The Fall of Autumn
_Bittersweet Romance Collection for Fall_
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**Dear Reader,**

Welcome to the Fall 2017 collection of short stories.

Remember how back in day and even today, you have fashion magazines that issue a Spring/Summer/Fall/Winter collection? I am excited to introduce to you the *literary* form of that. My hope, is that these stories will excite you, or just entertain you (I certainly enjoyed writing them!) while you sit and watch the leaves snap from a branch, or drink your piping hot coffee, or while you wait on your ride and smell Autumn air drift along the underside of your nose.

Whatever the case, I am glad you picked up this book, which although brief, contains stories ranging from contemporary to speculative and even science fiction. There is a story about falling for a cyborg, a girl who finds something interesting on the other side of death, and then there are stories that make you wonder about the intricacies of love altogether. There is something for everyone!

P.S. The majority of the stories fit the Young Adult or New Adult markets, but may contain “bitter” language and situations!
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To those who’ve tasted the bittersweet nectar
Of first love.

These stories are definitely for you.
Seaweed Eyes

Hoping against hope, I sit on grandma’s swing, under the shady tree, the large one I used to be afraid of as a child until one day I saw a beautiful, emerald thick caterpillar undulating on its branch. The tree couldn’t be all bad if beautiful creatures took up residence there.

I swing my feet out, my church shoes looking like horse hooves and kicked back and forth, my long legs were spindly and my shoes kept kicking up the dirt patch, but the November sun was warm, friendly and not unbearably hot.

I pray he doesn’t show up. Every Sunday dinner since I was ten, he would came by with his son. The one with the bowl hair cut, sneaky smile and dingy clothes.

I stop my swinging and finally make up my mind to tell Grandma Olsa my thoughts.

“Grandma!” I yell running to the house. I pull open the front door and hear it scream in protest as I dash upstairs to where grandma was knitting by the window. They look like small hats, for a baby.

“I don’t want Casey and his dad here. I hate them!”

Grandma slowly lowers her knitting needles and turns away from the window. After she sighs she then says, “Dearie. Never say you hate someone.”

“I don’t like them, Grandma,” I whine. Now I feel six instead of sixteen. “That boy is always looking at me, like he wants to eat me. He is kind of chunky. And he eats all our food!”

“You hadn’t seen him all summer, why worry now Elesa? We go to the same church and his family is in need sometimes. Giving him a free meal once in a while and some friendship is the least we can offer.” Grandma Olsa stands up in a beautiful, print dress of sunflowers and I admire her long, silver hair which hangs down in a single braid across her shoulder.

“Well. Do I have to talk to him?”

“I would like for you to be polite,” Grandma Olsa says just as a firm knock on the door downstairs confirms the worst.

They're here.

With the house smelling of sweet yams, buttered biscuits and grandma’s briskets, memories of the last Fall sweeps through me and I feel a kind of nostalgia come over me. Last year’s cinnamon raisin cookies, the large green Christmas tree with lots of presents under them.

The unopened presents mom and dad will never see.

I take the steps one at a time slowly, not excited about seeing the dark haired Casey and his thick shouldered giant of a father.

Grandma opens the door wide and opens her arms wider for Casey’s dad. “Come in fellas! You’re just in time!”

I turn on the dining hall’s lights as Casey’s dad enters.

I keep looking around the man for Casey. Grandma instead is holding a slender yet toned dude next to Casey’s dad.

The boy has his hair in a small bun at the nape of his neck and his eyes are the color of seaweed, framed by curly lashes.

He is mighty fine.

“Elesa. Aren’t you going to hug Casey?”

I swallow hard.

This. Can’t. Be. Casey.

The feet are still large, those eyes are large too but no longer hiding behind glasses. His lips are full and not because there’s food behind it.

“Uh, hi,” I flip over my words. “I didn’t recognize you.” Now it is my turn to feel self conscious.

Funny how that works.

This can’t be Casey! No Way!
Casey moves closer to me, slower. Oh God he is like one of the movie stars, or dancers I see on television.

“Hi Elesa, how’s it goin’?”

“Um, good I guess.”

“Elesa, help me with the table,” Grandma winks at Casey. I look down at my paisley top with the large, swirling design and my tights which make it appear as if I have some kind of shape.

Why am I worried over these things?

I take the red basket full of golden rolls from the kitchen, and set it neatly in the center of the long table. Casey and his dad are in the living room watching whatever sport is on television.

I push back my hair.

He is not fat.

He is not gross looking. This is Casey Pullim. Never have I felt drawn to him before.

I am such a loser. Such an idiot. So shallow.

I go back into the kitchen and help Grandma set the napkins and utensils on the table. The chill from the screen door, sweeps the house along with the scent of cinnamon from Grandma’s fragrant pine cones hanging by the windows.

I think of mom and dad.

We were just here last year watching a family movie. *A Christmas Story* to be exact. Just last year.

Before they were taken away from me.

Grandma said God took them. They were great parents, good angels, and the Lord needed them.

I need them.

I hug myself and close my eyes just as I feel warm air by my ear. “Need help?”

“N-no,” I slowly face Casey and his startling eyes. His chest fills out his shirt, I can see the indentation of muscle in his shoulders.

“I’m fine.”

“You sure? You were standing here for a minute and- well, it looked like you were lost or something.”

How sweet. He didn’t mention how my eyes are probably shining from unshed tears.

If he would have said I looked about to cry, I would have bawled right then and there all over his shirt.

“How are you and your dad?”

He stuffs his hands in his front pockets. “Good actually.” His Southern accent is beautiful. Why haven’t I noticed before?

I am such a darned loser.

“He found a job at a plant nearby, said it has benefits, good pay and we can finally give mom the beautiful headstone she deserves.”

I forgot. He lost someone too.

“Ready everyone?” Grandma announces.

Casey watches me. I can feel his gaze as I lower myself in my chair. I am next to grandma, he is next to his father, but we are across from one another.

After grandma’s really long prayer of grace over the food, we all dig in. I am ravenous for the rolls, but suddenly I am not so hungry for grandma’s lovely cooking. .

I watch Casey and of course, he is not affected by anything. He digs in with gusto, chomps down on the brisket, slops the rolls in the sauce made for the brisket and shoves it on down.

Soft music plays from grandma’s radio. They are playing Christmas songs. But the mood is perfect. The sky is the color of jean blue with a stitch of pink and I can hear the crickets.

“God has blessed you, Anthony.” Grandma begins, passing the ice tea in a large glass pitcher to everyone. I pour a small amount in my glass.

“He certainly has. I got this job because of hard work, but also a little divine intervention. You’ve been prayin’ on my behalf little lady?”
Grandma laughs and waves her hand, banishing the thought. “Why? I have to. You’re our friend now. Even if you weren’t I’d still give God a request.” Grandma Olsa then turns to Casey, a twinkle in her eye.

“This handsome devil could stop traffic though. What happened to ya?”

Casey shrugged, his eyes slammed into mine again before back to grandma. “I met some dudes at the camp who loved martial arts. I always liked seeing it on television but could never really do it. I began going to the dojo with them.”

“That’s cool,” I say and sip my tea to prevent further talk.

“Well I see Princess Elesa is still radiant as ever. How are you doin?” His father asks me.

I tell him I am doing well. I left out the part about me mostly staying home, crying myself to sleep thinking of mom and dad, throwing up food after I eat so I can stay small and pretty and petite…

Casey eyes me curiously. I can’t believe I hated them. I saw them as slum rats who ate our food every Sunday. Lazy, slovenly folks who couldn’t get jobs.

Now, I am sitting before a hard working man and his handsome son.

“Hey, Elesa wanna come outside with me?” Casey stands with his plate in his hand. “Is it alright, Mrs. Night?”

“Please, you call me Grandma honey,” Grandma remains seated, her hands in a steeple position. “Go on you two.”

I breathe in a shaky breath. Casey takes my plate for me and instead of just sitting them on the side of the sink, he washes each one and dries each one. I stand next to him and place them in the cabinet where they belong before we begin our silent march outside.

I feel the moment of truth coming on.

His hand reaches for mine. I gasp as we walk out into the early evening together. Some kids are riding their bikes while others are simply outside with friends laughing and talking about whatever.

Casey’s hand is warm.

We sit in the long white porch swing swing, the one swing in the front yard. He still clasps my hand.

“Look, Elesa-”

“Why’d you change?” I interrupt him. I didn’t mean to sound hard and scathing, but I don’t know whether to hate him or…

Or…

He pulls his hand from mine. I really do feel the coldness seep into my bone then. I need his hand.

“I was just kind of hoping that you’d y’know…fall in love with me.”

My face is heated and now I see why he pulled away from me. He is twisting his hands nervously, they are white as milk.

“Casey, you know I have a boy-”

“I know. He is everything I am not. He is a few years older, more handsome, has more money. But,” he turns to me and takes my hand gently, I feel butterflies. He takes my whole hand, wrist and all. “But I care about you. A lot.”

“Casey I am so very sorry for ignoring you all this time,” I slap a palm to my forehead. “Geez! Listen to me. I am only apologizing because now you’re hot.”

I popped the same hand over my mouth. My stupid mouth!

A smile curls at the edge of Casey’s lips. “You think I’m hot?”

“You mean, you don’t know?” I say astonished he doesn’t recognize he is cuter than my pothead boyfriend Sam.

“Well, towards the end of summer, my buddies kept inviting me to places and a few girls even asked me out. I thought it was just so they could hang with the other guys.”

“No way. They wanted you, Casey. But for real, you look good. I am happy for you.”

“Are you happy though?”

“Yes.” I bite my bottom lip. I also realize his eyes have always been deep and mossy, seaweedy, intelligent. His hair has always been thick and raven black. He was still the same, shy, caring Casey.
“I know you miss them. I miss mom a lot too. Drunk drivers are stupid. Deserve to be tortured in hell, really.”

“Yeah. I lived and the drunk driver gets to live in some fancy prison.” I said angrily.

“My mom died of cancer but it hurts a lot to know she kept it from us for so long. I thought we had years to go with her. I wanted her to take pictures of my prom, for her and dad to finally go to Hawaii... then she just...died.”

“Do you think she is in heaven, with God?”

Casey shrugs. “She ain’t here with me and that’s all I know.”

“Ditto. I’d rather them be here. I don’t know why good people always die.”

Casey takes my hand and boldly places it on his lap. “In that case, there better be a heaven.”

“I agree.”

“Come closer, Elesa. I don’t bite,” he chuckles. I smile and scoot next to him, lay my head on his shoulder. He begins to gently rock us back and forth.

I see grandma and his dad in the window. Grandma has taken out her large sized bible and they were looking into it, smiling and talking. She was probably teaching him more of the bible. My grandma, the teacher. Just like her daughter, my mom.

“So did ya?” Casey whispers, flicking back a strand of my blond tresses.

“Did I what?”

“Did you...fall for me?”

I give him the only answer I could. The one could seal the hole in my chest, the one that opens new possibilities.

I turn his face to mine and for the first time, with a boy, I am nervous.

He lets me run my hands up and down his face.

I am about to bring him closer when he pulls me to him roughly and before I can even blink, he is kissing me.

I kiss back wholeheartedly, falling into his lips, his scent of and soap and butter rolls; twin sorrows...
Give Me Bod, A Cyborg Love Story

“Strong enough to break the bravest heart
We have to pull together
We can't stay worlds apart” - from Transformers Theme Song

His whole body was a seductive poem.

Spiky ebony hair, great tan, eight pack abs, silver chrome fixtures above his right temple and entire right side- indicating his nature as a cyborg, but with heart shaped lips and a laugh that was any female would deem-perfect.

