

EXCLUSIVE

inside scoop on love, friendships, and heartbreaks!

# SCRIBE

February 2022

THE  
RELATIONSHIPS  
ISSUE

celebrating  
friendships  
AND  
OVERCOMING  
rejection

I don't  
need you  
I have me

CONGRATULATIONS  
ON YOUR  
BREAK UP

OW!

My heart is wounded,  
how can I breathe?

"I'M TIRED  
of being **THAT** friend"

Look I understand  
how you feel and  
I'm sure that you  
and Rory...







# e-board

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# DEAR READER,

Why do we celebrate  
love one day when it can  
cause us pain the next?

Before you can answer that, though, it's  
important we first ask ourselves...

What is love?

Is it that fulfilling sense of happiness that warms  
your heart the moment you are reunited with your  
best friend after months apart...or that overwhelming  
tsunami of sadness that consumes you the very  
moment that friend leaves you again?

What is love without the pain, heartbreak, and rejection?

And what love is love that is not expressed through the  
rapturing rhythms and melancholic metaphors found in  
poetry...or the despairing dialogue and  
carefully-constructed conflict found in short stories?

Take a peek at our publication to see how this month's  
themes of celebrating friendship and rejection are not  
as foreign to one another as they may seem. Who  
knows, you may find the answers to some of your  
own burning questions on love...

Yours sincerely,

*Rida Ahmed*  
Editor-in-Chief

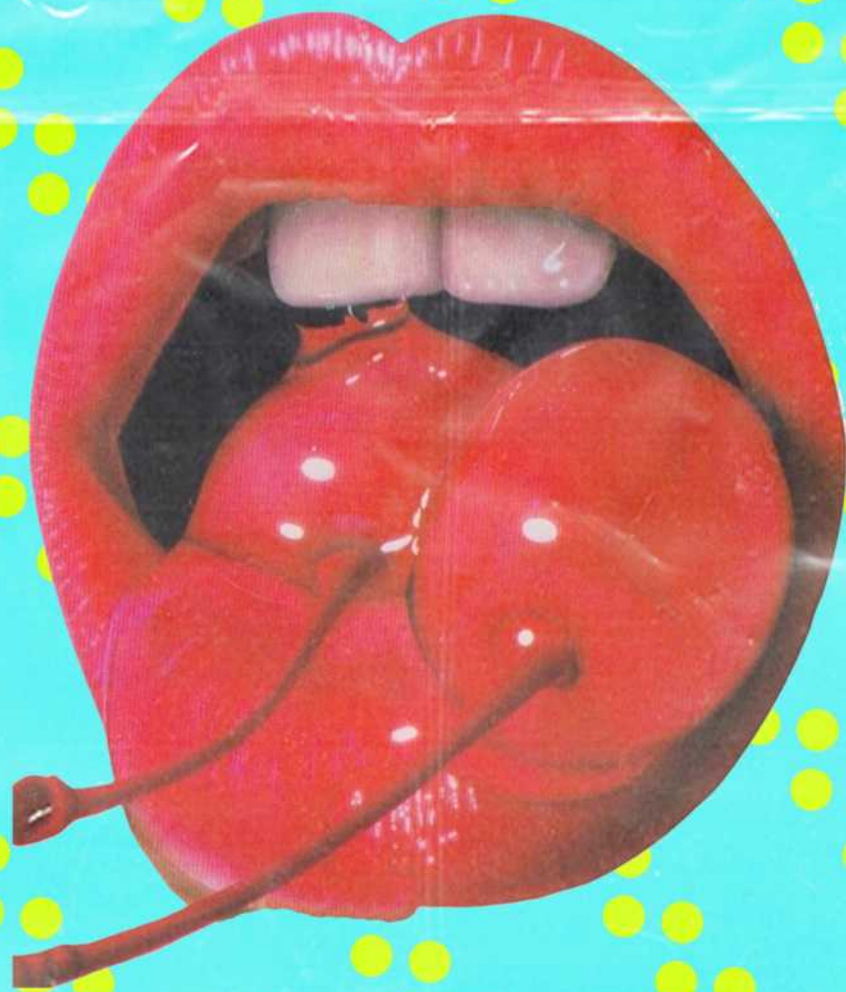


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# Dear Hopeless Romantic,

by Rosalynn Ye



Dear Hopeless Romantic,  
You've been in a frantic  
State of mind. A sea of thoughts flit  
Into your head, telling you you'll never find it.

Come, my dear, use your arms and lift.  
You can and you will find the gift.  
Take me out from deep inside  
Your packed shelf, where I reside.

A brown leather cover flaking and worn,  
With once-white pages yellowing or torn.  
My sharp edges are now tattered and frayed,  
Yet still you have never thrown me away.

I welcome you with open arms  
Into a place that has no harm.  
The distant world ignites a spark within, mending  
The broken pieces of your heart with a happy ending.

Come, my dear, use your arms and lift  
The lid off Pandora's box for my gift.  
Reach for me deep inside  
Your heart, where I reside.

Although the ocean currents are strong and the weather bleak,  
Swim through the sea and you will find the treasure you seek.  
I hate to see you sit around and mope  
But please don't give up.  
Sincerely, Hope.





Why do  
I still  
love you?

# CLOSURE

BY ARIANA GAYTAN

Love is a strange thing.  
It holds you captive for years  
and you don't even realize how deep it's got its  
fingers in you  
until that person moves on without you.  
You wish you had made your move  
those many years ago  
instead of seeing them with someone else.  
You can't help but think  
why not me?

