

Fifty Themes

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A selection of short stories based on different themes. Romance, Comedy, Teen, Drama...all rolled into one nice little package. Surely, you'll find something you like in this series of tales.

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1 - Smile

A long, soft sigh flew into the air. Julian's mouth closed after producing the sound, his lips softly pursing together. Reaching up with his right hand, he placed a fallen strand of hair that had escaped his low corn silk ponytail behind his ear. Resting one leg over the other, he placed his arm on his lap. Julian sighed once more. "**Late as always,**" He spoke to himself, though a wider smile graced his lips with these sad words. Even though he was being forced to wait, he couldn't help but feel somewhat happy. He would wait forever if he had to, so why start complaining when he knew that deep down, he didn't mind?

He perked his head up as a distant sound reached his ears. It was a jingly sound, like that of metal clapping against each other. Turning his head, he smiled warmly. Running towards him was what most people would think was a woman, but he knew better. Sure, the long purple hair that flowed down from behind a plastic neon pink headband could trick the eyes. Even the fact that the individual was wearing a blue baby tee with off-the-shoulder sleeves and pink heart in the middle, accompanied by a latex miniskirt, colored a light blue to match the tee. The legs, so feminine, were clad in a pair of matching blue latex boots with pink lace stockings peeling out just above the knee. Bracelets and rings lined the very gentle-looking fingers and arms. So overall, yes, one would think that there was beautiful woman running towards him. But Julian knew better. And that's all that mattered.

He rose to his feet slowly before addressing the feminine figure. "**Gabe...**" He spoke softly, only to let out a pained grunt as he was glomped.

"**Juuuules! Awww, it's been ages!**" The voice behind the looks dispelled all on-looker's assumptions, as it was clearly male. The purple haired boy wrapped his arms around the frail body of Julian, clinging to him. Julian laughed softly.

"**Gabe...my dear friend, you're...crushing my lungs.**" Gabriel pulled back, grinning sheepishly.

"**Sorry...I'm just so excited you could spend time with me today!**"

"**You know I will always make time for you, Gabe...whenever you need me,**" Julian spoke sweetly and seriously. Gabriel smiled, picking up Julian's left hand and taking it into his.

"**I know...I can always rely on you for everything, Jules.**" There was a small sense of peace and love between the two. Julian looked at his friend, admiring the boy's unnatural beauty. Suddenly, though, Gabriel flashed a smile and gripped tightly onto Julian's hand before dragging him down the sidewalk,

"**Come on! We have to beat the teen girl rush if we want to get the best miniskirts!**"

Julian followed, his legs moving on their own as the rest of his body seemed to fall limp and allow itself to be directed. He chuckled, "**Gabriel...no need to be in a hurry. We have all day...**" The purple haired boy turned his head, panting out batted breaths before speaking.

"**I know...but I still want to get there early.**"

They soon arrived at this destination, a small boutique dedicated to elite feminine street clothes as well as accessories. Julian felt nervous as he followed the ever cheerful Gabriel inside. It was often rare to find men in such stores and for those who were there, they were usually accompanied by female companions. Julian knew that, more than likely, people would believe him to be just the same and that Gabriel was his girlfriend. Still, it felt strange and he couldn't help the sensation that he was being watched by the numerous high school girls who had, too, flocked to the shop. The blonde boy looked at his companion, who seemed completely undeterred by the few glances they received. Gabriel let go of

Julian's hand, becoming totally distracted by a mannequin on a pedestal towards the back. Julian tried to stay close, not wanting to make himself seem out of place.

"Wooooow..." Gabriel cooed as he admired the mannequin from different angles, **"I like that belt. Don't you, Julian?"** Julian nodded, his answer quiet. He didn't particularly care much for fashion, as evident in his lack of style. But why should he? He was comfortable in his loose magenta long-sleeved top, dark denim jeans and simple sandals. Besides, he rarely ever got to go out and enjoy himself. His days were spent in his office, performing cosmetic miracles while his nights were spent filing paperwork. It was nice to get out once in a while. It was even better when it was in the company of such a beautiful person. But there was no need to go out of his way to appear fashionable, not even for Gabriel. Comfort above style, as they say.

Gabriel tangoed around the various racks of clothing, picking up random items and adding them to the ever growing pile in his hands. Suddenly, he turned to Julian with a wide grin. **"Let's go try these on, mkay?"**

"Me too?" Julian asked with slight discomfort. Trying on clothes was a tedious act and, judging by the pile, Gabriel had chosen some very uncomfortable pieces. But the femme boy opposite him just nodded and turned heel, walking towards the dressing booths. Julian sighed and reluctantly followed.

The next hour was spent changing into tight clothing, coming out, being humiliated and changing again. Julian was pleased when Gabriel announced he was finished shopping. In the end, he never actually bought anything. Julian felt like smacking him but just chuckled uncomfortably and suggested they go out to eat. **"Brilliant idea!"** Gabriel complimented and ordered that they visit Strawberry Bistro. After all, Julian's older brother did own it and that meant one thing and one thing alone: free sundaes. Julian complied and they walked several blocks before reaching the establishment.

"Oro? Julian! Doom! How nice to see you!"

