



# GUILD OF YOUNG WRITERS

HOW TO FIND  
YOUR PERSONAL  
STYLE

BOOK  
RECOMMENDATIONS

SHORT  
STORIES

POETRY

## FANTASY

Navigating through realms,  
worldbuilding, and focusing in on  
character relationships and romance!

**VOLUME FIVE**

**SPRING  
2022**

Story Studio Writing Society is located on the traditional territories of the **W**ŚÁNEĆ and Lkwungen-speaking peoples. We respectfully acknowledge and thank the Lkwungen People, also known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations communities, for allowing us to live, work, learn, play and create on their lands.

Through the work we do on the territory, we are accountable to the following communities: Esquimalt, Songhees, **ST**ÁUT**W** (Tsawout), **W**JOLEŁP (Tsartlip), **BO**KEĆEN (Pauquachin), **M**ÁLEXEŁ (Malahat), **W**ŚÍ**K**EM (Tseycum), T'Sou-ke Nation, Scia'new Nation and Nuu-chah-nulth: Pacheedaht Nations.

We acknowledge that the historical relationship to the land and territories of these peoples continues to this day.

As an education based organization, we recognize that we have the responsibility to work towards truth and reconciliation, and to remain open to suggestions, consultations, and partnerships, especially with local Indigenous communities and organizations, on how our organization can continue to work towards reconciliation.

We hope that Story Studio's programing and publications create a safe, welcoming and engaging environment for all people, including Indigenous peoples.

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## *Editor's Note*

A new year brings many new exciting opportunities for the Guild of Young Writers. We began the year by reflecting on our goals and interests for 2022. Guild members worked to select a word to represent their goals for the year. Some of the words selected were: Breathe, Risk, Authenticity, Perspective, Bloom, and Shift. The 45 members of this growing community continue to astound me with their dedication to not only their writing, but to the building blocks of the practice itself; the learning, listening, reading, and sharing they do with ease and attentiveness. They continue to provide encouragement and useful feedback to support one another, which is what this community is all about. I look forward to being a part of their growth this year, and welcoming new members into the community.

We kicked off the year with a fantasy and worldbuilding focused chat with author and actor Chris Humphreys. The group has been exploring creating their own realms for their own stories and creating characters using Hero Forge. We then learned from author K.A. Wiggins as we dove deeper into speculative fiction and writing tropes of the genre. Members of the guild have been taking a deep dive into their character building and exploring character relationships in their writing.

This issue holds a portion of their short stories, scenes and poetry that they've worked to create over the first quarter of the year. Enjoy reading the work of these young authors, and sharing in their interests and book recommendations for the season!

Rebecca Ruiter  
PROGRAM COORDINATOR



# Get to know the Authors

WE ASKED: WOULD YOU  
RATHER HAVE THE ABILITY TO  
TRANSFORM INTO ANYTHING  
OR ANYONE, OR TELEPORT TO  
ANY PLACE?

I think that I would love to have the ability to teleport anywhere. I am an artist and I love painting outdoor scenes, so to be able to teleport myself instantly to anywhere of my choice to paint would be a dream. I have always wanted to go to Ireland as well. Another reason why would be to escape BC winters, I get really bad SAD (seasonal affective disorder) so to be able to leave at no cost? YES PLEASE!!!!  
-- Florence, age 15

I would want the ability to teleport to any place. Travel is so expensive and difficult sometimes, I would love to just see everything.  
-- Raine, age 14

If given the choice between having the ability to transform into anything, or being able to teleport anywhere, I would have the ability to teleport to any place! Then, I wouldn't have to use transportation, and it would be better for the environment.  
-- Cathy, age 15

I think that I would rather be able to transform into anyone/anything. This is partly because it would be useful (birds don't have to go to school!!) and also because who wouldn't want to be able to turn into the same animal as their companion and play with them?? I'd also be able to have such cool Hallowe'en costumes! Imagine it!  
-- Zoe, age 13

Teleportation would definitely be the choice for me. To be able to visit and relish all the different cultures of the world in a blink of an eye would be absolutely incredible! I could go to any destination of my choice for any amount of time with practically zero cost! I could be on the balcony in Paris composing a short story, or on a bench with gelato in Rome getting a novel going. Day trip to Greece? Yes please!  
-- Ava, age 15

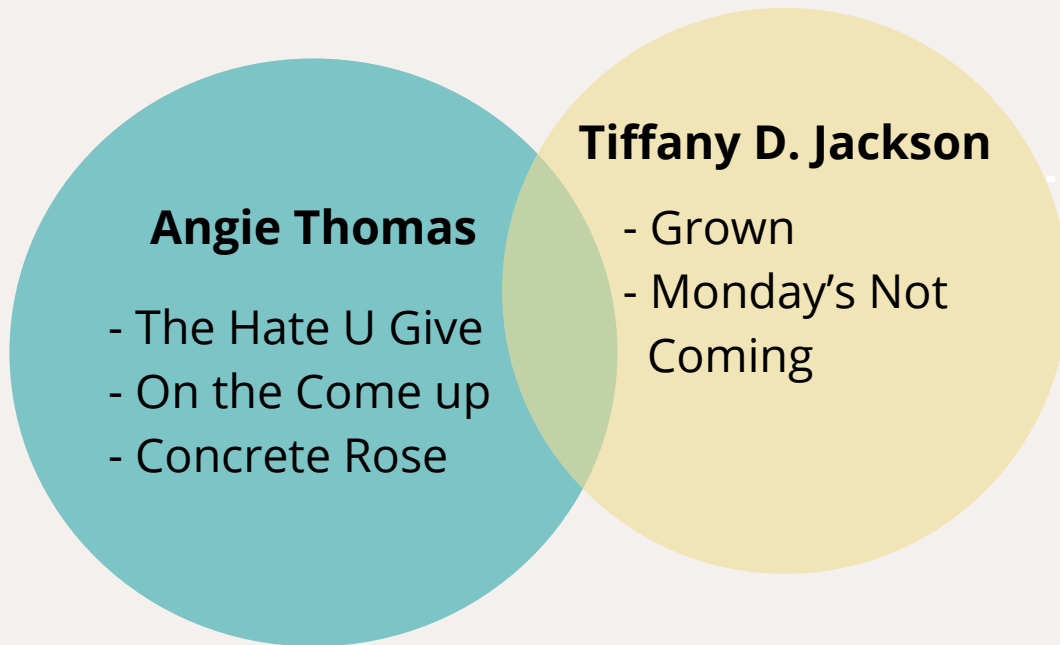
I'd rather be able to teleport anywhere. I've always wanted to travel the world (and the universe, though that's significantly more difficult), as there are so many things I don't know- people, places, stories. Being able to teleport would let me discover those things.  
-- Kira, age 15





# DISVERSIIFY YOUR BOOKSHELF

Book recommendations curated by the Guild of Young Writers to diversify your reading collection and welcome new perspectives.



- Ace of Spades by **Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé**
- Clap When You Land by **Elizabeth Acevedo**
- Once Upon an Eid by **S.K. Ali** (*Anthology of Stories*)
- A Phoenix First Must Burn by **Patrice Caldwell** (*Anthology of stories*)
- The Voting Booth by **Brandy Colbert**
- You Should See me in a Crown by **Leah Johnson**
- Each of Us a Desert, by **Mark Oshiro**
- The Field Guide to the North American Teenager by **Ben Philippe**
- A Good Kind of Trouble by **Lisa Moore Ramée**
- The Black Kids by **Christina Hammonds Reed**
- Stamped From the Beginning by **Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi**
- The Color Purple by **Alice Walker**
- Watch Us Rise by **Renée Watson**
- Genesis Begins Again by **Alicia D. Williams**
- Brown Girl Dreaming by **Jacqueline Woodson**
- Black Enough by **Ibi Zobov**





# FANTASY & WORLDBUILDING



"THE NOVEL YOU WANT TO WRITE IS AT THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN. CLIMB IT FAST AND DON'T LOOK DOWN. THEN, FIND THE BEST ROUTE ON THE SECOND CLIMB" ~CHRIS HUMPHRIES

The Guild was thrilled to welcome two local authors this past season to share tips and tricks about fantasy writing. [Chris Humphreys](#) joined us for an author chat in January focusing in on worldbuilding. He provided us with a wheelhouse of knowledge in creating worlds that draw on our own loose backgrounds, and the importance of researching the different aspects we plan to include in our character and plot designs. Chris encouraged writers to be surprised by their own stories - "There is no good or bad, it's does it work, or not?"

Following that we were joined by [K.A. Wiggins](#) to extend the discussion of fantasy into speculative fiction. She discussed the tiers of genres, sub-genres and tropes within a story and the importance of making those major elements known early on in your writing. Kaie also emphasized the importance of using observational skills. "Observe the world around you and bring it in to your writing," by trying to include a minimum of three senses in each scene.