And yet seeing them this happy—  
seeing them smiling towards another with a  
glimmer in their eye,  
red-tinted cheeks,

and that lilting laugh only you had ever been  
privy to—  
how could you possibly object to their decision?  
How is it their fault  
that your cowardice got the better of you in the  
end?

You feel envy towards the other  
for gaining that person's affections in a way you  
never could.

But you can't help but be happy for them as well  
and find yourself smiling  
at the idea that the person you love  
was able to find such happiness in their life  
even if it wasn't with you.



# WHIRLING WHITE SAND

by Haya Alkiswani



The wind whistles and the  
White sand whirls and waves of  
Water shimmer under  
The saffron, setting sun.

The waves are warm and steady  
I float on salty water,  
Surrendering to the waves,  
Coming closer to the shore.

I succumb to the scratching pain  
Of endless patches of pebbles  
I am now here where the white sand  
Settles and then spins with the wind.

"Mom look, some slimy seaweed!" she says  
The sand shakes with the steps of a girl  
Who tosses me back in the water  
Where the waves swish and stir me to sleep.





# UNREQUITED LOVER

## BY SHANNON FARNUM

The sea of dark waves cups her pretty face  
Her eyes hold secrets untold by her lips  
Her smile is delicate like soft silk lace  
When I see her my heart performs slight skips  
Her name like nectar; as sweet as can be  
Her stature is perfect in my brown eyes  
I so loved it when she smiled back at me  
The talks we have should be meant for the wise  
I decide to tell her that I love her  
All I get are silent sighs, no reply  
My world turns dark. My life's now a grey blur  
I think it's raining but not from the sky  
Ow! My heart is wounded, how can I breathe?  
When I knew she never truly loved me.







## dreams of what can't be

by Carl J. Gallagher

Honestly, I wasn't in the best state to see Max. I was piss drunk and soaking wet. I had been drinking for most of the evening and was walking through the pouring rain aimlessly. But that was part of the reason why I went to Max's place. As I knocked on Max's door, all of my doubts about coming here flooded through my head. Fuck was I a schmuck for all of this. What was I thinking? Showing up here like some vagabond...

"Oh..." Max said, after opening the door. I was completely taken aback and my heart was beating loudly enough that it drowned out my thoughts.

"Jude, uh what are you doing here?"

"I uh...I don't really know to be honest." The cheap brandy and Max's presence were throwing me off.

Max sighed. "Why don't you come in?" Max said, stepping aside for me to enter.

"Oh yeah, thanks." I said, stepping in aimlessly and took a swing of the brandy to gain some courage.

"I thought you were going to that party at Scott's?" Max said as I walked into the kitchen and drunkenly fell to the floor.

"Yeah I went, it was...fun I guess." I said, lying on the tiled floor with my eyes drifting across the room.

"It sure looked like you had fun." Max said sarcastically, while sitting down on the counter opposite me.

"Huh," I said looking up at Max "yeah, I guess I look rough." I took another swig of my brandy. Fuck it was almost empty.

"What happened Jude?" Max asked with charming concern. Max looked so



beautiful at that moment, but Max always looked beautiful just like a statue in the Met.

"Oh, well..." I tried to put the words in my head together in some sort of sensible way, but nothing in my head was making any sense.

"I asked out Rory" I finally said.

"Oh..." I could hear the disappointment in Max's voice, which I felt guilty and happy about. "How did that go?"

"Isn't it obvious?" I asked, laughing on the cold kitchen floor as Max looked at me with annoyance, not responding with any words.

"No, I guess it isn't." I said, regaining some of my composure

"Given how much of a mess I am, I guess this could be the reaction to great joy or great sorrow." I looked up at the ceiling and sighed.

"Rory turned me down, not that I can blame them." I took another swig of brandy.

"Oh I'm sorry to hear that Jude, that must really suck."

"It should, shouldn't it? I should be devastated about Rory." I looked up at Max's eyes. "But I'm not. I mean I am devastated and fucked up but not because of that or actually because of that but because of that."

"Jude what the fuck are you saying?" Max said with honest confusion.

"I'm bothered because I'm not bothered about Rory turning me down." I said somberly. I looked away from Max's eyes and back onto the floor. Neither of us said anything for a moment perhaps because we both knew what I meant, and we were both afraid of what this meant. I really shouldn't have come here, but now it was too late.

"Look, I understand how you feel and I'm sure that you and Rory..."

"Oh to hell with Rory!" I shouted up at Max from the floor "I don't give a shit about Rory!" I fell further onto the floor keeping my eyes down, not daring to look up at Max.

"Why do you do this Jude?" Max asked in despair after a long pause. "I mean why did you come here?"

"Oh for fucks sake Max, you know why!" I said, clumsily sitting up from the floor "You know exactly why."

"Do I?" Max asked with a quivering voice. "Because I can't understand you Jude, and I try, I really do, but I don't understand! Why did you come here?"

"Because I love you." I said, finally looking Max in the eyes as my brandy spilled onto the floor.

There was another pause as Max looked away from me with teary eyes. "You know this can't work Jude." Max said like a vicar giving a requiem. "I wish it could, I really do, but it just can't and we both know that."

"I know that." I said, feebly holding back the tears.

"Then why are you here Jude? To punish me? To punish yourself?"

"I don't know, I never know." I said my voice hoarse "I didn't plan this, I didn't want this. But I love you Max, and even if I know it can never work that doesn't mean I don't love you."

