

There is something about college that has changed me. Or maybe I am just understanding the world better now that I am older. The world is blank. It's just bland. When I was a child, I would go outside, and everything seemed so bright and technicolor, but now it's all muted. I tried so many things to bring the color back, alcohol, weed, shrooms, because people said that it would help me see another, better world, but all that happened was that the colors became even more muted when the trip or the feeling of being stoned or drunk wore off. That muted color became my baseline, and these colors that were so vibrant now have a grey tone. Soon I'm afraid I will lose all colors, and my world will be all black and white.

It's not just the colors that are losing their luster but touch as well. I used to snuggle into fuzzy blankets and how they felt against my skin after shaving and in a clean bed was an almost magical feeling. Now, maybe it's the fact that I haven't washed my sheets in three months, but they don't give me any comfort anymore. My favorite articles of clothes are silk, and their softness doesn't feel like I am being grazed by the kindness of the sun anymore.

Music. Music doesn't sound the same.

I blame college.

I have been trying my best to do the best I can in my classes, but the challenge of getting up and going to class and focusing has been drained me of my spirit. So much so that I may be on academic probation by my next semester.

I have one friend in college. Her name is Isabel, and she is lovely. She is so perfect and thinks all my problems would be solved if I pretended like everything was alright. If I just sit and do my work, if I just put on a smile, all my problems would vanish. She doesn't understand that

homework makes me feel inferior to my other classmates, who are much smarter than me. And sometimes, even the thought of getting out of bed is exhausting. I have to take a nap before I attempt it. She is great, though. Someone I look up to and would be like in an instant if I could.

Isabel constantly invites me to parties. She is approachable, I guess I am too, but she is kind, and when someone tries to talk to me, I think they must have some ulterior motive. I am either stoic or will attack like a chihuahua. She took me to a party once, and she left me after some time. As I was grabbing a drink to cope with the noise, and this frat boy came up to me.

“Hey, how you doin’?” He fucking quoted Friends. I hate him already. I love that show, and now he ruined it. I didn’t respond. I just looked at him with an expression I hoped said to *get the fuck away from me* but probably looked more confused because he explained, “Ha, it’s a Friends reference.”

“I know. I don’t live under a rock.” I sputtered while bringing the beer I just poured to my mouth.

He looked at me with wide eyes like I just told him his cat died and then somehow said, “I like you. You’re sassy. Come hang out with my friends and me.”

“No. No thanks.” The thought of hanging out with more frat guys made my stomach turn and I couldn’t tell if it was disgust or excitement.

“Come on! It’ll be fun! We can play hockey or something.” The cheerfulness of his voice was arguably charming but almost deceitful. *You’re going to break my heart, aren’t you?*

“Hockey?”

“It’s a drinking game. You try to hit other people’s drink with a quarter,” he explained with this golden retriever smile. I finally look at him and noticed his features that were almost

fake. His light brown, naturally highlighted hair shagged around his face, and his canines were a little too sharp. They made it hard not to look at his smile. His eyes were good competition, though, the way the blue of his shirt made his eyes appear almost as if the ocean had fit entirely in his irises. He stood at about 5' 11", and if he said he was 6 feet, he would be a liar. His limbs were lanky like he just had another growth spurt at 20 years old, but it only made him resemble a dog more. If he wasn't a labrador or golden retriever in his past life, I would be utterly shocked. I figured worst-case scenario I could probably take him in a fight.

He looked at me, waiting for a response.

"Fine, I will play your game." I conceded. It sounded fun.

He grabbed my hand and guided me to the table where his friends were playing hockey. As we approached the table, he looked around and yelled, "Guys! Move over and let me and...." He looked at me, realizing he never asked my name, "What is your name?"

"Genevieve," I responded a bit too quickly, but I had prepared myself with the answer all day, "You can call me Evie," I added a small smile to make myself seem kinder than I acted in the moments before.

"Evie, I'm James, and this is everyone. You should learn their names fast because you'll need to know them for the game." He proceeded to explain hockey to me in excruciating detail.

I can't remember what happened after that.

I must have lost the game because the next thing I remember, I was walking back to my apartment. I left the party without Isabel. It was cold. The kind of cold that made my ears hurt. I clenched my jaw so hard that I felt like my teeth were about to fall to the floor. I rubbed my

tongue over them to make sure I didn't lose any. The cold autumn air felt nice, and it had begun to sprinkle, which made the earth smell new.

I wish I could be new.

To start over again and be better. Try and enjoy my childhood more than I originally had.

