

Teen Short Story

1st Place

Gabriela H.

Letters Never Received

Querida Mama,

For many years now I've felt trapped. Trapped in the image you created for me without me knowing. I knew I would never be able to have your ojos tapatios, or your fair skin, or your light hair that cascades. I tried to wear those dresses after you begged me for days. But the smile you put on your face was not a true one. It was one to satisfy me when I was trying to satisfy you. Even though this is all you wanted of me I knew I could never give this to you in a way that you could accept. And I'm sorry for that. Sorry that I will never mold to the figure of me you hold in your mind. Sorry for making you worry about what your friends might think of having such a daughter like me. Sorry for the amount of rosaries that you prayed to have a daughter like you. I'm sorry.

Love,

Your child

Dear Future Me,

When you read this I hope you understand yourself more than I do at the moment. You see, I am confused on how I want the world to view me. The other day I saw the most gorgeous man I have ever laid eyes on. But, when I was looking at him I realized that I would be mortified if he ever was to approach me. Instead, I caught my mind wanting to look like him. The broad shoulders and chiseled face, I wanted it to be mine. At that moment I knew there was nothing more I wanted but to become him. I kept trying to shake this feeling off. But it was like sand, I could find it in every crevice. When I looked at my arms, there was sand. When I looked at my torso, even more sand. I tried to wash it off with makeup. No amount of foundation and false lashes did the trick. I hope by the time you find this you have found a way to wash off the sand, I don't want to look at it any longer. I don't think God would want to see it either.

Love,

Me

Dear Eva,

Do you remember when we used to stay up and watch old Selena music videos? We used to sing songs about heartbreak and pretend to understand the pain. You more than than me loved recreating the choreography, I was just happy watching you. It was something about the way that your feet never missed a beat or the way that you recreated her exact hair flips. My mom loved when you came over because of this. I knew that she wished you were her daughter instead of me. But you never flaunted this in my face, which is why I never envied you. You were the protector of my heart against my mothers arrows. Despite this I'm scared. Absolutely frightened, to show you who I really am because what if you don't see me the same way? You have always been the moon and I the ocean. I look up to you and move to try to reach you, to become a star in your sky. But then again, I am the ocean and will always be.

Love,

Your Dearest Friend

Dear God,

I have always been told that you are always by my side, with me in every step I take. I have been told that you love me unconditionally and made me in your image. That you make no mistakes in your creations. I tried to believe this and rationalize my own feelings and thoughts. The only answer that I have been able to come up with is that no one knows your true word. No one alive in my lifetime has heard your voice trickle into their ears. I want to believe that you're real and by my side. I want to believe that you made me in your image and that you make no mistakes. But I wish to change how you created me. I hope that you don't take this as an offence and I will try to live out my days believing that you will forgive me. Your other creations on the other hand won't forgive me. I know their words will be thrown at me like spears. I know that they will try to hide me as if I have committed the most horrendous crimes. But because I hope that you are by my side, with every step I take, I will survive and embody your image. For I now realize that we are not made in your physical image, but the image of your soul and mind.

Love,

Your son

Teen Short Story

2nd Place

Priyal P.

Journal Entry #1 Dec 27th

If I knew it would end like this, I would have written this earlier. Sooner. Sometimes I think you can only find the right words till after it occurs. When the final event occurs it is clear because it is too late. Let's start from the middle of it all. Where everything happens that shouldn't have happened. This is for her and it would go something like this:

She was given a voice that she could never use. Her voice was taken from her and her frustration grew. Muted by the people who choose her future for her, who say they care about her desires, but muddle them and rearrange them to appear in a more presentable manner. They will boast in what they believe to be a humble manner of how they let her decide to do as she pleases. To be what she wants. Some people pray to be spoken for so they don't have to do all the talking, but it grew tiresome for her. She wanted to be able to whisper and scream what she wanted to. She wanted to be able to recite poetry breathlessly to a lover or a friend.

She grew up in a chokehold, the air cut off from her delicate unused lungs. Her frustration became red hot aggression. The fiery type that you can feel in your chest to the bottom of your stomach. It burns your eyes from holding in the tears as you strain them further trying to read the tear-stained pages of the book you were given. The blurry words don't help you to hear them in your head, but you aren't allowed to utter a single one. You can only imagine how you would speak to them with that voice in your head. How you would announce each syllable with an expression that was lined with uncertainty from never being able to speak out. To speak for herself. To defend herself. If she were to be able to freely speak her words would be bullets of truth and no one wants to hear the truth. Her truth. It would be too harsh for their fragile ears.

