The Course:
Exploring the Role of Fantasy Fiction in Bibliotherapy

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Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA)

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL OWNERSHIP

This is to certify that this submission is all my own work, completed under the supervision of the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Jessica Mulcahy, April 2016.
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ABSTRACT

Bibliotherapy, or the therapy and healing that can be gained through reading books, has existed in one form or another for centuries. The genre of fantasy has existed for a far smaller amount of time, but it is a dynamic and largely unexplored avenue of research for current and future investigations into bibliotherapy.

This exegesis and the accompanying creative artefact, ‘The Course’, explore the processes of writing and reading bibliotherapy, as well as the positive links that exist between bibliotherapy and the fantasy genre. With a significant lack of research into the creation of bibliotherapeutic works of fiction, and little to no investigation into the potential that genre fiction – and fantasy in particular – has to perform bibliotherapeutically, ‘The Course’ aids in the development of a greater level of accessibility for readers, and a new approach to the utilisation of bibliotherapy.

The exegetical section of ‘The Course’ investigates these issues through an exploration of the forms and outcomes of bibliotherapy, as well as the elements of fantasy that are beneficial to the performance of bibliotherapy. Further, it reviews several pieces of fantasy literature that explore specific themes of bibliotherapy, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, abuse, and horticultural therapy, and considers whether they are successful. The research indicates that, whilst not all bibliotherapeutic themes are appropriate for all people at all times, the fantasy genre does contain specific elements that are valuable to bibliotherapy, and the selected texts examined are largely successful in regards to their therapeutic purposes.

The creative artefact, ‘The Course’ drew on these findings in order to create an original novella that explores these specific bibliotherapeutic themes, and illustrates one possible avenue of creation and subsequent application of bibliotherapy within a fantasy framework. It was found that when writing bibliotherapy, the task must be approached consciously, with a level of
awareness that allows for the strengths of – in this case – the fantasy genre to be used to their fullest extent.

The successful exploration of fantasy as a mode of bibliotherapy opens up the possibility of further dialogue between the two areas, and indeed between bibliotherapy and genre fiction in general. This would support the current trend away from an exclusive focus on ‘high literature’ and towards a greater scope in regards to texts, including more accessible forms of fiction that allow for bibliotherapy to be employed by anyone who desires it.
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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

General Introduction.

Works of fiction have been read for pleasure and enjoyment, as well as for intellectual stimulation since the oral traditions of ancient cultures were written down. From libraries, to public parks, to quiet living rooms, the modern book or novel is used as a form of entertainment and escape. Beyond this pleasure, however, fiction also has the ability to help, or even heal the reader who approaches the experience with the right support, tools, and – most importantly – the right story.

People read stories as an aid to mental or emotional healing for various reasons, and in regards to numerous issues. Everything from depression and anxiety, through to sexual, physical, or emotional abuse can be worked through, or at the very least approached through reading – stories can even be used in a preparatory manner, as is often the case in regards to reading therapy aimed at children. This form of reading, known as bibliotherapy, has existed long before the invention of the modern book, with the emotional healing properties of stories well-known even to the builders of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, who inscribed the belief in the healing power of literature into the architecture.

Whilst bibliotherapy can be used through the use of non-fiction as well as fiction, the focus of this exegesis and creative artefact has been on the more successful modes of bibliotherapy that engage with fiction, and more specifically with the genre of fantasy. The exegesis and the creative artefact in cooperation with each other investigate and employ the structures of the genre in order to explore particular themes of bibliotherapy within fantasy novels and fiction, both at the creative and consumer level. Specifically, the themes and issues of posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide, domestic abuse, abandonment, and horticultural therapy are explored through the examination of
the fantasy works: *The Liveship Traders*, *Mage Heart*, *Circle of Magic*, *Landscapes of Ephemeria*, and *Dreamhunter* within the exegesis, and through a piece of fantasy prose fiction in the creative artefact.

**Reasons for Research.**

The focus of research into bibliotherapy and therapeutic reading has been – and remains – largely focused on the process of reading texts, and the resulting efficacy of the varying forms of bibliotherapy. Investigations into the writing and creation of bibliotherapeutic texts, as well as examinations of bibliotherapeutic elements within specific texts are largely absent. This gap affects the usefulness of bibliotherapy at a reading level through the lack of knowledge available to the potential author of such therapeutic texts.

In addition, there is little to no research into genre-specific areas of bibliotherapy, such as that of fantasy. Both the fantasy genre and the area of bibliotherapy suffer from this lack, as fantasy contains particular, unique elements that are especially suitable for bibliotherapy and are currently overlooked, and the value and breadth of the fantasy genre itself is strengthened by investigations into its aptitude for therapeutic reading.

**Aims of Research.**

The aim of this creative artefact and exegesis has been to investigate and illustrate the benefits of writing and reading bibliotherapeutic fantasy fiction, and in turn, present the strengths (and weaknesses) of both the fantasy genre and of therapeutic reading in general. These aims were achieved by researching the relevant areas of bibliotherapy and fantasy within the exegesis, and then applying these findings and extrapolating upon them further in a piece of creative fantasy fiction that contains carefully constructed bibliotherapeutic themes.
Innovation Arising from the Research.

Both the creative artefact, ‘The Course’, and the exegesis focus on areas that are not well-covered within fiction or research. The creation and investigation of bibliotherapeutic pieces of fantasy fiction, rather than a reduced focus on the end-user application of bibliotherapy, allowed for research that uncovered new links between bibliotherapy and the fantasy genre. This research and its following conclusions were applied to ‘The Course’, resulting in an innovative piece of fiction that contextualises and presents these findings through the selective use of bibliotherapeutic themes.

The structure and plot of ‘The Course’ is also novel as – rather than focussing on a specific period of time, or a set of events, it covers the entire lifespan of a single character, exploring the emotional highs and lows of her life from beginning to end. In order to situate such a large span of time into a restricted amount of words, specific areas and themes of bibliotherapy were interwoven throughout the story in order to refine and distil the narrative. In turn, the original discoveries made through constructing and experimenting with the creative artefact were applied to the research within the exegesis in order to focus it further upon the relevant bibliotherapeutic areas.

Approach to the Project.

The exegesis explores both the process and the construction of the creative artefact, ‘The Course’, as well as researching the particular areas and themes of bibliotherapy that relate to both ‘The Course’, and to the fantasy genre in general. Investigating the creation and efficacy of bibliotherapeutic texts, the particular themes of posttraumatic stress disorder, abuse, abandonment, and horticultural therapy are then examined through the review of select pieces of
fantasy literature. These subjects were viewed through the lenses of fantasy and creative writing theory and then applied in an iterative, cyclical manner to the creation of the creative artefact.

This approach resulted in a creative piece of fiction that is both artistically sound, as well as consciously crafted, but also presents as a bibliotherapeutic work that supports, and is supported by the exegesis.

**Research Questions.**

**PRIMARY QUESTIONS:**

1. Can the fantasy genre effectively act as a vehicle for bibliotherapeutic themes such as posttraumatic stress disorder, abuse, abandonment, and horticultural therapy, whilst still retaining its reader appeal, and avoiding issues of didacticism and pedagogy?
2. What particular structures and elements of the fantasy genre lend themselves to successfully exploring bibliotherapy and bibliotherapeutic themes?

**SECONDARY QUESTIONS:**

1. Do the fantasy series *The Liveship Traders* trilogy, *Mage Heart* trilogy, *Circle of Magic* quartet, *Landscapes of Ephemera* duology, and *Dreambunter* duology successfully present and explore the bibliotherapeutic themes of posttraumatic stress disorder, abuse, abandonment, and horticultural therapy?
2. What creative choices and techniques in regards to plot, structure, characterisation, and setting are necessary for the creation of a successful piece of bibliotherapeutic fantasy fiction?

**Chapter Outlines.**
- Chapter One: Outlines the focus of the exegesis and creative artefact, presenting the aims, motivations, and approaches to the work. In addition, chapter one also states the primary and secondary questions that frame the research.

- Chapter Two: Presents the methodologies used to frame the exegesis and creative artefact, and illustrates how they were applied.

- Chapter Three: Discusses bibliotherapy in a general manner, presenting the various forms of reading therapy that have evolved during contemporary times. The chapter also covers the usage of bibliotherapy in various situations and for various demographics, and examines the varied outcomes of these applications.

- Chapter Four: Investigates the function of bibliotherapy within the genre of fantasy fiction, examining the elements of the genre that are particularly suited to therapeutic writing and reading.

- Chapter Five: Contains the literature review of the five chosen fantasy series, examining whether they successfully use the bibliotherapeutic themes also present within the creative artefact, ‘The Course’, and how these themes can be extrapolated for bibliotherapy in general.

- Chapter Six: Discusses the creative writing techniques used to research, plan and construct the creative artefact, ‘The Course’.

- Chapter Seven: Presents the conclusion for the exegesis, and addresses the research questions posed within the introduction in chapter one.
CHAPTER TWO – METHODOLOGIES

Like many theses that are creatively-based, this creative artefact and exegesis required an eclectic and customised set of methodologies. In the field of creative writing, Nash contends that a methodology requires the elements of content, as well as format and structure (2011). Content signifies the themes and discourses of the creative work, and format and structure cover the construction of the narrative – setting, perspective, point of view, voice, and character (Nash 2011). The difficulty in identifying methodologies for creative writing arises from the aspect of content. Unlike format and structure, which contain limited and defined systems, content is ‘only limited by the author’s imagination’ (Nash 2011). As Mencia writes in regards to her own creative research projects, ‘[t]ntuition is not considered a research methodology but… the unknowable does take a part in [her] process of investigating’ (cited in Biggs 2014, p. 76).

In order to try and define particular methodologies for the creative arts, the processes and outcomes of creative arts inquiries were linked to the processes and outcomes of the social sciences in late 1990s Australian academia, the assumption being that the arts ‘could be accepted as a form of creative social science or inventive applied technology’ (Sullivan 2014, p. 46). The results of this equivalence were research policies that contained adherences to research languages that were bound to methodological conventions from the social sciences (Sullivan 2014). Sullivan argues that, while this rigidity may have helped prospective graduates gain entry to the academy in the 1990s, ‘the policies bear little resemblance to research and inquiry that is grounded in art practice’ (2014, p. 46). Mencia argues that in order to link creative practice to academia, ‘we have to find a way to describe research methodologies but I wonder if it would be more appropriate to call it a process of research and creative practice’ (cited in Biggs 2014, p. 76).

To avoid the problems of both the undefined methodologies of content, and the rigid, false equivalences of simply appropriating methodologies from other disciplines, the
accompanying creative artefact, ‘The Course’ and its companion exegesis were developed within such a process – the methodology of practice-led research and research-led practice. The term ‘practice-led research’ is used to indicate how creative works are a form of research in themselves, and ‘generate… detectable research outputs’ (Smith & Dean 2014, p. 5). Beyond this, it suggests that the specialised processes that creative practitioners employ can lead to ‘specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research’ (Smith & Dean 2014, p. 5). This differentiates practice-led research from practice-based research, the latter of which acts solely as a form of research itself, rather than as a practice that can lead to research insights (Smith & Dean 2014).

Smith and Dean see practice-led research and research-led practice not as two separate processes, but as part of an interwoven, iterative cyclic web (2014).
The iterative cyclic web illustrates that the creative, or research process can begin at any point between academic research, research-led practice, and practice-led research, and then move ‘spider-like’ across and around the web to any other point (Smith & Dean 2014, p. 19). Beyond this, the creative academic process is often iterative, or repetitive – usually with variation. By repeating, adapting, and discarding where necessary, the creator chooses between varying outcomes and results as they transverse the cyclic web (Smith & Dean 2014).

‘The Course’ explores themes of bibliotherapy through the methodology of practice-led research and research-led practice. Issues such as posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide, emotional abuse, and horticultural therapy were explored through the exegetical research, and informed the practice within ‘The Course’. In turn, many of the themes that were engaged with within ‘The Course’ helped to conceptualise – and even extend, the theorisation present within the exegesis. Haseman and Mafe, citing Gray posit that the reason this intrinsically symbiotic methodological relationship works so successfully in allowing creative practitioners to interrelate their practices, is due in part to two aspects of its definition:

[F]irstly research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners (2014, p. 213).

Whilst Gray’s definition emphasises practice-led research over research-led practice, the idea of strategy through practice remains helpful in regards to the processes used in creating ‘The Course’. The specific, familiar methodologies Gray presents as carried out through practice are represented through the methods of psychotherapy and bibliotherapy that are employed within ‘The Course’ and the exegesis.
The central goal of ‘The Course’ is to present a text that can be read and enjoyed therapeutically. Goldfried describes a simplified version of psychotherapy as a ‘professional service [that patients expect] will proved them with a way of overcoming the difficulties they are experiencing’ (2013, p. 863). The themes of posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide, emotional abuse, and horticultural therapy within ‘The Course’ are explored and presented in such a way that the reader can, if they so wish, use the story as a way to understand, or sort through any of those issues and traumas that are present in the text and within themselves.

The connection between psychotherapy and language is a necessity, according to Pocock, who argues that language ‘shapes our perceptions of the world; it describes how historical and cultural contexts influence what counts as knowledge; and it offers a compelling account of the relationship between knowledge and power’ (2015, p. 172). Bibliotherapy is a methodology of therapy that prioritises the written word and the value of the reader-text relationship in a therapeutic setting. ‘The Course’ acts as a textual map, guiding the reader across terrain that might otherwise be more difficult to traverse. In regards to critical realism in psychotherapy, and the use of ideas in practice, Pocock cites Korzybski’s definition of maps: ‘A map is not the territory it represents, but if correct it has a similar structure to the territory which accounts for its usefulness’ (2015, p. 173). The text of ‘The Course’ does this – using bibliotherapeutic methodologies to represent the themes of posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide, emotional abuse, and horticultural therapy, rather than presenting them explicitly.

This clarity of purpose within ‘The Course’ stemmed from the use of these psychotherapeutic and bibliotherapeutic methodologies, understanding that – for any kind of therapy, ‘[p]atience is part of the key [to being effective]. Let things happen that happen. Let people find their own comfort. Allow them to learn through struggle. Don’t rescue, just support’ (Beutler, cited in Goldfried 2013, p. 866). One of the intended outcomes of ‘The Course’ is to present a text that can support people in related situations, whether that be through the basic emotional
catharsis that can come from reading a novel, or through the more specific goals of bibliotherapy – self-awareness, self-insight, and stronger connections to one’s external environment (Hynes 1980).

The outcome of ‘The Course’ – an original, bibliotherapeutic piece of creative fiction – informs and is informed by its accompanying exegesis through the methodology of practice-led research and research-led practice. Psychotherapy and bibliotherapy methods focus the role of the novel, and create the framework for the themes of emotional trauma and healing within the text, aiding the reader in their engagement with the text by appropriately situating the subjects within a beneficial context.
CHAPTER THREE – BIBLIOThERAPY

What Is Bibliotherapy?

Bibliotherapy has long been part of the reading experience, existing as it has, in some form or another, since humanity first began recording their myths and stories. Indeed, Pehrsson and McMillen support the ancient origins of book therapy, stating that the idea of the beneficial nature of the arts towards the well-being of the observer, creator and reader has existed since Aristotle proposed the notion of emotional catharsis (2005). In fact, the ancient western world in general was reasonably aware of the effect that therapeutic reading could have – both the library at Thebes and the library of Alexandria displaying inscriptions that spoke to the power of books: ‘The Healing Place of the Soul’ at Thebes, and ‘Medicine for the Mind’ at Alexandria (ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills 1982, p. 3).

The more specific use of books as therapy, and the beginnings of what is now known as modern bibliotherapy began in the nineteenth century, when books began to be specifically ‘prescribed’ to hospitalised patients by doctors (in tandem with librarians), so that they could become familiar with their own medical issues (Warner 1980). The term itself was coined in 1916 by Samuel Crothers, and although ‘bibliotherapy’ is the most common label for reading and book-related therapy, other definitions have arisen over the years including biblioguidance, literatherapy, bibliopsychology, library therapeutics, bookmarking, guided reading, and bibliocounselling (Pehrsson & McMillen 2005, p. 48).

Bibliotherapy can be difficult to define, as it sits between the regulated science of psychology and psychotherapy, and the less regulated, more subjective area of self and/or guided development; it can be difficult to arrive at a definition that satisfies the full scope of what bibliotherapy represents.
In broad terms, bibliotherapy can be described as the use of books or other written pieces, such as poetry to enrich the mental concepts of, or to enlighten the subject’s or patient’s sense of self, to enlarge their relationships with other people, and/or to enhance their connection to the world around them (Hynes 1980). Hynes goes on to state that ‘bibliotherapy’... overall goal [is that] of providing persons with ways of coping with life more gracefully and of dealing creatively with what cannot be changed’ (1980, p. 41), whilst Jalongo describes bibliotherapy as a concept that encompasses all kinds of literature – everything from counselling prison inmates to helping pre-schoolers with peer acceptance (1983).

Elksnin and Elksnin refer to the social applications of bibliotherapy, defining it as a ‘social problem-solving approach for teaching pro-social behaviors’, emphasising the general behaviours that are taught, rather than any discrete skills (cited in Forgan & Gonzalez-DeHass 2004, p. 25). Indeed, this is the area in which bibliotherapy truly excels – if you have ever turned to a book for guidance or self-help in relation to social issues such as loss, self-confidence, or other general hardships, then you have practiced bibliotherapy (Forgan 2002).

A little more poetical, but perhaps closer to the ‘romance’ of language that literature has the ability to explore (and that bibliotherapy seeks to mine), is the definition that Hébert and Kent arrive at:

“We read ourselves,” writes James Britton – and when we see ourselves in literature – straddling or perhaps balancing the roles of “spectator and participant”, we engage the reflective process. Indeed, we learn ourselves. This is bibliotherapy (2000, p. 170).

Through this exploration and reading of self, and because of it, bibliotherapy can be used to examine and aid a variety of areas, such as aggressiveness, adoption, diversity, death and dying, addiction, divorce, obsessive-compulsive disorder, gifted children, conflict resolution, child abuse, nightmares, ethnic identity, depression, loss and separation, family violence, homelessness, and
self-destructive behaviour (Pehrsson & McMillen 2005). As Pehrsson and McMillen also state, these issues have been explored in almost every helping profession that exists (school counsellors, social workers, mental health nurses, teachers, and librarians), across every age group and amongst multiple populations (2005). In ‘The Course’, the bibliotherapeutic themes of aggression, adoption, death, addiction, ethnic identity, loss, violence, and to a certain extent, homelessness are all explored through the journey of the main character Hedy’s life. She experiences many of these themes herself, or faces them as they present in her family and loved ones, and the potential reader is offered with the opportunity to experience them with her.

As can be determined from the wide-ranging scope of bibliotherapy, its application is very much unhindered by age. Everyone from children to the elderly can benefit from its use, although the general opinion remains that bibliotherapy is more effective on children as they learn to develop certain intrapsychic skills that it is assumed adults have already mastered (Detrixhe 2010). However, as Detrixhe goes on to argue, surely it is the case that not all adults have learnt such skills and furthermore, the general sentiment that adult problems are too complex to be addressed or captured in a story is fallacious – novels such as Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina, and Sartre’s Nausea are examples of literature that contain great complexity and psychological depth (2010).

This dismissal of bibliotherapy as a relevant avenue for adult development and treatment stems from the worry that suggesting adults should read fiction in order to address their problems may risk infantilising them and minimising their issues (Detrixhe 2010). Conversely, researchers such as Coleman and Ganong have found that well-written literature on stepfamilies for example, has been informative and instructional for adult subjects, as well as general fiction having aided in generating sensitivity for graduate students towards the issues that their clients were facing (1990).

However, in order for bibliotherapy to be successful in whichever arena it is applied, a considered approach must be taken. As referred to earlier, there are multiple bibliotherapeutic
practices that have evolved over the years. Generally, all of these approaches can be divided into either clinical or developmental bibliotherapy. Clinical bibliotherapy exists at the more therapeutic, psychological end of the spectrum. It most often takes place in a setting that is facilitated by a therapist, counsellor, or psychologist, and tends to focus on the more serious behavioural and emotional problems (Cook, Earles-Vollrath & Ganz 2006). Developmental bibliotherapy is far more subjective and more generally applicable to the wider public, and not as restricted to those suffering from mental trauma or illness. Developmental bibliotherapy (which will be the main model referred to in this exegesis) is most appropriately engaged with in libraries and classrooms, and uses guided reading to connect readers and their personalities to the literature (Cook, Earles-Vollrath & Ganz 2006). ‘The Course’ has been written with the developmental approach in mind – a non-professional presentation of a therapeutic text.

Hence, clinical bibliotherapy can be seen as the process of facilitating a resolution of significant behavioural and emotional issues, whilst developmental bibliotherapy’s goal is more the education of students or others in regards to the facilitation of normal development, rather than abnormal mentalities (Catalano 2008). Because of these differing focuses, the specific goals of each form of bibliotherapy diverge somewhat, however, they still share the same, overarching objective of all bibliotherapy: for the participants (both clinical and developmental) to use literature as an aid to growth or healing (McCarty Hynes 1988), to help attain their full potential, whether they are mentally or physically ill, or undergoing normal human development (Hynes 1980), or put simply, to ‘allow [them through stories] to tell about things that [they] know either tacitly or consciously, to help [them] rediscover or reinvent [their] reality and thereby understand it more deeply and meaningfully’ (Lauritzen & Jaeger 1992, p. 6).

For clinical bibliotherapy, its more specific goals align with the areas of trauma that are generally more suited to the therapeutic use of literature. Beneath the umbrella of the clinical approach lie several bibliotherapies that use the clinical model: firstly cognitive bibliotherapy, or
cognitive behavioural therapy, that is usually based on self-help, non-fiction books – keeping in line with the learning-process-as-a-mechanism-for-change model that cognitive therapists follow (Shechtman & Nir-Shfrir 2008); secondly, affective bibliotherapy that focuses on experiencing, rather than learning – enhanced by an identification with the literature’s characters and the richness of life, situations, difficulties and problems that are presented through it (Shechtman 1999); thirdly the less well-known, UK-based model of the Reading and You Service (RAYS), which uses a group situation and a discussion on selected books and poetry, as well as other therapy such as creative writing (Brewster, Sen & Cox 2013); and finally, there is Get into Reading, another UK-based model, that is similar to RAYS, but deals with a much smaller, more restrictive canon of texts (Brewster, Sen & Cox 2013).

All of these models are used to work with, and treat issues, such as depression (in adolescent, adult and prison populations) (Pardini et al. 2014), or schizophrenia-related issues (Heller 1987) – issues that are necessarily tackled in professional, therapeutic surroundings. Developmental bibliotherapy on the other hand, whilst having no specific sub-models due to its nature as a less structured, more accessible aid, is able to address areas such as loss and death, changes in the family dynamic, divorce, bullying, drug use, problem solving, sexual abuse, neglect, homelessness, anxiety and decreasing fears, negative body image, and sexual orientation (Catalano 2008). Most importantly, however, (in regards to this thesis) through its use as a preventative measure, developmental bibliotherapy can generate higher levels of empathy, as well as the skills required to navigate the aforementioned issues when they arise – both of which can lead to a greater ability for personal bibliotherapy at a later date (Knoth 2006).

The process of developmental bibliotherapy was initially divided into three general stages as used by Shrodes in 1949 (Jalongo 1983). Firstly, the reader senses a common bond between themselves and a character within the story. Secondly, the character encounters a difficult situation and resolves it. Thirdly, the reader, through sharing the character’s problems vicariously – reflects
upon and internalises some of the coping strategies that were present within the book (Jalongo 1983). Whilst this plan has been modified and redrawn over the years, the empathic connection between reader and book character has retained its vital role in developmental bibliotherapy. Morawski, as well as Kramer and Smith describe the three stages of Identification, Catharsis, and Insight (1997; 1998). Identification remains the step where a connection is made between reader and character, allowing a sense of solidarity and association. Catharsis becomes the process of the release of tension – as the character, through compassionate writing, works through a problem and releases their emotional tension, the identification between reader and character becomes even further established (Catalano 2008, pp. 18-9). Finally, insight becomes the point where readers develop knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world through the use of discussion or other communication after the initial reading is done (Catalano 2008). The reader of ‘The Course’ is given the opportunity to engage in this process with the character of Hedy, identifying with her as she grows and experiences life, and makes choices both good and bad. Catharsis for the reader may then occur as Hedy deals with her problems, and finds emotional release of her own, and insight may follow as the reader applies any knowledge or understanding they may have acquired to themselves and the greater world around them.

Beyond this, Hynes extrapolates the necessity of not only connecting with and empathising with the character and story, but also of juxtaposing their own previous viewpoints or feelings with the new ones drawn from the literature, especially when these new inputs force an examination of values and attitudes that may have remained relatively unexamined up until this point (1981). Once these feelings and concepts have been recognised, they need to be genuinely experienced, in order to both evaluate and then integrate said concepts into the process of self-application (Hynes 1981).

As Hynes writes, getting in touch with such powerful emotions and revelations is not always a pleasant experience; however, sadness and pain are often a part of growth, change is often
difficult, and participants can often find comfort in old habits and patterns that need to be worked through before transformation can take place (1980). Where the possible problems and issues with developmental bibliotherapy start to arise are in the grey areas of the practice – where developmental bibliotherapy becomes, as Catalano states, ‘a watered-down and non-professional attempt at Clinical Bibliotherapy’ (2008, p. 17). From this stems the fear that non-clinicians such as teachers and librarians could do more harm than good; however, developmental bibliotherapy exists to fill the gap that clinical bibliotherapy leaves – the space that exists for the readers and communicators of books that requires no special training (Catalano 2008).

It is when too much reliance is placed upon the book for healing that issues truly arise. Without proper research and planning, a book cannot undertake such a task and indeed, Pehrsson and McMillen point out the fact that bibliotherapy, when placed in the role of therapeutic healer, should only be an adjunct, not a substitute for the therapeutic process, especially since no two people will ever have an identical reaction to a work – indeed, no two people are ever the same in terms of their own psychological fields and symbols (2005).

In light of the issues that can arise through the incorrect application of bibliotherapy, it is easy to see why it is often couched in a significant amount of supervision and direction; however, there is a growing area of self-directed bibliotherapy beginning to emerge from the general model of developmental bibliotherapy. Unlike clinical bibliotherapy, developmental bibliotherapy lends itself to a certain level of self-direction, dealing as it does with more standard developmental and social issues. Indeed, there is a desire on the part of service providers to understand more deeply the impact that bibliotherapy has on those who use it as supportive therapy outside of more formal schemes (Brewster, Sen & Cox 2013).

The use of less formal, structured, and monitored modes of bibliotherapy can also lead to the generation of new benefits and evidences, such as the use of escapist literature, or the inability
to read certain works during particular stages of mental health issues. These insights can then be applied and promoted to other service users within more formal frameworks (Brewster, Sen & Cox 2013). In addition to the possibility of uncovering potential new applications, self-directed bibliotherapy can also allow for a more private experience that often meshes well with the intimate experiences of both reading, and dealing with internal mental issues. Manifold suggests that relevant therapeutic books should be made available to all school children, for example, so that they may ‘explore painful topics in a private way’ (2007, p. 21).

In a response to interviews taken by Brewster, Sen and Cox, the question of what values and benefits are taken from therapeutic reading was answered thusly by a librarian:

> The anonymous nature of libraries... it makes it difficult to know what it is that people are getting out of the books that we lend them... but we assume that some people are getting amazing things out of them. Life changing things really... but we don’t know because we don’t ask them, and it’s not for us to ask. It’s a private thing that they’re doing (2013, p. 577).

This form of bibliotherapy relies on the individual practitioner having a certain level of competency in relation to the practice of bibliotherapy – a competency that is still contested by some published researchers within the field. Indeed, as Bolton and Ihanus write, there are some therapists that believe that – in regards to creative writing therapy performed as an adjunct to bibliotherapy – writers have no place working with patients, as they have no therapeutic training (2011). However, Bolton and Ihanus go on to argue that such boundaries ought to be permeable, in order that ‘all of us in this uncertain world’ can make as much use of the therapeutic powers of reading and writing as we can (2011, p. 178).

Such confidence in the individual user is supported by the research into librarian/service-user perspectives by Brewster, Sen and Cox, who discovered that current models of bibliotherapy – such as cognitive bibliotherapy, do not fulfil all the needs of the participants, as its limitations
restrict the possible forms that therapeutic interactions can take (2013). Indeed, they discovered that the majority of participants that engaged with literature therapeutically did not use a prescription-based model such as cognitive bibliotherapy to do so. Rather, the data showed that the participants in their research had a wider conceptualisation of how to apply bibliotherapy in practice beyond the more rigidly structured models that are found in cognitive, clinical, and even affective bibliotherapy (Brewster, Sen & Cox 2013).

The modern trend towards more self-directed bibliotherapy has its roots in the far more ancient values and effects that books have on people’s minds and well-being. Freud described literature as cathartic – liberating us of our tensions, and allowing us to enjoy our own daydreams without shame (cited in Mc Ardle & Byrt 2001), whilst C. S. Lewis once said, ‘[w]e read to discover that we are not alone’ (cited in Hébert & Kent 2000, p. 170). Indeed, Lundsteen echoes these sentiments in her article on improvement through literature, ending as she does with the sentence, ‘[t]he poorest human in the world is he who is limited to his own experiences – he who does not have access to literature’ (1972, p. 512).

This value, this emotional impact, does not generally stem from non-fictional ‘self-help’ books, but almost always from strong, emotional, fictional works. Berns et al. write of the great, sometimes life-changing impressions that books can have on people: Stephen King points to The Lord of the Flies as life changing, and Joyce Carol Oates to Alice in Wonderland as the book that influenced her imaginative life most deeply (2013). Shrodes, with her bibliotherapeutic model of identification, catharsis, and insight, contends that didactic, non-fictional literature is more apt to add to a person’s intellectual awareness, whereas imaginative literature is far more likely to allow the reader an emotional experience that is wholly necessary for any effective therapy (cited in Pehrsson & McMillen 2005). It is for this reason that ‘The Course’ has been created as a highly imaginative, emotive piece of writing, in order to create the best possible textual environment for bibliotherapy to occur.
When choosing a text for bibliotherapy, however, one must go beyond the choice of fiction or non-fiction in order to choose a piece of literature that is both appropriate and most likely to be successful in connecting with the reader and generating positive, effective results. Whilst there is an overarching concern when it comes to cognitive or clinical bibliotherapy over the detrimental impact that an incorrectly-chosen, or an inappropriate book may have both ethically and emotionally on a client, counsellor, or the reputation of a clinical setting, within developmental bibliotherapy, it is – like the model of therapy itself – a little more subjective. Simchon argues that (in regards to bibliotherapeutic writing), a good rule-of-thumb is to have ‘gaps’ within the selected texts that will allow the participants to have the space they need to write their own personal stories (2013). This, however, need not be a literal writing of their experiences – such gaps allow space for the internal narratives of participants to germinate and grow as well. Without such space given for interpretation and thought, no bibliotherapy would be particularly successful. Within ‘The Course’, such ‘gaps’ – for example, Hedy’s internal, subjective opinions on her husband’s actions towards her, or her questioning reactions to certain events that occur around her – were consciously created in order to facilitate a fertile space for potential readers to interpret the narrative as they require.

Detrixhe suggests that, whilst reading a story that deeply parallels their own experiences can often result in a certain level of validation along the lines of, ‘yes, this too happened to me’, the effects upon the reader can be quite detrimental if the story is badly written or executed, or if the story’s structure is too simplistic. The reader may feel as though their problems are too easily overcome and thus mocked (2010, p. 69). Knoth states something similar, arguing that using a book that is too close to a person’s – especially a child’s – situation, risks simplifying their issues and belittling them. What if, she suggests, a child who:

[H]ears [a] story while experiencing grief… find[s] it simplistic? What if, after thirty-two pages, the reader does not feel better? What if he feels worse? Will he feel that he has failed
because [the character's] grief is now all wrapped up and the book is closed?’ (2006, p. 276).

Beyond all this, however, is the primary, categorically necessary function of a bibliotherapeutic text – that is, to be interesting and engaging, to generate the desire to read on the part of the participant. Spache supports this, arguing that students’ interests are the single most important influence on how they approach reading (1960). Any books that teachers may select for their students’ bibliotherapeutic needs, must reach them in ways that allow engagement and a connection between the lessons in the book and their own life experiences (Rozalski, Stewart & Miller 2010). However, this necessity for engagement with, and desire to read a text does not end with the conclusion of childhood. If reading a selected text as an adult becomes a chore – something that must be done, rather than desired – then arguably very little emotional connection or healing can occur.

Beyond the correct selection of texts in general, recent developments suggest that different stages of bibliotherapy may also require different forms of literature. In the case of depression, Brewster, Sen and Cox discovered that some participants in their research felt that the texts they could read when depressed differed from those they could read when their symptoms lessened. One participant, Olivia, admitted that when she felt particularly low, escapism was far preferable to more confronting literature. She found that they engaged her without challenging her vulnerable state of mind (2013). Knoth proposes something similar, asking whether the child ‘who is living through his mother’s breast cancer treatments want[s] to revisit them in fiction? Would he not rather escape to Narnia?’ (2006, p. 276). It is for this reason that fantasy becomes a possibly distinctive area for bibliotherapy, and why ‘The Course’ was written within the fantastical genre – a sandbox with infinite possibilities, and the distance that is sometimes needed from confrontational reality.
Another participant in Brewster, Sen and Cox’s research – Nathan – found that, like Olivia, he could not read the texts that he had bought to educate himself about his symptoms. However, as his illness began to present less acutely, he found that he was able to engage with them (2013). The conclusion Brewster, Sen and Cox draw from this is a demonstration that any use of bibliotherapy is affected by the individual’s own personal situation, and that not all forms of bibliotherapy may be appropriate at all points in a person’s life (2013).

When bibliotherapy is performed correctly, whether it be through clinical, developmental, or self-directed frameworks, its effects can be quite beneficial. Pehrsson and McMillen write of the reported benefits of bibliotherapy, citing a multiplicity of research that has found: an increase in self-awareness (De-Frances, cited in Pehrsson & McMillen 2005), the clarification of values, a development of cultural or ethnic identity (Holman 1996; Tway, cited in Pehrsson & McMillen 2005), an increase in empathy (Adler & Foster 1997; Pardeck & Pardeck 1998), an appreciation for other people’s differing cultures and viewpoints (Bernstein & Rudman, cited in Pehrsson & McMillen 2005), increased coping skills (Hodges, cited in Pehrsson & McMillen 2005), self-esteem and emotional maturity, and a decrease in negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and loneliness can all result from effective bibliotherapy (Borders & Paisley; Garagn, cited in Pehrsson & McMillen 2005).

Interestingly, Berns et al. state that – whilst it is still unclear how long the changes last – both cognitive and emotional effects from bibliotherapy have been seen to cause actual physical, transient changes in functional connectivity within the brain (Harrison et al.; Hasson et al.; Stevens et al., cited in Berns et al. 2013), however, there are some changes that ‘may persist for some time and may represent cortical reorganization’ (Mackey et al., cited in Berns et al. 2013, p. 590). Whilst the scientifically quantifiable results of bibliotherapy are still in their infancy, the emotional and cathartic results – whilst less measurable – are well-documented. Hynes relates the results of a
person who, initially anxious or disturbed, can find that they are not alone in these feelings, as the
writer expresses similar sentiments in a meaningful way (1980).

In the same vein, McCarty Hynes relates that therapists whose clients used bibliotherapy
found that the clients reported deeply significant and new insights and feelings that had not been
brought out with other therapeutic models (1988), whilst Cohen found that participants in
bibliotherapy used their newly acquired awareness to complete tasks within their own lives (1993).
This catharsis and sense of identification is at the heart of bibliotherapy’s role both as therapy and
as literature.

Outcomes for the Reader: Results, Group Therapy and *Harry Potter*.

For children, the process of bibliotherapy can create life-changing effects. In some cases,
such as the example of ‘Fred’, a child who suffers from communication problems can identify with
the issues that a literary character is facing, apply some of the techniques and strategies that he has
graped from the reading, and using the combined process of creative problem-solving and a plan
of action, can ‘increase his mastery of communication’ (Lundsteen 1972, p. 509). In aggressive
children as well, bibliotherapy can have a significant effect on deficiencies that often stem from
problems with anger and belligerence (Shechtman 1999). Through her study involving aggressive
children in Israel, Shechtman discovered that the children’s ability to listen to each other as well
as their ability to convey needs within a friendship improved after bibliotherapy – indicating that
their levels of empathy and self-expression had increased, both elements which are usually lacking
In the results presented in Figure 2.1, Eli – the most aggressive child within the group – showed evidence of consistent, if not linear progression and change (Shechtman 1999, p. 49). Eli, along with the rest of the aggressive group, demonstrated increased levels of self-disclosure, responsiveness, empathy and insight, along with a significant and sustained decrease in aggression (Shechtman 1999, pp. 48-9).

![Figure 2.1 Scores on Behaviour in Group Dimensions for a Single Child (Shechtman 1999, p. 49).](image)

Beyond child-focused research and results, it is evident that adults can also benefit from the positive effects of bibliotherapy. For adults, the ‘psychic interaction’ between patients and literary characters offers a multitude of benefits, including identification that leads to personal change, a familiarity with emotional steadfastness, and the generation of strength led by example (Detrixhe 2010, p. 64). An illustration of such responses can be found in the case of the writer Mario Vargas Llosa, who after reading Gustave Flaubert’s *Madam Bovary*, described his ‘love affair’ with the central character. He wrote of the deep connection that he felt to the literary character,
which resulted in personal changes over time with neither a single moment of epiphany, nor a fleeting aesthetic experience being mentioned (Detrixhe 2010, p. 63).

Llosa found Emma Bovary to be a constant that contrasted to the mercurial nature of reality – where moods, desires and personalities are continually changing. When contemplating suicide, he found that the description of Emma’s self-poisoning and subsequent agonising death helped him to control these thoughts (Detrixhe 2010), the fictional suffering helping to counteract the pain that he was experiencing in real life (Baudry 1990). As Detrixhe writes, surely (just as Llosa was) adults are not immune to the healing power, catharsis, and identification that books can provide.

Within the field of bibliotherapy – and more specifically research into its results and effects – there has been a more recent avenue of investigation opening up in regards to quantifiable changes to the brain itself after bibliotherapy. In Berns et al.’s research into the effects of a novel on the connectivity of the brain, Deco et al. is quoted as saying that the resting state of the brain is best observed as being in a ‘constant inner state of exploration, in which the brain generates predictions about the likely network configuration that would be optimal for a given… input’ (2011). The Berns et al.’s experiment which involved the reading of a novel, altered the resting states of the participants’ brains, tending towards a ‘hybrid mentalizing-narrative network configuration’ even as the participants remained uninvolved in any active tasks (2013, p. 597).

Through a meta-analysis of theory of mind studies, Berns et al. have noted that the right angular gyrus, the medial prefrontal cortex, and the left angular gyrus have been identified as the regions of the brain most likely to be activated if a task is story-based (2013). The implication then, is that during Berns et al.’s own experiment, the readings in the evenings activated these brain regions, and this carried over to the next morning, presenting as changes in connectivity (2013). When the bibliotherapeutic elements were applied to the participants in the study, both short-term
and long-term results were recorded, with the short-term, positive correlations gathering in the cerebellum and changing significantly over the course of reading the novel – the largest increase in correlation occurring after the first night’s reading, fluctuating during the course of the experiment, and then rising on the last story day and beyond (Berns et al. 2013).

The potential long-term changes in connectivity increased during the story days, but also persisted through the wash-out period (the five days of scanning after the completion of the novel) (Berns et al. 2013). All of the correlations witnessed in the wash-out period were higher than those identified in the wash-in period (the five days of scanning preceding the reading of the novel) (Berns et al. 2013). These long-term changes in connectivity that remained elevated after the novel’s completion were heavily concentrated around the central sulcus bilaterally, with additional connections to the bilateral posterior temporal gyri and insula (Berns et al. 2013). According to De Luca, this network corresponds closely to a ‘previously identified RSN [resting-state network] comprising somatosensory and motor regions’ (cited in Berns et al. 2013, p. 598).

The evidence of the long-term effects of bibliotherapy is not simply restricted to chemical and connectivity changes in the brain, however. In Landreville and Bissonnette’s article on bibliotherapy and older, disabled patients suffering from depression, a six month follow up was undertaken, where a significant increase in functional performance was found, along with a significant decrease in their excess disability (2008). This suggests that the effect of the treatment on the patients’ depressive symptoms was maintained over time (Landreville & Bissonnette 2008, p. 47).

In a similar experiment regarding depression, Pardini et al. compared pre-treatment and follow-up scores for their test subjects. The results indicated that, even after a month had passed post-treatment, the patients’ depression levels remained significantly lower than they had been at the beginning of the study (2014). Indeed, depression in general benefits from the use of
bibliotherapy, as can be seen in Pardini et al.’s two studies on the efficacy of bibliotherapy on prison inmates suffering from depression (2014). The results recorded from their first study indicated that there was a clinically significant change from pre to post-treatment Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) scores (the BDI being a twenty-one-item self-report that measures and inventories the severity of depression symptoms) (Pardini et al. 2014). Within the post-treatment results, eighty per cent of the participants evidenced a dependable change on the BDI, with forty-five per cent evidencing a clinically significant change (Pardini et al. 2014). These results were supported further in the larger second study, where sixty-eight per cent of participants evidenced a reliable change on the BDI-II, and fifty-five per cent evidenced a clinically significant change (Pardini et al. 2014). Landreville and Bissonnette’s study on depression and bibliotherapy also evidenced relatively significant results, with fifty-six per cent of participants indicating that their depression had decreased after bibliotherapy (2008).

Beyond depression, bibliotherapy has also been studied in relation to low levels of sexual desire in women. In the same manner as the studies on depression, Mintz et al. generated positive and maintainable results (2012). Women who were given a book to read under study made gains in sexual desire, arousal, satisfaction, and overall sexual functioning that were greater than women who were assigned to a wait-list control group (Mintz et al. 2012). In addition, these gains in sexual desire and functioning were maintained at a seven-week follow-up study (Mintz et al. 2012). However, as Mintz et al. point out, any conclusions in regards to long-term gains must be interpreted carefully, given the small sample size of the study (2012).

Issues surrounding sample sizes are not the only elements of bibliotherapeutic study that need to be carefully scrutinized when exploring the possible benefits and successes of bibliotherapy. In the case of the study on bibliotherapy and sexual desire in women, Mintz et al. suggest that in their group study at least, using a placebo group could eliminate the question of whether it is bibliotherapy that generates positive effects in participants, or whether it is simply the
act of doing something to help oneself (Mintz et al. 2012). Beyond this, issues also arise within specific modes of bibliotherapy, including that of narrative therapy – which can often occur after the use of reading therapy, or in the case of published pieces, can become generators of further bibliotherapy themselves.

Peterkin and Prettyman write of the possible benefits of narrative therapy, ranging from fewer doctor’s visits, to improved personal relationships (2009). However, some theorists challenge the benefits of therapeutic writing, citing the fact that not all people who write experience positive outcomes, and those that do often have qualified results – with men gaining greater benefits overall, long-term writing creating sustained benefits more so than short-term writing, the exploration of recent trauma being more successful than past stressors, and interestingly, subjects with initially coherent and resolved stories being less likely to benefit from the therapy (Peterkin & Prettyman 2009).

The idea of a less coherent and resolved story being more effective in narrative therapy may seem contradictory at first glance; however, it is also found in the theory surrounding bibliotherapy itself. Detrixhe contests Coleman and Ganong’s guidelines for therapy books that suggest that the books ought to have clear-cut endings that are positive and set good examples – showing that the characters make good decisions (2010; 1990). Instead, Detrixhe argues that books contain far greater powers, with characters that are flawed and who make poor decisions – even failing in their goals – having certain uses that successful characters may not share (2010). In coping with this ‘cognitive dissonance’, the reader may be stimulated to think outside their own personal experience (Detrixhe 2010, p. 65). In addition, books with ‘vague endings, not always pleasant... can lead to much open-ended discussion... concerning alternative solutions to the problem’ (Pardeck & Pardeck 1984, p. 198). ‘The Course’ embraces these points, establishing characters such as Hedy, Pasha, and Nikola that are flawed, and who make bad choices that they then (for the most part) learn from. In addition, the ending of the book, whilst closing the story arc, also
opens up the possibility of the cycle of life and death – and the issues and events that occur within them, continuing on, promoting the idea that learning and healing are always ongoing processes.

The positive impact of using flawed, or faulty decision-making characters in literature can be seen in the example of a young, schizoid man who, after writing a therapeutic poem about the rage that he could not express, brought two stories by Mark Twain into his group session – *The Good Little Boy,* and *The Bad Little Boy* (Heller 1987). Through the reading and discussion of these stories, he learnt to allow himself to feel the ‘mean and terrible feelings [that] all the rest of us have’ (Heller 1987, p. 342). He had created standards that were so impossible to meet that he had continually punished himself with the kind of ‘projective violence’ that was evident in his self-written poem (Heller 1987, pp. 342-3). Thus, it was through the interaction with a flawed character that catharsis and understanding were reached – this process echoing Hynes’ theory on the juxtaposition that is inherent in any examination of a bibliotherapeutic text (1981).

Along with open-ended books and flawed characters being helpful, or even necessary, for benefits such as catharsis and understanding to occur, emotion and feelings are also integral to the process, especially in regards to affective bibliotherapy that focuses on fiction and emotional catharsis (Shechtman & Nir-Shfrir 2008). Even when the therapy triggers painful, unpleasant emotions, it is part of the change that can come from ‘getting in touch with self’ (Hynes 1980, p. 38). Indeed, Greenberg and Hill argue that emotional expression and the exploration of feelings are fundamental parts of a patient’s change process (Greenberg; Hill, cited in Shechtman & Nir-Shfrir 2008, p. 112). This can be achieved by means of therapeutic literature that allows readers to deal with their own feelings through emotive writing, permitting identification with characters onto which the client can project their own emotions (Shechtman & Nir-Shfrir 2008). In this way the prose becomes a form of emotional engagement for the service user (Brewster, Sen & Cox 2013). All of these emotional benefits can be enhanced by their application in, or support through a group
or communal setting such as can be found in the online *Harry Potter* fandom, especially that of the website Pottermore.

*Harry Potter* has had an extremely powerful effect on the literary landscape since it was first published in 1997. Beyond its universal popularity, the *Harry Potter* books have effected real-life changes including the addition of words to the English language, an increased level of boarding school enrolments, fashion in glasses, preferred boy’s names, and even pet owl ownership (Patterson & Brown 2009). Much of its success aligns quite closely with the elements that make bibliotherapeutic texts successful, such as engaging writing, identifiable characters, and strong, affecting events with realistic emotional outcomes. Patterson and Brown depict these elements as occurring whilst reading *Harry Potter*, describing the process as the ‘exquisite experience of being borne aloft on the wings of a wonderful novel, a spellbinding story that transports [the reader] to another time, another place, another adventure involving extraordinary people, extraordinary creatures, extraordinary occurrences’ (2009, p. 822).

The way that the books are approached also affects any potential emotional outcomes from the readings. Patterson and Brown have identified four types of *Harry Potter* readers, and have labelled them with corresponding Hogwarts Houses. Gryffindor readers are generally those who read enthusiastically – tearing through the books until they finish, usually as quickly as possible (Patterson & Brown 2009). Hufflepuffs read slowly, methodically, absorbing as many details as they can along the way – their motivation not so much the plot, but rather the pleasure of reacquainting themselves with the characters and the world that has been created (Patterson & Brown 2009). They are also more likely to be re-readers – going back to the books for the emotional reconnection, and more readily identifying elements of *Harry Potter* that apply to, mirror, or even seemingly occur within their real lives (Patterson & Brown 2009). Ravenclaws tend to be the meta readers – those that question the text, read deeply into it, beyond it, as well as recreating it in new forms such as fan fiction, video mashups, or even live action roleplays (Patterson &
Brown 2009). Slytherin readers are less applicable to a study of bibliotherapy – being those that tend to skim the books, or ‘crib’ them in order to get by socially, rather than for any desire to actually engage with the text (Patterson & Brown 2009, p. 827).

These four types of readers relate to the general archetypes of the four Houses as well, around which resides a great desire for identification and belonging that has spread beyond the books and into the greater sphere of fandom and the public domain. Many websites have appeared over the years, allowing anyone who wishes to answer questions about themselves and be sorted into a Hogwarts House to do so (Lavoie 2003). Whilst there is a certain level of reductive logic within these quizzes – elements that are singularly identified as coming from one House may in fact appear as traits in representatives from all Houses – there is also a sense of belonging and camaraderie that is shared when one is Sorted, especially within online communities such as Pottermore, where the successes of the individual are shared with the House as a collective whole (Lavoie 2003).

Pottermore itself is an interactive online reading environment that was created after the release of the books and movies in April 2012, and allows readers of the series to enter and engage in the extensive fandom that has grown up around the novels (Saldre & Torop 2012). Within the site, participants can reread the text along with new multimodal additions (Saldre & Torop 2012). This level of transmedia engagement allows active readers to seek out, interact with, and share this content with others, allowing a space for creativity and interpretations of the text (Edwards 2012). The unique areas of Pottermore, such as the illustration of the books, virtual environments, gameplay, and the online communities for fan art, serve to transform the linear logic of the book into something more malleable and subtextual – allowing the reader’s communication with the text to become more metacommunicative and in a constant dialogue with their memory of the books (Saldre & Torop 2012).
In a diagram of Pottermore and its subsystems, the multiple levels and interactions with the user are illustrated, with content and levels of communication shown to branch into three distinctive sections, even as they all initially stem from the original novels, and/or the cinematic adaptations (Saldre & Torop 2012, p. 34).

Figure 2.2 Pottermore Subsystems (Saldre & Torop 2012, p. 34).

The influence of peer and friendship interactions upon bibliotherapy can be seen within the areas of interactive and user-generated content such as the character building activities, competitive activities, written comments and fan art. As a space for both continuing and post-reading interaction, Pottermore can represent an arena that allows for peer responses between users, something that can enrich the process of bibliotherapy (Hynes & Wedl 1990). Indeed, Hicks observed that secondary students that had read certain required books within cooperative groups before sharing personal stories with each other, gained a level of closeness and trust with each other that strengthened the class community (1991). In the same way, the communal, interactive
design of Pottermore allows for a similar bonding, as participants engage with and immerse themselves within the story and with each other.

Emotional Insurance: Preventative Bibliotherapy and Empathy.

The bonding that occurs within these communities and therapy groups not only helps to create a level of communication between participants, but also generates a degree of empathy and understanding that benefits both the bibliotherapy, and the future mental health of the user. Shechtman and Nir-Shfrir relate the experience of one group participant where, after recounting his memories of returning from a long absence overseas to the group, and the loneliness and helplessness that he had experienced, was reassured and supported by the empathetic reactions of the other group members, helping to make him feel more included (2008). This level of empathy can in turn lead to the discovery that individuals have unique ways of viewing issues, and that in accepting these differences lies the greatest possibility for growth (Hynes 1980).

The role that bibliotherapy occupies in regards to empathy can be most clearly seen within the developmental approach, where one of the main goals of the therapy is to develop an awareness and understanding of empathy (Paton & Knight 2003). This in turn leads to an increased ability to express empathy beyond the strictures of bibliotherapy sessions (Paton & Knight). Knoth recounts how such developmental bibliotherapy affected her empathetic reactions to, and understanding of other’s experiences and viewpoints:

When I was in sixth grade, the mother of one of my classmates died from cancer... I remember that I worried about my own mother, but more than that, I remember knowing that Jill’s behavior might be affected by her mother’s death. I remember thinking that if Jill refused to take turns on the monkey bars or pushed her way to the head of the lunch line, she might be doing these things because she was sad. No adult ever told me this, but I had read scores of books about children without parents. I knew that the orphaned Mary
Lennox in *The Secret Garden* was a terrible brat not because she wanted to be but because she was miserable (2006, p. 274).

This level of empathy along with the recognition that people’s external reactions are not always in harmony with their internal emotions, is particularly important for children who are still developing towards emotional maturity. Through the ‘time-tested processes’ of developmental bibliotherapy, school-aged children can discover knowledge of themselves and others like them, as well as those whose experiences or pain are of a different nature (Catalano 2008, p. 18). More specifically, teachers have reported that the use of bibliotherapy has led to changes in students’ perceptions of, and behaviour towards students with disabilities – both within their classrooms, and within the greater sphere of the school itself (Shechtman & Or; Prater; Dyches, Prater & Leininger, cited in Rozalski, Stewart & Miller 2010).

Often going hand in hand with the idea of empathy-through-bibliotherapy is the premise of preventative bibliotherapy, or the act of preparing people (most often children) for events and traumas that may affect them in the future. As Knoth argues, rather than trying to address what is happening to a child in the present, perhaps it is better to prepare them for emotional experiences before they occur (2006). One of the benefits to this pre-emptive, guided reading is the ability to identify issues before they become problems – helping young people to move through the ‘predictable stages of adolescence’ armed with the knowledge of what to expect and how one might deal with such concerns if and when they arise (Hébert & Kent 2000).

Knoth again draws on personal experience to illustrate the healing, and even protective effects that preventative bibliotherapy can have upon a person. After her grandmother died during Knoth’s college years, she was comforted by the emotional knowledge she had drawn from Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Ring of Endless Light*, which she had read in high school (2006, pp. 274-5). The seed of possibility it presented for continued existence after death, augmented by Knoth’s
own evolving ideas surrounding death, served to give her succour, and a ‘well of emotional knowledge’ to draw upon (2006, p. 275). As she states, such therapeutic reading can be incredibly subtle compared to other, more heavy-handed modes of bibliotherapy: ‘I am not even sure that I remembered the book correctly, but that did not matter. I took what I needed from the novel and applied it to the events in my life’ (2006, p. 275).

This preventative application also results in benefits beyond the sort of ‘future proofing’ that can come into play in situations such as the above. Developmental bibliotherapy used in the classroom as a preventative measure can lead to a rise in awareness, critical thinking, and problem solving skills, as well as a level of empathy for fellow students that may be suffering from the described trauma, whether the readers themselves have suffered or not (Catalano 2008). The librarians in Baruchson-Arbib’s study also discovered that after students were given the opportunity to read bibliotherapeutic books, they began to talk about formerly taboo subjects such as sex, drug addiction and violence, both amongst themselves and within class discussions (2000). By breaking the silence on such topics, and learning to identify when there may be a problem, the risks associated with ignoring such crises decreases greatly.

The act of bibliotherapy offers images and models that can be applied to issues and events that are not yet known (Heller 1987). Knoth argues that while we cannot inoculate against events in the same way that we can disease, it is still beneficial to arm people with emotional knowledge before it is needed – to read books about death and divorce and new siblings when ‘no one is dying, when a marriage is strong, before anyone is pregnant’ (2006). Reading about ‘the hard stuff’ long before the emotional information is needed, allows the reader the chance to practice their own personal form of bibliotherapy (Knoth 2006). McDaniel agrees, arguing that – in regards to sexual abuse – such emotional knowledge not only creates the tools to deal with such a traumatic potential event, it can also serve to circumnavigate the prevailing notion of parents that such abuse will not happen to their child (2001). Forewarned and forarmed, the possibility of sexual abuse
has the potential to be averted entirely rather than dealt with during and/or after the fact – an outcome that is to be highly desired, as prevention is far easier to deal with compared to the physical damage and pain that survivors of sexual abuse endure (McDaniel 2001).

More generally, the use of literature as both a preventative and educational tool can also have a greater effect on students than the traditional classroom lecture, relating as it does to individuals from broad and diverse backgrounds (Cook, Earles-Vollrath & Ganz 2006). Similarly, the distance that it allows between student and topic by relating experiences through literary characters, can lead to a more stable channel of communication in regards to traumas and events, which in turn makes it easier for the reader to verbalise their thoughts and feelings, and learn new ways to deal with potential problems (Cook, Earles-Vollrath & Ganz 2006).

This distance that developmental and affective bibliotherapy allows, creates the space for emotional development that is essential to both empathy and the ability to navigate difficult life events. As Hébert and Kent state, whilst most adolescents have the capacity to navigate common emotional concerns without significant help, those of a sensitive character, or those who will experience events of a traumatic nature can benefit from the catalyst that literature provides – steering young people through hurt and towards answers (2000). This advantage is magnified when such literature is allowed to create supportive frameworks prior to any distressing events. More specifically, such frameworks provide a more stable support through their role as indirect mediators between reader and conflict, and thus lessen the levels of anxiety, which in turn allows readers to access emotions and insight more clearly (Shechtman & Nir-Shfrir 2008).

Utilising developmental and affective bibliotherapy in a preventative manner lends itself to a certain level of self-direction. Baruchson-Arbib states that bibliotherapy can play a humanitarian role, with the position of librarians allowing them an awareness of the social potential that lies within books in general (2000). This ‘social potential’ results in the possibility of
independent practices that exist beyond the formal bibliotherapy schemes of schools, libraries, and therapist offices, where the intention of specific readings in order to maintain good mental health and well-being still prevails (Brewster, Sen & Cox 2013, p. 578). In the case of adolescent students, not only is such self-direction successful, it is also often preferred, with Baruchson-Arbib’s study finding that, even as students began to talk amongst themselves more openly over the period of a year, there was no move to direct questions towards, or raise issues with, the librarians – a lack of awareness, or desire to turn to the more therapeutic elements of bibliotherapy existing amongst the group (2000).

This trend towards preventative, self-directed bibliotherapy falls in line with McDaniel’s view that utilising reading in such a way creates developmental tools – rather than simple therapy – for the challenges of life (2001). Reading becomes an instrument for channelling energy, pressure, and tension, especially with school-aged children, where the absence of a therapist-type figure creates a friendly, open relationship between the readers and those who offer the literature, such as the example of neutral, objective librarians (Baruchson-Arbib 2000). As Knoth supports, children do not necessarily need heavy-handed bibliotherapeutic direction (2006). Often all that is needed is to provide a ‘full, varied... bookshelf’, as Knoth did for her daughter who, when her pet rat died, or she broke her arm, sought out stories she already knew and re-read them, deciding ‘when she was ready to read about the death of a beloved pet... [when] she needed to revisit the story of injury and healing’ (2006, p. 275). This form of self-directed bibliotherapy, whilst not as applicable to those who are working through previous, or current trauma, can allow the distance and openness needed in order for adolescents to prepare themselves for the world ahead.

**Writing Aftermath: Narrative Therapy and Fan Fiction as a Response to Bibliotherapy.**
Any bibliotherapy, including developmental and preventative models, should allow for a certain level of autonomy in regards to potential creative outcomes. In 1972, Lundsteen outlined certain criteria for what constitutes good bibliotherapeutic literature for children, one of which is the potential for a book to offer ‘unfinished episode(s)’ that can allow participants to continue the story in their own way (1972, p. 511). One of the outcomes of these independent processes is narrative therapy, or writing therapy which, when used in conjunction with psychotherapy – or in this case bibliotherapy – functions as an artistic form of expression and exploration, with the potential to transport the writer to the ‘heart’ of the issues that they need to work through (Bolton 2008). Bolton outlines some of the potential actions that therapeutic writing can enable, citing the exploration of narratives of experience (from differing perspectives), a clarification of values, ethics, identity, and feelings, a critical examination of daily-used metaphors to ‘express the otherwise inexpressible’, and imaginative, sharpened observation and description (Bolton & Ihanus 2011, p. 168). The narratives and the associated images that can emerge from these explorations have the potential to be used therapeutically in the same way that reading texts can be therapeutic through bibliotherapy – exploring and comprehending the fantasies and problems of the user (McArdle & Byrt 2001).

The power of therapeutic writing in response to bibliotherapy can be quite profound, with Simchon remarking that the written text can act as a mirror, reflecting back to the reader parts of their writing that they were unaware of having written, allowing an insight into their own mental processes (2013). This ‘reflection’ focuses the process towards an internal dialogue within the writer, helping them to discover more about themselves and their relationships to family, friends, and the wider fields of society and culture (Bolton & Ihanus 2011, p. 169). It also allows this practice to occur in a safe, confidential environment – compared to the external discussions with a therapist for example – which stimulates the communication of areas of experience that would otherwise be difficult to express (Bolton & Ihanus 2011). This trend towards internal dialogue is
not exclusive to narrative therapy – everything from general fiction, poetry, even journal writing
deals with the inner self and the writer’s dialogue with their own psyche (Bolton & Ihanus 2011).
As Bolton writes, personal memories, dreams, hopes, and fears – all of these are mined through
the process of writing, and sometimes they are uncovered in a courageous manner (Bolton &
Ihanus 2011). Adapting G. K. Chesterton’s quote on travel to illustrate the power of narrative
therapy, and writing in general, Bolton and Ihanus write: ‘The whole object of writing is not to set
foot on foreign land, it is at last to set foot on one’s own self as a foreign land’ (2011, p. 168).

