

Love Like You

It begins as a passing sort of thought.

They're thirteen years old, sitting on the steps outside the coffee shop Josune loves so much, even though she doesn't love coffee. It's the same coffee shop Janice's mother hates so much: *too sweet, too bitter, and never right*, she says.

Never right. It's a sentiment Janice hears a lot.

In a few years, the cafe will close, and Janice won't remember its name, but she'll remember this moment. Ice cream drips from the cone and down her arm, sticky and shiny in the summer sunlight. She licks the minty chocolate trail, from halfway to her elbow back up to her wrist.

Disgusting, she thinks to herself. But no one is around to watch her--no one except Josune, that is--so she does it anyway.

But Josune isn't watching her, far too focused on the tiny ukulele in her hands. She's humming one of those folk songs she loves, the ones accompanied by guitar strings and soulful singing. Janice doesn't care much for those songs, but she likes Josune's voice: soft, sweet, and strangely deep. There's an unexpected roughness to it, like gravel dust swirling around an otherwise smooth stream. It's nice.

In the deceptive calm, it's a shock when the current suddenly halts, the grit and pebbles coming to a stop, falling back into the riverbed below.

Janice opens her eyes. She hadn't realized she'd closed them. Her tongue is still at her wrist, a trickle of mint chocolate ice cream collecting against it.

Josune is watching her now, an amused smile on her lips. She's stopped singing. "I can't believe anyone thinks you're cool. Not when you do things like this."

A smile crosses Janice's face as well. "Really? You're calling me gross?"

"Just because I'm gross doesn't mean you can't be, too."

She looks beautiful like this, the sunlight reflecting off her sharp hazel eyes and casting a golden glow over her short auburn brown hair. Her lips are chapped and her left canine is crooked, but her smile is beautiful.

Beautiful. It's the first time in the seven years they've known each other that Janice thinks Josune is beautiful.

It begins as a passing sort of thought, born between melting drops of ice cream and the strumming of a ukulele, but it doesn't end as one.