

Ink Spatters in The Heart

by

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This creative fiction and poetry thesis sheds the importance on impersonal and personal relationship and how they may affect an individual. This thesis is about love, loss, growth, and grief. Even though this thesis includes fictional and real-life experiences, the themes presented are universal and relatable. Therefore, these experiences can still touch the lives of readers and spark emotion from it. Moreover, this thesis centers on how individuals who face hardships and tough decisions begin to heal and learn to carry the weight of life.

Introduction

My admiration for books started in the womb.

My mother read numerous books to me. Newspapers, magazines, and even the titles of cereal boxes. She wanted my world to be words and imagination. This was a bond that originated from the familiarity of storytelling and the soft harmony of my mother's voice. While I grew and grew in the months that followed, literature resembled a home for me. Once I came into the world, that fascination did not fade away. My room became a home for books such as *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats, and *The Junie B Jones* series by Barbara Park.

Not long after, the local library became my second home. Oftentimes, I spent hours reading through the various sections of the library, particularly the young adult section. Throughout my middle school and high school years, that was what I mostly read young adult fiction such as 39 Clues and Percy Jackson. Even though 39 Clues and Percy Jackson primarily explores a coming-of-age story, I never got tired of them. A coming-of-age story can be a strong foundation, but the characters and their interactions make the story more engaging. The possibilities are practically endless as you can see through various characters, cultures, and environments.

Books can mold a place into your heart. Sinking deep and fill your organs with blood and ideas. Sitting with a good book feels warm, content like sipping a cup of hot chocolate next to frosted window. Stepping into a novel can remind one of a freshly refurbished room, a place full of discovery, clarity, and authenticity.

Having said that, this is the backbone of why I wanted to become a writer. I wrote at so many stages in my life, from first grade to third grade to fourth grade and so on. Each moment became my paper trail for me to look back on and be amazed by how far I have come.

Navigating my way through the graduate program, fiction has been my main focus. A short time ago, I started to lean toward writing poetry as well. I use poetry to express myself emotionally.

There is so much freedom in the confines of each stanza. Writing fiction has a sense of familiarity, writing poetry is more challenging. Therefore, I thought it was best to feature both forms of writing in my thesis.

The heart of my thesis is to explore the importance of human connection. This thesis will focus on the topics of loss, remembrance, insecurities, love, and self-discovery. Through various types of human connection such as *Storage* (familial love), *Philia* (deep friendship), *Philautia* (self-love), and *Pragma* (enduring love). Some pieces showcase grief, such as *19,378 Days Around the Sun and Changed Locks*, poetry pieces dedicated to my late father. *From The Rearview* is a poem that showcases nostalgia for my grandparents' old home and the memories of my time spent there. *Apricot Variations* is a piece that is a celebration of color and emotions.

It was another English course which I evidently stumble upon an autobiography called *Elizabeth Toro: The Odyssey of an African Princess* by Elizabeth Nyabongo. This story focuses on an African woman named Elizabeth, who desires more than royal title. Nyabongo has had numerous accomplishments throughout her life. At one time she was a princess, activist, actress, and model living inside the kingdom which left her lacking experience from the outside world. Therefore, she is removed from her life of royalty and placed in the world of academia. Readers

learn that Elizabeth's story proves that no matter where you come from, you can achieve anything you set your mind to.

From a reader's standpoint, it's a fascinating story. The story itself is intriguing as growing up in black royalty is practically unheard of. Personally, there was barely any representation growing up. Especially not the magnitude of a black person being considered a royal figure. Although this autobiography discusses the pressures that would come with being a part of a royal family, I was more interested to see how that upbringing affected a young black girl. Thus, when a film such as *Black Panther* was released, it feels empowering to see your race portrayed with such grace and beauty. It resonated with so many people as you can see yourself being represented.

As a black woman, I wanted to provide that sense of pride to anyone who did not receive it due to lack of accessibility or representation. For that reason, I created this same sediment within a story featured in a thesis called *What Tomorrow Brings*. A story that heavily focuses on a young black princess named Troy who is experiencing her own coming-of-age story, shown in this part here,

“Do you think being a queen is hard,” Pari asks after a short while.

“I don't know, maybe,” Troy replies. “Mother doesn't make it seem like it's too hard.”

Troy ponders what being Queen is actually like. She is surrounded by remarkable role models, and she wonders if she will live up to the expectation. Her fears mirror my own personal experience as I find it hard to live up to expectations, as undeniably places a heavy weight your

shoulders. Listening in to other people's experiences, she's still uncertain. However, a particular encounter causes her to pinpoint who she wants to be as queen.

After reading Nyabongo's work I learned that being a princess is more than fancy clothes and a jeweled crown. Elizabeth shares her experience with readers, demonstrating how important it is to carry yourself and to make the right decisions. Nyabongo notes, "I had to remind myself that I was in a sense public property, a symbol of my country and my culture. My life was not mine, so others could afford to indulge and to let themselves go, I could not." (37) Both stories feature women who are not only strong but strive to turn their insecurities into confidence.

When writing, vulnerability is essential to a character's growth. Thus, changes in life are expected. Reading Nyabongo recount the tragic death of her father was heart wrenching.

Nyabongo writes, "I threw myself at my father's feet, remaining there in silence. This became my spot for the nine-day mourning period. I felt the eyes of a grieving woman watching me, noticing I wasn't wailing. "She's being brave," she cried out. (64)

Her voice is raw and full of anguish. Her words on her father's death, speak volumes. As she realizes that her pain is on display. For her people and the world to witness firsthand. She now must take a big step into maturity. Nyabongo's transition from childhood to young adulthood is an enormous change. Consequently, growing up in a world of royalty enhances that experience. Elizabeth's experience inspired me to explore how change could affect a child as young as Troy.

Moving forward, my path on autobiography was once again clouded by fiction. It wasn't long that I started reading *Funny You Should Ask* by Elissa Sussman. In this novel, Chani

Horowitz is a young reporter who wants more for herself and for her career. She's hungry for deep and complex stories. When she interviews the dazzling Gabe Parker, a heartthrob actor who has stolen the hearts of many, everything changes. Chani's life and career skyrockets, her life becoming a story on its own. Meanwhile, Chani and Gabe's relationship is left to be desired as it's alluded to that they go their separate ways. The novel hops from past to present, giving the reader space to figure out what happened between the two. Sussman takes a unique approach to storytelling here, mainly due to structure. The first few chapters are about the initial interview.

Hence, I thought of past story I have written, "I'm lovin', I'm livin', I'm pickin' it up", as it's similar in structure and theme. Chani is extremely nervous during her interview with Gabe. Regardless of his good looks and charms she puts her career first. Throughout the novel Sussman shows the behind-the-scenes aspects of an interview. Sussman writes,

“My questions-painstakingly written out—were ones that I could answer. I stared down at my notebook, dread sitting heavy in my stomach. Gabe cleared his throat.

