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Life, Love, and Lost Smiles

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ABSTRACT

This collection is a compilation of poetry, non-fiction and fiction writing. The works in this collection are inspired by many subjects including personal lifetime events, friends, dreams and more. This collection, entitled “Life, Love & Lost Smiles” symbolizes some of the many things that have personally shaped my life and helped me become not only the writer, but the person that I am today.

LIFE, LOVE & LOST SMILES

By

Ashley Virginia Matthew

A Collection of Creative Writing Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of English, Literature, and
Modern Languages at Cedarville University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Creative
Writing Minor

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Approved by

This collection is dedicated to my mother, Billie Jean Matthew.

INTRODUCTION

When people do something they are passionate about, they put their heart into it. When writers do what they love, they put a piece of them into their works. This is a personal motto I have always believed. As a writer, I have constantly put a piece of myself into my own written works. This makes me feel more connected to my works as it makes it more personal because there is always a part of it that I can relate to, even it's a certain line, word or character that has a special hidden meaning behind it that sometimes, nobody else would understand or know about because it relates to my personal life.

This is why I decided to entitle my collection "Life, Love & Lost Smiles". This collection contains works of fiction, non-fiction and poetry, with each piece from the collection having something personal from my life thrown in, whether it's inspired by a friendship, lifelong dream, childhood memory etc. Each piece is related to the title of my collection because each of them connects to my own life personally in different ways.

The first section of my collection consists of poetry works that I have written in the past three years while studying Creative Writing at Cedarville University. Much inspiration came from the poetry I included in the collection. In particular, *Cherry Blossoms* was inspired by my love for Asian things since my childhood. Growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio, my family had a cherry tree in our front yard. To me, it was the most beautiful thing in our neighborhood.

After we moved to Fairfield, Ohio, I quickly made some friends in my new neighborhood and one of them was a fan of Japanese culture, and especially loved the animated series, Sailor Moon. My friend, Karen also got me interested in Sailor Moon and by watching the show, I became more interested in Asian culture. Before then, the only Japanese animated series that I was watching was Pokemon. However, in the second season of Sailor Moon, there was an episode that focused on cherry blossom

trees, which is how I learned about them. I went to the library and researched cherry blossom trees. I thought they were beautiful and even though they weren't the same as cherry trees, the cherry tree we had at our old home reminded me of them.

My poem, *Summer Bliss* was inspired by the character of Catherine Moreland from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine's character is a fantasist, something I can relate to as I love to daydream. Because of that instant connection I felt with the character, Catherine Moreland became my favorite Austen heroine and thus inspired me to write a poem where I compared myself to her.

The poem, *Remember* is based on my childhood with my two friends, Courtney and Karen. I have a lot of memories from the times I spent with them, from playing with dolls to watching our favorite cartoons together at each other's homes. Because of the fond memories, I wanted to convey them for this particular poem, especially since the three of us have now gone our separate paths in life, due to our college and career choices.

Magical Memory is the only non-fiction story in my collection and details my first experience at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida when I turned 19 years old. A poem in my collection, *The Great Disney Adventure* also details this experience along with my second vacation there when I turned 20 years old. I wanted to include these pieces in the collection because they conveyed some of the happiest memories of my life, to date.

One of my fiction pieces, *The Mystery Case* was inspired by an actual event that took place at a restaurant I went to. However, I changed a lot of the details from the actual event to fictionalize it and to make the story more unique. Some of the minor details I changed were the type of restaurant and the appearances of the man and woman in the story, among many other details. I also changed details regarding the narrator of my story from what was going on in my life at the time that the real event took

place.

Another one of my fiction pieces, *Mermaid Queen* was inspired by a recent increased interest in mermaids over the summer. I've always found mythology interesting and have liked mermaids since I was a child but after watching a show about mermaids over the summer, my interest peaked more. During the time I wrote this story, death was a big theme on my mind due to the anniversary of my sister's passing coming around and due to my grandfather being ill where my family knew he would be passing away soon plus it seemed like I was having to read a lot of stories for classes regarding the theme of death around then. Because of this, death became a bit of a theme in my fiction writing stories that semester including this one.

Another theme in my stories is tragedy, but not in a deathly sense and with these tragic events that occur to my characters, they find redemption. For example, in my story, *Giving Light*, a young man, out of jealousy and desperation, does something that gets him into trouble with the law. After he is ashamed to face his parents, he begins living a hard life, feeling as if he has failed until a chance meeting with another person helps him find a sense of redemption.

In another written piece, *Realize*, a stressed young woman regrets a decision to have a child but later on when tragedy strikes, the young woman realizes the importance of her daughter to her. After the crisis is resolved, the mother gets her chance at redemption, in order to be the mother that her child needs and deserves.

In conclusion, this collection focuses not only on real experiences of my own life but experiences that others can relate to. From the hope we hold on to in the midst of broken relationships, the crushed feeling we get when we wish we were there more after losing a loved one and the many different emotions we feel when we realize we've taken something beloved for granted, readers can find a piece of themselves in written works just as the author who wrote them has a piece of them in their story.

FOREWORD

As a writer, my faith plays a large part into what I write. That can be seen through written works included in my collection, along with pieces I did not include that I have written throughout my life. In fact, many of my stories focus on the faith of my characters, finding redemption and hope through tragedy and overcoming the odds. I think these are positive messages to put forward into my works and they tie in with my faith because I have used my own faith to find hope through tragedy and to overcome negativity and trials in my life.

I personally think every writer should put themselves into their works somehow, whether that is through a character or message that they want to get across. By doing this, it helps the writer find a connection with their story more and possibly even a connection to the reader. When a writer conveys a message or moral through a poem or character in a story, readers may be able to relate, thus connecting with the work on a more emotional level. I have tried to do this through many of my poems and stories on a number of themes that involve love, friendship and life.

Through my own works, I have expressed moments from my own life in the hopes that someone would relate to them and even be inspired. If I could bring hope through my writing to one person going through a similar experience or struggle that I went through, that would bring me happiness because through my own faith, I was able to hold on during a difficult time and eventually share it through my writing. Being able to give someone hope to rely on their own faith that things will get better, would be an absolute blessing for me, whether I am aware my written piece helped them or not. While I know that I am not the perfect writer, nor do I ever expect to be, I have faith that with more experience, I can improve more and I have the faith that I will always try to write to the best of my ability.

Faith has not only helped me with my creative writing but also with writing, in general. The more

I have written in other areas of writing, such as journalism, the more I have improved. Also, my faith has brought upon many amazing opportunities including being able to write for school newspapers in both high school and college, submitting creative works for publication to other magazines, interning at a local news affiliate where I was able to have news stories published and being able to write for a wrestling news website, something I didn't expect to ever happen but consider a blessing from God, as I have a huge passion for wrestling.

