

GUILD OF YOUNG WRITERS

SHORT
STORIES

POETRY

POETRY PROMPTS

BOOK
RECOMMENDATIONS

VOLUME #16

SPRING/
SUMMER
2025

Story Studio Writing Society is located on the traditional territories of the **WSÁNEĆ** and Lkwungen-speaking peoples. We respectfully acknowledge and thank the Lkwungen People, also known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations communities, for allowing us to live, work, learn, play and create on their lands.

Through the work we do on the territory, we are accountable to the following communities: Esquimalt, Songhees, **STÁUTW** (Tsawout), **WJOLELP** (Tsartlip), **BOKEĆEN** (Pauquachin), **MÁLEXEŁ** (Malahat), **WSÍKEM** (Tseycum), T'Sou-ke Nation, Scia'new Nation and Nuu-chah-nulth: Pacheedaht Nations.

We acknowledge that the historical relationship to the land and territories of these peoples continues to this day.

As an education based organization, we recognize that we have the responsibility to work towards truth and reconciliation, and to remain open to suggestions, consultations, and partnerships, especially with local Indigenous communities and organizations, on how our organization can continue to work towards reconciliation.

We hope that Story Studio's programing and publications create a safe, welcoming and engaging environment for all people, including Indigenous peoples.

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VICTORIA FOUNDATION

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Editor's Note

It's hard to believe we are halfway through spring and ready to roll into summer already. This year has been a busy one for many of our members, and for Story Studio as well!

This group of young writers is constantly exceeding my expectations with their words and creativity. Aside from the writing shared in this zine, we have had such incredible participation in our weekly writing prompts as a group, as well as sharing personal writing for feedback from others.

Behind the scenes conversations have been so rich and diverse, from planning and discussing

new story ideas, to working through different story ending options, building new characters, and taking a look back at past writing to inspire new stories. It's wonderful to see the support members provide one another, and the inspiration they share.

I look forward to seeing new and old members come together over the summer for Summer Writing Studio, and regroup with the Guild in the fall with Marja as I head into maternity leave. I will miss writing with this talented bunch.



Rebecca Ruiter

PROGRAM COORDINATOR



Get to know the Authors

Would you rather stick to writing one genre or dabble in a few?

I would dabble in a few (or several)! Although I mainly like to write fantasy and adventure-heavy stories, I like to explore different genres and learn how my writing style changes with each one! I think my writing would start to feel stale if I was confined to only one genre for too long.
-Kat

I would rather stay in one genre. Almost all the stories I write (and read) are fantastical. In the future, I would like to experiment with other genres, but right now fantasy is definitely my favorite.
-Myah

I would rather write in multiple genres! I love combining different writing styles and I would get bored just sticking to one thing. Exploring and learning about different things is so important and so fun.
-Abby

I could never stay in one genre! In fact, my own stories tend to straddle many different styles of writing.
-Raine

I honestly only stay in one genre: realistic fiction. I like writing one genre because I can be really good at it, as opposed to writing multiple where I can never really get a handle on all of them.
-Daisy



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

What we're reading and loving these days

Home by Whitney Hanson

Elsewhere by Gabrielle Zevin

The Cardboard Kingdom: Snow and Sorcery by Chad Sell

High: A journey across the Himalayas through Pakistan,

India, Bhutan, Nepal and China by Erika Fatland

On Writing by Stephen King

Fresh Start by Gale Gilligan

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by Marjane Satrapi

The Other Valley by Scott Alexander Howard

A Study in Drowning by Ava Reid

***Home* by Whitney Hanson** is a great book to read when you are dealing with the aftermath of a breakup or grief or if you've lost someone who's important to you. It's a great way to heal and understand what's happened and where you can go from there. She's encapsulated so many emotions and manages to really convey that to the audience while bringing a sort of authenticity to her writing as well. You can really connect with her work as well as being inspired by it. I would recommend this book to any poet, any person dealing with grief or any person who just wants to have a little bit of hope amongst the hurt in this world.





