

VOICES!

SPRING, 2010



THE VOICES STAFF

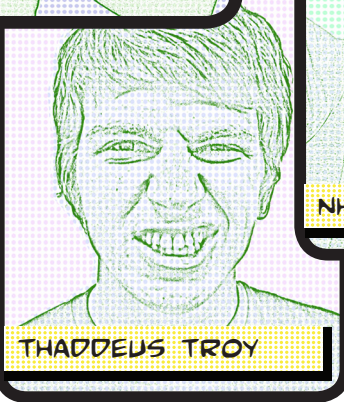
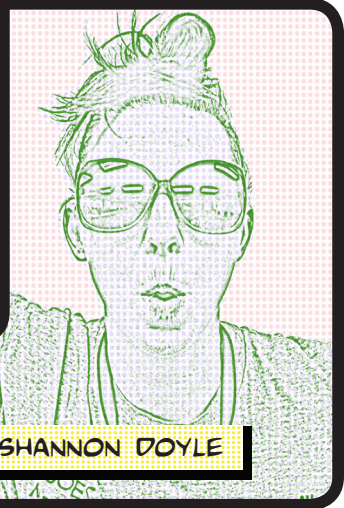
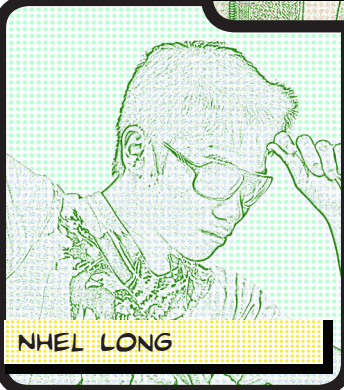
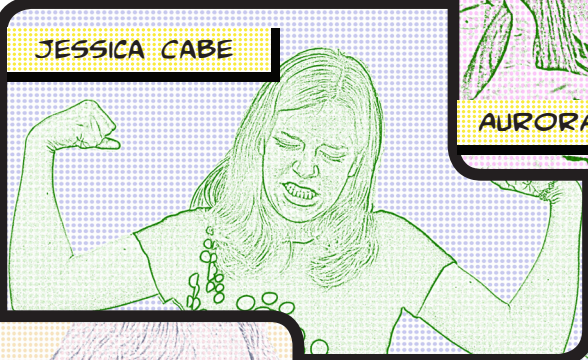
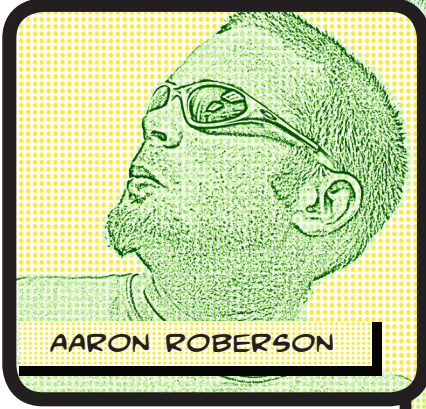
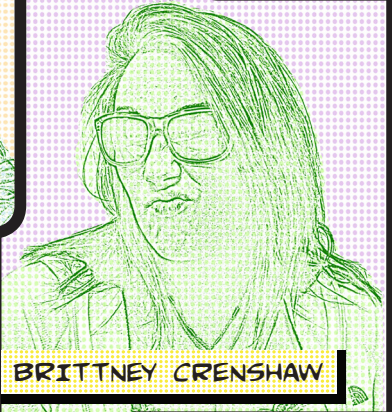
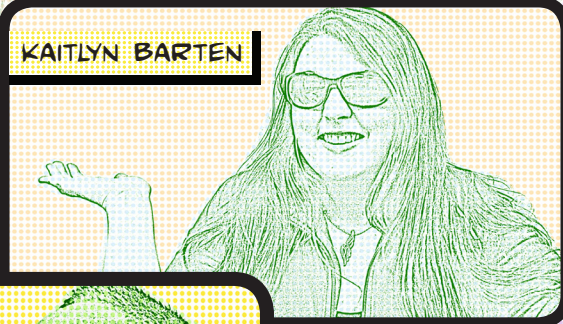
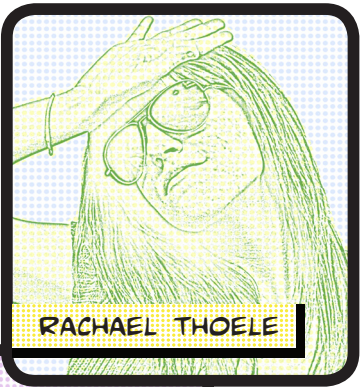
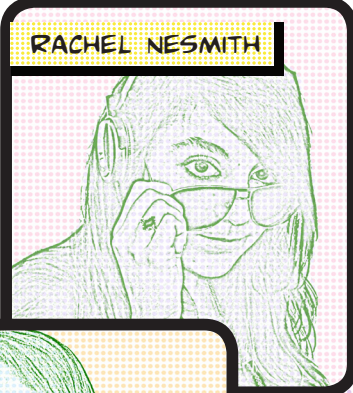


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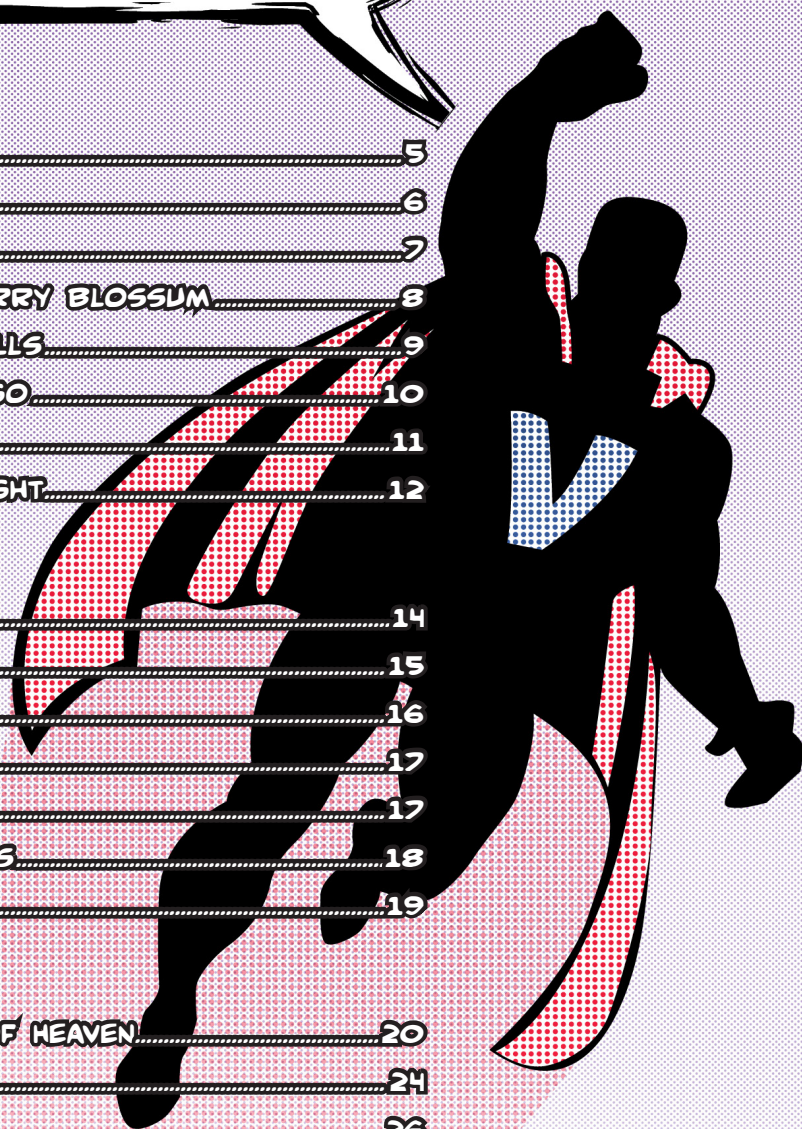
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SELF-PORTRAIT
JOANNE GUSTAFSON