My faith also integrates with my writing because it is something the Lord has blessed me with the passion for doing. If someone has the passion for something, they should do that because it is something that makes them happy. Also, by doing what we are passionate about, we can bring glory to the Lord through what we are doing whether that is writing, teaching, participating in a sport or anything else our hearts feel strongly about pursuing.

I think faith plays a vital role to being a successful writer. While having your works published is always something an author or poet desires, I believe success is not built on how many works you have published. To me, being a successful writer is writing about what you love and simply having a passion to write. Being a successful writer is also having the faith that what you are writing will connect to your readers in some way.

I also believe that faith in an author's writing can be built upon experience. Studying the craft of writing through classes helped me build my faith in my own writing. There was a time when I would write many stories but I never felt confident enough to share them with others. Through the classes I have taken, I have grown confidence in sharing my stories and even become confident in one particular story I have rewritten many times to finally be able to share that story with others, now that I have become more content with the way the story has turned out.

There are also certain factors that come into play in helping writers become more successful. These factors come from what we learn about the craft, both in classes and from personal experiences. I personally believe these things I have learned have helped me become more successful with my own writing.

The first factor in writing that helps an author or poet be more successful is the use of imagery. Imagery is something I learned about early on while studying the craft of writing. Imagery is important because it helps the reader get a sense of where the story is located and can even help set up the tone of the story. As a writer, I have tried improving my imagery, first through poetry and then fiction and within the past three years of studying at Cedarville University, I have improved my imagery most strongly through fiction writing where I feel I was able to study imagery better than in other creative writing classes with a different focus. As a writer, I have had difficulty in the past trying to convey the images I saw in my mind while writing and putting them into a story or poem and since studying the craft more, I have seen some improvement with this factor of writing.

Another factor of writing that I have seen improvement with over the past few years is plot development. In the past, I would often have trouble developing my plot, due to being unable to figure out exactly what I wanted to write to continue a story so I would get stuck in the middle of a story and not know how to finish a story. Within the past three years, I have been able to improve on plot development and because of this, was able to finally finish a story I have been working on for years.

There are times when I still get stuck with not knowing where to go with a story or poem but that is something I feel cannot be fully avoided and is something natural in the craft of writing. That's where my faith comes in. Even when I do get stuck on not knowing what to write to finish a poem or story, I don't let it discourage me from continuing to work on that story or poem and I don't let it discourage me from improving as a writer or continuing to write, in general.

Character development is another important factor in the craft of writing. A way I have always helped strengthen my character development was by creating profiles for my characters which was basically a scrap piece of paper filled with multiple details about my character regarding their physical appearance and personality. However, while working on creative pieces for the past few years while studying the craft, I relied less on those profiles simply because I did not have the time to make them as much.

While for some works, I still had the time to make the profiles, I wasn't able to for others. However, those creative works still came out successfully as I was able to finish them and the stories still contained a good amount of character development. This showed me that while making profiles helps you to know and remember more about your characters, a writer does not need to depend on those profiles to create a successful story with good character development.

As a writer, there are still many story ideas running through my mind that I hope to write in the future. The struggle in being able to do so is finding the time; something that other authors would agree can become a crucial struggle in achieving a writing goal. However, one thing I learned is that you have to make time to write, just like you have to make time to do anything you are passionate about. The more you do something you are passionate about, the more your passion will grow and the more you will improve on what you are doing, whether that is writing, another form of art, a sport or any other hobby.

Another thing I found a struggle that I improved upon while studying the craft of writing was not rushing a story. For many writers, their problem is including too much information and having to condense their works. For me, I have noticed it was more of not having enough information.

I was able to resolve this issue with my fiction writing through revisions and adding more dialogue to my works. By adding more details and dialogue, I was able to slow the pace of my story, allowing the climax of my story to build more until the turning point was finally revealed. This also

helped me to develop some interesting plot twists also that I didn't originally expect to write.

When wanting to write on a specific topic, it's best to do research on that topic. Another thing I think is important when doing research on a particular topic that you want to write on is looking into other authors and poets who have written on that topic. Reading their works helps you to see how a good story can be written on the topic you want to write on, whatever that topic may be.

Another important thing I learned about while studying the craft is the different points of view that a story can take. When I first started writing as a child, I would always write in first and third person mostly. Upon taking creative writing classes, I discovered that writing in third person works best for me as writing in first person is said to be the most difficult point of view to write in, at least for fiction stories.

However, upon learning about the different points of view, I would like to try someday to write a story in first person where I address the reader personally, as is done in one of my favorite novels, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, even if in my story the reader is only addressed in one scene such as the ending, for example. When I first read *Jane Eyre*, I felt more connected to the story as if I was a part of it, like I was reading the character of Jane Eyre's diary personally. This is why I would like to try addressing my readers in a story someday to see if I can get a good connection from my readers as Charlotte Bronte could.

In the future, I also want to try doing a story similar to the way that *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett was written, in the point of view of multiple first person narrators. I think this would be a challenging and fun technique to try. It may not turn out well but it could help me improve my writing through the experience or teach me something new about my personal style of writing. To conclude, one of the most important things that I've learned as a writer is that if you don't try something out, you'll never know if you can accomplish it and if you do try, it may just be something that you still can grow from.

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CHERRY BLOSSOMS

Bright, happy pink petals
align themselves on a
thin muddy-colored branch
Petals fall slowly
drifting downward
on to a *mossy seafoam ground*
A rosy perfume scent
captivates the *creamy air*
as I continue to marvel
at this *exotic, oriental paradise*

FLOWER KISS

Your lips are petals
Pink daisy petals crashing into my stigma
Your firefly stars gaze into mine
Mesmerizing me while a
clock's heart stops pulsing
and in this moment,
I feel euphoric

SUMMER BLISS

Ripe seeds spill out
from this juicy
sweetened strawberry
as I lay peacefully in my cot
reading *Northanger Abbey*
on a breezy day in July
Hearing the cherry canaries chirp
as I daydream of
a regency-era life
I am Catherine Moreland herself
I look up at the shapely puffballs
floating by in the dusty blue sky
Imagining the wildest adventures
I could have as an
Austen heroine

REMEMBER

when we all used to be little
playing on that lumpy
spring green hill
pretending to be
sailor warriors
instead of Disney Princesses
and how we would
play with our dolls
Anastasia and a Moon Princess
and the bonds of friendship
we shared
As we grew up,
we strayed to our own paths
I wish we were as close
as we used to be when
all we dreamed of was
happiness and fun

HOPING

She patiently waits for the day they'll finally meet
Hugging her comfy pillow, pretending it's his strong arms
Cuddling as she feels its teddy bear warmth
When will the day come when she can stare into those inveigling eyes?
Gaze at that intoxicating smile and hear that melodious laugh?
She keeps hoping, anticipating at every possible chance
All which have lead to devastating letdowns

FALLEN

Black and white roses lie dead on a broken grave
An angel embarks from this hollowed cemetery
Her shallow wings whispered against the somber wind
like the haunting melody of a piano
or the sacred symphony of a violin
as the words of a raven echo chillingly into a moonless night

FOUR SEASONS

I am the long, warm days of an ocean's play
I am the waves crumbling against the tide
I am the boredom that the rain brings
after it imprisons us inside

I am the leaves repainted
when the wind becomes chill and calm
I am the breeze flowing back and forth
I am its whistling song

I am the pearls that fall from the sky
I am the glimmering crystals
that form over the still waters
I am the frosty, peaceful nights

I am nature reborn
as the earth's brought back to life
I am the blossoming buds, the blooming dreams
I am the sun's lemony light

I am the four seasons
and all the surprises they bring
I am Summer's glory, Autumn's grace
Winter's peace and the joy of Spring.

