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ENG 542 – The Editor
Professor McDermott
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6-2 Group Workshop

Whoops and hollers echoed through the woods, stifling the sounds of nature. The click and whirl of gears and chains overtook the chatter of chipmunks. Yelled warnings of dangers ahead, of pits, obstacles, and sharp turns suppressed the songs of birds. The continuous crunch of wheels grinding everything beneath into the earth crushed the sound of startled deer stampeding away. The men paid no attention to how they dominated the natural world around them, instead they focused ~~foeused~~ instead on trying to surpass each other and lead the pack.

Commented [MW1]: This sentence feels odd. Maybe change it to something like “Over the songs of birds came yelled warnings of dangers ahead and the continuous crunch of wheels grinding the earth muffled the sound of deer stampeding away.”

Commented [MW2]: What does this mean?

“Break!” Jasper shouted breathlessly back to the others, and in an almost synchronized clench of the brakes, they all skidded to a stop on a flat part of a rocky outcropping. Bikes were dropped to the ground in the desperation to shed jackets, helmets, and gear to quickly cool off, to find water and snacks in their backpacks. Soon, the four men sat in various states of undress, panting for air and quietly recovering from the hard ride.

Commented [MW3]: Make this a separate sentence to keep the whole sentence from being choppy.

Commented [MW4]: Panting and quietly don't go together I think. Panting is loud and breathless.

“How many miles was that?” Jasper asked his cousin once his lungs no longer burned to breathe.

“No clue,” Alex said simply, dumping water on his head. “We lost the trail thirty minutes ago, when you decided to jump that gully.”

“Shit, and you didn't tell us?” Jasper kicked some moss at Alex, who threw his empty water bottle in retaliation. Nobody paid attention to wherever it bounced off to, they more focused on snacks and the minor argument.

“We went North and up the mountain,” Alex mused, laying back on the rocks. “Then we turned East at that weird tree. We head back West to the tree, South from there, jump the gully, and Bob’s your uncle.” Jasper threw a granola bar wrapper at his cousin but seemed satisfied by the answer. Alex swatted the plastic aside, chugging another bottle of water.

“Well, since we’re already off the beaten trail, why not go a bit further?” Jasper glanced over at Michael’s suggestion, then looked up to the sky, counting on his fingers.

“Why not? We’ve got a few hours.” Alex picked up his shirt and pulled it on after tossing his trash to the ground.

“I was about to say that,” laughed Jasper, giving his cousin a lighthearted shove. Alex pushed him back with a grin; ~~though causing~~ Jasper ~~to trip-tripped~~ over the fourth man of their group.

“Logan, what are you doing?” Jasper ~~asked~~, ~~pushinged~~ himself up to his feet. ~~Logan sat back, rubbing his bruised side. The loose trash was mostly in a pile around where Logan had been kneeling.~~ “Leave that crap. There’s nobody around to fine us or anything.”

“Should still take it,” Logan said defensively. “It’s bad juju to mess with Nature. We should head back to the trail, then ~~maybe She~~ ~~She maybe~~ won’t be mad at us for intruding.” He frowned as the others scoffed and laughed at him. Michael nudged him with a mocking ‘bad juju’ ~~while~~ ~~While~~ the others donned their discarded clothing. Logan shoved what trash he could into his pockets, ~~before though~~ Jasper swatted the ~~rest aluminum and plastic~~ from his hands. ~~before all of it could be stashed.~~

The four mounted their bikes despite Logan’s displeasure at being unable to clean up, setting off into the woods again. Once more, the sound of men and machinery overtook the peaceful noises of nature. They raced through thickets and brush, cutting across a creek multiple

Commented [MW5]: This feels odd. Is Logan lying down? Was he standing up? How did the trash end up near Logan?

times as they climbed the wild mountain. Hardly five minutes passed before Alex suddenly yelled for a halt. Dirt and dead leaves ~~were~~ kicked into the air as they screeched to a stop.

Looming ahead was a massive tree. Despite it being summer, the giant thing stood with bare, twisted limbs and gnarled body. Something about its shape, ~~the way~~ its branches warped in towards its center, the way its trunk arched, and holes gaped like an open maw looked and ~~felt as if it were a woman screaming.~~ All four stared, the world about them ~~eerily~~ silent. No bird chirped, no rodents chattered, no drone of insects. ~~filled the forest around them. Instead, there was an eerie hush that none dared break, until~~ the wind kicked up dead leaves into the shade of the tree, and the glitter of plastic bottles and foil wrappers in the roots broke the spell.

