*Cora*

There is always that one moment a person will never forget. Even though it’s been 5 years, the scene flashes into my mind every day, like a photograph I cannot destroy.

It started off as a normal day; I gently awakened Becca and got her ready for school. She could never wake at the sound of an alarm like me, or it would take hours to calm her down. See, my sister was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and mental retardation; at least that’s what my parents say. They also say that I have ADHD and if anyone asks I am suppose to say that I’m hyper all the time and can’t pay attention to anything. Truth is I am very quiet, and I happen to pay attention to everything.

After studying the genre of young adult, realistic fiction, one novel used as a main influence was *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*. In the novel, autism dominates the protagonist’s way of life. In my story, the protagonist doesn’t have any disabilities of her own, yet we can see how it plays a heavy influence on her life. Not only does she have to act as a parent to her younger sister at such a young age, by taking care of her and dealing with her tantrums, but must pretend she has ADHD as well, even though she does not understand why.

Creates tension/mystery about what is going on. After reviewing the surveys, the most popular genre that young adults chose was mystery. Even though this story does not follow the mystery genre, I have included elements such as suspense, tension, and mysterious events that will appeal to the audience.

After brushing Becca’s teeth, I combed her long, poker straight auburn hair and tied it into a ponytail with her favorite pink scrunchie. Then, I began to make her bed while Becca rummaged through her big brown dresser.

“Im wearing this today Cora,” Becca said as I pulled back her pink comforter, stained with countless outlines of pee. She liked picking out her own outfits.

“Becca those are pajamas.”

She stared at me, frozen, as my implication that pajamas can’t be worn to school began registering in her head. She started to shake and turn red in the face. Just because I was here, she didn’t scream, she rarely screamed when I was around, but I wanted to avoid the tears.

“I think you will look really pretty in them.”

She smiled. I helped her out of the yellow pj’s she had on and got her into the blue flannels with stars that she picked out. She then went downstairs to wait for the bus. I was not going to school that day. For homework, I was supposed to look up stuff about Ben Franklin on the internet, only we didn’t have a computer. I really didn’t feel like hearing my teacher yell at me again for not doing homework.

I didn’t like missing school-school meant breakfast and lunch. After going back to sleep for a few hours, I was awoken by loud voices from downstairs. Daddy and Mommy were up. As I walked down the creaking, wooden staircase I saw my Daddy and brother arguing in the living room. My mom was across from them, in the kitchen washing her clothes in the sink, a lit cigarette hanging from her mouth. I wasn’t alarmed; Daddy and Wilson bickered all the time.

We get a clear sense of the narrator and her lifestyle at this point. She is dealing with problems that many young adults face, and even if they can’t necessarily relate to her situation, they understand that the world works in cruel ways and can appreciate their own life a little more. It is obvious that Cora is living in poverty, which so many young adults must suffer through as well. Furthermore, she is surrounded by a dysfunctional family. Children and young adults are either dealing with their parents constantly fight like Cora, or become uneasy to hear the occasional argument. In this story, her parents and older brother fight so much that it is a normal, everyday occurrence for Cora. At this point the reader realizes the parents are not doing their job in taking care of their kids. Even though Cora is so young, she must carry the burden of living a disturbing lifestyle and do everything for her little sister who cannot take care of herself.

“What do you mean it’s all gone?” screamed Daddy.

“It was a long night, I couldn’t sleep, I’m sorry Dad I needed it.” Replied my brother.

I walked past them, unnoticed, and went into the kitchen with Mommy. As I passed my brother I looked into his eyes and noticed how much he changed in the past year. He used to be tall, handsome, with curly dark brown hair. Now, it scared me that I was looking at the same person. He didn’t even look human-like he traded skin with one of my plastic dolls. His face was sunken in at the cheeks and eyes. His hair was mangled and knotted, you couldn’t see the curls anymore. And worst of all he hunched in his back, making him look way beyond his years. I use to think he looked like Orlando Bloom, now he looked like a walking corpse. I sat at the round, wooden table in the corner as they continued to argue. Mommy was listening to intently to notice me sitting there.

“You know I don’t get the checks till the 1st Damit!”

“I’ll figure out something Dad, I promise.”

“You got one hour or you’re out of here!”

My brother bolted out of the house with his hunch back. I knew he wouldn’t be back in an hour, but he would come back, him, my mother and father would go into the basement, and everything would be calm-for about an hour. Then more chaos, more basement time, brief interludes of tranquility, and lots and lots of cigarette smoking. I could never take a breath of fresh air in this house. My father came into the kitchen with us.

