

*Dominican  
College '22*



*Bang &  
Whimper*

# Table of Contents

Vulnerability	1
Pier 19	2
Stages of a Grudge	2
The Beggar Scene	3
Circles of Emotion	5
Jailbird Blues	5
A Sweet Gaze of Blue Waves	6
Once Again	7
My Experience Meeting Cimorelli	11
The Thing About Guns	15

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Photo By  
Franchesca DeLeon

Vulnerability  
by Nicole Kordonias

As music flooded her ears,  
her body instinctually swayed with joy.

The delectation she felt,  
overcame her judgement,  
which made her feel delicate.

Butterflies fluttered through skies of blue,  
they soared never too high or low within her mind.

The alluring way her hands met his and moved in sync,  
like they were one,  
which never vanished her mind.

She felt tulips and lilies,  
bloom in her chest

The sun beat in synchrony with her heart,  
and the glow reflected softly upon her dewy skin.

As she sipped her tea,  
she licked her responsive lips,  
tasting sweet of honey.

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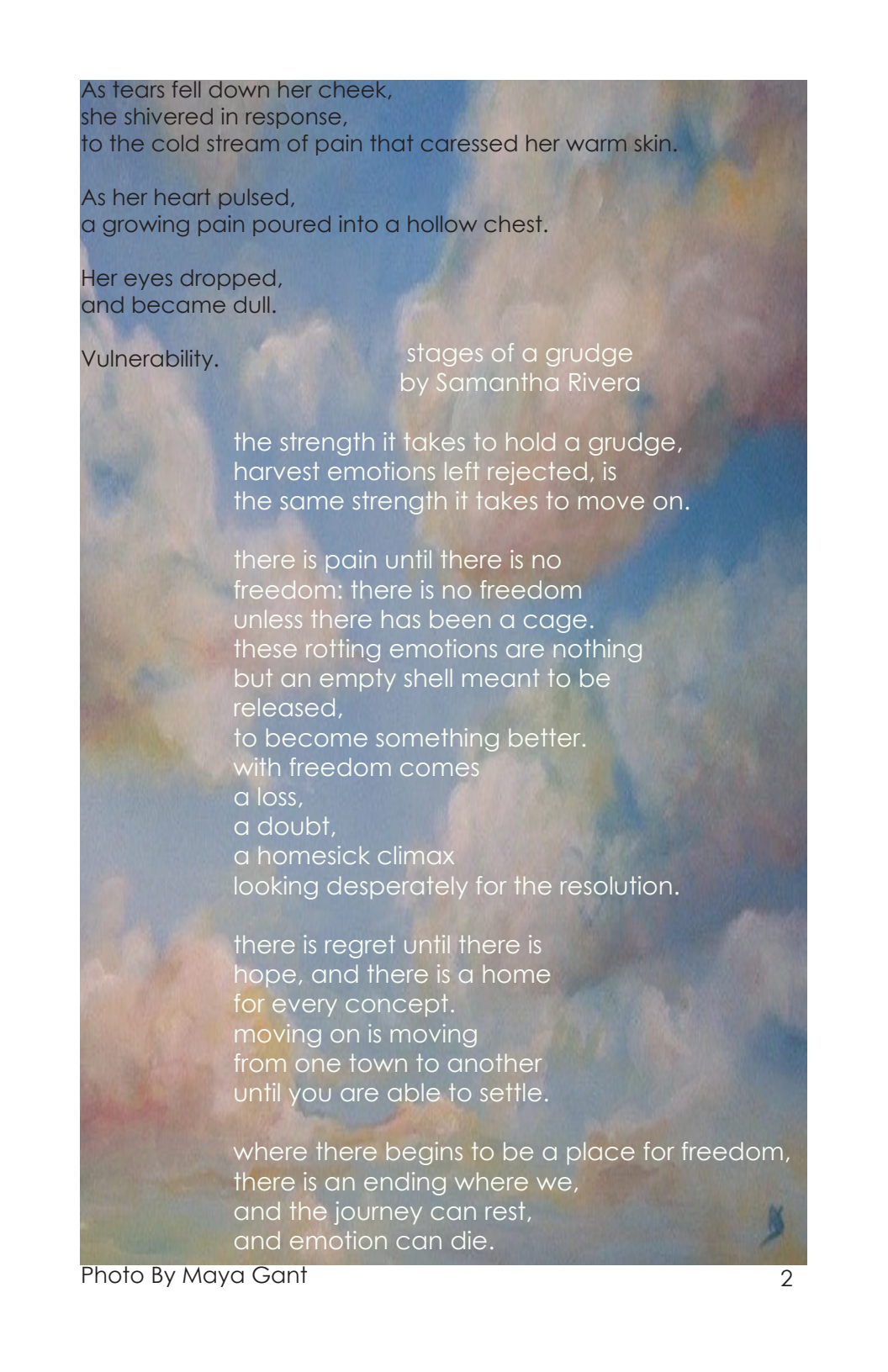
Suddenly silence was apparent,  
her heart reserved.

Sweetness never tasted so bitter,  
and foreign to her lips before.

The little memories her heart still held onto,  
slowly faded.

Which soon became engulfed,  
with hatred.

The bitterness,  
reminded her heart of the ache it endured.



As tears fell down her cheek,  
she shivered in response,  
to the cold stream of pain that caressed her warm skin.

As her heart pulsed,  
a growing pain poured into a hollow chest.