AWARD
WINNER

TWO BOWLS
VANESSA GRASS



PINK LADY
VANESSA GRASS



WHEN DARKNESS FALLS
JACQUELINE EGGERS



PLIGHT OF THE CHERRY BLOSSUM
JACQUELINE EGGERS



TRANSFORMING MY BLIND EGO
JOY HIGGINS



KATIE BUBELA
JUST DANCE



SLEEP RIGHT SLEEP TIGHT
TRACEY REDDING



POETRY



GOOD TIMES
TREVOR NELSON

AWARD
WINNER

Matted Hair,
Beard like a coconut,
Threadbare
Flannel shirt, tattered
With a button missing,

In self exile
On a barstool,
He shakes
Beer from the glass
As it quivers
To cracked lips.

Behind booze bottles,
The mirror reflects
On stolen life.
A young boxer, whose
Wife and three sons
Drowned
In a twelve ounce can.

A feeble hand swats
Perspiration
From a creased brow.
Draining half the glass
In two gulps,
He exhales ecstatically,
Pure relief.

Reverently replacing
The drink to its pedestal,
A vacuous chuckle erupts
From the yellow toothed smile
Torn across his face;

A tear squeezed
From a roadmap
Of red vessels
Cuts a path
Down
His dusty cheek.
A daily spectator
To this fight
Already lost,
I watch him look
At his reflection.

The realization
That I'm looking
At my own
Forces me out the door
Into the morning sun.

HOURLASS TREVOR NELSON

Torrents of swill
Waterfall over the brink
Of a shoddy wooden table,
Bubbling,
A foam pond forms
On the carpet
Once plush blue
Now dingy fly paper.
Massive eyes, lidless,
Scream silently for help,
Bursting
From a blanched face
Stuck to the rug.

The overturned can
Continues
Leaking its golden tributary.
A hammering heart ricochets
Off floorboards,
A body wishes
Itself smaller to no avail,
Attempting to avoid
A wildly waved pistol
Whose barrel resembles
An uncapped manhole
When held
Inches from the eye,
Brandished by
The tremulous hand
Of an agitated man
Barking shaky orders
Through a crimson bandana.

The drooling beer
An hourglass draining
As he lies on the floor
Waiting, wondering
What it feels like
To be shot in the back.

STROLL
CALVIN FREDRICKSON

The snow fell silent and slow,
whispered over lamplight glow.

I passed it smiling underneath,
I passed it for the hundredth time.

Felt the moment, certain, now.
Felt found by frozen calm.

These arms useless at my side,
give them a purpose to abide.

Give them a girl
with golden hair to hold,
one of such beauty untold.

Cold nose and hat too big—
your smile, your eyes, your aimless hum,
it all can be far too much,
can be like every bright color at once.

In a way, like dreaming,
not knowing what is next.
Having an idea,
then ending when you least
expect.

CONVENTIONAL DEATH
RACHEL NESMITH

In these dilapidated days,
Our lives slowly wash away
Along with our open minds-
Quickly be constricted, closed,
Thoughts, ideas draining away.
Trickling are wishes and dreams,
Depleting, ceasing, now non-existing.
In our carried out traditions,
Lie our repeated contradictions

SLEEPING TO DREAM
RACHEL NESMITH

Sometimes I reach over just to see
If I wished, prayed on the brightest star,
If you would end up next to me
Reaching out to where I would be.
And I fall asleep to dream
That when I awake, you're here
Waking up next to me

WHEN SUICIDE HAS SONS

RACHEL NESMITH

A child young enough to smile wide
But too young to understand why.
Learns emotions too strong,
Knows hate too big,
Hears anger too loud and frequent
To comprehend, then given weapons,
Too much power in hands too little
To hold something so heavy.
To be taught a lesson too diluted
Of life that should be too precious to lose.

This unsaid universal hatred,
Kill or be killed, so kill first.
In wars no nation can ignore
Against youthful unknowns
Sent out to fight in place of those
Too powerful to raise a finger.
Yet our children learn to despise
Yours, soft faced and wide eyes,
Hiding behind a loaded barrel
When too young to understand
That death is irreversible.

So tomorrow your children will target mine
Ending each generation
As soon as it begins
In a never ending cycle of
Senseless killing sprees
Of these adolescent bodies
Since they're small
And easy to bury

CRAYON BOX
RACHEL TALAN

If this poem was a color,
it would be blue,
deep ocean blue,
deep enough to drown all our sorrows.

And if you were a color,
you would be the color of sunshine,
golden yellow,
twinkling, shimmering
through the window of my heart,
lighting me up like you always do.

And if I was a color,
I would be pearl,
luminescent like the moon.
And the sun would chase me around the globe
and would never, ever find me.



THE REBEL SIDE OF HEAVEN

CARISSA KAMPMEIER

“Shh. She’s going to hear us,” Pierre whispered, as the two angels clattered about in the basement of the one story house.

“She can’t hear us, because we’re not here,” Leonardo hissed back, rolling his eyes. Pierre came to an abrupt halt in front of him, and Leonardo, unknowing, walked directly into a surprisingly solid form. He stumbled sideways, stubbing his toe painfully on a heavy trunk. So much for not being there. He did not let loose with a curse; it would have been un-angelike, but the temptation was there.

“Ouch! Watch it. This body can feel pain you know,” he reminded the other man with a frown.

“Only if you think it can,” Pierre rolled his eyes out of view of the sulking elder angel. “And anyway, do be quiet!” he went on. “You simply must hear this.”

“Hear what? Would you--” Leonardo began.

“Shh! Listen!” Pierre instructed.

Leonardo scowled as the other angel shushed him, cocking his head to the side with the air of someone humoring a small child. Pierre was several hundred years younger than he, and prone to this kind of behavior. And then, quite suddenly, he did hear it.

