Exercise 2: Hooking the reader

***Example:***

*Francesca was already in her pajamas when the doorbell rang, so she was curious and cautious as she opened the door. Imagine her surprise when she saw a deliveryman holding an enormous bouquet of beautiful, fragrant yellow roses. “Miss Yates?” he asked. Francesca beamed. “Yes,” she said, “That’s me. They’re gorgeous!”*

***My response:***

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*Draft 1*

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It was a Thursday night when Francesca Yates realized that the world was about to end. Okay maybe not the whole world, more like just her world. She sat cross-legged on the kitchen floor staring out at the opposite wall, looking for the remnants of the yellow roses that the delivery man had given to her just 15 minutes prior. Francesca poured herself a second glass of red wine and checked her watch. It was 9pm. 13 hours until D-day. She took a sip of the wine and sighed. She really shouldn’t be drinking it this quickly. Her best friend had bought the Merlot for her birthday and she’d managed to pour out half the bottle within a week. But Alicia was the least of her concern. With a sigh, Francesca got up, grabbed a broom and got sweeping up the remains of greeting card that she’d ripped to shreds straight after reading. She knelt down and picked up a piece that was curiously intact. ‘Love, Jessie’ it read. She took another sip of wine and got back to work. She would need to clean this place up as best she could if the step-monster was coming to stay with her.

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*Draft 2*

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The fact that Francesca Yates was a morning person belied her current situation. First off: Yes, she was one of those mystical people who actually enjoy getting up at 4am and going to the gym (a concept Allie could never really understand.) But anyway, she opened her eyes on this particular Saturday morning to find herself seated on the kitchen floor wearing in her pajama pants and a bright-blue Skylanders t-shirt with her back propped up against the fridge. She let out a groan. The daylight was already straining against the kitchen blinds, which meant that was off schedule by a country mile and a half. She peeked at her watch; it was 10 am. 3 hours until D-day.

Francesca crossed her legs and surveyed the damage. Looking at the opposite wall, she could see the remains of the yellow roses she’d brutalized into mush light night. She distinctly remembered being excited when, at 09:03 pm, she’d opened the door to find a delivery man standing there with her flowers. If she’d known who the roses were from, however, she’d have saved herself the effort.

She could see an empty bottle of wine nestled comfortably next to a half-melted tub of ice cream. Now that was just waste of perfectly good ice – wait was that the Merlot? Crap. She’d finished the whole damn thing - Alicia was going to kill her. It hadn’t even been two days.

With a sigh, Francesca picked herself up and grabbed a broom. She’d get to the flowers, the wine and the ice-cream in a minute but first she got to sweeping up the remains of the greeting card that she’d ripped to shreds straight after reading. She knelt down and picked up a piece that was curiously intact.

‘Love, Jess’ it read.

Now Francesca understood why she finished the whole bottle last night. The prospect of dealing with that woman was enough to drive anyone to drink.

“Okay, I’m not 16 anymore.” She said out loud, to no one in particular.

“I’ll deal with this like an adult.” And she would. Or at least she hoped she wound.

First thing first, though: she’d need to clean this place up and clean it well if she was going to survive a week of the step-monster staying with her.

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*Draft 3*

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Francesca Yates sat cross-legged the kitchen floor and stared at the opposite wall, looking at the remains of the once-fragrant yellow roses that she’d destroyed just 15 minutes prior. It wasn’t that there was something wrong with the flowers or anything like that, she actually quite liked the roses and she’d been excited when the delivery man had handed her the bouquet. If she’d known who the delivery was from, however, she’d have saved herself the effort.

Francesca poured herself a second – or was it a third - glass of red wine and checked her watch; it was 9pm. 13 hours until D-day. She took a sip of wine and sighed. She probably shouldn’t drinking it this quickly. Her best friend had bought the Merlot for her birthday and she’d managed to pour nearly the whole damn bottle out within two days. But Allie was the least of her concern right now. With a sigh, Francesca got up, grabbed a broom and got to sweeping up the remains of the greeting card that she’d ripped to shreds straight after reading. She knelt down and picked up a piece that was curiously intact. ‘Love, Jessie’ it read. She took another sip of wine and got back to work. She would need to clean this place up as best she could if the step-monster was coming to stay with her.