“Or we could just talk,” said Gabe.

I couldn't tell if he was being nice or condescending. Either way, it indicated that he didn't think I could do my job. It was going to be okay, I told myself. When I interviewed Jennifer Evans, I'd started the interview by asking about her hometown and she'd ended up talking nonstop for almost twenty minutes.” (38)

It's a true representation of what it's like to conduct an interview. You are filled with anxiety as you wonder, “Am I doing this right?" Am I asking the right questions?"

As a writer, this honest approach to interviewing inspired my writing with "I'm lovin', I'm livin', I'm pickin' it up", as Jade is a reporter fresh on the scene, wanting to get her first interview right. This desire to get it right feels like my own experience as I continuously want to get my writing right. I want to form a connect with my readers and give them the chance to form a connection with my work. It's an essential and profitable exchange to form this connection as it provides the novel more value and substance.

Furthermore, this Sussman's work has similar story beats to a romantic comedy. It's cheesy, yet predictable. Two people from different worlds collide, navigating their lives together. While reading this, films like Notting Hill and Never Been Kissed come to mind. Films that create a sense of warmth and comfort as you can just sit and watch the story unfold without feeling drained. In "I'm lovin', I'm livin', I'm pickin' it up", Bonnie Clemmons is a character who has suffered a major setback in her life but is recovering, expressed in this snippet,

“What I've learned is that everything can change in an instant. It's cliché, I know but it's true. I was lucky. I was given a second chance and I'm not planning on wasting it,” said Clemmons,” I found that even after everything I'm happy where I am now. I'm excited to see where this path takes me.”

Recovery is not easy, but she is managing and navigating her way through it. Through the love and support of her family and friends, she is rebuilding her life. This is not just a romantic comedy between her and another person. She is falling in love with herself again, with some comedic beats in between. My goal is to have characters navigate through external and internal conflicts, and hopefully, readers can relate to their struggles and triumphs as well.

Struggles are common on a writer's journey in completing a novel. I continuously struggle with grammar in my writing process. The type of grammar that I struggle with is verb tenses. I spend majority of my time frustrated as differentiating past and present tense invades my brain like migraines. I tend to blend the two in my work, shown here.

“How would you like your hair?” Her mother asks.

“Huh.” Troy asked.

“Your hair, how would you like it,” Katrina said.

My readers are often confused by the blending creating a blaring disconnection between the reader and the story. During my time at SUNY Brockport, to solve this problem I have endured numerous writing sections with professors and used grammar correction software/apps and wiring advice columns. No matter what I do I still make the same mistakes. It's extremely disheartening as it falls like an impossible obstacle to overcome. But what I noticed is this made me do something I rarely do: ask for help. I was never one to ask for help, not in my personal life or my writing ventures either. I thought writing was supposed to be a relationship full of cloudless skies and starry nights, but I was wrong. Thankfully that didn't stop me from being curious. I often wondered, “Why am I struggling with this? Why do I keep getting this song?”

For the longest time, I thought my writing and I were a single unit. I realize that I am the mentee, and writing is the mentor. This made me realize that I still have so much to learn and absorb on my writing journey. Through it all, writing is one of the few things that I feel confident in doing. It's something I vow not to give up on.

From experience, you are going to face highs and lows as a writer. You are going to struggle in certain areas and strive in others. I have improved on developing a proper setting mainly because of imagery. Creating an image in my head has given me a clear and vivid representation of who/what the setting to include. This strategy provides a road map to how I want the scene to unfold without feeling uncertain. The beauty of this duo is that your words can become a magnetic force, pulling readers into a world that is engulfed in beauty and wonder, show in this excerpt,

“Then she led Jade over to the living room. The room was warm and bright as there was a large window that let the room fill up with light. The living room is full of a gray haze as the morning dew forms a cloud around the house. The living room had a brown lounge chair, lush brown pillows off-white couches. On the back of one of them was a long orange blanket. Jade’s hand brushes across the soft material. For someone who spent eighty-five percent of her time in a van this home was very well lived in and homey.”

In this excerpt, the setting is lively and full of detailed scenery. It’s full of color and items that could be found around anyone’s home. This creates the possibility of a reader personifying this fictional home as their own home, a place to feel warmth and familiarity.

Writing resembles a blank canvas, one who holds a brush contains endless possibilities. Writing provides someone to build, dream and process. A combination that can help someone thrive and learn in a world that is constantly evolving.

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19,378 Days Around the Sun

My earliest memory of dad was pancakes.

Pancakes that I didn't get to eat because I bit a big hole in my tongue the night before.

However, he gave me a big hug.

Like he couldn't eat pancakes either like we were in the same boat.

I remember the warmth, like a warm blanket.

From the very beginning, we were twins,

Same noses, Same eyes, Same glasses. Same Face.

Same Everything.

The phrase, "You look just like your dad" was always thrown at me like a basketball.

But it would stick to me like a badge of honor.

We always had a bond over music.

From hours-long music sessions in the basement

Looking through his old cassette tapes. He just had that knack for knowing music, the beats, the tempo, the history, all of it.

His excitement was infectious as I asked, who's this (the first I ever heard *Forever my Lady*, by Jodeci) or who's that the first time I heard "*Square Biz*" by Teena Marie.

And if you ask him about the history of Hip hop, he will turn into a history teacher. He will go on and on, and on. Spilling out words, and verses that would sink into my brain.

There's no denying he passed that admiration to me.

Writing was another thing that tied us together.

Scribbles of phrases and story ideas filled our journals.

Gliding through the bookshelves of Barnes and Nobles, sprinkled ideas on us like a freshly sharpened pencil.

Dreams of writing that perfect novel forever on the horizon.

A whole week gone.

I noticed a butterfly fluttering around our backyard. It's wings flapping, a confident glide. It fluttered close as if it wanted to come close but remained a respectful distance. Still in proximity.

Fluttering.

Following.

Familiar.

It wondered if it was you. As if your soul had ridden the coattails of this butterfly's wing.

I read that people send messages through animals.

Here you are, a wing of comfort, saying hey I'm okay don't worry about me.

But I still worry, I will always Worry, just like I will feel pain.

Memories of lunch dates and movie ventures will always surround me.

Changed Locks

Did someone change the locks?

Did the number of steps to your door stay the same?

Did someone forget their key or ended up on the wrong floor?

Did the smell of Chinese noodles get silenced by an open window?

Did your music stain the walls,

Leaving an explosion of cassette tapes, discs, and unsung lyrics?

