

# UC Riverside

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Theory of Relativity: A Short Story Series

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## **Abstract**

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## The Song of Purple Summer

Dear Diary,

Friends would make this school year so much easier... I start in three days. I haven't had a best friend since second grade. My last best friend had long blonde hair, and often wore it in two braids. We had known each other since kindergarten. We would always run around on the playground pretending some witch had cursed the wall next to the swingset, and would watch us through the cement blocks that made it up. Me, my blonde bestie, and our third musketeer would investigate that wall for hidden messages in order to stop whatever curse had befallen such a wall at an elementary school.

At the end of that year, my best friend moved schools. I haven't really talked to her since, because cell phones didn't exist at that age. I have her on social media now, but I hardly check it enough to really spare her more than a glance. I do think about her every so often. I wonder what she's doing now.

Dear Diary,

Started my second year of high school this week. Everyone is more confident. None of the friendships I made towards the end of the year last year stuck apparently. Even those I saw on a daily basis last year have only waved in passing, or from across the room if we are in the same class. I wonder if it's because my hair is so much longer now, or because I changed the perfume I wear.

Dear Diary,

At a rec center today, I was helping with this after-school reading program they had set up for the local kids. They ask for once a week, which can help to get a job. I can't work yet, but I will be able to soon and the extra cash will be handy so I can have some semblance of a social life. I wonder how the people I work with there will judge me.

Dear Diary,

I got some glares in line while buying lunch today. We are three weeks into school now and people are starting to realize that I, their male classmate from last year, seem to have taken on another identity. I don't know if I can blame them. Nobody has bothered to ask questions - Instead they take one look at me and walk away. It isn't fair that I have only found this identity recently myself. We're in the same boat people! I'm probably just as confused as you are! At least I'm becoming more comfortable switching between feminine and masculine looks now, compared the negative feelings it gave me last year. I wonder if anyone will do anything other than hide away and avoid me like the plague.

Dear Diary,

I was asked if I was a boy or a girl today. By a kid. The damn kid doesn't know it yet, but he just complicated everything. What would their parents think? The person they send their kids to as a role model is someone they wouldn't even consider a person. As my peers at school have so willfully demonstrated, my type don't belong here. I can't blame the kid, and his ignorant mind, but I couldn't answer even if I knew what to in the first place. Why does accepting myself

have to be so damn hard? I wonder if things will ever get easier.

Dear Diary,

I bought my first dress today. Not sure if I'll wear it anytime soon, but it's blue and it will bring out my eyes. I think this is a good step, though I still feel like I'm forcing myself to accept my newfound identity. I wish I knew more people who I could talk to about this, but I haven't seen or met any other openly trans kids at my school. I wonder if they're in hiding.

Dear Diary,

Someone talked to me at lunch today. I was half listening a pitch being given by a girl about the drama club at the other end of the long table. I didn't notice the end to it until she was sitting in front of me and asking me why I was sitting alone. I didn't want to answer that, so I stayed quiet and shrugged. She took out her food and ate, and made small talk with me which I answered openly to. We talked about classes, and she brought up the drama club and relayed some of the information that she had said in her speech. My engagement act turned into reality as she told me about how awesome the club is. By the end of that, her food was gone and she left. It was nice to be treated as just another human. I wonder if I'll see her again anytime soon.

Dear Diary,

Dad asked me this morning about how school is going. We're very open in my house, but talking is never easy. I told him it's going okay, even though it's 2 and a half months into school now and I still don't really have friends. This semester ends in another month, I'm just counting

down the days because at least during the breaks I can spend time with my parents and little sister. My little sister Amy is only 10, but she understands a lot about who I am even though we don't talk a lot. I wonder if she talks to her friends about me.

Dear Diary,

The drama club girl came around passing out flyers today about this semester's theater production. She recognized me and sat with me at lunch again, and told me her name is Emily, which is a very pretty name. She talked again about how great the drama club is. I asked her about the sign-up process, and she was really helpful. I might do the club, try it at least. I wonder if all of the other theater kids are like her.

Dear Diary,

Today was this semester's last day at the rec center. The kids have grown fairly fond of me, which is so much better than what has happened at school. I guess when you're that little, things are a lot easier. That's kind of why my best friend in second grade and I were best friends. There weren't any strings attached to a boy and a girl hanging out with each other, and nobody fought too much. I wonder what makes people more hateful as they grow older.

Dear Diary,

We are going back to school tomorrow. Christmas was pretty good, I got some new clothes which I was really happy about. My family is clearly amazing considering I didn't even

have to ask for the skirt my mom gave me, she just knew what to choose. I've decided that when we are back in school I am definitely signing up for the drama club. My parents are excited to see what comes out of it, possibly even more excited than I am. I wonder how many friends I will make.

Dear Diary,

The first club meeting of the semester was today. I didn't talk much, but I learned a lot. This semester, the school is doing Hairspray - the musical. The movie is Amy's favorite, she and her friends watched it for the first time over this past summer and she hasn't really stopped talking about it since. I didn't even KNOW there was a musical version but I'm excited for it - Amy can't wait to watch it. I'm not sure what parts there are but I'll probably be doing background work regardless, since acting isn't my thing. Amy and I are looking at the music for the show together later... I wonder how quickly we will know every word.

Dear Diary,

Amy has already gotten the morning concert routine down, and she's got me singing the music nonstop with her. It's in my playlist now, which is an odd break from my other less preppy music. Even the songs that are just okay I have on repeat - I've decided it is my duty to my sister to know all of them by heart. Auditions for the show are in like 3 weeks, and our next club meeting is tomorrow. I wonder what jobs there are to do backstage.

Dear Diary,

One of my club-mates told me today I should audition for Penny. It's not a big role, but I wouldn't even know how to go about that. I've never acted before. Maybe I'll try it, for Amy's sake. She says Penny is her favorite character, because she isn't afraid to be herself. I don't know how to play that role when she is my polar opposite confidence-wise. I wonder if being in the show is an option for me after all.

Dear Diary,

Another week has passed, and they've convinced me to audition. Amy is helping me look for song options, and everyone in the drama club is being supportive... I was on facebook last night and my friend from second grade posted a flyer for her sister's play. They're doing Legally Blonde. I should see if any of Amy's suggestions come from there, it seems like it could be a similar style. Next week instead of meeting at the school, we're going to dinner and showing each other our audition songs in order to get critiques. I wonder if I'll be any good.

Dear Diary,

I have to sing today. What the hell am I doing? I haven't ever had a singing lesson in my life, and now I'm going to sing horribly in front of everyone. Goodbye social life! Maybe I just shouldn't go tonight. It's not like it's required anyways. I'll just skip on the dinner tonight, they won't miss me, and maybe then I will really just do crew for this show. I wonder if that's what I should have stuck with this whole time.

