

The background of the entire image is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise over a body of water. The sky is filled with horizontal clouds, transitioning from dark blue at the top to bright orange and yellow near the horizon. In the bottom left corner, a small silhouette of a boat with two people is visible on the water. In the center, there is a white graphic of a spyglass, consisting of a horizontal line with a circle on each end.

the spyglass

summer issue
twenty twenty-four



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SIT AND WAIT FOR SUMMER, AGAIN



I walk in the park a lot. Mainly to walk the dog, but my legs seem to have a mind of their own when they drag me towards the swings and I glide through the air in the fading light, alone. Most of the kids have gone, and the rest don't care about another dog walker, not at this hour. Just the wind, a squeaking swing, and me. Eighteen, fuzzy-minded, tired and alone, in the same park that has been standing since I was two.

Of course, there are differences. The waterpark features have been changed— instead of the fading yellow arch which sprayed as much water on the nearby pedestrians as on the kids below, there are now giant flowers of red and blue which spout in acrobatic fountains. Naturally, the city hasn't fixed the squeaky swing, but they updated the climbing net and repaved the crumbly paths. It's more colourful than when I was there five summers ago, transitioning from grade 7 to 8.

The people are also changed. No longer is it me, my sister, her friends, and our bikes; a swarm of adolescents (not quite kids, not quite teens), clumsy with rapidly growing limbs, drunk on the freedom of summer. Now there are adults walking around the woods in packs, smoking weed and drinking like madmen to relax, to forget, to laugh, to fit in. No longer is it me and my sister racing down the steep where it curves into the parking lot, hollering as the breeze musses up our hair. We haven't rode our bikes since grade 8. We don't smile as much as we used to. We fight more than we hug.

We're not twelve anymore. I'm eighteen and packing for university and she's sixteen, almost seventeen, and this will be the most time we've ever lived apart. We don't talk about how much I'll miss her or how worried she is about her post-secondary studies or how much our parents are nagging both me and her about things I'll forget or her slacking off. She goes out with friends and plays with the dog while I sit and check my list over and over and we go to work and try to forget that come September, I won't be there anymore. I won't be there with her anymore. We sit on her bed, utterly silent. Just me and her.

Some things just don't need to be said.

Some things just can't be said.

I'm thankful for that. I think.

I walk to the park again. Sit on the swing to lazily rock back and forth. It's almost summer—I can feel the anticipation in the air. But it's not the same, somehow. There is laughter (not mine, not hers), the whirring of bike gears (we haven't ridden since Covid times), and the creaking swing in the wind.

I sit and wait for summer again. Summer, five years ago.

The part I love the most of any vacation, whether it be driving two hours to Blue Mountain or flying to another continent, is unpacking.

Opening my blue suitcase, which I stuffed to the brim with “essentials” I did not need, is perhaps the most satisfying feeling in the world. I prefer to go one item at a time, which is why the entire routine usually takes up at least three precious hours of my time. To most people, unpacking almost always goes unappreciated, as it is often put off as an extra monotonous task that seems to pile up and loom over everyone’s consciousness during the days following a trip. To me, unpacking is an integral component of the travelling experience, and no vacation would be the same without it.

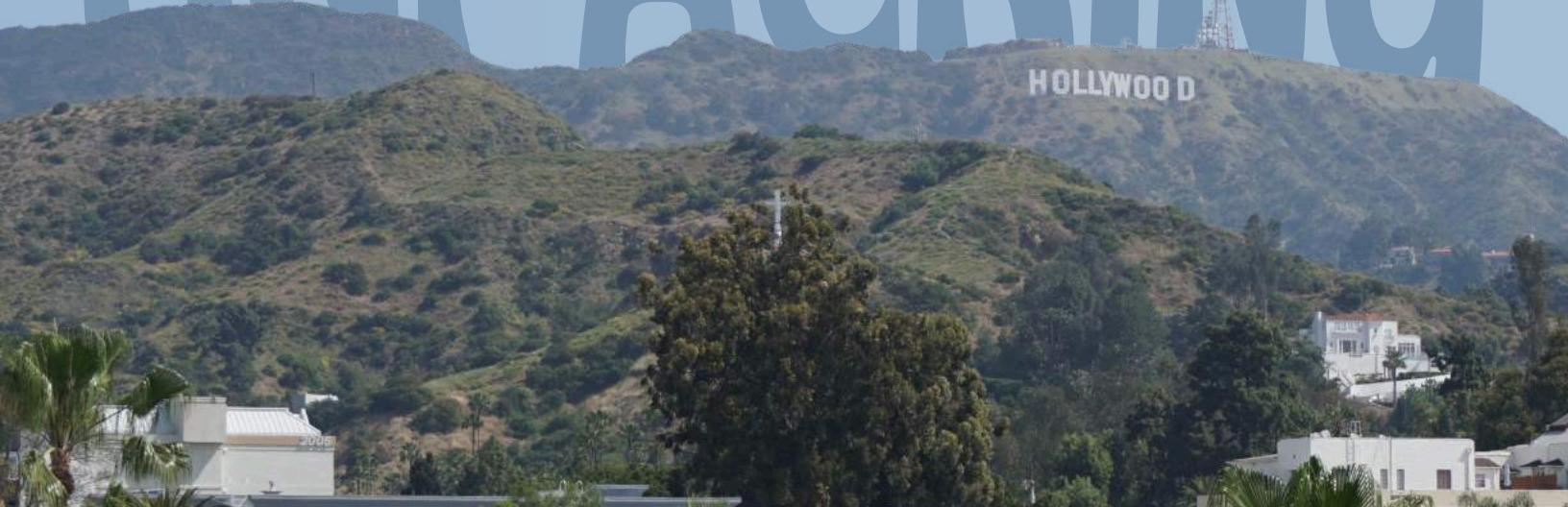
Memories are often even better than moments themselves, which is the very essence of what unpacking represents. While I unpack an item, it almost seems as if I am being teleported back to a fuzzy yet ideal version of the memory where I was wearing that top or holding that souvenir. Every part of my suitcase paints a picture of the places I went to, the food I ate, and the people I spent time with.

