



# **2024 Session 1 Chapbook**



## **Creative Writing 2024**

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# Editor's Note

There can be a lot to adjust to for a camp first-timer, no less so for an arts mentor than a camper. There was a lot to discover together. Throughout this session, campers learned new skills and exercised old ones, and I learned a lot as well, including about their unique personal writing styles and skills.

This year's theme, "And there was light," offered a lot of possible interpretations, and the campers this session did not hesitate to make it their own. Narrators made personal discoveries, escaped from ominous labs, were swallowed by dragons, performed daring rescues, reunited with siblings, and escaped into a good book. We wrote earnest poetry, hilarious flash fiction, thrilling short stories, and even an excerpt from a much longer manuscript novel.

No matter how they interpreted the theme, the light of their creativity can be seen in every one of these pieces. It has been a pleasure to work with each of you this summer and I hope you are pleased with what you've created.

Sincerely,  
Meir Hoberman

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Author's Note:

At the beginning of the poem not everyone got to experience stories, and there was Darkness. But then the stories were shared and there was Light!

-Hannah Berman

## When we owned worlds

Hannah Berman

We used to own worlds

Some were the worlds we kept to our selves  
Many crashingly blue next to sandy grains  
And not everyone could see them

Some were the worlds we secreted away  
Of clouds and dancing wings  
And not everyone could fly with them

Some were the worlds we watched behind our eyes  
The spacecrafts and views of perfect worlds  
And not everyone could long for them

Some were the worlds we hid under rugs  
Where grand trees and lush humidity surrounds  
And not everyone could understand them

Some were the worlds we shared exclusively  
With magnificent banquets and stunning parties  
And not everyone could get an invitation

And now everyone owns worlds  
And everyone can see them  
And everyone can fly with them  
And everyone can long for them  
And everyone can understand them  
And everyone is invited

Now everyone owns worlds  
if they're brave enough to pick up a book

Author's Note:

In this piece of writing, I didn't actually come up with the idea for the prompt. In the writing classroom, there is something called the box of unstick which is a white box that has a bunch of popsicle sticks that have writing prompts on them. I took one when I was having a hard time getting off my feet one day and this piece of writing came out of it. It's about a person getting eaten alive, the title of it, by a dragon. Maybe it's a dream, maybe it's not we might never know. I hope you enjoy or have enjoyed this piece.

Jessica.R.Weiss

## Eaten Alive

Jessica Weiss

I'm running the fastest I can ever remember running in my entire life.

The dragon is gaining on me by the second.

I turn my head back just in time to come face-to-face with the inside of a dragon's mouth. It has slightly yellow colored teeth that look as sharp as knives. Not butter knives, but the knives that a butcher would use to cut the meat they would sell. It smells horrible, like ten-thousand year old morning breath.

The dragon's mouth is wide open.

It looks almost like it's about to scoop up it's prey.

Wait...I'm the prey!

CHOMP!

My vision goes pitch black. Like a color of black that feels like the night itself just swallowed you whole.

But, for some odd reason, it feels like I'm falling, and fast.

Oof! I land on something that feels wet and slimy but also... slightly warm?

It also feels really hot in here too.

I hear some sizzling and bubble popping sounds around me.

I try my hardest to make out what is around me but, I can't do it in this pitch black.

It feels like I just lost one of my five senses.

I suddenly remember that I have my phone in my back pocket and reach into it before pulling it out and turning on the flashlight that it has on it.

I gasp when I see a human skull floating in a strange looking green liquid that surrounds me like an ocean with no end.

But, there is pink, damp looking walls that are in a circle.

They surround the strange looking green liquid of an ocean.

But wait, are those walls... moving?

I look down to see that I'm sitting on what looks like uncooked meat. But, it's really big and smells of uncooked turkey.

I try to stand up in disgust.

I'm a vegetarian.

The piece of uncooked meat wobbles slightly beneath me. Making me fall back down.

To my unpleasant surprise, I feel the sogginess of my damp pants.

It is now when I notice that the pink walls are getting closer and closer to me.

Now about an arms length away from me.

I whip my head to the left when I hear a soft swooshing noise just in time to see a piece of uncooked meat, smaller than the one I'm currently sitting on, falling into the green liquid.

My eyes widen slightly as I see the piece of uncooked meat go up in flames and be devoured

by the green liquid the exact millisecond the green liquid touches it.

Okay... so DON'T touch the green liquid. Got it...

I sit there floating on the piece of uncooked meat for a long time.

I don't know how long. Two, three, four hours even?

Just then, I hear a sizzling sound.

Almost like the sound of something getting digested.

I look down to see that the large piece of uncooked meat that I am sitting on slowly sinking into the green liquid.

I start to panic and think of ways to get out of here.

I suddenly remember that in a fairytale I once read when I was younger, the dragon in the story absolutely hated any type of vegetable.

I had no idea that dragons existed anyways so why should it be any different from the fairytale I read?

I quickly pull out the lunch container from my bag, it's a salad with all the fix-in's. Dressing, cheese, tomatoes, cucumbers, everything.

What can I say? I like vegetables.

I rush to open the container. I quickly dump the salad into the green liquid in hopes that something, anything, might happen. Suddenly, everything starts to shake and rumble before I'm flung upwards and out. I jolt up and frantically look around. I'm in my room. Nothing has changed.

I look down to see that I'm in my Pj's. I breathe out a sigh of relief.

Dragons aren't real, I never got swallowed by a dragon, everything was just my imagination after all, I guess it was just a dream... wait, why do I smell uncooked turkey?

Author's Note:

When I was younger, I used to have panic attacks every single day. And they were BAD. I would first start to shake, then, my vision blurred, my hearing started to ring, my breath would be caught in my throat, I couldn't move an inch, and tears would run down my face. All because I was too scared of something to even try it. That was before I was diagnosed and started to take meds for it. This piece is about that time in my life where I was too afraid to do anything. The piece is about someone trying to find out why they weren't normal. When I was younger, I always thought that so this piece is dedicated to my mom who always helped me through the panic attacks. I hope you enjoy or have enjoyed this piece.

Jessica.R.Weiss

## Why

Jessica Weiss

WARNING! THE PIECE CONTAINS STRONG EMOTIONS.

"I want to know more... no, I NEED to know more.

Why am I here?

Why am I doing this?

Why... WHY CAN'T I BE NORMAL?!?"

They start to shake slightly, their thoughts running like a train with no end, tears starting to run down their face.

"I want to, no... I NEED TO be normal, I-I, I HAVE TO be-"

They drop to their knees, arms wrapped around themselves like a hug almost, sobbing, screaming...

"WHY AM I NOT NORMAL?!?"

They pass out from exhaustion with their last thoughts being,

"Why... what's wrong with me...?"

Author's Note:

Everyday in the creative writing major, you get a question of the day which you can either write about or answer verbally as well as an opening prompt that you get around ten to fifteen minutes to write about. One of the days, there was a prompt that said to describe the objects that the mentor had put out. This piece is meant to be a funny one and make someone smile. I hope you enjoy or have enjoyed this silly piece of describing weird things.

Jessica.R.Weiss

## Items

Jessica Weiss

These few items, are the most important in the entire world...

A metal cup that looks like one of those metal cups you would get at a bar in the movies that is filled to the brim with foaming beer, or, like a cup the mighty thor would drink out of from the movies.

The cup that holds the writing utensils to change the world...

