

Angel's Dreams

*Girls will be boys and boys will be girls
It's a mixed up, jumbled up shook up world.*

-The Kinks

Part 1:

Zoisite Carter is obsessed with checking her reflection in mirrors. She's done this since the carefree, cloudless days of childhood. One warm morning life revealed itself to be a practical joker, who gently rearranges, prods, and pulls at what we know as truth. One fateful day Life taught, Zoey how most everything deserves a closer look.

The blistering heat of the Arizona desert opens itself up around Zoey as she begins her Saturday morning ritual as she's always done. Inside the sanctuary of Grandmother Rose's open kitchen, she starts her day with a hearty breakfast. Grandmother Rose has made zucchini- pumpkin bread, browned to a perfect decadence. Zoey has fresh squeezed pulpy, pink grapefruit juice in front of her on the handcrafted kitchen table. After breakfast, they begin to work on their respective projects. Rose is sanding rough patches of wood, which will soon become a birdfeeder for the swift hummingbirds that gather in the garden. Zoey is sketching her Grandmother. She is attempting to capture the flecks of salt and pepper that splash Grandma Rose's long hair, and her swift sanding motion. Zoey shades Grandma Rose's hair with the side of her pencil, gazing up at her grandmother from time to time. Rose's forehead is creased with lines which grow more pronounced when she's focusing on a task. Rose goes outside to feed the birds.

Suddenly, when Zoey draws a straight line, it will not comply. Her straight line bounces into a curves. She tries again. This time she attempts to draw a circle.

Instantly, it snaps to straightness. Her lines refuse to follow the systematic order of all the other lines Zoey had ever drawn in her young life. Repeatedly, when she tries

to draw a straight line, it curves or bends against her will. She tries to draw a lightning bolt. It zigs, and then zags into a line as straight as an arrow. *What the...* she murmurs out loud. "Something is not right." Growing irritated, she gives up on drawing. She throws her pencil onto the table, like folding a crummy hand in poker. She craves something reliable after the suspicious drawing incident, so she decides to take a bath in the antique claw foot tub, which has always proven to be just as dependable and trustworthy as her grandmother. Its familiar cats and birds etched into the outside comfort Zoey. It has never failed to leave her feeling cozy and clean. She admires the royal blue stained glass ceiling, with images of garden gnomes and rabbits. She runs the steaming water and soaks in the tub peacefully. After the bath, Zoey feels much better. She peeks into the mirror, and is astonished to find that it is vacant. *Huh, thinks Zoey. I've never seen a mirror without a reflection in it before.* She checks behind her in the bathtub, in case it washed off into the soapy suds, but it is not in the bath water. She checks under the bathmat. She looks all around the bathroom, but she is unable to locate her visual echo.

"Grandma!" She calls out frantically. "Grandma! My reflection is gone!"

Grandmother Rose always has a calm, patient answer for everything. "Did you check in the kitchen, Zoisite, dear? Once I found my reflection there trying to sneak into the cookie tin." She advises earnestly.

Grandmother Rose is the only one who calls Zoey Zoisite, which is her birth given name. Even her mother sticks to Zoey.

Zoey thoroughly searches the house, not finding her reflection anywhere. She checks the Sunday cartoon-printed cookie tin in the kitchen, under the paisley,

mismatched pillows on the comfy purple couch, behind dusty, worn books in the wooden shelves, but it is not to be found. About to give up, she goes out into the backyard adorned with small Buddha statues and shrines around every corner. There, among the daisies, she spots her mirror image happily plucking their petals.

“You need to get back inside the mirror where you live!” she reprimands her reflection firmly. “I can’t draw when you’re not home.”

Zoey’s reflection silently stares at her. She looks up at Zoey, batting her eyelashes, and offers Zoey a daisy. Zoey sighs, shaking her head but is relieved to have found her counterpart. Zoey takes her reflection by her hand, and they walk together to the hall mirror, where the reflection waves and climbs back inside.

Ever since the day her reflection waltzed off, Zoey has scrutinized mirrors with the frequency and urgency of someone checking the commuter train schedule on their way to work. She always feels a rush of relief that her reflection turns out to be doing exactly what it was up to last—looking back at her. It exposes her scrawniness, her large hazel eyes that always appear to be caught in headlights, the gap separating her front teeth, and light straight brown hair, cut short below her ears. She studies her image in the mirror, declaring it neither beautiful nor ugly, settling on something in between.

