**Haze**

 I come in many different forms. Some days I’ll come treading into someone’s head at night, scaring them breathless. Some days I can be the most reliable remedy in a person’s life, helping them escape reality, effortlessly-on their part. Other days I bring foreshadows of the things to come. I’m the motivation people cling onto to keep on fighting. I’m the cause of downfalls when people unleash their control on me. I am dangerous-yes. But without me, you cannot live, at least not well. And that’s that.

 Recently, I’ve been particularly interested in a very average teenage girl. She has a heart made entirely of delicacy. One touch, and it breaks. One sense of some kind of stirring-up, and it overflows. But hearts like this, I’ve seen a ton of. They’re delicate, but once they break, healing becomes as easy as one, two, three. And how would I know? I’ve always been known to work around in the head, manipulating images here and there-but oh, no, no, no, my dear. The heart and the head are connected in some ways more than you’d think.

 Why was I so intrigued by her? Hmmm….good question. I’m not so sure, but I have an idea. Maybe it was because, for the past year or so, her head and her heart haven’t been working as one inside her body. Not that they weren’t working, it’s just that they weren’t working together. It was as if the organs had a life of their own. The head was the logical one. It was telling her the right things to do. It was trying to protect her. However, the heart, being ruled by hormones, was rash and often times out of control. It led her to doing reckless things and thinking absurd thoughts. It made her feel all the wrong feelings, and most of all, it persuaded her to fantasize a little too much for her own good.

 Tonight I decided to visit her.

**Jasmine**

No, this can’t be happening. It just can’t be. I was on it again. Thinking about the same person for the bajillionth time within an hour. It’s always the nighttime that gets me like this. Throughout the day I’m perfectly fine. That’s why they say “The night is the hardest time to be alive and 4am knows all my secrets” (Poppy Z. Brite). My brain tells me to stop, because that’s the only logical thing to do. I listen and do as it says, to the best of my ability. But every time I see him again, whether in my head or in person, my heart bolts out of the prison I rationally made for it. Yes, I want my heart locked in. I want it to be guarded with the strongest guards in the world. I know myself; I know just how easily moved I am. I know just how naïve I am. Therefore, it’s only right for me to protect it by locking it up. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, the problem evolves in the fact that my prison cannot hold it in. It’s like a wild animal that is out of control.

 To make things even worse, tonight I dreamt about him.

**Haze**

Bringing her an image of the scene she wanted to see the most, I threw in a twisted but accurate depiction of her fantasies. Super cliché, let me tell you. Legit. Why would I do such a seemingly nice thing? It’s who I am, what I am made of. And though it seems nice, as soon as I leave, in my place there is pain and loss, longing and desire. I am evil to the core, all dressed up in a Vera Wang gown. I can also be the epitome of hope, depending on your actions after meeting me.

**Jasmine**

 He walked in, or rather, strolled in, in that casual way of his, even though the whole world was chaos at this moment. I dreaded seeing his face, because that would mean only one thing: a loss of self-control. Today, however, it was different. I did not blush. I did not look away. I did not try to act cool. Instead, I screamed. “WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU DOING HERE PLEASE GET OUT IM ABOUT TO GO CRAZY RIGHT NOW AND NOW YOU SHOW UP ACTING LIKE NOTHING IS HAPPENING ACTING LIKE YOU’VE GOT EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL WELL YOU KNOW WHAT ITS NOT AND IM TRYING TO MAKE EVERYTHING RIGHT BUT YOU’RE MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE SO GET YOURSELF OUT OF MY FACE BEFORE I…..NO LIKE NOW!” I didn’t know exactly what was happening. My head was spinning, I felt like I couldn’t breathe, and every part of me hurt so much I just wanted to run away. Far, far away from this wretched place. To somewhere where there’s room, room to live again. I was freaking out; I didn’t know what was happening to me, but he did not go away. He kind of just stood there like an idiot. Finally, after what felt like eternity, he quietly whispered, “Come outside with me, just for a moment.” WHAT?! You want me to do WHAT?! WHAT DO I LOOK LIKE TO YOU?! YOU SHOW UP OUT OF NOWHERE AND I JUST HAVE TO FOLLOW YOU OUT. But I didn’t say that, obviously. I simply said no and walked towards…what?

I don’t even know where I’m going, that’s how crazy this world has become. It felt like I was beside a body of water, it smelt like it, but I couldn’t see it. It was chilly and the sun either wasn’t out yet or had already gone down----I don’t know. It’s surprising how I even noticed all of that, considering how much of a mess I currently was. There were several houses around that looked sort of like mine, but I didn’t recognize them. Crap. What now?

