

Full Circle



2023 Huron High School Literary Magazine

Full Circle is a publication of Huron High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Writing pieces printed in this magazine are selected from submissions to the River Rat Writing Prize. Authors retain all rights to their own work.

The River Rat Writing Prize and The Mischief Arts Prize seek to provide a creative outlet and authentic audiences for students. We believe that the student work produced at Huron High School deserves to be celebrated within our school community and with the community at large. Winners receive public acknowledgement and financial reward for their inspiring work. We encourage all students to enter the competition.

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Thank yous:

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Cover image: Cornucopia by Caitlin Fong

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* winners of River Rat Writing Prize and Mischief Arts Prize

I told my mom everything. I told her about teachers I loved and loathed. I told her about my self-made rhyme for memorizing my multiplication tables. I told her about secrets I pinky-promised my friends I would never tell. I even told her about my hallway crush to whom I wrote grammatically-damaged love letters. But there was one thing I did not tell her.

As a diagnosed visual, hyper-organized, type-A girl, from the ripe old age of two, I organized my memories into mentally-labeled buckets. There were yellow buckets for happiness, like when my elementary school principal brandished the plastic froufrou pen to me for having the best score in French that semester – a feat even more valuable as unlike my Montreal born-and-raised peers, I had no French-speaking family members. There were blue buckets for sadness, like when my rhyme scheme for my times tables failed and landed me a dreadful B. There were green buckets for jealousy, like when I caught my hallway crush glancing towards my best friend.

But there was one bucket I was never able to name. It held experiences that I was unable to categorize, thus never expressed in words. After all, how could I tell a story I could not understand? So that bucket was aimlessly flagged as “Untitled.” That bucket, I never shared – not even with Mom.

As I spent more and more time in Montreal, the grey Untitled bucket began to fill with those uncategorized experiences. I felt grey when no one in my school looked like me or had a last name like mine – a one syllable last name, lacking fancy vowel accents or elegant connotations. I felt grey when my friends pinched their nose instinctively after I opened my thermos of dumplings. I felt grey when my Chinese conversations with my mom were reduced to chants of “ching chong.” I felt

grey when my fifth grade teacher – whom I loved so much – used that expression, “C’est tellement chinois,” “It’s so Chinese,” when she meant “It’s so stupid.” I felt grey when I saw the characters in comic books on the school bookshelf pull back their eyes when describing Chinese people. I felt grey when a second grader, a whole foot shorter than I, disgustingly muttered “Chinoise,” and made me feel one foot shorter. I felt grey – uncomfortable, terribly different, inferior – and I did not know why. Maybe it was because I was sensitive. Maybe it was because I was an overthinker. Or maybe it was just me. So from then on, the grey bucket was labeled “My Problem.”

Though I never talked about this growing feeling, suppressed into the depths of my being, its weight began to reflect itself in my actions. When looking in mirrors, I would tug my eyes wider with my thumb and index finger.

“That’s what I wished I looked like,” I would think to myself, as I enviously looked back at the reflected girl, stretching her eyelids prettily far over her eyebrows.

I also ordered my mom to stop making dumplings.

“I can pack roast duck tomorrow,” she offered.

“No, absolutely not,” I refuted.

“Wonton soup?”

“No.”

“Steamed eggplant?”

“No!!” I shrieked back. This memory dropped into my red bucket for anger.

“What do you want then?” she asked in an understanding tone, and I became self-conscious of how aggressive I was being. And this moment fell into blackness,

regret.

“I want to fit in,” is what I wanted to say, but instead I simply stated, “Pizza, pasta, poutine.”

“I don’t know,” I trailed off, trying to ignore her heartbroken expression. “Something like that.”

A few years later, Montreal was behind me. My family relocated to the United States, more specifically to Ann Arbor, Michigan. Since that first day I arrived, though I was not aware at the time, my grey bucket fell into disuse. Instead, my yellow pail began to brim over. There were tints of yellow when I walked up to my middle school and saw the words “Welcome” written in 14 different languages. One of them was Chinese. Yellow sparkles gently erupted in me. At my lunch table, I saw a new friend casually eating dumplings, not bothering to conceal it behind a lunch box. What’s more, no one else batted an eye at what she was eating. It was as if it was just another pepperoni pizza slice wrapped in plastic. My world turned yellow, and I had no idea why.

Gradually, I felt more confident in speaking Chinese with my parents publicly and lunch was no longer a problem.

“I can pack spaghetti,” my mom offered.

“No, thank you,” I politely refuted.

“Pasta?”

“No,” I said gently. “I kind-of want dumplings.”

It was not until the sophomore year, the year of “unprecedented times,” that I became able to decipher my inscrutable childhood.

That year, I took AP U.S. History class, and every day, there was something on the news worth unpacking, when we – zombie Zoom students – adamantly wanted to digress from discussions of the Gilded Age and horizontal integration. In mid-March, we began talking about the Atlanta Spa Shootings, where eight people were killed, six of whom were women of Asian descent. Halfway through the conversation, a word got thrown around, and suddenly it was used in every sentence. I began to notice it everywhere on social media, in the news, on advocacy pages. This word was “microaggression.” As our class recentered our attention to muckrakers and Andrew Carnegie, I was tunnel-visioned. I Googled my new word. I read the definition. I reread it. I read examples. I read more. And more. And suddenly, it was as though I had just gotten glasses. All the fuzzy shapes and blurry instances I had navigated through my entire life suddenly had defined edges and distinct appearances. I had finally found the name for the grey bucket I had once labeled “My Problem.”

I had always thought that the identification of my mystery bucket was the one pending factor to the happy ending of my saga. In some senses, I did feel better. I was validated. But in many other ways, I was heartbroken – red, black, blue, green. It took seven years of my life, half of my existence, to figure out that there was no need to blame, silence, or suppress myself. I was just a little girl. A little girl who did not know. Who just wanted to fit in. To be able to eat her dumplings without instinctively covering them. To be able to speak aloud to her family in Chinese. I was just a little girl – one of so many – who wanted to look into the mirror, without contorting or wishing for any changes, and be able to say, “I like me.”

“I really, really like me.”



you know that feeling when it rains in the morning and everything is wet and shrouded in mist and it's cloudy and dreary and somehow cold yet humid at the same time and you know the sun should be up by now but you can't seem to find it anywhere, and the trees seem like they're cloaked in fog and clouds and the water in the air creates halos of light around the streetlights and makes them look like stars in the distance and the traffic lights and headlights on cars reflect and make shining streaks of color on the road and even though water hangs heavily in the air all around and it feels like you may never be fully dry again you can't help but appreciate it?

yeah, that feeling

Life:

My mother had been a piano teacher for as long as I could remember. When I was an infant, she kept me with her as she taught, and when the last student had left for the day, she would bring me to her lap and rock me. Back and forth, back and forth, humming a lullaby and picking out the notes on the piano.

