



Teen Zine

Summer 2013

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That Horse Story – Dessa Leonard

I hate to say it was an average day – no day is ever really average. The most memorable thing from the summer I met Jey wasn't the giant fight I had with David over him, but rather the baby blue flowers that carpeted the grass outside our house. This is how it all started.

The day Jey and I met, my brother was doing his usual thing: lecturing me. I wasn't sure why David was yelling, but I learned long ago it was better to block out the lectures and screams. I took a sharp breath in and tried to forget about it, letting the dry scent of hay soothe me. Chances were David was accusing me of being a bad student again. Putting my hands behind my head, I let the gentle chant of the crickets and the booming of the bullfrogs lull my thoughts into a gentle fuzz.

David liked to bother me about my grades. Now I wasn't a failing student, but I wasn't David either. David was the all-around perfect student – perfect grades, perfect athlete; he was even going to Yale at the end of the summer.

I heard a snort breaking me from my deep thoughts and looked up at my horse Buttercream. She was all white, except for a brown spot on her nose.

“Hey what's wrong girl?” I asked, standing, and going over to her. I stuck my hand out to her and she sniffed it and reared a bit. She was a gentle horse, and was never skittish. Jey later told me that all animals were easily prone to sensing him.

“Easy now girl,” I whispered, gently pulling my hand away. She looked at it once more, but turned away from me, leaving me with her not-so-pretty end. I sighed and stepped away from her stall, falling back into the hay. This was the third night in a row she was acting skittish. I stared at the rafters, watching a barn owl fly out into the night. I felt the hay shift and collapse under my weight. I pushed away my hidden floorboard and took out an old Gameboy and played until I drifted off to sleep.

I was dreaming about my dog Patches when there was a solid smack outside. Sleepily, I pushed the latch open on the barn door and pushed my way into the night air.

David was standing there, fists balled and ready to start throwing punches at someone I couldn't quite see.

I pushed the door open a little more, so I could walk outside. There was a young man, no older than David, pushing himself up on the ground. His back was bleeding through his shirt, and he made a noise that signaled he was in pain. I walked over, pushing past David and offered my hand to help him up. He stared at my hand, as if it was offensive, then got up on his own. “Humans...”

“Alyssa, get away from him! He just...fell from the sky...like some kind of freak...” He grabbed my hand and started to pull me towards the house.

“Let go!” I snapped and yanked my wrist away. He kept going back towards the house.

“Get inside!!” He warned, slamming the screen door behind him, leaving his empty threat hanging in the air like a heavy cloud.

“Are you...uh...alright?” I asked, looking up at the stranger. He was about a head taller than me so I had to look up at him at all times. “You could stay in the barn if you want. It's safe in there.” I offered. The newcomer gave a soft smirk and spoke for the first time.

“A little rebel. You humans may not be so boring after all.” He smirked at his own personal joke, not paying me any mind at all.

Confused, I called, “Watch out for coyotes!” This guy set off all my weird radars.

"I don't worry about your petty wild dogs." He replied, disappearing into the woods. I was about to say something else – anything else – but David opened a window.

"ALYSSA! I won't tell you again!!"

Something inside me changed, then, a small spark of defiance that made me look at this unusual, impossible stranger's shrinking figure as he walked away. David would never follow a mysterious person into the woods. So there was only one option. I would. The newcomer was disappearing into the woods. If I debated with myself any longer, he would be gone forever. I looked back at David, who was glaring at me through an upstairs window. I looked at the edge of the woods, and drew in a breath. Taking my first step, I ran after him, as David screamed behind me that he was going to get mom and dad. But I didn't stop. When I was right behind the newcomer, I tripped over a root. Pain shot up my ankle, as I fell, and the impact knocked the air from my lungs.

I looked up at the stranger. He was standing there, talking to the sky. "This is NOT what I had in mind when you said banishment."

I had no clue who he was talking to. Maybe he was just plain nuts. He stopped talking and looked at me.

"Gone a little flat there little rebel?" He asked.

"Glad ONE of us is enjoying this..." I rasped and sat up. He walked over to me, and I blinked hard. "And don't call me little rebel." I protested. "Do you have a name?"

"Well, since you nearly pancaked yourself trying to come after me – even though it was mostly for your own good – I'm Jey."

"I'm Alyssa."

"I figured, little rebel."

I pushed myself up against a tree and leaned back. "Don't call me that." I said, but smiled a little bit. He was oddly-charismatic – he knew he was, and was amused by the fact.

"Normally, I wouldn't give my name to a tiny, insignificant human—"

"Why not?"

"Don't interrupt, little rebel. Because I'm not fond of humans."

"And I assume that since you fell from the sky and lived, that you're not...human?" I whispered.

"Clever girl." He smirked again. "And the only reason you're here is because you want to prove to the annoying brother of yours that you're not a kid."

I swallowed, contemplating my answer. It was true, but I'd also followed him because I was drawn to Jey, like there was a magnet in pulling me to him.

"You could've thanked me." I said finally.

"Thanked you?"

"For offering you the barn."

He scoffed. "You didn't really do anything to deserve a thank you. It was a selfish offer."

Again, he left me speechless.

"Don't worry little rebel, you get the hang of living someday. You humans always do. And that's the difference between us. I've been rebelling for a hundred years, and you've only just started."

"You look good for a hundred year old non-human." I smiled.

"Not just a hundred years little rebel. I'm so much older...So much." He sat down and sighed. "I remember sitting on a beach, the waves of cold, angry water just barely touching me. I saw a little fish fling itself onto the mud next to me. An elder angel looked down at me and told me, 'Don't hurt that fish – there're big plans for that little fish, Jey. A whole world will be born from that fish.' I've seen everything. From the fall of the Roman Empire, to Van Gogh cutting off his ear, Vikings, the very first time the citizens of France decided to rebel against their government...everything that happened, I saw it." He sighed again. "And I learned that you humans are so...frail. Like bubbles floating in a merciless wind. Yet, you just let it take you, until one day it takes you the wrong way and you're just...gone. Done. Fini. You spend 70 years learning how to live, and then you die. Only 70 short years, wasted on a human life."

I looked up at him.

"So the time came for me to pick one of you tiny bubbles and stop you from popping early. But I didn't see the point. No point," he looked down at me. "Watch you grow and nurture you – just to watch you bite the dust. There was no way I was becoming a guardian angel. So they decided right then and there."

"Who did?"

"The Arch Angels. They tore out my wings and I fell from Grace – by my own choice. I fell into your yard. You know the rest."

I nodded slowly. "But, didn't it hurt?" I asked, looking at his back.

"Like you'd never believe," he said, looking up at the sky.

"You were talking to them. The Arch Angels," I stated, following his gaze to the stars.

