

In My Dreams

By Katherine Fang

No one ever said being the new kid was easy, especially when it's the last year of middle school. My dad keeps on switching jobs, and whenever he has to relocate I go with him because there's nowhere else I can go. In just a few years, we've moved an overwhelming three times. I've kind of forgotten what it feels like to live in a permanent home, and have "friends" for more than, I don't know, a couple of months? People have already found their friend groups - just look! The first bell hasn't even rung yet, kids are starting to pile in, and I'm freaking out! Because it's *my* first day, while everyone else has had 83 days to make friends. I'm not just sitting alone, I'm lonely.

Being able to easily form real relationships with other people sounds simple enough, right? It is *not* easy! If I decide to just "be myself" I don't think anyone's going to like me. Fortunately, I've been quite skilled at putting on a different persona for each time we've moved. I don't enjoy becoming different people, but as long as I'm not a complete loser, then I'll do what I have to do.

The other kids stare at *me* as if I'm a giraffe in a zoo! So I just follow whatever isn't considered weird. And I become people who I'm not.

Once I became Ms. Charismatic, Confident and Popular in Cincinnati, everyone wanted to be my friend. Boys asked me out and I turned them down. It worked in my favor, as it made me seem like I was too good for anyone else. In reality, I knew they liked my popular girl facade and not *me*. In the cafeteria, my new clique pointed fingers and snickered at a quiet girl who read a lot, which scared me even more. I admit that I made fun of her too, and it just felt like I was making fun of myself.

Then came Pittsburgh, where I portrayed myself as the Athletic Agent, but I felt more like the Pathetic Athletic. I joined the field hockey team and made a considerable amount of friends. If only they knew that the real me couldn't care less about sports. On the rides back from evening games, I'd secretly draw in the dim light of the bus. If anyone asked me what I was doing, I'd reply, "Homework!"

In every city, I'd scroll through social media late at night because I admit, I am insecure and I care what other people are doing with their lives. And I'd see all my peers having fun. Without me. Because even though they were my "friends", they didn't include me outside of school. Perhaps they caught on to the fact that I was ... deceiving them. I was jealous as I watched people laugh with their friends. I'm desperate for



someone I can rely on... even after all these years, no matter how many “friends” I’ve acquired, the empty void that I feel is never filled. I wanted to be accepted, but it didn’t feel quite right when people were accepting my fake personalities.

So now I’m the new kid in Detroit and I have no clue who I should be this time. People are starting to whisper about me, and sooner or later I’ll have to walk to the front of the class and tell them who I am. But really, who am I?

I don’t think I can handle being someone that I’m not. Not anymore. It’s so tiring being someone else, but something in this city feels different than the others. Maybe it’s the curious energy in this room, or it’s the Art Club posters that are plastered all over the hallways. This time, I might sketch in the cafeteria during lunch and whip out my comic books during class. I’ll be humble and not that super arrogant girl that I tried to be in Cincinnati. I won’t force myself to do sports, because after joining that field hockey team in Pittsburgh, I won’t need to engage in athletic activities for another 50 years. At the very least I won’t be forcing myself to be a different person, and I’ll try to figure out who I really am. And maybe, just this one time, someone at this school will like me for the real me. Maybe not within the next 5 minutes, 5 months, or even 5 years, but... I don’t know unless I try, right?



Turning Point

Danielle Costantino

Yes, Dad? I know, Dad. We're not going to be late, and the recruiters aren't even coming until the third quarter. I'm getting my equipment from the garage right now. *(places hand on the garage handle, then stops in place)* *(whispers to self)* Come on Ray, it's now or never. *(back to regular voice)* You know what? I am not going today. *(pauses, then turns head around)* I am not going tomorrow. I am not going the next day or the next day or the next day. *(turns whole body around)* I am not going ever again. I'm tired of you talking to me like this every damn day for the past twelve years, and treating me like your puppet. Trust me, I know that I can make it far as a football player, even to the NFL. Just because you're pushing me to do this, I am refusing, and I will continue to refuse. *(points index finger at Dad)* This isn't what I want to do. It used to be a fun hobby for me back in the day. You know, playing catch with Dad. You forced this into being my lifestyle...my life. *(walks until four feet away from Dad)* I guess you take pleasure in doing that, since you drove Mom to leave. You're good at mentally abusing people. She never even looked back at us. I have to hear the other guys on the team telling me my Mom is probably having fun with other men. What a lovely couple of people that like to turn their backs on their own kid. You've always pushed me into a corner, and this particular corner is football. *(takes three steps back)* Football is the manliest thing a guy could do, right? You're all about pride, so you want your son to be the flyest out there. Yeah, I am an athlete. Look at me. *(puts hands on hips)* You see those moves and turns when I do ballet? That's athleticism at its finest. I need more coordination and perseverance completing a grand jete on the stage than completing a reception down the field. This brings you shame though. You won't even drive me ten minutes to rehearsals or pay the \$2.50 for me to take the bus there. It's okay when we have to fly halfway across the country for football tournaments though. God forbid your son does something "feminine". It would be even more of a shame if people accused me of being gay. *(wipes sweat off of forehead)* So what? This is my life, and I should do



