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September 2016

## Intertwined

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### Recommended Citation

Herbert, Whitney (2016) "Intertwined," *The Idea of an Essay*: Vol. 3 , Article 6.

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# Intertwined

## *Whitney Herbert*

*Whitney is an International Studies-Premedical major from Saint Clair shores, MI, near Detroit. She's a junior now and loves reading, cats and Asian dramas.*

Instead of telling you how I learned to read because I honestly don't remember, I want to walk you through my memories that made me the reader I am today.

Everything is dark. You open your eyes slowly, the light is low so your pupils dilate quickly. You look around a small room – a window, two wooden dressers one with a bookshelf portion, a small closet, another door leading to the unknown, books and Barbies scatter the white carpet. You realize you are in a bed as you snuggle your toes farther into the Power Puff Girls duvet and skim your fingers over the various stuffed animals surrounding you. After you've taken stock of the strange setting before you, you hear the sound of footsteps and see as well as hear the unknown door creak open. My mother in her late thirties appears. She has dark brown hair and an almond complexion. She smiles at you and walks towards you. "Time for bed, pumpkin. You know what that means." She pulls out a thin book from the bookshelf portion of the wooden dresser, a tall hardback that has a picture of two butterscotch colored rabbits – the bigger one's ears flopping over onto the younger one who is trying to hold them up with his small paws. "GUESS HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU?" encircles the cover scene in big, pastel green letters and my mother squeezes into the tiny bed with you. You can smell the lavender wafting from her hair and feel a comforting warmth wash over you from her nearness. She opens the book and begins to read. A story of Little Nutbrown Hare trying to show his father, Big Nutbrown Hare, how much he loved him and always falling short compared to how much Big Nutbrown loves him unfolds before you. After the story, you feel the dregs of sleep tugging at your eyelids. "Guess how much I love you?" you hear my mother say. "How

much?” you ask, curious at her response. “All the way to the moon and back.” She quotes lovingly. You feel a feather light touch on your forehead before your eyelids droop closed and everything is pitch black once more.

You squint at the sunlight behind your eyelids. You open them to discover a car window depicting big, green trees and a cloudy sky swishing past. Your eyes trail up to its normal line of view and all you can see is tan, tan, and more...tan. You realize you're laying down in the backseat of a car and instead of plush interior, there are colorful beach towels in the seat beneath you. You smell the light muskiness of cigarette smoke in the air. You sit up, only to be gagged by your seatbelt. You loosen it and re-tighten it back to its normal position. Two front seats stand before you with big pockets on their backs. You look in them to see newspapers, bouncy balls, a Bible, and a Betty Boop brush. The driver's seat is occupied, but your attention is caught elsewhere. On the rearview mirror hangs a cheap plastic teal cross necklace and two lanyards. The nametags attached to said lanyards spell out Lakeview Public High School and Jefferson Middle School respectively with the name Vilda Olsen written across both. A CD holder is across the passenger's overhead flap and a heart-shaped ornament with a kitten that says 'I Love You, Grandma' swings from the flap. You finally rest your eyes on my grandma in the front seat. Short, cropped blond hair, a lime green t-shirt with tan shorts, suntanned skin, and blue eyes with spectacles as you notice them staring at you from the rearview mirror. “Ya ready, kiddo?” Her contralto voice asks. You nod your head. You catch a smile as you see her push a button on the stereo system with a hot pink, bejeweled fingernail. While you half-heartedly listen to the talk radio, she grabs a CD from the passenger seat and pushes it into the slot. It goes quiet until a man's bass voice filtrates the car, “Double Fudge by Judy Blume – Chapter 3.” Instinctively, you look to the floor of the vehicle to spy a blue backpack. Your hands slip in the bag to pull out a couple of elementary school books, a pencil case, and a beat up library copy of 'Double Fudge.' You decide to read along and follow the voice across the juice-stained page. You lose yourself in the story until you realize the car has stopped and you're in a spacious, two-car garage. My grandma has paused the CD and is getting out of the vehicle into the garage. You lay your head against the seat, breathing in the smell of greasy tools, oil, and

freshly cut grass. As the car door opens, your eyesight fades as your ears catch a final question, “Same time tomorrow?” The world has gone inky black again.

