

## Kenosis Galactic Expressway

Digital Waverfield

*and if they are nothing then that is just as nothing is*

*and to a certain degree they are shared by all*

*(because just as everything is everyone within me*

*I am everything within everyone)*

*-Miyazawa Kenji (Spring and Asura)<sup>1</sup>*

I drag my paintbrush across the canvas, the stroke forming a thick horizontal line over the rough sketch. It's no good—What did my parents want to accomplish by sending me here? It's a real sleepy late May weather. I wish I could split off a part of me so I could catch up on my snoozing, and I definitely would've, but I was trying to save my skipping days for when I really can't stand myself. Though I've already skipped the first period today by pretending I needed to go to the infirmary. Most of the classrooms in this boarding school only have a full-sized window at each end of the room, meaning the rest of the windows lined up against the wall are narrow slits positioned up near the ceiling like those you'd find in a basement. The pale, murky sky of late May, with no distinctive characteristics, is like a perfect mirror of this place. With the windows positioned that way, from my desk, it really looks like the whole outside world is an unoccupied space. After a while of blanking out with my mouth always so dry and my arms and feet so cold whenever I sit still for too long, the end of

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<sup>1</sup>Miyazakwa, Kenji, Spring and Asura, trans. Moss Quanci, <https://fieldmoss.com/stories/spring-and-asura>.

the third period is at hand. The professor has given us the task of creating an outdoor observational sketch, as it was finally feeling like early summer.

The exterior corridors with their fancy neo-romanesque arched pillars look really pretty at this time of year. Passing by the courtyard that leads out of the art and music classrooms, I find myself among a small group of students making their way from these overcrowded halls to the patch of grass outside the main building's side entrance. Behind the old stone shed that looks like it could house a garden hermit, stands our spot. We light our cigarettes in the cool shadow of a freshly green maple tree and delve into idle chatter. I'm always the one who just nods along to all the human drama and repressed angst they'd spill out, but today I especially feel that their dreams and sweat have nothing to do with me. Yet I feel unjustified in my disdain. As I'm thinking this, I find myself staring at a corner of one of the stone steps that lead to the door back inside, and I know I have been in this exact position many times. I get this feeling that many years later, I will be looking at that exact corner, standing at this exact spot with a cigarette between my fingers, thinking about the same thing, and remembering this same moment in which I was gazing at it, shutting myself in my shell in the presence of my classmates. Then, I catch a glimpse of my reflection in one of the girls' glasses as she turns her head to exhale. It's funny, you never know how you look when you're getting lost or focused on something else, but the moment you realize and become self-aware of your own physicality in relation to the rest of the world, you begin to pose on purpose. But then your entire being comes locked to that action of posing and worrying about your form, so you won't actually be doing what you were originally doing. Though only when I'm smoking am I able to divide myself accordingly between posing and diverting my attention onto something else.

Like getting caught in a game of hide and seek, my thoughts are interrupted along with their jabbering when Marnie, the most nosy and perceptive in the group, signals with a slight head tilt and

side glance that a teacher is coming this way. All of us quickly throw our cigarette butts into the grass and subtly stomp them out. We are still inside campus grounds, after all. As the professor keeps approaching our spot, staring dead into our souls without saying a word, we awkwardly start pretending to be on our merry way somewhere. Sandwiched between this patch of greenery and the fences of the side gate, there is a small square adorned with stone paving that grass has carelessly overgrown between the edges and corners. It's probably neglected because there's nothing on this side of campus anyway. Nothing—except that dreadful clock tower. Dorothy, probably the one person here that can be described (as close as possible) as my friend, walks by my side and notices me staring sullenly at the tower. She gives me a meek smile as we both hear the chatty whispers coming from the rest of our group.

I was first sent to Saint-Coeur School for Girls due to my problems with memory loss and mood swings, which my folks undoubtedly thought were caused by substance abuse. As the options for entertainment are practically nonexistent here, the first-years, still not used to the blandness, were fixated on rumours and urban myths surrounding the facility like children spreading horror stories on the playground. On my first day, when the professor called my name, they noticed that this gloomy new kid shared the same given name as a past student who was at the centre of one of the more famous tales. The girls in my class would just try to tease me with it at first, but as somber and withdrawn as I was to their approaches, they started to feel like I was looking down on them, and being murky on purpose like a real vengeful spirit. Their treatment soon turned to cold, passive rejection. Rather than my name, they would say “the ghost” or “the banshee” whenever they talked about me or called to me. Then they started to play tricks on me, such as dumping dirty mop water—which eventually evolved into coercing me into doing some unsavoury things. This is the sort of place where everyone wore the same expression in front of faculty members; in fact, we all looked similar

due to our uniforms and dress code. But when left to ourselves, God knows what kind of wry smiles were waiting for me after class.

Though still somewhat an outcast, the bullying had progressively softened when the perpetrators eventually either grew out of it or found new targets. As well, I was able to get acquainted with Dorothy a bit as we both snuck out to smoke between classes, thus having an excuse to start tagging along awkwardly with her circle. Days went on since then with a perfect mechanism like cogwheels to replicate the same things every day. No difference between us lighting our smokes here today, and doing it tomorrow or yesterday, other than the absolute passing of time. Still, I hadn't forgotten about this girl who had jumped off this tower some half a century ago, as it was the main excuse they used to alienate me socially.

A lot of info was probably distorted as it passed between one generation of students to the next, but here's what I know as (probably) fact: There was this really smart honor student in the 1920s, apparently a woman of letters and a promising poet. Her name was Gillian Marsh. One night in early summer, for an unclear reason, Gillian and a friend broke into the old clock tower that was already unused and in shambles. And as they stood on the small roof supporting the belfry, the reverberation of the bell was heard across the campus. Then, she simply fell, meeting the cold, hard pavement as it splashed her flesh and splintered her bones. Of course, it was officially reported as an accident, and that was all that was verifiable by looking at the local newspapers of that time. The obsessive speculation came when the students were hypothesizing on the hows and whys. Some said she was pushed by that friend, a fellow writer who was envious of her natural talents, who tricked her into climbing that tower and ringing the bell together under the guise of searching for inspiration. Other dramatic individuals made the claim that, behind her rosy hopes for the future, Gillian was the one suffering the most in secrecy, and, caught in a trance by her thoughts and the heart-rending view

of the night sky, she rang the bell as a goodbye and swiftly jumped off before her friend could stop her. Either way, her image was now transformed into that of a vengeful ghost, forever haunting the halls of Saint-Coeur's and cursing the world of the living who, one way or another, caused her such piercing ache in her heart.

Headache. As if one side of my brain is being injected with a tiny, sharp needle. I remember how uneasy and almost feverish I got when the other kids first pointed out the tower to me. We start heading back inside for the next class when none other than Marnie, ignoring Dorothy's subtle side glance of protest, suggests that we should do the art assignment on the belltower, despite (or rather, because of) her knowing my awkward relation with it.

