A Walk to Remember*. It’s this cheesy Nicholas Sparks movie.

Eventually I found her leaning on the counter by a bag of pretzels. I grabbed a few pretzels. “So it’s great to see you, how are ya?”

“I’m doing really well. Glad I came out tonight, this is a blast. So many people here!”

“I know! James couldn’t have been expecting so many people at his place, I think this is the first party he’s thrown.” I reached for the bag of pretzels, “How do you know him?”

“Oh… I don’t actually,” She laughed, “Honestly, I just went out with some of my friends and the people here let me in.”

I laughed too, “Really? Ah, don’t feel bad, James wanted it to be a hit, and you’re a good houseguest.” I always thought James’ place was pretty lowkey; I never imagined people would try to sneak in to his party. I got a few more pretzels, “So how do you like it here? You’re a freshman this year, right?”

“I like it! I’m a digital media major and the classes are pretty interesting. And I love how much I there is to do here; I got a part in a play opening in early December.”

“Congrats!”

“Thanks! I’m just in chorus, but still I’m excited. Do you still do theatre?”

“Not since high school. I guess I just got involved in other things. I’m having fun in shoot and skeet club, and lately I’ve gotten pretty into writing society.”

“Shoot and skeet? How’d you get into that?”

“I don’t know. I started showing up Sophomore year and had fun, so I kept coming.” I then realized I was holding the bag of pretzels, and only about a quarter of the bag was left. I tilted the bag toward Amy to offer her some, but she just smiled and shook her head. I grabbed just a few more pretzels.

She was playing with the chip clip from the bag, opening and closing it on her fingers. “I read your letter,” She said. I had my mouth full, so before I could ask her about it she continued, “The one you wrote me for that retreat junior year. I really appreciate your writing it!” She said quickly, then slower she set the clip on the counter. “It really got me thinking back then.” Her fingernails were drumming on a ceramic plate there.

“Oh, yeah, I know what you’re talking about. For Kairos right? Yeah, I loved that part when I went, when my parents and a bunch of my friends wrote me letters. That really caught me by surprise!”

The drumming stopped. “You said that it felt like we had gotten a bit distant…and you said you were sorry about that and you hoped we’d reconnect sometime but I thought that was weird, because I didn’t feel distant,” She crossed her arms and looked to her right at the tv screen in the other room, “I thought we were really close. And that bugged me for a few days, and I kind of dwelled on it. But on the bus ride back from the retreat, I saw everyone else laughing and talking about the retreat, and… it seemed to me that you were probably a lot like them,” she let her gaze fall to the ground and rocked back and forth on her feet, “At that moment you were probably laughing about something, and you weren’t spending the time thinking about me like I was you. And I’m not saying that like it’s a bad thing, it’s good!” She paused to take a breath, then twirled around to find a stool to sit on.

“Hey, uh, I’m really glad you liked my letter. Sorry we weren’t able to hang out much after I left for college, but now that you’re here I’m sure we’ll see each other more!”

It sounded like some stuff she went through junior year was getting her down, so I hoped that would snap her out of it. I gave her a side hug for good measure.

She just sat on the stool though, and started pulling open the chip clip. “I think… well I mean when I met you you seemed like a really good guy. Do you remember when Angela wrote that play your senior year and Jacob and Charles hated their lines? There was one day they were talking about it, and you stood up for Angela’s script. You talked about how she worked hard on it and you thought it was good and every line had a purpose. I saw that, and I thought, ‘dang, that is someone who gets it.’” She let the clip snap closed, “And I think after that I kind of put you on a pedestal? And you were kind of like this standard, if that makes sense? I was spending too much time wondering about what you thought of things back then. But on the bus ride I realized that that wasn’t all that healthy. That by doing that I wasn’t letting you be just a regular person,” She pushed the stool back behind her and stood up, “Anyway, I guess I wanted to say I’m sorry for that, it wasn’t fair. So, sorry, I guess.” She let the clip rest on the counter again.

“Oh, don’t worry about it, we’re all good,” I gave her another hug, and this time she hugged back.

That seemed like as good a response as any. I wasn’t really sure what she was saying sorry for. In high school I had fun doing the plays with her, but I guess she didn’t have as much fun in them after I left for college? I don’t know, but this topic seemed to be bringing her down, and hugs usually seem like a good, quick resolution.