I remember when I came back from my trip to Turkey with my grandparents, it took me four whole days to unpack my suitcase. It was not necessarily because of how I was procrastinating or how I was busy, but more so because it took me so long to gather my thoughts about the trip itself. Since my grandparents do not live close to me and my family, unpacking my suitcase myself almost felt like I had them right next to me. When I took out my polaroid pictures, I felt as though I could hear the bustling sounds of the city and feel the humid air of the trip. When I took out my magenta hoodie, I was reminded of when I bought it at the clothing market that I went to with my grandma. All of my clothes, all of my technology, all of my belongings, acted as a one-way ticket back to Turkey.

Unpacking does not have to be an annoying and tedious responsibility; instead, it can be viewed as something similar to opening a time capsule. Time capsules always perfectly reflect the feelings and atmosphere of the time in which they were created, and opening them and discovering the things inside is wondrous. It feels as though you are seeing the objects for the first time, even if you had just used them the day prior. Unpacking lets you relive moments, and it is an amazing journey in itself.

// KATE SHAHIDI PHOTOGRAPHY // MARINA HUANG DESIGN // ANDREW CHU

UNPACKING





// AMRITA DUDAKA
PHOTOGRAPHY // JOLLY YAN
DESIGN // MAGGIE LI



Are we There Yet?

Come on come on come on.

Silence hangs like heavy fog at the station. The pale lights strapped to the ceiling cast halos across the littered floor, coating the gray subway tile in a dull wash. In the background, the drone of the escalator harmonizes with the sounds of shuffling feet and muffled yawns. Before the yellow line, people keep their eyes low, fixated on their screens as we wait.

Are we there yet?

The toe of my sneaker taps impatiently against the ground, and I take yet another glance up at the clock. Five minutes late, great. My ears strain against the silent orchestra of the commute, desperate to pick out the low thrum of wheels against track. After what feels like an eternity, it arrives. Heads perk up at the sound of trilling metal, and from the darkness, two yellow headlights emerge. With a magnificent screech, the train

barrels its way down the track in a blur of glass and silver, gradually losing momentum before heaving itself to a stop. It's about time. The doors open, and I weave my way through a crowd of blurred faces before quickly taking a seat. The train starts, gradually accelerating down the track, but it's too slow. My toe starts tapping again.

Are we there yet?

I close my eyes, dreaming of the destination. City lights. Golden afternoons. A fulfilling job and sterling shoes. I wake up every morning in a big apartment, made of more windows than walls. My shoulders are relaxed in this place, my back no longer aching from the weight of expectation and decisions of the future. Here, I go out more often, taking the time to travel to sunny beaches and frigid mountains, places I've only dreamed of from behind textbook pages and study notes.



Most of all, in my destination, I am imbued with certainty, the one that comes from knowing you've done it right.

Are we there yet?

A muffled announcement echoes from the speakers above, and I am flooded back to the present. My shoulders hurt. Outside, pockets of light stream through the blanket of rolling clouds, speckling the otherwise monotone suburban landscape. Irritation flickers behind my eyes; we're moving too slowly. There are places to see, things to do. I'll never make it if the train doesn't pick up the pace. I sit back, and close my eyes once more, eager to return back to the possibility of "someday."

How will we get there?

My brows furrow; I haven't quite figured out that part. I've got the destination planned out,

so I suppose the rest shouldn't be too hard to compose. Once I figure out what I want to do, I'll start working. Over time, I'll keep working until I've figured it out. Then, I'll arrive at the destination. There, that's it. Satisfied?

You have the destination, but what about the journey?

My eyes. The journey? I rack my brains, yet draw up a blank. From my train seat, the destination burns like a lighthouse in a storm, but the journey is lost in the waves. I look around, and my surroundings sharpen before my gaze for the first time. The silence fills my ears; there are no passengers but me. What train is this? Where are we going? I peer through the window, but the highways and hills have blurred into a kaleidoscope of distortion and possibility. I slump against my seat, and rub my eyes.

This is going to be a long ride.

Fourth Wall

I was originally going to write this article about the importance of not being afraid to embarrass yourself because it makes your life funny, but then I realized that I need to follow my own advice. The Insta self-care baddies who tell me to love myself probably don't love themselves all the time. Maybe I am an underthinker, or maybe I am a chronic overthinker who wants to co-opt the aesthetic of underthinking, but maybe if I tell myself I am an underthinker I'll actually become one.

Often, we disparage a demographic to signal we're not a part of it. To say, ah, I acknowledge that this type of person exists, and hopefully this acknowledgement is enough for others to think that I would never do anything they do. So we gaslight ourselves into thinking we are people we're not, but people we desperately want to be: this is the fourth wall.

I don't talk to my childhood best friend anymore. She lives right across the street, and I must have walked past her house a hundred times on my daily walks with my mom, but I never walk up the steps to the door to say hi. Part of me doesn't want to – it's natural that old friends grow apart – but the other is scared we won't be compatible. I live my life in the currency of experiences, and my highlight reel of experiences with her are filled with happy memories. Is it better to risk it or to continue to reminisce? I don't know, but I know the advice I would give if it weren't me: don't play it safe, send that risky text, talk about things you're scared to talk about, because you'll come out of it with an experience to share, something to make your life rich.

But until I have the will or courage to do that, I'll keep that fourth wall up.

But please, reserve your judgement because the metatheatrics of my life depend on it.

//RIANNA ZHU
DESIGN // LYNN HE
GRAPHICS//CANVA



AND THE FIRE, it Swells

in the dreadful dead of winter's dark
when the wind blows chill through bone
and the walls rattle with cold —
a small Fire sparks under the timbers
barely encased, barely contained
trapped from freedom behind a thin glass pane

you are cold, and the Fire is heat
a dash of crimson orange, a splash of liquid gold
painted against a canvas of nature's oaken bold
the flame is a phoenix's wing splayed wide;
it is alive,
and it longs to fly

your eyes, curious with admire
you inch closer,
and the Fire, it swells
embers sizzling with invitation
there's no time to dwell

anticipation rushing into your veins
you press your fingers against the thin glass pane
screws loosened and tugged free
and the Fire is released

at first it is small
afraid to take a step past its confines
but you coo and you encourage
you welcome it into your life

and finally, it begins drinking in oxygen
listening to your own words
once subtle smoke, now rising high
taking and thrashing like a man starved
it needs more, more

and now you're peeling strips of bark from the walls,
your favourite newspapers and photographs
offered with delight
everything you have is given
a sacrifice,
deemed worthy to the growing god

and the Fire, it swells
it takes
consumes and ensorcells
catching onto the corner of your mother's favourite rug
roaming the planks of the wooden floor
it needs more, yet more

and you can only stare as you watch it burn
it takes and takes and takes until you're forced out the door
your bare feet left padding across the frozen moor

in the dreadful dead of winter's dark
when the wind blows chill through bone
and the walls rattle with cold —
you turn back and take
a shivering glance
at the home you once called yours

and the Fire, it swells
once a cottage made of wood
ruin settles in where it once stood
flames rising up the walls
like a phoenix rising from the ashes
thatnot even winter can quell

you have given, and it has taken
and left you nothing in return
for the price of the Fire's freedom
is for your life to burn

