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The development of a romance film script. Heartstrings

End of Degree Project

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Abstract

This project shows the creative process followed to develop the story *Heartstrings*, an original script of the romance genre about finding love and never losing hope.

Keywords: creative process, research, script, romance, hope

Resumen

Este proyecto muestra el proceso creativo que se ha seguido a la hora de desarrollar la historia *Heartstrings*, un guion original del género de romance sobre encontrar el amor y nunca perder la esperanza

Palabras clave: Proceso creativo, investigación, guion, romance, esperanza

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1. Introduction

The topic for this project is the creation of a tragic love story between two girls. This topic was chosen with the intention of showing the creative process behind a story depicting how a relationship can change a person in a positive manner, even when there are problems inside of the relationship. The story was created before the project, so by the time I started with the project, the story itself had already gone through a few changes. Because of this, the goals and objectives for this project do not align with the goals for the full development of the story.

The story by itself started being a story about obsession and about how far humans are willing to go in order to be with the person they love. It was a story about how easily love can turn into obsession. However, the objectives for the story changed, it stopped being a story about obsession and became a story about hope and change. Later, this project would be born.

When I decided to use this story as the base for this project, I had to stop and rethink my objectives, now taking in mind that it was going to be more than just a story. First, I wanted to create a story that focused on the characters. I wanted the characters to be able to carry the weight of the story, instead of being along for the ride, moving from one plot point to another, only reacting to the world and never acting on it. Second, I wanted to create a story of emotions. That was the main point I wanted for the story. I wanted to show feelings and how they affect the characters everyday life. Finally, I wanted to show the different aspects of a relationship. Every relationship is different, every dynamic changes depending on the person and the situation. However, mainstream media display a limited variety of this relationships, although this has started expanding increasingly in recent years, there is much more to explore. I wanted to create a story with a relationship with a different dynamic to what we are used to seeing.

In order to be able to create this story, first I had to know what the popular media in the romance category is that people consider good. Had to see what those stories are all about in order to choose if I wanted to follow any of their steps or if I wanted to completely avoid them. For this, I analyzed the relationship depicted in some of the most well-known media, looking into what they had in common, what kind of tropes they showed in the story, how healthy is the relationship, what standards are they setting.

When making the analysis, I did not go deep into every single media, as that would have taken me a lot of time. Instead, I took notes as the story progressed on how the relationship evolved, what kind of dynamics did they partake in, what tropes did the

writers follow in order to create these stories. With these notes, I looked into which parts overlapped the most between stories and made my conclusions based on that.

The methodology for this project can be divided in two distinctive phases. One is the research phase. This phase consists of one, the research I have already mentioned, looking into relationships represented by the mainstream media, and two, researching the creative process of other authors in order to look for the best way to develop the characters. The second phase is the creative process, this is the actual writing of the story, creating the characters, thinking about the different scenes and dialogues, and by the end of it, making revisions to the story.

2. A look into romance stories

Romance is one of the basic storylines in all kinds of stories. We start to see them already in Greece, as Balló and Pérez say in *La semilla inmortal* “In Greece, the god Eros—Cupid among the Romans— plots amorous intrigues, shakes reason, exalts ardor. The result of the invisible action of that mischievous god is the circulation of the love, which the theater learned to express polyphonically through the comedy.” (1995, pg. 176). These romantic comedies become the base of the genre, which would influence many works over the years. Later in time, we get numerous fables, which use different topics to give children lessons, this includes those with relationships in mind. One of the most well-known fairy tales with a romantic plot would be *Cinderella*, a story in which the main character finds riches and a happy ending through love. Another fable with a similar reach as *Cinderella* is *the Beauty and the Beast*, a story about a young woman who falls in love with a monster, who by the end turns out to be a prince. However, *Beauty and the Beast* is not the first time we see a woman falling in love with a beast, in Greece mythology we can already see this, Balló and Pérez mention it

“And that the fabulous stories in which an animal savage kidnaps a beautiful maiden who marries him unknown to Europeans. We know that in the mythical origin of the continent is the abduction of a young woman, Europa, surprised by a bull white while she plays with her friends on the beach in Tyre. The presence of monster makes all the girls flee, except Europa, who, fascinated by the beauty of the beast, she approaches him and mounts him on top of her. The bull starts then a swift voyage across the sea, which brings the maiden to a new land where the kidnapper - who is none other than Zeus metamorphosed—shows himself in all his divine splendor, and marries the enamored maiden. We are Europeans, from this point of view, thanks to the union between a beautiful virgin and a beast that only seemed so.” (1995, pg. 129)

Sometimes, romance is the focus of the story, and other times it is a natural progression in the relationship between two characters as other parts of the story move forward. We see romance in most media, with *Marvel*, in movies, series or comics, we see the main characters fall in love and enter a relationship. Their story is that of being superheroes, but they are still humans, and they fall in love. A few years back, in the phenomenon that was *Game of Thrones*, a story full of mysteries, fantasy and war, we also had many depictions of different relationships. We find romantic relationships even in stories more grounded to reality, comedies like *Big Bang Theory* or *Two Men and a half*. Crime stories like *Bones*, *Criminal Minds*, or *Élite*.

However, how many of these stories depict actually healthy relationships? In a research paper made by Bjarne Holmes where he explains which messages media portrays about romantic relationships in relation to the belief of a destined one, he mentions research made by various people in relation to these beliefs

“Extensive research on dysfunctional relationship beliefs (e.g., Baucom, et al., 1996; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981) has demonstrated a number of powerful misconceived attitudes about romantic relationships with particular relevance to beliefs in relationship destiny: the expectation that if partners are “truly” meant for each other 1) they should have a complete understanding of each other’s needs and desires with little or no effort (so called “mind-reading”) and 2) sex in a relationship should be “perfect” and without effort. Both of these beliefs have been linked to decreased relationship satisfaction (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Baucom et al., 1996; Bradbury & Fincham, 1987; Kurdek, 1992), increased relationship distress (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981), and destructive problem-solving responses in relationships (Metts & Cupach, 1990). In general, women and men endorse these types of relationship beliefs to the same degree (see, e.g., Fitzpatrick & Sollie, 1999).” (2007, pg. 5)

This belief of having a destined one is not new as Mary-Lou mentions in her analysis of the myths in love stories, Plato had already written about it in the *division of the human species into two sexes and their longing for (re)union* a story in the original three sexes had four legs, four arm, one head with two faces and two genital, Zeus split these being into two who would seek sexual union with beings of the same sex. This can also be related to the story of Adam and Eve, in which Eve is born from Adam

And is not that the thing? Having a romance in a story, may that story whatever it is, does not automatically make the couple have a healthy relationship. For example, in the series *Big Bang Theory* there are many couples by the end of the series. However, lets focus on the relationships surrounding one of the female protagonists, Penny.

Penny has many relationships over the course of the series. However, none of them are healthy. She goes out with men who are jealous and controlling, who only appreciate her beauty and do not care about what she has to say. Even her relationship with the male protagonists is toxic. From the beginning Leonard and Howard are obsessed with Penny, being flirty, pushy, and somewhat creepy towards her, especially Howard. By The end, she ends up marrying Leonard. However, the power imbalance and the age gap, which is technically not that bad until once you take into account their backstories and their social standing, make the relationship unhealthy. Mainly when you think that, if for some reason they had a bad breakup, Penny would end up with nothing. She is dependent on him. We can find an in-depth analysis on Penny's relationships on a video analysis by Cheyenne Lin in which she talks about Penny's relationships not only with men but also with women.

Penny is not the only example for toxic relationships on popular media. The most known example for this situation is *Twilight*. Movies and films that were popular with all age groups. People talked about it and praised both the movies and the books. The romance depicted in this story show how toxic a relationship can become when love turns into obsession. Edward stalks Bella, watching her sleep at night, yet keeps giving her mixed messages, pushing her away only to later go after her like a puppy. Bella obsesses after Edward, after being told that he is dangerous and could kill her, she becomes more infatuated. She forgets about anything and anyone else, focusing only on Edward. Jacob is supposed to be the second love interest. However, he is only there for short moments of tension that do not lead anywhere and to make Edward jealous. *Twilight* is supposed to be a romance story. It is supposed to show how love can deal with anything, even being a monster, we can even consider that the film is telling the story of *The Beauty and the Beast* in a way. However, the only thing it shows is the romanticization of stalkers and obsession. It paints pink what should have been a red flag from the very beginning.

