



*Virtuous Flumadiddles*  
*Tales of Three Hours*



# Virtuous Flumadiddles

## Tales for Three Hours



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Virtuous Flumadiddles

Tales of Three Hours

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## Preface

Being compiled as our final project, this book is its own complicacy. Each and every single one of the writers has different experience composing the stories. Some of us are totally in love with writing, some of us don't even think of the piece as worthy and the rest are just casually having indescribable feelings. Hence, like a mother feeling proud of bearing her child, we would love to present ours, *Virtuous Flummadiddles: The Tales of Three Hours*.

The contrary combination, *Virtuous Flummadiddles*, is chosen to represent the impalpable content within this book. The title is meant to show how puzzled we may feel at times, not Meanwhile, as simple as it may sound, three hours of Creative Writing Class is what we always share weekly, thus making it the time full of learning on how to love what we create, learning to always develop what we have and learning how to simply imagine.

Read the story so you will know what we are going to tell; the despair, the happiness, the spirit, the struggle, the creativity, and whatnot –basically anything you could possibly imagine but with just a little bit of adventure.

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# Forbidden Mission

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by *Diana Citra*

“That’s not it”

“Then what’s the not it?”

As raindrops fell in the cold night of Jakarta, her tears garnished her cheeks. For the first time after a long time in front of her very best friend

\*\*\*

I saw her looking at me every Monday and Wednesday. She was sitting right there, still using her school uniform. Said I was too confident to jump to the conclusion. But here I was, sipping my coffee while in three tables apart, she was playing with her phone and stealing glances over me sometimes. A high school student glanced over and over again to a 40 years old man? I was used to it.

But she was different. Aside from being tall, thin and beautiful –my very type—, her habit was an attraction –at least to be observed. Always ordering the same coffee as mine with a book on the table, her phone, and headphone on, and sometimes her laptop. It was typical high schoolers’ properties in every coffee shop. But with those belongings she brought, her expression was not easy. While playing with one of her belongings, her glance to me never stopped. Not only the glance that bothered me, her eyes showed many words I couldn’t always interpret. Interest? Disgust? Sadness? Or even anger? But why would even she be mad at me?

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Gwenda didn't know how she had the courage, but she came to him anyway. The feeling to approach him, she couldn't ignore it. No matter what would happen after that, she knew it was her instinct telling her to do so and as Gwenda, she always followed it.

Standing in front of him, trying to say hi, Gwenda tighten her fist a little bit. "Hi. I'm Gwenda. I come to this place every Monday and Wednesday and always see you here every time, ordering the same coffee as mine."

From that little awkward opening, they sat down in the same table for hours. Talking about Gwenda's school, his job, until their hobbies. His laugh was free. Nothing blocked him from enjoying his time with his new young friend. Gwenda, she tried so hard to look normal by hiding the crowd of emotions that were trying to get out. With the struggle to focus into the conversation, Gwenda succeeded to impress him on their first talk but it still had a flaw. He was curious about why Gwenda never looked at him every time she laughed. Yet, he knew he shouldn't ask about it. To get the answer, he asked Gwenda out.

Gwenda too a little time to—pretend to—think. "Make sure it will be worth it," answer Gwenda with a tiny smile in her eyes. This time, she looked into his eyes to make sure she didn't do it wrong.

"I can guarantee." A big smile appeared on his face. Feeling satisfied, he believed he could start something new with Gwenda. Not only to found the answer to his curiosity to Gwenda's treatment to him, but also to make an intense relationship between him and her.

He was totally impressed. Gwenda was a total success.

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"Never 'baaa'-ing me again when we meet in the school hallway, in the class door, anywhere. Never say 'baaa' again to me." Luna knew she was too hard to Gwenda. But she couldn't resist the disappointment. She couldn't believe Gwenda never told her anything. Listening to her story was like ripping Gwenda skin only to find out that there was no Gwenda she knew inside that flawless skin.

"I can get used to that. I know my 'baaa' habit to you is annoying. I can get rid of it." Gwenda looked at Luna hopefully. Hope Luna could tolerate all the mistakes she made.

“No! Don’t take it literally, Gwen. Since when you become this silly? I mean don’t ever talk to me again. No, after you told me everything.”

Gwenda froze in her place it was like there was a thunder hitting her head. As her brain couldn’t react, her skin became more sensitive. The coldness of the pillow she was holding was the only thing she relied on right now.

“As you know right now that I’m an atheist, you also should know that I’m different with you. All of you. Not in terms of capabili—”

“Of course, your capability is different than us. Your brain is amazingly smart but your ass is amazingly idiot,” Luna cut Gwenda’s sentence, which Gwenda was grateful for, for the brief time Luna gave her.

“Okay, whatever. It’s just like we have different religion but we are more than that because I even don’t believe god exists. When you have something to rely on when you are in a stressed situation, I only can rely on myself.”

“Oh c’mon, Gwen. I know all about such stuff. Do you think I’m stupid like your ass? No, hell! I read.”

“Yeah, just to check that you know my norm is different with yours. I’m not bound with religious rules or law.” She stopped and looked at Luna’s impatience face then decided not to make her angrier. “Okay, okay. Let’s move on to my story.”

“Yes. Your story with your sugar daddy.”

Gwenda bulged her eyes, annoyed with Luna’s response right now. But that was the only thing she could do other than telling her everything. It was her mistake and she knew what she should do to fix it. She just didn’t have enough courage to tell her. Her courage had wiped out along with the beginning of her mistake.

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He was right there. Sitting there alone with an empty cup of macchiato coffee latte.

A smile painted his face right after he saw Gwenda entering the coffee shop.

“Good choice of coffee shop. Even better than before.” Without any greeting, she just sat there. Right next to him.

“Come here, my little lady.” He moved a little bit to give Gwenda some space.

“There’s no little lady.” Gwenda leaned her head onto his shoulder. “There is only a little girl. But I’m not little and not a lady.”

“So, who are you?”

“You define it.” Gwenda laughed a little trying to ignore her nervous.

This was their third meeting. Everything ran smoothly since their first talk—since Gwenda followed her instinct to take her mission into action. For him, Gwenda was a new fresh start. After the vacuum of a woman presence in several months, he finally felt the touch of a woman again. Gwenda even more than what he expected her to be. He never thought how smart and independent Gwenda was. Despite the age gap, he and Gwenda could connect to each other in every topic of discussion they brought, from economic stuff, job until life. Only one thing they never discuss: religion.

“You are not a girl. You are a woman. A young woman. An incredible young woman. Thank you for your father and mother.” He was playing with Gwenda’s long and wavy hair, didn’t feel the tense in Gwenda’s body.

“I’ll tell my mother.” She smiled covering the bitterness in her voice. “Why do you agree for us to move to this coffee shop? You are compromising your self-actualization to sip your favorite coffee in your favorite coffee shop.” She tried to find another topic so that she could forget all the first purpose her instinct told her.

“Aren’t you? You also love to visit that coffee shop, right? Ordering the same coffee as mine-”

“You ordering the same coffee as mine!”

They reflexly laughed at the coincidence that they always order the same coffee in the coffee shop near Gwenda’s school. Only little did he know, it wasn’t a coincidence.

“Actually, it wasn’t only because it is near your school and I’m afraid your friend will see us. There’s another reason I agreed to move. That because that coffee shop—near your school— was where I first met with my first love, that later became my ex-wife.” Suddenly, he became serious.

“That was... cute,” replied Gwenda hesitantly, didn’t know what to say.

“Yeah, that was cute. Calm down, that’s not the reason why I come to that coffee shop almost every day. I’ve moved on a very long time ago.” He

embraced Gwenda to strengthen his statement before. “Don’t let my ex-wife bothers you.”

“No, of course not. I live in the present time where I’m with you and you’re with me, right? But by the way, do you have another relationship after your divorce?” Gwenda amazed that she could control the situation— or she hoped she did—.

“Yeah, some relationships. All ended up with them leaving me. Just like my ex-wife. I’m bad at love, I guess.”

Hearing his answer, Gwenda wanted to puke. Instead, she took her jacket in her bag and wore it. Automatically, he removed his hand from Gwenda’s arm. It gave space for Gwenda to control her emotion—to prevent her from actually puking.

“Just cold, you know. The perks of wearing a sleeveless top. It is good for outside but it was bad to wear in the AC room.” Suddenly Gwenda feared if he could feel the emotions filling her.

“That’s okay. How about you? You never really talk about your love life.” He smiled thinking Gwenda had been really into him.

“Hmm... I have never been in a relationship before. My love life is so flat, you know.” She stopped, thinking her answer was also too flat. So, she added, “Not until I met you.”

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Gwenda put her first step to his apartment hesitantly. The emotions and doubt raged not only in her mind or heart but in all of her body as if it tried to tear Gwenda apart. But for her mission—or even stupidity. Like she cared anyway—, she walked into his apartment room. His apartment was so simple, there was not any flower or painting to decor his room, only the chair, table and other basic facilities for a 1BR apartment.

Gwenda sat in the grey sofa in the living room. After uncountable dates with him, Gwenda can control her emotions and reaction better than before. It even felt so natural, her conversation with him. Then, he sat next to Gwenda bringing two cups of tea and a jar of chocolate cookies.

“Hope you understand this old man loves a minimalist style.” He embraced Gwenda and she leaned her head in his arms which became a comfortable place for her after a long day in school or the place for her to

escape from the world. Those are dangerous feeling Gwenda always denied.

“First, you are not old. You are just much older than me. Second, this isn’t only a minimalist style of apartment. This, my dear, is you being lazy to make your place beautiful. How could a home don’t have any decoration?”

Then not many words came out from their lips. They just sat down there, inhale the silence from their tiny world. He became vulnerable every time he was with her. Nothing feels the same with his feelings with other women he had ever dated—and married. It was like finding something missing from his whole life, the last destination of his journey.

Drowned in their own feelings, they both felt the vulnerability, only with different causes. Being with him, Gwenda felt the home she had always been looking for. The home she had never found even in her own home. The home that prevented her from looking for a soulmate. The home Gwenda never imagined did actually exist for her.

Drowned in their vulnerability, they tried to express it with touch because they couldn’t find any words to describe it. Hot tea became cold tea. Cold air became hot. He wanted Gwenda to feel him, to feel his commitment for her, to feel how grateful he was that God had sent her to him. While she wanted all of it. She wanted to feel the unspoken words he tried to say to her, the home she never found anywhere, the vengeance for him, the pleasure she got.

“Dad...”

Then he stopped, hanging the unfinished touch only to see Gwenda face that was showing a shock. It was Gwenda’s carelessness that caused the ambiguity in her word.

Then he laughed. Thinking it was funny. But Gwenda froze. She knew nothing was funny.

“That’s okay. With our age gap, it’s normal if you feel the father figure from me. But your real father is in the home, Gwen. I’ll bring you home to him later. After we finish it.”

But it was too late. Gwenda started crying. Those spoken words were like a sharp knife stabbing Gwenda right in her heart. She couldn’t control her emotion and situation anymore. Not with the struggle she felt since their first talks and his words talking about her father. She couldn’t hold all the tears she wanted to show to her father.

that night ended up right there. The truth had been revealed. The

bitter truth for both of them. Gwenda left his apartment with messier life and mission. He let Gwenda left for she hurt him more than any hurt he ever felt. All the laugh, memories, touch and beautiful feelings were planned illusion. For him, Gwenda was good at doing all her plan this whole time. But for Gwenda, she failed her mission, the revenge to her father. She failed and she fell.

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“What the hell?! How can you do that, Gwen? How... so, he is your father, your real father? You are a crazy bitch.” Luna shocked with the truth Gwenda just spilled.

“Yes, don’t make me repeat it again.”

“So, you asked me to come to your home in this rainy night only to listen to your story about you being an atheist and your revenge to your father?”

“It wasn’t raining when you come here, Luna. Don’t overreact, please.” Gwenda a little bit annoyed with Luna’s reaction. It was so Luna and Gwenda knew that consequence so she couldn’t protest further.

“Whatever. I want to be a supportive friend but I’m totally shocked. And I have the right to be shocked, right?”

“Yes, you have that right. But what matters here isn’t the fact that I’ve met my father and revenge him. He deserves it. He deserves to feel the hurt. I’m a success in hurting him, just like how he hurt my mother. And I’m okay with revenge. But...”

“I’m not okay but it’s okay if you are okay with that. So, what is the matter here?”

“I feel something I don’t expect. I don’t know what it is, but I know for sure that it hurts. I left his apartment because I can’t. I can’t keep telling him the truth and say how much I hate him. It hurts. It hurts to see the pain in his eyes. It hurts to remember our memories every time I see his face. I know it’s ridiculous, but it hurts and I hate it.” Gwenda started crying. Tears went down to her cheeks heavily, competed with the rain outside.

Luna sat next to Gwenda and hug her tight. “I’m sorry for thinking that he is your sugar daddy. I’m sorry that I think your decision and actions were wrong. I’m sorry for being mad because you never told me anything.

I honestly don't feel sorry, but still, I'm sorry. I'm sorry that you get hurt from the mistake you made. I will always be here. You can cry in front of me as much as you want. You can also tell me everything. And let me tell you something, fix your mistakes. It might also get rid of your pain."

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I saw her looking at me every Monday and Wednesday. She was sitting right there, still using her school uniform. Said I was too confident to jump to the conclusion. But here I was, sipping my coffee while in three tables far apart, she was playing with her phone and stole glances over me sometimes. A high school student glanced over and over again to a 40 years old man? I was used to it.

Then she approached me, like what I had predicted. She sat down in front of me. No smile, no hi, no awkward greeting like what she did before.

"Mom doesn't know about you. It's better that way or she will get hurt if she knew. But can we start over? I have nothing to be afraid of our relationship. I don't have God to forbid me to be with you. It might be temporary, but can we make our temporary moment to be the best moment we can make?"

# Bleeding Red Wine

.....  
*by Dimas Haryo Prakoso*

San Francisco, US.

April 2044.

## CHAPTER I

### THE MIST

“Winter is coming,” that is what I said every time snow fell into the ground. The city had begun to turn into children’s playground because it’s Christmas day. The lights of the city were bright, but near residence was dim, and people enjoyed the night, except me. I was fifteen-year-old when I started to join FBI. It has been 9 years since I started working for the FBI as a resident agency exploiting kinds of mysterious cases. The reason I liked it was because I didn’t want to remember my past which was the loss of my family. Unfortunately, it didn’t help me at all because I kept remembering it every time a new case arrived, but I guess it couldn’t be helped.

I lost my badge when I came to my office today, so as of right now I couldn’t be as authorized as my partner, Ben. I couldn’t remember where or when I lost it, but it was not that important because the HQ made me a new one after that. People called me Polar, it’s my nickname given by my partner. I got my name because of how cold-hearted I am to people I have met, according to them, but Ben was an exception because he was my best friend. Since its winter I would usually enjoy myself with a cigar in between my cold lips because Christmas was the only time of day where an FBI agent could have their own free time to spend. The snow rained heavily as I was smoking near my office, but somehow the rain dropped heavier than it normally would. I ignorantly ignored the situation and kept on smoking until I felt the



cold gradually increased like I was living in Antarctica. My both hands were freezing, and my burning cigar was frozen like a candy cane. I didn't think that it was going to be this cold until I saw a mist. Inside of the cold blizzard mist I saw a person, a woman covered in stain of red wine, running wild in circle of the mist, screaming. Being unconsciously reckless, I dashed forward to save that woman from the mist. I tried to stop it but she went in another direction and the last thing I knew, she was gone, and so did the mist. My head couldn't process of what had just happened earlier. I thought it was a dream, but it's not. The temperature had changed because suddenly the cold went back to normal. But my cigar was still covered in ice, like it was a stone. After what had just happened, suddenly I got a call from my partner, Ben. He told me that we just got a case to investigate, "Po, we just got a case from headquarters. I need you here in my office now." So, I went there to see what happen.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HEAT

It was 3AM in the morning, I wore my formal FBI suit every day. It had been 30 minutes since Ben called me, and it had been an hour or so after the mist had gone away that day. But as soon as I got the call, I went straight away to his place as fast as I could. Every time an FBI or your partner called it could only mean two things; someone died, or it's a case. At first, I was worried because after I arrived at his place, Ben was there in front of his house waiting for me with his concerned-face and I assumed that it was bad news. It turned out that her sister had just died from a car crash. Ben said that a stranger found her in the middle of the street, "A stranger notified me that he found my sister dead from a car crash, and he believed that my sister hit a tree, and the stranger also said that he found several alcohols in her car". Then Ben walked up to me in vain and said, "Oh, and we got a case from HQ to visit Virginia City. We got a couple of months to prepare until the investigation starts.". Then Ben gave me an envelope and went back inside holding tears as I tried to soothe him down by hugging him. I thought it wouldn't work but after I hugged him, he smiled and after that I went back home.

When an FBI agent got a case, each person would receive an envelope contained lists of information. In the lists, there would be instructions from the Headquarters to follow. One of the instructions told us that there was a

significant population loss found near Virginia City and we must go there and find out what caused the population loss to happen in the first place. After I read the envelope and the instructions given from the Headquarters, my body began to sweat because of the heat. Suddenly it became really hot, and it was also odd knowing that it wasn't hot at all in here. I went outside to make sure that I wasn't hallucinating, but the heat kept gradually increasing as I about to lay down to the ground, fatigue. I almost passed out, and my eyes were gradually shutting close as I tried to keep it open. It felt like I was dying. It felt like hell. But before I completely passed out away, I saw a blurry red and orange color surrounded me. I could feel that it's a heat, but it kind of looked human or a blazing man. After an hour or so I woke up outside of my house, freezing cold and pale. I went back inside feeling very weak, and I ignited the fireplace I had in my house to warm myself down. After I was warm enough, I called Ben to see if he was ready to start the case tomorrow.

### CHAPTER III THE MURDERER

Ben didn't pick up his phone since last night I called him, so I decided to go to his house. When I was on my way to Ben's house, my car suddenly stopped. I checked if I ran out of gas, but I didn't. It was really weird experiencing this situation because my car rarely ever did that, and I was angry at the same time to my car because it was originally my father's old car that I fixed long time ago when I was just a kid. I didn't want to leave my car, so I locked both the right and left of my car's tire to prevent people from stealing my car, and since Ben's house was only a couple of blocks away, I decided to walk. Ben's place was empty. The lights of his front house were off. I assumed he wasn't home so I went into his house for checking. His rooms were so organized, and symmetrical like a five-star hotel. It was beautiful. But he wasn't there so I waited in his room until he comes back. It had been an hour or two since I waited him in his room. I was starting to worried that something might've happened to him. But suddenly I heard a noise in the kitchen near the back of the house. It sounded like a broken glass, so I creep onto the kitchen's area to check if that's Ben, but as I was walking, I said, "I thought this was Ben's house. Why would he go for the back door and not for the front door instead?". This kind of things happened before in Ben's neighborhood. It was Nara Weisman, an 18-year-old boy who got killed by

his father by a knife in his kitchen. People say Nara was crying in vain while his father stabbed him in his gut. So, I grab one of the knives in the kitchen for precaution, and slowly open the door, and there he was, Benny, laying down on the ground, drunk. He was asleep, and sad. His eyes were closed but his tears from yesterday when we met were still there. And I said arrogantly, “Come on Ben, wake up, do you want me to get fired?”. Because of that, our investigation got delayed and we decided to postpone our investigation until Ben felt like himself again.

## CHAPTER IV

### MIRAGE

It’s been 3 months since winter just ended. Our investigation just barely even started. We were on our way in Ben’s lovable Range Rover car to Virginia City. Trees and bushes that had lost their leaves over the winter began to grow new leaves again and also flower as we drove through the road. Although it was still quite cold, but the temperature of the air and soil started to warm up and made the road warmer. Driving there only took us 3 hours’ drive through San Francisco to Virginia City. After we arrived, the instructions from the envelope that the HQ gave told us to stay at Silver Queen’s hotel to meet our consultant there. There we met the consultant named, Demi, who helped us by giving information that we would need about Virginia City true backstory. We stayed at Silver Queen’s hotel for a day. According to citizen near the place they said that Silver Queen’s hotel was haunted by a ghost. Surely Ben didn’t believe a single word they say because he wasn’t a believer of ghosts, but I did. The sun had gone dark and the lights were brightening the city. Ben and I were in one room together, whereas Demi was in another room by herself. Ben was doing his research on what Virginia City was most known for, and I was doing nothing. I sat down on one of the chairs, trying to sleep. It was odd, but, when I was in that chair, I could still hear Ben speaking to me, but my body were completely shut and I couldn’t move. It felt like someone was on top of me, sitting, laughing, with the angel’s crying. Although my eyes were shut, somehow, I could see through my eyelids. I saw a woman in red dress with a stick in her hand and pimple on her head. it felt familiar, like I just met her. Suddenly Ben slapped me in the face and said, “Are you okay? You were growling like crazy just then—here, I found something interesting regarding to Virginia City. It looks like this city are full of haunted houses

just like what people said, boring right?”. I was dizzy after Ben woke me up, and in honesty I couldn't hear what he said either. All I could ever think of was the dream. A side of me believed that it was a dream, but another side of me believed that it was real. After few minutes I adjusted and was feeling better, we continued our research. Precisely at 12:00AM we finished doing our research and decided to go to bed. Then, right before we went to bed someone knocked on our door 3 times, “knock...knock...KNOCK!” the first one I opened it slowly and there was no one there. “knock...knock...KNOCK!” the second time I ran towards the door and opened it as I quickly turned around left and right to see if people were playing with us. I decided to stand there, in front of the room's hotel to check if anyone was going to knock on my door again. “What are you doing? It is late, you should be sleeping” said Ben. “Didn't you hear the knocking Ben? Someone is messing with us” I said. Ben was asleep later on while I am standing in front of our room. It was gloomy, and I was very sleepy. I forgot what happened. It felt like I was dream walking through someone's room. It felt so real but then I was awake when suddenly a noise from below the bed was heard. It was a pounding sound and a fade shriek which made Ben's eyes wide open and said, “what was that?!”. I quickly turned from the front of the door and then the knocking was started again, “it's the haunted house ben, we got to leave this place immediately”, Ben didn't listen because he didn't believe in ghost. So, I ran into Demi's room to ask to change the hotel right away. As soon as I'm in front of her room I saw a liquid underneath her door. It was red, and so I thought it was blood so I pushed the door and broke it in half and there I saw, Demi, sitting in a chair in the opposite side of the door, looking at the windows. I thought she was mesmerizing the sky, but as I turned the chair around, there she was, dead, with bunch of big sticks the size of a sharp pencil penetrating her skin that almost looked like, a devil. It made me shook when I saw that with my very own eyes. I ran back to where Ben was and told him everything, exhaustingly. After that we left the hotel precisely at 3AM with Demi's body. We went into a hospital where Demi's body could rest there, and then we left.

## CHAPTER V THE SINS

It had been four months since we left Silver Queen's hotel and left Demi's body in the hospital. It seemed like it was just yesterday. The sun was

getting hotter than it used to, and it was no longer cold because it was the warmest season of the year where the world needed the cold. We were driving to Montana, where our last location was located by the envelope. Along the road, I had this weird feeling that I had a psychic skill that I wasn't aware of. Precognition was what I called them. It's a psychic skill that would allow me to see into the near and distant future. Although I didn't believe it for a second, but somehow there's a connection between my dreams and the reality I lived in. I really wished that this psychic skill would allow me to kill myself to a point where I can meet my family once again. Because I couldn't stand seeing people dying in my dreams and had to see it again in my world or reality.

There we were, arrived at Montana that was known for its gold mining town, and once housed of 10,000 residents, and now it had been completely preserved as a National Historical Landmark. I was really scared and sad, because this was where my parents died long time ago when I was just a little kid. After arriving, we didn't know what to do. We were supposed to search the entire house looking for a person who lived there or a soldier who protected the place, but we couldn't find any.

In a distance, there was a voice I heard, shrieking. It was so loud that it seemed like the whole windows of the houses could be broken at any moment. We were painfully annoyed by that noise for almost 5 to 10 minutes, but then the shriek stopped. The source of that voice came from a cave near the houses in Montana. We went there with our only equipment: gun and a knife. Inside of that cave there we found, bones. We were shook knowing that it was a human bone, but along the way there was also animal bones laying around. the deeper we went into the cave, the bloodier the place was, and we couldn't see anything because all we can see was red. We were walking between our legs in fast pace but slow. Ben was definitely scared because he wasn't used to this kind of atmosphere before. As we were walking, a big wood swung at us and made us fainted. When I fainted, I dreamed about the people that died in my dreams, but it was different now because it was my face. It was so mysterious because as I was dreaming, I heard a whispering, "come to us" until I woke up it transitioned to a guy shouted, "Die for us!". There were five guys naked. Ben was still unconscious and we were tied. Judging from the way the cave looked, I can say that they were cannibals. I could tell that they were the problem to the significant population loss, so I had to kill them. The FBI had taught us one thing, to not give up. So, I grabbed a knife that was tied on to the back of my belt. I cut it off and charged towards them. I had never felt

as alive in a long time since I was with my family, but this time was different. I ended up cutting all of their throats, hands, legs, and hang them up where I later, burn them in vain. I smiled when they were looking at me in pain, but they deserved it. After that I cut off Ben's tie and brought him home back to San Francisco.

## CHAPTER VI TWO FACES

Ben was still unconscious throughout the journey to San Francisco from Montana. I thought he was seriously injured so I went to the hospital instead of his house. There was no injury in his body, no blood, but he looked so weak. After entering the hospital, I shouted, "I need help my friend is injured!" I was so worried about him. Maybe because he was like a brother to me. Doctor said that he would be fine, so I went to his room right away to check if he's okay. The doctor said they couldn't change his clothes due to his weak condition so he still wore the same clothes as he was laying in hospital bed, weak.

After a few minutes, he woke up. He wasn't in pain or anything, he was just confused because the last thing he remembered was when we were in the cave investigating together. After seeing him waking up I felt happy because I was no longer alone. But then he suddenly stood up from his bed, and hugged me. The hugged wasn't genuine because it was not his actual intention. He smiled to me and said, "thank you for saving me. I'll help you now— ". Right after that I felt really weak as the red wine dripped from my body to my feet. I was surprised because he was the one who I trusted ever since I lost my parents, my partner. I didn't move, and the room were quite because it was 3AM. There was no one around except the nurses and doctors. Since I couldn't stand being hugged anymore, I pushed him into the corner of the room as hard as possible with knife stuck in me, bleeding red wine.

Benny shouted, "you know the reason for this was because you are very annoying you know, you killed my sister!". There I was running in pain and shocked that he said those things to me. "I didn't kill your sister dammit!" as I shouted back in pain. "I'm done with your lies! I went to where my sister was crashed and saw your badge laying there in my sister's car! I have been waiting for this moment since ever I found out that you've killed my sister you prick!".

I ran out from his room as he chased me. Holding my tears from the betrayal I just received. Out of nowhere a flash feeling of heat came over me, that I had to kill. I was burning hot. It's like that last time I saw the blazing man. I couldn't run as fast as him, so I use this opportunity as a bait to made him chase me. I entered a room which filled with ventilator support with gas tank that they used for patients to help them breathe easier. I pulled-off the knife that was stuck in me heavily. It was disastrous. Once again, I feel as weak as I was first reading that envelope where I got a heart attack. I had no one to believe in anymore. As he came into the room showing his happiness towards my pain, I struck the knife into the gas tank and explode one of the building in the hospital into hell. As he was burning like the blazing man, I tried to run but my heart was fainting, so I crawled like my life's depending on it. When I did that, I saw my parents walked up to me to pick me up from this disaster apocalypse, so I followed into the purgatory, hell, and heaven, bleeding red wine.

THE END

# Camouflage

.....  
*by Ea Gittha Junior*

## CHAPTER 1

15 February 2019.

Sunday morning. 07.00 a.m.

It was Neil's 22nd birthday. He woke up from the deep sleep because the sunlight forced to come through the window touching his beardless face. He tottered away from his bed to reach his desk which was full of empty beer cans. He turned on his laptop, wanting to check out what he should do on that lazy day.

Once he opened his Gmail, he wasn't even surprised that he got an invitation to contribute (again) in the Youth Design Festival in Oklahoma for next month. It was his third times to contribute on that festival just to demonstrate his masterpieces. He scrolled down again, read all of the emails, then he suddenly stopped on the email with a subject "Job Offer to become Graphic Designer". He was shocked because it was from "The Chase" company. He didn't even expect that one of the most famous companies in the world would notice his designs because most of the times, he only worked for the small companies. He was so freaking out to get an email from "The Chase" and got no bravery to read it. He just stared at it with wide eyes.

After he froze for about five minutes, he decided to read the whole email. His heart was beating fast and he could not control it.

*Dear Mr. Neil Garbadan*



*We are all excited to get to know you over the past few days. We have been very impressed by your skill and would like to offer you the position of Graphic Designer. This is a full-time job and you will work with us from Monday – Friday at 9 a.m – 3 p.m.*

*For Graphic Designer position, The Chase company will be offering you a salary of \$99,000 per year. You will be paid on a monthly basis. You will also have the life insurance, dental insurance, health insurance, compensation committee and profit sharing.*

*Please indicate your agreement with these terms and accept this offer by signing and dating this agreement before 10 March 2019.*

*Sincerely,  
Antonio Bargoszaks  
Human Resource Department*

\$99,000. It was a very big money for an unmarried man who lived alone. How can a big company such The Chase offered him to become a graphic designer? He still could not believe that he would get a full-time job that he had been wanting for the past 7 years. It was the best gift he would ever receive on his birthday. He turned off his laptop with a smile on his face and ran into the bathroom.

*Bye bye freelancer.*

## CHAPTER 2

*Are you gonna take me home tonight?  
Ah, down beside that red firelight  
Are you gonna let it all hangout  
Fat bottomed girls , you make the rockin' world go 'round*

If you heard the sound that was being played very loud, it came out from Voch Bassy's studio. In his studio, Voch looked so busy with his laptop. When he worked, he always listened to the 80's songs such as Queen, Bon Jovi, Guns N' Roses and Lionel Richie. He had been working all day long 'til his pale face looked so tired. His studio was really really messed up. His cameras were left on the sofa, the cigarette ash was scattered on the floor, and there were so many bottles of beer laid on the table.

Cut the video, split the video, inserted the music, the texts, and the pictures, that was what he did on his studio to make the best content on his video sharing platform. He did it over and over for six hours. He messed up his hair and grumbled to himself. He didn't even eat yet since he worked on his laptop until he realized that it was already 7 p.m.

He got up from his pleasant grey chair and walked into the dining room. He looked at the dining table, only a slice of bread and an empty glass were left on it. He opened the refrigerator to get the fresh milk and a slice of bread to make a sandwich with a yesterday's leftover chocolate jam. However, a slice of bread was not enough for him. Working for about six hours had taken all of his energy. So, he decided to go to the supermarket near his house to buy some good foods to boost his energy.

He grabbed the car keys that was hanging on the wall and got into his old-fashioned car. His Triumph TR6 car was a legacy from his cool impassionate grandfather, Ramy Abraham Bassy. While he was driving his car, he stuck his right hand out of the car window and felt the wind that was passing through him. On the way to the supermarket, he saw a fat ashy-grey kitten wearing a collar with a red bell on it that was looking for some foods in the garbage.

After twelve minutes driving, he arrived at the supermarket. He took a shopping cart and started to explore every side of the supermarket. He bought some supplies, especially foods for the next week. While he was walking around at the supermarket, he suddenly stopped when he listened to the good pop-punk song that he had never heard before. Then, he thought that it was a good idea to made a cover of this song. He took his cellphone from his pants' pocket and searched for what the title of that song was.

"Yeah! Got it!" he shouted slowly to himself. Hazy Shade of Winter by Gerard Way. It was the title of that song. He ran to the cashier and paid all of the stuffs, then got back to his car.

On the way back home, he saw a girl was so busy fixing her car. He stopped his car with the intention to help that girl.

“Hey, what’s the problem?” asked Voch.

“I don’t know. My car suddenly stopped and I couldn’t fix it. “Can you help me?”

“Oh, wait a minute. I’ll check it”

Voch started to check the machine and repair it. He did it for only about five minutes and asked the girl to lend him the car key to check whether it was working or not. Voch tried to turn on the car and yeah, it worked. Then, he saw a fat ashy-grey kitten was sitting on the back seat. He noticed that the cat was wearing a red bell collar. Without asking the girl, he concluded that this kitten belonged to her.

“Done. You can drive your car, now. By the way, that’s a lovely kitten on the back seat”

“Thankyou. His name is Adolf. Oh yeah, what’s your name? I’m Sarah”

“Beautiful name. My name is Voch. Nice to meet you on the roadside. Haha” Voch giggled.

“Haha. Me too, Voch” answered Sarah with a cute smile on her face.

“Maybe we could hangout somewhere next time”

“That’s a good idea. Phone number?” Sarah took his phone from her purse.

“Sure”

Voch wrote his phone number on Sarah’s phone and named it “handsome engineer”. He gave Sarah’s phone back and showed the name on it. Sarah was laughing when he read it and said,

“Ok Mr. Handsome Engineer. I’ll call you later”

### CHAPTER 3

Jacob Sanderson was sitting under the moonlight at his backyard with a cigarette on his left hand. Occasionally he sipped his beer which was starting to run out. He thought about what would he do after one year of graduating from college. He thought about what would he be in the future.

It was so hard, but he was the one who started this game. He thought

that he could handle it, but in the end, he could not. Even though, it was so hard to go through everything, at the same time, Jacob always thought that he had the ways to escape all of these problems.

“How long I’ll be the job seeker? Would it be for the rest of my life?” he sighed.

Joblessness. Unemployment. That was the right words to express himself. Jacob was a very lazy young man who always underestimated everything. Being a jobless man was so pleasing in a year. However, after that, it was a boring life. He just kept repeating the same things every single day. Played video games, watched movies, hung out with some friends, laid on his bed and did nothing, and read some books, that’s what he did every day.

However, as a lazy jobless man, he did a little thing to his future. When he watched movies, he always wrote some motivational words to remind himself that even though he was very lazy, but he someday could make a change in this world. Also, he did the same things when he read some books.

On the past two months, he became a job seeker, but there were still no answers from the companies. However, Jacob was not alone. Martial, his nerdy best friend since junior high school was still with him and had no job. Martial looked so depressed because he had applied to several companies, but there was still no answer, like Jacob. Jacob felt so sad about Martial’s condition. Even though, Jacob had the exact same sad situation like Martial, even though Jacob still couldn’t find a job until now, but he always encouraged and supported Martial to not give up on his life.

Jacob actually was a nice person. With those motivational words that Jacob always gave to Martial, Martial asked him why wouldn’t he become a motivator. Those words that Jacob gave him was really life-changing for him, even though it was just a simple word such as “don’t let the unreal feelings control you”. That meant so much to Martial. Those unreal feelings had been taking the control over Martial’s mind for a long time.

## FINAL CHAPTER

It was just a game. Everything’s in this life was just a game that every person could play on it. It was just a drama that every person would love. Just sit on your fuckin’ old bench and watch it ‘til the end, because you had already

reached the end of all of this drama.

“Drowning into our own imagination was so fun. You can imagine whoever you wanna be, you can imagine wherever you wanna go, and you can imagine whatever you want to do.” said Season.

Season was daydreaming ‘til he felt like everything was so real. He had imagined being the different person that he wanted. He also imagined being the different person that he never wanted to be in his life. Every person that he imagined gave the difference experiences to him.

He imagined being a famous designer and call himself Neil Garbadan. He imagined that being Neil, he could made so many masterpieces, so the world would know that he existed. Season was a designer in his real life, but no one was attracted to his design. He had uploaded so many designs in his social media, but no one noticed it. That’s why he pretends to be Neil in his imagination. As Neil Garbadan, everything would be so easy, because someone in a big company noticed his existence and offered him a graphic designer in that company. He paid \$99.000 dollars per year and it was a huge money. If in the real-life Season got that job, he would ask for more to his parents ‘cause he could make his own money. However, his imagination stopped at there.

He started to imagine the other thing. “How about if I became a Youtuber?” he told to himself while daydreaming. “If I can’t be a designer, I should try another thing”.

So, he imagined himself as Voch Bassy, an old-fashioned guy with a good taste. He imagined if he became a famous Youtuber, he would make so much money and got every girl easily. As a nerdy boy in his real life, he did not feel confident with his physical appearance. Talking in front of the camera confidently without feeling anxious as if everyone would hate or judge him. If he could act like Voch Bassy, having his own car, driving wherever he wanted to go, maybe it would be so fun.

However, at the end his imagination stopped into someone that is relatable to himself. He considers himself as Jacob Sanderson. A jobless man who would do the same things over and over for the rest of his life, but liked to motivate someone. He got no no new friends, only his junior high school friend who would always hang out with him. However, the difference was Season got no friends in his life. Every day he would just talk to his cat, Adolf, about everything that he felt. Eventhough, Adolf could not answer him, but he felt free after he told his problems to Adolf.

Season is not like a normal people out there. Sitting on a wheel chair,

playing video games, reading the same books, watching some boring movies, and laying on his bed doing nothing, that's what he did from the moment he woke up every morning 'til the sun set on the west.

“I'm not lazy. I'm not a jobless man. I'm just different, but it's fun, sometimes. I like to imagine something. I like pretending myself as another person because from my imagination, I could do the things that I couldn't in my life. Even though I'm different, I still love the way I am” said Season in the end of his imagination.



# Another Side of Laura

.....  
by Recza Maharani

On the weekend morning, Laura just woke up from her sleep feeling energized. She took and turned out her laptop as usual. She was just lying and playing games on her bed, she played a game that she always played the whole time to spend her weekend. From outside of her room, there was her mother's voice calling Laura to have breakfast. On the dining table, her father started a conversation about his work. Laura's parents were very busy, her father was a businessman while her mother was a doctor. With the work of her parents like that, obviously Laura's parents were very busy and they are from wealthy family. Her father's job made her father should move for several years to California. Suddenly Laura was upset about the bad news she had heard,

“I don't want to move from here. Why you always think about your work than me?”

That's Laura; she hated her parents' jobs. She felt like her parents didn't love her, they always prioritized their job than Laura and her sister. Laura was 17 years old, she was the first child of two daughters, and her little sister didn't understand anything yet. Laura and her sister had been cared for by babysitter since they were babies. She did not get much love from her parents. Laura felt that the love they gave was only to buy Laura expensive items. However, that was not enough for Laura. Despite feeling annoyed, Laura must follow her father's willingness to move to California next month.

Laura's life in California began with the first day at her new school, as a new student, it was clear that Laura had become the center of attention in her classmates. Moreover, Laura was so beautiful she was so tall her body looks like a model. She looked really beautiful when she smiled, she had “eye-



catching smile”. By having a face and body like that, it made the boys in her class like Laura. However, on Laura’s first arrival she welcomed her classmates unkindly. She was just indifferent when her new friends invited Laura to chat. That’s how Laura was on her first day of school, seeing a new face, as usual, she didn’t say too much. Even in the city where she used to live, she was also a quiet person. But there she had a close friend, whom she knew from childhood.

Two weeks of the arrival of Laura as a new student, it was enough to attract the attention of her school friends. Some of her classmates were curious about Laura, they wanted to find out whom and how Laura’s life was in her native place. One of those who wanted to find out was Ruby. Ruby was Laura’s new classmate; she was also beautiful and she had a very different personality from Laura. She always tried to approach Laura, but she always failed to approach Laura, because Laura was so ignorant. Until one day she tried to invite Laura to hang out together.

“I have to do something with my family this weekend” Laura answered

With the sentence spoken by Laura, it was clear that Laura strongly rejected Ruby’s invitation. Ruby who heard that, she understood that Laura didn’t want to be with her, nor did Ruby force Laura to go together. During the conversation between Laura and Ruby, the driver of Laura’s family had come to pick up Laura. It’s usual for Laura, to be picked up by their family driver. Laura hoped that with the transfer of her father’s work, her father would have many times to be together, but the truth was not like that.

As usual, the activities carried out by Laura, she just arrived at home and immediately opened her laptop and playing games throughout the day while she told Ruby that she had been planning to spend the weekend at home but the truth was Laura was just playing games on her laptop. Laura preferred to play games rather than hanging out with her high school friends, she threw herself into playing games, even when she’s angry or happy. Almost every day she just spends all the time after returning home just playing games. However, her parents still wouldn’t care what she did. While playing games, she didn’t want to be forced by everyone. She is also very sensitive about her laptop. She did not want anyone else to touch her laptop, even to open her laptop.

Once when she was still her old city, she invited her close friend, Joy, to work on their assignment at her house. Laura also invited her friend to work in her room. Even that, Laura reminded Joy not to touch Laura’s laptop, Joy understood. But when Laura wanted to take a drink in the kitchen, Joy

was curious and she opened laptop Laura. When Joy opened it, nothing was suspicious. Laura, who suddenly saw Joy when she opened her laptop, was very shocked she was hurrying to turn it off. She was angry with Joy; she was very upset with Joy. In fact, she told Joy to go home. Joy was also amazed that Laura was very sensitive about her laptop, even though there was nothing strange and suspicious about the contents of the laptop. Since the incident, Laura has protected her laptop more, she didn't want to invite Joy to go to her room anymore.

Laura was also a freak person, sometimes she got annoyed when people thought that she was lonely because she just stayed all weekend in her room. Sometimes Laura needed a real friend to share everything with each other. However, she was afraid if someone knew about her life. She was afraid that when people tried to get along with her nobody would accept who she was. She was also afraid to feel lonely but she did not want to get together or try to get along with other people. Joy as her close friend, she was also confused about Laura, Laura didn't talk too much about her life with Joy.

After moving, the friendship between Joy and Laura were still going well. They were still sending messages to each other and call each other, sometimes Laura called Joy when she felt very lonely and needed friends. Joy understood Laura's situation, especially because Laura didn't want to move. Joy was very worried about Laura's condition; she hoped Laura would get many friends while in California. But almost three months had passed; Laura still had the attitude of being ignorant and wouldn't care about her friends. Her new friends also considered Laura as arrogant; especially since she was from a wealthy family. Laura did not want to be friends with them because they were not as rich as Laura. However, only Ruby who was still curious about Laura. She was still trying to approach Laura, at school she tried to invite Laura to eat together to talk with Laura. She also observed that Laura's habits were different from other students. Every break time Laura went to the toilet, and she spent her time only in the toilet. She did not forget to always carry her phone with earphones which usually hung on her neck. Laura also rarely ate in the canteen; usually she only bought food in the canteen and took her to class. Sometimes when Ruby wanted to invite Laura to chat, Laura felt anxious, as if she was afraid that Ruby would know Laura's secrets. Laura was also aware of the behavior of Ruby who approached Laura. She was uncomfortable when Ruby asked about Laura's life. She also often avoids when Ruby wants to approach her. Laura was tired of being asked by Ruby.

Finally she tried to answer Ruby's question.

"Laura, do you have any plan tonight?"

"No"

"Let's hang out together; you've never been out with us?"

"I can't, I want to go home"

"Come on, for the first time. We won't be long"

For the first time, Laura and Ruby left together. After school, they went to the mall. Ruby tried to start the conversation

"Hey Laura, why do you like being alone?"

"I love to be alone"

"Are you not happy to move to this school?"

"No, I don't have to think about it" Laura lied.

"Okay, I want to ask something. Why do you do in the toilet during a break time?"

Laura was silent and looked at Ruby with a cynical gaze

"Sorry I didn't mean to ask you that"

"It's not your business" Laura just answered.

Ruby suddenly fell silent, and she switched to another conversation. After returning from the mall, Ruby was very confused by the attitude of Laura who was so sensitive like that. But she was still curious about Laura; she finally tried to send text to Laura.

"Laura, let's be friends"

A text sent by Ruby to Laura. Laura was confused by the contents of the text sent by Ruby. Why would Ruby care so much about Laura's life? Laura didn't reply to Ruby text either, she just ignored it.

The next day at school, Ruby approached Laura and invited Laura to eat together at the canteen. Laura also forcefully accepted Ruby's invitation to eat together. While eating together, Laura and Ruby were talking for a long time, the longer they talked, the more Laura answered Ruby questions, even though Laura was not yet open to Ruby. Ruby was still trying. Ruby was so happy, finally Laura they could talk together for a long time and answer her questions. But one thing that was strange for Laura, when Ruby asked about this.

"Laura, what do you usually do all day at home?"

"Playing games"

“Playing games? Girls as beautiful as you like playing games like boys?”

“Is it wrong? There I can get more friends who are truly loyal to me”

“What do you mean by loyal friends?”

“Nothing. Forget it”

It made Ruby very confused, what is Laura meant by her words. She wondered if Laura had ever been betrayed in her old school. That was what Ruby wanted to know, she also had plans to invite Laura to play game together at Ruby’s house. Laura who was interested in games, she was willing to come to Ruby’s house. Then, they immediately went straight to Ruby’s house. Once there, Laura was so enthusiastic about playing games together. She was even more talkative and very different when playing games compared to when she was not playing games. Seeing Laura who was so happy, Ruby felt like having the opportunity to ask Laura about her family.

“Do you really like playing games?”

“I am very happy when playing games, I can smother all my complaints while playing games”

“Why is it like that?”

“Yes, my parents are very busy. They don’t have time for me; they have to take care of their jobs than me.”

Ruby realized that Laura got her figures from her parents, she could understand why Laura was so quiet and very unconcerned. So far, she could accept why Laura’s attitude the way it was. Laura and Ruby became a close friend. Laura also often went and met with friends in class, she also became very active in class, she was good at singing and she was a smart student. Laura used to be a very distant person when she first entered school. Ruby was also happy with Laura’s current attitude which turned out cool when they were talking together, but there was one thing that was still suspicious for Ruby. During their closeness, Laura never invited Ruby to go to her house at all. Ruby also tried to ask Laura to do the assignment at Laura’s house.

“Have you done the science assignments?”

“Not yet, I forgot that assignment”

“Let’s do it at your house, I don’t know where your house is”

“We better do it in your house,” replied Laura, who was very nervous

“Come on, Laura”

Laura was confused because of Ruby’s request; she took long enough

time to think about it. After a lot of convincing, Laura finally agreed to.

The next day at Laura's house, they began to do the assignment.

"Cring cring cring" came a voice from Laura's cellphone

Laura didn't answer the call from her cellphone, strangely, Laura was very nervous. She seemed hesitant to answer the phone. Ruby even had to tell Laura to pick up the call. With a strange attitude Laura picked up the phone, she left the room to answer the phone in a whispering voice. Ruby was confused by Laura's strange attitude. Nearly after half an hour of being on the phone, Laura entered the room looking sad, Ruby was shocked by what happened to Laura. When asked by Ruby, Laura didn't say anything, she just kept quiet. Laura changed her mind; she immediately opened her laptop and played the game she used to play. Ruby was amazed, but she also thought of what Laura had said in the past. She said, if she was sad Laura would play games. Laura said nothing, Ruby was confused and didn't know what to do. She decided to go home so Laura could calm herself down.

The next day, Laura was still silent. Laura didn't say anything about what happened to her. Finally, Ruby took Laura's cellphone calmly, when Laura went to the toilet. Fortunately, Laura's cellphone was not locked, a golden opportunity for Ruby to open Laura's cellphone. What a surprise for Ruby, when she opened Laura's text, it said,

"Answer me!! Or I will spread your sexy photo "

That was the only text on Laura's cellphone since the previous text had been deleted by Laura. The number was only named "MG". Not long after that Laura returned and Ruby was just stay silent and acted as if nothing had happened. School hours ended, Laura hurried outside and waited for her car to pick her up. But Ruby immediately grabbed Laura's hand and asked her to take a taxi. With the power of Ruby, Laura went with Ruby. Ruby only invited Laura to go around, and they stopped to go to the park where they would usually hang out. Ruby started the conversation.

