

The Future Foretold: how prolepsis forms plot

a BA Thesis
on Creative Writing

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Introduction

This Bachelor's thesis on Creative Writing examines the order of time in relation to plot. Firstly, a brief clarification will be given about the method used writing this research on chronologically unusual plots, after which the essay will start. A piece of original fiction will follow, called *Blue*, showing the effects, and difficulties, of writing a story that starts at the end. Lastly, the conclusion will explain how the research, the result of the research and the original piece of fiction came together.

“A *story* is a series of events recorded in their chronological order. A *plot* is a series of events deliberately arranged so as to reveal their dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance” (Burroway, 262). The most typical plot consists of conflict, crisis and resolution: conflict meaning a struggle between characters or within one character, crisis meaning the position in the story where that struggle leads to a boiling point, and resolution meaning the outcome of the struggle, happy ending or not. This thesis analyses the relationship between plot structure, time and order in a story.

Firstly, the research essay will show some examples of modern novels, films and television shows that illustrate forms of prolepsis. This in itself is already a form of prolepsis; a flash forward to later used examples. Subsequently, the term will be explained together with *annonce*, the passage that starts off the story. We will find out that the reader subconsciously stores away the important information found in the *annonce*, which will make reading the proleptic story so exciting as the reader will be looking for clues along the way. Reading the research, she will then half-way through meet with the examples again and have them explain about textual signs and the perhaps unwelcoming ending of a proleptic novel. Next, the circularity of prolepsis will be explicated and will as a result make place for an envisaged future that needs to be true. We will conclude with an example from the beginning that shows that a proleptic *annonce* in some cases does not work, because it is presenting too little

information. The conclusion will prove that, within a fictional world, readers do long for a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Wonder of Anticipation

On prolepsis and the chronologically odd plot

Some fiction is written in a chronologically unusual manner. The following examples are from modern novels, films and television series that include a phenomenon that jumps right into the story as the future precedes the present. These examples are given in order of significance to writing fiction so show examples of novels first, then of film and lastly of television shows. The popularity of this chronologically strange phenomenon is increasing in modern culture and although a television show can be regarded as multiple stories, the television examples are useful to explaining the difficulties of creating a chronologically different plot and what viewers will experience when too many time lapses take place. All examples will later on reoccur in this essay.

The novel *Skippy Dies* by Paul Murray starts with the following sentence: “Skippy and Ruprecht are having a doughnut-eating race one evening when Skippy turns purple and falls off his chair” (Murray, 1). The whole first chapter is then spent explaining, in dramatic matter, the last minutes of Skippy’s life and how he apparently does not die from choking on a doughnut. What the real cause of his death is, nobody knows. The following chapter starts with a title page that says: “1 – Hopeland” (Murray, 7), and includes a quotation. This suggests that this is actually the start of the story, as it is chapter one. The reader’s interests are now sparked: why did Skippy die? Yet it is not even clear yet who Skippy is, or who the other characters are.

The novel *Drive* by James Sallis begins with: “Much later, as he sat with his back against an inside wall of a Motel 6 just north of Phoenix, watching the pool of blood lap toward him, Driver would wonder whether he had made a terrible mistake” (Sallis, 9). Chapter two starts with a characterization of this Driver person, written in past tense. It

suggests that this is actually the onset of the story, where we get to know the main protagonist and hopefully find out *what he has got to do with* a pool of blood.

The film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, directed by Michel Gondry, begins with a man and a woman who meet each other for the first time and then impulsively spend some time together on a beach. This is actually the concluding scene of the film and this couple have met before, which the viewer will get to know while seeing the rest of the, more chronologically ordered, film.

The first episode of the Emmy-awarded television show *Breaking Bad* starts with a camper van speeding through the desert, then finally crashing down the side of the road after which a middle aged man staggers out in his underpants, wearing a gas mask. This scene repeats itself at the end of that first episode, with viewers now knowing who that man is and why he is not wearing any trousers. *Breaking Bad* then continues to start every new episode with that episode's finale.

The biggest tease is popular television series *How I Met Your Mother*, which starts with the ending scene, or maybe even further in the future than the ending scene, of the whole series. "Kids," the main protagonist tells his adolescent children, "Let me tell you how I met your mother." Moreover, each new season begins with a cliffhanger, namely what is about to happen in the finale of that particular season, without showing everything that is significant. The television series is currently showing season eight and we still have not met a future mother.

The above examples show that plot cases where the future is ahead of its time are not uncommon in modern culture and explain what a chronologically odd plot looks like. These examples are given at the start of this essay, exactly as in the example stories: starting in the heat of the story. When the future precedes the present, this is called prolepsis. This is almost the reverse of a flashback, so a flash forward, and can be seen as a form of anachrony, or "the

temporal reordering of elements of the plot on the discourse level in relation to their chronological order on the story level” (Fludernik, 150). Another categorization of anachrony is analepsis, where the past is introduced somewhere in the story where it does not belong chronologically. Analepses flash back into the story and prolepses leap forward. The most common form is repeating prolepsis, where a happening is narrated twice, both out of chronological order (at the beginning) and then later, in chronological order. In relation to a story, prolepsis problematizes the narrative in that three moments in time have to be considered: the time locus of the narrated, the time locus of the narrator and the time locus of the reader, and “Narrated time is anterior to the time of narration which is in turn prior to the time of reading” (Currie, 32). The first sentence of *Skippy Dies* is seen as the past for the narrated, the future for the narrator and the present for the reader. Although it might be a future event in the story, the reader has not experienced the event yet and therefore stores it as ‘present’. Peter Brooks explains: “if the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place, already in wait for us to reach it” (Brooks, 23).

