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quarantine
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creative process
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short stories

CPE 2020





These short stories are the result of a long creative process. They were thought about, planned, discussed, drafted, improved, corrected, and written again, commented on, edited...

Imagination ran free... 

This project demanded a lot of dedication and commitment. Congratulations!!



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Another Harmful Episode by Sofía Tena

I suddenly woke up. It was 7am when the booming and annoying noise of the alarm began to sound. The night before, I had been planning for a moment how the next day was going to be.

First, I would wake up, and of course do the exercises the doctor always sent me. It was something I was tired of doing, but I had to do them every day in order to start moving my left arm and left leg. No one in my family had expected the car accident I had been through the previous days, it definitely devastated them. But accomplishing those exercises could change everything. After doing the exercises, I would spend the whole day with my parents. I had to be thankful for everything they have done for me. Losing my voice was another thing that unluckily had crushed them. The car accident may have been my fault, but losing my voice had been due to that stupid doctor who didn't know how to do a throat surgery well.

My life had completely changed since then. Having difficulties with moving parts of my body wasn't something consequential at all. I mean, I had to stop driving to work because of my leg, but dad could drive me and there wasn't any problem with that. After the throat surgery, everything changed. I found myself bound to quit my job, as interacting with people

was going to be hard, especially when my job consisted, most of the time, of listening to people. Meeting with my friends became exceptional. My mood began to change. I started to witness panic attacks, which absolutely made everything worse.

It sometimes happened that my left arm and leg were paralyzed when waking up, and moving them would last a few minutes. But that morning was different. It was not just my leg and arm that I couldn't move, it was my whole body. There was a horrible feeling I was having. The only movement I could make was with my eyes. I glanced at every corner of my room, expecting someone to enter and help me. There was complete silence in my house. Was I having another panic attack? What if my conditions were worse?



The sound of the wind seemed to be louder than every day. After a while, I could hear how the window of the living room moved with the strong wind. Then, I realized that it wasn't the only thing I was listening to. I could hear my breath as if my ears were touching my lungs. It was something I had never been through.

I suddenly heard my parents talking to each other. It was quite unusual as their daily routine usually begins after 10 o'clock.

"Can you please give me the butter?" Mom asked my Dad.

"Here you have," he answered.

They weren't arguing, but I could hear their voices clear from my bedroom, as if they were two meters away from me. They seemed to be having breakfast, as every morning. After a few minutes, not only was I listening to my parents, but also to my sister Jane.

"Mom, could you please help me to turn on the computer? I think it's broken," Jane asked.

Listening to her was something I didn't expect at all. Jane had moved to her boyfriend's house, and usually came to visit us every weekend. But that day was Thursday in the morning. I guess she just missed her family. While listening to their conversation, I was still unable to

move, expecting someone to enter my room and call a doctor or take me to the hospital, but no one appeared. I was lying in bed, still, only moving my eyes.

I tried to keep calm, until I heard an unfamiliar sound which I didn't know from where it was. I looked at every part of my room for a few seconds, wondering where that sound was coming from, until I saw the roof.

My house was old. I had lived there all my life before moving to my own apartment, yet after the surgery I returned home. It had always been well preserved by my father. But while looking at the roof, I realized the wooden beams were different. That was where the sound was coming from. The pieces were being scratched. They were being scratched by something, probably by the storm. The sound was quite annoying, I could hear it so loud, that my ears started to hurt. I thought of falling asleep, but it was not worth considering with that irritating noise.

My panic attacks had never been that hard. They were terrible, but after a few seconds, they would be over. This one was different. All I was expecting was my parents or my sister to enter the room, so this could be over. I was still listening to my family's conversation downstairs.

“Mom, where’s the sweater I left last week?” Jane asked.

“It’s in my room honey, next to the television,” she answered.

My room was next to my parents room. I could hear Jane’s steps on the stairs, coming closer and closer. Each time louder, as if she was next to me. My eyes were at the door. I could see her shadow under it. She passed my room, went to my parents room, and after a few minutes directly to the stairs, taking no notice of me.

After a few seconds, I was able to move. I didn’t know what had happened. I wanted to make sure it wasn’t something dangerous, so I went to look for my parents as quickly as I could. They weren’t in the kitchen, or in the living room and Jane wasn’t either. I walked up the stairs, and looked into my parents bedroom.

I was in astonishment to see they were completely asleep, and my sister Jane wasn’t at home. There I realized that I had been through a sleep paralysis, and I had imagined every situation.

LIGHTS OFF by Mateo Baldrich

It is 5pm in the afternoon. Charles is arriving home at that hour, just as usual. He had a busy day; there were lots of things to work on at the office. Being the CEO of a bank is not an easy task, in any way. Doing businesses, travelling and being the one that takes the important decisions are just a few tasks he has deal with. "It's my determination, my cold mind and my ability to relate with others what took me there and the stress is worthy", he always argues. His wife Kate, however, does not work. She prefers to do the house and take care of their children, Lisa and Benjamin. They are 13 year old twins, but as similar as their look could be, they unfortunately have notable differences in their attitude. On the one hand, Lisa had always been the purest image of excellence someone could find. Charles and Kate are usually praised for her behavior, her marks at school and obviously her distinctive beauty. No kid can pass by and ignore her beautiful blonde straight hair and her green rounded eyes. On the other hand though, Benjamin is quite the opposite. He is a really good boy, but he had always found difficulty in relating with his peers. He is utterly silent and describes himself as "that clumsy boy who trips on with everything".

5:10 pm and Charles did not arrive. He cannot find a place to park his new BMW M3, one of their 3 luxurious cars. As they are remodeling their beautiful house, the garage is full, so the only

option is to park one of the cars on the street, for some time. The block is packed today, and he has no clue why. However, it is not important; he just parks the car in the other block, heads home and opens the door. To his surprise, nor his wife neither his children are there to greet him. In fact, it seemed as if nobody was there. The lights are turned off and there is a strange silence, something that is not particularly common at that house. He immediately turns on the lights, perhaps it was a prank from his family. Unfortunately, they are nowhere to be seen. Thinking the worst scenario possible, Charles rushes through every room of the house. Goes to his bedroom, nobody there.

He then goes to both Ben's and Lisa's rooms, but same results there too. He desperately phones his wife, but receives no answer. A shiver runs down his spine, it is like a fear he has never felt before. "If the 3 of them were supposed to go out, why would they not tell me anything about it?" he thought. Almost shaking, he is about to call the police, when he realizes that there is a note on the table of the dining room. "Head to Kennedy 192 as soon as possible...". He knew that address; it is his brother's address. At this point, he does not know what to expect, everything is really mysterious and feels a vibe he certainly does not like. But there is no time to waste. He rushes to his car and goes at a really high speed to his brother's house.

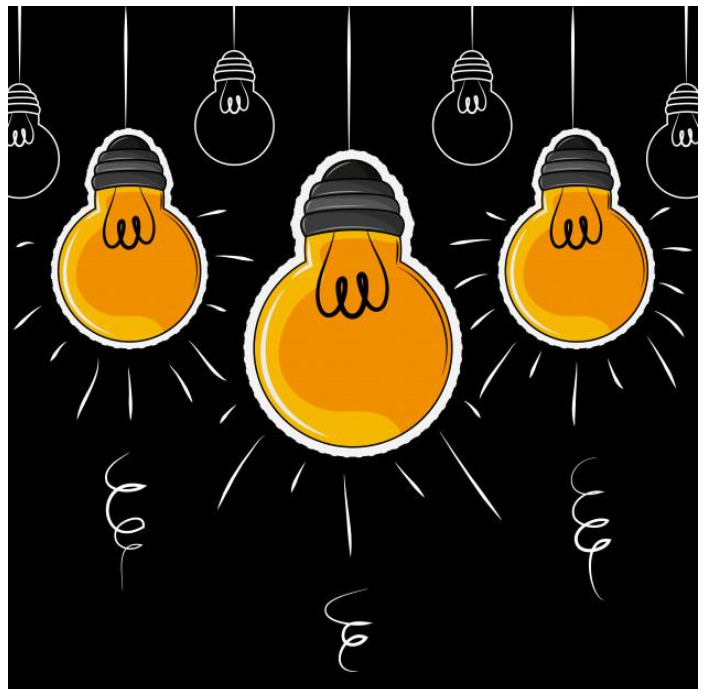
LIGHTS OFF

by Mateo Baldrich

There he is, "Kennedy 192". After ringing the bell 2 times, without any response, he sees the keys of the house are right next to him, lying on the floor. Charles picks them up, thinking how dangerous it would have been if a stranger had done that same action before he arrived. He misses the hole of the keys several times; the idea of what he is going to face when he enters that house terrified him. But as Charles describes himself, he is a cold minded man, who does not panic. He slows down a bit and manages to open the door. To his surprise, the lights are off in his brother's house too. He can not believe what is happening, history repeats itself. However, when he turns on the lights, it all makes sense. All his family and friends are waiting for him, along with some delicious snacks and a loud "surprise!" scream. With the

stress of work, and the odd situation going on since he arrived home, Charles totally forgot that today is his birthday, and all his beloved ones are there to celebrate. The relief he feels is great, he realizes everything is fine.