The triumph of *Twilight*, book, and movies spawned many more stories that used similar tropes and cliches. One example of this would be *Fifty Shades of Gray*, which is known to have been a fanfiction of *Twilight*. Once again, we see the romanticization of stalking. However, this time it goes even darker, adding the controlling nature of their relationship, in which Cristian controls pretty much all of Anastasia's life once they enter the relationship; a huge power imbalance, as Cristian is a rich powerful man; and sexual abuse. Because yes, as much as the author tried to make the audience believe that she was being true to a kinky lifestyle, what she was depicting was abuse. This abuse can be seen from both Cristian and Anastasia in this case. As Kat Blaque (2020) explains on her analysis of *Fifty Shades* from a perspective of an actual BDSMer

“It really did frame BDSM as abusive. It just did. You know, like you’re supposed to watch that scene and feel like Cristian Grey is this terrible, terrible person. But Cristian Grey told Ana exactly who he was from day one. And I think that both of these situations these two people were just not really wanting to believe what the other person said they wanted. She said she wanted love and romance, he said that he wanted kinky sex, neither of them wanted to give it to each other”

The dynamics that explore various kinks like dominant and submissive are meant to show absolute trust with your partner and that you can be vulnerable with your partner in all kinds of ways without them abusing your trust, safe words exist for a reason, and the use of this safe words should never be shamed or ignore. Safe words keep kinky play safe and consensual. The moment a safe word is used and ignored; it is abuse. This is also related to their whole dynamic, they are supposed to be in a 24/7 dominant and submissive dynamic, and they are showed discussing this at the very beginning. However, Anastasia is way too inexperienced to enter such a dynamic, especially if you consider that they do not discuss this any further, they do not change anything as they discover what works and what does not. In a Ted Talk by Candace Liger (2021), she explains the importance of consent, not only in kinky play, but also in everyday life. “Consent does not begin at sex and nor should it end there, it’s deeper than sex. The definition of consent is giving ourselves and maybe possibly another person or team permission to experience together, and while we can identify red flags, sometimes consent is kind of scary. Especially if you aren’t a fortune teller and can predict whether a particular experience will be exhilarating or absolutely devastating” She later continues with “The problem with consent isn’t just establishing consent it’s recognizing that yes isn’t the end of the conversation” In *Fifty Shades*, after that first discussion Anastasia is not allowed to say no, and Cristian is the one to make all the decisions, and when Anastasia tries to make her own decisions, it usually ends with Cristian getting angry at her.

Just like *Twilight*, this is a story that was popular with all age groups, and it showed young girls that having a man forcing you to do what he wants for pleasure is sexy and desirable. That the man following you to a family vacation when he was not invited is romantic. It is also a misrepresentation of what a kinky dynamic is like and could cause young people, who after seeing these movies want to do the same, to be seriously hurt or enter abusive relationships, thinking that it is normal.

These are not the only examples of toxic relationships, and it is easier to find this kind of relationships in mainstream media that it is to find healthy ones. Looking for more nuance media and outside of Hollywood films makes it a bit easier. But mainly, knowing which tropes to avoid is the easiest way.

Up until now, I have only talk of media with heterosexual couples. What about queer media? Queer media is a mixed bag of toxic relationships and healthy ones. However, it tends to be more grounded to reality and depict toxic relationships as problematic instead of romanticizing them, there is still its fair share of romanticization. An example of this is *La vida de Adele*, the movie depicts a relatively healthy relationship, but it is problematic in the fact that the protagonist in a minor when she meets and starts going out with the love interest. Another example is in *The reunion*, this is an example of a healthy relationship shown in a book, as both characters are better together than they were alone.

There is one topic that is used in queer media that I find problematic but is usually romanticized. That is minors exploring their sexuality with adults. The reason this problematic is simple. Adults should never be romantically or sexually involved with a minor. It does not matter what their gender or sexuality is or even if their age gap is only of a few years. Their maturity level is not the same. Children, teenager, and young adults mature at different rates, their experiences are different and their way of seeing and understanding the world is different. An adult flirting with a minor is grooming, even if that minor is seventeen. There are many ways to explore your sexuality, you can question if you prefer men, women, or both without having a relationship between an adult and a minor.

Queer representation in media is still lacking, although slowly rising in number. Nowadays, we can see shows with queer representation in mainstream media. Sadly, not many are allowed to make this representation explicit, having to opt for giving hints instead. However, we are starting to see some representation even in children's media, in series like the *Owl House*, depicting healthy relationships with healthy dynamics.

When thinking of romance in media, there is one topic that immediately comes to mind. The relationship between a healthy relationship and sex. Many of these stories, those directed to teens and up, depict the main couple having sex, be it implicit or explicit, as a culmination of the relationship. The sex is what marks a couple as compatible. It is what mark a couple as a couple. It mixes the concept of love with sex as if they were one and the same, as if one couldn't exist without the other. And it teaches young people that sex is one of the most important parts of the relationship. It pressures young people into wanting sex, makes them feel as if not wanting sex means that you are broken, or that there is something wrong with you. Sex is one thing and love is another. Sometimes they come hand in hand and others they do not. You can desire someone physically and not love them. Just as much, you can love someone romantically and not desire them physically. This does not mean that your love is any

less than those who desire and love at the same time. Love is love no matter what. In *Sex, love, and romance in the mass media*, through the whole book, Galician explains the different myths that the media portray and how it has affected society, for example from page 135 until the end of the point Galician talks about how for relationships to work in media, they need to have a sort of mind-reading ability and how this has set expectations on both young and old people.

Another topic that comes to mind is the number of stories created with a love triangle in mind. People like those type of stories in which not only one handsome man loves the main character, but two, sometimes more. The audience loves the idea of two people fighting for the main character's love. Yet instead of fighting, there could be another solution. Polyamory. Because humans are fickle things, but they are able to love more than one person at time. Polyamorous relationships can be healthy if all the members or the relationship are on the same page and able to compromise and consent. You do not have to lose someone you love because you have fallen in love with another.

However, polyamory is demonized. People spread misconceptions about it, of them being promiscuous or cheaters, this is easily seen in social media, where people in polyamorous relationships share their experience and the comments are full of people talking about how they just want to be able to cheat without saying it is cheating. For example, a TikTok account by the name of polyamfam is using his account to teach people about polyamory in a humorous tone, and in his comments, you can always find people who comment that he is cheating on his partner. However, that is far of the truth, a polyamorous relationship, a healthy one, is built upon trust. It is about being open and vulnerable with our partners. If authors used this approach, they could still partake in that fantasy of multiple people desiring the main character without the constant jealousy, most of the times unwarranted, and without the constant insecurity in the relationship.

In Bustle's YouTube channel, there is a video of an interview of a polyamorous couple called *A polyamorous couple's guide to sleeping with multiple partners [INSIGHTS]*. There, they show how a polyamorous relationship works, the need for conversations, being open about everything. The couple talks about different topics, like jealousy or dating when you are in a polyamorous relationship. They serve as an example that polyamorous relationships can work and be healthy.

In general, most of the romance focused stories would end much faster if the protagonists would sit down and talk about their feelings. Instead of being plagued by insecurities. Having an honest conversation and showing vulnerability would solve

many go their troubles. With the plus of showing young people a healthy dynamic in a relationship.

Earlier in the point I mentioned that knowing the tropes to avoid will help with finding healthier relationships in media. Story tropes exist in all kinds of media, from the chosen hero in fantasy stories, to the cheerleader in teen drama. Romance is no different. Although I said tropes to avoid, this is a generalization and by no means I am saying that media that follows these tropes is bad. This is just some of the tropes usually found in romance stories with toxic relationships.

The main trope I would avoid would be the bad boy loves sweet innocent girl trope. This is the trope that media like *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* follow- This trope usually depicts a man with a mysterious backstory that falls in love with a sweet and naïve (often childlike) woman who does not know much about life. This kind of trope tends to tell a story of the man tempting the woman and showing her a life of carnal desire, or in stories with a more paranormal outlook like *Twilight*, making the character follow a darker path. It is the man who usually holds the power in the relationship, being the one with experience, and the one who guides the female protagonist. This tend to get abusive pretty quick, with the man being in complete control of everything relating to the woman's decisions, including intercourse. In these stories, the audience is shown many instances in which the relationship is abusive, including in some cases sexual abuse. However, the authors try to excuse the actions of the character by giving them a tragic backstory.

Some of the examples I have already talked about that fit into this category are *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades*. Following this trend, we have another book that started as a fanfiction and was later published and turned into a film, the *After* series. In which the female protagonist is a woman depicted as innocent and as a prude, who has her sexual awakening with the male protagonist, getting hurt constantly by the male protagonist, but always going back to him. In *After*, the female protagonist is in a relationship with another man, younger than her at the beginning of the first film. However, this relationship is quickly broken out when the female protagonist finds someone she is sexually attracted to, leaving a healthy relationship in favor of passion and sex. And more recently, we have the movie *365 DNI* (also a book and a film), a story about a man kidnapping a woman and threatening her with hurting those she loves if she tries to leave or tell anyone of the situation. In exchange, he gives her 365 days to fall in love with him, if she does not, he says that he would let her go. This man also promises her that he would not touch her without her consent. However, not too long after this promise, he sexually abuses of her, having intercourse when she explicitly says no. Also forcing intercourse on her while she is having a panic attack.

Those are just some of the examples of the toxic behavior on this film. It would be okay if the film acknowledged the fact that this is problematic, that it is behavior to be avoided in a relationship. Instead, it is shown as romantic, as something to be desired and looked for. This film became so popular when it came out that the author has received an offer for a second movie about that same couple, which has already been released.