Gérard Genette, a French literary theorist, created the term ‘annonce’, or ‘advance notice’: the passage that starts off the story in a non-chronological order. *Annonces* are almost always brief suggestions. Those occurring here “refer in advance to an event that will be told in full in its place” (Genette, 73). A proleptic *annonce* is interesting because it leads to a different reaction in the brain of the reader than chronological *annonces* do. Usually, the reader builds up a contextual frame in mind and holds specific points in the story in memory for later recall. After a proleptic *annonce* the reader is confused because he has not had time to build this contextual frame yet, and therefore the frame in his mind is incomplete. However, the frame that is built instead, consists of the whole experience of reading the proleptic *annonce* and the expectation that this information in full is significant and should be

stored away safely in memory for later recollection. The expectation that this part of the story will return somewhere in the future narrative and should therefore be stored in mind entails anticipated recall. The proleptic *annonce* is, in a way, an invitation to speculate about the future of the story and also very strongly indicates that this information is important to know *now*. First of all to allow the reader to build an intense relationship with the protagonist(s) and to have the reader feel that he cares about what happens to this protagonist later on in the story. Chronologically plotted stories introduce characters more carefully, which often leads to bored readers who cannot seem to get through the first part of the novel, because *nothing really happens*.

When “nothing happens” in a story, it is because we fail to sense the casual relationship between what happens first and what happens next. When something does “happen”, it is because the resolution of a short story or a novel describes a change in the character’s life, an effect of the events that have gone before. (Burroway, 264).

Proleptic *annonces* immediately introduce change and produce a wish for knowledge and background information. Stories are read because humans have a dominant desire to want to know what happens next and why it happens. Think of a proleptically plotted novel as the inverted pyramid in news writing, where the first part is an attention-grabbing lead that makes the reader want to know details: an *annonce* works the same way. Start with the story’s most important facts or a startling statement, and then keep adding more details, chronologically.

How someone processes an *annonce* will depend on the reader’s general knowledge of communication skills and on her familiarity with specific novel genres. Moreover, it will depend on a number of textual features in the *annonce*:

1. The nature of the information in the *annonce*:
 - a. specificity/abstraction: degree of detail, quantity, balance between assertion and implicature etc.,

- b. world-building function: does it contribute information on properties of the fictional world, on primary and secondary protagonists, their goals and motivations, on acting situations (states of affairs), on actions, or does it evaluate these in the wider context of the narrative?
2. The distribution of *annonces* within the text:
 - a. range between *annonce* and target narrative,
 - b. frequency: number of *annonces* for a given event (or vice versa).
 3. The manner of presentation of the above information, including stylistic grounding devices, etc. (Bridgeman, par 28)

Every reader processes an *annonce* differently and also recalls a textual frame in a different manner than other readers, as we cannot be certain as to what a reader knows from general knowledge (school leaving ages, the maximum speed a camper van may be driven on a given road), textual signs (“the following week”), the knowledge of textual patterns so far (is information given directly of being delayed), the knowledge of textual conventions (cliff-hangers at the end of a chapter are usually resolved in the next chapter, or episode), of plot conventions (conflict, crisis, resolution) and of genre conventions (expecting a prolongation of suspense in crime novels). For example, readers not familiar with textual signs or plot conventions might, in *Skippy Dies*, not notice that the story actually heads back in time after chapter 1, as it is never literally explained and the following chapter begins with another character, and therefore never recall their memory of chapter 1 at all. Furthermore, whether or not the reader stores the *annonce* mentally depends on how significant (s)he deems the passage in regard to the motivations and goals of the protagonist(s). For instance, in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, the opening scene makes it seem like the main characters meet

each other for the first time, and so does not seem significant to remember because the viewer is particularly interested in whether these characters end up together again. In stories where repeating prolepsis occurs the proleptic textual frame can be expected to be reactivated at the concluding part of the story, or the part that is aimed at from the beginning. Those textual frames can be reactivated along the way by giving little textual signs so readers will actively follow the chronological development of the story and match it to their expectations of the extent of the *annonce*. In *Breaking Bad* for example, the viewer knows something is about to happen when the main characters buy a camper van and perhaps would like to tell them to leave it. Unfortunately, with the proleptic *annonce* of that episode in mind, the future is already arranged for these characters. Lastly, the reader's attention should be seized when there are only few pages left of the novel and the *annonce* has not repeated itself yet. This is because proleptic *annonces* *have* to come true, which frightens the reader, as those advance notices are never particularly happy. If stories have happy endings, people do not want to know about them on page one; this leaves no story to be told and triggers no suspense at all. Therefore, the last pages of a novel starting with a proleptic *annonce* may be unwelcoming, and some readers will even abandon the book for they do not want to experience their beloved characters getting hurt. Skippy is going to die. Driver is going to kill the people that kill Blanche. The main characters in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* will not remember that they once knew each other. The depressing middle aged man in *Breaking Bad* is going to ruin his life selling drugs. The future is set for these protagonists and the last moments of the story will reveal this, whether readers or viewers will like this or not.