Hush, little baby, don't say a word

Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird.

Sweetly lilting, or passionately fierce melodies seemed to fill the entire house on weekdays, accompanied by the occasional opening and closing of the front door. Her teaching voice, as she liked to call it, was gentle and kind, and as I grew older I would often sit at the top of the stairs and listen to her talk for hours. I learned to play the cello, and before long, my fingertips turned strong and callused. I was good – everyone said so, and I preened in the light of their compliments. Saint-Saëns, Walton, Shostakovich, Dvořák, Prokofiev. This was my childhood: music. Whimsy.

Two decades later, and I had a nice suburban home quite like the one I'd grown up in. The house was a dusty gray color, nestled in between two clusters of trees, and the front lawn was splattered with miniscule, delicate pinpoints of color: wildflowers. The cardinal colored door was old and worn, but fondly decorated with a handmade wreath of fiery red and brilliantly gold leaves. Behind it sprawled a quaint forest filled with singing birds and squealing animals, and a small pond teeming with aquatic wildlife. The neighbors were kind and painfully friendly, constantly bringing pies and cookies and other baked goods. I began to work as an accountant, and the calluses on my fingertips faded completely. This was my adulthood: comfortable complacency. Music had no place in comfortable complacency.

By the time I was tired of this life, I was no longer young. I bought an expensive cello with the money that had piled in my bank account over the years. After all, I had nothing and nobody else to spend the money on. The strings were harsh and unforgiving on my soft

fingertips, and ripped through my skin. My joints, once flexible and nimble, had turned stiff and immobile. I felt trapped, mourning my wasted talent, my wasted potential. My frustration was overwhelming, and I returned the instrument within months, resorting to listening to music instead. These were my sixties: bitterness. But Rachmaninoff and Chopin and Liszt soothed my resentment, cooling aloe vera over a blistering sunburn.

I had never been one to think about death. In that regard, I was completely indifferent – it had always felt too theoretical, too far-fetched. But eventually, even I had to consider the notion that one day, no longer would I exist. The passing of time could perhaps be the single most predictable, yet staggering aspect of life. And although I still felt like an overly caffeinated twenty-year-old on many days, my body betrayed me. My skin hung loose and wrinkled around my skeleton. My hair was white as snow. My bones turned brittle. When I finally began to feel panic, panic at the fact that there was nothing I could do to stop time from slipping through my hands like fine silt, it was far too late. This was my old age: fear. Regret. There were so many things that I would never forgive myself for. I wish I'd gotten married. I wish I'd traveled the world and eaten exotic foods. I wish I'd learned to sew, to ski, to ride a unicycle. I wish I'd kept music in my life.

I'd read articles that claimed that when one dies, their last thoughts are of their children. Mine were of flying on the wings of symphonies and concertos and ballades and nocturnes.

Death:

The sound that the cars made, dozens of them colliding into each other at seventy miles per hour on the highway, could be heard for miles. Tons upon tons of metal and glass and rubber smashed together, piling up and exploding upon impact. Birds flying above the many wreckages choked on the suffocating smoke rising from below, screeching. Orange flame flared hot and high, consuming countless trees and sending small creatures careening out of the brush, shrieking. The fires eventually fizzled out on their own, but not until the

outermost trees on the edge of the woods were scorched, and the stench coming from all the wreckage continued to linger. I was powerless to do anything. When I tried to reach for the nearest body laying twisted and broken right where scorched concrete met yellow grass, my hand, translucent and insubstantial, passed right through her bloody thigh. A firefighter hoisted her into his arms and carried her away.

“Is she going to be okay?” I choked hoarsely, trying to hurry after them. My feet, equally weightless, did not touch the ground.

Nobody replied, or even turned toward the sound of my voice. Faintly, I heard music coming from one of the wrecks, and dazed, floated to the source. It was some Beethoven piano sonata, and a humorless laugh huffed from my lips. How could the universe be so cruel, to have such beauty be the soundtrack to a tragedy so horrific?

Afterlife:

The afterlife consisted of silence and nothing else. There was time, too, but time did not feel as if it flowed the same way it had as a human. Humans are sensitive creatures. They feel. They express. They take time to savor some moments and pray that others pass quickly, to spare themselves pain. This is why a lifetime, to them, feels like an eternity. To me, it was no more than a twitch of a finger. A blink of an eye.

However, time was equally impossible to manipulate in death. Perhaps, if you thought about it hard enough, it could be a reassuring fact. But instead, it troubled me. I had already witnessed the life and death of trillions of humans, culminating in the extinction of humankind, which had given way to an era of newness: millions of new species of flora and fauna, new oceans, new mountains. On Earth, while humans had still lived, science had evolved to nearly unimaginable levels, and yet, time was still an elusive factor of the equation. Forevermore, it barreled on and on, relentless in its pursuit of the End of Time. I spent many of the infinite amount of hours I had at my disposal to ponder this. *Would* there be an End of Time? It became my mission to solve this endless, twisting puzzle.

I missed music dearly.

The End of Time:

Here it was; I could feel it. The blackness around me was beginning to compress, ever so slowly, but after one is suspended in matter between the folds of the still, quiet, motionless universe for so long, they become quite sensitive to any changes around them. My heart did not race like it did when I had died on Earth. Instead, I opened my eyes and ears and stayed alert, my head swiveling. I needed to observe all that I could. I needed to remember this. The pressure built, more and more of it in less and less time. And I hadn't known it could be possible, but my surroundings became even darker. The pricks of light I'd always observed from a distance — stars — winked out one by one, but I had never been scared of being unable to see. After all, there were other ways to perceive.

Sure enough, I became aware of other things. I felt movement — the barest of breezes grazing my skin and lifting my hair. I smelled something fresh — citrus, maybe? Citrus mixed with something clean and metallic. And I heard a melody.

Hush, little baby, don't say a word

Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird.

And suddenly, I understood.

The instant I did, I flew, *flew*, backwards through the days, years, centuries, millennia. For only a second, I fought the unyielding force that had taken hold of me by the arm, but it was useless. Music, carried by the wind rushing past me, blasted in my ears. Bits and pieces of famous works, music I'd played as a child, music I'd loved as an adult, all combined into a nearly indecipherable roar. Faster and faster I went, all the time, all the history that had passed, reversing in no more than several minutes. My head was thrown back, arms thrust behind me, at the sheer speed at which I was moving. I could feel nausea rising in my gut, and blood pounding in my head, and I opened my mouth to scream. But then . . . nothing. I stopped moving, so suddenly that my breath was knocked from me.

