

RULE 3

Final Portfolio

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Artistic Statement

At the beginning of the year, I had my heart set on only writing short stories, because I thought it was better, more fun, and easier. After spending this whole semester dedicated to short stories and having only written a single chapter of a novel, I know that's no longer the case. With my limited experience in writing novels, I know creating them won't be simple and it will unquestionably take time to develop my own style. When discussing my own artistic style(s), I want to do what's comfortable and feels safe, but I know that will only hinder me in the future. This upcoming summer and beyond, I will try to develop a sense of what kind of a writer I want to be. I've continually had an affinity for novels and series, and I've always had a lot of creativity floating around in my noggin that I could possibly turn into good novels in the future.

The fantasy genre is overwhelming at best and simple at worst, in my opinion. In high school I loved the books *Throne of Glass* by Sarah J. Maas though I didn't finish the series, I'm obsessed with books set in other universes usually including some sort of assassin that was forced into that profession. I would be honored to write a series like those that allow young adults to travel outside of their own lives. I know lots of people read fiction to escape the realities they have been given, or to find solace in knowing a book will enhance their imagination.

Though fantasy is what draws me to writing, I want to someday be able to write a book about nothing. Perhaps this has to do with my obsession with poetry devoted to the simple made beautiful, but I think it would be interesting to create a story about my own life. Not that I think my life is worth nothing or anything dramatic like that, but I think it would be a good exercise, at the least, to try and write about my life. To use my creative talents and create something out of

nothing. That might be something I work on in the future and it might not depend on how my life work out.

In the past, and within this semester, I've written a few stories dedicated to fairies, witches, girls with boiling blood and time travel, all while trying a new writing style each time. In my short story with Hina, the girl whose blood boils, it was selected in this semesters issue of NOTA, which had me shocked. I genuinely didn't believe my writing was worth being selected, but when it was, I was ecstatic. If anything, that has only driven my resolve to write freely and more creatively.

Revision exercise

Write a scene that follows Hina home from Nanami's cottage and care. What does she tell her family? How does she think of Nanami and how does this compare to her relationship with her mother? Write a scene or selection and see how it goes.

It was dark out when Hina started to recognize the hills and grass around her. Nanami had directed her to the outskirts of the Main Town, the one Hina set ablaze only days earlier. Leaning on a tree Hina caught her breath, she looked up at the moon thanking it for being night, "Arigato." If the sun happened to be above her instead of the moon, Hina knows she wouldn't be as confident walking near the town as she currently was. It had to be late, maybe a bit past twilight. There were only a few people in the town closing down shops or chatting, and when Hina walked towards the street, the one she burned, she quickly turned around holding in a gasp. The street was charred at best, and the trees around them were barren and grey. In fact, some of the branches still had embers of her flames in them. She ducked her head and jogged into the opposite clearing, the one with the zigzag path towards her family's cottage. Maneuvering through the branches and tall grass she walked for a few hundred feet, then almost suddenly she could see the glow her home emitted through the darkness of the moonlight.

At the gate, Hina reached up to unclasp the lock but paused at the mention of her name. It was her okasan speaking, "Stop crying," Hina crouched down and tried to scoot closer to hear better, "it's only been a few days." Hina stood quickly, she was delighted that her okasan was at least a little worried about Hina. Hina smiled and unlocked the gate, the small click echoed throughout the forest and her cottages paper thin walls it seemed, as the sound bounced off the cottage her okasan whipped her head towards Hina. Her eyes widened and she looked scared of Hina. Hina lifted her hand to wave but when her okasan saw Hina lift her hand she screamed and ducked. Hina wrapped her hands around herself, embarrassed, Hina called out to her mother like a lost duckling, "okasan? It's me, Hina." She paused to wait for a response, when the only response that occurred was watching her okasan stand quickly to blow out the candle no longer illuminating the house. Then Hina heard a few couple of shuffles then the front door opened, revealing Hina's okasan, her otosan, and her younger siblings. They all looked petrified to see Hina, all except for Yuki, the youngest of the siblings. Yuki cried out to

Hina, “Onesan!” running up to her, Hina bent down to hold her littlest sister. She was just learning how to speak English, so most of Yuki’s 12-year-old brain was just Japanese. Okasan always started teaching them the native tongue before anything else.

After hugging Yuki, Hina put her back on the ground, the middle schooler stuck to her leg. Hina looked her Okasan directly in the eyes, something she would never had done in the past. Flustered, her okasan looked down at Yuki, “Come back here this instant darling.”

