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Portfolio of work in Creative Writing

The work below is taken from three of my previous young adult books published in my home country of Brazil and from one book I am currently working on.

The sky had been gray, like it always was. Dark. Back then, she still had hope it wouldn't always be like that.

"You can't tell anyone, understood?" Vin had said. He was only a few years older than her, but to Eden he was a hundred feet tall and invincible. Without hesitating, Eden vigorously nodded, promising in silence what she had promised with words a thousand times before.

"No, no, you can't just jump like that" he had said, stopping her before she threw herself in the ocean as children tended to do. "You'll scare anything worth catching. Slowly."

As he spoke, his voice soothing and low, Vin slowly went into the water, his feet almost dragging over the rocks and Eden stared, wide eyed, trying her best to learn. He sunk until the water was on his chest, moving around the rocks as quietly as it was humanly possible and, with one fast movement, his hands – armed with a knife – had stabbed a bright blue fish swimming in the currents formed among the shallows.

Vin laughed and his smile as he lifted the fish was the most beautiful thing Eden had ever seen. She blushed when he caught her staring and looked away, embarrassed.

"Come on, firecracker" he said, using his nickname for her. He always said it was because of her orange-red hair, but she knew it was because of her personality. "Your turn."

On that day, Eden had hurt herself on the rocks trying to catch the bright blue fish and cried all the way home while Vin carried her on his back, whispering words of comfort. He was in the middle of patching up her knee and she couldn't stop sobbing.

Vin lifted her chin with his fingers and wiped the tears away from her eyes with his thumb. Smiling, he pulled the knife from his boot and handed it to her. "Here," he said "it will be easier once you get used to it."

Her emerald eyes went as wide as they could go and she threw her arms around his neck, laughing against his shoulders. Vin laughed back and in that moment, Eden believed she would be happy forever.

Until Vin said he was leaving the island.

"I can't stay, Eden." he had said, about a year later.

"I want to come with you!" she stomped her feet, cried and screamed, but Vin shook his head. He rested his hand on her small shoulder and looked her in the eye.

"I'm going to find it, Eden. I swear. And I'll come back for you. I have a year before having to report to the reserves, that's not a long time, is it?"

"But –" she tried. He cut her off with a smile. It was the easiest way to disarm her, that smile.

"Firecracker. You'll be ok. Keep practicing. Keep out of sight."

Vin had hugged her then, firmly, but she didn't move. She couldn't. Without looking back he left and the metal door slammed behind him. Eden still dreamed about that noise, she still heard it.

She had never seen him again.

Quinn didn't like going on land. Ever. Sometimes, when he thought about his life, he had the impression he had never stayed on land for longer than a day, which was obviously not true. He was more accustomed to the water against the hull of a ship, the dull sloshing sound than the insufferable overlapping chatter of a busy tavern or a crowded market street.

Which was exactly where he found himself now.

Quinn knew well that the Captain didn't think he was good enough to take care of this particular task by himself, which meant he was there as a simple risk evaluator. If the city was safe, if the people there answered questions or killed as an answer. More than once he had gotten into troubles that almost cost him his life, everything in the name of something he was scared he would never find.

Not knowing what kind of reception he was going to get, Quinn decided against asking just anyone for information. His goal wasn't to draw attention to himself, but at almost six feet, with his long brown hair tied in a ponytail and skin the color of bronze, it was hard not to notice he didn't belong there.

Reconnaissance missions. They were the worst. And Quinn was tired of leaving empty handed, tired of hearing the same lecture about his lack of purpose as if it was his fault. If only his efforts paid off. Ever. But Quinn was starting to think the Captain was chasing a ghost.

Ignoring the stares, Quinn moved through the narrow passages that were barely streets, the rusty buildings falling apart around him, every single citizen wearing tattered, brown clothing, their cheeks hollow and their eyes sunken. The air felt like syrup on his skin, it smelled of copper, it tasted of blood.

How could anyone live like this? It made Quinn's skin crawl. He would drown trying to get somewhere else before he ever had to stay in a place like that.