Her eyes dropped,  
and became dull.

Vulnerability.

stages of a grudge  
by Samantha Rivera

the strength it takes to hold a grudge,  
harvest emotions left rejected, is  
the same strength it takes to move on.

there is pain until there is no  
freedom: there is no freedom  
unless there has been a cage.  
these rotting emotions are nothing  
but an empty shell meant to be  
released,  
to become something better.  
with freedom comes  
a loss,  
a doubt,  
a homesick climax  
looking desperately for the resolution.

there is regret until there is  
hope, and there is a home  
for every concept.  
moving on is moving  
from one town to another  
until you are able to settle.

where there begins to be a place for freedom,  
there is an ending where we,  
and the journey can rest,  
and emotion can die.

Pier 19

by Vanessa Mazariego

As loneliness seeps into the night  
The memories of us give me light  
I was so in love and placed you above  
I lost myself in you. They were right.

The Beggar Scene

by Kaitlyn Carpio

Beggar

Please, sir. Do you have-

Man

No.

Beggar

Please, I'm just so hun-.

Man

Leave me alone. I don't have anything for you

Beggar

But you have something for someone else?

Man

I don't have to answer you.

Beggar

No, you don't, but please can I at least have whatever's left in that brown bag?

Man

This? It's garbage. You really want my leftover garbage?

Beggar

If that's what it takes.

Man

What do you mean? What 'does it take' for what?

Beggar

For me not to wake up again on an empty stomach

Man  
Well, you did that to yourself now-

Beggar  
But I didn't. You know what? Nevermind. Sorry I've wasted your time,  
man

Man  
Well, now hold on just a second. How are you going to do that to me?  
Beggar  
Man, 'do what' to you?

Man  
Leave me feeling like this?

Beggar  
You're leaving me feeling hungry. I don't think I'm the one in the  
wrong.

Man  
You know what? You want the bag? Take the damn bag. You'd just  
be getting rid of my trash for me.

Beggar  
Then at least I get to do something for you

Man  
[hesitates with the bag] You're relatively young. What are you  
doing out here? Where are your parents?

Beggar  
[snatching the bag and opening it] I dunno, dude. One day I woke  
up, no parents.

Man  
[watches him eat] You know, I often give to charities

Beggar  
I wouldn't think that handing your trash to me is charity, but sure,  
man, if it makes you feel good. You know what would be a real  
charity?

Man  
What?

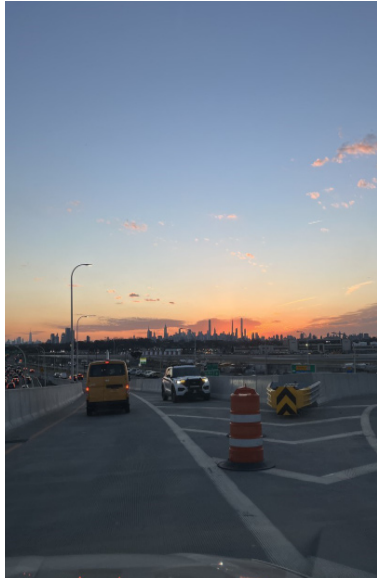
circles of emotion  
by Samantha Rivera

they say vulnerability lies in weakness,  
yet cold hearts could never understand.  
when there is pain, there is  
A reminder-  
we are alive.

it is adrenaline for a masochist  
but fear for the faint of heart;  
nevertheless, there is emotion.  
a lack thereof,  
is merely surviving,  
not living.

numb is but a broken feeling,  
not meant to be felt;  
its grip is so strong  
we feel nothing at all.  
cynicism, apathy, emptiness.  
but when we allow ourselves to feel,  
we cower, we allow, and then  
we bloom, we feel,  
we love.  
we may not always feel good,  
but when we do  
it becomes worth it.

Photo By Kristin Mena



Jailbird Blues  
by Casey Carangelo

Since night and day have now begun to blur  
The sun and stars elude my longing gaze  
These days alone make thoughts and voices slur  
My self of past was meant to be a phase.  
These walls of beige, a prison of the mind  
A life of plastic friends await outside  
My inner self unlocked for me to find  
For in my cell these two worlds collide  
But shall I falter or commit to die?  
These girls accept me for my faults and sins  
This tired facade; a new one I should try  
My crimes that were once losses now are wins.  
Night and day have found their rightful place  
My whole identity I now embrace.

A Sweet Gaze of Blue Waves  
by Franchesca DeLeon

I suddenly realized I was in the Dominican Republic, La Altagracia province opening my eyes on a lengthy car ride. Palmy air, salt breeze, and the sun-kissed glow I will receive. This Caribbean Island is like a Larimar rare crystal of white, light blue, green-blue, and deep blue. The mesmerizing maze of inter-connecting crystal lines and rough circles reminds me of how the Caribbean Sea interconnects Mexico and Central America, while the rough coral touches my feet. This is a place where I escape on a cold winter day. Like a crystal of aqua, clear, and turquoise tones stroking the tan, white sand as the lush coconut palm tree greets me.