I kept walking. As a young woman, walking alone in the middle of the night in a big city like Seattle, I am always cautious. Looking over my shoulder every few steps to make sure I don't have any unwanted followers.

When I was two blocks away from my apartment, I glanced around and noticed a figure. I picked up my pace. Almost skipping, I continued to look behind me. The figure was still there. It was staring at me, walking slowly in my direction; I began to panic. I should have called an uber. Almost to my apartment. I turn the skip [build more tension \ / continue skipping] into a run. I made it inside the building. The figure was across the street. I rubbed my eyes to see if I could get a better look, and it vanished.

I must still be wasted.

I crawled up the stairs to my apartment door. My hands felt the rough carpet from too many spilled drinks from the countless individuals who have lived in this building all the years before me. I wonder how they are doing. If the past occupants of this apartment building ever think about who is living in their old space. Finally, I made it. While unlocking the door with the pink key with cats on it, I noticed a red mark on the knuckles on my right hand. *I wonder what happened there. Maybe I fell or something.* My banged-up hand opened the door to all my apartment lights on and Isabel on the couch.

“Oh, thank the gods. You made it home!” She shrieked at me.

“Yeah, sorry I left without you. I honestly don’t even remember leaving.”

“We left together. And then you just ran off in the opposite direction.” She went on and explained the horrific details of my behavior that led to us leaving. “You were playing that game with that guy, and out of nowhere, you freaked out! You started yelling at everyone playing the game.”

Oh boy, I thought, I really need to stop drinking.

“... and then you punched the dude you were sitting next to.” She was sitting on the couch, her onyx hair was tied in a bun, and her pale face had a deep sense of worry. *She’s scared of me.*

“Shit, dude. I’ll apologize to everyone tomorrow.” I walked over to the fridge for a nightcap. I grabbed a beer out of the refrigerator and asked Isabel if she wanted one.

“What? Evie, it’s four in the morning. I’m going to sleep,” she started stumbling off the couch in the direction of the bathroom. “I just wanted to make sure you got home okay.”

“Well, thanks, Iz. I appreciate that.”

I found my way to the couch, hitting my leg on the coffee table on the way. I guzzled the IPA down, then mimicked Isabel. Stumbling off the couch in the direction of the bathroom, but instead of brushing my teeth like Miss Perfect, I puked.

I love puking when I am drunk. It feels like I am getting all the demons out.

I fell asleep on my pillow of a bed.

The next day was a big hungover blur.

I texted the people who I offended the night before and apologized—hating myself the entire time. *Why do I do these things? Why can't I control my fucking emotions?* Too many thoughts piled up in my head.

I took a nap.

At three-thirty in the afternoon, Isabel barged into my room.

“Get up, lazy butt!” She joked, but I was in no joking mood.

“I’m not lazy. I’m hungover. Now let me go back to sleep.”

“Nope! We are going to the park.” *Why was she so fucking bubbly? How is she not a pile of dread like me?* “I guess punching that guy was the right move because James just invited us to hang out with him and his friends at Gas Works,” she kept talking, “I’m so proud of you, Evie. You’re gonna have friends that you made all by your lonesome.” *This bitch.* Isabel does those backhanded compliments. An east coast thing, or is she from the south? I can never remember.

“You aren’t going to let me die in peace, are you?”

“Nope! Now come on and get in the shower.” She grabbed my hand to pull me out of bed. For whatever reason, this irritated me, and I slapped her straight in the face.

“What the fuck, Evie?” Her hand left mine and reached for her cheek.

I got up instantly, “I am so sorry, Iz. I don’t know what came over me.” *Fuck, fuck, fuck. I’m a horrible friend. She hates me now. I lost my one friend. This is gonna make living with her really awkward. Shit! Our apartment is month to month. She’s moving out.* I sat on the edge of my bed and cried into my hands.

“What are you crying about? You’re not the one that was slapped by their best friend.” She laughed, and it eased my anxiety, “Jeez, Evie, it’s just a shower. Really no reason to start an MMA career over it. And trust me, your bed will appreciate the distance.” She does have a way of making me feel better, and my sobs turned into laughter in no time.

In the shower, my thoughts went on a rampage. I started getting weird flashbacks to the night before, but none of it made sense. One thing that stood out to me was the figure on my walk home. I couldn’t get the image out of my mind. I tried to think of anything else, but my thoughts kept creeping back to the figure across the street staring at me.

The tiles in my shower had a weird design to them, and if I looked at them for too long, I could see faces watching me. I tried not to look at them too often, today though it felt like they crept all around me. Judging my makeup smeared face and all the regrets I had from the night before.