High School

Now that Zoey is fifteen, and a sophomore in high school, the girls in her classes are also urgently checking mirrors. But whereas they are updating their lip-

gloss and adjusting their hair, Zoey is ensuring her reflection is in its proper place. She knows this investigation would be considered odd, so she does not confide in her classmates.

Boredom clings to Zoey like static throughout her days at school, a series of monotonous bells and interchanging classrooms. What she thought would be an exciting second edition after middle school has turned out to be pretty dull and anticlimactic. Much like her image, high school is neither beautiful nor ugly. Zoey, because she had hoped for fireworks and magic. But instead of sparks and wonder, she mostly feels loneliness. As if an electric force field were ostracizing her, she feels a shock of separation every time she tries to speak to someone. Zoey cannot make friends. She has a theory though.

Zoey's had an unusual gift since childhood. She can see each entity of life with special vision that allows her to see into its truest nature of color and hue. She carries it within her, internally hardwired. She can focus and fine-tune her vision during art. While drawing, everything around her melts away, and she sees this luminescence with an intense focus and clarity.

Plants, people, houses, everything, contains its own special spark of light, that reveals itself to Zoey while she is drawing. The shades she sees are varied; they are sparkling, electric octaves that illuminate and outline everything, weaving each article, object, person, place and thing together to form a unified, visible quilt of patchwork. It's a super sense- her vision is HD, 3-D and amplified.

Since she entered high school, she's been feeling that this gift is a curse. She can see within everyone, even the seemingly evil, to find that they are actually the most fragile and gentle of all. She can see the strife and turmoil within her classmates. She wants to hate them, but even her greatest enemies have scars they conceal. She feels much older than 15 most of the time. It's a heavy burden to see into such people, those who aren't ready to reveal themselves to the world. Their inner struggles cause Zoey pain.

When she was a child, she would chase the brilliance in bugs she found with her friends through the desert woods behind their houses. She'd call out, "Ok, now we're going to catch the lime green ones! Next, the pineapple yellow!" Since they could not see what she saw, they became suspicious of Zoey, and called her a liar. As time passed, her vision faded, but only slightly. Since she kept it so well hidden from others, it could not be sharpened to its highest potential.

Zoey has never shared this ability she quickly learned was not universal with anyone, for fear of others thinking her manic, but she knew her grandmother knew. Her grandmother had the same secret, Zoey was sure. She felt she'd inherited it from Grandmother Rose, and that was why she felt so at ease around her. But Grandmother Rose does not attend Mesa Rock High School.

Rose

Zoey's grandmother, Rose, is an artist. She sews, crochets, and beads, but her all time favorite outlet is painting. She paints portraits as realistic as a trip to the post office, and images as abstract as looking into a kaleidoscope off the back of a speedboat in the middle of a meteor shower. Grandmother Rose is a pioneer. She does not wear a wristwatch. *Time is of no essence*, she often says. She owns no television set. "The only news I need is that of the setting sun and the phases of moon," she'd cackle gleefully if anyone tried chatting with her about current events. Grandma Rose lives in a snow globe of harmony, a safe escape from the rest of the world's relentless struggle.

Zoey feels the most alive when she is painting side by side next to her grandmother. With the swift movements of brush and paint Zoey feels that she contains the capacity for flight. After painting, Zoey gathers herbs from the garden, and helps cook dinners of fresh vegetables simmered in spices of basil, parsley, rosemary, and sage. The most vibrancy Zoey sees is in nature, especially in Grandmother Rose's garden, pure, untainted by chemicals, pollutions and ego. Zoey harvests the herbs that glow brightest and scintillate with freshness. Grandmother Rose never opens a cookbook, yet creates the best meals Zoey has ever eaten. She cooks spicy Thai basil soups, that leave Zoey's mouth watering, zesty Italian pesto overtop spaghetti squash that Rose grows herself. When indulging in these savory

morsels that burst and pop on her tongue, Zoey feels she could cry from happiness and fullness of stomach and heart.