Prolepsis is circular in a way that the anticipation of future events triggered by the *annonce* does have to reoccur in the conclusion of the story, and so has to be true. Therefore prolepsis and anticipation are not one and the same term, since "anticipation itself requires no verification in relation to the future that it anticipates" (Currie, 39). To make sure that the

reader understands that the *annonce* is indeed proleptic and not just a trigger to anticipate an imagined future, authors might have to incorporate tiny hints. The envisaging of a future in a novel works the same way as it does in real life: our anticipation of future events lies somewhere between hope and fear. Edmund Husserl, a 20th century philosopher and founder of the philosophical school of phenomenology, created ‘protention’: our perception of the next moment; the following moment that has yet to be perceived. Fear and hope, in anticipation of an imagined future, are two equally considered modes of protention. “As an envisaged future, it is not properly thought of as a future at all, and conforms more closely to what Husserl (1964) terms a protention: a part of the present which is future orientated” (Currie, 43). Prolepsis produces the future in a story by predicting it, so that in the end the possible transforms itself into the actual. What is more is that the godlike ability to visit the future can instruct authors (or *anyone*) in teleology – the philosophy that describes a thing, process or action only existing to aim at a certain final cause - and encourages us to look at our stories from the perspective of an action completed in the past, therefore looking back from the envisaged future into the present. As if one was already learning from future mistakes that have not yet happened. This approach to storytelling creates a self-distance that operates in the present because we are learning that there is a target that is to be fulfilled and that the envisaged future might be already set.

The danger of beginning a story with a proleptic *annonce* that hints at being repeated later on in the text is the lack of suspense it assumes. The reader knows what is going to happen in the conclusion, so her attention span might be a little low or she might be too impatient to read the middle part of the story. In the CBS series *How I Met Your Mother* proleptic *annonces* have backfired because of this lack of suspense, as each season starts with a new proleptic *annonce* that is repeated in the final episode of that season, but in an incomplete manner. For example: season seven begins with a shot of a wedding, and we see

one of the main characters, Barney, in a wedding attire. The series suggest that he is not quite marriage material so this is odd, but true followers assume that the bride will be another important character, Robin. In the finale episode of season seven we see that the bride is indeed Robin. What we do not see is the wedding, whether the characters actually get married or what else happens. The first episode of season eight begins again, with the wedding, and shows that the character, who is not marriage material, is indeed trying to escape. However, that is it. We do not see if he manages to escape and again, the picture is incomplete. As one season is filled with about twenty-four episodes with barely any hints of the outcome of the proleptic *annonce*, there is too much time between the envisaged future and the repeating of this future with additional information, and so viewers will lose interest. Suspense is created when events are anticipated and we are curious about how they happened. As season seven of *How I Met Your Mother* does not reveal anything about how or why Barney and Robin decided to get married, the effect of suspense is lost. Consequently, creating suspense in fiction is crucial to keep readers on the edge of their seats, craving explanations. Suspense is sometimes linked to mystery novels – detective, crime and supernatural fiction – which involve many choices and twists of events, and are usually made up of clues to find out who did it (the crime). These novels show that suspense creates a certain increase of intensity around an event and that it does not overburden the reader with background information. This way, there will be room for the mind to wonder. Moreover, suspense can be created by adding thorough, almost invisible details about something not being exactly right, which hopefully trigger a recall of the proleptic *annonce* and add to a fear or hope in the reader's mind about what is most likely to happen.

Why should authors start with a proleptic *annonce* rather than a usual *annonce* that leads up to a chronologically recounted story? The proleptic *annonce*, as stated above, very strongly indicates that this particular information is important to know *now*. In terms of cause

and effect, that *annonce* was caused by some event in the story's actual present or envisaged future. The prolepsis visits the future to envisage that event that produces the present in such a way that the envisaged future actually comes about: a self-fulfilling prophecy. The combination of a proleptic *annonce*, the reader's building of a contextual frame of significance, a good number of detailed signs, the reader's use of anticipated protentions, her later recall of both the proleptic *annonce* and further insinuations, and the perspective of a much feared or hoped outcome in this approach of storytelling grasps the reader from the start, and does not let go again until the conclusion of the narrative.

Blue

Max

Is it strange that I want to touch her? To make sure it's not some sort of mistake? Everything feels so unreal. I will never know what ended her that afternoon, her love for him or his misuse of it. I am lying in bed now and I'm not sure if it's worth it for me to ever come out again.

And as my family collapsed into a form of togetherness the next morning, I felt I could not be sad with them. I think the mourning part was already half way for me, and I had perhaps come into a state of acceptance, or blank realization. Psychologically, my sister had probably died a few weeks ago, and it had nothing to do with the condition of her pale blue body today.

The idiotic thing is that people actually ask me really intense questions about her and who she was and who he was. I think they want to know more about that day but what do I know? I overheard a few girls talking at uni today, it went something like this:

- What reasons could she have, to kill herself?!
- But did she really kill herself then?

And a third one said:

- Isn't it impossible to drown yourself?

Emma

She sat outside on a bench, one of those that wasn't exactly comfortable, but more comfortable than sitting indoors in this weather. Extraordinarily pretty she was, in an alien kind of way, eyes a bit too far from each other, but a face almost fully symmetrical. She was one of those girls that did not recognize themselves as beautiful, because that was not a standard she was looking for. The dreamer, she felt him immediately. In a sad way, this could have been the decisive moment in their story: stay or go? She chose to stay and therefore proved her trusting manner, looking up from her schoolwork and smiling at him. She wouldn't know why she did this, but then, from now on, she wouldn't know herself anymore. Simply following him would be enough.

"Hi," he said and he came very close. She felt tiny, sitting there and staring up at this man standing in her sunlight. He moved up his arm and for a minute she was so sure he was going to hit her. She couldn't move. His hand moved closer very slowly and she felt the warmth on her cheek when he suddenly very carefully slipped a lock of her blonde hair behind her ear. Anyone would have slapped his hand away. She shuddered. The beaming light of innocence, she was now lost.

"I'm sorry," she said, though she wasn't sure what she was sorry for, "do you come here as well?"