This ‘internalism’ then, can be applied to narrative therapy in order to explore and address
everything from developmental issues to specific traumas and problematic subjects. Surprisingly
in regards to trauma, the act of writing need not necessarily be focused on the actual events that
caused the issues, or the trauma that resulted from them. Indeed, no differences have been found
between writing about fictional trauma versus actual trauma, with the positive health benefits of
both being equal (Peterkin & Prettyman 2009). This evidence that a rigid adherence to reality and
facts is not necessarily beneficial unites with Peterkin and Prettyman’s argument that a lack of rules
surrounding writing in narrative therapy can actually be of more assistance than the reverse, with
the element of therapy being far more effective than the process used to reach it (2009). In
reference to expressive writing, Peterkin and Prettyman indicate that it is the act of expression,
rather than the nature and/or rules of the writing task that lead to the positive, therapeutic
component of the work (2009). The more open, and less rule-bound that narrative therapy
becomes, the more successful it will be, with the relatively free and unconstrained form of the
first-stage of writing – unhampered by the learned writing rules of later stages – supporting and
encouraging anyone with basic writing skills to express and explore themselves (Bolton & Ihanus
2011).

The initial stage of writing is an explorative one, usually intended for only the writer and
perhaps one trusted reader (Bolton & Ihanus 2011). Delving into memories, dreams, and other
personal material, the first stage of writing can often be undertaken in a state that is close to hypnagogic – relatively free of rules and restraints, and often less coherent than later stages (Bolton & Ihanus 2011). This lack of consistency and logic in the initial stages of writing, as referred to earlier, can actually result in greater benefits compared to more structured outputs (Peterkin & Prettyman 2009). However, as the narrative therapy progresses, elements such as insight, agency, and autonomy become more important as the emotional experiences are organised into a coherent story, and the writer’s perspectives are possibly altered – all of which is associated with greater benefits than writing in a disorganised way beyond that first, almost subconscious stage of creation (Peterkin & Prettyman 2009). This is not to say that coherency and the application of rules to writing are the same things, however. Once a writer begins to form their emotional expression into something more structured, the spontaneity of narrative therapy still remains.

Such ‘narrative competence’ should, according to Peterkin and Prettyman, embody six elements: ‘Coherent form (beginning/middle/end) = emplotment, self-revelation and reflection, emotional honesty, thoughtful/purposeful use of language (ie, metaphor), comprehensibility to reader, offers meaning, [and] generates a response in the reader/listener’ (2009, p. 86). When this shift towards narrative competence occurs, a level of relationality can emerge through a comprehensible story that can be shared with another person (Peterkin & Prettyman 2009). With this connection and with the cognitive exercise that results from utilising these coherent narrative abilities, a level of facilitation and progression through stressful and traumatic experiences can occur (Peterkin & Prettyman 2009).

The potential results, as well as some of the unique benefits stemming from narrative therapy are probably best illustrated by observing the experiences of those who have participated in it. Patients at the Mount Sinai Narrative Competence Therapy (NCP) group gave feedback at the end of each sixteen week session, many comparing their experiences to previous forms of
therapy, with others simply identifying the changes that had occurred, or the power of writing that had been revealed to them:

“[I] had to make something rational, organised – have to confront things without rambling”. “Writing celebrated my past versus forgetting what I said in therapy the week before”. “Had to think it through rather than tell it off the cuff like in therapy”... “Easier to write than say some things”... “[There was the] possibility to re-read then re-analyse my old thoughts”... “[I] never realised the beauty of language – its rhythm and cadence”... “[I’m] now able to share my stories with my family so they can understand me better” (Peterkin & Prettyman 2009, p. 86).

Perhaps, however, the most succinct explanation of what writing therapeutically can achieve comes from Virginia Woolf and her revelations regarding the effect that writing her novel *To the Lighthouse* had on her own mental well-being:

I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest (1985).

Through these varying examples that range from intentional therapeutic writing that takes place within a clinical setting, to the more organic, unconscious catharsis of a significant, published author, one can see that all writing has the potential to be therapeutic – from the most polished prose that can be found in book stores, to the raw, personally-infused writing of the non-professional, which includes the practice of fan fiction.

Fan fiction can be presented as a sort of ‘performance art in written form’ (von Veh 2014). Generally, however, fan fiction can be described as the practice of taking characters and settings from a professionally published piece of media, or source product, and creating an original story around them (Kustritz 2003). Jenkins describes fan fiction as a return to the early communal practices of storytelling, emphasising the interactive elements of narration as each individual contributes to the experience and perspective of the story (Kustritz 2003). In the same way that
oral tales were passed from person to person (and continue to be in some cultures), encouraging a continual recapitulation as well as individual interpretations with each story-teller adding minor changes to the narrative, fan fiction represents a text with a far more fluid, and interactional dynamic compared to that of print narratives (Kustritz 2003; von Veh 2014). In other words, the ‘essence of the story remains, but the context of its telling defines the meaning of the story and its borders’ (von Veh 2014).

This ‘essence’ is of great importance to any interpretation of fan fiction according to von Veh, who emphasises that the original story is not abandoned, but rather it is reinvented and expanded by those who hold a great love of the original source material in addition to a love of reading, writing, and the sense of belonging that comes from fandom (2014). Fan fiction may shake itself free of the rules and structures that can hinder therapeutic writing – pushing limits, revisiting modes of storytelling, stretching horizons – however, its purpose is to bring the writer home, both to the original text and to themselves (von Veh 2014). This sustained connection between text and fan fiction creates a bridge between the two, allowing a level of communication and dynamism between author and reader, with the reader’s interaction expanding beyond the historical role of a simple receiver of text – a text ‘they are not intended to alter or contribute toward, beyond their own interpretations and experience of reading’ (Skains 2010, pp. 103-4). The book has become more than an object in totality, cut off in its ‘atemporal perfection’ – it has expanded into a ‘cloud of possibilities’ that opens up a dialogue between author and reader, and between text and fan fiction (Ruffel 2014, p. 114).

Through the creation of fan fiction, a more fluid dynamic between the creator and the reader of a narrative is introduced (Skains 2010, p. 105). However, this does not presume that the reader will supplant the author’s role within the narrative, rather the narrative will continue to emerge from the author, and be experienced by the reader, although the reader’s participation will become increasingly imaginative and interpretive as a result, or as Skains interprets: ‘enormously
complex and free’ (2010, p. 105). This author/reader relationship can become more equal within digital delivery systems – such as authors’ interactive websites – as the digital elements allow the reader more choice as well as more control over the text (Skains 2010).

Fiction, along with all other ‘traditional’ literary genres, is no longer a ‘one way street’ of information (Skains 2010, p. 96). Instead of author and reader existing as two distinct elements in a book’s life cycle that rarely interact, a bridge between print and digital storytelling has been established through the creation of online novel communities (Skains 2010). With the introduction of author websites (such as those of fantasy authors Jasper Fforde and Neil Gaiman), the print-oriented reader is introduced to a far more participatory format, with digital and interactive elements such as multimedia and hypertext, similar to that of Pottermore (Skains 2010). Fforde on his site, hosts yearly contests that include writing fan fiction, and whilst the texts that readers contribute to his site do not alter the source material, the action of creating and distributing them shifts them partially into the role of co-author (Skains 2010). Neil Gaiman’s site alters the author/reader dynamic by providing a great deal of metafictional material, such as the author’s background and research notes on his texts, readings from his books, character analyses, and illustrations – all of which open up the author’s processes to the reader, giving the reader a more engaging experience with the original text, as well as allowing them opportunities to ‘create their own contributions to the narrative’ (Skains 2010, p. 106).

This expansion of the texts also becomes an extension, with these additional materials generating ideas and actions that the source text may have realised only partially, if at all, and leading to the author, and the reader potentially exploring them further (Vasset, cited in Ruffel 2014). Fantasy in particular lends itself to this continuation, as online novel communities are more often than not based on fantasy titles compared to other genres, by and large because the fantasy worlds lend themselves to extension beyond the original texts for both readers and writers, with
many fantasy novels extended into series due to the desire for continued interaction with the created worlds (Skains 2010).

With this level of interaction taking place within communal, online settings a significant element of readers’ desire to ‘create’ adjacent to the source text is the collaboration and connection that can be found with other readers (von Veh 2014). Unsurprisingly, one of the best ways to generate this connection is with content that can be shared and discussed, such as fan fiction (von Veh 2014). This community of fiction – mostly residing on sites such as Archive of Our Own (AO3), Fanfiction.net, tumblr, and to a lesser extent in current times LiveJournal and Dreamwidth – provides forums, messaging systems, comment services, and the ability to connect directly with each other for both readers, and fan writers alike (von Veh 2014). Indeed, AO3 was set up by fans, for fans, in order to preserve transformative works such as fan fiction in a way that is specifically tailored for communal interaction and support (von Veh 2014).

Such a sense of community and support is central to the reasoning as to why fan fiction lends itself to narrative therapy, and why fan writers choose to create stories drawn from source texts, rather than simply creating wholly new stories. Whilst oftentimes readers will find themselves under-, or completely un-represented in a text, they will typically rewrite the media to more closely align with their ‘autonomous selves’, rather than create their own original fiction, as readers continue to stake their own claims to the normative communities that matter most to them (Chander & Sunder 2007, p. 620). Indeed, this lack of representation, or the presence of stereotypes within narratives is often the stimulus behind the creation of fan fiction, with readers desiring to retell a canonical story in order to better represent themselves, and in turn engage more deeply with the original text (Chander & Sunder 2007). In a study of children’s books from 1900 to 1984, the results showed that in regards to adult characters within the story, men appeared almost three times as frequently compared to women, and the central characters of the stories were almost two and a half times more likely to be boys rather than girls (Chander & Sunder 2007).
The lack of diversity in regards to gender is also echoed across the spheres of race and sexuality, with all of these deficiencies and stereotypes within published texts having an impact on the mental processes and self-image of minority groups. A U.S. Civil Rights Commission found that people in minority groups internalise the stories that they read and otherwise absorb on a daily basis, reinforcing their own negative self-beliefs (Chander & Sunder 2007). In a therapeutic sense, the creation of fan fiction becomes a reflection of the reader’s needs, experiences, and desires – a way to question the representations surrounding them, and in turn offer counter-representations that more closely align with their own lives (Kustritz 2003).

*Harry Potter* is an obvious example of a published text that engages with readers across broad demographics, but still lacks diversity in certain areas. Many of the main characters within the books are male – including the central character of Harry, and the majority of the Hogwarts population is white (Chander & Sunder 2007). Some examples of *Harry Potter* fan fiction place Hermione Granger as the central character, making it her story, with her own goals and her own love interests (Chander & Sunder 2007). As Chonin states: ‘Hermione... as the Potter series’ brilliant bookworm... is a role model for smart girls (and boys) who find themselves overshadowed by their flashier peers’ – especially so when she is written as the primary character in works of fan fiction (cited in Chander & Sunder 2007, p. 610).

In terms of race, *Harry Potter* has also been rewritten to incorporate races and communities beyond its initial purview, with *Harry Potter in Kolkata* – a short lived ‘pirate’ version of the boy wizard which situated Harry in Kolkata, making it easier for the middle-class Bengali youth who read it to connect with his adventures (Chander & Sunder 2007, p. 611). As Chander and Sunder posit, this resituating of Harry in India, along with the reinvention of Hermione as the lead protagonist in fan fiction, is a variant of the writing phenomenon known as the Mary Sue (2007). Originating in the 1970s within Star Trek fan fiction, the Mary Sue character was created by Paula Smith as a response to the many self-insert characters that were appearing in Star Trek fan fiction.
at the time (Chander & Sunder 2007). In the decades following, Mary Sue has come to stand for much of what can go wrong in fan writing, however, as Chander and Sunder argue, the Mary Sue – a figure of derision, often perceived as narcissistic on the part of the author – can be interpreted as ‘a figure of subaltern critique and, indeed, empowerment’ (2007, p. 599).

Mary Sues can be interpreted as heroic figures, who are able to stand representative of a group of people (usually women) who are not particularly present in the source text:

In every fan literature, there is a Mary Sue: “She fences with Methos and Duncan MacLeod; she saves the Enterprise, the Voyager, or the fabric of time and space; she fights with Jim Ellison in defense of Cascade; she battles evil in Sunnydale alongside Buffy Sommers [sic].” She stands as the only female member of the fellowship of the ring (Chander & Sunder 2007, pp. 598-9).

Hence, the event of rewriting a story to redefine one’s role in it is not simply an exercise in narcissism, but rather a confrontation of a reigning discourse and knowledge, and a reworking of canon that can validate marginalised communities such as women, people of colour, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (Chander & Sunder 2007).

Thus, through devices such as the Mary Sue, and the re-envisioning of original texts, fan fiction targets writing that reproduces ‘traditional masculinity, traditional class and race hierarchies, and traditional relational scripts and reconfigures them into tales of communal societies, racial equality, and sexual transgression’ (Kustritz 2003, p. 376). In other words, fan fiction writers fill in gaps in both the quality of narrative, and the levels of representation, pushing beyond the boundaries of the original text (Kustritz 2003). Through this extension, fan fiction writers also often focus on the trauma and flaws that may lie in the past or the future of canonical characters. Often delving into logical explorations (that the source text has failed to explore) as to why characters act in the way that they do, fan fiction writers can ‘repair the damage’ inflicted on a
character’s ability to present as a real person with real flaws, desires, and weaknesses by the original author (Kustritz 2003, p. 375).

This ability for fan fiction to challenge everything from minority representation to trauma and character motivations has benefits beyond simply allowing better representation to readers. The act of writing can become a positive intervention for women who feel frustrated, despondent, or helpless – effecting change in their lives through perception and behaviour by creating stories that ‘live on’ in their daily lives – reconstructing values and beliefs that change their own perceptions and behaviours (Kustritz 2003, p. 383). When fan fiction is considered to be a tool that can help people work through problems, rather than simply an idiosyncratic product of fandom, it can be used to great effect as an example of narrative therapy. This can be seen in a study of depressed young women, who used fan fiction to help construct and develop their identities in a way that was not available to them in their core schoolwork (Smagorinsky 2014).

The potential benefits of fan fiction can also apply to the issues that many English as a second language (ESL) students suffer from while learning a new language and adjusting to a new culture.

Yina, a thirteen year old Hmong refugee, struggled with the trauma of leaving her country and culture behind her as well as having to learn English, and suffered from a high level of social isolation as a result. She wrote: ‘At that time, I’m lonely and sad! I don’t have anyone and I don’t know what they are saying?!’ (Li 2012, p. 314). When she was introduced to manga by a fellow immigrant, Yina began to write and illustrate large amounts of her own stories that borrowed ideas and characters from the manga books – forging connections with fellow fans, and improving her English as well as her attitude towards writing and reading as she did so (Li 2012). Eventually, a year later Yina wrote: ‘Writing! I love to write! Like always and often... Sometimes all I did was starting to begin writing and then as I move along with the story, I just keep writing and get more ideas, and more’ (Li 2012, p. 315).
In general, fan fiction seems to fill a need that is both extremely extensive, and incapable of being fulfilled elsewhere (Kustritz 2003). These fictions are written to give space to the personal perspectives and extrapolations that are often smothered in the definitive versions of public texts, where most individuals are restricted from sharing their own dreams, fantasies, and desires (Kustritz 2003). Benjamin argues that in current times, we are ‘starved for personal storytelling’, and when we are allowed such freedom it is often relegated to a position of relative frivolity (cited in Kustritz 2003). Fan fiction allows that freedom across all genres of writing – with fan writing existing for everything from Jane Austen, to The Phantom of the Opera, to Lord of the Rings (Skains 2010). Fantasy (and Science Fiction), however, generates a much higher number of online communities and resultant fan fiction relative to other genres, indicating that the desire of readers to continue their experience within these story-worlds increases when involved in the fantastical and meta-normative (Skains 2010).
CHAPTER FOUR – READING THE FANTASY GENRE THROUGH THE LENS OF BIBLIOTHERAPY

Defining Fantasy within the Context of Bibliotherapy.

The role and the effectiveness of fiction and poetry as bibliotherapeutic literature remains ‘essentially unvalidated’ (Detrixhe 2010, p. 60), with even the researchers that focus on the role of fiction in therapy acknowledging that examination of its use remains wanting (Detrixhe 2010). Detrixhe, however, goes on to state that – compared to the didactic use of bibliotherapeutic non-fiction, bibliotherapeutic fiction offers unique opportunities for healing, and the exploration of the unconscious (2010). By using a book that sparks the interest of a reader, the unconscious mind can be explored, along with the possible hidden meanings that lie behind a reader’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviour (Detrixhe 2010). This ‘eliciting of unconscious material’ pushes the connection between reader and text beyond simple identification with a singular character, and into a wider range of story matter (Detrixhe 2010, p. 68).

Duffy argues that the reason fiction-based bibliotherapy connects more strongly with readers is due to fiction’s innate ability to engage with a person’s emotions (2010). This emotional connection in turn attracts people to these kinds of texts over that of non-fictional, self-help books (Duffy 2010). The emotional aspect of fictional bibliotherapy falls in line with the emotional base that lies beneath the substance of bibliotherapy users (Van Velsor 2004). Tapping into this emotive baseline allows the client, or reader to explore their feelings more explicitly – something that can often be difficult in therapy, as both adult, and child clients tend to avoid verbally expressing their emotions (Van Velsor 2004).

Fantasy, as a prolific genre of fiction is well placed to be used as a bibliotherapeutic resource. The genre itself can be difficult to define, tied closely as it is to science fiction and the
larger umbrella of speculative fiction, however, most definitions include the presence of ‘magic’, or an element of the supernatural within the fantasy genre (Kurtz 2007). J.R.R. Tolkien writes that ‘fairy stories’, or fantasy stories ‘touch on or use Faerie [faerie being magic that lies ‘at the furthest pole’ from technology and science], whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality’ (Tolkien, cited in Kurtz 2007, p. 571). This presence of magic, or the supernatural applies to stories set both in this world, and within other worlds.

Clute and Grant describe fantasy that is set in this world as ‘self-coherent narrative[s that] tell… a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it’ (cited in Kurtz 2007, p. 571). When set in a world beyond this one, that other-world will be ‘impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms’ (Clute & Grant, cited in Kurtz 2007, p. 571). Egoff describes this ‘impossibility’ as that step beyond a natural law – the abrogation of which creates a ‘sustaining pleasure’ that is at the heart of the fantasy genre (cited in Kurtz 2007, p. 571). Fantasy author Tamora Pierce, however, moves beyond the genre’s conventions and narrative rules, and describes the fantasy as a ‘literature of empowerment. In fantasy, however short, fat, unbeautiful, weak, dreamy, or unlearned individuals may be, they find a realm in which these things are negated by [an]… empowerment that brings trials’ (1993, p. 51). Fantasy is the ‘pure stuff of wonder’ (Pierce 1993, p. 51).

In terms of bibliotherapy, fantasy’s subversive nature lends itself well to therapeutic reading, with its ability to show readers a new way of looking at their world (Kurtz 2007). It can also be a vehicle for escapism and nostalgia, but more importantly, it can be all of these things at once. This multiplicity allows for fantasy’s unique ability to cope and approach reality and existence differently (Kurtz 2007). Fictional fantasy stories take this emotional diversity and use it to develop cognitive benefits that stem from a story’s ability to transmit knowledge, and improve problem solving and learning, along with affective benefits that include hope, modelling, and catharsis (Heiney 2006). Catharsis especially has a strong connection to fiction and fantasy; as such release
can occur through the discharging of feelings such as anger, anxiety, and despair as they are released through the character’s journey in the story (Heiney 2006). Such is the case with ‘The Course’, where Hedy’s journey is designed to elicit such feelings in a cathartic manner.

Heiney goes on to discuss how the fictional story uses these elements to protect the ego, and allow the unconscious mind to access the bibliotherapeutic message, as well as increasing the reader’s sense of mastery over their self-confidence, self-image, and any emotional distress they may be feeling (2006). This catharsis through storytelling works particularly well with fantasy because as Heiney states, storytelling uses fairy tales, myths, and folk tales – all frequent elements of the fantasy genre – in order to ‘provide an alternative experience, establish psychological rapport, externalize internal conflicts, access and use unconscious processes, promote a state of internal absorption, and establish a level of meaning significant to the patient’ (2006, p. 900). ‘The Course’ externalises Hedy’s internal conflicts by placing them in an external world – that of Sanctuary, where Hedy has the opportunity to confront and work through the issues she faces in her life in the same way that the reader can by following Hedy’s journey through the novel.

This emotional, nostalgic, and even cognitive connection between reader and text stems primarily from the quality of appeal that a book projects towards a reader. Saricks defines appeal as ‘[t]he elements of books to which a reader relates’ such as storyline, characterisation, pacing, and frame (which encompasses elements such as setting, tone, mood, background, and atmosphere) (2005, p. 42). Dali herself, however, proposes that appeal is not so much the relatable elements of book, but rather the ‘the power to invoke interest in reading and to set off an action of reading’ (2014). In other words, whilst appeal can stem from the contents of a book, it can equally arise from the reader themselves – in their personality, mood, and environment – the reading context (Dali 2013).
Wyatt contends that the appeal of tone in a book, is highly influenced by the reader’s ‘mood and sensibility… [their] life experience, past reading history, and world outlook… matter a great deal in terms of [their] enjoyment of a title’ (cited in Dali 2013, p. 483). In regards to fantasy, and more generally cult fiction, the book-oriented, or book-related appeal can contain elements such as writing style; specific genre conventions such as alienation, and ego-reinforcement; the triumph of good over evil; and the fun and suspense of the genre (Dali 2013). However, pushing beyond this and into Dali’s ‘reading context’, the appeal ‘beyond’ the book in fantasy and cult fiction can include:

Sharing the experiences of characters; creating connections with characters; escape Inspiration; amusement; amazement; stirring emotions; evoking passion; staying in reader’s memory Entertainment; adrenaline rush; conquering fear; “[f]antastical manifestation of negative wish fulfilment”; education Entertainment; “connect[ing readers] with great minds and great thoughts from other places and times”; giving “Western readers greater cultural empathy and understanding”; building reading comprehension and language skills; opening readers to new experiences Vicarious experiences; [and] safe exploration of dangerous situations (Dali 2013, p. 484).

This reading context not only expands the definition of book appeal, it also very clearly places the reader in an active and dynamic role when it comes to creating such influence and attraction (Dali 2013). This active role can change the meaning and effect of a fantasy text, and ‘therein lies the importance of fantasy’ (Kurtz 2007, p. 574) – a genre which can help readers journey into their own subconscious, and allow them to view the world in a different way (Kurtz 2007). As readers change the meanings of fantasy texts, so too does fantasy change the reader.

The ‘text and reader’ relationship falls into line with the shift in literary studies from an emphasis on literary ‘works’ and their authors, to ‘texts’ and their readers (Wylie & Pare 2001). With this shift, Hynes’ argument from twenty years prior that bibliotherapy relies not on the value of a literary text, but on the perception of its message is supported further (Hynes 1981). Fantasy may not be largely considered as ‘classic literature’, however, its genre is not limiting, and is open
to vast subjectivity in perception. In other words it is its message, its subject that provides a therapeutic benefit, rather than any interpretation of its value as a piece of canonical literature.

Brewster, Sen and Cox discuss the Reading and You Service (RAYS) model of bibliotherapy, and its particular aptitude for this literary shift-in-emphasis within contemporary narrative therapy (2013). By challenging the conception that classical literature is the correct literature to read, RAYS avoids the restrictions that this can place on readers – allowing them to judge the value and enjoyment levels of a text themselves, as ‘there are no right or wrong books to read’ (Duffy et al., cited in Brewster, Sen & Cox 2013, p. 573). Furthermore, these judgements and responses to novels are ‘unique to the individual’ (Kurtz 2007, p. 574) – reaffirming the argument that the reader’s journey is a singular one, shaped by what they bring to the text (Kurtz 2007).

Fantasy helps to break through the ‘frustrating strictness’ of many models of bibliotherapy, where the rules often seem to wish to force certain responses from readers and clients alike (Detrixhe 2010). With its ability to step beyond this world, and reach into what can seem impossible, offering the reader ‘the freedom to imagine and grow’ (Bodmer 2002, pp. 400-1), fantasy in fact allows for a certain type of awakening that is not present, or possible when a reader’s identification with a character occurs through overly-similar, shared problems, and obvious solutions (Detrixhe 2010). Detrixhe argues that, in order to achieve a ‘soulful’ experience of cognitive and emotional development, readers and clients can benefit from engaging with books that kindle their imaginations, challenge their viewpoints, and question, but do not resolve their life choices – in other words, by experiencing a book that allows them to journey into their own minds (2010).

It is this kindling of the imagination that fantasy arguably does best. Pierce writes of the ‘fuel’ that fantasy provides to young adults in order for them to dream, to refine ideas, and
engender great visions (1993). This fuel, found in the ‘mighty symbols of myth, fairy tales, dreams, legends – and fantasy’, are echoed ‘in their most undiluted form outside myth and fairy tale’ in the fantasy stories of the twentieth century (Pierce 1993, p. 50):

Tolkien’s forces of Light fighting a mind-numbing Darkness; Elizabeth Moon’s lone paladin facing pain and despair with only faith to sustain her… Diane Duane’s small choir of deep sea creatures holding off the power of death and entropy… at the risk of their own [lives] (Pierce 1993, p. 50).

As Pierce argues, these stories’ apparent detachment from reality in no way serves to diminish their effect – providing readers as they do with the push to challenge and change the way that things are (1993). Rather than removing the reader from reality to the point that the story is no longer relatable to their own lives, fantasy is a genre of possibilities, challenging its readers to ‘see beyond the concrete universe and to envision other ways of living and alternative mindsets’ (Pierce 1993, p. 50). As Pierce states: ‘Everything in speculative universes, and by association the real world, is mutable. Intelligent readers will come to relate the questions raised in [fantasy] books to their own lives’ (1993, p. 50). Bettelheim argues something similar in his work on fantasy, stating that ‘if we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives, [and]… when [we] are young, it is literature that carries such information best’ (cited in Black 2003, pp. 47-8). Hedy uses fantasy in a similar way within ‘The Course’, relating the often fantastical events she experiences in Sanctuary with her ‘real life’, finding that the meaning and the questions raised in her fantastical encounters coincide with the meaning and questions she confronts in her life in England.

The connection between fantasy and its readers also extends into post-story interactions – namely the presence of online communities, and related online interactions. Indeed, fantasy generates a greater number of online communities and author sites than any other genre, including
that of bestsellers (Skains 2010). Skains suggests that perhaps this is a result of the fantasy fan’s desire to ‘continue interacting with the fantasy world beyond the end of the novel’s story’ (2010, p. 97) – often paralleled by the author’s similar wish (such a desire being one of the reasons that fantasy authors often expand their stories into series) (Skains 2010).

Similarly, fantasy is particularly suited to author-created sites, with their interactive elements, contests, and community forums – as readers are able to investigate and contribute to forums and such with content that spans, and extends beyond the fantasy world – world maps, character sketches, documentaries, and fictionalised news (Skains 2010). Moving beyond the limitations of an author-site, readers can also venture in creating their own stories and characters within the fantasy worlds. For readers, fantasy offers a vast, almost never ending sandbox in which to autonomously explore an other-world that has already engaged their minds and emotions – a fact that is supported by the overwhelming number of fan fiction stories on FanFiction.net that are based on fantasy novels, a number that surpasses that of any other genre (Skains 2010). Currently, there are 86,485 works of Harry Potter fan fiction posted to Archive of Our Own (AO3) (Organization for Transformative Works 2015) – a statistic that Black would most likely find unsurprising, as she remarks that gifted children who wish to place themselves more directly into Harry’s world can easily make up their own story based on one of Harry’s situations (2003). Black describes gifted children as ‘natural storytellers’ who, when given the opportunity to draw from the ‘outrageous imagination’ of J.K. Rowling must find it ‘irresistible’ (2003, p. 49).

**Fantasy and Escapism in Bibliotherapy.**

It is this extreme level of imagination that largely fuels one of fantasy’s greatest strengths – or weaknesses depending on one’s school of thought. Fantasy has long been identified as escapist literature, with similarly identified readers often described as those who ‘seek refuge from reality… the escape artists who… revel in the glory of make-believe heroes without any attempt to raise
their own status towards such worthwhile goals’ (Jalongo 1983, p. 799). Indeed, the escapist reader has also been seen as a hindrance to successful bibliotherapy, with a 1982 bibliotherapy factsheet including readers who ‘use literature as an escape’ as a restrictive factor against its success (ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills 1982, p. 4).

More recently, however, attitudes have begun to shift in regards to escapism’s role in bibliotherapy, with Knoth arguing that perhaps a child who is going through loss and grief might find more solace, healing, and understanding in a world set apart from their own, currently intolerable one, and not in a story that forces them to revisit their issues with no cushioning layer of imagination and distance (2006). In ‘The Course’, Hedy uses Sanctuary in a similar manner, utilising it as a place that is removed from her reality, somewhere she can find solace when it is unattainable in the ‘real world’. Brewster, Sen and Cox discovered something similar to Knoth in their research – with their subjects preferring escapist literature penned by authors such as Terry Pratchett during their times of severe depression (2013). Such texts allowed them to relax, and properly engage with the stories at an emotional, rather than didactic level as was the case with the texts available in the Get into Reading bibliotherapy scheme (2013).

Fantasy has suffered from the perception that escapism is a negative influence on a text’s value. However, as with bibliotherapy and escapist literature in general, in recent years there has been a shift in attitude. Fantasy authors themselves have long been advocates for the escapist elements of fantasy, with J.R.R. Tolkien, and Ursula K. Le Guin both extolling the virtues of escapist fantasy decades ago:

[F]antasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don’t we consider it his duty to escape?... [I]f we value the freedom of the mind and soul… then it’s our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can (Le Guin 1979, p. 204).
More recently, Tamora Pierce has written of the connection between fantasy, escapism, and reality, citing her own experiences as a child: ‘While the act of reading transported me out of reality for the time it took me to read, nothing carried over into my thoughts… until I discovered fantasy’ (1993, p. 51). Reading Tolkien’s Middle Earth books, and watching the interplay of ‘light and hope’ across the sky over the dead horizon of Mordor gave Pierce herself hope. Hope and optimism. It ‘got [her] through’ (Pierce 1993, p. 51).

Neil Gaiman has also argued for the benefits of escapism – not only for its ability to take a reader away from painful experiences in the real world, but also to return to their own lives with new-forged skills and strategies:

People talk about escapism as if it's a bad thing… Once you've escaped, once you come back, the world is not the same as when you left it. You come back to it with skills, weapons, knowledge you didn't have before. Then you are better equipped to deal with your current reality (cited in Melendez 2013).

Sanctuary performs this role for Hedy in ‘The Course’, arming her with knowledge and understanding that she lacked until she escaped to the fantastical place. When each of her adventures are over, she returns to the world with a different understanding of her own reality.

This is the heart of escapism’s role in bibliotherapeutic fantasy, and much of its redeeming power is stimulated by readers’ self-awareness. ‘Fantasy readers seem to know that what happens in books can be carried over, that the idea of change is universal, and that willpower and work are formidable forces, wherever they are applied’ (Pierce 1993, p. 51). Herein lies the power of escapism – not the ability to leave reality behind, but to travel beyond its borders with the express intention of looking back. In relation to children reading fairy tales, Zipes states that the act of reading ‘fairy’ separates the child from the ‘restrictions of reality’ and allows them to deal with the problems and anxieties of their own lives, facing the repressed unfamiliar, and making it familiar once more (1982, p. 309). Zipes calls this form of external gaze a quest for the Heimische, or real
home – the dislocation of a reader from their familiar world, and a subsequent identification with a similarly dislocated protagonist (1982).

To some degree this is a level of exploration that is present in all literature – a suspension between the real and unreal, and a place that allows readers to ‘see themselves and their problems from an aesthetic distance’ (Justman 2010, p. 128). In fantasy, however, this imaginary suspension becomes far more pronounced – patently it is not an accurate portrayal of, or guide to everyday life, it is unreal (Black 2003). This does not automatically mean, however, that it is untrue. Fantasy reflects not the ‘external reality’ of the reader, but rather their ‘inner processes’ (Bettelheim, cited in Black 2003, p. 49). The best fantasy must be true in order to ‘win our honest belief in a brand-new world with brand-new rules’ (Black 2003, p. 49).

A good example of fantasy’s ‘unreal truth’ can be found in Harry Potter’s game of quidditch. The game itself is patently magical – played as it is on flying brooms with charmed balls of varying size, and goals that are unfeasibly high off the ground. In this way it is unlike any game in reality, however, the behaviour, and the sense of competition that surrounds it is incredibly familiar – the reader sees their own family and peers ‘peeking from beneath the wizard robes’ (Black 2003, p. 49), they recognise Harry become aware of his talent, and strive for the victory that means so much to him (Black 2003). A gifted child, for example who faces their own trials and competitions, can acknowledge the unreality of the fantasy game, but recognise, and identify with the truth of quidditch – the handling of talent, work, desire, accomplishment, friendship, and competition (Black 2003).

In the same way, the ‘unreal’, fantastical parts of ‘The Course’ contain truths that both Hedy and the novel’s reader can recognise and identify with. There is the raging fire monster that echoes the fire of Hedy’s childhood, the memory-filled mirrors that speak to the very human desire
Fantasy, Metaphor, Symbolism, and Imagery in Bibliotherapy.

In the same way, the struggles of the hero in a fantasy novel – the dangers, trials, victories, and setbacks – echo the same unreal truth. At the end, the reader returns to the real world and is able to cope better with the problems and trials of their own lives, by using the truths found within these fantastical moments (Black 2003). Such benefits stemming from the balance between perceived reality and truth are made possible through fantasy’s use of metaphor, imagery, and ‘the rhythm and soothing of the art of the written word… and to the imagination that had been ignited by that art’ (Catalano 2008, p. 19). Fantasy is naturally suited to metaphor and imagery, as the genre itself is a ‘metaphorical mode’, with its allegorical images serving as transport for ideas and feelings that can – at their most successful – result in an ‘eventual restructuring of personal reality’ (Black 2003, p. 48).

In the most simplistic terms the device of metaphor stems from the Latin and Greek terms \textit{metaphora} and \textit{metapherin} respectively, both of which mean ‘to transfer’ (Chesley, Gillett & Wagner 2008, p. 399). In terms of verbal psychotherapy, Kopp broadened the definition, stating that a metaphor is ‘a way of speaking in which one thing is expressed in terms of another, whereby this bringing together throws new light on the character of what is being described’ (cited in Chesley, Gillett & Wagner 2008, p. 399). The role of metaphor in therapeutic reading focuses on helping people to visualise situations in order for them to imagine new actions and decisions – it allows people to experience and understand the connection between events (Amundson 2006).

Metaphor in therapy and bibliotherapy is a powerful tool, allowing the subject to face traumatic personal experiences with the benefit of the critical distance from upsetting matter that
metaphor provides (Van Velsor 2004). In ‘The Course’, Hedy faces the traumas of her life firstly through confrontations in Sanctuary; the critical distance it gives her allows her to then face the traumas in her life directly. Beyond this conscious distance, metaphor can also be used to frame and direct a client towards a desired goal in such a displaced way that the message is heard with ‘minimal interference from psychological defences’ (Heiney 2006, p. 900). Such displaced distance works because metaphor is, essentially, the language of symbolism – and it is through symbolism that individuals ‘experience and understand the world’ (McArdle & Byrt 2001, p. 522). In addition, through its symbolism and absence of explicit direction, or instruction, metaphor conveys meaning at a level that is at once a communication with the reader, and an open, subjective experience, which allows them to choose what to draw from the metaphor (Heiney 2006). Chesley, Gillett and Wagner give the example of Laura – a nine-year-old girl who, after her elder sister’s death, enters into bibliotherapy, and reads Bucaglia’s The Fall of Freddie the Leaf – a story whose leaf-protagonist falls from his tree during autumn (2008). This metaphor for death and the cycle of life, allows for distance and the avoidance of direct confrontation, whilst stimulating an emotional connection, and the ability for Laura to find meaning in the symbolism in her own way (Chesley, Gillett & Wagner 2008).

If, as can be seen, metaphor is such an integral part of bibliotherapy’s toolkit, then surely a genre such as fantasy that is so steeped in metaphor, symbolism, and allegory has an important role to play. In Amundson’s article on the metaphorical use of Baum’s The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, he illustrates the ‘rich tapestry’ that Oz provides for engaging people in ‘metaphoric reflection about their own processes’ – not just for the client, or reader, but for the counsellor as well who, ‘by focusing on fantasy and the development of metaphors… has the opportunity to develop new insight and to encourage more flexible thinking’ (2006, p. 38).

Closely allied to metaphor and symbolism is imagery – an element of writing that ‘frees persons from time and place, [and] is one of the qualities of literature that allows the spirits to soar’
Imagery – with metaphor being an ‘image-making trope’ (Bolton & Ihanus 2011, p. 178) – can be deeply facilitative to therapeutic situations, with Bolton and Ihanus arguing that psychological authorities have asserted that ‘the only way to gain access to deeply traumatic memories is through image’ (2011, p. 178). This ‘freeing’, ‘spirit-soaring’ imagery relies on its ability to ignite the imagination of the reader – something that fantasy excels at (McCarty Hynes 1988; Catalano 2008). The imagery within ‘The Course’ performs the same facilitative process – Sanctuary existing as a saturated world of visuals and sensations, as well as the hyper-realised ‘English countryside’ of Downheadley and its surroundings written to engage the reader and ‘free’ them from their current time and place. In contrast to this, when Hedy is forced to move to the city, her world is sparsely described, and when it is described, it is done in a realistic style that emphasises the lack of freedom that Hedy feels.

Cooper described imaginative fantasy stories that give children the ability to investigate their own problems with no real-world consequences as ‘amazing adventures with no price tag’ (cited in Black 2003, p. 50). Fantasy has always held a level of fascination for adults and adolescents alike, with some arguing that the genre satisfies an ‘intellectual and emotional need for... children’ (Harrison & Van Haneghan 2011, p. 690), and fantasy roleplaying games such as Dungeons & Dragons allowing adolescents the chance to stretch their minds, and ‘do anything [their] wildest imagination will permit’ (Harrison & Van Haneghan 2011, pp. 690-1). Classic fantasy also contains strong ties to the imagination, with Ang celebrating Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) as the ‘great liberating event’ in her progress towards adulthood – a book that took its point in the ‘strength of [a] child’s imagination, rather than guiding [them] to conform to goodness and light’ (cited in Bodmer 2002, p. 400). Sanctuary performs the same role for Hedy in ‘The Course’, as well as for any potential readers. Existing not only as a place of light and wonder, but also of darkness and terror, it does not try and force either character or reader to conform to any particular standard, instead opening itself up to be experienced in all of its imagination.
This imagery and metaphor usually inherent in fantasy texts often manifests in the heroic struggles of the book’s protagonists and champions. From Odysseus, through to Frodo, Cinderella, Luke Skywalker, and Harry Potter, the heroes of fantasy and science fiction have faced trials that are rooted in the struggles of life, and have ‘mapped the way’ for the readers that follow to confront and conquer their own metaphorical quests against gods, evil wizards, and evil empires (Duffy 2010, p. 7). The character of Hedy has been created in the same way – her journey and adventures are oftentimes fantastical, but her struggles are anchored in the labours of her life – battling through loss, pain, love, and change, even as she moves through a world unlike her own.

Campbell illustrates the inwardly-focused, truth-based unreality of following the hero’s journey quite succinctly:

\[W]e \[do\] not \[need\] to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And… where we thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world (cited in Duffy 2010, pp. 7-8).

The journey of the fantasy hero brings the child-reader ‘face to face with the basic predicaments of humankind’ – adversity and struggle, and the energising victory that arises when all is overcome (Black 2003, p. 52). Campbell sums up the essence of the fantasy hero’s journey, writing of the obscurity that the ‘child of destiny’ must endure before they are ‘thrown inward to [their] own depths or outward to the unknown’ (cited in Black 2003, p. 52). Then, a presence appears – an angel, or animal, crone, or gnome (‘the story has been told a thousand ways’) who teaches the hero the ‘lessons of the seed powers, which reside just beyond the sphere of the measured and the named’ (Campbell, cited in Black 2003, pp. 52-3).

This oft-told story of a person plucked from obscurity, given the seeds of greatness, and then, when all seems lost, having ‘benevolent powers [a fairy godmother, a woodsman, or a sorting
hat and a phoenix named Fawkes] coming to [their] aid’ (Bettelheim, cited in Black 2003; Black 2003 p. 52), seems to suggest that it is only through the deus ex machina of magic that victory and success can be achieved. Amundson, however, using the example of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz challenges this assumption, posing the question of how the characters within the story of Oz ‘developed their problems’ (2006, p. 37): ‘Certainly some magic was involved, but there were also a number of basic psychological dynamics that accounted for the issues that emerged… [and] help[ed] to bring about resolution’ (Amundson 2006, p. 37). In ‘The Course’, Hedy’s issues – whilst faced and sometimes explored through fantastical means, stem from her own psychological and emotional problems, and once investigated through fantastical avenues, they are usually resolved in the mundane world through mundane means, such as discussion, decision making, and the acceptance of change.

Even the presence of magic or magical elements, or mythical creatures/people does not necessarily detract from the therapeutic effectiveness of a story, as the authenticity of the emotional response is the essential attribute needed for successful bibliotherapy (Jalongo 1983). When these elements are all brought together – magic, imagery, metaphor – fantasy becomes a valuable instrument for achieving the mental benefits of bibliotherapy – with its vivid mix of good and evil, ethical and unethical, and humane and cruel helping to engage gifted imaginations, to understand personal needs and conflicts, and to provide tools to ‘reason through deeper meanings of the universe in which [we all] live’ (Black 2003, p. 48).

As well as mental bibliotherapeutic benefits, fantasy also contains developmental advantages for younger children, with research having shown that it draws children into reading with its imaginative and engaging stories, and can then address serious developmental issues such as themes of coming-of-age, and one’s place-in-the-world, and it achieves this ‘more effectively than realistic literature does’ (Kurtz 2007, p. 574). This developmental aptitude also creates a reading environment that is well-suited to the needs of, and issues surrounding gifted children,
with Black illustrating the themes of difference comprehension, tolerance, and self-perception that are shared between *Harry Potter*, and the lives of gifted adolescents (2003).

Gifted children may see their own conflicts in the talented young wizards at Hogwarts. When a jealous Draco taunts Harry, [the child] may recall the neighbor child who sent nasty notes when [they] received attention for performing. When Harry’s best friend Ron overcomes his jealousy to support Harry in his quest for the Wizard Cup, [the child] may recall [themselves] hugging and encouraging a friend who was… performing a concerto – an honour for which [they] had auditioned and lost. When Harry cringes as Gilderoy Lockhart pulls him up to pose for photographers, [the child] can remember the times that attention, praise, and publicity embarrassed [them] (Black 2003, p. 50).

While the value of fantasy for gifted, and typical children alike is easily supported in the literature due to the widespread view of the genre as a form of children’s fiction, the value of the genre for adults suffers from the same assumptions (Kurtz 2007). Fantasy’s importance for adult readers, however, has been argued in certain circles for fifty years or more, with J.R.R. Tolkien drawing on the prevailing notions of fantasy as beneficial for children, and extending it to explicitly include adults (Kurtz 2007): ‘[I]f fairy story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults’ (Tolkien, cited in Kurtz 2007, pp. 574-5). Tolkien lists the qualities that fantasy stories have – fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation – and argues that not only do adults have need of these elements, but they have a greater need than children do (Kurtz 2007). C.S. Lewis – a friend and contemporary of Tolkien’s – supported a similar viewpoint, arguing that, in relation to the significance of fantasy for adults, “nothing about Story has been so often misunderstood” as the element of “the marvellous and supernatural” (cited in Kurtz 2007, p. 575).

Fantasy authors, who know the genre best, hold a unique position from which to remark upon the emotional value and wonder of their chosen genre – both for children and adults alike (Black 2003). Cooper, author of *The Dark is Rising* series writes of the ability for fantasy’s ‘wonderful space’ to catch a child’s imagination and carry them beyond the world, beyond reality, beyond boundaries – transported into a ‘dream theatre’ (cited in Black 2003, p. 54). T.A. Barron,
author of the series *The Lost Years of Merlin*, discusses the ‘emotional truth’ that fantasy provides the reader – a belief that the emotional elements of the story are as honest as if they had occurred within the real world (2001, p. 54).

Finally, Tolkien – arguably the grandfather of the modern fantasy genre, who wrote of the hope and strength that reading fantasy can bring, said: ‘[Fantasy] does not deny the existence of… sorrow and failure… it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat… giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief (cited in Sandner 2004, p. 4). Hedy too, finds this joy in her experiences of Sanctuary – a joy and hope that carries her through the darkest times of her life, and can potentially help readers of ‘The Course’ to find a similar pleasure.
CHAPTER FIVE – BIBLIOThERAPY IN FANTASY, A LITERATURE REVIEW

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, the Effects of Trauma, and Bibliotherapy in Robin Hobb’s *The Liveship Traders* Trilogy.

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the development of psychological symptoms after directly experiencing, witnessing, or learning of a traumatic event (Cook-Cottone 2004). Whilst such events can lead to a variety of other psychiatric disorders such as dissociative and borderline personality disorders, depression, substance abuse, oppositional defiant disorder, and attention deficit disorder (Wheeler 2007), PTSD is the central focus of this section.

Traumatic stress can stem from a varied combination of factors and actions: naturally occurring events such as hurricanes, or man-made events such as terrorism; events within close physical and emotional quarters such as domestic violence, or physically distant, but emotionally close incidents such as the Challenger tragedy; and physically close, but emotionally detached events such as the fatal accident of a stranger (Cook-Cottone 2004). The levels of stress resultant from these occurrences can be acute – as in the case of rape, or chronic – such as is the case with years of exposure to war or abuse. It can occur in isolation, as with a single event in an otherwise healthy life, or as part of a layered experience of community chaos and stress (Cook-Cottone 2004).

Originally brought to mainstream attention by its connection to the Vietnam War (Putman 2009), PTSD has been related to a soldier’s war experience under many names since it was first described in World War One as ‘shell shock’ (Westlund 2014). In World War Two, it was relabelled as ‘battle fatigue’, during Vietnam as ‘post-Vietnam syndrome’, and in the 1980s as posttraumatic stress disorder (Westlund 2014). Currently, however, there is a growing debate over this terminology. Westlund states that ‘many veterans consider their distress to be an appropriate
response to the trauma and violence they have experienced’ (2014). Within the Canadian Forces, the term PTSD has been supplanted by that of ‘operational stress injury’, or ‘any persistent psychological difficulty [that] result[s] from operational duties performed while serving’ (Westlund 2014, p. 48). This terminology is preferred by many veterans, as it places the emphasis upon their suffering as an injury, rather than a mental illness (Westlund 2014). Whatever it is labelled as, however, it is clear that there is a significant psychological cost for those who serve in wartime (Kingsley 2007). In ‘The Course’, the character of Pasha suffers from undiagnosed PTSD after returning from the battlefields of World War One. In a time when ‘shell shock’ is seen as something that is highly visible in returned soldiers, Pasha’s ‘high-functioning’ PTSD allows him the dubious benefit of pretending that the war has not taken a significant psychological price from him.

In the case of the Traders’ liveship character Paragon, whose violent past and resultant suffering form one of the central themes of the series, his traumatic stress stems from a significant number of incidents in his history – some of which equate to the effects of being a prisoner of war – and begin with his ‘birth’ as a liveship – a vessel made from living wood that quickens with the lifeblood of its family (Hobb 1999):

Six months later, the Paragon came home. He was found floating in the mouth of the harbour, keel up… And tangled in the cargo net were the fish-eaten remains of Uto Ludluck and his son Kerr… But perhaps most horrible of all was that the ship had quickened… As the water slipped away to bare the figurehead… [Paragon] cried aloud in a boy’s voice, “Mother! Mother, I’ve come home!”… The bereft and frightened ship was inconsolable, sobbing and calling for days (Hobb 1999, pp. 261-2).

This quickening not only creates its own traumatic after effects, but also activates the latent personality issues that already lie within Paragon’s makeup. As a ship that is built from the disparate personalities of combatant dragons, and the multiple damaged psyches of the Ludluck family, Paragon struggles to retain a singular sense of self:
How had [Amber] known… just where to put her hands to reach each of them, both of them, all of him at once?...
“You are not a Ludluck,” the Greater [said inside Paragon]. “We are dragons.”
“Yes we are dragons, and we wish to live.” It was the Lesser, managing to insert a thought of his own.
“Silence!” the Greater one quashed him. Paragon’s list became more marked as the Greater asserted his control…
“What of me?” Paragon cried out wildly… “But what of me?”
“Be with us,” the Greater said. “Or do not be. That is the only choice that remains to you” (Hobb 2001, pp. 556-8).

These initial traumas are magnified by the abuse that Paragon suffers through his physical and emotional connection to his family member, Kennit Ludluck. Over many years, Paragon absorbs the pain and the secrets of their shared abuse, and keeps them buried deep within himself.

This level of mental avoidance is central to the presentation of trauma, when an experience becomes so overwhelming that it is ‘not fully processed and instead is stored as it was at the time of the disturbing event in a state-specific form and does not get linked to other networks in an adaptive way’ (Wheeler 2007, p. 134). An ‘intense affect’ occurs, along with the isolation of thoughts, emotions, and sensations that are ‘locked into the memory network’ (Wheeler 2007, p. 134). In ‘The Course’, Pasha refuses to process the traumatic events that occurred to him, burying them deeply within himself, isolating his thoughts and emotions from the event: “Some mornings it feels as though I’m shuffling through a fog,” [Pasha said]… “And then you keep asking me what’s wrong when you know that I don’t want to talk about it.” (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 224).

Such levels of isolation, and a lack of processing results in unstable, easily triggered memories – as is the case with Paragon:

“Paragon I… I don’t hate you… But I don’t understand you either,” she said sadly. “Sometimes you speak and… without warning, you are a spoiled ten year old.”
Twelve years old. Nearly a man, damn you, and if you don’t learn to act like a man on this voyage, you’ll never be a man, you worthless, whining, titty-pup. [Paragon] put his hands to his face… He moved one hand, to put it firmly over his mouth so the sob would not escape. Don’t let her look at me just now. Don’t let her see me (Hobb 1999, pp. 673-4);
Paragon’s memories and trauma are not only rooted in the suffering of his shattered psyche, or in the physical abuse that he and Kennit suffered as prisoners of the pirate Igrot, but also in the sexual abuse that Kennit endured as a boy at Igrot’s hands: ‘What do you want of the boy-priest? Do you desire him, [Kennit]? He stirs in your fever dreams memories of what you were. Would you do as you were done by?’ (Hobb 2000, p. 38). This re-creation of abuse, and the journey from victim to abuser is not uncommon with sexual abuse trauma. In the research example of ten-year old Gerry who was sexually abused by his older brother, the boy projected elements of his own abuse onto his younger siblings in order to try and gain control of his own feelings of helplessness – placing his siblings into the role of victim (Putman 2009). It is for this same reason that Kennit eventually rapes Paragon’s companion and crew member, Althea: “‘You’ve crossed the line,’” a tiny voice at his wrist observed coldly. “What made you do it, Kennit? Was that the only way to banish the memories finally, by giving them to someone else?’” (Hobb 2001, p. 623).

Their experience of sexual abuse also warps and colours how Paragon sees sexual intimacy between human beings, as can be seen when he senses Althea and Paragon’s captain, Brashen within his hold:

Paragon turned his senses inward, seeking. Something was happening. Something dangerous, something frightening. He had known this before, and he braced himself for the wrenching agony and shame of it. When humans came together like that, it always meant pain for the weaker one… He didn’t understand this… If Brashen did not mean to punish [Althea], if he was not trying to master her with pain, then why was he doing this?... He clenched his hands to his chest. He would not scream. He would not (Hobb 2001, pp. 302-3).

This deep link between the trauma of rape, and the trauma of physical violence that is witnessed, suffered, and/or inflicted, weakens Paragon’s susceptibility to both. Kingsley points out the link between those who experienced sexual abuse as children and those who suffered from battle-related PTSD as adults (2007). In a number of studies it was found that Vietnam veterans
suffering from PTSD had higher amounts of sexual and physical abuse in childhood compared to those without PTSD (Kingsley 2007).

Putman writes that survivors of sexual abuse often display PTSD-related symptoms, including mood disorders, anger and frustration, self-harm, and ‘a pervasive distrust of others’ (2009, p. 81). In order to try and avoid the trauma associated with thoughts, feelings, and activities that recall the abuse, the sufferer will often begin the process of dissociation during the course of the trauma, and will eventually present with dissociative symptoms (Putman 2009). Paragon acts as physical manifestation of this dissociation when Kennit is abused as a child:

Paragon had discovered… [that he] could take away the pain and the nightmares and even the bad memories. Not completely, of course… But he could absorb the pain just as he absorbed the blood from [Kennit’s] beatings. He could dim the agony and soften the edges of Kennit’s recall… It demanded that he keep for himself all that he took away from Kennit. The sharp humiliation and indignity, the stabbing pain and stunned bewilderment and the scorching hatred all became Paragon’s, to keep hidden forever deep inside him (Hobb 2001, p. 366).

Not only is such dissociation damaging, it is also ultimately unsuccessful in its goal of avoidance: ‘Hiding [the memories] for so long should have made them go away, should have made them not matter. Instead they had festered like a boil… and poisoned everything’ (Hobb 2001, p. 604).

Such memory-avoidance, and dissociation, can also have lasting effects upon a person’s development and functioning – often leading to a regression, or retardation of mental growth, or a loss of previously acquired skills (Putman 2009). Paragon as a vessel for Kennit’s denial, illustrates the developmental risks of repressing traumatic memories and events: ‘[Paragon] had reverted today to his most infantile behaviour, which included name-calling and sand-throwing’ (Hobb 2000, p. 559); ‘[Being e]ven. A boy’s concept. But the soul of Paragon had always been a boy’s
soul, abandoned and forsaken… Paragon had remained a boy, with a boy’s logic, while Kennit had grown to be a man. A man could face hard truths’ (Hobb 2001, p. 534).

These developmental delays can also create physical changes in the brain – with shrinkages found in the regions of the brain that relate to memory, learning, regulation of affect, and emotional expression in adults who suffered from continuous abuse when children (Cook-Cottone 2004). Paragon’s loss of his logbooks on his last return to Bingtown act as a metaphor for this loss of memory function and learning: “Those bold enough to venture aboard [Paragon] told of a ship stripped to its bare bones… Even his logbooks were gone, and depriving of all his memories, the liveship muttered and laughed and cursed to himself, all sense run out of his words like sand out of a shattered hourglass’ (Hobb 1999, p. 265); “I don’t remember. There is a lot I can’t remember, you know. My logbooks are gone.” “Sometimes not remembering is the easiest thing to do,” [replied Amber]’ (Hobb 2000, p. 14).

Dissociation, and its detrimental effects, are one of a myriad of behaviours and effects that can occur with PTSD and traumatic disorders. As trauma tends to disconnect the person ‘physiologically, emotionally, spiritually, cognitively, interpersonally, and socially’ (Wheeler 2007, p. 132), trauma symptoms are often organised into three overlapping categories: hyperarousal, or the persistent expectation of danger, real or otherwise; intrusion, or the re-enactment of the trauma, voluntarily or otherwise; and constriction, or the altering of a person’s consciousness in order to avoid the real world (Wolpow & Askov 1998). Hyperarousal also tends to create ‘all-or-nothing’ reactions in sufferers – an impaired ability to regulate their emotional responses, whether they be anxiety, anger, or intimacy (Wolpow & Askov 1998). This is clearly demonstrated in the character of Pasha in ‘The Course’, who experiences intrusion through the frequent occurrence of nightmares: “It was just a bad night last night.” Hedy tried not to point out that most nights were bad nights these days. Too much morphine, or not enough, and Pasha would wake screaming in the darkness of their tiny bedroom’ (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 224); ‘She would fall asleep with
the warmth of Pasha’s body wrapped around her like a protective blanket, and she sometimes liked to think that her presence was enough to keep Pasha’s nightmares at bay for a little while’ (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 224); and hyperarousal through his inability to contain his emotions, and his expectation of future danger:

“He’s just tired,” she said lightly, a brittle smile on her face as she took Nikola’s empty glass from his hand, and picked up Pasha’s from the end table.

“Yes, I noticed,” Nikola replied, watching the door Pasha had left by. “Tired and angry.”

He looked at Hedy. “Is he always like that?”

Hedy waved away the question. “His wound bothers him sometimes… and it can make him a little…” Paranoid, angry, empty. “…Irritable.” (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 244);

“I married a man who would never hurt someone he claimed to love. Who wouldn’t petrify his three year-old son, because he doesn’t know how to deal with his own emotions. I want that man back,” she said (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 248);

and ‘Pasha’s spidery writing… spoke… of the terrible sense of foreboding he carried with him, always, waiting for some other, invisible, inevitable shoe to drop (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 255).

This lessening of emotional regulation is also evident in Paragon throughout the Traders series, as he swings from rage, to fear, to love: ‘In some ways, [Paragon’s] a frightened boy. The dangerous side of the coin is that he is an angry man, just as often’ (Hobb 2000, p. 446); ‘[Paragon’s] displays of temper and strength made it difficult for Brashen to keep workers’ (Hobb 2000, p. 487); ‘He suddenly felt sorry for Brashen. [Paragon] hated it when his feelings switched back and forth like this. But he couldn’t control them’ (Hobb 2001, p. 282).

Intrusion is also apparent in Traders, with both Paragon and Kennit subject to flashbacks that take them back to memories and moments of extreme trauma and pain:

Planks could shift a tiny bit, could give with the stresses of the water. And sometimes they could shift a bit more than that, could twist apart from each other to admit a sheet of silent water… [Paragon] jerked away from the burning memory’ (Hobb 1999, p. 671);
“Leave me alone,” Kennit whispered. He spoke not to the charm, but to the past that had reached forth and reclaimed him. Other memories, memories most deeply denied flooded back to him (Hobb 2001, pp. 753-4).

Constriction, or dissociation is also clearly evident in Traders – with Kennit and Paragon’s altering of their conscious memories. Also included in the sphere of constriction are the symptoms of substance abuse – which may also represent a form of dissociation (Wolpow & Askov 1998). The character of Pasha in ‘The Course’ demonstrates this form of dissociation through his abuse of morphine – administered at first for his war wound, and continued by him for its numbing emotional qualities: ‘Pasha… [wrote] of his pain – how he could no longer sleep without the aid of morphine’ (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 255);

Hedy tamped down the familiar chill of anxiety she felt at seeing him so comatose. Some days the drug took him like that. He refused to talk to Hedy about it, about how much he took, but she didn’t need a conversation to see that there were more empty ampoules in the rubbish than there had been a year ago (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 240).

Cook-Cottone suggests that beyond the general symptoms of PTSD there is a more severe level of effect – that of Type II trauma (2004). The sequelae that can result from this level of suffering often include depressive symptomology, learned helplessness, dissociative states of massive denial and numbing, deficient and severe coping strategies, and excessive responses to anger-provoking stimuli (Cook-Cottone 2004). Given the severity and longevity of Paragon’s symptoms, it is likely that his trauma is of this category.

Within and overlapping the sphere of general PTSD symptoms, are the sequelae of war and battle-related PTSD. Across the western experience of war-related trauma, the unique historical contexts of each conflict do not overwrite the universal themes of trauma that veterans suffer from, such as rage, guilt, shame, dehumanisation, abandonment, and betrayal (Kingsley 2007). With collective evidence from the Post-Vietnam Syndrome symptoms of guilt, self-punishment, rage, violence, numbness, and alienation (Kingsley 2007), to the feelings of rage, guilt,
shame, dehumanisation, abandonment, and betrayal found in Israeli soldiers with PTSD (Kingsley 2007), an argument can well be made for the ‘universal[ity of] psychological responses to having been in combat’ (Kingsley 2007, p. 60). In ‘The Course’, Pasha suffers from many of these symptoms, including rage, guilt, a fear of abandonment, and a fear of betrayal: ‘[Hedy turned to Pasha] “You’re so paranoid about who I spend time with, you wouldn’t even let me go home for my school friend’s wedding.”’ (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 247); ‘Pasha’s eyes were almost black with anger. “I suppose you’d rather someone like Nikola come along and whisk you away to a better life?”’ (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 247).

Two of these sequelae are also strongly evident in Traders – guilt and fear. In Paragon, as in many survivors of trauma, the two emotions are often closely linked. Kingsley writes of this association and its connection to a sufferer’s impulse control, and ‘character defenses’ (2007, p. 58). These defences are learned in order to protect the person from intimacy – as the grief of losing someone may have compromised them in the past – as well as feelings of guilt that can manifest through the memory of actions taken during trauma, and through the presence of survivor’s guilt (Kingsley 2007). Paragon holds himself aloof from loved ones in much the same way, and for much the same reasons:

[Amber] seemed, [Paragon] thought to himself, more contained and isolated than any other human he had ever known. Sometimes he suspected it was deliberate; that she only shared herself when she chose to, and then only in a limited way. Not unlike myself, he reflected, and then frowned at the thought (Hobb 2000, p. 568);

Why hadn’t [Brashen] realized that the first ones to kill were the ones closest to you, the ones who knew you best? It was the only way to eliminate the threat to yourself… Strangers had small interest in hurting you. That was always done best by your own family and friends (Hobb 2001, p. 283).