Though her connection with her grandmother is strong, it seems to have skipped a generation. Whenever Zoey's mother, Paige, tries to engage in conversation, it fades in a fizzle. Conversing with her mother feels forced. Paige does not paint, or partake in any kind of art, regarding it silly and frivolous. On a deep, dark level of her psyche, one that she does not frequent very often, Zoey fears her mother may regard *her* silly and frivolous, and keeps her ideas and dreams to herself. Her father is... someone, somewhere, somehow, that Zoey does not know and has never met. She imagines him similar to George Harrison of the Beatles, and looks for him in record stores and in the faces of street musicians she passes on dirty sidewalks.

She draws her way through school. She doodles when Joey Raymond turns around to let her know she is a weirdo dweeb after she blushes and falls into a stammering silence when the teacher calls on her for a date of a battle in social studies. She feels her power of speech running on reserve and saves energy for art. Eventually she stops trying to communicate with her classmates, replacing the gaps in her social life with pages of sketchbooks and comics. Her peers cannot comprehend the insights that fill her notebooks, so she seeks solace in her own world of vibrant colors and caricatures. She draws animated versions of everything around her in detailed sketches and inky bold strokes, especially her classmates. Within them, she sees murky, crawly dullness and darkness around their mouths or stomachs, like centipedes. She finds joy in exaggerating Nina Glaze's already

exaggerated breasts, and draws lightning bolts exploding Joey Raymond's oversized head to cranial, electric bits of static.

Zoey's outfits are art as well. She wears teal tights adorned with polka dots, pink cheetah print leotards, and wraps her hair in brightly patterned silk scarves. She sports ballerina skirts with backwards baseball caps or oversized, baggy boy jeans.

Zoey paints designs on her t-shirts, pants, and high top sneakers, seeing all empty spaces as canvases for her to fill. She doodles in the margins of worksheets in math class, doodles around essays in English. Her teachers warn her she is going overboard, but she doesn't care. She sketches away classmates' stares and dodges whispers with designs. Art has become self-defense, a cloak of armor against the painfulness at being her own lab partner in biology class and only companion at the lunch table.

Home is not a comfort. Zoey's mother has strings of lovers, tangled as a cat's ball of yarn. Through her mom's shouting matches, Zoey draws cartoons of giants wreaking havoc on delicate gardens of fruits and vegetables, waking up baby broccoli and heads of cabbage, stomping through fields of sunflowers.

Ruby in Zoisite

One clear, crisp September, halfway through the first month of school, a girl with coffee and cream skin and a porcelain face appears in English class. She sits in the vacant seat next to Zoey. *The New Girl*, her classmates whisper blatantly. They gossip about her famous parents, tell tall tales of places she's been, and outright gawk. Her name is Ruby, and she is nothing short of beautiful. Ruby has green almond eyes, freckles, and black hair like a mermaid's, wavy and full.

"Tell the class about yourself, Ruby," She is introduced by the English teacher, Mrs. Wright. Ruby mumbles how she recently moved from Japan. "My mom is Japanese. My dad has white skin," she says, as if providing an explanation for her juxtaposed appearance. "We lived in a temple. It was cool." She blushes, and sits down, not knowing what else to say. Her cheeks flushed, she glares intently at the desk in front of her.

"Thank you Ruby," Mrs. Wright continues. "Now open your books to page 53. We'll continue where we left of in *The Scarlet Letter*." Since Ruby doesn't have a book yet, would you share with her, Zoey?"

Zoey agrees and moves her desk next to Ruby's. Through the simplicity of sharing a thin page of novel, they become friends. Unlike the popular girls in her class, Ruby is beautiful on the inside as well as out. Shy like flower buds, together,

both girls blossom. An unstoppable force, they become fast friends, bonding over anime comics and obscure movies. During lunch they find shady groves among the desert trees to sit and spy. Ruby, lively and sparkling as always, points out a specific Juniper tree with wonder. The girls go towards it. "This tree is in pain," Ruby says with certainty. "We need to heal it," The tree's branches have been cut off, and names carved into the trunk. Its bottom is swollen, creating an enlarged stump. The girls silently hold hands, and then place their palms on the tree's bark. Zoey looks over at Ruby, to find that she has tears streaming down her cheeks.