Cyborgs aren’t supposed to have beautiful lips, right?
Amza allowed his hands to roam down the side of her body. He took his sweet time.
They were alone, in the small alcove of the by the Borg stables, a mile from the lake. She was sure he didn’t like her, considering how lecherous he was with other female cyborgs. She was the only human there, slim not “well stacked” like the female cyborgs, but here he was smoothing his hands over her skin touching her as if she were beautiful. Treasured.
“If you want to make him jealous,” he began, talking about her abusive, loser boyfriend.
“You can start by using me.”
Bod didn’t have to say anything else, Amza grabbed his face and kissed him hard, surprised by the moan falling from him, like the humming a thousand bees, or the groaning of a few instruments during a symphony. His hands stayed around her waist.
For real or for play, Bod wanted her.
And she wanted him.
By the light of the moon she could see his chrome fixture on the side of his head glowing, his right eye shining like a star. He was beautiful and pulling her in for a deeper kiss.
Amza caught a shadow flicker along the wall just as Bod trailed warm kisses down the side of her neck…
“I must go.”
“No.” Bod yanked her body to his and treated her mouth to more tongue and hot lips. A possessive groan escaped from his lips before he pulled himself away. His body danced in rhythm, breathing life into his fitted, industrial faded black jeans. He wore no top. Why would he?
The guards will kill them if they ever found out.
He turned back, flashed her a white toothed smile. “Go home meat sack,” Bod gave a salute then bowed away from her to join the other cyborgs in their own domicile.
Amza touched her lips. Never have she been kissed thoroughly like that before.
Never have she been kissed.
Her father’s bodyguard, Crypt, met her at the entrance of the gate. His posture rim rod straight and he wore black, intimidating shades. It was dark and only the full moon cast light so she never understood the shades thing.
“Starting ruckus with those toasters?” he said in a gruff voice.
Amza was beginning not to like the derogatory term for the cyborgs her father owned. She was definitely not kissed by a toaster just now.
“No way Crypt. I have better things to do. Just getting some fresh air.”
“Alright. Get inside though. Your father came out looking for you earlier.”
“Okay.”
Amza rubbed a hand down her face. Can someone tell if you’ve been kissed? Probably not, she hoped.
Wearing nothing but yoga pants and a white tank, she looked up at the tall, impressive 1889 Victorian style home with the gabled roof. It was larger than most homes. It was actually a combination of at least three Victorian homes in one. Along atop a hill.
She walked up the large steps and entered the foyer where her father had just finished speaking with some important diplomat she did not recognize.
“Where have you been?” He bid the thin guy farewell before turning his attention on Amza. She forgot just how stormy his brown eyes could get. She inherited it from him.
“Talking with Crypt.”
“I saw Crypt. Not you.”
“I went to the ‘borg stables.”
Her father’s thick face reddened. “You did what!”
Amza shrugged, tried to make light of it. “I just wanted to know more about the Autumn Festival coming up and who can help out.”
Her father’s eyes rolled to back of his head as he began pacing back and forth. “How many times do I have to tell you? Stay out of the Borg House! It is dangerous!” He grabbed her shoulders and squeezed. “I thought you were out with Sammy.”
“I don’t like him, dad and I think we both know why. Need I remind you of his quick temper?”
Her father, clearly realizing he was not going to win the argument, switched back to the Borg House subject again. Amza stood there listening to his tirade of how they are dangerous and how it was like going into a home of moving, capable weapons.
He then strictly forbade her from hanging out with the males. Always stay away from the males, apparently the way they are wired were different from females.
He did not elaborate.
Amza went upstairs, shut her door quietly and lay in bed in the dark. She could hear the din from the distance drifting from the Borg House. They were having a lively gathering her father did not know or care about.
They belonged to him, on his premises and had to obey him because he had the Big Remote Control and could shut them all down and reprogram them if he wanted to or just delete their existence.
She could not imagine her life without Bod though. For a year, since her father acquired him for his home, she’d sneak peeks at the handsome cyborg. Whoever designed him did an excellent job. Not only did he have a sense of humor, he was intelligent (of course) and just super gorgeous. What female of any entity would say no to him?
The fact that he allowed her to kiss him must mean he felt the same way? But she saw how he looked at the female cyborgs. With their shapely legs and toned backs. Some had silver hair, fiery red hair and then the most stunning of all Masheerah with long black tresses and coal black eyes. A hard worker, yet Amza heard she did more than just “work” for her father and other political figures.
Masheerah was often the reason for broken marriages as well.
Yet under the full, bright moon with the crisp November air drifting in, Amza slept with dreams of her and Bod kissing under the same alcove and later in the dream they are in her room.
It is forbidden to love a cyborg, but what if it is too late?

Amza groaned awake once sunshine hit her. Thoughts of the Autumn Festival hit her like a ton of bricks.
But so did Bod’s kiss.
Yum. She could smell him now…as if he were right there in the room with her.
“Good morning, Sunshine.”
Amza shrieked when she saw Bod sitting in one of her fluffy room chairs by the door, leg crossed over the other, a black tight "Nirvana" shirt leaving nothing to the imagination.
“God! You scared me! How did you get in?”
Bod rolled his eyes, his black hair was spiky, disheveled. A bed ridden mess- and she loved it. “I have my ways.”
Throwing her legs over the bed she marched over to him and pointed in his face as if he were a bratty child. “You can’t do that. My father has a house set up for you. He will decommission you if you stay here.” Amza pointed at her door then. “You have to go.”
“And what will he do if you leave?”
“Excuse me?”
Bod stood up to his full height. He was a couple of heads taller than Amza and he watched her with amusement in his eyes.
“Let me refresh your memory.” He said, then suddenly in her exact voice due to his ability to mimic he said. “Father will kill me if I leave home. He loves that I am homeschooled and besides I get the best education. I want to explore, dammit!”
Amza was freaked out by Bod’s performance, but he recorded her perfectly six months prior. She will be eighteen in a few months and wanted to leave, but the daughter of the president of New America cannot just leave. Not in this brand new world where nearly 90% of the population was starving and poor because of new taxation laws and decrease in jobs because of the cyborgs.
“He will hunt me down.”
“Okay,” Bod took her hand in his. His hands were warm, soft. She dared to look him in his eyes: one dark, one brilliant lit like blue ice. “What was that last night then?”
“Me rebelling.”
“But you liked it. The heat of your lips were scorching and your heartbeat increased by several notches. Even the pheromones you were giving off-”
“Okay stop,” Amza took a second to breathe. Bod was not letting her hand go. “You can detect all of that?”
“There is more to me than meets the eye.”
She smirked. “Transformer.”
Bod cocked his head in question. “Transformer?”
“Nothing. A vintage franchise about robots who can transform into vehicles at will. They came from another planet and that’s their theme song.”
Bod was quiet a few moments. His eyes rolled heavenward, all cyborgs did that when seeking information on the NetLink.
Suddenly he snapped back to attention. “Got it.”
Bod then began dancing and singing the theme to Transformers, twirling and astonished Amza all around when three firm knocks hit her door.
Swift as a cat, Bod dodged into her huge walk in closet.
She answered her door to find the cook Stephen announcing breakfast was served and that her father was waiting.

“Yes, Stephen. Thank you.”

When she shut the door, Bod came out wearing her pale blue rimless shades, her tight fitting jeans and a ruby wrap shirt.

“You’d look good in these but I found something better.” He winked. Amza still couldn’t get over him wearing her stylish clothing.

In his hands was a sleezy, slink black dress her mom bought her for her sixteenth birthday. She never wore it because of the memories it held.

“Put it back.”

Bod came closer. “Why?”

“I just can’t wear that.”

“A gift from Mrs. Teree?”

“Yeah.”

“She had great taste, Amza.”

“She did.” Amza crossed her arms. “I’m going to shower then head downstairs before dad wonder about me.”

“Can I watch?”

Amza snatched the black dress from him. “No sir! You put up my things!” She felt a blush creep up her cheeks.

Later, Bod went to the Borg House while Amza had breakfast with her father. It gave him time to think more about his plan.

His plan to take the beautiful Amza far away from the world. He was a lot more than meets the eye and Amza will surely see.

Even the alluring Masheerah could not distract him from his plans. Before he closed his eyes to roam the secured NetLink provided for by his Maker, she laid a gentle palm to his arm.

“We missed you today at Planks.”

Planks was a contest between the borgs who could withstand Planks and Isometrics the longest.

He was the long running winner.

“I know. I was taking care of something.”

Masheerah’s maker must have equipped her with special tantalizing pheromones because even Bod who normally ignored her, felt himself drawn in. It was getting harder to resist her.

“I’ll leave you to whatever you are doing,” she said.

He closed his eyes and downloaded the maps he needed and calculated the time and possible obstacles.

After doing grueling yet easy tasks around the Teree estate, night fell easily upon them and right out front of the estate the Autumn Festival began.

There were pumpkin carriages, huge leaves blown across the yard in intricate designs by Masheerah to create a pathway or aisle down to Lake Teree. Quiet music, cakes made of pumpkin spice and eggnog was served.
The star of the evening was the svelte pixie haired beauty Amza Teree. Bod caught other male borgs watching her closely. One of them, Tiger ribbed him with his elbow. “I’d like to have a piece of that cake.”

Something alien came over Bod and he punched Tiger brutally in the nose. “Fight! Fight! The other borgs yelled, causing the big moving mountain named Crypt to go into the yard and inquire and assess the situation. Several more guards, smaller than Crypt moved in swiftly with huge, silver Remote Controls in their hands.

Bod picked up his friend. “My mistake. A kneejerk reaction,” he told Crypt while also looking over across the yard at Amza. She was trying the pumpkin spiced cakes Stephen cooked. Although Stephen was a borg too, he was older and a great Chef. Docile even.

Amza was holding the small cake in her sweet hands, watching the commotion. Her beautiful eyes wide.

“You all should not be wandering out anyway. Only Stephen is allowed outdoors.” Crypt boomed to all the cyborgs on the lawn.

“Wait,” Masheerah came over and turned her tone sugary sweet. “Can we just hang out a few minutes? The air is stifling inside. We just want to move our…bodies a bit. Is it alright?”

Even for Crypt, the lovely Masheerah was a great pill to swallow.

“A few minutes then. Then scat!” he said gruffly. He ushered the other guards to fall back.

“Ow! That actually busted my bridge man! Why’d you do it?” Tiger, with his long, brownish-red hair looked at Bod accusingly. “All over a human?”

“What is he talking about?” Masheerah said.

Bod could only focus on Amza.

Amza.

She was looking at him or maybe at Masheerah’s possessive hand on his arm. However, her expression was blank as she tried a cake and moved on to the pumpkin decorations and carriages. Mingled with her own kind.

Amza knew Masheerah liked Bod.

Whether she believed or not, she knew at some point, Bod had relations with Masheerah.

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Either way, it was none of her concern. Bod was from a different world then she. He was created, she was born. He had his own people and she had hers.

He served her, not the other way around.

Finishing off a small pumpkin spiced cake, she dabbed at her lips and drew her black shawl over her shoulders. The slinky dress was beautiful and made her legs look longer and sexier. It still held sorrowful memories of her mother though.

Too bad she died before the cure for cancer came.

Amza was watching the sun dip behind the trees casting golds and reds all over the yard when someone snuck arms about her waist.

“Hey Beautiful.” A familiar voice whispered deep into her ear. Soft music played and it seemed hundreds of people came out this year. They could be spotted.

“Bod, we can’t do this.”

“Why not?”

“You could be decommissioned! Plus,” she chewed her bottom lip, hating being petty but whatever. “I saw you with Masheerah.”. He held onto her fast.

