

## The Wolf

As the moonlight crept through the crack in the drapes, luscious black fur began to grow along my forearms. The fur continues to spread up my chest and down my legs until I am completely covered. My nostrils widen and my nose becomes a pale pink. My teeth sharpen and my ears become pointed. My hands and feet transform into paws and a wagging tail emerges from my lower back. My eyes have enlarged and my pupils are dilated as they open. I turn my head toward the covered window and push the drapes aside with my nose. I sit up in bed, back straight, eyes gazing dreamily at the moon. I casually stroll out of my bedroom and find my parents asleep on the couch, muffled voices from the television is the only noise echoing throughout the house. As quickly as I can I reach up to turn the front door knob with my paws. I walk slowly up the driveway, relishing in the feeling of the cool night breeze blowing over my thick fur coat. I charged through the woods, skillfully jumping over fallen tree branches and the jagged edged rocks peaking up from the ground. I decide to sit down in a small clearing to enjoy the crispness of the air. I hear a rustling in the brush, my ears perking upwards at the soft sound. I see nothing, until he steps out. A gun held firmly in his grasp, pointing at me. I growl and make a point to show him my teeth. I dodge the first bullet, sprinting across the field in a flash of black. He can't set up fast enough. I smell the panicky fear radiating off of him. My heart beats faster as I pounce, effectively knocking him over. My front paws rest against his chest, rising up and down with his breath. I study him for a moment, not wanting to make any rash decisions. His face seems familiar to the human part of me. A strange cloud is blown in front of the moon and I feel an uncomfortable tingling in my lower back. I glance behind me and see my tail begin to shrink. Not wasting another second I jump over the familiar man and run into the woods, hopefully the front door is still unlocked.

## Say Something

My room was all that was left. All the world had vanished, but I remain alone in my 9-by-11 foot cubicle, breathing in year old dust. Under the bed, looking up through the rusted springs to the cracks in the ceiling, I listen. I listen for the bone-chilling sound of a strong wind, blowing through the leaves of the tree outside my window, but there is none. I listen for the unmistakable creak in the floorboards of the hallway. The board came loose a year or two ago, but replacing it would have meant getting rid of the comfort of knowing that the house wasn't empty. There is no more hallway, so there is no loose floorboard, and so it remains silent. There are no cars speeding past. No dogs barking, or sirens blaring. There's no need for food or water, not anymore. Solitude only brings madness, not happiness.

I wrap my arms around my stuffed sheep. I squeeze tighter and tighter until my muscles are too sore to move, and I still feel nothing. I never stopped to think what life would be like without human touch. No more warm embraces or friendly smiles. No more spine-tingling kisses or soft caresses. My eyes are open, and incredibly dry from the lack of moisture in the air. I reach up to touch the mattress springs, and some of the rust brushes off and falls into my open eyes. I don't feel it.

Sliding out from under the bed, I decide to leave the stuffed sheep behind. I take the two steps over broken glass to the window. When I see her standing in the middle of the lawn, I can't say that I'm surprised. She reaches out her hand to me, and I feel a sudden rush of warmth. Her smile is just as I remember it. The crinkles by her eyes haven't changed, and she still has those yellow rollers in her hair. I can even see a couple of scratch tickets sticking out of the pocket in her nightgown. She's wearing the black one today; the black one with the pink and red flowers on it. I'd know it anywhere; she must have worn it a hundred times. The corner of my mouth curls up into a half-smile. It's the most real emotion I've shown in a year. I reach out my hand to hers, hear the creak of the floorboard, and she's gone. If only I had said something. Now, I can't say anything.

## The War of Evil and Light

There was once a field where children would go to catch fire flies. They would set out at night after their parents were in bed, carrying bags full of mason jars. Each night they would hide low in the grass and wait until the fire flies came out. Each night as the mason jars filled, the fire flies cried, “leave us be and let us fly, we need to light the night sky”. The children simply ignored their cries and closed the lids to muffle the sounds of their desperate pleas.

One night, as the children made their way to the field, mason jars in hand, the fire flies devised a plan. They waited in the grass for the children to come, and when they heard the crunching of leaves and the fits of maniacal laughter, they turned their lights on. The children's movement stopped and their breath quickened as they looked out at the message left for them. LEAVE. The oldest child took a step forward and the fire flies buzzed about, rearranging themselves. The child stepped back upon seeing the new word. MURDERER. Then, all at once, the fire flies darted straight toward the children, buzzing and screaming until every last child ran home crying, leaving their mason jars behind.