Hip Hop sounds like the blues

Achy and permanent

Melancholy laced in the base

I try to maintain the bridges you molded, it's hard to hold them up sometimes, my hands ache
and puffy.

I missed when Thursday and Sundays were reserved just for us

To eat

To wander

To learn

To do nothing

A passenger seat now empty

In a shape of an adult sized ghost

What Tomorrow Brings

Inches felt like miles as she reached for this orange.

The sun stung Troy's eyes as it shone through the branches of the large tree. This was the largest tree in the garden as the roots twisted and curled in endless loops. This garden had rows and rows of trees with apples, lemons, and cherries. However, this tree was special. This orange tree was the only orange tree on the island of Soliana. Many thought it was a sign as it could possibly bring luck and good fortune. This tree which was once bare was blossoming with oranges in the warmth of sunshine.

Of course, the best one was at the top.

"Troy, you need to get out of that tree."

Troy looks down at Pari, who was tugging at the bottom of her own dress. Stitched and then occasionally patched by her mother, Pari's dress was mostly white but had red stripes. Pari's round face and dimpled cheeks made her look six, not twelve. She kept leaning from side to side watching Troy's every movement. It made Troy smile that the young girl cared so much. Troy, who was now sitting on a thick branch, stood up. Her feet curled as she got on her tippy toes to reach out. Her fingers stretched out and grabbed the orange from its stem quickly.

"*Success,*" Troy thought as she tucked the orange under arm. She made her way down.

"Troy, you can't just do that, you could've gotten hurt," Pari says as Troy's feet finally touch solid ground. Troy shrugs, "I'm fine, plus I climb trees way better than you."

Pari sighs as Troy hands her the orange. Pari took it, and dug around in her boot, until she found her knife. The young girl sliced the fruit in half, leaving one half in her hand and giving

the other half to Troy. Troy took a huge bite of the orange. She hoped that this orange would give her luck for the ceremony tomorrow. It was her rite of passage; she was going to start training to be a princess tomorrow. And yes, she was born a princess, but because she was turning twelve, she needed to start training. In the following years, she would learn skills such as combat training, analyzing treaties, and learning different languages. These skills would help her on her journey to becoming a queen.

Eventually Troy and Pari lay down in the grass enjoying the warm breeze. It calms her nerves to see the sun peek through the emerald leaves. Troy ran her hand through the dancing flowers, feeling them twirl and curl against her fingers.

“Do you think being a queen is hard,” Pari asks after a short while.

“I don’t know, maybe,” Troy replies. “Mother doesn’t make it seem like it’s too hard.”

Her mother, Katrina, was a queen who was considered majestic in the eyes of her people. Troy remembered her mother had told her a story once that when she was a young queen there was a war. A long bloody war that had nearly destroyed the kingdom. Her father, Raheem had begun to round up their troops and began discussing battle strategies. However, her mother refused to stand by and just watch their soldiers fight for them. So, she went into battle. She put her life on the line for her people without hesitation. Katrina had spent hours in the sick bay, learning how to make her people better, *stronger* than ever. Troy knew by the look on people in the kingdom’s faces, that they held great admiration for her. She had always loved that about her mother. As long as Troy could remember, her mother was fearless, extremely compassionate and all around an amazing queen. Troy aspires to be just like her one day. She just didn’t think that the day would come so soon.

“Yeah, you’re right,” Pari says.

Troy rolls on to her side, facing Pari. “What do you think”?

“I feel like being a queen is the same as being a princess, just with extra steps,” Pari says.

“So, you’re saying that my job as princess is quite easy,” Troy says.

Pari laughs, saying, “No, what I am saying is that you have more responsibility, you must make lots of decisions. Decisions people may or may not like, hard decisions that are beneficial for your country.”

“Hmm,” Troy says.

It felt like Troy had an idea of what being a queen was, while Pari had the entire picture. Maybe that was due to her being trained since she was three to know about royal politics. Pari’s main purpose was to serve the royal family. She was assigned to Troy when she was seven. Troy was taught to treat her with dignity and respect. The young princess thought of her as a younger sister, as her own flesh and blood sisters were a few years older than her. After they ate their oranges, Troy wiped her juice-stained hands on her white dress with purple stripes, hoping it wouldn’t stain but dry in the sun. Troy requests that they go down to the beaches in search of seashells.

The beach was practically empty as there were some women on the far side washing clothes. Troy runs to the end of the shore; it was low tide, and she felt the damp sand stick in between her toes. She sees her favorite shells, blush pink spiral shells, orange shells with beige insides, some white ones with polka dots. She grabs a few of them and tuck them into her

pockets. The sky was full of puffy white clouds that drifted and froze as they watched the young girls dance and prance around. Like the world had stopped just to see them dance.

“Troy,” Katrina calls out to her.

The girls were in mid spin as Troy sees her mother approach them. Her long black hair, now in a ponytail, she wore a long yellow sleeveless dress. There's a seashell necklace pressed against her brown skin making her glow as the sun washed over her as if it was her own personal spotlight. Pari quickly stops and bows.

“It is time to return to the castle, dinner will be ready soon,” Her mother says.

“Yes, Mother.” Troy says.

Once Troy had bid farewell to Pari, her mother went to the throne room to see how everything was going for tomorrow. Troy walks into her sister Nyah's room. Her sister was at the far side of the room sitting at her desk. Her blue silk dress barely fit in the chair she was sitting in. Troy walked over and saw that she was drawing, her quilted pen was sharp as the pen began to draw a large woodland area. The girl was always drawing, her desk was full of sketches of people, her walls full of paintings.

“Nyah, Troy says.

“Hmm.” Her sister says.

“What are your opinions about being queen ?” Troy says before hopping onto her sister's bed.

“I think it's a huge responsibility.” Nyah says as she begins to erase parts of her work.

“Right, ” Troy agreed, “There’s so many rules.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Nyah said, “Yes, there are rules, but they are there for a reason.”

“We can’t do whatever we want, if that was the case, we would be ruling the world”

Nyah continued, blowing the eraser crumbs off the paper.

“However, what we can do is make the best of being queen while staying within the lines of the rules that have been set.” She continues, “As queen, I want to explore the world, I’ve been around for sixteen years and never stepped off this island, not once. I want to come back and teach my people what’s going on in the world.”

Troy nods then said, “But won’t that be scary?”

“Yes, Nyah said as a smile began to form on her face,

“But that’s a chance I’m willing to take.”

After talking with her sister, Troy walked to the kitchen, servants were scattered about their grand kitchen as they prepared for dinner. The sweet aromas made her stomach growl. She sees a bunch of muffins sitting on a golden tray. She spots a bunch of muffins sitting on a golden tray. These muffins look rich and plump, containing sweet honey and bananas. She grabs one and runs out toward the backend of the castle.