# BOOKS WE'VE BEEN INSPIRED BY



*Kaleidoscope:*  
Diverse YA Science Fiction &  
Fantasy Stories

*Crown of Feathers*  
by Nicki Pau Preto

*Daughter of the Moon Goddess*  
by Sue Lynn Tan

*Afterworlds*  
by Scott Westerfeld

*The Mortal Instruments*  
by Cassandra Clare



# Flower Crowns

BY SYLVIE



The assassin watches the girl hold her head, fighting back a torrent of pain only she can feel. He jumps from the tree, giving no clues that he is there.

*Sometimes death can be a mercy*, he reminds himself as he lands gently behind the girl. She doesn't notice him. Nobody ever does. She only feels the knife in her back, then nothing. But she knows Karma has come.

That's what they call him. *Karma*. A silent being that lives in the shadows and moves without a trace. *Deadly*. That's what the elderly men who claim to have seen him say. *Cursed*. That's what his village called him.

He stares at his next mark, a tall boy with brown hair, bronze skin and a strange pair of pointed ears. He's obviously been here a while, there's a tent and a small ring of rocks where a fire would go. He moves forward, knife in hand and the elf flinches as if he hears the assassin.

He turns and calls out, his voice soft and rich. "Hello?"

The assassin freezes; nobody hears him, nobody sees him. He keeps staring at the spot next to the assassin, and he stops breathing, hoping the Elf will move on so he can get this over with. He doesn't. He starts to walk towards the assassin, "I won't hurt you."

*'It's not me I'm worried about,'* he thinks, but after years of silence no words come out. Finally seeming to spot the assassin in the bushes, he frowns. The assassin stills as he moves closer, and his eyes track him carefully. He reaches out a hand and the assassin flinches away. He pauses as the assassin's hand moves to his knife. He sees the moment it hits the Elf through the subtle change in his stance, the tension in his spine, and expects him to run or at least scream, but he doesn't. The assassin can practically see the gears turning in his head, matching the stories to what's in front of him.

The Elf turns away, calling back, "I have food if you'd like some?"

The assassin pauses, his throat dry. The elf knows the assassin will follow him, and he does, leaping after him, landing gracefully a short distance away.

The Elf smiles, the corners of his eyes crinkling. "I'm Akiro," he says as he sits down, crossing his legs, and patting the spot beside him. "Do you have a name?"

The assassin freezes beside him. Does he have a name? It's been a long time since he was associated with it, and even longer since he'd been called anything so human as a name. He'd been called many things; Hellion. Monster. Thief. Murderer. Demon. Savage.

Akiro is still staring at him.

"Casimir." His voice is quiet, barely a breath, but it seems to echo, filling space between them he hadn't known was there.

Akiro looks Casimir in the eyes and brushes a piece of hair off his forehead. "Nice to meet you, Casimir."

Casimir jolts awake, with no memory of falling asleep, and opens his stiff lidded eyes to see Akiro smiling at him.

"You're safe."

Casimir almost laughs, he has never been safe, and never will be, but it catches in his throat when he sees that gentle, naïve smile playing out on the Elf's face. *'Let him be innocent,'* he thinks. Casimir realizes he's lying with his head in Akiro's lap. He doesn't seem afraid. He combs through Casimir's hair with his fingers. Casimir couldn't remember the last time he'd felt human touch not tinted with fear, the fear that this would be their last breath as he drove his blade home, the fear that they would not be able to outrun him, the fear that plays across their faces like shadows from a setting sun. Akiro is gentle, and Casimir closes his eyes, still tense at the unfamiliar touch.

"How long was I asleep for?" The assassin asks quietly.

"A couple of hours," Akiro responds, just as quiet.

He feels bold, sitting here in the forest glade, with this soft, beautiful boy.

Casimir sits up, and Akiro looks at him surprised. In one fluid motion, Casimir presses his lips to Akiro's. He feels the mouth beneath his twisting itself out of shock before Akiro kisses him back.

"I'm supposed to kill you," Casimir finds himself saying and Akiro pauses, putting down the flower crown he was making. He turns and looks at Casimir, his eyes of pale lavender staring into his soul.

"Are you going to?" When Casimir doesn't answer Akiro wraps his soft, nimble fingers around his own rough, callused ones and presses a gentle kiss to his mouth. "You don't have to hurt people anymore," he says. And there it is again, that naïve flower crown boy that thinks safety and love and happiness is certain, that joy is something you get when you deserve it. That boy who does not know that feelings are a luxury, that boy who does not understand that freedom has never been an option for him.

He says nothing, tucking away the print of this naïve, soft, beautiful moment into a corner of his heart that they will not touch when they find him again. Because they will find him again. These moments are a glimpse into a life that he will never have the luxury to live.

Akiro places the flower crown in Casimir's hands, and he's surprised by the intricacies of the rainbow of roses, smaller white flowers scattered in between. He glances at Akiro, who looks so damn proud of himself for making it, and Casimir thinks that he might just be in love, or as close to love as someone like him would be capable of. He smiles, a smile Casimir is coming to think is just for him, with the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. He laughs, places it delicately on his head, and feels his lips crack into a smile as he looks at Akiro, who responds with a look of surprise, and traces his thumb along Casimir's mouth.

"It suits you, you know, that smile." He stares for a moment. "I wish I could see it more often."

Casimir just about melts. He doesn't deserve this charming, lovely boy.

"When did you get so good at these?" The assassin says, gesturing at the crown on his head.

Akiro blushes and looks down. "It's an elven thing. Most are good with plants, I can do flower crowns." He blushes harder.

Casimir laughs at him. This silly elf with an affinity for flower crowns. "Perfect for wooing deadly assassins," he teases and Akiro grins at him.

Casimir sits down, staring at Akiro's sleeping face. He's curled up in the fetal position inside the canvas tent, looking peaceful and happy. Casimir kneels on the ground and prays to god, any god, that nothing happens to him, that no one will hurt this sweet, naïve, flower boy. That he won't ruin Akiro like he ruins everything.

"What are you doing?" a voice thick with sleep asks, and he turns to see Akiro staring at him, eyes half-closed. The assassin doesn't answer, and Akiro doesn't press him, just gestures to the spot beside him. Casimir crawls towards him, and buries his head in the soft spot between neck and shoulder, breathing in Akiro's flowery scent.

They've been in the grove for a long time. '*Years probably*,' Casimir thinks, staring at Akiro as he tends to the garden the two of them started. A thought hits Casimir. "Don't you have a family?" he wonders aloud.

Akiro tenses, then sighs and puts down the spade. "I did, at one point." Akiro twiddles his thumbs. "My... kind of love is not accepted in Elven society."

"Your kind of love?" Casimir asks.

Akiro gestures between the two of them. "They banished me. Called me 'Brother of Satan'." He pauses. "A bit dramatic for my tastes, but," he lets out a loose, shaky breath, "To each to their own."

"I had a sister once," Casimir surprises himself by saying.

Akiro looks at him, the glow of curiosity shining in his eyes, inviting him to speak if he wanted to. That was the thing with Akiro, he never pushed for things, simply took what Casimir could give.

"She was smart. And brave. And fearless." He laughs softly, and his face twists into a grim smile. "Everything I wasn't. I loved her. so much."

Akiro moves closer, his face soft and full of sympathy.

Casimir takes a shaky breath. "Do you ever feel like giving up? Do you ever want to just let them break you?" He stops, his throat closing.

"All the time," Akiro says, his voice soft. "Sometimes it's like a battle I'll never win because surviving often feels like losing. I would love more than anything to see my family one last time." He starts to move towards Casimir but stops, his ears twitching. He turns around sharply. "Did you hear that?" They both stand up, Casimir drawing his knives. There's rustling in the woods, and Casimir sees Akiro take a step forward, slowly. Casimir squints, his eyesight has never been that good.



Another rustle then a voice calls, "I have to give you credit. You're a hard man to find." A figure emerges from the trees, a knife glinting in the shadows. "Brother."

She looks just like him. Casimir had forgotten that. There's a part of him that wants to hug her, to feel her arms, strong and steady around him. He shakes his head, *'She's not that girl anymore. You're not that boy anymore.'*

"Missed me?" she says.

"Calla," Casimir breathes.

"Brother, darling."

"You're alive?"

She bares her teeth, "I was wondering when you would ask..."

"I-"

"SILENCE," she thunders, approaching Casimir. "You left me to die. To rot." Her mouth spreads into a smile. "And now, I'm going to enjoy watching you bleed." She lashes out, and Casimir braces himself, but it's not her knife he feels. He hears a scream, and something breaks in Casimir.

He looks as Calla carefully removes her knife from Akiro's stomach.

Akiro looks up, his eyes widening. "Oh. That hurt," he says, staring down.

Calla's face changes, her eyes changing as if realizing she's just killed someone. Casimir lets out a broken cry. She turns around, her eyes hardening. She leans close to him as he falls to his knees, another strangled cry coming out of his mouth, the cry of a man watching half his heart bleed to death. Her breath tickles his cheek. "Karma has collected your debt." Then she disappears into the trees, her long cape billowing behind her.

Akiro lets out a shaky breath, Casimir moves to stanch the blood, but Akiro stops him. "I'm fine."

"Don't leave me."