Dear Diary,

Did NOT go last night... BUT something unbelievable did happen.

They had my address on the club roster. Everyone was expecting me there last night, and when I didn't show they said they figured I was scared because this is new, so they came to the house to pick me up last night, and we all went for frozen yogurt. I didn't have to sing, and they all told stories about their first drama experiences. I'm not so different from them after all, everyone gets scared. I wonder if I'll end up singing for the audition next week.

Dear Diary,

I think I'm prepared to sing tomorrow. I had Emily give me some pointers on my singing, and she was surprisingly constructive about it. She was impressed at how high my voice could go - it makes sense since I've been practicing making my voice go higher before bed so I can be more feminine when I want to be. I wonder if I can actually do this.

Dear Diary,

The audition went decently. I followed all of the pointers I got from my club-mate and didn't shake the whole time. A few of us are waiting at a restaurant now for the callback list.

Aaand I didn't get one. Damnit, I wonder why.

Dear Diary,

I got in! Callbacks are mostly for the larger roles! I did not get the part I was auditioning for BUT I got cast... As FEMALE ensemble! I literally couldn't be more excited for this show. I'm still so shocked they decided to cast me with the rest of the girls. Amy is so happy for me too, she knows how much I've been struggling with my identity this year. I know I'll have fun, and this experience will be incredible, and I will definitely keep doing drama.

## White Unicorn

The giant purple dragon sweeps down out of the sky, flying just low enough for the silver-chestplated girl to roll onto its back, before it soars back up into the sky and begins to blend in with the deep indigo sunset on the small village, saved from yet another terror from the Warriors of the Water.

Alya drops her sparkly green pencil and zooms off in her rolling chair, spinning with no intention of going anywhere. The heroine soars on Tashu behind her eyes, blonde hair glowing in the gold light and flicking in the wind. When pulled from her fantasies, she glances at the real Tashu, who sits above her bed, flightless and small but ultimately still protective. He always promises good dreams of the beautiful blonde heroine with which Alya believes she has fallen in love.

The model behind Alya's fantasy is an 8th grader she has only seen in passing, and heard about but never talked to. She passes by so gloriously, so beautifully, making the world a much more amazing place. Her personality is gold, that of a heroine's of course, and her body is even better.

Alya's dad calls her to dinner, and her family eats peas and potatoes as Alya's mind soars with Tashu, searching for his and the girl's next adventure. Her thoughts are interrupted by the clacks of the baby's plate of peas, which falls to its fatal fate onto the floor.

Alya bounces out of her chair, promptly picks up the peas and throwing them ceremoniously into the trash, all the while maintaining the grin on her face.

Her dad thanks her, matching her smile.

Alya takes her seat once more.

“Mom, pole vaulting tryouts are this weekend!”

Alya’s mom’s head nods, and she responds to the cue immediately with a squeal. The excitement lasts the rest of the night, only lessening up when Alya falls asleep.

Alya’s mom drops her off at her middle school the next morning, and sends her off with a big kiss on the cheek. Alya overhears girls in the grade above her discussing finally going to high school, as class registration slips are due on this day.

“I’m just so ready to be away from all of these children,” one of them says.

“Think of all the cute boys!” says a second.

The third girl jumps up and down squealing, “And girls!”

The first girl nods ecstatically, and the second girl says, “Homework time?”

The first girl says with a smile, “Nobody ever got to high school without some hard work!”

All three girls laugh loudly, and walk out of Alya’s earshot. Alya walks into the school to find a spot at the picnic tables facing the entrance. She watches, just as she does every morning, for her blonde heroine.

Alya finally spots her. She is wearing a thin purple sweater which caresses her body and shows off her chest, and a pair of jeans which does similar justice to the lower half of her body. Alya tracks her for several minutes, and her core begins to warm up. Her face warms even more,

and a grin slowly forms on her lips. Her mouth grows more wet, which Alya responds to by swallowing with a big gulp.

The bell rings, breaking Alya's attention from her several minute stare. She walks to class, letting her imagination take over where her eyes left off.

At lunch, Alya sits in the front corner of the picnic tables, facing the rest of them. She eats mindlessly with her eyes wandering the schoolyard. Her friends Jill and Katie sit in front of her, breaking her concentration.

"You're looking for that 8th grader again aren't you?" Katie asks.

Alya's face breaks out in a smile, and her cheeks warm up.

"That's a yes! Alya, you are adorable," Jami says.

All three girls giggle loudly, grabbing the attention of the 8th graders at the other end of the table.

"Will you just shut up?" one of them says.

Katie rolls her eyes, and Jami says, "Will you just be nicer?"

The 8th grader sits up straighter and says, "Do what you're told, kid".

"Just ignore them," Katie says.

"I'm less of a kid than all of them put together," Alya says with a smirk.

Katie and Jami look at each other with their eyebrows raised, and go back to eating. Alya lets her eyes wander again, but they very soon freeze. Past her friends, at the table in front of Alya, facing her, is her beautiful blonde heroine.

Alya stops eating altogether, as her appetite for food disappears. Her muse looks down while she eats, chewing slowly, and reads a book. Alya watches her like this until the girl looks up to take a drink. Alya then forces her eyes down, not wanting her trance-like state to be caught. Her cheeks grow warm again, and Katie looks up at her, then smiles.

“She’s right behind us isn’t she?”

Alya’s smile widens, shuts her eyes and nods.

Katie and Jami giggle, and then finish eating. Alya waits out the rest of lunch in silence, peeking up past her friends whenever she can to rekindle her imagination with the image of her angelic heroine.

Pole vaulting tryouts start the next day at noon. Alya’s parents take her out for a big breakfast to give her energy. Their table is covered with orange juice and wheat toast, and a dozen eggs feed the family of four.

Alya walks proudly in to tryouts, despite the large crowd of kids from ages 10 to 18 ready to fight her for a spot on the recreational team. She is grouped with kids her same age.

“This is my 3rd time trying out!” a girl next to her said.

“My sisters have been doing this for years!” another added in.

Alya says confidently, “This is my first time!”

The first stage is the FitnessGram Pacer Test. All of the kids line up along one wall of the gym, and began. Alya makes it to 23, heaving and nearly losing her breakfast.

At level 30, Alya and only 6 other people were done with the test. A coach walks over to them with a clipboard.

“You all performed below average on this test. You will have a chance still with our sprinting and jumping trials, but you guys really have to impress us.”