I went back to the place I was before, and he was still there. I frowned at him, asking him why he was still there when I clearly told him to go away. Again, no response. Okay, two can play a game. I walked a little bit onwards trying to look for help, but there wasn’t a single human being in sight. Sitting down at the curb, I buried my head in my knees. What is this? What is life? The sky was getting darker by the moment, and I still don’t have anywhere to go. This was what I wanted, right? Somewhere where I can breathe, somewhere where the weight of this world wasn’t crashing down on me. A place to think. A place to make everything right. But it wasn’t supposed to be like this. I was starting to shiver, and----wait a second-----was that lightning? Now I really am screwed. As I predicted, five minutes later it started raining. At first, very lightly, but then it started pouring. I was soaked within seconds. Whatever. I’ll figure something out when it stops. It didn’t stop. But he came, and sat down beside me. I didn’t even turn to look at him. That ugly, attractive face of his casted a spell on me a while back. It wasn’t going to happen again, because I won’t let it. I’ve controlled myself enough times to be able to do it again. But why is it that whenever I’m at my most vulnerable, he’s always there? He doesn’t even try to comfort me, but he’s literally always, simply, there. In the midst of my thoughts, he suddenly reached out and held me tight. So tight, that every uncertainty was gone in that second. For a moment, I was a bit shocked. *I* was always the one trying in our relationship*. I* had always been the one starting conversations, trying, constantly trying to be closer to him. Once I realized that, I tried to cut off my ties and just, fall away. I studied as hard as I could and talked to as many people as I can that wasn’t named, him. He realized that I was done with him, and never tried chasing after me. He didn’t care. He has never cared. Too many girls are in his life, and I bet they all find him attractive. I bet they were all caught in his spell. Sucks. That won’t be me. I’m smarter than that.

So, being the wise person that I am, I pushed him away. “You can’t do this to me, you just can’t. Stop playing with me; you never even cared about any of this.” And then I just broke down. My tears flowed faster than the rain splashing on my face, and I fell into his arms. It felt secure. It felt safe, and I didn’t care if my heart sprang out again. This moment was mine, and I didn’t care that I had responsibilities. It didn’t matter that he’d be going away in a month. It didn’t matter that a million girls were after him. It didn’t matter if he was after another girl. If time would just stop for us, everything would be picture-perfect, in my perspective. Yet, time, being diligent in its work, never stopped like I asked it to. It went on. The rain stopped. I looked up at him, smiled, and walked on. Into the unknown.

**Haze**

I got her, I got her good. Man………”picture-perfect”, that was the word she used to describe it……I couldn’t have brought her a better surprise.

**Jasmine**

You know how typically in books or in movies when they have weird dreams or nightmares, the character always “sits up with a jolt” or something along those lines? Yeah…..that’s how you would’ve imagine me getting up from all that bittersweetness from last night. But I didn’t. It happened slowly. Someone, probably my mom, had turned up the air conditioner and it was steaming in here. Slowly and gradually, I awakened from my slumber and rolled out of bed unwillingly. If only last night was real, if only……..no. It was summer, I had time on my hands, and I will not waste it on the irrelevant.

I needed a burst of energy for my day, so somehow I willed myself to go outside for a run. The fresh air cleansed through my whole being and I felt like….like I got this. I was young, and there were a million things I could do to make myself better than I was yesterday. Tearing myself up over some guy should be the last thing on my list. It wasn’t worth it. With that thought in mind, I went home and stepped in the shower.

I may be the strangest person I know, ever, but in this time and age, you judge me, and you’re out. Just kidding. Judging is an involuntary action, the same way you’d breathe, or react to a burn. But I love showers. And I don’t like baths. If I remembered it right, the last time I took a bath was approximately three years ago. There’s this sense of intensity mixed with soothe a shower gives that a bath can never equate to. It allows me to think; it allows me to be pumped up; it allows me to plan my day. Since I’m not that much of a social person, on typical summer days like this, where swimming season is over and I have nothing to do, I stay at home and read, or paint, or watch videos, quiet things like that. I’m kind of weird in a way that I like being alone. Not all the time, of course. I do need my friends, they’re incredible and I can’t imagine life without them, but too many people in one day----and I’m out.

Painting seems like a good idea today. I’m not that detailed of an artist, and my work typically revolves around some landscape with people turned around looking at it. Faces are just too hard to draw, okay? Maybe I’m just lazy that way, maybe I’m a little timid to go into a realm I’m not that comfortable with. That’s why I’m not Picasso, or Van Gogh, or some other genius out there. There are so many factors that tie into making someone great-----and I have the patience, I have the will, I have interest, but apparently that’s not enough. I’m lacking creativity, along with experience and time. Sometimes, I wish I could be really really good at something, and I wouldn’t care at that point if I’m bad at everything else besides that one thing. However, “life is not a wish-granting factory”, apparently(John Green). So I get out the supplies and start. I’ve done this so many times, and it never fails to keep me amused. I have all these images in my head of things I notice, of all the beauty around me, and with a paintbrush in my hand, there’s not that much thinking involved. It’s pretty straightforward. You kind of just portray what you see onto paper. I’m not a logical person; with numbers and all these equations swirling around in my head, I get so confused and it’s sort of just like what the heck am I doing. But with pictures of sunsets, of flowers, of rainbows, of oceans, and whatnot, there’s a calming sensation, and I love it. I just love it.

