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Silence of a Heart

Julia A. Heilakka

Gettysburg College, heilju01@cnav.gettysburg.edu

Class of 2013

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Author Bio

Julia Heilakka is a member of the class of 2013 from East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. She has yet to declare a major, though she is considering music, language, or the sciences. Julia has been writing short stories and books since eighth grade and has fallen in love with the art of writing. In her free time, she enjoys reading and horseback riding.

Julia Heilakka

Silence of a Heart

She was a sweet, slightly overweight girl with a sharp tongue when I met her. Blonde hair that had been dyed fire-engine red was pulled back, away from her blue eyes, though she had bangs that refused to stay tucked behind her ears. Her wardrobe was of a classic Goth style, but she occasionally wore blue jeans. Anyone else might have chosen to smile kindly and keep a wide berth, but I was either too young or too stupid to notice the vibes she was giving off.

“Hey, can you help me tighten this?” were the first words I said to her. We both volunteered at a horse therapy center named Equi-librium.

“Sure,” she responded in a short voice, grabbing the buckles of the girth from my hands. Timmy, an albino Appaloosa, had sucked air into his lungs, so the girth that was meant to secure his saddle no longer fit around his swollen stomach. She kneed him in the barrel and pulled the buckles tight.

“Thanks,” I said to her back. She was already walking away.

The summer days passed slowly and our boss constantly threw us together. On the third day, she finally introduced herself.

“I’m Jamie,” she told me while we were mucking out stalls. “Want to come over sometime?”

I nodded, a little uncertain of her straightforward manner. She went right back to mucking and didn’t say another word.

Lo and behold, that Saturday, I was sitting in her room. Her bedroom was the attic of her house. The walls were painted a faded yellow color. Her bed and bookshelf were both made of ash, but the little stool that supported her TV was black mahogany. A Playstation 2 sat to the right of the stool, and that was what we did until dinner – murdered scary clowns and raced fast cars.

I guess she came to trust me over dinner with her family. Conversation in earnest started over baked macaroni and cheese, green bean casserole, and Ocean Spray’s Cranberry-Raspberry juice. I was overcome by the hundreds of similarities we shared. Her parents, Ingrid and Steven Pelinski, mused that we could have been twins. Yet, over dinner I felt that something wasn’t right. I couldn’t pinpoint my feeling’s source, but something was wrong. I noticed that I felt uncomfortable around her father. It came as no surprise though. His face was fixed in an almost permanent frown, and there was 6’4” of height and three hundred

pounds of muscle behind that frown. The two glasses of red wine next to his plate didn't help either. Regardless, my visit turned into a sleep over. We collapsed in the living room around four.

Two or three months had passed, and we'd grown inseparable. Finishing each other's sentences, craving the same foods, and responding in unison was only the beginning. We had the same reactions to situations, the same laugh, and the same innate love for books. Yet, such understanding of a person also comes with the knowledge of when the entire story isn't being told. I didn't want to press her, but it was obvious that she wasn't telling me something. I found out a fragment on a Friday night a few weeks later.

I was laying on my bed, particularly enjoying one of my favorite books when I heard her car come up my driveway. She usually called before she visited, but it wouldn't have been the first time she'd forgotten. I marked my page with part of my sheet and hopped out of bed to greet her. I got to the door the same time that she did. "You should have called, I would've made cookies," an old personal joke between us, died in my throat before I could say it. She'd been crying. A lot. Her makeup had smeared all the way down her cheeks and onto the top collar of her coat. Her eyes were bloodshot, cheeks bright red. It was obvious that she'd just wiped away fresh tears.

"Jamie, what's—" I hadn't gotten any farther before she wrapped her arms around me and new tears sprung from her eyes. I stood in my foyer, stunned to silence. A million possibilities were flying through my head, each scenario becoming more and more gory, more and more horrifying. I shot a glance over to her blue Kia, looking for any sort of damage. I didn't see anything, so I ruled out the possibility that she'd been in an accident. Perhaps her parents were hurt? Dead, even? Was she pregnant?

She wasn't ready to talk, that much was evident. I guided her into my room, and eventually got her onto my bed. She wouldn't let me go, regardless of what I said, so I resigned myself to putting an arm around her. My overactive brain would have to wait.

"Jamie, is anyone hurt? Do I need to call an ambulance or something?" I asked after few minutes. If she'd walked into her house to find her parents murdered... I didn't want to think about it. She jolted her head violently and kept crying. I managed to detach her from my side with the excuse of using the bathroom. Instead, I snuck upstairs and told my parents that Jamie was here and would be spending the night.

Morning came with no sign of Jamie, spare a quick note scrawled in her handwriting that was propped against my computer screen. The note explained that she was running errands after school, and that I'd see her again later. I shrugged before ripping the letter apart. Jamie and I were very close, but it still aggravated me that she never thanked me for anything I'd done.