A probably plastic dinosaur that is probably really over priced that is so realistic, it has a cowboy hat on its head.

Finally, last but never the least, but the absolute least important of them all and probably the least expensive one of them all, a stack of paper dollar tree level coffee filters with the power to make coffee for a overly stressed college student to get enough energy to get them through only one hour of an all-nighter...

Authors' Note:

The word lilah-tov means good night in hebrew, but we have a joke in our bunk that we use the word lilah-tov as a replacement for the word died. We got a prompt one day to partner up with another person and write a flash fiction, a short piece of writing, with a character who is reading something so we came up with this. We hope you enjoy or have enjoyed this piece.

Jessica.R.Weiss and Ivy Cohen

## What Happened That Night

Jessica Weiss and Ivy Cohen

"Verosika Green lilah-toved on Tuesday, October, 15th. She was a very loved person, and I hope she knew that. It was a true shame how her life ended. In such pain and agony of being stabbed 273 times, she said her goodbyes. I mean, I just assume she would because I wouldn't know," snuffles and confused looks came from the extremely small crowd of three people, "I loved her like a sister. And everyone knows that all sisters fight sometimes. And sometimes, the fights become ugly, and, someone gets hurt. But we were never like that." I looked up trying not to say something I would later regret. No one had to know what had happened that night.



Authors Note:

This piece has themes of gratitude, letting things be, and peace. All of this connects to the theme: "And there was light." This was also an internal journey of knowing when to rest. I hope you enjoy.

Ivy

## The Realm of the Lost

Ivy Cohen

My vision started to blur. Thickly layered tree tops fuzzed into green speckles. And now that I looked up, the endless blue sky looked to be more like a metallic ceiling. Dirt sank into the ground and bolted panels appeared under my feet. The aroma of metal and grease filled the air.

When I ran away, I was expecting to hang under a tree for a day or two. Maybe eat a couple PB & Js that I packed. They were the only thing I knew how to make. I wasn't, however, expecting a warehouse to close in around me.

I winced. My foot had been run over by a small rectangular cube; it could have only been the size of a tissue box, but it was coated in silver and had wires sticking out through its back.

"Please follow the line to be filed. Please follow the line..." the machine repeated these words over in other languages and dialects I couldn't understand.

I was standing in a roped queue with other people who wore parkas, hats, coats, Hawaiian shirts, and rain boots. These machines were nipping at others' feet, making sure each person was heading to their destination. Other lines sprouted throughout the room like branches on an oak tree.

"Where am I going?!" Shouted the girl ahead of me. She was short in height, but made up for it in her loud voice. She had a slight accent that I couldn't place and a strange fashion sense of jean shorts over yoga pants.

A new robot that looked the exact same as the rest began to glow green and started to play a message, "Welcome to the hall of the lost and sleeping. You've been here before, don't worry. Welcome back home."

The girl turned around to face me. She had a short pixie cut and chapped lips that looked dreadfully painful. "I'm Taylor. Last thing I remember was wandering around my school and making a turn and-" She paused for a moment to think, "you?"

I ran my hands down my braids. If I had known people were to see me I would have tried to look a little less like a toddler, "Tess. My name's Tess," I didn't trust her just yet to tell her what had happened to me, "I also was at school."

But I was too busy thinking to really pay attention. My escape plan was about to be in action. I gripped my hand on the fabric tying us into the line. It looked to be velvet, but felt more like freshly wrapped gauze. I ducked underneath, careful to make sure not a single soul saw me. Or a robot for that matter.

Every single step I took would somewhat echoe. One of the machines swiveled to my direction. It quickly turned to an aggressive red. "Please follow the line to be filed," it said in an agitated voice, if a robot could have such a thing. I picked up my pace and ran through more lines. People jumped and spewed curses at me in all sorts of languages and accents. I had made my way to the sixth line where I ran into a young child with closed eyes, dressed in silk, and was holding a jelly cat who promptly disappeared at my touch.

Something about this place was eerie. Maybe how there were no lights yet the entire place was illuminated with a glow. Or maybe it was the fact that the lines of bored people seemed to go on

forever, but I think what was the most off putting was how many memories were flooding back: The first panic. The sleepless nights. The flashlights burning the back of my eyes through my window. The empty coffin. But things are only lost if they can't be found.

After swerving and spinning for a while, my eyes were coated with a thick layer of mist. Things fixed and set became more abstract. But as I walked forward with my velcro sneakers, things became more in perspective. (My dad had insisted on me wearing those shoes after what had happened to Maddie. It made him feel young again. Reminded him of me refusing to walk when it was time for me to take my first wobbly steps, yet I would rock on our rusty swing set. It just made me look like a fool.)

Large conveyor belts and treadmills were attached to structures on the ceiling. They looked insignificant against the metal rods filled with dusty stacks of paperwork.

"Hello there," said a sweet sugar coated voice in the distance.

I turned around to see the owner of the sound. My jaw dropped. There sat on the floor a small dove with pristine white feathers. They had blue reflective eyes and a smile that I had no idea a dove could wear.

"It's quite funny because it just happens that this is the only place on Earth that if you get lost you won't be sent to be filed," they said with a teacher's voice. "I'm the manager around here by the way."

"Cool," I said awkwardly, trying to get away from the bird.

"You shouldn't be here." The dove flew over and landed perfectly on my arm. The bird's happy expression suddenly turned sad. They cooed softly at me. "You have pain. Why?"

I looked over at the dove, trying to hide my surprise, "just something that happened a little while ago." I faintly rubbed at the welling tears from my eyes with my free arm.

"You can't get pain to go away, it just washes over," the dove said meaningfully, "what are you looking for?"

"My sister's file. Maddie Collins. Is there a way I can see where she is?" I pleaded to the bird.

"Afraid not. Filing can only be published, never looked at. You should really go back to your line." The dove flapped its beautifully elegant wings up into the air. "You better be gone soon." And just like that the bird flew off into the misty abyss.

I took a deep breath. The dove was right. I should go back to the line. I should go back to my world, continue on with running, and see when the search parties would find me. See if anyone would care. But I didn't. Instead, I carried on with *my* search party.

I checked the thick piles of paperwork, but most of them weren't in English, and the ones that were said things like, "To process the displaced one must figure the time where they were and the time when they return," and "finding a return time can be done when reason of displacement is located," and other jibber jabber. But what caught my eye was that those who processed a person know when they will be found. My heart swelled.

I quickly ran through whatever place I was in and went to whatever place I would go. Everything looked the same no matter how far I ran, but something was different. The walls were the same shiny silver as before and the machinery was as clinky and burnished, but it seemed to be growing in size. Slowly and steadily it outgrew me. But it wasn't growing. I was shrinking. The floor became a gooey consistency that was swallowing my shoes. It was mad. I guess if you don't know where you are going you can't go anywhere.

I gripped onto a pipe and held on for dear life. It was cold, hollow, and probably had lead inside, but I'd rather die of poisoning than be eaten by the floor. The goo was now up to my knees and it was getting harder to hold the pipe from so far below. The jelly was sloshing through my socks and staining my jeans. The goo burned my skin slightly leaving me with an unsatisfied feeling. I pushed my leg deep into the liquid, having it splash out in speckles of fire. I smoothly pulled my leg out and looped it around the boxy machine. Almost there. I lifted my other leg up, heaving my back

a couple inches from the jelly. I closed my eyes and prayed that this wouldn't be the end. Not death by floor. I then twisted my body until I was upright on the machine.