## Fractured Fairytale

The brother! After everything they had been through together, the prince chooses Snow. Jealously burned in the pit of Rose Red's stomach as she sat down at the dining table. She slammed her closed fists against the mahogany as a maid rushed in with a silver platter full of food for her to feast on. The maid lifted the lid and steam filled the air. The maid glanced down at Rose's meal and covered her mouth with her hand, gagging. She was having human heart for dinner. "What one has, she must share with the other" their mother always told them. Well, Snow White got to have Mr. Bear all to herself. So it was only fair that Red got something of Snow's in return.

## Spring Cleaning

The fan flew out the window. Followed by the pillows and the carpets. I could hear the bed creaking against the floor, and not a second later I heard it break through the wall of my bedroom, leaving a gaping hole where the picture of my grandmother used to hang. I soon found myself in an empty house. Nothing but a few wires and a moldy pieces of bread remained. I watched my favorite pair of purple underwear prance down the street, struggling to keep up with the other apparel that no longer resided in my wardrobe, as my curious neighbors went about their business of gardening and washing their expensive cars, acting as if it were a completely normal Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Cumberpatch was the first to leave her yard, chasing after the blender his mother gave us for Christmas. My shoes were long gone, so I ran into the street barefoot, letting the scalding tar burn the soles of my feet. The purple underwear was trying to pick up its pace. I knew I would never catch up to the rest of our belongings, but if I lengthened my strides, I might just have something to wear under my pants tomorrow. Reaching out my arm, my fingers stretched out for what seemed like miles. I felt the soft lace slide under my fingertips and clamped my hand shut. I tucked them into the front pocket of my jeans as I watched the rest of our belongings disappear down the street, becoming nothing but little black specks against the fading sunlight.

## Smoke

I feel my lungs fill with smoke and a second later I'm coughing like I'm dying. He'd promised that he'd quit. Well, it wasn't the first lie and I know it won't be the last. I watch him from the doorway, his chapped lips wrapped around the cigarette. He feels me staring, I know he does because suddenly he can't sit still. His hands grip at the arm chairs, he squirms around in his seat. Puts his feet on the footrest for a moment before removing them again. Turns up the volume on the television. He tries to watch but gets bored and changes the channel again and again and again until he realizes nothing good is ever on Thursday night. He slumps back in his chair and sighs heavily. He takes one more drag before putting it out. I don't say anything and neither does he, but I know we've reached an understanding.

## Dinner Date

Dinner is always a quiet affair. He comes up with the most bizarre locations. Cemeteries and school playgrounds. One time he decided it would be a swell idea to sit down in the middle of the freeway during rush-hour. A couple of candlesticks sat in the center of a table, letting their wax drip down onto the overcooked pork, doesn't do much to ruin the meal. Nothing but the sound of our teeth grinding up pieces of food can be heard. You reach across the table to hold my hand, but I always pull back, and every time I do, you pull yours back too, eating on as if nothing had happened. Some nights you'll mutter vague comments about the weather, or work, or how your mom is adding a new vegetable to her garden. I say nothing. I ignore the dripping wax and your smothering stares, and I wonder why you put up with me at all.

## Cold Feet

I woke up that morning to a jumble of voices. There was a tray of fruits and pastries on my nightstand along with a pitcher of orange juice. I stared at it for a moment, then looked to my calendar. Under today's date it read: *WEDDING DAY*, in big, red, scribbly handwriting. Pulling the blankets back over my head I groaned. An assault of bridesmaids burst through my bedroom door, jumping on me and screaming like delighted children until I finally surrendered to their happiness. They pulled the covers off me and gasped. I followed their eyes to my feet, imprisoned in a block of ice that had to be at least 10 inches thick. I'd heard of cold feet before, but this was a little extreme. I guess postponing the big day wouldn't hurt anyone.



## Old Thorns

She looked outside the window of the white stretch limousine. The archway to the church was covered in thorns. The lions guarding the entryway stared straight at her, despite the fact they couldn't see her through the window glass. She could hear the bells chiming. That was her cue. Glancing down at her black wedding gown, she smoothed out the wrinkles of the lace with her palms, took a shaky breath, and reached for the door handle. "I wouldn't do that if I were you." She jumped from surprise, pulling her hand back into her lap. She turned around to face the all too familiar voice that belonged to her ex-boyfriend. "You don't love him." he stated. As soon as she dared to lift her eyes and meet his gaze he was gone. She reached for the door handle once more, and holding her breath, pulled it open.