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On a hazy day like this, the perfectly white walls of the school building are even more hypnotizing to the eyes. When the big clock fixed onto the exterior of the tall structure strikes noon, I follow the girls out of the classroom, and we exit the reception area that resembles a hotel lobby with its marbled interior and shiny black round pillars. After refueling our stomachs on the picnic tables next to the empty soccer field, Marnie starts pleading with Dorothy and me to go take a look at the tower, saying that it would be a waste of a fine day not to take this opportunity to go work on our sketches there, and that it would force me to overcome my fears. Taking this as a sarcastic challenge aimed at me directly, I accept her demand, and we go fetch our art supplies. But the excuse quickly fades; just as I sit down with them on a bench opposed to that stone tower, a pencil and a still untouched page of my sketchbook in hand, she already begins poking at a certain possibility. Balancing her pencil in between her fingers, Marnie enthusiastically brings up that her uncle, a private

detective, had taught her how to pick locks and even gave her a set of tools for her birthday, hoping that she would follow in his footsteps someday. Attempting to block the idea she was hinting at before it could be uttered, I only give her muffled, indifferent responses to indicate that I need to focus on the drawing, though it's clear that I'm struggling to lay down even the initial linework. I bend forward with my head supported by the palms of my hands and stare at the empty canvas on my lap. Her teasing voice can't reach me anymore, whenever I retreat into this hollow state. Dorothy, in an attempt to break up the micro-tension and brighten my mood, prompts me about the latest fiction that I've been writing since winter break, the work I told her in a half-drunken, half-manic state that I was going to submit to a literary magazine. I hate it, I hate that I brought it up. Now I feel I'm just made up of empty words and no substance, just like that failed piece of writing or this drawing that won't materialize; merely abstractions locked up in a world of Feelings.

While I'm busy sulking, the chattery lass, unable to sit still, springs up from the bench and places herself intentionally facing Dorothy and me. Puffing up her chest and readjusting her glasses, she looks like a junior detective ready to strike at a secret hideout in order to finally find out the truth behind a case that's long gone cold. In a way, it's sort of endearing. She assures us that an old door to an unused building of lesser importance like that probably had a relatively simple mechanism, and that it wouldn't hurt to just take a look and explore. Dorothy looks at me, wearing a slightly exasperated expression.

Despite the staff's knowledge of the school ghost stories surrounding it, it doesn't look like the building is barred or anything of the sort. If I were to take a guess as to why, it's probably because if they were to nail the doors shut with wooden planks or tape, it would only make it get more attention and encourage a sort of morbid attraction towards it.

"Okay...this is a bit more complex than I thought...come on...and now, here we go..."

The bespectacled girl gets a feel of the structure inside the depth of the mechanism, while us other two watch out for any passing professors. With a satisfying metallic click, she jumps for joy like it's her very first successful attempt at lockpicking.

The inside of the clock tower's base immediately gives off a damp odor. Aside from a little spot near the entrance brightened by the daylight, a realm of pitch black is conjured before our vision and seems to beckon us. Not sure how to proceed, Marnie tells us to close our eyes a few times to readjust ourselves to the darkness and march further in. And so, around us, we find the remnants of all the "things" that were left over from years gone by, judged too impertinent to be placed in the usual storage rooms but still too precious to be destroyed: trophies and medal frames at least a century old, stacked upon wooden crates, extravagant archaic furniture covered with holes and stains. Dusting it off slightly, I sit on the armrest of a Victorian-style sofa, reach out for the pack of smokes in my jacket, and take a better look around. The cold limestone walls of the interior are covered in foreboding shadows. A door further inside leads to the room that—I could tell by having vaguely observed the building's exterior structure whenever I passed by—probably houses a set of stairs leading towards the top where the bell is. The light escaping from its edges is one of a noticeable ruby red, possibly from the red-stained glass windows that adorned the high walls of the clock tower. Even I can't help but fix my pupils onto that phantasmic rendering of sun shadows dyed in graceful red as I blow out clouds of smoke. Naturally, the one who initiated this is just as captivated by this enticement, and, not content to merely find a few antiques here, attempts again and again to cheat this lock just as she did with the previous door. Dorothy, on the other hand, sits down next to me after examining some of the old theater costumes that've been carelessly thrown into the many jute bags lying on the cold floor. Putting a cigarette that I had offered her between her lips, she stretches her arms and shoulders as we both sit in silence and wait. But a few moments

pass, and by the time the ash coming from my cigarettes has formed a small mound on the furniture, it still won't budge

I can't lie that there is something cozy in this liminal waiting feeling, like curling up inside a dim, slightly cracked shell whose cracks allow in a reddish source of light. That warm light source would be your only glimpse, and thus, your only idea of the world on the other side. I find myself tracing the door's silhouette with my eyes many times over and attempt to not get myself too hypnotized by my own thoughts; drifting my gaze towards the coffee table in front of me that's probably been used in some scholarly geezer's private office many moons ago, a locket necklace catches my eye with its silvery surface carefully adorned with a crest in the form of a camellia and an Owl of Athena.

"Hmmm—Euuuuaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!"

A piercing scream from next to me blasts right into my eardrums before I can reach out and examine the locket; a spider has crawled out of one of the many holes on the sofa and made its way onto the back of Dorothy's neck. She immediately gets up with frail knees shaking and the rest of the cigarette fallen onto the floor; she starts tapping frantically around that awkwardly sensitive part of the neck in order to get it off. Covered in cold sweat, I join in trying to brush it off as well. Marnie, who's been given quite a scare too, turns around to look at the source of the scream and gives both of us a dejected look, as if to doubt this whole adventure. Well, whose idea was it to do this to begin with? Maybe she's just disappointed that it wasn't a ghost, a ghoul, or a banshee, but my delinquent friend with a heart of purity that's still so openly afraid of bugs like an innocent child.

"Thanks, Gill, I'll have to treat you to something," she said, with her neck cleared and the spider fallen back into some corner in the shadows.

Slightly more worn than usual because of that stupid outing, I can't seem to keep myself awake at all. My eyelids keep closing on their own, and I fall onto my arms folded on the desk like a cradle. The foreign language teacher's senile voice feels soft spoken like a lullaby... Only one thing to be done in this case—I raise my hand with what's left of my vital energy and ask to go to the bathroom due to a headache. I intend to spend the rest of this class and probably the next taking a sweet nap at the library, and given the potentially personal nature of my reason, it would be quite improper for any teacher to prompt any further details concerning my extended absence. They all know about my actual bodily and mental issues, too. But anyhow, this is my method of escaping the excruciatingly long hours in these pale walls surrounded by pale uniforms. I don't really care even if they do question me, as long as it won't affect my grades, but even then. Once I'm sitting in the complete silence of the library that's peacefully deserted during class periods, I let the sweet beckoning of slumber overtake me.