The water rushed down my body, and I imagined the evil thoughts leaving my mind. Stepping out of the shower, I wrapped myself in a robe, my hair in a t-shirt as to not damage my curls, looking into the mirror while the beads of water evaporated off of my body without the help of a towel, holding back tears that began to form in my eyes. Eyes that looked as if someone stepped in mud, brown and dull. I let my wet hair fall out of the t-shirt and saw the (almost) maroon-colored curls starting to form nicely, hoping they would stay like that, and I began to put on my face.

An old coworker of mine gave me a piece of advice that I decided to make my life motto. The motto was simple but effective, “Feel shitty, look pretty,” I don’t remember much of that coworker, but I remember that saying. So getting ready was a task I forced upon myself every

day, even when there was nothing to do. I felt shitty often. As I began to put on my foundation, I heard Isabel barge into my room.

“I’m gonna help you pick out an outfit,” she started rifling through my closet, throwing my clothes on the bed that would inevitably end up on the floor. “Do you have anything, not flannel?”

“This is Seattle! Of course, I would only have flannels!” I yelled back while trying not to smear the mascara I was putting on my lower lashes. “What do you want me to wear in the middle of fall? A dress?”

I walked into my room, where Isabel had laid out my outfit for this park day. She chose a pair of my mom jeans that made my square-ish body look a little curvier and a sweater I hadn’t worn in about two years. It was a cropped blue sweater with the edges frayed and a secret hole in the sleeve so I could put my thumb through it. I paired her “outfit” with my black leather jacket and a pair of Dr. Martens. My hair had decided not to cooperate. There was an urge to shave it off right then. After I was dressed I took a final look in the mirror. I didn’t feel comfortable. Something about how the clothes were pressed against me was putting me on edge. *Take a deep breath, and don’t yell at anyone today. Maybe don’t talk. That is probably the safest option. Just don’t talk.*

“Ready to go?!” Iz yelled from the living room.

“Yeah, I just have to fill my water bottle.” I grabbed my phone, wallet, keys, and water bottled and met Isabel at the car after putting seven regular ice cubes and one star-shaped ice cube for good luck into the water bottle that was more like my child.

We made it to the park. The overcast was heavy, which made it hard to find the group we were meeting. Luckily, Isabel remembered what everyone looked like because I forgot. She greeted everyone with a hug and a big smile that screamed, “love me, love me!” Looking around for a place to hide but, at the same time, resemble someone wanting to socialize, I found a lonesome blanket. It was wooly and made the feeling of the clothes touching me ten times worse.

There were some children playing tag or some imaginary game. Their raincoats flew behind them like capes. I envied them.

“Oh, to be high on a child’s imagination, right?” An unfamiliar voice said from behind me.

“Excuse me?”

“Imagine if you could get high on a child’s imagination. How cool would that be?”

“Oh, yeah, that would be amazing. I would kill to have my childhood self back.” The voice stood in front of me. She was small, maybe 5 feet tall, and a hundred pounds if she was soaking wet. Her blonde hair was short, and her features were sharp.

“Follow me,” she reached her small hand down to help lift me from the safe space I created on the uncomfortable blanket. I grabbed it. Her hand had many callouses, which made me realize how soft mine were. She never let go of my hand as we walked to the top of the hill. “I may know of a way to actually get the fix.”

“What are you talking about?” The confusion was making my head hurt, which in turn made my entire body tense, and the irritability started to kick in.

“We could actually get high on a child’s imagination. I know it sounds crazy, but I have done it.”

“Ooookay lady, sure.” I began to head back to the safe spot, but her rough hand held onto mine for dear life and didn’t let me escape.

“I know how it sounds but just watch, okay?.” She led me to a child that had wandered from his parents and began talking with them. She did something with her free hand over the child, and he fainted.

“OH SHIT! Is he okay? What did you do to him?” She didn’t respond but replicated the hand movement over me, going on her tiptoes so her hand could be over my head.

I started to feel funny, like butterflies were trying to escape from my throat. My head felt lighter, and I began to giggle. Looking around, I noticed how the once overcast sky had transformed into a sunny day. Gas Works was now a lot bigger than what I remembered. A bug flew past my eyes. *Was that bug wearing a dress? No, it couldn’t.* The grass wasn’t neon, but it was bright and had a shimmer. When I laid down to get a closer look at the grass, I noticed that the shimmer was glitter, and it didn’t feel like regular grass but fur from a cat that took care of their coat. *I wish I could have a jacket made from this.*

“You could if you wanted to,” Blondie responded to my thought, finally letting go of my hand. “You could have a coat made from whatever you want. And look at the water. Do you see that?” My eyes squinted as hard as they could to try to see what she was seeing.