“Do you know what I like about you, Amza?”
“Not really?” She felt a gentle kiss on the back of her neck. “You taste just like nectar.”
Her knees became weak but Bod held her up chuckling softly. “More than that, you are a
determined creature I want know more of.”
Amza saw Crypt getting a spiced cake and he almost turned around but Masheerah cornered
him and began talking to him animatedly about something. They appeared to be in deep
conversation.
“Come with me.” Bod said, suddenly unwrapping his arms from about her.
Without waiting for an answer, he pulled her and led her down the leafy path to the lake
where a small boat sat.
“Where’d this come from?”
“I made it. After you, My Lady Teree.”
Amza looked back at the estate and the growing twilight. Everything was beautiful. “Where
are we going?”
Bod pointed behind her. “Your boyfriend is looking for you.”
Amza nearly choked on her breath. There he was. Ebony skinned and dressed in a tailored
black suit. Always suits and looking handsome yet so in control.
She hated him.
Bod was getting into the boat. He was watching her as she looked from him to Sammy. Him.
Sammy. Him.
It was a no brainer, really.
Taking off her shoes, she took Bod’s hand and let him guide her into the freshly made boat.
He arranged himself so she sat between his legs, her back to his chest. She could hear a
steady heart beat and exhaled as the stars dotted the calm, dark water.
“I’m leaving.” He said.
“I know.”
“Getting into this boat means you choose me.”
“I know that too,” she sighed. “I know more about you than you think, Bod.”
Bod remained quiet. Maybe she did know. Maybe she knew he had a plan for them to leave.
But did she know it would be tonight? Did she care?
Bod rested his chin on her head and thanked his Maker for being so masterful.
My Little Killer

This time, she sported thick, corded locks that dragged down her perfectly toned, yet feminine exposed back. Her hair were like black long snakes that shook and bounced while she practiced hitting the wooden dummy, Wing Chun style. Her small elbows administering strong, fast jabs to upper arm and lower arm part of the block.

Her petite 5’2 frame amazed me and my friends. She not only can fight very well, but trained to use most guns and blades.

She was sent to kill me a few months ago. In fact, she said my name came up on the Clouds. Every name arose in the Clouds and she had to kill that person. Only in the Fall did she let up some of her killing spree.

“Why Fall?” I had asked her one day.

“Because, that is when life rests. I move with the earth. That is all.”

I shrugged. She spoke in riddles sometimes. But even so, she had no sense of humor that I could tell. She joked but it came off so deadpan. “Kill me now” I told her several months back. Kill me now and get it over with.”

The spade shaped blade glinted under the moon’s light as the tip brushed at my heart. It thudded with life and to think, this little waif cornered me, bested me! I’m a black belt and a well known MMA star but I was cornered, beaten bloody, spitting blood on the ground by some girl from out of nowhere who receives killing orders names from Clouds.

She paused. Oh, I remember the pause as her blade pierced my skin harder drawing rivulets of my own blood down my chest. Dear Lord, forgive me. I did not mean to hurt those people in the ring!

Suddenly she pulled back the blade and tucked it into her belt. Her dark face was small as a child’s, an angel’s face. Her eyes held no light. It swallowed it. Her locks were only past her shoulders then, not grazing the tip of her hips like now.

She had licked her lips like a wolf and backed off of me. “You have heart, soldier.” Her French/African broke me.

It turned me on like a cold lamp that hadn’t been used in years. I noticed for the first time that her lips were full pillows, and I bet just as soft. I scanned her face and then further down to the white leather she wore. When I think assassin, I think of black attire. Like the way Hollywood trained us all to think.

This chick, did not mind being spotted. She wore pristine white that contrasted HOT as hell against her skin.

“You said I deserved to die.”

“Not today though.” She looked up into the sky just as a fat raindrop splashed directly into her eye. She rubbed her eye, suddenly looking all of ten years old as if she was rubbing out dirt she could barely stand.

Then she turned her eyes back on me and sighed. Her bosom was not big at all. In fact, they were perfect. Round, and I bet firm. Her white tank hugged her chest tightly, amplifying it for my thirsty eyes.

I felt like a pervert that night. I wanted to die but in a different way.

“May I ask what your name is at least? How old you are?”

“None of that matters, Cayden.” She drew her jacket closed. “Your time is not tonight.”

“Just curious.” I shrugged.
That’s how much of a stupid male I am. We are all stupid. We could be in the presence of
danger and still our genitals will speak louder than reason.

I don’t know what drew me to her. During the chase, I felt adrenaline, I felt fear. Real, cold
fear and I knew I would die. She chased me up the streets, through malls, the parking spaces and
get this. The girl climbs walls.

Walls!
She would best anyone in American Ninja hands down.
But that was how she got me. My punk ass caught the elevator when I dodged her and went
up to the tenth floor of the bank and municipal building.

I had hid in one of the dark unused office rooms.
The room with a huge, skyline window.

Somehow and I still do not know how, she tracked me. I heard the tip-tap-tip of the cracking
glass just before it burst and the shards rained down like music from cymbals everywhere. I

stood there, shocked and amazed-

In love.

Her body broke through the glass as she barrel rolled to the ground, cutting her own self up,
her pristine white gear ripped in places above her shoulder and stomach. The threads hanging in
tatters like ripped white flesh. A flat stomach like a washboard couldn’t be missed.

She and I fought.
I had more height, weight and muscle on her and managed to do more defense than
anything. I held back. She was a girl.

She did not hold back. I was the girl. Funny how this little sprite could make a grown man

feel like a five year old, but she did.

Finally she pulled some Bruce Lee quick hand moves, coupled with gymnastics and had me

pinned to the wall with both hands, using a table as leverage and height.

Then she handcuffed me with platinum cuffs she claimed came from the collision of “stars”.

Yeah right.

Walked me outside and there we were, under the raining moon, with her spade-shaped knife
at my heart, and me looking at her defeated but turned on. Why?

That brings me to today.

It has been reported there were at least twenty more murders in the area: mutilated bodies
found behind dumpsters, decapitated heads delivered to doors and then the disappearances.

All had her name written all over it: tsadeq.

I found her walking through the City Center one day, wearing regular tight fitting jeans girls
wear, her hair pulled up in messy bun, a few locks escaping it. Her shirt was tight as well. The
girl had a killer body. No pun intended.

It was daylight and shoppers were out, not many but few. Everyone knew of the murders. I

knew the murderer.

“I smell you from here, Cayden.” She halts her steps near the bakery at the City Center. The
sun gleams on her, and I swear I see gold dust over her shoulders. It is a warm November day,
that’s for sure.

“I know. I was not stalking you. I swear”

She turned to me, her eyes were large and slanted like a cat’s, her full lips on display. A curl
at the edge of her lips grew. A smile?

“You better not be. Someone like me shouldn’t be stalked. You must want your time to be
up early, Fool.”
I guess my day of death still approaches…Ah well.
I stood boldly in front of her. Up this close and in the sun, she appeared older. Not old but at
least twenty. A childlike twenty.
“**I know your name.**”
“I know you do. You should by now.”
“Tsadeq. What does it mean?”
She put a hand on her hip, appearing normal for once. “Don’t you have Google?”
“I do.” I stepped closer to her and I watch her smile turn quickly into a frown. “I want to
hear it from you.”
“I don’t cater to **your** wants, or any human’s wants.”
“You’re human too right? Don’t you have…desires?”
For the first time, she seemed to bristle in fear. “Desires?”
“Yeah, something that you crave. Or someone..?” I wanted so badly to brush a lock behind
her pretty little ears. What was I thinking?
“I want to kill,” she looked at her small hands, turning them over once to the brown side,
then back to her pink, fleshy palms. Staring at them as if her reflection was there. “Over and
over. This gives me a---good feeling?”
She asked it as if confused. She couldn’t be confused since she handed my hindparts to me
months back. She knew what she was there to do.
“Why? Why do hurt people. Why do you kill them? You know there are some moral laws
that can’t be broken.”
I wondered also why she hadn’t been caught. Were cops mesmerized by her perfect body
and mysterious eyes? Did they hope to be the ones dying under her hands too?
“Justice.” She said and turned to walk away from me.
I can’t let her go. Not again. That night she cuffed me, left me for dead. I wanted her. Her
scent life flowers and honey and the image of her slowly cuffing me replayed over and over
again in my mind.
I still have those cuffs. For good reason.
I saw a dude, mean mugging me as I chased after Tsadeq. He had been eyeing her for a
while now.
He will not have her. I knew that look.
I ran and stopped in front of her, and threw the guy a “A ha I got to her first!” look before he
scrunched up his face and beat it down the street with his perfectly starched gray suit and wide
back.
“You’re chasing me.” She said. I like her voice. Man! Calm and resolute. Deep and rich like
maple from a tree. Sexy.
“Yes. I am chasing you. You tried to kill me, the least you can do is talk to me.”
She turned right, heading in the direction of the water sprout display. I followed, like a lost
puppy, her light blue jeans hugging the hell out of her ass and hips, making me jealous that it
wasn’t me holding her curves.
Where did she come from?
Why was she a maniacal killer who couldn’t be caught?
What got her hot and bothered? Does she laugh?
I caught up to her and she sat at a white-stone bench facing the ducks in the water, I calmly
sat next to her, not too close.
I felt this amazing energy rub off on me though. It was a vibration that was white hot but easy to endure. I felt more alive, like I can move around and dance forever.

“What you are feeling is life. The truest and purest form of it,” she began. She sat back and I listened to her. “It is like dying when life becomes the most potent. Tastier.”

She continued, “Karma is alive. It is composing music everyday in the heavens.” She looked up and I saw how graceful her neck was. Even the way she moved was poetry. “Whales and birds sing too, sing the song of the world. It is code, however. A way to communicate. Everything talks in one way or another. Just like the laws of the universe. The symphony must be harmonized at every moment. If there is too much, there must be less. Too less, there must be much. I am the one to subtract…and make it happen.”

“You kill people.” I reminded her.

“I end their lives. Yes. This is true.” She said it as a matter of fact, no emotion.

“Because they had Karma gunning for them?”

“That is one reason. The other is that the human race is successfully killing each other off. This is my last day here. I am no longer needed. The earth shall be green again, Cayden.”

She licked her lips, I lost my focus for moment.

“I don’t want you to leave.”

“Foolish, stupid boy.” She said, anger in her tone but she reached out for me, her nimble, small fingers tracing my brow and down my nose. My Irish father’s nose my mom told me and then her thumb traced the outline of my lips.

“You should die,” she said before leaning in to me. I couldn’t help it, I was aroused and pulled her closer to me, dragging her hips with both my hands so she was nearly sitting on my lap. She allowed me to do it and then I devoured her sweet lips.

Oh! Nectar of the gods and she kissed me back so expertly so real! Our lips and tongues dueled as we did with our hands before, each one trying to best the other but this time in giving, not taking.

My hands slid down her waist and hips, we did not care who looked.

It was just me and Tsadeq.
Betrayal Has a Name

Patsy swung the door open hard. Not caring that it banged against the chalky white cheap wall of her studio apartment. Not caring that her friends were eyeing her with strict concern. She took herself out of there and fast, needing to be the first to reach her friend Alista.

“Wait,” a firm touch and clasp of his warm hand, grasped her elbow as she tried to take that last step. Jonathan’s eyes roved over her body. A tingle broke through her, beginning from her arm where he touched her and pooled in her lower belly.

She removed his hand quickly. “What do you mean wait?” She spat. “Let me go to her. She’s my friend.” Every word was enunciated, hard. Like each nail driven into wood. Meant to close the deal and seal the truth.

But they were both liars and Patsy knew this bone deep.

Now it was Jonathan’s turn to frown. He looked at the short, cute girl wearing the gray pullover hoodie and whose sweatpants never looked better on another girl. Her body was perfect and her small face. Her lips always begged for his kisses.

“I think we passed that line two days ago- don’t you think?”

Patsy bit her bottom lip. Even had the decency to look nervous and guilty. She looked up at Jonathan. His eyes were trained on her lips. Now she remembered. Never did he look into her eyes when they would all hang out together. He always looked at her lips. And when she spoke, he always backed her opinions. She, Alista, Jonathan, and Coby were the best of friends since high school.

Two years later and they were still close.

For now.

Jonathan dated Alista, the pretty pianist with the big, chocolate eyes. He dated Alista all four years of high school.

High school was over now.

Now, they were deciding on college, jobs, and ultimately if there really was a pot of gold at the end of relationships. They both knew they shouldn't hurt Alista anymore. Alista has been hurt enough. By her family, this sudden accident, and now this...