Another trope to be avoided is that of the cold male protagonist that turns sweet and caring around the female protagonist. The stories that follow this trope are usually stories about manipulation and gaslighting being sold as something cute. These stories may look sweet at first. Many people fantasize about this kind of thing. Being so special to someone that they do a complete 180 change around you. However, that mentality is not healthy. Many relationships that start like that, end up being toxic, because they are not changing, they are putting a front that can crumble at any point- Excusing the actions of the cold protagonist because the author makes his change his behavior around the love interest is problematic.

In conclusion, there are many stories about romance, the relationship being the focus of the story or not. However, we need to be conscious that many of these relationships are not actually healthy and that we should strive to change that. We should show to the young people that are learning about love that there is more to a relationship than jealousy, pain, and sex. That a relationship is about vulnerability, about talking with your partner when something bothers you. And that sex is not the ultimate problem solver in a relationship, any doubts, jealousy, anger, will still be there even if the couple has a good sex life.

3. Story development

3.1. The start

Everything starts with a short story, barely four pages long. This story did not have a title and it was created primarily for a class assignment. The assignment was straight forward, choose a prompt from a list, look for a reference for that prompt and create a story based on both the prompt and the story you chose. My choices were “a pact with the devil” and the book “*the picture of Dorian grey*”.

How is a romance story born from this? It starts by thinking what kind of things a human becomes obsessed with. Material things are an obvious choice, money, a car, a house, an object, a photo. However, even though it seemed like an obvious choice, I could not think of a story, so I moved on. Other things people become obsessed with

are defined by their perception of life, beauty, fitness, the “perfect life”. And even though I really liked the idea of making a story with similar parameters to Dorian Grey, with focusing on the problems of obsessing over beauty, I still could not think of an idea I liked, so once again I moved on. I started thinking about other things people become obsessed with and I came up with emotions, sensations, adrenaline, chasing that high of just pure joy, blissfulness, pain, love.

3.2.The development of the story

The moment love appeared in my mind I thought “Ah, that’s it, this is the one”. I created two simple characters, there was not much to them, a name, and a brief idea of what the characters where like. A few lines for both, barely more than what you would hear from a classmate the first day of class. Here is where Sarah and Lilian, the protagonists of this story, were born.

The first choice I made in order to create these characters was making them opposites. Lilian was this angelic delicate being, while Sarah was rougher around the edges. They were meant to create a contrast, but not in a way that would completely repel both characters.

Once I had an idea for the characters, I wrote an outline for the story. This was both the easiest and the most difficult part of the creation of the story. No dialogs, no big, complicated descriptions made the words flow with ease. However, it was the moment for choices. How did I want to start, how did I want to end? It was all decided at that moment. The only part I decided to leave vague was the middle. I let the characters, bare bone as they were, decide how the story would lead to the end I wanted.

In the end, the story would go as follows:

“The story starts with an introduction of who Sarah is, a character with what would be considered a “normal” life. Then she meets Lilian by complete chance, becoming immediately infatuated with the other woman, but knowing that the chance of meeting again was low. However, she was pleasantly surprised when she is able to meet this woman on her place of work. After an embarrassing conversation, she manages to get the woman’s name and phone number. Once at home, she doubts herself, not knowing if she should text Lilian or not. This gives us the first signs of obsession ass Sarah thinks if she might have fallen in love with Lilian.

They get to know each other and start hanging out together. That is until one of Sarah’s friends makes an unfortunate comment making both realize their feelings.

They react in two diverse ways. While Sarah likes the idea of being a couple, Lilian panics and disappears from Sarah's life.

After some time, Lilian asks to meet Sarah. Sarah believes this is her opportunity to fix things with Lilian, to go back to how they were. However, Lilian wants to break things of. Sarah insists on wanting to stay with Lilian and due to the pressure, Lilian confesses that she is dying. At that moment, Lilian expects Sarah to leave, to abandon her. However, Sarah breaks all of her expectative. Sarah embraces her love, never wanting to be separated from her and unknowingly makes a pact with the devil in order to stay by Lilian's side."

In the story, the ending is left ambiguous. It is left to the imagination what happens to the couple after Sarah proclaims to being willing to give up her soul for Lilian. It is meant to be ambiguous, this way it does not force this magic phenomenon that was not mentioned at any point of the story. It gives the ability to the reader to imagine a more realistic ending withing the bounds in which the story was created.

With this being a short story. I went over every plot point but did not stop to explain any of them in detail. The story was told as if someone explained a memory from the past, skipping over days and only talking about the parts of conversations that really stuck to their memory years later. All of those missing details would come up in the future as I started to work on the story more.

3.3.From a short story to a script

This might have been an unnamed story, but I was proud of the results and thus I wanted to do more with the story. I wanted to explore what the story could be. I was not thinking of changing anything, I loved the story as I was and wanted to expand it without changing the core of the story.

The idea was to keep the story as it was, keeping all the plot points I had gone over in the short story, but this time actually explaining how they got to each point. I also wanted to change the ending. Despite the ending I had working on the short story, I was looking for more details and thus I needed a more explicit ending. The idea was to show that at that moment something supernatural was happening, mostly through visual descriptions of what happened, but also through some dialogue, and as an epilogue to the story, show the consequences of the pact, with Sarah being the one to suffer the worsening of the symptoms while Lilian got healthier. However, the most important part for me was to work on the romance. All the missing details I had skipped on the short story, I wanted them here. Their relationship was the most important part, and it needed the time to develop properly within the story.

Adapting a short story into a script was not easy. I had to turn a 4-page story into an hour and a half film. The story, the characters, were not meant for a long and slow development. Once I started to think how the romance between the two might have developed, I knew that what little development I had given my characters would not hold for a script.

I started to develop the character further, giving them a background, highlighting their main personality traits, and thinking about their physical descriptions. Sarah was energetic and so her physical description had to match this energy. Someone tall and athletic looking, with messy bouncy hair, dressed in vibrant and eye-catching clothing, which was how I imagined Sarah. For her background, I described it as “normal” with not much depth into it. Lilian’s description was mentioned in the short story, delicate and fragile looking, dressed in muted colors. A stark contrast to Sarah at first glance. Lilian’s background was conditioned by this illness that would become the main plot point of the story, having trouble making friends and going to classes because of it.

In terms of personalities, they were also created to be opposites. Sarah was outgoing and bouncy, always chatting with people and unable to stand still for too long. On the other side, Lilian was shy and quiet, afraid to get attached to people. This differences on their personalities would come up on the story and the character would need to adapt to the other in order to make the relationship work.

Having the new details for the characters, I started developing the story. How did they start to they to know each other, what kind of things would they do together, what kind of relationship did they have before they realized their feelings for each other, what were they thinking and feeling as everything happened? I had to add scenes of the characters getting to know each other, exploring their relationship in different ways even when they did not know the extent of their feelings. However, even when I thought I had all the details I needed, I still had to stop to think about other things, especially in terms of the locations. At first, I did not think of any place in particular, just describing things vaguely. A place that could be anywhere. However, this made the process of thinking where the characters would go to hang out or chat difficult as I had to stop to think about a place that would not feel out of place with the rest of the descriptions. I would continue with this way of creating places until I started with the next draft.

There were many things I could do, I could have made an over-the-top romance story, with many paranormal or fantastical occurrences, but I was still limiting myself to the story I had written originally. I still wanted to end the story with the pact to the devil that was the inspiration for the original story, and I wanted to make that pact to be the

only fantastical element in the story, I wanted it to feel like something special, something that no one would usually see. I still wanted to depict a story about obsession, about wanting a perfect love and doing everything to achieve it, even hurting yourself or others.

I did not allow the story to change organically. When writing, I was filling in the blanks of what I had already written, just adding to the in-betweens of the plot points. When I finished writing I was dissatisfied. The story was essentially the same, but I felt like something was missing, I just did not know what.

3.4.A necessary change. From pacts with devils to unconditional love

I might not have liked the story in general, but there were many aspects of it that I still loved and more than anything, I had grown attached to the characters. I wanted to give them the story they deserved.

I read through the story, choosing which scenes I liked. An accidental first meeting and that first spark of attraction. A panic as they realize their feeling. The choice of love even when knowing that it would bring pain in the future.

Having these scenes picked, I started the same process I used when creating the original story. I went back to the basics. What story did I want to tell? What theme did I want to work with? I still wanted to tell a love story, that much I knew, but what was **their** love story? Obviously not a happy one, not fully. There would be problems on their relationship, they are meant to be opposites so they would need to work through a lot of issues. However, the main point of conflict could not be just that, it could not come only from conflicting personalities.

The issue was easily solved when thinking about the illness from one of the main characters. From the start, one of them was meant to die and in the first version this was solved by supernatural elements, so if I were to follow the characters just like I had written, one of them was going to die and the other would have to live with it.