He nodded. "Banishment usually means that you're banned from your duties and, I believe you use the term, 'put on desk duties' for a short while. But they meant real banishment. This kind."

"So what, you're a fallen angel or something?"

"Or something." He nodded.

"And you're alone now?"

"Not alone exactly. There are some other fallen angels down here, but for the most part, yes, I'm annoyingly human. No longer immortal. No special powers. Nothing but this." He waved a hand outward.

"You have me. And that barn offer still stands, you know. I'm willing to give up my haystack for a few days." He smiled at my comment. "How very gracious of you, little rebel."

"Wait here," I said, standing up. "Promise this little rebellious bubble you'll stay put?"

He smiled and shrugged. I ran back towards the barn, and opened the door without turning on the light. I rooted around for a bucket and a clean towel. Once I found one and filled the bucket halfway, I picked them up and silently

made my way back into the woods.

Jey wasn't really that bad, I decided. I would be a little disagreeable, too, if I was kicked out of Heaven. I must sound crazy, but there was something, something I couldn't describe to you even if I had a thousand pages to do so. It made me trust him. I could just feel he was telling the truth. I walked up to him. "Lay on your stomach," I commanded, and he raised an eyebrow. "Just trust me?" I asked. "Please?"

Slowly, he lay down on his stomach and I could see him tense. I sat down crossed-legged, and dipped the towel in the clean water. I tugged his shirt up and patted the long cuts that went up and down his back. He shivered and tensed again, but forced himself to relax. His shoulders went slack and he closed his eyes. "Thank you," he said softly.

"I brought you a clean shirt too. You can run around looking like that."

He nodded his thanks.

"I don't want it to get infected. This way you can ignore me and leave me alone and I'll know you're okay at the very least."

"Okay...will I really be okay in just 70 years?" He mumbled, as if he was asking himself, his very consciousness.

I wanted to say something to console him, but anything would have seemed insignificant to him, so I just set the towel in the bucket. "I can go get bandages if you want." I said, starting to stand up. He pushed himself up, peeled his wet shirt off, and replaced it with the fresh one.

"You'll get caught if you go back again. I wouldn't want you to get into trouble with your brother."

"Well, he is just my brother." I said softly. "Not like he's the law or anything like that." I pressed my back farther into the rough bark of the tree, letting the cool, moist dirt from below rest on my palms.

"That's how you seem to treat him." Jey said, looking down at me with powerful, storm-gray eyes filled with daunting and emotion. "We're opposites, you know. You and I."

"How so?" I asked, looking back at him.

"You're living your life for that David character. You're trying to prove you can be like him. But me, I'm trying to prove that I'm only here for myself."

I looked away from him, staring at the dark outline of the grass beneath us.

"And I know that if those coyotes ever do come, you'll trip and get eaten first."

"That is not funny," I said, hiding a smile.

"Then why, little rebel," he started, taking my chin between his thumb and finger and lifting it up so I had to look at him once more, "are you smiling?"

I didn't answer, only continued to smile.

He laughed and dropped his hand. I almost wished he hadn't, it was cold out here, and he was warm. I drew my knees to my chest and looked up at the stars. "Were the stars brighter? From up there?" I asked, leaning in.

"Sometimes. But they're still tiny, no matter how close you get, there's always another, farther away than that one," he said, following my gaze. "A lot like life I suppose."

“Always something bigger and better to reach for. Most people reach for the things they can't have.” I agreed.

Jey nodded. “How very true.” He closed his eyes and lay back on the grass, opposite from the tree, so his feet were pressed against it. I copied him, and yawned. “I really should get home before David comes looking. Or my parents wake up.”

Jey nodded.

I stood up. “Will you be around?” I asked, looking down at him. He slid one eye open. “I won't go far.”

I nodded, and smiled softly. “Good night.”

He chuckled and turned on his side, stretching his arms out under his head. I walked back to my house and tiptoed inside, closing the door behind me. David had tried to wait up for me in the kitchen, but had fallen asleep on the job. I slipped off my shoes and slid to my room in socks.

“I knew he wouldn't wake Mom and Dad.” I yawned to myself, flopping back into the bed and falling into a dreamless sleep.

Our parents were big shots, meaning when they weren't asleep at home, they were working. David would never dare to wake them and possibly cost them precious work time tomorrow.

When I awoke in the morning, I knew they were at work, because no one was shuffling around the house. I stood up and walked into my bathroom. I brushed my bangs from my face and then brushed the rest of my hair. After pulling it back into a tail, I brushed my teeth and quickly swapped clothes. I pulled my window open and took in the fresh, late morning air. I saw Buttercream trotting around the pen. “Look who's back to normal!” I smiled and went into the hall.

“Did you finish your college entrance essay little Miss Ditch?” David called icily from the kitchen table.

I was about to reply, when I thought of Jey, and everything he said. “No. Because I'm not sure I want to go right into university. I don't want to graduate early either. I'll do them next year, when I'm a senior,” I shot back, stuffing four pieces of toast, two oranges and twelve pieces of bacon into a Tupperware bowl. “And I'm going out with friends today. Maybe you should do the same, and stay out of my business,” I finished, walking out the front door, leaving David dumbfounded and alone at the table.

I hopped our fence and walked into the woods. “Jey?!” I called, shuffling among the leaves that hadn't dissipated from last fall. I walked closer to where he was last night – it was only 10:30, he couldn't have gotten far.

“Jey?” I called again, stopping where we had talked the previous night. Maybe he *was* gone. He *had* said he was in this for himself, and himself alone. I was about to call again, when something grabbed my wrist, yanking me into the bushes to the left. I was about to scream, when Jey put a hand over my mouth, and then put a finger up to his lips, telling me to be silent. I looked around, wondering what was so terrible we had to hide in the bushes, but found nothing to my surprise. I set the container down and listened.

Jey slowly raised a hand and pointed to two figures off in the distance that I had missed before. He looked at me and mouthed, ‘Two angels, out looking for me.’ The two figures were slowly making their way towards us. I looked at Jey, and back, and in that short amount of time, the two angels had come impossibly close. I swallowed and froze, not even daring to let a breath escape my lips. They were fast, too fast to be humans.

They stopped right in front of us.

“Oh, Jey. You've not even been here twenty-four hours and you've already become soft. What a weak trick.” In one

swift movement, the taller one reached down, grabbed Jey by the arm, and tossed him to the ground by the tree he had slept under the night before.

The smaller one smirked.

“And he even found a pet.” With impossible speed, she threw me in the same manner, right next to Jey. The air collapsed from my lungs upon impact, and I coughed.

The taller one smirked. “Ah Jey. The most discontented angel I know,” he said, “Rise, and let me see how you've changed in these mere 12 hours.”