A sign that had probably one day been bright, glowing neon caught his eye. It resembled the rest of its surroundings now, broken, rotten and dusty. The letters simply spelled "BAR", the "R" barely keeping itself attached to the building. Bars, whorehouses, drug dens, anywhere people went to forget what real life was like were great for information for two reasons: alcohol made for loose lips; and anyone who had any information worth selling was bound to be looking for dark places to sell them. And for the aforementioned alcohol to drown the memories of how they got those secrets in the first place.

And Quinn was looking to buy.

Each island had their own currency, which made his life infinitely harder. From the looks of it, gold, silver or gems weren't going to cut it here. Some places still preferred barter systems, mostly because there wasn't much use in having gold if there was nothing to buy. It didn't keep you fed, or clothed or warm or dry. It didn't save your life when you were bleeding out.

"She's not gonna do it." the girl teased, her dark haired pulled back.

“Am too!” Eden replied, stomping her tiny bare feet on the rock. She didn’t want to, she really didn’t, but everyone would tease her forever if she backed out now.

“Then just go already,” a boy demanded, the white of his grin shockingly white against his filthy face. Eden turned around, her toes grabbing the edge of the rock as she carefully leaned forward, stretching her neck to look below.

The cliff towered fifty feet above a nightmare of white foam and swirling currents too fast to keep track of. Deep blue water formed a perfectly circular hole in the middle of a whirlpool like an eye staring directly at Eden. And as she stared back, she felt her knees buckle, the palms of her hands sweat.

Nobody knew what was down there. A long time ago the islanders said “treasure” and left it at that, but with every person who died trying to find out or retrieve whatever it was, the more they started believing it was a trick played by the Gods, a trap for the greedy, and there was nothing down there at all but death. And naturally, it became a rite of passage to dare people to jump in there. No one ever did it, even though they said they did. No one was that suicidal.

Vin had warned her not to pay attention to the kids, not to listen to the teasing, to never ever go near that hole, but Eden just wanted to show them she could. Maybe then she wouldn’t be such a freak. She might be, but a heroic freak was better than a loser one.

And what is a dead freak? Eden could hear Vin’s voice in her mind, but she shook her head and squeezed her eyes shut, trying to focus. When she opened them again, it felt like the drop was even further down. Everything was spinning. No one could do this.

“I don’t think I – “ Eden started, but the dark haired girl just yelled something she couldn’t understand and pushed her, one simple shove and she was falling, the world around her slowing and blurring as the walls of the cliff rushed past her. It lasted an eternity and was over in a second and then her body hit the water and at fifty feet, it felt like she was hitting cement. Eden heard a crack, a whoosh and then the sound of the water rushed into her ears, her brain, her entire body and she was being pulled into the whirlpool, being sucked down with no idea which way was up.

Eden flailed her arms and legs as wildly as she could, her entire small body being pulled further and further down. It seemed the more she struggled, the more the ocean pulled her in. Her lungs were burning, her muscles aching and the water around her got darker and darker and darker until there was no more light to be seen. Or maybe she just couldn’t see the light.

Something inside her just... shut down. She stopped flailing and struggling and just let her body sink. She was going to die. Her eyes were fluttering shut, like she was about to go to sleep and her little hands rubbed them like it was just a late night and she was tired. And below her, something glowed. Ever so slightly, a faint green glow she couldn’t really see properly. Maybe it was the light that would take her away, she remembered thinking. The water seemed different around it, clearer, as if she was seeing it through glass.

Her lungs convulsed suddenly, water filling them and she stared at the green glow. There was a peaceful detachment as she looked at it. It was pretty. She wouldn’t mind dying looking at something pretty.

And then her whole body was being pulled back, strong hands grabbing her little arms. Her head lulled and she vaguely recognized Vin’s shape

underwater, a rope tied around his waist, both his arms grabbing Eden so hard she felt she was going to crack in half. The light faded away, the water rushed past her, bubbles and white foam and salt and then there was air and she was being tossed onto a rock and Vin was holding her face and pushing her red hair away from her face and crying. Was he crying?

"Firecracker," she could hear him calling, but it sounded like his voice was still underwater. Eden was smiling and she didn't know why. "Firecracker, please, can you hear me?"

Eden just looked back at the sea and thought of the green light. Maybe it wasn't a treasure at all, just an angry sea monster trying to kill her. Vin wouldn't get mad if it was a monster, would he?

