

Spring 2017

# Lost Soul: The Process of Revision in Fiction

Nathan Woolard

Follow this and additional works at: [http://ir.uiowa.edu/honors\\_theses](http://ir.uiowa.edu/honors_theses)



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

---

Copyright © 2017 Nathan Woolard

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#). For more information please contact: [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

---

LOST SOUL: THE PROCESS OF REVISION IN FICTION

by

Nathan Woolard

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the English

---

Jake Andrews  
Thesis Mentor

Spring 2017

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
English have been completed.

---

Marie Kruger  
English Honors Advisor

University of Iowa  
Department of English

Lost Soul:  
The Process of Revision in Fiction  
by  
Nathan Woolard  
Honors Thesis Project

Spring 2017

Honors Thesis Advisor: Jake Andrews

*Dedicated to my mom for always reading my work,  
to Jake for always setting me straight,  
and to Kali for being as helpful and inspiring as always*

## Abstract

My aim in this thesis is to investigate the process of revision through focus upon my own work. To this end, I am presenting one of my short stories in three different stages of revision: a first draft, a heavily restructured middle draft, and a current final draft. The story, "Lost Soul," follows a teenage boy's trek through the wintry woods on an unknown mission for a dark creature simply called the Gloom. The progression between drafts is drastic and allows me to highlight different methods of revision. Comparison of early and final drafts of published works, namely Kali VanBaale's *The Good Divide* and Raymond Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, serves to put the revision process into a larger context beyond my own work. Techniques from craft books such as Alice LaPlante's *The Making of a Story* and Bret Anthony Johnston's *Naming the World* give further background to the various methods used. Together, my research and personal experience seek to demonstrate how revision can hone a rough work into a sharp and piercing story.

## Table of Contents

Overview .....	1
Draft 1: Flashbacks.....	2
Draft 2: ABDCE Structure .....	20
Draft 3: Switchback Time .....	39
Critical Essay: Structure in Revision.....	61
Annotated Bibliography .....	72

## Overview

In the process of developing my short story, “Lost Soul” has undergone a number of dramatic structural changes. In the original draft, the chronology of the present story was interspersed with flashbacks to give context to the journey of the protagonist, Alistair. This didn’t change through the first several rounds of revision, which were more focused on basic line edits. I thought that this thesis project would amount to the same type of work, but as I have learned, there is a big difference between general line edits and major revisions. Whereas the basic level of editing consists largely of correcting grammar, spelling, and word choice, revision prompts change on a grander scale. Through revision, writers reshape their works. Characters and scenes may be added, dropped, or rearranged. These are the kinds of alterations made between drafts of my short story, making it a perfect example for the purposes of this thesis. To highlight these changes, I present three different drafts of “Lost Soul.” The first is the untouched original draft; the second is a draft after several major revisions of plot and characters; the third is the present final draft after being further restructured. Together, they serve to demonstrate how a story evolves through the process of revision.

## Draft 1: Flashbacks

The background information to the main story is provided through Alistair's flashbacks.

### Lost Soul

White snow blanketed the black forest. No sound disturbed the emptiness of the night. The wildlife did not stir from its sleep. All was still.

The fresh snow crunched beneath Alistair's boots. An icy wind blew down his bare neck and he shivered. He should have brought the scarf his mother made for him, he chided himself. Noah would have known better. But it didn't matter now. Where he was going, he wouldn't need a scarf. The cold wouldn't bother him anymore.

The boy trudged on, his lantern casting an orange glow over the snow-covered ground and trees. Shadows danced in the candlelight, reaching out for Alistair like thin, crooked fingers. On a normal occasion, he would have been disconcerted by the image of the grasping hands, but not tonight. All his attention was focused on locating the object of his search. Mere illusions could not so easily dissuade him. There were far more frightening beasts on the prowl.

*"Ha ha! Sorry!" The younger boy flicked the small cardboard playing piece aside, sitting his own down in its place. He smirked in amusement at his older brother's exasperated grumbling.*

*"You little twerp," Alistair said, reaching across the board and tousling Noah's hair. "I bet you stacked the deck."*

*"Nah," Noah said. "You just stink at board games. You rush and make mistakes."*

*Alistair shrugged. “Yeah, but it’s more fun that way. Playing it safe takes too long.”*

*“Yet I’m the one who always wins,” Noah said, the corners of his mouth turning up in a cheeky grin. “You should take some lessons from Jason. He’s a real challenge.”*

*Alistair gritted his teeth and was trying to think of a witty retort when a dark shape dropped over his face, blotting out all the light in the living room. He yelped in surprise and clawed at his face, grasping his mysterious assailant and flinging it onto the Sorry board, scattering the pieces and cards. Noah rolled onto his back, clutching his sides with laughter. Alistair took several deep breaths to clear his thoughts before his eyes finally settled on his attacker: a bunched up, berry-red scarf.*

*“Congratulations, Alistair, you successfully killed a piece of cloth.”*

*His mother stood over him, raising an eyebrow in amusement.*

*“Yeah, heart attacks are hilarious,” Alistair said, sighing. He picked up the scarf and eyed it in confusion. “So what’s this for?”*

*His mother hesitated a moment before she answered. “Well, I made Noah a scarf for his birthday, and I never did get one for you. And I knew you’d been kind of upset lately with Jason being around so much –”*

*Alistair didn’t let her finish the sentence. He tossed the scarf aside and returned his attention to the Sorry board, restacking the cards and organizing the scattered pieces. “Yeah, cool, Mom. Thanks.”*

*She remained motionless for a minute, watching Alistair, waiting to see if he would add more to his expression of heartfelt gratitude, then turned and left the room without another word. Noah, who had been silent through the whole exchange, grabbed the scarf and carefully folded it into a neat square.*

*“She’s just trying to make things right,” he said, offering the scarf to Alistair. “Give her a chance. Besides, don’t you think Jason’s a pretty good guy?”*

*“Of course you’d think so,” Alistair said, refusing to meet his brother’s eyes. “He’s your board game buddy.” It was a flimsy excuse and he knew it, but he wasn’t about to admit he was being unreasonable.*

*Noah refused to pull back his arm. “Come on, Alistair. She made it just for you. Besides, you need a new scarf. Your old one is just a bunch of torn up dishrags now.”*

*For a long moment, Alistair didn’t respond. Then, with an exaggerated groan, he accepted the scarf from his brother’s outstretched hands. “Alright, you’ve got me. Thanks, Noah.”*

Alistair felt the ice a second too late. The earth slipped out from under him and he fell, gasping as his hip struck the solid ice. He scrambled away from the slick surface, snatching up the lantern from where it had landed in the snow and rising quickly to his feet. He ignored the pain in his leg and held out the lantern, eager to see what he had literally stumbled upon. The soft light illuminated an ovular indent in the ground, a smooth snow-coated surface that stood out in contrast to the uneven ground around it. A frozen pond, exactly what he had wanted to see. It was the third such one he’d discovered, and hopefully, it was the one that he sought.

He scanned the surrounding area. It seemed to be peaceful. No disturbances marred the pristine surface of the snow. There was no sign of any human activity at all. No footprints, no trodden-over sticks, no forgotten items. If anyone had been here, they had left no trace of their presence behind, and humans weren’t exactly known for their tendency to leave nature as they

found it. Clearly no one had been there recently. Alistair's heart sank. This wasn't the right place either.

There wasn't time to dwell on his frustration; his journey was far from over. He started forward, skirting the bank of the pond, when he caught a glimpse of movement at the corner of his vision. He didn't need to look to know what it was. It was the same creature that had been watching him all day, stalking him unseen through the forest.

“What lengths must you go to, Alistair?”

The being stood in the center of the pond. Its shape was humanoid, but cloaked in shadow. It appeared to be nothing more than a silhouette, with two blank white eyes staring out from the blackness of the head. Its only other defining characteristic was the long scarf trailing behind it, whipping in the whistling wind. Alistair didn't think the figure was frightening, exactly. Rather, it was unsettling, otherworldly. It came and went without sound or flourish. It seemed to move with the shadows, existing wherever they did. Whenever Alistair looked at it, he was overwhelmed with regret. He remembered the time he had broken his mother's favorite porcelain angel and blamed it on Noah. The poor child had just been a toddler at the time, unable to understand that he was only being chastised because of his older brother's spiteful behavior. Alistair forced the memory aside and narrowed his eyes at the figure on the pond. The memories of darkness and despair arose whenever the creature appeared. He called it the Gloom.

“You have walked these woods for hours,” the Gloom said. His voice was deep and rich, resonating off the frozen surface of the pond. “Yet you are no closer to your goal than when you began. The cold deepens. The frost spreads. Why go on?” He spread his arms, long and thin like the bare branches of the surrounding trees. “Come to me now, Alistair.”

Alistair's glare softened. He stepped forward almost unconsciously, submitting himself to the beckoning arms of the Gloom. Then his foot hit the ice and he snapped back to reality, instantly backpedaling away from the frozen pond. "No," he said. "Not yet."

The Gloom cocked his head sideways; if the creature's mouth was visible, Alistair assumed it would be twisted in a mocking smile. "You are only prolonging the inevitable, child. You will be mine eventually."

"I'm well aware of that," Alistair said, trying and failing to keep his voice from trembling. "I made a deal and I intend to follow through on it. But I expect you to hold up your end too. And that means my work isn't done."

"I am a man of my word," the Gloom said, bowing his head. "Of course I will respect our arrangement, should you choose to go through with it. But I still question the legitimacy of your quest. You only prolong your pain this way."

Alistair turned his back on the pond. "I didn't come this far to give up now. It's one soul for another, right? I'm just making sure you don't shortchange me." He strode away, back into the cramped trails of the woods.

"I'll have you eventually, Alistair," the Gloom said, his words carrying on the wind after the boy. "It doesn't matter when or how. Your mission is foolish. Whenever you have had enough of the pain, come to me. I will be waiting to relieve you."

Alistair quickened his pace, crashing through the underbrush in his desperate attempt to distance himself from the Gloom. Whatever tempting offers of relief the foul creature offered were meaningless. Alistair couldn't stop his search until he'd found what he needed. He wouldn't disappoint Noah. He had failed his younger brother too many times. Now he finally had the chance to make up for it, and he wasn't about to pass up the opportunity.

Snow began to fall. The wind howled through the trees, battering Alistair with a rain of dried-up leaves and broken twigs. He wrapped his coat close around his shoulders and marched on, undeterred. He had to be close, he had to be. He'd been wandering the woods since nightfall, and now, what time was it? He had no idea. It had to be at least midnight. Maybe later.

It was just like the night when he'd run away.

*"No, Alistair. Alistair!"*

*Noah desperately chased after his brother, but there was nothing he could do now. Alistair stormed down the hallway, knocking doors open as he passed them, searching for the object of his rage. "Leave her alone, Alistair!" Noah called, pleading, tears streaming down his face. "She's happy! Don't you get it?"*

*Alistair finally found his mother in the kitchen, humming cheerily to herself as she searched through the fridge for something or other. She turned around, raising an eyebrow in confusion as Alistair entered the room. He locked his gaze on her hand, and the golden ring that glinted under the overhead lights. His face contorted in a mask of fury, but his voice remained quiet and even. "How could you?"*

*His mother took a deep breath and stepped forward. "Look, sweetie, you have to understand –"*

*"How could you?!" Alistair repeated, his voice rising. "How can you forget Dad so easily?"*

*"I haven't forgotten him," his mother said, her eyes brimming with tears. "Of course I haven't forgotten him. But it's pointless to stay alone forever."*

*Alistair scowled. "Then you never even loved him in the first place."*

*“I loved him more than life itself!” his mother screamed. “At least, that’s what I thought. But loving a person doesn’t mean that you die with them. I’ll always love and remember your father, but that doesn’t mean that I can’t move on.”*

*Now tears were streaming down Alistair’s face as well. “But with Jason? You let that clown put a ring on your finger?”*

*“Jason loves me,” his mother said, her voice softening. “And he loves you boys too.” She put a hand on Alistair’s shoulder. “Give me one reason why you don’t like Jason. Give me one logical reason and I’ll give him this ring back.”*

*Alistair clenched his fists at his sides. His mind raced, but he knew it was pointless. Jason was a great guy all-around. He played board games with Noah and brought little gifts whenever he could. He treated Alistair like an adult, whereas all the other people in town had been handling him with kid gloves ever since his father’s death. And, although Alistair hated to admit this most of all, his mother seemed as happy now, just as happy as she had been with his father. And it was because of Jason.*

*“It’s pointless, Alistair.” It was Noah, standing in the doorway. “Hating Jason for no reason is pointless. It won’t bring Dad back.”*

*Alistair couldn’t take it anymore. He tore himself away from his mother’s grip and dashed out of the room, nearly trampling Noah in the process. He snatched his coat from the rack, knocking his scarf to the floor in his haste, but he ignored it. He slipped into his boots and swung the front door open. The world outside was an infinite plain of white, but that was better than staying in the house. His mother and brother both hollered after him, but he ignored their desperate cries. He slammed the door behind him and vanished into nothingness.*

His retrospection was interrupted suddenly and painfully by a tree. Alistair fell back, jarring his neck as his head smacked the ground. He could feel the welt on his forehead from the tree and was sure that a matching one would be forming on the back of his head as well. He groaned and lay still, unwilling to move. Perhaps it would all end right here.

A darkness descended over him and he opened his eyes to see the Gloom standing over him. “I am here, Alistair. I presume you are ready for me? Or would you prefer to just stay here, making snow angels?”

Alistair gritted his teeth against the throbbing in his skull and sat up, brushing the snow from his hair and coat. The Gloom was nowhere to be seen. His sole pleasure seemed to come from taunting his victim, but Alistair didn't mind. The Gloom's mockery fueled the fire in his gut. It kept him moving. He would not let that monster win, not when Noah's life banked on his success. His younger brother deserved better than what he'd gotten. And Alistair would sacrifice everything to make things right.