Once again, silence.

I gasped for air as my eyes flew open and my head whirled. *I know the answer I know the answer I know the answer—*

The Answer:

I was alone, sitting upright in a chair. Something rested lightly against my sternum, a weight that was instantly familiar. When I looked down, I saw a cello positioned against me, nestled between my legs. My right hand, swinging at my side, clutched a bow. Across the room was a mirror, and I suddenly knew where I was: my house. My human house. I observed myself for a moment, my breathing still a little shallow and unsteady. My hair was gray, but not white. My skin was flawed, but not saggy. There were no painful aches in my bones. I was not dying. Slowly, my gaze fell to the music stand in front of me. There was a simple piece printed on the single sheet of paper, and I let my eyes roam over it before slowly, *slowly*, my hands remembered what they needed to do. Thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk. I let my clumsy fingers fall into place, let them remember the length of the fingerboard, the distances between each interval. The string felt harsh, and I knew my skin would tear, but I breathed. And I played.

The lighthouse is lonely most of the time. The only other people out here are on boats near the horizon. My grandpa always said that you're most like yourself when you're alone, but I disagree. I was most like myself with him.

He gave me this job, actually. Put in a good word for me with whoever was running it before I was, I didn't catch their name on the day they handed it over. All they told me was instructions on how to run the lights and what to do in a storm and the coast guard's phone number.

It's peaceful, I guess. But the wind and the giant mechanical parts of the lighthouse make so much noise, and there isn't any cell reception. I don't mind it, even though it's loud, and the wind always makes it cold, despite being a beach. There wasn't really anything left for me at home anyway since I don't have Grandpa anymore.

The wind isn't really that strong, it's a cold autumn morning. Or is it night? The sun is just coming up. But it's so loud whistling against the metal outer wall, it's impossible to even sit down to read a book or anything. I think that maybe the gallery deck will be quieter, even if it's cold outside. Maybe the sunrise will look nice.

My grandpa always said that the sunrise was the most beautiful thing, besides his wife, but I never met her. I think her name was Savita. He said he could see her smile every morning when the sun came up. I try to pretend that I can see his smile, but I don't let myself believe enough, and all I can see is the sun reflecting off of the ocean.

Maybe I do believe just a little. The light rippling across the waves dances and shivers with me in the cold. I step towards the railing, but I don't touch it. The metal railing would hurt my hands in this temperature, and I left my gloves inside. My scarf whips around in the air.

The light on the surface of the water continues to grow brighter with every minute, but it's not just the sun making the light on the waves. There's a pink glowing spot in the water, small but getting bigger. I stare down at it. What is that? The partygoers on the beach sometimes leave trash and glowsticks laying around on the sand, which eventually get

washed out into the tide, but this is too bright to be a glowstick, I think. I lean just a little too far and tip over the railing.

I gasp as I brace for hitting the freezing water. The shock from the cold and the smack of the water are painful when I hit the surface. My hair tangles around my face in the water, I tear it away so I can see, the saltwater stings in my eyes, and I'd cry if I wasn't already in the world's largest bath of tears. I'm right in the center of the glowing pink spot. Ribbony tentacles extend from below where I can see and tangle themselves around me. I kick and squirm but they pull me deeper, until I can't see the surface anymore. It's so dark at the bottom, I feel hypothermic. My chest feels like it's going to explode if I hold my breath any longer. The ribbons are strangling me. It's so quiet.

I can hear a voice in my head, but not my own. It tells me it's been waiting for someone like me, someone who can be what was missing, a hero. I can't think, I can't breathe. If I hold my breath for a moment longer I'll suffocate. I open my mouth to breathe, but I don't feel like I'm drowning. The water is heavier than air in my lungs, and I breathe slower than I did before, but it's doable. I calm down a little. A group of eels twirls around me, and I realize it was their voice I heard.

They tell me that I am what they were looking for, worthy of being an ocean goddess. All I can do is stare as they circle me. The ribbons that dragged me down swirl around me and form an elaborate and flowing dress, reminiscent of a jellyfish. The eels cry and weep and praise me as their new goddess. The sea seems to melt away as I float back up to the surface.

I drag myself out of the water, the fabric is heavy when I'm no longer supported by liquid. I cough up the liquid out of my lungs, it hurts. The sun is above the horizon now, illuminating the eels, crying for me to return to the ocean. I pull myself along the beach and into the door of the lighthouse. My dress drips onto the concrete floor. Everything smells like salt. I lock the door behind me, I won't be going back out there again. My grandpa always



I had been noticing the noise more and more frequently
The soft rhythmic tapping, the scratching and scampering
Just behind the walls and inside the attic, surrounding me.
Something hidden from sight, but still my stomach aches

At first, I only heard it on lonely nights
When red ink beaded on lined paper wasn't enough to feed my urges
I would listen to them gnaw on the insulation
Soon, I would hear the sounds with every pink sunrise
And every time Moonshine brushed my lips

I found solace in the noises,
I'm not sure why I let the pests fester like an open wound
I knew they would only grow and grow
Yet, I wanted to peel the wallpaper back,
Like my frail skin that flakes in the winter months,
Exposing the secrets hidden within my flesh

I knew it was wrong: selfish and impulsive
But I wanted to feed the compelling desire
And when this thought came,
It stayed. It dominated.
It resonated in this hollow room until blood seeped from my ears

So, I gave in.

I placed a crumb of bread on the wooden floor
Eventually, a small, fluffy mouse inched its way through the door frame

It meticulously inspected the morsel.

I shut my eyes as the guilt expanded in my chest
A thought you cannot fake, but an action is irreversible.

An action *defines* you

With every night, I laid out larger slices of bread

More and more mice came for me to feed

I would watch them devour the slices,

Devour each other, slowly devour myself

They come every night now,

We have become acquaintances

Their teeth are jagged,

Their hostile eyes emanate hunger and greed

Their fur, matted and coarse

When a child begs,

It will torment you.

It will never be satisfied.

It will never stop until you starve it for long enough

Noise. A ceaseless, mind-breaking noise is all I hear, as if there is a constant humming in my ears that refuses to halt. The murmur of officers in the room next to me fills my head, and I glance to my palm and the three, shallow, bloody scratches along it. *He always did want to fly.*

Someone kneels next to me and adds significantly to the incomprehensible mumbling, shoving a warm and flimsy mug into my left hand while pulling out a pristine bandage to wrap around my right. My head snaps up and I yank my hand away. Heat drips down through my thin leggings, and in the slight part of my brain that still manages to register the sensation, I realize I must have spilled whatever was in the mug.