Music drifted down the stairs, a sweet and heartrending melody backed by piano and violin.

“Oh,” Leonardo’s expression suddenly changed. “Yes, I do hear it. It’s quiet lovely,” he sighed, almost wistfully. “I suppose he hasn’t made it to Heaven yet?” he wondered idly.

Pierre furrowed his brow, sifting mentally through the vast records of such information for a moment. Leonardo smiled a secret smile; he could have done it, and quicker too, but he knew it gave the other angel great pleasure to perform this relatively new task. He’d only been on the job for roughly a century.

“No, no,” he said finally, with a small smile. “He’s young. Years yet to live. Shame,” he added unthinkingly, and then, with a quick look at Leonardo’s furious gaze, quickly amended. “I mean, it’s just that I should like to hear it from time to time. There’s no telling what he’ll come up with once he gets to Heaven. And here I thought John Lennon could never compose a song greater than Imagine,” he chuckled.

Leonardo relaxed slightly, and Pierre gave a sideways, almost wary sort of glance toward the other man’s face.

“You do realize that we can’t possibly take her now,” he said, as though they were discussing the weather.

“What on Earth do you mean?” Leonardo, who had been starting for the stairs, turned back, shocked.

“Well,” Pierre explained. “It would be a shame for her to miss such a lovely tune. Let’s at least wait until it’s over,” he suggested.

Again, Leonardo’s expression changed, his head tilting thoughtfully.

“Yes, I do believe you’re right,” he agreed finally. “It shan’t be long?”

“Not long at all,” Pierre agreed, dusting off the top of the trunk Leonardo had stubbed his

toe on, and perching gingerly on the edge.

“What do you predict her next song will be?” Leonardo asked conversationally, and then, seeing the look on Pierre’s face, glowered warningly. “And no looking ahead to see.”

Pierre had the grace to look embarrassed. “I suppose, maybe... given her taste, that is. Perhaps Mr.’s Simon and Garfunkel.”

“A wise choice,” Leonardo agreed, reclining on the steps, where he suddenly jumped up quite suddenly. “Oh! You don’t suppose she has an entire disc of this sort of thing, do you? We should be here all day.”

“Oh, indeed,” Pierre hadn’t thought of this. “Well, let’s wait and see, shall we? We’ll know in a moment, and then decide from there.”

“Very well,” Leonardo agreed, sinking back onto the steps with a feeling vaguely like shame for letting his emotions get ahead of him. Being amongst the living did seem to bring that on.

Her next song was not of the same, nor of Simon and Garfunkel, as Pierre had predicted, but something else altogether. Mild shock registered on both their faces.

“A woman appreciative of both modern and classical?” Leonardo mused. “I wouldn’t have thought it possible.”

And still, neither of them moved, a look merely passing between them. A look of silent agreement that they could not yet do what they’d come here for. They fell into silence, Leonardo idly conducting the music to an invisible orchestra. Pierre eyed him shrewdly, and it was a moment before he felt the other man’s stare.

“What is it?” Leonardo asked, his fingers pausing.

Pierre seemed to choose his words carefully.

“What would you say,” he began slowly, “If I suggested a game.”

Leonardo narrowed his eyes.

“What kind of game?” he asked suspiciously, and Pierre grinned suddenly.

“Based on her playlist,” he went on conversationally. “For the true works of art, a point. For the less, erm, classy songs, a negative point. When the music stops, we’ll make our decision.”

“And what decision is that?” but Leonardo had a sinking feeling he already knew.

“Why, whether to take her of course,” his tone said that should have been obvious.

Leonardo looked as though he couldn’t decide whether to laugh or gape. He closed his mouth, swallowed, opened it again, and for a moment, simply stared.

“Well?” there was a sparkle of mischief in Pierre’s eyes that Leonardo thought he had grown out of.

“Are you insane?” he finally burst out. “Charles would kill us. Well, not kill us,” he amended with what was almost a smile. “But he’d certainly be unhappy.”

“As we’re already dead,” Pierre finished with a chuckle. “Charles is busy. He’s been swamped ever since we got those new interns. Honestly. Do you remember what it was like to be only a few hundred years old?”

“No,” said Leonardo dryly, “No, I can’t imagine what that must be like.”

“We’re agreed then?” Pierre went on blithely, oblivious. “We’ll play the game as I described?”

Leonardo could not see how he would be able to get out of this. He could argue with the man, of course. Put his foot down, and insist on taking her now. He was the senior angel, after all. But there was something appealing about the idea of wiling away the afternoon in a mortal’s basement, with nothing but a drifting melody to mark the passing of their time.



"Yes, all right," he said, with a bit of a sigh. Pierre's eyes shone with triumph before he even got the words out.

"Let the game begin."

What an odd scene this would be, if anyone were to come across it, Leonardo thought idly hours later. They'd long since gone invisible to mortals after a very near miss in which the woman of the house and, he reminded himself, their mark, had come downstairs to fetch a box stuffed with papers.

"Tax things," Pierre remarked, peering inside. "Shall I help her carry it up?"

Leonardo's resulting splutter of dissent was enough to break the monotony nicely.

Now, the younger angel was floating invisibly on his back, feet above the trunk he'd perched on for real so many hours ago. The other reclined several inches about the stairs, his hands tucked gracefully behind his head. Next to Pierre, two sets of tally marks hovered in the air, winking faintly gold. He drew another one every now and then, when the song changed and he had shared a glance with the elder angel. By this time, they scarcely needed words to communicate their opinions, and they marked the tallies wordlessly, speaking only to comment on the artists themselves. Who had gone on to Heaven, and who would be there soon, or those that they should have to wait nearly a century to hear again.

The sunlight was beginning to wane, and Leonardo had just thought longingly of home and a hot bath, when Pierre's voice startled him out of the gloom.

"That's it," he said suddenly, sitting up in midair. "That's the last song."

Gentle violin filtered down the stairs, and Leonardo sat up as well, nodding gravely.

"A point for that, I suppose, though it makes no difference in the long run."

Pierre shook his head sadly as he drew the final point. Though she'd kept up a nearly even tie for most of the day, there was a handful more negative tallies than the other.

"I suppose it's best," he sighed. "Charles would really be unhappy if we came home with no mark at all." He exchanged a significant look with the other angel, who nodded somberly.

The two of them started up the stairs, but Pierre paused, glancing back at the other angel.

"You knew, didn't you?" he said quietly. Leonardo paused, looking flustered, but of course, angels do not lie. They can, naturally, but they never will.

"Yes," he said finally. "Yes, I knew."

Pierre nodded once, a small smile playing around his mouth. The smile said everything for Leonardo. It was a thank you for letting them play, for letting them have the illusion, for a little while, that they were not simply here as bringers of death. That it was possible to change fate.

Turning, the two angels made their way up the stairs to meet her.



