

## 9. TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

Mrs. Camerson was our ninth grade English teacher. She animated my interest in poetry with Crane and Stevens and Dickinson. After only a month, she learned that her mother was very ill. She needed to go back to Minnesota so that she could care for her.

They planned to get someone new to take her place. But that wouldn't be until after Christmas. They asked Steve Walker if he could pick up another class.

Mr. Walker took Mrs. Cameron's vision one step further. He seemed to live the poetry. He had deep sunk eyes and an ashen face. He combed his dark flowing hair behind his ears. He was a Lord Byron in the twenty-first century. I felt that the spirit that inhabited his body always felt uncomfortable and was waiting for the day when it could fly off on its own.

He spent the first week discussing the origins of the Romantic soul.

"Wordsworth talked about it as if it was a transmigration. The soul finds its new home. But it always wants to return to its former home. It's like one of those movies where the main character loses his memory. He wakes up one day, and has no idea who he is. But he has this feeling. And he acts upon this feeling to get in touch with his old self."

I knew exactly what he was felt. I found a copy of *The Prelude* on the internet. I stayed up until three in the morning reading the blessed verse.

The next day Mr. Walker told us more about the soul's travels.

"There is a melancholy that engages the poet that is more attractive than any pleasure that he feels. The poet looks at the daffodils blowing in the wind, and he is full of ecstasy. But that feeling turns to sadness when he realizes that his happiness is only a glimpse of a greater paradise."

I wondered about this sadness.

"This deep emotion is what makes the poet the poet. It separates him from his everyday experience, and it opens him up to the mysteries of the universe. It echoes the power that shows the poet his true nature."

I needed to know more about Wordsworth's dream. This was something that I had been feeling all this time. It promised me the meaning that I sought for my life. It offered me a real mission.

At night I would research the poems. Then during the daytime, Mr. Walker would tell me more about the Romantic soul. Perhaps, Wordsworth lived and breathed in me. I knew that there was a source for all my wonderment.

Mr. Walker continued his lesson, "The poet couldn't wait for his inspiration. He needed the ghosts to visit as soon as possible. He became like the medicine man. He had to find the potions that would unlock these vision."

He told us more, "Some of the poets stayed up for days. They let the body's chemistry takes its course. They started to see things, to hear voices. And there was a form to this inspiration. They unlocked the doors of perception, and they stepped inside."

The class was hypnotized by his tale.

"I bet that he's taking drugs. How else does he know about these visions," Cary Wilson told us.

"Cary, there's more than drugs. It's spiritual."

I wanted to learn all about the spirit. I tried to stay up all night. But I grew tired around twelve. At seven in the morning, I felt wiped out. If this was what it meant to be a poet, I was determined to adopt the ways of the poet.

That weekend, I had loads of time to learn more about the ways of the Romantics. I was becoming more and more the disciple of this movement. The fire burned bright in 2005.

I tried to discover patterns in the poems. I made lists of words. It was like doing crossword puzzles. Words for the soul, words for light, words for nature's glory. I was unfolding the layers of the poems. With my own eyes, I was coming to know the hidden ghosts. I was crossing over into the lost paradise.

The next week, Mr. Walker introduced a new element, music.

"Wagner took the romantic inspiration even further. He recognized how sound could act as these keys into the mysteries of the universe.

He explained how Wagner used the idea of characterization, "The musical themes are each associated with a particular character in his operas. But more than that, the character is connected to primal being who gives him life. It is like a secret identity. And the music echoes this primitive well. Behind the masks of personality, there is a the original form, like the clay that is used to form the being. It is like the substance of angels. And you can hear it in the music."

This was difficult to understand. I was trying to get my mind around these complex ideas.

I expressed the same feeling as the rest of the class.

"How can there be one substance but multiple characters?"

"That is one of the mysteries of the music. Just imagine that it is the same stuff that is formed into these primitive beings. There might be the ancient knight. And the heroic Tristan reflects this original power. Again, the idea is something like reincarnation. Wagner expanded on the Romantics' conception."