"Likewise, Dafne. How are you?" Julian smiled as he and Gabriel stood at the podium, watching the woman behind it. She was shorter than both of them but had a large frame. Her short black hair kissed her face, her large blue eyes shimmering by the dim lights beside her. She was dressed in a chemise and apron but her ample cleavage remained dominant. Julian was used to it, though. His eyes met her face while his companion gave her chest a tad more attention. **"I hope you've been well?"**

"Of course. You guys want a window seat? There's one in the VIP section." The girl picked up two menus, holding them to her chest which caused Gabriel's vision to advert. **"Want me to let Antoine know you're here?"**

"Well...I don't want to bother him..."

"Hell yeah! I wanna see him!" Gabriel spurted out as he clung onto Julian's arm. He always liked Antoine. He was so stern and it was fun to try and make him laugh. Dafne laughed and led the boys back, seating them in a secluded booth beside a large window. She handed them the menus and left to retrieve her beloved boss.

"Hmm...what are you gonna have?" Gabriel asked as he read the menu up and down. His eyes looked over the laminated paper, observing his company put the menu down and dig into his pocket. Julian withdrew a pair of glasses, slipping them on his face before picking the menu up again. **"Man, Jules. Your eyes are getting worse, huh?"** He asked, concern. He knew Julian had worn glasses all his life but never did he have to wear glasses to read a menu before. Julian smiled.

"Yes...it would seem so. But it's alright." Doom slammed his hand down on the table, causing Julian

to jump a little.

"frack no it's not!" Julian leaned in, his smile fading.

"Gabe, please. Don't be so loud." Gabriel rarely raised his voice or used profanity. But he was an Akamatseru nonetheless. They were well known for their potty mouths. He was no exception.

"Julian, your whole livelihood depends on your eyesight. What are you going to do when you go blind?" Julian leaned back, the plush of the booth massaging him.

"I don't really know. I have enough money as of now to live off of for a bit but.." Doom shook his head, rubbing his temple.

"You spend so much time healing other people. Heal yourself for once." Julian smiled again. It was rare for Gabriel to be so serious but it was sweet, heart warming.

"It's alright. I swear...now...I think I'll have a strawberry shortcake and some tea. You?"

"Hum....if you get the shortcake, can I have some? And I'll get an éclair to share with you."

"Of course. Do you want to share the tea too?"

"Yes, please."

"You two are going to create a whole new type of AIDS if you keep sharing things." The two boys turned. Antoine stood at the end of the table, Dafne behind him. He looked just as Gabriel remembered. His hair was long, much like Julian's, but it was a midnight black. His eyes were blue like Julian's as well, only much darker. He was dressed in a black vest, pinstripe shirt and slacks. He looked rather regal, not like the type of man who owned a bistro that thrived off of desserts. Julian frowned.

"That's not something you should joke about, frere." Antoine looked at Julian, his expression blank.

"Je m'excuse. I didn't mean to offend. In any case, I wasn't expecting you today. Don't you have work?"

"No. I took the day off to spend time with Gabriel." At the mention of his name, the boy waved.

"I see. Well then...Dafne, you heard their orders. Get to it." The girl meeped at the command but quickly disappeared. Julian sighed.

"Si moyen. Shouldn't you be nicer to your own girlfriend?"

"Do not give me romance advice. I will hear none of it coming from someone like you. When was the last time you were with someone?" Julian opened his mouth but remained silent, for his brother already knew the answer. A rare smile crossed the raven-haired man's lips and he turned.

"Comme j'ai pensé. I shall see you later, frere." The dark figure left the two. Gabriel twiddled his thumbs, unsure of what to say or do.

"Um..."

"It's alright. My brother does come off a bit...harsh, does he not? Still, he's blood." Julian sighed. Gabriel nodded.

"I think he just wants you to be happy and...well...he's happy because he's with Dafne, right? So it only makes sense that you would be happy if with someone else. Think about it, Jules. When was the last time you were with someone? Since Armel and Herve?" Julian bit his lip softly, going through the recesses of his mind. His last relationship was back when he was 18. He was now 20. Yes, it had been quite a long time but Julian never felt bothered by it. He didn't need to prove his existence through that of another. However, there were times when he felt lonely. They were just passing feelings so he never thought much of it. But if both his brother and Gabriel thought he needed someone, maybe he did. **"Jules, isn't there someone who makes you...you know...horny?"** Julian laughed.

"So blunt, as always." The click clank of heels stopped Julian from continuing. Dafne returned, balancing trays of food on her palms.

"Sorry it took so long! Here you go!" She laid the trays down on the table, lifting the two plates of food and putting them in front of the boys. She then sat the tall glass of tea in the middle of them, placing two

straws beside it. **"There! Is that everything?"**

"Yes. Thanks," Gabriel said as he stuck one of the straws in the tea. Julian smiled and nodded her off before turning his attention to his treat.