He rose to his feet, his knees shaking, his head aching. The blizzard grew more powerful with every passing minute. Snow and sleet pelted him, stinging his exposed skin, drawing unbidden tears from his eyes into the frosty night. The wicked wind screamed in his ears, sharp and biting, so loud that he could barely concentrate, but not too loud to drown out the distant sound of laughter. The Gloom, booming and merciless, more chilling than any ice could ever be.

The world turned white. The storm consumed the forest, enveloping it in the blankness of the void. Shadows materialized from nowhere, trees rising up from nothingness. They were the only remaining handholds as reality slipped away. Alistair stumbled between them, one tree to another, clutching to them like life itself. They directed him through oblivion, grave markers

through an otherwise empty landscape. And above it all, the baritone laugh of the Gloom rang out, rattling the earth itself, driving Alistair ever forward.

What was Noah feeling right now? Was he angry? Afraid? Depressed? Perhaps even satisfied, accepting, delighted? The Gloom alone could answer that now, and he wasn't talking. Just laughing, ever laughing. The only way to know would be to complete the deal.

*Alistair rushed blindly through the forest. He had hoped that the trees would shield him from the brunt of the wind, but they didn't seem to be blocking much.*

*His shoulder slammed into a trunk and he tumbled sideways away from the tree, his shrieks lost in the howling storm. What had he been thinking? He didn't even think to grab a flashlight. Navigating the woods was practically impossible without a light to guide him. This had been a bad idea.*

*He shook the doubt away. No, he chided himself, this was necessary. He would prove to his mother how wrong she was. He would make it to town, it was only a mile or so away. He'd hide out there for a few days, maybe in an abandoned shack or something. Then, when everyone was good and worried, he'd return home to a triumphant welcome. He'd have his way yet.*

*But the little voice in the back of his head – it sounded annoyingly like Noah – disagreed. What would this accomplish? Its question pierced through the heart of Alistair's armor. Running away wouldn't solve any problems. It wouldn't prove that Jason wasn't worth marrying. It wouldn't show Alistair's mother that she was a terrible person for getting over his father. This was a foolhardy endeavor.*

*But Alistair refused to listen. He pressed on, fighting the storm. It was too late to turn back now.*

The storm focused all its energy on Alistair. The wind pushed him down, held him down. He fell to his hands and knees, slumping into the snow, the cold emanating through his gloves and pants. The ice bit at his face and neck. He raised his head and squinted into the ivory abyss. He opened his mouth to cry out, but no sound emerged. Not yet, he wanted to scream. Please. I can't die yet.

All went silent. The wind stopped, leaving not even a whisper of a breeze behind. The white of the blizzard faded away and the forest reemerged from the all-consuming blankness. Alistair remained kneeled for a moment, trying to process the sudden return of the world. He raised his lantern, shining its flickering light over the clearing laid out before him.

He was perched at the peak of a short ledge. The ground ended just ahead of him, creating a drop of perhaps six, seven feet. At the base of the ledge was a deeper indention, a small valley circled by trees. Another frozen pond. Alistair's eyes widened. He peeked over the edge of the drop, staring straight down at the pond below. The surface wasn't flat as the others had been. This one was uneven with a few almost jagged pieces sticking up from the otherwise smooth expanse. It looked as though the ice had been broken, only to refreeze in various poorly-connected chunks.

Alistair leapt to his feet. This was it. He glanced about frantically, searching for further evidence. A flash of color caught his eye, something long and thin, waving to him from a nearby tree. He dashed to the tree and took the yellow object in his hands. It was a strip of police tape, flapping weakly in the breeze. This was it. This was the place.

This was where Noah died.

“So, Alistair, you have arrived.”

The Gloom stood in the center of the pond. The wind was weak, but his ebony scarf billowed out behind him as though in a gale. He extended a bony hand and gestured to Alistair. “Come to me, child. Seal the deal.”

Alistair clenched his fists at his side and strode toward the pond once again. The time to appease the beast was at hand. “I’m ready. Bring back Noah.”

The Gloom raised his hand and a yellow spark winked to life in his palm. It was small, little more than a candle flame, but it gave off a radiant light that bathed the entire clearing in its glow. The shadows of the trees danced on the snow, writhing around the Gloom, hailing him, bowing to him. Alistair stopped at the base of the ledge, scowling at the demon on the pond. “I said to release him, monster. We had a deal.”

“I will release him, Alistair,” the Gloom said. “But not until you’ve given me what I want. One lost soul for another. That was the agreement.” The white of his eyes shone nearly as bright as the spark in his hand. “Now come to me. The ice awaits.”

*Life on the streets wasn't quite as easy as he'd expected.*

*Alistair rifled through the trash can, desperate to find anything that was even semi-edible. It had been three days since he'd run away. He'd been lucky on the first day, stumbling upon a barn where he managed to hide out for the night. It was relatively warm, sheltered from the weather, and there was a bushel of apples inside to keep him fed. Unfortunately, the farmer had appeared in the morning and he'd been forced to beat a hasty escape, though not without first snatching a lantern, candle, and lighter; he wouldn't be caught out in the night without a light again.*

*He sighed and wiped his hands on his soiled jeans. There was nothing to eat in this garbage heap either. He glanced around the alley, but there was no sign of any other trash cans to search. He'd really assumed that the townspeople would have more discarded pizzas to snack upon. That really had been wishful thinking.*

*A sudden breeze stirred up the litter in the alley, blowing a newspaper straight into Alistair's face. He sputtered and batted his hands at the paper, knocking it to the ground. He glared at it, ready to rip it apart in what could only be called a petty act of vengeance against an inanimate object. But he stopped when he saw the picture on the front.*

*It was him. And Noah. He remembered that picture. His lips turned up in a wistful smile. It was from three years before, back when their father had still been alive. Noah was only four years old, but he was already showing the telltale signs of his future intelligence. He was reading from a Dr. Seuss book, oblivious to the camera. Alistair sat behind him, giving a peace sign to the camera. Or rather, to his father, the man behind the camera.*

*However, his nostalgic grin vanished as he read the headline.*

*Two Boys Run Away in Storm; One Missing, One Dead.*

*Two Boys. One Dead.*

*Alistair didn't react as he read the article. Older brother Alistair had gotten into an argument with his mother and then ran away in the storm. Shortly after, Noah, the younger brother, followed, pursuing him into the forest. The next night, police had found the younger boy's lifeless body sticking up through the icy surface of one of the many ponds in the forest. The older boy was still nowhere to be found.*

*One Dead.*

*Noah was dead.*

*Alistair slumped against the alley wall and slid to the cold ground, wrapping his arms around himself, rocking back and forth, his mouth hanging open. He wanted to cry, needed to cry, but he couldn't. All his tears were frozen.*

*Noah was dead.*

*Noah was a good boy. He was a smart boy. He shouldn't have died. Alistair knew it was all his fault. His baby brother was dead because of him. It should have been him.*

*"Noah didn't deserve to die. But you do."*

*The deep voice came from nowhere and everywhere at the same time. Alistair's head shot back and forth, searching for the source of the sound. The shadows of the alley writhed and squirmed, pooling together in a swirling mass. A black humanoid figure rose from the vortex as though ascending from Hell itself. Its fiery white eyes pierced Alistair to his soul.*

*"Do you disagree with me?" the figure said. "Do you think this is right?"*

*Alistair was too shaken from the news of Noah to question the appearance of the monstrosity before him. He paused, then shook his head. "No," he said. "I don't deserve to live after what I did to Noah."*

*"Then what do you plan to do?" the creature asked.*

*Alistair said the first thing that came to his mind. "I want to die."*

*The Gloom nodded approvingly. "Good. Then perhaps I can cut you a deal." He snapped his fingers and a yellow spark ignited in his hand. "What I hold here is your brother's soul."*

*Alistair's eyes widened. He lunged at the Gloom, but the monster simply stretched its arm up, far too high for the boy to reach. "It's not that easy, Alistair," the Gloom said. "I can bring*

*back your brother, but I need something from you first.” He pointed his bony finger at Alistair’s chest. “You. One lost soul for another.”*

*That didn’t sound quite right, but Alistair ignored it. Anything that could bring back Noah. And if he gave himself up in the process, all the better. He didn’t want to remember his sin. “Alright,” he said. “But we’re doing it my way. I deserve to die as Noah did. I’m finding the pond where he fell. Can you take me there?”*

*The Gloom shook his head. “That much is on you, child. I will claim your soul no matter what, whether you drown in that pond or freeze in this alley. But I will only bring back your brother if you return to where he died.”*

*“I’ll do it,” Alistair said without hesitation.*

*“Good,” the Gloom said, withdrawing into the shadows once again. “I will be keeping an eye on you, Alistair. I wish you success in your mission.” He clenched his fist and the yellow spark – Noah’s soul – fizzled and died. “For your brother’s sake.”*

*With that, Alistair was left alone in the alley once again. He picked up his stolen lantern and peeked out the end of the alley, looking both ways to make sure no one was watching. There was only one thing left for him to do now.*

*The forest awaited. The Gloom awaited. Death awaited.*

Alistair hesitated. He didn’t want this. He wanted to live. But he had to atone for what he’d done. It was his fault that Noah was dead. It was because he had run away that night that Noah had ventured out into the blizzard. It was his fault that his brother was dead. Giving himself up to the Gloom was the only way to even things out.

*“My patience grows thin, child.”*

Alistair ignored the Gloom's grumbling. He made his way up the ledge one slow step at a time. He surveyed the frozen pond two yards beneath him. He could imagine it all in his head: the solid crunch of the impact, the ear-splitting crack of the ice, the bone-chilling embrace of the water, the beautiful pain of fading away, the welcome bliss of release from his pain. He was ready.

He took one final step toward the edge, only for his foot to hit something strange. Something soft, cushiony. Alistair frowned and dropped to his knees. "What are you doing, Alistair?" the Gloom called. "Stop staving off the end! I shall have you no matter what! If you don't hurry, then your brother will be mine as well!" But Alistair paid no attention to the raving monster. He dug through the snow, brushing it aside until he could find what had been buried underneath it. It was a bundle of red cloth, standing out against the snow like a bloodstain. A scarf. Alistair's scarf.

It was the very scarf his mother had made for him. The very scarf he had regretted not bringing into the blizzard. Here it was, at the pond of all places. Noah must have brought it with him when he ran away. He would have wanted to give it to Alistair when he found him. Alistair couldn't help but smile at the thought. Noah always had displayed a level of common sense that his older brother lacked.

Alistair's smile faded. He'd never had an ounce of common sense before in his life. That's what had caused all his problems in the first place. Maybe some logical thinking was just what he needed now. A sensible look at the matter. That's what Noah would suggest.

He stared at the scarf as he spoke. "You can't bring him back, can you?"

The Gloom cupped his hand to his ear. "You're mumbling, child. Speak up."

“You can’t bring him back!” Alistair screamed. The Gloom recoiled, apparently surprised by the outburst. “He’s dead. That can’t be changed,” Alistair continued, his voice softening. “Not even by you.”

“Of course I can bring him back,” the Gloom said, his circular eyes narrowing to white slits. “I promised you I would do it, and so I shall. You must simply give yourself up first.”

“But that won’t work,” Alistair said, locking the Gloom in his icy gaze. “One lost soul doesn’t equal another. One death doesn’t cancel out another. It just ends with two people dead instead of one.”

The Gloom shrugged. “But your death means the end of your pain. The end of your guilt. You will be blameless.”

Alistair shook his head. “No, I won’t. Getting rid of myself won’t magically fix what happened.” He hesitated and glanced at the scarf once again. “And honestly, I don’t think I’m the only one responsible for this.”

“Of course you’re the only one!” the Gloom roared. Alistair raised his eyebrows in surprise. It was the first time the monster had lost his composure. “It is all your fault!” he continued. “If you hadn’t run away, he wouldn’t have followed you to his death. It is one-hundred percent your fault!”

Alistair was astounded by the tirade. Was the Gloom actually panicking? “I do have some responsibility,” he admitted. “I will feel guilty about this for as long as I live. But Noah was always the smart one. He was cautious and thought things out, while I always just charged ahead blindly. But I wasn’t the only one being reckless that night. He was too. Noah died because he was acting like me.” Alistair’s shoulders sagged. “He was acting like me then. So maybe now it’s time I finally started acting like him.”

The Gloom's eyes blazed with white fire. "So that's the way it is. Selfish. How can you be so selfish? Why should you live when your brother could not?"

"Because somebody has to learn from this." Alistair hugged the scarf to his chest. "If I kill myself, then his death will have been pointless." He thought of his father, and of Jason. Hating one had done nothing to bring the other back. It was only negativity. Useless. "But I can use this," he said, steel in his voice. "I can improve myself in his memory."

"And will that fix everything?" the Gloom asked.

Alistair paused for a long moment before answering. "No. It fixes nothing." He met the Gloom's empty stare once more. "But killing myself is even more useless. It won't bring Noah back. It won't do any good to anyone." The Gloom's hand stretched out, reaching across the pond for Alistair, desperate to grab him, to drag him down to the icy depths below, but it was too late for that. "I won't kill myself," Alistair said, closing his eyes. "I want to live. I *need* to live."

Silence.

He opened his eyes. There was no more outstretched claw. The fiery white eyes were nowhere to be seen. The Gloom was gone.

Alistair sank to his knees and buried his face in his hands. The sobs wracked his entire body. For several minutes, he remained on the ledge, allowing the tears he'd held in for the last three days to pour out.

The wind returned for a moment, quick and sharp, sending a shiver down Alistair's neck. He stood up, wiping the snow from his pants and the tears from his cheeks. His decision not to kill himself wouldn't amount to much if he stayed in the woods and froze to death, he thought. He had to return to his mother. She'd want to know that one of her sons was still alive. He needed to apologize to her. And he needed to apologize to Jason.