The ground began to transform back into its stable form, but just to be careful, I still crawled on the many tubes and levers to my destination: The file center. Wherever that was, I was getting there. My knee was raw; my skin ripped from collision on metal. My pants had turned into shorts after my near death experience. But I was okay. Okay for now.

If it weren't for my extreme focus on crawling I may have never noticed the sounds coming from the distance. Choppy zaps and screeches. Something was getting shredded. There in the distance stood a small hut-shaped house where huge shredders were being used by small working creatures. They had the appearance of porcupines, but were covered in a peach fuzz and stretched out to the size of a ferret. Each of them had a stack of manilla folders and would slowly grab one and push it into the machine. Pieces of paper rushed into the air and then settled on a surface.

I entered the hut to find it being huge on the inside: a tall ceiling, long hallways that stretched to the farthest corners of the place, and almost twelve dozen more of the creatures. What was in those folders? And why were they being shredded?

"What is that?" I asked one of the creatures sitting on a swivel chair with glasses perched on their nose. They looked the same compared to the rest, but possibly a little more dignified.

"Shhhhh," they whispered, not even looking up from their shredder.

"Hello?"

"Shhhhhh," they whispered more aggressively.

I walked behind the mammal and took one of the folders. It felt clean and fresh. I opened it and found that each page was laminated and perfectly placed.

The animal turned around to look at me with an agitated face. "What do you think you're doing?" It said. Their wire framed glasses jumped into the air with every word they spoke.

"I'm looking for something," I said, not even looking at them. I was nose deep in papers. They were written in English, but the characters were mixed together in an indecipherable combination.

"So am I. A job. And you're making it very difficult for me to keep one," it snapped. It took its stubby arms and grabbed the paper from my hands. "People's lost files are found farther in The West Location."

"Oh wow. Thanks," I kept walking farther in the direction I presumed was West and then stopped abruptly, "How'd you know I was looking for that?" I questioned.

"Most people are," said the creature wisely while turning back around to their shredder.

"People tend to do this?"

The creature didn't answer. It just kept to its job. I continued on through the hut hoping for there to be some sort of map knowing very well there wasn't going to be one.

The floor had a preppy checkering and a polished feel. I was barefoot walking on the cold ground since the goo had eaten my shoes whole. I pulled out my expensive watch to see that it was gone and thought nothing of it. Weirder things had happened prior in the day. Finally, the hut came to an end. Light shined brightly leaving me temporarily blind. I turned away, protecting my eyes. Everything sparkled and shined as I walked past. The darkness of my shadow made the light more captivating. I had much farther to journey.

I remembered it so clearly. Me, locking myself in my room praying that it would go away. The sound. The sound of Ma screaming on the phone with somebody. The silence of my dad who was probably sitting in denial. The whispers of rumors by neighbors thinking they wouldn't be overheard: "Did you hear what happened? So young, what a shame. Could never be my child." The thunder in the distance overlapped with my heartbeat. The only wet thing on my face was the rain

droplets falling from the sky. I didn't feel anything at the time. Now, I felt everything. But now I was here. And now, I could know when she was coming back.

My heart jumped inside my throat. There it was. Another hut, only this one was empty and smelled of library. I ran inside; I didn't even care that my braids were becoming undone or that the hem of my shorts were falling on the ground or even that I was half-crying. I skidded sharply and traced my fingers down the rows of files. I threw open the M cabinet and let it fall to the floor. Papers spewed across the ground unorderedly. Collins. Collins. Collins. There were too many to count. I guess it's a common name. But there was only one with the same time as hers: October 16th. The worst day of my life. That day I had lost hope. And now I've found it.

Her folder was clean and barely touched at all. I let my tears fall down making a storm on the papers. I slipped my finger in the crease preparing for what I was about to see.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," a sweet voice cooed. It was the cute little dove from earlier. They were sitting down on the cabinet I had knocked down.

"Just let me have this," I whined.

The bird flapped their majestic wings and landed peacefully on my shoulder. "Nothing good will come of knowing things you were never meant to know. It's the way of the world."

I dropped down on my knees and let out a howl. I pounded my fists on the floor, "No, no, no, no! I had hope, please." I yelled. My tears were scorching hot. I couldn't keep it in anymore.

"Speak my child. And hope will come," it said quietly.

"My younger sister of five years ran into the woods half-a-year-ago," I gasped for breath from my tears, "she didn't know what the world could do to you."

The bird was now sitting on a counter directly in front of me. They were listening. No one listens.

"The search parties came that night. I just waited in my bedroom watching tv. Like an idiot. My parents were just mere shells of what they used to be. I couldn't go to school because I just couldn't face anybody. I was more worried about that than my sister," I screamed, "I was so selfish. I *am* so selfish. After a couple of weeks we had a funeral even though I knew she was alive. I know she is alive. But guess who didn't cry?" I said in mock-curiosity, "Me. I didn't cry for my sister. After she left everything was different. Not just the many casseroles and pies in the fridge that the neighbors had brought, but my parents lost interest in everything," I paused to think, "they lost interest in me. So I left. Because I wanted to see if anybody cared. If they would even notice," I finally faced the bird, "just let me do this one thing for her."

The dove looked at me solemnly. "Is this for your sister or is this for you?"

Anger swallowed me whole. I felt my face twitch and my eyes dry out. "No," I spat.

"Come with me." The bird flew across the hut to a new room. There were tall white walls and meticulously tiled floors. There, a group of people stood. Not random. Taylor was there. I had gone in a huge circle. Everything was pointless.

Taylor was sitting at a table while a trail of people behind her waited patiently. One of the tissue boxy-robots rested on top of the surface recording something on a file.

"Is your mind clear?" The robot asked.

"Yes," Taylor said sleepily. Her face was dragging and her big brown eyes looked smaller in comparison to her large bags.

"Can you find yourself?"

Taylor looked confused, but began to close her eyes. She stood there for a couple of seconds. Thinking. Contemplating. "Yes," she murmured. And just like that she was gone. She had left so quickly that my mind couldn't even register that she had left. Back to her school. Back to where she was supposed to be.

"And that's where you are mistaken Ms.," the dove said sweetly, "something lost isn't waiting to be found; it must find itself first."

My lip quivered softly. I had lost sensation in my hands, but I was still able to push my hair back from my face.

"The light is always in your eyes, some people are just too scared to see it," the dove whispered, "don't turn a blind eye."

It came back racing. Maddie. That night. The neighbors. School. My parents. Me. "Do you think anybody knew I was gone?"

"You did," the dove perched itself on my shoulder, "you were lost far off from this realm. Pain can make someone fall into a hole. It can disconnect you from everything."

"I think I need to go home," I said quietly. I let it go. I don't know how it happened, but it felt as if the weight was taken off. I still missed my sister, but I could finally breathe for the first time.

"We usually have a strict policy about humans not remembering their time here," the dove turned to the robot, "you think we could make an exception?"

The robot sat itself down on another file. It illuminated in a green glow. "Is your mind clear?"

"Yes."

"Can you find yourself?"

I took a deep breath. I was finally ready. "Yes."

#### Editor's Note:

In Bee's piece, as in many others, the theme of light is both literal and figurative. A family is reunited after a character makes the brave decision to step into the light. The headlights appear as a warning of danger, but in the end the weight of loss on the family is made lighter.