He held her small face in his hands and cried.

She closed her eyes and hoped – a little – that she would open them again.

Eden had assumed she had imagined how immense that hole was, that her child eyes had seen it and exaggerated the memory and it really wasn't all that bad.

She was wrong.

It was bad.

"If all you want is to kill yourself, I have simpler ways of doing it." Quinn said, craning his neck to see into the hole. They could hear the rush of the water way down below.

"Listen," Eden said, impatient. "If there's anything worth having in this shithole, that's where it will be. Take it or leave it."

"So you don't even *know* if there's something there, is that what you're saying?" Quinn asked, pinching the bridge of his nose. He seemed less phased than Eden thought he would be. She just shrugged in response.

"Alright, how do we get down there?" he looked around, puzzled. Eden just stared at him, one eyebrow up and after a few moments, his expression changed to realization. "No. No no no no. No."

"I wouldn't recommend it, but it is the only way." Eden stated. She had never gone back there. Whatever the ocean was guarding wasn't worth her life, she had decided. Or rather, Vin had decided it for her. He hadn't let her out of his sight after the incident all those years ago. "The best I can do is anchor you to the shore, send a rope down."

"Does it work?" he asked, looking down the hole again.

"Not usually. You can make it quite far, but all the way down and it will snap. It always does."

"You are *very* helpful." His tone was dripping with sarcasm.

"You said you needed help finding it, not retrieving it. I did my part." Eden sat down next to the edge.

"We're not leaving this island without it," Quinn replied. Eden perked up. She had hoped if he saw how impossible it was to get, he would find a way around it. Explain to his Captain it was unattainable, impossible. But his face was set. He wasn't joking.

"We're not leaving the island *with* it, or at all if we jump back in there."

"Back?"

Eden sighed.

"I fell in once, as a kid. I'm not eager to do it again." That seemed to really impress Quinn. He stared at her, wide eyed, and back at the hole. He seemed to be trying to come to terms with how anyone would get out.

"How did you get out?" he asked. There it was.

"I was pulled out." Eden answered, her brows furrowing under the weight of the memory.

"By whom?"

"It doesn't matter, does it? He's not here anymore and even if he was, he broke three bones and almost died getting me out, I would never ask him to do it again." Eden was furious at the mere suggestion. Vin took weeks to recover. He was more hurt than he let on, because he didn't want her to feel too guilty about it, but she had anyway. She always wondered what she would have done if he had died. Well, she would have probably died too, so not much.

"I only ask because if he pulled you out then it is possible."

"I was a child. I was much lighter than I am today."

"You look like you're one hundred pounds soaking wet, I think I can hold on to you."

"First of all, it's not *my* weight you'll be struggling with, it's the sea's. Aren't you a sailor? Shouldn't you know this?" Quinn looked annoyed, but didn't reply. "Second of all, when did we make the switch to me going in?"

"You most certainly can't hold on to *me* can you? We have a much higher chance if we do it *my* way."

"I'm not going in there," Eden said, simply.

"Eden, look -"

"No!" she shouted, her voice echoing on the rocks around them. Quinn took a step back and the ground pulsed, reverberating underneath them. He lost his balance and waved his arms trying to gain it back but the Earth still shook and before Eden could even register what was happening, he lost his footing and fell.

She saw him reach out to her, his eyes going wide and she instinctively went for his hand, her fingers stretching, splayed in front of her face, but all she managed to do was brush his sleeve before he tumbled down toward the raging whirlpool below.

The word "pay" made Lara feel, more than ever, like a merchant of Death. She pulled the heavy coins from her pockets. They were so hot she could barely hold on to them.

The Ferryman held out his hand and Lara dropped the coins on it. He set the staff aside and pulled his own hood back. Lara had to contain the scream that tried its best to escape her throat at the sight of him, the hollow eyes and the old face, not like an elderly person, but like an ancient statue, cracked, punished by time, pale and haunting.

He took two coins and placed them on the holes where his eyes should be, storing the others in his robe. Taking his staff back, he turned his back on the three of them.

"Yes, we know," Lucius said, even though the Ferryman himself had not spoken. "We still need to go."