He raised his hands in there, "Imagine light that just spreads out everywhere." He made a fist. "This is the moon. It is lit up by the light of the sun." He used his free hand to move in waves to imitate the movement of the light. "There is no light in the moon. It just reflects the light. It is the same thing with the characters of the opera. They all share in the light. But they are not made out of light. "

I stared at him so that I could better make sense of what he was saying.

"If you look at the moon, you see the man in the moon. Those are the contours of the moon. It is the same thing with the contours of the characters. Their personality is shown in the life of the music. But the actual tune is what makes each person who he is."

"It still doesn't make sense," I said.

"You have to listen to the music first."

He moved over to the desk and sat there with his feet hanging over.

"The music promises so much. It is so grandiose. But what distinguishes Wagner is that sense that you are never complete. He doesn't resolve the tension. He keeps it building. That is why Brahms challenged him. Wagner violated the classical rules. The academic composers hated him."

"Some of the audience rebelled. They rioted. But the true connoisseurs of music

understood the feeling. The music expressed what it was like for the lover to be separated from the loved one.”

He enjoyed talking about the music, “By using Germanic myths, Wagner grounded his experiment in ancient themes. It is the same thing that you see in Wordsworth. The artist is not alone in his search. He connects to the universality of experience. He shares his emotions with all mankind.”

He expanded on the theme, “The music is so overpowering that you just have to listen to it to be overwhelmed by its power. This is where Wagner found his listeners. Those who were devoted to him were almost like a religious sect.”

Mr. Walker made such an effort to build up the music. How could anything really be that fantastic? He must have been exaggerating. He was so good at creating the effect. His voice was deep, and when he intoned the name, “Wagner,” the room seemed to shake.

I sat back in my chair as if I was strapped into a rocket being launched. If the music was all that he promised, I would be blasted into space.

A few of the other students were bored. They found him confusing. But for many, he was a rock star. He was our Wagner.

Mr. Walker wanted us to hear actual records. He told us that they sounded more real than CD’s. “With the CD, they crunch up the sound. In the vinyl records, you get the full quality of the sound. When you hear this, it is going to amaze you. It’s so rich.”

I prepared myself to be astounded. The needle seemed to carve the sound in the air. The violin strings vibrated with such power. He played the *Liebtestod* from *Tristan and Isolde*. It was a story of endless love. It affected all us school girls. The lover’s longing seemed to go on forever. In the kiss was an eternity of satisfaction. It was the ultimate Romantic expression rebirth through death.

As I listened, tears came to my eyes. I was held by the urging of the strings. The music sent chills through me. It was not just a phenomena of the mind. I could feel it in my heart. I could feel deep inside of me, like a burning desire that radiated its heat throughout my being. It was almost like something forbidden. I embraced the sin!

Mr Walker described the Ring Cycle to us, where Wagner strung four separate operas together in a single piece. The performances could go on for days. It was total theater with music and costumers and grandiose stage design. It was spectacle. It was religion.

The story seemed ominous. These elves threatened the extinction of the gods. Just thinking about it made me afraid. It suggested the end of all time.

With all this stimulation, I felt that I was losing my mind. Not did the art touch the fiber of my being. But the very idea suggested a magnificence that seemed so far beyond me. But it was touching me directly. This was way more intense than any drug could be. This went to the very heart of who we were as people.

Here we were in the universe trying to make sense of who were. We called to the gods. But they had been silenced. We screamed to our protectors, but our screams echoed with the rumble from deep inside the planet. The explosion spread out to sky as the thunderous roar was everywhere.

The horns blared out!

The more that Mr. Walker played, the further that I was entranced. There was so much

vibrancy implied in this music. I could barely hold myself together.

What struck me most about the music was the sense of emptiness that it conveyed. It filled these spaces with massive sound. But it implied these hollows in our existence. A wisdom of the ages.