## The Edge of Isolation Woods

Bee Kohlbrenner

My eyes slowly open as I realize the pink fluffy covers have been pulled away from me. A tall man with no face is sitting on my bed. This is the being that raised me my whole life ( well, most of it at least) By now, I'm used to his features. Pale white skin, and not the snow white kind. The creepy antique doll kind. I can feel the cold energy on my mattress, and its almost comforting. I stretch out

my hands, but they get pulled down. Father's grip on me has always been very strong, but today he seems to not want to let go. "Good morning. How did you sleep?" He has no mouth, therefore he cannot speak. His thoughts transfer to mine, and mine to his. We are one, is what he likes to say. "Fine." I follow him down the stairs, hand still gripped tightly to his. The smell of burnt toast wafts into my nose as we enter the kitchen. "Are you excited for your 14th birthday present?" He asks, taking the toast out of the toaster. I nod. " I mean, I don't even know what it is." I pull out the wooden chairs for me and Father. He looks at me gratefully and we sit down. "That's why it is a surprise." He hands me my toast on a off white plate, butter on a separate smaller plate. "Do you think I could go outside for 45 minutes instead of just 30? For my birthday?" This is my usual question of the day. We both live in a small cabin in the middle of the woods. It's isolated from the rest of the world, the real world. The only reason I know about the real world is because father goes there every night. He does not tell me what it is that he does there though. I am allowed 30 minutes outside every day, except for Fridays, which I am allowed an hour. I want more. More than this sad

mess of a life. Every night I fall asleep wanting to know if there is anything else out there, anyone. Fathers voice snaps me back to reality. "Actually, Yes. More than that even." Wait. Is this the surprise I've been waiting for? Maybe I can finally get out of these woods, this life. "I have been waiting to tell you this for 14 years now. Today is the day you will be able to go into the real world."

*August 4th, 1999, 3:33 AM*

It's the middle of the night, and I can't sleep. All I can think about is the continuous crying of Margaret. Ever since she was born, mom and dad have been ignoring me. The only thing they care about is her. Maybe, just maybe, I fall asleep wanting more. More than hiding from the popular girls every day at school, hiding my face from them, from everyone. I feel sleep, and the room starts to fade away. The crying is getting louder and louder. I hear a scream. Not an average baby scream. A blood boiling, horror movie scream. I sit up and get out of bed. I feel the adrenaline in my veins. I need to know what happened to her. The wooden floor creaks under my wait. My pace gets faster and faster and I finally reach the nursery. I turn on the light, and everything looks normal. I walk over to the baby blue crib, and pull back the curtains. My heart drops. Nothing is there. No baby. Frantically, I look around the room. It's dark, so I can't really see anything. I look to the couch, and for a second, see a tall man sitting on it. I blink, and he is gone. I walk over to couch cautiously. In the place of the man, there is a small note. I pick it up. Written in red pen are five words: *She is mine now, forever.* I tear it up, each piece floating to the floor, as if mocking me. I feel the tears in my eyes and I collapse in a heap on the floor. Why do I even care about her so much? No, Please, please no. This can't be happening. She can't be dead, she can't-

*Present, The Edge of Isolation Woods*

The Edge is right in front of me. The ongoing wind is blowing my red hair in my mouth and I can hear Father in my head, telling me to hurry up. Honestly, I'm terrified. I don't know what's out there, what kind of things, of people. Real, breathing people. People with emotions, feelings, faces. This feeling is inside of me, this feeling that I need to find something, someone even. I can't communicate with Father anymore, I'm by myself. Once I step into the gleaming purple fog, everything will change. There will be no one for me anymore, I will be all alone in a giant universe, much bigger than this one. I need to do this. No matter how hard it is, I need to get out of here. I would rather be lost than in the same place forever. With a deep breath, I step into the light.

*Present, Los Angeles California*

It's the first day of school today. Mom and dad say I should try for more than one friend this year, but I'm really not interested in that. I already get bullied enough, I don't want someone else to suffer because of me. The halls are filled with noise, terrible noise. The noise is gossip, rumors, and lies. High school is not a pretty place. I've tried to forget about Margaret, but I can't. When she disappeared, Dad became a different person, and not in a good way. I hear these... things in my head, these thoughts that aren't my own. Sometimes it's crying, sometimes it's pleading for "escape". It sounds like a girl, and she always sounds sad. It's almost like I know her from somewhere. "Why aren't you in class?" A teacher pulls me by the arm. "Honey, this behavior needs to stop. I know things at home might be tough, but you have to keep up with everybody." She says sternly. We are standing right in front of the doorway, and I couldn't be more embarrassed. I need more strength. I have no one to help me survive. I can't do this alone. The girl is still in my head, but now she is saying something different. She is asking: *Where are you?*

*One hour later*

I hit the concrete hard. I have no idea where I landed, or how long I was falling. I can't remember what happened when I jumped, it's all gray. I feel very hot, hotter than I ever was in the woods. I look up at the sky, and there is a big yellow ball in the vast blue of it. It hurts my eye, but I continue to stare. It feels like a memory, a memory of something long ago. I have gotten up off of the scratchy ground by now, and there is a girl in the distance. She seems to be gesturing towards me, holding a finger up, then pulling it back. I think she wants me to come to her, but I'm not sure. "Hello! Are you blind or something?" she shouts, walking to me. "Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't know what you meant." She's right across from me now, and still talking. She is tapping a small object in her

hand, it looks like a little purple box. Now its up against her face, and she is talking again." I swear, this, this...kid just fell from the sky! No, officer, I'm not crazy!" This doesn't seem good. It's now blazing hot, and my red hair is sticking to my neck. My feet feel squished in my high black boots. I feel like I can't breath. It's all too much, I need more time. I came unprepared to this this world. I feel the tears building in my eyes. I start to walk away, but the girl grabs my arm. I pull it away and start running. My pace quickens with each stride and now I'm sobbing. "Where are you! What is the thing I came here for! Where!" I'm screaming-crying. What did I come here for? Was it all for nothing? I wish I could go back to the quiet of the woods, the comforting voice of Father. I look up, and see the headlights of a car. I feel myself hitting the ground, then nothing.

### *Three months later*

The doors of the hospital open. Mom and I came to visit someone. She wont tell me who though. we walk up a flight of stairs, than into a room. there is a girl lying on the bed, eyes closed. She is wearing a hippie blue midi skirt and a orange blouse with puffy sleeves Her red hair is wild, going different directions, not just down. She looks familiar, somehow. I notice her dark brown eyes, eyes that almost look black. Same as mine. "This is your sister."

"What?"

"The hospital called me yesterday. She has been in a coma for three months because she got hit by a car. It's a miracle she's alive."

"But, how? We gave up looking for her ages ago, I thought the police told us she was dead!" Mom looks at me. " I have no idea either. I'm just glad we found her." I put my hand on hers. A warm glow washes over her almost-gray face. "Me too."

#### Author's Note:

The theme this year was "And there was light!". My piece relates to this theme because whenever someone is struggling, they should recognize that there will always be light. I tried to describe my experience to let others know that they are never alone and that there's always light in the dark.