Raucous laughter and the clatter of metal silverware scrapping against dinner plates triggers your eyes into opening. You are at an oval-shaped table with a shabby blue tablecloth, surrounded by seven other people. You take in each. My uncle is at the head of the table; he has golden hair, small blue eyes and is wearing a white t-shirt with blue jean overalls. My aunt next to him has silver hair, a warm smile, and is passing around a pasta dish giving off the heavenly smell of mostaccioli. The two boys – Josh and Jeremiah – sit side by side. Josh has dark brown hair and glasses while Jeremiah looks identical to his father. The middle child, Sarah, smiles impishly at Jeremiah as she grabs a roll from her brother’s plate. She pushes her blond bangs out of her eyes as she denies every accusation he throws at her. The second eldest, Michelle, has short, brown hair and some dirt smudged on her face. She laughs at the witty joke Josh just made up. Joy, the precious baby of the family, has her hair sticking out all over and is making the yellow kitchen glove on her left hand talk to the belt in her right in a language all her own. “I’m thinking of an animal...” Michelle trails off. “Is it a mammal?” replies Sarah. You listen in as my cousins and occasionally my uncle try to deduce what animal it could be. You spear a couple mostaccioli onto your fork and savor the flavor of garlic marinara with hints of meat in it as you devour the dish. As Josh takes a bite of the pasta, he quotes the Lion King, “Slimy yet satisfying.” “Is that what you think? Well, maybe YOU can whip up dinner some time.” My aunt laughs. The game ends before long and my uncle pronounces, “Time for a reading before you all head off to bed.” The kids scramble to rinse their plates off in the sink in the little kitchen alcove behind you. You put your plate in the sink as well as you trail behind the family to the cozy living room. The two boys and Sarah arrange themselves comfortably into a sofa while my uncle plops into an armchair. My aunt leads Joy-bells down the adjacent hallway with whispers of bedtime and brushing teeth. Michelle curls up into a cushioned rocking chair with her brown locks falling into her face. You slide to the floor, your back resting against the steel gray, corduroy-like fabric of the sofa. My uncle pulls a decent sized hardback from the mahogany hutch residing close to his armchair. He opens the forest

green book and begins to read. The rugged landscape of Middle Earth at nighttime presents itself to you from his deep baritone before he dips down to reveal a party of Orc-raiders fighting each other as two small Hobbits named Merry and Pippin slip into the dangerous Fangorn forest. Your eyes begin to slip closed once more as you hear him tell of an elf, a man and a dwarf appearing on the scene. Your eyelids lose the battle and your vision is clouded with ebony.

You take a moment to feel your surroundings before opening your eyes this time. Soft, cloth beneath your palms, cushy seating surrounds you, and the smell of cinnamon and cats in the air overwhelm your senses. Eyes opened, you gaze at the new setting. You behold the welcoming scene of a living room decorated in tans, dark browns, and hints of royal purple. There's a baby grand piano in the left corner by a window, an unlit fireplace closer to you, and a large rug covering the wood floor. A little staircase separates a hallway that leads to a small, yellow kitchen from an armoire to the right of the piano, and a glass top table stands in the corner opposite of the piano. Another sofa across from yours holds my mother. She's older – you can see it in the laugh lines and the sprinkling of silver in her raven hair. She's reading a dark blue paperback with golden writing painting the front. "What are you reading?" you ask. "As Sure as the Dawn," She replies distracted. She is reading intently; her fingers grasp the well-loved pages in a tight hold as her eyes flick across the page. "Sounds boring," You hear your voice say of its own volition, "Read it to me?" She laughs as she pulls her eyes from the book to look at you warmly. She flicks a lock of hair over her shoulder with a caramel colored wrist as she basks the book in the lamplight near her. You burrow deeper into the comfort of the couch beneath you. She nods and begins to read the story as you let the characters and story be brought to life in your mind. As you listen, you hear a word you've never encountered before and stop her to ask what it means. She lists out a variance of definitions and sample situations. You marvel at the dictionary-like knowledge she displays and motion for her to continue reading. She picks up the story once more and after a couple of chapters, your mind drifts away from her voice. The scene fades out.

