



Fear and Superstition

***SJSU International
House***

Newsletter : Fall 2012

Table of Contents

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Coping with Fear	<i>Leann Cherkasky Makhni</i>
Two Different Views	<i>Melanie Flanagan</i>
Corridors of life	<i>Marianne Siréta</i>
Hey Child	<i>Marianne Siréta</i>
Helpless	<i>Natasha Lamperti</i>
Fear or Superstition	<i>Serena Organ</i>
Fate	<i>Daniel Kautz</i>
BAM	<i>Andrea Nguyen</i>
Fear	<i>Kevin Cross</i>
See From Superstitions	<i>Xincheng Yuan</i>

Leann Cherkasky Makhni

Coping with Fear

So many fears to overcome, so many possibilities to consider. How do we go on day after day?

For inspiration, I look to those I know, or read and heard about who've survived the most extreme experiences I fear: catastrophic fires, natural disasters, genocide, acts of terror and war, random acts of violence. I look to those who've survived accidents, injuries, illness, and to those who've survived where their family members have not -- the loss of a parent, a sibling, a child, a friend.

I consider what helps these individuals cope and then thrive. Their inspirations vary. For some, it's a belief in God. For others, it's a belief that they should live for others who were unable to or for those in their lives who did survive. Others believe that life is a rare and precious gift; not a moment is to be wasted.

I have experienced loss - the kind that I feared. It made me determined to value my days, my opportunities, and those around me. It made me stronger so that I try hard not to sweat the small stuff.

I try my best to do what is in my control to be safe and healthy. Beyond that, I remind myself that I can't let life slip through my fingers while I wait on the sidelines fearing what could be.

**Artwork by
Shannon
Rost**

Melanie Flanagan

The two very different environments of my upbringing have defined me.

Part of my childhood was spent with ultimate freedom. Running bare foot through untamed bush land, Lantana strangling my legs, pulling me to the ground, an army of ants climbing the mountain that is my foot, hanging on with their tiny jaws as I pick myself back up and jump into the water. Turtles and fish swim beneath me in the dark waters of the tea-tree stained creek. When I get out a spider hangs from his bungee chord in my path. Unfazed, I pinch the chord and re-locate the spider to another tree. At night I am exhausted and fall into a peaceful sleep.

Growing up in Sydney, Australia's largest city, was very different; my parents were far more protective. My city nightmares were not of boogymen, scary beasts under my bed, or monkeys in my closet. My fears were much more realistic and sinister, fuelled by the media. When the lights went out in my room my dressing gown became a man clad in black, waiting for me to succumb to the heaviness of my eyelids. The light from my stereo became the reflective retinas of his sidekick. The trees outside scratching on the window were spectators, taunting me of my fate. As my bedroom came alive, I was forced under the covers, frozen, fearful that any movement would give away my location in the fortress of my blanket.

My experiences have left me with the ultimate respect for Mother Nature and skepticism for humanity.



