

She was a girl who didn't believe in fairytales. She didn't believe in resting her chin on the palm of her hand, nor did she believe in staring out the window, expecting something wonderful to happen. She watched the news with her mother, and that was just about the only thing she ever did to socialize. She knew how terrible the world was. After all, it *was* quite unfair for her father to die. In fairytales, the good people never die. At least, not the ones she had ever heard of. But then again, she hadn't heard of many.

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He was a boy who didn't believe in true love. He didn't believe in the music that his father played while driving him to school, nor did he believe in brightly colored flowers having any meaning. Sometimes, his father would ask him to get out of the house and do something “normal”—like going to find a girlfriend or something (his father thought he desperately needed one). But he didn't believe in true love. After all, his father had thought he found true love, only to find it abruptly ended by a man who was too cheap and too drunk to bother getting a taxi. *The only place there's true love is in fairytales*, he thought. But then again, they're just fairytales.

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She didn't deal with her father's death easily—something changed inside of her, causing her to set up barriers inside of her mind. She ate (much) less, avoided people at all costs (she used to actually be quite popular), and spent her days sulking and her nights hibernating. She used to be obsessed with boys—especially some kid named Ryan—although she could barely bring herself to glance at them now. Her old friends grew more distant as time progressed, and in a matter of a few years, they barely recognized her anymore. Her mother thought that it was because her daughter was finally rudely awakened with the news that the world was not as lovey-dovey as she had hoped. Her mother sometimes wished she read her less fairytales.

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He cried with his father on the second Thursday of every odd month, when the two would look at old photos of his mother and reminisce. She died on a Tuesday, although the two found it too painful to remember her then. It wasn't like him to cry—he was supposed to be the

indifferent bachelor, the boy who could be punched and feel no pain, the boy who was notorious for keeping a poker face. But he wasn't any more. After he saw how much his father suffered, he broke up with his girlfriend—a lively girl named Paris—and concluded that love only ended in hurt. He began to think that he only needed to talk to himself, and as he grew colder towards social connections, it seemed as if people forgot who he used to be. As if the old him didn't ever exist at all. It was hard to even remember his name.

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She sat alone at lunch, occupying a table with a boy with dirty-colored hair, who sat on the opposite side, so that there was as much space between them as possible. She sometimes wondered why he was sitting alone (or why he had such a goofy smile on his face), but most of the time, she liked to prod at her food with the back of her plastic fork, occasionally taking a small nibble. She tried to make it to the food last the whole lunch period so that there was something that could occupy her the whole time. Else, she might have had to do something drastic. Like read. Or find someone to talk to. Sometimes, she thought the food actually tasted good. Most of the time, it tasted awful. After all, it *was* school food.

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He sat alone at lunch, occupying a table with a girl with frizzled blonde hair, who sat on the opposite side, so that there was as much space between them as possible. He sometimes wondered why she was sitting alone, but most of the time, he liked to play conversations inside his head. Never love stories, of course. Sometimes, he thought that he was quite funny, perhaps even to a point where he could start making money if he had a decent partner. Most of the time, his conversations were dull and probably unrealistic. After all, he rarely talked to other people his age (considering that, they *were* pretty good). Often, he wondered what other people saw when they looked at him.

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She was furious when her mother told her that she was going to have a “play-date” again. She hadn't had one since she was five, and even then, she was quite sure that she didn't enjoy

them (sometimes, her mind lied to her—it made it easier to deal with her problems). It was with one of her co-worker’s kids. A boy, actually. She wondered if he was mean. Probably. *Most people are*, she thought.

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He was surprised when his father told him that he was being forced to meet this girl. Apparently, she didn’t really have any friends either, and his father thought that this would be helpful for his son.

“It’s not like she has to be your girlfriend or anything,” his father would constantly tell him. “Just go out and meet some people.” He secretly thought that his father was trying to set him up. After all, he *was* an only child. He wondered if she believed in true love. Probably. *Most people do*, he thought.

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It was an early Saturday morning when she heard a ringing. She couldn’t tell if it was going on inside her head or if it was real—it usually took her a couple of minutes to defeat the groggy feeling she got whenever she woke up before noon (which, sadly, happened whenever she had school). She tended to sleep a lot—it was her definition of a Friday night party. She had barely regained her eyesight when she was startled by the sight of her mother, who had most likely been screaming in her face the past few seconds.

