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Holding Me

Emily H. Whitcomb
Gettysburg College, whitem01@gettysburg.edu
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Author Bio
Emily Whitcomb ’18 is a senior Studio Art major. She loves writing but found its healing powers a little too late, so she is sad that she wasn’t able to explore this outlet more in her classes. She loves the outdoors and spends most of her time hiking, kayaking, skiing, camping, etc. This is my first time opening up to strangers, and she is feeling vulnerable, but she is excited to see where this takes her!
Holding Me

Cradling myself, feeling the support of the kitchen floor beneath me. The grey and brown swirls of the tile are cold and tough. I surrender all my weight into the light brown, wooden cupboards beside me. I don’t care that my tears are distorting my thick, black eyeliner. The heat they bring is welcomed because I find my skin to be freezing. I try to curb my inner monologue because my thoughts are elusive and sometimes too fast for me to catch. I try to control my thoughts because thoughts turn into triggers. Triggers are dangerous because they stop my breathing, they quicken my heartbeats, and they transport me to a scene of their choosing. But it’s too late to avoid that now.

He was my best friend. Sometimes I think about how happy we might have been if the bad, the horrors, had never existed.

But they did.

We met in the summertime, when the sky was blue and the shade of a tree provided shelter. Six years ago, at the age of fourteen, he was just over six feet tall. His eyes were wide and light blue with a little hazel circling his pupils. His hair was outrageous, untamed, and black. I remember running my fingers through his thick curls, lightly grabbing hold, and leaning in for a soft kiss where his lips embraced mine.

We were so in love. Maybe in the you’re-too-young-to-know-what-love-is kind of way, but it was wonderful. We spent every weekend together, always doing something outdoors. Maybe it was a sailing trip with my parents or a wine festival with his. Whatever it was, we were together, and I was incandescently happy. We were the type of couple that everyone was jealous of. If he could, he would never let go of my hand. If he could, he would make sure I was always smiling. If he could, he would never let a moment pass by without letting me know that he loved me.

We attended two different high schools, he and I. He went to Gettysburg, smack-dab in the middle of Adams County, Pennsylvania, and I went to Fairfield, just fifteen minutes southwest. Fairfield is a rural town where the cows outnumber the people, everyone knows everyone else, and drama spreads like wildfire. To me, Gettysburg was the town where all the essentials were: Walmart, Giant, restaurants, outlets, etc.

Because we lived in two different towns, we could only see each other on the weekends, but we made the most of it. Once, I attended his soccer game and cheered his name so loudly and so often that I lost my voice. I sat in the grass with his father, stepmother, and two stepbrothers. The grass was itchy, but I didn’t mind because I was watching my superstar take the field and totally annihilate the other team. He scored goal after goal and, as he ran past me, he would wink and say, “How’s my girl doing?”

I loved being called “my girl.” I loved being possessed, knowing I was his and he loved me. The way he acknowledged my presence gave me a high. My body erupted with pleasure that started in my chest and spread to my fingertips. No matter how embarrassed I felt, no matter how much my modesty

But that smile would vanish after a year of bliss. The smile he fought so hard to keep on my face would falter and disappear.

July 31, 2012. One year, one month, and twenty days after we met.

It was premeditated. The expansive forest behind my house, the comforter taken from my bed, the condom stolen from his parents. I had changed my outfit at least seven times but settled on a short, tight dress with a floral pattern. A little too girly for my taste, but what other costume could’ve been more perfect for my deflowering?

We were both acknowledged virgins and owned the innocent awkwardness of that fact as we hiked about a mile into the woods. Nervous laughter and multiple whispers of “Are you ready for this?” interrupted the forest’s quiet demeanour. As we stepped foot onto the sacred ground chosen for this occasion, I felt the nervousness ease in my stomach. We helped each other unfold the comforter and place it on the forest floor. Smoothing out the wrinkles, we ended up on opposite sides of the blanket. We made eye contact, and he spoke first.

“Are you nervous?” he asked.

“No, I know you’ll be gentle,” I said.

And with that, I crawled towards him and let my fingertips pull upward at the seams of his grey t-shirt. Taking his turn, he tugged at the hem of my skirt before realising that it needed to be taken off in the other direction. In one, fluid motion, he pulled the dress up and over my head. I wriggled my arms free from their sleeves and stood before him in only my bra and panties. He decided to take off his shorts himself because the button had always caused me trouble.

Simultaneously, we undressed down to our bare skin. I allowed myself a moment to acknowledge everything my senses were experiencing. Before this moment, I had only seen his bare chest in the context of a pool. Now, he was in front of me with nothing to hide behind. The various shades of green enveloped us. The dark green grasses curled over the edge of the blanket. The lighter green leaves canopied the tops of trees, contrasting the sunlight sneaking through the gaps between branches. Even the browns from the trunks of trees were encircled by lush green vines.

He reached up, brushing the loose strands of hair from my face, and kissed me. It was different from other kisses he’d given me. This one was hard and, acting like a leading question, begged for a response.

Close by, a branch fell.

Its crackling noise stole my attention. My awareness expanded from his immediate touch to the surrounding forest. My Cherokee-oriented grandfather taught me that nature is sentient and autonomous. In the moment, the trees became perceptive and the soil in which they grew was responsive. The forest’s presence overwhelmed me. It provided active company. The green engulfing my vision was dynamically occupying this moment. The vegetation remained unbiased, but I could not help but find comfort in its existence. But this ease would be short-lived.

