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Somewhat damaged and interrogating the incubus : sleep paralysis explored in the young adult novel, 'Somewhat Damaged'

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Somewhat Damaged

and

Interrogating the incubus:

Sleep paralysis explored in the young adult novel,

‘Somewhat Damaged’

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Abstract

This thesis, comprising an excerpt from my young adult paranormal novel 'Somewhat Damaged' and an essay, examines the mythic potential of sleep paralysis, a paralytic transitory state between sleep and consciousness during which frightening hallucinations are projected onto the waking environment. While the neurophysiology is generally agreed upon, further investigation is warranted on the anomalous phenomena that manifests during sleep paralysis hallucinations. Within the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis, particularly Carl Jung's collective unconscious theory (1959), I will imaginatively explore the recurring figure of the 'incubus' of sleep paralysis that has provoked ubiquitous fear and ambiguity. The essay will describe the ways that conventions of young adult and horror fiction have shaped the development and execution of 'Somewhat Damaged'. The novel adopts a feminist approach, examining the concept of the 'figurative orphan' resulting from parental absenteeism and emotional distance, and conveying male and female attitudes towards female promiscuity. In addition, the essay will communicate my research in the area of sleep paralysis, its correlation with childhood sexual abuse (CSA), and its psychoanalytical potentials in 'Somewhat Damaged'.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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Somewhat Damaged

(Excerpt)

One

Watching Australians try to celebrate Halloween is like watching a dad try to explain puberty with Barbie and Action Man. Just like in obesity statistics, Americans had us beat.

In theory, it's an awesome idea, dedicating one day of the year to letting our inner psychos come out to play. However, the only aspects of Halloween that we Aussies have embraced are the doorknocking rug-rats chasing that ultimate sugar coma, and the unchaperoned teen parties. And we can't even do *those* right.

The scariest thing about said parties is that girls believe G-strings make for perfectly acceptable pants.

Then again, it's not like my costume this year is espousing Amish modesty. I'm sure that, back in the day, Medusa wore more appropriate garb than four-inch stripper heels, a push-up for her lack-ofs, and a toga that barely fell past her butt-cheeks. Live and learn, gorgon.

'Chug, chug, chug!'

My party co-host, Reilly Moran, plus a cluster of classmates chant drunkenly as I tip a Screwdriver down my throat. I'm pretty sure it's not supposed to taste *this* bad, but I've let a smashed sixteen-year-old make it for me, so I've no one to blame but myself. And, um, society.

The place is packed. Hufford District High School's entire Year 11 class have arrived in droves, having been promised an unsupervised piss-up with plenty places to crash for the night—provided those surfaces were not first splattered with vomit from virginal stomachs.

'Jett!' My boyfriend's voice floats over a sea of bodies doing the bump n' grind, *'Jelly shots!'*

The Moran house has been transformed into a horror geek's wet dream—in every direction, grisly dioramas, spider webs, creepy crawlies, severed limbs, bloody shower curtains, skeletons and mutilated doll heads. Unfortunately, I'd had more fun decorating the party than

participating in it, but dating a guy as popular as Jack Moran has its downfalls. Even though I wanted nothing more than to sleep, I had to hang around.

I send Jack a thumbs up, swaying dangerously as I withdraw a tray of purple shots from the bar fridge. As I bend down, someone moves behind me and performs a most unseemly action.

‘Reilly!’

Jack’s twin brother laughs as he spins me around; the shots wobble precariously. ‘Aww, Jett. It’s touching to know you can identify me from the mould of my junk. Speaking of touching—’

‘Finish that sentence, and you won’t have *anything* to touch,’ I warn.

Grinning behind his crooked handlebar moustache—the Moran twins had dressed up as the Mario Bros—Reilly downs three shots in quick succession. I shrug and follow suit.

Reilly slaps my arse proudly. ‘Good girl!’

Nicki Minaj’s voice assaults my ears—not even alcohol can up her appeal. I stagger towards Jack, making a mental note not to wear heels that make me look like I learned how to walk from the Monty Python team. Hands snake from all directions, seizing shots from my tray. I bump into Elle Symons—or what had been Elle Symons, before her tragic transformation into a Playboy bunny.

‘Scary costume,’ I say, straight-faced.

‘Oh, hiiiiiii,’ she slurs, sagging against me. I hastily place the jelly shots on a table, since she’s making my Personal Bubble her bitch. ‘You look *sooooo* cute. Are you like, Poison Ivy?’ Then, noting my elaborate hairstyle of twisted dark hair and interweaving rubber serpents, she adds, ‘Ew. They look like little green penises.’

‘Totally,’ I say. ‘I’m Gonorrhoea Girl.’

‘What’s gonorrhoea?’ Elle asks blankly.

An Irish lilt interjects. ‘Ask your doctor, Elle. It’ll answer a lot of questions you’ve been having lately.’

Jack's hand slides around my hip, pulling me away. I don't see what effect the removal of my support has on Elle but, from the sounds of it, she's face-planted into the jelly shots. Someone yells, 'YOLO!' and the crowd erupts in cheers. I hate my generation.

At that moment, Jack sweeps me into his arms and kisses me. I break the kiss prematurely, claiming his Mario moustache is making me ticklish. He doesn't question this.

'You look awesome,' he says.

'Yeah,' I drawl. 'That's what Perseus would have said, had he been able to look me in the eye. Sucks he turned to rock.'

Jack leans down and whispers something *very* dirty in my ear. I flush. 'Jack Moran! That is *not* the language I expect from a respectable Italian plumber!'

'Play your cards right, Medusa, and I'll let you play with my Yoshi.' He beams ruddily.

Reilly chooses this moment to gatecrash our intimate flirting with a spectacular butt-squeeze. He roars with laughter at my scandalised glare, and thunders away to harass someone else. 'Seriously?' I call after him.

'Sorry,' Jack says. 'Reilly lives by the rule that, as twins, we share everything. I'll have to correct him, because you're the one thing that I don't want to share with anyone.' I smile, granting him a soft kiss on his lips.

He looks stunned by my tenderness. 'I love you, Juliett,' he whispers.

Oh. Um, okay.

I falter.

Part of me knows I'm supposed to be pleased by these words, but I'm mostly put off. And not because he's selected the romantic atmosphere of a Halloween piss-up to utter them for the first time. I've known he's felt that way for a while, and I feel ... well, *something*. But hearing the words makes me feel dizzy, and not in a good way. Of course, my sudden nausea is probably more related to Reilly's Screwdrivers than Jack's pronouncement.

Luckily, a pair of shrieking fairies bounces past us, arguing over whose wings are sexiest. Glitter to sequin ratio is brought up as a factor. While Jack is staring at them with incredulity, I escape into the thick of the party. Sweaty bodies are sliming against each other. I try to focus on getting to Jack's ensuite upstairs. If I throw up, I'll feel better.

Well, mostly. How do you purge a premature confession of love?

I stumble through his bedroom to the bathroom and lean over the toilet, swaying. As the nausea subsides, I sink to the edge of his spa bath.

You're okay, Julieta, I tell myself. You just needed some water, and some chips, and to tell Jack to shut up about the 'love' stuff. Love leads to awkward conversations, and to expectations for you to express that love.

Guilt trickles in. I really do like Jack. He's the perfect balance of sweet and cynical. Am I wrong for not wanting any squishy feelings to mess that up? God, I want to sleep. My spinning head is not helping. Maybe I'll just curl up in the bath, and rest my eyes...

A sharp knock jolts me from my thoughts. Jack comes into the bathroom, which is fast becoming party central. Not.

'Jett!' he exclaims. 'I was looking—' He breaks off, sucks in a sharp breath, and says, '...Can we talk?' Oh, goodie. Awkward conversation alert.

He closes the door as I sit up straighter, wary. 'Look,' he says slowly. 'I didn't mean to upset you.'

'I'm just tired,' I protest dully.

He's holding his liquor a lot better than yours truly; I'm starting to see two of him—and not, for once, because Reilly is at his side.

'I'm sorry if I brought out the L-bomb too soon,' he says. 'I don't care that I'm more into you than ... you know. I can wait. Just please, don't shut down.'

He waits in vain for a response.

'Come on, Jett,' he pleads, his voice low. 'Give me something to work with...'

Wow. A guy who wants me to talk, be more emotional? We really *are* in the era of the sparkly vampire.

'I'm *tired*.'

Jack glares. I can understand why: the 'tired' defence is getting pretty ... well, tired. It's my number one complaint these days, thanks to my pesky inability to sleep through the night. Jack doubtlessly thinks just I'm using it as an excuse to abandon this topic.

He's half right.

'Whatever,' he mutters. 'Just do me a favour, Jett. Let me know when you start giving a damn, okay?' The slamming of that door reverberates long after he's gone.

Stricken, I stare at the dead space that Jack evacuated. My body burns with anger. If he wants to get mad at me for being sleepy, that was just *fine*.

I leave the ensuite for Jack's bedroom. When did it get so hot? Fanning my face, I tumble haphazardly onto Jack's mattress, knocking over his stationary box from his workbench in the process; my elegance knows no bounds. Pens, highlighters, a letter opener and several paperclips spill all over his unmade bed. I don't care. But that's my problem, right Jack? That I don't care? Well ... so's your face. Or something.

A riotous swirling sensation takes me over. I pull off my toga, allowing the blankets to cool my hot skin. I'll just...rest for a second...

*

My eyelids unlock.

Jack's ceiling is grey. I try to move, but my body is rock solid. Screaming proves futile as well; even though my mind is wild with the echoes of my distress, I know that I haven't made a sound.

White noise buzzes angrily at my ears, distortions of the downstairs party. I'm not asleep, nor am I awake—I'm trapped between the two. I see everything as if I were coming out of a dream, but the nightmare lives on.

And then I hear him.

The shadow.

He lurks at the corner of my consciousness, watching me. I know him well, like a dark extension of myself. He wants my fear and, fight as I may, this sycophantic body always provides.

I need to escape. To run. I know what's coming. He is going to destroy my will to survive. Make me see, hear and feel the unreal, and it's going to hurt. Pain is pain, no matter what the source and he is creative in his cruelty.