She shuffled past the growling lions, and stalled in front of the forest of thorns. They were long, sharp as a pin, and lusciously green. She clawed her way through the forest with her freshly manicured fingernails, coming out with only a few minor scratches. The little droplets of blood on her arms rubbed against her dress. She stood at the end of the aisle, with every eye in the building glued to her nervously shaking form. She stepped in time to the wedding march. Her intended destination moving further and further away with each step. Sweat started to glisten on her brow. She scratched at the freshly made cuts on her arms, desperate for a distraction. She heard the soft purr of the limousine's engine, promising a quick and easy escape. She paused, the face of her groom vanished and was replaced by her ex-boyfriend's sneer. Her heart beat slowed as she stood perfectly still in the center of the church. A knot forms in her stomach and her eyes widened. "Don't make this mistake." her ex-boyfriend warned her as her fiance's face reappeared on his body. She looked back to the entrance where roses had started to bloom on the thorns' vines and the lions were splayed out on their pedestals, snoring. The limousine's door opened and she ran, never looking back.

## Staring Contest

Chad sat cross-legged across from me in our two bedroom apartment. The shades were partially open, letting the first few rays of sunshine come inside and brighten up the dark room. His breath came in a soft whisper. The rise and fall of his chest was barely noticeable. His hands rested on his knees, fingers gently caressing his exposed flesh. His stare was intense, with eyes like a fire, burning their way through my skin. We started our little staring match nearly two hours ago, well two minutes, but at this rate I didn't see much of a difference. The rules were simple: No blinking. No smiling or laughing. No talking. No taking our gazes off each other. Whoever lasted the longest, won. Though I'm not sure what we were competing for.

It was early. The birds were just beginning to sing. Their cheerful chirps did little to distract me. I was determined to come out victorious. The neighbors had other plans however. They were always a rowdy couple. As open as a book, leaving nothing to the imagination. They would bang on walls, blast their stereo loud, have sex in the hallway. I don't think they ever slept. At the peak of Chad and I's competition, they decided to reenact a scene from *Stomp*. The sound of wooden spoons beating on the tin trash cans was enough to make me jump, release a pathetic, puny scream, and blink my dried-out eyes three times. "I knew you wouldn't be able to defeat me!" Chad boasted, as he beat his fists against his chest, resembling a modern day Tarzan. "Yeah? Well next time I'll really give you a run for your money." It was a promise. Too bad I always break my promises.

## Lovemaking

All that matters is skin against skin. Lips moving against lips. Hearts beating in time to one another. All that matters are his fingers brushing against the tops of my thighs. The tingling sensation in my lower belly. Our foreheads gently resting against each other. All that matters is this fantasy finishing, before the shrill of my alarm clock sounds.

## The Circus

I didn't normally care for the circus, but his brother was the ringmaster, so I went under family obligation. Except that it wasn't my family. We were seated in the front row. All throughout the show I was bombarded by frightening looking clowns, with blue and orange painted faces, red and green hair and big purple noses that squirted water when they were squeezed. The tent we were under was tied down with animal balloons, and every time a gust of wind came through, I thought it would tumble down on top of us. His brother stood in the middle of the ring, wearing a bejeweled tailcoat and top hat. He had a gold cane in his left hand, and when he walked he even pretended to have a limp, except he wasn't limping on the right leg. What bad acting.

When they brought the lion out, and had him walk around the tent, I thought for sure that I would be the person to get attacked. I backed up in my seat, gripping the sticky underside of the chair in panic as the big cat stopped in front of us. He pulled me forward with excitement, "Don't be afraid, it's perfectly tamed" he said. The lion licked its chops, showing off a row of perfectly sharpened teeth. The smell of its breath made my stomach lurch and my heart beat faster. I could see its claws grinding into the dirt floor of the arena. Its green eyes staring into mine as if we could communicate with each other telepathically. He was pushing me closer and closer to the edge, and the lion made a soft growling noise at the motion. It pounced up, placing its paws on the small wall that acted as a barrier between us. He let go of me instantly, screaming in fear along with the rest of the audience. The lion opened its mouth and let out a mighty roar. It was like nothing I'd ever heard before. It made my whole body clench and my mind stop working. When it jumped back down, and continued its walk around the tent. There was a soft ringing sound in my head and I rubbed my ears, trying to soothe my now slightly ruptured eardrums. He sat up in his seat, wiping the terrified look off his face and leaning into me. "See, I told you we had nothing to worry about" he whispered calmly. I rolled my eyes and returned my focus to the ring; catching eyes with the lion once more.