Then I saw it. Fins the color of rubies splashed the surface of the Puget Sound. “Is that? No way. It’s not possible.” The fins weren’t connected to a fish head but to what could only be

described as a man. A man so chiseled you had to wonder if mermaids had their own gym made with boulders.

“It is. That is a merman.”

“What did you do to me?”

“I gave you that boy’s imagination. Luckily he is still in the sweet fantasy stage of childhood. I have had a kid once who couldn’t stop seeing faces in everything she looked at. Not a good trip, if I’m being honest.”

“How long does it last?”

“It comes and goes but usually as long as you let it.” At that moment, Isabel started calling my name. I didn’t want to let this feeling go, though.

“I have to go back to my friend, but how can I get ahold of you? I want to do this again. Like tomorrow.”

“I’ll be around. Go to your friend. I will see you shortly.” Then she whispered in my ear, “and, don’t worry, some of the effects stick around longer than the imaginary.”

“Like what?”

“You will see soon. Go back to Isabel and don’t say a word about this.”

Walking back to the group, I tried to wave to the merman, who kept popping his head out of the water. The feeling was innocent, kind, the sense of a dream, but this was reality. Wasn’t it?

As I reached the group, I turned around to see where Blondie went, but she was gone. However, at the corner of my eye stood the figure. *What does it want with me?*

Isabel was talking to the frat boy from the night before. His face looked unharmed from the punch he took, and I tried to remember where I punched him or if it was him at all. They saw me and waved me over. Whatever anxieties I usually would have had seemed nonexistent. I haven't experienced this much inner peace since my high school graduation when the feeling of leaving home and starting my own life was so close to being a reality. The ignorance of childhood was bright back then. There were children screaming, playing make-believe or tag, and I fought every instinct to go join them. I had to play like I was normal. When I finally reached them, Isabel was staring at me like she didn't fully recognize me.

"Evie, you remember James from last night?" Isabel motioned to the puppy of a man standing next to her.

"Yeah, I remember him. I'm sorry for punching you last night."

"You didn't punch me," he stated so causally, it took me by surprise. "You punched Brain. A good punch, if I might add. Have you taken any classes?"

"No, I've never taken any classes. My dad taught me how to throw a punch when I was a kid. I wanted to do karate, but he couldn't afford it, so he taught me tips on how to defend myself." Still confused, *I continued*, "Why would I punch a dude I can't even remember meeting?"

"I guess he kept putting his hand on your leg. I heard you tell him to stop touching you, but he was drunk and didn't give a shit," *People really need to understand boundaries*. "He is going to have a sick black eye, and he got it from a girl, haha." His intentions seemed pure, or maybe I was still feeling the effects of the kid's imagination and was too trusting.

"You were really sweet, though to kick him out." Isabel must be crushing on him because she usually would have gone and socialized with other people since she wasn't involved in the

conversation for so long. “Isn’t he sweet, Evie? Like who would’ve done that to their own teammate?”

“He’s your teammate? I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. He needed to be knocked down a size.” Changing the topic, he added, “How long have you two known each other?”

Isabel went on to practice her vocal skills but described the not-exciting story of how we met. It was two years ago, during our freshmen year at the UW. We were dorm-mates, and at that time, I was fun, and we would go out, almost joined a sorority together before I realized that that was not the life for me, and we would talk about everything. We were fast friends. Nowadays, I wonder why she is still so kind to me, why she puts up with all of my bullshit. I didn’t get the answer until she told James.

“She reminds me a lot of my sister. They have similar tendencies and mannerisms. I miss my sister a lot.” She was avoiding eye contact with me when she said this. I was dumbstruck. I had to walk away—what a way to kill my high.

Isabel’s sister, Taylor, had serious problems. She ruined Iz’s childhood. I am nothing like her. Even if I am in her eyes, it made me question our relationship even more. I walked back to the safe space I had found earlier, looking around, trying to see if I could spot the merman again. I needed that feeling again. Right as I was about to give up, he popped out of the water and winked at me. I laid down and realized the softness of that once rough blanket, and closed my eyes.

I woke up at home. In my bed with my comfy clothes on. *How did I get back here?* I looked at my phone. It read 11:30 pm. We got to Gas Works at 5:00 pm. What happened?