The shadow rips the blanket from my body, launching over me. He is faceless, cold and heavy. Panic ignites within me. His fingers creep up my legs, his long nails hovering over the skin.

They stab.

My howl dies before it is born. There's so much blood... It floods the sheets, meandering from my wounds as crimson snakes. Acidic sweat bubbles beneath my skin. The shadow traces his nails up my legs, my thigh, my navel. He holds me down, but we both know it's just a formality; I have been turned to stone as if I have looked upon Medusa.

His palms press against the urgent staccato of my heart, building in pressure. I cannot breathe.

I know, with perfect clarity, that I am going to die. This realisation leaves me feeling dead long before the moment has arrived.

He's killed me time and time again because one death just isn't enough.

An impenetrable darkness prevails as I feel my body twitch. He's still here, but the paralysis has gone. My fingers scatter desperately for some means of defence; they meet something cold on the bed sheets, and I throw all my force behind it. The shadow roars, his nails retreating...

'Jett!' Jack yells. Blood spills from his arm. A glint of silver catches the dull light from the ensuite.

Jack is gone again, his voice muffled across a great distance. I am at the shadow's mercy. I flee, tearing through a world of darkness; my fingers find an unknown door handle. Winding staircases. Light and noise skew my senses. Faces of demons dance and mock. Laughter. Clapping. Whispers.

Something touches my arm. I whirl around. Jack is glaring at a room of monsters, a letter opener still jutting out of his arm. I'm shaking.

'Everyone out,' he snarls. 'Party's over.'

More clapping, laughing. 'Dude, what are you using for blood? It looks so real—'

'Get the *hell* out of my house!' Glass explodes everywhere as Jack punches the face of his grandfather clock. A few girls scream.

Reilly starts herding out the angry partygoers. I cover my eyes and ears, wincing against the ruthless chaos. It dwindles to a flickering buzz. Shakily, I drop my sweaty palms to my sides. Air licks at my exposed skin, and I realise that I'm barely dressed.

The Halloweeners are gone, and the Moran twins are staring at me.

'Dude,' Reilly says, 'Care to explain your half-naked girlfriend? Feel free to fill me in on how you got stabbed, but only if you have time after the naked story. Details, please.'

Jack ignores him. 'Jett? Why did you—I ... I was just checking to see ... you went *berserk*. I think I should go to a hospital.'

'I'll drive!' Reilly says cheerfully, belching essence of bourbon.

'Jett,' Jack repeats, wrapping a tablecloth around me. 'Let me just—'

'Don't *touch* me!'

He tries to stroke my shoulder, but I wallop him across the face, meriting a loud cuss. My handprint burns red on his cheek. ‘What did you do to me, Jack? What... what *are* you?’

Jack is primed to respond, but I cannot trust his words anymore. Everything about him could be a lie. What if he is my shadow? Is his beautiful face a disguise? Has he stolen his way into my life, my heart, only to tear me apart?

I have to expose his true face to the world.

Lunging at the shadow, I seize fistfuls of his hair, trying to tear away his mask of innocence. He snarls in pain. ‘The hell—’

Arms snake around my waist, pulling me back. Reilly is laughing raucously. He doesn’t see the danger; he doesn’t understand. I have to—

‘Stop!’ Jack yells. Reilly loosens his grip, still chuckling in drunken wonder.

I’d failed. My shadow refused to be revealed for what he truly was.

...And now, I have to run.

Two

So, it's safe to say that last Halloween wasn't my finest moment.

Most kids stop seeing scary monsters when they're exactly that—*kids*. But not this rebel. I attacked my boyfriend because I thought he was a monster trying to kill me. Even if I'd tried, I could *not* have picked a more public forum in which to unveil my crazy.

It's not like my Hufford District classmates don't already have enough gossip on that Juliett Fierro girl. If I were to walk the school halls blindfolded, I'd be bound to bump into one of the many students who owe their parents' broken marriage to my mother.

Ma doesn't hunt down those unhappy husbands. They just happen to drink themselves into a stupor at the Hornet's Nest Tavern, where Mona Fierro waits for love. Being a treacherous mix of Southern Comfort, bad judgement and surgical enhancements, she always ends up taking them home.

And then our house gets egged.

Cheyne is a small town. Everyone knows everyone, and Ma has taken 'knowing' to biblical proportions. The main industries of Cheyne are tourism and seafood, owing to the stunning beachside location and folksy charm, so it's a hot summer getaway. Frankly, I'm surprised Ma isn't mentioned in the brochures.

I'm tormented at school just for being Mona Fierro's kid. I've been on the receiving end of the 'Slut!' sneeze; the star of many toilet wall scribbles; the casualty of your standard accidental-on-purpose choc milk spill. Luckily, Ma is currently dating some caveman throwback, so she hasn't made out with any of my teachers this Christmas break.

She's not much of a role model. I'm sure 'parenting' is still on her to-do list, along with all those other things she's never quite gotten around to over my sixteen years. Maybe that's why I'm so screwed up.

And *now* look what I've gone and done. I've really given my classmates something to talk about.

'JET FIERO IS A PYSCO!!!'

That's the title of the Facebook group in which I'm showcased.

It makes sense that they're taking their harassment to the interwebz, given that I now have street cred after losing my nut and stabbing Jack Moran. I mean, if they tried doing this to my face, who knows? I may just cut them into little pieces.

That's my *thing* now, right?

I'd like to think that they are talking about some other poor Jett Fierro, since they've misspelled my name ... *and* 'psycho'. Unfortunately, I can't delude myself since the creators have been sweet enough to upload a particularly deranged-looking photo of me.

'Sorry to call so early, Jett ... I just thought you should see,' my friend Lloyd babbles as I press my phone to my ear. 'I found it yesterday. I tried to join—you know, for recon, not because I think you're Loony Tunes—but I got ignored.'

I click on the members. It has 49 thus far—an impressive feat, since our year group only has about a hundred kids. That means that at least half of the Year 12 population openly think I'm a whack-job.

'At least I know what to expect today,' I groan.

I actually used to be popular, back when I could call Jack Moran my boyfriend, but even then, I always knew I didn't belong in the inner sanctum. Therefore, I made little effort to endear myself to the popular kids. Now they're relishing my meltdown. They either don't realise, or don't care, what making a Facebook group slandering my sanity might do to me.

To be honest, even I don't care as much as I probably should. I have more on my mind than my status as social pariah. Or maybe I have less on my mind, since I've supposedly lost it.

According to this online portrayal, I, Jett Fierro, am a recently dumped psycho brimming with violent tendencies. And now we play the waiting game. The moment this school year is over, I'm doing a Roadrunner out of this town.

'At least Jack hasn't joined,' Lloyd coos.

'Yet,' I add darkly.

*

'Great to see you back, guys!' Andy waves cheerfully.

We shuffle into the cramped classroom for Media Studies as Andy flicks off the lights and fires up the projector. His real title is Mr Anderson, but ever since *The Matrix* came out, he's grown sick of students mocking him with the classic Hugo Weaving drawl. So now he's just Andy.

Someone calls my name. I turn to find my two best friends already sitting in the front row. Lloyd Patrelli is six feet of freckles, topped with a mop of curly ginger hair. Kenny Tash, on the other hand, is petite, ash blond and annoyingly pretty. Lloyd beams, tugging my long dark braid playfully. I swat him away.

'Hey,' Kenny mumbles in greeting.

'Whoa, curb your enthusiasm there, Ken,' I say. 'You might just blow a fuse.'

Lloyd bounces. 'Girl, we have *so* much to tell you about Europe!'

I smile. 'And I have so much to tell you about *Dexter* and Doritos, since that's all that my Christmas break consisted of. But we can't all be international jet-setters at sixteen.'

'Seventeen now—' Lloyd begins, but Kenny's jerking his head towards the back of the classroom. My smile fades at the sight of Jack Moran, playing with his smartphone. I feel sick. I tell myself I've got no right to miss him.

But if he only knew what I'd seen that night...

Apprehension lines Kenny's delicate face as we select seats. If Hufford District gets wind that he spent the summer touring Europe with Lloyd Patrelli, he'll die. He hasn't let his cat out of the designer bag yet, but I'm sure there are plenty of kids here who'll happily do it for him.

Jack hovers in my peripheral. He's staring at me.

I'm not sure why I find this so annoying, but it's enough that I march over to the seat in front of him and stare back with comic intensity. 'Hi. So, I figured if you wanted to have a staring competition, we'd better make it official,' I say, a little more aggressively than necessary.

He raises a brow and returns to what appears to be *Angry Birds*.

My blood starts pumping in a suspicious way. He says nothing, so I barge onward. 'I hear they run Metalwork at this timeslot too. Wouldn't you be better off there?'

'Wouldn't *you*?' he retorts, the ghost of a grin stretching across his lips.

Oh, so I can sharpen my letter opener.

'Did you expect me to drop the class?' Jack drawls. 'I've dealt with my fear of you in a healthy way. I carry pepper spray and everything now.'

I glare. He has as much right to be here as I do—perhaps more, since his father has made generous donations to Hufford District ... if only to encourage the principal not to expel Jack's brother Reilly. But it still pisses me off. This is *my* class, *my* territory. And I want it to be a Jack-free zone.

'Can you go?' he requests. Then, nodding down at his Smartphone, he adds, 'I've got enough angry birds on my mind without you here.'

I return to Kenny and Lloyd, cheeks aflame. Andy clears his throat as he loads his PowerPoint presentation. 'Right. Last semester we had a pretty intense look at romantic comedy.'

'Ugh,' Kenny says. Most of the class murmurs in agreement. Lloyd is scandalised.

‘But onto bigger and better things this year!’ He loads a ghastly slide of his PowerPoint presentation. Freddy Krueger glares at us ominously.

‘Score!’ I say. ‘Horror movies are my favourite.’

Jack snorts from across the class, still playing on his phone. ‘Which is why you tried re-enacting one?’

I grip the arms of my chair. I am seriously going to stab him again and, this time, I’ll make it count. ‘Let’s kick off with a discussion!’ Andy says zealously.

The next slide asks: *What is the appeal of horror?*

We gawk at each other.

Finally, Jack says, ‘Fear.’

After a moment, he notices that he is the subject of our collective gaze, and lowers his phone. ‘What?’