He fascinated her deeply and she couldn't stop longing for another touch and at the same time loathe him for this wild intrusion. He owned some common facial features that lots of girls would find handsome. A nose that was kind of big, a lot of tangled hair, a mouth that owned a bottom lip bigger than the upper one, a pair of bushy but well-shaped eyebrows and some stubble on his chin. She found him clean. He was wearing a plain t-shirt that didn't look cheap. His intentions could not be read.

He smiled. She didn't know if it was a real smile.

"I just really like this spot," he said.

She had been coming here for all her three years but had never noticed him, even if this was a favourite spot of his. He made a move as if he would come to sit next to her but he didn't. His knee was very close to hers and she wondered very much about this tiny gap between them. Why would someone leave a gap that small? His presence was very obvious, though he was so ordinary. His hair had no particular colour, he wasn't autumn or spring or night or dawn; she didn't quite know what to make of that.

"So you don't study here," she tried again.

He sat down suddenly but the bench didn't move or squeak.

"I study here," he said and she was satisfied for a bit.

"I study the people that go here and the mistakes they make in their communication."

His eyes went through her skin and into her head and she had to look away.

“Oh. I took a course once, on the aesthetics of communication,” she said, hesitating.

“There are more errors, I believe,” he said pleasantly.

“I don’t actually think there are rights or wrongs in speaking.” She shifted.

“Yes, well.. that’s what they teach you so you speak up.”

She never spoke up, she sat in the back of the group; listening. She didn’t think she’d ever risen her hand or voluntarily spoken to someone she didn’t know.

The back of her neck felt tingly and she discovered his arm was resting on the bench behind her. It wasn’t casual because she felt he couldn’t be casual. He picked up a ladybug from the back of the bench and threw it on the ground. She was nearly as far as commenting that he shouldn’t have done that and that she was in a hurry and should go somewhere, but he didn’t give her a chance to.

“I don’t expect you to understand though,” he went on quickly, daring her.

This was an insult and she was so annoyed by his behaviour that she took the risk of being blunt.

“So then, explain it to me,” she said. He had waited for that, obviously.

“I feel like there is such a thing as good and bad, you know. Through people’s communication I can find out whether they are the one or the other. Whether they are suitable.” He looked quite confident.

She felt a little nauseous about this. And his arm, so close and so warm.

“Okay,” she said. She didn’t ask.

It seemed to start him off as he laughed really hard and withdrew his arm and turned towards her and their knees touched.

“So you’ll swallow anything, hm?”

Max

This was a confusing night, cause little Emma was going out. Fine, I knew I was two years younger and all, but it has felt like this for a few years because she's such a brainy late bloomer. She actually studied on weekends.

At the moment, Emma was standing in my doorpost. She would do this quite regularly, just paying me little visits, pretending my music was too loud or something. She chewed on a strand of blonde hair.

"Where are you going then?" I asked her. I went out every weekend and it would be kind of weird bumping into her.

She shrugged and kind of blushed, as if going out was something to be ashamed of.

"To town."

"Emma," I said, "Is someone taking you? You will get lost, you know."

I'd never in my life known someone this dreamy. When she was younger she would often get so absorbed walking home from school – which took about five minutes – because she was distracted by a pretty tree or something, and would then come home an hour late. Our parents lost the will to worry.

"Yes!" she sort of cried this out, "a guy from uni."

A guy. Suddenly this all made more sense. I stretched out on my beanbag and pretended to look really impressed.

"High five!" I said.

She slapped my hand away and darted up the stairs to her room.

Emma

She went from student who sat alone to object of fascination so fast she thought they could have been in a zoo, cages opposite each other, two gazing creatures. There was no spark, merely an extreme curiosity. A need.

She liked that people now looked at her because she was with him, and that she could not read their expressions anymore because it didn't matter. She felt like she should tell her parents or her brother because this was her first official love, but what should she call him? An intellectual companion on romantic terms?

Sometimes when they were together she wanted to sink into him, to be absorbed and exist from within him. Two become one. She wanted to be wise with him more than anything. Though, when he embraced her she would get so cold and shivery she had to really shake her head to snap out of it.

The first time he brought up the subject of dying she was very confused. She knew he was sceptical on most topics, but this was an entire new level of complex.

"I don't know," she had said, "I think everyone is curious about how it feels.."

He looked at her in that overly familiar way that said 'cute answer, but no'. His opinion was more important than hers and she wanted to go back in time and choose her words more carefully.

"I'm not talking about feelings." He touched her cheek, "I'm saying it doesn't exist."

"Life doesn't exist?"

"Death doesn't."

She envisioned the leaves that fell from the trees in autumn, lying next to the road - untouched, colourful - and she thought they could not be dead. What if, after winter when those leaves would vanish, the trees would start drinking from the ashes they left behind and would so gain new life and those leaves would appear again, at the end of the trees' branches in spring. Endlessly.

"Isn't that the same, though?"

"Possibly," he said, "But think about this Emma, what is everyone saying? You only live once? What if life is never ending? What if it doesn't stop after you die?"

"Like some sort of immortality?" Why would he bring this up?

"Well, you would officially have to die first to start a new chapter of your new life. So life and death are not finite, they're intertwined. The terms wouldn't exist anymore because you wouldn't be able to talk about ending a life when it's like an ongoing process."

Her head was spinning but she wouldn't let it.

“But how do you *know* it is an ongoing process?”

“Come on, Em, don’t be naive! Do you really think this is all?” Scoffing.

She thought all was quite nice, perhaps a bit bland. If he was right though, they would be like seasons. Starting, ending, changing, beginning again. Trees.