Going back to my genre study, another text I used as a resource is *Crank*. Through this argument, the reader can tell something is going on here that is most likely drug related. Cora doesn’t understand the extremity of the situation; however, she is not blind to the fact that something terrible happens when they go into the basement. This is also adding more tension to the novel, while Cora is a good, quiet, little girl, she must suffer from her parents addiction. In *Crank* the protagonist starts off as a good girl and becomes addicted to drugs when she gets with her first boyfriend, who influences her to do them. While Cora is far too young to suffer from the same situation, drugs are already having a major impact on her life. This also creates suspense, a mysterious element that young adult readers want to get from a novel. The reader will question the outcome of her character; will she remain this innocent girl, or fall under the influence of drugs due to her family’s behavior? Additionally, the reader is now starting to understand the reasoning behind Cora’s so called ADHD. The parents are purely supporting their drug habit through the disability checks the government gives them that is supposed to be for the children.

“I told that jackass you were gonna be mad.” My mother said as she put out her cigarette.

“Fuckin kid”

“Ya well wait till the checks come he aint gettin nothin”

I spotted a box of cheerios on top of the fridge. I stood on top of the chair I was just sitting on to get them, poured a bowl, and grabbed a spoon from the drawer. I didn’t even bother looking for milk.

My father finally noticed me as I clinked my spoon against the glass bowl.

“And why aren’t you in school?” He demanded.

“I um I didn’t feel good.” I lied.

“I didn’t feel goodddd!” My mom micked in a high-pitched, baby toned voice. Yes that was how I talked, but give me a break I am only 12. She did a pretty accurate imitation I’ll give it to her, but she’s missing the slight raspiness in my voice.

“Bull” my mother continued. “She’s always trying to get out of things. Like yesterday, she didn’t even wanna give Becca a bath. Lazy Bitch!”

“Honey” my father continued, but was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. “Get that, I’m not here.” My father instructed my Mom.

“Hello!” my mommy didn’t talk, she yelled. She yelled every word that came out of her mouth. Some days she talked for so long and so loud that I’d go to bed with a pounding headache. I wondered how she told secrets.

“Hello, this is Mrs. Donaldson from Hazle Elementary. I have called to talk about your daughter Rebecca.”

“AYE, What she do now?”

“We would like to set up a meeting with you and your husband to talk about your daughter.”

“You think we have time to come to her school? We are very busy; if you can’t control her then I don’t know what to tell ya! God with this school already, ya make it required for Becca to go to school, I mean she can’t learn anything anyway she’s fricken retarted, like I can’t be there holding her down. Send her home if she’s outta control!”

“We are very concerned with her well-being, and her behavior is becoming far worse than problematic.”

“Well-being! You saying I don’t take care of my daughter?”

“Mam, do you know how your daughter arrived at school today?”

“No my daughter puts her on the bus. I was sleeping, I gotta house to take care of all day, cleaning, and this and that, I need some sleep you know.”

“Well first of all she is wearing pajamas. Are you aware that we have dress code?”

“You think I’m rich? How about yous give me proper clothes for her then.”

“And today at lunch, Becca comes to the cafeteria with a paper grocery bag. Mam she pulled out a bag of frozen fries and a can of corn.”

“Ohhh well we like to let Becca pick out her own foods. She is so picky with everything.”

“Mam is there any day, any time, I can set up a meeting with you and your husband?”

“Ohh I don’t think so, he don’t like school and I’m up to my neck in work I have to do. I’ll let you know when were available.”

She hung the corded phone back on the receiver, took it back off, and let it hang from the table. That way, if anyone called they would get a busy signal. Mommy always did this when the school called. I finished my Cheerios and put the empty bowl and spoon into the rusty sink.

In this section, the notion of the dysfunctional family is reinforced. The parents do not even want to take the time to go to their daughter’s school to discuss a behavioral plan. This is true for so many young adults; many parents are not concerned with their children’s education and either don’t care or possess the knowledge the help their kids with homework, attend open house, or make sure they are attending school. They clearly use the child for her disability check, and don’t want to take responsibility in taking care of her, so pass on the duty to Cora.

A mysterious element that the reader will be wondering is if the Mom did drugs while she was pregnant. This is also another horrible circumstance many Young adults face. So many children are born “messed up” because of the mother using drugs or alcohol during her pregnancy. It is not their fault, but must suffer for the rest of their life because of their mother’s poor choice.

Then, I heard a knocking at the door. I sprinted out of the kitchen, across the living room, and opened the door.

“Aunt Michelle!” I screamed and jumped into her arms. I loved when Aunt Michelle came to visit. My parents and siblings, except for Becca of course, would turn into actors and completely change their character. The best part was the absence of cuss words and not arguing over basement activity.

