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Nerfed

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Nerfed

Steven Graves

I watch as my son is swallowed by the fog-covered Earth, his polished mahogany casket soon lost in wispy air. There's a crowd of people who I think are my relatives here with me. They are dressed in black and some are crying. All of them walk up to me and express their condolences, at least I think that's what they're saying. A high-pitched ringing scrapes and bounces around my skull and it muffles everything else.

I think it's customary or socially expected for a grieving parent to stay at their child's funeral till the last, but as soon as the ceremony was done I got the hell out of there. The priest, the false tears, the empty booster seat in my car—they all suffocate me. It gets worse when I get home.

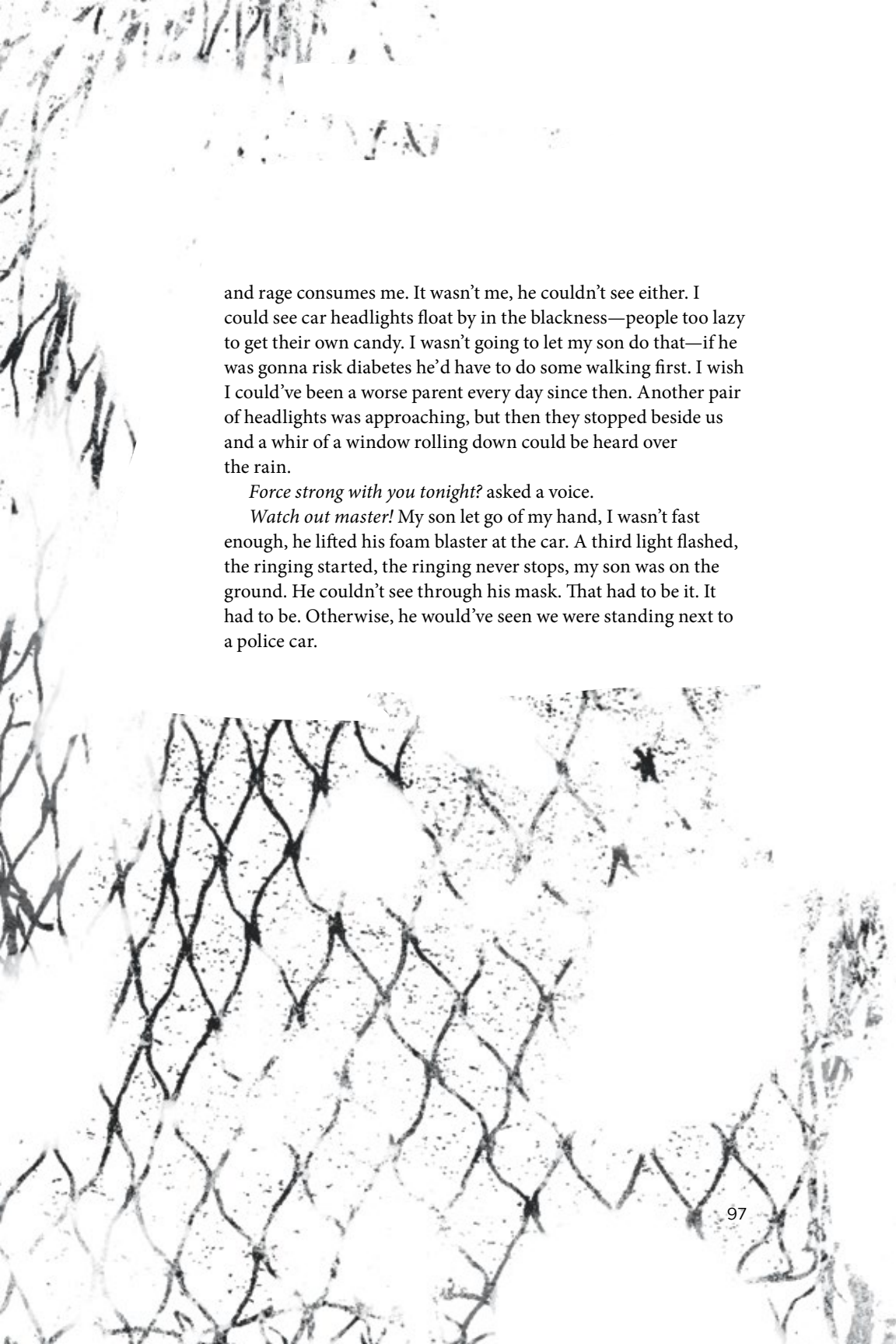
The emptiness and silence clenches my throat and refuses to let go. I find myself in his room, surrounded by all his stuff, stuff that defined him as the nerd I love. Star Wars posters, Marvel hero figurines, action figures, toy cars and violent video games line his walls, shelves, and floor. I lie back on his Star Wars bed spread looking at the ceiling. I stare at the speckled paint patterns for hours until my eyes glaze over, but I don't fall asleep.

Do you have any idea what you wanna be this year?

Yeah let's do a two-person costume! You can be Kylo Ren and I'll be a Stormtrooper!

You don't want to be Kylo Ren? Why didn't he fucking pick Kylo Ren?

It was cold and dark, it always rained on Halloween. I could barely see out of my mask. I was holding my son's hand like a good chaperone, but to be honest he was leading me around. If his mask was like mine, he probably couldn't see either, the blind leading the blind. I tell myself that at night when the self-doubt



and rage consumes me. It wasn't me, he couldn't see either. I could see car headlights float by in the blackness—people too lazy to get their own candy. I wasn't going to let my son do that—if he was gonna risk diabetes he'd have to do some walking first. I wish I could've been a worse parent every day since then. Another pair of headlights was approaching, but then they stopped beside us and a whir of a window rolling down could be heard over the rain.

Force strong with you tonight? asked a voice.

Watch out master! My son let go of my hand, I wasn't fast enough, he lifted his foam blaster at the car. A third light flashed, the ringing started, the ringing never stops, my son was on the ground. He couldn't see through his mask. That had to be it. It had to be. Otherwise, he would've seen we were standing next to a police car.