

*Misunderstanding of the Last Five Centuries*

Walking into the British Museum for the first time introduced an old timey, yellowed paper scent to my nose. It would've probably been more enjoyable if I didn't have to constantly worry about filling my four-inch notebook with the details of each art piece. I remember what Lily, my best friend back home in L.A., told me about when she went to London: her parents took her shopping and she had the "time of her life". I'm stuck with the argumentative parents, the unrealistically high academic expectations, even the "only medical journals, no time, magic stuff Zoey". Why did she care so much about what I read or liked? At least I'm reading and not scrolling on my phone because lord forbid I be scrolling on a device!

As I'm walking down the vast hallways, I catch a glimpse of a picture of an English queen. There's an almost mischievous look on her face, hidden behind her facade of elegance. I recognize that it's the second of King Henry the Eighth's six wives. Her necklace of pearls and the letter B signifies that it's the brief queen, Anne Boleyn. She was the one who had earned me an hour-long lecture from my mother. I'd missed a question about her on a world history test, which later resulted in the confiscation of all of my science fiction books. Ever since I'd learned how to read I had a weird obsession with time and the idea of multiple universes. *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Frankenstein*, *1984*, among others all sucked me into science fiction and I became more and more intrigued. My mom, on the other hand, thinks "that weird timey, magic stuff" is strange and completely unhelpful for my future.

Something about Anne's smile in the painting made me think that under all the pearls and extravagance, she was hiding something she wouldn't dare let it out. Maybe I was hiding something too, but from myself. Ever since Dad died, Mom's been on edge.

My mind is especially drifts today and I can't seem to focus on anything. I look over to the tempting cafe, with croissants laid out and the smell of freshly brewed coffee. I drop my notebook and pen on the bench and wander over to look at the glass case of pastries, taking advantage of my mom's concentration on the tour guide. A few peaceful moments slip by before my thinking is interrupted.

"What do you think you're doing now? I've never met such an easily distracted ten-year-old!" she says, her eyes flashing with disgust.

"I'm going to use the restroom and get a drink of water," I explain meekly before walking off. My subconscious keeps me walking, no particular destination in mind. I pick up my pace and navigate through the maze of paintings until I run into a museum employee. I ask where the exit is and walk calmly out the door. It's a typical autumn day with a chilly breeze, but the emptiness in the air is enough to feel like a blizzard.

I saunter down the street until I see bright neon lettering – it's a fifties-style ice cream parlor. The rainbow ice cream man brought a grin to my face. My mom would never have let me eat ice cream, at least not without telling her the exact percentages of sugar, added sugar, and flavoring. I quickly walk to the cashier and order a quadruple scoop cone, taking it outside to relish the creamy deliciousness. I lick until a scoop falls off onto the street. Reflexes lead me to quickly blurt out *Sorry mom I'll clean it-!* before realizing: she's not there.

It hits me that I'm all alone. I've never been unsupervised before, in my whole life. In my stupor, I don't notice when I run right into someone. His height towers over me and his sunken in eyes look straight at me while he whips his head around.

"What are you doing? It is impolite and disrespectful to be so blind and rude to your elders. I'm standing here very clearly. Respect your elders."

Trying desperately to walk away as fast as I can and struggling to breath evenly at the same time, I arrive at an intersection. Not pausing, I swerve left, right into another stranger. *Why do I keep running into people!* This time around I'm hesitant to look at the stranger's reaction to my clumsiness, as the last one was nothing shy of terrifying. But this woman isn't yelling at me. I decided to introduce myself and apologize instead of running away this time around.

"Oh my gosh I'm so sorry. What's your- "

*"Not my head! Get away from me!"* she screams as if she's in a trance. "Who are you and why are you talking to me?"

Not my head? Get away from me?

"I'm Zoey Wang. What's your name?"

Her eyes dart around frantically. My own worries disappear and are replaced with the urge to make this lady feel welcomed. If she really is lost, then I totally know the feeling.

"Maybe I can help you find your way home? What's your name?"

"I am Anne Boleyn." she responds with a more friendly tone this time.

*The Anne Boleyn*, who just so happens to be an English queen? Second wife of London's very own King Henry the Eighth's six wives? The queen that caused me to get a lecture from my mom??

I stare at her necklace with its gleaming, ghostly white pearls. This was proof of the multiverses I'd always known existed. Awe-struck, I take her hand and pull her into the nearest department store.

We stroll into the store trying to fit in with everyone else before Anne careens excitedly towards a red dress, grabs it, and runs to the dressing room. She emerges from the room with a glow completely unrecognizable from before. The dress has geometric features with angular

sleeves and a sharp neckline. She looks empowered and is even strutting a confident smile on her face. That frazzled, confused woman has completely disappeared.

I notice that Anne leaves her B necklace on, as if she wanted to preserve some of her previous identity. We pay at the cashier with some of the emergency cash my mom gave me and exit with style.