Strolling into the living room, hoping to find Isabel to give me some answers, but she wasn't in there. I opened the door to her room, my knuckles had turned to a lovely shade of blue, but she wasn't there either.

Panic started to press against my chest. I didn't know what to do. I paced around the house, trying to calm myself down but realizing that I was accelerating my heart rate, which made the panic worse. I felt a tear stroll down my cheek and then a river flooded onto my face. The thought of something happening to her made my body start to squirm. I fell to the floor of the living room and my body shook with fear.

I found myself back in my room, phone in hand, sitting on the floor next to my bed. Wiping the tears from my face as I called her.

"HEY, EVIE!" She screamed into the phone.

"Dude, where the fuck are you? How did I get home?" I tried to hide the anxiety in my voice, but the shuddering was too apparent.

"What are you talking about? I am at the bars in CapHill, we invited you, but you said you needed to go home?" The noise in the background made it hard to hear what she was saying. "James was kind enough to give you a ride back to the apartment. You don't remember this?"

"No, I don't. But have fun. I'll see you when I get home." My room had turned upside down. The knot that had formed in my chest seemed to have tripled in size. *How did I forget that James drove me home? I don't remember drinking when I was there. Maybe the high had an odd after-effect Blondie forgot to mention. If only I could have some more, though. That was insane. How am I supposed to*

find her? My mind went wild with the curiosity of how I managed to blackout while not having a drop of alcohol. But the thought that calmed me down was remembering the high.

A child's imagination. I could have never thought that a child's imagination would be the best high of my life. Thinking about the colors that were dull for so long turning into the vibrant shades of the rainbow began to raise my spirits in this confusing state I was in.

I thought of the merman, of the bug in the dress, and everything felt like it was made with happiness. I wanted more.

My heart seemed to ease the marathon it was in and return to a normal speed. I got off the floor of my room, made my way to the kitchen, and started preparing a quesadilla. Personally, when I make quesadillas, I will add a shit ton of cheese and spice it up with garlic salt, pepper, chili powder, cayenne, and paprika. It adds a bit more flavor to the average quesadilla. When it was done, the cheese melting out of the tortilla, I grabbed a beer and sat on the couch. The first bite was unlike any of the quesadillas I have had recently. *Did Iz get a different type of cheddar?* The deliciousness of the simple snack was beyond what I could have imagined. It was gone in six bites. I decided to make another, and the same sensation occurred. I sat back on the couch, beer in hand, and turned on a show that I have watched a million times.

I felt content. Like all the worries I have ever had, never happened.

When I finished the beer, there was no desire for a second or third. The bed was the only thing that could complete my night. I forgot about the blackout that occurred early in the day and slept.

Most mornings are incredibly hard to get out of bed and be motivated to live life. This morning was different. I awoke at 6:00 to the sun shining through my bedroom window. It felt warm on my face, and it raised me out of bed with ease. This had been one of the easiest mornings I had in a while, and I was excited to attend to class tomorrow. It didn't take long to escape the bed that usually held me hostage until Isabel would come in and drag me out of the comfort and safety my bed provides me. Walking to the kitchen, I realized that I had woken up before Isabel. I was ready to shock her with the competence this morning had given me. While I made coffee for us both, I briefly remembered Blondie. *Was that even real? It must have been.*

Whatever witchcraft she

did to me worked. Pushing the thought away, in the fear whatever magic she gave me would leave, I brought one cup into Isabel's room and hushed her awake.

"Good morning, Iz," I whisper into her ear as a way to not startle her too much. "I made you coffee."

She groaned, grabbed some of the blankets that fell off her arm, and snuggled deeper into her bed.

"Isabel, it's time to wake up. It's time to wake up in the morning," I sang a little louder than I intended. It did the trick, though, because she turned and faced me after my little jingle woke her from the peaceful slumber I had just destroyed.

"What time is it?" Isabel moaned while trying to pull her eyes apart from the sleep that clung them together.

“It’s 6:30 and a semi-beautiful Seattle day if I don’t say so myself.” My chipperness was shocking enough that her eyes darted open and stared at me. “I made coffee,” I placed it on her spotless bedside table.

“Are you okay? You seem different,” there was concern in her voice, and she sat up in her bed, reaching for my arm.

“I’m great! Just ready to get this day started, would you want to go to our favorite coffee shop and grab breakfast like we used to?” We found a coffee shop right after we met. It’s in Fremont District, not far from Gas Works, and we decided it would be our spot when we went in and saw that they play live music and sold alcohol as well.