Akiro shakes his head. "I just need to..." he closes his eyes. "Rest a bit."

"Please, don't go." Casimir hates how weak he sounds.

"Where would I go?" Akiro tries to smile, but his eyes are starting to glaze over. He lifts a hand to Casimir's face.

"I-" he coughs.

"Shhh." Casimir grabs his hand and presses it to his face. "Shh, save your strength."

Akiro coughs again, and Casimir feels a crevice open in his heart, threatening to swallow him whole. He presses Akiro's hand to his forehead fighting the tears, as he feels Akiro's hand go limp. "Please wake up. I don't know if I can do this without you." He lets out a scream, a horrible watery sound. He lifts up Akiro's body, remembering something Akiro had said *"I'd love more than anything to see them again,"* Casimir looks down at the body in his arms, his brain refusing to connect Akiro to this broken bloody thing.

Casimir couldn't tell you how he found the elf city. He just did. A female elf stops in front of him. She is short with a curly afro of dark hair and lightly tanned skin. He glares at her.

She looks at him, her face crinkling in confusion, then she notices the body he's holding. She covers her mouth with a hand. "Is that-" she moves closer. Casimir moves away, wary of this short female. "Is he dead?"

Casimir doesn't respond but focuses on her features. "You're his sister." It's not a question, he's just repeating facts.

She nods, still staring at Akiro's body. He takes a deep breath. "He loved you." It comes out as an accusation.

She looks up at him and seems to come to a decision, "Follow me."

"Why did you bring him here?" she asks, bringing him through the village. People are staring at the two of them, *'Which is understandable,'* Casimir thinks. *'They must look like quite the pair, a tall, battered, human-looking being wearing a cape and carrying a limp body in his arms and an elf walking through the city centre.'*

"Here's my house." She stops and opens the door, stepping in and calling into the house. "Mama?" There's clattering from deep within, and a tall, sleek-looking elf appears.

"Dalisa? Who's this?" she stops, her eyes catching the dead body in his arms.

*'Her son's body,'* Casimir realizes and all the anger he's been saving for this woman drains. *'I'm so tired of being angry.'* The thought struck him suddenly, like a flash of lightning, and as soon as he thinks it, he realizes how true it is. He is so done with being angry, with being sad. He's so done with emotions. The woman stares at him and takes a step forward.

You hurt?" she frowns.

"I hurt him." His voice sounds so broken. "I killed him."

Her brow furrows. "Did you put a knife in his chest?"

Casimir shakes his head.

"Then it wasn't your fault." She comes closer, laying a hand on his face. He flinches at the unexpected touch. "You're hiding so much pain." Her eyes turn sad, "You're keeping so much bottled inside." She takes her hand away, "You need to let it out. Don't let your emotions control you."

Casimir stares down at Akiro's pale face. Casimir gently closes his eyes, maybe he can pretend Akiro's just asleep.

Akiro's mother speaks again. "I don't know you. I don't know what you've seen or what you've had to do to survive, but I can tell you love my son. You need to let him go."

Casimir doesn't realize he's crying until she wipes a tear away. "Thank you." His voice is quiet but holds so much emotion. Casimir presses one last kiss on Akiro's forehead and says goodbye to the one person who kept the darkness at bay.

"See you in a different life."







# *Life's Not a Picnic*

## Fairytale Dialogue

By: Abby

If you were to wander into the east end of the Glenwood Forest and go along a well worn path all the way to a small clearing then you would find two princesses perched on rocks in the dappled sunlight. At their feet lay an assortment of goodies, cherry pie slices, and a bowl of sugared rose petals alongside a glass jug of lemonade.

"Ah, true love's kiss, it was wondrous when I woke up to him standing over me with love for me in his eyes," Aurora gushed.

"You're lucky, you actually wanted this, I didn't. I never had a choice. He's not even a good kisser," Snow White sighed.

"What!? Not a good kisser, that's hard to believe; don't princes have, like a class or something for that?"

"Apparently not Florian."

"Well, you have to make do Snow, it's not like everyone is perfect. We can't be." She grabbed a fork and stabbed it into the cherry pie. Red goo squirted out and landed on the picnic blanket. "Oops! Sorry, but you should totally try this. It's so tasty!" Aurora exclaimed.

Snow White picked up a fork and said, "This is my frustration!" while she proceeded to jab her fork into cherry pie and shovel out a big glob. "Mm," she said in content, "You're right, this is delicious."

"Told you so," Aurora laughed.

"Y'know what?"

"What?" Aurora asked, playing along.

"Sometimes I just wonder..." Snow trailed off. "What if, what if I didn't want to be with Florian anymore?" She set down her fork and leaned back on her rock.

"Like divorce you mean?"

"I guess, yeah. My life just isn't that great, I mean he's loving and kind and gives all these gifts to me, but I don't feel anything. It's just not there anymore, it might not have ever been," Snow confessed.

Aurora stopped mid bite and held up a finger signaling that she needed to finish her bite. Hurriedly she chewed and Snow White offered up a small smile. "Okay," Aurora began when she had finished, "You just need to tell him how you feel, maybe he'll understand?"

"Yeah, I don't know if I have the guts to tell him though..."

Aurora shook her head. "My girl, you have a dilemma. A mighty fine dilemma."

"Don't I know it."

"I'm going to let you contemplate that thought while I pour us a glass of lemonade, as made by my cook, Melinda." She reaches over to the other side of the rock where the jug of lemonade had been waiting and gets some glasses for them from her basket. After a bit of struggle with the jug's lid she finally has two glasses set out for them on their blanket in front of them.

"Thank you," Snow White says as she picks up her glass and takes a sip from it. "Just like the pie, very good," she remarked.

"You can tell Melinda once we get back, she'll be happy to hear. Anyways, back to this divorce business."

"Yes, this. So I feel like I should do it, but if—"

"Or when" Aurora butts in.

"Yes, when, I tell him, could you be there? With me?"

"Well of course, that's what I'm here for, helping breaking news to princes about divorce."

Just as she says that two men appear from the forest trail.

"Snow? What are you talking about?" The first one asks.

Snow looks up and as soon as she recognizes the face she turns white and her breathing becomes shallow. "Florian," she states. "What are you doing here?"

Aurora looks up at his name and she goes just as pale.

"Snow." His face turns hard and his lips draw into a line. "Please tell me that I didn't just hear the word 'divorce'."

Aurora turns to face her, she nods, encouraging her to tell the truth.

"Well," Snow White starts, unsteady.

She folds her hands and wipes them on her dress. "I didn't want you to find out like this but—"

"Like what huh!?" Florian suddenly cuts in. "You've been sleeping with another man haven't you!?"

"Wha—" She says blustered, "N-no! You know I would never do that to you. Don't you?"

"I just don't know anymore. You've been getting quieter these past couple months and you just aren't the same."

Snow looks down at her hands, face downcast. She looks up again and sees so many questions flitting past in his eyes.

"Do you even love me anymore, Snow?"

"Be honest," Aurora murmurs to Snow, leaning in so only she can hear it.

Snow nods and opens her mouth, "Prince Charming, I never wanted to do this to you, but I have to tell you the truth now. I—" her voice breaks, "I think I can't love you anymore, and I don't know if I ever did..." Her prince starts to interrupt but she stops him with a raised hand. "Please, let me speak. You are a wonderful person, full of love and joy, but it felt like when you woke me up I needed to marry you. You saved me after all."

"So what are you saying?"

"I'm saying that we can't be together anymore. You aren't my one true love like you and so many others thought."

Prince Florian's eyes were brimming with tears. He turned away and when he turned back the tears were gone and redness rimmed his eyes. "I don't think you know how much this hurts me, Snow." Her name came out like a curse, full of disgust and sorrow.

"I—" she starts.

"No, we're done. You wanted this; so there, you have it." He turns back to Aurora who had been silent this whole time. "Good day Princess Aurora, I hope to see you at the Evergreen Ball this August." And with that he turns around, pulling Prince Phillip with him, and they stalk out of the clearing back to their homes.

"Goodbye Phillip!" Aurora calls softly as they vanish into the forest. She looks to Snow White and says softly, "We should go home now."

"Yes. Yes we should."





## ACT 1: SCENE 7

*A young girl, Ingrid sits at the dining room table, looking out the window.*

**The young girl, Ingrid:** Mother, where is Father?

**Mother gulps, putting her fork down:**  
Business meeting.

**Ingrid:** But it's been a few years, hasn't it? Shouldn't he come home?

**Mother looks down at her plate:** The world we live in isn't the only world out there.

**Ingrid, shocked:** W-what?

**Mother looks away:** Your father is in another dimension. He will come back someday, just not soon.

**Ingrid:** B-b-but why?

**Mother looks at Ingrid:** He just has business to attend to.

**Ingrid, urges:** Will he visit?

**Mother:** Traveling in different worlds is a lot of work. One day, you will travel to the world he'll be in.

**Ingrid:** Why not now?

**Mother:** The portals are too dangerous.



*On the other side of the town, a young girl comes out of the portal, with her new Mother and Father, with hands full of suitcases.*

**New Mother:** Welcome to FairView, your new home!

**New Father added:** Away from the world you used to live in.

**The other young girl, Charlotte:** Will we visit... the planet?

**The mother shakes head slowly:** Not for the next few years.

**FIND THE NEXT SCENE IN OUR  
SUMMER ZINE JUNE 2022**



# Poetry

USING WORDS & WORK TO CREATE  
BLACKOUT POETRY





# ABBY



## AN ODD STATEMENT

just

us,

patches

covered

our

friends

loneliness

a

group of

shy

afraid

desperate.