The other kids nod slowly as the coach speaks. Alya’s face scrunches up and her breathing gets heavier. She glares at the coach and stomps away. She opens the gym door, slams it shut, and finally expels her food. She calls her mom to pick her up. Alya’s mom consoles her with a big dinner out, and Alya falls asleep with a stomach full of food and resentment that evening.

Alya wakes up Sunday morning with an idea.

“I should skip 8th grade and go to high school,” she says as she walks in for breakfast.

Both of Alya’s parents grin and her dad asks if she is sure.

Alya matches the grins of her parents, and says, “Of course! Look how well I take care of Ari!”

Alya’s Mom says, “Actually, will you watch her by yourself on Wednesday night? Your dad and I are going to a movie and dinner for our anniversary!”

Alya’s grin grows wider, and excitedly says, “Yes!”

Monday morning at school, Alya misses her heroine's entrance. She finds Katie and Jami first instead. Before much can be said, Alya speaks up.

"I'm going to high school!"

Katie and Jami give each other one of their looks, and Jami turns back to speak.

"I'm not sure you're ready."

Katie chimes in, "Why would you want to leave us?"

Alya rolls her eyes. "I want to do pole vaulting, but the recreational team didn't want me. So, I'm going to go to high school early so I can do it!"

Katie says, "That doesn't mean you are ready for high school."

Alya shakes her head. "I'm definitely ready. Haven't you seen me with Ari? I take care of a lot, how much harder can high school be?"

"High school is hard work" Jami says.

"I can handle it!" Alya says with confidence.

"No, you can't," Katie says.

Alya growls. "I don't need you guys anyways," she says, then she turns and pauses.

"Fuck you," she adds, and stomps away.

Katie and Jami snap their gaze directly to Alya. They stare at her back with wide eyes, and mouths hanging open. Alya is almost out of earshot when they audibly denounce their friendship and walk the opposite direction. They don't talk for two days.

The silver-armored girl travels to her village on Tashu. The villagers clap as their heroine returns home, and she makes her way to her friends. They roll their eyes at the celebration.

“What is wrong, my friends?” The blonde dragon-rider asks.

“You don’t deserve their cheers,” they answer.

The blonde heroine begins to question their jealousy, when Tashu comes crashing from the sky.

The giant purple dragon has been flying in flips for several minutes, playing around while his rider handled her situation. Somehow, he had overstrained his wing.

The blonde heroine runs to Tashu’s aid immediately. They take him to the village’s healer, who tells her that Tashu will not be able to fly for some time. The armored girl needs to seek out the Ladies in the Wind, who can give her aid while Tashu is unable to do what he does best.

At the completion of the chapter, Alya exhausts her last distraction. Her light smile turns to a scowl, and she pulls out her box of post-it notes from Jami and Katie. She begins to rip one, and it cuts her finger. She stares at the blood beginning to trace the path the edge of the paper had just taken. She takes another post-it, and runs the edge of it across another finger. This path too is traced by blood. Her face rests blankly as she traces bigger and bigger slashes on her fingers and arms, becoming angrier and more forceful with her efforts. The force fails her, and the paper begins to bend instead of slice. Alya becomes frustrated and rips the post-it notes to

shreds. Her arms now burn slightly. Alya rolls her eyes, then gets up to wash away the mess she made. It is time to watch Ari.

“Make sure you have your eyes on Ari at all times!” Alya’s mom says before walking out the door.

As soon as the door shuts, Alya bolts to the baby’s room to move her and her toys out into the living room. Once comfortable in the new location, the baby plays happily next to Alya. Over the next hour, Alya changes Ari’s diaper once, feeds her dinner, and plays with her. The baby spills Alya’s glass of juice.

Alya jogs to the kitchen for paper towels. There are none on the roller. She opens the cabinet above the roller, and there are no paper towels there either. The cabinets next to the first and underneath the counter do not contain what Alya needs either. She concludes the kitchen is out. She then skips to the garage, locates the 16-roll case, and lugs it into the kitchen. Alya pulls each roll out individually. The first goes on the roller. The next five go in the cabinet above the roller. The other two cabinets Alya looked in receive five rolls each as well.

Alya walks back into the living room empty handed. She sees the juice has been smeared into a bigger mess, and Ari is missing.

Alya freezes. She looks at the pile of toys again. Ari is definitely not there.

She searches frantically around the room. After checking behind the television, Alya notices the path of juice which Ari must have tracked when crawling. She follows the path behind the couch, which has not been swept recently. Ari is sitting behind the couch, covered in animal hair, some dust, and juice, sitting with her fingers in her mouth.

Alya releases a sigh of relief, and brings Ari to the bathtub for a bath. She sits the baby in the tub, turns the water on, and closes the plug when the water is warm enough. She walks to get her phone to call her mom. She scrolls through her all if her contacts, eventually reaching her mother's, and pushes the call button.

“What’s wrong?” Alya’s mom says without greeting.

Alya walks slowly back to the bathroom, more focused on the phone.

“Everything’s fine! We spilled in the living room and Ari made it a bigger mess when I left to get paper towels. She is in a bath now!”

“And you are watching her?”

“I’m almost back to the bathroom! So, am I doing well?”

Alya’s mom speaks with panic in her voice. “Alya, you can’t put a baby her age in a tub! Get in there NOW.”

Alya picks up her pace, and makes it into the bathroom.

“She slipped down into the water a little, hold on-”

“We are coming home! Get. Her. OUT.” her mom screams.

Alya drops the phone and turns off the bath with a shaky hand. She then grabs Ari, wraps her in a towel, and waits on the couch, holding her.

Dad comes in first, forcing the door open. Ari stares over Alya’s shoulder into his eyes, and he breathes a sigh of relief.

“She’s in here,” he says, and embraces his wife when she walks in.

“Alya, give me the baby,” her mom says.

Alya passes Ari to her mom.

“Now clean up that mess.”

Alya pauses before moving. “I did a good job watching her, right?”

Alya’s mom sighs. “You aren’t ready for this yet.”

“I took so much care of her!” Alya whines back.

“You could have killed your baby sister, Alya,” her mother says.

A tear forms in the corner of Alya’s eye. She looks down, and then turns toward the pile of paper she caught out of the corner of her eye. She saunters over, picks up a paper, looks into her mother’s eyes, and begins mapping red paths on her arms again.

Her mom gasps, and runs over to rip the paper out of Alya’s hands. She apologizes for yelling, and asks her to clean up the juice once more.

Alya looks down, tears still running out of her eyes, and gets up to clean up the juice, which is now sticky and congealing with the hair behind the couch.

Alya’s dad comes up behind her.

“You aren’t ready for high school, Alya,” he says.

Alya hugs her dad, and sobs. “I’m sorry dad, I messed up.”