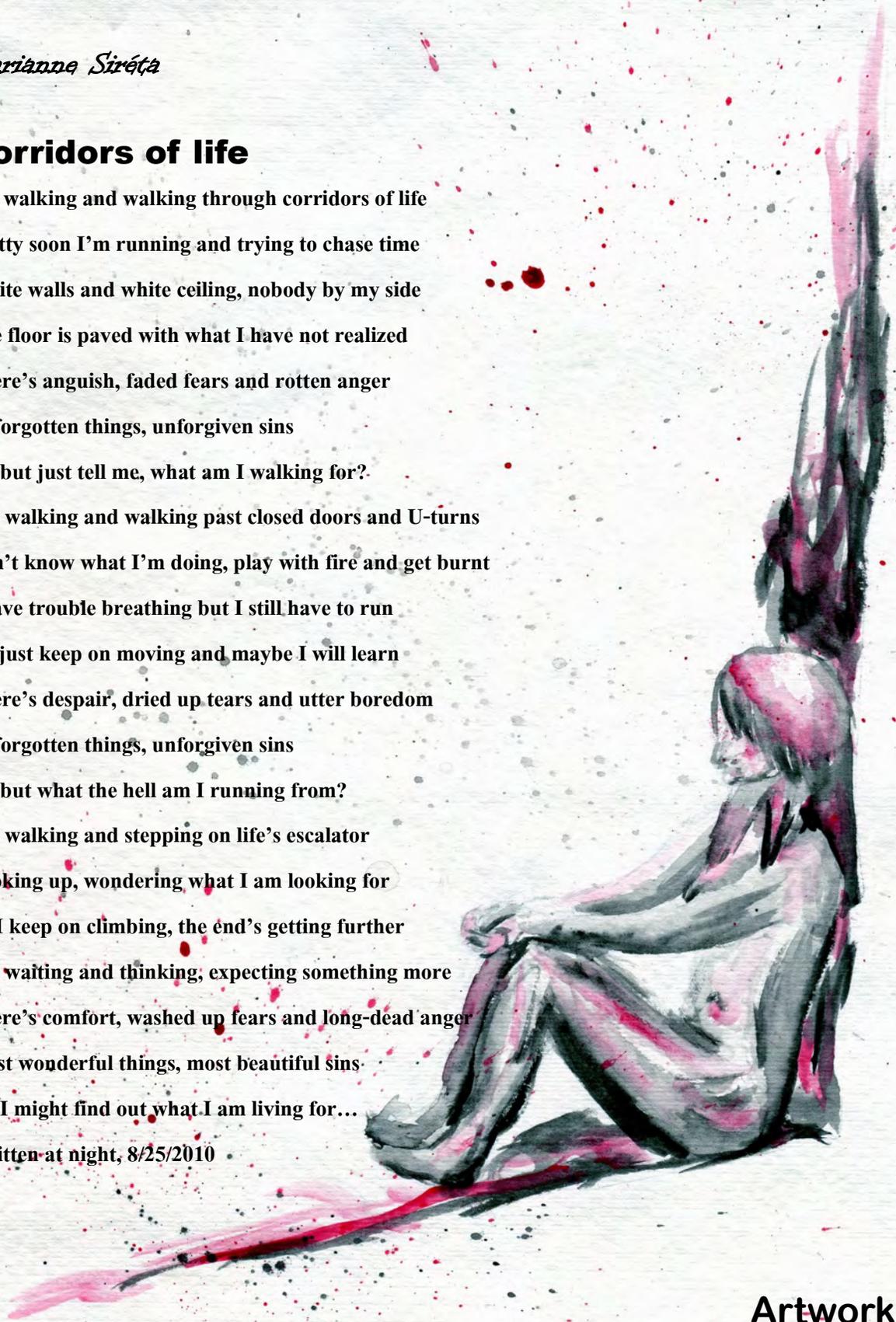
**Photo by
Alex
Lamperti**

Marianne Siréta

Corridors of life

I'm walking and walking through corridors of life
Pretty soon I'm running and trying to chase time
White walls and white ceiling, nobody by my side
The floor is paved with what I have not realized
There's anguish, faded fears and rotten anger
Unforgotten things, unforgiven sins
Oh but just tell me, what am I walking for?
I'm walking and walking past closed doors and U-turns
Don't know what I'm doing, play with fire and get burnt
I have trouble breathing but I still have to run
I'll just keep on moving and maybe I will learn
There's despair, dried up tears and utter boredom
Unforgotten things, unforgiven sins
Oh but what the hell am I running from?
I'm walking and stepping on life's escalator
Looking up, wondering what I am looking for
As I keep on climbing, the end's getting further
I'm waiting and thinking, expecting something more
There's comfort, washed up fears and long-dead anger
Most wonderful things, most beautiful sins
Oh I might find out what I am living for...

