

**All The Little Towns**  
William Helps

## **Author's Note**

People are more than just faces. Faces are beautiful, but what make them so are the thoughts inside. The ideas that lie beneath the surface, the fears of which we hide, the histories of which we burn, the people of whom we forget, they all live inside us. That is what keeps us up and brings us down. In a world of where faces are plastered everywhere, don't lose what makes us human. The beautiful creature of which we are inside.

## **Poem**

Open vessels, washed up shores,  
Rustling seas, full of weeds,  
A familiar painting of unpolished potential, unimagined dreams,  
And the constant knocking of the floor.  
The sounds that rustle through the walls,  
Of stories yet untold,  
That bang and shriek no more,  
Ceilings! Oh, they move,  
They twist and they twirl,  
And the pure white stains your eyes,  
And the lights burn your skin,  
Until they say you are no longer of that man,  
Now, well now you can begin.

-Frank

## **Story**

Journeys are pretty mystifying for outsiders, but everyone takes one. It is a continuing stream of steps that your mind walks upon, full of noises and faces that call for you to turn back, and speeding lights that flash in your eyes, as time wisps by. You try and count on everything to help you find a way, and look out for the sign that grabs you and tells you that you've found it; you are home. But where is that? In all of the big buildings, all of small streets, all of bright lights, and black outs, you can't find it. All of the loved one's eyes, and lost hopes, you can't find it. This is where we find Frank. A man who has always felt like life was a collapsing bridge, blind to what he feels, and empty of anything even himself.

Frank grew up the outsider of every social interaction one could have in life, friends, co-workers, family. His mother and father lived an unhappy marriage, they got engaged because they felt like love was physical attraction to one another, and they thought they were compatible because they felt they looked good together. After a year of their marriage they knew this wasn't the case, but they thought it would all fall into place if they had children, so Frank's older brother Nicholas was born and within the space of a year, Frank was born. However, children didn't save Frank's parents marriage. Frank's father felt trapped in his circumstance, and took his anger out on his family and his wife. Frank was often beaten as a child, and he grew up in fear of his father. Frank's mother had an affair with an out of town man when Frank was twelve. After that, Frank's parents divorced and Frank's mother gained custody of Nicholas and Frank, however this did not make family life easier. Frank's mother struggled to find work and time to raise her two growing teenage boys, and she comforted herself with one-night stands and bottles of rosé wine. Frank and Nicholas were very different too, Nicholas was the care free, extrovert sort whilst Frank sat in the corners of the high school lunch halls, and stared out into nothing. Frank never knew how to speak to people properly, and he struggled to look someone in the eye. Throughout his high school life, he was the weird quiet one who no one cared for, guys thought he was an oddball and often joked he was going to grow up to be a psychotic killer, and girls found him strange because he couldn't talk properly or interact with anyone. During classes, if he were paired up with someone, he would try so hard to speak to them and talk about small problems, high school dramas, relationship statuses, but he never knew what to say about them so he kept quiet because that was what he was known for. Frank went to the hospital several times, as he often felt ill and had thoughts that worried him. This news got around pretty fast and people started treating him differently, they was the ones now keeping their distance. People often wondered why Frank was so subdued as appose to his brother, whom often got in fights and was very open about his emotions towards certain people. Frank was puzzling, because on the outside he could appear pretty normal, he was very attractive, majority of the girls were somewhat interested him even if they

dared to admit it. Frank had big blue eyes that ran deep; if he looked at you it felt like he was studying you, understanding you, caring for you. However, he never cared much for his own appearance. He grew his brown hair out until he was told to get it cut by his mother, and he never styled it. He wore whatever fit him, mostly jeans and tracksuit bottoms, and a various range of unstylish t-shirts. Frank was very bright and when high school ended, he came out with enough grades to get into a prestigious sixth form. But, Frank's mother who went in and out of jobs throughout Frank's high school years could barely keep her family's finances above debt and told Frank, he could never attend sixth form or university, because his family could not afford it. So he started working at a local bar in the centre of town, using whatever wages he earned to help his family.

A few years later, Nicolas met a girl at a nightclub and they decided they wanted to move to a city, and that is what happened. Frank never moved out of his mother's house, until one day she came back to say she had accepted a job in Sweden which would earn her a lot of money. Frank felt confused, as he did not know where he was to go now. His mother sold their house and gave Frank a majority of the money she made from selling the property. So, Frank bought a small house just on the outskirts of the town, and decided to use the rest of the money to open a bar, as he knew that was the one thing he could do well. He bought a rundown old shop and spent several months rebuilding it. His mother left England just before the pub was completed, and his brother said he would attend the pub's opening but cancelled because he found out the girl he moved to the city with, was pregnant.

Frank kept the pub functioning throughout the years, until it became a quite popular local in the town. He lived alone and very rarely spoke to others, apart from the occasional conversation with his customers and bar staff.

But he never felt happy; he always thought this wasn't what he wanted. But Frank never knew what he wanted. So he lived with what he had.

## II

Howl, oh let them howl, Frank thought, as he turned up his coat towards the blistering winds, and the light freckles of snow that pattered down on top of his head. He lightly brushed specks off his shoulders with his thick woolly gloves and continued on his walk into town. Old stonewalls and large panned windows, they seemed to be the only décor this tiny town holds, Frank studied. This town was old, and it always had been, even down to the people, whom were either the drunk or the homeless or the young rebels or the frightened old timers. It was like class is the be all and end all of this community. The old people group together and sneered at the young, and the young ganged together and scared the old. Frank felt like the in-between, the small insignificant part of a divided town, he was the one that no one

cared for. It is not liked this thought never conjured into Frank's head before, but he hated feeling insignificant, like the little green monster, with snarling teeth and unconscious doubt, had latched onto his brain and taunted his love for the quiet things. During the evenings, Frank would drown this creature with the medicine of alcohol, until he thought of nothing but his longing to go out and dance with someone who he never knew, and then he would grab a pillow, and turn on his vinyl and play some distant, loud music, and dance. But he could not do this during the daytime, so he shrugged it off himself and thought of other worldly things.

Frank wondered why the colour of white saddened him whether he saw it, maybe because of its duality. How it is so cold and empty, and yet it is also blank and inviting. Frank didn't like the idea of new possibilities; the decisions to place a previously unplaced footprint frightened Frank a little. He felt like what he leaves will stay there forever, and everyone will see it and some people won't like it and he couldn't change that. Frank cared about what people thought of what he does in his life, and often made changes to suit others, because Frank was in essence a very introverted, people person. Then Frank thought about a dream he had the previous night involving a conversation with Vincent Van Gogh, who slowly became the famous vase of flowers he painted, and how it made Frank wonder after if the painting really was Vincent Van Gogh or just a part of him.

Frank contemplated a lot of things; the man was very interchangeable. His mother thought it made him endearing and profound, his father used to wonder how Frank always managed to say the most off the wall comments, and therefore he never took Frank's questions seriously. Frank was very unpredictable and it was often the reason, he thought, why so many people never liked him, people want more security with who they know, and who wants to know a man who only converses in riddles.