“We were moving East,” Alex said dumbly.

“This is the same tree,” Michael snapped. Jasper and Logan glanced between each other as Alex and Michael began to argue. It was the same strange tree which had them turn paths earlier, the same tree which should have been almost twenty minutes West of them and down the mountain, not five minutes East and at higher elevation.

“Hey! Cut it out,” Jasper yelled as the two threw down their bikes. He moved between them and held his arms out to prevent the pair from coming to blows. “Fighting won’t help anyone. We probably just looped about on accident. From here we head South, right? No harm in calling it now. We can stop for beers on the way home.” Michael and Alex calmed slightly, but Logan shifted nervously on his bike, staring at the tree.

“There’s some bad juju going on, man,” Logan muttered. “She looks even worse than before.” He yelped when ~~Jasper turned and pushed him over,~~ grunting as he got tangled in the metal of his bike. “What? There’s no way we got that badly turned about. There’s something

Commented [MW6]: You've said this twice in the same sentence, maybe change the wording here.

Commented [MW7]: I'm not sure this makes sense here unless you personify the tree beforehand? Or say that it looked like a woman screaming instead of saying "felt as if".

Commented [MW8]: Make this a new sentence.

Commented [MW9]: This feels like an odd place for Jasper to be aggressive after he just broke up Michael and Alex from fighting.

going on here, especially with this tree. Us hitting it again when we were headed the opposite way? Reminds me too much of my Nan's stories. I'm telling you. Bad juju."

"Shut up with that stupid superstitious shit," hissed Jasper, standing over him. "We got turned about, that's all. Now, we're going to head South and getting out of this creepy ass forest." He glared down at Logan, daring him to protest. Instead, Logan focused on getting up and making sure his bike was alright. He didn't agree, but the others were just as spooked as he was, and fear made them aggressive. He eyed the tree, recalling his grandmother's stories warning against harming Nature or she'd return the favor tenfold. The tree felt perfectly fitting into the stories, and he couldn't shake the feeling of being watched.

The group picked up their bikes and set off South from the tree. Nobody wanted to comment on how none of the terrain looked familiar or how they were gaining elevation rather than heading down the mountain. Instead, they kept riding hard up the trail cutting that they cut through the overundergrowth. Once the dead tree was out of sight, the forest resumed its noise. Without the excited whooping, the calls, the jumps and or rowdiness of careless bikers, the shrieks of birds, the bleats of deer, the and chatter of small critters resumed.

"Bad juju," Logan muttered at the sounds around him, louder than the whirl of chains and gears as they pedaled. "She sounds... Angry."

"Shut up, Logan," growled Michael, kicking at the other's leg. Logan yelled as he wobbled, crashing to the ground. Yet the stone yielded as he slammed into it. His jacket caught onto an outcropping and tore, whipping him about like a rag doll and forcing him to hang by his arm. Gravity suddenly pulled Logan and his bike down before anyone could grab him, dragging him into the dark. Leaves, torn leather, and pocketed wrappers rained about him. He wheezed, staring at the hole twenty feet up.

Commented [MW10]: I'm wondering why fear would make them all aggressive. Everyone reacts to fear differently, so it's a little odd to have all of them react aggressively.

Commented [MW11]: You don't need to capitalize the A in angry

Commented [MW12]: This feels really out of place to do when all they are doing is trying to get out as fast as they can. Maybe Logan could turn around to glare at Michael and then he hits a lifted root and he tumbles over the edge? Or maybe a bird suddenly lunges as Logan and he loses balance to show the power of Nature?

Commented [MW13]: Is he hanging over a cliff here? I'm a little confused as to what is happening. How did his bike end up falling with him when it probably would have fallen first? Did he fall into a hole?

“Logan! You alive?” His friends were shadows against the light above. “Answer me!”

Though he wasn't sure who called, he offered a weak thumbs up.

“I'm good! Maybe.” The croak struggled to be audible, as his lungs fought to get a full breath of stagnant air. He sat up, clutching his arm as pain lanced up his the-shoulder. His hand came back wet; the scent told him it was blood. “I'm hurt! Anyone got a rope?”

