**FIRST ASSIGNMENT: write your story statement.**

Survive a conflicted life as a transgender person in a hyper-masculine world

**SECOND ASSIGNMENT: sketch the antagonist or antagonistic force in your story.**

His father’s toxic masculinity, the demands of Catholicism, pervasive homophobia and society’s embrace of traditional male identity are existential threats to John Lenihan and the family he creates.

Brought up in Liverpool by a tough Irish father and a stoic English mother,

John’s life is a Gordian Knot he cannot untie. He will live the tangled life of a manual worker who cannot reveal that he is transgender. In early and mid-century New York, men like him endured shame and ridicule which forced them into isolation and invisibility.

John marries, has two daughters and will go on to have several grandchildren, all of whom are deeply affected by the way he deals with his conflicted nature. His hyper-masculine bullying, anger and secret-keeping do long-term damage to his family, even sixty-years later.

His children’s lives are marred by alcoholism and depression, and his grandchildren are brought up by the damaged, controlling daughters. Skip two generations: a gay sixteen year old boy attempts to hang himself after being bullied on social media because of his sexuality.

**THIRD ASSIGNMENT**: create a breakout title (list several options, not more than three, and revisit to edit as needed).

The Knot Makers

Life is a Strange Son

John, In Between

**FOURTH ASSIGNMENT Comparables**

**FIFTH ASSIGNMENT**:  Hook, Log Line

Dominated by a tough Irish Catholic father, a young man assumes a hyper-masculine persona to mask his transgenderism, and seeks redemption after years of anger and secrecy which still reverberate through generations of Lenihans.

**SIXTH ASSIGNMENT**: Primary inner conflict your protagonist will have; secondary conflict involving the social environment.

**Primary Conflict:**

John knows from childhood on that his gender identity is at odds with his physical body.

He struggles to hide this aspect from his father, a merchant seaman, who wants his first son to ‘toughen up’ and regularly challenges five-year old John to arm wrestle at the kitchen table. John can’t or won’t refuse, and prefers bruises to the humiliation of turning his father down. Even if he is in pain afterwards, John will bear it, avoiding his father’s taunts, *sissy, Mama’s boy, weakling.*

John’s inner conflict is fueled by fear and shame over his sexuality

and is triggered by questions about his masculinity, Catholic guilt,

pressure to fulfill male expectations: playing sports, marriage, children,

and a successful career; his gender questioning great-grandson faces the same pressures sixty years later.

**Secondary Conflict:**

John’s temper flares when he discovers that his eight year old daughter has lice in her curly blonde hair. He bullies her into submission and chops off random clumps of yellow frizz. He doesn’t, or does, remember conflicts with his father who mocked his beautiful black curls as a child, calling him a little girl. Having power over a child’s hair is like having power over a child’s entire life.

The social environment is a family scene in a run-down railroad-flat in Manhattan full of tension and disappointment. Conflict is triggered when his authority is challenged and when things are beyond his control.

The nature of the conflict is John’s insistence on perfection, in himself and his children; he wants to be admired for his good looks and the presentation of his children. This obsession with appearance will be inherited by his two daughters.

John’s family is hostage to his dominance, but his relationships with co-workers and neighbors are cordial and taciturn.

**SEVENTH ASSIGNMENT sketch out your setting in detail.**

1. **Liverpool 1900-1920.**

Hundreds of ships are docked at Liverpool piers and loaded with goods and passengers, headed for New York, France or other international ports. The Mersey River is stained with oil and ship waste, and the omnipresent coal smoke and haze add to the city’s maritime atmosphere. The sound of horse-carts, ship horns and thousands of seamen are omnipresent in a city in the midst of modernization. The Liver Building, dominates the port-scape, named in honor of the mythological Liver bird, and on its roof two huge statues of the bird loom over the city.

Liverpool is filled with seamen, laborers, poor Irish families, some of whom are famine survivors, and generally live in municipal housing close to the water. Children play in alleyways with uneven streets.

Stately Georgian homes where the well-off live, line streets farther from the docks, clearly delineating the classes. Wealthier women wear upscale dresses and coats, and large hats with feathers and flowers.

The city is a hot-bed of strikes and riots, with police and 100,000 transport union representatives at war in the streets. Turbulence is routine. The sinking of the Titanic casts a pall over the city where the White Star line is headquartered.