Frank managed to get to his pub with relative ease, and as soon as he entered, the two members of staff working that day greeted him and he acknowledged them. One of them asked if the weather was bad, and Frank replied it depends on what you define as bad weather, and said it felt like a light blizzard. Frank entered his office and sat down to do his paperwork for the day, which involved various bills and sales. As his business was relatively small he had no extra cash to hire someone to do these tasks for him, he also believed that the workload would be large enough for one person but too small for two people, which would mean he would be hiring a staff member whose job is finished by lunch.

Frank's pub was basic in its design, using dark furnished wood tables and chairs, and several red sofas for decoration. The walls were poorly painted white and several pieces of brickwork and wood were left unpainted. The ceiling still showed its piping and support beams. Lights hung from the ceiling, dangling above several tables and chairs. The door was made of an old-fashioned wood, and had stained glass windows. Some locals described the place as classic, and all it needed was a few books to finish

the place off. Frank often joked he would bring a few along the next day, but he never did because Frank never wanted to share personal things such as his collection of books with anyone. He thought that when you share something special with someone, it stops becoming special to you. Frank thought this was maybe why he never loved anyone because was too selfish to share his love. He can love things from a distance, but never up close.

Frank spent most of his days working at his bar, and spent most evenings either talking to various customers, or at home with cheap ready meals, or take away pizza and watching TV, or films on computer.

His house wasn't the cleanest of places. Pieces of old paperwork or receipts or books lay stacked on tables and clothes lay in filled baskets or on the edges of chairs. The place smelt of musk, and empty whiskey bottles. The lights were a dim yellow, and curtains mostly remained shut throughout the day and evening, so most of the place never saw natural sunlight.

Frank lived his life day by day like this, not expecting anything different, he had accepted he was to forever live in this unappealing town.

This was until a change came in his life. Some day's lie unaffected on a person, they can merge together and a person could never tell you the difference. But others can change you, create you, move you, and they could be over the small things, such as meeting someone else.

One evening Frank finished all of his paperwork for the day, and decided that night he would watch over his staff till close. This was when Frank met Amelia. Frank leaned back on his stool, and rested his back on the cold wall behind him. He was having a meaningless conversation with one of the many lone drinkers that night. Around half-eight, the door swung open and two girls walked in, the first was a bright, blonde girl who was particularly chatty, and the other was Amelia.

Her hair was jet black and her smile had a way of comforting people. The way she held her was unique, how she appeared both shy and completely confident in herself at the same time.

But, Frank remembered her eyes the most. Green, like leaves he thought. Like the ones you would never dare rip off the plants to look at closer. The ones you wouldn't want to pick apart. He then wondered why he would have ever thought of such a random thing to connect their lives. Frank often wondered why he went off on tangents like that sometimes. Maybe, he wondered, maybe his brain was just fond of the uncommon.

And unbeknownst to Frank, Amelia was as some people deemed her, relatively uncommon. A phrase one cannot just throw around likely, as all humans are not entirely common to one another. Then what made Amelia so uncommon to others? Amelia was the girl who sat at the back of the classroom, with her disruptive friends but never uttered a word herself. She would go home and spend her time reading

Sylvia Plath poetry and Ernest Hemingway novels, and wonder not about death or sadness, but the beautiful way in which they wrote. She would stay up way past her parents, whom would drift off around half 11, and she'd watch the late night reruns on a Tuesday, and go to school the next morning wide-awake. She always did her homework at the last minute and always passed, and she never cared for the teachers' critiques. She flew under the radar through high school and Sixth Form, and never saw much of her friends after that. She went to University well away from her hometown, and studied Medicine. There she met her first and only boyfriend Ryan, and she never knew why she fell in love with him, because she thought his fashion sense was odd, and she didn't like his friends, but she loved him anyway. They moved into a house together during their third year, and she learnt what he was really like. He got angry easy and he hit her several times and yelled at her for making the smallest mistakes. After a couple of months he got worse, and Amelia finally decided she had to break up with him. He moved out.

She cried a lot after that, but she always told herself to hold her own whether she left her room, which she did. After a while, she built up barriers inside herself and learnt to let her emotions go. If there is nothing to feel, there is nothing to bottle, nothing to fear, this is what she told herself. She reread her collections of Sylvia Plath and Ernest Hemingway, and she saw them differently now. She enjoyed drinking and going out a lot more, she built a strong taste for beer, and gin, and drank them in the afternoons. This was before her accident. One night she drank too much and passed out on a flight of stairs, and fell down them. She broke her arm and a couple of ribs, and this moment created a change in Amelia. She no longer wanted to live in the pain others have caused her and decided to get her life going again. She stopped drinking, and decided she would only drink for certain occasions such as a special night, with others. She passed her degree with a distinction, and moved to a big city where she began her foundation training. After completing both her foundation and specialist training, she searched around for jobs, and found one in the city but could no longer afford to live there, so moved to a small town where she found a cheap flat. After years of battling she had finally got her career and, as difficult as it was, she had succeeded in what she dreamed of being. This is what made Amelia so uncommon to some, because in the small town Frank lived in, no one ever dreamed of big things, Amelia dreamt and never stopped dreaming and started doing.

Frank didn't know what to say to these new customers, the majority of the local drinkers watched these girls as if they were some otherworldly beings, the outsiders in this dark establishment. Frank understood that feeling; he had felt it before. And yet, he didn't know how to convey that to Amelia, he thought that whatever he would say, it would all end up the same. Frank would come across as strange and a little unnerving, without ever intending to be. It made him laugh a little inside because he

was even an outsider to the outsiders.

So Frank, without any confidence and small amount of self-pity, decided to stay put and glance over at a dream of which he could not fulfil.

Amelia felt out of place, with not only her location but also her company. She decided the best way to comfort this discomfort was to have a little drink. Only a small glass she told herself, because she did not want to hurt herself again. So she approached the bar, and thought it was best to ask the man sat behind the counter, wearing a smart blazer. She felt he was the friendliest person here and he wouldn't look at her with disgust if she spoke up. He was almost calming to her, which she thought was a little odd to feel about a stranger.

"Um, hello. Are you serving people?" Amelia asked Frank.

Frank nearly jumped; he was so shocked that she approached him.

He shuttered out the words "No... but... but my colleague will be with you shortly."

"Oh okay" Amelia replied, with a small smile.

A moment passed, and Frank tried to think of what to follow up this jumble of words with.

"I own the place," Frank declared a little too loud, "I haven't served a drink in years, it is why I cannot serve you."

He blew it. He knew he had.

"So you are a bar owner who cannot bartend?" Amelia laughed.

"Yeah I guess it does sound a little funny, when you put it like that" Frank said, looking down at himself.

"No it's fine I get it. Customer service and everything, don't want to give people a reason not to return."

"Yeah."

"Well I will just wait then" Amelia smiled, giving Frank an encouraging look.

Something came over Frank, and he stood up from his stool.

"I guess I could serve you something, if you permit the possibly terrible drink," Frank stated, trying to look Amelia in the eye.

"Oh I am sure it will be fine," Amelia said, widening her smile.

