

Chasing Words **By Razan Shahrouri**

Click, clack, click....

A blank screen began to be filled with words, ideas born and a being created...*me*.

Clack, click, clank...

Sentences fell in line, armies of paragraphs grew, all commanded by a flashing curser on the screen.

CLACK— David's hand slammed, the laptop shook.

Could it be possible to feel anger towards something you've created? Words you have written or lines you have drawn? Despite being made mere hours ago, I've learned that lesson far before many have gained conscious awareness of it.

When a baby cries and wakes it's mother, when an artist captures the lines, but not the spirit of their muse, or when failure gawks at you, a seed begins to be planted. In given time, a flower of hatred blooms, a flower fertilized by thoughts of fleeting perfection and ones inability to make it there.

David was plegged by those very same thoughts, and as he glared at me though a screen, I was poisoned.

He hated me.

"DAVID," a figure from afar yelled, intrupting our silence, "YOU COMING?!"

Chris, David's friend, stood in the grass swaying, bellowing out in laughter as he awaited a response.

David turned to him, eyes strained from the sun's golden glow, "I already told you, I have to finish writing my thesis, sorry." He focused his attention back on me.

"Oh, come on, you're always saying that! Thesis this, thesis that—" Chris snorted, doing a little dance a few meters away on the grass, "I can't believe the prof is making you hand it in on paper, looks like his haircut isn't the only thing stuck in the 1980s!"

"That's a good one," David whispered to himself, audible sarcasm even if he was the only one that could hear it.

It was a beautiful Thursday afternoon, and I kept David from enjoying it. The sun was beginning to set, and as it did, it kissed the sky with a crimson red that stretched along the horizon. The trees swayed methodically in the wind, a hypnotizing commander that conducted the old willows on campus like a band. As David stared at his friend, he wasn't quite sure if he was joining in with the trees or just being an idiot.

"Bye Davie!" Chris laughed as he unlocked his car and climbed inside. It was his dad's old Subaru, but by the way he drove it, you'd think it was a Dodge Charger. It really was a sight to behold in the worst possible way. Tacky green paint chipping on the sides, a flickering taillight, and a busted up old blinker was his pathetic excuse for a turning indicator.

Focusing back on the screen, on me, David and I made contact again. As much as he hated to admit it, he felt that Chris was right. What was the point of handing me in on

paper when everything in the course had been online so far? His fingers clambered on, clumsily filling white space with words devoid of meaning despite his intensity. Although we could never converse, it was evident that the more he wrote of me, the more I began to feel like a letter of resignation.

Closing his laptop, David slid out of the wooden bench he was sitting in. The wood was worn, and the scratch marks told him tales of past students long forgotten. Taking in one last deep breath, he bid a silent farewell, turning to get on his bike. While the rest of his classmates were running home, suitcases rattling a tow, he was heading someplace else.

Screech...

As the doors slid open, the cool conditioned air welcomed David inside. The automatic doors of the library had a strange way to make him feel as if he were someone special. It was nice as he felt he wasn't.

Echos of children's laughter could be heard; their recognition of the rules were unfollowed. Parents spoke in hushed whispers, a threatening crescendo willing to break those same rules their kids had already. It was foreign, then again, David wasn't a regular patron of the library, nor could he ever remember the last time he'd been at one. But his senses told a different story. The smell of freshly pressed books, oddly familiar grey carpet, and the lines of carefully arranged shelves made him believe he had spent many hours within these walls. Perhaps a distant childhood memory just far enough out of reach that the pictures in David's head were blurry but still there.

Making his way towards the printer, David inserted his thumb-drive containing me. Struggling at first, he soon made quick work of the complex buttons and waited. With a sudden whoosh, the printer whirled to life, reanimated from its vacant state. In a speed that surprised David, my delicate papers swiftly flowed down on to the holding tray, littered and dotted with words that meant nothing to him.

Nothing.

“That’s a lot of papers!”

A voice startled David, and he promptly spun around. He saw no one, that is, until he looked down.