I REMEMBER
AURORA SCHNORR

**AWARD
WINNER**

I remember the day that my aunt died.
I remember the horrible wheezing that her almost lifeless body let out the day before she left.
I remember my family surrounding her, my grandmother's eyes- bloodshot and swollen, trying to hold back another tear.
My grandfather sat in the corner, almost emotionless, eerily calm.
My mother tried her best to be a good little sister. Her voice was desperate and tired as she yelled at the nurses, asking question upon question, trying just to fix everything like she always has.
But more than anything, I remember avoiding it.

I've never been a family person. I grew up in a big family and never minded being lost in the shuffle. My sentimental attachments formed to ideas of people more than anything else. As my siblings would leave for colleges half a world away, I would always just re-arrange my life, my bedroom, my bookshelf, and everything would slowly close together like they had never been there at all. When my three closest friends moved away in the same year of high school, I managed. I re-arranged, shifted friends around like a bad game of Tetris. I missed having people to spend time with at a moment's notice, but you lower your standards and everything has this funny way of working out. Regardless, I have never been particularly fond of my family, and that has served me well for the most part, leaving me out of the familial drama, the unwanted guilt of living so far away, and the disappointment that always comes with loving someone so much.

My aunt, Melody, was mentally handicapped and had the brain function of a seven year old. I was never very close to her; I just didn't know how to connect with her, and at the time I didn't think it mattered. My aunt loved my dad. My mother always told me with a wink, "If she had met him first, you wouldn't exist." At family functions Melody would single my dad out and compliment him, and then blush proudly at her own audacity.

Melody was active in Special Olympics, mainly bowling, she kept scrapbooks and boxes of newspapers, but more than anything, she loved animals. Melody kept two pet rabbits in the basement of my grandparents' house. Patches was my favorite, we watched him grow up from just a little ball of fur into a full-grown Dutch rabbit. After about six years, Patches changed and got progressively more aggressive. After the rabbit began to make regular attacks on his cage-mate, the two rabbits had to be put in separate hutches. My aunt and Patches got sick around the same time.

My aunt began falling, a lot. She couldn't go up or down stairs anymore, but even before the shaking set in it was a struggle. Her hands would tremble uncontrollably. After another month she was drooling and her speech was almost unintelligible. She could hardly swallow water, and food was virtually impossible for her to choke down. My grandparents scheduled doctor's appointments, but it seemed the more doctors they saw, the more they talked, and the less we knew.

In another month, my aunt was hospitalized for a fall; she had broken her leg attempting to walk up the single step that separated my grandparents'

living room from their kitchen. My family surrounded her. My mother spent almost every waking moment in the hospital, trying to hold my family together. My father split his time between working, grading papers at home, and doing his best to keep my mother together. Melody only got worse in the weeks to come, slowly slipping into a coma.

After my first, and only, hospital visit to see my aunt, I went to my grandparent's house to feed Patches, who had become skin and bones due to an undiagnosed sickness. My grandma couldn't bring her self to euthanize something her now comatose daughter loved so much. Patches could no longer control his bowels, and the cage, which used to be immaculate because he was litter-trained, now was a mess of food, feces, and newspaper strips. I went to pick him up, like I had a hundred times before, and he backed away. Shoving my arm deeper into the cage, I went to grab him. The rabbit lurched forward and bit my thumb, which began seeping surprising amounts of blood immediately. I rushed to the sink to wash out the wound. I don't think I have ever felt as betrayed as I did in that singular moment.

That night my mother came home and told me that Melody was gone. I had nothing to say. My father had nothing to say. We searched the floor like someone had hidden the words we needed somewhere in those ceramic tiles, until finally we realized, there was nothing to say. That night while I lay in bed, I looked up at the spots on the ceiling that the painter had missed, where the yellowy plaster still showed through the gleaming white paint. For the first time in my life, I think my mind was empty.

I didn't go to my aunt's funeral. Anxiety sets in at hospitals and funerals. I can't handle places like that. I can smell the death surrounding me, closing in. Even when my nieces and nephews have been born, it is a struggle for me to see them in the hospital. I often think that I am a bad person for not attending that funeral. I feel like I let my family down, but I suppose that is nothing new. I wish I could tell them that I don't miss Melody, but things like that I keep to myself. So, I just rearrange my furniture and fill in the gaps, because there is really nothing else I can do.



SILENT REVERIES

JEREMY BELKNAP

There was coldness in the wind he had never felt before; in the eight summers of his life he couldn't recall a single time when he felt more exposed. The breeze seeped into his soul like the tears that had escaped his eyes and froze to his face. Even through heavy cloaks—well-worn robes that had at one time belonged to his father—the small child was wrapped in the chilled mercy of the wind. His malnourished body constantly shivered as dense fog wreathed mountains far to the west, barely visible even with their grand size. The fog cascaded downward from the sky-reaching peaks to cover the valley around him in a thick, grey blurriness—the night stars dimmed to a vague display of beauty.

The small child, teeth chattering and homesick, pulled the warm outer robes of his garb tightly around his face, shielding it from the glacial winds that froze his lungs and penetrated his soul with every breath. For the first time in more than three days he was able to rest without worry—Kashaad had assured him they had traveled beyond the reach of the Bloodraids. With his back against the skeleton of an oak tree, he sat still and opened his ears to the world as it slept; its breath rushed over his frail body in gentle whispers.

“Bastian,” Kashaad spoke, the young boy turning to him. “Gather around the fire. It’s to be another cold night.”

The tow-headed adolescent looked at the blaze but didn't move. The fire danced with wicked flames, whipping archaic spires of orange and yellow that swayed with the gentle breeze. Grotesque shadows threw themselves across Kashaad's harshly angled face with every movement of the wind. The light of the small blaze against the darkness of night was a direct likeness to the anxious and apprehensive

maelstrom of emotions prevalent in the azure eyes of the scarred man, hidden behind rich black hair that had fallen into his face.

“Come. We shan't allow ourselves to catch cold now. It would only hinder us.”

Bastian conceded and rose, a delicate yawn escaping his thin lips. Grey smoke billowed into the dark hued sky, his eyes following the transparent vapors until they became too faint to descry. Weather frozen trees surrounded the clearing like frigid fingers reaching toward an absent sun that now slept behind the mountains in the west. As he approached, a burning piece of wood fell over from the vertically stacked arrangement, sending an array of hot red orbs into the air which drifted along in the wind before fading out. The pile of burning wood cracked and popped as its life was slowly consumed by heat and singed into a death of smoldering ash.

Kashaad was placing more wood into the flames when Bastian knelt before the fire with his hands extended. The older man gave him an easy smile before extending his own hands toward the whipping flames.

“You were crying again.” He softly spoke, looking across the fire at the boy.

He gave a deep sigh before replying, “I miss home and Mommy.”

They knelt before the fire for several moments, the tension oddly attracting their attention toward one another. Snow had begun to fall, freezing them in silence. Bastian gave a bitter shiver as he tried to retract his face further into the refuge of his cloaks.