, and

is an odd

statement.

## LOVE IS INEVITABLE

I know love is inevitable, and we're  
doomed that come a day when all  
has been to dust the sun  
the earth we'll have, love



# SYLVIE



## BROKEN MIRRORS

There is one mirror [redacted] home, [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] see

I can't say

for the

sake of vanity.

-I still look like a little girl,

It would be self-indulgent.

eyes catch mine in the

mirror. It is too late to look away,

I stare into my own eyes for a moment. Today is the day [redacted]

And tomorrow, [redacted]

I will decide the rest of my life;

I

slide [redacted] the panel over the mirror

beautiful, in a different world. Her [redacted]

be

at night,

hide

that beauty [redacted]





## INCLUSIVE

We say we are inclusive.  
I see inclusive  
Just  
not here.  
What's that?  
I ask myself everyday  
What does it mean to be inclusive?  
Does it mean  
Owning up to our mistakes  
Letting BIPOC people into our school  
Having a GSA  
Not acknowledging race, nor being deliberately racist?  
What does it mean to love others?  
Try to "love your neighbor as yourself?"  
Or try being pansexual or gay?  
What does it mean  
when you let everyone in  
and yet you never talk about the  
important stuff  
How is our world going to be  
With all these rich white men ruling everything?  
Will the people of color be pushed down  
The LGBTQ+ people shunned  
The disabled forgotten  
and the ones in need of mental support be put in asylums?  
What does it mean to be inclusive when we don't know how to love anyone  
Other than ourselves  
When we say we are sorry, when we say  
"I'll try harder next time,"  
We don't know who we are.  
We say we are inclusive.  
I say raise the bar.

What if rocks in the sea are dreamers  
on their knees, trying to get up?

*-Kira*





# BETRAYED

An excerpt by Lola

## Chapter Three

The next morning I have a plan. I just have to figure out the details. I quickly feed the dogs and run down the stairway. I need to get a head start if I am going to go on the museum mission without permission. I just have to sneak out before the others leave.

I slow down as I get to the main carpeted stairway. The entire house is carpeted. I gracefully make my way to the dining room. My uncle is sitting at the head of the table with servants circling around, serving him. He looks calmer and more collected. I can tell he will not be as open as he was last night, for a long time. I sit down on his right and wave servants over.

"The usual please." They nod and run off to the kitchen. "So uncle, have you changed your mind yet? Will you let me go on the mission?"

He looks at me coldly, he is so different from the kind uncle I saw last night. "Like I have said to you many times, no. The subject is closed."

I frown and look down at my hands. I am holding a small bag full of sleeping powder. The servants bring in a glass of orange juice. I put my foot in the way of the guy carrying the juice. He trips and spills the juice all over me. The other servants rush to grab cleaning wipes.

"Oops, sorry sir. I will clean it up right away." The servant rushes after the other servants.

"Uncle, if you don't mind. I will clean up in the kitchen."

Uncle frowns and gestures with his hand as if to say go, you are dismissed.

I walk into the kitchens, it is bustling with noise and servants running everywhere. "Excuse me, may I clean up at this sink?"

They nod and step backwards away from the drink they are making my uncle. I grin, perfect, I have luck on my side. I start to clean the stain from my shirt, I face my back to the drink and pour in the sleeping powder.



When I finish cleaning up I start to walk towards the door and then turn around to thank the servants. They nod as I hurry away.

A few minutes later, they bring the drink in. Instead of bringing it to him, the servants brought it to me. My eyes go wide.

"I thought since your drink was spilled, and since you have always wanted to try my drink. You could have a taste." He smiles at me.

"I..." I stutter trying to think of something to say.

"Go on then. Try it."

"You know what, I think I am going to go up to my room. I am not hungry."

His smile widens. All I can think is, 'How does he know I drugged his drink?'

"Just one sip won't hurt. Or is the drink too grown up for you?"

I take a deep breath. "Okay, I guess one sip won't hurt."

I gulp and grab the drink. It is murky brown and smells weird. I take a sip, it tastes horrible.

"Well? Do you like it, Ailith?"

My vision goes fuzzy and my mouth feels strange. "Um, I don't think I like it," I say and topple out of my chair and onto the fuzzy rug. The last thing I see as the drug takes hold of me is him smirking.

"Is she all right sir? She is breathing funny. I should get the doctor."

"No, she is fine. She just over exercises herself often. You are dismissed."

I start to slowly come into consciousness. My uncle is in a chair next to me and a servant is leaving the room. My whole body feels heavy and sore. I struggle to move my arms out of the uncomfortable position they are in.

"Why?" I croak. My voice sounds like sandpaper.

He turns and looks straight into my eyes. "Ahh good, you are awake. I could not keep the servants from getting the doctor for much longer."

I glare at him, he just smiles softly.

"Why?" I croak again.

"You were trying to drug me so what was I supposed to do? Drink it? You don't think I suspected that you would try to sneak on the mission? As a precaution, I sent them out two nights ago. Then drugged you."

"Wait, two nights ago? You must mean one night ago?"

"You have been sleeping for more than twenty-four hours."

I look at him in shock. I had asked the medicine man to give me the dose that lasted three hours. That way I would be out of the mansion before he knew.

"Wait, did you..."

He smiles, "Of course. I knew your plan from the start. You were so desperate that I knew you would sneak out. I asked the drug master to give me an extra long dose. Did you really think he would give you a drug without my permission?"

Of course he wouldn't. I should have thought of that. I had just been too excited at the thought of sneaking out to think properly.

"Now, I have told all the servants that you will be well soon. But you are not to leave your room until the others come back from the mission. There will be guards guarding this room at all times. Do you understand?"

I grimace, of course he has guards guarding me. "Fine, but I am not happy about this."

He smiles, "I know you aren't. That's the point. Be glad you are not Jack right now though. You would not want his consequence." Then he stands up and walks to the door. "Oh and one more thing," he points to the four windows I have in my room. There are huge bars covering them. "No escaping for you." He laughs as he walks out, I hear him click the lock on the door. Now, I am locked in.



# THE FLAME OF MARS

An excerpt by Florence



## Evanna

She was in her space pod, flying over the red deserts of Mars waiting for the black smear on the horizon that meant she was home. Evanna ran her hands over the controls of her pod, lost in the memories she gained only an hour ago. The history of her ancestors, the Aguya, the legacy they left for her and her blood sisters wherever they were. The pain, the suffering, ancient knowledge, her powers. They all came to her through the rush of blood, the pounding of her heart, and the pressing of death on her mind.

As she moved into the city of Mars more pods flew past her on the main freeway and down below, a dark city of obsidian glass ripped into the sky. She sighed and reached up to rub her sore temples with her gloved hands, annoyed by the consistent painful pulse. The castle came into view on the horizon, a dark menacing piece of pitch black glass with sharp spires and virtually no windows. Evanna pulled into the pod docking area by the palace, a heavily monitored platform hovering outside the palace gates.

Upon landing three armed guards moved toward her pod and helped her out; they knew her pod on sight. She clambered out and was ushered towards the palace surrounded by guards. She was not safe in the city, it was a miracle she was allowed out to the desert on her own at all. They walked along a bridge made entirely of clear glass that led to a black yawning gap in the palace's side, the main entrance. She walked proudly into the palace, her white blood stained dress swirling with the breeze of her movement.



Her father would want to see her as he always did in the pretense of wanting to hear how it went in the desert. He really just wanted to let her know how displeased he was to find her alive.

The silvery walls of the palace glowed with the light of several dim oil lamps and the walls were watchful of everything that transpired in and out of the royal grounds. Evanna stared straight ahead, her back bone straight, her eyes cold, her lips quirked in a sarcastic smile as they closed the space between them and the double doors of wrought iron that led to the throne room. As they got even closer one guard broke away from the group to open the door and announce her arrival.

“Presenting her royal highness Princess Evanna Eldar,” the guard said, his voice echoing in the menacing quiet.

She swept into the throne room, a mask of indifference frozen on her fine boned face. “Father,” she said, looking up at a man sitting on a raised platform a few feet away from her.

His face was obscured by a mask that enabled him to breathe in the oxygenless atmosphere of Mars. He did not need to wear it indoors, there was a microfiber seal on the door, but Evanna had suspicions he wore it to promote his generally ruthless reputation. King Eldar, the ruler of the Mars kingdom, was not a nice man. “My Dearest,” he said, his voice low and smooth, a sheet of ice on which one could easily slip on. “I trust all went well in the desert...” he said, caressing the arm of his throne and gazing at his daughter through dark hooded eyes. Evanna nodded.