In the same way, the character of Pasha in ‘The Course’ holds himself apart from his family and loved ones, especially Hedy, even as he demands everything that Hedy can give to him. This alienation becomes one of several forces that slowly begin to destroy their relationship.
The fear that can lead to social and intimate isolation is also often precipitated by the desire to avoid intrusive thoughts and flashbacks that are unpredictable in their appearance (Westlund 2014). Hand in hand with these flashbacks go the features of hypervigilance, and hyperawareness – both of which are connected to a higher level of fear arousal (Putman 2009). Increased forms of arousal, such as sleep disturbances, irritability, difficulty concentrating, exaggerated startle responses, and aggressive outbursts have been noted in children who have been sexually abused (Putman 2009), and many of these exaggerated, aggressive responses are evident in the Traders’ Paragon: ‘Paragon darted his face down close to the man he clutched tight in both hands. For one horrific instant, Althea feared he would bite his head off’ (Hobb 2001, p. 224).

In relation to guilt, Borysenko argues that unhealthy culpability – like the guilt that can be found in trauma disorders, begins to revolve around avoiding fear, rather than sharing love (cited in Merritt 1997). This guilt begins to push moments of happiness to the background, whilst faults and fears are highlighted, resulting in a loss of joy, and an increase in fatigue, negativity, and depression (Borysenko, cited in Merritt 1997). Both Paragon and Kennit exhibit this pessimistic fatalism in Traders, with Paragon bleakly convinced of the certainty of repeating his terrible actions:

“No!” Paragon shrieked out into the night. He reached back with his fists to drum and batter on his own planking. “No!” he cried again. Denial and defiance. And hopelessness. No one ever listened… They’d take him out and he’d have to kill them all. Again (Hobb 1999, p. 579);

He knew… they said that they were going to re-float him. But he didn’t believe them. He knew this was his punishment, coming at last. They would weigh him down and pull him out under the water… It was, after all, what he deserved (Hobb 2000, pp. 563-4).

Kennit faces his own fatalistic belief in being forced to repeat the traumas of his past when he is presented with what for most people would be a joyous occasion – news of the impending birth of a child:
Now Etta would start it all over again. Was she mad? Didn’t she know what must come? Eventually, of course, he’d have to hurt the child. Not because he wanted to, but because it was inevitable… Nothing could save him, or the child… Nothing could disrupt the cycling of time. Things would happen again just as they always had. Just as they always would (Hobb 2001, p. 754).

This negativity and pessimism often coincide with some level of suicidal ideation. Preadolescents and adolescents who suffer from chronic PTSD regularly present with levels of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and issues surrounding depersonalisation (Cook-Cottone 2004).

Pasha suffers from this level of negativity and depression in ‘The Course’, as can be seen from his journal entries:

Pasha’s [journal]… spoke a little of the things that he’d wanted from his life, of the things that he’d felt were always out of his reach, but mostly it spoke of how his life had always felt like a punishment for some unknown transgression. It spoke of his pain… His whole life was shameful to him, and he’s sorry, my darling Hedy. He’s so sorry for everything… (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, pp. 255-6).

Paragon too entertains the idea of oblivion when talking to Brashen, and again with Amber:

“What choice is that?” Brashen asked uneasily.
“Stop.” Paragon spoke the word with breathless desire. “Just stop.”
“Stop what?”
“Stop being. You are such a fragile thing… It is so easy for you to stop being. Open your skin and let your salt blood flow out… [a]nd you won’t know or feel or think anything any more. You will have stopped. Stopped.” (Hobb 1999, p. 296);

Despair washed over him, colder and deeper than any storm wave. “I’d like to be dead,” [Paragon] declared. “I’d just like to stop.”
“You don’t mean that,” Amber said softly. He could hear in her voice that she knew he did (Hobb 2000, p. 16).

Brashen and Amber are horrified at the idea of essentially ‘giving up’, however, Paragon wishes only for the release that death would bring from the guilt and memories of his and Kennit’s past. Such a level of despair and hurt is exceedingly difficult to fight against from an external perspective, as suicidal people can often be regarded as ‘black hole[s] of pain. You can give and give but you just can’t fill [them] up’ (Knieper 1999, p. 360). When a traumatised person does
succumb to that extremity of depression and takes their own life, the act itself creates its own trauma in those who witness it, or who are left behind in the emotional aftermath. Hedy suffers from this trauma in ‘The Course’:

“You left me,” she began quietly, growing louder with every word she forced from her body. “You left our children, you chose to leave our children. You’ve made me question who I am, my entire life with you. I feel as though I’ve failed somehow, that I wasn’t good enough. Was our life together worth nothing to you? Did I mean that little that you couldn’t stay for me?” The leading edge of heat from the fireball hit her, and she screamed. “You abandoned me!”

There was the cool sensation of a hand on Hedy’s shoulder as Rachael came to stand beside her, and Hedy was overcome with the heartbreak that her anger had been holding at bay. “I loved you with everything I had to give,” she sobbed, her voice cracking. “And it wasn’t enough, was it?” (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 262).

Tolstoy writes of the deep spiritual damage that the loss of a loved one can inflict upon a person: ‘[When the dying creature] is a beloved and intimate human being… besides [the] horror at the extinction of life there is a severance, a spiritual wound, which… is sometimes fatal and sometimes heals, but always aches’ (2007). Whilst such pain is usually felt for any bereavement of a loved one, the pain and scarring of loss-through-suicide is usually more complex. As Conley writes, ‘many deaths leave survivors with unfinished business, but few may be said to create more of it than suicide’ (cited in Knieper 1999, p. 359).

For the survivors of a loved one’s suicide, their death can often generate questions surrounding the truth and nature of their relationship to the deceased, as well as making them call into doubt their own identity (Jordan 2008). In the case of a mother who lost her son when he hanged himself in his room after an argument with his parents, her son’s death forced her to question not only whether he had intended to die, but also whether he had truly been the boy she knew, and whether she herself was the ‘good mother’ that she had identified as (Jordan 2008). Jordan discusses the need to perform a ‘personal psychological autopsy’ after bereavement due to
suicide, as it helps the survivor to understand the death itself, as well as their own role in the act (2008, p. 681).

The pain associated with such a death becomes complicated due to the nature of suicide, as the process of grieving is coloured by the additional emotions of guilt, rejection, shame, isolation, and an intensified search for meaning (Knieper 1999). These higher rates of problematic grief in survivors can often lead to strong feelings of anger and abandonment aimed at the deceased, especially if the suicide is seen as voluntary – a ‘willful rejection or… abandonment of the survivor’ (Jordan 2008, pp. 680; 682), as in the case of Hedy: ‘[W]hy was she so damned angry? Angry enough that it drowned her grief beneath its heat’ (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 259). This in turn can create greater amounts of shame and issues of self-worth when this rejection is focused on the survivor’s sense of value (Jordan 2008). This combination of complex grief structures, as well as the real and perceived social shame of suicide can often lead to an experience of stigmatisation and social isolation, whether or not that stigma is real, or simply a projection of the survivor’s own, convoluted feelings (Knieper 1999). Whether or not this translates to an actual reduction in bereavement support or not, the survivor’s belief in the stigmatisation certainly impedes their recovery regardless (Knieper 1999).

Trauma through suicide is not the only form of trauma that manifests with social seclusion. The pessimism, guilt, and fear that leads to the isolation from loved ones also often creates a level of isolation from society in general. Wolpow and Askov write in no uncertain terms that ‘traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between the individual and his or her community’ (1998, p. 55). This disconnect from society often goes hand in hand with the destruction of trust, and a higher level of suspicion directed at other people. Kingsley writes in regards to veterans that their ‘psychological injuries have destroyed social trust’ (2007, p. 57). This distrust can often manifest as an expectation of being exploited, and a suspicion of people in positions of authority (Kingsley...
In ‘The Course’, Pasha’s distrust manifests as a mistrust of Hedy’s faithfulness and loyalty, as well as his brother’s:

Nikola helped his brother into the compartment, and turned to extend a hand to guide Hedy, but once again, Pasha darted forward to pull her into her seat himself. “Husband’s prerogative,” he said, smirking at Nikola light-heartedly (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 223);

“I— Thank you, Nikola,” [Hedy] said. “I can’t deny that I worry about the farm sometimes. I’m so glad to know that it’s well looked after.” Nikola raised his glass to her, smiling, and Hedy tried not to notice how Pasha tapped his fingers against the table in an ominous rhythm, his face like the wrath of God (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 246).

As a result of this mistrust and suspicion, trauma survivors often have heightened reactions to lies and untruths, as can be seen in Paragon’s positive reaction to Amber’s avoidance of an outright lie:

“I am called Amber.”
“But that is not your name.”
“I’ve had a number of names… This is the one that suits me best, here and now.” She could, he reflected, simply have lied to him and said it was her name. But she had not. He extended an open hand toward the sound of her voice (Hobb 1999, p. 512).

In addition to a greater emphasis on the value of truth, Paragon also suffers from a significant lack of empathy during his disconnection from Kennit, and from people and the community in general. It is only once he begins to reconnect that his empathic link to other living beings begins to return: ‘To his surprise, [Paragon] felt genuine sorrow that he had to hurt her. He tried to remember the last time he had such a feeling, and could not. Was this… the ability to feel sympathy? It would take time to adjust to feeling such things’ (Hobb 2001, p. 818).

This gradual return of empathy, along with other, healthier emotions is part of Paragon’s slow ascent towards better mental health, and a reconciliation with those things that he cannot change – about himself and his past. Tolstoy writes that ‘silence will not cure a disease. On the
contrary, it will make it worse’ (cited in Knieper 1999, 353). Such is the case with trauma and PTSD. Bibliotherapy’s possible role within the management of PTSD is minimally explored in the literature, however, the ability for fiction to present examples of trauma via a connection to the reader is noted. Marlene, an adolescent student who suffered trauma at home from an alcoholic father, when reading Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Black Cat” identified the abusive alcoholic in the narrator’s voice, and proceeded to discuss the story along with her class (Wolpow & Askov 1998). Wolpow and Askov argue that these sorts of narratives can put the ‘as-yet-unspoken horror’ into a manageable context, and out of these contexts can arise a ‘new sense of order and continuity which, in turn, helps to reestablish [sic] a sense of community’ (1998, p. 55).

Fiction’s ability to create these manageable contexts is one reason, amongst others, that non-fictional self-help books have been found to be less than effective for PTSD, even as Brewster, Sen and Cox acknowledge that more investigation into its uses for PTSD are needed for more conclusive results (2012). There is an argument to be made for the use of more emotive, fictional literature, as it can address and echo what a trauma sufferer is feeling, rather than simply directing a reader towards what actions to take ‘should they develop symptoms [of trauma]’ (Ruzek 2008, p. 334). However, even taking this into account, the value of bibliotherapy for direct use by PTSD and trauma sufferers is debatable. As Wolpow and Askov state in an article section rather unambiguously titled ‘Bibliotherapy: No remedy for PTSD’, the treatment for adolescent trauma usually spans several years, rather than the far briefer timespan usually allotted for bibliotherapy, and so perhaps bibliotherapy’s role can be more appropriately applied as part of a support team that includes school counsellors, mental health professionals, and literary teachers (1998). Ruzek also maintains the failure of bibliotherapy to produce significant change in individuals with PTSD, remarking that the case is yet to be made for psychoeducation and trauma (2008).

In light of this, perhaps the most effective use of bibliotherapy for PTSD lies with the families and loved ones of trauma sufferers, allowing them not only to participate in the recovery
of the survivor, but also helping to communicate the ‘unspeakable memories’, and the ‘untold stories’ of the sufferer through a ‘personal understanding of what [is] read’ (Wolpow & Askov 1998, p. 51). This purging of traumatic events to an empathetic audience is vitally important for PTSD sufferers, as the ‘silence’ that Tolstoy speaks of exacerbates the traumatic damage, leading to ‘increased PTSD symptomology’ (Wolpow & Askov 1998, p. 51). This ‘sharing’ can also occur within classrooms, where trauma bibliotherapy can be used to generate open discussions on such topics between those children who ‘know’ the sort of traumatic things that can occur to people, and their peers who may or may not be suffering from similar situations (Wolpow & Askov 1998). From this, the children’s experiences can be placed in a context, and a process of trust and mutual self-respect can be initiated (Wolpow & Askov 1998). For these reasons, ‘The Course’ has been crafted in such as fashion as to be beneficial to those who are dealing with PTSD in a family member or loved one. Hedy’s journey includes her necessary dealings with Pasha’s PTSD and how she manages her life around it, and beyond it, rather than focussing on the direct experience of posttraumatic stress.

Paragon’s journey is a slow illustration of his history and trauma. When he finally recovers his logbooks, they act as the beginning of his (and his loved ones) coming to terms with his ‘untold stories’:

“The log-books were part of it, Brashen, but… [t]he largest part is me. It has done me good to look back and see my voyages through my captains’ eyes. The places I’ve been, Brashen, and the things I’ve seen, just in my life as a ship; they’re all mine… The pain was just a part of all that… I can take all of my pasts, keep them, and determine my own future. I don’t have to be what anyone made me, Brashen. I can be Paragon (Hobb 2001, p. 721).

Sherman explores the importance of family responses to a loved one’s mental illness, focusing on normalising the varying reactions and on how families can support themselves and their loved ones, retaining hope, and considering different forms of advocacy (2006). More specifically, families can be ‘instructed about numerous red flags that may signify a potential crisis,
as well as specific behavioral and communication strategies to implement during stressful times’ (Sherman 2006, p. 215). These indications are signified to readers in *Traders* in a similarly beneficial way:

“He’s like a boy in adolescence. He has decided that nothing is the way he believed it to be, and is reconstructing his whole vision of the world.” [Amber] took a deep breath as if to say something important… and said instead, “It’s a very intense time for him. It is not necessarily bad, what he’s doing, but it’s deeply introspective. For Paragon, that means sifting through some very bad memories” (Hobb 2000, p. 885);

Did the others hear the desperation behind the ship’s hopeful words? If Paragon failed at this last grasp for wholeness, [Brashen] suspected that the ship would spiral down into madness… He dared not trust the ship’s sudden elation. It seemed a mirrored distortion of his formerly bleak moods. Could it not vanish just as swiftly and arbitrarily? (Hobb 2001, p. 721).

Bibliotherapy can not only strengthen the flow of communication from family to trauma sufferer, but also from sufferer to family. In the case of ten-year-old Gerry, mentioned earlier, the use of bibliotherapy and creative expression allowed him to express his feelings about his abuse to his family, as well as his counsellor (Putman 2009). This falls in line with much of the theory surrounding veteran PTSD therapy, which generally notes that ‘healing from trauma depends upon [the] communalization of the trauma – being able to safely tell the story to someone who is listening and who can be trusted to retell it truthfully to others in the community’ (Shay, cited in Kingsley 2007, p. 65).

In regards to trauma that is suffered through suicide, bibliotherapy and fantasy fiction can offer a particularly unique way to aid in bereavement. Historically, bibliotherapy has been used to help treat the complicated bereavement of suicide since the 1950s (Knieper 1999). As suicide is often felt as a rejection of the survivor, the limitless imagination of fantastical bibliotherapy can offer examples of discovering a ‘continuing bond’ with the deceased in order to symbolically deal with any unfinished psychological business – something which can be ‘enormously helpful to survivors’ (Jordan 2008, p. 684). This is illustrated in ‘The Course’, when Hedy – through the
fantastical nature of Sanctuary – is given the opportunity to deal with some of the unfinished business between her and Pasha:

“There are some things that I never had the chance to say to you, and some things that I should have said when I had the opportunity.” Hedy steeled herself with a breath, and looked Pasha in the eye. “I think you used me. I think you took our love and turned it into a way to escape your family and your home – the life you hated, and then you couldn’t bear it when leaving everything behind didn’t make things better. You took me and turned me into someone I didn’t like facing in the mirror… Everything that you and I went through, the total sum of our life together, and all that I’m left with is that sense of dread. The fear that Nikola will be just like you, that if I let myself love someone like that again, it’ll finish off what you started. Well, I’m not the girl who saved you from the river anymore. I’m not even the same woman you married. I’m sick of living in the shadow of your misdirected self-hatred.” She stepped forward. “I loved you, once. You loved me too, I know it. But it wasn’t enough, and I was too young, and too close to you to see it.” She smiled at him and Pasha smiled in return, a little bemused. “Goodbye, Pasha.”

She pulled him into a hug, feeling the warmth of him, inhaling the scent of him. He held her back, silent as the grave, and Hedy let him go, watching him fade away like paint in the rain (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, pp. 274-5).

Beyond the connection between a trauma sufferer and their loved ones, is the relationship between a sufferer and their similarly afflicted peers. According to Knieper, an ‘overwhelming number’ of suicide survivors have remarked that the most helpful and effective support came from other survivors (1999, p. 357): ‘Kathy Jones upholds this idea: “At my mother’s funeral, a lady came up and shared that her mother had completed [sic] suicide. She was the only one that could console me, she had been there”’ (Knieper 1999, p. 357). For children this sharing and identifying is also incredibly important, with stories that describe common experiences of loss and change helping children to develop an awareness that ‘others have dealt with similar problems’ (Ayyash-Abdo 2001, p. 426).

This identification and awareness goes beyond the trauma of suicide and bereavement as well. In the Michigan state penal system, an inmate wrote about his traumatic life story during a language experience activity, and prison inmates now use these books ‘as a model to acknowledge the tragedies of their own past so that they may eventually learn to interact more positively with
[in this case] their children’ (Wolpow & Askov 1998, p. 54). Not only can the connection between trauma survivors create healing and a sense of understanding on the part of the sufferer, the sharing of their own stories can also help others who may find themselves in a similar situation. Paragon finds himself in such a place at the end of Traders. After he has related the true story of his and Kennit’s trauma at the hands of Igrot – as well as his own, earlier ordeals, Paragon finds himself in a position where he is able to use his own experiences to aid Althea in coming to terms with her traumatic memories:

For a time, [Althea] resisted, gripping [the memory] tightly. “You can’t take it from me. It was that horrible. It was that bad. No one would understand it, no one would believe it. If you take the pain away, you make a lie of what I endured.”

“No. No, my dear, I make it only a memory, instead of something that you live continuously in your mind. Leave it in the past. It cannot hurt you. I will not let it.”

It was like having a deep splinter pulled. There was the dragging pin of the extraction, and then the clean sting of fresh blood flowing. Something clamped tight inside her suddenly eased. [Paragon] had been right. She did not have to grip her pain. She could let it go. The memory was still there. It had not vanished, but it had changed. It was a memory, a thing from her past… She did not have to keep it as a part of herself. She could allow herself to heal. Her tears were diluted in the rain that ran down her face (Hobb 2001, p. 897).

Both Paragon and Althea find that the sharing of their pain lessens its impact – the silence of grief making way for the solidarity of mutual understanding. Within this sharing of trauma lies the power of bibliotherapy – the ability to identify and co-relate one’s own ordeals with that of someone else’s, to lessen the weight of negative experiences by recognising that they are also experienced by others, both in actuality and within the representations in fiction.

Abuse, Abandonment, and Bibliotherapy in Jane Routley’s Mage Heart Trilogy, and Tamora Pierce’s Circle of Magic Quartet.

ABUSE AND THE MAGE HEART TRILOGY.
Emotional and physical abuse, or intimate partner violence (IPV) committed against women is often comprised of a complex network of processes and stages – many of which occur over a span of years (Bouhnik 2007). The gradual process of victimisation begins with emotional and cognitive changes, can sometimes end with the separation from the abusive partner, and according to Miles, involves five chronological stages: Entering the violent relationship, dealing with the violence, undergoing a loss of self, re-assessing the violent relationship, and then reforming the self (1985). All of these stages may not apply to all women, however, and those that do experience them may regress to earlier stages during their abuse and recovery (Bouhnik 2007).

Throughout victimisation and abuse, several cognitive and behavioural processes can occur for women, including:

- **Consciousness raising.** The seeking out of information and the gaining of a better understanding of a person’s situation. This is often where bibliotherapy can be used.
- **Self-revaluation.** The cognitive and emotional reassessing of a person’s values in light of the problematic behaviour.
- **Environmental reevaluation.** Relates to the assessment of how the problematic behaviour affects a person’s environment.
- **Social liberation.** The increasing awareness and acceptance of a potential, abuse-free lifestyle.
- **Helping relationships.** The relationship with, and acceptance of help from, other people.
- **Self-liberation.** Occurs when the person decides to change the problematic behaviour, and commits to it.
- **Stimulus control.** Controlling the circumstances or causes that can trigger the problematic behaviour (Burke et al. 2004).

These stages of change and self-awareness go hand in hand with sources of help that abused women reach for, and many often start looking for help by reaching outwards from the self (Bouhnik 2007). Initially, the abused woman attempts to rely on her own inner resources, and if this fails, she can turn to the informal support of friends and family (Bouhnik 2007). If this level of support fails as well, the woman can turn finally to formal sources such as the police, and health professionals (Bouhnik 2007).
The specific types of help and support sought within these levels of resources obviously varies from person to person, however, research into the areas of IPV have revealed that the particular types of help that women look for include: emotional support, information on strategies of coping with abuse and why abuse occurs, information on the choices available to her, counselling, physical protection and refuge, medical and financial assistance, help with planning a course of action, and community resources (Bouhnik 2007). The result of all this positive internal change and external support is the eventual attainment of the maintenance stage. This stage is considered to be an ongoing state where the woman continues to work towards health and lessen the chance of regressing to earlier stages of change (Anderson 2003).

The scope of behaviours that can be attributed to abuse and IPV range widely, and more importantly, range beyond the physical acts of bodily harm and intimidation. Bouhnik describes ‘violence’ in relation to abuse as ‘any inappropriate behavior that is intended to maintain power and control of the male over his female partner in an intimate relationship’ (2007, p. 130). This includes physical abuse, property damage, sexual abuse, stalking, emotional and verbal abuse, economic abuse, isolating the woman, and using children (Bouhnik 2007). In Jane Routley’s Mage Heart trilogy, Dion – a young and very powerful mage, is seduced and betrayed by an incredibly manipulative and ravenous demon masquerading as a handsome, morally ambiguous nobleman known as Andre, or Bedazzer in his demon form. Many of their encounters and his subsequent actions fall into the categories above, such as stalking:

How had [Bedazzer] got here? I hadn’t been thinking of him, had I? He laughed “…You do not need to think of Bedazzer to have him near. I watch. I am always watching you.” “Always?” I croaked… All I wanted was the safety of my mirrorless bedroom, though I knew now that safety was an illusion (Routley 2000a, pp. 230-4);

No matter where I went or what I was doing, [Andre] could be relied upon to find me alone at least once a day… Once I accused him of following me around. Unabashed, he explained that it was all part of his plan to seduce me (Routley 2000a, p. 338);
Sexual abuse:

Kitten explained that some noblemen who wished to undertake seductions used dream-sending spells to soften resistance. The sender merely rubbed the spell on his temples and thought the thoughts he wished to send. Dreamers had little resistance to such sendings… “It’s a low trick,” she said. I was aghast to think that Andre had known about all the dreams I had been having about him (Routley 2000a, p. 382);

And verbal abuse and isolation:

“You thought you’d escaped me, didn’t you, little mage,” he shouted in his grating demon voice. “You thought you were rid of Bedazzer, but I know where you are now. Whore! Did you think another could take Bedazzer’s place? You are mine. You belong to me and no one else. No one else shall have you.” His voice was like a whip lashing and lashing. I wanted to scream, wanted to run, but terror froze me… “You are mine,” yowled Bedazzer. “I will never let go of you. Whore! You will not go with any other, do you hear me?” His face was a chaos of howling (Routley 2000b, pp. 336-7).

Like Dion, Hedy also faces several of these abusive behaviours from her husband in ‘The Course’, including emotional and verbal abuse, and isolation after they move to the city.

All of these forms of abuse can lead to issues of co-dependence: ‘It’s like you can’t live with them and you can’t live without them. It’s like drugs’, and learned helplessness: ‘Everyone always told me how dumb I am… I don’t think I can really do it’ (Carlson-Catalano 1998, p. 106). Dion exhibits both of these across the trilogy – with her lingering desire for the feelings Bedazzer conjured in her remaining long after his betrayal and revelation:

I told her… how I had fought hand-to-hand with the freed demon [Bedazzer] in a great magical battle. It was hardest of all to tell her of how when I had almost run out of strength, Bedazzer had tempted me with offers of belonging and union. I could hardly bear to tell her how tempted I had been. I had never told anyone of… how linked I still felt with Andre/Bedazzer (Routley 2000b, p. 358).

She also suffers from a level of self-doubt and learned helplessness in regards to her powers and abilities, mostly instilled by her conservative foster father, Michael:
When I was almost seventeen, I sat my final exam three years early and passed ahead of students even ten years my senior. Michael was both gratified and worried. He would not let my results be publicly displayed… As he explained to me… [t]here was no need to be too proud of my results. They were merely the result of all those years of special teaching (Routley 2000a, pp. 41-2);

“Why do you think you failed [Michael]?” [asked Kitten.]
“He said so. I think. Often he would say… I don’t know. He adopted me to prove that you could teach women advanced magic. I know he concluded that you couldn’t (Routley 2000a, p. 227).

Dion’s sheltered, conservative upbringing endangers her recovery from her experiences with Andre/Bedazzer, as it does with many women. Religious counselling that instructs a woman that the abuse is her fault, or within her control if she becomes a more obedient partner, and the internal barriers of a woman who believes in the patriarchal role of a woman in a relationship, or suffers from her own conservative religious principles can all affect her ability to take action when faced with abuse (Bouhnik 2007). Dion, who has been taught of the evils of sex, whores, and losing one’s virginity, takes on her father’s patriarchal views against herself and other women: ‘It had been an accident, for God’s sake. I was rationalizing. I had almost touched the demon’s hand that first time. I could almost hear Michael telling me that one was never an innocent victim’ (Routley 2000a, p. 86).

All of the above results and factors apply to both physical and emotional abuse; however, the distinction between the two forms of mistreatment is not as great as may be immediately apparent. Physical abuse can create a high level of emotional chronic pain in sufferers in the same way that emotional abuse does. In a study of abused women, Carlson-Catalano found that every woman interviewed used essentially the same words to describe their pain: “It is not the physical pain, but the emotional pain… that I feel” “[that] keeps me up at night” “that I remember” “that hurts” “[that is] lasting” “[that comes from] his words playing in my mind like a record player”’ (1998, p. 107). Hedy suffers in a similar way in ‘The Course’, unable to move past the emotional
pain caused by her husband Pasha for a significant length of time after the fact, struggling against the effect it has on her life, and the choices she makes.

As Karakurt and Silver state, ‘abusive behavior does not always involve tangible violence’ (2013, p. 804). The moniker of emotional abuse is attributed to any non-physical behaviour that, at its base, has the intention of creating control, punishment, submission, or isolation of another person through the use of fear and/or humiliation (Karakurt & Silver 2013). Similar to Bouhnik’s description of what constitutes ‘violence’, emotional abuse can include verbal assault, control, isolation, dominance, ridicule, and degradation through the use of intimate knowledge of the abused (Karakurt & Silver 2013).

Yoshihama, Horrocks, and Kamano give examples of some of the reported experiences of emotional abuse suffered by women, including a partner trying to keep her from seeing friends, trying to restrict her contact with her family, insisting on knowing her whereabouts at all times, ignoring her and treating her with indifference, getting angry if she spoke to another man, frequently suspecting she was unfaithful, insulting, belittling and humiliating her in front of other people, scaring or intimidating her, and threatening to hurt her (2009, p. 648). Within ‘The Course’, Pasha uses emotional manipulation to try and control Hedy, especially when it comes to his jealousies over where Hedy’s affections lie:

“I suppose you’d rather someone [else]… Well, I’m the only one that really wants you, Hedy. If it weren’t for me, you’d have become an old maid like your mother, toiling away on a farm that you’d never own.” (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 247);

“Oh. They still keep in touch, do they?” he asked blandly, and Hedy could feel her anger rising.
“You know damn well they write to me, because you read the letters. You don’t think I can’t tell when someone’s been rifling through the envelopes in my dresser drawer?” Pasha smiled at her, but it was more of a snarl – an animal cornered in a cage (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 247).
Andre/Bedazzer exhibits many of these actions in his relationship with Dion, using indifference – and the flaunting of other sexual partners (Jewkes 2010), as a weapon twice over – first during his attempted courtship of Dion: ‘[Andre] did not look at me at all when we were in company together and no longer sent minstrels or servants to wait on me… I tried not to watch as he flirted outrageously with various other ladies’ (Routley 2000a, p. 326); and again after she balks the morning after their first tryst:

Lord Andre Gregorov was also acting as if nothing had happened at Ardyne and with a vengeance. His exploits seem to have become even more outrageous… Had he not persuaded two women… to come to bed with him at the same time? Was he not the bold fellow who had seduced a certain young lordling away from the Duke’s brother, Lord Pell?… [I] tried not to show how much his exploits upset me. It didn’t grow easier (Routley 2000a, p. 380).

Emotional abuse is often a precursor to physical abuse, with some physical actions that create emotional trauma acting as a bridge between the two forms (Karakurt & Silver 2013). Such physical behaviour can include throwing objects, kicking walls, shaking a fist at the abused, driving recklessly, threatening to destroy objects that the victim holds dear, and harming pets (Karakurt & Silver 2013). Pasha transitions to this quasi-physical abuse in ‘The Course’:

Pasha looked livid, but it was as though his rage had nowhere to go, no one to target. Instead, he whirled, lightning fast, and hurled the whiskey glass he’d been holding against the wall as viciously as he could. There was a shatter of glass, and the shards scattered across the floor in a terrifying spray of shrapnel (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 248).

In Mage Heart, when Andre is revealed as the demon, Bedazzer, he uses both physical abuse and the threat of cruelty to hurt Dion:

Suddenly he grabbed me by my hair and dragged me to my feet… and screamed, “Hey, bitch!… If you had listened to Bedazzer, I would not be enslaved. This is all your fault.”… He threw me back against the wall, picked me up, smashed me against the wall again and held me there… Horrible visions filled my mind. Vision of rape, dismemberment, torture. I was sobbing with terror. I could not help it. “Yes, all interesting,” purred the demon. “I could enjoy your essence in all kinds of ways. Slow like a worm in a flower.” (Routley 2000a, pp. 433-4);
After which, he uses the rape of Dion’s close friend to emotionally abuse her further:

“Look at this.” Bedazzer pulled at his bloody shirt. “This is the blood of your beloved friend. Norval had me rape her. Yes. Rape her... In demon form. You know what that means, don’t you.” I remembered the first time that I’d seen him. That huge spiky phallus. I shuddered.
“No!”
“Yes! It was agony for her. She will die of those wounds soon.” (Routley 2000a, pp. 442-3).

The resultant effects of these forms of emotional abuse on women are just as detrimental as physical abuse (Karakurt & Silver 2013), and can manifest in poorer health, suicidal ideation, difficulty in completing daily tasks, general fear and anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression (Jewkes 2010; Karakurt & Silver 2013). Apart from the fear that Dion endures from Bedazzer’s lingering presence in her life, she also suffers from low self-esteem due in part to her dealings with the demon, especially when it comes to her new love interest, Shad: ‘[Shad] had saved us both and I felt disposed to like and trust him, but as I reminded myself now, I was unfit to make those judgements’ (Routley 2000b, p. 148);

“I have no intention of marrying. For God’s sake, I’m not the kind of woman men want to marry.”
“Why not? Because of your power?... And don’t worry that you’re not a virgin”...
I’d meant that nobody would ever care enough about me to want to marry me, of course, especially after they found out about Andre (Routley 2000b, p. 217);

and ‘I pulled a face at [Kitten]. I knew full well that “beautiful” was no more than the illuminating effect of fame on a face and figure that were perfectly ordinary’ (Routley 2000c, pp. 27-8). Hedy suffers from a similar level of low self-esteem after her relationship with Pasha in ‘The Course’, believing that she will make the same mistakes with Nikola if she attempts a relationship with him:

“I can’t go through it all again, not after everything I went through with Pasha. All that pain, and love, and fear mixed up together until I couldn’t tell the feelings apart anymore. The dread of realising that I didn’t really recognise my own husband anymore, someone that I’d known since I was thirteen years old. I just can’t bear having to face all of that
again, not with anyone, but especially not with you, Nikola. It’d be like choosing to make the same mistakes all over again – another Astakhov…” (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 272).

Karakurt and Silver argue that younger women are more at risk of emotional abuse due to their complex amalgam of social, cultural, and economic factors, which place a higher value on emotional connectivity, rather than independence (Karakurt & Silver 2013). A young woman with this set of values, and ‘a lack of awareness concerning the parameters of a healthy relationship’ (Karakurt & Silver 2013, p. 816), can decide that the emotional abuse of a partner is ‘not too big a cost to bear for the benefits of remaining in a romantic relationship’ (Karakurt & Silver 2013, p. 816).

Dion showcases this youthful belief that romance is all – quickly forgiving Andre’s use of emotionally coercive erotic dreams, even as she recognises their manipulation: ‘I was… disgusted that he should have manipulated me in such a way. However, I forgave him with surprising ease. It quickly occurred to me that he still must be sending me dreams, and I was filled with hope that all was not over between us’ (Routley 2000a, p. 382). Dion feels the fear of losing her relationship, even whilst battling Bedazzer for her life, and the lives of her countrymen and women: “Your power would join with my hunger. Together we would be mighty.” He was lying to me. And yet I wanted so much to give into him. How could I bear to lose Andre?’ (Routley 2000a, p. 455).

Karakurt and Silver suggest that the lower rates of emotional abuse in older women stem from their maturity and experience – having learnt to create a strong social support network, having higher self-esteem, and possessing a greater knowledge of what constitutes abuse (2013). Such a change is evident in Dion as she is drawn back into political intrigues three years after her battle with Bedazzer: ‘I had changed a great deal from the shy seventeen-year-old I had once been… In those days I would never have imagined myself sleeping with a man… Strange how three years as your own mistress, surrounded by people who look up to your advice, can improve
your confidence’ (Routley 2000b, p. 238). More specifically, she learns to re-evaluate her relationship with Bedazzer from a place of knowledge, experience, and blamelessness:

I told [the emperor] all about my relationship with Andre Gregorov who had been Bedazzer in human form. I told him how Bedazzer had read my mind and become the very person who would most attract me and how he manipulated me into loving him so much that some element of that tenderness still remained in me. I told him of how for longs years I had blamed myself for loving him, of how I had felt secretly evil and unclean and of how with time and with the love of a kind and understanding husband, I had come to realize how wrong I had been to feel that (Routley 2000c, p. 261).

This change is also evident in Hedy, as she comes to terms with her previous relationship with Pasha, and gains new confidence and an understanding of the differences in her new relationship with Nikola:

“—But the scandal, Nikola. People already talk about us.”
Nikola huffed as he sat bare-chested against the headboard, his arm around Hedy as she drew pictures across his skin with her finger. “Well, if you’d just let me marry you, it wouldn’t be a scandal…”
“You can ask me as many times as you want, sweetheart, I’m still not going to say yes,” she replied, kissing his chest softly.
“But why?” he groaned, half laughing. “We love each other, so why can’t we make it official?”
“Because I like things the way they are. What we have works perfectly well.” (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 287).

It is here that bibliotherapy plays a role – giving women the knowledge of how to recognise an unhealthy relationship, the precursors of abusive behaviour, such as controlling and isolating behaviours, and how to maintain healthy relationships with social support networks, such as family and friends (Karakurt & Silver 2013). As stated in a review of Wisechild’s book, which deals with her own emotional abuse, this is what bibliotherapy does best: ‘The reader can get into the process of interaction with the author and use it for personal assessment, adjustment, growth and development’ (Wisechild 1994). It grounds the reader’s own story without analysing, and gives them permission to follow their own ‘intuitive self’ towards health (Wisechild 1994).
In relation to abuse and IPV, bibliotherapy has been found to be effective in reducing fear, as well as generating changes in the attitudes and behaviours of sufferers (Bouhnik 2007). Using bibliotherapy as a form of intervention for physical and emotional abuse sits amongst other forms of assistance, such as assertiveness training, cognitive restructuring, coping enhancement, and decision-making enhancement, and can allow a person who is in distress to identify with a literary [or non-fictional] character (Carlson-Catalano 1998; Bouhnik 2007): ‘I found [a book] in the library about different women and their stories… I reread it several times… it has been helpful’ (Carlson-Catalano 1998, pp. 107-8). This distress continues even after the abused has left the abuser – as leaving the violent situation only removes the physical, or emotional threat, not the lingering emotional scars and the shattered sense of self (Carlson-Catalano 1998). Healing is necessary for this fracturing to mend, and for the sufferer to reconnect and ‘develop a sense of wholeness’ (Carlson-Catalano 1998, p. 109).

Bibliotherapy can be the first step in support for women who initially, and most centrally, need emotional support and understanding (Bouhnik 2007). It can become part of the ‘right information at the right time’, and a form of emotional encouragement and support – information and knowledge that can be ‘useful, provide an insight or a new way of looking at problems, help to find an alternative or a solution tried by others, or bring simple relief to someone in temporary or permanent distress’ (Bouhnik 2007, pp. 117-8). This sort of support is beneficial in reducing stress, as well as allowing individuals to make decisions in a more rational state of mind, and bibliotherapy can give this – both direct information, and supportive knowledge (Bouhnik 2007).

Bibliotherapy is also particularly helpful for abuse and IPV, as it presents a form of aid that is accessible to those with physical barriers due to disability, or due to their abusive partner limiting their time away from the home, phone usage, or the people that they are allowed to meet (Bouhnik 2007). It can also serve as a form of identification, helping women to recognise and identify abusive and unhealthy behaviours in case stories and fiction, and relate them to their own lives and
relationships (Bruneau, Bubenzer & McGlothlin 2010). This identification in bibliotherapy also has the added value of illustrating the thought processes and stumbling blocks that may also be facing the abused reader.

It has been noted that a significant factor in women refusing or struggling to take action and to change behaviours is the guilt associated with abuse, and the belief that the abused is responsible for the violence that is perpetrated upon them (Anderson 2003). This – it is assumed – leads to a much higher rate of women hurt by IPV than is reported to the authorities (Bouhnik 2007). In an Israeli ministry of social affairs and social services survey carried out in 2005, it was discovered that only 27.3 per cent of abused women involved the police (Bouhnik 2007, p. 117). Dion suffers from this paralysing guilt, and it prevents her from seeking outside help: ‘I told nobody what was happening, for there was no way I could tell anybody without revealing my guilt” (Routley 2000a, p. 125). If, through bibliotherapy, an abused woman can recognise the same destructive thought patterns – and their consequences – within a character, she may also be able to recognise them in herself.

For incarcerated women who have suffered, or are recovering from IPV, reading can play a ‘central role’ in helping to free them from self-imposed forces – such as abuse – that have kept them in ‘literal and figurative states of detention’ (Sweeney 2008, p. 304). Bibliotherapy can offer – as it offers Long’s predominantly white, middle-class women – a way to not only reflect on ‘identities [that] they already have, but also to bring new aspects of subjectivity into being’ (Long, cited in Sweeney 2008, p. 305). They can connect to new meanings and relationships, to characters in the book, to themselves, and to the society in which they live (Long, cited in Sweeney 2008). In the same way as it does for free women, bibliotherapy provides a way to explore and manage their own lives, especially in a situation when little else is under their control: ‘Some people read to escape from life; we read to deal with life’ (Long, cited in Sweeney 2008, p. 305). Their emotional
involvement, and the ‘illumination of their experience[s]’ can lead the abused reader beyond the book and onto their ‘own dilemmas of selfhood’ (Long, cited in Sweeney 2008, p. 305).

Specific to incarcerated women, former prison librarian Sara Delaney argues that witnessing how problems are addressed or solved in bibliotherapy can lead inmates to not only a sense of identification, but also to a level of catharsis and a revelation of the nature of their own conflicts (cited in Sweeney 2008). Much of this identification stems from the connection between reader and character, and the sense of hope and understanding it can bring. It can allow the reader to recognise the complicity in their own victimisation – the ‘things [they] have done that [were] not in [their] own best interest… [such as] staying in a situation when [they] know it is causing [them] pain’ (Sweeney 2008, p. 316). Denise, an incarcerated African American woman, after reading Patrice Gaines’ *Laughing in the Dark* as part of a prison book club, responded that the book:

[T]ouched every part of my life, but it also showed me that I could come through it. I just stay stuck longer than [Gaines] did. Every opportunity is available now for myself, and that’s just what this book help[ed] me see, that I can’t keep living like this… I… can step out of this situation any time I want to (Sweeney 2008, p. 319).

Denise loses the ‘barrier… between self and fictional ‘other” whilst reading – reintegrating aspects of her own self in an almost therapeutic way, and arming herself with the catharsis and hope needed to effect change within her own life (Sweeney 2008, p. 322). Summarising Gaines’ book, she also summarises her realigned worldview:

Just ‘cause you’re crushed right now, don’t stop because it looks like this. It won’t look like this in the end… You know, there’s a greatness in you that you couldn’t see when that man was beating you… But if you keep on and keep on… finally you’ll get… where you can see everything (Sweeney 2008, p. 322).

This level of self-administered bibliotherapy can deepen the abused woman’s self-awareness, create new meanings from their experiences, and inspire them to ‘carve out a different
future’ (Sweeney 2008, p. 323). As Denise puts it, ‘[t]his started as just a book club, but it was kind of life-changing for me’ (Sweeney 2008, p. 323).

For Donaghy, bibliotherapy takes its place amongst several dimensions of care for abused women, including occupational, spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual care (1995). Bibliotherapy generally falls into the latter category, although it can be argued that it plays just as strong a part in the area of emotional control and expression. It serves as a validation for abused women’s experiences by reflecting, interpreting, and clarifying them – a process that is incredibly important, with forty per cent of women surveyed in a 1997 study stating that ‘the single most helpful response for a battered woman is the validation of her experience’ (Carlson-Catalano 1998, p. 108).

Bibliotherapy can also help with the exiting and re-entering of an abusive relationship that often occurs to abused women. Agencies that serve survivors recognise that these seemingly regressive behaviours are in fact part of the changing actions of the recovering abuse victim (Anderson 2003). Women that may return to the men that abuse them ‘do not return as the same women they were when they left’ (Anderson 2003, p. 227). Through the dimensions of care that include bibliotherapy, they are able to continue changing their behaviour and working towards an ultimate goal of recovery, or management.

The regrets of abuse survivors are predominantly those of a lack of action taken, rather than actions taken and regretted (Anderson 2003). The failure to keep physically and mentally healthy, to forge new directions for their lives, to participate in self-care and self-development, and to seek out information and knowledge to effect change, all feature in the guilt of survivors (Anderson 2003). Dion suffers from many regrets after her relationship with Andre/Bedazzer, especially in regards to what her actions and inactions have cost her loved ones: ‘For myself,
Kitten’s loss of favor was just another stick to beat my guilty back. In hindsight it was so obvious what Andre had been’ (Routley 2000a, p. 466);

“[H]ow can you feel yourself a failure when you have done such wonderful things in your life?”…
“How can you say that of all people?” I said in astonishment. “Bedazzer betrayed me because I was stupid and he injured you horribly once he got to you. That was my fault.”” (Routley 2000c, p. 109).

For Dion, it is her lack of action and understanding, rather than her actions that leave her with regret. For women in abusive situations, bibliotherapy allows them to not only recognise issues of abuse in their own relationships, but to also move towards taking action in their own lives, and reclaiming their own futures.

ABANDONMENT AND THE CIRCLE OF MAGIC QUARTET.

Relationship issues beyond abuse are also able to be explored and facilitated through bibliotherapy. Issues of adoption, foster care, and abandonment can be investigated and aided through book therapy, including fantasy texts. With adoption, many children exhibit greater levels of insecurity (especially when there is a weak bond with the adoptive parents), loneliness, relationship conflicts, distancing and rejection, along with issues surrounding intimacy, control, and dependence (Corder 2012). In Tamora Pierce’s Circle of Magic quartet, the four children Sandry, Tris, Daja, and Briar are ostensibly adopted and become the students and foster children of the magical dedicates Lark and Rosethorn, along with the extended ‘family’ of their other two teachers, Niko and Frostpine. While all four children come to be adopted in different ways, and due to different circumstances, all of them suffer to varying degrees from several of these issues. Tris
finds it difficult to let her new family in, showing signs of aversion to intimacy, rejection, and distancing that she slowly begins to overcome over the course of the quartet:

“I was trying to be nice.” Sandry placed the hanging on the desk… Chin high, she walked out. Tris slammed the door, and glared at it… She thinks I’m stupid enough to believe her… She thinks people never pretended to be my friend before?” (Pierce 2001, p. 65);

Tris stopped and looked back. “Lark?”
“Yes dear?”
“W-would you like to come? With us, I mean?” A part of Tris was dismayed: what had she turned into? Two months ago, she never could have made such an offer to anyone, particularly not an adult” (Pierce 1999a, p. 6).

The lightning had been so beautiful. It didn’t hurt her feelings. It didn’t tell lies. It was above everything ugly. People didn’t matter to it. [Tris] wished that people didn’t matter to her (Pierce 1999a, pp. 142-3).

Tris also shows signs of insecurity and low self-esteem: “Do you think your uncle might lend this to me?”… “Ask him,” replied Sandry. “He likes you.” “He does?” asked [Tris], baffled. “Why?” (Pierce 1999c, p. 19); and she and Briar both use anger and meanness to keep people at a distance: “You’re too hard on people,” retorted Sandry. “…Briar’s like you – he talks meaner than he is, and people fall for it” (Pierce 1999c, p. 22).

Briar himself also manifests the insecurity of an orphaned and adopted child – doubting his foster mother’s love for him:

“I can’t go back…It will hurt.”
“Scuze me for thinking it’s worth it…” [Briar] cried. She was not coming back for any street rat [like him]… “Scuze me for thinking maybe you liked me enough to want to come home!” (Pierce 1999c, p. 199).

Hedy also experiences this insecurity in the relief that she feels, watching memories of her adoptive mother in the looking glasses of Sanctuary:

“You see? If you land the fly just so, the fish jump into your arms.” Molly whooped as her words rang true, and a trout arced out of the water, caught on the line. She laughed wildly,
and began to reel it in. Her laughter had been infectious, Hedy remembered, and the six
year old version of herself began to giggle along with Molly. When the fish was finally
landed, her mother turned to her and grinned, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.
“And that’s how you catch a fish!”
Little Hedy giggled again, her heart racing with the rare sensation of a hug from her mother.
“Show me again!” Hedy heard herself exclaim in delight.
Her mother was still smiling – she was so much younger than Hedy remembered. “Just for

Adopted children can also face issues of identity and duality – struggling with the disparate
sense of who they were with their birth parents, and who they are now with their adoptive ones,
as well as the anxiety that comes with such split loyalties (Corder 2012). Of the four children, Daja
especially feels this sense of dual identity and loyalty, with the confusion of her old life colliding
with her new one:

Sandry frowned at Daja. “Don’t let them walk over you,” she ordered sternly. “You’re not
one of them [anymore], so make your own status. If they push you around now, they’ll
keep doing it and making you feel bad.”
“And they’ll try to cheat you when they buy,” added Tris, who was a merchant’s daughter
to the bone.
“If you don’t let us push you around, you oughtn’t let them,” Briar added… “We saw you
for your own self before they ever did.”
Daja sighed. “I don’t know who confuses me more,” she told her friends at last. “You or
them.”
“Nonsense,” retorted Tris… “We make sense.”
“That’s what confuses me,” said Daja (Pierce 1999b, p. 58).

Briar too, feels the jarring disconnect between his old life and his new, fearing the loss of
his identity – who he once was:

“I would imagine… she had lice and fleas as well.”
Briar was about to ask, “Don’t everybody?” when he remembered that he had not since
his arrival at Winding Circle. Who am I? he wondered for a moment, shocked. Who am I
really? It’s like I shucked being a street rat like worn-out clothes – but being a street rat is
who I was for years. I can’t just strip away years (Pierce 1999c, p. 56).

This duality is also felt by Hedy in ‘The Course’. As an Anglo-Indian girl, abandoned in
the English countryside in the early twentieth century, Hedy faces both internal and external
pressures of belonging and identity. Sanctuary – a fantastical space that is rooted in her Indian heritage, allows Hedy to connect with both parts of herself in a way that would not have been possible otherwise in 1920s-40s England.

A sense of abandonment also often accompanies adoption and foster care, especially when the need for belonging is not met (Regan & Page 2008). When faced with rejection from their families, children often create meaningful friendships in order to compensate for the family rejection (Regan & Page 2008). Such is the case with the children of Circle of Magic, who find strength and confidence in each other:

Polyam shook her head. “To hear kags [non-traders; dirt-under-foot] called saati [friend-of-the-heart; family] – it makes me feel as if the world’s coming all unglued.”
“What else am I supposed to call them?” Daja asked, surprised. “Tris, Briar, Sandry – they’re as close to me as my own blood. It’s been a long summer,” she said, wishing that explained their friendship and knowing it didn’t even come close. “We’ve been through a lot together.” (Pierce 1999b, p. 104).

This coming together can also lead to positive changes in behaviour, as can be seen in Louis Sachar’s There’s a Boy in the Girls’ Bathroom, where the friendship of the character Bradley with his counsellor allows him to start believing in himself, and others, as well as performing better at school (Regan & Page 2008). It is these chances taken at forming new relationships with people that rely on finding love and acceptance – in the way that Sandry, Tris, Daja, and Briar find love and acceptance at Winding Circle, and in the way that Hedy finds friendship with Pasha in ‘The Course’. Children of divorce often need to face the same chances, unloved and rejected as they feel by one or both of their parents (Pardeck 1996).

The healing and power-of-growth that strong familial bonds provide, allows for all four children, but especially Tris and Briar, to develop their own, true personalities, as well as reaching their full potential: “You have to trust me.” …Trust him? He was her teacher. He had seen inside
her, and told her she wasn’t crazy – after her family had said she was for years. Because of him, [Tris] lived where she was wanted’ (Pierce 1999a, p. 20);

[Briar] wrapped his arms fiercely around [Rosethorn’s] waist, resting his cheek on her back. “I’ll find that light-fingered woman if I have to turn over every rock between here and the Bight of Fire,” he whispered passionately… “I’m sorry,” Rosethorn whispered, [crying]. “I didn’t mean to do this.”
To hear her apologize for a fit of weeps just as the girls did nearly broke his heart. He’d never guessed how much of himself he’d tacked to Rosethorn’ (Pierce 1999c, pp. 76-7).

With adoption and foster care often comes an associated sense of loss and mourning, especially if the child’s biological parents have died. For children suffering this type of loss, fiction – and fantasy in particular – can aid in working through the loss, and provide ‘guidance and consolation’ (Leggett 2010, p. 94). Harry Potter is a prime example of a relatable fictional character who has lived through loss. Characters such as Harry can show children in the midst of mind-altering grief that the world is ‘not always what it seems to be’ (Leggett 2010, p. 94).

This is the positive effect that bibliotherapy can have for adoptive and foster children. Heath et al. support this, with studies showing that children who engage with bibliotherapeutic programs and activities often show improvements in classroom behaviour, interpersonal relationships, reality orientation, and in recognition of problem situations (2005). It can also allow for the expression, recognition, and even the honouring of the pain that children may be enduring – showing a way to ‘celebrate [one’s] abilities and… disabilities… creativity… [and] strengths’ (Wisechild 1994).

Pardeck sees bibliotherapy as a way to facilitate children’s understanding of, and emotional healing from, difficulties surrounding adoption, foster care, and blended families (cited in Heath et al. 2005), with studies indicating that bibliotherapy can be helpful when working with children dealing with loss or transition – in particular adopted children who are adjusting to their new families and surroundings (Heath et al. 2005). Adoptees often want the chance to ‘tell their stories’
– according to Corder – and bibliotherapy techniques can offer this to clients and readers who are trying to create their own stories (2012). Similarly, bibliotherapy can also provide these children with a broader view of their experiences – helping them to understand that the problems related to family breakdown and placement in care are ‘predictable, and… [that] other people have dealt with them successfully’ (Pardeck 1994, p. 422).

Issues surrounding adoption and foster care, such as abandonment, inadequacy, identity, and guilt can be recognised in fictional characters like Sandry, Tris, Daja, and Briar, and the reader can ‘witness the manner in which the character(s) cope and/or resolve their inner conflicts’ (Regan & Page 2008, pp. 38-9). In order for this resolution to be achieved, Pardeck suggests that the books used for bibliotherapy contain believable characters and situations, in order to offer realistic hope, so long as the novel falls in line with the reader’s interests and reading level (1994). While at first glance, this may seem to exclude fantasy fiction, the example of Circle of Magic illustrates that setting is secondary. The characters and the situations in which they find themselves may be drawn in the style of the fantastic, but they are firmly rooted in the emotions and behaviours of the real world: Sandry – orphaned from a loving home and finding solace in the bonds she forms with her new one, Tris – abandoned and unloved, learning to love and trust again with her adopted siblings and parents, Daja – orphaned and placed in a new life so utterly unlike her previous one that she must learn to reconcile the two parts of herself, and Briar – who never truly had a home or family, learning that love and affection are not weaknesses (Pierce 1999a; 1999b; 1999c; 2001). Together they illustrate the potential for love and acceptance beyond the traditional view of ‘family’:

Sandry closed the distance between them at a run. Colliding with [Briar], she wrapped her arms tightly around his neck… [while Rosethorn] stood ankle-deep in mud, arms wrapped tight around Lark… Sandry gathered her skirts and went over to the women, sliding her own arms around Rosethorn’s waist. Daja followed her more slowly, to pat Rosethorn’s back. Briar went to stand nearby. Tris, crimson with emotion, glared at the guards as if daring them to comment… Lark wrapped an arm round [Rosethorn’s] shoulders. “…You [and Briar] look worn to the bone, my dearest.”…

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“But you’re alright now,” Sandry announced. “You’re both home safe, and we’re going to be fine... [W]e’re where we should be. That’s the important thing... We’re all home.” (Pierce 1999c, pp. 98-9).

For the four children, the complications of life and family – fantastical or otherwise – can be faced and dealt with far better when in a supportive environment, amongst understanding people. In the same way, children in need of assistance can find support within the Circle’s story – as well as other fantasy texts that are viewed through a bibliotherapeutic lens, as they face their own issues of abandonment, family, love, and acceptance.

**Theory of Place, and Horticultural Therapy in Anne Bishop’s *Landscapes of Ephemera* Duology, and Elizabeth Knox’s *Dreamhunter* Duology.**

Panic attacks your pain-porous skin?
Imagine the layers of onion, Sufi-circling
and circling until there is no tear-making body.
If the issue is anorexia, taking starvation’s
dark spirit-flight, or anhedonia, running from
the skin’s having fun, consider the mushroom’s
fleshy erection, and the pumpkin’s, earth goddesses
and rotund Buddhas sprawled by compost’s funky aerosol.
For social phobia, desensitize among the rows
of corn’s parade, ticker tape leaves and Rasta tassels
that wind-strut and bring on the crows’ hop and rap.
Too much affect: meditate on potatoes, taciturn
as overturned stones. Too little: visualize the hanging
tomatoes’ insides, the soft hearts, sentimental ornaments.
From the lettuce there is common sense for narcissism:
acceptance as a side dish, garnish for a meaty sandwich.
If that leaf isn’t the dose, there’s always the soil
people shovel and level, rake and make wishful with seed,
feed leftovers from the compost’s vegan sewer,
the soil that wants for nothing yields and yields (Morazzini 2008, p. 222).

Nature has always held an important place in the hearts and minds of humanity, whether it be in a well-tended garden, or in the wild biomes of lush forests or clear deserts. Williams writes
that nature sparks the dreams and ideas of humanity, ‘court[ing] our souls’ (cited in McFarland Taylor 2004, p. 40). Relating her encounters with the wild places, Williams writes that, ‘[i]n the severity of the salt desert, [she is] brought to [her] knees by its beauty. [Her] imagination is fired. [Her] heart opens and [her] skin burns in the passion of these moments’ (cited in McFarland Taylor 2004, p. 40).

Going hand in hand with its ability to fuel the imagination is nature’s power to heal. Contact with nature is important for human well-being at a cognitive, emotional, psychological, and physical level (Westlund 2014). Irvine and Warber write of the interconnected system that includes the health of the mind, body, and spirit, and how reconnecting with the natural environment can help to keep that system balanced and healthy (2002). There are two theories that have been put forward as to why nature is important for the well-being of humans. Firstly, attention restoration theory (ART) suggests that on a cognitive basis, interaction with nature improves mental functioning, as well as the capacity to learn new tasks, and perform complex undertakings or problem solving (Irvine & Warber 2002). ART is based on the idea that there are two kinds of attention – voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary attention is used when one needs to block out distractions, or focus on the task at hand (Irvine & Warber 2002). As such, it is a depletable resource that needs recharging, unlike involuntary attention, which is considered to be an automatic action that responds to stimuli such as ‘strange things, moving things, wild animals, bright things, pretty things… words… etc’, and is not susceptible to fatigue (Irvine & Warber 2002, p. 8). Nature not only acts as a catalyst for the involuntary, it also functions as a restorative for voluntary attention, through content (such as trees and animals), and processes (such as the movement of wind through leaves and branches) (Irvine & Warber 2002).

The second theory on nature’s effectiveness on well-being is based on the human stress response, with several pieces of research suggesting that interacting with the natural world may ‘counteract the negative physiological effects of stress’ (Irvine & Warber 2002, p. 78). It is theorised
that interaction with non-threatening natural settings can increase the ‘parasympathetic outflow’ of the body’s autonomic nervous system, and help to reduce or end the ‘fight or flight’ response that the body generates in situations of extreme stress (Irvine & Warber 2002).

In terms of the effects that nature can have on physical well-being, there is a possibility that a mitigation of stress-related changes can be achieved at a microphysiological level through interaction with nature, as well as a degree of mediation of the physical effects of illnesses at the macrophysiological level (Irvine & Warber 2002). In an example of the post-operative effects of nature on patient recovery, Irvine and Warber note that patients with a view of trees had shorter lengths of stay post-surgery, and took fewer doses of strong analgesics compared to those patients who only had a view of a brick wall (2002).

The effect on psychological and emotional health has been explored through studies ranging from women recovering from surgical treatment, to children suffering from attention deficit disorder (ADD), to discerning levels of job satisfaction (Irvine & Warber 2002). In women in post-surgery who were suffering from breast cancer, it was found that there was a significant improvement in the ability to concentrate for women who participated in nature-related restorative activities (Irvine & Warber 2002). For children suffering from ADD, attentional functioning after engaging in green, outdoor activities was significantly better than for man-made, or indoor equivalents; and a study of job satisfaction in relation to differing interactions with nature whilst at work discovered a high correlation between levels of satisfaction and involvement in the natural world (Irvine & Warber 2002).

The theme of nature-based emotional healing can be found within many pieces of literature. In terms of bibliotherapy, it often exists as a therapeutic device for both the readers, as well as the internal characters of the story. Such nature-based bibliotherapeutic themes can be seen in Knox’s Dreamhunter duology, where there exists a part of the world called simply the Place. Only
certain people can access it, and within it there are dream-like memories that can be caught and brought back to be replayed to vast audiences of people. One such ‘dream’ is called Convalescent One, and illustrates the physical and psychological healing that natural environments can provide:

…the invalid had been gravely ill, but was better and was to be allowed out. He was to take the air… [H]e was bundled up and… transferred to a white canvas pavilion which had been built on the roof of a railway carriage… It was a late afternoon in summer, the air balmy, the light gold. The train took them through tunnels of elms and black beech trees, a cool green and red gloom. It ran along cuttings with its roof at the level of meadows. Young horses galloped beside the train, sometimes plunging through the banner of the engine’s white steam… [It] ran along beside low sand dunes, and showed the invalid the sea, the sun setting over its quiet surface… The train ran on to a causeway… [that] went out across the water. The train seemed to glide over the sea itself. Everything was peaceful, the air cool and caressing. The invalid lay in the safe embrace of his bed, yet there was space all around him, open air and flaming light… (Knox 2005, pp. 4-5).

When performed to an audience of sleeping people at the Rainbow Opera, the resolution of the dream creates a universal sense of well-being, as the Opera’s patrons ‘[breathe] in deeply, and out slowly, and [seem] to melt into their beds, let gently down into a deep, restoring sleep’ (Knox 2005, p. 5).