The cake was chilled. The atmosphere was crisp. The tea was causing his lung to collapse from sheer coldness. So why was his body still so hot? Gabriel looked up at his friend, his lips glued to the straw as he suckled. Julian seemed uncomfortable, drinking opposite him. Gabriel removed his lips, causing Julian to do the same with a confused look. **"Something wrong, Gabe?"**

"You look uncomfortable..." Gabriel mumbled as he crossed his arms on the table, his long fingers gripping the fork that was sticking out of his eclair. **"What's up?"**

Julian smiled and shook his head. **"And that!"** Gabriel exclaimed, **"You keep smiling for no reason."**

"Que? Do you not like my smile, Gabe?" Julian asked innocently, sliding his glasses down his nose.

"That's not what I meant...it's just...you always smile and I don't know how you feel when you do."

"I feel happy. That's why I smile."

"You feel happy when you're alone? When you're uncomfortable?"

"I'm never alone when I'm with you, Gabe."

"But you are STILL alone. Why don't you date anyone?" Julian hesitated for a minute. He twirled his straw between his index finger and thumb.

"Hm..."

"Well..." He began slowly, **"I guess it's because I already found my special someone. They just don't know how I feel yet."** Julian's word sank away as he turned his head towards the window. The air was silent, as Gabriel tried to find words.

"Hm...well, do I know this person? I could set you guys up." Julian laughed.

"Well...you do know them but...trust me. Let them notice me back on their own." Julian looked back at Gabriel, whose lip pouted.

"Jules..."

"Don't worry so much..." The blonde boy reached out, taking a strand of Gabriel's hair in his hand and rubbing his lips against it. **"I'll be fine. Now you...you should find someone who can make you happy."**

Gabriel whined. **"But I dooooo!"** Julian pulled his hand away, his expression hardening.

"That...man. He's not the one for you." Gabriel swooned, disregarding Julian's voiced concern.

"You don't know him like I do," The violet-haired boy sighed before a mischievous look crossed him.

"I daresay you are jealous." Julian gasped, horrified.

"W-what? Never. No. I'm not." Gabriel laughed, pointing at the distraught man.

"You totally are! You totally hate that Zack has all my attention!" His laughing subsided the moment Julian rose up. He put his hands on the table and leaned towards Gabriel.

"Gabriel....I'm not jealous." Though his expression was one filled with both anger and sorrow, his voice was soft as always. **"I...I just don't like how he treats you. If it were I who had your affections, I'd be honored. I'd return them and I'd make sure to never lead you astray. That man...he doesn't care about you..."** A part of him wanted to continue with *'like I do'* but now was not the time. His blue eyes focused on Gabriel. He was listening closely, something he'd never done before. Julian sighed and sat down. Slowly, a smile came to him. **"I'm sorry...I just don't want to see you hurt."**

Gabriel, too, smiled. **"I know. And thank you, Julian. You're the best friend a guy could have."**

'Friend. Of course. But don't you forget, Gabriel. This smile isn't meant for anyone else...but you.'

2 - Family

The soft hush of water flowing down from the fountain would have normally calmed her nerves. But not tonight. Her mind was on other things. Her legs stretched out, covering more distance as her feet patted against the dirt path. Her body moved quickly in a speed walking motion, her gaze straight ahead. The park was merely a means to get where she was going tonight. There was no time for admiring the fountain or various statues.

She crossed the park and then the empty street, continuing her journey along a cement sidewalk. She passed a line of houses, darkened, with the only light being the occasional street lamp or post light. She stopped at a dark colored house on the corner, her feet pointing to the light stone driveway. Taking in a deep breath, she walked slowly up to the door and reached over, hitting the doorbell.

Groaning, Jamie threw the steel blue comforter off his body, exposing his flesh to the cold air. He was having such a nice dream involving nachos when suddenly, his nacho cheese let out an annoying ringing sound. Realizing it wasn't the cheese causing the sound, Jamie was woken abruptly from his dream. Leaning over, he checked his clock. "Who is still up at 2 AM?" He yawned. Still, he had to get up and see who it was, possibly giving them a good lecture.

He walked downstairs and into the formal living room, where the front door was located. His eyes were too tired to completely focus on the image of a girl who stood just passed the wooden-rimmed glass door. Still, the vague appearance reminded him of a name. "I...rene?" He yawned, as he opened the door. A soft sniff crawled out of the girl.

"Jamie...I...I..." was all she could manage. She could have thought about what she was going to say or how she was going to say it on the walk over but then, all she could think of was seeing him. Jamie yawned once more, rubbing his eyes clean of sand. His vision focused and were not prepared for the depressing sight before him.

His beautiful, beloved girlfriend was a wreck. Her ebony hair was messily tied up in a clip, while her clothes were obviously lazily put on as Jamie noticed Irene had wore them the earlier day. Her usual cheerful smile was replaced with a cut lip, pouting into a frown with slight bruising rising from her top lip into her cheeks. Her eyes were swollen red, obvious signs of tears, as melted mascara bled into her skin. Still, even with these scars of pain, she looked at him with nothing but devotion as she spoke again. "Jamie...can I come in?"

Jamie grabbed her hands and led her inside, "Oh my god...Irene? What happened to you?" She was silent until they reached the olive-coated living room. Jamie helped Irene sit down on a love seat, gently hugging her as she took in a deep breath before sobbing. "Shhh...it's okay...what happened?" Jamie asked again as he rubbed her back, letting her rest her head into his bare chest. Irene cried, finally able to release the pent up energy she had carried. Still, she couldn't find the words nor the courage to speak.

