



# Creative *Writing*

**STUDENT PRODUCTIONS**

**Edited by**  
Tera Loudon Warn



**State University of Maringá**  
Language Arts Program  
Letras-Inglês e Português-Inglês  
Creative Writing - Student Productions

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# Introduction

In partnership with the Language Arts Program at the State University of Maringá (UEM), multiple Creative Writing workshops were developed and led by Tera Loudon Warn, a Fulbright/CAPES English Teaching Assistant grantee from Michigan, and participant in the Fulbright Brasil program. The workshops took place from August 22nd to December 5th, 2022 at UEM, and focused on using creative writing as a method for self-expression and as a tool for English Language Arts students to improve their writing skills. Topics covered during the courses included an overview of creative writing, personal essays, non-fiction creative writing, short stories, poems, and comic strips. The texts included in this e-book are a result of the writing projects that were produced by some of those talented university students.

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*Creative Writing - Student Productions*

# Personal

# Stories

CHAPTER 01



# Adrian's Mind Map

Adrian Marcus Brito de Souza

06

Imagine yourself in a new land. This land is so vast that you can barely see the horizon far away. It is divided into 3 parts. The first one is a large field full of dark blue flowers, the second one is a small pink village containing some simple houses and a lovely square in the center. And the third is the farthest among the places, to be honest it is almost impossible to see, but when you get closer it can be properly seen. The third part is basically a field with a cyan lake in it; there are some rocks and plants around it, but that's all you can see from the surface because the real beauty is inside the deep lively-colored lake full of fish and crystals.

The land you're stepping on, my dear friend, is the representation of a young man named Adrian's mind. The field full of flowers represents the way he wants to be seen by people from the outside, in other words, he wants to be seen as someone interesting, pretty and different. The small pink village represents his real personality and each house is a different personality trait. And last but not least there is the lake. The lake is a physical manifestation of his memories, feelings, traumas, dreams but also his darkest fears. The lake has inside of it things that can be pretty but do not want to be seen.

Maybe you're wondering "Which place should I visit first?" But it's important to mention that the process of entering this land is not easy. The thing to do is to follow a specific order. First you must pass through the field, then the village and finally get to the lake. It's a great journey and you'll need to conquer the most important thing of all to get free access to this land: the golden visa called *Trust*.

Once you get the key and follow the process, you'll be able to walk freely on the land. Sometimes you won't, though. Because even though you have Adrian's trust, in some moments he won't open the gates; his emotions control the whole land. If he's not okay, not even the most trustworthy person can get in.

Before I forget, I need to mention that you can't ever enter the lake, or even touch it! You're only allowed to look from above. If you touch it, you might unbalance the whole world and ruin everything!

That space is too personal, so it's there only to be seen. Otherwise you will be invading Adrian's deepest insecurities and in the end both of you will be hurt by the consequences.

Another interesting aspect of Adrian's land is that the citizens of the village are actually different versions of himself. And the people he has met throughout his life are also present in this land. They're represented as the fish in the lake (at least the most important people from his past relationships).

Now that you have free access to this Wonderful land, I have some good news. The land is expanding day by day and soon you're going to see different versions of this unique and curious universe.



# Later is Harder

Paulo Jun Masukawa

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**G**o over there and talk to him. Don't say 'are you ok?', just 'hi.'

Me – "Hi, uncle, I am sorry for your loss."

Uncle – "Thank you."

Me – "If you need anything or want to talk, I'm here."

Uncle – "Thank you."

He answered me in a simple way, it was as if he knew he would have this conversation over and over again.

Me – "When did it happen? Last night?"

Uncle – "No, it was this morning. Yesterday she was talking, breathing normally. Then, this morning, I arrived, caressed her like this," (runs his hand through imaginary hair), "and now she's gone. She was waiting for me. This moment is going to stay with me forever," (puts his hand over his heart).

I arrived early along with my parents. My mom likes to do things right, and it was a day for comforting people, which was why we arrived early. Although she was the one who really needed to be comforted. Fortunately, she is tough, and my hugs and presence seemed to be enough (I guess). I am terrible with words (most of the time).

As I said, it was early in the day. Only my uncle, my cousin, her husband, and a woman who I believe was their housekeeper were there. My aunt's body had not arrived yet. After meeting my uncle who was next door, he and I went to sit on some couches where the others were.

I was feeling weird. I was happy to see my relatives who I hadn't seen for a while, but at the same time, I didn't know if I could smile. Would my happiness hurt their feelings? How sad and disoriented were they? Or would it be good to smile? To show them that I was happy to see them, and to help make the moment a little bit less sad.

Uncle – "Well, we could make it rain here, couldn't we?"

Me – “?” I looked at him, not understanding.

Uncle – “We just need to tie up a candle on a stick and...” He pointed with his head to the smoke detector.

I gave a smooth forced smile and kept looking at him. Maybe that was the best I could do. I definitely was not expecting that joke, and it was not funny.

Me – “Uncle, can I ask a question about my aunt?”

Uncle – “Of course.”

Me – “How did you two meet?”

Uncle – “We were neighbors. She lived in the student housing and I lived nearby.”

Me – “Here in Maringá?”

Uncle – “Yes.”

Mom – “Your aunt lived in the student housing, then when I came here, we moved to the apartment buildings near UEM. Do you know which ones I mean, son?”

Me – “Yes. Did my aunt go to college?”

Mother – “No, she didn't get a chance to go, she was always working.”

Uncle – “She didn't go, but she could still kick the asses of many lawyers around this city.” He said this with a slight smile at the corner of his mouth.

Later, when the funeral ceremony started, there we were looking at her for the last time.

Cousin – “Grandma, are you ok?”

Grandma – “Now, while she is here, it’s easier. Later is when it’s harder, when you know that you can’t see her anymore.”

I don’t remember everything that happened. I believe that certain situations are concretized by being a new experience, and not by words. But I guess these brief words can sum up a little bit of what I lived on the twenty-third and twenty-fourth of October.

# Eggs in My Way

Antonia Mara dos Santos Araújo

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I was returning home after spending a weekend at my mother's house. My bus passed in front of a chain supermarket, and I remembered that some things were missing at home, so I decided to get off at the bus stop and buy everything.

I entered the supermarket and went to get a shopping cart. A security guard stopped me, and asked:

- Miss, do you prefer to use an electric scooter with a basket for shopping?

I am a wheelchair user, but I had never used one of those scooters, so I decided to try it out.

- Sure! How do I use it?

The guy was very kind and gave me all of the instructions, and when I was about to start shopping he called me over again.

- Miss, I just wanted to let you know that to prevent someone from trying to steal the scooters, they are always low on battery, and when they are low, they don't go in reverse.

I thanked him for the warning and began my shopping.

Everything was going smoothly until I had to enter somewhat of a cramped corridor, and would need to maneuver in reverse to get the space necessary to move forward.

In the aisle I wanted to go there were some shelves, and an employee was packing egg cartons. I asked for his help, explaining why the scooter wouldn't back up, and I asked him to pull the scooter back a little to help me maneuver and be able to pass between the egg racks.

- Aaah miss! You don't need to reverse, you can go forward, there's room to pass.

- Seriously? I don't think so...

- I'm sure, don't worry!

- What if I hit the shelves and break something?

- You won't hit the shelves.
- And if I do hit them...?
- I'll take full responsibility. Now, go for it!

And with that answer I accelerated the scooter and started driving...

There were eggs everywhere! Two shelves fell, with a huge thud, drawing the attention of many frightened people. When I looked back, the poor guy had a white face and had his hands on his head. He said:

- Go ahead, no problem. Go, go!

So I went.

Moral of the story:

And they still say that women have no concept of space!

# My Au Pair Story

Barbara Maria de Oliveira Ricardo

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**A**t one point, in 2006, there was a contest going on at my school. The winners were going to win a trip to Walt Disney World, in Orlando, Florida. All we needed to do was answer a questionnaire about grade-related content. I remember my strong will to win, and my disappointment about not getting the answers right. I cannot recall my parents helping me or asking them for help, I just knew that I wanted to go to Walt Disney World.

Even though in the end I received no prize, I started to ask myself: Is winning a contest the only way to go to this beautiful place? There must be another way. And from there I started cultivating a dream to visit the United States, that U.S from the contest, from the books and movies. That U.S. where so many companies and innovations come from - a land of freedom and opportunity. In my search for strategies to make my dream a reality, I discovered the Au Pair program\*.

After being introduced to the program via a YouTube video, I researched all the aspects of it: price, requirements, agencies, etc. Next, I started working on those requirements, by learning English, gaining more experience with children, learning about their development and behavior, saving money, and talking to my family about it. By then I had already worked as a babysitter, I knew that I enjoyed children, and I had some basic English skills. I was also in my senior year, preparing to go to college and working as an apprentice in my hometown.

It was a long five-year journey of preparing myself: getting a degree in Trilingual Executive Management\*\*, doing internships, doing academic research, and working as a volunteer for the Junior Enterprise movement in Brazil (which consists of college startups focused on developing students skills for the marketplace by providing needed services for a cheaper price). I had a very busy routine, but it was one of the best phases of my life. I had a dream, and I was doing everything that I could to reach it. I was building my career and helping my country.

However, as soon as I graduated from college in Brazil, two great companies offered me jobs. I would not be an intern anymore, and I could finally earn more, do more, and make a good living in Brazil. The decision was hard.

*\*The Au Pair is an exchange program that consists of working in an American household as a babysitter for one year. Both the family and the Au Pair must follow the guidelines established by the American Government.*

*\*\*Also known as Executive Assistance, Business Assistantship, Office Management, among others.*

On one side was my family, a career, and stability; on the other, my dream and a mix of risks, challenges, and discomfort. Would I make friends there? Would I have a nice host family? Would I fall behind in my career? Would my family be okay while I was gone?

Although it was with some tears, in 2019 I chose to take the risk and to dive deep into the unknown: I became an au pair in the United States. I was going to live with a strange family, speak a different language, be far away from my own family, have to solve my problems alone, face different climate and weather, work forty-five hours per week, drive in a new country, manage homesickness, and still deal with the insecurities of being a young adult.

But beyond that, my biggest responsibility remained to the little ones I took care of. I was trusted to be an example to them, to protect them, be patient, cherish their dreams, make them happy, prepare them for life, keep them hopeful (when they did not have a good day at school), play with them, convince them to eat fruits (not easy), and teach them more than just the ABCs or 123s - to raise them with good character.

Today, at the end of this crazy journey, I can say it was the best choice for me. I grew so much during my time in the U.S. I am a better person than the one who left Brazil. The risks I took made me vulnerable, and yes, we can get hurt when we are vulnerable, but pain sometimes also has the power to change our way of seeing life, and of seeing the people around us. I became a more empathetic person because I had failed at things, which helped me to understand other people's failures. I felt pain, and it forced me to think about other people's pain. The experiences I acquired in the U.S., in that uncomfortable, vulnerable, yet amazing point in my life, were priceless.

My dream of going to Walt Disney World took me in such a different direction. It made me take the biggest risk of my life. I have risked, failed, faced my failures, and learned from them. If I do not take risks, how will I know how far I can go? If I do not make mistakes, how will I learn? I believe in people who dare to dream and to take risks. It makes them extraordinary. And I am certain that extraordinary people can beautifully impact the world.

# The Portrait

Bruna Thiemi Wakita Kawamoto

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"Sweetie, can you do me a favor and see if the cutlery for visitors is in the attic?" asked my mother, with an excitement I did not share. I hated going to the attic, and I had avoided that place ever since we moved into this house. "Mom, can't you look for it yourself?" I grumbled from the living room, but she was already far away and I would not repeat it, because I knew it was a silly fear. So I chose to ignore her, and wait until she asked me again.

The next morning, I ran downstairs and out the door quickly so my mom would not have the chance to ask me about the cutlery again. That night, I was walking home from work and I passed by an Asian couple who were taking a walk with their daughter. They seemed very happy, they were laughing and trying to make their little girl smile too, but she was very quiet. When she looked at me, those nostalgic black eyes made me look away. I did not want to remember. I closed my eyes for a second, and continued on my way home, taking my sweet time.

Usually I would let my parents know when I arrived home, but that night I intended to come in as quietly as possible. I managed to get to my bedroom without being noticed, but only for a moment. While in my room, I was able to do something that I was excited for every night: check my calendar to see what I had planned for tomorrow, and for the day after. Thinking about the future was refreshing, and with it came a thousand possibilities of a better life.

Then I heard a knock. "Dinner is ready!" my dad shouted. Dinner time was very important to my family, because it was the only time of day when we would have the chance to have a proper conversation... Though sometimes that was also scary. "I will be right there!" I answered, with failed enthusiasm. The dining room was downstairs, and to get there we had to walk through a small hallway, which had white walls, with nails in them that we had never removed.

For dinner we had a different meal from what we usually had, but the taste was somewhat familiar. My mom saw my reaction and said, "Honey, don't you remember? You used to love Donburi\* when we lived in Japan." Oh. So that was it. It was an odd feeling, but familiar. My parents shared their frustrations from the day and exchanged laughs while eating, but I chose to eat silently... Until finally my mother decided to remind me. "Don't forget to search for the silverware, because your cousins are coming tomorrow, okay?" I nodded, and hoped to find it anywhere but in the attic.



It was Saturday morning and I had looked for the cutlery everywhere. I had checked every corner and every room, but had found nothing. At this point, I was surrendering to the fact that I would need to go up to the attic. Oh, what a stupid feeling. I was not a child anymore, and it was just an attic. All I had to do was look in the boxes, I didn't even need to check the shelves. So I gathered my courage, and went upstairs.

From the only window near the stairs leading to the attic, I saw grey clouds that looked almost like ash. The sun was hiding behind them, and no sound could be heard from the neighbors. The handrail was uncomfortably cold, but I still held it tightly, afraid of it breaking. When I reached the last step, I realized that the door was already open. I took a deep breath, blocking my view of the shelves with my hands. I did not know if it was luck or not, but the boxes with the household utensils were in a corner far away from the shelves. Even still I could feel them calling me.

I finally found the silverware, it had been inside a transparent box the whole time. I hadn't remembered how beautiful and delicate it was with its flower designs. I thought about the last time we used it, on one of my birthdays when I was still a kid, though I couldn't exactly remember the date. Well, I should get downstairs quickly, because the smell of memories is making me dizzy, I thought to myself. I was ready to lock the door when I heard something cracking on the floor. Going against all my rational thoughts, I looked to see what it was. One of the portraits that had been on top of the shelf had fallen to the floor, and it was then I knew I would not be able to leave without first getting closer.

In the frame on the floor, was a photo of me and my parents on my first day of school in Japan. They were so proud of me; and I had no idea then how hard the next few years would be. I put the portrait back on the shelf, next to the one in which my grandparents appeared. How could I forget that day? They had visited us, and I had never felt more at home than when I was in their presence. When we came back to Brazil it was hard, because the feeling of not belonging is the worst feeling in the world.

Oh, no. Why was that picture here? I thought I had thrown it away a long time ago. Even though I tried, I could not stop looking at it, and all the memories started to come back to me. The person in the third portrait was me, just me. I was all dressed up for Matsuri\*, I had makeup on, was wearing a yukata\*, which was the tightest dress I had ever worn, and my hair was up in a bun. Yes, that was me, trying to fit in with a culture that often told me I was not a part of it. I guess they thought that I was not Japanese enough because I spoke Portuguese.

I gazed at my pained smile in the picture. That smile said everything. I was taught to smile, because that was my life for years. But I knew I deserved better. I deserved to find myself somewhere else. And that was when my family and I had moved to Brazil. Here I was a misfit too, though, not Brazilian enough. I did not choose to be lost, but I was, for most of my life. To this day, I am still trying to find the best of me, the light inside, but if I could, I would say to that little girl, "You are not alone, and even if you choose to be different, you will still find a way to be happy."

Holding the picture tightly, I felt tears covering my face, and I sighed a sigh of relief, and of freedom. At that moment, I could only hear myself saying, "I am sorry I forgot who you are." When I opened my eyes, my face was being touched by the warmest sun, coming from a window I did not know existed. The shelf was also covered in the bright color of the sun, which made me realize how beautiful all the pictures were.

I took my portrait, and the silverware, leaving the attic's door open as I descended the stairs. Once downstairs, I started walking through our hallway, but then suddenly I stopped. I looked at one of the nails on that empty wall, and realized that this portrait had belonged there all along. "Hey, honey!" my mom said. "Thank you for finding the cutlery!" And then she noticed the portrait on the wall. "Look! That's my Lily!"

### **Glossary:**

- **Donburi:** a bowl of fluffy, steamed rice with toppings such as vegetables and meat or seafood, eaten all together in one meal.
- **Matsuri:** a Japanese festival to thank the Gods, with dances, parades and food stands.
- **Yukata:** a traditional garment that looks like a robe, which wraps around the body and fastens with a sash (obi).