In ‘The Course’, Hedy benefits from a similar, nature-based sense of healing and wellness, finding it in the spaces around her beloved river, her farm, and the wild places of Sanctuary:

The willow hung low over her as she drowsed in the heavy sun of the afternoon – its long, feathery tendrils floating back and forth above her in the slow breeze. Hedy watched the light play through the leaves, listening to the steady rush of the river beyond her feet. This place had been special to her since her mother first let her begin to wander past the farmyard gate (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 165).

In reference to the spirit, nature also performs a role in physiological health – with spiritual well-being enhanced through one’s connection and interaction with the natural world and leading in turn to a more acute awareness of one’s surroundings, a greater sense of connection with themselves, and a conflation of outer and inner worlds via contemplation and reflection (Irvine &
In ‘The Course’, Hedy experiences a loss of this spiritual connection to nature when she is forced to move to the city with Pasha:

She walked without purpose, and the streets blurred together as she wandered through unknown parts of the city – an angry chaos of dirt and people, and noise surrounding her, until she suddenly found herself in a tiny, abandoned square (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 226);

“Downheadley isn’t home, this [city] is!”
“No it’s not!” Hedy screamed, five years of disappointment and claustrophobia finally boiling over like a shrieking kettle. “It’s a prison cell… and I can’t get out!” (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 247).

The character of Glorianna Belladonna experiences this spiritual connection to the land in Bishop’s *Landscapes of Ephemera* duology, finding a sense of peace and oneness in nature after experiencing very dark, stressful emotions:

The elders decided that you suffered from a sickness of the heart, a… poisoning… I followed you through our gardens, through the fields and woods. Then you stopped suddenly, lifted your face to the sky, closed your eyes… and drank peace. I watched the Light fill you, felt it rejoice in the vessel, saw you bloom like a plant responds to rain after a dry spell (Bishop 2007, p. 84).

Beyond the benefit to the individual, there is also the social aspect to nature’s healing effects. Its identification as an important factor in overall health and its connection to the environment have been investigated with group studies (Irvine & Warber 2002), one of which discovered that the presence of greenery and vegetation in the common areas of urban public housing ‘significantly predicted the strength of neighborhood social ties, including whether people knew their neighbors, socialized with neighbors, and felt a sense of community’ (Irvine & Warber 2002, p. 79).

What specific aspects of nature contain these restorative and supportive effects is an area that has been debated for some decades. Frumkin suggests four specific areas of nature that
influence well-being: animals, plants, landscapes, and wilderness (2001). Within this structure, Kaplan and Kaplan consider four dimensions to a restorative landscape experience: being away – the experience of distancing oneself from one’s problems; extent – using the infinite sense of space in nature to allow a feeling of exploration and belonging; fascination – the ability to appreciate the landscape without utilising directed attention; and compatibility – the process of following the flow of nature and the wish to ‘do the things that nature affords’ (cited in Adevi & Mårtensson 2013, p. 231).

This is the power of nature, the power that place has in relation to humankind, a concept that has been acknowledged by philosophers, psychologists, and social commentators alike (Beeton 2010). Its power stems from the deep and affective bond that exists between people and place or setting, a definition that was coined by Yi-Fu Tuan, who labelled the union as ‘topophilia’ (Tuan, cited in Fleming 1975, p. 315). The experience of topophilia is very much a unique process, tailored to the individual’s singular collection of environmental encounters (Fleming 1975). In a study of the correlation between topophilia and quality of life, Ogunseitan concluded that there was a statistically significant association between the two states, with the appreciation of flowers and water bodies correlating with high quality of life (2005).

This bond between person and place has long existed between humanity and nature, with many people unconsciously aware that ‘walking in the woods, exploring outside with children or working in a garden makes us feel well’ (Westlund 2014, p. 48). At a scientific level, the human brain has evolved for hundreds of thousands of years within complex environments – our survival reliant on a constant successful interaction with nature and other animals (Westlund 2014). Research into the relationship between humans and nature suggests that these deep ecological instincts persist within the human psyche (Westlund 2014) – the ‘powerful healing effects of the natural environment’ remaining connected to human well-being, with people consciously or unconsciously seeking that connection and healing in their lives through gardens in hospitals,
schoolyard gardens, homes out in the country, and an increasing use of national parks (Irvine & Warber 2002, p. 82).

According to Milligan, Gatrell and Bingley there are two elements that help to create the connection to nature and place: firstly, direct physical engagement with the environment – being in or on the landscape, and secondly, mental engagement – through sensory experiences and a person’s sense of place (2004). Whilst these two elements can be experienced in tandem, they remain two distinct means in which one can interact with nature (Milligan, Gatrell & Bingley 2004). In whatever combination these two elements are experienced, the encounter – as in all topophilia – is unique to the person, with landscape becoming a ‘construct of the mind and feeling’ (Tuan, cited in Milligan, Gatrell & Bingley 2004, p. 1783), and textures, sights, sounds, and smells all contributing to the distinctive ‘feel’ of a place (Milligan, Gatrell & Bingley 2004). This allows a person to generate specific meaning for places and subsequently derive meanings for their own lives (Adevi & Mårtensson 2013). From this, place can help to develop a person’s sense of self and the process of human identity formation, ‘reminding us of and confirming who we are’ (Adevi & Mårtensson 2013, p. 231).

For Nown, a golem-like creature made from earth in *Dreamhunter*, this meaning and self-recognition is explicitly discovered within the Place:

“[W]hat are you listening to?”
“I am listening to it.” [Said Nown.] “It is listening to you.”
Laura shivered. “The Place?” She said. “Is the Place listening to me?”
“Yes. I can hear now. I am nearer to myself than before.”
…“What do you mean?” Laura said.
“I can hear now. I am here with myself,” Nown said.
“How?” Laura asked…
“I don’t know.” Nown answered her…
“Are you more yourself? More your *true* self?” Laura asked…
Nown was looking at her intently… He answered her. “Yes, I am.” (Knox 2005, pp. 372-3).
This sense of one’s self can also be directed externally into a sense of spiritual belonging—an idea that is deeply linked to the notion of ‘home’ (Trigger & Mulcock 2005). For this sense of belonging to occur within a connection to nature and place—memories, emotions, and often the longing for particular places need to be evoked (Trigger & Mulcock 2005). Bishop’s *Landscapes* duology takes this connection between person, place, and home and spins it into a literal, day-to-day experience for the people of Ephemera. A land that has been shattered into multiple pieces by an ancient evil, those that brave the bridges between landscapes must ‘travel lightly’ in order to reach a place with which their hearts resonate: “Sometimes people cross a bridge and never find the way back to a landscape they had known because they have outgrown [it]. They have nothing to offer that landscape, and it has nothing to offer them’” (Bishop 2007, p. 85). In addition, a person’s link to the land in Ephemera is so absolute that if they should try to stay in a landscape that no longer resonates with them, they will find themselves restless and unhappy until they take the step across a ‘resonating bridge’ that allows them the chance to find a new landscape that can give them the feeling of belonging, of home:

[We guides a]lter the currents around [a] person to provide the chance for [them] to take the first steps of the journey that will end with the heart having what it desires… Some hearts will back away from the journey, too fearful to leave the familiar even though it withers. Others will leap forward and never look back, bruising the hearts left behind. Pain will force some to begin the journey. For others, love will be a beacon that keeps them moving forward (Bishop 2006, p. 210).

This theme of shifting connections to nature and environment is also present in ‘The Course’, illustrated when Hedy’s experiences move her on—both emotionally and physically, from her family’s farm:

“Don’t you know [who owns it]?” Finny asked, dismayed. “That’s our family farm. Surely you’re a little worried over who has it.”

Hedy shrugged. “I haven’t been up to working it for ten years now. It’s changed from how it was when I was young – when you were young. My mother wouldn’t have recognised the place.” She looked at Finny. “It was time to move on. When the land stops speaking to you, find another place that does.” (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 294).
This spiritual and internal sense of belonging in nature is often complicated by the tensions involved in settler societies such as Australia, where the connection-to-place through birth and ancestors is lacking for both settlers and modern day immigrants alike – a lack that can often deny them the sense of ‘deep belonging’ available to those who remain in their country of birth, and to Aboriginal people of Australia (Trigger & Mulcock 2005). Regardless of these tensions, Australians from all descents have found that the natural landscape of the country – the bush – can become a place of deep connection, spirituality, and healing: ‘I think that the bush is our cathedral, our church, you know? It’s where we nurture our spirit… I think if I couldn’t walk in the bush that I’d feel totally cut off’ (Trigger & Mulcock 2005, p. 309).

The idea of the spiritual in nature stems from a significance that goes beyond its material properties and into the ‘sort of tranquillity… beauty and… sense of interconnectedness of life… which you get from a natural environment’ (Trigger & Mulcock 2005, p. 311). It becomes an experience that allows those who may not find or even search for spirituality in other areas, to experience a ‘spiritual consciousness of connectedness’ (Trigger & Mulcock 2005, p. 311). In a study of outdoor leaders and their connections to nature places, Hutson and Montgomery found that there were several statements in relation to ‘deep-spirit’ that resonated strongly with the participants, including:

I regain my perspective on life in nature… Everything seems interconnected when I’m in nature… When I’m in the outdoors, I feel as though I’m part of the rhythms of nature… Spending time in nature anchors me… Just being in nature makes me happy… [and] My relationships with others take on deeper meaning when I’m in nature (2006, p. 34).

This awareness of the interconnection and spirituality of nature also creates an awareness of how one can learn from nature. In her poem Topophilia, Ruefle expresses the lessons and values that nature affords her:

I study nature so as not to do foolish things.
For instance, in the worst windstorms
only the most delicate things survive:
a vireo’s nest intact on the lawn next to the roots

The understanding that observing and interacting with nature provides, also extends to
greater, encompassing themes such as the life cycle of plants and animals. Baker suggests that
making a connection to these sort of systems can foster an increased sense of acceptance ‘in
relation to the cycle of one’s own life’ (2009, p. 94). In this way, a person can be drawn out of an
absorption with the self and have their sensibilities heightened through the tactile qualities of
nature – something that can potentially be accessed through bibliotherapeutic literature, as well as
direct contact with natural environments (Hynes 1980).

The significance of sensory engagement in nature and in gardens is illustrated by Milligan,
Gatrell and Bingley, who relate the experiences of their study’s participants to the importance of
colours, smells, flowers, and birdsong in a garden:

The garden’s filled with bluebells when the bluebells are out… and there’ll be the
daffodils… sometimes I grow beans… they’ve got lovely red flowers; I love perfume and
all flowers, but I love the perfume. I like any rose; I’ve got southernwood, that’s beautiful…
when you touch it, it smells beautiful; I love nature, we have got loads of birds in our
garden. The thrush was singing this morning (2004, p. 1786).

Gardens in particular can be designed to stimulate the senses through the therapeutic
application of particular features, such as defined perimeters, a profusion of plants and people-
plant interactions, accessible design, plant-dominated features, and a recognisable p[l]acemark to
its design (Kavanagh 1995). These factors emphasise the experiences of the five primary senses,
and go hand-in-hand with the understanding, sense of time, and freedom of movement that also
result from a therapeutically designed garden (Kavanagh 1995). Such a garden, designed to
stimulate the senses that lie beyond the traditional visual engagement of a green space including
memory, hearing, touch, smell, and taste (Kavanagh 1995), allows for the application of horticultural therapy.

At its simplest, horticultural therapy is the process of ‘working with plants and gardening resources to achieve a therapeutic end’ (Smith 1998, p. 14). Baker defines it as a process that uses plants and garden-related activities to generate well-being across the interconnected mind, body, spirit system and has the capacity to be used by therapists, teachers, nurses, and health workers (2009). Within this terminology there is a delineation made between horticultural therapy and therapeutic horticulture – the former being the use of plants as part of a therapeutic treatment by trained professionals in order to achieve a ‘clinically defined goal’ (Kam & Siu 2010, p. 80), and the latter being more directed towards the recreational use of plants and gardens for therapeutic benefit, without any specific clinical goal (Kam & Siu 2010). As Baker writes, simply working in the garden should not be referred to as horticultural therapy, but rather therapeutic horticulture (2009). For the ‘treatment modality’ to be truly considered as horticultural therapy it must contain three elements: a client in treatment for a specific problem, a definite goal that the client is attempting to achieve, and the care of living plants by the client (Relf 2005).

This division does not necessarily make these two practices mutually exclusive, however. Examining the general therapeutic character of gardens, Baker suggests that one imagine a continuum, with the actual therapeutic nature of gardens at one end, moving through the experiences of those who are actively involved in the gardening process and potentially possess the knowledge of horticultural practices in the middle, and clinical horticultural therapy, with specific practices and trained practitioners at the other end (2009).

However, in the same way that self-directed bibliotherapy can exist alongside clinical bibliotherapy, recreational therapeutic horticulture can occur in the same spaces with, and utilising the same tools as horticultural therapy – serving its own outcomes, and its own fluid goals. Milligan,
Gatrell and Bingley emphasise that gardening and the experience of gardens in general have their own therapeutic benefits that should not be overlooked, suggesting that recreational gardening can reduce anxiety and depression, help to relieve stress and promote relaxation, and ‘provide opportunities for empowerment and increased competence, building bridges to naturally occurring supports and resources within the broader community’ (2004, p. 1782).

The therapeutic benefits of recreational gardening – and indeed the ability for a garden to act as a source of both general well-being, and active therapeutic goals can be seen in Landscapes, where Glorianna, acting in her formal role as a Landscaper uses her garden for both the anchoring and protection of disparate landscapes and their people, as well as a restorative place where she can heal and rejuvenate through actively engaging with it as a gardener:

[T]oday was for pleasure and, for her, that pleasure meant tending the earth, not as a Landscaper who was always vigilantly aware of the balance of Light and Dark currents that flowed through her landscapes but as a woman performing the simple chore of looking after her plants and cleaning out the weeds (Bishop 2007, p. 52).

Within ‘The Course’, Hedy actively gardens in both her mundane garden and her garden in Sanctuary, and reaps the same benefits from the work:

Her tools were where she’d left them, stacked against the little wooden shed that Rachael had built. Loading them over her shoulder, she headed towards the worst of the untended plant beds and set to work, weeding the soil and trimming the growth on the rangy plants, before watering the whole garden, walking its paths with a hose and hand pump that was plumbed into the village’s watercourse, and revelling in the intoxicating perfume of moistened earth (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 249).

Beyond the benefits of active recreational gardening, the passive use of gardens can also be deeply engaging and beneficial for people. Gardens can become private spaces that allow individuals a place to “‘step out’… [and] enjoy the peace and tranquillity of nature’ (Milligan, Gatrell & Bingley 2004, p. 1786). This passive engagement of sitting, observing, and walking amongst nature, or engaging in concerts, picnics, and parties in a garden encourages comfort and
familiarity in the individual (Milligan, Gatrell & Bingley 2004; Kavanagh 1995). The quiet moments that Hedy spends in her garden in ‘The Course’ illustrate the comfort that can come from simply existing within a natural space: ‘Hedy sat with Rachael in her garden, Pia warm and sleepy by her side as she watched Erin weed the flowerbeds beneath the lupins she had planted herself a year before’ (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 301). Further, passive engagement with gardens – such as the ability for visitors to see, touch, and smell plants, allows the individual a greater level of autonomy – experiencing the restoring effects of a garden and ‘encounter[ing] the luxuriant garden growth in their own way, on their own terms, and at their own pace’ (Kavanagh 1995, p. 106). Considering the importance of time, patience, and the life-cycle within nature and gardens, this ability to self-direct and pace oneself when engaging with a therapeutic garden can be of greater benefit than the more directed, dependant form of active, horticultural therapy.

The specific nature of horticultural therapy and its gardens has a history that reaches back to the 1930s, where it was a part of occupational therapy health care, before it evolved into a more independent discipline in the 1950s (Adevi & Mårtensson 2013). Westlund discusses the therapy’s wartime association, relating the planting and harvesting of gardens that occurred in the trenches of the First World War, and the subsequent garden therapy that was used to treat its returning ‘shell-shocked’ soldiers (2014). During the Second World War, this practice was refined into horticultural therapy by US veteran hospitals – such gardens ‘in contrast to war… assert the dignity of life, human and nonhuman, and celebrate it’ (Westlund 2014, p. 48). In ‘The Course’, Pasha moves to a gardenless home in the concreted-and-asphalt space of the city after returning from the war. This lack of connection to natural spaces for him parallels the lack of treatment he receives for his PTSD.

Today, therapeutic gardens have become carefully designed, gracious compositions of open spaces, water features, paved walkways, ledges and tables, and modified, raised planting beds that are accessible to all (Kavanagh 1995). Relf defines the differing roles and appearances of
several therapeutic gardens, beginning with meditation and restoration gardens, which she describes as gardens that are not affiliated with healthcare, but are designed to stimulate a significant level of mental and/or physical enhancement when visitors spend any length of time in them (2005). Healing gardens are usually present within healthcare facilities and are specifically intended and designed for staff, patients, and visitors to use at their own discretion, rather than as part of a specific healthcare plan (Relf 2005), whilst therapeutic gardens are often used by medical staff as part of treatment programs for physical therapy – with walkways, steps, and raised grass beds for outdoor exercise (Relf 2005). In the same vein, wandering gardens are designed for mental therapy, especially for Alzheimer patients and a reduction in their symptoms, with such gardens usually maintained by landscaping professionals (Relf 2005). Finally, she defines horticultural therapy gardens as spaces that are designed specifically for patients’ use, and the associated care and cultivation of plants – all as part of a designed treatment programme which can address the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs of the patient (Relf 2005).

For a horticultural therapy garden to be successful in these goals, there are several elements that are beneficial, if not essential, to have as part of the garden’s design. Therapeutic gardens are primarily designed as healthy environments that provide ‘safe and comfortable settings for people’, with moderated climactic extremes, and protected environments (Kavanagh 2005, p. 106). With this healthiness in mind, environmental pollutants and irritants such as herbicides, fertilisers, and insecticides are avoided or minimised, and most gardens are ‘fundamentally organic’ (Kavanagh 2005, p. 106). The ‘safety’ of the space is achieved by creating definite and visual boundaries that ‘enframe’ the landscape and provide a sense of solitude, insulation, and security through the use of fences, garden walls, structures, and plant masses (Kavanagh 2005). Hedy’s garden in Sanctuary is similarly enclosed as a safe space for her to heal and restore:

Rachael smiled, and came to a stop in front of a long, oblong building that Hedy could swear hadn’t been there before. It was different to the limestone houses that comprised
the rest of the settlement – roofless, it was built of warm, red brick, and golden mortar, with a graceful archway set into one wall.


Within this creation of a safe and healthy space, the choice and application of plants and plant types is particularly important – organising the plant masses into ‘legible open spaces’ and interactions that play on the evolutionary preferences of humans for ‘lush environments and observable, defensible open areas’ (Kavanagh 2005, p. 106). The plants that are selected for these arrangements are chosen for their qualities of taste, texture, fragrance, sound, nostalgia, or their aesthetically or horticulturally-based requirements of form, foliage, or flowers (Kavanagh 2005). They need to be suited to the chosen site and to be able to flourish in the particular climate of the garden and its region (Kavanagh 2005).

Encapsulating all of this, is the need for a visitor to find beauty in the garden and their surroundings. Hynes writes that ‘where beauty is perceived, an integration of self takes place’ (1980, p. 37) – beauty being the response to a fundamental desire of the mind for the essentially delightful – a separation from acquisitiveness and self-absorption and the chance for enjoyment of the good beyond oneself, which leads to self-actualisation and mental health (Hynes 1980). This sense of beauty can help the therapeutic garden to stimulate the senses of the user – encouraging contemplation and reflection on the cycles of life, or conversely providing a space for socialising (Irvine & Warber 2002).

Beauty is included by Adevi and Mårtensson as one of the four distinct elements of working in a garden that benefit or have a remedial effect upon the user:

1. The beauty of nature with seasonal changes and a multitude of life-forms which fascinates, relaxes and puts worries in life into perspective;
2. The dependence on nature and the cultivation of it, supporting the ecosystems of the planet;
3. The nurturing of plants and attendance to their growth, which creates a feeling of affinity with nature;
4. Achieving contiguity with other people through the sharing of experiences such as cultivation and harvesting (2013, p. 230).

Within these overarching dimensions the specific activities of gardening, raking leaves, sowing seeds, and weeding are presumed to have a beneficial effect upon users (Adevi & Mårtensson 2013) – an undertaking that Smith found to be enhanced by those clients who were creatively-minded, had prior gardening or farming experience, or simply those who consistently enjoyed the activities and gardening – the ‘green thumbs’ (1998, p. 17). Hedy, as a farmer, possesses this enhanced experience in her active engagements with her gardens in ‘The Course’.

The effects and results that be derived from the use of the therapeutic gardens and the various activities available within them are wide-ranging – from the development of physical skills and wellness, to mental health and emotional robustness. Baker describes the sense of well-being, relaxation, and satisfaction she felt when wandering through her friend’s garden:

Upon entering the garden area of my friend’s home I was met by a beautiful array of colour and a combination of shaped gardens, potted plants and raised garden beds. Simply observing the rainbow of colour set in a sea of green lawn created within me an immediate sense of pleasure… [My friend] Lorna spoke to me of the quiet and peaceful escape she felt when she was able to step aside from the pressures of daily life and work in her garden. She explained that the focus and creativity provided a sense of satisfaction, and also helped to foster relaxation by alleviating stress and tension while developing an affinity with nature (2009, p. 93).

Smith writes that horticultural therapy can ‘promote the development of leisure or vocational skills’ as well as aiding clients in appreciating natural surroundings, and producing crafts and projects (1998). Alternatively, Westlund describes the physiological and mental benefits that can come from working or spending time in a garden or preserve, with studies having shown that ‘blood pressure, anger and aggression all decrease when participants walk in a nature reserve’ (2014, p. 48), ‘[c]hildren with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder experience fewer symptoms when
they spend time in nature’ (Westlund 2014, p. 48), and ‘[e]lderly nursing home residents who spend
time in a garden… report… improved moods and lower levels of anxiety, [with] significantly lower
levels of cortisol, a stress hormone’ (Westlund 2014, p. 48).

This connection, and the connection to the life-cycles within nature can help to promote
patience and create a metaphorical narrative for the person’s own growth and development – the
’symbolism of nature as associated to one’s own growth and the passing of time’ (Adevi &
Mårtensson 2013, p. 230): ‘It [the garden] almost confirmed my own growth… [W]e grew together,
so to say’ (Adevi & Mårtensson 2013, p. 233); ‘I think it moves nice and slow. I can’t see the colour
combination directly, as I had wanted to do before, it takes some time. And I have accepted this’
(Adevi & Mårtensson 2013, p. 233). This gaining of patience and the recognition of how nature
ebbs and flows can lead to a better life-balance of rest and activity in people’s lives (Adevi &
Mårtensson 2013). This connection to the life-cycles of growth can be seen in the storm harvest
that takes place within ‘The Course’. It occurs at the same time as Hedy herself arrives at a level
of maturity and understanding in her own life – a ripening that is echoed in the ripening of the
wheat.

Along with the patience and the sense of connection that is gained through observing life-
cycles, self-esteem can also be developed by positively influencing the growth of plants and being
a necessary part of their survival: ‘I actually gave life to something… [My] self-esteem is at its lowest
point… Nobody wants me. I’m over fifty and burned out! But here I was needed. The plants
needed me, they need water, they need to be planted’ (Adevi & Mårtensson 2013, p. 233). This
positive influence can also extend beyond self-esteem and into benefits for mental illnesses, with
research indicating that horticultural activities can promote social functioning and self-efficacy in
people suffering from psychiatric illnesses – especially those who present with typical symptoms
such as limitation in thought content, attention, and emotion (Kam & Siu 2010). In addition, such
garden-related activities can reduce stress levels, psychiatric symptoms, and mental fatigue, along
with helping to stabilise moods, and increase a sense of tranquillity and enjoyment (Kam & Siu 2010).

In *Landscapes*, the people of Ephemera use the land as a way of absorbing and changing or ‘stabilising’ their moods, and reducing mental fatigue and stress:

“[E]ach person in the village takes a stone and carries it with them… [They] hold the stone and whisper the things that weigh on the heart. Small hurts, large regrets. The stones hear the sorrows and absorb them… [and then the] keeper pours clean water over the stones and closes the lid [of the jar]. The next morning… [on] the spot they have chosen as ‘sorrow’s ground’… [t]he keeper opens the jar and pours out the water, which has turned black, [refilling it] with water again and again until it finally pours out clean. That’s when the people… return to their lives with lighter hearts” (Bishop 2006, pp. 348-9).

This reduction of stress and bad feeling can also be related to the outlet that physical gardening provides. According to Baker, issues such as anger and aggression (along with stress) can be safely expressed and/or siphoned off through physical activities within a garden (2009), whilst issues such as depression can be fought with the ‘positive thoughts and feelings that are generated as a result of… communing with nature, or taking part in a… structured programme’ (Baker 2009, p. 95). The result is a diversion of one’s attention from the ‘negative stimuli’ of one’s circumstances, and an overall uplifting of the individual’s mood (Baker 2009).

The gardens of *Landscapes* work in a similar fashion – allowing a person to come to terms with their harmful memories and feelings, and to face their life with a more positive outlook. They also act as metaphors for their gardeners’ greater understanding and acceptance of the darker parts of themselves:

Shadows in the garden.
It is the hardest lesson for a Landscaper to learn.
The gardens are not just access points put together in a pleasing manner. They also reveal the heart of the Landscaper, the signature resonance that will overlay the landscapes in her care. It is a reflection of who the landcaper is, and her innermost self will be manifested into plants and stones and water for everyone to see.
If the heart tries to lie, the garden will reveal that, too.
But every student’s first attempt tends to be a pretty lie. All the plants are the ones that symbolize kindness and generosity, patience and understanding. Love… And the garden fails. It takes time to find the courage to display the parts of yourself that aren’t bright and shining. But you have to see them, have to know they’re inside you, because they will resonate in the landscapes you control... So every Landscaper has to learn, and acknowledge, the dark side of her own heart in order to keep our world balanced. Shadows in the garden. They are a part of all of us (Bishop 2006, p. 384).

In the same way, Sanctuary echoes both the light and dark parts of Hedy’s psyche in ‘The Course’, illustrating to both Hedy and the reader that to be whole, one must acknowledge and understand the negative elements of oneself, as well as the positive ones.

This resonance and reflection of people’s personalities and emotions is part of nature’s potential to act as a distinctive character within fiction. Place has the ability to operate as a literary device in various forms – ranging from a narrative element and backdrop, to a period setting, source of destiny, and character in its own right (Kinsey 1998). McCauley and Lanning describe the device of place-as-character as when ‘the setting affects the people in a story as much as they affect one another… [and] what results is a kind of interaction between place and person’ (1987, p. 167). This reciprocal effect is particularly valuable in fantasy fiction, with place and landscape occupying a significant role in the genre. Indeed, Dali cites Landscape as the central category for fantasy, historical, and western fiction, based on the ‘prevailing appeal elements identified in the genre or subgenre’ (2013).

Connecting the idea of ‘frontier’ stories and the spiritual, connective power of the Australian bush, Beeton points out that many Australian movies (such as the ‘Australian western’, The Man from Snowy River) use place as considerably more than a ‘passive backdrop in the action’, instead making it a ‘significant player or character in a movie’ (2010, pp. 114-5). This was especially the case in early twentieth century bushranger movies, where the bush became ‘a friend to the
outlaw and an enemy to those attempting to uphold the law’ (Beeton 2010, p. 115). As Australian movies continued to evolve, the Australian landscape began to be portrayed as a deeply complex character of its own:

Mad Max fights for hegemony over it. Picnickers are subsumed into it, never ever to return. The man from Snowy River spurs his small and weedy beast in a race to master it… [and the country becomes something much more significant than the environmental setting for indigenous narratives (Beeton 2010, p. 115).

Place-as-character extends beyond the landscapes of film and into the reactions of people towards nature and gardens in reality. Adevi and Mårtensson write of how gardens can become helpful partners with whom gardeners can practice using their body and their senses in order to remain comfortable (2013). The gardens of Ephemera in Landscapes are also influenced by this sense of partnership between Landscaper and place, with the world of Ephemera reacting and responding to thoughts, feelings, and actions of the gardener:

A dissonance in her garden. Something here that didn’t belong…[S]he felt Ephemera stirring, trying to align itself to the emotions and wishes churning inside her… It would manifest her emotions, thinking that was what she wanted (Bishop 2007, pp. 53-4).

Sanctuary acts as a partner and guide for Hedy in ‘The Course’, allowing her to explore herself through its manifestations and its particular locations. Through her presence within it, and its presence around her, she grows in understanding and confidence.

In addition to the feeling of ‘partnership’ that can take place between garden and gardener, an element of parental care can also occur. Baker relates the feelings of her friend, Lorna as she describes the character of her garden: ‘I suppose it’s like a child really. You do things for it to make it flourish, bloom and progress’ (2009, p. 93). Ephemera is also quite child-like in its portrayal in Landscapes, with one character even referring to it as the ‘wild child’: ‘The wild child circled round him, anxious and confused. Did he want something? Should it make something? What? What?’
This idea of a dialogue between a person and nature – with a garden becoming a responsive partner (or child in this case) (Adevi & Mårtensson 2013), is taken to fantastical heights in *Landscapes*, where the land can react to emotion and stimuli almost like an adolescent:

He waited. Felt nothing.
“Wild child?”
Ephemera finally answered his call, but the world wasn’t happy…
“You can do this, wild child. I know you can.”
Gone. A flurry of notes that sounded in his mind like a child blaming him for some unhappiness, and Ephemera was gone (Bishop 2007, p. 499).

*Dreamhunter* also demonstrates this level of place-as-character, with the Place continuously trying to communicate with the dreamhunters of the Hame family:

It has often seemed to me that the Place appeared in time to welcome its discoverer, to welcome Tziga Hame and give him his crippling injury… It is as if the Place was locked, and Hame was the key that unlocked it. It is as if the Place appeared where and when it did because *that* was where it happened to find Tziga Hame (Knox 2005, p. 115).

This communication and characterisation is made explicit when the Place is revealed to be a giant Nown – a golem that Laura Hame’s son had tried to pace out and then raise from the ground some decades into the future, before burying himself at its heart. The land itself has reached back into the past to find Laura and ask for her help – through dreams found in the Place and whispers heard on the telegraph line:

“The dreams *are* memories, Da, like Uncle Chorley always thought. Human memories from a time in the future. But the Place itself uses them to try to talk. It shows us what *it* finds meaningful.”
Laura’s father peered at her, puzzled.
“The Place is a Nown, Da.”
Tziga opened his mouth, but didn’t say anything for a long moment. Finally he said, “Whose?”
“I don’t know.” (Knox 2007, p. 429).
The communications on the telegraph line, however, and indeed Laura’s whole relationship with the Place move beyond this dependant relationship and into what is closer to the erotic relationship with place that Terry Tempest Williams’ experiences. For Williams, the erotic relationship is about ‘a “two-way love,” a giving and receiving. It is about vulnerability, surrender, and an engagement of soul’ (McFarland Taylor 2004, p. 41), and she finds this eroticism in her relationship with nature, through the giving and receiving of pleasure and succour:

Climbing… into the arms of a juniper tree… she spends much of the day straddling the branches and nestling her body deep into the body of the tree. “I had forgotten what it felt like to be really held”… When she [climbs down], she stops for a moment and gives back to the body that held her so intimately: “Feet on Earth. I took out my water bottle and saturated the roots. Pink sand turned red. I left the desert in a state of wetness” (Williams, cited in McFarland Taylor 2004, p. 42).

Laura experiences something similar in her encounters with both her own Nown – a physical embodiment of the land, and the Place – a giant, voiceless Nown that becomes an environment of its own. With her own earthy Nown, she uses their reciprocal relationship to be held and carried in much the same way as Williams:

Laura told [Nown] to pick up her pack. He did. Then she told him to pick her up. His arms were faintly warm, like sand under a winter sun. They softened to accommodate her. She rested her head on his chest, heard a faint creak of sand moving on sand – but no heartbeat (Knox 2005, p. 374).

With the Place, the reverence and eroticism in their relationship stems from Laura’s appreciation of the landscape’s own form of embrace:

When the last [blanket] was lifted Laura looked down on the bared earth. At that moment it seemed to her that the most significant things that had ever happened to her – The Gate [dream], and [her time with] Sandy – had happened in this uncomfortable spot. She stood looking reverently at the ground, her face soft with serenity and bodily tiredness (Knox 2007, p. 311);
And in the Place’s raptured sense of anticipation as it waits for her – tapping out its ecstatic expectation on the telegraph line:

[Chorley] flipped the book to show [Rose] its first page, and its title: “Bad code from the obsolete Founderston-Sisters Beach telegraph line, 1886-1893.” Mamie said, “It is Maud – chapter twenty-two, stanza eleven.” She read it out.

She is coming, my own, my sweet;
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Were it earth in an earthy bed;
My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead;
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red (Knox 2007, p. 116).

In ‘The Course’, Hedy too finds a level of eroticism and love in her experiences with her landscapes, recalling the sensations she felt within them when she feels the desire for reconnection:

The last time they had lain together here the wheat had just been taken in. Now the field was awash in green clover and wild flowers – bursts of colour waving in the breeze… There was such a beautiful contrast to their skin where they lay together, dark over light. The day was already fading, and she and Pasha still lay where they had fallen, the crushed, sweet-smelling clover a mattress beneath them (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, pp. 206; 208);

Eventually they would embrace, Pasha’s hands as warm and dextrous as ever, and Hedy would find herself back beneath the oak tree with the smell of clover in her nose (Mulcahy, ‘The Course’, p. 224).

Finally, this reciprocal love between a person and the character-of-place can sometimes become biased and one-sided, with the landscape becoming a ‘body that is used, rather than a body that is shared… [a] pornographic encounter’ (McFarland Taylor 2004, p. 42). The relationship becomes soulless and exploitative, something that Williams argues is how we as humans currently interact with the environment – taking what we need without giving back: “As we mine, as we deforest, as we dam rivers, as we pump gallon after gallon of water out of the aquifers beneath the desert, [we drain] its very life force” (McFarland Taylor 2004, p. 42). This division between
reciprocal erotic love, and exploitative pornographic love is also present in *Dreamhunter*, as Tziga Hame warns his daughter not to follow in his footsteps, ignoring the land and its needs:

Laura, you must listen to what the Place tells you, what it will tell you if it speaks to you as clearly as it has to me since the beginning. I wasn’t ever prepared to listen to it. I should have let it make something of me – what it needed me to be. Instead, I took what I wanted from it (Knox 2007, p. 283).

In the end, Laura’s relationship with landscape and the Place is of a far more mutual nature – the true understanding and connection that can exist between person and place, or gardener and garden. Personified in her relationship with the mobile, ninth Nown, and the fixed tenth is the wonder that exists in the relationship between humankind and nature:

By its master’s own actions the first letter of… Nown’s name was erased. It was its Own, and it remembered an earlier promise it had made: ‘I promise in the future to do more, to do – I know not what – to save whomever you love.’
Laura knew she would love her as yet unborn son… [Her] servant, the ninth Nown, had loved her, and so the giant, immobile, speechless tenth, the Place, remembered having loved her… It tried by the only means available to it – the memories of the lives its territory had encompassed – to tell anyone who would listen… To show them… the beauty of human life… the joy of the boy on the shore racing the schooner, the happiness of the singsong around the beach bonfire – dancers, banquets, desires, balloon rides, the miracle of rivers. *Life* (Knox 2007, p. 478).

For Laura, as with *Landscapes* Glorianna, and Hedy from ‘The Course’, the connection, love, and restoration that can be found in a relationship with nature spreads beyond that bond and into all the corners of a person’s life – mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual.
CHAPTER SIX – CREATIVE WRITING TECHNIQUES

Methods Used to Create ‘The Course’.

‘The Course’ was approached first and foremost as a layered, creative artefact comprised of bibliotherapeutic, fantastical, and historical elements. By applying the particular creative techniques that were suited to its themes of posttraumatic stress, loss, spousal abuse, abandonment, and the significance of place, its formation as a multifaceted text was achieved. As a bibliotherapeutic narrative that is intended to be used as a beneficial therapeutic mechanism for readers, ‘The Course’ required a balance between being a text read for its entertainment value, and a text with intentional therapeutic properties. In turn, the therapeutic elements needed to be neither too heavy-handed, nor too unstructured.

In order to achieve both the narrative and bibliotherapeutic goals of the story, a single-perspective, third-person point of view was used, and important, selective moments from the protagonist Hedy Carrow’s life were presented and explored in a linear, arcing chronology that encapsulated her life span. By presenting the text in this straightforward order, the reader is allowed to experience Hedy’s life – its trials, and her strengths and weaknesses – in a recognisable format of cause and effect. In the same way, the perspective of third-person, limited omniscience created a subjective narration that allowed the reader to observe both Hedy’s internal and external world. The perspective became a guide that could lead the reader through Hedy’s experiences, choices, and mental processes, without sacrificing their role as observers, rather than as participants – an issue that may have arisen with the use of the far more personal and internal perspective of the first-person point of view.

The use of setting, both physical and chronological, also needed to be approached carefully in order to ensure that the situation remained recognisable enough for identification by the reader.
The events could not be so dislocated from the present that any potential reader would struggle to connect with the issues presented for bibliotherapy. The elements of fantasy also aided in achieving this outcome by creating a world where the extraordinary could be explored, whilst remaining framed in a comprehensible format.

In terms of the most vital creative techniques used to create ‘The Course’, this chapter will focus on the elements of:

- Writing Bibliotherapy
- Perspective, Voice, and Characterisation
- Plot, Structure, and Length
- The Technique of Setting: Location, and Era
- Using Setting Within the Fantasy Genre
- Cliché Within the Fantasy Genre

The examination and unpacking of these techniques illustrates the methods taken to create ‘The Course’, and to position it not only as a fantasy narrative or a bibliotherapeutic text, but as a work that encapsulates and integrates both of these outcomes.

**Writing Bibliotherapy.**

Much has been written about the reading of bibliotherapeutic books, but little on the writing of them. At its core, bibliotherapeutic writing is a process that emphasises the ‘understanding and sharing of human experience’ (Brand 1979, p. 58). In order for this process to be most effective, a bibliotherapeutic book needs to be written with a few literary techniques in mind. Adelaide writes that an author does not necessarily need to define their target audience, that a book written ‘purely for oneself [has] the capacity to speak to a vast readership’ (2007, p. 8). In regards to bibliotherapy, this approach may be slightly altered – there is a very definite targeted audience for therapeutic fiction, and whilst the therapeutic elements of the story cannot exclude, or even necessarily take precedence over the storytelling or the entertainment value of the
narrative, reader demographics such as age, trauma, or level of recovery need to be taken into account when writing bibliotherapeutically.

Most important to the writer of bibliotherapy is an awareness of how, in ‘creating the text [an author is] invoking a reader’ (Adelaide 2007, p. 9). The reader is the ‘implied object of the text’ (Adelaide 2007, p. 9), and becomes the voice of the writing. This is critical to a bibliotherapeutic narrative, as the story acts as a ‘palimpsest, a draft, a black-and-white outline, for the reader to superimpose their imagination [on]’ (Adelaide 2007, p. 9). The reader is given a framework on which they can build their own interpretation of the therapeutic elements of the narrative. In this way, the story is prevented from ‘railroading’ the reader towards what goals and conclusions the writer assumes are beneficial, and allows for a more organic relationship between what is read and who reads it.

In regards to voice in general, the relationship between text and the voice of the reader is not the only important dynamic in bibliotherapeutic writing. In any story the reader relies on the voice of the character, or characters to experience the narrative and its themes (Bowman 2009). For bibliotherapy this is particularly important, as the character voice needs to be one that the reader can identify with, as well as being one that can guide the reader through healthy, non-destructive cognitive patterns and processes, if it is to be successful as a bibliotherapeutic text.

An identifiable and bibliotherapeutically-minded voice is not the only element of a therapeutic narrative that needs to be clear and recognisable. The setting of a story must be designed in a way that is, as Bowman writes, ‘major’ rather than ‘minor’ – in other words a specific, or ‘minor’ locality such as a small town must be made large, or ‘major’ in order for it to become universal (2009, p. 11). In this way, the reader can ‘recognize aspects of their own histories, and relate to the narrator’ (Bowman 2009, p. 11) – something that is particularly vital for bibliotherapy.
This recognisability was achieved in ‘The Course’ through the careful construction of both Hedy’s voice, and the settings that she found herself in. Hedy faces the problems of her life in a realistic way, which often includes her initially handling things badly, or unhealthily, however, she eventually learns how to unpack her experiences in order to begin incorporating them into the person that she has become. Her initial fears and thoughts of helplessness, or inadequacy help to set the baseline from which a reader may be potentially starting when reading the story.

The setting of ‘The Course’ was also constructed in such a way that it was both specific enough to be realistic, but also broad enough to be easily recognisable. By creating a fictitious little English town, and an accompanying, unnamed ‘big city’, set in a non-specific location, the reader is allowed to draw their own suppositions, without being jarred out of a connection to the text through a specific ‘minor’ element of the setting that contradicts their own, self-created imaginings.

The construction of a bibliotherapeutic text relies a great deal upon the balance between the intellectual and emotional challenges of the story. At their core, therapeutic texts are designed to soothe emotionally, rather than challenge intellectually (Holmes 2006). This is particularly relevant to creating bibliotherapy for children – as children that are under stress often tend to regress – however, whilst the level of language and the complexity of themes may increase for an older audience, the emotional connection remains the primary goal of any bibliotherapeutic text, regardless of age (Holmes 2006). As was addressed in Chapter Three, adults suffering from particular issues such as depression, often find it easier and more beneficial to read less intellectually taxing stories compared to when they are less ill.

It is for this reason that elements such as the wider-reaching, geo-political outcomes of both world wars were not explored in ‘The Course’. Rather, the emphasis remained on the emotional impact that such massive changes in the social, political, and cultural landscape had upon Hedy and her family and friends. Indeed, spanning across most of the twentieth century as
‘The Course’ does, there was a vast amount of complex change and development that could have been addressed more deeply; however, these instead became part of the setting, aiding in presenting Hedy’s internal, emotional experiences as she engaged with these external changes.

This focus on emotionality is aided by the natural properties of fiction. When an author creates characters and situations, they place themselves and the reader in the position of observer. For bibliotherapy, this viewing position is especially important in order to create the distance needed between traumatic situations and the reader. Bowman talks of the larger opportunity for healing that this distance brings to the writer:

By creating characters and giving them difficult lives, or putting them in bad situations and then forcing them to cope, I can write about life and pain as an observer, rather than as a participant. Controlling characters, and the world around them, gives the writer a wide range of opportunity for catharsis (2009, p. 9).

While this is in reference to the experience of the writer, the same effect of distance applies to readers as well, allowing them to experience the traumatic events within a bibliotherapeutic text without creating more stress and trauma from the sensation of direct experience.

Combining this effect of distance with the outlining framework of plot, character, and theme, readers of both fantasy and literary fiction are left to ‘[fill] in the unwritten elements in [a writer’s] work’ (Alter 2011). For Eco, a fictional text hints at a world within, it is a ‘lazy machine asking the reader to do some of its work’ (cited in Alter 2011). This kind of ‘work’ is admirable in a story, and essential in bibliotherapy. The reader is unconsciously spurred into making their own connections between events and themes within the narrative, and this generates a similar connection between the therapeutic issues brought up in a story and the issues that the readers face themselves. Holmes writes of this direct connection between a reader’s fears and concerns, and the problems presented within a story in relation to children: ‘giving voice to a child’s fears or concerns is often enough to allow the child to talk about his or her feelings. Stating a problem in
terms [they] will recognize will help [them] understand what is happening’ (2006, p. 41). This in turn (for both children and adults) allows the reader of bibliotherapy to identify and give voice to their own issues and fears, which can then be discussed within the appropriate therapeutic environment.

**Perspective, Voice, and Characterisation.**

Point of view and perspective were integral to the success of ‘The Course’, revolving as it does around the life of a single character – Hedy Carrow. Considering that point of view must involve a ‘full and authentic report of human experience… satisfying a reader with such matters as coherence, manipulation of judgement, the mingling of scenes, summary and description’ (Jua & Besong 2009, p. 39), as well as (in the case of ‘The Course’) allowing a reader to engage the story bibliotherapeutically, both perspective and point of view were considered very carefully before any writing commenced.

Limited omniscience was chosen as the narrative point of view for ‘The Course’ – a viewpoint that allowed for both a focus on a single character (in this case Hedy), and an awareness of how the external world is filtered and reflected through the character that is focused upon. The narrator in general is the creator of the narrative’s style and organisation – responsible for all of the sentences within a text, just as the characters are responsible for the dialogue (Buchholz 2009). In terms of the limited omniscient narrator, Jua and Besong describe character responses to the limited omniscient point of view as that of varying degrees of awareness, ‘ranging from the most naïve to the most sophisticated. As [the character] responds to events around [them], [they] may arrive at a meaningful discovery about [themselves], other people, [their] environment, or [their] moral and spiritual relationships’ (2009, p. 41). This viewpoint is integral for the success of ‘The Course’, as it allows the reader to experience Hedy’s approach to her environment, as well as her changing views and actions in regards to her family, and her environment.
In order for this approach to be successful, the limited omniscience needed to be coupled with the third-person perspective. By doing this, the distance necessary in order to maintain the narrative’s ability to perform as a bibliotherapeutic text was achieved. By using the third-person perspective, the limited omniscient narrator also became a covert narrator – a presence that ‘remains hidden in the discursive shadows’ (Buchholz 2009, p. 212). The covert narrator stands as middle ground between that of the invisible narrator, who gives a ‘camera eye’ account of what occurs, and the overt narrator, who creates a definite, conspicuous presence within the story (Buchholz 2009, p. 212).

This covert presence, framed in the third-person point of view allows the author to show enough of the main character for the reader to understand and identify with their strengths and weaknesses, whilst also illustrating the external world, and the elements that are clear to the reader, but less evident to the character (Buchholz 2009). For ‘The Course’, this allowed the reader to identify and understand Hedy’s choices and thought processes, but gave enough of an outsider’s perspective to illustrate how her understanding of the people and the world around her might have been flawed.

In addition to the covert narrator, the third-person perspective also allowed the narrative techniques of dual presence and free indirect discourse to be employed. Free indirect discourse (FID) is a subtle narrative technique that allows for insight into the mind of a character without a direct quotation (Buchholz 2009). Mezei suggests that one ‘imagine FID as an expression of the character’s bid for freedom from the controlling narrator’ (1996). The narrator occupies a much-reduced role, allowing the subjective nature of the character’s own personality to shine through. Due to the third-person perspective being retained, the theory of dual voice arises. It supports the idea that, while the narrative voice is much reduced, it is still present while the character speaks indirectly in ‘the same utterance’ (Buchholz 2009).
The use of this technique in ‘The Course’ allowed for the subtle awareness of how Hedy was interpreting and interacting with the external world, instead of using an explicit shift in punctuation and grammar, as would happen if the indirect statements were couched in quotation marks, and prefaced with the phrase, ‘[she] thought to herself’ (Buchholz 2009, p. 204). It is an effect that has been used within ‘The Course’ to allow the reader to – almost subconsciously – become aware of Hedy’s thoughts and feelings, and identify with them without feeling as though they have been overtly told what Hedy experienced, or how to experience it themselves.

At the end of ‘The Course’, the point of view shifts subtly from Hedy to her granddaughter Erin, in order to show the cyclical nature of the narrative, and to illustrate the therapeutic theme that Hedy’s experiences can be passed on to another – to someone who can learn from her triumphs and failures. The voice shifts from one life and character to another.

The creation of voice was important to the success of ‘The Course’, acting as it does as a guide for the reader, when the author cannot. As Bowman writes:

[The character’s] voice is not my voice, it has limitations and I’ve left [them] alone with the reader. Exegetically I can explain my connection and my reasons, but in the actual story, it’s the reader who enters into the text to find what it is saying; I cannot walk alongside my fiction with my notes, pointing out what changes have been made, what experiments I’ve undertaken and why the reader should be lenient. The narrative is constrained to that one voice (2009, p. 8).

For ‘The Course’, Hedy Carrow’s voice needed to serve as a guide for the reader, and for this to be achieved, for this connection between character and reader to be established and maintained, all the voices of ‘The Course’ – most especially Hedy’s, needed to be clear and easily understood. If the setting of a story is particularly specialised – for example if it is contained within a specific time period, or a specific location that contains its own localised speech, idioms, and customs (as in the case of ‘The Course’), then the voice and the writing need to be authentic, but they also need to work beyond time, or location. A character’s story ‘should be clear, or unclear,
to any reader regardless of geography’ (Bowman 2009, p. 11), it needs to be aimed not at readers in a certain location, but directed toward ‘any reader who would be affected by love, hate, life or death’ for example (Bowman 2009, p. 11).

In terms of ‘The Course’, set as it is in a fictitious English village, and occurring as it does across most of the twentieth century, voice had to be both realistic and accessible. Both the direct and the indirect discourse was slightly formalised, and anglicised, however, not to the point that it became so mired in its own location and time period that the greater western reader could no longer understand or identify with Hedy, or the characters with which she interacted.

The technique of voice is encapsulated by the greater practice of characterisation. In the same way that voice must be both authentic and comprehensible, character as a whole must also engender belief on the part of the reader. If the motives and actions of the character do not come across as credible and coherent, if their thoughts ‘simply do not make sense’ then the story itself will be rejected (Jua & Besong 2009, p. 48). A perceptive reader will usually ask, when presented with the actions, or thoughts of a character, whether they are psychologically credible, or ‘in character’ (Jua & Besong 2009, p. 54). Moreover, a character’s actions must be significant in terms of their own characterisation, since, as Jua and Besong state, ‘[f]iction never deals with character in isolation, for what [someone] is determines what [they do]. Plot and character interpenetrate in a story’ (2009, p. 54).

For ‘The Course’, and for the main character of Hedy in particular, characterisation had to walk a fine line between being credible and identifiable, and being too bland and un-nuanced. As a figure through which the reader must be able to engage bibliotherapeutically, Hedy needed to be both ordinary enough to serve as an icon for any reader, and dynamic enough to be engaging and vibrant as a character. More specifically, this vibrancy was important because Hedy was required to travel great metaphorical distances within ‘The Course’ – to adventure into her own mind.
Sackville-West discusses this connection between character and travel, asserting that anyone can physically travel, but to achieve ‘an adventure in the mind’ requires a certain kind of spirit (cited in Kelley 2005, p. 368). This ‘spirit’ was necessary to spur Hedy into exploring the fantasy world of Sanctuary, and the deeper recesses of her own mind – to create a metaphorical travel narrative of sorts. Through her balanced characterisation, the fantastical, explorative elements of the story were matched, and even fused with its bibliotherapeutic aims.

**Plot, Structure, and Length.**

The process of structuring a plot, integrating ‘multiple and scattered events into one unified story’ (Comte 2001, p. 4), is generated through the use of exposition, rising action, climax, and dénouement (conclusion), (Jua & Besong 2009). These characteristics of structure can be achieved through the coherent and/or credible use of conflict within the plot (Jua & Besong 2009). Conflict within a story can relate to many relationships – those between a person and nature, between people themselves, and between a person and their own minds (Jua & Besong 2009). These conflicts, or complications are created by the interplay between character and events, ‘build[ing]… the tension and develop[ing] the conflict out of the original situation… in [a] story’ (Jua & Besong 2009, p. 63).

For Hedy, the conflict in her life serves a twofold purpose – firstly, to achieve the central part of a successful plot structure, and secondly, to create issues and problems that can be approached and read bibliotherapeutically. In order to be successful, the conflict and the resultant resolution needed to be well-plotted and detailed enough to stimulate the reader into considering the complications present in ‘The Course’ in relation to their own issues. This relied on the strategic creation of certain stressful, or unpleasant moments within Hedy’s life.
The structure and length of ‘The Course’ influenced the choice and construction of events and complications across the span of Hedy’s life. A span of what amounted to over eighty years needed to be refined and encapsulated in only forty-thousand words without losing the gradual and believable evolution of character, as well as the sensation of having witnessed the passing of a long and full life. Because of this, the scenes chosen all needed to contribute something towards the forward momentum of the plot, as well as presenting examples and processes related to the chosen areas of bibliotherapy, such as the effects of trauma, death and suicide, abuse and abandonment, and the healing and restorative use of gardens and natural spaces.

Considering these parameters, centrally-important events and crises such as the trauma that Hedy’s husband, Pasha suffered in the war, his subsequent suicide, Hedy’s discovery of Sanctuary and its garden-space, her encounter with the mirrors of Sanctuary that illuminated her biological origins, and the gradual development of her own self-trust, were created almost as milestones around which the smaller, interlinked events were generated.

The Technique of Setting: Location, and Era.

Setting was integral to the creation and the realisation of ‘The Course’, especially considering the elements of fantasy, and the bibliotherapeutic themes of horticulture and landscape that exist within it. In reference to his own writing, Krauth states that setting is ‘never just a backdrop, it is always an active participant in the fiction. It is always doing things, meaning things, being metaphor or symbol, in itself analogous – or antithetical – to the foregrounded drama of characters and ideas’ (2003, p. 2). Such was the case with setting in ‘The Course’, where one of the primary locations – that of the fantastical Sanctuary, acted as a metaphor for Hedy’s own mind.
With such a significant level of meaning attached, it performed almost as another character within the story, continually active, continually engaged with the ‘characters and ideas’ of ‘The Course’.

Beyond Sanctuary, the other settings of ‘The Course’ – both physical, and chronological, were also chosen with an intention and awareness of their significance in terms of the greater plot and characterisation. While the author had no experience of both rural England, and the early twentieth century when writing ‘The Course’, direct experience of a specific setting or event is not necessarily beneficial, or even required. This is endorsed by Willard, who states that, ‘The [person] who never fought in a war may describe a battle much more vividly than the [person] who did’ (1977, p. 432). Indeed, when it comes to writing within the fantasy genre, a lack of direct experience related to a specific fantastical setting is almost assured.

In ‘The Course’, just as in many other stories, direct experience of a setting is replaced by a sort of intuitive alchemy. Writing about his war novel The Red Badge of Courage, Stephen Crane discussed his lack of battle experience, but suggested that he received the relevant understanding needed to write convincingly of the American Civil War through analogous moments: ‘I believe that I got my sense of rage of conflict on the football field, or else fighting is a hereditary instinct, and I wrote intuitively’ (cited in Willard 1977, p. 433). In a similar fashion, the relevant experience needed to write convincingly of twentieth century England was gleaned from an alchemical mix of experiences ranging from the personal, to the anecdotal. The reason that indirect, rearranged amalgams of experiences work within a story stems from the very essence of what fiction represents. ‘Fiction records experiences and ideas, re-shapes and re-creates the world that surrounds the writer, and projects it outward, in an attempt to share’ (Bowman 2009, p. 2).

Setting not only assists in the connection between direct experience and fiction, but also between character and landscape. For women, their link to setting and landscape has long been explored in fiction, with Rundstrom discussing this connection in relation to Willa Cather’s works
Within Cather’s works is evident the social and natural link between women and the land, and Rundstrom argues that this stems from the shared seasonal rhythms of the earth, and the cultural roles that bind women to the land (1995). Such a connection influences the relationship between Hedy and the landscapes within which she dwells in ‘The Course’.

Hedy was intended to have a complex relationship with setting – seen as an outsider by some people due to her Indian heritage, she in turn contradictorily feels her strongest connection to her English farm and to the rural land around it. So strong is this sense of connection that when removed to the city, she struggles to thrive, emphasising the necessity of her link with place. In addition, Hedy’s discovery of Sanctuary allows her to not only explore her connection to her biological roots, but also how people can affect and be affected by the landscape. Bowman discusses this and asserts that, as humans, we ‘naturally assert ourselves on each environment we enter’ (2009, p. 5). Hedy asserts herself on the landscape of Sanctuary, and in turn Sanctuary leaves its mark on her. Rundstrom, however, argues that women do not ‘assert’ themselves upon landscape in the same way that men do. Through their ability to adjust to the rhythms of nature, women find the ability to live ‘in harmony with the land’ (1995, p. 225). They ‘connect with rather than conquer the environment’ (1995, p. 225). This idea of the female experience of setting and environment was also crucial for the choice of chronological location within ‘The Course’.

The choice to set ‘The Course’ across the span of the twentieth century stemmed from the desire to not only place a young Hedy in a time that was less technologically advanced, and more connected to the land and its rhythms (within a rural setting), but also to place her across a century that is recognised by most as the era that has seen the greatest change socially, culturally, and technologically. The huge shifts in the traditions and ways of life that occurred throughout the century helped to mirror and create a backdrop for the changes that occurred within Hedy as she grew up, and grew old.
The knowledge that readers have of the set time period also creates an additional effect. Through the act of placing ‘The Course’ within a particular historical setting, an additional layer of awareness is generated. Krauth writes of the particular coding that stems from placing a story within a specific historical scene:

If I had said to you [the setting is] The Sari Club in Legian Road, Kuta two years ago [in 2001] you would have thought then an entirely different set of narratives from those conjured up today. And if I use the Sari Club for a scene in a novel set back in 1990, the setting will have a particular edge and resonance, imposed from ‘the future’… it will be coded from the reader’s time and perspective. And then again, someone reading it in twenty years time may not get the point at all, because the significance of the place might have become obscure (2003, p. 1).

The same is true with ‘The Course’. Beginning in 1910, the reader is acutely aware – as the characters are not – that the First World War is looming only a few years ahead of them, that the Second World War will follow only two decades later, and that the feminist and ‘free love’ movements of the sixties will come after that, along with the steady rise of technology. This awareness on the reader’s part colours, or ‘codes’ the story using the reader’s own time and perspective. Chronological setting becomes something that is read on multiple levels – through the character’s experiences, and through the reader’s own knowledge and awareness of history and events.

For Hedy, much of her own experience of setting – both chronological and physical – is derived through travel. For western women of the early twentieth century (when ‘The Course’ is first set) travelling to remote settings in order to seek an escape was an especially transgressive act (Kelley 2005). They travelled in order to find a sense of authority, and to find a place dissimilar enough from their homes that it could serve as a ‘vehicle for inscribing something new, even something unspoken about themselves’ (Kelley 2005, p. 357).
For ‘The Course’, this travel to discover the ‘unspoken self’ is largely metaphorical – an ‘excursion into fantasy’ (Kelley 2005, p. 367). Such excursions, however, have the ability to allow a character to voyage into their own mind (2005) – a mental journey that is situated at the heart of ‘The Course’. Hedy’s journey into Sanctuary is literally a journey into her own mind, the fantastical metaphors she encounters allow her to explore herself through travel and setting in a way that would not necessarily have been available to her if she had remained ‘at home’.

This form of travel, and Hedy’s experience of the foreign setting of Sanctuary could be termed as ‘imaginative geography’ (Said, cited in Kelley 2005, p. 358) – a way of understanding how ‘space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here’ (Said, cited in Kelley 2005, p. 358). As Kelley argues, the greater allowance given to women’s narratives to engage in self-exploration, also implies that they may be freer to examine ‘imaginative geographies’ (2005, p. 358). Hedy’s Sanctuary most certainly acquires an emotional sense – converted into meaning through Hedy’s experiences there. In this way, the setting achieves its purpose, representing a subjective, emotional space for Hedy – a chance to escape the bonds of her home and travel, and at the same time explore who she is within her own environment in England.

Alter suggests that setting not be dismissed, or deemed unimportant due to its inclusion of everything from place, culture, and history to the political and social climate, the weather, the language, and even the mood of a place (2011). Beyond this though, she also stresses that the element of setting is especially important when it comes to the fantasy genre (2001). As Tuttle states, ‘world-building, in… fantasy, is more than just background: it plays a role equivalent to that of a major character’ (cited in Alter 2011).
Using Setting within the Fantasy Genre.

Whilst the variations of setting within the fantasy genre are numerous, there are a few particular forms that it can take within the genre that tend to situate a story within one subgenre or another. If the fantasy story is set within the real world, or within a rational and familiar world, then it is generally classified as ‘low fantasy’ (Alter 2011). Alternatively, a story that is set in a fully realised world that is completely unconnected to this one – an ‘imaginary world’, is described as ‘high fantasy’ (Alter 2001).

This broad categorisation is contentious, however, as Alter relates. ‘Low fantasy’ stories that include portals to fantastical worlds, such as C. S. Lewis’ Narnia Chronicles have elements that would allow them to be classified as both high and low fantasy (2011). ‘The Course’ belongs to this ‘portal fantasy’ category. Much of story within ‘The Course’ is set in the real world of twentieth century England, however, essential sections of the narrative occur within Sanctuary, a fantastical ‘other world’ that – while still connected to Hedy’s home – is very much separate from the non-fantastical real world.

Within any subgenre of fantasy, setting needs to be a ‘dynamic and changing space’ in order for the reader to be able to ‘constantly discover… new corners and histories of the imagined world’ (Alter 2011). For ‘The Course’, this remained true to a point, as Sanctuary represented not only a dynamic, fantastical new world for Hedy to explore, but also a refuge where she could find safety, and renewal, and in turn so could the bibliotherapeutic reader. For this to be successful, a certain number of unchanging, comforting spaces and characters within Sanctuary needed to be created, such as the walled garden and the settlement, and the characters of Rachael and Pia.