NOTHING LIKE THE MOVIES



//YASMIN HADIZAD
PHOTOGRAPHY // SAM ABDI
DESIGN // ERIN CHEN

“High school was nothing like the movies.”

Moving through high school was kind of like running a marathon, except the easy cement of a tarmac on which my feet could go tip-tap was replaced by mud. Lots of thick, dense mud— the kind that’s dried out just a bit too much in the sun.

When I think now about the four years I spent trudging through the sludge, I remember the days spent in regret— I wish I’d done more extracurriculars, made more friends, read more books, written more, loved more, scrolled less. In hindsight, I really do wish I’d done more with my high school life than bury my face in social media and studying.

But it’s all hindsight. When I stare at the sun dancing in the warmth of spring, just past my window, I realize that winter was months ago.

“High school was nothing like the movies.”

It was an incredible day: prom. I remember the colors as we neared the entrance of the Manor: green in the full branches and round bushes that lined the edge and purple-blues in the wisteria that hung above a crystal-white stream. Of course, it

wasn’t half as beautiful as everyone’s dresses. “God, if only I could recreate the sheer incredibility of the long, gold-fleck blues, the puffed tutus, the silver necklaces and silver sheen, the sequins and feathers...Seriously; I ran out of breath telling every girl I passed “Your dress is so pretty!” Everyone was squealing over each other like that.

“What kind of movies were you watching?”

What was I watching before? Because now my eyes were fixed to the world in front of me, the field stretching out into the lake and the bright, young flowers flitting about. The air was crisp and the water of the lake burbled. I sighed at the two swans gliding over its surface. Chatter hung steady in the atmosphere. I laughed well into the evening with friends and I ate until my dress was going to burst and I screamed memories into the hungry night. I twirled my skirt to the sky and held hands with the people I had wiggled my fingers at in the hallways. It was magical.

“Hey, I remember this scene!”

Do you? The warm sunset coloured the sky thirty-one different shades. Me and my friends must have

taken sixty pictures crouching and curtsying and joining our hands to make cute hand-hearts behind the snap of the camera. The other girls would flick by like the reel and we would stand still, our wide, sweet smiles captured in the lens. Once, sitting dangerously close to the edge of a rock set high over the water, I saw the swans swimming in the distance near the venue's wooden pagoda. They drifted away, but my eyes landed on the ripples left behind in the water...

They disappeared behind the pagoda, and I knew they were there, craning their necks to the springtime sun.

“Wait, pause here.”

I sank down at our table and stared at the dance floor. Arms waved back and forth. I was stuffed from dinner and tired from dancing, so I shut my eyes for a second. Four years flashed by.

My indie soft-rock music phase.

Meditating and taking up watercolor.

Decorating my room with vines.

Drawing pictures in my painted journal.

Penning heartfelt birthday letters to my best friend.

Drinking mango bubble tea on the walk home.

Transferring schools.

Watching this anime again.

Daydreaming, daydreaming, daydreaming.

My very first kittens.

My very first job.

Writing book reviews in my black leather journal.

Chemistry (god, *why*).

AP English exam.

Writing my book.

Dropping my book.

Joining the Spyglass.

60 pages of math notes I tried to sell.

Bike rides to the library on Saturdays.

Being a part of a play.

Picking my book back up.

Regionals.

Provincials.

Adopting our sweet kitty.

Winter break in Costa Rica.

Applying to college after college— can I get a reference?

AP English exam—I studied this time.

So...many...essays.

Mom! Mom, I got in! I got into SASAH! I got into IVEY!

Dreaming, dreaming, dreaming—

“Shh, stop talking! I’m trying to listen!”

I almost sprint to the dancefloor— this is *my song*. I belt the lyrics into the world and smile at the people I love. The melody moves me— back and forth. I twirled in my beautiful poofy princess dress and yelled out every lyric like it was my last...

“Aw, it’s over already?”

That’s right. I picked my feet out of the mud and noticed the grass I hadn’t seen before.

When I look back at the four years I spent dragging my feet through high school, I see the flaws, the days spent wishing I’d done better. I see what I did wrong— why didn’t I take the leap? Why didn’t I study harder, join more clubs, try a sport, get closer to more people and farther from self-doubt— and why didn’t I write more? I think about 13-year-old me wishing these past few years to be like some teen flick, and being— well— disappointed, to say the least. Sometimes I feel like I’ve lost time, too.

But really, rewinding the old cassette, I’ve found the frames, speckled in timeless spots, are more beautiful than my pea brain could ever have appreciated. Winter was months ago, and the next winter will come a few months later. There will be a winter after that, and after that.

But today, it’s spring...summer, actually.

“Man, that was a great film.”

It was.

Did you like the movie?

Humans of RHHS



Andrew Dai

“A general rule I have in my life is to try and be happier every day. I'll probably be way happier next year when all the things I'm worried about are gone [...] I'm romanticizing senioritis, I guess. Just for the first semester of grade 12, though [...] Even if I end up doing something that makes me a ton of money, it'd have to be something I enjoy. Like, have you heard of underwater welders? They get paid a ton of money for something super specialized. I don't want to go down a path that leads just to one thing like that.”



Zoe Chan

“Maybe I'll start a car brand. I'll be like Elon Musk, but better. His cars aren't very good, in my opinion, but I could be like him, you know. I'd choose to make high quality cars over looks or the aesthetic. I'd be a better person than him too. I'd make my own social media platform instead of buying one for a ton of money [...] I think that if I made some huge innovation and got famous, I wouldn't mind all the attention. Like a Wikipedia article, or something like that.