‘Care to elaborate, Jack?’ Andy says.

Jack shrugs. ‘Well, horror movies let the audience experience a synthetic kind of fear, don’t they? It’s fake, but the adrenaline feels real. And once we’re able to master fake fear, we feel like we can conquer fear in the real world.’ A girl named Gail claps sycophantically at this response, though probably because she didn’t understand a word of it.

‘It’s more than that,’ I argue. Jack smirks, aware that I’m trying to best him. ‘I think horror movies let us access the darkest parts of humanity in a safe way. By watching villains, we vicariously experience the dark recesses of our human capabilities. We’re meant to relate to the heroes, but it’s the villains who leave us wondering what it would take to push us over the edge.’

Jack sneers. ‘You’d know, psycho.’

‘I don’t like horror,’ Gail shudders. ‘Gives me the willies.’

‘I’m not touching that one,’ Jack laughs, glancing at Kenny and Lloyd.

Urge to kill ... rising...

Despite his faint dismay, Andy perseveres. ‘So why do some people like horror while others don’t?’

‘We aren’t all creeps?’ Gail sniffs, tossing her golden hair indignantly.

‘Yeah, because having a room full of unicorns isn’t creepy at all,’ Jack says.

I’d be suspicious at this comment—my ex-boyfriend’s familiarity with a random girl’s room—except it’s a well-known fact that Gail posts half-naked photos of herself in her glittery, fairyland bedroom on Facebook. Some would call it a juxtaposition of childlike innocence with burgeoning adolescent sexuality. I call it gross.

‘Well,’ I reason, ‘I guess some people don’t want to force themselves into an unnecessary state of fear.’

‘Yeah!’ Gail adds passionately. ‘I mean, like ... we have terrorism and immigrants and stuff.’

I wince, reminding myself that she’s trying to be supportive.

‘Er, yeah, I suppose? Others don’t want to become desensitised to violence and horror; when it happens in real life, they want to be able to feel it with all the magnitude it deserves. And some, like me, want to be prepared for it.’

‘The good ol’ Stanley Kubrick way,’ Andy says, delightedly.

Jack yawns. ‘Don’t know what you’re so worried about, Jett. Haven’t you heard the rules of horror? Chicks who don’t put out always make curtain call.’

‘Right,’ I spit. And I catapult my pencil case at his stupid, pretty face.

He seizes his nose in pain. ‘What the *hell!*’ he yells.

This is the last straw for Andy. ‘Outside!’ he snaps. As he joins us in the corridor, he scowls, ‘What is *with* you two today? Did you guys break up or something?’

‘Or something,’ I scowl.

Andy’s face softens. ‘Please keep it out of my classroom?’

I apologise quickly.

‘Sorry, sir ... won’t happen again,’ Jack says, finally removing his fist from his nose and checking for blood. I almost scoff at him, before remembering that I am trying to impersonate an adult. Andy nods curtly, returning to the classroom. Jack and I are alone in the corridor.

‘Sorry I threw a pencil case at you,’ I mutter.

Now assured that his nose isn’t bleeding, Jack stands at his full height. ‘Yeah, and I’m sorry for saying that you weren’t slutty enough. That was very, very wrong of me.’

Reluctantly, I laugh.

Jack does too. After a moment, he sighs, ‘I miss you, you know.’

I laugh again, but it sounds weird this time. I’m not sure if I’m ready to be missed by him. He’s just my type, and that’s the problem. He is sarcastic, ambitious, and sharp in all the wrong places. That, and I’m not a hundred per cent sure he’s not secretly a demon trying to kill me.

...I’m suddenly very glad that people can’t read my mind. It’s pretty screwed up in here.

Jack moves closer, by a breath. But that’s all it takes.

His vibrant face fades to pallid grey. His eyes grow cold, grotesque and cruel as his cheeks hollow. His mouth stretches to a gaping maw, darkness gushing into it as if he’s sucking my energy. I’m lost to the monster he has become—

‘No!’ I crumble to the floor.

Jack rushes to help me up, but I shove him away. It’s better that we don’t touch.

Two leggy girls near the bathroom are staring at us. From their expressions, you’d think that my face was oozing pus or something. They start whispering furiously.

‘What the hell?’ Jack asks. ‘Jett, are you—’

‘Just s-stay away from me,’ I splutter.

Jack stops trying to help me stand. ‘Hey, no problem,’ he grunts. ‘Have a nice life.’ He snaps something scathing at the gossiping girls on his way back to Media Studies; they scuttle off in fright.

I remain on the floor for another minute, willing my skin to stop freezing over.

What is *happening* to me?

Three

My first day of Year 12 is about as much fun as Frenching a razor blade—which Hufford District already thinks I do, so whatever. At the beginning of Human Bio, Jack’s twin brother, Reilly, starts pelting Skittles at Kenny and Lloyd with the witty catchphrase, ‘*Taste the rainbow, queers!*’

Teachers don’t bother to discipline Reilly anymore. They ignore his random acts of rudeness in favour of *not* driving home in a car spray-painted with a funky four-letter word.

Kenny is in a towering mood. Word has already circulated about his European ‘sausage-fest’ with Lloyd, and he isn’t handling the abuse very well. He’s purposefully left a seat in between himself and Lloyd for appearance’s sake. I’m hesitant to sit there; after my butch attack on Jack Moran, I’m now a suspected lesbian so, according to Hufford District, my sitting between two homosexuals won’t create a deviation ... it’ll just create a row.

‘Why are you late?’ Kenny asks as I finally park my butt. He sounds a little accusatory; I guess he *was* counting on my boobs.

Given this situation, I don’t want to burden him with the truth about having just fended off two verbal prompts for me to kill myself. I’ve had to remind my harassers that I tend to harm rather than self-harm; that shuts them up.

‘Mammogram,’ I say. ‘I mean, gynaecologist. Or something.’

Kenny laughs it off, though I notice that Lloyd looks distinctly jealous he’ll never be able to use the all-powerful ‘girl problems’ excuse. Did Sigmund Freud ever get around to writing about ‘vagina envy’...?

Besides the sporadic shower of *Skittles*, to which I respond with a most unladylike hand gesture when Ms Kline’s back is turned, Human Bio passes uneventfully. Kenny, Lloyd and I gather our books to leave; I’m careful to bump Reilly hard in the shoulder as I pass him.

...Mistake.

Reilly isn't intimidated by my acting like someone out of *Fight Club*—though, if I were in a Fight Club, I certainly wouldn't be talking about it. Grinning, he corners me as I come out of class, blocking my exit.

'So, what does Fierro mean in Italian?' he asks.

'Screw you,' I say. 'No, really; that's the translation.'

He hasn't moved from the doorway, and my anatomy books are growing heavy. 'Well, I was thinking, since you and my brah called it quits, maybe I could ... you know. *Fierro*.'

I shove past him violently, but he pursues. 'Oh, come on! That was funny!'

'As funny as pancreatic cancer,' I reply. It's a long walk to the locker room. Kids are already staring at my jerky power-walk and the Irish stalker. They're most likely churning out rumours that I'm sinking my trampy talons into Jack's brother, because I really am my mother's daughter.

'So, are you a lesbian?' Reilly asks as I rush through the courtyard. 'It'd explain why you hang with Queer as Folk; birds of a feather, right? Well, you're in luck! Your old pal Rei is gonna find you a new girlfriend.'

My patience cracks. Dropping my books, I turn and seize fistfuls of his wrinkled blazer, fantasising about rearranging that stupid face. And if people weren't staring before, they are now.

'Go ahead, throw a punch or two,' Reilly dares. Then, lowering his voice to a whisper, he adds, 'Everyone already thinks you're craaaaaazy...'

I drop my fists.

'*Fierro*,' I scowl.

His laughter haunts me all the way to my locker.

*

My Mitsubishi Mirage has undergone a botched cosmetic makeover.

One of my adorable classmates has scrawled 'SLUT!' over my windscreen in red permanent marker. I suspect Reilly until I see that the exclamation point is dotted with a cutesy love heart. That opens up the possibilities to all the HDHS schoolgirls who blamed my mother for their fathers' cheating.

It's infuriating that those douche-bag daddies, innocent victims of Ma's wicked sexuality, are exonerated while Ma is thrown to the lions. And why am I branded a slut, just for having a man-eating mother? Trust me; the apple has fallen worlds away from the tree.

Exhausted, I get in and drive.

The coastal road of Cheyne is gridlocked. I stare at the dated houses and businesses, stained white with sea salt. Tourists are carrying surfboards up to the beach, despite the unseasonal grey clouds brewing over the ocean. The air tastes bad in my mouth, its moisture making my skin grow clammy. Everything about Cheyne is depressingly familiar like a song loathed since childhood.

Traffic picks up speed, the lights burning green. I've only got one more year as the town bike's kid, the psycho, the fallen angel of the Hufford District in-crowd, the—

My Mirage slams into a Toyota Prado.

I feel a burst of pain. The amber traffic lights snap to red. Prado-Guy emerges from his car, gesticulating furiously at me. I squint at the back of his car, but I can't see anything wrong with it. I doubt my lemon car would have made so much as a scratch on it. Prado-Guy comes to the same realisation. He blinks comically at me before backing away, giving me a hearty thumbs-up. The lights turn green; he drives off, unscathed.

Cars are honking. I punch the hazard lights on and swerve into a side street, cursing the non-deployment of my airbags. I gingerly test the painful part of my forehead.

Blood.

I lower my fingers and stare at the crimson. It feels as if I'm sitting beside myself, observing my attempts to be real. I'm supposed to cry. Normal people cry after they've had car accidents, right?

The tears won't come.

*

Good parents aren't supposed to dump details of their money problems on their nine-year old daughter. They're supposed to read her bedtime stories or buy her Barbies, if only just those second-hand ones with most of the hair missing. Good parents definitely aren't supposed to guilt their kid into shutting up about the monsters under her bed. But Ma isn't much of a mother, and her creepy boyfriend sure isn't my father...

Derik leans down to pull my blankets up to my chin. He smells weird. It's not a bad smell, but I know that I hate it.

'Where's Ma?' I ask. He ignores this, pecking me on the cheek. The smell wafts with him, stronger, making my stomach hurt. I shrink away.