To start the party, Kate tells Benjamin to bring from the kitchen the huge chocolate birthday cake. But as classic as Ben can be, he trips on with the cake in his hands. But this time it does not matter, it is a day of celebration, and everyone had a great laugh from Ben's unfortunate event. Everything was so odd and frightening from the beginning, but this is for sure a surprise Charles will never forget in his whole life.



THE LIFE-CHANGING CITY by Lucía Tovar

Having just finished my senior year of secondary school at St. John's, I aspired to continue studying abroad. Obviously, it was not as straightforward as I had thought. Before travelling, I had to face two main complications: my family's economic situation and the fact that, despite my attempts to convince them, my parents were still reluctant to let me move to London since I was just nineteen years old.

Luckily, I had the where-to-stay problem solved as a dear friend of the family that had moved to London a few years before offered me his place. So supposing I was really travelling, I would be staying there until I could get a job and afford an apartment.

I had always been this typical stubborn girl who had always tried to get what I wanted without giving up. I was not prepared to let my life dream go. Days passed until I decided to talk to my godfather, who had supported me in every decision I took, and tried to talk him into buying me the plane ticket to London. After hours talking and giggling, he insisted he would be happy to help and that gave me the opportunity to ask my parents one more time with the advantage of having the plane ticket guaranteed. They agreed. Finally I was moving abroad!

Two months later, the day came. I was travelling to London with everything I could have taken. Nothing could have ever prepared me for my first taste of London! From the cab taking me directly to Chris' house, I could very well see this stunning city which was bustling, vibrant, multicultural and cosmopolitan at the same time. I could feel the forceful beating of the heart in my chest, as it was going to explode because of my eagerness. All I wanted to do was get out of that imprisoning car and get lost in its streets.

Once there, I wasn't fully aware of how much I had missed them until I saw him and his family. With a little bit of uneasiness, not really knowing what to say, I stammered "Chris! It's been a long time!" I paused, "how are you doing?"

After I could say anything else, he turned back and I was shocked. He was not how I remembered him. He was now 6.2 feet tall with just 23 years-old. His hair was frizzy and brown and his two large pea-green eyes that stood out of his pale skin were looking directly at me in such form that made my heart beat faster and faster. He was dressed in the same style of white oxford button-down he'd worn since we were neighbours, rolled carelessly at the elbows. His strong, jutting chin showed immediately his determination.

THE LIFE-CHANGING CITY by Lucía Tovar

“Jen! Wow! You *have* changed over the last couple of years! How are you? Come in, please.” He crooned, with such a slight difference in his voice that seemed vaguely unfamiliar to me.

He was talking to me in a deeply calm way and somehow providing me assurance. He then offered me a cup of coffee which made me feel comfortable there. We kept talking until midnight about the past years, what my flight had been like. He was so polite that he asked me about my family.

Using the first days to get settled was the best thing I could have done. I had plenty of time to wander through all the places I had thoroughly investigated and seen all my life via the Internet. As soon as I arrived, I was immersed into the beauty of such a dazzling city. I had the chance to stand in front of The Tower of London, Big Ben and The Buckingham palace for the first time. It had never occurred to me to be facing *that* specific balcony on which the Royal Family traditionally congregate to greet the crowd.

By walking around its streets, I was staggered to see conventional pubs rub shoulders with the newest cocktail bars. I stood with incredulity in front of its most ancient castle next to its latest skyscrapers. I could almost feel like London was inviting me to visit

all those splendid spots the city itself offers, such as The View from the Shard or Westminster Abbey, the outstanding architecture of iconic London landmarks.

Despite Chris’s consideration and the fact that the first days were absolutely beyond amazing, it was inevitable that not even a problem was presented until then. His house was too far away from Cambridge, so I had to find another possibility as that one was no longer useful for my plan. A few days later, I decided to move nearer Cambridge but that meant using savings that I did not have. I spent the money that was supposed to be for paying for university since I had not found a job yet.

Only one month had passed since my arrival and I was already feeling solitary and a bit nostalgic for being separated from my family. Everything I had ever dreamt was failing now and I could not do anything to overcome these depressing circumstances.

Not knowing what to do, I called one professor of my school informing her of my situation and seeking reassurance and help. She comforted me without promising anything. Nonetheless, when a week had lapsed, I received news from Buenos Aires.

THE LIFE-CHANGING CITY by Lucía Tovar

“Oh Jeez, I cannot believe this!” I gushed while I was grasping the correspondence. I rushed inside slamming the door and although I did not know what the letter was about, I could picture everything. A thought loop of me going to university, having my own place, living here was trapped in my mind, repeating itself again and again. I just couldn’t deal with so much enthusiasm that tears of

joy had been running down my cheeks by the time I opened it.

“OH MY GOD!!” I sobbed and that was when everything came back to normal.

I had been offered a scholarship to attend classes in Cambridge. Within a few months, I got a really well-paid job and had the chance to move to a tiny apartment, just for myself.



LOST IN A SWEET PARADISE

by Nazarena Terrazas

The day had finally arrived, after a whole week of waiting, it had finally come, it was Wednesday. On Wednesday the little five-year-old did the shopping with her mom. Katie loved going to the supermarket, she always did, it was her favorite day of the week. Pretending to be an older woman was very entertaining to Katie as she played around, picking up what she was going to buy, she even sometimes took her doll to the market and acted as if it was her baby daughter.

There was only one single rule she had to follow; stay by her mother's side, the market was way too immense to be wandering all alone. That's why every Wednesday her mom gave her exactly the same lecture. She stood in front her in the crowded parking lot that smelled as gasoline and burnt chrome wheels, right before going in, with her arms cross and a

serious and straight face while she said,

"Honey you are *not* allowed to leave my sight at any time, if you *do* so you could get lost or something terrible could happen."

Katie always nodded in agreement with her face shining with enthusiasm and joy prepared to have a wonderful time. She was an obedient girl and always listened attentively and carefully to what her mom told her.

They had both established this routine where they would first buy the fruits and vegetables, then go on with the cleaning and restroom articles and finally continue with food. Katie loved the method because she always knew where to go and what to grab. Her favorite aisle was that of groceries. She was fond of it because she enjoyed picking up the food and wrapping the paper around it,

LOST IN A SWEET PARADISE

by Nazarena Terrazas

she always claimed she felt as a professional greengrocer. She chose the bananas, the apples, the watermelon and the broccoli although she didn't like the last ones very much, she loaded everything into the cart, took them to the wrapping section, all as if she was a grown-up lady. She was known by the whole supermarket staff, she was a famous regular customer and she had lots of friends there. The cashiers always pleasantly helped her out with the heavier fruits; in return for their help, Katie gave them a huge, shiny smile showing off all her tiny teeth.

This Wednesday while they were picking up the bleach, the floor cleaning product and some shampoo, something caught Katie's attention. They passed through an aisle they had never been through before, her mouth dropped open. It was the candy aisle. Her mouth started watering

just by the thought of tasting some, she was standing in every kid's dream and perfect paradise, lollipops, hard or soft candies, caramels, gummies, you name it. Katie gasped in awe; she just couldn't believe her eyes. The smell of excess of sugar felt as if stealing a cloud right out from heaven and devouring it all in one single bite. While she stared with her eyes as opened as an owl, she fantasized about loading every single piece of candy in a humongous supermarket cart. The shining and colorful bright wrapping paper of the sugar candies seemed to be screaming out her name and begging her in desperation to eat them. There were so many sweets, everything was spinning around her, she couldn't just grab one, she wanted *all* of them. She contemplated the shelves with amazement while she stood in the middle of the hallway as people walked past her. That's

LOST IN A SWEET PARADISE

by Nazarena Terrazas

when she remembered...

Katie turned around, her mother was *gone*. Her heart started pounding harder than ever just as if it was about to jump out of her, her hands sweated and her body shook. Her beloved mom had vanished and was nowhere to be seen. The five-year-old strived to call out her mom but her tears wouldn't let her speak clearly.

"Momi?" She tried to keep on talking but she couldn't. Her throat felt swollen and she stuttered as she tried to speak the words in her head.

She was beginning to feel dizzy and lost, the colossal shelves that looked like gigantic buildings, the annoying squealing noise of the carts' wheels, people coming and going, the music coming out of those vast and utterly loud speakers. That song was insufferably loud; it was mixing up all her thoughts. She knew that melody from somewhere;

it was the song that was being played over and over again on their way to the supermarket that same evening. Katie couldn't take it anymore; she sat down on the freezing, filthy floor and just burst into tears.

The little girl regretted so much leaving her mother's side, she wished she could be holding her hand buying some soap and toothpaste but she wasn't, she was alone and terrified. She remembered her mother's strong words telling her she should never be by herself. Katie was then overwhelmed with guilt and fear.

Suddenly she heard someone call out her name; it was a sweet familiar voice. "Katie, honey, where were you?"

The second Katie heard it, she turned around and her heart was filled with peace. "Mom!" The little girl cried out in desperation. She ran as fast as ever into her mother's warm

LOST IN A SWEET PARADISE

by Nazarena Terrazas

arms and cried while she hugged her really tight. Then she sobbed while she stumbled upon her own words, “I missed you mommy. I’m sorry mom.” She paused to look at her mother’s face that was covered with anxious worry and said, “I love you, mom.” Her mom looked back at her and smiled while she rubbed her back and calmed her down.