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My assigned room is at the end of the west wing of Saint-Coeur's dormitory. I'm quite lucky in a way, while other students have to share their living spaces, I somehow managed to convince my father, who used to teach here, to use his academic connections and talk to the guys in administration in order to secure this little place just for me—for the cleanliness of my mental state, I had said. This unit used to be a janitor's closet before it was remodeled and had its walls painted an inscrutable white. Therefore, it is still quite tiny, but the peace I have at the end of the day is akin to falling onto the highest quality of silk, totally worth the claustrophobic interior. I throw myself onto

the minuscule bed—a spotless white that matches the walls so well it's scary—squeezed between the window and the antiquated wooden closet.

As I lay down, I think about the vision I had earlier, when I was asleep like a baby in the library; I was on board a F-104 fighter jet, the singular point that was me was a faraway, ephemeral memory when compared to everyone who was locked onto solid ground. The aircraft ascended and accelerated on its own—Mach 0.9, Mach 1.15, Mach 1.2, Mach 1.3. When it reached a certain altitude right above the clouds, I looked out from the cockpit; the boundless sky appeared to be frozen solid. No, rather, it was the F-104 itself that had stopped moving at all. Locked in motion, when did the engines go silent? And yet, it did not fall, the fighter jet, along with me stuck inside, was to stay frozen in this vastness, unable to ascend to the unknown where Cassiopeia shone—nor to dive towards the known and ordinary, under the azure. When I fully awakened from this dream, it was already nearing the end of the last period. Of course, instead of attending extracurricular activities like good students should at a prestigious boarding school, I held onto my free will and loitered around the library. Outside the window, a glaring ray of light pierced the few hazy clouds that still lingered and dyed the library in its lucid brightness. I already knew they didn't have my favorite writers, so out of dumb curiosity, I decided to look for something else instead.

I stretch out my arms and reach out for my school bag that's been carelessly tossed next to the plushies I kept, and take out a worn yearbook with the year 1924 printed in an antique font on its mahogany hardcover. Still lying sluggishly on my back and letting out a yawn, I start flipping through its deteriorating pages. It's a funny thing, the more dumb I think this whole obsession is, the more I want to know about what actually happened in order to better deny it. Surely this is a shot in the dark, but I can't help but let my unconscious guide my fingers. And there—after chaotically flipping through the many pages of all the names and photographs of women with a certain swagger of that

blooming era—I lift the yearbook high up, then bring it back close to my eyes; before me is a page spread dedicated specifically to Marsh:

In Memoriam – Gillian Marsh

Beloved Student, Poet, and Friend

Gillian Marsh, a young woman of exceptional grace and quiet brilliance, was taken from us far too soon on the fateful late spring night of May 30th, 1924.

Her days were spent in ink and verse, her words forever drifted towards the eternal, along with her youth.

Though her form is no longer with us, her soul forever walks with God in the brilliance of the starry sky.

Placed right above this text is her yearbook picture: She's wearing the standard white uniform shirt with the school's cross crest embroidered on the collar, the collar itself elegantly fastened with a pearl-tipped pin. Her dark hair falls long down her shoulders and chest, contrasting the wavy short bobs that the rest of the students wore; its ends curl gently, catching the light and giving off a misty but bright texture like the wet mixing of watercolor shades. A glowing tint graces her eyes, their long lashes blurred by the faulty quality. There is something night-bright about these eyes, like removing your glasses before you go to sleep, with only the warm lighting of the bedside lamp illuminating your blurry vision of the dim room. At its corners, above the visible tearbags, a fine-drawn curve suggests that she could have been showing a restrained smile to the camera, one that was dissolved the instant the shutter button was pressed, leaving a lingering phantasm. Her lips, rather expressionless, are pale and mostly thin except for a soft fullness at the center. Looking at this soft, sepia-toned portrait of hers as a whole, I can't help but feel a poignant pinch at the very back of my chest.

The next page displays a few other photographs to remember her, but they are small and inconspicuous; pictures of her during religious ceremonies, honors day, and at events of the literary society. I try to shut down any ideas that this is anything more than curiosity. Then, as soon as I do that, my mind starts descending towards its usual dejection. It's just too much to bear, so let's listen to some records, perhaps? When I returned to school from winter break earlier this year, taking advantage of the hustle and bustle at the start of the winter term, I managed to sneak in my own vinyl player along with some records that the stuck-up staff here would probably make a fuss about.

Removing the pile of old clothes in my closet that's been stacked there to obscure the goods, I flip through my registry and pick out something I'm vaguely in the mood for. After quickly checking the door crack to make sure there's no one hanging around who might snitch on the noise—everyone is still probably in the dining hall anyway—I put Douji Morita's record (the one with the shattering cross under a clear blue sky on its cover) onto the platter and place the needle on top of it. Her soft, grief-stricken voice and nostalgic guitar strumming cradle me in their melancholy as I stare at the ceiling, sundrenched by the final bursts of the dusk sky. I feel like everything I do—I do it to intoxicate myself, to impose a personality or meaning on this me lying here on this bed, do you even like reading or listening to records? Is it all to insist upon myself? Shit, of course, I know I had acted overly indifferent towards my parents when I was living at home. Some people say that their parents acted too much like friends and too unlike parents when they needed them to, but growing up, I felt like it was the opposite for me. I never hated them, but to me, they just seemed like the conductors of my life; constantly relocating and resettling ourselves due to my dad's academic advancement, and then being constantly on the move again when my mom was getting remarried. I just followed them and never once spoke out on how I felt about all this, nor did they ever prompt me for my take on the affairs of the adult world. I never had any childhood friends either; no one around

me could say that they knew me. I had no continuous point of reference for my being here, no ground to stand on and pronounce to the world: "Look, this is me. This ground knows me, it knows my weight and can feel me." But no, especially lately I'm starting to feel as if my feet are not touching the ground at all, as if they're hovering right above this plane that people live their everyday on, without ever being able to physically touch it.

It's not like my folks are horrible, irredeemable human beings. I don't understand. Someone like me shouldn't have had the preordained destiny of being birthed by them. I feel terrible. If I had completely dysfunctional, negligent parents, then I wouldn't be so ashamed and conflicted about feeling this way—see? This is the exact contents of my self-centered, ungrateful spite. They mix together to form a sort of mutated, modern take on Dostoevsky's Underground Man, with my self-loathing falsely intellectualized into resentment, using free will to scoff at others and to see myself in a dominant way in my head. And then to indulge my sole winning, bitter alienation, in hedonistic self-pity...

From outside the door, I can hear some girls talking about their upcoming summer trips, complaining about the endearing annoyance of their siblings, as well as about the significant others that they will finally get to see once the school year ends. It's at times like this where I feel an unbearable black lump swelling inside of my chest that makes me want to crawl my skin off.

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As night settles outside my window, I am still unable to unwind, so it's decided that I take a few sleeping pills to hopefully go back to slumber early. With enormous effort, I get up from my bed and make a quick trip to the communal shower rooms, avoiding the other students as much as possible, and then change into my night clothes as I get back. With my last energy for the day, I start tidying up everything that's been thrown carelessly on my bed, and as I put the yearbook back into

my schoolbag, I notice something cold and metallic brush against my fingers—I pull it out. Dangling in front of my eyes is that silver pendant finely embellished with the camellia flowers that I had taken notice of earlier today.

