

# Writing Sample Portfolio

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## Fragmented Fiction

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### Little Violences

*Digital clocks don't tick, they buzz and ring without the radio, and then they buzz and ring and static when it's on.*

*You say everything is so quiet without Dad—no it is not. The lights hurt they're so loud. You must be turning deaf if you can't hear it.*

*Did you tell Mom?*

*Mom says there's something wrong with me.*

Sidney, Sid, Sidney Kidney, Sidney Bean, Sid the Kid; she sits on the edge of her bed and stares down. Blood pearls from the cuts on her palm.

He's dead for real now.

Sidney walks downstairs holding her hand. Mom is still asleep. Sidney runs cold water over her cut and watches the drain turn pink.

Something had to give, and it did, and now Dad is dead again.

Brandon creaks down the stairs and stands by the fridge.

*"Gross, that's the food sink."*

*"I don't remember where the band-aids are."*

*"You don't need a band-aid."*

Brandon leaves for the bathroom, and Sidney focuses on bloody water swirling down and away.

“Retro,” that’s what Dad had called his radio. It had fake wood paneling peeling in places, and the numbers were orange, faded, and missing the segments that told eights from zeroes. Reading it half asleep took doubletakes, but it knew the time well enough for the radio alarm to work. As long as the antenna was just right. Without a strong connection, the wakeup call would become hellish static screeching. Sidney taught herself the angles to get the strongest stations, as long as nothing in the setup ever shifted.

Sidney leans on the counter. In her memory, dad sneaks in her room every morning just before the alarm and pulls the covers off to wake her up. When it doesn’t work, he tickles her until she launches out of bed to smack him.

Once upon a time, Sidney had hated that. She hates it still, which makes missing him all the more infuriating.

Brandon, in exchange for making it to seventh grade fatherless without outwardly collapsing, was rewarded his own alarm clock. His was sleek and round and blue, and it started beeping a good hour before Dad’s went off. A week after Brandon’s clock had come in, Sidney moved her bed to be against the wall dividing their rooms. Every morning that she could, Sidney woke to Brandon’s alarm and laid still, eyes open, for nearly the whole hour between clocks.

The ritual meant she could hover over Dad’s radio and hit it before the second screech.

Sunday night before the incident, Brandon fell asleep without re-setting his alarm for school.

Monday morning, Sidney dries her hands with a green dishtowel, turning a growing portion brown. Brandon pads over with a metal box and utility flashlight.

*"Give me your hand, Sid."*

The now retro, now dead, radio clock had been given brand new to their father on his first day of kindergarten. His mother's reasoning for the rare gift was:

*Big kids wake up on their own.*

Dad always woke Brandon up the same as he did for Sidney. They used to bond over their hatred for it. Neither talk about it now.

Sunday afternoon, the children rode their bikes up and down the street. They almost raced but not quite. Not as long as Mom watched from the porch. Only when she retreated to her room could they really hit the pavement.

Racing was important. There was violence in the speed that could be molded into euphoria.

Sidney's Nascar flag and car magazines went missing a week after he died. It was late June.

The same day, Mom lit the fireplace.

At the kitchen table, Sidney tells Brandon the wheezing, crackly shrieks of her clock had startled her out of a nightmare.

*"I murdered him."*

Sunday, riding in the woods. Stopping at a felled tree across the path. Brandon lowered himself into the hole the roots had left.

*Sid. Have you ever wondered about how spiders eat, how they really eat?*

*No because I know it.*

*You know wrong.*

*Nuh-uh, I read Charlotte's Web. She mummifies bugs and sucks the juices. Everybody knows*

*that.*

*They know wrong.*

Regarding the clock, it didn't break right away.

*"Because it scared me. I didn't want to but it scared me. I just did it."*

*"I don't care. You're not electrocuted."*

*"It's your fault. It's your fault I was sleeping."*

Sunday, Brandon caught a big wolf spider from under the tree and put it in his water-bottle.

Monday, Brandon dabs Sidney's palm with a damp cotton ball. She slaps him and yells.

*"The pain means it's working, stupid."*

He dips the tweezers in the hydrogen peroxide and grips Sidney's hand to keep the cut open. Blood obscures visibility. A pile of red cotton balls grows. The paper towel under them

does nothing to preserve Mom's blue tablecloth. Somehow, Brandon finds sliver after tiny sliver of glass and pulls them out.