It was so intense that Mr. Walker was introducing this kind of knowledge to middle school students. Many would have been afraid of the truths that he conveyed. But I wholeheartedly welcomed his lesson. I was not alone!

Part of me felt a deep sorrow for Mr. Walker. He gave so much of himself in these lessons. Some students were so silly that the teaching was just wasted on them. They laughed at him, and it made it all more pathetic.

I did not want him to stop. He had already opened up a wound in us. I wanted him to tell us more. I wanted to experience all the pain implied by the music. We had never been treated so much as adults. I was ready to accept the transformation of my being.

I again listened to the strings and the horns exalted. I could be completely free.

Over the weekend, I spent all my time researching more about Wagner. I listened to his music over and over again. I soared with the Ride of the Valkyrie. I rode high with the magnificence of his architecture. I touched the heavens with the composer.

I didn't want to come down. I wanted it to stay forever like this. But there was such tragedy in the music. I awaited the coming disaster. I could sense the conflagration around me. I needed to hold on. I needed to carry the news to those who survived.

Such was the testament offered by the music. It was debilitating. But it allowed for a final resurrection. The epic invited the lyrical, the poet in communion with the universe.

The music inspired two contradictory feelings: melancholy and euphoria. Part of me was lost in a deep-seated sadness. Except for the music, there was no reason for that feeling. On the other hand, the sadness was coupled with an intense high. This sense of elation made me feel that I was walking on air. Such was the Romantic dilemma. The artist exploited his past remembrance to recall an event of profound anguish. As the memory made him more preoccupied with the traumatic event, it opened up a well of the most intense experience. It cut his being in two. Left to his predicament, he pushed on to surpass the gloom. At this point, there was a rush of pleasure. He was transported into paradise.

Listening to Wagner allowed me to feel that I was truly an artist. I was seeing the world in a new way; nature was electric and shone with a vibrancy that I had never known. I could touch with my eyes as each gaze captivated my whole being. At times, I would have to close my eyes because it was too much to take in at once.

I would look for new music to download. Then I would play it over and over again and dance in my room. My moves were all very dramatic. I felt as if I was part of a solemn ritual. I stretched my arms out until they became wings.

After my dance, I lay on my bed to listen to more of the music. I had been accepted into an exclusive ritual, and could witness all the secrets of the cult. I left behind my old life and accepted the new faith.

As I continued my journey, the struggle of the Romantic artist all made sense. Once he had pushed out this far, he wouldn't want to return to his drab existence. Everything would pale next to the transfigured wonderment. So he would need new ways to alter his everyday reality to

offer immediate access to the paradise. Fortunately, even his feelings of separation ended up contributing to an eventual new meeting with his transformed self.

It was so hard to explain what was happening. Just to talk about it seemed gibberish. But it all made sense in a physical way. At the same time, it was beyond the physical realm so it was near impossible to explain to anyone else.

I could hardly wait until Monday. Mr. Walker had opened me up to a new world. But I still needed his guidance. This was something too overwhelming to deal with on my own. But it had none of the aberrant qualities that had beset my former experiences with Suzie or Esme. This was a true liberation of the psyche.

Before I went to bed on Sunday, I wrote down a list of questions. I would pose them to Mr. Walker in class. I wonder if the other students had been so conscientious. I would soon find out.

All my other classes seemed so boring in comparison to English. At lunch, I looked over my notes. I didn't see anyone else from class.

Mr. Walker seemed even more unusual today. It was as if he had gone through the exact same thing that I went through on the weekend. He asked us if anyone had listened to more Wagner. I was the only one who raised my hand. I felt as if the class was just for me.

"I remember the first time that I listened to these records. They were my father's. It was the one thing that I remember the most. Before I heard them, I was a lost soul. But once he played them for me, I thought that I had heard my calling. That was one of the things that inspired me to become a teacher."

