

Jaida Barker
Grade 12
South Kamloops Secondary School
Letting Go
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Letting Go

I stare through the cold metal with an altruistic malevolence, trapped within a world where my only company is the creeping shadows of hope and regret that slink along these leaden walls. If I close my eyes, I can still feel his arms around me; I can almost hear his whispers of a secret plan to steal chocolate from Mom's room - *She couldn't possibly notice if we only take one square each...* But, I open my eyes, not to find my ardent partner in crime, but a rugged-looking man sitting inside a cell. The man who killed my brother.

I'm not entirely sure why I've come. It's not as if I can go in there and punch him in the face, and make him feel even a sliver of the pain he's caused me. Besides, what would that accomplish? It's not going to bring my brother back. I guess, a part of me wanted to be able to look at him, and try to understand, somehow - to try and make sense of all this. Instead, the weight on my heart has grown too much to bear, so I move towards the exit where two watchmen stand guard; when, all of a sudden, I'm stopped in my tracks.

"You remind me so much of her."

Taken aback, I turn to face the man I've told myself to despise, the man against whom my kind heart has been hardened. "O-of who?"

Caught in his own trance, he replies, "My wife, Julianna." I notice a tear slowly streaking down his stubbled cheek, then he chokes out, "All I wanted was to save her... I-I didn't have a choice... He didn't give me a choice. I love her so much, so so much." Tears spill down his chin,

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and curiosity gets the better of me. Every part of me knows that I should turn and walk out, but I choose to forget, if only for a moment, about the blood that stains this man's cruel hands.

We can't possibly know everyone's story, but I believe everything happens for a reason, my brother once told me, and it's up to us to figure out what that reason is.

The walls around me close in, my mind begins to race, and my voice wavers in an attempt to form the question that haunts me most, "W-who didn't give you a choice?"

Sitting in fearful silence, I wait as he seeks to compose himself. "I don't know, b-but he had my wife... and he threatened to kill her if I didn't commit," he paused, "unspeakable things for him..."

"...like killing my brother."

As the words escape my lips, a blow falls heavy in my gut, leaving no room for air, and I can't hold back any longer - my walls crumble. Tears well up behind my eyelids and begin to trickle down near the corners of my mouth, allowing for the salt of my sorrow to seep in and onto my tongue, whilst my lungs gasp for air, my whole body shaking.

All I see is red. Red, bleeding out from the empty hole between his eyes. Red, suffocating the unsuspecting carpet beneath his cold, limp body. The look of shock still adorns his face.

"His name was Fabian," I say, more to myself than anyone.

"I'm so s-sorry..." The man choked out before shakily lowering his head in his hands.

In my pain, my mind drifts to a time when the ice that guards my heart and causes my frail body to tremble from within was replaced by a warmth that I so easily took for granted.

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Come out come out wherever you are my little bug, my brother would call out, while he crept around the corner to try and find me in our routine game of hide and seek. Naturally, I would protest, *Hey, I'm not little!* And he would round the bend, catch me up in his arms and reply, *Fine then Grandma, but you're still a bug.*

My brother was always there for me. I loved him with all my heart. This man, what he has, the love that he and his wife share, is real. The heart that I've tried so hard to stitch back together, only falls apart once more, if not for the true love I lost, but the love that has been stolen from him.

I remind myself of what this man has done, and the grief that he has inflicted upon me; but, when I look into his warm brown eyes stricken with sadness and longing for forgiveness, I am filled with a hatred for the wrong person. Somehow, I have allowed myself to forgive this man, and have placed all of my hatred upon the man who manipulated him; because, I too, would do anything to save the ones I love. Looking into those desperate eyes, I see a future that will never be mine. But it can be his.

My mind flashes to the words I saw hung by the door on my way in: *'Alistair Jenkins. Guilty of murder. Punishment: hanging,'* I peer over at the watchmen dutifully standing guard, and make a decision: this man cannot die.

Leaning in closer to the bars, I begin to whisper, "Alistair," when a feeling of uncertainty washes over me. How can I bring myself to just forget everything that's happened? Because

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Fabian would have wanted it. I know he would. And, maybe, by letting this man go, I'll be able to let him go too. "Alistair, I'm going to get you to your wife."

