

PROMPT #2: You open a book and a note with a letterhead falls out. At the top it says: If you are reading this, ...

[Untitled]

by **Drew Bradley**

Since I commute to school almost every day, it's easier for me to go to the Kings Library here in Sevierville than in Knoxville. While walking around searching for a book to help me with cooking, I said, "This semester's classes and procrastination might kill me." "Together with malnutrition." While wandering around, I decided to pick up "125 New Cooker Recipes for Dummies." A note with the letterhead "Write a Story" falls out when I open it, and it says at the top: "Complicated Feelings." I put the book down and read the note. It starts off with something you gradually lose—for me, it was the night I realized the moon doesn't think I'm the only one worth following. I thought I was the most important and special little girl in this world. That's because the moon would follow me no matter which way I turned until it was out of sight. Instead, she likes to be there for people who most desire in this world what they have lost. I put the note down for a second. "Dang, I simply wanted to learn how to prepare anything other than ramen and frozen pizza," I murmured. I put the note and book on the table and walk around the table to see if there are any more books that caught my attention. The note is caught by the wind of my walking and falls face down on the ground. I bend down to pick it up, and I notice another title saying, "His Voice Had Never Sounded So Cold." I continued reading, and it said my heart felt tight. My breaths were shallow and sharp. It felt just like diving into a cold river during the early summer. His painful rule was like a timid ghost hunting my thoughts. You are not permitted to come over uninvited. I knew deep down that it meant something I couldn't go back on. How could I not go over uninvited, though, right now? He just keeps going on about the idea of leaving and how I'd be better off without him. He is attempting to make a sorrowful promise that maybe, in the future, we could meet again. I felt trapped because all of this was over text. I had so many responsibilities that night, and I just neglected them to take a slight chance on finding him. I bet I could write something. Give me a spark of joy instead of writing lab reports or studying for my organic I exam. Should I continue to make them sad or try to leave an upbeat message for the next person? I don't see why I shouldn't. There are already so many happy endings. I paid 0.25 cents for a sheet of paper, and my title

was “Retail.” When I was younger, my mother worked in retail. I thought it was the best job ever to exist. I so badly wanted to work with her at the age of 12. I begged her for an entire day, and she agreed to take me next week. Short story: she never took me. I forgot about it. I turned 17 when I got a job in retail. For the first year and a half, I loved it. Really, I loved the people I worked with. Customers were a different story. One time I did my makeup and hair because I wanted to feel pretty that day. I asked a gentleman if there was anything I could help him with today. He looked me up and down and said, “You sure can, sweet thing.” I never dressed up after that. I worked there for another 2 more years. I realized that people are racist, sexist, and uncaring of other people. There were even times when I helped people search for coupons on their phones, and there were suggestive websites in their search results. Retail sucked the life and joy out of me. There weren’t as many nights spent listening to music and driving in peace, but instead worrying about my next exam. I guess it does take a strong, awesome person to work retail. I put my story on a different page number and continued the book search. I figured I’d take 125 New Cooker Recipes for Dummies with me since I can’t live just on ramen as a college student. I also grabbed a microbiology 1997 textbook out of curiosity to see if it was different from what I am learning in 2022 or could help me pass. Since times were easier back then. Right before checking out, I wanted to see if the two stories were still in the book. The first ones I found were there, and I double-checked my horrible handwriting and spelling. I flipped the paper to see if I could do another one when I noticed writing on the back of my note. It had “Overwhelmed” as its title. I watched in surprise while another sad story was being written by an unknown author. It wrote that I am the result of distance, fear, ignorance, and impatience. I feel as if I have dry knots within my throat, warm pink cheeks, and an appearance that seems uncertain. I come from a family known to be prone to complicated lies and quick tempers. Then there are the forced smiles and incomprehensible feelings. I stand stiff with red eyes. We’ve all got our sides, and they’re against mine. It’s a repeating story with the same lines, the same setting, and the same feeling. There’s never going to be a change. This feeling in my stomach will always remain the same. inconsistency, uncertainty, and unworthiness They never want to address an issue. There isn’t a point; there isn’t a way. But maybe this time it won’t be the same?