



Third Prize Winner 2022, Category 14-18, Jasmine Fuller

Out of The Frying Pan

Iggy used to be chipped nail varnish and contradiction. Clashing piano chords and winged eyeliner.

She knew what had to happen. The smell of incense hung low in the air, enveloping her like a soft duvet. She studied the church with controlled assessment.

Inhale. Exhale.

‘Revenge is Sweet.’

They slapped it to streetlamps and cars, windows and online forums. Eliminate evil and make the world a better place.

‘Design your paradise.’

It sounds glamorous when you put it like that. It doesn’t sound like the woman who strangled her husband with a pair of her tights in the flat below. But maybe you’ll believe it if you hear it enough.

'Join Utopia.'

Warnings against Utopia had been drilled into the population's minds by the government. Double-lock the door and check it three times. Stay at home. Tape up your webcams. Turn off your phone.

Utopia is watching you.

Utopia can hear you.

Utopia can find you.

Trust in the government. The government has this spree under control. The government has exterminated most of Utopia already.

Iggy wasn't sure what the difference was between the government and Utopia anymore.

Iggy clamped her hands beneath the pew. An icy breeze hit her as the door to the church swung open.

'Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realise anyone would be in here. There never usually is.'

A woman stood in the doorway. She glanced at Iggy, hesitated, then shook her head.

The graveyard adjacent to the church used to be empty of life. Iggy used to lay lilies on the grave. There she had company. There she knew she was appreciated. Recently the living started to visit, despite the warnings. Now Iggy avoids the graveyard.

Her eyes followed the woman down the aisle. The woman genuflected, paused when she got to Iggy, then tucked herself into the row in front of her. She twisted around, smiling cautiously.

'Do I know you? I thought I recognised you from somewhere.'

Iggy blinked.

'Never mind, I seem to recognise everyone these days. My name is Remi.' Remi held out her hand for Iggy to shake, laughing awkwardly. Iggy wondered if this woman had just told a joke. Iggy's lips contorted in a smile. Her hands remained firmly in her lap.

Iggy had signed up about a month ago. Utopia weren't difficult to find, they are everywhere, on every platform, welcoming all chaos and justice. Iggy knew they didn't really want to create a Utopia. Not truly. Their paradise was laced with power, not justice. Chaos was just a means to an end. But still, revenge is sweet.

Remi breathed out, forcing her shoulders to relax. 'Isn't it peaceful? I feel like, this is what heaven would be like,' she closed her eyes and smiled, tilting back her chin. 'It's wonderful to know that after everything you go through you can always come back here and have someone to talk to. Someone who will forgive you.'

Iggy lifted her eyes to the stained-glass window. It depicted the baby Jesus being held by His mother.

His mother.

Mum was screaming. The seatbelt locked into place. Empty water bottles which were perpetually at Iggy's feet were rolling around her head.

How long until the glass would rain through the window?

How long until her tears would fall the right way up?

How long until her heart broke her ribcage?

The road was in the sky. This wasn't right. The sky was the road.

The road.

Silence.

Mum.

Mum who was sherbet lemons and the sound of the ocean. Stargazing and quiet confidence.

Her neck was flopped to the side, eyes rolled back in her head. Iggy tried to shake her. Nothing. Her hair was sticking out, a golden halo, matted with crimson clumps. Blood was smeared everywhere, a toddler's abstract painting. Something invisible was clutching at Iggy's throat. She howled with pain.

A woman was getting out of her car. A red car.

Red like anger.

Red like blood.

Red like fire.

It was all this woman's fault, Iggy could tell. Her fault there was blood was running across her hands in ribbons.

Tin foil blankets. Cups of tea which were far too sweet. Therapists with spectacles on their noses.

'How are you feeling?'

Empty. Only hate.

'Fine.'

Remi's eyes clocked the stained-glass window. Regret pinned her heart down.

Remi is the breeze in spring and the sky before a storm. Independent coffee shops and crushing hugs.

Remi's hands screeched on the brakes. The car in front of her slid across the frozen road and then flipped into the air. It seemed almost elegant until it smashed into the ground.

Remi slammed open her car door and ran to help them.

A strangled, broken scream. A girl looked up, locking eye contact with her.

Nobody had hit the car; she knew it was only the driver's fault.

The driver's body was pinned to the seat of the car, hanging like a rag doll. Acid crept up Remi's throat. She began to pray. This wasn't her fault, it couldn't be.

The street was dark in comparison to the church. Iggy's boots smacked rapidly against the pavement, thumping like her heartbeat. She could still feel the heat of the burning church on her back. It went up surprisingly easily. Utopia supplied the gas canisters and distraction. Revenge isn't sweet. It tastes of charcoal and incense.

The blaring chatter from a radio fought through a window and drifted onto the street.

'... the burning remains of the church this evening. So far there have been no casualties found. We will keep you updated throughout the night.'

Remi must be alive.

A burning tear slipped down Iggy's cheek.

Iggy used to be chipped nail varnish and contradiction. Piano chords and winged eyeliner.

Now she is withered lilies and online forums. The smell of smoke and the church's skeleton.