The times she was able to speak it was scripted and only displayed what they wanted others to see. As the world around her went out of line and morphed and crumbled, she was to remain neatly wrapped into her character only showing emotion when it was suitable. If she were to cry, her tears were laughed at or created a fit of bubbling anger in those around her. To them, there was no reason for her to cry. There was no reason for her to feel how she felt. And if she tried to reason with their closed minds, they would shut her out. Leave her trembling and cold on the stairs leading up to the house. She couldn't even find the words if she could, they wouldn't allow her to find the words. To let her feel them come out of the tip of her tongue and escape into the air around her.

She had the insatiable craving to say what she wanted to. To use the words that she was gifted by the literature she read and the mundane signs outlining the sides of the road. She learned to listen to others and feel their emotions from their words. She would close her eyes to see the words in the dark black space of her mind, their colors different in their use. Words with passion were a bright yellow, while ones of sadness were a deep slush gray. How she wished to be able to express herself like they did use these powerful words to speak and to have someone finally listen to what she had to say.

You could say she was emotional. Too fragile and sensitive. It wouldn't take long for the world to rip her to pieces, even more than it already did. She wasn't prepared with the reality that people don't want to hear what you have to say. They don't want to be bored with the details that were meaningful lines of poetry to her. They wanted the summary, a brief description of the topic, and she wanted to experience the full story from the beginning to the very end. But in a way she was already faced with reality. She already had reached her limit and her end.

She would sit there and listen. Sit there and wait for the chokehold to loosen, but she knew it wouldn't come no matter what an optimistic fool she was. No matter how much of a dreamer she became because reality was weighing her down and messing with her and it was beyond the limits of her voiceless self to do anything. She would soon wither away leaving the same effect as a blank page at the end of the book. Only there for reflection with no lasting impact.

She is us. All of us. We all understand her to varying degrees. The frightening fear of losing your voice when you've only just begun speaking. I hate being her. She shouldn't have existed in this way. I like to think she is off somewhere far away out of sight because when we don't see something we simply assume it doesn't exist. She is closer than you think.

Teen
Short Story
3rd Place

Anne J.

A Long Overdue Phone Call

She can no longer type out the phone number by memory. In fact, she does not recognize the numbers that she punches into the phone. They're foreign to her, and twice she feels her fingers drift towards the familiar combination, the eights, and zeros, and fours that she so often dialed years ago, hoping to hear a voice on the other end. So often she was greeted with the repeated dial tone until she slammed the phone back onto the receiver.

She's gotten the number from a friend of a friend, and she clutches the post-it note that she'd scribbled the phone number on so tightly that it crumples around her fingers. One, two, three, four, she counts the seconds as she holds the phone up to her ear with shaky hands. A pause. A crackle of static.

"Hello?" The voice on the other end is the voice of a grown man, deep and hardened with age. Still a hint of a southern twang from his childhood.

She makes shapes with her mouth, trying to form words, but this man has thrown her off guard.

"Hi," she just barely whispers. Her voice is a creak, a tiptoe on wooden floorboards.

"Who is this?" the man asks. There's a moment, a long, painful moment, where she's hurt by his words. Someone has threaded a needle through her heart but forgotten to make a stitch, leaving it hanging there. It swings back and forth, a pinprick of pain every swish. But she collects herself. Of course, he doesn't recognize her voice. She can barely tell it's him on the opposite side of the call.

She debates what to answer in return to his question, not knowing how to identify herself to him.

"This is Elaine. Elaine Summers." The silence is deafening. So quiet that she can imagine hearing the man's heartbeat, thumping against his rib cage.

"Mom," he breathes. An invisible hand presses the needle deeper into her heart. A drop of blood squeezed out of the tiny puncture wound. The man corrects himself. "Elaine."

"Jonathan." She never liked that name. Nothing about the three syllables tastes any different in her mouth than anything else. She wanted to name him Gabriel, after the angel, because lying there in her arms, he was. But his father had been Jonathan and his father's father had been Jonathan, so he was Jonathan. She knows that he isn't fond of the name either. It's yet another that links him to his father.

"Is there something I can do for you?" The man's voice is cold; it has been since she's identified herself. She searches for something to say, something to justify thirteen years of no calls, no visits. She knows that there is nothing.

"I'm sorry," is all that she can muster. The man- Jonathan- chuckles, not coldly, not warmly. Indifferently, like her apology is an unfunny joke that he laughs at to humor her.

"I know." He's quiet for a moment, then, "I'm married now," is what he adds. *Married.* She is once again struck by how old he is, how long thirteen years truly is. She doesn't ask why she wasn't invited to the wedding. She knows why not. "We're planning on having a baby." *A baby.*

"Oh." Her instincts get the best of her, and before she could stop herself, "You know, raising a child is difficult," slips out. Her son scoffs.

"We're capable," he says shortly. His tone is final, defensive. She doesn't press. "I'm not going to fail." *Like you did,* are the unspoken words that she knows he refrains from saying.