Full revision - Workshopped story

Rule 3

“Now, darling you must remember the 3 Rules,” she paused, signaling with a gesture that it was Hina’s turn to apparently remind Hina’s okasan, it seemed, of what those Rules were.

Hina sighed, “Rule 1: Do not get emotional.”

She recited them as if they were etched into Hina’s skin with ink.

“Rule 2: Do not get hurt,

Rule 3: If Rule 2 is broken, then I must run from everyone.”

The last Rule made Hina feel torn apart, like she were a mutilated and clawed to shreds kind of monster. That she should not be near people. Hina wanted so desperately to prove her family wrong. Hina wanted to prove to them that she could be something. Recalling her past, Hina wiped angry tears from her eyes. Hina was weak. She was angry. Hina quickly shifted to her side and reached up to her knotted braids as if to fix them, a decent block from her okasan’s watching eyes.

“Good!” Her okasan exclaimed as she faced towards the door, smiling to Hina’s younger sisters, “You must also remember dear,” she looked over her shoulder, “That you mustn’t leave here today. The rain fall of yesterday has stuck to the grass and stone making it slick and treacherous. We wouldn’t want anything to happen.”

Not to Hina though. Her okasan never mentioned Hina’s wellbeing in all the times she had caused trouble. The last thing on her Oksana’s mind was if her daughter was ever okay. Frequently, when Hina was little and she would return home with a bloody kneecap or a hurt younger sister, Hina’s okasan would look at Hina like a maggot, like she so desperately wanted Hina to go off and never return home. Hina felt her heart skip a beat, and her blood responded slightly to the change in emotion. She coughed and choked down the rising exasperation.

“Or the house again.” The youngest pitched in, smiling and pointing ever so dramatically to the ceiling. Yuki being 13 and Hina aged 16, the two have always been close, so Yuki’s response immediately made Hina smile.

“Oh really?” Hina giggled a bit, “Maybe I’ll hang out in your bedroom today.”

Yuki ran up to Hina to give her a hug goodbye, telling Hina that they would be back by night. Hina liked her other sister Miku enough, but cherished Yuki the way Hina thinks a sibling should be loved, not like how their okasan treats Hina. Hina knew her bitterness towards Miku was unintentional, but Miku could leave the house unattended. Miku was okasan's favorite. Miku had the best posture, never caused problems, and didn't set things on fire. Yuki knew and had witnessed the pain and rejection Hina suffered from her own physique. Yuki had seen firsthand what occurs when Hina does not follow her 3 Rules. Her okasan, however, had always made Hina feel small, entirely incorrect and that Hina should not have been born. Her okasan believes it was because Hina was cursed still in the womb. When she ate a wrong kind of mushroom, it made her sick and made her child come out amiss. Whatever the reason, it was not normal, therefore Hina is told she must not leave home, she must not get angry, she must not show emotion, she must not do anything. But with the blossoming opportunity to slink into town quickly, she could not tell herself no.

With her family away traveling to the far East village, where the upper class resides, they would be selling the glazed pots they forge, meaning Hina's family wouldn't return till it was twilight. The cooing of the South Main Town terrified her, but she was drawn to that kind of chaos. Perhaps it had something to do with whatever happened inside her. Whatever was not allowed out.

The small number of steps leading to the bustling town was full of a kind of muse for Hina and it was intoxicating. It reeked of sweet matcha donuts, Nikumaki Onigiri - delicious meat wrapped rice balls, savory Yufuhana Crepes, the kind filled with sweet edible flowers. The town echoed with thrills of laughter, horse hooves pounding the stone path and children crying for sweets. Sounds that jarred her, shaking her weak resolve of only entering the bookkeeper's shop, to grab some pretty parchments. Hina craved entering the tea shop with pink and red flowers blooming at the entrance, the sugary and fiery smells of soaking flavor made her mouth water, and how she adored the towns glasshouse, which resembled nothing comparable. Hina clutched the worn wooden podiums, where always lit lanterns hung, and a tangle of black hair came loose from her tight braids as though it knew her true attitude of today's venture. She twisted them up into tight braided buns, to avoid any future disasters.

If only I don't get hurt, Hina thought to herself. If only I don't hurt anyone else.

As she looked down at her layered kimono, she exhaled and hiked them up as far as she could. Hina took additional restrictions to get up this wet staircase and she had her heavy boots on, the ones her Otosan made her so she would not fall and hurt herself as often. In one hand she held the charred wickerwork basket her sister made years before their old house caught fire, it held a flask of water and a few yen. And with the other, she hoisted the skirt to her ear and pinned it between her head and right shoulder. Hina giggled as she believed she must look ridiculous, if not a little silly and slowly padded up the stairs. Although it was a little cooler than expected the tears that escaped her eyes were not due to her breaking Rule 1, the wind simply nipped at her eyelashes.

