"March 31, 2009"

The Kiowa Way is what my father calls his unhealthy habits, and my mother would've chuckled at his nonsense. Now, the Kiowa Way is the road we're taking to the flowerfield where she lays. Arvo rolls down the window and loudly sings lyrics into my ear; some pop song on the radio of this dingy white car that lacks a heater. My acne covered in concealer will drip like the rain of last week's storm that stopped me from riding my bike to the park. I giggled like my mother would've, tidied up my flyaways of my silky black hair she would comb through before I went to school, and fixed my face for Arvo like she would've for my father. Perhaps it's the yellow, flowy top and white ruffled midi-skirt that forces a distinction between her and I, because for some reason my dark skin doesn't happen to pair well with the earrings, the outfit or the lipstick I chose today. Arvo is wearing a comfortable pink plaid polo with simple khakis that were washed and worn out multiple times in balancing two jobs—one on his family's part of the reserve and one in town to support his brother's attempt to go to college.

The drive doesn't take more than ten minutes, but on bike it's practically tripled; the side views aren't anything interesting either; only hosting tall grass and dead road for miles. The hum of the car prevents an uncomfortable silence between Arvo and I; he used to look at me with his dark-brown eyes that glitter in the sunlight, anticipating something from me. It's like he's trying to tell me something I'm meant to know.. Finally, the dreadfully boring scene ends when he parks in the grass, taking the blanket, masterfully weaved basket and umbrella to the flowerfield up ahead. In one of the movies Arvo took me to see when my father went out with his "friends", the girls who are in love smile, laugh, and jump like they know that this boy is the one they want. Forever. Arvo's serious, unamused face almost urges me; and I start to skip into the greater part of the field, grabbing his hand and encouraging him further into it. He smiles. I run with him close behind and stop when I see how the yellow bounces to and from the flowers and the sun. Arvo places the blanket down, using the basket full of food as an anchor to keep the blanket from flying away.

I run into the field, and it's like I'm five again. Instead of Arvo, it's my father, with wrinkles around his eyes and the genuine smile he only ever gave to my mother. He waves at me with my short,

black hair and shorts. My mom holds me in the air, like I'm the only thing that matters. She hands me pink prairie roses and tells me to pick some for the house; so I proudly run over to her with bright yellow tickseed sunflowers and coral colored blackberry lilies. And twelve years later, the yellow tickseeds stand in front of me, prairie roses, behind me and the lilies beneath my feet. Everything is as it was; like my father didn't lose the love of his life and resort to non-religious spirits to take his pain away; like my mother wasn't taken by her own hand, for reasons we'll never get to know because of her silence; like never having to know what a silent life is like in a crummy apartment in Carnegie. My shadow covers the lilies and they almost wilt. If I kept going west, I would find the house in my mother's name; I would find the light pink nursery that held my outfits that my mother swore I looked *so pretty* in. I want to find the girl that fit in those outfits, the girl that smiled like she never will again, and ask her so many questions.

When I open my eyes, the flowers shift from bright pink to dull blue and I can't help but feel worse for turning them such a pitiful color; but I also can't help but keep this flower selfishly in the heart locket around my neck. I pick it out, fold up its petals and seal the locket shut. Apparently my sobs were loud enough for Arvo to collect the items he so dutifully carried not even twenty minutes ago. I closed my eyes and we were in the car again, except with an overcast sky that attempted desperately at hiding the sun. The dulled color of the dirt blended in with the color of the townhouses as we passed the fields of tall grass that remind me of the fence in middle school that blocked animals from coming in but allowed girls to give secret kisses to crushes that wouldn't last. Arvo and I were busy playing soccer or whatever other sport I could indulge in to be doing something as ridiculous as that. It was more of the same until the beginning of high school, where jerseys, shin guards and sneakers wouldn't cut it anymore. And why was my hair so short anyway? That's how he and other girls liked me better, and I am better. Better than doing all that boy-ish stuff.