“I’m so glad I saw you here. It’ll be great to be able to hang out again!” She spurted out, “So who is this James that lives here?”

“Oh, a real swell guy. I think I just saw him in the other room, I’ll introduce you!” I led her back across the room and as I passed I saw an open spot on the couch by some engineering friends. A good spot to go after this conversation. I saw James out on the balcony and we headed there. The night air was fresh. Mid-October but 65 out at 11:00, that’s balmy. I guess James must’ve felt the same way because he was just hanging out here by himself. “Hey James, what’s up?”

“Just getting some air. Hi!”

“Hello! I’m Amy, John’s friend from highschool.”

“John didn’t tell me he was bringing a girl! Nice to meet you!”

“Well, that’s the thing James, I didn’t bring her, she snuck in here… *uninvited!* Well done, this must be a real party if random freshman come by!” Damn though, it would’ve been way more fun if I’d told James I brought her.

“Hey, alright! Well welcome! How’d you hear about it?”

“I could just hear it outside! A friend of mine from communications let me in. I’m glad you’re not mad, it’s been a great time!”

“Thanks. So you’re a communications student? What major?”

“Digital Media.”

“Oh, do you know Freddy? Shorter, blonde hair, huge smile?”

“Fred Rylick? Yeah, he actually also in a play with me too, so I know him pretty well.”

“You’re a thespian, cool.” James isn’t all that into theatre

“Yep, that’s actually how John and I know met other. We were in a few shows together in highschool.”

“You’re a thespian too, John? Huh, I had no idea.”

“Well, I was a thespian, but not anymore. It’s been a while since I’ve been on stage, and Amy is doing cooler stuff than we ever did in highschool. When’s the play, by the way?”

At that Amy had a beat of hesitation and looked at me with an eyebrow cocked. “December… the first Thursday in December we open, if that’s what you’re asking,” then she relaxed. “The practices are going pretty good so far. I think you’ll really like it!”

“Oh yeah, if I’m free I’ll try to come by and check it out!” I said. Honestly I hadn’t planned on going; theatre is more fun to do than to see.

She looked at me and let the conversation skip another beat, “Oh, you weren’t thinking of seeing…?” Then she closed her eyes and smiled, “No, yeah, of course, if you can make it. Hope you can.”

“For sure.” The conversation paused there. I turned and took a half seat on the railing, facing the door. It was a really nice night.

James shuffled a bit, “Well, hope I can make it too. It was nice to meet you Amy, break a leg with the show. John.” We pounded fists and he stepped inside, sliding the screen door closed behind him. I thought about following him. I was kind of thirsty, but not quite enough to push my way through a crowd.

Amy was standing off to the side, arms crossed, staring down the ground. She looked kind of upset, “You doing okay?”

“It’s just, that thing again I was talking about. I’m sorry.” She was staring down again, “I guess when you said we’d hang out more I just kind of thought it be like in highschool, but you don’t do theatre anymore and we’re different people now,” She laughed a little and looked up, “God, I haven’t seen you in two years! What have you been up to, I honestly have no idea! We could be totally different people now!” She took half a step back, with trembling feet “But still I think, don’t you want to see what I’m up to? I mean do you even care?” She dropped her eyes down again and started blinking fast, fearing there’d be tears. As I stood up from the railing she hugged me, “I’m so sorry; I don’t mean that; it doesn’t matter, I know it doesn’t,” She was holding on tight, “I really tried to be better about this, and I thought I was. But… John, sometimes I don’t know if I’m gonna make it.”

I started to hug her back, but she pulled away, “I… I think I better go, I’m sorry.” She reached for and pulled open the screen door behind her. “Maybe I’ll see you around,” she said as she walked through; she was starting to cry.

I thought about saying something, but what do you say to that? I stood on the balcony for a second, trying to process what she was getting at; after a bit I realized I just didn’t know. Sounded like she’s had some personal stuff to figure out. Hope she get through it.

I wonder if my engineering friends are still hanging out on the couch.

**MEETING NOTES**

“She obviously likes him”

Likes the descriptions

Felt like a tipsy college student describing – is it because he’s tipsy or because that’s just him?