*Creative Writing - Student Productions*

# Short

# Stories

CHAPTER 02



# The Mystery of the Trailer ●●●

Amanda Gomes dos Santos

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It was just another normal day of life. I got up early, took a shower, got dressed, put on my uniform, had breakfast and brushed my teeth, exactly as I love to do every single day. But all of a sudden, everything was different, and I didn't know why. I was feeling a weird feeling, something that I'd never felt before. I tried to ignore it, and continued my routine. As I live outside of the city, I go to work on my motorcycle, a huge two-wheeled machine which I consider to be family, and which I affectionately refer to as Dalila. In fact, it's always just me, her and nature. So I went to work that day, and as soon as I got to the police station, the chief called me. When I entered her office, she started to tell me about a phone call that she had received in the middle of the night. The caller was a frightened woman, who was yelling, and it was impossible to understand what she was saying. The chief had tried to trace the number, but something was blocking the trace from going through. All she had discovered was that it was a call made in our little town, Saint Antony, and she asked me to go see if I could find anything out.

So I left the police station with Dalila and went looking for clues. First, I went downtown. I spent so many hours there, but I didn't find anything; it was very frustrating. So after a while, I decided to go eat something because I was starving. I went to a very popular restaurant, got a table and ordered mac and cheese. As I was eating, all I could think about was that woman and what she might be going through at that moment. Then, I happened to look outside the window, and I saw a very weird looking man. He was very, very tall, was wearing a beige coat, a hat of the same color, a black shirt, black pants and black boots. He was bald and had big eyes. He had a weird way of walking, it seemed almost as if he was hurt. I swallowed my food, paid the check and ran outside, but he had already disappeared. I couldn't find him anywhere. I started asking the people around the area if they had seen that man, but nobody had seen him, just me. It was a weird situation.

I was very intrigued by the guy, so I got on my motorcycle and started to roam around the town, looking for something that could lead me to him. That was when I came across a vacant lot near the old train station, which had been abandoned long ago. There was an old silver trailer from the 70s parked there, and it was falling apart. I had never seen that trailer anywhere in town. The weird feeling that I had felt earlier in the morning was back, including a headache and a pressure in my ears unlike I had ever felt before, but I ignored it and continued doing my job. I decided to go into the trailer to try to look for something. When I entered, I was so shocked that I gave a slight cry of amazement.

The trailer looked like it was from the year 3000 inside. It was fully equipped with a technology I had never seen before. I decided to call my boss and ask her to come and see what I had found. While I was waiting for her, I began looking around the vehicle. I was kind of afraid to search inside, but I couldn't believe what I saw. I'm a very skeptical person. I don't believe in ghosts, astrology, religion, and much less in extraterrestrials, but after what I was seeing, I wasn't sure about anything anymore. The trailer was definitely not something from this world.

After a while, the chief arrived with Rodriguez, my other colleague. When I showed them what I had found inside that stale trailer, they couldn't believe it either. We searched for some clues; maybe that vehicle had something to do with the frightened woman, but we didn't know yet. However, I soon found a cell phone. It was just a regular phone, from the current year, 2022, and had nothing to do with the technology from the future that we had found. I tried to turn the cell phone on, but it had no battery, so I went outside to the boss's car to charge it. As soon as I got enough battery, I started to fiddle with it and try to find something that might connect it to the woman. There were several pictures of a lady on it. She had brown hair, blue eyes and a friendly smile, but there were also thousands of pictures of cats, all of which seemed to be kept in a house. Strangely enough, I had already seen that house somewhere in the city, but I couldn't remember where. I showed the chief all the pictures and she told me to go look for the house, while she and Rodriguez continued searching the trailer.

So off we went, Dalila and I, on the road. It was almost dark, and was a beautiful and cold evening, with a sunset so unique and breathtaking, something that I had never seen before. The sky had a gradient of dark blue with purple and pink, and the stars were starting to shine brighter and brighter. The sky had never called my attention as much as it did that day. Suddenly, a very strong light began to shine on the horizon, between the gradient; a light so strong that it made me stop the motorcycle in the middle of the road, because I couldn't see anything else in front of me. At that moment, the strange feeling that I had felt before hit me harder than ever. The strong light lasted a few seconds and then disappeared, but I chased after it. I was driving so fast, and the closer I got to where the light had appeared, the more that bad feeling inside me increased. It felt like I had something in my head, controlling my mind and crushing my brain. But I didn't stop, because I knew in my heart that the light had something to do with the mystery we were trying to solve.

After driving for some time, I saw something odd in the middle of a cornfield. It was a huge hole, and part of the field was burnt, but there was no fire. So I stopped and got off Dalila, continuing on foot to try to find something. Out of nowhere, my body went numb. I couldn't feel anything, but I was able to move normally. I walked and walked for what felt like forever in the direction of the field, and I saw something right at the bottom of the hole. It was clearly a woman, but not just any woman—the woman from the pictures, and underneath her there was something even more strange. It looked like a giant drawing. I went down into the hole to check and see if she was alive, and she was, but she had some serious wounds. I called my colleagues and waited by her side for them to come. The numbness in my body continued, but I had to be there for her. While I was waiting, the woman suddenly woke up, and started talking. I couldn't understand what she was saying. She was very agitated, so I tried to calm her down by saying that help was on the way. She finally calmed down, and the police and medical staff arrived. They took her to the hospital as we started to investigate the surrounding area.

The next day, I went to the hospital to talk to the lady. I discovered that her name was Olivia. She was 32 years old and had no family, just her cats. She was calmer this time, and we started to talk about what had happened. Olivia told me that she had been sleeping in her house when she heard some loud noises on the ground floor. At first, she thought that it was her cats playing, but the noise was very loud. She went downstairs to see what it was, and saw two very strange men, who were tall, with big eyes and a creepy face; they looked like monsters. So she ran, locking herself in the bathroom, and she called the police. But the men caught her by knocking her down, and she woke up in that field, completely numb and with a very odd feeling, just like what I had been feeling that day.

In the end, we couldn't find anything to prove that the whole event involved aliens, because the trailer had disappeared; though the field remained burnt with that strange drawing in the middle of the hole. The whole city had heard about the odd event, but there was nothing that could confirm what had really happened. Today, 10 years later, the mystery of the trailer is still alive and that strange feeling, well even though I don't feel it anymore, it has never fully disappeared from my mind.

# Garden of Evil

Julia Delsantoro Schuindt

22

Johanna went to sleep tired that day. The air was cold and still, almost as if it was moist to the touch. Droplets of water occasionally rolled through the surface of the window panels near the bed where Johanna slept. In her dreams she was in love, in fact she was also in love when awake; she thought of him everyday, even though his face was still a mystery to her.

The Tuesday thing had been going on for a while now; every Tuesday morning she opened her door to find a huge bouquet of chrysanthemums waiting for her at the doorstep, resting in the little green carpet at the entrance of her house. The first ones were bright orange, just like embers fresh from a fire, then she got the yellow kind, lilac and pink, but today she had the red ones, and she loved them. They were gorgeous. She picked one and put it behind her ear, treasuring it as a token of the love of her secret admirer.

Johanna had always loved her plants, she had a beautiful garden in front of her house and her backyard was filled with flowers; she had lilies, carnations, camellias and her favorites, the purple poppies. She cared for them as if they were her children; she watered them, talked to them and even read stories to them. They were her first love, love at first sight, as you might say.

That Tuesday she decided to try to see who the person sneaking flowers to her door every week was. She boiled a kettle of water and made her fresh white tea, the tea that she knew was used to keep people awake past their bedtimes for centuries, then she went up to her bedroom and carefully closed the chic, transparent drapes just in the right angle so that she could peek at the front gate. The woman waited, and waited, and waited, drinking her coffee and wondering what that person was like; was it a she? Was it a he? Tall or petite? There were so many questions that helped to keep her mind busy and away from slumber.

The clock was nearly striking three in the morning, when finally she heard a metallic noise coming from the front gate. It was a man, a very tall and lean man, elegant in the way he walked, wearing a fitted suit and a cane. She couldn't see any more than that because the street lights were too dim, but that was enough for her. The man left the flowers and she felt the thrill of a young and reckless passion building up in her brain.

She went through the week becoming more and more obsessed with her admirer. The woman would often catch herself imagining the two of them going on dates together, stopping for ice cream at a fancy shop, or even going to get groceries.

She thought of being together in the cheerful gardens, eating small sandwiches and drinking fresh lemonade at a picnic. Johanna would sit in front of her mirror for hours brushing her silky deep brown hair while she fantasized about those silly dreams. She was eager to actually meet that gentleman. He had no idea of the effect he had had on her.

After a whole week of thinking, Johanna decided to leave a note on her doorstep in the spot where the man always left the flowers. She wrote to invite him for tea on Sunday and told him that she loved his flowers. She set the note there with one of her perfectly grown silk white carnations lying above the paper. Again she waited for the man to appear like a shadow in the night, excited to have another glimpse of him. When he appeared, he took the note and carefully read it while holding the carnation close to his nose, then he vanished in the dark moving at a happy pace, almost as if he were dancing. She was delighted with the scene and went to sleep hoping for the week to fly by.

On the next day when she woke up, she rushed to the door and grabbed her flowers, hugging and smelling the bouquet with pure joy. Johanna put the flowers in a jar of water with a bit of sugar to keep them pretty and plump for a few more days, then she went to her garden in the back yard to tell her poppies the good news.

– I'm finally going to meet him! – She exclaimed to the bright purple flowers planted in the ground. The poppies looked at her in a very suspicious way and replied:

– What if he doesn't like us? What if he steals you from us? You promised to look after us!

Johanna was shocked, but it wasn't the first time that her poppies were angry with her, and she understood the reason; after all, they were only trying to protect her like they did years before.

– He seems like a good man, I really want to have the chance of getting to know him better! – She said out loud, the flowers looked back at her and said no more, simply withering a bit in discontent.

She felt divided by the love that she held for the poppies and their magic properties, and also by the love and affection that she had built up for the mysterious man.



That night Johanna had all sorts of nightmares being haunted by her flowers and the crimes that they hid below their beauty. When she woke up, the woman realized that she wasn't in her bed; as a matter of fact she was standing in the middle of her garden, covered in dirt and holding a shovel in her delicate, pale hands, viewing the horrid sight of a grave dug near the daisies.

– You know what you have to do. – Said the poppies in a macabre choir, she agreed, and indeed she knew what was to come.

On Sunday morning she started the preparations, she took her finest china from the cabinet, organized the table with beautiful fresh flower arrangements and prepared food for the table: honey, goat cheese and finger sandwiches. Her perfectly delicious poppy seed cake was just fresh out of the oven, spreading its nutty roasted scent throughout the whole house. She also made her special tea, which she sweetened with her special flower jelly.

The woman went upstairs and got herself all dolled up; she chose a light, discrete silk dress, painted with the colors of a shy afternoon sky. Her brown hair was tied up in a thick braided bun with small wavy strings that fell from it like a cascade. She was not happy anymore; now she felt very apprehensive. She paced from side to side around her room until the clock hit four in the afternoon, and she heard the doorbell. It was too late to turn back now; the poppies had heard the doorbell too, and they would know if she turned the man away.

He was gorgeous, and she felt so sorry for having to let all that beauty go to waste. He was wearing another suit, a gray one with a silk blue tie around his thin and elegant neck. He was probably from a good, wealthy family and she could tell this by his golden watch chain and by the ring he was wearing in his pinky finger. He smiled at Johanna but the smile wasn't a very white or pure one. She invited the man in, and to her surprise, he didn't leave his cane at the door with his hat, but instead carried them both inside. The happy dancing pace she had seen the previous night was in fact a limp in his leg.

They were both sitting at the table chatting but Johanna couldn't seem to keep her mind focused on the subject.

– Would you care to try a piece of my poppy seed cake? – She said, trying to avoid much conversation.

– I'm not much of a poppy seed on my food kind of man. – He replied with a smirk.

The decision of turning him away that she had been considering was immediately forgotten. How could someone not like poppy seeds?

– They are such ugly, little flowers, not even close in comparison to the other flowers with all their beauty and aromas.

When she heard that last sentence, she didn't think twice before pouring the man a cup of the warm tea with a huge dollop of her special flower jelly in it. The man was delighted with the sweet scent of the tea and took a huge gulp of it. She smiled at him and he complimented the jelly. After he was finished with the whole cup they chatted for a while more, and she said that she loved his chrysanthemums; he replied that he loved the carnation she had left for him.

– The secret for beautiful carnations lies in the fertilizers I use on them. – The woman said, while the sides of her face wrinkled a little with the tension of her almost rude smile.

– Can I see your garden then? Maybe you can teach me to take better care of my own flowers. – When they stood up the man felt a sudden dizziness. He looked at her, and she made a confused face. She asked if he was okay. The man replied that it was probably because he had stood up from the chair too quickly and laughed, apologizing. She nodded with her head and pointed the way to the garden. The man went ahead of her, walking with his cane in his hand again, but he stopped as soon as they got to the garden and he saw the large grave at his feet.

– Are you planning to plant a tree here? This hole is deep enough to fit a big one. – The man said, grasping his cane firmly and feeling even more dizzy.

Johanna quietly raised the shovel in the air, and as soon as it descended a spritz of red tainted her dress, while his body fell into the hole like a lifeless potato bag.

– Nobody gets to hate poppies in my presence! – She screamed at the man in the bottom of the pit.

The flowers agreed. Johanna watered all of the other ten coffin-shaped flower plots, each one blooming with a different flower of a different age, but grown with the same fertilizer.

– You will grow perfect this time my love, I promise. – She whispered to the seeds buried into the fresh soil, hoping that one day they would meet her high expectations.

Johanna went back inside, showered and burned her dress, and before sleeping she drank another cup of tea with a very small amount of her jelly, made of sugar and opium from the poppies she cultivated. She wished sweet dreams to her flowers, and with no guilt, in peace, she slept.

# You Were Right

Ísis Maureen de Souza Cardoso

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- You were right, I'll give you that... - They say after letting out a dramatic sigh. After a moment and an amused smile, they turn to their right side, resting their head with a hand. If laying on the hardwood floor was uncomfortable, they weren't showing it.

Aside from the sound of shallow breathing, the room was very quiet.

- I tried my best, you know? To fit in, to be normal... But it can be a bit hard when you can't feel what people should, so I had to fake it. Maybe that is why I usually did so well in drama classes...

*"Anyway, I noticed that you were bothered by me a few months ago. I overheard you complaining to others, well... maybe not complaining, not at first, but I heard you saying about how there was something about me that just "felt wrong" or that I didn't seem very "genuine". You could have hidden it a bit better, don't you think? It was clear how annoyed you were that no one seemed to agree with you. It didn't help that I was always a good student, good grades, good behavior, always kind and polite, I even tutor math to the lower grades, volunteered regularly. I tried to make sure that no one could paint me in a bad light... Oh!"*

They let out a playful giggle, turning to look at the ceiling again. Their right cheek was now wet with a dark red liquid.

- I think I know what it was... it was the prize, wasn't it? For the best essay in our grade? That's what got you so bothered? - There was a short huff. - It's true that these things are relevant when you are trying to get a scholarship, but I thought it was something more interesting. But I wonder what made you start looking into me...

*"I'm used to people looking at me, especially when they think they notice something odd or out of place. Hmm, but normally they leave it alone, I thought you would do the same. I wasn't really surprised, since you weren't that subtle, the side glances and getting so tense around me didn't give it right away, but not covering your tracks did. Did you really think that no one was going to tell me that you were asking around about me? A little naive on your part. As I said, I always made sure that people had a image of me, so when you went to some of our teachers, the librarian and the nurse with so many questions about my behavior and my past, they were a bit worried that maybe we weren't getting along, even offered to have a talk with you. At least the others could hide their suspicions for a little longer..."*

The only answer was a quiet gurgling.

- The others? Yes, of course there were others. Unfortunately, they couldn't just let go, you know? What am I saying! Of course you know, you just tried to do the same! - There is another giggle, followed by a sigh and a small frown. - We could have had a lot more fun if you hadn't done things so secretly, if you hadn't snooped around.

After a short silence, they could hear steps approaching at a slow pace. The shallow breathing near them suddenly became labored. The security guards on campus usually did their rounds at that time. A flash of light passed briefly through the windows and they could hear someone whistling.

A meekly "help" echoed through the large room.

- Oh please... If you want anyone to help you, you will need to do a little better. - Their tone was kind, but their sly smile gave their real intentions away.

- It wouldn't have come to this if you hadn't gone to my student records and medical files. I expected better from you. - Getting a little closer, they whispered - It was rude, you know? Those should be private!

"I thought it was a bit odd that you suddenly decided to help in the school's office, since you mentioned before how administrative work bores you. Especially at such late hours! If you hadn't mentioned a few key words to the nurse, I wouldn't have felt the need to intervene. Of course, the fact that she was getting old and a bit forgetful helped me to get rid of her."