## Recovery

Zel Schneider

To break two dying men:  
To have a heart  
To have a mind  
But I will be colorful again

To get out of this hole  
To tell which way the end will fall  
To break two dying men  
But, no worries, I will be colorful again

When I was eleven I wished to be ten, and when I was ten I wished to be nine  
I was too young to split my mind apart,



To break two dying men  
I will be colorful again

Possibilities rose, the end receded  
Recovery falling not too far behind  
To heal two dying men  
I was colorful again

### I Will Deliver You to the Fireflies

"I will deliver you to the fireflies." That was what my best friend told me, my best friend who had no faith in me. A gorgeous choice of words, really, if it hadn't meant what it did. What bothered me is that she didn't even try to help, she just said that it was too much work. That had me spiraling, wondering if I was meant to be on this Earth. Or if I was just a huge burden that some people were sometimes stuck with and unable to leave alone. I was always asking people "I will miss you, will you miss me?" because I never thought anyone cared. At a certain point, you become out of your head and your body moves without thinking. Get on the bus, go to school, do homework, fall asleep It's actually really hard to find enjoyment in that, if you can believe it. I felt hollow, like I was dancing with the ghost of the person I once was. I just wanted to get through the day, and hope that tomorrow wouldn't be as gut wrenching as today.

### Broken Promises

I had promises with some people, that were not kept. We all have our own lives and our own business, so we can't always keep our promises. Some are really important, and some are meaningless. When the important ones are broken, it feels like your heart has been shattered into a thousand pieces. To get it back together, you have to pick up each piece, and put it where it belongs. That would take a pretty long time, and that's how long it would take for me to trust that person again. Things can't just go back to the way they were, because I won't ever look at you the same. I'll see you as someone who couldn't keep up with their words, and I had to suffer for it.

### How are you, really?

I get asked this pretty often. People say "I know your face when something is going on. How are you, really?" But they don't really seem to know me at all. I'm not always upset. Even when I am, I don't always want to talk about it. I've learned that it's okay to cry, and it's okay to be upset. Not every tear is a crisis, and not every breath is my last.

### I Was Colorful Again

In the whole recovery process, I thought I was so alone. As if I was the only one in eight billion people that felt like this. But a part of recovery is admitting you need help, and realizing that you aren't alone. Everyone feels this sometimes, but it isn't forever. It does go away, because everything is temporary. Change will always happen at some point. Keep going, because no one wants to write notes on a life not quite lived.

Authors' Note:

This is a prequel to another book that we are writing together. This story follows Charlie and shows the events that occur for him before the first book. This connects to the theme because when Charlie escapes, he finally sees the light of the sky for the first time in seven years.

## Blue

Lilah Meyrowitz and Ellie Bressler

"I'd like to adopt the one with the blue hair," the woman says, looking down at me. I can't read her expression, but she doesn't look like she would want to be my friend. Mrs. Jenkins, the lady who watches over the adoption center, always tells me not to judge a book by its cover, so I'm willing to give her a chance if she'll give me one.

"Oh, wonderful!" Mrs. Jenkins exclaims, motioning for me to come over. I do, hiding behind her skirt. Now that I'm looking at this woman up close, I can see that she definitely doesn't look interested in getting to know me. I'm hoping that she just has a mean face and her personality is much nicer. At least her eyes are a pretty blue color. My favorite color has always been blue. Mrs. Jenkins let me dye my hair blue when I first got here. I also really like to color, especially with blue. Mrs. Jenkins lets me borrow her art supplies. Usually I draw myself, my mommy, and my daddy. They aren't here right now, but Mrs. Jenkins says that they are just on a long vacation and they will be back. Whenever I ask her when they will be back, she tells me "soon", so I'm sure I don't have too much longer to wait.

Mrs. Jenkins' voice breaks my train of thought. "This is Charlie. He's a bit shy, but he's a sweet little one once you get to know him." I smile up at the woman, and she looks back down at me with the same blank expression she's been wearing this whole time. My smile becomes more awkward and I shrink behind Mrs. Jenkins again.

"Yes, yes, alright," the woman says sharply before pushing past Mrs. Jenkins and bending down to look at my face more closely. Her whole face is scary, like she dressed up for Halloween before she came here. The only thing I can bear to look at are her eyes. I wish my eyes were blue like that.

"I'll take him," she decides, grabbing my arm. Roughly. I can feel her nails digging into my arm. Mrs. Jenkins looks concerned, but she plasters on a smile anyways.

"I will get you set up with the paperwork, then." she says sweetly, motioning for the woman to follow her, and leaving me standing in the lobby. I'm a little confused. Why am I going with this person? Don't I have to wait until my mommy and daddy get back?

After what seems like forever, Mrs. Jenkins and the woman come back. Mrs. Jenkins is holding a stack of papers. Maybe I get to color now!

"Charlie, I am going to need you to go with this nice woman, okay?" Mrs. Jenkins says softly while looking in my direction.

"What about my mommy and daddy?" I ask. "Won't they be wondering where I am?"

"I can tell them where you went," Mrs. Jenkins answers. Her face looks weird when she says this. It looks like she is hiding something, but then she continues. "Now, go with her, okay? Everything will be alright." The woman just looks down at me expectantly, and I have no choice but to follow her. I wave to my few friends as we leave the center and walk towards her car. She still has a firm grip on my wrist as we approach the vehicle.

She ushers me quickly into the backseat and shuts the door, walking around the side of

the car to get to the driver's seat. She starts the car and turns back to look at me, speaking in the same authoritative tone she used inside.

"You will address me as Dr. B. If you disobey, there will be consequences," she states, and doesn't say another word for the rest of the car ride. It wasn't a long drive, but things feel longer to me in silence. We finally reach what I think is her house. I think she must be rich, because it is a very tall house. The house is ugly, though. I think it could use a little blue.

"You have a BIG house," I tell her, staring up at the building in awe. I look back at her, but she's frowning at me.

"It's a lab," she says shortly. "That's why it's so big. Now, follow me inside." and without another word, she gets out of the car and opens my door, pulling me out of the car. This time when her nails dig into me I wince, but she ignores me. We enter the building, and I look around, in awe once again. There are machines everywhere, and lots of people in long white coats. We walk further down the hall and into a second room. Everything is white in this room, like a blank piece of paper. I want to get a crayon from Mrs. Jenkins and color over this wall. And then I remember she isn't here right now. Dr. B is.

There are large cylinders with kids like me in them. Except they kind of look weird. One of the kids has red eyes that pierce into me and a long fluffy tail and dark ears on the top of his head that look like ones a fox would have. Maybe this is normal and I'm the weird one, but the kids I've seen don't have tails. The next one we pass has wavy brown hair and deep blue eyes. They also have a tail, but it looks different. I've read a book about sharks before, and I think it's a shark tail. The next cylinder has someone in it, but I can't see them fully due to a large sign on the glass that reads FAILED. From what I can see, though, they don't seem to be moving. They're slumped up against the wall, and their hands are laying limp. They have long, bright blue hair that falls across their face. I realize as we pass that their hair is the same shade of blue as mine.

"What happened to them?" I ask quietly, and Dr. B scowls down at me.

"She's dead," she says flatly, and my eyes widen. "She was a failed project and of no use to us." I look back, but we've passed that kid already. Dead? How could she be dead? What is this place, and why am I here? Have I done something wrong?

"Are my mommy and daddy mad at me?" I ask, meeting her eyes, because they are the only thing I find comfort in right now. "Did I do something wrong to come here?"

"Your mommy and daddy aren't able to tell me anything," she says. "They're gone. Don't you know? The woman at the adoption center told me that they died in a house fire when you were seven." I feel my heart drop. Had Mrs. Jenkins lied to me? No, she would never.