"I...I..." Was all she could repeat, hopelessly trying to confide in Jamie. He didn't push her, though. Whatever happened, it had left her shaken.

"Why don't you go get cleaned up?" Jamie suggested as Irene lifted herself from him. She nodded,

sniffing up a line of snot that was slowly trying to crawl out.

"Will you come with me?" She asked innocently, much like a toddler. The brunette boy smiled and nodded, slowly rising with her and holding her against him as they moved in unison to the nearby half-bath.

Jamie turned the painted gold knob, opening up the door. Then he reached to the left and flicked on the light switch, the formerly dark room lighting up. It was small, which incited Irene's claustrophobia, but so inviting with its frog theme. Irene walked in and sat down on the yellow frog embroidered toilet seat cover, as Jamie opened up the medicine cabinet. "Let's see...we got some neosporin. Ooh and here is some Avon stuff my mom uses to get rid of blemishes without making them burn...do you want some foundation? Probably. And here's a wash rag and a towel to dry your face on." Jamie placed the two folded cloths on the ceramic sink fixture. "Do you want me to stay in here or wait outside the door?" Normally, she would have begged him to stay but instead had another request.

"Could...could you make me something to drink? Maybe some cocoa?" She asked softly, looking up at him with hopeful eyes. Jamie looked at her for a second before a warm, gentle expression befell him. "Sure." Jamie walked slowly out of the room, leaving the door open behind him. Hearing his footsteps grow distant, Irene rose and began to wash her face. She lightly laced her index finger with neosporin and applied it to her bruised cheeks. She had trouble, as she wasn't really looking in the mirror to apply the gel evenly across her cheeks but how could she? Her appearance was too shocking, too painful to look at.

"Jamie? Is that you?" Irene hurried and wetted the wash cloth, stuffing her face into it in a flawed attempt to hide herself. "Wha...Irene? What are you doing here?" A feminine voice of the softer variety entered the room. Irene sighed and slowly brought the cloth off her face, which then inspired a gasp. Her eyes locked on the woman who was both in and out of the bathroom. She was slightly taller than Irene, with her long brown hair braided and tossed over her shoulder. Her small frame was dressed lightly in a pink night gown, remnants of her previous slumber.

"Hello...Miss Varley," Irene greeted quietly. Immediately, the woman threw her arms around Irene and held her close.

"Oh my god! What happened to you?" She asked, distressed. Irene tried to calm her but the embraced overwhelmed her. Was this how a mother was supposed to be? It was nice, calming. Irene let herself sink into the hug, forgetting for a moment where she was. Soon, Jamie returned and was surprised to see his mother hugging his girlfriend.

"Mom?" He asked curiously, "I thought you were asleep." The maternal figure turned her head to her son, still hugging the girl.

"I was but I guess the light from the bathroom woke me up. What's Irene doing here and why does she look like she's been beat?" Jamie shrugged and suggested that they sit down in the living room and drink some cocoa, hoping it would calm all their nerves so they could learn and reveal the truth.

Once settled, Irene began to tell her story. "Well...you know my dad can be a bit difficult. He always acts like he's mad, always." She repeated, looking empty inside as she stared into the swirling liquid that danced inside her mug. She closed her eyes for a moment. The scowling face of her father reached her, causing her to open her eyes once more. "He's been alot more angry lately...ever since I told him I didn't want to go to med school." Jamie nodded. He knew that Mr. Casales, a lawyer for medical malpractice firm, had been pushing Irene to go to medical school and become a doctor. Irene had often confided in Jamie that she didn't want to be a doctor. She instead wanted to run her own bakery, having a deep love for the culinary arts. Jamie felt guilty, for it was he who pushed her to tell her father her dreams.

Irene continued with her story, "Well...tonight, he and Mom were talking about sending me to med school AGAIN when I finally told them I purposely flunk the entrance exams. Dad...got mad. Really mad. He..." She dragged off. She looked to the floor. Jamie looked at his mother who then looked at Irene, speaking up.

"It's okay, dear. You don't have to continue." Irene looked up at Jamie's mother.

"Thank you..." She looked down again, though. "I have to go back, though...they won't be happy when they find out I ran away..." It was at this moment that Miss Varley stood up.

"No. I can't let you go back. Tonight, you can stay here. I'll dig out some pjs for you and you can sleep in Jamie's bed. Jamie, you okay with the couch?" Jamie nodded, standing up as well. "Alright. Then tomorrow, I will talk to your parents. I can't let you go back to those people. If need be, I will ask to take their parenting rights away." Irene's mouth opened in shock. The way Miss Varley spoke was much more confident and strong than her usual sweet, motherly way. Irene nodded in acceptance, mouthing her gratitude.

She slipped comfortably into one of the PJs that had been given to her, handing over her dirty clothes to be washed. Miss Varley wished her and Jamie a good night before leaving them, heading off to bed.

Irene sat down on Jamie's bed, taking in a deep breath. Jamie sat down on the floor, staring up at her.

"Mom...really likes you, you know. She just wants what is best for you but if you'd rather she not interfere..." Irene shook her head, a genuine smile crossing her lips.

