

Milo

Milo sat down silently on his old, worn swivel chair, which had long since forgotten how to swivel at all. He slowly lowered his head, resting his exhausted eyes on his cold palms while he began to watch those **strange purple and green shapes** that would always drift through the soft hazy space displayed when he covered his eyes. **The blobs of color faded slowly in and out of existence, all the while morphing and changing their form.** They never seemed to care all that much about where they were at any given time. **They were like clouds.** They lived a reality where shape and physical form had little to no importance. Milo always found comfort in observing their simple existence. **It made him feel far away, like a memory that couldn't quite be recalled. It was a strange feeling. It felt like the sort of thing that needed a word of its own but had none.** **A soft mix of nostalgia, melancholy, and whatever else had the strongest grasp on his mind at the time.** Over the past two or three or four months, this feeling of mental distance had become an ever-growing presence in his life. Nearly every day after work for those past two or three or four months, this was his reality.

The worst days were always the busy ones at the bakery. Milo's apartment sat directly above the Little Teacup, a small French/Vietnamese cafe/pastry shop run by an older Vietnamese woman who Milo could never remember the name of. He didn't really talk to the woman, he definitely didn't hate her. What he did hate was the noise. **It wasn't too loud;** it was just a handful of customers each night when the bakery was open. The floor (or roof, depending on what side of the stairs you are on) was **thin enough that you could hear the talking downstairs but thick enough that most of the consonants got lost on their journey to Milo's ears.** The problem was that he couldn't ever quite tell what the people downstairs were saying and so the words, instead of

taking their intended form, morphed and changed to fit his own mental state. Lately that aforementioned mental state was one of worries, depression, and self doubt. The voices never seemed to address him directly. The closest they ever got were occasional mentions of his name. He never saw the people that were behind the voices therefore he was never given the chance to humanize them. He knew consciously that they were just normal people, though he never found the courage to prove it to himself.

Thuy

Ever since the unfortunate passing of Thuy's husband Bao, running the bakery was getting more and more difficult. The first and most obvious problem with this was having to work the same amount with half the people. This was difficult enough on its own, but even worse was that what had once felt like a constant adventure of ground almonds, tea leaves, butter, and flour had become work. Baking and making teas had morphed from a favorite activity, with money involved, to a chore where she got paid. Today felt worse than usual.

Thuy woke up, got ready, and made the two-minute walk to the bakery. She moved fast through the crisp morning air, only looking ahead of herself and only stopping at the red lights. She missed the days when those morning walks took ten minutes instead of two consisted mostly of not walking. When she reached the door of the shop, she quickly opened it and walked inside. She didn't stop to paint another one of her fantastical creatures on the door. If she did, she would be late. For the almost 20 years the Little Teacup had been in business it was known for three things: The almond croissants, the friendly couple who ran it, and the door. When they first opened the bakery, an old oak door served as the entrance way. When the door was locked, it became more of a suggestion that you shouldn't go inside rather than something actually

stopping you. The only upside was when people walked by the entrance of the bakery the wonderful smells of chocolate, butter, and almonds could find their noses. The door was also decaying and frankly, quite ugly. Thuy's first project at their new shop was to find a good door. She had already planned out what she was going to do with it and so it didn't have to be pretty. It just had to be sturdy and flat. Within a week, she had found a nice slab of mahogany and cut it down to the proper size to fit the door frame. The wood in its raw form was like sandpaper. After installing it, she painted a small red rabbit in the center of the door and every day before she went into the building, she would add another animal to the growing mosaic.

As she swiftly walked inside, Thuy flipped over the sign on the door from CLOSED to OPEN and turned on the lights all in one fluid motion. She took a minute to set up shop, wiping down the counters and putting out the pastries in the little glass display. After years of use and children rubbing up against it the glass had obtained many scratches so it felt a bit like wood grain. The first customer came sooner than she had expected. It took her a second, but then she recognized him as that kid who had moved upstairs recently. She didn't really mind him, she definitely didn't hate him. He approached the counter in the way that the alley cats would approach a frog. He seemed confused, curious, and somewhat hopeful that at the end of the interaction, he would acquire some food. Slowly and cautiously he began to introduce himself, "Hi" he said in a way that more resembled a sharp exhale than a word. Before Thuy could respond he followed up, nearly managing to interrupt himself "HimymnameismiloImovedinupstairsrecently". Evidently realizing the distress that was written all across Thuy's face, Milo paused. His shoulders relaxed a bit and just said, "Sorry, it's been a rough week. I'm Milo. I came to say hi, and for food." He sounded so defeated as he said this and she couldn't quite tell why, but she liked him already.

Milo

He **didn't even know what he was saying anymore as he spoke**. All that went through his head was **"Damn it! Damn It! Damn it!"**. He **felt like an idiot**. He had planned this whole conversation out beforehand. He was **so confident as he walked down the stairs**, and now he was pathetically falling apart in front of a person who he wanted to like him and who he would have to interact with most days. **He could clearly see the disappointment and disapproval on her face**. **And of course he had forgotten to ask her name**.

"I'm Thuy," she said. **This made him feel a little better**. He **didn't have to ask her name, and at least she didn't comment on his idiocy**. She continued with a quick **"What would you like"**. She said it in such a practiced and fluid way, almost as if she didn't even have to think about it.

"I'll have the Mille-Foowilie he said, tripping over the word as he said it" he thought to himself, **"She definitely thinks Im an idiot now"**

"It's pronounced Mill-Fuy" she replied calmly sounding almost endeared. **It didn't seem to Milo at all like she enjoyed correcting him**. It felt more like an enjoyment of watching him learn.

"Thanks," he replied. **For some reason there was something quite comforting about Thuy for him**. It was strange, he thought.

"What's wrong?" Said Thuy as she bent down to grab a wafer-like piece of chocolate topped bread. **"It's pretty obvious that you're stressed about something. You seem super tense and very stiff, like a telephone pole."**

For some inexplicable reason, Milo felt the urge to tell her the truth. He wanted someone to talk to. He didn't expect it to be a short old Vietnamese woman that he had just met that day.