“No,” I whisper, clearing my throat a bit before repeating myself. “No, I’m fine.” I achieve what I hope is a small little smile at the blurry face sitting next to me, blinking a bit. *His mouth moved, words nearly whisked away by the wind.* Whoever it is takes the cup from me and pats my knee with a gentle touch. After another unintelligible string of words and a small hesitation, they place the bandages on the table beside me and disappear into the noise, leaving me to my muddled thoughts.

He had been here. He should still be here.

Before I begin, I must explain one crucial piece of information: My brother never wanted to leave the sky. For instance, when I was seven years old, my older brother of a superior nine years jumped off the roof of our parent’s car. He had attached white-and-blue trash bag wings to the sides of his body with hap-hazardous strips of duct tape, promising me that he would float gently down to the ground before I could try. I can still remember his sneakers squeaking against the varnish of our van before he threw out his arms and pushed off.

Needless to say, I did not get a turn at flight that day. His face, which had landed on our gravel driveway only moments after his hands and feet did, bloodied fast, and he barely

managed to smile with a newly made gap in his teeth before I ran, crying, for help.

In retrospect, I should have asked for the same help the day he created himself a parachute and told me he would launch himself out of the tall tree that towered over the neighborhood. He was in eighth grade, and I had recently graduated from being a whiny elementary schooler to a super-cool junior high student just like him. As such, I refused to be a 'snitch', and, as a result, I was the only one there for the second time my brother did something incredibly idiotic. He climbed the solid, winding oak tree that marked the 'park' (which was truly just a clearing) in the center of our area, climbing until he reached the uppermost branches that could barely hold his weight. And then my skinny, 13 year old brother and his biggest smile at the top of the tallest tree I had ever seen, unpacked his parachute and jumped, arms splayed out as if he was mimicking a flying squirrel.

His parachute held up surprisingly well, steering clear of stray branches until nearly halfway down the tree. As it hit the halfway point, though, the parachute ripped, and my brother toppled, gaining speed far too quickly. He hit the ground with a shuddering crack, and refused to show his obviously fractured wrist to our parents for a full two days after this excursion. Even now, the glare he gave me to keep my big, new, junior high school mouth to myself sends goosebumps skittering across my arms.

Now that I've explained his passion, I can move on to today and all its horrors. Thinking about it chills me to the bone, and I long for the warmth of my poor, spilled drink - whatever it was.

I woke up the way most wake ups go, with the buzz of my watch on my wrist and the light of the sun creeping through my supposed "light blocking" curtains. The still open door of our shared bedroom told me my brother had gotten up early, and the smell of sugar and strawberries told me he was making pancakes. Both were surprising, as the last time we had made pancakes was over two years ago when our broken family had still resembled a moderately normal one, and my brother was notoriously bad at waking up early. That should have been my first warning.

He was smiling as he cooked the batter in a skillet, the spatula usually used for scraping rice out of our rice cooker born anew for the much more appealing job of flipping pancakes. I snuck up behind him, stealing a misshapen cake from his plate and spooning sugared strawberries onto a plate of my own. Yelping at the heat of the fresh pancake, I set down my meal and jabbed him in the side with a finger.

Just checking, but you are *triple* sure you didn't poison these, right?" I laughed as he knocked my head with the hand still holding the spatula and told me to try it myself to find out. We sat down to eat, leaving our mom sleeping. As a nurse who works late into the night, she always needs more sleep than a seven in the morning wake up can give her, and so we left out the strawberries and refrigerated some pancake batter along with a note before heading out to school.

My brother drove, his driver's license authorized six months prior, asking after my school life. I was all too happy to oblige, ranting about petty arguments, and the teacher who I swore made it their life's purpose to always ruin my perfectly nice day.

At the end of the relatively short drive, he hesitated before letting me out. "Do you mind," he asked, unsure, "if you could steer clear of the roof today?" That should have been my second warning. The roof (accessible through a door I am almost certain no one would notice if it hadn't been explicitly pointed out to them by the janitor, like it had been to us) had become his private lunch spot after begging the staff. I was a frequent visitor, but, unlike him, who always took pleasure in the blustering wind, I could never stand the cold for long.

Instead of thinking about it, I shrugged and agreed rather mindlessly. It wasn't until a quarter of the way through second period that I finally began to suspect the signs I should've seen earlier. My forced awakening came in the form of a text; *Hey have u seen ur brother? He left 1st hour early - doctors app.?*

An itch started in the back of my mind, a hunch that wouldn't fade and instead grew into an almost panic fueled by his demeanor, his explicit warnings, and his disappearance. After shooting him a couple texts, I claimed a bathroom break, seconds passing in a blur as

my teacher wrote me a pass.

The brisk walk to the roof door took a minute and a half, the stairs taking another half a minute to climb, winding me before the gales whipped through my shirt. I hung onto the railing that stood at the edge of the door for a few painful seconds before whirling around the roof, letting out a ragged breath of relief I hadn't realized I'd been holding as I found no sign of my brother. It took barely a moment before that sigh caught itself in my throat and forced its way out of me in a scream as my eyes snagged on fingers clenching the edge of the roof. I dove to the floor, catching the hand as it started to slip, and my brother's shocked eyes met mine.

"Idiot," I shouted, it coming out more of a whisper in the rushing of the wind. "What are you *doing*?"

My hair was as frantic as I was, spinning through the air as my sweaty hand started to lose its grip and my legs losing their strength from where they were hooked around pipes. "Stop, help me pull you up." He barely registered my tugging, mouthing words I couldn't hear, the familiar cap of a pill bottle tumbling out of his pocket.

"*Dex you idiot!* Come on, it's going to be okay, just..." I trailed off as he pulled his other hand up to grasp mine, fixing his gaze on me again, his red-rimmed eyes seeming slightly blurry as I struggled to see over the top of my tears. "*I'm sorry,*" He said without hesitation, his mouth moving in soft words nearly whisked away by the wind that I could make out nonetheless. "*Thank you, Izzy.*" I started crying in earnest then, I think, pulling and pulling and pulling and *pulling* with all my might, but he seemed to suspend, still, no matter what I did. The smile that I can remember so clearly after he jumped off of the roof of the car, flying with his parachute at the top of our tree, flashed across his face for a moment. "*It's okay.*"

His nails cut into my palm, slicing the skin and almost forcing me to recoil. That was all he needed, easily breaking out of my grip and falling backwards, feet pushing off the school wall. His body seemed to hang in midair, as if seconds were stretching themselves into minutes, and he closed his eyes. "*So this is what flight feels like.*"

I know I screamed, as my voice is hoarse now, his name following him down the five stories of our high school. I watched, helpless, as his body hit the ground, and I could imagine hearing the cracking sound, all-too-similar to his broken wrist.