He hugs her tighter, and when they release, Alya finishes her job and goes to her room.

Alya perches herself at the picnic tables again like she always does the next morning, but her target is different this time.

“Katie! Jami!” Alya shouts when she sees her friends.

The girls don’t respond. Alya runs over to the pair.

“I’m not leaving you guys, I’m sorry.”

Katie turns around. She opens her mouth to say something, but the lines on Alya’s arms stop her.

Alya picks up her arms higher to show her friends.

“I got super angry,” she says.

“That’s disgusting,” Katie says.

Alya slumps. “I need your help,” she says without looking up.

“You have to listen to us, and stop that,” Jami says, motioning to her arms.

Katie adds, “And no more using mean words. I cannot believe you said that.”

Alya nods and hugs her friends. “I’m sorry I’m so overly confident all the time.”

Katie pulls back, and says, “It’s not your confidence that is the problem, it’s your attitude.”

“I do not have an attitude-” Alya starts.

“Yes you do,” the girls say in unison.

Alya grits her teeth. She fumes, but Instead of stomping away, she pauses and then nods slowly. All three girls hug again and then walk to class.

The blonde heroine wakes at the crack of dawn in the middle of a field. She rubs her eyes groggily, searching for her giant purple friend. Tashu is nowhere to be seen.

She quickly puts on her silver armor, which has been imbued with the powers of the Ladies in the Wind so that she herself could soar without Tashu.

Did her armor render Tashu obsolete? Is he jealous? Or, did something bad happen?

The armored girl questions the disappearance of her giant purple dragon, and meticulously plans her next adventure.

Alya grins as she finishes the end of this story, and grabs Tashu from her bed. She hugs him tight, and drifts to sleep.

## Mad World

I stare into her grey eyes.

The grey is not warm, but a cold, stormy grey, deep and dark. They match the sky which blankets the world outside of the car. Looking into these eyes is discomfoting, as if they belong to a stranger, though she is anything but that. She has auburn brown hair, pulled back into a ponytail, which leaves her face out in the open. Her face itself is scattered with freckles, adding depth to her evenly tanned skin tone. The tan is not dark, but the girl is nowhere near any kind of albino or pale. The girl's lips are thin, but not to the point of nonexistence. They turn down slightly, as if she is scowling. Her nose is small, but a perfect fit for her generally small face. She is twenty-five. The girl sits quietly in the driver's seat of a 2005 Ford Focus. The car is idling. There is no other movement, no other sound.

She stares back, but then quickly fades away into a memory.

She was fifteen, and had come home from school to find her younger brother working on his schoolwork. His short blonde hair stuck up in all angles, never really finding his fair-skinned forehead. His piercing blue eyes were seemingly focused on the page of pre-algebra equations in front of him, but something about them told the girl with grey eyes that they were focused on something much further away.

She walked over to her brother, hugged him for a quick moment, then sat at the table across from him. His eyes focused on her for only a brief moment before returning to the problems, and only silence followed. The girl with storm grey eyes watched her brother's blue ones, intently waiting for him to ask for help.

“Did you know dogs understand staring as a sign of a challenge?” he asked without looking up a second time, quickly followed by, “Fortunately, I’m not a dog. This stuff isn’t hard for me, you know that”.

The girl with grey eyes replied, “If the homework in front of you isn’t the problem, what is? Because you’ve been staring at that page for a good two minutes without touching your pencil”.

The boy looked at his sister and remarked, “We don’t look alike”.

“No, I guess we don’t look too alike. Is there something wrong with that?”

“It was wrong enough for someone to bring it up at school...”

The girl with grey eyes sat silently with no reply.

“Do I belong with you guys?” her brother asked, blue eyes wide and insecure.

The girl with grey eyes replied, “Do apples and oranges belong together?”

She sat for a moment longer before finishing off her point.

“They’re fruits, silly. Of course they belong together.”

Her brother nodded silently and hugged her.

It happened again the next day, and many of the days following. It was always the same question after school, “Are you sure I belong?”, always with those bright blue eyes.

“We are all fruits,” the girl with grey eyes answered, again and again.

And then one day it was his mother he asked, to which she responded, “You are most definitely part of this family”. That was the last day her brother asked about his inclusion, though the girl with storm grey eyes still always worried about him.

She was nine, and there was a moving truck in the driveway. Not hers, but the one of the house next door. Her mother had already prepared dinner and called her in when she saw it pulling in. The girl with grey eyes crept out onto the sidewalk to get a closer look. Her focus was intent, until she heard her foot kick something over the crack in the sidewalk. The girl with grey eyes squinted and discovered a pin in the shape of a rocket. It was a cartoon rocket, with a blue body and red cap and tailfins. There was cartoon fire coming out of the blasting end of the rocket. She picked it up and put it in her pocket, then her mom called again. She glanced over at the truck once more before wandering inside.

“Mom, there’s a moving truck outside,” she remarked.

“I could hear it! We will bring them some treats after dinner,” her mother replied, as she danced busily around the kitchen fixing dinner plates in tandem with her husband, who was carefully pulling unfrosted cupcakes out of the oven. The girl with grey eyes reached over to pick off of one of the small pastries, but her father easily brought the pan out of reach and exclaimed, “They’re hot! After they are frosted, okay?”

She quickly nodded and went to sit down. Dinner was served and the girl with grey eyes ate faster than usual, in hopes of getting her desert that much quicker. She finished at the same time as her mother, and her mother immediately went to frost the cupcakes. One by one she placed each of them in a tupperware container.

“What about my cupcake mom?” the girl with grey eyes questioned.

“You and your brother can share one after we take these to the new neighbors!”

The young girl pouted quietly as she waited for her mother to finish frosting the cupcakes. They soon both walked out the door to their new neighbors, mother’s head high and daughter’s the opposite, with all but one cupcake in tow.

“Do you want to knock?” asked the mother of the girl with grey eyes. She responded by looking down, and continued to sulk while knocking three times on the neighbor’s door.

The door opened only a few seconds later, and in the doorway stood a girl with black beaded braids. Her head was turned, and she was shouting “DAAAD! Door!” before she looked at the mother and daughter and smiled.

“Hi!” the mother said, offering a smile in return. “How old are you sweetie?”

“I’m nine!” the girl replied, while continuing to smile.

The girl with grey eyes looked up some, and said quietly, “I’m nine too,” all the while maintaining a somber attitude towards the loss of her desert. “Are you going into fourth grade this year too?” she added.

The girl across from her shook her head rapidly, and said excitedly “Actually, no! My dad is letting me skip fourth grade because my grades were awesome!” Her father walked up just then, beaming the same smile as his daughter’s.