"No...I...don't want to go back to those people. I want to stay here. I know Dad is a great lawyer but I think we have a good chance...even if it will be scary..." Jamie rose and sat down beside her on the bed, resting his hand on her leg gently. He nuzzled into her neck, causing her to laugh softly.

"It'll all be okay, I promise. I'll protect you from now on, okay?" He mumbled into her neck. She laughed, nodding. Once he pulled away, he met with her lips. Though still slightly cut, they were as inviting as ever. It was a short kiss but one that was desperately needed. Jamie broke it first, leaving Irene begging for more. Still, he cited it was time for her to get some sleep. She agreed and crawled under his covers and bid him goodnight as he walked out of the room, heading to his makeshift bed downstairs.

The moon rose and descended swiftly, daylight coming quickly. Irene woke early, knowing she would have to confront her family today. Jamie was still asleep when she walked downstairs but a light breakfast, courtesy of Miss Varley, was waiting. She sat and together, the two women discuss their plan. If the Casales wouldn't bend to their will, they would take it to the courts. When Jamie awoke, the girls were already dressed and just about to leave. Irene stood nervous beside his mother, causing Jamie to plant a deep good luck kiss on her which seemed to cheer her up a bit. Still, in the car ride over, she couldn't help but think that she should just beg her parents for forgiveness and move on. She closed her eyes and sat in the car once they reached the house. Her parents were both outside, standing beside her father's black Gallardo. "You ready?" Irene looked over at Miss Varley. "I know you're nervous but trust me...you will feel so much better once this is all over." Irene didn't speak, only sighed, as she popped open the door. The two women slowly walked up the driveway, Miss Varley being the first to incite conversation.

"Eliseo... Iliana." The two talkers turned to face the newcomers. Irene saw her father's eyes glare at her, while her mother portrayed her usual diva pose.

"Ah...Carin. How very nice to see you. And you brought home our lovely wayward daughter," Iliana spoke coolly.

"Yes well..I actually came her to ask that you sign her over to me."

"Excuse me?" Eliseo spoke up in his hoarse, rough voice. Irene shivered, his voice shaking her very core. Carin held her head high, stern in her words.

"You heard me. I want you to let me adopt Irene. She deserves a loving home, not one where she gets beat." Eliseo looked at his daughter harshly, his dark blue eyes boiling. Iliana shook her head, a haughty laugh escaping her throat.

"Oh my...that's hilarious. What makes you think we'd hand over our own daughter?"

"She's right. Irene is ours and there is no proof that could convince a judge that we are bad parents," Eliseo spoke. Carin's mouth curled slightly, a plan forming in her mind.

"We'll just have to see...I'll be seeing you in court then. Come on, Irene." Carin and Irene turned to leave but the young girl's yelp halted them. Carin turned and saw Eliseo had grabbed his daughter's wrist tightly, his large fingers almost crushing her bones. "Let her go!" Carin shouted as she yanked Irene free. She quickly dragged the girl back to the car, trying to escape the roars of angered pride Eliseo spewed. Irene zoned out midway, Would she ever be able to escape this, completely?

The soft hush of water flowing down from the fountain would have normally calmed her nerves. But not today. There was no need. Her heart was calm, resting happily inside her chest. Her lightly glossed lips curled upward, laughter lines appearing slightly. Her gentle blue eyes followed the passing people, children playing and their parents gossiping. She turned her gaze to the woman beside her. The elderly woman, her age obvious, also appeared at peace. Her faded hair fell over her shoulder, much like the young lady beside her. She, too, smiled. She then opened her lips, laughing softly. "Ooh...today is so beautiful, eh, Irene?"

"Yes, Miss Varley...it's so peaceful." She leaned over, her head turning to the side. "I just wish I knew when Jamie would get here."

"Now now, dear...he'll be here soon." Irene sat back, her head turning to the voice. Her hands waited patiently in her lap.

Moments later, her body ached and responded to a distant sound of feet running. "Sorry!" Jamie's voice sung as his body jogged up to the women. He placed a hand on the black frame that danced around the bench on which the women sat, catching his breath. "Had to help close up the deli..."

"Does that mean your hands smell like bologna?" Irene laughed gently. Jamie grinned and shook his head.

"Naw..."

"Well...now that we are all here, wasn't there something you wanted to give Irene, Jamie?" Carin asked softly. Her son hesitated, finally remembering his purpose. He dug his hand into his denim pocket, licking his lips as his words readied to pour out.

"Yeah...um...Irene? I've been thinking lately...we've been together for a really long time, right?" Irene nodded, her eyes and attention solely on Jamie. "Yeah so...well...I was wondering..." His words trailed, as he slowly got down on his knees and took Irene's hands in his own. Her heartbeat quickened, knowing exactly what this position meant. She looked at Carin, as if to clarify. The elderly woman gave a silent answer, causing Irene to look back at Jamie. He pulled out a crimson box, covered in light fuzz.

"So...uh...will you marry me?" He asked nonchalantly, opening up the box to expose a golden ring with adamant stones colored light blue. Irene gasped as she fell into Jamie, her arms wrapping around him. Through her sobs came a slur of "Yes" and "Of Course".