If I don't get hurt, Hina internally chanted again, keep your emotions in check.

With her head tilted to the side, her left eye saw the bustling market and when she caught sight of the overwhelming colors, smells, and sounds, Hina simply forgot who she was. The captivating sensation, that Hina is not dangerous, that she hadn't ever set their old cottage on fire, and she didn't have hundreds of scars on her skin. She was merely a normal child covered in blue fabric, a hue that matched her complexion. She reached the top of the stairs, and a whiff of fresh Kase Kuchen suffocated her nostrils, she inhaled deeper as if asking it to live there permanently. Kase Kuchen cheesecake made her mouth water and although the streets were still a bit damp from yesterday's rain, the people still came out to enjoy the hustle and bustle of it all. Hina smiled, and lifted her head dropping her skirt to its rightful spot.

To the right of her, the market swayed in chaotic ecstasy with people yelling out sales prices, and neighbors discussing the towns drama through their open windows. Laundry hanging between the stone buildings, flapping in this chilled wind. Hina wondered if the clothes would freeze if they happened to be damp. To the left of Hina, the town isn't as busy that direction, but it was still crowded filled with afternoon street performers. A man in a bright red suit was doing a handstand atop a skinny hula hoop and Hina was curious of the spectacle, so she walked towards the left to get a better look. But as she was turning, someone bumped into her causing them to drop all their possessions.

Hina was startled, and in that instance, quickly remembered who she was. The instant terror flooded her veins and the overbearing worry rolled quickly into heat and panic. Her breathing shifted becoming shaky. The anxiety of showing the people her

identity, of being a disgraceful monster had already started to get to her. Hina's anxiety consumed her head, and her heart started beating incredibly quickly. The breaths that escaped her throat were too fast and shallow to hold any useful amounts of oxygen. *Too many people. I mustn't get emotional.*

As Hina turned away, it seemed like she was gasping for air. Her lungs felt like they would fail at any second and her vision turned blurry and red. She leaned on the railing for only a moment to suck in a large gasp and ran right back down the sleek staircase. Hina felt her throat close up and as she so desperately wanted to cry, a sliver found its way in the web of skin between her thumb and pointer causing Hina to screech, "ow!"

The stone tread was still wet from the drenching rainfall. Hina reached into her basket pulling out the flask, she could feel her skin forming the pores where the steam escapes like little volcanoes. Hina winced as her heartbeat faster and faster and faster and hotter and hotter, Hina's skin started to bubble. The embarrassment and rage circled her organs.

"Oh no, not right here." Hina pleaded to the fire in her blood. She started chugging the liquid desperately, hoping that might cool her down, but when it hit her throat, Hina screamed, realizing it was alcohol she slammed the flask into the stone. Hina must've grabbed the flask for cleaning and not drinking, how could she have known? They look so similar. The liquor had begun to boil, searing her throat, and she cried out for help. But alas, no sound escaped her vocal cords, she felt frantic, unable to contain this monster in her skin.

The people on the stairs shuffled out of Hina's way and gapped at Hina like she were a crazed freak. Hina ran down the stairs, dropping her basket, the yen coins flying out and clinking down the pathway. One of them found its way underneath Hina's heavy boot, causing her to slip. She felt the wind for one second, free as all, then she slammed her ribs into the bottom of the stairs. Her hands did little to save her in the crash, penetrated with gravel and blood, she cried out when the deep red fluid hit the air. Hina slammed her hand into her side, it was unintentional and as soon as her muddy hand connected to her raw muscle and blood, she screamed and when she lifted her palm from her ribs some of her skin ripped off, floating to the bloody ground. The pool of gore

forged from the slice in her bones, boiled and scorched the stone street so fast that the flames started immediately, mixing with yesterday's rainstorm.

Hina had set fire to the pond near her home once, when her Okasan found a young Hina outside at nightfall, crying and alone. Hina remembers she had slipped on the little dock where they would fish, and she cut her elbow. Her blood boiled so molten hot that the water caught flames and her Okasan was terrified to touch Hina.

Catching on the rain-soaked trees, the impossibility of it all was nothing compared to what Hina felt. She has broken all the Rules. Her blood boiled outside of her skin and suffocated her heart to inconceivable levels. So, Hina followed her Oksana's rules, and she ran.