"Okay what would you like?"

"A pint of beer, please."

"Any specific type?"

"Surprise me" Amelia shrugged.

So Frank went about pouring Amelia her drink, he did so with relative ease, and did not understand why he had stopped doing so in the first place. He handed the beer over to Amelia, who sipped it.

"It's good."

"Thanks."

"How much is that?"

“2.50”

“Okay,” Amelia replied, handing him the money “What is your name?”

“Frank.”

“Hi Frank, I’m Amelia. It’s nice to meet you,” she expressed, before walking away.

Amelia spent the evening with her friend, but would always return to the bar, alone, and order from Frank. She would then joke with him a little while, before returning back to her friend. She would glance at him every so often and Frank would try and not look so creepy for looking back.

As the evening drew to a close, Amelia and her friend put on their coats and looked ready to leave, but Amelia approached the bar one last time.

“Hey I’m leaving now but I wanted to give you my number,” Amelia said nervously.

“Oh okay” Frank replied, taking the folded piece of paper that was in Amelia’s hand.

“Yeah give a call sometime” Amelia responded, before she turned and left.

Everyone else that was still in the bar was as stunned as Frank was. Frank did not know what to do, he contemplated throwing the number in the bin and ridding him from any possible issues it might cause, but Frank knew that it would continue to lie in his brain as another regret. This type of situation only comes about ever so rarely so he might as well see what would happen.

Frank called Amelia the next day, and they continued talking. After a few weeks of texting and calling, at long last Frank asked Amelia if she would like to meet up in person some time, and to Frank’s surprise she said yes. Frank had been building his walls extra thick that day so that when he got let down he would not feel so bad, but now those walls were useless. Amelia said she was free that Friday after work, and Frank was too. And so the date was set.

Frank didn’t know where to take Amelia for their date, at least he presumed it was some sort of date, so he called her and asked what she wanted to do. Amelia remained silent for a while before saying that they could go to “Ambrogio’s” an Italian restaurant of which Amelia had always wanted to visit, and Frank had gone to several times. Afterwards they could then go to “The Old Library”, which was the rival pub in the centre of town. Frank agreed because she had told him what they could do, and he was just glad it was decided.

Did he have to kiss her on the cheek, or was it impolite to kiss her on the cheek? Was it impolite to not? Frank didn’t know what was the right or wrong thing to do, so he called his brother and asked, and his brother laughed for what felt like minutes and then said if she’s worth it, and then added always say yes to tea afterwards, it means sex. Frank’s brother was a man who was the unhappiest of people in the world; he got tied down too early, and lived unhappily because of it. At least Frank is going by his brother’s words, which were never the best to go by. Frank just thought his brother

was in a long-term relationship and that equalled to love, and if he knew about love some more then he wouldn't be so worried about it all.

Frank spent the remainder of the week thinking and thinking again of what was to happen that Friday. His staff wondered why Frank seemed so offbeat and some of his customers missed Frank's company, as he spend most of his evenings at home watching bad romantic movies to try and better himself. He looked at himself in the mirror several times and glanced down at his stomach and was dissatisfied with his body. He searched on the Internet quick workout routines and tried each and every one of them until he was sweating and out of breath. He stopped eating ready meals and takeaways, and tried to learn cooking, he messed up the first few times but managed to finally cook something edible. Frank felt if he had some idea of how other people interact, he wouldn't scare off the first person that took interest in him. But he still felt unprepared for their date.

\* \* \*

He met Amelia at six forty five on Friday evening, and they headed off to "Ambrogio's" which was down one of the alleyways into town. Frank was a little worried that Amelia might not like it because she had never been there before, but Frank knew everybody loved Italian food, so it was always a safe bet. Amelia and Frank hugged one another when they met, and Frank wondered whether this was a good sign or a bad one, because as much as he liked Amelia, he didn't want to be heartbroken if she did not like him too. He thought that a hug was more a sign of friendship than anything else, so he was worried that his approach showed lack of interest. He really want Amelia to like him, through all his years of being the supposed town outcast, he liked the idea of someone as pretty as Amelia to not think of him through his reputation, but through his heart. Frank has always felt lonely because of how people perceive him, when you live in such a gated community, it is difficult for folks to see you as anything other than the boy who went to hospital, or the uncomfortable bar owner or the silent man who lives in a house alone.

They got to "Ambrogio's" at around seven, and Frank told the lady at the front desk about their reservation, and she brought them over to their table. "Ambrogio's" was extremely modern in its design. The tables were marble white and the chairs and walls had weird patterns and the place looked very minimalist. It seemed particularly empty that night, which comforted Frank. He didn't like being around to many people. He just wanted to speak to Amelia alone without people watching him, or worse judging him.

They sat down at their table. After briefly looking over their menus, they ordered their food and sat in silence, neither of them knowing what to say.

Amelia spoke first.

“So this place is nice,” Amelia stated.

“Yes, it really is. Have you ever been here before?” Frank asked.

“No I haven’t, I have only been to the fast food place down the end of the road” Amelia replied.

“Oh yes of course you must have little time in the town, to go to one of these kind of restaurants?”

“Well I guess so,” Amelia considered “but I never went to these places, because I had no one to go with.”

“Neither did I, I just go by myself” Frank responded, a sense of sadness underlining in his voice.

“Gosh” Amelia laughed out “we have begun this date rather gloomily haven’t we?” *She used the word date, Frank thought, so maybe this does mean something.*

Frank got awfully shy quickly after that and didn’t reply to Amelia’s comment. Amelia seemed rather confused by Frank’s response, and tried to change the subject.

“So how is the bar going?” Amelia asked, with a welcoming smile.

“It is fine, Michael is shift manager tonight so hopefully the place will still be in one piece tomorrow” Frank uttered, bashfully.

Amelia laughed, which comforted Frank; he did not like feeling like she wasn’t enjoying herself.

“So you don’t trust Michael much then?” Amelia asked.

“Oh no I trust him fine, it is just the last time I left someone else in charge I lost a lot of regulars.”

“Wow,” Amelia giggled, “I hope they got fired.”

“Yes she did.” Frank shook his head.

“She?” Amelia questioned.

“Yeah, Emily was her name, she was my first co-worker. I opened the bar, and for the first few months I was doing fine by myself, I was not getting a high number of customers, but I had just enough to get me by. Then, for whatever reason more people started coming, and after one shift where I almost fainted under the amount of pressure I was having, I decided to get in staff. Emily was the first person asking for a job so she got it” Frank paused for a moment, before adding “and then she started abusing everyone in the place”.

“Abusing?” Amelia gasped.

“Yes, mentally. I didn’t know about this of course, because she would have been fired immediately. She would just kind of make people doubt themselves. You see people who go to a bar alone tend to wish to lose their lives and all its problems for a little while; she did not let them do that. She would make them question themselves, give them further reason to drink, further reason to hate themselves.”

“Like how?” Amelia asked, shocked.

“Well-“ Frank began, before stopping himself “actually can we change the subject?”

I don't particularly like discussing those kind of things."

"Oh yes of course, sorry." Amelia thought for a second "So have you always lived here?"