You find yourself enclosed by books and sitting on a stepping stool in between bookshelves. You're separating the botany and self-

help books from the foreign language guides. The finger-printed metal shelves tower above you and you look down the little lane to see my grandma once again. Only this time instead of a car, she is seated at a quaint, wooden table – one of many – with a stack of assorted books looming in front of her. She herself is reading a seemingly religious biographical novel. Past her is a row of gleaming desktop computers and little containers of midget pencils standing guard next to each screen. You get up and move towards her whilst dragging your fingertips across the bindings of the books at your side. The pile of books at her table comes almost to her chin, which is a bit impressive considering she is quite tall. You decide to sit at the table and my grandma barely even moves. “No more than 12 today, Whit; remember you’re grounded till next week.” You look up at her to see her chuckle to herself as she mumbles about how silly that concept is – grounded from books. Your eyes trail over to the stack of books to find nine sitting lopsided and waiting to be checked out. Their topics spanning from manga to poetry to vegan recipes. You tug your feet up to balance on the edge of the seat as you grab the top book and begin to read. Being a manga book, it takes a bit of concentration at first to follow the story right to left instead of the way you have culturally learned. You soon get the hang of it and are transported to a new universe where things that cannot physically happen can and the unreal becomes real. As you finish the book, you close your eyes and sigh with contentment.

When you open your eyes again, you’re standing before a large, Adler desk that is littered with various pencils and pens, a large write-on calendar, a tall, green Thermos beside a large Star Wars mug, and a tall yet slim plank of wood covered in scribbles. Letting the environment soak in, you notice a healthy amount of teenagers sitting in light tan student desks to the right of you. Witty posters cover the walls behind them with different things to say about Literature and Grammar. “Did you hear me, Herbs?” a voice says, interrupting your deduction of this being an English classroom. You swivel back forward to see my English teacher with his Italian features, dark hair and beard, Spiderman tie and a semi-professional outfit. “Not at all.” “As I was saying,” he sighs heavily, “you should broaden your literary horizons instead of reading Christian Vampire Romance Novels all the time.” You laugh at the funny term and assumption being made. “I’m being serious. Look

into Edith Wharton. I think you'd like her style of writing, especially the Age of Innocence." "Not a Christian Zombie Adventure?" "You're hilarious, but no." Turning to rest his eyes on his students, he boomed, "Alright, Ladies and Gents! Time for the FUN-damentals of Literature!" Various groans rose throughout the room. He rose from his computer chair and walked to his wooden podium at the front of the room. "Seriously, Midder!" scoffs Amy, as she adjusts herself in her seat. "Well with that charming commentary, we'll begin, Ladies and Germs. Turn to page 184. Now..." His voice grew faint as you take a seat and begin to examine the rest of the room. A large rectangle of green chalkboard takes up much of the wall; it's covered in diagrammed sentences and has a few Star Wars magnets in the bottom right corner. On an overflowing bookshelf, a rather large Superman action figure stands proudly among a few pictures and a Chewbacca bobble head. Edith Wharton, you watched the clock overhead tick the minutes away, could be interesting. Putting your chin in your hand, you let your eyes slide shut as Mr. Scally starts talking about grammatical structure or something like that. Think back to all the places you visited in my memories. You were never alone; you were always around people. Weird how even though literary pursuits don't require multiple people, they can be enjoyed by many at the same time and be shared from one person to another. The people around me have loved books and in loving them, their love for books has shaped me into the woman I am today. The people I love and care about have taught me to read whether they knew it or not. Books intertwine people together and that is a very beautiful thing.