Hina sprinted till her legs felt like they could give away at any second, and a thunderstorm coming from the North was now on top of Hina. The burning street in the South market was almost out of her sight, barely in the distance, a few miles away. The rain that was about to drench Hina was mocking her, and again Hina felt small, stuck inside her boiling body. She found herself in the next town's neighboring forest and fell into a stream of running water, it felt crisp like crushing grapes beneath your feet. The instant her bloody ribs touched the stream, the water started to boil. Hina coughed and swallowed large gulps of water, she cried as the boiling stream started to cool, though the water started burning the wet grass on the edges. She rolled her eyes and sat down in the water. The adrenaline rush from that sprint was no longer supplying Hina with any energy, and she was exhausted.

"Just don't get hurt," Hina told herself through breaths, looking down at her reflection in the ripping water, her mascara running down her face, Hina let herself fall into the shallow stream. Her back tapped some of the pebble's underneath and she delicately let her head rest on the edge of the singed grass. Her neck was submerged, and her ribs were sizzling half under the water. Thunder close behind her and the clouds turned from a marshmallow white to a mucky sadness.

Hina closed her eyes and laid her right hand on her heart catching the splinter on her gown she flinched and listened for her heart beats to calm themselves, although they were still too close together. So Hina stayed still, laying in the stream, the weather that charged forward decided to give Hina a shower. She sighed and sobbed as angry cries echoed through the forest, but Hina felt no remorse for disturbing the creatures living within it. A mixture of pure embarrassment and resentment for being born this way, she was cursed to be alive and a curse to those around her. Hina wanted to prove to anyone that she could be something. The rain poured down upon her, it gave nothing away that it cared for her bloody body and bruised ego.

After a couple of minutes Hina realized, the rain had stopped hitting her face, and the pitter patter of the rain hitting something other than her skin, forced her to open her eyes. Only to find the reason the rain stopped falling upon her was due to a fist holding a black umbrella. Hina tried to hold it in, but some sound accidentally escaped her mouth resembling a gasp. She sat up instantly, and a shock of pain surfed through her. She cried out and clutched her side. The cut from the fall started to bleed out again and Hina screamed. The hand tugged the umbrella away quickly, and Hina heard a rustle sound from behind the umbrella.

Then, the umbrella closed, and behind it stood a gorgeous woman. The rain happened to stop at that exact moment, which made Hina shiver in this woman's presence. She had long black hair that resembled Hina's, but this woman's skin seemed lighter than snow, her cheek bones were high, and her eyes were the color of emerald stone. She was beautiful, though she didn't smile. The woman carefully stepped into the stream, and although Hina's skin was fizzy and burning, she felt like this woman with the strange eyes would not hurt her, but she was still a mystery.

So Hina shot her hands up, and felt her body shake as she spoke, "Please-please don't step closer," Hina let her hands wrap around her stomach again, "I don't want to hurt you." Hina felt her heart growl inside her again, banging on the sides of her body to be set free. The water boiled faster.

The woman tilted her head to the side and smiled almost too beautifully, "I'm not going to hurt you *sweet one*, I want to help you."

“You can’t!” Hina yelled as the woman took another step, her other boot entered the stream. The emotion which resembled annoyance of being called a “sweet one” ate her up, but Hina ducked, waiting for this woman to scream out in pain. But nothing happened besides the sound of sloshing water as this lady moved closer to Hina. The woman grabbed Hina’s chin and forced her to meet the emerald eyes, “Let me help you, you poor innocent soul.”

Poor innocent soul.

Hina’s heart fluttered, but not with embarrassment, just anger, like every other time. Her okasan, the world, and now even this woman all viewed Hina as this helpless thing. “Like I said,” Hina tried her hand at sounding intimidating, “you could not help me if you tried.”

Nanami smiled again, a sort of, *I know better than you know*, kind of smile and hoisted Hina up. Hina, desperate to get out of the boiling stream, let the woman do so. The woman wrapped a cloth around Hina’s ribs, instantly the fabric began soothing the gash. Hina sighed and gasped from the sheer pleasure of this herbal medicine that was unlike anything Hina had ever heard of. It almost seemed magical.

“Tell me darling, what is your name?”

“Hina,” Hina pointed at the wrap, “What is this made of? How-how can you touch me right now?”

“Silly girl, if I told you that you wouldn’t believe me” She cooed at Hina. Patting down Hina’s messy braided buns, Nanami swayed back and forth with Hina. Hina started to feel tired, maybe all the sprinting was catching up to her?

“Why do you want to help me?”