"Are u okay?"

"I'm fine"

"Just tell me if you need someone to talk to"

Laura still didn't want to talk about it, and Ruby kept on persuading Laura to talk. Laura remained silent, but she immediately asked Ruby to go to her house. Shortly at Laura's house, Laura immediately opened her laptop and played the game first. Ruby waited for Laura to finish the game. Until Laura

finally finished, she pulled Ruby by the hand and told Ruby to sit right in front of the laptop and she told Ruby to open her laptop, more precisely she opened a conversation in the game chat with someone who had the initial “MG” And that was very interesting for Ruby, especially “MG” was Laura’s online boyfriend all this time. Laura then explained her relationship with MG.

Almost 4 years Laura dated MG, she knew MG from game she had played. Their meeting only started from a game, and they became a couple from a group in a game. Laura was a naive woman; she had never been close to a man and had never been in a relationship. Laura was stunned by playing the games, she was stunned by the command MG. The figure of MG a man who was 5 years older than Laura, because of Laura’s innocence. She liked what MG said, even though they had never met during the 4-year of relationship. The distance between them was also very far, and MG never invited Laura to meet. MG was very possessive, but Laura was very fond of MG, because she felt that only MG could give all love to Laura, since she couldn’t get all of it from her parents. Laura was very obedient to what MG said, if being completely honest, Laura actually didn’t really like the game. That’s also why she could play games because the MG ordered it too because they came into contact when playing games. He would get angry when Laura refused to play games, so she couldn’t refuse.

Because she was also afraid, MG would be angry with Laura even if she did not want to contact MG, if Laura refused to play the game, she was afraid that he would leave her alone.

Ruby was very surprised and sad to know what was happening to Laura, and when she read the contents of the conversation, she got very sad. Because MG was very rude with Laura and always forced Laura to do what he wanted, MG also told Laura not to be too close to her friends at school. Until the question arose in Ruby’s mind

“I would like to ask you”

“What do you do during breaktime in the toilet?”

Laura was very surprised by Ruby’s question. All this time, Laura had been providing time for video calls with MG at school but not ordinary video calls. They would do video call sex, Laura was a victim of MG. She was always forced to do disgusting activities with MG, Laura initially didn’t want to do that, but MG was always angry when Laura refused. Laura got very depressed. She hadn’t been brave enough to tell anyone, she’s afraid people would stay away from her because of what she had done. Even Joy, her childhood friend,

did not know about what happened. Laura was confused, she was afraid to leave MG, because she really liked MG. Laura was also disgusted with herself, she often did disgusting activities almost every day with MG.

Since moving to California and meeting Ruby, it turned out that it made Laura to be more open to others and as the result, got love from her friends especially since the closeness of Laura and Ruby. The closeness to Laura and Ruby also made Laura could care less about MG. MG often prohibited Laura from being friends with Ruby, making her lied to MG whenever she was being with Ruby. Laura tried to leave MG, but she was also scared because every Laura tried to leave MG, MG always threatened to spread her sexy photos. During their relationship, MG would often ask for Laura's sexy photos, Laura, who is so in love with MG, would immediately send him photos. Of all the photos. Laura only showed a picture of her breasts at MG. MG also often asked for naked photos of Laura, Laura always refused to, which made MG angry with Laura. When at Laura's house what would make her cry was when she received a call from MG, MG asked Laura to not be friends with Ruby.

"You're mine; you have to do what I say. Stop being friends with Ruby, she doesn't deserve to be friends with you." Said MG and Laura on the phone.

"Stop it! I'm tired of following all your requests. I want to end this relationship"

"You don't have anyone other than me, dare to leave me alone? You want to die and your picture spread publicly?!?"

Laura immediately turned off the telephone from MG. At that moment, Laura was very frightened, especially with such a threat. MG always sent text with threats

"You must die. I will spread your photos"

That's the message from MG which actually Ruby knew.

Ruby tried to calm Laura who was crying as she described the incident.

Laura became a victim of an abuser and always saddened that the incident made her feel traumatized to meet men and play online games. Fortunately, thanks to Laura's friends who still cared about her, they were still kind to Laura and helped saving her from MG when he popped to contact Laura

**END**

# A Man Named Diman

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*by Elly Santi Pertiwi*

It's 4 AM and a dusty house of Diman in a countryside's settlement has opened its window. Right in front of the table in the house's kitchen, he stood facing a stove with a smoky frying pan upon it. His thoughts fled somewhere away, not realizing that the only egg he was cooking was burnt by him. At his right was a door to his room, a narrow room with limited stuff inside. A bed lied across the door with a window right beside it. A rotten cupboard, a mirror, and a table with a frame of a woman and a kid that looked contrast against the atmosphere of the house were on the other side of the room, right across the bed. Apparently, he started to realize that his egg was burnt and he immediately turned off the stove and lifted the egg. He saw the egg with disappointment in his eyes remembering it was the last food that he had. He limply took a plate and put yesterday's rice that has gone dry and the burnt egg. He ate the food on the table in front of the stove. Finished with his breakfast, then he prepared himself to be ready to go to work. He worked as a cobbler, and he went with his bicycle.

After he's taken the bike outside, as he was going to ride it his neighbour suddenly came running towards him. It was Mr. Jaka. He said that the townsfolk found a body floating in coastal river not far from his house. Mr. Jaka looked so surprised and afraid while he told the incident. He was curious about what was going on in their surroundings since everyday seemed so normal and nothing suspicious has ever happened. His neighbour talked so long in a surprised and also frightened tone but Diman did not respond anything. Not a single word out of his mouth; he was frozen and immediately became pale and sweaty. The man that he'd known as a friendly neighbour was still trapped in his mind until Mr. Jaka shouted at his face to snap him out of



it. Instead of responding to his neighbour, he went in rush and ignored his neighbour's invitation to see the investigation on the scene. He pedalled his bike with a trembling body and a worried face. The wide smile that he used to put on his soothing face was gone; his face told everything about his worries and fear. After pedalling for a while, he stopped in a former bus terminal, he laid his bike against the old bus and then sat on the floor in silence. He looked down to both of his hands and later he cried so hard. After some time he looked up to the sky and cried again, he hit his hands against the wall a few times-- that made his knuckles bleed.

He went back home and found that a man was standing in front of his house. He kept on walking close to him but Diman did not recognize the man's face at all until he saw a mark on the man's back hand, a similar mark that a kid in the picture in his room had. The man bent his knee in front of him and cried loudly. It opened the old scars of Diman's; the man was his son who ran away after Diman lost his wife and all of his assets. He suffered a mental breakdown and lost everything but his son, who, instead of supporting him through the harsh time, blame his father instead for his mother's death. Diman could still remember how it felt living those days: the feeling of failure and being left alone. He was confused of how to react, so he just wiped his son's hair in tears. He knew right away that he was still hurting inside the same way as the last time his son left him. However, he tried to embrace his pain and open up to his son.

"How are you doing?" asked the son to his father as the first opening conversation they had after they sat together in the living room. Under the dim lighting of the lamp, the awkwardness was clearly seen between the two men. There was a moment of when the was widower silent for couple minutes; Diman had expected that things would never be the same had his son ever come back—which he did. Diman was afraid that there would be no other chance for him to feel like being a father again. He forced a smile that he used to put on everyday in front of his son, "I work as a cobbler again, I am doing fine." He looked down for a while as he continued, "Every day I wondered how you're doing. I wanted to see how you turned up, but that's fine, we all know that we can never change the past, can we?" The son could not hide his despair anymore: it reflected in how he was looking at his father. "Since I've made lots of mistakes, my life is horrible. I have been trying to find you for the past two years, I suppose if I found you earlier..." answered his son in tears; he was trembling. "That's okay son, you have found me now. Thank you

for remembering me,” said Diman with smile. They spent the night by talking to each other. Sometimes, there would be moments when both of them went silent; they could not describe how it felt seeing each other again after being apart for ten years, especially for Diman’s son; he still acted awkward and nervous around his father. His face described the sadness that he has kept for long; perhaps it was all about a regret that unfortunately took too long a time to come.

Beneath the dark, Diman felt that the ground was sinking, and then he fallin somewhere cold and dark. No sound or any visualization, there was only him and silence. All of the sudden he saw so many people that he knew, pointing a finger at him accusatively. They blamed Diman for the murder of the body that was found in the coastal river. Diman denied in panic but people kept mocking and cursing him, until a woman came to him and said, “Why did you do that, my love? I thought you have promised to meet me in Nirvana. You’ve said you’d pay as the time goes by. You stained our promise,” Diman woke in a horror with a gasp, realizing he was dreaming. His was panting and sweat covered him all over. He cupped his face within his hands; he tried to regain his consciousness. “I’ve got to surrender myself to the police. I have to tell them the truth, I have to repay, I have to meet my wife,” said Diman while he moved his back off the bed. However, he was stopped with the image of his son who just came back. A new fear came to haunt him. He believed that there was no other chance to be a good figure of father. His son’s arrival was a reward that God has given him, payment for doing good deeds all this time-- probably for being exceptionally good. He figured he should keep up his facade of being good-- just for this time he would not admit his sin.

The sun has risen, he started to pedal his bike to work. He committed to himself to face the day as a usual, convinced himself to stop every worry and fear. He wanted his son to see him the way people around saw him. “Diman! Here!” A man shouted in front of his house, calling for Diman to stop. “I have to attend my daughter’s graduation tomorrow, I believe you are better than anyone in this; help me so I can show up looking perfect in a good day,” said the man as he was handing his shoes over to Diman. “You know I am an expert in this,” answered Diman with a wide smile while preparing his toolbox. He got right down to the job: he worked on the shoes, and once it was nice and done he handed it back to the man. After that he set off his way, pedaling around seeking for more customers. Suddenly he stopped when he saw a familiar woman walk out of the house carrying a few wallets. Diman ran

and stopped her in her tracks right beside the house, “You fooled me! You are responsible for murdered the man! I have to take you to the police!” Diman warned the woman with a trembling voice. “No, I am not! The one who hit that man was you! I have nothing to do with his death!” the woman persisted, denying Diman’s accusation. The words made him stutter and confused, not knowing how to answer it. “Nnn... no, no, no way. I know you are a pickpocket who made use of my existence at that time so that you would put the blame on me! You cannot do this to me! I- I- I have a life! I have a son too!” Diman kept his tone risen to intimidate the woman though in truth he was holding in his tears with his reddening face. “Then take a detour. You may have to rethink-- is it because of your recklessness or your naivety? You’re supposed to have known since day one, just admit that you ignored the truth!” said the woman before she bolted after hearing people shouting in the distance. The woman threw away the wallets then ran by shoving Diman aside.

Right after that, the wife of the man whose shoes Diman just fixed earlier came across Diman, who picked up the wallets, “Oh my Goodness, thank you for impeding the thief. I cannot imagine how would it be without you! Luckily you’re here, thank you! Thank you!” Diman was still frozen, fixated by what had just been said to him: *“Then, mind that. You may have to rethink is it because of your recklessness or your naivety. You supposedly to have known since the day one, just admit that you ignored the truth!”* The words kept repeating in his mind. Diman felt haunted again; he heavily carried his burden while he walked his bike to house.

Apparently, his son was already waiting at his house and he’d brought some food. Diman could see him from the distance. His son waved his hands welcoming his father. Diman tried to overcome his thoughts and waved back at his son with smile. The conversation went along in the dining table, both of them enjoyed supper together after and shared each of their stories. The awkwardness of last night has turned into a warm conversation between a father and son. The circumstances were different, Diman successfully put aside his burden in front of his son. “Assalamualaikum!” Mr. Jaka greeted in front of Diman’s house. “Let me check who that is,” Diman asked for permission from his son to meet the guest.

“Oh it’s you, what can I help you with?,” ask Diman

“Um no, nothing, I just saw that your door is open, which is unusual. I just wanted to say hi.”, replied Mr. Jaka.

“Oh okay, the closed door is now open now since my son found me.”

“You have a son? After 10 years of being your neighbor I just found this out now?!”

“I’m sorry, uh-- yes, I have one. Do you want to meet him? Let’s go inside.”

“Sure.”

“Hi, I’m Banu.”

“Jaka. Wow, I’m not sure if you used to look like that Diman!”

“Ahahaha.”

“By the way, do you remember the body that found in the coast of the river?”

“Uhm, yes. Why?”

“It has been identified and still investigated by the police.”

“Uhm okay, that’s good.”

“Yeah, we all hope the case will be closed soon. We hope there would be no such case in here again, right?”

“.....”

“Diman? Are you here?”

“Oh, yes, of course. I hope so too.”

Diman could not sleep for days after the conversation between him and Mr. Jaka that night. He felt haunted everyday by the sin that did not only belong to him. Diman, a man who has learned a lot for the past ten years, never hated anyone except himself. But now, he hated the pickpocket woman that tricked him to be responsible for someone’s death. In his memory, it was a really exhausting night after a long day of working. When he was walking home alongside his bicycle suddenly he heard a woman screaming for help. Diman was shocked to hear the scream. He looked for where the woman was and found she was pressed under a man. The woman said that the man is going to rape her and steal her money. Diman had a slight of dilemma at that time, but ended up helping the woman. He pulled the man off the woman and helped the woman get up. Unfortunately, the man fought back and hit Diman various times-- Though he fell back bleeding. When the man lost view on Diman, Diman hit the back of the man’s head with a big rock. The man collapsed to the ground and Diman kept on hitting him with the rock. Unrealized by him, the man eventually went still and stopped breathing. Then

Diman threw the rock away and took a few steps back; shocked of what was he had done. His hands were covered in blood and they trembled so hard. The woman watched the incident and was trapped in her shock. When the woman took steps back, unintentionally she dropped a bag that stored the wallet, phone, identity card-- all items that belonged to the dead man. Diman got limper seeing the blunder that he did; he just killed an innocent man that wanted to get back his stolen stuff from a pickpocket woman. Without further reaction, the woman bolted far away, leaving Diman and the death man. Diman crawled to reach his bicycle and wanted to go away but he looked again to the body that was not breathing anymore. He put the body in the river right beside the land where he committed the murder and drove away with his bicycle. He so much regretted the incident and hated the pickpocket woman to the bone. He could still remember the blood in his hands and the hard trembling chill that he felt. It was so terrible and he wanted to erase all memories of it.

All of the sudden, while Diman was daydreaming remembering what has happened, his house has been surrounded by the police. He was accused as the murderer and was brought into the police station. Diman was shocked and he nervously denied the accusations, he kept shouting the words, "No, it's not me. I didn't do anything wrong. Please leave me alone!" His son was shocked to see his father arrested by the police and taken to their car. He chased after the car but he could not reach them.

A month later, a court for murder was held. Diman was accused for the murder cases of both his wife and the anonymous man. The evidence that was found was his wife's skeletal remains, the man's body and the smack prints of a hard object in both of the remains. In Diman's house they also found a couple of t-shirts covered in bloodstains. Several eyewitnesses were also gathered in court, some of them neighbors from Diman's old house. All of the evidences and witness testimonies pointed at Diman, a fifty-years-old man who worked as a cobbler. Based on a witness, Banu, ten years ago in a land with no owner near Diman's residential, at around 2 a.m. Diman had an argument with his wife and then he hit his wife's head with a big rock and buried her under a cotton tree. A thirteen-year-old boy viewed the shocking incident between his parents and he could not do anything about it, he was captivated in fear and thought of revenge. Another witness was Diman's former neighbor; they were confused as to what happened to Mrs. Diman since that night when she saw both of them going outside together in the middle of the night while it

was raining. It was a strange thing since they both often spent their time in the house, especially at night. The next day, Diman admitted that he lost his wife. He said that his wife had left him and unfortunately his son left him too. It got more suspicious since Diman's description was not clear at all and he started to sell his house and all of his assets. There was no interval for grief after losing the only two family members that Diman had. Couple days after that, the house was sold and Diman was gone somewhere nobody there knew. A construction contractor for the unowned land where the murder of Diman's wife took place was also present at the trial. He explained that he has managed land matters to the authorities and bought the land in 2008; 8 years after the event took place and he was working on a construction in the middle 2009. At that time, one of his workers found a whole skeleton of a woman buried under a cotton tree. Then, the headman that received the report of this finding directly brought the case to the authorities and the investigation started.

In the jury seats there could be seen Mr. Jaka, and the pickpocket woman who watched the court session thoroughly. Mr. Jaka was no longer a mere neighbor of Diman's: he was a man who helped Banu since the first time he found him. Diman's son brought a letter that was written by his mother—said he carried it everywhere, and he's cried over it countless times. The letter told a lot of things but he could not bring himself to read it aloud, so Mr. Jaka came up to assist him:

*It is the fifth year of our marriage; I think I have woken up beside a different man that admit as my husband. Those eyes and face are not the same as the usual. One day he strangely talked again about our last fight that was caused by the doctor's verdict. The diagnosis said that my pregnancy has endangered me. We have agreed to keep this baby through any damage that probably would cost us, especially me. Previously he was so supportive, he strengthened me every day and there has not been a single day without his affection. But then, one night I woke up and found him sitting with a nervous face. He bit his nails until blood streamed down over them. He was never like that. I tried to keep my eyes closed but I still curious of what was going on with him. Then he came to me and swept my hair while saying, "Keep struggling my love, I would pay*

*off the pain that you have suffered from. I would bring you to Nirvana where there is no pain that can touch you—not even an inch.” Ever since that night, every morning I feel like I’ve woken up beside a stranger. My life is haunted by a shadow of him that I never knew before. I feel like being threatened every time he gets close to me and every time he said love; a love that probably would be yanked out my life someday.*

The pickpocket was a different case. The pickpocket first met Diman at the former terminal bus; Diman saw her as she was counting money that she got from the stolen wallets. Since that day, Diman seemed to care so much and he showed sympathy to her; Diman has always shared his food and gave her water. Until that night came, the pickpocket did not expect that the person she was going to trick was going to be Diman. She thought Diman would not care about her screaming since she assumed that he’d be able to tell that the pickpocket woman was held down by that man that night because had stolen from him. Shouting her victim as a rapist was a usual thing that she always did for protecting her deeds. Unfortunately, no, instead of understanding and being aware of the scene, Diman turned out to be a fool who helped the pickpocket woman. The pickpocket woman could still remember what Diman said after he murder the man, “Oh a pitiful soul in a cruel world, I have redeemed your sins. Live life better after this to repay what we have done.” Before she left, with a quick turning of face expression, Diman said again, “I have to deal with my wife. Oh no, no, no, no, I shouldn’t have done this! I’m supposed to meet her in Nirvana! No, no, no, I did not kill him!” Then the pickpocket left him, who was hysterically screaming next to the bloody body. In the court, though, the pickpocket woman did not have an enough bravery to be a witness; she was afraid that her deeds would also be opened there and she would also be accused for the theft she has done so far.

Yet somewhere along the trial, the pickpocket stood in the witness stand. Diman was sentenced to 15 years in prison with therapy for being mentally unstable. Apparently, he has lived for so long with his mental delusions. He thought he would save someone’s life and end their suffering by murdering them. He thought by murdering his wife, his wife would be purified and her pain will end. Later he would repay the sins by doing goodness for the rest of his life and then he’d die being purified to follow his wife into a

tranquil life beyond. Similar perspective he applied on the pickpocket woman case. He felt sorry for the life of the poor girl that had to be a pickpocket to live. He wanted to stop her pitiful life but somehow, he was mistaken in understanding God's script. He'd forgotten that it was never his role to justify how one's life should be.





# Uriah and Regina

*by Eri Dwi Nugraha*

His name was Uriah, the demon blooded angel. He lived in The Land of Angels up above the clouds called Eldia. He was born from the womb of an Angel and a father of a Devil. He was presented by his father with a pair of piercing horns and by his mother a pair of marvelous wings. The beauty of an angel enveloped him, yet strength and charisma of a Devil was in him. Being different made his life the kind filled with solitude. However, his own thoughts saved him from the way he felt. His thoughts were different among the other angels; when they were straight and strict to the heaven's law that blinded them to the knowledge they would never know, his thoughts were an azure horizon as vast as the entire sky beyond the eye might see. His fellow-angels were softened by his thoughts, and gathered around him laid by fierceness, and stood entrance with his lay. All the angels praised him really well but no one ever knew his true feelings for being half-angel-half-demon.

Most of the time, he spent his time wandering in the valley, questioning all the things he saw, solving the meaning of his life. The valley was the only answer for his loneliness. One day, in the middle of his daydream, a voice called him out of his sight: "Who's here?" Said a voice, an echoing voice that sounded far away yet he could feel it whisper. "Here," he replied. Uriah looked around, but he saw no one. "Come!" shouted Uriah. As no one came Uriah called again, "What are you?" As the Voice replied, "Nobody," its answer did nothing but leave more questions linger. "Farewell," replied Uriah. Then, he introduced himself to the Voice but silence was its only reply. "O' what calming voice passed through my ears, such a voice of A nymph or a stunning Angel I had never seen." He said to himself; the voice has melted his heart.

Early in the morrow, the valley was his very destination. He sought for the truth about the voice that day. As he arrived at the valley, he shouted

the way he did before: “Here, I come.” The silence took a while before the voice it gave. It replied: “Here”. Then, one more time he introduced himself. “O’ you the I-do-not-know, greetings, I am Uriah an angel, yet a demon.” After a while the Voice asked for certainty. “Angel or Demon?” A very little smile was on his lips, feeling glad by its response. “Both in one shape.” Since the very short introduction, their meeting flowed as clear as the water springs. Only the Voice, the one who was able to offset his thought, the one who made Uriah felt his ultimate happy, the one who understood his kind of solitude.

As the days turned away, Uriah was never seen in the city nor in his own house. The valley became his new home and the other angels were nothing then the Voice. One day, by his curiosity, Uriah asked the Voice “O’ dear you-unknown-being, we had met since the last full moon, yet you are still the I-do-not-know, if it pleases you, what should I call you?” In its whisper, The Voice called a name: “Regina”. Calmly, he asked another question, “O’ Regina, beautiful for a name, forgive me but what kind are you, dear?” Her reply shocked him: “I was an angel.” Rushed by curiosity, Regina was delivered by question and question “Was? Then, what life have you faced?” Uriah replied briefly. “The same as you, I was an angel who felt solitude in the middle of our being. Instead of living in Eldia, I chose to live among human modesty.” Answering his question. “One day as any usual day, when I was living my ordinary life on Earth, a black storm covered the sky, thus heavy rain poured upon the soil. I saw a human in front my hut, he was wet and cold. By sincerity, I offered him shelter. We had a pleasant talk, and unbeknownst to me, he made me fall asleep. Then, I was woken up in fears, I saw no man anymore yet a tremendous immense creature was on top of me, raping me and reaping me off my purity. I have forgotten how many times he tortured me. Darkness conquered over my will then madness possessed me entirely. Now, darkness is the only thing I can see.” It cluttered his heart to hear such a grave story, “O’ dear Regina, how miserable your story is, I feel your woe and I might have cried.” Once more she added “You should not cry, voice is a voice, I am somewhere, deep down below you.” And another question he delivered “May I meet you on the somewhere?” Then rejection came by Regina: “You may not, I am cursed, no one may see me.” After Regina said so, she suddenly disappeared. Uriah shouted her name over and over yet she was already gone by the wind.

The valley was never such the same, no more wandering upon him, mourning was the only relief. He was as blurry as a puddle of mud, all angels

ignored him since he lost his wondrous thoughts. No one ever called his name as no one ever wanted to know his lost.

Under his sorrowful depression, he stood over the cliff of Eldia, the edge of heaven between the high and the infinite below. By his feeling of despair, he left all the things in Eldia and jumped himself into the unseen. His fall gleamed brightly, even so that the sun itself might be competed. A flash of light crawled to every corner of atmosphere. The shine illuminated every creature on earth. Bards stopped playing his strains, thinkers stopped saying what it said, and all humans may not remember whether it was night or day. Strongly, he smashed his horns into the solid earth. Rising up a crater as he unfolded the deep earth, he kept falling through the fire of lamentation.

Arrived by him was the realm of hell, the place of true death and restless spirits. His body became weak since angel could not live in hell but his half being shape saved him, his wings turned dark as they were burned by the heat, his eyes turned red showing his inner devil power. he stood in front of the gate where its top was one that no one could see. The hell keepers surrounded him with every spear pointed at him. The keepers were tall and he stood as tall as their legs. "I come not to spy out the secret of hell, nor to try my strength against the keeper of hell. I come to seek my voice, the one who only understands me whose opening years were cursed by evil. Love has led me here, a powerful love which dwells us in differences. I implore you by these abodes full of terror, the realms of silence and uncreated things, please unite me with my voice." As Uriah said by his truthfulness. "Angels are not supposed to stand their feet in hell, your being may be an exception, and what a piercing horns you have there?" Replied one of the keepers. "I am different from my kind, half of what you see are supposed to lived here." told him with his sincerity. There could not be doubt of this story of Uriah and his Voice. Then, Uriah was permitted to stay in hell in one condition: that he should not stay more than seven days or the keepers would tear him down. One of the keepers said that he might see after Attarus, the name of the highest mountain in hell since a maiden was tortured on top of it. Under this condition he proceeded on his way. Through dark and steep, in total silence, he looked for Regina with no clue. Seven days he lingered about the brink, without food or sleep he reached out to the top of mountain. The answer was nothing, there was still no clue of her, yet Attarus was the very place he has not yet to sought about. His steps were shaking, his eyes were grim, blood and sweat were no more of a comparison. His feathers fell out one by one until he lost every piece

of his marvelous wings. He was pale and his skin was no thicker than an old fragile mortal.

Days passed, another set of steps passed, Uriah reached himself on the top of Attarus in the edge of his time. The mountain was very, very high, as they said, the highest mountain where those eyes could see the entire part of hell. On the top of it a maiden stood naked in her lamentation. "O' Regina please answer that you were you!" said Uriah. By her lowest pride, Regina was tormented since the day she could not remember. Her arms were chained between the rocks, her wings worn out and pitch black, she hid her eyes behind a black cloth, her angelic beauty was tarnished by hell creatures. She was the saddest being Uriah has ever seen. "Uriah, your voice is so close to me, don't tell me that you are around me." said Regina startled. Up of heaven to the bottom of hell, what might a being do seeing their very loved one in such a pain. Uriah was crying deep inside in his heart but he had no intention to give her more pain. "Forgive me for being such a stubborn to see you," revealed him. Then, he freed her body from the pitiful snare and opened her eyes from the dirty black cloth. In hope of seeing her savior, her eyes were completely turned to darkness. Entirely, she had turned into a nasty hell creature "As what I said, do not see nor try to save me—O' Uriah, what kind of fool are you, leaving all you had to come to this miserable place, seeking for someone you knew you would never have. Forgive me Uriah but I have become a being of this abyss forever." "O please come with me, I will save you and we can build our new life!" In a moment of forgetfulness, he assured her that he might be able to save her. He was lost in his own thoughts-- how could such a weak soul lift the burden of the saddest being?

Running out of time, the keepers came to Attarus, "You, the exceptional creature, time for you to leave!" As he begged for more time, the keepers dragged him to the upper air. Stretching out their arms to embrace each other, they grasped only the air. "A last very farewell" and was hurried away, so fast that the voice hardly reached his ears.

He sang his complaints to the rocks and mountains, melting the hearts of tigers and moving the oaks from their trees. He held himself aloof from womankind, dwelling constantly on the recollection of his sad mischance. Losing his wings meant he lost his heaven, angels, and wondrous thought, so what was left was only his piercing horns that made him hunted by humans. Spears and arrows stabbed him on his back, blood drenched everywhere. He fell harmless at his feet, while those humans tore his limbs and soon death was

close to him. His body was burned and the smoke climbed up, reaching Eldia. What a miserable being he was, known as a thoughtful Angel yet ended as a despicable creature. Once more, his shade passed a second time in Hell, where he sought out his Regina and embraced her with his eager arms. They roamed the happy fields together now, sometimes he would catch glimpses of her, sometimes her of him, and Uriah gazed as much as he could upon her. and so it was the story of Uriah the demonic angel and Regina the cursed angel.



# Zimzu

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*by Fritha Emmanuella Pirade*

Zimzu, a-16-year old girl with oval bright face, curly black hair, pointed nose and slim body lived in an isolated village with her only mother in simplicity. She was smart, hardworking and an introvert. In her house, she had one and only cute kitten named Imcu. In the school she had close friends named Anaz and Zara, but they were just friends, there was no inner closeness like best friends in general, only a playmate because of kittens they had. They sometimes played with their own kittens together, they dressed the kitten up with clothes and funny clips.

Zimzu's mother worked as a housemaid at the neighbours' houses. Every day Zimzu had to go to school which was within 5 km from her house alone, but sometimes she was accompanied by her mother if her mother was not busy doing the house work. In the afternoon, returning home Zimzu must worked to help her mother. They did everything, washing the neighbor's clothes, cleaning the house, selling cake around the village and other job so that they could survive. Either Zimzu's mother and Zimzu were hard workers, they seemed do it with sincerity.

In a sunny morning on Sunday, Zimzu stood at the door staring blankly at the sky as usual. Some moments later, some cars came to a large empty house which was about a couple houses from Zimzu's. The strangers that came there looked like a new family from town. They came with cars so that it was so catchy to the villagers. Zimzu looked at the strangers' cars on and on, and suddenly the new family's son came out of the car to enter the house. Zimzu saw that, and she felt interested in that boy just at the first sight. Zimzu entered in, she saw herself in the mirror and though that she could vanquish what she had saw at the moment. It was a weird feeling for little



Zimzu which was spontaneously thinking of herself and the new comers in the village.

It was about three days later, Zimzu and her mother were invited to help cleaning the new family house. The new family heard that Zimzu's mother was so diligent in cleaning and cooking at the village, so they called her to come to their house. It was so surprising for Zimzu. She was going with her mother to the house and that made her so excited. When they went to that house, Zimzu felt so close with that boy but she did not dare talk or approach him. She kept watching the boy's movements silently from afar.

The new family asked them to work at their house regularly from morning until evening, because they saw how diligent and kind-hearted Zimzu's mother was to the family. Both Zimzu and her mother accepted it happily.

Returning home from school then helping her mother in that house was something Zimzu did almost every day from Monday to Friday. But silently, she loved watching at that boy, it made her try to be so calm. That boy and his parents were so kind, they took care of Zimzu and her mother well. Zimzu's mother loved her job too, because of the amenity of the family and the work which was not hard to do. The treatment of the family to Zimzu was so warm as well, so it was a kind of pleasure for Zimzu to come on and on there. The husband and wife of the family thought that it was a natural act of human to be nice as what the other has done it first.

Every day was a beautiful day for Zimzu because she could see the boy more. The boy's name was Zayn. Like his parents, Zayn was well-mannered too. And yes, his behavior made Zimzu so happy. Zimzu liked Zayn so much, and the condition got worse. Day by day, Zimzu's desire for Zayn got bigger that she even thought of being a part of Zayn's family. It looked so fast but the desire kept growing in Zimzu's heart. Zimzu kept it just by herself.

Zimzu was so anxious about it. "Why is this feeling so strong in me? I've liked Zayn at the very first sight since I saw him coming to this village and because we are so close now, I can see him whenever I want. I am happy because of the kindness of this family, especially Zayn's. But why? Why is it so quick? This is so weird," Zimzu thought of it every time.

Zimzu's own feeling disturbed her so much until she was kind of getting the answer, "Zayn is the reason of my bewilderment. I see him like I see someone I miss... Is there a figure behind my feeling?" Zimzu was so close

to the answer but she was still searching for it.

“Father!” Zimzu shouted in the earlier morning. It looked like she dreamt of her father. She was so shocked.

“Zimzu, what happened to you? Are you okay?” Zimzu’s mother asked her.

“I am okay, Mom,” Zimzu replied.

“You must be missing your father, Sweetie,” Zimzu mother said then hugged her. “Let’s sleep, tomorrow you have to go to school,” Zimzu’s mother continued it.

“Alright, Mom,” Zimzu replied then slept.

In the bright morning at school, one of Zimzu’s close friends shouted at her, “Hey Zimzu! We have looked for you at the yard, surprisingly you are here!”

“Eh, hi, Zara! Hi, Anaz! Yes, I have been here since about two hours ago, the view is so beautiful from above,” Zimzu was so surprised with the arrival of her close friends, whereas she wanted to be alone.

Returning home from school, Zimzu did not follow her mother as usual. She just stayed in her room. “I already figure out the reason why I like Zayn, there is a figure I found in him. Is he father?” Zimzu realized it. “What is the relation between Zayn and my father actually? But looking at Zayn made me think the figure I have lost long time ago, that is my father. But that’s so strange,” she thought.

Zimzu continued thinking and searching for the reason. She was so curious about that, it lit up in her feeling. Some days later she finally knew, when she was with Zayn she felt like getting back something that was already lost.

Actually, Zimzu had bitter past. She was a wealthy little girl with her mother and father. She had cute toys, candies, foods on table, servant to serve her and the other things. But it changed when Zimzu’s father got sick, bankrupt, and died. After the death of Zimzu’s father, the situation forced Zimzu and her mother moved to a small village. This helped them to avoid paying Zimzu’s father debt to the creditors. That was not an easy fact to a little girl like Zimzu at that time but as strong as her mother, Zimzu was always being an obedient and kind daughter. Zimzu always told herself that she still had one and only valuable thing in this world that was her mother, so she had to be a nice girl that always made her mother happy and proud. Being a stubborn girl with reason that only got one attention from her mother was

useless. So, being a nice one even in depressed condition was better. That was why Zimzu's mother loved her little daughter who never made her get depressed.

Zimzu and her mother were always grateful in any condition, although it was so painful for them. They shared everything with just both of them while missing the late member of their family. Zimzu's mother loved hearing all stories of Zimzu, it helped her to understand Zimzu even more.

But about Zimzu and her mother's past, none of the villagers knew the secret of them. All the neighbors never asked them about Zimzu's father and Zimzu's mother was so closed when it came to her private matters. When Zimzu's mother and the neighbor got together, she never talked so much so there was a space between them.

Had no basic employee made Zimzu's mother could not maintain their lifestyle back, the life that was full of everything they wanted when the father was still alive. So, Zimzu's mother had to work to earn a living for her and her daughter. It seemed so sad when the condition made them to live their lives in different way, so different from before.

Day by day, Zimzu had already given up with her condition, she thought to change it. When Zayn was there beside her, she wanted to make herself the way that she was in the past. She knew what she had to do. She thought of the one and only way, that was being a part of Zayn's family. She had lost her father and even all the assets, and she imagined that getting Zayn meant finding all that had been lost so far. She wanted to be happy, fat, rich and to get everything back. She kept making way so that her big dream could come true. Even now Zimzu and Zayn had become best friends, they were so close because they met each other almost every day.

What challenged Zimzu was that Zayn had girlfriend but it made Zimzu became more confident and strong, and she even justified any means to get what she wanted.

Actually Zayn was kind-hearted and good-looking. Since moved to the village he had Zimzu as best friend, they were both in the same age so it was very easy for them to share stories. Zayn joined in Zimzu's school recently, they went to school and returned home together. At Zayn's home, besides helping her mother to clean the house, washing the clothes and cooking, Zimzu kept spending some times to be with Zayn, either to play or to study. Zimzu's mother was happy to see her daughter and her employer's

son were so close, it would help her to work longer at the house considering its easy work, large salary and the kindness of the family. Zayn mother loved looking at Zayn who was happy to be familiar with Zimzu, the village girl, and Zayn felt comfort there.

Six months later, Zimzu got a letter from his girlfriend, Saqila, in the town, she announced her arrival at the village which would be soon. It made Zayn so happy. He told Zimzu about the news, and she just paused but forced to smile. Day after day changed but Zimzu's mind continued to rage, she was afraid of Zayn and Saqila's meeting. She tried hard to thwart Saqila's coming plan, so she replaced Zayn letter that looked forward to Saqila's arrival with a letter made by her which rejected the arrival of Saqila.

Some days later Saqila came to the village. Zimzu's effort was in vain. Zayn and his parents welcome Saqila warm. Zimzu and her mother served a lot of food as the request of Zayn's mother. They enjoyed the food and the time. Saqila decided to stay there for a couple of days. It was a short day but for Zimzu it would feel like a long time. On the next day which was weekend, Zayn and Saqila wanted to spend their time on a beach just two of them. Zimzu cried silently hearing their plan and got back to her house. Looking at Zimzu's behavior made her mother returned home too. Zimzu told her mother about her feeling to Zayn and all her turmoil so far. Her mother was sad to see her daughter's problem in her heart but it was human character in general according to her, remembered their family background which greatly changed drastically. Her mother did not blame Zimzu of that, she just left a message to her only daughter to continue doing for what she was really willing. Zimzu smiled and her mother got back to Zayn's house to work. Zimzu looked at herself in the mirror and promised to get what she really wanted to be hers.

It had been two days she did not help her mother in Zayn's house since she actually avoided seeing both Zayn and Saqila. The next day after she heard Saqila's had gone, she went back to that house again. For now she promised to work hard to get Zayn to be hers. Many ways she did. She became very good to Zayn every single day.

"It has been a year after Saqila's coming to this village, why she never comes again?" Zayn asked to Zimzu while they were sitting in front of Zayn's house. "Maybe she has another important work to do more than you, another man maybe," Zimzu replied.

“What? What do you mean?” Zayn asked.

“I’m a girl like Saqila. Sometimes I will feel bored with someone I love, even the serious matter that will make girl feel so, so bored with a man is distance. Long distance relationship, it has no use,” Zimzu said firmly.

“Could you leave me alone, Zimzu?” Zayn asked.

“Yes, of course. You can think of it more, I only help you to save your feeling because you are a good boy, my truly best friend.”

Zimzu had planned all the words, she knew the weakness of Zayn. Zimzu went to her home and read all the letters from Saqila. She saved all Saqila’s letters to Zayn, she kept them silent and did not want to tell Zayn. It was already six letters. Zimzu was so entertained with this matter, she knew she would be the winner of this battle.

Today was a rainy day in village, there was a car came and stopped in front of Zayn’s house. The car was so familiar, yes it was Saqila’s. Zimzu got so panic, Saqila stood in front of Zimzu but Zimzu did not allow her to enter. Zimzu said that Zayn was so disappointed with Saqila, he did not want to see her again. Zayn was busy finishing all his assignments now. Saqila was so confused with Zimzu. Saqila entered the house and met Zayn, both just looked at each other and kept silent. Zimzu entered and forced Saqila to go. Everyone in that room was silent and confused. Zayn left the room and left a message through Zimzu that he was going to take a shower for a moment and would meet Saqila after it. After Zimzu told the message to Saqila, Saqila cried.

“It’s enough!! All the curiosities have been answered. I have seen all your movements so far, Zimzu. I knew it was your plan. I knew that you were the one who received all the letters from Saqila, I thought that you would give it to me later, but no. I felt something different in your gesture for me. That was so excessive of you even dare enter my private room when I slept yesterday, all are so weird. The next letters that are in you now did not reach me. But I let it be. I knew it was six letters already. After our conversation some days ago, you really make me know who you are. I decided to write a letter for Saqila to invite her to come here and I was just about to ask you to tell Saqila about something that was actually just a way for me to make sure that what I saw so far was not true, but it is true then. You told different news to Saqila to make her go from here. Saqila, it was an honor for me to see you in this house again. All misunderstanding between us had been answered, Dear,”

Zayn said it loudly.

“What do you want from us?” Saqila turned to look at Zimzu.

“I wanted Zayn, I wanted to make your relationship to fall apart, simple,” Zimzu courageously answered Saqila.

“You are so outrageous. I had treated you like a daughter but why did you make Zayn like this?” Zayn’s mother shouted.

“I will make this family be mine forever, no one could stop me. Hahahahaha...” Zimzu said and ran away after it.

It was five days after the accident, Zimzu was gone. All the villagers had been searching for her but nothing. No one ever heard about her again.

Zimzu’s mother told Zayn and his parents that she had lost what she had. “I had lost my husband and daughter. I loved to watch Zimzu grew up as an amazing girl with all the pains and wound in her back because of her past, but then I saw something different in Zimzu too. Zimzu’s teacher in school told that Zimzu often found in fights with her friends for taking her friends’ belongings and other things. At home, I usually saw Zimzu played some toys that I never bought. Actually, all the matters I found make me know that my daughter had another character in her body but believe in me, Zimzu is a very kind-hearted girl. This was all my fault honestly, I let her be whatever she wanted because she is the only one that I have, I won’t make her sad by not approving all her willingness. She told me about Zayn and I did not stop her. That’s my fault, not Zimzu’s,” Zimzu’s mother cried.

“You had lost what you had so far, and now you have us as your new family. You can stay here while the villagers keep searching for Zimzu,” Zayn’s mother said it to Zimzu’s mother and hugged her.

“I knew this will happen, but I had prepared it well,” Zimzu’s mother talked silently in her heart. “Zimzu, my baby girl, whatever you do, I will support you. I look forward to getting news from you as soon as Saqila returns to town. I can’t wait to hear the scream of this entire house when they hear that Saqila dies because of the upcoming accident. We have prepared this for long, Dear.”



## Normally Permanent

by *Zenhing Angeline*

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In the neighborhood with only twenty-five houses, Mrs. Evan gave birth on June 22, early in the morning. Her newly born baby was a girl and her parents named her Elsia. She grew up healthy and happy. Mrs. Evan used to give birth in her house, but this time she was hospitalized. Although she and Mr. Evan had to cost more, she was glad because it was less busy giving birth in the hospital.

Elsia grew as a pretty little girl. She was innocent and eager to learn. Her parents taught her how to read and write. She also had an interest in paintings and her parents supported her hobby. Her parents were happy Elsia grew to be an obedient young girl. She was now four years old and was learning to ride a bike.

One day, Elsia was riding bike again in the neighborhood. It was summer that the road was empty because everyone might possibly be in the beach. Her mom was enjoying herself cooking for dinner while her father was busy in the backyard making a small cabin for storehouse. Her sister, Rose, was reading a book in the balcony while looking out for her sister. Meanwhile, Noah, her brother was gone for summer camp so Elsia could use her brother's bike without her brother annoyed her. She felt challenged riding Noah's bike because obviously it was bigger than hers. Besides, there were no additional wheels. It was a perfect day for everyone until Elsia was crying—out loud.

“MOOOOMMMM! Elsia fell from the bike!” Shouted Rose from the balcony while running downstairs. Mrs. Evan was still busy in the kitchen with her knife.

“Mom! What are you doing there? Elsia fell from the bike. She is crying so hard.”



“What? What am I supposed to do? Elsie can just stand up again and back to ride her bike, right?”

“Yes. But she is hurt! Why don’t you help her quickly! She fell in front of Mrs. Greta’s house.”

“She was falling from a bike, Rose. Not a motorcycle. She will be fine.”

Meanwhile, Mrs. Greta, the old woman living a block next to the Evan family was shouting to Elsie. Rose could hear it from the kitchen. She ran fast to the outside to find Elsie was brought home by Mrs. Greta.

“Here is your sister. Next time tell your ignorant mother to take care of her children. She cried so loud and got me a headache. I am old now. I can’t fix all the mess this family make because of your ignorant mother and stupid father. You and your brother are pain in the ass already.”

“Oh! Sorry Mrs. Greta. Thank you for being so honest but you don’t have to be so rude to me. By the way, it was actually nice to help you out with Lucy’s new dog in the house.”

“Ah about that, thank you for reminding me. You don’t have to come over to check the dog. We’ve given it away for adoption. Lucy is still 6 years old. Mrs. Susan was too generous to let Lucy own it. No wonder if she was losing her money when people borrowed it. She is such a fool to let everyone have anything she owns.”

“Aw. Too much information I guess, Mrs. Greta. Can I have my sister now?”

“Oh. She is all yours. Make her stop riding a bike. She is awful. Good afternoon,” Mrs. Greta finally said goodbye. “Oh, by the way,” she turned her back again to Rose, “nice dress, Rose. You look good in it.” She smiled and headed back.

“Thank you, Mrs. Greta!” replied Rose loudly.

Elsie had not stop crying. Her knee was bleeding and her hand was bruised. Rose brought her to the kitchen to meet their mom.

“Mom. Help Elsie, please!” said Rose as if she was requesting her lunch.

“Wait! You know I am cooking, Rose.”

“Fuck the cooking, Mom! Elsie is hurt!”

Mr. Evan entered the room right after Rose’s swearing. He was surprised hearing the f-word inside the room although it might not be the first time. Apparently the sound of the f-word was louder than Elsie’s crying.

“Why did you swear at your mother, Rose?”

“She wouldn’t help Elsia.”

“What happened to Elsia?” asked Mr. Evan while turning his head to Elsia who was still crying. “Hey, what happened to you?”

“Bike... Fall.”

“Oh. Oh. It’s okay. It’s okay. What hurts?” Elsia showed the bleeding on her knee and the bruises on her hand—or more like showing her broken hand. Mr. Evan patted her hand and there was a loud ouch and Elsia cried even louder. Rose ran to them.

“Dad! What did you do?”

“I don’t know! I did nothing harmful. I only touched her hand!” Mr. Evan panicked. Mrs. Evan was still cooking.

Eventually, Elsia was in hospital after Rose dragged her mom to take a look at Elsia. The doctor said that Elsia had broken her hand and might be as well resting in the hospital for a couple of nights. Now, everyone was in the hospital, looking out for Elsia—or more like accompanying Elsia because all they did was nothing unless absorbed to their own world. Luckily, Elsia was asleep.

Elsia was twelve years old now. Life for her was not easy. She had not had so many friends back when she was a younger kid. Her friend was her sister, Rose, that often forced her to wear something that she did not like. Rose also forced Elsia to dance because she was into dance. Elsia tried to reject her many times because it was simply not her passion. She had got so many physical injuries throughout times but Rose always said that she could do it. “You only need practices, Elsia. I also couldn’t do anything at the age seven, but see, I’ve got many medals and trophies already in the age fourteen. Come! Practice!”

Other than her sisters, Lucy was Elsia’s friend back when they were kids. After the bicycle incident, Elsia could not ride her bike again because Noah broke it after he got home from summer camp. He was angry because Elsia had crossed his warning not to play any of his belongings while he was away. It made Elsia uncomfortable to be at home every time Noah was home. She ran to her neighborhood, Mrs. Greta, where she could find Lucy who was two years older than her. Both of them were having something in common. They loved to paint. Other than playing the doll house which Mrs. Susan had given to Lucy and Elsia, they were doing their crayons.

Lucy often paint something based on something that she read. It could be novel, magazine, everything. One day, her father brought a box of worm house, and put it on the table in the kitchen while he went upstairs to change his clothes. Elsia was six years old that she never met a worm. She opened the box, assuming it was food. When she touched it, she screamed so loud and directly ran to Mrs. Greta's house without bothering to find her mom—because she would not care anyway, or her dad—because he was her dad and he could not do anything about it. She surely knew Mrs. Greta would grumble at her but all she needed was Lucy so she ignored Mrs. Greta. For the rest of the day, Elsia painted a worm monster that was terrorizing a village with Lucy. Elsia painted something based on her mood and anything that had role in it. She was almost done when Rose came to pick her up because it was already dinner.

“Wait a sec, Rose”

“Dinner is ready, Elsia.”

“Yeah. But the farmers haven't got hair and their caps. Mom would not get angry anyway if I'm late”

“But your soup is getting angry, so, come on,” Rose dragged Elsia from the floor she was sitting on while smiling a nice goodbye to Lucy.

“But I don't like soup.”