“Good, good. Well it’s nice to have you back,” he said absently, his baritone laced with annoyance. The king crossed his knees and stared over her shoulder.

Clearly they were done. Evanna gave a short vicious bow and left, slamming the door behind her. Once outside she slumped with exhaustion, despite the fact that her wound vanished, Evanna had still lost a lot of blood. Slowly she pried herself off the door and headed for her quarters.

# Pollux

He gave a strangled scream, throwing a bowl across the room to shatter on the opposite wall. His breath came in short panicked gasps as the puncture in the side of his satellite let out more and more oxygen. He was going to die in this cramped smelly shithole, with no one and nothing. Pollux’s eyes stung and he gave a broken moan sliding to the floor and cradling his head in his arms. The hiss of fleeing oxygen was like a ballad of doom in his ears. Pollux sucked in a breath to let out another scream and then stopped choking on his own breath. He was not supposed to be able to breathe; he realized standing up from his prone position. The tear in the satellite was silent, all the oxygen was gone, and yet... A stabbing pain pierced his chest. This is it, Pollox thought, falling to his knees once more. The pain grew stronger by the second until his tortured screams tore at his throat and he began to choke on his own blood. At the peak of his torment a stirring sensation grew in his limbs and he was thrust into darkness. A stream of thoughts began to flow through his mind, unbidden and not his own. Memories of his ancestors, the Tumas, crashed in unforgiving waves through his mind reminding him of something he never should have forgotten.

Pollux came to in a haze of pain, his temples throbbed and his body was curled in a fatal position on the ground. He rolled over, spat out a glob of blood and crawled toward the wall which he gripped, making it to a standing position. Once he was standing, Pollox brushed a dark lock of hair out of his eye and peered out of the satellite, nothing. Not a ship in sight. He sighed and leaned against the wall, a sickening soup of anger boiling in his blood. He was stranded, Pollox thought just as an interstellar overdrive blast shook his satellite and a ship appeared out of nowhere.





# The Sirens Sing for Odysseus

BY CAMERON

## Chapter Four

I rolled over in my bed, groaning and stretching as I struggled to open my half-asleep eyes. I had the weirdest dream last night, about a ghost boy called... Devon? Blinking a few times to get rid of the flashing colours dancing before my eyes, I yawned slowly, stretching my arms out wide.

“Ouch!” Devon cried out as my arm smacked him in the face, leaving a red mark on his forehead. “What was that for?”

So, meeting a ghost boy was decidedly not just a weird dream. “Sorry. Didn’t mean to.”

Well, having Devon, (my new friend!) with me was no reason to break routine more than I already had. I rose from the bed, grabbed the fresh clothes I had laid out for myself upon my arrival, and walked to the bathroom, coat swishing as I went. It was the only thing I would never, ever, take off under any circumstance. But other than that, clothes that I’d worn for more than a day were absolutely unbearable.

I quickly changed and brushed my teeth with the specific brand of toothpaste that I insisted on using. Any other one felt like tiny needles stabbing into my mouth, and it would take ages for it to feel ‘right’ again. I shuddered at the thought.

Bang bang, bang bang, bang! Crash!

I burst out of the bathroom to see what was the matter. “Devon! Are you okay?”

He lay on the floor, clutching his head and rolling around in pain. Apparently, ghosts could feel pain, which seemed highly irregular. The point of feeling pain was to let your body know not to keep doing whatever you’re doing or you’ll die, after all. But ghosts were already dead! Could they die again? I didn’t think so, because then what would they be? Dead<sup>2</sup>?

“Help!”

My internal questioning was stopped in its tracks and I rushed to Devon’s side.

“What happened? What can I do to help?”

“I can’t see!” he yelled.

I started to panic, then remembered our glasses on the nightstand. Sighing, I walked back into the room and got them, then put the glasses on Devon’s face.

"It's alright, I can see now!"

I rubbed the bridge of my nose. "Forgot your glasses?" I said, and he laughed sheepishly. "I suppose."

Suddenly the door made a screeching, ripping sound and fell to the floor with more loud crashing.

"It may not be fine."

I heard the clomping noises of my grandad sprinting up the stairs as fast as his old, rickety body could carry him. "Mordecai! What happened, are you alright?" He saw Devon and I standing there over the fallen door, staring at it.

"Salutations, Grandad. My bedroom door has taken its leave, and my friend has joined us." I jabbed my thumb in Devon's direction.

"Nice to meet you!" The ghost waved so fast that his hand was nothing more than a blur.

I had expected Grandad to be a bit more surprised, but he simply gave a knowing smile and waved back. "Hello, Devon. So, are you going to be sleeping in the same room or would you rather have your own?"

"Same room, please. I get lonely."

The older man nodded, then gestured to me. "You're fine with this?"

I shrugged. "Whatever makes him feel comfortable."

He clapped his hands together. "Well, now that's settled, let's hop in the car, shall we? We need to get to the carnival before the crowds arrive, or we'll be queuing for hours. We'll fix the door when we get back."

Devon jumped and pumped his fist in the air, sparing no time in getting to the car as fast as humanly possible, and I spared no time in following him. While I liked routine, some spontaneity once in a while made me feel alive. After all, a drab, repetitive piece is no piece at all, as I had learned when I first started composing. My brain craved stimulation beyond 'Chopsticks' and 'Heart and Soul', so I started writing pieces of my own, despite having no private musical education.

It was my choir teacher in Year 3 who taught me how to play and compose. I forget what she looked like exactly, but her kind smile, and the way her laugh sounded when she was pleased with my work would forever remain among my most treasured memories. She would sit me down on her lap and place her hands over mine, guiding them across the keys. Soon, though, I was playing melodies on my own, with her only helping me reach the pedals when necessary.

I still remember her pulling me aside one day, after I had performed "The Flight of the Bumblebee". I had worked for ages, learning to read music, play the song without getting tripped up, and simply remember all the notes. I poured everything I had into delivering the best rendition of the song that my school had ever seen, and when I finished, beads of sweat dotted my face from the effort.

Looking into my classmates' eyes, I bowed and waited for the thundering applause. It never came. Merely a pitiful smattering of claps from the teacher. My face dropped like a stone. As I observed the children more closely, trying to figure out what I did wrong, why they weren't satisfied with me, I was met with a sight that both saddened and disgusted me. Half of them had dozed off, a quarter were picking their nose and eating it, and the rest were staring off into space. Completely oblivious to what I had just done, they were lounging around like it was their own house. They didn't care.

Now, that was a harsh realization to come to for a child. And I responded how any child would: burst into tears and run out of the room. When the choir teacher found me, I was kicking the wall next to the water fountain, sobbing.

"Is everything alright?" She crouched down so that we were looking each other in the eyes.

"Stupid kids! They hate my song, hate music, hate me! Why can't they just go away!"

The teacher cupped my face in her hand and turned me around to face her. I placed my hand on top of hers and plopped down in criss-cross applesauce. "Oh, they don't hate you. They're just interested in different things, that's all. You'd react the same way to watching their schoolyard games, wouldn't you?"

I scowled. "I wouldn't pick my nose and eat it, that's for sure."

She stifled a laugh. "Well, besides, who cares what they think? You played your music, it made you happy, that's the end of that. People can be irritating sometimes, from one person to another."

I looked up at her. "You mean it? Really?" That kind smile spread across her face again, and I glowed with pleasure.

"Really! And, if it makes you feel better, I thought you played beautifully."

I blushed. "Thank you. But, miss, I've got a problem."

Her eyebrows knitted together in concern. "Whatever it is, we can work through it together."

I shuffled my feet nervously. "Well, if you say so. So, erm, recently, I've been having the problem where there's a nice-sounding bit in my head, but I can't find any sheet music that sounds like it. I really want to play it though. What should I do?"

To my surprise, she laughed. "Seems like I've got a little composer on my hands! Alright, I'm going to let you in on a little secret, but you have to promise not to tell anyone."

"I promise! What is it?"

"Well, I have to be really quiet so others don't hear," she said. I leaned my ear close to her mouth.

"Okay, ready?" she whispered.

"Ready!" I whispered back.

"You can write your own music!"

I couldn't contain my excitement. "Really? I can?"

She nodded, and I shouted "Yes!" in my excitement. The teacher put her finger to her lips and I grinned sheepishly. "Sorry. Er- can you teach me how? Please? I have so many snippets floating around up here." I knocked my head playfully, and she laughed.

"Absolutely! Let's head back to class first, though."

"Okay!"

She helped me up from the ground, and we started to walk back to the music room together.

"Maybe this year we'll finally have a competent player to enter into the district talent show. God, was the last time embarrassing. He was in front of that entire concert hall!" she muttered under her breath.

"What was that?"

She made a dismissive gesture. "Don't worry about it."

And with that, I had to be content as I skipped back to class with her.

"Mordecai!"

Devon's voice cut through my flashback and I snapped back to reality. "We're at the carnival! Now hurry up and get out of the car, I want to go on rides!"