The warm breeze carries her dress as she runs across the grass. She walks down the hill to the back garden. The lake is one of her favorite places. She likes to sit near the edge and just think. Think about the future, her future. She sits there and picks her muffin apart.

“Excuse me, come back here,” A voice calls out. There was a ton of commotion at the back exit. She turns around to see a young girl, about the age of five racing down the hill. The girl was fast, but Troy is faster. Troy quickly grabs the girl, hastily grabbing her arm. The young girl’s dress unravels, the ground is then covered in banana-honey muffins.

“You little cretan,” Warren, one of her father’s royal subjects exclaims, “How dare you steal from the royal family”. The young girl looks down ashamed. Her shoulders hung low, and Troy could tell she was trying not to cry. Warren, who hastily brushed some grass from his navy suit. Troy watches as Warren ponders in his mind about how he will get rid of the child when Troy raises her hand.

“I got this.” Troy says, her voice strong and steady. Warren nods, annoyed and relieved as he can return to his duties. Warren leaves, Troy and the girl are now alone. Troy looks at the girl, her hair in two short ponytails that are pointed straight out rather than down her back. Her round face soft and full of expression.

‘You’re not running away.’ Troy asks.

The girl shrugs, “The food is dirty, I’ve failed.”

“How so.”?

“My mother expects me to do my job, she wants me to get fresh sweets because her hands are sore from doing chores.” She sighs, “I’m a horrible baker, so I decided no-one would miss a few sweets here.”

“What about your siblings,”? Troy asks.

“My sister is a baby, she just cries and eats, ” the young girl responds.

“What’s your name?”

“Abbi.”

“Okay Abbi, come with me.”

The girls enter the kitchen. Troy walks through the large room, she grabs some eggs, butter, and yeast. Then Troy mixes it into a bowl. Meanwhile Abbi stands on the sidelines. Troy beckons her over.

“Look now, we must make the dough,” Troy explains. The two of them begin to knead the dough. A frequent motion until the dough was smooth. They grease the dough up and let it set for a while. After it settles down, they cut it up into six individual pieces and then stuff it into the oven.

“I hope they turn out alright?” Abbi exclaims.

“They will.” Troy promises.

They came out golden brown with a soft inside. Troy sprinkles a bit of honey around the buns, “Now, you have your sweets,” Troy said happily, her hands clasped together. Abbi squeals and begins to stuff them into her pockets. Troy shakes her head at the girl, “I’ve gotten something better than these pockets.” Troy fetches one of the old wicker baskets from her room, once she returns, she sees Abbi and the sweet buns have disappeared.

She can still smell the sweetness of honey in the air.

That night after dinner, once her stomach was full of chicken, vegetables, and blueberry pie she now sat on her bed. Her mother who was now in purple silk pajamas had her legs criss crossed as she had Troy in her lap. Troy's braids were taken out, leaving her hair in a giant curly afro. Her mother told her that her hair needed to be braided for tomorrow's ceremony.

"I tried to help a girl today." Troy says.

"Hmm." Her mother replies. Her mother just listens.

"I tried to help her make some sweet buns after she stole some muffins." Troy says.

Her mother doesn't say anything. Troy feels stupid.

"I made the sweet buns, and she stole from me." Troy squeezes her knees, "Again".

"How does that make you feel?" Her mother asked.

"Angry, because I trusted her, sad because she had to steal again." Troy shivers.

Her mother kisses the top of her head, "This happens, it's a risk to put your trust in people."

"Is it worse when you are queen?" Troy asks.

"It depends on the situation, I try to think with my gut and consider the best in people, but I prepare for the worst as well." Her mother answers.

"Consider the best, prepare for the worst." Troy mutters.

They are quiet for a few minutes.

"When I'm queen, I'm going to make sure that people feel safe and secure," Troy says.

Her mother is silent. Troy continues.

“Even when she stole, I want to feel like she shouldn’t have to, I want her life to be better,” Troy says, “When I become queen, I want things to change, I want to make that the right decision to make things better. Her mother begins untangling her braids.

“All in due time darling”, Her mother says.

Silence falls over them.

“How would you like your hair?” Her mother asks

“Huh.” Troy says.

“Your hair, how would you like it,” Katrina says. “You need to start making decisions like this.”

These decisions were always made for her. She never really thought of it before.

“Decisions about my hair, " Troy replies.

“Yes, if you want to start making decisions you should start now,” Her mother said.

Her mother squeezed her shoulders.

“I’m still scared, what if I mess up, what if I want to reject my title, what if this change is the wrong choice?” Troy asks.

“Love, you will have setbacks, everyone does but I have a feeling that you will be great.”

Her mother says.

Troy pouts, but feels slightly better, more confident, her mother wraps her arms around her tightly.

“My love, you can still be you,” Katrina says. “Nobody is asking you to change who you are, especially not me”.

Troy nods.

“It’s tough getting used to it but you will understand what I mean someday.” Katrina says.

Troy nodded, then said, “I went to the giant orange tree in the garden today, I picked the one at the top, hoping that it would give me the best luck for the ceremony.”

Her mother laughed, “I did too, I was so nervous the night before.”

This made Troy feel better, “Do you think that the magic of that tree is real?”

“Well, it has been here for generations, when I was little, I would listen to the elders say there was this ancient myth as this orange tree would bring people luck and fortune. I didn’t believe it, Katrina says. But I was so nervous I went to the orange tree the night before my training. I got an orange and the next day, my first day of training went well, very well actually.”

“Really?” Troy asked.

“Hmm,” Katrina says, “Best decision I ever made.” Then Troy squeals as her mother tickles her sides, “Besides having you and your sisters.”

They were silence for a few moments, then Troy says,

“Mother.” Troy asks.

“Hmm.” Katrina says before she kisses the top of her daughter’s head.

“Can I have my hair in two big puffs.” Troy asks.

“Of course, darling.”

“Also, can you put those orange flowers in my hair,” Troy asks gleefully, “The ones right next to the castle.”

“Of course,” Her mother exclaims.

“Also, can my dress be like....”

From the Rearview

You never really liked goodbyes

The curtains in your windows remained shut

But you blinked as I took that final picture

Your hazel exterior shined like a frozen candy bar as it began to fold and crinkle

Memories fill the cracks on the walls as I see pictures with empty frames

The halls forever smell with fresh pound cake and sound of cherry jingle bells

But then the house creaks and cries as we walk across the empty floorboards

Outside the flowers twirling in their flowerpots as we walk past

I begin to pull out of the driveway, I see the flag on the side of the house move

A small wave from the flag as I finally pull away from the hard blacktop.

The house quickly became smaller and smaller, a blurb in the cull de sac

The house became terrifyingly still, its heartbeat slowing down...