EMPATHY

Teardrops falling on the ground
like icicles breaking in the Winter
The bittersweet taste lingering
on my velvet-soft lips
I look over to you
and see those same
tear shaped icicles
fall from your
perfectly complexioned face
as I rush over for
your toasty-warm embrace

IMAGINATION

Icicle blue eyes
gaze up at
aquamarine skies
where clouded dragons
fly through their
sea blue castle
and a sunflower
shines celestially

The breeze gusts by
and she dreams that she
is up there floating
with atmospheric creatures
Her gossamer dress sparkling
and as the sky turns dark
she dances on her very
own star

HAVEN

Sunlight shimmers down on the toasty sand
No cold, no winter on this exotic island
Solar rays give off a warm, happy vibe
I listen to the rippling ocean before taking a dive

I feel the bitter sand in the spaces between my toes
In this place, I have no worries, no woes
When it comes to relaxing, I'm a maven
and the beach is my tropical haven

THE TWO CHILDREN

A boy plays in the Summer rain
A girl clings to pillows
For the first child, his life is purely joy
but the little girl wasn't born a boy
He can hit home-runs with his Louisville Slugger, whack
while her face becomes flaming red from a vicious smack
The young boy gets to swirl under the stars
The timid girl struggles to hide her rough, itchy scars
For some children, life is just a perfect dream
but others suffer through their silent screams

HIDDEN ANGEL

His voice, rasped with anger
Bitterly breathless
Innocence lost while
growing up in the streets
but there's still that
mischievous smile
that shows the silly
little boy inside you
Your soul is tormented
Your life haunted
by crimsoned memories
from past midnights
Your heart is tortured
and I never knew this
when I first met you
Just a young man
going for dreams beyond
his wildest thoughts
Those dreams came true
but I can see you're
still hurting and I
can't help but want
to be the one
to make it better,
to give you the one
thing you've always wanted
but never truly
got because it always
turned you away

MIDNIGHT ILLUSION

Illuminating eyes stalk me
as I travel this spiraling woodland path
His charcoal wings fluster against the wind
He taunts me, his caw like an old witch's cackle
and I become entrapped
by branches tough as twine
Tangled and unable to escape,
his spellbound gaze continues to entrance me
and I become captivated in this illustrious scene
from a beautiful Poe-etic nightmare

THE ANGEL I THOUGHT I HAD

The strong, lingering smell
of Axe body spray
His cool, soft lips
with the waxy lanolin taste
of Carmex lip balm
His grip on me,
strong and firm
like an oak tree
His hair, soft like
spider-woven silk
His skin, rough like
crumbles of granite
Wrapped in a warm,
teddy-bear embrace
Tightly tied together,
like the knot of a rope.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

The gap-toothed smile of a child.
A speck of sunshine lighting up
her stardust blue eyes as she looks
up at large fluffs of cotton snowballs
in the sea-blue sky
Twirling in circles,
her frilly Crayola pink skirt swishing around
like a strawberry ice cream swirl
Golden sunlight reflecting upon her fair,
carefree porcelain doll face, lightly beaming
like a Glo-Worm
Her thin, twig-like arms spread out like fluttery,
delicate bubblegum pink butterfly wings as she spins.
Her long, thick, velvet-soft locks flowing through
the mildly breezy air as if she was Rapunzel herself.
Her laugh, gentle and dainty
like the chirping of a baby bluebird.
Her bony stick legs, brushing against
the tall, spiky, wet, bell-pepper green grass beneath her.
Her caterpillar sized toes digging into the mucky,
chocolate-brown dirt, wiggling them in deeper
like an earthworm as she breathes in the clear,
fresh air from the aftermath of a morning rainfall.

THE THINGS I'VE GOT

I've got Jesus on my dashboard to guide me where I go
A heart full of unconditional love, a soul of relentless hope
I've got a holy light of faith to show me the right way
and the enduring courage to believe that things will be ok

I've got his eternal strength to get me through every troubling day
I've got the chance to speak my mind, finding the words I need to say
Sometime I've got a little, sometimes I've got a lot
but one thing is for sure, God, I've always got

SATURDAY NIGHTS

Swan white pillow fights and
play-wrestling on the taupe sofa
Taking goofy pictures while wearing outrageously fancy clothes
Having Harry Potter and Marilyn Monroe movie marathons
Slow dancing in the living room, like we're playing out a waltz
from one of those classic romantic film scenes
Playing WWE video games all night
and laughing as we beat each other in matches
as we drink cups of Swiss Miss Cocoa
and open up pizza boxes from Papa John's
to enjoy the cheesy triangles of bliss waiting inside

These are the moments I think about
when we talk about our future adventures together
These are the images that dazzle my mind as I sleep,
dreams I envision coming true
These are the wishes I cherish,
the shooting stars of my hectic life
I picture our future memories,
like a Polaroid picture waiting to be developed
These are my hopes of the Saturday nights
that I want to spend with you

CAPTIVATED

Shrilling words turn to streams of salty raindrops
that fall upon my soft face
Your anger, hot as a steamed pork bun
as I try to handle this with gentle grace,
I desperately want to run
but every time I try, you sway me back in
with the alluring words you say
Like a little mouse being lured by a snake,
I am the prey wanting to stay
in this constant battle of heartache
so reel me in again with those enchanting sounds
Tell me everything will be ok
and I'll remove this pouty frown
from this back and forth game we play
because whether we have peace or whether we have war
I cannot leave because you make me
want to love you so much more

COFFEE CUP DREAMS

That crazed gleam of coffee cream in his eye
and that whippy smile of fluff
can only come from that cloudy bliss
inside his loca mocha cup

The frothy java taste
lingers upon his chappy lips
as he wildly dives his biscuit
into his coffee for a dip

Drip, drip is the sound he hears
as he takes it out of the cup
followed by a crunchity munch
as he gobbles the biscuit all up