Alistair turned his back on the pond and wrapped the scarf around his neck, silently thanking Noah for delivering it.

## Draft 2: ABDCE Structure

The story opens with the penultimate chronological scene (Action), then cuts back to the beginning (Backstory) and proceeds forward in a linear fashion (Development) until reaching the opening scene again (Climax) and continuing to the conclusion (Ending).

### Lost Soul

White snow blanketed the black forest. Moonbeams, full and bright, barely penetrated the canopy of branches to reach the earth below. No sound disturbed the emptiness of the night. The wildlife did not stir. All was still.

Alistair was perched on a short ledge. The ground ended just ahead of him, creating a drop of perhaps six, seven feet. And at the base: another frozen pond, illuminated by the moon. The surface wasn't flat as the others had been. This one was uneven with a few jagged pieces sticking up from the otherwise smooth expanse. It looked as though the ice had been broken, only to refreeze in various poorly-connected chunks.

He rose to his feet. This was it. He glanced about frantically, searching for further confirmation. A flash of color caught his eye, something long and thin, dangling from a nearby tree. He dashed to the tree and took the yellow object in his hands. It was a torn strip of police tape, somehow still intact after the storm. This was the place.

“So, Alistair, you have arrived.”

A familiar dark figure stood in the center of the pond. Despite the wind's absence, his ebony scarf billowed out behind him. He extended a bony hand and gestured to Alistair. “Come to me, child. Seal the deal.”

Alistair strode toward the pond once again. The time to appease the beast was at hand.

“I’m ready.”

The being raised his hand and a yellow spark winked to life in his palm. It was small, little more than a candle flame, but it gave off a dazzling light that bathed the entire clearing in its glow. However, the shadows of the trees pressed through the light and danced on the snow, writhing around the slender silhouette, hailing him, bowing to him. Alistair stopped a few feet from the edge, scowling at the demon on the pond. “Release him, monster. We had a deal.”

“I will release him, Alistair,” the figure said. “But not until you’ve given me what I want. One lost soul for another. That was the agreement.” The white of his eyes shone nearly as bright as the spark in his hand. “Now come to me. The ice awaits.”

\*

Life used to be simpler.

“Sorry!” Noah flicked the small plastic playing piece aside, replacing it with his own. He smirked at his brother’s exasperated grumbling.

“You little twerp,” Alistair said, reaching across the board and tousling the smaller boy’s hair. “I bet you stacked the deck.”

“You just stink at board games,” Noah said. “You rush and make mistakes.”

Alistair shrugged. “It’s more fun that way. Who has time to just sit around and think about their move for five minutes?”

“I’m the one who always wins,” Noah said, the corners of his mouth turning up in a cheeky grin.

“The game isn’t over yet,” Alistair said, drawing his next card with a dramatic flourish. “Ha, a two!” He moved his piece out of the start zone and drew another card. “I’m back in the game, baby.”

“Got room for one more?”

The boys looked up at the newcomer. He was tall; even standing side-by-side, the man was still a good two heads taller than Alistair. He scratched his stubbly chin absentmindedly as he gave a short wave of greeting. Noah smiled warmly up at him. “Jason! Just in time, we should be done before long.”

Alistair scooted back away from the board, refusing to meet Jason’s eyes. “No, I’ll leave. Noah has this game in the bag. You two can go ahead and have fun.”

“I’d like to spend some time with both of you,” Jason said, kneeling down beside Noah, putting himself on equal ground with Alistair. “We never play together, all three of us.”

“That’s not really my idea of fun,” Alistair said, leaning back against the couch and hugging his knees to his chest. “Nothing against you, of course,” he added, after a conspicuous pause.

Jason nodded, flashing a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “I won’t force you, of course. It was just a thought.”

Alistair tried to avert his gaze from the game, but he could feel Noah’s big puppy dog eyes boring into his skull. Cautiously, he peeked at the boy out of the corner of his eye, and sure enough, there were the eyes, begging for him to submit to their will. For a long moment, he resisted, but he could only hold out for so long against Noah’s unspoken pleas. “Fine, I’ll play another round or two.”

Noah beamed as he moved all the pieces back to their start zones and Jason shuffled the deck. Alistair allowed himself a small smile; at least his little bro was happy. He remained silent while Noah and Jason chattered back and forth, their conversation serving as white noise to his own restless thoughts. His turns were mechanical, drawing a card, aimlessly moving forward whenever he was lucky enough to get a piece out of the start, Noah's chiding falling on deaf ears.

It was all Alistair could do to stay calm with *him* only a few feet away. He grew tired from tolerating Jason, as though the man's presence wasn't inherently wrong on every level. Sure, Noah liked the guy, but Noah liked everyone. Alistair envied that all-loving nature, that willingness to forgive and forget all unpleasantness. But he couldn't live like that, not with Jason. He drew a card and gave a short humorless laugh as he knocked one of Jason's pieces back to its start zone. "Sorry."

A dark shape dropped over Alistair, interrupting his brief moment of triumph. He yelped in surprise and clawed at his mysterious assailant, Noah and Jason laughing all the while. Finally he tore it away from his face and held it out at arm's length: a bunched up, berry-red scarf.

"Congratulations, Alistair," his mother said, standing over him. "You successfully killed a piece of cloth." She raised an eyebrow in amusement.

"Yeah, heart attacks are hilarious," Alistair sighed.

His mother hesitated a moment before explaining. "I knew you'd been kind of upset lately with ... well, you know, so I grabbed this today while I—"

Alistair tossed the scarf aside and stood up. "I think I've had enough Sorry for now." Jason started to follow, but Alistair's mother simply shook her head. Noah grabbed the scarf and carefully folded it into a neat square.

“I’m going for a walk,” Alistair said. “You guys have fun while I’m gone.” He expected his mother to protest, but she made no move to stop him. It was oddly disappointing to slip on his jacket and step out into the chilly January evening without so much as a word spoken to hinder his progress. He shoved his hands in his coat pockets as he crossed the small barren yard to the edge of the forest, stopping for a moment to stare up at the leafless trees looming above, then stepping into the realm beyond the trunks.

The woods felt like an entirely different world to Alistair. The orange glow of early twilight filtered down through the jagged branches of the empty canopy, bathing the forest floor in a golden haze. Strolling amongst the oaks chased all his troubles away, letting him remember when life was more than quiet sorrow. The first time he’d come out here, he’d been around Noah’s age. Their dad had loved wandering the woods when he needed peace, and in the last few months, Alistair had taken up the habit himself. He didn’t give himself any set route or time limit. He simply walked.

After ten minutes, he sat down on the bank of one of the dozens of ponds that speckled the forest. The water was dark beneath the ice-coated top layer. Alistair grabbed a handful of pebbles and skipped them over the surface, one by one, listening to them bounce and tumble across. He took a deep breath, in and out, feeling the pressure inside him ease up gradually with each exhalation. This isolation was what he needed. Out here, his problems couldn’t reach him. He could be truly alone.

“Hey.”

Alistair jumped up at the voice, stumbling forward onto the edge of the pond. With a sharp crack, his foot smashed through the ice, sinking in up to his ankle. His other leg slid out

from under him and he fell down, away from the pond. When he opened his eyes, he was flat on his back, staring up into the pink evening sky and the worried face of his younger brother.

“I’m sorry, oh my gosh, are you okay? Are you hurt? Oh no, I’m sorry!” Noah was beside himself, checking Alistair up and down for signs of any injury.

“I’m okay, really.” Alistair sat up and stretched, popping his neck. “But what are you doing out here? You scared the hell out of me.”

“Mom wanted to make sure you were okay,” Noah said. “And she needed to talk to Jason for a bit, so I said I’d come check.”

Alistair took a deep breath of crisp winter air and stood back up. “Well, aside from one drenched and freezing shoe, I’m alright.” He turned back in the direction of the house. “Come on, let’s head home. I’ve cleared my head enough for tonight.” With Noah on his heels, he started the short trek back. After a few minutes, Noah broke the silence.

“I brought this.”

Alistair looked down at his brother only to see the berry red scarf, clutched to the younger boy’s chest. He put on a rather admirable show of annoyance, rolling his eyes to the heavens and giving several dramatic sighs. “She really thinks this stupid scarf will make me feel better about anything? About *everything*?”

“She’s just trying to make things right,” Noah said, offering the scarf to Alistair. “Give her a chance.”

Alistair hesitated, giving off the appearance of genuine consideration for one, two, three seconds before firmly pushing the scarf back into Noah’s hands. Ahead of them, the house came back into sight through the last line of trees.

“You hang onto it for now,” Alistair said, giving Noah’s hand a quick squeeze. “And if I ever need it, then you can give it to me. Okay?”

Noah nodded, flashing a small happy grin. “Okay.”

\*

Two months later, there were no more happy grins.

“No, Alistair. Alistair!”

Alistair stomped down the hallway, knocking doors open as he passed them. “Leave her alone!” Noah pleaded, tears streaming down his face. “She’s happy!”

Alistair finally found his mother in the kitchen, humming to herself as she searched through the fridge. She turned around in confusion as Alistair entered the room. He locked his gaze on her hand, the golden ring that glinted under the lights. “How could you?”

His mother stepped forward. “Look, sweetie.” She took a deep breath. “You have to understand –”

“How could you forget him so easily?”

“I haven’t forgotten him.” Her eyes brimmed with tears. “Of course I haven’t forgotten him. But he’s gone, and I can’t change that.”

“A year? You never loved him in the first place.”

“I loved him more than life itself!” his mother shouted. “But loving a person doesn’t mean that you die with them.”

Now tears were streaming down Alistair’s face as well. “But with Jason?”

“Jason loves me,” his mother said, her voice softening. “And he loves you boys too.” She put a hand on Alistair’s shoulder. “Give me one reason why you don’t like him.”

“He’s condescending to me, like I need to be treated with kid gloves. He’s... he can’t...”

He trailed off, unable to finish the sentence.

“It’s pointless.” Noah stood in the doorway. “Hating Jason won’t bring Dad back.”

Alistair tore himself away and dashed out of the room, shoving Noah aside. He snatched his coat, knocking his scarf to the floor, and yanked on his father’s old boots; though large and worn, they fit well enough. The world outside was an infinite plane of white, but that was better than staying in the house. His mother and brother hollered after him, but he ignored their desperate cries, slamming the door behind him.

He rushed blindly through the forest. He had expected the trees to shield him from the brunt of the wind, but they offered little reprieve from the raging tempest. His shoulder slammed into a trunk and he tumbled sideways, his screams lost in the howling storm. What had he been thinking? He didn’t even grab a flashlight. Navigating the woods was practically impossible without a light to guide him. This had been a bad idea.

He shook the thought away. No, he chided himself, this was necessary. He would prove to his mother how wrong she was. He would make it to town, it was only a mile or so away. He’d hide out there for a few days, maybe in an abandoned shack or shed. Then, when everyone was good and worried, he’d return. He’d have his way yet.

But the little voice in the back of his head – it sounded annoyingly like Noah – disagreed. What would this accomplish? Running away wouldn’t prove that Jason wasn’t worth marrying. It wouldn’t show his mother that she was a terrible person.

But Alistair pressed on, fighting the weather and his doubts.

Three days later, Alistair rifled through the trash, desperate to find anything that was semi-edible. He'd been lucky on the first night, stumbling upon a barn where he managed to hide out. It was relatively warm, sheltered from the weather, and there was a bushel of apples to keep him fed. Unfortunately, the farmer had appeared in the morning and he'd been forced to beat a hasty escape, though not without first snatching a lantern, candle, and lighter; he wouldn't be caught defenseless against the night again.

He sighed and wiped his hands on his soiled jeans. There was nothing to eat in this garbage heap either. He glanced around the alley, but there was no sign of any other trash cans to search. He'd really assumed that the townspeople would have more discarded pizzas to snack on. That had been wishful thinking.

A sudden breeze stirred up the litter in the alley, blowing a newspaper straight into Alistair's face. He sputtered and batted his hands at the paper, knocking it to the ground. He glared at it, ready to rip it apart in what could only be called a petty act of vengeance against an inanimate object. But he stopped when he saw the picture on the front.

It was him. And Noah. He remembered that picture. His lips turned up in a wistful smile. It was from three years before, back when their father had still been alive. Young Noah was already showing the telltale signs of his future intelligence as he read from a Dr. Seuss book, oblivious to the fact he was being photographed. Alistair sat behind him, giving a peace sign to the camera. Or rather, to his father, the man behind it.

However, his nostalgic grin vanished as he read the headline.

*Two Brothers Run Away in Storm; One Missing, One Dead.*

*Fourteen year-old Alistair had gotten into an argument with his mother and then ran away in the storm. Shortly after, seven year-old Noah followed, pursuing him into the forest. The next day, police found the younger boy's body in one of the forest's many ponds. He was pronounced dead at the scene. The older boy is still missing.*

Alistair slumped against the alley wall and slid to the cold ground, wrapping his arms around himself, rocking back and forth, his mouth hanging open. He wanted to cry, needed to cry, but he couldn't. All his tears were frozen.

It was all his fault. His baby brother was dead because of him. It should have been him.

"Noah didn't deserve to die. But you do."

Unbidden memories flashed through Alistair's mind in rapid succession. His mother crying at the kitchen table. His father's casket being lowered into the earth. The front door opening to reveal Jason standing on the porch, fidgeting nervously. Noah's desperate screams for Alistair ringing out in the snowy night.

The deep voice came from nowhere and everywhere at the same time. The shadows of the alley writhed and squirmed, pooling together in a swirling mass. A black figure rose from the vortex as though ascending from Hell itself. It appeared to be nothing more than a silhouette, with two blank white eyes staring out from the blackness of its head. The being wasn't frightening, exactly. Rather, it was unsettling, strangely familiar.

"Do you disagree with me?" the figure said. "Do you think this is right?" Alistair's mouth opened and closed repeatedly, but no sound came out. The dark creature gave a harsh bark of laughter. "Don't worry, child, I understand your shock. I am simply too magnificent for words."