I don't remember fumbling with my phone, dialing 911. I can't recall if I was there when the nurse pronounced him no longer breathing, nor do I know how I got off the roof. I might have been there when they harshly ruffled through his backpack, finding empty pill bottles and college letters titled "we regret to inform you". What I can remember, distinctly, is the *noise*.

Noise rushing through my head as if I still were upon the roof, wind whistling through my hair. Noise, as if he were still whispering apologies. Noise, as if he were still falling, forever, living in his moment of flight.

Someone sits next to me, rubbing my back, and my vision slowly clears. I lift my head up, recognizing my mother and her own tear-filled face, and I can't help but let out a sob, resting my head on her lap. Tomorrow I might begin to forget, but today, I let myself remember my brother, and his final flight.

*For every suicide death, there are **four** hospitalizations due to suicide attempts, **eight** emergency department visits, **twenty-seven** self-reported suicide attempts, and **two hundred seventy five** people who seriously considered suicide. This is a reminder to check up on your friends, siblings, classmates, grandparents, no matter how happy or "okay" they seem - and a reminder of all the people who love you enough to do whatever they can to catch you if you fall.*

<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html>



It happens when Lila is sprawled across her couch, feet propped up against the coffee table and the TV playing something like *New Girl*. She doesn't know. She hasn't been watching for the past half hour. Instead, her eyes follow Joel as he paces around her apartment, always one to never be able to sit still for long. He's opening drawers, taking out plates and utensils like he's memorized her kitchen. It's disgustingly domestic. A small smile settles on Lila's lips when Joel makes his way back to the couch with a plastic bag of takeout in one hand and utensils balanced on another.

"Hey, I ordered us Thai food from that restaurant downtown. I got you Pad thai," Joel says, sitting next to her in their fort of blankets and pillows and setting down her favorite dish in front of her.

Lila gives him a look and as she opens her mouth to speak, Joel beats her to it: "I know. No cilantro with extra shrimp and limes, the way you like." And he grins like he's proud of himself for knowing this tiny detail about her that she's never *verbally* told him. He just saw her doing it once and has done it every Thai takeout night since.

Joel is offering her a fork now, but all Lila can think about is the way her heart is doing this weird inflating thing that makes her feel like it could implode inside of her. She meets his eyes again and wonders why she's never noticed how offensively beautiful Joel is. It's not like he's wearing anything fancy either; just a T-shirt and a pair of sweatpants, but she swears he's glowing. It punches the air right out of her lungs.

Joel stares at her intently with an eyebrow raised, clearly confused on why it's taking Lila so long to take the fork. She forces herself to reach out, arm heavy and lips moving to form a 'thank you'.

"Yeah, I mean," Lila swallows harshly then starts again, "Cilantro is gross."

It's like everything snaps back into place. Joel laughs loudly, shaking his head mumbling something about "the taste buds of a ten-year old". It almost makes Lila question if that moment had even occurred, but the squeezing in her heart lingers.

Lila knows that she's slow at realizing her own emotions, but of course she has to come to this conclusion at the most inconvenient, inopportune time.

Because *of course* she's in love with Joel.

They first met in a cafe. It was by chance that Lila's friend was the owner of that cafe and had needed an extra hand. And it was by chance that there was a layover in Joel's flight in New York and he had decided to try something new that day.

Lila had watched Joel walk into the store, the first customer of the day. He had smiled at her politely, and a little awkwardly.

She took mental notes of him like she did with everyone. First, he was stupidly attractive in the kind of unignorable way. Second, he looked older than her, a dark beard running along his face.

Lila had taken Joel's order, an unsuited hot mocha, walked up to where he was seated with the drink in hand, and proceeded to spill the entirety of it right at his feet.

She had expected him to yell at her and storm out of the cafe, but all he did was laugh. Joel had been in a particularly good mood – the airline had allowed him hourly pay for his layover flight – and he bent down to help Lila clean up her own mess.

Third, he was friendly and strangely forgiving.

Lila had remade the mocha Joel ordered and brought it back as he waited patiently.

"Sorry about that," she sighed. He shrugged.

"Wouldn't want to ruin a service worker's day over a little mistake," Joel had said. Lila didn't know what made her overshare. She could've laughed and moved on, but she couldn't bring herself to do it.

"Oh, I don't work here. I'm just helping out a friend." She then felt the need to elaborate, "I'm actually a photographer at the studio down the street."

Joel's face had lit up at that. "Cool! So you like, take pictures of models and celebrities?"

Lila had chuckled at his excitement. “Models, celebrities, anyone they want me to photograph.”

“What do you do?” Lila had asked, to keep the conversation going. Definitely not out of genuine interest.

“I’m a pilot. At JFK.”

“You thought *my* job was cool but you get to fly planes all day?” Lila took pride in being responsible for the smile that brought on Joel’s face. And then she made the mistake of looking down, not missing the ring on his left hand. Impossible to not notice, really.

Fourth, he was married. Her list stopped there.

Lila had tried not to seem too disappointed when she returned to the counter and waved goodbye to Joel when he left. But then he came in the week after. And again, and again, and again. Lila tried to convince herself it was by chance, the same as the first day they met. Maybe he liked the coffee and maybe she was only visiting the cafe to support a friend.

She blames the universe for their affair, like it’ll erase the guilt that weighs heavy on her heart. Like it’ll stop her from picturing what his children might look like.

So Lila tries to find peace in the small things. She photographs Joel and pretends it’s for practice, but really, she just wants memories of him captured in those tiny little squares. Something to remember him by when he inevitably leaves her. Lila swears she’ll get rid of them all then.

Lila first photographed Joel on a cool autumn day. They had gone out for a walk, purposefully taking their time and circling around the park, praying that night wouldn’t come so soon even while the sun was setting. Joel had been looking out at the splash of yellow and orange contrasted with the pink and blue of the sky with his hands in his pockets and a melancholy gaze. He had looked so mesmerizingly handsome that day that Lila’s eyes naturally found his figure no matter how many times she looked away. How annoyingly

obvious, she had thought. Lila had taken her camera out of her backpack and taken photographs in secret, the sky creating the perfect backdrop for the most beautiful man on earth.

All she had done was shrug when she was caught, as Joel glared at her playfully. He tried not to make it obvious but he tolerated just about everything Lila does.

“Little to the left,” Lila joked. It had earned her a laugh from Joel, the kind where you can see the smile wrinkles below his eyes and where his nose scrunches out of habit. Lila set her camera down when Joel moved near her.