Our Home

Nathan Erickson

They gaze infinitely into the busy night sky full of empty voids and distant suns looking back at them. It gives them hope, for something better. However they do not need to look far to find hope, they do not need to look to the stars but to their feet. For their home, the only one they have ever known is not destroyed. It does not lay in ruins but as a blank piece of paper. They have wrecked the first side but they must turn their page and start anew. We do not live in ruins but in something waiting to be built. That should give them hope, hope for a bright future for their children and for everyone yet to come. They will look down at this once fertile planet that has given us so much, and find a way to preserve it.

Our simple slice of the universe, the only home we have ever known is dying. It is dying at the hands of all of us. From the high school student who got their first car to the oil industrialist who sells that student the gasoline to start that car. We are all the issue, and it is our problem to fix now. Not tomorrow not in ten years not in one hundred years we need to take action now. We live on a sinking ship amongst the great sea of stars that is our universe. But it doesn't have to be like this. We have a call to action, we have a unique opportunity where we have the technology to change the course of our planet. Our one home.

We have great technology that has sent us to the bottom of our oceans and past the threshold of earth's atmosphere. We have great war machines and planes that break the sound barrier. We have machines that turn our own sun into a powersource, and our wind into fuel. However we have used our vast intelligence and our resources to destroy the very thing that gave us these amazing gifts, Earth. But we can change we have already seen vast advances in the field of renewable power and sustainable expansion. We see pavement that can theoretically suck in carbon emissions, and dams that use life's greatest resources as power. This is not enough we need to find an alternative to our addiction of coal, natural gas, and oil. We need a resource as sustainable as the sun itself.

We must look no further than the oil fields of Alberta to see our great malice for our planet. Industry has built up such a monopoly of power over our planet that they no longer care if the planet dies, as long as they meet their profit margins. I hope that someday we will not look at these companies not as the people that pushed Earth to far but as the people who took a stand for our planet and made a change. Made a change for renewable and sustainable energy, made a change for the betterment of the planet and for us as a species.

I'm not saying it will be easy, because if it was it would have already happened. I'm just pointing out that we need to make a change, one that is not based on the benefits of greedy men but on the will of our planet, on the will of the betterment of mankind and our home. Us as humans are special, we can either be the catalyst for great progress and

prosperity or the catalyst for great destruction and greed. I believe that if us the people take action now it will not be too late for us for the planet for everyone.

It sounds bleak, it sounds terrible, people say we have lost hope. We do not live in a ruined planet, we live on a planet that is ready for change. Ready for a great movement, one that involves all of us, one that we will look back on with pride and hope. We are now the catalyst that will spark change on a massive scale. People talk about going to Mars, going to the moons of Saturn, and to the edge our solar system. We must not look to the future but to now to what we can do now. Something we can do everyday that will slowly benefit our planet. Maybe walking to work instead of driving, maybe carpooling instead of taking four cars, or maybe even building solar power for our homes.

How delusional they must have been to treat their only home with such disrespect and malice. They polluted their water and poisoned their air. To a point where the thousands of fish, birds, and reptiles have become scarce in this dying world they have created. They have neglected the plethora of other organisms they have shared this perfect place with. They perceived their world and their universe as this bustling slice of space created just for them. Their own slice of heaven, but they have destroyed their perfect home. One day it will be too late.

One day they will journey past the threshold of Earth's atmosphere into something better. Into a brighter future, into forever. Until that one fateful day, they fly past the upper echelons of our universe and take one last look back at Earth when we finally realize. That we should have fought to preserve their once perfect slice of the universe that they had once called home; and how they had not realized that his tiny bastion of life was made for all of Earth's creatures and not just for them. They will contemplate how they went so wrong, creating great war machines and fantastical space ships. That they could not have used that effort and technology to help our one and only home.

Rose's hand brushed against Blake's arm as they walked toward the cemetery. He knew she was trying to comfort him, but he didn't want it. Not right now. He needed the support, but would never admit it. He stopped when the grave came into view.

Her hand tightened on his arm, "It isn't your fault, Blake." She hesitated. "It isn't anyone's fault. I know it's hard but..."

He pushed passed her; welcoming the pain in his head. He deserved it – he deserved a lot more suffering. He dropped beside his brother's headstone and pressed his forehead against it.

"I don't think that Johnny would want you to feel guilty," Rose said as she knelt down beside him.

"It is my fault though. If I hadn't wanted to go, none of this would have happened."

"You don't know that Johnny wanted to go too."