"Don't do this Jude." Max pleaded with me, but I wasn't able to.

"I love you Max, I love you because you are perfect and amazing and even if I don't deserve you, I still love you."

"Don't say that, never say that." Max's words soaked with tears. We were both breaking.



"You know it's true."

"No I don't, I don't know that because it isn't true!"

"Really? You say that as I'm lying on your floor soaked in cheap brandy and crying like a toddler who dropped a lollipop." I said with a sad smile.

"It's still not true." Max replied with eyes glued on the floor, not looking at me.

"You're hopeless." I said with a dry laugh.

"You're the one to talk." Max replied with a small smile, I could live for that smile.

"Do you love me Max?" I asked selfishly.

"Why do you have to ask that?" Max asked in a pained voice.

"Because I need to know Max, I need to know."

"Does it even matter? It won't change anything."

"I just need to know."

"Why? Why do you need to know?" Max exclaimed.

"Because it's killing me Max! This is killing me and I need to know!"

"Of course I love you Jude!" Max shouted with honesty and desperation. "I love you and the fact that it can't work kills me! The fact that you came here in a drunken haze doesn't help!"

"I can't help it, I can't help that I love you."

"But it can't work Jude! You know that. Think rationally!"

"I can't! I'm in love and I can't think rationally!" I said as I threw my head on Max's legs sobbing like a baby.

"Don't do this to me Jude." Max said, looking away from me. "It can't work and you know that."

"Why?" I asked desperately as I got up and grabbed Max's hands "Why can't it work?"

"Oh Jude." Max said so lovingly, "Because we are bad for each other, because with all of our love comes all of our pain and all of our fear. And we hurt each other, and when we hurt each other we do it badly."

I recoiled from the truth of what Max had said and turned away in tears. Max was right and that's what this was, emotional self flagellation. I should never have come here, but I could never have not come here.

"I love you Max." I said looking back at Max with tear stained eyes "And I don't know if I will ever not love you."

"You should leave Jude. This isn't good for anyone." Max replied with a voice strained with the weight of our souls.

"I love you." I said one last time as I headed out and back into the storm, another storm raging in my heart.



# A\_Friend\_Like\_You

A friend like you  
Is hard to come by.  
One who's always there for me  
To escape to in times of need.

In my head and in my dreams  
You are always here.  
It's my favorite reality  
To run from others  
And talk to you up there.

Not many people can understand  
How I can be with you all the time.  
But you are a safe place  
Where I can be happy, upset, and even cry.

They say "don't get caught up in your mind"  
Or "escape your head."  
Find a real, real friend  
Who can actually hold your hand.

Sometimes I wish  
That I never created you,  
That I could be free and normal  
And a friend to other real people.

But it's been too long  
And I've been rejected too many times  
To try again.  
So for now it's safer for me  
To talk to you instead.

Can I be free?  
Can I escape you?  
And my lonely mind?  
I don't know, I'm too scared,  
I don't dare to try one more time.

For now I think I'll stay here  
Alone and safe with you.  
But one day I will break free  
And escape you who is imaginary.

One day you, my fake friend, will disappear  
And someone else will take your place.  
A friend who is not made up in my mind  
But who's very real instead.

So thanks for what you've done  
For being there for me  
But it's my time to say good-bye  
And find a friend who's real, not imaginary.

By\_Tzippi Applebaum



# Closure

By Samantha Samy

There's someone out there who's been waiting for you  
But deep down she knows that you're not waiting too  
You've rejected her time and time again  
Always said to her that she is just a friend  
She used to hold out hope that you would change your mind  
Because someone like you is really hard to find  
But she is done waiting just to get shot down  
Because she has lost the self esteem that she once wore like a crown  
You hurt her badly, but that she always hid  
How could you have possibly known what it was you did?  
A hug, a smile, a glance, it always gave her a rush  
You somehow never figured out that she had a little crush  
She hasn't been known to be the best at lying  
But did you know behind her smile she was crying?  
She was selfless whenever it came to you  
And that's how you know her feelings were true  
She put your happiness before hers every single time  
Even if seeing you with someone else killed her inside  
She said, "I hope he's happy, even if it's not with me"  
But deep down, it was her she hoped you would see  
There is no blame to place, she says the pain is nearly gone  
But that was the case already twice before, she just can't seem to move on  
So now you know why she wrote this note of pure exposure  
She had to let her feelings out so she could get some closure



# READERS ASK



*I'm that friend that gets DM'd  
When my pretty friends are taken  
But once they're all free again  
The focus on me is shaken*

*I'm that friend who gets called cute  
When guys are bored or lonely  
They keep me tied on a string  
And leave knowing they own me*