“You want to go to Stone Way? We haven’t been there in over a year. Not since...” Isabel trailed off. I wasn’t sure where she was going with it but decided not to read anything into it. “Yeah, that would be fun. Give me an hour to get ready.” She took a sip of her coffee and began to emerge from her bed.

“Yay! I’m so excited, just like the good ole days.” I left her room, took a shower, and finished my coffee while I got ready.

As I was trying to figure out what to wear, I noticed how almost all of my clothes are all so dark. I checked every inch of my closet, hoping to find something that expressed how I was feeling. After about ten minutes of scouring my closet and dresser, I settled on my blue vintage midi skirt, a tan sweater, and a grey trench coat since, knowing Seattle, it was about to be a little chilly outside.

As we entered Stone Way, we were greeted by the baristas we used to chat with on the daily. They remembered our order and asked why we hadn't been around in a while.

"Life has been hectic. You know how it goes." Iz diffused the potentially awkward conversation about the real reason we haven't come in recently. We grabbed our coffees and breakfast. I usually ordered their cajun benedict, but today I felt like waffles, and Iz ate her usual, Rosalia's Biscocho, which consisted of a cheddar jalapeno biscuit, egg, avocado, tomato, mango aioli, and mixed greens. It never appealed to me, but Isabel loved it. We made our way to a free table and dived into our meals.

"You know, I have never seen you eat waffles before." She stated in a way that seemed almost interrogating.

"Yeah, I don't know. It just seemed like the move today. How was the rest of your night?" I was determined to find answers on basically anything that could fill in the gaps my memory has been creating.

"Oh, it was fun! I wish you could've joined. James ended up meeting us at the bar we were at, and he is just so funny," *Does she like him?* "He asked about you a lot. I think he may have a little crush on Miss Evie Ozanne. What do you think about him?" She also wanted answers.

"I don't know, honestly. I haven't thought about him too much. He is very attractive, but he's not really my type." I wasn't sure what to say. I don't know him very well plus I think that Isabel might like him and I don't know what to make of it.

"You should hang out with him more. He may be just what you need. Also, your type of man is not usually the best people." I looked around the coffee shop, trying to avoid eye contact

with Isabel when I saw a small woman with short blonde hair. *Blondie?* She walked towards the bathroom.

“I have to go potty. I will be right back.” I had to excuse myself so that I could talk to her. As I reached the bathrooms, I waited for Blondie to come out, but it was vacant. I went into the bathroom and hoped for a sign that she had been there, but there was nothing. Washing my hands, wondering where she could have gone, *I must have seen someone else.* I returned to Isabel and she immediately went back to trying to convince me to date a guy she clearly likes.

“We should try to hang out with him this week! Maybe he will ask you out or something.” The pep in her voice was convincing enough I almost gave in. There was just one question I needed to know first.

“Why are you pushing so hard for me and James to end up together?”

“Oh Evie, I just want you to be happy, and James radiates happiness, don’t you think?”

The look on her face was something I haven’t seen on her for too long. It was the look of unrequited love, Isabel had a habit of giving the guy she had a thing for to her best friends. I have seen her heartbroken over this strategy she can’t seem to break, twice now. Luckily, I was never the friend she had set up before but if I don’t play my cards right then our friendship will be difficult to maintain.

“I am happy Isabel. I know I have been in a weird mood the past few months...”

“It’s been a year. You have been acting all sad and weird for a year now. Do you understand how that has made me feel?” *That took a turn.*

“Whoa, Isabel I’m sorry if I have been a pain, but I am better now, I promised. If you want me to date James I will I guess, but either way, I don’t think a person is a magical cure-all

to make a person better. And I may not have been the same preppy girl you originally knew, but I wasn't a menace to society or anything." Tears began swelling in my eyes and I tried to keep them in place as to not attract too much attention at the restaurant. It didn't work out very well and what I thought was a normal volume was a scream and my tears had fallen all over the table.

"Eve, you know I didn't mean to hurt you. I just have felt so helpless this past year. You are my best friend and to see you not being, well you, hurts and I can't seem to shake the feeling like I have lost you," Isabel said looking down at the table, and rubbing her hands together. "You know, you don't have to date James, right? I am not trying to force you into a relationship you don't genuinely want. I just want you..."

"To be happy," I finished for her. "I understand that Iz. I really, really do. Maybe we should go though, I hate crying in public."

We left the cafe and made our way back to our apartment. Not a single word was spoken in the car. The feeling of mutual anxiety and dread over how we both acted at Stone Way was so strong, you would need a jack hammer to break through it.