He dashingly looks at his Rolex
as he takes his final sip
but not forgetting to leave
his waitress the proper tip

Off to start the day,
with interviews and meetings, it seems
Cheerfully looking back at the bistro,
where he leaves his coffee cup dreams

THE GREAT DISNEY ADVENTURE

I step on the pale cobblestone pathway
Looking around at this world around me,
I stare astoundingly at a giant blue and silver castle
In this place, I meet so many new friends
and come across old ones I grew up with
Princes, princesses, dragons and genies
My time in this world is filled with so much extravagance
as I spin around in a giant lilac teacup
and flying on an enchanted purple carpet
This world I have visited more than once
but each was like the first
and hopefully there are more journeys to come
where I will visit old friends and be introduced to ones I have yet to meet
like a group of fairies and the fairest princess in the kingdom
when I travel to this world of magic once again

TAKING A SHOT

As seen by her family's sorrows, tragic acts have been done
She travels into the grim woods
This dark, somber war has just begun
Strands of gold flow briskly in the crispy air as she pulls up her burgundy hood

Her hands shiver as she gazes at her plum-bruised knuckles
The scratches from thorny twigs are scattered up and down her fragile arms
She can hear the wind softly chuckle
and in this forest resides a creature who brings harm

Painful scars scatter her emotions
Shrouded by bloodshed memories from the past
Now it's time to make a notion
Vengeance, she desires, at last

The path walked along is narrow
Deep eyes squinting, trying to see through thick mist
The archer prepares her bow and arrow
Staring at the trees, the branches that twist

Watching from above is the midnight owl
Deeper into the forest, she goes trit-trot
Adrenaline rushing, the girl hears a chilling howl
Pulling back her arrow, the hero takes a shot

LADY

She looks up at the woman above her
with her eyes like large, round blueberries
Her hair is as soft as fox fur
It's color, dark like Bing cherries

The little girl notices this woman's skin
as delicate as a china doll
She takes in the woman's endearing grin
her laugh, like a parakeet call

The woman holds the girl in her arms,
the child clings to the woman's ivory blouse
If only the girl could have the woman's elegant charm
but she's still only small, like a field mouse

If only she could be as smart
and have the woman's exquisite grace
If only she had such a pure, forgiving heart
and as fair and gentle a face

As they make it past the evergreen grass,
the girl continues to dream
of having the woman's sophistication and class
This is her biggest wish, it seems

The girl imagines being feminine and grown
as her and the woman sit under a tree that's shady
To be the woman that's taken care of her on her own
To be like her mother, a beautiful lady

THE WINTER MEMORY

My friends are calling and I must go
as I prance upon the glistening snow
I feel a frosty chill in the air
and the breeze blows back my radiant hair

My hands shake like a baby's rattle
while I struggle to endure this wintery battle
Frantically putting on my icy blue gloves
that were made so carefully for me with love

Kids are building snowmen, I see them at a glance
while gazing up at the snow on a tree's thick branch
Twigs poking at me from the sides very slightly
as baby snowflakes fall on my face so lightly

I reach the middle of the park where all my friends stand
I notice them shivering with snowballs in their hands
A few minutes later arrives laughter and play
as we all enjoy this amazing snow day

WHAT SHE DREAMED OF MOST

The little girl pranced around in her pink polka dot dress outside
As she climbs up the emerald colored hill, she feels her bare feet slide against the spiked grass
As she reaches the top of the hill, she gathers small dandelions
Lying down, she looks up at the cloud covered sky as her mind begins to drift
Her dandelions, now a bouquet of white and yellow daisies
Her face lit up with a smile, beaming like a rainbow
The long grass she felt against her curly, copper red hair has become a white lace veil
and her polka dot dress is now a silky, ivory gown
Visions of her proud daddy fill her mind as she walks down the aisle of her small Baptist church
Her dainty feet slowly tip-toeing on the navy blue carpet
Dressed in a black tuxedo, her dashing groom waits for her patiently
before putting a pink pearl ring on her peachy finger
She leans in to kiss her handsome gentleman
"Tiffany, time for supper!"
Snap! Out of the daydream, she rises as she hears her father's call
She then runs down the hill, into her red brick home
Never forgetting what she dreamed of most

WELCOME TO WRESTLEMANIA

Ding, Ding, Ding
The timekeeper's bell rings
A giant and a real American
standoff in the squared circle
The crowd of 93,173 and millions
of fans watching at home are ecstatic
They've anticipated this altercation for months
The irresistible force duels against the immovable object
Human bodies, now twirling twisters
Boom! The 6 ft.7, 302 pound Hollywood Hulk body slams
the 7 ft.5, 525 pound Eighth Wonder of the World
on to the canvas mat
The crowd in pure astonishment
Then one final leg drop for the pin
The echoing cheers continue to be heard
Looking up, the champ thanks God
for this wondrous blessing that both he
and the fans have witnessed on this
legendary day of March 29, 1987.

THE DANCE

Memorizing motions on the luminescent pearl floor
as golden streams of light burst in the royal blue sky
I take your hand, soft like dandelion seeds
Your arms like large wings, from which I can fly

I take in everything I hear
Your gentle voice, a honey soothing sound
Your laughter, as light as a monarch butterfly
Like a ribbon, you twirl me around

I look up at you and here's what I see
Glossy diamonds smiling back at me
Like a carousel, you spin me one more time
as the midnight clock tower begins to chime

You pull me in close for a tender embrace
Your delicate hands caress my gentle face
I gaze into your riveting eyes that shine
and in this graceful moment,
an adoring angel is mine

SUGAR AND SPICE

Inside this red brick cafe lies a heavenly smell
The baker loves the ting-a-ling sound of the bell
that his customers ring as the oven bakes
aromatic desserts like chocolate fudge cake
but the baker's job is not as simple as pie
especially towards Thanksgiving and Christmas time

The chubby, jolly baker dashes to the kitchen
Tying on his eggnog apron, he grabs his rolling pin
He pounds at the dough of his festive treats
that are sure to make this holiday so gingery sweet
He glances at the clock and knows he must hurry
All over the kitchen he scatters and scurries

He cuts out the dough into wintery shapes
before flurrying to the stove to check on his crepes
Water drips from his forehead, a sugary sweat
Thank goodness the crepes just haven't burnt yet!
It's not even noon and he's already stressed
Wishing for just one moment of rest

However, he knows his work is not yet done
Pulling out from the oven, his cinnamon buns
His job may be tough, his baking keeps him busy
and it certainly puts him all in a tizzy
but he loves to see his customer's glee
especially when they see all of his sugared goodies

MAGICAL MEMORY

As I reached the hotel room and placed my luggage in the corner, I waited for my parents to get ready to head out. It was our first time in Florida and my dream was finally coming true. I had been saving up for a year to finally come to this beautiful place that I've wanted to go to since I was a child. I knew the only way I ever would is if I worked hard to get there myself, which involved cleaning up after messy kids and selling pretty little accessories for them to wear, like Hello Kitty jewelry and hair bows.

