

Owl City

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Owl City: Ocean Eyes

About a lonely boy, a wild ambition, and the best listener in the world who cannot even hear.

A story inspired by Owl City: Ocean Eyes by Adam Young. Story by me, JustL.

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1 - Cave In

I coasted down hill after hill on my bike. A sad tune was shooting through my brain, blasting each and every cell, forcing my mind not to let go. Occasionally I'd find myself closing my eyes as I brainstormed. But then, a few seconds later, they'd soon fly open as an eighteen-wheeler honked and sped past me. I picked up my pace again, trying to stay focused on my destination without losing my train of thought.

No, I wasn't running away from anything. In fact, I was running *to get* to something.

Hy-Vee was the name. And I couldn't be late.

Rain was beating against my back, pushing me down towards the handles of my bike as I rounded corners at blinding speed. Other than gasping between blasts of water, the most I could do to prevent it from letting me shift to a lower gear was shake my long dark hair and keep peddling. My feet would slip every now and again, but I would hurriedly sacrifice scratching up my ankles to stop them from spinning, and continue on my way.

I entered through the door that read, *Employees Only* near the back of the large store, dripping everywhere. My co-workers shot glares and inappropriate hand gestures as I rung out my drenched T-shirt and changed in a dark corner. I opened my tiny locker.

A small mirror fastened to the bite-size metal door showed a perfect view of my tie, which I tightened while trying to catch my breath. I grabbed at my name tag, which even giggled every time it saw itself. "ADAM Y., FROZEN," it said. Aside from the grammatically incorrect name tag ("1 years of service"), I would soon be a Hy-Vee employee for almost two years, about to hit the twelve-month mark.

"Your weapon, brave knight," Eric, one of my fellow employees chuckled, passing me a box-opener.

I huffed a few times and snatched it from him angrily.

"C'mon, Adam...", he pressed. Then his eyes found their way to my tag. Eric laughed as he made the most popular joke: "Adam, why frozen? Ha!"

I grumbled, clenching "the razor blade," as we called it, wanting to slice his neck with it. I inhaled down to my toes and exhaled through my nostrils as I stormed pass my associates as they guffawed along with their usual antics, heading to the frozen section to unpack boxes and stock shelves. I tried to recall the tune that had been ricocheting throughout my mind. I soon remembered, and then a sharp singe of inspiration launched a huge idea.

"*I'll soak up the sound, try to sleep on the wet ground,*" I started in a low murmur as I murdered yet another chilly brown cube. My knife lodged and locked in place as I hit a strict piece of tape my bony hands stood no chance against. I took this as an opportunity to rack my brain for a millisecond.

"*I'll get ten minutes, give or take,*" I advanced, bringing back the blade and stabbing the box harshly.

"Cause I just don't perceive myself getting drowsy--"

Stab.

"When cold integrity--"

Stab.

Keeps me wide awake--"

Stab.

I let out a brisk yawn and encouraged myself to stay on task. *"Awake... awake... awake--"*

"Adam, check please!" a familiar voice spoke sternly over the intercom.

I jumped, accidentally scraping a good chunk of skin off my left wrist. "Sh!t," I growled low so that a passing costumer couldn't hear me. I think she did, though.

A silky curtain of hair spun around in my direction, a concerned facial expression revealing itself. She didn't say a word.

I stood there, blood gushing from my arm, right hand covering it as though nothing had happened. Then I took a moment to observe the woman who I gave a heart attack.

First, she wasn't a woman. She couldn't have been any older than I. Perhaps seventeen or eighteen, I guessed. Feeling as though the awkward staring contest should end, I blinked a few times and feebly smiled.

She grinned a little back, eyebrows still fixed upwards.

I waved a little with my left hand, then soon covered it up as blood began to drip onto my shoes.

The girl's shoulders bounced once as her sweet lips leaked a hint of gleaming white teeth.

I wondered for a second if she heard me singing.

"ADAM. CHECK. PLEASE." my boss all but shouted over the intercom.

The brunette's eyes circled down from my face to my tag. She held in a laugh as she read the name and service.

I motioned that I needed to go. She nodded once, and I nodded back. I reluctantly went on my way.

2 - Interminable

Sprinting past aisles, I tried not to lose sight of the girl. I pondered her thoughts on my singing voice. My top row of teeth clenched my bottom lip nervously as I threw myself in her shoes.

What a weirdo, was the first thing that came to my mind.

"Adam! There you are!" my boss snapped, grabbing my shoulder and practically throwing me behind the short counter. He certainly wasn't the nicest of all men, and if I had a choice, I wouldn't give him the honour of calling him a gentleman; he was anything but. Even though his prickly mustache covered his mouth, I could still tell he was scowling.