Kashaad stood and moved himself beside the restless and freezing young child. He wrapped his arms around him from behind, trying to give him as much shelter from the brutal cold as he could.

In a confident and soothing tone Kashaad assured him, “We should be in Pepla in less than five sundowns.”

Bastian had faithfully followed the older man a great distance from the lifestyle that now lay as frozen ash of the past. Memories of the alabaster walls and marble stairways flooded his thoughts. He missed the softness of his bed that overlooked the lush gardens his mother tended to every morning; it had become her place of solace since his father was rarely home anymore. But, life beyond the stone walls of his home seemed unusually harsh and difficult. Over the past few sundowns he had secretly started to doubt Kashaad’s promise: they had been traveling west for more than fourteen sundowns and had yet to see any sign of Pepla.

The small child closed his eyes, holding back tears eager for release. “What if he doesn’t recognize me?”

“Why wouldn’t he?” Kashaad whispered, bringing a plait of glistening tow hair behind each of Bastian’s ears.

The young boy broke from the embrace. He turned around and looked at his father’s old friend in a way he never had before. There was a new maturity to his face and as he spoke there was genuine worry present in his voice, “Last time he saw me was when I was five. It’s been three summers since father was made a Councilor of the Order.”

“And you think he’s somehow forgotten about

his son since then?”

“I don’t know,” Bastian shrugged. “Maybe.”

Kashaad smiled at the frightened boy he had become so fatherly toward. “I was there when you were born. I’ve never seen a man more proud. I don’t think anyone could forget their own child, especially a rascal like yourself. Now, let’s concentrate on keeping warm.”

They exchanged a warm smile. It was the first time they had done so since their journey began. Bastian pulled the black hood of his outermost cloak over his head, his blond hair becoming shrouded in darkness. He acts more like his father everyday, Kashaad quietly thought to himself in painful laughter.

“Do you think we’ll be safe in Pepla?” Bastian asked in pure innocence.

“Once Araik, err, your father I mean, is reunited with you, he will see that no one ever hurts you. I promise.”

Kashaad had been appointed the boys guardian-father at birth and had grown to be very protective of him. Discovering the assassination plot of the Chancellor’s family had forced Kashaad to walk away from his own life, as the duty required, and protect Bastian—the only member of the family to have survived the massacre of the Bloodraids. He missed those he loved, but guarded Bastian with his life and looked to the tender child as if he had been born of his own blood. As he gazed at him now, Bastian vaguely reminded him of the young boy that had fled the carnage of Sinsilla; that boy was changing before his eyes daily. He was growing and maturing and coming to understand that the world

truly was no place of childhood innocence.

The child let loose of another yawn and stretched his arms above his head. Exhaustion had taken its toll on every part of his gaunt body. They had travelled a great distance earlier in the day while the sun had blessed them with light. Kashaad had even insisted on walking a bit further when the earliness of night had taken its sojourn. He knew they would continue this way for the next several sundowns. The blisters on his feet made it hard to walk sometimes, and when Kashaad offered to carry him he refused in anger. He felt he was slowing them down and had cried himself to sleep several times because of feelings of inadequacy.

“I think you should try to get some sleep. Tomorrow we have many leagues to make up.”

Bastian stood, his knees popping. He walked toward his pallet on the ground but stopped in mid stride and turned back. “Kashaad, will I ever see them again?”

He lifted his head and smiled. “Their faces can be seen in your reflection.”

Bastian feigned a smile and laid down, nestling himself in the blankets, twisting and turning until he found a warm and comfortable position. He closed his eyes and tried to drift away into the inviting warmth of a dream but was only given the cold thoughts of his peril.

As he slept Kashaad continued to feed the hungry fire. The silence of night was only broken by indistinct whimpers. Bastian rolled himself up into a ball, bursting into silent tears. His small hands covered his eyes, as if covering them would somehow stop the pain, shade his misfortune, and obscure what had happened. He remained in his thoughts for several

moments, his slender frame being covered in an icy sunderance of snow, enveloped by a cold sorrow. He took several deep breaths before wiping his tears in an attempt to regain his composure. He sat himself up, brushing away the thin layer of fallen snow. He turned his head and looked toward the fire.

It blazed with a weakened and tired vigor. Kashaad sat with his forehead in his left hand, a clear line glistening down his cheek. His body shuddered every once and a while, and Bastian knew it wasn't from the cold. He was a burly man and had never shown any sign of discomfort while on their escape from the flames and screams of the coastal city. Throughout his summers of loyal service, he had come to realize it was not in his demeanor to attest hardship. He simply did what was asked of him and never complained.

With sorrow reaping his words, Kashaad pardoned in a faint whisper, “I'm so sorry Araik. Please forgive me. I could not save them.”

There was a long absence in his thoughts. It was the first time he had ever seen Kashaad cry. His heart ached and he was filled with agony. He forced his eyes closed and rolled over, sorrow becoming the blanket that covered him.

The next morning bright sunshine filtering through trees greeted his opening eyes, gleaming off the icicles dangling from low-hanging branches. The small boy rolled over with a yawn, stretching his arms into the air as if reaching for the warmth of the sun. Brushing a thin layer of fresh fallen snow from his blanket, he rose to find Vandel already packing away the last remnants of their makeshift camp.

“Arien bless your morning,” Bastian said wiping sleep from his eyes.



Kashaad regarded him with a warm smile, sliding a pan into a pack, “Yours as well. You slept so long I thought you were a bear in hibernation.”

“To hibernate I would need lots of food. And I haven’t had any.” The young boy rubbed a hand over his growling stomach,

The cloaked man tied the pack shut, setting it aside. “We should reach a town today. We’ll stop at an inn and get some food.” He looked up at the fatigued preteen. “Sound good?”

“For a warm plate of food I could walk a bagillion leagues.” Bastian chided with a cheeky grin.

The two suns hung low over the horizon as the pair set out to cover as many leagues as possible. The pack strapped to Bastian’s back seemed to grow more burdensome with every stop he took, but he refused to speak of its heaviness; he didn’t want to trouble Vandel anymore than he had already. Thoughts about what he had seen from a distance the night before played like fresh scars in his mind. The heavy pack and his agonizing thoughts weighed him down.

Reaching the top of a frozen knoll, Kashaad stopped, taking the pack from his shoulders. He let it sag from his hand, inches from the snow-covered ground. Tilting his head up, he inhaled a deep breath, releasing it several moments later.

“This my boy, “ Kashaad stated, peering straight ahead of him, “is our destination. Welcome to Asrith, Eternal City of Disguise.”

“But. . . “the small boy looked up at his guardian, confusion taking his delicate features and twisting them. “This isn’t Pepla. Is it?”

Calmly the older man replied, “No.”

“Then why did you call this our final stop?”