“I will rise, but not for you.” Jey stood up, but turned and squatted next to me. “Just stay still, don't speak,” he said, his eyes concerned. Then he stood up once more, and faced the two angels. “I chose my path, and you two would do well to stay clear of me. If anyone else knew you were here fraternizing with me, of all Angels...” He stood up a little straighter and exhaled sharply, leaving this threat to their imaginations.

“We thought you'd need our services,” the short one said.

“I told you. I made my choice, and I will accept my banishment accordingly.”

The tall one looked ready to argue, then stopped and turned to me. “Accordingly how? By adopting one of the creatures you loathe as a pet? What a worthless Angel you have become.” His voice was cruel, dripping with loathing as if it were as thick as honey.

“You could speak to her. She's not a pet, and she certainly is not an it. Your job is to protect them, but you treat them like insects. Talk to them like the creations they are!” Jey shouted.

Tall and Short looked at each other. “I hope you know we are powerful enemies.” Short closed the distance between herself and Jey and stared him down. Despite being about 3 inches shorter, I could tell she held power over him. Tall yanked me up by my wrist. “Such an average human.” He said with a click of his tongue. “Perhaps a hundred years is too long a lifetime for you.” I backed away, but couldn't go far with his hand clamping down on me.

“Do anything her and you will live to regret it!” Jey said, breaking away from Short, who was knocked to the ground in one swift movement by the swing of Jey's hand. Tall tightened his grip, and I was sure something in my wrist was going to snap. Jey stepped forward and Tall shoved me at him so hard I thought I would knock him down. Instead, Jey reached out and took me in his arms, steadying me in one sudden, tender motion. “Easy little rebel,” he whispered in my ear. Then he moved in front of me. Short was up again, and coming toward us.

“Jey. This used to be a mining town,” I whispered, hoping he would know I was talking about the hundreds of miles of abandoned mines that ran right under our very feet, which were prone to collapse when stepped on. Jey smiled and nodded slightly. “10 steps forward.” I whispered. Jey advanced on them slowly, and they backed up, clearly not wanting to. When Tall resisted, Jey kicked his kneecap, and forced him backwards once again. The ground shifted under their weight and buckled underneath them. Jey grabbed my wrist, but gently, and we ran. I kept up, and Jey let go of my wrist when he was sure I would stay nearby. We stopped running after a few minutes, and Jey turned to me. “Anything broken?”

“No, I'm okay,” I replied, sitting down crossing my legs. “But I could do with an explanation.” Jey sat next to me, and nodded. “Those two were...I use this term loosely, associates of mine. Now they know I'm powerless and want me to do their dirty work for them down here.”

“Dirty work?”

“I'll spare you the details.” He said grimly. “I'm not a safe person to be around, little rebel.”

“And I am, apparently, too average.”

Jey smirked.

“If they were angels, why can't I see their wings?”

“They're made up of energy, more so than tangible material. Spiritual matter that only the divine and those who He has deemed worthy can lay their eyes upon.”

“Oh.”

“You sound disappointed.” He raised an eyebrow at me, looking down.

“I'm just upset we wasted twelve strips of bacon because of those guys.”

Jey laughed and tilted my face up to his again. “Little rebel, you and I are going to get along famously.” He stared at me for a few seconds, before dropping his hand and focusing his attention on my wrist, which was red and sore from being dragged all across the forest. We were quiet for a long time, while he stared at it.

Not far off, Tall and Short could be heard making their way towards us. I looked up at Jey, who stood, and I followed his movement. He grabbed my wrist and took off. I stayed at his side. He took my hand instead. “Hold on tight little rebel.”

“Why am I holding on tight?”

He nodded ahead, as we came to a river, about 10 feet below us in a ravine. I knew the river well. If it snowed here, it never froze over, because the current was faster than a snake bite. Before I could react, Jey jumped off the cliff, towards the rushing, deafening water below us.

I tightened my grip on his hand, and he did the same. I took a breath and prepared for the pressure coming from below.

The first thing I felt was the immeasurable stinging. It took my breath away, and it escaped in a flash of bubbles and was swept away in the blink of an eye. I resisted inhaling the sharp, frigid water as the current took away my sense of direction. I started to flail and panic, wanting air, but I refused the urge to inhale. Suddenly, Jey rushed us up towards the sky. I greedily drank air into my lungs as I bobbed to the surface, shoved and buffeted by the current. We still held hands, and I was careful not to let go of my lifeline. He was clinging to a branch, left hanging low from a tree above. It was thicker than both our arms put together, and no doubt strong enough to keep us from being taken by the rushing river.

“You okay?” He asked, as I simultaneously drew in large gasps of air, and tried not to get swept away by the current. I gave a nod and Jey nodded back.

“Grab the branch and hold onto it.”

I started to protest and then decided better of it. I reached my other hand up and grabbed it, placing my hand next to his. Slowly, to my despair, Jey released my hand, and grabbed the other half of the branch, hauling himself up with nothing more than pure arm strength. I watched him, slinging my other arm onto the branch to keep myself anchored. The bark scratched my arms, but I barely noticed – too preoccupied with the pressure trying to rip me away from the tree.

Jey leaned down and gripped both my wrists and hauled me up onto the branch. “Down we go,” he said, standing up and walking to the trunk of the tree and jumping down with ease.

“I'm afraid of heights, by the way!” I called after him, slowly edging my way towards the trunk of the tree.

“Of heights, or of falling?” He asked, shaking out his hair. It clung to the bridge of his nose and forehead afterward.

“Falling, I guess,” I replied and looked down at him. “So a little help down?”

“No. Jump.” Jey said, looking up at me.

I didn’t have anything to say to that, so I just stared at him.

“I promise I’ll catch you.”

“I’ll just fall on you!” I pleaded, hoping he would just show me how he had climbed down.

“Little rebel, if I drop you, I give you full permission to retaliate in any way you see fit.”

“Why do you do that?” I asked, quickly changing the subject.

“Do...what?” He asked, crossing his arms as his face registered confusion.

“When you talk,” I answered, “you get all formal sometimes, especially with those other Angels. Why?”

He chuckled, “I’ve been watching you humans forever, and I know how to talk like you do. It’s considered disrespectful to talk like this to other Angels. So, jump.”

I swallowed. “You’ll catch me?”

“Nothing could stop me doing so,” he nodded.

My hands were slippery with river water and sweat as I scooted towards the edge of the branch. My heart beat frantically, and I wondered how a branch that was only a foot from the top of the water could go up six feet away from solid ground.

I jumped – forcing my eyes shut and telling myself to calm down, I wasn’t going very far. Then Jey’s arms clamped safely around me.

“You can stop being afraid of falling, little rebel,” he smiled, setting me down feet first. “I will always, always catch you.”

I nodded and thought about this. “What if you’re not there?” I shivered.