"Yes" Frank said, rather quietly.

"So you must have a good knowledge of the area then?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"What was it like growing up here? Like has it changed much from your childhood?"

"Um..." Frank wondered, "well not massively. The biggest change I can think of is that many shops have come and gone in the market square. Oh! And maybe the time they built that cinema on the edge of the town. I remember that was a big thing at the time."

"Really? A cinema being built was a big thing?" Amelia laughed.

"Oh yes, we never had one of those places here. We would have had to go out of town to watch a film, or wait for it to come out on VHS."

"VHS? Wow! I remember that thing," Amelia said shocked.

"Yeah, so it was way back. What about you? What was your hometown like?"

"Oh well we had a cinema, thank god! But it wasn't like a huge city. It was a moderately sized town. Most of the shops seemed to be charity shops, as most businesses couldn't make tonnes of money. It was because there was this huge supermarket just outside of town that you could pretty much get everything from and was a lot of cheaper too, so it took away any competition. They did have this vinyl store in town that I used to go to with some of my friends after school, and I would go into this little soundproof booth they had and just listen to records."

"What did you listen too?" Frank asked.

"Oh things like *The Police* or *Nirvana*, occasionally *Spice Girls*" Amelia grinned.

"Spice Girls?" Frank said, open-mouthed.

"Yeah, *Wannabe* is a great song."

"I guess," Frank laughed "just a bit of a difference from things like to *Nirvana* and *The Police*".

"Yes I suppose it is, but I have such a wide taste in music I like that I don't get dragged into the formalities of what I should like and what I shouldn't."

"Well I was a old romantics fan myself."

"Old romantics? What is that?" Amelia queried.

"You know the old style of music. Folk, classical, jazz." Frank replied.

"Oh, I kind of like that. Never really listened to classical music, but I can give it a try."

"Yeah you should, it can be really calming."

The waiter returned with their food, and Frank and Amelia sat quietly and ate, glancing up every so often and smiling, with the occasional comment on how good

the food is. Once they had finished, they began speaking again.

Amelia spoke first.

“That was really good food.”

“Yeah, it was. Do you want dessert or anything at all?” Frank asked.

“Oh gosh no, I am full. You can if you want?” Amelia laughed.

“No, no I am fine too.”

“Great, so we will get the check then,” Amelia said.

The waiter came back over, and returned with the check and Frank got out his wallet to pay.

“Oh no you don’t have to pay” Amelia disputed.

“Amelia, I want to pay. As a thank you for letting me have a lovely evening with you.” It took all of Frank’s courage to say this.

Frank paid for the meal, and when he looked back over, her eyes were practically beaming.

“Thank you Frank. But the evening isn’t over yet.” Amelia stated.

They left the restaurant and headed out into the cold night to find “The Old Library”. The place seemed a lot more of an established building than Frank’s pub. It looked historic with its wide stained windows and aged wooden door. On the inside this idea was only supplanted further, with grand tables and chairs and a chandelier that hung above the both of them.

“This place is too stylish to be a pub” Amelia said astounded.

“Well I definitely need to step up my game” Frank added.

“No you don’t, I like your pub. It looks like a pub, I don’t have to feel like I have wear a formal dress just to get a pint” Amelia joked.

“Still it could do with a paint job.”

Amelia looked over at Frank and shrugged, “it is up to you, but I think your place is a lot more friendly and inviting.”

“You are the first person to say that,” Frank laughed.

“Well the world is full of firsts,” Amelia said.

They went over to the counter and ordered a couple of pints of beer. Amelia paid, when Frank tried to argue, she explained of thinking of it as being her way of thanking him for the lovely evening. They found a table in the corner and sat across from one another. Frank glanced over at Amelia who seemed perfectly comfortable and he felt so too.

Frank spoke first.

“So your job, what is it that you do?”

“Counselling.”

“Counselling? Like psychiatric work?”

“Well yes, but I specialize in abuse, and relationship issues.”

“Okay,” Frank thought, “why did you choose that career path?”

“I just wanted to be doing what I wanted to be doing really” Amelia thought “and although it is a pain in the arse waking up at 6 every morning, and getting a hour train to work, I love my job, it feels nice knowing that I have that part of my life sorted out.”

This statement took over Frank’s train of thought, and gripped onto his vocals. So as much as he would like to reply, he just couldn’t. He was speechless.

“Are you okay?” Amelia asked.

“Yeah I’m fine,” Frank lied “What is city life like?”

“Busy. You have got a lot of people wanting to get places, and apologies are uncommon. So if you bump into someone, don’t bother apologising they do not seem to care.”

“Appears like everyone is little withdrawn from each other” Frank considered.

“Yes,” Amelia replied “but I kind of like that. It means no one is particularly worried about things like your appearance, or your past. You know things that follow you around in small towns.”

“Yeah,” Frank thought “but wouldn’t that mean people won’t care about your opinions or your words as well?”

“Your words should only matter to the people that matter to you. It shouldn’t faze you if some stranger doesn’t listen to your voice, because they shouldn’t matter to you. Do you get what I am saying?”

Frank nodded.

“Ah,” Amelia let out a sigh of relief “Good because I felt like I was rambling.”

“Isn’t rambling just saying your thoughts out loud?”

“Well yes I guess” Amelia contemplated.

“Well then I like you doing it,” Frank replied, “I like hearing your thoughts.”

“Why thank you Frank” Amelia smiled, rather quietly.

Frank sipped at his beer, and it tasted odd. It was a little too sweet and Frank seemed a little put off by it at first, but slowly got used to its taste.

“So did you always want to be a bartender Frank?”

“No, I don’t particularly want to do it now” Frank replied, holding down his beer.

“Why don’t you try something else?”

“I would, if I knew what I am good at.”

“I am sure there is,” Amelia considered “You are a successful businessman for one.”

“I have never been called a businessman, makes me sound formal.”

“That’s not a bad thing,” Amelia laughed.

“No I guess not,” Frank thought “I never wanted to own a business, I always wanted to be a marine biologist.”

“Marine biology?” Amelia asked, shocked.

“Yeah I always had a love for sea animals, I used to watch those nature

programmes, like *Planet Earth* and stuff. I used to know useless facts when I was younger, like did you know an octopus has three hearts and blue blood?”

“No I didn’t” Amelia replied in fascination.

“Yeah, I used to know all the stuff,” Frank waved it all away.

“Why didn’t you take it up then?”

“I never had the time,” Frank shrugged “family pressures, money, never could get round to taking anything up.”

“Are those pressures still around?” Amelia asked.

“No not so much anymore.”

“So why not take it up again?”

“Well I have a business to take care of, and I have never really left this town, I wouldn’t know what to do in a city.”

“I am sure you will be fine,” Amelia smiled, “anyway tell me some more “useless facts” about sea animals?”