One of the students asked, "Do you really like being a teacher?"

"I love the search for knowledge. I have to admit that some days that I seem to be getting nowhere. But I am still committed to what I do."

A disinterested student added, "If you explained things in a simpler way, you wouldn't be so frustrated with your students."

He was a little taken aback. He knew that he inspired this reaction. But it was brutal actually hearing someone speak the words.

He worked to be patient, "You heard the music. How did it make you feel?"

"It was weird. When there weren't any words, I felt like going to sleep. It was really boring. And then the singing was in another language."

It was as if the roof fell in. Another student chimed in, "We don't come to school to have these strange feelings. I mean, if you want to win us over, you got to speak our language."

They didn't understand. I needed to come to his defense, "You have to stretch your mind if you want to understand. There's a whole history behind it. It can't be reduced to the same stuff that you see all the time on TV."

"If I can't relate, I can't relate."

Someone else agreed with me, "You're just used to being spoon-fed. You have to make an effort. Did you really listen to what Mr. Walker said?"

The class had divided into two factions. On the one hand, there were those few who had been moved by the presentation of something new. Then there were the others who wanted to stay in the narrow confines of their suburban upbringing.

"You have to have a college degree to really understand any of this."

Mr. Walker didn't want to leave things be. He needed to justify his approach.

"This is like learning another language like French. There are English words that are just like French words. And they can help you to learn French by seeing the resemblance. But if your French teacher told you that you were learning French because you knew those few words, she wouldn't be honest with you."

A disgruntled student interrupted, "Why would I want to learn French anyway?"

I jumped in, "It's an analogy. He's not really teaching French. He's illustrating how the Romantics spoke a different language. And if you don't want to learn, you shouldn't come to school."

Someone from the back yelled, "They make us come." That made a bunch of people laugh.

Mr. Walker wanted to be diplomatic, "I'm not here to win a popularity contest. I'm your English teacher. I want you to become better writers. To do that you have to take an interest in books, books that can change your life."

I was afraid that someone was going to report on Mr. Walker, and the class would turn into one like all the others. Or maybe he would be fired from his job.

Mr. Walker invited a bunch of us to stay after class. He was going to start a poetry group. "We might even put out a journal with your writing."

There were nine of us who were really excited by the lessons.

Erin suggested, "We need a really cool place to meet."

"We could meet at a coffee shop," suggested Mr. Walker.

"That's too public," said Erin.

"How about your place?" said Stefan. He was the guy who agreed with me in class.

"It's a little unorthodox. I did have a college class where we met at the professor's house. Maybe we could try it. But it would be our secret."

He wasn't really telling the students that they couldn't tell their parents. But some students took it that way.

When we actually met, there was only five of us. The other four had been told by their parents that it wasn't right for them to go to the teacher's house. He had agreed to send a note home for all nine. But it was not sufficient for the drop outs.

After the first few meetings the group dropped down to four; another student was forbidden by her parents. It was me, Erin, Stefan, and Phoebe. We all felt a little like nerds, the English club.

We were excited to be at Mr. Walker's house. He was very gracious. As a teacher, he was totally respectful. He treated us as if we were grown up, but he knew what were the bounds. He never made any of us feel uncomfortable. I had none of the unease that I had felt at Eddie's house. Mr. Walker knew how to do things right.

That didn't stop some of the students from talking. They had dirty minds. But this didn't phase our circle.

We talked about specific poets like Shelley and Keats. We went into more depth than in class. We read the poems aloud. Erin brought in her journals and shared them with us. I wanted to start a journal, but I knew better with the watchful eye of Hazel.

Stefan was really cool. His dad had done a lot of business in Europe so Stefan's family

had done a lot of traveling. He had even been to Bayreuth. He was Jewish, and he asked about Wagner's anti-Semitism.