// MAX SKIDELSKY
PHOTOGRAPHY // AUDREY LAI
GRAPHICS // CANVA
DESIGN // VIVIAN WU



"I wanted to be a racer at one point, too."

Claire Chen

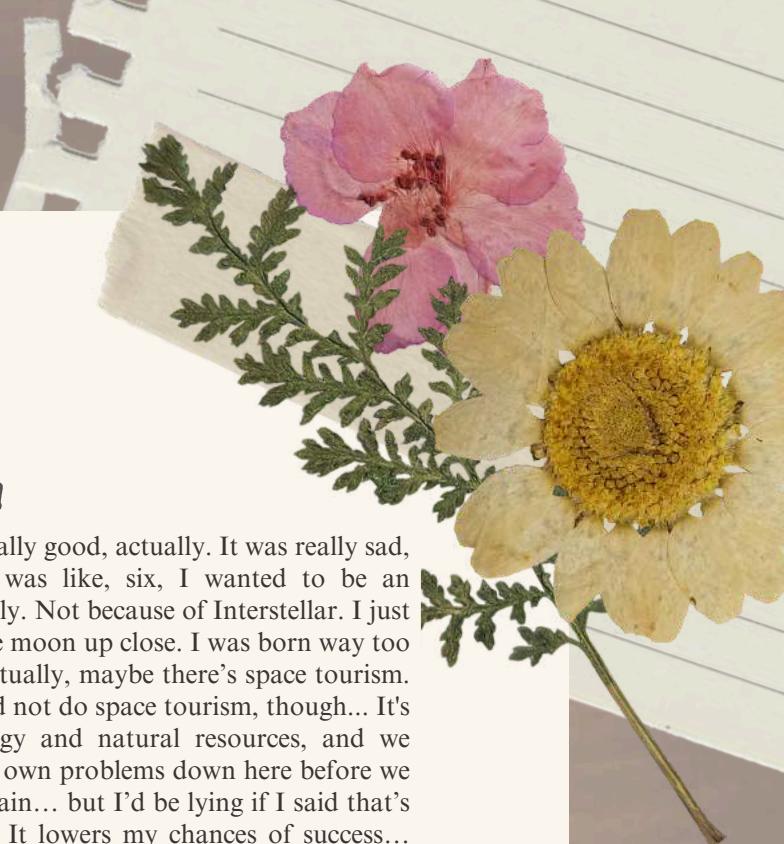
"Interstellar is really good, actually. It was really sad, too [...] When I was like, six, I wanted to be an astronaut, actually. Not because of Interstellar. I just wanted to see the moon up close. I was born way too late for that... actually, maybe there's space tourism. I think we should not do space tourism, though... It's a waste of energy and natural resources, and we should solve our own problems down here before we head to space again... but I'd be lying if I said that's the only reason. It lowers my chances of success... like, if I work hard enough, I can get into NASA, you know? I want to have worked for space — earned it. Not just someone who paid for it. I guess it's selfish, I want that kind of pay-off for myself so that I can know all my work was worth it."



"You just don't want to tunnel vision onto anything."

Patrick Wei

"It's hard to know exactly what you want to do. But it's also a good idea to work towards an achievable goal, and then you can set your sights on something bigger. Doing stuff like music and DECA is branching out; you get to learn more about other things. You can apply nearly anything you learn from one thing to another. One of the biggest things I've learned has been communication skills, and those are super helpful in basically any field, especially in STEM ones... lots of other people just don't have those skills. It's also just nice to have variety in life, especially in high school when you've got way more time."



SHAVING CREAM

Cedarwood stumbling in soft musk,
It hangs in the air, like talks in the car,
Weightless, crisp like paper shaking off dust,
All cool and tickling stubble.
All fresh laughs.
It smells like coming back to the springs
of when I was small,
Wrapped in his arms, tumbling over his shoulders,
hoisted on high hilltops with that cool mountain air,
You know the kind-- that fills your lungs with the greed
for another breath.
Please, just one more.
The smell of the days dad shaved.

Clean-cut on a warm summer's day
With a hint of sweet citrus,
All bright and calm
All painful peace
Cutting through the bridge of my nose,
Sharp like comfort, stinging like the wind,
Yearn for my churning chest when I breathed,
Breathed for too long, got too greedy
for that cool mountain air and got—
Smelling of cedarwood coughs,
Musk like murky waters that made me
happy in the Hell of forgetting.

Heavy, like my eyes, asleep on the ride home
Fall, like the fragrance of stepped-on leaves in autumn,
Fresh, like inhaling thoughtless laughter.
All familiar cedarwood and a little lavender.
All pressed iron shirts in the—

Musky breath after musky breath.
Cold like the coming of winter, the turning of time.
All musky cedarwood citrus with a drop of lavender...
My father on the days he shaved.

Letter To my 13 Year Old SELF

I wish we had met earlier.

"Why?"

So I wouldn't have to feel as scared as I did. So I could know that I was cared for. So we would have had more time together.

"But it took that time to get us here?"

I know. It took trials and tribulations. Mountains and foothills. I used to be frail. I used to stutter and cower. I used to be alone. I sprinkled seeds I never knew would grow. I didn't see the colour I do now.

"What did it take?"

Grasping anything that would pass me by. Jumping off cliffs of my own fear. I stopped cowering. I stopped gluing my eyes to the floor. When you look up, you see everything that's ahead of you. You realize that you need to run towards the things that scare you the most.

"Did you run?"

Yes. That's how I met you. Every moment and every experience led me here one way or another. Every moment of anxiety, every second of sleep lost, every tear that I shed. But there were still the laughs I shared, the people I loved, and the even more (happy) tears that I still shed. Before I knew it, the seeds I planted had sprouted into trees that shimmered in the sunlight.

"What was it all for?"

I don't know. We'll see! Maybe that's the allure of it all.

Ask yourself: "*What would I do if I weren't afraid?*" And go do it.

Do not scream silently. Do not muffle your tears. Do not be afraid to say that thing to that person. Do not be afraid to try your hardest and fail. Do not be afraid to try your hardest and succeed. The only thing you should be afraid of, is letting it all pass you by.

Chase after everything that you want and seize it by its reins. You are an artwork comprised of all the people you have met and all the moments you have experienced. You will always be enough for the people that matter.

