

Sequins in the Dark

by Amy Hoang

Youth Prize

I can't.

I just can't.

Not with that look on her face, not with the coldness in his eyes.

But I've already gone too far and said it all, and I'd already promised Sam that we'd be there together this year, because now we're Almost Adults, and that means that we can do Whatever We Want.

Well, that's how it should be anyway.

I feel their glares burn into my skin. *Deep breaths*, I remind myself.

"So... can I go?" I hold my scarf closer in an attempt to muffle the erratic beating in my chest.

The response comes quick, and it's the one I expected. "No."

I don't know why I kept going. "But Mum, I even made this," I hold up the scarf and let its rainbow sequins shine weakly in the fluorescent kitchen lights. "And... this all means a lot, I swear. So, please? Dad?"

My father stands stoically beside her, unflinching – immovable in the centre of the doorway. He looks tired, his melancholy outline tinged by the soft glow pouring out from the living room. He doesn't speak, and I don't need him to; his answer is in the imperceptible shake of his head, his vacant glances shifting languidly between my mother, me, then my mother again. The light behind him moves.

In the corner of my eye I see it on the television; an awesome explosion of glitter and rainbow flags and dancing and tears and love, all boxed in by the metallic silver edges of our old Sony screen. There's even a live reporter, standing on Flinders Street and beaming at the camera. They speak in whimsical, drawn-out sentences. "... Meanwhile *this* year's Mardi Gras parade on tonight is expected to be bigger and better with over three hundred thousand—"

"People who are unnatural like you don't need this kind of thing, I think." My mother's voice cuts back into focus. "You explain all *that* to us and you expect us to let you go? You know we love you darling, but who knows what's out there? We try so hard to accept you but this is..." The white of her hair radiates a harsh shine. "It's too ... you know what I mean. Too much. Too wasteful. Over the top." Her face looks so pale. She turns aside in a way that lets me know that it's over and there's no use arguing. "Is this really what you want?"

I guess it isn't, because all of a sudden it feels like I'm falling.

In my room I scrape the glimmer off my scarf. It hurts. But when did I ever let anything stop me? I rub my palms raw against the sharp metal sequins as I tug them off its woollen surface over and over again, and they hang on by their *stupid, stubborn* threads of glue.

Stupid. Once I left my diary wide open on my desk. It was no wonder my parents found it and read it from end to end. And no wonder they were waiting for me by the door when I arrived home that day.

Stubborn. I hid it again, before they could keep it from me. From that day, room has had its door locked, its shutters closed and the lights off permanently.

But – the book. I could feel its rough leather cover now if I reached my arm between the mattress and the floorboards, and pulled it out from beneath my bed. Run my fingers along its broken pages. Free it from its hidden prison.

Somewhere a block away a dog howls.

And somewhere a world away there must be people outside, marching together on the street, waving flags and giving hugs and high fives and holding each other's hands. I imagine streamers and music and singing and dazzling lights. I imagine confetti falling softly from the sky. I imagine Sam must be out there somewhere too. Their parents are there with them, of course. They're all smiling. Maybe Sam's wondering where I am.

I cradle the soft, battered loops of my scarf in my arms. *I'm so sorry.*

So far away from everything in the universe

it's just me

and a myriad of other sequins

shrouded in darkness

waiting.

