

WORK IN PROGRESS

By

Jeremy Henderson

DISCLAIMER: Though this story is centered around a creative writing class, I am not trying to depict anybody from our class in this story. No offense is intended and, I hope, none is taken.

The industrial grey classroom had the standard sound isolating drop ceiling along with a faint smell from the new carpets. One of the students wore a lilac perfume and its faint scent losing the battle with the new carpet. As usual the majority of students were seated in the back of the room, as if that extra distance from the front might protect them and their work.

David Meyers looked over his class before addressing them. There were a dozen people signed up for the class, but there were only eleven here. Creative writing

tended to shed several students by the last class. This is a side effects of teaching any college class, especially a non-credit one.

Checking his watch, David knew that he had given the remaining straggler enough time. Time to get started.

“OK, class, let's get a little cozier. I want you all to get up and take a seat in one row at the front, move the desks if you need to.”

A couple of groans came out from the students, but they all complied. One girl sat at the end of the row nearest the door, as if she might want to make a quick escape. She stood out because she wore a bright orange hooded sweatshirt with the hood up so that only a few of her long blonde locks hung out at the sides.

After everyone aligned their desks in a tight and slightly curvy line of desks, introductions were started. The typical people that tended to take the class were here, single parent's, retired individuals trying to keep active, and a couple of people that actually took writing serious but never moved on to the next step of trying to get published. The oddities were one former army soldier, one professional chef, and Lorraine, the girl in the orange sweatshirt. Lorraine was only odd because she said almost nothing other than her name.

David started the lesson on using your five senses to expand your writing after the introductions were finished. Several people asked insightful questions during the lesson and a short writing exercise showed that the students varied greatly in skill levels.

The class ran out of time by the end of the writing exercise. So, David gave the format for the writing assignments and the first assignment, a story involving a public place.

David waited as everyone filed out after class, answering any questions the students had before leaving. He left with the last student shutting off the lights and locking up the room behind him.

The next week there were eight people sitting at various places around the room when it was time to start class.

/I lost three this week,/ thought David. /Not the worst drop in student attendance, but more than I expected./

“Alright everyone,” he said. “You know the drill. Please move your desks into a single line at the front of the class.”

This the students did as they did the previous week, with slight groaning and much shuffling. Lorraine wore her orange hooded sweatshirt again and had it covering her head. Her writing exercise had been one of the weakest in the class due to her extensive use of clichés and passive voice, but maybe today’s lesson on active voice would help her out.

David noticed the chef was missing once everyone was lined up again.

/That’s a shame,/ he thought. /He seemed to have some talent. Maybe he’ll be back next week./

He started class by having each person read their story to the rest of the class. David felt the value of having the students read their stories out loud was worth the

discomfort that some of the students displayed. It tended to be the easiest way to point out the weak writing and the best way to fix it.

Each story differed remarkably from the others. One of the retired gentlemen, Jeffrey was his name, wrote a story about his daughter's wedding that had a good example of the lessons taught the previous week.

Kathy, a single mother, wrote a story about when her and her brother had snuck away from their mom and explored the mall they had been at until, finally too tired to continue wandering, they had collapsed on a bench where they were discovered by her mom and a team of mall security. Its humor and touching prose stood out from the pack.

Lorraine's story, while not as rough as the writing exercise last week, was still one of the weaker assignments in the class. It dealt with a teenage couple breaking up at a McDonald's. It simply felt awkward and her extensive use of teenage slang made the story difficult to follow.

David commenced with the lesson for the day once all the stories were read. He showed examples of passive voice and then how to turn them into active voice. After this he broke down how to transition action from one paragraph to another to help a story's flow. He skipped the writing exercise that day due to a lack of time, and assigned the next story topic, a story about an addiction.

Again he stayed until the last student was leaving and then walked out with them shutting off the lights and locking up. This time though he walked back to the parking lot with Jeffrey.

“I liked your description of the scents at the wedding. It really reminded me of a wedding in June,” David said.