Regardless of the form taken, setting plays a particularly important role within fantasy texts, and certain effects of a fantasy setting upon the reader are relatively universal. Primarily, whilst a
fantasy setting will create ‘unfamiliar settings, characters, and narratives, they always make use of
the reader’s knowledge of the real world in doing so’ (Alter 2011). As Jackson states, the fantasy
realm is not truly the invention of another world, but the inversion of this one, recombining its
elements and features to create something strange, unfamiliar, and seemingly new (cited in Alter
2011).

The same was the case for ‘The Course’, where Sanctuary represented a strange new
amalgam of elements from Hedy’s world, and from parts of her ancestral home in India. They
were reconstituted to form the fantasy world and filled with beings that were strange versions of
creatures and substances found in the real world. Sanctuary ‘inverted’ parts of reality, and re-
represented them as something strange and wonderful, whilst remaining partially recognisable and
familiar. This recognition creates verisimilitude and allows readers of ‘The Course’ to be carried
away through the wonder of a fantastical place, whilst still feeling connected to the reality of Hedy’s
life, and the very real issues that she is facing.

This credible construction of an unreal setting sets the reader in a position of discovery.
In order for this discovery to be both successful and enjoyable within the context of the fantasy
genre, fantasy settings must be ‘more than just a background – they must provide the vicarious
experience of a different world’ (Alter 2011). The physical elements of the setting need to be a part
of the supernatural, or magical features of the narrative in order to emphasise the fantastical
elements of the story and engender the sense of wonder expected from the genre (Alter 2011).
Usually if this process is successful, and the setting is successfully evoked, the reader will
experience a strong sense of the feeling and mood of the place (Alter 2011). This perception is
particularly important within the fantasy genre, as ‘the experience of imagined place’ is one of the
specific pleasures often sought when reading fantasy narratives (Alter 2011).
One way of viscerally connecting readers to setting in a fantasy text is through the use of the five senses – describing a setting through smell, sight, touch, taste, and sound (Alter 2011). Whilst this approach is advocated by many authors across all genres of fictive writing, it takes on a particular effectiveness when dealing with fantasy. With the necessary importance of setting in fantasy stories, using the five senses to describe a character’s experience of place compels the reader to absorb the very heart and wonder of a fantastical place. No longer a simple backdrop, the setting can be brought to life by drawing attention to those visceral elements that both ground the fantasy setting in a level of reality that the reader can understand, and illustrate the strange and wondrous differences that exist: alien scents on the wind, a sliding touch against the skin when a character is alone, the strange taste of a potion, or the vast sweep of a landscape – wild and filled with the cries of unknown creatures.

In ‘The Course’, the senses play a large part in describing Sanctuary and communicating its wonders to the reader. Hedy experiences the fantasy setting through all five senses – the vertigo of the island’s cliffs and the spangled light of the stars underground, the scents in the garden and up in the mountains, the taste of the chai, the icy feel of the river and the slickness of the stone pavements, and the sounds of the creatures that she encounters. Through her, the reader experiences the fear and wonder of the imagined place.

Cliché within the Fantasy Genre.

There are particular elements of writing that can often become over-used tropes – or clichés – when used whilst writing genre fiction. In order to avoid one’s writing become stereotypical, Bowman suggests – in reference to his own work – that an author draws the focus away from the genre-orientated mores of their novel, and moves the reader towards the human
elements of their tale – such as love and the loss of love, or life and the loss of life (2009). For fantasy, there are numerous themes and features that are often seen as clichés of the genre – in fact so numerous and so well-known are they that Diana Wynne Jones, a celebrated fantasy author, published *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* – a tongue-in-cheek collection of numerous fantasy truisms. An encyclopaedic a to z of everything from the apostrophes in fantastical names, to the mystical zodiacs that predict a traveller’s fate, *The Tough Guide* illustrates many of the genre pitfalls that exist for fantasy fiction:

Find the MAP. It will be there. No Tour of fantasyland is complete without one… This will be followed by a short piece of prose that says *when the night of the wolf waxes strong in the morning, the wise man is wary of a false dawn. Ka’a Orto’o, Gnomic Utterances, VI ii*… Examine the map… There will be scribbly snakes that are probably RIVERS, and names made of CAPITAL LETTERS in curved lines that are not quite upside down… Find your STARTING POINT. Let us say it is the town of Gna’ash. You will find it down in one corner on the coast, as far away from anywhere as possible. Having found Gna’ash, you must at once set about finding an INN, Tour COMPANIONS, a meal of STEW, a CHAMBER for the night, and then the necessary TAVERN BRAWL… The following morning, you must locate the MARKET and attempt to acquire CLOTHING (which absolutely must include a CLOAK), a SADDLE ROLL, WAYBREAD, WATER-BOTTLES, a DAGGER, a SWORD, a HORSE, and a MERCHANT to take you along in his CARAVAN… You set off… [You should] select your Tour on a pick-and-mix basis, remembering only that you will have to take in all of it, so that it is no use going straight to CONCLUSION. Management Rules will not allow you to do this until you are on your third brochure (Jones 2006, pp. x-xii).

Alter discusses how a writer can subvert these genre associations and archetypes by contrasting them with different, or opposing standards, and creating something that is seemingly new and unusual (2011). Tolkien suggests something similar, emphasising ‘Recovery’ in fantasy, or a way of presenting ‘old imagery and ideas in new fresh ways’ (cited in Alter 2011). Garth Nix’s *Old Kingdom* trilogy presents an excellent example of this re-presentation, combining the gothic, medieval modes of traditional, Tolkienesque fantasy, and juxtaposing it with a land that is reminiscent of early twentieth century England. The two worlds collide together at the Wall – a setting that is reminiscent of both World War One, and the Berlin wall, and combine to create a
subversion of the usual bucolic, medieval, pre-industrial setting of traditional high fantasy (Alter 2011).

In ‘The Course’, a similar awareness of the pitfalls of genre writing was acknowledged, and steps were made during the writing process to avoid them where possible. Tropes such as magic and magical systems were largely circumvented, long, physical quests and journeys were replaced by the metaphorical and mental travels within Sanctuary, and the usual hierarchical systems of gods and religions were not used at all. Instead, the focus of the fantasy elements within ‘The Course’ was concentrated upon connecting the fantastical with the everyday highs and lows of Hedy’s life in the real world.

Summary of Methods Used to Create ‘The Course’.

The various creative techniques discussed here allowed ‘The Course’ to achieve its primary goals both bibliotherapeutically and structurally as a fictional narrative. The particular characterisation, voice, and perspective chosen allowed for a story that engages with the reader on multiple levels, and creates a balanced relationship between the central character of Hedy, and the reader, whilst the setting – both chronological and physical – created a vivid, dynamic setting that acted as an additional character in order to help convey the fantastical elements of the story, and situate the narrative in a fashion that remained accessible on a therapeutic level. The structure and length of the plot were designed in such a manner that specific conflicts and issues could be explored and addressed bibliotherapeutically, whilst allowing the conflict present within the plot to remain entertaining to a broad audience. Finally, the elements of genre fantasy were used to enhance the bibliotherapeutic experience, avoiding the major genre clichés where possible, and viscerally engaging the reader on an emotional and sensory level.
CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

Through the research undertaken in the exegesis, particularly within the literature review, and the ‘trial and error’, iterative creation of the creative artefact, ‘The Course’, it has been established that not only can the fantasy genre act as a vehicle for bibliotherapy, but that it also possesses particular strengths, such as its subversive nature, freedom of imagination, metaphor and imagery, and escapism that make the genre especially well-suited to bibliotherapy. In addition, the commercial success of some of the authors whose works were examined here – Tamora Pierce, Robin Hobb, and Anne Bishop especially – would suggest that their books do not lose reader appeal due to the subtlety and the interwoven nature of the bibliotherapeutic themes present within their works.

As a result of the review of Robin Hobb’s *The Liveship Traders* trilogy, Jane Routley’s *Mage Heart* trilogy, Tamora Pierce’s *Circle of Magic* quartet, Anne Bishop’s *Landscapes of Ephemera* duology, and Elizabeth Knox’s *Dreamhunter* duology, it was discovered that the texts were indeed successful in their presentation and exploration of the bibliotherapeutic themes of posttraumatic stress disorder, abuse, abandonment, and horticultural therapy. These issues were effective enough to be used in a bibliotherapeutic manner that is appropriate to the situation of the potential reader.

In the course of examining both the processes of bibliotherapy, and the elements and structures of the fantasy genre, certain creative techniques that are beneficial to bibliotherapeutic writing were uncovered. These techniques were then explored and refined further through the creation of the creative artefact, ‘The Course’. Elements such as the third-person perspective, limited omniscience, linear plot structure, accessible, or generally universal voice and setting, and a focus on the emotional impact of events were found to exist within examples of bibliotherapeutic fantasy, and were beneficial in the creation and success of the ‘The Course’.
These findings have significant outcomes for several areas of research, including bibliotherapy in general, the fantasy genre, and the writing of bibliotherapeutic texts. Previous research into bibliotherapy has focused on particular areas or forms of book therapy, such as clinical or children’s bibliotherapy, however, through this exegesis and creative artefact, a much more comprehensive investigation of bibliotherapy as a whole has been achieved. The multiple areas and applications of bibliotherapy were addressed and related to each other in such a way that its role – both historically and contemporarily – was clearly, and fully investigated.

In addition, the process of writing bibliotherapeutic fiction was researched and presented, both within the larger discussion of bibliotherapy, and within the examination of the creative processes used to create ‘The Course’. This is an area that is currently under-researched, and while this exegesis and creative artefact do not comprehensively address the subject of writing bibliotherapy, they do add new elements to the discussion, focusing as they do on areas of plot, character, voice, theme, and setting, examined through the context of bibliotherapy.

Finally, this work has uncovered some valuable and significant new areas of study within the fantasy genre. The exegesis and creative artefact’s research into the use of fantasy as a vehicle for bibliotherapy achieves a deeper understanding of the genre’s historical scope as well as its potential future, and re-contextualises many of the well-established strengths of fantasy (such as its uses of escapism, metaphor, symbolism, and imagery) within a bibliotherapeutic framework. As the accepted range of bibliotherapeutic texts begins to broaden, evidence of the therapeutic abilities of genre fiction will become vital.

In light of these findings, several potential avenues of further research occur. First, there is a need for greater levels of investigation and discussion on the role of the author, and not just the reader, of fictional bibliotherapeutic texts. Much research exists on the varying techniques of creative writing, but very little on contextualising these methods within a bibliotherapeutic
approach. Second, the successful use of bibliotherapy with readers who suffer from PTSD has been largely discounted, however, as this creative artefact and exegesis suggest, there may be the potential to apply bibliotherapy as a support for family or friends of a PTSD sufferer. More research into this form of adjunct bibliotherapy is warranted. Third, the positive conclusions made here in regards to fantasy’s ability to be written and used as bibliotherapy support further research not only into the links between bibliotherapy and fantasy, but also into potentially beneficial associations between bibliotherapy and other genre fiction, such as, romance, crime, science fiction and young adult fiction.

By examining and researching the history and capabilities of bibliotherapy, the techniques of writing bibliotherapy, the thematic and structural strengths of the fantasy genre, and the particular bibliotherapeutic issues that fantasy is well-equipped to explore, a strong foundation of understanding and knowledge was built that led to the effective construction of the creative artefact. A fantasy novella that carefully draws on the unique assets of its genre, ‘The Course’ is at once an instrument and example of bibliotherapy, as well as an entertaining tale of a girl who grew up, grew old, and grew happy.
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CREATIVE ARTEFACT – THE COURSE

MAY, 1897.

“West! Go west!”

The call carried across the chain of villagers as they paced in a line through the forest’s undergrowth. Ahead, Constable Tatlowe, his helmet tucked beneath one arm, whistled sharply and held up a hand for silence. At first there was nothing but the occasional call of the birds, and the spring wind ruffling through the trees above them, until eventually – up to the left and closer than before, came the exhausted cry of a baby.

“There!” the constable shouted from beneath his push broom moustache. A handful of villagers followed the puffing, red-faced policeman over the rise, quickly outpacing him. The cry came again, echoing off the heavy trunks of the oaks and beech trees until the small group of people stumbled to a confused halt.

“Where’s it coming from?” asked the publican, George Eames. He rubbed his shiny bald patch as the others shook their heads, unsure. All except for Molly Carrow, who cocked her head, closed her eyes, and listened to the wail as it bounced around the glade. As the group continued to argue over which way to go, Molly slipped away, climbing over the roots of an ancient elm and picking her way down the hill and into a stand of young trees that were growing up through a blanket of lush spring flowers and dark ivy. The sun was brighter here, filtering through the canopy, and illuminating the golden cups of the daffodils, and the soft, blue petals of the dog violets.

The desperate wail of an infant came again, much closer this time, and Molly strode forward through the thick carpet of wildflowers, crushing the stalks beneath her feet without care. At last, beneath a white-barked birch, she came upon the baby nestled deep within a waxy profusion of ivy. Wrapped in a faded blanket, its face was dusky and spotted with red welts where the ivy had brushed against its delicate skin.
“There now,” Molly said as she bent over and carefully pulled the infant free of the grasping leaves. “Isn’t that better?”

The baby grizzled in her arms, blinking eyes that couldn’t seem to decide whether they were blue or grey. Molly sighed and cast her gaze back in the direction of the other villagers. “Well, there’s no use hanging around here, my girl, best we get back to the others and see what they make of you.”

The baby wrinkled its nose, and sneezed as Molly turned them both towards the sun.

“You can’t keep her, Moll, she’s got to belong to somebody!”

Molly gazed calmly back at George, who was nearly pink with emotion as they sat in the Rectory’s drawing room amongst the gathered few of the village’s most prominent inhabitants – the butcher, Donald, Agnes the postmistress, and Constable Tatlowe. She took a few lazy puffs of her pipe, before removing it to speak.

“Seeing as she was left alone in the forest with only a scrap of blanket for company, I’d say whomever she belonged to doesn’t want him anymore.”

George winced slightly at Molly’s sharp tone before regrouping. “That’s as maybe, but it doesn’t follow that she’ll come to you. No.” He drew himself up, sharp and proper. “The Government shall take her.”

“Fat lot of good that’ll do her,” scoffed Donald. “We’d be better off putting her back in the forest.”

“Oh quiet your noise, Donald,” came the sharp reply from the village’s aged postmistress. “Always going on about the great many things you know nothing about.”
There was some grumbling from the butcher, but he fell quiet quickly – everyone knew not to argue with the iron-haired and iron-willed Agnes, unless of course one didn’t mind a stream of misdirected mail.

The small group fell into an uneasy silence, until finally the door to the rector’s study swung open and Reverend Bishop and Constable Tatlowe emerged, the baby cradled in the rector’s arms. The rector himself was a man of middling years, whose boyhood still clung to him in odd ways – in the coltish form of his long legs, and the strawberry blond flop of hair that draped itself across his head like an indolent toycat, and in the way that he often joked about his name allowing him to hold two religious offices at once.

“Is she all right, then?” asked Molly through the clasp of her pipe.

Reverend Bishop wrinkled his nose in well-bred distaste and turned to Molly. “Really, Miss Carrow, I have asked you not to smoke that dreadful thing indoors, and on more than one occasion…”

Molly grunted and fished a coin out of her pocket, pressing it into the bowl of her pipe and sucking sharply on the end until the smoke tapered away. The rector nodded in relief and turned to face the room collective. “I must congratulate you all on finding this little mite amongst all those trees – quite a feat, although I must say, Constable Tatlowe a trip to someone more medically-minded may have been a more prudent course of action in the circumstances.”

The constable shook his head. “No, Sir, Reverend. Foundlings were allus taken to the Church – best place for them.”

“Good lord man, not since the middle ages! Still.” The rector looked down at the sleeping form held in his arms. “Perhaps on this occasion it was better that you did – goodness knows what would happen to her in an English orphanage.”

“English orphanage?” asked Agnes.

Reverend Bishop sighed. “Yes.” He turned to look at Molly. “It was easy to miss with all of the welts and murky rashes from the ivy, but her skin is quite dark – as is her hair, and combined
with this – he showed them the small square of cheesecloth that had been tucked amongst the blanket. A line of faded brown text was printed across it. “Well, I recognise it from my time in India. It’s Hindi.”

“What does it say?” asked Agnes, her eyes narrowed.

“It says ‘love and prosperity’, Miss Causey,” replied the rector.

“Does that mean… She’s black, then?” said Donald.

The rector cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Well, if you mean to say Indian then yes, at least partially so.”

“Her eyes.”

The room turned as one to face Molly, her gaze fixed on the little girl in the rector’s arms.

“Her eyes, Miss Carrow?”

“Yes her eyes. They’re grey.”

“Well, that’s not particularly uncommon on the continent,” the rector replied.

“So,” Molly started as she stood up. “A girl, not a boy, and an Indian, not an Englishwoman. I’ll still take her if you have a mind to give her to me.” She reached out her hands for the child.

The rector frowned and twisted gently away. “Miss Carrow, I can’t simply hand the baby over to you. In any case it’s not up to me. She must go to the proper authorities before anything more can be decided. Still, as I said before a child with such a heritage will struggle to prosper in an orphanage. Perhaps in light of the circumstances, and in knowledge of your good character, Miss Carrow—” George raised an eyebrow at this, and shared a significant look with Donald. “—I could give my recommendation to the authorities that she be allowed to reside with you. That is of course if you truly wish to have her, Molly? A child is such a responsibility, and she will have the cards stacked against her from the beginning.”

“Can’t we send her back to where she comes from?” Donald cut in. “I mean she’ll fit in over there no worries.”
“She doesn’t come from over there though, does she?” replied Molly, her eyes still fixed on the baby. “She’s never been outside of the county, let alone England. She was born here. I reckon that means she’s home already.”

“Oh, don’t be stubborn, Moll,” said George. “You’re an old m—” He flushed slightly and changed tack. “You’re not as young as you were, and you’ve no husband to speak of. It’s just not right. In any case, can you really see our little village accepting a— accepting an… accepting her?”

“Well,” Molly reached forward and lifted the baby girl out of the rector’s arms, cradling her close to her own chest. “They’re just going to have to, aren’t they?”

“She’ll need a name,” the rector murmured.


“That’s a cow’s name, you daft bugger! You can’t call her that,” said George.

The rector winced. “No, perhaps not the best of names, Mr Heston. Maybe some other plant from the forest, something with a bit more formality. Something Latinate, perhaps?”

Molly sucked her teeth. “Ivy.”

“I’m sorry, Miss Carrow?”

“Ivy. I found her in amongst the ivy. It cradled her, looked after her until we could find her.”

The rector smiled. “Well, yes. It also gave her the most terrible rash – she’s most likely quite allergic to it. Perhaps not the luckiest of names to be stuck with?”

Molly shook her head. “Both a blessing and a curse. Something she made it through, something that didn’t beat her. If she’s to have a tough life, best to have a tough name to go with it, something to remind her of how strong she is.”

There was silence for a moment as the room took in Molly’s rather undisputable logic.

“Indeed, Miss Carrow. Most astute,” The rector smiled. “And if I recall, the Latin name for ivy is Hedera.”

“A good, strong name,” sniffed Agnes.
Molly, as stoic as ever looked down into those grey eyes and gently brushed away a wisp of the baby’s black hair. “Hello then, Hedera.”
PLANTING

JULY, 1910.

The willow hung low over her as she drowsed in the heavy sun of the afternoon – its long, feathery tendrils floating back and forth above her in the slow breeze. Hedy watched the light play through the leaves, listening to the steady rush of the river beyond her feet. This place had been special to her since her mother first let her begin to wander past the farmyard gate. By now she could make her way here with her eyes closed.

The sound of laughter cut into her reverie like a discordant note in a melody. Four boys were making their way over the grassy crest of the hill towards the river. Two of the boys were local – one, Daniel, was the son of a sea-widow from the village, and the other was Michael, the youngest son of George Eames, the publican. Both went to her school, and Michael was in her year, but the other two boys were entirely unfamiliar to her.

The four boys continued to banter, playfully jostling each other as they half-jogged down the slope towards the river and the stand of willows that concealed Hedy. A tendril of unease wound around her insides. The children of the village had never been particularly friendly towards her, and her hiding place – far enough away as it was from any roads or paths had remained blissfully undiscovered by anyone but her.

This part, her part of the river boasted a spit of land where the water almost looped around on itself, creating a near-island of lush, grassy soil where three weeping willows grew, framing the curve of the river. One of the willows grew on the narrow isthmus between the two stretches of water, turning the teardrop of land into a hidden safe haven in all but the barest of winters.

The sound of the boys’ banter grew clearer as they reached the riverbank, a handful of paces downstream from where Hedy was crouched against the trunk of her willow. Peeking out from behind the trailing fronds, she watched them – the two unknown boys in their crisp, white cotton shirts, untucked and fluttering in the breeze, and Michael and Daniel in their rougher linen tops. The two nameless boys shared the same long, angular faces, and the same fine, straight hair.
as each other, although the older boy’s hair was so dark that it was almost black, while the younger’s was a warm, tawny brown.

Michael and Daniel seemed to look to the older, dark-haired boy for leadership, waiting for him to sit down by the riverbank before joining him. The youngest boy stayed standing, two or three paces behind the others. “We shouldn’t be here,” he said, his feet shuffling back and forth uneasily. “Father wouldn’t—”

“Father doesn’t need to know, Pasha, nor would he care,” the older boy interrupted. “Besides, he’s in Rossiya for another week.”

Pasha didn’t seem to be convinced, but after a few moments beneath his brother’s heavy stare, he sighed and sat down beside him.

Michael leant over, and opened a wicker basket that he’d set down beside himself. He pulled two collections of wood-and-metal poles from its depths, and quickly transformed them into two fishing rods, which he deftly strung and baited. Pasha’s older brother rummaged casually through the basket after him, and brought out two ceramic jugs, stoppered with heavy wedges of cork. He reached back into the basket again, before shooting an imperious look at Michael.

“Where are the glasses?”

Michael looked up from the line he had just cast across the rippling water. “Glasses? What are you talking about? We just swig from the jug, manor-boy. This isn’t a dinner party.” He started to laugh, and Daniel joined in, until the older boy, his face like stone, stood up, and whipped Michael’s fishing rod out of his hands, before dropping it casually to the ground.

“Manor-boy?” he drawled.

Daniel elbowed Michael sharply in the side, and Michael let his expression of outrage slide into one of simmering resentment.

“He didn’t mean nothing by it,” replied Daniel. “It’s just that… well, you live at the manor, don’t you? Your life’s not exactly hard.”
‘Manor-boy’ smiled, but his eyes were as sharp as cut glass. “Oh yes, my life is simply full of decadence and endless parties.” He dropped the smile, and turned to Michael, letting an obviously well-practiced mask of cold disdain slide into its place. “Don’t ever presume to know anything of my life, farm-boy.”

Michael stood, properly angry now, and jabbed a finger at Manor-boy’s chest. “I’m no farm-boy, my dad owns the pub. We’re businessmen.”

The way that Manor-boy smiled… it was obvious that he’d been quite aware of Michael’s circumstances. “Ah, but your father doesn’t own the pub, does he? He rents it. From my father.”

Michael’s anger flickered like a guttering candle. “Well… yes, but he intends to buy it when we have the money,” he stammered.

“Again, dependent on my father agreeing to sell,” replied the manor-boy, raising a meaningful eyebrow at Michael, who finally seemed to understand his tenuous situation and looked away, biting his lip. Pasha came up behind his brother and placed a tentative hand on his arm.

“You’ve made your point, Nikola, he understands.”

Nikola smiled, even as Michael’s shoulders tensed, but he seemed to take no pleasure in his victory, rather it seemed as though he considered it an inevitability.

“Why don’t we have a try of Michael’s cider, Kolya?” Pasha suggested, turning to look at Daniel, who nodded, relieved, and stepped towards the forgotten jugs, picking one up and uncorking it with a practiced motion. The cork made a wet, squeaking sound as it slid free of the bottle, and Daniel upended the jug to take a hasty swig, half of which spilled down his chin and onto the grass. Choking a little, he passed the jug on to Pasha, who wordlessly handed it on to Nikola without taking a drink.

It took Nikola a few moments to notice that he held the jug, before he slowly tilted it and took a drink, his eyes focused on Michael as he let the cider spill around his mouth and down his shirt. When he had taken his fill, he let the bottle drop to his side, one finger hooked through the loop near the jug’s neck. He grimaced. “By God, that is atrocious.”
Daniel laughed and Michael tensed, ready to defend his father’s choice in alcohol, but Daniel grabbed his shoulder with one hand and the jug of cider out of Nikola’s grasp with the other, shoving it unceremoniously against Michael’s chest. “Just drink, will you?”

Nikola walked past Michael as the boy took a baleful swig of cider, and sat back down beside the forgotten fishing lines. Uncorking the second bottle from the basket, he cast an unbaited line into the water and took a long draw from the jug. “Absolutely atrocious,” he murmured to himself, almost happily.

Slowly, the others came back to sit by the water’s edge. Michael picked up his rod from where Nikola had dropped it, and slowly sat down with Daniel. Pasha sat down next to his brother, and gently let his feet sink into the cool summer waters of the Lowe river, closing his eyes, and tilting his head up towards the sun.

Hedy had no idea what to make of the two ‘manor-boys’. Nikola’s treatment of Michael was appalling, but Michael himself had been the frequent instigator of taunts and bullying at Hedy’s expense, and she had to admit to a certain level of satisfaction, seeing him bested by someone else. Still, now that the interesting moment had passed, the idea of watching four adolescent boys get drunk by the river was less than appealing, and she returned to her place by the roots of the tree, and occupied herself with her book.

As the jugs of cider were passed between the four boys, and the stilted conversation became freer and louder, and decidedly bawdier, Hedy noticed that Pasha, who at first had shied away from trying what Hedy was now reasonably sure was homemade scrumpy, was now happily drinking alongside the older boys, and was well and truly in his cups. She checked the sun, and saw that it was hovering very close to the horizon. Boys or no, soon she’d have to head home if she didn’t want her mother growling at her for missing dinner.

A raucous laugh flew up from the riverside, and Hedy turned to see Michael shoving Pasha in a drunken, half-playful manner. Pasha – his balance muffled by the effects of strong drink on a small body, toppled wildly to the side, and grappled madly for a handhold in the grass, which only
served to unbalance him further. He teetered on the edge of the bank for a few desperate, scrabbling seconds, and then suddenly he was in the water, his scream cut off by a ragged splash.

“Pasha!” Nikola cried, dropping the jug of cider, and stumbling forward onto all fours, his eyes desperately scouring the surface of the river.

Hedy had bolted upright when the boy had fallen in, and now she stood wreathed in the fronds of the willow, her muscles tensed. Nikola staggered to his feet as well, his panic cutting through the fog of alcohol. “Do something! One of you do something, now!”

“Do what?” stammered Michael. “Me and Daniel can’t swim.”

Daniel shook his head in mute agreement. Nikola growled, frustrated, and spun back towards the river, leaping feet first into the swiftly-flowing current. A handful of heartbeats later, his dark head broke the surface, gasping for air, a hand clasped around the worryingly still form of Pasha.

Nikola tried to pull Pasha’s body towards the bank, but his stroke was uneven and unpractised, and the dead-weight of his little brother, combined with the relentless pull of the current began to drag him back beneath the water.

Whether it was fear or cowardice that drove him, Hedy would never know, but as Nikola began to sink once more, Michael bolted, sprinting away from the river.

“Come on, Daniel!” he shouted over his shoulder. Daniel hesitated for a moment, his eyes locked onto Nikola’s sinking form as he was dragged downriver, before he swore brokenly and turned to sprint after Michael.

Hedy watched, frozen by her own inertia, until a desperate, wet gasp from Nikola spurred her into action. Sprinting from cover, she coursed alongside the bank, trying to catch up with the brothers. They were already reaching the curve in the river that marked the boundary between the Lowe, and its much larger sister, the Hyde. If they were pushed out into that deep water, nothing she could do would save them.
She could see that Nikola was still vainly trying to drag Pasha behind him, but the effort was tiring him, and his obvious inexperience as a swimmer was telling on his ability to keep either of them afloat. Two more frantic gulps for air, and Hedy could see that Nikola would have to make a choice.

With a despairing grunt he made it, dropping his brother’s arm, and striking out for the bank on his own. Hedy drew level with them at the same time. She took a running jump, and dived over Nikola, already reaching out for Pasha’s sinking body as she hit the water.

The river was a cold shock to her system, but Hedy ignored it, blindly searching for a hand, or a leg – anything solid in the muddy swirl of the water. Only rocks and slick wood met her fingers, and she was about to surface for breath when a tangle of cloth and flesh whisked past her hands. Hedy wrenched her body towards it, desperately scrabbling for purchase as her lungs began to burn. A spotty red mist was starting to form behind her eyelids when her fingers finally hooked on what felt like an arm. She gripped it tight enough to bruise, and pushed off the riverbed, her lungs screaming for air. When she finally broke the surface, her first breath was one long, exquisite burn. Trying to find her bearings, she saw that they were on the cusp of the river bend, the banks rising sharply on either side of them.

Pulling Pasha’s limp form across her chest, she began to kick as hard as she could, angling towards the bank upstream. At first she seemed to make no headway at all, the Hyde gaping wide and pitiless ahead of them, until suddenly, blessedly, they slid into a quieter current of the river, and Hedy had the chance to move them upstream enough to make a proper break for the bank.

The muscles in her legs were screaming at her to stop; her lungs were working like bellows, but she knew that if she stopped now, they’d both sink below the water and not come up again. Kicking with everything she had, she drove them towards the bank, where the sodden form of Nikola floated half in, half out of the water, his head resting atop his folded arms. At the sound of Hedy’s frenzied kicking, he half turned towards her, one arm reaching out limply towards his brother.
At last, just when Hedy felt as though she had nothing left to give, her feet finally brushed the riverbed, and she pulled herself upright, dragging Pasha along with her.

With the bank finally in reach, and with Nikola beside her, Hedy lunged for a clump of dirt and grass, and managed to find a hold strong enough to anchor herself.

Nikola reached out to help pull Pasha alongside them, and Hedy used the anchor of his hand to give herself time to climb up onto the bank. Pasha was small for his age, but Hedy was exhausted from the pull of the river, and when she tried to pull him from the water, he barely moved.

“You… Nikola,” she panted. “Help me pull him up onto the bank.”

Nikola didn’t even bother to answer, he simply moved through the water until he was behind his brother and grabbed his waist, pushing him up while Hedy dragged him backwards by his arms. Hedy wasted no time once he was free of the river, rolling him onto his back and pressing an ear to his chest. At first she could hear nothing, until a faint flutter reached her ears, and she quickly cast her hand across his mouth, waiting for the ghost of a breath. There was nothing.

“He’s not breathing,” she said to Nikola, who had made the bank at some point, and was now crouched on the other side of his brother’s body.

“Do something!” he shouted at her, panic in his eyes.

“I— He needs air,” she stuttered, and gestured at Pasha’s mouth. “I don’t know if I can—”

“Don’t think, just do it, damn you,” he snarled in reply. “I don’t have the first clue what to do!”

Hedy swore, and gripped Pasha’s face in her hands, sealing her mouth over his, and driving her own breath into his body. Grimacing, she blew again, and again, until with a gurgling splutter, Pasha arched his back, and began to cough – a wet, tearing sound.

“God, he’s swallowed half the river,” Nikola breathed, as Pasha rolled onto his side, water gushing chaotically from his mouth. Finally, he began to dry retch, and Hedy found herself rubbing
his back in slow, reassuring circles, until she realised what she was doing and drew back sharply, settling on her haunches a few feet away from the brothers.

Nikola didn’t spare her a glance, all of his attention was focussed on his little brother. “Pasha? Pasha! Blyad! Come on now, malen’kiy brat, come on.” He dragged Pasha upright, his hands grasped firmly around his brother’s small wrists. Pasha’s head hung low, almost touching his chest, the occasional cough still shaking his thin frame. His normally tawny hair, now dark with water, hung straight and limp over his forehead, beads of water still dripping from its tips.

Nikola leant forward, his hands running up Pasha’s arms to his shoulders. “Are you well?” he asked, worry – and something awfully close to guilt in his voice.

Pasha nodded wordlessly, before trying to speak. At first nothing emerged but a gravelly croak, so he cleared his throat and tried again. “I’m fine, Kolya. I… I just need a moment.”

Nikola nodded and sat back on his heels, his grey eyes hawk-like, fixed on Pasha.

Hedy turned away, meaning to take her leave before either of the brothers remembered that she was there, but the swish of grass beneath her feet as she stood caught Nikola’s attention, and his gaze darted up to look at her.

“You there, stop.” Hedy froze, half-turned, watching Nikola out of the corner of her eye. He stood, raking his dark, wet hair out of his face. “Come here.”

Hedy bristled instantly at his commanding tone, at the obvious way that he assumed his orders would be followed without question. When Nikola realised that the girl stubbornly standing away from him, her arms tightly crossed, was not going to move, he curled his lips in the parody of a smile.

“Please.”

It was the most acerbic, and utterly unfelt pleasantry that Hedy had ever heard, but she ignored it, watching Pasha instead, who was staring back at her, his gaze bleary and confused.

“Who are you?” he asked in a raspy whisper.
She quirked an eyebrow, and when Nikola realised that it was the only answer that they were going to get, he began to circle her, like some pale, wet bird of prey.

“She doesn’t look familiar” he said. “Certainly, she isn’t one of the servants from the House… Maybe she’s a scullery maid?” Without warning, Nikola grabbed her hands, and began to examine her fingers. She jerked them away, angry, but he had already let her go, turning back to his brother. “Her hands are so brown I can’t tell whether they’re coal-blackened or not.”

Hedy flushed – a terrible mixture of anger and shame raging through her.

Nikola turned back to her, eyes dancing. “What are you then, if you’re not a servant? Vagabond? Tradesman’s daughter? Well, ragamuffin, speak!”

Oh, how she wanted to scream at him, to kick his shins, and rake her nails down his arrogant face, but years of bitter experience had taught her to watch and observe. Nikola was baiting her, just as the children at school – just as Michael did. Taking a breath, she swallowed her rage and smiled, cat-like, executing an overly-floral bow.

“Hedera Carrow, farmer’s daughter, at your service.”

Nikola’s smile was as much a mask as hers, but his bow was far more polished, his feet clicking smartly together in the style of the continent. “Nikola Yevgenievich Astakhov, at yours. And this,” he gestured down at Pasha. “Is my clumsy brother, Pavel Yevgenievich Astakhov.”

“I’m not clumsy, Kolya! That oaf Michael pushed me.”

Nikola smiled, and grabbed Pasha’s hand, dragging him to his feet, and clapping him on the back. Pasha staggered a little but managed to keep his balance. “Pasha, it was just a friendly jostle. If you could hold your liquor better, you wouldn’t have made such an ass of yourself.”

“An ass?” Hedy cut in incredulous. “Your brother nearly drowned! You nearly drowned, we all nearly drowned! And all because you let a boy drink his own volume in scrumpy.”

Nikola looked taken aback, but it was Pasha who responded.

“Hey there, I’m not a boy!”
“Well you look younger than me, and I’m still a girl,” she retorted. Pasha frowned and looked away, and Hedy sighed. “In any case, regardless of your age you’re all right now, and I need to be home before dark, so…”

“Can’t be late for bedtime, Ragamuffin?” Nikola drawled. “Your parents must be missing you, I’m sure.”

“I’m sure too,” Hedy countered. She almost stopped there, but damn it, she’d saved his brother’s life, and Nikola’s first response was to tease his rescuer. “Do yours?” she added pointedly.

There was no more teasing in Nikola’s eyes, only anger, but it was the look on Pasha’s face that made her regret her little jab. He looked miserable, his face a mess of weariness and pain. An old wound, then.

She bit her lip. “I am truly glad that you’re all right, Pavel,” she said, smiling at Pasha awkwardly, and was rewarded with a hesitant smile in return. Nikola was still watching her like she was a particularly fascinating beetle, and so she took advantage of the silence, and nodded a farewell to Pasha, turned on her heel, and headed for home.

~O~

It took Hedy a month to dare a return to her place by the river. It was unlikely that she would run into the brothers there again, but the idea of having to face Nikola Astakhov – unlikely or not, was enough to make her shove the calling she felt towards the river down deep inside herself. The fact that her mother’s farm was, like many of the local farms, tenanted land owned by Nikola’s family was also no small help in that regard.

It was only when, caught one day in a lazy daydream of dipping her feet in the shimmering water of the river, she’d fallen off her chair in the middle of school that she had decided no amount of attention from the local gentry was worth rapped knuckles from the Schoolmistress, and the
ridicule of her classmates. That afternoon, she decided to make use of the last of the day’s light to spend the evening in her favourite place.

Walking the path across the fields and meadows, over the stiles and the little wooden bridges felt like coming home. When she finally reached the river, the sun was already low in the sky, cutting through the tops of the trees, and Hedy settled herself beneath the arms of her favourite willow, closing her eyes, and letting the quiet rush of the river carry her away.

At first there was only a flickering light behind her eyelids, and the sound of the river in her ears, until the flickers morphed into swirls of colour, and movement that slowly resolved into the images of people dancing. Their skin was dark and glowing, covered in lusciously coloured cloth – skirts of blood-red silk, shot through with gold that spun and twirled against their skin, vests wrapped around gauzy shirts that looked as though they were spun from cloud and water. Some of the dancers, men and women both, danced bare-chested through the shimmering light, and Hedy was taken by a sudden sense of belonging.

“How do I know you?” she whispered, and the whirl of bodies slowed and then faded away, leaving nothing behind, but a slide of colours like paint across a palette.

Find us, someone whispered, close to ear. Follow the river, as your father did before you.

“My father?” Hedy surged forward. “What do you know of my father?”

Thunk.

Her head smacked against the branch of the willow above her, and it took her a few stunned moments to remember where she was. The light around her was the odd, reddish hue that often came just before sunset, and Hedy sunk back against the trunk in shock. She’d been here for hours.

The river called to her, beckoning her to sink her feet into its depths, and let it carry her away. As it did my father? She crawled towards the water. As it did for a man whom I’ve never known?

The soft crunch of footfalls on dry grass broke the strange hold of the river, and she turned to see Pasha Astakhov standing shyly behind her.
“What are you doing here?” she asked before her brain caught up with her mouth.

Pasha fidgeted, twisting his white shirt in his fingers. “Well, I— Kolya told me not to try and talk to you, but… he also said that you helped to save me, and I— I… just wanted to say thank you.”

“Oh. Well, that’s all right. I’m just glad that there’s no harm done,” she replied, gesturing at Pasha’s body.

Pasha’s gaze flickered, and he turned to stare at the river. “I wouldn’t say that.”

“The river can be dangerous,” she murmured. “But as long as you treat it with respect—”

“I hate it,” said Pasha.

Hedy stared at him, startled by his sudden vehemence. “The river?”

“All of it. The river, the… the House, the village.” He looked back at Hedy. “When I grow up I’m going to leave, and never come back.”

“I can’t imagine ever leaving,” she replied. “I’d like to travel the world – see all those amazing places we learn about in school, but I’d always want to come back.”

“Well, you belong here,” said Pasha, as certain as though he were saying the sky was blue. Hedy smiled, she couldn’t help it. “Maybe you just haven’t found where you belong yet, then.”

Pasha smiled back, his dark mood gone as suddenly as it had arrived. “Maybe,” he said, the gap in his front teeth showing through his smile.

A spear of sunlight broke through the trees, and for a moment Hedy was blinded. “I need to be home soon,” she said, shielding her eyes, and stepping back.

“Will—” Pasha’s hand twitched towards her. “Will you be here tomorrow?”

“No?” she replied, confused. “I mean, I hadn’t planned to…”

“Oh.” Pasha shoved his hands in his pockets, and turned away with feigned nonchalance.

“Where will you be?”

“At home I suppose. Why?”
He looked back at her, suddenly shy. “I just thought. Maybe you’d like to… there’s an old tree by the lake on our estate,” he blurted. “It’s quite fun to climb. There’s a hollow in the trunk, like a squirrel’s nest.”

“All right…” Hedy replied, not entirely sure what Pasha wanted her to say, until she caught his hopeful expression. “Oh! Oh, well I do like to climb trees… Pavel, but I don’t think—”

“Please call me Pasha,” he pleaded.

“Pasha, then.” Hedy was about to try and decline again in the politest way possible, when an unpleasant thought occurred to her. “Don’t… don’t you have friends of your own? Friends more like you?”

Pasha’s shoulders tensed. “No one’s like me. No one except Nikola, and he’s… he’s Nikola,” he replied as though it explained everything.

“But why me?” Hedy pressed. “Surely someone else—”

“You saved my life,” Pasha replied simply. “No one’s ever done that before.”

“I’m sure no one’s ever had to,” Hedy retorted, smiling. “So… a tree, you say?”

Pasha’s face lit up as he sensed victory, and he stepped towards her. “Mhmm. If you climb high enough you can see for miles.”

“It sounds like a view I ought to see for myself,” she replied. “Perhaps I could come and see it one day.”

“Yes, that would—” Pasha bowed his head. “Until then, Miss Carrow.”

She laughed. “Please call me Hedy.”

“Hedy,” he replied, eyes sparkling.
AUGUST, 1910.

Armed with only a wicker basket full of fishing supplies and her sunhat, Hedy walked through the heat of the day across the meadows that edged the banks of the Lowe. The harvest was finally in and she’d managed to slip away from the farm before her mother could rope her into more work. Taking the long walk along the water’s edge Hedy finally came upon her little twist in the river as the sun reached its zenith in the sky.

Stepping beneath the blessed shade of the willows, she dropped her basket to the ground, and proceeded to take off her dress, hanging it over one of the branches, leaving her in her slip. The water was calling for her to dip more than just a toe into its depths, and sweat was prickling across her shoulders, plastering her white shift to her skin like wet tissue paper. She took two giant strides towards the river and with a yelp of glee, flung herself into the deep water that lay off the bank of her little grotto. Even sun-warmed, the water was a shock as it flooded across her overheated skin, and Hedy quickly rocketed back to the surface, before letting herself float towards the bank, grabbing a hold of a protruding root to anchor herself.

Her slip rippled against her skin, translucent and ghostly in the water, as the gentle chink of a harness reached her ears, followed by a heavy thud as booted feet hit grass. The willow trees rustled, and then suddenly there were two, long-fingered hands curling over the sod at the edge of the bank, a dark-haired face joining them a few moments later.

“You know, I’ve been riding up and down this wretched river for over an hour now, Ragamuffin.”

Hedy stared at Nikola, the initial shock at seeing him looming over her quickly flashing into anger.

Nikola cocked his head to the side, and wagged a finger at her. “Now, now I’ve been looking for you, not for a fight.”

Hedy studied the cast of his face – all biting smile and bitter eyes, and doubted it very much.
Sighing when her stony expression didn’t change, he rested his chin on his hands and held her gaze a moment, before letting it slowly drift down her body.

Hedy flushed, feeling horribly exposed, and did the only thing she could think of to get away. Letting go of the root that she was clinging to, she threw her head back beneath the water and rolled over like a seal, kicking her way down stream with the current. For a moment, she considered drifting across to the opposite bank, but then she would be left without her clothes, not to mention her rod and reel – the loss of which her mother wouldn’t forgive. Cursing everything, but mostly Nikola, she raised her head above the water and struck out for the closest bank. She had managed to make it quite a way downstream, almost to the point where she and Nikola had wrenched Pasha from the river.

Pulling herself onto the bank in as dignified a manner as possible when only wearing undergarments, she looked back upriver to see Nikola, his hands cast wide in questioning bewilderment. She steeled herself, and began to stride back upriver, ignoring Nikola as she swept past him, and stepped beneath the protection of the willows.

“What was that all about, Ragamuffin?” he asked her, baffled, as he followed her under the trees. Whisking her dress off the branch Hedy could hear Nikola shifting his weight behind her, and she gripped the dress tightly, speaking without turning around.

“There is no way on God’s green earth that I am going to put my dry dress over my wet shift…”

When there was no response from Nikola, Hedy turned around and stared at him pointedly, until dawning comprehension flushed across his face, and he turned around hastily and plunged away through the curtain of willow fronds.

When she was sure that she was blocked from view, she drew her clinging shift over her head, and pulled on her scratchy dress. There was nothing to be done for her hair, so she simply ran her fingers through its black lengths as best she could, and shook her head. Grabbing her things, she stalked out from beneath the trees, and right past Nikola without stopping.
Nikola threw his hands up as she passed, seeming to question the air in front of him as to why he bothered. It was only a few footsteps before he had caught up with her – his dark black riding boots creating a heavy counterpoint of sound to her bare feet.

“Leaving so soon, Ragamuffin? You just arrived.”

“My name is not Ragamuffin,” she replied, her teeth gritted.

“Ah well, what’s in a name?”

*Everything*, she felt like saying.

The silence dragged on as they continued to walk, until Nikola suddenly jumped in front of her, his hands in the pockets of his flared black riding coat.

“At least allow me to tell you what I came to say, before you go stomping off with those great big feet of yours.”

Hedy cast her eyes down at her brown feet, heat suffusing her face as she stared at her toes pressed deeply into the grass. She pirouetted with exaggerated grace on the ball of one foot, and began to march back the other way. Three steps later, he was by her side again, uncomfortably close.

“Listen, farm-girl I have better places to be than trudging after some bad-tempered child!”

Hedy spun to face him. “Child? And you are what? A man of the world?” She laughed, and Nikola stiffened, his lips thinning. He leant down, grey eyes boring into her own.

“I came to thank you for helping me save my brother from drowning – ungrateful little animal. Why I bothered is beyond me.”

“And me!” Hedy retorted. “I didn’t ask for thanks when I saved Pasha, and I’m not asking for any now.”

Nikola raised an eyebrow. “*Pasha*?”

Hedy ignored the implication, and let her anger press her onward. “Your brother has been nothing but kind, and polite to me, while you are quite possibly the least pleasant person I have ever had the misfortune of meeting in my life. I am not an animal—” she shoved Nikola away from...
“Or a bad-tempered child,” she shoved him again. “Or a bloody ragamuffin!” This time she shoved him so hard that he stumbled a little, anger turning his features ugly. “You think yourself better than those around you? That they exist only for your entertainment?” Hedy shook her head, continuing more calmly. “You’re nothing more than the shadow of a gentleman. It doesn’t matter how high and mighty you believe you are, Nikola Astakhov, you will always be small.”

Nikola looked as though she had struck him, and he wanted nothing more than to return the favour. Instead, his eyes stormy, he snapped his booted feet together in a very perfunctory bow, and walked away without a backwards glance. He mounted his horse, and spurred the animal away into a gallop.

Her mind churning, Hedy stalked back to the willows, and threw herself down beneath them, kicking viciously at the grass. Her toe caught sharply against something hard, and she yowled in pain, jerking her foot towards her chest.

When the throbbing had lessened slightly, Hedy looked down again, intending to grab the offending article, and throw it into the Lowe. Instead, she was met with the sharp, precise edge of carved stone. She pulled at the turf surrounding it, kept pulling, until the whole block was revealed, curved and buttressed perfectly against another stone brick… and another… and another. She kept digging, almost feverishly now, revealing more and more of the strange construction, until suddenly with a rip of sod tearing away from the stones like the pelt from a rabbit, there it was – a circular stone pool, smeared with soil, and resting dead centre between the three willows. The northern rim of the basin had a gap cut between two of the stones, so Hedy dug her fingers beneath the grass and pulled a little more away. The groove of stone extended all the way to the river, and Hedy kept pulling, until the whole channel was unblocked, muddied water gushing from the river down into the pool.

Hedy stared at the water as it swirled around the rim of the basin, somehow never quite overflowing its edges. The water was already beginning to clear, and it wasn’t just the mud that was disappearing, but the tannins in the water as well. By the time the river water reached the pool
itself, it was as clear as glass, and ice cold too, as Hedy discovered when she dipped her hand into
the chilled water. In an instant, she was surrounded by the scent of flowers, and brightly coloured
blooms began to bob up at the edges of the pool, circling towards the middle as they followed the
river’s pull, before being sucked beneath the water, and disappearing.

Hedy stood, and tentatively brushed the surface of the water with her toes. A ribbon of
sensation pulled at her from her spine to the tip of her foot, and Hedy jerked back for a moment,
before letting her foot slip all the way back into the water. The feeling intensified, and when she
stepped forward and drew her other leg into the water, it became overwhelming, soft petals
brushing against her skin like gossamer, as the water seemed to tug her down and envelop her. For
a moment she felt as though she were drowning, and then as quickly as the sensation had arrived,
it disappeared.

Opening her eyes, Hedy saw that she was standing in the same ornamental pool as before,
but now it was three times as large, filled with stagnant green water and the dry, brown husks of
long-dead flowers. There was no river, no willows, no sunburnt grass around her. Instead, there
were the scattered ruins of a handful of buildings, and the previously cloudless sky was now a
sullen grey.

The limestone stubble of the ruins protruded from the ground like wind-worn bones, even
as a thick carpet of luscious green grass sought to smother them. To her right were two slopes
rising away from the flatlands that she stood on to meet as a crescent of mountains in the distance
– encircling arms that cradled an alpine valley between them.

There was a quiet roar behind her, and Hedy spun around, sliding on the slime that
squished between her toes, but there was nothing behind her, only a wide expanse of sky and a
perilously close drop where the land directly behind the pool fell away to the sea, hundreds of feet
below. Hedy swore, stumbling backwards, catching her heel on the lip of the pond, which spun
her down to land hard on her back. Groaning, she sat up slowly, and took a closer look at the cliff
edge.

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Trails of stones bent and teetered over the edge of the land – buildings ended halfway along their lengths as whole walls had long ago tumbled down into the sea below. The pool had probably once stood proudly in the centre of this place. Now, in a few more years it would most likely join the buildings already dashed on the rocks below.

Hedy staggered to her feet, and tried to tamp down the panic that had begun to well up inside her. Stuck on a crumbling ruin with no idea how she’d arrived here, or how on earth to get home. She turned back to the ornamental pond. There was a channel – much larger and more sophisticated than the one she’d excavated by the river, that had obviously once fed the pool its water. She stepped into its dry limestone bed, and padded slowly along its length. Two paths, mostly obscured by the ever-creeping grass, ran on either side of the culvert, but here and there were flashes of colour – tiles in mosaicked patterns of gold, crimson, and azure. Scrambling out of the watercourse, she grabbed a hunk of the thick, peaty grass, and peeled it away. Beneath it lay the image of three figures. One was balanced on the shoulders of another, and held a bow and arrow in his hands, aiming it at the third figure – the strangest creature that Hedy had ever seen. With countless heads and arms, and with skin as blue as cornflowers, he looked fierce and terrible. The entire scene was framed by a tidy border of black tiles, and there were other scenes above and beneath it – elephants and horses, rainbow-coloured people and lotus flowers, battles, and floods, and picnics. Hedy sat back, amazed. Story upon story laid out along the footpath.

A sudden, pitiful cry drew her attention, and she jumped to her feet. After a moment’s confusion, she realised that the call had been so startling because there hadn’t been any sounds of life before – no bird calls, no animal noises, nothing. Only the dull roar of the sea far below.

The cry came again, and she took off along the grassy outline of the path towards a distant stand of trees. The roar of the sea grew louder the farther she ran, until suddenly it wasn’t the ocean at all, but a river, huge and powerful, forging its way across the plateau, until it thundered over the cliff face in a miasma of mist and spray. The cry came again from across the water, and Hedy raced along the water’s edge towards the falls, until it appeared out of the mist like a spectre
– a limestone bridge extending across the churning waters like the neck of a graceful swan. It was weathered, and some of the decorative stones that had once capped the walls had fallen away, but it looked sound.

Hedy began to cross slowly. When she reached the apex of the bridge, she spared a glance at the river. It flowed down from the gully that lay between the two rising hills Hedy had seen before. The hills themselves continued to climb, left and right until they became the mountains – snow-capped and towering above the meadow that lay at the top of the valley.

All that snow and ice – it explained the ferocity of the river. Fed down through the folds and valleys of the great peaks, the ice-melt had forged the power of water beneath her feet.

She finished crossing, and headed towards the strange rows of trees. When she reached them, she was surprised to find that they were apple trees – rangy and overgrown, and in desperate need of pruning, but very definitely apple trees. Their branches were lush with leaves, but Hedy could find no evidence of blossom, or fruit on any of them.

A yip of pain – louder now, came from deeper within the ancient orchard, and Hedy pushed past row after row of trees, heedless of the way their branches tore at her, until suddenly she was free of their clinging limbs.

A puppy. Small and golden, huddled against the base of a tree, whimpering as a wasp the size of a small child loomed over it, the sharp spear of its stinger aggressively thrust forward. Its abdomen was a nauseating pattern of black and yellow, and the buzz of its wings penetrated through Hedy’s skull, and settled painfully in the space behind her eyes. The wasp lurched towards the dog suddenly, and Hedy looked around with increasing desperation for a weapon, but there was nothing, not even a fallen branch, or a loose rock. She eyed the wasp again – if an insect that size stung her, or the puppy it would almost certainly kill them, and there were no old remedies around to help her kill it – no soap suds, no peppermint, no sugar water traps in which to drown it.
Water. The river. Hedy crouched low. If she could somehow get the wasp to the river, and lure it in, the mass of its own body might drown it beneath the water. The wasp’s abdomen began to curl and flex sinuously, as it aimed its stinger at the puppy’s unprotected belly, and Hedy sprinted forward, scooping a handful of grit as she did so, and flinging it at the wasp. The spray of dirt hit its wings like the sound of sand thrown through a pinwheel, and the wasp swung towards her. Hedy didn’t hesitate, sprinting back towards the river as fast as she could, the warning drone of the wasp close in her ear.

When she reached the water she turned left, up towards the gully. If she really had to pull the damn thing into the water with her, she was going to give herself as much distance, as much of a chance as possible to climb back out before she went over the falls. The river swung left as Hedy raced alongside it, morphing into what looked like rapids, rushing over slabs of tumbled stone that had been washed down from the mountains in some long-ago glacial shift.

Here was the safest place to try her mad plan – if there really were any safe places on this river. The stones might give her enough traction to hold her steady in the water and not be swept away. Turning to face the grotesquery of her pursuer, she settled into a crouch, and opened her arms wide.

“Come on then, you big bastard, come and get me!” she shouted as the wasp whirred towards her. When it was almost on her, its body curled forward beneath its glittering, compound eyes, Hedy dodged right as fast as she could, and then flung herself behind it, grasping it around its slick thorax, and throwing them both into the river.

The shock of the water was almost enough to make her lose her grip. Ice-melt cold, and bone-aching painful, it ate at her strength like a pack of hungry mouths. Locking her hands together, she managed to keep the wasp submerged with her, until the water became a vice around her chest and she had to let go, rocketing to the surface. The current had tumbled her almost to the end of the rapid’s rocky cradle, and Hedy scrambled to the water’s edge before the deep water
could take her feet out from beneath her, but the cold of the water had deadened her limbs, and she couldn’t find the strength to pull herself free of the river.

There was a rolling, purring growl, and then her aching fingers were unexpectedly coated in the warmth and wetness of an enthusiastic tongue. Hedy looked up and saw the dog, with its deep brown eyes, and laughing mouth hanging over the edge of the bank above her.

“Hello,” she whispered, raising a frozen hand towards its fur.

The puppy whined, and licked at her hands again. Hedy smiled. The little animal’s ministrations were warm at least – she could feel the sensation returning to her fingers and hands, running down the length of her arms like warm honey over pancakes. When it reached her shoulders and slid down her spine as well, Hedy suspected that perhaps there was more to the little animal than first met the eye. A minute more, and she felt strong enough to try and heave herself out of the water. With a tremendous effort of will, and with much clawing of the ground, she finally managed to drag herself back onto dry land. Rolling onto her back, she stared up at the grey sky, and was instantly accosted by a set of blunt paws, and a tongue that had decided that her face was in need of the same treatment as her hands.

“Oh, that’s quite enough, thank you!” she spluttered as she struggled to sit upright. The puppy took this as an obvious sign to scramble into her lap, where it grunted contentedly, and settled down within the dip of her crossed legs.

Hedy couldn’t help but smile. “Well, that’s nice for you, but if I don’t get home and change out of these wet things, I’ll catch my death.” She frowned and looked back towards the ruins she had first emerged in. “That’s if I can even find my way home. I haven’t the faintest idea of how I got here in the first place.”

Her anxiety returned as she stared at her surroundings. Nothing here looked familiar – not the jagged mountains, and certainly not the terrifying wildlife. Either she had somehow been thrown thousands of miles away from her home, or…
She rubbed her head tiredly. Or perhaps she wasn’t really thousands of miles from anywhere. Perhaps this strange, deserted island didn’t really exist at all? Maybe she had hit her head, or suffered a fit, and this was the peculiar fever-dream that her mind had conjured for her. Hedy tried pinching herself, and slapping her face, but all it did was hurt.

“What am I going to do now, puppy?”

The dog’s ears had perked up, but its attention was fixed on the river, its body taut, and a low growl trickling from its mouth.

“What is it?” Hedy asked.

The growling increased, until, with a sound like a popping balloon, a tiny wasp shot out of the water, and drunkenly buzzed away towards the apple orchard. The puppy tracked it with unblinking eyes, until it had disappeared completely, then gave a single, resounding bark, and tumbled out of Hedy’s lap. It gambolled away downstream towards the bridge, and Hedy heaved herself to her feet.

“What are you going?” she called out, swallowing a sigh of relief when the puppy stopped at the bridge and turned to wait for her.

Across the bridge and along the overgrown pathways she followed the little dog, until they were back amongst the limestone ruins again.

Only they weren’t ruins anymore. They were houses. Houses and buildings with stonework that was sharp and fresh-cut, traces of carved patterns dusted around the doors and window frames. The roofing were beautiful – luminescent sheets of pale, grey-green slate, layered across beams of cedar wood, each topped with a heavy running beam – great, sculpted eagles bursting, wings outstretched from their ends.

The bright, golden-wood door of a nearby house swung open, and Hedy grabbed the puppy, darting behind a cedar tree that she was almost certain hadn’t been there before. A beautiful woman with dark skin and darker hair stepped out, wearing a long, high-waisted dress in mint
green. Her hair was sculpted high in flowing waves, and a wide, silken headband arced across her forehead, tied somewhere behind her glossy black curls.

“Hello?” the woman said, shielding her eyes against the sun.

Hedy poked her head out from behind the tree, relaxing a little when the puppy trotted up to the woman and wagged her tail. “Hello,” she replied warily.

The lady smiled, and opened her arms wide. “Welcome to Sanctuary, Hedera. My name is Rachael.”

Hedy moved out of the cedar’s shadow and hovered a few feet away from the woman. She caught movement out of the corner of her eye, and was surprised to find that Rachael wasn’t the only sudden inhabitant of the rebuilt village. To her left and right were women, and men, and creatures of all descriptions, slowly emerging from houses and buildings. Above her head birds twittered and flew through the sky, and the sharp cry of a distant animal echoed down from far up in the mountains.

There was a woman dressed like a housekeeper, who bowed to her in quite a precise manner, and there was a monkey – almost as tall as her, wringing its hands together nervously as it smiled in Hedy’s direction. From a very small house came a very small girl, dressed in a similar fashion to Rachael, her whole body shaking with excitement, or some other strong emotion, while a house away a dark-skinned man with stringy white hair peered distrustfully out from his window, his lips thin and humourless against his teeth.

“How do you know my name?” Hedy demanded. “Who are you all?”

The dog trotted back to her side, panting up at her happily.

“We are the People,” Rachael replied.

“We are here for you,” added the housekeeper, and the old man scoffed.

“I’m not here for anyone,” he said. “All I want is to be left alone.”

Rachael shook her head in exasperation, hands on her hips. “If you wish to be left alone, then perhaps you should go and live in the mountains, like some of the others do.” The old man
muttered something unintelligible, and slammed the shutters on his window closed. Sighing, Rachael turned back to Hedy. “You’d think that time would soften his edges, but no – people have to want to change, and he very much enjoys the way that he is now.”

“You still haven’t answered my question,” said Hedy.

“We are the People,” Rachael repeated.

“But what does that mean?”

“Well, I suppose that it means very little to you at the moment, but like this place we are… a little difficult to define. We have always been here, even as we are often… not here.”

Hedy wanted to punch something. “That makes even less sense!”

The housekeeper joined them, and nodded deferentially. “Perhaps it would be easier to explain over a nice cup of tea?”

Rachael groaned theatrically, and slapped a hand to her forehead. Hedy studied her long, tapered fingers, and noticed that her hands were stained with a riot of colours. “Not everything can be solved with tea, Ada,” Rachael sighed. “What Hedy needs now is time. Time to let all of this sink in. We’re not going anywhere, my dear – quite literally. If you want to take some time for yourself—” There was a burst of laughter from the old man’s house. “—Then that’s absolutely fine,” she finished with a growl.