I sigh deeply with a great sigh, to feel my last breath as I lay on the white tan skirt of the sea. This natural space where I feel most at peace signifies the power of life. The power of life is a momentum feeling that not everyone feels but should experience in a lifetime and here is where I feel. As I gaze towards the horizon of the Caribbean Sea, I become hypnotized by how peaceful and calm this island can be. This mesmerizing view tells me that the sea can be scary and beautiful at the same time. The sea may roar in different seasons and be calm as a summer breeze, but its presence always puts me at peace. The heart of the sea is my sanctuary in how I view life. At the right time of day, with such crystal-clear blue water, I can see the reflection of the sky below as I'm above. The sound and feel are like no other, to be disconnected from mankind and urban life. Every direction I look continues, to only be surrounded by water and mountains. That crisp feeling of water signifies every teardrop I have experienced, to know that everything will be alright. I leave behind my sadness, happiness, curiousness, nervousness, and mindfulness. I feel alive, adored, calm, extraordinary, and safe when I'm on the island.

As I float above, I feel how I was created by God in my mother's womb of flesh and water. I feel reborn on the island and connected through the essence of my mother and the sea. As I float above, I feel the seaweed wrapping around my feet as my mother's umbilical cord feeds me. I breathe heavenly as I'm between the abyss of birth and rebirth. As above, so below is the darkness that lies, thou shall not be afraid because life is the abyss within peace and darkness, so why be afraid of the sea. This is what the sea signifies to me. As I float, I want to reach the center of the island's heart. The heart is near the coral reefs, where it lies in the shallow center of the deep blue sea. Aha, a sweet gaze of blue waves.



Photo By Franchesca DeLeon

Once Again  
by Vanessa Mazariego

As I sat at the kitchen table with the same wedding preparations laying in front of me, I remembered the memories from eleven years ago. I had prepared myself for this day since my fiancé popped the question, I thought I would be fine but sitting here once again brought back all the heartbreak and pain.

My mother and sister were running through the house trying to get the final wedding preparations. I was ready and excited to start planning for our wedding and as they laid the pictures of bouquets, color schemes, centerpieces, and textures out in front of me I prepared myself.

Before my fiancé and his family had walked through the door I started looking through the pictures, thinking of what our wedding would look like.

"Or what it would've looked like," said his voice inside my head.

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, praying this uneasy feeling would go away so I could get on with the rest of my life. With that thought, I heard my fiancé and his family come through the doors, greeting my parents and sister. I walked up and ran right to my fiancé and hugged him, holding him and hoping this feeling would go away.

"Val let us get a hug in before you take him away," my family said as they all laughed, noticing my affection. "It's ok. I love it," replied my fiancé as he looked at me and smiled while squeezing my waist.

We all walked to the kitchen table and sat down, as my mother started giving out refreshments.

"These look nice babe," he said as he pointed at one of the beautiful bouquets in the pictures.

"They're actually beautiful," I replied picking up the picture. We both looked at each other and nodded.

"Ok, we got the flowers!" we both yelled out. Our families turned and looked at us like we were crazy. Then they realized what we had said and our mothers and my sister jumped up and started clapping.

"Flowers are done," my sister yelled back at us as she took the flower bouquet pictures from the table.

After we had chosen the flowers the color scheme of our wedding started slowly falling into place, we discussed colors and typical wedding stuff. Everything was flowing smoothly until it was time to choose our wedding date.

"I want to get married in winter," I heard his voice in my head again. I shook my head and moved on to the next thought as I tried to ignore those old memories. We were sitting here planning our wedding, and here I was thinking about what could've been.

"Val, what do you think?" my fiancé said as he held my hand, shaking it, trying to get my attention.

"Spring. I want to have our wedding in the spring," I said, looking at him first and then looking at our families.

"You sure you want to do it in the spring?" he replied looking at me with a smile on his face.

"Yeah, think about it. It's beautiful, we can have it indoors or outdoors," I said as I started naming all the things we could do. We agreed on having the wedding in the spring and the planning progressed.

After hours of talking my father, father-in-law and fiancé stepped outside to get away from all the wedding preparations and left us women to it. We continued talking about the details we wanted for the wedding but that nagging thought kept tugging at my heart.

"I want to get married in the winter," I heard his voice in my head over and over again.

I went over to the counter and watched as my mother and mother-in-law sat at the kitchen table in awe of what we had done. They were writing down ideas, searching up photos, and being two happy mothers planning their kids' wedding. I smiled as I watched them.

"You alright V?" I heard my sister say as she came to stand right next to me.

"Yeah, I'm good," I said as I sighed. She hugged me and I already knew what she was going to say.

"You know if it's too hard, you can always tell him," she said as I felt her tighten her hug. I nodded my head in disagreement.

"I'll be fine. I promise," I said as I walked away and went to sit with them. I smiled as I looked down at all the preparations, everything in our wedding was a mix of my fiancé and I.

"Valerie go find the guys, we're going to eat soon," my mom said to me as she pat my hand and smiled.

I walked outside looking for them, only to find my father and father-in-law.

"Hey, where's Thomas?" I said to them looking around the backyard trying to see where he was.

"He stepped out to the front." my father-in-law answered.

"Mom said to go inside in a few minutes, we're going to eat soon," I said with a smile. They nodded with a smile and went back to their conversation.

I made my way to the front looking for Tom and as I unlocked the gate I heard his voice, he was on the phone. The leaves are ruffling on the ground as I walk over them following his voice. That's when I see him with his back towards me and his arm mid-air with his phone to his ear. I smile as I see him and scan his body. That's when I see it. A white envelope in his back pocket.

I felt my body go numb. Seeing that white envelope sent me into a trans and his voice in my head got louder and louder. I had been trying so hard to fight his voice but the memories from that night played in my head and I froze.