The girl laying beside them shed a tear. They were in a similar position, with their arms and legs spread apart. The girl on the right was almost still, the only movement being the barely visible ups and downs of her chest. As her pulse was getting slower, she was getting more and more pale. The floor surrounding her was wet with something that had a very similar color to the walls surrounding them, a deep shade of scarlet.

Noticing the silence, the person on her left turned to the girl, adding quickly with a comforting tone:

- Oh, don't worry, I didn't have to kill her in the end, just made her think that she wasn't fit for the job anymore. It was easy really, swapped around some labels, misplaced a few objects, made her think that she was "hearing things"...

She could hear the person speaking near her, but at the state that she was currently in, she couldn't understand much of it, not after losing so much blood.

Everything hurt, she was emanating a cold sweat and, as much as she wanted to get up and run away, there wasn't really much energy to do anything; the small bit that was left was currently focused on remaining conscious.

- It was also very easy to get you alone, you should have known better, really. A girl, alone, this late at night? That's dangerous! Yeah, yeah, you were inside the school building, it should have been safe enough. Still, you could have been more careful... - They switched their gaze back to the ceiling, the old chandelier looked almost enchanting in the low light of the room. They spoke again after taking a deep breath. - If you were going to look at the student files, did you really need to do it after hours, in the dark, with a flashlight? People already knew that you helped the teachers, you could have turned the lights on and just come up with a lie if you had gotten caught. Well, I guess you never were a good liar...

*"I was going to do it in the office, but you kept running around... It was a little unnecessary. Going inside this ballroom was even more unnecessary. If you were so suspicious of me, why did you let me get so close? You really didn't notice me approaching from behind? You thought, what... that you could fight me? Bare hands against a really big knife?"*

After another deep breath, they got up and stared at the girl on the floor. She tried to mutter something, but the only thing that came out was a quiet sob. They sighed.

- It's okay, there are not many people who will miss you.

She had been looking at the ceiling for some time now. A part of her hoped that someone would find her in time, but the other was accepting what was coming. Her vision was blurry with tears and it was hard to focus on anything, but when they stood over her, she could see their smile, and the gentleness of that smile only made things worse.

Before she even had time to close her eyes, there was a sharp and deep cut on her neck, and she drowned in her own blood.

They hummed as they walked away, leaving the building and blending in with the crowd, while they thought about adding a few things to their list of chores and assignments for the rest of the week. They smiled and waved as the other students recognized them. It was really lucky that she decided to play detective while the school held the Halloween party, they thought, while joining the group they usually hung out with, pretending to be enjoying the festivities for the rest of the night.

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*"Now on to some shocking news: The body of a female student was discovered this morning at the Cleanton Preparatory School. Their annual Halloween party was held the night before, and several witnesses claim to have seen a girl wearing the school's uniform, with several stab wounds on her chest area, and with her throat cut, laying in a pool of blood in one of the rooms. However, they thought it was part of the decorations, since the school is known for displaying very elaborate decorations on Halloween. A janitor, who was sent to clean the room today, notified the authorities after noticing that it was, in fact, a dead body. The school board has yet to release an official statement in regards to the situation. The police have had limited access to the crime scene and are still investigating..."*

# A Crucial Mistake

Julia Lourenço Pereira

It all started when I accidentally picked up the wrong suitcase at the airport. I was so excited about being back home after so many months that I didn't even notice exactly what it was that I was doing. Samuel was waiting for me, smiling widely. As soon as he saw me, he came towards me, moving in what was something between a fast walk and a slow run, and gave me a warm hug.

"Can't believe you're finally back", he said.

"Yeah, it felt like the longest flight I've ever taken", I said, just then releasing him, smiling too.

"Ready to go home, eat some good pizza and get some rest?" he asked me, guessing my mood perfectly.

"You really couldn't have made me a better offer", I told him, letting my weak smile show all my tiredness.

Samuel helped me with the luggage. We got to his car and it didn't take long before I was home. I wasn't willing to unpack or organize anything at that moment, instead I went straight to shower. My bathroom was very tidy after not being used for so long, and I even felt sorry about using it. Before closing the door, I told Sam that I would be right back. He was apparently having problems with his cell phone.

"Yeah, ok. And I guess I'll have to go. I'm really sorry, but look at this", he said, coming closer and showing me his cell phone. I saw a couple of messages sent by his boss on the screen. Someone had just broken into the company office, and he was being requested to go back to work to check what was going on.

"What the hell!" I said, astonished. "You definitely should go and help".

"I'll be back as soon as the whole thing is solved", Sam told me, looking a bit distressed. He kissed me goodbye and left.

Great, no company on my first day back. I guess I wouldn't have much to do besides unpacking.



Even though I was tired, falling asleep at 7 pm was not an option; that was too early in any circumstance. I took the shower I was so desperate for and started to organize some of my things. I eventually convinced myself that sooner or later I would have to unpack the largest suitcase anyway, so there was no reason to keep postponing it. When I turned to get it, I realized that something was wrong. *Oh, crap, I thought, that's not my suitcase.*

Why didn't I check if it was the correct one when I got it? What was I thinking? How the hell did I confuse my own suitcase with such a weird looking one?

I took a closer look at it and, the more I looked, the worse the black suitcase seemed to be. It was all scratched, and was stained in some places with an apparently scarlet liquid. There was also a funny smell that seemed to be emanating from it; old leather, I guess. If the clothes inside were in a similar state to the object containing them, the real owner would not have much to miss. Maybe I should open it, I thought. I could not risk messing up my perfectly clean bed though, so I kept the suitcase on the ground, unlocked it and opened it.

It felt like my brain could not fully register what I was seeing. A cold feeling washed through my whole body and I felt as if an electrical current had just hit me. A scream was stuck in my throat. I could not move or draw a breath. I have never felt so horrified in my entire life. Nothing could have ever prepared me to face the scene playing out in front of my eyes.

A dead body. There was a dead body inside the suitcase.

*How?*

*Why?*

I shut my eyes closed with all the force I could gather and slowly sat on the floor, covering my face with my arms. It's not real, I thought desperately, *it can't be real! I'll open my eyes and it will be gone.*

It was not gone. It was still there. Even after trying to make sense of the situation and convince myself that it was not actually happening, I opened my eyes and saw it again.

But now I could not stand to look at it anymore. My senses seemed to come back to me, and I was able to get up from the floor and quickly leave the room. I closed the door behind me and started walking around the apartment. It was impossible for me to focus. It took me a while to realize that I was supposed to call the police, and when I finally made my way to get my cell phone, which was lying on the small table near the sofa, a knock on my door made me halt in the middle of the living room.

I froze for a solid minute, but then the knock came again, and it occurred to me that maybe Sam had come back for some reason and would be able to help me. I took a few fast steps towards the door and opened it. And all the rush of fear came back again. The strange man standing in front of my door was dressed in all white: shoes, pants, shirt and coat. His face was pale, as white as his clothes, contrasting with his dark black hair. He was holding something in his hand, something that I was only able to identify shortly after having it pressed against my skin.

"Hope you liked the new suitcase", he said, injecting the syringe content in my right arm.

All my senses slowly left me, and the man just stared at me, motionless, waiting for me to succumb.

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After a period of time, I was not able to discern how long, I woke up in the same place where I'm being held hostage now. It is like a cell. No furniture, no windows, almost no light. The only way in is through a door that provides a slit of brightness through the slot between the ground and the bottom of the door. Judging by the change in the light's intensity, I have been here for a whole day since I woke up. Completely sealed inside this room, my nose seems to be getting used to its smell. Not the smell of old leather this time, but the smell of a place that has certainly housed a corpse before.

Whoever brought me here has not come back to check on me yet. But I heard people talking.

Seconds after waking up, I suppressed the urge to desperately scream for help, because I realized that someone was near the door. I used all my strength to focus on what they were saying. It sounded like two men.

"... but I'm not sure if she was a good choice. This guy must know her very well, maybe he will make it hard to keep the story believable".

"These beings will believe everything. The made up evidence reported is enough. You know how humans are always fascinated by monstrous acts, no matter how much fear it causes them. And when it all happens for the second time, tomorrow, it will be even more interesting for them".

"Do you think they are going to figure things out?"

"They won't have time for that. By the time they get close to understanding the situation they won't have any power over it anymore. When all the fear caused by the deaths around the globe becomes pure power placed right into my hands, they won't have any option other than to serve us".

"It sounds plausible, yes". A pause. I held my breath. "So we don't need the girl anymore, I suppose".

"She's no use. And we don't have to waste our time. The injection will kill her soon, right after messing with her head a little bit. We'd better get moving now". Footsteps began and faded seconds later

I have been laying motionless on the cell's floor since I heard those men leave. I am feeling sick, like I am going to throw up. And I can not let go of the sensation of being observed. Has that crack in the ceiling been there all along? I wonder. What are those pills doing near the door, laying on that dirty tray? I do not feel like I will ever know the answer to that question. And I become more certain of this with every second.

# The Brothers

Éric Alan Rocha Reginato

35

*Mike, when will you come back to play with me? I miss you so much!*

Ever since you went to live at grandma's house, I ask daddy and mommy when you will come back to our sweet home, but they always answer that you are not ill like me, and that that rainy day when we decided to play soccer was the reason why we got pneumonia. I don't know about you, Mike, but I don't think I can trust mommy and daddy anymore, because we have been sick at the same time before, so why is it different this time?

Without you by my side to play with, I feel that the days are like a limbo of loneliness. I wake up, I eat Froot Loops with milk in your favorite bowl, I say bye-bye to daddy, and I listen to mommy reading a book aloud. But the worst part of my days, lil' brother, is when the rain is pouring down outside, and I have to swallow the pills that help me to be healthy, and finally go to sleep. I swear it's all so boring and tiring without you. Really! I don't have a TV to watch our favorite cartoons: SpongeBob and The Woody Woodpecker show... Do you remember them? I don't have a mirror to make silly faces, or toys to create stories about heroes fighting against villains. And I don't have you to pretend that I am the Super Lightning and you are the Mud Man.

It is a limbo of boredom, where the windows are always closed, as mom always says that the storm will flood the house if they are open. Not that it matters, since I spend most of my days inside the dark basement. Every time I see a little flash of light, I cry, asking to play in the yard, but mommy always uses the rain as an excuse not to let me, and points out that I need to stay under the covers to get better. Now I'm here crying, and thrashing in fits of agony, and she is making me swallow the sleeping pills and drink the juice. I can't see anything now, Mike...

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Mike, I have a plan. Do you remember when we decided to put one of mom's sleeping pills in Uncle Zachary's soda? And how he slept for, like, forever and we played with his lighter? So... My plan is to do the same thing with mommy, after dad goes to work, and then I can finally get out of this house and walk to grandma's house to see you.

Now mommy's here, standing in front of me, with that hair of hers tied in a messy bun, trying to force me to take those pills again. Oh, lil' brother, she does not notice how I do not chew the pills, or how I keep them under my tongue until I can hide them beneath my pillow. I'm a genius! You should've known that I was a mastermind and I would make Machiavellian plans.

I miss you so much, Mike. I cannot wait to wait to see you. Tomorrow I will definitely put my plan into action

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When the morning comes, while mom is preparing my Froot Loops, I crush the pills in the glass of orange juice. I devour the Froot Loops as usual, but refuse to put the juice in my mouth. I cross my arms, pout and make a disgusted face at the orange liquid.

"You need to drink your juice," her tone of voice is that of someone extremely tired, with no more strength to force a naughty child to do something against their will.

"I won't! You poisoned it, you witch!" I yell this like I am about to go into crisis mode, keeping that disgusted expression focused on my glass. "I don't wanna die!"

"You won't die, hun. I promise."

"Liar!" I shout loudly. "I will only trust you if you drink it first."

"Now's not the time to play around..."

Tired and with no strength to argue, mom decides to drink all the juice, and tells me I am grounded. There is now an angry expression that has replaced her once-so-careful gaze. When dad goes to work, she takes me to the basement, saying that she is going to read me a short story, and then force me to take the sleeping pills. It all seems super unfair, but I agree, as so far everything is going as planned. Once I escape the house, no day will ever be the same again.

The meds kick in a few hours later, and mom falls asleep sitting in her rocking chair, as she hugs a copy of the Bible with its yellowed pages. All I have to do is steal the key ring from her right pocket, and be very careful going up the stairs and unlocking the basement door. Soon, I hear seven footsteps of someone sleepy coming up the stairs to catch up with me. It's her.

If she had caught me before I ran away, I would most certainly have been grounded for life. But for you, my brother, I manage to run with my small legs to the exit, and she is unable to reach me in time. Yet, I can't escape, because I can't find the right key to open the door. I am so close, but at the same time, so far away. I have never felt my little heart beat so fast.

"I just want to protect you! Don't run away!" She yells, while getting closer, things are getting totally out of her control. She stretches out her arms that are now limp and wrinkled, ready to stop me from escaping from that windowless eternal limbo. "You won't die, dear!"

Luckily, she passes out in the middle of the living room, unable to catch me. In a few seconds and with the correct key, I am able to run towards the storm that is falling down outside. No... There is no storm, just a warm sun, that I'm sure will burn my pale skin. The sound of the storm keeps ringing in my ears, because the rain was never outside our house, but inside my mind.

The reason I never stopped hearing the rain has to do with what happened the afternoon of the storm, when we were playing soccer. I remember clearly how neither of us managed to catch the ball before it rolled toward the street, and also how we competed to see who would get to the ball first. I was always the fastest, and I got to the toy before you did, the same way the vehicle with no headlights on rocketed right up to me, giving the driver no chance to prevent that fatal accident.

Mike, now everything makes sense. All my life is a lie. I'm dead, this house is hell, and our parents are the demons. With these memories of my death illuminating the dark side of my brain, I cry like a baby. Do you remember how I always teased you, calling you a fearful cry baby? Now I'm the cry baby. Actually, I'm a dead cry baby, crying because I can't see my favorite person in this world ever again.

The tears spill out even harder when the demon's car pulls into the driveway, and a creepy old man steps out of the vehicle.

He doesn't look like dad, even though there are features that bring back memories of the dad who held us up into his lap when he got home from work.

"Son, you should come back inside. I can explain everything, okay?"

Like a monster, he is getting closer and closer with his fast steps. I am paralyzed.

"You are our baby. We just want to protect you."

"I want Mike! I want my brother!"

"You don't understand..." The demon's voice is hoarse, barely audible to me, the boy with the sound of rain inside his head. Even so, it takes me a while to understand that he is going to drag me into the house. If I want to get out of this limbo, I will have to fight my way to heaven.

It seems impossible that a seven-year-old boy can take down a demon, but I do it! One punch is enough to send the old man to the ground, begging me not to hurt him. I keep hitting the one who pretends to be my father, demonstrating how much stronger I am than that maniac. After a few more hits, I have beaten the monster, and I am free to walk the streets, to head towards a better place.

My next action is to get up, and I feel the wind blow against my face. A sweet taste of my freedom. However, when I see my reflection in the car window, a scream of terror escapes my mouth. I am in the body of a man, apparently older than when our father still took care of us. But it isn't a man I am staring at... It is me. It is all a lie, Mike. Decades have passed since I ceased to be a child, and I have now taken the form of an old man, with long brown hair, an equally long beard, and skin as pale as a monster's.

*All my life is a lie.*

Mike, I did not die in that accident. You died! You died and it's all my fault. You, the fearful one, ran in my direction to stop the car from hitting me squarely on. But it didn't help, because both of us were practically crushed by the car.

You were fighting for your life even before we got to the doctor, but you died while I was undergoing all those surgeries, surgeries that were never able to fully reverse my brain trauma. Up until age thirty-three, all of my days have been the same; because my parents could not stand to lose another beloved child, they chose to keep me as a child until there was no more salvation. They became tired, bitter and old, but I saw them as young, for I was manipulated into believing that you were never gone.

The terror is still in my eyes as I recall every bit of our tragic story, and I finally understand every one of my parents' lines. They just wanted to protect me. But at what cost? I have wasted my whole life. No, there is still salvation... If only I could run towards the street, and yell for a car to take me to safety. I am so close to *living*.

But my dad is also close, close enough to sneak up behind me and bang my head against the car's window, while begging me to forgive him for everything. There is no way to forgive, even if over the next few days, little by little, I am starting to forget my discovery again. From time to time, I arrive at this same point, almost starting to remember, until I am forced to return to the basement.

This is the first time that my parents actually lock me in the dark room, and nail my palms against the wall behind the bed. Blood runs down my hands, as tears are streaming down our parents' aged faces.

"We're not going to let you die, dear." They swear it seven times per day when they come in here, while I scream, begging them to set me free. But in order to protect me from my own death, my parents will never let me experience a taste of life.