Kashaad knelt in front of the boy, “I made a promise to your father to keep you safe at all costs. And I intend to keep it. Pepla is too dangerous. But no one should be able to find you here.” He smacked his hands together, rubbing them together several times to warm them up. Kashaad then placed a hand on either side of the boy’s head. “Close your eyes, Bastian.”

The boy complied. He felt nothing at first except two cold hands pressed against his temples. But, soon he began to feel a warm tingle starting at the base of his neck and working its way up. As it progressed upward, the sensations of warmth grew. Then, the warmth filled his entire body. The blackness of his closed eyes was replaced with a throbbing whiteness. His mind seemed to be separated from his body. Memories were taken from him, replaced with blankness. He couldn’t remember his mother, or his sister, or his father. He couldn’t remember the palace he had called home until recently. And then, he couldn’t remember the events of the prior night. And then he couldn’t remember his name. Finally he collapsed, supported only by the arms of a burly man he couldn’t recognize.

He heard the man speak one last sentence before blacking out, “And now without your memories, no one will be able to figure out who you are. Araik, your boy is safe.”



I HAVE LOVED YOU

KELLIE OJEDA

Kayla Smidgal was a petite, Caucasian girl with long auburn hair. She was strong and stubborn, yet compassionate. She had started school at Downers Grove South in her sophomore year and she'd never regretted it, even though it had been one tumultuous event after another. It was where she had met her fiancé and best friend. It was where she learned that her idea of love had to be lived out. It was where she realized how hard it truly was to trust another person with her heart.

Shay Alvarez was a young Mexican man with jet black eyes that had softened in the last few years and caramel brown skin. His head was shaved, his left ear was pierced. He had been cynical and cruel before he had met her, and for a long time after. Yet, she had shown him in many ways how he had been wrong about everything. He had believed that he was alone, that he was strong, that he didn't need anyone, and that to love was to be vulnerable. She had shown him that to love was to show strength.

And today was their wedding day.
Shay

I looked up at the ceiling. I had been looking up at the ceiling for the last hour. I reached over and grabbed the blackberry off my nightstand. It's only 5:00 am. I still have another 9 hours to wait. Then I smiled. It's finally here, I've been waiting for this day for, I chuckled out loud, pretty much since the moment I laid eyes on her 3 years ago.

I'm 19 years old, almost 20. I know I sound like I'm just a young kid; like a young fool who's about to get married to some girl he doesn't know well enough. But that's just not true. And everyone says that, but I know it.

I sat up, unable to keep still a moment longer. I picked up the photograph I had on my nightstand

next to the lamp. It's a picture of Kayla and I. In this picture we're standing together, not touching, but you can see it—the link between us. In this picture we had broken up 8 months before, we'd been engaged, and we had somehow found a way to be friends. We were smiling at the camera. Why were we smiling? She was smiling because she was happy. I was smiling because, even though I was miserable, I was still in love with her, and we'd been together all day.

Was she still in love with me? Yeah. Did I know that? No. Kayla Smidgal is not as transparent as everyone likes to believe. She's honest, she's compassionate, and she's forgiving but she's stopped wearing her heart on her sleeve. Maybe I'm to blame for some of that.

I know that she's forgiving because she's forgiven me for everything I've ever done, which is a considerable amount of malice and bloodshed. I haven't always been the way I am now. In fact, up until the last year or so I struggled with my old man; and when I say old man—I mean who I was and who I wanted to be.

I used to be President of the Latin Kings in Downers Grove and was respected everywhere I went. Well, I was more feared than respected to be honest. When I think back on how I much Kayla has had to suffer just for being connected with me... it's a wonder she's still here at all and mean that figuratively and literally.

There have been many instances when Kayla's life has been endangered because of me. But the time that I'm thinking of happened a long time ago, about two months after we'd met for the first time. We weren't dating and I can't say we were friends because I didn't consider anyone a friend back then.

We were at a party and I had gone outside to



deal. At this point in time, a new gang was rising up and trying to take over my turf. My fence had just walked away with some blow and my pockets were a little heavier from the last stash I'd given him. And suddenly I hear her screaming my name. She was sprinting out, across the parking lot, waving her arms like a crazy woman and she was headed straight for me.

I knew something was wrong but I couldn't figure out what the heck it was because of the way she was acting. She finally pointed behind me when she had almost reached me. I turned my head to look and I felt myself being launched into by a very small but compact force. As I was being tackled gunshots rang out.

I felt her warm blood oozing through my shirt. I knew it was her blood and not mine somehow through the dizzying effect of surprise. I don't know why I was surprised for those few seconds, stuff like this happened all the time. No, shootings happened all the time. People didn't take bullets for me every day.

I laid her down as gently as I could as saw where the blood was gushing from. I ripped off my hoodie and shoved it into her wound. People were pouring out of the apartment complex behind us at this point. They were screaming and panicked.

"Call an ambulance!" I had shouted in Spanish at one of my boys. I looked down at her and growled, "Stay with me, damn it."

Her eyes were becoming unfocused. I knew she was going to die, I knew it. I knew it because everyone I ever felt myself getting close to was taken from me and usually in a cruel manner.

"Kayla, damn it!" I said in a steady voice. I felt desperate and I felt rage building but I know no one could see it as I held her head in one hand and shoved my jacket in her wound with the other.

"Shay." She had whispered. "Don't..."

"Why?" I had demanded bewildered. "Why would'ju do it? Why?" I wondered if she could understand me at that point.

"Because," she had breathed her eyes focusing for only that moment, "I'm ready to die. And you're... you're not." She managed to say.

I couldn't understand it. I didn't understand it then but I do now. I wasn't ready to go because I wasn't really living yet and she was.

"Kayla, no." I had growled at her as I felt her losing consciousness. She blacked out and something inside of me snapped because she was innocent and she would die. I was not innocent and I was living. It wasn't right for this compassionate person to die for me. They had come for me and they had taken her.

I was ready to die, that's what I thought. I had been ready to die for a long time. I was only 16 at the time but I felt like an old man. Maybe I felt old because my twin sister was brutally murdered and raped when we were thirteen. Maybe I felt old because at that point in time I killed the man who had taken my sister from me. Maybe I felt old because I was a drug dealer and leader of a Latin Kings gang at 15. I was born with an old soul and I lived through hard times. It's hard to believe that then I felt so old and now I feel so alive.

Obviously, Kayla lived because I'm marrying her today. I think that when she took the bullet for me... at that moment a part of me began to fall in love with her. She wasn't just another female anymore, she was Kayla Smidgal. The girl who'd bled my blood.

Of course, I was Shay Alvarez, Brass on the street, and I could never show emotion. For a while I was truly incapable of showing any emotion other than fury and bitterness. It was what my environment had socialized me to be and it was what I realized I needed to be to survive. It was self preservation. And somehow... Kayla Smidgal understood that despite our completely different backgrounds.