“We have to see her. She is at the hospital. I’m done with...with this.” Patsy crossed her arms over her small breasts, watching as Jonathan licked his lips.

What have they done?

What have they done?

Jonathan wrapped his arms around her. Not caring who may see them. “I told you before,” he whispered. “And I'll say it once more. You have always been the one for me. Maybe if we tell Alista the truth now, it won’t be as hard for her to take later.”

Patsy shoved him hard and made it all the way to her car door and was about to pull it open when once again Jonathan’s arms wrapped about her. She forgot how fast he was, being a former track runner and running back for their high school football team.

Her phone buzzed.

His rang too- had a stupid ringtone.

She pulled hers out of her pocket. Alista’s cousin’s face bloomed all over it, causing a knife to stake its way into her chest.

Jonathan showed her his screen. Alista’s mother was calling him.

It is moments like these where it is inappropriate to think of the late day showers with Jonathan’s muscular, powerfully built body pressing hers into the cool tiled wall, grunting, groaning, praying her name aloud.

Or in the morning, with her body spooned with his. Excited and tortured by his teasing lips. The cries of near pain and ecstasy as Patsy realize he was indeed a very, very experienced lover which caused her to nearly lose her voice. Probably one delicious reason Alista stayed with him.
In a span of forty-eight hours, she and Jonathan shared passion with one another in a thousand ways. No holding back.

Patsy should have left him alone.
“...“I want you, Patsy. Let’s tell her the truth.”
Cold prickles marched down her neck like ants. “I don’t want to take this call.” She swallowed. "I don't want to tell any truths."
“...Jonathan agreed.
This time it was just his phone buzzing.
Alista’s mom again.

* 

*My problem is that I always feel something is there, even when I’ve lost it. My leg. My beautiful leg Jonathan always groped and tickled, just right under the knee- is now gone. I am told to be grateful I still have my piano fingers. But I have no leg and I am in strange pain.*

Alista pushed herself up in the bed, just as Patsy, Jonathan and Coby walked into her room. In that order. Her mom, Patricia Michaels stood up, erect, dignified. Nodded at each friend briefly. “...Make it short. She needs her rest.” Adjusting her heavy pewter coat with white fur lining the hood, Alista’s mom walked out the room. Her heels clicking hard. The sound of importance and success. Alista only hoped to be like her someday. Unaffected by life, taking charge as problems came.

“Hey baby,” Jonathan leaned down. Kissed her lips gently. She couldn’t feel it. Her lips were too dry and cracked. Noticing her discomfort, he poured her some water into a small Styrofoam cup from the pitcher on the side table and added the short, tiny white straw. “Drink.”

She sipped a little as he stroked her hair, telling her he missed her and asking about her health and did she dream of pianos.

Meanwhile she caught the faint surprise on Patsy’s childlike face. That beautiful face of a cherub. But her eyes held a shine. Tears. “Oh, Alista!” She came over and leaned down on Alista. Patsy’s soft body smelled just like Jonathan’s arm. Baby powder and Dove soap. “Hi! Are you okay? I am so, so sorry!”

“I miss my leg.” Alista said. “I would borrow yours, but you have incredibly short, turtle ones. I’ll manage.”

“Still find time to crack jokes, huh?” Jonathan stepped back from Alista as Coby narrowed his eyes at everyone. Alista waved her hand. She knew Jonathan hated how she picked on Patsy. Ever since high school, Patsy was just easy to like and tease at the same time. She couldn't help it.

“I have to. I’ve been in an accident on my way to perform.” She took Coby’s offered hand. He kissed the back of hers.

“You are a perfectionist, Sweetheart.” Coby’s handsome pierced face and blue eyes shone with affection for her. Alista loved her childhood friend. Suddenly she wish they could start that band he’s been meaning to put together.

But Alista wanted to make sure she wasn’t dreaming. Jonathan’s eyes usually soft for her, were now hard. With concern or...something else?

Patsy appeared skittish as usual. Such a shy kitten. But Alista could see clearly that Jonathan was protective of their little friend.

“When I said break a leg,” Coby began. “I was only joking.”
“You know I always took your advice.”
“How does your body feel? I mean. Are you going to be alright?” Patsy asked her.
“What’s crazy is I think I feel my leg.”
“What?” Patsy asked touching the railing. “What do you mean?”
“Phantom limb effect I believe. Remember in psychology class? When the teacher talked about losing a limb but still having the feeling that it’s there?”
“Oh, yeah.” Patsy and Jonathan said at the same time.
“Anyway,” Alista ran her hand down the severed limb part. Grateful the blanket was covering her. “It may be gone, but I still feel it.” She paused and sat her cup down. "We lose something and still feel it is there. It hurts more now that it is gone, than if I had it. Doctors said it had to be done."

“Wow,” Patsy bit her bottom lip. “It had to be done to rescue you from worse hurt you know.”

“Yeah. You wouldn’t be with us, otherwise.” Jonathan shifted, placed his hands in his pockets. “It must be done.”

“I keep thinking,” Alista sat up slightly grimacing as everyone leaned in closer to hear what she had to say. “I keep thinking, maybe if they could have left it on. I can walk on crutches you know?”

“You would still suffer,” Jonathan offered. “Why have something that is crippling you. Why would anyone want that? Plus, you are here. You needed to be cut out from that car.”

“You sound insensitive. Why would anyone want their leg cut?” Coby interjected.

“No one wants it,” Patsy glanced at Jonathan’s face. “But if something is not working or if it can rescue you from a world of debilitation and pain---why keep it?”

Alista shook her head. Coby suddenly took her hand again while Jonathan’s remained in his front pockets, but his eyes still loved her. In whatever form it was conveying. It had to be love.

Alisa bristled. With her leg probably sitting on ice in a cooler right now, a part of her since birth now disconnected from her forever, what could she hope for in life?

Becoming a one legged pianist?

Then again, that would surely get YouTube hits. Like Coby said. All hope isn’t lost. She could have died.

Coby stared at her in wonder. Why did he always do that? His deep eyes and piercings used to disturb her but now, she was grateful for the attention. Whereas Jonathan and Patsy seemed to be fading away from her.
The Fall of Autumn
(Who Are you? Where am I?)

Funny how the pain you think you’d feel before dying would be the worst. The pain of a body finally fizzing out like old soda. The creaks and groans of sick bones, the sore throat that is beyond hell and just having a sheet draped over you in the hospital, hurts your skin.

They doped me up with all kinds of funny name brand medicines, the clear tubing runs through my veins and I have my thumb taped to the “pain control” monitor to allow me to “inject” more stuff into my blood stream as I lay dying.

But none of this is as painful or morbid as staring into the eyes of my boyfriend Darwin Humphrey.

I can tell by the wince in his face, the pain in his tone that he is watching a shell of me. The true me is slowly wasting away. The rare stomach cancer has finally won. At the age of 24, I am losing the battle. Have lost the battle.

He is probably inwardly groaning right now. The day I found out I had it, I remember sitting in my mother’s favorite chair. The pink one with pink feathers and red and pink small heart pillows(gifts from dad).

Darwin was sending pics of me to his family in Germany. He called me the “hot blonde” and truthfully I was.

I stand at 5’5, long strong, lean legs, breasts that I am/was? Naturally blessed with that had very little bounce and some jiggle. Bright blue eyes and hair that was just naturally straight and white teeth to match.

I was going to be a forensic photographer. I have always been a fan of those enormously addicting crime shows like *Criminal Minds*, *Law and Order*, and *CSI* but my fascination has always been with scenes.

Pictures tell a thousand words. Right now, Darwin is breaking inside. I can feel it. His hand lightly touches mine, but instead of feeling warm and making me all bright inside, it hurts my paper thin skin. It’s like he is slowly scraping my skin with razor blades and I feel a boiling anger brewing.

At him. At myself. At no one. At God.

He sees an old woman. Chemo will do that.

My shiny, bright California bred looks are no more. I look 65 to be honest and gaunt. I saw myself in the mirror by accident two months ago and since then, my mom agreed to buy me a veil to wear over my face.

In the hospital, I do not wear it. I do not wear it for Darwin. I don’t care anymore.

His wavy brown hair and lion gold eyes drinks me in from head to toe. Before, when we first met in college, his eyes would trail slowly over my curves causing small fires in my heart, making my stomach flutter.

Now, he looks at me as if I am a stranger. He takes me in slowly because Reality is a Beast. I look away from him and towards another rainy day. It’s true. It never rains Southern California but it is today.

“Autumn…I..love you.”

Instead of responding, my eyes water but even that hurts. Can’t even cry. It’s been a good run in this world. All 24 years of it.
“Please. Look at me, love.” His Boston accent is what always does me in. I love city boys. I love smart ones who are hot. Darwin is all of that.

He will move on without me in six months to a year maybe. Find another beauty who will console him as he talks about his dead girlfriend, they will share Starbucks coffee a few days out the week until his heart beats a little faster and his touches on her becomes less friendly and more loving- same as he did with me.

They will trade sob stories of the monster of cancer and he will invite her over for dinner at his mom’s.

A year from now or two he may be with or he may not. He will marry someone because that’s Darwin. Hot biology major whose parents are both professors at California State University.

They will welcome her.

He may become a player. Just sleep with a lot of girls.

I look at him and that is when all of a sudden, I feel a POP! Explode in my chest.

My air is cut!

I look to him and he is holding my hand, he is yelling and I see lime green nurse suits. Mom, dad, and my little brother Manly sweep in quick as dust.

Their images blur. It is getting darker in here.

I can’t breathe!

I gasp sharply as my world turns gray and blurry, then suddenly black.

*

I am floating.

I am light as air and I twist and turn, darkness all around me but I feel so much at peace. It is like for the first time I am not weighed down.

In life we seek peace through religion, or helping out at shelters, using drugs or sex.

But I must say, this is better than all of that combined times 100.

Out of my skin and bones, out from psychological worry, I can float. No care in the care in the world.

“Open your eyes,” a smooth, silky, male voice says. It says something else that sounds like my name but I cannot identify it.

What is my name?

“Is that why it’s so dark?” I whisper. Why does my words sound like…music?

He chuckles. “Yes.” His words are poems too. Even a single word.

I hesitate. I nearly forget where I am and how I got to where I am. Why are my eyes closed?

I use muscle I no longer have to open my eyes.

“It takes a few tries to get used to a new body.”

“Huh?” I really snap open my “eyes” now and the plethora of color explode before me. Colors I don’t know the name of including a few common colors. Light and bright as the sun filters in and I see tall creatures before me. Their shadow advancing on me.

I take a step back.

I am standing on something lush and soft.

“She’s a new one, let us treat her as such.”

Their voices are so loud! I can hear them in my soul! “Stop yelling!” I shout.
“Yup, new body alright. Is there a reason why these people act like this? Do they not know about their transformation?”

Smooth Voice says, “They were not taught it properly. As far as I know they are the only species who can transform after expiring. You’d think they would be informed.”

I inhale a deep, cleansing breath and look down at myself. My feet are the color of bronze, they shine and sparkle. No need for polish. My nude body is positively glowing!

Long wisps of spun silk gold tresses spill between my fingertips.

I train my eyes on those before me, but a hand is placed on my shoulder.

Smooth Voice says, “Welcome to your home, Autumn.”

Autumn. That is me.

I turn to him, the tall shadows at my back. He is indescribable. My brain has no English terms for him.

It’s more of a feeling he gives me, than a look.

He is golden, like me, his tattoos are not dark torques so popular where I am from. They are threads of light. Gold, shining lines of symbols all over him.

He is something else. He is like decadent caramel, smooth A minor notes, hearts and candy, sunshine and sunset with a brilliant purple moon hung in the sky.

He is nights in a hammock near a bayou, strumming a ukulele and caresses stolen through the night.

I swallow thickly and take a step back.

Into another pair of arms. “Whoa whoa honey. Let’s get you acquainted with everyone shall we?”