Mr. Walker explained, "There was a nationalistic strain in Wagner, very pro-German. At the time, some of this feeling was very liberal. But it also had its dark side. Many of Wagner's relatives were anti-Semitic. And nationalism often implies purity of the race. But we see the same thing in America so we shouldn't be quick to moralize. That is why Wagner is so fascinating. He inspires us to great heights. But we have to guard against the excesses of our own personality."

I liked Mr. Walker's explanation. It was nuanced. He didn't give in completely to Wagner's point of view. He showed us the limits of the nationalistic Romantic feeling. He helped us understand history in a deeper way.

I imagine that some of the more conservative students would have reported some of the things that he told us if he had actually said them in class. That was why this group was so exciting. Everyone was so committed to art. I really thought that we would be friends for long time.

As the weeks past, the group dwindled to three. Phoebe did what she could to come. But she had dance lessons and music lessons so it was difficult for her.

Stefan and Erin were committed to the group. They also seemed to take a romantic interest in each other. There was one session that they both needed to miss. I didn't want Mr. Walker to postpone.

On that day, he seemed a little less sharp than usual. His words were a little slurred.

"Are you OK?"

"I've been having trouble sleeping. My doctor gave me a prescription. But it's making it harder for me to concentrate."

Like a great artist, he was a man in turmoil. He wanted to keep some of his private life hidden from us. This was the respect that he showed us as students. But I could tell that something was wrong.

The house had a great appeal to me. The curtains were a lovely velvet. The walls were wood-paneled. The library was full of books. He just kept things too dark. This contrasted intensely with the rest of Roswell, all sunny and bright.

He kept on with his lesson. He had a number of books on his table and constantly referred to them. He read the Yeats poem "Sailing to Byzantium". At times, his voice would falter.

"Do you need to stop?"

"I'm perfectly all right."

He talked about Yeats and mysticism. He related it to Wagner. "For Yeats, it all seemed so personal. But he was also moved by this sense of the public mission of the poet. You can hear it in the authority of his language."

I was learning so much. I didn't know how I could use it all or even store it up. I had this sense of deep fear. This was more foreboding than listening to Wagner. I felt that this was to be short-lived. My teacher would be taken from me.

At one point, he began coughing uncontrollably.

"You don't have TB?"

"Just allergies."

He got up to get some tea.

“Would you like some tea?”

“Yes. Please.”

He served me tea with milk and lemon.

“I wish that I could write like this. I’ve tried a little. I also don’t want Hazel to discover my writing. She’d think that I was taking drugs or something weird like that.”

“Who’s Hazel?”

“I live with her, and she claims to be my mother.”

He smiled, “I don’t want to come in between you and Hazel”

“You don’t have to worry about that.”

The next day in class, Mr. Walker was more himself. He also met with the three of us after class.

“I’m going to have to cancel for the next few days. I’ve been a little under the weather. We’ll pick up where we left off soon.”

After he left, Stefan and Erin asked me question about what we did when they were absent.

“We talked about Yeats.”

Erin told us, “Yeats is my favorite poet. I love his sense of color!”

The next week Mr. Walker wasn’t in class. I heard these bizarre rumors.

Phoebe told the three of us, “My dad’s a doctor. Mr. Walker is a patient of one of is colleagues at the clinic. He said that Mr. Walker was being treated for depression. He also received a referral to a psychiatrist. I think that he is having a breakdown.”

I had some idea about what this meant. It still didn’t make sense to me. I had just seen him a few days before, and he had been perfectly all right. Sure, he had a coughing fit. But he had joked with me.

“Are you sure?” I asked her.

She nodded. “I liked coming to the group so much. I wish that I wasn’t so busy. But I was always so afraid for him. Like a wild bird that you find injured. If you touch it, you might make it worse.”

The image that Phoebe painted was so evocative. I wanted to help. Under the circumstances, we could hardly go over to his house. I needed the sessions. They were part of me. At home, I played the Overture to *Parsifal*. I danced around my room.

I felt so helpless. Was there nothing that I could do?