The illness would become the fuse that would set up most of the conflicts. It would be why they would not be together from the beginning, causing Lilian to hesitate once she realized the depth of her feelings. It would cause arguments and problems, both characters frustrated by not being able to do what they wanted, although each for their own reason, with Sarah frustrated by not being able to do what she is used to with her friends and Lilian frustrated by the limits her body imposes on her. And by the end it would be what would separate the characters. However, I did not think that ending in a character death was a proper way to finish the story. One of them would still be alive, their live would go on.

As I was thinking of the ending it dawned on me. Up until now I had been writing a story of hope. At the beginning with the hope of meeting each other again, wishing to get to know each other, hoping for their relationship to work. I could not just end the story with the grief of death. I had to find a hope. The death of a loved one marks your life and moving on does not mean forgetting. So, I decided to show Sarah moving on, continuing her life, finding a new partner, but never forgetting the past. Not only that, but I wanted to show that even after Lilian's passing, Sarah still kept all she had learnt from her relationship with Lilian. While the Sarah from the beginning was energetic and excitable, the Sarah from the future is meant to be a much calmer and mature person and with hope for the future.

And like that it changed from a story of obsession and pacts with devils to a story of change and hope.

3.5. Adding the final pieces

The story was finished, now the last thing to do was to add the final details and correct any mistakes I could find. The base story did not change anymore from these corrections. Mostly, I added details related to the descriptions of places and situations and gave names and distinctive looks to the secondary characters. Other details that were added were giving a better description on the date the two characters go and adding to the conversations between characters. I also changed some of the interactions that depicted the contrast between the character, since even though I wanted to make this contrast easily seen, I had gone over-board with it, making it too on the nose. Even if the characters are opposites, they still needed to have some common grounds, something that served as a line that tied both characters together, this came with showing the characters having similar interests, for example, going back to the date, the characters go to a concert, which is from a band both characters know and love. It is something they have in common.

In terms of corrections, I changed the wording on some of the dialogues, as I did not think that the message I was trying to transmit was properly translated to words. This is mostly related to the advice Lilian's mother gives her, as the conversation on the previous draft could have made someone think that she was telling Lilian to stop talking to Sarah, while I was trying to say that Lilian should not let bad experiences influence her future, but that you can love someone in more ways than one, there are more options than being partners and if she does not feel ready to be Sarah's partner, she can still love her.

Other corrections would be at the moment they realize their feeling when hanging out with Sarah's friends. Mostly, the changes were made as to properly show the

closeness between the two so that the secondary characters reaching that conclusion was logical.

The part that received the most changes would be the third act. On the previous draft, the third act was focused on the arguments caused by Lilian's illness. However, although there were going to be arguments, that was not all there is to the third act. There had to be something that kept them together, something that helped them through the pain, the sunrays that peek through the clouds in a tempest. I gave them good memories of sitting on a park under the shade of a tree, enjoying the good weather. Of going out hand in hand, walking without having to worry about anything. Of watching the stars, letting the silence speak for them.

4. Characters

4.1. Introduction

There are many ways to create a character, and each writer follows their own steps to do so. However, in order to properly explain the creation of my characters for this story, I have decided to use the steps explained on Linda Seger's book *Creating unforgettable characters*.

The following points are based on the points in the book and related to the creation of my characters.

4.2. Researching the characters

When creating a character, you need to know about the different parts that make up their life in order to make the character believable. For example, if your character works as a private investigator, you will need to research about how a private investigator does their work. And that is the first step, research. Research can come from observing people (how they act, how they talk), to fully investigating a specific topic.

Due to the way the story was created, I did not start my research until I had finished the first script draft. The characters were underdeveloped, and it made the creation of that first draft difficult. However, thanks to that, I also knew which parts I would need to investigate deeper and which I could pull out of my own experience and that of those around me.

4.2.1. Context

"Characters don't exist in a vacuum. They are a product of their environment" (Seger, 1990, pg. 6.). As a student that has barely travelled outside their country and who has

only theoretical knowledge on what work life is like, there are not many places from where I can pull knowledge from, the internet and social media being the primary source of information I have available. Because of this, I decided to use my own context as a baseline for the characters.

But what exactly is the context of the characters? Seger explains using Syd Field's words "He compares context to an empty coffee cup. The cope is the context. It's the space surrounding the character, which is then filled with the specifics of the story and characters" (1990, pg. 7). Their environments, their families, the people they have met, the experiences they have had, everything has shaped them into being who they are at the beginning of the story.

For Sarah, her experiences taught her that studying was not her forte and that she enjoyed serving people coffee in the coffee shop, it taught her that although she did not think that she could reach an academic success, she had people around her who would stay by her side no matter what her choicer are. For Lilian, her failing body has made most of her choices for her, making it hard to remain positive when people in her life kept disappearing. However, she was still here, still standing, and would make the most out of her life, whatever she had left of it.

Basically, we have two sides of a similar environment, and how much of a difference, small things make to one's way to see the world. Sarah's world is stagnant. She is content with the way things are and does not wish to change anything. Lilian's world is also stagnant, but not by choice, she wishes she could do more, be more, but physically she cannot. They are two sides of the same coin.

Once they meet, this difference in their environment will clash as, even though they have similar tastes, they will start to see new possibilities, they will change.

4.2.2. Cultural influences

All characters have an ethnic, social, religious, and educational background, and as Seger says "All of these cultural aspects will have a wide-ranging influence upon the makeup of the characters, determining the way they think and talk, their values, concerns and emotional life" (1990, pg. 7). In this case, both main characters are born and raised in Spain, specifically in a Valencian town. This defines the way they talk and express themselves. Living in a town means everyone knows at least a member of your family, or even half of your lineage, because of this, people expect you to follow the steps of your family, expect you to behave and be similar to your family members. In places like school, they expect you to be just like any other family member who has gone to that school, or even better.

There's also religion to take into account. Born into catholic families in a town where most of its inhabitants are also catholic did not give them much choice growing up. However, now as adults their views of religion have changes. For Sarah, she does not believe that there is a higher power controlling everything, she prefers to believe in people. Meanwhile, Lilian is more bitter, because for her, if there was a god, which would mean that it has forgotten her, left her to suffer. She prefers to believe that there is no way a god exist. Its less hurtful.

4.2.3. Location

As I have already said before, at the beginning of creating the story I did not really think of a place in real life I could relate the story with. I had a few ideas of how I wanted to describe the places the characters visited, but for the descriptions I used image references online of places I do not even know. However, after the troubles with describing the places and reading Seger's book, I stopped to think about where I wanted the story to actually take place. Seger mentions in her book that using a location you are familiar with helps with the amount of research needed, since you reduce the research to only specific research. This helped in making the decision to which place should the story be in.

There are not many places I know, not enough to feel comfortable writing about them, so I chose my hometown as a base for describing the story. A town in the Valencian community, which has enough citizens to be called a city but had the atmosphere of a small town. It is also a place where young people can get away with many things, like underage drinking, since normally no one asks for documentation to buy alcohol if you look old enough. As I have said in the previous point, in a town it is very easy to know about what someone does with their live as rumors spread like wildfire, but because of this, it is also easy to find someone willing to do a favor for you because they know a member of your family.

This influences both characters, for Sarah, it gives her an easy access to parties and to participate in risky behavior. It also gives her a way to hide what she does at night from her parents, as others in similar situations to her would not want their activities to be known either. For Lilian, it is isolating. Even if people missed the rumors about her condition, they would have heard of rumors of someone who used to be her friend and stopped hanging out with her, and without a context, the rumor would grow out of control, with wild theories about why.

Another thing to take into account in in terms of Lilian's condition. My hometown does not have a hospital, you need to go to a city nearby to get treated at the hospital. This affects Lilian's character in a few ways. One is when she is a child, having to spend a

whole evening in order to get a visit in the hospital (traveling to the hospital, waiting her turn and then the journey back), but it also gave her the opportunity to meet new people, people who were not aware of all the rumors circulating in her town. People who were separated enough to her experiences in her town for her to be more or less comfortable speaking with them.

A town is also a place of routines. People tend to always visit the same places. They have breakfast or coffee always in the same coffee shop. They spend time together with people in the same places. They go on walks at the same hour. This means that at work, Sarah has a lot of regulars, people who know her by name and notice when there is a change. It is also a place with a lot of older people, with closed mindsets and a tendency to complain about the young people.

In summary, having a set location for where the characters live made it easier to give life to the world around the main characters.

4.3. Defining the character

4.3.1. Observation

When developing a character, in order to make it believable to an audience, you need to add small nuances to show their personality. A good way to get to know what details would show in different types of personalities and experiences is to observe those around you, look into the actions they take and what that tells you about them. Seger uses as an example to how observation is useful Carl Sautter and Joe Sedelmaier, and how the two of them observe the people around them to create their stories. With Sautter, she explains how observing someone unusual in a restaurant helped him illustrate to a class how observation and imagination work together. With Sedelmaier, she explains how he chooses the actors he deems more interesting and creates ads around their nuances. It is with these two examples that we see the importance of observing the world around us, the details, in order to write interesting and deep characters.

Due to how this story was created, I did not start thinking about these details until the story was almost finished, and because of this, the characters felt flat in many moments. I had to go through the story and stopping to think about my characters and how they would act in certain moments and looking in my memory for people I have met or seen who would act similarly, and what they did on those moments.