Another inkling of the boy he used to be. He was always so polite. He let all the women in her bible study pinch his cheeks and coo over him.

“How is he?” her son asks. She was wondering when he would ask her that. His voice changes when he talks about him, and she is brought back to when he was younger, crouching in the corner while his father yells.

“I wouldn’t know,” she says and she’s proud that she does not know. “He lives down in Montgomery now.”

“Ran out of people to terrorize up in Birmingham?” She doesn’t say anything. It’s because she finally got up the courage to tell him, no, but she doesn’t tell Jonathan that.

“We separated a year ago,” is what she tells him, and by the way his breath changes when she does, she knows that he’s surprised.

“I hated him.” Bluntly. No beating around the bush. His truth. Finally.

“I know,” she says for the second time.

“I hated you too.” Now, she’s taken aback.

“Me?” He gives a sharp breath.

“You *let* him. You let him hurt me.” His voice hitches. “He hurt me, mom.” He’s crying now, big, shaking sobs. He doesn’t even realize that he’s called her mom. “I used to ask you to take me away, take me anywhere, as long as it was away from him. He was- he’s a monster!” He screams the last words. Loud screeches of static sound and she flinches. Her eyes burn. “Did you know what he did to me?” She can’t speak, can’t find the words to tell him that she doesn’t want to know. “The things he used to say to me? He hit me in front of you and you never did anything!

Why didn't you do something?" Her vision is blurred, and thick, salty drops slide down her cheeks to her lips.

"I wanted to," she whispers. "I tried to. I- I just couldn't." Her son laughs coldly.

"Don't flatter yourself. You were too much of a coward to even walk out of the goddamn house without his permission. You chose *him* over me."

"I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry." She rocks herself back and forth. The needle is stabbing her, but now it's no longer a needle, it's a knife that is embedding itself into her chest. Over and over and over. She comforts herself the way that she would comfort her child if he would let her. But she knows that he never will, that she has broken everything between them with her silence.

"Goodbye, Elaine," the man that she no longer knows says. His voice is quiet, but final. She swallows down her tears, swallows down her regret, swallows down her misery.

"Goodbye, Jonathan." She can hear him breathe, once, twice, three times. He hangs up the phone.

Teen Short Story

Honorable
Mention

Soulee H.

Soulmates Aren't Just Lovers You Know

Fate sat in the bleak, dirty bar on Earth. He didn't know which country, though there were far too many drunken screams about random intervals of yards for it not to be America. Damn United States and their need for odd measurements. Another loud cheer came from behind him that made his ears ring. For an ethereal being he was such a lightweight. He set what was probably too much money for three drinks on the counter, humans always had fluctuating currency anyway, and got up to leave. He closed his eyes, rubbing his temples trying to stop his oncoming headache and opened the door to the dark sidewalk. He looked up just as he ran into a rather tall woman. "Hey! Watch where you're goin' bucko!" she yelled in a heavy Old New Yorker accent.

The sudden noise shot a bolt of pain right behind Fate's eye and he quickly looked down. "Sorry," he muttered and went to walk around her. The woman grabbed his arm as he tried to pass her. Fate was surprised by this and looked up at her. A wave of recognition flashed between them.

"Well if it isn't Fate. Funny seeing you here," crowed Coincidence.

Fate smiled warmly at their familiar greeting. "Please, this was meant to be," he said. Coincidence laughed as she always did when they saw each other. The noise boomed down the street, but it didn't seem to hurt his head anymore. They walked together to no planned destination and caught each other up on recent events of the last couple centuries. To a stranger walking by, it would probably look like young lovers still at the part of the relationship where they adore everything about each other. However, Fate and Coincidence were not young nor were they lovers. They'd existed long enough to know that a good friendship brought more than enough love for lifetimes.

Soon the two companions found themselves at an old park they each had been to before. They'd never been together, however and told each other of the buildings they had seen and the people they had met. Centuries apart the peoples' lives had been, but then again, humans never seemed to change much. "They're all still beggars dreaming for a miracle." Fate said solemnly.

"Still dreamers begging for a chance," Coincidence replied, offering Fate a cigarette from a small tin she carries with her. He obliged, and lit it with a lighter he'd gotten as a gift a long time ago. He took a long drag and Coincidence layed down on her back on top of the stone wall they were occupying. Coincidence sighed as she stared at the stars and Fate nudged her with his knee questioningly. "Do you ever miss it?" Coincidence asked quietly.