I thought to myself about how she must be feeling, helpless is the word she said. She feels helpless, like I don't? I finally found something wonderful and was starting to feel like a normal human again, beginning to want to be productive and good and fun like I used to be and she can't see it. Anguish rushed through my body and all I wanted was a nap.

When we finally made it back to our apartment, we both walked straight to our rooms, still without a word and closed the door. *We will be fine*, I thought as I crashed face first on my bed, only sliding my shoes off.

There is a forest around me, brightly light from the afternoon sun. I lay in the dirt, looking up through the branches and the patches of sky, when I hear someone call out my name.

“Evie!” The voice calls throughout the woods.

I sit up and a glance around, not seeing a thing besides the brush and trees. But I hear my name again. I stand, knowing deep down that you should never answer the call of your name in the forest. Walking without knowing exactly where the voice is coming from, simply hoping my instincts will take me in the right direction.

The redwoods are flowing, almost breathing in the wind. I start to get the feeling like its hungry, and I may be a feast for it soon. My name keeps echoing throughout the trees, “Evie! Evie! Come to me, my sweet Evie!” I feel rather soothed by this voice calling me, unsure though if that is the correct feeling I should have.

The forest starts to get darker, fuller, and I begin to wonder if I will ever find this voice that is calling my name. When I see her, she is glowing, almost angelic in her white dress. Blondie lit up the deep, dark, forest. *She has been calling me. She wants me to be with her.* She turns toward me and her blue eyes darken to a shade almost black.

“Not you!” She calls. I look around knowing she can’t possibly mean me, when I see the figure. My heart begins to race as the figure ignores Blondie and darts straight to me. “NOT YOU!” Blondie calls again as if the words will make it go away.

The figure reaches me and grabs me tight.

I awoke to the smell of something delicious. The marriage of garlic and onions simmering on the stove. I must have slept all day, maybe I'm growing. I turn to check my phone and see I have a message from James, "hey if you're not busy later would you be down to chill? Maybe i can see your apartment when you are actually conscious lol," bleh

Possible ending #1 (unfinished)

When I awoke, I was constricted by my wrists and ankles. Forced to sleep on my back. The terror of letting demons get in was excruciating. All I wanted was to be on my side. I barely noticed anything else besides the desire not to be forced to sleep like a corpse.

Is this what sleep paralysis feels like?

It was the next morning when I woke up that I realized that I was not at home, in my pillow, my cloud, my save space. I was somewhere cold. It became way too bright in the morning that I felt blinded by the light bouncing off of the bleach-white walls, and uncomfortable

because I couldn't scratch my nose that has been itchy for hours. I tried to sit up and was stopped by the constraints around my wrists and ankles. I was floundering like a fish on land when a nurse came in and forced pills down my throat. She checked all over my mouth too to see if I somehow tricked her into not taking these pills.

I saw the back of my eyelids soon after watching the nurse, with too loose a uniform for her curvy body, leave my room.

I awoke again, but this time something was different. I was able to move freely. Let loose by the demons, either in a nurses uniform or invisible. They trick you these demons. Maybe they are working with the figure. Maybe they are making me feel crazy, tying me up and giving me pills that wont work because I am the one who can see clearly. Ther was a trail for what I can only describe as small shards of ripped paper.

I ran.

I was somehow able to make it out of the place I was taken prisoner and soon I was running down the street in the nightgown that shows all of your ass. I didn't care. I kept on running.

When my breath finally seemed to not function as it should, I stopped. I was in the woods, probably in Discovery Park somewhere, when I realized I was following a path. My walk was slow but purposeful. I was heading somewhere. I was ready to turn back or just give up and sleep on one of the tree stumps nearby, when I saw this patch of blonde hair. *Blondie*. My pace quickened. I yelled her name.

“BLONDIE! BLONDIE!”

She never budged. I lost the hope of having a friend's help as she turned a corner and I wasn't able to see where she went after. *She could have walked off the path.* I slowed down. Feeling depleted, I found a tree that looked too beautiful not to die on. I planted my flubber ass on it and slept.

The things people dream about are crazy when they are stressed. But when you are finally at peace with your decision not to move from a tree branch, you sleep into oblivion. That is until, you wake up and see the fucking figure that has been following you for what feels like years.

It was lurking around a tree trunk not 50 feet away from where I decided to have my final resting place. I didn't know what to do. *Let it get me. Fucking run for my life. Confront the damn thing and see what it had to say for itself.*

I wish I was strong enough for the ladder, but I chose to run. And boy did I run. Every once in a while I would turn around to see if it was still trailing me. This evil figure was never further than what I could guess was 80 feet away from me. Even as I ran crosswise, going left, right, left for a bit longer than hard right, the figure was always there.