“Always, little rebel,” he promised, reaching up and grabbing two apples from the tree. I hadn’t even noticed the large green fruits hanging there. He pressed one into my hands, and he crunched loudly into his. I wiped mine on my shirt as I started to walk, and he quickly followed me.

“Will they ever grow back? Your wings?” I asked him, snapping my teeth into the apple.

“Only if I repent. Prove that I see the error of my ways, and they come back. That’s what Ebral and Iasef were offering me. Those two,” he nodded back to where we came, referring to Tall and Short, “they wanted me to...get rid of some of their enemies in exchange for them putting in a good word for me.”

“They wanted you to kill for them so you could go home?” I asked, trying to get it through my head. He nodded, then glanced both ways down the street we had come to. He stepped onto it and trotted across. “Mostly fallen angels, but they wouldn’t have stopped there. They would have gotten power hungry. I would have had to go after Arch Angels, eventually. But, that’s why I have you. I think you’re just the one to help me prove I can get my wings back.”

“Can we stop? I’m exhausted already,” I nodded in the direction of a restaurant. Jey acquiesced and yanked the door open.

“Go on in.” I ducked under his arm and smiled.

“Are all Angels gentlemen, or it just you?”

“Just me,” He countered, sliding into a booth with a childish smirk. I walked over to the counter. “Can I use your phone?” I smiled sweetly, trying to distract her from the fact that two, sopping wet teenagers, one of who was a fallen, wingless angel, and the other who was far from home and in a world of trouble had just come through the door.

“Sure thing, hun,” she replied with a wave of the hand behind her bouncy blond hair, not giving me a second thought.

“Thank you.” I plucked up the receiver and dialed quickly. I exhaled sharply and counted the rings.

One...two...three...four...five... “The number you have reached is unavailable. Please leave your message at the beep.” I let out a breath I didn’t know I had been holding, and steadied my hands at the shrill noise of the beep.

“Mom, Dad, David. It’s me. I’m off doing a little...soul searching...And redemption. Don’t worry about me. I’m a hundred percent safe. I’m with someone who could protect me better than all of you combined. I’ll try to be back before the end of the summer, but I can’t promise anything. My cell got wet, so I can’t call from that. I’ll call when I can. Mom, Dad, I love you. David, enjoy Yale. I love you all so much.” I dropped the handset and heard the tiny satisfying click of the receiver on the cradle.

I bounced back over to Jey and slid in across from him.

“How does 4 hamburgers, 2 chocolate shakes and a double order of fries sound?” He asked, not looking out from the menu he was buried behind.

“Sounds like you eat a lot. And I’m broke,” I replied, leaning back and playing with a bendy straw. Jey dropped the menu and gave me a childish smirk.

“Little rebel, a tiny thing you need to learn about us Angels...money is nothing.” He fished out a faded brown wallet from his pocket and opened it. It was bursting with hundred dollar bills.

“Geez! Did you rob a bank?!” I asked, eyebrows raised. He laughed and tucked his wallet away.

“I’m trying to get my wings *back*, remember?” He grinned.

“Then four burgers, 2 chocolate shakes and a double order of fries sounds great! As long as you promise we can get a hotel tonight.” I said, pulling a wet leaf from my hair.

“Okay, but YOU have to do something for ME in return.” He decided.

“Like?”

“Like, you have to give me your word that you will stay by my side,” he finished with a soft look in his eyes.

“You have to ask?” I asked, looking away from him.

“Yes, actually I do Little Rebel.” He reached up and took my chin in his hand, making me look up at him. I blushed softly.

“As long as you promise not to drop me when you get back your wings, I’ll stay right here,” I decided finally.

Jey smiled. “I promised to catch you no matter what, didn’t I?”

Perfect - Taylor Bradley & Kalyn Smith

10 tons of mascara.
That's what was on Sarah.
She thought it'd make her look
Pretty,
She thought it'd make her look cool.
She said "It makes me perfect."
I said "You're a fool."

20 foot long fake lashes
Was on the girl with
Sashes.
She thought it make her
Appealing,
And made the guys go kneeling.
She said "It makes me a princess."
I said "I could not care less."

30 inch long pink heels.
That's what was on Ms. Reels.
She thought it made her look taller,
She thought it made her look hot.
She said "It makes me a model."
I said "Sure you are. NOT!"

I jumped up on a desk,
And looked down at all
The "perfects."
I said "Make-up doesn't make
You the best.
To me it makes you a clown.
You look good on the outside,

But inside you wear a frown.
We aren't judged on how we look.
Or how quick we can
Read a book.
Only when we be ourselves
Do we wear the crown."

The all stared for a minute
To absorb my speech,
And the power within it.
Ms. Reels snapped her
Pink heels
And said her feet were sore.
The girl with sashes
Plucked off her lashes
And said they were a bore.

And as Sarah smudged off her
Mascara,
The three realized something.
"Perfect doesn't exist."
They all said together.
"You can try to your very hardest,
But really you should quit."

The three never tried to be "perfects" again.
And they vowed to stay together,
At to be true to who they were...
Forever.

The Killer – Anna Wilson

1 2 3...

Darkness...

He's missing...

Where is he? He's gone? How?

Mr. Green, he's after your family.

I have to find him. He's out there somewhere. I have to protect Liz, my wife, and my 8-year-old daughter. I must kill him before he kills my family or anybody else.

He's somewhere... I have to find him...

Run... Run... Run...

"Liz, we have to go."

"Go? Where? Honey, what's going on?"

"Someone is coming for us! We have to go somewhere far away and safe."

"Okay, okay." Green kisses his wife on the cheek gently.

"Be safe. Go to the train. I paid for the train tickets already, so they will let you on okay."

"Okay. I love you, Henry." I have to protect my family. I just have to. He can't find them. He just can't.

"Daddy?"

"Oh, baby, go with your mother."

"Why?"

"To be safe, sweetie." Green kneels down to his daughter and kisses her forehead. "Don't be scared. Trust me. We're going on a trip for a long time. Go and pack."

"Ok, daddy. I love you." He hugs his daughter quickly and then lets go.

"Liz, I will be right back."

"Wait! Where are you going?"

"I'm going into town to talk to some people. Don't wait for me. Just pack quickly and head to the train. I will be there as soon as possible. I promise." Green walks out of the house.

"Daddy!" yells his daughter.

Run... Run... Run...

Did you find him?

No, but he's here and close. We don't know where he is hiding, but he's here somewhere.

I have to go somewhere far away. I'm going to miss you, brother.

Green, be safe. Take care of them.

I will. Bye, brother.

Green runs back home.

Run... Run... Run...

Good, they've already gone to the station.

Green runs upstairs to retrieve his briefcase. He runs back downstairs to get his wallet. Just then he sees the red writing on the wall. It reads, "I will get your family."

He quickly runs out the door and to the train station.

