

## ***A very long rainy day***

Sofija Nikolic, Q11

The rain was pounding upon the little colourful umbrellas running through the streets. The people underneath were holding onto them as if they were life belts, minding their own business and trying to escape the pouring rain. They were in such a hurry that none of them cared to look up and notice the girl quietly watching them through her window. To her it seemed as though the umbrellas were tiny dots floating to their destination and their colour seemed to fade the longer she watched. Every drop of water was draining the colours away until they were fully washed of and the whole street turned black and white. The view at her window was just as miserable as she felt.

She was lonely and bored to death. When had it started? When would it end? She didn't know. It definitely felt never ending to her although it probably wasn't really that much. The boredom was unbearable, there was nowhere to go, it felt like life was just paused for an indefinite amount of time and all she needed to do was press the "play" button again. The problem was; whatever she did, the remote control was undetectable. Still, the loneliness was much worse. She was hoping that she would get used to it at some point, but that never happened and it was slowly suffocating her.

The girl stared at her frowning reflection in the window and as she watched it seemed as though the rain were tears running down her face. Returning to reality, she noticed the street again on the other side of the rainy glass. There were only few of the tiny umbrellas left and they were getting fewer and fewer every minute. They too, were trying to escape the suffocating reality, but the girl knew better; there was no escaping, they were stuck with it. She leaned her head on the cold window. She didn't have a choice in this matter, the question was merely: How long would they last?

Nevertheless, the breaking point hadn't come yet and that meant there was no giving up. Something had to be done. Slowly, she stood up and took her mobile phone from the table. She stared at the black screen for a few seconds. Then she gripped it more firmly, straightened up and turned it on. She searched for her best friend's number and pressed the "call" button. After that she just listened to her phone ringing and waited.

Finally, she heard a voice on the other end, it was her best friend, mildly confused, but it was her. As soon as she heard her best friend say: "Hi, how is your day going?", she knew it had been the right decision. She felt better in an instant and while she thought about her day, she realized that maybe, just maybe, the rain wasn't that bad. At second glance neither the now completely empty street seemed as miserable as before nor did the situation seem as hopeless or never ending. After all, without the rain the plants wouldn't grow and the rain wouldn't last forever, it was going to pass at some point. It was true that she didn't get to decide, but maybe it could be a good thing. She would have to find motivation in herself and she would have more time, than she probably ever will again. She could not choose the situation, but she could choose to make the outcome a good one.

Looking at the window the girl finally saw her reflection smiling back at her.

*“A great story with an excellent beginning that sucks one right into the text. Just as if one was sitting behind the window herself/himself.”*

*“A moment frozen in time – beautifully worded account of pure loneliness and the healing power of friendship.”*

### ***She called me Chicago***

Miriam Dassel, Q11

She called me Chicago. She screamed it across the square when she saw me. We did not care about the looks people gave us. All that mattered was us. It was us against the world and it was the world that nearly ended us.

I do not recall the first time she called me Chicago but I remember the first time we met. I will never forget the way she walked in on that Saturday night in October. She walked right up to me and asked me to dance. We did not even know each other's names. We were strangers up until this moment which changed my life forever; which changed me forever. We danced through the night as if we never did anything else. I forgot about the people surrounding us. I forgot about my problems. I forgot to worry about others' opinions. It was just us and the music. We danced for what felt like forever and yet the night was not long enough for us.

I never really thought about what I was doing when I was younger. As kids we just lived our lives. None of us worried about our future. Everything we wanted was to have fun. We lived in the moment. That is what I miss. I miss not having to worry. Not having to worry about school, about our looks, about who we want to be or anything else but as we grew older the world told us to worry. It told us to look a certain way or nobody would want us. It told us to be good at school or we would not have a successful future. It told us a woman could not be in love without a man at her side. It felt like we were not even allowed to breathe the way we wanted. All those people on the internet told us how to be. They told us who we should be.

She called me Chicago. She was the one who helped me to break free. She took me to places which gave me a feeling of belonging. With her I was okay the way I am. Nobody told me how to be and what to do. We went to dance balls and it did not matter to us that everyone was watching. I doubt that I have ever connected with anyone on the same level as I connected with her. At the beginning I never really thought about us but as time went by I began wondering what *us* even meant; what *we* meant. What were we? I thought about who I am.

We did not see each other frequently. Unfortunately we went to different schools and she lived on the opposite side of the city. I wish I could have seen her more often. It feels like we have met years ago but I hardly know anything about her. The only times we really got to chat were when she stayed at my house for the night. We talked and laughed for hours until our tummies hurt. Even though we opened up to each other I sensed she was holding something back. She had this little smile on her face when she was lost in thoughts but once I asked her what she was thinking of she just told me about a city she wanted to visit when she was older. She said it is a place where she could be herself. A city where she could do what she wanted to do. I miss those nights. I wish we could have spent more of them together.

She called me Chicago and I thought it was meant to be forever. Nobody thinks about how or when a relationship will end. It just happens when it has to happen. Sometimes you do not

even feel it but there are also times when it feels like you have lost a part of yourself. When you are being torn apart by something you did not see coming. It stings like a papercut, those nasty ones between your thumb and index finger. It gets worse when you think about it but moving on hurts even more. That is exactly what it felt like when she was gone. They took her from me. All those people on the internet who told us how to be. It felt like she built a wall around herself. All the things she helped me to break free from caught up with her. They broke her. Everything I could do was watch the wall grow higher and higher until she disappeared behind it. I thought I had lost the girl who once found me but I never gave up my hope. I sat by the wall and told her a story. A story about a city where we can be ourselves. I told her somewhere out there is a place where we can do what we want to do. A place she once told me about but never named.

I believe in fate and I also believe it was our destiny to meet each other at that specific time in our lives. Otherwise I would have never turned out to be the person I am today. I would also have never seen the beam of light peeking through the bricks of the wall which did not seem as high as before. It does not take that much to tear down a wall if you know how and why it was built. She once saved me from such a wall and now it is my turn to do the same for her.

She taught me who I am without telling me who I should be. I was okay the way I am. I told you this because it is okay. It is okay for everyone to be who you are, to do what you want to do and to love whoever you love.

She calls me Chicago because that is the place where she wanted to be.

*“Elusive and strong at the same time this story tells of loss and hurt and longing that become one’s treasure, one’s growth and one’s place in the world.”*

*“A great becoming of age story capturing the idea of finding oneself. Without giving details but rather remaining vague the story and its protagonist become especially strong.”*

*“A story that drifts by in front of your inner eye like a daydream – fleeting memories that leave a strong impression and bring back the bittersweet feeling of growing up.”*