Our substitute was Mrs. Maxwell. She was so boring. There was nothing poetic about her. I was glad that we were going to get a permanent teacher by November. Mrs. Maxwell was a total disaster.

The naysayers were glad about his absence. They didn’t have to challenge their designer mind-sets.

It was ironic that I was becoming more depressed about not being able to talk about the artist and his melancholy. I wanted Mr. Walker to return.

After a week or so, it became clear that Mrs. Maxwell would be there for a while, and Mr. Walker was not going to return. This seemed terrible. I wanted to jump up in class and scream with all my might.



Phoebe had more news, “I think that Mr. Walker is suicidal. That’s probably why they don’t want him back in school.”

Erin commented, “I bet I know what they’d say about him if they had the chance, that you can’t look at depressing things and not become a depressed person.”

Stefan added, “They would have given Wordsworth prozac and be done with it.”

I jumped in, “You need to think about sadness if you’re going to deal with it. All these kids are just disasters waiting to happen.”

I didn’t want to feel better than the others. But they had been so intolerant. A lot of it was their parents. They would never give them the chance to be themselves. Even if some of them were freaks, they still didn’t challenge the status quo. They accepted their emotions as a given.

Then there were the others who were even more afraid of themselves. They were the first ones in the Prozac line. If they had to deal with too many people different than they were, they would need to drug themselves. They needed a convenient excuse, and they wanted a doctors to say that it was OK. As long as they didn’t have any bad thoughts to interrupt their shopping routine.

When I got home from school, I ran up to my bedroom and locked the door. I wanted no one to bother me. When Hazel got home, I could hear the dull noise of Fox News. I turned the Wagner horns on full blast. It felt so good!

The next week I was called into the principal’s office.

“We had a report that you spent time alone with Mr. Walker at his house. We can’t really tolerate this kind of thing.”

“There was no kind of thing.”

“Some of the parents complained.”

“None of the parents were there.”

“We are going to have to call in your parents. This kind if this is highly irregular.”

“Reading poetry at his house. Maybe he put something in the tea that he gave me.”

He scolded me, “You’re making light of a serious situation. I realize that you’re the child here. It was his offense. But you needed to report it.”

“What do you want me to say? It was our secret.”

“Did he ever touch me in an inappropriate way? Did he say anything lewd? This poetry isn’t even part of the curriculum. One student told us that he was distributing anti-Semitic literature. We can’t have that here.”

“Whoever said that was lying. He played us music by Wagner. He was trying to expand our horizons. This administration is so pathetic that you won’t even follow state mandates against creationism. You dance around the subject as if it really is a scientific alternative. You should be ashamed of yourself.”

“That’s not what this is about. There was something going on between you and Mr. Walker.

“Mr. Walker is probably gay. And he most likely felt persecuted in a community like this. What’s intolerable is that you would even haul me in here like this.”

“This is not the only time that I’m going to talk to you. You’re coming back with your parents. I should expel you for being disrespectful.”

“I’m not being disrespectful. I’m being honest. That’s the problem here. You can’t deal with honesty. I hope that they are more mature students at Roswell High next year.”

“Quit trying to interfere with what we do here!”

“I know what you’re doing here. The school board reprimanded you for trying to conduct prayer sessions here.”

“The state does require a minute of silence each day.”

“That is one of the most backward things that I’ve ever heard.”

“We’re not finished with you.”

For a while, it seemed that things would get worse. I was called back with Bill and Hazel. I was ready for Hazel to get down with the principal’s Bible thumping.

But it was one of her few finer moments, “If you don’t quit harassing my daughter, I am going to get a lawyer and sue you and this goddam school for a million dollars. And I am going to win. Then I’ll go to the press and tell them what you’ve been up to. Finally, I’ll go to the PTA and the school board, and you won’t be able to find a job in this state if your life depended on it.”

Bill sat there and listened to her performance. Both he and I loved it.