He took a moment to meticulously study my expression, waiting for me to wince and back up. I didn't let him win. His brown eyebrows furrowed.

"Sorry for the inconvenience, sir," he spoke nonchalantly to the first customer in line. "I swear, this one," he continued, wrapping his plump hands around the joint in my left arm. "If his nose wasn't attached to his face, it'd be gone, I tell you."

The man smiled weakly, afraid of the consequences if he refused to do so. He then turned to me, green eyes sending a telepathic message saying, "It's no big deal."

~::~ [O,O] ::~

Oxygen filled my lungs as I saw my boss walk around me. My eyes elevated until they hit the ceiling right as the door slammed. It seemed as though even the tiny room had suffered a chill climbing up its spine unexpectedly. My fingers weaved through their mirrored digits and clasped together comfortably. I let go of the air I had been holding and sighed, not afraid to show a bit of angst and anxiety, if not a ton.

As I opened my eyes, I saw my boss creep back around my left side and slump into his desk chair behind a cluttered computer area. He clicked around on the screen, searching through his employee's files.

I watched him, unamused.

He made a face.

I made one back.

He grimaced and scrolled back to his desktop. "Young comma Adam," he spoke after clearing his throat.

I raised a finger in case he forgot my name.

"Put your hand down, son!" he snarled, teeth ready to chomp. "You've been tardy twenty-one times this month out of twenty-seven total shifts."

I sat up to make my argument, but he restricted me.

"And don't go on and on about how you're busy doing your music crap. I don't want to hear it. I've had it up to *here* with you, Young," he exploded, raising a fist above his shoulders.

"It's *not* my music--!"

"Oh, then what is it, hm? It's the only thing you do in this place besides cut yourself with a box opener. Is it so hard to stay on task?"

"No, it isn't! If you'll just give me a chance to explain! It's very simple--!"

"I'll bet it is," he grinned out of character. "What, Young? Gotta go buy some new strings for your guitar? Some drums? A mic? Well, guess what? You won't get anything if you don't work for it!"

"I *AM* WORKING FOR IT!" I screamed, finding myself on my feet and my palms pointing so hard at my chest, they shook. My heartbeat was so intense, I could almost feel my eyeballs throbbing. "AND IF YOU MUST KNOW, THE MONEY I'VE BEEN WORKING FOR ISN'T FOR ME!"

"THEN WHAT IS IT FOR, YOUNG? IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THE ONLY THING SHACKLING YOU FROM DOING WHAT I ASK IS PURE LAZINESS--!"

"IT'S EVERYTHING BUT!" I yelled, tightening my red-hot claws to the edge of his desk. I looked him straight in the eye. He glared back, not absorbing a single thing I had said. He was the worst sponge I've ever met.

"Then what *is* it?" my boss puffed. "What are you doing with all of this money? Why do you even bother to get up every day and come here?"

I breathed and breathed, forcing my heart rate to slow. "I've been asking myself that same question for two years, sir," I replied proudly. I shook my damp hair, face contracting into a large frown. My brows pulled together. My nails dug into the pin holding my name tag and slammed it on his desk.

"I quit," I shot through a half-closed mouth. I pivoted and began walking towards the exit. Upon leaving, I turned back to the porcupine mustache man. "And by the way, I didn't make money for myself. Ever since the beginning of December, my mother has been terrible ill. I've been rushing back and forth from here and the hospital on my bike." I gave him a moment to take in every word I was saying. I could tell he regretted going off on me, and so I continued. "She has cancer... and it's interminable."

3 - Room 233

The things I left behind didn't matter to me.

The stuff in my locker-- it was just stuff. My co-workers that stepped back as I parted the red sea-- they're just my co-workers. And my boss... oh, my boss. He's just another person set in front of me to test my endurance; and I had won.

I calmly threw on my jacket, careful to zip it up tightly. I acted as though my silent friends weren't there, whispering and conversing why I was leaving before my shift had ended. I let them talk.

Riding back down my usual route I felt empty. I felt as though a part of my intestines had been vacuumed right out of me, with the exception that was needed in order for me to live. I felt a sudden surge of despair as if something had happened that I could never have been aware of but somehow was in step. I shook my head, realizing it was just my mind focusing on the negatives.

I rounded cloudy corners and cruised down crowded highways. I kept my nose high, proud that I had stood up to the dragon himself, and that I left victorious.

I parked my bicycle in my usual spot, on the sidewalk nearest the building. The doctors and nurses there greeted me, for I was no stranger in this section of the vast hospital.

"Early, I see?" one doctor asked, looking up from behind his spectacles.

"Yeah, kinda," I smiled back, hiding a gleeful smirk. I kept my shoulders high as I slid the cuffs of my sleeves over my frozen fingers.

