

BEYOND BEAUTIFUL

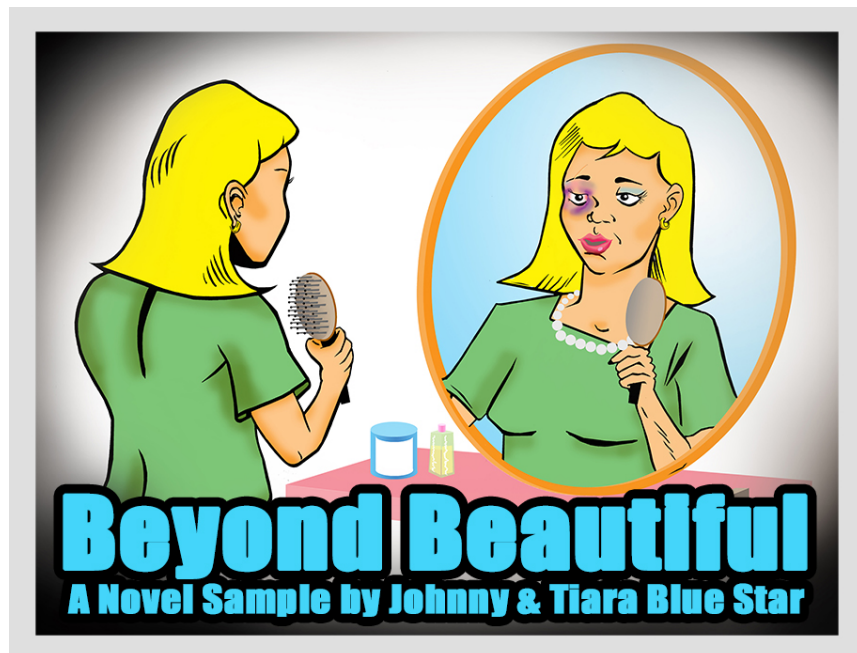
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A NOVEL SAMPLE WRITING CHAPTER

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CHAPTER 1

Belinda opened the door to the bathroom quietly.

The sacred shrine was intact. The mirror cried longingly for her attention. The golden cushion of the plush toilet seat summoned her for moments of contemplation between the long make-over that stood before her. Her cosmetic case overflowed with flowery goodness with the promise of imparting to delicate

features that exotic flair that drove men beyond her sumptuous figure to melt into her eyes.

“I am a good witch,” she said, lightly, spritzing the bathroom with a touch of lavender fragrance.

She sighed deeply, in awe of her beauty, her control, her mastery over her life.

As she powdered her face lightly, she felt a slight twinge of pain in her chest.

“It’s that damn improv class again. Whenever I leave, I am never myself. Never! I should give up acting and become a model. If only I was more shallow and stupid and could be content with being beyond beautiful,” she smiled.

It was quiet outside. The excitement of the moment was based on the promise of isolation so she could attend to her makeover without phone calls, without Aunt Betty’s daily tantrum, without Haj upsetting her silent makeover.

There would be no interruptions- as she progressed from beautiful to the next dimension.

By the time she was putting on her eyeliner, almost an hour later, she was unable to avoid the pain as unwanted memories cascaded through her mind.

“You ugly bitch,” her father said, literally pitching her across the floor so that the back of her head crashed into a broken, white cabinet across the room.

He was drunk again- and meaner than usual. She knew he could kill her- and her only hope was that she could keep her mouth shut and be extra polite.

“You eat us out of house and home. You are a ravenous, fat little butterball. I’m hungry as shit and your Mom made dinner special for me.”

She wanted to cry out, “I am not fat- you stupid jackass. Another one of your disgusting chicken pot pies is on the third shelf, waiting for you to cram it into your hungry, little mouth whenever you want to. And Mom didn’t make it for you. I took it out of a TV dinner and put it in the microwave- as I always do. Yes, I deserve to eat, too.”

But she couldn’t say that. Oh, no- that was far too much.

Death could be hovering near if she disclosed one tiny fragment of the family jewels. #1 Mom hated his guts and never made any food. #2 All food that was “made” was out of a can or out of a box. Mom counted it on his vulgar stupidity never to notice. It was all supposed to be ‘home-cooked’ for the crude, angry large man she called her husband. #3 She, Susie Belinda Johnson, had to give her stupid Mom all the credit for everything she did for him- the cleaning, the ironing, the cooking- even the phone calls.

Belinda’s Mom did nothing all day but make herself look beautiful and smiley for the arrogant, drunken truck driver she had the misfortune of marrying and whom she hated with a passion.

As a result, Susie, as Belinda was called back then, in certain ways, was far beyond her mere seven years.

The images from her childhood that had collided with her sacred ritual of self-preparation for the rigors of the day- were exceptionally vivid. Beyond vivid- and her chest pain was excruciating.

