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ENG-361: The Art and Craft of Creative Writing

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Part 1: Revising a Short Story

Diamond Cascade

Swerving to not hit the deer that has appeared in front of her, Tessa realizes she's driving on autopilot. Damn, that was close. How many deer have died along this stretch of highway? Too many she thinks. It's a deadly road that is dark and narrow with thick trees on one side and a cliff that drops into Lake Erie on the other. Tessa tries to calm her racing heart. **Is this an omen of what this weekend brings? She shivers at the thought.** She passes the Speedway gas station on the outskirts of town. The welcome to Middleton sign is just ahead. Looking at the dash she reads the time as 9:26 **p.m.**

Driving down main street brings back so many memories. There on the left is Sally's beauty parlor where Tessa, her sister, and cousins would get pedicures in the summers. Next to Sally's is Musa's Music where she bought her very first CD, *Californication* by the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Across the street from Musa's is Mimi's diner that has been in her family since the 1940's. **Her great-grandparents, Don and Teresa Diamond, settled here after the great depression. They opened the little café and after saving for many years they built the lake house. After they died the lake house was bequeathed to Mimi, their only child. Tessa's mother and**

Aunt JoAnne were raised here, and this is where they always came for the summers. Now that Mimi has passed the future of the lake house, or Diamond Cascade, as the family calls it, is unknown.

Tessa makes a few turns until she reaches Arbor Lane and rolls her window down. The air feels chilly for this time of year, but she loves the way the water smells. She can hear the waves crashing just beyond the dunes. At the end of the cul-de-sac is the lake house. It's all lit up as if beckoning her home. The driveway is full of an assortment of cars. Most of the family lives within an 8-hour drive of Diamond Cascade. Tessa grabs her bags from the trunk and makes her way up the drive. She sees her cousin Sam sitting on the porch as if he's waiting for her. "Hey stranger." Sam says. "Hey Sammy". There is an awkward silence. "Am I the last to arrive?" I ask. "Yeah, but Tate and I just pulled in about an hour ago. Everyone is in the kitchen. Here let me help with those." He jumps up and grabs my bags and turns towards the house.

We enter and I notice that although the house looks the same, it has a worn look to it. The ratty old wicker furniture with faded cushions is against one wall. The weathered floorboards creak with each step. Walking through the house I notice that the paint is peeling and there is a chill in the air. There is a large cedar table sitting in front of the glass doors that face the lake. Mimi loved lake life décor and it is spread throughout the house. "Wow. It's like stepping into the nineties. This place could use a make-over badly." I laugh as Sam shakes his head in agreement. "Believe me, our moms been on Mimi for years about updating, but Mimi wouldn't hear of it. "This is her home, and she was not open to discussions about updates." Sam mimics Mimi's "don't mess with me tone". They both look at each other and burst into giggles. Sam

leans in and gives Tessa a big hug. “Man, I’ve missed you girl.” He says as he squeezes me. The moment is interrupted by Tatum, Tessa’s twin sister. “Well look what the cat dragged in. It’s about damn time you’ve graced us with your presence.” Tatum says giving Tessa a huge hug. Turning to Sam she says, “Will you take her bags to the bunkhouse please?” Dismissing him she turns back to me “Are you hungry? Mom saved you a plate from dinner. It’s tuna casserole, your favorite.” I nod my head as to say no but then my stomach grumbles and I give her a sheepish grin. “Lead the way.”

As Tatum and I enter the kitchen, everyone stops talking for a moment. The light is bright and there are snacks on the counter, along with empty bottles of beer and wine. Everyone starts speaking at once and I get pulled into hugs from each direction. Why have I stayed away so long? I realize how much I’ve missed my family. **Everyone is here, my parents, my brother and sister, and my aunt JoAnne, uncle Bill, and my cousins Sam, Tate, and Nicole. The only person missing is Mimi. The reason we are all gathered here this weekend.**

The next morning, I am awakened by bright sunlight. I forgot how Mimi refused to put blinds up on the back of the house. She said it was so she could see the water from wherever she was at in the house. “I’d prefer a blackout curtain or two but it’s not my house” I think. I pull on a sweatshirt over my pajamas and quickly brush my teeth and creep out, so I don’t wake my sister or cousins slumbering in the bunks surrounding me. When we were kids our grandparents converted two of the bedrooms into one huge room with four sets of bunk beds. We nicknamed it the bunkhouse. We had so much fun in this room telling ghost stories and playing games. This was the best house to be a kid in.

I head to the kitchen for coffee, and I find my mom and aunt JoAnne arguing about something. They quickly stop as I enter the room. “Everything alright?” I ask. “Tessa, my girl” my Aunt JoAnne says to me. She hurries to me and wraps her arms around me. “What’s going on? It sounded like you two were fighting.” There is a long pause while the two women eye each other. “Nonsense,” Aunt JoAnne muses. “We were just discussing the ceremony for tomorrow. Why don’t you head out to the veranda and I’ll bring you some coffee?” I nod my head and scamper away. Some things never change I suppose. Even though I’m an adult now I’m still not privy to adult conversations in this house.

