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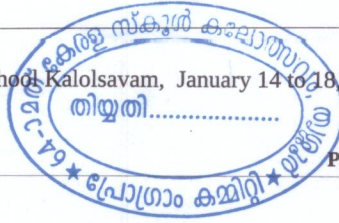
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Blinded by Love

Love makes us blind. It leads you to believe that everything in front of you is safe, may it be a calm lake or a deep chasm. It blinds your ability to think, to choose wisely. No matter what others tell you, you believe in love. Because, it's too hard to resist, too hard to run away from. I realized ~~its~~^{its} danger too late, and I write my story for all, blinded by love.

Growing up in a village with few people, and few things to do, I dreamed big. I dreamed of being famous and honoured, inspiring others to be like me. My poor mother, Elliot Henry, raising me as a single parent, and not wishing to sadden me, supported my dreams. She had named me after the famous Renaissance writer, Cassandra Fedele. A woman, who inspired my mother to believe in herself and keep going. I didn't like my name being this long, so I shortened it to Cassie. Cassie Elliot Henry. A name I hoped

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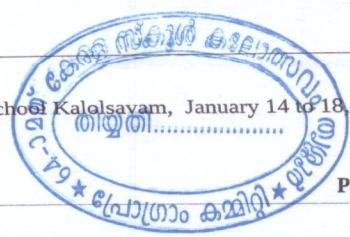
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would be written all over newspapers and articles as "Best Author of The Year." A dream, I believed was possible if I tried my best, and expressed my feelings out.

My favourite spot to go out and write was the lakeside. Being under the age of 20 however, my mother insisted me to come back before it became dark. But, I felt like the lake was alive at the time of darkness. Fireflies hovering around, frogs making ribbeting sounds, and the chirping of crickets had always felt peaceful to me. The Crystal Lake, as it was called, was such a scenic spot, that no one would feel like they are on Earth. In fact, my first poem, "Heaven on Earth" was inspired by the beauty of the lake.

My little village of Cherrysville was a calm and quiet place, with hardworking peasants and gossiping women. There was never a quarrel and never a fight. Peace and harmony was the motto of our village.

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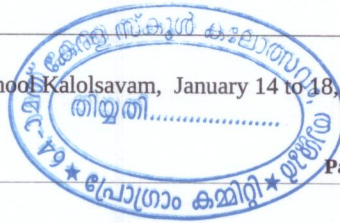
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Nearby the lake lived the Smiths. Alice Smith was a hardworking and gentle woman who toiled hard to keep her family alive. Her son, Joseph Smith was also hardworking and handsome. He was tall and had dark hair, with strong biceps and a handsome mustache. But, what drew me to him was his passion for books, like me. One day, he saw me writing by the lake side and wanted to read what I had written. He seemed pleased and complimented ~~my~~ writing style. Smith told me that he wanted to be famous as a writer like me and showed me his piece of work, that he had been working on. Unfortunately, Smith did not have great writing skills. But, my heart forbade me to tell him that. He was a passionate young man, and was also very handsome. My young mind did not want to hurt him. So, I complimented his work as well.

Months had passed, and Smith and I grew much closer. He also seemed to like me.

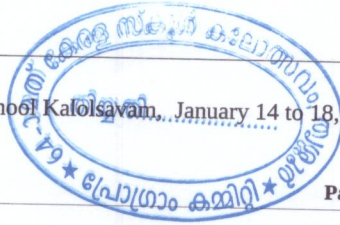
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and always wanted to read my works. I started to write love poems in order to gain his love. My mother, however, was not pleased. ~~He~~ She explained that Smith was greedy and power-hungry and will misuse my talents. But, my heart and mind were already blinded. All I could see was my darling Smith, with a cheerful and gentle smile. I argued with my mother. Finally, my mother wearily resigned and let me take care of myself.

One day, Smith came to my house to read the latest story I was writing. He loved it so much that he gave me a hug and told me that we needed to find a publisher for the book. I agreed with him and decided to make him a coffee. However, a horrible cry alerted me. I quickly ^{came} back to see the title page of my book burning in the fireplace, and Smith trying to grab flying papers. I was shattered. Years of pain, toil and hardwork had just went up in flames. All I had was the final few pages.

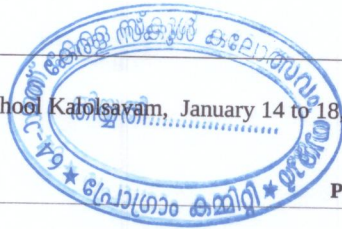
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of the book. Smith told me that a strong wind had blown in and burned the papers. He consoled me and cheered me up. His presence was enough for me to regain myself. I promised him I would never give up.