"What's wrong? We can go inside," I said to him trying to grab his hand but he didn't make a single move.

"Val I'm sorry," he said as he looked into my eyes.

"What're you talking about?" I asked him and I laughed out of confusion. I wasn't understanding what he wanted.

"I can't do this. I can't get married. We can't," he replied back without any hesitation in his voice.

"What're you talking about?" I said again confused as to where this was coming from. We had been planning our wedding for months now, and this broke me.

"We're too young Valerie," he said.

"I'm sorry. I just can't," he repeated that back to me twice seeing that I didn't answer the first time.

I stood there looking at him searching for answers. I was too overwhelmed to process a word he was saying.

"Here," I heard him say as I watched him extend his arm to me. It was a white envelope.

"Here's the money for the expenses we made for the wedding and for your time. I'm sorry," he says still reaching out for me with the envelope in his hand.

"Get out," I said. I look him in his eyes and I see no pain and no remorse for breaking my heart. I walked away from him that instant, and I never saw him again.

All the painful memories from that night hit me the second I saw that envelope in Tom's pocket. Tears rolled down my face and I was frozen. This can't be happening to me again.

"Valerie! Val, are you ok?" I heard his soft voice call for me and I felt his hands on my shoulders.

The tears continued to stream down my face and I hugged him.

The tears continued and I hugged him.

"Please don't leave me too," I plead, holding on to him.

"What, no. I love you and I promise you I'm not leaving," he said to me over and over again.

I told him everything that happened to me that night eleven years ago. I told him about the envelope and why I had reacted the way I did. And that was when he handed it to me.

"Open it," he said.

I opened it and it was a love letter. It wasn't goodbye money or a goodbye letter. It was a letter he wrote for me as we were about to start this new journey together. I looked at him and smiled and I knew he was it for me.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said looking into my eyes and I knew he meant it. With that, we walked inside with our families and sat at the kitchen table.

The weight and sadness I had been carrying all these years went away the second I saw the sincerity in his eyes. He showed his love for me and that was what I needed. I felt his hand squeeze mine under the table and I turned. "I love you," he whispered.

"I love you too," I whispered back.

Years later, here I am once again at the same kitchen table but this time will be different.

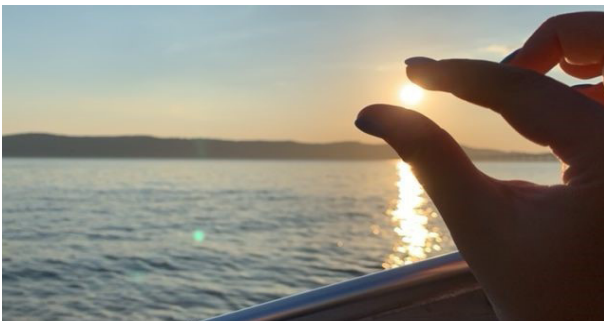


Photo By  
Kaitlyn Carpio



Photo By Abigail Dougherty

## My Experience Meeting Cimorelli by Abigail Dougherty

I had no idea that on April 10th that my biggest dream since I was nine years old, which was to meet the band Cimorelli, was about to come true. On what I assumed was just going to be another regular day of music theory, I found out the news I had been waiting to hear for months: My family and I would be leaving for Nashville in two days to meet Cimorelli. This experience was absolutely incredible. I learned that dreams really can come true and that anything is possible as long as you put effort and time into it. This definitely proved to me that the fight I put up against cancer was worth it and I can do anything as long as I put my mind and heart into it.

For those who do not know who Cimorelli is I am about to tell you. Cimorelli is one of my all-time favorite bands that is made up of six sisters. Their names are Christina, Katherine, Lisa, Amy, Lauren, and Dani. I first heard about them from when I was scrolling through YouTube, one day and clicked on their video, which was a cover of the glee version of "Don't Stop Believing" by Journey. From that day I became one of their biggest fans, and became pretty obsessed with their videos and music. It had

become my biggest dream after that day to meet them and that dream finally came true. Cimorelli have posted many covers on their YouTube channel, these covers are pretty amazing but they aren't as incredible as their original music. They have been writing and recording original music since 2009 and I honestly don't know how but every year their original music gets even better. One of my favorite songs they have written is "Wings" this song means so much to me and a lyric from that song that especially means a lot to me is "when we fly, we fly together" which gives me a constant reminder that I was never truly alone in my fight against cancer. These amazing girls have written other songs that mean just as much to me as "Wings," and those songs are "Who Told You," "You're Worth It," "Pretty Pink," "Good Enough," and "Worth the Fight." I've been a fan of them for so long and unlike some of their other fans I have never picked a favorite member, because they are all amazing, and I love each of them for different reasons.

I met my incredible wish granters Janine and Diana in October of 2017. They told me what the different options for a wish are. Which are "I wish to go," "I wish to be," "I wish to have," "I wish to give," and the option that I picked. Which is "I wish to meet." I knew what I wanted to do from the moment the social worker at the hospital told me that I would be getting a wish. My wish that I asked for was to meet Cimorelli. I didn't know when the wish would be granted, and after two months of waiting and hoping that it was going to happen before the end of the year, I started to doubt it was even going to happen. I started to lose hope and became impatient about it, because I just wanted it to happen sooner rather than later. I pretty much almost entirely ran out of hope, excitement, and joy about even getting a wish. Little did I know that the week before Coffee House a fundraiser my school does, that I would end up having my dream come true.