The only and last time I see a light is on the third day, when all the pain in the palm of my hands is finally gone. And now, after another 33 years, I need to ask you:

*Mike, when will you come back to play with me? I miss you so much!*



## Temporary Weakness

Rafael Oliveira Gomes

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He sat next to her on the icy, bloodied floor boards and sighed. The burning sky outside never changed, but they tried to forget about this cursed nightmare at least for a minute. The Man carefully took off his bloodied gloves, and gently stroked his calloused hands. It was like touching someone else's hands, as the touch felt so unfamiliar. The Lady silently watched his odd and timid movements, keeping her eyes from looking directly at him. Something in their hearts could not rest. The chilling and the steely air coming from the door, which even in calm moments like these threatened to suffocate. It was the smell of blood... So much blood, it was everywhere, spilled from their countless battles. Now all their thoughts were drowning them, mixing. Between them was a shared momentary weakness that the world needn't know about. The lioness's pride and firm stoicism subsided, as the Lady bowed her head on the Man's shoulders, her sigh full of sorrow and sadness.

His weary mood was no better as he clung to her hands, and bloodied clothes like a child clings to a parent. Maybe, just maybe, the Man was not alone in his pain. He shed tears all over the lady's bloodied cape, and the tears mixed with the crimson blood. She benevolently, and so gently, caressed his mortal head, holding his trembling hands. Now she was letting out all her sorrows, but she still lacked the skill to express her feelings; the ability to be someone other than a mentor, a master, or a beacon for the lonely man. She sighed, as if she wanted to say something as the flowing water kept coming down his cheeks. She wondered:

"Does he feel guilty for crying before my very eyes? Or did the pain finally catch up to him?"

Whatever it was, she placed her hands on his red cheeks and collided her forehead into his. They swore never to speak of what had just occurred. He poured out again, more tears and like a baby, said something indistinct to her, about being ashamed of his current appearance. They hugged. They both needed it, for they had lacked human affection amongst all the chaos and constant fighting. For the first time, the Lady gathered all her pain and concentrated it into a single tear. When the teardrop dried up, they fell silent and looked at the moonlight piercing the windows. For some time they sat there motionless, but when the townspeople started screaming in the distance, the Lady got up and said:

"Only an honest death can cure them now. We must liberate them from this nightmare."

As the Man eagerly got up and readied himself for another violent hunt, the Woman muttered to herself:

"It was just a temporary weakness."

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*This story was inspired by the video game Bloodborne. Names and locations were removed to avoid any copyright infringement.*

## Trust Me

Isabela Franzoni dos Santos

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*You were right.*

*You were always right.*

Cordelia Lovell was late for class for the first time since she had set foot in Saint Adrien. She knew how seriously Mr. Brown took tardiness so she jogged a little quicker, strengthening her hold on her backpack's straps. The previous night, Cordelia had had a terrible nightmare involving her mother and a beheading. For a week now, her dreams had all been following that pattern: her loved ones dying in different types of terrible murders. Because of that, she had not been sleeping as much as she should have, which reflected in her behavior in class. For example, the day before, Ms. Lewis had asked her to read a paragraph from the book for the whole class and, well... Let's just say Cordelia might have read almost half of the words wrong, which caused her classmates to laugh, and the teacher to be furious.

Saint Adrien was a private high school located in London, well known for being rigorous and one of the most expensive schools in Europe. Getting into this school, however, did not only depend on how rich you were, or if you had an influential family. They prioritized well-behaved students and, of course, impeccable grades. Cordelia had worked hard her entire life just to have the slight chance of being accepted at Saint Adrien. It was mostly her father and mother's pressure on her that pushed her forward; they were once students there, as well as her grandparents. It was a family tradition Cordelia just couldn't fail at being a part of. Reminded of the risk of being expelled, Cordelia jumped the last three steps of the stairs, her legs wobbly. Sweat drops rolled down her back despite the teeth-chattering weather.

Cordelia stood in front of the classroom door, fixed her dark brown curls, and knocked. She hoped Mr. Brown would be understanding. It was the first time she had been late for something. It was not usual for Cordelia to ever be late, and she hated it. Her father never tolerated any misbehaving from her.

Suddenly, the door opened. Cordelia could almost hear the hinges screaming for mercy; such was the force used in the action of opening the door.

"You're six minutes late, Ms. Lovell." - Mr. Brown said.

Mr. Brown was the scariest man Cordelia had ever met. He was probably older than her grandparents; he had a permanent scowl on his face that transfigured his otherwise kind features into an I-will-send-you-home-right-now sight. However, what scared her the most was his similarity to a tree that she had in her backyard at home, both Mr. Brown and the tree were impossibly tall, and loomed over her in a way that made her feel insignificant. The tree's branches would scratch her window every windy night, and she swore she could hear it asking her to let it come inside. For some reason, Mr. Brown seemed to despise Cordelia. Cordelia was the top student in her class; she had outstanding performance, never once got a low grade and was respectful even when Mr. Brown was rude. She was clueless as to why he hated her guts.

"I know, Mr. Brown, I just—"

"With all due respect, Ms. Lovell," - he interrupted her - "I do not care. Just go to your desk and let me continue to teach those who, unlike you, arrived on time, and are interested in preparing themselves for their upcoming exams."

Feeling her face burn, Cordelia nearly sprang to her seat. Mr. Brown instantly went back to what he was doing, explaining something on the board. Cordelia made eye contact with her best friend, Bella Carter, a blonde and brilliant girl who had become Cordelia's whole world less than a week after they met at Saint Adrien. They had a one of a kind connection; they could tell exactly what the other was thinking just by looking at each other. This time was no different; Cordelia could understand precisely what Bella's raised eyebrows were saying... "Are you crazy? Late for Mrs. Brown's class?" Cordelia shook her head aggressively, as if shouting "Not now! Not now!"

After four long classes, they were finally released for break. There was nothing the students at Saint Adrien liked more about the place than its food. The school had kids from all over the globe, from Brazil to Azerbaijan, and because of that, it had to accommodate everyone's food tastes as well. Every day you could eat Tteokbokki as a main dish and have Brigadeiro as a dessert; the options were endless.

Cordelia and Bella got in line, chose their food and sat at a table near the school cafeteria doorway. Before Cordelia could even open her mouth, Bella flooded her with questions.

"Cordelia, what is going on with you?"

"You have been acting so odd lately, there are dark circles under your eyes, you look like a ghost! Are you eating properly? Oh my God, of course you are, I see you every day." - Bella kept rambling nonstop. It was funny to Cordelia how dramatic her friend was; nonetheless, she appreciated her concern.

"Bella, please, stop it! I'm fine, alright?"

"You are not. Tell me why you were chewing on your favorite pen yesterday while staring at a blank page in your notebook."

Cordelia took a deep breath and had an internal debate on whether or not she should tell Bella about her nightmares. She was reluctant to do so because most of them involved her friend being abducted and killed by shadowy figures. And that was where things got even more abnormal, Bella had told Cordelia that she had been followed by someone around the school many times, although she could never see who it was. The only thing she was emphatic about was that it was someone wearing "a black cloak with a hood on." Of course, Cordelia always believed her best friend, but she couldn't grasp why anyone would do such a thing to a lovely and harmless girl.

"You see? That's what I'm talking about!" - Bella said, while waving her hand in front of Cordelia's face. Cordelia finally gave in and told Bella everything, and she could already tell her friend was terrified.

"Bella, don't freak out, it's nothing serious."

"Such a coincidence can't be nothing, Cordelia, something is off." - Bella said, while looking around. She was acting very strange.

"Bella, is there something you aren't telling me? You are overreacting, it is not that serious. We've already spoken to the principal about that person who's following you. It's ok." - She took Bella's hands in hers, they were sweaty and cold. Cordelia loved Bella so much, she would do anything to make her friend happy.

"Alright, the thing is" - Bella paused, and took a deep and shaky breath.

"I think I saw Mr. Morgenstern doing something... Beyond weird."

"Mr. Morgenstern? As in our literature teacher?" - Cordelia asked, confused.

"Yes, and since that day I... I think he's been following me, I- I think he's the one wearing the black cloak."

Cordelia was speechless for a moment. Mr. Morgenstern was simply the most polite and sweet teacher in the entire school. He always had a smile on his face, made jokes and was far from being as harsh as the other teachers. Cordelia could not possibly imagine Mr. Morgenstern hurting a fly.

"Bella, that's a serious accusation, are you sure?" - Cordelia questioned carefully. Not for a moment did she think that her friend was making things up, but Bella could be mistaken. Every time she had been followed, it had happened at night, and she could barely see the person.

"I've never been more sure about anything ever before in my life, Cordelia. I know what I saw!" - Bella said firmly, looking deeply into her eyes. She now was the one holding Cordelia's hands, so hard it almost hurt.

"Fine, then I need you to tell me what exactly you saw."

Before Bella could open her mouth, the bell rang. It was time to go back to class. If Cordelia hadn't arrived late to class once already today, she would have stayed to talk things through with her friend, but she was already failing at maintaining good behavior lately, and she couldn't keep letting that happen.

"Bella, look, after class I will come straight to your room. Do not go anywhere else, ok?" - Bella nodded, and they went to their separate classes.

After all Cordelia's classes ended that afternoon, she headed back to the dorm. She was exhausted both mentally and physically, but she needed to talk to Bella. Bella's room was at the end of Cordelia's corridor.

She loved her friend's room because it had an amazing view of the forest that surrounded the school. Composed by big and ancient trees, the dense forest felt mystical with its flowers of all colors, sizes and smells. Whenever Cordelia and Bella had the time, they went to a small clearing, not too far from the dorms, and talked for hours. Sometimes they even studied there; it emanated such a peaceful aura. They hadn't been there for quite a while now due to their exams; it was their first experience with a Saint Adrien's exam week and it surely lived up to its reputation. Last week had gone by in a blur, Cordelia had been so busy almost devouring her books, or just spacing out thinking about her unusual dreams.

Cordelia knocked on Bella's door and waited. Seconds went by but not a sound was heard coming from her friend's room. She's probably at the library, Cordelia thought. She sighed and went back to her room. She decided to write Bella a note asking her to stop by later so they could talk. Cordelia was too tired to go all the way back to the library. After she stuck the note in her friend's door, she laid down in her bed and immediately fell asleep.

Cordelia was exhausted enough that she only woke up the next morning and, thankfully, she was not late for her first class. As soon as she stepped into the classroom, she noticed her friend's absence. Cordelia frowned and looked around, but no long-haired blonde girl was to be seen. She took her seat and checked her schedule. She was in the right class, Mr. Morgenstern's literature class.

It was then that Cordelia saw Nezha Coleman, the only other friend Bella had. Differently from her friend though, Cordelia wasn't really fond of him. In her head they were the typical academic rivals, the only difference was that she hadn't ever verbally uttered it and so, well, he didn't know about it. Since Bella had become friends with Nezha, she had tried to make Cordelia befriend him too; however, Cordelia was too proud and intimidated by him. Another reason for that was that Nezha was simply the most breathtaking human being Cordelia had ever laid eyes on. Nezha Coleman was tall, not too slim, but also not too muscular, but what amazed her most was his face; it was flawless, with not even one freckle out of place. His lips were full and his nose was straight, giving him an arrogant look, and the only thing that could ruin his face - and failed - was a wee scar above his left eyebrow. His eyes were the color of a moonless sky, dark but with the stars still visible in them. She hated his hair, hated it because she was not able to touch it. It looked like the finest silk, long, and just like his eyes, pitch black.

All of that only made Cordelia dislike him even more, how was it possible for someone that stunning to exist? She had tried once to describe him in her journal, but she couldn't find the right words for it. No combination of syllables could ever describe his God-like appearance.

Cordelia pushed aside the aversion his sight caused her and walked to his desk, her heart hammering in her chest. She really wasn't keen on talking to him.

"Do you" - she cleared her throat and raised her voice a note - "Have you seen Bella?" - Nezha lifted his head, his eyes were even more impressive from up close than she thought was possible for them to be.

"Bella?" - He frowned. Despite him being the same age as the other boys from their class, his voice was deep and husky. - "No... The last time I saw her was yesterday in class. Why? Did something happen?"

"Oh, I just- Are you sure she wasn't at the library yesterday?"

"Yes, I was there until late last night and she never showed up."

"That's weird..." - Just when she turned towards the direction of the door to go search for Bella, Mr. Morgenstern entered the classroom.

"Good Morning, dear students." - Mr. Morgenstern said, smiling from ear to ear. Unlike Mr. Brown, Mr. Morgenstern's smile reached his eyes, and made him look handsome. In no way was Cordelia attracted to her teacher, but he had the same beauty as a painting, or as a rainy day. You just acknowledged its beauty. He had a handsome face, and that smile, along with his dark brown skin color, only made it more evident.

"Where are you going, Ms. Lovell? The class has started." - Mr. Morgenstern asked, smiling amicably at her.

"I am going to look for Ms. Carter, I'm worried about her."

"Ms. Carter?" - His smile seemed to falter for a second, but he quickly fixed it.



"Yes, Bella Carter, my best friend."

"Ms. Lovell, there was never a Bella Carter in this class." - He explained slowly. Cordelia laughed out loud and looked around the class, of course he was joking... Bella had been in this exact room just yesterday. Yet, all twenty-three students were looking at her as if she was mad, and no one was laughing. Nezha was the only one confused like her.

"That's not funny, Mr. Morgenstern, Bella could be in danger right now." - She said, louder than she intended. She knew her teacher loved to joke around, but she was far from being in the mood for that. Her classmates started to whisper and chuckle behind her back. "Has she gone insane?" "What is she on?" Mr. Morgenstern approached her calmly and put his hand on her shoulder.

"It's exam season, you must not be not sleeping well lately. I think it's better to take you to the infirmary, so they can give you something to help you calm down." - Mr. Morgenstern hardened his grip on her shoulder, to the point that it hurt.

Cordelia started to protest, but her literature teacher was already dragging her out of the classroom. The infirmary was just around the corner, and it took less than a minute to arrive. There, the nurse gave her a pill and some water, and told her to lay down on one of the beds.

Cordelia was so confused, she had no idea what was happening. How come no one remembered Bella? Was Mr. Morgenstern right? No, she thought, Nezha remembered Bella, she was not crazy. Something was off, and she was going to find out what it was. Her head was spinning and her vision started to blur with unshed tears. The universe seemed to be out of its usual order.

"Ms. Lovell, dear," - Mr. Morgenstern approached her bed, and touched her hand. Instantly she felt a weird feeling, like all her cells loathed his touch. Cordelia moved her hand out of his reach. - "The nurse, Mrs. Smith, also thinks you're overwhelmed by stress, and it is causing you to have hallucinations. Stay here until lunch and then go back to class, ok? I'll ask Mr. Coleman to bring you your backpack."

After Mr. Morgenstern was gone, Cordelia finally let some tears roll down her face. She couldn't just lay there, she needed to do something.

She looked at the nurse who was scribbling rapidly with her back turned to Cordelia. This was the moment, Cordelia thought. However, the second she sat up, Mrs. Smith turned to Cordelia.

"Oh no, sweetie, lay down." - Against her will, Cordelia laid back down again. She would have to wait until the nurse was distracted. Minutes later, Nezha came into the room, pale and with his eyes open wide.

"What the hell is going on?" - He screamed in a whisper. The nurse had gone to the opposite side of the room.

"I have no idea I'm as confused as you are." - She cried out. Nezha sat on a chair by her bed and put his head in his hands.

"We've got to do something... Listen, I- I will look for the students that usually see Bella and I at the library, I'm sure they'll remember her." - He lifted his head and Cordelia became starstruck by his beauty once again. She was sick of him.

"O- ok, I can't leave here until my lunch break. Meet me in the dining hall later?" - He nodded and left in a hurry.

Hours later, Cordelia was released from the infirmary at last. She ran to meet Nezha. It was so easy to spot him, he stood out among the hundreds of people. She sat in front of him and they stared at each other silently.

"So-"

"Well I" - they said at the same time. - Cordelia signaled for him to keep talking. - "No one... No one remembers her." - He gulped.

Cordelia's eyes became watery, and she was seeing a dozen Nezhas. This couldn't be happening, it made no sense at all. How could someone be erased from everyone's memories but theirs? What could've happened to Bella?

Suddenly, she remembered that she and Bella had been talking about Mr. Morgenstern yesterday. She quickly wiped her tears and in a low voice told Nezha everything. Cordelia had always had a hard time trusting people, there was a motto her mother had taught her: "Trust no one." But in this case, the motto could not be applied; she had no one to trust but Nezha. She barely knew him, but he was the only other person still able to remember Bella, so she had to tell him.

After she was done, Nezha had a weird look on his face.

"Bella told me the same thing, she kept telling me how she got anxious just by being in Mr. Morgenstern's presence." - Cordelia started nervously shaking her leg under the table, everything seemed to come back to their teacher.

"Listen, Nezha, we should follow Mr. Morgenstern. Let's start doing it tonight. We'll hide outside the teacher's dorm and wait until something happens." - She said with conviction.