For example, the way Sarah interacts with her friends is loosely based on the way I have seen my brothers interact with their group of friends. It shows a group of people who have known each other for a long time and that the people in the group are so

comfortable with each other that they can joke around any topics without worrying about offending any other member of the group.

Other details can be found in the way each waits for the texts. Sarah's actions as she waits for that first answer is based on a friend of mine who would always do her best to distract herself from constantly checking her phone. It not only shows her eagerness for having the conversation, but also her insecurity about her relationships with the people she talked with, her self-doubt. Lilian's actions are based on multiple people in my life who calmly answer their texts and continue their tasks but keep the phone close so to not take too much time in between answers.

There are other details that do not come from people in my circle, but instead come from social media. Thanks to social media and how recently people have been using it to show people the truth off living with certain conditions, I have been able to have a peek into the experiences of many people with a great variety of conditions. It is from there that Lilian's hopefulness for the future originates. Seeing all these people with all these different conditions struggling to maintain a certain amount of normality within their lives, but still fighting for a brighter future was inspiring, and it felt natural to give Lilian this fighting spirit.

4.3.2. Integrating experience

As Seger says

“Wherever you begin in the creation of your character, ultimately you will have to draw upon your own experiences. There is nowhere else to turn to know wherever you've got the character right, no one else can tell you whether or not you've got a character that's credible, real, and consistent. You must rely on your own inner sense of what people are all about.” (1990, pg. 25)

This basically means that when you create a character, you must rely on yourself to give it life, and thus there will always be a part of yourself in the character. This part of yourself can be an experience you have had in the past, or an emotion you have felt. It is a building piece which you as the writer use as a base to create the story around it

Both main characters have a part of me in them. Sarah is the fear of the unknown, wanting to stay in the little bubble you have built for yourself, staying with what you know instead of risking doing something new and failing at it. She is also the love and care for those I love, without wanting anything in return. There are many elements that surround Sarah's character, and although not all of them are a part of me, Sarah is the character from which I have pulled most from my own experiences

Lilian is composed from mostly external elements. Having never had someone with a grave or terminal illness in my life, I got the elements related to that from the internet. However, there is one element that is a part of the core of Lilian's character that comes from me. That is the fear of abandonment. The fear of losing someone you are close with, someone you love, the moment you show yourself fully to the other person. The urge to run away the moment you realize that perhaps you are in deeper than you had expected. All of that comes from feelings I, myself have felt at some point or another, making it easier to express them in Lilian.

4.3.3. Physical description

The look of a character is the first introduction the audience gets for a character. For Seger, this physical description "it's evocative – it implies other aspects of the character. The reader begins to associate other qualities and imagine additional details from the few lines of description you have given" (1990, pg.27)

In addition, characters with unique physical characteristics will stand out from any other character and make them more memorable. These characteristics do not need to be merely aesthetic. You can also use their speech pattern, a particular walk, or certain peculiar movements to attract the attention of the audience.

In terms of my characters, Sarah, as mentioned before, is tall and athletic, with long messy auburn hair and dressed in vibrant and eye-catching colors. She moves with a bounce in her step and never-ending energy. I picture her rocking back and forth on her feet or playing with her hair when she must stand in one place for long. When she gets nervous or flustered, she freezes and starts blabbering whatever is on her mind, even if her first thoughts are not related to the situation at hand.

On the other hand, Lilian is small and way too thin, with very pale skin and permanent dark circles under her eyes. She is always seen with an umbrella used to block the sun when she is out or to support her weight. She moves slowly as if every movement took a lot of her energy. When she goes out, she must take constant pauses and at times must rely on the support of objects or people to walk.

4.3.4. The core of the character

The core is the main piece of a character's personality. It defines who the character is and gives the audience expectations on how they will act in certain situations. As Barry Morrow explains to Seger

"Part of the appeal of characters in a film is their predictability. You understand who they are, and you have a sense of their history and their code of honor and their ethics

and their worldview. The character is going to have to choose and make certain choices which the audience can anticipate and enjoy” (1990, pg. 29).

Characters need to be consistent. They should not change emotionally and psychologically from one scene to the next without a reason. The audience may get confused or annoyed, not knowing what has happened to that character while off-screen to have changed. They need to evolve with the story being told, not despite the story.

We also have to take into account what John Yorke mentions in his book *Into the woods*. “We are all identical- yet we are all different” (2014. Pg. 134) When creating a character, it is important to think about what makes them different. How does that character customize the things around them, what choices do they make and why do they make these choices. He continues “There is a contradiction within us all. We are animals yet we are all capable of rationality. We all have our own personal survival to ensure, yet we all have to live in society” (2014. Pg. 139) This might seem contradictory to the predictability mentioned earlier. However, it does not have to be opposites. Predictability comes from contradiction. If there were no contradictions from time to time, there would be no predictability nor any chance to break it, to surprise the characters or the audience with a choice that breaks expectations.

With the protagonists evolving with the story “Post-midpoint the protagonist has to learn how to integrate the now dominant new self with the old one. It’s not enough for them to assume an entirely new personality – they have to learn how to merge the good from the new with the good from the old.” (Yorke, 2014. Pg.148). Knowing what the core of the character is will help with the merging of the personalities as the story progresses. If you know what the basics for the characters are, it gets easier to discern what parts of their personality would change with the different choices the character has to make through the story.

Sarah is a young woman who started working at a café instead of going to university like the rest of her friends. The main reason she gives to those who ask is that she does not go to university for financial reasons. However, the truth is that she feels insecure, thinking that she is going to fail her classes. This insecurity is what moves her to look for happiness in parties and extreme experiences. It will also be seen in her relationship with Lilian as she feels the need to apologize the moment, she thinks something is wrong. She prides herself in her ability to talk with people, to make everyone be comfortable around her. It makes her hide her true feelings about the situations and to avoid confrontation, going instead for the solutions she thinks will avoid the others getting mad at her.

Lilian is the same age as Sarah and also does not attend university. However, for Lilian it is not an unwillingness what keeps her away from her studies, but an illness that takes away her energy and ability to do things. This illness causes Lilian constant frustration as it stops her from doing many things she wants to do. It is also the source of many of her fears, and what causes her to fear becoming close to the people she meets.

Characters do not always need to be coherent. It is human nature to be illogical and unpredictable. These details are not always easily seen, but it is what draws the audience to a character and makes it compelling. These paradoxes do not necessarily negate the consistencies from the core of the character, they simply add to them. It surprises the audience and makes them think about the preconceived ideas they had about them.

Sarah is a bubbly happy character who walks with confidence. However, she holds a deep insecurity built over the years and feels lost as to what to do with her future. Meanwhile, Lilian is a character with hope for the future, always thinking ahead. However, her time is limited, and she knows it. These characteristics are what enhance the script when showing the personalities of the characters. It makes them feel real.

4.4. Backstory

Everyone is curious about the past, that is why, when we are meeting someone new, we ask questions like: Where are you from? Where did you meet your partner? How long have you two been together? Why did you decide on this job? Etc. The decisions and events from someone's past shaped them into who they are and will determine their actions in the future. By knowing someone's past we get an explanation on who they are now, and we get an idea on how they interact with the world around them and how they would react on specific situations. As Seger says

“Every novel and screenplay focuses on a specific story, one we might call the *front story*. That's the real story the writer wants to tell. But the characters in the front story do what they do and are what they are because of their past.” (1990, pg. 25)

In order to tell the story, you want to tell, you need to know how the characters reached that point, why are they there. This is information that the audience may never know, especially if it is not relevant to the main story, but there are parts on someone's background that may directly affect the way the story is constructed.

There are many things one can add to a character's backstory. Things related to their physiology, like age, sex, appearance; things related to their sociology, like class, occupation, education; or things related to the psychology, like ambition, frustrations,

temperament, etc. In Seger's book, she quotes Carl Sautter and his comment in approaching the creation of a backstory.

"There is a danger to doing the three-page character biography. I still encourage writer to do it, but the I basically tell them to throw it away. Do it and know all of that but let other elements evolve as your characters evolve. In a lot of ways that character is being born in front of you. Anybody can come up with a three-page history for a character, and you do find lots of good and useful elements through that exercise that you're able to use later on. But it can't stop there." (1990, pg. 26)

Creating a backstory will give you the core of the character, but that is not all there is to it, characters need to evolve with the story. There are times when parts of the backstory come up naturally as you write the story. If the writer focuses on only allowing the parts of the backstory written previously into the story, they may lose details that would make the characters more interesting or more believable.

A writer also must take into account how much backstory to show to their audience. Overloading a script with flashbacks, voice-overs or dream sequences will make the story be focused on the past, instead of in the present (in the story you want to tell) and pushes the story backward instead of forward to the future. The backstory is best shown in short burst of information, and it is especially important when the characters are going through major changes.