Frank and Amelia sat at “The Old Library” for hours, and talked, laughed and drank a few too many drinks. Amelia joked at one point that Frank is putting his company out of business from giving his competition this much money. Frank and Amelia told stories of their pasts, their hobbies, and their families. They were comfortable with each other by the end of the evening, and finally they left when they were told the pub was closing. Frank walked Amelia home to her small flat, and Amelia said she had a really nice evening, and gave him a kiss on the lips and went inside. Frank never felt happier walking home that evening, he saw everything differently, the lights were bright, he saw colour in everything, and he didn’t feel so out of touch.

\* \* \*

Frank and Amelia meet up several times after that night. Once they visited the cinema and went off for drinks, another time they went out for coffee, and the couple of times Amelia just met Frank as he was closing up his bar for the evening, and they would have a couple drinks together in the dark twinkling light of his pub.

On the sixth date, Amelia asked Frank if he wanted to go to hers to watch a film she had just bought in the city and they could perhaps have a couple drinks at hers. Frank agreed immediately, remembering what his brother had said to always say yes to going to a girl’s house. Frank admitted to himself he had never touched a woman like that before, and it scared him quite a bit. He had kissed several girls when he was younger but he had never gone any further with any of them. Sex never really played a huge part of his mind, he had felt longing for someone before, but everyone has at some point in his or her life. Frank just understood he wasn’t particularly appealing to most women in that way because of the way he acts, and the lack of confidence he has in himself, so he never bothered to try. He had felt feelings for girls before, and at

points he really wanted to talk to them, sometimes beating himself up about not talking to certain ones. But he would always comfort himself with the knowledge that unconditional love would never happen to him because the other person would have to work incredibly hard to love Frank, and Frank would have to try hard to fix himself up for the other person because it would be selfish of him not to.

And yet, Amelia did want him to come into her life. This scared Frank more because it was unknown territory. He was used to sitting alone in the corner of the room with his thoughts, and now when someone, especially someone as beautiful and sweet and funny as Amelia, wanted to know his thoughts, he could only worry that they wouldn't be enough for her. And that his touch would be too clumsy, or that his lips would be too dry, or that his eyes would seem too unwelcome to her pretty ones.

Frank worried because he really liked Amelia, and he really liked talking to her, and listening to her, and learning about her, and looking at her. He didn't want to lose her because of anything he worries about, or anything he does. Frank knew about the lack of people in his life, and the lack of people he kept in his life, but Amelia was the first person he wanted to keep around. He thought maybe that it was only because he thought she was pretty, but then he thought it wasn't down to that, he liked her because she was the first person to ever notice the scared boy in the corner, and wanted to sit down next to him.

Frank smiled and cried at the same time that evening after he agreed to meet Amelia the next day. He never knew why, because he felt happy and extremely scared at the same time. His brain caused flips in his stomach as he worried that he was too happy about meeting Amelia, and needed to tone himself down or he is going to scare her away. But he couldn't help but be happy to see her again, and to go to her house because it meant she liked him enough to invite him into her private home, just them two. He couldn't wait to learn more about her, but at the same time he was worried. He kept repeating in his head everything he could do that would ruin things, and the more things he thought of, the harder he cried.

He had sorted his head out by the time Amelia met him at the bar the next day. She waited for him outside, and her smile immediately made him feel a little better. After he locked up, he turned to her and raised his forearm for her to intertwine hers with, and she did so. They walked together for a while down the cold streets, and past the houses, until they reached Amelia's flat. It was one of four other flats, and Amelia said they should be quiet when entering her place, as the person who lives above her is old, and she does not want to wake or upset her. But she then added, as soon as they got into her place they could be as loud as they wanted. This flirty remark shocked Frank a little, but he just laughed it off.

When Frank entered Amelia's flat he took off his shoes because it was common custody, and Amelia chuckled and said it was very sweet of him to do that.

Amelia's flat was surprisingly empty, her sofa, TV, dining table, coffee table and

chairs were the only things in her living room. Her kitchen was bare too, there was a lot of fruits and nuts, a small pint of milk in the fridge, a bag of low calorie popcorn and one recently bought bottle of wine, but that was everything. The ceiling was marble white and the walls had a nice minimalist flower pattern, all bright colours like red, yellow and green. Amelia said she wasn't particularly fond of the design but she got it cheap when she moved in and it didn't matter as much.

Frank sat down on the sofa, and Amelia brought out the popcorn in a bowl, the bottle of wine and two glasses. She placed them on the table in front of Frank, and turned on the TV, put in the DVD and pressed play. She then sat down next to Frank, and opened the wine and poured it in both the glasses.

"To the evening," Amelia said, handing Frank a glass, and clinking it.

The film was sickeningly romantic and sentimental, and Frank wondered if Amelia even enjoying watching this too. But in the end Frank didn't care about the film, because Amelia had rested her head on his shoulders.

"Do you like this?" Frank asked, quietly.

"Not particularly, but it shuts off my brain for a while" Amelia replied.

It worried Frank a little about what could happen later on, but he focused on the film instead, and it took his mind away from those feelings for a while.

After the film was finished, and the wine empty, Amelia asked if Frank wanted a tour of the rest of the flat, and Frank nodded. Amelia showed him the two other rooms, the bathroom and her bedroom. The bathroom was also marble white, and the flower pattern theme that the flat had continued through the towels and the curtains. The bathroom was clean from head to foot, but health and beauty products lay everywhere. On the edge of the sink, on selves, on the top of the toilet, the edges of the bath, and even some lay on the floor. Frank asked why Amelia had so many products, and Amelia giggled and said clearly you have never seen a girl's bathroom before.

Amelia's bedroom was different from the rest of the house. It felt private. It was like everything else in her flat was the personality she showed everyone, the flower girl, the girl who liked The Spice Girls and a good pint, the strong confident go-getter. This room was special, it didn't have the flat's flower theme, it had calmer, quieter colours, and the bed sheets were a black and white pattern and the room had one single poster on the wall. A cover of *'The Bell Jar'* by Sylvia Plath. Frank asked about it, and Amelia said it was her favourite book growing up. A cupboard, a desk, and chair lay in the corner of the room. A small mirror stood on the top of the desk. The room smelt of Amelia, the rest of the house was covered with the odour of rose scented candles and incense sticks. This room was a lot more human. Frank was a little scared at how close he was getting to Amelia now.

"I don't show a lot of people this place," Amelia said, staring down at the ground with her hands twiddling together.

“I like it” Frank replied “Thank you for showing me it.”

Frank noticed a picture by Amelia’s bedside table and walked over to look at it. It was a black and white framed photograph of a young girl, and two people that looked like her parents. Her father was holding her, and all three of them were laughing happily. Frank picked it up and studied it closer.

“That is my mum, dad and I together” Amelia stated “I was five when that was taken. I remember that day well. We went on a spontaneous trip to the beach and I ran away from my parents as soon as our feet touched the sand. I ran straight into the sea with my clothes still on, and my parents had to take me to a nearby store and bought new clothes and a swimming costume. I got told off by them, and started crying, so to cheer me up they bought ice cream, and it was the best ice cream I had ever tasted. We then sat on the beach all day, and laughed and played games, and then my parents let me play in the sea. I felt so happy, like every day was going to be like this.”

Amelia then stopped talking. Frank put down the photo, and turned and saw Amelia was sat on her bed. Frank sat down next to her.