“Good thing she’s still going to your school this year though! My daughter here needs some friends to help show her around,” he added, and stuck out his hand.

The mother of the girl with grey eyes took it while introducing herself.

“It’s really nice to meet you! I’m really glad we have such nice next door neighbors, our old ones always let their little yippy dog poop on our lawn and bark in the mornings,” the new neighbor said.

The mother of the girl with grey eyes nodded enthusiastically. “We also have some treats for you, to officially welcome you guys to the neighborhood.”

The girl with storm grey eyes stared at the container of cupcakes being passed from one adult to the other, and then caught the eye of the other girl.

“So, we can be friends?” the new neighbor asked.

“Those are my cupcakes,” the girl with grey eyes said.

“We can share them! Come play with me and we can have all we want!”

The girl’s grey eyes brightened, and she turned around quickly to look up at her mom, eyes wide with pleading.

Her mother smiled and nodded, and left the girls to play. They did so for the rest of that day, and continued to be friends throughout all of these years. They were best friends, always sticking up for each other.

Even through the many bullies who teased her best friend for being a nerd, and various other things, she and the girl with grey eyes always stuck up for each other. Even through the years at different schools when their grade-levels restricted them to different places, they always met up and did homework together. Even through the periods of anxiety her best friend went through when the pressure on her from classmates, teachers, and her father were especially high. The girl with storm grey eyes still always stuck around for her.

She was seventeen, and her brother had brought a boy home, a boy with a small button nose. Her brother sat with this new friend, homework laid in front of them. He looked up towards his sister.

“My teacher asked me to help him, he is one of her pre-algebra students,” he remarked.

The other boy lowered his head at the comment. The girl with grey eyes glanced at him and noted, “Needing help is nothing to be ashamed of!” and back to her brother, “What is getting him about pre-algebra?”

Her brother replied without looking up again, “It seems to be actually using variables”.

The girl with grey eyes nodded and started her own homework. She worked automatically and mechanically, multitasking between the many assignments she was completing and listening to her brother teach.

He never lost focus, explaining every part of each function and equation.

Just before dinnertime, their guest dropped his pencil and sighed. He was done for the night. Her brother nodded in understanding, and helped the other boy pack up the homework supplies. The boy called his mother, and when she arrived he slipped out silently.

Her brother sat back down at the kitchen table without a word. The girl with grey eyes asked, “Are you okay?”

He matched her gaze with his own eyes, and replied, “He makes me feel like I belong”.

This was the routine those evenings fell into, the entire year they sat quietly every night, working on math until the button-nosed boy understood, and eventually they sat and played

hangman or tic-tac-toe. Her brother was always patient, always concerned with whatever his friend needed or wanted to do. The girl with grey eyes didn't think even she could be as patient as him.

She was fifteen, and it was her best friend's sister's birthday.

The girl with grey eyes sat side-by-side with her best friend. The tortilla chips were running out, but it was almost time to cut the cake before present time. Her best friend's father soon replaced the chip bowl with an enormous pink sheet cake decorated with edible gold glitter. In the middle of the cake was a giant "13" candle, already lit. All of the party guests surrounded the table, and they all sang, and the birthday girl blew out her candles.

Presents came next, and the girl with grey eyes gave the birthday girl the present she and her best friend had picked out just two days before.

She quickly unwrapped the gift, her first makeup set, and squealed loudly. All of her friends asked her if they could try it out, and soon all of the other presents were unwrapped, and they all spent the next two hours giving each other makeovers in the bathroom that the sisters shared.

At the end of the night, the birthday girl asked her sister for affirmation. She responded with a smile and encouragement, her sister had a natural talent.

The birthday girl beamed, and every morning after that she attempted over and over to replicate her birthday makeup success.

Well into middle school, she was fairly popular. Her peers always wanted to be around the prettiest girl in school.

She and her friends gossiped constantly, and when she came home each day she resorted to her cell phone, tapping away with her long nails while the girl with storm grey eyes and her best friend did their homework together.

One of those afternoons, the middle schooler committed herself to that same activity on the couch. The best friend of the girl with grey eyes checked the next set of homework to be done in her planner.

“Hey, where did you put my calculator after you used it yesterday?” she asked her sister.

No response.

“Come on, my math homework requires a graphing calculator tonight”

Tap tap tap away on the phone, but still no acknowledgement.

The older sister got up from her seat next to the girl with grey eyes, walked over to her younger sister, and snatched the phone from her hands.

“Where is my calculator?”

The younger sister looked up at her older sister for just a moment.

“Don’t know. Give me my phone back.”

“You used it yesterday!”

“Still don’t know!”

“Oh come ON”, the older sister said with exasperation.

Her sister got up off the couch, and took her phone back.

“You’re bugging me, I’m leaving,” she said, walking to her room.

“Alright, find the calculator when you’re in there-”

She was cut off with the slam of her sister’s bedroom door.

The girl with grey eyes offered, “We can go look for one at my house, I’m sure we have one somewhere”.

Her best friend nodded and stood quietly.

The girl with grey eyes witnessed a lot of these fights between the two sisters. Sometimes she was thankful she had a younger brother instead of a younger sister. Over time the arguments got louder and they stayed angry at each other for longer because their topics were more serious. All the while, her best friend’s sister tapped away on her phone, keeping her popular pretty little head above water because of her looks. The girl with storm grey eyes never wanted to end up as petty as her.

She was seventeen, and her brother told her a story.

He started his story with a girl, the girl who had always bullied him. One day after school, he watched her being ushered violently into a car by a screaming woman. He said he didn’t remember thinking a lot about it at the time, because just then mom picked him up and asked him about his day.

He told the girl with grey eyes that a day or two later, the girl had a bruise on her eye. She didn’t speak much that day, other than her usual banter to him after school: telling him again

that he probably didn't belong to his family, his mom shouldn't be proud to have him, and so forth. By then, the boy said, he had learned to ignore his bully, but that day was particularly bad. She was spouting longer insults than usual, and their mom was running late.

She only let up when the same woman from the day before rolled down the window to her car, and called out. The boy's bully walked quietly to the car, and the rest of the wait was uneventful.

There was a weekend after that. The next Monday, the girl was not at school. Tuesday she was, with no more bruise. Her after-school bullying was as normal that day, and she was picked up by a man.

"I don't know why I noticed this" the brother told his sister. The girl with grey eyes nodded slowly, and said "I wonder if she is okay."

The boy stared at her with his bright blue eyes, and sat for a moment. He finally replied, "I hope she is too. No amount of bullying can make me wish injury upon anyone."

