Emily McNeiece

Ephemeral

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“The words were on their way, and when they arrived, she would hold them in her hands like the clouds, and she would wring them out like the rain.”

-Marcus Zusak; “The Book Thief”
A Day in the Life of “Marissa McPhillips”

2/5/14

As you slice cleanly through the water with well-positioned hands and kick as quickly as your leg muscles will allow you, your mind attempts to invigorate your exhausted body by sending you small but vehement words of encouragement. *Keep going,* it urges, *Finish strong.* Expending the remainder of your energy, you perform some final, quick kicks, which allow you to reach your ultimate destination: the wall of the pool. Finally, you have completed the long and arduous swim workout. Picking up your things, you exit the pool area, ready to journey to yet another swimming facility where you will do it all over again. This is just an average day for Marissa McPhillips, an extraordinary high school student who is able to balance being a frequent contributor to two different swim teams, competing at high levels in running competitions, and being an honest and hardworking student who succeeds in many areas of study. So evidently, when asked about how she feels her life is going as of late, she responded: “It’s been quite busy. I really would like some more sleep and free time.” However, despite her time-consuming schedule, Marissa is always able to find time to help her friends out with their lives. Whether the problem is homework or study help, social or running advice, she is always there to lend a helping hand to people in need of it, even if it’s something small like a quick joke or a supportive encouragement. Some of Marissa’s favorite foods are bananas, bacon, and chocolate-covered sunflower seeds, all of which she has been witnessed eating on multiple occasions. And in fact, after she was asked about her interests, Marissa listed off that they were running, swimming, and food. Continuing on, when questioned about what type of superpower she would enjoy having, Marissa stated that “Invisibility would be really cool,” for the reason that she would be able to
sneak around and act as a secret agent of sorts. Honestly, who wouldn’t want that kind of superpower? On a more serious note, Marissa showed that she can be very profound with her word choice in her response to a question that stated: “If you could ask God one question, what would you ask Him?” After pondering the inquiry for a short while, she replied that she would ask: “Why are humans so destructive?” As she exhibited during her interview and throughout her day-to-day life, Marissa McPhillips is an intelligent individual who always assists in the aid of others, even if it’s not in her best interest at the time. She works extremely hard in every activity she participates in, always striving to reach the height of her potential by partaking in all the necessary training sessions she needs to accomplish her goals. Marissa is also very logical, as she takes time to consider the workings of the world around her and asks herself why everything is the way it is. Ultimately, Marissa McPhillips’s entertaining personality and intriguing lifestyle made her an extremely interesting person to interview, as well as an amazing person to get to know.
A Road, a Fence, and a Man

2/25/14

In the heat of a sun that may or may not exist, there lies a road. It is a road of twists and turns, a road of decisions and mistakes. Its length is that of infinite proportions; its side routes unable to be counted. Its surface is worn and corroded with the wear of the many feet that have passed over it, and the flowers that had once sprung from its edges are now bent with age. Its composition varies, changing from granite to sandstone to glass; to any material known on the face of the earth. The road stretches far into the horizon, creating a field of quilt-like patterns below the ever-present sun. And it is filled with people. Billions of people. The ground shakes at the pounding of their footsteps and the air trembles with the echoes of their voices. They don’t all make it, some reaching far off tributaries that they know they can never return from. But as long as they follow the road, they will be fine.

On this road walks a man. His brown hair is parted in a normal way and his height is a normal height and he is not very important. He is young: his body is sturdy and lithe and his skin has not yet been folded in by the years. His mind is sharp but not impressively so, and is able to quickly process his surroundings, which he does, pointing his chilling gaze to the many bodies packed in around him. His blue eyes shift, with something akin to animosity, to the fences that border the walls. They loom over him with their chain link armor and glare. He looks away, sighing. He’s been very tired lately.

A yellow dress runs in front of him. Twisting and whirling, it weaves its way through the crowd. The girl wearing it, hair piled high in a complicated bun, is beautiful, the man thinks. With long legs and graceful arms, she is dainty in every sense of the word. Her face, with full lips
and large brown eyes, would be breathtaking if it wasn’t for the unpleasant mask of
determination covering it. Slow down, the man thinks, stay and walk for a while. But the girl in
the yellow dress has reached the fence. She curls her fingers around its chains, an unreadable
expression flitting over her features. Then, gritting her teeth, she leaps, gripping the sides of the
fence and using the holes as footholds. Inch by inch, she begins to scale the massive structure.
And second by second, a crowd begins to notice her attempts. They hurl hushed and hurried
whispers back and forth to one another, gathering like sheep at the base of the fence. The girl
tenses, increasing her speed suddenly as if it were a natural reflex. The mumbling crescendos,
building a towering wave of sound. And the man lowers his head, suddenly finding the ground
very interesting. He kicks a rock, wondering where it will land instead of focusing on the girl’s
slipping fingers. He taps out a beat on his leg, making the rhythm much more interesting than the
thud of something falling from high up. He hums a tune, listening to it far harder than the spew
of lethal words battering a torn yellow dress. The man sinks into the crowd, tiredness filling him
to the point where he could burst. Still, he walks the road. Because as long as he follows the
road, he knows he’ll be fine.

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I’ve been having a staring contest with the computer screen for a while now. It isn’t a
very fun game, and I lose as soon as I begin, but I really have no other options here. These
numbers are just refusing to stop wriggling around my vision. That’s what four straight hours of
accounting can to do a guy, I guess. As if testing the waters, I plug a few values into the screen.
Reluctantly, and with some high-pitched beeping noises, the computer accepts them. Gaining a
little bit of hope, I plug two more in.
“Error,” says the computer.