This could not be just the goddamn improv.

Once in awhile, she had pains in her chest, but no one had ever found out why. And she had veered away from any kind of heart specialist as had once been recommended by Doctor Milton, her primary physician. After all, it only happened a few times a year. But, nonetheless, what she was experiencing was crazy, a pounding and sharp pain she had never known before.

Still, she noticed that when she took her focus off these damn memories, the pain subsided. *It must be emotional*, she thought.

To exacerbate this problem, fate had dealt her a drama teacher who was in love with Method Acting, who pushed his student victims into paroxysms of the past in order to be able to ape the secret traumas of a playwright’s character.

And, in a way, all this ‘inner’ work was driving her crazy- as she, willy-nilly, purposely dislodged long forgotten episodes of early childhood, the wonton

memories of her first love affair during her Sophomore year in high school, the confrontations she always had when she went shopping on Rodeo Drive.

Why couldn't Davies be a nice external, Continental acting teacher? Why had to he take them through such a labyrinth of memory and pain just to play a goddamn part?

But now, the pain had finally subsided entirely and she was now concentrating on her evening. It was a holiday and Haj was going to escort her to the Forest Ball, a charity event put on by the Trollope Foundation, a non-profit that helped place troubled orphans from Asia in the loving arms of American parents. She had been helping out at the Foundation since she was twelve.

Joe Trollope, the head of the Foundation, had long ago replaced her truck driver moron of a father in her affections. And he had encouraged her in every area of her life. She secretly believed that in Joe's heart, she had replaced the stolen and then orphaned Malaysian child that had given birth to his fabulous undertaking. Haj, a boy from her acting class, was lucky to be taking her to the ball. Very lucky.

At least when I make myself up like this, I am not doing it for a drunken moron. At least, I go through all this effort for a purpose. Life is a stage. My stage. And I am Queen of the Forest, she thought.

She looked at herself in the mirror. The light violet hue dominated her features. Her lips were big and succulent as always, but somehow even more enticing, downplayed by paleness of the violet that lit up her eye shadow and provided a touch of shading to her high, prominent cheekbones.

She would provide her audience with just a slight taste of cleavage, a wisp of her ample curves now poured spectacularly into a lacey gown and the softness of her long, curly hair somewhat buried under an array of flowers and ribbons. It would be a spectacular evening.

It was now her third hour in the small bathroom- and she was becoming claustrophobic- but she knew she couldn't leave. It was the finishing touches that made her what she was.

She was in control and she braced herself for the final, almost microscopic detailing of image of the evening when the banging started.

"SUSIE, GET OUT OF THERE RIGHT NOW! I NEED TO USE THE BATHROOM."

"Use the one in your bedroom, Auntie."

"Stop calling me, Auntie. You know I hate it."

"Leave me alone, Betty. I need to get ready," Belinda said, thinking how bizarre it was to live with her mother and her mother's sister, two people whose demands could distract her at the drop of a penny.

"How long have you been in there?"

"I don't look at time that way?"

"Do you know how crazy that sounds? I need to use your bathroom. The sink's broken in my bathroom- as you undoubtedly know."

"Use the kitchen sink."

"It's inconvenient."

"At his moment, my leaving the bathroom is more than inconvenient. I am getting ready for a formal night out."

"I don't care, Belinda."

"But that's the way it is, Auntie. Live with it!"

Belinda heard her aunt stomping off and smiled in the mirror.

"Peace for a minute," she said out loud.

Despite her occasional tantrums and her perennial mothering, Belinda liked her Aunt, who was a truly decent person and sincerely wanted to help her.

Betty had lost her husband several years ago and drank too much, but, still, she had not lost control over her essential mission in life- to help her now motherless and fatherless niece- make it to adulthood without personal catastrophe.

And just as Belinda had started to scrutinize any slight misplaced hairs in her eyebrows and was turning to inspect the inside of her nose, just in case- the ringing began....

Her father hated her so what was he doing in her room at night?

Every evening he would come in, about a half an hour after she was supposed to sleep- and stare at her. He never read her stories or tucked her into bed. But, still, he would come into her room.

Occasionally, the phone would ring or he could hear his mother's voice calling him for some last minute chore- and then he would quickly slip out of the room.

He never did anything to her, never even came near her- just stopped and stared.

Once he was doing that- staring and staring- as she fervently pretended to be asleep- and the phone began to ring downstairs. There were suddenly rapid footsteps up the stairs- and as he quickly went to leave- he collided with his wife at the door.

Belinda never would forget the strange look on her mother's face. Why? Why?

But now, putting aside the strangeness a ringing phone often summoned, her own phone- the 'now' phone- the phone of the thankfully spectacular present- was ringing off the hook. It was probably Haj, wondering if she was ready.

And was she ever ready? Oh, yes, fiercely contemplating the wonderful night ahead.