'Well? Where's my goodnight kiss?'

It doesn't even sound like a question anymore. I provide.

He leaves, the door shutting with a sharp snap. My eyes widen against the darkness. I want to turn the light on, to fight the sleep that's coming. I feel my mind drifting, but I won't let myself fall asleep. If I do, they'll find me.

I'm standing on my mattress, not sure how I got here. I'm screaming and sweating, even though I've never felt so cold. My world is foggy, like a fading dream. I know something bad has happened, but I just can't *remember*...

Ma is talking to me. 'You're all right, baby ... you're all right now.'

No, I'm not, Ma. I just can't explain why.

Derik bursts in, a dark shadow against the orange light. I start crying again. The waking world is no better than my nightmares. Monsters come in many shapes.

‘For God’s sake...’ Derik growls. ‘This has *got to stop*.’

‘She can’t help it,’ Ma says weakly. ‘Maybe we should take her to see—’

The lights flash on. I hide my eyes.

‘Juliatt,’ Derik says. ‘Do you know how much doctors cost?’

‘No, Pa,’ I say. He’s stolen the name, but it’s not like the real owner has noticed.

‘Rik,’ Ma says, ‘she’s only nine. Don’t you think she’s too—’

Derik ignores her. ‘I want to buy you pretty things, Juliatt. I don’t want to give my money to doctors. They’re just going to say you’re having these nightmares, or terrors. Whatever they’re called, it doesn’t matter. If I keep shoving money at the doctors, I’ll have none left.’ His face hardens. ‘You can’t keep worrying your mother with this. Look how scared she is.’

Ma is pale. She bites her bottom lip, as if she wants to say something.

‘I’m sorry,’ I whisper.

‘Sleep,’ Derik says.

They leave me alone in the darkness.

I’ve known for a while that I need to stop talking about the things I see at night. Derik likes to tell me that if I keep going like this, the doctors would lock me up. They’d inject me with needles, tie me down, and stop me from talking altogether.

It’ll be better if I stop all on my own.

*

My iPhone buzzes irritably. I blink, unsure of where I am. I answer the phone call.

‘Jett? Where *are* you?’ my sister demands.

It's nearly 4.30 pm. I'm still in my car, and the blood has dried on my forehead.

I lick my lips. 'Sorry ... I'm five minutes away, Patra.'

'Good,' she snaps. 'I'm stuck in the house with Brute. He's wearing his budgie smugglers again and it's giving me a migraine. *Hurry up!*'

Four

‘What is this crap?’ Brute grunts, flicking shards of Doritos off of his chest. Patra and I exchange glances.

Brute—well, I think it says ‘Bruce’ on his birth certificate, assuming he was born of woman and not sewer—is best when comatose from his nightly indulgence in Wild Turkey. As this happy silence is still a few hours off, we’ll have to tolerate the vexing sounds and smells that come from his mouth and other sphincters.

‘This,’ says Patra, ‘is the *news*, Bruce.’

He glares.

I can appreciate Brute’s disappointment. The news telecast of the latest Tokyo earthquake, with its lack of special effects or direction from Michael Bay, is simply not stimulating enough for him. There’s not even a steroid-sucking alpha male dressed in a homoerotic onesie pinning his opponent down under the pretext of wrestling. Poor Brute.

He sits in the faux leather recliner like a lump of pink plasticine, topped with a scratch of thinning blond hair. He might be a good-looking guy, I suppose, if he was ... you know, someone else entirely. I look away before I visualise him mating with Ma.

Eww, too late.

Whether due to my recent head injury or his general grossness, I’ve wanted to throw up ever since I got home. I’ve sponged off most of the dried blood and combed my fringe forward. I’d rather not spend the evening waving away accusations of joining a gang.

Brute punches a stubby forefinger on the remote, unleashing the brusque roars of a rowdy AFL team.

‘Well, that’s me out,’ I say, crawling off of the couch. My hatred for sports exists on a molecular level. And my hatred for Brute runs *much* deeper.

‘Bring me another Turkey,’ Brute calls. I look back to see Patra following me and Brute’s eyes lingering on her form for a little longer than necessary. She doesn’t notice, but it makes my heart rate kick it up a notch.

‘I’ll tell that pig where he can shove his Turkey,’ she scowls, transferring a large baking tray of lasagna from the oven to the bench top. ‘I mean, he comes into our house, eats all our food, does nothing except our *mother*, and then barks orders at us? To hell with Ma! This guy is a *joke!*’

‘Right there with you,’ I say. I’m nearly seventeen now, and I’m sick of waiting for my mother to pass her own adolescence.

It’s a relief not to be the brunt of Patra’s rage for once. Despite being two years my junior, she’s the one that keeps the Fierro household afloat. Trust me when I say she does *not* suffer in silence.

Ma is a real estate agent, which has her coming home at all hours. Floundering through life on her edgy good looks, Ma leaves all the tough decisions to her ravenous nethers. She believes that true love is the highest calling. What does it matter if she frequently plays the role of The Other Woman? Love is a battlefield, and the current wives of her philandering suitors can take a hike for all she cares.

Bruce Macintyre recently got chucked out by his ex-wife, Melinda. Poverty-stricken and divorced, Brute raided the local real estate agencies for a cheap rental. However, at Astute Realty in West Cheyne, he found something even better—the wide-eyed, wide-legged Mona Fierro. Within the week of their first date at the Hornet’s Nest Tavern, Brute moved out of his motel room and into Ma’s pants. So for now, we’re stuck with him.

Patra savagely segregates the lasagna into large rectangles with a knife. Her ferocious demeanour suggests she’s fantasising the hot Italian dish is part of Brute’s anatomy. I laugh.

She shoves a lump of lasagna onto one of the plates, dumps a handful of salad on the side, and vanishes into the living room. I'm still feeling sick, so I just pick at the salad. As I crunch my first disc of cucumber, Patra returns, her face twisted in disgust.

'He used the fork to scratch his armpit...' she whines. I wince delicately and wait for my appetite to come back.

'Aren't you supposed to be the man of the house?' she demands. 'Why didn't you put your fat foot down when he tried to barge in here?' She hops nimbly onto the kitchen bench and eats with angry gusto.

'How am I the man?'

She nods at my total lack of womanly assets. 'Oh, I dunno. Maybe because *Brute* has more going on in the chest department than you?'

This is an unfortunate truth. I am very slight in build, paling in comparison to Patra's curvaceous appeal. It's easy to forget that she's barely fourteen. Disturbingly easy, for some...

I sniff. 'Shut up, Stepford.'

Patra simpers. I think she rather enjoys that the biggest insult I can hurl at her is that she cooks and cleans too much. I'm keeping my accusations of her micromanaging megalomania for a rainy day.

Neither of us is sitting at the dining table. Due to the absence of our mother and respective fathers—yes, Ma has spawned sisters from different misters—our slapdash family isn't exactly nuclear. That untouched dining table is a taunting reminder of what Patra and I have never had.

The door bangs shut as Ma hurricanes through the kitchen in her Astute uniform on heels too high for the workplace. She's taken some liberties with the traditional amount of buttons done up on one's blouse; it's a wonder she doesn't close more sales.

We mumble incoherently in greeting. Distracted, she pulls out her mobile phone and asks, 'How's Bruce?'

‘Ask him yourself?’ Patra suggests.

Ma’s face falls. She’s well aware that we like Brute about as much as the Nazis or Justin Bieber. That’s got to hurt, I guess.

‘So, uh ... anything sell? Are we eating next week?’ I ask her, smiling.

She shrugs. ‘Oh, you know ... slow market. Things will pick up soon.’

‘Promising,’ drawls Patra. Then, with a theatrical gasp, she says, ‘Wait, I’ve got it! I know this is a radical thought, but ... why don’t you ask Bruce to go get a job?’

‘*Cleopatra*,’ Ma snaps. From her ominous tone, you’d think Patra just dropped the C-U-Next-Tuesday.

‘What, is “job” a cuss-word now?’ Patra asks. ‘Or just for Bruce?’

‘Patra, cut it out,’ I sigh. Ma looks too exhausted to hear this now. Her Napoleon Perdis face has all the markings of suppressed anxiety.

Before Patra can retort, Brute’s roar chokes the house.

‘Mona!’

Ma flutters into the living room and, after about thirty seconds, flutters back with Brute’s plate. The salad is perfectly intact.

‘Oh, my bad,’ Patra winces. ‘I always forget that he’s allergic to nutrition.’

Ma titters helplessly, picking at his remains. The salad, I mean, not his decomposing corpse. Sadly. The three of us stand awkwardly in the kitchen for a moment longer before Ma forces a laugh. ‘Well, I’d better go give Bruce a proper hello...’

‘Eww,’ I say. She ignores this, and leaves.

Patra glares at me defiantly as I allow a disappointed silence to settle between us. ‘What?’ she hisses. ‘Jett, she deserves it.’

I cock a brow. After a while, Patra cracks like tenuous glass. ‘It’s just ... she needs to grow up! Why does she think her hellhole of a life is such a fairytale?’

‘Because the commoners of our kingdom bestow upon us gifts of eggs every week?’ I suggest. I knew all the tricks for getting rotten eggs off of the door by now. Dr Seuss was a douche-bag for leading me to believe that green eggs weren’t all that bad.

Patra begins loading our dishwasher. ‘She keeps kissing toads, expecting them to turn into princes. That’s how we always end up with the Brutes of the world.’

‘Now, be reasonable.’ I stuff leftover lasagna into Tupperware containers. ‘Brute is a pig with a turkey up his ass, remember? Let’s not mix our metaphors.’

‘I’m serious, Jett,’ Patra says sternly. ‘Ma’s obsessed with love. It’s not healthy. Look at us, for God’s sake! Cleopatra and Juliet? She picked, like, the *only* two Shakespearean bitches who offed themselves for love.’

‘At least she’s literary?’

‘If one of us threw herself off a bridge because she got dumped, Ma would probably be proud of her for living up to her namesake!’ Patra says disgustedly.

I laugh. ‘It could be worse. There’s a girl in my History class called Shaniqua-Jean. Her milkshake brings *all* the boys to the yard.’

‘I’m glad you’re taking this seriously,’ she says.

