Secrets in Ink

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Looking down at the body on the floor sketching intently in his notebook of figures and numbers, unaware of everything going on in her life, she couldn’t decide if she wanted him to go away or curl up beside her. The moment her tongue began forming words, her words cracked and lay shattered on the ground as her eyes formed tears that she couldn’t easily brush away.

Plop. Plop. She felt the teardrops hit the notebook splashing her words, eventually wrinkling the pages, forever leaving their mark, never to be forgotten.

“Are you okay?” He asked, but he knew she wasn’t. He knew she hadn’t been okay in a long time. Once upon a time, she could have pretended she was, but she couldn’t take it anymore. He didn’t touch her or even get up from the grungy carpet, instead he just stared intently at her; his head cocked slightly giving him the appearance of a bird, quizzically waiting for an answer.

She shouldn’t be upset with herself; she should be pissed off and wanting to throw things. But she sat there huddled under a blanket, wanting to disappear from the world while feeling defeated.

“Yeah,” she muffled as she pulled the blanket up over her head, shielding her face.

“Are you lying?” he asked. His eyes were focused on her, but she could tell his mind was elsewhere, on his own problems that she didn’t know. She didn’t answer, but crawled onto the floor and put her head on his shoulder. All she wanted was for him to make her feel better, to magically make it all go away.

“I’m just tired that’s all,” she said. Tired of life, tired of this, tired of not knowing what to do.

He got up and left the room and she let out another sigh. She couldn’t describe the feelings in her head, let alone tell him. But it wasn’t all her fault; he was always off in his own little world that she couldn’t reach no matter how hard she tried. It wasn’t like there was a lot holding them together anymore, apart from memories and sex.

“I have an idea,” he said coming back in the room clutching a black marker and taking off his shirt. “We are going to write on each other’s back. A secret that we haven’t told each other,” he said. She raised her eyebrow at him. It was just another idea, another crazy hope of promising to be better tomorrow, but it would do nothing. Nothing would make the issue go away.

“Then what?” she asked.

“That’s all. We’ll say all the things we can’t say aloud. Then maybe we can eventually talk. Now take off your shirt.” She didn’t want to take off her shirt. She didn’t want to be naked anymore.

“I am not trying to seduce you, at least not yet,” he teased. “Take it off.”

She pulled her thin tank top over her head. He gently unhooked her bra, leaving her to undo her arms through the holes. It was all done without passion or the feeling of sweet temptation. It was a deeper form of nakedness, looking beyond the lust and actually upon the person. She was vulnerable and didn’t like the way his eyes were on her, as if it was the first time he was actually looking at her. She felt like her body, used over and over, had nothing left.

She heard him uncap the marker and wrinkled her nose as the stench of permanent marker wafted to her nose. Grazing her back, he looked for the best place for a message that would never be read. When the marker touched her bare flesh, it caused shivers to crawl up her spine.

“It’s cold.” She said crossing her arms across her breasts. The marker tickled her skin, and she thought of the ink bleeding into her bloodstream, forever changing her.

“Shhh,” he said. His breath lingered on the back of her ear. He was so close to her yet she was unable to touch him. What secrets was he telling? In the end it was his decision to make, but she needed to know what he was thinking. The marker dragged against her skin and she tried to make out the sensations into words but couldn’t put together the pieces. His fingertips pressed into her back making the words darker.

She thought about all the possibilities of what he was writing, but she couldn’t bring herself to ask. Once she asked, she couldn’t live in denial or naivety; she would have to face the facts—whatever they may be.

She took everything he said so seriously—every criticism and act of kindness she took upon herself to try and change. No matter how many times she told herself that it was for the best because he was making her better, she couldn’t truly believe it—most of the time she felt a bit desperate at the whole thing. She wanted to please him so much that she was acting on tiptoes, afraid to upset the balance in anyway. This of course led to more fights, but she couldn’t change it.

Not wanting to break the magic, she sat in silence. Her heart pounded against her chest, and her stomach, despite her huge lunch, suddenly felt hollow. She had to remind herself that it was just words on her back, but it seemed like so much more. Like the world was hanging in the balance of what he wrote. Her skin was the canvas, for his thoughts, like he was molding
Abigail Barefoot is a senior in Women’s Studies and Journalism. She is currently applying to graduate school with the hope of one day becoming a professor. She has a book on her at all times and is frequently talking about social justice. When she isn’t doing activism, she likes to cook and take photos.