The Sailors Home on Canning Street is an ornate place seamen can stay in relatively safety between voyages, away from prostitutes and thieves. Gert Berwick, Patrick’s unwilling future wife, works at the front desk, assisting sailors with wages and timetables. Pat, Gert and their children live close to the docks, and Pat is often at sea, stoking coal in huge merchant ships.

Charitable donations fund the center, where sailors are given access to education and religious instruction. It’s not a particularly comfortable place with below-par food, teeming with rough tattooed sailors and lascars.

Gert and Pat go to a small rented room to have sex for the first time, a comical and quick session, leading to pregnancy, a forced marriage, and an uncomfortable honeymoon in Southport. There is a succession of unplanned children.

She is fortunate to stay with a kind spinster who lives in a very comfortable, well-appointed house until Pat is able to find her suitable housing in Eldon Grove, a new tolerable municipal housing community which grows crowded with three children and a sister-in-law.

During WW 1 Liverpool is the center of weapons production with women doing traditional male jobs in factories. Streets are filled with men signing up for service, bright posters urging mothers and wives to let their loved ones go to war. The atmosphere is both circus-like and somber.

The Spanish flu ravages the city, where beds and graveyards are in short supply, and troop ships are incubators for disease. People drop dead within hours and are carried out on stretchers to join unburied piles of the dead. Gert takes the children to Southport before the pandemic is in full force; the gulls are loud, ladies in bathing costumes sit in the sand, and Gert is uncomfortable in matronly clothes.

The family crosses the ocean to America on a large ship with modest accommodations. It is far better than the famine ships and turn- of- the- century immigrant vessels, but far from first or second class.

**Cinematic aspects:** Liverpool docks **,** Interior of ships/ furnace room**,** sailors home din,

strike chaos, landscapes/buildings, Eldon Grove Housing, Titanic/Lusitania (headlines?) WW1 Recruitment posters/crowds, Spanish flu dying in streets/ masks/ health ads

**Character Visuals:**

**Gert Berwick Lenihan:** Plump English teenager, slightly prudish, glasses, haughty determination

Uncomfortable Bride in 1910 fashion, Grows matronly with children/ Pat absences, Old in NY

**Patrick Lenihan** Short, feisty dark-haired sailor, smoker, eighteen years old, swaggering, Celtic Cross tattoo**,** Wear and tear from stoking/ hard living**,** Royal Navy, uniforms, beating/scars from officers**,** Limping, blind in one eye, hard of hearing**,** Old in New York

**Nell O’Brien (sister in law)** Pale, red-haired Irish girl, timid**,** in NY More independent and modern

**Young John** Dark-eyed, curly black (longish) hair child, steely and quiet

**\**

**2. Manhattan 1920-1950**

Ten years ago, John emigrated from Liverpool and spends his teenage years in his parents’ cramped apartment with a constant increase in new siblings. He moves to a boarding house close to Greenwich Village where he and a group of younger men meet for drinks and mock the ‘fairies’ and homosexuals who reside there.

He marries Maureen and starts a family in Chelsea on the lower West Side of Manhattan.

Apartments and modest brownstones are predominant in the neighborhood; the family lives in a cramped railroad flat with a hallway bathroom and an iron bathtub in the kitchen. The building is filled with noisy, immigrant families. Two daughters live there from birth until marriage, forced to sleep in the same bed for years, ashamed of their surroundings. It is a typical New York City neighborhood where people gather on stoops, talking or fighting late into the night. There is a Catholic School and Church a few blocks over where both sisters go and stay out till dinnertime, sneaking cigarettes and candy.

John Lenihan dampens the mood when he comes home from work in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and tension often fills the flat. The girls have less and less privacy as they grow up, adding to the claustrophobic atmosphere of home.

Most people don’t own cars and use the subway which is close by and easy to navigate. Children are vulnerable, some murdered, molested or simply disappeared, which puts parents on edge, but also provides some level of intrigue for imaginative children.

The Depression is a black cloud over the city, with apple lines and tents in Central Park. Movies help people escape the gloom. During WW2, lights are dimmed at night, food is scarce, new clothes are rare. John Lenihan has a steady job so there is a sense of security.