“Thanks. The smell of the prime rib with the rose center pieces really sticks with me and I think about my daughter’s wedding day whenever I smell either now.”

“Well, here’s my car. Keep up the good work. I look forward to hearing what you bring us next week.”

“I’ll try not to let you down,” Jeffrey replied with a smile. “See you next week.”

David started up his old Ford Taurus and pulled out of his parking space. As he neared the end of the parking lot he noticed Lorraine and Kathy talking by a couple of parked cars. He always found it interesting which students forged friendships from his classes. In this case it was high school student Lorraine and single mother, Kathy. He smiled as he thought about that pairing and the possible stories he could write about their adventures.

By the third class only four students showed up. Neither Jeffrey nor Kathy returned, and this greatly upset David.

The stories for that week showed much improvement over the ones read previously. Richard, the soldier, wrote about a man addicted to internet gambling. His protagonist slowly lost everything to an unknown person online. In the end the faceless nemesis turned out to be his brother that had been using special software to cheat.

Lorraine’s story was about a woman trying to conquer her coffee addiction and was filled with many great scents and sounds of a convenience store while also showing the comedy of the addiction with talking coffee cups and muffins doing the can-

can on the checkout counter. Though David had a good laugh and was impressed with Lorraine's improvement, her humor and descriptions reminded him of the talents of his missing student's Kathy and Jeffrey.

He tried to teach the class with the same energy he always had, but the ghosts of the missing students haunted him. They created dark thoughts that harassed his teaching techniques and poked holes in his self-esteem. That week's lesson on dialog felt like it took years and David decided to end class early instead of going through the normal writing exercise. So he gave the topic for the next story and locked up after the last student.

As he walked back to his car in the parking lot Lorraine surprised him around one of the corners.

"What did you think about my story," she asked as she played with the cords to her sweatshirt's hood.

"I thought it was very well written. You've really improved since the first class."

"Thanks," she said quietly. But David saw the smile spread across her face. He hadn't seen her smile before so when she did he was surprised how attractive she looked, even in the bright orange sweatshirt that had become her calling card.

"Say, Lorraine. I saw you talking with Kathy last week. Did she mention whether she was going to miss class this week?"

"Well... She did tell me that she wasn't really getting anything out of the class. She didn't say she wasn't going to come back, but I wasn't surprised when I didn't see her tonight."

“Oh... I see. Well here is my car. Thanks for answering my question. I’m looking forward to seeing what you come up with for next week.”

“Have a good night.”

The next week the class was down to one, Lorraine. She sat front and center in the first row. David didn’t know what to say. In the ten years he had taught this class never had a group fallen apart like this.

“Where is everyone,” he asked Lorraine.

“They are all here,” Lorraine replied from under her orange sweatshirt’s hood.

“No. You’re the only one here.”

“Have you ever been published?”

“I told you I had been in the first class! Currently I’m working on another novel about a group of boys growing up in a small town in the Midwest. Why? Are you questioning my ability to lead this class?”

“Not at all,” she replied getting up from her desk. She slinked her way over to David and looked him right in the eyes. “I just wanted to know whether or not you were worth consuming.”

“Consum--”

Lorraine gripped his hand in hers and David felt as if he had been plunged into freezing water. It stunned him into silence and though he wanted to let go of Lorraine’s hand or even just convulse with shivers, he could do neither. It was as if his body had suddenly stopped obeying his commands.

Lorraine smiled showing perfectly white teeth as fire seemed to burn in her eyes. She felt David's memories and soul arrange itself into a pocket of her mind. She now knew the entire story about the boys growing up in the Midwest, but she also knew that David's original ending wouldn't work. Instead she pulled on the memories and skills from Jeffrey, Kathy, Richard and the other students she had devoured from the class until she felt she had a suitable ending.

By the time she had worked out the entire novel in her mind she was standing alone in the classroom. Her hand that had been gripping her teacher's now held empty air. David and his memories were now a part of her, just like all the other student's that had attended the class.

She shut off the lights and locked up after herself as she left. After all, she had a novel to write.

THE END