Hedy stared at the motley assortment of people before her and nodded quietly. The hateful, angry feeling that had carried her here had been washed away by the course of the icy river. Now, all that she could feel was a bone-weary tiredness, and a longing for her comfortable bed. From the smile Rachael sent her, she seemed to know it.

“You know how to find your way here now, Hedy. Come back and visit whenever you want to.” Her smile dimmed a little, grew softer. “Whenever you need to.”
AUGUST, 1914.

She sat with Pasha against the battered trunk of an oak tree, looking down into the valley, where Downheadley tumbled against the river like a collection of stones. The remnants of the harvest chafed at their skins, flecks of straw sticking to the sweat on their arms and legs.

Pasha flicked the newspaper in his hands and began to read. “The following statement was issued from the Foreign Office last night: Owing to the summary rejection by the German Government of the request made by His Majesty's Government for assurances that the neutrality of Belgium would be respected, His Majesty's Ambassador in Berlin has received his passport, and His Majesty's Government has declared to the German Government that a state of war exists between Great Britain and Germany as from 11pm on August 4.” He dropped the paper into his lap. “So that’s it then.”

Hedy exhaled. “What will happen now?”

Pasha shifted on the hard-packed ground. “Well, a lot of things, I suppose. The whole of the continent’s essentially at war. With any luck the forces involved will be so immense that the whole thing will be over in a few months.”

“Or they’ll blow each other to hell, and take us all with them.”

Pasha nudged shoulders with her. “The war won’t come here, Hedy. Downheadley’s too insignificant, too far off the map. We’ll be safe.”

Hedy shook her head. “The war might not come here direct, Pasha, but Downheadley will go to war. All the boys in the village, the men…” She gestured fruitlessly. “Half of our farmhands are already talking of signing up. Even Nikola might, if only to prove that he’s not a complete moral coward.”

“Hedy,” Pasha chided gently.

She turned to him, grimacing. “I’m sorry. I know that he’s your brother, but every time I meet him, my opinion of him drops a little further.”
Pasha’s gaze grew distant. “We’re both products of our upbringing, Hedy. Kolya took our father’s... disappointment in us, and he turned it on the world. I turned it inwards, I suppose. Nikola could be a good man, but he’s been left alone with his failings.” He turned to face Hedy, and gently rested his head against the tree. “I’m luckier. I have you.”

Hedy smiled, blushing a little, and looked down at her feet stretched out in front of her. Pasha’s legs were cast out before him too – longer now than hers, and his hands rested in the dirt beside his body, his fingers tapered and graceful. Somewhere along the way, without Hedy noticing, Pasha had grown up, grown past her. His floppy chestnut hair was still boyish, but the face beneath it was not. Hedy swallowed, suddenly self-conscious.

“What will you do, Pasha?” she blurted, desperate to shove aside her discomfort. “For the war, I mean. Will your family keep sending you to Eton?”

“I suppose so,” Pasha mused, seemingly blind to her nervousness. “I doubt any of the schools will close, not unless they run out of teachers. Or students. Neither’s very probable.”

“That’s good isn’t it?” Hedy asked.

“For me, definitely.” He grinned at Hedy, his eyes sparkling. “If I want to have any chance of getting into Oxford, I need to finish prep school. Just think of it, Hedy – me at University amongst all those learned men.”

“And women.”

“Hmm?” Pasha murmured, caught up in his own imaginings.

“And women, Pasha. There are women at Oxford now – studying, taking examinations.”

“But not matriculating, Hedy. Or graduating.”

Hedy tensed, and shoved her foot at Pasha’s knee. “Only because they’re refused the awards that they’ve earned. They work just as hard as the men, Pasha. They’re just as deserving.”

“How do you know so much about it?” he asked her, mystified.

Hedy flinched and looked away. “No reason.”
Pasha watched her in silence for a moment, before reaching over, and taking her face in his hand, turning her towards him. Hedy wasn’t sure how to feel when Pasha touched her these days. They had been friends long enough that the occasional hug, or a hand on a shoulder passed beneath notice, but lately… lately when she felt his fingers brush against her skin, or the warmth of his hand pressed through the shirt on her back… They were friendly touches, and his eyes were always as warm and innocent as ever, but there was something in the way that they lingered, the way each finger trailed away from her skin like a caress. She imagined the boy that she had met by the river as a child, and compared him to the young man sitting beside her now. They were almost different people.

“You’ve always been a terrible liar, Hedy,” he murmured.

“I just—” Hedy bit her lip. “There was a time when I wanted to go to University. Miss Rook always said that I had the intelligence for it, but Ma…” Hedy exhaled sharply. “Oh, what’s the use of thinking about it? I’m done with school, and you’ve barely begun. I shall just have to live vicariously through you.”

“Second-hand accounts of lectures, and batty professors? I’ll be a poor entertainment for you.”

She shrugged. “Next best thing to actually getting toattend. Better than being stuck here without prospects, or entertainment.”

“What if—” Pasha drew his hand back and studied his fingernails. “What if you don’t end up staying here, Hedy? What if you manage to escape like me, or something else comes along and whisksin away you?”

“That sort of thing happens to people like you, Pasha. It doesn’t happen to people like me. Anyway, it’s not as though I want to leave and never return. This is home. I just want to see a little of the world beyond the county’s boundaries, before I resign myself to the role of wife and mother.”
Pasha shook his head. “That won’t be you,” he replied softly. “You want something more from your life. That sets you apart.”

“Not enough,” she sighed, and laid her head back against the tree. Pasha did the same, his hair tickling Hedy’s ear, and they watched in silence as the clouds scudded across the sky.

There was something soft and warm pressed against her cheek as she swam up from the depths of sleep. Even through her eyelids, the light was piercing, and Hedy instinctively brought her hand up to shade her face when she opened her eyes. She was still in the field, and the sun had sunk low, light spearing towards her and Pasha where they lay curled against each other – Hedy’s face nestled into the crook of Pasha’s neck. She jerked back, releasing the fistful of Pasha’s shirt that had been loosely clutched in her hand.

Pasha shifted, tilting his head towards her. “Mmm, where’d you go?” Hedy watched him, speechless, until he finally opened his eyes. “Hedy?”

He was so close, his eyes dark with sleep, his neck flushed where her head had lain against it. She felt as though she were caught in a bubble, the rest of the world held behind its iridescent barrier. The sensation held as Pasha lowered his gaze to her lips, the whisper of his breath fanning against her mouth. When had they drawn so close?

“Hedy…”

Her name was a whisper, and she drifted closer, wanting to capture the sound as it left his mouth. When they finally came together it was chaste and silent, the soft press of Pasha’s lips against her own, and the warm scent of him wrapping around her like a curl of smoke.

Pasha’s face was flushed when they drew apart, his breath unsteady. Hedy watched him come back to himself, eyes brightening, until they were clear and more than a little apprehensive.

“I’m so sorry, Hedy I don’t know what came over me.”
His words were like a douse of ice water, and she jerked away from him sharply. What had she been thinking? To be friends was one thing, but for the two of them to be anything more… Hedy sometimes forgot that Pasha wasn’t just some particularly well-bred boy from the village. Men in Pasha’s situation didn’t fall in love with farm girls, and they certainly didn’t marry them. He would marry an heiress, or the daughter of a member of parliament, and she… well, she would either marry a farmer, or spend her days like her mother – strong, independent. Alone. Faced with the prospect of marrying one of the village boys whom she had grown up with, the latter sounded more appealing.

“It’s all right,” she replied lightly. “We were still half asleep. It’s all right.” She looked away quickly, back towards the west, where she could blame the sun for the prick of tears that she could feel threatening. “It’s getting late, Pasha, you should probably go home.”

There was silence behind her, and then a hesitant hand on her back. “Hedy, I didn’t—”

She stood, shrugging off his touch. “Go home, Pasha, please. I have work to do before I go to sleep tonight, and I need to be up early in the morning. Why don’t you go home and enjoy your roast veal, or your smoked salmon, or whatever it is you’ll have for your dinner, and just leave me to my bread and soup.”

“Hedy!”

She refused to turn around, refused to acknowledge the hurt she knew would be on his face. Astakhov, Astakhov, Astakhov, she repeated over and over to herself – a chant in her head. When she finally heard him walk away, she slid back down the tree trunk, and watched as the sun finally slipped below the horizon, bathing the field in purple shadow.

~O~

Hedy walked up the laneway towards Wexford House with more than a little trepidation. Things between her and Pasha had been awkward since that evening in the wheat field. The next
time that they’d met had been an accident – running into each other at the county fair. After a few minutes of stilted conversation, they had gone to look at the horses, and it had remained unspoken between them that their kiss would not be mentioned.

They had arranged to meet again in a few days at the end of Pasha’s drive, where the ivy grew in profusion over what was once a very respectable sandstone wall. Hedy never knew what to make of ivy. It gave her the most terrible rash whenever she brushed against it, but it had also given her her name. In darker moments it almost seemed a metaphor for her life.

She turned the corner and there by the towering wrought-iron gate stood Pasha. Nikola lounged against the wall beside him, clad in driving boots, coat, and gloves. A motorcar – dark red and lusciously upholstered, was parked beside him, the cover down and its brass accents glinting in the sunlight. The brothers were arguing, oblivious to her approach, and Hedy thought about turning tail, and leaving them to it – anything to avoid another verbal fencing match with Nikola. But it was too late, Pasha threw a hand out to make a point, and caught her eye, and now Nikola was turning too, a languid smile on his face.

“Hedy! Tell Nikola that he can’t just run away to go and join up.”

Nikola grinned at her expectantly, and Hedy smiled as though she were eating a lemon. “I would never presume to tell His Lordship what to do, Pasha.”

“Oh, Lordship. I like that,” Nikola replied, then gestured at Hedy. “You see, Pasha – even your little ragamuffin knows I’m right.”

“Oh, I didn’t say that.” she replied, arching an eyebrow.

Nikola stared at her for a moment, less amused, and then turned back to his brother. “I’m not ‘running away’, Pasha. My country requires my service, and I require it of myself.”

“But you could be killed,” Pasha whispered fiercely.

“It’s entirely possible,” Nikola mused. “But I’m bound to have some skill with a gun, and I’ll most likely be ordering men around, not leading the charge.”

“Going to be an officer, are you?” asked Hedy.
“What else?” he replied. “I’ll sign up directly, and then go straight to training.” He looked at Hedy. “When I come back you can admire my medals.”

“I’d rather drown in the Lowe,” she said, watching with satisfaction as her remark hit home.

“Enough of this.” Nikola thrust out his hand for Pasha to shake. “Wish me luck, little brother. I’ll try to write as often as I can.”

“No!” said Pasha, ignoring the outstretched hand. “Have you even talked to Father? Mother? She’ll be inconsolable, Kolya.”

“Which is exactly why I didn’t tell her. She’ll be proud enough once I’m there to cancel out most of her nerves. As for father…” His expression stuttered, and he grew serious in a way Hedy had never seen before, stepping forward to grip Pasha by his shoulders. “Perhaps this will finally make him proud of me, Pasha. Perhaps, if I return I’ll finally be my own man.” He looked past Pasha into some unseen future. “Either way, I’ll be free of him.”

Pasha slumped slightly, and dropped his head against Nikola’s chest for a moment before forcing himself upright. “What about me? I’ll be alone.”

“Nonsense.” Nikola shook him gently. “You have your ragamuffin, remember?”

“Oh yes. And how is she supposed to help me when it comes to Father?”

Nikola’s eyes were dark and unreadable as he looked at her. “She’s saved you so far.” He seemed to be waiting for her, for some acknowledgement that she understood what he was asking of her. She nodded sharply, and it seemed to be enough.

“Now I must go, or I’ll miss my train.” He stepped away from the wall, and moved to sit in the motorcar. “Take care of yourself, Pasha.” Pasha nodded miserably, and Nikola turned around to face Hedy, one arm slung over the back of the passenger seat. “Hedera,” he said, and for the briefest of moments, she saw the man that he might be staring back at her.

He tooted the horn as he drove away, and within a few moments he was gone, the cloud of dust and the fading buzz of the engine the only testament to him ever having been there at all.
Pasha stood where his brother had left him, and Hedy walked up to him slowly, not sure whether she should speak at all.

“Pasha…”

He started, as if he’d forgotten that she was there. “I— I need to go back and tell my parents that Nikola has gone. We can go walking another time, perhaps,” he replied in a daze.

“Pasha, I’m sorry about Nikola. I—”

He turned towards her sharply. “Don’t pretend you care what happens to him, Hedy. You might be glad to see him dead, but I can’t stand the idea of being stuck in this house alone. Just… just go, will you please?”

Hedy was horrified. “I don’t want him dead, Pasha. Do you really think I’d wish that on anyone?”

Pasha sighed heavily. “No, you wouldn’t. I’m sorry, Hedy I truly am, but you don’t understand. You can’t, not really. Just go home and be thankful that you don’t have any real family to lose.”

She wanted to slap him, and by the look on his face he knew it. “Hedy, I didn’t mean—”

There was nothing he could say to take back such ugly, unthinking words, and Hedy spun on her heel and left before he could try. By the time she reached the paved roads near the village, she was surprised that her shoes didn’t strike sparks from the cobblestones with every step she took.
FEBRUARY, 1915.

Hedy lived the next six months trying to ignore the stinging absence of her best friend, throwing herself into the thankless winter-work of the farm. When she woke one day in the pitch dark of a February morning and her mother didn’t join her, still lying still and cold in her own bed, Pasha’s callous words returned to beat at her like a storm of crows. *You don’t have any real family to lose…*

The funeral was a miserable affair, not least because of the weather. The threat of rain loomed overhead in banks of angry cloud, and the villagers and farmers who had come to farewell Molly Carrow huddled together in gloomy silence.

The Reverend Bishop held the committal service, as Molly was lowered into the ground, and Hedy found her attention wandering to the faces of the other mourners. It was customary, though not always observed, for a representative of Wexford House – Pasha’s family home, to attend the funerals of their tenanted farmers, and Hedy’s eyes found a familiar figure standing a respectable distance from the gravesite, stoic and grim in his dark suit.

“We now commit Margaret Carrow’s body to the ground,” the Reverend droned, as Molly’s coffin came to its final rest. “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust: in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, amen.” He stepped back and motioned for Hedy.

Hedy swept her hand through the mound of earth heaped by the open plot, and stood over the grave, dirt trickling from between her fingers. She knew that it wasn’t really her mother down there, not anymore, but it was the body that had hugged her close, the hands that had brushed her hair from her face, and Hedy was suddenly overcome with the horror of throwing dirt down on her mother – how disrespectful Molly would have found it.

She hesitated at the edge of the grave, frozen in indecision, until the Reverend stepped up beside her and guided her hand over the coffin, pushing at Hedy’s fingers, until she finally opened her hand. She tried to ignore the harsh, scattering sound of the soil as it hit the coffin, and turned away. A handful people followed after her – the Constable, Postmistress Causey, George Eames
and his wife. Slowly the mourners dispersed, until only Hedy remained, standing by her mother’s graveside, the silent form of Pasha hovering by a distant gravestone, trying to look sombre, instead of anxious.

Hedy bit down on her growing sense of anger, and tried to school her expression into something a little less bitter, as Pasha slowly began to walk towards her.

“Pavel,” she said in a monotone as he drew near, and he stumbled to a stop a few feet away.

“Oh, Hedy please don’t call me that. Please. I can’t bear to remember how we left things the last time we were together. God, what I said to you.”

“Prescient almost, wasn’t it?” she said. Pasha looked stricken, and Hedy wasn’t above feeling a grim sort of satisfaction at seeing him so distraught. “Now I really don’t have any family to lose, do I?” Pasha opened his mouth to say something, and Hedy waved a dismissive hand before he could start. “It doesn’t matter anyway. I’ve heard enough platitudes to see me through the next ten years. I don’t need to hear any more from you.”

“Then I won’t say them,” he replied passionately. “God, there’s nothing anyone can say that would make this feel any better. But I know you. If you’re not careful, you’ll disappear in there.” He trailed a hand down her temple. “Alone with your thoughts, you’ll just… work yourself into nothing. You need someone to pull you out sometimes.”

“I have the farmhands,” she replied, trying to ignore the warmth of his fingers against her face.

“They’re not your friends, they don’t know you like I do,” he replied, his eyes dark and fervent. “No one does. And no one knows me like you do, Hedy. God, I’ve missed you so much – every time I went to write to you at school, all I could think of was how you’d looked at me that last time. As though you wanted to kill me.”

“You deserved it,” Hedy said, and Pasha nodded miserably.
“I know. I’d do anything to take it back. I was just so scared of losing my brother. And so angry at the way he left.” He took her hands in his, and looked deep into her eyes. “I am so sorry that you lost your mother, Hedy. I’d do anything to make it better for you if I could.”

He was so painfully earnest, and Hedy could feel the terrible, icy calm that had been surrounding her like a cocoon start to melt away. “So, you want to be a friend to me again?” she asked, hating the way her voice broke.

“I want to be everything to you,” he replied, and brought her hand to his lips, kissing her knuckles gently. “You’re everything to me.”

How did he always manage to do this? Take her through such terrible highs and lows, as though he were a lodestar, and she a wayward ship? She felt wonderful, and dreadful, and more than anything in the world she wanted to talk to her mother. Her practical, quiet mother. A mother who had taken her in against a village’s worth of doubters, who had loved her, in her own particular way, never once regretting her, never once wishing her gone.

Instead there was only Pasha, holding her hand and looking at her, into her, as though he saw something precious. She didn’t even know she was crying, until he drew her in against his chest, and wrapped his arms around her.

“Oh, Hedy,” he whispered, his broken tone only serving to make her cry harder. She wept until she had nothing left, letting her head rest against Pasha’s shoulder, letting the warmth of him seep into her bones. When she felt the world slowly coming back into focus, she squeezed her arms tightly around Pasha’s waist, and felt his heartbeat quicken beneath her cheek.

“You never stopped being my friend, Pasha,” she said, pulling her head back to look at him. “And you’re here when it matters. You just… you have to return the favour. Let me be there for you as well.” She leant forward and rested her forehead against his. “You’re important to me.”

Pasha smiled, and closed his eyes. “You’re important to me too,” he murmured, his breath whispering across her skin, across her lips.
There was a moment, like the hesitation before a dive, and then he was kissing her, his hands in her hair, tangling through the pins and combs, until her face was framed by a flood of back curls. She let herself become lost in the feel of him, if only for a moment, and when they finally drew apart, Pasha’s hand still tangled in her hair, she wasn’t sure whether it was her or Pasha who whispered, *I love you*, into the warm space between them.

~O~

She sat against the pale stone of Rachael’s house, and let the strange, warm sun soak into her bones, her dog Pia drowsing beside her. Rachael was outside too, standing in front of an easel, paint speckled across the brown skin of her hands.

“What are you painting?” Hedy mumbled drowsily.

“A field of poppies.”


Rachael turned to her and smiled. “I know.”

Hedy turned back to look across the plateau, and the infinite sea that lay beyond. “Do you have parents, Rachael?”

“In a way, yes,” Rachael replied, her nose so close to the canvas that it was almost in the paint.

“Do you still see them?”

“Not in that way. I suppose they are a part of me, and a part of this place, rather than actual physical beings.”

Hedy looked down at her hands. “My parents aren’t part of anything. They aren’t anywhere. I can’t ever talk to them, or see them again.”

Rachael stopped painting, and turned to face her. “Yes. I know of your mother’s passing, and we mourn with you, but Hedy… your mother may be gone, but you still have your memories
of her, of your time together. And you have memories of your father too. You may not be able to speak to them anymore, but they can still speak to you.”

Hedy stared at her. “I don’t have any memories of my father, Rachael. I don’t even know who he is, or if he’s even alive.

Rachael frowned. “But of course you have his memories. Haven’t you been to the Wall?”

“What wall?” Hedy replied, and then realised what Rachael had said. “Wait, his memories?”

Rachael put her hands on her hips, clearly forgetting that she held a paintbrush in her hand, and smeared a streak of red across her dress. “Didn’t Pia show you the wall?” she said, looking down at the dog, who whined pitifully at Hedy’s side.

“She ought to have shown you,” Vivi, the monkey admonished, her eyes closed against the sun where she perched on her own roof across the way. Hedy grimaced, and stroked Pia’s head reassuringly.

“So where is this wall?” she asked Rachael.

Rachael pointed with her brush along the pathway, spattering red paint across the stones. “Follow the path until you’re about to reach the ornamental pool, then turn towards the mountain and keep going until you reach the cliff face. Follow the cliff, until it becomes the Wall. You’ll find the memories there.” Hedy went to stand, but Rachael threw up her hand. “Don’t go beyond the Wall, though. Before the land drops into the sea, there is a cave. It goes deep beneath the earth, and I beg you, Hedy do not to go down there. Not when there is no need.”

Hedy was a little taken aback at the concern in Rachael’s voice, but she nodded, and began to make her way back towards the pool, leaving Pia to nap in the sun. The paths were many and winding, with more than a few cliff-ward routes suddenly blocked by the solid wall of a building. Eventually, she discovered a pathway that took her all the way to the rock-face. It towered over her, reaching up towards the foothills of the great mountains far above her. To her right, Hedy could see that the rough stone of the cliff began to morph into something smoother and less natural. She trailed along the base of the cliff, until the smoothness resolved into a wall – the Wall
full of smoky black mirrors, set into frames of carved stone. Panel after panel of dark glass ran along its length – each piece becoming a little older, a little more weathered as she walked along. The first panel, farthest away from the village, was so old that it was beginning to crumble away – its carved figures and inscriptions worn bare, until they were nothing more than indiscernible shapes in the sandstone. Beyond the mirrors lay the dark, empty space that led down into the caverns that Rachael had warned her against. A terrifying roar of rage and power spilled out from the black maw of the cave and sent Hedy stumbling backwards in fear. She picked herself up and ran all the way back to the end of the Wall as the last echoes of the thunderous call died away.

No sound followed it, and Hedy sighed in relief, leaning back against the second-to-last panel in the Wall. A pane of black glass like the others, it was framed by carvings of military sabres, towering pine trees, and a ship battling through a wild sea. Tentatively, she turned and ran her fingers across the glass, shivering as the mirror came to life beneath her hand. An English garden appeared behind the glass – roses bordering a close-cut lawn, and a high wall of warm, red brick enclosing the space like a cloister. There was a stately house that Hedy didn’t recognise in the distance, and a woman perched on a seat by the rose bushes, the long afternoon light illuminating her blond curls beneath her modest hat.

The owner of this memory had evidently finished watching the woman, and strode forward to sit down beside her. “Alice, I’m so glad you came,” he said, his voice strange and mellifluous to Hedy’s ears. His hands where they reached out for Alice were dark and slender, white cuffs rolled back away from his wrists.

“I shouldn’t be here,” Alice replied timidly, her accent smooth and unremarkable. The man moved closer to her, and Hedy was shown her face in a stunning amount of detail. She was pretty, in an effortless sort of way. Her nose was small, her lips bow-shaped, and her eyes… her eyes were grey, the same grey as Hedy’s. She reached her hand out to Hedy— no, to the man, and ran her fingers down his cheek. “You’re like no one I’ve ever met before,” Alice whispered, and the scene faded to black.
While Hedy was trying to understand why the woman had seemed so familiar, another memory swam into focus behind the glass. A man stood before a full-length mirror in white tie and military medals, trying to straighten his bow with savage tugs at the white cotton. Hedy kept staring at his hands as he bested the bowtie, his nimble fingers pulling the material back into shape. They were the same hands that had reached out to the woman – to Alice, in the garden.

Hedy watched the man’s reflection as he scowled at the mirror. His hair was night-black and lay against his forehead like the sweep of a dark wing. His face was fine-boned, like his hands, but his profile was hawk-like, his nose aquiline above full lips. Again, Hedy had the strangest sense of familiarity – as though she were looking at a mish-mashed version of herself. His eyes weren’t grey like hers though – they were a rich, molten brown, as dark as his skin. Hedy held out her hands in front of herself. Her skin was a little lighter than his, but it held the same warmth.

Inside the memory, there was a knock at the door, and the man turned to see a portly, white, middle-aged man peering through the entrance, his fingers clutched on the decorative handle of the door. He wore a red sash across his chest, and there were military honours pinned to his dress coat as well.

“Ah, there you are!” the rotund man said. “We’ll be late for dinner, Rafe.”

‘Rafe’ turned back to the mirror. “I’m not hungry, Lawrence,” he replied – a slight accent once again rounding out his fluid English.

Lawrence huffed and stepped farther into the room. “That’s beside the point, old boy. Being late – it’s just not done.”

“It’s fine,” he muttered. “I’ll be down in a minute.” Lawrence stared at him for a moment, then sighed in defeat, and wandered back out the door. Rafe finished tying his bow with a vicious flourish, and stepped closer to the mirror. “It’s for the best,” he said to his reflection. “It’s for the best, Ravi. Go home and keep her as a memory in your heart.” He left his reflection behind, and walked slowly out of the room, the light fading around him, until he was a lone figure in the smoky glass of the mirror.
Hedy watched until the mirror reflected only herself, and then took a step back, remembering to breathe. Alice and Ravi – both so strangely familiar. Had they really been her parents? To have seen them both, to have heard them speak – it fell woefully short of what she’d had with Molly, but it was still more of a connection with her past than she had hoped for in a very long time. She looked to her left where the final – and by the look of the freshly carved frame, the most recent panel of glass lay embedded in the Wall.

The stonework around this mirror was bright and sharp. Ivy curled around the upper corners, and there were sheaves of wheat, and willow leaves running down stylised rivers on its sides. This was her glass, then. Hedy touched the cool surface with her fingertips, and it came to life beneath her hand. There was her river, far upstream from the willows near the rapids at Sallyforth. Molly, her real mother, stood by the bank, casting a fishing line into the water.

“You see? If you land the fly just so, the fish jump into your arms.” Molly whooped as her words rang true, and a trout arced out of the water, caught on the line. She laughed wildly, and began to reel it in. Her laughter had been infectious, Hedy remembered, and the six year old version of herself began to giggle along with Molly. When the fish was finally landed, her mother turned to her and grinned, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. “And that’s how you catch a fish!”

Little Hedy giggled again, her heart racing with the rare sensation of a hug from her mother. “Show me again!” Hedy heard herself exclaim in delight.

Her mother was still smiling – she was so much younger than Hedy remembered. “Just for you, my darling. Just for you.”
APRIL, 1915.

Easter had arrived, and with it spring, but Hedy watched it all with a certain sense of dread. With the Easter break approaching, Pasha would be returning home, and Hedy wasn’t sure what loomed greater in her mind – her fear of what would happen when they saw each other again, or the desperate want that she felt at the idea of kissing him again. The last few months seemed to have tumbling and churned the pieces of her life together, and now her future stretched out ahead of her like the water beneath a glassy lake – unseeable, unknowable.

He was standing beneath the same oak tree, dressed in dark trousers and a white shirt with braces, and his body looked relaxed where it reclined against the trunk. The last time they had lain together here the wheat had just been taken in. Now the field was awash in green clover and wild flowers – bursts of colour waving in the breeze. She knew the moment that he heard her approaching, he looked up, smiling at her in greeting, and slipped something into the pocket of his trousers. She stepped into the shade of the oak tree and leaned forward.

“What’s that?”

He winced as though he’d been caught out, and pulled his hand back out of his pocket. At first it didn’t look like anything much – just a misshapen lump of metal sitting on his outstretched hand, but the tense line of Pasha’s arm, his shuttered expression gave it a darker meaning.

“What is it?” she asked again, dropping her hand lightly onto Pasha’s wrist.

“A bullet,” he replied. “Nikola’s bullet. Well, a German bullet I suppose, but my brother’s in as much as it hit him.”

Hedy pulse jumped. “Your brother was shot?”

“Yes, a month or so ago. He wrote to regale me with the story, and sent the bullet in order to impress upon me the ‘most excellent danger’ that he’d faced.”
The words were so reminiscent of Nikola that Hedy could almost hear him drawling the words.

“What happened?” she asked.

Pasha closed his fist over the bullet, and looked out over the field. “Apparently his unit was advancing into no man’s land, and he was hit by enemy fire. So were a lot of his men by the sounds of it. Nikola took a bullet through his calf – which sent him down to his knees, and *this* one…” He held up the offending piece of lead between his thumb and forefinger. “He thinks it would have hit him in the chest, dead centre, but it clipped his ear instead when he dropped. Took off a chunk of cartilage, and then embedded itself in a post behind him.” Pasha sighed, and slipped the bullet back into his pocket. “He levered it out with a knife, and he’s been thanking his lucky stars in a French hospital ever since.”

“My God,” Hedy breathed. “So much for ordering men around, instead of leading the charge.” She’d never been fond of Nikola, true, but the story was terrifying, and Hedy had the uneasy feeling that Pasha wasn’t giving her all the details that Nikola had included in the letter. “Will he come home now, or will they send him back to the front?”

“Oh, he’s almost certainly there already,” Pasha replied. “It was only a flesh wound, and they don’t send you home for that. No, he’ll be fighting for his country, still.”

He had that faraway look in his eyes again, and Hedy stepped forward to wrap her arms around his waist, and buried her head against his chest. “He’ll see his way through it, Pasha. I can’t imagine Nikola letting anyone have the last word, not even someone who’s trying to kill him.”

Pasha looked down at her and huffed, smiling. “How true.” He hugged her to him tightly. “You always know what to say.”

“No, I don’t. I think it’s only luck that it comes out sounding as helpful as it does. Luck, and… and my friends. Whenever we speak, I always feel as though everything makes more sense. That it all fits into place in a way that I hadn’t understood before.”

“Your friends…” Pasha repeated slowly.
“Yes, I—” Could she really tell him about Sanctuary? About the People that no one else could see? “I’ve made friends with some of the farming families that I see at the market. We talk sometimes,” she finished lamely.

“Oh. That’s nice,” Pasha replied, trying to sound unconcerned. “But…” His thumbs traced the small of her back through her dress. “You still want to talk to me, don’t you? I know that I’m not a farmer, that I can’t talk to you about your work, but we can talk about anything else. Everything else.” He cupped her face in his long-fingered hands. “I want to talk to you about everything.”

When he kissed her this time she kissed him back without hesitation. She would let herself drown in Pasha, if only for an afternoon. The spring day was warm enough that she didn’t feel the cold when he slid her dress off her shoulders, or when it slipped past her hips, and there were no goose bumps on Pasha’s skin when she dropped his braces, and undid the buttons on his shirt to expose his pale chest. By the time they were lying together in the clover, skin to skin – their hands caught in each other’s hair as they kissed, sweat was already beginning to prickle down her spine.

Pasha rolled her beneath him, and Hedy looked up. Above her, the sky was azure blue – the few clouds a white so luminous they were almost blinding. She turned away, tucking her face into the crook of Pasha’s neck, as he wrapped himself around her. He was warm, and solid, and when he moved inside her, he whispered her name over and over again, as though it were a talisman to keep the world at bay.

There was such a beautiful contrast to their skin where they lay together, dark over light. The day was already fading, and she and Pasha still lay where they had fallen, the crushed, sweet-smelling clover a mattress beneath them. Pasha twisted their hands together as he gazed upwards.

“Look at that sky,” he murmured.
Hedy followed his gaze, and watched the blushing pink and yellow of the sunset spread across the horizon. “It makes me think of what lies beyond it all,” she murmured. “What it would be like to just get up one day, and walk over that hill. And the next one. And the next one. To just wander for a while – to be free, like those colours in the sky.”

Pasha squeezed her hand, and drew her against him. “Then that’s what we’ll do. After the war’s over, we’ll go and travel the world. We’ll go to Russia, and India, and then the Americas, and we’ll go skiing, and cross deserts, and go swimming in all the great oceans. How about that?”

Hedy smiled, and closed her eyes. “I like the sound of that.”

They lay together in comfortable silence, until the sunset had faded to a dull glow, and Hedy began to shiver, even pressed up against the warmth of Pasha’s body as she was. He turned towards her, frowning.

“You’re cold. Why didn’t you say something?”

“I didn’t want this to end,” she replied, stroking the hair that fell across his face. “We have so little time together before you go back to school.” Pasha’s eyes flickered, only for a second, but it was enough. “What is it? What’s wrong?”

He wouldn’t meet her eyes. “I’m leaving in three days.”

“What? Three days? I don’t understand. Term doesn’t start for another two weeks.” Pasha stared at her, as though he were willing her to understand so that he wouldn’t have to say the words. “You’re not going back, are you?” she said, a terrible sense of understanding flooding over her.

He shook his head sadly. “I can’t. I need to go – It’s my duty. How can I let my brother fight, let him nearly die, and then go back to school as though nothing’s changed?”

“Nothing has changed,” she challenged, feeling her anger rise as she sat up, arms across her breasts.

“I have,” Pasha countered, leaning up on one elbow. “I’m so sorry, Hedy, but I don’t feel as though I have a choice. I need to do this.”
Hedy clenched her jaw. “You’re too young, Pasha you’re not even eighteen. They’ll never take you.”

Pasha shook his head. “They’ll take anyone who looks like they can fight, Hedy. They’re desperate.” He sat up properly, and wrapped his arms around her, pressing her back against his chest. “I signed up this morning,” he confessed, the sound of his voice rumbling through her chest like far-off thunder. “My train leaves at nine o’clock Tuesday morning. Please will you come and see me off, Hedy? Mother doesn’t know I’m leaving, and… and there’s no one else who will care that I’m gone.”

Hedy was still in his arms, watching the swallows as they used the last of the day’s light to catch their dinner. “I can’t,” she said, her voice shaking with anger – or despair, she couldn’t quite be certain. “Goddamn you, Pasha I can’t.” She shrugged out of his hold and stood, grabbing her dress, and throwing it over her bare skin. “And damn you for letting me— for letting us…” She gestured to their bed of clover. “…When you knew that you were leaving.” Pasha looked devastated, and suddenly a lot more boy than man. “You knew, you must have known how I would feel, and you did all of this regardless.” She picked up her underclothes, and walked away, heedless of the breeze that swept through the clover, carrying her name.

~O~

Tuesday morning dawned, and Hedy startled awake, Pasha’s letter still gripped in her hand – crumple-soft and stained from repeated readings. It had arrived, hand-delivered the morning after she and Pasha had slept together beneath the oak tree, and by now, Hedy knew every line of it off by heart.

I love you, Hedy. I’ve loved you for as long as I’ve known you. Please don’t leave it like this, please don’t let those words yesterday be my parting memory of you. I never planned for us
to come together as we did, but by God I can’t regret it. I can’t regret anything about you, my darling.

Hedy groaned, her chest aching, and she stumbled over to the washbasin to splash her face with the chilly, early-morning water. It was shock enough to wake her properly, and she walked out onto the landing in the dimness of the predawn. Oh, Pasha. How badly would she regret refusing to say goodbye? If he never returned from the war, and the last memory she had of him was coloured with bitterness and anger would she ever be able to forgive herself? She was still so angry with him for lying to her by omission, for wanting to risk his life when he didn’t need to. How could she say goodbye to him without wanting to knock him unconscious and *make* him stay?

She waited until the last possible moment, the final chime of the clock striking the three quarter hour, before she was dashing out the door, panic gripping her tight around the chest, the terrible fear that she had left it all too late chasing her all the way to the train station.

The clock above the post office showed her that it was only a few minutes to nine, and Hedy could see the head of steam building above the trees by the train station.

The station’s picket gate smashed hard against the stone wall as she flung it open. The handful of people on the platform were hugging their friends and loved ones goodbye, as the guard began his final checks, whistle in hand.

“Hedy!” The shout was barely discernible over the calls of the guard, and the shriek of the steam engine. She turned, and spotted a familiar figure in what had become an all too familiar uniform.
“Pasha.” She ran over to him, and flung her arms around him before he could say a word.

“I’m so sorry for how we left things, I was just so angry.”

Pasha shushed her, and held her tight against the prickly wool of his uniform. “I’m sorry too,” he murmured into her hair. “I’m so sorry. I thought I’d done my dash up in that field. Thought you’d never want to see me again.”

She looked at him. “I was just hurt, Pasha. And scared. Oh God, I’m so scared for you. Promise me that you’ll be careful.”

Pasha nodded, opening his mouth to speak, when the shrill call of the guard’s whistle cut the air. “I have to go,” he said, hugging her, before he let go, and stepped through the open door of the carriage behind him. He reached back for her through the window. “Don’t forget about me,” he joked, but Hedy could see the worry in his eyes.

“How could I ever,” she replied, cradling his head in her hands. “I love you, idiot.”

Pasha’s eyes crinkled, and he leant forward to kiss her deeply. “I love you too,” he whispered in her ear before he drew away. A throaty whistle came from the train itself, and the carriage began to ease forward, rapidly picking up speed. Hedy walked alongside it as far as she could, and when her hand slipped from Pasha’s grasp, she held it across her heart, and watched him get farther and farther away, until even the plumes of steam from the engine were lost amongst the clouds.
GROWTH

JANUARY, 1919.

The remainder of the war had passed with little fanfare for Hedy. She had managed to keep the farm running with the help of a handful of land girls, but most of them had begun to return home now, as the soldiers began to slowly trickle back from their battlefields – trains full of tired, battered men disgorging their human cargo across the country.

Downheadley was the same, but not everyone would be coming home. Almost a third of the village and its farmland’s male population were lost. Boys whom Hedy had gone to school with, and men who had helped each year with the harvest had been killed in action – some in great swathes of attrition, as boys who had all signed up together, died together in the same companies. Others had returned, but terribly injured – missing limbs, and melted faces reminding everyone of what the village had lost.

Hedy sat on her bed, folding and unfoldng a yellowing, dog-eared letter. Three months old now, it was the last piece of sporadic correspondence that Pasha had sent her since he’d returned to the front a year ago. The memory of that leave brought her no more happiness than re-reading the letter did. He’d been happy enough to see her, and they’d spent more time in bed than was strictly necessary, but he’d held himself apart in a way that he never had before. Any trace of the young boy he’d once been had long since been blasted away.

She looked back down at the letter in her hands, studying not so much the words that Pasha had written, but how he had written them – the way that he fudged his ‘r’s, and looped his ‘o’s. She imagined him swearing when his pen had leaked across the top of the second page, and she ran her hand over the whorls of his thumbprint where it had pressed into the still-wet ink of the spill. He was here, in these pages. Not just in the words, but in the paper.

Hedy put away the letter, and wandered out of her bedroom. The last few weeks had begun to give Hedy an inkling of what it must have been like for her mother, before she’d found herself
a daughter in a nest of ivy. Even surrounded by the land girls and the returning farmhands, Hedy still felt alone in the winter-cold farmhouse.

Snow was falling lightly as Hedy looked through the fogged windows of the sitting room. It was a tiny space at the front of the house, but easy to warm with a small fire when winter came. She sat down in the threadbare chair – old even when she’d been a child, and stoked the fire, stirring the dulled embers back into life. The crackle of the new log she threw on top afterwards was almost enough to cover the crunch of feet moving through the snow, but not quite. The heavy step hesitated as it neared the front door, and Hedy slid across to the window, angling her head until she could see the front door.

It was a man, taller than average, with brown hair so dark it was almost black. He wore a greatcoat of an expensive cut, and he ran a hand through his hair, shaking free a flurry of snow. It certainly wasn’t Pasha, and Hedy tamped down the sudden, irrational hope that she’d felt.

Whatever had made the man hesitate passed, and he walked to the door, knocking briskly. Hedy stepped back from window, and looked towards the hallway, suddenly wishing very deeply that she didn’t live alone. The knock came again as she crept across the old floorboards towards the door, and curiosity warred with hesitation as she reached for the tarnished door handle.

The door caught and dragged as it always had against the floor, and Hedy booted it the rest of the way open with a well-practiced kick. When she looked back up, Nikola was staring at her, his mouth slightly ajar, and his hand poised to knock again.

“You,” Hedy accused, before her brain could catch up with her mouth.

Nikola stared at her, slowly lowering his hand. “I— Me,” he replied, as if he were just as surprised as she was to find himself at her door.

Hedy looked him up and down, noting the well-tailored civilian clothes, and the slightest shadow of a beard across his jaw. He looked so much older than he had the last time they’d seen each other, and Hedy could tell that it wasn’t entirely physical. He wore the same expression as Pasha had that last leave, as though something fundamental had been ripped away from him. They
watched each other in silence, summing up the differences between who they had been, and who they were now, as though time had washed away much of what they remembered.

“You’ve been demobbed, then,” she said eventually.

“Yes, two weeks ago. I meant to come and see you earlier, but things have been—” He shook his head. “No excuses. He made me promise not to tell you, and fool that I am I agreed to it. It’s taken me this long to realise that it’s only making you both miserable.”

Hedy tensed. “Promise?”

Nikola looked at her resignedly. “Pasha was wounded at Passchendaele in October. They evacuated him back to England just before the armistice, and he’s been in hospital ever since. He was finally released a few days ago, but he’s still bedridden.” Nikola’s voice wavered slightly, and he cleared his throat. “I didn’t even know that he’d been hurt, until mother wrote that she’d received the telegram.”

“Will…” She took a shallow breath. “Is he going to recover?”

Nikola’s eyes were haunted. “I don’t know. He was hit in the side, and it shattered his hipbone, as well as part of his upper femur—er, his thighbone.”

“I know what a femur is, Nikola.”

A little of the boy he’d once been flitted across his face, and he raised a sardonic eyebrow. “Well, how am I supposed to know what you do and don’t know?” he scoffed, and then his expression softened and he rubbed his forehead tiredly. “I’m sorry, Hedera. I’m rather at a loss as to know what to do. There’s a chance he’ll never walk again, and even if he does, he’ll never have the same mobility he did before. I don’t like being helpless.”

“Try feeling helpless and in the dark,” Hedy replied. “I didn’t even know if he was alive. I’d heard nothing for so long, I thought—” She bit off her words, trying to stifle the sob that was threatening to burst from her mouth. “I thought he was dead, Nikola. I thought he was lying in a muddy field somewhere, and I’d never see him again.”
Nikola stepped forward, and patted her awkwardly on the shoulder. “Well, he’s not dead. He’s stubborn and pig-headed, and usually ignores what’s best for him, but he’s alive. We’ll see him through this, Hedera.”

She sniffled and rolled her eyes, ignoring the spill of tears. “Oh, do stop calling me that, Nikola. No one ever calls me Hedera.”

“Well, I can’t call you ‘Ragamuffin’ now, can I?” Nikola drawled.

“It seemed to suit you just fine when we were children,” she reminded him.

He sobered, and a shadow crossed his face. “We’re not children anymore.”

“No, we’re not,” Hedy replied quietly, looking back at her empty house.

Nikola followed her gaze. “I was sorry to hear about your mother’s passing. She seemed a good sort of woman.”

“Thank you, she was,” Hedy replied. “She went very quickly – I don’t think she suffered.”

A shiver crawled up her spine as the wind scattered flecks of snow around her, and Nikola swore softly. “You’ll catch your death if you stay out here. Get back inside before I have to relate the news of your untimely demise to my invalid brother.” He shooed her backwards, and then turned to go. “I’ll keep you in the loop from now on, Hedy I promise,” he called over his shoulder as he strode away. “Courier boy – that’s about all I can do for him right now.”

He sounded so frustrated, and for the first time in her life, as she stood in the snow with no idea of what to do next, Hedy understood exactly how Nikola Astakhov felt.

~O~

Nikola didn’t write to tell Hedy about Pasha’s recovery as she assumed he would. Instead, he visited her, once a week if he could manage it, and told her in person of the small improvements that Pasha had made – first he had sat up in bed, then he was able to walk assisted to the bathroom, now he was walking small distances with the aid of crutches.
It hurt to be so distant from his recovery, and Nikola seemed to sense it, relaying to her the small incidences of Pasha’s day, as she read the heartfelt notes that Pasha entrusted to Nikola’s care. It seemed so utterly bizarre for Nikola to be the one relaying their messages to each other, that one day as they drank their tea in her sitting room, she asked him outright.

“Why are you doing this, Nikola?” she sighed, putting down her drink. “You must know how Pasha and I feel about each other – that we’re more than friends, so why are you helping us? Helping me? You and I have hated each other since we were children. I can’t imagine that you approve of Pasha and I being together. Surely it goes against everything you believe in?”

Nikola set his cup of tea down very carefully, and stared, unspeaking into the fire for a few moments. When he did speak, it was quietly, and without rancour. “You may have hated me, but I don’t think I ever hated you. You annoyed me, you intrigued me… you occasionally made me so angry that I wanted to kick a tree, but I never hated you. Well,” he corrected himself. “Perhaps I hated who you were to my brother. Someone who he could look to, since he certainly couldn’t look to me.” He laughed humourlessly, and turned to look at her. “You – a little brown girl, with armour made of wheat dust and pride. I didn’t even have pride in myself – and I had the money and breeding, and privilege that ought to have fed it. You had the one thing I didn’t. You were happy.”

Hedy wanted to argue with him – her childhood had been hard, even dangerous at times. Happiness didn’t seem like an appropriate description to her. Then her memory caught on the times that she had played by the river, caught fish with her mother, chased Pasha around the village, playing hide and seek. Her happiness was there in the way that she smiled to remember her mother’s cooking, or her delight in recalling how her mother had taken her to the travelling fair – the sound of the steam-powered carousel dancing through her mind.

Nikola watched her as the memories played across her face. “That happiness made Pasha happy too, in a way that I never could be – alone as I was amongst all those people. It’s that same happiness that will see him through this pain – it’s you who will see him through. I love my brother,
Hedy enough to know that you’ve been who he needed since the day you pulled him from the river.”

“I—You’ve changed so much,” Hedy stammered.

He smiled at her, and shook his head. “I just grew up. Thought it was about time.”

They settled back into a comfortable silence, watching the fire burn down as they sipped at their tea. When Nikola left, they parted— if not as friends, then perhaps as people who were finally on the path to understanding each other.
MAY, 1919.

The car purred to a stop outside Hedy’s farm, just as red and flashy as it had been the last time she’d seen it. Nikola sat in the driver’s seat, his hair swept back by the wind, but Hedy’s gaze didn’t linger on him, her attention drawn quickly to the man sitting next to him. Pasha looked almost unchanged at first glance – the same floppy chestnut hair, the same hands with their long-fingered grace. When he turned to look at her though, Hedy could see the shadow of his wound dimming his amber eyes.

She walked over to the car, her gaze wandering over every inch of him as though she were trying to convince herself that he really was alive and in one piece. When she reached his door, instead of opening it, she found herself leaning forward to wrap her arms around his shoulders, and bury her face in the crook of his neck. Pasha wound his arms just as tightly around her waist, and silently held her back.

“I’ve missed you,” she whispered into his skin when the silence grew too great.

“I’ve missed you too,’ he replied, one hand carding through her hair.

“And I’ve missed such stimulating conversation,” added Nikola drily as he came around the car. “I’ll help you get out, shall I?” he asked Pasha, as Hedy drew back.

“Thank you, Koyla,” Pasha replied, blushing. Nikola reached for a walking stick in the backseat, and began the lengthy process of turning and raising Pasha out of the seat, until he was finally standing, a grimace on his face and sweat beading across his brow, but smiling despite it all. His hand was gripped white-knuckle-tight around the silver head of his cane, and so Hedy covered the distance between them, and wrapped herself around him with care. She’d almost forgotten that Nikola was still there, until she heard his voice, trailing away even as he began to speak. “I’ll just…” He cleared his throat. “I’ll be back in an hour or so, Pasha.”

The car roared into life and drove off, the growl of the engine slowly fading away. Hedy kept a hold of Pasha through it all, until the feel of him melted back into her bones.
There was no way with Pasha’s injury that they could make it to their tree by the edge of
the field, and so Hedy dragged two of the kitchen chairs out of the backdoor, and into the little

garden instead. They sat there, looking out over the fields and the village below, as Pasha ran his
thumb across her palm, his bad leg cast out before him.

They talked at first of light, airy things of little consequence – the well-known characters
of the village, how nice it was to have peace again. Hedy had just been regaling Pasha with news
of the new Postmaster, when he suddenly spoke.

“I can’t live here again, Hedy.”

She stared at him. “You can’t… Are you leaving?”

Pasha nodded miserably. “When I’ve healed – well, healed as much as I ever will. I’m
moving to the city. I have a friend who I met in the service – he’s found me a good job.”

“But… University. You always said that you—”

“That was before,” he cut her off. “The idea of lying about on the grass, debating the finer
points of some ancient war with a bunch of boys pretending to be men… No. I need to go
somewhere new. Coming back here is like trying to move back into my nursery room.” He
shuddered. “You know how much I’ve always hated it here, Hedy. University would have been an
escape – this job is just a better fit.”

Hedy turned away, and tried not to let the hurt she felt bleed into her voice. “Well, if it’s
what you want, I’m happy for you, Pasha. You know that I’d never stand in your way.”

When silence greeted her words, she turned back to Pasha to see him staring at her in
disbelief.

“No, Hedy… I want you to come with me. I need you to. I could have easily convalesced
from—” He flashed a look at his hip. “From my injury back in Richmond, I didn’t have to come
home. I came back because I needed to see you. To make sure that you were all right. To ask you
“He sighed in frustration, and ran a hand through his hair, then looked at her. “This isn’t how I wanted to do this.”

“Do what?” Hedy asked, eyes wide.

Pasha looked down at the close-cut lawn. “Marry me.”

Hedy blinked. “What?”

He turned to look at her properly, trying not to twist his leg as he did so. “Marry me, Hedy.”

“Marry y— Are you mad, Pasha?”

“No. Why is it mad? Don’t you love me?”

“Of course I love you!” she replied. “I love you more than anything. But this isn’t about love. I can’t marry you – your parents would never allow it.”

He swore viciously, and turned away. “This has nothing to do with my bloody parents. Why do you think I’m leaving, Hedy? I don’t want the life they have, carved out and waiting for me. I don’t care about the money or the House, or the titles. I only care about you. I thought you knew that?”

“I do, Pasha,” she replied, her voice shaky. “But you’ve never been without wealth, or privilege. Life is hard without them, and even worse when there are people actively set against you, as your family would be. Even Nikola can’t be in support of this.”

Pasha started at her intensely. “What does Kolya have to do with this?”

Hedy sighed. “Nothing. You’re missing the point, Pasha. You’d be sacrificing everything you have.”

“Now look who doesn’t understand,” he replied with the ghost of a laugh. “I’d be sacrificing nothing. I’d have you. You’re all I’ve ever wanted, Hedy. From the moment you saved my life.”

Hedy shifted, uncomfortably reminded of what Nikola had said days before. “But is that enough?” she whispered. “Is that really enough to make a marriage last?”
Pasha grabbed her hands, and gripped them tightly. “Of course it is. We’ll make it enough. So, will you come with me? Will you marry me?”

Her mother’s voice echoed sternly in her head, speaking of the practicalities that they would face – money, lodging, work, children, but Hedy pushed them all aside, and listened to the beat of her heart instead. Leaning forward, she took Pasha’s face in her hands and kissed him softly.

“Ask me again tomorrow.”
JUNE, 1919.

“Are you ready, darling?”

Hedy looked up from the weathered wood of her front door, and released the handle for the last time. She had said farewell to her fields and her garden, she’d walked the rooms of her childhood – bare now of all her belongings. Yes, she was ready.

The trip to the station in Nikola’s car was quick and silent – almost awkwardly so after the absurdity of their departure from the farm, when Nikola had stepped out of the car and gone to open the door for Hedy, only for Pasha to stumble past him and wrench it open himself. Neither of the brothers had said anything, but Hedy had clearly seen the flash of confusion and hurt cross Nikola’s face.

Now the three of them stood together on the platform in an uneasy silence, no one quite ready to say goodbye, until the whistle blew and Pasha sighed, moving towards the carriage door. Nikola helped his brother into the compartment, and turned to extend a hand to guide Hedy, but once again, Pasha darted forward to pull her into her seat himself. “Husband’s prerogative,” he said, smirking at Nikola light-heartedly. Hedy sent a warning glance to her husband, and leant back through the tiny window.

“Thank you, Nikola,” she said, hoping that he understood everything that she was thanking him for. He nodded sharply, and then suddenly pushed himself forward, his hands gripping the frame of the window.

“Look after him,” he pleaded with her, his voice a thread above a whisper.

Hedy fought down a sudden shiver of apprehension, and tried to laugh him off. “I think you have that the wrong way round,” she quipped. “Aren’t you supposed to tell Pasha to look after me?” Nikola shook his head as the train began to move.

“No. Look after him.”

Hedy’s smile bled away as the train pulled free of Nikola’s grip, and she stared at the station until it was no more than a speck of dust caught in the morning light.
NOVEMBER, 1920.

He was standing in the hallway, a posy of yellow flowers clutched in his hand, and a contrite look on his face.

“You’re sorry, you didn’t mean to upset me, you’ll love me always, please forgive you. Am I right?” Hedy asked, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Yes. Always,” he replied, trying to hand her the flowers. “It was just a bad night last night.” Hedy tried not to point out that most nights were bad nights these days. Too much morphine, or not enough, and Pasha would wake screaming in the darkness of their tiny bedroom. “Some mornings it feels as though I’m shuffling through a fog,” he continued. “And then you keep asking me what’s wrong when you know that I don’t want to talk about it.” He exhaled in frustration. “You need to let me alone sometimes.”

“Any more time apart, and we might as well be strangers,” she bit out, and then turned away, smoothing down her dress. She closed her eyes – there was no point starting another useless argument. “Dinner’s ready when you want it,” she said over her shoulder, as though she hadn’t been on the verge of screaming her frustration.

The evening drew to a close in much the same way as it often did, with both of them preparing for bed and slipping beneath the covers in stony silence. Then she would shiver, or Pasha would take in a shaky breath, and they would move a little closer, cast a leg across the other’s ankle, or turn to lie face to face, until their breath mingled in the heated air between them. Eventually they would embrace, Pasha’s hands as warm and dextrous as ever, and Hedy would find herself back beneath the oak tree with the smell of clover in her nose.

She would fall asleep with the warmth of Pasha’s body wrapped around her like a protective blanket, and she sometimes liked to think that her presence was enough to keep Pasha’s nightmares at bay for a little while.
The baby rested against her breast as Hedy sat in the cool autumn air. She could hear the beat of the city bleeding through the fences that surrounded their paved backyard – its thrum had become a near-unremarkable accompaniment to her life.

Pasha shuffled through the backdoor and across the flagstones, a letter clutched in his hand. “Nikola send his congratulations and best wishes,” he said, fluttering the paper carelessly in front of him.

“That’s nice,” Hedy replied, fighting a yawn, and resettling her fitful son on her chest. “It’d be nicer if he sent us a nursemaid instead – perhaps a cook too?”

Pasha shuffled forward and bent down over the baby. “We don’t need anything from Nikola.”

Hedy rolled her eyes. “He’s your brother. It’s nice that he cares.”

Pasha kept his gaze on his son. “He can care all he wants, but we don’t need his charity, do we, John? You and Mummy, and I are doing just fine together, aren’t we?”

Just fine. Hedy wanted to smile at Pasha’s one-sided conversation, but the truth was that he wasn’t present for the ragged days and sleepless nights. When John cried, Hedy was the one who rocked him until he settled, when he woke in the night, it was her who had to crawl out of bed to feed him – Pasha dead to the world beside her. During the day, Hedy was left to try and balance her everyday work, with ensuring that the strange little wailing creature didn’t suddenly die when she wasn’t looking. She had never felt naturally maternal, and some days she felt as though she were adrift at sea, struggling desperately to keep her head above water.

That pressing sense of her inadequacy came to a head a week later as Hedy washed John’s nappies in the great stone sink in the kitchen. She placed the baby beside her on the bench, his pudgy body resting on a fleecy blanket, and turned away for a second, just one second, only to hear a terrible sound, like a haunch of meat hitting a slab, as John tumbled over the edge of the bench and crashed to the floor. There was a moment of horrified silence, and then he began to
scream. Hedy watched as his face turned the colour of the blood that was dashed across his forehead, his legs waving in the air like a beetle’s on its back.

Eventually, she managed to move, and rushed to gather her son up in her arms, but no matter what she tried, he wouldn’t quiet, and the sound of his fall kept repeating itself over and over again in her head. She cleaned away the blood on his skin, and checked as well as she could for other injuries, and when, half an hour later, he finally settled down, she laid him carefully in his cot, untied her apron, and walked out the front door with a calmness that belied her racing heart.

She walked without purpose, and the streets blurred together as she wandered through unknown parts of the city – an angry chaos of dirt and people, and noise surrounding her, until she suddenly found herself in a tiny, abandoned square. Empty windows looked down at her from darkened buildings, and a cracked and empty fountain stood in the centre of the open space. Hedy stumbled forward, and rested her palms against the gritty, pitted texture of the fountain, curling her fingers into the deep grooves between carved stone, where mortar had once existed.

Thoughts of little John, lying alone in his crib stabbed at her, but she couldn’t make herself turn around and go home. Instead, she wanted this fountain to fill with water, to become a river. She wanted to dive into it and be pulled away by its course, until she was somewhere else.

When the first splash of her tear hit the bottom of the fountain and began to spread clear and bright across the stone, something tight and ugly inside her loosened. The water swirled around the edges of the pool, until it stood knee deep, and Hedy crawled into the fountain, clothes and all, and knelt in the water. She closed her eyes as the current caught her around her waist, and like an old friend, pulled her far, far away.
It was exactly as she had left it, all those years ago. The little watercourse still flowed with water, the mosaicked paths were clear and bright – filled with the images of Ganesha, Shiva, and Vishnu, and the limestone houses stood tall and unbroken.

It felt like coming home, watching the grass swaying across the plateau, inhaling the sharp air of the mountains after years of bitter city smog. Hedy dropped to her knees, and dug her fingers into the loamy soil, exalting in the feel of proper earth between her fingers, until a hand on her shoulder pulled her out of her reverie. Rachael stood before her, her face as serene as ever, if a little older than the last time she’d seen it.

“Hedy,” said Rachael, smiling as she crouched down beside her. “It has been such a long time since we’ve seen you.”

Hedy stumbled forward on her knees and threw her arms around Rachael in a hug. “I moved. I… A lot of things changed,” she whispered over her friend’s shoulder. Rachael smelt of paint and turpentine, and Hedy could feel herself relaxing with every breath she took. “I wasn’t sure whether I’d ever be able to come back here,” she confessed, as she finally drew back.

Rachael smiled. “You can always come back, Hedy,” she replied, looking down at her. “Especially when you feel such turmoil.”

Hedy closed her eyes. “You know what happened, then? You know what I did?”

Rachael took Hedy’s hand. “Your son will be fine. This is not about him, this is about you, yes?” Hedy nodded bleakly.

“I feel as though I’m drowning, Rachael. I didn’t even mean to come here today – I was just running away.”

“Then you need to stop running,” she replied gently. “You need to face yourself, face what you’ve become.” She looked away, up towards the mountains, and then drew a parcel wrapped in brown paper and twine from her pocket. “There is a girl… she lives up there amongst the snow. Give her these three things, and she will help you to understand.”
Hedy took the parcel and set it in her lap. “A girl in the mountains will help me,” she said flatly. “How?”

Rachael shrugged enigmatically. “It’s not in my nature to know.”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” she retorted. “I’m sorry, but I just can’t face your particular brand of vagaries, not today.”

“I’m sorry,” Rachael replied. “I don’t mean to make things worse, but I can promise you that if you do this, you will feel… more like yourself by the end.”

Hedy sighed. “All right. How do I find this… girl, then?”

“Pia will lead you through the caverns, and up through the rising passages,” said Rachael, pulling Hedy to her feet.

“The caverns?” Hedy backed away from her. “No. No, no, no. I can’t.”

“The way up the mountain is almost sheer in places. The only safe way is through the caverns.”

Hedy laughed, feeling a little hysterical. “Safe! I’ve heard the sounds that come from… whatever it is that lives down there. I can’t.”

“The caverns are simply a place. Dangerous yes, but a part of our world. A part of your world. And you will not be alone.”

Hedy still hesitated, clutching the parcel to her chest, and Rachael moved forward to clasp her gently by the shoulders. “Do you trust us, Hedy?”

She looked around at Rachael, at Sandy, Vivi, and Ada who hovered behind her. A warm, wet lick on her hand drew her attention to Pia, the dog’s liquid brown eyes patient, and without judgement. “Yes,” she eventually murmured. “Yes, I do.”

“Then go,” said Rachael. “Go, and remember who you are.”

Pia scrambled to her feet, and padded off towards the distant cavern entrance. Hedy followed, trying to ignore the terror that she could feel swirling through her head. When they reached the dark breach in the cliff face, Hedy hesitated at the threshold, until Pia’s echoing bark
eventually drew her onwards. By the time she caught up with the dog, her eyes had adjusted to the
dimness, and she realised that far from there being a complete absence of light, the walls, the roof,
even the floor of the cavern were dusted with thousands of golden sparks. Her fingers were
streaked with the shimmering gold as she ran them across the rock, as though someone had
powdered the precious metal and then scattered it to glitter across the stone. Looking up, she could
see that she stood beneath a massive, cathedral-like roof, its highest point so far above her that
she could barely see it. Pia led her across the great expanse towards what seemed to be a solid wall
of stone, until Hedy drew close enough to see a narrow fissure at hip level.