“Because you look like you desperately want help, and you remind me of myself.”

Hina looked up at Nanami, whatever was in the cloth was making Hina dizzy, but it felt nice to go to sleep. Hina’s legs started to give out, but Nanami was still holding Hina up, like she planned for this to occur. Before Hina could react to what was happening around her, Hina felt her mind go blank and her eyes go dark.

What seemed like a moment later, Hina awoke inside a wooden cottage, the ceiling resembled that of her own home. After a few seconds of allowing her eyes to adjust, Hina could tell she was laying on an old quilt laid upon a squeaky mattress. The bed groaned under the minor weight Hina had. She was no longer wearing her kimono and was instead dressed in a dark blue nightgown that went to her knees. Hina was alone in this room with a mug of water on the adjacent nightstand and a lantern that lit the room up. The flames danced through the cracks in the wall. Remembering what had happened, Hina looked down at her ribs, terrified of what she might see, she pulled up the dress to look at her sliced stomach, but fortunately, the wound was almost completely sealed up and the stitches that crisscrossed along the 4-inch cut did not hurt to touch.

“How long was I asleep?” Hina quietly asked herself. “What is going on?” Hina looked to the door that was closed and decided that if the strange woman wanted to hurt Hina she would not have healed her first. She carefully padded her way to the door and turned the handle opening it. On the other side, the woman was cooking something in a large pot in her fireplace. Churning a spoon slowly, over, and over. Nanami smiled showing Hina she knew she was awake.

“Did you drug me?” Hina shuffled towards a door that she assumed lead to out. “What do you want?” Hina felt herself sink into her skin again, a monster of humans.

“I wanted to help you, but I doubted you would follow a stranger willingly. I saw your wound, your own body punishing you for your ignorance.” Nanami slinked over to Hina and Hina backed up against the wall, she threw her hands up to shield herself. Which caused Nanami to smirk the same way in the stream, Hina felt her blood begin to boil. No one in Hina’s family had ever tried to egg Hina on or purposely get a reaction out of her. Did Nanami not know what Hina was capable of?

“I cannot imagine the burden you must carry in your *existence*,” Nanami walked over to Hina and patted Hina’s head again, she grabbed both Hina’s hands and noticed the splinter, carefully caressing her hands she yanked the sliver of wood out and Hina

flinched, the thorn left a small spot of blood. “You see here? Just like me, you ignored what you have been gifted.”

“You think what I have is a gift? You don’t know anything about me,” Hina looked up to meet Nanami’s eyes, pulling her hands from this strange woman. Hina’s blood was starting to boil, but Hina did not feel scared, she was starting to feel something else. Knowing something was off about Nanami, Hina needed to leave the cabin. She didn’t know where she would go, maybe back home? The thought scared Hina and as she turned to leave, her arms limp at her sides, the prick of blood streamed down her hand in a thin line. When a drop splattered on the cottage flooring it sizzled and dissolved through the wood. Hina watched in disbelief, if her blood was searing the wood, how on Earth had it not attacked her own skin. Nanami leaned down behind Hina, “See?” she whispered in Hina’s ear, her voice coated in honey, “I long to help you.”

Hina sharply inhaled and rolled her fists into balls, “I don’t need your help.” Hina opened Nanami’s front door and stormed outside. Nanami laughed and yelled behind her as Hina started running through the deep forest, “Run straight ahead and you will find what you need!” Hina slowed and looked over her shoulders to see Nanami slam something into her porch, causing a huge cloud of green smoke to cover Nanami and the small cottage. Nanami laughed a beautiful laugh yelling again, “When you accept the truth, I will come save you my dear!” Moments later when the smoke cleared, both the structure and Nanami were gone, only gravel remained where the home once was. Hina was paralyzed in her own two feet, her hand still bled, sizzling the grass it spilled on without searing her own skin, and she had perhaps just been stationed in a Witch’s Hut.

That idea popped into Hina’s head as she recalls her okasan reading old fairy tales to her and her siblings when they were very small. Skinny, lanky, beautifully eerie humans that possessed relationships with the earth, allowing them to bend the rules of nature. Hina’s okasan once said to her, “Maybe you’re a cursed witch? An unlucky one.”