"What if I can't keep going?"

That's alright.

Just remember the way your friend laughed with you and the way they held your hand when you cried. Remember the comforting words that people who mattered whispered in your ear when you thought it had all gone wrong. Remember what it felt like to stand on stage with shining lights shining down on you, as if the entire world was watching you. You'll shine just as bright, trust me.

It'll be hard on you. It'll take its toll. It's easy to doubt a possibility that might never come true.

But it's better than a world where you and I never meet.

90% of Gamblers Quit Before They Win BIG!

90% OF GAMBLERS QUIT RIGHT BEFORE THEY WIN BIG is, in my opinion, among the funniest punchlines to have come out of modern-day teenage culture. It's a very versatile saying – you can use it to encourage someone to keep going, or that their lucky break is coming, completely divorced from the original context of gambling. It's obviously not true (looking up "gambling success stories" returns only horror stories of addicts losing everything,) but the ironic sentiment of the joke has made the reality of gambling fall onto covered ears.

I'm not going to just tell you "gambling bad." I'm sure we all know that. But I'm not quite sure that most people know how deep the rabbit hole of psychological trickery and manipulation goes when it comes to separating a gambler and their money, all the while keeping them playing until they hit it big – after all, their big break might be their next hand.

Let's start with the backbone of all gambling and chance-based games; the Skinner box, or in nerd terms, an "operant conditioning chamber." In the 1930s, Harvard psychologist B.F. Skinner created the "lever box," a light-and-sound-proof box with a lever and a chute for food (it should be noted that Skinner disliked his name being attached to this

// MAX SKIDELSKY
DESIGNER // KATRINA LAM
PHOTOGRAPHER // SAM ABDI
GRAPHICS // CANVA

box.) Skinner stuck mice into this box, and when the mice eventually flipped the lever out of boredom/desperation, a pellet of food would fall down the chute. The mice eventually learned that lever equals food, so they would keep flipping it to get food.

The mice eventually got full or bored, so Skinner made a modification to his experiment. The first few times the mice flipped the lever, they'd get food, and after that, Skinner proceeded to make the distribution random, meaning that some pulls of the lever would get food, but most wouldn't. What Skinner found was that when reinforcing behaviour with random rewards, rather than constant ones, the mice would keep on flipping the



lever, even when they were full. I don't think I have to explain how this random reinforcement applies to gambling. Even though we as humans might think we're better than mice, our brains are largely wired the same, giving us the same predisposition towards randomness. Of course, this randomness is always tilted in favour of the "house;" a catch-all term for who you're playing against in most games of chance.

Let's move onto the titular example; "I'm about to win big." If you've ever persisted with something that you know had a low (or no) chance of paying off, then you've experienced the sunk costs fallacy. A school-related example would be staying in a difficult course that you've really struggled with for two months because you've already been in that course for months. The time you spent in the course precludes your judgement and makes you think that you have to keep going, when in reality, the time you spent in the course is, well, sunk. It's not something you should take into consideration when going forward, but the strong emotional attachment to the time spent makes it hard to give it all up.

This applies to gambling almost one-to-one. Replace



time with money and a difficult course with a gambling game of your choice, and you've got the business model of every casino there's ever been. Only, in the context of gambling, the sunk cost fallacy is far more insidious. The very nature of gambling allows for fairy tale comebacks; even when you're down to your last dollar, the possibility of winning just a few more hands and making it all back is a real one, no matter how slim.

Compounding the sunk costs fallacy is perhaps the (in my opinion) most fascinating fallacy; the gambler's fallacy. This fallacy is so intrinsically tied to the way any human first understands

probability that its very existence has made us learn that our prehistoric lizard brains are terrible at understanding probability. Defined simply, it's the (erroneous) belief that independent events are influenced by previous independent events. For a common example, take a coin. You flip it ten times, getting heads each time; now, on throw #11, are you going to call heads or tails?

Well, the reality is that it's still a fifty-fifty chance whether or not it's heads. You could flip a coin 100 times, get heads every time, and it'll still be fifty-fifty. However, before the advent of modern statistical analysis and education, the vast majority of people assumed that bad luck eventually turns to good luck, and vice versa. Gamblers who thought they were just down on their luck would continue gambling until Lady Luck smiled upon them, not realizing that in the end, they were never going to break even, just go up and down while already in the red.

It's easy to see how these fallacies are all, well, fallacious; especially when we boil them down to statistics and cold math. But it's hard to think beyond these fallacies, especially when they're in context. Try to look at these fallacies and see if you've ever experienced them; I guarantee you that you have. When you're done with that, ask yourself if you'd ever dip your toes into gambling, **even if you know the house always wins.**



Now, I predict two possible reactions to the above headline. You are either vaguely confused and indifferent, or, conversely, seething with unspeakable rage and utmost annoyance. Indeed, The Game has a reputation for evoking abnormally polarizing responses. But for those in the former camp, additional context is undoubtedly necessary. I must warn you, however, that some knowledge is better left unexplored.

The Game's premise is deceptively straightforward, characterized by two simple rules:

Everyone in the world is playing the game, whether they are conscious of it or not. There is no way to withdraw participation; you are **always** playing.

The win condition consists simply of not thinking of the game. When you think about the game, you lose.
Ergo: you just lost the game.

1.

2.

While seldom considered anything more than a childish method of internet trolling, The Game has, for the longest time, perturbed me in a manner I could never articulate. Indeed, there is something deeply and existentially unsettling about a game in which it is impossible to simultaneously win and be aware of it, such that one cannot help but ponder: what does it say about our lives? Our existence?

And most importantly, is it really that deep? Certainly not, but calling our lives into question as collateral to hypothetical conjecture is simply par for the course for us overthinkers.

So, why not take this journey together?

You've already lost, after all.

"You just lost The Game" is mildly thought-provoking in its nature as a self-fulfilling statement. The mere act of reading the sentence invokes the dual function of making you aware you have lost and thus making you lose--in that order.



YOU JUST LO



It's interesting how the mere cognizance of an idea can guarantee an outcome, sort of like mentioning the ability to blink and breathe manually (sorry).

However, the most intriguing part of The Game lies in its paradoxical win condition; that you can only win without knowing so, and that awareness of the game invariably leads to loss.

Because the truth of the matter is that *everything* is The Game.