What was this monstrosity? Alistair couldn't keep from trembling. It looked like a demon, a ghost. It could have been Satan himself for all he knew. "Wh-what are you?" Alistair finally asked, his voice shaking. "What do you know about Noah?"

"I am a simple trader, and I know everything." The monster snapped his fingers and a long black scarf materialized from thin air. He wrapped it around his neck, tightening it like a noose. "It sure is chilly today," he said, deadpan. "Where is your scarf, Alistair? You must be freezing."

Alistair blinked, too stunned to listen to the creature's mockery. He could only stare at the enigmatic entity before him, his consciousness overflowing with regret. Guilt, fury, despair, surrender. The emotions all stirred together, rising up as a merged, overwhelming cloud of gloom. That was this being's name, Alistair decided. The Gloom.

"I'll ask you one more time," the Gloom said, serious again. "Do you think this is right? Do you think that Noah's death was just?"

Finally, Alistair found his voice. "No," he said.

"Good. Then perhaps I can cut you a deal." The Gloom snapped his fingers again and a yellow spark ignited in his hand. "What I hold here is your brother's soul."

Alistair lunged at the Gloom, but the monster stretched his arm up, far too high for the boy to reach. "It's not that easy, Alistair," the Gloom said. "I am a trader. I can bring back your brother, but I need something from you first." He pointed his wispy finger at Alistair's chest. "You. One lost soul for another."

A twinge of doubt registered in the back of Alistair's mind, but he ignored it. "Alright," he said. "Take me."

The Gloom shook his head. “Again, it’s not that simple, child. You must find where your brother died. That is where we will make the trade. Only there. These are my rules.”

Alistair frowned. It could take days to find the right pond in the forest. “Isn’t there any other way?”

The Gloom shook his head again. “I will claim your soul no matter what, whether you drown in that pond or freeze in this alley. But I will only bring back your brother if you return to where he died.”

Alistair nodded, then hesitated. “Why do you want my soul?”

“I am a collector of fine souls,” the Gloom said. “Your brother, he is certainly brilliant, a pure, innocent soul if ever there was one. But your soul, the soul of the one willing to give himself up for the sake of his brother? That is the most radiant soul of all.”

\*

The first two ponds Alistair found were undisturbed, certainly not what he was looking for. The fresh snow crunched beneath his boots. An icy wind blew down his bare neck. He should have brought his scarf. Noah would have known better. But it didn’t matter now. Where he was going, he wouldn’t need a scarf.

He shivered. His lantern cut an orange shaft of light over the ground and nearby trees. Shadows flickered in the candlelight, reaching out for Alistair like crooked fingers. On a normal occasion, he would have been disconcerted by the image of the grasping hands, but not tonight. Mere illusions could not so easily dissuade him. There were far more frightening beasts on the prowl.

Alistair felt the ice a second too late. The earth slipped out from under him and he gasped as his hip struck the solid ice. Ignoring the pain in his leg, he snatched up the lantern, eager to see what he literally stumbled upon. The soft light illuminated an ovular depression in the ground, a smooth, sunken surface that stood out in contrast to the terrain around it. Another frozen pond.

He scanned the surrounding area. Nothing marred the pristine snow. If anyone had been here, they left no trace, and humans weren't exactly known to leave nature as they found it. No footprints, no trodden-over sticks, no forgotten items. This wasn't the right place either.

His journey was far from over. He started forward, skirting the bank of the pond, when he caught a glimpse of movement at the corner of his vision.

“What lengths must you go to, Alistair?”

The Gloom's long scarf whipped behind it in the growing wind. “You have walked these woods for hours,” he said, his voice deep and powerful, resonating off the ice. “Yet you are no closer to your goal. The cold deepens. The frost spreads. And you don't even have a scarf.” Alistair touched his hand instinctively to his neck. The Gloom's eyes burned brighter, as though feeding off Alistair's frustration. “Why go on?” He spread his arms, long and thin like the bare branches of the surrounding trees. “Come to me now, Alistair.”

Alistair's glare softened. He stepped forward almost unconsciously, submitting himself to the beckoning arms of the Gloom. Then his foot hit the ice and he snapped back to reality, backpedaling away from the frozen pond. “No,” he said. “Not yet.”

The Gloom cocked his head sideways. “You only prolong the inevitable. You will be mine.”

“I'm well aware of that,” Alistair said, trying but failing to keep his voice from trembling. “But I expect you to hold up your end of our bargain too. And that means my work isn't done.”

“I always keep my word,” the Gloom said, bowing his head. “Of course I will respect our arrangement, should you choose to go through with it. But I question the legitimacy of your quest. Your pain weighs you down. Release those chains and free yourself.”

Alistair turned his back on the pond. “One soul for another,” he said. “I won’t let Noah stay lost forever.”

“Your mission is foolish,” the Gloom said, his words carrying after the boy. “Whenever you have had enough of the pain, come to me. I will relieve you.”

Alistair crashed through the underbrush, desperate to distance himself from the Gloom. He couldn’t stop his search until he’d found what he needed. He wouldn’t disappoint Noah. He had failed his younger brother too many times. Now he finally had the chance to make up for it, and he wasn’t about to pass up the opportunity.

Snow began to fall. The wind howled through the trees, battering Alistair with a rain of dried leaves and broken twigs. He wrapped his coat tightly around his shoulders and trudged on. He had to be close. He’d been wandering the woods since nightfall, and now, what time was it? He had no idea. It had to be at least midnight. Maybe later.

His introspection was interrupted suddenly and painfully by a tree. He fell back, jarring his neck as his head smacked the ground. He could feel the welt on his forehead from the tree and was sure that a matching one would be forming on the back of his head as well. He groaned and lay still, unwilling and unable to move.

He opened his eyes to see the Gloom looming over him. “I’m here, Alistair. I presume you are ready for me? Or would you prefer to just stay here, making snow angels?”

Alistair gritted his teeth against the throbbing in his skull and sat up, brushing the snow from his hair and coat. Now the Gloom was nowhere to be seen, but his mockery kept Alistair moving.

The storm grew more powerful with every passing minute. Snow and sleet pelted him, stinging his exposed skin, drawing unbidden tears from his eyes. The wicked wind screamed in his ears, sharp and biting, so loud that he could barely concentrate, but not loud enough to drown out the distant sound of laughter. The blizzard consumed the forest, enveloping it in the blankness of the void. Shadows materialized from nowhere, trees rising up from nothingness. They were his only remaining handholds as reality slipped away. Alistair stumbled between them, one tree to another, clutching to them like life itself. They directed him through oblivion, grave markers through an otherwise empty landscape. And above it all, the baritone laugh of the Gloom rang out, booming and merciless, rattling the earth itself.

The storm focused all its energy on Alistair. The wind pushed him down, held him down. He fell to his hands and knees, slumping into the snow, the cold emanating through his gloves and pants. The ice bit at his face and neck. He raised his head and squinted into the ivory abyss. He opened his mouth to cry out, but no sound emerged. *Not yet*, he wanted to scream. *Please. I can't die yet.*

All went silent. The wind stopped, leaving not even a whisper of a breeze behind. The white of the blizzard faded away and the forest reemerged from the all-consuming blankness. Alistair remained kneeled for a moment, trying to process the sudden return of the world.

The ledge. The fractured surface of the frozen pond. The torn police tape. The Gloom.

“My patience grows thin, child.”

Alistair ignored the Gloom's grumbling as he surveyed the frozen pond two yards beneath him. He could imagine it all: the ear-splitting crack of the ice, the bone-chilling embrace of the water, the beautiful pain of fading away. He was ready.

He took one final step toward the edge, only for his foot to hit something strange. Something soft, cushiony. Alistair frowned and dropped to his knees. "What are you doing, Alistair?" the Gloom called. "Stop staving off the end! I shall have you no matter what! If you don't hurry, then your brother will be mine as well!" But Alistair paid no attention to the monster. He dug through the snow, brushing it aside until he could find what had been buried underneath. It was a bundle of red cloth, standing out against the snow like a bloodstain. A scarf. Alistair's scarf.

He couldn't help but smile. Of course Noah had brought it. He always had displayed a level of common sense that his older brother lacked.

Alistair's smile faded. He'd never had an ounce of common sense before in his life. Common sense would have stopped him from running out into the blizzard. Maybe some logical thinking was just what he needed now. A sensible look at the matter. That's what Noah would suggest.

He stared at the scarf as he spoke. "You can't bring him back, can you?"

The Gloom cupped his hand to his ear. "You're mumbling, child. Speak up."

"You can't bring him back!" Alistair screamed. The Gloom recoiled at the outburst. "He's dead. That can't be changed," Alistair continued, his voice softening. "Not even by you."

"Of course I can bring him back," the Gloom said, his eyes narrowing to white slits. "I promised you I would do it, and so I shall. You must simply give yourself up first."

“But that won’t work,” Alistair said, locking the Gloom in his icy gaze. “One lost soul doesn’t equal another. One death doesn’t cancel out another. It just ends with two people dead instead of one. Every word you’ve said is a lie.”

The Gloom shrugged. “But your death means the end of your pain. The end of your guilt. You will be blameless.”

Alistair shook his head. “No, I won’t. Getting rid of myself won’t magically fix what happened.” He hesitated and glanced at the scarf once again. “And honestly, I don’t think I’m the only one responsible for this.”

“Of course you’re the only one!” the Gloom roared, the loss of his composure shocking Alistair. “If you hadn’t run away, he wouldn’t have followed you to his death. It is one-hundred percent your fault!”

“Noah was always the smart one,” Alistair admitted. “He was cautious and thought things out, while I just charged ahead blindly.” He took a long, deep breath. “I do have some responsibility, and I will feel guilty about this for as long as I live. But I wasn’t the only one being reckless that night. He was too. Noah died because he was acting like me.”

The Gloom pointed at Alistair, his hand stretching out toward the boy. “How can you be so selfish? Why should you live when your brother could not?”

“If I kill myself, then his death will have been meaningless.” Alistair hugged the scarf to his chest. He thought of his father, and of Jason. “But I can use this,” he said, steel in his voice.

“And will that fix everything?” the Gloom asked.

Alistair paused for a long moment before answering. “No. It fixes nothing.”

Silence.

He blinked. The Gloom stood before him, unmoving. Slowly, the flaming white eyes faded away and the shadows surrounding the monster's body melted into the night, revealing the figure beneath. Alistair froze. His own face stared back at him. Crimson tears streamed down the Gloom's pale cheeks and dripped onto his black scarf. Then, the mirror image shattered like glass and dissipated, leaving Alistair alone in the snow.

Alistair sank to his knees and buried his face in his hands. For several minutes, he remained on the ledge, allowing the tears he'd held in for the last three days to pour out.

The wind returned for a moment, quick and sharp, sending a shiver down his spine. He stood up, wiping the snow from his pants and the tears from his cheeks. His decision not to kill himself wouldn't amount to much if he stayed in the woods and froze to death. He turned his back on the pond and wrapped the scarf around his neck, silently thanking Noah for delivering it.

\*

The sky was lavender when Alistair emerged from the woods. Yellow light poured from the house's windows, illuminating his path up to the front door. A pause, a deep breath. He turned the knob and stepped inside, letting the door bang shut behind him. It was Jason who first appeared in the hallway. Neither spoke. Then Alistair's mother peered around the corner and everyone was moving and screaming and crying, clinging to each other as to life itself.

In the midst of the bundle of arms holding him close, Alistair opened his eyes, and beyond his mother and Jason, he saw one more figure awaiting him. Its black outline seemed to have been cut from the fabric of space itself and scarlet lines streaked its face. But its scarf was gone, and Alistair's once bare neck was now safe and warm. Everything would be different and nothing

would come easily, but he had faced the darkness, he had seen the truth. And Alistair knew he could live with his Gloom.

### Draft 3: Switchback Time

The story shifts back and forth between past and present storylines without giving one inherent focus over the other. They exist as connected but independent entities, with no strict chronological structure as the story zigzags between the time zones.

#### Lost Soul

White snow blanketed the black forest. Moonbeams, full and bright, barely penetrated the canopy of branches to reach the earth below. No natural sound disturbed the emptiness of the night. The wildlife did not stir. All was still.

The fresh snow crunched beneath Alistair's boots. An icy wind blew down his bare neck. Fourteen-years-old and he still forgot to bring his scarf. Noah would have known better. But it didn't matter now. Where he was going, he wouldn't need a scarf.

He shivered. His lantern cut an orange shaft of light over the ground and nearby trees. Shadows flickered in the candlelight, reaching out for Alistair like crooked fingers. On a normal occasion, he would have been disconcerted by the image of the grasping hands, but not tonight. Mere illusions could not so easily dissuade him. There were far more frightening beasts on the prowl.

Alistair felt the ice a second too late. The earth slipped out from under him and he gasped as his hip struck the solid ice. Ignoring the pain in his leg, he snatched up the lantern, eager to see what he literally stumbled upon. The soft light illuminated an oval depression in the ground, a smooth, sunken surface that stood out in contrast to the terrain around it. A frozen pond, exactly

what he'd been looking for. It was the third one he'd discovered, and hopefully, it was the one that he was seeking.

He scanned the surrounding area. Nothing marred the pristine snow. If anyone had been here, they left no trace, and humans weren't exactly known to leave nature as they found it. No footprints, no trodden-over sticks, no forgotten items. This wasn't the right place either.

His journey was far from over. He started forward, skirting the bank of the pond, when he caught a glimpse of movement at the corner of his vision. He didn't need to look to know what it was.

“What lengths must you go to, Alistair?”

Unbidden memories flashed through Alistair's mind in rapid succession. Walking into the kitchen at midnight to find his mother crying at the kitchen table. Shedding tears of his own while his father's casket was lowered into the earth. Watching out the window as his mother kissed an unfamiliar man on the porch. Ignoring his brother's desperate screams ringing out behind him in the snowy night.