Fate knew what she meant. "Yes," he replied, "sometimes." He sat back on his elbows and gazed at the stars with her. They were both remembering when they were young. Only a couple centuries and they were gliding through the universe. It had been a lot smaller back then, but it was their job to make it bigger. They'd gather matter and build planets, like small children would build sand castles. They'd bring together galaxies like a chef bringing together ingredients. They spent their early lives with each other like schoolmates who had only just met, but were already planning out their futures together. Unfortunately, they grew up. They began to understand the value of life, and decided to put in their service on the same planet, thinking they'd see each other all the time. Mellenia zipping through the entirety of the universe will make a single planet seem small, but the people they wanted to help didn't think so. They ended up only being able to see each other every few centuries. And now, they were on a planet

where the people living there needed something to believe in more than ever. So, they never got the chance to leave.

"We should just go," Fate said. "Humans evolved to be able to keep their own, they won't die if we're not here." Fate leaned even further, fully lying on his back now. Just then, Coincidence shot bolt upright. Fate sighed and pushed himself back up looking at her quizzically.

"Why don't we?" Coincidence said. Fate saw a glint in her eye he remembered her getting when they were younger and she wanted to create an atmosphere where it rained diamonds. Maybe in a time when they were more reckless he would relish seeing that look, but now he knew it led to more trouble than it was worth.

"We can't," Fate said, looking away. He always hated saying no to her when she got so happy. "We can't just abandon them; being alone is what they're scared of most." He didn't have to see her to know her shoulders slumped as she looked to the ground. "I'm sorry," Fate offered because he was.

"I don't miss it like you," Coincidence muttered. "I don't miss it sometimes. I never stop. I always think about jumping from star to star. Our feet burned like the humans' do on hot sand, and we loved it. The white dwarfs and supernovas were our beaches, and the vacuum of space our oceans. I miss the freedom we used to have. I miss you." She said that last part quieter than the rest, but knew Fate would still hear it.

Fate looked up again. He remembered all of that fondly, but he also remembered other things. He remembered how they would take a sun from one galaxy and move it to another without thinking about the planets that would grow cold without it. He remembered how Coincidence would hold a planet in her hand and crush it like an

apple. He remembered himself draining all the water from a planet with the potential for so much life, just so he could put ice on an asteroid he thought needed foliage. When he looked up he didn't think about the fun they had, more the destruction they caused.

"I miss you too, but it wasn't as good as you remember it. You're just sappy and nostalgic," Fate said in an attempt to lighten the mood. Coincidence looked at him appreciatively, but he could tell she was still upset. He knew she felt bad for bringing up such a sad topic, but Fate didn't blame her. They're both always thinking about it whenever they're together. It's better to have it out in the air even if all they want to do is bottle it back up again.

"Come on," Fate said, jumping off the white, brick wall they were sitting on. He took Coincidence's hand and pulled her along with him. "Follow me." Fate led Coincidence out of the city. It was a long walk, but they've traveled trillions of lightyears in the span of nanoseconds before. It was nice to slow things down a bit. They walked on seemingly endless highways (of course they knew what it really meant to be endless), they stepped over the rocky mountains, and they trudged along at the bottom of the ocean. Not once did they look up at the stars.

It took weeks to walk across the country and ocean to get to that small island. It would have taken more if they were human, but finally they'd arrived in Hawaii. Coincidence laughed. "Thinking of having a honeymoon? Who's the special someone?" she teased lightly. Fate shook his head and led her up the volcano.

"Here it is!" Fate said, gesturing to a tall building on the side of the volcano. It was white, shiny, and had a circular roof. Coincidence knew at once it was an observatory. She helped build the first ever one with Sanad ibn Ali in Iraq.

"Why did you bring me here," she tried to sound lighthearted but her voice was sharper than she expected it to be.

Fate had expected this reaction though. "We can't go back, well not at least until the humans are dead, but that doesn't mean we have to shun our old life." Fate smiled his biggest and most persuading smile he could muster, and in the back of his mind thought he must look like a serial killer. Coincidence didn't say anything for a while. Fate didn't think she knew what to say. He knew they wanted the same thing, to be able to think about their past without it feeling like a knife being driven into their chests. Still, he didn't know if this was the right way to do it. If Coincidence went with him she was putting a lot of faith in him, but he didn't have much faith himself.

Coincidence took his hand and he led them both to the giant telescope. By some chance, no one was there that night. Although, it might have been destined. He let her go first since he didn't mind waiting. What is a few seconds to an immortal being? She walked up to the massive telescope and hunched over, pausing just before putting her eye against the lens. "I believe in you," Fate said to Coincidence.

Coincidence lowered and looked through the telescope. A small gasp escaped her as a smile spread across her face. "Look over there!" she exclaimed. "It's Rigel! I haven't seen it in ages! Do you remember making that one?" she asked, standing upright again and turning to Fate. He beamed and nodded. She turned back to the telescope excitedly and continued reminiscing. Fate was proud of himself. He hadn't made Coincidence smile like that since they were young. He didn't need to look through the telescope anymore for his spirits to brighten. Just seeing her like this was enough to last him all of time. They stayed, gazing through the telescope, for the rest of the night.