“Ok, let's go.” I said excitedly as my parents finally finished exploring the hotel room. This was my birthday vacation and I intended on making it as amazing as possible. So what better choice than to vacation here, where magic is born?

We left the hotel room and headed towards the bus that would transfer us to the big, crowd-filled park. The bus was so stuffed that some tourists had to stand. As I looked around, I could see children sitting by their parents, smiling and laughing as they showed off their fanciful costumes.

Finally, we reached the park. As I stepped off the bus and headed past the entrance gate, my parents and I walked down the cobblestone street, trying to avoid the bustling crowd around us. As we finally reached the end of the street, I looked up at the large and marvelously gorgeous attraction in front of me. My eyes sparkled as I gazed at a silver and blue castle where several princesses were dancing including Aurora, Snow White and my favorite, Cinderella. I may have been turning 19 but I was still a child at heart and all my hard work had paid off. I had dreamt of this moment and finally, here I was, in the most enchanted place of all.

THE RUN

I had to run. I could hear the blaring noises into the night. I felt the broken glass crunching underneath my black sneakers. The wind blew back my hair as my speed increased.

Maybe this has gone on a little too far. That was my fault. Sometimes I just don't know when to let things go. To be fair though, I had good reason to not let go of what he did to me. They say revenge can be sweet and it felt pretty damn good right now.

I slipped my pearl ring off of my blood dripped hands. Fiercely thrusting the ring into the distance, I ran down one of the narrow alleys down the road towards the bustling city. I looked back and could see those bright lights flashing back and forth behind me. I reached the end of the alley but could go no further. I was blocked in between a dead end and the fate I was running away from.

“Don't move! Put your hands in the air!” the officer said.

Busted! I guess revenge isn't so sweet after all.

THE MYSTERY CASE

It was a typical Monday evening. I had just got off work and was heading to my favorite Italian restaurant, Bella Fiore, for dinner. As I walked in, I could hear the classical music of Vivaldi playing. I could see the fancy crystal chandeliers and the watercolor paintings on the walls. This was my comfort zone I had become familiar with after my shift would end at Bath & Body Works.

I strolled over to an empty booth and sat down. After a few minutes, the waitress came over to take my order. “Lasagna and a glass of water, please” I said. She wrote down the order on her notepad and walked away.

As the waitress left, I began to look around the room. It wasn’t as crowded tonight, just a few families eating gelato, an elderly man eating manicotti and a group of young girls gossiping about the latest celebrity news as they enjoyed their tiramisu. Then as the waitress came back with my order, I noticed a couple from a table near mine.

It was a middle-aged couple. The woman had copper red hair and was wearing a yellow dress. The man, sitting across from her had mahogany brown hair and was wearing a black suit.

Their conversation was inaudible from where I sat. I began to imagine what they were talking about together as they enjoyed their Chianti wine and spaghetti and meatballs. *Perhaps they are reminiscing over family moments or discussing the latest political news.* Suddenly, I noticed the man had pulled out a charcoal gray case from his pocket. It looked like a jewelry case.

My thoughts began to ponder about the case. *Was he giving her a special gift? Was it a pearl bracelet or a diamond necklace?*

I could see the woman getting emotional as she wiped the tears from her emerald green eyes with a brown paper napkin. The man reached over the table and touched her hand gently as she cried, still holding the case in his other hand. *Was she getting emotional because of the gift?*

I continued sitting there, watching as I ate my lasagna. I was anxiously waiting for the big moment, anticipating when whatever was in the case would finally be revealed. About a minute later, the man began to open the case.

“Oh my goodness! This is it! He’s going to give her the gift!” I whispered to myself. As he finally finished opening the case, my feelings of excitement rapidly turned to those of disappointment as he took out a pair of eyeglasses from the case and placed them over his hazel eyes. I sighed and looked away. *I guess I’m just too much of a hopeless romantic.*

GIVING LIGHT

22-year-old Koichi Takahashi never pictured his life to be like this. He was once a Philosophy major at Cleveland State University until he received a tuition bill he couldn't afford. He couldn't find a job as nobody seemed to be hiring at the time. He applied for scholarships but never got them, despite having a 3.6 GPA and his parents wouldn't co-sign for a loan, believing that he should be solely responsible for paying his own college tuition.

Desperation got the better of him as he struggled to find a way of paying for the bill. A student he knew had their own house in the city. Tyler Bardette was one of those rich, stuck up, snobs who thought he was better than everyone just because his parents would buy him anything he wanted. He didn't have to lift a finger for anything or spend a dime for that matter and was only going to college to party and pick up chicks. All of that pissed Koichi off.

It was unfair that Tyler got a free ride to college, doing nothing to deserve it while hardworking students were struggling to pay for it. Tyler would skip class to sleep in or hang out with his friends. He would pay students to do his homework for him. Tyler even had enough of his parent's money to live off for the rest of his life without ever having to do a thing. What did he need college for?

Therefore, Koichi came up with an idea one night to teach Tyler that materialistic items aren't everything, while also finding a way to help pay for his tuition. Koichi was going to break into Tyler's home and rob him, stealing some of his more expensive items like his ugly gold Rolex watches he showed off in class, his designer suits, his Apple iPad, his Dell M6400 laptop and his Samsung flat screen television that he would brag about in class when discussing parties at his house where he and the rest of his snooty upper class friends would watch The Stanley Cup Finals, The Super Bowl and The World Series. Koichi planned it out for days, figuring out precisely what time he would execute the plan. 2 a.m. on a Saturday. Tyler was sure to be out clubbing still, like he did every weekend.

Obviously, things didn't work out like Koichi planned. He got caught by the burglar alarm, was run down by the cops and then spent a year in jail. His parents were notified of the incident and tried to reach out to him after his release from prison, telling him to come home and that they would work things out there but Koichi was too ashamed to face them, not to mention he couldn't afford to go home to San Antonio, Texas anyways. He had no money, was living on the streets because nobody hires someone with a criminal record. There was no way he would ever go back to college again either even if he did ever get the money since no college ever accepts students with criminal records either. His life was pretty much over at the age of 22 so he had to resort to stealing just to get by, except this time, he had got better at it, starting off with stealing little things like packs of Slim Jim beef jerky, cans of Pepsi or Butterfinger candy bars, in order to survive on the cold, hard streets of Cleveland.