In a universe that extends so far beyond our comprehension, it can be easy for us to question whether or not we truly possess free will, and whether anything we do is of substantial consequence. As such, we invest ourselves in games of our own creation, defined by rules and objectives fabricated to provide the illusion of structure. These games can be anything, ranging from dream university acceptances to the discovery of good music. Anything you care about, anything that infuses even a modicum of purpose into your existence, is a manifestation of The

Game. And so, to realize you are playing, to dwell on the triviality of your pursuits and succumb to meta-ironic apathy, is the surest way to lose. The only thing you can do is believe wholeheartedly in the meaningfulness of life, embracing whimsy and remaining unfazed by the looming threat of absurdity and futility.

Because The Game, in its purest essence, is a test of endurance. There is no final destination, no way to achieve conclusive victory. You play and persist as much as you can, accruing wins and losses in equal parts along the way. There is no greater meaning or lasting fulfillment, only constantly shifting goalposts that leave you chasing, at times stumbling, to reach them.

And if there is one undeniable truth about humanity, it is this:

We **LIVE** for the chase.

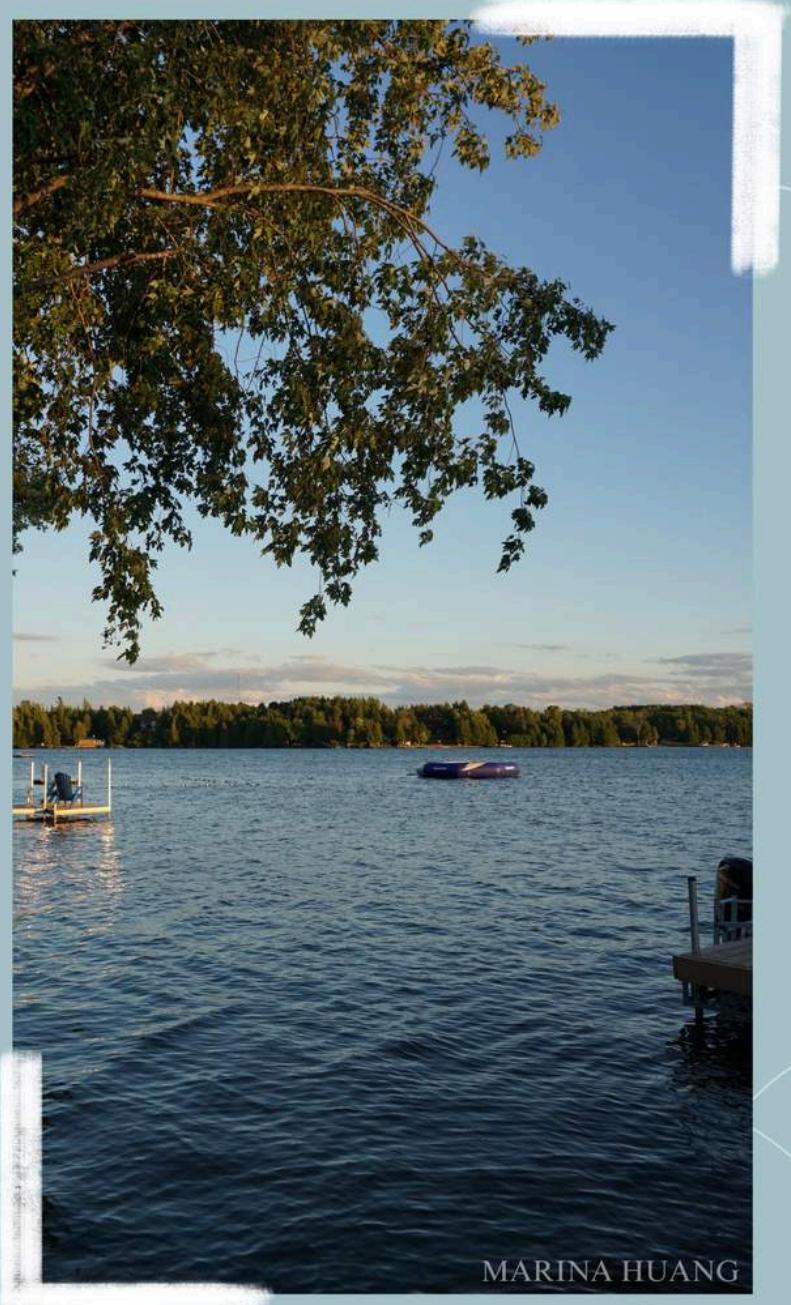


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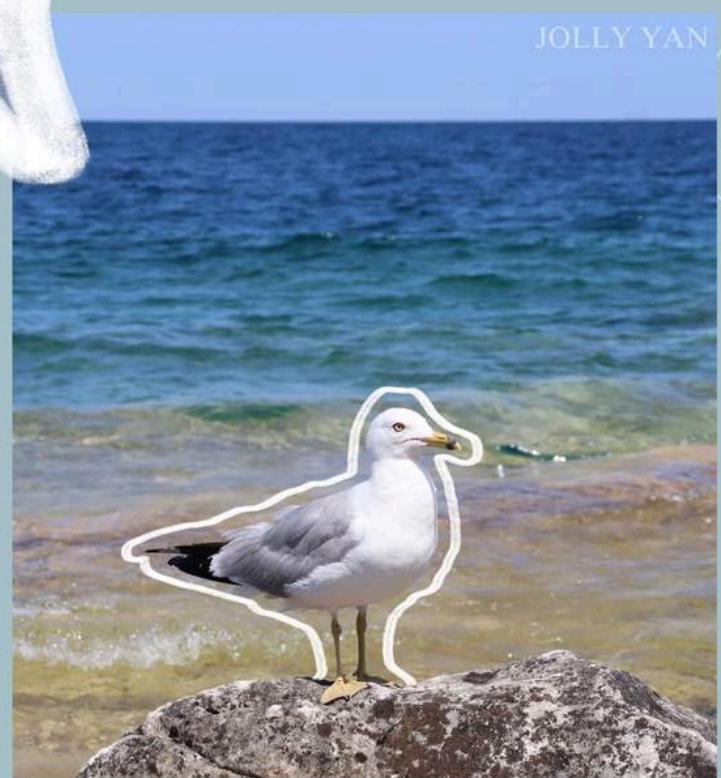