Until the doorbell rings.

Time Can't Stop Me Quite Like You Did

Autumn had finally settled in Williamsport, Indiana. The wind whisked leaves into a ball of orange, yellow and green. Up and coming actress Aimee Patterson nuzzled into her face into her pillow. The weather forecast had said it would rain throughout the day; she welcomes the darkness. The bed shifts as Alex nuzzles his way into her neck, his raven curls tickling the back of her neck. She sleepily rubs her feet against his, trying to gain the heat that usually radiates off his body. Then his alarm goes off. She groans. Alex whines in agreement and kisses the top of Aimee's head. He pulls away from her and reaches for his phone. The beeping stops. Aimee feels the bed creak as he sits up against the headboard. He unlocked his phone, looking at the texts that he had missed the night before.

“What time do you have to go in,”? She asks, her voice slightly muffled by the pillow.
“Six fifteen”.

“So, it's got to be like-”, Aimee begins. “Five fifteen”. He finishes. Her boyfriend is an amazing actor, time management not so much. He gets up, his feet sliding across their wooden floor as he enters the bathroom.

Filming their indie film, *Lasting Prints*, has been a breeze. Aimee's character Isabelle Louis, an art teacher catches the eye of Alex's character, an upcoming artist named Matthew, who falls in love with her murals in town. Shooting for almost six months had led up to this big scene. Matthew would create a beautiful mural of her as a big romantic gesture. Alex had to be to set early to get ready for it.

They were lucky that their rented apartment was only fifteen minutes away from set. Aimee has grown to love it here and often fantasizes about settling down in a sweet little apartment near the lake.

“When’s your call time,” She hears Alex ask as he comes out of the bathroom.

“8 o’clock,” Aimee replies.

“I only have a few scenes today; you want to go out for pizza after,” Alex’s voice booms into the apartment.

“Sure, I should be done around 3,” She speaks. She watches as he throws on a short black sleeve shirt with black sweatpants. He leaves the room. She hears him flutter about the kitchen, humming to some pop song that they had listened to the night before. He would always bump against their countertop or drum his fingers around the cereal boxes before shaking them into his bowl. A weird harmony that lulls her to sleep on most nights. She gets up too, grabs one of her own sweatshirts and throws it on. She looks at the digital clock next to the toaster, “5:45.” She shakes her head.

“You’re going to be late,” She says as he scoops up the last few oats from his bowl into his mouth. She hears a soft rumble of thunder off in the distance.

“No, I won’t.” He says before slurping the rest of his milk and putting it into the sink. He goes to the door, laces up his shoes. Once he stands up, he smiles at her, his emerald eyes shining in the dimmed light. She doesn’t have to look up at the stars to know she has the brightest one right here in front of her.

“I’ll see you later.”. She nods, before walking backward into their room, saying, “Wait”. She disappears and appears again with a black sweatshirt. She tosses it to him, “It’s going to be raining by the time you get there.” He smiles, “Thank you, honey.” He kisses her nose. She can’t help wrapping her arms around his neck, planting her lips on his. He doesn’t hesitate to reciprocate the kiss, but then quickly pulls away, “Now you’re going to make me late.” He whispers.

She laughs softly, “Okay, okay.” She pulls away.

“I’ll see you later,” He says again.

“Bye.” She replies.

Aimee’s phone rings.

She rolls over onto where her phone rested on the nightstand. Carly, Aimee’s manager’s picture is flashing on the screen. She yawns sitting up, “Carly-”.

Her manager’s voice interrupts her, “Don’t turn on the tv.”

“What do you mean”?

“I need you to come down to set right now, I’ve sent a car for you.”

Aimee throws on some clothes and walks outside to see a black Hummer truck. Once she approaches it, the window rolls down, it’s Carly in the passenger seat. Her sandy brown hair in a tight ponytail, her pale cheeks are flushed, lips curled like she tasted something sour.

“Get in” Carly says.

It felt like ages, but they finally made it. The scene near the field was flooded with people. She ignores Carly calling her name as she gets out and pushes through a crowd full of paparazzi, crew members and the public. She sees other cast members, looking distraught. Lightning flashes in the distance. Aimee kept going, finally making her way to the front. Looking up she sees the loose wires, the singed billboard. There in the clearing, she sees the EMT’s begin zipping up a body bag. She sees flashes of curly raven hair, pale skin bubbling in black and red. She doesn’t even feel it when her knees hit the ground.

It doesn’t feel real, nothing feels real. The ash fills the air like snow. It’s heavy, ugly, and suffocating. A sick parallel to a first meeting that fogs her brain, and her mind is flooded with grief and memories.

A Few Years Ago....

“Aimee, you got to meet Mr. Fletcher.” Carly says. Aimee is quickly pulled along, Carly’s chocolate brown buttoned coat brushes against people as they push past the crowd. Her manager was usually serious and strict but now she was beaming with buzzing excitement.

This is a big party hosted by a famous director (who is nowhere to be seen). Nevertheless, waves and waves of people showed up. The building was surrounded by large glass windows that had a perfect view of Rockefeller Center. Therefore, the Christmas tree was shimmering as flecks of gold sprinkled the room like pixie dust. Regardless of the magic she saw, she had a

good feeling about this. They finally reach Mr. Fletcher, a middle-aged man dressed in a blue button-down shirt and beige pants.

“Mr. Fletcher.” Carly says, “Aimee Patterson”. Aimee shook the man’s hand, “Nice to meet you.”

“Quite a pleasure to meet you, I watched you in Everlasting a few months ago.” Mr. Fletcher says, “You were incredible.”

“Thank you, that’s so kind.” The older man nods, before gesturing to them to sit down. They discuss a new role for her, a fantasy drama. They listed the details, her being a powerful goddess that controls flowers and other plant life and tries to navigate her new surroundings once she lands on earth.

“You were the first person I thought of when I read the script.” Mr. Fletcher says, “It’s yours if you want it.”

“Oh my gosh.” She gently tugs on the bottom of her sleeves, “I would love to.”

“Great.”

“We haven’t really discussed your co-lead, but I was thinking of Alex Wesley.” Mr. Fletcher continued, then a curly haired boy appeared in front of them.

“Ah, Alex, you’ve finally found us,” says Mr. Fletcher. The young man rubs the back of his neck, a slight hint of red on his cheeks.

“Sorry, traffic was crazy.” Alex says.

“Anyway, Alex, meet your co-star.” says Mr. Fletcher says.

Aimee and Alex shake hands.

“Alex.”

“Aimee.”

“We’ve met before.” Aimee says as he sat down beside her, “We were supposed to be rivals on that cooking show.”

His eyes grow wide, arches an eyebrow... thoughts computing....