Run... Run... Run...

"Liz!"

"Henry, there you are. Let's get on."

"We have to go now."

They get on the train. The train starts moving.

"Papa!" says his daughter.

"Hi, sweetie."

"Where are we going, papa?"

"A trip." Liz stares at Green and leans into him. He can't find us. He can't.

A couple hours later

"We're here!"

"Wow!" exclaims his daughter, running inside. Green smiles.

"Come on, Liz. Let's go in." Liz smiles at her husband and rests her head on his shoulder as they walk into their new house.

Two days later

There is a note:

Mr. Green,

Meet me at the dock at 7

Be alone and don't tell your wife

I won't hurt your family

I want to talk to you

You know who this is

He found us. How? How could he find us? He'd better not hurt my family. I don't trust him, but I have to go. I won't tell my wife.

Hours later

Hello?

Mr. Green. I never thought I would see you again.

What do you want?

I told you. I won't hurt your family.

What do you want?

The killer laughs.

You don't believe me, Green, do you?

Over my dead body.

Look, I won't hurt your family. But I will hurt you and then I will kill your family.

The Killer pulls out his knife.

Are you scared, Mr. Green?

He starts to amble over slowly.

Come on. Too scared to fight?

I just narrow my eyes at him.

Just as he is about to raise the knife,

I swipe at it, and it falls from his hand.

I punch him so hard he falls onto the ground and lays still.

Is he dead?

I walk over to him.

He's dead. Dead as a dog.

My family is safe.

We're free.

Mr. Green walks back into his house.

"Henry, what happened to you," asks his wife, coming over. He is covered in blood.

"He's dead."

"He's what?"

"The killer is dead. We're safe."

Liz covers her mouth with relief and hugs her husband.

Forgotten Friends (Imaginary Frenemies #2) – Taylor Bradley

Molly Hyde was in the car with her mother; on the way to their new house. She was your average 17 year old. She loved lipstick and gossip magazines, and was always checking what was hot, and what was not. Her mother had recently purchased a new house in Springfield, Illinois. Molly was upset that she would have to leave her friend, Debby, not so much about leaving her jerky ex-boyfriend, Andrew. She'd discovered his true colors about a year ago. He was nothing but a sexist, conceited football jock.

"New text. New text. New text." Repeated a computerized voice.

"Molly, is that your phone *again*?" Ms. Hyde said.

"Sorry, mom." Molly grabbed her phone and opened the text. "It's Debby."

I MISS YOU ALREADY!!! :(

Luv, Debby

"She was really upset when I told her about the move." Molly told her.

"But, sweetie," her mother started. "We lived in Peoria. Springfield is only about an hour away. She can visit, you know."

"I told her that, but she was too busy crying." Molly said while texting a reply.

Calm down. It's only an hour away. I promise you can visit soon.

Hugs, Molly

"Teenagers." Ms. Hyde said. "They just can't stop texting."

K. Is Andrew still single???

Luv, Debby

Yeah, I think so. I'm so over him.

Hugs, Molly

Mind if I ask him out?

Luv, Debby

Bad idea! Terrible boyfriend choice! Alert! Alert! Deb, come back to me! Alert!

Hugs, Molly

Okay. What happened between you two, anyway?

Luv, Debby

Long story. G2G. Pulling into driveway.

Hugs, Molly

Molly had never told Debby why she had dumped Andrew. Or her mother either. It happened one day when Andrew asked her out on a yogurt date. When she opened the door, expecting Andrew, she met a gray skinned boy named Ace. Apparently, Ace was Andrew's imaginary friend. Ace kidnapped her and took her to the forest. Eventually, Ace told her that Andrew had locked him away in his head when he got real friends. She felt sorry for him. They became friends. But then Andrew had shown up and put Ace back in his head. Molly stood up to him, but Andrew had told her he controlled her. That she was his property. His possession. She had slapped him and somehow was transported into his brain, where she rescued Ace. After that, she had dumped Andrew because he was so selfish and sexist. And to this day, Andrew still has no idea that Ace escaped, due to Ace's ability to pick and choose who sees him. Right now, that was just Molly. Molly was afraid that if she told Debby, she would tell the whole school, including Andrew.

Molly missed Ace a lot. She had set him free last year, and he went to see the world. They communicated through letters, but it wasn't the same as seeing him.

"Molly, look!" said Ms. Hyde

Molly put her phone away and looked at the new house. It was very big. She got out of the car and walked up the porch steps. Her mother unlocked the door. "Wipe your feet." she told Molly.

Molly walked in. "This place is huge!" She quickly scoped out the ground floor before rushing up the spiral stairs.

"Your room is the first one on the right!" Ms. Hyde yelled up the stairs.

Molly opened the giant brown door to reveal "A purple room! It's just what I wanted!" she screamed.

"Molly!" her mother called up. "Why don't you go in the backyard while I help the movers put your room together?"

"Okay!" she yelled back. She ran back down the stairs and threw open the back door. The backyard was at least double the one at her old house. "Wow. If this house gets any better, I'll never move out!" Molly said.

The backyard had a flower bed full of roses and a small Koi pond. Molly poked at the fish. There were two orange ones, a yellow one, but Molly was most partial to the gray one. It reminded her of Ace.

Ms. Hyde was tucking Molly into her bed. Her room was complete, and she was tired after the long day. "Good night, Molly." She said kissing her forehead. "Get a good night's sleep. You've got your first day at the new school tomorrow."

"Okay." Molly mumbled.

"What's wrong, Molly?" Ms. Hyde asked.

"Nothing." she said. "It's just...why did we have to move in the middle of the school year? By now, everyone will have friends. Except me. I'll just be an outsider."

"Sweetie," Ms. Hyde soothed. "A lot of people were looking at this house. If I hadn't made an offer, we would have lost it. I'm sure you'll make some friends. Now go to sleep." Her mother clicked off the light and shut the door.

Now I know how Ace felt when he was alone in Andrew's mind. Molly thought. I wish he was here.

Molly fell asleep fairly quickly, when she awoke with the sudden feeling that someone was watching here. She looked at the clock. "I've only been asleep for three hours." she whispered. "I'll never make it through school at this rate." She laid back down and shut her eyes. But the feeling only got stronger. Relax. She told herself. You're just nervous because you're in a new house. If you just open your eyes, you'll see that no one is there. So she opened her eyes, and to her horror, a pair of green eyes were staring back at her. Someone was looming over her. She was about to scream, but stopped. These eyes. She thought. I recognize them.

"You snore really loudly." said a voice. "Did you know that?"

That voice. She thought. That sly, sarcastic voice. Could it be? "Ace? Is that you?" she whispered.

"No, it's your grandma." The person joked. "Don't you remember your dear grandmamma?"

"Yeah, that's you." she said sitting up.