The being in the center of the pond appeared to be nothing more than a silhouette, with two blank white eyes staring out from the blackness of its head. Its only other defining characteristic was the long scarf trailing behind it, whipping in the growing wind. The figure wasn't frightening, exactly. Rather, it was unsettling, strangely familiar. Alistair called the creature the Gloom.

“You have walked these woods for hours,” he said, his voice deep and powerful, resonating off the ice. “Yet you are no closer to your goal. The cold deepens. The frost spreads. And you don't even have a scarf.” Alistair touched his hand instinctively to his neck. The Gloom's eyes burned brighter, as though feeding off Alistair's frustration. “Why go on?” He

spread his arms, long and thin like the bare branches of the surrounding trees. “Come to me now, Alistair.”

Alistair’s glare softened. He stepped forward almost unconsciously, submitting himself to the beckoning arms of the Gloom. Then his foot hit the ice and he snapped back to reality, backpedaling away from the frozen pond. “No,” he said. “Not yet.”

The Gloom cocked his head sideways. “You only prolong the inevitable. You will be mine.”

“I’m well aware of that,” Alistair said, trying but failing to keep his voice from trembling. “But I expect you to hold up your end of our bargain too. And that means my work isn’t done.”

“I always keep my word,” the Gloom said, bowing his head. “Of course I will respect our arrangement, should you choose to go through with it. But I question the legitimacy of your quest. Release the chains that bind you and free yourself.”

Alistair turned his back on the pond. “One soul for another,” he said. “I won’t let Noah stay lost forever.”

“Your mission is foolish,” the Gloom said, his words carrying after the boy. “Whenever you have had enough of the pain, come to me. I will relieve you.”

Alistair crashed through the underbrush, desperate to distance himself from the Gloom as his unshed tears fought to escape. He couldn’t stop his search until he’d found what he needed. He wouldn’t disappoint his brother again. Now he finally had the chance to make up for his failings, and he wasn’t about to pass up the opportunity.

\*\*\*

Life used to be simpler.

Alistair slapped down the 7 card and moved his plastic pawn up into the home space, grinning smugly across the board at his brother. “You’re out of luck, Noah. Looks like I might actually win this round.”

“You are doing better,” the younger boy said. He drew a card from the deck and couldn’t contain a small giggle. “Sorry!” he exclaimed, flicking aside one of Alistair’s pawns at the base of his safe zone, replacing it with his own.

“You little twerp,” Alistair said, crossing his arms and pursing his lips in a pout. “I’m getting real sick of losing every game to a seven-year-old. I bet you stack the deck.”

“You just stink at board games,” Noah said. “You rush and make mistakes.” He pointed to the pawn in Alistair’s home space. “A 7 can be split up between more than one piece. So instead of moving the one piece all the way into the home space, you could have moved both up into the safe zone where I couldn’t get them. That would have been much safer.”

Alistair shrugged. “I don’t want to play it safe. Who has time to sit around and think about their move for five minutes?”

“I’m the one who always wins,” Noah said, the corners of his mouth turning up in a cheeky grin.

“The game isn’t over yet,” Alistair said, drawing his next card with a dramatic flourish. “Ha, a 2!” He moved his piece out of the start zone and drew another card. “I’m back in the game, baby.”

“Got room for one more?”

The boys looked up at the newcomer: Jason, their mother's boyfriend. He scratched his stubbly chin absentmindedly as he waited for a reply. Noah smiled warmly up at him. "Just in time, we should be done before long."

Alistair scooted back away from the board, refusing to meet Jason's eyes. "No, I'll leave. Noah has this game in the bag."

"I'd like to spend some time with both of you," Jason said, kneeling down beside Noah. "We never play together, all three of us."

"That's not really my idea of fun," Alistair said, leaning back against the couch and hugging his knees to his chest. "Nothing against you, of course," he added.

Jason nodded, flashing a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "I won't force you. It was just a thought."

Alistair tried to avert his gaze from the game, but he could feel his brother's big puppy dog eyes boring into his skull. Cautiously, he peeked at Noah out of the corner of his eye, and sure enough, there were the eyes, begging for him to submit to their will. For a long moment, he resisted, but he could only hold out for so long against Noah's unspoken pleas. "Fine, I'll play another round."

Noah beamed as he moved all the pawns back to their start zones and Jason shuffled the deck. Alistair allowed himself a small smile; at least his brother was happy. He remained silent while Noah and Jason chattered back and forth, their conversation serving as white noise to his own distant thoughts. His turns were mechanical, drawing a card, aimlessly moving forward whenever he was lucky enough to get a piece out of the start, Noah's chiding falling on deaf ears.

Of all the ways his world had changed in the two years since his father's death, Jason's arrival had been the most unexpected and unappreciated. Alistair grew tired from tolerating the

man, as though his presence in the house wasn't inherently wrong on every level. Sure, Noah liked the guy, but Noah liked everyone. Alistair envied that all-loving nature, that willingness to forgive and forget all unpleasantness. But he couldn't live like that, not with Jason. He drew a card and gave a short humorless laugh as he knocked one of Jason's pieces back to its start zone. "Sorry."

A dark shape dropped over Alistair, interrupting his brief moment of triumph. He yelped in surprise and clawed at his mysterious assailant, Noah and Jason laughing all the while. Finally he tore it away from his face and held it out at arm's length: a bunched up, berry-red scarf.

"Congratulations, Alistair," his mother said, standing over him. "You successfully killed a piece of cloth." She raised an eyebrow in amusement.

"Yeah, heart attacks are hilarious," Alistair sighed.

His mother hesitated a moment before explaining. "Since you've started taking walks in the woods, I thought you might want something like this. I was going to wait until Christmas, but it's already been getting cold, and I'd hate for you to freeze out there."

Alistair tossed the scarf aside and stood up. "I think I've had enough Sorry for now." Jason started to rise, but Alistair's mother simply shook her head. Noah grabbed the scarf and carefully folded it into a neat square.

"I'm going for a walk," Alistair said.

He expected his mother to protest, to at least try to force the scarf on him again, but she made no move to stop him. It was oddly disappointing to slip on his jacket and step out into the chilly November evening without so much as a word spoken to hinder his progress. Half the fun of this was getting his mother worked up and anxious; she was recovering quickly from losing her

husband, too quickly, and the best way to punish her was to burden her with the worry that she might lose her son too.

Alistair shoved his hands in his coat pockets as he crossed the small barren yard to the edge of the forest, stopping for a moment to stare up at the leafless trees looming above. The white face of a barn owl peered down at him inquisitively, as bright as the moon against the mild warm shades of the sunset sky. Alistair glanced over his shoulder, waiting a moment longer for his mother to burst onto the porch, to beg him to come back inside, but she never came. Sighing, Alistair turned his back on the house and stepped into the woods. Overhead, the owl lifted off, giving a piercing shriek as it wheeled around and soared away from the outstretched branches of the dead, lonely trees.

The woods felt like an entirely different world to Alistair. The orange glow of early twilight filtered down through the jagged branches of the empty canopy, bathing the forest floor in a golden haze. Strolling amongst the oaks chased all his troubles away. The first time he'd come out here, he'd been around Noah's age. He'd been hunting for adventure, but instead, he found something that few young kids were truly familiar with: tranquility. Their dad had loved wandering the woods when he needed peace, and in the last few months, Alistair had taken up the habit himself. He didn't give himself any set route or time limit. He simply walked.

After ten minutes, he sat down on the bank of one of the dozens of ponds that speckled the forest. The water was dark beneath the ice-coated top layer. Alistair grabbed a handful of pebbles and skipped them over the surface, one by one, listening to them bounce and tumble across. He took a deep breath, in and out, feeling the pressure inside him ease up gradually with each exhalation. This isolation was what he needed. Out here, his mother and Jason couldn't reach him. He could be truly alone.

“Hey.”

Alistair jumped up at the voice, stumbling forward onto the edge of the pond. With a sharp crack, his foot smashed through the ice, sinking in up to his ankle. His other leg slid out from under him and he fell down, landing in a heap in the frosty dirt. He found himself flat on his back, staring up into the now-pink evening sky and the worried face of his younger brother.

“I’m sorry, oh my gosh, are you okay? Are you hurt? Oh no, I’m sorry!” Noah was beside himself, checking Alistair up and down for any signs of injury.

“I’m okay, really.” Alistair sat up and stretched, popping his neck. “You scared the hell out of me.”

“Mom wanted to make sure you were okay,” Noah said. “And she needed to talk to Jason for a bit.”

Alistair took a deep breath of crisp winter air and stood back up. “Well, aside from one drenched and freezing shoe, I’m alright.” He turned back in the direction of the house. “Come on, let’s head home. I’ve cleared my head enough for tonight.” With Noah on his heels, he started the short trek back. After a few minutes, Noah broke the silence.

“I brought this.”

Alistair looked down at his brother only to see the berry red scarf, clutched to the younger boy’s chest. He put on a rather admirable show of annoyance, rolling his eyes to the heavens and giving several dramatic sighs.

“She really thinks this stupid scarf will make me feel better?”

“She’s just trying to make things right,” Noah said, offering the scarf to Alistair. “Give her a chance.”

Alistair hesitated, giving off the appearance of genuine consideration for one, two, three seconds before firmly pushing the scarf back into Noah's hands. Ahead of them, the house came back into sight through the last line of trees.

"You hang onto it for now," Alistair said, giving Noah's hand a quick squeeze. "And if I ever need it, then you can give it to me. Okay?"

Noah nodded, flashing a small happy grin. "Okay."

\*\*\*

"She said *yes*?" Alistair growled through gritted teeth. Noah shrank away as his brother stomped past, heading down the hallway.

"Leave her alone!" Noah pleaded. "She's happy!"

It had been two months since they walked in the woods. Two months since Alistair had entrusted Noah with his scarf. Two months since Alistair had felt a moment of genuine peace. And now, the day he dreaded had finally arrived.

Alistair found his mother in the kitchen, humming to herself as she searched through the fridge. She turned around as Alistair entered the room. He locked his gaze on her hand, the golden ring that glinted under the lights. "How could you?"

His mother stepped forward. "Look, sweetie." She took a deep breath. "You have to understand –"

"How could you forget him so easily?"

"I haven't forgotten him." Her eyes brimmed with tears. "Of course I haven't forgotten him. But he's gone, and I can't change that."

“Then you never loved him in the first place.”

“I loved him more than life itself!” his mother shouted. “But loving a person doesn’t mean that you die with them.”

Now tears were streaming down Alistair’s face as well. “But with Jason?”

“Jason loves me,” his mother said, her voice softening. “And he loves you boys too.” She put a hand on Alistair’s shoulder. “Give me one reason why you don’t like him.”

“He’s condescending to me, like I need to be treated with kid gloves. He’s... he can’t...” He trailed off, internally cursing at himself to finish the sentence.

“It’s pointless.” Noah stood in the doorway. “Hating Jason won’t bring Dad back.”

Alistair tore himself away and dashed out of the room, shoving Noah aside. He snatched his coat from the rack in the hallway, knocking his scarf to the floor, and yanked on his father’s old boots; though large and worn, they fit well enough. The world outside was an infinite plane of white, but that was better than staying in the house. He threw open the door and ran for the sanctuary of the trees, ignoring the desperate cries of his mother and brother until their voices were swallowed by the gale.

He rushed blindly through the forest. He had expected the trees to shield him from the brunt of the wind, but they offered little reprieve from the raging tempest. His shoulder slammed into a trunk and he tumbled sideways, his screams lost in the howling storm. What had he been thinking? He didn’t even grab a flashlight. Navigating the woods was practically impossible without a light to guide him. This had been a bad idea.

He shook the thought away. No, he chided himself, this was necessary. He would prove to his mother how wrong she was. He would make it to town, it was only a mile or so away.

He'd hide out there for a few days, maybe in an abandoned shack or shed. Then, when everyone was good and worried, he'd return. He'd have his way yet.

But the little voice in the back of his head – it sounded annoyingly like Noah – disagreed. What would this accomplish? Running away wouldn't prove that Jason wasn't worth marrying. It wouldn't show his mother that she was a terrible person.

But Alistair pressed on, fighting the weather and his doubts.

\*\*\*

Alistair rifled through the trash, desperate to find anything that was semi-edible, but the cold gray afternoon held no promise of a satisfying meal. It had been three days since he'd run away. He'd found shelter the first night, managing to find the old barn at the edge of the woods despite the storm. It was relatively warm, sheltered from the weather, and there was a bushel of apples to keep him fed. Unfortunately, the farmer had appeared in the morning and he'd been forced to beat a hasty escape, though not without first snatching a lantern, candle, and lighter; he wouldn't be caught defenseless against the night again.

He sighed and wiped his hands on his soiled jeans. There was nothing to eat in this garbage heap either. He glanced around the alley, but there was no sign of any other trash cans to search. He'd really assumed that the townspeople would have more discarded pizzas to snack on.

A sudden breeze stirred up the litter in the alley and several pages of newspaper fluttered across the pavement. Alistair kneeled down and grabbed a few, trying not to crumple them more than they already were. Maybe he could find a legible copy of the funnies. The first two pages

were sports reports and personal ads, nothing remotely interesting. The last page was just a news article, as disappointingly humorless as the rest. Then a photo caught his attention.

It was Noah. He remembered that picture. His lips turned up in a wistful smile. It was from three years before, back when their father had still been alive. Noah, only four-years-old, was already showing the telltale signs of his future intelligence as he read from a Dr. Seuss book, oblivious to the fact he was being photographed. Alistair sat behind him, giving a peace sign to the camera. Or rather, to his father, the man behind it.

However, his nostalgic grin vanished as he read the headline.