On April 10th as I walked into music theory, I was met with the news I had been waiting to find out about for months. When I walked into the room one of my favorite songs of theirs, "Wings" began to playing "I can be so negative sometimes, my own worst enemy sometimes," were the first words I heard, as I read the gigantic banner that said "CIMORELLI CANT WAIT TO MEET YOU, PACK YOUR BAGS," I looked at my vision teacher, who was right next to me, and said, "I can't believe this is happening, I'm so happy!" I started crying tears of joy and ran straight into my mom's arms, and gave her a giant hug. After I stopped crying I looked around the room at all my family, friend, and teachers, who had giant smiles on their faces, and were wearing shirts that said "all about Abby" on the front with music notes underneath the words, the music notes and words were in yellow writing, which is my 12

favorite color.

All of my friends immediately wanted to take pictures with me, which I said yes, to of course. I felt so happy not just about my wish coming true, but because all the people in that room really cared about, supported, and loved me, this means way more to me than I'll ever be able to explain. We were all jamming out to Cimorelli's music, talking, laughing, eating bagels and cupcakes, taking lots of pictures, and celebrating the incredible news. I still can't thank my principal, Mr. Connolly; My vision teacher, Mrs. Kirk, and my incredible music teacher, Mr. Wurster enough for allowing this to happen, and pulling off this incredible surprise for me. The next two days couldn't go by fast enough, and I couldn't wait to leave for Nashville that upcoming Thursday.

The day had finally arrived, April 12th, the day we were flying to meet Cimorelli. I couldn't sit still that entire morning and I literally was jumping for joy when the limo arrived to take us to the airport. This was my first time ever riding to a limo, which made me even more excited. At LaGuardia airport, I couldn't wait to just get on that plane and go to Nashville. I couldn't wait because I was meeting Cimorelli the following day. Cimorelli lives in Nashville now which is why we were flying there, and not to California where they used to live. I was so excited when we landed, that I was bouncing up and down practically as we walked to our rental car. We were staying at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel, where my sister and I got the celebrity treatment, at the celebrity check in part of the hotel, where we stayed for 3 nights and 4 days.

The next morning, I woke up at 7:30 am because I was so excited, and because my mind thought it was 8:30, because there is an hour time difference between Nashville and Orange County, NY. I jumped out of bed that morning because I was extremely excited to meet Cimorelli that day. We were picked up in a limo, which was pretty cool, and it made me feel like a celebrity on my special day. We were meeting Cimorelli at Grays on Main, which is a restaurant in Franklin, Tennessee, for lunch. When I walked into the restaurant, I could smell the scent of country barbecue food, mixed with a sort of lemon cleaning scent, and the smell of freshly brewed sweet tea. The first person I met when I walked in was Megan, who works for Make A Wish Middle Tennessee. After I said "hi" to her, Katherine and Amy walked over to me, and gave me a hug, I literally almost screamed, but I ended up screaming in my head instead. Then Dani and Lauren walked in with their mom, all three of them gave me a hug. So far, they all seemed very excited to spend the day with me. Not long after that, Christina walked in and she practically made me not be able to breathe because of how tight she hugged me, then finally Lisa showed up and she

gave me a giant hug, which I happily returned. Before we ordered lunch, they gave me a little present, which included stickers with song titles from their third album, posters with lyrics from "Who Told You," and "Pretty Pink" on them, a t-shirt that had "Rise and Carry On" written on it, which are lyrics from "Who Told You," and four CDs: their "Hearts on Fire" mixtape, their first album "Up At Night," a signed copy of "Alive," their second album, and their third album "Sad Girls Club." I loved this present so much! After ordering lunch, they started asking me lots of questions, including ones about my diagnosis, my hobbies, my music taste, what I thought they were like based on their videos, which one of them I thought I was most like, and where I am from. I had them sign a shirt that I had made over the summer which had the name of the band, and a picture of them on it. Before we left the restaurant, I gave them shirts that said "All About Abby" on them, which they loved. When we were leaving the restaurant, I asked them who wanted to go in the limo with my family and I. Lisa, Katherine, and Amy said yes.

On our way to Craft Love Franklin, Lisa asked to see pictures of my hair. I showed her pictures of how long my hair was before I cut it, what it looked like when I cut it, I was reluctant to show her pictures of me without hair at first, but I showed her them anyway, and then I showed her a picture of my hair when it started growing to where it was that day. They all seemed kind of shocked about how fast my hair was growing back, even though I thought it was taking longer than I thought it should to grow back. We started filming a video for their channel at lunch, which included all the questions they asked me. While walking into Craft Love Franklin, Lisa asked if we could take a picture and I said "yeah of course we can!"

Inside, they were playing Cimorelli's music, which made me very happy. Aside from my sister and I, everyone else was building and painting something made of wood. Since we had to fly home with whatever we ended up making my sister and I decided on pillows, which we got to paint, it was really fun. We continued talking, laughing and having an incredible time. Before I had to say goodbye to them, we decided to sing "fall back" which is one of my favorite songs they have written. I had wanted to sing with them for so long and it finally happened! Before I left I took individual pictures with each of them, and we took a few group pictures as well. I almost started crying on the way back to the hotel because this had been one of the most amazing days of my life, and I couldn't believe that my dream finally came true. This seriously was the best week of my life!