“Did you rip them from the books?” The young boy who stood by David’s feet commanded, his mind seeming already made up. His mouth was folded into a frown, the lines of his face flashing a look of anger. David could only imagine the disapproval in the young boy’s eyes who were obstructed by his rich brown curls.

“No,” David harked, “These are my papers, with my ideas, all from my head.”

The boy adjusted his oversized t-shirt, shifting in his worn running shoes.

“Wow, you must have read a lot of books to get all those ideas!”

“Yeah, I must of,” David played with the words from his mouth, they were nothing short of odd.

And with that, the young boy adjusted his t-shirt for the last time, a cartoonish dinosaur plastered at the front. With the adjustment settled, he flashed a smile, turned, and ran to an unseen part of the library.

Returning to his dorm, David slid the key in the lock and opened the door. Darkness met him, it's greeting quickly dismissed by the flip of the kitchen lights. He sat at the dining table.

“Lots of books,” David pondered aloud, “I must have read tons of them to write a thesis, to write you.” He tossed me on the kitchen table.

The words the little boy said had stuck, a nagging feeling he couldn't get out of his head and felt in his heart. With a buzzing bulb above his head, and in an empty room all on his own, David had realized one thing. What exactly had he learned? All his life he had been working towards his education, and what has he got to show for it? He hasn't even really read any books, no textbook opened in his entire life on his own accord.

A crude curiosity built inside him, and I was the first to witness a grin form on his face in a long time. No more school, and no more work, this time he'd open a book just to see what it was like.

Entering his room, David didn't need to turn on his lights. The dorm was far too small to mistake anything, and his textbook called out to him. It told David to turn the pages, and so he did.

Turning the pages David expected something nothing short of wonderful. His anticipation had built, and euphoria was demanded. But nothing occurred. Page after page he turned and line after line he scanned, but the only thing that came into clarity was his own frustration. When he was about to close the book, a word caught his eye. As he began to follow that word within the line it came from and scan the page in which it was held in, and turned it to see where it may go, David began to read. He had only realized this when he turned the last page and could no longer follow the word he saw. But he still remembered it, and the words that came before and after it, more clearly than he had ever recalled anything in his entire life.

All this time, David hadn't been learning, no matter how weird the sentiment sounded. He had always realized the glory of performing well, not understanding. Picking me up, his thesis, suddenly everything felt wrong. The words were empty, and he couldn't chase them like the ones in his textbook.

Rip, whoosh, whizz, rip

From corner to corner, David ripped me. As the pieces of the paper that held me broke and fell, we both became free. He had created me. His thoughts were mine, his words mine and yet I (he) stood in his way.

Within the following hours, David went to work. He drafted another copy, carefully crafted words, and arranged sentences in a way that truly showcased all his passion. The late-night typing reminded David of the many nights in which he had spent his time cramming in work before exams, the beads of sweat that poured from his face. The stress and

melancholy of it all. Like the ones in the past, this night was restless, but this time, he enjoyed it.

Greeted again by the sliding doors, David entered the library, and the same feeling of nostalgia washed over him. He let his heart guide him, and his legs carried through with the command. Arriving at the printer, operation was easier. Plugging in his thumb-drive and pressing go, the printer whirled to life as it did before and began to print. He stared at the pages.

David was proud.

A slight tug pulled him away from the printer. Looking down, there was a small young boy, who David almost seemed to recognize as the boy he'd seen yesterday, even though he knew it wasn't true. In his tiny hands he held a book that made it look as if he were about to topple over from its size. Gesturing the book towards David, they exchanged conversation through silent looks and glances.

“Do you want me to read to you?” David questioned; his eyes locked on the book that now rested in his hands.

In quick successions, the boy nodded his head, his blond hair bobbing up and down as he headed towards a table. Pulling the seat astray, the boy climbed the chair revealing his unpressed kaki shorts. He centred himself in the middle of the seat, hand invading the next, tapping rapidly, bidding David to come. He took the invitation and sat beside the boy.

“Do you know how to read?” David said, turning to the first page of the book.

The boy didn't say anything, instead offering silence as he waited for David to start.

“Well, that's okay,” David responded to the boy's silence, “All you got to do is chase the words.”