"There's nothing I can do for it!" She cries. They pat the tree's bark, vowing to do as much as they possibly can for the future of trees everywhere. This is when Zoey begins to suspect Ruby has some sort of gift as well.

"What could you do for the tree?" Zoey inquires with curiosity.

"Uh, nothing." Ruby clears her throat, as if clearing out the words she is not saying. Zoey knows there's more to Ruby than meets the eye. Though she does not know exactly why, she knows that Ruby is special.

Zoey and Ruby grow closer as they pick wildflowers and draw comics during lunch. One day they find group of turtles in the stream, and happily sketch them in their notebooks.

Ruby invites Zoey to come to her house one October after school. The girls joyfully ride the bus to Ruby's home, pointing out trees they know and singing lines of songs for the all girl rock band they plan to form. When they arrive at a bus stop a ways from the school, at the border of desert and forest where Ruby lives, Zoey is awestruck. They gallivant off the bus into a friendly, pine-tree lined street, to

approach a house with a gravelly driveway and welcoming front porch. Ruby barrels ahead, pushing open the front door.

“Mom! We’re home!” she calls out, into the high ceilinged rafters, as the smell of warm vanilla greets them. *I bet this is what, temples in Japan feel like*, Zoey thinks, *Or heaven*, as she gazes around, mystified. The house radiates tradition and enchantment, filled with wood and structure. Framed Japanese calligraphy paintings line the walls, and dried flowers and sage hang from the ceiling rafters. The next scent to fill her nostrils and clean out her lungs is that of incense burning. The house is nothing like the adobe condominium, where Zoey lives with her mom. Zoey’s house looks like all of the

a maze of halls and mirrors, stained glass and paintings. “Right here,” she says other houses and rocks that comprise the Arizona desert. She feels more at home in one millisecond of Ruby’s house than she ever felt in her own. The layout resembles a converted barn, with shiny, mahogany floors and tatami mats. The walls are lined with bookshelves filled to the brim with volumes on every subject, from anthropology to bread making to zoology. Zoey does not feel that she’s in Arizona anymore, but in a tree house within an enchanted forest.

.Zoey needs to check on her reflection. This house would be just the place for it to get lost somewhere, and that would definitely create an awkward situation upon visiting her new friend’s house for the first time. She imagines explaining to Ruby’s perfect mother that she is searching through her silk scarf collection for her renegade reflection and shudders. Fortunately, her reflection is there, as gawky as always.

Next must tend to the feeling inside her chest: something like a swarm of newly winged creatures with a learner's permit, flittering and flicking around, just learning how to fly. She does not recognize the feeling first. Quickly it dawns on her. Hope. The same feeling that overtakes her, painting in her grandmother's backyard, has stopped in for a visit. She closes her eyes, letting a slow smile seep across her face, a sun rising over a rocky ocean, and prays to the almighty gods that this sensation will stay.

Zoey exits the bathroom, and finds Ruby in her room sitting on her bed. She is flipping through a photo album. Her photos are in black and white. "I developed these myself!" she boasts proudly. "I took photography, dance, and calligraphy classes at school in Japan." As Ruby flips shows Zoey her photos, she sees: shrines, happy looking children, mountains, empty temples, bowls of rice, pots of tea, all in perfect, simple composition and contrast. Ruby's mother invites Zoey to stay over for dinner, which she accepts graciously. They eat steaming bowls of rice, and vegetables cooked in a curry sauce that Zoey gobbles down hungrily.

Desert Camping

Ruby's parents are outdoor enthusiasts. They love everything nature-related, and decide to go camping in the Sonoran desert for a weekend. Ruby invites Zoey to go along, and Zoey is nervous and excited. Ruby's parents burst out laughing when they see what Zoey has packed. She brings a suitcase full of clothing, sunscreen, cookies, bug spray, markers, paint, canvases, comics, and dvds.

"Zoey, honey. We're only camping for 2 nights, not the rest of our lives!"

Ruby's mother laughs, squeezing Zoey's arm kindly.

But Zoey has never been camping, and does not have a scope of what is considered necessary. She believes her belongings are essential. "I need it all," she says simply, shrugging her shoulders with conviction.