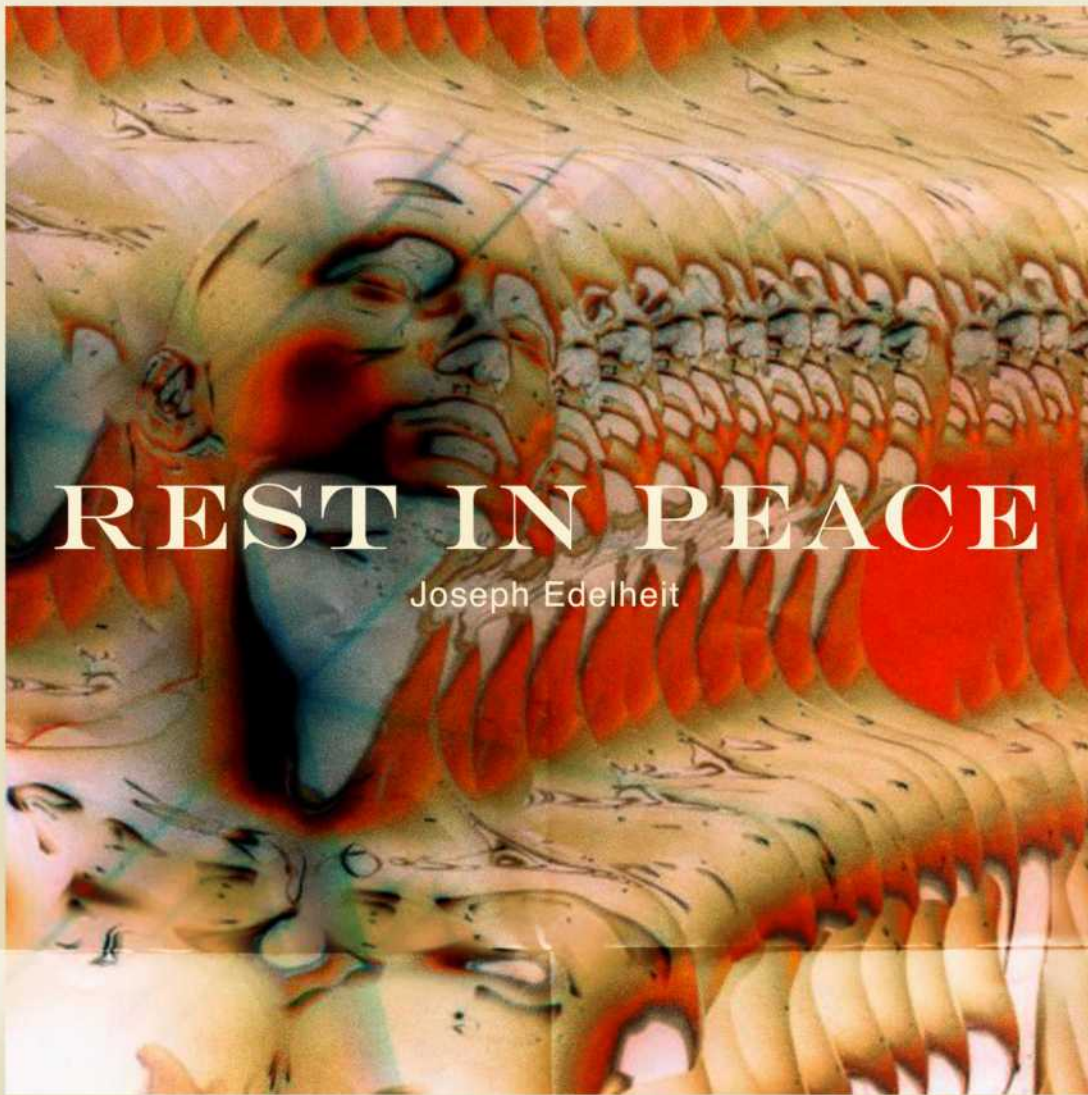
*I'm that friend that's left out of the loop  
And finds out everything later  
And when I fail to insert myself  
My isolation just feels greater*

*I'm okay with not being invited  
And if not I can continue to pretend  
I'm okay with being just average  
But I'm tired of being that friend*



"That Friend" submitted by Samantha Samy





# REST IN PEACE

Joseph Edelheit

Meyer peeked out from his hiding hole, his eyes straining against the monochrome fog. In the distance, a light flickered, but it was from no fire, instead the divine emanation from an angel's halo.

Of course, the light was not the important marker, but it did declare the presence of this guard, who stood watch over the opaque fields of the dead. If he was detected, then the operation would be a complete failure, and he did not want to know what sorts of punishments the Underlords would inflict on him.

The light grew closer, the angel continuing on their patrol across the

boundary of the afterlife; technically one of the three afterlives, but that was unimportant. Meyer ducked, and held his breath, hoping that the combination of his hiding spot, his breath-holding, and the inhibiting enchantments that masked his presence and were woven into his clothing would cloak him from the angel's sight.

There was a low rustling as various scattered souls were pushed aside as their guardian passed briskly, their gaze never once leaving the ridge of this particular reality. Meyer could feel them grow closer and closer, and he almost instinctively grabbed his emergency spellstone, hoping to summon a portal



and escape. This too would scuttle his mission, but with his objectives in mind, he definitely did not want to stick around and get caught by the powers in charge here.

But luckily the angel simply moved past Meyer's hiding spot without a second of hesitation; and why should it? What sort of fool would try to break into the afterlife while still alive? Sadly for everyone involved, it would seem Meyer fit that bill exactly.

He liked to think of it less as a break-in and more a liberation. The Underlords were sovereign over the afterlives of Sathos, entirely separate from Sathos' pantheon of gods. This wasn't an inherently bad thing, and Meyer could clearly see the wisdom, if not grace, of such a balance of power. Sathos had some despicable gods, be they Ubin, who sought to spread pain and suffering across all existence, or any of the other Twelve Below, and it was far better no one who died ever had to suffer any of those fates. But at the same time, it meant the Twelve Above could not protect these souls either.

He paused his thoughts, allowing his mind instead to focus on his timepiece. For a few moments, the suffusion of detection magic and other defensive spells would falter, a strange imperfection in their designs. The Underlords' system was nearly impregnable except for this imperfection, and it made little sense as to why they would allow this weakness to remain unsolved. It was possible they were unaware of the issue, but that was unlikely.