I shook my head and thought of all the times we had gone through together. I can't believe we're finally getting married. I still can't believe that I have her, that she's mine. I don't deserve her and I'm not just saying it to be cliché. I'm not sure how it happened even though I know our story like the back of my hand.

Kayla Smidgal is the most beautiful person I know. She's bled my blood, she's forgiven me, and she's understood me like no one else. But it wasn't always like that. We weren't always the awesome couple we are today. We didn't always get along and we weren't always best friends.

I shook my head and looked at my cell phone again. Only another 8 hours to go.

Kayla

I've been up since 6:00 am. Not that I was asleep until 6:00am, because I was wide awake the entire night staring through the pitch black in the direction of my ceiling. Rachel Gonzalez, my maid of honor, has been snoring softly since 3:00 am. She's been one of my best friends since I started going to Downers Grove South my sophomore year.

Rachel was once a private girl with lots of walls. But in the last few years she's started to smile much more often and genuinely. She's a thin young woman with thick black hair that hangs to the middle of her waist. I keep joking that she's going to be more beautiful than me today.

Today. I breathed out slowly as I sat down on a lawn chair in my backyard wrapped in a blanket. I had made myself green tea which I have no intention of drinking; I just needed something to do with my hands. I smiled as the sun rose. Only 7 more hours, I thought. I'd just checked the time in the kitchen a few minutes earlier.

I might be the happiest person in the world, other than Shay of course. He's probably just as happy. Sometimes I think Shay appreciates me so much because he's lived without intimacy and closeness

for so long. I don't mean sexual intimacy; he had that with a lot of other girls before I came into the picture. What I'm referring to is the intimacy that you can only have with someone you are incredibly close with, that understands you, and loves you for who you are even when they know everything about you.

One of the reasons why I broke off my engagement with Shay the first time was because of his many sexual encounters with other people. I was a virgin and I am a virgin today until tonight. It hurt that he had been with so many people when I had never given myself to anyone. It wasn't that I regretted being with no one. I regretted that he hadn't had the foresight to wait for me.

I know a lot of women say that a man is a man and he can't wait for any woman. But I think that's nonsense. If I can do it then so can he. But then, Shay has waited for me, in more ways than one. For a long time I was afraid to commit myself to him which is strange considering our backgrounds. He was the cruel one who wouldn't allow anyone to get close to him. I was the one who wanted friendships and intimacy. Yet, in the end, I was the one who couldn't trust him enough to allow myself to be vulnerable with him. Because committing your life to another person is the ultimate vulnerability.

He had asked me to marry him the first time on my 16th birthday. That was an extremely bold, and maybe rushed, on his part. But Shay knows what he wants and he goes after it. What he wanted was me. Shay was only 17 when he asked, but you have to understand, he was much older than other 17 year olds. He had done things many men never do in their entire lives.

Shay wasn't just older than other 17 year olds but we weren't like other teenagers our age. I had almost died from a gunshot wound not even a year before he had proposed. I had taken a bullet for him. I can't explain to other people why I did what I did, it just needed to be done. He just wasn't ready to die and that's all I'll say about it.



I almost died due to blood loss and for some reason the hospital I went to was low on my blood type. Shay is my blood type and he gave his blood to save my life. He hardly tells anyone this but his blood is running through my veins and was running through my veins when he proposed.

So, why did I break off the engagement with him?

Shay was dating another girl; her name was Ashlee, before I moved to Downers Grove. He wasn't in love with her but he cared about her, which was a big deal back then. She ended up walking out on him when he was sent to jail for the only crime he's ever been framed for. He was later found innocent but she was gone. He ended up despising her.

I almost hated her too for a while. But that's getting ahead of the story.

When we got engaged she didn't like it. I think that she never thought he'd care about anyone else and when he did she couldn't handle it. I think she wanted him to be miserable without her. It turns out she had been holding a wild card close to the vest for over a year. She decided to lay it out on the table when she realized he was happy with me.

I found them talking in his basement one Friday afternoon. I had immediately suspected the worse. Then I heard it. I know she said it on purpose so I'd hear everything. But it didn't matter, what mattered was that it was.

"We have a baby, Shay." She'd said. "I thought I could keep it a secret, but I can't."

I stared at them open mouthed and suddenly I couldn't handle it. They had a little one-half him and one-half her running around. They were bound together forever and I couldn't stand the thought. I had forgiven everything. I had understood all of his cruel ways and his dark past but this I couldn't handle. So, I ran away. He chased after me but I was already in my car and squealing into reverse.

I broke it off the next day. Things were too soon anyway but that was the last straw. He said he'd wait for me as long as it took and to his credit he did. He waited for a very long time, too.

It turns out Ashlee had put the child up for adoption and never told him. He was hurt and angry at first. But he went to see 1 year old son half way through my junior year, a couple months after he'd found out. Somehow we silently worked out boundaries for ourselves so that we could be friends. The truth is that for the first 2 months after we broke up I practically burst into tears every time I saw him.

I had broken up with him because I hadn't loved him. I'd broken up with him because I wasn't ready for him. And he wasn't ready for me yet either, he just didn't know it.

So over the next 2 years our friendship grew and we became best friends. We started to hang out a lot with our church friends and he began to meet people he could trust. We went on a lot of mission trips together. Then this summer he went to Mexico. And he wasn't gone for only a couple weeks, he was gone for the entire summer, from the last week of May to the beginning of August.

I missed him so much I can hardly explain it. My heart hurt pretty much every second for almost 70 days. I was so mad at him when he told me he was going to Mexico. But then I forgave him the day after he left. I couldn't help it. I realized that I was an idiot for keeping my feelings to myself for so long. I was terrified that I was going to lose him permanently. I had this fear that he was just going to decide not to come back to the U.S.

The other thing was we didn't talk on the phone a lot. He was down in Mexico helping build houses for a missions trip with a church group so he didn't have access to a phone much of the time. It was torture. I even wondered if he'd met another girl, a beautiful native of course, and fallen in love with her. Because, obviously, any girl in her right mind would

fall in love with Shay Alvarez.

He did come back though. I met him at the airport with a couple of our friends, some of them former gang members. I was so nervous, my heart was pounding and my hands were sweaty. It was insane. But I couldn't wait to see him. I was torn. Part of me wanted to throw myself at him the second he came into sight. The other part of me knew I shouldn't make a fool of myself in front of everyone by throwing myself at him.

The thing is I wouldn't have analyzed it if it had been anyone else. I would've just run up to them and given them a big hug. But Shay and I are complicated. And Shay hardly ever touches anyone and hardly ever let's anyone touch him. I've only see a couple people ever hug him and one of those people is me.

Then I saw him from probably 150 feet away. I knew him as soon as I saw him even though his features were blurred because of the distance. I would've recognized that bald head anywhere. I took off running. He was wearing a back pack and that was his only luggage.

I leaped at him, which I think took him off guard, and hung onto his neck for dear life. He hugged me back and I heard him laughing. That's another thing. Shay never used to smile, let alone laugh.