That weekend Zoey learns how to pitch a tent, catch fish, and make s'mores: how to toast the marshmallows just right, lightly charcoaled. She has never felt so full of joy with someone besides Grandmother Rose. Under an inky night sky Zoey and Ruby snuggle closer to one another in the tent, feeling the warmth of each other's bodies emanating from their sleeping bags. It's the two of them, against the cool night air, an eternal, unconditional alliance.

"I love you Zoey," Ruby whispers, squeezing her hand tightly.

"I love you as much as the stars," Zoey says back.

"I love you as big as the moon!" Ruby cries.

"I love you like...my best friend!" shouts Zoey, as they fall asleep under the winking comets and flashing meteorites. They fall into a safe slumber under the endless blanket of Milky Way.

When Zoey wakes up, Ruby is not in the tent. She feels sudden alarm at her friend's absence, and takes a walk along river. Relief floods through her when she spots Ruby sunning herself on a rock like a salamander. Ruby stirs at Zoey's approach. Ruby sees her friend, and lifts her heavy hair from her back, which she ties into a knot on the top of her head. Ruby looks at Zoey, and then, when she is certain Zoey is watching, slips out of her dress, leaving it on the rock, and hops into the river. It's a dare. Zoey never turns down a dare as a general rule. Zoey prefers yes to no every time. Yes provides space to grow, whereas no is a prison. Self-consciousness creeps into the foreground of her brain, reminding Zoey of her scrawny paleness and small breasts. She wants to stand up to her anxiety, to shove it out of the way. So, as in fending off mountain lions or bears, she grows bigger than she is. She vehemently rips off her white camisole, indigo dyed denim shorts, and lacy undergarments, which she tosses onto the riverbank and plunges into the frigid water.

"Aghh!" Zoey shrieks. The water is much cooler than the air. It shatters her peaceful and pleasant dream state upon wakefulness, the river a cold and alive alarm clock. She splashes Ruby playfully, though Ruby does not splash back. She just looks wistfully out into the horizon. Today Ruby appears older, calmer. Something is on her mind.

"Zoey," she begins solemnly. "Do you ever feel kind of...different? I don't know how to explain it." Zoey is usually the one to get tongue tied, so it is interesting for her to witness the role reversal, and waits patiently for Ruby's thoughts to settle.

“It’s just that, sometimes I know more than I want to. About everything. It’s not something anyone tells me. It’s not something I hear or see. It’s just something I feel. I can feel if someone is really sad or in pain. Like remember that tree? It was dying, because people mutilated it! I felt so bad for it.” Now tears fall down her cheeks, tiny waterfalls.

“Sometimes I can help things get better. Usually it’s animals and plants I can save, because they don’t resist me. They are receptive to healing. People have a lot of guards built up to protect themselves, even though they’re not really protecting anything. You can’t see the walls, but you can feel them. That’s why I like you Zoey,” she smiles at her friend, “You don’t have walls up like everyone else. You’re just yourself.” Ruby wipes the tears from her cheeks, and ducks under the water.

She reemerges suddenly, taking a huge inhalation of air, and grabs Zoey, pulling her closer. She gazes directly into Zoey’s eyes, and then plants the warmest kiss on Zoey’s lips.

Both girls jump back in surprise, landing in the water with a splash. The kiss sent a streak of lightning, an electric current, through them both.

“Uh,” begins Ruby awkwardly. It is clear she doesn’t know what to say, having surprised both of them. But Zoey gets it.

“It’s ok. I understand,” Zoey confirms. They are best friends after all. “Sometimes it makes more sense without words,” she smiles, revealing the gap in her teeth, and the air is calm. They climb out of the water, and put their clothing back on. It is time to leave the campsite, and they make their way back to the tent where Ruby’s mom is stirring a pot of oatmeal overtop a small campfire, and Ruby’s

dad is frying plantains over a griddle. The plantains pop and sizzle, as the scent of fried oil drifts through the smoky air. Ruby's parents are drinking coffee from matching ceramic mugs, and Ruby's mom pours orange juice into glasses for Zoey and Ruby. The warmth of the campfire envelops the girls, and they eat hungrily.

"Let's get going everyone!" Ruby's dad ushers them off to break down the tents, as they roll up their sleeping bags with quiet determination. The ride back to town is a mostly wordless one, with Ruby's parents doing all of the talking, as if they were the excited teenagers, and Ruby and Zoey the overtired parents. Ruby's parents sing along to the radio giddily and hold hands, while Ruby and Zoey can't seem to find much of anything to say. They drop Zoey off at her aluminum condominium, and Zoey lets herself in with her key, since the door is locked.