Written at night, 8/25/2010



**Artwork
by Melvin
McElrath**

McElrath



Artwork
by
Michael
Wu



Artwork
by
Michael
Wu

Hey Child

Hey child, don't you worry too much 'bout the future
I know it doesn't sound too good on the news
With *all* those unknown words they use
But you know they just want to look assured
'Cause they don't understand what's going on
And they're *all* pretty scared of ending up alone
Hey child, don't you listen to grown-ups *all* the time
'Cause they're not *always* right and they're not *always* kind
You can speak with your mouth, you can think with your mind
And if you do just that, I bet you will be fine
Don't fool anybody but don't let them fool you
Always do what you like and you'll like what you do
Hey child, don't let anyone tell you love doesn't exist
Or causes more pain than it ever brings bliss
'Cause numb isn't human and safe isn't alive
And sure, you'll never fall if you are never high
So you can cower back here on the ground
Or try to get back up at every other round

24/08/2011



**Photo by
Alex
Lamperti**

Natasha Lamperti

Fear is universal. Not only is almost everyone scared of something, but the things that we fear are often the same.

I don't like heights. I've never have been particularly fond of them, but as time has gone on, it seems to have just gotten worse. It's hereditary, apparently; my father also gets nervous around high places. I have been on Drop Zone at Great America once, and I will just say--never again.

I could never go skydiving, either; even the idea of it makes me queasy and lightheaded, and not in a good way. It is one of those fears that can be immobilizing. But I'm not really afraid of heights, I'm afraid of falling.

I first started to think about death when I was nine. I knew what death was, I knew that everyone and everything someday dies, but I wasn't religious and no one close to me had ever died, so I had never really thought about it.

I'm not scared of death; I was when I was younger, and I don't want to die, but for me death is an ending. It makes sense, and I have no interest in living forever; that's what scares me. Forever is a long time, and it's a concept that I can't wrap my head around. The absolute vastness of the universe and the concept of forever remind me just how small me and my world really are.

What scares me, though, isn't feeling insignificant; it's feeling small and fragile. The human body is such a complex system and is so easily broken. For the time that we have, we are entirely dependent on these bodies, and unlike a new cell phone, we can't simply go out and buy a new one if something stops working.

I don't like feeling fragile and I hate being dependent on others. I fear being small and helpless and that is what I am to the vastness of space and time.





Serena Organ

The fear that grips me tight is the fear of losing. Not as in losing a game, but in losing something--a treasured toy, a there-and-gone chance, a dear friend, a loved one. Some can be found, some can be re-planned or reworked. Others will never come back and I am terrified by this.

I feel cloying tendrils of worry twist themselves into dread-slick cobras inside my chest, coiling and squeezing around my heart as I think of all that I can lose. They sink horribly sharp fangs into my heart, frantic beats sending their fear toxin coursing through my veins and filling every last space within me until the only thing left is the inescapable knowledge that I can do nothing to prevent all the imagined losses. But I can try to stem the tide of despair by drowning those around me in every ounce of love and compassion I desperately dredge and mine out of inner places shriveled and blackened by that same infectious fear still flowing icy and thick as the warm blood it's replaced.

I look around and my frightened eyes replace those around me with the empty space of their loss, until it is myself alone in a room that still whispers the echoes of their voices into my ears and brushes against me with the ghost of their presence. I cry out at all that was and never will be again, all that has been lost to me. This is my greatest fear: to lose those whom I hold so dear that their very absence would drive me to the brink of madness as I tear apart the world around me in searching for the smallest hint of them, the tiniest sign that they were here, that I at least had them for a time.

And it would not be enough. Never enough to forget the pain of that loss, never coming close to filling the empty spaces in the room where they should be, the somber pauses in conversation left by their absent words. The fear of losing grips me tight in body and mind, curls over me and opens its jaws, and I am consumed.



**Artwork by
Michael Wu**

Daniel Kautz

There are people who call it fate, some say it is fortune, but for most it's destiny. But is there really something supernatural guiding all of our lives? Finding something you have been looking for a long time, missing the last bus by a few seconds, finding the perfect birthday present for your friend in a store you have never been in before, or even finding the love of your life.