Scholars, theologians, strategists, and even the gods had debated the nature of the imperfections in the Underlords' defenses; how could they be so unaware

of the weaknesses inherent to it? Had they not designed it themselves? Some argued this was due to the fact that there were only two of them, as three was metaphysically balanced, not two. But no one could truly say for certain, perhaps in truth they were just flawed spellcasters.

Of course, who was going to complain or question when this advantaged everyone but the Underlords, Meyer thought as he leapt from his hiding spot, unfurled his wings, and rocketed forwards to a nearby hill. If he was quick enough, none of the patrols would see him, and he'd be in and out in a matter of moments. All the gods tried to keep souls away from the Underlords, and this imperfection was a key piece to their attempts; they could snag souls and pull them into their own artificial afterlives. However, it needed to be done right after a person died, as after this they would be too attached to whatever afterlife the Underlords judged and sent them to, and this would make extraction far more challenging.

But not impossible. Meyer quickly slid down the hill, landing in a foggy plain. Everywhere was incredibly foggy, but the further up you got, the less thick the fog was. Endless rows of glass extended from the field, reflecting the lives of various souls to them, cycling them through every possible iteration of their lives for all eternity. This was the entrance into the Realm of Echoes, and this was where Meyer needed to get to.

In theory separating the gods from the afterlives could have been a good thing. The issue was, Meyer thought as he carefully ran into the endless maze of mirrors, that the Underlords did not do a good job.

Maybe they thought what they were



doing was correct. Maybe they didn't care, or maybe they just were inscrutable. The problem with their sovereignty over the afterlives of Sathos was that they were incredibly arbitrary. The three tiers of the afterlife, Oluxus, Kreolirat, and the Realm of Echoes could perhaps act as a place to put the truly evil, the heroes of the world, and those who didn't fit into either category, but it was of course never that simple. Good people would end up in Oluxus and be punished, while horrific monsters would end up in Kreolirat. Other times the opposite would happen, or perhaps everyone would be judged and sent to the Realm of Echoes, where many souls ended up in.

Some scholars believed, and were very likely correct, that the Underlords were not making utterly random choices, but instead judging based on potential. Potential was something very holy across Sathos; the Brightseekers, Pillarists, Yaroki, Veirosians, and basically every other faith, placed divine importance on the concept of Free Will, and the potential inherent to all things. But it seemed the Underlords took this a bit differently. To them, actions that utilized this inherent potential in all things to greater extents than others were actions that needed to be rewarded, as they fulfilled the action taker's potential more.

For example, if someone lived a monotonous life as a messenger, they likely would not get much reward in the afterlife, according to the Underlords, as they had done little but settle into monotony, starving off their immortal soul and its prerogative of self-discovery and actualization. Had the chance arose that this same messenger could have robbed and then murdered a fellow, and they had done so, then they would be rewarded in the afterlife; clearly they

exercising their inherent potential to a far greater extent than simply being monotonous.

But that was absolute lunacy, and not something the Twelve Above would abide by. Nor really would any of the other twenty-four gods either, as each believed they understood how to best judge and place souls. This was why there often was a quick, brutal tug-of-war between the Underlords and whichever gods were interested parties willing to expend their power to claim the soul, with whomever winning being very protective of it. Something had to be said for the proclivity of the Underlords to dominate the afterlife and all things attached to it, as there were only two of them standing against a myriad gods.

It was sad to say that the Twelve Above did not have the power to claim every soul that ever died, often allowing the Underlords to claim them to keep those souls out of the hands of the Twelve Below, and vice versa.

And so entered Meyer. These souls may have been claimed by the Underlords, but it was an injustice allowing them to languish here, or be rewarded here, by a system of judgement so clearly flawed. This was a raid, a liberation, and it had to move fast.

It took some time for Meyer to actually find any souls, the mirrors reflecting them throughout the maze, but very few lingered at any of the maze's theoretically infinite entrances, this plane itself pulling them towards the center as a security measure. He removed the burlap sack that was folded to his side, opened it, and quickly stuffed a soul into it.

The identity of this soul did not



currently matter. When he escaped, Drimera, goddess of Leadership or Light, his master, would sift through them all the same and judge them morally, and with far greater compassion than the Underlords did, no matter who they were. He hadn't been sent to break anyone specific out, just to liberate what souls he could.

And so he raced through the maze, trying to avoid looking at the actual mirrors themselves, as they were suffused with so much magic, he wasn't sure that he, angelic as he was, would be able to resist them deconstructing his life and capturing him in an endless loop of counterfactuals.

The sack began to grow heavy, and Meyer checked his timepiece again. He did not have very much time until the imperfection would fade, and he did not want to be stuck on this side of reality when it did. Even as covert as he had tried to be, it was clear that more guardians were manifesting themselves here, and it was only a matter of time before one of them found him.

So he stopped in his tracks, and tried to crouch as best he could. There were hundreds of thousands, if not more, souls in this section of the maze, which when compared to the totality of the plane was tiny, and so he hoped that a cursory glance would not immediately reveal him, and the patrols would simply move on. He held his breath, hands yet again clasping the portal stone; it would certainly pull him out of this plane, but such a direct route would also alert the Underlords to Drimera's interference, and perhaps to the very imperfections that had made this rescue possible. Unless the risk was great enough, he would have to stay strong and not use this easy way out, because while it may be easy

for him, it would cause untold hardship for countless others.