April 10 and April 13, are two days that I will remember 14

for the rest of my life. They are the days I'd been waiting for since October and they both had finally happened. I look back on both of these days, and I can't help but smile, since they both were absolutely incredible. This was the week when I had one of my biggest dreams come true, and also when I had the realization that anything I want can actually happen as long as I believe and put my mind and heart into it. It's also the week when I realized that my dreams and dreams in general, can really come true, even when you least expect it. While I sometimes wish that I never was diagnosed with this horrible disease, it's the fact that I survived my battle and got to have my wish come true that really matter. My dream might have never come true if it wasn't for being diagnosed with cancer. Even though if I think about it I probably could have met them another way, but I honestly prefer the way it happened over any other way of meeting them.

Thank you, Make A Wish for making my dream come true, and for the incredible experience of not just going to Tennessee for the first time, but for making meeting Cimorelli possible. I loved every moment of my wish and I wouldn't trade it for anything in the entire world!

## The Thing About Guns by Erin Carr

The first time Barbara Eaton shot a gun, her father has his hands around her shoulders and he tells her how proud he is even though the glass bottle fifteen feet away remains intact. Barbara Eaton was Barbara O'Keefe back then. She was ten, she cared a lot and said very little, and when the bullet left the barrel, a rather sour feeling started to churn inside of her.

Her father took the gun from her hands and urged her to cover her ears; she did so, and closed her eyes for good measure. She hoped that when she shut off her senses, that awful feeling growing in her gut would subside, but when she opened her eyes and saw jagged shards of glass strewn about the thick grass, the uneasiness deepened.

"Didya see that shot, B?" Her father asked, eyes bright.

"Aye, great shot Dad!" She lied. The feeling grew worse and she feared she might vomit.

Her father just sighed, all content, still unaware of the state of Barbara's insides, "I know mum says it's unladylike, but you never know when it might come up. I'd like for you to be able to defend yourself."

Barbara realized that this was her father's idea of kindness: sharing his skill, giving her something to inherit. She supposed it was important to know how to defend herself in playground showdowns, but couldn't fathom a situation in which she'd have to shoot anything.

When she edged her finger near the trigger again, her chest would tighten, her legs would shake ("it's because I'm excited!" she mustered when her father showed concern), and she would have to focus quite intently to keep her breathing regular.

Eventually, much later in the morning, she hit a target. The sound of shattering glass and her father's whoop rang in her ears as she immediately, instinctively, dropped the gun, turned on a heel, and vomited on her father's work boots.

The first time Barbara Eaton picked up a gun was also the day she understood the thing about guns.

The thing about guns is that they are utterly permanent, and as she threw up, the knowledge of this tore through her like a tempest. As she expelled the last of her breakfast, she vowed to never touch that god-damned weapon again.

The next time Barbara Eaton shot a gun, vow long forgotten, she was 46 and gearing up to kill what was left of her next-door neighbor.

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"Mum, are you really going to do this?" Robert asks, brow in a straight line, "You know there's a chance they won't let you back in."

Barbara Eaton is 47 and doesn't remember when her son started looking so much like his father. Perhaps nostalgia and time has tainted her vision, but in some of the few lazy moments she is afforded, she sees her husband in her son's appearance, but herself in his actions. She tries not to think about her husband too much at all though, because it tends to make her incredibly upset. Better not to think, better to just do.

"I understand that, and I know you probably can't imagine why I would do anything like this," Barbara starts, voice soft, eyes softer, "but it's not a choice. If it was, I'd never leave."

"I don't-" Robert tries, cuts himself off, tries again, "What does that mean?"

Barbara sighs, "I made a promise. At the beginning of all this."

When discussing the end of the world, most people tend to use phrases like all this, or back then, because despite the fact that it's been a year now, the absurdity of a phrase like zombie apocalypse rings false in people's ears. In truth, that's what it was - what it is - but every time the z-word comes out of someone's mouth, it sounds like a cruel joke.

They had all seen *Evil Dead* and *Zombieland*, they had dressed up for halloween. To compare putting on chalky makeup, or giggling at awful special effects, or cheering when a bat removes an undead head from an undead body, to the world they were living in now? Frankly, it was laughable.

Back then, people would take off their costumes at the end of the night. Back then, the plucky characters won in the end. There's no winning now, not when every zombie shot was a person, a someone to somebody. There was no, "when this nasty virus blows through," because it had been a year.

If help was coming, one of the undead probably bit a chunk out it's carotid artery months ago.

So nobody says 'zombie', and they avoid 'apocalypse' when they can.

Barbara continues, "Your father told me that when he turned, he'd like for me to shoot him."

Roberts looks up to the sky. It doesn't answer him often. He opens his mouth to speak, closes it.

People don't have a lot these days. He's very lucky to have a wall that keeps the undead out. He's exceedingly lucky to have a mother.

"Mum, Dad's dead," he doesn't know what to say exactly, only that if he stops talking, she'll leave. "He might've wanted that - hell, from the way you're looking at me, he definitely did. But he's not here anymore! Whatever promise you made to him," or Lizzy, he thinks, but decides not to complicate things further, "died the second he got bit."

He's not all that fond of the way he sounded, but feels justified in the knowledge that his message got through to her. After a couple of seconds of heavy silence, Robert sighs, a weight removed from his chest. He believes the matter to be finished, and he turns back to look out to the other side of the wall.

The grass has grown thicker without humans to trod upon it, and it meets the sky like a mother kisses her newborn baby. It disgusts him.

