

Flynn

Flynn could hear his sister shut up in her room. She could hear her long, heart wrenching sobs and her hyperventilating. He was only 7, his trucks laying abandoned on the rug, untouched, while he stared at the stairs, waiting, hoping she would come downstairs and tell him she was okay.

Flynn knew he couldn't go up there. He knew the second he moved, he wouldn't be safe anymore. He knew Cora wasn't safe- and he had never felt more torn.

He knew if he had, Cordelia would never forgive him for putting himself in that position. He sat there, with his soggy bowl of Fruit Loops, just listening to the sounds, as tears slipped down his little cheeks.

Eventually it stopped. His dad stormed down the stairs, took an ice cold beer from the fridge and before Flynn's eyes could follow him, he was gone with the wind.

Flynn sat there, confused. He heard running water upstairs, but soon, everything stopped. The silence disturbed him more. After a while, he ran upstairs and found Cordelia, her head submerged deep into the bath water, while her body bent lifelessly into the tub.

"Cora?" Flynn whimpered. He knew something was wrong. He moved her head out of the water and cried out. Her lips were cold and had a purple tint to them. He laid on the floor, holding her cold, dead body.

The officers who found her told Flynn she had drowned- and he was confused. Drowned? Flynn always imagined it differently. He imagined throats filling with salt water, bodies beginning to lose a fight to the enormous waves of a great big sea. That was drowning. Doing everything to keep your head above water.

But the officers told Flynn that Cora had put her head under water herself, she had kept it there. She wanted it to stay- she wanted to die.

Cordelia

When Cordelia killed herself- she knew she wasn't going to heaven, but she didn't expect to be right where she started.

After she died, she woke up. She was angry at herself, she swore she could feel herself dying- literally. But as she looked around, she saw her head still buried in the still water. The second she saw Flynn's face, his sweet eyes, the feeling of regret sunk in.

She couldn't wake herself up, she couldn't shut the door on him, she couldn't save him anymore.

After that though, she realized she could. He began to see her. They talked before bed, and he always brought her new drawings each week. Usually they were dinosaurs- other times they were sketches of her suicide scene. She made him destroy those before his foster parents could see.

His entire life, his therapists, his parents- everyone didn't love this attachment he still had to Cordelia. They told him that was how he coped, that she was an imaginary friend, and eventually as he grew up, he would let her go. It made Cordelia furious- but again, did she really deserve anymore than that? She had fucked him up big time. Nonetheless, she was convinced he would never forget about her. But as the morning of his first day of freshman year approached, that all changed.

Stevie

Stevie slumped down on the stool, exhausted. The walls of room 506 were painted green, with a big, very used black board hanging at the front. She could feel her head get dizzier and begin to move down to rest, when a boy walked in.

Stevie never messed with boys. The feeling of falling in love made her stomach turn, like rotten milk on a hot day. But as this boy walked in, she could feel her body tighten, like he could look at her any moment- like she wanted him to look at her.. When she watched his eyes find the stool next to her, she jerked her head forward.

Sooo slick.

He sat down, taking his books out, and Stevie watched him- he was ethereal. He had a head of wavy hair, and his soft porcelain skin glistened in the sunlight. His eyes were brown, delicate in an endearing way, like wildflowers that seem too beautiful to be weeds.

He glanced over at her and gave her a soft smile. Her body burned, she felt so stupid. Why didn't she smile back?

"How's the first day going for you?" Stevie finally blurted. The silence was too awkward for her to just leave it alone.

His eyes widened, still looking at his desk. He heard her, why wasn't he answering? Stevie sighed and faced back to the board, not looking anymore. She felt like an idiot- until a single, pale yellow post it note slid over to her desk.

Flynn

Flynn scribbled on the note, rushing, in fear she would lose interest. He hadn't spoken since, well, yeah. All he wanted was for the words to slide across his tongue, a melody, a voice, something, to release. Words. All he wanted was words.

Throughout the class, he had used his entire 3 pack of post-its for Stevie. She had dark, curly hair, and soft caramel skin. Her voice sounded like the sweetest song, it was surreal to Flynn that someone could speak so ethereally, so elegantly.

He hadn't heard a voice that gave him comfort like that in a long time.

The rest of the semester, they only grew closer. They fit like puzzle pieces.

Flynn had never met someone so lit from within- so passionate about life. She had dreams, and even though it often felt like he could never give her those dreams, that life she wanted- she always brought him back down to earth, to her. He reminded her that the little things are enough.

On the last day of school before winter break, excitement filled the school hallways. Flynn only dreaded Christmas. It reminded him of Cordelia - how she used to decorate the tree with him, and stay up to try and catch Santa, even though the next morning their Dad was gone, and the only gifts under the tree were the ones they had gotten each other.

As lunch ended, he watched Stevie leave her table and come over to him. Stevie was popular. But even then, she never thought twice when she'd cancel plans, even just to SEE Flynn. And he couldn't help but love that.