This voice is smooth and rumbles deep.

Smooth Voice guides me by the small of my back as I see five other bodies standing there.

“Who are you? Where am I?”

Rumble Voice chuckles softly. His voice sounds like a small storm. “The third heaven. These five are part of your welcome team. Afterwards you are free to do whatever, Pretty human.”

As my vision clears I see him more. Smooth Voice has stepped away from me to align himself with his own.

Everyone is nude.

And it is okay. It does not bother me. Somewhere in my first life, it would have. But here, it was...acceptable. The norm.

The others stand still and wait. I guess they want me to approach them. Only fair. They probably don’t trust me.

Or want me to trust them.

Either way, I walk across the bright green, lush grass. A female with gorgeous deep night skin smiles and her teeth gleam perfectly between a lush set of lips worthy of kisses from any gender I suspect.

She steps forward boldly, her body a long sinewy dewy musical note. “I’m Sendra. Hail to you, Autumn.”

Hail me?

“I’m not a queen or princess,” I utter stupefied.

“But you are from the blue disc? The blue planet?”

“I am.”
She nods. “You are part of a very special race. Your species found out our existence after your bodily expiration. We welcome you.”

She and Rumble Voice connect eyes. I see something there. Something I was once familiar with. It is a feeling like seductive Jazz music or something.

Their eyes linger on one another before the next one bows before me. His long, gold hair spilling over his face. His name was Fye.

Rumble Voice finally comes over, takes both my hands. His eyes were just as bright as Smooth Voice. “I am Toomir. Welcome.” He looks beyond me.

Smooth Voice have once again placed himself behind me. He reminds me of someone.
I feel fine hairs stir deep in my eardrums when Smooth Voice tells me his name.
It is a name that is hard to pronounce but my soul knows it well. All I have to do is say it.
“Derkimdusman.”

I nod.
“It is sweet to meet you all.”
I know not whether it is day or night, the colors swirl all around me constantly as I walk with them in silence, listening to the music of this world.

My hand moves of its own accord to my abdomen, maybe used to pain being there but there is nothing.
I once thought it beautiful to have skin, bones, long blonde hair, a degree, but none of it matters here. Sendra and the other chatter on with music in their bodies and voices. Rumble Voice or Toomir looks over at me and smile as I touch a tree that is soft. It’s bark moves and shimmers when I hold my hand there, making more music. Like chimes.

Derkimdusman or “Derk” never leaves my side. He does not talk unless I ask a question but I feel his eyes move over my body many times. He is not being sexual(at least, I don’t think so), he is fascinated by me.
“You are familiar with my people but you seem amazed by me being here. Why?”
Derk takes his time studying me, then he looks around him and at the beautiful sky above.
The others have moved along ahead of us as we walk the open forest.
“You are different to me.”
“Just to you?”
“Yes. You carry a familiar music with you and scent. I do not understand it. But not understanding makes me like you more. It is acceptable.”
I smile. I am a walking chaotic chord. Perfect.
I am perfect.
The Climb

The wet, foul smelling pink tongue licked up at them from the frothy waters below. This monster was like none she’d ever seen before.

Their leader taught them about the terrains here before but not like this. This is not what she expected.

“The animals here are huge!” Cander1 shouts up at Cander2. Cander2 yelled down not to let go of his legs at any cost.

Using all six of his legs, Cander2 climbed even higher on the cold, jagged cliff. It was very cold. Sharp. Cander1’s legs grew tired. Sore. Her equipment had since fallen into the blue foaming ocean. She looked back and the gray and green monster had its mouth open wide now. Cocky. Knowing it will get to swallow them up soon.

She could almost hear it cackle.

Or was that the stroke of lightning above?

“Gah! It’s lightning too! Move faster!” She shouted over the loud water.

Funny how this planet seemed so green and serene from above in their ship, but here it is loud and deadly.

She absorbed material about this place before and was shocked to learn that it had four seasons, rain, even slosh that paints the hilltops and grounds with glittering white crystals. To her, it was beautiful.

Cander2 did not want to be here.

Who could argue? Some Leviathan was hoping to make a meal of them.

Moving all her legs around so that they formed a cylindrical shape, she used all her upper body strength and just as she was about to pull herself up on the rope and Cander2’s leg, she felt the incredibly hard tug of one of her legs being yanked down.

If she hadn’t moved with it, she’d be missing a limb.

“2! 2! Help me!”

Cander2 looked down at her swinging all her legs to and fro amidst the gray sky wind and water. His usually coal black eyes went ruby. The chords in his neck swelled and he reached down with a hand to pull her back.

It was still out of reach.

The monster below was slowly pulling her down with incredible ease. Yes. It was cocky. It knew it would eat.

She will die here on this pretty planet.

“1! Look up at me. Me only-- and grab!” Cander2’s legs stretched downward as well. By him being male, his legs were thicker, stronger, but hers was more flexible and her arms longer.

She gave a hard thrust up and finally reached; their hands touched.

Cander2 wrapped his hand about hers pulled. “Hang on to my pack!” He yelled and grabbed his long, black stunner gun and began shooting downward.

Multiple shots were fired as Cander1 climbed onto the back of her partner. She too pulled out her weapon. A long, whiplike chord made of fish bones on her home planet and with one snap and POP, brought the long whip down onto the face of the beast, slashing across its hideous face, splitting it open.

A gush of red(they bleed red here?) Burst from its mouth like a geyser and the waters churned into a gorgeous fuschia hue.

“It’s gone.” Cander 2 climbed on while Cander1 remained on his strong back.
The climb was a long one. They were small compared to the rocks here and the world was getting brighter.

“2.”

“Yes?”

“It is growing brighter. Is this…day?”

“A twenty four hour cycle just past. It is day.”

“Their days are quick here.”

“It is. It was night earlier. Before.”

“The time changes during a certain season. If you look ahead there,” he pointed past the cliffs on their right and on top.

“Pretty. Plants.”

“They are colorful, but that is only because they are dead or at rest.”

“I remember. The planet sleeps.”

“Something like that,” Cander2 kept climbing. After some time he paused to let Cander1 climb on her own. She grasped the sharpest edge and pulled. Nearly there. They may have covered a mile by now.

Her skills were in numbers and music. Cander2 was a book of facts. Adventure and facts were in his spirit.

He never treated her well. Always wanted the females with the sweeter scent and thicker legs.

Cander1 was shocked they were sent on this expedition together. She worried she might have to kill him.

“We made it,” he huffed as they reached the plateau at the same time.

It was flat, hard, and cold but they flattened their many legs on the ground- a resting state.

“The orange ball in the sky is bringing some heat, Cander2.”

“Yes it is,” he found a small crater filled with water. His long, pretty black tongue licks at it. Cander2 is fascinated by his body and how he drinks. She remains where she is though and hunts for her own water. She thirsted so badly.

“Here.”

Cander1 gathers more water into his mouth until it fills up his cheeks, his large eyes are ruby again.

Cander2 hoists herself up, just a little and meet him halfway.

He presses his lips to her mouth and she opens hers all the way, melds her lips to his as strange, yet pure clean liquid bursts into her mouth.

She drinks from him as they have done before.

But after their near death, this time feels different.

Their kind drinks from holes and share through orifices in the front of their face as a sign of safety and friendship.

“Thank you,” she says quietly.

Cander2 falls back and watches her. “I am not supposed to like you.”

“You don’t. I don’t smell like the other females.”

“No,” he bats long lashes. Longer than hers. “You do not.”

Interested, she scoots closer and stretches out her legs. They are spindly like the arachnids native to this planet. “What do I smell like?”

Cander2 smiles broadly and leans in to sniff her neck. “Like sallow plants with spicy warmth. Nothing sweet about you at all.”
“And it is mating season probably,” Cander1 adds. “Your eyes. Your scent has changed.”
“Yes,” Cander2 looks down at his groin area and spreads his legs wider. “Funny how they sent us together at this particular time. A time to mate and make more living things while a planet is dying.”
“So this place is dying?”
“From sources of long ago, they named it Fall. Plants, the leaves of the trees in particular lose moisture because of the cold. The earth is now tilted but away from the sun I suppose. Half the planet’s year will be thrown into cold. The other half heat.”
“I remember. It is definitely different here.” Cander1 hears the change in her voice, it rattles and shakes more.
Cander2 watches her carefully. His nostrils flares up wide and then it flattens. It does this several times, like a gill or heartbeat. His eyes flash ruby on her and the chill other females of her planet warned her of, shot straight to all of her feet. The electrical jolt was real and caused her to shiver.
That was part one of the mating ritual.
But. Wait?
Cander2 wanted her?
Maybe because there were no viable females available.
She thought of something to distract him. “Let us race to the plant over there. The strong one you pointed to me earlier.”
Cander2 shook his head, to dislodge his confusion and stood up with her. “Right.”
She let him stand fully and took a deep breath.
They both shot forward, under the gilded light and towards the colorful terrain of plants. The smell of sea and rotted plant was sweet to her. It spoke to her being. If happiness could be measured, she’d not have enough numbers for this grand scale.
“You look- free.”
“I am,” she said while they continued on all legs dashing around the tall structures. Anyone looking on them would probably see two balls of wind, miniature hurricanes.
Cander1 kept going deeper and deeper into the vibrant lush forest. The electric jolt she could feel in her legs even more now. She shivered as she ran.
She could smell him. He was right on her.
She never knew he could run so fast.
“2! You’re fast!” She called over her shoulder.
Suddenly she felt Cander2’s legs embrace her roughly from behind. His scent was so intoxicating it immobilized her and she let him suckle her neck with his black tongue as he murmured how spicy and warm she was to him. His legs nearly crushed her breath.
“Cander..” Her breath was caught as he continued his nibbling upon her neck.
“I was never into sweets anyway. Hence, why I never chose a female to bear my offspring. Hence why I never chose a mate.”
Cander1 remained hunched over. Before her she saw a large animal or monster with hair this time. Picking something off the ground with flattened teeth. It had four legs and beady shaped black eyes.
But her mind was brought back to her and Cander2. All of his legs grazed her abdomen.
Part two of the mating session.
The grazing of all his legs tickled her abdomen and made it sing. Finally, the Song of Love! She heard it on her planet. Sometimes during mating sessions with older Semions, you would hear the sweetest melodies.

Cander2 was stroking her abdomen, the sections like boards, or slats accordion style enjoyed his stroking.

As the female, she is to remain still. Any movement could cause a Semion to become violent. A broken song could mean death.

She let him play with her body in the ground of this new planet.

Then came the painful part she read about.

The Bite and Plunder.

This was the only way to ensure offspring. The one thing Cander1 wanted to skip.

“My love, my only love,” Cander2’s fangs sliced into the side of her neck, she watched as purple shoot out of the side of her neck, and at the same time she felt her womb blossom open to him. Accepting him.

They remained like that for several minutes. Hours? Days?

Cander1 did not know what to make of her new life. Their species will continue here then.

She was as sure of that as she was that Cander2 will be her mate for life.

She felt another electric jolt during their silent mating process.

Her womb became full.

So did her heart.
School for Zombies

Patty

If anyone would have told me I would be stuck in a closet with the hottest zombie ever this side of the Atlantic, “I would have said WTF and get out of here”.

But here I am. In the janitor’s closet of all places.

Stuck with Sindrome. That’s his name for real. A tall, well built zombie who looks down on me now like a tasty snack but because of our current and dire situation, he cannot afford to eat me.

“Explain again what you saw.” He growls annoyed.

I roll my eyes to him. “I said, I went back to the cafeteria to see if I left my small wallet on the floor by the cashier and I heard the noise and started running. It sounded horrific, like vomiting but, I don’t know.”

I had went into the cafeteria ten minutes earlier to retrieve my pink coin purse. I knew better than to go alone.

In my dad’s infinite wisdom, he placed me in a school that was full of dead folks. On the outside everything looks normal and new, and the people look beautiful and normal. Borbon High School is a lie. A fake.