## Purple Tornado

I watched from the window as the sun rose over the forest of red ferns. I had a blanket wrapped around my shoulders, white and wool and warm. A strawberry flavored cough drop was tucked protectively against my right cheek. "Get back in bed" I heard him shout from the doorway. I groaned, sliding across the cold floor in my mismatched socks and falling hard into the mattress. The siren started blaring. It was nothing more than a muffled scream to me, but he responded within seconds. I could hear the trees snapping as the sounds of a freight train grew closer. He swung me over his shoulder, the motion nearly causing me to choke on my cough drop, and I started coughing into his shirt. He got us to the basement just before it hit. The wind so strong, that it tore up the floor boards, leaving us exposed. He turned his back to me, looking for something to cover us with, and I noticed the purple splotches on his white shirt. "That's odd" I said mostly to myself, as a large piece of wood came crashing down not two feet from where I was sitting. He threw himself over me protectively, eyes closed as he muttered words of prayer. "What do you think that purple on your back means?" I asked curiously. "Look out!" he shouted rolling us over, avoiding the hard impact of the dining room table, ignoring my issue entirely.

## Chocolate Ice Cream

Upon leaving my grandmother's house I noticed a strange man, leaning against a purple polka-dotted car, wearing a yellow top hat with a big blue bow placed on top. He had sparkling silver slacks on with glittering gold suspenders. His shoes were sharply pointed at the toe. Sharp enough to cut skin, I thought. My stomach growled at me as the man smiled and crooked his finger, summoning me to him. "Do you want to see something magical?" he asked. I nodded my head eagerly, intrigued by the man's odd appearance. He removed his hat to reveal a box, beautifully wrapped in pink with an orange ribbon tied neatly around it. He held out the box to me and I took it. It was lighter than a feather and I wondered if there was anything in it at all. I pulled the ribbon and it fell to the ground. I opened the lid to find another box, this one wrapped in blue with a green ribbon. Inside the blue box was a red box, and inside the red box was another pink box. Before I could open it, the man snatched it from me. He took three steps back, pulled the ribbon off tortuously slow, and then he placed the box upside down on the ground. Grabbing the sides of the box with his thumb and forefinger, he lifted it up, high above his head. Shaking the box, four wheels tumbled out, followed by the frame of a car, equipped with windows, a steering wheel, gas and break pedals and an engine. The last thing to fall from the tiny pink box was an enlarged plastic ice cream cone that sat upon the roof. The man had climbed inside as I stood there thunderstruck. He opened up the window and asked me what I wanted. "I don't have any money" I told him. He winked and reached back to grab a small chocolate ice cream cone. Smiling devilishly as I took a tentative lick he said in a low whisper, "This one's on me."

## The Sand

Jack kept his gaze focused on his feet as they walked, thinking back on the disastrous dinner him and Claire just shared with his parents. He watched as the sand weaved in and out through his toes, as his father's words echoed in his ears. "She's not good enough for this family." he had said. Jack was becoming mesmerized by the various textures he felt against his skin. The grains were rough at first, scraping against the soles of his feet, but as he kept walking they began to smooth his calloused skin. The sensation was beginning to erase his memories of their evening. "Take your socks off." he said. It was more of a request than a demand, but Claire only looked at him like he had five heads. "You heard me. Take them off, you can't feel the sand if you keep them on." Claire rolled her eyes at him but gave in to his request and removed them from her feet. She stuffed her socks in her pockets and crossed her arms over her chest. "Now what?" she asked. Jack gave her a saddened smile, "I thought the feeling of squishing your toes in the sand might cheer you up." Claire looked down guiltily, staring down at their feet that were engulfed in sand. Finally noticing how calming it was, to have the cool grains caress her usually confined skin.

Claire smiled for the first time that night. Jack laced his fingers through hers, pulling her close, letting his free hand lift her gaze to meet his. "I'm sorry my parents are idiots." he said. To his relief, Claire laughed. "Yeah, me too." she said before tackling him to the ground. They stayed that way for awhile, tangled together on the beach. Every now and then, they would each take a handful of sand and pour it over the other, letting the grains softly scrape against their skin.

