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Mrs. Healey

Brit. Lit. Aslan

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### The Way Back

Azer Rhi peered out of his tent flap. His people were spread out across the open plain, the massed line of tents stretching for at least a mile in either direction. The skyline was marked with the occasional plume of smoke signaling a fire. It was about that time of the evening for food being prepared and the fires served a double purpose. Out here on the steppe the temperature could drop well below freezing at night, even in late summer as it was now, and the fires were always packed with friends and family enjoying the seething warmth.

It had been a long day of traveling under the beating sun, and they had decided to stop early for today and pitched their tents. We were all heading for the same place: home. It had been two years since he had left, two years since he had seen his family. He had spent this time as a migrant worker, traveling all over central Asia in search of work. The money he got from the wealthier nations could feed his mother, sister, and himself for well over a year. He did not have a father, or at least he never knew him. His mother had told him he had died of an abnormal growth in his body. His mind wandered off at the thought of all the times he would never have with his father, but now was not the time to worry. He was going home and would not have to leave again for another year.

Just then a large, grinning man looked up from the fire nearest him and yelled for Azer to come over. Azer smiled back. That was Bola, an old friend of his father's that had promised to

watch him on these journeys. No one really knows where he got that nickname, or what his true name was. It was strange to him how much he thought of Bola as his father. Azer began to walk over, and as he did Bola threw another steak on the fire. "Thought you'd never come outta that tent, boy, you sleep like a rock", Bola said. Today was a hard day, and as soon as he had pitched his tent, he found himself unable to keep his eyes open and passed out. "Yeah because I never get any sleep with your snoring", I said. Bola grinned even wider. Everyone knew how loud Bola was. Most people, except for Azer pitched their tents a fair distance away from Bola's, because his snoring could be heard through the thick tent walls. It surprised him how much he was accustomed to hearing his snoring on this journey, and many times when Bola was out doing something he found himself unable to sleep without it.

The steaks began popping, signaling they were ready. "Fox says only one more day of traveling till we get home." Fox was another friend of his father's that came on the the migration journeys every two years. His lean, wiry build and his cunning deserved himself the nickname after the stealthy steppe foxes that stole from everyone's food stores while they were sleeping. This news heartened Azer, he was happy to be so close to home. They spent the waning hours of the evening relaxing and discussing the days events.

As it got later in the night, fires were extinguished and an infrequent stream of people passed by their fire headed for their tents. Eventually Azer decided to retire for the night, said goodbye to Bola and got up to leave. As he did this he noticed a shadow slip from outside his tent through the opening flap. Panicked, thinking it was a thief, he ran to the tent as fast as he could, swinging open the flap and screaming like a banshee. To his surprise he found Fox standing in the middle of the room, with a mixed expression of surprise and barely suppressed

laughter.

“Great just made an idiot of myself”, Azer said, as he looked out the flap at people peering at the tent with peculiar expressions on their faces.

“Naw, that animal being butchered made a fool of himself”, Fox said, grinning as he did. “I didn't know you were out so late, just coming to check on yeh-”

“I can take care of myself”, Azer grumbled. The people around the tent began to move on, and Azer began to relax. Fox walked out of the tent, patting Azer on the back and chuckling at the same time. “Just like your father, kid”, he said. Azer laid down on his bed exhausted, and pondered Fox's words. He wondered if being like his father was a good thing, after all he never knew the man. These were his last thoughts as he dozed off into a deep sleep.

Azer woke early the next morning, washed , ate and began to pack up. He folded up his tent and threw it on his pack mule, as well as the rest of his possessions. The sun was beginning to rise on the horizon, and most of the others were already and moving out. There were always stragglers who overslept, they were left behind, but it was not hard for them to spot the mass herd moving across the steppe. He began walking, following the steady stream of people moving out of the camp. He spotted Bola rolling out of bed, late as usual. Continuing on, Azer left the camp and entered the vast steppe. He had grown up on these endless plains, the swaying grasses, and the near desert patches that are devoid of rain. One day he hoped to get enough money to go and leave this place. It was his home but also felt like a prison, it was devoid of civilization. He kept walking, picking up a steady beat he was so accustomed to on these long days.