“It sounded like a really good day.” Frank said.

“Yeah,” Amelia quietly responded, “I just wished I had more days like it. I don’t regret anything, I just wish I had more fun days like that.”

Frank knew what she meant, he had days like that growing up too, when his father would take him to the playground and push him on the swings, and then chase him and his brother around the park. Or play football with them, and let them win. He wished he had more days like that too, before everything got complicated.

“I wish I had more days like this” Frank uttered.

“Me too” Amelia replied, looking at Frank.

Silence lingered as Amelia and Frank gazed at one another. Something was building inside of Frank, a strong feeling that he should capture something. His thoughts fell away as he held Amelia’s hand, and kissed her on the lips, and she placed her hand on his cheek and kissed back.

Amelia took off her shirt and skirt rather quickly, and Frank felt he should do the same, and so he did. Amelia stood up from the bed to unhook her bra, but before she did so she felt she needed to explain to Frank how she had issues in the past with a boyfriend and it is why she has some scars on her chest, but Frank only replied with what matters to me is if you are comfortable, and Amelia smiled because she did feel that. So she unhooked her bra and stood in front of him naked, displaying her honesty.

She looked so beautiful to him, and he looked at her with awe. The way she was so open to him, how comfortable she felt with him, how she did not care whether or not her body was in some kind of shape, she just wanted Frank to see who she was. Frank watched her as she took off her clothes, and he felt a kind of feeling he never felt before, a feeling of companionship. Amelia looked amazing no matter what. She wiped off her makeup, Frank didn’t care; she was beautiful. She apologised if her

body was underwhelming, and Frank responded that she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Oh how he smiled so happily at her, because she looked at him with nothing but love in her eyes, and Frank loved Amelia for who she was. She had eyes that would burn lights; she had a smile would warm fires; she had a body that was imperfectly perfect; she had a heart that would beat for others; she had a mind that was so intelligent and so thoughtful; she was everything he was not. She was herself; she was Amelia. And Frank looked up and down at her naked body, and saw nothing but beauty. He got up from the bed and walked over to her. She did not move but continued to look into Frank's eyes, she was not worried about his physical appearance either. Frank placed his hands around her hips, and said how lovely she looked. And she kissed him. And Frank kissed her back. He did not feel fear anymore, because he had met her. Amelia. Whose body he kissed with passion. Whose eyes he could not take his gaze from. Whose lips felt so calm and warm and soft. Whose heart fell in rhythm with his own, as he lifted her off her feet and onto the bed. And as their bodies intertwined, Frank felt no hatred in her soul, no fear in his mind, only contentment, something that never left his mind every single moment he was with her.

The next morning Frank lay with his arm around Amelia, and for the briefest of moments his head felt clear but then he started to think about what this all meant. He thought about all the difficulties this would mean. He wasn't prepared for this, this feeling that radiated out of Amelia. He wanted this to feel so right, for his heart to be fully invested in her but it just wasn't. He couldn't let himself love anyone because he feared that he had too much emotional baggage, and wasn't working with himself to fix it. He couldn't just dump everything onto Amelia's shoulders, and force her to walk the rest of the journey struggling with him. He wanted to be right for her, right for the moment, ready to not hurt her. Ready so that his mind wouldn't destroy the bond.

It was all going black and white, and Frank's head started hurting because it was all too much. He slowly got out of bed and started to put on his clothes. This was the moment Amelia woke up.

"Morning" Amelia said sleepily "have you got to be somewhere?"

"I think so."

"Okay that's fine then" Amelia replied, nuzzling her head back into the pillows.

Frank started to get scared by what he was thinking. He cannot just up and leave Amelia; she was beautiful to him in many ways. But he didn't want to get hurt, or worse hurt her. In his mind she would suffer from loving him any further than she did. He was a freak; a man of a thousand emotions and none of them were good for anyone.

By god! He was this pathetic to walk away from her. What was wrong with him? But then again this shows who he is, shows why he has to stop this, because she is

going to get hurt by all the fire he juggles.

He looked at her one last time. She slept peacefully, her hair falling down onto her shoulders, her body calm as it breathed deeply in and out. She didn't look upset, and that is the way Frank wanted to keep it.

He opened the door and left.

\* \* \*

Over the next couple months, things only got worse for Frank. He lost all contact with Amelia, but he kept telling himself it was for her benefit.

Amelia called several times but Frank never picked up and she texted him several times to asking what was wrong. Then when Frank didn't reply again, she got rightfully mad. She told him that he couldn't just go and sleep with someone and think it won't affect him or her. And Frank agreed with everything she said, and it hurt him because he did feel for Amelia, but at the same time he knew it would hurt even more if she knew how pathetic he truly could be.

He kept saying to himself that the timing wasn't right, and that he wasn't right, and everything was wrong. But he knew no matter what he tried to say, he knew it all didn't feel right to say. Because he thought about her all the time, and he thought of how stupid he was to push her away. And how much of a mistake he made by knowing after it ended she was more than someone else.

One night, Frank sat back on his stool behind the bar, and watched everyone gets on with things, and he felt incomplete. Like all of the puzzle pieces in his head were the same shape and therefore he couldn't fit them all together. He thought of how messed up everything he once strived for had now become, and how everyone had something. And he had nothing. He had noise, not conversations. He had faces without eyes. It was all becoming one thing, and everyone was becoming the same. No one stood out to him, and that was what made him feel sad. He felt so lonely, because people were living their lives in this little village happily, and without fear, whilst he was unhappy, and drunk himself to keep all the tears away. A crack opened in his stone heart, and he thought of Amelia, and the more he thought of Amelia, the even more unhappier he became. She wasn't like everyone else; she didn't just see a person. She saw Frank. Frank was more than just part of a crowd in Amelia's eyes; he was the only thing in front of her. And he thought of how stupid it was of him to ever be scared of loving her, because she feared nothing. He was just so petty and selfish and overdramatic.

The voices at the bar got louder now, oh so much louder. They were all one voice, they were all one thing, they were a community, a society. Frank was not. He was away from all of them, a lonely dark casted shadow.

He could never tell them, because his troubles were his troubles, and not theirs.

Besides if they knew what he thought, they would just keep him further and further away from them. An outsider of society, Frank thought, is someone who speaks of his problems. That is why everyone else in the bar that night was becoming the same, because they all wore masks and spoke like nothing was wrong. Frank feared becoming one of them, but at the same time, he wanted feel the warmth of company.

This hypocritical ideology stayed with Frank the entire evening, until the last of the regulars' left, with a young man who sat on his own drinking his scotch, finished and walked out sombrely. Frank felt lonely; everyone was something, like a glass, see-through, clear, and pristine. Whilst he was smashed, taped back together, and told to act like he wasn't cracked. He just wanted all the thoughts, noises, and faces to leave him. He wanted to be blissfully silent. He wanted to feel like he was really on earth, not the out of body creature that possesses him.

He was cleaning up that evening, when he decided to end it all. He smashed one of the pint glasses, and slit both his wrists. His vision faded.