“Hey sis.” Daddy said as he escorted my Aunt into the kitchen.

“Hows everything goin’ Wilson?”

“Ah this damn pain in my back wont go away. I gotta go to the doctor for a different medication. They got me on this stuff, ya, I take it and the pain doesn’t go away at all, not even a little!”

“He’s always complainin’ Michelle.” Mommy butted in. “Ohh you dyed your hair, it looks so pretty! Ya, I gota do mine too look at this mop on my head haha…”

The three of them sat at the kitchen table, smoked cigarettes, and talked about people in the family for a little while. I sat with them too. I was daydreaming about food and only caught snipits of the conversation.

“Bevs havin’ a yard sale tomorrow.”

“When’s Jason gettin’ out?”

“Where’s little Wilson?” My Aunt asked, drawing my attention back. “I thought he was staying here again.”

“He is, he left, I don’t know where he went.” Daddy answered.

“Well, would you mind if I took Kaitlyn for a few hours? I wanna go to the movies and I need a buddy.” She smiled at me.

Before Daddy or Mommy could answer I had already jumped up from my chair, heart racing, not able to control myself. I held my breath and waited for their answer.

“I don’t know she skipped school today.” Mommy said even more loudly then usual while giving me a stern look. She never punished me before for skipping.

“Oh, she can go, have fun honey.” Daddy said.

“Yes!” I exclaimed. I ran upstairs to change into my jeans and put on my sketchers. I could hear Mommy complaining as I left.

“Great, now I have to get Becca off the bus!”

I ran back downstairs, nearly tripping over my untied laces, and opened the front door. “Come on Aunt Michelle!” I hollered to the kitchen. She grabbed my hand and led me to her car.

The trip to the movies was unlike anything I’ve ever experienced before. When I stepped into the theater I was in awe the entire time. The bright lights, happy faces, people chatting to one another about the movie they had seen, it was like stepping into an actual happy movie. Aunt Michelle then bought two tickets to see “The Smurfs.”

“Cora, you wana get some popcorn?”

“Okay!”

She bought us two sodas and popcorn to split. I was watching the workers behind the counter. It would be so much fun to work here, they get to see this all the time.

“How old do you have to be to work here?” I asked my Aunt.

“I don’t know, probably 16, why you want to work here someday?”

“Ya!”

My Aunt took my hand and led me to the room where we would watch “The Smurfs.” Before the movie started, we chatted the entire time. I loved talking to Aunt Michelle, she listened to everything I said, and actually valued what I had to say. I asked her so many questions about what was going on in her life. She said her daughter moved away to college and she was feeling lonely in the house. College, I wished I would go someday.

Once the movie started I didn’t make a peep. It was so funny, the little blue Smurfs. It was so much fun, laughing along with the rest of the crowd while eating the delicious popcorn. I finished it so fast, that Aunt Michelle went to buy us another.

When I arrived back at my house it was already dark. Aunt Michelle opened the car door for me, held my hand, and led me to the front porch. Before she turned to leave she hugged me, kissed me on the cheek, and gave me that sad look she always did when she had to bring me home. She shouldn’t have felt so sad, I had the best day of my life.

“Thank you Aunt Michelle, so much!”

“You’re welcome honey. I am going to the mall next week to buy some clothes for the summer. Would you like to come with me and get some summer clothes for yourself?”

“Yes! What day next week so I can tell Daddy?”

“I’ll call the house and let you know, probably Monday or Tuesday.”

“Okay!”

Before leaving, she handed me a 5 dollar bill.

“Don’t let your Mom or Dad see that,” she said with a wink.

“Okay.” But I already knew better.

Based on the surveys, most of the young adults were really into video games and sports. By reading this story, they experience a girl their age that does not possess the luxury of computers or video game systems. This is a girl who has parents that never even took her to the movies. Furthermore, a simple trip to the movies was so much fun for her that she declares it was the best day of her life. This is true for so many young adults living in poverty, or have parents who neglect them. They can have a direct connection to Cora’s situation. Even young adults who don’t suffer from this, and can enjoy luxuries such as video games, can read this story and appreciate the kids who are on the other side. Maybe they will learn to not be so obsessed with material items and appreciate the things they do have, because some people suffer from much worse. Cora doesn’t have the freedom to be a kid, she deals with responsibilities that she shouldn’t have too.

I opened the front door and walked into a puff of smoke. Mommy, Daddy, and Wilson were sitting on the couch, watching the little TV in the corner.

“Hey honey, did you have fun?” My Dad asked me in a dazed, monotone voice.

