

Dear friend,

Hello. Let's start with that. I've known you for such a long time, but you've never seen me. Not for years anyway. You used to notice me when you were little, but you grew up and I get lonely now.

Every night I lie awake, listening to your soft breaths and low grunts. Sometimes before you fall asleep I hear frantic rustlings and short, sharp breaths that I used to find confusing, but I think I understand now. After a groan you slump against your mattress and fall into peaceful sleep. I can see the outline of your body in the sags of your mattress. I've watched you grow through the changing outline of your form in your mattress.

Sometimes I feel so lonely, even though I'm not alone. So when your breathing slows and you become still, I scurry out from the darker darkness under your bed. I gently lift up the covers and lie down next to you. I rest my head on your pillow. I feel your breath on my face, warm and moist and natural in the same way that mine is cold and dry and unnatural.

I never touch you. I worry that you would not like to wake up from whatever soft pillowy dream you are floating through to look into the darkness where my eyes should be. We lie like this for hours sometimes, almost touching. Never touching. Your eyes closed, your face slack. You are so beautiful when you feel safe. Eventually watery light will start to brighten your curtains. I move quickly - not because I am in a hurry, but because all my movements are fast and sharp compared to yours. Your soft meat casing slows you down.

Sometimes in the night you wake up. You sit at the side of your bed. Sometimes, in the stillness of a night that is already gone, I reach out to touch you. My hand moves towards your ankle, white against the darkness of your room. But I hesitate, and you move on. I watch from the shadows under your bed as you walk out the room.

I feel disappointed, but also relieved. I am unsure of what I would say to you. And what you would say to me. But sometimes I feel braver, and I leave the twisted ends of my blurry fingers just visible from under your bed. I secretly hope that you'll notice me and we can finally talk. You can explain to me all those things you mumble about in your sleep, or what love is.

But it is always dark when you walk back in, and your pupils are so slow to dilate. So you do not see my darkness in that darkness reaching to you. Just to say hello.

Regards,

Your oldest friend.

*About the writer:*

Melinda Morris is a Tasmanian researcher, writer and editor. She appreciates the smell of second hand book stores and regularly travels to far flung places and makes ill advised decisions about food with unpronounceable names like hákarl.