Two days later, Smith told me to wait near the Crystal Lake bridge to meet him. I was glad, because I felt a pain in my heart from losing my precious work, and I believed that he was the only one who could heal it. He had asked me to come during the night, which I knew my mother would not agree with. So, I had to sneak out at night and went towards the bridge. There was no one nearby, so I decided to wait for some time. I started to dream. I dreamt of my life with Smith, as a famous writer, with children. I dreamt of a life where I inspired other women and people to become like me. Suddenly, the bridge collapsed. I fell into the icy water. I yelled for help. Shortly, two strong hands grabbed me. I was

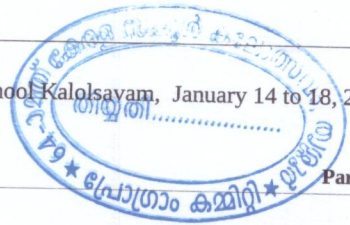
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sure it was Smith. But, I had lost consciousness. I woke up later in the hands of Smith. He assured me I was alright. I sobbed like a little girl and fell into his arms. His tender, yet strong arms caressed me, and I felt safe. I asked ~~Richard~~ ^{Smith} how he had saved me. He told me he was getting close to the bridge, when it collapsed, and when he saw me in the water, he jumped and swam towards me. I felt so grateful that he had been there on time and he had risked his ~~to~~ life for me. Smith told me that when I felt better, I should come to the Mist Cave, nearby the lake. I promised him and began to drift into sleep.

Once I ^{had} woken up, I went outside to see a bunch of roses and a letter. It was from Smith. It said: "My darling, I hope that you are doing alright. Please come to the Mist Cave at night. I will be waiting to see you. Your dearest - Joseph." I was excited. Maybe, today he would confess his love to me.

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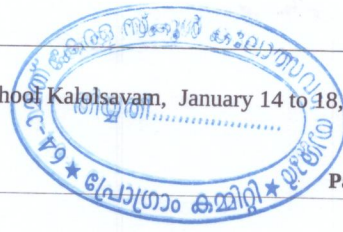
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Maybe, he will promise me to marry me and make me his wife. I was so blinded by love to even notice my poor mother, who had fallen sick. She tried to warn me, but her voiced failed. A tear rolled across her cheeks, as if she could predict the future.

Late at night, I dressed up in Smith's favourite dress and slowly walleded towards the cave. It was eerily quiet, and a New Moon, so I had to rely on the fireflies to guide my path. The cave had a bad reputation of being haunted and being a house of murderous ghosts. But, I wasn't afraid. Because, Smith would be there for me. He would save me from all dangers. I called out for him, "Smith, Smith where are you?". A voice echoed from inside, 'I am here my darling, come inside.' I faltered. His voice sounded deep, almost cruel. It was not ~~to~~ ^{the} sweet honey, tender voice I usually heard. But, I still went inside. There, I saw Joseph studying some sort of article. "Smith, what are

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you doing?" I asked. "My darling, Cassie. Recognize these papers?" He said, giving me the stack of papers. I read through them and was shocked. They were my works! Every page I thought I had lost into the burning fire was with him. "Smith, you... you found them?" I asked, confused. "No, my darling. They were never lost. I had taken it with me to publish it as my work. But, the publisher said he cannot publish the work as mine ~~is~~ without the writer's consent. Which would mean, your name will also come in my books. Think about it, Cassie. We will be famous. You will be the co-editor of my book." Smith said, with a smirk. I was shattered. Smith, who I believed was supporting me and helping me this entire time was a liar. He stole my work and was trying to publish it as his work. "No. That is my hardwork. I wrote it myself. I want its credit to be mine. Smith, what has happened to you?" I said, with tears, rolling over my cheeks. "Well then, you leave ~~me~~ me with no other choice."

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Smith said, his smile now gone. He suddenly, grabbed me by the neck and started to choke me. "Joseph... Joseph... stop it. Leave... me...!" I said, trying to leave his grasp. "You won't let me become famous, huh? Then, you will not be either. Remember the bridge incident? Well, I had ~~cut~~ ^{cut} the ropes, knowing you will come. But by some miracle, ^{a fisherman saved you.} ~~you swam ashore.~~ You had lost consciousness. And now, only I will be the famous writer I wanted to be!" Smith said, his laughter echoing through the cave.

Joseph killed me. He blinded me with love and caring ~~to~~ so that he could steal my ~~per~~ precious works. Now I, remain as a soul in this dark cave, able to write in these haunted walls, the story of my life. A story that will never get published. A story that will never get famous. Love blinded my mind and my heart, and has now left me in this sorrowing state. Let my story be a warning, to only believe in yourself, and not be blinded by love.

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