‘I’m glad you’re giving up sarcasm,’ I reply.

Shoving the dishwasher door closed, she snaps, ‘What if she tries to marry him? What if he takes control of the finances? Or what about the—’

‘*Ahem.*’

We whip around to find the hulking figure of Brute in the doorway, his eyes narrowed into piggy slits.

‘You two talk a lot about the old girl behind her back,’ he murmurs, grabbing another can of Wild Turkey from the fridge without breaking eye contact.

We stand our ground, albeit nervously. Patra is first to find her voice. ‘So? She’s *our* mother. We can talk about her as much as we like—’

'Keep out of my business,' he growls. 'Or else.'

'Or else?' Patra's laugh is devoid of mirth. 'Are you *kidding* me? You're not a Bond villain, you moron. You're a jobless, homeless divorcee, and you smell like a urinal. So don't you dare threaten us in our own house. We live here; you don't!'

Brute's fingers tighten around his can; the aluminium crackles in an ominous way. 'You want to watch yourself, pretty lady...' He takes a step toward her, his eyes alight with dark curiosity.

Swallowing the heart that is inexplicably throbbing in my mouth, I edge in front of my sister, holding her back with my arm. 'As long as *you're* not watching her.'

I can't help but notice that he hasn't rushed to defend himself against this particular allegation. Brute takes a slow sip of Wild Turkey, his eyes lingering idly on the hemline of Patra's school skirt.

I half-expect Patra to make a smartarse comment, but she doesn't. I'm frightened to see the news that Brute's been leering at her when she's not looking has rendered her nearly catatonic.

Maybe I need to educate Brute about my violent tendencies. History has proven that I'm pretty handy with a letter opener against monsters.

At that moment, Ma comes in from the lounge room, yawning. She is oblivious to the strange tension lurking between her daughters and boyfriend, so situation normal. She slides her arm around Brute's waist. 'There you are, hon. I wasn't sure where you'd got to.'

His gaze leaves Patra, and he turns to smirk at me instead. 'Don't worry, I'm here. I'm going to be here for a long time.' He kisses her deliberately on the neck. Ma flushes with pleasure, giggling. Is she *twelve*?

'Goodnight,' I say through gritted teeth. If Ma thinks it's strange that we're heading to bed at 7.30 pm, she doesn't comment. She nods absently, trailing after Brute in the direction of the master bedroom.

Seizing Patra's wrist, I drag her forcefully from the kitchen. Once we've climbed the stairs, she twists out of my grasp. 'Jett, we can't just let him—'

'Don't be an idiot,' I scowl, marching into my room. She follows angrily. 'We've got to be sneakier. He could make life really difficult for us.' With a sickening pang, I remember how late I was coming home from school today. I left her alone with him.

Never again.

Patra's shoulders slump; a sheet of sleek brown hair shields her eyes. 'I just hate it,' she says in a small voice. 'All these strangers, coming in and ... why can't we just have a normal mum? I ... I *hate* her, Jett.'

I should chastise her for these disloyal words. I'm the older sister, after all. But to be honest, I kind of hate Ma too.

Ma never should have had kids, but I suspect Patra and I were more likely consequences of faulty condoms or boozy bareback hook-ups. Either that or she popped us out as anchors to keep her then-boyfriends from skipping town. They still left, though, so the joke's on her.

...And us.

'Look,' I whisper, pulling her down onto the bed. 'I'm saving like crazy at my job. As soon as I can, I'm getting the hell out of here, so feel free to follow me.'

Her jaw drops. 'You're moving out?'

'Not just out,' I say. 'Away. Far, far away.'

Patra's face mists over in longing. 'When can we leave?' she gasps. 'When will you have enough money? When—'

'Whoa, down girl...' Her haste makes me smile, albeit weakly. I'm still waiting for my job at Blockbuster to pay me with more than just magic beans to grow myself a mighty fine beanstalk. I have a few grand stashed away, ready for after graduation ... assuming I don't fail Year 12 with flying colours. If sleep keeps evading me, failure is definitely in the cards.

Patra's huge brown eyes start welling uncontrollably. 'Jett, you can't go without me—'

I cut her off. 'Patra, I swear. I will not leave you here to rot.'

She collapses against me and I embrace her automatically. She's such a raging spitfire that I sometimes forget how young she is. In a shaking voice, she says, 'It feels like I'm dying in this house.'

Oh, good. Not just me then.

I kiss her hair softly. I'm not a fan of human connection, given that most people suck big time, but I love Patra like I could never love anything else in this life. She'll keep me grounded.

However far gone I become, I can always find my way back to her, and myself.

*

Remembering Ma's boyfriends is like trying to remember bowel movements; not something I care to dwell on for too long.

There are a few losers that really stand out from the ocean of drug users, drug dealers, dognappers, neo-Nazis, scientologists, nudists, and chauvinists. But I still believe that, if given the chance to get back together with one of them, Ma would have chosen Derik Morgan.

He was definitely the smartest and the most accomplished, which wasn't saying a *great* deal given Ma's track record. Derik used to be a sessional tutor in Fine Arts at Cheyne University and had earned a modest fortune from national exhibitions and private sales of his collections.

Ma liked the illusion that he took care of her. He made all the hard decisions ... *and* the easy ones. Ma was never one of the great thinkers of our time; when she was with Derik, she indulged in her sudden freedom from choice, loneliness and single motherhood.

Derik regularly spent months off from teaching at the university. Day-care was a great expense for Ma back when Patra and I were young, so Derik's long breaks from work came in handy. He didn't object to playing babysitter, though he never took the role very seriously. We were often left to fend for ourselves for hours at a time while he left the house.

Ma had to park her car on the lawn because Derik set up an art studio in the garage. It was dirty, dark, and stank of turpentine. Shelves of oil paints and half-finished canvases of grotesque, abstract portraits littered the tin walls and floor. Derik said he needed natural light to paint his masterpieces. I hardly ever saw the garage door open.

When we were at home with Derik, I played in Patra's room while he painted. I would sneak into the kitchen whenever we got hungry, hoping that Derik wouldn't catch me. He never liked me eating in front of him. He warned that I'd get fat and the girls at school would tease me. Every now and then, however, he offered a different reason: he said he liked me small.

After a while, not eating became sort of a habit. I would challenge myself to see how long I could go before I gave in to hunger. It was like a game. But Patra hated it. She'd cry.

I stole a loaf of bread from a bakery once when I was eight, and gave her stale slices to keep her quiet over the few weeks that followed. I needed her to grow, so she wouldn't be small. I had to stop doing it, though, because she got really sick one time. Green bread was bad bread.

Sometimes, Derik would try to be friends with me. He used to give me pretty bracelets, and not give Patra any. She cried, so I shared them with her when he wasn't looking. It didn't always go well. He found one on her wrist once and threw all my bracelets straight into the bin. He called me an ingrate.

When I turned eight, Derik told Ma that I was grown up enough to have my own bedroom away from Patra. He spent the weekend decorating the spare room in shades of pink, and then moved me in. He asked me if I liked it, and I told him I missed my old room. He locked me outside until Ma came home later that night.

The new room wasn't all bad, though. We lived in a cramped double-storey house, and this new room was right in front of the staircase. One night when I was twelve, and trying to flee my monster, I accidentally pushed Derik down those stairs. He was okay; just a few broken bones. But he left Ma the very next day.

It's been years since that night, but I think Ma still believes I pushed him on purpose.

Five

'You look like arse,' Jack says. He is truly the Shakespeare of our time.

I ignore him, staring blearily at my laptop screen. I'm on a kooky website with a dream-catcher backdrop, but I've finally found something that interests me.

Sleep paralysis occurs in transition between sleep and wakefulness, during which the body undergoes full paralysis and hallucinations may be projected onto the waking environment. Episodes are generally accompanied by an acute sense of foreboding...

Yeah, that's one way to put it.

I'm hiding out at the Hufford District library after another hellish school day. Though I may show prowess in removing rotten eggs from unlikely surfaces, I've had no luck with the stubborn 'SLUT' stain on my windscreen. That sure got a big laugh when I pulled up this morning. You know me, always glad to put a smile on your face. And then punch said face repeatedly.

I don't have to be home for a few hours. Patra has rehearsals for the local theatre group's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Ten guesses what role she landed.

The sleep disorder is generally not harmful ... Muscle atonia occurs as a perfectly normal part of sleep but fails to wear off upon awakening to sleep paralysis ... Waking dreams ... Frightening, but not real.

Thanks, website. Super comforting. Why don't you tell that to my shadow? He's realer than anything I've ever known.

Jack doesn't leave, but he's keeping his distance. 'I'm sorry about yesterday,' he says.

'Oh?' To be honest, I can't remember what he supposedly did.

Cautiously, he places his schoolbag on the library desk. When I don't object, he sits opposite me. 'I wish I could understand what's going on with you, Jett.'

I smile wanly. 'So do I.'

I've heard of the term 'sleep paralysis' before, but this description doesn't even begin to describe the horror of what happens to me every night. Every time I read the word 'episodes', I want to kick something. That makes it sound like I'm watching some bad sitcom that'll be over soon. God, it's so much more than that. I'm being attacked, ripped to shreds, contemplating the prospect of my own death over and over again. And the darkness is rapidly spilling into my waking life. I want to be reassured by this website's 'hakuna matata' sentiment, but it's kind of hard when I know that tonight I'm going to be vivisected for funsies by a dark mass of malevolence. Really, the idea that my mind can conjure up a scenario of such horrific realism is the exact *opposite* of reassuring. Surely that means I'm destined for a lifetime of brain-melting antipsychotics? I'm scraping by with four hours on a good night and I wake each morning to a world where the volume is too loud, the colours are too bright, and my eyes are sunken graves. This life is like a hangover without the preceding fun.

A hand prods my shoulder. I start, looking up to find Jack leaning across the table. 'You nodded off,' he explains. He's wearing the Moschino cologne I got for his sixteenth birthday. It hurts, being so close to him when I've told myself that he's off limits. He really is beautiful.

And I look like an extra from *The Walking Dead*.