He looked really confident, yet absent, when he said:

“Let’s just test it in a few weeks.”

Max

I threw my bag on the kitchen table, but of course-

“Max, your bag goes in your room,” my mum said immediately.

“Right,” I picked it up again, “What’s for dinner?”

Mum kind of lit up because she loved cooking so much and always expected me to not care about her hobbies. I didn’t, really, it was just the food that I’m interested in.

“I’m making a lasagne with zucchini and minced meat. Thought it would be nice for a change,” she was shuffling through drawers and picked up our big wooden ladle. It was a gift from Emma, who was of course much more considerate about our parents’ likes and dislikes.

“Meat?” I was confused.

“Could you go and get Dad? He’s upstairs.”

“Sure, but why are we eating meat?” I asked again. Mum turned around from her lading.

“Darling, Emma’s not staying here this weekend, she’s staying at her boyfriend’s! Didn’t she tell you?” She looked really proud; look at my daughter, all grown-up!

Well, I didn’t care. It was not like we ever really did anything together anyway. Just watched television or something. I sprinted up the stairs into my room and threw my bag on the floor. It was really dark and I noticed the curtains were still closed because that was something Emma would do because she couldn’t stand “the smell of a teenage boy cave”. More darkness for me, then! I turned on my Playstation and flopped down on my beanbag.

“MAX!” My Dad called. Oh, right, dinner.

Emma

He called her big words, like ‘beloved’. She felt really, really mature, sitting on his grey couch that matched the taupe walls, looking at a television screen that was too big for the room, or any room. It hung on the wall in the centre of the living area, like a big statue for conformity in a house that was already so IKEA. They weren’t watching the television though, because there was no reason why they should lower themselves.

“Dearest,” he said and handed her a glass of what she thought must be really expensive red wine.

“Let’s intoxicate our minds.” He grinned but it was neither cheeky nor sexy.

She looked at his eyes and discovered that they were a mix of green and brown. When he looked back she glanced down at her wine.

“Em,” he said, worried wrinkles on his forehead, “You’re not uncomfortable around me, are you?”

She didn’t know. She was perhaps afraid of the feeling he gave here, a feeling that she thought didn’t fit with being in love. She didn’t want to kiss him or have sex with him, she just wanted to know what would happen if she would touch his skin and trace the contours of his body. If he *would* be like a statue, emotionless.

“No!” she said, unconvincingly. He took her in a really warm embrace and it surprised her completely. She had thought he would be so much more awkward but his arms were around her quite affectionately and not stiff in any way. She could do that thing where she nuzzled a bit in his shirt and smelled his scent and it comforted her. And it really did. His grey couch suddenly changed from being designer to being snug and she felt her lips hovering over his neck.

He drank his expensive wine and they lay stretched out, like content cats, sometimes really stretching out their arms and then finding their embrace again. They draped their bodies off the couch onto the big, white rug, shuffled themselves under the glass table and looked up as from in a fish tank.

The topic was hers.

“I know it’s a bit ridiculous and I don’t really believe in those daily horoscopes or something, but my birth horoscope looked really pretty,” she said.

He stroked her hair and shook his head in mock despair. “What am I doing with you! You and your affection for pretty things, even if they have no value at all!”

“Well,” she said, “in my defence, I have never in my life known anyone who thought stars weren’t pretty.”

“Right. I do believe in stars, of course,” he answered.

“But don’t you think it’s strange that we’re both water signs then?” she said. She had thought about this a lot because she didn’t think water signs could go together, officially.

“No, I do not think it is strange that we were born in different months of the year and that our signs look like water animals and are then both placed under the element of water,” he said, being his, somewhat annoying, sceptical self.

She slapped his arm.

“It means we’re both really emotional, stop being so sarcastic.”

He all of a sudden looked serious.

“Do you think I’m emotional?”

She thought about the way she felt around him and about his ever still face and believed that she was, definitely, the more sensitive of the two.

“Not really,” she answered honestly, and cringed a little because it wasn’t such a nice thing to say. As if he was empty. She realised that was what scared her and so it was a good thing to have told him because she sometimes read that communication was everything in a relationship.

He didn’t flinch; he actually looked a bit proud of himself, as if hiding his emotions was a wonderful trait he’d taught himself. Hiding his emotions in this modern apartment, under expensive designer pillows and next to his ice cube maker, his abstract paintings that didn’t show anything, his lightweight MacBook and his en-suite bathroom. She thought this was typical of his irony.

“See, I’m right. Astrology doesn’t mean anything,” he said. Then he looked up at the table and discovered his glass was empty and hers was still full. He slid up and sat on the couch. She followed his move.

“Em,” he looked really stern, “you can just tell me if you don’t like your wine.”

“No,” she said, “it’s just—”

He had already jumped up and had snatched the full glass of wine from the table.

“We can’t let it go to waste, right!”

She watched in horror as he emptied the whole glass above his perfectly white rug, the red fluid happily streaming down like a slow-motion waterfall. A big red stain on the only soft area in his clean home. He laughed really hard.

“Don’t worry, don’t worry!”

She wanted to go home.

Max

It was Monday. Mondays were always a bit difficult in our household. Dad and Emma would always be pleased and chirpy and frolic around the kitchen, while Mum and I would sit at the table and not speak to anyone. We weren't morning people, certainly not on a Monday. Our table was huge, with lots of humps and bumps that were filled with lost crumbs and sticky drops of spilled lemonade or jam. I thought Mum once planned on having lots of dinner parties here, but was too much of a scatterbrain to actually organise something. I got annoyed doing my homework at times, because there was always stuff clinging to it. But hey, I wasn't going to clean anything myself.