Arvo slips into the empty road in front of the apartment, gives me a kiss on the cheek before telling me to have a good night. I walk into the empty apartment that hosts nothing but grief and shelves of empty antique glass bottles. I refuse to look at the stacked stained dishes and crumpled up pee-pads for our cat, so I take large steps toward the hardwood door and gold handle to see more of the

same mess. I take out the homework and a short pencil without an eraser just to be interrupted by the pseudo romantic gesture that climbing into my window is supposed to be. Arvo smiles the same smile I see in the movies before I'm supposed to close my eyes. Except, I don't, and he leaves flowers in a vase atop my nightstand before a flurry of warm tan skin mixes with mine. Harsh fingers, and big red frowns pop up like stickers on a sheet, and I'm finally back in my body again. Staring at the flowers creates a storm in me that refuses to foster the synthetic flowers fostered with synthetic love. I put on pajama clothes—a shirt and pants—and knock over the vase and I'm glad he has something else to be angry at.

I steal a five dollar bill, and I know it isn't enough for concessions, but maybe just enough for one ticket. I fly down the stairs of the yellow-red dingy popcorn walls and cheap lightbulbs that are on the verge of going out, finally seeing the dusk paint the sky rainbow. My blue bike flies down the streets and in flashing lights, is the Liberty Theater. I feel like a sly, slick actor walking down the red carpet as I marvel at the scene. The feeling quickly ends as the woman stares at me like a pitiful little girl and gives me a ticket to a movie that fits my budget. A romantic movie that follows a girl who had a past that she's not afraid of, and a future full of flurries and guilt. In an empty theater, I let the storm from my room rain down on me as I realized that I was like the woman in the film. My clothes were on backwards and I kept layering and layering when I should've undressed until I saw the core.

Upon leaving the theater, a curious pale person with deep hair and sharp features invited my storm and I to a beach-house filled with diversity, love, naivety and a book—*Nothing Pink* by Mark Hardy.

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stopped me from riding my bike to the park. I giggle like my mother would've, tidy up the flyaways of my silky black hair she would comb through before I went to school, and fix my face for Arvo like she would've for my father. Perhaps it's the yellow, flowy top and white ruffled midi-skirt that forces a distinction between her and I, because for some reason my dark skin doesn't happen to pair well with the earrings, the outfit, or the muted red lipstick I chose today. Arvo looks at me, and he's wearing a comfortable pink plaid polo with simple khakis that were washed and worn out multiple times from balancing two jobs—one on his family's part of the reserve and one in town to support his brother's attempt to go to college.

The drive doesn't take more than ten minutes, but on bike it's practically tripled; the side views aren't anything interesting either; only hosting an empty scene of tall grass, vividly orange dirt and road for miles. The hum of the car prevents an uncomfortable silence between Arvo and I; he used to look at me with his dark-brown eyes that glitter in the sunlight, anticipating something from me. It's like he's trying to tell me something I'm supposed to instinctively know; and I never do. Finally, the dreadfully boring scene ends when he parks in the grass, taking the blanket, masterfully woven basket, and umbrella to the flowerfield up ahead. In one of the movies Arvo took me to see when my father went out with his "friends", the girls who are in love smile, laugh, and jump like they know who they are, know that this boy is the one they want. Forever. Arvo's serious, unamused face urges me; and I start to skip into the greater part of the field, grabbing his hand and encouraging him further into it. He gives me a smile that I haven't seen in awhile. I run with him close behind and stop when I see how the yellow bounces to and from the flowers and the sun. Arvo places the blanket down, using the basket full of comforting food as an anchor to keep the blanket from flying away.

I run into the field, and it's like I'm five again. Instead of Arvo, it's my father, with wrinkles around his eyes and the genuine smile he only ever gave to my mother. He waves at me with my short, black hair that carries tiny, colorful beads and shorts that match his. My mom holds me in the air, like I'm the sun, the only thing that matters. She hands me pink prairie roses and tells me to pick some for the house; so I proudly run over to her with bright yellow tickseed sunflowers and coral colored blackberry lilies. Twelve years later, the yellow tickseeds stand in front of me, prairie roses behind me, and the lilies

beneath my feet. Everything is as it was; like my father didn't lose the love of his life and resort to non-religious spirits to take his pain away; like my mother wasn't taken by her own hand, for reasons we'll never get to know because of her silence; like never having to know what a silent life is like in a crummy apartment in Carnegie. My shadow covers the lilies when I hold them, and it's as if they're being watered with my tears as a way of repaying them for taking away something they love so dearly. If I kept going west, I would find the house in my mother's name; I would find the light pink nursery that held my outfits that my mother swore I looked so pretty in. I want to find the girl that fit in those outfits, the girl that smiled like she never will again, and ask her how her day has been.