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There is a specific group of girls who aren't in my classes anymore but whom I still can't help but notice regularly. Every morning, they hang out in the bathroom adjacent to the hallway that houses all the classrooms for first and second year humanities courses. Standing in front of the mirror and leaning on the lavatories, they basically made this place theirs. Any student who dares to venture in with the hopes of relieving themselves at this time will be met with a chilling side stare; this clique would all cease their chattering, stop whatever they were busy with, and give the visitor the gift of pure silence, gazing back at them from an abyss of absolute zero. It's become an unspoken rule these days to not use this specific restroom in the mornings until atleast the end of third period. While I can't say I know these people personally, I am familiar enough with them to know that this is their type of passive assertion of dominance and cold rejection of choice; after all, these were the girls who made my first semesters at this boarding school so miserable.

But since waking up this morning, I can't help but feel like I've slept like shit and my muscles and entire body feel tense and unrested, and whenever I feel fatigue like this, my bladder always gives me frequent trips to the bathroom. On top of that, on my way to class earlier this morning, I already had a short episode that added to my weariness. It was a banal thing, really, but I passed by the janitor who's not even the dorm janitor but just one I would often see on my way out from the dormitory to the main building and asked myself what might be the cause and effect of this

recurrence, for I never thought it was because he was up to no good or was doing something creepy, he always seemed to be simply tending to his tasks near the artificial pond next to the path that lay in front of the dorm entrance. “Then it’s just everyday life,” I mumbled to myself. If it was someone I liked, or even someone I loathed deeply, I don’t think it would have had this effect on me, but it was the fact that this was an everyday coincidence that held no weight or meaning but had to happen, and will continue to happen—something chaotically chosen that’s meant to be, and you have to accept it. Suddenly, the pudgy janitor man with unkempt sideburns seemed like a special agent of mundaneness that had the fated task of crossing paths with me every morning until I graduate or till I die, symbolizing the stagnation of everything. I started pacing myself quicker despite my morning slothfulness until I reached the other end of the pond—abruptly throwing my bag and my books on the ground (then looked around me a bit, making sure no one had seen me, cause I did get embarrassed). Sitting on the cool grass that hasn’t fully absorbed the warmth of the morning’s rays yet, I reached out for my left wrist with the other hand and fought the urge to start violently scratching at it with my nails like an alert feral cat in self-defense mode.

At this stage, I don’t care anymore if those people were to stare me down with their stinging gaze that makes me remember the stuff they put me through. I feel this urgency is strong enough to give myself the right amount of courage, so I get myself excused from the classroom and bite the bullet. As I take one step, two steps, onto the slightly wet ceramic of the restroom floor… I can feel something building up in the air, as tense as my bladder is right now. The stalls are positioned right in front of the sinks, so there’s no avoiding them as I catch my reflection frozen behind theirs in the wide mirror.

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But there's no reaction. They carry on their mingling and make up touch-ups as if I'm not even here. They're probably too caught up in whatever scandalous details they were gossiping about, I think, as I get inside the stall and lock the door in relief. Either that, or their latest plan is to completely ignore my existence and not even give me the honor of being passively bullied like before. It's already 10 minutes to break when I get back since I took my time on purpose walking down the hallways. Ready to receive a mouthful from the old but still ever so talkative foreign languages teacher Mr. Raynault, I slide my way in as lowkey as possible, though it would be impossible not to trigger one of his many wise speeches about proper student etiquette. However, much to my surprise, I manage to make a perfectly inconspicuous entrance and slip back in my seat.

When we finally get up for break, I find Dorothy nudging me, hinting at a quick smoke out. In the hallway, Marnie, still energetic as ever despite the disappointment at our excursion the day before, bumps into us on her way out from her volleyball practice, and demands that we wait for her to get changed before hanging out there together. No doubt she has another one of her detective anecdotes to tell us.

"Hey, before that, wanna explain to me what's up with that prank you tried to pull. With the pendant stuck into my bag." I say to her before she could get away.

"What? A pendant? I don't have a clue what you're talking about." She shrugs her shoulders.

With that, Marnie gives us another reminder to wait for her near the side entrance doors, and dissolves into the waves of students flowing through the neatly white classroom corridors.

Before I know it, the yellow shades of early dusk are already mixing with the blue of the clear day's sky. It's nice that days are long now, but that also makes me dejected whenever I look at the actual time on my watch. You get the impression that you have so much time because it's bright longer outside, so you get carried away so easily, only to realize that the day you took with relative

leisure is already fading away in the sunburnt skyline, like a butterfly escaping from your bug catching net and flying back to the vastness of nature, never to have your eyes laid upon it again. When I head to the dining hall to quickly grab something with the intention of going back to my room as soon as possible, to finally try to get some work done on my latest writing piece and get my mind distracted from all this, I spot Dorothy sitting at the table of that clique who often frequented that one bathroom. She notices me in the corner of her eye and shows me one of her feeble smiles.

They're keeping her at the table but completely leaving her out of the conversation, and when I place myself next to her they don't even seem to notice. But before Dorothy can respond to my hand signal to get out of this awkward atmosphere together, one of the girls sitting in front of us turns her head towards her, pretends to ask if she's thirsty, then proceeds to demand she get two iced coffees, one cafe au lait, and one hot chocolate. Their lack of response to my presence here confuses me. Feeling the tension in the air, I try my best to string some words together in order to help Dorothy's situation without setting off something bigger like defusing a bomb.

"Huh? Oh, right, it's you, Gill... can you give her some time alone right now, we're doing a study session here, she needs to focus, y'know." The last few words are pronounced with aggressive intonation, clearly directed for Dorothy to hear.

The damp smell of night rain permeates through my open window, letting in a light drizzle that graces my skin with a sleepy coolness as I get back from the showers and change into my comfy night clothes. I sit at my study desk and stare at the white wall. Apparently, Dorothy's father was caught embezzling funds as they were secretly burdened with debt, despite their wealthy appearance. Her family owns a construction company that had been doing well until recent years when it started having trouble with the organized crime they secretly had dealings with, peaceful until now. One thing

led to another, and it started a rumor that gangs were forcing her, the daughter, into prostitution in order to pay off their debt. Those girls probably heard such details and then fabricated some more in order to extort her and make her their afterschool target. Maybe that would explain why I rarely see her hanging around after classes lately.

Feeling the damp wind blowing against my hair, I try to digest what I have learned. Yet there's nothing I could do. I had thought that at least being there would deflect some of their cold harassment towards me, but somehow all I could do was sit there.