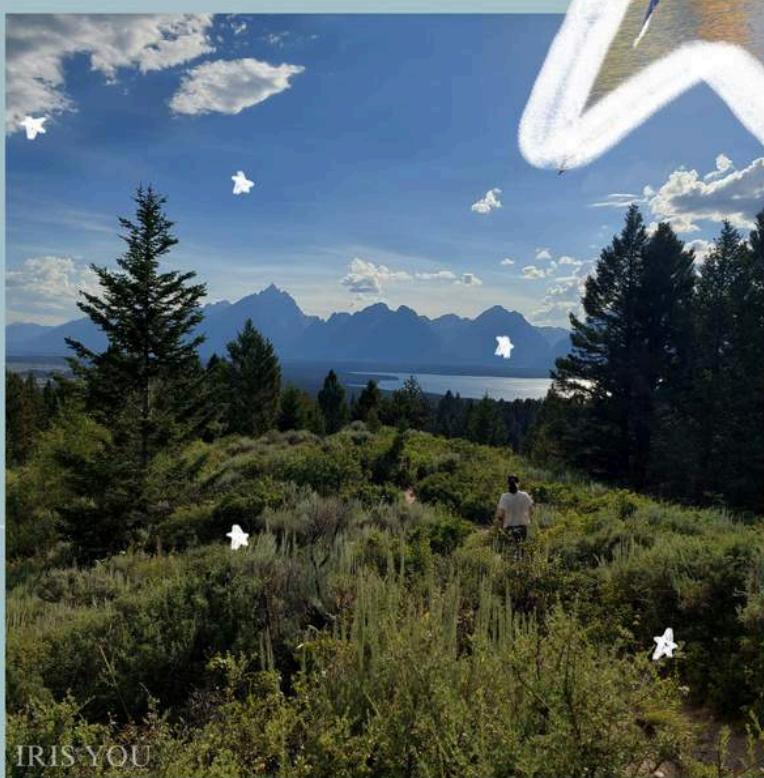
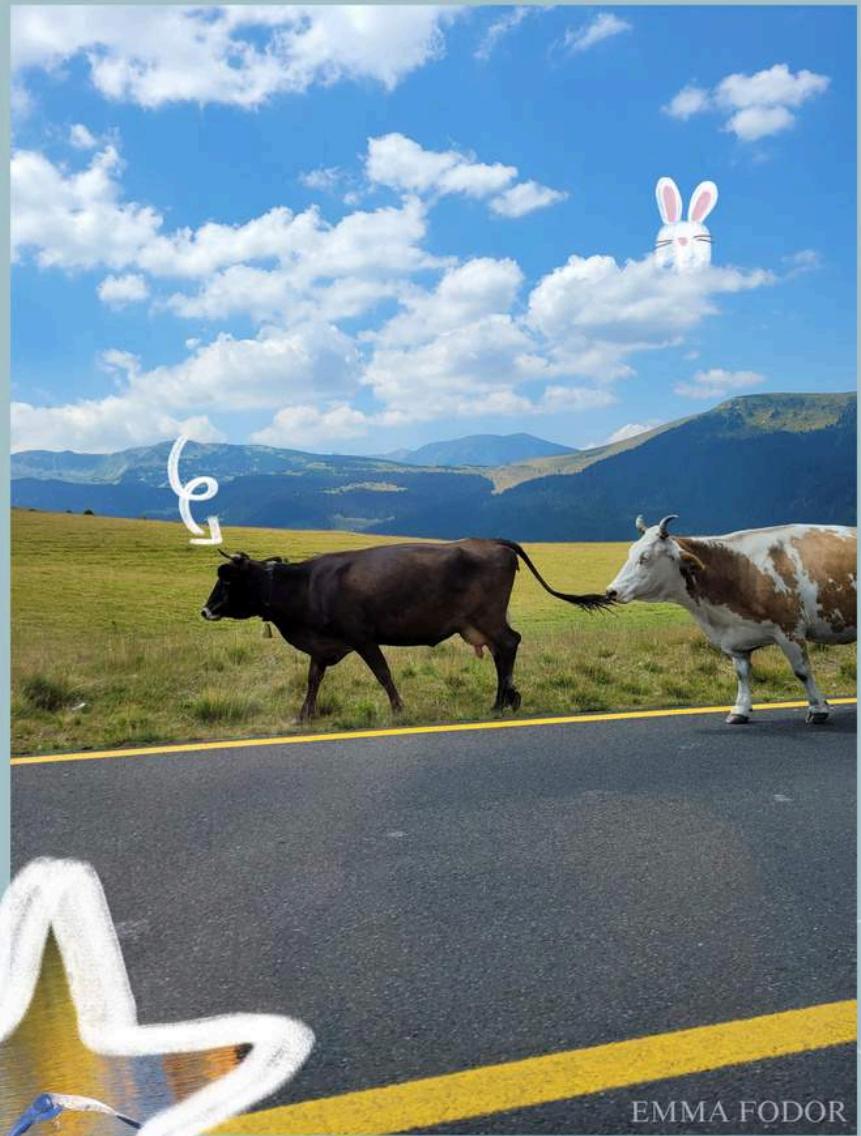
MARINA HUANG



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+Deity+

The creation of a new life will always be beautiful.

Shaped by the hands of the deity themselves, a nascent soul emerging from something beautiful— a pool of the clearest water, perhaps. Your first sight will always be the visage of the deity who shaped you, gazing down with a benevolent smile.

Though you do not know it yet, you should by all means owe them a great debt, for the time and energy required to create you was substantial indeed. It is a debt you can never hope to repay. It is a debt you will never need to repay.

You will be forever grateful for this blessing.

The earliest years are always filled with delight as you explore all the novelties of the world. The deity who created you accompanies you throughout it all, sparing endless time to keep you safe and happy. They teach you about the world you find yourself in and allow you free rein to do as you wish, only stepping in when there is danger.

// ANNA PAN
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Their guidance turns out to be crucial to your survival— the dangers hadn't seemed any different from the rest of the world until you were taught to recognize it. How to recognize the evil in others' eyes. How to see the malice in others' smiles.

It's a little difficult because none of them talk like you do. You never know what they're saying.