After a few weeks, he had become so good at stealing that he was able to start stealing other foods like Doritos chips, Oreo packages and plastic bottles of Coca Cola. Today, he had planned on attempting to steal his very first sandwich from Pappy's Supermarket. Koichi cautiously walked down the aisle, mildly gazing around to see if anyone was nearby and if there were any security cameras. After realizing there were no cameras nearby and after waiting for the old lady in the purple wool coat at the end of the aisle to go to the next one over, Koichi coyly grabbed the ham and cheese sandwich wrapped in clear plastic saran wrap and stuffed it into the pocket of his olive green trench coat. He glanced around again, making sure no one was around to see what he just did.

After confirming everything was ok, Koichi casually walked out of the store. He turned the corner, dashed through a few alleys until he made it far away from the supermarket, eventually stopping at a plaza with a fountain and forest green bench. As Koichi sat down on the bench, he quickly unwrapped the sandwich from its plastic wrapping. He looked up, checking for cops, in the fear he still may be caught. However, instead of seeing a cop around, he noticed a little girl, sitting down on the light gray cobblestone ground.

She was scrawny and covered in soot and dirt. She looked to be about 11. Her long, coal black hair was tangled like a bird's nest. Her body was crumpled up into a little ball as she struggled to stay warm in her sunflower yellow cotton dress, nudging her small, bare feet together.

Koichi walked over to the young girl.

"Hello." He said.

"H..Hi." She whispered softly.

"What's your name?"

After a few silent seconds, the girl replied.

“Maya...Maya Adachi.” She said shyly.

“Where are your parents? Why are you here all by yourself?” Koichi asked.

“My daddy’s dead. He took drugs and someone got mad at him for not paying for them and shot him.” Maya said as she pouted, her eyes watering up with tears.

“I’m so sorry!” Koichi said. “What about your mother? Where’s your mom?”

“She does drugs too. She and I had been living on the streets for two months now. She pick pocketed some guy’s wallet 2 weeks ago and said she was going to buy us some food with the money but I haven’t seen her since then. I’ve been drinking water from the fountain so I’m not thirsty but I haven’t eaten anything since I saw her apart from small bread crumbs people have thrown down for birds.” Maya said.

Koichi immediately looked at the sandwich in his hand. He knew this little girl needed it more than he did and hearing the story about her parents only made him realize how grateful he was to have parents who cared about him, who were trying to reach out to him, something this girl sadly didn’t have but deserved. He remembered a moment where he asked his parents why they named him Koichi. They told him because it meant “light” and that he should use the “light” he has inside him to help others and bring good to the world. This was his chance to do that, to give light.

He stuck his hand out with the sandwich in it towards the girl.

“Here. You deserve this more than I do.” Koichi said.

Maya looked up at him, her face lightly glowing yet covered in tears as she took the sandwich.

“Thank you.” She said, slightly smiling.

Koichi smiled back and in that moment, he knew he wasn't completely lost to the world. There was still light in him.

REALIZE

Jasmina McDevins sat at the kitchen table, her head down and her fingers clenching her curly, raven black hair. Her eyes were puffy like marshmallows and there were dark circles underneath them. Taking care of a four-year-old wasn't easy, especially being a 19-year-old cosmetology student who works part-time as a waitress at IHOP.

She couldn't get any help from anyone except Mrs. Talbert, one of her neighbors who occasionally babysat Keylee when Jasmina was at school or work. Obviously the father of Keylee wasn't around as he left Jasmina and Keylee six months ago for an older woman from Las Vegas that he met online. Jasmina's mother passed away last year and her father was in jail.

Jasmina was exhausted and wished she had not been forced to keep her kid by her mother. An abortion would have been quick and then she wouldn't have been in so much financial stress. She could have gone to her high school prom or bought that makeup kit she wanted instead of baby clothes. She could have moved out of Columbus and to her dream city to live in, Baltimore. As Jasmina took a sip of her bitter coffee and a bite of her stale donut, she heard her daughter, Keylee run into the kitchen, still dressed in her pink Hello Kitty pajamas.

"Hi Mommy!" Keylee said with a big, gap-toothed grin.

Jasmina sighed and made a bowl of Froot Loops for Keylee, as the little girl sat in her chair by the table. After Keylee finished eating, Jasmina dressed her in her day clothes, a lime green and white striped shirt, matching lime green pants and white sneakers.

“I have to study. Go play outside.” Jasmina said to her daughter.

Keylee listened to her mother and walked out the door and into the backyard. As Jasmina looked briefly out at the window at her daughter, she imagined to herself how nice it would be to be that young again, carefree and innocent. Jasmina then grabbed her cosmetology book and started reading it, taking notes on a separate sheet of paper and occasionally glancing out the window at Keylee, who was playing on the tree swing in the backyard. Around noon, Jasmina began preparing lunch, fried chicken, mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese. As she stirred the pot of macaroni and cheese, she heard the front door slam.

“Keylee?” Jasmina said.

She turned off the stove as she walked into the living room. No one was there. She went back into the kitchen and grabbed a knife, as a worried look emerged on her face that someone may have broken in.

She went back into her bedroom, checking to see if anyone was there. Nobody was. She then checked the small bathroom, followed by Keylee’s room. There was still nobody there. Assuming she had just been hearing things, she went back to the kitchen and put the knife away.

Jasmina gazed out the window to check on Keylee. She was nowhere to be seen. Jasmina pushed open the backdoor and ran onto the backyard porch.

“Keylee? Keylee!” she said.

Jasmina looked around the backyard. Keylee was nowhere to be found.

“Keylee, this is no time to be playing games. Come out!” Jasmina said.

There was utter silence. Jasmina’s eyes began to water, her body began trembling.

“Where is my baby?” Jasmina said.

The worse thoughts began to fill Jasmina’s mind. *What if she was abducted? What if she’s hurt or dead? What if she never sees her again?*

“Where’s my baby? I want my baby!” Jasmina said as she ran into the front yard, looking left and right for Keylee.

Jasmina ran up the street to Mrs. Talbert’s house where the middle-aged woman was tending to her rose bush.

“Mrs. Talbert, have you seen Keylee?” Jasmina said.

“No, dear. Why?” Mrs. Talbert said, looking concerned as she brushed some dirt off of her overalls.

“She was playing out in the backyard and when I went to check on her, she was gone. I checked the house, backyard and frontyard. I can’t find her anywhere. Where’s my Keylee?” Jasmina said, sobbing.

“I’ll help you look for her.” Mrs. Talbert said.

“Thank you.” Jasmina said, wiping a tear from her eye.

Mrs. Talbert and Jasmina headed towards Zuckerman’s Convenience Store at the corner of the street and walked in.

“Has anyone seen a little girl around here?” Mrs. Talbert said.

The cashier looked over at Mrs. Talbert and Jasmina, quickly responding “Sorry, no. What does she look like?”

“She’s four-years-old, has dark black hair and brown eyes. She was wearing a green and white outfit. Her name is Keylee. If you see her, please tell her to come home.” Jasmina said, trying to hold back her tears.