Jamie pushed her back gently, allowed her to breath air not secluded in his neck. He let go of her hand briefly, picking the ring out of the box and then sliding it onto her left ring finger. He rose, helping her up

as he then initiated a kiss. Carin looked on approvingly.

In the back of her mind, Irene realized she now knew what it meant to have a family. And she also knew that she had the best family in the world.

3 - Abandoned

Benjamin Reyer looked down at his hand, clutching onto the pink slip of paper. He looked up. "This is it, I guess..." He spoke hesitantly. The numbers on the paper were identical to the gold ones beside the door. There was loud music playing and he could see a few people dancing inside. He sighed heavily. For the first time in his life, he was actually invited to a party thrown by one of the more popular kids. He had believed it was a mistake for him to receive an invitation. After all, he was classified as a nerd, a social outcast, in the eyes of most of the student body. But when Sara Bass came to him the day before to confirm whether or not he was coming, he knew it to be true. For a short while, he felt accepted and pleased. Naturally, he realized she was inviting him as a way to pay him back for dissecting her frog in biology. That somewhat made his mood simmer down.

He cleared his throat, trying to ready himself. This was his first, and probably only, chance to mingle with the popular crowd. If they liked what they saw, this could be the first of many parties for him. He smoothed out the wrinkles in his blue shirt, tightening the black skull necklace around his neck. He released his belt a bit, letting his tan shorts sag slightly. He took a deep breath, lifting his sandal-clad feet up onto the stoop. He pocketed the slip, knocking on the large wooden door. He waited for a moment, tapping his foot. The door cracked, catching his attention. There was Sara, dressed in a white blouse with a black sleeveless vest and black shorts. Her wavy ebony hair was hidden under an onyx beret and her face was fresh, coated lightly with make up. "Hey!" She greeted, "Glad you made it, um...." Benjamin smiled weakly, trying to hold back his discontent.

"Benjamin."

"Benny! Right! Come on in." She opened the door wider, letting Benjamin pass her. The moment he entered, his eardrums seemed ready to burst. Loud bass echoed through the hall, bouncing off the laughter of his peers. "Come this way. The party is raging right now." Sara spoke as she walked down a corridor. Benjamin followed her into a large room, presumably the game room. The room was large, filled with a dance floor and arcade machines. There were countless people dancing to heavy trance in front of a DJ booth, some Benjamin didn't even recognize. "If you want refreshments, they're over there. Enjoy yourself!" Sara pointed to a corner where a long table of treats lay alone, before walking off to the dance floor. Benjamin made his way immediately towards the food, muttering "excuse me"s and "pardon me"s as he passed the writhing teen bodies.

He reached the table, picking up a paper plate and piling various finger foods upon it. He picked up a napkin and made his way towards a red sofa. There he sat, eating and watching people have fun. 'Figures,' He thought to himself, 'I get invited to a party and am the wallflower.' He sighed, looking at his food. It would seem that the refreshment table and the sofa would be his only companions tonight.

A small urge to look towards the doorway struck him. Acting upon it, he saw her. Her long brown hair was tied into a large ponytail, falling to her mid back. Her slender body filled out a one-strap dress that fell to her knees, colored white and pink. Her dainty feet sat serenely in a pair of pink slip ons. Her face was glowing, her soft and plush lips shining with clear lip gloss. Her cheeks were colored a light pink. A faint light seemed to come off her body, as if telling all to direct their attentions to her. Benjamin swooned. "Hollie Hillsdale..." The girl whom he had been pining for was here, at this party. Granted, she probably didn't know he existed but just being in her presence was a sign. But then all turned sour.

Benjamin realized she wasn't alone. Running his grubby hands all over Hollie was Eric Peterson, his rival for Hollie's heart. Benjamin growled, returning his attention to his food.

Hollie smiled. "I'm so glad you decided to come with me," She spoke to Eric. He shrugged.

"Anything for you, babe." Hollie giggled, wrapping her arms around him tightly. He held her waist, copping a feel. She shivered.

"Not here, okay?" Hollie pulled away from the hug. Eric grinned sheepishly, nodding. "Alright. I'm gonna go get a drink, okay?" Hollie waved to Eric as she walked towards the refreshment table, unaware of the pair of green eyes following her. She picked up a plastic cup and moved over to the punch bowl. She picked up the ladle, pouring a reasonable amount into her cup. She took a sip, spinning to scan the crowd. There were a lot of people here, she noticed. She continued to peer around the room when she noticed Benjamin. He seemed out of place. Hollie stared at him, watching him pick at his food. He was probably a pity-invite. While he was a nice boy, he wasn't nearly as popular to be invited normally. She guessed he probably did something nice for Sara.

She finished off her drink, looking down at her cup. "Mmm....I wonder if Eric wants some." She looked up, trying to spot her boyfriend. Though it was hard to see through the crowd of people, she could tell he wasn't on the dance floor. "I wonder if he went to the bathroom." Tossing her cup in the nearby wastebasket, she walked onto the dance floor and made her way to Sara, who was dancing with a boy she recognized only as Jacob. Tapping Sara's shoulder caused her to turn.

"Hm? What's up, Hollie?" The girl asked, her body still moving to the beat. Hollie gave Jacob a small wave before talking.