The day after the boy told his sister this story, he went to school and the girl was not there anymore. The teacher did not call her name, but nobody wondered where she was. This was the first day in years he wasn't bullied, but he came home worried. He told his sister so, and they sat with each other for a while before starting homework.

The girl with storm grey eyes always wondered what happened to her.

She was eighteen, and a younger girl with long blonde braids sat two seats to her right.

On the other side of the girl was a dark haired man with the same nose and eyebrows as her, seemingly her father. The girl was whispering into the man's ear every few minutes, and he always responded quietly. At one point, instead of responding, the man motioned towards the rest of the group, apparently so she would insert her question into the discussion. At that point, the group had otherwise fallen silent because the previous topic had exhausted itself.

"D- do you think this could explain Christianity?" she asked, with slight hesitation in her voice.

"Well, how do you think existentialism might do that?" said the man in front at the podium.

The girl with blonde braids sat silently for a minute or two. Her eyebrows were scrunched together, and her mouth was moving slightly.

"Well..." she started, moving herself to sit up straighter in her chair. "If you think about it, existentialism is the belief that there is no purpose, and that might make people uncomfortable. They might feel lost, or even alone. God fills that hole for a lot of people. I know a lot of people that turn to Him when they feel lost or alone. The belief in Christianity could be some kind of..." She turned to the man who seemed to be her father, and whispered, "What was that word?"

The man said louder for the group, "Coping mechanism".

The girl nodded to confirm her word choice.

The group began to murmur again, and the man at the podium nodded wildly at the girl's words.

“That is an excellent observation, I think we can all agree that as existentialists, we all feel lost and lonely at times, and we have our ways to deal with those times. Does anyone want to share their coping mechanisms with the group?”

As the people around the circle proceeded to discuss their various coping mechanisms, the girl with grey eyes sat back and listened to the conversations. She also thought about her best friend, and her brother, and her part in their lives.

The girl with storm grey eyes had never related to words more than those words of the girl with long blonde braids.

She was turning twenty-five, and her brother graduated with an engineering degree. He was leaving in three days for a six-month internship with NASA, which was 1500 miles away.

The girl with grey eyes drove her family to a small cafe near their home where her father paid for each of her, her mother, and her brother to feast on crepes and other pastries for breakfast. The parents of the girl with grey eyes then walked home, and the boy with blue eyes stuck with his sister to buy more supplies before his departure. In the Walmart the brother and sister walked past a pin display.

The girl’s grey eyes dragged behind her, pulling her to a stop. She glanced at her brother, who continued walking down the aisle. She then turned her head back to the pin which caught her eye.

The grey eyed girl picked it up and admired it. The pin was a cartoon rocket, with a blue body and red cap and tailfins. There was cartoon fire coming out of the blasting end of the rocket. She stared at it, remembering the same pin from the day she met her best friend.

When they were done, the girl with grey eyes went to the restroom while her brother checked out. When they met again, her brother adorned his shopping cart full of groceries and a smile on his face.

“Happy birthday, sis,” her brother said, and handed her a cupcake in a plastic container. “It was at the checkout counter and it was the least I could do for such an awesome sister on her birthday.”

The girl with grey eyes smiled, hugged her brother and took the cupcake while thanking him. The girl with grey eyes then drove him home and went back to her own apartment.

She went searching. The girl with grey eyes remembered putting the rocket pin from so long ago into her jewelry box, the same one she used for the past 16 years. She had never worn it, but kept it for the obvious sentimental value to it. She pulled it out of its resting place and sighed. She moved it to her wallet for easier access.

Three days later, the girl with grey eyes drove her brother to the airport. Right before leaving him at security, she pulled out the rocket pin.

“This is for good luck,” she said, and the boy’s blue eyes sparkled.

“Thank you so much,” he said.

The girl’s grey eyes glistened with the start to tears as she pinned the rocket to the boy’s backpack.

“I miss you,” she said.

“I’ll miss you too,” he said, eyes bright and smile beaming.

The boy with blue eyes hugged his sister goodbye, and she hung on for as long as she could.

“I need to go now,” her brother said sadly.

“I know, I love you, goodbye” she said.

The girl with storm grey eyes watched as her brother paused, looking back into her own eyes. He hugged her one last time, and she sent him off. Only she knew that that was the last time she would see her brother.

She was twenty-five, and her best friend was starting her last year of medical school.

The two girls sat in their apartment, eating chinese food on their last night before her best friend left for the house she was staying in with the other med students next to the school.

“Do you remember how we met?” the girl with grey eyes asked.

“Of course I do, you and your mom brought my dad and I cupcakes,” her best friend answered.

“I was feeling so resentful walking over to your house that night,” the grey eyed girl replied with a laugh.

“Man, all of that fuss over cupcakes? You were SUCH a fatkid back then,” the other girl said, smirking.

The girl with grey eyes raised her eyebrows, and a fork full of chow mein. “Still am,” she said smiling, then took the bite.

Both girls laughed, and the grey eyed girl tried to keep the food in her mouth.

“I’m so glad I met you, I wouldn’t have made it anywhere near this far without you,” her best friend said seriously.

“I’m glad I have been around for you too,” the girl with grey eyes replied, “you deserve the best.”

“OH so now you’re the best?” her best friend laughed.

“I never said that!” she laughed back.

The girl with grey eyes hugged her friend. “You’ve just got one more school year, you can do this,” she said into her friend’s shoulder.

“I sure hope so,” her friend replied.

The girls finished their food and watched a movie. After falling asleep on the couch, both girls woke up early the next morning, put the med student’s luggage in the car, and said their goodbyes.

The girl with storm grey eyes was happy that this was how she spent her last day with her best friend.

She is staring back at me again.

She decides to turn away with a calm, straight face. She is alone now.

The girl with grey eyes switches the gearshift into drive, and releases the parking brake. She accelerates the car, pushing the engine.

I look into her eyes again, through the rearview mirror.

She looks back. She is focused, and determined.

There is a deafening slam, accompanied by the sound of crunching metal.

My head hits the steering wheel. My vision goes black, and I cannot see her storm grey eyes anymore.

## When it Rains

A tall girl with two long blonde braids makes her way to the back of a public bus. She holds a large purple book bag, which carries her collection of sharpies and a book. She takes her seat and reaches towards her book, stops, and pulls out the sharpies instead. She begins scribbling a word on the seat in front of her. She receives a text, pauses for a minute, and replies. She then resumes, and under her doodle, she writes a series of numbers. The bus driver announces the next stop, which happens to be hers. She puts the sharpies away and checks her phone. A blank expression falls over her face, and the girl continues to rapidly reply on her phone, hardly looking up even as she gets off the bus when it finally stops.