*Two Brothers Run Away in Storm: One Dead, One Missing*

*The body of seven-year-old Noah Johnsson was found on Sunday in a pond located in a wooded area near the boy's home. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Noah's mother, Mary, reported to police that her fourteen-year-old son, Alistair, had run away from their home Saturday evening and Noah pursued him into the woods. Alistair is still missing. He was last seen wearing-*

The newspaper slipped from Alistair's hands before he could finish reading, his fingers too numb to hold on any longer. He slumped against the alley wall and slid to the cold ground, wrapping his arms around himself, rocking back and forth, his mouth hanging open. He wanted to cry, needed to cry, but he couldn't.

It was all his fault. His baby brother was dead because of him. It should have been him.

“Noah didn't deserve to die. But you do.”

The deep voice came from nowhere and everywhere at the same time. The shadows of the alley writhed and squirmed, pooling together in a swirling mass. A black figure rose from the

vortex as though ascending from Hell itself. Alistair could feel its blank white eyes piercing his soul, reading every memory and secret as if they were written on his face.

“Do you disagree with me?” the figure said. “Do you think this is right?” Alistair felt his mouth open and close repeatedly, but no sound came out. The dark creature gave a harsh bark of laughter. “Don’t worry, child, I understand your shock. I am simply too magnificent for words.”

Alistair couldn’t keep from trembling. It looked like a demon, a ghost. It could have been Satan himself for all he knew. “Wh-what are you?” Alistair finally asked, his voice shaking. “What do you know about Noah?”

“I am a simple trader, and I know everything.” The monster snapped his fingers and a long black scarf materialized from thin air. He wrapped it around his neck, tightening it like a noose. “It sure is chilly today,” he said, deadpan. “Where is your scarf, Alistair? You must be freezing.”

Alistair blinked, baffled by the creature’s mockery. He could only stare at the enigmatic entity before him, his consciousness overflowing with regret. Guilt for Noah’s death, fury toward his mother and Jason for pushing him this far, despair from another crushing loss, surrender to the cruel force that so clearly wanted to break him. The emotions all stirred together, rising up as a merged, overwhelming cloud of gloom. That was this being’s name, Alistair decided. The Gloom.

“I’ll ask you one more time,” the Gloom said, serious again. “Do you think this is right? Do you think that Noah’s death was just?”

Finally, Alistair found his voice. “No,” he said.

“Good. Then perhaps I can cut you a deal.” The Gloom snapped his fingers again and a yellow spark ignited in his hand. “What I hold here is your brother’s soul.”

Alistair lunged at the Gloom, but the monster stretched his arm up, far too high for the boy to reach. "It's not that easy, Alistair," the Gloom said. "I am a trader. I can bring back your brother, but I need something from you first." He pointed his wispy finger at Alistair's chest. "You. One lost soul for another."

A twinge of doubt registered in the back of Alistair's mind. The Gloom's offer seemed perfect, perhaps too perfect. But if there was a chance this monster could save Noah, what else could he do but accept the deal? "Alright," he said. "Take me."

The Gloom shook his head. "Again, it's not that simple, child. You must find where your brother died. That is where we will make the trade. Only there. These are my rules."

Alistair frowned. It could take days to find the right pond in the forest. "Isn't there any other way?"

The Gloom shook his head again. "I will claim your soul no matter what, whether you drown in that pond or freeze in this alley. But I will only bring back your brother if you return to where he died. That is where his soul can be reattached to the Earth."

Alistair nodded, then hesitated. "Why do you want my soul?"

"I am a collector of fine souls," the Gloom said. "Your brother, he is certainly brilliant, a pure, innocent soul if ever there was one. But your soul, the soul of the one willing to give himself up for the sake of his brother? That is the most radiant soul of all."

\*\*\*

Snow began to fall as Alistair continued his search for the pond. The wind howled through the trees, battering him with a rain of dried leaves and broken twigs. He wrapped his coat

tightly around his shoulders and trudged on. He had to be close. He'd been wandering the woods since the Gloom gave him his task that afternoon, and now what time was it? He had no idea. It had to be at least midnight. Maybe later.

The storm grew more powerful with every passing minute. Snow and sleet pelted Alistair, stinging his exposed skin, drawing unbidden tears from his eyes. The wicked wind screamed in his ears, sharp and biting, so loud that he could barely concentrate, but not loud enough to drown out the distant sound of laughter. The blizzard consumed the forest, enveloping it in the blankness of the void. Shadows materialized from nowhere, trees rising up from nothingness. They were his only remaining handholds as reality slipped away. Alistair stumbled between them, one tree to another, clutching to them like life itself. They directed him through oblivion, grave markers through an otherwise empty landscape. And above it all, the baritone laugh of the Gloom rang out, booming and merciless, rattling the earth itself.

The wind focused its energy on Alistair, pushing him down, holding him down. He fell to his hands and knees, slumping into the snow, the cold emanating through his gloves and pants. The ice bit at his face and neck. He raised his head and squinted into the ivory abyss. He opened his mouth to cry out, but no sound emerged. *Not yet*, he wanted to scream. *Please. I can't die yet.*

All went silent. The wind stopped, leaving not even a whisper of a breeze behind. The white of the blizzard faded away and the forest reemerged from the all-consuming blankness. Alistair remained kneeled for a moment, trying to process the sudden return of the world.

He was perched on a short ledge. The ground ended just ahead of him, creating a drop of perhaps six, seven feet. And at the base: another frozen pond, illuminated by the moon. The surface wasn't flat as the others had been. This one was uneven with a few jagged pieces sticking

up from the otherwise smooth expanse. It looked as though the ice had been broken, only to refreeze in various poorly-connected chunks.

He rose to his feet and glanced about frantically, searching for further confirmation. A flash of color caught his eye, something long and thin, dangling from a nearby tree. He dashed to the tree and took the yellow object in his hands. It was a torn strip of police tape, somehow still intact after the storm. This was the place.

“So, Alistair, you have arrived.”

The Gloom stood in the center of the pond. Despite the wind’s absence, his ebony scarf billowed out behind him. He extended a bony hand and gestured to Alistair. “Come to me, child. Seal the deal.”

Alistair strode toward the pond once again. The time to appease the beast was at hand. “I’m ready.”

The Gloom raised his hand and a yellow spark winked to life in his palm. It was small, little more than a candle flame, but it gave off a dazzling light that bathed the entire clearing in its glow. However, the shadows of the trees pressed through the light and danced on the snow, writhing around the slender silhouette, hailing him, bowing to him. Alistair stopped a few feet from the edge, scowling at the Gloom. “Release Noah. We had a deal.”

“I will release him, Alistair,” the Gloom said. “But not until you’ve given me what I want. One lost soul for another. That was the agreement.” The white of his eyes shone nearly as bright as the spark in his hand. “Now come to me. The ice awaits.”

\*\*\*

Two years ago, the woods had not been a smothering tomb, but an open land filled to the brim with potential adventures.

Alistair stuck his tongue out in concentration, measuring the distance across the pond in his mind. It was a warm summer afternoon, and filtered sunlight from above reflected on the smooth surface of the water, coloring it with speckles of soft whites and yellows. A fallen tree lay over it, stretching from one bank to the other, perhaps thirty feet across. Alistair could hardly believe how perfectly the log had landed over the pond, but he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth. The woods had provided him a new trial, and it was one he was happy to pass.

As he stepped up onto the end of the log, a little voice spoke up behind him. "Alistair, should you be doing that?" Noah looked up at his older brother, his head barely level with Alistair's knees.

"It's fine," Alistair said. "This tree is sturdy enough to hold me." He glanced around for any sign of his father, who had come out earlier for a walk by himself.

As usual, Noah seemed to read his mind. "Dad said not to do anything crazy while he wasn't around."

Alistair shrugged. "Well he's out here somewhere. And besides, you're here to keep an eye on me, right?"

"You're supposed to be the one looking out for me," Noah said. "And even I know better than to go out on that log."

Alistair turned his back on his brother and took a purposeful step forward, deliberately pushing down with all his weight. The log held firm and he looked over his shoulder back at Noah, smirking. He continued walking forward, slowly at first, gaining confidence with each step. Noah skirted the edge of the pond, keeping pace as he watched his brother with wide,

unblinking eyes. Alistair knew his younger brother meant well, but that kind of cautious attitude would never take him anywhere fun. Taking the long way around any obstacle was boring, and life was too short to waste that precious time.

Alistair was almost directly in the center of the pond when the trunk splintered beneath him with a resounding crack. Then he was in the water, enveloped in its coolness. One half of the log smacked into him and he kicked off sideways to avoid being pinned. The pond was deeper than he'd thought; the light trickling down from the surface seemed a mile away, and his path up was littered with broken chunks of wood and debris. He pushed through it all, suddenly and painfully aware that he'd not managed to take a breath before being dragged under the water. As he breached the surface, gasping in a lungful of air, the first thing he heard was Noah's desperate cries. He tried to call out to him, to say that he was fine, to stop shouting, but all that came out was a series of short coughs. In a few short strokes, he reached the edge of the pond and started to pull himself up, only to find a pair of strong hands grabbing beneath his shoulders, lifting him up onto the bank.

His father kneeled before him, hands firmly gripping Alistair's forearms, asking him question after question that never quite registered in his mind. Beside him, Noah was sobbing, shaking where he stood. "I'm fine, I'm fine," Alistair insisted, trying to speak over them.

After a few seconds, their voices calmed down, Noah's crying reduced to sporadic sniffles. Alistair stared at his feet, waiting until his father finally spoke. "You could have died."

"Yeah, but I didn't," Alistair said, unable to meet the man's eyes.

"You're the big brother here, Alistair," his father said. "Noah can't stop you from doing reckless stuff like this, so you have to control yourself."

Alistair rolled his eyes. "Can we go home now?"

His father sighed. “Yes, let’s go get you into some dry clothes. You’re sure you’re okay?”

Alistair nodded. His father stood up and turned away from the pond, heading back toward the house. Alistair followed behind him, silent, shivering a bit as a cool breeze drifted over his soaked skin. Noah walked beside him, his eyes red from tears that still slid down his cheeks. Maybe Noah wasn’t the most adventurous, but Alistair never wanted to see his little brother so upset again. Crossing that log, even with its end result, had been fun, but the aftermath was anything but. Perhaps he’d save his recklessness for when Noah and his dad weren’t there to watch.

\*\*\*

“My patience grows thin, child.”

Alistair ignored the Gloom’s grumbling as he surveyed the frozen pond two yards beneath him. Maybe this was the same pond that had attempted to take him once before; there would be a certain poetic justice in that. But it was irrelevant now. What mattered was the end itself. He could imagine it all: the ear-splitting crack of the ice, the bone-chilling embrace of the water, the beautiful pain of fading away. He was ready.

He took one final step toward the edge, only for his foot to hit something strange. Something soft, cushiony. Alistair frowned and dropped to his knees. “What are you doing, Alistair?” the Gloom called. “Stop staving off the end! I shall have you no matter what! If you don’t hurry, then your brother will be mine as well!” But Alistair paid no attention to the monster. He dug through the snow, brushing it aside until he could find what had been buried

underneath. It was a bundle of red cloth, standing out against the snow like a bloodstain. A scarf. Alistair's scarf.

He couldn't help but smile. Of course Noah had brought it. He'd said he would, and Noah would never forget that promise. Even if he was about to go blindly searching the bitter cold woods, he'd want his older brother to be as warm and safe as possible on the walk back home.

Alistair's smile faded. He'd never had an ounce of common sense before in his life. Common sense would have stopped him from running out into the blizzard. Maybe some logical thinking was just what he needed now. A sensible look at the matter. That's what Noah would suggest.

He stared at the scarf as he spoke. "You can't bring him back, can you?"

The Gloom cupped his hand to his ear. "You're mumbling, child. Speak up."

"You can't bring him back!" Alistair screamed. The Gloom recoiled at the outburst.

"He's dead. That can't be changed," Alistair continued, his voice softening. "Not even by you."

"Of course I can bring him back," the Gloom said, his eyes narrowing to white slits. "I promised you I would do it, and so I shall. You must simply give yourself up first."

"But that won't work," Alistair said, locking the Gloom in his icy gaze. "One lost soul doesn't equal another. One death doesn't cancel out another. It just ends with two people dead instead of one. Every word you've said is a lie."

The Gloom shrugged. "But your death means the end of your pain. The end of your guilt. You will be blameless."

Alistair shook his head. “No, I won’t. Getting rid of myself won’t magically fix what happened.” He hesitated and glanced at the scarf once again. “And honestly, I don’t think I’m the only one responsible for this.”

“Of course you’re the only one!” the Gloom roared, the loss of his composure shocking Alistair. “If you hadn’t run away, he wouldn’t have followed you to his death. It is undeniably your fault!”

“Noah was always the smart one,” Alistair admitted. “He was cautious and thought things out, while I just charged ahead blindly.” He took a long, deep breath. “I do have some responsibility, and I will feel guilty about this for as long as I live. But I wasn’t the only one being reckless that night. He was too. Noah died because he was acting like me.”

The Gloom pointed at Alistair, his hand stretching out toward the boy. “How can you be so selfish? Why should you live when your brother could not?”

“If I kill myself, then his death will have been meaningless.” Alistair hugged the scarf to his chest. “But I can use this,” he said, steel in his voice.

“And will that fix everything?” the Gloom asked.

Alistair paused for a long moment before answering. “No. It fixes nothing.”

Silence.

He blinked. The Gloom stood before him, unmoving. Slowly, the flaming white eyes faded away and the shadows surrounding the monster’s body melted into the night, revealing the figure beneath. Alistair froze. His own face stared back at him. Crimson tears streamed down the Gloom’s pale cheeks and dripped onto his black scarf.

When the Gloom spoke, his words were soft, lacking his usual intensity. “The sadness. The guilt. Don’t you want it to end?”

Alistair gave a weak smile. “I do. But I still love my mom, and my dad, and Noah. And I don’t want that to end.”