“Thanks for looking out for Elsia today, Lucy!” said Rose to Lucy. “But you have to eat your soup. It will prevent you from flu,” explained Rose to Elsia.

“But I am not sick, Rose.” Rose did not answer. So Elsia shouted to Lucy from the first floor because she had not said goodbye. “Please keep the painting, Lucy. I'll be back tomorrow!” There Mrs. Greta was almost angry before Rose said good night and shut the door.

“Why do you always force me do something that I don't like?”

“Because it is what it is.”

“What is what?”

“No idea. Why are you so rebellious now?”

“I am not. I only wanted to finish my painting.”

“Well, you are no longer wearing the bracelet I gave you.”

“Oh. That bracelet sucks.”

“Well, you are rebellious now.”

Growing older, Elsia got more friends. Now she also could get along with Noah for the past three years. Elsia and Noah were a team in science projects. Every summer, the town conducted science fair where people were competing in display their projects to win several categories like the most favorite, the most creative, and the science king. Obviously, Noah was striving to get the title since he had completed the other categories. Elsia liked to help Noah in all his projects, although Noah always lashed out every time Elsia made mistakes—even to a small mistake, and hit her. Nevertheless, that was the closest Elsia could get to Noah. Also, Lucy had moved to town to stay with her parents since three years ago. So, it was either Rose—who never let Elsia do anything she liked, or Noah—who always hit her for every problem, who accompanied her.

Mrs. Evan was actually doing nothing since all her children had grown up. She was doing her responsibilities in the house such as cooking and cleaning. When she had already done and she got a spare time, she read book, wrote blog, or tried a new recipe for her afternoon snacks. She did nothing if Elsia cried when Noah hit her hard because Elsia messed up some procedures to finish the projects. So, Elsia only went upstairs and cried in Rose's room until she got back. Mr. Evan, on the other hand, was always busy with his job. When he got home at 4 pm, he always checked out his children to see if they were fine. He saw Noah was still busy with his project or his homework. He entered Noah's room to ask how his day was, listen to his story, and complement him for his great day. Same went to Elsia, he listened to her story. But whenever Elsia told him that she was in Rose's room all day because Noah beat her, Mr. Evan did not know what to do. It was not like Elsia lied to him and neither did Noah when he was asked whether he beat Elsia. It was Rose, who came home the latest, who got angry. She listened to both the stories and always drew a conclusion that both of Noah and Elsia were wrong. She insisted her parents to punish both of them when their mistakes were intolerable. Rose believed that the punishment would serve justice to both Noah and Elsia so they would be deterred. Mr. and Mrs. Evan took her suggestion to punish them, or more like Mr. Evan took the suggestion—even asked for what kind of punishments they deserved to Rose. Mrs. Evan was too insolent to teach the children about manner. She was only saying yes or no to Rose's suggestions.

The punishment did not go well, of course. Noah always got angry for whatever punishment he got. He threw things after every decision his father

made, went to his room, and did not go out until the next morning. Elsia, on the other hand, showed different reaction based on the mistakes she made. If she thought she deserved it, she would obey her father's decision. But most of the time, the decision was as heavy as Noah's while she did not do anything that bad. If that was the case, she would go upstairs, to her own room, and cried to her sleep. Meanwhile, Rose were satisfied because she believed everyone deserved it.

Elsia's daily life went by as usual. The only difference was that she grew up discovering more people, more personalities, more information, more books, and more paintings. She was seventeen years old now. Her face was no longer innocent and happy. Underneath her eyes were wrinkles because of sleep deprivation, or that she still used to cry to her sleep. Her family did not change a little bit. But Elsia might not find that as something annoying anymore. She could defend herself against Noah now and she no longer received punishment from anyone in her family—or she rejected it. She was out most of the time with her friends in her school and only going home when Rose was looking for her as Rose was worried sick and unable to sleep if Elsia had not been home. Rose insisted that Elsia still needed protection despite she was older now.

One day Elsia was smoking while entering the house, because she knew the house was empty. She ditched school because she was sick of the teacher. The classes were also boring because Louis, the friend from whom she got the cigarette, was not in the same class. Rose was scheduled to meet her doctor because she needed another medicine since she was sick. But she could not ditch college because she got examination that day. So, Mrs. Evan went to meet the appointment, also she was the one paying, not Rose. Noah had gone for almost two years now. He lived in town with Lucy—in the same apartment building. He got a scholarship in science and now he was also an intern in a tech-company. He got so much trouble working with observation team in the company because he could not hold his temper. But he was brilliant, so the company managed to give him a job that did not require team work. Meanwhile, Mr. Evan right now might be working in his shop because he managed to open a new bird shop. Elsia was free today.

“Oh Elsia! What are you doing here?” Mr. Evan suddenly came up from the back door bringing a box of worm when Elsia was smoking.

“Gosh, Dad! You surprised me. What's that?” she said while hiding

her hands under the table.

“Oh. This? Worms for the birds in the shop.”

“Ew. Put that away from the table, Dad.”

“It is fine, Honey. What are you doing here? Why aren't you in school? What's up with the cigarette?” Mr. Evan picked a cigar box on the table and observed it.

“Uhm...” sure Elsia got panicked. “The teacher is sick so we can go home early,” said Elsia stuttering. “About that cigarette... Mr. Musk gave it to me. He told me to give it to you.”

“Mr. Musk who?”

“The one whose house was in the corner of this block. You probably haven't met him. He was new here. I met him every morning this week when I was walking to school.”

“Oh. But I don't smoke. Could you give it back to him and say that he is very nice?”

“Sure. Will do, Dad. I have to go now. I'll bring it so I can give it to him directly.”

“Sure, Sweetie. Thank you.”

The following weeks, Rose had become sicker because she got no proper treatment in the house. After rejecting to be hospitalized six months ago, she was now hospitalized for more than a week. On the tenth day in the hospital, there was incoming call from the hospital directly to Elsia's phone when she was in the wood enjoying her cigarette with a bunch of people. The call said that Rose had passed away. Elsia was shocked and then rushed to the hospital. There was no family in the hospital. Only Lucy, who had been working in the local hospital for three days. The hospital told that Mrs. Evan was actually picking up her phone three hours ago but there was no further follow up from the family, so Lucy called Elsia. It was so heartbreaking for Elsia. She was angry at her mom for being neglecting her child. She was angry at her father for doing nothing but relying on Mrs. Evan. She was angry at Noah for not going back home given the news that Rose was sick. She was angry at Rose that she had been rejecting to be hospitalized six months ago. Rose might be doing well if she was hospitalized back then. Lucy could do nothing other than hugged her.

Two months passed and Elsia was still grieving. Noah had been home for a month ever since Rose died, but he could not handle the sorrow. He

kept throwing glasses, shouting at his parents and Elsia. He kept hurting Elsia physically and verbally. Lucy, who lived again in Mrs. Greta's house often overheard it. It was Lucy who forced Noah to get back to town so he could focus on his science project again, or for a better reason, so he would not abuse Elsia again. Elsia was in denial and regret. She knew she could have done better than smoking weed in the wood. She lost her only family, that although was annoying, but was always the best in protecting her since she was a kid.

One day, Lucy stopped by the Evan's house to see Elsia. Mr. Evan opened the door for her and told Lucy that Elsia was in her room. She had been laughing and crying all of a sudden for the past week and Mr. Evan did not know what to do. On the way to Elsia's room, Lucy met Mrs. Evan sipping her coffee on the couch while reading a book.

"Hi, Mrs. Evan. How do you do?"

"Hi, Lucy. I'm good. Thank you. Oh. If you are going to see Elsia, could you please bring her lunch downstairs if you have finished?"

"Sure, Mrs. Evan."

Lucy opened the Elsia's room, and found her sitting on the bed. Her eyes were crying but empty. Elsia looked at Lucy, hopeless, and no spirit.

"Why are my parents like that, Lucy? Didn't they know Rose died because of them? I was supposed to give Rose justice for her death...but I could not die."

"Are you trying to commit suicide, Els?"

"I am not. I just couldn't handle it. Is it permanent, Lucy? Aren't they changing?"

"It is permanent, Els. My grandmother was not nice when she was dying. So are they. And all other people. The ugly truth is they are normal. It is just us who are doomed to be the opposite normal."

Elsia laughed at Lucy but she could not resist herself so she cried.

# A Place Called Mississauga

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*by Novita Lestari*

Julio Ceasarae de Borgias was a 15-year-old boy who had black, short and messy hair. He came from a small town in Toronto. His family had a small bakery near the river. Ceasarae's height was around 5.1 feet; For his age, he had an ideal body of teenager with his handsome face. His blue, dark eyes, showed a strong desire for his actions. When he wanted to do something, he was going to do it without any hesitation. Sometimes, some people called him the determined. Ceasarae was the only child of his parents, hence why his parents trusted him so much. Although his parents were traders, Ceasarae never showed that he was a well-off person. On the contrary, he showed his modesty with his appearance. Ceasarae had a friend named Alloysius de Great. Alloy was the only friend he had and they had the same hobby: to adventure along the harbor.

One day, Ceasarae and Alloy heard that a new ship from Venezuela was coming to Toronto and that the ship was loaded with an egg-shaped meteor fragment that would be placed in the Madantese museum in Toronto. The people said, there was a magic power inside the stone and if someone succeeded in seeing that egg-shaped meteor fragment when it was cracking, he/she will get a magic power. Alloy realized a thing about Ceasarae that he will do anything he wanted to get that magic power because Ceasarae's desire was so fiery when he heard about that news. Then, Alloy invited Ceasarae to join him on the mission of Magic Stone.

On a very cold long night, Ceasarae and Alloy went to the ship which was loaded with that magic stone. There were many soldiers on guard near the ship. Ceasarae and Alloy did not think that they could pass all of the soldiers without getting caught. Alloy said that they had to pass through the bottom of the ship, but Ceasarae realized it would take too much time, so he came up



with the idea to catch two soldiers off-guard and knock them unconscious instead.

“We shouldn’t do that Ceasarae! It is breaking the law!” Alloy said.

“We’re just going to make them sleep soundly.” Ceasarae answered.

“What will you do to make them sleep?” Alloy asked Ceasarae

“Just hit them on their nape and take their clothes, so we can enter that door safely.” Ceasarae said. They did as Ceasarae said but it was not as easy as they thought; crippling the soldiers was not as easy as crippling herders. They were almost caught by the soldiers until Ceasarae took the soldier’s knife and killed them all. Alloy realized one important thing about Ceasarae; behind his charm and intelligence, turned out he could be very cruel when it came to reaching his goal. Finally, they reached that magic stone, and Alloy said to Ceasarae:

“You should take it, my friend, you are more deserving to get it because of your desire.”

When Ceasarae opened the box, there was no Magic Stone inside. Yes, it was a piece of stone, but there was nothing magic about it whatsoever.

Ceasarae ran and went outside, taking the stone with him, with a little more than slight regret.

The next day Ceasarae woke up and still thought about last night, the incident that took place when he looked at the Magic Stone.

That morning was a busy day, as usual Ceasarae hurried to school. After he arrived at school, the students were busy talking about the news that was written in the newspaper about the robbery that had taken place at the ship last night. Ceasarae ignored the news and went straight to the classroom where the lesson had begun. When it was break time, Ceasarae went to the cafeteria, and saw Alloy enjoying his food. Ceasarae took his food. Alloy was shocked by the sudden arrival of Ceasarae. Alloy started the conversation by whispering and asking Ceasarae:

“Have you heard the news this morning?”

“What about?”

“Ship Robbery! I am afraid that we will be found out.”

“Just calm down, everything will be alright. Believe me!”

“I am afraid. What if someone had seen us? What if what we’ve done was recorded by cameras?” “Everything will be safe.”

“Okay, I believe you.”

The bell rang. It meant that next lesson will be started, the next lesson was History-- taught by Miss Ane. Just as the lesson was about to begin, she suddenly asked a question.

“Did you know the news published in the newspaper this morning?”

All of the students were silent and whispered curiously about the truth of the news. Ceasarae and Alloy just kept silent and occasionally, Alloy directed his gaze towards Ceasarae.

Without continuing her question, Miss Ane started the lesson that day. The next time the bells rang again, meant that was class finished. All students left the classroom. Yet Ceasarae still sat in his chair while he collected his courage and arranged the words that he was going to say to Miss Ane.

Quickly he went to miss Ane who was erasing the writings on the white board.

“Is it true? The news that written in the newspaper this morning, Miss?”

“Ah, you knew about it?”

“Yes Miss, I heard it from the students this morning.”

“Yes, it was reported that the ship which brought the Magic Stone that was going to be placed in the museum was stolen.”

“What are the contents of the magic stone Miss? And why do people want it? “

“I do not know the contents of the Magic Stone, but certainly it is something valuable and historical.”

“Alright then. Thank you for your information Miss.”

Cesarae rushed to his house; on the way home he saw several police officers on guard. Cesarae slowed down his steps, wanting find out what the police were doing. Without knowing further, Cesarae continued went to the house. After he arrived home Cesarae headed to his bedroom and took the magic stone.

He only looked at the magic stone in his hand with questioning thoughts. His curiosity brought him to rise up and set off his way to meet Alloy, who was herding his sheep when Cesarae arrived.

“Hey Alloy!”

“Yes! What brought you here?”

“Listen to me; we are going to find out about the Magic Stone, this will be our new mission!”

“Forget it; I have other things to do. What will happen to my sheep herd if I were to abandon them? We don’t need it Ceasaræ.”

“Come on! I am sure it has something in it. Something big! Bigger than we ever knew before.”

“Okay. Then where you wanted to start?”

“Follow me!”

Cesaræ and Alloy went to the public library to find any book that could possibly give them any information about the Magic Stone. A few moments later they found a history book that was written about the Magic Stone. Evidently that Magic Stone did not come from a meteor fragment, but instead a local type of stone called Torontonian that could be found in a remote island in Toronto. It was written that the stone type was scarce and further information about the mineral was unknown. The only way for them to reach the island was by crossing over five uninhabited island. Next they have to pass through a small village called Scarborough Bluff until they find their last destination, Mississauga.

Alloy was shocked to find out about it. To reach Mississauga they would be needing a lot of money and time. They were only 15 years old boys; Alloy suggested that they had to call off their mission there, but Cesaræ ignored him. Instead, Cesaræ said to Alloy:

“Are coming with me?”

“Are you insane?”

“We are not going anywhere, Cesaræ.”

“Why not? Are you scared?”

“No. I am not scared. You have to think clearly! We should not do this now we have no preparation at all!”

“Come on, this is going to be a great adventure.”

“Are you sure about this Cesaræ?”

“Of course! We are going to leave tomorrow at 5 a.m. while our parents are still asleep. Just carry important things.”

“Okay. I would collect all of my savings and you should too.”

The next day, as promised, these two boys began their mission. They already knew that it would not be easy to reach Mississauga but they would not give

up just yet.

After two days on the trip, they had just crossed one island.

“I cannot believe this would take forever. We still have a long way to go.”

“Calm down Alloy, you only need to enjoy this trip and imagine what we are going to find!”

Alloy just sat down and looked out the window. All he saw was the blue ocean. Meanwhile, Ceasaræ arranged their next plan.

Unbeknownst to the two boys, the ship that they were on had run out of fuel, and it turned out that they have been moving nowhere for the week. This incident made them almost desperate, especially Alloy who didn't agree with this trip from the beginning.

On that night, Ceasaræ was asleep while Alloy couldn't sleep because the sound of thunder that felt like it had struck their ship. Alloy was scared that something bad was going to happen, and sure enough, suddenly the power blew out and all the passengers ran outside because the bottom of the ship had leaked and half of the ship has already been submerged. Alloy and Ceasaræ panicked; what should they do to survive? They chose to jump off the ship, even though they couldn't swim. The decision brought them to oblivion; the ship they were on sank and all the victims' fate were unknown. The two boys' adventure ended with the no clarity about their existence and their purpose: Mississauga~.

**THE END**



# The Distinguished Wanderer

by Yefta Andrew Rudolf Ebalkoy

Fishy scent was in the air that afternoon, Alabaster market was always filled with all kinds of monster meat. I was looking for a new crossbow when Aela, my shield-sister, called me.

“Dane! Over here!” she shouted while she waved at me.

“Aela, what are you doing here? Aren’t you supposed to cook the dinner for today’s banquet at Jahre Jorvaskkr?” I asked while walking towards her.

“I was, but we ran out of Cucosh—a type of rat—meat. Qillian told me to buy some.

“What are you doing here?” she replied.

“Oh. I was searching for a new crossbow, I lost the old one at Misty Mou--” I replied.

“I’m sorry to cut you short but I have to run or Qillian is gonna kill me, see you at the banquet!” she replied as she run towards the crowd.

Aela, not one person ever talked to her and finished their story. After walking for a few minutes, I finally reached the fletchers area. It didn’t take long until I saw the best crossbow I’ve ever seen.

“Carved Dragon Bone limb, Iron Wood grip and stock, and Dream Tree wicker for the string.”, I was amazed.

“I see that you know a lot about crossbows.” said the peddler while smiling at me.

“He- he, I do. How did you get this stuff anyway?” I asked with a slight glimmer in my eyes.

“I didn’t. A man came by this morning and sold it to me. He looks like he’s in a rush and he’s not from around here too I think.” he explained.

His words came and gone through my ears, this crossbow already took my full attention away from anything around me. “Hey kid, if you really crave for it I can give it you, but...” his words caught my attention. “But? But what?” asked me excitedly.

“You must help me with my wraith problem, I have a farm just a few minutes south of here. Can you kill it for me? In exchange for that crossbow.” he offered. “Can I use this crossbow to kill it?” I asked. “Well... Okay, but you must promise me that you will kill it by tomorrow.” he told me with a doubt on his face. “Easy! Consider it done!” excitement still filled my face. “I’m counting on you kid!” shouted him as I took my leave. “Oh wait, does she have a name?” I asked as I turned back to him.

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Radelia, I tried her a few times at the market’s shooting range. She provided the best accuracy and firing rate of all the crossbows I’ve ever tried.

I was admiring her beauty by the river, when suddenly the sky turned as black as coal, no light came through the clouds, everyone stopped moving.

“Hello Dane.” a voice from above called me. When I turned my head upwards I saw a man dash as fast as lightning towards me. He grabbed me by my shoulder. “Let’s see, are you worthy enough or not?” he pushed my face downward to the dirt and turned me unconscious.

“Where the hell am I?” I asked as I awoke to a confusion. I was in a small room without a door, a window, nor any ventilation, but one thing I noticed was that the wall and floor was covered with blood that flowed endlessly from the ceiling. “This place reeked with the stench of sulphur and death. As I closed my nose with my arms. Suddenly, a voice came out of nowhere: “Welcome to the Tomb of Osiris, Dane.”

“Where are you, demon!”

“DEMON?! HA- HA- HA, get out of that simple mind of yours! I’m not a mere demon! And you are in no place to ask a question! I will be the one who will ask the questions.”

“And why should I answer it?”

“Stop asking cliché questions! Here’s the deal, you are locked in a prison where I took one of Osiris limbs years ago, it was built so shoddy the limb is festered and cannot move. Now, you are the one inside this prison, and

you... as a human you think you can survive the torment a God can't endure? If you want to get out, I have a proposition for you, if you want to stay, then you can sit and make yourself comfortable, because I know for a fact that you can't last long enough in this place, I can tell that by the look of your skin that start turning to blue. Your choice?"

I looked at my hands, and it was as the demon said, my skin was turned from light brown to sickly brown and my palms are sweaty, knees weak, periodically my heart stop beating, there was blood on my sweater already. "What's... the deal?" I answered with a voice that start to weaken.

"You must go to the infamous Osiris sarcophagus and wake him up, think you can handle it?" "Are you NUTS!! What if he decides to kill me!"

"That's your problem, you have ten seconds to decide, 10..."

"Wait!"

"...9..."

"Let me think about it!?!"

"...8...7..."

I fell to my knees, as I saw my hands on the floor my skin started to blister, it felt like dying a slow and painful death.

"...6...5...4...3...2...1..."

"I'll do it!!!"

"Great Choice!" suddenly, the room was expanded and collapsed to total destruction. I found myself flying in a dark empty space, on a spur of a moment my body was pushed to a sudden burst of acceleration and I could see the space was stretched out in front of my eyes; all of a sudden everything stopped and stood still in front my face: behold, the sarcophagus of Osiris himself.

All of my blisters were gone and I felt better than before, when suddenly a mark is carved on my top of my left hand by a mysterious light.





What did this mark stand for? Til' this day I still did not know. All I know was this mark on my hand looked like one of those ancient Nordic runes. For the meantime, I had a deal to finish.

“How can I wake a sleeping god?” I thought in my confusion.

Suddenly a voice answered from inside the sarcophagus “WHO SAID I AM SLEEPING PUNY HUMAN?”

Surprised, I quickly pulled the sarcophagus' door with great strength and found the infamous God of the Underworld, Osiris-- but in chopped condition and all of his limbs were flying inside, and then without his eyes, his opened mouth started moving again. “I AM NOT ASLEEP NOR I AM AWAKE. I AM DREAMING.... FOR THE MOMENT, WHAT DO YOU WANT PUNY HUMAN? CAN YOU NOT SEE, I AM ALREADY TORN DOWN OF MY POWER, I CANNOT GRANT ANY OF YOUR WISHES ANYMORE, SO I ASK YOU ONCE AGAIN, WHAT DO YOU WANT?”

Surprised by his answer I replied, “Someone or something asked me to wake you up. All of it happened too fast. One second I was the luckiest guy in all Zahriman and the next minute I was in a mortal dread and now, this-- face to face with the God of Death himself.”

“WHO HAVE SENT YOU HERE, HUMAN?”

“I don't know, as I said it all happened too fast, do you think I have the time to ask a question, I don't even--” suddenly his mouth opened as wide as a crater left by an A10 meteor.

“THAT MARK ON YOUR HAND, WHO GAVE IT TO YOU?”

As a god, he's a rude one to cut off people like that. “What? Oh this? I don't know who gave it to me, I would think it's the guy who sent me here.”

“DID HE PUT YOU IN MY TORMENT, RIGHT BEFORE YOU ARRIVE HERE?”

“Yeah. Do you know this guy? Because I need to know too.”

“I SAW THIS IN MY DREAM, A HUMAN WITH RAIDHO MARK ON HIS LEFT HAND CAME TO CLAIM THE PRIZE OF THE OLD, DO YOU HAVE ON YOU ANY ARTEFACT OF THE PAST?”

“I don't know if it is an artefact of some sort but I did get this crossbow today, so magnificent I don't know I could get it for free but I did, I got it from

this merchant....”

“SHOW THIS CROSSBOW TO ME.”

“First, I don’t know if you learn this in your god school but it’s rude to cut off people like that, second, I don’t know where it went, as I lost it from my grasp when that guy somehow transported me places.”

“LISTEN MORTAL, YOU ARE DEALING WITH NO MERE HUMAN ENDEAVOR HERE. THE GUY WHO SENT YOU HERE IS LOKI OF ASGARD HE IS ALSO THE ONE WHO RESPONSIBLE FOR MY IMPRISONMENT, HE’S BEEN PLANNING FOR THIS DAY ALL HIS LIFE, HE’S ABOUT TO START THE HIGHER FORM OF WAR PITTING THE REALM OF GODS ALL OVER THE WORLD IN DANGER AND PUTTING YOUR WORLD IN THE MIDDLE AS THE BET AND ALSO AS THE BATTLEGROUND, YOU NEED TO TAKE THAT CROSSBOW TO HEPHAESTUS OF MOUNT OLYMPUS--”

Out of nowhere that voice from earlier cut his explanation, “All right, that’s enough Osiris.” “LOKI!”

“Hello there, old friend, you have your time now go back to your dream.”

“LISTEN HUMAN, BRING THAT ARTEFACT TO MOUNT OLYMPUS THEN ASK HEPHAESTUS TO--”

I never got to hear what Osiris had to say next. I got thrown back in the same excellence of speed as before and lost all my consciousness. All clues left for me were ones with Mount Olympus and The Blacksmith of the town.

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“...waking up with Radelia back on my hand but sadly this time I’m not by the side of the river, I’m here, on the outskirts of a small... what do you call it again?”

“Kampung.”

“Yeah, that... It’s great to meet you Gatot.”

“Yeah it’s great to meet you too, Dane. About that war you said earlier, I don’t think I can help you with that, what I can do is bring you to Olympus.” He put his hand out to pick me up

“Sure why not” I reached for his hand and in a flash we took flight up in the sky.

“Damn! What are you?”

“I guess you can say I’m a demigod, I’m the son of Bima.”

“Wait, what?! Stop!”

“Sure, we’re already here.” As he put me down, I realised that he was godly quick.

“Goddammit!”

“Hey!”

“I’m sorry, man, this will get complicated. Why didn’t you told me earlier that you are a son of god, you can’t just cross the border like this. This will only invite problems, and since you didn’t want to take part in the war..”

“SON OF BIMA!” a thunderous voice came from the peak of Mount Olympus.

“Shit.” With a face full of regret, I could see Zeus flying down to reach us.

“Zeus.” He started to bow down to Zeus, as did I.

“What is your business here?”

“He just took me here to meet--”

“SILENCE, MORTAL!” I don’t know what’s wrong with gods and cutting off people speaking. “I’M NOT TALKING TO YOU.”

“I came here to send this man to meet your blacksmith, Hephaestus.”

“You just violated the truce of White Oro Concordat, by stepping here without notice.”

“I’m sorry, Zeus but there is something higher at stake here, my friend here will explain it to you.”

“I can see nothing more important than the violation of the truce here.”

“Yes there is, Almighty Zeus.” I started to explain everything to him.

A surprised look stuck on that old bearded god face. He sent Gatot back to his homeland and told him to speak to his father about preparation if this all fall ill. Gatot nodded and headed back right away.

“If this is true what you speak of then it’s not Hephaestus you wanted to meet it’s my brother.”

“Which one?”

“The one who keeps Hel in check, mortal.”

Hel is not that bad, I guess Persephone and his pet has been keeping

this place clean and in order.

Seeing Hades for the first time, he looked like Zeus but with a more gothic sense of style. He took Radelia off my hands and said he's taken care of the artefacts and he also said that my job was done in the realm of gods.

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So, that's my story guys. That's how I got this rune on my hand. The whole banquet went silent, all food is stopped being eaten and the room was full of people with surprised faces.

The Harbinger stood with the only rage face in the hall:

“Dane! You are the strongest warrior we have here in our mead hall, but also you are the stupidest of us all.”

“Um, thanks I guess.”

“There's a reason why you should join my class of history, because if what you tell us about your is true-which it is because I know how stupid you are- you just complete the RAGNAROK PROPHECY!!!”

The warriors inside Jahre Jorvaskkr starts clamouring the mead hall, Aela's face is full of disappointment, The Harbinger went to his room and leave the banquet. All I know was I was tricked to do that endeavour by Loki and now apocalypse is upon humanity, the festivity of the banquet turned into a mourning, all thanks to me. A bang on the door just give us another silence

“Warrior of Jorvaskkr! Ready your weapons! Man your stations! It is the we all awaits!

SOVNGARDE SARAAN!!!” The god of Thunder himself visited us to warn about the upcoming ends. “You! With Raidho mark on yer' hand, come 'ere! Ye will find the front of all lines and lead this glorious battle.” My heart skipped a beat, after all these years fighting all kinds of battle never have I ever felt this mortal dread before, not even Osiris' torment nor Gatot flight can match the fear I have now.

As the seventh horn sounded thus ended the story of Dane The Distinguished Wanderer and all of mankind.



# Delusion

by Aviaska Wienda

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Silent without a voice, the scene of a quiet morning greeted the men—though one of them looked like he was just a boy in his teens. There were no sounds of footsteps, breathing, nor a bird’s chirp. The sun was still asleep and the flowers were not set to show off the colors yet. In the other hand, the man was ready with his floor dust, even though the sunshine from the east was still unwilling to greet him. Every inch of the third floor’s corridor was cleaned up by him. Immensely clean, till the dust might be ashamed to drift.

Lapse of one hour, the morning glory came and brought the cheers of the students that one by one teased the quiet corridor. Some of them were gossiping, some were having breakfast, and some were making fun of each other. The quiet was like a time that passed by.

In a small office room for the cleaning serviceman, Endigu, the boy, set down the cleaning tools in the locker. In the middle part of the room, there was a brown wood dining table. In the left side of the room, there was a kitchen set. The window was facing the football field. Overall, this small room was homie and simple.

After setting the cleaning tools aside, Endigu sat in the dining table where Rodeo was drinking a cup of coffee.

Rodeo asked Endigu, “Ed, is it possible for us to leave everything in our life silently?”

“I think it’s possible,” he answered.

“Is it possible for someone who is forced to leave?” Rodeo asked again.

“You know the rain could go down during the summer. We do not have to think about every possibility. Moreover, it is not our business. Take it easy Ro! Your coffee is not hot anymore.”

## Autumn The Initial

“Unbelievable! How could I forget my wallet? Argh... come on I don't have so much time now! I hope, I just forget where to put it. My God please don't let me drop it”, complained Mrs. Raline while she rummaged through her bag and teacher desk.

During the break, Endigu entered the teachers' room on the first floor. He went to Mrs. Raline's room. In his hand, he brought something that might be sought by this restive woman.

“Mrs. Raline? Mrs. Raline!”, called Endigu when she was busy rummaging through her bag.

“Ah... yes? Oh, Ed, sorry, I'm looking for my wallet, do you need some help with anything?” answered Mrs. Raline in panic.

“Oh... no Mrs. Raline, I think you are the one who needs help for now. Here, your wallet. You dropped it in the library,” said Endigu while he gave Mrs. Raline back her blue navy wallet with a flower latch.

With a face full of relief, Mrs. Raline thanked Endigu, “Oh my god Ed...how can I thank you? Thank you so much Ed.”

“Welcome, sorry I opened it because I need to find the confused, restive, panic woman.” He joked.

“Hey... you mock me boy!” She chuckled flippantly, “but it is true though.”

“Well...I think I'm old enough to not be called a boy.”

“Who said so? You look like a pure boy though, a nice one too.”

“Ha-ha-ha... I take it as a joke then.”

“Up to you, ah... please take this coffee. I like to appreciate anything. You deserve this.” She said, giving him a cup of coffee.

“You don't need to do this, but thank you miss.” Thanked Endigu.

The bell rang, all the students entered the classes. Endigu left the teacher's room and went back to the library, his most favorite place where he could explore the world that might be too wide and limited for him. This place was vast enough for a library owned by a senior high school. The glass windows in every side always welcomed the shine and rain to be a background view for the curious world explorer who dared venture it. The book collections

vary, from the ancient ones to the latest there was. During class period, this place was so quiet. There were only some old bookshelves and books which were waiting for someone to touch it, to read, and to understand. Endigu took a book entitled PoissChemy. This book was about the kinds of chemical poisons. Endigu enjoyed his reading; he spent hours and hours to finish his reading. Whatever was interesting for him to read, he'd read the whole book; he was there to kill the turnaround time.

When the blue turned orange and the light said farewell to nature and humans alike, it was a sign for Endigu to go home. The 4.15 p.m. bus was like the tomorrow that he was always waiting for. Then the apartment was like the parents who always waited for him. His simple and minimalist apartment would never be enough to admit luxury. It only admitted Endigu. Television was the only luxury admitted despite him. There were unique things placed along the windowframe, those were bottles of red roots and petals. He set them together neatly as the decoration for the apartment. Unique but clumsy, for what purpose he collected the red rose petals and roots despite the rose itself.

He lied in bed after a tiring day. He relaxed his body and mind. Tonight the bed was very comfortable for him until he drifted to sleep, forgetting that he was sleeping without having changed clothes nor take off his shoes. Then, he woke up just to take a bath and have dinner. After that, he pulled the blanket and hugged his pillow. He was ready to reach the dream.

00.15 a.m. As usual, Endigu awakened from his sleep. He took the broom, then swept the corridor in front of his room. Weird indeed, but he got used to doing that since childhood—he never missed the routine once. When he was a child, his mother used to ask him to sweep the terrace every 00.15 a.m. His mother had never explained the purpose for that weird thing. Since the first day of his exile in the forest, he had to do that irrational thing. No questions and no rejection.

### **First Greeting**

The break time, it was the time for tiredness to be set free. All of the boring things changed for the fun and fresh. The smell of the lunch dish was so appetizing. Some boys were playing soccer in the football field, some girls were braiding the hair of their friends'. But, some of them choose the library to spend the relax time.

“Hi, Ed! Where will you be going to?”



“Ah... Alex! Hi bro! as usual, I want to have a date with the books.”

“Oh...you need to date a girl once. Tonight there will be live streaming between Liverpool and MU in moon coffee. Do you want to join us? it will be fun! You support Liverpool right?” Alex invited.

“Damn you! Hmmm... I think that’s a good idea. I join!”

“Woo...hoo...so let’s meet there at 8pm. Some boys from class II-C will join us.”

“Fine... make sure you finish your homework first!” Endigu mocked, Alex replied by giving his middle finger.

Then, Endigu went to the library to have a date with the books. When he entered the library, a girl suddenly nudged him. The books that the girl brought fell over.

“Oh... I’m sorry, my bad. Are you hurt?” The girl apologized while she picked up the books on the floor.

“It’s ok! I’m fine. Let me help you with the books.”

“Ah, thank you, but sorry to bother you. I have to go now. Bye.”

“Your welcome, no problem. Bye.”

The girl left Endigu, but after a second, she turned back.

“Hey! I’m Aggie, you can call me Gie though”

“Ah... just call me Ed.”

The girl was smiling when she left the library. Endigu resumed his purpose there and to look for books to read.

On the next day, Aggie waited for Endigu in the library. She brought a lunch box for him to apologize and thank Endigu. When Endigu came, she called and approach him. Endigu was surprised, he did not expect this from Aggie because they’ve only met once. Then, they spent the break time to talk to each other. They discussed important things, but also foolish things, too.

As time went by, the fallen leaves changed to snowfall, the two were getting close, spending more times together, sharing secrets of each other. Endigu and Aggie became best friends. This was a beautiful beginning of an unexpected ending.

Cliste Senior High School was the place that united them. The library became their favorite place. Both of them liked reading books. In the library, they explored the world together. The table in the corner of the library was the comfiest place for them. Besides the library, the pedestrian area around the basketball field also became their favorite place to share secrets.

There, Endigu always saw the different sides of Aggie. Aggie was well-known as a popular and bright student. She was beautiful, too. But, Endigu could see her true colors; sometimes she was so spoiled, careless and childish. She was sweet, though.

“Gie, do you know? You treat me very well. Why?” asked Endigu, when they toyed with snowballs they made on the pedestrian area.

“Well... it’s okay right? We are best friends. Gotcha!” Aggie threw a snowball to Endigu.

“Aww...well maybe my guess is right?”

“Guess what?”

“Nothing” Endigu smiling.

### **Right to Left**

The winter grew colder and colder. The snow was thicker and thicker. Cold changed many things in this world: people, feeling, nature, and fates. The changes walked slowly, but the effect was significantly felt. Until the old feelings and experiences were almost forgotten. Only the spring kept the remaining pure feelings and good times of the last.

“She must love me,” said Endigu to himself when he saw Aggie in Mrs. Raline’s room to submit the student’s worksheet.

Aggie submitted the worksheet of the students in her class to Mrs. Raline. After submitting the worksheet, Mrs. Raline asked for Aggie’s help to collect the biography of the students’ class III-A and asked for Nathan to come to her room. Mrs. Raline asked about her relationship with Endigu.

“Mrs. Raline, here are the worksheets.” Aggie put the worksheets on the table.

“ok, thank you very much Gie. Ah, may you help me to collect the students’ biography and call Nathan to come here?”

“With pleasure miss. Excuse me.”

“Gie! It seems like now you are close with Endigu. Am I right?”

“Oh yes, we are close, but it doesn’t mean we are in a relationship. Just best friends.”

Then, Aggie left the room and met Nathan in his classroom. Gie told Nathan that Mrs. Raline asked him to meet her in her room. Nathan remembered that he borrowed her MP3 Player. Nathan gave it back to Gie

and pinched her cheek, as always. Nathan was Gie's childhood friend.

Endigu, who was watching since Aggie had entered Mrs. Raline room, didn't like to what Nathan had done to Gie. He was mad and approached them. Endigu with his sharp gaze tried to intimidate Nathan. Then he grasped Aggie's hand and towed her to the cleaning service room. In the cleaning service room, Endigu dropped her roughly to the floor. Aggie was shocked, she never thought Endigu would treat her like this. With overwhelming anger, Ed shouted to Aggie.

"Why you let him pinch your cheeks?" shouted Endigu in anger.

"What? What's wrong with that? He is my friend. It is a usual thing. Why are you shouting?" answered Aggie. She was so shocked and afraid. Tears flowed down her cheeks.

"Only I can do that to you."

"...Why? What do you mean?"

"Because you are the one who started all of this! You love me!"

"What? I never loved you, I just like you as my best friend." Explained Aggie. She was confused as of why he thought she loved him.

"No, you don't!"

Aggie was speechless. She ran away to escape from Endigu. Aggie cried a lot, she didn't know why Endigu misunderstood her feelings for him. She never expected Endigu to treat her like that. She told Nathan about Endigu. Nathan advised her to maintain her peace with him, but if he became more abusive, Aggie had her right to avoid and leave him.

Day after day passed, Aggie still treated Endigu well, but he changed. He was not fun and nice. He became strange. She couldn't find the figure of Endigu who always nice, humble, and fun anymore. He was like a stranger to her. She was sad because she lost her innocent best friend Endigu. Aggie realized one thing that she hated most from Endigu: Endigu tried to stalking her. One day, she found Endigu sitting in her terrace at 03.00 am. Endigu was watching every time. It was scary.

Aggie didn't have any choice, she had to avoid Endigu. She asked Nathan to accompany her because she was afraid Endigu would hurt her. Nathan who already knew the problem always stayed with Aggie. He always accompanied Aggie wherever she went to.

This matter made Endigu angry. He could not accept that Aggie was avoiding him. He could not accept the fact that the person who loved him left

him. Of course, it was a delusion, Aggie never loved him more than as a best friend. He hated Aggie being close to Nathan nevertheless.

### **The End of Winter**

This afternoon, a snowstorm struck the town. There were not many people who went outside because the temperature dropped drastically to -30C. Nathan and Aggie were trapped in school. Aggie who had to finish her assignment stayed in the library to finish the assignment, while Nathan had to go home because his mother was sick. There was a worry that Nathan felt because he had to leave Aggie.

The cold was piercing to the bone. Nathan tried to hold the cold until he arrived at the subway station. He could not wait to buy a hot cup of coffee in the station and warm himself. He quickened his step. Only a few left steps he would arrive at the station. He was so relieved, then he crossed over the street.

“CRASH!!!” Nathan was hit by a car. He bounced off three meters far. No passerby helped him up. The car drivers just left him lying down in the road. One hour, two hours, finally there was a man who helped Nathan. He carried Nathan to the station and called an ambulance. But, it was too late, Nathan died. His body couldn't hold the pain and the cold. It was so sorrowful, he had to die without anyone having time to save him.

Meanwhile, Aggie was still doing her assignment. She was alone in the library, the administrator had business to tend to with the headmaster. She went to the bookshelf to find a history book. After she found the book, she went back to her chair and continued finishing her assignment. When she was reading the book, Rodeo greeted her. Rodeo had come to clean the library. Before he left, he asked Aggie why she never met Endigu again. Aggie just answered the question with a sore smile.

It was at 5 p.m. Aggie had finished her assignment. Then, she prepared to go home. The weather still hadn't improved. Before she went home, she called Nathan's phone three times, but there was no answer. She was worried for him, she hoped he was home safe. She went to the bookshelf to return the book.

Suddenly, the feeling of stuffy, empty, darkness came over her. Her hands and feet were shackled. Her mouth was smothered and her eyes were

wrapped closed. Only her ears could she use to identify her whereabouts, but it was not enough to figure out the answer. She just felt that this place was so small she could not straighten her legs, even to move her body. She started questioning “How could I be trapped here? Who is the person who carried me? where will he bring me to? And why me?” asked Aggie to herself curiously.

Pounding made her realize that she was inside a chest. She heard someone open the lock, then he carried her and put her in a chair. He untied the handkerchief in her mouth, then, on her eyes. For God’s sake, she really didn’t want to know the person.

Endigu, yes. Who else would do this to her except him, she never had an enemy. He put her in a secret room on the library.

“Surprised?” asked Endigu with a chill voice while he wiped her sweat.

“Ha-ha-ha...you.” Aggie smiled sardonically while she stared into his eyes sharply.

“You need to take a bath.”

Endigu released her coat. Then he opened the button of her shirt, the first button...second...third...she rebelled, her body began to be exposed, he released her shirt. Furthermore, he lowered her skirt’s zipper and took off her skirt. Aggie cried, how insulted she felt for his treatment. Endigu did something really inappropriate to her. She could not fight against him because her hands and legs were still bound. Then, Endigu bathed her in his bathroom. After he bathed her, Endigu dressed her in a purple gown and put make up on her, so she looked beautiful.

Endigu set a romantic dinner for her. He set the table with a red tablecloth, a bottle of wine, a jar of red rose petals and roots, and three candles. He fed her a tenderloin steak. She refused to eat. Endigu forced her by holding her jaw and shoving in the meal roughly. After the dinner, Endigu put her in front of the TV and played a recording. Aggie could not do anything; she even didn’t speak. Endigu played the recording of a quiet road in front of the subway station. For a few minutes, there was no oddity with the recording. A few minutes later, there was a man was crossing over the road. Then, suddenly a car hit the man until he bounced off. Aggie was shocked, her body limped and trembled. She knew that the man in the recording was Nathan. She never thought that Nathan would die like that because of her. Aggie cried loudly, Endigu forced her to watch again and over again. She resisted, but when she

resisted, slap landed to her cheeks, Ed would hit her using baseball bat.

“AAAAHHH...why are you doing this to me? How could you?” Aggie groaned holding the pain that made her body bruise and bleed.

“WHY? Because you left me, bitch! I hate being left by someone! AND YOU! You were the first who flirted with me! you were the first who loved me! but you were the one who denied that and left me! You never know how it feels like being exiled as a kid because your parents believe in superstitions. You don’t know how it feels like being left behind by your friends!” shouted Endigu, while still hitting her with the baseball bat.

“How could you think I love you? I never had that feeling to you! You were my best friend! It is just your delusion!” with her last strength to speak with bleeding body.

“SEE! you denied it again. I’m wasting my time talking to you and letting you live! Now please say hello to the Grim Reaper!”

Endigu brought her to the glass crate that he already decorated before with his collection of red rose petals and roots. Then, he took a scalpel and started slashing her body in the patterns of red rose. He started slashing her face while playing classical music. Aggie screamed in pain, she could not escape. She screamed and cried as she felt the seconds of her death getting closer. Finished with her face, Endigu continued with her neck, hands, and legs. He slashed her body calmly and carefully.

00.15 am. There was no scream, no groaning, no tears. Only blood that scattered and filled the floor of the secret room. This midnight, Endigu didn’t sweep the corridor in front of his apartment. Instead, he cleaned the secret room from the blood. After that, he preserved her body by formalin and put her a glass crate in the middle of the room.

## Epilogue

Silent without a voice, the scene of quiet morning greeted the men. There were no sounds of footsteps, no breathing, nor a bird’s chirp. The sun was still asleep and the flowers were not set to show off the colors yet. In the other hand, the man was ready with his floor dust, even though the sunshine from the east was still unwilling to greet him. Every inch of the third floor’s corridor was cleaned up by him. Immensely clean, till the dust might be a shame to drift.

Lapse of one hour, the morning glory came and brought the cheers of the students that one by one teased the quiet corridor. Some of them were gossiping, some were having breakfast, and some were making fun each other. The quiet was like a time that passed by.

In a small office room for the cleaning serviceman, Endigu set aside the cleaning tools in the locker. In the middle part of the room, there was a brown wood dining table. In the left side of the room, there was a kitchen set. The window was facing the football field. Overall, this small room was homey and simple.

After setting the cleaning tools aside, Endigu sat in the dining table where Rodeo was drinking a cup of coffee.

Rodeo asked Endigu, “Ed, is it possible for us to leave everything in our life silently?”

“I think it is possible.”, he answered.

“Is it possible for someone who was forced to leave?” Rodeo asked again.

“You know; the rain could go down during the summer. We do not have to think of every possibility, moreover, it is not our business. Take it easy Ro! Your coffee is not hot anymore.”

“I just don’t understand why she’s missing. she was so bright. She’s missing without any trace. Poor soul.”

The flowers on the pedestrian area beside the basketball fields bloomed. Endigu enjoyed the smell of spring. All of the good things returned to its place. The pain he buried in a neat peaceful place, where no one could tease it. All of the memories and trace locked safely forever.

**The End**

# Interim

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by *Elisabet Ayu*

“Katya! Glad to caught you early this morning!” I lifted up my head from the book I read, focusing my attention at Ruth who was talking. “Done your homework yet?”

“Sure. Do you want to borrow it?”

“Ahh...as expected of you, nice as always,” she said, grabbing my book. “Thank you, Darling.” Ruth patted my cheek and went back to her seat.

I smiled at her retreating figure; it was easy to make Ruth happy.

“You do know that she’s using you to raise her grade, right?” Andora hissed at me, narrowing her eyes.

“Good morning to you, too, Andora. You look really beautiful today,” I said while giggling at her nervously, trying to avoid having this conversation. I did not like arguing with my best friend.

“You keep letting people to use you,” she said. “It’s going to bite you in the ass someday, Kat.”

I was about to answer when the bell rang, signaling the first period and fortunately breaking our conversation. I did not like to fight with my best friend.

My homeroom teacher, Mrs. Wardwell, entered the class with a boy I had never seen before. A new classmate, yay. Everyone was waiting with anticipation. The boy would be the one who you usually in the fashion magazines, modelling branded clothes. He was tall and had a quite muscular body. Ink ran on his right side of the tanned body, peeking from behind the collar of his uniform and ran until his wrist. Messy jet-black hair from running his hand to often there, thick eyebrows, and light stubble painted his jaw, making him looked intimidating. Definitely the typical bad boy type.



“Attention, class! We have a new friend that will join us starting today. Mr. Russell, please introduce yourself,” Mrs. Wardwell said.

“Hi. My name is Cameron Russell. You can call me Cam,” he stopped for a moment, thinking of something, “...or babe.” The whole class laughed, including Mrs. Wardwell. Oh, what a perfect package. He had a funny bone in him on top of everything.

I am sorry that I might sound annoying. Well, I had a slight aversion with people like him, I envied them a lot. They were the kind that people like without having to do anything. They were perfect from the start; a perfect body and a perfect face. People would forgive them immediately when they make a mistake or two; their perfect packaging save everything. People would not abandon them for their mistakes. People definitely would not have the heart to do so. I wonder if that was the case with my mom. Had she left me because I was not the perfect child for her?

“Hello, Kitty cat. I’m talking to you here.” Fingers snapped in front of my face, breaking me out of my reverie.

Oh, it was only the boy. What was his name again? Caden? Caleb? Ah! Cameron.

Andora was laughing silently at our interaction. Well, it seemed that she was not mad at me anymore. If she was happy, she would not leave me. I could not afford to lose her.

“What? And who do you call a feline?” I stared at him, annoyed.

“You, of course, Munchkin. Would you prefer it if I call you ‘Pussycat?’”

What is his deal with pet names? The boy sat in front of Andora, with Emery, the class president, as his seatmate. He adapted to the class really quick. Uttering jokes here and there, making everyone laughed. He even managed to get Emery laughed! Emery who was popular for being unapproachable because of his sharp tongue. It seemed that Emery was not that awful because he and Cameron were being buddy-buddy right there already. The next few days, they were best friends, going everywhere and doing anything together.