It is a Night School. For Zombies.

And guess what? I am not one.

How do I get away with it? My dad, a chemist involved with making popular perfumes for celebrities, made a special perfume for me that repels the dead. Meaning my brain, capable of a 2.9 GPA at best, will not be morsels to these monsters.

Turns out that my “dad”, isn’t really my dad though.

Never was. Just a mad scientist who was using me as bait.

He knew my real dad.

Turns out Sindrome is my only ally because he has living human beings he cares for still. A living, breathing Barbie doll of a girlfriend he wants to save and he knows I have the perfume that will prevent him from wanting to snack on her like a burrito.

So anyway, I walk up into the cafeteria as if I am not completely surrounded by zombies. And. No. I do not eat their food. Are you kidding me? I bring my own bag lunch. I get their canned drinks though because they are packaged at a local factory.

I reach down to pick up my wallet when I hear the snap of something like a big chicken bone followed by a loud shriek.

I look over the sneeze guards which previously shielded meatloaf(yeah right) and mac and cheese. Hidden beneath these dishes are brains. Just to let you know. The “real” food is placed on top to make the zombies feel normal as they once did.

Beyond the large sink and stove I saw movement in the backroom and then a large splash of red hits the window. Blood.

I bucked out of there quick, just as I hear the quick clicking of heels on my tail.

I turn a corner quick and that was when I spotted Sindrome smoking a joint in the janitor’s closet with the door half opened.

“Let me in!” I whisper loudly pushing him inside, not caring if he dropped his cigarillo. I bang the door closed. Confident I left the ghoul or whatever was chasing me.
“Patty,” Sindrome puts both hands on my shoulder. His whole body is ivory, but it is those eyes that do me in every time. They were an aquamarine hue?

Damn! I am not falling for no damn dead person. Nope! Not me!
Eyes framed by long lashes that are ebony- ebony like his hair, ebony like me and my hair. This closet is too tiny for my fro and his body. One of us has to go.

“Keep quiet, Patty.” He says again. “I hear something.”

I scooch my body closer to Sindrome, aware that my ample booty is pressing against surprisingly rock hard abs.

Yes. I’m officially losing it.

But I nearly lose my cookies when through the slats of the door I see some wolf-beast-dog thing with long, yellow teeth stalking the hall.

It was as high, or almost as high as five Great Danes and the smell of death followed it. Even Sindrome smelled better. Well, Sindorme smells of water and leaves mostly. Cigar leaves. Perhaps he has a better wash regime than I give him credit for.

“What the hell is that?” He asks me.

“I don’t know?” I whisper back. “I am new here to this state, this city, this school. Virginia is looney tunes!”

The wolf monster thing pauses. I see its high black butt and three tails wagging. My heart nearly plummets.
If Sindrome is truly evil, he could just push me out the door and be done with me. The wolf thing could then gobble me up and maybe it’ll spit out my fro- just to be nice.
I have all kinds of crazy scenarios playing in my head right now.
One scenario keep creeping up on me.
Sindrome has cold, dead hands on my shoulder and I am pressed up against him like we’re lovers.

We are so. not. lovers.
He hates my guts because of my “dad” and I hate his because he is dead. He has dead guts.
“I have to alert everyone else somehow.”

“Wait. You’re scared of it too? Aren’t you a zombie?”

“I have a very bad feeling about this.” He pulls out his cell phone but I remain on him, booty and all. I am scared and did I mention the closet is cramped? Full of dirty mops and thousands of chemicals I am unfamiliar with.
He texts someone just as we hear another scream and I hear that bone cracking noise again. I cringe and throw my body harder against Sindrome’s body.

“Mffofme.”

“Huh?” I can’t understand what he is saying.

“I said,” he does something with my hair.

Oh. He pushes it down. I am about to swing on him and knock him out for that alone. Then he growls: “I said your hair is in my mouth.”

“Oh, God. Sorry.”

Sindrome swears under his breath and suddenly my worst nightmare comes true.
I am pushed through the door with my arms out and I stumble into a hallway that is suddenly overcrowded with zombies. Teachers and everybody is scurrying. Blood ripping from hands and faces.

Some with a gaping hole in their chest to the point I can see the wall behind them and the stampede.
I am tossed and thrown about, trying to run for the exit when I am roughly pulled from the melee.

“This way”, he growls low in my ear and before I can protest, I am yanked again and hard through the crowds.

“You have your motorcycle?” He asks.

“I do.”

“We need it.” I pull the keys from my pocket, unsure how this will all play out.

If I’m smart, I could let him get torn to shreds by the Wolf Beast thing.

But who said I was smart?

We are moving too fast down the hall and that is when I hear the worst sound of all.

“The hell?” Sindrome pauses as the top floor, that holds library and classrooms, suddenly wobbles as if it is made of rubber and I see some plaster fall down.

Three very big, large black Wolf Beasts stands at the top. Red eyes looking right at me and through me.

The left one has a good eye on Sindrome.

“Patty. RUN!” He shouts.

I do just that.

I was on the track team at my last school. “They called me Fast Fro Like Flo Jo. And for good reason. When I run I fire off all cylinders like a bullet.

It is me pulling Sindrome now and we make it out to the parking lot where my motorcycle rests near Student Parking Gate.

A last parting gift from “dad”.

I hop on and insert the key, while pulling on the clutch all the way out, switch the key to On and press the handlebars.

The stench of death, wafts outside, choking me.

My helmet is in my bookbag.

In school. “Sorry. I have no helmets for us.”

He jumps behind me with a look that says, “Does it look like I need one?”

Something big and black bursts from the side of school’s brick building.

I am kicked into high gear now and kicking up dust with my tires. I try to ignore Sindrome’s hands around my hips. His hands are a block of ice, seeping through my shirt, but it burns my soul.

He may not care about dying- again, but he sure is grabbing my hips hard so he doesn’t fall off.

We ride down I-95 and finally coast through the early evening, clearing into the red and green foliage.

I find my way around the bending, twisting curves. Near the cul-de-sac. The house where “dad” lived.

It is now mine. My real dad left this home to me according to the family lawyer, and I wish they never trusted my real dad’s friend. His friend who ended up being a pathological liar and mad scientist at that.

I pull into the driveway, cut the engine and smoothly slide off the bike as Sindrome slowly let go of my hips.

He blinks in confusion a second before speaking, “It’s just you who live here?” Sindrome asks.
“I have a Guardian who lives here with me. A trusted family member. She goes to bed really early and watches the soaps all day long too. She feeds me and clothes me still.” I insert the key and turn the lock. The house is dark so I flick on the light switch on my right to the kitchen.

Gwen’s television could be heard upstairs. My heart thumps wildly as I realize Sindrome is in my house. Really in my home.

“Did you need anything?” He stands in the doorway, hesitant to come in. His massive arms fold across his chest. His long hair is dark and long. He looked.. hungry?

“You need to spray on more repellant, Patty.” He says simply before going through my fridge without asking.

“Hey! You need to ask first buddy!” I carefully open the flip cap top to of bottle containing fuschia colored contents and spray the Zombie Repellant over my neck and arms.

“Rare meat. Yum. Hope it wasn’t your dinner for tonight.” He rips open the package with his teeth and just starts going to town on the poor meat. I can hear its silent moos while he attacks it over the kitchen sink.

“So any meat will do?” I ask wrapping a band around my large afro.

Sindrome’s eyes grow unusually dark. “This will do for a while.”

“By the way. That was my dinner,” I huff turning to go upstairs.

I go upstairs to check on Gwen. She is an old woman, approaching her 70s I think but she has long, silver hair and has soft skin and high cheekbones.

I find her dozing off in her rocking chair, the television is on and I see my school on the screen. “Gwen. Gwen wake up.” I shake her gently. I need her up so we can all escape.

**Part 2**

**Sindrome**

I watch Patty go upstairs. She calls herself skinny but she does not realize with those jeans I see everything.

I eat the rare, bloody steak, suck the bone and dump it into the silver trash can. It is not enough. Never enough. We need brain, specifically. I can survive off of the brains of small animals but nothing does it like the human brain.

I become stronger, satiated.

I play with a thought: How would Patty Knighton’s brain taste?

A very real, very male part of me asks in response: *How would all of her taste?*

I shake my head thinking of how my mouth now has afro hair chemicals, steak meat and death riding on my tongue right now.

Along with three hungry wolves capable of eating and devouring zombies.

Patty comes back downstairs.

I heard her conversation with Gwen even from down here:

*Gwen. Wake up! There are monsters chasing us! From our schools!*

*Honey. Your school is already full of monsters.*

*It is not like that. I promise you, it is eating the “other” monsters now…*

I tune them out from there.

Patty thinks me a monster. Of course. I’m dead. Contrary to her belief, I’ve been dead nearly five years. Not five hundred. All of us are recently dead. Our memories float somewhere in dark
dreams and sometimes when we are in close proximity, I see bits and pieces of reality float by. How some of us died. Memory doesn’t serve us well after death. Some of my memories come back after eating brain, however.

The school is technically closed down but Patty being there by accident is a lie. I feel it. Her dad put her there for a reason.

“Gwen wants you out of her home. Now.” Angrily she swipes up a blue bag lying on the couch and pulls the black drawstring to open it.

I go behind her, hear her small intake of breath as if I surprised her and glance at the knife and gun in her bag.

“I’m guessing those were for the zombies.”

“Yep.”

The gun is a small pistol, but she pulls out the gun’s mag like a pro, checks for the bullets and snaps it in like she’s a snack-able sized assassin.

“Salt?” I point at the large cylindrical container of Morton’s salt.

“Absolutely. Zombies hate salt.”

We both turned at the sound of baying.

“Gwen went back to sleep. I have to go get her and go to the basement. We’re locking it down.”

“Need help bringing her down?”

“No. I got her.” She pointed at the small green door to the right of the entrance of the kitchen. “The basement is down there. Turn off the lights too.”

She pounds at the steps two at a time. I do as she asks and flip off the kitchen and living room light.

I open the door and feel around for a light.

A chain dangles to the right of my cheek and I yank it, spilling warm, suffused light on the steps below.

It looked like an old lab down here.

There were cages down here too.

I took the last step and stood there. I could hear the muffled voices of the woods outside and there was only a small circular opening down here, but I could see the moon.

To my right was a large black sofa and a green, smaller chair in a corner.

Computers, vials and cages were before me.

I stared at the cages with unmoving animals in them. Rats, gerbils, a toad in a jar, a rabbit that looked really big and with gills.

“Hey,” Patty said.

“I didn’t hear you come down,” I said. “What is this stuff?”

Patty’s large eyes took in all the stuff as if for the first time. “My dad’s secret room. He did all the dirty research down here.”

“Where’s Gwen.”

She thumbed behind her and there was green, sprawled out on the green couch. Her long braid draped over and down her arm, mouth slightly open.

I noticed Patty shivering. Was I too cold for her to be around? “You cold?”

She look up at me, Sepia toned eyes mesmerizing me. Even Crystal’s stunning looks couldn’t compare to this girl’s right now. What the hell am I thinking? “I’m fine. Can’t stop shaking through.”
She looked at the cage with the bunny. “Oh my God.” She tapped on the cage, the big, Cottontail rabbit slowly opened one red eye. “What kind of work was dad doing?”

“Which dad?” I ask.
“Both I suppose. Dang.”
Another howl. “I take it they kill zombies. They were engineered, Patty.”
“I know.”
“A perfect weapon designed for us. Did you see the second one? He was upright? Like a man?”
Patty nodded. She was barely speaking to me.
“Did you lock the basement door?”
“Bolted and locked.” She kept looking out the tiny window. The moon seemed to glow brighter.

We both heard the rattling of a door upstairs. Maybe they were trying get in through the kitchen door.
Patty took out her gun, but her hand shook so badly she dropped it.
“Be careful there,” I say gently and hand it back to her, but her hands were so hot and she couldn’t stop looking at the damn window.
“Patty,” I whisper. “Look at me.”
She does, bites her lower lip. Her canine tooth was longer than I remember.
“Dad, my fake dad said I was special. He said I will be really special. I told him it is a lie. I am a dummy. The only classes I excel at are lunch time and gym,” she chuckles. Her voice is hoarse.