Guess I wasn't going to have to explain the modern world to him. He seemed to understand well enough (perhaps too well). Yet another classic ghost trope, disproven.

"Okay, okay! I'm coming!" I said, hopping out of the car. Instantly, my nose was greeted by the smell of mini-donuts, cotton candy, and just overall sugar. Yikes. I hated carnivals. I'd only been to one, but once was all it took. Screaming children, flashing lights, repulsive food, and everyone trying to sell you things. Literally every single one of my nightmares combined. But my grandad didn't see me often enough to know that, and he was only trying to be nice, so I decided to simply make the best of it. Besides, looking at Devon, who was completely in awe with everything, made it all somewhat worth it.

We walked over to the queue in front of the ticket booth and waited to purchase our tickets. Looking at the number of cars pulling in now, I breathed a sigh of relief that we listened to Grandad and arrived early.

Eventually, we got to the front and bought our tickets, moving through the turnstiles and into the theme park itself. It was a lot bigger than I had originally thought, with rides and carnival games in every direction. Devon seemed like he was about to pass out from excitement, but I just wanted to pass out.

He grabbed my arm and yanked me over to some kind of spinning capsule. "Look, look, Mordecai! You stick to the wall because it's so fast! Please can we ride it?"

If I say 'no', it's not going to change the outcome, is it?"

"Absolutely not!"

I sighed, "Alright then, let's go."

Luckily, the queue wasn't excruciatingly long, or I might have simply left right then. After a few minutes, the theme park worker opened the gate and allowed us into the metal disc-shaped thing. Inside of the capsule, there were spaces for people to stand and bars separating each one, and we went and found two spaces side by side. A woman gave us some instructions, but it sounded like garbled word soup to me. Oh well. Hope that wasn't too important.

She stepped out, shutting the door behind her and trapping us in. I heard a whirring noise, and just managed to make out Devon's voice, "Mordecai! Hold on!"

I gripped the bars just in time as we began to spin around and around, faster and faster until I could feel my lungs pressing against my ribcage like they were trying to escape. Honestly, I didn't blame them.

"Whoo-hoo!" the ghost yelled.

"We're all going to die!"

He looked over at me, eyebrow raised. "Don't say that. This is perfectly safe."

"Easy for you to say! You're dead!"

Devon frowned. "Fair point." Struck by a sudden idea, he reached over and grabbed my hand.

"What are you doing?"

"Well, like you said, I'm dead, so just squeeze my hand when you're scared. Do it as hard as you want, because while I can feel pain, my body can't actually be damaged. Again, because I'm dead."

I frowned, not satisfied with this. What if I hurt him? Then my stomach dropped again, and that was completely forgotten.

"You're doing great, don't worry, we're almost done, it's almost over, it's fine, it'll be okay..."

I managed to slow my hyperventilating down to deep breaths, finally calming myself as the ride slowed to a halt. The door swung open and I yanked Devon towards it, running like my life depended on it. When I finally got out of the capsule and into sunlight, I breathed a sigh of relief and immediately felt guilty.

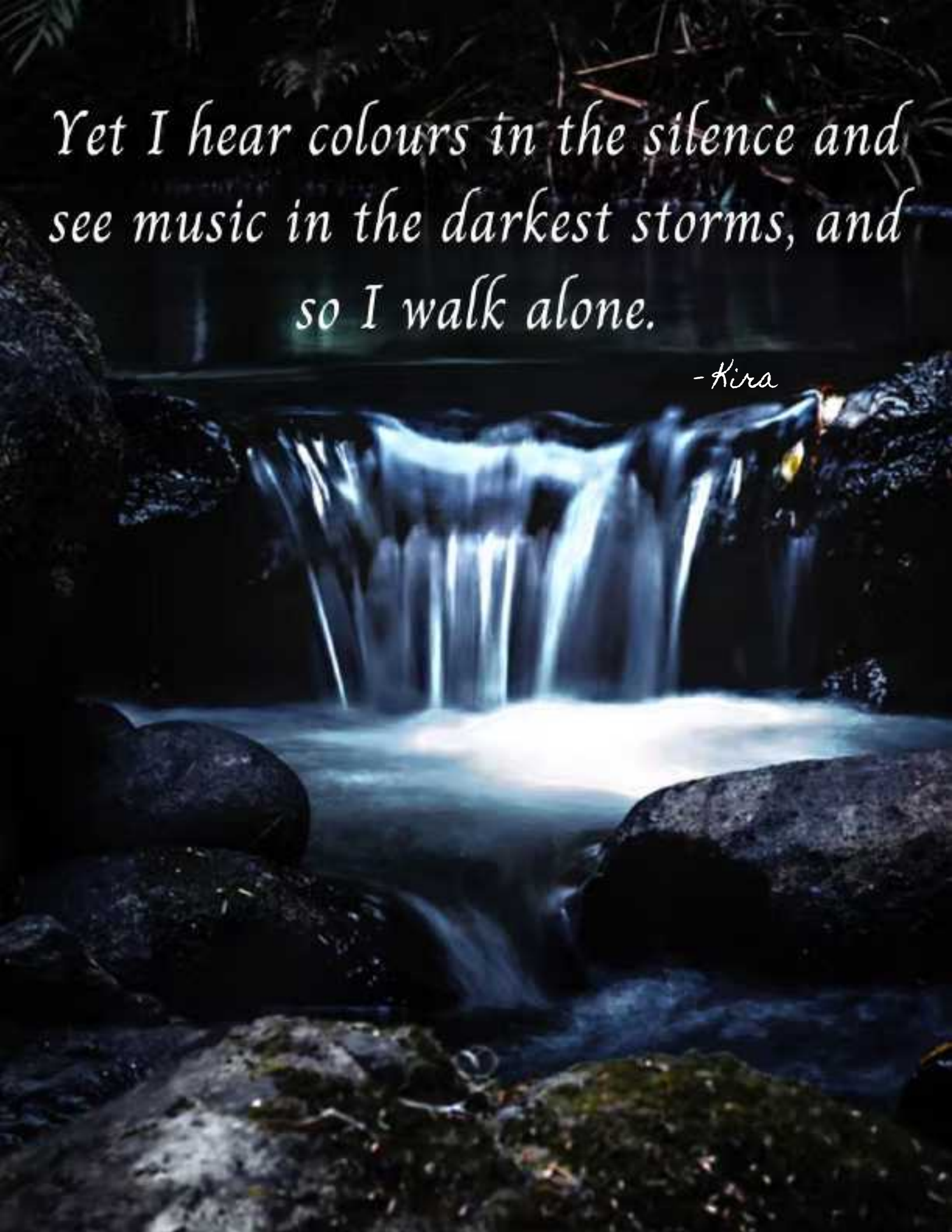
Devon put his hand on my shoulder. "Hey, there's a forest area around here, want to hop the fence and explore?"

I looked up at him. "Really? You'd do that? I thought you loved the carnival."

"Eh. Friends are more important than a fair. Anyways, race you there!" He took off sprinting, and I laughed, following behind.

*Yet I hear colours in the silence and  
see music in the darkest storms, and  
so I walk alone.*

*- Kira*





# THE ADELAIDE INVASION

## Part One

*By Jakob*

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“My friends,” the leader of the Penguin Clan, Bartholomew Zeppelin, began. The Penguin Clan was titled ‘The Penguin Clan’ by most, but its formal name was ‘The Righteous Rebellion of the Really Quite Antagonized Adelie Penguins,’ (RRRQAAP) (pronounced with a zing on the rrr).

Continuing, Bartholomew Zeppelin spoke, “We have almost gotten one hundredth of the weapons necessary to take Adelaide. They should have never named their city so similar to Adelaide island, the island we inhabit. I understand that spirit and support for our righteous cause is running low. Which is why I have written up a speech in the style of Winston Churchill’s famous ‘We Shall Fight On The Beaches’ speech.

The crowd of penguins were happy. They loved Winston Churchill as much as they loved that funny feeling in their brains that happened when they ate the ice mushrooms.

“Why Triangles Are The Bestest Shape Ever by Bartholomew Zeppelin Jr,” Bartholomew Zeppelin began, “Number one: the rule of three states that things that come in threes are inherently more satisfying and funnier than other things. A triangle has three points, hence, the funny.”

The crowd was moved by this statement. They were in tears and clapping.

“Whoops,” Bartholomew corrected, “It seems I picked up the wrong manuscript by mistake. This is actually my son’s english proj-”

“BOOOOO!” The crowd shouted, “KEEP READING!”

“Alright,” Bartholomew said, “I will. Number two: Triangles are a longer word than scares or kirkles.”

The crowd cried. These statements were too, too, true.

“Number three: Triangles are pointier and they remind me of the knives I used to stab the bully yesterday.”

The crowd fell into a hush. And then, they cheered. “SHOW THAT SON OF A LEOPARD SEAL!” they jeered. (Also, since cheered rhymes with jeered, I’m a poet now.)

“Number four,” Bartholomew continued, “Hagsji,skjbjajnconoganfcao ifhanifkjfhKODIJFM!”