“Shut up,” I growl.

I’ve only had this job for a week and I’m already talking to computers. Great. But, hey, it pays well and it’s what I went to college to do. My father always said that if I got a good-paying job I’d be happy, and be able to live comfortable. And in his mind, there was no better paying job than the one I was in now: working for his very own company. I, of course, had agreed. There was no sense in being someone on the streets, forgotten and starving, strumming a guitar for whoever will listen. There really was no sense in being someone like that, living their own life and forgetting their promise of calling their brother every once in a while. I stare at the computer screen. It goes into sleep mode. Looks like I won the staring contest.

***

It’s been about a year since I first joined True Bleu Accounting Firm, and until now, nothing has really surprised me. Each day, with its monotonous clicking and tapping away at the computer, has become routine, and every person I’ve interacted with up to this point has been normal and predictable. Which is not necessarily a bad thing; I have indeed been comfortable. But today something is happening that feels completely out of place. We’re getting a new employee. This event, in it of itself isn’t very unusual, but as soon as she steps out of the elevator, I feel like it’s different somehow. She is a young woman, fresh out of college, filled to the brim with that strange mix of excitement and nervousness one gets at the first time in a new job. With hair done up in a complicated bun and crisp white clothes, she is obviously trying to dress like what she thinks stereotypical secretaries look like. Her brown eyes are sparkling with energy and her high heels click on the floor when she walks, long, loping strides that take up about two full tiles with every step. Her name is Desiree Hancock, a name that to me wouldn’t be
out of place belonging to a fast-talking attorney. And when she vigorously shakes my hand, it seems even more likely she’d do better in court.

“Greetings, Mr. . . .” she squints at my nametag.


She tilts her head, “Bleu…huh, I feel like I’ve heard that somewhere…”

Was she seriously asking me this?

“Um, it’s the name of the company…” I offer, trying to be the least sarcastic that I can.

She looks lost for words, “Yeah, I, uh, knew that.” Something in her expression tugs at me a little. I think because, for some nonsense reason, it reminds me of myself on my first day. Granted, I wasn’t that dumb, but I could at least try to help her a little.

“I can show you around if you like. It’s not that exciting, but you’ll have to get used to it if you really do want a job here,” I say, a dull professional tone entering my voice.

“Yeah,” she says, “Thanks.”

We start to walk forward. “But don’t you worry Mr. Bleu,” she leans in as she says; “It won’t be boring as long as I’m here.”

***

“No.”

“What?” Des cries, brown eyes going wide, “What do you mean no!?”

I raise an eyebrow at her “I mean that I’m not stupid. The last time you came rushing over to my cubicle with an idea, the entire office shunned me for a week. No friendly hellos, lunch invitations, nothing. I really don’t want to go through that again.” I wasn’t over exaggerating. On that occasion, she had brought over a full-scale police report, filled to the brim with criminal profilings, DNA evidence, and worst of all, crime scene photos, exclaiming to
everyone who would listen that we were going to become private detectives. Despite being
mortified in every shape and form, I had to endure countless suggestions from her to actually go
through with it. And I’m no weakling, but honestly, seeing murder victim photographs every day
for a week had made me want to curl up in a ball in the corner.

“Oh, don’t worry Alex; it’s nothing like last time!” Des says brightly. Will she ever
realize that all of her ideas were like last time? Still, I could feel eyes on us, and the only way to
dispel them was to finish this conversation, and fast.

“. . . Fine,” I sigh, “What is it?”

She takes a deep breath, and puts on a face she hardly ever wears: a serious face.

“I want you to write me a poem.”

My emotions roll from shock to anger to absolute terror. Then to emptiness.

“How did you…find out about that?” I mumble. My father couldn’t’ve—

“John told me,” Des says, “He said you used to write his songs. Good ones, he said.

And—“

“I told you before to stop talking to my brother,” I say, force pushing its way into my

voice.

“But he knows you, Alex! He really, truly knows you and he wants to help you! I’ve
known you for a year now and I know that you’re not happy here. So just write one! I know
you’ve wanted to!” She exclaims, her voice echoing around the room.

I hiss, “Be quiet!” The eyes of our coworkers are starting to hurt.

“Here, let’s try it out!” she says softer, but with just as much earnestness, pushing a pen
and a scrap of paper in my direction. But just hearing her say it makes my head ache.

She locks her eyes with mine, but I break the connection and look away.
“C’mon, I know you’re bored,” she pleads. Bored. I am bored. I’m so bored I could watch paint dry and it would be a theater production. But being bored is better than being a failure.

Confusion lacing her voice, she says, “Failure?” I guess I said that aloud. But it was true. Because when I was little, I would play with words. I would spin them around, mash them together; blend them until they were beautiful: descriptions of flowery sunsets and clashing waves. I was real good at it too; I could make them say whatever I was thinking and feeling and they would listen, placing themselves in order right in front of my eyes. But as I grew, I started to see the truth. My words were useless. I could play with them all I want, mix them in any form or combination, and they still could do nothing for me. Because they weren’t practical: weren’t a good paying job. They were like my brother John, made out all his life to be a proper accountant like my father, only to throw it away for his own fickle music. He was a failure, said my father, a disappointment. Don’t be like him, he said. I won’t, I said. And I knew what I had to do. My words set me apart, distanced me, from the rest of the world. If I wasn’t with them, I could be useful. I could be a success. So I threw them away. They weighed me down, so I threw them away. Reality chased away reverie, practicality knocked out purpose, and I was left standing in the middle of an empty room, pressing my hands against my ears so tight that even the words I loved the most couldn’t get in.