Possibilities

A Persuasive Speech by Raine Hermosa

Picking what to do after high school feels like an unsolvable burden. How can I reduce my whole life and dreams and wishes into one school, and one program. Since I was a young child, I never grasped onto one passion, I never really became one person. I became an artist, musician, a writer. I spend all my time learning and learning, finding parts of the world I didn't know about before and desperately wishing I could do everything. Well, you can't do everything, but why limit yourself? You don't have to force yourself to stick to one job for your whole life and not do anything else. Every day you have the opportunity to try new things and explore new possibilities, you just have to start.

Each one of my interests that I have picked up have always come back around to help me down the line. I started my writing journey in the summer of 2021, when I signed up for a summer writing program that would culminate in our stories being published in an anthology. I had never really worked on stories that seriously beforehand, but I ended up being published in the anthology that year, and I've stayed with the group till this day.

When I started writing songs with lyrics I easily transitioned from writing poetry and stories to now adding music into the mix. Creating stories helped my music composition because I now see my art as more than just a singular thing.

Having multiple passions gives you power. Innovation and creativity comes from connecting the dots, pulling ideas from all facets of your repertoire. When you're able to bridge your vast knowledge together, that's what will make you stand out. The world needs people who don't limit themselves, those who practice seeing from multiple perspectives by pushing themselves to constantly reinvent themselves.

Just like how listening to an immense variety of music genres is what inspired me to write music how I do. From electronic, jazz, classical, including artists from all around the world, let my music be limitless and undefined, not bounded by one style but a plethora of influences, which keeps it fresh and unique.

Writing led me to the opportunity to practice live storytelling and public speaking, being invited as a guest speaker at the Belfry Theatre and UVIC Five days of action, thanks to the people I was introduced to, people who believed in me. Pursuing a variety of interests doesn't have to be a solitary pursuit. Being part of so many different fields of study and passions has blessed me with so many welcoming communities, local musicians, my writers group, cosplay and arcade goers, and all of my teachers and mentors. If you're struggling to find friendship, or if you're feeling isolated, the club or hobby you're thinking of joining might just be the key. From there your connections can grow, as you'll continually be introduced to others, which brings more opportunities that you couldn't even dream of.

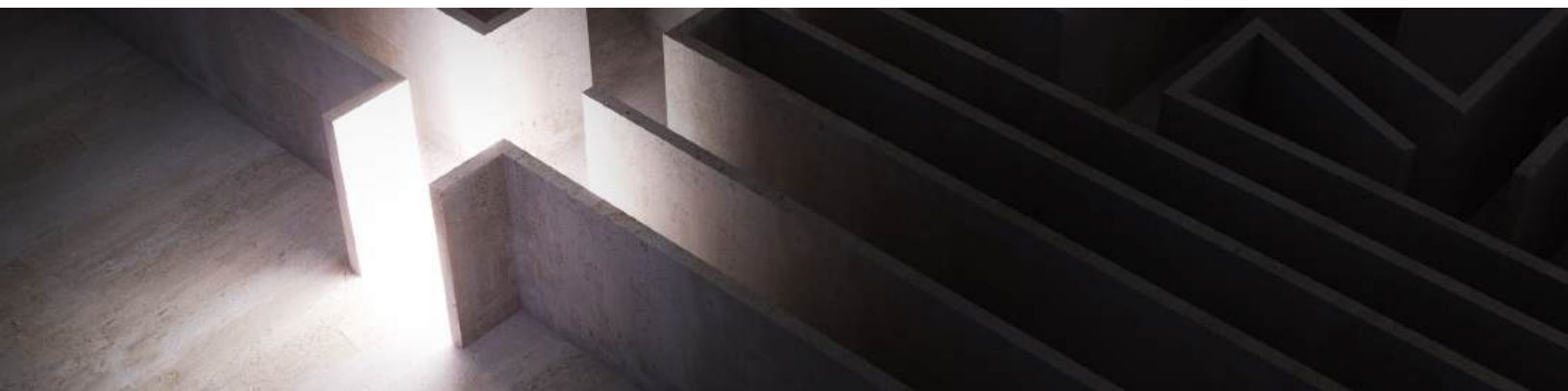
Don't shy away from doing something new. Maybe you're not sure if you'll be successful, or you're embarrassed to share it with others, or you think your life doesn't have room for it. But what if it does? People think that constantly trying new things and not staying focused would make you feel confused, unsure about your identity. In my experience however, the more I discover new things about myself, the more I know who I am. Every time my life changes, I learn about how I retain information, what keeps me engaged and what doesn't. Put that all together and you have a more detailed sample of the ins and outs, what's true and what's not true about me. Common belief is that our lives are only defined by a select few things, but in reality, our identities are intersectional and multi-faceted, the only way to discover all of it is to put yourself out there and find it.