Pia scrambled through the opening, belly low to the ground, and Hedy tried to follow,
biting down on the thrill of claustrophobia that spiked as her dress caught on the low ceiling.
Twisting sideways, and scraping her elbows and knees against the rough stone, she managed to
work herself free, only to find herself in a cave so small, that it was barely worthy of the name. She
had to duck her head low, and buckle her knees in order to avoid striking her skull on the roof.
She felt like Alice after eating the cake in Wonderland – all awkward angles in a too-small room.

Stalagmites erupted from the ground like a maze of calcified swords – a silent guard
between Hedy, and the continuation of the tunnel she could see on the other side of the cave. Pia
was milling around the stony protrusions, so Hedy picked her way across the floor towards the
tunnel. She had almost drawn level with the last of the stalagmites, when one of them seemed to
move, and a small, mummified creature skittered away from her towards the exit.

Like something out of a nightmare, the thing crouched on the wet slick on the stone floor,
its shrivelled hands clutching at the air. It looked as though someone had tried to preserve the
dead body of a little boy in a vat of salt. The eyes and nose were gone – sunken away, and only
ragged holes remained where the ears had once been. Hedy gagged, and threw her hand across her
mouth in revulsion. The creature slunk back against the wall, seemingly as fearful of Hedy as she
was of it.

“What are you,” she whispered, creeping forward.
The creature gave a dry, rattling rasp, and it took Hedy a moment before she realised that the mummified boy was trying to cry – its desiccated frame shivering and twitching as it clung to the wall.

“It’s all right,” Hedy said as she moved closer. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

This close up, she could see the folds of leathery skin that rippled across the creature’s body like frozen waves of flesh. Clenching her jaw, she reached a hand out to try and reassure the pitiful thing, when she was assaulted by a flood of pure, unadulterated fear that flushed through her veins like ice-water. A cold sweat broke out across her skin, and she gasped for air as she scrambled away from the terrible sensation.

The mummy turned towards her and screamed, its lipless mouth gaping open to let a sound like metal screeching against metal echoed spill from its maw. It was enough to jolt Hedy back into action, and she scrabbled back along the ground until she reached the narrow entrance that she’d first crawled through. No sooner had she reached its dubious safety, than she was being pushed firmly back into the cave by an unseen hand at the small of her back.

When she turned around, she was met with the sight of a man – massive in size, and bent almost in half beneath the low ceiling. His skin was dark and shining, and the muscles that played beneath it were immense, but his voice when he spoke was gentle.

“Face it, Hedy.”

She stared at him, crouched before her like a bear in a cage. How had he even managed to make his way through that rat hole of a tunnel anyway?

“Why? What possible reason do I have to do that?” she exclaimed.

“Because,” he replied, extending a meaty hand towards the exit that lay behind the mummy. “It is the only way to reach the girl.”

Hedy bit her lip, and tried not to swear in frustration. Across the cavern, the creature tried to scream again, and Hedy shrunk back against the wall. There was no way past that… that thing without being flooded with terror once more, and she shook her head. “I can’t.”
“You must. You cannot go forward without passing through it,” he replied. “You may turn back if you cannot find the courage, but you must know that it—” he jabbed a finger at the mummy. “Will still be here waiting for you. You will have resolved nothing.”

“I didn’t even want to come here!” she cried. “I didn’t want any of this!”

The man looked at her. “But it has happened. And you are here now. So choose.”

Hedy cast her eyes to the ceiling, and clenched her fists. She had saved Pasha’s life as a child, run a farm at seventeen, moved far away from everything that she had ever known. She could do this. Taking one step closer for every breath that she took, she moved towards the mummified boy, faint, curling fingers of cold beginning to touch her as she reached the centre of the cave. The creature shivered, and wrapped itself around a stalagmite as Hedy continued to move closer, letting the vice of fear clench tight around her heart. She kept moving forward, kept putting one foot in front of the other, as Pia and the man followed close behind her. As she drew level with the creature it twitched, and a stick-like arm shot out and clawed at her arm with the desperation of a drowning man. Hedy shrieked and stumbled backwards, but the giant man was there like a wall of strength behind her, pushing her forward again. The terror pressed in on her, but the solid weight against her back, and the warm press of fur against her leg bound enough strength around her bones to keep her moving past the grasping mummy, and into the narrow tunnel beyond.

They rushed up its steady incline in silence, with only their harsh breath, and the slap of their feet against the stone as an accompaniment. Eventually, as the tunnel grew steeper, Hedy slowed.

“I still feel afraid,” she whispered into the dim glow of the tunnel. A warm hand dropped onto her shoulder and squeezed.

“Of course you do, but you’re still moving forward, aren’t you?”

Hedy nodded wordlessly, and they continued their ascent through the heart of the mountain.
The climb was exhausting, and Hedy didn’t speak again as the trek drilled a slow ache into her knees and ankles. A white glow that Hedy had taken for a particularly bright patch of gold dust, slowly resolved itself into actual daylight, as a crisp breeze swept down the tunnel and curled around her and her companions. Hedy almost moaned in relief at the fresh air, and staggered free of the mountain’s heavy embrace, only to scrunch her eyes closed against the blinding glare of the sun. When her eyes had adjusted to the daylight, she saw that they stood on the bend of a narrow mountain track, small heaps of crystallised snow banked around the rocks and the stunted trees. Down the sheer drop that lay on one side of the path, Hedy could see all the way down to a wide meadow that lay cradled between the curves of the mountain range, the thin trail of the river converging at the mouth of the gully that led down to the settlement.

“The village is not as far away as it looks,” came a voice from beside her. “And the return journey is far more enjoyable.”

Hedy turned to the man. “You mean that we don’t have to go back through the caverns?”

“No. We can make our way down the mountain path and through the meadow.”

“But I thought the way was too sheer?”

“To climb, yes, but I can lower you down the worst parts.” He looked at her. “Unless of course you would rather brave the caverns again?” He almost looked as though he’d enjoy going back that way, but Hedy’s shiver of fear was enough of a ‘no’ to convince him that option was off the table.

Hedy took a moment to look at the man properly in the light of day. He was as he’d been in the dim underground – tall, broad, and well-muscled – but his dark eyes were kind, and what she’d taken to be a uniform of some sort was actually the ill-fitting overalls of an itinerant worker.

“Who are you?” she asked him, mystified. “I’ve met everyone who lives here.”

“I wasn’t living here,” he replied. “I was… elsewhere. Now I am not. Elsewhere, that is.” He rubbed his neck self-consciously.

Hedy sighed. “This place is so confusing.”
“Not always,” he replied, smiling. “Only when everything else is confusing too.”

“Do you have a name?”

“I believe I am called Hass,” he replied.

“Hass. Well, Hass what do you suggest we do now? I have no idea where I’m supposed to be going, and Pia seems uninterested in showing me.” She looked over at the dog, who was currently trying to dig a rock out of the ground.

“I don’t know,” Hass replied.

Hedy exhaled sharply. “Some help you are, then.”

“That’s not why I am here,” he replied, sounding a little confused. “Perhaps you ought to follow the path upwards? Going down at this point would seem a little… counterintuitive, after climbing all this way.”

Hedy shivered as the breeze cut through her clothes. “Fine. Anything’s better than freezing to death up here while I wait for inspiration.”

Hass looked as though he approved. “Good,” he replied encouragingly.

Hedy ignored him, and followed the track upwards. It was narrow, just as the tunnel had been, but it was beneath an open blue sky, and Hedy could feel herself relaxing little by little as they walked along. The path wound around boulders, and doubled back on itself when it met vertical drops where the stone had sheared away, but it wasn’t long before it had opened up onto a flat expanse of rock, bare but for a few dead bushes, and a filthy child in greying rags, who sat at the centre of the clearing, her arms wrapped around her knees.

Hedy edged towards the girl, trying to ignore how much she reminded Hedy of the mummified boy. She crouched down in front of her, the brown paper parcel clutched against her chest. The girl sat, staring past Hedy, her grey eyes unseeing, and her black hair lashing across her face like a flagellant’s whip. There was something about her, something that felt so familiar, but Hedy couldn’t quite place it.
“Hello?” Hedy tried, but there was no response from the girl. Hedy crept closer, trying to look her in the eye, but the girl’s gaze slid away as though she couldn’t bear the contact, and when Hedy went to touch the girl’s arm, she slid away, hunching herself into a ball. Hedy turned to Hass. “What do I do?”

Hass gestured to the parcel clutched in her hand. The three things that Rachael had given her. Laying it out on the ground, she undid the string, and carefully unfolded the paper.

She had been expecting a coat, perhaps some dried food, or a flint and tinder. Instead, there was a flat glass flask filled with a warm, amber liquid, and a strange scarf that looked like someone’s first attempt at trying to sew.

“What is this?” she said, unfolding the scarf. It was long and misshapen, and made from various, clashing fabrics – everything from fuzzy red wool, to worn denim. The feel of it as it ran through her hands was strangely familiar, like the little girl herself, but it wasn’t until she saw the faded blue and brown stripes of her own baby blanket sewn at the beginning of the scarf that she realised the shreds of fabric came from her life. There was the blanket that she’d been found in by her mother, and there was a square of Pasha’s white cotton shirt, still stained green with clover. The red wool was from the jumper that her mother had knitted for her, and the worn denim was a square from Molly’s old overalls – the ones that had eventually worn away at the knees. At the very end of the patchwork was a soft, blue square that Hedy recognised as the blanket John had been wrapped in when he was born. How had such a thing come to be here, and why was the desolate little girl eyeing it like a starving man would look at a feast?

Hedy tentatively held the scarf out to the girl, and after a few moments, she grabbed the end of it and pulled it to her, wrapping it around herself, and burying her face in its folds.

Hedy watched the girl grip the scarf tightly in her hands. “Those are pieces of clothing from my life, Hass.”

“Yes,” he replied simply.

“And the flask?”
Hass gestured to the girl. “Give it to her and see.”

Hedy lifted up the flask, and extended it towards the girl, shaking it a little to grab her attention. The light refracted through the amber liquid and set it glowing like a warm candle, and the girl took it out of Hedy’s hand with great care and unstoppered the cork.

The scent that curled out from the open flask made Hedy’s eyes well up with tears, and she turned away to surreptitiously wipe her face on her sleeve. The smell was a mixture of the scent that Molly would wear on very rare occasions; the smell of the summer grass by Hedy’s river, where she and Pasha had played together; and the warm spice of a fire in the farmhouse sitting room, dense and peaty.

It was the bottled memory of all the good things in her life, swirled together in a cloud of sensation. The little girl seemed to be in agreement, inhaling the scent from the neck of the bottle as though it would keep her alive, and perhaps that wasn’t too far from the truth. Colour had returned to her cheeks, and her eyes began to focus on her surroundings, rather than skittering from one thing to another. Finally, her eyes came to rest on Hedy – patient and expectant, as though she were waiting for something. Hedy looked at Hass, puzzled.

“The third piece,” he prompted, gesturing to the flutter of brown paper on the ground.

Hedy looked down and saw a sprig of something green and waxy that must have fallen free when she’d unfolded the scarf. She picked it up gingerly between her thumb and forefinger.

“Ivy,” she said flatly. “Why put ivy in with the rest of this? This isn’t a pleasant memory for me – I get terrible rashes from even touching it.” She dropped it back on the paper with a look of distaste.

“Did your mother ever tell you why she named you Hedera?” Hass asked conversationally, and Hedy nodded.

“Because she found me in a mass of ivy.”

Hass looked at her. “And?”
“And... she always told me that I must have lain in the leaves for hours. I suffered, I cried, but I came through it all no worse off. It didn’t break me.” Hedy sighed. “An allegory for my life, I suppose.”

Hass smiled. “Then you know why it’s there.”

Hedy looked over at the girl's all too familiar face. “Why does she need these things, Hass?”

His smile faded a little. “You know that too,” he replied.

She picked up the ivy once more, and shuffled back over to the rag-clad girl, pressing the green spray of leaves into her hand. “This is in acknowledgement of who you are,” she whispered, squeezing the girl’s hand. “For you to remember where you come from, and where you’re going.”

The little girl looked up at her, and Hedy finally let herself see her own reflection in those grey eyes. Pia crept up beside them both, and gave the girl's nose a tentative lick. The girl shook herself like someone trying to clear her head, and smiled at Hedy.

“Hello?” she said quizzically. “I’m—”

“I know who you are,” Hedy cut in gently. “I know.” She turned to look at Hass, feeling a weight that she hadn’t known she’d been carrying lifted from her.

“Why don’t we head back down to the settlement?” he suggested, holding out a hand to her.

“Yes,” Hedy replied. “I’d like that.”

The way down the mountain was slow and steady – Hass’ strong arms lowering her down the sudden drops between the fields of scree. When they finally reached the meadow, Hedy revelled in the gentle slope and the wide, grassy plain, trailing her fingers through the long fronds, and picking the occasional wildflower as they meandered down the field towards the rocky gully.
There were few trees on the path that they had taken, but in the foothills to her left and right, there was a profusion of cedars growing thick and tall up the slopes like a creeping, green army. A flash of movement beneath the tree line to the west caught her eye, the crown of the forest swaying and bending, as though caught in a great gust of wind. Hedy tensed, ready to run for the relative safety of the settlement below, but Hass pulled her up by the elbow.

“Wait, Hedy. There is nothing to fear. Look,” he said, nodding towards the tree line.

With a sound like the rumble of a train, a herd of glassy, shining creatures broke from cover, and cantered into the meadow. They moved almost as one, shifting and changing direction like a flock of exotic birds. As they drew closer, Hedy could see that they were horses – huge, graceful horses, seemingly formed of translucent, molten glass, tinted with colour here and there to show manes or tails, or eyes, but their bodies were as pure as cut crystal.

Hass drew her forward into the herd, and the horses – either unaware, or uncaring of Hedy’s presence, milled and pranced around her, tossing their manes. As they slowed to crop the grass, swirls of colour began to emerge from the depths of their bellies. Some of them formed patinas of watercolour, while others were covered with bold streaks of oil paint. All of them eventually resolved themselves into images – strange objects and figures – tableaus held within the clear barrels of their stomachs. There was one of a little girl flying across a bright expanse of water towards a tropical island, another contained a cacophony of animals – bears, tigers, and deer, playing together in the snow.

Every scene seemed to lift Hedy’s spirits a little more – bonfire dances, and skies full of hot air balloons filling her mind. She sat on the grass, fingers buried in Pia’s fur, watching the herd and their kaleidoscope of images, until she lost track of time. When the horses began to move away, Hass placed a solid hand on her shoulder, and she blinked away the after-image of a girl floating through the stars. She looked up at her tall companion.

“Thank you,” she said.
He shrugged, as though it were nothing, or at least, nothing to do with him, and helped her to her feet. She watched the last of the images bleed from the horses as the herd cantered away, the colours flowing behind them like ribbons of paint from a Master’s hand. When they had disappeared once more beneath the cedars, Hedy and her companions continued on their way.

“I have something to show you,” Rachael murmured as she sat with Hedy outside her house, sipping her chai. Hedy groaned.

“Please tell me I don’t have to trek halfway across Sanctuary to find it?”

Rachael laughed. “No, just across the way – by the edge of the village.”

“Well, that’s all right then, because I honestly don’t think I’m ready for another journey like that one,” Hedy replied, as they stood and made their way along the paths.

Rachael looked at her. “It was… difficult?”

“It was draining. At home— I mean, at the farm, I’d be sitting in the garden right about now, settling myself with some weeding, or planting. As it is, I’m lucky enough to have the space for a window box.”

“I thought you might say something like that.” Rachael smiled, and came to a stop in front of a long, oblong building that Hedy could swear hadn’t been there before. It was different to the limestone houses that comprised the rest of the settlement – roofless, it was built of warm, red brick, and golden mortar, with a graceful archway set into one wall.

Hedy ran a hand across the brickwork. “It’s not much of a house without a roof, Rachael.”

“It’s not a house,” Rachael replied, leading Hedy through the archway. “It’s a garden.”

The ground was all turned earth and twining pathways, and a stack of shining brass tools leant against the far wall, a little wooden shed set into the corner beside them.
“It’s for you,” Rachael said softly. “So that you might have a place to dig your fingers into the earth and grow the things you love.”

Hedy stared at the space before her, thoughts of lemon trees, and bright sprays of flowers dancing through her head. “How… I… How did you know?” Rachael only smiled enigmatically, and Hedy threw her arms around her, squeezing her as tightly as she dared. Rachael huffed with laughter, and hugged her back.

“You’re welcome, Hedy.”

Hedy carefully closed her front door behind her and padded into the baby’s bedroom. Only a handful of minutes had passed since she had bolted out of the house, and John was still asleep in his cot, his tiny hands fisting occasionally in his blankets. Hedy watched him as though she were seeing him for the first time, before slipping away, only to return with her bag of sewing supplies. She sat down in the rocking chair beside John’s cot, and pulled out a scrap from one of her old sundresses, then reached over to pick up one of John’s baby blankets. Slowly and methodically, she began to stitch the two together.
DECEMBER, 1924.

Hedy sat at the foot of their little Christmas tree, putting the final, modest touches to its decoration. John sat beside her, trying in vain to wrap himself in silver tinsel to complement his crown of gold. He looked up at her, amber eyes beaming, and Hedy smiled back, ruffling his black hair.

She set the last bauble on the tip of a low-hanging branch, and turned to look at Josephine, who was crawling around Pasha’s feet as he dozed in his armchair. She babbled inanely and tried to pull apart Pasha’s shoelaces, bouncing up and down in her nappy, but Pasha stayed asleep – the warmth of the fire, and the pull of the morphine holding him under.

Hedy tamped down the familiar chill of anxiety she felt at seeing him so comatose. Some days the drug took him like that. He refused to talk to Hedy about it, about how much he took, but she didn’t need a conversation to see that there were more empty ampoules in the rubbish than there had been a year ago. There were some nights now that he slept like the dead – still and pale, and Hedy tried to convince herself that it was better than the nights he woke drenched in cold sweat, a scream choked halfway out of his throat. Even if those quiet nights meant that Hedy lay alone on her side of the bed, her husband a disinterested body inches away.

Still, Hedy tried to convince herself as she watched John and Josephine play in their living room that there was much to be grateful for, and love was bound to change as the years passed – just as all things needed to change. If she sometimes looked at Pasha, and saw a stranger, it was enough that she could find the boy she’d loved in the bright, carefree gazes of their children.

A sharp knock at the front door startled her out of her thoughts, and dragged Pasha, shuddering out of his sleep. Hedy stood up, and glanced out of the window as she headed into the hallway. It was still lightly snowing – an inch or so blanketing the ground and edging the trees with a ghostly white rime. The silence of the snow had muffled the footsteps of whoever was knocking. Hedy wondered who it could be, calling at such a late hour.
The knock came again as she reached the front door, and she could hear through the letterbox, the stomp of boots against the doorstep. She opened the door, and was confronted with a man – tall, and shrouded in a black greatcoat, with a heavy scarf wrapped across his nose and mouth.

“By God it’s cold out here!” came a muffled exclamation from behind the scarf. “At least the train was heated, but the taxi ride over here was positively pneumonic.”

“Nikola?” Hedy exclaimed, as the man tugged down his scarf and tilted the brim of his hat up to reveal his chill-redened face. “What on earth are you doing here?” Nikola opened his mouth to explain, but she cut him off. “Oh, never mind, just come inside before you catch your death.”

Nikola stamped his feet once more to knock them free of snow, and stepped past Hedy into the hallway, removing his hat, and unpicking the tips of his gloves as he did so. Hedy closed the door against a flurry of snow, and turned to take Nikola’s outstretched coat.

The last few years had been kind to Nikola. His face had filled out, lending him an air of maturity that Hedy was convinced must lie at odds with his character. It was only after he had smiled, though – tiredly, and without his usual tinge of irony – that Hedy noticed the shadow of an unshaven beard across his jaw, and the darkened rings beneath his eyes.

“Are you all right?” she asked, the strangeness of his sudden, rather haggard appearance setting off alarm bells in her head. Images of people lying dead, or of the farm burnt to ash filled her mind, but Nikola shook his head, and gestured towards the living room and the gentle murmur of noise that was floating out through the door.

“I have news, but there’s no point in telling it twice,” he said. “I’m not even sure whether I ought to tell you both, or just Pasha. Not that he wouldn’t tell you anyway, I’m just not quite sure what the proper courtesy is for a thing like this.”

He looked a little lost, and Hedy felt herself taken aback – vulnerability wasn’t an emotion that she’d ever equated with Nikola. “Well, why don’t you start by going in and saying hello to your brother,” she replied gently. “I’ll put the children to bed, and then come and join you both.”
Nikola raised an eyebrow, a small smile quirking his lips. “Children? You mean to say you’ve got more than one now?”

“Of course,” Hedy replied, confused. “Josephine’s— Finny’s almost a year old now.”

“You have a daughter?” he said, amazed. “It’s rather like magic isn’t it, the way they just suddenly… pop into existence?”

Hedy scoffed. “It might look like magic from the outside, but I can promise you— Wait.” She frowned at Nikola. “Do you mean to say that you didn’t know we had a daughter? Didn’t Pasha write to tell you?”

Nikola snorted. “Pasha’s letters have always been few and far between, and when he does write, it’s a page if I’m lucky. More of a telegram than anything else. He’s getting worse too – these days he only writes to tell me that things are well, and to share the occasional bland anecdote about his work.”

“I thought he was keeping in touch better than that,” Hedy replied, frowning.

“Well, perhaps I’m the reliable brother after all,” Nikola quipped, waggling his eyebrows at her.

Hedy narrowed her eyes. “You must have caught the flu on that taxi drive after all,” she said, lifting the back of her hand to Nikola’s forehead. “I think you’re feverish.”

Their laughter was cut short by the sudden appearance of Pasha in the hallway. “Kolya?” he murmured, his voice still gravelly from sleep. “What are you doing here?”

Nikola looked at a loss for words, and Hedy took the awkward silence as an opportunity to head back into the living room and get the children ready for bed. She kissed Pasha on the cheek as she passed him by, but it was like kissing flint – and his eyes were locked on Nikola.

By the time she had put the children to bed, Pasha and Nikola were quietly murmuring to each other in the living room. They stopped talking the moment she walked in, Nikola looking away as though he’d been caught out at something.
“What’s going on?” she asked. When neither brother spoke, she continued – letting a hint of steel bleed into her voice. “Well, something’s clearly happened.”

Pasha leant forward, elbows on his knees, and ran his hands through his hair. “Moy otets—My father… Died. A fortnight ago.”

Hedy was stunned. “A fortnight ago? I don’t understand.” She looked to Nikola, who exhaled sharply.

“Our father had been ill for some time – had been dying, in fact—” Hedy shot a look at Pasha, who seemed entirely unfazed by that particular detail, as though he had already known, as though Nikola had already written to tell him of their father’s failing health, and he had chosen not to tell Hedy anything. Her eyes flickered away from her husband, and she looked back at Nikola, who had continued to speak, oblivious to Hedy’s miserable conclusion.

“—and he had enough time to make sure that his will, and his last wishes were carried out to the letter.” He looked back at Hedy. “It won’t surprise you to learn that he cut Pasha out of his inheritance entirely. Everything goes to me – apart from a small stipend for our mother, and he was very clear that he didn’t want Pasha anywhere near the funeral, or the reading of the will. I was instructed quite implicitly not to tell Pasha of Father’s death for a full two weeks after his passing.”

Pasha smashed a hand against the upholstery of his chair, and stood up sharply, striding over to the decanter of whiskey that stood by the bookcase. Nikola watched his brother pour a full glass in silence.

“I came as soon as I was allowed,” Nikola continued. “I told Mother that I need to travel to the city to deal with some of Father’s business investments – she’s distraught enough that she doesn’t seem to have connected the timing of my visit to you.”

Pasha scoffed, and downed his drink in a single swallow. “Mother hated Father. We all hated him. Why the hell would she be distraught?”
Nikola walked over to Pasha, and poured himself a drink. “Because, our mother is a very fragile woman, Pasha. Because she had lost a son and now a husband, and it has taken a toll on her already frayed nerves.”

Pasha looked away angrily as though he’d been scolded, and perhaps he had.

“So… what happens now?” Hedy asked, trying to fill the tense silence.

“Nothing really,” Nikola replied. “I came to deliver the news, and to see my nephew. And my niece,” he added, raising his glass in the air. “Now that I know of her existence.”

Pasha darted a glance at Nikola, and then at Hedy. Whatever he saw on her face made him turn away again. “I’m going to bed,” he muttered, slamming his empty glass down on the table. He went without another word, and Hedy was left, mortified in the overly-silent room.

“He’s just tired,” she said lightly, a brittle smile on her face as she took Nikola’s empty glass from his hand, and picked up Pasha’s from the end table.

“Yes, I noticed,” Nikola replied, watching the door Pasha had left by. “Tired and angry.” He looked at Hedy. “Is he always like that?”

Hedy waved away the question. “His wound bothers him sometimes. He takes medication for the pain, and it can make him a little…” Paranoid, angry, empty. “…Irritable.” She pressed her lips together. “I am sorry to hear about your father’s passing though, Nikola.”

“Don’t be,” he said, a biting smile on his face. “He was a brute who thought that the only civilisation to be found in the world lay in Sankt-Peterburg. I don’t think he ever really recovered from the Revolution, you know. Couldn’t stand the idea of never going home again.”

Hedy tried to smile, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “Well, I know the feeling,” she replied, trying to keep her voice light and empty, instead of just hollow. Nikola looked down at his shoes, and Hedy silently thanked him for trying to hide the pity he so obviously felt. When the silence between them grew unbearably awkward, she cleared her throat.

“Are you staying in the city for long?”
Nikola looked up, surprised. “A few days,” he murmured. “Wouldn’t do the ruse any good to return home the same day I left.”

“Well in that case, why don’t you come round for lunch tomorrow? If you’re stuck in the city this close to Christmas, you should at least be with family.”

Nikola smiled. “Yes, family,” he said, as though the thought hadn’t really occurred to him before. “Thank you, that would be lovely, Hedy.”

Hedy nodded, strangely relieved and took the whiskey glasses out into the kitchen. When she returned, Nikola was already in the hallway shrugging on his heavy greatcoat. “Until tomorrow, then,” he said, swiping his fingers around the brim of his hat. Hedy nodded, and wrapped her arms around herself as he opened the door and let the cold night spill in.

~O~

The lunch was awkward at first, but Nikola seemed to find his nephew and niece incredibly entertaining, and their childish enthusiasm shattered some of the ice that had formed between him and Pasha. Hedy tried to keep the conversation limited to safe topics such as the weather, or Nikola’s love of horses and cars, but the shadow of their father’s death and what it had shaken free loomed over the brothers like a storm cloud. Eventually, when the children had begun to fidget, and Hedy had sent them down to nap, the talk began to skirt more treacherous waters.

When Pasha began to reply to Nikola’s increasingly frustrated questions about their life in the city with progressively monosyllabic answers, Hedy bit the bullet and asked the question that she’d been dying to ask Nikola since he’d arrived on their doorstep.

“So, how’s my old farm going, Nikola? I’ve always wondered how it’s fared.”

Nikola stared at her for a moment, and then turned to Pasha. “Didn’t you tell her?”

Pasha looked mulish at first, before his face took on that blank look that Hedy had become all too familiar with. “I told her that the farm would stay in our family, yes.”
“But not that I’ve been overseeing it personally, or that I carefully selected a replacement
tenant that would look after the land, because I know how long that farm has been in Hedy’s
family? Because you and I both know how much that place means to her?”

“Truly?” Hedy interjected before Pasha could respond. “You did that— I mean you’re
doing all of that?”

“Well, you’re family now, aren’t you,” he replied archly.

Hedy laid her hands flat on the table in front of her. “I— Thank you, Nikola,” she said. “I
can’t deny that I worry about the farm sometimes. I’m so glad to know that it’s well looked after.”

Nikola raised his glass to her, smiling, and Hedy tried not to notice how Pasha tapped his
fingers against the table in an ominous rhythm, his face like the wrath of God.

Once Nikola had said goodbye to the ‘little grots’ as he called the children, and had agreed
to Hedy’s rather forceful suggestion to visit them again, instead of just writing, Hedy closed the
front door, took a deep breath, and headed back into the living room, where Pasha stood facing
away from her, silent and remote.

“Why wouldn’t you tell me about the farm?” she whispered to his back. “And why
wouldn’t you tell your own brother that you have a daughter?” She threw her hands into the air,
despairing. “I don’t understand you sometimes, Pasha.”

“Perhaps I didn’t want to be reminded of my family, or of Downheadley,” he replied with
deceptive calm, his body still turned away from her. “Perhaps I didn’t want my new life tied to the
old one, to everything that happened to me.” He whirled to face her. “Damn it, Hedy, this was
supposed to be a fresh start!”

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“A fresh start? We came here because we didn’t have a choice! You’re lucky enough to have a brother that – for all his faults, still wants to be in your life. All I have are my letters from a few old acquaintances, and my memories.”

“Oh. They still keep in touch, do they?” he asked blandly, and Hedy could feel her anger rising.

“You know damn well they write to me, because you read the letters. You don’t think I can’t tell when someone’s been rifling through the envelopes in my dresser drawer?” Pasha smiled at her, but it was more of a snarl – an animal cornered in a cage. “You’re so paranoid about who I spend time with, you wouldn’t even let me go home for my school friend’s wedding.”

“Downheadley isn’t home, this is!”

“No it’s not!” Hedy screamed, five years of disappointment and claustrophobia finally boiling over like a shrieking kettle. “It’s a prison cell. No one can write, no one can visit, and I can’t get out!” A terrible silence met her words, and Pasha’s eyes were almost black with anger.

“I suppose you’d rather someone like Nikola come along and whisk you away to a better life, since you two were so close to each other when I was bedridden? Well, I’m the only one who really wants you, Hedy. If it weren’t for me, you’d have become an old maid like your mother, toiling away on a farm that you’d never own.”

“And if it weren’t for me, you’d be dead,” she spat back at him, revelling in the thrill of victory as her barb hit home. “And as far as your brother goes, we hardly knew each other when you were wounded. We hardly know each other now. Yes, it would be nice if someone like him promised to take me and the children away somewhere that didn’t smell of smoke, and shit, and stale, sweaty people. But it won’t be him, because he’s Nikola. Because – amazingly, he’s not actually a selfish, possessive bastard – that’s you. But most of all, it won’t be him, because he’s your brother, and that makes us family – something that obviously means a hell of a lot more to him than you. God save me, but between the two of you, I think he might actually be the better man.”

Oh, if her younger self could hear her now.
Pasha looked livid, but it was as though his rage had nowhere to go, no one to target. Instead, he whirled, lightning fast, and hurled the whiskey glass he’d been holding against the wall as viciously as he could. There was a shatter of glass, and the shards scattered across the floor in a terrifying spray of shrapnel.

For a moment, Hedy stood frozen in shock, until there was a sudden childish wail from the hallway door. Hedy spun around to see John crying in fear, his favourite toy car clutched in his hand. She didn’t hesitate, sweeping him into a tight hug, before swinging back to face Pasha. “Look what you’ve done,” she whispered fiercely.

Pasha looked outraged. “None of this would have happened if you didn’t always remind me of how bloody unhappy you are. I suppose you write to all your old school pals and tell them what a mistake you made marrying me, don’t you?”

“But I didn’t marry you, did I,” she retorted, shifting the grizzling John higher up on her hip. “I married a man who would never hurt someone he claimed to love. Who wouldn’t petrify his three year-old son, because he doesn’t know how to deal with his own emotions. I want that man back,” she said, even as she knew, deep in her bones that something had been lost between them that night.

Pasha deflated like a battered balloon, and slowly stepped towards Hedy and John. “I’d never hurt him, Hedy. You must know that. I’d never hurt either of you. God, I love you.” He shook his head, and reached out his arms to pull them into an embrace. “I promise I’ll do better. I can be that man again.”

Hedy let Pasha wrap them in his warmth and closed her eyes, trying to imagine a universe that would let such a hopeless pipe dream come true.
APRIL, 1928.

Hedy had waved goodbye to John and Finny at the school gate, and then wandered down the street towards a nearby post box to mail her letter to Nikola. She ignored the pang of irrational guilt she felt as she slid the crisp, white envelope through the slot. She’d been writing to Nikola for over three years now, but Pasha remained in the dark about it. Hiding Nikola’s return letters beneath the sink in the kitchen had almost become a matter of routine for Hedy, and the back-and-forth correspondence between the two of them had become a strangely reliable lifeline. She could write of Pasha’s dark moods, and how they came upon him more often now – that he either medicated himself into a stupor in order to numb himself, or – when his supply grew too low, how he would snap at the slightest things – Hedy having a cup of tea with a friend, or the children playing too loudly. Nikola would reply in his usual, sardonic way, and Hedy could pretend that someone else understood how it felt to be faced with Pasha’s predictable unpredictability.

The one thing that Hedy kept from Nikola – that she kept from everyone – were the blessedly rare moments of morphine-fuelled rambling, where he would despair over his failures, and rail against the people who had failed him. Hedy had heard almost everyone they knew mentioned at one time or another, but it was Nikola to whom Pasha always seemed to return. He would rant and ramble about his manner or his luck, or the way that he had treated Pasha when they were children.

Hedy had long ago come to the understanding that Nikola’s childish behaviour growing up had been just that – childish. He’d grown out of it in the same way that Hedy had grown out of much of her wilfulness, but for Pasha, the past seemed to be as vivid as the present, and he clouded his days with the memories of his youth, of the things he couldn’t change.

He’d been sitting in his chair, smoking a cigarette when she’d left to take the children to school that morning, and Hedy had bitten her tongue against the words that she’d wanted to say, and instead had muttered something bland about not being late for work.
“Come and give your father a hug,” he’d said to the children, twisting around in his chair. John and Finny had crept forward, unsure at first, and it had caused the old, familiar ache to rise in Hedy’s chest. Pasha had held them tightly, and then reached out a hand for Hedy, and for a moment, she had been taken by the idyll of the unfamiliar scene. Pasha took her hand in his and drew it to his lips in a chaste kiss.

“You’re the best thing that ever happened to me,” he’d said, his expression so close to that shy, little-boy smile Hedy remembered that she had turned away, ushering the children towards the front door, unwilling to deal with such a bald-faced lie so early in the morning. By the time she’d turned back to look, Pasha was already drawing hard on his cigarette, face turned to the window.

The idea of returning home now to an empty chair and a cold ashtray made her tense up, so instead she turned away from the post box and headed towards the little abandoned square with its swirling fountain.

She slid into Sanctuary as easily as ever, and slowly made her way across the grass towards her garden, waving to Rachael as she painted at her easel, and to Hass, who sat hand-feeding what looked like a jewelled snake that was twined around his arm. She stepped through the archway into her walled garden and let herself finally relax, breathing in the scent of the jasmine and wisteria that she had planted in the far right corner. They had both spread up and across the brickwork, turning the corner into a luscious green shroud that sheltered a clump of hydrangeas.

Paths twisted and turned through the rest of the garden, wending left and right between flowerbeds that were bursting with life. A row of buddleia trailed an abundance of long, tapering flowers, and the roses that she had placed against the front wall were beginning to bloom in a multi-coloured spatter of sunset oranges and pinks. In the centre of it all, where she had spent many hours digging down into the soft, loamy soil, was a pond of still water, lined with orchids, and filled with lilies and lotuses. The ground sloped down gently towards it, so when Hedy lay
back and dipped her feet in the water, the world seemed to spin out above her, and she was alone amongst the buzz of the bees and the gentle lap of the water.

Her tools were where she’d left them, stacked against the little wooden shed that Rachael had built. Loading them over her shoulder, she headed towards the worst of the untended plant beds and set to work, weeding the soil and trimming the growth on the rangy plants, before watering the whole garden, walking its paths with a hose and hand pump that was plumbed into the village’s watercourse, and revelling in the intoxicating perfume of moistened earth.

When she was done, she put away her tools and went to sit on the hand-carved bench that Rachael had made for her the year before. It was made from the warm, red wood of the forest cedars, and designs of twining ivy and sleek fish wound their way across the planes of wood. It sat beneath the ber tree that Hedy had planted three years ago, and she stretched out beneath its shade, letting the garden’s colours and smells, and the drone of the bees in the flowers wash away the last of the city’s grime. She drowsed for a while, surrendering herself to the timelessness of Sanctuary, until raised voices called her back. She rose and stretched, and then wandered through the garden and out through the archway towards the commotion.

Hass, Vivi, and Sandy were standing around the ornamental pool at the edge of the plateau. Hass looked supremely uninterested in the conversation, but his arms were crossed tightly over his barrel chest as the monkey-ish Vivi argued with him.

“We ought to tell her,” said Vivi, as Hedy drew level with them, her furred paws twisting anxiously together.

Hass shook his big head. “Tell her what? Everything’s fine, Vivi. Sandy’s just stirring up trouble again, as usual.”

Sandy grunted in response, and spat on the ground.

Vivi grimaced in distaste. “I think it’s only right she be told, Hass. If it turns out to be nothing, then no harm done.”
Sandy grunted again. “Doesn’t matter what you lot think, I bloody well know. Something weren’t right about how he said goodbye this morning. I don’t trust him.”

Hass raised an eyebrow. “You’ve never trusted him, Sandy, this isn’t exactly news.”

The scrawny old man growled and turned away, catching sight of Hedy. “Hey, you! Yes, you, Hedy Whatsername. You need to listen to me.” Hass went to pull Sandy back, but Hedy held up her hand.

“No, let him talk. What ‘goodbye’, Sandy? Who are you talking about?”

“You,” he said. “You and that bloody useless man of yours. Didn’t he seem strange this morning – well, stranger than usual?”

“How on earth do you know about that?” Hedy demanded. “You can’t possibly know about that.”

Sandy scoffed, and Vivi looked away guiltily. “Of course I know, we all know.” He gestured around wildly. “The point is, it was all too nice, too lovey-dovey. When was the last time he smiled at you like that? When was the last time he wanted to hold the little kiddies?” He shook his head.

“No, I don’t like it.”

Hass smiled, shaking his head and waved the old man off. Hedy wanted to dismiss him too, but Sandy’s words niggled at something dark and uncomfortable in the back of her mind.

If she left with a little more haste than was usual, none of the People commented on it.

The clock in the hallway ticked away quietly as she shut the front door and placed her purse on the side table. “Pasha?” she called, not sure what response she was hoping for. Silence was her only reply, and she sighed in relief. Gone to work, then. Good. The quiet wasn’t odd by any means – now that both of the children were at school, Hedy often took advantage of the morning peace by grabbing a book and reading for an hour or so.
She stepped into the living room, and chose one of her favourite stories, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, from their tiny bookshelf. When she turned to sit in her chair by the window, she was startled to find Pasha asleep in his chair, the morning paper held in his lap, and a nearly empty glass of whiskey at his side.

“Oh, Pasha,” she groaned, dropping her book down on the bookcase. It was already well past nine o’clock, and Pasha was beyond late for work. She sighed in defeat, knowing full well how Pasha had managed to fall asleep so easily at the beginning of the day. He’d been so good at keeping his self-medicating to the evenings and the weekends. If he was beginning to slip… Hedy didn’t want to imagine what they’d all do if Pasha lost his job.

“Pasha, wake up,” she barked, as she walked over to him. “Pasha.” She went to shake him by the shoulder, but the look of his fingers brought her up short. As long and slender as ever, the flesh around the nails was tinged a dusky blue that seemed horribly wrong. “Pasha?” she tried again, looking up at his face.

There it was. Lips as cold and blue as a winter moon. Hedy dropped to her knees in panic and grabbed Pasha by the shoulders, shaking him. There was no response, and this close to him, she could see the vomit that stained the corner of his mouth and spilled onto the chair’s armrest.

She was shaking as she raised an unsteady hand to his face, wishing suddenly, absurdly that she could brush away his floppy chestnut hair that had long since been cut away. If she could just wake him up, everything would be fine, but his cheek when she touched it was cold, and his beautiful amber eyes refused to open.

“Pasha!” she shouted, and slapped him lightly. When he still didn’t react, she slapped him again, this time as hard as she could.

His body slumped over, and the newspaper that had been resting in his lap slid gracefully to the floor. He lay against the side of the chair, as still and lifeless as a painting, and Hedy wanted to lift her head and scream as savagely as she could. Scream until the whole house came crashing down around her.
They draped a sheet over his body as it lay on the stretcher, and Hedy was suddenly
overcome with the realisation that she had seen Pasha’s face for the final time. She had talked to
him for the final time too – laughed with him, shouted at him, touched him – and amongst all
those last moments, there had been no great, melancholic farewells, no tearful declarations of
undying love. Just a hold of his hand, and a few words of affection that Hedy had spurned, and
then he simply wasn’t here anymore – a pair of stretcher bearers and a murmured condolence as
they carried his body out the door, and he was gone.

Hedy stood, alone in the quiet of her house and imagined Pasha crinkling the newspaper
over breakfast, or swearing as he tripped over kinked rug in the hallway for the millionth time, and
then, like knives beneath her skin, she forced herself to face the knowledge that he would never
do so again.

He’d never fall into melancholy again either, she reminded herself, or watch her over
dinner with jealousy in his eyes, or fall into a drugged sleep so close to death that some irrational
part of Hedy imagined that she ought to have been better prepared for this. The attending doctor
had asked her whether Pasha had suffered from any illnesses that might have led to such extensive
cyanosis, and Hedy had shaken her head, telling him that the only problem he’d suffered from was
his war wound, and the morphine that he’d taken for the pain.

At the mention of morphine, the doctor’s face had cleared. “Ah, then,” he’d said as though
a small puzzle had been solved. “An overdose.” He’d waved a hand at one of the stretcher bearers
and then at the wastepaper basket in the corner. “Check the bins.” A quick rummage through the
rubbish, and the man had returned, brandishing a handful of empty ampoules, and the doctor had
nodded sagely. “Mmm. Well, judging by the amount that he’s deliberately taken, along with that
early morning drink I spied on the table, it’s safe to say that it was most likely self-inflicted. I am sorry, Mrs Astakhov.”

Hedy had shaken her head and turned away from him, as though ignoring him would be enough to make him and his terrible conclusions disappear. But those last few moments with him that morning kept playing in her head now that she was alone – his quiet calm, his measured words… How he had wanted to say goodbye…

The terror of not knowing began to eat at her, and she started to search the living room for clues as to what had really happened, methodically at first, and then randomly, haphazardly, as she continued to find nothing. By the time she had finished, she was panting with exertion. Nothing. There was nothing here, but scattered books and knickknacks, and the faint smell of smoke.

Smoke? Hedy spun in a circle and stared at the tiny curl of smoke that was drifting up from the ashes in the fireplace. She grabbed the poker and stabbed around in the cinders, until the iron point came up against something solid and unyielding. Reaching into the still-warm ash, she pulled out the blackened remains of a leather-bound journal. All of its pages had been burnt away, save for the first and last that had been protected by the thick, red cover.

The first page – honey-brown from the heat of the fire, held only the embossed sigil of the paper company, and Pasha’s name handwritten in blue ink. The last page, however, almost glued to the melted leather, was covered in the black scrawl that was— that had been Pasha’s handwriting.

Hedy shuffled backward and pulled herself up into a chair, heedless of the ash she left on the upholstery. Pasha’s spidery writing on that final page spoke a little of the things that he’d wanted from his life, of the things that he’d felt were always out of his reach, but mostly it spoke of how his life had always felt like a punishment for some unknown transgression. It spoke of his pain – how he could no longer sleep without the aid of morphine, of the terrible sense of foreboding he carried with him, always, waiting for some other, invisible, inevitable shoe to drop.
His whole life was shameful to him, and he’s sorry, my darling Hedy. He’s so sorry for everything…

Hedy stared at those last words, until the page blurred before her eyes. She curled over – a terrible wrenching pain in her stomach. What was she supposed to do now? Her mother’s voice whispered of practical things – the funeral, and the wake that she would have to arrange. She would have to decide where to hold it too – here or in Downheadley, where his family could…

Oh God, Nikola.

She forced herself out of the chair, letting the remnants of Pasha’s journal slide to the floor. She needed to let Nikola know as soon as possible. She’d seen firsthand how, regardless of his feelings for the man, being told of his father’s death so long after the fact had cut Pasha. Hedy couldn’t let Nikola suffer the same way.

Grabbing her purse where she had left it on the side table an age ago, she headed out the door towards the post office, the street spilling ahead of her like a guiding line on a nameless map.

~O~

The four of them sat together in the first class carriage of the train, their stark black attire at odds with the brilliant blue sky that lay outside the window.

Hedy had an arm around each of her children as they sat beside her, and Nikola sat across from them all, staring out of the window. Somewhere at the rear of the train in its own special compartment was Pasha’s coffin. Hedy felt as though they were all trailing along in the tail of a dying comet.

As they drew into the station at Downheadley, Hedy could see the hearse parked in the laneway that waited for her husband’s body. She clenched her fists, and Nikola turned away from the window to look at her, never quite meeting her eyes.
“I’ve found you a spot on the hill that overlooks the mausoleum. There’s a giant horse chestnut that grows there, so you should be relatively concealed.”

“Oh, yes. We couldn’t have your family’s grief interrupted by mine now, could we?” Hedy replied, her voice like acid.

Nikola’s gaze slid farther away from Hedy’s face. “You agreed to this, Hedy.”

“Only because I didn’t have a choice,” she hissed. “It was this, or let him be buried in some poor churchyard in the city, at a cost that I couldn’t afford.” She stood up, and led John and Finny out ahead of her. “At least this way he can be buried with honour and dignity, and his mother can have him back, for all the good it’ll do her.”

She didn’t wait to see Nikola’s reaction, sweeping out of the carriage and across the platform towards the car that Nikola had arranged for them, just as he’d arranged everything else since he’d arrived, stark and hopeless on her doorstep four days ago.

Hedy felt a sudden twinge of guilt at the memory. She wasn’t really angry at Nikola, she was angry at his family, at his neurotic mother who refused to let Pasha’s children say goodbye to him properly, the woman who, according to Nikola had insisted on telling everyone who would listen that her son had ‘died in the war’. Nikola himself had been nothing but a support, and she’d seen his guilt at not being able to get Hedy and the children to the funeral playing across his face since the train had left the city.

The car took them to a side lane on the edge of the Wexford estate, and Hedy waited until the car had driven away before she started to awkwardly clamber over the patchy hedge. She turned to help John across, and then lifted Finny over herself. Even with no one to witness them, she blushed with embarrassment as she picked at the twigs that had clung to her stockings, and was suddenly overcome by memories of leaping hedges like this as a child with ease, clad in nothing more than work trousers and an old shirt.

The horse chestnut stood on a hill a handful of steps from the edge of the estate, and Hedy ushered John and Finny beneath the tree’s low branches. Below them, in the distance she could
see the small, white form of the crypt, and the group of mourners that were beginning to congregate outside. Hedy could just make out the forms of Nikola, an elderly woman who must be his mother, and the priest, whom Pasha had refused to let perform their marriage.

The priest carried out his own rites, but Hedy only knew the words that had been spoken at her mother’s funeral, and so as the minister raised his hand for his own, final blessing, Hedy spoke another for the sake of her children.

“We now commit Pavel Yevgenievich Astakhov’s body to the ground. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust: in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, amen.”

John and Finny looked up at her. Finny’s eyes were wide and clear – a little girl on a strange outing, but John’s held a shadow that hadn’t been there a week before. He was just old enough to understand what had happened to Pasha… and just young enough that as the years passed, he would find it harder and harder to remember the living man his father had been.

The pallbearers, Nikola amongst them, stepped forward to take the coffin into the crypt. Nikola paused as he took the weight of his brother against his shoulder, and looked up towards the hill where Hedy and her children were standing.

What did they look like to him, she wondered. Three black candles, standing against the sky? What did anyone really see when they looked at Hedy?

~O~

Hedy kicked at a sweep of grass as she stalked across the meadow. The children were with their uncle, touring a little of the countryside in Nikola’s new car. John had taken one look at the thing and had promptly forgotten his mother’s existence, and Nikola had taken one look at Hedy and her simmering anger, and jerked his head towards the river.

“Go on. Go and stick your feet in the water, or scream at something. I’ll keep the little grots entertained for as long as you need.”
The walk to the water was mostly the same – some trees had disappeared, and a few fences had been replaced, but it was the Lowe itself, when she finally reached it that made her feel as though she had stepped back in time.

Her three willows stood unchanged, as the river ran its lazy course around them. Hedy walked beneath the curtain of their leaves and then stepped into the swirling water, high heels and all. Sandy had known, he had known that something was wrong with Pasha that last morning. Why had no one else told her? Why had they said nothing, until it was too late? And why was she so damned angry? Angry enough that it drowned her grief beneath its heat.

The old familiar tug of vertigo pulled her away to Sanctuary, but when she opened her eyes there was no pleasant view of green grass and blue sky to meet her. Instead, the world was a hell-storm of fire – its red sky matching the flames that raged across the plateau beneath it. She ran through the village, calling for her friends, but there was no one, not a sign of life amongst the blackened buildings.

A sudden press of heat against her back threw Hedy forwards, and she ran, darting between the houses, until she reached Rachael’s. She wrenched open the door and threw herself inside, just as something bright and searing roared past her.

“Rachael?” she gasped, as she looked around the sparsely furnished house with its paint tins, and half-finished moulds and carvings, trying to see through the thickening haze of smoke. A shadow shifted in the far corner of the room, and Vivi stepped forward, her face and fur blackened with soot, and her arms wrapped tightly around herself.

“Hedy? Hedy! You need to find Rachael,” Vivi choked, reaching out to her. “She’s in terrible danger.”

“You’re all in terrible danger!” Hedy shouted back over the roar of the inferno. “Isn’t there somewhere you can go to take shelter?”

Vivi shook her head. “Nowhere’s safe. The fire will find us all in time, but right now it’s going after Rachael.”
“I don’t understand, how is it going after her? How did a firestorm this big even get started?”

Vivi looked up at her, true fear in her eyes, and grabbed Hedy by her shoulders. “It’s not a firestorm, Hedy, it’s the firestorm. The firestorm from beneath the world.”

A roar echoed outside, blotting out for a moment the crackle of the flames, and Hedy suddenly knew what that raging sound was, recognised it as the noise she had heard echoing out from the caverns all those years ago.

“You mean it’s alive? How did it get out?” she cried.

Vivi shoved her towards the door. “When it’s allowed to grow beyond the confines of its cage, there is little that can hold it. It will destroy everything it touches, Hedy, and not everything will recover. You must save Rachael.”

With that, Hedy was thrust back out into the smoke and heat. Turning around, she used the walls of the houses, one after another to help guide her towards the river. Above her in the foothills, the cedar trees had begun to catch alight, their pointed shapes curling in the sudden heat. Hedy was curling inwards too, and she could feel sweat sliding down her spine and forming in beads across her upper lip.

She almost fell into the river when she reached it, and she ripped away the hem of her dress and soaked it in the icy water, before wrapping it around her nose and mouth. She turned to walk upstream, until she reached the gully that led up into the meadow.

“Rachael! Rachael, where are you?”

There was only the punishing thunder of the fire in response, and Hedy pushed on, staggering up the scree. She found Rachael near the top of the gully, standing in the middle of the stream, her face buried in her hands.

“Rachael? What are you doing here? We need to get you away,” Hedy shouted, but Rachael only looked up at her and shook her head.

“There’s no point, Hedy,” she replied so quietly that Hedy barely heard her.
Swearing beneath her breath, Hedy wiped the sweat and grime from her forehead and stumbled forward, until she was face to face with Rachael. “Vivi says that the fire is coming for you, so I need you to run.”

“You can’t run from this, Hedy,” Rachael replied. “It will consume everything, and then—when this place is a hollow shell, it will turn outwards and burn your world too.”

“Then we need to stop it.”

“Why? Why do you care? You didn’t come here for answers, you came here looking for someone to blame. Well, now we’re all being punished, and you’re punishing yourself.”

“I just want to understand!” Hedy shouted. There was a thundering crash in the mountains above them, as a whole sweep of the forest crashed to the ground under the weight of the flames, and Hedy grabbed Rachael, pulling her roughly behind her as she made for the plateau, following the river until she could hear the thunder of the waterfall. “I’m sad, I’m full of regret, and I’m angry. I’m beyond angry,” she said, her hand still clamped around Rachael’s wrist.

She could feel it, that fury, like a second pulse beneath her skin—not just anger, but rage, eating up through the heart of her and burning behind her eyes, building slowly since the moment she had found Pasha slumped in his chair.

“Stop running, Hedy!” Rachael said as the cliff face came into view through the smoke, wrenching herself free of Hedy’s grip. “The fire destroys everything, because it cannot find the one thing it truly wants. The one thing that is not here. You must turn and face it. You must let yourself understand why it rages.”

The fires in the meadow above them began to coalesce into a single, immense fireball—flame upon layer of flame, until it roiled above them like a meteor fallen from the sky. Hedy began to pace, her hands gripped together. What was she raging against if not herself? Pasha’s mother, for not letting Hedy attend her own husband’s funeral? Nikola, for not magically fixing the rift between mother and daughter-in-law? A little, perhaps, but not enough to account for the fury pooling in her belly. Pasha had already gone long before they’d laid him to rest—saying farewell
to his body when she’d never had the chance to say goodbye to him in life would have been nothing more than an empty gesture.

The great sphere of fire had finished pulling every shred of flame in Sanctuary to itself, leaving the world around them a smoking ruin, save for its single, white point of light. With a roar like a dragon taking flight, it began to race down the gully towards them, steam pluming up around it as it carved a path through the river. Oh, God who was she angry at? Who had ripped Pasha away from her? Who had shattered her already fractured family so completely?

The answer in all its terrifying inevitability came as the fireball reached the plateau, and Hedy staggered back, horribly aware that there were only a handful of steps behind her before the sheer drop of the cliff. She stumbled to one knee and stared up at the oncoming firestorm.

“You left me,” she began quietly, growing louder with every word she forced from her body. “You left our children, you chose to leave our children. You’ve made me question who I am, my entire life with you. I feel as though I’ve failed somehow, that I wasn’t good enough. Was our life together worth nothing to you? Did I mean that little that you couldn’t stay for me?” The leading edge of heat from the fireball hit her, and she screamed. “You abandoned me!”

There was the cool sensation of a hand on Hedy’s shoulder as Rachael came to stand beside her, and Hedy was overcome with the heartbreak that her anger had been holding at bay. “I loved you with everything I had to give,” she sobbed, her voice cracking. “And it wasn’t enough, was it?”

With a scream of triumph, the fire enveloped her, searing along her nerve endings, and stripping the air from her lungs. She could feel the rage like acid in her blood, but she held on to the feeling of Rachael’s hand against her shoulder, and with a shriek of pain she turned and hurled herself over the edge of the cliff. A vice-like grip on her ankle halted her fall, but the fire kept moving past her, screaming its fury, and Hedy opened her eyes to see the seething mass of flames plummeting down towards the sea like a falling star. There was an inhuman shriek as it finally hit the water, and a great plume of steam erupted from the sea.
Rachael dragged Hedy back onto solid land and patted at her singed dress. There were great holes in her stockings, and she’d lost a shoe somewhere along the way, but her skin was unmarked and the pain was only a lingering ache that settled into her bones. She rolled over onto her stomach, and crawled back to the edge of the cliff. The steam had mostly dissipated, and only a few, lingering bubbles remained as proof of the fire’s passing.

“So it’s gone,” Hedy murmured.

“No,” replied Rachael, standing above her, her clothes blackened by the fire’s passing. “It will find its way home through the tunnels and passageways.” She looked down at Hedy. “It cannot die. Such a thing is eternal.”

Hedy sat up, and looked back at the smouldering ruins of her friends’ houses, at the blackened ground, at the stands of cedar trees in the mountains that looked like nothing more than a forest of burnt matches. “Is everyone all right? Will Sanctuary recover?”

“Oh, yes,” Rachael replied, running a long-fingered hand through Hedy’s thick, black hair. “This place is eternal too, in a way. Even your garden will bloom again.”

Hedy tried to take some comfort in that as she stood, and slowly made her way back towards the smoking buildings and their traumatized owners, her heart a single, solid ache.

~O~

“What will you do now?” Nikola asked her, sipping at his whiskey as they sat in the Pickled Toad.

Hedy cradled her lemonade, thought of her children asleep in one of the rooms above them, and shrugged.

“I’m not sure. I don’t think I’ve really been able to imagine anything beyond this point.” A stab of anxiety made her tighten the grip on her glass. “We can’t stay in our house, obviously.
It’s too expensive. If we move to a cheaper part of the city and I can find a job… perhaps it will all be fine.” She shook her head as though she didn’t truly believe it.

“Why stay in the city at all?” Nikola suggested nonchalantly. “Is there really anything left for you there? For the children?”

Hedy stared at Nikola. “Their school is there, their friends, my friends. It’s all they know.”

“And if you had the choice?” Nikola replied, his voice suddenly sharp. “If you could come back to Downheadley, get out of the city that I know you hate, would you do it?”

“It doesn’t matter whether I hate it or not, Nikola. It’s not about me anymore, it’s about John and Finny. It’s about what’s best for them.”

“And what is best for them, hmm? An anonymous city with no other family but you? Being teased and bullied at school?”

Hedy looked up sharply. “How do you know about that? I never told you.”

“Pasha did,” he replied, swallowing the last of his drink and waving his hand for another. “In one of his few candid letters. He said that all three of you were… singled out because of your race.”

“And you think that it would be any better here?” Hedy demanded. “You think I wasn’t bullied at school? In the village?”

Nikola watched her steadily. “I know. I know you were. And I know that I played my part in it, much as it pains me to remember. But can you really say that the city isn’t worse? People remember you here, they remember your mother, remember Pasha. You have family here, and friends. John and Finny could too.”

“And where am I supposed to find work, Nikola? In the city I can get a job as a seamstress or a washer, even as a secretary if I’m very lucky. There is nothing for me here.”

Nikola sipped at his new drink. “What about the farm?”

“Oh, what about it,” she growled, flopping back against her chair. The last thing she needed right now was a reminder of a place she could never return to.
“Couldn’t you work it again, make your income off the land?”

“You have a tenant,” she replied, wary.

Nikola shook his head. “He’s a good man, and I’ll see him right, especially since he kept the farmhouse in such good condition, but he’s not getting the yield he could from the land. He means well, but he’s used to farming fruit farther north. His lease ends in two months, and I’m not going to renew it.” He leant forward, arm sliding across the table. “You could take it on again, Hedy. You could come home.”

Hedy stared at him. “No, I— I can’t. I knew when I married Pasha that I could never come back.”

Nikola shook his head. “That was when my father ran the estate. I’m in charge now, and my mother barely leaves the house since Father died. I fear that’s only going to get worse now Pasha’s—” Nikola swallowed heavily. “Now that he’s gone.”

Hedy closed her eyes. To have her children grow up beneath the open sky of the country, to watch them explore the rivers and fields as she had. She’d long since locked away those dreams – they had been too painful. Now, to have her farm back within her grasp…

“If I did this…” she began slowly. “If I became a tenant of the Astakhovs again, you would be my landlord?”

He smiled a little. “Well, I’m a lord already by courtesy, so it’s only a little extra step.”

“Oh.” She paused, and then wrinkled her nose in disgust. “Wait, does that mean that for all these years I actually was supposed to call you ‘Your Lordship’?”

Nikola laughed, and then bit it off sharply, ashamed at his own joyfulness. “Let’s keep it as Nikola, shall we?” he said quietly, and clinked his glass with hers.
SEPTEMBER, 1934.

John hung out of the window, waving madly as the train steamed its way out of Downheadley station, and took him away to his new boarding school. Hedy waved back just as madly, making sure her smile stayed plastered across her face until he was out of sight.

“There. That wasn’t so bad, was it?” said Nikola, stepping forward to rub Hedy’s hands between his own in sympathy.

Hedy’s smile cracked, and she squeezed Nikola’s hands once, before walking away down the platform a little, trying to get clear from the grief that was choking her. Finny was pretending not to cry, and Nikola went to stand behind her, his hands on her shoulders, looking frustrated – as though his inability to fix both of the girls’ sorrow was driving him to distraction.

Hedy took a few deep breaths, and then forced herself to turn around and head back to them. “I’m sorry,” she said, shooting them a watery smile. “I knew it would be hard, letting him go, I just didn’t know how much it would hurt.” She sobbed the last few words, and buried her face in her hands.

“Oh, Mum,” said Finny, and Nikola let go of his niece’s shoulders to stride over to Hedy and fold her up in his arms. He held her until her sobs had quietened, one hand buried in her hair, holding her against his shoulder.

“Shh, Hedy,” he murmured. “It’ll be all right, I promise.”