But I won’t say all that.

All I’ll say is, “Yes, failure.” Then I’ll walk away; sit down at another cubicle, and work.

But seeing Des sitting here, hoping for me and believing for me, is killing me. Her ideas were always so crazy; so far out of left field that I could never agree to them. And she wouldn’t care; she would just laugh it off and come back with another the following week. But this idea, I
could tell, she wanted me to follow through on. The first day we met her eyes had held the most excitement I had ever seen, and now, they held an emotion just as intense: a deep-as-the-sea sincerity, begging me to believe her. She was reaching out to me, calling me back to a past so buried I could barely see it. And really, she was starting to convince me. Almost. Because the moment I looked from her eyes to my desk, reality clambered right back onto me and held me tighter than it ever had. Because my father was standing there, standing right behind my desk. He looked at me for a brief moment, as if analyzing my thoughts. Then, he turned to Des.

“I have your final paycheck in my office,” he says.

What?

“Thank you,” Des nods. She looks back at me, surprisingly emotionless, “I was just leaving.”

“Yes, of course,” he states, “Follow me.” He walks away down the hallway.

“I was thinking of quitting for a while,” Des says, looking at me with strong, unwavering eyes, “I didn’t know the exact day I would do it, but this morning I just felt like I had to go. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you earlier. I’m just . . . so tired of this place,” she smiles softly; “I thought maybe you were too.”

Des looks at me one last time, her warm chocolate eyes dancing with playfulness, “Don’t get into too much trouble once I’m gone.”

Then she turns, her sunshine yellow dress swishing as she walks.

I open my mouth to call out to her, to say my last goodbye, but nothing comes out. She turns the corner, and is gone. I plop down in my chair, staring at the cluttered surface of my desk. Slowly, with a trembling hand, I pick up the pen. My coworkers stare at me, at the glaring abnormality in the center of all normality. And I begin to write.
A man stumbles through a tightly-packed mass of people. He weaves through the crowd, clumsily but gracefully, haphazardly but surely. The man must be a very confused man, as he fights with the flow of the crowd, choosing to walk in the opposite direction they do. He dons an unpleasant mask of determination, one that envelopes his features and maneuvers his mind. And in his hand he carries a small piece of office stationary, words sloppily splashing its surface. The man reaches the edge of the road slowly, as if every step were a separate hurdle for him to leap. He grips the fence. And with creaking bones and shaking hands, the man begins to climb. Every step up is a dream; every foothold a memory. He remembers as he climbs, he remembers the words and he remembers the computers. They help him, curing him of the tiredness that was rooted in his mind. And when he hears the roar of the crowd below him, he does not falter. Instead, he gathers up his hopes and they push him higher and higher and higher. Then the man stops. Because he has reached the top of the fence. He looks out at the groves of trees that continue forever, spread out below him like a sea. He has never seen such trees, glistening and shining, each one radically different from the rest. There is no road; no path, and for a second, the man is scared. If there is no path, where should he go? If there is no one to follow, how will he walk? But then he clears his mind. He looks down at the words in his hand, and breathes a deep breath. Then he descends from the fence, venturing into the unknown.
Act two; scene two. Enter from stage left. Stand in group looking straight ahead and remember to face out. Listen for your prompt; it should be right after the introductions. Don’t trip in the dance this time; you almost fell off the stage last rehearsal and you really don’t need—

“Hey,” said a voice.

Yanking myself up and out of my thoughts, I snapped to attention.

“Scene two’s about to start,” my friend Rachel grinned, “We’d better get backstage.”

I took a deep gulp of air, glancing one last time at the outside world hiding behind the large school windows. And, with lines swirling and jumping in my skull, I followed Rachel down the narrow hallway to the backstage area. When we sat down on the battered wooden floor, I allowed myself to settle for a bit, thinking over the circumstances that had brought me there.

I was in seventh grade, which, just like most kids my age, I thought was the most difficult grade in the history of mankind. Between the overload of history notes assigned from Mr. Holden and the battering of grammar sheets given by Mrs. Boynton, I could barely survive the homework load, much less the impossibility that was Algebra class. Still, I had my yearly after-school activity schedule, and theater was near the top of that list. This year, we were performing Peter Pan, and after months of perfecting my lines and dances as one of the main Lost Boys, I thought I was ready. Well, at least I was through the entire first act. The second act, with its complicated dances and fight scenes, was where I was still a little unsure. So, when faced with the fact that its start was looming nearer and nearer, my twelve-year-old self was quickly losing what little confidence I had stored up during act one.
Rachel, taking a quick peek through one of the side curtains, whispered, “I think we’re about to start; the sound crew’s going to their seats.”

“Really?” I whispered back, “I thought they all were—“

“Shhh!” hissed a fifth grader, “You have to be quiet!”