"Mom, I'm home!" she calls out, like Ruby had done at her home, but instead of vanilla and incense, it smells like garbage that needs to be taken outside. Her mother is nowhere in sight. Zoey sighs. She takes out the trash, and turns off the lights in her bedroom. She crawls into her bed trying not to think, and quickly falls under the spell of a dreamless sleep.

In school, everyone is enchanted by Ruby. She is pretty, polite and perfect. The students are charmed by her Japanese tendencies and unfamiliarity with western lifestyle. They love explaining pop culture and slang words to her. Unlike Zoey, Ruby has no trouble making friends. Zoey wishes she could hide inside the haven that is Ruby, as it seems to be a much more carefree and lighthearted oasis than her own.

Ruby has suddenly gotten very, very busy. She tries out for the school's cheerleading team, an extracurricular activity in which Zoey would rather chop off her legs with a samurai sword than participate. Why would she want to enthusiastically encourage people she doesn't like to do something she has very little interest in? Zoey is confused by the school's constant urging of students to participate in activities that pit them against one another. She rejects the peer pressure of school spirit. She feels that an intense current is pushing and pulling her and Ruby towards opposite coasts, and there's nothing she can do to stop it.

Practices

Ruby is a natural at everything, including cheerleading. One afternoon, Zoey, feeling listless, decides to peek into the gymnasium during practice. Timidly, she opens the heavy gymnasium door where she hears peppy, upbeat voices shouting something about fighting. Zoey finds it incredibly useless. "Alright girls, 5 minute break!"

As a quiet settles over the gymnasium, Zoey overhears a familiar voice ring out, as if it were coming out of a megaphone.

"Who, Zoey? Yea, she's got a massive girl crush on me. I just hang out with her because I feel bad for her, honestly."

A pang of anger courses through Zoey. She is unfamiliar with the grating, grounding grip of jealousy and rage. A compulsive urge for action engulfs her. She's got to do something--and fast. Zoey storms out of the building in a blur. Rushing out

at a hasty pace, she speeds off in a torrent on her bicycle. She twists and turns through back alleyways as her cyclone of thoughts burn up like steam, drifting off into the atmosphere. Suddenly, Zoey looks around. The familiar streets and friendly alleyways have disappeared. In their place is a part of the city that she's never explored. Through the haze of anger Zoey neglected to take note of her surroundings. Zoey searched for a storefront to stop and get directions, when she hears a powerhouse voice coming from a side street. A voice that is both feminine and masculine simultaneously.

"Let's take it from the top!" the husky voice is booming. There's a cracking of drum sticks pounding on one another, and another female's voice, this one deeper and more gravelly shouts out, "One, two, one two the three, go!"

Zoey follows the sound, which takes her down an alleyway, leading her to a small, rustic shed with a screen door. The screen door beckons to Zoey, and she pulls her bike into the driveway.

For the second time today, Zoey stumbles upon a scene of females shouting. But this time, instead a war chant, it's a song, free of school spirit, sports or stupidity.

A pixie girl with glinting emerald eyes and an asymmetrical haircut half sings, half shouts "Life's so mean when you're seventeen. Life's unclean when you're seventeen. Life's a dream when you're seventeen, oh life's been mean to us," She slams emotion into the microphone. It launches out, a cannonball disguised as a song. Her voice is scratchy, deep and sad, as pulls chords on the cello, like an attack.

There are two other females in the shed. They're wearing all black, thick-soled combat boots, and piercings line their ears. The other young woman pounds her heart into a drum set. The girl has wavy dark hair dyed pink, brown skin, and a ripped t-shirt with a lady-vampire grinning, and a hoop through her nose.

Then there is the bassist, who keeps times steadily. She is skinny, with yellow hair, which looks as though she cut it herself. Her midriff is exposed, and reveals a small tattoo that says *Love More* inside a sunflower.

Zoey can't look away. They're the most beautiful humans she's ever seen. They don't see her, fortunately, and she feels that she could stay rooted to the spot outside their screen door forever.