

2022

## To Live Forever

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### Recommended Citation

Cisar, Katie (2022) "To Live Forever," *Calliope*: Vol. 34, Article 35.

Available at: <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/calliope/vol34/iss1/35>

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## **To Live Forever**

**Katie Cisar**

The cool air of autumn held my hand, guiding me forward along the rocky forest path.

The tall trees towering over me created a mosaic of orange and red, lit up by the setting sun. A chorus of birds and bugs reminded me that, although I was alone, I was surrounded by life. Everything was so vibrant and full of light. It was like a temple sculpted by nature itself.

I wandered through the woods to seek relief from a strange hollowness that had infected my mind. To rid myself of the hopelessness that had turned me into an empty vessel. To let the earth fill my soul with life again.

I passed by an elderly couple walking hand in hand. I wondered why they had come to nature's temple. Was it to reminisce on all the years they'd spent together? Or was it to argue about how their love had grown tired as they had grown older? I doubted the latter. They were so enamored by each other that they hardly noticed as I went around them. I could still hear their buoyant echoes of laughter and declarations of love when I had gained a considerable distance between us.

I wandered through the woods to yearn. To yearn for a love like theirs. A love like Greek fire with an unyielding passion that it could burn through any storm. Not necessarily romantic love, or even human love for that matter. But perhaps a love for anything that could reignite a sense of meaning in my life.

As I continued my journey, I saw a father who had his daughter thrown over his shoulders for a piggy-back ride. The pair traveled in a content silence, taking in nature's handcrafted masterpiece. When I walked close enough to see the awestruck expression on the girl's face, I knew exactly why she had come to the forest. She was here to explore, to discover how big and limitless the world could be. To touch the stars. To make lifelong memories with a father that would lift her up until she could hold the moon in her hands.

I wandered through the woods to escape. To leave behind the past that still troubled me.

When I saw that girl with her father, I could not help the muted anger and irrational jealousy that pooled in my gut. My father had never lifted me up to the stars. If anything, he'd kept me chained to the ground with impossible expectations and an obsessive need to sculpt me into someone that he could bear to call his daughter.

I wandered to get out of his sight.

I crossed paths with a boy. He walked alone with a pair of earbuds plugged in and a thoughtful glint in his eyes. Why was he here? His head turned in every direction, as if he was trying to memorize every bird, every tree, every ray of sunlight that passed through the forest canopy. He looked lost, but in a wonderful sort of way. He was trying to find himself.

I wanted to find myself too.

I wandered through the woods to gain an identity. To meet the soul that lived under my skin. To stop living as a façade with a million different faces and to finally become one. To rid myself of the rotting, ugly sides of myself that tormented both me and people I cared about. I wandered to meet the person that I'd always wanted to become.

I could not stop my eyes from lingering on the boy as he wandered away, humming a tune softly under his breath. His voice joined the forest symphony with such ease. It was then that I realized this boy was very different from me.

Even if he did not know himself, he still knew his soul. He still had a voice that belonged to him. He did not live each day with an artificial identity that he had created to cater to the world around him. He lived for himself, and only for himself.

I wanted to be that boy.

I wanted to stop being afraid of my soul.

As I climbed up a particularly steep hill, I noticed the trees parting to reveal a grassy trail. I followed it until I found myself on the rocks of a cliff, overlooking a valley bordered by the rounded peaks of the Appalachian Mountains. The Mon River cut a path straight through the center, sparkling brilliantly underneath the sunset.

I hadn't quite reached the stars, but I had reached the sky. I was eye level with a group of beautiful ravens, flying with such an unbridled power that I could only dream of having.

I took a seat on the edge of the cliffside, letting my legs dangle over the forest below. It was exhilarating. I felt connected to the earth in a way that I had never experienced before. I felt safe. I felt home.

I reached into my pocket, pulling out my writing journal to describe the incredible scene that I had walked into. I wrote about the birds and the mountains and the way the orange in the sky reflected off the Mon.

And then I cried. I cried because I realized that I wanted to be alive. The screaming in my mind had finally subsided, making way for a liberating silence.

I cried because I was grateful. Through some miracle, I existed in a world that allowed me to witness such beautiful sunsets. It made me think about all the other things I was grateful for.

My friends. I loved them more than anything in the world, and they loved me too.

My family. Our relationship would always be an incomplete patchwork of conditional acceptance and unconditional love, but this could not erase the threads that bound us together. The threads that ran deeper than blood. The threads of our patchwork home.

My life. Being lucky enough to wake up every morning and make each day an adventure. To meet new people. To discover new places. To learn more about the person I was becoming.

To embrace the soul that had been locked away in a prison of my own making.

I looked back at my journal and realized that my page was filled. However, I was not done writing. I flipped to the next page, and the words practically wrote themselves. Four words.

*I want to live.*

But I wasn't done. My pencil kept moving until my soul had been transcribed onto the page.

*I don't want to die.*

*I want to live. I want to live.*

*I want to live forever.*