“Sure. Could you give us a phone number to reach you by in case we see her?” The cashier said as he grabbed a pen and ripped off a piece of receipt paper from the cash register and handed it to Jasmina.

Jasmina’s hand shook as she wrote down the phone number. “Here it is.” She said after she finished jotting it down. The cashier took the pen and piece of paper back.

“Thanks. I hope you find her safe and sound. We’ll be on the lookout for her.” The cashier said.

“Thank you so much.” Mrs. Talbert said.

“Yes, thank you.” Jasmina said as she and Mrs. Talbert walked out of the convenience store.

Jasmina began to hyperventilate as she choked back tears. “Oh gosh, what if she’s been...”

“Don’t think like that! If we keep looking, we may find her.” Mrs. Talbert said.

Jasmina nodded, trying to control her emotions, feeling guilty about her morning thoughts. Keylee was really the best thing that ever happened to her. Having Keylee helped her settle down from her once wild ways of sneaking out at nights to go to local clubs and bars with friends. Having Keylee helped her learn how to be independent, take life more seriously and be grateful for every moment spent on this Earth.

Thinking back, she actually realized how excited she was to find out she was having a baby girl, how much she looked forward to going shopping for baby clothes with her mother. Keylee was an April baby so all the cute, fancy pastel Easter dresses were on the racks when she first went shopping for baby clothes. Jasmina kept reminiscing of all the moments she's shared with her daughter like dressing her up as a ladybug for her first Halloween that she went trick-or-treating, teaching her to walk and seeing the smile on her face when she got the Princess Tiana doll she wanted last Christmas.

Tears streamed down Jasmina's face as she reached her small butter-yellow home with Mrs. Talbert. The two women sat on the front porch. Jasmina covered her face with her hands as she weeped, feeling the lumps in her throat. Mrs. Talbert tried to comfort her.

"What am I going to do, Mrs. Talbert? I feel so terrible. Do you want to know the awful thoughts I was thinking this morning? I was so stupid and selfish for thinking them. I was thinking of how my life would have been so much better if I never had Keylee but the truth is, I need Keylee in my life. She's the only light I have in it. I don't think I could live without her." Jasmina said.

"It's going to be ok, Jasmina." Mrs. Talbert said.

"No, it's not! I want my baby girl back." Jasmina said.

“No, really. It’s going to be ok. Look.” Mrs. Talbert said as she pointed at the lavender house across the street, where Keylee was playing with her friend.

Jasmina looked over and saw her daughter. She continued to sob as she rushed over across the street to Keylee.

“Keylee!” she said as she hugged her daughter tightly.

“Mommy, why are you sad?” Keylee said.

“You scared Mommy, baby. I didn’t know where you were.” Jasmina said.

“I left you a note on your book that I went to Skylah’s house to play Fairies. I even came inside to get my fairy clothes.” Keylee said as she twirled around in her green tulle tutu and glittery green fairy wings.

Suddenly, everything clicked. The door slamming earlier must have been Keylee coming in to get her dress-up clothes and as Jasmina had checked the house for a break-in, Keylee must have been in the kitchen writing the note before she left.

“I’m sorry, sweetie. I didn’t see the note.” Jasmina said, wiping a tear off her left cheek.

“It’s ok, Mommy. I still love you.” Keylee said as she kissed her mother’s left cheek, exactly where the tear was.

“I love you too, Keylee.” Jasmina said as she kissed her daughter’s forehead and hugged her once more.

MERMAID QUEEN

“Hey, Ben, what do you want to do when you grow up?” Kelly said as she looked up at her 16-year-old uncle.

“Well, I want to move out of Kennebunkport and become an English teacher.” Ben said as he looked down at his 6-year-old niece.

“Why’s that?” She said, her wavy, honey blonde hair blowing in the wind as they looked out at Goose Rocks Beach.

“Because it’s something I’m passionate about. I like reading and writing a lot. I like encouraging others to learn new things and if I was a teacher in another town, a bigger town, I could help more people learn than I could here.” Ben said with a smile.

“Oh.” Kelly said as she held her Princess Ariel doll close to her body, hugging it.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” Ben said.

“I want to be a mermaid just like Princess Ariel!” Kelly said as she looked down at her mermaid doll.

Ben chuckled. “Yeah, you do love mermaids a lot don’t you?”

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“Of course! The Little Mermaid, Aquamarine, Splash, The Sea Fairies, Barbie In A Mermaid Tale, Sabrina Down Under, H2O: Just Add Water, I love everything mermaids!” Kelly said.

“Well, you have your whole life ahead of you. What would you want to be if that didn’t work out?” Ben said.

“Hmm, maybe a teacher like you?” Kelly said.

“Why’s that?” Ben said.

“Well, if I can’t be a mermaid, I can teach people about them!” Kelly said, smiling.

Ben laughed. “I guess that makes sense. Kelly, promise me something?”

“What?” Kelly said as she stared at him, tilting her head.

“Promise me you’ll never change, that you’ll always be curious, imaginative and a dreamer.” Ben said.

Kelly looked a little confused but after a few seconds, she grinned and said, “I promise as long as you promise to never give up on your dreams too.”

“It’s a deal.” Ben said.

That summer, Ben not only constantly babysat Kelly while her mother and father worked at the small café they owned but also helped tutor kids in summer school. He figured the experience would help him better prepare for pursuing a job with teaching in the future. After doing his tutoring one Wednesday, he headed straight over to Kelly’s home. He liked babysitting his niece. Every evening from 6 to 10, they would watch Mako Mermaids: An H2O Adventure on Netflix or The Little Mermaid: Ariel’s Beginning on DVD.

Sometimes Ben would even make up mermaid stories to tell Kelly. Lately, he had been making up stories about a mermaid queen named Alexandria and her adventures with her best friend, a dolphin named Leiluna.

“I love the stories about Queen Alexandria.” Kelly said as she cuddled with her Sea Sparkles Merissa doll.

“Well, I’m glad you do.” Ben said, his smile as warm as a sunny day on the beach.

“I wish others could read about her adventures.” Kelly said.

“Maybe, they will someday.” Ben said.

“That would be nice. I wish I could be like Queen Alexandria and rule the Calypso Kingdom and be able to talk to dolphins, starfish and seahorses.” Kelly said.

“Well, I’ll let you in on a little secret. Queen Alexandria is based on you. You and your dream to be a mermaid inspired the character.” Ben said.

“So I am her!” Kelly said, her smile beaming like an oyster’s pearl, her eyes sparkling like the moonlight’s reflection in the water.

“In a way, yes.” Ben said. “Now time to get some rest, mermaid.”

“Ok, goodnight Ben.” Kelly said.