These are just some examples of situations that might make people start to believe in something they are unable to explain with science. Most of you might call it coincidence. But is there a way to be sure it is nothing else? We will have to find out!

Isn't it scary to realize how little influence we have on our own lives sometimes?

Think of some accidents where each second matters. Imagine the following situation: Person A is just about to leave the house when he receives a call from his brother and decides to answer it. Ten minutes later Person A has an accident with Person B.

That should not have happened. There are a lot of other different outcomes for this story. Why did Person A's brother decide to call his brother at that exact moment, or why was Person B at that exact place at that specific time? This leads us to the question: are some things just meant or not meant to be?

The most asked and probably most common question is the question of destiny. Some accidents happen to people who do not deserve it, whereas luck sometimes just comes to people who deserve worse. For those among us who "believe," the answer to this question is an easy one: destiny. For the rest of us, it will be coincidence or bad luck.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said: "All things the gods bestow, the infinite ones on their darlings completely. All the joys, the infinite ones, all the pains, the infinite ones, completely." For some people, another thought enters to their mind when it comes to destiny: the fear of having less influence on our lives than we want to have.

Among all controversies about this topic, there is a point everyone can agree on: Some things in life just happen out of nothing, bad things as well as good things. Dying in an unexpected but horrible accident; so is finding the person you want to spend the rest of your life with.

In our social network, we depend on other people, which is only one out of many reasons we cannot plan precisely. There will always be this little piece of life we do not have any influence over. But let us be honest: isn't this one thing what makes life exciting and worth living? No matter how much technology and science will improve, this inexplicable and supernatural something will always be a part of our lives. That's why I like to call it destiny.

Andrea Nguyen

BAM

I won't pose for a photo if there will be three people in the shot. I once heard my uncle say it was unlucky, and I've avoided it ever since.

No one really understands why it's unlucky, not even me. But that's not the point. The point is when I told Cris and Natasha about it, they held me down while someone else in the house took a photo of the three of us together. Rarely have I ever felt so betrayed.

But looking back, I didn't feel more unlucky after the photo was taken. I felt more or less the same. So maybe superstitions are actually irrational fears. As though we didn't have enough fears already, our cultures had to make up some more to really make us nervous.

When I really think about what I'm really afraid of, I always think back to "Citizen Kane," which many (possibly pretentious) people consider to be one of the greatest films of all time.

I love "Citizen Kane," but only because of one short scene in it.

An old man tells the story of when he was young. He was on a boat. He looked out across the water and saw another boat, on which stood a beautiful woman in a dress, holding a parasol. He fell in love with her, but he never went to talk to her. In fact, he never saw her again. Then, in old age, he confessed that not a month went by when he didn't think about her.

I watched "Citizen Kane" a second time with the audio commentary on. Film critic and Tweeter extraordinaire Roger Ebert talked about how people simply do not reach out for the happiness standing in front of them.

Not seizing happiness is my biggest fear. I'm frightened of living with regret that gnaws away at me, hour after hour. Time goes by so quickly. Any day now, we will wake up and be old and soft, like overripe bananas. Why not go for what we want while we are still green and strong? Why do we hesitate in the face of good fortune?

"Into the Wild" is another great film. In it, Christopher McCandless says, "If you want something in life, reach out and grab it."

I think we could all benefit from following this advice. But use common sense, obviously. If you like someone's mouth, don't just rip it off their face. Ease into it. If you want someone's candybar, politely ask for a piece. Maybe they will be generous and give you half. And if you are fond of someone, hug them early and often. This last one applies especially to the people at I-House, who are all cutie-pies in their own way. Just take that diem and carpe the crap out of it.