As I emerged from our thick haze of intimacy, I noticed that his expression was one of annoyance. He was clearly flustered that I had broken his concentration and, therefore, killed the mood.
“May we resume?” he pressed.

“Can I just have a minute?” I pleaded, “I’m sorry, I just got caught up in
the moment, and that clamour made me jump.” Suddenly, the thought of un-
welcome hikers crossed my mind, and the fear of being happened upon made
me uneasy.

“Are you serious? Do you even want to do this? Are you just making up
excuses because you can’t just tell me that you don’t want to be with me?” he
probed.

“Of course not! I was so excited for this moment! It was going to be so
special…” I felt my voice begin to trail off.

“Was? So it’s over? Just like that you decide that we’re through here? That
this isn’t going to happen?” he assumed.

“No, that’s not what I meant—”

“Because you don’t get to decide that, you know. You built this up, you got
me all hard, and now you have to honour your word,” he stated firmly.

“But I’m just not in the right mindset now, you know? I’m sorry,” I said.

“You will be.”

In a flash, he placed his right hand on the curve of my shoulder and his
left around my neck. He had never touched me this way, and it rendered me
speechless. His grip was so tight that I could follow his veins from the back of
his hands, up his arm, to his biceps. His eyes were darker now, his dilated pupils
taking up most of the space, and his jaw was clenched, as if he was putting every
ounce of energy into this action. I was eighty-five pounds, and I knew he could
overpower me, but I still didn’t understand what was happening.

My body became tingly and numb as I felt him push me onto my back. I
even remember blinking at him a few times, wide-eyed, as I stared into his fa-
miliar blue eyes, as he lowered himself to reflect my horizontal state. I allowed
him to position my body, like a puppeteer manipulating his doll.

Heaving, he separated my legs. He tugged my underwear down over my
knees, then over my ankles, and eventually onto the pile of clothes I had will-
ingly removed. He situated himself between my thighs, creating a space wide
enough for his hips.

I remember how dizzy I felt as I refocused my eyes on the leaf-speckled
ceiling. All of my blood drained from my face and rushed to my heart, which
was now beating so loudly that even he couldn’t help but notice its rhythm. He
gathered my limp wrists into one of his giant palms and held them above my
head. With his other hand, he adjusted himself and pushed into me.

The pain startled me, and I yelped. In that moment, everything was too
much. My senses were overwhelmed. I could taste the blood in my mouth, as I
had unknowingly been biting my tongue. I could hear the breeze move nearly-
weightless objects across the ground beside my head. I could smell the perfume
I had borrowed from my mother in honour of this occasion. I could see how his
body contorted mine. As I exhaled, his weight crushed my ribs, not allowing my
lungs the courtesy of another breath.

I raised my head to see if the fear on my face could be registered and pro-
cessed as an apologetic surrender. I repeated my repertoire of apologies and
pleas but he took my words and twisted them into consent. This was before I
learned that silence makes him softer.
“It hurts!” I cried.
He ignored me, and another sharp pain was followed by a shift of weight. I felt him thrust his full body weight into me.
I started screaming and thrashing within the confines of his grip, “Please, I’ll do anything! Please stop! Stop!” He tightened his grip and choked my sobs away until I was left, whispering, “Please... Please... Please...”
After what seemed like hours, his grip loosened, and he pulled away. When I inched away from him, I clasped my hand over my mouth. About three feet below the indent that my head left behind was a pool of blood, now staining the middle of my childhood comforter. I pulled my knees upward to rest my chin on their boniness.
He edged slowly towards me, offering my clothes in lieu of a white flag.
“I’m sorry,” he said, his eyes, now soft, pleading with mine, “You’re just so beautiful that I couldn’t help myself, and I had built up this moment in my head, and the thought of not going through with it today nearly broke my heart. Don’t you understand?”
I couldn’t find the words. I couldn’t even look at him. I grabbed my clothes from his hand and slowly began to dress.
“Are you really going to be a baby about this whole thing? I mean, come on, wasn’t that everything you ever wanted it to be? Wasn’t it special?” He reached his hand out to touch mine, and I flinched, the first of many to come.
“Oh, Love, you know I would never do anything to hurt you. Please? You’re making me feel bad,” he beseeched.
That broke me and he knew it. A guilt swelled up inside of me that was so great and so overwhelming, that I smiled. I turned to face him, lifted his hand to my lips, and kissed his clasped hand. As my dimples gave way, he enveloped me in an embrace that reeked of a false sense of safety. But while I was shrouded in his arms, I buried my face in his chest and allowed silent tears to fall.

My eyes burn, my head is pounding, and my lungs feel like they are thawing. All at once, very real arms surround me. I’m lifted off the kitchen floor, and my feet are grounded. My mind still feels clouded, and my body is weak from reminiscing, but he knows this. He scoops me off my wobbly feet and carries me to my bed.
Trying to calm my dread, my beloved sings to me, “You are my sunshine, my only sunshine...” I almost urge him to stop because this nightmare will not be soothed with a nursery rhyme, but think better of it because his voice settles my breathing, dries my eyes, composes me.

“Which time was it?” he inquires, his low whisper not intruding on my privacy but genuinely wanting to understand, to help.

“The first,” I manage, but my voice breaks.

“It’s ok. You’re ok. You’re safe now,” he repeats. With each phrase, he strokes my hair in rhythm. “He’ll never touch you again,” he says, sternly. And although an embrace from my protector may send me back into the arms of my demon, all I want, more than anything in the world, is to be held.