But if he could get back out of the maze, through the fog, and back to the shoreline of reality he had started in, he could use it there, as that edge of existence was not actually in the Underlords domain, so they would detect nothing. Meyer had not succeeded in filling the sack with souls, but at least a dozen were already inside, and that was going to have to be enough. He may not have been willing to sacrifice the potential of future rescue missions nor risk starting a conflict between the Underlords and the Twelve Above for his own safety, but his line of self-preservation still held true. These were immortal souls, they could wait to be rescued.

Yet again, by luck, these patrols, swarming as they were over this region of the endless maze, seemed to lose interest and scatter. Meyer whispered a prayer to the Trifold Three, triplet deities of probability, by whose power one-in-a-million chances often cropped up nine-out-of-ten times. It was unlikely they heard him, with none of the gods holding sway here, but it was less the actual devotion that mattered and more the self-development that came with modesty and graciousness. Of course he was likely more religious than a vast majority of Sathos, as he was a literal angel who served the gods directly.

His luck did not extend too far, however. There was a loud, earsplitting screech as a skeletal griffin launched itself into the air, landing with a crunch on several nearby mirrors. It had no eyes, but in the depths of its bony-yellow eye sockets something swirled, and while it had no skin, tissue, or muscle, its sharp leonine teeth dripped with an oily green



substance that dripped downwards, staining the floor with a sickening sizzle. Various souls tried to push themselves as far away from this skeleton as possible, while it paid no attention to any of their desperate shuffling and scrambling. Instead its eye sockets seemed to bore straight at Meyer, who turned and began to run.

The skeleton did not follow, and instead raised its neck, a kind of gurgling sound emanating from its trachea, and then it spat.

Meyer had always had fast reflexes, they were what was helping him, in addition to speed, put as much distance between himself and the skeleton. So when he heard the gurgling stop, he ducked downwards, barely protecting himself from the ensuing gush of acid that poured from the skeleton's mouth. The ground burned, and the mirror walls of the maze melted away, making a surprise shortcut he could use to escape. Maybe all of this wasn't so bad.

Then the skeleton leapt, nearly closing the gap between it and Meyer in a single leap. It swiped with both front claws, missing Meyer but making it very clear that acidic spit was not the only way it could make his life hell. He unfurled his wings and rocketed forwards, too afraid to simply try and fly over the maze. Out in the open he would be a clear target, not just for this one skeleton but for any other guardian of the maze that saw him, and he preferred not being shot at from every direction. The extra speed got him through several melting mirrors unharmed, their magic seemingly being muted by the acid. The skeleton simply ran after him, only a hair away from actually catching him, but Meyer stayed ahead, as there were very few stronger motivations for being speedy than death

right at your heels.

Meyer had been very lucky today, and he hoped his luck would hold out. The acid had burned through some of the mirrors, but the actual area on each mirror that had taken effect was relatively small, about two feet in diameter, something he could squeeze through but that the skeleton could not, which he hoped would buy him more time. Knowing how his day had been going up until now, he also wondered if something else advantageous would happen.

Instead, as he squeezed through these holes, the skeleton simply let out a roar and charged, crashing right through the mirrors, knocking them to the side or shattering them on impact. It swatted him out of the sky, having caught up with terrifying speed and single-minded directiveness, and he slammed with a crack against another mirror. It was not the glass that broke in this situation, however.

Grasping his chest, and trying not to think too hard on what ribs were normally supposed to feel like, Meyer stared at the skeleton, which loomed over him, the oily green substance yet again dripping from its teeth, this time the acid burning his face in addition to the floor.

Meyer tried to find his portal stone, but recognized that the skeleton was toying with him now. It was a predator, and it believed him to be its crippled prey, and so it felt confident enough in not killing him. But if it thought he could change that dynamic at all, it wouldn't think twice about ending him and eating him later. So he had to be slow and careful in how he accomplished that.

The ground shimmered, and the mirrors around the two shifted. Meyer wasn't



sure if this was just his hallucinations from the pain he was desperately trying to ignore or perhaps an impact of mirrors he had passed through, whose magic had not been as suppressed as he had believed.

He felt something push him slightly to the right, as a massive stalagmite crashed down on the skeleton. Other guardians were drawn to this noise, and then began to descend towards him in force, but sparks leapt from each of the shifting mirrors, and swiped at them, like some sort of crude claw.

Not being one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Meyer ran as best he could, struggling to keep hold of his ill-gotten gains. The claw of sparks had shattered, replaced by tendrils of the same force whipping themselves at different guardians as they grew too close. Meyer had no idea who or what had been causing it, given that the Underlords directly opposed what he was doing, but that was likely a question for when his insides were not trying to split in two.

Never before had Meyer been so happy to be greeted by a melancholic fog, and he promised himself he never would be after this. Putting the chaos of the maze behind him, he was consumed by the rolling force of gray uncaringness. Nothing mattered to the fog, it simply was, and things happened to get in the way, but it pushed forwards and subsumed them all the same, covering them too in a monochrome haze. The Underlords were probably very happy about this symbolism, but he didn't have much time to think up a witty response, given the fact that most of his attention was focused on a mad dash away, and the rest focused on not focusing on his innards, which absolutely did not feel like they were being consumed by fire; this

was by no means a falsehood given that he kept having to tell himself that, he was just reaffirming the truth and nothing more.