"Young," I nodded to the nurse at the front desk and signed my name on the clipboard.

She peered up happily, glad to see a familiar face. Then she stopped.

The pen in my hand stiffened. She always smiles unless something had changed for the worst. "Oh, you don't need to sign in," she spoke low.

"Oh," I said, turning white. I gave her a perplexed look and dropped the chained pen back on the smooth surface. "Why?" I trembled, on the verge of losing it.

The receptionist pursed her lips and reached for the phone. She dialed a few numbers. "Yes, hello? Adam is here," she said, tone falling faint as her words continued. Her eyes then caught view of mine.

I blinked, utterly frightened and disturbed by the unknown. My mouth gaped as my pupils ran from the phone to her and the elevator, wondering when they'd move.

"Yes, I'll send him up. Thank you," the nurse peeped softly into the telephone. She took her time to place

it back on the receiver without making a noise. "Room two thirty-three," she at last affirmed, keeping a contempt composure.

I thanked her, thoughts dimming the light to my brain. I didn't bother waiting for the elevator, but hurriedly proceeded up the stairs.

I didn't care to grab a sample of hand-sanitizer upon walking in to the Intensive Care Unit. I made a dash for the door, scrambling to gain control of my shaking hands to turn the knob. The door swung open, throwing itself against the opposite wall. I all but died when I saw her.

Thankfully, my mother was still breathing. Whether or not she was breathing at a healthful rate was the question. She wasn't gasping for air, which was a good sign. Her dark brown hair was set in all directions, greasy as ever, wiry as a telephone line. She faced upwards towards the ceiling, blinking every few seconds as if she were immensely drowsy. For all I knew, she was.

"Mom?" I asked quietly.

I heard her huff for oxygen. Clumsily she picked up her head. "Oh, hello," she chuckled lightly, then added a cough, and then another. Soon she was heaving blood on the floor, and I was holding a pan under her clammy chin as usual.

Tears formed in front of my eyes, fogging my vision. I gulped as more red dripped into the container I held until my mother had finished vomiting.

She groaned as her torso hit the pillow. "Adam, I don't know how long I can stand this," she whispered, closing her green eyes.

I began to search her entirely. Though blood trickled from her mouth, I could still make out the subtle dimples that sat in the wings. I suddenly recalled the way they showed themselves whenever I had presented my mother with a perfect score on a test. I remembered the way those dimples appeared when my puppy died, trying to grant an ounce of reassurance.

I refreshed my memory. All I could see now were those dimples... locked away behind the pain my poor mother was feeling inside.

She opened her eyes. I could tell she had had enough of this life and was ready to move on to another purpose elsewhere. She raised her dark brows, a pleading expression revealing itself.

I squinted, finding tears meandering down my face. I wanted to say, "Don't go!" but I couldn't. My throat had closed, permitting any vocal action. My ears popped as my knees shook until they had hit the floor. I fought to inhale just the slightest amount of air to keep me alive.

"N-no...," I murmured uneasily. "You j-just... I could n-never..."

"Adam," she spoke soothingly despite the angels that were calling her by name. One of her spidery hands extended to reach my face. Her thumb brushed away the soft water that fell every two seconds. "You know that saying, 'the early bird catches the worm?'"

I sniffled, still choking, and nodded.

"Well, look at it like this: you are the bird, and I am the worm. You have been by my side at every moment I needed you there. If my segments were ever separated, I'd scream... and you'd be there for me.

"True, being the worm has its downs," she chortled and wheezed. "but the bird is always there when the worm is present. Therefore, you are the ravenous bird to my weakly worm, if that makes any sense."

My knees unlocked as those dimples reappeared as though by pure magic. I gained the strength to wipe away my own tears this time and continued to listen to my mother's sermon.

"And fair is fair," she grinned with pride as my misty eyes sparkled. "You and I left our troubles far behind. To me, nothing comes before you; and to you, nothing comes before me. Now it's time to find someone new to watch over."

The smile that was plastered to my face shifted into a devastated look. I stammered various thoughts, unable to fit them all together.

"Shh," she said roughly. "I have a line for you: *If you're the bird, whenever we pretend it's summer, then I'm the worm. I know the part, it's such a bummer, but fair is fair. If my segments get separated I'll scream, and you'll be there.*"

I mentally shrugged at her lyric-producing skills and allowed her lines of words to float along in my stream of thought.

"And now... now I leave," my mother spoke promptly. "But not without a proper goodbye." She held out an arm, and I squeezed her. It didn't matter if I had crushed her lungs, if I had broken her bones, if I had pushed her heart to the limit.

My mother died in my arms, right where she belonged.