“You helped me with my English paper.”
“I like expressing myself.”
This close I wanted to eat her brain so bad. The perfume was not repelling good enough, but I couldn’t to kill her. She saved me. Trusted me.
Maybe if I...
“Can I…kiss your lips?” I’ll have her any way I can.
“Thought you’d never ask,” she brought her lips up to mine and I kissed her soft, sweet but couldn’t help bringing the kiss deeper.
Something in her, in us, made me growl. I became overly possessive of her lips and needed more.
Apparently, so did she. Her nails grabbed my arms, clawed at my skin, her skin was flaming hot as she sensually kissed my lips.
The noise grew louder around us.
The wolves were here.
Down to a Fraction

Stephanie Grant sneezed into her tissue and wiped the tip of her nose. *Great. Out of all days, I come down with a cold.*

This was her first day tutoring. When she looked at the tutor roster at the study hall sheet, she saw someone requested her. *D.D. Chester.* The student specific problem was word problems and advanced geometry.

Stephanie swept back her red hair for the tenth time before finally placing a rubber band around the unruly curls. She looked up at the clock. The student was supposed to arrive five minutes ago.

She would give them two more minutes.

Just enough time to catch up on the sci-fi series she downloaded to her Kindle app.

A minute later while she was caught up in the whirlwind of spaceflights and chivalry, she heard the heavy thump of a book bag causing her to quickly swipe out of her reading app.

She stared into the beautiful, onyx black eyes of the one they call “Devil”.

The teachers call him by his full, legal name though: Devlington Chester.

She was literally about to tutor the hottest of HOT boys in the school!

Although hot may be an understatement.

She put away the Smartphone and pulled out her notebook. “Hey,” she stuck out her hand. “I will be your-”

“I ain’t here for all of this. Just give me answers to these stupid problems.” Devil whipped open his notebook and the giant geometry textbook. The slam was so loud other students and Mr. Casey, her employer, looked in their direction.

The Tutoring Room was supposed to be quiet.

Devil was being obnoxious.

Now she saw understood why she ignored him all these two years on campus.

“Um, it does not work like that.” She quickly unfolds her used Kleenex to wipe the tip of her nose because it will drip soon.

Twenty minutes left.

“Yes it does,” His eyebrow raises and Stephanie couldn’t believe she loved the Southern accent he tried to hide.

Everything about him appeared cloaked and mixed. She heard his mom was some beautiful blonde model and his dad was Italian and African.

He came from a wealthy, successful stock.

She heard he dated older women too.

“I can’t help you if I am giving you answers. You want to graduate right?”

Devil looked at her quizzically for a moment before snapping his finger. “I do know you! Middle school. You’re Snoopy!”

Oh no.

He remembered.

“You wore that Snoopy costume on Halloween back in 7th grade but the back part was missing. Your panties-“

“Okay, okay.” Stephanie rubbed her temples. Yes her mother sewed the costume back piece all kinds of wrong but it embarrassed her for life.

Even worse. Her panties were the Snoopy kind. Everyone saw it during the Halloween dance at school.
Devil had left for a few years then came back. She and Devil go way back but never really had a conversation. Until now.

It would have been easier to talk to him in 7th grade because then he was smaller, skinnier but still had amazingly long lashes and beautiful tanned skin.

Now, he was intimidating to her.

She had to rely on her professionalism as a tutor. Her mom always said she was a big kid but a beast when it came to helping people.

“Alright. No more jokes. Let’s look at the first problem.”

Stephanie watched as Devil yawned. All of his teeth were straight and gleaming white. Darn it. She brushed her teeth twice a day and flossed.

Still, she got a nice off white egg color on good days. Not bright, bone white like Devil’s.

The first problem involved a fraction. Devil said he was never good in solving fractions and when he said it, Stephanie looked up. His face, for just a brief second was somber. Different.

“For some reason, I just don’t get this stuff.”

“It’s okay.” Stephanie said softly.

“No it ain’t.” He leaned closer, she saw the thick black torque tattoo across his left forearm. It appeared to snake up his arm to the side of his neck. What she could see under his white collar.

“I need to know this stuff or I don’t graduate.”

“How are you in your other classes then?”

He shrugged still watching her.

Another drip was coming on and her throat was scratchy. Eyes watering.

“I’m fine. I love history. Can you believe it? In middle school I hated it. Now, I love it.”

“Wow. I hate history and writing classes. Yuck.”

“I always thought you were a super nerd.”

“Sprinkling garlic on your food every now and then and vitamin c tablets could help.”

Stephanie blinked in surprise. “What are you, Dr. House?”

“I read. A lot.”

Stephanie was blown away. “I’ll try that then.” They resumed their studies. Stephanie hated tutoring boys because they always thought they knew more than their tutor as she tried to help, because of their egos.

Devil was no different.

By time the bell rang. He was at least 65% more confident about solving word problems involving fractions.

Devil watched as Stephanie slung her backpack on her shoulders.

What a waste of a cute body.

She wore Harry Potter frames and kept her head down a lot. Sported a community of small freckles across her cheeks and nose, but boy did she blush the whole time while helping him.

Her skin was pale, but her hair was the color of fire. Her jeans were bought, maybe a size larger eons ago, but her curves were undeniable. Very undeniable.
He knew of some dudes who wanted to explore her curves while she kept those glasses on and sometimes they made crude comments in front of Devil.

After their tutoring session today, he caught a glimpse of a sad girl who relied on her talent with numbers to make herself feel good but devoted unselfishly, her time to help others.

Everyone knew she grew up very poor in the trailer park not far from the school. Maybe a couple of blocks down and people teased her mercilessly even in middle school.

She will never know it, but the boys who teased her, he beat them up after school those years ago. Bloody noses and all.

The girls, well, he don’t hit girls, but he never looked in their direction or gave them any attention if they had hurt Stephanie.

They were just. Wrong.

Granted he never had feelings for Stephanie like that, but something nudged his heart today and he did not know what to make of it.

Her eyes, large and green as emeralds sparkled when she was serious. They would dim to a softer green when she smiled.

He liked her smile. He liked her laugh.

“Geez. What I am doing?” He ran a hand through his dark waves.

He watched her walk out, amazed at his reaction to her. He felt like a voyeur watching a Siren slip from water to land.

That night he went over the notes she wrote in his notebook. Tips to help him solve for X, tips for understanding word problems with fractions.

After an hour, his head hurt so he thought about texting one of his girl “friends”. Telling her to swing by.

Carlette Johnson, swung by in her red sports car alright. The long legged, chocolate beauty made her way over at close to midnight.

She stayed on campus at another college at least two miles away.

His dad never cared who Devil brought home back in the day. He just told him, “No glove, no love. No babies in this house.”

Carlette was a walking wet dream for most boys at school. She had pretty skin, almond shaped eyes and unfortunately…

Every guy did have her.

Her one goal in life was to be pretty and maybe act.

That was fine with Devil.

For now.

After enjoying Carlette, they sat up in his bed and watched some Netflix on his laptop. His dorm mate was out working late so it was quiet, save for Carlette’s manicured fingers texting someone every minute.

Devil threw her leg off him and stood up. “I’m tired,” he said.

“Oh?” Her lips were wet from his kisses. Understanding dawned on her quickly. They knew what this was. “Time for me to go, huh?”

This time with less sting, he said “Yeah.”

She nodded. Her curtain of dark hair falling over her full breast as she pulled her one piece red skirt back up over her chocolate body.

She was slender. Not enough meat, save for her breasts.

She wasn’t Stephanie though.
With resolve and a small smile, Carlette picked up her purse and pecked him on the cheek.

“She must be some girl.”

Devil released a soothing sigh. “You know me too well, Carlette.”

“Normally I would say she’s a lucky girl, but I think you are the lucky one, if she can put up with a devil. Ciao.” Carlette waved and saw herself out.

She wasn’t bad at all. Perhaps they could be friends, never more than that.

He had to find Stephanie, and soon.

*

There are some people in this life who are bold.
Then there are those who have big balls.

Devil had big balls. He had to because as soon as Stephanie stepped out of the Liberal Arts building readjusting the notebooks in her arm, she see Devil running up the steps where she was walking down.

Taking her books he looks at her and says. “I slept with Carlette but thought about you the whole time.”

Stephanie coughed on her own spit looking around to make sure no one heard this fool say that out loud.

Before she could say something, Devil tucked her books under his arm and took her hand, leading her down. “It’s never happened before. I kept seeing your face and said your name as a whisper. I thought of you.”

“Devil. That’s not something you want to mention out loud to anyone you barely know.”

Stephanie was glad when they reached the main sidewalk. “You can hand me my books now.”

“No,” Devil’s eyes flashed defiantly. “I won’t give them back. And this,” he waved her Smartphone in front of her face. “Is my property until you say yes to a date with me.”

Stephanie stood there with mouth agape at the brazen behavior of the foolish boy.

“You’re kidding me.”

“Take off your glasses.”

“Why should I?” She glared at him, hands on her hips. “You just swiped my books and phone. I should tell campus police.”

Devil grinned. Oh.

He was like just like his name. That wicked, wicked gleam in his eye and that tattoo, those eyes. He was the Devil.

A hot one.

Puns intended.

“Please, just give me back my stuff.”

“Say yes to a date with me, Stephanie.” His eyes strayed from her eyes to her chest, hips and shoes. Stephanie felt like she was going under an X-Ray.


“Coffee?” He made a face of disgust. “Find your best clothes and I will take you to dinner. You deserve it.”

Stephanie was not going to win this war.

Devil was already under her skin.

His gaze was hot and without thinking, she pulled her glasses off. Devil was semi-blurry before her and the green and gold of the leaves around her became a soupy visual mixture of Fall’s display.
“I’ll go.” She whispered.
Devil handed her her Smartphone, but not before keying in some numbers and swiping to some other app.
“I have your number now and you have mine.”
Stephanie’s heart warmed at the sight of him standing there. Was he nervous? Did he really like her?
If so, it was about time.
Great River’s Ghost

Tuesday, October 10, 2017 7:23 a.m.

Nearly six months ago I gave up photography and journal writing. Why should I do any of these things?
I feel as if my brain has been taken out and limbs sawed off of me. Nothing left but the ability to sense things with sight.
Numbness took over months ago.
I am sitting on a rock, watching Great River. My brother Alm wanted to join me this morning but I woke up feeling compelled to hike. Compelled to watch the leaves sway off a branch and then snap off like cracking knuckles only to be golden red as it hit the ground.
Fall.
The early morning light peeks up at me and the air is unbelievably crisp, cool and tolerable. The trail on the right of me has some cobwebs forming off the base of trees, but the pebbles and rocks, nature’s jewels lay flat and quiet.
A squirrel is looking at me with an acorn in its mouth.
I toss a banana chip to it and am amused it ditches its acorn for my favorite treat. Its blinking black eyes seem to say “thank you” as it scurries away and up the tree next to me.
More leaves of radiant earth tones fall.
I sigh and watch the river flow…

7:57 a.m.
I remain on the small stump I found and hear the birds caw as they swoop over me. Such large birds! They may be Osprey.
A few minutes ago, I swear I felt the slight sweep of a hand over my cheek but when I looked back. No one was there.
I blame it on cobwebs.
Yep. Cobwebs. I will wash my face later.
I take out my bottled water and drink most of it before recapping it and standing up to stretch my legs.
Father told me to come out here to rekindle my zest for life and taking pictures. I told him with Ian gone, who cares about things like eating, hiking and snapping pictures?
I bend over, touch my toes, then reach up with my right arm, left leg bent, just as the sound of a million beating wings startles me and I drop to a crouch on the ground.
Now I am on the ground looking around me. Wishing I were home instead.
They say this place is haunted. Could it be true?