“I’ve always wondered why you liked taking pictures of me so much.” Joel had turned to look at Lila. She avoided his gaze but can’t help but answer:

“Because you’re pretty.”

She had said it too quickly, without pause or hesitation. Joel seemed surprised, expression clouded with shock and confusion, but it melted into an amused grin just as fast. These unforgettable moments, Lila reminisced through the photographs she took of Joel.

And now, when they’re in Lila’s apartment, waiting for their time to run out, Lila already mourns the loss of the time they have together. Before Joel has to go back upstate to his family. Before this pretend nonsense fantasy of a happy-ever-after that she dreamed up in a state of earth-shattering euphoria comes to an end. Reality will hit them like gravity does an anvil.

“Lila?” Joel calls out. Lila wonders where he went, the space next to her on the couch empty. She gets up reluctantly, wondering what he wants.

Lila finds him on her bedroom floor, the album she has of her best photos of Joel splayed open. She doesn’t know how quickly she reacts; she could have been standing for a second or maybe five minutes, but she’s certain of her heart thumping inside of her chest with the way it’s ringing in her ears when she snatches the book from off her bed. Joel is staring up at her from the floor, eyebrows furrowed and lips pressed into a thin line. The panic seizes Lila’s throat and gnaws at her like a parasite. She doesn’t dare to speak first.

Joel runs a hand through his hair. “You kept them all?”

Lila takes a moment to respond. “Just a few.” As if that’s helpful. She sounds incredibly unconvincing, even to herself.

“These aren’t ‘just a few’, Lila,” Joel says, standing up. Lila steps back like she might burn if he comes any closer, like she’ll crumble to the ground and turn to dust.

She grasps for anything now. “It’s just... they’re just stupid pictures I took of you, okay?” Lila chokes out, “They don’t mean anything.”

Joel shakes her head as if he disagrees, refusing to acknowledge her words. “Really? Because it doesn’t seem that way.”

Lila snaps her head up to look him in the eyes. Suddenly, she feels the bottled up anger that has been chipping away at her for months. She wants to look at this man and realize that he’s just trying to recapture his youth; look at this man, really look at him, and see how pathetic he is; look at this man and hate him for who he is. But no matter what, she can’t find those feelings within her.

She breathes in sharply, feeling the trembling anger that threatens to crawl through her teeth as she speaks, “Why do you care so much? This means nothing to you, Joel.”

Joel barks out an insincere laugh like he can’t believe what she just said. “Nothing? No, Lila, this is everything to me.”

Lila almost breaks at those words. He says them with such genuinity that she could believe him. Instead, she scoffs.

“This can’t be everything to you. Because guess what. You come here and you get to do whatever you want. You get to have a pretty girl that is desperate for your attention and stops breathing just waiting for you,” Lila nods like what she’s saying will come true if she tried hard enough. The words are bitter in the back of her throat and she spits them out like they’re venom. “And when you leave, you get to go home, right? To your wife, your kids, a farm with chickens, and cows, and pigs, and *everything*. You get to have it all. So when you leave, guess what I’m left with.”

Joel frowns at Lila with an unwavering gaze, his expression going flat. The sun has now set but Lila can see under the dim lights, the way the hurt has stitched itself into his skin and threaded through his features.

“You think this is some kind of midlife crisis? You think I’m living out some twisted middle-aged fairy tale daydream? Do you think I’m enjoying this?” His voice is intense with anger and disbelief as he lets out a huff of air. A mean facsimile of amusement.

Lila’s eyes sting with unshed tears but she still attempts to hold on to every last shred of rage. He feels bad. So what. That doesn’t change a thing. “Yep,” she says, like a spoiled brat.

Joel throws his arms up in the air, turning his back to her and walking out of her bedroom. As if there’s anywhere to go. They’ve ruined every corner of this apartment for each other. They’ve ruined the whole city.

He turns back around abruptly, but can’t seem to find the right words to say. A beat passes. “You’re not some impulse buy at the mall, or a Disney movie guilty pleasure, or a spontaneous trip to Hawaii. Okay?” He ends with a defeated exhale, the arms that hovered near his head dropping by his sides.

Lila is unable to say anything for a while. She tries to think, form a sentence, anything. But nothing comes out. She tries again and, “Just go back to your family, Joel.”

But before she can even move, Joel snaps, “I told my wife.”

Lila falters. Her blood runs cold. She’s frozen where she’s standing.

Joel lets out a hollowed-out laugh. “Yeah. I bet you didn’t see that one coming.”

“Why?” Lila’s voice breaks on the single word. It would be embarrassing but she’s too far gone to think about it now.

Joel licks his lips once, then twice like he’s unsure. “Because I’m in love with you.”

That’s when Lila really starts to cry, tears streaming down her cheeks and palms pressed tightly against her eyes because just the sight of him makes her heart rattle against her ribcage.

Joel watches her reaction, easily prying her arms away from her face with trembling hands, revealing her red-rimmed eyes and sniffling nose.

“I love you, Lila,” His voice is barely above a whisper. “Let me choose you, please.”

It’s humiliating how it makes Lila cry harder, her voice watery. “Okay. Okay, you-”

Before Lila can finish, Joel has already leaned down to kiss the rest of the sentence off her lips, her arms still in the air, a silent, final show of surrender.



I thought it was strange that he never seemed to target obvious places of power to carry out his plans. However it wouldn't matter much since every time he got close to his goal, I would turn his mech suit back into the scrap metal that he made it from. He didn't even seem like the type of person to want to be a villain. His parents were still alive and loved him very much, he didn't have a traumatic back story, he just seemed to like starting from scratch on a new invention every time I stopped him.

I only really came face to face with him once when he had stolen a fighter jet to use in one of his “creative” projects and didn't know how to stop after he had taken off. I flew up and slowly reduced his speed to where I could glide down and set the plane in its hangar without any damages. He was a handsome man really, he had short brown hair that sort of poked out of the sides of his steampunk top hat. His outfit was not complete without a big bushy mustache, goggles, brass pocket watch, and some other 1800's attire.

On this particular day, the sun was shining, the birds were singing, people were at the beach enjoying it all, and Dr. Seth Brandy PhD (in traumatic brain damage) was driving his latest invention to northern California to steal the world's largest hammer for god knows what. The moment I got word, I got into costume and took off towards where he was. He had never hurt anyone badly before but we didn't know what he was capable of so the authorities always kept an eye on him. When he did cause damage he would pay the price and since he was so nice about it no one would give it a second thought.

When I arrived in the coastal city of Eureka, (the city with the hammer) I saw Dr. Brandy driving a large truck with a crane on it, presumably to pick up the hammer and drive back down south with it. He was in the process of lowering the crane like the claw game when I swooped down and gave it a slight tug resulting in the entire crane falling apart.