“So how’d you get here?” I try to spark some conversation to solve my curiosity.

“...Everything from witchcraft to adultery to treason... All lies... I might be married to the bugger but I certainly am not invisibly shackled to him for life. And then the day came when he ordered that I be executed.”

My eyes bulge.

I suddenly catch sight of... something. Multiple somethings. I look closer and see that they’re blades, curved perfectly to fit someone’s neck. The knives stand at seven feet tall and a crowd of masked, robed executioners hold them. Their eyes dart around as fast as can be. Their beady, determined eyes stop right when they see Anne. Apparently the new outfit hasn’t fulfilled its job. These types of looks are always in the London magazines and stuff! Aren’t the streets of London supposed to be like that too?

Hold on. That’s when it dawned upon me. Anne Boleyn was publicly executed, and those people over there in the ugly black hoods were assigned to kill her. I lurch for her hand and run as fast as I can. As I’m dodging restaurant chairs, people, animals, the executioners have gotten closer. And then I start to see buildings collapse - straight to the floor. Chunks of diners and fancy repair shops are raining from the sky.

“HEY BOLEYN! YOU KNOW IT’S COMING! JUST GIVE UP ALREADY!” yells one of the executioners.

“ANNE! I know we’re running but why do I feel like *I’m* about to die despite being completely innocent!”

I hear her mutter quietly and turn my head to see her in a state of deep thought. She doesn’t respond.

Running has become increasingly difficult due to the amount of raining debris, until I turn a corner to the Tower of London. Nothing has happened to it, no damage at all. While buildings directly next to it have disappeared into a pile of rocks, it hasn’t moved. Observing the strange event puts me into contemplation. I stop running to see that the destroyed buildings have started to build back up again, this time with modern neon signs but also with horse stables right next door. Strange glittering vortexes appear and disappear everywhere. The insides of the vortexes spurt out even more executioners but also strange historical figures. I see a tall, wide man with a luminescent crown and jewels come out, but also maids in faded, torn uniforms. Robots come out of other vortexes that are strangely closer to the newer architecture.

I have now stopped running for more than five minutes and I see that there are no executioners or security guards coming after us anymore. There is now a crowd of futuristic robots and old fashioned royals gathered all around the Tower of London. What in multiverse nation is happening?

I look upwards at the Tower of London to see my mom walking along the drawbridge. She seems frantic, hair everywhere, dark circles rimming her eyes. I realize that I haven’t seen my mom like this since my Dad died. Anne looks over at me and snaps me out of it.

“Okay how about this Zo! I want to time travel but forward this time. Let’s just leave! We can go to the future! How cool are robots right?! Come with me! You can finally escape your mother! You’ll be able to explore all by yourself!”

I look over my shoulder while running in an attempt to see mom again. She was on a tour of the Tower of London. Independence and roaming the city had been my dream! Being able to get quadruple scoops of ice cream whenever I wanted, and hanging out with robots??! And yet... I sneak another glance at my mother. She looks so small, and scared.

Suddenly I find myself stopping and veering backwards towards the Tower. I can’t stop sprinting towards my mother’s direction. I reach the gates and climb over them. For once in my life my spider limbs are actually working with me! I survey my surroundings. Over the tall stone walls I climb up an impressive flight of stairs and look over to see a very frazzled Anne. Does that mean I made the right decision?

The black birds fly away as I reach my mother. She doesn’t see me so I come from behind and lightly tap her on the shoulder. After this entire journey I guess I thought it’d be like the movies. The Great Reunion between the crumbling mother-daughter relationship! I have no clue how to tell her that the disgrace of a daughter she raised ran away and came back. I grab my mom’s hand, and we run straight for a glittering vortex. We pop out from the vortex back home on the dusty gray couch. After having been away, I soak in the state of our home. Books and papers are strewn everywhere, covering every table and crevice. We have a mound of instant ramen flowing from our pantry, for our lunches of course. I’ve never realized just how much things changed without Dad.

An awkward silence fills the air. For once, she’s not yelling at me. The awkward emptiness has become unbearable so I grab two packs of Cup Noodles. I quickly boil some water

and try to make as much noise as possible with the pot.. I bring two measly styrofoam cups of MSG to the dinner table and slide one over to her. We both start slurping up to noodles quickly. When my cup is empty, I finally speak up.

“What just *happened?*”

She stares at the table. “We had a fight, and then we came home.”

But I didn’t remember going to the airport. I didn’t remember getting on a flight. My mind was full of multi-verses colliding, but like always, maybe she was right. I was the crazy one. Deflated, I dug my hands into my pockets, deep. My right hand brushes against something cold, and smooth.

I pull out a string of delicate white pearls, with a B charm in the center. The sound of it clanking against the table jolts my mother, and I, awake. For once, I confront the situation at hand and tell her the truth. What happened.

“We did have a fight mom,” I said. “But then, I met Anne Boleyn...”