I rolled my eyes. As nervous as I was, the theater fifth graders never ceased to annoy me. With their high-pitched voices and bratty remarks, and their habit of always telling us older kids what to do when they, in actuality, had no authority over us irritated me to no end. This one in particular had been bugging me as of late, since she had literally been shushing me for four consecutive rehearsals. But before I had a chance to speak my mind, we were on. My irritation instantly evaporated in pure anxiety as I strolled onto the stage, making sure I found my place correctly. As practiced, we formed a pyramid shape, waiting for the music to cue the start of our dance. I set my eyes above the crowd, avoiding their gazes that I knew could turn me to stone with a single moment of eye contact. And I waited. And waited. And waited. There was not a single sound in the entire auditorium. I glanced nervously toward the people in charge of sound. They were frantically pushing buttons, desperately attempting to cue up the music. Nothing happened.

My mind instantly erupted into utter chaos. This is it, I thought, this is the end. We’re just going to stand here until someone shuts the curtains and then everyone will boo us off the stage and they’ll all throw food at us and. . .

Suddenly, one of the kids up front moved. Sliding his feet behind him one after another, he moved backwards across the stage. Dimly awakening from my thoughts of the theater apocalypse, I squinted at him in confusion. Is he…doing the moonwalk? And then, as if awoken from a trance, the other kids started following suit. Two girls started a kick line. Another boy
started disco dancing. Four others tried something that looked like a mix between the Cotton Eyed Joe and the Macarena. And me? In all honesty, I don’t think I even did anything. I don’t think I could’ve done anything but stand there like I was, grinning like an idiot as the audience cheered for a group of kids dancing to nonexistent music. And when the song finally turned on and the play continued as scheduled, I was a little sad to see the moment go.

“That was actually pretty great,” I commented to Rachel as we exited the stage after the scene.

“Yeah, it really was,” she replied amiably.

“I think it helped me calm down a lot,” I said, “I feel so much less nervous now!”

It was true. The moment I had stopped taking everything so seriously and had simply enjoyed being on the stage was the moment my anxiety had just slipped away. I had spent so much time worrying about whether or not things would turn out the way I had planned that I had never stopped to think that maybe it would be better if they didn’t. And even though the nervousness wasn’t gone, and I didn’t think it ever completely would be, from that moment on it was no longer in control of me when I was on stage. With some calm breathing and carefree thoughts, I could allow the character I was playing to take its place instead. But I didn’t realize it then. All I realized then was that a fifth grader being able to exasperate me with a single sentence was actually pretty funny.
Surrealism
4/3/14

Crouching amidst the hushed ruins of the world, under the quickly diminishing shade of
dying Sycamore trees, there was a house. Its walls groaned with exhaustion, its rotting roof
forced out ragged breaths as it stretched out with its final fraction of remaining strength, and its
porch, littered with broken chairs and splintered floorboards, had been unconscious for quite
some time. It was a catastrophe: a complete abomination of a home; a hollowed-out shell almost
unfit to be lived in. The woman knew that, she honestly did. But really, she thought as she took
small, trepidant steps down the aging staircase, the place did have a certain charm to it. Dainty
long-legged spiders pranced along the ceiling beams, the moth-eaten curtains always filtered in
just the right amount of sunlight, and if she tilted her head slightly to one side, her attic of junk,
residue left over from when she had a family to look after, had a definite artistic arrangement to
it, a sort of chaotic organization. She’d probably paint it someday, when she got the time. That’s
what they would have wanted her to do, she guessed, the art school people. Every class they had
gone on and on about it, about that moment, that sharp instant of clarity that slices through your
mind when you create that perfect painting, the masterpiece of your lifetime. Inspiration, they
had called it. Lowering herself slowly down at the paint-covered dining room table, she tried the
word out on her tongue, mumbling it so softly not even the sycamore trees could hear. Hmm. It
was an ugly word, really, a word filled to the brim with promised hope. And if there was one
thing the woman had learned throughout her lifetime, it was that hope got you nowhere. It got
you a broken-down house, some paints, and a life-supply of loneliness that could kill with a
single glance. But it was okay, because she was happy. She was comfortable in nowhere, wasn’t
she? With a sigh, she lifted herself off the table. Time to get to work, she supposed. Gathering
herself up and out of her thoughts, the woman made her way down the water-stained hall to her
office, softly humming a tune she had long ago forgotten the name of. What, she wondered, could she possibly work on today? Her watercolors were polluted with murky brown, her pastels were scattered around the house in a never-ending game of hide-and-seek, and the portrait of her grandmother she had begun to attempt had been destroyed; smashed apart in a blind fit of artist’s rage. She hadn’t meant for it to be ruined, but she’d been having a bad day. One of her angry days, in fact. As the woman’s thoughts rambled endlessly on inside her cluttered mind, her eyes were drawn suddenly to the bottom of the staircase. Standing on the bottom step, with feet spread slightly but firmly apart was the man. The woman looked down at her shoes. She had known he would come eventually, but she had thought today was going to be a good day. She guessed she wasn’t the best judge of how things were supposed to go.

“Hello, Katherine,” smirked the man, leaning on the banister, “I thought I would find you in your office.”

Katherine glanced up, meeting his eyes in a second of passive defiance. Then, as she usually did, she reached out to shake his hand. He’d be here all day now; she knew there was no use in ignoring him. She wasn’t even surprised when her hand phased through his, since it was always what happened. No matter how much she pretended otherwise, Ross just simply wasn’t there.

“Quiet today, aren’t we? Are you still thinking about that painting of yours? You know, the bluish-green one?” he prompted.

