

## Unwritten – Fiona, Year 10, VIC

A serpentine voice emerged from the depths of the vast ferry.

“We strongly advise against speaking to anyone, here, and on the island. Another ferry will appear there at exactly this time tomorrow. If you miss it, there will not be another to retrieve you. Happy travels.”

I gazed out of the window and was greeted with inky, relentless waves crashing against the side of the boat. I’d known the risk of voyaging to Quillian, but the thought of roaming on mythical land seemed to erode my senses away. Since we could only travel to the isle once in our lifetime, I was keen on making it worthwhile.

“Excuse me,” another voice interrupted my thoughts. “Are these seats free?”

I saw a guy motioning towards the seats I was staring at. His raven-black hair drooped lazily over his brows, and his eyes were a blueish-grey. I opened my mouth to reply, but remembered what the cold voice had warned against earlier. I clamped my lips together and merely nodded.

“I’m Lynx,” he said too casually.

I hesitated before replying, “Lyra.”

Lynx flashed me a feline smile. “Lyra,” he repeated. “Like the constellation?”

My eyes lit up. I could talk about my name for hours. About how Apollo gave Orpheus a harp, and how my mother had seen-

“I don’t think we should be talking,” I said carefully.

“You voyage to arguably the most dangerous island on earth, but talking to strangers is where you draw the line?” He took a bite of an apple I didn’t notice he had. “Lynx is a constellation too, you know. Named after the animal. Not as cool as a flute, but-”

“Harp,” was all I said.

“She talks?”

I realised I’d fallen into his ploy to get me to speak. I narrowed my eyes at him, but he smiled with accomplishment, tossing the apple up and catching it again. The warning that had once sent shivers down my spine suddenly lost all its value.

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We conversed relentlessly until the towering library emerged in the distance. It expanded across the perimeter of Quillian Isle and was made of elegant, white marble. As we neared the library, I saw the patterns in the marble shift into pictures. A boy and a dog running

through a tree-lined street melted into an image of a man proposing to a woman. I glanced at Lynx, who was surveying the sight with saucer-wide eyes.

We exchanged awestruck glances as the ferry docked and the passengers began to disembark.

I followed the stream of bustling people with Lynx by my side, his presence surprisingly comforting as we approached the entrance of the library. The double doors were adorned with intricate artwork and engravings in a language I was unfamiliar with.

Just as we'd begun making our way up the marble steps, a cloaked figure appeared. The horde flinched backwards as gasps escaped their mouths. But Lynx's face was masked with nonchalance. The creature's silvery hair spilled over its hunched back and feathery wings and its eyes had a russet glow to them. Poking out of the pockets were quills of different sizes and a lighter.

"What *is* that?" I asked Lynx, my voice barely above a whisper.

"An Inkweaver. I read about them once."

The Inkweaver unfurled its wings, beating violent gusts of wind into our faces. My racing heartbeat was the only sound audible.

"Some may commend your bravery in voyaging to Quilian," it hissed. "But you are fools, I say!" A low, terrible cackle tore through the air. I felt the gentle brush of Lynx's thumb over my wrist; I smiled at his attempt at solace.

"Every year, a fleet of *humans* arrive," he spat, choking on the word 'humans'. "And only dozens return! Fools, I say. Fools!"

As if in reply, the doors behind it flung open. I'd never felt more like a lamb being led to slaughter.

The Inkweaver ominously beckoned us into the library. I hesitantly made my way through the open doors. The smell of fresh parchment stung my nostrils and besides the sound of quills gently scratching paper, it was utterly silent. There were two storeys of books neatly filed away on either side of me and crystal chandeliers hanging from the vibrant ceiling, elegantly embellished with gold. I gaped at the sheer magnificence of it all when I felt a tug on my sleeve. I faced my new friend.

"Look," he said, gesturing towards floating books.

Books swam lazily through the air, their pages turning slowly. A sparkling hologram danced above each one, displaying what seemed to be a synopsis of people's lives. I took Lynx's hand and led him towards one of the books. A ballerina pirouetted above the flickering pages, her skirt mimicking each turn. The title of the book read 'Rosemary Durand' in gold lettering.

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A star-strewn sky and full moon soon replaced the letter-shaped clouds and blazing sun - my first and last night on this beautiful island. There was a bridge made of glass that stretched

over a glistening river of starlight and memories. The water glimmered with a labyrinth of gold coins that had sunk to the bottom, each carrying an unvoiced wish. I wondered if any of them had come true.

We propped our elbows on the ornate crystal handrails, the river meandering delicately beneath us.

“I don’t want to go back,” I said dreamily. “This place makes home look like a dumpster.”

“You won’t remember anything when you return.” He offered a weak smile.

I know he noticed the disappointment in my eyes and the surprise in my agape lips as he said, “That’s the reason this place is so magical. It’s like a secret world.”

“But I won’t have any memories to reminisce on,” I protested. “Lynx, will I remember you?”

The ever-present gleam in his eyes ceased to exist and his face became unreadable. “No. We will forget everything since setting foot on the ferry.”

A wave of sorrow washed over me, but an idea pulled me out of the water. “Can’t we alter our futures so that we meet in real life? You know, write it in our books?”

The gleam returned to his aqueous stare.

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We strode through the network of bookshelves, stroking their spines as we passed them searching for our names. While the darkness made it hard to find our books, it was our only layer of protection. We had to write a sentence each without getting caught by the monsters living here - how hard could it be?

I carefully flicked through my book. When I reached the first blank page, I wrote with trembling hands: Lyra meets Lynx Adler at her local university. A sigh of relief. I glanced over my shoulder at Lynx, my lips parting to say, “We did it!”, but the words never made it out.

His skin was stripped of colour and horror was etched into every line of his face as I followed his gaze to an Inkweaver approaching rapidly towards us.

“Foolish, selfish human!” It cackled, snatching Lynx’s book. Before we could plead, it pulled out a lighter and lit the book on fire. Flames devoured the pages, blackening the edges as they disintegrated into floating embers.

Glittering holograms of a baby Lynx taking his first steps, wrapping his arms around a dog wagging its tail, falling from his bike and grazing his knee, escaped from the book and slowly faded into nothing. Lynx had a hand pressed to his chest as he stumbled backwards as if he’d been shot. I braced myself, ready for the Inkweaver to take away my future, too, but it turned away with its cloak rippling behind. I dashed to Lynx, wrapping an arm around him.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“Yeah, a bit of chest pain is all,” he said with an unconvincing smile.

“Why didn’t it burn my book, too?”

“It didn’t see you write.”

“What’s gonna happen to you?” I said softly.

“I don’t have a future. Or a life to return to.”

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Dawn soon stained the sky and the ferry docked on the shore. Passengers began to board while Lynx walked me to the ferry. I threw my arms around his neck, savouring the warmth of his body and the scent of his cologne.

“I don’t want to leave you,” I said, hoping he didn’t notice my welling eyes. I studied his face, memorising the placement of his freckles and the depth of his smile lines.

“You aren’t leaving me. I’ll always remember you, Lyra.” He squeezed my hand and I took it as my queue to leave.

I boarded the ferry and didn’t look back. It hit me that I’d already written about meeting Lynx in my book - I would spend my life searching for someone who didn’t exist.

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I found myself standing on a wooden deck with a pounding headache. I wasn’t sure where I was, but for some reason, gazing at the Lynx constellation in the sky brought me comfort.