Eli lies sprawled out on his bed, staring at the ceiling. Beside him sits a card table piled with hundreds of playing cards, the rubble of a once extravagant tower. Rain falls from the sky, a blessing for the tail end of spring in a small town where nothing is more common than heat. Eli pulls the sheets over his body. *There's a reason I hate you.* Almost in response, the rain outside thickens, pounding on his window like an urgent beckoning of sorts.

Eli's journal sits on his desk, untouched since Christmas when it was given to him by his mother. "It should help," She had said during that one occasion she was actually around. Eli gets up slowly, dragging his sheets with him. He opens the journal to the first page. *A new beginning she'd said. Damnit...* Eli thinks, then writes as his thoughts come.

*I miss you Dad. It's easier to talk to you than to chase after mom for conversation. Remember when you would build card towers for me? You taught me patience, I think that's important. But you didn't teach me how to rebuild. Shouldn't that be easy? Rebuilding things should be simpler,*

*because an idea that has fallen once should remain a template in my mind... but instead, building things from scratch has always been easier.*

Useless, Eli thinks, dropping the pen as quickly as he picked it up. He shoves the journal and thoughts away, and flings himself onto his bed to quickly fall asleep.

*I can still stick around-*

*No. Do what you need to do to be happy... I want you to be happy.*

*Is anybody really happy?*

Eli wakes with a jolt. Only the blank ceiling is in his field of view, which he overlays with his racing thoughts as he stares. Eli lugs himself out of bed and makes his way over to the desk so he could at least say he tried.

*You never met Emma. She was beautiful. And sweet. She had the longest blonde hair, and though she was so small in all ways she could be, she had such a big heart... She brought me to a comfortable place. I wish I didn't let her go.*

Eli's throat becomes tighter, and his eyes begin to water.

*That girl was great for me, and she helped me just like you. Our house has a beautiful porch to show for it.*

*It's all mom's fault.*

Eli slams the journal closed and storms out of his room. He half-consciously approaches the porch in the backyard, where he takes in the morning air. Eli relaxes with only a few breaths, and then he is staring again. The eaves at the edge the porch still drip their fake rain. The porch itself is looking more weathered than it probably should, possibly due to the rain from the night before.

*Everything looks different after it rains.*

Before he can go any further, Eli's alarm goes off for school. He quickly gathers his things, and leaves behind the quiet house.

Eli meets his friend Jay and they move into the back of the crowded bus for seats. They ride in silence until Jay points out the graffiti on the seat-back in front of them.

"What does that say?"

Eli traces the silver markings on the blue leather, and shrugs his shoulders.

"Whoever wrote this put a phone number here too I guess," Jay said, poking below on a series of numbers in the same color. "Can I borrow your phone?"

Eli hands his phone to Jay without more question, and soon it is ringing in Jay's ear, followed by a standard voicemail message.

"Not even a personalized greeting. What an artist."

He hangs up and texts a picture of the seat-back art to the same number, captioned, "We want to know what this says. A+ on intriguing material."

Eli puts his phone back in his bag.

Eli gets back home just as his mother is leaving again. She greets him, hugging him quickly and automatically, and leaves without another word.

Eli is back in his room when he gets a text.

“Savior, it’s my tag.”

Eli’s brow furrows at the reply.

“Shouldn’t that be something more interesting or meaningful?” He writes.

His phone soon buzzes again.

“I once knew someone who’s tag was cracker. Have you ever listened My Chemical Romance?”

*Nosy.*

Eli writes back, “No.”

Three buzzes come in before Eli checks his phone again.

“Seriously?? Ugh, teenagers these days!”

“Okay I crack myself up”

“I’m Maysee, by the way”.

Eli shakes his head, sets his phone aside and saunters to the desk to write again.

*Emma's dad was one of mom's first rebounds after you died. He reminded me a lot of you, because you were both so invested in me, and encouraging. Emma did a lot of the same, when they moved in for a brief period of time.*

Eli stares at the page for another 5 minutes without writing more. His phone buzzes.

“If you aren’t replying, just go find ‘Welcome to the Black Parade’ by MCR. Listen to some real music.”

He starts back up.

*Emma understood things even mom didn't. But she never felt as I did. I fell for her. I pushed too hard after they were out of our house. Now I have nothing left of her.*

Eli's eyes droop, and his hand drops the pen. He leaves to lay in bed, and stares at the ceiling.

Dusk comes, and Eli grumbles at his thoughts. He picks at the cards next to the bed, and builds small towers that collapse right away. He picks up his phone, and searches the internet for Maysee's song. He turns it on, and drifts to sleep as it concludes.

Eli writes to her in the morning, “Isn’t that a little conceited?”

“Why do you say that?”

“You’re calling YOURSELF a savior. What have you ever done for anyone?”

“It’s an image I strive to be, not a position I feel I fill. I want to help, that’s all.”

Eli rolls his eyes and proceeds without further reply. He reports to Jay the nature of the graffiti, and doesn’t speak for the rest of the day. At some point, Maysee sends another text.

“So now you know about me. What’s your story?”

*No.*

Eli writes when he gets home.

*Nobody cares, dad. I’ve seen mom twice in the past week, I don’t even know if she’s working anymore.*

The phone buzzes again, this time it’s Jay asking to go into the city, to which Eli agrees.

Maysee’s next attempt is while Eli and Jay are riding the bus once again the next morning.

“If you ever need someone to talk to, I’m the person you can go to. That’s why I put my number on that bus, because sometimes all someone needs to do is talk.”

*I don’t need to talk.*

Eli turns to Jay. “So, why did you decide to kidnap me today?”

“It’s all part of my master plan to immortalize you in my basement. I could also use more football gear. You need to help make sure it fits.”

“You have to try very hard, I trust you already. Plus, you’re the only person who talks to me.”

“It’s all part of my master plan,” Jay says again with a smirk.

The bus stops in front of a bookstore.

Eli glances at the shelving through the windows. Without turning back, he asks, “Need any books?”

“No, but we have time because I know the bus always stops here.”

Without another word, Eli walks into the store. His wandering is aimless, and the books become walls closing around him. His shoulders relax, though he never realized beforehand that they were tense. A tall blonde girl with two long braids approaches him.

“Is there anything I can help you find?”

*Love. Life. Direction.*

Eli shakes his head.

“Alright well, let me know if you need any help later!” The girl says with a smile, and turns away to help other customers.

Eli’s breathing grows heavier as the girl walks away.

*I miss you Emma.*

He leaves the store with a quick pace.

“Done already?” Jay asks.

Eli nods, his face slightly pale.