"Mrs. Jenkins told me that they were on a vacation and were going to come and get me soon." I say proudly, hoping that I have proved Dr. B wrong.

"Mrs. Jenkins was lying to you," she responds firmly. "Your parents are dead. They aren't coming to get you." The reality of her words sink in, and I look down at the floor.

"I have one more question," I say nervously, and she doesn't respond, so I continue. "Why am I here?"

"We needed a new test subject to replace the failed one," she answers. "And you were the perfect candidate for the job."

As she says that, we approach an empty cylinder. She shoves me inside and locks the door.

"What are you doing!?" I panic and struggle to get the door to open.

"Do not try to escape. This is where you live now. You will be addressed as #004." Dr. B answers, looking me straight in the eye. And with that, she walks away, leaving me staring at her retreating form, trapped in this room by myself.

"Help! HELP!" I yell after she leaves the room.

"No one is going to help you. Save your energy." The boy with the fox tail says. He looks much older than me.

"What's your name?" the other boy asks. "My name is #003, but I like when people call me Mako!" Mako looks younger than all of us and he has a squeaky voice. His wavy brown hair almost covers his eyes.

"My name is Charlie," I answer. "How old are you?"

"I'm, uh... Boy, how old am I?" Mako asks.

"You are five and I am fifteen." the other boy responds. "Hello, Charlie. My name is Boy."

"Boy?" I repeat, tilting my head. "That's not a name. That's what you are."

"That's what they call me here," Boy explains. "I don't know what my given name is, and I've never had interest in thinking of one."

"You don't remember your name? How long have you been here?" I question.

"Almost twelve years now." Boy sighs. "Mako has been here for about one year."

My eyes widen. Twelve whole years? How long would I be in here for? Then I remember the other thing I want to ask about.

"What about her?" I point to the cylinder that holds the girl I had asked Dr. B about. I can see Boy tense and Mako looks away.

"That was Silvie," Boy finally tells me. "She was ten years old. She got here five years ago."

"What happened to her?" I ask, already knowing part of the answer. Mako is facing the opposite direction now, and Boy heaves a sigh.

"She failed her tests," he explains. "We're here for experiments, Charlie. The scientists take us out of here every week to make sure everything is running the way it's supposed to."

"What kind of experiments?" I sit down in my cylinder.

"Hybrids, I think. You can see, mine is a fox and Mako's is a shark." he points his thumb in the direction of Mako. "They want to see what will happen when humans have the same qualities and abilities as certain animals. Silvie was a combination of three, I think. She had horns like a rhinoceros, could see in the dark like a cat, and could blend into her surroundings like a chameleon. They give us DNA shots in our arms every three days. They give us these features like our tails."

"What about the tests? How do those go?" I ask.

"Every week, they take us out one by one to run tests on our qualities. They test my speed, and for Mako they test his swimming skills and the flexibility of his body."

"And Silvie?"

"Silvie was tested on her vision in the dark and her abilities to blend into her surroundings. Her last tests were on her camouflage, but she failed three of them."

Mako spoke up from his cylinder, facing us again. "If you fail one or two, they don't give you food. But if you fail three..."

"They kill you." Boy finishes. "And since Silvie failed three tests, we watched her get dragged back here and... eliminated." Nobody speaks for a long while after that. I stare at the floor, grieving for this girl I didn't even know. Finally, I ask my last question;

"Do you know what they're going to do with me?" Mako shakes his head, but Boy guesses, "Most likely the same thing as Silvie. They won't stop until they get it right."

"Will I fail?" I ask quietly.

"You had better pray that you don't." Boy says simply.

"It's okay. We will all pass our tests! Right?" Mako looks like he is about to cry.

Boy doesn't answer.

## YEAR ONE

I've been here for a whole year now. I've started growing small horns. They make my head hurt every time they grow. My hair dye should have faded by now, but it's still bright blue. Boy says that Silvie's hair was blue too. I've had a lot of test sessions, and I haven't failed three times yet. The scientists seem very satisfied with my progress so far. Dr. B is our caretaker here. Or, that's what she calls herself, but she doesn't care about us at all. The food here is just slop, and most of the time I can't even tell what it was. Sometimes I fail once on purpose so I don't have to choke down the food every night. If we don't eat, though, they force us to. They don't want us dying unless they do it themselves.

## YEAR TWO

I've started to somewhat see in the dark now, and it makes it really difficult for me to sleep. The scientists say my horns are completely grown in now. It's a good thing I like blue, because I don't think my hair is ever going back to normal. Mako noticed that my eyes are turning yellow. I think they were green before. It's funny, I can't remember a lot of things I used to know before I came here. The only reason I remember my name is because Boy and Mako still call me Charlie. I think they are going to start me on the chameleon DNA soon. Boy says that Silvie used to tell them how difficult the camouflage tests were. I hope I can do well on mine.

## YEAR THREE

My ability to see in the dark is better now, and I have gotten used to sleeping like this. My hair is much longer, but they won't give me a haircut or a hair tie to put it up. Boy's hair is longer as well, and I can't even see his eyes anymore. He has been complaining about not getting enough water. Maybe it's because he is getting larger doses of shark DNA and sharks live in the ocean. I can't camouflage yet, but they are starting to give me the chameleon DNA now. I hope I can pass my tests. I miss Mrs. Jenkins.

## YEAR FOUR

I've started camouflage. So far the scientists are pleased with my progress. Boy doesn't talk much anymore. He spends a lot of his time staring at the floor. Mako has had trouble breathing between testing sessions due to his growing reliance on water. They've finally cleared out Silvie's cell, which is a relief for me. She was a constant reminder of what would happen if I fail my tests. I won't fail my tests. I can't fail my tests. I can fully see in the dark now, but I feel like I've always been able to. Maybe I have. I can't remember.

## YEAR FIVE

How long have I been here? I ask Boy this every couple of days. Somehow he always knows. Five years is a long time. Have I always had yellow eyes? Blue hair? Horns? I can't remember anymore. The days blend together here. If it weren't for Boy, I wouldn't know if I've been here for ten days or ten years. I've had a lot of close calls with my tests. I'm not very good at camouflaging, but the scientists are giving me time to figure out how it works. I need to get

the hang of this before my next tests. I haven't eaten much because I've been failing so often. But I won't end up like Silvie. I can't end up like Silvie.

## YEAR SIX

It has been six years since I got here, according to Boy. The only time he talks is when Mako or I ask him a question. He keeps on failing his tests more often and I'm worried. Mako is too. Sometimes I wake up to him crying, but he never admits it when I ask him. I can't get the hang of my camouflage and the scientists seem angry with me. One time recently Dr. B took Boy away for around an hour. They brought him back after, but Mako said that he could smell blood on him. I wonder what happened. Boy wouldn't tell either of us anything. I miss hearing him talk more often. I can't believe I'm fifteen now. That's how old Boy was when I got here. Now Boy is twenty one and Mako is eleven. My hair has grown out a lot. It goes past my shoulders now. They've had to take Mako out of his cell much more often for water, because he is the most successful out of the three of us and they need to keep him alive. I'm scared. I might end up like Silvie.