Standing right behind her mother, there were two utterly muscular, gigantic and scary guards that had been looking for her while she was gone. That moment Katie deeply understood she should really be prudent and take care of herself, the little girl never let go of her precious mom’s hand ever again.



Resentment by Valentina Viaggio

"I'm exhausted- "my coworker, Sophia, complained "-what time is it?"

"It's only 3 o'clock- "I answered disappointed "-Two hours left."

"You still need to clean the bathroom," Sophia said

"No way! I did it last time!" I told her bitterly, "Plus I still need to wash the boss's fancy dresses and iron her poor husband's socks," I said while imitating our boss's voice.

When I came to LA 30 years ago, in order to follow my dreams, I had never imagined that I would end where I was now. As the innocent, optimistic and stubborn little girl I was, I used to believe I could prove myself to my high school classmates. I knew becoming an actress was my destiny. It is quite obvious now that it had been a foolish idea.

When work had finished, I came straight home, grabbed my mail as every other day and lay down on my sofa. I went through each letter, one by one. Most of them were bills to pay but one of them caught my attention, a light pink envelope with my name written in rose gold ink. It was an invitation. An invitation to my graduation anniversary party. I couldn't believe it had been 30 years already. It was time. Time to prove my noisy, smelly and annoying ex-classmates wrong.

Nevertheless, there was a problem... I had nothing to wear.

There I was doing my boss' laundry. It had been a week since I had received the invitation and I was sure of one thing: I was not attending the party. I had gone to every single shop I could afford at the moment and had not found one dress to wear... just a pair of white, fancy and for sale heels. And then I had an epiphany. My dearest boss had about 300 dresses, she wouldn't mind lending me one for one night. But I was not risking her being able to deny my request. I had decided to "borrow" one of her many white dresses... and a beautiful coat to match my outfit just in case it was windy.

The night of the party came. There I was, at the entrance, looking stunning. The aroma of my old school' gym hadn't changed at all, it was a combination of teenage sweat, cheap cleaning products and a strong environmental artificial flavour.

"Kiara, is that you!" a sharp voice said.

I could recognise that annoying scream anywhere: it was Kate. Also known as the cause of my high school years being miserable. Had it not been for her, I would have been the main character in my seniors theater play. It was her who had ruined the scenography and blamed it on me. Resulting on me being kicked out of the Drama Club.

Resentment by Valentina Viaggio

I put the fakest smile I could and said, "Oh my gosh! Darling it's been such a long time since the last time I saw you."

"I know, I know! Running my own clothing brand takes up so much time- " she said while looking me up and down "-What about you darling? Still trying to become an actress?"

The day before I had come up with a plan: I wouldn't be able to say I was a famous actress because everyone would have noticed I was lying. Instead, I decided to tell everyone I was a recognised film producer in Europe.

"Oh no! I discovered my real passion...Producing films in Europe" I replied with a victory tone.

Kate's face was priceless, I could see the jealousy in her eyes. Furthermore, my other classmates loved me. I mean who wouldn't be interested in my anecdotes with Colin Firth and how I got him his role in "Mamma Mia".

We were half way through the party. Everyone was dancing and jamming to the 70s most popular songs. Everything was going great when...Splash! Kate had spilled red wine all over my white dress, on purpose obviously. I freaked out. The stain was huge. As panic filled my body, I rushed to the cloakroom where I had left the coat. Lucky me, the staff had lost it.

No sooner had I rushed inside the

bathroom than I started sobbing. I imagined a million possibilities of how this situation could end up and none of them were good. If my boss knew I had not only ruined her expensive dress but also lost her fashionable coat, I would be fired.

I was so caught up with my problem then, that I didn't even realise a waitress was there in the bathroom with me.

"Is everything alright?" she asked, I could see the worry in her eyes.

For a moment I hesitated whether to answer or not. But the truth is I couldn't contain it anymore. I opened up completely about my situation. Words kept coming out of my mouth until I had to stop in order to breathe. My eyes were puffy as I couldn't stop crying. I was shaking. And I couldn't breathe because of how utterly shook I was. The poor waitress was shocked, she probably regretted asking.

With a sweet, calmed and soft voice she said, "It's alright, I can help you."

I looked at her in disbelief.

"Or at least I can try-"she murmured"-let me help you clean up."

In no more than 10 minutes she had made the stain disappear. I had never been so grateful in my life.

Resentment by Valentina Viaggio

The next day I went early to work in order to return the dress. I placed it exactly where I had found it. No one knew I had taken it, well except for the waitress. By the end of the day my boss hadn't realised her coat was missing.

As soon as I grabbed the freezing cold handle of the door in order to leave, my boss called me...

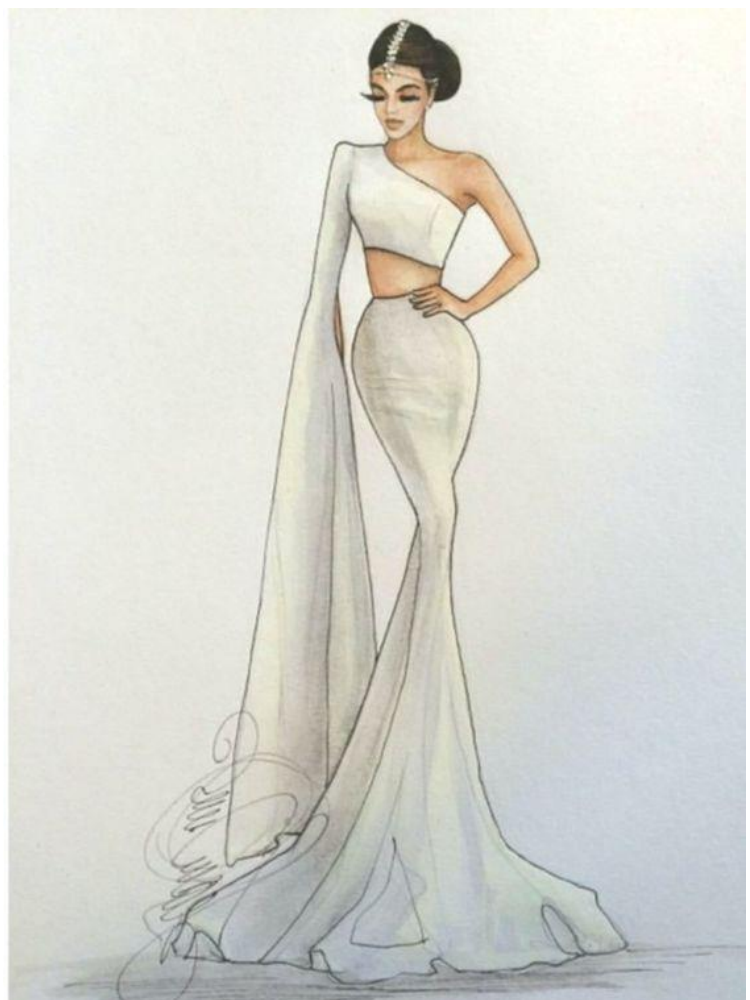
"Have you seen my magnificent coat? You know...the red one I love," she asked.

I tried my best not to stutter and

answered, "No madam, haven't seen it in a while."

That was when I heard the most comforting words I had ever been said.

"I must have lost it in Paris," she whispered to herself, "Never mind! Thank you. See you on Monday!"



The perfect mask *by Jazmin Mikalonis Bubilek*

Everything was perfect.

The common family, a wealthy couple, with one child, who always got what she wanted, in other words, a spoiled little girl, Isabella, a slender glamorous juvenile who was usually dressed in fashionable designer clothes. Her hair, soft as a baby's bottom. As the years passed, not only their happiness kept growing, but also their wealth.

Everyone in their neighborhood was envious of them for their style of life, but worst, because of the kind people, how easy-going, warm-hearted they were. Nonetheless, Isabella had a peculiar personality. She was frequently an irritable and nasty adolescent who usually threw temper tantrums when her lovely and tolerant parents did not obey her. Throughout her short and perfect life, she had created and strengthened an extremely strong bond with her father, one that no one could break. He had educated Isabella, and twice a week, during the afternoon, a father-daughter picnic was carried out in the house's backyard. Together, they watched horror movies, listened to music, told humorous anecdotes, lying down on a blanket on the grass, with a basket full of snacks. They could spend hours, with none of them getting bored.

Her mother, heartbroken because of not being able to take part in that joyful moment, usually asked Isabella if she

could join them, to what she always answered that she preferred to spend that time alone with her father.

Tired of her daughter's attitude, she obviously began to suspect of her and confronted her in order to get answers to the large number of questions she had.

"What have you done? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? Where's my daughter?" the mother shouted desperately at Isabella while scratching her arm nervously.

"I am your daughter, mommy, I do *not* know what you are talking about." Isabella answered ironically.

"I'm telling your father, I'm telling the police."

"I think that isn't really necessary, is it, mom?" Isabella responded in a threatening way.

A scream of pain could be heard from afar. Some minutes later, she came out of the house, with a huge smile on her face. Nevertheless, there was something strange with her, but the father couldn't notice it. Staring at her, he noticed her clothes were soaked in blood.

"Are you okay, sweetie?"

"Yes, dad, don't worry, I hurt myself while cutting some fruits for our picnic."

The perfect mask by Jazmin Mikalonis Bubilek

For the following months, the father became a complete different person. He didn't pay too much attention to Isabella, feeling depressed about it but his immeasurable sadness did not allow him to spend time with his daughter.