Weeks passed by eventfully with his annoying antics every day.

It was on one evening when I was preparing dinner for my Dad and me. I made chicken soup for us because Dad caught a cold recently. I looked at the clock on the wall. It was thirty past five. Dad usually went home at six. I had thirty minutes to take a bath and feed Dog. So, I went to upstairs to take a bath.

After taking a bath, I took the food for Dog downstairs. Ah, it was a pity, Dad bought the pellets kind, Dog liked the flakes kind more. He forgot about it, I think. The front door was unlocked and opened. Footsteps could be heard from the living room. I called for Dad while feeding Dog the pellets.

“Dad, you forgot that Dog likes the flakes one, not the pellets kind,” I said without turning around to face him. “I made chicken soup for us today. It can warm up your sore throat,” I continued. The footsteps were getting closer, but Dad gave no response.

“Dad?” I called once again.

“You named your pet fish Dog?” a voice I did not expect answered.

“You?!”

Cameron stood after me, trying to hold back his laughter.

“Katya! Meet Cam, the new mechanics at my workplace. I offer him to have dinner with us tonight,” said Dad, coming from the front door.

“But... Dad, I—”

“Ah! Let’s start eating,” Dad interrupted me, walking to the kitchen.

I narrowed my eyes at Cameron, or Cam like what Dad said. He was still laughing quietly.

“You amaze me, Kitty cat. Dog? Really creative!”

During dinner, he and Dad were busy talking about one of their customers who wrecked a racing car, they were excited to fix the car. I was listening intently, interested in the topic. The dinner passed by.

I walked Cameron outside. Dad had offered to take him home, but he refused, saying something about getting his sister a doll from the night market.

“Hey, Kat?” he broke down the silence between us.

“What?”

“Look up! The stars are really bright tonight,” he said. “When I was a kid, my father said that our loved one that has passed away always watching us as stars. He said he will watch me from above before he died.”

I looked at him, then the stars, and back at him.

“They are beautiful,” I stupidly said.

“Yeah... Really beautiful.” He was looking at me.

Few days later, my class were busy choosing participants for the Spirit Week. Emery was mad at Ruth because she, who had not participated in any

competition, did not want to participate in marathon.

“My darling Katya, would you like to substitute me in marathon? I really don’t want to run in the scorching sun,” Ruth was looking at me with hope.

Ah, I really did not want to participate in marathon either. I had joined the T-shirt designing contest. The rule was one person could only join one competition. Ah, but I really want to join T-shirt designing contest.

“Hey, Katya wants to join T-shirt designing contest. Suck it up and join the marathon!” Andora bark at Ruth harshly.

“Aha! We can exchange place, Kat. I’ll join the T-shirt designing contest and you can take my place in marathon,” said Ruth.

“Emm...” I pondered for a moment. Ruth needed my help but I really wanted to join the T-shirt designing competition.

“Pretty please, Kat?” she continued to beg me. Well, I could just join the competition next year. It was more important to help Ruth rather than doing what I want.

“Okay, let’s exchange place.”

“Kat...” Andora looked at me in disbelief. I shook my head at her to stop whatever she was thinking to say.

“Thank you, Honey. I really owe you one.” Ruth smiled at me sweetly then went back to her seat.

“Kat, I really don’t understand you. You really let people to use you whenever they like. What about your need? Your want?” said Andora.

I kept quiet while listening to her. Yes, she had a point. But what if when I was doing what I want, people will think I am an egoistic and dislike me because of that? Just like my Mom, they would leave me one by one. And at the end of the day, I would be alone. I had to be nice all the time, so that no one would have the reason to leave like Mom.

The next afternoon, I went to my safe place, the abandoned cemetery three blocks away from home, with Dog’s fish bowl on my hand. I usually went there if I wanted to be alone, thinking about my Mom. I went there because I did not want Dad to know that I still cried over her depart.

Halfway writing the letter I planned to send to the town’s radio corner, I heard someone called my name.

“Katya! What are you doing here, alone? Oh, hello there, Dog.” Cameron approached me.

Why? What did I do for meeting this devil everywhere? I kept silent, pretending not to notice him and continuing to write my letter. Maybe he would go away if I did not acknowledge him.

“Kitty cat, are you writing a love letter for someone? For dear Emery perhaps? I notice that you’ve been staring at him quite a lot,” he said, getting closer.

I still kept quiet. Apparently, he was getting annoyed of my pretending not to hear him. He grabbed the letter. I was stunned for a second. Before he could get the chance to read my letter, I grabbed it back forcefully from his hand.

“It’s not your business, Russell. Piss off!” I crushed the letter in my hand and took Dog with me, stomping my way away from him.

“Hey! Hey, Katya!” Cameron grabbed my shoulder, stopping me from going away. “I’m sorry, Kat. I didn’t mean to make you mad. I’m really sorry okay? I just want to get your attention,” he stared at me.

I looked into his eyes, searching for sincerity. He was not as bad as I thought, it seemed. I was hating him for no reasons.

“Hey, would you like to see a car race together tonight? I heard from your father, you like cars,” he said. I started listening intently, thinking about his offer. “I can ask my sister to accompany us if you don’t want to be just the two of us.” His face flushed deep red.

“Okay.”

“It’s okay, I can understand if you don’t want to. I know I can be really annoy— What? okay, I’ll pick you up at seven. See you, Kat!” he said rapidly and ran away.

I went home to heat-up an instant for my dad’s dinner. After showering, I changed clothes. It was ten to seven when I was done. Before Cam came, I left a note for my dad saying that I went out with Cam and his sister to watch a car race. I was sticking the note with a magnet on refrigerator when the doorbell rang.

“Hi, Kat! You ready?” Cam was standing on the doorway, smiling widely even though he still looked a bit pale.

“Sure, let me just grab my bag. Hey, you alright, Cam? You look pale.”

“Ah, it’s nothing. Let’s go, before the race starts.”

I saw a girl around fifteen years old in the back seat. It must be his sister.

“Hi! Nice to meet you. I’m Katya. What’s your name?” I extended my hand, hoping for a handshake from her.

The girl was just looking at my hand, then scowling at me. Oh no, what did I do wrong? Did she want to sit at the passenger seat?

“Amy? Be nice, please. She is my friend,” said Cameron.

“Kat, please forgive her. This is my little sister, Amethyst. You can call her Amy.”

“Ah, it’s okay. No problem.” I assured him.

We arrived at the race on time. This was the first time I watched a car race directly, not from a TV. It was fun because I was betting with Cam which rider would win. The one who lost the bet had to fulfill the winner’s wish. In the end, the rider he bet on won the race.

“Katya, about my wish...I will tell you when the time comes.” Cameron smiled at me when we reached my home.

“Okay, but I hope you don’t wish on something I can’t do, Cam. Really.” I smiled back at him.

I bid goodbye at him and Amy. I thought I saw Amy’s eyes was glistening. Was she still mad at me?

The Spirit Week came. I was stretching to prepare myself for running marathon, when Emery approached me.

“Kat, Russell wants to exchange place with you. Now, you have to go participate in the T-shirt designing contest. He will run for marathon instead.”

It took me a minute to comprehend. “What?”

“Go! Now!” Emery pushed me away.

I went to the contest absentmindedly. I did not win the contest, but I was content. Laughing at my T-shirt which has the funny-looking version of Cameron. I intended to draw the cartoon version of him as the form of my gratitude. I could join this contest because of him. Unfortunately, it came out really ugly.

I walked to the track-field, wanting to give the T-shirt to Cameron. I was looking for him, then I saw people were crowding an ambulance. What happened?

“Katya! Katya! Finally. I was looking for you. Russell fainted halfway the race, his nose was bleeding.” Emery was panting when he reached me.

I remembered when he looked pale the other day. So, he must be sick then.

“Hey, Kat! Let’s follow him to the hospital!” Emery said. He dragged me to the motorcycle parking area. We followed Cam’s ambulance to the hospital.

I was blaming myself throughout the way. He would not have fainted if he had not exchanged place with me, right? He would have been fine and maybe won the contest since he was talented in everything.

I saw Amethyst who was huddled near a bench, crying in front of Cam’s room. I approached her slowly.

“Amy...Amy, calm down. It’s okay. He will be okay,” I said calming her down.

“No! He will not! He knew that he is s-sick and he has to rest all day. Instead h-h-he went to the school and joined the stupid marathon! N-n-now his condition is getting worse.”

I started to panic. “What...What’s wrong with him?”

Amethyst shook his head repeatedly, mumbling something, not paying attention.

“Amy?”

She flinched. She seemed to ponder on something.

“Fine! I promised him but right now it doesn’t matter anymore,” She said, trying to control herself. “Cam is sick. Really sick, Kat. He has von Willebrand disease, he got it from our dad. He knows he doesn’t have much time left. Mom had allowed him to go to school because he begged her. She had also allowed him when he said he wanted to work at a mechanics store. We want him to be happy. Turns out, it is because of you. Remember the night we watched the car race? His condition got bad, his nose was bleeding really bad because he was tired from working, but he still forced himself. He said he wants to impress you because you like cars. He is stupid, really.”

I was stunned. What?

“His nose was bleeding again last night. But he said, he had to go to school because his angel needs his help.”

I could not get myself to answer. He would do something that far from me?

“I don’t blame you for what happened, Kat. Really. He becomes stupid when he’s in love.”

The next morning, I hurriedly went to the hospital after hearing Cam had wake up from Amethyst. He looked really pale and weak; he did not look

like the bad boy Cameron Russell that I knew. Amethyst and Mrs. Russell had gone out to give me some time alone with him.

“Hi, Kat! To what honor do I owe this visit? I look horrible now, but you should see me when I repair a car, I look the best then.” Cam winked weakly at me.

“You are stupid, you know,” I said. My tears broke down freely like a broken dam then.

“Hey, hey. Now, why are you crying? Did I do something wrong?” he tried to get down from his bed, trying to calm me.

“No! Don’t move! You are stupid, Cam, really. Why would you do stupid things just because... just because...something stupid!” I barked nonsense at him.

“Kat, please don’t cry. Please. Hey, remember the bet? You still owe me a wish!”

How can he still talk about something like that in this situation?

“Let’s have a picnic! I will tell you my wish. Come on!”

We went outside to the hospital garden. Cam insisted to have a picnic there so his doctor and his family had no choice but to allow him. We sat on grass below an apple tree. He looked really enthusiastic. I kept on being silent, arranging the food while ignoring him.

“Kat? Are you mad?” He noticed my silent.

I still ignored him. I took out the sandwich Amethyst got from the canteen and gave it to him on a paper plate.

“Kat, I’m sorry, okay? I didn’t know what I did, but I’m really sorry,” he continued.

I glared at him. “If you didn’t know what you did wrong then don’t apologize!”

“Okay, okay. What I can do to please you, Princess?”

I was pondering for a minute. “Tell me everything. Tell me why you keep doing things for me even though you know it’ll cost you a lot. You are sick, dammit!”

His face fell. I felt disgusted at myself then. Why do I keep making things hard for him? I could not even make him happy for once. I was taking him for granted.

“Amy told you, huh? That kid, I swear.” He pinched his nose.

“Start talking if you still want me here, Cam.”

“Alright,” he sighed. “I was walking back to my house when I see a girl, hush, don’t interrupt me. It’s still the prolog.” He shushed me, stopping me from interrupting him.

“So, I was walking when I see this girl. She was crying on a tombstone, hugging a fish bowl. She called her fish Dog! What a strange girl, right? I hid myself to watch this girl crying—It’s creepy, I know. I hesitated to approach this girl because what if she got scared of me, thinking that I was a stalker or something? So, I kept myself hidden from her. After some time, she got up and walked away. She left a letter to the town’s radio behind. I followed her home to return the letter, but I was curious of the letter. It was about how her best friend got mad at her for not saying no to people. But it was because she was afraid if she starts saying no, people will dislike her and leaving her alone. She has abandonment issue. Her mother had left her when she was still a child. According to her, being herself is not enough. She has to make everyone happy. It is the way for her to survive. She thinks by getting people to like her, they will have no reason to abandon her. After watching her for a quite long time, I started to think that I have to approach her; I begged my mom to go to her school and working at where her father worked. Her father told me stories about her, on how unconfident she is, always thinking so lowly of herself, and how she is trying to make everyone happy. Then, I thought, why not make her happy? For no one ever did it for her. Make her realize that it is okay to be herself, to be more confident in herself. I will be there always with her.”

I was gasping for air. He—he was really crazy.

“But then I have my weakness. I have a genetic disease I got from my father, which doctors said cannot be cured. I do not blame my father. I’m just sad that I have to make everyone I love, see me in my worst condition. And for the girl, I cannot stay with her in this life time. I feel sorry that I can only stay with her only for a while, an interim in this life time of hers. But I will always be looking out for her as stars in the sky. When she looks up at the night sky, I will always be there. I promise, in my next life, I will stay with her forever.”

He turned his head, staring at me.

“Kat, my wish is for you to always be happy in this life time.”





# A Love Killer

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*by Naomi Bunga Rastafari*

It was her first day school, new semester. She always went to school alone by a train. She walked to the train station - waiting for a train to Philadelphia. In one day, she spent \$30 for the train and her lunch box. After she arrived at the next station, she walked into a market to buy her lunch box. She never ate at school's canteen because no one wanted to sit next to her. She was lonely and she never had a friend. She tried to get new friends by joining extracullicular activities in her school. Mrs. Jessica called each of the students' names to check her student's presence. "Stacy Olivia Denovo?" She said. Nobody cared about her, it was as if she was not present in the class at all. When class was done, Stacy went to the school's rooftop to eat her lunch box. She did not like to eat at the cafeteria because her friends bullied her physically. She was not beautiful enough for a 16 years old girl. She had thin eyebrows, a flat nose, a bare face, dark skin, unfolded teeth, though she had beautiful, long, black hair and blue eyes. Everyone knew her as the ugliest girl in her school. She only wanted to live normally like others, but she could not.

Stacy had two pet fish, named Bona and Lala. She often talked to her fish when she felt upset or happy, although she knew that her fish will not give her an answer. She loved to sing and dance, she made a comic book for Line Webtoon and had a music channel on Youtube. She played piano and sang without showing her face. When she was lonely, she made many works like poems or song lyrics. Only her grandmother knew of her talents. Stacy was very quiet, but she always sang and danced in her bathroom every morning with the shower as a microphone. She did it often because she believed if she started a day with happiness, she will end it happier. She could only talk to her laptop - the things that helped her survive.

Few days later, she went to the rooftop, as usual. The day was different, she was not alone. A boy named Kevin came to her and accompanied her

for lunch. She felt confused and awkward at that moment because she never really talked to people. He was very kind and humble, he had many friends. He was a handsome and clever boy. They always shared lunch together ever since. Stacy felt so comfortable around him. She never wanted to let him go from her side because no one could ever love her like he did, even her mother who left her when she was in elementary school and her father who passed away because of cancer. Her mother never came back to home after her father died. She lived with her grandmother in a small house with a vast backyard.

They became very close and Stacy was happy. Now, she had a friend - at least one. She was very happy to share stories about life with him and Kevin was a good listener. Day by day, they were happy together, until one day, Kevin, who she considered as her very best friend stopped coming to the garden anymore. She looked for the reason why. She was sad and tried to express her feelings through her art. She made a story on Wattpad and a comic on Webtoon. She had many followers and fans on social media with the username "msfloooo", but no one knew that it was her. She had a different life on social media as oppose to the real world.

She never showed her face in social media because of her school peers. 5 years ago, she made a poem for the wall magazine anonymously, and everyone praised it. She was very happy and tried to make more. She thought that her works might change their treatment towards her at school. Stacy decided to write her name down in the poem next time. After she posted it, everyone mocked her and said "Someone like you don't deserve to write such a beautiful work." The reaction left her hurt and appalled. Angry, she never mentioned her name in her art works anymore-- like this Wattpad story she's writing; she wrote a plot about a killer. She imagined that the killer would come after someone who has ever hurt the killer-- it was like revenge.

She tried to find the reason why Kevin ghosted on her. She visited his favorite coffee shop in Melbourne by train. She saw Kevin with his other friends and she got jealous. She won't let her one and only friend go from her life, she did not want to be lonely anymore. With her fury, she made up her mind to change. With all the thunder and rain, she transformed into a strong girl--like a superhero, no! the enemy of the superhero. When Kevin has left, she came up to one of Kevin's friends, and asked him to follow her. His name was William. Stacy told him that she would like to fetch something for Kevin, but she left it at her room. William followed Stacy to her house, the basement. He was surprised to find that her basement was full of books, like a library. He loved it. He was curious to know the inside of her basement. She smiled at him and she went upstairs to prepare a drink for her guest. She closed the

door and locked it, she turned off the air circulation in the basement so that there was no oxygen anymore. She killed him slowly, she said that everyone who attempts to take Kevin away from her life, she would take their soul.

After killing him, she wrote it on Wattpad. In reality, she envisioned herself as the main character in her story, but she did not want to show it. She entered the basement and checked William's body. She could not move his body someplace else, so she kept it in the cooler room next to the basement. She was happy after she killed him. She called Kevin then asked him to go to the coffee shop together, but he declined her after he got news that his friend, William has been reported missing. Stacy was still jealous as to why Kevin was still thinking about his friend while he has died. She was angry and so she went back to the cooler room to stab the dead body with her knife. She was crazy and she could not handle her emotions.

Kevin came to her and said to her that he lost his best friend. Stacy delivered her deep condolences. Day by day, they were close again and Kevin said to her that he read a fiction about a woman killer who killed someone who want to hamper her. Kevin said that he loved the writer because she had brilliant imagination. Stacy used the Wattpad to tell her story about Kevin, but she did not want to Kevin know it. She always followed what Kevin did, she knew the address of his house, his phone number, his parents' name, even his clothing size. She also knew the good and bad things of him. She knew everything after she hacked his social media. Kevin said that whenever he read the novel named "A Love Killer" by msfloooo, sometimes he felt that it was him being described in the story.

Every person who tried to take his attention, she promised to herself that she would take their soul. She looked like an innocent girl who other people would not expect to kill almost 5 people-- she stored all the bodies in the cooler room. She was smart, she could remove all the evidence. Day by day, Kevin felt that something was strange because the friends around him were missing one by one without a trace. Kevin came to Stacy's house for a cup of tea. When Stacy was busy making tea in the kitchen, he accidentally saw a bunch of dirty paper containing a novel script that he once read in Wattpad. He also saw an award certificate for Msfloooo at Stacy's house. He began to suspect that Stacy was the one behind the fictional story.

Kevin started to link the novel script to the story of his life. He felt that something was wrong. The tea was ready, but Kevin excused to go home because of some emergency. Stacy believed him and let him go. Kevin went home and looked for some evidence. He did not show his fear and mistrust to Stacy. He came to her house every day to find more and more evidence, until

one day Kevin found the cooler room when Stacy asked him to bring her new book to the basement. He opened the window of the cooler room and saw pieces of dead bodies. He bolted to the police station and then back to the house to show the dead bodies. When they entered her house, they found that Stacy has hung herself in the living room and she left a note.

“Don’t blame me, you are the true killer. I read your note, you wanna kill ‘em many times because they could not accept that you are gay. I cannot accept that either. I have loved you with the deepest part of my heart, but then you killed my love.”

**The End**

# I've Said I Loved the Sea

by Clara Pontifisia Selesiana

The clock was showing eight a.m. and it was when Terry opened up the door as well as the blinds. "I'd sit alone and watch your light. My only friend through teenage nights. And everything I had to know I heard it on my radio..." sang Terry to start her day. As Freddie's voice continued to fill up the air, you could hear the doorbell rang loud enough that the birds outside flew away immediately, "Brazen Breakfast! What can I help with you with?" Terry greeted her very first customer of the day.

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"Brrringgg!!! Brrringgg!!! Brrringgg!!!" Finally, the sound of her alarm woken Dakota after it screamed through her ears for a good solid fifteen minutes. Startled, she finally landed on the floor. It was eight and she was supposed to be in class in thirty minutes. "Fuck," she said as she rushed to the bathroom to get ready. The toothpaste kept falling as she tried to get her mind collected; brushing teeth has never felt this frustrating. She then went downstairs only to find nobody since his brother George had left for school and so did her mom Terry. "Oh, well. What a way to start," she said. She then took the last two pieces of bread on top of the table, assuming they were left for her.

Before leaving for her running-late-for-class trip, Dakota managed to put her earbuds on and Bicycle Race came to play. Dakota started wiggling and as if forgetting that she was actually alone, she pointed at the poster of Freddie Mercury by the kitchen door and said, "Sing it, Freddie!" Half dancing, she ran outside to get her bike and pedaled her way to school as fast as she could.

On normal days, it would take her ten minutes to get to school, but that day it was indeed a bicycle race. In the midst of her race, she would still stop to look up to the sky and she realized how slow the clouds were moving, as if showing off their lack of excitement to her. “You guys are a big squad, why aren’t you excited about today? I don’t have as many friends as you do but I am not slothful like that, come on guys!” she said to them, wishing she could change their minds, but she continued her race. Approaching the front yard of the school, she aimed at the parking lot and quickly put her bike and made sure it was locked and secure.

Dakota had burst into the class just in time before Miss Norris, began explaining. “I like students who come late how I like my coffee; I don’t.” said Miss Norris and then she laughed, nervously— and it was only her who laughed. You could almost see all of the grinning faces in the room, especially Dakota’s as she scratched her head slowly trying to look away knowing that the ‘supposed’ joke was addressed to her. In the back corner, Blaire Clement was seen murmuring to herself as she rolled her eyes, “here we go again”. Miss Norris herself is a middle-aged lady teaching algebra and somehow people secretly had the public agreement that ‘Nervous’ was her middle name while ‘Awkward’ was her last, also her first name was interchangeable with ‘Snowflake’.

Trying to get it over with, Dakota apologized, “Sorry I was late”. She did not waste much more time and went to catch the empty seat right next to Blaire. It did not take long for Dakota to notice who was sitting just across her seat; it was Seth Logan, one of the brightest kids in her class. It was vastly obvious that Seth was so caught up into what he was doing—playing with his pen. She stared at the pen as it was spinning,

What am I even doing right now? Well, let’s replay that scene when the pen spins perfectly again... in slow-mo... this is so much fun, she thought. It was going on for quite some time that she didn’t realize Seth was already looking back at her. At some point, their eyes met and locked for a solid two seconds and Dakota’s face instantly turned all red and she looked away. Blaire seemed to notice what happened, but there was a short gap until she started teasing me. This is not the first time Blaire acted like this; something must be up, thought Dakota. The girls just kept looking at each other as if there was a connection.

What is she thinking? Why does she keep staring at Seth every day now?

Why is she staring at me like this? What is going on in her mind now?

Both of them kept wondering without saying anything and the staring contest went on for quite a while with some extra soundless giggles here and there and the next thing they knew was that the whole class had managed to survive the entire course of Miss Norris.



It was lunch break, Dakota and Blaire went to the cafeteria to join Will, Mike, and Maxine. They all grouped up and started talking about the Dance Night which was 3 days away. “Emily is going with me!”, Mike said excitedly. “I haven’t heard from Eva... she is definitely rejecting me, I think”, said Will, frowning. “I still don’t know but I don’t care, I’ll just go alone or can we just go together?”, asked Max to Dakota and Blaire. “Of course! I don’t have anyone to go with anyway”, Blaire responded. Dakota has never been naturally chatty, and had never been otherwise, which drove Blaire to try and make sure as she slowly elbowed Dakota, “Hey! What do you think? Are you cool with the idea?” “Yeah, totally”, gasped Dakota, trying to be as convincing as she could to the girls yet she continued thinking, I can’t be less enthusiastic than this.

“I thought Seth asked you out? Or maybe you did ask him out first?”, Blaire asked Dakota under her breath. Not seeing what was coming, she raised her eyebrows and said, “What? No. Why would I go with Seth Logan?” Blaire shrugged and with a smirk on her face she said, “I don’t know, why wouldn’t you?” “I just don’t... I guess,” said Dakota. Dakota seemed to be really puzzled about the situation since she couldn’t figure out what was Blaire’s intention by asking those questions and why would she act the way she did.



Later that day on her way home, Dakota encountered a flock of birds jumping around, so she decided to take a closer look. They were all over the front yard of Mrs. Harrison’s, pecking at what seemed to be some bird food that were intentionally spread there to invite them. She saw Mrs. Harrison sitting on her porch, also watching the birds. “Good evening, Mrs. Harrison! Would you mind if stay here? I’d like to see the birds. I won’t be long, I promise,” she asked politely. Mrs. Harrison smiled and patted an empty seat next to her,



signaling Dakota to come and sit. She tiptoed across the yard to the porch, not willing to drive the birds away. “Do you like the birds?” asked Mrs. Harrison and she answered with a friendly nod. In her head, Dakota thought to herself, “The excitement of these birds is what I have not seen and felt for a while; this, somehow fills up the hollow space within me. They’re bouncing around, singing, eating, and not worrying about how humans would judge them if they eat too much. Oh, and they fly again right after done eating, too. To be completely fair, other birds might probably judge them but hey, it is okay. Wow... How simple it is actually to be happy.”

“I like them, too,” said Mrs. Harrison, interrupting Dakota’s daydream, and she continued, “Seeing them really reminds me of my children... it brings back memories of the days we spent running and playing around the yard. They are my companion now and it soothes me knowing that when I wake up the next day, I’ll be having my friends over.” Mrs. Harrison’s cheeks rose when she said that and she was smiling the whole time; however, it was obvious that there were no sparks in her eyes. Dakota sensed the loneliness in her voice and it all made sense since she had been living on her own for almost three years now. Her children left their home to live with their own families and rarely came to visit her, not to mention, Mr. Harrington’s passing four years earlier; she had nobody.

“When I have free time, can I come over and watch the birds with you, Mrs. Harrison?”

Mrs. Harrison smiled and said, “Of course, my dear... be here as long as you please.”

“Thank you!” she could not help but smiling.

“Genuinely lucky that I still have mom and George,” she thought.

And that is the story on how she brought home a new friendship, that day.

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It was almost six in the evening when I finally got home and I directly went to the kitchen. I sat on the counter and played with the coasters we got from our trip to Disney a few years ago. It was sitting right next to me. I, then, wandered around my kitchen until I noticed the sky had turned dusky violet on one end and bright orange on the other. The sun was sinking slowly as I

pinned my eyes at its movement. Each time it sunk a little deeper, the darker the surface of the mother earth would get. All of the houses and trees turned into silhouettes—it seemed like Caelus was giving his grand show so Gaia has to tune down her beauty just a little bit.

Suddenly, I heard someone come through the front door-- it was my mom. I asked her how her day was. “Fantastic as usual,” she said. I could tell that she was exhausted but she still offered to make us dinner. I never thought someone could be as strong as she was. Working a full-time job and two part-time ones while taking care of me and my brother George and making sure we both have enough. We were lucky that each job paid her well.

Mom gasped a little and her eyes turned wide open as she remembered she was forgetting something. I knew what it was. “Sorry, Freddie”, she apologized... to our music player. I was ready to help her out preparing dinner after she had decided to make some Teriyaki Vegetables. I looked up to the fridge and I told mom, “We got some zucchinis, cauliflowers, and carrots right here. Good to go?” “Sounds great. Can you cut them up for me? Just thin slices, okay?” said mom. My mom was preparing the seasonings when George suddenly sprinted downstairs, “What’s for dinner, mom? Let me help!” It took us forty-five minutes to make it, which could had been twenty if we did not dance too much. After we had done eating and cleaning up the dishes, I went up to my room.

I lied down on my bed with my stomach feeling so full. Naturally, I should be feeling sleepy, but I was not. The stars I painted on my ceiling seemed to be dancing and I let them be. The movements they did were not the best but was entertaining enough. “Hereby, I appoint you guys as my birds and I am your Mrs. Harrison,” I then laughed at how silly it sounded. Right next to my dancing stars, I saw my man Freddie, wearing a white and red ringer tee which says “FLASH” while he was getting a piggyback ride on top of the shoulders of a Darth Vader’s figure. This picture that was taken from his 1980s The Game Tour was my first picture I had of him and also happened to be one of my favorite pictures ever. I remembered having to act fully courteous for a week before I could get my mom to buy me this picture from the DVD store in Oklahoma City since we did not have any in Tulsa. Being able to see and talk to him before bed had gained us a special bond; In reality, he did not know me and would never do, but I felt closer to him this way.

I stretched my body and fixed my pillow, then, looked to my side. There, I came across the dusty keyboard in the corner of my room. I was

allowed to keep the keyboard my dad got me when I was little in my room. This keyboard was probably the only thing related to my dad that my mom let us have in this house since she got rid of the piano already. So, I came up to it and I started thinking of playing our secret song; mind you, it was my first time in years of not playing this song. This song was never meant to happen—at least, not to my knowledge. My dad secretly put the melody for the poem I had written for him a few months prior to his leaving as a surprise. The song was a great surprise, but what I found out after it turned to be more surprising. Thinking about it still enraged and disgusted me, every single time.

“It has been six years, Dad. Don’t you want to see me again?”

“Stop. You’ll be waking up with swollen eyes.”

“I know.”

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It was Friday and Saturday would be the Dance Night. After a lot of begging and convincing, Dakota finally agreed to meet up at my place later in the evening so that I could give her the makeover she would need for the big night. Since she told me how she did not feel of it as an important thing, I had the urge to prove her that it would be amazing and that she would love the experience. I wanted her to be as excited as I was. I would let Dakota wear whichever dress she liked because she would look great anyway. At this point, I might sound like my own mom, but I couldn’t wait to spend the night with her and Max. I wrote as the closing statement in today’s journal, “I guess it is safe to say that I’m so pumped for my first Dance with My Girls Night”.

I might have been too salty to her the other day. Trust me, I could not even wrap my head around the idea that I was jealous. I could not even believe it at first, but I assured myself, I knew what I was feeling, although I had not fully committed to it. I was jealous.

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I was getting ready to leave for Blaire’s house but I honestly was quite hesitant about accepting her offer since I thought there must be something off, “Is it possible that she has any feeling for Seth?” My own thoughts stroked me this time. I had been friends with her for so long that I never realized

she could potentially like someone. “How insensitive could you be?” but she never told me anything about it, though. “Of course, she would never tell you, she caught you staring at him for at least eight hundred times a day already,” I recalled. At that point, I felt so bad already but decided that I should probably get going and would apologize to her later. “Blair’s house off we go.” I pedaled my way to her house which was only two blocks away from mine.

During that short trip to Blair’s, I kept seeing people in our neighborhood; I knew every single one of them. Our community was not that big that everybody knew everybody and everybody got everybody’s ears, as well. News spread like peanut butter and jelly in my city, which was a good thing when you want to keep up with what is new in the neighborhood but then it could also backfire at you. To be honest, our family learned the biggest lesson from it, too. “There are certain things that are better off not being discovered”, I told myself, “I guess, that is exactly how we found out about what he was up to; I wish I could remain unenlightened”.



Terry was able to go home early for the city was having Memorial Day Weekend so, she chose to run errands from home. Dakota had just left and George was out in the community park with some other kids. Terry then remembered that she had left some books that were meant to be sold at their garage sale in the basement so, she went and got it. Going through the towers of old boxes in the dark basement, Terry started to feel uneasy since she did not intend to spend as much time there. She finally discovered the books but as she stepped back, she bumped against one of the towers of boxes and as expected, it all fell down and created a huge mess.

“Oh shoot!” said Terry as she jumped to avoid the boxes. Luckily most of the boxes were sealed tightly, however, there are some which the things inside were spilling everywhere. Terry inspected it over and she was not pleased with what was laying in front of her, she knew well what they were. It took a while for her to finally be able to get herself back together and to finally start cleaning up the mess. She bowed down and took the photographs of Dakota’s 3rd birthday party. Of course, there were other birthday parties, too. Terry told the kids that she had to get rid of the photographs and that she had burned it already. Although in fact, it was still inside of the house. She examined the pictures one by one and each memory seemed to be flashing by

her eyes. She smiled at many of them but for the rest, she could not handle the pain and she broke down in tears. It would be understandable—the pain that Terry had to endure, to trigger such breakdown. It felt like hundreds of stabs on her chest when her mind flew into the day when she came home to the love of her life, laying naked in bed with another woman, with her own sister.



I showed up at Blaire's and I was nervous—it was obvious. I was not sure if I should knock, since my palms were sweating. I started to rub my fingers with my thumb, just like when making money sign. As my thumb pressed against my fingers, I could feel how much sweat there, judging from how slippery it was. At last, I told myself, mom would know if I was murdered here, so stop being a chicken. let's do it. I knocked three times and I could hear someone was coming. The door swung open and Blaire's head peeked out and she smiled, "Hey! Come in!" I stood still, failed at processing the time being. Noticing that I was not following her, Blaire came back out and pulled me by my wrist. We went to her room and the next thing I know was she began throwing different dresses at me, making me trying each one, asking me what I think about it, and another ten different questions; it was a peculiarly different experience, but I liked it.

I remembered my struggle coming here so, I braced myself to address the situation. I had to rub my fingers, again. My lips felt like falling down and at this point, I embraced the fact that I was so poor at speaking to other human beings except for Mom, George, and of course, Freddie. I might risk losing my only close friend but after taking a deep breath and sticking to the promise to stop being a chicken, I tapped her shoulder.

"I noticed you were acting a little bit different and rather aggressive to me the other day, is everything okay?" I asked ultra-carefully.

Her facial expression hastily changed. "Oh yeah... I was going to apologize for that. Maybe I was a little too mean to you... I didn't mean it," she said as she walked away, seeming uneasy.

"Is everything good? You know you can always tell me anything as I do, too. You could have told me if you like Seth. I promise, I don't have any feelings for him, at all."

"I was indeed jealous..." she paused for a while, "I was jealous of him."

“What do you mean by jealous of him?”

She blushed but did not say anything. I did blush, too. Eventually, she ended up not answering my question, but I guess I knew what was up. She just handed me the dress and gave me some jewelries to be paired with it. I decided to just go home as I did not want to make her feel more uncomfortable with my being there.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?” I said as I moved closer to her and I gave her the biggest and tightest hug. Her heart was beating rapidly and so was mine. We really did take our time, our surroundings. At last she said, “I’ll see you tomorrow. Good night.”

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I rushed to my room and I immediately looked for my journal. My chest could not help but wanting to explode. I should not scream or my neighbor would certainly call the cops on us, so I had to vent out whatever these things inside of me as I could feel they were tremendously banging on my stomach, quite persistently. I kept failing to comprehend what it was, even if I tried hard. I pulled out every drawer but it did not seem to be anywhere in sight. Frustrated, I took my pillow as I laid down my body and covered my face with it. I pressed it against my face, harder and harder each time. I got back up trying to recall where I put it the last time or any place I had not looked into and there was one place I had not checked—my wardrobe.

I slid the door open and I could easily see the upper side of my journal underneath my folded clothes; I sighed in relief. I squeaked and almost screamed but covered my mouth just in time, “There you are!” I pulled my journal out and at the very end back of the wardrobe, I could see a stack of papers peeking out—It was some sheet music and a picture of Beethoven. I hold the picture up and when I turned the back side, there was written, Museo de Beethoven, February 18, 2001. Derek Juliann Feryn. I smiled bitterly. I, then, continued going through the sheet music and among them were Für Elise, Toccata and Fugue in D minor, and Eine kleine Nachtmusik.

“It has been too long since the last time we met”, I sighed, “I may or may not have forgotten how to play these...” At that time, I was not confident about my remaining ability, but there is one thing I was confident about, Mom was not going to be happy with this. I sat myself down and started

thinking of how much I loved my mom and how much she hated my dad. I did hate him, too but to be completely fair, he was the one who brought me to these masterpieces; the one who taught me how to meld the perfect harmony consisting of music, feelings, emotions, and faith; the one who taught me how to play the piano in the first place. This felt like visiting an old friend, only the friend was also my first ex-boyfriend that I never officially broke up with; it was awkward but I knew I wanted it.

After some considerable amount of consideration, I rose from my bed and told myself, “There would be no harm on sitting down and practicing this out, right?”

I locked my door and turned down the volume on my keyboard, I wanted this moment to only belong to me and me only. So, I made it my own.

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After an hour and a half revisiting the old friend, Dakota came to a realization of how much she loved it. She knew well that her mom would not be fond of the idea, but she didn't have to know, she thought. It could just be her producing music without her knowing. It would not do any harm, she thought; In fact, it would heal, it would fill, it would help her deal with the longing. She thought that to properly gain and maintain sanity and felicity in one's life, one needs to practice and celebrate the beauty of forgiveness.

She went into her keyboard then placed and set up her phone to be facing her fingers. She hit the record button then put her fingers on the keys. She took a deep breath and after closing her eyes, her fingers pressed the keys and it stuttered a bit, she was nervous. She took another deep breath and she started over again and this time it went unbelievably working, Dakota's fingers were dancing thus creating some harmonious melodies. In her mind, she and her keyboard were being in an empty deck by a lake with only woods surrounding it. She wasn't sure where she was but the idea of being there really gave her a sense of sincere serenity. The sound of the wind blowing was really a music to her ears, and somehow the strange sensation she felt in that place was being depicted through the keys she had been pressing. “I can go for an eternity and never come back from here,” she thought. At that point, she did not know how long she had been composing and once she opened her eyes, it really had only been five minutes. It had been so long since she felt that kind of closure.

After she was done filming, she went to her laptop to edit the footage and it did not take her long. Once she was done making sure nobody could recognize the set up and done making some adjustments here and there, she was ready to upload it to YouTube. However, the only problem is that it was impossible to upload it under her real name or she might upset Terry for still messing with the music genre Derek once became a professor on, considering how hard Terry tried to erase every single thing about him in the household mentally and physically.

The brainstorming for a name that would seem fitting with her content began but it did not take her long to come up with a deserving name. “Wolfgang Amadeus 2.0, it is...” she said as spelling it out. She had become the girl with the biggest smile that day.

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“I might have lost my best friend... what if she refuses to talk to me anymore after this? Why would I be that stupid?” said Blaire walking back and forth in her room, regretting what she had said to Dakota. “What were you thinking Blaire Clement, you should have not let it slipped out like that! You should have let that be your very own secret!”

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The highly anticipated day finally had arrived and people were gathered up in the school ball. Many girls showed up, purposely wearing different colors to spice up the dance floor, their jewelries were twinkling when the disco light hit them, and the low-heels from their dancing shoes created that subtle ‘click’ and ‘clack’ sounds. The boys appeared to be wearing either suits or tuxedo and their shoes were all polished and shiny. The ball itself was full of colorful balloons and decoration ribbons arranged crosswise above the dance floor. The color blue and magenta beaming from the lamps seemed to dominate as it was the main actual dancer of the room.

Max and Blaire were inside waiting for Dakota. Blaire’s worry was visible as she thought Dakota might be offended and not willing to show up for what she had said the night before. Noticing the restlessness in Blaire, Max asked her, “You good? Also, where is Dakota? I hope she can be here fast because



they are starting in a little bit. Do you think I should call... Ah! There she is! Oh my god..." Blaire instantly turned her head to look and her jaw dropped instantly.

Dakota showed up wearing the blue dress that Blaire gave her and also the navy dancing shoes; she had her brunette long hair braided on the side, as the statement touch, she was wearing the red ruby stud earrings. All eyes were on her since they had never seen Dakota Feryn try hard enough with her outfits or makeup, but that night, she was the absolute show stealer. She then went to approach the girls but things were still awkward between Blaire and Dakota, and it was showing pretty well. Smelling something fishy, Max left the two to have some talk and said, "I'll get us drinks, okay?"

"Hey, what's up?" Dakota smiled as she tried to open the conversation because she knew that Blaire would not speak first. "Yea, hey... I'm great, what about you?" said Blaire without the audacity to look at Dakota's face. "Hey listen, I am okay and I don't mind. I care about you so you have to tell me what's up. Let's get some air?" Dakota signaled to sneak out of the ball. They sat down at the parking lot and Blaire was finally decided to risk it all by confessing to Dakota. "I hope you don't get weirded out but..." she paused and Dakota said, "but...?" Blaire closed her eyes and sped up her talk by three times, "but I like you, like more than friends, more than best friends. I like you". Dakota did not say anything and just smiled. Thinking that she might have freaked out her crush, Blaire was about to apologize until suddenly Dakota said, "I like you, too, I think, but..."

"But...?"

"But I had been thinking about it and I think I am not ready for any sort of romantic relationship right now, Blaire."

"So, you said that you like me too, but you don't want to be with me? Enlighten me..."

"There are so much that I care about in life that I can't have my life gravitating towards one thing only. So many dreams I want to achieve and so many things I have not learned. You are my best friend in the world and I don't want to lose you. For the record, I've always cared about you and I've always loved you and for exactly that reason, I'm not trying to possess you in any way. I will let you be free so that you can explore more of yourself. We are only so young, Blaire... Just be my company to the future journeys to come, and I'll be yours, too. You and me will grow better and bigger together, I promise."

Blaire kissed her on the cheek and hugged her, “Many people said that they love me, but their love was often becoming the reason for them to hurt me. The reason to change me to be what they want; They don’t let me grow in my own... I guess, that’s it, love means letting go for the better and letting it be the way it is”, she sighed, “Promise me, for many more adventures to come, you and me?” she said as she offered her pinky.

“Pinky promise.” and their pinkies were sealed.

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It had been a year since I started my YouTube channel and, in the meantime, Blaire was still the only person I trusted to be knowing about my secret channel. Aside from composing music and producing videos, I had been able to save up some money from the ad revenue that I put in my videos plus, I had the chance to try a summer job in a new donut shop in my community which both combined had contributed in filling up my piggy bank.

“I think I have enough for a new piano.” I told Blaire.

“Then go and get one, I’m sure people can’t wait to hear your music in a much better quality and they will be excited to see your channel grow anyway, at least that’s the impression that I’ve been getting from their comments.”, she said convincing me.

“You’re right... thanks a lot, I appreciate it...”, I smiled, “It means that we may have to drive to the city. You down?”

“Let’s go!”

Blaire drove us to the city since I had not had my driver license yet. It was a thirty minutes’ drive to Cleveland and we finally made it to one of the music stores there. My attention immediately went to one of the pianos that was being exhibited at the window display, it was polished marble white with a glossy finish to it, it has such petite legs but it seemed strong to support the body; I knew I wanted it. However, once we went in, there was nobody inside, although we could hear sounds from the back. I did not really think much of it so I pressed the bell, “Hopefully somebody will come out”. I waited for a bit before I went on and started looking into what they had in there. The store itself was rather spacious, with some special sections or areas for each type of instruments. Then I remembered about the white piano I saw earlier so, I went and looked for it. I spotted its elegance from distance right away and

I finally got my hands on it. Blaire was walking around in the guitar section when a middle-aged man eventually showed up and apologized to us, “I’m sorry... what can I help you with?” he said.

I could not believe who I was seeing and my eyes immediately started to flood. I ran to him, shouting, “DAD!” I hugged him, so tightly that myself was unable to breath for the fact that I was crying, too, and he hugged me back as tight. Without loosen it up, I confronted him, “Where have you been? Why don’t you come and visit me and George? You know you could always try to reach me, at least? Why did you go like that? Why? I fucking hate you!” I kept sobbing in his arms for at least the next ten minutes. Blaire excused herself to get us drinks, which was her way of giving us some space.

He was finally given the chance to explain himself and so he did, “Kid, no words would be enough to express my guilt and how much I am sorry for being the asshole that I was. My relationship with your mom just did not work and I know I had no excuse. But I want you to know that no matter what, you and George would always be the love of my life.”

“You know you messed up a lot, Dad.”

“I do, and I know that you don’t. Wolfgang Amadeus, right?” he put a big smile on his face.

I stuttered, “How... How do you know?”

“First of all, your videos blew up in the music community. Second of all, I bought that keyboard as your birthday present; did you expect me not knowing even the smallest details of it?”, he paused and as he looked outside the window, he continued, “I am so proud of you and I am your number one fan. Never missed one video”, he said as he put his arm around me and pulled me closer to him.

“Thanks, dad.”, I said, hugging him.

Then, I asked him my biggest question, “Why didn’t you try to see us? Because of mom?”

“I dragged her hearth to filth, I failed her. It is totally her right to hate me as much as she does and I deserve it but trust me, I have tried to get in touch with you and George. I sent letters, I made calls, I came to the house, but everything never went through.” he said.

There were moments of silence between us, which I enjoyed. I laid my head on his shoulders and I told him, “Dad, I may not be able to forgive what you had done to mom, me, and also George, and you have to understand that.

But you are still my dad, my first love, ever.”

I rose from his side and walked towards the white piano that I liked and I sat myself down and I gave the piano one more glance before I looked back at my dad,

“Here is to my first love, our secret song...”

I've said I loved the sea.  
Even the perfect swirl of the waves;  
It breaks as it hits my little toes  
Even the brave sun above the sea line;  
It sets as I let the time goes  
I've said I loved the sea.  
Even the chirpy shorebirds;  
It flies afar as I ran right through  
Even the hue of the water;  
It envies me as I've never become this blue.

The End



# Analure

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by R.B. Danang Putra Wijaya Kusuma

Cold morning spring breeze with the scent of baked eggs awaken Greta from her sleep earlier than her usual sleep portion in the morning. This time, she could hear her mother wake her up loudly from the other room. She put her clothes on quickly, afraid that she would make her mother angry. She put her underwear on and buttoned her dress as she bolted out from her bedroom and put herself on the dining table in front of her mother and her father. This time, her mother prepared *frittata* for her family, one of her favourite food. Those cooked eggs scent always stole her attention aside from anything else.

“Before you eat, Greta, poke that fire first and get us some warm milk.”

“Yes, father.” as she gets up from her seat.

She poked the fire in the fireplace near the dining room so that they would not eat their breakfast in the cold morning air then picked up the milk her mother boiled for them. She could not stand the heat of the kettle and runs towards the table where they had their breakfast. She pours the milk carefully into the chalices that their family would usually use. Her father leads the prayer before they started feasting on their *frittata*. Her father finished his breakfast earlier and parted with his family to go to work and told his wife to keep Greta rather than to take care of her. Her father left her a pin because she obeyed what the father told her to do. She watched as her father left the house and finishes her breakfast with her mother and finally picked all the dirty dishes and put them in the dishwasher in the kitchen. While she was cleaning the dishes, her mother told her to do the chores, as usual, and to clean every bit of the house. She got a bit of time to rest and used it very well

before getting taught by her mother in the afternoon.

“You see that box over there, girl? It’s called car.” As she points towards the refrigerator. “You can write it C-A-R.”

“I understand, mother. It’s a car.” She replied, and the time passed.

She could not hold back her curiosity after days had past when she saw a cat passed by their garden and decided to run towards her parents to ask them about that. Her father boiled, and always got angry when she started to get curious about something. The mother calmed him down and started explaining to her about the cat she found passing by the garden. Her mother told Greta that cats are their family greatest enemy which killed their great grandparents on their way back home. She understood and accepted the fact that a cat is a murderer, a monster, an enemy. The father yelled out loud at her and threatened her to lock her up for days in her room if she started to be curious about things and wanted to learn something new without their parents’ consent. She apologized and went to her room to read some books that her parents gave her. Before she went into her bedroom, she was given a pin by her mother since she apologizes to them. The book’s cover was both sides torn but, in the top-right corner of the page, it was written *Perla* which meant her name in Italian, where she always noticed that the word was written by his father. Her eyes got very tired after she finished a few pages with words in the lines replaced by their parents, and finally she could not remember how she fell asleep.