When I open my eyes, the flowers shift from bright pink to dull blue and I can't help but feel worse for turning them such a pitiful color; however, I can't keep myself from selfishly confining this flower to the heart locket around my neck. I pick it out, fold up its petals and seal the locket shut. Apparently, my sobs were loud enough for Arvo to collect the items he so dutifully carried not even twenty minutes ago. I close my eyes and we're in the car again, except with an overcast sky that attempts desperately to hide the sun. The dulled color of the dirt blends in with the color of the townhouses as we pass the fields of tall grass that remind me of the fence in middle school that blocked animals from coming in but allowed girls to give secret kisses to crushes that wouldn't last. Arvo and I were busy playing soccer or whatever other sport I could indulge in to be doing something as ridiculous as that. It was more of the same until the beginning of high school, where jerseys, shin guards, and sneakers wouldn't cut it anymore. And why was my hair so short anyway? That's not how he and other girls liked me, and I'm better than that. Better than doing all that boy-ish stuff.

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atop my nightstand before a flurry of warm tan skin mixes with mine. Harsh fingers, and big red frowns pop up like stickers on a sheet, and then I'm finally back in my body again. Staring at the flowers creates a storm in me that refuses to foster the synthetic petals fostered with synthetic love. Quickly, I put on pajama clothes—a shirt and pants—and knock over the vase. I'm glad he has something else to be angry at.

I become slimmer than the models in his magazines, slipping through the crack of the door into the kitchen. I steal a five dollar bill off of the counter, knowing it isn't enough for concessions, but maybe it could be enough for one ticket. My blue bike flies down the streets and in flashing lights, is the Liberty Theater. I feel like a sly, slick actor walking down the red carpet as I marvel at the scene. The feeling quickly ends as the woman stares at me like a pitiful little girl and gives me a ticket to a movie that fits my budget. In bright pink, yellow, and blue lights were actors who felt like and looked like Arvo and I, but I know we aren't that movie. Strella keeps an unsuitable, transformative past, and the man drowns in regret and shame from his unlawful actions. Both seek nothing but truth from one another. My stifled sniffles and sobs begin to flood the room, driving out the drunk teenagers who just see a pathetic girl crying to a foreign movie. The now empty theater is my hiding spot from my own unsuitable truth that Arvo doesn't know—and doesn't yearn to know. That single scene transforms the lights into the flowers in the field, a dream where I'm someone else. I feel my hair touch my chin, and thankfully, no more down my back. It's boy-ish, just like the parts I have beneath the clovers. I hide from an enlarged, looming version of Arvo and my mother. I'm ashamed to be this way, but it seems too right to be true; and I laugh, turning pink until I dissolve into the red and embrace the blue flowers that accept me for who I am. Their faces turn back into the disappointed stickers, and the overworked highschooler kicks me out of the theater, my emotions exposed to strangers who won't ever experience the joy of seeing yourself for who you are. Perhaps I won't find a place where I can experience who I am, but that's too pessimistic for a night like this, with the wind blowing through my too-long hair and bike unchained; prepared for my future that I see in the present of Strella.

A curious, sharp faced person with an air of confidence approaches me as I slow down the pace of my bike. They have a masculine face like Strella, but the feminine empathy that I hope my mother

would've had with me. They invite me to a naive beach-house filled with blue, genuine flowers, scents of savory meat, and a sign that kindly screams "No Judgement!" to all that enter. As I walk through the tiny club house, the most remarkable aspect to me is the cozy book corner. Atop the highest shelf, I find an intriguing novel covered in dust—Nothing Pink by Mark Hardy.