Why is she just spilling this? Because she’s tipsy? Or because she’s her?

Main guy sounds like Joseph – “he says ‘swell’”

Cluelessness of the last line is fun.

Uncomfortable… maybe lighten up with the girl? Tough to sympathize.

Don’t really understand where she’s coming from – ‘Do you even care?’

Does she not have friends in high school? When she talks about people she talks about being around them, just describing people who were doing something.

Is she psychotic?

Like the commies. Oh yeah.

Walk to Remember, specific, strange, very com student.

Based on true events?

James didn’t expect so many to come – people get stuck on that.

Characterization choices of John generally come through it seems, but Amy’s do not seem to.

**WRITING PROCESS NOTES**

“I’m a communication student, so I’ve got some friends in com that know your roommate I think

When did you say the play you got a part in was showing?”

She lit up a bit more at that,

Recognize a girl at the party. Haven’t seen her since high school. Talk to her for a bit, and then she tells me she read my letter I sent her on Kairos. Out of that retreat she realizes that she had been relying on me and the she had an unhealthy relationship with me. Since then she’s been doing really well. That’s great. We hang out at the party some more but something happens… something to make her rely on me emotionally again. What happens? Shoot I’m doing it again, she says. Don’t I care? She’s so sorry. She doesn’t mean to. She wanted to be better. Really, she did. She is scared, and leaves. I hope she gets herself figured out.

The fire dosn’t

I heard James walking up behind me. I turned from the fire and saw him carrying several good logs. “Brought you something.” James said.

“Thanks, those look great.”

“Glad to hear you say that; maybe I could’ve been an eagle scout!”

I laugh a little and turn over a log on the fire, “Boy scouts hardly taught me any of this. I’ve been making fires here for a while now, since I was a kid. Guess my dad was the one who showed me how.”

“It’s cool you guys got to make fires here every weekend. Y’all must’ve been a lot of s’mores!”

“Oh we didn’t make it to this cabin every weekend, even during the summer, and even at that we didn’t make a bonfire every time we did come down. But tonight we are!” I stood up to stretch my legs and felt behind me for my chair. Sitting down, I felt a stick jab me in the butt. “ “Looking at the fire won’t keep it going though, throw some of your logs on it.” James looked for a good stick to throw on. I sat myself down in the chair next to the one Kyle filled with his sticks

The protagonist of the story is the one who grows the most. That’s the definition with which I’ve always rolled. The protagonist is almost always the person who is followed in the story. That’s probably because people are interested in people who grow. We can relate with growth, with understanding.

But the person we follow doesn’t have to grow. But following Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings could get a little bit boring. I don’t want the person we follow to be perfect, but good enough. Good enough that he gets by. And well intentioned. I don’t think it will be enjoyable at all to follow around a jerk, and it will be difficult to keep someone who doesn’t grow from looking like a jerk.

But he misses the mark. And helping people isn’t his deepest desire. It isn’t what drives him. He’s not looking for the satisfaction of giving advice. He’s looking for something else. Something largely hidden from the reader. Should it stay hidden?

“I read your letter.”

“What?”

“The one you wrote the last time you left my house.”

Kyle – he’s got it. Like he’s figured it out. He’s into some sort of collaborative extra-curricular activity, but doesn’t make it his life. He’s pretty good at school but isn’t obsessed.

What if I had a character that did grow though? I’d have to keep the character around Kyle so we can see it. That could be cool. How I lost a friend. We go through the day or week of Kyle, and his interactions with James. And at the end of the week James realizes that Kyle doesn’t care about his friendship like he does.

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But there’s still something in Kyle. He plays guitar and has had his lizard for ten years. He works concessions at the pool. His favorite part of that job is messing up an order and eating it himself. He’s played several video games…He doesn’t know if he has a favorite, but he’s seen his buddy playing Red Dead Redemption 2, and that looks pretty cool. I knew I wanted to be

We learn most of everything we’re going to learn about Kyle from some interview he gives. His friend from bowling realizes that Kyle doesn’t care about his friendship like he does, so that friendship ends. His sister talks to him about a letter she found that Kyle wrote, talking about