The minutes began to wear on into hours, his steady trudging did not mark how active his mind was. His eyes kept flicking about looking for any signs of the small cliff his village was

situated on. There were no mirages out here on the steppe, but for some reason he kept seeing the dark outline on the horizon. He did not know whether it was him wanting to see it or it was actually there.

The temperature was rising fast, with the sun now directly overhead, he felt his back beginning to sweat, out here on the steppe there was no shade, the soil was loose and crumbly. It collected heat just as fast as it lost it, making for hot days and cold nights. Just then someone ahead yelled a shout of joy. "Its there, there I see it!" He was waving frantically in the direction they were facing. Sure enough on the horizon he could see a slight, dark mound outlined. He knew it well enough from the first time he made that journey that this was the final stretch, they were almost home.

Everyone began noticing the same dark mound, and the pace visibly increased. It was still a couple hours walk to the mound, but everyone was nevertheless excited about seeing home. He grinned at what he thought would be his mother's face when she saw how much money he had brought home. This year was better off than others, the bosses were more generous this year. He zoned off in thought of having a family again, he always felt lonely on the plains, even with Bola around.

The sun was beginning its downward tilt when they reached the base of the cliff. They all could see small figures at the top moving around, presumably doing their work. Everyone began squeezing into the narrow trail that led up the side of the cliff to the top. Most were pushier than usual, he did not blame them, he himself was anxious to get to the top as fast as he could. The path was not small enough to be dangerous, but still evoked caution in the packed conditions they were traveling it on.

As they rounded the top, one of the villagers noticed them, and alerted the others. Kids came running out of their houses at the sight and bolted towards the mob, eager to see their parents or siblings. He remembered when he had done the same for his older brother. Many of the villagers dropped their tools also and began running with the kids. All around him reunions were taking place, family members and friends embracing.

He followed the familiar path of the village, weaving through the celebrating townsfolk, until he found the familiar path he was looking for. He gazed down to the end of it, and just as he left it, his house stood there, almost welcoming him too. He grinned, and as the sun was setting on the horizon, he began the last strides of his journey.

\* good indirect characterization  
+ dialogue

\* does not actually fit the prompt, but  
well-done

\* source material?

Content A -

Style A

Jake Schneider  
Mrs. Healey  
British Literature 4  
18 October 2011

The Plastic Surgeon's Tale

*Sent home*

It was the summer of 2008 that I prepared for my trip to Las Vegas to appear as guest speaker at the Annual Botox Convention. Everyone wanted to know my latest techniques on how to use the botulinum toxin to remove facial wrinkles. As testimony to my research, I was recently voted "Most Handsome Fifty Year Old" at the Rotary Club in Tampa Bay, Florida. I was used to the attention, admired by both men and women for my dashing looks. Because of my workload, I had little time for social life, instead focusing on shallow relationships with my patients, mostly forty-something women who were seeking a fun time outside their family relationships. First and foremost, they needed lots of money to pay for the treatments, the fancy restaurants they would take me to for dining out, and pay for my upgrades to an already gentleman's quarterly wardrobe. My home was a 5000 square foot beachfront with an 85-foot sailboat moored at my dock. I was what everybody wanted- single, no attachments, successful, rich and revered by my peers. There was no reason for modesty. I was living a dream.

My flight out of Tampa seemed ordinary enough. While I waited for Flight 877 to Las Vegas one afternoon, I met an older ophthalmologist who was attending the same symposium in hope of finding an answer to cure his overactive sweat glands on his face. He seemed nice enough but I kept the conversation short so that I could strike up a conversation with a delightfully attractive nurse who was there on behalf of her insurance company. She was as pretty as I was handsome. She was

younger than the women I treat, but I was captivated by her beauty. I dreamt we would be together this weekend as my plan would take root. We agreed to sit together on the flight, maybe share a few drinks and we would be together later that night in her hotel room. Much to my surprise, the seating arrangement on the plane had the three of us together, a full three hours of the talkative ophthalmologist who would not leave me alone, and the nurse, whom I could not leave alone. And so the flight began.

I had decided that the three of us would spend the flight talking about our favorite tale and based on a vote among the three of us, we would agree on who would be fed a meal at Bellagio's Restaurant, my favorite dining spot on the Strip. Given my education and training, no doubt I would be having the free meal and with the one lovely I had just met.