“Yes! Daddy it was so much-”

“Stop screaming!” My mother said in voice much louder than mine was. “Tell us about it later, your sister has been upstairs crying for hours, she thought you weren’t coming back. Why should you go out and have fun while Becca’s upstairs alone. Go up there now and calm her down.”

I ran upstairs to find Becca already asleep. She was still wearing the blue flannels that she put on this morning. I was planning on giving her a bath, but I knew better than to wake her. Instead, I crawled into bed next to her, so if she woke she would know I was here. I closed my eyes, and thought about my wonderful day, until I drifted off to sleep.

What seemed like a minute later, I jolted out of bed, trying to catch my breath. Becca was curled up on the bed, crying and shaking all over. I was scared too, but I had to be brave for the both of us.

“Come on Becca we have to get out of here!”

The room was filled with smoke, and not the normal cigarette smoke I am used too. This was a thick, dark smoke that made me choke. I knew the house was on fire. I grabbed Becca by the arm and ran for the door and down the stairs. She was screaming bloody murder the entire time. When I landed at the foot of the stairs, I saw the picture that would be engrained in my mind forever. Daddy was face down on the floor, shaking violently. Mommy was passed out, a sharp needle penetrated into her arm, hanging there, with blood slowly dripping down the edges. And there was my brother, red eyes wide open, but not really looking at anything. He sat in the corner, expressionless, with those wild eyes. Those eyes that would haunt me forever. I wanted to help them, but Becca was still screaming and I was becoming dizzy with lack of oxygen. I made the decision to run to the door, still holding onto Becca for dear life.

Now I sit here at the shelter, wondering if I will ever see my parents again. After me and Becca got out of the house, the firemen arrived moments later, and saved my parents and brother. Me and my sister were immediately taken by the police, and they were carried into an ambulance. I was so scared, I prayed to God they would be okay, and they were. But me and my sister are not allowed to go back to them, at least not for a while. Mommy was allowed to talk to us for a few minutes on the phone, she promised us that her and Daddy were getting help and they would be “clean,” and before I knew it we would be back home. I didn’t fully understand what she meant, but I knew it had to deal with that horrifying needle sticking out of her arm.

My Aunt came to see me at the police station too. She asked me if I wanted to come live with her. When she asked me this, I felt it was too good to be true, and it was. I couldn’t leave Becca, she would die without me, and Aunt Michelle said she could not handle Becca. She still promised to come see me, wherever I might end up, and that is what keeps me happy. The police said they are looking for a foster home for us to go too, until my parents get “clean.” I hope we stay with nice people. But most of all, I wish I get to go the movies again with Aunt Michelle again. Even if I don’t I will continue to look out for Becca and protect her from any harm, no matter what happens.

What she thought was the best day of her life, turned into a nightmare that she will never forget. I decided the ending should have suspense and tension, adding more elements of the mystery genre. The reader will wonder what will happen to Cora. “Will she go into a nice foster home, or the kind that only takes kids for money?” “Will she get to see her Aunt?” “Will she ever end up back at that house?” “Will her parents really clean up their addiction?” Since this is a short story, the tale ends here, so the question of her well-being will up for debate amongst the readers. Furthermore, I did not want to end with the traditional, Cinderella, happy ending, because no Young Adults life happens that way. Even when we have a happy day, there is always tragedy waiting around the corner. It is up to the person to make their own happy ending, by taking life’s punches and dealing with it.

Similar to *Crank*, readers will question if Cora will follow the same path as her parents and brother. Many might think she will because of her horrible condition, but I do not interpret it that way. Cora sacrificed a life of comfort and luxury that she could have had from her Aunt so that she could remain with her little sister. This demonstrates selflessness and incredible courage. No matter how bad she wished she could live with her Aunt, she never even considered putting herself before her sister. Also, she handles tragedy very well; she is taking life’s miseries and still seeing hope while remaining strong for her sister. I imagine a life for Cora getting better, somehow.

I want readers to be able to read this story and understand the life of someone in Cora’s condition. I want them to take something away from reading this, whether it’s more appreciation for their own life, or choosing not to bully someone because they wear second hand clothes or don’t own the latest technology, they should feel some kind of impact from reading this. Young adults are constantly suffering from problems and they can read this and realize their not the only one out there dealing with a tough situation. By reading one so extreme, they will view their problem as being much less significant, and learn to deal with it in way that does not involve drugs or alcohol as an escape. Hopefully, they will learn that drugs only lead to a path of destruction, and when faced with pressure, make the right decision. The main thing I hope readers get out of this is to not only refrain from bullying, but look out for victims of bullying as well. They should treat their peers with kindness and stop judging people on the basis of material items.