

Between the Lines

By: Lindsey Miga

She fell like a leaf in autumn. Bright, and graceful, almost as if she were dancing. Of course, she wasn't really dancing, nor was she really falling, at least not physically. It was a gentle twist of movement swaying between invisible winds, slowly leading her towards the ground.

Her heart felt light and her smile felt free. For the first time in months, she was unburdened, untethered, safe. Her fingers skimmed the page, before briefly settling on her lips to suppress a giggle. A soft breeze lazily ruffled through her hair, plucking at loose strands and sending them soaring. Her fingers again traced the edge of the page, as she read the last line, and quietly closed the book.

She placed the novel in the grass beside her and allowed the last line to wash over her again. And again. And again. She sat back up, reopened the book, and flipped to the back. Another giggle slipped through her fingertips, and there's that feeling again. Falling like the first snow, gentle and twirling.

The sun had just begun to slip into night, but Calla barely even noticed, too fascinated by the way the branches of the tree behind her cut up the sky. Her dark eyes shot towards the robin singing through the air, and the crunch of leaves beneath her boot as she stood. Her hands collected the book from the ground, and her feet carried her back to civilization.

Again she felt it. That rush of energy. Her smile widened as she exited the orchard and stepped into town. She slipped down the bustling street, hardly noticing as the crowd surged up against her. She stuck out like a dandelion in the middle of a dreary gray alleyway, a gentle, unexpected sort of beauty. The businessmen pushed by her grumbling about the ridiculousness of youth, but Calla didn't seem to hear them, too focused on the brightness in the world and the beauty of its colors.

The air was thick with the scent of recently baked pastries. She could practically taste the vanilla in the air, and hear the crackle of fresh bread. She thought of Sunday mornings with her father. A contented smile slid into place, as she passed by the baker's shop, and under a small stone archway.

At long last, she had reached the quaint little bookshop. She leaned down on the handle and pushed the door in. The aroma of baked goods slowly faded away, suddenly overtaken by ink, spilled coffee, and leatherbound books. Calla inhaled.

Her eyes skimmed the room, drinking it in. The shop was dimly lit, and nearly empty, but to Calla, it was perfect. The bookshelves sagged under the weight of so many volumes and stacks of books were scattered across the room. Calla smiled softly and scratched the shop's fat ginger cat, behind the ear. The animal purred, as it slinked towards the shopkeeper. Calla continued towards the back.

Her body knew exactly where to go as she plucked a new book from the shelf and settled into a secluded corner in the back. In her corner the sound fell away, the world stilled, and nothing existed but the book and Calla. Opening the cover she turned to the first page. The worlds danced across it, coming alive in her mind. Immediately the world brightened, the colors became more vibrant, and she was transported to a land far far away.

She found herself in a new world entirely. She could smell the salt of the sea, and feel the sun on her skin. A young girl, who looked alarmingly like a young Calla wore a flower crown, whilst a boy no more than fourteen lightheartedly teased her. The girl had the same earth brown eyes Calla shared with her mother, the same easy smile, and looked at the boy the same way Calla looked at Julian. She felt her heart warm, like a dying ember centered in the flames. His face was angular and his grin felt familiar, safe. Calla eased into the story, let it wash over her like sinking into a warm bath.

“Yet, what use is a flower crown against the monsters of the dark, dear Leda?” The boy joked, but Calla could sense the serious undertones in his voice. The girl -Leda- huffed indignantly, not bothering to look at him. He continued, “What use is beauty if there's no light to see it?”

“Shove off Cadmus,” She rolled her eyes, still smiling in jest. “Beauty is not just what is seen. It's mostly what's felt. If beauty were entirely reliant on sight, you'd be an ugly boy indeed.”

Calla could almost hear his laughter wrapping around her like a ray of sunshine. She could feel his smile, and see his dark hair falling into his eyes. She heard the voice of an old friend when he spoke next. “Then it's a good thing you have enough beauty for us both.”

“You best remember it.” Leda retorted ignoring the heat on her cheeks.

“I suppose I should. It’s getting late Leda, perhaps we should go now.”

“I don’t want to go home just yet.” She whispered. Calla smiled as she read of the smirk on Leda’s face, and the twinkle in her eyes. Leda’s face morphed into Calla’s, the same mischief, the same gleam. Leda tilted her head up. “But I suppose we should, before those monsters you so fear, crawl into the streets and come hunting for us.”

She grabbed at his hand and Calla’s memories mixed with Leda’s. As Leda and Cadmus dashed through the street, Calla saw herself running hand in hand with her childhood best friend, Julian. When Leda and Cadmus reached her doorstep, Calla saw Julian walking her up the front steps. Leda waved to Cadmus as he walked away still grinning, Calla watched Julian from the window, heart fluttering the way raindrops fall. When Leda entered her small house and greeted her parents, Calla opened the door and saw her own. As Leda settled into her room and started to draw, Calla saw herself walking through the aisles of the quaint bookshop where she was currently seated.

A sense of relaxation came to Calla as her consciousness intertwined with the characters’. Her fingers traced the outline of the page. She soaked in each chapter, each word. She saw herself in Leda, found comfort in the way she spoke, and recognition in what she felt. When at last she closed the book, the sky was dark and stars scattered like flecks of glitter on a black cloth. She shuffled to the front of the shop, patted the cat’s soft fur, bid farewell to the shopkeeper, and reached for the door handle. Calla paused, glancing at the stacks of books and drooping shelves.

She remembered a character named Johanna, a character named Adrian, a character named Leda. She thought of the witty banter, the feelings she felt with them, and the mirror she saw in each story. Her fingers skimmed the closed pages of the book held to her chest. She stopped halfway down the now empty street, opening the book once more. She read the same line. Giggled again. Then closing it again, hugged it tight to her chest, and continued her stroll. There was no one there to see her dreamy smile and faraway gaze. Yet there it was again. That feeling. The fall of a twisting autumn leaf sailing on the breeze.