Greta found herself awake in the middle of the night feeling hungry and cold. She picked her sweater from her drawer and wanted to go outside the bedroom to get something to eat without thinking what her parents would be like when she disobeyed them. She remembered as she held the doorknob that one day she was beaten up by her father and thrown into the pool because she picked a bread from the refrigerator and dropped a spoon that woke him up. Blamed for stealing food and disobeyed their parents she was punished for. Her feet started to tremble and returned herself to bed and covered herself up with a blanket, trying so hard to put herself back to sleep. She spent hours before she was desperate to put herself to sleep and decided to hit her own head very hard to the wall and passed out lying down on the floor. Because she knew, if her parents found her awake in the middle of the night, something terrible was going to happen to her.

Days later, with a bruise still left on her left forehead, she was told to clean the garden. While cleaning the garden, her mother told her to take a rest

for a bit and to put herself in the swimming pool. While she was calmly afloat on the surface of the swimming pool, she could hear a cat's meow from the gate near the way to the outside.

"Mother, what is that? Help me!" she cried, but her mother is nowhere to be found around the garden.

Greta decided to get off the swimming pool and picked anything that she could use to protect herself, but the cat kept coming closer and closer slowly. She stumbled her hand on a big grass-cutter near the shack on the corner of the garden.

"Don't come any closer, you monster! Or I'll kill you, *merda* !" while holding the cutter on her hands.

The cat ran towards her and Greta stabbed the cat as it curled on her legs and cut its head and stabbed it again and again. She felt accomplished by killing a cat and ran inside the house after throwing the cutter to the pool with blood on her legs and hands. She told her mother what happened outside with the cat's blood still dripping from her hands. The mother decided to clean her up in the bathroom and gave her three pins for killing the cat. One for killing it, one for avenging her great grandparents, and one for keeping the family safe. While cleaning herself, she could hear her mother talking to someone from inside the telephone in which she did not understand what that device was and grew curious about it.

One day, her parents were away and she was told to keep the house safe from anything. She was still curious about the device inside her parents' bedroom where they talked to the human inside the device and she decided to try it, turning the numbers randomly. She could hear another human talking from inside the device and closed the telephone right away to get out of her parents' room and waited for them to come back home. She could hear the gate opened and bolt towards the car her parents use from the outside. She wanted to ask something to their parents about the telephone inside their room and decided to ask them when they were back inside.

"Mother, father, what is the box in your room with human inside of it?" She asked.

"*Sei una piccola puttarella!* Who told you to get inside my room and touch everything!?" Said his father.

Her father started beating her up very severely without stopping even once. Greta cried of hurt very loudly while her father was still beating her up



with various things onto her feet, her hands, her body, and her head. He left her bruises all across her body and threw her inside her room forcefully and locked her inside her room.

“Next time you get inside our room without us knowing it, there will be more consequences, *piccola scopata!*” her father said and slammed the door to lock it from the outside.

One hot summer day, she woke up from her sleep with pain of the bruises her father gave her days ago before season’s change. She was afraid to get out of her room to see her parents, but she was more afraid to be punished if she disobeyed her parents. She finished her breakfast quickly and asked her mother if she could get more food since she was very hungry. It was fortunate for her that her mother accepted her wish and gave her more food. After she finished her breakfast, as usual, she got taught by her mother something new that she had not understand yet. She went to the swimming pool after she was done studying in the evening. She laid on top of the waters and on thing caught her attention up on the sky. A plane was passing above her house and she could see it. Before she could turn her body around to get ready to chase it, her father threw a toy plane somewhere on the garden.

“Greta, go pick that plane up somewhere from there!” as he points to the gate.

“I’ll go get it, father!” as she ran towards the gate.

She found the toy plane near the gate and ran back to his father. His father told her that the plane that was flying was a toy thrown from the outside world and she could keep it so that it would not escape.

One night in the dining room, they were having their dinner together peacefully. Everyone was quiet, only the sound of the cutlery every human could hear that night. Greta broke the tranquil atmosphere with a statement.

“Father, I want to know and see how is the outside world looks like and feels like.”

“Stop talking and finish your dinner, mother has made it best for you.” He answered.

“But father, I never knew about the outside, but you do!” She replied.

“Take me outside now!” while gripping her fork harder.

Her father started to boil as she kept talking about seeing the outside. He stood up and threw her a chalice full of water, it hits her head. Greta had no choice other than being quiet. Her mother sighed and carefully explained to

her how and what the outside world beyond the gate looked like.

“Girl, *tesoro*, you won’t like to go to the outside, there are a lot of monsters, killers, and any other evil being, that’s why your father always use the protector to get to the outside world, he looks for those evil to kill them so that they won’t hurt us.” She said

“But mother, what if there is any other human like us out there?” She asked.

“*Silenzio!*” Her father yelled at her out loud.

“Finish your dinner and go to your room, or else!”

Greta silenced herself and finished the dinner her mother had prepared for her. She went to her room with disappointment in her mind and her heart. The next day, she had done nothing what her parents considered wrong. She was calm that day, and being helpful to her mother almost all day. She learned a lot of new things from what her mother taught her and mowed the grass in the garden tidily. Her father liked her attitude a lot that day and decided to prize her a pin for her to keep.

One night, Greta could hear her father talking through the telephone. She heard something about someone his father would like to be visited and something about money. Her father called her to come to wait with her parents in the living room. Had no idea what was happening and would happen, she remained calm throughout the time. One man came inside the house, he greeted her father and mother friendly and asked about Greta. Her father and mother chatted with laughs and sometimes being serious. Greta could accept the fact that the man was friendly and was her father’s friend. In the middle of the night, the man cut his conversation with Greta’s family and handed her father a bold stack of *liras*.

“There’s the room, *amico*. She’s all yours, but remember safety!” His father said.

The man escorted Greta towards the room her father had prepared for his friend. Greta was very confused at that time; she could not understand what was happening at that time. She had no idea what happened and would happen to her. The man sat her on the bed as he unbuttoned his shirt and opened any fabrics that he wore. The man started touching Greta everywhere and started to kiss every inch of her body. Only one feeling she could feel at that time; she was very afraid of that man in a blink of an eye. She tried to fight but she could not. Once, she slapped the man. The man had gotten angry and

forcefully inserted a pill into her mouth. She could not move, and everything were blurred, very unclear.

The next morning, her parents entered the room and told her that she was a good girl. They gave her lots of pins, a toy plane, and a special doll for her. Greta spent the rest of the summer being depressed, stressed, and she was full of hate, anger, sorrow, and fear almost all the time. She could not understand her own feelings and what was in her mind after she got used by the man. She remembered, and always would.

The trees turned yellow and leaves were falling away from them as Greta watched it from inside the window near the garden. She kept wondering about the outside world and thinking about asking her mother about the outside. She was very afraid to ask her such question, but her father was not around and his protector was also not in the garage at that time. She took all the courage she had to ask her mother about the outside. This time, her mother decided to explain how to be in the outside world.

“You see my left ring finger, *tesoro*? When you grew old, your ring finger will be like this, and that is when you will be able to go outside the gate. Safely.” Her mother said while holding her left hand upwards.

Greta did not know what actually happened to her mother’s ring finger. Her ring finger was broken and snapped while she was driving a car and had an accident, it needed to be amputated. Greta did not know that her mother was lying so she believed it. Greta kept looking at her ring finger and waiting for it to disappear from day to day. Her waiting made her feel worried each day, afraid that her ring finger would not disappear by itself. One day, she decided to get rid of her ring finger by herself. Any ways that could made her ring finger disappear or released from her hand. Without her parents knowing what she was doing, she kept doing that every time she had the chance to make her ring finger disappear. Hurting it, hitting it, cutting it slowly, squeezing it between the door and the frame everything that she could do, she did it. Days and weeks, without her parents knowing what was she doing, she kept doing that.

One evening, she was swimming in the pool and playing with the leaves on the water that fell from the trees. She kept her left hand untouched by the water and lift it up aligned with her head. Her mother grew suspicious about why she always lifted her left hand in the swimming pool. She came up to Greta and pulled her out of the pool. Looking at her left ring finger, she got

angry.

“What are you doing with your ring finger? Are you trying to get out of the house? What is in your mind, girl?” Her mother said.

“No, mother, I accidentally squeezed it with the door.” She replied.

“*Bugiardo!* I knew what’s in the head of yours, girl! What is your father going to think about this!?” Her mother cut her talks.

Her mother slapped her face hard enough that it made her fell to the ground and pulled her back up to push her towards her room. She was locked inside her room for the rest of the day and was not fed by her mother. All pins, toys, and dolls were taken by her mother for showing how disobedient she was towards her parents.

Snow fell outside her room one night and she could see it from her window. Her desire of going to the outside grew more rather than leaving it behind after she got punished by her mother of what she was doing. She still believed that her finger had to be off of her body in order to get to the outside world. She looked for a knife or scissors to cut her ring finger off her left hand but she could not find them. Instead, she decided to put it between the dresser. She bit a book with the text “*Perla*” on the first torn page to muffle her screams. Greta pushed the dresser very fast that she could not feel her ring finger anymore. The blood flows from where the ring finger should be, and she covered it with a duct tape she took from the garden earlier. She kept waiting until her parents are asleep and went carefully towards the garage to put herself in her father’s protector trunk. Greta kept waiting until her father’s protector was ignited. She kept waiting, but what she could see was only darkness. It kept being dark, always dark.

The next morning, her father rushed to the garage afraid that he would late for work and drove the car away from the house. While her mother, kept calling Greta to eat her breakfast. She got no response from Greta at all. Decided to kick the door open, she found that the door was unlocked and only found that there was only her finger below the bed. Greta was not there; she was not there.



# A Tale of Spring and Summer

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by *Kenia Ridani T.*

The summer breeze danced through the trees, causing somniferous music of rustling leaves. It was almost mid-day when Eria finished arranging the hydrangeas. The pale blue clusters proudly looked up from wrappings of white silky paper and thin fabric, bound with a pale-blue ribbon as a finish. The green stalks that poked through the bottom of the bouquet had been trimmed neatly. Eria handed them over to a gentleman in a mismatched suit who waited eagerly at the counter.

“Thank you!” he said excitedly as he searched his pocket for some money. “She likes these ‘hee-drang-ees’ so much! I’m sure she’ll accept my proposal!”

Eria laughed a bit and received the man’s money. “Good luck, then,” she said, putting the money into a small wooden box below the counter. The man swiftly headed for the door.

“Oh, and, it’s pronounced ‘hy-drayn-juh’, by the way,” Eria added. But the man already closed the door behind him. Eria sighed, rather with pity for the man than disappointment of being left unheard.

As usual, when there were no customers, she would sit on the tall stool a bit further behind the counter. She fiddled with the silver bracelet on her left hand—something she always did when she got bored or nervous—and for the thousandth time observed her own flower shop.

It was not a big shop, only about six meters long and four meters wide. Half of the shop which was close to the front door was for all the bundles which only awaited to be wrapped in pretty papers and ribbons. The smaller bundles were displayed on tables, and the bigger ones in baskets on the floor. The only object not so flowery was the two stools placed near the

door for customers to sit in waiting. The wall of the shop facing the streets was but a wide glass window where the most popular flower combinations of the week were displayed behind it. Some were made into grand bundles, and some were rather meek. This week it was the sunflowers with baby's-breaths and pale-purple asters. From outside, one could see "WISTERIA'S" written on the large window.

The other half of the room belonged to Eria's workspace. There was the long counter table, which was also an unofficial borderline between the customer's space and hers. Beside the counter was the arranging table with a cupboard full of papers and fabric below it. There was a clear area on the middle of the table, and around it all different kinds of scissors and ribbons were neatly arranged. There was a door beside the table, leading to a small porch which opened up to a greenhouse behind the shop. Meanwhile, beside the door and conjoining the back wall were two levels of long racks. On each level there were buckets filled with flowers grouped by their color and kind. Almost half of them were roses of different hues. "Such an overrated flower," Eria once thought.

The doorbell chimed, catching Eria's attention. There was nobody at the door, except the gust of wind playing with the brass bells hanging over the shop's door. Across the street a young girl with pigtails and red ribbons skipped happily on the street with some other lively boys. They were all covered in the same dust and dirt, playing the same game with sticks as swords and "magic" pebbles. They shouted and struck their sticks around and got yelled at and ran everywhere. Eria thought about the girl. Even in a summer dress, the boyish little girl looked pretty. Maybe it was something more than her looks. Maybe it was the way she was totally ignorant of everything she should be. The girl knew nothing, cared for nothing.

The doorbell chimed again. But this time it failed to catch Eria's attention.

"Eria? Miss Wisteria?" a tender voice called.

"Yes!" Eria snapped out of it. Already walking halfway to the counter was an old lady in black dress and white apron. "Oh, pardon me, Miss Gibbson. It's just..."

"Oh, I totally understand, Dear," the lady interrupted. "The summer breeze does like us to get carried away in thoughts."

"I've prepared the usual," Eria said, hurriedly reaching somewhere under the counter. She took a bundle of white roses and purple agapanthus

that was standing in a bucket of water. In small and swift movements, she cut away any excess stalk and imperfect leaves. The bundle of flowers was already arranged and tied with a simple string, so all she had to do was wrap it in the brown paper. In less than two minutes the bouquet was done.

“Here you go, Miss,” Eria said, handing out the bouquet. “Should last for three days.”

“Swift and sharp as usual!” the old lady laughed. “Oh, Eria. Have you heard of the travelling caravans?” Miss Gibbson asked her while opening her purse.

“No, I don’t think so,” she said.

“Yes! There were a group of them, assembling near the prairie East of town. Such a sight! So colorful, and, and the people wore lovely satin clothes! They just arrived yesterday. I bet they will set up a performance any day soon, now!”

“Oh, really?” Eria commented rather plainly. She tried to smile, but one could see she was not particularly interested in the topic. She received the money and put it in the wooden box.

“Well, you should go see it if you have time,” Miss Gibbson smiled. “Bye now, Dear.”

After Miss Gibbson left the shop, it was a lazy day. For the rest of the day she only checked on the displays, arranged her scissors, counted her earnings, and stared out the large window. When sunset came she packed some of the displayed bundles, locked the back and front door, and walked home to her small cottage by herself. She was used to a lazy day, though. It was a small village, anyway. Most people who needed flowers there were only those who worked at the church, those in pursue of a girl, or those whose family just died.

Eria had been a florist for two-and-a-half years now. And every day was similar to this one. It was only the flowers that changed by the seasons. In winter she would go back to her mother’s place and spend her time reading and sewing through the bleak white days. She was glad to do this job, though. For if not, she would be at home, reading and sewing through the days all year round.

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The next morning, the flower shop was rather busy. Eria had customers come and go with quite some demands for the sunflower bouquet. It was not until noon that she could have a cup of tea for herself. She had rested for about half-an-hour before a man entered the shop. At first look the man was just another man. His skin was quite sunburnt. He was tall and slender and his wavy light-brown hair was cut short and gave it a curly impression. He had very thin sideburns and a goatee, lined with silver strands of hair. Eria thought he was in his late thirties, though he may be older than that.

What was slightly foreign, or odd, about the man was his garments. The man wore a baggy long-sleeved yellow shirt which was tucked into his leather belt and leather gloves. He also wore silky-looking trousers and a small golden earring on his left ear. His laced boots were almost up to his knees, and hanging from his waist was a ragged looking money-purse with intricate beaded patterns. All of it was nothing local!

“Can I help you?” Eria asked with a flat calm voice as she had asked every customer she met. The man walked to the counter, but with his sight thrown here and there around the shop.

“You arranged all these flowers?” he asked when he arrived at the counter.

“Yes...” Eria said. She started fiddling with her bracelet. “Any of it interests you, Sir?”

The man paused a while and smiled. “Of course! They are all splendid! I’ll have one of those sunflower and aster bouquets—the small one—and a rose bouquet, twelve stems, any color you like.”

Eria looked around to plan the man’s order. “Alright, Sir. Please wait a moment. You can sit by the door there if...”

“Oh, I’m actually interested in seeing how you arrange them, so I’ll be watching from here. If you don’t mind, of course.”

Eria paused for a while. “Of course, no problem.”

It was not uncommon for some customers to see the arranging process, and Eria was not really bothered by the man’s request. She set to work as usual. She first started with the sunflower bouquet. She took the flowers needed from the rows of buckets: one big yellow sunflower, three clumps of baby’s-breath, seven small stems of pale-purple aster. Then she approached the arranging table and did her usual sharp and swift trimming of the flowers. While Eria worked, the foreign man spoke to her casually.

“So, you are Miss Wisteria?” he first asked.

“Yes. Though most just call me Eria,” she answered while snipping away imperfect stalks.

“Interesting. You were named after that hanging flower plant that blooms in spring?”

“Yes, actually. Mother says so,” Eria said, a bit distracted. “It was my father’s idea,” she said while involuntarily slowing down. She then wrapped the bouquet in an ochre-colored silky paper.

“Huh...” The man nodded in interest. “Most just call me ‘Red’, by the way.”

“Red?”

“Yep.”

“Huh...” Eria had just finished the sunflower bouquet and laid it on the counter. She took a second to look at the man’s overalls. Not a spot on him was red or even reddish. “So, what’s ‘red’ about you, Sir?”

“Oh, you ask them people, Lass,” he chuckled. “Some say my name’s just too mouthful.”

Eria proceeded to the rose bouquet, which design she had decided. There were six hues of roses in the buckets behind the counter. She took two stems from each hue and arranged them accordingly: dark-red, light-red, deep-yellow, white, light-pink, and dusty-pink. She went back to the table and set to work. There were a few seconds of uncomfortable silence, so Eria decided to carry on with the small talk.

“So, I guess you’re not from around here?”

“No,” Red said. “I’m with the caravan folk. Just arrived yesterday.”

“So I heard,” Eria said.

“Aaah, then you should come tomorrow evening! We’re having music and magic tricks!”

“You play music?” Eria asked, avoiding the topic of having to come to such events.

“Oh, no-no-no. If I am to hold a lyre in my hand, the world will be on fire.”

Eria chuckled, “You’re exaggerating, Mr. Red.”

“Don’t make me come here with a lyre, Lass,” he warned.

Eria had finished tying up the rose bouquet with a white silk ribbon.

She gave all the bouquet to Red and he paid for them. Red examined the bouquets for a bit. “Well, you have an interesting way of arranging these beauties,” he commented. “It’s...very structured.”

“Thank you,” Eria said plainly.

“See you, Miss Wisteria,” Red said, walking to the door. Before closing the door he added, “Oh, and just call me ‘Red’, you know, without the ‘mister’ thing?”

“Oh...umm, okay,” Eria said hesitantly.

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“Good morning, Miss Wisteria!” Red said rather dramatically while entering the shop the following morning. Eria was spraying the flowers on display that morning and was quite surprised by Red’s sudden appearance.

“Oh, good day, miste...good day, Red,” Eria had almost forgotten Red’s remark the day before. “Back so soon? Is there a problem with yesterday’s flowers?”

“None at all! In fact, the ladies of our humble crowd loved your flowers!”

“Well, thank you,” Eria said hesitantly. Almost unconsciously she clutched her bracelet in nervousness.

“The ladies were wondering if you can make us something more... exotic. Or bright! We would love to have it accompany our performance today.”

Eria mumbled, then tapped her foot on the floor. She was still fiddling with her bracelet.

“Okay, I do have something in mind. But it would take some time and cost a bit more.”

“Break a leg, Lass.”

Eria reached into her pocket and took a small ring of keys from it. She walked to the door leading to the backyard and unlocked it. Before entering she paused for a second. “Actually, can you help me with something?” she asked Red.

“Surely!” Red said enthusiastically.

They entered the backyard and for the first time Red saw what was in there. The small backyard was shaded with semi-transparent glass and the

sides barred with wooden fence. Rows of potted plants stood neatly, each of them tagged with what was plated there. Roses, hydrangeas, different kinds of lilies, freesias and irises. Most of them were not at the front display. The smell in there was rather refreshing.

“There’s some glass jars near the freesias. Pick one you like and just put it on the arranging table,” Eria said. Meanwhile she took a gardening scissor and was busy looking for a particular flower. Red picked a simple jar with slightly smaller neck than the body. He put the jar on the table and went back to the backyard. Eria was walking around with a bucket.

“You don’t happen to have some wild flowers, do you?” Red asked casually.

“Uh, no. What kind of wildflowers do you mean?”

“I don’t know. African daisies, maybe? Or corn flower?”

“No. Wildflowers are quite...well, wild. Hard to control for me,” she said while leaning over a big pot. “They are easy to grow, yes. But take an eye off for a day and they’re everywhere. And they need a lot of adjustments when being arranged.”

“Well, they are beautiful in their own way, though.”

Eria did not respond. When she turned around and stood, her bucket was full of bright red amaryllises and spotted orange Peruvian lilies. One would say they were blazingly beautiful. Even Red was put on an amazed expression.

“So, what flowers do you like?” asked Red while Eria walked back to the shop. She was silent for a moment. She put the bucket on the floor near the table and sat on the chair.

“I...don’t really like flowers as they are.”

There was another silence, but Red broke it. “But, you are a florist,” he said.

“Yes, as long as I can shape them to my desire and my client’s desire, they are fine,” she said in a low voice. “I just don’t really like them when they grow messily. And, sometimes I envy their kind of freedom.”

Red was about to speak but Eria spoke first, “Now, this will require some more concentration so...be quiet for a bit, Red,” she chuckled uneasily and set to work.

Red let out an inaudible sigh and pulled up a chair to sit near the counter. He observed as Eria tweaked and bent some vines, trimmed the stems

and leaves, and set the flowers upright. She then picked some silk ribbons to tie some bows on the stems and the jar. Five minutes had passed until Eria spoke again.

“It’s almost done.”

Red hesitated, then asked, “What was your life like before becoming a florist?”

Eria paused for a moment.

“I’m sorry if…” Red immediately regretted his question.

“No, no. It’s okay,” Eria interrupted. “It’s just, I never really thought about it.” She paused. “Well, I was from a quite decent family actually. A family line of butlers and governesses. I could’ve stayed home and be a governess, too, one day. My mother was a governess! But I don’t remember my father. I think he left when I was two.”

“So sorry to hear,” Red said.

“There’s no need to be. I’m not really sad about it though I often wonder what he is like. I only knew he was named after a sort of flower, too,” Eria smiled. “Anyway, knowing my family’s history, you might wonder why I choose this life. Well, long story short, I made a mistake on my seventeenth birthday. I was kind of grounded, and here I am two-and-a-half years later.”

Eria took a deep sigh. She put the magnificent bouquet on the counter.

“Still doesn’t answer why you’re here, though,” Red said. “May I know what was the mistake?”

“Well, mother and grandfather told me that on my seventeenth birthday I might wear whatever I liked and be whatever I wanted to be. So I wore this silly blacksmith-maiden dress and told them I wanted to go to the smith workshop and learn to be a silver-smith! And I was serious, too! I was grounded then.”

“For expressing your true self?”

“It’s not my true self. I was just silly back then. I knew my life was tied to my family and I could only act in their approval. I was just stupid enough to try something out of the line,” she sighed. “Well, at least they let me stay in this small and pretty countryside and do…this. Maybe the flower thing is from my father’s side of the family?” she tried to laugh.

Red stood up slowly and looked at Eria with a sort of sympathy and sadness. Eria felt awkward and thought of something to say.

“Oh, you’ll need a box for this,” she said, reaching under the counter.

She packed the bouquet and traded it with Red's money.

"Walk in the shade to make it last longer. Should last two nights."

"Thanks a lot, Lass," Red smiled. "Sure you don't want to come, tonight?"

"I don't know, Red. I..."

"It's okay, Lass!" Red said almost shouted. "There's a performance fee, anyway. Capitalist gypsies, you know?" he whispered mischievously before leaving.

That night while Eria cooked dinner for herself in her small cottage, she thought about her conversation with Red. She realized she just told quite a lot of things to a person she had only met. She even said some things she had never said to her family. How strange life is, that talking to strangers is sometimes easier than talking to those you share blood with.

Then Eria tried to guess Red's life among the band of gypsies. What did it feel like to be with unique talented people? To meet new faces in every journey? To see sceneries from all corners of the land? What did it feel like, to be free? But Eria buried those thoughts. For, last time, hope of freedom only brought her disappointment.

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Eria sat on the counter, fiddling restlessly on her silver bracelet. It was past mid-day and Red hadn't come to visit. Eria was a bit frustrated for reasons she did not know. "It was a hot summer day, though," she thought. And everyone got grumpy in the heat. Although she did admit in her heart that she missed talking with Red. He was so easy to talk to in a way, and he was humorous. Disappointingly, that day ended without Red showing up at all.

It was almost sunset, and Eria closed her shop earlier than usual. She had all kind of thoughts of what happened and what she should do. Was he exhausted of the performance last night? Had the caravan left? It was true that gypsy caravans never stayed too long. Should she go check the caravan? But if they had left, then going there would only end in vain! Will she ever meet Red again?

Eria strode home slowly. She rarely left at this hour and had only now noticed the beauty of the countryside at sundown. The skies were dyed in

hues of lilac, gold and streaks of red. Golden rays of the setting sun gilded the cobblestone pathway. Eria looked on the vast stretch of grass on the Western prairie, which was dotted with various bushes and wildflowers. Among them were tall weed-like plants with red crowns of flowers. “Pigweeds,” she remembered the villagers called it. She remembered that it only grew in summer, and that you could eat it as vegetables. She also remembered it had another name, more beautiful, and something very innately familiar to her.

“It was...” she mumbled.

“Good evening, Eria!” called a voice from across the street.

“Good evening!” Eria reflexively said while turning around. It was Miss Gibbson, no doubt heading for the church.

“Lovely skies today!” she said happily.

Eria only smiled and nodded. She had forgotten what she was thinking about and she was too tired to remember it. So she continued to walk home—this time in a slightly faster pace.

Eria did not sleep well that night. She slept on and off on intervals of two hours and was getting more tired by the hour. The air was admittedly quite cold that night, but that was not the main problem. She was tired, and usually she would sleep right of the bat even in the cold. However, this thought she had since that afternoon was not letting her sleep. She sat upright and thought hard. Eria remembered what was she thinking about. She was thinking of the pigweeds. But what of it?

It was still dark but Eria could tell, now, that it was about an hour away from sunrise. “I may as well get up,” she said to herself.

And so Eria ate a bit of bread and milk, got ready, and walked to the flower shop. The roads were tranquil that morning. Eria passed the prairie where she saw the pigweeds. She looked at them for a moment and continued walking. Now she remembered something else. She was thinking of the other name of the plant. What was it, again? She had it at the tip of her tongue before Miss Gibbson greeted her yesterday.

Eria did not realize she was in front of her shop already. She snapped out of it when she saw something placed in front of the door. It was a small bouquet placed inside the box she gave Red to carry the exotic lilies.

Eria took it and examined the bouquet. There was a small tag tied around the flowers. At one side it was written: “Be free, my child.” And on the other side “—Red”. It was not a very neat bundle and Eria thought it must be

some sort of goodbye-bouquet. But then Eria's heart almost stopped when she recognized the plants used in the bouquet. There were wild daisies and some stems of marigold. Summer wildflowers! But more surprisingly, dominating the bouquet, were the same red flowering weeds that grew on the prairie. That instant Eria remembered the flowering weed's name.

"Amaranthus..." she whispered.

Then she almost abruptly sat down. As the sun started to rise, Eria tried to take in all the information rushing in her head. It was all starting to connect and make sense. "*Most just call me 'Red'... Some say my name's just too mouthful... Be free, my child.*" His words went round-and-round in her head. A long lost memory blooms into Eria's mind.

"Amaranthus..." she said again slowly. "That's...my father's name."





# Kala

*by Kesia Ruth Peneduh Sukma*

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“Here is your drink,” said the waiter while serving a cup of black coffee.

”Thank you,” said the girl.

The girl looked gloomy. She sat alone in the far corner of one of the coffee shops in Jakarta. She seemed so busy with her laptop while occasionally staring out at the window and sipped her coffee. From the reflection in the window, it was seen that she was staring at her family pictures. Suddenly, her phone rang. Her soft voice spoke to her interlocutor.

“This was an end of everything.”

“My end.”

After she got off the phone, she put all her stuffs in her plastic bag and hurried away. Her face puckered and eyes filled with tears. Evaporated into the gloomy atmosphere.

## 3 Years Later

She was laying on her bed while looking at her acceptance to New York University. She was not sure of her decision to go there. New York was her dream to continue her study. However, after her parents divorced New York had not become her main destination for college but a place to escape from her parents who had already broke her heart.

“When this game, called life, will be over? I need time out.” She said softly while dropping the letter to the floor. And she sobbed herself to sleep.

In the next morning, she dialed her sister’s number. Her sister did not picked up. She kept dialing her sister’s phone. Then her sister picked up the

call. She told her that she was going to New York this morning, but her sister just denying her. Her soft voice trembled with tears.

“You do not have to act so rude.”

“You do not have to offend my feelings.”

After hundred seconds in silence, her sister spoke.

“I may act rude as hell, but it was only the way I talk.”

“I never meant it.”

“If you ever get offended, my apologies.”

And her sister hung up the phone.

Three years ago, her sister left without trace. Like really gone. Her sister said she was just paying the taxi downstairs, but she was not coming back.

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Then, she left the house and took a cab to the airport. She entered the waiting room with her favorite Starbucks Ristretto Bianco in her black tumbler. And she was reading *Quiet* by Susan Cain while waiting for boarding time. The crew announced the boarding time, but she still did not move.

”This is the final boarding call for passenger Kala Wijaya booked on flight 123A to New York City. Please proceed to gate 1 immediately. The final checks are being completed and the captain will order for the doors of the aircraft to close in approximately five minutes time. I repeat. This is the final boarding call for Kala Wijaya. Thank you.”

And the final boarding call accompanied her to the plane.

## **New York City, 2018**

New York was very strange for her. How she was looking at her surrounding but they did not even set a glance at her. They kept doing what they were doing. Reading newspaper, feeding their pet, or playing with their kids. Everyone was busy with themselves, no one cared about people around them. And so, did she. She did not care about other people’s problems and did not want to know about their live.

She never went to nightclub or pub. She just went out for school or

groceries shopping, because she was afraid to make new friends. She spent most of her time in her apartment by reading novel, blogging, and staring the bustle and happiness of people behind the window. She saw many young people like her who went out at night with their friends or lovers. They kissed, laughed, and hug on the road. She knew nothing about love but desire to be loved. She did not sure of her ability to love anymore. She couldn't trust. She couldn't love. She only loved her own everyday companion, Bibo, her white Pomeranian dog.

She was the girl who loved the sky. Her apartment had a very large window, floor to ceiling window with Manhattan view. And she had roof windows in kitchen to create a bright and airy space. She loved to have a home theater in her apartment with her one and only LG Sinha beam 4K laser projector. She placed the projector in front of her bed and plug it into her MacBook. And killed the time by watching thousands classic movies. Her apartment was her shell. Just like a clam, she had been trying to protect herself from her surroundings with the shell.

## **A Year Later**

She was just one of those girls who took a morning train to downtown. Every morning, she sat in the corner with a glass of coffee in her black tumbler and a piece of eggs avocado toast. She always avoiding interaction with other passenger by reading novel or listening to music while sleeping.

He was just one of those guys who took a morning train to downtown. He was a 22 year-old photographer and film maker. He was one half of Gallery Caesar, a successful YouTube channel and blog that had over three million subscribers. Through the success of his blog, he had focused on raising awareness around climate change and mental health. He could not let a day wasted without vlogging. Like he never got bored of silently watching that brown eyes.

It was a busy morning train. And when he entered the train, he saw her right away. She was reading a book, it was Haruki Murakami's 'Norwegian Wood.' Under the circumstance, they sat beside each other that day.

"Are you a model?" he asked her, but no answer.

"Are you a model?" he repeated.

"No, I am Kala." She answered without raising her eyes.

“I am Jo.” He said.

Twenty minutes had gone, and the train stopped at its last destination. They went out without any words. Every day, Jo always tried to understand Kala to make her accept him as a friend. He wanted to see Kala smile, laugh, and cheerful. He wanted Kala to tell her story to him. He wanted to help her. And after hundred days of talk and laughter in the morning train, she finally said ‘hi’ to him.

She started telling him her story, feeling, and dreams. She felt comfortable when she was with him. Only him, not everyone.

“Come on Kala. We have given the same life and received the same love. You have to learn to treat other people equally. Not judging them by their faces, words, and doings.” He said.

“That is God’s role to play. And I will not be playing God’s role.” She answered and leave him alone.

## **Asia, 2019**

After thirty cups of coffee they shared, she agreed to come with him to Asia. Jo had a job to make a report about some green buildings in Asia. And he wanted Kala to accompany him during summer break to go to Asia. They went to *The Humble Houses of Kyoto*, *The Great Greenhouses of Singapore*, and *The Bamboo School of Bali*. She met many different people from different culture and social background. And she knew that she could love others. She was no heartless. She learnt to respect others. She loved kids. She followed Jo to his humble life and becoming one of those peripatetic. For her, it was like seeing the world from outer space. It was like her floating there looking at the earth and be amazed every time she observed each of every little edge.

Their last destination was Bali, Indonesia. It hit her like a hurricane when they landed in Indonesia, but she persisted. She kept going forward. Though it was hard, but she managed to step her foot into new chapter. She explored. She learnt. And her gratitude went to Jo who never failed to amaze her. He knew her best.

“You know, the summer I just really tried to live in a moment and there were so many memories made. So many exciting things that I will never forget. Thank you for bring me there.” She said.

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After dozen times of traveling together, she started vlogging. She liked photography. She loved editing videos. And everyone loved her channel. She joined a community. She was active in social activities. And she worked at a social media marketing assistance specializing in content. She really started to open up and develop herself. She did not afraid stepping out of her comfort zone. She loved to meet new people that just made her look at the world through a different lens. She was surround herself with the people that made her a better person and encourage her to do everything to her fullest potential.

And after fifteen social events they attended, Jo finally said good bye. He just stayed for three years in New York for work. And it was his time to go back to his home in London. They had been stressing the same mess for months. They argued for nothing, only to see that they were both to blame. Kala let him go without anger and tears. Jo had formed her to be a better person. And after he back to London, they still keep in contact. Shared their story and everyday live.

And she has forgiven her past. She started call her old mama, someone she always ignored the call every day. She said sorry and told her that she would coming home for Christmas. She forgave her father. Even though her position and sister had been replaced with his cute little daughters. She was happy taking care of someone's fathers for fifteen years. And she also forgave her beloved sister. She missed her so much.



# Arkananta

by Aninditha Langit Nugroho

## Around February, 2003

I was playing with my toys when suddenly I heard mom and dad shouted to each other from their room. I might too young to understand what they were talking about right now, until both of them talk with an anger in their eyes. Little did I know, this situation was not the first time, they often fight against each other like what happening right now.

“Who was that women? I saw you were with her last night!” My mom shouted.

“You do not need to know since this is my privacy! Have I told you before that she is just my friend?” Then, my dad answered it in anger. Later on, my dad slapped my mom’s face until she cried. God... I felt I so frightened right now. This also not the first time my dad abused my mom, he ever did that sometimes. I was just a five years old boy who couldn’t do something to prevent something like this, I was scared with what was going on. I chose to bury myself inside my blanket.

After what was going on at that night, my parents chose to divorce. My mom was so sad and depressed because she was left by my father. I know from the face that she showed since that day. She was so depressed. She hated my dad so much and even hates all man. Therefore, my mom started to abuse me because I’m a boy. Every time she saw my face, she often said something harsh and I often slapped or beaten with something by my mom. The worst thing that my mom had ever done was placing a cigarette stub on my temple. This felt really hurt... Moreover when your mom who did such a thing like this.



What my mother do to me was the beginning of my trauma towards women. I would be scared if a girl doing a physical contact to me, moreover when they shouted at me. I hated to have this kind of trauma, but please blame my mother because she made me feel like this.

### **Beginning of August, 2015**

I was a seventeen years old boy who currently on his 11th grade of high school right now. I started learned and discovered many things about life. My mother were sent to psychiatric hospital by my uncle because her psychiatric condition getting worse, so I had to live by my own now. Well, it was not an easy thing since I had trauma to women. Just by a simple physical contact like holding hands or a pat, it would make me scared. However, in spite of my trauma to women, I wanted to get rid of it by dating a girl. I knew it was such an extreme decision but yeah, let's see. Actually, my biggest fear was if I couldn't heal my trauma to women and ended up not getting married in the future. No, I wanted to get married and see my mom happy even though she made me trauma. So, I dated a girl named Larasati.

Laras and I met in school organization named OSIS. We were in the same division so we often met each other. She was a kind hearted girl, smart, and she helped me a lot on school organization. Until that day, I confessed my feeling towards her and she accepted my feeling. We started to be in relationship, at that time. Our relationship ran smoothly like the other couple. She treated me with full of affection and so did I, it was such a great time for both of us that I wanted to always protect her. She was precious to me, and it felt like Laras was the one that God destined for me.

One afternoon, I asked her to go out. I wanted to say something serious about our relationship because I think this is the right time. I really hope the best that luck will be on my side for today. "Laras, please wait until that day come. I will make us become together till the rest of our life. Please wait me." I said with a deep gaze, a sign that I'm serious and sincere with what I feel towards her.

She looked uneasy. I could see at how her pupil moved. "Arka, sure... I want us to be like that too, but please don't blame me if destiny won't be on our side..." She said that in a low voice, I almost couldn't hear what she said. She did not even look into my eyes. "What do you mean?" I replied.

“I discussed with my parents today and they said that I will arranged with someone from my father’s friend... I can’t say no because it is a decision from my family. I am truly sorry for you...” I could see a guilty feeling when she said that.

I felt disappointed. I truly was. Why did she tell me about it now, when I wanted our relationship to become more serious? Did she just play around with my feeling? I didn’t understand. What Laras did before just made me trauma with women again. It seemed that I couldn’t believe in love. I couldn’t believe with what women said to me. Sure then, I needed to focus with my life instead of healing my trauma to women.

Current time, in the middle of August 2019

I am on my 7th semester of college right now. Being a student in one of state university in my hometown, Bandung, is one of my dream and I’m living on it. I take Faculty of Teacher Training and Education as my major. My college life is quite same like the other students; busy with assignments that lecturers give to us, join an organization, attend the organization meeting after school, hang out with some friends, and so on. Everything works well in my daily basis as a college students. If I have leisure time, I would visit my mom to check her condition. Her condition is getting better now, but she still needs some treatment so doctor does not allow her to leave the hospital.

After my heart broke because of Laras, I still need time to heal my trauma. Therefore, I won’t start to be in relationship with anyone else for now. I won’t say that I’m too confident, but many girls are trying to get closer to me by doing any effort that they can. For examples asking me to go out with them, being in the same group project with me, and many more. Sometimes it is hard for me to refuse their offering. They seemed trying so hard to get closer with me. So I usually refuse it smoothly because I won’t hurt their feelings. Well, even though I have been hurt by women several times, I won’t hurt them back.

Talking about my 7th semester, my other activity is constructing my thesis. I have a target to finish my thesis in the end of 8th semester so it will be good if I start to do my thesis now. In order to complete my thesis, I have a research to do in one of elementary school. This research makes me often to visit the elementary school after I finish my college schedule. It is okay, I believe that my hard work will paid off.

“Arka!” I heard someone shouted my name from a far when I’m about to ride by motorbike, then I turned my body and looking for the one who

called my name. I was a little bit surprised because I recognized the one who called me. I was trying to keep calm. She was Adrina, one of my classmates. “Arka, my friends and I are going to go to karaoke now, how about to join us? Don’t worry, Johan will be there too!” She invited me to join her but I had to go now. See? I just told about how some girls were trying hard to get closer to me and looked at them now. “I am sorry but I have to go now, Adrina. Next time, okay?” I replied with a little smile on my face. Adrina let out heavy sighs, then she nodded. “Mr. Busy, as usual. Okay then, but promise me you will join us next time okay?” Then she left me.

After I rode my motorbike for around twenty minutes, I arrived on Pelita Nusantara Elementary School. This elementary school was the place where I did my research to complete my thesis. I arrived at 01.00 pm when all of the students just ended their break time and were back at their own classroom to study. When I was on my way to go to the administration room, a girl walked in a hurry and accidentally bump into my shoulder. “I-I am sorry.” She bowed down then passing me. I could see her face at a glance. She was someone who seemed in the same age as me. I was not familiar with her face, it seemed like I just see her now. Well, I had been visiting this elementary school for almost three weeks, more or less, so I remembered the staffs and teachers in this school.

I entered the administration room, and discussed about the document that I needed for my research. The document that I have to take for today was not many so the discussion did not take a long time. After Mr. Fuadi, the staff of administration office, and I ended our discussion about the document, I asked him about the girl who I met before. After I described about the girl, he said, “Ah, I think I know what you mean. She is Gemintang. Gemintang is one of part time workers in our school. Actually, she has been doing this job for almost one month but maybe you just met her.” Mr. Fuadi explained to me. “Why? She is pretty right?” He raised one of his eyebrow when he asked that question, teasing me. “I’m just curious about her. Okay sir, thank you for the document. I will come here again next week.” I left the room while bringing the document. I couldn’t deny that Gemintang’s appearance was indeed pretty. Her hair was quite short with a red hair clip on the left side and she had a fair skin. She was quite... Attractive. However, it did not mean that I would be interested in her by just her appearances, right? The heartbreak that caused by women was enough for me. I wouldn’t let myself being trapped in the same thing twice.

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The sun shone so brightly when I visited Pelita Nusantara elementary school. I had a good instinct for that day. After I parked my motorbike, I walked in the corridor to go to administration office while playing with my motorcycle key. I was about to enter the administration room but then I stopped in front of the room, staring at someone through little window on the door. Mr. Fuadi was now talking with a girl who used hairclip... Wait, was it Gemintang? Curious about what they were talking about, I opened the door and entered the administration room. "Oh, Arka? Come and sit here. I am talking with Gemintang about how she help you to prepare the document that you need for your thesis. Gemintang will start to help you today." Mr. Fuadi explained to me. What did he say? She would help me to prepare my document? Gemintang saw my reaction. She looked at me and showed a sweet smile, she even offered her hand to shake hands with me. It took several seconds for me to shake her hand, since I was afraid of girl. "Hello, your name is Arka right? My name is Gemintang, I will help you to prepare the document that you need. Therefore, if you need something do not hesitate to reach me okay?" I just answered her with a nod. Mr. Fuadi smiled when he stared at me and Gemintang, "Sure then Arka and Gemintang, good luck and I hope both of you will cooperate well." After we ended the discussion, both I and Gemintang left the room. We still talked to each other in order to minimalize the awkwardness.

"So what major that you take in the university, Arka?" Gemintang opened the conversation by asking a common question that people usually ask when they meet a college student. It was fine since I did not know how to start a conversation on this awkward situation. "I take English language education as my major. How about you?" "I have graduated from university this year, but I take the same major as you when I'm in the university." She answered me with a smile. Ah, so she was older than me. I thought she was in the same age as I was, because her body was a bit tiny. I just met her now, but surprisingly, she was an open-minded person so she talked to me about everything. She talked about her experiences being a part time worker in Pelita Nusantara Elementary School, how she liked being a teacher, and even told me slightly about her family. She was such an interesting person to talk with. I felt comfortable when I talked to her and discussed about many things.

Moreover, the way she laughs made me happy and wanted to be with her for a long time.

Time flies so fast when suddenly the bell ringing and it was time for Gemintang to teach the students. “Arka, I am sorry but I need to go now since this is my schedule to teach the students.” Gemintang bowed down and asked permission to leave now. “It is okay, you need to work now.” I smiled as replied her. “Okay then, I have given you my number right? Just contact me if you need something. Bye Arsa!” Then Gemintang left me. See? My instinct proved that today would be a good day. Such a bright day to meet a bright person like you, Gemintang.

After what happened yesterday, Gemintang and I often met each other not only to discuss about my thesis but we also met to do some fun activities like watching movie together, dinner, and many more. Let’s call it, a date? Whatever you called it, I enjoyed my time that I spent with her. I ever invited her to visit my mom in psychiatric hospital too, so she had already known about my family condition. How about my trauma to women? I healed it slowly whenever I spent my time with Gemintang. I felt comfortable around her. She had something that I never found in other women that I met. Her sincere heart perhaps made me start to believe in love again.

“Gemintang.” I started our conversation in one evening when I went out with her to eat dinner. “Hm?” She looked at me while fixing her hairclip. “Don’t you know that I have trauma to women?” I made our conversation become a deep talk. “Really? I do not know about that... However, if I recall to the first time I met you, you seemed cold and hard to approach? Maybe it is a sign that you scared with women.” She replied me. “Hahaha, yes. I tend to make a cold and hard to approach aura so girls will think twice to get closer with me.” I paused my talk, then continued it again. “If you think that I’m a cold hearted person and seemed hard to approach, why did you still want to get closer with me?” I asked her, staring deeply through her beautiful eyes. Gemintang emitted a little chuckle then replied me, “Simply because I know you are not that kind of person. From the first time of our meet, I want to get closer with you. And now, when I know more about your flaws, I want to know you even deeper...” Gemintang said that in a low voice and blushing cheeks. Her expression now was really cute, I swore that she was the cutest girl that I ever seen. Okay, perhaps I did not need to hide my feels again since she felt the same way.

I held both of her hands without any hesitation, this was my time to

confess my feelings to her. She looked a bit surprised with my action then looked at me. “Gemintang, you know that I have suffered from my trauma right? However, you help me to heal my trauma and make me start to believe in love again. See? I even have courage to hold both of your hands.” I let out a deep sigh then continued to talk, “I want to end my pain now. So, Gemintang, would you be my girl and make me believe in love again? I cannot promise you a good thing but with you, I’m ready to take all the consequences.” I saw tears dropped through her eye, then she wiped her tears and answered me, “Sure, Arka. I want to be your girl too. It is okay I will help you to believe in love, you do not need to worry.” After I heard her answer, I stood up from my seat and hugged her body. Thank God, I met Gemintang who makes me believe in love again.



# We'd Never Be Normal

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by Lauren Karina

*New York City,*

*May 2019.*

A young woman in her mid-20s stands by the curb of a busy street. The vibrant, childish fire of innocence she used to boldly carry in her sharp, emerald gaze has dimmed—is corrupted by the terrible reality that is her past.

Her body is petite and fit, though underneath the warm, ivory blouse she is wearing there lies islands and stretches of scars, both literal and figurative—serving as her own eternal, grotesque reminders.

The wind keeps trying to brush her auburn curls out of her face, though Ava rebels by moving the strands of her hair back to cover part of her face. It is not because she is ashamed of the way she looks; oh no, her beauty turns heads and even she herself knows it.

Yet Ava hides in her shell regardless.

Out in the open, standing amongst the crowd she feels as though she is naked—vulnerable and bare. The world is out there to get her, she convinces herself; a dreadful cloud of nightmare that tingles the surface of her skin with chillig touches-- sending shivers down her spine every time.

She never feels like she is good enough for anyone; she feels too broken, too damaged, too much for anyone to handle. She turns down every man that dares cross her path. Turns down anyone who dares step up and professes their admiration;

Why? Because family is not in the cards for her.

She didn't grow up with one, and she could not start one even if she wants to;



She is infertile.

So she stays away, she detaches and she rids herself of any strings and she lets the world revolve around her—serving as nothing but a silent watcher.

As she watches the crowd from the distance, the corners of her lips quirks up in a tiny motion—there is a gentleman standing right across the street, beaming with a boisterous smile that spreads ear to ear, with a petite young woman in his arms, embracing him ever so tightly.