*"It hurts."*

*"Yeah."*

*"Does that mean it's working?"*

*"No, it's just going to hurt."*

*"How long?"*

*"I have a scar that still stings sometimes from when I was five."*

*"Jesus Fuck."*

Brandon glances at Sidney. She stares at him.

*"Am I going to jail?"*

*"For what, swearing? Mayb—"*

*"For killing it."*

Brandon checks the cut again and her tears spill over. Some drip on his head. Sidney hiccups.

*"Dad hated that thing anyway."*

*"You're lying."*

Dad and Mom had used that clock for five years before Brandon was born and seven after. For the first five, the clock sat on their bookshelf, on Mom's side of the bed. At seven it would start to shriek, and Mom would first nudge Dad's shoulder, then his stomach, and at last she would give a gentle shove to his head. He would rise, bleary and bestubbled, just enough to reach over Mom and hit the snooze button. When the clock went off again, Mom would hit the

snooze. On the third time, one or the other would sit up, blink at the world, then turn the clock off properly.

Dad had been slowing down for the exit. He had picked up dinner and strapped it into the passenger seat so it wouldn't slide. Their neighborhood sits close enough to the highway that the smoke rolled lazily across their yard and through the open kitchen windows.

Sidney remembers blue sky.

*No, it was overcast. It was storming.*

*It was not.*

*Do I look like I care?*

Brandon dabs Sidney's hand with hydrogen peroxide again. This time she gives up struggling and lets herself sob. He focuses on her palm and setting a gauze pad against it.

*"Is that a band-aid?"*

*"You don't need a band-aid."*

Brandon pulls the end of something that looks like tape and wraps it around and around Sidney's hand.

*"You need stitches, but I got a C in home ec."*

*"Oh. You're late for school."*

*"Do I look like I care?"*

Standing and dusting himself off, Brandon surveys the gory mess of cotton balls with apathy.

“Sidney!”

Both children look to the stairs, then each other.

Sunday evening, the spider scuttled desperately around a Tupperware they had found and put on the porch. Brandon placed a chunk of bark in the corner and tossed in a few leaves. The spider hid.

*Did you catch it?*

Sidney held a plastic cup and paper that trapped an agitated housefly within.

*Excellent.*

Brandon had grabbed the little thing by a wing. It wriggled. The buzzing scream was so loud Sidney clapped her hands over her ears and shut her eyes. She didn't watch Brandon tear off its wings and drop the fly into the Tupperware.

She hadn't watched, but her dreams that night were full of buzzing insects and smoke against an achingly bright blue sky.

It had taken gripping and throwing and stomping and throwing again and hitting and kicking and crying to make the screeching—to make the *buzzing* go away.

“What the Hell—



Mom never cursed before Dad died. Now, she stands on the bottom step and looks from Sidney's hand, to the cotton balls, to Brandon.

"—did you do to your *clock*?"

Brandon nudged his sister and pointed to the Tupperware on the kitchen counter. Within, the spider holds the fly with two legs. Sidney crouches to watch.

"Sidney Anne Marlowe—"

*"It's chewing".*

*"Yeah."*

*"It's taking forever."*

*"I know. That's what I've been telling you."*

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## Thursday Night Triptych

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### I Take a Walk

Here at last appears Harvey the prodigal bastard—sending the door chime jangling in his haste—

Giving his name to the hostess, spotting me, and manhandling a waiter out of his way—

Acting like he can buy back an hour and a half with "brusqueness." My shit-cart knight. Long strides bring him to the table.

I empty the last of the wine down my burning throat.

Harvey has a whole load of reasons for being late to dinner. The reservation, which we had booked together over the phone, was for six thirty.

It is seven *fifty-two*.

I stand and thank the waiter for her patience. Harvey asks where I'm going. The reservation was for six. Thirty.

I say.

"I'm hungry."

He says, in his own drawling, wordy, way, sit back down. We can order now. We can make the most of our time together. Our evening can finally start.

Giardino's may be my favorite, I may be in fishnets, but the Chardonnay is gone, and all I want now is a QwikTrip hotdog.

"Don't you dare keep me from that."

He tries, but this jacket is satiny and his hands too smooth for friction. It is seven fifty-four. I leave him with a deadpan and the bags under my eyes.

"You said it would be your treat tonight. Tip well."

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### The Back Wheel Won't Turn

The other woman on the corner is a mother with black hair she's pulled into a bun. Her glasses don't fit the bridge of her nose.