Outside the office, she turned to me and said, “I didn’t know that you had a crush on that fag teacher of yours.” Her usually understanding-self was showing itself again.

Needless to say, the principal left me alone for the rest of the year. He also stopped trying to railroad Mr. Walker. But the damage had been done. Mr. Walker was not going to be coming back.

After my run in with the principal, the rumors multiplied a thousand fold. The principal’s main contention that there was a student-teacher romantic affair going on. This was the basis for loads of stories. At times, I ignored it all. At others, I took it as a badge of honor. If the Yahoos wanted to make fun of me, I could toss the mud back.

One story did seem to have some substantiation. The school hoped that Mr. Walker would not try to come back because of his suicidal tendencies. His feeling were probably natural due to our close-knit community. They never really gave him a chance. But it went deeper than that.

No one had much more information to go on. For some time, we thought that he may have succeeded in killing himself. This mortified me. I remember the day in class where some of the students had reacted so violently. They just seemed like spoiled brats.

Phoebe eventually found out that he checked himself into a clinic. This was only after an actual suicide attempt. I never felt that way myself. Listening to Wagner didn’t make me depressed. I did feel bad that the school had handled this so badly. But I became angry about it. I vocalized my feelings. I didn’t simply internalize it all.

I loved the poet’s way. I wanted more.

After Hazel’s performance, I thought that this was the opportunity for us to really communicate. She just used the whole thing to get me off her back. And she remained watchful every second of the day. If someone was going to punish me, it had to be her, not the school. She was naturally suspicious of any facility that had anything to do with the government.

Mr. Walker’s case was not unique. The school did everything that it could to promote this Wonder Bread version of education. All the real color was bleached out. Mr. Walker still

believed in something real. But the school did everything that it could to stand in his way.

Before he came to our class, he had been more active. He had tried to influence curriculum. He had some success. But the principal was more of a traditionalist. He made sure that Mrs. Maxwell was hired. She did a lot towards watering down of Mr. Walker's ideas. At teachers' meeting there would be arguments. Many of the other teachers agreed with Mr. Walker. His ideas were more reasonable and supported by the scholarship. But Mrs. Maxwell tried to scandalize the board. They felt embarrassed by her methods but didn't know how to go against her. She also found a minority of highly vocal parents on the PTA. She used her influence to make sure that their point of view was most taken into account.

Once they blocked Mr. Walker on curriculum, they went after him personally. He was already weak physically. And he had his own personal problems. They just hammered away. By the time that he had arrived in our class, he had been very affected by their campaign. He no longer took his struggle public. He thought that the writers' group might be a way to get around their interference. He had gambled unwisely. The meetings had all the appearances of impropriety. There was really nothing wrong, but it was the final step for his opponents. He was already weakening. They just crushed him.

I hated what had happened. It was only later on that I learned about the details,. By that time, it became harder and harder to do anything. One day I passed by the principal's car. I stood there and wanted to puncture his tires. But then I thought about how Hazel made him seem like the worm that he was. That was enough pleasure for me.

Mr Walker had left my life. I wanted to do something to bring him back. Mrs. O'Connor was a decent replacement. She had none of the mystery. But she liked a lot of the same authors. She did whatever she wanted in the classroom. She was just a little more low-key. There was really nothing that they could do to her. I continued to pursue my love of Romanticism. It helped make me a better writer.

I really wanted to keep our group going. Phoebe was still supportive but entirely too busy. I hoped that Erin and Stefan would be excited about the prospects. They were for a while. But then they too lost interest. Maybe our meetings had none of the charisma of Mr. Walker's. That wasn't the main reason. Sure, they became more attached to each other. They also gave up the fight. It surprised me. Down deep, Erin wanted success. Stefan was nothing like that, but he just went along with her. Sometimes we'd talk, and I'd feel the old spark with him. However, we both knew where that was headed. At this time in his life, he craved security. He had surrendered his worldly ways for the Roswell lifestyle. I was on my own.