The minutes of shuffling above felt like hours, with someone – Michael, judging by the guilty tone – calling down that no, there wasn't rope, but they were making something to get him up. Logan stood despite the pain racking his body, getting a feel for his injuries. His legs were bruised from the bike landing on them, but not nearly as bad as his arm. If he had guess, it was dislocated on top of the gash. He took his shirt off, gritting his teeth as agony shot up his arm while he tore the cloth into strips. He tied his wound as best he could in the dim light, then peered into the darkness. After a moment, he recalled his phone and fished it out, turning it on for some light.

The cracked screen offered dim, intermittent illumination of the area. He couldn't get the device to unlock for the flashlight feature, so he investigated with what he had. All around him were smooth stone walls, caked in places with dark mosses and lichen. In one corner, he noticed markings. Limping closer to investigate, they seemed to be carvings. When he tried to examine them closer, though, his head grew lightlight, and his ears rang, suddenly feeling faint.

“Bro, didn't you hear us calling?” Logan jumped at Michael's voice behind him, turning and throwing his phone as hard as he could. His phone smashed against the far wall as a wave of dizziness struck with the motion, compounding with the lightheadedness. His phone smashed against the far wall and Michael managed to catch him before he fell.

Commented [MW14]: Did you mean for this word to be there? Is the air in the hole polluted and unbreathable?

Commented [MW15]: I think it would be better for him to look at the blood on his hand or if he is one of those people who can't stand the sight of blood, just say something like “his hand came back wet and he knew it was blood, but he dared not look for fear of fainting if he did.”

Commented [MW16]: Make this into another sentence.

“He doesn’t look so good,” Alex noted quietly, taking out his own phone and turning on its flashlight. Michael grunted an agreement, pulling Logan’s uninjured arm over his shoulder for support. Jasper landed on the stone and his phone’s light joined the others, aimed at his friend. Logan’s arm had a large gash on it, poorly wrapped by shirt strips, bleeding profusely through the makeshift bandages. He also bled from the head and was quite pale. His eyes didn’t open until Alex lightly slapped his cheeks. Even then, he immediately fell unconscious again, head falling to his chest.

Commented [MW17]: I'm confused at what this is. What stone are we talking about?

Commented [MW18]: We already know this, so I don't think we need another sentence explaining it.

Commented [MW19]: We don't know this so maybe expand on it?

“Alright, we gotta get him back up,” Jasper said, while he, though took his shirt off to tear strips to better bandage Logan’s arm. “Alex, get up there. Call for help.” Alex made his way to the makeshift rope and began to climb. Their rope was just their jackets tied together at the arms, with one of their bikes serving as an anchor above. It gave when he was halfway up, followed by the sound of metal on stone. And He landed roughly and rolled away as their anchor-bike crashed into the cave, warping its frame and snapping off the handlebars.

“Shit! How do we get out?” Alex stood and whipped his light around. Michael sat Logan against the wall to rest and checked his own phone. No signal. His light examined the walls. No exit, just smooth stone around. It was like an old, natural well, or a trap pit. He shuddered, searching the walls for cracks or ways to climb to the top. Instead, he noticed the carvings which Logan had been examining.

“What’s that?” The other two stopped their searches, looking towards the marks. In the light of three flashlights, there were three scenes carved into the wall, and another mostly covered by moss. One showed four crude figures with round-legged mounts, a rain of sharp notches around them, with deer and birds fleeing from them. The figures seemed to be summoning the notched marks into the air, a rain of danger. The next showed the four figures

Commented [MW20]: I don't understand this description

Commented [MW21]: I also don't understand this sentence

and their mounts before a weeping woman-figure, which had been carved with a reverent halo around her, and more of the notches stabbing her feet. Next, the four were within a pit with two of their mounts, with auras about their hands and the sharp marks about. Alex blanched, staring at the carvings.

Commented [MW22]: What are these mounts?

Commented [MW23]: What are these notches?

Commented [MW24]: What are auras?

“Yo, is that us?” Michael glanced at his friends. “There’s no way, right? I mean, it’s an old ass picture, or it’s gotta be some sort of joke.”

“Who would put this bullshit as a joke, Michael?” Jasper smacked his shoulder, looking to Alex. “Talk some sense into him, man!”