So that same night they hid in the dark, but nothing eventful happened. And even though they tried following their teacher, this pattern of nothing happening repeated for more than a week. They'd sneak out at eleven o'clock, wearing black clothes from head to toe, meet at their hiding spot and watch the dorm for three to four hours. During that time, they got much closer, Cordelia was no longer nervous around Nezha, and she could now stare into his eyes without blushing. He was really sweet, they loved the same books and the same writers; it was insane how similar their interests were.

His company, however, did not decrease the pain of Bella's absence. She missed her dear friend so much that sometimes it was hard to breathe. No day went by that Cordelia didn't cry over Bella. She felt like she was missing a limb. At long last, on the tenth night that they snuck out, something finally happened. As usual, they were talking about whatever came to their minds.

"What do you do to make your hair look so healthy and shiny?" - Cordelia asked.

"Nothing, I swear! Just regular shampoo." - He laughed. Cordelia loved to make him laugh. - "Your hair is way prettier than mine, though. Look!"

He grabbed one of the curls, pulled it softly, and smiled at her. She hoped it was dark enough for him not to see her bright red face.

"You're so stupid" - she laughed lightly.

"And you're pretty" - he stated, looking deep into her eyes. He was no longer smiling, now he had a dreamy expression on his face. Cordelia did not know what to reply, of course she was used to receiving compliments, she knew she was indeed pretty. However, a compliment coming from him meant more to her than from any other person. Her heart was beating so fast, she swore it was going to come out of her chest.

The only thing she could think of doing was to close the distance between them. It was clear their thoughts were aligned because he too leaned his head forward. When they were a strand of hair away from touching their lips, they heard a door closing. Both of them were startled and, with their faces blushing and their hearts jumping out in their chests, they turned to look for the source of the noise.

It was a person with a black cloak on who, just like them, was wearing dark garments from head to toe. They hurriedly leapt up to follow whoever it was, careful not to make any sound. Cordelia was breathing rapidly and her whole body was trembling; this was the first time in her life she had ever done something so reckless. Nonetheless, she knew it would somehow help her to find Bella, it had to. She had no other way of finding out where her best friend was. She believed in that as if her life depended on it.

"Cordelia, he's heading into the forest, we have to walk faster" - Nezha said, reaching for her hand. His hand was as damp and cold as hers was.

"How do you know it is a man? It's so dark I can barely see anything!"

"Judging by his height and size, it must be a man." - He said simply. - "Also, if what Bella said is true, it's probably Mr. Morgenstern." - Cordelia knew her friend would never lie, but she could not stop wondering if perhaps Bella had been wrong, maybe it was not Mr. Morgenstern, after all.

Nezha and Cordelia walked faster, following in the man's footsteps. The man was walking abnormally quickly, which only made it harder for the kids to keep up while trying to be quiet at the same time. Cordelia felt like the bushes and tree branches were closing in around them, almost as if warning them to stay off that pathway.

Out of nowhere, it started to rain so heavily that Cordelia couldn't even see Nezha properly. She wondered how on earth he could still see Mr. Morgenstern. The ground became muddy and slippery in seconds, which made their pursuit harder, but also disguised any noise they might be making. Wherever they were heading to, it was far, so far that their legs were beginning to burn. She hoped Nezha knew the way back to the school.

After what seemed like hours, Nezha started to slow down. Cordelia tried to see what was ahead of them, but still she could see nothing.

"He stopped running." - Nezha turned and whispered in her ear, his voice was huskier than usual since he hadn't been talking for god knows how long.

"I can't see anything, what is he doing?" - She whispered back. Now that they had gone this far, Cordelia realized they didn't have a plan. If they saw Mr. Morgenstern doing something terrible, how would they prove it to the school? Would they believe her over a teacher? How would they explain why they were following a teacher in the middle of the night in the first place? No one remembered Bella, so they couldn't just say that a teacher did something to a student who technically no longer existed; everyone would say they were mad. Cordelia felt her stomach drop. If they were caught by Mr. Morgenstern, what would he do? Based on what Bella had told them, he was not a good guy.

"He... Oh God, he's gone." - Nezha said, shocked. He must have seen in Cordelia's expression that she was about to lose her mind, so he quickly added, "We should keep walking forward, he must be nearby."

Stumbling, they continued walking. The rain was lessening to only a pit pat, and their surroundings became clearer. Cordelia immediately felt that something was off. She had no idea what it was, but she felt it anyway, deep in her soul.

The forest was silent, as if even the crickets had stopped cricketing just to listen. All Cordelia could hear was Nezha and her own shaky breaths.

"Nezha, we have to go back. Now!" - She pulled him in the opposite direction; however, Nezha resisted.

"Cordelia, what do you mean, 'go back'? Don't you want to find Bella?" - He frowned at her, his hair was wet and stuck to his face. She couldn't help but think he looked cuter than ever. Cordelia shook her head, she shouldn't have been thinking about that right now. Yes, he was right, she wanted to bring Bella back, but... She looked at him, he had come here for her; she was the one who had put him in danger. I'm being ungrateful, she thought. He could've just pretended that he didn't remember Bella, he could've left me alone in this, but he's here with me, holding my hand.

"The forest... You know what, never mind. We better hurry before we lose Mr. Morgenstern's trail for real." - This time she was the one pulling his hand and guiding their way.

A crushed bush got Cordelia's attention. That was the only reasonable direction in which their literature teacher could have gone. They picked up their pace, and about five minutes later they found him. What Cordelia saw next paralyzed her. Her brain couldn't process the scene in front of her. She blinked multiple times and shook her head, but nothing changed.

At least fifteen meters in front of them, there was a clearing. In the clearing, the sky above was as blue as the ocean, as bright as a summery day. Meanwhile, the rest of the forest was still dark and soaked. Their breathing was heavy as they stared at each other in complete disbelief. Cordelia's mind was racing and her brain searched for an explanation, but nothing she thought of could come close to making sense out of the scene. Cordelia and Nezha had begun to follow Mr. Morgenstern at around one o'clock in the morning, when the full moon was shining in its holy glory. Even if the sun had already risen, the trees were not big enough to completely shroud the sunlight from reaching the forest. So why was it sunny in that clearing?

"Maybe..." - If Cordelia were a step farther away from Nezha, she wouldn't have heard him speaking. - "Maybe now is a good time to head back to the dorms." Cordelia wanted to run as fast as she could, she really wanted to.

But as soon as that thought came to her mind, Bella's face popped up too. She would not abandon her friend.

"No. We have to keep going."

"Are you sure? Look, my dad has some good connections, he's an important man. If I write him a letter he won't hesitate to help us." - Cordelia knew he was trying to soothe her, and for that she was deeply thankful, but she also knew that there was no going back.

"Nezha, let's keep following Mr. Morgenstern." - She took his hand and he nodded at her. They both took a deep breath and walked in the direction of the clearing.

When they got close to crossing the invisible line that separated the forest's density from the clearing, they saw Mr. Morgenstern's dark figure, running, though at the same time, looking like he was stuck in place and not moving an inch. Once again, reality seemed to have shifted. The space right in front of them was fluttering, as if they were looking at a river on a not so windy day. Cordelia was starting to think she was stuck in one of her weird dreams.

Yet she had come this far, so going a little further couldn't do any harm. Cordelia gathered all the courage she had, and readied herself to take the final step.

"Cordelia, hold on." - Nezha pulled Cordelia back and faced her, scaring her. Holding her shoulders tightly he said: "I want you to know that I had no choice, my people had no choice." - He looked intensely at her, like his eyeballs were about to jump right out of their sockets. He frantically examined her whole face, as though memorizing it. - "The moment we cross that portal, I will not be able to help you, I will be helpless. For that I want to say that I'm profoundly sorry."

Not giving Cordelia a chance to think or speak, Nezha kissed her. It was not really a kiss, he merely crashed their lips together. It was a hard touch; there was no kindness in it. Nezha was angry, but not angry with her, Cordelia realized it was something else. But whatever craziness he had uttered seconds ago, was all gone from her mind, and she could only focus on his lips touching hers; his scent and the waves of heat coming from him.

He inhaled deeply, and let go of her just in time to grab her hand and jump into the clearing.

Time was there, but it was also not there. Cordelia's body was burning and freezing, her mind disintegrating and being built. All at once. Her legs were no longer hers. It hurt, it was comforting, it was a hug, it was a knife dug deep in her back. Every fear and hope crossed her mind in a sudden flash.

Then suddenly it stopped.

She hit the floor and threw up all over it. It was far from being a nice view. Cordelia crawled on the floor, trying not to pass out. After she was sure she wouldn't vomit again, Cordelia laid down, closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She had no idea what the last five minutes had meant. Nezha had freaked out and she couldn't make any sense out of his words. What did he mean when he said his people had had no choice? What was he apologizing for? And why the hell did he kiss her? Her head was spinning and spinning.

"Are you done? You've ruined my carpet with that mess of yours." - A husky and deep voice said, its tone flat, bored even.

Cordelia quickly sat up, and her vision spiraled like the world was rotating at the speed of light.

She blinked repeatedly and after a few times she could finally see where she was. The first thing Cordelia saw was the cobblestone floors, then the walls that were covered with the same material as the floors. Next, she noticed her own vomit on a fancy looking floral carpet. Lifting her head up, she glanced around, confused. She was supposed to be in a clearing, she was supposed to be sitting on grass, not on a carpet in some kind of medieval castle from the European Middle Ages.

"For your information, we came up with this kind of architecture. Your people were the ones who plagiarized it." - The same voice as before said, speaking from a place somewhere behind her. She frowned, was this person reading her mind? Or had she said that out loud?

Cordelia stood up and turned around to finally face whoever was speaking to her.



Mr. Morgenstern, wearing the same clothes as before, but with his face devoid of any sign of the lovely smile he carried around at school, was sitting on a throne made out of gold. Her literature teacher.

"It took us so long to find you." - His voice had also changed; it was nothing like before.

"You did a great job, son." - Cordelia blinked. Son? Who was he talking to?

"Thank you, father." - To Cordelia's utter surprise, Nezha, who had been quiet and still until that moment, bowed his head.

"What?" - She whispered. - "Nezha, what is going on? What do you mean by 'father'?"  
Nezha looked at her, and before his expression could go blank, she saw the pity in his eyes. In that exact second, she connected the dots. It had all been a trap. She recalled how he had been eager to follow Mr. Morgenstern and, in addition, the things he said to her before he pulled her into the void, and to wherever they were right now.

"Quite dramatic, hmm?" - Mr. Morgenstern caught her attention again. The tears pooled in her eyes. She was so dumb. - "I wouldn't say that, my dear, we are the ones who were too smart, that happens when you are immortal."

"Stop reading my mind!" - Cordelia exploded. Now the tears were freely running down her lovely face. - "Where is Bella? Where is my friend?"

"Bella?" - Mr. Morgenstern tilted his head back and let out a cruel laugh. - "That girl has been dead for days now."

Cordelia's legs gave up on her, and she fell to the floor once again. She scratched the cobblestones, her fingers bleeding as she tried to breathe, but no air was enough to fill her lungs. No, this could not be real, he had to be lying. Bella was not dead. Bella, her sister, her soulmate, couldn't be dead.

"Oh, but she is." - He said excitedly.

Mr. Morgenstern, for the first time, Cordelia thought, disgusted her. - "It was her fault, though. If she hadn't befriended you, she'd be happy and alive!"

"You're not making any sense, just tell me what the hell this is all about!" - Cordelia screamed the last word, she had had enough of being clueless.

"As you wish, madam." - He mocked. Standing up, Mr. Morgenstern brushed nonexistent dust from his somehow completely clean and dry clothes, and then he walked towards her, stopping two meters away. Nezha, she realized, had retreated to one of the corners of the room; his posture rigid and his eyes emotionless. She did not recognize him anymore. - "Well, let's start from the beginning, shall we?" - From the pocket of his pants, Mr. Morgenstern removed a purple, sparkly powder. He blew it upwards towards the ceiling. - "We are from a planet called Wessem, the one that we are on right now" - as he talked, the powder he blew formed into their planet. - "It is not in the same galaxy as Earth. We are physically so far away from you that no technology you mundane people can produce will ever be able to see us. In Wessem we used to have two species of intelligent forms: us, the Cassas, and the Cohos." - The scene above them moved, and it formed creatures that looked exactly like humans, only more ethereal looking. - "Basically, there was never harmony between them, they were constantly at war, killing each other over nothing.

But everything changed when the Cohos developed a substance that gave them superpowers and, with that strength, they overpowered and enslaved the Cassas for more than five thousand years." - The sparkles then showed nothing but misery, and people being killed by the hundreds.

"During that period, Cassas were murdered, beaten, humiliated and repressed, but eventually they were able to overpower their oppressors. They rebelled and killed at least eighty percent of the Cohos; it was a carnage." - Little purple Cassas were shown killing Cohos with no mercy. - "In order to avoid extinction, the Cohos fled Wessem, and using their magic, they found a small planet called Earth. However, before leaving, the Cohos poisoned our sacred tree." - An enormous tree took up almost all of the space above their heads. It would have looked like a normal fruit tree if it wasn't for the hearts spread all over where the fruits were supposed to be. - "That tree, called Ijaeh, is what keeps our planet alive. We are bound to it, and if it is sick, our lands fall sick too. If it is healthy, our lands and rivers thrive."

"As the Cassas went after the Cohos in hope they'd revert the damage caused, they were met only with a prophecy: The last Coho alive would have to willingly sacrifice themselves and have their blood poured on the holy tree's roots. That is the only way to save Wessem." - Mr. Morgenstern waved his hand and the powder fell over them like a purple rain.

"I assume" - Cordelia said in a low voice - "That has something to do with me, or else I wouldn't be here."

"You're smart" - he chuckled humorlessly. - "You, Cordelia Lovell, are the last Coho alive. Cassas have been killing Cohos for centuries, and we've finally found the last one."

"If you only needed me then why did you kill Bella?" - Cordelia said through gritted teeth.

"I had no choice. We found your trace, but you and her were inseparable, and she also had the Coho scent, due to being constantly in your presence; an average human that smelled just like a Coho." - Mr. Morgenstern circled her like a predator, just waiting for a sign of weakness to attack. - "Not to mention the fact that she accidentally saw me creating a portal. How fortunate for her!" - Smiling, he appeared again in front of her. - "After that day, I followed her for a while just to scare her. It was kind of fun, if I'm being honest."

"Bella, you were right" - she whispered to herself. - "You were always right."

"Nezha lured her into coming here, just like he did with you." - He said as if he hadn't heard her. Cordelia felt so dumb at that moment; she had been so stupid. She had let a pretty face fool her. Mr. Morgenstern clapped his hands once and Nezha immediately appeared by his side, handing him a dagger. Its handle was made out of gold and was encrusted with emeralds. Cordelia's mother had had a collection of them at home, but none had looked this majestic. It was the prettiest dagger she had ever seen.

"Bella used this same dagger to take her own life, but as you might assume, it did not work" - he said, while admiring the dagger in his hands. - "This used to belong to an important Coho, your ancestor. I kept it for more than a thousand years, and now it's time for it to be used again, by the last of your kind."

He threw it at her and she flinched as it landed right in front of her.

"I can't be the last Coho, what about my family?" - She knew she shouldn't be mentioning them, but she was indeed not the last one alive. She had a feeling she already knew what he was going to say.

"I've already taken care of them, so just kill yourself already. The clock is ticking, and as we speak Cassas are dying. Wessøm is dying." - Hearing about her family's death did not conjure any reaction or emotion in her. She no longer had the strength to feel anything but numbness.

"I don't want to die" - she said. Cordelia loved being alive, loved to fill her lungs with oxygen and open her eyes every morning. Death meant darkness, emptiness.

"Don't be silly, you mortal little girl!" - Mr. Morgenstern finally lost his cool, his eyes glittering with rage. - "Don't you see this is bigger than your insignificant existence? You must die, it's that simple. My people have been suffering for millennia because of your ancestors. Our planet has no food, the soil is sick, the animals are sick, and we have no way out. Your blood shall be shed tonight." - He spat this out all at once. The veins on his temples were popping out and his face was drenched in sweat.

Deep down Cordelia knew he was right. What was one life compared to millions of others living in pain? She was exhausted. She wanted it all to come to an end. There really was no way out. If she somehow managed to go back to her world, no one would believe her. They would simply tell her she was crazy and lock her up. Cordelia did not want to die, that she was sure, but she had no family out there, no one she could go back to. She was alone.

Cordelia looked past Mr. Morgenstern, at Nezha, who was staring at her with a blank expression, like there was no longer a soul in that shell. He would not help her. Still making eye contact with Nezha, she grabbed her ancestor's dagger and, with no hesitation, stabbed herself in the heart.