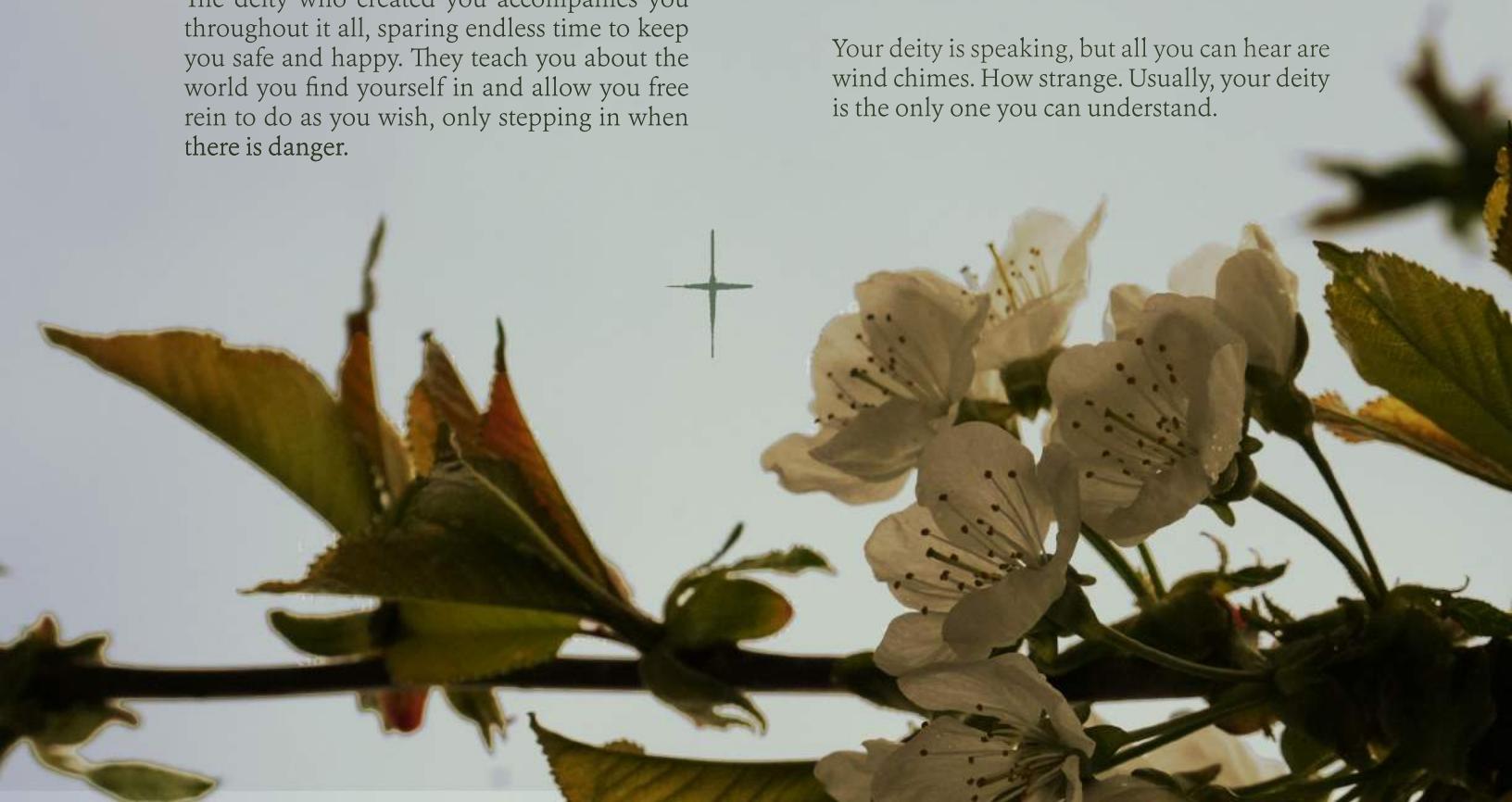
And it seems that there is a lot of evil in the world. No wonder why you and the deity are always on your own.

The learning process takes quite a while, but that's all right. The deity— *your* deity— is never out of sight.

You see *it* by accident. The thing lurks in the shadows, almost as though it knows it belongs there. The thing looks at you. You recognize the danger from the water in their eyes.

It makes a rasping noise. As soon as you startle, your deity is there, a safe barrier between you and the thing in the shadows. It rasps again, louder and more broken than before.

Your deity is speaking, but all you can hear are wind chimes. How strange. Usually, your deity is the only one you can understand.





Perhaps this *thing* can't understand proper words.

The thing hisses and you can see a flash of teeth. You frown, about to protest its rudeness, but your benevolent deity simply sighs.

The thing lumbers into the light, clumsy as though fighting its own steps, and you can see clearly what it looks like.

It is a mess of a body, barely more than a crumpled heap of loose strings and pieces haphazardly held together by those fraying threads. The purple-black strings are visible all over its body, especially at the joints.

If the thread was a nice crimson red... if someone would carefully put all those pieces back together and tuck away the string... if the thing didn't have so much water dripping from its eyes...

It might have looked similar to you.

Morbidly curious, you almost want to look closer. Your deity, ever attentive toward your wellbeing, ensured that your eyes are spared from any further interaction with something so unsightly.

Those very hands that had shaped your life come together in a gentle clap and the thing crumbles to nothing, your deity once again ensuring that all is good in the world.

After that unfortunate incident comes a welcome lesson about your own body.

The main thing keeping you together, your deity explains, are the red strings embedded within your body. Without them, you would begin to fall apart— just like the thing you had encountered.

But not only do they stabilize your body, they also anchor your thoughts. Without them, you would slowly descend into madness, becoming nothing more than a depraved creature who would even dare to bite the hand that fed them.

It is your deity who keeps them strong and intact. They show you the red string tied around their pinky, an unbreakable connection between them and you. The brilliant red almost distracts you from the circular scar on their finger. You don't say anything, because you know better than to pry.

In fact, your deity tells you, that thing had also been like you, once. But it had lost its faith and dared turn against its creator. Sadly, it could not be saved. It had to atone for its sins.

But you could never be like that lowly, treacherous thing. Not when your deity has only ever provided you with warmth and comfort. How could that thing even *think* of turning on its creator? How could there be such a deplorable existence in the world?

You owe your deity everything.

You owe your deity *everything*.

Why would you ever even think of betrayal?



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