Image from
www.whithonea.com

Fear

Fear drives people toward unexpected places. It could be one of the main sources that drives the people of the world to do what they do. In a discipline called Parkour, you use your body to overcome obstacles fear is a necessity. In a documentary called "People In Motion," a practitioner of Parkour said, "Fear can be laughable. You get all worked up and jittery, and it's funny because you know you can do it, so you just have to conquer it. The fact that you do experience fear is just your body telling you, 'Hey, there's a risk here, be aware of me, be aware of that risk and the consequences of not doing something correctly,' and that is it, your body's friendly reminder to not be reckless". Fear is good because it reminds us to be careful and not do anything too extreme or careless in our lives. Fear is an excellent thing to take into consideration before doing anything.

Questions like "Will what you do cause fear?" or "Is there fear already?" can get any idea of action rolling in the right direction

For many, fear is a terrible feeling. The thought that something bad is going to happen, that there is a concealed danger somewhere, is not pleasant. Fear can drive people to do very

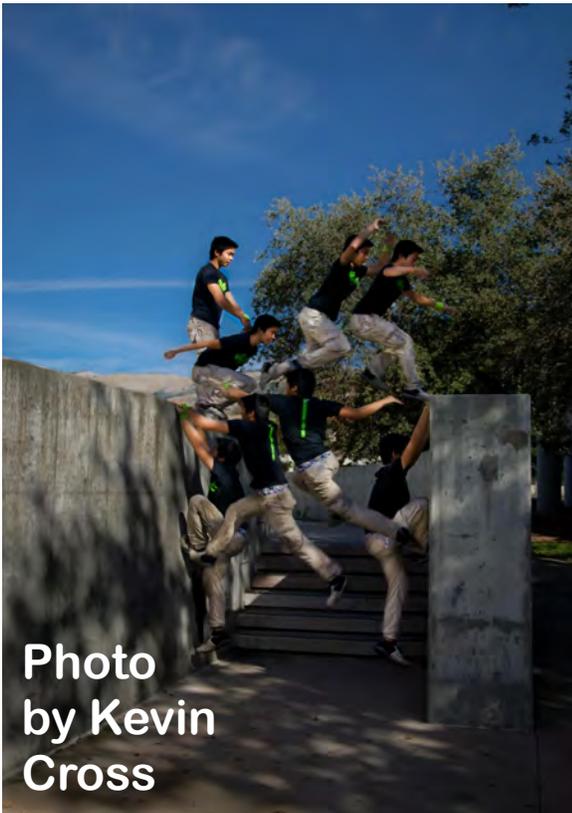


Photo
by Kevin
Cross

destructive things. Fear has been the cause of wars, hate, and people not taking action. When people don't understand something, it's easy for them to hate it. Once they overcome the fear and learn about what it is they hate, more often than not, they do not hate it any longer. A person can be fearful that if they do commit to something, then they will be harmed, or humiliated. So fear is for many a bad thing because it can cause destruction, distaste, and hold people frozen in place. Fear is a helpful tactic in many people's arsenal of getting others to do what they wish.

Horror movies have always played a big role in the movie industry, yet they have always baffled me. The thought of fear being exciting is something I do not understand, yet for many

people fear is exhilarating and exciting. People will spend lots of money throughout their lives to go see scary movies—and they love it. There are many who cue up in lines for possibly hours to ride scary roller coasters because it excites them.

Fear can be an emotional response that drives every living being to do what they are doing. Fear is just another obstacle to overcome. It is a checkpoint to make sure you are making the right decision. It can stop people from taking action or be the cause. Fear is an adrenaline rush or a tactic to get others to do what you want. Whatever it is, fear is good, bad, helpful, and exciting.

18 years ago, I was born in Xi'an, China, without knowing that China was a country rich in superstitions. A short time after my birth, my parents began planning on giving me a name. They were busy taking me to a fortune-telling person to see my trend of life in the future. Chinese people believe that the nature consists of 5 main elements, which they call "Wu Xing", that are gold, wood, water, fire and earth. At that time the fortune-telling person told my parents that I was weak in gold and earth out of the 5 elements. And in this reason I got an original name with components of 3 gold and 3 earth in the 2 characters. Later my parents thought it was too superstitious and changed my name to what it is now.