Remembering what Nanami said about going straight ahead, and her own mother, Hina grabbed what was left of her torn up skirt and hiking it up, she started running. The sun directly above, beating down on her skin caused Hina to gasp for a breath after a few miles. Without allowing her mind to process much of what happened, Hina looked down

at her bloody hand. It had completely dried, and was crusting off her skin, it was a feeling she had never experienced before. Hina contemplated licking the dried blood off her hand to taste it. Her sisters always said that blood tasted like coins, and when Hina first heard that she touched a coin to her tongue to taste it. The tangy iron taste didn't follow when Hina then licked a small paper cut, but instead she lay writhing on her bedroom floor, the youngest sister holding Hina clutching her as she screamed and cried in pain, while her okasan watched through the doorway. Hina let a sob escape. Looking down at her dried bloodied hand in this bright forest, with Nanami's witch's hut a few miles behind her or wherever it went, and all the events leading up to this moment, the first time in Hina's life, ironically, she felt normal. She licked her bloodied hand and waited for the searing to start. When it didn't come, the tears did. She continued to walk forward as the tears fuzzed her vision, Hina could not understand why these events out of everything else were the events that transformed her. Hina let her mind wonder to Nanami and what she said to Hina, "I long to help you."

It was dark out when Hina started to recognize the hills and grass around her. Nanami had directed her to the outskirts of the Main Town, the one Hina set ablaze only days earlier. Leaning on a tree Hina caught her breath, she looked up at the moon thanking it for being night, "Arigato." If the sun happened to be above her instead of the moon, Hina knows she wouldn't be as confident walking near the town as she currently was. It had to be late, maybe a bit past twilight. There were only a few people in the town closing down shops or chatting, and when Hina walked towards the street, the one she burned, she quickly turned around holding in a gasp. The street was charred at best, and the trees around them were barren and grey. In fact, some of the branches still had embers of her flames in them. She ducked her head and jogged into the opposite clearing, the one with the zigzag path towards her family's cottage. Maneuvering through the branches and tall grass she walked for a few hundred feet, then almost suddenly she could see the glow her home emitted through the darkness of the moonlight.

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that her okasan was at least a little worried about Hina. Hina smiled and unlocked the gate, the small click echoed throughout the forest and her cottages paper thin walls it seemed, as the sound bounced off the cottage her okasan whipped her head towards Hina. Her eyes widened and she looked scared of Hina. Hina lifted her hand to wave but when her okasan saw Hina lift her hand she screamed and ducked. Hina wrapped her hands around herself, embarrassed, Hina called out to her mother like a lost duckling, “okasan? It’s me, Hina.” She paused to wait for a response, when the only response that occurred was watching her okasan stand quickly to blow out the candle no longer illuminating the house. Then Hina heard a few couple of shuffles then the front door opened, revealing Hina’s okasan, her otosan, and her younger siblings. They all looked petrified to see Hina, all except for Yuki, the youngest of the siblings. Yuki cried out to Hina, “Onesan!” running up to her, Hina bent down to hold her littlest sister. She was just learning how to speak English, so most of Yuki’s 12-year-old brain was just Japanese. Okasan always started teaching them the native tongue before anything else.

After hugging Yuki, Hina put her back on the ground, the middle schooler stuck to her leg. Hina looked her Okasan directly in the eyes, something she would never had done in the past. Flustered, her okasan looked down at Yuki, “Come back here this instant darling.”

Yuki didn’t seem to like that, “iie, you’re mean to onesan.” She stayed at Hina’s hip.

Her okasan sighed dramatically, “Hina’s not welcome here anymore.”

Hina let those words sink in, and the sharp sting she felt in her heart forced another sob to escape her mouth, “What? I’m not allowed home anymore.” Hina’s voice was shaky. “You’re not even going to let me explain myself or what I’ve discovered?!” Hina’s legs felt like lead, but she forced herself to continue to stand. She looked at her otosan, the man that could be considered her father if she had to express who he was. He was rarely in Hina’s memory or life, always off working in the Main Town to make money, or to stay away from Hina. At least that’s what her okasan always said under her breath. Her other sister had always been more susceptible to their okasan’s advices and

opinions of Hina. Miku stuck to otosan like how Yuki was to Hina. Two sides of the same coin, but her okasan was the edge of that coin.

“Explain yourself?” Her okasan scoffed, “you broke the rules! You blew up the Main Town and ran away like a coward. The rules Hina!” Hina squinted her eyes, thinking, wasn’t that what her okasan wanted her to do? In the eyes of danger, Hina should just run away. Right? Her okasan threw up her hands, she sounded frantic and Hina stepped back a few inches while placing her hand on Yuki’s head.

“DON’T TOUCH HER!” Her okasan screamed at Hina, while stomping up to Hina she yanked at Yuki’s arm, “Come back here you baka child.”

“Yamete!” Yuki cried out begging okasan to stop.