I shake my wet head of hair in order to clear my mind, then reach out for the drawer that contains the hair dryer. A silver gleam catches my eyes the moment I open it; there is the pendant, shining with a reflective light that feels strangely familiar. The light of dusk. The light over the dreadful suburbs on the walk home from the last day of elementary school. The light that once shone from my mother's eyes when I was born. The light of summer that grew fainter each day as the voice of the cicadas was drowned out by the unforgiving march of seasons. Taking it out of the drawer, I hold it tight to my chest but dare not open it to see the content inside. I thought I had just thrown it under the bed and forgotten about it, but I guess I'll stuff it in my bag for now and return it to where it was found when I pass by again.

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As if something is layering itself onto the air, there is a quiet eeriness to everything on campus. When I overslept this morning and had to make a sprint to my first class of the day, I noticed that even when I bumped into people on the way, there were no reactions, and the feeling of physical

contact has never been so light. And it's the same thing when the girls tap on my shoulder during break. I don't know what's caused this uneasiness to emerge.

Feeling quite off and unable to focus on my task in class, I whisper to Marnie, who's sitting at the desk behind me, with the hopes of asking her for help breaking into the belltower again. When she teases me about my sudden peaked curiosity, I gently tell her to shut her fucking mouth and that this is only because she decided to pull that little prank on me, putting that weird pendant in my belongings. But it still seems like she has no idea what I'm talking about.

"Damn...well, maybe her ghost really got to you this time. Though if that was the case, I guess I would be kinda responsible for it. Or maybe there's someone hiding inside your furniture, like in *The Human Chair*, you know, sneaking in and out of your room, hiding right under your nose."

Hearing her utter these words in her usual lighthearted tone makes me agitated enough to stand up, turning towards her to tell her how much this feeling inside me is real. But I can't get the words out, so I let my fist hit her wooden desk in hopeless frustration. In response, she stands up from her seat as well, sensing a strange extra seriousness from me, and glances sharply straight into my eyes as if trying to find what's wrong with me. It was during his time, though I hadn't realized yet, that even Marnie's self-gratifying manner of speech, and Dorothy's awkward ways of quietly interjecting us had become ever so nostalgic and precious to me.

"Marnie, please sit down and focus on the reading. Jeez, there's only ten minutes left and you can't even concentrate for that long." the professor says, making Marnie slightly embarrassed at her reaction. But what about me, professor? I'm standing right here too, aren't I? In fact, I'm standing right in front of her, you should have noticed me before nagging her. Now with Marnie sitting back down, I am the only one left standing, like a specter floating on another plane of existence. Aren't you going to say anything, teach? Hit my hands with rulers like they would have a while back

in the old days for being this neglectful of you? Now the traces of her brief flustered attitude toward me turn into merely a state of vacant confusion. Fine, I tell myself, I'm just going to zoom out of the class, quite literally, as I walk straight out the classroom door and walk the pristine halls, then up the stairs with the intention of snoozing through these strange couple of days.

...

I wake up to a blooming sunset that has infused its hazy orange tint into every nook and cranny of the library's reading room. Sitting up from my napping position, a feverish feeling clouds my senses and numbs my legs and forearms. That's right, I remember going up here to nap; that's why I find myself here now, but how long have I been asleep? As consciousness finally starts to settle in, the aftertaste of another dream comes to mind—a mother-like gentleness with a death-like uneasiness. Something akin to images of cold bodies and blood piling up on every floor as I try to look for a safe haven—going up and down the stairs endlessly and seeing spots of rot and decay pervert the pristine white walls of the hallways—that otherwise remained unchanged in its decor—tarnishing it more and more each time I take a peak at it from the staircase. Yet, there was a tired warmth to my body as I ran through the building like in a cheesy horror flick. That sensation is not unlike this strange heat emitting from my strained flesh as I get up and stretch near the tall windows. The campus is caressed by the formidable flames of sunset, its gardens stand still, and the patches of grass along the courtyard with its marble fountains and statues have a red dreaminess to them. Since when did the light at this time of day become this poignant? So powerful that it seems to have trapped the entire scene under blazing ice.

It must truly be the end of spring, and summer will come. But despite yearning for summer like everyone else, I can't help but feel a tinge of sadness. Because once it has come, the longing dies, and the only next step is for it to fade away from you... in the distance, lost to time and the

passing of seasons. I hate beginnings and endings. Because in anticipation, there is a certain “incompleteness” that serves as a path that goes beyond time and space, like a train to the unknown endless corners of space that we can’t ever board and yet hold the tickets dearly to our chests in anticipation.

As I walk out to the sunlit gardens, tall shadows of students stride along the pathway before me. Their way of taking up the entire path bothers me a bit, but instead of making my pace slower like usual so I don’t have to interact or be stuck behind, I simply push right through this little group of friends. For an instant, a trace of perplexity shows on their faces, as if not understanding why their bodies just slightly tossed themselves back for a moment. Then, like a sudden change in the air, their expressions contort back to normal as if nothing at all happened.

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The dorm beds and floors creak with the proof of their age. The morning schoolbell chimes through the speakers, stirring the still air like a metallic spoon in a cup of tea. Voices and laughter are scattered in small clusters along the way to the main building. Just in bloom, Camellias that adorn the vicinity around the small pond emit a shyly sweet fragrance. I can feel the morning sun on my skin. It carries a mild crispness in its rays, with an azure cleanliness that strengthens the reborn greenery of the maples and oaks all around.

The scratchy chalk with little clouds of dust falling down, the mechanical noise of the lawnmower outside drifting in from the open windows, the rise and fall of lively chatter at lunchtime, the echoes of thumping volleyballs in the gym, and the natural smell of sweat in the changing room.

The sights, sounds, and textures that I feel everyday are like encasing myself within a small bubble of sensations. Yet, this individual realm also has the expanse of the sea, as these things surround me and encompass everything I know without having a defined shore: a solid boundary where the ripples known as “the self” would motion towards and then hit, and then slowly ebb away.

And so, with the arrival of early summer along with the anticipation of summer break, my connection to the rest of the world begins to wane even further. My voice, my name, my presence, all of the parts that make up the link between me and the world are starting to fade into a void transparency; the sensation of hovering above everything as weightless, see-through glass, while simultaneously having my own awareness be submerged by the overwhelming sea of people and things that surround me. Without being seen, touched, or heard by another being here in the same existential plane as me, can I even confirm if I have an arm, a leg, a torso, a body? What if I’m only a collection of feelings and consciousness floating here in this immense domain?

I follow my two friends through the halls, the ever-familiar yellowish afterschool glow hitting its windows. As we pass through the courtyard to get to the side entrance, a strong sense of nostalgia starts eating away at my insides as the two girls rag on each other playfully, with Marnie holding the lead as usual. Under rays of late afternoon escaping through the leaves of the maple branch, I’m the first one to light up as I try to distract myself and suppress the sting inside me. We then banter about daily, mundane topics. Their hairs reflect spots of light. Dorothy keeps glancing at her watch as the sun begins to go further down. How many afternoons have I spent just like this? How many such times does one get to have in one lifetime? Not able to help it, these questions float in my mind as I remember the signs of my rapidly declining presence in this shared world. Just when will they be completely unable to see me as well?