When I grew up a little, one day I found a ceramic statue of Bodhisattva with some fruit sacrificed for her in the balcony of my home and was curious about what it was. Later on I travelled a lot with my parents. There were temples in many scenic spots. And every time when we enter a temple, after the tour guide explained who was enshrined there, the tourists including my parents would start bending their knees and kowtowing to whatever the god there. I had no idea what they are doing, but following them kowtowing. And at this time my mother would correct my posture, by telling me where to put my hands, how many times I should kowtow, and so on. Eventually every time we do this, I began asking my mother why we are doing the kowtowing, and my mother would tell me that this god can guarantee your wealth, and that god can dispel your misfortune. Then I understood why there was Bodhisattva in my home, and I began admiring these gods and began worshiping with my parents.

There are many Chinese people looking for places with good "feng shui", and picking days from almanac which is said to be able to determine what is suitable to do in a day and what is not auspicious to be done on that day. There are even people believing in "Falun Gong" deeply, thinking that a person can become "gods" only if he or she does not fear death, so they would try to commit suicide. But "Falun Gong" is only a so called Daoism art made up by a normal person who wants to make moneyThere are still many of this kind of matters happening. And I have seen on news that before Chinese college entrance exam thousands of candidates scrambled to spend large amount of money touching the foot of a Buddha statue in a place of interest for a good grade, which made the place of interest be packed. In some remote rural areas, people are still very conservative. They have no knowledge of science, so they blindly believe in gods. So they have grown many foolish perceptions. They even think that a woman at home would cause misfortune, and only men are powerful. They live in the shadow of fearing about offending the gods and being cursed. It is said that a man had a fought with his wife, and during the wife accidentally broke the statue of gods. Being afraid of being cursed, the guy asked his brother what to do. And under his brother's advice, he jumped into the river, dead. See how foolish the guy was!

But then again, superstition has its only advantages. As Chinese people spend time begging the gods to give us benefits, the spring festival is conserved until now. There are no more superstitious activities on this festival, but the festival has left joy for us. In China spring festival was always my happiest day among a year. We got family reunion making dumplings, and watching TV, which was so lively. Now in America, I have spent the first Halloween in my life. Although Halloween was also origin from superstitions on ghosts, now we still get a lot of fun from the carnival. What's more, many people are superstitious because they lack confidence and hope. So they made up rumors that so called gods can keep people lucky, and from these gods they got hope. Therefore another advantage of superstitions is that when some people are upset, they can give them hope and support in spirit.

Still to my own opinion, superstitions limit people's mind, restrict people's normal action. Hundreds of thousands of people spend precious time on superstitions. They spend all their wealth and even their lives just for some non-existent gods. Is doing this worthy? I believe this is still a question need all of us to consider.

“Is it useful to feel fear, because it prepares you for nasty events, or is it useless, because nasty events will occur whether you are frightened or not?”

– Lemony Snicket

“Fear cuts deeper than swords.”

– **George R.R. Martin, Game of Thrones**

“The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease for ever to be able to do it.”

– J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan

“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

– Nelson Mandela

“Power does not corrupt. Fear corrupts... perhaps the fear of a loss of power.”

– John Steinbeck

“How much I missed, simply because I was afraid of missing it.”

– **Paulo Coelho, Brida**

“I'll tell them that on bad mornings, it feels impossible to take pleasure in anything because I'm afraid it could be taken away.”

– Suzanne Collins, *Mockingjay*

“Do not be afraid; our fate cannot be taken from us; it is a gift.”

– Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*

“CORALINE SHIVERED. SHE PREFERRED HER OTHER MOTHER TO HAVE A LOCATION: IF SHE WERE NOWHERE, THEN SHE COULD BE ANYWHERE. AND, AFTER ALL, IT IS ALWAYS EASIER TO BE AFRAID OF SOMETHING YOU CANNOT SEE.”

– NEIL GAIMAN, CORALINE





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