The chatty ophthalmologist agreed to start off the tales. He began talking about his childhood. He grew up in Brooklyn and his parents were Jewish immigrants from Germany. He said his Bar Mitzvah was one of the best moments of his life because his parents were so proud of him. He spoke about his high school days. Surprisingly, the coke-bottle-glasses wearing, rather awkwardly looking Ophthalmologist was an all-state tailback and went on to play for Marist College in New York. Upon his graduation from Marist, the ophthalmologist went back to Brooklyn and married his high school sweetheart. They had five children.

I envisioned his wife as being somewhat unattractive, since he described her as being quite plump with a round face. The five children all followed in their father's

footsteps, all getting jobs in the medical field. It seemed as if the ophthalmologist was an overall good person; he mentioned that every Saturday he and his wife would help out at an inner city soup kitchen which they had started many years ago. My thoughts started to wander as he rambled on, until he began talking about his tragic twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. He and his wife had shared a romantic dinner at her favorite restaurant. Everything had been perfect, until they were blindsided by a drunk driver. The tragic accident took the life of his wife. He seemed troubled by recounting the accident and broke down crying and sweating profusely. Ever since the accident and the loss of his wife, he claimed that he could not stop sweating. His reason for coming to the convention in Las Vegas was to find a cure for his sweating and try to recover some of his fond memories of life.

The young nurse went next. She was so captivatingly beautiful, I hung to her every word. She was from a small town in Ohio and had lived on a chicken farm with her mother and three brothers. Her father had died when she was only three years old. He fell off the barn roof. The mother kept the family together by raising chickens and took on odd jobs baking, sewing and doing the neighbor's laundry. Likewise, the mother, too, had died at age of 45, from a heart condition. With no one to care for my new found friend, her family was split up into different foster care homes, having never seen her brothers again. Living in new surroundings took its toll on her. Her foster parents only wanted her to take care of their house and cook meals and do laundry. They did not love her. Although she knew she was attractive, she had few friends in high school. She became carefree



trying hard to blend in with the wrong crowd in school.

Pregnant at eighteen, she miscarried the baby by falling down a flight of stairs in a drunken stupor. Through a near death experience experimenting with drugs, she was kicked out of her home having to be taken care of by a nurse counselor at a drug rehabilitation center. Through the help of the nurse, she was able to get financial aid to finish her high school GED and get a nursing degree from the local community college.

Now in her mid thirties, never having been married or having a family, she continued to seek relationships with other men but never finding the right person. She worked for an insurance company that wanted her to attend the symposium to review changes in Botox treatments that would hopefully lower insurance costs. She claimed to be also looking for Mr. Right, figuring there would many eligible men for her perusal. I could not be more pleased.

My story was an easy one to tell. I came from rich parents, never having to share anything as I was an only child. We lived in Miami where I learned to surf, drive fast cars, and date only the finest women. Everybody wanted to know me because I knew how to have fun. School was a breeze as I was awarded full ride scholarships right through med school at the University of Florida. I was not interested in long relationships with anyone as I was a gift to be shared by all. My work consumed me especially on improving the looks of women who were aging in their forties. I was like a god in my practice and I expected the rewards that went with the trade-whatever I wanted from my patients I would have.

so this  
what you  
told  
you  
new  
friends?

The time had now come for a vote as to the best tale. The old ophthalmologist went first and chose the young nurse. By his reasoning, he wanted her to find the kind of happiness that he enjoyed with his deceased wife. This was too easy for me. All I had to do was agree to a second vote for her, making the contest complete. By so doing, we were awarding her first prize and a free meal at the Bellagio.

The plane had arrived in Las Vegas. The plan was for the beautiful nurse to eat her meal at the Bellagio at 7:00 pm that same night. I had already checked into a small room for one night, figuring that I would be staying in her room for the duration. I put on my best clothes, knowing that I would soon be joining my new friend shortly.

As luck would have it, I met the old ophthalmologist in the elevator who appeared to be singing and dancing by himself. More importantly, he was not sweating. Not to be outdone, I asked him how he planned to spend the evening. At that very instant, the elevator door opened and the nurse took his arm as they went to dinner together. What had gone wrong?

Rebuffed by my friend, I decided to try my luck at slots and then retire to a quiet evening. It was there that I met the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

*great ending*  
*- nice job*  
*- good indirect characterization*  
*- good details for each character*  
Content A  
Style A