But the other reason he could think of nothing witty was that after all of this, all the running and dodging and sneaking, right at the very last lap to victory, there was a sudden flash as a previously doused halo chose this exact moment to make itself known. Meyer was nearly blinded by the contained conflagration that ensued, but it was not the flame he feared but what it heralded. An angel, similar to the one he had seen earlier, stood in his way, the fog parting just enough for him to actually see what he faced. Standing before him was a sentinel of steel, clad head-to-toe in rusty plate armor that reeked of rot and whose weapon was not so much a sword but a writhing edge of sand.

They raised their weapon in a quick arc, which Meyer barely dodged away from. He simply could not direct attention towards this new threat, too many things had been going on and his fight-or-flight reaction had already been overwhelmingly flight, just now it had overridden thought itself. It wasn't so much that he blacked out, but more so that everything faded from his perception except for his legs, wings, and the edge of reality he had to reach. Get there fast enough, and he was free, too slow and he was dead, it was simple as that, and nothing else mattered.

Which of course made him even more flabbergasted as the angel's strike did not arc like a slash or leap forward like a jab, but instead stopped taunt in the middle of its predestined sweep, held gaunt while simply pointing outwards, like some sort of military gesticulation.



The tip of the weapon simply pointed outwards to a point parallel to it, and from that point the fog parted, in its place an ember of flame burst forth, carving a circular ring of fire out of the canvas of reality. This ring shimmered for a moment, the image held within changing from the monochrome field of the afterlife into the great divine sanctuary of the Panoram, the hall of the Twelve Above.

“Go.” Croaked the angel, whose whisper sounded like a light breeze.

There was no time for questions, no time for pondering, and so Meyer leapt through the portal, the ring of flame closing behind him with a damp squelch. He was greeted not by lifeless air, monochrome fog, and general hopelessness, but with vitality and color, the emanations of the Twelve Above’s simple presence on the Panoram helping to ease the pain of his ribs and internal organs, which by now had become impossible to ignore. He took one good look at the great shimmering spires of this paradise, let go of his sack full of souls, and then promptly fainted.

Other servants of the Twelve Above, who were obviously plentiful in the stronghold of their masters, quickly found him; one cannot enter a realm of any of the gods without them knowing quite quickly, and so they tended to him and the souls he had brought along. Meyer still remained unconscious, but when he would awaken he would find that he had been more successful than he could have known, and that he had saved far more souls than he had expected; there were going to be a lot of stories he could tell from even this relatively quick incursion into the Realm of Echoes, and so too would there be much celebration.

But servants of other forces did not

celebrate.

The angel watched intently as the ring of flame died in a puff of smoke. They waited for a few moments, and then bent down, pushing against the concealed stonework they stood on.

There was a whir and a click as the stonework split, revealing a winding flight of stairs that descended into utter darkness. The angel began to walk down them briskly, as the stonework closed behind them; it was imperative that the existence of these stairs not be well-known.

Of course they were not true stairs, sharing more in common with a tunnel than anything else, simply taking the form of stairs so that three-dimensional beings did not go mad trying to perceive its true form.

The stairs ended abruptly at a stony landing, and the angel slid onto it, following the stones that rose from the darkness as they came, a bridge of sorts manifesting itself brick by brick. And then it stopped, the darkness dripping away like ink, replaced by a throne room, with great stone pillars and stained glass windows irregardless of the fact no light passed through them. And in the exact middle of the room was a throne, though it was quite modest given the context of whose throne it was, being a simple chair of stone without decoration.

“It has been done.” The angel murmured.

The imperfections within the Underlords’ defenses had a clear answer, as did any investigation into the actual members of the Underlords; both shared an answer that simply was purposefully suppressed from common discourse and knowledge.



“Good.” Khozriak, the eldest archfiend, the dark god of plots, and perhaps most importantly at this moment, the third Underlord, replied, smiling wickedly. “So it begins.”

And so it did



# Warm and Familiar

Haya Alkisiwani

The alleyways were dark where the skyscrapers cast their towering shadows. The sky was a haze of pastel blue, plum purple, and tangerine. Streetlamps dimly flickered in the winter fog, and snowflakes danced with the gentle wind. It was a quarter to 5.

She was cold, shaking underneath her deceased mother's coat. It was getting darker, and her hands and toes were burning from frostbite. Walking quickly, she knew where she was headed. Home was one left turn away, but what was home? She remembered the day her husband had walked right out the front door of their tenth story West Village apartment. Where was he now? She shivered and turned right at the curb.

Tripping in the snow, she pulled out a cigarette from her coat pocket. She puffed on it and coughed. The dead leaves on the sidewalk rustled with the wind, and the snowflakes fell much heavier now. Doors and windows creaked from afar. She heard footsteps crushing in the snow behind her. Unperturbed, she continued walking and found herself headed to a local park. The small hills were decorated in white powder. She sat on a white bench and let the cold snow trickle down onto her hair and neck.

A tall, slim young man wearing a black suit and a fur coat was approaching the white bench. The smell of cologne flooded the air. He was clean-shaven, and his wet, brown hair was slickly combed to the side. She smiled coyly and leaned back.

He raised an eyebrow. "What's a beautiful lady like you doing out here all alone? Aren't you cold?"

She grinned and cleared her throat. "I love this weather. What's it to you?" She could feel her cheeks tingle as the wind roared and the leaves susserated against her boots. Her messy blonde hair covered most of her face.



"It's freezing. You could get frostbite. Look at you, you're underdressed," he said as he glanced at the lint on her thin, shabby coat. She saw his face contort with pity as if trying to feed a scared, starved street cat.