## YEAR SEVEN

I've failed. I can't camouflage for the amount of time they want me to. It hurts too much. It sends pain through my entire body to camouflage. Three times. I've failed three times in one session. They took me back to my cell without a word. I don't know when they're going to come back. Mako keeps asking me questions, but I can't bring myself to answer. Boy has gotten worried as well. I'm worried for him, though. He's been failing so many tests. I haven't seen him eat in weeks. His hair falls down past the middle of his back and his eyes are completely covered. Today is the most I've seen him talk in years. I don't want to answer their questions. They'll find out what's wrong soon enough.

"Charlie," Boy says firmly. "I need you to look at me. Please, Charlie." I don't want to look at either of them, but I force myself to turn around. Boy puts his hand on the glass between our cells.

"What happened?" he asks, concern filling his voice.

"I failed, Boy. They're going to come back soon and kill me." I answer flatly.

Mako flinches when I say "kill" and Boy stops moving.

"Oh no!" Mako cries. "We have to get him out, Boy! I don't want Charlie to die."

"Calm down," Boy says to Mako, and then turns back to me. "Charlie, you have to leave."

"How?" I stare down at my hands. "We've tried everything. We can't leave."

Boy shakes his head. "Not we, Charlie. You."

This time, it's me who shakes my head. "No, Boy. I'm not leaving you and Mako here to deal with the consequences."

"It doesn't matter what happens to me. Mako is too promising to them to get rid of. They're after you, Charlie."

I stay silent.

"How are we going to get Charlie out?" Mako asks. He starts to bang his head against the glass, but only small marks form. He steps back and starts to rub his head.

"Mako, stop," Boy orders. "That's not going to help. It's only going to hurt you."

"Then what are we going to do?" Mako flops back down onto the floor of his cell.  
"I'm not sure yet. But we need to get Charlie out of here somehow, and fast." Boy answers. He stays silent for a few minutes and then finally announces,  
"Okay, I have an idea."

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After what seems like eternity, the scientists walk in to find and eliminate me. They approach my cell and I can hear one yell to the others,

"He's gone!" The scientists open my cell quickly and look around. I have to dodge them as they move around the confined space. They decide that I must have gotten out somewhere else, and they rush out of the corridor, leaving the door to my cell open. I exhale silently and fade back into view. My camouflage might not be the best, but it was long enough to stall them. Boy gives me a nod and I slip out of my cell for the first time in seven years.

"Okay, now I'm going to find out how to unlock yours, and then Mako's," I say, quickly rushing over to Boy's cell and struggling with the digital lock.

"No, Charlie," Boy says firmly. "You have to leave us here. We'll be okay."

"I can't, Boy! I can't just leave you here." I choke, the frustration of the lock and the intensity of the situation causing tears to form at the corners of my eyes. I jump back as he slams his fist against the glass.

"Charlie! Listen to me for once in your life," he says, his voice breaking slightly. "Get out of here. There's no time. They'll be back any minute now." Even through his thick hair, I can see that he is looking me straight in the eye. I stare at him for a minute, tears streaming freely down my face now. I put my hand on the glass where his fist still hangs, and he unclenches it to flatten his hand onto mine.

"Goodbye, Boy." I finally whisper, and then I turn and bolt down the hall.

As I run I feel free from the small space of the cell. The walls here are as white as a blank piece of paper and seem familiar. I don't have time to look back at Boy and Mako, but I'm sure they will have a chance to escape soon. At least, I hope they can.

I turn the corner and a scientist spots me. They start to chase me, but I force myself to run faster. This lab is like a maze, but for some reason I think I know how to get out. Memories from my first time here tell me where I have to go. After a few more turns, I see the exit. I stop in my tracks and quickly shove open the door before the scientist can reach me, slamming it behind me just as the scientist catches up to me. I hear the heavy metal door slam against them, a thud against the floor, and then... nothing.

The cold air hits my body, and I look up. The sun stares back down at me for the first time in seven years.

And I realize I think I forgot how blue the sky was.

Author's Note:

Blake is a 19 year old girl, who lives a perfectly normal life, with no complications. Sure, she's hiding a werewolf from the government, and sure, she *was* trained as a government soldier, and sure, she's legally pronounced dead, but that's all perfectly normal.

Blake likes to see the light in the darkest rooms, and find ways to solve complicated problems. She's a powerful magic user, and hates bread crumbs on mac and cheese.

"Let there be light." There is always light, we just don't care to see it. Blake explores this concept in the excerpt, and lets there be light.

Love, Ilana

## Excerpt from Untitled Novel Manuscript

Ilana Kaufman

### FOUR

The full moon was coming. Nomi was asleep (somehow: Blake swears that kid can pass out on command), and Daynel was walking back and forth in the kitchen. He was wearing a shirt and loose pants, head covering still tied tight on his head.

"It's 3pm." Blake says. "Come on, the moon will rise soon."

Daynel spins around. "How do you know this is safe? Because—"

"Daynel, It's *safer* than caging you."

"—if it's not just lock me up—we should just lock me up, maybe they're right about—"

"Stop. No." Blake sighs, pushing the large crate over to Daynel. "We will talk about this later. Get in the crate and for the love of *my* sanity go easy on yourself."

Daynel's eyes dart back and forth between her and the crate, and Blake considers just hauling him in herself, her metal leg be damned, before he steps forward.

"Okay." He folds himself into the crate, and Blake lifts the crate up with her Magic, taking Daynel out of the house.

Stepping out into the road lets her see that nobody is out, so she begins the slow walk towards the woods, metal clanking against the concrete. The sun only a few breathes from the horizon. She passes her neighbors one by one, counting the houses as they pass by.

"Oi!" An old man on a lawn chair calls out. Blake turns to face him slowly, easily, but she feels Daynel curl in on himself in the crate. "What you out here carrying a crate for?"

"I found some road kill, thought I'd drop it in the woods." Lies lies lies.

The man just nods. "Be careful of those mutants, I hear they transforming tonight." He says it like it's nothing, like it's a normal thing to call other people mutants. Like it's a normal thing to tell *Blake* to be careful.

"Oh really?" She's sure if the man wasn't so rambly, he would have heard her sarcasm slip through. "I had no idea."



"Yeah well, you're lucky I caught you." He leans back. "I've been keeping watch for them. 'Case the governments lost a few."

"Right. Well, I should go, don't want to be out too late."

"Yeah. You do that." The man closes his eyes, and begins to snore.

Blake sets the box down, silently. "Onunasemura." She whispers, watching as her magic flows up to him. The blue circling around his head before stealing his mind. She waits as the memories surround her. Watching as everything from his kid's first steps to his first great loss wrap around her in a blue fog. She doesn't touch anything, tries not to even look as she waits for the most recent memory to fade in. It appears before her, a small cloud at her fingertips.

Blake looks away as she crushes it.

She lets the fog go, watching as it slips back into the old man's mind. His snores ringing through the empty road.

"Now who's the monster." She mumbles, picking up the crate. Daynel's life form is still tense, and Blake can't even blame him.

She drops the crate down once they're in the woods. "Hey, you can get out now, we've still got a bit of a way to go but we're out of eye sight."

Daynel pushes the crate open and stumbles out. The Moon seems to be laying its claws in him, stretching him taller than before. He looks sickly, as though his bones are breaking.

"It's not far, but we need the crate to get back."

Daynel nods, His frown stretching the sacred side of his face down and pulling on his ear.

Blake begins to walk, watching as Daynel stays a step behind her. "Do you want me to keep your head covered?"

Daynel walks mechanically, words passing through him before whipping his head around to face her. "What!?"