In fact, come to think of it, ever since that day when we ventured into the old clock tower, I have not heard my name being called out, aside from these two; not from teachers when taking attendance, not from other people in my class. It's as if the pronunciation of my name has started to escape from the collective psyche. When I was frolicking with the rest of our extended social circle, even when I do my usual automation, there have been these moments where the girls suddenly halted their conversation, looked around as if they forgot something, and then resumed their conversation as if nothing happened. Every time this occurs, my words or any attempts at interpersonal contact with people blur and dissolve even further. At first, I used it to my advantage, carelessly pushing my way through overwhelming crowds of white uniform shirts in the hallways, shoving them aside and taking a slight amusement in seeing their clueless faces. But then I couldn't even do that anymore; my body couldn't touch theirs, it went right through them. It's like I'm turning into a will-o'-wisp made up of my lone consciousness.

Whether it be laughter, mockery, whining, or spite, their everyday passes through me like a hollow wind. My voice and presence have become completely imperceptible to everyone around me, except for these two—or so I thought. Yet, I decide not to tell my two closest acquaintances about this phenomenon or try to convince them to help me find a way to undo this curse or whatever. What's there to be done? I can only slowly fade, but I'd rather be like this than push them away someday because of my own words or actions.

“Life is not worth a single line of Baudelaire!” I hear Marnie quote such a line vigorously as they discuss an old writer who committed suicide by an overdose of Barbital.  
“That's sad, he could've lived well long enough to see that movie based on one of his short stories.”

“Oh? So you watched that one too? How did you find it?”

“I really liked it. It’s by that really famous director too.”

“Great! I have a collection that has the original story in it. I could lend it to you, if you want.”

“When did you become so generous?”

“I’ve always been this magnanimous, y’ know.”

Then I realize that I’ve been too caught up in my own thinking to include myself in their conversation, the topic of an author I am actually fairly familiar with. But as they continue to talk, with a cigarette burning away bit by bit between their fingers, they seem to be taking glances in my direction with a perplexed expression here and there. I knew this was coming; they have been subject to these moments too; a sign of my presence waning, perhaps, in its final stage… Their eyes, despite looking towards me, are gazing at a point that’s well past me, maybe at the whiteness of the building’s facade, maybe at the bushes next to the stone pavement that’s been dyed by the afternoon air. Eyes that hold both confusion and pity, as if they see me still, but merely as a color of regret that has resurfaced in their thoughts.

They go back to laughing and teasing each other, like best friends, like lovers, like close family. In front of me, from my outsider point of view, every little interaction they have with each other seems to be as bright as the greenness of the summer sun. The black lump inside of my chest grows; I know I have to step away coolly, but the waterworks just won’t stop. Turning away towards the school building, I then hear Dorothy awkwardly excuse herself right when they were in the midst of discussing the intriguing tidbits of that author’s life, mentioning something about supposed afterschool errands she forgot she had. Her body passes right through mine as she reaches for the entrance door and goes back inside. As I look back at the spot under the maple tree one more time, Marnie’s silhouette seems lonely in the expansive orangeish sunset.

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Without knowing what expression rested upon my face, I listlessly made my way back to my dorm room. It was something I wanted to make sure of, but I guess I know for sure now about my new nature as a sort of lingering spirit. But no, the truth is that I'm not even part of some school ghost story, it's really like if I were just an orb of consciousness floating across this vastness, holding on to a collection of memories that I think are mine. I can roll around on my bed, and I can let my tears stain the white pillowcase. But without having any footprints left or the ability to leave any of my traces, what is there except just an abstraction of these recollections stored inside my inner world? Now, it can only be these words. But these words, they are the abstractions from me that spill out like cutting open a transparent fruit to let the juices out, only for the entire thing to crumble apart and waste itself away. The fact that I can only rely on my own realm of words to define my existence in a world that seems so real and concrete gives my heart such unbearable loneliness that I can't help but violently crawl at my neck as I'm tightly hugging my pillow, curled up in the fetal position on the narrow bed. The yearning to yell out "I'm here!" pierces my body thoroughly. However, just like words that I had tried to use for my unfinished, abandoned short fiction, my words don't even try to come out and prove that there exists significance behind them.

Without any taste for slumber but nonetheless desiring it, I find myself digging through my schoolbag for my sleeping medication, but it doesn't look like it's in this stash of used pencils, hairbrushes, and old notebooks. What then attracts my eyes is the faint glow of a silvery reflection, that of Gillian's pendant. The thought of returning it comes to me. Though I've been carrying this all these days, I have not had many thoughts about it since I put it in my backpack. With everything happening to me, I had completely set aside the bother of sneaking into the old clock tower and

putting this back where I had found it. But now, since I'm reduced to the non-presence that I am, I could easily do it. Yes, I could at least do that. In fact, somewhere inside of me, something itched me to do it.

That one janitor is there as always, I see him from the lobby's tall windows, sweeping the stone path outside the dorm entrance as the street lamps illuminate his plump figure in the early evening darkness. But this time, I'm glad to have this agent of the mundane around. This goes well planned for what I have in mind. So walking out, I casually approach him and slip my hand onto the large keyring attached to his belt that dangles the keys for who knows how many locked rooms and buildings on this campus—and snap, like the world's greatest pickpocket, I snatch it without him having the slightest hint of my presence, as expected.

Outside, the sky is a dark watercolor. It seems that it had rained a bit while I was locking myself in my room. The grass along the pavement, wet with nocturnal dew, gives an aftertaste of sweetness to the odour of the evening rain. Dangling the keys along the way, I raise my head and let rain droplets falling down from the wet maple leaves dampen my bangs. The sky has cleared for the most part. The almost full, waxing gibbous moon looks like it's dipped in bright, glowing honey; its shine is blue cobalt. The stars glimmer shyly, like individual grains of sand shimmering inside an hourglass. There is always no one else out on campus at this hour; the few lights from buildings here and there only come from people still busy studying last minute for their finals exams. In this backdrop, the only thing accompanying me is the sound of crickets calling from the bushes beside the road. Everything, regardless of illusory or corporeal, seems to be dwarfed by this canvas.

After that detour, I arrive at the small square where the clock tower stood in the blue quietness of night, its red-stained glass windows giving off a disquieting gleam. I laugh as I take a good look at it from a distance, though I'm not sure why.

