

Fiction

A Silent Hello

by Ariel Bealer

Days pass by,
There is no time,
No sense of night or day.
All that's left,
Those who live are
Silent with naught to say.

Abby folded her red blanket once, then twice, and after the third time smoothed it down on her bed. She looked left, then right, and closed the window. Taking a deep breath, Abby held it for a minute, counting methodically in her head. At “60” she released, letting the air flow out in a hiss like a deflating balloon. She was ready to begin.

At 1 p.m. she had three pages typed; by 4 it was twelve. And then the evening slump kicked in, but Abby was determined to beat it. She knew with enough discipline and persistence her goal could be reached—forty pages by midnight.

Henry brought iced tea with four packets of sugar, please. Henry brought more paper when the printer choked and died. Henry carried out bag after bag of paper paper paper, all written over and crumpled up, sometimes shredded. Abby wrote.

At midnight Abby checked her page count, rubbing her eyes to make sure she saw correctly. Twenty-two pages. She took a deep breath and held it for a minute. Then, as her balloon deflated, Abby saw Henry standing in the doorway. He

smiled and she knew; her time was up. She couldn't work all night because in her foolish youth, when the world was the real world, she had married a dashing young man. Henry still might have been dashing, but Abby did not notice anymore. When life had pressed down on her, Abby escaped and since then she lived as she pleased. Henry might have a dozen affairs but it was no matter; she was having an affair too and hers was serious, long-term.

At one point Henry stopped bringing tea and instead came Mara, but her tea was too strong. When Abby pushed it away and looked up in dismay the maid just shook her head and left the room. It does not matter, I do not care, Abby insisted when her heart cried out. I have my own affair to comfort me and distract me. He can do what he likes. Mara said he would never come back, but Abby knew Henry was just moody and bored. He'd return. He always did. So meanwhile, Abby wrote.

And her affair flourished, her writing paid off, because one day she got a letter. Her work was the best! She'd be a success, just come sign some papers and make all these edits and we'll do some publicity on Monday. It'd been far too long since she'd seen the world. Abby was afraid it'd be harsh, uncontrolled. Mara guessed her size and bought a new suit, grey with a bright blue silk shirt. She pondered over heels, but knew they'd be hell, and settled for flats.

Then the day came. Her words had been written for her for once and she practiced in front of a mirror. Nothing could have prepared her for the swarms of people that surrounded the podium, all eagerly, hungrily gazing up at her, expecting wisdom, embarrassment, creativity, and more.

Abby took a deep breath and counted to sixty. She tried to remember how to start out. Was it "good morning"? "I'm so glad to be here"? "Hellooooo New York"? She inhaled once more, but only counted to six and stepped up to the

microphone with a smile. This was her time to make an impression, sweep the crowd off its feet and have them eating out of her hand. This was her chance, but all that came out was a silent hello.