"But I had the idea. I was the one who put it into his head."

Rose smiled sadly. "You shouldn't beat yourself up over something that you can't control." She placed the bouquet of flowers she brought in front of the marker. "I'll give you a moment."

He watched her wander to another grave; he didn't need to read the name on the headstone to know it was her grandmother's. He had come with her enough times to know. Now she was coming here with him.

"Johnny, you can't know how sorry I am. I should have listened to you. I should have... I miss you. And I'm so sorry. I'll get better and you won't."

"Get over yourself."

Blake smashed his chin against the stone when he whipped his head up at the sound of that voice. He'd thought he'd never hear that voice again. He looked in the direction the sound

came from and choked. “How are you here?” Because there his brother was and he looked as if nothing had happened to him.

Johnny smiled at him. “It’s not all about you, brother. You need to move on and stop beating yourself up. Rose is right; it’s not your fault that I died.”

Blake opened his mouth to defend himself, his mind somehow ignoring the fact that his brother was dead. “I don’t think that it’s all about me.”

“You’re acting like it is. You’ve changed, Blake. You’re not the person that I thought you’d be.”

“Of course I’ve changed.” He buried his face in his hands. “You died!” That wasn’t the worst part though. Blake looked at his brother and sobbed, “I killed you.”

Johnny laughed. “You’re wrong; you didn’t kill me.”

“Why are you here?”

“Because you need me. You’re the one struggling. I’m fine, and clearly you are not. You lived, Blake. My life is over; yours is not. I want you to do something with it.”

“How can I live when you’re stuck here?” It wasn’t fair. He should have been the one to die that night, not Johnny.

“What makes you think I’m stuck here? I am only here because I want to be here. For the dead it’s different. I can exist anywhere I want. I came here so I could be with you – so that I could say goodbye. I watched you struggle in the hospital.”

“Aren’t you upset that I missed your funeral?”

“You were in a coma,” Johnny said. “I can’t hold that against you.”

“You couldn’t have wanted to die?”

Johnny sighed. “I didn’t want to die, but I can’t change the past. I need you to know I’m ready to move on. I wasn’t at first. I was angry. I felt robbed. I lost my future that night, but those thoughts won’t do me any good here.” He smiled. “I waited this long to say goodbye. You missed my funeral and I’m glad that you did. I wasn’t ready then. I just needed to know that you’d be okay. But I’m ready, Blake. I really am. I’m ready to find out whatever is waiting for me. I just want you to be able to do the same.” He started to fade.

Blake flung out his hand to stop him, but it just passed through air. “Don’t leave me. I’m not ready. I haven’t said goodbye yet.”

“I’m already dead, Blake. I’m not leaving you; I’ll always be with you – in your heart and in your memories. I need you to move on. Put that crash behind you. Do all the things you wanted to. We both know how quickly it can all end. If you do that, I’ll always be with you, even if you cannot see me.”

“Where are you going to go?”

“Where all the dead go – wherever that might be.” He turned to look out over the cemetery. “This is the final goodbye, big brother.”

“I don’t want this to be the final goodbye.”

“You came here to say goodbye, Blake. I’m happy; I’m at peace for the first time in my life. But you need to let me go, you need to say goodbye.” And he was gone. There was only air where Johnny had stood a moment ago.

Blake pushed himself to his feet and scanned the cemetery.

“Are you ready to go?” Rose called out.

Blake looked at her. He could feel the tears streaming down his face. “Where do you think he went?”

“I don’t know.”

“He would have been amazing.”

She nodded. “Do you know why he would have been amazing?”

He shook his head.

“He would have been amazing because he had you for a big brother.” She reached out and took his hand, “We’re good?”

Blake nodded. He looked once more at the headstone, “Goodbye little brother.” And then he let Rose lead him out of the cemetery. As they walked away he heard the reply.

“Goodbye big brother.”

Desert Ashes and Dust

Skin wrinkled, muscles taught, bones locked straight.

Hair thin, spots of liver upon the hide, fixate.

Youth once, now a dream, still he won't abate;

He clings to hope, desperate thereby,

And yet has naught to grasp.

Skin puckered, muscles ache, bones gnash and grind.

He crawls and claws, desperate with a body misaligned.

Eyes tired, yet won't shut, with desert sands they blind.

Emaciate, deteriorate,

His final breath, a gasp.