Today, Dad was the only one who was cheery.

"Another week has begun!" he sang whilst making himself an omelette.

We said nothing. Mum looked annoyed, Emma didn't even have her eyes open and I was chewing away on dry toast. The crumbs were increasing.

"Emma dear, when are we meeting this boyfriend of yours so I can ask him what his father does for a living?" Dad joked.

Emma opened her eyes. I saw she noticed the mess around my plate.

"Never," she said.

I put down my toast and looked at my parents, who were grinning like they had hit a homerun teasing their daughter. Hadn't they noticed Emma's tone? She hadn't spoken in a grumpy I-don't-like-Mondays kind of way, but rather matter-of-factly: we were never going to meet this guy.

Emma

Today they were out and about and she missed class for it but it didn't matter, because he would know all the answers anyway. To anything. There was a nearby forest lurking for them to explore, which was full of trees very much alive and green. One particular line of oaks intrigued them, the branches growing towards each other at their ends, forming a tunnel. There was even a light at the end, she laughed.

"I almost feel like I'm in a clichéd wedding photo," she joked, posing in the opening. It was a sunny day and she was wearing a sunny dress in a faded orange. She *never* wore dresses, but today it felt appropriate.

They walked up the tunnel path and he picked her up gracefully and carried her to the top. She wasn't sure if he was joking too, he felt serious. A sudden thought overwhelmed her. She would probably have said yes.

"How's your rug?" she asked teasingly.

He rolled his eyes but laughed.

"It's ruined. I know, I shouldn't have done that. But whatever, it's just a rug."

They went to climb the biggest tree. They didn't help each other, just climbed like squirrels on each side of the tree, the first one to the top branch would win. The views were wide; meadows spreading out to the east, oak wood intertwining to the west, their tunnel beneath them.

"You know what we were talking about the other day? I want to feel infinite," when it was just them she wasn't afraid to say ridiculously big things.

He reacted immediately and pushed her. She felt her feet slipping from the branch she was standing on, suddenly nothing vast below them, a gasp leaving her mouth and her fingers reaching for any branch, anything. He held her back. The second she realised he was holding her she wasn't sure if she should be mad or sad, or happy that she had just felt infinite for a split second. Not knowing where the beginning was, or the end, just that she would've fallen and couldn't have saved herself.

"God! That was.." she couldn't find the words. Powerful? Idiotic?

"It was just what you needed, really. Plus, it was some practise for our experiment."

He looked confident. She could have probably pushed him off a branch and he wouldn't have cared. He would have fallen with some sort of sophistication. A smile permanently on his face. Whatever, it would say, I know better than this. She felt small again. She could've just not tried grasping for that branch so desperately.

"But what if you hadn't caught me?" she dared asking.

He looked at her with a smirk on his immaculate face, as if the question really annoyed him.

“Yes, what then?”

She started climbing down without saying anything. His presence usually comforted her so but his mindset was completely out of her world. Her feet were wobbly, but luckily the branches grew thicker near the bottom of the tree. She walked down the path again, finding an opening between two trees that lead to a big field of grass.

The boyfriend in the magazines would have followed her by now and indeed, she felt him clutching her wrist and turning her around.

His fingers found hers and softly stroked them and the sun was in her face and it was all so sweet. She felt repulsed.

“Hey. Don't you trust me?” he asked, and brought her fingers to his mouth.

Max

“You haven’t been home for three weekends now,” I said stubbornly. I didn’t know what was up with me but I felt a brotherly kind of duty.

Emma turned around in the doorway and sighed so heavily I was afraid she would melt into a puddle of weakness. I folded my arms.

“You can’t just go to uni every day and never come home for dinner or for anything and then just never talk about anything.” I must have found speech somewhere in my body.

She just stood there, deciding whether to leave and run for the bus, or to engage in this frenzied conversation with me. I demanded the latter.

“It’s dumb!”

She rolled her eyes and tucked at her dress. Her legs were bare and they looked blue and pale and new, as if she’d just bought them somewhere. I guess they were never out and now she was suddenly all grown-up and womanly and her legs had to be out for that.

“It’s not dumb, Max. You don’t know what it’s like, you’ve never been in love!” she said.

And I didn’t believe her. She didn’t look in love. She looked weird and wrong.

“Well, whatever. Just bring him home then for once so we know what it’s like.”
Compromise.

“No,” she shook her head.

“WHY not?” I didn’t get this part, was she ashamed of him or something? Was he some sort of super geeky math student she met on the internet?

“You’ll understand one day, okay?”

She was just being vague again. Then suddenly something hit me. The way she had looked at me just now, how she had rolled her eyes at me, how she had looked in horror at our messy table, how she had groaned at Dad singing in the morning-

“Are you ashamed of *us*?” I said.

She didn’t say anything, she just stood there in her stupid dress, with her stupid pale legs and I pushed her through the doorway and grabbed the handle and slammed the door close.

I snatched a bottle of water from the fridge quite furiously and stomped up the stairs. Upstairs, I looked down from the window in my parents’ room. Emma was still standing in front of the door.

Emma

Today was the day they had chosen for the experiment. He, the practical one, wanted a school day and she, the romantic one, wanted to see a bit of sunshine.

She had never been chosen for anything. She had been watching other girls perform the Spice Girls on stage at elementary school, she had seen guys run after less shy girls and lovingly tease them and seen her friends get Valentine's cards, secret text messages and first kisses. She had seen her friends actually reject the guys they didn't quite fancy enough.

She thought she might have been too boring. For anyone, really. She wished she just could have chosen to play Ginger Spice for once, just because she wanted to.