# A Turbulent Journey

Eugênia de Góis Haberkorn

60

**T**he first time I saw her, the sun was about to set.

I was sitting on a bench at the park, looking at the busy street in front of me: cars of different colors going up and down the avenue; the city lights starting to glow brighter. I had been paralyzed for a few minutes, until a neon sign lit up across the street, breaking my trance. Its light was so bright I thought it was going to blind me. I covered my eyes for a second, and then, she walked past me. A tall, slim woman, dressed in black. Her hair was jet black too, and looked like silk, as it swayed from side to side. She seemed to move so gracefully, I didn't realize how much she had captured my attention. That is, until she looked back, and caught me staring. I immediately looked away, feeling my heart pick up to a faster pace. I didn't have the gall to do a double take, so all I could distinguish on her face was a pair of deep, dark eyes. I stood up from the bench and hurried home.

A couple of weeks later, I saw the lady again during a break at school. There was something unsettling about it. I had never seen her walking those halls before, never seen her in a class, never seen her in the cafeteria. I wondered if I was overthinking it. It was none of my business; if anything, I thought, I probably shouldn't even look her way, because what if she remembered me from the park and thought I was a creep? A stalker? But I was so sure that I wouldn't have missed someone so bewitching like that, not even in a crowd of students. She didn't look at me that day, but I watched her walk down the hallway and out the front door of the building. She didn't greet anyone, nor was she carrying anything that indicated she was there to study. No one else seemed to acknowledge her presence. I went back to my classes.

I started seeing her more frequently at school. Now she would sit in the cafeteria, even though she never ate anything, and no one at her table ever spoke to her. I sometimes glanced up from my plate to see her already staring in my direction. She always looked a bit sad; kind of pale, the corners of her mouth turned down. I would sometimes hold her gaze, taking my time to admire how her hair was tucked behind her ears. I considered asking someone which classes she took and who she was friends with, but I had no one to ask, and I wasn't bold enough to talk to her, so we continued with our secret staring contests. I must confess she was always the winner.

I saw her again at a party. I can't remember whose house it was. Really, I wasn't feeling it that night, and I shouldn't have been there.

I chose to go because I hadn't been to any social gatherings that semester, so I thought maybe a little partying would cheer me up. But I wasn't a party person, so it was natural that, at some point in the night, I would find myself sitting on a couch. It was at that moment that I saw her. She was dancing by herself in the middle of a crowded makeshift dance floor in the living room. An upbeat song was playing. I can't remember which song it was, only that she seemed to be moving to a different rhythm; slowly and delicately, yet no one paid attention to her. I did, though. And she must have noticed, because she stopped her dance and came over to the couch, sitting next to me.

It was the first time we had ever interacted, after weeks of looking, and staring, and thinking. She looked much more stunning up close, all her features could have been sculpted by the greatest Renaissance artists. I was speechless, as I had always been. And then she spoke in a way that seemed too gentle to come out of someone who looked so striking.

"What brings you here today?" she asked.

"It's my friend's party," I replied.

And then she chuckled and said, "You don't seem to have any friends."

"You don't seem to have any either," I added boldly, "At least not from what I've seen."

I don't know what came over me. I had to dig deep to find the courage to say that, but I regretted it the moment the words left my mouth. She didn't seem to mind, because she grinned and spoke once again.

"Do you want to come and dance with me?"

I didn't want to dance, but I felt like I should, because I had been observing the girl for weeks, and it could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I didn't want to dance, but I was at a party, and there was music playing, and that girl was asking me to dance with her. So I held her hand and we stood up from the couch. I didn't know if anyone was watching us, because I could only look down at our intertwined hands, and think of how with each second that passed, her grip felt stronger and stronger.

We danced close to each other in a corner of the living room. It wasn't a song people dance together to, but we did. And I couldn't look at her face; my whole body was too tense to process what was going on.

The music was slowing, the song was almost over, but we couldn't stop dancing. And then she moved her face closer to mine. Or maybe I did. However it happened, I felt a pressure in my chest, my hands started sweating, and my lungs were getting tighter and tighter and...

I couldn't breathe. Hadn't I been waiting for this moment? Why did it all start to feel so wrong? I started to become much more aware of my surroundings. The upbeat song we were slow dancing to started to sound obnoxiously loud. Her black clothes looked even blacker, if that was possible. I automatically broke her grip and fled the room. I left her in the middle of the dance floor, and I didn't look back, I was too scared she would come after me. As soon as I reached the front of the house, the knot that had formed in my throat untied itself and I threw up. My body was shaking so hard, it was as if I was freezing. My lips quivered and tears came to my eyes, and in no time I was sitting on the curb sobbing. My mind was too hazy to hear the sound of footsteps behind me. Suddenly, a redheaded girl crouched in front of me and asked if I was okay. I clearly wasn't. As a result, I couldn't manage to reply verbally, only to nod. The rest of that night was a blur.

The day after the party, I woke up with a text on my phone. The girl who had helped me the night before, whose name was Asha, was texting to check on me. We started talking and we eventually found out that we had many interests in common. I had also never seen her at school, but she told me which classes she took, and how often she went to the cafeteria. She introduced me to her friends, and they welcomed me into their group. All of this happened over the span of about two months.

I actually saw the dark-haired girl many times after that party. She was always silent, always staring at me, and still wearing black clothes to match her melancholic face. She only tried to talk to me again once, but she was interrupted by my friends, so I never heard what she had to say. I realized that I had never asked for her name. I felt like I had always known her, but I didn't even know what to call her.

The last time I saw her, the sun was about to rise.

Asha and I were on a walk at the park and I saw her sitting on my favorite bench, the same one where I was sitting the first time I saw her. She didn't look at me at all.

Asha asked in an apprehensive tone, "Are you feeling okay?" I might have been staring too much at that empty bench as we walked past it.

"I'm okay," I said to Asha, and we smiled.



## The Perks of Being a Wallpaper Flower

64

Élica Vorpapel Biff

I start to get ready for the party. I'm not even invited, but I don't think anyone will notice. Because I don't think anyone will even notice that I'm there.

The water is too hot, but the weather is really cold, so my skin doesn't complain about the warm temperature. That's stupid, how could it complain? My skin doesn't even turn red when I'm embarrassed, or burned.

I confess I find it cute when some girls blush. I used to think this was literary bullshit, but then I met Carla, a girl from my class. She is so pretty and shy, her cheeks turn red immediately when someone compliments her. Of course I never say a word. I just watch her being pretty and flirting with other people.

How could I say anything to her? She would never look at me anyway.

I can feel my curls swaying in the warm wind of the hairdryer. My eyelids get heavy. The sheets smell like flowers when I lay on my bed. I close my eyes, and all I see is all I am.

Nothing.

I woke up very scared. Some giant machine was trying to murder me in my dreams. I can still hear it getting closer and closer; it sounds like it's in my bedroom. I look out the window; there's no sun outside. I look at the clock on the wall: seven o'clock.

*Late, so damn late.*

I get up and unplug the hairdryer. My headache gets better. I can feel my hair is messy, but there's no time to try to fix it. I smile, imagining how crazy it would be if I tried to fix my hair using a mirror. I'm not that kind of person. I just go out without worrying about my appearance.

Something I do care about, however, is how I smell. I love walking into a place and realizing that everyone likes the perfume that just came in. So tonight I overdo it and put perfume all over my body. Maybe Carla will notice my existence.

Ten minutes later, I leave my house. After eight blocks, I can finally hear the music from the house party. Despite the cold, I am sweating. I have never been to a party before. It's crazy how difficult it is to do something new. The backyard is full of people and there are lights all over the place. I turn around and start to walk quickly back home. The cold wind hits my face. It's crazy how difficult it is to walk eight blocks in winter. I turn around again.

The temperature feels immediately warmer when I get closer to other people, even outside of the house. Inside, it feels like summer. No one recognizes me, and I don't recognize anyone. I look for a couch to sit down on, but the place is filled with people, and contains nothing else. Does anyone live here? I lean against a wall; it's not a chair, but at least I can share my body weight with something. Sometimes existence is just too heavy.

I reach for a beer that someone left on the floor and I drink it, trying to make things easier, but all I get is an awful taste in my mouth. Some girl comes close to me, and for a moment it seems like she's going to talk to me. Then she sits on the floor and starts to cry.

"Do you need any help?"

She looks in my direction and then to the left. She gets up and leaves the house. I sigh. The room is brightly lit and crowded, but I have never felt more alone. I get up and start to look for a kitchen, or a bathroom - anywhere that might have running water to wash my mouth out with.

When I find a bathroom, there's a line. No way. After 15 minutes, I can finally go in. The taste of the sink water is worse than the taste in my mouth. A hammer inside my head follows the beat of the music. I look in the mirror. All I can see are the flowers on the wall behind me.

"Why is the door closed? No one went in there," I hear someone saying.

Maybe things would be better if I wasn't invisible.

# Sisyphus

Leonardo Baldo Dias

66

Every day, you visit that same moment from your past. And every day, it hurts. Despite how much you try, you can never outrun your guilt. It will always be with you, haunting you. And you know it was all your fault. You know things could be different, better. You know you may never be forgiven, and there is nothing you can do about it. After all, it is not the first time this has happened. At this point, you are used to it. Tired of it, actually.

Every night, you see yourself stuck in the same cycle. Asking the same questions. "When did it all go wrong? What if I had done things differently? Could I? Would I? Is it too late? Am I cursed? Am I broken? Am I just doomed to be like this forever? To keep repeating the same mistakes, over and over again?" Every single question still hurts the same way they did when you first asked them. And the pain, it never gets easier. Let's be honest, it probably never will.

Every now and then, you think to yourself "Is there even a reason to keep going? To keep struggling? To keep pushing?" It doesn't matter how much you work to change things, to change yourself, you always end up in the same place you started from. It feels like an endless and useless labor, one you already feel completely weary of. But still, you continue.

"It serves me right" – you say to yourself – "I tried to be someone I'm not, I dared to be happy, I wished for something I'm not worthy of. Now, I'm just paying the price. I must pay it. That's what I deserve, right?"

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You wake up. Your phone alarm is going off. Gentle streaks of sunlight peek through a little gap in your bedroom window. It is the warm embrace of a brand new day. Full of wonders, full of possibilities. You are feeling optimistic. It has been a while since you felt like this. "Maybe today won't be so bad after all," you think. You start rubbing your eyes to properly wake up.

While your hands are still covering your face, reality hits you with a sudden blow. The weight of a massive boulder pressing you against your bed. You suppress a scream but it reverberates internally.

You don't want to move, your whole body hurts. You're afraid of uncovering your face and exposing yourself to the world. The alarm is still going off, each ring like a stake piercing through your skull. The same headache that has been keeping you company for god knows how long now, shows up – worse than the day before.

You start feeling around for your phone and knock something to the floor. A genuine rage flows through your body and you finally decide to open your eyes. The sunlight immediately burns them, making you hiss like a pitiful beast. You try to get up, but your bedsheets are tied between your legs and around your body, like a giant snake ready to crush the feeble bones of its prey. You recklessly kick your way to freedom and manage to hit the little snooze button with a bitter growl.

You are covered in sweat. Your breathing is heavy. You notice that your jaw is clenched like someone else's life depended on that, but you manage to free it after enough struggle. You let out a long and painful sigh out, and lay yourself down again. You feel a knot in your throat and a dryness in your mouth. Picking up the water bottle right next to you is a herculean job you have no energy left for. The morning heat is becoming unbearable. Your bed is boiling you alive and your skin is scalding hot. Despite that, a lingering feeling of emptiness crawls from somewhere deep within your chest and spreads over your body, filling you with an irrational freezing cold. You need to hide, to protect yourself. So you shut yourself in an oven made of blankets. For a moment, you do feel safe, yet you know you are in hell.

You roll over to one side – looking for some rest before you actually have to face the day – and then again, to the other. You are overwhelmed by a constant flux of intrusive thoughts. You try flipping your pillow over. You feel the Styx's flow in your mind; dragging with it memories of times that will never come back. You turn your pillow back over. That moment replays in your mind, again, and again, and again. You roll over and let your face drown in the pillow for a while. The shame you feel is nerve-racking. You roll over once more, staring at the ceiling now. You feel yourself stuck in an insufferable loop. You desperately try covering your ears with the pillow, hoping that it will make it all stop, or at least keep you from hearing everything you regret saying. It does not, of course. You feel a sorrowful scream forming in your core, all your muscles tighten. Just as you are about to shout, your alarm goes off again.

So you just stop. You stop everything, you stop yourself.

You swallow your feelings, take a deep breath, force a big smile onto your face, and finally get up from that battlefield of a bed you have slept on. You drink some water from the bottle right next to you. It is already too warm because of the morning heat, and it does not refresh you at all, but it is still the nectar from the gods you have longed for. You proudly march to the bathroom and look at yourself in the mirror. Your smile instantly fades away. You look at the two lightless voids on your face and they begin to tear up. Your proud posture soon crumbles. Reality's burden makes you shrink on yourself.

An aggressive and unasked for slap hits your face. You turn on the sink, take another deep breath, and put your head down into the running cold water. You dry your face and take a quick peek in the mirror. You manage to hold back the tears. "It does get easier" – you think to yourself – "but I gotta do it every day." You take yet another deep breath, gather some courage, and stare into your own eyes again. "Maybe today won't be so bad after all" – you say out loud, and this time you mean it. You keep looking at your face and you see it beginning to take shape. Yes, it is smaller, but it is also more honest. And, most importantly, it is still there. You smile.

# My First Love

Laura Pelagio Pires de Souza

69

**T**his is a story about the first year of my relationship with the boy I love.

I suppose it all started in August of 2021. He had just gotten out of a relationship a few weeks before, and it had ended on bad terms. While he was dating the other girl, I never saw him once, no matter how often we worked together. I think I managed to say hello, but nothing more than that.

When I really met him it was March of 2022. To be honest, I don't really remember much about that night, just parts of what happened. At that point we were just talking as friends, but that was when we began to get to know each other better.

By the end of March, we were chatting every day online. On the internet I'm a lot less clumsy, and I'm able to talk to other people, so this was an easy way to start talking to him.

As I began to become more friendly with him, I realized that he wasn't just my best friend.

We started hanging out more, and the more time I spent with him, the closer I felt to him. I couldn't explain why, but I felt like I had some kind of bond with him, like I could connect with him in a way that I couldn't with other people. I usually find it weird when people hug me, but when he did it it always felt warm and comforting.

Our relationship progressed slowly. At one point, I had one of my depressive episodes, and ended up leaving all the group chats I was in. At the time I felt very alone, as if I was destined never to be happy.

He eventually tried to send me a private message, asking me what was wrong, and why I was feeling that way. Few people knew how much of a shit-show my relationships were then, but I felt comfortable talking about it with him. And he seemed to have the perfect answer to everything. After a while, I felt a little better about myself, and I will never forget some of the things he said to me on that night in June of 2022.

"Every time we see each other, I feel like I should make the most of everything we're experiencing at that moment."

Whether it's walking, talking, laughing, just looking at each other, kissing, or anything else. I know I have to feel all these things to the fullest, because one day it might end, but not only that, I know that it will end. Being with you is so good, it makes me happy; it makes me feel so alive that it's hard to leave when the time comes.

You are always there for me, and you make me feel alive, and that feeling is one of the most important feelings to me, even more now that I've met you.

I need you, it's okay for me to tell you this now. I need you because being with you makes me happier, and when I'm feeling sad, it always cheers me up. I don't know what we're going to do with what we feel and what we're experiencing with one another. If I could, I would like to be close to you, and to hear how your voice fills every room.

If you want me to stay just say it, I already know what an amazing person you are, I hope you know that.

I really want to hug you and hold your hand.

I like you very much, Laura".

I was in a very bad state mentally at that time. I ended up telling him what was making me feel this way, and we drifted apart over it.

In early November of 2022, a friend asked me if I liked him, to which I replied, "I don't know". I felt like I couldn't, because maybe I wasn't worthy of his affection anymore. My friend was surprisingly supportive about the situation and told me to go for it.

So, I decided I was going to tell him that I liked him. Even though I had already been in a relationship with someone before, I had never held another boy's hand, let alone kissed anyone like him. To say I was shitting myself would be an understatement. I thought to myself, "How could he possibly be interested in me? Why would he want to date a fat, ugly, 5'1", short-haired, troubled person"?

He's about 5'4". Compared to me, he's a genius. He's very skinny, and he's still the most handsome boy I've ever seen.

Every time I talk to him all my problems seem to disappear, and I can be myself, and can feel happy for a change.

I thought a lot about how I was going to tell him. I had a few opportunities to talk to him, but I ended up getting really nervous and I couldn't do it. I really wanted to do it in person. But in the end I told him how I felt online, via a message, not knowing if he would ever read it.