'Are you sure it's safe to be seen with me?' I laugh, though locating what's so funny proves difficult. 'Associating with Jett Fierro these days is socially suicidal. You might not have heard about this crazy thing I did at a party last year ... I killed a bunch of people based on the seven deadly sins. Sent a severed head in a box to the lead detective at the Cheyne PD and everything. Made my career.'

He grins. 'I've heard whispers of it, yeah...' Then he frowns. 'Since when did I care what people thought of you?'

I try to act all offended, as if it's big news that Ma's home-wrecking stink was still hovering around me back when we were dating, but I can't summon the energy.

Jack covertly pulls out a candy bar from his pocket, keeping an eye out for skulking librarians.

‘Still a closed book, aren’t you,’ he sighs in dismay, chewing. ‘Speaking of books ... last I checked, Reilly was drawing dicks in the Educational Resources section. The teacher who borrows that digestive system batch is in for a treat.’

‘Reilly sure knows how to make science come alive—’

‘Juliett, are you okay?’ Jack asks, his forehead wrinkled with concern. The use of my full name throws me off-guard and I catch his eye. He’s looking at me far too closely. I turn away, unwilling to witness another of his shadowy transformations.

I shrug.

No, Jack. I don’t think I am okay. My mother’s boyfriend is a dirty creep who keeps watching my sister, and I hate it. She’s still a baby; she always will be, and I want to save her from everything that could possibly hurt her in this world. But I can’t even save myself. Jack ... I think I’m losing my mind. When you get too near to me, everything falls apart. What is it about you that skews me off of my axis? You make my world dissolve into the darkness, and I don’t trust myself to know what’s real anymore. Am I here? Am I even awake? Jack, I can’t tell. I don’t feel it.

‘I’m fine,’ I smile. That lie will always be my answer, but it’s nice to hear the question.

At least I know someone will notice when I fade away.

Interrogating the incubus:

Sleep paralysis explored in the young adult novel,

'Somewhat Damaged'

Interrogating the incubus:

Sleep paralysis explored in the young adult novel, 'Somewhat Damaged'

This essay examines the construction of character in my young adult paranormal novel 'Somewhat Damaged', an excerpt of which forms part of this thesis. I will describe the ways that conventions of young adult and horror fiction have shaped the development and execution of 'Somewhat Damaged'. The novel adopts a feminist approach, examining the concept of the 'figurative orphan' resulting from parental absenteeism and emotional distance, and conveying male and female attitudes towards female promiscuity. In addition, the essay will communicate my research of a parasomnia called sleep paralysis, its correlation with childhood sexual abuse (CSA), and its psychoanalytical potentials in the novel.

The term 'parasomnia' refers to a dissociated sleep state during which partial arousal of the mind or body occurs in the transition from sleep to wakefulness and vice versa, often presenting with anomalous movement, behaviour, emotion, and distortions in perception. Specifically, sleep paralysis symptoms involve full body paralysis, respiratory distress, knowledge of wakefulness, and an acute sense of foreboding while heightened experiences may comprise frightening auditory, visual and tactile hallucinations of malevolent entities such as incubi, spirits, witches or aliens (Hurd, 2010). The manifestation of these entities represents the dynamic interaction of culturally informed narratives and human physiology, and is a primary focus of this thesis. The aim of my inquiry is to situate the suggestive supernatural aspects of sleep paralysis within a fictional context and explore their mythic potential.

'Somewhat Damaged' is the story of Julieta Fierro, a teenage outcast enduring the repercussions of her mother's indiscriminate promiscuity, while constantly exhausted by attacks of sleep paralysis. Following her meltdown at a party during which she attacked her

boyfriend, Juliett approaches her final year of high school with disengagement, cynicism, and an deteriorating sense of reality. Nightly torment by a faceless shadow whose cruelty reverberates on a deeper level of her memory, Juliett surrenders herself to the darkness of those hallucinations to evoke the truth of what her mother's sinister past boyfriend, Derik, did to her in her childhood.

The concept of 'Somewhat Damaged' originated when I began experiencing sleep paralysis with fluctuating frequency and intensity in 2011. My research in the neurophysiological explanations of the phenomenon could not account for the ubiquity of the apparitions, prompting the question: how can my experiences of sleep paralysis, independent of prior knowledge of the parasomnia, be almost identical to accounts of sufferers from earlier centuries? My experiences have ranged from hearing footsteps slowly ascending the stairs and entering my bedroom to vivid hallucinations of sexual assault and, whatever feature I focus upon, I can find commonalities with various other sufferers online or from past literary or medical allusions. My experiences of being choked and crushed have been mentioned as far back as a 1664 case study by Dutch physician Isbrand van Diemerbroeckof: 'the devil lay upon her and held her down, sometimes that she was choaked [sic] by a great dog or thief lying upon her breast, so that she could hardly speak or breath [sic]' (Kompanje, 2008, p. 465). Indeed, my lack of knowledge of sleep paralysis made me fear the cause might be mental illness, or that I would need to re-evaluate my belief system. Research allowed me to educate myself in the discourses of sleep paralysis and reaffirm my position on the phenomenon; however, the myths of incubi attacking sufferers when they are neither asleep nor awake still intrigued me, so that 'Somewhat Damaged' began to evolve. While there has been inconclusive substantiation, some theories attempt to account for the recurring imagery; in particular, Carl Jung's theories of a 'collective unconscious' (1959) and the 'shadow' archetype (1948) offer fascinating potential when applied to sleep paralysis, underpinning my creative inquiry.

Although the excerpt submitted does not feature sexual abuse, it does foreshadow revelations of repressed trauma. During her sleep paralysis episodes, Juliett's tormentor manifests as an 'incubus', a prevalent figure in sleep paralysis history, mentioned in both literary and medical works. The narrator of 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (Poe, 1845) refers to the symptoms of sleep paralysis: 'But my efforts were fruitless. An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame; and, at length, there sat upon my very heart an incubus... Shaking this off with a gasp and a struggle, I uplifted myself upon the pillows' (p. 77). The incubus, from the Latin *incubare*, to lie upon, was described by the early Christian Church as a male demon or devil that lies upon the sleeper, often engaging in intercourse with them and inspiring a state of terror (Adler, 2011, p. 46). These sexual connotations of a forceful dominant presence already allude to the violent nature of sexual abuse; indeed, the article 'Prevalence and correlates of sleep paralysis in adults reporting childhood sexual abuse' (Abrams, Mulligan, Carleton & Asmundson, 2008) strongly implies that a history of abuse exacerbates the severity of sleep paralysis episodes. The novel will examine this suggestive correlation in addition to the occurrence of dissociative personality traits in abuse survivors.

Literary and psychoanalytic theories of Tzvetan Todorov and Sigmund Freud have informed the darker, hallucinatory aspects of the narrative. Freud's (1919) concept of the 'uncanny' or the 'return of the repressed' is resonant in the tone of the novel. The 'uncanny' is derived from repressing and therefore alienating the familiar; it is the subsequent revival of this familiarity that arouses dread. The frightening nature of the protagonist's hallucinations during sleep paralysis is suggestive of repressed sexual trauma so that sleep paralysis becomes the medium through which the 'return of the repressed' occurs. The 'fantastic' effect in literature is described by Todorov (2000) as the intellectual hesitation between attributing uncanny phenomena to natural and supernatural causes (p. 15). This essay will discuss how these theories encourage readers of 'Somewhat Damaged' to entertain both paranormal visitation

and the emergence of repressed experience as competing explanations for the protagonist's sleep paralysis.

Young adult fiction is written for an adolescent readership, generally ranging from preteens to early twenties. As the teenage experience can be fraught with turbulent issues of identity, young adult fiction aims to depict adolescence realistically; its significance lies in its often fearless articulation of themes such as sexuality, body image, substance experimentation, peer pressure, and relationships. Michael Cart (2009) states that teenage readers require stories that 'speak with relevance and immediacy to their real lives and... provide a place of commonality of experience and mutual understanding, for in so doing, they bring the outsiders out of the darkness and into the light of community' (p. 5). The formative years of adolescence can be deeply affective for some, with associated insecurities often enduring well into adulthood. Discussing the teenager's search for identity, Patty Campbell (2000) states:

The central theme of most YA fiction is becoming an adult, finding the answer to the question 'Who am I and what am I going to do about it?' No matter what events are going on in the book, accomplishing that task is really what the book is about, and in the climactic moment the resolution of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that helps shape an adult identity (p. 485).

Julieta Fierro, the protagonist of 'Somewhat Damaged', slides between numerous facets of her emerging adult identity, many of which have been created in response to labels designated by her peers: 'I've only got one more year as the town bike's kid, the school psycho, the fallen angel of the Hufford District in-crowd' (p. 24). Julieta's acceptance of these labels of slut, psycho and social pariah as partial aspects of her persona results in feelings of displacement in her social and familial environments. In particular, Julieta's disconnection from her mother is a recurring theme of the novel, prompting her identity as a 'figurative orphan'.

The breakdown of the family dynamic has become a common theme in young adult fiction, frequently depicting parents as incompetent, abusive, non-communicative, oblivious or cruel.

Julie Just (2010) observes in 'The Parent Problem in Young Adult Lit' that classic stories generally preferred the hero's parents to be dead or absent rather than callous or inept. Indeed, fairy tales such as *Snow White* and *Hansel and Gretel* cast the terrorisers of children as step-parents; this removal of the biological mother allows the romanticism of unconditional love between mother and child to remain untarnished. However, modern young adult fiction regularly include negative constructions of the parental figure: 'The most memorable bad guy [has] become, in many cases, the mother, matching in pathos what the wicked stepmother once conjured in malevolence' (Just, 2010). Whether the 'bad parent' allows space for the protagonist's growth as a character or acts as a source of anguish at the heart of the narrative, depictions of parental absenteeism and abusiveness in young adult fiction are plentiful. 'Somewhat Damaged' features Mona Fierro, a single mother raising two daughters, Juliett and Cleopatra. The protagonist is unbridled in her criticism, quick to condemn Mona's indiscriminate promiscuity, the quality of her parenting, and even her motives in motherhood:

Ma never should have had kids, but I suspect Patra and I were more likely consequences of faulty condoms or boozy bareback hook-ups. Either that or she popped us out as anchors to keep her then-boyfriends from skipping town. They still left, though, so the joke's on her.

...And us.