Unfortunately, after months of research, the police never found the murder weapon even though it was right under their noses. The father, crying his eyes out, begged the police to find out who was responsible for his wife's death. After all, it was their job. Crazy as it may sound, even though their relationship was not the best, Isabella did not bring any tear to her eyes, which resulted in the father suspecting of her. "How could it be possible that a daughter did not suffer for her mother's death?"

The days passed, and her father had decided to look through some old family photos in order to bring some joy to his life. He started laughing, as he remembered what had happened in some pictures. He came across a stunning picture of Isabella, he couldn't believe she was his daughter, "such a perfect and well educated child," he thought. Yet, something stood out to him from the picture. His daughter had a birthmark on

her neck, one that you couldn't miss, but, if he looked at more recent pictures, he couldn't see it, it had vanished like a bursted bubble. His suspicions about his daughter got bigger and bigger, so he had no option but to interrogate her.

"Hey, didn't you have a birthmark here on your neck? That's really strange, how could it have disappeared just like that? That can't happen. Please, give me a reasonable explanation, before I make my own conclusions, please", begged her father, with both hands on his head, as if trying to keep his composure.

Ironically, Isabella started laughing at his questions.

"Sorry, dad, but those will be your last words. But first, I have to thank you for the life you and mommy gave me, my dream wouldn't be possible if it hadn't been for you too."

Her plan was going just as she had designed it. Now, with her mother out of her way, and his father dead, she would be the only one to receive her father's will, and keep having the life she had always dreamt of, with no father, no mother, to stop her from doing whatever she wanted to. Unfortunately, she had to wait until she turned 18 years old.

Throughout that torturing year Isabella had to wait to receive all of her family's

The perfect mask by Jazmin Mikalonis Bubilek

wealth, she kept herself busy by making sure no one knew she was responsible for her parents' deaths.

And, after waiting and waiting, her 18th birthday came. There was a nice crisp refreshing air, like a waterfall, that morning. The first rays of morning tiptoed through the meadow. The first thing she did was to call the family lawyer in order to arrange a meeting to authenticate the will her father had left for her. Isabella was nervously walking from one side of the house to another, not only biting her nails but also thinking of all the possible actions that could happen which could ruin her plan. Thankfully, and for her mental health, the sweet and glorious lawyer appeared on the entrance door, saving her from going crazy.

Suddenly, one second before signing the will, someone knocked on the door. Those were the worst noises she had ever heard during her life. Drops of sweat started to fall from the top of her face. Frightened, she slowly walked towards the entrance door. The worst she could have imagined had happened. The police were on her house's porch. She let them in, offered them a cup of tea and invited them to a private room to pretend she wasn't on the verge of passing out. Silence crept into the room.

"Is everything ok, sir?"

"No, miss, and I think you know why, don't pull my leg please," answered one of the officers.

"Could you explain to me what is happening?" Isabella exclaimed with a nervous tone.

"We just wanted to let you know that your father called us before dying, agonizing, to let us know that her real daughter had gone missing. So we started a missing person -."

And before finishing the sentence, Isabella had taken a knife and, with no difficulty, killed both of the policemen by stabbing them in their hearts.

All of those years of effort, of pretending she cared about her family, wouldn't be thrown away because of some stupid officers.

As if nothing had happened, Isabella returned to the room where the lawyer was and kept on completing the will.

Everything was perfect.



UNCOVERING THE TRUTH

by Chiara Cristófalo

While eating the toothsome pancakes my mother made I looked around me and started thinking about being more appreciative of the wonderful family that I had. I wondered what it would be of me if I lost either of my parents, as I thought out loud I asked myself.

"I would definitely be lost without them,"

"How would I live without seeing my father read the digital newspaper every morning as I walk down the stairs?" "How would I live without my mother's precious cooking?... I don't even know."

"Everything alright, sweetie?" mother asked, with concern laced in her voice as she heard me mumbling something to myself.

"Yeah, just thinking." I replied, in hopes of reassuring her that everything was okay.

"Ok then, me and your father should get going, we're taking the 'rfx-38' so could you take the bus to school, please?" she asked me with pleading eyes.

"Of course, mom, see you later. Love you!"

With that said I was off to school, as I walked to the bus stop I laughed at my mom's obsession with that car, it was brand new, one of the first ones ever made. It could fly over any other flying cars so it was able to avoid traffic, maybe that was why she loved it so much.

Everything was ideal; I was talking with my friends at school remembering some funny anecdotes from when we

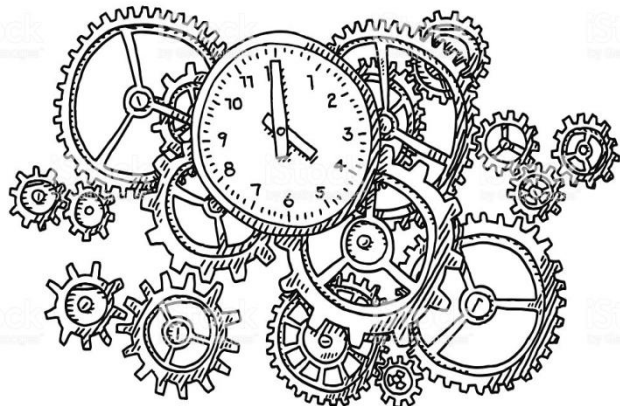
were young and just starting this outstanding friendship of ours when, out of nowhere, my phone started blowing up with messages all from mom. I got up from the table my friends and I were talking at and rang my mother hoping to get some answers from her sudden outburst. The messages were unclear, I didn't understand anything.

"Christine, I'm so sorry, it happened so fast!", mother kept repeating over and over, once she answered my calls.

"Mom, calm down, what happened?!" I was getting nervous, I didn't know what was happening.

She couldn't stop crying, nothing could be heard but her sobbing, "Your father, Christine, he's gone!"

I didn't know what to do or say, I was frozen. Every memory with him came back to me; I had lost my father, my best friend. My dad was the first person I had talked to about a boy I liked when I was a kid. The connection we had was like no other, I could talk to him about anything with ease as he was nothing but understanding.



We were inseparable. He had taught me how to ride a bike while keeping up with my irritating self being extremely loud due to being scared of falling. Despite everything, he kept a smile plastered on his face at all times. My father was the greatest man you would ever meet, he was affectionate, considerate and easy-going.

My mom was still crying on the phone without saying a word, I immediately asked her where she was and, after getting her response, I hung up the phone. I ran and ran till my legs gave out in hopes of getting to her as fast as possible. At one point, I was on the sidewalk balling my eyes out, but had to stay strong for my mother so I stood up and kept going.

Once I arrived at the hospital, my mom crying in the waiting room was the first thing I saw. My first instinct was to approach her and hold her in my arms. We were crying together like there was no tomorrow until I decided to take us home. A cab approached us and we got in giving him directions to our house. The house fell silent as we stepped into it, nobody talked; we just stayed there looking at the house as if there was something missing, which there was. He made this house feel like home which was no longer.

Month after month, week after week and still we were miserable, but no more. I wanted nothing more than to say goodbye and that was what was going to happen. Every day after school I would tell my mom I'd be going to a friend's house when instead I would be

going to the public laboratory where my plan would come into action.

The day finally came, after six months of hard work I got it. I had created a time machine. People working there warned me it was dangerous as it was? unknown territory and wanted me to stop. Yet, I would stop at nothing to see my father and I one last time together and say my goodbyes.

Everything was as it was supposed to, making it possible to finally go back in time to one day before his death, I wasn't going to change what had happened but I needed to see him one last time. Something seemed off about this. Nonetheless I pushed past it and pressed the button that would send me back in time.

Things were going as planned when suddenly the machine started glitching and everything went sideways. I woke up with a pounding headache in the middle of a park, I was disoriented and didn't know where I was or what had happened.

A man saw me and came closer asking me, "Hey, are you ok?"

The man gave off as a giving, kind and reliable man that seemed to have no intention of anything despite providing help as well as guidance... I couldn't say anything as I knew nothing of what was going on, I didn't even remember my own name!

It was maddening yet something had to be said, the man was starting to look concerned so I blurted out what first came to mind.

"Yeah, I'm ok... umm, hi, I'm Mary," shaking his hand.

"Hi, I'm Bradley-", said the man with a bit of enthusiasm "-Are you sure you're ok, you seem a little bit disoriented."

He let out a giggle while saying it.

"Yeah, you could say that."

"Well then, welcome to Chicago!" he said with a huge smile.

Years had passed; I decided to leave what I couldn't remember in the past and form a new life, get a new name, new job, new friends plus, I even ended up having a husband. Bradley proposed to me a year later and I couldn't have been happier. We lived our life at its fullest by travelling through the world along with going on adventures that remained as anecdotes that would forever remain as the best days of our lives. Not long after the wedding we decided to form a family, yeah, it may seem rushed but it felt right, it's a feeling I could never describe. When you find your other half there is nothing you wouldn't want to do with them.

Nine long months after we had our beautiful daughter, Christine.

Everything was splendid, I was living the perfect life with the people I loved the most, there was nothing more I could ask for. Christine was growing up, years passed by us like a flash. Before knowing it she had become a joyful, kind and gorgeous girl.

