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## CAPS LOCK

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**CAPS LOCK**

By: Marissa Ortosky

I live my life in CAPITAL LETTERS, peppered with exclamation points. I'm all boldface and italics and when I start talking I go for pages. Some people don't appreciate my "colorful" personality. I get that a lot: "colorful." People call me "quirky," too. "Melodramatic," "eccentric," and, when he thought he was being particularly clever, one of my boyfriends said "enigmatic." But my favorite thing to be called? "Happy."

So I keep living in CAPITAL LETTERS, skirting away from ellipses and running from periods. I hate periods. They're endings. They're big, black blots that end the sentence, and if there's not another sentence afterward they end the whole thing. It's too late. There's nothing we can do. She's gone. Period. I'm okay with semicolons, though. They're just a quick pause, noncommittal closure; the sentence can keep going and going and going.

You can keep someone alive on semicolons.

I wasn't always like this, you know—masquerading behind metaphors. For a long time, I wasn't much of anything. I was white ink on white paper, printed neatly on the page. I was "shy" and "quiet" and "stuck up." But then I met Sam.

Sam was all Wingdings and Word Art. She wrote in the margins and sketched between the lines, and she saw color in everyone. Somehow she matched personality with pigment, and

mentally assigned hues straight out of a Crayola crayon box. I was purple. **Lovely Lavender**. Our favorite math teacher, the one who started every Thursday with an inspirational pep talk, was **Honeyed Amber**. The guidance counselor, the one who conducted mental health evaluations on Mondays and compiled graduation lists on Fridays, was Cumulonimbus: dark and stormy grey. Sam and I always laughed about the absurd appropriateness of that one.

"What color are you?" I asked Sam once.

She just smiled. Sam had figured out a way to turn on a light inside you when she smiled. "I don't have a color," she said.

After everything happened, I didn't feel like I had a color, either. Everyone treated me like I did, though. They treated me like I was **Eggshell**. I was that white ink on white paper girl again and everyone tiptoed around their words, like if they talked too fast or came too close I might shatter. But I've learned. Sam taught me to live in CAPITAL LETTERS, in slanted script and **rainbow ink**. And since Sam can't give me one anymore, I've chosen my own color. I'm **Sunshine Yellow**—vibrant, bright, and distracting. **Yellow** in CAPITAL LETTERS.

As far as I know, our math teacher is still **Honeyed Amber**. The guidance counselor is still Cumulonimbus Grey, too. Cataract Grey, Blind Grey, Stupid Grey because even though Sam went to her office one Monday in October; and even though she went back with red eyes one Monday in November; and even though she went back with red rivers running under her sleeves one Monday in December; all Cumulonimbus said was, "Oh, honey. I thought you took care of this. Didn't you

talk to your parents?”

Of course Sam hadn't talked to her parents. How could she? When every time Sam let down her CAPITAL LETTER facade her father said she was just “dramatic”? Or when every time she even mentioned the word depression, it turned into an argument about why she was calling her mother a terrible parent? No, Cumulonimbus. She came to you. She reached out to you. And you did nothing.

So she continued living her life in CAPITAL LETTERS and fancy fonts. For Sam, Wingdings was as effective as white out. No one knew how badly she was hurting. Not our bullshit guidance counselor. Not our math teacher. Not her parents, not her brother. Not me.

My best friend died last year.

And there were times when she almost told me. When she would dismissively mention going to see Cumulonimbus or talk about a fight with her Mom and almost tell me. I didn't know it was so bad. I didn't know but I knew there was something she wasn't saying. But when I would try and ask she'd throw on CAPS LOCK and smile. And when she smiled she smiled so bright you didn't notice the light was all on her lips and never in her eyes.

Sam killed herself in March. Swallowed all the white pills in the medicine cabinet. Threw up some of them during the night but by that point the coroner said it didn't matter and she died anyway. She didn't write a note, and she didn't say goodbye.

My best friend died last year. Period.

My best friend died and after three weeks everyone stopped caring. After the memorial service at school they all just went on with their lives like she'd never even existed. Cumulonimbus kept going over graduation lists; **Honeyed Amber** still gave those meaningless pep talks. Besides, now there was some third-world earthquake to raise money for, or some other kid in a car accident to rally around. They all moved on and treated me like **Eggshell** because I hadn't. So I followed Sam's lead. I started living in Word Art and Wingdings because it was easier to pretend.

After all, Sam's period was just one of my semicolons. Everyone expects me to continue my sentence. My best friend died last year; I'm doing fine.

It's easy. Did you know? Microsoft's grammar software is set by default to ignore misspellings in ALL CAPS words. It's a poetic paradox: the more vibrant you are, the less people notice. I guess it's easier to see a boldface bundle of quirks and quips, call her happy, and not think about what the spectacle is hiding. It was true for Sam. And I guess now it's true for me.

I live my life in CAPITAL LETTERS. I'm exclamation points and slanted script and “happy.” I'm **Sunshine Yellow** and I'm doing fine.

I'M DOING FINE.