I didn't know if he had read the letter I emailed him; it was a really long and stressful four days. But finally we agreed to meet alone to talk about it. Something we had never done before. That day I was very anxious and had a stomach ache. I couldn't stop shaking, and I wasn't sure if I should go. I knew I couldn't bail on him though, so I went. It was pretty muddy that day. We met up on the balcony, where we had first met in person. I couldn't start a fucking conversation, but luckily he was the one who did most of the talking that day.

He didn't want to rush into anything, and wanted to see what things would be like before we decided to start a relationship. We began to spend time together every day. And little by little, I became more comfortable with talking to him in person. Within a week, I was able to start conversations, and then later on, I was able to start conversations, and to continue them.

I was still very nervous, though, and wasn't sure what was normal. It got to the point where one time I asked him if it was okay for me to hold his hand.

On the 22nd of September, it was a hot day. We met up, and at this point I really wanted to know if he could see himself in a relationship with me. So I asked him. And he said yes. I will never forget that day. For our first date we decided to watch *The Sea Beast*.

We still wanted to take things slow, so we did. It took a few weeks for me to feel comfortable kissing him. The first time I kissed him was on a bench, the one we usually went to to talk about life. This is also something I will never forget, our first kiss.

It's been 2 months...and without him I don't know who I would be. I have loved every moment that we have shared together.

So Hero, if you come across this short story...I love you.



# The Man on The Third Wagon

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Maria Beatriz Bornia

**I**t was my first trip alone across Europe, and, of course, I chose to go by train, so I could see the marvelous sights through the window and have a completely new experience. I never could have imagined what was going to happen on that train. I was in the third wagon, but I was very hungry and hadn't tasted the food on the train yet, so I decided to go to the restaurant wagon. I sat down and waited for the waiter, who brought the menu. I picked a unique dessert and was waiting for my dish to come when a young man rushed up me:

"Did you see the fight in the third wagon?" Where did this guy come from? I thought, and then I answered:

"I just came from there and I didn't see any fight."

He said: "That's because it hasn't happened yet."

"What do you mean?" - I responded.

"I know this might sound crazy, but I knew since I saw you for the first time in that wagon that you were the kind of girl that would join me in a prank. What do you think about us pretending to fight?" *He must be crazy, that's it.*

"Wait a minute, were you spying on me? Anyway, I can't do it, I am terrible at acting." - I added, with a forced laugh.

"I know that is just an excuse. Come on. It will be fun."

"Ok" - I sighed - "But what will the fight be about?"

Then, the waiter came with my dessert.

"This apple pie" - the guy said. "And we can improvise, as well."

I knew I would regret it, but I went back with him to the third wagon. We arrived there and suddenly I knew how I was going to start the prank.

So, before the strange young man could say anything else, I threw my piece of pie directly in his face and said:

"It's over, Michael. I will no longer stand your betrayals. This is it."

It was hard not to laugh, after all, I had just thrown a piece of pie at a stranger, but I kept my poker face.

He instantly got mad at me:

"Are you crazy, Linda?" - he shouted - "That was my new sweater!"

I couldn't tell if he was pretending or if he was really angry at me, but I kept going.

"Ask your new lover, Mandy, to buy you a new one!" - I shouted back.

Everyone was looking at us, some angry, because we were interrupting their ride, others just curious. It was funny, indeed! I couldn't recall the last time I had laughed so much inside. It had been a long time, for sure. And, then, before I could help it, I began to cry. I think "Michael" thought I was no longer acting, because he tried to comfort me:

"Hey, honey, I am sorry, ok? I didn't mean to hurt you. I was a complete fool, I promise I will never do it again."

He hugged me and I cried even harder.

"Come on, hug me back" - he said.

And I did. What would mama say if she saw me hugging a complete stranger? I had no idea. However, it was her that I was thinking about. How I missed that incredible woman. The rest of the world had vanished and I didn't know for sure how much time had passed, but finally Michael whispered:

"Are you ok? You said you were terrible at acting."

"Um, I..." - I cleaned my face with the back of my hand - "I think that perhaps I underestimated myself."

He let me go and declared in my ear: "Great job!"

"Th-thanks" - I cleared my throat. - "It was nice meeting you, I will get back to my pie now. I mean, I will ask the waiter for another dessert, this one kind of traumatized me." - I gave him a genuine smile.

And I started to walk away. He followed me:

"Where is your stop?"

"Berlin."

"We are almost there" - he said sadly.

"Yes, we still have half an hour, though."

So, he came and sat with me in my wagon and we talked about a lot of things. He seemed to understand me like no one else ever had. Differently from my family and friends, who were always demanding things from me, like "you have to find someone to marry, you have to have kids, you have to get a better job, you have to socialize more, you have to improve your English..." He just sat there and really listened to me. He was not bored nor did he try to talk the whole time, he was truly listening.

I had an amazing time. When the train stopped in Berlin, I saw some police officers and some odd movement going on outside. The police entered the train. I turned to ask Michael something, but he had disappeared. Strange.

The cops came in, and it seemed like they were looking for something, or someone. They shortly arrived to where I was, in the third wagon:

"Good afternoon, gentlemen, ladies. We are looking for a fugitive."

"He is known for deceiving young women and robbing them of their belongings. He is dark-skinned, about 6 feet tall and has a small beard. He approaches women pretending he knows they are the 'right type' of girl and that kind of thing. Did any of you see someone who fits this description?"

Oh, my God, could it be Michael?

"Gentlemen, I think I may have talked to this guy." - I explained to the police everything that had happened.

"Did you notice if anything was missing from your purse, ma'am?"

I looked into my purse, my cell phone was gone.

"My cell phone. I think he might have stolen it"- I said.

The police officers searched every wagon and eventually found the thief. He briefly glanced at me before he was arrested. It was a bittersweet farewell: bitter for him, sweet for me. So why was I so sad?

\*\*\*

SOME MONTHS LATER...

Okay, so you might take me for a fool, but I had to see him once more. So when I read in the newspaper that Ethan Thompson (yes, that was his true name) was being released from prison, I knew I had to be there to see him, and find out the truth.

When I arrived at that street, in front of that gloomy and gray building, full of that barbed wire with no color, looking like a sad cage; I was very apprehensive. It felt like an eternity before he finally appeared...

Curly dark hair, a beard and that hideous jail outfit. He seemed lost, I approached carefully:

"Hi..."

"Hey. What on earth are you doing here?"

"I needed to see you, and... I want my phone back."

"I'm sorry I don't have your phone, you forgot it on the table. I tried to warn you, but I was too busy being arrested."

"You gotta be kidding me, I don't believe a word you're saying."

"So why are you here?"

"Was all of it a lie? Our conversation, our fight, all of it?"

"It was... But not all of it. Listen, I've tried to stop a hundred times, but my obsession is stronger than me. You would've been just another victim, and yes, that crap about seeing you and thinking that you looked like the kind of girl that would join me for a prank was a lie. But when we talked, well, I knew it was different, you know. And I knew I wouldn't have to deceive people anymore. Here, in jail, I was able to talk to a lot of people about my problem, and I will see a therapist as soon as I get a job. I guess I should say thank you."

Some tears fell down my cheek.

"Come on, follow me"- I said.

"What are we doing?"

"We have a train to catch, and we can't risk losing another minute of our short lives."

A loud noise from across the street interrupted the sound coming from my headphones and scared me slightly. It was quite windy, more than usual for that time of the year, but you know, global warming has its ways of saying, "Don't you forget about me..." Or maybe it wouldn't say something like that, and I was just being influenced by Simple Minds, which had been playing on repeat since I left home.

My walk to work was always boring, tiring, hideous, and every other adjective you can think of to describe something unpleasant (as you can see, walking is not my favorite activity), but that day... That day there was something different. The cold feeling of the wind hitting the skin on my face felt almost like needles, yet the leaves from the old trees by the sidewalk danced as joyfully as ever, like it was the most beautiful sunny day they had ever seen; even though you could see nothing but clouds hiding the sun. I walked almost automatically, enjoying the atmosphere that only a gloomy day could create, until finally I stepped into the front door of the record store. It was my favorite place in the world, and I had been working there ever since I had graduated from high school, which was... Some time ago.

The lights were off, so I turned them all on with a quick hit to the control panel placed beside the front door. I opened the windows and took a deep breath - the smell of old paper and plastic from the album covers and the scratched vinyl discs hanging on the walls welcomed me for another day of work. I started to organize the counter while waiting for Hyde, my coworker, to arrive, which could happen at any time between 9 and 11am (we open the store at 8). I happened upon one of our oldest records waiting to be put away. The dog on the cover of Fleetwood Mac's "Tusk" stared back at me, and I laughed to myself at the resemblance between that dog and my own, Leia. The cover was pretty damaged, but the vinyl itself was intact, there was just a bit of dust playing around the edges. Carefully, I cleaned it, and was just about to put it back in its cover, when the idea of playing it popped into my head. I had to make sure that it was functioning properly, and I definitely had some time to spare.

Sitting back in my chair, I breathed deeply when Stevie Nicks' marvelous voice filled my ears. I closed my eyes for a moment, inhaling the song, feeling every slight change of the notes in my body, and that's when it happened. I wasn't in the record store anymore.

A huge field of the greenest grass I had ever seen expanded out in front of me.

It was filled with colorful spots in random places - blankets, in psychedelic patterns of red, orange, yellow and blue, stained the plain bright green view. It was okay, though; somehow, every little piece of that sight seemed so perfect, so fitting, that I smiled at it as if it were put together for me, and only for me.

Sitting on those blankets were lots of people, who were chatting happily, sharing food, cigarettes, hugs and warm smiles. It was at that moment that I noticed I wasn't alone. A man, wearing a brown coat, bright blue bell bottom jeans and yellow sunglasses, framed by wild black hair that was all over the place, was sitting by my side on the grass. On my other side, a woman, dressed in embroidered overalls and high platform boots, was lighting a cigarette. She was so focused on what she was doing that she didn't see me staring at her, noticing the way her long wavy blonde hair was dancing around her face as the wind played a song that only she and the breeze could understand. She was beautiful. Fiercely so. The long fingers that balanced the cig were pale, highlighted by perfectly painted red nails.

When she took the first hit of the cigarette, her eyes closed as if in relief; the white smoke left her parted lips and, in a moment, it was gone with the wind. My eyes followed the vapor's track until it disappeared completely, and that was when I heard someone call my name.

When I looked back, her hand was outstretched towards me, and the cigarette in the tip of her fingers was pointed at me. I looked at her, trying to figure out what was going on, but ended up becoming even more lost in the sight of her. Her brown eyes stared back at me, and the sun bathed her face as if it was made especially for her and no one else. And as I stared, that angelic face was changed by the surge of a smile. First shy, then more welcoming, until her entire face was changed by that simple movement - the corners of her lips going upwards, ending up in a smile that could only be translated to mean something so joyful, hopeful and possible. Something that had started to grow in my heart since the moment I first laid eyes on her. A harmonious laugh broke the silence that we were immersed in, making me laugh as well, although I couldn't figure out why I was laughing. I took the cigarette from her hands, and those same fingers that were holding it had now gotten lost at some point near my temples, pushing my hair back. *That's it, - I thought - This is how it feels to be...*

Suddenly back to reality.

I breathed quickly as a loud noise from outside passed through the midst of whatever that daydream was and reached me.

The plastic curtains were beating furiously against the open windows as a strong wind ricocheted through the room. I looked around, the same old records were waiting to be cleaned, the dim lights were giving no more illumination than necessary for the room, and the record player... Was letting the last seconds of Sara burst into the room.

I could still feel it, the sun's rays bathing my body, the smell of tobacco and flowery perfume, the perfect spring - and her smile. A smile that could light up a world in darkness, my soul and all the hidden parts that someone could hide. The calmness of her presence and that feeling... The feeling that I was home.



# A Dog's Miracle

Felipe Bonini

80

On a day like any other day, in one of the many cities that never sleeps, a dog awoke. It was another gray day with a hidden sun, as every other day under that same gray sky, surrounded by those same gray walls, and the pale-colored stains of vegetation. The vegetation was only still there so that the leader in power might say that in this city, there was "still green somewhere," and it was only preserved by the fences, which prevented the people from reaching the life-giving green. The dog laid over a staircase, and slowly he opened his eyes, as they were enveloped in the white of the first sunlight coming through his pupils. He blinked a couple of times until he could finally see the tremendous doors of the cathedral. Looming over him, as big as the doors, was the shining stained glass window, which told those who didn't go inside the church the stories of God's miracles. And as was the case with the many homeless people who lived around the building, the dog also believed in those stories. Atop the stained glass, a bell tower would sing out every hour, telling him that he had made it through one more day, and could survive to another.

The dog liked to sleep on the church's welcoming carpet, it was less cold than the bare ground, and the wall's entrance and doors protected him against the winds. But as soon as that door opened, he had to leave, because then he would be in "God's path," as he had heard many times while being beaten out of the way. After that, man's best friend would start his day with his one and only goal: to fill his belly. It was the sole mission he had ever had, and would ever have, unless, for some supernatural reason, a miracle happened. Miracle, a word that even he, a dog, knew, but that didn't often happen to any dog... So on he walked.

Looking for food in the city was no easy task, as he had learned throughout his life till now, and many days he didn't eat at all. Today started with a walk around the square that encircled the church. The place was gray and green, both old and falling apart as if it had no strength to hold itself together. The walkways were covered in litter, and the more street sweepers cleaned it, the more litter would come. The place didn't receive many visitors; however, it was full of life in its own unique form, as many homeless people would make their own roofless homes there. The city didn't know how to care for them; it told them they were not welcome, and sent them away, with no place to go. They went to pray for a miracle under the cross, and there they waited, just like the dog.

The dog walked away from the almost fecal smells on the other side of the square to find a commercial street.

The sidewalk was packed, and as the dog walked, he became lost in the middle of a sea of shins and ankles, all walking towards the same goal; a goal that would also be the same again on the next day, and the day after that. The dog had never wished to walk on two legs, as he saw how hard life was for humans. During his walk, he took a couple of turns, in the hopes of finding anyone who would be generous enough to feed him, or someplace with any leftover food that he could grab. Unfortunately, nothing was left for him, so he kept walking. Past experience had told him that somewhere he would find a miracle, and so he was looking for it, but with each new step, he felt less sure of finding one.

The hunt to find anything to eat took him through some laborious trails, as he passed narrow aisles and alleyways. On the path to a restaurant, which was the last idea he could think of, the dog had to pass through a chain link fence with a hole. The hole looked tailor-made for him, however, the tailor was cruel enough to leave the pointy wire of the fence aimed toward the center of the hole. Those pointy wires were always in his way, and today they poked him one more time, as they had been doing every day. The metal pierced through the now-layered scar, which was always cured during the night, only to be sliced open once again on the next day. At this point, sometimes the scar itself didn't know if this was a new sore, or just the same one failing to ever be fully healed. As the dog walked, little drops of blood began to pour every couple of steps he took. But he didn't feel the pain anymore. He was used to it, or didn't care that much, since he knew that he wouldn't take his blood or his scars with him when he passed away... So he just kept walking.

Now two or three yards away from the restaurant, the smell of food made the dog's mouth salivate, and his stomach rumble. The place was full, and food was coming and going to the door with each step. The dog suddenly stopped walking as he saw a figure leaving the doors of the restaurant. Unfortunately for the brown canine, the silhouette was the same as every man, but unlike the kinder soul the dog had met before, this man didn't bring food in his hand, but a broom. And he came in the dog's direction. Angrily, the man screamed at the dog that he was not welcome. The animal quickly turned the other way, as today he didn't want to be beaten again. While running, the flow of blood from his wound increased. The dog ran for blocks until he looked back and saw that the man was making his way back into the restaurant. On his walk back to the plaza, the dog thought that maybe one day the man might bring him food instead of harm; maybe someday.

The sun had reached its highest point in the sky by now, and the dog rushed to catch the 6 o'clock mass. He went as fast as his unnourished and bleeding body could, and he arrived in time. He liked to watch the mass. As he would sit on the carpet, paying attention to every word, he could see himself in the others seated there; asking God for the same miracle he was, and hoping one day the Lord would bless him, just as everyone else in the church was hoping. After the mass ended, many would pass by him, saying "poor dog" and "bless his soul," however, no one would touch him. He had forgotten what feeling care was like. People would always look at him, and he could feel the pity in their eyes as they told him how unlucky he was... "Oh, if Priest Daniel were still here with us, he would take care of you." But the Priest in question was long gone. Once all the worshippers had left the house of the Lord, the altar boy would come to close the door, bringing with him a silver goblet with the remaining body of God from the communion ceremony. As he was reaching to put those holy wafers into the poor dog's mouth, the new Priest grabbed the boy's arm. "What are you doing with the body of the Lord?" He said. "Shouldn't the starving dog receive God's blessing?" asked the boy. "How dare you give the body of God to a dog, those offerings are blessed!" exclaimed the Father, as he walked away, goblet in hand. The altar boy quickly followed, while asking, "But if dogs don't receive the body of Christ, how will they go to Heaven?"