Life seemed out of this world, my husband and I had never been closer. Moreover, Christine was finally on the way to becoming the brilliant and

independent woman we, as parents, had expected her to be. That was until the day came where everything changed. My life would never be the same after discovering the truth. I had said goodbye to my daughter as she left for the bus when suddenly everything came back to me. Every memory. Who I was. My past. My parents. The accident. Everything. I panicked as I realized I had formed a life with my own father as well as me being my own mother. I was going crazy. I had to get back and reverse everything. The thing I did not take into account was that the time machine hadn't been created yet so I got into my car with my husband or father, both I guess. I told him to make a stop at the laboratory because I was staying there for some time but he insisted on being there with me or at least on fetching me lunch. I agreed without thinking much of it and told him to stay in the car as I wasn't going to be long. I got out of the car rushing inside to be able to make the time machine in hopes of everything going back to normal, even though it actually had taken me months to create it before.

Last thing I remember was me lying on the ground after hearing a loud bang. I got up and headed for the car. I didn't know why I was even here, but when I got there the car was smashed into a building. I am guessing there had been an explosion that made the car go through a building with Bradley inside.

THE ENDGAME

by Matías Santana

After he stepped down from the time machine, Mark was firstly experiencing a state of dizziness, followed by tightness in his throat. His lungs were feeling as elastic as old underpants just sagging instead of contracting for the next breath. He let a few seconds go by in order to adjust his entire body to this new reality, looked up to the sky, and begged for being where he was supposed to be. Nevertheless, in a second of distraction, Mark felt astonished by the surroundings and everything froze around him for a few seconds which felt like a million years to him. Mark was used to destroyed buildings, to working 14 hours a day without a chance even to enjoy the beauty of a sunset. But this was completely different, pre war Germany kept its beauty... and this young man was feeling something he had never felt before, every little detail, from multicoloured flowers to the glowing sun illuminating a quivering path across the water, bathing the ocean's meek waves and the wispy clouds in a burnin

Unfortunately, time to gaze at the sunset was quickly gone, as a few soldiers appeared to be running towards him, and they looked as if they had seen something

horrible. A few shots were fired and Mark quickly found himself in a dead end. In the glimpse of an eye, Mark was rescued by a group of people who were heavily armed, and seemed to be part of some kind of "resistance". Doubts came around Mark's minds about whether those soldiers would set him free or maybe would not believe him and end his life prematurely, before accomplishing what he was there for. When he first opened his eyes the room where he had been taken was full of darkness but there was something in the darkness that was like a promise, like the world before dawn. "What is your business here?!", one man shouted angrily. Before he could try to answer that question, from the shadows emerged a frightening figure, tall as a tower, with two shotguns around his arms. He hit the table with his fists, and in a both calm but firm voice, he said, g red.

“Okey, Frederick, the one who calls the shots here so let’s start with something simple, what’s your name?”

While his mouth was trembling, Mark murmured, “M... M... Mark.”

As he crossed his arms, Frederick roared.

“Right Mark, now that we know each other, the real questioning begins, I hope you’re not a spy, and you’d better have a reasonable explanation as for why you were being chased by a group of German soldiers”.

Lots of questions were asked, and Mark tried to answer them as well as he could, considering he came from the XXVth century. Faces of astonishment and amazement covered the room as Mark explained what he had been sent to accomplish. Even so, every single soul in the room didn’t fully believe the young man, with many of them ready to take him as a prisoner. Despite the group's mistrust towards Mark, Frederick could sense something from his face, profound rage maybe. But the eyes, they never lie and through his exhausted, helpless, and almost hopeless pair of green eyes, empathy was felt by the commander of the revolutionaries. After Mark told them his entire plan, Frederick ordered his subordinates to give him everything in their disposal to help,

including the Führer's whereabouts. Not everyone there was willingly to help Mark, but orders were orders, and no one would even raise his voice in concern about helping this enigmatic man. Before he left, Mark gave Frederick a tiny bracelet built by the resistance groups from the future, which had a Latin phrase engraved in it, “per ardua ad astra”, which means “throughout effort, triumph is guaranteed”. Both men smiled, and after Frederick wished Mark the best, he and his men left to attend an aid call from another group.

So Mark was now ready to fulfill his destiny by saving humanity from all the atrocities Hitler's regime had done during and after the war. Reaching Berlin was the easy part of a not-so- well elaborated plan... what was really difficult and challenging was to break into the Nazi headquarters, which was the most important facility in Germany, and because of being so, was also the most surveilled building. Not only were there top security gadgets, but also 300 of the best trained soldiers in the world.

Running through the main entrance while shooting every single soldier was not an option, while infiltrating quietly didn't seem possible due to soldiers being everywhere. In that moment, Mark realized one of the things Frederick had given him was a German soldier uniform. Everything was clear now, as Mark got past every soldier in the building and reached the Führer's office. There he was, one step away from changing the outcome of the war and the entire future. In his hands laid the opportunity to give his own people a life worth living. So many thoughts came through his mind as he opened the door...

All of a sudden shots were fired and as a result Mark got heavily injured. Nevertheless, one shot in Hitler's Chest was enough to end it. Mark had saved an entire future, and gave mankind a fresh start. But since he was impacted by several bullets, the young hero realized he wouldn't live long

enough so as to witness a new world. Despite that crude reality, Mark left the world with a smile in his face and an incomparable contribution to mankind, which would be remembered all over the world... for eternity.



THE STALKER

by Camila Perez

The clacking sound of keys could be heard from the other side of the apartment's door. After a tough fight with the old wooden door, Marie walked in, dragging herself inside after a long and tiring day at college. She would normally sit down and talk with her roommates about her day but today was not the case. She felt anxious. It was like something was off. On her way home, she had felt like some stranger's eyes were watching over her, but when she had turned around... no one was there. *"Maybe I'm being paranoid,"* she thought to herself.

As she walked down the hall, some voices could be heard coming from the kitchen. She could clearly hear the disaster that was happening inside that room and with no surprise, it was Tanner and Alice, two of her roommates. They were both cooking... something. The pungent smell of burnt meat could be sensed from the hallway. Marie walked up to them with a confused but funny look.

"It's not the usual seeing you two cooking," she giggled.

"Hey, Mae" Tanner forced a spoonful of tomato sauce inside her mouth.

"Gee," she gulped. That nauseating substance and answered with disgust "not really your expertise."

"I'm cooking dinner for today, any requests?" he asked kindly.

Marie only laughed at him with irony and with her hand pinching her nose, she walked out of the kitchen heading to the living room. There she found Dave, lying on the couch, reading some nerdy book, probably something from college. Marie

sighed; her day had been awful and all she could do was rant about it. She sat down next to him and stared at his book. Dave realized something was wrong and shut the book, leaving it in the small table next to the couch.

"Ok, spit it out. What's wrong?" And with that, she started talking. Dave, as always, sat there listening to her tragedies, which were not really tragedies but more of inconveniences. Marie loved talking with him, she felt understood when talking to him.

Time passed and from 6pm to 7pm, and to 8pm they kept talking, until it was time to eat dinner.

Tanner and Alice gave up with the cooking thing and called for some pizza delivery. After sharing a nice meal with her roommates, Marie went to her room and got ready to sleep. She got her face mask and her teeth brushed and was ready to rest.

"I hope tomorrow is a better day" she sighed as she lay in her comfy bed. That was the last thing she thought before fainting of tiredness.

The following day, some way or another felt brighter. The sun shining through the curtains and the birds singing were a good sign. However, it just felt the same. It was simply one more exhausting and boring day like the rest. Marie could not wait till she graduated to move out and live her fantasy life as a writer. Working hard at college, she had got an internship in an editorial and she would head for Manhattan, New York in a month or so. Despite the fact that this was an astounding chance, she was not hyped about it anymore. Her days had

THE STALKER

by Camila Perez

become so tasteless and grey, she just could not feel excitement at all.

The day was long, winter had come and it could be felt. Marie had forgotten her jacket in the apartment, so she was freezing cold. This time she chose to take the public transport back home, it was unreasonably cold for her to walk home.

Barely getting the right bus, she was already heading back home. Earbuds plugged in and music on, the trip was relaxing. It had been a long time ago since Marie felt this calm. There was no stalker following her and no responsibilities. Without realizing, she started to close her eyes, lastly nodded off.

She woke up in a cold sweat, two stations before arriving. She frantically searched for her telephone yet it was no longer in her pocket. No more music and no more serenity.

It was then that she could feel it again. Someone was watching her. It was just instinct but it was enough to get her off the bus. She stood up and pressed the button for the bus to stop. As she walked off, she could promptly feel the cold wind hitting her face. Yet, regardless of what she did, she could still feel like she was being watched. What's more, as though it was not enough, it started raining. She ran to the apartment but still arrived soaking wet and shaking. Her roommates reacted instantly, giving her hot chocolate and clean dry garments. This was a changing point. This feeling had continued for a considerable length of time before she started realizing she might be insane. The feeling of being followed was consistently there.

Omnipresent. Regardless of what she did, she would always feel that way.

That night she told everything to her most trusted roommate, Dave. This anxiety had been accumulated and made her feel like she was suffocating.

