

Micki Lam

Finalist, Elementary Division

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Brighter Than Any Sun

When did it all go wrong? Those countless hours wonderfully spent huddled in front of a dim screen, searching for our perfect future. Our chance to escape what little troubles we had, now insignificant compared to the piles of paper on our bedstand. Laughs and giggles and jokes- I long for them to echo through these empty, lifeless rooms.

The kitchen light flickers hesitantly above me, but I have long grown used to it, and the silence. I fist my hands in my thin hair so that none of my tears fall. The job interview tomorrow must be perfect, void from puffy eyes and blistering headaches.

Our fairytale life, far away from our restricting parents. That was our dream. 15 Harbour Road had more than a few stains on its carpet; countless chipped pieces from the door. But our patterned furniture covered the sticky blemishes and the vibrant paintings hid the old wallpaper. I didn't need to pretend anymore. We made the large house a living, breathing thing, damp from sweat and laughter.

The euphoria made us delirious. It made us, on a sweaty summer's day, plant the too-sweet smelling flowers that framed our entryway. Under our care, they blossomed in colourful hues of purple and blue. It altered our minds, reminded us of the perfect dream we had that was always just inches away from our reach. Nothing could go wrong, not when we were drunk on freedom.

Was it the nine to seven job you took to pay off the ever-increasing numbers? I need to know. I can't sleep to silence, can't ignore the looming presence of abandonment. Some nights, I long for sleep to come without the tiny pills in the cabinet or the bottles in the fridge.

Was it the flowers that wilted long before winter had ended? The bitter cold that froze us over, followed by the eternally grey spring that did nothing to our stiff, still freezing hearts? A broken window, then a flickering bulb?

I can still feel your breath tickling my ear. Your fingers tracing my arms, leaving long, white lines on my thin skin. The smell of cheap beer; the feeling of a numb and carefree mind. The voice inside my head that was screaming the name of *you, you, you*. You who smiled for me and touched me so shamelessly. You, who was so different from the love I'd always known as a child. You- dangerous and forceful and wild- making me grin like an idiot because it was so *free*.

These memories haunt me, but they are also the only things that are keeping me alive. So, I pretend not to notice the packages in the garbage, or the clock still ticking long after the final train has left. I stay facing the front door even when the incessant ticks of the clock begin to echo, begging me to sleep. The creak of the door can make it all go away.

But every night, I am hit by a fresh blow of disappointment. Tonight is no different; my chest contracts sharply in realization. *Fwish*. The sound of another paper cut, the newest addition to the thousands scattered across my heart. I close my eyes, bandaging it. I pretend not to notice the missing bottles from the fridge, or the clock still ticking long after the final train has left. I go to sleep alone, much past midnight, just hoping for the front door to creak open and your voice to float towards the room. I hope, but you are never here anymore.

When I wake up, the room is dim. The sky is still grey. Nothing's changed. I squeeze my eyes shut, forcing small drops of frustration out from the corners. More than ever, I wish that the sun would shine through the foggy windows and cast bright squares on the wall like it used to. For the singing birds to magically appear again.

My breath catches in my dry throat. I automatically rise to open the fridge.

The bottles of beer sit innocently in my view in front of the water. My hand hovers over one before I begin to take them out slowly, lining them in a neat row across the kitchen counter. Beads of water slide down the delicate glass.

I stare, contemplating, before I clasp a cold bottle and pop it open easily. I tip it downwards into the sink and watch, fascinated, as the bitter liquid disappears down the drain.

I start to smile after the third had been emptied, laugh faintly after the sixth. When the work is done, I sigh contently and wipe the back of my hand across my forehead. I watch as the now empty bottles reflect the faint light and scatter a constellation of stars against the bare wall.

They shine brighter than any sun.