Ava smiles, not because she knows them—no, these two lovers are nothing but a couple passersby on this crowded street—Ava smiles because by now she'd found that there is no greater joy than to see others happy; at least a couple strangers' smile in the distance can fill the somewhat hollow void in her heart.

*What makes you happy?* Ava ponders, and she ponders about this quite often. *What drives you crazy? What sparks you with joy? What excites you?*

And then her own smile disappears and she says to herself: You don't know. You've never known.

*Keep searching.*

And that, she supposed, is where Grant Sanders enters the narration she calls her life:

*New York City,  
September 2019.*

Grant said he wanted to take her on a date.

Ava scrunched her nose and ruminated on the word for a second, like a foreign tourist hearing an unfamiliar word for the first time.

*A date.* What's up with that? Were the overnight stays and ramen take outs in his apartment not enough? Because it was *enough* for her. Things felt *private* and *safe* and she much preferred it that way. No one in the workplace has found out that they've been sleeping together thus far and it felt perfect—like a private little escape bubble just for herself. They never even discussed to what extent do these *stay overs* are supposed to mean to each other—is *it a relationship? Is it not?* Ava would find herself wondering. When he reasoned that taking her out on a date would make him feel more *normal*, she felt even more like an alien. She was orphaned as a young girl and spent her whole

childhood getting beaten and whipped and abused-- how the hell was she supposed to understand what being normal feels like?

The first person to realize that was Clark—her best friend since diapers. They got into a heated argument over her having to go see a shrink; she lost the fight and he dragged her to sit through tedious weekly sessions with a pathetic spinster with saggy cheeks and baggy eyes who'd always looked like she'd rather be anywhere else than counsel her. "A waste of money," she complained, but like it or not Clark was a rock-headed asshole who sadly cares about her way too much, so she listened to him anyways.

She had stopped seeing the shrink now, with Clark's permission, of course; and as years went by she had learned how to cope with the triggers and occasional breakdowns. She'd have her 'moments,' from time to time, but it was never anything big, and it had never become a problem. Nobody else knew about it and no one else has ever had to endure being within her proximity long enough for them to notice something's wrong.

Until Grant came along.

Well, three nights ago she found him wondering why is it that she never bled. He found it odd how they've been sleeping together for a few months now and she never asked him to use protection, never taken any contraceptives, and first and foremost she hadn't had her period yet.

"How does it work for you girls? Do you need to see a doctor? Is this normal?" His blue eyes stared her down with profound concern and innocence.

She should've seen it coming; Grant wasn't a complete fool, even when it comes to stuff he doesn't normally know about. He told her that his buddies usually share stories about how much of a bummer it would be when the women they wish to sleep with are on their period.

But that was not even the worst part. The worst part was when his eyes lit up when he said:

"Are you pregnant?"

He didn't mean to show his excitement. She was pretty sure he didn't even realize how happy he sounded when he said it. They've only officially been together for less than five months-- talk about moving too fast. This was a discussion she had hoped she could delay for another few months. She never even told him she loved him yet.

She'd never even thought of things *that far*.

Her breathing hitched and her ribcage tightened around her heart and lungs. She had to take a pause before she could say anything. A memory from a moment of ridicule in her past popped into her mind almost immediately and she clenched hard on her fists with all her strength to not break down in front of him. Once she calmed down, she opened her mouth to speak.

When she told him she was *infertile*, his face fell.

It felt like a deadly blow to her chest.

She should've seen *that* coming, too. She noticed how ecstatic he becomes whenever they pass by a toddler or a baby in public. "Look, a baby! Look at how fat she is!" Ava would smile at him and agree. They'd walk over to those random people and ask them if they would let Grant hold the baby for a moment. Those people never said no;

Grant's charming smile and kind eyes—they never cease to disappoint; it's not hard to trust him at first glance. They'd *always* let him hold their babies.

The point is, he didn't have to make a direct statement about it:

He wants a family someday. He wants something *traditional*, something *serious*, something *normal*.

And that, is something she could never give him.

She swallowed her pain away and kept it in, not wanting to scare him off with a breakdown. They tried to ignore the subject that night. They ordered Chinese for dinner and settled for a random movie on Netflix; the movie was terrible, but the silence between them was worse. Neither of them initiated to reach for the remote and pick another movie, much less suggest another activity, though. Those cheesy lines and bad acting was way better than complete silence they were bound to endure once the TV's switched off.

And then she saw him looking at her, with those loving eyes, mixed with a tad bit of disappointment. He wanted to fix this, she was sure. She stayed where she sat on the couch, not physically responding despite the obvious signal. A few moments later he was right next to her, running his fingers through her hair and pressing his lips onto her neck, kissing and nipping softly with an awkward motion.

"Do you want this?" he whispered within an intake of breath, as if she needed a heads-up. The simple question, though, felt like it asked more than the obvious. It almost sounded like he was saying, "Have you given up on us yet? Or do you want to try again? Please let us try again."

I don't. She wanted to say but she didn't say it. She just turned her

head so their lips could meet, foolishly hoping her mood would turn around and her anxiety would disappear. He took it as a yes, and so he kissed her deeply, as if digging through any emotion left he had for her. She played along, compliant and silent for now. The movie was still on, its characters pronouncing a love speech or something. She tried to listen carefully, an effort to distract her mind from the complete uneasiness of this embrace.

She ended up naked and pinned under him anyways, though. He didn't force her to, and she couldn't exactly come up with a reasonable excuse as to why she would want to turn away so badly without telling him that she was in fact, mentally unstable.

She wanted to fix them. Maybe not as determined as he was, but even she had to admit that what they had-- it was something that would be immensely painful to cut loose.

The kiss was sloppy and odd, and he pressed into her with a halfhearted, messy rhythm, and she closed her eyes, clenching onto the sofa's back-- fighting the urge to cancel this whole thing.

"Wait, Grant--" she said when she couldn't take it anymore, and he pulled away from her lips and slowed down. "Stop it. Just...stop."

"You want me to stop?" he frowned breathlessly and she nodded.

He listened though, being the gentleman he was.

She pressed a palm against his sweaty chest and pushed him away. He pulled out of her and sat at the edge of the couch, while she dragged herself to sit down, running her fingers through her tangled hair. She looked over at him with guilt. "I'm sorry-- let me-- let me finish you off."

He shook his head and pursed his lips while his palm covered his face and his fingers massaged his temple fretfully;

"No," he murmured.

He got up from the couch and picked up their scattered clothes, every single one of them. Ava could read him like an open book-- the action was a needed distraction from having to see the look on her face. "You could've told me you didn't want it, Ave."

"I wanted to fix this. Like you do."

He looked at her with a sigh as he handed her clothes back. "I know."

She told him that she wanted to go home that night and he looked at her with desperation in his eyes. He kept begging her to stay, but she firmly said no.

Well, today he turned up at her door, wrapped in a moss green coat, asked for forgiveness and told her that he'd like to take her out on a date.

She weighed on the odds and decided to say yes, no matter how uncomfortable this whole thing made her feel.

So took her out he did.

He took her to a cafe by the river, looking out to the night view of Manhattan. They stayed indoors, though, for the night air outside was too cold. He ordered a cup of coffee and a slice of cheesecake and offered her hot cocoa. She smiled at that, her mind drifting back to the year of 2013, back when they first met, back when they were nothing but platonic co-workers: she remembered how goofy he looked with his side-combed blonde hair and his thick-framed glasses. She remembered how they shared a cup of hot cocoa together in a small café just outside New York City—drenched from the rain on their way back from a conference. Now here they were, six years later— his blonde hair was a view of neatly trimmed blonde tufts, and his glasses were nowhere to be found. Still handsome— more handsome, even. Age became him—a set of hard-lined broad shoulders and a stature of a god to her eyes. Too good for you, Ava, she would find herself pondering during the late nights when she struggled to sleep. She pondered that with him next to her, bare-chested, deep asleep and breathing ever-so softly.

“So, hot cocoa?” he asked again, blinking incredulously and smiling sweetly, snapping her back to reality.

“Yeah, I'd like that.” she said, her cheeks flushed by both the cold air and the sweetness of the memory.

The opening conversation after that, unfortunately, was nothing sort of an icebreaker:

“About what happened in the apartment--” he began with a sharp inhale.

“It's nothing, Grant. Let's pretend it never happened,” she cut off curtly.

“Okay.” He looked down to the table and the conversation died down to a cold, tense silence.

“Are you okay?” he asked her after a while, hating how quiet she'd become all the sudden. She kept looking around at the people sitting at the other tables, as if expecting a familiar foe to turn up.

“Yeah.” She bit her lip and looked at him. “It's just that-- I've never

been to an actual date before.”

The space between his forehead creased with confusion. “We’ve gone out together a million times before--”

“But they’re different, Grant,” she insisted. “They’re for business inquiries—and, for...work. When we went out as friends we’d go to quieter places. More secluded. And now we’re not even friends, Grant—and we’d stay indoors and we’d sleep in and, uh...I don’t know.”

He began to look around, too, guilt beginning to come sweeping into his innocent blue eyes. “Do you wanna go somewhere else then? Somewhere quiet?”

She let out a sigh. Your apartment, she wanted to say but she refrained from doing so. In a way she didn’t want to disappoint him. He had wanted this for a while, she was even willing to bet that he probably had this written down on his bucket list or something—an open book. So easy to read, too easy to read.

She shook her head in a tiny, humble motion. “No. Let’s stay.”

“You sure?” His tone was still heavy with concern but she could see his eyes light up a little.

“Yeah.” She smiled at him, using her exceptional aptitude for lying to appease him. This was in fact the very first time she lied to him. She was not proud.

A waiter turned up and served them their order, saving Ava from having to come up with something to say. The waiter and the food distracted Grant for a bit, made him dig into the cheesecake and sip down his coffee. He liked it mixed with milk, she learned that within weeks of sleeping over and messing on his bed. She preferred hers black. One time he complained about how bitter her mouth tasted when he kissed her. She laughed at him and made a sexual joke about him having to kiss her somewhere else-- she loved how red his face got after that.

“So... Mr. Tanaka wanted me to take this job,” he stifled a cough as he began.

Mr. Tanaka. His superior. Her superior as well. A firm and cold man, yet he did the job right. Ava remembered how she finally saw Mr. Tanaka smiled at her for the first time as he gave her the promotion she yearned for a year ago.

“What job?” She took a sip of her hot cocoa and licked her lip. It was

pretty good, not the best but close.

“To curate this art piece in Belfast. I’m leaving tomorrow noon.”

She nodded. “Okay.”

“So uh, that’s why I wanted to take you out.”

“Cos you’re leaving?”

“Yeah and because, you know--” his cheeks flushed red. Boy scout Grant Sanders. She always wondered how she managed to fall in love with someone like him.

She shifted where she sat and tried not to stare him down. “Because you need to feel a little bit of normalcy. A picket-white fence and a sweet dame with a wriggling baby to go home to, but since you can’t have that, this is the closest alternative.”

His jaw stiffened upon hearing what she had said. She kept her eyes to her lap, realizing that what she had said-- though true, was better left unsaid.

“Ave, don’t be like that,” his voice hummed low, his eyes darkened. There wasn’t anger in the way he looked-- there was just... sadness and a disappointment that lingered in her mind.

“I shouldn’t have said yes, should I?” she scoffed as she leaned back in her chair.

Grant toyed with the cheesecake to comfort himself. His breathing intensified, and he fought the urge to raise his voice in front of all these people. “So do you wanna go home?”

He’d forgot that he was talking with someone who got her masters in psychology:

“You just wanna find somewhere more suitable for us to fight in,” she said analytically.

“No one wants a public display.”

“I wasn’t trying to pick a fight,” she leaned forward. “I was saying the truth.”

“But your tone--”

“It doesn’t fucking matter what tone I used!”

“Please, don’t swear,” he leaned forward too, his words coming out through gritted teeth.

“Don’t change the subject--”

“Ava, tonight was going so well!”

“Yeah, for you. You just want me to keep my mouth shut and sit here like a loving future wife, like your misogynistic buddies would do.”

“I just wanted us to have a nice time! To fix our--”

“See? This is why we don’t talk to each other. You’re only useful when your mouth’s shut.”

His mouth parted with disbelief, his blue eyes were appalled with betrayal, “Is that the only thing I’m good for? Sex?”

She shrugged dismissively. “Might as well be.”

Her answer struck him to a complete silence. She stole a furtive glance at him, observing how hurt he looked right now. She felt terrible for everything she just said, but at the same time she felt relieved; she’d been wanting to say this for a while.

“I should go.” She began reaching into her purse and pulled out a \$20 bill. He was still sitting there when she stormed out the door, onto the chilly night air of New York in mid-September.

She almost thought he wouldn’t go after her.

But of course he did.

He came sprinting towards her direction, calling her name and begging for her to at least let him give her a ride home.

She bit her lip but said yes.

The motorcycle ride was unbearable as the night air had grown colder the later the night went, so they ended up seeking shelter in her apartment, which was closer from the Manhattan bridge.

That night was in fact the very first time he entered her apartment.

He looked around like a curious, innocent puppy, frowning here and there at the lack of personal clutter this place held. No posters, no pictures, no collection of anything, no decorations, no nothing on display. Just a plain, less than homey apartment space filled with efficient necessities like kitchenware and cupboards full of medicines.

When he followed her to her bedroom and met her eyes, she knew he finally started to understand.

“You’re the second person I’ve ever brought to this place,” she said, hugging herself out of discomfort. He still hadn’t said anything, and she’s not sure whether or not that was a good thing. “The first being Clark. He didn’t stay very long— he was about to pick up Jenna and the kids from the mall that day and his car broke down just a block from here,” Ava murmured, the



corner of her lip quirked slightly at the glimpse of nostalgia. “Lucky bastard, huh? Clark Johnson,” she scoffed, her voice quiet and small, while her face displayed a frown. “He has everything. Me? His best friend? Next to nothing.”

Grant gave no response to that. It pained him to hear what she had said—pained him so much that he’d rather discuss something else. “How did Clark react when he saw this place?”

“He gave me a look.”

“What look?”

“The one you’re giving me right now.”

He looked away with a small sigh. His fingers gently brushed over the plain white sheets of her bed while his countenance frowned with contemplation.

“I think I should let you know that I didn’t mean it when I said I only wanted you for the sex, Grant.”

He glanced up at her, his face calm and more relaxed. “I know,” he nodded. “But I also know that you meant everything else you said, though.”

To that she had to look away. They were standing on the opposite sides of the bed, awkward and confused.

“Am I that much of a pushover?” he asked, genuinely wondering and burdened with guilt. “Look, I’ve never been with someone the way that I am with you, and I don’t even know if it’s too soon to talk about it but I don’t mind--” his lips trembled slightly, “...with- with, the children thing.” He rubbed his palm over the nape of his neck uncomfortably. “I don’t want you to feel like you’re obligated to-- you know.”

She squinted. Her voice was incredibly quiet when she audibly concluded, “You’re lying.”

He looked back at her as he searched for something to say. He chewed on the inside of his cheek while his arms folded across his chest, uncertainty apparent in his eyes now. He was never a good liar— they both knew that.

“Look around you.” She took a deep breath and braced herself for her next words. “This place is who I am. I’m not someone who has the luxury to own a life I call my own. I’m not good with the concept of family; I can’t have children and I’ll never be able to. I have issues-- trust issues and panic attacks and-- I can barely handle myself already, Grant. I can’t put all that burden on you. There’s no future with me. Not one you’d want anyway.”

This time he really found himself lost for words. He weakly leaned

back against the wall, sighing while looking down at his feet. He would be lying if he said he was perfectly fine with what being with her would cost: a wife and children and a home. He knew he was being a bit unrealistic whenever he dreamed of that, but if Clark could have it, why can't he?

When he looked up again he found her green eyes looking at him, analytical and cold. "Next time when you want someone to warm your bed, give me a call. Otherwise, well..." She shrugged casually, almost as if there was no emotion involved, but he knew better. He knew she was hurting as much as he was. She was just very good at pretending.

"I'm not that kind of a man."

That was where she sighed heavily. "I know."

He pursed his lips to a thin line, trying with all his might to mask his disappointment. "So that's it then? It's over?"

She didn't need to say anything back. She gave him one look, and he nodded, though he hadn't had the heart to turn away and leave.

He stood there uneasily, taking in all this heavy realization with every breath he took. He kept feeling as if something's wrong-- that leaving her-- ending this, was a complete mistake. How long have they been sleeping together? What, a three months? Three months. Yet he felt like they've been together for much longer; those cozy times they traded stories in between work hours, the stressful nights when they worked overtime and the countless deep conversations they shared at tiny coffee shops. The stolen looks they'd give each other from time to time, the three crazy days when a curated piece was misplaced and sent to another city when it's needed for an exhibition within the week and they worked so hard to retrieve it that they drove all the way to North Carolina and back—it was a crazy week overall but he enjoyed every second that he spent with her there. He'd never felt like this towards anyone before, never felt so drawn to anyone like he felt towards her. All these events, all these years they spent knowing each other, felt like a buildup for something bigger, and now that he's had it, he didn't want to lose it.

Maybe it was the way her body looked, or maybe the way she moved and spoke, or maybe the way her wavy, auburn hair swayed as she gently strolled-- and maybe it was her secrets and her sharp eyes or her low, sultry voice. Or maybe it was her sweet side, a caring personality that lay within layers and layers of ice cold masks.

Whatever it was, he had gone too far, fallen too deep, that he didn't

want to turn back.

All that couldn't be for nothing, right? It had to mean something.

"To be perfectly honest I think you should just move in with me," he said it out loud, out of the blue, and he had no intention of taking it back.

Her mouth parted with surprise. "What?"

He nodded. "You heard me. Pack your bags, get them to my place. You're barely here anyways lately."

"But what we just talked about--"

"I know," he nodded. "I know, Ave--"

"You don't seem to understand. You were leaving. This, this isn't some spontaneous decision you can make." She crossed the bed and took a step closer to him to study his face and stance. Everything about this confused her.

"I don't want us apart. I don't want to leave this all behind. I--"

"You have no idea how delusional you sound--"

"Let's not think about that. Let's take what we have, when we have it."

"We'll never be normal, Grant."

"I know. But think about it for a second. We both want it-- we can try. We can always try, Ave." He reached for her, pulling her close by the waist and seeking her eyes.

"But the baby thing, and starting a family..." her voice faltered, her eyes looking away to the empty wall.

He took a deep breath and accepted a little sting in his heart as he said:

"That's just the price I'm willing to take."

When she finally braced herself to look at him, she had fear and concern in her eyes. "You're one crazy, reckless son of a bitch."

He just chuckled and rolled his eyes at that.

"You don't know what you're getting yourself into," she warned when his thumb stroke over her lips, asking for permission.

"Neither do you." He leaned in and kissed her. The kiss felt right, and the tingles in his skin and his accelerated heartbeat in his chest ensured him that whatever this is, he should be here to live it. He'd rather be chasing her than go after a mist of a dream that he never even thought for sure could come true, right?

They decided to spend the night at her apartment. He found himself lying on her bed, already dressed down to nothing but a pair of navy blue

briefs when he looked over to the open bathroom door and saw her standing in front of the sink, a toothbrush stuck between her teeth and a bathrobe draped down to just below her knees. She noticed him staring and flashed him a smile.

The warmth in his heart from the smile couldn't be a lie, so... yes. This, he told himself, is worth leaving his old dreams behind.

Crazy? Maybe. Reckless? Definitely. But it feels right.

It feels right.



## Decision

by Lidia Vrma Kartika

It was a rainy day. There was a woman walked alone under the umbrella. She always likes rain because she could feel the fresh air around her. She was Luciana Putri Atmadja, her friends called her Lucy. She was a beautiful woman, now she was 33 years old. She had beautiful brown eyes and she also had a sweet smile. She was a kind, humble, and friendly person, every person around her loved her personality.

She was also a career woman. She worked as a writer in one of the book publishing companies in her town. Writing a poem was one of her hobby and she had a dream to be a famous poem writer. She tried to make a good poem every day, she really worked hard to get what she wanted. She hoped one day she can publish her own poem book.

Lucy such a busy woman almost all her time spent for made a new and good poem. Sometimes, she would spent her time with her friends or she would meet with someone, like in that time after walked not to far from her office, Lucy arrived in a coffee shop where she wanted to meet with someone.

She sat in the corner of the café. This was her favorite place because no one would notice her and she also could do what she wanted without being disturbed by other. While she was sittings at the café and enjoying the coffee, suddenly someone sat in front of her and surprised her.

“Oh My God, you are surprising me. I think it is not you.” said Lucy.

“Hey, do not you miss me?” asked this person.

Immediately, she stood up and hugged this person.

“Of course I miss you, almost a month I did not meet you. How could you say that I did not miss you?” asked Lucy.

“Hey, I’m just kidding my little sweetie.” said this person.

“Please, stop calling me like that.” said Lucy.

“Okay, okay calm down (with smiling). How is your day?” said this person.

“Yeah, not too bad.” said Lucy.

Lucy and this person spent their time together in the café. They spent the time by talking, laughing, joking, and anything until they forget the time.

“I think I have to go home right now, it is already night.” said Lucy.

(Looked at his watch) “Yeah, we forget the time.” said this person.

“No problem. We can meet another time.” said Lucy.

“Should I take you go to home?” asked this person.

“No thanks, I think this is not the right time, maybe another time.” said Lucy.

“All right, I will order a taxi for you.” said this person.

“With my pleasure.” said Lucy.

Lucy knew that her son would look for her and her husband would worry about her. She really happy could meet this person until she forgot the time. She promised she would bring and introduced this person to her family. With smiled in her face, Lucy thought she was very luck because she finally could meet this person again after a long time. She hoped in the future she and her family could live happily together with this person.

After went to coffee shop, Lucy came back to home at night. Actually, Lucy was not a single woman. She was a wife and also a mother of one child. Her child named Gavin Abraham. He was 9 years old, he was a cute boy and he was also independent enough for his age. Lucy’s family was not compatible enough. Lucy and her husband were always busy with their own business and almost did not have enough time for their child. Lucy’s husband named Reynand Abraham, worked as manager in one of the banks in his town.

Reynand wanted to take care of his son and gave him affections as long as he could, so almost all his lunch time he would spend time with his son and after that he went back to work. He did not want his son felt lonely. He tried to be a good father for his son. He knew that his son sometimes felt lonely because of he and Lucy were always busy with their own business

When Lucy arrived at home, her husband had been waiting for Lucy in the living room.

“What time is it?” asked Reynand.

“I’m busy so, I come home late.” said Lucy.

“Where are you from?” asked Reynand.

“Do still need my answer?” asked Lucy.

“I saw you at coffee shop with a man. Who is he?” asked Reynand.

Lucy was very surprised to hear that. She did not know what she should answer. At that time Lucy was still being silent and thought what was the better answer. Reynand also thought that Lucy did not want to answer it and then he decided to forget that problem. Reynand knew that Lucy would be mad at him if he tried to disturb her business.

“Forget it. I think it is not my business.” said Reynand.

“He is just one of my friends.” said Lucy.

“Sorry, I do not really want to know that.” said Reynand.

“Oh I just want to say that Gavin was always looking for you today.” said Reynand again.

“Where is he?” asked Lucy.

“Sleeping. I hope next time you can come home earlier and take care of our son.” said Reynand.

“I’ll try my best for my son.” said Lucy.

After that little conversation Rey left Lucy alone in the living room. She was confused and little bit worried. Lucy did not know what she had to do at that time after his husband knew that she lied to him. Lucy thought this was not the right time to introduce this person to her family. Lucy knew that her husband was upset to her and might suspect that she had an affair with this person.

Lucy also knew, all of these times his husband had a thought that she was not a good mother and good wife for her family. Lucy never cared of her family and she was always busy with her poem. Actually, his son really needed Lucy on his side all the time, gave him love and affection. One day, Reynand told her to stop working so, Lucy could take care for their son all the time. After hearing that, Lucy became very mad with Reynand. She felt that her husband never supported her to get her dream.

Several days later she came home very late in the evening even though she had tried to come home earlier. At home, she would spend her time with Gavin. She would play or watched the movie. At night she would cooked for her family dinner, then before her son slept she would read children’s story. Gavin was very happy because for several days his mother accompanied him at home. This did not last long, Lucy came back to her routine, sometimes she



would come home at night. This happened after she got a big project from her office. Sometimes, Gavin asked about Lucy to Reynand, why Lucy rarely accompanied and played with him again.

“Dad, where is mommy?” asked Gavin.

“Boy, right now mommy is busy, okay,” said Reynand.

“I want to meet her, Dad,” said Gavin.

“Hmmm, I have a new story about pirates. Are you interested in that?” asked Reynand. Reynand tried to change the topic so Gavin would not look for Lucy anymore.

In her office Lucy became busier because she got opportunity from the company to publish her own book of the collection of her poem. She was very happy to hear that and she really worked hard on this project. At that time, she was just being focus on her project. She tried to do the best as she could. Therefore, she forgot all the things around her including her family, almost everyday she had to work overtime.

One day when she had a meeting with her boss to discuss about her book, suddenly her husband called her repeatedly, but she tried to ignore it because she was busy at that time. She thought she would call back her husband later. She thought it would be not too long. Turned out, the meeting took a long time until late night.

At night when she arrived in her home, she was confused because there was nobody home. She decided to call her husband. She suddenly just remembered that she forgot to call back her husband. When she unlocked her phone, she was shocked because she got messages from her husband saying their child in the hospital because of an accident. Then, she went to hospital directly as she really worried about her son’s condition.

Lucy decided to take a taxi to go to hospital. She tried to call her husband to know the condition of her son but he did not pick up his phone. She was really worried about her son’s condition. After she arrived at the hospital, she went to Gavin’s room directly. When she went to Gavin’s room, she met her husband.

“How is Gavin’s condition? Is everything alright?” asked Lucy.

“Yeah, everything is alright,” said Reynand.

“I want to see him,” said Lucy.

“He just sleeps, do not disturb him. He is a little bit shocked because of the accident,” said Reynand.

She just stood up front in front of window of Gavin's room to see her son condition. She felt so sad and upset to see his son condition. She really wanted to take cares his son at that time and she wanted to accompany him but she did not want to disturb his son. She was confused. She did not know what she had to do. What she could do at that moment was crying in the silent, prayed to God and hoped that everything would be alright. Then, her husband came to her and asked her to take a rest.

"Just take a rest. I know that you are tired," said Reynand.

"I really worry about his condition." said Lucy.

"I'm really sorry because I did not pick up your phone." said Lucy again.

"Were you really busy until you can not pick up my phone?" asked Reynand.

"I'm so sorry, I did not mean like that." said Lucy. She did not stop crying because she regretted not to spend more time with her son.

"Is your business more important than your son condition?" asked Reynand.

"I am sorry Reynand. I am really sorry. I did not mean like that, believe me and please listen to my explanation," said Lucy.

"I think it is enough. It is already night, I will call a driver to take you home," said Reynand.

"Please, I want to be with my son," said Lucy.

"You have to take a rest at home. I will call you if Gavin has conscious," said Reynand.

Next day, Reynand told to Lucy that Gavin had conscious. He said to her that Gavin was looking for her and Reynand said that her son's condition was better at that time. Immediately, she went to hospital. Gavin was really happy when his mom came to his room. Gavin told to Lucy that he was really sorry to make Lucy felt sad, and then he also said that she did not have to worry about his condition. She felt grateful to God because her son's condition was getting better. Also, she felt so grateful to have a smart and good child like Gavin.

Lucy and Reynand accompanied Gavin all the time in hospital. They took care of him and tried to entertain him so that Gavin would not feel bored in the hospital. When Gavin slept, suddenly someone knocked Gavin's room. Then, Lucy checked who knocked the door and she did not expect that this

person would come to see Gavin's condition.

"Hi, I heard that Gavin got an accident, so I want to see his condition. Is everything alright?" said this person.

"Yeah, he is better right now. Just come in." said Lucy.

Reynand little bit confused about who the person was. He remembered that he had seen this person in the coffee shop with Lucy.

"Who are you? What is your business in here?" said Reynand.

"I heard that my nephew got an accident. I just want to see his condition." said this person.

"What do you mean? Who is your nephew?" asked Reynand. He really confused at that time.

"Lucy, Have not you explained to your husband?" asked this person to Lucy.

"Okay, this is my fault because I have not explained to you yet, Reynand. I am sorry." said Lucy.

Then, Lucy began to explain to Reynand. This person is Adam Putra Atmadja, he was Lucy's brother who disappeared for 17 years ago. Adam left his family because he wanted to prove to his father that he could get what he wanted and he would become a success man without any help from his father. After 17 years he left his family, he decided to come back to his family and proved to his family that he was a success man right now. Lucy never told Reynand and Gavin that she had a brother because she was confused how to explain to Reynand and Gavin about the problem that happened to her family.

After explaining the misunderstanding that happened between Lucy and Reynand, Lucy told to Reynand that she would stop working at her office. She decided to be focus to take care of Gavin and her family. Reynand was happy to hear that, he would support Lucy's decision.

# The Hidden Truth

by Maria Felicia Adinda Silalahi

Above Boston, Massachusetts, the sun shone brightly in the beginning of August when Lucy Harley Gilles stood still in front of Anthony Gilles and Juliana Helen Gilles' graves - her parents' graves. Her tears were still streaming down from her bright blue eyes to her face and her body trembled. Her sobs could still be heard and the view of the crying little blonde girl was just so painful to see that some people at the funerals shed tears as well. Deep down, she was beyond sad, she was depressed. Among her sobs, she was still thinking about too many things and those almost drove her crazy; the sudden deaths of her parents by a car crash, the truth that she was all alone without any close relatives left, the sudden deaths of her parents by a car crash, the fact that she would have to live with her one and only aunt whom she had never met, the sudden deaths of her parents by a car crash...

The funeral had come to the end. After putting down some flowers on the graves, the people came to Lucy to hug her; what happened to her in that very young age was no doubt so tragic that some of them were still shedding tears while doing so. Lucy knew or at least, had seen all those people before; her parents' colleagues, some of the neighbours, some of her teachers.

There were less and lesser people there when Lucy came to realize that among all those people, there was a woman stood a bit further than the rest and she was someone that she had never met. She was a short fat woman in her middle 40s with short brown hair. She was wearing a black beret, a long black dress, and black high heels. Her hands were holding a little black purse. In short, she dressed as neat as everyone, but she somehow looked a little bit nervous although she also looked like she just stopped crying. What Lucy knew next was there were only three people there; her parents' lawyer, Mr. Brad, the woman, and herself.

“Come on, Lucy, let’s meet Miss Carrie,” Mr. Brad said to Lucy while patting her back softly, encouraging her.

As they all came closer to one another, Lucy could see the woman said to be Miss Carrie more clearly; her eyes were brown and very much alike to her mom’s, and it made her remember that Juliana Helen Carrie was her mother’s maiden name.

“Lucy, this is Miss Agatha Colleen Carrie, your aunt. Miss Carrie, this is Lucy Harley Gilles,” Mr. Brad said.

“Hi, Lucy. How do you do?” Agatha greeted her while reaching out her hand nervously. Lucy could not say anything but just looked at her dazedly, before finally shook her hand.

“Miss Carrie is your only alive relative for now, and according to the latest Mr. Gilles’ testament that I myself have signed as I also witnessed it, Miss Carrie will be your guardian and will take care of you until you are at least eighteen and then all depend on you; whether or not you are still willing to live with her. Sixty percent of your parents’ inheritance are yours, and the rest will be Miss Carrie’s right – but what is her right also includes your life’s support until you are eighteen. Miss Carrie will also help you in organizing your inheritance at the right time, step by step,” Mr. Brad explained.

Lucy opened her mouth to scream and protest, but she could not. Her tongue could not move, her voice would not speak. Agatha looked even a bit more nervous seeing her in such a state. “Well, if this all is too hard for you, I can explain it a bit for you later, if you want,” Agatha said with a weak smile.

Lucy closed her mouth and finally spoke without her wanting this, “Okay.”

Mr. Brad smiled and then said, “Well, I think now we are going to Lucy’s home to help her packing her stuff so she can move with Miss Carrie as soon as possible...”

“...Well, but I think Lucy still wants to stay for a few days at her home, and I am okay with that. I can accompany her if she’d like,” Agatha suggested while looking at Lucy. Lucy nodded.

Mr. Brad thought for a second before saying cheerfully, “If it’s so, okay then. You can contact me when you are about to leave. Well, do not hesitate to contact me whenever you all need help.” Both the woman and the little girl nodded.

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After a few days staying at her own house and interacting with Agatha there, Lucy finally concluded that Agatha was indeed a very nice woman and they had become good friends for each other. Every day, Agatha woke up earlier and prepared their breakfast cheerfully. She was communicative and friendly; she talked much and told many funny stories that made Lucy laughed. She did the laundry and cooked for them both. In the afternoon when Agatha was not busy with her laptop (which she called 'my time to work') in her room which was a guest room, she would do gardening with Lucy in the garden owned by Julie. In the evening, Agatha would ask Lucy to help her prepare their dinner and she would do it happily, the way she always did with her mom before. At night, Agatha always took Lucy to bed before greeting her 'good night'. The bond between the aunt and the niece was created and getting stronger in such a short time. Lucy became much more cheerful and happier although now and then she still felt a bit sad when she remembered her parents. However, what made Lucy even happier was the fact that Agatha was willing to live with her at Lucy's house since Agatha only lived in a flat and her work was 'something that she can do everywhere at any time'. It took about ten days for Agatha to work on her move to Boston from Portland, Oregon.

They had finished their dinner when they shared stories together, just like other previous evenings. While pouring more water into Lucy's already empty glass, Agatha asked, "When will you go to school, Sweetheart? How do you usually get there?"

"Mmm, on Monday, September 2nd, if I'm not mistaken. Daddy usually drove me to school too, because his office and my school were only blocks away," Lucy answered. She remembered how she always went to school with her dad after having breakfast with her parents. Her mom would hug her tight and kiss both her cheeks before she got into the car. Her dad would do the same thing before she got off the car as well. She wondered whether Agatha would also do the same as she started to hug her and kiss her cheeks too before she was going to bed.

"Hmmm, I guess I can drive you to school too, then. Did Anthony pick you up from school too?"

"Well, Dad didn't, because he was still in work and I usually went home with my friends by bus. It was always so,"

"I can pick you up from school, if you want to," said Agatha with a smile.

“Hmmm, I guess I’ll still pick a bus, Auntie, I’m used to it too, however,” Lucy answered, shrugging.

“Okay then. Well, let’s clean it all up. And if you have got nothing to do anymore this evening, Sweetheart, you’d better get to bed after this,” Agatha said while collecting the plates.

“Aye-aye, Auntie,” Lucy responded with a giggle.

She was still sad for not having her parents around for sure, but at least she would not be alone.

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In the dim light of her bedroom, Lucy woke up and tried to see the alarm clock on the nightstand.

“Almost one o’clock,” she thought.

Sleepily, Lucy got off of her bed and got out of her room, trying to find the toilet outside. She was walking dottily in the dark of her room and Agatha’s room’s corridor when she could hear some soft sounds coming from Agatha’s room. It was midnight, to whom Agatha was talking?

Slowly, Lucy approached the door and put her head against the door, trying to eavesdrop what was being talked about inside. Agatha’s voice became even more clearly.

“Don’t you think this is the right time to kill her? Or the next morning? Well, it’s either to kill her in her sleep or else to smear the base of her tea cup with poison tomorrow.”

Lucy was shocked and she shrieked in a high pitch; her eyes opened wide and she closed her mouth with both of her hands. She could not believe that her aunt was this evil – she was thinking about killing her in her sleep! But then it was too late...

The door opened and Agatha looked surprise to find Lucy in front of her door. She looked puzzled seeing Lucy was staring back at her in horror.

“What are you doing here, Sweetie?” asked Agatha, approaching Lucy.

“Stay where you are! Don’t touch me, you murderer!” Lucy screamed, almost cried.

Agatha looked even more confused. “I don’t understand what you mean, Lucy, how cou--“

“I’ve heard you! I’ve heard you talking on the phone, deciding when

was the right time to kill me! Who knows – you - you might try to take away my dad’s inheritance! How dare you...”

Agatha was silent for a while, staring at Lucy, before she burst out laughing. This puzzled Lucy even more, as Agatha’s laugh was getting louder and louder that Lucy could see tears in her eyes.

“Oh Jesus Christ, no! You are mistaken, my Sweetheart, Lucy! Of course I was not planning to kill you! How could I become that evil! I was just -, I was just...oh my God this is so funny!” Agatha tried to explain, yet failed because of her laughs. Lucy was still looking at her aunt with horror in her eyes.

“...then what...”

“Oh my Lucy, listen to me, oh my God... Well, if you want to know why I’m okay with moving here and I look busy only in front of my laptop is because I’m an author. Okay? I write novels, short stories, everything like that... I mostly write criminal stories, detective stories... Oh my God, this is so funny. I also write children stories, funny stories, romance, if you wonder why I can tell you such funny stories...” Agatha explained, still tried to take a breath among her laughs.

“...How can I believe you...?”

Smiling, Agatha took Lucy into her room, showing her laptop. Lucy looked at the screen and saw an unfinished document was on it. “Look? I’m still typing my story. I’m sure you know this author named Donna Marie C.? Because I found that Julie or maybe Anthony collected her novels. That’s my pen name, Sweetheart, I’m Donna Marie C.!” She then laughed again. “Working in the middle of the night when all the sounds are hushed helps me to be creative better, and so does talking to myself physically! Oh my God, Sweetheart, I’m so sorry for making you scared!”

Lucy was puzzled, before totally realized what was going on and she burst out laughing too. She surely knew Donna Marie C.; she was famous and she was one of her late parents’ favourite novelists. They often praised her works and it was just her parents never told her that the famous novelist was her one and only aunt, Agatha Colleen Carrie!

“I can’t believe this! How could my parents not tell me about this - that my aunt is the one and famous Donna Marie C.! Oooh, Auntie, I’m so sorry for thinking this bad – that you were a murderer! Oh my God, I’m so very sorry!” Lucy was apologizing among her laughter, which made Agatha laughed out loud too.



“Oh my Sweetheart, let’s think of nothing about that! Now I can understand why saying what is in your mind out loud is not always a good idea for some!”

# **Magic and The Mysterious Mark**

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*by Maura Michelle K. T.*

One morning, she woke up with a great headache. “Mmm,” she moaned. She closed her eyes, and massage her forehead for a while. The dizziness faded little by little. She did not want to get up from the bed. Her blanket felt so cosy. It warmed her naked body from the cold air around the house. Yet, she could not bring herself back to sleep. She finally opened those jade eyes and made an annoyed face. They were dark, but they made a good complexion with her dark hair. She got up, and tidied her bed. She folded that warm handmade blanket. She held it on her hands, stroke it gently, and a tear suddenly drop from her eyes. She hugged it tightly, then she kissed it, like she was saying ‘good morning’ to the blanket.

She grabbed a thin black robe that laid on her drawers. When she was about to put it on, she saw something from the mirror which stand across her bedroom. A new tattoo. A mysterious yet familiar circle mark on her back, near her left shoulder. She walked toward the mirror and carefully looked at that mark. The size was the same as a watch. She did not feel any magic from the mark. It did not hurt her either when she touched it. She did not recognize the pattern, yet it somehow familiar. She was looking at that mark with curiosity. Then, she was back with her plain face. It seemed that the mark was not a curse, and she did not put a lot of thought on it. It was three in the morning. She could not sleep, she still felt a bit dizzy, and it was too early to go to school. She put on some clothes and decided to make potions.

The time passed by rather quickly, and it was almost breakfast time. She went downstairs and headed to the kitchen. The squeaky sound from those old stairs followed her steady steps. The steps that suddenly stopped in the middle of the way. She looked around with some sort of cautious eyes. She

must have felt something, but there was no one but her in that seemingly wide living room. There were only cold morning air and silence that was followed by small chirps coming from an opened window, somewhere inside that old mansion. She continued her steps, passed the dining room, and stopped in front of a medium size refrigerator. There was nothing in it. Nothing but a bowl with some pancake dough that she made two days ago for a midnight snack. It was not enough for two people, but they did not have anything else. When she was about to lit up the stove, she drew back her hand, and sighed. The stove was still broken. She put down the bowl impatiently and went outside through a door beside the kitchen.

The sun was finally peeking out its light, bringing a little warmth to that cold morning. It had woken up the brother from his deep sleep. He stretched out his muscle and yawn happily. It was a really good night sleep that he had in the past two weeks. He got up and stood beside an opened window near his closet. He looked outside and saw an old tree house. He smiled. He remembered the time when his mother used to read a story book until he fell asleep on her lap. He could still hear her gentle voice telling him about the great witches and wizards of the past. It was a joyful morning for him, until he smelled something unusual. He followed the smell and ran to the backyard. His smile turned frown. His surprised look was followed by anger after seeing what happened there.

‘Jynora Redfield! What the hell are you doing?!’ shouted Justin.

‘I am cooking some pancakes,’ answered Jyn casually.

‘Cooking? Wha?! You set a big fire in the backyard just to make some pancakes? Are you out of your mind?!’

‘Well, where do you want me to cook some goddamn pancakes if it turns out that the kitchen’s stove hasn’t been repaired for days?!’ Jyn begin to shout.

‘I told you to fix it because I was busy’

‘Well, I was busy too and it was your turn to fix things! Do you prefer me to use my cauldron to make some pancakes that will poisoned us all?!’

‘Magic is forbidden to use inside the house except for emergency,’ said Jyn again.

‘Well, this is not ‘inside the house’ anymore, isn’t it?’ said Justin fighting back.

‘hhh... Quit nagging and just eat up your breakfast, will ya?’ said Jyn

while giving Justin a plate of hot pancakes.

Jyn rolled her eyes and walked into the house with an annoyed face. She threatened to burn down the kitchen if the stove was still not fixed by the next morning. Justin smiled proudly for he knew that he won the argument this time.

At school, Jyn was still annoyed by her brother's victory. She entered the class and sit on the back just like usual. 'Good morning,' said a gentle voice that is familiar to Jyn. She looked at that sweet pale blond girl and gave her a smile. Jyn did not smile often, but every time when she heard that morning greeting, she always smiled. She felt grateful for having someone like Lily as her best friend. Lily was a very kind hearted person. She was the only one brave enough to approach an outcast such Jyn. At first, Jyn did not respond to her at all. She went away each time Lily tried to get to her. Yet, she did not give up. Lily always tried to be nice to her. She even shared her lunch whenever Jyn had nothing to eat during break time. Jyn slowly opened her heart and felt her warmth greeting her every day. Lily became a precious friend for Jyn. She saw Lily as the light who always tried to break the darkness in her life. And school was so much better with her around.

School was just for formality to Jyn and her brother. The important thing for witches and wizards regarding their education was learning and practicing magic. There were schools for learning magic in the magic realm called Sera. But it took a lot of money just to get in there. Fortunately, Jyn's family was able to pay for such education. Jyn and her brother went to Baugaven Magical Academy when she was six. Her parents already paid for two years education, but some unwanted things happened. Jyn's father left when she was three, and her mother was taken away two years later. They did not have anyone else taking care of them. They parents did not even seemed to left them with great fortune except for the old mansion where they lived. They both had to drop out from the academy because they could not afford the expenses. The twelve years old Justin thought that they had to work to earn money. Earning human money would be enough to cover the daily needs. Then, they enrolled to an ordinary school. The title from that school could help them to find a decent job in the future.

Since the absence of her mother, Jyn and Justin helped each other with the daily needs. Justin got the part to cover for meals and house treatment. He worked hard day and night as a shopkeeper, a bartender, and a delivery guy. Jyn, on the other hand, got the part to cover small bills like buying soaps

and toothpastes. She also covered for the enchantment needs. In Sera, people could buy various enchantment needs as long as they had silver or gold coins, or jewel. Of course, the siblings could not get these kinds of money in the human world. Jyn had to work as a bounty hunter to get the money. Bounty hunters hunted ogres, goblins, or any other kinds of dark creatures. They hunted for their organs and body parts. They would hand them over to a butchery so they could be processed and sold as enchantment needs. The reward was not that much. Jyn mainly hunted for demons and special orders because they worth a lot. It would be lucky if the bounty hunters encountered fallen angels and managed to kill them. Fallen angels had high reward for they were rare to find compared to demons. If a witch or a wizard managed to kill a fallen angel, he or she could claim the wings and make them as their own.

That morning, Mrs Dean gave a lesson about French. Jyn was a bit sleepy somehow, yet she still could hear her voice muttering in a difficult French accent. The voice was getting hard to hear and her vision was turned blurry. Suddenly, her soul was being pulled away. She could no longer hear Mrs Dean's voice or the girls muttering about the new shopping centre in town. She turned around, and there they were. The two gates that triggered her to a horrific memory from the past. Her heart was beating faster and faster. She remembered that the gate was open, and a monster dragged her mother passed the gate. Jyn followed them from behind, and peeked from a dark corner near the gate. She heard someone was screaming so hard that it hurt her ears. She took steady steps toward the gate. It was darkness everywhere, but she could see a woman figure laying on the ground. Her hair was pulled by that monster, and she was stabbed dozens and dozens of times. She cried and cried like she was burned, but there was no fire. Her body was covered in blood, yet it seemed like she could not even die. 'Mommy.. Mommy..' cried little Jyn while running to the woman. She ran faster and faster, but it felt like she was getting nowhere. Then, she cried, 'mooomm!' when a hand suddenly appeared and pushed her away from the gate.

Jynora fell on her knees tried to get back to the present time. She tried hard to return to her body, but it felt like something hold her back. She was angry and annoyed. It felt like she knew who was behind this.

'In the light shall I be, where the present is seen. To the light shall I be, where my body awaits me. Puer incantante!' said Jyn with all her might.

'Miss Redfield!' shouted Mrs Dean who suddenly stand beside Jyn's desk.

‘Ou.. Oui Madame?’ answered her as sober as possible.

‘Are you still with us, Miss Redfield?’

‘Yes, Madame’

‘Good. Now go to the library and bring me twenty copies of le Magz book,’ ordered Mrs Dean.

After school, Jynora went downtown to open her fortune telling stall. She unlocked the door and walked upon the beautiful blue ceramic floor. The stall was Jyn’s most proud work. She decorated it beautifully so that people would feel the ‘magic’ whenever they stepped in to the stall. The sealing was covered with purpled-blue colour curtains, accompanied by some stars made from golden papers. Curtains made from glittered beads and seashells were also hanged around the room. Jynora also put some aromatic candles across the room to increase the patience of her customers. When working, she put on a blue Arabian costume to keep her mysterious aura. She kept her identity and used the name of Miss Wizzy.

The stall was divided into three parts. The waiting room was outside of the stall. There was a bench for the customers to sit down and read the ‘menu’ of the day. It contained the list of the price for fortune telling, consultation, and merchandise. ‘The witting’ room was the main part of the stall. It was where Jynora read fortune through the crystal ball or with tarrot cards and had consultations. The back room was for storage room. There, Jyn kept her merchandise like crystals, stones, good luck charms and some emergency enchantment supplies. It was also the place where she hung her withered flower collection.

Jyn was setting the place up when she found that flower. A red rose flower with no thorns was placed on the table, near the crystal ball. She picked it up and turned the flower around her hand. The smell was good. She did not know who put it there. She did not seem care about it. She cut a small ribbon to hang the rose in the back room with others withered flower. Jyn loved to collect withered flowers and brought it everywhere. Every day, she had at least two withered flowers inside her bag. Lily ever asked why she brought such things in her bag. Jyn simply answered that it was for protection and good luck –even though it had nothing to do with it at all.