He gave her lots of choices and seemed to open up to her way of thinking. After all, she was the one that had come up with this plan. It wasn't so much a plan as well as a feeling that she wanted to achieve, and a state of importance.

They drove up the car park and she blinked at the sun beaming at her through the car window. She was wearing a sundress again, for the occasion. The light was so bright it made her smirk a little, such clichés! The light at the end of the tunnel.. Why would anyone want to experience that while there was such a thing as the sun?

He opened the door for her and his watch glistened. It was only noon, nobody would be around at this time. She got out of the car as if in slow motion, as if climbing out in front of a herd of paparazzi; significance.

They walked up the little path behind the car park, along the ticket booth and up to the fence. 'Closed on Mondays', a sign read.

"Not for us," he said, and he jumped over the fence. She followed, a little afraid her dress would get stuck and tear.

The pool was glistening pale; the water looked chemically blue. Like a dolphin basin in a marine park. The fence was surrounded by trees and conifer needles were spread out on the concrete and sun beds. She went to lie down on one but when he tried to tip over the bed she knew he meant business.

"Can't we have a little fun first? It's such a pretty day," she asked lazily.

"Fun!" he exclaimed, "we're doing a huge scientific experiment!"

"Don't forget religious experiment," she added, pointing at his chest playfully. "It's all in one!"

"Yes, alright," he checked the area around the pool with hawk eyes.

"Relax a bit, will you," she said. It was a pleased mood for her today, he shouldn't ruin it.

She walked over to the pool and slowly lowered her toes into the bright blue. The water felt soft and lukewarm and she walked on to the shallow end of the pool. Then she stepped in. The water came to her knees and she felt like sitting down and having a picnic there or something. They hadn't brought any food or juice but she sat down anyway, feeling the silkiness of the water on her skin. It made her feel at ease. Unlike him, who was still standing at guard in a corner.

"You don't know what you're missing!" she said. Her dress flowed around her waist onto the surface of the water.

He came into the water as well and sat next to her; his green shorts coloured a few shades darker. They had spoken about this dream of infinity for days and days and had come up with tons of scenarios to prove they were right, though neither of them really wanted to test out dying.

So she came with the idea of nearly dying. The tunnel-idea. The supposed blissfulness of a feeling that should be beyond time and space, beyond science or religion; a feeling just about floating. And, she had said, floating would feel double as floaty when they would be in water.

The plan was that she, the emotional being, was the chosen one of them because she longed for such a floaty feeling the most and because he was the stronger one he would hold her back when she would go too far. Too deep.

"It's time," he said.

"Yeah, you're right," she said.

She waded through the blue until the point she had to stand on her tiptoes to hold her head above the surface and then she let her feet go. Under the water she had to keep her eyes open, she had promised that to herself, without her eyes open it wouldn't be much of another world, it would just be solid darkness. The chloral cleanliness of the water stung her eyes a bit but she didn't mind. The world was different under the surface, it was slow and she could twirl around and see the movement of her limbs following the circles she made. She could also see his legs, which was kind of funny, as if he just existed as legs. She swam towards him and tugged on his shorts and snorted out bubbles from hidden laughter. Everything was simple here but she started feeling like she needed to breathe.

"You are crazy, you know that?" Max's voice. She was startled for a second, but it was also kind of nice, having him around to talk to her.

"I thought you were supposed to be the sensible one," he went on. She pictured him in her mind, always joking and teasing their parents, going out every weekend, drinking, hanging with his friends..

"Why?" she thought. "Why does that matter? You are the smart one, the social one. It's not like anyone notices me doing crazy things anyway."

Her brother shook his head in her head.

“No,” he said, “You are completely wrong. Everyone notices you. You are the loved one, I am the goofy little brother.”

Funny, how they all thought different things about themselves, things that didn't matter or shouldn't matter because what really mattered were the thoughts of their loved ones. She thought she did good. Behaved well. She had never purposely been rude to anyone. She sometimes did kind things for no reason.

She realised she had closed her eyes and tried to open them but the force of the chlorine was too much. She was in desperate need of oxygen and so she kind of splashed around until she found the pool's edge and the stairs that lead to the surface. She clung to the stairs. Yes, she thought, this way she could easily stay down but also get up again.

“What are you trying to prove, seriously,” Max said. What was she trying to prove? That she would feel infinite under water? That she was like the seasons and could exist endlessly? That there was indeed a light at the end of the tunnel but you could choose not to go there? That her love for him was really strong and made her do strange things? That she was significant enough to have people care that she was doing this?

She shook her head really slowly and tried to make sense of it all. Maybe air was better than water. It was only emotion that kept her here, in this soft cage of blue. She didn't feel her legs anymore and could not tell if she was standing on something or just floating around. Again she noticed the forced shut of her eyes and when she opened them a little she couldn't find his legs. Inside her head felt extremely bright and extremely black, like she had looked into a lamp for too long. She needed air. She wanted the freshness of air and to see the trees and the concrete and the sun in their real colours. They were all purple inside her head. Everything was purple. Her head went all heavy and she started floating up to the surface and coughing, coughing a lot, there was water in her mouth and in her throat and it burned from the chlorine and she had to go to the surface where there was air! She splashed about and finally her fingers found air and it was deliciously dry and warm and cold at the same time and she stretched out her fingers but then they were in the water again. She was back under, something was pushing her, but she needed to go to the surface. Her throat was burning and she was coughing and coughing, the water went in and out at the same time, invading her. Air! She tried to open her eyes but all was black and inside it a bit of green trousers. She felt herself getting tired of needing air. Maybe floating was good enough. There was nothing around her. There was no light.