“Yeahhh, I remember that we were supposed to film that pilot last year,” She laughs at his childish expression, her dimples slightly showing.

“Too bad it fell through,” She says, shaking the curls from her eyes.

“You never know, maybe we have a second chance this time.” Aimee replies.

“Yeah, maybe we do.” Alex said with a smile.

It’s a blur for the next few hours. It’s almost one in the morning once Aimee arrives back to their apartment. Hers now. Her heart aches at the correction. She leans onto the wooden siding of the deck, the waves crashing against the dampen planks down below. She’s cried enough tears to make a name for herself in the ocean.

“His parents will be here tomorrow.” A voice says, “We’ll talk about the funeral arrangements when they get here.” She sees Carly, appearing beside her. As strong as she is, Carly can feel the weight of this crushing her bit by bit. Carly loops her arm with Aimee, who gently lays her head on her shoulder. This is the first time Aimee feels like she can lean her as a friend instead of a manager.

“Regardless of what happened he would want you to have this.” Carly digs into her pocket and gently places a small object into her hand. Aimee looks down, it’s a ring. Its silver coating was burned on the edges, dotted with black spots. He was planning to propose that afternoon. She remembers them talking about marriage but felt like the time wasn’t right yet. She knew it would happen eventually but not like this. What a sick surprise this was.

“The investigators told me it was in his pocket when it happened.” Aimee can feel tears burning in her eyes. It hurts to look at it, so she tucks it in her pocket. A tainted memento.

“Only a few people know about this, ” Carly says in a soft whisper, “But people are going to start asking questions, making assumptions, stories.”

“I know.” Aimee cuts her off, a sharpness in her voice, “It’s going to be an absolute shit show.”

Carly nods in agreement, “It really isn’t fair.”

“When is it ever?” Aimee replies.

Carly then leaves, giving her some alone time.

Aimee curses all the stars in the night sky for taking away the brightest one.

I'm lovin', I'm livin', I'm pickin' it up

First day jitters suck.

Jade Harper felt like a cliché. It was her first day without her mentor or supervision of any kind. But of course, the jitters were racking her brain. This was her first *big* assignment. Her first big assignment interviewing Bonnie Clemmons of all people. Bonnie is such a huge celebrity. A singer with such critically acclaim is super overwhelming. This had to go *perfectly*. Her boss back at the office put a lot of faith in her to not only impress her but do this assignment correctly. Once Jade hears the familiar “*beep*” of her car locking, she smiles. “*Off to a great start*”. She balances her bookbag on her shoulder. She rounds the corner and walks along the chalk sidewalk.

“51... 52... 53, here we go,” Jade mutters.

The house was surprisingly homey for someone who basically lived out of a van. This was a chocolate brown two-story home with tan square doors, small windows, and a small porch. In the garden in front of the house were all types of flowers, such as pansies, lilies, and orchids. Jade walks up the tan steps. Knocks on the door. She waits...No answer. She knocks again, no answer. She checked her phone. It was 1:10. The interview was set for 1:15.

“Maybe I’m at the wrong house.” She thinks.

Before she could turn around...

The door opens. A girl with a round face and brown eyes, her hair raven black that went all the way down her back, stood in front of her. She was dressed in a blue tank top and red striped shorts. Jade quickly puts the phone in her back pocket.

“Jade.”

Jade nods. *Iris Yukimura*, Jade assumed.

The lucky contest winner. The complete unknown with the golden ticket.

“Iris.” The raven-haired girl holds out her hand and Jade shakes it.

“Follow me. You can wait in the living room.” Iris says then adds.

“Can you give us like twenty minutes? Bonnie woke up late this morning.”

Then she led Jade over to the living room. The room was warm and bright as there was a large window that let the room fill up with light. The living room is full of a gray haze as the morning dew forms a cloud around the house. The living room had a brown lounge chair, lush brown pillows off-white couches. On the back of one of them was a long orange blanket. Jade’s hand brushes across the soft material. For someone who spent eighty-five percent of her time in a van this home was very well lived in and homey.

“Just give us like twenty minutes and she will be right down,” Iris says over her shoulder before disappearing around the corner.

Across the way, plastered on the fireplace were photos. Not pictures in frames but polaroid's. Some of them looked old as she noticed the folded corners. Others seemed fresh as if they were printed out yesterday. She noticed at the far end of the fireplace shelf there was a hospital band. It was quiet for a few minutes before Ms. Clemmons finally appeared around the corner. She was dressed in an indigo sweater that was covered by some dark blue overalls that convert to pants. Her hair was in two high braided buns at the top of her head. She smiled when she saw Jade.

Bonnie immediately reaches over and grabs Jade's hand, shaking it firmly.

"Ms. Clemmons."

"Bonnie is fine, we're like the same age."

Jade smiles and nods, "Sure, Bonnie."

Bonnie quickly apologized, but Jade just shook her head.

"It's fine, you gave me time to take one last look over my notes."

They quickly switch places, Jade on the lounge chair and Bonnie now criss cross applesauce on the couch. Pictures and photo shoots don't do her justice. She is so pretty-- her brown skin, her hazelnut eyes. But what Jade liked is that her body language didn't scream, "Look at me, I'm so pretty." No, her body language told a different story, just in that simple introduction told Jade that this is a person who is radiant, resilient, even powerful. She thought of a critic that once said, "She wears her heart on her sleeve, effortlessly soulful." Jade thought,

"This is going to be amazing."

“Ready?” Jade asked, her finger hovering over the note recorder.

“Let’s do this.”

I'm lovin', I'm livin', I'm pickin' it up

How singer-songwriter Bonnie Clemmons put the shattered pieces of her life back together.

By Jade Harper for Flower City News

Bonnie Clemmons is someone who never stops moving. At seventeen, she released her first single, signed with a major music company, and released an album a year later. The last two years have been full of opportunities, promises then uncertainty. Now she’s slowed down a bit, traded lavish hotels for a 1969 Volkswagen van and is trying to figure out where to go next.

“Things have been great, all things considered. I have been touring for the last six months and now have a few days off before my last performances in San Francisco,” said Clemmons.

Her tour, a mixture of concert festivals and stadium performances, started in March. It consisted of eight locations: Albany, Philadelphia, Boston, Atlanta, Orlando, Miami, and San Francisco. After being with her label for two years, producing a string of successful singles, she

decided to break her contract and become an independent artist. Many thought that was a career ending decision.

They kept asking me, "Don't you think you need some time to process and think about this. I sat there and was like, no, I'm not going here to be in a place where I'm not happy. said Clemmons.

She finds her new title as an independent artist exciting. She loves being able to have more freedom. Almost every other week she's posting snippets of songs on social media and live stream writing sessions.