That night was a cold night. The wind blew rather hard and brought the rain cloud to the town. Jyn sat in front of her dresser, brushing her hair aside slowly. She kept brushing her hair while looking at the mirror with plain expressions. She had not realized that her door was opened, and Justin was

suddenly standing at the door. He saw the mysterious mark on his sister's exposed shoulder. He was surprised. He asked about the mark with rather unpleasant tone, and Jyn did not answer. She kept brushing her hair until he yelled, 'Jynora are you deaf?' Jyn stood up, put down her brush hardly, and walked past her brother. She rushed her steps downstairs to get out of the house. Justin was furious and chased her by the stairs. He kept asking and insisted for his sister to answer the question. Yet, she did not say a word. She was almost reached the front door, but Justin made a fire wall in front of her. And she stopped.

'No magic inside the house!' yelled Jyn.

Jyn pissed off and used impact to her brother. He was pushed back by the impact, and the atmosphere was heating up between them. The siblings had a big fight inside the house. They yelled and threw spells on each other. Justin casted a sonic impact, a powerful impact that is bigger than ordinary impact, and made her fall. Justin summoned his sword and swung it toward her. Jyn was surprised because Justin was taking things that far. So she summoned her staff through a diamond-shaped star mark on her right wrist. A darkish purple staff appeared on her hand. The staff was about her height. It had a blooming flower shaped as the headdress, crowned with a bud where the crystal of the great sorcerer, ..., laid. It was made from high level mithril. It was light but also powerful staff. It was the staff of Eathenhorn, one of the most powerful staff in the history of magic. Eathenhorn was a great kingdom known for its powerful witches and sorcerers.

Jyn fought fiercely and blocked her brother's sword as best as she could. But her brother had superior physical strength compared to Jynora. She fell on the ground when Justin tried to streak again. She froze. Her serious face looked angry and surprised. She could not believe that her brother would swing his sword toward her with the intent to kill. Jyn closed her eyes, feeling uncertain for what might happen to her. Clank! Then, she heard the sword hit something hard, something that was not her head. She opened her eyes, and saw a tall man with dark hair and black leather jacket was blocking her brother's powerful stroke with just one hand. The brother was surprised for the man came out of nowhere.

'Don't do something that you might regret, wys,' greet the man.

'Who are you?' asked Justin.

'You!' cried Jyn. She felt that she ever met that man before, yet she could not remember who he was.

‘Who is this man, Jyn?! Answer me!’

‘I.. I couldn’t believe that you were really going to kill me!’ said Jyn standing straight again.

‘What kind of brother are you?! I’m leaving..’ said Jyn with a disappointed look, and walked to the door.

‘Jynora Redfield! Don’t you dare opening the goddamn door!’ Justin threatened.

Jyn kept continuing her steps and open the door without hesitation. Justin was about to cast a spell but the mysterious man snapped his fingers and freeze his movement.

‘Nice sword,’ said the man with a smirk and left.

Jyn was walking on an empty street. It was dark and the rain was still gathered in the sky. Jyn was still angry to her brother. She always thought that even though they fought a lot, Justin would never tried to kill her little sister. The moment suddenly fell silent. The wind was still blowing gently when she heard footsteps coming from behind her.

‘What do you want?!’ Jyn turned and raised her staff to the man’s throat.

‘Wow wow wow, easy girl, that staff is not a toy. Aren’t you supposed to say thank you to the man who just saved your life?’ said the man casually.

‘Who are you?’ said Jynora while trying to recollect her memory.

‘Don’t take another step!’ threaten Jyn when the man was trying to approach her.

The man stepped forward, hold her staff aside and grabbed her in his arm. Jyn gasped. Her eyes kept looking straight, and she could not bring herself to look at his face above her. She was panicked and scared. Her body trembled. His face was getting closer and closer to her, and he whispered with his smirk face, ‘don’t you remember?’ That voice. That feeling she felt when he was around. Cold but somehow attractive. That enjoyable fragrant around his body, created a sense of obsession. She looked up, her hand stroked across his cold pale face. It felt like she was hypnotized by those deep dark purple eyes. And that dark bluish hair. She remembered. ‘You are..’

Dante Belfarre, the demon prince of the Underworld. He was the son of Lucius Belfarre, known as Lucifer, ruler of the Underworld. Dante was the one behind Jyn’s mysterious mark.

It was one of Jyn’s bounty hunting nights. She dragged a demon body



that she just defeated. The wind suddenly blew harder behind her. It was not a usual wind. It was followed by flapping sounds in the air.

‘What a nice catch you got there. Why don’t you share it with me?’ greeted her with an evil smile.

‘I don’t do share,’ said Jyn coldly, still dragging the corpse.

‘Oh. Don’t be so cold little witchy. With that kind of manner, you might lose your tongue!’ her tone changed sharply.

Jyn stopped. She turned her head and faced the creature.

‘You d ark angels sure talk a lot don’t ya?’ she grinned.

‘Why don’t we just.. cut to the case, shall we?’ Jyn continued.

‘Hmm.. gladly!’ the dark angel accepted the challenge with her wicked face.

Jyn tapped her shoe and sent the corpse to a safe place through a portal. ‘shokan sword’ said Jyn summoning her sword, and the fierce battle began. Fighting dark angels was not easy compared to fighting with demons. Their wings were such a big advantage for them. They could create a big wind to ward off throwing objects or spells. Some wings that were high levelled could turn as hard as dragon scales to be their shield. Dark angels also had the advantages to attack on air. Jyn’s opponent was quite skilful. Jyn managed to land some attack, but she received more from the angel. The angel blasted off and swung her sword to Jyn. She was able to blocked it right on time, but her sword broke.

‘I got you now, little wizzy! Dasu kuron!’ An angel clone with two swords appeared behind Jyn. She was stabbed on both sides of her waist. ‘Argh..’ cried Jyn. The angel did not waste her time. She flew like a spear thrown powerfully with her claymore sword targeting Jyn’s heart. Jyn managed to evade a little. The angel missed, but she almost cut Jyn’s left arm off. It felt really painful. Jyn wanted to call her brother, but the sibling mark broke because of the angel’s strike.

‘This is nothing! This.. is nothing! I can do this. I am going to win this!’ said Jyn to herself while reaching for a vile of energy potion on her right thigh.

‘Hee, still got the nerve to stand? The, I’ll have to chop off your pretty little legs!’ said the angel.

Jynora stood up as best as she could. She gathered all the energy that she had left. She ran toward the angel. Then, she jumped, and used sky walk.

The angel was surprised, and let her guard off for a second.

‘Letting yourself off guard, and you die! Gwysio mithril light cleddyf!’ cried Jyn casting an advance summoning level spell.

A bright mithril sword came out from her right hand, and she stroke it right through the angel’s heart.

‘This is what you get for stabbing me on the back, bitch!’ said Jyn full of anger.

Jyn stabbed it deeper and deeper. She looked at her in the eyes until there was no life in them. Jyn manage to land on her feet, followed by the dark angel’s dead body. Yet, her wounds got worsen and she started to suffocate. She took a breath for a bit when a beam suddenly hit her right chest. ‘Ahk..’ cried Jyn. She fell and tried to stand up again. The beam came from a white witch who suddenly appeared in front of her.

‘You! What the hell are you trying to do here?! You despicable puritans!’

‘So persistent. Juuryoku.’ She cast a gravity spell below Jyn.

Jyn fell on her knees. Then, the girl hit the ground once with her silver metal staff. The pull was getting stronger, and Jyn fell with her face down.

‘Why don’t you just sit there for a while. I’ll take care of the body from here, thank you!’ said the girl with her sweet and evil smile.

‘You, filthy puritans! Don’t you dare..’

Before Jynora was able to finish her sentence, the girl threw a vile of poisonous gas toward her.

‘Thank you for your hard work, sister, ’ said the girl followed by a mocking smile.

The girl made a portal on the ground, and left with the angel’s body. Jyn rolled her body upward. Breathing was getting harder to do for her.

‘I.. won’t die.. I can’t .. die here.. I.. huh.. huh.. mom.. I..’ she panted.

She was dying. She felt chill and great fear around her body. She was afraid because she had not fulfil her goal to save her mother. She almost lost her hope. But then, she saw a shadow of a tall man. She could not see him clearly because her vision was rather blurry.

‘Who..’ asked Jyn with her weak voice.

‘Make a deal with me, and I’ll save you.’

‘I’ll give you protection and power.. In exchange for you soul,’ offered the man.



# The Adopted Girl

*by Putri Anindya Shavitri*

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There was a family of seven, one single father named Robert and six children. Robert was married for almost twenty years before but his ex-wife cheated on him so they separated. After his divorce, Robert really wanted to have children. He could not have his own children because he had no wife and he did not even think of getting married again. So he decided to adopt some children. At first, he adopted three children. They are Michael (30), Ben (29), and Ken (28). Then three years later he adopted three more children; James (27), Josh (25), and Mario (22). These men were actually Robert's friend's children. Their parents had economical issues so Robert wanted to make these men's lives better by adopting them. Robert felt like these gentlemen deserved a great-successful life so they could live happily and get what they wanted.

Robert and his sons lived under one roof. Robert was a very successful businessman or he used to be called as a conglomerate. Michael and Ben followed their father's career as a businessman. They worked in the company Robert had been building for thirty years. Meanwhile, Ken was in the army. Ken decided to join the army as a dedication for his family and his country. James worked for the government, he worked for the President and the prime minister. Josh had his own business in culinary. He and some closest friends opened a steak and grill restaurant. Josh also owned a bar club at the main street; it was a famous one. Mario was still in the university. He took business management as his major. In the house, these guys did not really get along. They argued a lot and most of the time, it ended up with someone getting bruises or with somebody leaving the house for the night until they cool down. Robert thought it was just a part of them to get to know each other and he believed one day they will get along, he hoped.

All these years Robert had been living with only men. He finally felt this house needs a woman figure. He was too old to get married and he did not even want to. He had asked his sons about them getting married. Their answer was, they hadn't had thought of getting married yet. Robert wanted to have a daughter. He spoke to his sons about his idea that weekend when his sons were always at home. Ben and James thought Robert's idea was insane. He had adopted six children and they thought that was enough. Michael didn't really say anything, so did Ken. They agreed but not agreed. Josh and Mario supported their father because they thought it was a good idea to have a woman figure in the family. They had some housekeepers but they were not a part of the family. One thing was on Robert's mind; he had not had thought yet who would be his daughter. Robert could not think of any of his friends who had a daughter. Some of them had daughters but he was sure they did not want to let their girls being adopted. At the end, Robert hired someone from a foster care to look for a girl to be adopted.

After few months looking, they finally found a girl. She was Abriella; an eighteen years old girl who lived in another state. She came from a broken-home family. She was on her last year in senior high school. Abriella had an alcoholic mother who never talked to or even cared about her. Her brother was in jail because of some crimes while her sister always had problems with her sugar daddies. Abriella did not know her father; not his name or how he looked like. She never saw her father. She had asked her mother but she became furious and told Abriella to never ask about him again. People said that her father was killed by a gangster. Abriella did not want to end up like her family. That was the reason she wanted to fight for her school and she was willing to continue her education to the university. She needed to have better education, and was hoping to have a better life too. She had no idea, still, who the family was until the adoption day. She didn't know that her life would change.

Robert was thrilled knowing that they finally found a young woman to be adopted. Right after he found out, he was busy preparing for Abby's arrival, literally everything, especially her bedroom. He asked Maria, the head of the housekeeper and the other maids to clean up and arranged some stuff for Abriella. He wanted her arrival to be perfect so that she would feel being home and accepted. Then on that weekend, Robert and Michael picked her up at the airport. Michael could see how excited his father to see his new child, a daughter. Someone who he was waiting for so long. When they arrived at

the airport, they didn't meet the girl immediately. They had to wait because Abriella had some documents to be signed. Thirty minutes later, Robert recognized the girl's face and he went to the gate as fast as he could and hug her in tears. He couldn't believe she was finally there.

Abriella was welcomed very warming by the guys; her new brothers. Abby did not have idea what to do or say. She did not expect that her arrival would be that warm. Unfortunately, Ken was not there because he was deployed few days ago. Robert led Abriella to her bedroom. It was a big girl bedroom with queen size bed with both bed-side table, a wardrobe, desk for studying and another for her make-up kits with mirror and lamps. Her dream bedroom came true. Robert let Abriella to take rest or take her time. Abby needed time to rest a bit after her long flight. Besides, she needed to look decent on her first dinner with her new family.

When it was time for dinner, Abriella sat down with her new family in the dining room. She couldn't believe she was sitting down with her new family for the first time. She had so many brothers. She tried to have conversations with them and to get to know them. Her father and brothers made things better. They started the conversation first because they realized Abriella was shy and nervous still. They were chatting like a normal family. It looked like they had been knowing each other for long. It did not take long time for Abriella to get along with her brothers. After dinner, she and her brothers watched some movies in their home theater. Abriella knew, she would be fine living with these men. She knew she would be safe because her brothers would protect her, so did her father. She did not like calling her new family with 'step family'. Abriella felt this is her real family. After watching some movies, all of them went to their bedrooms. Abriella could not sleep because she took a nap earlier. She decided to go back downstairs and laid down on the bench at the edge of the pool while watching the moon and stars. She was lucky to be in that house with generous people, especially her father. He was so nice to her. Her brothers also made her feel at home. She was hoping that everything would go smooth and well. She closed her eyes and was enjoying the night by herself, until she heard someone sat next to her. It was Michael, her first brother. He saw her when she was dreaming so he decided to make her a glass of hot chocolate milk and brought it to her, maybe she needed it. Michael and Abriella had their first conversation. Michael asked her mostly about her personal life and what was the reason she wanted to be adopted. Abriella did not mind Michael asking her such questions. He was

her brother and he deserved to know the story. It was already 2.30 AM. They had a very long conversation and they started to feel sleepy so they went to their bedroom and sleep.

Abriella spent her first months adapting to everything. She learnt, she read, she saw how her family is, including their routine. She was exploring things around her, the people, the places. Abriella also went to school, her new school. Robert signed her up to a famous-high pride senior high school in the city. At first it was strange to meet new people in her senior year in high school. The people at school were some nice, but some others were being bitchy. But it did not stop her to try to know them, at least her classmates. She realized she did not have enough time to know everybody well, even though she spent half of her day at school and hanging out with her new friends. She wanted to make friends in her new school. Even though in her school, there were some girls who did not like her, maybe a lot of them did not like Abriella. The first time Abriella came into that school, people were staring at her from head to toe. Abriella had long brunette hair that she always straightened every day. She was tall and a little bit curvy. People usually think or see her as an older woman. It was true. She did not look like girls on her age. She looked more mature than her age. Abriella was also a clever and diligent student. She never got score lower than B in class. She was very good at school. Abriella had a lovely personality which is something people like about her. She was a fun, easy-going, humble person. She was beautiful in and out. That's why people like her so much. Abriella never took what the girls said about her personally. She thought maybe those girls felt like threatened by her appearance at school. It was like in the movie. A new girl came in to the school, people stared at her, girls talked about her, guys couldn't stop looking at her. Just like that.

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A year later, Abriella finally graduated from senior high. Robert was so proud of his only daughter, so were Abriella's brothers. She graduated as an honored student. To celebrate Abriella's graduation, her brothers threw her a graduation party at home. The Blairs invited their family, closest friends and colleagues. They held it in the afternoon. It was Abriella's first big party. She felt loved by her family more. She was happy that all her family gathered to celebrate her graduation, including Ken who was home for few weeks. Robert introduced Abriella to his colleagues and told everybody how proud he was of

Abriella. He was even more proud because she got accepted in the prestigious university. Everyone enjoyed the party. There were at least a hundred guests in the house. There were good music and a lot of foods and drinks. It was so alive. When everyone was talking, Abriella saw a man who had been staring at her from the side of the pool. He was sitting there by himself with a bottle of beer on his hand. Their eyes met each other and that man came to Abriella and introduced himself to her. Benjamin. That's his name. Benjamin was Michael's friend. He was the CEO of a telecommunication company. Abriella and Benjamin walked to the side of the pool and talked there. Just two of them. They talked for the rest of the party.

Abriella realized it was almost time for sunset so she asked Benjamin if he knew a place to see sunset. Benjamin offered himself to take her to the beach, so they went to the beach immediately. They enjoyed the warmth of the sun together. Benjamin realized how beautiful Abriella was, and he felt there was something about her. He fell in love with her already. It was strange for him. It was only the day one he met her but he fell in love with her. His feelings got deeper when Abriella laid her head on his shoulder while watching the sun went down. She closed her eyes when she was talking of how she loved sunsets and sunrise and the beach. She was talking about what she loved to do. The more Abriella talking, the more Benjamin knew her as a person. She was no longer a stranger for him. The sun went all down and they left the beach. Benjamin dropped Abriella off to her house. Abriella arrived when her family was about to have dinner. Her father and her brothers were in the living room waiting for the chef to serve the food on the dining table. Abriella sat down with her family, smiling. Josh and Ken saw it then the rest of the family realized Abriella was so happy. They knew something just happened with her and Benjamin. They were just guessing without asking her what happened. Even Robert was smiling knowing that his daughter might have found someone. They ate their dinner and talked like they would normally do. They were aware this dinner time was different. Abriella looked happier.

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After several months spending time together, Benjamin thought it was a good time for him to propose Abriella to be his wife. He asked Michael about his idea proposing his sister. Michael was surprised. He did not know that Abriella had a relationship with Benjamin. He did not realize that his

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sister was so that close to Benjamin. He did not say anything. He was confused. He was afraid Abriella would get hurt because Michael never heard Benjamin ever dated anyone. There were a lot of girls who flirted with him but Michael had never seen Benjamin with a woman before. Michael told Benjamin he'd better ask Robert, as her father, for this. While saying that, Michael was not sure if his father would give Benjamin permission to marry Abriella. She was still young and she just entered the uni. She still had long way to finish her bachelor degree. Michael himself would not give permission. He did not want Benjamin to take Abriella's future, even he knew Abriella would be okay with him. He would take care of her. Benjamin also asked Ken since he was the protective one to Abriella. His reaction was similar to Michael but he had his own reason. Ken knew Abriella was his sister but Abriella made him feel like he deserved to be loved. She was the only one who sent him letters when he was deployed. She cared. She was so sweet. Ken knew it was wrong to fall for her but he could not handle his feelings. Abriella knew nothing about this. All of this. After talking to Abriella's family, Benjamin decided to postpone the proposal. He continued his relationship with Abriella, a young woman he fell in love with since the first time he talked to her.

At the same day, Abriella came home from school feeling so sad. Robert was talking to Benjamin in the living room and he saw Abriella was running to her bedroom and locked herself there all day. Robert did not know what happened to her. It never happened before. He tried to knock on the door but Abriella told him to leave. Benjamin went to her room and asked her to open the door but she refused. Robert asked his sons to try to talk to Abriella but none could make it. Abriella also told them to leave her alone. Only Maria who could enter the room because she had to bring Abriella's meals to the bedroom. At night, when Maria brought Abriella's meal to the bedroom, Maria asked Abriella what happened. Abriella was being silent. Her eyes were swollen from crying all day. She looked like a mess. She just felt betrayed. There was a girl who came to her that day at school telling her to stay away from Benjamin. That girl who said her name was Fiona, said she was dating Benjamin. She met Benjamin at the club and he slept with her when he was drunk that night. After all these months Benjamin hurt Abriella. He caused her pain.

Days went by, Abriella finally came downstairs for lunch. She thought she had to talk to somebody about that so that she felt relief. She found Michael and she talked about what happened. Michael was furious. Benjamin had hurt

his sister. He immediately called Benjamin to stop talking to her sister or he would be in trouble. Benjamin did not understand what he was saying. He tried to call Abriella but she did not pick up her phone. Benjamin had no clue about what was going on. He came to the house but the security said Abriella was not home. He was lost. He was wondering what happened to his woman. He kept trying to reach her but it was useless. On the other side, Abriella felt lost and betrayed. She felt like she had a mental breakdown. After dinner, Abriella tried to take some pills she bought that day. She felt so stressful. She had spent days crying and hurting herself for being stupid to fall in love for Benjamin. She decided to take as many pills as she could, hoping she would die. The next day, Maria found her in the bathtub with her bloody wrist and foamy mouth. Abriella, the nicest girl everybody knew, died because of her mental illness that nobody knows. And Benjamin made it worse by betraying her.

**The End**



# The Story of Reivan

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by *Julius Novan Deni Kurniawan*

Reivan was 17 and was born in Kseria, in the Kingdom of Havalia that now had been subjugated by Rockbanastre Empire. Like many other Kserians, he had tanned skin, black hair, and green eyes. He was 171cm height and about 63Kg weight and always wearing a dark coloured t-shirt with light metal armor that covered his left hand and his legs. He wore that armour because those were the memory that he had about his brother who died on the battle between Havalia and Rockbanastre. Also, he wore a ring that his brother gave him on his 7th birthday, a year before his brother gone forever.

He became an orphan since the death of his brother and he didn't have any family left. His parent was unknown and now he lived with his friends named Luna, Baeks, and Abgudmen. They were staying in Old Caka's house who sell weaponry and supplying the Empire's weaponry. Old Caka's house was located on the Old City of Kseria. They were helping Old Caka to sell weaponry and Reivan was also a very great blacksmith although his hobby was stealing Rockbanastre's Soldiers pouch on the New City every night after working on Old Caka's tent. One day when he was stealing money from the soldier, he dropped his rings and when he realized, he came back to the soldier and the ring was on the soldier's hand and he got a fight with them. He got arrested and tortured but Old Caka helped him out from jail by bribing the soldiers. Old Caka was so angry with him but Reivan thanked him because Old Caka helped him to get back his rings. He feared that his ring would gone forever. After he got the money, he would share it with Luna, Baeks, and Abgudmen and because he felt that he had the responsibility to make them happy because he was the oldest among them although Luna would always got angry on him because he was doing a bad thing even though Rockbanastre's Soldiers always oppress Kseirans People. Then he would tell his story to them

that he someday would have his own airship and became a sky pirate and they would always mock him and laughed together.

At night before he slept, he always went to Old Caka's Rooftop even though it was raining because the rooftop had a canopy on it so he could sit there without any drops hit him. Luna would always be there accompanying him. Reivan would take his brother's ring and started talking about him. Deep down inside, he still missed his brother a lot, even though it was 9 years ago when his brother was died. Reivan said, that he hated the Empire. He was just wanted a revenge. But he never did anything about it. What he could do just stealing their soldier's money, and realized there was nothing he could do. He would say stuff like being a sky pirate, or some other stupid things like becoming a great blacksmith or even having a ship. He said anything like that just to keep his mind off it. He was just running away. He said that he hated how the world works, whoever have the power, will win. And he just wanted it but it would make him realized that he was just nothing.

In the morning, as usual, he, Luna, Baeks, and Abgudmen were working at Old Caka's place. Then, a dozen of Rockbanastre soldiers came to the store. It was Romy, the Head of Kseria's New City Soldier Department and he was trying to put Reivan to the jail because of his crime, pickpocketing the soldiers. Old Caka helped Reivan by telling Romy that if they arrest Reivan, he wouldn't be able to supply the weaponry to the Empire again because Reivan was one of his best blacksmiths. Romy agreed because he would get a problem from the Empire if the weaponry supply on his territory was dropping. Then, he agreed to not to arrest Reivan in one condition; that Old Caka must build special armour and weapon for him that made from Crysalia Crystal in a month. Old Caka agreed with him.

After the soldier was left, Reivan ask Old Caka about the Crystal. Old Caka said that the Crysalia Crystal was a transparent crystal that would turn to orange when heated up. Crysalia Crystal could absorb heat from the sun or when burned by fire and can keep the heat for an hour. When the crystal was being put on in a weapon like a sword and heated up. It will transmit heat to the whole sword for an hour and it was very effective to injure the enemy with burns. This crystal was once used by Havalian Soldier when fighting with Rockbanastre army. Reivan asked about why the soldiers was requesting to build an armour with Crysalia Crystal but Old Caka had no idea about it.

Old Caka explained about the way to get the crystal. He said that the crystal was located on Boza Cave on the Northern City of Kseria, crossing

Big Bubble swamp. Big Bubble Swamp was a muddy swamp that emits sulfur-filled bubbles from the mud because it is actually a crater. Old Caka asked Luna to go with Reivan, “You, Luna, go with Reivan, he will need your help, especially your cooking skill.” Luna agreed with Old Caka because she knew that if Reivan went alone, he would die of starvation although Reivan wasn’t agree because he thought that it would be dangerous for her.

Old Caka gave them the Havalian Kingdom’s Map. He told them that there was a secret gateway in Kseria’s South Waterway that can be opened just from the inside (Kseria’s side). The secret gateway was a shortcut to get to Big Bubble Swamp way much shorter rather than going through the Kseria’s city main gateway that located in the south of the city. On that day, they were preparing everything for the journey.

The next day, Reivan, Luna, and Old Caka were walking through the waterway. The waterway was the place where Reivan was training his sword skill with Luna, Baeks, and Abgudmen every holiday. Reivan asked Old Caka about what kind of “secret way” that he was saying about but he just kept smiling and always changing the subject. Then at the end of the waterway, Old Caka stopped, then he took the key from his pocket and put the key on the keyhole that located on a brick below his leg that covered by moss and then he rotates it. Suddenly, there’s a gap between the brick in front of them and it looked like a doorway. Old Caka asked Reivan to move it and then they saw a very bright light at the other end.

Reivan and Luna was amazed and also confused about how could Old Caka knew about this secret shortcut and how did he have the key. Again, Old Caka was just smiling to them. Before Reivan and Luna went, he gave them a letter and he said

“You will meet with somebody at the cave, they have mine the Crysalia Crystal, just bring the crystal with you, they are my friend and friends of Velocy too, your brother.”

Hearing that, Reivan was shocked, then he asked him,

“What??? My brother’s friends? How could you know? Also, how do you know about my brother? Who are you actually?”

Old Caka said “It’s a long story, just go, we can’t wait any longer. You can ask them for yourself, just get the letter for them.”

Reivan asked, “What it is about?”

“It’s about our future, Havalia Kingdoms future.” He said with smile.

“Just don’t forget to come back here yesterday at 6pm, and don’t be late!!!” pushing Reivan and Luna to the secret way then closing the door.

Reivan was still confused about what just happened, about Old Caka that said he knew about his brother and about Old Caka’s friend that he would be meeting with. Luna said to Reivan that she was shocked too, knowing that all this time Old Caka was maybe a friend of your brother. Reivan said “We should go to the cave as fast as we can. “C’mon Luna, let’s go out there and go to Boza Cave.” They were running outside and suddenly they were stopped after get to the outside. When they step outside, they just realized that Kseria City was built at the edge of the cliff and the waterway from the city build a gorgeous waterfall. They never go to the south of the city because it was the Emperor’s Palace. They were amazed by the scenery. There was a mountain in the north, a lake on the northeast side, and above them was the Palace. According to the map, the cave was northwest from here but they could not see it. At first, they were confused about how to go down there but Luna found a pathway on the left (west side) that leads below to the Big Bubble Swamp. They went down through the pathway and entered the Big Bubble Swamp.

It was dark, watery, gloomy, and stinky swamp. The swamp was full of trees and plants. Reivan was in a rush because he wanted to get to the cave as fast as possible but Luna asked Reivan that it was almost night, it was better to set a camp right now before it was too dark and got lost. At first Reivan refused Luna’s suggestion, but seeing Luna’s condition, he finally agreed to set a camp. Luna was cooking and Reivan just laid down, wondering about what was actually happened. Who actually Old Caka is? Who are they? After the food had done, they ate together. “Hey Reivan, when your brother was still alive, did you know one or some of your brother’s friends?” asked Luna. “No, I never met them, my brother said that he works for the Royal Guard, then nothing I know about him” said Reivan while looking to his ring. Done eating, then they went to sleep.

The next morning at 6am, they continued their journey until finally they arrived at the mouth of the Boza Cave. When they were going to enter the cave, suddenly they were surrounded by 5 people armed with sword. Reivan and Luna also took out their sword. Then before the fight began, a voice of a man came from the cave “Wow wow wow easy guys easy, he is Reivan and Penelo, a friend of Caka and obviously a friend of ours too.” The man came out from the cave with a young woman next to him. “Get back” said the woman. “Yes, my princess.” Said one of the 5 soldiers. “Princess?” said

Reivan and Luna. The woman just smiling.

They all got in to the caves and they saw a huge war airship. They all sit on a tent.

“Welcome,” said the women, “my name is Princess Leianesca, you can call me Leia, I am the daughter of King Branko, the last King of Havalia Kingdom.”

Reivan and Luna were shocked that Princess Princess Leianesca, daughter of King Branko was still alive until now.

“and my name is Roy, I am her royal guard” said the man next to her.

“So, your name is Luna, right?” Leia asked

“oh, um, yes my princess.” While lowering her head.

“oh you don’t need to do that, we are friends right now.” Said Leia

“and you, Reivan right? Your brother, Velocity, was my royal guard, my friend, and Roy’s friend too, he is a good friend of ours.” Said Leia

“My brother?? Your royal guard??” asked Reivan, trembling.

“Yes, he is one of our great warriors, and our precious friend too who died on the great war.” Said Roy.

“So how did he die???” ask Reivan.

“I am so sorry Reivan, he died protecting me, but I promise, I will avenge his death!” said Leia.

Reivan lowering his head and said nothing. Suddenly, while crying and trembling, Reivan said “it’s alright, at least my brother was died because of royal duty.”

“Now it is my turn to avenge them, not you not all of you, but me!”

“Please! I know what you guys were doing. You want to attack the empire, right? Don’t you?!” Said Reivan.

Leia and Roy were looking at each other. Then Roy asked Leia “What?”

“You have job to do Roy.” Leia smiling

“What? Really? This kid???” said Roy.

“Hey! This kid was your friend’s brother, I can fight too and I want fight too! With you, for my brother, for the Rise of Havalia Kingdom!” Said Reivan.

“We need more men Roy, we can’t waste his spirit. Just train him.”  
Said Leia



“But uh... alright whatever,” Said Roy, “As your wish my princess.”  
Bowling to Leia.

Reivan was very happy hearing that, but Luna was the opposite. She looked worried about Reivan.

Knowing this, Reivan said to Luna “Don’t worry Luna, it’ll be alright,” Said Reivan, “this is my chance to avenge my brother’s death, don’t worry.” holding Luna’s shoulders.

“Almost forgot, this is a letter from Old Caka,” handing over the letter to Roy, “so what it is about?” asked Reivan.

“It’s about our victory, the way to defeat Rockbanastre Empire.” Said Roy.

“Ok now let’s get to work, I will ask some of the man to brought the Crysalia Crystal for Caka and explain to him that Reivan joined the army and Luna will be here before we attack Havalialia,” said Leia, “Reivan, you go with Roy, he will train you how to fight and operates airship, Luna you come with me, I have some questions for you.”

Then Reivan went practicing with Roy and Luna was following Princess Leia to her room.

“What can I help you my lady?” asked Luna

“Oh, please just call me Leia, please sit down, I just want to know about you and Reivan,” while taking a book from her bookshelf, “I want to write about you and Reivan, it is my habit to write about my men’s or my friend’s origin, journey, and everything on my book,” holding Luna’s hands with sad face.

“I guess we have the same habit my lady, I also have a diary for myself.” Said Luna.

“Well then, we share the same hobby I guess,” smiling, “Ok so let just begin, the first question is, what do you know about Reivan?”

Then the princess and Luna were sharing together about their life and about the people that they knew while Reivan was practicing with Roy.

A month has passed, some of the soldiers had already infiltrated to Kseria City. They were Havalialian’s loyal army. After Havalialia was lost, some of the army were fled to Black Sand Desert, Werstinger Mountain, Falconvale Forest, and Goldmill Mountain where the Princess were hiding and preparing for revenge. For years, Princess Leia were preparing and convincing them to take back Havalialia. It was hard at first, because they had lost their morale, but

with her spirit and sincerity, slowly, they regained their morale and wanted to fight alongside her to take Havaliala back. Today was the day, the day they fight to take back Havaliala.

“Evandrus one, do you copy?” Leia asked

“Copy that.” Said Reivan

“Wow finally, I became a sky pirate with this cool plane!” Said Reivan

“Wow easy, just don’t your friends all right?” Said Roy

“Hahaha, copy that!” Said Reivan

That night, about 500 warplanes were taking off from Werstinger Mountain, heading towards Kseria City that led by Princess Leia. She and Roy were on the same plane. Some of Kseria’s citizen like Old Caka, Luna, Baeks, and Abgudmen were evacuated on Boza Cave during the battle.

When they were already above the Big Bubble Forest. Princess Leia gave order to start the attack. The first attack was the explosion of 5 bombs which already planted on the city weaponry supplies and soldier’s barracks. It would decrease Reckbanastre’s power and morale. Then about three thousand Havaliala’s Army breached the front gate and about five hundreds elite soldier were using the secret way on the waterway to infiltrate the Palace.

Then it was time for the warplane to participate.

“To Victory!” Said Leia on the Plane’s microphone, heard by all the army.

The fight was really fierce. There was a lot of corpse that could be seen from the plane that came from Havaliala and Rockbanastre’s soldiers. Planes explosions, gun firing, sword clinging, screaming, all could be heard from above this.

“Guh I’m so tired!” Said Reivan from the plane communication

“Keep focus Reivan, don’t die!” said Roy

“Meh, I can’t be killed, Raaargh!!” shooting one of enemy’s plane

Reivan fought bravely. He had shot down about 10 of enemy’s plane. Suddenly there was an attack from above. It was Rockbanastre’s Great Battle plane. The size was about twice than normal plane. The armour was also very thick and it had a lot of gun on it. It destroyed Havaliala’s planes easily, but none of Havaliala planes could penetrate the planes.

Reivan was trying to go above the Great Battle Plane, hoping that the above plane had a thin armour and it was true. But there were some enemy soldiers above the plane that ready to shoot Reivan’s plane. Then Reivan was asking for help and finally, they could shoot down the plane. The plane was

falling down very fast and crashing to the ground then exploded, causing a lot of casualties from both sides.

“Oh no what have we done?” said Leia watching the battle below.

“We have to do that my lady, or we will lose.” Said Roy

Boom, Roy’s plane was shoot by enemy’s plane from above. It destroyed the plane’s main body but not the cockpit. They were falling, and the enemy plane still trying to shoot Roy’s plane but it got destroyed by Reivan.

“Roy, Princess, are you, all right?” Reivan Asked

But no answer because Roy’s communication devices had been destroyed.

“My Lady, there’s a parachute below my chair, take it,” Said Roy

“It just one parachute! Where’s the other?” Said the Princess

“Gah, I don’t need a parachute,” Roy smiling

“Roy?!”

“Good Bye my lady, don’t forget to write my story on your book, and tell to the world about me, about Roy the Plane Slayer! Hahaha.” He said that and push a button to eject Princess Leia’s chair.

Princess Leia was ejected then she opened her parachute. From up there, she could see Roy’s Plane.

“I’m sorry my lady, but you can’t die. I’m so happy to protect you, to be with you although we can’t we can’t be together anymore, I Love You.” Then Roy’s Plane was crashed to the hall of the palace. Seeing that, princess Leia was cried out loud and after she set foot on the ground, she took her sword and started fighting.

Knowing that Princess Leia was fighting below, Reivan got off his plane and was fighting together with the Princess. When they stepped aside from the plane, suddenly a soldier appeared from his back and tried to stab Reivan but Reivan could counter it. They were already tired and almost gave up. But suddenly the citizen from Boza Cave came and was helping them.

“Thought we were late,” said Old Caka

“Huh, Old Caka, Luna, Baeks, Abgudmen, and the other, what are you doing?” Reivan asked

“We can’t just let you die Reivan,” said Luna

“Tch, but thank you.”

“No problem. Let’s kill those bastards,” said Luna

The fight was continued until the palace had been taken and somebody from the palace announced it. It was Romy, he announced from the speaker around the city that the palace had been taken by Havalial's Soldier and Kseria city was now under Havalial's Kingdom again. Romy was actually Leia's Loyal Guard. He sent the letter to Leia when acting that he wanted to arrest Reivan but actually, he just wanted to give a letter to Old Caka. The letter told that this day, Rockbanastre Emperor was on his way to conquer Springhaven Kingdom so it was the right time to take Kseria.

They all were happy, but suddenly, Reivan fell to the ground. His limbs were wounded because of the soldier who stabbed him when he was step off from the plane. And then he died before got any help.

It is the Story of Reivan, this book was written by Havalial Empire, based from Princess Leia's book and Reivan's friends.

**He is a true hero, for us. -Leia**



## Rotten Rose

by Albertus Revo Pramudya

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The rain was pouring hard in the gloomy night. It gave off a chill atmosphere to the surrounding hill of Stardew Town. A little house sat near the river at the foot of the hill. The house was a small cottage with one bedroom and small yard in front of the house. Inside, there was a man washing a woman's hand with a wet cloth, thoroughly yet careful and gentle. The man was Bedlam Jeager, and the woman was his wife, Rosa Jeager. He turned to the left hand and washed it as clean as the other hand. His eyes looked across Rosa's face, the beauty of her face, the shape of her nose, the curve of her eyes, all of it still reminded him the feeling when he first met her. Bedlam flipped over the foot side of the blanket, and he could see the rotten flesh on her feet. It released fishy and rancid smell of rotten meat. The colour of her feet blackened as the disease spread further and further to her head.

Rosa looked to her husband face. She could see worries and regret on his face. She turned her husband head in front of him and looked on his eyes through his soul.

"I'm going to be fine," she said. Her voice was soft and gentle. It was like the melody at the beginning of the orchestra. It made him feel excitement and calm. A bitter smile came up on his lips.

"I know and I promise that you are going to be fine," he said with a confident in his heart. Then, he covered her feet with blanket and leave the room with a bowl of warm water and wet cloth. He threw out the water and went outside to hung the cloth on the cloth lines. Bedlam went back to the house and put out the candle first in the living quarter and the last in his bed chamber. The activity became a habit since his wife was contacted with the devilish disease. No one knew how it first got to the town, and he thought

that it was not the best question to be asked. The disease had taken over half of his wife body, the only thing that mattered to him was how to cure Rosa. Bedlam took a place beside his wife, kissed her forehead, and went to sleep. He decided to leave whatever trouble today had brought.

The next morning, Bedlam did his usual activity. He bathed her wife, prepared breakfast for them, and got to the market, before finally went to work in the barrack's blacksmith. The soldier called him 'people soldier', it was only because he wanted to help the soldier fought their battle but he did not want to wielded any weapon. In his early childhood, he was taught to never lift any weapon to hurt others, and he did not have any plan to abandon that teaching. He did his usual work as best as he could. His work place was small, with anvil, furnace, and grinding stone in the corner of the room.

From the door, came a big soldier. His face was dirtied from the training drill the soldier usually did in their free time. He was in his prime age. His eyes were sharp, and intimidating. His body was huge, bulky and stiff. The man was Charles Donovan, the sergeant of the soldier which stationed in the town. He approached Bedlam while carrying an iron sword with dent here and there.

"Bedlam, could you please fix this sword for me?"

"Again?" Said Bedlam, he managed to glance at the sword and gave him a smile and then he continued hammering the burning sword on the anvil.

"Well... you know... I have been working hard on my technique so I can be the greatest general under the sun.", Said Donovan while scratching his back head.

"Maybe you could test your technique with a real person instead of training dummy."

"It's not just a training dummy. It is a training dummy with armour and sword, heck even a shield."

"It's still not a person." Said Bedlam. Both of them just smile. He threw the hot sword to the water bucket right beside the anvil and then a hot steam came up from the bucket. Bedlam then took off his working glove and threw it to the table near the door.

"What's wrong this time?"

"The usual wrong." Said Donovan.

He gave the dented iron sword to Bedlam to be inspected. Bedlam

observe the sword carefully, from the grip of the sword until the point of the sword. He weighted the sword with his arm to find the centre gravitation of the sword. Then Bedlam swung the sword around him, Donovan had to back off a little bit to avoid the sword. Bedlam stroked his chin and thinking what else could be wrong with the sword.

“You could use some training with your swing you know” Said Donovan.

“I don’t do any sword or fighting,” Said Bedlam while putting the sword to a little cupboard entitled ‘Fix Job’. “That would be fine, you can come here again in two days”

“In return, I heard some rumour from the innkeeper at the tavern. They said there is a fruit that can heal everything.” Said Donovan.

“Not this again, the disease is incurable, there is not even way to stop it.” Said Bedlam. His eyes were full of sadness and quite tired.

“Trust me, the fruit called Alcure. The innkeeper is not the only who knows about it. The old witch on the hill knows about it. I asked when we had an inspection in her dungeon.” Said Donovan.

“You mean the herbalist?” asked Bedlam. He knew quite well about the condition of the town. With the disease spreading around, the gossip about the witch who created the disease also spread. People become superstitious and suspicious with one another.

“She is a witch, she said she is here to help, but she does nothing but bring bad luck to the town.”

“Okay... I’ll check on the witch after work.” Bedlam continued his previous work. Donovan seemed satisfied that Bedlam finally heard his advice. Deep down, Bedlam knew there was no way of treating the disease. Everyone in the town had been trying so hard to help him, but it was all just a rumour and gossip about the cure. He thought that this was no different.

The work was quick and dull. There was nothing to expect from working as blacksmith. The way home was quiet and silent. There were no people passed the street to his home, the entrance of the town was on the east and his home was in the west. The road was dark, the only source of light was the lantern on his belt. He stopped suddenly, before him was a figure with hood. The figure was not tall, it was more like medium height. The figure drew closer to him slowly. He suddenly felt out of place. The world around him twisting around and made his head felt dizzy. The figure stood still, unaffected



by the twisted environment all around. The figures get closer and gave him a rose.

“The love of your life,” The figure shoved the flower to him. “when the last petal drops so is the last petal of your love. As the gardener who tend his flower, the man shall tend his flower. Look for the fruit in the top of Mountain Severet.” The voice was clear and loud as if the figure was talking right in front of his ears. The sound was smooth and chilling to the ear. Suddenly, his eyes were tired and heavy, the world slowly fading away from his consciousness.

Bedlam woke up in his bed. His eyes were still blurred by the sun directing it light from behind the mountain. In his left hand was a glowing rose. His body felt sore and heavy as if last night he was doing labour work. He remembered faintly about last night. The figure was speaking in code, it was all too real to be just a dream. Bedlam didn't even sure that last night was a dream, he didn't remember how he got to his bed. It was a strange experience and he felt so sure the answer for all his trouble lain on the top of Mount Severet. He didn't know much about the mountain, only that it was not that tall to be called mountain. He stood up and put the flower inside his hanged coat. Then he went to make breakfast for her wife. He made a simple chicken porridge for her wife. He feed her wife carefully and gently.

“I think I will be going to Mountain Severet. I'm going to look for some mineral for the workshop. I will tell the herbalist to tend over you for the time being. Is that okay?” There was a doubt in his sentence. He was not sure whether this was a good idea or not.

“I told you before, I'm going to be okay, there is no need to worry about me.” She smiled. The smile that never left her face even since the disease got her.

“I'm going to leave when the sun is a little bit higher, I can get there by noon and get home by night. Now... finish your food.”

He did his morning routine diligently, nothing missed or left out. After that, he prepared his belonging to go to Mountain Severet. He had doubt whether to take his sword. It was there but he never used it before, and hopefully never will. He grabbed the sword and tied it on his belt. It was brought just to make sure his wife didn't worry and just to be safe. Then, he strapped the rose on his right arm. Lastly, he double checked everything, he wanted to be as prepared as possible for this was the one chance that he couldn't miss. Not long after that, there was a knock on the door. The herbalist had come, he thought. He opened the door and there she was. She carried a bucket of herb on her right

hand. She was cleaning the dirt on her knee until she noticed the door was open.

“Good morning, Mr. Jeager.” She said.

“Good morning, Mrs. Diane.” He said. He greeted her with warm and soft smile.

“By the way, do you still need the mushroom in your yard?” she asked carefully.

“Just take it. You probably need it more than I do.” He smiled. “I’m going away until nightfall, could you please look after Rosa for me?”

“It’s no problem, I’ll make sure she is fine.” She said. The herbalist was a young woman. Her hand shows many scars of small knife. There was a spot with brighter or darker skin colour here and there on her palm. Her attire was rugged and old, it showed the style of poor lady, but her neckless and ring said otherwise.

Then, he left. His heart beating so fast, he felt excitement and optimism. The road was clear, the weather was nice, he could feel the blessing of today.

He walked steadily climb uphill. Not long after that, he saw an old man sitting in the side of the road. The old man looked tired and famish. He felt pity towards the old man. He carefully approached the old man, and when he was trying to reach food in his bag, the two other old men came up from the bushes with the dagger on their hand.

“Just give us all of your belonging and we’ll be fine.” Said the old man with the dagger. His face had diagonal scar on his face. His body was a little bit crooked.

“Please... I need my belonging, it’s because my wi...”

“Shut it. Just give us everything and we’ll let you pass.” Said the other old man with the dagger. “We run out of patience.”

“Please... I don’t want to do this.”

The old man with the scar face charged with his dagger. Bedlam was panic and drew his sword, blocked the old man’s attack, and slashed his gut open. The internal organ poured from inside the old man’s gut. The other old man was shouting out loud and charging towards Bedlam. Bedlam kicked the old man and stab the old man’s neck with his sword. The blood was squirting out to his face. He realized that his face and hand were covered in blood, his feet began to shake and then he fell to the ground. The remaining old

man looked over his two dead friend and he jumped towards Bedlam. Bedlam quickly got his sword and stabbed the old man on his chest. The blood slowly coming out from his lips and it took a few second until he didn't feel any struggle for the old man's body. After that he shoved the body away from him. He was just siting there, scared to the bone, in front of him was three dead bodies. He collected his scattered courage and put his sword back to its scabbard. Then, he continued to look for a river to wash over the blood on his body.

It took a quite long walk and rancid smell of blood until he found the river. The river was quite but it was far from upstream to down. He washed his face and hand before finally got a drink and food. The food tasted worse on his current condition. He looked at the rose strapped on his arm. The petals were withered and fell along the road. Bedlam knew in his heart that something was wrong with his wife, he felt sorrow and grief. He looked over to the top of the mountain, he was halfway there. Bedlam felt that he was so close to his goal, the cure that was supposed to be there. He covered the rose with his sleeve. As he tried to continue his mission, he saw a man hanging on the log that was drifting on the river. The man looked as he was trying to scream out for help. Bedlam instinctively chased the man. As he ran, he felt the petals came off more. He knew if he tried to safe the man, the rose won't make it. He stopped chasing the man, he ran to the other direction. He left with the feeling of deep regret as he continued to the top of the mountain.

He arrived at the top of mountain. There was a huge tree with no leaf. The tree was huge and the branches were twisted. In that tree, hung a glowing fruit. The glow was like the sunrise, it warm and enveloped all being who saw it. As he tried to reach the fruit, a man came up from the opposite direction.

“Wait... please... I need it, its my daughter.”

“I'm afraid I can't give it to you. I'm sorry...” He picked the fruit and put it in his bag.

The man approached him and drew his sword. “Please...”

Bedlam also drew his sword. This time, his hand was steady, he was ready to protect the fruit at any cost. “Let's do this.”

The man charged him with all his might. Bedlam was no different, there was only certainty. The man swung his sword and attack him. He blocked the attack and stroke back at the man. The man was fast enough to avoid his strike. The mean ran towards him in quick motion. Bedlam took out his hammer from the bag and threw it towards the man. The hammer crashed

his skull and he fell with crushed face and blood all over. Bedlam swung his last strike to the man and ended the man's life. In his last strike, rose petals flew all over the place, leaving nothing but the stalk. He left with his sword still stabbed in the man's chest.