When Barbara speaks again her voice is quiet, so much so that Robert wouldn't have been sure she spoke at all if it weren't for the tears gathering in the corner of her emerald eyes.

"Robert, do you remember the most important thing your father and I taught you?"

He does. A sentence flashes behind his eyes like reflex, one that has been burned into his mind like a brand. Our word is the very last inch of us.

He looks up at the sky once more, and then the ground. He wordlessly opens the gate, his mother walks out, and after a couple of seconds, he feels something wet on his cheeks. The grey clouds are heavy above him, but intact all the same.

As he cries, he doesn't say goodbye.

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The thing about guns is that they only carry so many bullets.

Barbara Eaton has managed to collect three.

She only needs one, anyways, to shoot Robert Eaton Sr. in between the eyes.

What used to be Bobby, she corrects, and it makes the gun in her hand feel a little lighter.

She knows where to look, she knows where's dangerous, and she knows where the two overlap. She decides to start at the beginning.

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The second time Barbara Eaton picked up a gun, she was 46 and her undead neighbor was clawing at the remnants of their living room window. For one errant second, she remembers the last time she baked a cake. It had to have been years ago, when they had begged to have their whole class over for their birthdays.

For some god-forsaken reason, this party called for storm-trooper cake, which happened to require far more sugar than Robert Sr. had thought it would. She was left with a half-finished batter with the closest stores being closed for the remainder of the weekend. She hesitantly made the call to her neighbor, fully expecting a rebuttal and instead found a whole bag of sugar and an of course, don't worry

about it, it's what neighbors do.

What neighbors did contrasted with what neighbors were currently doing in the present moment, so with a big huff and eyes unintentionally shut, she pulled the trigger, and what used to be Ms. Connor fell to the ground with the grace of a sack of potatoes.

The radio broadcast had come soon after, urging anyone in Sector B (which was their sector, apparently), to Camp B, about seven miles east.

"That's a decent system they have in place," Robert Sr. (who preferred Bob, for the record) deadpanned as he hurled a petrified Lizzy over his shoulder.

He smiled at his wife, grabbed a bat, whistled, and all but skipped out the front door. If Barbara didn't know the man, she would've fancied him either the bravest person in Scotland or the dumbest. But she did know Bob, and his tendency to put on a brave face for all to see when the going got tough, because there was always later to deal with how he felt.

What Bob forgot to consider is that later is not an indefinite thing. Time, in all his indifferent cruelty, constantly changes and waits for no man. Later, despite how much you ignored it, screamed into the void, begged at Time's feet, or sobbed in the dark, would inevitably become Now.

In the case of Robert Eaton Sr., Later became Now when he was within a mile of Camp B. He and his family had been walking, jogging, and running from the undead for about seven hours, when an impossibly quiet zombie (to Bob's credit, all he knew of them was what he had seen in movies), took a bite out of his daughter. This was promptly followed up with another zombie, with another bite just for him.

The world had been ending for months on end, but Bob did not truly comprehend it until he experienced his personal apocalypse. He had hours before everything he knew would disappear, before his lights would dim and this virus would turn him into a thoughtless mouth, but he now had a definite expiration date. Later was officially six hours from now.

After he spent all of a second processing this, he shot the two zombies and turned on a heel to see his wife sobbing. He couldn't have that, not now when she and his son still had time. So, he grabbed her by the shoulders and screamed, shrieked until his throat was raw. His mouth was forming words at first, urging her to keep going, forget him, but by the end he couldn't tell if the sounds were intelligible or not.

It didn't matter much, everything was going hazy and he could tell by the look in her eyes that she had gotten the point. The zombies had heard his auditory beacon, they were on their way to this location, and Barbara, who was still shaken, was now at least shaken from her stupor.

She nodded subtly.

And one last time, he leaned in to kiss his wife and seconds later realized he couldn't. Not without chancing infection. These zombies had taken his life, his daughters' life, the lives of countless others, and in one final act of mindless, stupid, evil, they took away the last kiss he would ever get from his wife.

He chuckled, "You know, our anniversary is in two weeks."

Barbara smiled and did some kind of laugh-sob in return. It was the most she could manage. If she was being honest, she was really hoping he wasn't going to ask what she knew he was going to ask. He asked, because of course he did.

"Barb, dear," he attempted to suppress the crack in his voice, "do you think you could shoot me? I have one bullet, but um-" He trailed off, because how was he supposed to tell his wife that he was going to shoot their daughter?

"It's not for you?" she offered, generous as always, tears streaking lines across her dirt-caked cheeks.

He nodded weakly. She went for the gun on her belt, and then realized in horror that she couldn't use it.

Do you remember the second thing about guns?

Barbara's voice was meek as she whimpered, "Bob, I'm out of bullets."

He sighs heavy, pushes down another sob that threatened to wreck his core, and shrugged.

"Well, maybe someone will come along and shoot me then," he tried to say through what he knew was a wince.

Barbara's countenance seemed to harden in an instant.

"I'll do it. I'll come back for you."

Bob opened his mouth to shut her down, tell her, no, you can't be that stupid, please just look after yourself for bloody once Barbara, before he was one of what would be many undead in the distance.

Their time was up. The bell was tolling. Later was Now. He knew that if the roles were reversed, he would be doing the same things, saying the same stupid, heroic, beautiful shit, so instead of denying his wife his own dying wish, he nodded. He embraced her, his son, and his daughter tightly, and in an idiotic and tragic moment, he tried to kiss his wife again.