Slowly, the Gloom nodded, silent for the first time. The mirror image flickered and shrank before Alistair’s eyes, its scarf ripping free of its neck and disappearing into the trees. Even as its shape faded away, Alistair could still feel its presence, lurking at the edges of his consciousness. It was impossible to completely destroy such a powerful force. But Alistair had faced it, and it would never rule him again. Even if it followed him his whole life, he knew he could live with his Gloom.

He sank to his knees and buried his face in his hands. For several minutes, he remained on the ledge, allowing the tears he’d held in for the last three days to pour out.

The sky above grew lighter, painted lavender by the nearing dawn. The wind returned for a moment, quick and sharp, sending a shiver down Alistair’s spine. He stood up, wiping the snow from his pants and the tears from his cheeks. His decision not to kill himself wouldn’t amount to much if he stayed in the woods and froze to death. He had to return to his mother. And Jason.

He turned his back on the pond and wrapped the scarf around his neck, silently thanking Noah for delivering it.

### Structure in Revision

No story is ever finished after the first draft, and the road leading to a finished state is often littered with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Some writers scale them with ease, and others are stopped dead for extended periods of time. Each writer tackles the process of revision differently, picking and choosing what methods serve them best. I have put my short story, “Lost Soul,” through three specific types of revision over the course of its lifetime: working with an editor, taking part in a workshop, and self-revising. Not all of these methods have had an equal effect on my writing, nor have they necessarily led to positive changes in every case, but they have all brought about change in some form or another. Each has had a unique influence on my own reflective work.

When thinking of the revisions of a professional writer, collaboration with an editor comes immediately to mind. Editors around the world are hired by authors or assigned to authors by publishers, to help prepare a creative piece for publication. To many authors, they are an invaluable asset and friend. However, as Alice LaPlante cautions in her craft book *The Making of a Story*, there is an inherent danger in relying too heavily on an editor (548). In some cases, an editor may stray from their role of offering advice and critiques and become more tyrannical. The author may deal with unpleasant consequences if complete creative control of a piece is seized by an editor. Raymond Carver faced just such a situation with the publication of one short story collection. Originally entitled *Beginners*, the entire collection underwent a startling transformation after passing through the hands of the editor, Gordon Lish. Even the title was changed, to the now-famous *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. In his article “The Carver Chronicles” in *The New York Times*, D.T. Max notes that “Lish thought of himself as Carver’s ventriloquist.” Against Carver’s wishes, Lish sent the collection on, and it was

published under his title and included his changes. Carver himself had no input on many of the revisions.

One particular story, previously titled “A Small Good Thing,” was renamed “The Bath” and reduced to a third of its original length. The story is about a couple waiting for their child to awake from a coma, including a good deal of introspection from both parents. But Lish removed this self-examination altogether, turning “The Bath” into a more objective, less personal tale. Significantly, Lish erases much of the natural sentimentality Carver injected into his work, both in this story and in the collection as a whole, resulting in a deadpan tone and a more cynical outlook. At the beginning of the story, Carver describes the mother’s meeting with a baker in vivid detail:

The baker was not jolly. There were no pleasantries between them, just the minimum exchange of words, the necessary information. He made her feel uncomfortable, and she didn’t like that. While he was bent over the counter with the pencil in his hand, she studied his coarse features and wondered if he’d ever done anything else with his life besides be a baker. She was a mother and thirty-three years old, and it seemed to her that everyone, especially someone at the baker’s age – a man old enough to be her father – must have children who’d have gone through this special time of cakes and birthday parties. There must be that between them, she thought. But he was abrupt with her, not rude, just abrupt. She gave up trying to make friends with him. (*Beginners* 56)

In this quotation, Carver delves into the mother’s own thoughts about the baker, providing the readers with numerous specific details concerning the characters and their interaction. After Lish’s edits, however, much of this was cut, leaving only a trace of Carver’s words on the page:

“This was all the baker was willing to say. No pleasantries, just this small exchange, the barest information, nothing that was not necessary” (*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* 48). Lish’s style is reflected in the baker, having removed every spare word of his interaction with the parents. This stands true for the story as a whole, with its entire skeleton of structure being stripped to bare bones via revision. By the time Lish was satisfied, it had been shortened dramatically. In Carver’s initial draft of “A Small Good Thing,” the mother spends a great deal of time agonizing over her son’s condition, antagonized all the while by the anonymous calls of the unknowingly insensitive baker, until her son’s ultimate death and her final confrontation of – and closure with – the baker himself. After Lish’s edits, the twenty-six page story was reduced to only nine, with the ending coming abruptly after the mother goes home for a bath and receives a mysterious call asking about her child; in the original draft, the caller is confirmed to be the confused baker, but in the final publication, the caller is left unidentified. Virtually all of the emotion present in Carver’s writing is drained away by Lish, presenting the newly christened “The Bath” as an entirely different construction of tone and plot.

The published collection was a tremendous success, with many critics citing improvements over Carver’s past works, yet Carver was still deeply hurt by Lish’s actions. Lish showed no remorse, believing that he “knew what was best for Carver – even if Carver didn’t see it that way” (Max). Given the critical reception of *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, it is certainly difficult to fault Lish. It can be argued that what Carver wanted for the collection seems not to have been necessarily what was *right* for the collection. An editor’s job is to point out the perceived flaws in an author’s work, and Lish did exactly that. The issue arose from the difference in views between Lish and Carver, both in Lish’s decision to proceed with revisions without Carver’s consent and in Carver’s response to alterations made to what he

considered a competent work. The fallout of the author-editor conflict had a profound impact on Carver's professional career, leaving him shaken and untrusting, and both parties came out of the experience with completely different views of how they had failed each other and their work. As the Lish-Carver relationship demonstrates, the editor's role in shaping a story can have far-reaching effects, well beyond what anyone might anticipate.

A more varied approach to revision can be found in the workshop method. Rather than relying on a single editor, an author can share their work with a larger group. A wider range of readers allows for a wider range of suggestions. Whereas a single editor offers a limited viewpoint, multiple people might present differing opinions of what works and what doesn't. LaPlante succinctly sums up the method's potential: "The results of a workshop can be magical, or brutal, or extraordinarily helpful, or ludicrously unhelpful, or all of the above" (545).

The success of a workshop rests entirely in the hands of its members, and in a university setting, these are often inexperienced student writers, tremendously underequipped for the task at hand. Furthermore, if an author feels like a lone editor is too pushy in trying to enforce their ideas, then a workshop group may not provide complete relief from that. If their opinions are united, then the author must face pressure from an even greater number of reviewers. Depending on how the workshop group is formed, the author may find they are dealing with people outside their intended target audience. Particularly in university classes or publicly open workshops, it is common for authors to find themselves receiving feedback from people who are unfamiliar with the genre or thematic content of their work. Even in an ideal group, helpful commentary is not guaranteed. Readers may say that a section of text should be "cut out" because they see no relevance for it, and they may ask for "more" regarding certain aspects or characters because they want to see something that isn't yet on the page. But in both cases, the reader may be premature

in their requests. A passage may be unimportant at the present time, yet continued revision may eventually create the proper space for it. Similarly, providing “more” of a character or place may result in overexposing an element of the story that was better left in a minimalized role. LaPlante ascribes this to the desire to assign one’s own preferences to another writer’s works, stating that “People – often with the best intentions – want to remake a story or nonfiction piece in their own image” (548).

The workshop method also places heavy emphasis on critiquing, often to a greater extent than complimenting: “The fiction workshop is designed to be a fault-finding mechanism; its purpose is to diagnose and prescribe” (LaPlante 546). Thus, the results of a workshop can be largely critical, as its members feel that they must point out flaws, even if they have to stretch their imagination to find something to comment on. Madison Smartt Bell describes his experience teaching MFA workshops at the University of Iowa in similar terms: “At Iowa, the students were very diligent about annotating each manuscript and writing an overarching commentary at the end – each student producing a separate version of the instructor’s work” (6). He explains how the students, assaulted with such overwhelming criticism, face their revisions with resignation to the changes requested of them. No matter how contradictory the comments may be, the writers attempt to incorporate them all, feeling obliged to for having participated in the workshop in the first place. Saddened, Bell states that “The results of this kind of revision were often very disheartening. I’d get second drafts that very likely had less obvious flaws than the first, but also a whole lot less interest. These revisions tended to live up to commonly heard, contemptuous descriptions of workshop work being well-tooled, inoffensive, unexceptional, and rather dull” (7). The drive to become “better” is omnipresent in the process of revision, yet the actions taken to make a story better from a technical viewpoint may simultaneously rip away the

story's heart, the little details or perceived "flaws" that make it unique or innovative. The author risks losing traces of their own style in the name of a more homogenous approach to writing. Overall, though workshops certainly can serve as a good grounding point for an author looking for general feedback, the process can saddle the author with a whole slew of new issues to bog down their progress.

Ultimately, the author sets the limits of who they are comfortable working with, and it is their decision to heed any advice given by their readers. No one knows better what is most feasible for a story, what makes the most sense, what conveys the intended tone. A writer must simply listen to their gut and follow their instincts. Jason Brown sums it up in *Naming the World*: "It can help, of course, to show your work to smart readers and listen to what they think, but in the end, only you can revise your own work. The only solution is to become your ideal reader" (Johnston 310). Though idealistic, Brown's statement is not definitive of the self-revision method. Most writers practice self-revision – writing, contemplating, rewriting – possibly repeating the process several times. While self-revision is a powerful, essential tool, most creative pieces do not transform from ideas to published works by self-revision alone. This technique tends to be paired with one, or both, of the other revision methods.

That which feels right to an author will not always be properly understood by their intended audience. Even a writer's preferred word choices can result in a disconnect with the reader. If an author lacks the proper facts to write knowledgeably about a subject, then turning to outside reviewers can bring more insight to the topic and allow the author to correct any misinformation in their work. An author's gut feeling may tell them that a certain creative decision is correct, but if the audience is of a vastly different opinion, then it can be difficult to justify the author's decision to stand by their own intuition.

This is especially true in relation to edits made or requested by an editor, as with the conflict of Carver and Lish. My mentor, Kali VanBaale, was also faced with this issue with her most recent novel, *The Good Divide*, which she discussed at length in our personal correspondence. Her book took nearly two decades to come to fruition, during which it underwent extreme revisions that completely reshaped it. When VanBaale began working with a new editor several years into the life of the manuscript, she was leery of their biggest suggestion: to chronologically restructure the story. Though she had received similar recommendations from her previous editor, she had always adamantly stood by her structure, which included an extended flashback section set in the middle of an otherwise straightforward chronological story. Despite her long-held misgivings, she agreed to test the new structure for her story, with each chapter alternating back and forth between present and past, and was surprisingly satisfied with the results. There is no objective answer to whether one version of a story is superior to another, though some cases are much more ambiguous than others; regardless of an author's personal feelings about their writing, the suggestions of an editor cannot be lightly tossed aside. And when potential or contracted publishers enforce their own strong opinions on the work, the author may not have the luxury of staying true to their own ideals. It is not always a pleasant truth, but it is true nonetheless. When all is said and done, an author has the final say in what happens to their work. But if the ultimate goal is to be published, relying solely on self-revision may not be feasible or even possible.

In my experience with revising "Lost Soul," all three of these approaches played a role in bringing me to my current position. The combination of editor, workshops, and self-revision provided a balance and made up for the weaknesses of any individual method. I could pick and choose from the numerous options given, taking into account the suggestions of my personal

editors, the varying opinions of the larger workshop group, and the little voice in my head that told me what felt right and wrong. Not every writer has access to a devoted editor or to a reliable workshop group, so I am well aware of the brilliant opportunity I have been given.

The most prominent changes, both authorial edits and outside suggestions, all revolved around one central aspect of my short story: its narrative structure. The question of its temporal layout was an issue of discussion throughout the entire process of revision. The initial narrative was almost entirely supported by flashbacks which provided its backstory, raising the question of what chronological structure could most properly tell the story. Drafts shifted from one chronological order to another and back again, gaining new elements with each set of revisions while the structure itself remained a constant point of debate.

Of all the methods, workshopping had the least visible effect on “Lost Soul.” After no less than four different workshops, I had a wide selection of review letters to consider, ranging from minor line edits to bigger story-wide suggestions. Compliments were handed out gratuitously, as were criticisms, many at odds with each other, readers divided on particular issues. Many readers of “Lost Soul” wanted to know where and when the story was set, requesting that a location and time period be specified. Others preferred that both be left ambiguous, giving a more timeless element to the story. Some were confused by the mysterious character of the Gloom and wanted to know more about his existence or lack thereof, while still more maintained that his uncertain presence added to the sense of wonder in the story. The vast differences in opinion gave me extra room to work with the suggestions, choosing what synced most with my own ideas. Of course, this isn’t necessarily a good thing; using the discourse surrounding my structure as justification to impose my own opinion is a rather flimsy excuse.

Stretching the limits of contradictory comments to accommodate authorial stubbornness is yet another potential hazard of the process.

Despite the numerous conflicting opinions, the central issue of the story was still discernible. The readers' confusion regarding characters and setting largely stemmed from the story's structure, which left a good deal of information ambiguous at best, regardless of my own perceptions. This issue was apparent as early as the first workshop session to evaluate "Lost Soul" and only became more obvious over time. However, these structural problems were not directly included within my peers' comments; no part of this process was that easy. I was required to dig beneath the surface issues to recognize the uniting factor of the various confused comments from the workshop members, the subject which divided their insights. The solution lay not just in gauging what the readers understood, but in seeing what they did not understand.