These words were so, so, so true, and now the crowd of penguins were motivated, moved, and felt a deep sense of duty.

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They cheered, and Bartholomew Zeppelin stroked a tear off his cheeto-crusteD face, and it promptly killed some microorganisms, who were on the brink of discovering a cure to world hunger, despite being microoganisms.

And the penguins prepared to launch the invasion. Despite not having enough weapons, they had spirit. And spirit would win the day.

Bartholomew Zeppelin Jr. stood proudly in front of his class. He was about to give his poem, why triangles are the bestest shape ever, in front of forty other young penguins in a small icy cave.

“We shall defend Adelaide island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the icy beaches, we shall fight on the icy landing grounds, we shall fight in the icy fields and in the icy streets, we shall fight in the icy hills; we shall never surrender,” he said proudly.

He was given an F for plagiarism.



# COMMISSION

BY RAINE

Jared always liked working in the afternoons. The mornings were too cold, and the evenings too dark. The afternoon was the perfect time to stay inside, especially in the summer. A light breeze was flowing through the house, and on the bottom floor with the screens open it felt very cool. His setup for sewing was simple, but cluttered. Compared to his parents, his table was smaller, and pushed up against a wall. There were several boxes underneath, one for fabrics and cloth, and one for different threads. To the right of the table there's a hanger with different clothes to be altered. It never seemed to get any emptier. On the table itself was a wooden container with dividers for different needles, scissors, and other tools; shipped straight from Chez-La Maison in the north. Sewing was a tedious task, so at least the afternoons lasted forever.

Slumped over his desk, he was busy finishing up the last task of the day; for some reason someone needed him to fix this shirt's buttons, as if it was as complicated as. As him trying to do it right now at 5:00PM, his stomach growling, the candle barely lighting the room. He finished up the last button when his mom walked in the room.

"Jared. Someone just made a commission right before closing."

He looked up from his desk.

"They specifically requested you."

His eyes lit up. "Wow, uh, is it someone from school again?" he asked.

"Actually, I've never seen those two boys before. I think they were dating but I wouldn't know for sure. Anyway, they requested you make them a skirt."

She placed a paper with the measurements on his desk. His eyes lit up even more. His favorite clothing to sew, commissioned by someone who is no doubt a fan. What more could he ask for?

His mom continued. "It's supposed to be red. And it's due tomorrow."

Jared's expression stopped.

"Are you up to it?"

Jared looked at his desk, looked at the clothing rack of jobs, looked at the messy calendar, before taking a deep breath. "Yeah I'll do it."

"Great, I'll be making dinner in the other room, don't work too late, it's already so cold in here."

Jared's mom was right, night time was already arriving. He sat down at his desk again, upright. Could it be him? He thought. His old friend would fit the description. His friend would've been aware of his sewing skills, he's even made a few things for him in the past. And the skirt he wore everywhere was red. Unlike Jared, his friend loved the cold, he couldn't stand any heat clothing could create on his body. But why would he come here now? After all this time? When he left, he said he would never come back. He must've gone somewhere far away.

Port Defigo would be easiest to get out of during the summer, so it could make sense. But his mom said that there were two boys. Did he finally find someone? Did that special one want to know where the looks came from? It was me. All me.

Jared turned around. He looked at the at the bottom box of the stack. He knew what was in there, but decided not to use it right now. He blew out the candle, and left the room for the day.

~ ~ ~

The next morning, Jared woke up early. He put on a new shirt and shorts, but changed the clip to yellow. He grabbed a rice ball from his mom before heading out. The Rizumu streets were quiet and eerie, and it was one of those rare summer days where clouds filled the sky, a reminder of the seasons to come.

Not far from the storefront, on the main street, was the fabric store where he works. Jared remembered when he went there with his friend to be away from their parents, as Aki never spilled any secrets, and always let them stay after the shop closed. Today was just a simple in and out. Buy the red fabric, and be out of there.

He opened the heavy door, which always made a thud as it closed. The lack of windows in the space, which protected the fabric colors, created a cold and dark environment which was still uneasy yet familiar.

"Hello Jared" Aki yelled from the back.

"Hi! I'm just grabbing some red fabric."

"What's it for?"

"Um, someone's paying for a skirt."

Aki smiled. "You don't see that colour used much anymore."

Jared went to the left side of the room where it was kept.

"Do you want something made of cedar?" Aki asked.

"No I'm good, just the red right now."

Aki went over to where Jared was standing. "This shade has not been used in a while. What size?"

Jared had the dimensions from last night memorized already.

"Is this enough?" Aki asked.

"Yeah that should be good."

"You have string for the waistband already?" Aki asked again, folding the fabric and placing it in a paper bag.

"Yeah, it's not my first time making one."

Jared handed over a few double As, before walking towards the door.



"Good luck," said Aki.

"I'll be fine, it's nothing new."

It was just after lunch, the sun now high above the little clouds. There were no windows in the room, but Jared knew from the light seeping in that this was the case. He now had everything he needed to complete the commission.

He started off by folding the fabric in half. After smoothing it out, he quickly did the math for calculating the waistband, before cutting out a semi circle. He then cut a parallel curve further down to create the bottom of the skirt. After it successfully folded out into a half donut shape, he cut another rectangle for the waistband, which he folded, and began the slow process of sewing it to the top of the skirt with needles, making sure it followed the curve and didn't bunch up. After that, all he had to do was carefully sew the remaining straight edge of the skirt, connecting everything into a wearable shape.

When that was done, he stood up to look at the whole piece. It really was how he remembered his friend's version. He went to hang it up on the rack when a beep sound rang from the bottom of the stack of containers.

*What now.*

Sometimes, he tries to forget about it all. The bunkers, the memory rooms, the screens, the past, the future, the communicator he took home in secret. He knew that him and the others were in a pact to keep it to themselves, yet he also didn't know who they were and what they wanted.

He knelt on the ground, carefully moving the boxes over to retrieve the device. Besides that, there was also... Captures.

Before his friend left, he used the communicator to preserve some of those moments, a snapshot of that moment, unmoving and unchanging. On the top of the pile, was a photo of that friend. He was standing in the moonlight, the photo only picking up the basic features, but it was enough to bring Jared back. The red skirt was easy to spot though.

He looked over at the communicator. The beep came from a message. It was from the new user.

*{74839: We're here to pick up our skirt.}*

Jared froze. It couldn't be. He grabbed the skirt from the table, before rushing out of the room to the front desk. His mom was waiting there, as well as two boys he's never seen bef-

"Jared. What a coincidence. Your clients here are ready to pick up their order."

Jared looked over to see two boys. One had blonde curly hair flowing down to his chin, covering his right eye. He was wearing a white turtleneck sweater and turquoise green pants. The other boy had black short bangs, with the rest of the hair tucked into a ponytail at the back of his head. He was wearing a white shirt and red overalls. Judging from the way they held each other's arms, Jared thought they must be very close to each other.

"Hello. I'm Jared, this must be for you?"

"Yeah it's for us, I'm Ciel," the blond boy said.

"My name is Indigo," the black haired boy added. Indigo handed over 30 AA cells.

"Are you two new around here?" Jared asked.

"Well, kind of? We're just passing through," Ciel replied.

Jared's mom headed back inside as they exchanged awkward glances, before Indigo continued. "You got our message?"

"Yes," said Jared. "How did you find m-"

"We ran into Ocean back in Chez-La Maison. He had a lot to say about you."

The skirt, the message, it was coming together.

"Is he?"

"Ocean's number is 34678. We need your help."

We're the brushtrokes of  
the universe, love

-Kira



# THE FEAR

BY ZOE

*Smoke blows through the trees, and I run.*

*I run, and run, and run. I can't stop—I don't know why I'd ever want to, either. The fire flickers, pops, and crackles behind me.*

*My house, my home, my life, my family... they're gone.*

*I was right to fear. I know that now. Why did I ever think I could ignore the possibilities? Anything could go wrong, and everything will go wrong. I was stupid—I practically killed them. It's my fault, for not thinking about what could go wrong. My fault, my fault, my fault.*

*I. Stopped. Being. Scared. It's. My. Fault.*

*Fire burns my back.*

*As I clear the log that falls into my path, everything goes black, and I cry. Tears pour through my lashes, even as I focus on my heartbeat, slowing it as best I can. I tell myself to calm it, like I usually do. I look up at a voice. There's a camera light and someone standing in front of me; I recognize her. She's in my class.*

*I take in the phone she's using to film my tears, and look at my feet. I hope that she won't show it to anyone, but I cannot say anything. My heart beats faster, racing though it had been calm seconds ago.*

*She begins to laugh, and my cheeks go pink. This will be my ruination. Ruination—a good word, perhaps. I'll have no one to talk to, no one who'll — I notice that there are people behind her. My classmates, and friends from my old school. They all smirk, stare, and laugh. I cry harder.*

*Then they disappear, and I am left in the dark. My heartbeat slows again, and I feel calm.*