There were many more nights like the one I described above. They didn't always start with a tear-stained face, but they always ended with one. She'd attach herself to my shoulder and cry until my shirt was soaked through, and she didn't have any more tears to cry. Then the whimpering and night

terrors would start, and I would have to sit there, unmoving. Never before had I felt so terrible and so completely useless. There was absolutely nothing I could do except keep her company while she dealt with her demons.

After her most recent episode, she informed me that she was going to her cousin's house in Philadelphia because her mom was on a business trip. She never gave me a timeline, and I finally got a call two weeks later.

"Hello?" I said into the phone.

"Hey, Julie, it's Jamie. Are you doing anything this week?"

"No, what's up?"

"Well, my mom's out of town again and I was wondering if I could maybe spend the week at your house."

After a quick check with Mom, I told her it was fine, and she responded that she'd be on her way in about an hour.

When she got to my house, I had a surprise waiting for her. She'd always talked about how she'd wanted to dye someone's hair, so I had two boxes of black hair dye waiting to be squished into my hair. I threw a box at her when she walked into the kitchen. She laughed.

"Let's get this started. If you look like a retard, it's not my fault." She pushed her long sleeves up to her elbows and donned gloves to protect her hands. I'll be completely honest; only the years I spent learning how to be a respectful young lady kept me from gasping. She had telltale white lines from her wrists to the shirtsleeves. The lines got worse as they moved up her arm. I didn't want to think about what marred her upper arm. She caught my glance before I could look away and shook her head ever so slightly. That meant we'd talk when Mom wasn't around.

I kept a cheery mood in the kitchen, even once venturing to smear dye on her nose. In return, I got a smudge on my ear. She also managed to get some on her clothes. Once my hair was set, we went downstairs and I grabbed her one of my long sleeve shirts. That was another plus to being best friends with her—we shared the same clothing size. She pulled her shirt off and put mine on.

"Jamie, what happened to your back?" There were ugly bruises on her shoulders and sides.

"Dutch bucked me off again. It's fine Julie, don't worry about it."

That's something I never wanted to hear from her. "Fine" meant that she didn't want to talk about it; "don't worry about it" meant I shouldn't ask. What worried me more was that she was lying to me. Duchess, a Paint horse we worked with, had gone lame two weeks ago, and Jamie and I were both in charge of nursing her back to health. The fact that she'd used a lie that I could spot so easily freaked me out. But Jamie was Jamie, and she wouldn't talk to me until she was ready, no matter how much I pried. So, as usual, I shut my mouth and prayed that she would be ready to talk to me soon.

Her last visit to me was different. Her face was pale and her eyes looked forlorn, almost like she was sleeping, and a puppeteer was holding

her up by only a few strings. She walked straight into my house and collapsed onto my downstairs couch. Alarm bells were going off in my head like there was no tomorrow. I needed to find out what was wrong, and I needed to do it soon. The sense of urgency I felt almost overcame me, but I kept myself in check. Regardless of what I did or asked, Jamie would tell me when she was ready. There was no way around that.

“Julia?” she finally voiced, fifteen minutes later.

“Yeah?” I answered back.

“Thank you.”

The look of alarm that crossed my face reflected only a portion of what I was feeling. Something was wrong. Very, very wrong. “For?”

A wan smile crossed her face and she leaned her head up against my shoulder and shut her eyes. “Everything.”

I felt her relax against me and I listened to her sigh. It was long and drawn out, like she was releasing air out of a balloon.

“It’s okay, Jamie. You know that we’re—” That was as far as I got before her torso dropped into my lap.

“Jamie?” I grabbed her shoulders and pulled her up. Her head rested against her chest, and her tongue was resting between her teeth. “Jamie?!” I called again, shaking her. She fell against me and my world stopped when I shoved my fingers into her neck and felt no pulse.

“MOM! NOW!” I screamed at the top of my lungs. The urgency in my voice must have scared her, because I heard her slipped feet pounding down the stairs. “AMBULANCE!”

I couldn’t take my eyes off Jamie. I got her onto the floor and started CPR on my best and closest friend. I felt tears clouding my eyes and shook them away, staying as focused as I could. I could hear my breath coming in raps. It filled my ears. Two rescue breaths, thirty pushes. Repeat. Two rescue breaths, thirty pushes. Repeat. I couldn’t lose her. No. My best friend, my sister, my closest companion. She was motionless on the floor, not breathing. Her heart had stopped. I had to save her. I had to. Failure wasn’t an option. I couldn’t lose her.

I felt two strong arms haul me away from Jamie’s body. I kicked and screamed, trying desperately to get back to her. The person behind me was strong. They kept me back and immobile, even through all of my attempts to get away. I lashed out once and instantly regretted it. I felt the stab of tranquilizers. The last thing I can recall is staring at the ceiling, watching the flash of the ambulance’s lights bounce around the room.

Jamie was pronounced dead at the hospital. She’d suffered from severe internal bleeding, bruising to her abdomen, and a popped lung. She died as a result of those injuries and the CPR I administered. I learned later that performing CPR had pushed a broken rib into her lung and popped it. If I hadn’t performed CPR, the EMT’s probably could have saved her.

I’ll never forgive myself.