8:15 a.m.
I get over myself quickly and take pictures with my digital camera. I snap at the river. I snap at the sky. I walk around and down to where the spider webs ground level spun clouds of silk skirts for the tree trunks.
I see the Black Widow and respect her space.
Move along.
I find my buddy the banana chip eating squirrel up in the tree watching me. Or is it the mother?
I snap at her too.
I take many pictures.
It feels good out here.
I feel again.
I put away my camera and continue on the trail.
I think I will stay an extra hour or two…

“Look at you!” My big brother says just now eating some waffles at the table. It is after ten and he was still in his pajamas. I can’t fault him though, I did the same thing after Ian passed. I was always an early bird. I love the mornings.

“What?” I laid my pack down before going into the freezer to fix me some waffles too.

“You got leaves in your hair and look, you have color in your cheeks again!” Alm pointed at my face. For him to be seventeen, only a year older than I, he behaved like a ten year old.

I reach up and take down some fragile dry red and gold leaves. I sniff one. Smelled just like Great River Park. Like morning and land.

“I took some pictures,” I say dumping two waffles into the toaster and turning back to him.

“I think you may like them.”

Alm asked. “Where are they?”

I go into my bag and pull out my digital camera. I did not look at them yet but wanted him to see if I still had the Juice. I pretty much ace all my art and design courses and I was just imagining all the cool things I could do with these pictures using Photoshop.

Alm put down his juice and grabbed my camera to turn it on. I knew my battery was running low so hopefully he could look at them quickly.

My waffles popped and I placed them onto a plate and drowned them in syrup. Mom and dad both work in the hospital and probably won’t be back until six or seven this evening. So for this Saturday we were parent free.

I was feeling better already.

“Um…Andra. When did you take these?” My brother said as I stuffed my face standing.


“You are a lie,” he whispered so low I knew I didn’t hear him clearly. “He is in these pictures.”

“Who?” I go over and peek beyond Alm’s broad shoulders and look down at the screen I recognized.

Or didn’t recognize.

There was the lake with the canopy of beautiful oak trees and their dying leaves sprinkling the trail but on the boulder, the one I sat on, there was a familiar dark haired guy sitting there, looking at the lake.

His back was to us.

But I knew who he was.

“And look at these,” Alm showed me more pictures. One of them was after the “kiss” to my face and that loud beating noise. The trail was tousled like my hair, whipped around from a brief crisp breeze but there was a hand reaching out in front of the camera.

A familiar hand.

“I swear Alm, look at the date. I took those today.”

Alm shook his head. “We all miss him Baby Sis, but screwing dates on the camera and pulling it off as if-”
I felt hot tears sting the back of my eyes. “Not true! All of that was today! How is it possible he’s in these photos?”

“I don’t know.” Alm stood up and put both his hands on my shoulders as if to comfort me, get me under control. “There is no way Ian was there today. You know that is not possible. This is reality, Andra.”

My brother’s eyes were as dark and serious as mine. We shared the same light eyes and blond hair. There are times when he knows me better than I know myself. This time, he is wrong.

“Please believe me.”

“I told mom and dad you seemed better but I think it is time you see Dr. Lipswitch. I heard he was good with teens dealing with stuff.”

“Don’t go all adult on me now thinking you know stuff,” I throw back at him shrugging off his hands. “I never took these pictures before! I have not even had a chance to go upstairs and Photoshop anything. No time to fudge anything. How can I prove it to you?”

Instead of arguing, Alm just pulled me in for a hug. He squeezed me very tight. “When we lost grandma, I saw her everywhere. I saw her in school, here. In my dreams. They felt so real. She was like a second mom to us when mom would work all the time and dad being gone. I still miss her.”

I say nothing.

Later, I go upstairs and I write…

Tuesday, October 10, 2017 4:11 p.m.

I have some Indie band playing on YouTube in the background and am unsure whether I am on earth or not.

My brother believes I am mental and that I need to see a doctor, but I know what I experienced. The kiss at the lake was exact same peck on the cheek Ian would give me whenever I aced a test or scored big on some XBOX game.

His lips were always supple and pretty too. For a guy. Our first kiss was by the lake last summer. He told me always liked me and hoped I liked him too.

I remember I was jealous that he always had Lana on his arms but when they broke up and I served him on roller skates at Sonic, I remember feeling his hot eyes all over me. To be gazed upon by Ian was a gift.

One I did not take for granted.

When he kissed me that Summer, he pulled me in by my hips and gently mashed his lips on mine.

My heart burst and fluttered like a million birds and I felt him massage my hand…

I experienced it all over today. Such a brief love we had.

I will close my eyes and dream of my Ian again. He is never far.
About the Author & Notes

Erica Jean Smith enjoys reading and writing fiction and has also published inspirational poetry which kind of reveals her heart and some thoughts she has on life. When not writing, Erica enjoys practicing the Bamboo flute, Pilates and designing personal web pages. She loves feedback about her stories, so visit any of her networks to chime in about her books or just to connect!

If you enjoyed The Fall of Autumn, let others know on Goodreads, Smashwords, Barnes and Noble and/or your blogs. She appreciates feedback about her books. It lets her know how she’s doing.

Connect with her at these places!

Twitter
The Write Web
Pinterest
Wattpad
Turn for a Sneak Peek at Fright of the Frostbitten!
Marnie

I wonder about you.
I think you should keep speaking with Dr. Bowe, honey.

My husband’s eyes are pleading with me. His suitcase is still in hand as he stand before me. Our front door is open, letting in Jack Frost. I shiver and he finally closes it softly and sit his suitcase by the brown couch. I shake my head. This can’t be!

I was right here, speaking with a customer online. Five minutes later my husband walks in. I try to convince him that a whole nine hours slipped by and I didn’t even notice. How is it I missed such a chunk of time.

I told the woman goodbye, have a nice day…
I sipped some coffee..
Felt a little sleepy but I blinked.
Sipped some more.
Then the key turns in the lock.

“I promise you, I did not fall asleep! I was right here on the laptop, talking with a customer. I blink and there you are.”

My husband sighs and takes me in his arms. “We are going to solve this. You hear me, Marnie Babe? We are going to solve this.” He pulls back and kisses my cheek. He inspects me more, piercing his eyes into mine before picking up his suitcase and going to the bedroom.

I hear the neighbor’s dog barking outside and an owl hooting somewhere in the distance. I pull my hair back with my hands and exhale slowly. “Come on, think Marnie! Did you fall asleep?” I question myself. Hoping an answer will fly down from the heavens and Bing! Answer delivered.

I am tempted to ask Google where the hell I may have went.
Did I go to sleep? Did I fall somewhere? Sleepwalk?
I don’t normally sleepwalk. I hear of cases where people do, but me? No. I barely have nightmares. Maybe once a year there is a strange dream I’d have, but sleepwalking?
For the last six months I would have periods of time missing. Chunks stolen right from me and for the life of me, I do not know why.

My husband, thank God for him, is patient and kind. He goes to work, pays the bills, make sure we are alright.
Checks on me from time to time,
Sometimes he gets busy and can’t call.
Sometimes, he comes home early, sometimes he don’t.
I wish he would come home on time often.

Now we live in a nice three bedroom home in the middle of Count Town, Maine. It is freezing up here and that is bad because I am a Floridian.

I am used to sunshine and maybe wet days and of course hot Christmases. I have a bikini body still even though I am pushing forty and I keep up my health.

Here, everything is frigid. We are miles away from the nearest grocer and mall and the fields stretch as far as the eye can see.

One night, I spotted a green glowing eyed wolf.
My husband said I have a wild imagination and Stephen King would be proud of me, perhaps I should write a book?
No. I am not interested in a book.
My neighbors…who are they? I don’t think I’ve seen another living soul since we moved here six months ago.
I keep up with my family by calling them, or using Skype.
My best friends are on Facebook so at least I see what they are doing.
I scrimped up enough change for a flight back to Florida soon. I’ve spoken with Bob about it, he’s okay with it but I can tell he is trying to keep Florida at bay.
I understand.
His new job involves being an accountant for a prominent business and he uses our one and only car to get to and from work.
With his next check, he will get me a car.
I can’t wait. The only times I am out is when he is off.
He is not off tomorrow.
Not the next day either.
I meet him in the bedroom just as he is pulling off his socks. The room now has a rancid odor.
“Wash your feet, Bob!”
“Join me in the shower!” He waggles his thick, brown eyebrows.
“I don’t know. Don’t want you to kill me with them things.” I peel off my thick, cotton sweater and peel off my clothes too.
We crowd in our luxurious tub together and have a good time, like old times. Once we are done, I pull on the warm, red silk pajama set my friend Christen Deen gave me as a wedding gift.
I slip into and ask if my hubby wants some homemade pizza.
He is pulling on a white shirt, his muscles visible in his arms, evident of his workout regime in the mornings. “Sure, yeah. It’s Friday.”
I pull out the gluten free pizza bread, cheeses and homemade sauce. While taking out the bread, I realize I have a little red sauce under the bed of nails already. Odd.
I run the warm tap water and dig and pluck the red out.
Several of my nails on each hand has the red gunk under it and I wonder why I hadn’t noticed it before.
My husband’s back is to me, he is watching a game.
I go over and lift the back of his shirt.
“Marnie?” He turns.
“Just seeing if, ah, if I scratched you. I got skin, or blood under my nails, I think.”
“You did, but not deep,” he winks.
I don’t wink back.
Maybe one of the pizza packages or sauce packs had sauce under it or something. I shrug and finish the pizza.
An hour later we are cozying up, watching Rings.
I abhor scary movies.
My husband knows this and yet insisted on this? Just because to him, “it ain’t scary enough anyway.”
I pull out my cell phone halfway through the movie to text my mom. I am not in the mood for blood and gore.
Once it is done, my husband turns down the volume and takes my hand in his. “Is everything okay, Marnie Babe?”

I curl up then stretched my toes out on him. “Not really.”

His attention went to my toes and he played with them, gently wiggling each one. “Sorry. Maybe this place is gloomier than I thought.”

“Lonely too,” I poke out my bottom lip for effect.

“I know. My family is from here, but the job offer was too good to pass up. Now we have our own place and not living with roommates to save cash. Isn’t that good?”

“Perhaps.”

“Well, how about once we get your car, we can maybe move in a more city area.”

“I want to go back to Florida,” I say softly. Firm. “I don’t like it here, Bob.”

“I see.” He stops wiggling my toes and watches the black screen, deep in thought.

I finally feel the effects of the food. I get really sleepy and I recall Bob lifting me up and placing me in bed. The covers feel so good and soft on my skin and I drift into the huge pillows and turn my cheek as he kisses it.

You are the perfect wife...
The perfect wife...

I snap awake. Eyes open and I see stars, white sparkling stars and hear the wolf. I wake up because I felt something sharp. Cold.

I sit up and realize the coldness has seeped into my skin, my hair my face, my back and butt are icy and I think I am in the middle of...

“Where am I?”

I can’t see anything. I am freezng. Cold. But there is something else. I feel around me and I feel other soft bodies, cold bodies. Unmoving bodies. What the...?

I can’t see anything but the stars above. They seem farther away than normal. I am in a hole.

“HELLLLLLL!” I yell.

I feel a naked, cold body press against me when I move to stand. “HELLLLL!”

Oh God.

I try to pray, but I don’t know any prayers. I close my eyes and-

“Marnie. Marnie!” My body is jerking to and fro, my husband’s gray eyes are big. “Where did you go?”

“I went nowhere but to sleep!”

“Sleep?” His brow crinkles. For two days? Not here?” He whips out his cell phone. I am in my same PJs and I touch my hair. It is wet. My brown strands dark and slick with cold water.

“Honey, jump in the bath. I ran a hot one for you and I have the heated blanket-”

“When did I get here?” I ask.
More Books by Erica Jean Smith

Sea of Iron Hands

The Prayer Monologues

Fright of the Frostbitten(TBA)