In *Heartstrings*, the backstory of the characters is barely mentioned. It is mostly used as a way to give a reason to actions. For example, Lilian's reaction to finding out her feelings is running away. Up until that point the audience has seen a girl who does not let things stop her from doing what she wants. She was even the first to approach Sarah. However, these actions have a reason, and the audience gets a glimpse into her past in order to justify her running away. Nevertheless, most of the background information is given as the two main characters get to know each other.

I have already mentioned some of the background for both main characters through other points, mainly with points related to their personalities, their social background, and their context, but there is more to it.

Before, I have explained how Sarah has experienced trouble with her studies, and how this caused her personality to change. However, her difficulties at school caused more than insecurities. Due to losing hope that she would get good grades, she stopped trying and instead looked to spend her time in other places, looking for experiences that would help her forget all the anxieties caused by the classes. She started going to parties and indulging in risky behavior. When she was at her worst, she met Elijah,

who would become her main support system before the group formed. Elijah was who helped her go through finishing her basic studies and who helped her find a job. She never talked with her family about the things she went through, instead confiding with Elijah all her troubles and later with her whole group.

In the past, before the story starts, Sara has been in a few relationships. However, she never managed to make the relationship work and never fully understood why. This is a detail that I do not explicitly mention in the story, but it is important for the character, as her actions will be affected by it. The past experiences with her relationships not working makes Sarah a person who tries her best to make the relationship work no matter what, apologizing before knowing if it is something caused by her, just in case.

Her relationship with her parents is neutral. She does not dare speak about her troubles and insecurities with them but knows that they will not abandon her to her luck no matter what. However, if something happens that they do not consider to be serious enough, they will answer things like “you will get over it soon” or “you just have to work harder”. There have been arguments in the past between Sarah and her parents, mainly due to her going out at night until well past midnight. Nowadays, they do not say much about her going out, as they consider her a responsible adult now that she has a job. But even then, at times they still do remarks about the times she would go out to parties aiming them to be hurtful.

In terms of Lilian’s backstory, her life has been marked by her illness. Being told that the symptoms would get worse with time, but that nobody could tell how long she had. Constant visits to the hospital in order to make sure her symptoms stayed stable. Not being able to play with other kids, having to stay at a side, watching. Not having many friends because they considered her boring for not playing. However, she also does not let it drag her down. She is aware that she cannot do things in the same way others do, so instead, she tries to do things her way.

She manages to make a few friends during school time, children that also did not play with the other children. Despite the reasons for not playing being different, she is happy to be able to talk to others her age. That is until she talks about her illness. In that moment, the friends she had made reject her and leave her with tears in her eyes that she refuses to let fall. This event marks her, making it difficult to open up about her condition.

Years later, this event would repeat itself, this time with her partner at the time. She had dared to open her heart to someone once more, had let them in and had fallen in love. Finally, she had dared to speak about her condition, hoping that their love

would be strong enough. It was not. Her partner left her with cruel words, saying that they had wasted their time and never spoke to her again. This just reopened to would, giving her more reasons to not wanting to talk about it anymore.

Naomi is her one and only friend. Having met Naomi in the hospital, she had known about Lilian's condition from the beginning and had not cared about it. At first, Lilian had tried to push her away, but Naomi did not let her. They are not able to hang out much as Naomi lives in another town and Lilian is not able to go there. But they try to be available for Naomi to go to Lilian's town and hang out from time to time.

Lilian's relationship with her parents is full of guilt. She feels as if she is stopping them from having a fulfilling live, since they must be constantly taking care of her. Nevertheless, she loves them more than anything and knows that they love her just as much.

5. Plot

5.1. First act

A park with a river that splits the space in half and a dirt path that crosses from one side to the other with a wooden bridge to cross the river. Sarah (early 20s) arrives with her group of friends to the park. She is a tall and athletic looking woman with long messy auburn hair, dressed in an eye-catching orange jacket. Her friends are: Archie (early 20s) an androgynous looking non-binary person with short split black and white hair, dressed all black with chains on their belt loops and a lot of pockets; Liam (early 20s) a man with long light brown hair dressed in brown pants and a white button up and a leather book in hand; Elijah (mid 20s), a man with black hair with bright red highlights dressed in all black, platform boots and wearing rings in almost all fingers; and finally, Lana (mid 20s) a woman with long brown hair dressed in clothes that look straight out of a pirate movie. They enter the park laughing, making plans for the night, making jokes, and pushing each other around.

The group crosses the bridge and gets near the fountain in the center of the park. Suddenly, Sarah stops talking, getting visibly flustered and stumbling over her own feet, falling face first onto the floor. As she looks up, Sarah cannot help but feel enthralled by the girl sitting on the fountain bench. Sitting there is Lilian (early 20s) a thin and pale woman, dressed in soft pinks and purples and holding an umbrella to shield herself from the sun. Lilian is looking at Sarah and giggling into her hand. At that moment, as they looked at each other for Sarah it felt as if time had stopped only for them, as if the two of them were the only people there. However, this moment is

interrupted as Lana roughly moves Sarah into her feet, blocking her vision and asking if she's okay.

Sarah comes out of her stupor to Archie and Elijah teasing her asking her if the dirt tasted good. Sarah takes the teasing laughing, patting her hair to get rid of the sand, while joking that the sand tasted of blueberries. The group walks towards the exit with Lana trying to manage the chaos while Liam kept provoking them. Sarah is still flustered but having fun to the chaos it brought to the group. Before getting to far away from the fountain, she looks back to where Lilian is sitting.

Back on the fountain, Lilian is looking at the group with a small smile on her face. She sighs as the group leaves the park, tilting her head back and closing her eyes. A voice calls her name, making Lilian open her eyes. She sees Naomi (early 20s) a girl with short brown hair and golden glasses. Lilian smiles at her, accepting the hand Naomi offers her. As Naomi helps her stand, Lilian asks about her day, letting her guide the conversation just as much as she guides her out of the park.

The next day, Sarah is at work. She works at a local coffee shop, a small establishment with plush seating and potted plants decorating the space, giving the place a cozy vibe to it. Sarah is confident at work, moving from one table to the next without skipping a beat, a smile on her face. As she serves the customers, she engages in small talk with them, asking about their day and how they are doing.

As Sarah is preparing some orders for the customers, Lilian comes into the coffee shop. Just like the day before, Lilian has an umbrella with her, which she closes when she comes inside and uses to support her weight as she goes to the counter. At first, Sarah does not notice the presence of the other girl, focused on getting the order right. Once she turns around to place the order into the tray, she looks up, finally seeing who the customer is. Looking at Lilian smiling at her, memories from the day before flooding her brain, causing her to almost drop the cup. Blushing from the embarrassment of making a fool of herself for the second time, Sarah tells Lilian that she would be back in a minute, fleeing the counter, tray in hand and heart beating fast.

Sarah goes back to the counter after she manages to calm herself. She smiles at Lilian, apologizing to the other woman and asking for her order. After Lilian places her order of coffee and a pastry to go, Sarah asks her if this is her first time at the coffee shop while she turns to prepare the coffee. Lilian answers that yes, this is the first time. While she is answering the question, she reaches into a pocket and takes a piece of paper with something written on it, which she hides from Sarah's view as the other girl

turns around. Sarah rings her up and as she picks her order, she leave the piece of paper on the counter, leaving the café after thanking Sarah for the service

5.2.Inciting incident

Sarah at first does not notice the note, hiding her face in her hands and sighing, feeling as if she had embarrassed herself again. She rubs her face, taking a deep breath, at that moment she sees the piece of paper laying on the counter. Confused, she grabs the paper and looks into it. In the paper there is a note written “You’re cute, text me some time”. Below the note, there is a phone number and Lilian’s name.

Sarah smiles at the note, blushing lightly. She stares at the note, thinking of the girl, Lilian, feeling happy at being called cute. As she is lost in her thought a voice calls her name, snapping her out of her thoughts with a jump. She turns to see Elijah, who works with her, going towards the counter. Elijah teases her about staring at a piece of paper so intensely, which prompts her to hide the note into one of her pockets, flustered. Elijah raises an eyebrow at her, making Sarah go back to her work with a groan, knowing there will be questions.

The shift goes on without an issue. However, as time passes, Sarah starts getting restless, there is a nervousness to her steps and she keeps checking the pocket with the note to make sure she doesn’t lose it.

5.3.Second act

When Sarah finishes work, she quickly goes home, avoiding Elijah’s questions. Once home, she goes directly to her room, taking both her phone and the note from her pocket and sitting on her bed. She saves the phone number and opens a chat, leaving the note at her side. With her thumbs hovering over the keyboard, she stares at the empty chat. She takes a deep breath, tapping the back of her phone and starts writing a text, a simple greeting, shaking her head. She tries again only to erase the text once more, repeating the same actions a couple of times.

In the end, Sarah lets herself fall back into the bed covering her eyes with her arm with a groan.

“Why am I being like this? Where did my confidence go? I do not... I am not like this. What is even...?”

She rolls over, lying on her stomach, head resting on her arm as she looks at the open chat. Finally, she gets up and writes a quick message.