More drastic changes came about through my work with my thesis advisor. I took the story apart, trying to see how it worked in alternative structures. Since the structure was at the heart of the issues with "Lost Soul," dismantling and reconstructing it in a new form proved to be an effective means of testing the waters. The entire story underwent a massive overhaul, completely reshaping its progression. Originally, the story was set in various temporal chunks, with the main story in the present interspersed with flashbacks to provide context to the actions and statements of the protagonist, Alistair. In its new state, the piece was set almost entirely chronologically, starting with a brief scene set in the present before going back and allowing Alistair's story to run its course from beginning to end. However, this change did not come to me easily. My writerly intuition fought tooth and nail against it, and was ultimately more than a bit unnerved by the newer product. Additional and extended scenes instilled greater importance in some motifs, namely the role of Alistair's scarf, but the heart of the story seemed somehow

hollower than before. I feared these structural changes would alter the readers' experience, shifting their focus away from my desired effect. The original structure framed "Lost Soul" as a tale of guilt, with regrets popping up from the past like bubbles rising to the surface of a pond; when I rearranged the flashbacks, the new straightforward chronological structure felt weaker, foregrounding Alistair's physical journey instead of his emotional and spiritual turmoil.

This experience of uncomfortable change is hardly unique to myself. As mentioned before, VanBaale underwent a similar trial with *The Good Divide*. In VanBaale's case, she faced a different kind of revision than I had; whereas I was removing flashbacks and putting the story into its exact order, she was taking a story set in large chronological pieces and instead dividing it into parallel present and past timelines. In the end, she felt comfortable with her changes, but reaching such a conclusion about my work proved a greater struggle. Though initially in hesitant agreement with my advisor about the structural rearrangement of "Lost Soul," my other venues of revision brought the decision into greater question. When sharing my newly reordered story with my thesis workshop class, my peers argued that the back-and-forth chronological style of the first version led to a more suspenseful adventure, and that the story lost some of its strongest qualities in the shift to a single straightforward timeline. Their perceptions of what the story was meant to be mixed with my own ideas of how I envisioned it; the views of writer and reader differed, yet still intermingled in the march onward to the finished product. I personally viewed "Lost Soul" as a story about guilt above all else, but I certainly wanted to keep the suspenseful elements that my classmates had appreciated so much. My goal was to compromise the underlying theme with the elements of craft, bringing them together in a way that complemented the characters and plot without losing the spark that gives them life, uniting both my advisor's suggestions and the workshops' conversation. The cracks in the story's structure caused the differing methods of

revision to collide violently, acting in direct opposition to one another and further complicating my conflicted internal debate on what path to take with “Lost Soul.”

Thus, the final decision came down to my own self-revisions; in a situation without any higher power placing demands upon the intricacies of my work, I was afforded the luxury of following my own instincts. Thus, I took the closest thing I had to a middle road. The story returned to a back-and-forth structure of time, but taking cues from both my advisor and from Joan Silber’s *The Art of Time in Fiction*, I laid out “Lost Soul” through the lens of switchback time. In this arrangement, the scenes set in the past run alongside the present scenes without simply functioning as flashbacks, prompted by Alistair to fill in the gaps in readers’ knowledge of the story. The concept of switchback time allows for scenes from different time settings to be utilized “in an order that doesn’t give dominance to a particular time” (Silber 45). Bringing the concept to my own writing allowed me to reconcile some of the larger conflicts that arose in the discussion of the structure of “Lost Soul.” In this format, I found that I had come much closer to my ideal vision of the story’s thematic resonance. Without the framing device of Alistair’s personal retrospection, the arrangement of the story felt more organic; rather than being consciously recalled as flashbacks, Alistair’s past regrets serve as unbidden interruptions in the midst of his present journey. The past and present are allowed to come together, rather than standing as two separately defined entities.

In the end, the three methods of revision I implemented with “Lost Soul” accomplished more in conjunction with each other than they possibly could have alone. My relationship with my editor, my advisor, was balanced, heeding his advice in most regards while sticking to my strongest personal convictions, albeit not without working through the suggestions given to me first. My workshop experience, while less influential in regard to taking the advice of my

classmates, was nevertheless an integral part of my story's reformation, bringing to light its central structural issues. Finally, my self-revisions were prominently informed by the conversations with my editor and workshop peers; they were rooted in satisfying my own desires alongside the expressed wishes of my readers. As "Lost Soul" now stands, it is a representation of how these different and often conflicting methods of revision intermingle, complementing one another even as they contradict each other. There is still a great deal more that could be done to improve it, of course, as will always be the case. But there comes a time when every story must be left to stand on its own. For at least a while, "Lost Soul" can remain untouched, allowing the product of all my revisions to strengthen its foundation, to hold it up or let it fall. Regardless of its fate, the process of revision has defined the story as strongly as the initial act of writing it.

### Annotated Bibliography

Bell, Madison Smartt. *Narrative Design: A Writer's Guide to Structure*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997. Print.

Bell recounts his own experience in teaching workshops at the University of Iowa. Beyond being connected to me on a personal level, this also highlights the numerous inherent flaws of the workshop method, which are made all the more glaring by Bell's assorted memories. This is certainly an important viewpoint to allow for a more well-rounded look at the workshop method and how it can potentially be detrimental to those who take part and blindly accept whatever advice is given to them on the grounds that their audience always knows what is best.

Carver, Raymond. *Beginners*. New York: Vintage Books, 2009. Print.

This book seems almost specifically designed to assist in the making of this thesis. In 1981, Carver's short story collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* was published, but not before passing through the hands of his editor, Gordon Lish. More than fifty percent of the manuscript was cut in the ensuing edits before being sent on to the publisher. Even the title was a result of Lish's edits. However, over two decades later, the initial draft was fully recovered and published under its original title. This allows the unique opportunity to compare an author's previous draft to the final published edition, not just with one story, but with an entire collection. Additionally, some of the stories in the collection are already revised versions of Carver's older stories which appeared in various other magazines and periodicals. The collection as a whole serves as an example of how stories develop through revision, whether it be by the author's own volition or by the hands of an editor.

Carver, Raymond. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. 1981. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.

Continuing on from the previous entry, this short story collection features the final drafts of Carver's manuscripts after being edited by Gordon Lish. Being able to compare this version to Carver's own drafts allows for a direct look at how stories develop as outside insights and opinions enter the writer's editing process; in this case, for example, we can see an editor taking control once the manuscript is out of the author's hands. The visible changes between these works are an important area of focus in my critical essay.

Chiang, Ted. *Stories of Your Life and Others*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002. Print.

This collection includes the short story "Story of Your Life," which serves as an example of a work with a very fluid chronological structure. It helps to illustrate the concept of switchback time, in which no specific time is given absolute prominence and the order of events is not necessarily chronological, even within flashbacks. It also acted as a model while I was considering revisions for the current final draft of my short story.

Conroy, Frank. *Dogs Bark, but the Caravan Rolls On*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. Print.

One chapter of this book focuses on the various aspects of the writing workshop, providing a detailed assessment from an instructor's point-of-view on what particular elements do and do not play into a successful workshop, giving emphasis to the basic elements of writing craft and how they serve as the foundation for metaphor, simile, and deeper concepts. Conroy also puts the subject into context of the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa, giving specific reference to the community experience and what it entails.

Grimes, Tom, editor. *The Workshop: Seven Decades of the Iowa Writers' Workshop*. New York: Hyperion, 1999. Print.

This massive book offers a lot of different and unique perspectives to include in my critical essay. The main point from it that I focused on was its history of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, which shines some light on the origins of the workshop method itself. By looking at the beginnings of this method of revision, and its role within the university setting, I am able to further emphasize its effectiveness and shortcomings.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. 1926. New York: Scribner, 2016. Print.

This book is a special opportunity for my project. The novel, while notable for plenty of other reasons, doesn't seem like it alone would offer much to a thesis about revision, but this recently-released edition is particularly useful. It is supplemented with Hemingway's early drafts and deleted chapters, allowing for a direct look at the arduous writing process that he went through in creating his first novel. Hemingway himself said that revising this book was the most difficult job of his life, and the extended reading here provides a rare first-hand glimpse at the development of a classic work. Unfortunately, this work was unable to find a place in my critical essay, but it offered me some new insights on the general topic of literary revision that inspired the essay as a whole.

Johnston, Bret Anthony, editor. *Naming the World: And Other Exercises for the Creative Writer*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007. Print.

Various writers compile their own chapters and exercises within the section, each taking a different approach to revision and highlighting separate aspects. Don Lee discusses the relative ease of revising "crappy first drafts" and Rene Steinke emphasizes the importance of "empty space" and the benefits of outright dropping sentences, paragraphs, and entire

chapters from a story. Other sections focus on recognizing what doesn't belong in a draft, preventing first-person narration from becoming tedious, developing conflict in otherwise boring stories, and using words that have strange and specific appeal to readers. The writers cover many different elements of revision that can all play a hand in developing both my own stories and reflecting on them in my critical essay.

King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. New York: Scribner, 2000. Print.

No other craft book – if this can be labeled as such – is such a genuine delight to read, time and time again. King's down-to-earth and colloquial writing isn't just fun, it is smart and easy to grasp. His description of his process of revision is laced with his personal touch, which is entirely fitting; as he explains, revision is an entirely personal process, and the advice he gives isn't necessarily what's right for everyone. Yet it is still good, original advice, shining a unique light on revision. He encourages writers to take a break after finishing the first draft, to let the story sit for a few weeks before returning to it, seeing what still works and what doesn't. Much of his commentary seems far removed from that which I normally find in craft books, from his suggestions about trusting close friends as a test reading group to his concept of writing specifically for one "Ideal Reader." Overall, few other craft books have left me feeling so positive about the process of revision; despite his snarky comments, or perhaps because of them, his writing comes across as overwhelmingly uplifting and encouraging, and I come away from the book feeling truly excited about the often-intimidating task of revision.

LaPlante, Alice. *The Making of a Story: A Norton Guide to Creative Writing*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. Print.

Over seventy pages are dedicated to revision and all that the process entails, in a chapter encouragingly titled “Learning to Fail Better.” The expansive chapter addresses many of the exact topics I had hoped to cover in my critical essay. Rather than simply giving readers ideas and suggestions about how to undergo their own revisionary process, LaPlante gives a critical evaluation of several of the common strategies of revision, such as the workshop method, even cautioning readers about relying too much on other people while revising. It’s the first time I’ve seen anyone point out the downside of these interaction-based aspects of revision, and that feels like an important part of my research. Beyond this, the chapter offers advice on avoiding perfectionism in first drafts, details the various stages of revision, describes the potential benefits of placing constraints on one’s writing, and provides a wide variety of frameworks for practice exercises. On top of all that, it features some direct examples of short stories that back up its themes, including one of the short stories featured in Carver’s aforementioned collections.

Max, D.T. “The Carver Chronicles.” *The New York Times*, 9 Aug. 1998. Web. 1 Sep. 2016.

This article serves as a good supplement to the collections of Carver listed above. Though it is not particularly focused on revision as a process, it does shine a light on the potential shortcomings of allowing another person to play too active a role in story editing. The tremendous changes Lish made when editing Carver’s stories are highlighted, though the overall tone of the article remains neutral. The improvements made by Lish are emphasized, though the more questionable edits are also brought to attention. Both Lish and Carver are seen as working in a morally gray area, and the resulting controversy

cautions those who would leave too much of their work to be altered by the fiddling fingers of an editor.

Munro, Alice. *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*. Vintage International, 2001. Print.

I included this collection because it features the short story “Comfort,” which utilizes the kind of flashback structure I was looking for. Specifically, it is structured in the format of switchback time, and is therefore particularly equipped to inform my discussion of that concept in my essay, as well as serving as a model for the revisions of my own story.

Olsen, Eric and Glenn Schaeffer. *We Wanted to be Writers: Life, Love, and Literature at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop*. Skyhorse Publishing, 2011. Print.

Similar to the previously mentioned work *The Workshop*, this book offers a look at the history of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. An assortment of graduates and teachers all give their own insights into the experiences they had with the workshop. This naturally includes some discussion of the actual workshop method, allowing another deeper look into a more professional view of the revision process.

Silber, Joan. *The Art of Time in Fiction: As Long As It Takes*. Graywolf Press, 2009. Print.

This book served primarily as an asset in actually revising my short story. As the title suggests, the main focus is on how time works in fiction, how it can be used and manipulated by authors to meet their ends. In particular, there is a chapter on what is called “switchback time,” the repeated shifting back and forth between different times with no particular regard to chronology, which was vital to my work. My short story, “Lost Soul,” is told through multiple flashbacks that intersperse the ongoing narrative, bouncing from present to past, but I had been considering changing the story to be

completely chronological. This chapter helped me to reorganize my story into its new straightforward form, and continued to be helpful when I ultimately decided to return the story to its former structure, albeit still heavily revised.

Sims, Elizabeth. "Get Messy With Your First Draft." *Writer's Digest*, 10 Feb. 2009. Web. 1 Sep. 2016.

The main point of this article revolves around the "looser" side of revision. Instead of seeing writing as a clinical process, full of sequential steps, it emphasizes writing as a nonlinear progression. Physical looseness and relaxation is viewed with as much importance as mental flexibility. The idea that story writing must be done chronologically is also dispelled. A book doesn't have to be written from beginning to end, but can be done in pieces, jumping around from place to place. Furthermore, the belief that a first draft should be finished before revising begins is somewhat reexamined; though still maintaining that a writer shouldn't get so caught up in revision that they allow it to overtake them early on, Sims also admits that it is perfectly normal to keep up minor revisions throughout the first draft. This slackening of what are often considered to be the hard rules of revision seems especially interesting to contemplate in my essay.

VanBaale, Kali. *The Good Divide*. MG Press, 2016. Print.

VanBaale has been my mentor and occasional editor for nearly a decade, and I'm once again indebted to her infinite willingness to help. Her second novel was finally published last year, following nearly two decades of writing, rewriting, rewriting the rewrites, and so on. She agreed to talk to me about her long process of revision, which included virtually rewriting the whole book on at least one occasion, and was gracious enough to share her

past drafts with me, giving me yet another direct look into the changes and alterations that take place throughout the many phases of revision.