He walked a long road and arrived at his home. The flower strapped on his arm was already withered and lose all of its petals. His house was crowded with people from the neighbourhood. As he arrived, everyone looked at him in sorrow and made a way for him. He walked helplessly, as he saw her wife, her body was already pale and blackened. Her face didn't have any light left. He got down on his knee, took her hand, and fell into sorrow. He regretted not getting home faster, he regretted for going to Mount Severet. Bedlam realize that all of this was the twisted game of fate.



# Plain

by *Caecilia Riris Krismarini*

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The wind danced and sang with the leaves. It entered my room through the window. He could feel the breeze. And he was still lying under his blanket. But, the light started hitting his face. It made him to open his eyes. He tried to open them hardly. He was too lazy. It was more comfortable to stay lying on the bed. He walked to the window. He watched outside. The sunflowers greeted beautifully. He smiled to them. The morning air was really clear and fresh.

It was his last day in that house. Tomorrow, his parents would pick him up to go home. Now he sat on the bench behind the house. He enjoyed the view. The rice-field was outstretched widely. The sound of river stream and the song of birds made it more soothing. He smiled remembering what he had done here. His grandfather came and sat next to him. He tapped his grandson's shoulder.

“You will leave this house tomorrow,” he said. But, Kenzo just smiled.

Dusk was his favourite moment. The sky that was blue turned orange and red. That was so beautiful. But, this dusk was not pretty as usual. The dusk sky was dark and it poured cubic of water. The dusk became cold. Kenzo went down to the kitchen. He found granny was cooking for the family. He approached granny and offered a help. He thought that he would really, really miss her biscuits. He loved granny's biscuits and ate them with a cup of hot tea.

“Granny?”

“Yes, Son. So, do you need something?”

“No. I just want to help you.”

“Oh, sure. Can you wash the spinach and the carrots please?”

“Sure.”

Granny pierced her grandson for a moment. And then she asked, “You don’t need something, do you?”

Then Kenzo answered her with low voice and little shy, “Hmm... Actually, yes.”

Granny smiled. “Just say it! Why do you feel awkward? What’s that?”

“Granny, can we make biscuits?”

“Yes, of course. Let’s finish it first.”

“Alright!” he answered granny with a big smile on his face.

It was 6.48. They had sat around the table. Chicken soup with tofu, rice, and fried shrimps had been served. They ate together and enjoyed their food. Ting. The microwave marked that the biscuits was baked very well. After the supper, they still sat there. Grandpa took the biscuits from the kitchen while granny were making cups of tea for all of them. Although it was cold outside due to rain, it was warm inside. They enjoyed their snacks and talked until late night.

Granny opened the door. She called his husband to go to the terrace soon. There was a black big car stopped in front of their house. They watched that car carefully. Then, a beautiful and very elegant woman and, from the other side door, a tall man who wore sunglasses and was in casual fashion came out from the car. Then, granny and grandpa approached them and hugged them. They were very happy their son and daughter in law came to their house. They entered the house. The women looked around trying to find something or someone.

“He is still sleeping in his room,” grandpa said. He knew who she was trying to find. Then the woman and the man went upstairs and entered a room with a door full of superhero stickers. They walked closer to the bed. She kissed the body there.

“Good morning. Get up. The sun is there.”

The boy started to open his eyes. He found his parents were already in front of him. He smiled and hugged them. He missed them so much. After they talked a little bit, they went downstairs. Grandpa and granny were already in the dining room and had prepared the breakfast. They sat together and enjoyed the breakfast. Kenzo sat between his parents. They talked about many things.

Kenzo packed his things and was helped by his mother and granny while his father was talking with his grandfather in the living room. Today

he must have gone back to his house. After he finished packing his things, he hugged his grandparents who had taken care of him for a long time for a farewell. Started from now, he would live with his parents in city. And then the car drove away from that house.

In the way to go home, Kenzo was telling his parents what activities he had done there. His mother and his father were enthusiastic about their son's stories. Kenzo told about his experience when he went to beach and lampion festival. He talked about his activities there until he fell asleep. The car entered the yard of a big house. Kenzo was carried by his father. Next morning, Kenzo opened his eyes. He looked around and watched everything around him. Then, he remembered he was at home. He walked out of his room and entered his parents' room to see his mother and father.

“Mom! Dad!”

He opened the door, but unfortunately, he could not find anyone. The he went to the dining room, maybe he could find them there. But no one was there. Then, he heard voice from the kitchen. He walked towards it. He found a woman washing the dishes, but not his mother.

“Excuse me, Ma'am. Who are you? What are you doing here?”

“Oh, good morning. I'm sorry I didn't notice you. My name is Patrice. I'm the house keeper. Nice to meet you, Son.”

“Nice too meet you too, Mrs. Patrice. By the way, where is my mother?”

“Your mother is not here. She goes to work. And so does your father. They went when you were still sleeping. I have prepared your breakfast. Go to the dining room and eat your food, Son.”

Then, Kenzo just answered yes and he went to the dining room. He felt a little disappointed. After finishing his breakfast, he wore his hoodie and went to the garden. He played with Buddy, a golden dog that had kept the house safe for years. He brought Buddy to his room. He sat by the window with Buddy next to him. He draw the view from his window. He really liked drawing, but he never told everyone. When he was drawing, he could spend hours sitting with his drawing book and pencil. It was 4.45. It was dusk, but his parents were not home still. He was waiting in front of the house and playing football with Buddy. He enjoyed his time with Buddy. They really missed each other.

Patrice called Kenzo for dinner. Then he asked why he should eat the



dinner now, however, his parents had not been at home yet. Then she tried to explain that he should not wait for them because they would be back at eleven. Kenzo understood that his parents were swamped. After the dinner, he went to his room and played video games while waiting for his parents to come home.

The sunlight entered the window and woke him up. He looked at the clock. 8.13. He went downstairs. And he found same situation as a week ago. There was only Mrs. Patrice in the kitchen. He did not eat his breakfast. He wore his hoodie and just said to Mrs. Patrice that he wanted to hang out with Buddy. They went to the park. In the park, Kenzo watched kids went there with their parents. It was weekend, but neither his mother nor father was at home. Accidently, he saw a brochure on the wall. There was a festival next Saturday. He wanted to ask his parents to go there.

This Thursday, his parents were free. So they could have breakfast. In the middle of the breakfast, Kenzo said that this Saturday there would be a festival at the square. Unexpectedly, his parents agreed to go. Then his father said, "Son, tomorrow we will go to a place."

"Where?"

"You will know," his father replied.

"You will like it," his mother added.

This Friday after the breakfast, they went to a place that his parents had told him. It took four hours to arrive at the place. It was a boarding school. Kenzo was a little confused. His father asked him to walk around the school together. Meanwhile, his mother would meet with someone. The school was very big. There was a stadium behind the main building. After for a while, his father held his hand and brought him to where his mother was. They entered a room. Exactly, it was headmaster office. They sat near his mother. Then, his mother introduced Kenzo to the headmaster. From the conversation, he understood now. He brought back to home because his parents wanted to send him to this boarding school. And his parents agreed to go to the festival because started from next Sunday, he would live here, in this empty house. He could not feel anything. It was just plain.

# Perfect Imperfection

by Safira Delicateza

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In a small village, there lived a girl named Claire. She had long wavy black hair and big blue eyes, and she wore glasses. She lived with her parents and her siblings in a house that was like a castle. She had unforgettable experience in the past. She ran into things that made her sad, insecure. She sometimes blamed herself about her weakness and it almost made her gave up. She had difficulties in entering the university. She registered herself to some universities that she wanted to enter. Surprisingly, she was accepted to one of the favorite universities that she wanted to enter, even though previously she was not sure she would make it.

At the beginning of the semester, Claire was always alone in whatever she did and wherever she went. As time went by, she met someone who was very concerned about her, always accompanied her, and helped her when she had difficulty about everything whether it was group discussion or the notes about the lesson that had been explained. This person soon became her best friend. Her name was Crecensia. Claire really felt happy to have Crecensia as her best friend. She always shared her experience with her.

As a college student, Claire was interested in and mastered mathematics, especially in trigonometry. Science and sports were also the subjects that she had been interested in since she was in high school. Besides that, she also liked playing music instrument such as piano, violin and guitar. Her favorite musicians were Celine Dion, Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart. Her parents always supported her activities. She had unique habits. She liked to collect stamps from everywhere. She also liked to read newspaper every morning.

One day, when she was reading a newspaper, she found an information that Fantasia Sunshine Art and Music School would hold a music competition

at the end of the year. She was so interested to join the music competition in Vienna. She didn't want her parents to know because she thought they would object her idea to compete abroad. In order to afford her stay during the competition she decided to work part time for months before the competition. She gave private math course and private music lesson so she could save money. She worked very hard every day on her spare time after class for several months.

Not only working hard for saving money, but Claire also worked hard to practice her music skill for the competition in Vienna. Unfortunately, Crecensia could not accompany Claire to Vienna because she had many things that she should do in Indonesia. She just accompanied Claire to the airport. In the airport, before Claire departed to Vienna, Crecensia gave her a special necklace that was so important. When she was wearing it, she would feel calm and feel that her friend, Crecensia, accompanied Claire even though Crecensia was far away from her. Crecensia hugged Claire tightly before Claire departed.

Six months later before the day of competition, Claire met many friends who would join the competition. She felt so nervous and anxious dealing with the circumstances. She noticed the competitors were so talented and they were tough rivals. She came through lack of confidence and worried a lot she would lose easily in the early round of the competition. During the break time of the competition, Kathy, one of the rivals, came to her and talked about many things. She was showing off her talent and achievements winning several competitions. To make things worst, Kathy spread gossip about Claire, so people didn't support her to become the favorite contestant. Kathy was afraid Claire became her toughest rival. Therefore, she tried many ways to look for Claire's weakness.

Kathy noticed that Claire had a special necklace that she always wore during all sessions of the competition. Claire also once told her about the importance of the necklace. Claire said that she always felt calm and confident whenever she wore the necklace. The necklace was from her best friend, Crecensia, and she gave it at the airport before Claire departed to Vienna. It was why she felt her best friend's presence by wearing the necklace. The competition was held in two days. In the first round, every participant must show their individual performance. Unfortunately, Kathy hid Claire's favorite necklace.

Moments during competition, when Claire found out her necklace

disappeared, she felt unconfident and anxious. She didn't perform well. Claire was so sad for her first bad performance that she did not want to continue the competition. In the meantime, Crecencia heard about Claire's distress having not only her absence but also losing the special necklace from her. To her sympathy, Crecencia decided to support her friend and flew to Vienna. She knew how important her presence was for Claire's confidence. She gave motivation to Claire not to give up in the beginning of the competition. She motivated Claire that there was a chance to be successful. Claire became excited and performed amazingly so she could go to the next round.

In the other hand, Kathy came to Claire and regretted her action to Claire. She met her and explain honestly that she did that because she wasn't ready to accept failure. She saw the great potential of Claire so she worried too much.

After thinking a while and discussing with Crecencia, finally Claire forgive Kathy. In the result of the competition, Claire won it and she felt so happy. Her friend and her rival congratulated her for the achievement that Claire had achieved from the effort and hard work. The rival had been sympathized with forgiveness by Claire and they became friends.



# Approval

by Martua Samosir

*Ding... dong... ding... dong...*

Two postmen stood in front of a house. If one saw this house, one will stop for a moment, maybe because of its various colors or maybe because of its artistic door or maybe because of its candle statue which in the west part of the house or maybe because there was a poem written on its wall. First postman is a middle-aged man with no mustache, small eye, wearing eyeglasses, big belly, and resembling Churchill without hat. Second postman was a young man who wear loveable hat.

“What time is it?” asked Mr. Postmanwiththat.

“08.42,” said Mr. Postmanwithouthat. As Mr. Postmanwithouthat spoke, he looked to Mr. Postmanwiththat. Both agree it was still early in the morning.

Mr. Postmanwiththat looked down and saw a doormat said: “WE COME”. The letter “L” was gone. Mr. Postmanwiththat assumed it was a message to the visitor that the occupant will come, or letter “L” stands for “Left” so the letter “L” is left behind, forbidden in this house.

“Push it again,” said Mr. Postmanwithouthat. Mr. Postmanwiththat pushed the doorbell once again.

*Ding... dong...*

No answer. Mr. Postmanwiththat observed the house from end to end; his eyes noticed the poem written on the wall. For my wife by Soepomo, Mr. Postmanwiththat never heard a poet called Soepomo. Maybe, as Mr. Postmanwiththat began to think, Mr. Soepomo was the owner of this nice house since the package addressed to Mr. Soepomo. Mr. Postmanwiththat began to read the poem:

*Laugh O, love of my life  
Those go for us.  
In the ocean, I will dive  
Wait for the school bus*

Mr. Postmanwiththat remembered his wife; he never gave his wife a present like this, even Mr. Postmanwiththat loved to read a poem and was able to write the good one, at least better than this. O, Mr. Postmanwiththat just realized. Two more weeks was his wife's birthday, how old was she? Mr. Postmanwiththat tried to calculate, 24, and I am at 25 this year next four months. August 17. Better started to write poems, a great one of course, and paint it on our bedroom wall, Mr. Postmanwiththat told to himself. Mr. Postmanwiththat saw his co-workers smile brightly.

"What's going on?" asked Mr. Postmanwiththat. Shocked and looked to his partner Mr. Postmanwiththat said nothing and shakes his head. That was a silly idea to tell his partner about his plan.

"How is the lady? Good?" asked Mr. Postmanwiththat tried to be nice.

"O, Lily? She is good, well... in fact, she is great..." Mr. Postmanwiththat said

"Great? Why?" Mr. Postmanwiththat said.

"Well... she is... pregnant," Mr. Postmanwiththat said casually.

Mr. Postmanwiththat's eyes seemed to come out from its place when he heard it. As Mr. Postmanwiththat knew, his partner had already been waiting for a child for years after his wife had a miscarriage. At that time, as Mr. Postmanwiththat ever said to him, he was at the lowest point in his life. Mr. Postmanwiththat grabbed his partner hand and congratulated him.

"That was great news, you know? When did you know it?" Mr. Postmanwiththat asked.

"This Morning" said Mr. Postmanwiththat, tried to hide his emotions.

Mr. Postmanwiththat observed his partner then the door. He pushed the doorbell again with a smile in his face. Both of us had a good morning, what a start to begin a day. Mr. Postmanwiththat looked at his watch. "8.45", He said to himself. Then the door opened, *kraaaaaaaaaaaaaakkkk*, there stood a young man with a bottle of milk in his hand. The young man observed those

postmen one by one. He observed a little longer to Mr. Postmanwithhat, tried to guess what happened before he opened the door.

“Yeeeeeeesssss.....” said the young man, his eyebrow tried to meet his hair.

“A package, sir, for eeee... Mr. Soepomo,” said Mr. Postmanwithouthat.

“Oohh... he is having diarrhea right now, come in then,” said the young man, he swirled his hand, invited them to come in.

“Well, that not how its work, sir,” said Mr. Postmanwithouthat confused and looked at his partner who still smiles for no reason.

“So, we will entrust the package to you Mr. ...?”

“Tirto, T. I. R. T. O, Tirto” said Tirto, as he drunk his milk which seemed it was still hot. With heat in his mouth, he asked:

“And you sir...?”

“Oh, I am a postman without a hat and he is my partner, postman with hat,” said Mr. Postmanwithouthat.

“Alright then this is the package,” Mr. Postmanwithhat said and handed the package to Tirto. Tirto received and looked it carefully. He read the sender.

“Mr. Sudirman; I don’t remember my dad had a friend called Sudirman. One man called Sudirman I knew is the one who builds this house.”

Tirto looked up again to the postman and said:

“Thank you very much, Mr. Hatless.” Tirto gave his smile.

“Yo...”

“No problem.” Mr. Postmanwithhat cut out his partner speech, and then he turned around walking back to the van. Both Tirto and Mr. Postmanwithouthat looked at each other for a moment. Mr. Postmanwithouthat followed his partner back to the van. In front of the door, Tirto yelled:

“Nice nickname, gentlemen.”

Both Mr. Postmanwithhat and Mr. Postmanwithouthat peeked and nodded to Tirto. The smile on their face made Tirto remember his dream when he was at second grade. He admired a postman, for him postman was a cool job to do. He watched the van until it has gone in a crossroad. As he closed the door he said to himself: *I want to be a postman*. He drank again his milk, as it touched his lips, *aaaahhhhh...*, still hot. “Well, I will become Mr. Postman with hot milk, then.”

Tirto walked to the family room and put the package and his bottle



of milk on the table. Inside of the house was as fun as the outside part. First thing one would see after enter the house was five pillars that represent each of family members. Then, if one walked through it one will saw a round table which used to greet a visitor. After that one would face with a sign said: *if you are one of the members of this family you might go right. If not then go left.* In the right side, there was a family room consist of a TV, a fridge, book shelter, a mystical bird painting on its wall, long sofa, and red carpet. There were two dolls lied on a table beside a nofish-aquarium. The fish was eaten by an orange cat. Since the fish as Tirto recalled steal the dolls from its owner. The family room was the rightest part of the house. The left side consisted of another visitor room, a kitchen, a dining table, and a garden which sandalwood tree stood and a stair. This house is a two floors building. The second floor consist of three rooms, one for the parent, one for Tirto, one for the twin little sisters. The house seemed so quiet right now, Tirto sat on the sofa accompanied by an orange cat in the family room watching TV. Tirto changed the channel looking for a news program. After few moments Tirto found the good one. He put down the remote and watched carefully. A short-haired woman was the news anchor. She reported that there are a several names that suspected commit as everyone called, the biggest corruption scandal. Maratus Sholikah, Lorenso C Kusuma, Nuh A Ibrahim, Farid F Hudha, Darwis Suluh, Tegar G Anugrah, Helmy Y Saputra, Andy B Tabudi, Masdin, Soeharmono, Fajar S Moshrom, Yanto Panghangyo, and Erwin Fachriza. These names suspected harm the nation six hundred sixty six trillion rupiah, the biggest ever corruption in this nation. The Commission of Corruption Eradicator (CCE) was still working to collect the proof. However, since two weeks ago CCE had not found any strong proof to bring those names to the court. The chief of CCE held a press conversion; she asked for help to the people. Aaaaahhhh... a sound came from behind, Tirto looked back and saw his father out from toilet.

“Go home or go big boys,” Mr. Soepomo said to the whole house.

Mr. Soepomo looked around and then he tapped his belly with his hand. Tirto watched his father walked through him,

“A package for you, Dad,” Tirto said as he turn to the TV.

“A package? For me? What a good day!” Mr. Soepomo said.

Tirto told his father that the package from Sudirman. Mr. Soepomo was confused when he heard it. Tirto observed his father face and asked the reason. Mr. Soepomo told Tirto about weird man whom he met yesterday. That weird man asked Mr. Soepomo’s address and that man said that “General

Sudirman will give order” than left Mr. Soepomo in confused. Tirto advised his father to open the package, Mr. Soepomo agreed and started to open the package. Turned out the package was a document. Mr. Soepomo started to read it. Mr. Soepomo read the document carefully. He read it again and again. “Holy Mother Mary!” Mr. Soepomo yelled and made Tirto and the cat shocked. Mr. Soepomo handed the document to Tirto. He started to read the document and then looked his father’s face. Mr. Soepomo smiled brightly. Tirto asked whether the document was true or not. Mr. Soepomo just shook his head and laughed.

“Who care? Just as this document exists is a strong evidence to bring those guys to the court,” Mr. Soepomo said to his son.

Tirto felt his heartbeat increase inside his body. Mr. Soepomo took the document from Tirto’s hand then put it back to the envelope. He wanted to send it to the CCE office.

“Let’s turn the world upside down, shall we?” Mr. Soepomo said to Tirto.

After that lovely morning Tirto and Mr. Soepomo agreed not to talk about the document again. After a week, when Mr. Soepomo’s diarrhea gone, what he and Tirto were waiting for had finally came. In one evening, the whole family gathered in the family room.

“Let’s watch some news, ladies and gentlemen, let’s hear some truth,” Mr. Soepomo said to the rest of the family. After a few moments Tirto and Mr. Soepomo shocked. The news showed that the biggest ever corruption scandal finally solved, Tirto and Mr. Soepomo danced and singing together.

The next morning at 9.05 a woman and a man stood in front of a house. This house was a good house for one to live.

*Ding... dong...*

Mr. Soepomo opened the door. He recognized the man’s face. The moment Mr. Soepomo wanted to speak, Tirto appeared from inside of the house. Mr. Soepomo looked to his son and then pointed at the man. Mr. Soepomo told Tirto that he was the weird man that he talked about. The woman began to speak:

“Congratulations, Mr. Tirto, Mr. Soepomo.”

“For what?” Mr. Soepomo and Tirto asked.

“Both of you are approved.”



# Me and My Experience

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*by Satria Budi Nugroho*

It was one year after the biggest eruption in this country. It destroyed many populations here that made this area like a new undiscovered area with building constructions everywhere. One day in beautiful sky, there was a boy sat down at his house's balcony stared at the yellowish red sky. He sat down at his favorite place in his balcony. He realized that there were big accidents that he could not forget which haunted him from a few years ago and people around him tried to move on from one of the accidents/tragedies.

"Pop, Mom, I miss you. Puts, Pete, I'm sorry I could not control myself in that moment. Can time repeat again when you were still alive," he grumbled.

"Gun, come here, Son. There will be dark soon, the dinner is ready to get a new place," his sister called him from the dining table.

"Okay, I'll be there!" he shouted.

"Why will he always be alone there and never plays with his friends since the accidents happened?" she thought while preparing the dinner.

A few moments later, he went down to eat. His sister waited for him with angry face. Then, they ate the food together.

"Wow, it's a nice dinner, Put. I think I will eat all of them," he said it after eating the dinner.

"Is it praise or just your words to make me happy?" replied his sister with her angry face.

"Calm down, you know me very well. But it is delicious food. Can you make another tomorrow?" he asked his sister.

"Of course, I will make the new food that it will make you go talking with TOTO," his sister replied.

‘Owh, please NO. Thanks for the food, Put,’ he replied with cute face.

“Welcome,” his sister threatened him while swinging the knife.

After that, he went to his room to read some books and he felt sleepy. Then he read some websites to accompany him to sleep in his bed. He suddenly fell asleep but he was disturbed by his sleep.

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One year ago, I saw three boys that walked in that street. They laughed every time they talked until some people came to them or called them “Bastirdos”. I thought they would fight, the middle boy acted like they did not accept the Bastirdos’ desire.

“Hey, Boys, can you give us some money?” said one of the Bastirdos members.

“What, money? We don’t have money!” said Gundala with serious face. His friends, Putra and Peter, suggested him to just give them the money.

“Come on man just give them the money. I don’t want to get in a trouble,” whispered Peter.

“No, just leave them alone, come on, Guys,” said Gundala.

Then they left Bastirdos quickly after they talked, but Bastirdos didn’t give up to take their money.

“HEY stop!” said Bartirdos. They surrounded those boys.

“What do you want?” said Gundala with angry face

“Give us your money, or we will fight and kill you all!” said the leader of Bastirdos with angry face and high tone.

“I’ll fight you because it is not your money. This is just easy fight with you all,” said Gundala angrily.

Then I saw the fight between those people, those boys were outnumbered from Bastirdos. Two of the boys had fallen. I didn’t know if they were still alive or not. There was left one boy that fought them busily but suddenly he fell too. Then Bastirdos left them there. I came to the boys and screamed to get help from other people. The boys were taken to the hospital. Then I left them to get back to my job.

“Where am I?” whispered Gundala and looked around.

“You are in hospital now,” said the nurse.

“Where are my friends?” asked Gundala.

“I’m sorry, our doctor can’t save them,” answered the nurse.

Several times after the fight, Gundala visited his friends’ houses to apologize to their parents after what he did several days ago.

“I’m sorry for what I did yesterday that made my friends died,” said Gundala sadly.

“It’s okay, Son, it is God’s destiny,” answered his friends’ parents.

“I promise that I will not make any mistake again,” said Gundala.

Then Gundala left them and visited his friends’ graves.

“I’m sorry my friends, maybe if I did not fight Bastirdos yesterday, we would have still played together right now,” whispered Gundala.

After the accident happened he decided to stay away from his other friends because he didn’t want to make them die as well. His friends asked why he stayed away from them, why he always got back home early, and why he never talked to them again.

“Why he never joined us again?” said one of his friends.

“Maybe, that accident turns him into this,” answered another.

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Suddenly he woke up and realized that he only dreamed about his friends.

“Owh, it is just a dream,” he said. Then he decided to sleep again.

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A few months ago, there was an eruption that made our parents passed away. Gundala and I could save our lives but they, our parents, tried to save other people around our house and could not escape the eruption.

“You two go first, we will try to save the other,” said my father.

“Go, run faster,” said my mother.

Very loud thunderous sound surrounded our ears, then the eruption happened. After that, we escaped the eruption but in the end we found our parents died. It made us slumped. Then my brother said to me.

“Yesterday my friends are gone, now our parents, and then what,” he

said. "FOOL YOU, WORLD. I HATE YOU."

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"Argh, this dream again. Why can't I forget it?" he wakes up from his sleep.

\*\*\*

One year later, after I saw the fight I didn't see those boys again. Suddenly one of those boys crossed me and I stopped him.

"Hey, Boy, come here," I said.

"Oh, okay, Sir," answered him

"Where are your friends? Why are you always alone and look sad?" I asked.

"My friends died in the fight, and my parents died too," answered him.

"Wait, the fight? The fight right there?" I asked.

"Yes. After I asked the nurse where they were, the nurse answered that they couldn't save them."

"And what happened to your parents?"

"The last eruption killed them."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Son. Next time, be careful and come on you must move on. I see you never laugh again and get some friends with you. Behind all of this, you must escape the past. If you don't, you will always see the dark. You can't make all of your day be afflicted by the dark. You must see the light, Son. You must see the message behind those accidents. Here's to you, for being steadier, stronger and better every day," I said.

"Okay, Sir. I'll try to see the light. Thank you for the advice," answered him.

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After all of those accidents and advices from the unknown man, I must let my self stay away from the dark. I must see the light.

# Raymussen

*by Septian Ridho Suwarna*

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Raymussen, a kid who lived with his parents. He was a spoiled kid who always demanded things from his parents, but didn't give any feedbacks to them. His black hair represented a world of negative thoughts. The depths of the ocean could be seen in his blue eyes. His slender body really suited his pale skin. Pointed nose, thin eyebrows, and thin lips also decorated his pale skin.

His youth was filled with joy. Ray had a lot of friends who always played with him after school. He was also loved by his parents. His parents would accompany him wherever he went and granted whatever he wished. He had no image of what might happen in the future, until he took his first step to be a high schooler.

His story started when he studied in St. Alphonse High School in the middle of 2005. At that time, he knew that he became a high schooler and needed to start his youth time properly. Ray was really confident that he could pass his days as a high schooler. Got friends, had a relationship, and graduated nicely were his dreams. He believed his dreams would come true and everything would be alright.

In the first day at school, Ray met this girl. She appeared so angelic, her straight golden hair waved as the wind blew. Her emerald eyes sparked elegantly whenever she blinked. He was astonished by such beauty, and then he encouraged himself to greet her first. Since both of them were assigned to the same class, they were going to be classmates. Ray kept staring at her until both of them caught eyes-contact. He asked for her name and she replied calmly by mentioning "Stephanie" as she smiled.

From that day, Ray could be seen sticking with Stephanie. Stephanie



was also happy that she became Ray's friend. Ray always stuck with her, but she didn't really take it as a big matter. In Ray's mind, he wanted to spend more time with her, since she became his very first friend in school and he admired her so much.

At home, Ray was a hardcore game player. He stayed in his room nearly all day. Because of his gaming habit, he didn't have any close friend. His relation with his parents was also not really good, he often had a fight with his parents due to his gaming habit. The thing that really annoyed his parents was he often asked a lot of things, especially money which then would be spent on his game.

Everything went right, until January 2016. His school life was drastically changed, especially when all of his friends knew that he was good-for-nothing. Ray always got bad scores, even when it came to sports. He tried real hard to barely pass all the subjects in school. Even though he studied really hard, his scores didn't improve at all. Then this one guy who made it even worse for Ray, with his spiky black hair and merciless gaze from his hazel eyes. His name was Zerlyn, the most prominent guy in class, took the chance to bully Ray. He knew that he had better both academic and physical ability compared to Ray, also he had better look than Ray. Zerlyn and his friends often bullied Ray when they were at school. Started from hiding Ray's belonging and kept escalating until they beat him out in alleyway after school. Ray was so afraid of Zerlyn and he decided to do whatever Zerlyn asked of him, so they would stop bullying him. Stephanie, who was at first befriend with Ray, then she made a distance with him. She was afraid to get bullied because of her close relation with Ray.

At home, Raymussen didn't talk to his parents about his problems. He knew that he had a bad relationship with his parents, so he chose to keep silent about him being bullied. Nobody in the school knew about the bullying Zerlyn did to Ray, except his classmates. His classmates were also afraid to tell the teachers, because if they did so, they would also get bullied by Zerlyn. Ray got no other choices to avoid Zerlyn's bullying and no one in his class had the guts to help him.

25 November 2016, his fate faced an unexpected turn. That morning, when he was about to go to school, his phone rang and someone from the hospital gave him a news which said that his parents got an accident. Their car hit the sidewalk and flew into a building. They were gravely injured. Ray was really shocked to the point where he couldn't say a word and was petrified

when he heard that news. He halted his way to school to see his parents. The moment he had his steps to the hospital, his parents passed away. That very moment his mind went blank, his chest felt so heavy, and he fell to his knee. His heart was filled with huge regret and despair.

His darkening sky had completely turned gray.

He couldn't sleep that night, as the guilt and sorrow haunted him. The next morning in the cold drizzle, his parents were buried.

"I'm sorry, Mom! I'm sorry, Dad!"

Those were the only words Ray said repeatedly to his parents' graves. Once everyone was gone, he was left alone mourning for hours. His tears had become one with the rain, he knew that he did nothing useful for them. He failed to make them happy. He knew that he was only a spoiled kid who only knew how to ask without giving anything back. He realized that he had been wrong all this time.

Several days had passed since his parents' funerals. Ray still didn't want to go to the school.

He was so depressed the moment he lost his parents. That time, he forgot what was the so called

'happiness'. He suddenly recalled his childhood memories, where his mother told him,

"...Ray, life might get hard sometimes, but you should never forget the good times you had with your dearest, and keep going forward..."

His heart broke even more, when he realized that he had no one dear to him. Not to mention what would happen when he went to school. Zerlyn and his friends would also bully him no matter what happened. Those pressures put Ray's broken soul into pieces as despair covered his mind.

When he was being all alone, suicidal thought corrupted his mind. Poisoning himself, cutting his vein, hanging himself were the only way he thought might solve his problems.

February, 2017. One of Ray's counselling teachers, Mrs. Lexi received the news that one of her students stopped attending the school after a certain incident. She tried to visit Ray's house, and tried her best to convince him to attend the school again. She encouraged him to go to school. First, Ray was afraid to go back to school, he was certain that Zerlyn might bully him again once he had the chance. There was something that bugged Mrs. Lexi about Ray's odd attitude, and his reaction on why he refused to go to school. She

figured out something might be wrong, and she asked Ray whether something deterred him from coming to school. Again, Ray remained silent, refused to answer her question. Then, she left Ray's house with curiosity in her heart, but she refused to give up on Ray. She came again the next day in private, tried to open up Ray's feeling. Her perseverance finally paid off when Ray told her that he was bullied by Zerlyn at school and that was the reason he refused to go to school. Mrs. Lexi, whom finally opened her student's heart, offered her hand and said that she would take care of it somehow and sympathized with Ray's loss and asked him to forget what Zerlyn did to him. That time, Ray felt like someone offered their helping hand and he tried to reach it. Mrs. Lexi also said to him,

“Ray, hear me. You might lose your beloved ones, you might lose your trust to others, but do not lose your will to live.”

Those words from his teacher, made him saw a glimpse of light in his gray sky. Unconsciously, tears shed from Ray's eyes. And after all those sorrow, he was able to smile again. Then he promised his teacher to return to school. But he was still afraid that Zerlyn would bully him. Then, an unexpected thing happened, when Waver, who was the class president helped him to overcome the bullying that Zerlyn did. He helped him out to go from a bully. With the help of people around him, Ray gained his courage to live on.

The moment during Ray's absence in the school, he played an online game all day long. He lived an antisocial life where he rarely left his room. He barely came out of his room. In the game, he found a few people who really cared of him and knew his situation. And the ties of fate bounded those guys with him. Those guys were Wiese and Veelyn. Three of them befriended since then.

It had been five months since Ray attended school again and he had living the normal school days he was always dreaming of. But his grades were still the same as before, he barely made any improvement. He realized that if he didn't make any progress he would achieve nothing eventually. Then he remembered about his friends in game, Wiese and Veelyn. Ray himself was a bit curious about how both of them in real life. So he arranged an appointment to do an “offline meet up” with the those two. That was the moment where the three of them had their first meeting in real life. That was his first time to meet Wiese, who was 3 years older than Ray. His gentle personality was seen in his deep brown eyes and with his short black hair. And Veelyn, a cheerful girl with the same age as Ray. Her short red hair gave impressions of blazing

flame. It really suited her personality, and it also made her look younger. She was a very cute girl with light blue eyes. She showed her cheerful character when the three of them met. Meeting them in real life was really a blessing for Ray, because those two really helped Ray recover from 'that' tragedy. And they also helped Ray to get through his academic problem. Wiese, who had graduated from school, really understood how the school works. Veelyn was also had a brilliant mind. On the other hand, Ray was really happy that he knew both, Wiese and Veelyn. Ray started fixing his life after he realized the problem of his life and asked for his friends' help.

Not long after he made his resolution for his life, Ray asked Veelyn to teach him some subjects. He studied really hard. Sometimes, he visited Wiese's place or Veelyn's to help him in studying. Since mostly he was helped by Veelyn, Ray started to like the way Veelyn treated him. She helped him with all subjects that Ray didn't understand. Veelyn also treated him with care. It was a nostalgic feeling, and Ray was sure that he liked Veelyn.

Six months later, the connection between Ray and Veelyn became tighter. Ray's grades had also gradually improved, thanks to Veelyn's help. Later on, they decided to date. Veelyn also had a feeling towards Ray. She saw Ray as an energetic person. She knew that Ray needed a reason to live on, she also felt that her presence in Ray's life could give him the strength that he needed all this time. She liked on how Ray tried his hard to achieve the so called "success". That was the reason why Veelyn put her heart to Ray. Knew that his best friends were having a relationship, Wiese who also tagged along with them started to feel jealous. It happened because Wiese also liked Veelyn. Ray and Veelyn didn't know about Wiese's feeling at the moment. But Wiese chose to avoid the couple and kept a comfortable distance for himself. He was mad at them, because no one knew his feeling, either towards Ray or Veelyn. He just didn't want to have any contact with them, and that was why he kept his distance with them.

Wiese didn't want to meet either Veelyn or Ray. Knew that his friend was keeping his distance at him, Ray confronted him. He wanted a reason why Wiese made a distance with them, but Wiese refused to give an answer. Ray, who was really determined on knowing the truth kept asking him. Wiese was agitated on how Ray's behave, he then recalled about how he helped Ray to get out of his depression. Amidst his story, he told Ray about how he liked Veelyn all this time. He was really frustrated that none of them understood his feeling. Ray was astounded by the fact that he didn't really understand

Wiese's feelings back then, he explained that he didn't mean to hurt his friend's feeling. Wiese who couldn't hold his wrath finally snapped, he hit Ray on the face. Ray tumbled down to the ground and tried to have it back to Wiese. They ended up fighting. Suddenly, Veelyn came and saw both of them fighting. She tried to stop them. It was really painful to watch the people you dear so much fighting against each other. She nearly got hit while trying to stop them. Fortunately, Wiese was aware of his action and stopped his movement. Those three later had a conversation about how their feeling to each other. The conversation really helped those three of them understood their feeling, then the situation went better for them ever since.

2008, Ray graduated from his school with a good grade. He really thanked Wiese and Veelyn for helping him all this time, not only with the study, but also with his life. Wiese knew that would become Ray's very first step to adulthood. He suggested Ray to find a job as soon as possible. But Ray had another idea. He realized that he had limited money, so he decided to open a coffee shop with his saving. He chose to open a shop rather than continued his study in university. The situation made him to quit his dream of studying further. Again, with the help of Wiese and Veelyn, and with the little amount of money that Ray's had, they built DnD Coffee Shop.

When the shop ran for 3 months, it didn't go quite well. There were only few people came to his place, and it made Ray feel frustrated. He asked all of his relatives on how to run a business, but he didn't manage to realize it anyway, since most of them suggested the hard way. The moment when he met Waver, he knew that Waver also ran a business. Waver had a clothing shop, somehow his shop was really crowded and it was really a huge success for him. Ray asked Waver a few tips to run a business. How he caught the customers' attention, how he kept those customers coming to his place, and so on. Ray learnt a lot on how to run a shop from Waver. Step by step, he followed Waver's suggestions on it. A few months later, Ray managed to run his shop very well and lots of new customers came to his place.

Meanwhile, Zerlyn didn't manage to get a job right after he was graduated. His habits back then when he was a student really affected his personality. He knew that was something wrong, and he wanted to change. When he took his steps on the street, he found Ray's place. Zerlyn was really surprised that Ray could do something like that. He was really envious of Ray, because he managed his life better than him. Ray who served his customer, suddenly saw Zerlyn standing still in front of his shop. He ran to the front

door as soon as possible. When they met again, Zerlyn couldn't see Ray's eyes, he was so embarrassed for what he did to him back then. Ray already moved on and forgot the past he had with Zerlyn, instead he asked Zerlyn to cooperate and work with him, and it made Zerlyn shocked. He couldn't even imagine someone whom he bullied were lending his hand to help him. Zerlyn, who also needed money to cover up his family debt, accepted the offer and became Ray's employee. He thanked Ray for what he did to him. He also worked very well, making Ray's place to get more crowded. Both of them later became really good friends.

Two years passed, Ray's business ran smoothly. Lots of customers came to his place, thanks to Zerlyn help. He knew how to interact with people and it made the shop had lots of regular customers. Ray became a successful young businessman. Somehow, Zerlyn also managed to pay off all the debt that he had. But since he had 'another' debt to Ray, he stayed at Ray's side to run the place. The successful life led Ray to make up his mind. He decided to marry Veelyn. She was happy the moment Ray showed and put a ring to her finger. On the other hand, Wiese also found another girl that really suited him. He also decided to marry her not long before Ray and Veelyn's wedding.

In the end, Ray still didn't feel his life was complete, because he reached his success without his parents. He wished his parents would be able to see him change his future. He regretted that he failed to realize it earlier, so his parents could see him being successful. The only thing that prevented him from being happy was his wish to see his parents again. And he kept blaming himself for everything that happened.



# The Immortal

by Kartika Nova Furya Anggadewi

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Anna worked in a bank office as a loan staff. She had blonde hair with a slight of black hair on her bangs. She took 30 minutes in the morning for make up only, for her appearance is everything. Before went to her office she stopped at a nearby café for a sip of coffee.

‘A cup of Americano, please.’

‘Sure, Miss. Here or take away?’

‘Here, please.’

While drinking her coffee she was reading news on her phone, then she went to her office before it would be too late.

‘Good morning, Anna.’

‘Morning, Sam. What are you up to?’

‘I’ll go for meeting now.’

‘Nice. Have a nice day!’

‘Have a nice day, Anna.’

Everyday Anna directly went to her work seat after finishing some chitchat; she did not like to talk much. It was only for formality. Nevertheless, Anna was famous among the customers because she was very kind and attractive, her personality changed when she met the customers.

‘Good morning. May I help you?’ said Anna

‘Good morning, Miss. Yes, sure. I need some loan.’

‘First, fill this form for the number of money you want to take, and then give me your house’s certificate as the warranty.’

‘Mmm, but we do not have any certificate, Miss. We are poor.’

‘Then I can’t do anything about it, we need a warranty. That’s the procedure.’

‘Can you help us, please? My children need to attend school. I don’t



want them to live like me in the future. Please, help me...'

'Fine, I will help. I will take care of the warranty for you. However, it is not free.'

'Really? Thank you so much, Miss, we will pay you in installments. Ah, I forget to introduce my name. I am Sarah Geens. These are my daughter, Analie, and my son, Tom.'

'Pleased to meet you, Sarah. However, I do not need money. You can pay me in different way.'

'What do you mean?'

'My family works for charity, we take care of kids in Oklahoma. We give them place to stay and pay for their school's fee. I want to take care of your son when you cannot pay the loan.'

'How dare you say that! Even though I am poor I will not give my son to you!'

'Why are you getting angry at me? I am trying to help. You said you do not want your kids to live like you in the future! Think about it for some time, here's my address and number.'

Then The Geens family went. It had been two weeks since they came. Anna continued her usual life, but she got bothered with the Geens family because usually poor people would agree with her offer in fourth or sixth days. One day Sarah popped up in front her house.

'You scared me! What are you doing in front of my house at this time!'

'I'm sorry, Anna. I want to talk to you about your offer personally.'

'Okay then, come in.'

After that Sarah entered Anna's house, it was a quite big house for one person. Then they sat in the living room. Sarah explained about her family's condition. Her husband leaved them ten years ago and she had been struggling to raise the kids by herself. Now she had leukemia and she could not take care of her little son anymore, she wanted Anna to take care of him. She agreed to give her son after six months. She wanted to spend times before that and Anna agreed.

Six months passed, Anna and Sarah met in a small restaurant along with Analie and Tom. Tom looked nervous, he held his sister's hand all the time. Anna explained that she would take Tom to Oklahoma, she would take him to the family's orphanage. Analie and Tom were shocked, because their mom did not say anything about it.

'What? Oklahoma? That's really far from here, why can't you take care of him here, in Kansas?'

'I wish I could, Dear, but I'm busy with my job already. My family will take care of him there. Don't worry, he will be okay. I will ask them send many pictures regularly'

After that, Analie and Sarah went home, then Anna took Tom for shopping. She got him many new clothes, books and some toys. Tom was happy, he never had new clothes for 4 years, life was struggle for him. Anna and Tom reached home very late, she took him to his temporary room. It was a big room located near the basement, it had only one bed and a cupboard. But it had some decorations of kid's room. Tom was confused since Anna lived alone, why she had a kid's room. But he did not really think about it since he got new clothes and toys.

In the morning, Anna took Tom to the Disney Land. They played together, Tom was happy. She took many pictures of him. After that Anna took him to photo studio and asked him to take pictures with different clothes and hair styles, she said it is just for fun. Tom agreed and did it. Anna seemed happy.

One year later, Analie suddenly messaged Anna that she would have internship in Oklahoma and wanted to meet Tom. Anna lied and said Tom was busy with his school, but Analie still wanted to meet her brother. Then she asked about the address of her family and she went there.

'Good afternoon.'

'Good afternoon. Who are you?'

'My name is Analie. I'm the sister of Tom. Can I meet him?'

'I'm sorry, but there is no boy named Tom here.'

'What? Are you sure? Is it the right address? You are Anna's family, right?'

'Yeah, it's the right address. Anna? Did you mean Anna Andreson?'

'Yes...'

'She was our neighbor but we are not relatives'

Analie was surprised about what the woman said, and then she contacted her mother. Her mother scolded her because Anna sent them the pictures of Tom regularly. She must have given Analie the wrong address since she was busy. Analie was angry and worried about her brother, after that she tried to look for Anna's information through internet. She found out that Anna was a medical student. Why would a medical student work in a bank? Analie contacted her friends who had brother studied in the same university as Anna, his name was Jamie. Then Jamie and Analie decided to meet after

she finished her internship.

Analie and Jamie met in the public library. Analie asked help from him to approach Anna and find out what exactly happened. She was so worried about Tom. Jamie agreed to help Analie but he could not promise since he never talked to Anna during the college. It would be hard to approach someone you did not talk to.

Jamie tried to approach Anna through Facebook with an excuse for his project interview, because she was the best in her class. Initially she made excuses but after some times he managed to make her agree. He went to her house and did the interview.

‘Hello! May I come in?’

‘Hello. Yes, please.’

‘So, you were a medical student in our university, right?’

‘Yeah, I was.’

‘Why are you working as a loan staff right now?’ said Jamie with a chuckle.

‘Hahaha, it was a very long story. Let’s not talk about my personal matter and start the interview.’

Jamie realized that Anna avoided personal topic, so he started the fake interview he had prepared. After that, Anna offered him a coffee and asked him to leave soon since she should go for meeting. Jamie made excuse to use her toilet and when he was walking to the toilet, he saw a room with a boy’s stuff such as clothes and toys. Jamie asked if there was anyone else in the house but Anna said none.

Jamie went home and he directly called Analie about the room he saw in Anna’s house. Analie became more curious and worried about the existence of his brother. She could not even call police since she had no prove. However, Analie tried to talk about it to her mother, but she scolded her again. She said Anna sent pictures of Tom regularly and he looked fine. Even better than before. In the morning, they did receive a picture of Tom playing in a park. Her mother asked her to stop worrying about him because everything was fine, but for Analie everything was not fine. She then realized that in every picture she sent was the same. Tom looked same in every picture. The face and body did not change, it was only the style and the clothes were different. It was as if the pictures were taken in the same period.

After that Analie sneaked to Anna’s house. She went to it from the basement. There were many mice in Anna’s basement and all of them were

crippled. Some of them behaved aggressively and insanely, some had extra tail but not limb, all were mutated in wrong way. There were many papers and there was an empty place for a human subject. Then Analie took the papers and went back because she was afraid.

In the morning, Analie went to Jamie's place to show the papers she took from Anna's basement. Jamie was surprised because it was a formula for experiment but he did not understand much about it. They decided to meet a professor in his university. The professor was surprised about the papers. It was an experiment of regeneration he was doing back then. Then Jamie and Analie explained about what was going on. It turned out that the professor was the one who was teaching Anna about it. The experiment was success for reptile, however, Anna wanted to try it on human and the professor declined. On the next day, Anna disappeared with the formula. Anna had been working relentlessly to find the perfect formula for human's regeneration. Anna believed that we could be immortal, for the loss of her grandmother created a deep wound in her heart. It was the reason she did the experiment. Analie got scared of it and asked Jamie's help to get her brother and he agreed.

On Sunday, Jamie invited Anna as a guest to college during an event. Meanwhile, Analie was searching at Anna's house at that time, but before she found her brother suddenly Anna came back and caught her. Anna acted calmly and asked her to sit for a drink. Analie knew she had been caught, therefore she was trying to leave. But then Anna came back.

'Are you trying to leave?' asked Anna sarcastically

'No, I was not. I was just looking around. Ah, Anna, can I use the toilet?'

'Sure, go ahead.'

Analie took this as a chance to find her brother, but then she found a box with many pictures of Tom clicked before and many letters already wrote. Analie took the pictures and the letters then asked Anna for permission to go. However, Anna already stood in front of the door with a knife.

'What will you do with that knife, Anna?' asked Analie, trembling.

'Oh, I am about to cook soup, so I will cut a meat first.'

'I see, then I will go now,' said Anile while walking

Then Anna grabbed her hands and tried to stab her, but Analie defended herself as much as she could. Anna stabbed her on the stomach, however there were cops' sirens coming. Anna then ran to escape. After the police came they found a passage to basement, and there they found a

file with Tom's pictures and experiment details. He was being injected with a regeneration serum and his hands and legs had been cut. It was seen regenerating, but the last updates were not filled. They found Tom dying in the experiment's tube. Anna was nowhere to be found. When they went to the farm near her house, she had committed suicide. She was found with the regeneration injection in her hand.