The boys look for equipment, and Eli helps his friend in silence. He communicates in nods, and Jay never questions him. They depart in silence, and Jay leaves him at the stop with a short goodbye.

Eli stares past where the bus was 2 minutes before. He allows his breathing to get quicker again.

He takes off running.

The cool late-spring breeze moves faster past Eli as he runs. The house gets closer to him, and when he reaches it he doesn't stop. He runs through the house to the garage. He grabs his father's axe, rusty from years of not being used but still strong enough to serve its purpose. Eli still doesn't stop, until he is on his porch.

*I never got to say goodbye.*

He slams the axe into the floor of the porch. Twice, three times. He only pauses to move places, and swing at the supports for the porch. He hacks his life away, and works until the porch is in shambles, and wood splinters are stuck in his clothes. The PVC piping previously meant to create the fake rain effect drips on the mess, picking up dirt from underneath to create mud. The mud splatters on the walls, on Eli's clothing, and anywhere else it can, painting the area around him as if it were blood.

Eli curls up in the mess with the axe and stares off into the backyard.

*No more.*

He falls asleep, despite his tense frame and still-racing mind.

The water sprinkling from the clouds is not what wakes Eli up. The sun peeks through the clouds briefly, and shines into his eyes. This signals him to consciousness, and the rest of his body shivers awake. He slowly sits up, struggling to lift his heavy head. As Eli brings himself to a more vertical position, his nose runs along with the water dripping from his hair, and he sneezes. He stands up, gets himself through the back door, and sits at the kitchen table. His mom turns from her breakfast cooking on the stove.

“Hey buddy, I didn’t even see you come down. Why were you out there so early this morning?”

Eli stares at his mother, who turns around and continues cooking breakfast. Without turning around again, she says, “I’m making tea, you want some?”

“Sure,” he says, and picks himself up to get changed out of his wet and muddy clothes.

Eli comes down to a mug steeping on the counter and his mother gone again. He sips the tea, adds some honey, and moves back upstairs to his bed. He stares at the ceiling only briefly before falling asleep.

He wakes up to a text from Jay asking about homework. Eli responds in short sentences, focusing more on getting better.

Eli does pull his laptop out of his backpack to pull up the prompt for the essay he hasn't started yet. He buries himself then into reading his materials, and typing rough ideas for the essay, all the while sniffing and swallowing knives.

Eli goes back to distracting himself from the essay by scrolling through and deleting old message threads on his phone. He hesitates when he reaches the messages from Maysee, and keeps them. He then locks his phone and opens up another article to read, which puts him to sleep.

He wakes up to paragraphs of text from Jay to proofread.

Eli rolls his eyes and scans the text quickly. He sends his critiques, then ventures to finish up his own essay. When he does, he closes his tabs, one of which shows his phone and laptop search history. Following the articles is Maysee's song. He clicks it, and lets it lull him to sleep in the darkness that falls during that time.

Eli's head is less heavy the next morning, but his nose still runs. He stays silent for majority of the day going to and from school, only holding small conversation with his friend.

When Eli gets home again, his head is even clearer. He pulls out his journal to write.

*I'm not as heavy, dad.*

*When Emma and her dad moved out, I missed you a lot. I battled that by trying to start a relationship with her. I thought there was already something there. There wasn't. She said she cared for me, but it's best we be friends if anything.*

*She got into a relationship not even a month after that. I couldn't talk to her after that, she knew how I felt.*

Eli calmly pushes the journal away, and picks the phone up.

“So how do you usually go about talking to those who need to?”

Maysee replies quickly.

“Sometimes I ask questions. Sometimes I just listen. It depends on how willing to share the person is.”

“What made you decide to try in the first place?”

“Someone I knew when I was in middle school committed suicide last year. She was 25.”

“Were you close?”

“Not at all. I just know that existential crises are not fun.”

Eli puts the phone down, and tears begin to spot his covers like the first drops of a rainstorm wetting the ground outside.

*I'm sorry.*

Eli curls up into a ball and lets the tears flow. The tears stop after the room grows dark. His empty shell turns towards the window and stares at the moon.

“I'm sorry,” he writes to Maysee.

“Everyone is.”

“Do they also not like to talk about anything concerning their emotions?”

“If that is your biggest issue, it's a big step to tell say something in the first place.”

“My biggest issue is not that I can't talk about my emotions. I write to my dad for that.”

“Does he write back?”

“He can’t.”

“Is that really talking to someone then?”

“It’s called talking TO somebody for a reason.”

“Technically, it’s writing”

“Technically, so is this.”

Eli lays back and stares at the ceiling. After only a few moments he turns to the card table and builds a small tower. It stays up, but he doesn’t add to it.

Eli gets the next text after he wakes up in the morning.

“Whatever this is, you know what I am here for.”

He waits to reply, until he is done with classes for the day. He pulls the journal out next to him, and refuels the conversation.

“I don’t know where to start.”

Maysee replies within 5 minutes. “Why can’t your dad write back?”

“He’s dead.”

“What about your mom?”

“She’s dead to me.”

“Do you have any friends?”

“I’m a dude, any friends I have wouldn’t matter.”

“So that’s a no”

“I have one friend. His name is Jay, and he doesn’t know much about this.”

“I don’t even know YOUR name, kid.”

“I’m not a kid. My name is Eli”

“Everyone is kid to me, kid. It’s nice to finally know who I’m talking to!”

Eli nods to himself, and writes in his journal.

*It’s nice to finally know who I should talk to.*

*Thank you dad.*

## Author's Note

Dear Reader,

Throughout this series you read about a sophomore who finds their love of theater, a middle schooler who finds her fault, a twenty-five year old who finds herself, and a college student who finds someone to talk to. It is my hope by the end you noticed my last main character in this series: Maysee, the girl with long blonde braids. She is an important figurehead to this entire project, because she serves as both my mouthpiece and a connector between all of these characters. She is meant to vary in her influence on their lives, and they all vary in their influences on her life as well.

I, as Maysee does in *When it Rains*, would like you, Reader, to go search a few songs now. Each of these stories is titled with the names of songs they were inspired by or related to. The first story's title comes from the play *Spring Awakening*. The second comes from the artist Wolfmother. The third is named after the popular song by Gary Jules. The fourth is a song by Paramore. Each of these songs were selected for you so that you can experience more of the same feelings I have felt while writing these stories. I do also second Maysee's suggestion to listen to 'Welcome to the Black Parade', as it has heavily influenced both the writing of these stories and my life in general.

Thank you, Reader, for taking this journey with me. I hope you enjoyed these stories as much as I enjoyed writing them, or at the very least they made you think about the world as much as the made me think about it.

Sincerely Yours,

The Author