Conclusion

My stories emerge from dreams: I have the most realistic, fantastic, exciting, adventurous dreams. This particular dream was quite simple, setting and story-wise, but therefore so much more focused on suspense and underlying emotions. I began writing pieces of it while I was on a train racing through rural Thailand: I had just been reading *We Need To Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver and was quite fascinated by how the story's plot revolved around an event that had already happened. Many different subjects came up, starting with the idea of 'what if one already knows something is about to happen, but it is not literally said in the story?' This proved to be too difficult and could not be analyzed so the subject changed over the summer and ended here, with prolepsis.

Intertwining my own fiction with this idea of prolepsis proved to be difficult. The entire research essay proved that prolepsis helped creating more suspense or anticipation in a story, but when writing the fiction piece, producing anticipation turned out to be complicated. The textual frame of the *annonce* of *Blue* is centred around a girl dying by drowning: this is the part the reader will memorize for later recall, and so she will look for clues that have anything to do with this. I started slipping in hints related to water and her drowning, such as "swallow", "sink", "water signs", "tunnel", but realised this had no effect as only I really knew what was going to happen and I had not mentioned anything about the characters' idea of the light at the end of the tunnel yet. However, I still wanted the story to have a layer of water related terms over it. I added more 'tunnel' suggestions to the part where the characters are climbing trees.

The research suggested that change in a character's life is the most important factor of keeping the reader interested and therefore if any change is introduced in the *annonce*, this should result in a thirst for more knowledge. In my *annonce*, Emma's brother has just learned

that Emma has died: introducing Emma. Where the inverted pyramid is concerned, this is my attention-grabbing lead. The introduction by Max tells the reader that Emma will die drowning and someone asks whether it is possible to actually drown yourself. This was the biggest clue and perhaps the most important sentence in the story. Expectantly this would work as the sentence readers would store away in their minds for later recall, the sentence they would focus on hoping or fearing about Emma's death: if one cannot drown oneself, she might not have drowned, or someone else must have drowned her. Of course this was a self-fulfilling prophecy and Emma does die, but she does not do it herself, or on purpose.

Unfortunately I have no insights in the general knowledge of each reader that reads *Blue*, but mine seemed to be sincerely interested in adding details to the information provided in the *annonce*. Readers wanted to not only know why Emma died but seemed satisfied with the somewhat open ending of not knowing *his* feelings afterwards, because they could ponder over this.

Whether or not the reader would store away the most important part of the *annonce* in consideration to the motivations of the main protagonist was quite clear as it regarded the death of the main protagonist. This meant that there could almost be seen a clock above readers' heads: there would only be so much time to find out the essential information, as due to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the proleptic novel the circle would come round and so Emma would actually drown. That span of time was an issue as I struggled to form round characters, motivations, enough hints and a building up towards the concluding piece within little words. Because of this, readers could literally see the trouble coming as it starts with 'Today was the day..' This sentence should immediately recall the initial fear (or hope) for the main protagonist's death. The teleological structure of the story had already set the future, or the concluding part, for me, and made it hard to write down as I had labelled it the most significant part of the story. This might not be exactly true, story-wise, but the fact that

readers had anticipated this particular ending from the beginning added to the stress of writing.

Characters and Setting

The development of the characters evolved subtly. In my dream Emma had died willingly, but making up a reason why anyone would want to die randomly did not work out. I then focused on the bored, rich male protagonist who never got a name, as I wanted to keep him as vague as possible. The odd fact was that halfway writing the story I thought he could not be more awful, when some readers actually thought he was a pretty perfect guy. Adding more socially strange events, such as the ladybug, the spilling of the red wine and the pushing in the tree, revealed the character had urges he could not resist. He would oftentimes regret it later, as with the spoiling of the rug, but the adrenaline of living on the edge of being out-of-control proved more important. These urges of 'him' were the reason the main protagonist died. However, after I had added these slightly psychotic traits, some readers now felt the character was inherently evil, which he is not. I tried to write Emma as fragile and absent-minded as possible in her first chapter, so readers would hopefully feel protective of her, or would perhaps just sense that something was going to happen to her.

The points of view in this story helped creating a better overall picture of Emma and her timid, sensible character. Max showed the reader what Emma was like at home and at the end I decided to create a more intense brother/sister relationship by having Emma envision Max speaking to her while she is drowning. Moreover, Max helped the reader fear for a certain outcome as he himself was confused by Emma's new relationship, noticing that something was not completely right.

In addition, I am aware of the fact that I write in a quite over-the-top Romantic manner, I have had people mentioning *Twilight* or even *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and I perhaps even wanted to achieve this. These books offer main characters that are extremely fragile and victimised as well, and I wanted to show that letting characters dominate other characters cannot always end well.

The most significant for me is that this fiction reads like a story, and not like loose pieces of words. I started out with almost no setting and added a number of trees, dresses and sunlight to set a Romantic tone. It is nature that Emma is dreamy about and it is elements of his nature that kill her. The primary aim of this piece of fiction was to make the reader feel incredibly uncomfortable reading about this very unsettling and unhealthy relationship between him and her. Using a rather forecasting sentence in my *annonce*, revealing that Emma was dead, creating Max to help feel the reader something was socially wrong with 'him', adding as much drowning insinuations as possible (he literally said "after you die"), and hopefully creating a relationship that did not feel like a relationship, *Blue* showed the features of the well-formed proleptic story described in the research. Some readers added that *Blue* explained the research essay: they read the story first, then the research essay, and because of the story understood the core of the research immediately. In a way, this again shows that a future preceding a present is helpful because it creates a faster understanding of the whole picture.

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