Neither Jason nor Lara understood the exchange, but when Lucius stepped inside the ferry they were forced to do the same. It was a strange feeling, like they were leaving something behind that could never again be recovered. Something important. Vital. It was a sort of emptiness mixed with an expectation Lara couldn't quite define.

When the ferry started moving, slow and continuously, it was like sailing through silk. Although the movement was soft and quiet, it was not pleasant. Lara saw the warm lights of Patmos weaken until they could no longer be seen on the horizon behind them. When she once again turned her gaze forward, a despair invaded her body, unsettling and impossible to silence. She looked ahead but it was like walking in the dark, no indication of how far away they were from their destination and nothing to guarantee they weren't about to fall down an infinite abyss.

A candle was lit at the front of the ferry, but it only cast a gloomy glow on the Ferryman's face. Lara noticed, much to her surprise, that the further they went, the less hollow and scary his face became, a semblance of youth slowly returning to it. And yet the severity of his expression had not changed at all and it was somehow stranger watching a youthful face carry so much sorrow.

At a certain point, Lara couldn't say exactly when, the environment seemed to close, as if a transparent dome had been placed over them and she knew they were no longer in the Aegean sea. Neon green lights started popping up as small dots under the water and Lara leaned over to try and see what they were. She saw Jason do the same, but Lucian remained still and impassive.

Her eyes fixed on the dots, but they were too blurry. The agitation of the water made them even harder to see, but slowly Lara started to make out that they weren't dots at all, they weren't even round. They were elongated, different, *human*.

They were bodies.

Bodies that slid under the ferry, eyes closed, legs and arms relaxed as if they were only sleeping. There were thousands of them, hundreds of thousands and they tinted the water green with their odd luminescence. In one moment the whole place had gone cold, ghostly and horrible. Lara could hear whispers, laments, hushed moans and the light lapping of water against the hull. It was quiet, like the surface of a lake in the early morning. The silence wasn't the silence one hears at night on a quiet suburban street, it was an absolute one, a silence only the dead could make, the kind that hurts the ears more than an explosion, a hollow feeling that made Lara feel as dead as the corpses floating beneath them.

The phone "clicks" and goes silent. I stand there, a little dumbfounded, looking at it like it could bite me or explode in my hand and then I finally slide it into my pocket, just in time to get off the train and take the one going in the opposite direction.

I stand, not because there's nowhere to sit but because I'm far too agitated to even consider sitting down. I'm so distracted watching the stops light up as we go by them I don't notice the kid wearing headphones walking in my direction, head bobbing as his lips silently mouth the music.

He is so entertained in his own world that he doesn't notice when he places his hand directly above mine on the support rail. As soon as I feel the volume of his hand over mine, the air escapes my lungs. I can see the kid had every intention to apologize, but he's choking and going pale, his hand stuck atop mine.

Oh my God.

I'm wearing gloves, how did this happen? How did it happen so fast? It can't be happening. It's not happening.

I let go of the rail like it's on fire and step back, screaming as small crystals form at the tips of my fingers. Every passenger on the car stops to look at the kid as he goes down, the headphones flying off his head as he hits the floor.

Please don't die, please don't die.

It may seem hypocritical of me to be so concerned about the death of someone I don't know, but somehow it's different. It's different knowing when I'm killing a criminal, that I'm being paid for it. It's different knowing it's an innocent person going home to a family after a long day, a person whose path would never cross mine and who can now die because of me.

It's different having no choice.

I am standing there looking at a group of people now gathering to help him, completely horrified. This has happened before, but never this fast or with such a devastating effect. The kid is convulsing and I feel cold.

No.

The world goes gray and I feel weak and nauseous. All the other passengers are suddenly gone. Now it's just me and a nearly-dead kid on this gray world. Here, he is motionless. I kneel next to him, tears running down my cheeks, freezing and hardening before landing on the ground.

Who was I trying to fool? I'm never going to get used to this. I'm never going to control this. I need help.

Please don't die. You can't die.

I'm whispering now, wishing those words true with all my strength. Slowly my trembling hands land on his still chest. They're hot. They are always hot when this happens.

But they seem to be hot in a different way. An almost... *good* way. I'm still crying, crying because I can't seem to stop. It's coming in sobs and all I can think is that he has to live. He has to. He has to.