"I was wondering where your bathroom is. I think Eric might've gone there and I wanted to ask him if he wanted some punch." Sara turned and pointed out of the room.

"To the left, the third door on the right. Next to the umbrella stand." Hollie thanked her and followed the directions. She knocked on the door, expecting a voice. But she received silence.

"So he's not in the bathroom..." Then a sound came to her ears. A feminine giggle from the other room. Hollie slowly followed the sound, leading her into the breakfast nook. Leaning against the counter was Eric, holding onto a blonde girl dressed in a pink spaghetti-strap camisole and shorts. The girl seemed to nuzzle Eric's neck, as his hands wrapped around her waist. Hollie gasped, taking a moment to register her thoughts. Deciding that anger was the emotion she was feeling, she stomped up to the couple. "Eric! What do you think you're doing?!"

Expecting Eric to push the girl away and break into a stutter, Hollie found he was as casual as before. Not even moving, his hands still wrapped around his blonde companion, he chuckled. "I'm talking, what's it look like?"

"Your hands are all over her!" The blonde rolled her eyes, pushing herself off of Eric.

"Ditch the cheerleader and THEN come find me," She said as she walked towards the exit. Eric stretched, preparing to follow her. Hollie, enraged, pushed him back.

"Where do you think you're going?" She said, her voice cracking. Eric let out a slight growl.

"Listen. I'm sick of this charade. You're cute, okay? But you're boring. Frankly, I was ready to break up with you after a week." Hollie's eyes enlarged, her bottom lip quivering.

"You can't be serious..."

"I am. It's over, Holl. It's been fun but you're just too plain Jane for me. Later." Waving her off, Eric followed his make-out partner and left Hollie alone to wallow in her heartbreak.

Hollie stood there, trying to fight back tears. "I...can't believe this..." She huffed. She wiped her eyes,

trying to make it seem like nothing was wrong. She thought about just leaving the party, hoping no one would learn of her embarrassment. But her sudden absence would spark rumors. It would be better, she decided, to stay and clear up any questions. She put on a brave face and walked back towards the game room. She slipped in, hoping no one noticed her. She made her way over to a red sofa, sitting down and sighing.

"You okay?" Hollie turned to her right, finding herself looking at a boy with green eyes, glasses and black hair that passed his chin.

"Yeah...I'm fine."

"You don't look fine." He scooted closer to her and examined her. "You've been crying." Hollie shook her head, a smile gracing her lips.

"It's nothing," She said as she looked down at her knees.

"I can tell you're lying...come on, tell me." Hollie looked back at the boy. He seemed trustworthy and willing to listen. With a heavy sigh, she explained.

The boy's face showed pity, "That's terrible!" Hollie nodded. The boy was silent for a minute before he spoke again. "Well...if you ask me...I think you're better off. I mean, he obviously can't tell how great of a girl you are." Hollie looked at him with a puzzled look.

"How do you think I'm great?" The boy stuttered out his words.

"W-well...I know you're on the cheerleading squad...a-and on the school newspaper...and y-you are one of the friendliest girls in school." Hollie nodded. She wondered how he knew all this. After all, she didn't know him personally and he didn't know her personally.

"I guess so..." Hollie drifted off, letting her vision stray. She felt herself throw up in her mouth slightly when she spotted Eric all over the girl he left with. Seeing him, Hollie felt a deep burning feeling, identified as jealousy. Looking at the boy next to her, she felt the need to seek human comfort. That is what made her ask, "What's your name again?"

"Benjamin."

"Well, Benjamin...do you want to dance?" The boy's eyes widened.

"A-are you serious?" The girl nodded and lifted herself off the couch, holding out a hand.

"Come on!" She encouraged with a big smile. Benjamin hesitated, hoping this wasn't a joke, before he placed his hand in hers and she led him off towards the DJ booth.

The music had shifted to a soft ballad, causing many of the dancers to disperse into groups of two. Benjamin gulped, knowing he could no longer be hidden in the crowd. He stood in front of Hollie, waiting for direction. "Oooh," She giggled, "I love this song..."

"I...don't know how to dance," Benjamin confessed. Hollie laughed.

"You don't have to know how to dance...here, I'll lead." Hollie took Benjamin's hands, taking one in her own and placing the other on her hip. She then put her empty arm around Benjamin, resting it against his back. "Now," She said, "Just slowly move in a circle...." Benjamin nodded and followed her instructions. All the while, he kept his gaze on her.

'This has to be a dream,' He thought. Here he was, at a party and slow dancing with the girl of his dreams. They danced slowly, spinning in a circle, for the duration of the song. Another slow song crept out of the speakers but Hollie didn't move away. She instead brought herself closer to Benjamin, resting her head on his shoulder. "Uh..." He croaked. Hollie hushed him.

"Let me just stay like this, okay? You smell nice..." Benjamin fell silent, not arguing or complaining.

Hollie brought her head back to face Benjamin, though much closer. Her blue eyes met his, asking him countless questions. Benjamin tried to speak but found the words trapped inside. Hollie sensed it and

smiled. "Don't speak...please. Just...kiss me." Benjamin stopped moving his body to the beat, frozen by her words.