At that moment Hina started to laugh. She placed her dried bloodied hand on her okasan’s arm throwing it off Hina’s sister. Her otosan backed up a few steps and Miku ducked her head, they were both expecting Hina to do the worst. Hina continued to laugh breathlessly, just then she realized she sounded like Nanami. “I followed The Rules and did everything exactly like you said I should do.” Hina didn’t yell, again for some reason she felt more levelheaded than she had ever before. “Maybe I heard wrong,” Hina tilted her head to the side as she swallowed confidence, “but didn’t you just say that it’s only been a few days since I left? Doesn’t that mean you were worried about me?”

Her okasan wiggled trying to get out of Hina’s grasp, “Actually you did hear wrong,” Hina could feel the bubbling start to happen again, but this time Hina didn’t let go, Hina knew this feeling resembled the one Nanami forced out of Hina. Hina’s whole life consisted of pain, rejection, and disappointment and now that Hina had followed her okasan’s rules, she was still upset with Hina. That leaves only one explanation, Hina finally understands why her okasan hated Hina all these years, and Hina was going to let her say it.

“Your father and I were not crying for you,” she deliberately paused to deliver the last blow, “we were worried you would come back.”

At that moment, Hina gripped harder on her okasan’s wrist and utilizing this new strong feeling, Hina seared her okasan’s skin with Hina’s old and dried blood. The

scream the echoed the woods left Hina pinned to the stone walkway laughing uncontrollably. Hina's father had finally done something fatherly, and hand thrown his daughter to the dirt, he clutched his wife in his arms as she cried looking at her new scar. Yuki didn't know what to do but she still stood next to Hina, as if saying, "I like this side of the coin." Hina lifted herself off the stone and stood up rubbing her shoulder that was just thrown mercilessly into the rock.

"The Rules were never for my protection, were they? They were for yours, in hopes I wouldn't come back." Hina lifted her palm to her okasan, they flinched again, "Not a single cut on my hand, but I still hurt you didn't I. Turns out I don't need to be a danger for you to still hate me. Maybe Nanami was right, I think I did find what I needed."

Suddenly, a fog of intense green smoke filtered its way through our cottage. Hina's parents held each other and collectively gasped at the gas. Miku looked me in the eyes for only a second," before grabbing hold of okasan's arm. The smoke continued to pour from nowhere and Hina asked it, "Nanami is that you?" There was no response, but Hina knew what she had to do, Hina crouched down to meet Yuki's eyes, "Do you want to go see the Witch's Hut with me?" Hina figured if Yuki was already attempting to take her side, then okasan would not ever let that down. Hina could not bring herself to force her okasan's judgment on anyone anymore.

Hina held Yuki's hand and they turned towards the Mian Town again, to find Nanami, but before they walked a few steps Hina's okasan yelled out to her, "You will always be a monster in my eyes," her otosan hadn't said a thing but he cut in, "If you take Yuki from us, we will hunt you down like the creature you are."

So many things Hina could have said to hurt them but turns out Hina liked gifting people a different kind of pain. The searing of her boiling blood that she alone had only ever experienced, the pain of her *existence*, as her family egged her on, like Nanami did so earlier. Hina lifted her palm to their second cottage, which caused her remaining 3 family members to duck yet again, cowering against the fear of one small girl, and Hina laughed.

“Good luck with that, you had 16 years to get rid of me, but now everyone is cowering beneath me.” Hina dropped her hand. Knowing she could not do anything from that far away. Hina and Yuki turned into the forest and let the green smoke take them to the Witch’s Hut.

Critical statement - Full revision

In my full robust revision, I took your revision exercise and ran with the potential of that ending instead. In my original plan, I wanted to still make Nanami and Hina evil, but after I finished this version, I decided to make Hina's family the ones that seemed the worst out of all the characters. By doing so, I gave Hina's family members a bigger presence in the story and allowed for more discourse between them. I turned Nanami into a witch that wants to help Hina become stronger, because Hina reminds Nanami of herself when she was younger and scared of who she was. Unfortunately, in this revision I still left my story on a cliffhanger. I bet I could finish it in a few more pages, but I think what I've learned about myself in these past few years of writing short stories, is that I LOVE cliffhangers.

I was very partial to the original ending, only because I desperately wanted to create emotional inducing characters, that no matter how much you strive for them to be good, they simply want to be bad. I also really enjoyed the concept of simply killing off both main characters for the sake of ending the story. Turns out, I don't think I know how to let go of characters unless they're dead, so that's something I will need to work on in the future. My draft at this point, turned into a working novel and I am excited to see if I could make this into a series at some point in my writing career. I plan on traveling to Japan in my future, which would give me heaps of information and personal experience in writing this. But I'm more comfortable with what I have revised in the story than what it initially was.