When Hedy finally drew back, Finny was staring at them both like the sun had just come out, and Hedy was suddenly very conscious of the hand that Nikola still had resting against her hip. She stepped away, embarrassed when she realised just how much she had sunk into his embrace, how much she’d craved that comfort.

“All right. Why don’t we go home and have a cup of tea and a slice of cake, hey Finny?” she said, a little shaky. “Would you like that?”

Finny smiled and nodded, and Hedy silently thanked her daughter’s sweet tooth as the three of them made their way out of the station. If Finny continued to shoot hopeful looks at her
and Nikola as they all piled into Nikola’s car, Hedy ignored them. She would have ignored Nikola too, but he was doing a fine job of ignoring her on his own, staring down the road as though it were the most fascinating sight in the world.
MAY, 1936.

Hedy pulled her front door closed with a thud, and headed up the laneway towards the woods. John and Finny were coming home for the half-term break in less than a week, and Hedy wanted one more quiet walk on her own, before the next fortnight was taken up with the noise and arguments of her two children.

Nikola would usually be accompanying her as she walked up through the woodland and then across the bridge at Sallyforth to wander down the banks of the Lowe, but he’d been called away to the city on business as he so often was these days, and so Hedy wandered through the springtime greenery of the forest on her own – watching the occasional flit of a bird shadowed through the tree branches, and the late-blooming bluebells and anemones. When she drew clear of the woods, she headed towards the Sallyforth rapids, and crossed the weathered sandstone bridge that spanned the river.

This part of her walk was always quiet, even when accompanied by Nikola, perhaps especially then. The point in the river where Pasha had fallen in and nearly drowned was a handful of yards downstream from the entrance to Sanctuary, but it might as well have been miles away for all the connection they shared. Of course, it would make more sense to just avoid the river altogether, but some part of her understood that this place served as a sort of memorial for both her and Nikola – the one place that they could both come to together and remember the man that they’d lost.

“I thought I’d catch you here.”

The voice startled her out of her silent reverie, and Nikola stepped forward from beneath a stand of birches, his hands tucked casually into his coat pockets.

Hedy tried to glare at him, but only ended up grinning. “You’re back early.”

He shrugged, moving forward to hug her. “Only a little. A business contact cancelled our meeting at the last moment, so I caught an earlier train home. I had a feeling that you’d still go on our walk.”
Hedy grimaced, and drew away. “I needed to get away from the farm for a little while. See something other than row after row of bloody wheat.”

Nikola nodded in agreement, and began to walk alongside her. “I was glad to leave the city for much the same reason. Everywhere I looked it was the same thing. The talk of Europe is… unsettling, and it seems to be everywhere you go. Germany’s re-arming, and Spain’s a powder keg.” He shook his head. “If things keep escalating…”

“Another war?” The thought was terrifying.

“It’s possible,” Nikola replied, and Hedy stopped walking to look out over the fields. “It can’t happen again, Nikola. All those boys who went to fight and never came back. John’s fifteen, he’d be right in the middle of it.”

Nikola bumped his shoulder against Hedy’s. “There’s no telling whether there’ll even be a war, Hedy. Don’t go worrying over something that may never happen. Besides, if it comes to it, he may decide not to join up at all.”

Hedy shot Nikola a dirty look. “Oh yes, with his family’s history of underage service, and volunteering at the very beginning of the bloody war, I’m sure he’ll just sit the conflict out until he’s conscripted,” she growled.

“Well, there’s no need to get sarcastic over my selfless act of bravery, thank you,” Nikola said.

Hedy rolled her eyes. “Oh, there’s every need with you, Nikola Astakhov. I’m almost certain that it’s one of the few things that keeps your ego in check.”

Nikola grinned with a flash of teeth, and began to walk across the meadow, towards the horse trail that ran alongside it. “You do know why I chose that particular day to sign up, don’t you?” he called over his shoulder as Hedy jogged to catch up.

“Melodramatic flair?” Hedy muttered, glancing towards him as she drew level.
There was a bark of laughter. “That’s rather closer than you’d think, actually. I’d heard you and Pasha talking at the fair a few days before, arranging to meet up near the House, so I made sure that I left at the right time that day.”

“The right time?” Hedy replied, puzzled.

“So that you’d be there,” he said, a spark of embarrassment in his eyes. “I had to stall a little – you were late, you know.”

“You’re stalling now,” Hedy countered.

Nikola grimaced. “Yes, well.” He sighed in defeat. “I made sure to abscond when I did, because I wanted you to see me going off to war – brave soul that I was. I knew exactly how badly you thought of me, especially compared to my brother, and somehow I thought that you watching me march off to fight the good fight might commend me to you a little.”

“Oh, Nikola,” Hedy groaned, trying not to laugh.

Nikola shrugged enigmatically and smiled. “What can I say? I’ve always liked an appreciative audience.”

Hedy shoved Nikola lightly, and he swayed away from her. “How on earth did I become friends with such a dramatist?”

Nikola let his momentum sway him back towards her, and grabbed for her hand, clasping it to his chest. “It must be my incredible magnetism,” he teased, and began to dance with her – crazy, overly exaggerated steps that had Hedy laughing and leaning into the ridiculous moves. After a few stumbles, Nikola spun her away in an unsteady twirl and then pulled her back into the curve of his body, his hand tight against the small of her back to steady her.

The laughter between them evaporated, and Hedy felt the air go too, closing her eyes against the sudden feel of Nikola’s body pressed so close to her own, the rise and fall of his chest against her breast.

Nikola’s hand tightened against her back. “Hedy.”
Her name was dark and unsteady on his lips, as he shifted his body against hers, the hand caught between them lifting to trace a curve down the long line of her neck. He tilted her face up towards him, and Hedy kept her eyes closed, listening instead to the soft hush of his breath as it ghosted across her lips. She ran her hand up the side of him, across his shoulder, and then finally opened her eyes as she buried her fingers in the warmth of his hair.

He looked so much younger like this, open and vulnerable – fragile, in a way that Hedy couldn’t remember ever seeing before. The pad of his thumb stroked across her chin and pulled at her bottom lip, sending a warm rush of feeling to pool low in her belly. She moaned, low and needy, her hand fisting in Nikola’s hair, pulling him closer, until they were kissing, and Hedy was drowning, drowning in the river again.

Nikola kissed like he did everything, with confidence and flair, and a dark, almost wicked thread of passion. She wasn’t sure how long they stayed locked together in their embrace, or which one of them drew away first, but it was Nikola who, when his eyes had lost their dazed expression and sharpened in realisation, stumbled back as though he’d been burnt. Hedy wasn’t far behind him, slapping a mortified hand to her mouth as she stepped away. She stared at Nikola, but he wouldn’t look at her.

“I… Nikola I’m sorry,” she whispered, as she dropped her hand away.

Nikola shook his head, the edge of his hand pressed against the bridge of his nose. “I shouldn’t have done that,” he grated, still not looking at her. “Hedy, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s all right, it’s not your fault,” she stammered, watching him shift from foot to foot. “It’s just I can’t. Not after Pasha.”

Nikola nodded sharply, staring at the ground. “I know. It’s not right, we’re betraying him.”

“What?” Hedy went to take a step towards Nikola, and he shied away, as though he didn’t trust himself so close to her. “Betraying Pasha? No, Nikola that’s not what I meant.”

He looked up at her, his grey eyes drinking her in as though he were trying to memorise her. “It’s what I meant. He was my brother, Hedy. I can’t fail him again, not like this.”
“Fail him?” Hedy replied in confusion. “You can’t fail the dead, Nikola. There’s nothing that you or I can do that would touch him now. This is about me.” Hedy moved closer, and watched as Nikola tensed like a metal coil. “I can’t go through it all again, not after everything I went through with Pasha. All that pain, and love, and fear mixed up together until I couldn’t tell the feelings apart anymore. The dread of realising that I didn’t really recognise my own husband anymore, someone who I’d known since I was thirteen years old. I just can’t bear having to face all of that again, not with anyone, but especially not with you, Nikola. It’d be like choosing to make the same mistakes all over again – another Astakhov…”

Hurt flashed across Nikola’s face, and he stepped towards her. “I am not my brother,” he said fervently.

“Well, what does it matter, you don’t want this any more than I do,” she retaliated.

His eyes drifted across her face, and Hedy felt every look like a caress across her skin. She shivered. “Wanting is not the same as having,” he murmured. “I loved my brother, but I knew his faults too. I’d rather you not want me at all than think I’m anything like him.” He reached forward to hook a stray wisp of hair behind her ear, the pads of his fingers trailing down her dark skin, until they met the collar of her dress. “It was easier, you see. To think that you’d never want me like this, that you’d hated me too much and for too long for us to be anything more than tolerable friends. But then you came back home, and you laughed at my terrible jokes, and mocked my attempts at being lordly. We walked together, and ate as a family together, and really, none of my good intentions matter at the moment,” he panted. “Because right now, Pasha’s memory is the only thing that’s stopping me from begging you to kiss me again.”

_God_. Hedy threw her head back and looked up at the sky above her. “He’s stopping me too, Nikola,” she managed to choke out after a moment. “But it’s the memory of my life with him, not his ghost that’s doing it. I— Perhaps if we give ourselves some time and distance, this… this _thing_ between us will go away?”
Nikola looked dismayed when she finally lowered her gaze. “But… John and Finny are coming home in a few days.”

Hedy swallowed against the bitter taste in her mouth. “I’m sure that they can meet you somewhere in the village, or perhaps you can take them for an outing. Do you really think that we can return to normal, pretend that this never happened if we just carry on as we were? Walks together, family dinners… Watching you smile at the children.” Nikola’s eyes flickered, and he looked away. “Don’t you understand? I don’t want to lose you,” she begged, her voice breaking.

“Well, cutting me out of your life seems to say something else entirely,” Nikola replied quietly. He turned towards her. “I love you, Hedy,” he said, and then slowly walked away.

“I love you too. That’s the problem,” she whispered when he’d gone, trying to ignore the feeling that she’d just made a terrible mistake.

~O~

Hedy wandered through the village in Sanctuary and up the rocky slope of the gully, until she reached the meadow. The snow on the mountains was settled low in the foothills, and Hedy’s breath steamed as she wandered through the long grass, trying to collect her thoughts. A small herd of the glass horses stood a little apart from her, grazing through the short winter grass, and Hedy wandered down towards them, shivering against the breeze. When she drew close enough to touch the herd, she stopped, watching the dream-like images that flickered across their bellies.

A flash of sunburnt grass and the whirl of a spinning dress caught her eye, as one of the horses twitched its translucent skin and sent ripples of colour across its flank. Hedy leant forward, trying to catch the image again as the horse settled once more.

It was her. Her and Pasha, dancing together barefoot on a bed of grass, beneath a great, vaulted ceiling. They were dressed in sumptuous attire – silks and linens that Hedy would never
have a hope of truly owning, and Pasha whirled her around as the breeze caught their clothes and ruffled the grass beneath their feet.

Hedy stepped forward and hesitantly rested a hand against the horse’s belly. For a moment, there was cool, solid glass beneath her hand, and then, without warning it was gone, and Hedy was tipping forward, plunging through a rush of colours, until there was grass beneath her suddenly bare feet, and silken gloves on her arms. The great ceiling of a cathedral arched overhead, and Pasha stood before her, dressed like some long-lost prince, his hair soft and sweeping across his forehead as it had done when he was very young. He reached out a hand to her, but Hedy shook her head and stepped back.

“I don’t want to dance with you anymore, Pasha.” He cocked his head to one side quizzically, but let his arm fall away from her. “I’m not sure how I got here, or even where ‘here’ is, but it can’t be a coincidence that I’ve found you, this… this incarnation of you now, of all times.” Pasha watched her silently, his whiskey-amber eyes unblinking. “There are some things that I never had the chance to say to you, and some things that I should have said when I had the opportunity.” Hedy steeled herself with a breath, and looked Pasha in the eye. “I think you used me. I think you took our love and turned it into a way to escape your family and your home – the life you hated, and then you couldn’t bear it when leaving everything behind didn’t make things better. You took me and turned me into someone I didn’t like facing in the mirror. My God, the guilt you made me feel for wanting friends, for wanting to write to them, to write to Nikola.”

Pasha’s gaze sharpened, hawk-like, and Hedy laughed mirthlessly. “Oh, yes Nikola. Your eternal sticking point. He kissed me, you know? He kissed me and all I could think about was how badly things could go between us, how terrible things were between you and I near the end.” She could feel tears pricking at the edges of her eyes and blinked them away angrily. “Everything that you and I went through, the total sum of our life together, and all that I’m left with is that sense of dread. The fear that Nikola will be just like you, that if I let myself love someone like that again, it’ll finish off what you started. Well, I’m not the girl who saved you from the river anymore. I’m
not even the same woman you married. I’m sick of living in the shadow of your misdirected self-hatred.” She stepped forward. “I loved you, once. You loved me too, I know it. But it wasn’t enough, and I was too young, and too close to you to see it.” She smiled at him and Pasha smiled in return, a little bemused. “Goodbye, Pasha.”

She pulled him into a hug, feeling the warmth of him, inhaling the scent of him. He held her back, silent as the grave, and Hedy let him go, watching him fade away like paint in the rain.
AUGUST, 1936.

Hedy switched off the radio and strode outside into the deceptive heat of the sunshine. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky, but if the weather report was right, they had a day, maybe less to bring in the last of the harvest before days of soaking rain reduced her crop to worthless mould. The lower fields had already been taken in earlier in the week, but the remaining wheat would take two days or more to bring in, even with the new harvester that she and Nikola had invested in the previous summer.

She shook her head at the thought of Nikola. If she’d needed another excuse to put off going to see him, this was it. Jogging towards the ramshackle building attached to the stables, she called out to her head farmhand Evan where he sat whittling by the door.

“Bad news, is it?” he said as she approached, his eyes on his work. “Thought I smelt rain.”

Hedy nodded, hands on her hips. “Torrential, for the next two days at least – probably longer with our luck. We need to bring in as much of the top fields as we can before we lose the rest.”

Evan nodded slowly. “Well, you have me, Claude, Fred, and Philip, but I reckon you’ll need more than that, even with that fancy machine of yours. That topmost field is a twisty bastard – a lot of it’s going to need to be done with horse and reaper, maybe even some by hand if we’re that short on time. We’re also going to need to thresh it straight away if that much rain is coming.”

Hedy shot a look at him. “That’ll mean skilled workers. You and the other hands will have to work the thresher, while I and— God, whomever else I can manage to find do the reaping.”

Evan nodded slowly, and Hedy tried not to panic. It was harvest time across the valley, and every farmhand for twenty miles around would be busy bringing in their master’s crops before the rain. She clenched her jaw, and waved a hand at Evan. “All right. You and the others get started reaping, then. When and if I manage to come back with some help, you can move over to the thresher.”
She didn’t wait for his response, and ran towards the farmhouse and then along the side path to the front yard, where her decrepit Model A was parked. The car started on the second try, and she jerked it into gear and tore out into the laneway towards the village.

One line of wheat down and an hour gone already, and Hedy was sweating with exertion as she cast the sheaves of wheat onto the flatbed of the cart. At the rate they were going most of the top fields would be lost to the storm that she could already see beginning to build on the horizon. She’d left word at the post office and at the Pickled Toad that she was in desperate need of help bringing in her harvest, but she knew there was little chance that enough people would come to make a difference.

“Halloo?”

The call came from down the hill by the farmhouse. The publican, George Eames was there with his son, Michael, and they were surrounded by other neighbours and acquaintances from the village, as well as one tall, dark-haired man who stood a little apart from the rest.

She supposed that an open shirt without a tie, and his second-best pair of trousers, matched with a pair of loafers was as close as Nikola had ever come to wearing work clothes, but it would be poor protection from the grit and chaff of threshed wheat if he really intended to get his hands dirty.

Nikola began to walk up the hill towards her, a mess of harvesting tools cradled to his chest, and Hedy signalled Evan to go down and start assigning jobs to her volunteers as Nikola came to a stop before her. His usual expression of dry humour was writ large across his face, but Hedy could see that there were cracks in the mask – fractures of apprehension, as though he wasn’t entirely sure of his welcome. “I was in town when I heard that you needed help, and since your land is technically my land, I thought this was the… landlordly thing to do.”
She smiled, hoping that she didn’t look as awkward as she felt. “Thank you, Nikola, I do need all the help I can get today, lordly or otherwise. It’s just that—” She looked him up and down. “Have you done much physical labour before?”

The tools drooped slightly in his grip. “Well… no, there’s never been much call for it. Still,” He brightened, and the drawl returned to his voice. “How hard can it be?”

Hedy quirked an eyebrow. “Very, if you insist on wearing those clothes.” Nikola’s expression grew hesitant, and then worryingly mischievous. “Why, Hedy what are you suggesting?”

Hedy ignored the flush that was creeping up her neck. “That you wear other clothes, Nikola,” she ground out. “I’ll go and see if I have anything in the house that you can wear.”

“Why would you have— Never mind,” Nikola replied, suddenly subdued.

Just like that, things were awkward between them once more, and Hedy set off towards the farmhouse with a little more speed than she needed to, Nikola trailing behind her. She tried to remember whether she’d kept any of Pasha’s old clothes. She’d given away most of his outfits when he’d died, but being her mother’s daughter, she might have kept some of the sturdier items for John when he was older.

Nikola waited in the kitchen, while she went in search of clothes in the linen cupboard. It smelt faintly of lavender and rosemary as Hedy rummaged through the folded stacks of bedding and winter clothing. Near the back she found a small pile of faded shirts, and some trousers that were made from a tougher material than Nikola’s fine woollen ones, and while Nikola was taller than Pasha had been, and Pasha a little broader than Nikola, they would fit well enough for a day’s work.

The shoes were a different matter. Nikola’s loafers were next to useless, and Hedy was almost certain that she had nothing that would fit him. She bent down and searched through the scattered footwear on the cupboard floor regardless, but there were only old school shoes, faded sandals, and a small pair of mismatched wellingtons. In one last ditch attempt, she reached to the very back of the closet, and her hand caught on the cracked leather of a pair of heavy boots. She
drew them out, already knowing what she’d found. Pasha’s trench boots, the laces beginning to yellow with age stared up at her. John had always been fascinated by his father’s uniform, and so she’d kept it for him when Pasha had died, and squirreled it away so deep inside the closet that she’d managed to forget all about it.

She was abruptly reminded that it wasn’t only her who wished to forget some things when she returned to Nikola, clothes and boots in hand. He took them from her without a word, but his eyes were shadowed, and his usually full lips were pressed together in a thin line.

“They were Pasha’s,” Hedy said pointlessly. “John wanted to keep them.”

Nikola nodded, and turned the boots over in his hands. “You don’t mind me wearing his shoes?”

Hedy shook her head. “They’re not his anymore, Nikola. They’re just shoes.”

Nikola stared at them for a moment longer, and then looked up at her. “I suppose they are.”

Hedy watched him leave to change, and then headed back outside towards the small crowd of villagers whom Evan had directed towards the pile of scythes. Hedy began to teach them how to swing the blade cleanly through the stalks of wheat, and looked up to see one of the farmhands standing astride the thresher, pitching in the first of the sheaves as the tractor grumbled into life and began to power the belt. A spray of macerated straw thundered out the side shoot, and then shortly after, a cascade of grain came spilling out of the machine’s end and into the waiting container.

The swish of the scythes was beginning to settle into a steady rhythm beneath the jangle of the horses’ tack, and the clatter of the tractor. Hedy, smiled to herself, and pulled the horse and harvester around to begin the long pull through the golden wheat to the far end of the field.
The sun peeked through the last gap in the clouds before disappearing for good. Most of the volunteers had gone home with Hedy’s deepest thanks and the promise of an enormous, outdoor dinner party for everyone when the weather had settled once more. The thresher was still rumbling through its paces, and George Eames – refusing to go home, currently stood atop it, his grey hair blending into the steely sky above him.

The last of the reaping was done, and Hedy and Nikola had worked together in companionable silence for most of the day, finding comfort in the rhythmic shift of moving stalk, to sheaf, to cart. When their hands had begun to touch as they passed bundles of wheat to each other, both of them had shied away, but it had only taken a few hesitant exchanges before they’d been grinning, and after that, Hedy wasn’t entirely sure that Nikola hadn’t started to slide his hand against hers on purpose. Now they both stood shoulder to shoulder by the thresher, pitchforks in hand, as they tossed the sheaves up to the loader. On the other side of the machine, Hedy’s farmhands were rushing to store the grain, and bundle the straw as the sky rumbled threateningly overhead.

“Leave the hay!” Hedy shouted over the din of the thresher. “The grain’s more important, get it under cover.” Evan nodded, and strode over to the rapidly-filling grain cart. He feed the grain augur back into the cart, and let it pull the wheat up into the silo that stood behind the barn.

Nikola look down at her, his face streaked with dirt and flecked with gold. “I do love it when you take charge.”

If she’d had more energy, she would have shoved him. As it was, she just shook her head and smirked at him. “Oh, there’s more where that came from, I can assure you. Now get up there and help with the loading, Astakhov. Chop chop!”

Nikola grinned, and saluted with gusto. “Yes, Ma’am!” he barked, and marched up to the thresher, his pitchfork cast over his shoulder like a rifle. Hedy snorted, and walked over to where Evan was working.

“How much time do you think we have?” she asked him as she approached.
He looked up, one eye scrunched closed. “Half an hour, maybe Missus.” Another long, low growl echoed across the sky, and Evan’s lips thinned. “Maybe less.”

Hedy grimaced. “The best chance we have is to get as much of the wheat through the thresher as we can. Between all of us we might just manage it.”

Evan nodded, and then grabbed a pitchfork and began to pitch the sheaves up to Nikola, where he stood on the top of the thresher. Hedy followed Evan’s lead, but clambered past him to stand beside Nikola, where they all settled into a solid pace of work. Even waiting for it as she had been, she was still startled out of her rhythm when the first fat drops of rain began to fall. She looked up to see that the sky was nearly black now – bruised like an overripe plum, the hills in the distance lost beneath the mists of the oncoming rain.

“How much more?” she shouted down to Evan.

Evan threw Nikola two more sheaves and then staggered back, gesturing to the mound beside him. “That’s it!” he shouted back.

“All right.” Hedy looked down at Evan. “You and Philip get the grain cart into the barn, there’s no time to store the rest in the silo. Get Claude and Fred to move the machinery back into the barn, and we’ll cover the last of the wheat with a tarpaulin, then see to the horses.

Evan nodded, and called the other farmhands to him. Hedy looked across the thresher to where George Eames was staring at the thresher’s workings. “Mr Eames. Mr Ea— George!” The publican jerked his head up. “Can you please get down and help direct things into the barn? We need to fit everything in together, and rather rapidly.” George nodded, and clambered gingerly down the side of the thresher.

Nikola tapped Hedy on the shoulder, letting his hand rest there as she turned to face him. He looked uncertain as the fat drops of rain began to stick his hair to his head. Another minute and they were all going to be soaked through. “What should I do?” he asked her, his hand still heavy on her shoulder.
She shot him a quick smile. “Help me cover this mountain of wheat,” she replied, jumping down to the ground. Two of the hands were already dragging a tarpaulin across the last of the un-threshed wheat as lightning cracked across the sky. She felt rather than saw Nikola jump down behind her, and the four of them dragged the sheeting across the wheat, and fastened it to the ground. When they were done, she grabbed Nikola and dragged him over to the horses, who were shifting nervously in their harnesses.

“Help me guide them into the barn,” she said to Nikola.

“What about the harvester?” he asked, as he took a set of reins in hand.

“The boys will look after it once the big machinery’s under cover.” Lightning cut across the sky again, the resulting boom of thunder loud enough to spook the horses, and they shied, churning the ground beneath their hooves. Hedy managed to calm her dray with a few whispered words, but Nikola’s horse was still panicking, the whites of its eyes flashing as it tossed its head.

Hedy was about to shout at Nikola to get away from the frightened animal, but before she could he was moving in closer, rubbing along the horse’s neck and withers in long, reassuring strokes, murmuring softly into its nose and mouth. It took a moment, but the horse calmed a little beneath Nikola’s touch – enough at least for them to move the horses forward again.

“I’d forgotten how good you are with horses,” Hedy remarked as they drew level with the barn.

Nikola looked over at her and smiled. “Your love was the river – mine was horses.”

By the time they’d settled the horses inside their stalls, Claude and Fred were bringing in the last of the machinery. As they dragged the harvester towards the barn, there was a roar like a bloodthirsty crowd at the Colosseum, and the rain finally became a downpour, hammering on the slate tiles of the roof above them, and soaking the farmhands as they finally pulled the harvester under shelter. The seven of them crowded around the massive doors of the barn, watching as the fields were drenched by the deluge.
Nikola came to stand behind her. “Doesn’t look as though it’s going to ease off anytime soon,” he remarked.

“Not for at least two days,” Hedy replied, hugging herself.

George looked back at them all from where he’d been peering out into the rain. “I can drive Mr— Er, Lord… Sir… Your esteemed friend home, Mrs Astakhov, if he wishes it.”

Nikola leant over and murmured in Hedy’s ear. “I’ve never had so many titles before.” Hedy tried not to laugh, as Nikola spoke to George directly. “Thank you very much for your offer, Mr Eames, but I have my own transportation.”

George looked more relieved than he’d probably meant to. “Well, in that case if you don’t mind, I might get going. It’s not looking to ease off out there any time soon, and I’ve worked up a powerful hunger—”

“—Staring at machinery will do that, so I’ve heard,” Nikola remarked beneath his breath, and Hedy forced her sudden burst of laughter into a cough, elbowing Nikola in the stomach.

George narrowed his eyes a little at Nikola in suspicion, and Hedy stepped towards the publican. “Of course you have, Mr Eames,” she said earnestly. “Thank you for your help today. I wasn’t expecting— The fact that so many of you to turned up to help me when I wasn’t sure that anyone…” she trailed away self-consciously.

“You’re a Downheadley girl, Mrs. Astakhov,” George stated, clear and confident. “And we take care of our own.” He glanced, a little pointedly down at Hedy’s waist, where Nikola’s hand, Hedy suddenly realised, was resting on her hip. Hedy blushed as George turned away from them, before he turned back, bowed awkwardly, and then dashed out of the barn and down the hill through the rain.

Hedy swallowed unsteadily and turned to Nikola, trying to ignore the persistent warmth of his hand through the thin, wet cotton of her shirt. “I— Would you like something to drink before you head home?”
Nikola grinned. “And here was me thinking you’d just make me stand out in the rain with my mouth open.”

Hedy rolled her eyes. “Don’t tempt me,” she said, and ran out into the rain. Nikola followed her close behind, and the two of them dashed down the hill towards the house. By the time they had scrambled through the garden to the backdoor they were both soaked to the skin. Hedy stepped out of her muddied boots, and tried not to slip on the slick flagstones in the kitchen as she made her way towards the linen closet. “I’ll get us some towels, Nikola, hold on a minute.”

She returned with the towel as well as Nikola’s own clothes. “Aren’t you glad you left them inside,” she said wryly, setting them down on the kitchen table. Nikola’s dark hair had fallen in front of his eyes, and he took the proffered towel and scrubbed at his head until Hedy half expected to see bolts of electricity arcing from strand to strand. He wrapped the towel across his shoulders and picked up his neat stack of clothes.

“Just a bit,” he replied ruefully, fingering the collar of his dry shirt.

“Ah, you can change in here if you want?” Hedy suggested. “I’ll change upstairs, then we can have a nice refreshing beer in the sitting room.”

Nikola rolled his shoulders, and yawned a little. “Mmm yes, lovely soft chairs,” he sighed. “I think I could sleep for a month right now.”

Hedy bit back a yawn of her own as she headed upstairs. “Not in my good chair you won’t,” she called back over her shoulder.

She could hear his snort of disdain all the way at the top of the stairs.

It didn’t take long to dry off and change into clean clothes, but by the time she was done, all Hedy wanted to do was lie down on her bed and close her eyes. It was a mistake to perch on
the edge of her mattress as the rain beat a steady tattoo on the windows, more of a mistake still to let herself tip over and rest her head on her pillow – if only for a moment.

It felt like seconds later when the sound of persistent knocking woke her, and Hedy opened bleary eyes to see her bedroom door swinging open.

“Hedy? Hedy are you in here? I tried knocking, but there was no answer. It’s been half an hour. Not even you could take half an hour to make yourself presentable.”

“Oh?” Hedy replied, rolling onto her side and stretching. “Fell asleep, sorry.”

Nikola peeked around the door and snorted. “So much for being a hardened farmer,” he murmured, walking over to sit down beside her on the very edge of the bed. “I suppose I shall have to find my own way around the kitchen, and probably burn the house down in the process,” he said, his words bleeding into a yawn.

“What, looking for beer?” Hedy murmured, closing her eyes again. “It doesn’t matter anyway – the rain’ll put it out.”

“Quite true,” he replied, sounding as half-asleep as Hedy was. “Perhaps I should just go home.”

Hedy – feeling warm and content, and entirely done with Nikola’s particular sense of propriety, pulled him down by his shoulder and curled along his side, flinging an arm across his chest and tucking her face into the soft fuzz at the nape of his neck. “You can’t go now, I haven’t said thank you for helping me yet.”

Nikola had frozen when Hedy had wrapped herself around him, now he slowly brought his hand down to play hesitantly with the fingers that she’d curled across his chest. “Then say thank you.”

Hedy pressed against him more tightly, and inhaled the scent of him, letting her lips rest against his skin. Nikola’s hand twitched against hers. “My thank you requires more energy than I currently have,” she breathed. “In the morning, Nikola.”
Sleep wanted to pull her down, but she fought it for as long as she could, until her breath began to run together with Nikola’s, and she experienced the perfect sensation of not knowing where her body ended and Nikola’s began.
APRIL, 1942.

“—But the *scandal*, Nikola. People already talk about us.”

Nikola huffed as he sat bare-chested against the headboard, his arm around Hedy as she drew pictures across his skin with her finger. “Well, if you’d just let me marry you, it wouldn’t be a scandal…”

“You can ask me as many times as you want, sweetheart, I’m still not going to say yes,” she replied, kissing his chest softly.

“But *why*?” he groaned, half laughing. “We love each other, so why can’t we make it official?”

“Because I like things the way they are. What we have works perfectly well.”

“What we have means that I only get to see you a few times a week – even less when I’m stuck at home with the accounts, and you’re busy with the farm.” He sighed, and pulled her closer, running his hand down the bare skin of her back. “I want to wake up like this every morning, not just when we manage to find the time, whether I marry you or no.”

“But… to live in the *House*…” Hedy trailed away.

“The House is just a building, and a lonely one at that these days. I miss having family around me, Hedy. If you come to live with me, John and Finny can too – when they have leave from the Airforce and the War Office. Imagine it. All of us in one house – breakfast, lunch, and dinner together, no more sneaking around.”

Hedy closed her eyes and tried to picture it, but could only imagine her and Nikola seated at far ends of an enormously long table, trying to talk across the great expanse. “Ask me again tomorrow?”

Nikola turned to kiss her, long and slow. “Take as many tomorrows as you need, darling.”
JANUARY, 1944.

The road from the House was slick with early morning frost, and Hedy, clutching her coat around her, tried to walk on the grassy verge, rather than on the bitumen of the road. The sun had finally risen, but it cast a weak and watery light, pale shadows spearing across the fields as Hedy made her way into the village.

As she reached the final curve before the road descended into the town, Charlie, the postman came marching around the bend, nearly running into her.

“Charlie!” she said, steadying herself with a hand at his shoulder. “You’re off on your rounds early today.”

Charlie looked at her, his usual easy smile strangely absent. “I’m sorry, Mrs Astakhov there are a lot of letters to deliver this mornin’ – a lot of telegrams. Postmaster’s got me scurrying around the countryside as quick as possible.” He glanced at her sidelong, suddenly apprehensive, and slid a hand into his satchel. “This one’s for you,” he said, pulling out a telegram. “I was going up to the House to deliver it, but I don’t much like the idea of it lying in wait for you when you return.”

Hedy stared at the outstretched piece of paper. Its edges stuck as she tried to unfold it, and for a moment she held onto the irrational hope that it would never open – that it would be stuck fast, holding its secrets tight.

Deeply regret to inform you, it said. Our sincerest condolences… The rest didn’t matter, and Hedy turned away from Charlie, the telegram fisted tightly in her hand.

“Mrs Astakhov! Mrs Astakhov!” Charlie shouted after her, but his words were no more important than the empty words of regret sealed in the telegram, written by someone whom she’d never met, who had never met John. She turned away from the village and walked instead along the dirt road that led to her farm. The fields were dead and cold, and Hedy kept on walking, over the fences, through the hedgerows, heading for the one place that she knew she’d be able to see him again.
The People were waiting for her as she stepped out of the whirlpool. Some were standing along the mosaicked pathways, others simply stood by the doors of their houses, watching. Even Rachael stood silent and unmoving, watching Hedy with solemn eyes.

She drifted past them all, past their silent vigil, and headed towards the Wall, where its ink-dark mirrors waited, glittering. Her hands were already stretched out before her in anticipation, and she slid her palms against the cool glass of her own mirror and willed it to come to life.

“Show me,” she ordered, her voice guttering like a dying flame. “Show me him. Show him laughing and dancing, and smiling. Show me!”

The mirror sang like silver bells, and the glass shimmered to reveal the inside of the farmhouse, the deep pine-and-spice scent of a Christmas tree curling out of the mirror to wrap around Hedy. The murmur of conversation drew her in closer, and she could see that it was the last Christmas they had all spent together as a family – her, Nikola, Finny, and John, all seated around the dining table after their meal. Nikola, sitting next to her, was leaning back and groaning in his seat, and Finny and John were talking about something across the table – a conversation long lost, and one that Hedy now desperately wished she could recall.

The scene shivered and changed to show the living room, flickering by candlelight as they sang carols, Hedy and the children laughing at Nikola when he sang the wrong words – loudly and off-key. When they had finished, John and Finny stood up and hugged Hedy, but the mirror showed only the broad expanse of John’s back as Hedy had tucked her chin over his shoulder.

The mirror shifted again, and Hedy was suddenly shown the day – a week or so later, that they had all farewelled John at the station. He stood, smiling in his uniform, and Hedy shuddered and scrunched her eyes closed. “No. No don’t show me that. Show me everything else. Show me my little boy.” Her voice cracked as the mirror changed in a whirl of colours, and then Hedy was watching arms, her arms – youthful and smooth, as they held a bundle of blankets close to her chest. He was so much smaller than she remembered, barely the length of her forearm.
“Show me everything,” she whispered again, and the mirror complied. John’s life flowed forward before her eyes, and Hedy watched him smile for the first time, walk for the first time, talk, and cry, and laugh. He was at school in his smart new uniform. He was fighting with his sister in the kitchen. He was sitting in the garden, lost in a book. When it had all passed far, far too quickly, the mirror faded to black.

“Again,” Hedy commanded it.

And so the mirror showed her John’s life, over and over, until Hedy could no longer stand, and she slid to the ground, her head resting against the glass, listening to the sound of her son’s voice growing up, growing older, growing silent.

The willows didn’t seem to want to let her go, their long, graceful fronds clung to her hair and her coat as she stepped out from beneath them.

Nikola stood a little way downstream, watching the run of the river, as though he were searching for answers. “I always find you here,” he said softly, looking up at her, his voice so fond, so broken.

She walked to him in silence, and he drew her close. Her tears were silent, as they rolled down her face and disappeared into the heavy gauge of Nikola’s coat. Everything around them was silent too – as though nothing dared break the quiet that was holding her together.
“Grandma!” Matty ran towards Hedy, his mop of dark hair fluttering in the air, as he rocketed past his older siblings, Sarah and George, who were walking at a far more sedate pace.

“Hello, sweetie, look how much you’ve grown,” Hedy said as she bent down to envelope her grandson in a hug. “What’s it like being a big brother?”

“Fantastic,” Matty gushed, beaming up at her. “I held her for five whole minutes yesterday.”

Hedy laughed, patting him on the back, and then straightened up to greet Finny, who was walking towards her with baby Erin cradled in her arms. “Finny, darling you look wonderful!”

Finny grimaced. “I look like I haven’t slept in a month, Mum mostly because I haven’t.”

“Well then, let me see my newest granddaughter, and I’ll give you a break.” Finny smiled, and passed Erin over into Hedy’s arms. “Hello, you,” Hedy murmured, running a finger down the baby’s nose. Erin’s eyes slid open – a translucent grey that Hedy recognised at once.

“David keeps saying that she has his eyes, but as soon as I saw her open them that first time, I knew they were yours,” said Finny.

“As long as she hasn’t inherited her grandmother’s great big feet she’ll be fine,” Nikola interjected, strolling out to meet them.

“Uncle Kolya,” Finny admonished. “Sometimes I don’t know why Mum puts up with you.”

“Neither do I,” Nikola and Hedy replied together, and Nikola grinned at Hedy, his eyes flashing.

Finny shook her head, and ushered the children into the House ahead of her.

Nikola peered down at the baby, who was fisting at the blankets with her tiny hands.

“Picture perfect.”
“Isn’t she just,” Hedy replied, rocking Erin softly in her arms. “Come on, let’s show her around her family estate.”

Their weekend together passed with disconcerting speed, and before she could have wished it, Hedy found herself sitting at their final dinner together. Sarah and George were fighting over something trivial in much the same way that Finny and John had once fought, and if the fond expression on Finny’s face were any indication, she saw it too. Strange, how some things seemed almost fated to repeat themselves.

After the meal was finished, Nikola retreated into his study, and Sarah took her younger siblings off to show them some of the better hiding spots in the upper rooms. Finny and Hedy took Erin, and moved into the sitting room. The sun was long gone, and the heavy curtains were already drawn against the chill of the night as they both sipped at their tea. After a few minutes of companionable silence, Hedy spoke.

“So, how have you been, darling? Really?”

Finny sighed, and dropped her cup onto its saucer. “This last month… it’s been difficult,” she said, staring down at her tea. “Especially with David working so much – our clinic has become so busy over the last year, and now that I’ve had to stop working again, all the patients fall to him. It’s not really fair on either of us, I suppose.”

Hedy patted her daughter’s shoulder comforting. “Is there anything that I can do to help?”

Finny quirked her mouth, biting back a smile. “Well, you could babysit the children sometimes? Maybe take Erin a few days each week when I go back to work?”

Hedy stared at her. “You know I’d love to, but the commute would be a little difficult, considering that you live over a hundred miles away.”
Finny was smiling properly now. “What if we didn’t live so far away? What if I told you that David and I have decided to move to Downheadley – to be nearer to you and Uncle Nikola?”

“But I thought that you and David loved London,” Hedy replied, confused.

“We did. We do,” replied Finny. “But we’ve four children now, and with David’s parents moving away to Canada, we’ve no family nearby anymore.” Finny sighed. “I love Erin, Mum I really do. If I were given the choice to go back and stop her from being born I wouldn’t, but… it’s exhausting, Mum. We thought we were done with Matty, and I just don’t have the energy I did when I had Sarah and George. God, the broken nights alone,” she groaned, and Hedy laughed.

“Oh, I remember them all too well – you were terrible.”

“I appreciate the empathy, Mum, thank you,” Finny grumbled, and Hedy chuckled again.

“It comes with being a Carrow,” she said, and then sobered. “If you do move back to Downheadley, I know for a fact that there’s work waiting for you. At the moment you have to travel at least two towns over to find a doctor. Unless you’re Nikola of course, and then the doctor comes to find you.”

Finny rolled her eyes. “Still haven’t adjusted to a life of luxury and entitlement, Mum? Even after all these years?”

“I was taught to do things for myself,” Hedy grumbled. “If you wanted good vegetables, you grew them, if you needed a doctor, you went out and found one. Your Uncle Kolya is a good man, but he’s never quite understood why I can’t just sit around and wait for things to be done for me. We’re as stubborn as each other, sometimes. I think it’s probably part of the reason that we ended up together.” Finny snorted into her tea, and Hedy grinned. “So, when do you intend to move?” she asked.

Finny sat back. “As soon as we tie up all the loose ends up in London – sell the house, buy one here, hand over the practice to Richard – he’s our locum. If everything goes relatively smoothly, sometime in the New Year, I suppose.”
“I can’t wait,” replied Hedy, putting down her tea, and turning to hug her daughter. “It’s always been a little quiet here without you and—without John.” Finny smiled wistfully, and Hedy patted her hand absently. Over twenty years since John had been killed, and Hedy still found herself looking up at their family gatherings sometimes, expecting to see him there in his vest and summer shirt, his hands wrapped around a book. “It'll be so lovely to watch Erin and Matty grow up. And to see you more often too, darling.”

“It’ll be strange coming back here though, in a way,” Finny murmured. “Everything’s so different from when we lived at the farm. Who has the farm these days anyway?”

“We sold it off when we sold the western part of the Estate,” Hedy replied. “I think a little man from… somewhere, and his family have it now.”

“From ‘somewhere’? Don’t you know?” Finny asked, dismayed. “That’s our family farm. Surely you’re a little worried over who has it.”

Hedy shrugged. “I haven’t been up to working it for ten years now. It’s changed from how it was when I was young – when you were young. My mother wouldn’t have recognised the place.” She looked at Finny. “It was time to move on. When the land stops speaking to you, find another place that does.”

Finny smiled. “I think that’s the plan.”
MAY, 1977.

Hedy and Erin strolled along the laneways and the backroads of the county, Hedy’s walking shoes striking sharp and solid against the bitumen that seemed to cover every path these days. She pointed out the badger dens and rabbit holes to Erin as they crossed through the fields and the stretches of forest. Erin took it all in with wonder, and Hedy felt a wave of sadness. Her granddaughter might have been raised in the same country as Hedy, but her world was different. The children Hedy saw in the village played on swing sets and slides, not through the woods and far across the fields. Their worlds seemed so much smaller than Hedy’s had been.

“Shall we head down to the river and see if we can spy an otter?” she asked Erin as they crossed over a stile.

Erin’s eyes lit up. “Oh, yes please.”

Hedy smiled. “All right, head down that way, then,” she said, pointing to the line of trees that ran along the crease in the land at the bottom of the field.

Somehow, perhaps through her own, unerring sense of direction, they found themselves arriving at the banks of the Lowe just above the bulbous curve of land on which stood Hedy’s three willows.

“Oh, look at that, Grandma,” Erin breathed. “It’s just like something that fairies would make, don’t you think?”

Hedy nodded. “I’ve always thought that it looks as though some elfin thing moulded it by pinching the river together with its hands.”

“Can we get a closer look?”

Hedy blinked, thinking of the sunken pool. “Well… I suppose so, yes. If you want.”

Erin flashed a quick grin at Hedy, and sprinted along the bank, her lime green coat flapping behind her as she raced across the grass.
“Mind how you go!” Hedy shouted after her, and then followed at a far more sedate pace. Erin slipped behind the fronds of the willows, and Hedy remembered a time when that had been her, streaking along towards the next great thing as though her feet were made of lighting.

By the time she reached Erin, her granddaughter was crouched down by the swirling pool.

“Look at this, Grandma,” she said. “Who would build a pond here?” “I was never sure,” Hedy replied. “I used to sit there and wonder sometimes.” She pointed at the hollow in the hard-packed dirt at the base of one of the willows.

Erin turned to look at her. “Really? You used to sit here?” Hedy nodded. “Sit here, swim there.” She pointed at the sweep of the river, before gesturing farther downstream. “Yell at your great uncle over there.” “You yelled at Great Uncle Nikola?” Erin replied, mouth agape. “I still yell at him,” Hedy retorted. “And then he yells back at me, and we see who runs out of steam first.”

Erin squinted up at Hedy. “And that’s fun?” Hedy’s eyes twinkled. “Most of the time. Nikola knows how to tease for his country, I know how to argue a point until I’m blue in the face, and we’ve both learnt how to lose gracefully."

“If you say so,” Erin replied, still patently unconvinced.

They watched the river flow past for a while. “You know, I met your grandfather for the first time, right here.” Erin stared at her. “Right on this bend in the river. He’d fallen in, and I jumped in to save him. Your mother’s never told you that story, has she?”

Erin shook her head. “What was he… what was he like?” Hedy ran a hand around the rim of the pool, feeling a ghostly tug in the pit of her belly. “He was… kind – when he remembered to be. Very loyal, in a way, very passionate underneath all of his reserve.” She looked across at Erin. “But he was hurt very badly in the war, and it stayed with him for rest of his life.”

“The Second World War?” Erin asked, and Hedy shook her head fondly.
“No, darling the Great War. In those days we didn’t know what to call it – shell shock some people said, but it went deeper than that. I don’t think anyone could look on what he did and not be changed, but Pasha – your grandfather – couldn’t come back from it. His mother – your great-grandmother, used to say that he died in the war. I used to hate her for it, but I think in some ways she was right. The boy I knew died on those battlefields. The man who came back was like a frail replica of some priceless artefact. The war hadn’t forged him into a stronger person, it had only made him more brittle.” Hedy watched the river flow past them. “He tried for years to fight it, and then one day, he just… broke.”

“Why doesn’t Mum ever talk about him?” Erin finally asked after a moment of silence.

“Well, she was only five when your grandfather died – she barely remembers him. And after we lost your uncle in the second lo… I don’t think she likes to remind herself of what the wars took from her.”

“Was Uncle John like my grandfather?”

“Yes and no,” Hedy replied, looking down. “He was reserved like his father – sensitive, you know? But he had a… a willfulness that Pasha didn’t possess – a strength. And he loved to read, like me. Like you.” She gestured to Erin, and Erin grinned. “I wish you could have met them both, my darling.”

“Me too,” Erin sighed, and trailed her hand through the swirl of water in the stone pool beside her. Hedy had long since given up on anyone else ever being able to see what she had seen through the whirlpool – Rachael had pulled her aside many years ago, and in a faraway voice had whispered that none of her children would ever set foot in Sanctuary. So when Erin yipped, and cried out “It tried to pull me in!” Hedy couldn’t quite believe it. She stood slowly, bracing herself against the trunk of one of the willows. Bright petals were swirling around in the water now, as bright and fresh as they had been when she first saw them as a girl.

Hedy waved her stunned granddaughter over to her. “Help me into the water, Erin.”

“What? Why?”
She waved at Erin impatiently. “It’ll be fine, I promise. You step in as well.”

Erin looked at her as though she’d gone mad, but Hedy felt the opposite. Just one more step and she could know for sure, after all these years.

With a look of deep mistrust, Erin gingerly stepped into the whirlpool and turned around to guide Hedy in after her. Hedy could feel the tug of Sanctuary straight away – as could Erin, if her moan of fear was anything to go by. Hedy grasped her by her hands and squeezed. “Close your eyes, sweetie,” she whispered, smiling as she felt them both being pulled down and away through the rush of the water.

“You can open your eyes now, Erin.”

Erin shook her head violently, and Hedy gently squeezed her by the shoulders. “I promise you, it’s all right. Go on.” Erin gingerly opened one eye and then the other. She stared at her grandmother for a moment, until she caught sight of the village and the mountains that rose behind her, and a soft gasp escaped her lips. Hedy watched her take it all in. “Well, what do you think?”

“Where are we?” Erin breathed.

“It’s called Abhayāraṇya. It means Sanctuary in Hindi,” Hedy replied.

“Are we still in Downheadley?” Erin slowly spun around, taking in the wide sweep of the ocean behind them.

“I don’t think this place is really anywhere,” Hedy replied. “Honestly, I’ve been coming here for over seventy years, and until today, I was never sure whether it wasn’t all just in my imagination.”

Erin turned back to face her. “Why didn’t you ever try to show anyone? Mum? Or Great Uncle Nikola?”
Hedy shook her head. “I did try. So many times, but I never managed it. I’d forget what I was going to say, or a walk that I tried to take along the river would go on a sudden detour… When Rachael finally told me that I would never see my children set foot in Sanctuary, I just gave up.”


Hedy smiled. “Would you like me to introduce you?”

They walked alongside the watercourse, over the bright mosaics that illuminated the pathway.

“What are these?” Erin asked, pointing down at an image of Vishnu in his incarnation as a fish.

“They’re images from Hindu mythology,” replied Hedy. “When I first came here, I didn’t know anything about them – their names, the stories behind them, nothing. When I was a little older, I started to research it a little – I wanted to know more about my father’s culture. I never learnt as much as I would have liked – Hinduism is a very complex religion, but it’s also very beautiful.” She looked at Erin. “And it’s as much your culture as it is mine.”

“Mum never really talks about our Indian side of the family,” Erin replied. “I don’t really feel connected to any of it, you know?”

“Well then, let this place be a reminder that you are connected. See? Here—” Hedy pointed at the mosaic ahead of them. “That’s when Rama – an incarnation of Vishnu, battled Ravana the demon king. It’s part of the epic poem, the Ramayana.”

Erin listened to her as they slowly paced forward, and Hedy spoke of the names and the stories that lay beneath their feet. When they were done, they had reached the point where the water channel met the river. Erin looked out over the rush of the water, and then up towards the mountains.

“Have you ever climbed up there?” Erin asked.
“Only once,” Hedy replied. “But I didn’t climb up the outside, we made our way through the heart of the mountains, through the caverns and tunnels.”

“We? You and… Rachael?”

Hedy shook her head. “No, another one of the People. They’ve been here since I first found this place.” She frowned. “Or longer, if they’re to be believed.”

“How many are there?” Erin asked, and Hedy blinked.

“You know, I’m not quite sure.” She pointed to the limestone buildings that surrounded them. “Some of them live here, some live farther afield – up in the high meadow, or in the mountains. Others…” she trailed away. “Others live underground, in the dark places. I tend not to visit them if I don’t have to.” She started, as though pulling herself out of a daze. “But never mind about them. Come, I’ll introduce you to my friends.”
JULY, 1981.

Hedy sat with Rachael in her garden, Pia warm and sleepy by her side as she watched Erin weed the flowerbeds beneath the lupins she had planted herself a year before.

“No sign of anyone else today?” Hedy asked Rachael, as she stroked Pia’s grey muzzle.

Rachael, dressed in pastel slacks and a striped top smiled at Hedy. “No. It’s just us now, Hedy.”

“The houses look quite empty too – not that Erin’s noticed yet.”

“Empty yes, but not abandoned. Just waiting, as mine will be waiting.”

“For?” Hedy asked, already suspecting the answer.

“For her,” Rachael replied, as she sketched Erin’s lupins on the easel before her.

Hedy watched her granddaughter, watched her thick ponytail sway against the side of her face in time to the rhythmic stabs of the trowel. “And if I went back to the ornamental pool now?”

“You would go home,” said Rachael. She put down her paintbrush and turned to face Hedy. “But you won’t.”

Hedy felt the ache in her bones, and the whispery rush of her heart. She watched Rachael’s gentle smile, her steady hands, watched her grow faint and transparent, until she had finally faded away like Hass, and Sandy, and Vivi before her. She took a deep breath, and held the taste of mountain soil and cedars in her lungs for as long as she could, before letting it all go in a rush of air. “No, I won’t,” she said.

Erin sat back on her heels, her arms aching from the work, and looked at her grandmother.

“Did you say something to me, Grandma?”

Her grandmother looked down at her dog, sleeping by her feet. “No, my darling,” she said.

“I was just talking to myself.”
“That’s the first sign of madness, you know,” Erin replied, grinning, and her grandmother rolled her eyes.

“If I were going to go mad, it would have happened a long time ago, let me tell you.”

Erin laughed, and wiped the dirt on her hands onto her threadbare jeans. “Well, I’m almost done here, so why don’t I go and find Rachael – wherever she’s gone off to, and then we can all go for a little walk?”

Her grandmother shook her head. “I don’t think you’d find her, Erin. Help me up, will you?”

Erin dropped her trowel and stood up, lending her grandmother her hand. “Are you all right?” she asked, concerned, but her grandmother only shook her head.

“I’ll be fine,” she replied, and pointed towards the edge of the settlement. “One more walk is all I need.”

Erin was unconvinced, but her grandmother seemed her usual, resolute self. “If you say so, Grandma…” she hedged, and her grandmother nodded firmly.

“I do.”

They made their way through the silent village, with only the sound of the open sky, and the murmur of the watercourse to accompany them. The doors to all the houses were open, but they felt empty, and Erin was suddenly convinced that the three of them were the only things still living in this place.

“Where is everyone, Grandma?” she asked uneasily. “Why can’t I hear anyone?”

Her grandmother patted her hand reassuringly, but didn’t answer. They reached the Wall, but her grandmother kept walking all the way to the end of the path, until they stood before the entrance to the caverns.

“We’re not supposed to go down there, Grandma it’s not safe. You told me it’s not safe, remember?”
“It is now,” her grandmother replied. “There’s nothing down there but rock and water. It’s all right, Pia knows the way. Besides, it’s downhill and I’ve always preferred walking down to walking up.”

Pia looked up at Erin’s grandmother with cloudy eyes, watching her as though she were her whole world, and then she turned and padded slowly into the dark.

“But… there’s never a view if you walk down,” Erin stammered as her grandmother made to follow Pia.

Her grandmother smiled at her. “I’ve always thought that if you only ever go walking for the view at the end, you’re missing something.” She tugged at Erin’s arm and pulled her along with her into the dark, though it didn’t stay dark for long. Like the arc of the Milky Way, a trail made of a million different points of light scattered along the floor to create a single, dense path of golden stars. It illuminated Pia in a soft glow where she stood just ahead of them, and she whined as Erin’s grandmother shuffled towards her.

“It’s all right, old girl,” her grandmother murmured, as she stroked the dog’s head. “Not long to go now.”

“Do you know where we’re going, Grandma?” Erin whispered, afraid to speak too loudly in the silent chamber.

“It’s more of a feeling than knowing for sure. I trust Pia, she’s always known the way.”

As they trekked deeper into the earth, through vaulted tunnels, and ramps of stone and earth, her grandmother began to pick up speed, becoming more and more surefooted, even as Erin began to stumble, held back by some instinctive dread.

“I’m scared,” she said.

“Of course you are,” her grandmother replied. “You’re only sixteen.”

They continued walking, the twinkling path twisting and turning back on itself through serpentine passageways, until Erin couldn’t tell in which direction they were facing anymore. At one point, they passed through a great, cathedral-like cavern, its roof studded with golden stars.
Her grandmother paused in the centre of the great space, her head cocked as though she was listening for something, but there was only the whisper of shifting rock, and the occasional drip of water.

The golden trail led them onwards, down through cracks in the rock that Erin could barely squeeze through, and across narrow bridges of stone that seemed to shear away into nothingness on either side.

“Grandma, I think we should turn back, this is dangerous.”

Her grandmother shook her head, not bothering to look back. “We’re almost there, Erin.”

“How can you tell?” Erin whispered to the darkness.

“Can’t you hear it?”

Erin stopped, and listened. A dull, roaring sound that ebbed and flowed reached her ears. It rumbled and sighed through the bones of the earth, as Erin gasped and stumbled back.

“I thought you said there was nothing down here,” she squeaked, and then flushed with embarrassment at her own voice.

Her grandmother laughed, and began to move away from Erin once more. “There isn’t, Erin. That is the sound of white horses.” Hedy strode around the bend in the tunnel, and Erin’s stomach suddenly clenched with fear – the starry trail of gold was beginning to fade, and everything around her was becoming shrouded in a misty, grey light. Erin stumbled to catch up with her grandmother, her hands scraping against the slick stone as she felt her way along in the dark. The grey light began to grow brighter as she stumbled around the bend, and the roaring sound grew louder too, until she was faced with an opening of slick, wet rock, spray flickering across her face.

“Grandma?”

No answer came, and Erin staggered towards the light of the opening, as another mist of salty water was cast across her skin. A few more steps, and she was outside, standing on a black, seaweed-strewn wedge of rock. Her grandmother stood beside her, one hand fisted in Pia’s fur.
They had made it down to the very edge of the sea, the cliffs so sharp and tall above them that Erin couldn’t see the top. This close, the smell of the ocean was almost a living, breathing thing, and Erin watched as her grandmother closed her eyes and inhaled deeply.

“It’s been so many years since I’ve been to the sea. It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

Erin nodded slowly, but her eyes were fixed on the small coracle that was bobbing low in the water, creaking and shifting against the rocks it was fastened to. Her grandmother turned to her, and followed her gaze to the boat.

“That’s for you, isn’t it?” Erin said quietly.

Her grandmother paused, as though unsure of how much she ought to say. She walked over to Erin, strangely sure-footed over the slippery, uneven rock. “Yes, I think it is.”

“I can’t come with you, can I?”

Her grandmother took her by the shoulders. “No,” she said softly, brushing a strand of hair free from Erin’s face.

“Where does it go?” Erin asked, trying to ignore how her voice wavered.

“I don’t know,” her grandmother replied. “I don’t think you’re supposed to know until you get there.”

“Do… do you think Uncle John saw something like this? Grandpa Pasha?” She could feel tears beginning to slide down her face, only to be lost amongst the spray of the sea. “Will I ever see you again?” she sobbed.

“Oh, darling.” Her grandmother wrapped her in a hug that smelt of gardens, and of hay, and flowers, and the sea. Erin let herself sink into it for a moment, before her grandmother drew away and leapt into the boat like a girl of eighteen. Pia jumped in after her, just as nimble, and they both settled themselves down against the curve of the coracle’s hull.

“Throw the line free now, Erin there’s a good girl,” her grandmother said, as she braced herself against the rocking of the boat. Erin stumbled over to where a thick rope had been fastened through a massive iron ring, and began to untie the knots, until the rope lay heavy in her hands.
“You have to let it go,” her grandmother prompted gently, but Erin only gripped it tighter, and darted a glance out towards the expanse of the horizon.

“Let it go, sweetie. I’ll be fine,” her grandmother said softly. Erin clenched her jaw, her arms straining against the pull of the coracle as it strove to head out to sea.

“You’re just going on ahead, all right?” she told her grandmother as the rope bit into her hands. “You’re just going on ahead, and I’m going to catch up with you in a little bit.” With a huff of breath, Erin let the rope go slack, and it slid free of her grip and slithered into the water. The coracle began to glide away, guided by an unknown hand. “I’ll catch up with you, I promise.”

Her grandmother’s attention was already caught by the vista ahead of her, but she turned back to look at Erin one last time, before they slipped free of the rocky harbour and moved out into open water. “Don’t you dare,” she said, smiling. “Not for a long time, Erin. Not until the dark doesn’t scare you anymore.”

Erin nodded, a wretched sob caught in her throat, but her grandmother was already turning away, turning back to the horizon, her head tilted as though she listened to something that Erin, try as she might, could not hear.

Erin watched the boat, until it was just a black speck in the distance, until it was nothing at all. She wasn’t sure how long she stood there for, staring out to sea, but eventually, when the cold had stiffened her bones, she turned around and headed back to the cave entrance. The spattering of golden stars still lined the floor as she went deeper into the dark, and Erin followed the trail upwards, ever upwards, back through the narrow passageways, and the vaulted caverns. When she stopped to catch her breath, she saw that golden stars behind her had disappeared into the blackness, leaving no trace behind of the path that she’d taken. By the time she reached the
surface, she was quite certain that the way back down to the sea would be lost, until the day it was once more lit by that starry trail.

The smell of the sea was gone when Erin finally reached the surface – all that she could smell was grass, and cedar trees, and cool mountain air. She made her way along the Wall towards the village, but stopped when she reached the final mirror. Freshly engraved, its border was filled with sprigs of lupins, entwined around each other all the way to the bottom of the frame, where Wexford House was carved in sharp relief – its mullioned windows, and French spires all meticulously recreated. It sang to her in the way that her mother’s laugh sang to her, and she reached out to touch the cool glass.

“Show me the first time I met my grandmother,” she said. The mirror flickered into life to show the front door of the House. Erin’s infant self peered through her wrappings and watched as her grandmother walked towards her, her back straight, and her arms lithe and strong.

“Well then, let me see my newest granddaughter,” her grandmother said. There was an exchange from one set of arms to another, and then her grandmother was peering down at Erin through the mirror, with eyes as grey as her own.

“Hello, you,” said her grandmother.

“Hello, Grandma,” Erin whispered to the mirror, her forehead pressed to the glass.

She wandered through the empty limestone houses, past the garden that she had been working only hours before, down to the ornamental pool, with its whirling dance of flowers. She crouched down by the water, watching as each new bloom spilled out from beneath the stone rim and was drawn inexorably towards the centre, where it was pulled beneath the water and disappeared from view. She wondered if the flowers that emerged at the edges were the same ones that were lost at the centre.
There was a yip, and then a sound like knitting needles skittering over tiles, and Erin stood and turned to see a pudgy black Labrador puppy tumbling along the pathway towards her. It tried to pull itself up short when it reached her, but the mosaic tiles were too slick, and its fat little body too ungainly, and instead, it crashed into her ankles at full speed.

Erin scooped it up in her arms before it had a chance to recover, and was rewarded with a wet nose to the face, and a tongue swiped across her mouth. She grimaced, drying her face with the back of her sleeve, and held the puppy out in front of her. It squirmed for a moment, and then stopped to look at her, its head cocked to one side.

“Hello, you,” said Erin, grinning.

Tongue out, and mouth open wide in a smile, the puppy snorted, and wagged its tail.