## Cousin Gertrude

After breakfast, cousin Gertrude decided she would hike up the nearby mountain so she could touch the clouds. But there was a rockslide, so the path she wanted to take had been closed. She turned the car around and nearly got herself run over by a truck, I told her not to buy that damned smart car. Anyway, after she got back home she noticed that someone had broken in and stolen her favorite tea cup. Gertrude was so upset that she went upstairs to her safe, took all the money she had and burned it in the fireplace. Then, as she was watching the flames engulf her life savings, she noticed that her favorite tea cup was sitting on the mantle. She was so thrilled at the discovery that she cried for hours and hours.

I listened to my grandmother as she finished her story, and I asked her “Do we even have a cousin Gertrude?”

She laughed and leaned over the coffee table to touch my knee, “No dear, but that's not the point”.

“What is the point?” I asked her.

Leaning back in her chair she smiled, “Money burns, but tea cups are forever”.



## Respect Your Elders

A tall woman, who stood at about 10'3", plucked a dandelion from the grass. Across the meadow, a little boy and his father were trying to gain control of a kite. The little boy pulled and tugged, but the wind was too strong and the kite's reel peeled out of the little boy's grasp. The woman, who had been watching the scene, reached up her hand without a thought to catch the kite's string as it floated past her. She tied the stem of the dandelion around the kite's tail and with a small, gentle smile, handed it back to the boy. The boy scowled at the flower and tore it off quite viciously, throwing it down at the tall woman's feet. The woman, angered by the boy's rudeness, clenched her teeth and balled her hands into fists. Her shoulders raised up to her ears and her chin pointed downward. Her eyes glowed a magnificent red, matching the kite's cloth and the flames that now engulfed it.

## Sailboats and Coconuts

A Hawaiian shirt. Detailed with sailboats and white clouds and palm trees. He insisted on wearing it to the party, claiming to have an absurd attachment to the colorful rag. I think it was just to spite me. It was a cocktail party. Expensive food that looked like it belonged in a trash can and apple martinis were the only source of sustenance we could find. Our friends were dressed in elegant ballgowns with pink and gold hair and foot long eyelashes to match. We looked ridiculous. Him in his ugly shirt and me in my hula skirt and coconut bra, because I couldn't very well let him be the only goofball at the party. I popped one of the many balls of food into my mouth and nearly vomited all over the hostess. Grabbing a drink from the bar, I didn't bother with sips, preferring to down it in one go. It tasted like watered down apple juice. I found him dancing on a table in the backroom, completely alone. He pulled me up with him and forgetting the party, we danced.

## Black Cadillac

I sit in the backseat of my father's gold trimmed Cadillac, watching the pine trees fly by in a blur. The hunter green needles almost blending in entirely with the dark and stormy sky. I feel the car slow and come to a stop. Leaning against the window, something peculiar caught my eye. There was a small alleyway in-between the two apartment buildings we had stopped in front of. There were a couple of old tin trash cans, and reaching into them was a small girl. She had a white lace dress that was torn at the ends, her blonde curls were splayed down her back, her left shoe was no where to be seen, and when she looked up at me, I swear I had never seen eyes bluer than hers. They were mystifying, like someone had colored them in with a crayola crayon. She kept her gaze locked on me, her eyes never wavering even when the thunder boomed and the lightening struck. She took a step forward and her balance faltered slightly, but enough for her to have to grip the rim of the trash can in order to stay standing.

The traffic light was still red and I could see the irritation in my father's eyes in the reflection of the rear view mirror. His thumbs tapped anxiously against the steering wheel. The girl had gotten closer, and while I felt no threat from her before, the closer she got the more tense the knot in my stomach became. I could hear my father swearing as he honked the car horn at the empty streets. As the light turned green, my father pressed down on the gas pedal, surging us into motion as the little girl gave chase, waving her hands in a frantic manner. The last thing I saw was the little girl tripping over a crack in the sidewalk before the truck hit us, and everything went black.

## Reality

I had managed to scrounge up some bread crumbs from the mice that lived under the loose floorboard in the kitchen. I cradled them in my palm carefully, blocking the cool gust of wind coming in through the broken window so they wouldn't blow away. When I presented them to my father he smacked my hand, allowing the crumbs to tumble onto the floor, summoning the mice to come out from under the loose board and retrieve them. "That's the best you can do?" he spat at me, taking another swig of Johnny Walker. We'd be able to eat more if he stopped drinking, but I'd never tell him that. Mom couldn't either, and that's why she left, leaving me here to fend for myself. "Better you than me" she'd said. Sometimes I wonder if that's true. Sometimes.