The panic started to sink in after six miles of this pathetic car chase I was trying to avoid. There was sudden movement in the corner of my eye. Blonde hair and a jean jacket. I did all I could to run faster after Blondie. She seemed very pleased to see me, as she eventually turned around and saw my clumsy body doing its best to be athletic.

Blondie paused in her tracks.

“Evie! There you are. I was wondering when you were gonna turn up.” Blondie smiled and reached out her right hand for me to hold. “Come, come, there is something you should see.”

I grabbed her hand. *oh, how I love how soft her hands are.* She guided me to a beautiful spot. It was right on a cliff that overlooked the Pudget Sound. The view at the hour we arrived was to die for, and as Blondie was showing me why she brought me to this spot, it was hard to feel as euphoric as I should have, given the sun dwindling and making the sky look like an acid trip. The feeling of wrongness clung to the air. Nothing felt like it should be beautiful and happy as most are when they view a scene like this cliff over-looking the Puget Sound during an astounding sunset.

Dread.

I felt dread, regret, and remorse as Blondie pointed out the spot she was waiting for me to notice. There was what looked like a small hand poking from the dirt that surrounded it.

It all sank in.

My breathes were shorter, getting close to passing out. I couldn't believe what was happening. *I wasn't killing the children I was getting high off of, right?* At that point, I was getting to a point where I couldn't even trust my thoughts. *Who did this to me?*

There was a point where I couldn't take this feeling of being taken over anymore. I was about to take my final step down the cliff where the bodies of where I think the children I killed were buried when I feel someone grab my shoulder.

“I never wanted this for you.”

It was the figure, but the voice was similar to someone I know. I turned and my right foot went off the edge. I went down but the figure caught me by my arm. It honestly was heroic.

I look up at them and was stunned for so many reasons.

1. It was a woman.
2. She had dark auburn hair.
3. Olive skin, that most influencers could kill for.
4. *She was me.*

It took a minute for me to recognize my own face. *The thing people say about not being able to see your doppelganger on the street because you don't recognize your own beauty is true. Goddamn. I would instantly fuck me.*

I tried to speak but was too stunned. *Women are the most mythical of creatures, aren't they?*

Luckily the figure (or alternate reality me) spoke for me.

"I have been trying to warn you for months, that small blonde girl, she is the cause of all of this." Concern was the only thing I could read on her, not my face.

"What do you mean? Also who the fuck are you? Because you look a helluva lot like me."

Too many questions began flooding my mind, but those were the only ones that I was able to speak.

"I think you know who I am, Evie. I am so sorry it had to come to this. If only I were able to have lost the cape earlier, then I could have saved you. But deep down, you didn't want to be saved. Which is why I am finally able to show my true face." The figure tried her best to reach me. She (or I?) pulled me from the cliff, and soon I was looking at the sunset slowly getting darker and less elating than before.

“Blondie!” I screamed for someone more familiar than the Figure before me.

“She will return soon I am sure. I sent her away, it is my turn to talk to you.”

“The fuck is that supposed to mean?” I didn’t know what to say, think, or feel. I was waiting on the Figure or BLondie to tell me what the hell was going on. *Why am I in a hospital gown running through the forest? Why, why... do I see a small wrist and hand poking out of the earth just 10 feet away from me? What the absolute fuck was going on?*

“Evie, Blondie has been destroying you.”

“That’s not possible, she’s been the only one there for me. She has helped me find true happiness. I mean, children’s imagination has changed my life.”

“That’s the thing, though, it has changed you but it turned you into something you should have never become.”

I scoffed, “Oh yeah, and what is that? Happy?”

“Evie, please look at me.” At that point, I had been avoiding eye contact, but I looked up. “I am you. The version of you that is in there, just deep, deep down. I have been trying to warn you about what you call “Blondie’s” influence. She is making us worse.”

Too many thoughts. *Was I supposed to believe the figure that had been stalking me for months or the woman who had changed my life by introducing me to a drug that actually worked? What should I believe?*

“How is she making me worse when I feel the best I’ve felt in years?” I rebutted.

“Honey, look down. And really look, please. I am not sure how much longer I can keep her away.” The figure looked pale, strained. *Am I in some sort of Supernatural reality. Where the monsters are real? I mean I knew it all along but this, this is just too weird. It looks liked the Figure is*

physically keeping Blondie away from me but not with upper body strength, which I know i don't have. So I looked.

“No.”

Multiple graves surrounded the area.