Ah, the painting. She’d been trying not to think about. Of course he had to bring it up. It was one of her trial paintings, one that started out as an impressionism of her garden, then merged into an abstract of a butterfly, then exploded into a still-life of the dining room table. Katherine didn’t know what it was; she didn’t even think it would know what it was if it were
alive. At the time, she had presumed it would figure itself out someday, but now, when her only other work-in-progress had been reduced to the equivalent of yesterday’s leftovers, she had no choice but to finish it. And that, she reckoned, would be an absolutely horrendous task. There was really nothing worse than working on a painting you despised. “Come on Kat, it’s not that bad,” said Ross, his eyes sparkling, “Just think of all the other paintings you’ve done. This one’s nowhere near as bad. Remember that one you did of me? Terrible!”

She did remember that one. She had painted that one when Ross was still here; when he wasn’t rotting somewhere in some far-off cemetery that she knew she would never visit. She had liked him before; had loved him, even, but now she couldn’t recall why. The only Ross she could remember was the apparition: the fake. The one that never left her alone. Ross leaned over her shoulder, “You know what, Katherine? I think I’m going to watch you paint today. Maybe it’ll finally be worthwhile and you’ll be able to leave here,” he smiled, watching her face as she shrunk back in fear. No…no…no…she couldn’t let him do that. Her paintings were all she kept from him; they were all that he never got to see. They were her privacy, her own separate space where she could let herself be free from everything, her meadow seated calmly in the midst of his cynical accusations, her valley between the mountains of his criticism. They were the only thing that held her porcelain mind together, the only thing that kept it from shattering from his words. Katherine knew, with all her heart, that if he took them away now, she would break. And she wouldn’t survive it this time. So, with her paintbrush held tight between her fingers, she uttered a single, firm word; the first word she had said in years.

“No.”

Ross stared at her, eyes filling with wonder. He stepped back, limbs shaking, and gave her an utterly bewildered look. For once, he was lost for words. Quickly, as if she were recalled
by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung up in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did it matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the center. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.

Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse
As far-off phosphorescent lights flickered on and off through the night sky, teasing the moon for its isolation from them, a boy sat dangling his legs off the edge of the world. The cliff he rested on was cluttered, made up of thousands of mashed-up words, words that ran like ink off its rocky surface with the slightest touch of his finger. His parents had told him not to touch the words, he recalled. But now he was the only one left, and they were gone. So they couldn’t have been very smart, he figured. No, not like he was. With an exasperated sigh that reeked of boredom, the boy heaved himself up to a standing position. He had really started to grow tired of this world. Where it had once been bountiful, meaningful, and filled to the brim with an insurmountable beauty and intrigue, it was now dull, a drab display of blacks and grays with worthless patterns and arrangements of broken letters dotting his every surrounding. But it was okay, really. He was going to end the suffering as soon as he could. With an air of ultimate finality coming over him, he raised his hand in the air, forming a familiar pose with his fingers. And he snapped. Then the boy turned his back, calmly strolling away from the dying world behind his shoulders.

Offset by the cluttered background of his bedroom combined with the first few colors of the morning, a man abruptly awoke. His body jerked upward without warning, causing him to instantaneously collide with the shelf above his head. Swearing softly, he dropped back onto the bed, utterly defeated by the shelf’s sudden violence. He had known the decision to put that there was a bad one, with all the unexpected awakenings he’d been experiencing lately. Really, the number of times he’d hit that thing was starting to amount to a ridiculous value. Groaning, the
man rolled out of bed. One glance at the silver-lined clock on the wall, and he knew that he had overslept. Again. With a drunken sway in his step, the sleep-shrouded man stumbled towards the stairs, thoughts of work and responsibility overtaking his mind. But no matter how much he lingered on them, he just couldn’t rid himself of the feeling that he was forgetting something important.

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The boy yawned, stretching his limbs out in a way that seemed over exaggerated, even to him. It had certainly been a long day. For a reason he wasn’t completely sure of, his usual work activities of granting creation and approving destruction, forming life and establishing death, and judging those fit to live and those not, were not satisfying him like they ordinarily did. He assumed his mother would have told him it was remorse, that he was regretting his actions. But the boy knew that it was impossible: he’d stopped feeling anything but numb satisfaction and boredom since she had gone. Unnecessary emotions like regret couldn’t find him anymore; he’d made sure that he’d gone at least that deep into his mind. His mind huh . . . He looked around the cavern he had found himself in, at the poems and letters splattered like insects on windshields all over its shadowy walls. If this really was his mind, the boy thought, then why would it feel so real? The devoted cheering of the people when he created a world; the power circling his fingertips after an act of destruction; the overwhelming knowledge that he and he alone could decide the fate of the universe; it couldn’t be created, couldn’t be replicated. Yes, he confirmed to himself, relief flooding through him, it had to be real. He was the appointed supremacy of the people, both their granter of life and harbinger of death, as he had always been. He was their God. And God, he knew, could never be wrong.

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The man, settling down in his familiar cubicle, sighed a deep, heavy sigh. Here he was again, staring at the same computer screen in the same room at the same office, ready to relinquish his mind to the same monotony he had been experiencing for years. Still, it was monotony that paid well. Deciding this with yet another deep exhale, the man forced his eyes down at the stack of papers on his desk. His vision was automatically greeted by piles of numbers upon numbers, endless values riddled with dollar signs. Really, he didn’t know what he had been expecting. He was in accounting, after all. Just one lone paper pusher in a herd of obedient sheep, all flocking around those lucky enough to be the shepherds. That’s how he liked to think of it, anyway. Picking up one of the papers, he tried to focus on the work at hand. Clearing his mind, the man looked over the complicated calculations, attempting without avail to make himself interested. The values swam in his mind, blurredly focusing in and out. Finally, after two or three minutes of his failed work endeavors, he put the sheet down. Leaning back in his chair, the man did what he usually did when work was too much, when he just couldn’t bear being an average, ordinary, invisible face a moment longer. He shut off his mind. And drifted off to a place where he wasn’t.