“Hello, I am the girl from the coffee shop, Sarah”

As she sends the message, she blocks the screen, rolls over and gets up, leaving the phone on the bed. She immediately bussies herself, cleaning the room and doing chores, resisting the urge to constantly look at the phone.

Meanwhile, Lilian is sitting down on a sofa on her room, with a book in her hands, a tea by her side, and a blanket around her shoulders. She looks calm as she reads, barely moving. However, she is tapping her finger rhythmically on the back of her book. Suddenly, Lilian’s phone lights up with a sound, startling her. Lilian takes a deep breath, leaving the book to the side and grabbing her phone, looking at the notification on the locking screen. She smiles as she sees the message, unlocking the screen and saving the number before answering, asking about her day. As she locks the screen, she lets out a content sigh, getting more comfortable on the sofa and grabbing the book back, leaving her phone on her lap.

After that we see them texting each other for a while. Nervous and giddy and exited. Both waiting for answers on their own way. While Sarah does other things while waiting, we see Lilian drinking her tea while sitting on the sofa, book half forgotten, nervous energy getting out through the tapping of fingers and the constant checking of the phone. When they read the messages, they smile and giggle and read and reread the text they sent.

Over the next month, Sarah and Lilian are constantly texting. They do not see each other much, only when Lilian visits Sarah at work, but they are getting to know each other via text. Meanwhile, they go on with their lives like normal. Sarah goes to work on the weekday and spends the weekend with her friends, sometimes partying, sometimes playing games, or going out to drink a beer at a bar. If she is not working or with her friends, she is at home, doing chores. However, no matter how busy she makes herself, she always makes time to answer Lilian’s texts

Meanwhile, Lilian spends most of her time at home, doing online classes, or engaging in different hobbies like drawing and reading. From time to time, she goes out with her friend, usually hanging out at her home or going out for a bit until she gets tired and needs to go back.

After almost two months of getting to know each other, Sarah asks Lilian on a date, taking her to a concert of a group both enjoy. At first both are excited about the concert. However, Lilian had not taken into account how exhausting it would be for her, and although they had a great time together, by the end of the concert, Lilian

could barely stand. Sarah had tried to make Lilian's evening easier, getting her a place to rest when she got tired, but not knowing the nature of her tiredness, Sarah insisted on going back close to the concert, wanting to enjoy the rest of the concert, frustrating for Lilian who just wanted to stay sitting down.

In the end, it is far from a perfect date. However, both made memories that they would treasure.

The next day Lilian does not answer any of Sarah's texts. Sarah gets worried, thinking that maybe Lilian regrets the date, that she made a mistake at some point, that Lilian may be angry at her. In the evening, since Lilian had not answered, she tries again, sending texts of apologies and asking if she had done something she should not have and how to fix it. In reality, Lilian had exhausted herself on the date and had spent the morning asleep, barely managing to stay awake by the evening.

For the first time, Lilian sends a voice message not having the energy to type, trying to reassure Sarah that she had done nothing wrong, that she was just tired and had woken up late. However, her voice sounds pained, leaving Sarah to wonder if that is truly all. She knew something had to be wrong, but she did not know what, or how to approach the subject, already feeling bad for having sent so many messages. So instead, she tells Lilian that she was glad that everything was all right between them. While waiting for Lilian's answer, she thinks on the day before, how Lilian had been tired, and she had been the one who insisted on staying longer. Thinking back, she started regretting her actions, promising herself to do better next time, if Lilian agreed to go on another date that is.

A few days go by before Sarah sees Lilian at the coffee shop again. She had been worried that Lilian would not want to spend time with her, so seeing Lilian bring such a relief to her that she barely notices the dark eyebags and the cane she has with her. She is about to ask about the cane when Lilian speaks, telling Sarah that she had missed going out to the coffee shop and seeing her. Flattered, Sarah answers, forgetting about the cane as Lilian asks how everything is going.

After that, they start hanging out more often. Sarah takes Lilian with her as she spends time together with her friends for the simpler plans, like going to watch a movie or going out to play videogames. It is still awkward at times. Sarah's friends are very energetic, and Lilian gets easily overwhelmed by them. However, this time, Sarah is more aware of when Lilian gets tired and makes sure she can rest and that her friends do not get too pushy about getting things done.

One day, Lilian and Sarah are hanging out with Sarah's friends at Elijah's house. During the night, Sarah and Lilian constantly gravitated towards each other, keeping the other close even when conversing with others. Halfway through the night, Lana makes a comment on how close they are and asks them if they are a couple. Sarah and Lilian, who until that point had not talked about their relationship, freak out and answer that they are just friends, even though there is more to the relationship than just that. Lana does not seem to believe them, but does not push the subject

Sarah immediately regrets her panicked words, wishing she had said something else, anything, that better explained their relationship, but the conversation had moved on and it would be strange to bring the topic back. The rest of the night it was awkward between them. They kept themselves away from the other, stealing glances from time to time, only to look away the moment the other looked back. Sarah wanted to talk to Lilian properly but did not know how to approach her about it, so instead of going to Lilian, she stayed away, hopping for words that wouldn't come. In the end, they part ways without talking about it, both feeling as if something in their relationship had completely changed.

Lilian, now alone in her room, thinks back about what happened that night. She had genuinely not noticed how close she had gotten to Sarah. She had not noticed that she had started developing feelings for her friend. And as she noticed, she panicked. Memories from past relationships and how horrible all of them ended the moment the truth about her illness came to light. She could not go through that again, not with Sarah, it would break her. But she did not want to hurt her when the inevitable happened, she could not do that to her.

She sat down in her bed, face hidden in her hands, body trembling, breathing fast and short. She needed to calm down, but her mind would not stop bringing up how much Sarah would be hurt once she left. She was spiraling and with nothing to catch her attention, she could not get out of the cycle. Vaguely, she sees the screen of her phone light up with a text before her vision goes dark. Lilian's parents find her unconscious, half on her bed, half on the floor. They immediately go to her, laying her properly on the bed, exchanging worried glances. For them, it is not an uncommon experience, seeing Lilian pass out, but it still makes them worry. The father goes to fetch a glass of water for when she wakes up while her mother makes sure that she has not injured herself by accident, that she is breathing properly and that her heart is beating normally all the while whispering sweet nothings, more to reassure herself than her child.

After tucking their child in bed, both parents leave the room. The mother stops at the door, looking back at her child with a sad face, tears starting to fall. Her husband hugs her and takes her away from the room gently. As the parents leave, Lilian stays in the same position her parents left her, not moving an inch, barely breathing.

Meanwhile, Sarah is lying on her bed. She is lying on her side, staring at her phone which is unlocked and showing her chat with Lilian. By that point, she has already sent Lilian a few texts, apologizing for her friend's behavior and for having made her uncomfortable. After that, she texts Lilian about how she would have liked to talk with her before leaving, but that the words would not come out, that she wanted to make sure everything was okay with them. Sarah falls asleep staring at her phone, still dressed and with a sad expression.

In the next few days Sarah tries to contact Lilian a couple of times more. However, she never receives an answer. As the days pass, Sarah starts talking less with her friends and being a lot less animated at work. When people ask her about it, Sarah just answers that she is feeling tired. Her friends try to cheer her up, but it only works momentarily, after a while she goes back to the saddened expression.

On the other hand, Lilian is staying mostly in bed because her parents are worried about her health. She is entertaining herself by reading and drawing, but every time her phone lights up with a notification, she looks over, barely containing herself back from grabbing the phone. At times, the curiosity is stronger than her and she reads through the texts, answers half written, but never sent.

At first, Lilian's parents leave her to deal with things herself, knowing that she does not appreciate having others meddling with her life. However, when they see that she is not making any progress, not only mentally, but also physically, they decide to intervene. Her mother goes to her and asks about what is happening. Lilian does not want to talk about it, but seeing how worried her mother is, she starts to talk about how she is feeling. She starts with basics, unsure of if she wants to tell her mom everything. However, as she starts talking, she starts to spill everything out. With tears in her eyes, she confesses her love for Sarah and how afraid she is of losing her.

Her mother gives her advice, telling her that love is not something that can be controlled and that she should not let bad experiences dictate her present. However, loving someone does not mean that she should be with that person, sometimes it is better to keep the distance. She also tells Lilian that before taking any decision, she should talk with Sarah. After thinking about what her mother told her, she texts Sarah.

Instead of addressing the many texts Sarah had sent, she sends two simple messages, asking to meet in person.

5.4.Conflict

When they finally meet, Lilian does not let Sarah speak. Instead, demanding that Sarah does not talk to her at all. Even though her voice is harsh, her demeanor, her body language, is nervous, sad, with tears in her eyes. When Sarah asks why, she does not give an explicit answer. Sarah asks if Lilian hates her and without thinking answers no. Sarah yells at Lilian for an explanation that Lilian does not want to confess. However, unable to keep her feelings to herself, she confesses the truth, including the fact that she is dying. Then, silence. They look at each other, shocked by the outburst. Suddenly, Lilian starts running away from Sarah, overwhelmed. At that moment, as she runs after Lilian, she finally understands.