“Goodnight, Kelly. I’ll see you tomorrow.” Ben said as he turned off the light, left the room and walked downstairs to the living room, where he waited for Kelly’s parents to arrive home from work.

The next day, Ben made his way to Kelly's home again. He had finished his tutoring sessions early and decided to head over sooner than usual to surprise Kelly with a handmade book about Queen Alexandria that she could read. He had been working on the surprise all summer. When he arrived at Kelly's home, his excitement suddenly turned to concern as he saw a bunch of red and blue flashing light, a line of cop cars parked outside of the small, powder blue cottage.

Ben immediately parked his blue Dodge Neon across the street from the cottage and rushed over. He knocked on the white front door. After a few knocks, Kelly's mother answered. She appeared stricken with grief, her face smeared with black, muddy mascara, as she tried to control her tears.

"Haylie, are you ok? What's going on, Sis?" Ben said.

"Oh, Ben!" Haylie said as she instantly hugged her brother tightly.

"What's going on?" Ben asked Kelly's father, Daniel as he began to approach them.

"Kel...Kelly's dead." Daniel said, his lips quivering like flan on a plate.

"Wha...What?" Ben said.

"She...She was in the backyard pool...swimming and playing mermaids while the afternoon babysitter, Sandra was here. She hit her head somehow and drowned." Daniel said as he wiped a few tears from his eyes.

From where he stood, Ben could see Sandra being questioned in the kitchen by a police officer. She appeared distraught, shaking her head in disbelief at the situation.

"Where...Where was the babysitter when Kelly was out playing in the backyard? Why... Why did she not notice something was wrong?" Ben said, on the verge of tears.

“She was in the kitchen, cooking Kelly’s dinner.” Haylie said as she grabbed a Puffs tissue from her pants pocket.

Suddenly, Ben broke down. He could no longer hold the tears back and they began flowing from his face like a waterfall. He then embraced Daniel and Kelly as they all cried together.

After Kelly’s death, Ben became more determined to keep his promise to Kelly that he would become a teacher. Once he turned 18, he left Kennebunkport, Maine and attended Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Upon graduating, he got a teaching job at an elementary school in Miami, Florida. He also published a series of books about Queen Alexandria so that Kelly’s wish of other children being able to read those stories came true too. In each book, there was a dedication to Kelly, “In memory of my niece, Kelly, whom I told these stories to so many years ago. You will always be a mermaid in my heart.”

The books were very popular at the school library and even one of his own students, Brittany, a 7-year-old loved them. She reminded him a lot of Kelly. She was just as obsessed with mermaids which was obvious by her Princess Ariel folders and green Harajuku Lovers mermaid backpack.

“I like your mermaid stories, Mr. Snyder.” Brittany said.

“Thank you, Brittany.” Ben said.

“I love mermaids. I want to be either Princess Ariel at Disney World or a Weeki Wachee Mermaid when I grow up.” Brittany said as she flipped back her curly, strawberry blonde hair.

“That’s great but what would you want to be if that didn’t work out?” Ben said.

“Then I’d want to be a marine biologist. I love underwater animals!” Brittany said.

“Well, I hope your dreams come true someday. You just have to believe in yourself.” Ben said as he slightly smiled, thinking of Kelly in that single moment.

SECRETS

There they both sat in a small diner in Loveland, Ohio on a cool, Autumn-crisp evening in October. He was a tall, average-built man, his chocolate brown hair slicked back and wearing a navy blue tie with a pale blue dress shirt and black slacks. She had her curly, sunflower blonde hair decorated with a carnation pink headband, her petite figure dressed with a dusty pink cashmere sweater, powder pink tweed skirt and pearl necklace. They both looked at the menu, deciding on what to eat.

“I don’t know why you picked this place, Mary. Their food isn’t that great.” The man said.

“Oh, come on, George. This is a nice diner. We went here on our first date, remember?” Mary said.

“Yeah, I remember. You spilled your strawberry milkshake all over my shirt that night.” George said.

“True but it was an accident. I was so nervous. It was the first time I had ever gone out with anyone.” Mary said with a demure smile.

George was at a loss for words. He was hoping to start an argument with her so she would be too mad to care when he told her his secret. Maybe she would be so upset from an argument that he wouldn’t have to feel as guilty. Perhaps he wouldn’t make her feel as hurt by the truth if he got her angry beforehand. But he knew the truth would have to come out. He just wasn’t happy anymore with Mary.

Meanwhile, Mary nervously bit her lip, fiddling her fingers to prevent herself from biting at her perfectly manicured primrose pink nails. She was anxious to tell him her news. It would change both of their lives forever. As they waited for the waitress to come over, Mary noticed a jukebox in the corner of the diner. She walked over to it and picked a song to play. “Baby Mine” by Bette Midler. She then walked back over to the booth and sat down.

“Why did you pick that song?” George said.

Mary smiled and said, “Well, I picked it because...”

“Welcome to Pattie’s Diner. I’m your waitress, Debbie. What can I get you two today?”

“I’d like a cup of black coffee, a slice of pumpkin pie and a double decker turkey club sandwich.” George said as the slim, ginger haired waitress with freckles wrote down his order.

“And you, sugar?” The waitress said as she looked at Mary.

“I’ll just have a glass of water and a salad, please.” Mary said.

The waitress wrote down her order. “Ok, your orders will be ready in just a few minutes.” She said before walking off.

“A salad and water? That’s all you’re getting?” George said.

“I’ve been trying to eat healthier lately.” Mary said as she lightly touched her stomach, it churning from more than just nerves.

“Well...you have been gaining a lot of weight lately. Maybe you should go on a diet.” George said, hoping she would get mad.

“To tell you the truth, the reason why I’ve been gaining weight is because...” Mary said.

“Here’s your orders.” The waitress said as she placed their food on the table.

“Thanks.” Mary said.

“Enjoy. If you need anything else, let me know.” The waitress said before walking away.

It was no use. No matter what George said, he couldn’t make Mary mad at him enough to get her to do what he wanted. He was going to have to tell her the truth, no matter how much it devastated her to find out.

“Can I say something?” George said.

“Sure.” Mary said as she took a bite of her salad.

“Do you remember my old friend from high school, Susie?” George said

“Yes, I met her at the Christmas party last year.” Mary said, continuing to eat her salad.

“Well, she’s living in Hamilton now and I’ve been talking to her lately. She…Are… Are you ok?” George said.

Mary put her hand over her mouth, trying to hold back her gagging. She quickly got out of the booth and rushed into a stall in the ladies restroom.

George sat at the table, a stunned look on his face as he stared blankly in disbelief at what just happened. Finally, he sighed.

“Guess I’m not going to get to tell her the truth after all.” George said.

Meanwhile, Mary sat in the restroom, sobbing, humiliated at getting sick in a public place.

“Guess I’m not going to get to tell him my news after all.” Mary said.