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The boy, in a sluggish, slow movement, awoke to a flickering stream of daylight shining in through his cave’s ceiling opening. With the blindfold of sleep still obscuring his vision, he blinked sleepily in dulled surprise. It had been raining for the past few weeks above his cave, strumming rhythms of silvery strings that had formed a constant background beat to everything he had been doing. Now, with the silence sitting tangibly in the air, he felt off somehow, as if its sudden removal signified some kind of change in the atmosphere. A bit on edge, he sat up, examining the walls. They were the same as usual, the poems he had written long ago plastered
on their surfaces. He snorted. He really did wish he could remove the things. They were from a
time when he was ordinary, was unimportant and impractical. Tearing his gaze off of their
inadequacy, he got up to venture outside, yawning as he went. The boy threw open his wooden
door carelessly, causing the hinges to squeal loudly in protest, and was greeted with a rather
peculiar surprise. A mirror stood completely upright facing him. It was a meek, cheap-looking
mirror, with a simple wooden frame, gilded gold edges, and a flat sheet of fractured glass making
up its surface. It was a small object, one that only came up to the boy’s waist in height, and
measured a little longer than his waistline in width. Peering at it suspiciously, the boy gave it a
small light touch. It felt like a normal mirror, but if that was so, why was it here? And then again,
how was it standing up on its own like it was? The boy bent over, crouching down to the mirror’s
level to get a better look at it. And suddenly, as if he were ensnared in an unseen trap, the boy’s
eyes caught his own reflection. Gasping, he fell back. It was a face. Only a face, surrounded by
white, without a head, a neck, or even a body. It stared back at him with the same shock he knew
was spreading across his features, distorting them with fear. But the face, it wasn’t his. It was a
man’s. He was in his forties, it looked like, and abruptly, as if someone had flicked a switch, it
changed. Morphing as if in a flip book, more faces started to appear. Millions and millions of
them, all with the same basic features as the man, with his average haircut, average eyes, and
average face structure. The boy buried his head in his hands, shaking it wildly. He couldn’t look
at them, he just couldn’t. They reminded him, too much; they were just too familiar. Squeezing
his eyes shut, the boy felt his world crashing down. His importance, his achievements, his
accomplishments all disappearing, gone with a snap of the fingers. He wasn’t powerful, he
wasn’t a god. He was just a man in an office, closing his eyes to forget about the paperwork on
his desk. With a final burst of realization, the boy screamed. And disappeared, just an illusion of an overly imaginative, ridiculously mediocre mind.

The man’s eyes shot open, alarm filling his features. Had he fallen asleep during work again? Dread overtaking him, he risked a glance at the clock. Two hours he didn’t remember had taken their place on the hour hand. Crap! His hands shot to his head in a gesture of utter panic. He quickly collected his paperwork, attempting to at least pretend he had accomplished something. Scribbling as fast as he could, the man resumed work. He really had to stop daydreaming and actually get something done for once. That was all he could do he supposed, finish his paperwork as a part of the flock, partaking in the normality that the life of a sheep such as himself had no choice but to accept. He sighed, thinking ahead to the discussion he would have to have with his boss later that day about the unfinished papers. It was going to be a rough afternoon, and, he knew, an overwhelmingly average one. But maybe, for once, he was okay with that. Normality, he had come to realize, as unspectacular and unexciting as it was seemed to suit him. It humbled him, making him feel as if he had others to relate to, as if he weren’t so alone anymore. That single, simple thought helped the man pick up his pencil, and face the day in front of him for the first time in years.
CHARACTERS

JOYCE, an overly nervous sixteen-year-old girl attempting to pass a driver’s test

EXAMINER, a hulking mountain of a man who works as a driving test examiner

Act 1 Scene 1

A used, old-looking Toyota Camry is parked near the front entrance of a moderately full parking lot, its exterior glinting in the intensely bright summer sun. The air around it swelters in the heat, making it a truly torturous day to be outside. A man, large both in size and stature, stands with folded arms next to it, an impatient expression staining his features. His scowling appearance seems to fit him comfortably, as if he has looked like that forever and cannot remember looking another way. He looks at his watch, as if waiting for something. Suddenly, as if on cue, a girl runs on.

She looks to be of teenage age, and looks to be in quite a hurry. Her disheveled hair and haphazardly thrown on sweatshirt and jeans signify her to have dressed in a rush, and her demeanor, although attempting to be business-like, is clearly flustered.

JOYCE [panting heavily, perhaps over-exaggeratedly, she waves the man over]  Sir! Hello, um, excuse me sir but do you maybe know where the driving test is taking place? I think I’m lost. You see, this morning I woke up really late and—

EXAMINER [Gruffly, ignoring her]  Driver’s test?

JOYCE [Shut down, she blinks confusedly]  Uh, yeah.

EXAMINER [Flipping through clipboard papers]  Are you [butchering the pronunciation] Joyce Stafford?

JOYCE  Yeah I—

EXAMINER  You’re thirty minutes late.