Owing to the absence of her biological father and her mother's serial romantic relationships, Juliett is subjected to a chain of unsuitable father figures. Juliett, in her resentment, is predisposed to disliking Mona's many suitors and often infantilises her mother, regarding her choices in men and life as signs of perpetual immaturity: 'I'm nearly seventeen now, and I am sick of waiting for my mother to pass her own adolescence' (p. 29). As the 'bad parent', Mona's crimes of obliviousness, self-interest, and emotional distance from her daughters are comparatively mild considering her exposure of her daughters to predatory men such as Derik Morgan and Bruce Macintyre. In reminiscing scenes of Derik, the foreshadowing of sexual

abuse functions as evidence of Mona's incompetence in protecting her children. Additionally, Mona's pervasive preoccupation with romance is immortalised in the names of her daughters:

'Ma's obsessed with love. It's not healthy. Look at us, for God's sake! Cleopatra and Juliett? She picked, like, the only two Shakespearean bitches who offed themselves for love.'

'At least she's literary?'

'If one of us threw herself off a bridge because she got dumped, Ma would probably be proud of her for living up to her namesake!'

Mona's belief that romantic love is the highest calling in life is symbolically represented in these names and implies that life without love is worthless and unliveable, contributing to her pathology as a serial dater. Consequently, Juliett has great difficulty in her romance with Jack Moran, withdrawing emotionally from the relationship when Jack pronounces his love. Juliett is reluctant to allow love to cloud her judgement as she fears that prioritising romance will imbue her with Mona's selfish and destructive characteristics.

While Mona is cast as the obvious 'bad parent', the absence of the protagonist's biological father is condemned by Juliett through her relative silence on the matter; his only mention appears when Juliett expresses her reluctance to call Derik 'Pa': 'He's stolen the name, but it's not like the real owner has noticed' (p. 26). In a literature review of father absence and adolescent development, findings indicated that paternal absence results in increased antisocial behaviour and lower self-esteem, but promotes a strong sense of obligation, independence and family values (East, Jackson & O'Brien, 2006, pp. 289-290). Juliett's premature detachment from her absent father and emotionally distant mother casts her as a character who is 'orphaned, not in the precise, literal sense but in an unexaggerated, figurative sense' (Leoutsakas, 2004, p. 3). The 'figurative orphan' is one of Juliett's many self-designated aspects of her identity that ultimately emphasises her isolation. As 'figurative orphans', Juliett and Cleopatra fulfil roles atypical for their age group, often fluctuating between traditionally ascribed parental roles; Juliett acts as protector of her sister, while Cleopatra maintains the

household. Julienn's lack of a father figure may have inhibited her interactions with the outside world, but has elicited a surrogate micro-family comprising only Cleopatra and herself, temporarily satisfying their desire for a stable family dynamic.

Cleopatra's additional function is characterised by the protagonist as her ability to ground Julienn in reality. 'Somewhat Damaged' is concerned with facing the prospect of mental illness; the beneficial relationships that Julienn can create and maintain are crucial in shaping her sense of 'what is real', as her sleep paralysis episodes and resultant sleep deprivation fill her with uncertainty. In the absence of parental support, Cleopatra is what keeps Julienn from escalating her antisocial tendencies into self-destructive behaviour:

I kiss her hair softly. I'm not a fan of human connection, given that most people suck big time, but I love Patra like I could never love anything else in this life. She'll keep me grounded. However far gone I become, I can always find my way back to her, and myself.

This distorted perception of reality suggests that the combination of her parents' absenteeism, her sleep deprivation and associated symptoms, and her childhood sexual trauma have culminated in the destabilisation of Julienn's idea of identity. Meaghan Fox Gurdon (2011) contends in 'Darkness Too Visible' that young adult fiction has taken a dark turn with negative parental representations and discussions of abuse, self-harm, mental illness and other pathologies:

The argument in favor of such novels is that they validate the teen experience, giving voice to tortured adolescents ... If a teen has been abused, the logic follows, reading about another teen in the same straits will be comforting. Yet it is also possible—indeed, likely—that books focusing on pathologies help normalize them...

While this is a legitimate concern, the teenage experience has undergone some radical changes, likely due to the accessibility of social media such as Facebook pages, online blogs and YouTube accounts that are controlled by teens themselves. The trend of suicidal teens

uploading their final words on YouTube has become almost desensitising; reality television programs such as *16 and Pregnant* normalise irresponsible sexual activity; 'pro-anorexia' websites advocate that eating disorders are lifestyle choices, sharing dangerous weight-loss tips with girls worldwide. It is the current climate of society that perpetuates these darker aspects of the teenage experience; quality young adult fiction simply seeks to explore the adolescent mentality in these situations, often in social commentary. The representation of the figurative orphan in 'Somewhat Damaged' is reflective of the social changes in the family dynamic and their associated effects on adolescent development.

Mona Fierro's indiscriminate sexual activity has further reverberating consequences for Juliett, who is persecuted for her association with a promiscuous figure. 'Slut-shaming' refers to the discourse of regulating female sexuality by attacking the sexual values of women and thus marginalising their power (Ringrose & Renold, 2012, pp. 335-36). Adolescent girls are growing up in a world where cruel sexual regulating of their peers is normalised and encouraged. Laurie Penny (2010) suggests that 'it is easier to slut-shame young women by telling them that their clothes are too sexy than to tackle cultural violence at its root'. In a scene with Mona's current sexual partner, Juliett has accused Bruce of voyeuristic behaviour towards fourteen-year-old Cleopatra:

Brute's [*sic*] fingers tighten around his can; the aluminium crackles in an ominous way. 'You want to watch yourself, pretty lady...' He takes a step toward her, his eyes alight with dark curiosity ... I edge in front of my sister, holding her back with my arm. 'As long as *you're* not watching her.'

I can't help but notice that he hasn't rushed to defend himself against this particular allegation. Brute takes a slow sip of Wild Turkey, his eyes lingering casually on the hemline of Patra's school skirt.

The passage intends to highlight this reinforcement of rape culture, the emphasis of which is on teaching girls how to not get raped rather than teaching men not to rape. The focus of Bruce's gaze is reminiscent of the common schoolgirl sexual fantasy which is perfectly

acceptable when engaged in by consenting adults; however, the underlying symbolism of this fantasy can create a dangerous standard that normalises the sexual exploitation of children. Furthermore, Julieta endures bullying from her peers because of her promiscuous mother, whose sexual relationships include fathers of Julieta's classmates, and schoolteachers. Mona Fierro is not vindictive; she does not use her sexuality as a weapon to harm other women, but rather to attract and maintain relationships. Julieta often talks about her mother's promiscuity and its social aftermath, but Mona's ineffectual parenting is her primary concern. After someone has defaced her car with the word 'slut', Julieta remarks on the injustice of the double standard in regards to extramarital sexual activity:

It's infuriating that those douche-bag daddies, innocent victims of Ma's wicked sexuality, are exonerated while Ma is thrown to the lions. And why am I branded a slut, just for having a man-eating mother? Trust me; the apple has fallen worlds away from the tree.

Julieta recognises the sexual discrimination, but also distances herself from the damage caused by Mona's behaviour. This gender disparity of women being punished more harshly than men in sexual affairs perpetuates the patriarchal notion that women's bodies are objects to be acted upon, and are persecuted the moment they become active subjects pursuing their own sexual desires. Linda K Christian-Smith (1998) comments on the reinforced ideals of sexuality in young adult fiction:

[Heroines] are taught that women's sexuality is dangerous, that sexual desire must be properly channelled... their roles as enforcers of the traditional code of sexuality that limits sexual expression to chaste kissing. Heroines also learn that their bodies are the site of many struggles for control; boyfriends, parents, and the girls themselves all contend for ultimate control (p. 109).

This objectification of the female body is depicted literally in Julieta's episodes of sleep paralysis; her movement and therefore free will is removed, rendering her passive and helpless to the malevolent, masculine force that is acting upon her. Young adult fiction frequently features elements of the regulation of female sexuality; it is my intention in 'Somewhat

Damaged' for Julienn to eventually detach herself from her mother's identity and reclaim her own sexual agency.

The novel has also been informed by horror fiction, the prevalence of which is testament to our cultural attraction to investigating our fears. Doing so inside the safe context of horror fiction promises eventual relief due to the finite nature of the narrative when the natural order is re-established (Fahy, 2010, p. 2). In order to depict the often bizarre and macabre content of hallucinations, I have drawn on horror imagery to arouse fear and disgust in the reader: 'There's so much blood... It floods the sheets, meandering from my wounds as crimson snakes. Acidic sweat bubbles beneath my skin' (p. 12). Likening Julienn's blood to snakes seeks to reinforce her detachment from her own body as she is lost in sensory experience. The prominent figure of Julienn's hallucinations is the incubus, which is identified as a male presence. My intention is to use the symbolism of the incubus to represent Julienn's childhood sexual abuse. The incubus, the subject, acts upon its objectified victim and mirrors the power relationship between the abuser and child. The incubus is a symbol of all Julienn's repressed trauma, connected inextricably with her unwanted and premature exposure to destructive sexuality. This is not to imply that sexuality itself is destructive; Penny (2010) clarifies the difference: 'It suggests that sexuality is something that is done to young women, rather than something that they can own and control: that they can never be sexual, only sexualised. This is not a helpful message to send to girls'. The distinction lies in the fact that this sexuality was forced upon Julienn in childhood and is now represented by her incubus, embodying Julienn's repressed feelings towards activities of a sexual nature. As such, the moment that Julienn was prompted to contemplate her boyfriend Jack in a sexual way, she started to associate him with her predatory incubus and consequently attacked him.

The incubus manifests as a 'dark mass of malevolence' (p. 38) and is referred to by Julienn as her 'shadow'. This terminology has been used intentionally to evoke Carl Jung's 'shadow'

archetype, one of four main archetypes in his 'collective unconscious' theory in analytical psychology, though it can be 'inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious' (Jung, 1948, p. 112). The 'shadow' archetype comprises the dark aspects of the personality; in the case of 'Somewhat Damaged', it results as Juliett's projected feelings of shame associated with her repressed memories of abuse. Juliett even acknowledges her shadow's indivisible involvement in her unconscious: 'I know him well, like a dark extension of myself' (p. 12). The protagonist is literally doing battle with her personal unconscious when she encounters the 'shadow' archetype in the form of her incubus.