"I feel like I'm going crazy," Marie cried as she wiped her nose with the sleeve of her sweater, "and today I got my phone stolen," she cried considerably stronger. Dave was looking at her with surprise, she would usually not cry to such an extent. He sighed and reached for tissue paper. "It's all right, don't cry." He wiped her tears and left the wet tissue on the table. "Just relax, everything is going to be ok; if you want I can walk back home with you tomorrow," Dave spoke with a soft voice, as an attempt to calm her down. Marie sat down and sighed; she grabbed the box of tissues and took one from the inside. She nodded in agreement, and from that day on, she would walk back home with Dave.

The next Friday night, as most Fridays, Marie stayed longer at her job in the local library, since it was her turn to shut down. She had been walking home with Dave for the last week or so, and this was going to be the first day to do so without him. She turned all the lights off and left the building through the back door. That night, people could be seen wearing big jackets and gloves; it was pretty obvious at this point that winter had arrived. Marie decided she wanted to walk and check out the stores in the main street. It was almost time for her to set off for New York, and she wanted to give everyone something as a goodbye. Still, she decided to leave it for another day, it was getting dark and she was

THE STALKER

by Camila Perez

feeling a little bit tired.

Halfway through her way home, she noticed this strange presence again. Since she would walk to the apartment with Dave, it had ceased, but once more, she was being followed. She grabbed her backpack firmly and painstakingly turned around, all to see a person behind her. Paranoid as she might be, this time she was certain that person was following her. She quickened her pace in alarm, however, the stranger managed to catch up quickly. Marie panicked; without knowing what to do, she just began running. It was no surprise when the stranger ran behind her.

He was fast, and was drawing closer and closer. Fear was what kept him from catching her, as she ran faster than ever. The night was dark and people were already at their homes. She could find nowhere to hide. As she ran slower and slower, looking around for help, she took a turn to her left and found an alley to hide. Gasping for air, yet not having any desire to make a commotion, she let herself plunk down on the floor. She could hear the stranger getting closer. She covered her mouth and sat in silence with her eyes closed, not being brave enough to keep them open. A few minutes of silence had passed by, and so she decided to open her eyes, but it was too late. The stranger suddenly pinned her down to the floor. She tried to scream but he covered her mouth.

“Do not move,” the man said with a rough voice. That voice sounded familiar to Marie. She somehow knew the truth but didn’t want to accept it. She kept struggling to talk but the man didn’t let

her. “If you calm down, I will let you speak,” he answered as he struggled even more to keep her quiet.

She quickly stopped moving and waited for the moment to speak. The man slowly retired his hand from her mouth and let her talk.

“Wh-who are you? What do y-you want from me?” Marie almost cried with fear. That’s when the face expression the man was holding changed. He seemed surprised, and then embarrassed.

“Marie, is that you?” the man said, removing the cap he had of his head. It was Dave. He stood up and offered her a hand. Shaking, she refused and stood up by herself. He tried to reach her but she dodged him.

She wanted to know why that ever happened, but couldn’t manage to ask. And even if it had been an accident, did he even mean to do that to someone else? Those were questions she was too afraid to ask, but still wanted an answer. They walked home together that night, as if nothing had happened. There was dead silence and horrible tension between the two, but still no explanation of why that had ever happened. As they were walking aside, Dave quickly put something away in his pocket. Marie was unable to see what it was, but at that point, she was afraid of anything he would do. So she built enough bravery to ask, “What’s that?” to what he responded that it was nothing important, as he carefully put away the small dagger.



The Looking Glass by Valeria A. Sánchez

The day was perfect to go out, it was not as hot as the weather forecast had announced, and there was a subtle cold breeze. Sarah needed to take the chance. She had been wanting to go shopping since a while now, but did not have the time to do so.

The girl had been born and raised in London, but since her grandmother had passed away leaving her the house she had taken the chance to move to Birmingham. Her parents were divorced so she was used to traveling every now and then to visit them. She had recently dyed her hair wine red, she had always wanted to do so, she thought of this as a form of freedom; with her change of town freedom came.

As she was new to the neighborhood and wanted to socialize she decided to throw a party in order to meet new people, but since the house was older than the Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens, she knew she had to deep clean and give it a makeover.

When she first moved in, she did some cleaning but there were still spiderwebs and dust everywhere. She fancied some of the furniture left there but thought she needed to varnish them. The wallpaper in the living room was peeling off and the design was old fashioned so she wanted to take it off and paint the walls plain white. There were fungus produced by humidity on her

bedroom wall, but she did not mind much as she knew it was common in a place as humid as this .

The streets were empty with the exception of those who went to ride their bikes. Sarah was quite shocked about this as she thought it was a great day to go out. While walking down the streets of lovely Birmingham, she saw a vintage store, but what caught her eye was the old and rusty mirror placed on the showcase. She thought she could give it a makeover and place it on her newly decorated bedroom. The mirror was only £6 which was cheap considering it wasn't in horrible conditions. She decided to buy it. The place smelled funky, and somehow made her feel nostalgic.

After a long day of shopping Sarah was finally home. She had walked miles shopping for house decoration, varnish, wall paint, and drinks for her party. She was exhausted regarding the hard choices she had to make about decoration and the weight she had to carry back home..

It was the morning after, she had woken up with a smile painted on her face and determination to work hard for the day and start the remodeling. Downstairs she went, drank iced tea with almond milk and a hint of vanilla, and ate a grilled cheese sandwich with fried eggs.

The Looking Glass by Valeria A. Sánchez

She went to her bedroom again to fetch the mirror so that she could take it somewhere she could paint it. She stared at it, goosebumps all over her body. She felt observed, and so she was. Her reflection smiled at her.

“Am I hallucinating?” she thought to herself.

The lookalike reflected figure waved at her as she stared in disbelief. Her reflection stuck her hand out of the mirror for Sarah to grab it.

She did.

Through the looking glass she went. Sarah was still astonished. There was a tunnel full of colourful spirals, there were memories projected in the space. Memories of moments of extreme happiness, with friends, family and mostly important herself.

During the trip she began to ask herself why the mirror had such special qualities. Was its price low so that people would buy it? Was it enchanted? Or, was all of this just a dream?

Through the looking glass awaited a painful reality. At the beginning it didn't seem like it, there were birds singing and a cheerful energy, but there was a door which, out of curiosity, she opened. In there her darkest thoughts were to be found. Hundreds of voices whispering, “You are not good enough,” “You are so annoying, why don't you shut

up?” pessimistic thoughts that were dreadfully overwhelming to her.

For her it was torture, but her reflection seemed to enjoy it. She locked herself in. She knew she wanted to get out of the glass but couldn't let it happen.

“What are you?” Sarah exclaimed, “Let me out, please!” she begged.

Out of the looking glass she came. But Sarah wasn't herself anymore, not the same Sarah everybody knew. The sweet, lovable girl who was also empathic and caring. Eyes still emerald green, skin as pale as snow, but there was no smile painted on her face. She fell onto a hole full of insanity, sadness, pessimism and anger.

Now there is no reflection. Just screams and whimpers calling for help.

The Divorce

by Juan Pablo Alonso

I was arriving at my decorative beach house, in sunny Malibu, after a long and exhausting day at the office. I was skeptical whether to go in or not. I'd been having a lot of fights with my wife and I didn't feel like having another one so I went to the local bar. After a few minutes, my wife came into the bar. Her face was dark red, she had a clenched jaw with the vein in the middle of her forehead popping out.

"What the hell are you doing here?!" she shouted.

"I'm just meeting a friend here," I lied, to try and get out of an awkward situation.

"I'm done putting up with your lying and drinking. I can't do this anymore!" she lashed out, pointing some papers at me like a gun.

Before storming out, she handed me the papers, they were divorce papers.

After putting a lot of thought into it I signed them and went to the state court to make it official. A few moments after leaving the courtroom she told me she had already bought a house in London and she was going to move there.

A month went by and I was

feeling better than ever. My happiness didn't depend on anyone but myself. The world was my oyster. Nevertheless, one day I was picking up some food from the supermarket when I saw a woman who looked just like my ex-wife. She had her huge, shiny smile, the same perky chick-bones and her unforgettable light-blue eyes. She even had her bouncy walk and the same "innocent" face expression she always had. The only thing unlike her was the woman's curly blonde hair so I didn't pay attention to it.

That same night I went to the bar to hang out with some friends. We were famished, so we went ahead and ordered some fries. To my surprise, the waitress that brought us our order also looked awfully like my ex-wife but, in this case, she was a redhead. At this point I felt really uncomfortable so I decided to drink and overlook everything that happened. When I arrived at my home I could barely open the door as I was so wasted, and passed out right there in the living-room sofa.

The Divorce

by Juan Pablo Alonso

As I woke up with a terrible hangover the only thing I could remember from the day before were the two women that looked like my ex. A little later the mail arrived and, through the window, I saw that the mailman was, in fact, a woman with an uncanny resemblance to my wife. This time she had her flowing and natural, long brown hair. At this point I didn't know if I was going crazy or my ex-wife was just stalking me. So without thinking it twice I boarded the first plane that was available to London.

When I arrived, I went directly to my ex-wife's house. As I knocked on the door. She answered it. I was extremely confused but then I realized the problem was that I hadn't got over her. I told her how I couldn't get her out of my head and I invited her to go for a cup of coffee to sort out our differences. We talked all afternoon. It felt like we were young and falling in love once again, it was great.