"It's like baking from scratch, you have the ingredients, the skills, but you don't know how the cake will turn out in the end," said Clemmons. "It's scary, but I like it."

Her first single after going independent was given rave reviews, one critic saying that "the world has met the real Bonnie Clemmons, her beautiful harmonies and soulful vocals let us know that she has a promising career ahead of her."

It was a nice start, a new road with endless possibilities... until it wasn't.

On January 12th, her mother's gray Toyota SUV was t-boned by a tractor trailer that ran a red light. The other driver suffered a minor concussion. The SUV was totaled. Clemmons, who was driving, faced critical life-threatening injuries. However, her mother, who was the only other passenger, only suffered a few cuts and bruises.

"Luck was having the shrapnel from the car hit the center of my chest. Four more inches to the left and I would be dead," Clemmons says, rubbing her palms together.

Doctors say that even after removing the shrapnel, she had a concussion, her left wrist was broken, intense bruising on her ribs and stomach. But that was minor. The problem was her heart.

Her heart had stopped for five minutes. Arrhythmia quickly led to Cardiac arrest, her heart pumping irregular heartbeats due to the stress and trauma of the car crash. Her heart stopped again when she reached the hospital. They rushed her to the emergency room but after multiple attempts they were unable to bring her back using the defibrillator. But her doctor wouldn't give up. He continued two, three, four times more before her heart started beating regularly again.

"Even after all that, all I cared about was that I couldn't play piano," said Clemmons.

Her broken wrist and other remaining injuries kept her in her mother's home in upstate New York for almost seven weeks.

"I've been playing piano since I was six, so not playing was hard," said Clemmons.

Recovery was much easier than she expected. She spent her day watching movies with her friends, writing songs, and eating pineapple-chicken pizza. But it also gave her time to process things.

"To be honest, I didn't think I fully understood what happened, " said Clemmons. "I still don't. It comes in waves, the anxiety, and the fear, just drowns you."

"I've had a few therapy sessions, which has helped but it still gets overwhelming sometimes," said Clemmons, "That's why I woke up late this morning, Iris turned my alarm off

because she knows that beeping noise wakes me right out of my sleep. It was the first thing that I woke up to when I was in the accident before blacking out.”

“It’s gotten better but there was a time where I would flinch when I heard alarms or a car honking, ” said Clemmons. “Noises like that make me feel like I’m right back in that car again.”

“Bonnie.”

“Bonnie?” Jade sat up, shuffling her question cards, not sure what to do. The young singer was frozen in front of her.

Then like flipping a switch, Bonnie blinked, her cheeks wet but she quickly wiped them away.

“Are you okay?” Jade asked, she watched as the young singer wring her hands harder. Like she’s wringing out a soaking sponge.

“I’m okay, it’s just that sometimes memories come back...,” Bonnie said.

“You said something before, Jade said, leaning forward a bit, “Do you want to repeat that?”

“Bonnie.” Jade turns to see Iris standing there, her back pressed against the wall. Her face was visible with worry.

“I don’t think she meant to say that.” Jade heard Iris say from afar.

Bonnie sniffled. “I did.”

She was silent for a few moments then said,

“That day, my mom was showing me how many people saw the video featuring my new single at the time, two million views in four hours. I glanced at my phone for just a second then when I looked up the light was green.” She breathed in deeply, “So I went.”

“It felt like everything happened in slow motion.” Bonnie said.

“Do you blame her?” Jade asked. Bonnie quickly shook her head.

“No of course not, I could *never*.” Bonnie replied, “It was an accident.”

“I just wished I was paying better attention, I’m the driver you know”, Bonnie said with a humorless laugh.

“It’s something I have to deal with, I know it wasn’t my fault, it’s something I’ll have to come to terms with.” Bonnie said.

They were all silent for a few moments.

Bonnie lets out a shaky breath, “Can we take a break?”

Jade saw the girl fidget in her seat, her eyes a bit glassy.

Jade nods, “Of course.”

Jade watched as Iris had disappeared from the room.

Bonnie stands up, finally pulls her hands apart and says, “Follow me.”

As they walked through the hall, “Is it alright if I put that part about your mom in the interview.”

Bonnie opened her mouth then,

“Sure, maybe my mom needs more convincing that the accident wasn’t her fault.” Bonnie said.

“Maybe that would be good for you as well, you know.” Jade said, “Take that guilt off your shoulders a bit.”

Bonnie just shrugged, “Yeah, maybe so.”

Jade trails behind her as she follows her into the kitchen. The kitchen, like the living room, was cozy, but much smaller. The walls were covered in white cabinets with brown handles, the sink was up against the far wall, its windowsill covered with flowers and plants. The island in the middle of the room.

The girls find Iris now in dark blue jeans and a white sweater. Her raven hair flowing down her back in endless curls. Iris smiled when she saw Bonnie. Iris’s smile was bright, not like the sun but a freshly bloomed sunflower. Glowing and joyful. Bonnie, her back to Jade, leaned against the counter, sighing deeply as she drummed her fingers over the sink. Iris entered her space causing them to bump shoulders. Iris can sense the tension in the room, then bumped her shoulder again as if saying “*you okay*”, Bonnie nodded, before giving her a small smile, “*I’m fine.*” They melt into this routine, this steady rhythm, like a perfectly tuned guitar.

Jade listened to them banter for a bit as they hustled around the kitchen. Once they finished talking, Iris turned to face Jade. Jade watches as she places a decorated floral mug in front of the young reporter.

Jade expected tea or coffee... not hot chocolate.

“Thanks,” Jade says.

Iris nods.

“Five minutes huh, Jade takes a sip of her hot chocolate, didn’t think that was possible.”

Bonnie shrugs, “Guess I’m one of the lucky ones.”

There was an awkward silence, Jade decided to change the subject.

So, how do you like living with Bonnie?” Jade asked, now putting her attention on Iris.

Iris shrugs, “I thought it was going to be crazy, but everyone’s way more laid back than I expected.”

“She didn’t think she was going to fit in,” Bonnie said.

Iris rolled her eyes, “You all have big personalities.”

“Like you don’t,” Bonnie teased.

“She’s obnoxiously humble.” Iris said before rolling her eyes again at Bonnie.

“And she’s just obnoxious.”

Iris kicks her playfully.

Bonnie continued to sip her hot chocolate, it eased her consciousness, her fingers stopped drumming.

“We were awkward for like a day and then she’s like let’s go eat pancakes at 6 AM and I’m like sure.” Bonnie laughed, “We work so well it’s crazy.”

They are all silent for a few minutes, basking in the glow of the sun shyly peeking from behind a cloud. It's peaceful. Bonnie continued to sip her hot chocolate, "This always makes me feel better."

Once they finished the hot chocolate, they all returned to the living room.