The gray boy took a seat at the edge of the bed. He had black hair, black clothes, and a devilish smirk. "Congratulations, Molly. Your nightmare has returned."

She reached over and hugged her friend. "I missed you." she whispered.

"Hey!" came a female voice. "What am I? Chopped liver?"

A gray girl was climbing through Molly's now open window. Her black hair was tied in a braid; she had on a black dress, a large green purse, and a pleasant smile.

"Polly!" Molly said.

Polly was Molly's imaginary friend. She made her last year, to keep Ace company while he traveled. Polly gave Molly a big hug.

"Where have you guys been?" Molly asked. "What have you seen? What did you do?"

Someone knocked on the door, but didn't open it. "Molly?" called Ms. Hyde. "Is someone in there with you? I could have sworn I heard you talking to someone."

"No, mom." Molly replied. "I was just talking to myself."

"Should I be concerned?" Ms. Hyde asked.

"No." she said. "Just reassuring myself about the first day of school."

"Okay dear." her mother said. "Just try to get some sleep, okay?"

"Okay." she said. She waited until she heard her mother's bedroom door close before continuing her conversation. "Tell me all about it."

"Why tell you," Polly started as she took a large book out of her purse. "When I can *show* you?" She opened the book to reveal hundreds of pictures.

"You made a scrapbook!" Molly said.

"Ace helped." Polly stated.

I did not!" Ace told her. "Men do not scrapbook."

“So you’re saying you’re not a man?” Polly smirked.

Ace was quiet for a minute.

“You stumped him!” Molly gushed. “He can’t think of a comeback!”

“If you think that’s cool, you should hear what I told him in China.” Polly said leaning closer to Molly with a sneaky grin.

“We spit swore not to talk about that!” Ace snapped. “And besides, she didn’t stump me. I was merely creating a dramatic pause.”

“Okay, Mr. Drama Pants.” Molly stated. “I’m interested in hearing the sarcastic remark that follows this ‘dramatic pause’.”

“The...um...remark?” Ace stuttered.

“Yeah.” Molly said. “I mean, if you needed to pause, it must be really good.”

“Right.” Ace said getting nervous. “Of course.” Once again, he fell silent.

“Well?” Molly persisted.

“We’re waiting.” Polly echoed in a sing-song voice.

“Well, you see...” Ace started. “You didn’t let me finish. I was gonna say ‘Men don’t scrapbook. But as you know, imaginary friends only have half-lives, making me only half a man. Technically speaking.’”

“Okay.” Molly said still smirking. “So did you help with the book or not?”

“Well...yes.” Ace said, rubbing the back of his neck. “I mean, like, I held the glue stick and stuff...and...Yeah.” Ace blushed.

“He didn’t just hold the glue.” Polly informed. “He help angle the pictures and even cut out all the wacky designs.”

Molly pointed to the book. “Is that a pink cut-out bunny?”

“She made me do that!” Ace piped.

“Did not.” Polly told him. “Besides, I thought it was cute when you made that.”

The circles on Ace’s cheeks were as red as a clown’s nose. “Well you see...I had...she...I got nothing.” he blushed.

Molly changed the subject and pointed to a photo. “Where are you in this one?”

“That’s Ace leaning up against George Washington’s nose on Mount Rushmore.” Polly said.

“You’re really good at taking pictures.” Molly told her.

“Oh, I didn’t take that one.” she said. “We used the timer.”

“Then where are you?” Molly asked.

“Up the nose.” Polly smiled. “It was fun. The moss on the rocks reminded me of boogers.”

“Ew!” Molly shrieked.

Ace fell back on the bed, laughing. “Boogers.” he chuckled.

Polly pointed to another picture. “And here’s Ace pretending to hold up the pyramid. Again, we used the timer, because I was laughing too hard.”

“Yeah,” Ace said. “You never told me what that was about.”

“Okay, no offense, but I was laughing at you.” Polly stated.

“Why?” Ace inquired.

“Realistically, you can’t lift up anything over forty pounds.” Polly said.

“Yes I can!” he snapped.

“No, you can’t.” Polly told him. “I’ve done the math.”

Ace turned to Molly in a huff. “How much do you weigh?”

“You’re never supposed to ask a woman- Ah!” Molly screamed.

She couldn’t finish her sentence because Ace was already lifting her over his head. He looked at Polly. “Told ya.” he said.

Polly smiled as she took a large feather out of her purse and wiggled in on the tip of Ace’s nose. He laughed, uncontrollable, as Molly was tossed around in his hands.

“Put me down!” Molly screeched while hitting him with a pillow. “Put me down, you dipstick!”

Ace carelessly tossed her onto the bed and fell on his back, while Polly continued to tickle him.

“You go girl!” Molly cheered. Why didn’t I think of that? She thought, as Polly continued to wiggle the feather. Oh, wait. Polly came from my mind, so technically, I *did* think of it.

Polly let Ace up after a few minutes, and continued to point out pictures. “This one was really funny.” she said.

“What is that?” Molly said as she stared at a gray blob.

“That’s Ace mooning the Blue Moon in Transylvania.” Polly giggled.

“Sick!” Molly yelped shielding her eyes. “Why would you *do* that?”

“When do you get a chance to moon a Blue Moon?” Ace shrugged.

“I could have gone my whole life without needing to see that.” Molly continued. “Now I’m scarred!”

“Wait.” Ace said as he turned to Polly. “You took a picture...of my *butt*?”

“Yeah.” Polly shrugged. “When do you get a chance to take a picture of a guy mooning the Blue moon?”

Ace turned away. "Outsmarted with my own words." he mumbled. "Harsh."

...

Molly walked like a zombie through the halls of Evergreen High school. Her eyelids were puffy, and her back was arched from the weight of her backpack, which wasn't that heavy, but to someone who was up almost all night looking at pictures, a jellybean would feel like a boulder. She slumped to her locker and tried the combination. Once. Twice. "For the love of boogers!" Molly shouted. She kicked the locker in frustration, then recoiled and grabbed her aching foot.

"Need a hand?" came a voice from behind her.

Molly spun around to see a tall girl about her age. She had short, golden, wavy hair, a *Twilight* T-shirt, a gray skirt, and yellow flip-flops.

"Uh... sure." Molly murmured. She moved to the side. "The combination is"

The girl held up her hand. "Wait" she said. "Don't tell me. I can read your mind." She squinted and put two fingers on her temple. "36...4...19." She twisted the lock and pulled. Like magic, it opened.

"Wow." Molly said in awe.

"I was just kidding. I don't read minds." the girl said.

"Then how'd you know the combo?" Molly asked.

"You wrote it on your hand." she said.

Molly looked at her palm where, sure enough, she'd scribbled Combo: 36-4-19.

The girl held out her hand. "I'm Maxine Jenkins."

