



This month's challenge:

Your character is in high school. One of their classmates is always on their own and never seems to talk to anyone. Write from the perspective of your character and also from the perspective of the shy classmate.

Participants:

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I Watch...
By Olivia Milner

I watch her from my place in the classroom.

Dark hair strapped into a high bun, her face is visible to see, but impossible to decipher. Her eyes are dappled with grey insomnia, sunken and indifferent. Her clothes are wrinkled and dust feathers her knees from where she had knelt on the classroom floor.

She stares back at me. Unseeing.

I glance at her form. Her skin is pale, with an unearthly pallor. Her ribs are visible through her top. She knows it as well as I do, yet still spends her meals eating only what she needs to survive.

Despite all this, everyone deems her as “fat”. Whether in jest or not, it is unclear. But still this gives her more reason to continue with her starvation.

I step away from the barre following my ballet teacher’s instruction and watch as she copies my move exactly.

Her stance is all wrong, head in the wrong position and her heart is defeated.

I look away from the mirror.

I Won't Say I'm Sorry

By Gemma Rothwell

Trigger warnings: suicide, sexual assault, murder

This high school cafeteria full of hormone-raging teenagers is nothing new. It is crowded with a smell of cheap school dinners mixed in with strong perfume and sweat, like any other cafeteria in the world. But everyone in this cafeteria has their stories to tell or, for some, to keep to themselves.

Take, for example, a boy sitting alone in a corner and a girl who walks in and begins staring at him from a distance.

Not one word is muttered out loud, but if telepathy was a real thing, everyone in this cafeteria can hear their stories.

There you are.
Alone as usual.

There you are.
The only one who hasn't said sorry yet.

Wait...
How do you know I'm here?
I'm not that noticeable.

It's your stare I always notice first. Not **see** first.
I **feel** it. I don't like your stare, but I don't hate it either.
It shows you've seen things.
Granted what you've been through.

Funny how I never spoke about what happened to Buckley, yet everyone at this damn school knows about it.
I bet that's why you keep looking over.
Because I've been through what you're going through.
You haven't spoken to anyone since Abigail...
You don't want to talk to me, do you?

I've heard it so many times.
"I'm **so** sorry about your sister!"
"It must have been such a shock."
"I didn't know she was even depressed."
As if words can magically bring her back...

I did the whole 'sitting alone' routine too.
Did for an entire year.
Just seeing people alive hurt.
Each laugh dissecting me.

They were just cruel reminders that despite everyone, even people I didn't care about, were happy, my own best friend wasn't and I didn't know what to do to make him better.

I hate it.
I don't care if they only want to help.
Saying sorry is stupid. It doesn't do anything.
Pity won't help me. It only makes me worse.
Being alone is better.
Don't you dare say you're sorry!
It's not like you pushed her!

I won't say I'm sorry.

Abigail was my older sister.
I always had her there.
I didn't really get that until she was gone.

Did you know Abigail and I were in the same year?
We had history together.
She, me and Buckley.
Ha...
Such wasted attempts.
"You know, I prefer men who like their history. Just shows how intelligent they are..."

She did go out a lot and spent nights somewhere else.
But she always came back.

Did you also know Abigail was spoiled?
Because she didn't take to Buckley's rejection so kindly.

It's weird.
When she was alive, she always made drama.
"Oh my God, Mum! I hate you!"
"What do you mean you won't give me any more money? You don't even care about me, do you? I'll just leave and **never come back!**"
I hated that. I just wanted peace and quiet.
Now the peace and quiet means there is nothing there.

"Please, Buckley! You know you want to. You know I love you, Buckley! I want you!"
She actually accused me of putting Buckley off her! Ha. Really?
If only she was told to get over herself.
Did you ever tell her? Or did you just let her get away with everything?

She used to come into my room and ask for my "oh so knowledgeable, oh so wise advice for someone who spends their life online".
I could have done something.

Buckley said no.
Yet she did it anyway.

She told him no one would believe him because it only happened to women.
A woman couldn't do that to a man.

She always helped me. Like when I was outside alone and got mugged. She found me
and took me to the police station. Police stations gave her panic attacks yet she didn't
leave me.
"I got you, bro," she said.
I thought I got her back.

