

Kala's Heart - Ebba, Year 8, NSW

You had gotten in, through the closed and locked door. I didn't have the key. Nobody did.

I hadn't been there for ages. The last time I was there, the walls were covered with paintings of castles, and childish dreams were all over the floor. But you had told me when you arrived, there were only two big armchairs, a small coffee table with a few coupons on it, and a fireplace with a family photo on the mantelpiece.

You lit a fire and sat down, closing your eyes for a short rest. That's when I knew you had come. I couldn't see you, but I felt the warmth of the fire you had started flickering through my whole body. I was longing to come closer.

So I did.

I came slowly and uncertainly, replicating how this situation made me feel perfectly. I didn't exactly know the way, but I kept walking, knowing deep down that I was on the right path. I was wearing a pale green shirt and a denim skirt Jen... I mean, "Mom" had picked out for me, knowing I wouldn't care.

I didn't care much. All I cared about was having enough money to get through life, a way to keep warm, a place to rest my body, and since that day, you.

You must have looked around the small room twice, just like I did the first time I was there. The second time, you must have seen a door that you hadn't seen before. You went and opened the door with the key you had used to get in. The soft click echoed around the walls of my half-empty heart.

You had found my bedroom.

That room had been locked away for so long that I couldn't remember putting anything in there. The room that resembles privacy. The room where I put my hopes and dreams to rest. I could feel things pouring out of that long-forgotten room. Things I cared about from then on, but that I can't remember caring about before then.

The first thing that I could feel fall out was a violin and a bow. The beautiful ones that my dad bought me for my tenth birthday. I had always "played" violin. I had always practiced when I was told, and always tried to improve, but I never had any desire to play. But now I feel a longing to make the music that lives in the strings of my beloved instrument. It became a dream to play and bring joy to others.

So I started walking quicker.

Next, a tube of glitter fell out of the little room. I had never thought very highly of glitter before; all it created was a sparkly disaster in my mind. But along with a slight mess comes the beautiful, sparkly sight of creation.

Item after item fell out of the overcrowded room, each one growing dearer to me by the second and each making me walk faster.

Some were hopes, like the cross that made me hope for heaven. Some were dreams, like the violin representing my dream to share the joys of music. And some were memories. Not only good ones, like the boots I used to play in the rain with, but also the ones that dug their way into my heart, the ones I couldn't seem to forget that just ended up getting locked away with all the rest. The ones that are too hurtful to mention.

And they were all back. All the hopes, dreams, and memories. The bad and the good. The things I had tried to hide and suppress. The things that made me feel whole came running back.

I started running. Running at a pace that I didn't know was physically possible. Running to the place where joys, hopes, sorrows, and misfortune dwell. Running at a pace that was just not fast enough.

I had finally reached the gate. The fencing around this tiny little beach hut was a soft white, thin, metal fence that stood out from the grass and sand on the beach in the distance. The kind of fence that anyone on the inside would feel protected by, even though it is weak. The gate was light blue in the same style as the fence.

On it was a two-word sign that read "*Kala's...*" with the second word faded out over time.

It was still mine. That is for sure.

That's when I started to doubt. The thought of the last time I had relied on this place and had made a complete fool of myself made me stop in my tracks. Were the emotions in this place unreliable and weak, just like the fencing? Was the blind faith that made me hopeful here as worn and outdated as the sign? I had made my way from a sturdy, reliable life I could depend on, just for a smile that would end in disaster. Had I come because all that I had was not enough? Was I just an ungrateful child who could not resist the temptation of the cookie jar even though I knew it would lead to punishment? Had I gone out of my mind just to regain my heart?

Could this short joy be worth it? Will it end like it did so long ago? Is it real?

The love that lingers at the edge of every word here. Is that real?

Yes.

Hope led me to open the gate. It swung open soundlessly as if it had been waiting for me to come. I stepped into the garden slowly, my hands trembling with emotion.

This is the place I had loved, played in, and protected as a child. This is the place I had sworn never to come back to after it had betrayed me. It had let me down. It had exposed me.

So what am I doing in this place again?

I was living. I was hoping. I was coming home. So I kept walking in the grassy garden. All the way to the front door, my hands steadying with every step. The house was blue and white, welcoming and frail, and memory-provoking, just like the fence. I decided to skip the emotions this time and just open the door. The handle was cold in my hand and showed minimal signs of resistance. But turning it is the hardest thing I've ever done because I knew that on the other side of the door, I'd find you.

With a soft click, the door told me it was too late to turn back, so I let it swing open with a gust of wind that seemed to urge me in. You were standing there looking at me with your soft green eyes, and that's when I knew you weren't going to be leaving anytime soon.

I took three sturdy steps toward you, holding my head high. Then I fell into your embrace and started to cry.

I was scared. I was loved. I was anxious. I was home.

You know most of the story from then on. We moved your things to the house, we made new friends, and fought a little. Storms came and went. They destroyed and restored. But we were okay. And from that point on, the sign on the gate was chained by adding two words and revealing the last one.

Now it reads, "*Gomer and Kala's Heart.*"