Molly shook her hand. "Molly Hyde. I just moved here from Peoria. Which explains the locker trouble."

"No problem." Maxine told her.

"Hey, do you know where I can find the computer lab?" Molly asked timidly.

"Sure I do." Maxine grinned. "Just grab your stuff and I'll walk you there. I left my science homework there, anyway."

...

Molly was trudging through the cafeteria with her purple lunchbox, searching for an open seat.

"Hey, Hyde!" someone called. Molly turned to see Maxine pointing to a vacant seat next to her. Molly grinned and took the seat.

"Cool lunchbox." Maxine commented.

"Thanks."

"So how was computer class with Mr. Brooger?" Maxine asked.

Molly groaned. "He had a twenty minute speech about the spacebar. The *spacebar!*"

"He needs to retire." Maxine said. "He's old enough to be my great grandfather."

"More like you great grandfather's *grandfather.*" Molly giggled. "Wait. I just realized something."

"What?"

"If you take the first R out of Brooger, you get Booger." Molly said.

Maxine laughed loudly. "A really old, crusty, great great grandfather booger!"

Both girls laughed for a whole two minutes. Maxine is super cool. Molly though. She's funny, nice, and she likes talking about snot! It's like looking in a mirror.

"What do you have for lunch?" Maxine asked.

"A BLT, potato chips, and a soda." Molly said.

"Swap the soda for root beer?"

"Sure." Molly handed her the can. She watched as Maxine shook the can and turned to the boy on her right,

"Could you open this for me?" she asked innocently. The boy ignored her and looked at Molly.

"She's done this everyday since school began." he said.

"Come on, bro." Maxine said. "You know I'm just messing with you. Besides, you need a shower anyway."

"You have a brother?" Molly asked.

"Yeah, this is my twin, Domino." Maxine said. "I call him Domino, because he's a nerd."

"I am not!" Domino exclaimed.

"Yes you are." Maxine said. She reached over and hugged her brother. "But you're *my* nerd!"

"You're lucky. I'm an only child." Molly chimed.

"Aw, come on. You've got to have a man in your life somehow." Maxine said.

A half man, actually. She thought.

...

"I had the best school day ever!" Molly exclaimed running up to her room. She threw open the door. Ace and Polly were sitting on the bed.

"Do you think we should have streamers? I think we should have streamers." Ace was telling Polly.

"As long as they're not pink." Polly grumbled.

"What are you guys talking about?" Molly chimed.

"Well," Ace began. "As you know, you rescued me on January 16th, 2011. Also on that day, you made Polly."

"So?" Molly said.

"Well today is January 15th, 2012." he continued. "That means tomorrow, it will be one year sense we all became best friends. So, we have to throw a Friend-Aversary party to celebrate."

"He's been talking about this ever since we left Kalamazoo." Polly informed her.

"What's a 'Friend-Aversary?'" Molly asked.

"It's an anniversary that celebrates the friendship between imaginaries and humans." Ace told her. "I always wanted to do it, but Andrew was all 'No, let's play football instead.'" he mocked. "Have you ever gotten nailed in the face with a speeding football? It hurts."

"I didn't even know footballs could drive." Polly joked. "Why is he speeding?" She laughed at her own joke. Nobody joined her.

"Anyway, I think we should throw a party when you get home from school tomorrow." Ace continued. "Oh! I changed my mind! We should have confetti instead."

"That's really hard to clean up." Polly whined.

"Come on." Ace told her. "Where's your Friend-Aversary spirit?"

"Probably back in Tokyo." she said.

"There's one problem." Molly said. "My mom. If she hears a party..."

"Molly!" Ms. Hyde said from downstairs. "My new job just switched my hours on me! I won't be home until about 3 hours after you. You'll be okay, right?"

"Yeah, mom." she yelled back. She turned back to Ace, who was smiling from ear to ear. "Okay. Maybe that *won't* be a problem." Ace began jumping on her bed with excitement.

"If you're gonna do that, take off your shoes!" Molly scolded.

Ace stopped and smiled at her. "Are you sure you want me to?"

"NO!" Polly screamed. "No, she's not! She's not sure about anything! Just please, for the love of God, keep your feet covered!"

"Hey!" Molly said. "I'm sure about stuff."

"Sorry. It's just," she leaned closer and whispered in Molly's ear. "He hasn't washed his feet since we crossed the Atlantic Ocean. I tried to get him to at least soak his feet, but...Did you hear about the horrific smell that's plaguing Paris?"

"That's his feet stench?!?" Molly cried. She turned to Ace. "DUDE!"

"Hey, a guy is nothing without his horrific odors." he smirked. "Which reminds me...Someone pull my finger."

"OH no!" Molly commanded. "You are *not* farting on my bed!"

"Um...can you please tell him to not fart, oh, I don't know...*anywhere?!?*" Polly suggested.

"If he has to do that, he knows how to get outside." Molly told her.

"If I did that, you'd need new fish." Ace said.

"New subject!" Molly said.

"Fine." Ace said. "I think we should play a bunch of games and eat sugary food while we party tomorrow."

"Ace," Molly began. "The *last* thing you need is sugar."

"We should make friendship bracelets!" Polly exclaimed. Molly peered over at Ace.

"Don't look at me." he said. "She came from *your* mind. I'm just an innocent imaginary friend." He tried to make a cute, innocent face.

"Innocent is the *last* word I'd use to describe you, Ace." Molly said.

"Oh, stop." he grinned. "You'll make me blush. So tell us about this so called 'Best school day ever.'"

"It was awesome." she told him. "I've already made a friend. Her name's Maxine."

"You made a friend?" Ace said. "A *real* friend?"

"Yeah. And her brother isn't bad either. I guess I can hang with him, too."

Ace looked like someone had thrown a football at his face. "You made *two* friends?!?"

"What wrong? You're not jealous, are you?" she grinned.

"NO!" he boomed. "But...why do you need real friends where you have us?"

"You *are* jealous!" Molly laughed.

"I am not!" Ace repeated.

"Don't worry, Ace. No one can stink up the City of Love like you can." Molly told him. "What's the big deal, anyway? You didn't act like this when I hung out with Debby. Even though you never really talked to her."

"Debby was harmless." Ace said.

"And Maxine isn't?" Molly asked slightly agitated.

"Maxine' is totally a fake name." Ace said. "I mean, what do you know about this girl? She could be a criminal for all you know!"

"Now you're being ridiculous." Molly said. "She's really nice and super funny. You would probably like her."

"Oh, I seriously doubt that." he snapped.

"What is your problem?!?" Molly yelled.

"I don't know! Why don't you ask your friend Maxine? I bet she knows." His face was turning red with fury, as was Molly's.

"Guys," Polly stepped in. "Let's not saying anything we're going to regret."