I was the only one who believed him. His parents kicked him out. Dad didn't like Buckley, so he
refused to let him live with us. I snuck Buckley in anyway...

Once...

Once I found him covered in his own blood and tears. He said that the only thing that
preoccupied his mind was ending it. He couldn't think up a single good thing. But suddenly he
remembered me, so he stopped.

I was the only one who made him want to carry on.

All this...

The pain...

To even want to...

All because your sister couldn't handle being told no.

That cliff...
Lots of people jump from there into the jagged rocks below.
You'd think the council or someone would do something.
But no. Not even a barrier.
I hope she closed her eyes before jumping. Then the last thing she saw was the sunset
turning the woods red and orange.
Maybe the last thing she saw was beautiful.

I like to walk up the cliffs. To see nature instead of buildings with graffiti and cracked pavements.
I only went up there to see the view. I didn't know *she* was there.

I wonder if you hate people saying they're sorry too?
We're the same.
I can't stand seeing people alive, but I could make you an exception?

When I saw her, looking at the view, I then understood what Buckley meant by forgetting all the
good things. All I thought about were the terrible, dark things. I thought about the one thing I
wanted to do to end it all.

That's when my similarity with Buckley ends.

He stopped.

I pushed.

Please come over.
Please.
You're the only one who gets it.
I don't angry seeing you alive.

The only thing I regret is **not** regretting what I did.

And what that says about me.
But after I did it, Buckley got better.
I'm not angry anymore.

I don't want to be angry anymore.

I won't say I'm sorry.

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62 Moons Around Saturn

By Charlotte Clark

“What do you have next period?”

“English. You?”

“I’ve got Physics. Don’t even know why I picked it for A Level, I only got a C last year. I’m going to fail it, I can feel it already.”

“Oh, be quiet! You’re proper smart.”

“It’s so annoying. I love it, but I hate it at the same time. There’s so much to learn!”

“You’re such a nerd.”

Bea got her planner out of her bag and flicked through to the timetable. It was only two weeks into the college year, and she could never remember which rooms her classes were in. She ran her finger down Wednesday’s column and found Physics.

“Where’s E19?” she asked Tammy, who stood next to her filing her nails.

“Dunno, to be honest. Never go to Physics. You’ve got that weird girl in your class, right? The one with the blue hair. She’s a right weirdo. She lives down the road from me.”

“Yeah, but I don’t think she’s weird. Just quiet, that’s all.”

“Oh. Fine,” Tammy said with a grimace. Bea wished Tammy wasn’t so judgemental. She’d love to be friends with Lara, the girl in her Physics class. She loved the enthusiasm with which she answered all the questions about space and theoretical equations. She could imagine having a proper conversation with her, rather than the constant bitch-fests she had (or, rather, listened to and pretended to be interested in) with Tammy.

“Right, I’m off. Shaun just messaged me, he’s waiting for me. See you later, babe.”

Tammy threw her nail file in her small clutch bag and strutted off to meet her boyfriend, kissing her hand and blowing it in Bea’s direction. Shaun was two years older than Tammy, and she thought it was so cool to have a boyfriend who was about to go to university. Bea just thought she was a bit desperate, but she’d never dare admit that to her face.

Bea forced a smile. She really disliked her friend; she sometimes wondered why they were even friends at all. They were just so... different. But they’d been friends since they were five, so she couldn’t back away now. She was stuck with her.



Lara really loved Physics. It was the only class she really looked forward to each week. Not only did she love learning about the theories and even putting some of them into practice, but she idolised her tutor, Jane. Jane really understood her – a lot more than anyone in her class did. Lara was a bit of a loner, really, but she liked it that way.

She arrived to Physics ten minutes early and found her seat. She always sat in the same seat every lesson. It had the perfect breeze from the window, the best view of the projector, and it was so close to the front of the classroom that nobody sat anywhere near her.

“Oh, hi, Lara!” Lara’s tutor sang as she walked into the room and put her books down on her desk. “You’re early again!”

“Yeah, there’s not much to do at lunchtime. I’d much rather be here.”

“You know you’re always welcome to eat your lunch in here. Is that a Saturn pin I see on your jumper? I love that!”

“Oh, really? I’d love that! And yes, it is. Thanks, Jane!”