“Hey man, what gives?” he yelled from the cab of the truck.

“I'm sorry but there is no way that is street legal. Not to mention you're trying to steal a national landmark.” I responded.

“Be honest, who would miss it?” he shot back.

“As much as I agree with you, it's still theft.” I said “Let's go home.”

Just then I heard a frantic radio message come through my earpiece.

“We've detected a very large object in your area. Is everything ok?” it said

“Uhhh yeah, I think.” I responded.

All I could really hear was some waves but they were quickly followed by a loud metallic clank behind me as a massive shadow was cast over me. I turned just in time to avoid the 10 foot long spike headed straight for me. The spike pounded into a hill about 50 feet away and kicked up a ton of dirt. There was a chain attached to it that could have been used as an anchor for an aircraft carrier. Still in shock from the first attack I didn't notice a second spike shoot out of the mechanical monster that was still half submerged in the ocean. I had enough time to catch it but it carried me into the same hill as the first one and nearly killed me. I'm durable but not immortal.

Through my blurry eyes I see the rest of the machine rise from the water and start inching closer to me. The spike that's on top of me retracts and is replaced by a robotic hand, pinning me to the hill again. Once the war machine had come to a stop the man inside introduced himself over a loudspeaker.

“My name Cornelius Tempp and I have come to take the life of this pathetic excuse of a superhero,” The electronic voice said. “Your services are no longer required, doctor, I'll take it from here.”

“No,” Dr. Brandy said just loud enough for the machine to hear him.

“Do you wish to meet the same fate as the pitiful man this world calls their champion?” he said, louder than before.

“Let me check,” Dr. Brandy took out his pocket watch and tapped it a couple of times. “It appears that it's time for the tables to turn,” he continued. The ground began to shake but it wasn't an earthquake. Waves started to brew in the ocean. A massive tentacle breached the water and slapped the surface creating waves in every direction. When it resurfaced, I saw that it wasn't natural. It wasn't alive but it moved like it was. Another tentacle creaked out of the water and this time I could tell it was all steel.

The leading tentacle struck first, puncturing straight through the huge robot's torso. I winced as the sound of metal on metal pierced my ears. The grip it had on me loosened and I could feel my lungs open up. The second tentacle raised itself above the water and shot forward, tearing through the machine's head. The 2 tentacles then slowly faded down the beach and into the water as Dr. Brandy chuckled.

“What the hell was that thing?” I managed to say before the pain cut me off.

“It was an old friend of mine that decided to stop by,” he replied before walking over to me.

“You alright? That was a pretty big hit.” He leaned over me and poked my shoulder.

“I'll live, thanks for checking,” I responded.

“Now where were we? Ah yes, the hammer,” he said with a chuckle.



Most people have a favorite sound. For some it's the crunch of crisp autumn leaves, Others it's their significant other's voice, but for me, it's always been the cracking of the spine of a new book. Every time I hear it I get taken into a new universe in a land far FAR away. Away from this world, away from my insufficient flat in the sketchy corner of town, away from my creepy boss who seems to leer around every corner, away from my disapproving family who are convinced I will never amount to anything, away away away.

The heels of my black leather knee-highs click on the pavement repetitively, click, click, click. My mind races with ideas for the new cover of *hipster's* spring addition. Not that I have any say in that department considering I'm just the coffee girl. My foot lands in a puddle and the splash pulls me out of my thoughts. I hate this neighborhood. It's dark and gloomy and... scary. Every corner seems like it holds a monster just out of view, and based on the people who end up here. There very well might be. The border between Crest street and Leviathan boulevard is almost like a magic portal. The thick air and fog of Leviathan lift and fade almost as soon as you step into the newly redone sidewalk. Everything is... better. The atmosphere is more breathable, the temperature more tolerable, and the people are more kind.

It's still foggy here but the early morning sun creates the illusion of gold mist that envelops and welcomes you. It's very comforting compared to what I'm used to. The buildings are brighter, shadows are practically nonexistent and you don't feel like someone lurking around every corner.

I continue down the sun painted pavement with one earbud in. I could never do that on Leviathan. My stygian trench coat and hair made me look almost misplaced. As I turn the corner of 4th street I pause to take in the view. The street itself seems like another dimension. The colorful bricks, gold lettering, and smooth finishes give the aesthetic effect of a french town in the 50s. Building after building were stacked one right after the other with very little room in between. As I continued down the street a dark royal green building came into my eyeline. The golden curved lettering on the sign ahead spelled out "Umbra Book Store".

I go to this store on every trip to Crest Street. I walked up to the gold framed glass door and walked in. The gentle sound of the bell alerted the man placing books on the shelf. He turned slightly in my direction. I've met him several times before. He was tall and his short black hair gently framed his face which held a shallow gaze in my direction. His dark green eyes paired well with his black t-shirt and pants. He never spoke, at first it was slightly off putting, but he has his own subtle ways of communicating. The gold name tag on his chest read "Tristan". The swinging doors in the back opened revealing the owner of the store Mr. Umbra. He was a gray 50-year-old man. His once brown hair was now stained silver with time. He wore the same uniform as Tristan but rather than a cold stare Mr. Umbra paired it with a warm smile,

"My favorite customer," Umbra said joyously. He always seemed happy to see me but I assume that's how he is with all of his customers.

"My favorite book store owner," I said with a laugh. Mr. Umbra chuckled as he stepped towards the cash register.

"That sounded more funny in my head," I giggled.

"Well I appreciated it," he grinned. "What can I getcha Anita?"

Our conversation was short. I wasn't looking for anything in particular and I knew the store like the back of my hand so I could navigate the store alone. Mr. Umbra had a book picked up in Honestwood which is about 3 hours away so he left relatively quickly. That only left one thing to do. Books. The towering shelves of endless titles and covers. The smell of fresh paper and wood enveloped my senses. I stepped up to the closest shelf and started looking. Read it, read it, read it. I continued down the rows and rows of books. Occasionally I would read a blurb or move a book that was in the wrong section. I got nearly half way through the shelves when I started to feel off. Something was odd. I felt like I was being watched. I turned attempting to be discreet and saw Tristan standing behind me. He was holding a book in his hand. I looked at him then turned my gaze to the novel he held in my direction.

“Contritos Man?” I asked. He nodded gently. “That’s latin isn’t it? The broken man?” he nods once again. I reached out and grabbed the book. I ran my fingers over the cover of the soft rouge book. When I looked back up Tristan had stalked back to his books. I turned back to the bookshelf but I couldn’t keep my eyes off that book. I traced the letters on the cover and the spine. The soft outside was seemingly untouched. The corners of the book were pristine and the pages were crisp. I looked back towards the shelves and continued to search.