Then, as I shift my attention upwards towards the clock hands—that are frozen in a certain second, hour, day, and year in time due to the lack of upkeep—I’m suddenly reminded of how my mother sometimes said that my laughter sounded clear like a bell when I was a child. Shaking that thought off, I place the key ring I’ve been holding on to in front of my eyes and try to discern which of the bundles is of use to me, before simply picking out one at random. And there—the key I bet on actually fits like a puzzle. The moldy door opens its way once more to an interior of darkness. I take out the small flashlight I had prepared beforehand and step into what seems like the shadowy belly of an unknown dormant entity. Giving no regard to the antique furniture and storage items that are covered with dust or the damp walls that attack my nose with the smell of mold, I stop my footsteps at the door at the end of the room, with its previously red glowing silhouette diminished by the blackness of night. Before I could give it a try with one of the keys again, my hands somehow already reached out for the rusty handle. It opens with a slight push. A faint moonlight seeps inside with its luminescence tinted a slightly reddish hue by the stained glass along the height of the tower. In this shadowy environment, the redness lit the stone staircase that spiraled narrowly around the walls with an ambiance of dignified madness. Ascending in a spiral, the tower seems to be extending higher and higher without end.

Before I knew it, I’d already made my way halfway up when I noticed a breeze from above passing through my hair and white school vest, and slightly pushing open the door at the end of the stairs.

Immediately as I enter it, the moonlight that accompanied me throughout the night shines much more brilliantly and clearly than ever before as it seeps through the opalescent glass of the clock faces. After passing through the different sides of the walkway, I find a small door tucked against the wall in a corner. It leads me into another small set of spiral stairs, even narrower than the

ones before. It's just a short climb, so I dashed my way upwards once more, squeezing myself through the tight passage. Looking up, there's a rectangular crevice that opened up to the night sky, and I could see the heavy-hearted bell viewed from below.

The wind that came so suddenly earlier comes brushing against the side of my neck once more through the opening. It feels sweet and cool. I poke my head out, right under the weathered bell. A few droplets come falling down from the sky, as thin as silk threads, and are felt upon my cheeks. A shadow blankets over me—turning around, a figure stands at the edge of the cramped space under the roof of the belfry. Her long hair, slightly wet by the rain and with its loose curls at the end spilling down from her shoulders, sways in the moonlight. Its watercolor shade of dark brown and mist-like smoothness flows over her pale uniform and reaches well beyond its hem. Her side profile seems to be looking towards the sky, beyond the boundaries of the school and past the groves of white oaks and the small suburban neighborhood that surrounds the campus.

I think to myself, as those eyes of hers were locked onto something beyond us I couldn't pinpoint; that's right, even though I can only see them from the side, they have the same mellowness as that of a bedside lamp in a dim room.

Before I could be sure of the realness of this sight, the figure had already turned around. Her face in the flesh is pale and soft, as if molded from distant memories. A wet, lone strand of hair stuck on her cheek, decorated with dew, gives off a feeling of tenderness beneath the moonlight. Her tearbags curve, and her mouth reservedly draws out a smile, a smile with a subtle maternal undertone that I can't possibly put into words alone. The moment I lay my eyes upon that smile, lanterns float across the dark sky and light up the breezy darkness, as if projecting images of a childhood from another world. Then, right in the next moment, they fade back into the same wind of the still night. Something small and metallic pokes against me. I nearly forgot about the main reason I came back

here. Looking away from her, I fidget clumsily inside my school vest. Even as I'm distracted by my own maladroit nervousness, I can still feel her gaze on me, and I still see her, as if she became synonymous with the moon enveloping us. At last, untangling the pendant from the keyring I had stuffed in my pocket earlier, I take it out and let the chain dangle from my shaky fingers.

Gillian stares back at it, then at me, then at it again, with a finger on her chin. For a moment, she looks like a child who's not sure if she should feel astonished, happy, or guilty when given back the most treasured possession that she thought was already disposed of. As I'm left without adequate words to say in such a situation, I force an awkward smile, and, with the pendant in hand, slowly reach towards her. I could make out a slight smirk on her face too, as we slowly extended our arms towards each other.

But, before any of my emotions could be processed, she snatched it from my hand in a single motion as soon as we got really close to each other's faces. There isn't any trace of the reserved ambiguity from moments before any longer. Instead, her lovely mouth contorts into the shape of a clear, crystal-like smile. Grasping it with certainty in her hand, its silver light shines from the fair camellia emblem and is reflected in those night-bright eyes. But these eyes of hers—since when? I wouldn't know—are wet with tears.

Still unsure of what I should say or even do, the dark blue curtain of night hangs above us over our heads, looming with a sentiment of both anticipation and dread. I am like a doomed soldier with nothing left to do but wait for the right moment to turn the shiny blade towards my own self.

"But even so, that's fine. Here!" Gillian breaks the silence with a voice that seizes a sense of nostalgia within me that I didn't know I had. A voice that broke through the feeling of finality.

It's not like she read my mind; my sentiments probably weren't that well hidden at all, but it still makes my heart skip a beat. With a dignified glow, she grasps my hand with both of hers and gives me back the piece of jewelry, while closing my fingers gently.

"I, I really don't know...what you're talking about..."

"Don't worry, you always knew what to do. Because, though it is nothing, the world, for you, exists only because of you. The world ends when you meet an end, and it begins when you begin. You are everywhere and the world itself, so don't be afraid to break it. That's when you will be able to hear it."

A hollow wind carries her words across the nighttime scenery.

I still can't say anything, but I guess this is part of what I have to do. Something has to be finished by the end of spring, so I hold the pendant firmly in my hands and open its glimmering, silver lid. Something flashes from atop the clock tower from where we stand: a whitish amber light, like a signal tower at night transmitting my inner world to Gillian's from another space-time. This ache and heartrending wish that pushes me to dig out my own heart if only to make myself more complete, to find my form in a world of pure whiteness; yes, all of this resonated with her deepest sentiments.

She gently takes hold of my hands again, and we both simply look into the flash of light that's being reflected in our eyes as it gapes our pupils as the almost full moon does with the sky. What's the temperature of her hands? Is she actually a ghost? And this light, how far does it go? I don't know the answer to any of these questions that flash through my mind, but that's fine.

However, a sudden gust of night wind puts me off balance, I lose my footing, and my body tilts towards the edge against her. Slightly quivering, now I find myself within the complete embrace of a soft entity. As my body tries to regain its stance, her hair drops its long dark strands over my head as I fall right into the clasp of her bosom. As if it's the most natural thing to do, I close my eyes and

try to feel the inside of her chest; somehow it's hollow, and almost frozen like a rusted window in the middle of winter, a clear contrast to the subtle warmth of her bosom. But just like this, a few wet locks of her hair, blown by a mild breeze, comes flowing down to tickle my nose as a few of its remaining droplets fall upon my eyelids and lips. Though we are in the middle of the night, her hair gives off a sunburnt aftertaste, like a childhood sweater left out for too long on a rare warm day in early spring. Still with one hand holding the pendant, our white uniforms softly flap in the wind as I hold on to her.

A dreamscape that makes me feel like my shirt's tight collar is choking my neck sweetly; something seizes my heart. A frightening, overwhelming feeling moves me forward with only one thing in mind.