"Ready for round two? Jade asked.

"Oh, yeah." Bonnie said, her smile beaming. Iris grabbed her sleeve, "You sure"?

Bonnie nods, touched by her gesture, "Yeah, I'm okay."

Clemmons said her friends and her fans really helped through everything. Shortly after her accident, fans flooded her social media with well wishes and speedy recovery.

"My fans are truly incredible, they are so supportive, sent so many kind messages. Clemmons said, "They even tried to pay for my medical bills."

"The nurses brought flowers, cards and so much candy." Clemmons laughed, "It was a great distraction from hospital food."

Even though her recovery was long, she had a great support system.

"My mom is the best, literally the sweetest person. She really wouldn't leave my side for weeks. She literally did everything in her power to make my recovery go as smoothly as possible. I had to convince her days before this to let me do this on my own. She's in San Francisco with the rest of my friends helping promote our final performance," said Clemmons.

During those weeks of being practically bedridden, she was surrounded by her friends constantly.

“If it wasn’t for my friends, I’d probably go crazy,” said Clemmons. Her friends are also her bandmates; Kane Condor (Piano/Bass), Alissa Gomez (Guitar) and Margo Anderson (Drummer).

“We were all so used to moving around, especially spending most of our time on tour as well living in a van. I’m used to seeing roadside attractions, fresh flowers or smelly gas, egg sausage and cheese breakfast sandwiches in a paper bag. Here it’s super quiet, it was an adjustment,” said Clemmons.

Their yellow and black van is nicknamed “Bumble”, a 1969 T2 VW Camper Van. It was given to her friend Kane as a birthday gift.

“Believe me, it’s not always perfect but living in a van is way better than people think. We’ve been friends since middle school, so the awkwardness was practically non-existent. But we always have a place to sleep, our bags full of snacks. My favorite part is that living in a van really helps me think, it’s like our little corner of the universe,” said Clemmons.

This past summer, she created a contest for whoever made the best cover of her comeback single, “Never Knew”. The fan with the best cover was given the ultimate fan experience to come on tour with her.

“I felt like I was stuck for the longest time even when I convinced myself I wasn’t. I just need a new perspective to look through and I thought that having someone new would bring me that.” said Clemmons.

After Bonnie and her friends looked through nearly two thousand submissions, one stood out.

Iris Yukimura, a nineteen-year-old who spends her free time taking pictures of her neighbor's cat, roller-skating, and occasionally posts acoustic covers online. She never thought that her cover would win.

"Iris is a person that just lights up the room, she's electric," said Clemmons, "she's a person that continues to impress me, whether it's her singing or her just being herself."

Clemmons said that this experience has redefined her.

"What I've learned is that everything can change in an instant. It's cliché, I know but it's true. I was lucky. I was given a second chance and I'm not planning on wasting it," said Clemmons, "I found that even after everything I'm happy where I am now. I'm excited to see where this path takes me."

Tickets for Bonnie's final performance of her tour in San Francisco, California is on sale now. Her latest single, "Never Alone," is available on all music streaming platforms.

A few weeks later, Jade quickly sidestepped people as she walked through the busy street of Flower City. She checked her phone, 3:45 PM. She had fifteen minutes until the evening meeting at the office. However, she was starving as she hadn't eaten since 7 AM. She sees a newsstand with a hot dog stand right beside it. Just her luck, the line was clearing up as the last group of people walked away. She walks up; a man stood there with a gray cap on his head. Jade's stomach growled at the sight of the grilled hot dogs, the onions, sweet relish-

“One hot dog with ketchup and relish, please.” Jade said.

“That’ll be four bucks.” Jade fished a ten-dollar bill out of her pocket. She handed the man ten dollars as she waited for the man to cook her hot dog. She looked down and saw a few magazines. Then she sees a familiar face.

There’s Bonnie, front in center of *Flower City News*’s Issue 521, Fall Edition. Thus, Bonnie was on the tan steps of her mother’s home. Yellow, orange, and brown leaves scattered around the steps as she sat there with a huge smile on her face. Her aura was bright like the sun that parted through the fluffy white clouds that day.

“Miss.” Jade blinked looking at the man as he gave her change then her hot dog in a signature red and white paper basket.

“Thank you, have a nice day, “she said.

Jade looks down at the magazines again.

“Actually....”

Jade made it back to the office with a crumb filled basket and a rolled-up issue of Flower City News tucked under her arm. Once she threw the basket away, she got onto the elevator then pressed the button for the fourth floor. She sighed, excited for stories just waiting to be told. She looked down at the magazine and smiled. When she reached her floor, the clock on the conference room doors read 3:59 PM.

One story has ended and a new one is about to begin.

Apricot Variations

Apricot is the cousin of yellow, not distant cousin but cousin. It's subdued, sleepy, but stabs you in the eye just as much as yellow. Apricot makes its presence known as the sky is full of light, lush, and blinding colors that flood the stars with a particular glow. This glow fills your room, shining in your eye, you shield it. This becomes your prominent backdrop to your own personal hand shadow show. Your room lulls you awake to the melodies of Frank Ocean's "Channel Orange". The song, "Pyramids" fill your ears until they bleed. A citrus smell that engulfs your clothes. Apricot is a feeling that's nostalgic like your favorite stuffed bunny with buttermilk skin sprinkled with Apricot spots. Then a rich smell guides you downstairs. On the table you see Apricot pie, golden crust with its insides frozen, incubated. Apricot bleeds into the chalky vanilla, blending the crust with pulpy apricot, brown, and white. You sit in the back yard, a blanket full of faded tulips, they shed their petals, like a seasoned snake shedding its skin. Apricot bulbs bruised with red, their past embedded in its stem. They softly sway in the wind, slowly baking in the apricot sun. It's a peaceful lullaby. Apricot bleeds into your hair, makes your hair burn. A permanent sunspot on the soil below.

Rue Haiku

1. Hospital gown dances

As it leaves purgatory

Gets baby white wings

2. Spaghetti brown curls

Red jacket choked her young heart

It's her junior year

3. Small push pin regrets

They soon fill up her plate like

A stack of pancakes

4. Shyness eats her tongue

Anxiety gnaws her brain

Loss consumes the rest

5. Nevertheless Rue

Makes room for pills and Ziplock

Powder crushed calm peace

6. Person equals drug

Could lead to a bike ride home

Charmed by blonde, blue eyed Jules

7. Sweet conversations

Seeing bright purple & pink skies

Through cracked sunglasses

8. Then everything blurs

Two clasped hands & stolen kisses

World occupants: Them

9. A thrilling escape by train

Rue's idea but doubts fill her head

Their love on a cliff's edge

10. Rue takes a step back

Surprised Jules leaves heartbroken

Rue's tears shine like stars