"And what about it?" She tilted her head, almost offended. She didn't mind the cold; she was frozen anyway.

"You don't want to get sick now, do you? Here, take my coat." He gently handed her his coat. It was a Russian sable fur coat. She remembered buying one for her husband on Christmas years ago. \$5,675. She could never afford one now, she thought, remembering the thousands of dollars that she owes in debt.

"I'm fine." She rolled her eyes and handed it back.

He rubbed his hands together. "Okay... well, care if I sit?"

"I mean, sure. It's a public space."

He sat right next to her. His lips were full and looked almost carmine against the snow. She found herself lost in the waters of his deep-set, turquoise eyes. They sparkled under the lamplight. Annoyed by the pleasure she felt, she quickly looked away. Suddenly, she felt very lonely and empty; she didn't know him but didn't want him to leave. Something about him felt distant, yet familiar. Too familiar. He was clean and tamed and wild and beautiful, and she wanted him to stay.

"So do you come from here?" he finally asked. His cheeks were now a bright red against his pale skin.

"Yes, I was born and raised here. Lived here my whole life actually. My parents too," she blurted.

Her eyes widened. Why did she feel the need to lie? Perhaps she didn't want him to know that it was her husband that had brought her here. She remembered waving to her mom right before departing from Colombia. Her mom was long gone. And so was her husband. It's all fine though, she thought. Who is this stranger anyway? She stared at a snowflake that landed in her palm and watched it melt.



"What about you?" she asked.

"I'm from Healdsburg, Cali. Nice place there. Warm weather. I left when I was 25." He paused and looked up at the sky.

"I always wanted to go to New York City, and here I am. I've been here for 5 years. It's a journey, but there is no turning back now." He smiled, almost like he was content with his current state. She could not relate.

"Are you happy here?" she muttered.

"Happy enough, I guess. New York is nice. Cold and busy, but nice."

"New York is too busy. But I don't think New York is the problem."

She threw her cigarette butt in the snow and lit another one.

"Well, how do you feel? You look...sad."

Sad? Ha! She was taken aback. How dare he? She didn't know him, and he didn't need to know anything about her. But he was so beautiful and familiar. She almost felt inclined to tell him everything that happened. She leaned forward and looked into his eyes. "I want to feel. I can't feel anything, you know? I love the cold because it makes me feel." She stopped herself. Her eyes watered. "Do you feel? You probably don't." She paused. "When was the last time you felt?" she continued.

"Please don't cry." He smiled. His teeth were a pearly white. Clean and tamed and wild, she thought. Of course he wasn't going to answer the question.

"I can make you feel. Do you want to feel?" he asked. He carefully placed his arm around her waist.

Maybe. The cologne was dizzying. She could not think. She was still annoyed by this all. Why was she still talking to him? Why is he so familiar?

"Yeah. I do."

She knew she was being foolish. How could he make her feel anything? Would he kill her? Or would he piece back the broken glass that she had long left behind? Or would he tell her husband...

He leaned in for a kiss. She was pleasantly surprised. His warm



breath singed her cold cheeks. The crisp winter air, the cologne, the bellowing wind—it was all intoxicating. She dropped her half-smoked cigarette to the snow and caressed his neck as she leaned in.

She tugged on his still-wet hair and didn't let go. She was cold and frozen—frozen in time. This stranger felt warm and familiar, and she needed that. His lips were soft and welcoming. She bit them gently. Carmine. Sweet, sweet carmine. This feels nice, she thought.

His kiss sucked her into a hole of pleasure and shame and sorrow and guilt. She felt herself falling. Again. Suddenly disgusted, she pulled back.

“Do you feel now?” he asked.

His face was melting, and his eyes were nothing but specks in the dark. He grabbed her flushed cheeks and kissed her again. She held on tighter, remembering the day her husband walked out on her.

“How could you? You ruined us.” He threw a vase that shattered on the bedroom floor. “After everything...after everything?” he sobbed quietly. “I thought we were happy. I thought you were happy. Are you not happy?”

“I am. It's not you.”

“Why then, Caroline?”

The wind was blowing violently now. Sobbing, she tightened her grip and kissed this stranger more aggressively.

“I trusted you.”

She remembered her husband's sad brown eyes, glossy and hollow. And then she remembered the loud silence that echoed for years after that door was shut. He was right, how could she? She hated herself. She hated this familiar stranger, but she couldn't make herself let go. She felt weak and laid her head on his fur coat. Tears flooded her eyes, but she didn't care. She never cares.

“Do you smoke?” she asked solemnly.

“Are you kidding?” he laughed. “Been smoking since I was 12. Here,



try this.” He handed her a Davidoff cigar.

“Isn’t that—”

“Take it.” He gently placed it in between her lips, pulled out a lighter, and lit it.

They smoked the rest of the evening together in the snow on that white bench in the empty park. She woke up next to him in bed the next morning. She didn’t even know his name. But he felt warm and too familiar, and she didn’t care.



**I miss you**  
**By Samantha Samy**

**Three words can't be enough  
To tell you the whole truth  
"I miss you" can't possibly say  
I care about you  
I hate when we are apart  
I love being near you  
I want you here  
I treasure your time  
I cherish your love  
I miss my friend**

**My walking diary  
My partner in crime  
My shoulder to cry on  
My rock and foundation  
My sadness  
My anger  
My fear  
My joy  
My hero**

**My person I can turn to  
My person I can lean on  
My person I can love  
My person I can miss**

**"I miss you" is just three words  
But three words can say it all**





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