“The likelihood of a prank is pretty bad,” Alex muttered, glancing at the images before looking elsewhere into the cave. His flashlight swept the area, but he saw no video camera or anything else to show it as a bad-prank, just two mangled bicycles and a lot of fallen trash from Logan’s pockets. He refused to draw any attention to the comparisons.

Commented [MW25]: I think it would be a good idea to add while they are looking at the scenes to add that they are stepping on all the trash they had left in the beginning and the trash that Logan tried to pick up.

Commented [MW26]: This doesn’t make that much sense. Is he trying to say that the likelihood of a prank is pretty low or that it is probable? Or is he trying to say that this prank would be really crappy

“Explain this, then!” Michael slapped the carving, glaring at the other two.

“Hell if I know,” Jaser admitted, though he was distracted as Logan groaned. He knelt and shook his friend’s shoulder, though the other didn’t wake fully. Instead, he only muttered ‘she’s angry’ before he was asleep again. Jasper sighed and stood again, glancing at the carving of the four in the pit. He didn’t like how one of the figures was layinglying as if dead, and or how there were two mounts lying at the edge of the pit, like their bikes at the mouth of the cave. He didn’t like how the whole chain of carvings werewas like their trip so far. The fourth carving was covered mostly by moss, but he opted to ignore it in favor of escape.

Commented [MW27]: ? It’s okay to use their names and say he instead of other. It makes it less confusing.

For the next hour, the three checked every nook and cranny of the cave for an exit. They tried to sit on each other’s shoulders to reach the top, but couldn’t reach without Logan, who remained unconscious. His makeshift bandages were soaked through, and his skin grew ever

paler. Alex tried to use the jacket-rope, tied to the broken handlebars of a fallen bike, to catch another item as an anchor. For a moment, it caught. The men cheered as Alex began to climb again. However, the new anchor gave as he neared the top ~~and he. The man~~ crashed to the bottom ~~again~~, followed by the bikes that had been ~~laying~~ ~~lying~~ by the mouth of the cave.

Michael cursed and dragged Alex from under the bikes, leaning him against the wall by Logan. There wasn't any visible bleeding, though he'd landed hard on his head. Michael looked to Jasper, ~~foundable to tell~~ that Alex was breathing, if only just. ~~Neither~~ ~~Both~~ men ~~didn't~~ ~~knew~~ ~~knew~~ what to do. Michael tried to rouse his unconscious friends, while Jasper paced restlessly in the fading light that filtered into the mouth of the cave. Wall to wall, it felt like the space was shrinking. There wasn't any way to get help, it was getting dark, and their phones didn't have much charge left.

"Fuck it." Jasper lurched suddenly towards the wall with the carvings. He tore at the moss covering the last depiction and lifted his light to examine it closely. There lay all four figures, their curved mounts, and the woman in the pit. No, not in. The four people and their mounts were in the pit, and the pit was stood over by the sobbing woman in from the prior image. Her halo was larger, and she stood to block the entrance of the pit, sealing in the other figures with the sharp notches raining down over them. Instead of crying, though, she seemed to be laughing.

The sound of crunching leaves and groaning wood echoed into the cave. ~~Simultaneously,~~ Michael and Jasper looked up to the entrance. The waning light was broken by branches that moved, but not with the wind. They were temporarily blinded as the meager light reflected off a rain of plastic bottles and foil wrappers. Their discarded trash cascaded down onto the pile of mangled bikes as the groaning continued. The men watched as the tree's roots reached across the

Commented [MW28]: I think it would be really cool to add either the sobbing or laughing from the woman here. I also think it would make the story stronger if you did add her in at some point, like physically in the cave like those scenes depicted.

entrance of the cave, its trunk moving to eclipse the light, the branches blocking anything else from slipping into the cracks. The men were soon left with nothing but darkness, their bikes, and their trash, trapped in the tomb nature built specifically for them.

The sounds of birds singing stifled the sounds of the men's screams. Deer grazed peacefully as the y-men beat at the stone walls of their prison. Chipmunks and rodents scampered in the branches of the old tree as it blossomed with green leaves and flowers, releasing its agonizinged twist and reaching its arms lovingly to the now-clean woods. Soon, there was nothing but the cheerful cacophony of nature, bright and alive above the dark grave of the men.