JOYCE  Have never heard that name in my life!

EXAMINER  [With the exhaustion only someone who’s worked endless years as a driving examiner can have]  Just get in the car
JOYCE [Suddenly panicked, she tries evasive maneuvers] But I... I can’t! See I, uh, see I have this condition where I can’t drive when—

EXAMINER [Gets in passenger seat of Camry and slams the door]

JOYCE [Knowing it was inevitable but is still unprepared, she walks slowly toward the car and gets in. With ease, she buckles her seatbelt and turns the ignition key, successfully starting the car. She starts to drive.]

EXAMINER [Scribbling on clipboard] Mmhmm. [Looks up as if evaluating the road ahead. Scribbles something else.] Yes, hmmm, yes.

JOYCE [Growing increasingly uncomfortable] Um, should I turn here, or what? I think you’re supposed to give me directions…

EXAMINER [Without taking eyes off paper] Left, left, then a quick right

JOYCE [Obey. There is a brief moment of silence. Then, as if she cannot take it anymore:] So...how’s your family? Another pause. When she doesn’t get an answer; Do have a wife? A third pause Any kids?

EXAMINER No. Why would I want kids? All I ever see are kids.

JOYCE Well, I don’t know, they’re fun I guess. If you have kids you can play with them, go on trips to the zoo…

EXAMINER [Mumbling to himself] They never shut up, all the kids I see. Just keep thinkin’ I wanna make conversation and have small talk.

JOYCE [Hearing him] Well it’s a good thing I’m not like that, right? [Without waiting for a response] Oh hey! It’s a dirt road! Are you sure you want me to turn here? Seems kinds sketchy.

EXAMINER [Monotone] It’s just a cut-through. Merges into traffic on the other side. [Looks back down at clipboard]

JOYCE All right, got it. [Glances over at clipboard] Am I doing okay?

EXAMINER [Silently makes large mark on paper]

JOYCE [Wincses. Then suddenly, the car jerks forward. A screeching sound is heard from the front of the car] Whoa! Did’ja hear that?

EXAMINER [Fully looks up from clipboard for the first time since they got in the car] Broke down again. Figures. [Growing grave, a deep expression forming on his features] You can never trust a car salesman.
JOYCE So should I…?

EXAMINER [Snapping out of the seemingly grim flashback he was having] Pull over and get out of the car.

JOYCE You don’t need to tell me twice. [Gets out along with EXAMINER]

EXAMINER [Opens up car hood. Instantly smoke comes billowing up. The complex inner mechanisms of the car creak and smash against each other]

JOYCE Well it doesn’t look that bad. If you ignore the noxious gases rising from it and the fact that it’s about to catch on fire, I mean.

EXAMINER [Growling with annoyance] We’ll just have to call a tow truck. All you kids have those cell phones nowadays don’t ya? With all the Googles and such?

JOYCE Uh yeah, I think I have my phone on me. Let’s see. . .[Pulls out cell phone] Yup here we go! [She tries to turn it on, but to no avail] Never mind, I think it’s out of battery. . . Sorry. [She cringes, as if bracing herself for EXAMINER’s reaction]

EXAMINER [Realizing they’re all out of options, he begins to get angry. Then as if a switch was flipped, he takes a deep breath and calms down considerably] Fine. Then we’ll walk. A gas station couldn’t be too far could it?

JOYCE Right, but um…

EXAMINER What? What’s the problem now?

JOYCE This is kinda weird isn’t it?

EXAMINER What you mean?

JOYCE Well, you’ve heard of stranger danger right? You know, how people always tell you not to go off with people you just met, for oh, I don’t know, [narrow her eyes at EXAMINER] a walk on a dirt road through the woods, per say.

EXAMINER [Exasperated] Oh, come on! How else are we going to get back? Why are kids like you always so difficult!?

JOYCE [Giving EXAMINER an accusatory look] Hmmm. I knew you were gonna say that. It’s what they always say. I’ve seen it in all the movies. The murderer always drops that line right before killing the victim! Then they chop them up, and hide them under the floorboards!

EXAMINER [Utterly stupefied] Wha— you think I’m some kinda physchopath or something?
JOYCE Well you *do* hate kids. And I can see it, definitely. One day, you’re just really tired of your job and the kids and you just snap! You fake a car breakdown, and when the poor innocent kid’s caught off guard you just take revenge. You take all those boring, pointless hours; all those torturous repeats of saying left, right, stop and you put them all into the act and—

EXAMINER *[Legitimately angry now, he yells]* QUIET! Ya know what? Each year I see hundreds of teenagers. Their hopes are high, their brains are full of knowledge, and their heads are held as high as they can reach them cause in their minds, they think they’re better than me. They always say they’ll do better, that they couldn’t possibly be dumb or unlucky enough to be that guy, to be that driving test guy.

JOYCE You almost done? We’re running out of script time.

EXAMINER *[Continuing as if she never interrupted]* I sit here every day watching their faces and seeing them think it and whenever they leave, they leave knowing I’m here rotting away and that they’re not. You’re one of them. And ya know what? I think it’s time for me to start thinking I’m better than you. So as much as you want me to, I’m not leaving you here. I’ll just wait it out until you’re ready.