### III

He woke up seeing this big white wall, and its purity hurt his eyes. He lay in a light blue bed, underneath its thin sheets, his head rested on a comfortable pillow. The place smelted of antiseptic and a constant rhythmic beating could be heard coming from the right side of him. He was lying in hospital he knew that now. The bandages wrapped around his wrists, and the needle stuck into his right arm, reiterated this assumption. It took him a moment of time before he realised why he was there, and then he felt sad. Someone must have called; someone must have discovered his mess of a body, and now he has another thing the town will know him for. Tiredness took over him and he fell asleep.

The next time he awoke, Amelia was sat in a chair across from him, and the curtains to his unit were closed. She was sat reading *'Tender is the Night'* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Frank dared not stir because he wanted to look at her peacefully for a moment, the quiet beauty of which she holds, even if she was doing something as casual as reading a book, was calming to him. Eventually though, Amelia did close her book and turned her attention over to Frank. When she noticed he was awake, she smiled at him, and stood up to move closer.

"So you are awake?" Amelia spoke softly.

Frank nodded very lightly, he still felt quite weak. Amelia slowly slipped her hand into his, very gingerly gripping it, wishing not to hurt his wrists.

"Your brother visited you a couple of hours ago, his girlfriend, Maria I think it was, left you some chocolates, they are just on the side there," Amelia pointed in the direction of the dresser that lay on Frank's right side. "He said he would be back

again soon to visit. Also your mother is getting the first plane out of Sweden just to see you also.”

Frank thought for a moment, with Amelia lightly stroking his hand in a circular motion, and his mind went empty of anything except for how weak he feels, like he had lost something. The strength he once had was now gone mentally, physically. He now needed help from others; he was so weak that he couldn't even save himself from himself.

“So what happens now?” Frank said, looking slowly up in Amelia's deep green eyes.

“I don't know Frank,” Amelia replied “they are sending a psychiatrist, and are putting you under this suicide program. For your own protection they said. But after that, I guess it is up to you.”

Frank closed his eyes, and breathed in deep. He didn't want to cry, but it was tough not too. Tears started to fall from his closed eyes. He felt like he was never going to be the same again, he took a path that will forever change him.

Amelia sat on the bed next to him, and kissed his hand.

“You haven't lost anything Frank” she stated, “Wars are never fought alone. I will be by your side as long as you want me.”

“Thank you” Frank managed to utter through his tears “I just don't want to live with what happened. The world is going to feel so strange to me.”

“Well the world always feels strange to me” Amelia smiled weakly.

Frank opened his eyes, and with his open hand he wiped away his tears, and looked at Amelia, she was level with him now. He felt unwell, and angry with himself, and conflicted, and an unbroken soul, but knowing someone out there did not see him as that, made him feel better. He knew at least one voice was encouraging him to stay.

He moved his hand towards Amelia and touched her cheek. Her cheek felt warm and she didn't flinch when he touched her, she welcomed him. She smiled and Frank lightly stroked her cheek with his thumb, before putting his hand back down. Amelia squeezed Frank's hand a little harder, and moved in to kiss him on the lips. They kiss briefly before Amelia moved back. His mind started to take over and his eyes wanted to close all of a sudden.

“I am really tired, I am sorry.” Frank said.

“Oh no get some rest. I'll be here as long as you want me.”

“I would like you to stay.”

“Okay.”

And with that, Frank closed his eyelids once again, and fell asleep, Amelia's comforting hand still slowly stroking his.

When Frank woke up once more, his mother was sat beside him stroking his forehead. She smiled when she saw him open his eyes. His mother looked different to

Frank, her hair had turned grey and there were several more wrinkles on her, but she looked happy.

“Hello dear, how are you feeling?”

“Tired,” Frank replied, unwell.

“I have heard dear, apparently you have been sleeping a lot, but the doctors said it is not much of a worry.”

“How are you, mum?” Frank asked.

Frank and his mother caught up that mid-afternoon. Frank learnt about his mother’s new boyfriend she met at work, and how nice he is to her. She tried to teach him a little Swedish but Frank wasn’t particularly good at picking up the dialect. His mother told him not to worry and how much she struggled re-learning the language herself, but she kept at it and now she is more or less fluent. Frank’s mother asked him a lot of questions such as how his business was going, and if the town had changed a lot since she left. And then finally she asked, with a grin, “So who is this lovely girl Amelia then?”

“Um...it is difficult to describe”

“I do not think a description is needed Frank, it seems you two get along and like each other very much.”

“It is difficult.”

“I don’t think it is dear,” his mother said, looking at Frank “She said she wanted to reconcile things between you two, when she found you. She wanted to talk things over with you, and how she had missed talking to you. From what I have heard Frank, is that you can’t seem let yourself go, and be happy with someone. Amelia didn’t say that, it is just what I think darling. Look I love you, we all do, never forget we are here. Your past is your past Frank, you cannot lose out on the present because of it. It is what I learnt.”

This made Frank wonder. After every mistake, every wrong turn, the one thing he thought he got right was speaking to Amelia. And yet, he had never truly had any mistakes. He set up a relatively successful business, he had helped fund his family through their times, he had been extremely strong academically and had never hurt anyone but himself. What Frank had was regrets, regrets such as never furthering his education, never leaving this little town he locks himself in, and letting the past hold back his love for Amelia. If he lives his life also watching his back then he never going to see what is in front of him. His future.

Frank’s mother patted him on the knee and stood up.

“I am just going to get some food” she said, and left.

A doctor came by several hours later and asked Frank’s mother if he and Frank could speak privately for a moment, and Frank’s mother left the room. The doctor explained to Frank he was his psychiatrist and he would like to ask Frank several questions. These ranged from how much sleep do you get, to what stresses you, to

how long have you had suicidal tendencies. That last question stirred something in Frank, the word alone made me feel weird. After the doctor had ticked a couple boxes, he diagnosed that Frank had severe depression and social anxiety. Despite this, the doctor saw no reason but to let Frank leave, as he showed no current suicidal symptoms, however he was expected to attend therapy sessions for up to six weeks as part of the suicide program he was placed under. He asked Frank what time would suit him to visit, and Frank gave some vague time, the doctor wrote it down and left.

That was it? Frank thought. He felt like he was part of some machine. Like they put a circle around him and place him with other people. Like everyone was either this, that or the other. Like everyone is one-dimensional. Like the whole world was one big Venn diagram.

Frank wasn't part of a box of people. No one was part of a box. Everyone was different. Sure people had similarities in life experiences but that doesn't mean everyone has the same experiences. Frank just felt like the doctors could diagnose why he felt so bad, because Frank sure couldn't did not know why he felt so unhappy all the time.

He spoke to his mother about this, and his mother said doctors are very busy people, and perhaps he will be able to learn why Frank feels the way he does during the sessions. Frank admitted she was right, and felt bad for his outburst. Frank just wanted to be on the mend fast. He didn't want to feel so low.