I crumple the foil from my hotdog.

“It was supposed to be a good model,” she mutters.

The wine sloshes in my skull. I say the groceries must have banged it up somehow. Strollers weren’t made for all that. She mutters again, to me this time.

“I never had any trouble before him.”

The baby kicks his rattle out of the seat again, and I nearly fall into the gutter fetching it for him.

“The lock’s not flipped, right?”

“I checked that *First*.”

Her voice is forehead wrinkles and peripheral glances. I wonder on the men in her life, briefly. The only one who matters in the moment has thrown his toy again, and I am stooping to rescue it.

I know she walked here. Walked to this area hours ago, maybe, but the darkness is thicker now. The bars are alive, but the neighborhoods are steeped in shadow.

“Could you use me for holding?”

“I can get an uber.”

“That’s expensive for a short drive.”

“I know.”

“I can walk with you. Or, if you call, I can wait with you?”

Then she looks up at the street light and the shadows cast from the glow of the QT. She watches the traffic, then glances back to me in my flats and pencil skirt.

To her in this moment, my height is a comfort.

“Actually, I would appreciate that.”

She gives me permission to pay.

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### Harvey Drives A Tesla

“Let me at least take you home.”

Harvey shows up at the same time as the mother’s Uber. I ignore him to help her pack the baby and the stroller and the grocery bags, but there’s only so much time that takes up. I have to let her go. She becomes shrinking tail-lights. I find the baby’s toy in my hand.

“You distracted me.”

“You don’t need to act like this.”

What is it that I want from him? He asks from the driver’s seat. Why do I insist on being drunk, and difficult, and making a scene? Even now, I am in the backseat instead of shotgun solely out of spite.

“Is this the fourth car in three years?”

“Not everyone is a total cheapskate.”

Not everyone chooses fake beef over four stars. I’ve hurt his pride somehow, and I am surprisingly relieved to realize this and feel nothing.

I try to ask if he’d been drinking bitters, but he anticipates my joke and dives into self-pity and can’t you see how much I’ve sacrificed to make this relationship work?

I consider instead the backseat of a stranger’s Corola.

A baby sleeps next to his mother. How long would the ride be? Would they go straight home? Would they have any distance to walk in the dark?

The baby snuffles in my mind. The mother leans her cheek against the cool window to watch the paint-stroke blur of streetlights. I know I spotted a rosary at her throat so at least she has someone to ostensibly keep an eye out for her. In some full-baked bid to increase their chances of safe return, of the baby not mourning his toy when he wakes, I pray to a god who hates me.

My apartment building rolls into view and we stop. Harvey and I share the silence. There is a bed and a hangover waiting for me.

“Do you have the spare on you?”

He does.

My keys jangle in my purse as I reach over the passenger side and present my open palm.

“I don’t have all night.”

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## Poetry

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### Between Words Written

poetry picks me apart  
a price I pay in  
cuticles  
to bear a poem I  
bare witness  
to my skin  
blood  
sinks in cracks I  
draw  
dull chitin knives  
over knuckles over  
poetry pressed into crusts  
of dry pre-scabs  
and  
rake healing open  
to release  
phrasing

### *(Heaven At) Waverly Cemetery (AUS)*

granite angels bare their breasts  
to any storms the gods may send  
to the cliff where existence is  
endurance in the face of windborne  
salt and nature's grit—  
the selfsame force that weathers skin  
all for love of those who rest below  
in bunkers built from earth and bone

*View From The Front Window: Pennington House*

The curse of Tantalus is upon me

A dog across the—

No, two!

Dogs—

Doggies, Even—

Across the street

And none on my lap

Nothing to Work With—

Or: That Time I Attended a Social Skills Group for 10-Year-Olds With NVLD

The biggest kid in the room has  
Black, curly hair  
a black Nintendo DS,  
and at least two liters of denial  
comorbid to conscious avoidance.

Wanna help us build the model, kid?  
Wanna discuss the good, kid?  
The bad, kid?  
The Neutral?  
Kid?

I opened myself, I volunteered,  
but this kid's bolted and barricaded.  
Do you think you're a golden boy, kid?  
You lip locked, no talk  
watching the clock kid

I wonder if we all thought—  
Who dragged you here, kid?

I lost your name in the parking lot,  
but a face warped with static  
I remember. You claimed  
"It doesn't affect my life at all."  
And for that, I hold on to you.