Francesca finished with the greeting card and took stock for a moment. At the mere mention of her step-mother’s name, she had managed to allow herself to be reduced to this: a half-drunk mess who destroys innocent flowers and drinks half a bottle of wine by herself in her pajamas on a Friday night. God, she was pathetic. A big part of her (the not-so-sober part) wanted to call the step-monster up and tell her to ‘go to Hell’ herself instead of letting her stay at Francesca’s place while she was in town but that same part of her also wanted to sit on the floor finishing the rest of the wine and eat ice-cream for the rest of the night. Francesca refused to let herself sink that low. Besides she wasn’t 16 anymore and mouthing off to the woman wouldn’t cut it now that she was an adult. She’d face the bitch and get this over and done with. It was only for a week. She could live with the woman for a week. Right?

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*Draft 4*

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Francesca Yates woke up on Friday morning praying to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit that it was all just a dream. The pounding in her head told her that it was not. She closed her mouth and detached herself from the kitchen floor, sitting upright and cross-legged, and stared out at the opposite wall, trying to make sense of the picture that greeted her.

She remembered the doorbell ringing at 8pm. Francesca had planned an early night and she had already been in her pajamas when she’d answered it. She remembered being excited when the delivery man had handed her an enormous bouquet of beautiful, fragrant yellow roses. So why the hell was she looking at the remnants of those roses after what looked like she had bashed them against something hard repeatedly and finally threw them at the wall?

It was when Francesca tried to get up that she spotted the culprit. She saw the empty bottle of wine next to broken glass on the floor. She moved to pick it up. Damn it was the Merlot. Alicia was going to kill her. So much for the collection. Francesca would worry about that later. For now she grabbed a broom and got to sweeping up the remains of the greeting card that she had ripped to pieces straight after reading. She knelt down and picked up a piece that was curiously intact.

“Love, Jessie” the piece of card had read. Ah yes, now she remembered why she had reacted so violently. Francesca checked her watch. It was 6 am. 14 hours to the invasion. With a sigh she got back to sweeping. She would need to clean this place up as best she could if the step-monster was coming to stay with her.

The mere sight of the woman’s name had sent Francesca into a rage and a driven her to drink, so she could only imagine what would happen when the woman stepped foot in her house again. Francesca hoped that she could maintain her sanity this time.

“I’m going to need more alcohol.” Francesca said to herself, depositing the bruised flowers into the bin. This next week was going to be Hell.

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1. Whose story is it?
   1. Francesca Yates
2. Is something happening, beginning on the first page?
   1. Yes. Francesca wakes up in the kitchen after passing out drunk the previous night
3. Does something hang in the balance?
   1. No. At least nothing beyond Francesca’s sanity.
4. Is enough of the big picture visible, from the get-go, to give us a sense of where the story is going?
   1. Yes. We know that her step-mother is coming to stay with her for a week and that she is not looking forward to it. To the point where she destroyed a bouquet of flowers and ripped up the card at the sight of her step-mom’s name.

**Draft 2**

Protagonist: Francesca

Events: She gets a bouquet of flowers that she immediately destroys. She doesn’t do this because she has anything against the flowers, she actually likes them, but because she dislikes the person that sent the flowers to her. When we find her, Francesca is on her way to getting roaring drunk because someone she truly hates is coming back into her life and her response is to open a bottle of wine and start drinking while seated on the kitchen floor in her pajamas.

Inner issue: having to deal with someone she truly hates but is expected to - not just tolerate but – accept back into her life with open arms.

I’ve been drunk just twice in my life, and the . The first time was at my matric-dance after party – I ended up dancing on top of the bar, it wasn’t my finest evening – The second time was last week.

“You know when I moved out here, I thought I was leaving the fucking mess behind. Apparently not. Now the step-monster is going to be out in full force. The one consolation is that I get to see my sister again.”

There’s something almost flattering about hatred

The opposite of love is not hate but indifference. In my experience hatred is actually closer to love