Skin split, muscles dust, bones clatter and dry.

He sees naught but stone and rock with his lone untethered eye.

His soul, unbound, rises from ground, and thus returns to high.

A corpse, not more or less, a rind,

His hand remains a clasp.

A Bore

Misery loves company,
Happiness too,
But when you're just boring,
Your best friend is you.

Elegy for C

To her, I write in memory,
Though she was never dead.
She lived through no cruel agony,
Nor died within her bed.
Her name, I can't reveal,
Though it is no hidden secret;
Merely a fact that was never quite real,
Like a make-believe friend or pet.
She was alive, of that I swear,
And still, she lives today.
Her body stays, though I don't care;
It fits me anyway.
I'll make some changes; I have already,

To make it better, to make it all mine.
Though some mistake me for her. I remain steady,
For she's still within my head; she likes it just fine.
Once I didn't know, I had no meaning, no end,
Then I found a label and a name I treasure.
So, in all, this is what happened:
The "she" was me, and I was "her".

That you choose gladly to stay within the confines of that house.

What of me, then? Of my longing, bleeding heart?

What shall I do, all untethered and free?

Shall I return to my abode and stand at my own lonely window?

Shall that be my post, where forever I'll stay?

Or, perhaps, before your door I should stay,

So that I may one day meet you, without me forcing my help.

Will you notice me then, perched against your window?

Will you dare come down and welcome me into your house?

Will you ask of my intentions, wholly judgement-free?

And will you accept my motive of following my heart?

Though, should you refuse my live, beating heart,

I would have no further reason to stay.

Of my wide, heaven-cast stare, you'd be free,

And so would I of my fantasies to help.

Yet, I imagine, I would not avoid your house,

Nor would I refuse a glance at your framing window.

For now, my dear, I will remain free with adoration in my heart,

Gazing up at the window where your silhouette has come to stay,

Where you may or may not need help, within the barriers of your majestic white house.

The Passing

Dark shadows of clouds consume the ashen sky, their nefarious fingertips clenching handfuls of stars. An ominous rumble causes dew drops to shudder on the edges of many maple leaves. The apprehension of the next thunder strike is seething in the cold September air; a flock of birds has dispersed, taking shelter in the decrepit bows of a pine tree.

My fingers, intertwined with damp blades of grass, uncultivated and yet to be manicured. The smell of soil on my face and in my ears grounds me. In the essence of my panic I find a sense of calm close to earth's surface, and desperately plead for the storm to commence.

If I close my eyes for long enough, I start to wander in and out of consciousness. I remember back to when I was younger, hoping my dreams will help to subside the throbbing angst deep in my chest, buried under my skin.

It's Mom's face now, her skin the colour of honey and her eyes a sizzling amber. Her chocolate hair is loosely fastened by a cotton bandana, and around her neck she wears a gold pendant in the shape of a cross. The cartilage on her left ear, mangled. Just below her right brow bone, bruised and bloodied. The smell of kitchen bleach made my head pound that day. When I asked Mom what happened, she claimed she had fell down the stairs.

I should have known. I should have told somebody.

But now it's too late.

I close my eyes again; it's Dad's face. Gravel shifts below his sturdy boots, sputters and releases a breath of airborne dust. His smile, drawn thin across his broad face, refracts sunlight off his front teeth. His knuckles, mud-caked. His eyes, illuminating.

The sound of a car horn in the distance makes my heart sputter up in my throat. My hands clench the soil, harder this time. The flock of birds disseminates at the sound of the horn, a cold mass of black washing across the still horizon. I hold my breath until the air becomes hot in my lungs, hoping the sound might become closer, somehow. Tears begin to sting my eyes, assembling in their ducts before running down my dirty cheeks.

The car horn stops.

When I close my eyes, it's morning now. The sun has lifted its amber soaked head in a glorious upsurge, the clouds turning the same colour as the pink carnations in our front yard. The cold bathroom tile radiates very little heat; goosebumps dot my small arms. I lock myself up in the bathroom while Mom and Dad raise their voices in the living room. The sound of a vase shattering is distant, but still startles me. I hold my favourite doll out in front of me, almost as a shield to absorb the voices emanating from beyond that bathroom door. I run my fingers through the doll's glossy, blonde hair; I adjust her feet, moving delicately so as not to hurt her.