JOYCE *[Stunned, is quiet for a moment. Then slowly and hesitantly, she smiles]* I knew you had something you wanted to say. All it took was a little push from me. Okay, let’s get going!
“When you open your hands to catch and wind up with only blisters and bruises; when you step out of the phone booth and try to fly and the very people you want to save are the ones standing on your cape; when your boots will fill with rain, and you’ll be up to your knees in disappointment. Those are the very days you have all the more reason to say thank you. Because there's nothing more beautiful than the way the ocean refuses to stop kissing the shoreline, no matter how many times it's sent away.”

-Sarah Kay; “B”
Imitation of Hanging Fire by Audre Lorde

3/19/14

I am fifteen
and I am confused
What am I doing and
where am I going and
why do I need to decide?
They point at the fluttering papers, saying
“Pick one”
but when I reach, they shove me away
Who do they think I am?

I walk to the beat of Routine’s rhythm
and stumble to the tune of Normality
But when Reverie calls I dance along so
Who am I trying to impress?

The second hand ticks and the hour hand tocks
and decisions tug at my hair
They scramble my mind and scoop out
my thoughts until
all I know is what I don’t
Where are they taking me and
why isn’t it where I want to go?
Isn’t it a little strange how people nowadays view the future?

They take one look at its wide veiled face and say “That’s gotta be bad” when not even thirty years ago people looked at it seeing flying cars and hoverboards in its smile. Zombies and tyrannies have risen where the Jetsons have fallen, And Future, with its shadowy robes and long legs has begun to take up just a little too much of our vision.

In this era, one where NECAP, MAP and now interim are jumping onto us like little kids into a leaf pile, this change might be a little more than we can handle.

We feel it in the halls, creeping up behind us and gripping our shoulders.

We hear the whispers of its name in our ears as we frantically scribble down answers, the drumbeat rhythm of “future, future, future” that doesn’t seem to go away. We see it, its arms rising, its body cloaking, choking us.

This future. I don’t think I can handle this future.
Knowledge ≠ Thought

4/27/14
Reflection

“Ultimately, Creative Writing was an extremely interesting course, one that I would without hesitation recommend to anyone with a love for words”

-Emily McNeiece
An Overview of the Creative Writing Experience

6/3/14

Throughout the entirety of the Creative Writing curriculum, I have learned a great deal of information concerning new writing techniques, poetry concepts, and different writing styles that I can utilize in my later assignments. Last year, I had selected the class Creative Writing because writing had always been an enjoyable hobby for me; a way to decrease the stress caused by a buildup of projects, homework, and tests. However, sometimes I wouldn’t have enough time to write all the stories that I wanted to, with extracurricular activities and school taking up the majority of my spare time. So, as a result, I decided to enroll myself in Creative Writing, a class that would finally force me to write the stories that I wanted while still balancing them with school. To continue, personally, my goal for the semester was to attempt to introduce and develop characters more effectively, something I knew was lacking in many of my previous writing pieces. In turn, I began to focus my stories more and more on their characters. This undoubtedly was a decision that was beneficial to my progress as a writer, as I noticed that my stories began to have characters with varying personalities and interesting thoughts. Although writing these character traits does not come easily to me, I feel that I was able to meet my goal of making my characters more interesting to the audience.

Within Creative Writing, my personal favorite assignment this semester was indisputably the short story assignment. Specifically, I enjoyed the fact that I was permitted to write about anything I chose, and was able to put an idea down on paper that had been in my mind for a while that I had never previously had the time to flesh out. This writing freedom and the fact that I wasn’t restricted to writing solely about one particular subject gave me the option of exploring themes that I never had before, therefore assisting my growth as a writer. However, my least
favorite assignment in Creative Writing was most likely the composition of a one act play. Since I usually prefer to have more descriptions than dialogue in my stories, this was very difficult for me, as I was required to write in a different style than I was used to. And this style, one where my characters thoughts have to be conveyed through conversation, caused the quality of the story I was attempting to portray to drop significantly, as the characters did not know each other well and were hesitant about telling the other their inner thoughts. Furthermore, a common theme that revealed itself within my writing was the theme of change. In my stories, I communicated the fact that people eventually become accustomed to their lives, not realizing the goals and desires they’ve let go of along the way. However, if these goals are recalled, they can change their lives for the better, an act that is often very difficult for them. Next, in taking Creative Writing, I gained a new appreciation for professional writing works, especially poetry. Previously, I had not been much of a poetry reader, and therefore was unfamiliar with the many different genres of the medium. However, with the introduction of poetry I experienced in class, I was able to be exposed to many different kinds of poems, including free verse, spoken word, and found poetry. Additionally, this class has also altered my perception of myself as a writer. Previously, I knew that I enjoyed writing and wanted to do more of it, but I was unsure if my writing was good or not. But by taking this class, I was able to see that although my writing has a long way to go before being professional, that it is actually of acceptable quality.

Moreover, I have definitely improved as a writer throughout the semester by taking this class. One area I have enhanced through my studies is my descriptive language. As a result of the practice and experience I had in this class, I was able to sharpen my vocabulary and word use when illustrating a scene. In the future, because of these newly found skills, I will most likely continue to write short stories, as I have found that I enjoy writing them as a result of this class.
In fact, this class recently motivated me to write a short story for a local writing contest, which I ended up getting second in, earning me a hefty sum of $500. Continuing on, one thing I would change about the class was perhaps writing less poetry and more short stories. As I enjoy writing short stories more, this is just a personal preference, but is really the only thing I can think of that I would want changed. Ultimately, Creative Writing was an extremely interesting course, one that I would without hesitation recommend to anyone with a love for words.