Memories are made at the Horn and Hardart Automat, Dodgers field, Central Park and Madison Square Garden, where boxing matches are major events, St. Patrick’s Day and the Macy’s parade. With no televisions, the radio suffices as entertainment through the Depression and War. Both girls find husbands and like so many people, are able to establish their own lives in the suburbs.

John’s father invites him to take a trip to England and Ireland on a ship which brings back fading memories. They stay in a hotel and an Irish inn which become too close for comfort and spend time in smoky sentimental pubs.

**Cinematic Aspects:** Manhattan railroad flat, shared bathroom**,** Neighborhood, streets, subway,Greenwich Village,Automat, stadium, Navy Yard,

WW 2 clothes, movie theaters, girls products: make-up, stockings, hairdos, England and Ireland visit Liverpool, Dublin, Cork

**John Lenihan** Looks like Tyrone Power well/dressed, handsome, Repressed and overt anger**,** Manual work in Navy Yard, Clothes experiments, Aging in late 40’s-50’s

**Maureen Kelly (girlfriend/wife)** Tiny, cute, Becomes dowdy –house dresses, early grey hair

**Constance (daughter)** Dark-hair, regal looking, Air of maturity**,** Attractive adult & mother conservative dress, tasteful

**Lorraine (daughter)** Wild, blonde curly hair,Chubby,Pouty and mischievous, Make-do cosmetics fashion**,** Pretty adult, perfect hair, makeup, dresses, tan, thinner, feminine

**3. Long Island 1960-1990**

Suffolk County Long Island is where thousands of families establish roots after leaving New York. It is filled with affordable tract housing, with lawns and small back yards, new schools and a totally different atmosphere from the city. John’s daughters, Constance and Lorraine move fairly close to each other, and have daughters of their own. Women learn to drive or depend on their husbands who commute to the city; shopping for groceries at the A&P is a major undertaking.

Lorraine’s house is immaculate, so unlike her childhood apartment. A neat lawn, clean clothes on the line, tidy children, a pretty hairdo, a belted dress and make up give her a sense of security.

But the small house with 1960s appliances and cheery wallpaper becomes a prison of sorts. Imagined slights from neighbors, imagined dangers, constant assessments of the lawn, obsessive over-protectiveness and phobias make her life, and by extension her daughter Julie’s, a tense and scary existence.

The living room walls are painted federal gold, and colonial furniture fills the house; nothing is out of place. Checkered kitchen curtains with valances, vigorously-vacuumed carpets, beds which cannot be sat upon, crucifixes and Infant of Prague statues, pictures of the Blessed Mother advertise an obsession with cleaning and piety, more likely superstition.

Lorraine sees her daughter as an ambassador of perfection, sent into the world as proof of exemplary mothering. From the the green tweed living room chair, Lorraine sits on the floor between her legs and corrals Julie’s hair into an uncomfortable, tight ponytail wrapped in a torn piece of sheet. Julie retreats nightly to her room, folds down her perfect bedspread, finds it painful to lie flat on the pillow and watches lights and shadows on the ceiling, and on her dresser are a small jewelry box, a flow-in-the dark Mary and her blue leather diary.

**Cinematic Aspects:** Small cookie-cutter house, green lawn, neat bushes,1960’s decorations wallpaper, appliances, corded phone**,** Bikes and toys

LI Expressway, Early 60’s cars & TVs, commuter trains

Unromanticized version of time period,Immaculate house, girl’s typical bedroom

John’s House: Cape Cod, backyard, surrounding woods

**Character Visuals:**

**Julie Harrington:** Little girl with ponytail, Bordering on pretty-teenager

**Bill Harrington:** Average fatherMild demeanor

**Bonnie Callahan (Julie’s cousin, Constance’s daughter)** Breck girl, blonde hair, dimples

Sassy 60’s pre-teen

**4. Boy’s Bedroom in Suburban House 2022**

**Julie Harrington**

**(Lorraine’s daughter, Sean’s mother)** Attractivemiddle-aged, Retired professional, Casual

**Sean**

**(Julie’s son, John’s great-grandson)** 12 year old: Tall, gangly, Typical teenage boy energy, withdrawn

**Cinematic Visuals:** Post-1990 house, typical boys bedroom retro music posters, Laptop, cell phone and charger, closet, hospital