She just leans back, and with the practiced grace of a politician, presses her index finger to her lips, then to his, as another tear rolled down her cheek.

It was enough, only because it had to be.

\*\*\*

Barbara Eaton is 47, and is kneeling in awe at what used to be her house, completely and utterly alone. She has two bullets left, as she had to use one on a zombie that got close enough to smell the lack of shampoo in her hair.

She had found a family photo five minutes ago, and hasn't been able to pull herself together since. It isn't even of Bob, or Lizzy, or Robert, but instead of her parents. Her father in a pair of overalls with a sweat stained white t-shirt underneath, and her mother in an awful floral blouse. They're smiling something stupid at each other.

They were both dead long before the news channels breathed a word about zombies, and she cannot recall the last time she's thought about them.

The past slams into her like a freight train, and as she tucks the photo into her back pocket, she looks out the window. And that's

He's hobbling, right leg broken in places. He's covered head to toe in dirt and grime and something like sweat that makes Barbara gag if she thinks about it for too long. His skin is loose on his bones and his big brown eyes - the ones that used to always betray him when he put up a front - are vacant, devoid.

Barbara supposed it would be easier to shoot her husband if he didn't look the way she remembered, but as she slowly makes her way into the front yard, she feels a pool of dread congeal in her stomach.

She only had two bullets, and she's never one to be wasteful. She would have to let him get close.

She doesn't know what to say, but at this point the thing that used to be her husband is limping in the wrong direction, so in a moment of pure instinct, she yells, "Bobby!"

He turned vaguely, and she waved like he was still the man who decided to quit his job at university and care for the kids so that she could run for mayor. He honed in on her like an animal, and began a grotesque sort of run, this time in her direction.

Her insides churn, her skin tightens, and her hair stands up as she cringes with all her body. Her brain her away, screaming wrongwrongwrongwrong with a relentless shrill, and she feels tears rolling down her cheek. She takes a step back, and goes for the gun at her hip. She grabs it with a shaking hand, and knocks the photo of her parents to the floor.

Her eyes snag on her father's work boots, stained with vomit, and the vow she made all those years ago slaps her across the face. The gun slips from her fingers.

The thing about guns is that they are a means to an end.

The thing about guns is that they usually are that end as well.

Bob is within one hundred feet of Barbara now, and she is suddenly faced with an awful choice.

She has two promises sitting - no - bearing down on each of her poor, tired shoulders, and as the corpse of her husband ambles clumsily closer by the second, she must choose which one she intends to break.

She has broken the one she made to herself before, sure, but it was a matter of life or death then. It was her husband, her daughter, her son, her family, or the undead clawing its way towards them.

Unlike then, she now has the option to run. Zombies, for all the damage they managed to inflict, were comparatively slow. She could turn on a heel and make a break for it, and she'd probably make it back to camp, back to her son.

She could run, or she could shoot.

She could break the promise she made to her husband, or break the one she made to herself.

Bob was within 30 feet of her now. She remembers the last time she saw the back of him as he bolted, their dying daughter on his shoulders. She remembers his embrace, not in a field on the way to camp, but on a snowy Thursday morning when the weather outside kept them under the covers. She remembers when he bragged about her to everyone at a party after she had won the town election.

She remembers when he held her hand in front of her father's 20

casket, and how he cried during *The Lego Movie*, but only after he had double checked that they both had fallen asleep. She remembers their honeymoon, their wedding, his vows.

She remembers their very first date, at a bowling alley. She had been brought by a friend under the guise that this was a friendly outing, before being abandoned with a guy who they swore she'd love.

He introduced himself with a flourish, but when he asked for her name, she refused to give it, claiming that any relationship that had started at a bowling alley was absolutely doomed.

She remembers how he proved her wrong, just as she remembered his smile, his beautiful olive skin dotted with freckles, and his caramel eyes, and how they always told the truth.

His body was within fifteen feet of her now.

Barbara picked up the gun, cocked it, and let the bullet soar right into his forehead, like she always imagined she would. And then she began to weep.

\*\*\*

The last time Barbara Eaton shot a gun was immediately after she buried her husband.

When he crumbled to the ground, finally lifeless in every sense of the word, she exploded. Loud sobs wracked through her body as she shook. Snot dripped from her nose as she looked up at the overcast sky.

Before she could ask any questions, it answered with the first drops of rain.

It was never more than a drizzle, but it softened the ground, mercifully making the act of digging a grave slightly easier. She dug with a shovel she had found discarded in their shed and cried. She picked up his rotting body and cried. She lowered him in and cried. She ran out of tears somewhere in the process of packing dirt on top of him, and when she finished she fell to the ground.

Barbara Eaton is 47, and four facts remain:

1. She shot her husband.
2. She broke a promise to herself.
3. Our word is the very last inch of us.
4. She had one bullet left.

The thing about guns is that if you hold them for long enough, they stop feeling heavy.

As she slowly inserts the pistol into her mouth, she closes her eyes and thinks apologies.

To father and mother, for forgetting.

For Lizzy, for being too late.

To Robert Jr., for leaving him behind.

To Bob, for finally pulling the trigger.

To herself, for breaking a vow, for waiting this long, for what she's about to do.

And to God, for whatever she forgot to apologize for.

The last time Barbara Eaton shoots a gun, there is nothing left of her but the trigger finger. As the bullet tears through her ghost, she slides to the ground for a promise kept, and breathes her last for a promise broken.