Lara sat and waited for the rest of the class to arrive. She always dreaded the few minutes when everyone would pour past her to their seats, because they’d usually look at her like she was a freak. Like turning up early to a class was the most alien thing in the world. For most people in this college, it probably was.

The first person to come in was a girl with brown hair, a knee-length tea dress and thick tights. It was a complete contrast to Lara’s blue hair, ripped black jeans, and hoodie with a NASA logo in the middle. Lara didn’t know the brown-haired girl very well; all she knew was that her name was Bea. She smiled at her as she walked past, and Bea half-smiled in return.

“Hi,” Bea said quietly as she passed.

“Hey,” Lara replied, surprised as she always was when Bea said hello. No one ever spoke to her. No one except Bea.

Bea found a seat in the classroom and dumped her bag on the floor. She sat down and reached into her bag to find her books, thumping them heavily onto her table. Her notebook was covered in planets and stars, and she loved it more than anything. Tammy laughed at her when she bought it, but Bea didn’t care.

She peered over at Lara, sitting quietly at her desk. She had a book in her hand – something about Einstein’s theory of relativity. She noticed she had a space-themed notebook, too.

“Hey, I think we have similar notebooks!” Bea blurted, nodding her head towards Lara’s notebook. Lara was so engrossed in her book that she jumped. “Sorry, didn’t mean to startle you! I just love your notebook.”

Lara didn't know how to respond. "Ugh – thank you! My mum got it for me for my birthday. It's holographic, look." She held the notebook up in the air and rotated it slightly. The planets looked like they were moving around the sun in the very centre.

"That's so cool!" Bea stood up and moved closer, gently taking the notebook in her hands and moving the planets around. "I love it!"

"I've got a whole holographic poster in my room, too," Lara told her excitedly before recoiling, her cheeks blushing. "Wow, I think that's the uncoolest thing I've ever told anyone." She turned around to the front of the classroom, her head down.

"I don't think it's uncool. Not at all. What's on your poster? Mind if I come and sit by you?"

"Of course, you can!" Lara beamed. "Won't your friends wonder why you're sitting by me? I'm not the coolest person to be around. Oh, and it's Saturn on my poster," she answered, shyly, "Saturn's my favourite planet."

"To be perfectly honest," Bea told her in a reassuring tone, "I don't give a flying monkey's tail what they think. I want to know why Saturn is your favourite planet, because mine, by far, is Mars."



When Physics was over, Lara and Bea found a bench outside in the sun. They didn't have very much chance to talk throughout the lesson, but as soon as the bell rang, they talked non-stop.

"So, why do you like Mars so much?" Lara asked. "I mean, it's pretty cool, but it's not Saturn-cool."

"You'll laugh at me when I tell you."

"No, I won't! Go on."

"Okay. To be honest, I just really like The Martian." As Bea had expected, Lara laughed. "I told you you'd laugh at me!" Bea burst into laughter too, elbowing Lara in the ribs. "I have a proper crush on Matt Damon."

"Ugh, no!"

"Shush. He's beautiful. Anyway, why Saturn?"

"I love everything about it. Its chemical structure is just fascinating, especially the way the rings are formed. And the thing I love most about it is its moons. Did you know Saturn has 62 moons? And one of the moons has high possibility of extra-terrestrial life?"

"What! No way. Imagine a whole colony living on a moon!"

“I just think Saturn is beautiful. I love the idea that there are so many things circling one bigger thing, like a huge nucleus of life. It’s just like the planets around the sun, and the 62 moons around Saturn.”

“That is cool. Man, I think you’ve out-cooled Mars!”

Lara whooped. “Saturn wins!” she chanted, imitating Madam Hooch at the end of Harry Potter’s first-year Quidditch match. Bea laughed and cheered with her. “Can I admit something?” Lara asked, her laughter calming down. “I thought you were such a ‘cool girl’, the kind who’d never speak to a weirdo with blue hair. But you’re not. You’re pretty awesome. Even if you do only rank your planet preferences in order of ones Matt Damon has lived on.”

“Hey!” Bea replied, smiling. “He’s a pretty cool guy. As much as you love Saturn and its 62 moons, it’ll never beat my love for Matt Damon.”

“Want to come and see my Saturn poster?”

“Only if we can watch The Martian.”

“If you insist. I’ll never fancy Matt Damon, though.”



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