The dog had no time to hear the answer, as the night had arrived, and his blood-pouring body was craving something to eat. So he went to the only place left where he thought he might be able to find some food. The trash collectors would make a pile at the end of a nearby street, and maybe if he looked well enough, he could find something inside one of those garbage bags. He soon arrived at the pile, while the trail of blood leaking from his wound followed him, and quickly went on to search for food. The trash fell on him as he looked, and the smell was awful, but this was his only hope. He could feel there was something to find, and his focus was completely buried in the trash pile until suddenly he felt an agonizing pain in his torso. Another bigger, and stronger, canine had had the same idea as him, and was not happy to share the results. The dog, now more wounded, tried to defend himself, but he was no longer as strong as he once was, and he knew what the other dog could do to him. Only the hope of a miracle remained now as he walked back to the carpet, bleeding all the way.

Thankfully, it may have been the dog's lucky day, after all. As he walked back to the doors of the Lord, he saw that a good soul had left a receptacle, and poured some water in it.

There was no food, given that the Priest had prohibited it since the people in need would gather at the church's entrance to grab their fair share as well. But the water was enough, as he knew it was a gift from the heart, and he needed it more than anything. He came closer to the bottom of the stairs; his humid mouth could feel the taste of water with each step, and he started to salivate at the mere idea of something edible going into his mouth. The drops of blood were pouring nonstop now. Living creatures are made up mostly of water, but the dog had been losing his for most of the day, and could not believe that something would finally be going in to replace what he had lost. He thought it could only be a miracle, the one he had believed in his entire life, and that was now finally his as he approached the last few steps of the cathedral staircase.

His blurred eyesight could perfectly see the water, and he used his last strength to get to it, as he stumbled along. With the same unstable walk and the same hunger whose vision could turn anyone blind; a man, brown as the color of Jesus after spending 40 days in the desert, thin as the layer of skin that was the only thing covering his ribs, and dirty as if he didn't know the meaning of a shower, but as faithful as the dog, also saw the water as a miracle. The man took the receptacle, unbelieving, and peered at himself in the water. He looked at the cross in its majestic position on the top of the highest tower, as sovereign as it could look from above to those on the ground, and the man lifted his arms with his last bit of strength. It seemed as though he was carrying the weight of the world in his empty hands, and slowly, he made the sign of the cross, thanking God, as he had now been fortunate enough to receive one of His miracles.

The dog watched the man consume every last drop of that holy water, regaining a drop of hope with each sip. Nothing was wasted... And nothing was all that the dog would have that day. With his remaining strength, he approached the carpet in the entranceway, and as he lay on the now-red floor, he thought that maybe his miracle would come tomorrow. As the night passed, his breath became weaker with each exhalation, his heart slower with each beat. His eyes were closed, and he had no strength to open them. As the night reached its coldest point, so did his body, and with his last breath he barked one last time, and everyone in the square and the surrounding area listened to the final cry of the dog as he said, "There was a time when I believed in miracles, but those days are over now."

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# Poems

CHAPTER 03



# The Flower Said

Andre Lucas de Azevedo

85



When my hope was dead  
And my life lost its sense  
When I thought I never would see  
Your face again...  
Your mellow eyes shining at me...

I heard a voice  
The voice of a loyal friend  
My sweet confidant  
Who listened to me cry, so many times:  
Flower of the green pine, oh flower  
Do you have news of my lover?

It told me you were coming  
But I did not believe  
What a fool I was...

And then this morning,  
Its voice filled  
My heart with joy  
When the breeze  
Brought me a sound  
He comes...  
He comes...

(Poem based on *Song of the Flower of the Green Pine*, a medieval portuguese song)

# The Place Where Dreams Are Born

86

Gustavo Czachorowski



**F**rom a rush of blood,  
With ideas your head floods,  
Giving birth to dreams.

This little haiku was inspired by Coldplay's *A Rush of Blood to the Head* (2002). The album title means doing something on impulse according to vocalist and pianist Chris Martin. The poem is meant to express dreams are born from ideas, rationality, but sometimes you also need to be bold and passionate to bring them to reality.

# My Dear Sister

Melissa Quintela Martinez

87



**H**er eyes are always wandering  
as if they can see something that I can't.  
What treasure lies inside that vast blueness  
I only hope one day I'll get to have a glimpse.

Sometimes she looks my way,  
sometimes she doesn't,  
but when I see my reflection in her pupils,  
suddenly I am inside a painting  
surrounded by the blue sea of her irises  
with the summer sun touching my skin.

And if I take one step closer,  
I can see the shape of a sunflower  
with yellow petals pointing at the sun of a blue sky.  
I wonder in which direction her soul gravitates.



# Perfect

Estéfani Vitoria Sytnik Ferreira

88



We were perfect  
In the most beautiful way  
You were the sun of my day  
Your eyes were shining  
They were the reason I was smiling  
Everything was perfect.

Perfect doesn't mean it was working  
So I left you just wondering  
Were we like a broken heart?  
Just looking for a new start...  
I still love you  
I just wanted it to be perfect.

But now you're perfectly fine  
With her and her glass of wine  
I regret everything I hid  
You were the right person at the wrong time  
I miss when you were mine...  
And now our perfect life is just a goodbye.

# The Ocean

Matheus Willian Neves

89



It is big, blue and beautiful like a storm,  
Yet so serene and pure as a diamond.  
Waves crash at the seashore  
Sparkling in my mind like a cold war.

It is deep, dark and dead as space,  
But it's black and bright in the moonlight.  
Sandcastles running into the sea, like my face,  
Crying, wanting back all my midnights.

In the ocean you find true mystery,  
Searching for a hidden world inside.  
The ocean is where you find beauty,  
In the madness of dying and living.

The ocean hears me when I ponder  
Healing my mind, my body, and soul,  
The ocean is for those who wander  
Like me, lighthouses in a blackhole.

This is a place where the world whispers,  
The wind blows and the waves glisten.  
Where time and space have no hold,  
Guarding the treasure of stories left untold.

In the arms of the ocean I rest in peace,  
The nocturnal fog numbs my pain  
It's as if we've broken gravity's chain  
When you lay me down under your sheets

It is a place so wonderful and deadly,  
Where rivers end, and you forget the past  
Where the memories do not pass  
And time can't go back, a sad way to be.

I hid my love, like jewels in a cave,  
Waiting for my frail mortality to stand in the ocean's grave,  
Since no one in the world can save me...  
Always moving away wave after wave.

The tide can't keep us together  
Our love will not last forever  
And I begin to question: "Why?  
Why did you put sand in my watercolor eyes?"

When I was at the worst of my worst  
Water bleeding through my heart's wound  
Where were you? You turned me into your favorite ghost  
Yet everyone still knows I like you the most.

An ocean of darkness haunted  
By the phantom of my soul destroyed.  
The violent, shallow edge wants me dead,  
But deeper in it's calm and untouched.

It's all a fragile and superficial reflection,  
The moon isn't full in the water of the ocean,  
Creating the perfect illusion,  
So I'm always the one fooled.

My lungs are a dark empty sky,  
The false stars shine, calling me to die,  
But I'll return to you after to say goodbye  
After the deep blue love drags me in to dive.

# A Cloud Shaped Like You

Fabiana Frasson Ribeiro

91



Like a miracle  
I can't recognize  
Is it me? Or someone else?  
Never been so beautiful  
Me, myself and I

As the leaves fall down  
On the street  
I swoon every time I see  
A cloud that looks just like me

I have never felt so happy  
And it is true  
I may not be the perfect version  
But I'm still the real one

Yeah, I liked the cloud  
But actually, I love myself more.

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# Comic

# Strips

CHAPTER 04



# Back in the Day

93



Isadora Zubioli

# The Mistake

94



Nathália Cristiane Cortez de Castro

# The Mistake

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Nathália Cristiane Cortez de Castro



# The Mistake

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Nathália Cristiane Cortez de Castro

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**Author**

**Biographies**





## **Adrian Marcus Brito de Souza**

"Adrian's Mind Map"



Adrian is 21 years old and in his 2nd year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Amanda Gomes dos Santos**

"The Mystery of the Trailer"



Amanda is 21 years old and in her 2nd year of the English Language program at UEM.

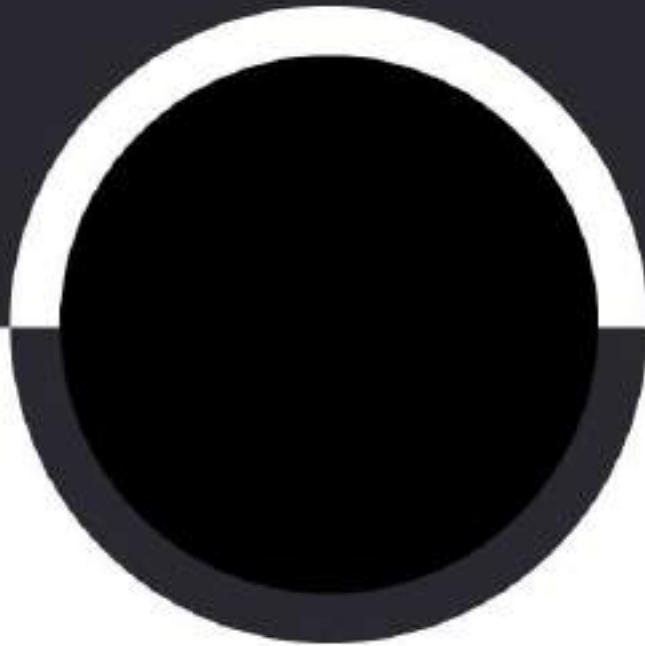


## **Andre Lucas de Azevedo**

"The Flower Said"



Andre is 20 years old and is in his 3rd year of the double-major English/Portuguese



## **Antonia Mara Dos Santos Araujo**

"Eggs in My Way"



Antonia is 37 years old and in her 1st year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Barbara Maria de Oliveira Ricardo**

My Au Pair Story



Barbara is 25 years old and in her 1st year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Bruna Thiemi Wakita**

"The Portrait"



Bruna is 20 years old and in her 3rd year of the English Language program at UEM.



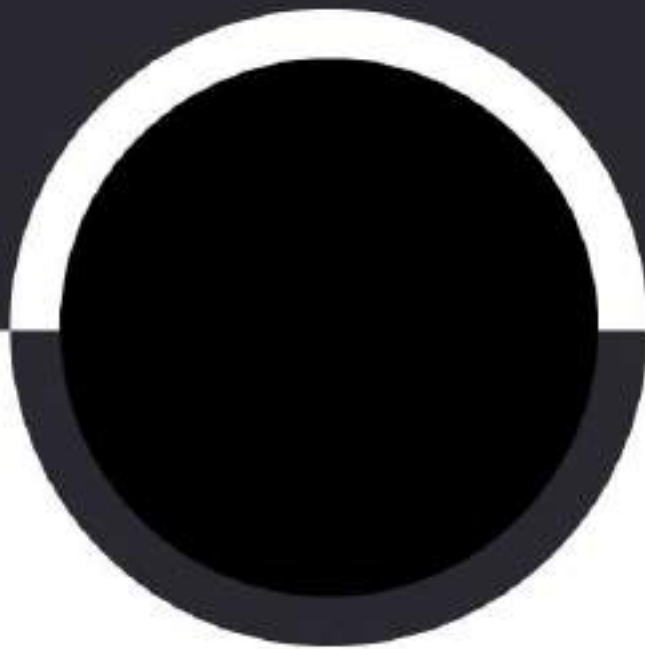


## **Élica Vorpapel Biff**

"The Perks of Being a Wallpaper Flower"



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## Éric Alan Rocha

"The Brothers"



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## **Estéfani Vitória Sytnik Ferreira**

"Perfect"



Estéfani is 18 years old and in her 1st year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Eugênia de Góis Haberkorn**

"A Turbulent Journey"



Eugênia is 21 years old and in her 4th year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Fabiana Frasson Ribeiro**

"A Cloud Shaped Like You"



Fabiana is 18 years old and in her 1st year of the double-major English/Portuguese program at UEM.



## **Felipe Eduardo Canuto Bonini**

"A Dog's Miracle"



Felipe is 23 years old and in his 4th year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Gustavo Czachorowski**

"The Place Where Dreams Are Born"



Gustavo is 22 years old and in his 3rd year of the double-major English/Portuguese program at UEM.



## **Isabela Franzoni dos Santos**

"Trust Me"



Isabela is 22 years old and in her 4th year of the double-major English/Portuguese program at UEM.



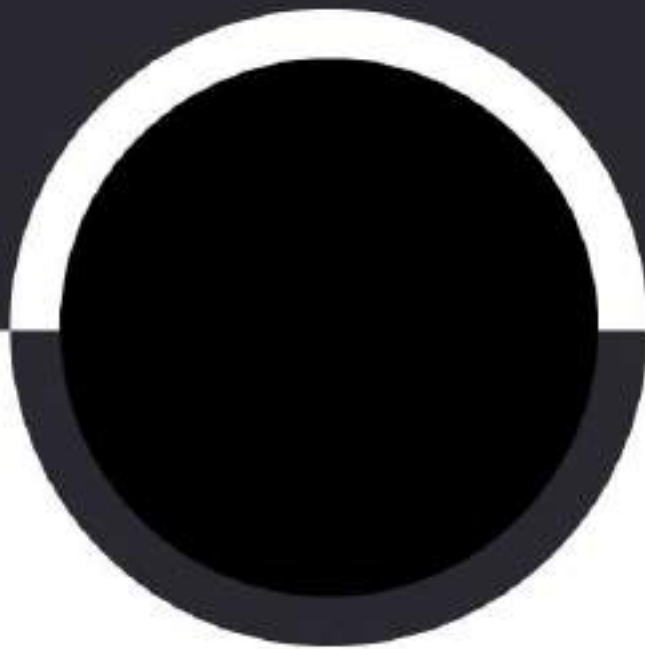


## **Isadora Zubioli**

"Back in the Day"



Isadora is 18 years old and in her 1st year of the English Language Program at UEM.



## **Ísis Maureen de Souza Cardoso**

"You Were Right"



Ísis is 22 years old and in her 4th year of the English Language Program at UEM.



**Júlia Delsantoro Schuindt**

"Garden of Evil"



Júlia is 25 years old and in her 4th year of the English Language Program at UEM.



**Julia Lourenço Pereira**

"A Crucial Mistake"



Julia is 23 years old and in her 4th year of the double-major English/Portuguese Language program at UEM.



## **Leonardo Baldo Dias**

"Sisyphus"



Leonardo is 24 years old and in his 4th year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Laura Pelagio Pires de Souza**

"My First Love"



Laura is 20 years old and in her 2nd year of the double-major English/Portuguese Language program at UEM.



## **Maria Beatriz Bornia**

"The Man on the Third Wagon"



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**Matheus Willian Neves**

"The Ocean"



Matheus is 18 years old and in his 1st year of the double-major English/Portuguese Language program at UEM.



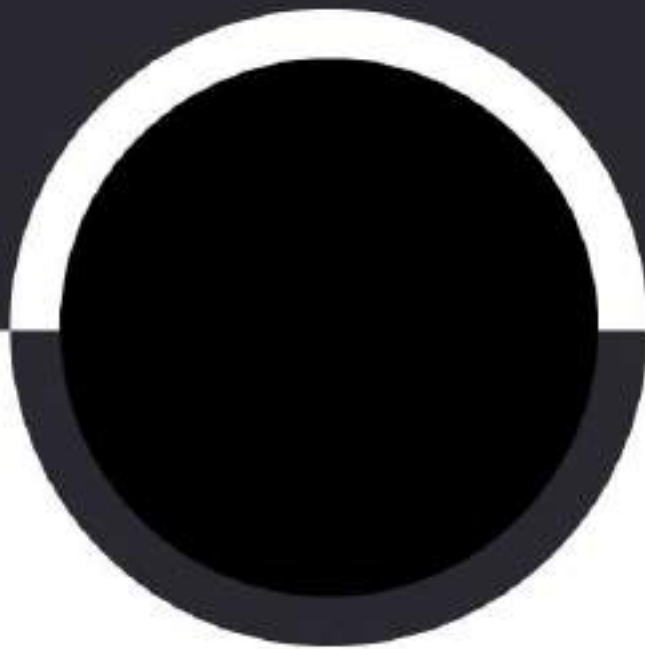


**Melissa Quintela Martinez**

"My Dear Sister"



Melissa is 22 years old and in her 4th year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Nathália Cristiane Cortez de Castro**

"The Mistake"



Nathália is 19 years old and in her 1st year of the English Language program at UEM.



**Nathália Maria Pitareli**

"Sara"



Nathália is 21 years old and in her 4th year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Paulo Jun Masukawa**

"Later is Harder"



Paulo is 25 years old and in his 3rd year of the English Language program at UEM.



## **Rafael Oliveira Gomes**

"Temporary Weakness"



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