*That is, until the voice in my head whispers, what creatures lay in this darkness? It doesn't say the words, but the thought pounds into my skull. I panic, breath hitching and I cough. I thought I could forget the fear. I thought I could perhaps even control it. Now look at what I have done to myself.*

*I want to cry, but I force myself not to. Crying is for being alone in the bathroom, I tell myself sternly. With the door locked, and my back against it. This time, I do not cry, though the place in my chest where fear usually holds court 'pings'.*

*I wonder at it, my thoughts drifting for a second. What if the tears well up in my eyes, and I cry in front of my classmates again? What if holding in my tears hurts me? What if—what if—what if—what if—*

*I remember my surroundings, and immediately wish I had a duvet to hide under, and a stuffy fox to cuddle to my chest. To calm me. I remember a saying I once heard—I don't remember where from. Something about your bed holding you, your blanket sheltering you, and you stuffy not judging your tears. It resonates inside me, making me wish for Aurora—my stuffy fox—even more.*

*The darkness is barely darkness by the time I pull myself out of my thoughts.*

*I can see almost as easily at night as I can in day, which is useful when it must be, but horrible when I want to sleep. I see a room full of ladybugs, and I want to scream.*

*I am not scared of ladybugs. I find them beautiful and lovely; creatures of maestososo in their own right. I simply once wondered what would happen if a ladybug made its way up my thumbnail and got into my bloodstream. It was terrifying, the thought of such an occurrence, that I'd been haunted by the thought of ladybugs.*

*But they do not deserve that hatred—fear?—and so I do not scream, do not stomp, and just let the fear in my chest pound my heart harder and faster, the mallet it uses achingly heavy. The ladybugs swarm, and begin to crawl over me; they fly into my hair. I want to brush them away, to flick them out of my hair, but I do not want to hurt them, and so I do not. I wait as they begin to climb onto my face, and around my eyes. They do not go up my nose, nor into my mouth, but I still fear it happening.*

*And then the ladybugs and the room disappear. I am left alone in what I see is a meadow, full of both flora and fauna. The animals around me—mainly birds and bugs—are calm, and so am I. I forget the feeling of creatures crawling over me, and remember peace once again. I feel happy.*

*This is because I allowed fear to reign, I tell myself. I stopped being scared, and everyone burned. I am scared now, and I am at peace. I know somewhere that this thought couldn't be true, but do not want to think it, lest everything goes wrong again. Instead, the place in my chest begins to pick up speed, and my heart beats faster and faster.*

*I do not realize why, until I see people. I groan inwardly. They are my classmates, who will scorn me now that they've seen me cry. I am sure of it. They will act as if I am nothing, no one, and they will ignore me. I will be forgotten—snubbed—disgraced.*

*I walk towards where they stand, chatting. I want to say hello, but my fear stops me. Perhaps they won't notice if I just walk away? It is unlikely, but I try anyway.*

*They ignore me, and I manage to get a few feet away. I contemplate this as I watch them talking amongst themselves, laughing together. I remember how even before I was humiliated, my fear made me stay on the outside.*

*It's—I try to get the sentence out. It's—a—I want to think the word so badly: curse. It's a c—curs—e.*

*My fear really is. It clutches my heart, making me feel even more terrified. My nerves are on edge, as they say, and my heart beats faster by the minute, yet again..*

*I watch my classmates, and I swear one of them looks me in the eye. I wait for the taunts I fear—my fear knows—that will come. I see them whisper to each other, look at me quickly, then whisper again.*

*I understand now. They are ignoring me.*

*A small part of my brain—reason, I assume—whispers, "They should comfort you, shouldn't they? Didn't all your fears come true?"*

*I whisper back, 'Not all of them.'*

*My classmates disappear, and I am alone again in the meadow, a sense of dread coiling around like a snake in my chest. I observe how all the animals who hadn't run from the other people now shy away from me. It hurts, but I try to ignore it. I've always known that this would happen. Even when I rejected my fear, my sense of self-preservation.*

*I knew it would all one day come crashing down upon my head like a tidal wave or tsunami. I knew everything would crash down around me. I knew that I was—am—hopeless. I knew it, I knew it, I knew it, I knew it— Darkness descends, and my fear makes me terrified.*

*I am scared of what could come crawling out of the dark, what could come and harm me. Anything is possible. Anyone is possible. My mouth, paralyzed, cannot talk. My legs cannot walk. My arms cannot move.*

*Save me, I manage to think. Save me—save me—save me—save me—save me—I cannot stop thinking it. I know no one will, because no one can hear me, and no one would anyway. My family is gone. I've lost my friends. My home has been burned to a crisp. No one is here. It is dark, and things are coming for me. I am scared—shaking. I am still embarrassed. I am no one—I am no one—I am no one—I am no one—I am...*

*I cannot hold it in anymore. I whimper, and the weight lifts, the area around me brightens, and I find myself hovering in the air over a cliff. I realize that it is not tall, but it would still hurt—maybe kill.*

*I am not scared of this.*





# *ROMANCE READING*

BY MAISHA

## HISTORICAL FICTION

- **The Unquiet Past** by Kelley Armstrong
- **Alex and Eliza** by Melissa de la Cruz
- **Small Bones** by Vicki Grant
- **A Big Dose of Lucky** by Marthe Jocelyn
- **The Degenerates** by J. Albert Mann
- **The Song of Achilles** by Madeline Miller
- **My Life Before Me** by Norah McClintock
- **Shattered Glass** by Teresa Toten

## CONTEMPORARY

- **Emmy & Oliver** by Robin Benway
- **I Wish You All the Best** by Mason Deaver
- **Love & Gelato** by Jenna Evans Welch
- **The Fault In Our Stars** by John Green
- **To All The Boys I've Loved Before** by Jenny Han
- **Indestructible Object** by Mary McCoy
- **Up For Air** by Laurie Morrison
- **Like a Love Story** by Abdi Nazemian
- **Where I End and You Begin** by Preston Norton
- **The Sun is Also a Star** by Nicola Yoon
- **Everything, Everything** by Nicola Yoon

## SPECULATIVE FICTION

- **Six of Crows** by Leigh Bardugo
- **Soulless** by Gail Carriger
- **Mirage** by Somaiya Daud
- **Spin the Dawn** by Elizabeth Lim
- **Dance of Thieves** by Mary E. Pearson
- **Wilder Girls** by Rory Power

# FINDING YOUR PERSONAL STYLE

BY RAINE

Are you tired of wearing clothes you don't like? Are you wanting to try something new? Are you feeling inspired but don't know where to start? It's always said that "finding your style" is complicated, but it's all about referencing, independence, and wearing what you want. I have created 4 steps for how to start finding your style and being intentional with what you wear, while saving money and the environment. It's not a fast process, but it will let you get to know yourself and what you like.

## 1. Collect Photos of Outfits

The first thing you need to do is find inspiration. Start saving photos of all the outfits you like. I recommend either creating an Instagram folder or Pinterest board, since it lets you see all your photos next to each other, (which will come in handy later). Although, if you don't want to make an account you can simply use a file folder in your computer. If there's a certain subculture or aesthetic you're interested in, save photos from there. Movie, Anime and video games characters also work. Any outfit that you like and/or want to wear. Feel free to take your time.

## 2. Isolate Common Pieces

Now that you've amassed a sizable collection, (maybe 100 photos), take a look at your entire folder. Try to pick out pieces that are common throughout the outfits. For example, in my folder I noticed berets, shorts, long socks, sweaters, and collars. I also noticed bright colours and layers. You can also take note of particular things you gravitated towards in photos, like hair makeup, and accessories. This will help give you an idea of how to get started on building your style. Of course, if you don't like certain staples you don't have to adopt them.

### 3. Identify What You Have and What You're Missing

Now you have an idea of what to include in your outfits. But; before you go shopping, take a look at your current closet. You may already have pieces you like and would work in your outfits. You might also find clothes you can modify. When I organized, I found that a lot of my shorts could be cuffed shorter, and that most of my shirts were nice, (although I wish I had more funky tops).

Ask around your family and friends as well; they may have clothing and accessories they could give away. If you want to get rid of certain clothes do make space, make sure you do so responsibly by donating, selling, or exchanging with others. With everything organized, make a list of everything you don't own yet, so you can shop for it later.



### 4. Start With Local Thrift Stores and Marketplace

The first place you should always shop for clothes is your local thrift store. Repurposing used clothing is beneficial to the environment, and it tends to be the most affordable and most interesting shopping experience. You don't know exactly what you're going to find, but there's always a large selection, so you should be able to pick up most things on your list. Take your time, and bring some friends to make the experience more enjoyable. You can also check online resources like Facebook Marketplace to see if people in your area have any affordable clothing you are interested in.

From there, it's up to you. Maybe you want to continue perfecting your art of fashion, experimenting with style everyday. Or maybe you're just happy with clothes and accessories that make you feel good. Just always remember to wear what makes you happy and comfortable. Be inspired, but don't compare yourself to others, as we are all unique and amazing as ourselves.







# SHARE YOUR WRITING

Submission  
Opportunity!  
Ages 13-18

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