I didn't kill off any characters, and I gave Hina's sisters more of a tangible existence so that later in the story, her sister Miku could become the evil character I love. I think I want to give Miku water freezing powers, which is a good opposite to Hina's boiling blood and another reason why they never truly got along. That will give more incentive to Nanami and why she so

desperately wanted to train Hina, though I'm still not sure as to why Nanami truly cares about this situation. By also making Nanami into a witch, there are a few more questions that resurface, such as, how did she get her powers? How do they work? Again, why does Nanami care about helping Hina? I could use the age-old quest that there is a great prophecy between siblings to see who should become the new witch, but as of right now I liked where the story stops.

Overall, the revision exercise came in handy when I was flip flopping between how to end this story. You gave me the scene I needed to create, all I needed to do was change the incentive of why Nanami and Hina would meet up and what potential I had going from that point on. I hope to continue writing and revising this piece over the summer, and maybe I'll even develop it into a novel someday.

Critical statement - Novel Progress

I greatly appreciated the feedback I received from Joey, Julie and Kensie. They each offered suggestions for better tone, flow, and a more understandable timeline that I know will be beneficial for me to implement in the future. Joey's critique gave me a sigh of relief, he stated, "You didn't dwell too long on exposition and it comes across very well. You showed the reader what the world was like rather than telling them, excellent!" I feel I have always struggled in the exposition part of writing, so it was good to see I have been making some progress in my writing. In Kensie's critique however, she gave me more of an indirect suggestion that I know I need to work on in my novel writing process, which is shoving everything in at the beginning. "You don't have to explain everything in the opening of your novel," she wrote that quote regarding something else, but I know that in the beginning of this novel I have one main scene that surrounds many other things taking place and it can be a little disorienting to read. In Julie's critique she mentions my creative decisions as great choices to change up the overwhelming concept of time-travel. "Also, unlike stand time-travel stories, your characters have to CREATE the art before they can travel; it is not instant which is clever." And "As far as worldbuilding, you have a great start. I love how time traveling is referred to as gliding, which defamiliarizes time travel even more!" I'm glad the critique letters picked up on my attempts to distort the original rules of time travel, and I look forward to how I can develop that idea further.

All those positive things being said, I know my novel opening is not doing what I had imagined for it. Usually, when I write a story, I am partial to some of it, but for this exercise, the animosity I hold for almost everything in this first chapter is amusing. My goal for this novel, originally, was to create main characters that were all unlikeable in their own ways. I like the

idea of my readers being forced into liking characters or have the curiosity to wait for the reason why my characters do the things they do. When I decided to have Folen be an aggressive Fairie that gets very upset when he does not get what he wants but has a love for the simply beautiful creations in art, that allows readers to fall in love with this hurting and angry individual. In Joey's critique he wrote at the end, "You created such unlikable characters that for some reason the reader wants to see what the story will do to them." That gave me hope that there is still potential for this story, and although I am willing to change anything, my main concept reached someone. In my revision, I want to focus on Folen as a fairy and discuss his race in a more detailed way, since it is only the first chapter. I wanted to give my readers as much information as I could in hopes that would grab their attention and they would want to keep reading, but if anything, I only overwhelmed them.

I easily become too excited to share the next scene that I forget about the little details and facts that readers need to know, or that they would want to know. Since I already know how it will go or how the novel will change, I overlook those changes in my writing. I know someday I will hopefully write a novel, considering I do not think I could ever stop coming up with plot holes, connections and incentives. The process of this novel almost left me in the dust, so to say. I would write a few random scenes for each class and somehow stitch them together, and boom, now I have 10 pages of content that serves as a first chapter. I want so desperately to be an original creator, to develop an idea that no one else has thought about yet. To change up something common (like time-travel) and put a twist on it to make it my own. Which is difficult, when even I dig for connections to other writing when I'm critiquing stories or reading something new. I'm instantly conditioned to think, "oh, this is similar to Star Wars, so I'll put this story in that world." But after reading every critique I've ever gotten, I know now that I

cannot control how my readers and even myself think sometimes, and yes, a lot of the stuff I have written has most likely already been done, but I learned that those things have not been created by me yet. That I have some great potential to create something no one has considered yet or developed.

This project was difficult for me, as I have never attempted to write a novel before, but I am excited for the challenge it brings to the table.