Before I know it, the gravitational force of my body begins to sway towards the edge as I push my weight towards Gillian, almost like a tackle. Assisted by the arms around me that seem to pull me towards her as well, our thoughts and wishes harmonize in an absolute oneness. Now, in this movement of tilting and swaying, I feel no sense of losing my balance. Instead, it's as if a certain cosmic mechanism is in sync with my inner world; a pendulum in the middle of the sea, pulled by the force of universal automation, hitting against the transparent shell enclosing it with its mass. No other thoughts came to mind but to entrust myself with this overwhelming force. Therefore, I press my face onto her rounded, porcelain-like features.

While we're still being pulled towards the edge of the belfry's platform, our interlocked connection is instinctively strung together like lines of warm saliva. The taste of a humid late spring night with its bittersweet floweriness is felt throughout every nook and cranny of my tired body. A piece of caramelized blankness dissolved within me and overpowered every one of my torments. The sky, without either of us realizing until now, has started to drizzle once more.

Taking notice that our clasp has taken the form of a freshly laundered wool blanket left in the wet weather, her lowered eyelids, with their dignified, wet long lashes that rest against her tearbags, seem to hint at a plea for warmth. A poignant lucidity strikes me as I'm once more reminded that this young woman of flesh and blood is the same one from the abstract, faraway narrative of a mere school urban legend. She is brought to me because of that old piece of jewellery, which no doubt she cherished with all the pure feelings she held within her. I wonder if this silvery pendant holds all of her friendships, betrayals, abandonment, reunions, resolutions, regrets she knew in her youth frozen in time—her everyday.

Just how much of all of her everyday still lingers in the air as of today, as it splattered onto the ground below us and disintegrated onto the white walls of our school like traces of fingerprints in a forgotten dusty library?

A shared pain inside of an unknown magnitude seizes the back of my heart, and I let the pendant slowly slip away from my grasp as it bounces onto the edge, hitting against the platform with a metallic clarity that could shatter something and set free a caged bird somewhere. As we are still linked together, I let my hand caress the top of her hair, sheltering it from the mundane rain. It's slightly frizzy because of the drizzle again, but it's soft and carries warmth. Then, passing my hand clumsily around her face, the touch of my fingertips is felt against the curves of her slightly blushed ears before slowly taking hold of her chin. I could feel the cold aliveness in her intensifying breath. The shape of her lower jaw, the beads of raindrops sitting on it, the slight fat under the chin with its tenderness—it all makes me realize how fragile to the point of melting people are when they handle each other like this. Yet, this sense of fragility resonates with me. Holding on tightly, falling towards the edge of the tower under the moon of a quiet, lovely hysteria.

As if the sky itself would be broken apart along with our thoughts if we overindulged, we finally feel the need to pull our faces away. As we do so, the reality of physics hits us once more, making our balance tip over the edge, launching our footing halfway into the void.

In a single instance—the sound of the bell behind us, the bell atop the clock tower, rings out with such a timbre so sharp and clear that it seems to pierce through the dark air of the night itself. A sound that has a quality of brightness even greater than the amberish white light of her pendant. Behind her face, shoulders, hair that are all so close to me, beyond the limits of the schoolgrounds, across the grove of half-bare oak trees and the few brick houses with their empty yards; a glimmering emptiness with a silveriness akin to liquid mercury soaks the horizon. A sound that dyes every corner of night's colors—the mundane lives we lived and all thoughts we've had while dwelling in those shadows—in a pure light that holds no meaning other than being a sum of concentrated electromagnetic waves: the particles that make up the very proof of the world's existence in our eyes. A world that's about to shatter into a thousand pieces as we start our free fall towards the cold stone pavement.

One foot, two, four, into the open space beneath our feet. We plunge into the empty air. Gillian looks at me with a thin smile, a smile that no longer moves me or frightens me; a smile for its own sake? In the memories of the living, her very existence is tied to the clock tower, and the remnants of it would have simply rotted away in the tower. So perhaps it's a smile of gratitude. At least, that's what I wish to believe. For we are breaking apart from this together, leaving the memoirs of a bygone life behind. As we start our descent towards the ground, that simple smile is burned into my retina. The figure of the girl I hold on to, in front of the view of the ground below, shines shyly under the silver blue moonlight.

A freefall. Why's it called a freefall when there's only one way we can go: the cold pavement? I don't know, but these 2.4 seconds of falling with her in my arms, I wouldn't trade it for anything in this ending world. These 2.4 seconds of freedom. The bell's ringing continues to resonate in the crisp nocturnal air, as clear as the form of hers, and mine.

As we plummet under the moonlight, I see, in front of my eyes, civilizations fading, old libraries collapsing, and mountains whose caves store the mementos of bygone tyrants erupt and shatter ...a flower blooms. Yes, a large red camellia blooms on the stone cold ground. It's an ever-expanding horizon of redness and white light. Life...me...regrets...friends...lingering existence...and the words I wasn't able to write for my story...All of those collided with Gillian's world: one that was mere words as well, as her memories became just a ghost story that floated up in people's consciousness once in a while.

Though the pendant did bring us together at first; I know that we no longer needed it. Our forms collide into one as the pull of gravity proves our existence. We both meld as one with the bell as it kept resonating above. The constellations, the galaxy, the moon, they all hear it. This resonance is a cosmic expressway. It pulls us helplessly towards the ground, and it's overwhelming enough to scatter us like glass. The moon is made of glass; that's why the impact of something hitting the ground sends its broken pieces flying all over the stone pavement, reflecting the light of our lives, the lives that we had once lived in this place.

It's scattered everywhere...like scarlet jewels, like crimson camellias taking root from nowhere at all. Reflecting the moonlight, our existence extends to all directions, all surfaces. It's an End, but it holds so much significance.

(the life of a highschooler, a nostalgic winter break, a sulky summer trip, words written for a rejected poem entry.)

The many known “things” of this world, my world—the certain futility at the end defines their meaningfulness. In fact, they might have never even existed in the first place, but as they are the only things I get to see in my world, they are the everything that shines on as the universal proof of my own existence.

In the melody resonating in the rainy air of the early morning sky, she taught me—no, I found out about the gravitational force of the things we see as abstract and formless.

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There is a vision when I gaze into the classroom window. I can see two figures clad in the pristine white uniforms of Saint Coeur’s. It’s probably still pretty early before class since no other students have arrived yet. The cool morning rays of early summer light up their silhouettes.

Dorothy is sitting at her desk by the window, she seems sad as she stares absent-mindedly at her open sketchbook with the indescriptive doodles she drew in art class. Marnie is at the seat right in front of her, sitting backwards leisurely on the wooden chair, turned towards her. The bespectacled girl gestures her hands energetically in order to tell the story about something that’s happened to her recently, letting her obsession with detective fiction somewhat alter the degree to which the events had occurred. Then, sensing her mopey attitude, she stops what she was saying mid-sentence and points at her friend, bringing up her observation in an exaggerated way on purpose in order to tease her. Dumbstruck, Dorothy, with the side of her face resting on her hand, is unsure if she should get mad or laugh at how much of an idiot her friend is, as the tears that were welling up in her eyes subsided.