**Love, Hate, Fear Short Story**

**Jessica Blackmer**

Leona glances at the piles of cassettes like they were a ticking bomb, clicking to the sound of her own heartbeat. Suddenly everything makes sense and yet nothing does. These tapes held the answers, but she no longer wanted any of them.

She grabs the top tape with such force the box nearly tipped off the counter. She places the tape into the second recorder. Clicks record.

*This is entry- oh who am I kidding this is so stupid. I’m so stupid…but you want to know why, Jackie? Because of you, because of you and your grand ideas for the future, because of your smile. I wanted that too, you know?*

Leona takes a breath. It comes out shaky, almost like static. Crackling, breaking, echoing down her throat and making her stomach churn with an unexplained feeling.

*Did you find me entertaining? Huh? Did you at least think I was fun? I thought you were my friend. I thought we… Ha, never mind. God this is all so insufferable. God…did you know I went to church? My grandmother always nagged me to, and I always ran off to meet the group. I thought we were all so cool. I thought we had fun.*

*So I went to the church. It’s a lot smaller than I thought it would be. I used to think it was a castle when I was a kid. The spires that stabbed the sky, the fresh coat of white paint, the looming sense of existential dread. I didn’t want to go in, but I did. You know why? Because I wanted you. Yeah, that’s right. Before you decided you were better than this town-better than me- and decided to run off, before you started to act all crazy, I went, and I sat in row three and I bowed my head. I prayed for everything and nothing. I needed to cling to something, because you felt so real but so nonexistent all at once.*

*You made me feel alive and that scared me so there I was, crushed between my grandmother and some man from the trailer park who reeked of alcohol, and I prayed that I could figure out my feelings. So yeah, that’s where I was that Sunday you called…when you needed me.*

*If I had answered, would you still be here?*

*I still pray, you know, although I don’t think I really am. My mind just kind of…spaces out, but I do it because it felt like the only thing I can do. You would think that is so pathetic, right? Right? I hate this, all of it. I hate that I’ve lost all sense of control. I hate that nothing has felt right since you ran away. I hate you, and I hate that most of all.*

*If you come back now, I won’t be mad, I promise. I’ll get rid of all of that hate, I’ll pray every day to get rid of it. I’ll stop if you tell me to. I’ll answer your call anytime just like I promised. I’ll do anything to stop feeling like this. Just…please, come back to me.*

Leona stops the recording, popping the tape out of its tomb. She isn’t sure if the tape was clear or not but she didn’t care. She dropped it to the floor, hearing it hit with a sharp click. Then, with one swift motion as the unexplained feeling emerges, she brings her heeled boot down atop the tape. Again. And again. And again.

A smile curls onto her lips, and a chuckle emerges from some unknown place. This is no time to laugh but she can’t stop as she falls into a fit of laughter. Collapsing to the ground, heaving from the laughter that seems to never cease, she lays there until the tears start streaming down her face and she no longer knows what they mean.