After that, our coffee turned into dinner and, before we knew it, it was late and I had nowhere to go in London. Having noticed that, my ex offered me to stay at her

house and I accepted. After going into her house, the first thing I saw were a blonde wig, a red one and two uniforms; a waitress and mail-man's uniforms. Right after that everything went black. Ever since that day, I've been living in my ex-wife's basement.

THE "HOW DID YOU MEET?" STORY

by Alexia Pilar

The Robinson family was having dinner, and between laughter and a lot of food, Tom, the youngest of the family, asked, "Mom, dad, how did you actually meet?"

Henry, his father, answered, "It was a kind of funny story..." Back in 2008, Henry was supposed to have taken care of his brother's apartment in New York although he didn't want to. While he was getting into the building, he was having a call with her mother. "But mom, why should I take care of his apartment?" slamming the entrance door. "I don't know the city at all, I'm all by myself!"

The apartment was average size, it had a comfortable couch in the living room, but what was amazing was the enormous window from where you could watch Central Park with its trees covered in snow like cupcake frost.

While he entered his belongings and settled down, he checked every inch of the kitchen. Every cupboard, shelf, everywhere to see what he could eat during his stay there. He was annoyed when he found out there was nothing but a loaf of bread and a can of beans and that meant that he would have to go out again to *shop* in the horrible weather NY was having those days. Worse still, it seemed as if a snowstorm was coming. Later on, he took a long shower and only afterwards, was able to calm down.

The next morning, Henry tried to go out but found his way out blocked by tons of snow. While struggling to get out (something that he couldn't manage), a delicious smell was all over the hall, it seemed as if someone was cooking some pasta or maybe some meat, his mouth dropped. He was hungry as a bear and had no idea how to deal with his problem. Thinking about what could be done, he had this idea of listening to music way too loud so he wouldn't think of his hunger. He tried to convince himself that it was just for one day. Half an hour later, someone was knocking on his door.

When he opened, he found a tall brunette with a furious look on her face. The girl must be his age, maybe younger. When she saw Henry, she started yelling in his face, "Would you mind turning that music down? for God's sake I'm going to go deaf."

"No, I just can't. Sorry," he explained.

In a very impolite way, she started yelling again that she would sue him for this sonoric disturbance. They kept on arguing and she finally stormed out to her apartment even angrier than before. Henry was more annoyed than ever, he had had a fight with his temporal neighbor, had nothing to eat and was becoming deaf.

THE "HOW DID YOU MEET?" STORY

by Alexia Pilar

The next morning, Liz, his neighbor, knocked again. This time she apologized for the scandal she had caused last night. The first thing that Henry noticed was that she was bringing a plate with some cookies in her hands. She came into the apartment and figured out that they should be on good terms considering the weather situation... and that they were neighbors.

"I'm sorry for having my music so loud. You see, this is my brother's apartment and as he went on a business trip, he asked me to stay here to look after it and when I checked in the kitchen for some food, there was nothing and I'm terribly hungry so I was trying to distract myself," he explained.

"It's alright. I'm sorry too. I shouldn't have reacted in such a way. I'm claustrophobic and watching the snow and knowing I will be in here for a couple of days made me anxious."

They made amends and agreed that he would keep his music down if Liz brought him some food during the day and enjoyed the crispy and chewy cookies.

Later on, Liz appeared at his door again with a plate full of food, the smell was the homemade meal he had sensed the day before in the hall. "Amazing" Henry thought.

Days passed and Henry and Liz were becoming closer. They had late night talks, they had dinner together

and laughed about, well, basically everything.

This went on for a couple of days. She would come to his apartment, he would go to hers. Both of them were getting more and more interested in each other. Henry and Liz were spending more and more time together but they knew once the snowstorm was over, Henry's brother would eventually come home and that meant Henry would have to leave. They would listen to loud music, cook, watch a series or just be around each other.

A week later, the snowstorm had passed away and the entrance was no longer blocked. Henry's brother was able to travel back to New York and now it was time for Henry to go. His brother was back and he had no other reason to stay, but Liz was there...

He went to her door.

"Hey"

"Hey"

"So...well, my brother just came from the airport and tomorrow I'm going back home". Liz's face changed from happiness to wretched in a heartbeat.

"Oh," was the only thing she could master to say.

Henry just couldn't leave her, he liked her too much, he wanted to keep on knowing her. "But the thing is that I don't want to leave...", Henry said.

THE "HOW DID YOU MEET?" STORY

by Alexia Pilar

"Then stay," Liz answered.

They discussed how they could spend a bit more time getting to know each other better. Finally, they figured out that he could stay a bit longer with his brother and see how things went on between them. Now that the snowstorm was over, they could have proper dates in those hidden restaurants all around the city, visit some of the museums New York. This went on for a couple of days. She would come to his apartment, he would go to hers. Both of them were getting more and more interested in each other. Henry and Liz were spending more and more time together but they knew once the snowstorm was over, Henry's brother would eventually come home and that meant Henry would have to leave. They would listen to loud music, cook, watch a series or just be around each other.

has, walk through Central Park, visit the Brooklyn bridge or just hang out in the apartment. It didn't matter what they did, as long as they were together.

After listening to the story Tom asked his father, "So New York wasn't that bad after all, right dad?" and his father answered looking at Liz, "No, not at all Tom".

The Golden Boy

by Ana Cutó

17-year-old Sarah Miller jumped for joy from her bed early in the morning when her mother woke her impatiently up to surprise her with the headlines which were all over the news. She felt dreadfully excited when she heard the announcement that her favourite band, "The Golden Hour", was going to perform a concert in her town which was unlikely to happen since "Forks" was an unpopulated small village in Washington. She has been waiting for this news since she was a little girl. Indeed, she became a huge fan right after she noticed that the boy she liked, was extremely keen on the rock genre. Since then, she knew every lyric of each song back and forth. Her obsession with the band continued for several years and her disappointment was shown in her face, which drastically changed, when she noticed that the tickets were more expensive than she could ever pay, yet she wanted to go so badly that she started thinking some ideas in order to earn some money. Sarah's mother came up with the suggestion to babysit the neighbour's 6-year-old son as they were looking for a babysitter since, in the last week, almost 5 teenagers had unfairly renounced the job.

"I know that it could be a little awkward, since you dated their nephew, but why don't you give it a chance to earn some money?", Sarah's mother insisted, "I'm sure that Mr. and Mrs Mayer are going to be pleased to see you!" she continued.

"In fact, that sounds like a really good idea mom", she replied with no arguing, s

Sarah didn't think twice, she was delighted with that idea, this would be a wonderful job to earn the cash she desperately needed for the concert.

Sarah was amazed when she reached Mr. and Mrs. Mayer's house, she had never seen such a fancy and delicate house in her life. As she entered through the front door she passed into a grand hallway. The hallway flowed into a large, wide staircase that provided the main means of egress from the entertainment area of the house to the private rooms on the second floor. Off the main hallway, to the right, was the playroom, where Randy was silently playing with his toys.

He seemed to be a quiet chill boy, his curly amber hair, and his dazzling blue eyes, made him look like the

most charming angel in the whole world. But what Sarah didn't know was that appearances can be sometimes tricky. At the beginning it was quite easy for her, the boy was utterly obedient, until Sarah grabbed a pack of delicious fluffy marshmallows for her own. The noise of the package was loud enough to alert Randy, who immediately approached Sarah to check what she was about to eat. "What are you eating?", he asked impatiently while running into her. "Not of your business boy", Sarah laughed sarcastically.

"Can I have one?", he gently asked, "Pleeeeeeeaaase", Randy insisted with his eyes wide open and his mouth full of slobber.

It was hard for her to say no to such a cute face, yet Randy's parents were highly specific that junk food was not allowed in their house, so she firmly refused. He turned away from one place to another in a steely silent rage. The 6-year-old kid started to act aggressively, with his eyes filled of tears, he began to pull his toy's head out while screaming in anger.

"AAAHHHH!", Randy shouted at the top of his lungs. "You are the worst!" he cried pointing at her. Sarah was paralyzed. He started to

mess around, break toys and he even threw his father's iPad through the window. The noise caused was so loud that Sarah could hear the whole neighbourhood wondering what was going on. Mr. and Mrs. Mayer were going to arrive soon so she felt desperate for not being able to calm the situation down.

Suddenly, she heard Mr. Mayer's car engine. Sarah tried as fast as she could to clean up all the mess caused by the little boy; it was too late.

"What the hell happened here?" asked Mr. Mayer while his mouth was falling open at seeing such chaos in his house. He seemed too astonished to continue speaking.

"Oh, darling, you are in real trouble," Mrs. Mayer tried to continue his husband's speech. They stared into each other's eyes. "No," Sarah said, barely moving a muscle in her face. "I really need the money; I promise it's not what it looks like" she continued almost on the verge of crying.

They fired Sarah immediately without any chance of explaining what had really happened.

Furiously, she grabbed her stuff and as if slamming the door wasn't enough, she also spitted out on Randy's irritated face.

On her way home, the breeze gently rubbed Sarah's face while she was aggressively mumbling as she was having an argument with herself. She was freezing cold so she put her heavy sweater on.

"Ouch", the 17-year-old gently whispered as she felt something scraping her fragile skin. Sarah looked down and breathed, "Oh".