I understand how inevitable learning math and science is in this growing economy where technology is as important as water, or food, or perhaps even the sun, but nobody said that just because I deal with it everyday has to mean I like it. Because I don’t. Maybe someday I’ll run off into a forest and live there for a month, just to see what I can amount to without the assistance of technology. Maybe I’ll die. Maybe I’ll come back not knowing how to speak in a human language. I don’t know.

These days, sunsets were my thing. I drew them over and over again, and when it looked ugly as heck, I’d just paint over it. That’s what I love about painting. There’s no messing up. And as scatter-brained of a person as I am, messing up tends to happen so much I’m already used to it. I deal with it.

Meanwhile, as I’m dealing with my mistakes, the sun has already set and before I knew it it was already 10 o’clock at night. The night frightens me. It used to be my favorite part of the day, because it meant sleep. But these days, it’s been so hard to fall asleep with dreams haunting me all night long.

**Haze**

I started off with how I left off last night, bringing her an image of emptiness as she walked away from the guy. She walked into an abyss. Then, I brought her into a sketchy dark alleyway. Then, it was the roof of a 200 story building. It was on top that she met with the guy, again.

She was speechless. “Jasmine?” The guy whispered.

“Wow, it seems like you’re stalking me these days” she replied. “Hmmm….maybe I am,” he muttered.

“ I hope you’re kidding”

“Oh, but I’m not. I never kid. How old do I look to you?”

“ You look like you’re about to die.”

“ WHAT…….CRUD!.......” the wind blew strongly in his direction, and if he hadn’t stepped inwardly……………..not gonna be a pretty sight.

And then she laughed, a real laugh, not like the sound of ringing bells, but of the sound of someone who was locked up in a cage their whole life, finally set free. It was an unfamiliar laugh, because it felt like she hasn’t laughed like that since so long ago. Of course, she could never bear to see him hurt. The fact that he wasn’t hurt, she laughed of relief. The fact that she had always been the clumsy one, but this time, it was him, evoked the laughter he hasn’t heard in months.

The scene switched back into the dark alleyway, but this time, she wasn’t laughing. She was fighting, for her life. Eventually, she escaped the drunk guys who had nothing better to do than hit on girls, and started running at top speed. Since being drunk made people all wishy-washy, they couldn’t follow. By the time she ran right into him, she was breathless. He grabbed her hand and they started running off together.

They ran into the abyss from earlier, except this time, instead of feeling like the world was ending and she was going crazy, she held his hand tight and ran on.

**Jasmine**

I woke up with tears streaming down my face. Everything we could be, everything that happened in the dream, it could’ve been us. But it wasn’t. Because he was him, and I was, just, me. Never good enough, or pretty enough, or smart enough, or anything enough.

And so it was like this, for months and months and even after he left in real life, there were times I thought about him. There was a time I dreamt that we went to the sun together; it was radiant. The whole thing was. There was a time I dreamt that he went out with a Kpop star and found out she gets plastic surgery every month so he came to find me and spilled out his heart to me. There was a time I dreamt he took me to prom. So many beautiful things, but I only talked to him like once in real life. But what can I say? When encountering the name of love, women are so stupid. Time went on, and he graduated college when I graduated high school. We both went on our own paths, never crossing ways. But it was okay.

 And years and years later, when I thought about the guy my head was so full of back when I was young, I smiled. I smiled because I never regretted falling for him. I never regretted the pain of knowing I can never be with him. I never regretted dressing up just for the sake of seeing him. He was a waste of my time, yes, but he was also a beautiful memory. The dream I could never grasp ahold of. But that’s totally fine with me, because I don’t need to have everything that’s beautiful in my possession. Like the sunset that never fails to amaze me, if I held it so tightly in my arms, I’d only be diminishing its beauty. Like the moon that waxes and wanes unceasingly throughout the month, if I dreamt about it everyday until one day it was clearly on the palm of my hand, I’d be so, so disappointed. And you know why? Because the closer it is, the harder it is for it to amount to my expectations. My expectations would just grow and grow until one day, the moon that I dreamt so often about would no longer satisfy me. The fact that it’s so high up in the sky and I can never reach it makes me wonder about it every night. So, him, the guy that I never got to have, I never wanted him. I just wanted the idea of him. That was all. And it was enough. He represented everything beautiful in my teenage years. And after him, even though there were so many more, so many more that made me blush whenever I saw him, so many more that made me laugh so lightheartedly with so few words, so many more that gave me heart attacks whenever he came near, they never exceeded him, because he was the one that appeared in my dreams for as long as I can remember. He wasn’t necessarily more attractive, or smarter, or nicer, or richer, he was only special because whenever I thought of him, there was the purity of youth that rose up along with the image of him, and I like that. I like that a lot.

 The guy that eventually became truly mine, I fall in love with him every day. Never has he ever made my heart flutter the way the guy of my youth did. Never has he ever made me long for him as much as the guy of my youth did. Never has he ever made me blush the way the guy of my youth did. I don’t think he’s as good-looking, and I don’t think he’s as smart. He’s never once made me freak out over him the way the guy of my youth did. But he is perfect for me, because he represents everything realistic, he is everything that the other guy was not. And I need that. I need that more than haze.