It does not take much to catch up to Lilian and as she does, she hugs her as they catch their breath. Lilian struggles against her hold. She begs Sarah to let her go, saying that it is for the best, but Sarah refuses and confesses her love for Lilian and her resolve for staying by her side no matter what. They kiss, a soft press of the lips as both say, “I love you”.

After their confession, Sarah helps Lilian walk back to her house as Lilian is exhausted. As they walk, Sarah talks, voice soft, about how much she had missed Lilian and Lilian asks for forgiveness. With a soft smile, Sarah answers that she already has it.

They arrive at Lilian's house, where her parents fuse over their daughter's state. Before they can yell at Sarah for causing that, she is already apologizing, saying that it is her fault as she scared Lilian without meaning to. Lilian comes to her rescue by telling her parents that it is her fault for running away.

After the talk with Lilian's parents, Sarah is ready to leave. However, Lilian asks her to stay, and Sarah cannot say no to her after everything that had happened that day. They go to Lilian's room, where they lay down on the bed, facing each other. For a moment, there's silence, but it does not last for long. Sarah is the first to talk, telling Lilian about the past days, whispering. It does not take much for Lilian to start talking as well. She tells Sarah about her fears off being abandoned again and Sarah does her best to soothe those feelings and telling her that she is also afraid, afraid of not being enough for Lilian, of screwing something up and not being able to fix it. Slowly as if to not to spook the other, they hold hands, still talking in whispers.

They fall asleep together, holding hands and with soft smiles on their faces.

5.5.Third act

They go back to their routine. Lilian goes back to visiting Sarah at the café during work hours. She stays for a few hours, talking with Sarah at every opportunity she has and leaves after a while, going back home.

On the days Sarah does not work, they spend the day together, they go out on a walk around the town, with Sarah supporting Lilian as they walk, arms intertwined, and go on picnics. When Lilian starts getting tired, they go to a park, sitting on the grass and they either chat or read a book, just enjoying their time together. In the evenings, if they have the time, they go to the movies and watch a film or go to a bar to drink something together. Over the next years they are together, Lilian's health starts getting worse and slowly they have to stop going out as much. Lilian stops going to the café and Lilian mourns her presence, having grown used to having her around when working, getting disappointed every time she would look at Lilian's usual spot to find it empty or occupied by another customer.

Instead, they spend most of their time in Lilian's room. They did more or less the same things, spending their time together even when they were doing different things. They just wanted to enjoy their time and what they were doing did not matter. Sarah would go to Lilian's house after finishing work, spend the evening there sit down by Lilian's side while they shared their hobbies, like reading or drawing. Sometimes, Lilian's parents would invite Sarah for diner, and she would stay the night. On those nights, they would cuddle in bed, whispering sweet nothings to each other until they fell asleep. Spending so much time outside caused multiple arguments with her parents who didn't like that she was spending so many nights away from home, reminding her about who she used to be before she finished her schooling, making hurtful remarks of the times when Sarah would go out to parties until early morning, coming back home drunk and about to pass out. Sarah tries to defend herself when her parents mention that topic, saying that she is not the same person anymore, and although she keeps partying from time to time, it is not the same. Now she knows where the limits are. Sarah also stopped spending as much time with her friends, but they understood what was going on and even encourage Sarah to spend as much time with Lilian as she could.

Although Lilian had to spend most of her time at home, they were still able to get out from time to time. Days when the symptoms would lessen, and Lilian would feel well enough to spend a few hours outside. Those days, Sarah would let Lilian choose what

place she was in the mood to be, and they would go together. Some days, they would go to the park where they first met. They would sit down under the shade of a tree with a blanket, something warm to drink and a few snacks and talk until Lilian started to tire, or until the park closed. Other days they would go to the coffee shop Sarah works in, just as a remembrance of all the hours they have spent together there. On the days Lilian was feeling her best, they would walk hand in hand around the town.

Nevertheless, Lilian's favorite times were when she was feeling good at night and Sarah would take her to see the stars. The night where they would sit down on a blanket, cuddled close together, watching the sky. Those moments where no words were needed, where they could forget about everything and just exist, together, loving each other.

However, not everything is good. As Lilian's illness gets worse and she starts to be more dependent on her parents and Sarah, her mood worsens. She gets frustrated with not being able to do anything, she feels useless and worthless, and feels like Sarah is the only one providing something to the relationship, since Sarah is taking care of her constantly even when she is in a bad mood and refusing the help. She tries to stop the negative thoughts, but the more time she spends not doing things for herself, the more difficult it is.

Sarah tries to convince her that she does not need to provide anything to the relationship, that as long as they loved each other, who cared about anything else. Even though Sarah insists that Lilian does not need to do anything, she can see that the situation is also affecting her.

When the illness is at its worst, making her bedridden and unable to do anything by herself, these feelings overwhelm her, making all the emotions explode in a one-way argument in which Lilian starts yelling at Sarah, letting all her frustrations out. During this, Sarah hugs Lilian quietly, keeping her close as Lilian screams and sobs. Her heart breaking at the sheer helplessness in Lilian's voice. Once Lilian has calmed down, Sarah maneuvers them into bed, lying down while softly caressing her hair and back, and hugging her close. They stay in silence; it is not a moment for words.

The next day, as Lilian wakes up, she immediately apologizes to Sarah, saying that she would understand if Sarah were angry at her. Sarah just reassures her, saying that she is not angry, that she understands how frustrating this must be for her and how she wishes that she could do more to help. Lilian hugs Sarah, thinking how lucky she is by having someone like Sarah as her partner. And even though Lilian is not able to do much else that day, Sarah spends the day beside her, and she talks about anything

that comes to mind, a new game, a series, or a film they have watched together, etc. Anything to distract Lilian from her situation.

Lilian's health continues to get worse, barely being able to get out of bed at times. Sarah tries to lighten her burden, sitting by her side, holding her hand softly as she reads her favorite books to her. She tells Lilian her favorite memories and stories about stupid things her friends have done while drunk and tries not to cry when Lilian is unable to answer without coughing.

With Lilian having to stay in bed, Sarah spends some time with Lilian's parents, as they sit beside her. They share all kind of memories of Lilian from when she was a child, while Sarah shares how they met and became friends and later partners.

The last time Sarah visits Lilian's house is when Lilian's parents inform her of Lilian's passing. Sarah breaks down crying and so do Lilian's parents. At that moment, they comfort each other. Before leaving Lilian's house, her parents tell Sarah that she will always be welcome once she is ready. Sarah promises that she would come back some day.

5.6. Epilogue

A few years later, Sarah is visiting a graveyard. She has cut her hair short, just below her chin, and is now wearing a purple jacket instead of her usual orange one. She is accompanied by a woman. Carol (late 20s), a woman with long straight purple hair. They walk hand in hand through the graveyard and stop at a grave with Lilian's name on it. There, leaving flowers in front of the grave, Sarah introduces Carol as her new partner and explains how they met in class at the university. She talks about how much she still misses Lilian. Carol asks Sara to tell her things about Lilian, and with tears in her eyes, Sarah does. She tells her about how they met and how they stuck together despite everything. She tells Carol that she still loves Lilian even after years of being gone, even after falling in love once more. Carol answers that that is good, that it means that their love was true, and that she does not need to forget to move on. There is a silence after that as Sarah closes her eyes and leans on Carol, enjoying the comfort that having Carol there brings her.

"I love you, both of you"

6. Conclusion

The creation of this project has been long and the story I created by the end of the project is wildly different to the start. The levels of motivation and excitement were different from the start, when I decided to turn a short story into a script, to the end, when my vision of the story started to change. Making the process have periods of arduous work, and periods when I barely progressed on the story.

Did I complete the objectives I put upon myself? I would like to think so. I wanted to create a story about characters and how they interacted with the world around them. I wanted the characters to be up and center of the story and their emotions being what drives the plot forwards. I wanted to create characters that were believable and made sense. I also wanted to make a story that was able to show several aspects of being in a relationship, even bad ones and having the characters cope with the situation healthily. I believe that I managed to show all of this through my story by the end of it. It is pure raw emotions that draw the characters together at the beginning and their feelings is what causes them to temporarily separate and later reunite. The characters follow what they feel like is right, without giving it a label or without thinking too much on it.

From this project I have learnt many things about the creative process involved in the creation of a story. The importance of a good character creation before starting the writing process, in order to maintain a certain inner coherence as the story advances. I also learnt that it is necessary to have a reference for the locations where the characters' lives in, not only for the uprising of the main character, which would affect aspects of their personality, but also for giving life to the world around them. Finally, I have learnt that an author needs to be more fluid when writing a story. Everybody has a story they want to tell but obsessing over every single detail being exactly what you thought at the beginning of the creative process does not make for a good story. If you have a good base for the development, if you know who your characters are, it is better to let the characters speak for themselves, to let the story flow naturally.

Going forward with any creative project I develop in the future; I will remember the things I have learnt with this project, and I will adapt my creative process accordingly to the thing I have learnt from this project, and I will keep learning until I develop my own creative process.

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