“Get up! They’re here.” She didn’t want to, and she probably wouldn’t have if her mother hadn’t almost pulled her arm off while trying to get her out of bed. Her mother threw something at her, and she, struggling to awaken her reflexes, felt something soft hit her in the face. “Wear this. It’ll make you look nice and pretty.”

She didn’t want to feel pretty—she wanted to sleep. She heard her mother’s nimble footsteps rush down the stairs. She groaned.

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He didn’t know what to say to her mother when she opened the door, so he just tried his best to put on a smile, although it turned out much goofier than he hoped for. He wished that his

father would do all the talking, although he knew that her mother would end up asking loads of unnecessary questions, such as what interests he had (He didn't know) or why he hadn't met her daughter earlier (because he was *such* a charismatic person).

"Oh, you must be Roan!" she said, with a much-too-high, much-too-cheery tone of voice. It slightly bothered him. He wondered if her daughter talked like that, too.

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She looked at herself in the mirror, and she sighed in disgust. She couldn't stand her blue dress that revealed too much of her legs, and she couldn't bring herself to look at the necklace and bracelets her mother was forcing her to wear. She looked almost like one of those "cool kids", and the thought of that made her want to hurl (it's funny to note that she actually used to dress that way). She quickly shuffled her bright pink socks (which hurt her eyes whenever she looked at them for over a minute) down the stairs, the creaks prompting them all to look toward her.

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When he saw how dressed up she was, he immediately felt uncomfortable. He let out a deep, unhuman-sounding groan when he saw that his father's eyes had widened. *It's the girl from lunch*, he thought.

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*It's the guy from lunch*, she thought.

"Do you two want to go to your room?" her mother asked. She almost cracked a smile. For any other (normal) teenage girl, the mother would have had a panic attack if the daughter ever asked to hang out with some dude in her room. *But for her mother's teenage daughter....*

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"Hey," he muttered, barely audibly. They were sitting on the floor of her bedroom, and he would have liked nothing better than to leave. He felt strangely uncomfortable as he tried to

keep his jittery hands from picking at the sides of her rug. He felt a constant, unexplainable urge to look around. The bed was still messy.

“Hi,” she said, her voice barely louder than his. She noticed that she had forgotten to make her bed, and she immediately shied her eyes away from his. She cleared her throat awkwardly, as if she needed something to break the silence but couldn’t think of anything to say. He wondered if she was feeling as uncomfortable as he was. But then again, she *did* dress like the popular kids.

“Sorry I don’t know this, but what is your name?” he ventured, suspicious that his father would be forcing him to spend a lot of time with her in the near future. He looked at her, noticing that her eyes seemed to be staring off into a different dimension. He waited for her to say something, pressing the bottom of his tongue against his dry lower lip. She kept silent, her eyes blankly unfocused. “I’m sorry if that sounded rude. I don’t talk to people much,” he offered.

“Excuse me?” she asked innocently, as if she was actually paying attention to him but just couldn’t hear what he said clearly enough. Truth be told, she didn’t care what he thought of her, nor did she think she really wanted to get to know him. After all, she didn’t think she would be talking to him at all after this. Her brain was still recovering from her sleep (or lack thereof)-induced hangover, and she found that zoning out was almost as pleasant as sleep.

“I asked what your name was,” he said curtly, with a slight hint of annoyance.

“Oh. Julianne,” she said indifferently, although she immediately wanted to take it back. Although she wanted nothing to do with him, she felt a pulse of guilt travel throughout her body as she remembered thinking that he would be mean. And here she was, brushing him off her shoulder as if he was a petty spider web that she had accidentally walked into. “You’re Roan, right?”

“Uh huh.” He sat there in silence—it had been so long since he exchanged more than a few lines with somebody other than his father. He almost felt as if he didn’t know how to anymore (after all, the conversations he played in his head *were* quite unrealistic).

The rest of their conversation didn’t turn out so well either, consisting of awkward moments of silence (where she would be moving in between states of consciousness and where he would be struggling to prevent his eyes from dancing around the room), with breaks of superficial small talk, murmured in hushed tones, as if they were in a library.