“Hey!” she smiled, getting close to him and stealing a strawberry from his lunch.

“Do you um- have plans on Christmas? Me and my family would love to have you over for the night,” she asked.

Flynn’s stomach filled with butterflies. He shot her a text, which he eventually learned was much more efficient than post its. She blushed and smiled.

“Great, see you then Flynn,” she said, walking back over to her table.

Flynn suddenly couldn’t wait for Christmas.

Stevie

Stevie led Flynn through the door and she watched his eyes light up. Outside it was dark, the earth’s surface drowning in snow. Her home felt like a burning star in the middle of a dark, polluted sky.

Their night was- again, quiet, but it felt so right to Stevie. The two of them kept busy- baking more Christmas cookies, Stevie singing her heart out to Michael Buble, while Flynn watched and laughed the whole time, oh, and kissing. Lots of kissing.

Eventually, around 11, Stevie crashed. She wiped her wine colored lipstick off her lips. As she changed, she could feel eyes on her, obviously Flynn, but others too. It made her feel a little sick, but once she turned to Flynn and saw how he admired her, the worries melted away like snowflakes.

With her arms wrapped in cashmere and her parents already fast asleep, Stevie gestured Flynn towards the couch. Once he laid down on the cushions, she settled directly on top of him.

Cordelia

As she watches snowflakes bury dead leaves, she feels her heart begin to slow down. Yes, Cordelia had died, but had she really? She had still been Flynn's sister all his life, even after hers stopped cold, before he could comprehend it. But today- she can feel Flynn loosening his grip, changing his focus. Flynn sees in color, and Cora has only seen black and white since that day. Flynn is still alive- and she isn't.

Cordelia watches from in between the banisters. The room filled with mementos, then there's Stevie and Flynn. Fallen into deep sleep on the couch, every part of their body intertwined with the others- fitting like puzzle pieces. A single tear fell down her face as she watched her little brother find his home in someone else.

Cordelia felt the pain spear deeper, but still observed. She observed the way he held her hand as she slept, how they snored delicately. And just as Cordelia loosened her gaze, she felt the knife stab her heart for the last time.

The two of them laid there, now with their eyes open,

"I love you," she said softly, her honeyed voice sending him practically into comatose. He looked at her, their lips centimeters apart. The world was silent, the snowfall muted in comparison to the words Stevie whispered.

Although she hated it, she was rooting for him. She had spent months watching them. She held her body up tensely, whispering to herself.

“Say it back, say it back.”

As if he had heard her, his eyes became glassy, and for the first time in what felt like forever, he opened his mouth and sound began to come out, like a broken music box.

“I think I love you too,” Flynn blurted, shocked, his voice sounding unfamiliar to himself.

Long, thick tears slipped down Stevie’s face. Before his apple-cheeked face could redden anymore, she slid her cool, soft hands across his face and kissed him.

As their lips met, Cordelia’s world burst with color and sound. As she saw her brother, for the last time, his hair was darker than she remembered.

Cordelia watched as her hands became golden light, spending her last moments watching Flynn and Stevie. Stevie took his hands and her scratched record began to play softly. She held him close, and soon, Cordelia watched as everything transformed. She felt the sparks of their love burn through the walls and turn to smoke from the cold.

The tears swiftly slipped out of existence- and before she knew it- she watched the scene fade out of focus. Somehow the heartbreak still managed to whisk its way into her ghost. The image burned away slowly but surely, until it was gone- until she was gone.

For real this time.

Artist's Statement

In my multi-narrative story, I feel like a lot of Robin Benway's techniques were important to include. I chose perspectives based not only on who's family, but also who can add dramatic irony to the story, like Stevie. In one particular scene, Stevie feels watched, which creates this sense of knowledge for the reader, because we know Cordelia is the second pair of eyes witnessing their love, but neither she or Flynn know that. I also feel like adding the rare use of dialogue really highlights the effect Cordelia's death had on Flynn, as well as the effect of falling in love again. The final use of dialogue, when they say "I love you" is where Flynn speaks again, after years of selective mutism. Dialogue being used less often really makes this moment special. Thoughtshots also played a big role in my story. I chose to include young Flynn's thought process of the idea of drowning, because I feel like it demonstrates his innocent thinking as a child, and shows how unnatural the situation really was. For snapshots- I wanted to create the last chapter, where Cordelia watches them fall in love, the biggest snapshot of the story. I highlighted how Cordelia felt, and how each short, intimate moment between Flynn and Stevie affected Cordelia. I engaged the essential question of what it means to be a family by showing that through life and death- bonds are forever. Healing isn't about ignoring- it's about accepting. When Flynn lets himself love again, it gives Cordelia the chance to rest- and let him go as well. It is and always will be a bittersweet story, but no matter what, it carries so much emotion, so many memories that will always be with you, and I think "For Real This Time" demonstrates that amazingly.