"But...you...and Eric..." Hollie dug herself into Benjamin's neck.

"I want to forget about him. Please." She nuzzled her nose against his neckbone, seducing a Yes out of him. She pulled away and was met by a pair of dry, thin lips. Feeling forceful, Hollie wrapped her arms around Benjamin and brought him closer. He welcomed her kiss, intoxicated by the situation.

Their kiss seemed to open the door for many. Every few minutes, Hollie requested more and Benjamin was more than happy to oblige. They danced, they kissed and they created meaningful memories. The night was droning on, when Sara finally decided it was time to end it. Walking Hollie out, Benjamin started to replay the evening in his mind. The brunette girl, holding onto his arm, cooed. He turned his attention towards her. "Hm?"

"Thank you..." She said. She gave him another kiss before pulling away at the end of Sara's driveway. "I had a really great time."

"Me too," Benjamin agreed. Hollie rubbed her arm as she looked down at her feet.

"I can walk myself home...I'll see you later, then." She waved before walking down the street. Benjamin swooned, waving after her. From there, he walked in the opposite direction.

Once he got home, he couldn't find the exhaustion needed to sleep. His mind and body were far too awake. He immediately got on his computer and pulled up his livejournal. Normally, he found it difficult to put into words his exact feelings but with the previous events, he found it hard to stop writing. He wanted to share with the world all of his amazing feelings in hopes that they too could somehow feel them. After turning off his computer for the night, he got dressed in his night clothes and laid in bed, the lamp on his nightstand the only light. Yet, sleep would not come. Each time he closed his eyes, all he could see was Hollie. Sitting up, he tried to think of a way to get her image out of his head long enough to acquire sleep. A blank canvas called out to him, as it rested on the wooden easel in the far corner of his room. He rose off his bed, and walked up to the easel. He could see Hollie, her portrait, waiting to be painted. He looked at the clock. 'Midnight...It won't take too long.' Picking up his palette and a brush, he began his vision.

The next morning, when Benjamin should have woken up groggy and still tired, he found himself ready to take on the day. He dressed quickly, hoping to get to school early so he could speak to his beloved muse. Shooting one last adoring glance towards his work in progress, he hurried off to school.

He waited for Hollie to arrive by bus, spending most of his waiting period writing in his journal. He was deeply immersed in himself, though a rumble of snickers seemed to break his train of thought. He looked up and around, trying to figure out what was so funny. He spotted Sara Bass whispering to the boy named Jacob, causing him to break out into a storm of snickers. Benjamin closed his journal, putting it in his backpack and walked towards the duo. "What's up?" He asked. Jacob raised an eyebrow, as if telling Benjamin to mind his own business. Sara merely shook her head, answering him.

"It's Hollie and Eric." Benjamin became interested.

"What about them?"

"Well, I heard that they got into a fight at my party last night but...well...I just passed them and they seemed to have made up."

"Really?" Benjamin asked curiously. Sara nodded. "Where are they?" Sara gestured downstairs.

Benjamin thanked her and walked down the flight of stairs. He continued to walk until he came to the corner that led to the locker rooms. He stopped as soon as he heard the unmistakable laughter of Hollie.

He turned the corner and his stomach churned.

Hollie, the one who had kissed him and physically proclaimed her love for him last night, was enjoying the embrace of Eric, the one who broke her heart the very same night. Eric was nipping at her ear, causing her laughter. Hollie's eyes opened and her laughter stopped as soon as she saw Benjamin.

"Oh..." She let out. Eric turned and rolled his eyes.

"What's wrong? It's just frog boy." Benjamin glared, wishing numerous types of torture upon his insulter. Hollie, meanwhile, broke away from Eric.

"Um, I need to talk to him. I'll meet you in gym, though." Eric shrugged and walked off, leaving Benjamin alone with Hollie. He looked at her with pained eyes. She realized the look and sighed, trying to think of her words. "Benjamin...I'm sorry. Last night was a one time deal. I..." She drifted off, trying to put her meaning delicately. Benjamin wanted to yell at her, accuse her of being as bad as Eric, but the love he felt wouldn't allow him. Instead, he tried to be understanding.

"You just needed someone to care and that someone was me." Hollie nodded.

"Yeah. Eric really hurt me...but he apologized so...we're back together. And...so..." She rubbed her arm, just like before.

"You'd...rather we never speak of what happened again," Benjamin guessed. Again, she nodded.

"I'm so sorry..." Benjamin sighed.

"It's alright. I understand." Hollie smiled, breaking his heart even more.

"Thanks...well...I'll see you..." With that, she turned her heels and headed off to meet Eric. Benjamin shook his head. She was too good to be true. Gazing at the school clock, he slowly drifted off to his first class, the rest of his day doomed to depression.

He didn't hurry home as he did the night before. However, he also didn't go to bed as he normally would, either. He sat on his bed, staring at his painting. "What should I do with you?" He spoke to the face looking back at him. "Destroy you along with my memories...or keep going, keeping my false hope alive?" The painted Hollie just smiled at him, providing no visible answers. He rose, getting closer to the painted canvas. Picking up his brush, he let out a long sigh. "False hope is better than none, I suppose..."