I stepped up to the counter with three books in hand. Tristan stepped up to the cash register as I set the books on the counter. Mr. Umbra is a very old fashioned man so he kept an old cash register. It was big and had buttons like a typewriter. Tristan flipped open the back page of each book to find the price tag. I always appreciated how careful he was not to break the spine. I reached into my purse and pulled out roughly 60 dollars in cash. He put his hand out in my direction. I trust him enough to hand him all the cash. He ruffles through the money and pulls out three ten dollar bills and pushes the money and books back in my direction.

“Thirty bucks? Seems a bit cheap,” I opened the back pages of all the books and did the math myself. “This should cost fifty shouldn’t it?” He turned to face me.

“The red ones on me,” his voice sent shivers down my spine. He’s never spoken before. At least not around me. His voice was deep and had a growling sort of undertone. I was shocked.

“Th-Thank you,” I stuttered. He didn’t respond nor did he acknowledge my leave. I stepped out onto the sidewalk. In contrast to earlier the roads were bustling with cars and the sidewalks and stores were filled with people. I started walking down the sidewalk. I can’t believe that’s the first thing he’s ever said to me. I reached a tall beige building with an extending sign that read “cafe”. I stepped into the shop and ordered my usual.

I was completely isolated on the cold dark street way towards Leviathan boulevard. My steps echoed endlessly down the deserted neighborhood. The small bag filled with

soaps and lavender chamomile tea shook in my hand making a crackling noise with every movement. I crossed the threshold of Leviathan Boulevard and continued towards my apartment. The welcoming feel of Crest evaporated within an instant. It seemed like there were eyes all over me. The moderate wind became harsh and freezing. My hands felt frozen and my nose was bitten by the cold. I lost my grip on the bag I was holding and it fell to the gravel with a clash. I muttered to myself as I reached for the bag and its loose contents. That's when I heard the sliding scratch of gravel behind me. I spun around attempting to locate the source of the noise but the road was just as empty as before. I scooped up the bag and began to walk faster. The numerous gazes I once felt had dispersed yet there seemed to be one set of eyes still on me. I began to run. I had no idea who was behind me but frankly I didn't care. I didn't look back, nor did I stop running until I reached the doors of my apartment.

I slammed the door shut behind me and locked it. I jostled the door handle to ensure it was locked tight. Turning to face my run-down living area I resting my back on the door. I sigh in relief, was that all in my head? I walk in the direction of my chair. It's a black leather sofa facing the window that leads to the street. As I reached the chair I tossed my bag onto the seat next to me. Staring out of the window is one of my favorite things to do. I allow my brain to relax as I fix my gaze on a point in the distance. My heart began to slow and my breathing became less heavy. I reached over to the bag and rummaged through its contents. The different covers of the novels were heavy in my hands as I studied them. Each title and cover differ greatly but one book kept catching my eye. *Contritos man*. I stroked my spine gently. I pulled the middle pages apart and listened to the crack of the spine. I opened my eyes and went to flip to the first page but something stole my gaze. A piece of paper was left between the pages. I lifted the paper up, its tan burnt look was odd. As I flipped the paper the jet black ink spelled out "He's following you."

My heart stopped. My breath caught like something was holding it back. I whipped my

head around to find my empty apartment staring back at me. I sprang towards the bag and scrambled to find my phone. After what happened earlier I'm not taking the risk of this being real. I fumbled around the bag but the search for my phone was unsuccessful. Where is my phone? I looked back by the door and scanned the carpet but found nothing. Suddenly a shining object from outside caught my eye. I squinted through the pouring rain to focus on that distant light. There in the rainfall and blistering cold, I laid my phone. I have to get that phone, but I can't go outside. There's no other way. I slowly paced towards the door. My breathing is shallow as I slowly unlock the bolt. I ripped open the door and began to sprint out of the building. I had no time to waste. Panic began to set in. my decisions didn't seem to be my own and my thoughts were running faster than i am. I nearly slipped, throwing the door open and venturing further out into the night. The light from my phone was no longer present. Where did I see it? I ran up in front of the next set of apartments. That's when I heard it. It was subtle. Barely audible over the downpour, but it was there. The light buzzing of my phone with the gentle android ringtone playing over it. Someone has my phone. Someone hiding in the alley.

I ran. My brain stopped. I could not think of anything but running. I can't feel anything. I have no idea where that person is but the thought of them behind me shakes me to my core. I thought to scream but no one would hear me. I don't know how I got to my floor but I'm not going to stop. I reached my door and dug in my pockets for the key. Without wasting a second a gloved hand wrapped around my mouth as the other hand held my arms back. Before I could scream. Before I could think. A familiar voice whispered "Umbra is in there. Run, now!"



All is silent, eternal dead air.

The house with no door sits atop its hill.

Solitude, but what does it care?

Anonymous, they just never cared to learn.

The house used to have a door,
massive and gorgeous it was.

Warm brown with a golden knob.

An eye-catching mat that read “welcome.”

An adolescent boy lays awake in his bed.

His sadness produces no weep.

His resentment composes no bark.

Mother wishes to know what irks her boy.

He will give her none of his integral voice.

“How do you feel?”

“Fine,” he always says,

He’s not fine. He hates it here.

But he’d never give you that,
the pleasure of knowing why,
knowing the pent up notions.

Mother, unworthy.

Undeserving of such a title.

At least you're not like him.

Oh God, not him,

The fickle being.

My lips struggle, refuse to open
to utter such filth.

Father, Oh father,

teach me the man's way.

Teach me what a real man does.

Teach me a man's job,

worthless bastard.

He taught the boy well,

taught him abandonment.

Neglect must be a man's way.

Diligence was too difficult,

too difficult for the man.

Left a "man's" job to a boy

Unappreciated, unrecognized

How dare she cry, she dares weep

For a man, the one who left her

The man that left her son

Mother loves not child but creator

“The boy’s pain is nothing compared to mine.”

“He knows not of my dolor.”

Is that a boy’s duty?

“How was your day, son?”

“Fine.”

“Tell me how you really feel.”

“Let me in”

Don’t you know?

The house with no door lets no one in.

He has shut out the world.

They just make a mess

So many chances given

So many times they took advantage

No one cares how the house feels

Dust covered knick knacks,
they lay on dust covered shelves.

Spiders leave their webs.

They all remain untouched.

The house will wither away
as the house with no door,
not as the house that lost it.

Solitude, but what does it care?

The house with no door sits atop its hill.

All is silent, eternal dead air.