I was that type of child. Not one who would violently drive toy cars into walls or colour beyond the lines. I was careful; purposeful. As I grew older, I became more afraid. For the longest time I didn't know what I was afraid of, or why.

Now I know. As I lay here, my clothes splotted from the new fallen rain, I know why I was afraid.

But it's too late.

In the midst of all my panic, I begin to pray. I pray for Mom. I had never felt such a moral culpability until now, when there is nothing left in my power to do. I pray I will be given a second chance to redeem my vile ignorance. I pray that Dad will turn to kindness after my Passing.

It's raining hard now. I part my lips, relishing the sweet taste of cold rainwater draining down my dry tongue. I move my hands towards my abdomen, trying to mask the pain with my bloodied palms.

It's his face now. Green, darting eyes. A deep stroke of silver running through his dark curls; his hairline receding like the waves do on the shore of Santa Monica beach. An unfamiliar face had never struck such a match to ignite terror inside me until this day.

His car was the smell of Cherry Merlot. My mom used to have that same scent in her car. When I recognized the scent, my breath snagged in my throat and I stopped screaming and struggling for a moment.

How I wish I was back at my home. In that kitchen. On that bathroom floor. How I wish the hands of time moved as swiftly backwards as they did forwards. I would do anything; *anything* to go back and do it again. To speak up and bring justice to my mother.

How had I not done anything? How had I been so naive?

But now it's too late.

My hands release their overwrought tension and fall facing palms up. The rain washes over me, cleansing my wounds and lifting my soul. I'm feeling very tired now, and I know it's only a short matter of time until I have to go. I take in a cold breath and start to sob.

I don't want to go.

The last thing I can remember is the sound of police sirens, and the flapping of birds wings. Red and blue light emissions dot my vision like thousands of tiny stars. My soul seems to give from the adhesive which is my skin; I feel lighter, *happier* now. If I look beyond the sparse cluster of trees I can see a network of roadways cushioned by two overcast arches. I start to wonder why I had ever been so afraid.

The City Of Walls

He scans over the walls, eyes as dull as the citizens inside, and yet his mind quicker than the lies spread through this city by the zealots. Though through his thought of the beauties of the city, he sees corruption hidden in the cracks of the sidewalks. He sees the lies intertwined into each individual's mind and the hatred dripping from each tongue of each citizen; this hatred and these lies spilling to form each puddle and lake to be drunk by the children sheltered inside the city of walls.

In their city of walls he sees each traitor hung from the window sills, each crook's ankles bound together in a symphony of knots held together by the words of each inmate who passes by. Each hanging corpse a silhouette of freedom to close to the fingertips of those who glare; yet those who stare with anger and disgust hold their hands in tight fists; all of the propaganda pouring from their tongues keeping each feather of freedom from floating any closer.

The man peers closer into the city and inside the castle and he sees another man. A man who calls himself a great ruler, one who brings victories and love to those around him, but this onlooker is not fooled. He sees how this king has created each idea of fear and frustration, and how he watches. He watches with amusement from his throne of corpses and speaks about dignity and salvation, bellowing about his triumphs. Yet as this man, peering inside the cracks of the city, sees the obvious malfeasance, he also sees the corruption go unnoticed by each citizen. The lives the king has saved creating an imaginary, justified wall of acceptance that prospers his ever growing throne of bones.

The sightseers walks along the city's walls, listening to every murmur this place has to offer. The residents of the city murmur about their generous walls. They talk about the constant thundering of the voices outside the gates. The lies and hatred the outside brings about

ideologies and change. They keep their heads up high as they talk about the progression of the city and the safety it brings. They say this as if it's common knowledge as they walk past each carcass hanging from outside their homes. And they thank, they thank their devoted barricades that surround the city for everything it has brought them.

They treat their slaughterhouse as if it's one of great respect. They show the the pastures they let their young retreat in; they leave out the axe of capitulation that leaves no room for diversity in thought or opinion.

As this man saunters for years along the wall he finds himself walking further towards the edge. Each citizen making points that weave into his morals. He finds his thoughts diminishing into those of the prisoners around him. Each character slowly imbedding lies into his mind. He walks step by step next to those around him; at one point he swore he would never see eye to eye with these beasts, but now here he walks. He walks with his feet in line with the king. The king smiles when he sees the man take each step, for his lies have infiltrated and drilled into another walking wolf, leaving room for another to take his place upon the wall.