So Frank was let out of hospital later that afternoon, and his mum helped him into the car, as he was too weak to walk by himself. When he got home his mother kept saying how much it had changed since he bought it. Oh! How much it had changed. She never out rightly said it had changed for the worse, but Frank knew that is what she thought. She spent the next couple weeks at Frank's home, cleaning up, cooking Frank "proper meals" as she called them, and making sure he was okay. Frank worked from home, and his mother checked in on the staff to make sure everything was running smoothly, she had learnt a lot from her job in Sweden. Amelia visited him whenever she could and they would talk over cups of tea, and sometimes Frank's mother would join them and she would discuss something in the news or a book or film and would sometimes trade stories with Amelia about what Frank was like as a child, and Amelia would laugh her warm laugh, and Frank would feel some contentment. But yet he still felt a sense of entrapment in his town, he never left the house out of fear of what people would think once he left, and he wouldn't dare return to his business. The only times he left were when Amelia drove him down to attend his therapy sessions. He was very quiet at first, he barely spoke much on how he felt, because he didn't know what to say, depression isn't that basic. But he tried for the sake of his mother and Amelia.

His mother eventually flew back to Sweden, and told Amelia to make sure Frank calls her every week for a check-up and Amelia promised she would. Amelia kept to

her work and kept the same drive she always had, but she rarely went home to her flat in the evenings anymore, instead she went to Frank's. They talked more, this time about more personal things, Frank told her why he was so distant, and Amelia told him how she felt. They both decided to work through it, and Frank didn't feel scared to love Amelia anymore. They would happily lie in bed sometimes, in that moment where everything feels timeless, and everything else has stopped except for their beating hearts.

Frank kept working on his business, and tried to do all the things the therapist said he should try, like drawing his feelings or writing a diary, but both seemed silly to him. The psychiatrist even encouraged Frank to see if he could still get an international scholarship, as nothing is ever too late. Frank thought the idea was stupid at first, but after discussing it with Amelia in bed he started searching online and applied for several courses in America. He never thought much of it after that, it wasn't going to be easy get into a university at his age, let alone one in another country, but Amelia patted him on the shoulder and said just wait.

So Frank and Amelia found some strange life together, they were together but they were still pursuing their own goals. It lead to debates sometimes, and one of them might say the wrong thing, but they always got over it. Both of them knew love isn't a simple bond; it is woven in and out of everything. Amelia worked on her life, and Frank worked on his, and that was how it was.

One afternoon, Frank checked his emails and found an acceptance letter from one of the universities he applied for in America. He told his mother who was delighted, he told his brother who was surprised, and he told Amelia who kissed him on the lips and said "I told you so". He wondered what this meant for him, and it frightened him because this was something different, this wasn't just another town or city, this was another country. He told his psychiatrist this and the psychiatrist responded that some day we have to take that leap because it may lead us somewhere beautiful.

Frank applied for his visa that same afternoon, and in the mean time began saying his goodbyes and thought of what was to be done with his bar. He eventually decided to hire extra staff, and keep his ends as the head of the business. Frank could afford to do this now as by a stroke of luck "The Old Library" had closed down after a lack of customers lead to bankruptcy. Everyone was now visiting Frank's pub and Frank was making a lot of money off of it. He still questioned whether or not to leave his pub in the hands of others again, but he learnt to trust his staff enough to let them be in some form of charge. Especially Michael, whom was now promoted to store manager.

Frank decided it was best to sell his property too, and so he put the place on the market. It wasn't long before a family of four bought the house, and Frank was moving out all of his things, and placing some of them in a warehouse temporarily and some in Amelia's flat. He found a small flat near his university and managed after a while, and a lot of unnecessary obstacles, to have everything sorted for his three

years of university in America.

But one thing was playing in his mind, and it was affecting him a lot. So after Frank and Amelia retired to bed for the evening, Frank felt it was the right time to ask.

“So what happens with us?” Frank asked.

Amelia fell silent for a moment, and thought.

“Frank, I care about you a lot, but I cannot leave my job. Everything is in place here for me. I want to be with you, but I don’t want to be you. If you understand?” she replied.

“Yeah I understand. I care about you too, but I don’t want you to leave what you have, for me.”

“Well I guess we will just work things around that then. Just because we aren’t living together doesn’t mean we aren’t together.” Amelia said.

“I will talk to you whenever I can.”

“I will whenever I can too,” Amelia thought “finding time... it won’t be easy.”

“But it will be worth it” Frank smiled.

“Yeah, it will be” Amelia smiled back.

It was not long before the day finally came, and Frank was packing his luggage and putting it into Amelia’s car. They spent the last day together, in the city Amelia worked in, and Amelia took Frank to various spots she liked to visit, and they had food in a posh Vietnamese restaurant, which had golden pillars and plants everywhere. Frank had never had Vietnamese food before, but he really liked it. They sat together on a bench overlooking the city night, with its blue lights and high buildings and noisy streets and the moonlight that peaked through it all reflecting onto the river that ran through the city. They then went home to Amelia’s flat, and spent the night together.

The next day Frank was up early and ready. Amelia woke up slightly later and by that point Frank had made breakfast for the both of them, and Amelia thanked him sleepily. She then drove him out of the town, and towards the airport. And Frank said goodbye to his box of a home, and screamed in his heart onwards to a different life. After a few hours driving they arrived at the airport.

They waited together, sitting down on a airport bench and holding hands. Frank did not want to let go of Amelia’s hand. He knew he would miss her presence, he knew he would miss her warmth, her laugh, her smile, her jokes, her conversations. But then again, this longing, this missing would only last a few years, and what were a few years to a man like Frank. Amelia wanted him to be happy, she wanted him to live more, she encouraged Frank as far as he wanted to be, and so he was forever grateful to her for that. Now though, he had to do it for himself, like Amelia had done everything for herself, because he was the only one that could.

Frank’s flight was called for boarding, and everything rushed through his brain,

excitement, fear, intrigue, and worry. But they all went away as soon as they came. Frank turned around to Amelia. She was still beautiful to him, in so many ways he couldn't describe. He loved her, whole-heartedly.

Frank kissed Amelia hard and she kissed him back, tears rolled down from her eyes and his, and he stopped and looked at her. She was glowing, she was happy.

He kissed her one more time and went through the gate.

The plane took off and Frank lied back in his seat, and smiled because he understood it all now. Life isn't bound to make sense for you, like most things it needs time. Plans are not forged on some unforeseen path of which you are destined to follow. You make your own path, your own future. And people are as temporary as you want them to be. Most things are not permanent despite what people say; everybody has tattoos their pasts gave them that can be removed. The only thing that is permanent is what you do on this earth. Frank knew his wish was not to live in a small town, with a small future, and a small feeling of happiness. Things do not always make sense but you have got to be okay with that sometimes.

Frank looked outside his window and saw everything differently. The universe is a big painting filled with small details, and Frank knew that whatever darkness lies inside him, light shines somewhere too. You can focus on the small things, but that means you lose everything else that life can offer you. Frank was ready for the new journey ahead, ready to see the rest of the painting. And as he looked down at the sea below him, he saw all of it, all of the little waves, all of the little trees, all of the little people, all of the little houses, all of the little streets, all of the little cars, and all of the little towns.