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He had been gnawing his nails vigorously when her mother burst through the door, excitedly talking with the same much-too-high, much-too-cheery voice which he found quite annoying.

“So, did you two have fun?” she asked, her eyes seeming to have a glimmer of hope. *We didn’t really do anything*, he thought. But he didn’t want to dull the false hope in her eyes.

“I suppose so,” he said, with a tone only slightly more friendly than nonchalance. He looked at her mother and gave an expression which almost looked like a smile.

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She was slightly irked that he had lied to her mother to give her some hope that her daughter would somehow make friends. That meant that she would have to talk to him a lot more, which she obviously could do without. But she pitied her mother (and found her mother to be the only human being she didn’t mind), so she kept silent. She subconsciously gave a nod of agreement and felt her heart sink as she saw the grandiosity of her mother’s smile. Her mother led the two down the stairs again, at a much slower rate than she did when she dragged her daughter out of bed.

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As they made their way down, he looked around the lower floor, noting the ornate china and the dust-infested photographs (which, curiously, had a man in them), until his eyes finally set upon his father’s exaggerated grin, similar to the one he noticed her mother had been sporting. He wondered if they were going to take any photographs here. After all, people never sported those kind of grins for everyday life.

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Despite her unfaltering disinterest in him (at least, she thought this was so), she found it a bit difficult to watch him be leaving. First, this meant that she would be stuck with a mother who would be asking her an unbearable infinity of questions. Second, this meant that she would probably have to suffer through his father’s questions as well. Her thoughts paused midstream for a second, as she realized that her mind had been tricking her. It had been *so* long since she had talked to someone other than her mother that she couldn’t remember what it was like. And third, she truthfully found his presence to be peaceful and not just because she had been zoning

out for half the time. *Perhaps some people in this world are okay*, she thought. *Perhaps talking to other people wouldn't be the death of me*. She wondered if her mind was lying to her about that, too. Or, she wondered, if her barriers were crumbling.

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It wasn't his idea to come to her house in the first place, so he was feeling quite annoyed that she had ignored him for so much of the time. It wasn't as if she was any less strange than he was.

"Will you two be visiting again?" her mother asked him, perhaps sounding a bit more optimistic than she intended to. He bent down to tie his shoe so that it would seem like he was busy. He didn't know the answer, nor did he really want to give one anyways.

"Why don't you two come over to our house next time?" his father offered. He deliberately untied his shoe again, so that he could avoid the situation for as long as possible.

"Oh, we'd love to!" her mother exclaimed, nodding towards her daughter. "Right?"

"Yeah, I guess that'd be fun," she said, in a slightly faded version of the tone that her mother used. He was surprised by it, considering that she had spent the entire time staring into space, which he thought meant that she disliked him and would have liked to be doing anything but talk to him.

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She was feeling strangely adventurous—something that she hadn't felt in years. It was as if human contact (even if it was forced) caused her to remember what it used to be like, back when her father was still alive. But she thought he probably hated her.

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He wondered what his father was thinking because, after all, nobody had ever wanted to hang out with him, much less a girl. He supposed that she was okay, although he wouldn't have minded if they never talked again. He knew that his father would constantly be nagging him now, urging him to ask her out or something similar to that. At the thought of that, he felt a mild pain in his stomach.

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He sat in his father's car, with his arms crossed and his eyes closed, taking in the slight pine smell—the kind that comes from cheap gas station ornaments. His father tended to buy a lot of them. He heard him opening the door, the groan of the old metal prompting him to open his eyes. His father smiled at him, turned on the ignition, and immediately reached for the radio, pressing the cracked “On” button.

“So, how was it?” his father asked.

“Awkward.”

“She seems to really like you,” his father beamed, sounding like a fanatic soccer mom whose son had just scored the winning goal. Or, like a dad whose son would no longer have to be alone forever.

“It’s weird, actually,” he reflected.

“Why so?”

“She spent the whole time ignoring me, and then at the end, she says she wants to hang out again. That’s weird.”

“Maybe she’s just shy,” his father muttered.

*Maybe.* He almost wanted to smile.