His chest moves.

My own chest seems to have been hit by a hammer, launching me back to the subway, to colors and people, people who are staring at me like I just landed on Earth from another planet.

Wait, why are they all so tall?

I'm lying on the floor, the noises slowly returning like my ears are recovering from an explosion. I sit up, rubbing my eyes while people try to take my hands and help me up.

"Stay away from me!" I shout, backing up. The people stare at me like I'm a lunatic, even for New York standards.

But I'd rather look like a lunatic than be an involuntary murderer.

I stand up slowly, still sick and see the circle around the kid has dissolved. No one wants to touch a dead person.

Except he's not dead.

I can barely believe it. He's right there, confused, a little dirty, but breathing. Definitely alive.

I smile. I want to scream. I want to cry. I want to laugh.

But instead, I cough. My whole body is taken by such a fit I'm forced to bend over, kneeling on the floor and covering my mouth with my hands. People want to help, but the seriousness of my warning seems to have been enough to keep them away.

The floor is splattered with blood.

What the hell is happening to me?

Kat opened her eyes, feeling strange. She couldn't really define why. Maybe it was the fact that her body didn't seem capable of feeling the temperature of the environment or any humidity. Maybe it was because she couldn't hear any sound; nor see anything except for a white light, no matter where she looked.

Or maybe it was the fact she wasn't breathing.

That's it then, Kat thought. It finally happened. I'm here for good, in the land of the dead. I finally died.

Somehow it seemed fair. And Kat felt strangely at peace, knowing she would no longer had to worry about her decisions or her future. Knowing she was free of the burden her abilities brought upon her life and the life of the people she was close to.

As soon as she stood, Kat noticed another unusual thing about her new state: she didn't seem to weigh anything. Just thinking about her moves was enough to make her execute them. The feeling was a bit disorienting, but it didn't take long for Kat to get used to it. She was in familiar ground after all.

Even not knowing where to go or what to do – what did one do after dying anyway? – Kat decided to walk. Unfortunately, it was like diving in the ocean without any frame of reference, impossible to know the distance being traveled as she walked, with a persistent nausea and headache. It seemed unfair that she could feel these things after her heart had stopped beating, but Kat could do nothing except carry on.

As she walked, Kat tried to remember the circumstances that had landed her on that permanent state. Images of fabrics floating in the air, crystals refracting light and red stains on marble passed through her mind and intensified her headache. She quickly gave up on trying to recover those memories, memories of a life that was no longer hers. What did it matter now anyway?

A snap in the opposite direction grabbed her attention. Or at least it felt like the opposite direction, it was very difficult to tell. Kat spun to try and identify the source of the noise and, at first, nothing in the pale landscape had changed. But in the time it took her eyes to adjust to the movement, a small landscape did in fact reveal itself, not too far from where she was now.

It was difficult to see anything specific, but it was already a relief having somewhere to fix her gaze on as it drastically reduced the feeling of disorientation. For reasons she couldn't quite explain – perhaps because she feared her frame of reference would disappear as soon as it had appeared – Kat ran, her feet touching the white ground as if she was stepping on clouds. It was a

bit like trying to run underwater, frustrating, slow and strange, but Kat didn't so much as blink, didn't do anything that could compromise her mission.

When she finally reached her destination, after what seemed like a small eternity and a long distance, Kat expected to have to catch her breath, rest her hands on her knees or feel thirst. But again, none of those sensations was present and it made her feel quite uncomfortable. She hoped she would learn to get used to it.

The landscape that had appeared couldn't really be called that. It was nothing but a few dead trees and a reflective surface between them, smooth and silver like a mirror, but with irregular edges that indicated it was anything but solid.

Her desire to clarify exactly what it was made Kat kneel and lean over it, reaching like Alice looking at the White Rabbit's burrow. But what she saw before her fingers could so much as graze it was her own face; pale, violet eyes glittering, white-blond hair cascading past her shoulders.

Seeing her face there was frightening in a way. It was like she couldn't remember what she looked like and now it bothered her. Her eyes reminded her of how different she was, her skin was almost as white as the ground surrounding her, she felt like... a freak. Even there, even alone with no one to judge her, she felt the shame that never made itself known to others when she was alive.