I grab a blanket from the basket by the glass door and step out onto the veranda. The back of Diamond Cascade faces the lake. The large veranda wraps around the entire house. My grandmother had seating placed all around the veranda so there was always a space to escape too if you needed a timeout. This nook looking out at the lake has always been my favorite place to be. I loved to sit out here and read a book as a kid. I settle into an Adirondack chair and take in the quiet around me. My aunt comes out and hands me a hot cup of coffee. She tilts her head before she says “How are you Tessa? It’s been a long time.” It has been a long time. This place holds so many memories for me. “I can’t believe she gone. I should have come sooner.” I croak. My aunt looks at me sympathetically and says, “Yes, you probably should have, but you are here now so don’t beat yourself up over it.” I sigh as I pull a blanket around me. What’s going on between you and my mom?” I ask. “Oh, you know, sister stuff”, we both laugh. “The house seems different now, with Mimi gone.” It seems a little rundown too. Is everything alright?” My aunt is quiet for a few minutes and then she says, “Honestly Tessa, no it’s not. The lake house is rundown and old. There are a lot of things that need to be replaced. New roofing and windows. It

costs a fortune to heat this place in the winter. Your Mimi loved this place, but she really couldn't afford to live here as long as she did." I am surprised by this news. "Isn't the lake house paid in full?" I ask. "Not anymore," Aunt JoAnne says bitterly. "Mimi took out a second mortgage about ten years ago. Her café wasn't doing well, and she needed funds to help keep it afloat during the recession. She didn't tell your mother or I how bad it was. She just kept incurring debt." I sat stunned by this news. "How long have you known?" I asked. "Only a few weeks. She kept things pretty hidden from us." "What about life insurance? Surely, Mimi had a policy." I inquire. "Her policy lapsed about six months ago. She couldn't afford to pay the monthly premium." I sat devastated. My poor grandmother, worrying about money and losing her home in her last few months.

After getting ready for the day, I head down to the lake. I see Sam and Tate down at the dock. As I approach, I notice they are messing with a boat. "Hey, are you taking that out today?" I asked them. "Yeah, it's gonna be a beautiful day. Figured we might as well go out while this place is still quiet." I smile tentatively, "Mind if I join you?" I ask. "We never mind you being around Tessa. Let's go before someone tries to stop us." Sam smiles mischievously while Tate helps me into the boat. We drift away without any ruckus.

Sam, Tate, and I reappear around lunchtime, laughing and pushing each other like when we were kids. We head back up to the house where our parents are waiting on the veranda. We gather around the large oak table in front of the window. My dad and Uncle Bill have opened the glass door to the veranda, so it is as if we are sitting outside. We pass food around the table. Small conversations take place among my family. **I haven't been able to stop thinking about the**

financial situation my family now found themselves in. My cousins and I tried to think of solutions while we were on the boat this morning. If only Mimi had reached out and told someone about what was happening.

I clear my throat. “Diamond Cascade means so much to all of us. There must be something we can do.” Everyone sits in silence. A few people murmur their agreement. My mother has tears in her eyes. “What do you suggest Tessa”, she says to me. “What if we all contribute to saving the lake house.” And I proceed to tell them my suggestions. My cousins and sister add their two cents. We conclude that this is our family home, and we are not giving it up without a fight. My mother and Aunt JoAnne look at each other and shrug. “It can’t hurt to try, Aunt JoAnne says. My mother nods in agreement.

My father suggests we each tell a favorite story about Mimi. We decide we have time to make decisions about the future, but this is the time to honor the mother, grandmother, and woman who meant so much to all of us in this beautiful place we all consider home. We begin to celebrate the reason we are all here today.

Part 2 - Revision Explanation

The original short story is of a woman named Tessa who is traveling to her ancestral family home after the death of her grandmother. In the opening paragraph, Tessa is driving along a well-remembered road when she almost hits a deer. Foreshadowing is added here by her reference to a bad omen for the weekend. The character feels that something is not quite right, and it sets her a little on edge. With the inclusion of the beloved lake house being at risk, the plot is more developed because this conflict has now been added. There is tension between the

protagonist's mother and aunt, which is more foreshadowing about something not quite being right about the visit. This tension throws the protagonist in a tailspin as she tries to come up with solutions to save the home. This is her home, and she doesn't want to lose it. The setting has been updated through dialogue and observations. In the original story it is mentioned that the lake house is a bit outdated, but in the revision, it is noted that not only does the lake house need cosmetic changes, but that structural changes are needed as well. There were too many unnecessary characters for the story. The removal of unimportant characters was necessary to not allow the story to get bogged down in useless details, like names and how they are related to the protagonist. With the addition of the inciting event the story is able to have a stronger resolution. The family comes together at the end to not only honor their mother and grandmother, but to also work together to save their beloved lake house.