Jung's 'collective unconscious' concept proposes that there exists, within the human psyche, a reservoir of innately recognisable archetypes. This reservoir of 'archetypes' are allegedly responsible for the recurrences of intuitively familiar figures, events and instincts that appear in myths and legends. It is from this universal library of data that Jung believes our mythologies were born and hence why similar stories appear across cultures. Jung (1959, p. 42-3) explains that these instincts regularly do not reach a level of awareness and are 'specifically formed motive forces which, long before there is any consciousness, and in spite of any degree of consciousness later on, pursue their inherent goals'. Building on this, Jung defines archetypes as 'unconscious images of the instincts themselves...patterns of instinctual behaviour' (p. 42). Jung's concept may be used psychoanalytically to explain Juliett's recognition of archetypal imagery during her sleep paralysis hallucinations. Ryan Hurd (2011) notes of the 'shadow' archetype in sleep paralysis hallucinations that 'these unconscious patterns can play out over and over throughout history, as well as in our dreams ... [and] sometimes the apparition comes not to be scary, but to be heard' (p. 38). When applied to the similar occurrences of figures that emerge during hallucinations of sleep paralysis, the 'collective unconscious' theory offers a possible explanation as to why the same variants of the 'shadow' archetype such as demons, witches, aliens, dead relatives continue to plague their

victims. They are simply variants of innate archetypal images that are projected in times of distress; we apply our cultural and personal connotations to the malevolent presence we sense and rationalise the threat of evil by means of religious or cultural data that has been learned.

Susan Rowland (1999, pp. 10-11) states:

Given that archetypal images can never exhaust the multiple possibilities of the archetype and are refracted through the personal, they can be described as fictional, metaphorical versions of an unrepresentable reality... not because they are arbitrary but because they are the partial and imaginative expressions of fundamentally plural potentials for meaning... Jung believed that mental existence was a continual dialogue with archetypal forces in the unconscious.

The archetypal images that are cast onto the dreamscape of sleep paralysis are coloured with cultural loading but offer, as Rowland suggests, profound potentials for the creation of meaning. Archetypes are not absolute or immune to the personal unconscious; they are subject to updating and reshaping. Hence, the protagonist's 'shadow' archetype manifests in a form that is culturally and personally specific.

Juliatt's episodes of sleep paralysis are written so that her vulnerability and powerlessness are emphasised. As the novel progresses, these hallucinations will become the medium through which Juliatt can access her repressed abuse, acknowledge the damage that this abuse has inflicted, and ultimately overcome her hallucinated bogeymen. Joni Richards Bodart (2012) asserts that by tackling monsters through fiction, readers are able to detach these fears from their own psyches, project them onto a separate entity, and conquer them on an unconscious level (p. xxiv). Juliatt's eventual victory over her shadow—in her acceptance of her abuse as an undeniable aspect of her past—will help her to begin her healing process.

Studies have suggested a correlation between occurrences of childhood sexual abuse and the development of sleep paralysis later in life. 'Prevalence and correlates of sleep paralysis in adults reporting childhood sexual abuse' (Abrams, Mulligan, Carleton & Asmundson, 2008)

finds that, while there is not strong evidence of causation, participants of the study who reported sexual abuse were found to have higher frequency and more frightening symptoms of sleep paralysis (pp. 1536-39). Additionally, the article observes:

This notion is not implausible, particularly when one considers that a substantial proportion of CSA victims retrospectively report experiencing tonic immobility (TI) during an abuse episode. TI is a temporary and involuntary peritraumatic fear response typified by an inability to move or call for help during a traumatic event (p. 1536).

This is suggestive of similar fear responses at work in both cases of child sexual abuse and sleep paralysis. Paul J Whalen (1998) has postulated the theory of the ‘threat vigilance system’ based on neuroimaging studies of the amygdala, which J Allan Cheyne (2001) adapts to explain the neurophysiology of sleep paralysis in ‘The Ominous Numinous: Sensed Presence and ‘Other’ Hallucinations’. This system allows the brain to recognise potential situational threats on an instinctual level; its prior function is the disambiguation of these cues by determining their degree of dangerousness. However, Cheyne suggests that during sleep paralysis, the rapid chain of events involved in the threat vigilance system—sensed threat, ambiguity, search, and disambiguation—is disrupted due to the bizarre duality of consciousness and unconsciousness (p. 3). Sufferers are unable to reach the stage of disambiguation, which is why Cheyne suggests that they may hallucinate potential threats that manifest as culturally informed bogeymen.

Juliett’s attitude towards the common explanations of sleep paralysis, as expressed in the final chapter of the excerpt, is reflective of the general dissatisfaction of sufferers who believe these explanations to focus only on the neurophysiology rather than the disturbing recurrent imagery. Shelley Adler (2011) includes in *Sleep Paralysis: Night-mares, Nocebos and the Mind-Body Connection* various true accounts of sleep paralysis; fear of mental illness permeates the plaintive statements of sufferers: ‘My doctor was of no help... she referred me to a neurologist and neither of them had heard of [it]’; ‘I see my meetings with the invisible, paralysing man

that tortures me as possible bipolar hallucinations' (p. 27). Similarly, Ryan Hurd (2010) laments that 'in a recent diagnostic survey, over half of psychiatrists admitted that they would diagnose a person who reported a typical sleep paralysis dream ... with some kind of psychosis'. It has therefore been my intention to explore sleep paralysis in a fictional form in order to increase its accessibility and reduce the widespread misunderstanding surrounding cultural interpretations of the experiences.

Medically, Julieta's hallucinations can be justified by any number of psychiatric disorders ranging in severity; post-traumatic stress disorder, narcolepsy and schizophrenia are prospective candidates. However, as I have written 'Somewhat Damaged' from the perspective of a sleep-deprived, sexually traumatised and socially ostracised teenager, I have made the stylistic decision to examine Julieta's hallucinations through a paranormal lens with the aim that the reader can experience Julieta's 'return of the repressed' as she does: through metaphoric imagery in a seemingly paranormal context. Freud (1919) explains the concept of the 'uncanny' or 'return of the repressed' as projections of unconscious anxieties and desires that have been unfamiliarised and alienated from the conscious, eliciting fear upon their return. Conditional of the 'uncanny' sensation is the environment of realism; the estranging event must occur in everyday reality. Marina Warner (2006) explains how the juxtaposition of a bizarre element against an environmental situation of the mundane results in the sensation of frightening familiarity:

Realism paradoxically reinforces the supernatural presence of the departed; a fairy-tale does not produce the same shiver as the banal, and imaginary figments in the realm of art do not make themselves felt: the reality effect is needed to produce the frisson of the uncanny (p. 26).

Tzvetan Todorov (2000) proposes that the 'uncanny' is a subcategory of the 'fantastic' and that, in attempting to justify a seemingly preternatural phenomenon within a narrative, the narrator-protagonist and the reader alike are faced with two options. The phenomenon is

deemed 'uncanny' when the protagonist relies on natural explanations to explain strange occurrences; alternately, the phenomenon is rendered 'marvellous' when the protagonist embraces supernatural explanations and rejects conventional laws of reality. The 'fantastic' effect occurs during the intellectual hesitation between 'uncanny' and 'marvellous' justifications for phenomena (p. 15). Interestingly, Rosemary Jackson (1981) notes that the realm of the 'fantastic' is located 'alongside the axis of the real' (p. 65) as evidenced in prepositional terms that introduce the fantastic realm to be 'beside', 'beyond', or 'at the edge of' reality. Monstrous encounters of this uncanny realm, Jackson suggests, are simply unconscious projections, or 'qualities, feelings, wishes, objects...expelled from the self and located in another person or thing' (p. 66). Projection mirrors the idea of meeting our Jungian 'shadow'; during encounters with her incubus, Julieta is actually looking into the face of her estranged familiarity and that 'return of the repressed' is the true cause of her fear.

The theories of the 'uncanny' and the 'fantastic' have significantly informed 'Somewhat Damaged'. They illustrate the conflict of the conscious when confronted with denaturalised phenomena in a narrative context; this consequently defines the structure of reality within the narrative. Hallucinations experienced during sleep paralysis have the unfortunate quality of being perceived as realer than real, often causing the sufferer to query the nature of reality. This sentiment is reflected in a survey taken by 2,715 introductory psychology students, revealing 771 cases of sleep paralysis. Many students found 'fear' an absurdly insufficient term to communicate their emotional distress and their belief in what was happening to them: 'There are not words strong enough to describe the horrific fear I felt' (Cheyne, 2001, p. 6). As such, Julieta often comments on her dissolving sense of reality and questions what is happening to her; this uncertainty of what is real prompts Julieta to consider the paranormal potential of her hallucinations, bringing 'Somewhat Damaged' into the realm of the 'marvellous-fantastic'. This invites the reader to experience the 'fantastic' effect of the novel

along with Julieta in considering 'marvellous' supernatural haunting and the 'uncanny' return of repressed experience as possible causes for her incubus.

Brief depictions of sleep paralysis and incubi encounters have appeared in various literary works over the centuries, but I have yet to locate any examples of young adult fiction that prominently feature the parasomnia. This essay has examined how the excerpt of my young adult paranormal novel 'Somewhat Damaged' seeks to explore the alleged paranormal aspects of sleep paralysis that have promoted ubiquitous fear and mysteriousness. Todorov's 'fantastic' literature and Freud's concept of the 'uncanny' have significantly informed the novel's contemplations of paranormality. Similarly, Jungian theories of the 'collective unconscious' and the 'shadow' archetype have shaped the depiction of Julieta Fierro's incubus and the associated connotations of repressed sexual trauma. My main aim in this thesis has been to open a platform for discussion, to engage fellow peers and potential future readers in the various dialogues surrounding sleep paralysis. By situating this novel within young adult fiction, I have incorporated common themes of the genre, such as repressed abuse, fractured parental relationships and persecution of female promiscuity, in order to depict contemporary aspects of the teenage experience that deserve further scrutiny, as they have direct relevance to the psychosocial development and health of adolescent girls.

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