But Molly was too far gone. "Well what do you know?!?" Her eyes were glued to Ace. "You don't even have a real brain!" Ace gasped.

"MOLLY!" Polly snapped. Ace left the room in a huff. Molly heard him slam the back door. "That's no way to talk to your best friend!" Polly continued.

"Some friend!" Molly said. "What's his issue anyway?"

"You know what?" Polly said. "Think about it, and find me when you're ready to talk like a true friend should." She began to walk to the door. "I need to go make sure our *friend* is alright." And just like that, Molly was alone.

Part 2: Ace vs. Molly

"Okay, Polly. I washed your pillow case." Molly said. It was 8:45 pm. Ace and Molly hadn't spoken to each other for over 4 hours. "Do you have your sleeping bag?"

Polly held out a large brown sack. "Yup."

Molly stared at the sack. "Polly, that's a potato sack."

"Really?" Polly looked confused. "Aw man! I paid, like, 50 bucks for this thing in Egypt! I was robbed." she pouted.

"Isn't Ace coming upstairs?" Molly asked. She still hadn't apologized, and she was still a little mad at him.

"He said he didn't want to be in the same room with you."

"I thought you were going to calm him down." Molly said.

"I tried, but you really hurt him." Polly told her.

"We'll it's his fault, anyway." Molly informed. "He had no right to criticize my friend when he doesn't even know her. She really is nice."

"But he's your friend too." Polly said. "And you weren't very nice, either. You called him out on something that he has no control over. It's not his fault his brain is limited."

One difference between imaginaries and humans is that they only know what their creator wants them to know, unlike humans, who learn every second of their lives. "Yeah, I guess." Molly said. "But he started it!"

"I don't care who started it!" Polly sobbed. "If you guys don't make up, I'll finish it! You were both way out of line! Besides, Ace was your friend way before this Maxine girl and you treated him like *dirt!*" Polly stopped to blow her nose in the potato sack.

"Calm down." Molly soothed.

"NO!" Polly yelled. "You don't get, it do you? He only said that stuff because he's scared! You said it to hurt him! And you did! Do you know that he actually glittered when you said the thing about his brain?!? He glittered *a lot!*"

Another difference is that when an imaginary friend cries, their tears bust into pools of glitter. "Scared? Scared of what?" Molly inquired.

"Think!" Polly said. "Think of your old boyfriend! Why did he get tired of Ace?!? Why did he lock him in his mind?!?"

"Um..."

"Because he got *real* friends!" Polly said. "He got friends, and didn't need Ace anymore. He grew up. And he was a real jerk about it, too! Ace felt threatened by Maxine because he was afraid that you would do the same!"

"He knows I can't lock him away!" Molly shouted. "Only Andrew can do that!"

"But you can still get tired of him." Polly pointed out. "He's afraid that you'll get other friends and you'll forget all about him. Don't you understand? We're all he's got! He's afraid of being replaced! Of being abandoned!"

Molly was quiet for a minute. "I guess I never thought of it that way."

"No, you didn't." Polly said. "And now he'd rather sleep on your rock hard sofa than in the same *room* with you!"

"I guess I should apologize."

"You think?!?" Polly snapped. "Molly, I don't even think he'd forgive you right now. I wouldn't! I can't believe this." she seethed as she crawled into the potato sack. "And right before our Friend-Aversary."

Molly clicked off the light and crawled into her own bed. She laid awake for hours, staring at her clock. At the stroke of midnight, she whispered, "Happy Friend-Aversary." Eventually, she fell asleep, and dreamed of herself, Ace, and Polly. They were all smiling and throwing confetti, shouting "Happy Friend-Aversary!" Then, Molly woke up, and returned to the nightmare that she created. "What am I going to do?" she mumbled as a single tear drop slide down her cheek.

Molly frantically awoke. Polly was shaking her back and forth by the shoulders. Her eyes were filled with tears. "What's wrong?" Molly asked.

"It's Ace." she sobbed. "He's gone!"

Molly was suddenly fully awake. "Gone? What do you mean 'gone'?!?"

"I went downstairs to see if he wanted some waffles and he wasn't there! Neither was any of his stuff!" Polly became hysterical. Molly slapped her across the face.

"Snap out of it!" she yelled. "Search the house. Look for anything he forgot. Something he might need to come back for." Polly nodded and ran downstairs. Molly searched her room. She discovered that all of Ace's clothes were missing, one blanket, Ace's sleeping bag, and a suitcase. Polly rushed up the stairs.

"He forgot a pair of underpants!" she said, presenting Molly with a pair of tighty-whities.

"Polly, those are *yours!*"

"Oops. Sorry."

"This is not good." Molly began to pace. "This is not good *at all*. He could be anywhere: Mexico, France, Hawaii, Heck, he could even be on Jupiter for all we know!"

"What if something *terrible* happens to him?" Polly began to cry again. "He's out there all alone! He could drown! Or be lost in the woods! Or fall off a bridge! Or even-" Polly started to sob loudly, but Molly didn't notice. A horrible thought had just dawned on her. What if I made him so upset and depressed that he reveals himself to Andrew? What if he thinks he's better off that way? Heaven knows what my ex will do to him! What if Andrew hurts him?!? What if he *kills* him?!?!? Wait, can imaginary people die? Oh, if anything bad happens to him, I'll never forgive myself! She grabbed Polly by the shoulders. "We're going to find him. We have to."

"But *how?!?!?*" Polly sobbed. "We don't know where he would go! And even if we do find him, what if he doesn't wanna come home?!?"

"He doesn't have to if he doesn't want to. We can't force him. You were right. I shouldn't have said that thing about his brain. I should have apologized." Molly sighed. "We *have* to find him. even if he doesn't come home, we have to make sure he's okay...cause that's what friends do."

Polly sniffled. "I'll look for clues on where he might have gone." She walked back down the stairs. Molly felt like washing her mouth out with soap.

"I shouldn't consider myself his friend." she murmured. "After all I put him through, it would be a miracle if he even *looked* at me." She blew her nose in a tissue. "I was so happy about making a new friend, that I pushed my old ones away. I lost track of what was important. My family. Ace and Polly are part of my family now. And nothing ever comes before that." She turned around and kicked her bed in frustration. It hurt, but she didn't care. "Today is Tuesday. Mom will *kill* me if I'm not at school. But Ace is missing." Molly had to make a choice. She thought really hard. Ace spent months plotting a way to escape Andrew and find me. The least I can do is find him. She straightened her back and lifted her head up, full of determination. "And if that means I get grounded from my phone for a month, or a detention in my new school, then *so be it!* But right now, my friend's in trouble!" And with that, she marched out of the room.

-To be continued in the 3rd story: My Reality



teen zine is:

Taylor Bradley, Angelica Cataldo, and Dessa Leonard

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