"...You're wearing a head covering, do you want me to keep your head covered?"

His dark eyes are blown wide and his mouth agape. "Why are you asking me this."

"Cuz, like, I don't know." Blake sighs, turning away from him. "When you're a wolf, your brain won't be there but it's still your body. I can cover your head if you want."

"I..." Blake hears him stumble, but she keeps her eyes firmly on the ground. "I normally just take it off before the transition and then put it back on."

Blake frowns. "Is that what you want?"

"...I don't think about what I want."

"Okay. That's.. fine. You don't have to." The silence stretches and Blake turns to look at Daynel. He seems taller than ever, new stretch marks lining his skin. Blake swallows. It's not his claws that scarred him; his skin pulls itself apart. *I can't fix that.*

Daynel coughs, small and timid. "...I think I'd like it if you kept it on."

Blake looks up at his face, craning her neck. "Okay. I will."

He nods, turning his head away. The forest cracks beneath their shoes as they wander out into the dark, silence swallowing the space between them.

The trees open up to a clearing, tall trees surround the dead circle, the shadows creeping towards their legs.

"We're here." Blake says. Daynel nods, and steps away from Blake to take a look around the clearing, but time was never kind.

The moon peeks over the horizon.

Daynel collapses onto the ground, and Blake quickly puts a shield around them, her Blue magic setting a fog just before dead land meets trees. *Thank god for defense class.*

Daynel's face twists in something that would resemble indigestion, if not for the helpless look in his eyes. His skin breaks, and he whimpers as blood and muscle are revealed to fresh air. His arms change shape, muscles building as the gurgly mess of blood seeps onto the land. His stomach bulges out, sprouting tan and gray fur. He rises high, legs no longer human, replaced by rabid thighs and hairy paws.

For a brief moment, he is nothing more than a terrified boy with the body of a wolf.

*He's younger than me.* Daynel's face begins to twist, his eyes squeezing shut as his skull pushes outwards, tearing at the scared side of his face. Fur sprouts, then a muzzle, and deep, deep orange eyes.

The wolf has risen.

## FIVE

-ten years ago, age 9-

Blake stared at the twenty ounces in her hand. Mother had dropped Ray and her at the lake, shouted 'don't embarrass me!' and left. Which was.. odd. Normally they were underwatch twenty four seven. Ray didn't seem to care, he was already bouncing up and down next to her.

"Come on come ooon!" He tugged at the sleeve of her swimsuit, shaking her back and fourth. He was just wearing swim shorts, but Blake had a long sleeve cover up on. She was already perceived as a boy, she didn't need to show her nipples to. "Let's go!"

"Okay okay." She shoved him. "Let's go."

They walked over to the lake, Ray speeding up at the last second to cannonball into the lake. Blake stood still as he splashed her with water.

"Get in!" He shouted.

"No, I'm going to go to the shop."

"BOOO BORING!"

Blake ignored him, turning to walk over to the tiny cabin-like building. She pushed through the door, bell ringing softly after her.

"'Ello!" The lady at the desk said. "Can I help ya?"

"Oh, no. Not at the moment, thank you." The lady nodded, and Blake went to look at the toys. A plastic pony, a dog stuffy, a gator tooth game, and..

She stared at the toy. It was colored burgundy and a faded shade of gold, top hat upon its smiling head. It's neck was stretched upwards just enough to make Blake reach for her own neck, rubbing away the discomfort. The body was nothing more than a glorified hump, stretching far longer in the back then could be convenient. Legs came more out of its hips then its bottom with the knee's placed far too high up and the caves stretching too low. Standing on two shaky circles, wobbling at the slightest wind. Yet its arms were the most

nonsensical by far. Tiny twigs stretching outwards and ending with them splitting off in three different directions. It felt mutilated, disheveled, and unloved.

It was perfect.

She picked the toy up and ran towards the desk. "Um, miss!"

"Yes dear boy?"

"Can I get this?" She pushed the toy onto the counter.

"Oh, sure dearie." The lady typed something on her computer. "That'll be 5 ounces."

Blake hands her the bill, bouncing back and forth as the lady gets her change.

"Alright, there you go-"

Blake didn't hear the end of her sentence, she had already stuffed the cash in her pocket, grabbed the toy and ran out of the store, eager to show Ray.

"Ray!" She yelled, as she ran to the edge of the lake where she last saw him. And he was still there, he was just swimming with a boy. "Ray. Hi."

"Hi Blake!" He grins up at her. "This is Fuga. Fuga, this is my twin brother Blake!"

"Hey." Blake turned to the boy for only a moment before turning back to Ray. "Look at this toy I got!" She held it by the back and waved it around.

"Woah!" Ray swam closer to get a better look. "That's so cool!"

"I know." Blake smiled, clutching the toy to her chest.

"It is pretty rad." Fuga said, and Ray whipped around excitedly to look at him. "Like, one time when I was little I.." Blake tuned him out, staring at her brother as he stared at Fuga. He stared at him like he built the world or something. *Oh my god, Ray's got a crush.*

"Do you want to join us?" Fuga said, smiling at her kindly.

"I think I'm gonna go get ice cream, you two have fun." She said, walking backwards off the shore. "Have fun, be safe."

"BYE!" Ray yells.

Blake didn't respond, already walking away. She had to find a tree where she could spy on them. *Probably the great oak tree. Yeah, that'll do.*

She steps up to it, setting the toy on the best branch and kicking off the lowest to get there herself. She positioned herself so it'd be awkward for them to look at her, but she can look at them. They were still swimming around, laughing and talking. Her brother had positioned himself so Fuga was the center of his view. *And his world, apparently.*

Blake scooted further down the branch to get a better view. Fuga was telling a story with his hands, making waves in the water. Her brother, the ant brained fool, was following every motion like some puppy, head moving in circles with Fuga hands.

"He has it soooo bad." Blake giggled at her toy, leaning over to watch. He was responding to something Fuga said, *oh my god, is he tucking his hair behind his ear?* And-

The branch broke, and Blake fell out of the tree.

Screeching and screaming, she jumped out from the pile of branches, violently brushing twigs off her top. She glanced back at Her brother, he's *still* gazing lovingly at Fuga, but Fuga had noticed her. *Oh my god.*

"Blake!" Fuga shouted, jumping out of the water and running towards her.

"Huh?" Ray said, spinning his head around before spotting her. "Oh crap. Blake!"

Fuga reached her first. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, thank you for asking. I'm gonna go jump in the lake." She smiled at him.

"Blake dude are you okay?" Her brother asked, bending over to catch his breath. She bumped into him as she walked away. "Fuga's my favorite boy now."

"Huh?" Ray called as he started to walk behind her. "Wait. Why wouldn't you be your favorite boy? Why was it me?"

*Oh. Right.* "...Narcissism is bad."

"You're my favorite boy too Blake!" Fuga said. She shot a thumbs up at him.

"HEY!"

"You're my third favorite boy Ray, don't worry."

"Huh? Who's your second?!"

"My dad."

*My dad.* Ray mimicked, making a face. "He's not a boy, he's a man."

"Well then you're my second favorite!"

"NEITHER of you are my favorite boy. I'm my own favorite boy."

"UGH." Blake turned her head to face Ray. "Nobody cares!"

Fuga bumped shoulders with Ray, and Blake turned back around. "Don't worry, I care a lot about who your favorite boy is, because there is nobody who-

Blake jumped into the lake.