Kat squeezed her eyes shut like a child who thinks they saw a monster. Close your eyes and the monster will go away. But when she opened them, the monster was still there. And now there was more than one.

Her face had been copied to another person, standing behind her, gazing at the mirror. But this other woman looked older, her blond hair cut short, wrinkles on the sides of her eyes. It was like looking at the future. And her future was smiling.

Future Kat raised one of her hands slowly while Present Kat watched it all in the mirror. It was scary. It was simply scary having a modified copy of you preparing to touch you in the world of the dead where it didn't seem possible to react to things like it would be in the real world. Kat couldn't move. She was frozen.

The hand of her clone landed gently on her left shoulder and, in a fraction of a second, Kat felt a pain like nothing she could possibly describe, like a thousand frozen needles piercing her skin at each spot where the hand touched her. She squeezed her eyes shut again, screamed and, turning around, threw herself into the mirror, silver drops flying everywhere, swallowing Kat into a thick liquid and making the woman disappear.

Eden didn't feel good about this. She literally didn't feel good – her back still itched and ached – and she also had a pit in her stomach. After what had happened in the last couple of days, she was starting to wonder if she had gotten herself into more trouble than it was worth. She had just wanted to get out, not get tangled with old magic and have a glowing map on her back, leading to Gods knew where. This was too much.

Quinn seemed to share at least part of her concern. If Eden had to guess, she would say he wasn't expecting this either.

"I thought I would be excited to find a map," he had said as they climbed the cliff wall on their hands and knees. It wasn't a completely steep vertical climb, but a fall from there would still hurt. Or even kill. The human neck was a surprisingly easy thing to break. "But I sort of hoped it would be made of parchment. Or pigskin. Not, you know..." he trailed off.

Eden't hadn't responded. What could she say? Even now, as they made their way to Quinn's ship, she didn't know. He had lent her his navy blue jacket, way too big for her and still soaking wet, but the cool water felt good on her back. Even if it didn't, Eden had no other clothes and it's not as if she could walk around with a glowing map on her skin. People were killed for a lot less.

"Not much farther," Quinn stated as they walked past the market street. Eden had never been here this late, just before dawn. It looked even filthier in the near darkness; unwanted, leftover goods spread all over the ground, stomped beyond recognition, half put up tents torn and swaying in the light breeze. There was always dried blood on the floor, but it seemed to glow blue and silver under the night light. The smell made Eden's stomach turn, there was something about it she had never gotten used to.

They passed it fast and reached a small dock, stretching maybe twenty feet. The water was too shallow around Neoni for anything bigger, maybe why none of the larger merchant ships ever bothered to come that way. Or maybe it was because there was nothing worth trading for.

Tied to the dock, the waves gently beating against its hull, was an old wooden skiff. Quinn walked briskly behind a rock and pulled out a tall package wrapped in beige canvas. He unwrapped it and pulled out two oars, proceeding to place them on the boat and holding out his hand to Eden.

She hesitated, looking at his outstretched hand, the urgency in his eyes. She remembered that dock. Vin had taught her to fish there, how to find mildly edible things. That island was hell, but it was home, the only home she had ever known.

Could she really leave? What if the world out there was even worse? At least here she knew what awaited her, knew how to stay alive, to feed herself. Except it was getting harder and harder to find food. The fish were dying. Vin was dead. That whole island was dying, the good and the bad. Soon it would be no more than a graveyard.

It would always be haunted.

And Eden had had enough of ghosts.

She moved forward and took Quinn's hand, feeling the boat sway under her weight when she stepped inside, but he held her steady, his own legs solid as a rock. Her chest tightened when he untied the boat and pushed away from the shore with one of the oars.

Eden stared at the island the whole time, this once massive, intimidating pile of rocks and rust now growing smaller with each stroke of the oars. Eden realized she had never seen it from a distance. It had been her whole world for nineteen years, but it looked so pathetic and frail from afar, a monster in the dark, the one you realize, when you turn on the light, is nothing more than the shadow of a coat. It can't hurt you.

She turned around and put the island behind her, focusing on the noise of the water and the vastness of the horizon ahead.