But he was laughing. He his face back and looked down at me. I was really tempted to kiss his entire face but restrained myself because I wasn't sure how he'd feel about it. I learned later that he would've felt pretty good about it.

Then Coven and Angel ran up behind me and shook his hand. We were all really glad he was back. He put an arm around me and we walked like that back to the car. I was surprised at the closeness and hoped it didn't mean that he was over me. I know that probably doesn't make much sense, but sometimes when you get over someone you can allow yourself to close the distance because the danger is gone. I

was afraid the danger was gone.

I looked up at him and realized that he was extremely brown and he actually had a dark brown freckle on his neck. I liked it. Then again at that point everything about him was pretty attractive. Well, everything still is but then it was like I was seeing him again for the first time.

We finally got back to the house from O'Hare. We drove back to my house because my mom had cooked dinner for him. Oh and that's another thing—Shay doesn't have a mom or a dad or grandparents. He has an Uncle and a cousin or two who have been disowned by their parents.

"Mom, made you dinner." I had told him as we drove to my house even though he hadn't even asked for an explanation as to why we were taking him to my home.

"Cool. I hope she made a cheeseburger or something." He stated and I noticed that his Spanish accent was much more pronounced than it had been before he left. "You know what? No. I hope she made lasagna." He nodded.

I grinned because my mom had made lasagna because it was his favorite thing that she cooked. Later on he went home. I paced the entire night and realized that I needed to talk to him. I needed to tell him the truth. I wanted him and I didn't want to give him up. In fact, I wouldn't let him go without a fight. I know that it seems that I would've let him go a long time before that since I'd broken up with him, but I'd never let go of him.

I talked to Rachel about it and we decided that no matter what, the next day I would throw my heart under the train if need be. We were hoping it wouldn't be that bad though. Rachel assured me he was still in love with me but I didn't believe her. She couldn't know him better than I did and if I wasn't sure, she couldn't be.

I was scared out of my mind. He was the love of

my life. I finally admitted it to myself, and Rachel, and he might've fallen for some Mexican seductress. But regardless the next day we were supposed to meet for coffee and I was going to confess everything.

I wasn't sure how he'd react. He might be mad. He might say it was too late. He might not even care. But a tiny part of me argued, hopefully that he might just be in love with me back and this might be the best decision I ever made. I gambled a whole lot on that tiny little voice.

We met at Miranda's Barista the next day at 4:00pm. I'd been sweating it out the entire day and by the time I got there I was a shaky, nervous wreck. We got our coffee and went outside to sit at the tables on the sidewalk in front of the café. I tried to make myself act normal but I couldn't do it.

"What's wrong?" He finally questioned. His black eyes seemed like they knew everything as they searched my blue ones.

I glanced at his large, brown hands and then looked down at my vanilla latte. I couldn't get myself to talk. It was a disaster. I felt like a panicked moron. I forgot everything I had rehearsed saying to him. I felt like I was drugged or something, my mind completely forgetful and slow.

"Are you ok?" He asked slowly. I looked up ready to start crying but I was met by a compassionate smile. Then I smiled back.

"I love you." I said quietly as two tears fell down my cheeks.

Nothing. No expression. No grunt, no mutter, no reply. He looked over his left shoulder into the distance.

I exhaled. Oh. "I'm sorry." I apologized as my heart broke. I began to weep silently. "I shouldn't have said anything."

He met my eyes. "How long have you felt this way?"

I looked down trying to get myself under control. I swiped at my tears. "Um... ever since we broke up."

His eyes widened slightly. "The last 2 years?"

I nodded. "I know, I should've said something before now. I know you've probably moved on-,"

Then he stood up and stared down at me. "Are you serious?" He asked incredulously.

"Um..." I faded. My nose was leaking and so were my eyes. I probably looked like a hot mess and he had no emotion on his face. Then he turned my chair so that I was facing him and he got down and knelt in front of me.

"You know, this is great news." He stated. I searched his eyes wondering if he was serious because his face wasn't telling me it was good news.

"It is?" I managed.

"Yeah... I'm finally done waiting." He smiled at last.

"Waiting?"

He took the latte from my quivering hands and put it on the table. He took both my hands in one of his and reached up with his other hand. "I told you I'd wait. Remember?"

"Yeah... of course I remember."

He half smiled. "Well, I've been waiting this whole time and it's been pretty hard."

"I'm sorry-,"

"No. I promised I'd wait, no conditions." I had watched him in amazement and smiled. Rachel had bet me five bucks that he'd tell me he loved me and

it looked like she'd about to win that bet. I'd bet it hoping she'd win.

"So you can stop looking so scared," he had said as he wiped a tear away with his thumb, "because I loved you this whole time, too."

I smiled as I came back to the present. He had asked me to marry him several days later and I agreed on the spot with no reservations this time. I am probably the luckiest woman in the world.

I mean how many girls have a guy wait for them for over two years? Not many, I'll tell you that, especially a reformed ex-gangbanger. It's kind of a miracle.

"Kayla," Rachel said sleepily from behind me, "come inside. It's 8:00 in the AM and we have to get your hair done."

I turned and looked at her. She yawned. "Are you drinking tea? Since when?" She demanded as I stood up and followed her to the house.

"And since when do you snore?" I returned as I conspicuously dumped the contents of my teacup into the bushes.

* * * * *

Shay stood at the front of the aisle waiting for the music to start and for Kayla to step into the auditorium of the church. He had waited a very long time for this and it was about time they got married anyway. The music began and the bridesmaids and groomsmen all walked down the aisle arm in arm. Shay barely acknowledged them.

Kayla stepped into the huge room filled with guests and met Shay's eyes from the back of the room. He was happy, he wasn't smiling but she could see it in his eyes. He'd never looked more handsome and she realized today was the first time she'd ever seen him in a suit. He dressed up well. As she walked towards him and thought back through their years in

each other's lives she realized she hadn't been wrong to wait for so long to tell him how she felt. She had waited just the right amount of time and she didn't regret it.

She knew now what she couldn't have known if she'd never broken off their first engagement. He really loved her and he'd been willing to wait 2 years so that she could realize it. And she did, she really did.



PHOTOGRAPHY!!

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SINKS

VANESSA GRASS



THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE TREE
LAUREN MAGNUSON



RAILS OF PROGRESSION
LAUREN MAGNUSON





LYRICS FOR - SCHMALENTINE
CALVIN FREDRICKSON

Valentine, oh shmalentine, I never understand.
Hallmark cards and candles, too—today was born for me and you.
Take me in your hands, up here the view is grand.
Valentine, oh, do be mine. We're up in outer space.
The earth is small and mars is red,
But I hear you don't sleep in a bed

Floating around, it's a funny thing.
Hate to change the subject but I'm dying for spring.

Valentine, oh shmalentine, I never understand.
Valentine, oh shmalentine, today was born for me and you.

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