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what makes me happy, and not live the life that you wanted for yourself, but failed. It's alright though because I'll be out of here next year attending a small liberal arts college, where I won't be on some big Division 1 football team. I'll be dancing and learning how to live a life without you controlling it. I don't need your acceptance because I accept myself. I'm sorry for being a disappointment, since you never forget to remind me that everyday. So no, I am not getting my equipment from the garage. You can explain to coach and the recruiters why I'm never coming back. (*exits*)



What I Will Tell You

By Isabel Mehta

(Mia lies in bed scrolling through Instagram on her phone. The only light is from her phone screen, everything else is dark. She stops on one image.)

It's been a long time since we've smiled so brightly like that.

I could never tell you how yellow school buses made me feel so small. I could never tell you about my early mornings listening to Taylor Swift and staring out the window pretending my life was a movie. I had to pretend to want to sit alone on the bus because pretending was easier than admitting I would be alone anyway. My eyelashes were long and sleek like my should-be shaven legs and the tears slid off and drip drip dripped onto the cracked leather seats. People stared.

I could never tell you what it felt like to watch you leave me slowly. We wrote stories and braided each other's hair and read fantasy novels like a sport, but soon your shirts were tighter and cut lower and your hair was straighter and you blended in with all of the other girls. And all of the boys stared. Booobbs. They never stared at me.

I could never tell you how I existed in your shadow. You always walked two steps ahead, you never let me synch up to your rhythm. Your words oozed jealousy like how your makeup bottles oozed foundation.

I could never tell you how disappointed I was that you stopped reading books. You stopped using big words. You made me feel ashamed to be drowning in the world of Hogwarts instead of drowning at a house party on Saturday night. You were the girl that reminded me of what I wasn't, and I reminded you of what you used to be, so we fit together like puzzle pieces. I thought we filled each other's voids.

I could never tell you how it made my heart hurt to see you prance around with all of those girls so happily. I remember that night so clearly. Clutching an iPhone alone in one's room on a Friday night is only followed by catastrophic consequences, I have learned. Did my feelings ever cross your mind as you were editing and filtering that picture? Did you realize how much you hurt me by clicking "share"? I thought you said you couldn't hang because you were sick. I guess not. My eyelashes were heavy that day with thick syrupy tears. I never understood how I was so kind to you and you stepped on me like a doormat that read "Welcome" in big, bold letters.



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After that you just became another face in the halls, faded, gliding, floating. I was lucky to get split-second eye contact or a soft smile. I think it's possible you felt a little sorry for me.

(Smiles) But I also could never tell you thank you. Thank you thank you god bless you thank you. My battle scars were once fresh and clean cut but since then they've scabbed and peeled making room for new skin beneath. And that skin is thicker, tougher, my copper shield. Because even though you made me question myself over and over and over again, I think you also taught me how to love, properly.

I want to tell you, and I will tell you, someday, that I no longer try to hug icicles like you. I hug people that are warm and kind and don't melt between my fingertips. I treat my new friends like the kings and queens they are so we don't fall apart at the seams. And I have a new best friend, but she doesn't remind me of us, not in the slightest. She makes me smile when I'm alone while you made my lips thinner and my smile weaker. She puts my heart on a pedestal and I put hers on one even higher. And together we laugh in all of those bitches' faces with the fire of a thousand suns and our eyelashes drip drip drip tears of gold. That's what I will tell you.