A dazzling golden necklace was stuck in the delicate wool knitting of her sweater. She knew exactly who it belonged to, but she was so pissed off that she didn't have the intention to return it. It felt an eternity until she finally arrived home.

"Hey sweetie!", her mother approximated Sarah when she barely stepped on the entrance stairs. "You had a wonderful day! Your face speaks from itself", she cried. "It seems as if you have found gold or something!", her mother giggled shyly.

"It could be said", she grinned impishly.



THE PROPOSAL

By Ignacio Krembs

“What do you mean you don’t want to marry me?”

“Well...” I gulped, “I don’t know you, I don’t even know your name, and you really creep me out.” I looked up to the prosecutor before me.

“That’s when I was attacked.”

It all started when I decided to move to NYC, I was told to be careful. Regardless of its beauty and astonishing architecture and skyline, some neighborhoods could sometimes turn into spine-chilling environments. The number of alcoholics lurching along the streets has been continuously rising, especially where I was intending to rent. Having been told that, I thought I was ready to encounter anyone or anything.

Clearly, I wasn’t. One day, as I was riding the subway to work, a woman decided to approach me.

She was dressed in many layers of worn, torn and filthy wool clothing. A greasy, tangled mess surrounded her haggard face and intertwined with her thick layers of vestment. No sooner had I analyzed her than she sat beside me, flooding the air with a funky smell.

“I think you’re amazing,” she whispered. “Honestly,” she continued, “You’re the most handsome man I’ve ever seen.”

“Okay,” I said, thinking that would be the end of it. “I’d like to take you out somewhere. What’s your name?”

My dad had told me about these kinds of people. Trying to ignore her, I kept looking straight the whole time until 3 stops before mine, luckily, she got off.

Later that day, there was a knock at the door, and I answered "Who is it?"

"It's me! You know, the woman from the subway?" a voice answered.

How did she find out where I lived? She couldn't have followed me, she got off the subway before I did.

He knocked again. "Are you going to let me in?" I stayed silent. Maybe she'll go away, I thought.

She didn't, she stayed there, knocking and knocking until she said "I'll just come back tomorrow," And left.

This happened for a solid three weeks. She came every day at around 3 PM and stayed until 7 PM, sometimes until 8. Sometimes she would knock, most of the time she'd just stand there. I had to run all of my errands early so I

wouldn't have to go out when she was there.

One day, it just stopped. I could finally have a normal life, and get out in the afternoon, I was so relieved to be left alone. Little did I know that that was far from the end.

I was at work one day -I work as a receptionist at a law firm- and this big beautiful bouquet of flowers arrived. I asked the delivery guy who they were for and he said my name. My heart dropped. I wasn't seeing anyone at the time. "There must be some mistake," I said. The delivery guy just shrugged. I looked at the card that came with the flowers.

"From: Your secret admirer."

I threw the flowers in the dumpster in the back of the building. "Not only does she know where I live, but she also knows where I work.

How did she find out? Has she been following me around town?" The bigger question was *why* she was so fixed on me. I had already shown no interest in her; didn't she get it?

My head was fuzzy for the rest of the day. I didn't see her following me to the subway station. I didn't see her going onto a subway train. I didn't see her around my apartment or me for that matter, at all.

Now my thoughts were starting to get the best of me. Maybe she had hired a private investigator or maybe she was one. How much longer until she showed up at the firm mercilessly asking me to go out over and over again? I didn't know what to do with myself. I had to get away from her, so I went to the one place I thought she wouldn't dare go, a public library.

The library was surrounded with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and places to sit and there was even a place that sold hot coffee and tea. I took the most interesting book I could find, and some money for a cup of coffee or two and sat in one of the many, leather upholstered, reading chairs. By coming here, I hoped she wouldn't follow me as the quiet environment may make her feel uncomfortable, nevertheless, I kept my eyes open along the way, but didn't see her at all.

After buying myself a cup of piping hot Arabic coffee with a dash of cream and a pinch of sugar I began reading. I was not surprised people liked going there so much, it was very relaxing. Well, it was if you weren't desperately trying to get away from someone.

I was maybe thirty pages in when I heard it.

“Hey you!”

I began to tremble. She had followed me here. The one place I thought I would be okay; this place was 20 miles from my house for god’s sake!

That’s when she approached me. “hey, I have something to give you.” she reached in the pocket of the same greasy pants she wore when we unfortunately met on the subway. It was a little black suede box.

I felt as if I were going to die right then and there. People were paying attention to us, ladies were *ooing* and some were getting ready to clap their hands. My stalker was proposing to me.

With a terrifying smile plastered on her face, she said “Will you marry me?”

“N-no,” I had managed to say.

“And, Mr. Anderson,” The prosecutor said, “That’s when she stabbed you below the ribs?”

I simply nodded.

After a brief pause, the prosecutor said, “No further questions, your honor.”



TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF MARRIAGE IN A LETTER

by Pilar Silva

“Good morning,” Karen said in her pajamas, with a messy hair bun, rubbing her eyes, as she had just woken up and didn't have any kind of rush to go anywhere, providing that she was a 46-year-old housewife with few responsibilities.

“Hey” he replied steadily as he finished his breakfast and stood up from the kitchen table, ready to set out to work. Harry was a tall handsome 48-year-old man, working as a partner in a law firm substantially all the time, so he wasn't an entirely present or attentive husband.

She opened the fridge and steadily gazed inside, as she lifted an empty bottle “How many times do I have to tell you not to leave the empty gallon of milk in the fridge? Like please! Just throw it away!”

“Okay, bye!” Harry rushed to the door in the attempt of avoiding a new fight.

“No, it is definitely not okay! Now we don't have any, we've run out of it! What am I gon—” he slammed the door and left “—gonna drink my coffee with?” she asked to the loneliness that now encircled the house.

They had been married for twenty-three years now. They argued every day, of every week, of every month. We could say that: all the time. Mostly about insignificant things, like running out of milk or basically

when Harry made any kind of mistake. For instance, when he took not only the dirty white clothes to the laundromat, as his wife had ordered him to, but *also* a red sock amongst the colourless apparel, so all the clothes came out pink as one would expect, including one of Karen's favorite shirts. Or the time when he had almost burned the house down while trying to cook dinner one night, in order to avoid Karen stressing out that night, but clearly hadn't come out as planned.

As a matter of fact, Karen had never been quite an obsequious or bootlicking wife. So she would always complain about foolishly leaving the gallon of milk, without any milk, *inside* the fridge, and not discarding it. Lately, Karen had been feeling her husband was being more self-centred, distant and uncaring than normal. In some way, she was feeling that their marriage was directionless, like a boat that went adrift. And couldn't come up with an accurate way to bring the spark back.

Although she usually tended to overreact when they were going through tough times, she wanted to know how he would react if she left without telling him where she had gone. Suddenly disappearing from his life. She wondered what he would do. If he would go out and about

TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF MARRIAGE IN A LETTER

by Pilar Silva

looking for her. If he would call her parents to check if they had seen her. Or she wasn't actually sure what she was expecting, but Karen knew there had to be at least *some* kind of sorrowful reaction.

She decided to write him a letter saying she was tired of him and didn't want to live with him anymore. She knew it was a stupid idea, and perhaps quite childish for her age, but she needed to know how her husband really felt about her. If he still loved her... Anyway, this was some kind of prank rather than a real test, right?

After writing the letter, she put it on the night table and then climbed under the large bed and hid there like a creepy monster that haunts children's nightmares, until her husband got home. She hoped to hear his outraged response, or too watch him cry, or at least to see him a little bit upset.

Eventually, when the husband got home he saw the letter on the table and read it. After a few moments of silence, he picked up the pen and wrote something in it. Then he started to get changed while he happily whistled and danced his favourite tunes. "Just one look and I can hear a bell ring," he sang. He put on his best suit and proceeded to soak himself in his most expensive perfume. He seemed overjoyed and

euphoric rather than crushed and heartbroken.

The woman was shocked and utterly sad. But things only got worse.

The husband grabbed his phone and dialed a number. From under the bed his wife listened as he was chatting with someone not acquainted to her.

"My wife left me, she literally wrote me a letter saying she didn't want to be with me anymore, so I guess this is our chance to finally be together, don't you think so?" he told this girl he phoned, apparently named Becky. "Becky who?" Karen thought, trying to make up her mind whether she knew any Becky in her or her husband's life. She thought of the waitress that worked in the coffee shop two blocks away from their house, but it couldn't be. Her husband had never liked women younger than him. Until it dawned on her. It must be Harry's homewrecker, 50-year-old, personal assistance.

"Are you free tonight?" he confidently asked and waited for a probably affirmative reply, "Would you like to have dinner with me?" He then proceeded to invite her to a fancy restaurant, said goodbye and hung up. His forlorn wife stood scowling under the bed "Ugh, such an idiot!" she murmured.

Then he walked out of the room.

TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF MARRIAGE IN A LETTER

by Pilar Silva

Slam! The thudded door yelled and out of the room he went. Her husband was gone. Devastated and sank in melancholy, she climbed out from under the bed, as fast as a cheetah would, and stumbled over to read what her cheating, unfaithful, traitorous husband had written on her letter.

Through sorrowful, teary, sunken eyes, she read “I could see your feet under the bed you silly, I’m going out to buy some milk, text me if you need something from the market. XOXO -Harry”