I'm currently planning on studying music composition in university, but I know for sure that I can't fit my whole life into one school. That's because I won't limit myself. I'll be involved in my community, I won't hide, I will be proud of everything I've explored and everything I've picked up. I'll keep cosplaying, writing stories, writing songs, travelling, drawing and volunteering, however I can. I know that by honouring who I am, I can take myself further than I ever thought possible.

Sources:

Fisher, Tamara. "Multipotentiality." EducationWeek, 11 August 2010, <https://www.edweek.org/education/opinion-multipotentiality/2010/08>.

Wapnick, Emilie, and TED Talks, directors. Why some of us don't have one true calling? 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sZdcB6bjl8>.





Selfish

A SHORT STORY BY DAISY BROWN

“JUNE’S my roommate?” I practically scream. This is the absolute worst nightmare I could imagine.

I have to go to Sleepaway Camp every year for at least a week, according to Mom. It’s the same one, every time, Strathcona Camp. But I didn’t expect June to come as well.

I sprawl my suitcase out in the middle of the floor and groan. “Move your stuff,” orders June like I’m her servant.

“You can easily step around it.”

“This is absolutely ridiculous. I can’t believe I ended up as your roommate. Of all people.”

You can say that again.

My nose wrinkles as if I’ve smelled something bad. “We have to sleep TOGETHER?”

“Stop screaming!” June screams.

I start folding clothes and think about how this will be the most torturous, tiring, annoying week ever.

June’s my best friend from fifth grade. We used to be really, really close until something happened that changed our friendship forever. I’m in 8th grade now, and I still haven’t forgiven her for it.

We still go to the same school, but we’ve each branched out and gone our separate ways. We don’t really run into each other that much anymore.

“What’s the point of all this, Willow?” she asks.

“Point of what?”

“Hating each other.”

“Well, you haven’t apologized for what you’ve done,” I say.

I hear a sigh come out of June. “How many times do I have to tell you that your feelings aren’t always the most important thing?”

I decide to change the subject. “You should get unpacking. We’re doing group games soon.” I still have flashbacks to that day in 5th grade. I was at my locker, getting my stuff. June had a locker beside me. The biggest boy in the entire grade started walking up to me.

“Hey, I noticed you got braces.”

“I got them a few days ago and I was hoping no one would notice.”

“You look really *weird*.”

Then, all at once, his five friends popped out and chanted, “Who is the metal mouth? Will-ow!” I was too embarrassed and ashamed to say anything. My face burned and all I could do was look down and try not to cry.

I knew it shouldn’t have, but it really hurt me. I looked over at June, mystified that she didn’t say something. She was sitting right there, hearing what the boy was saying, and she didn’t *want* to say anything in my defense. It especially hurt because she knew how self conscious I was of those. I know that if somebody had said that to her, I would have done something. I would have told that boy to back off. I would have tried to comfort her. Instead, she just shook her head and went to her next class. Like it didn’t matter.

June brings me back to the present. “Here are your two drawers.”

“Don’t put any of your clothes in my drawers. I don’t know where they’ve been.”

“They’ve been in the washing machine! Seriously, Willow.”

“*Seriously, June*,” I mock.

“DO YOU WANT TO HATE EACH OTHER FOR THE NEXT WEEK?” The loudness of her voice startles me. “BECAUSE I SURE DON’T!”

Ugh. We’re going to have another screaming fight. We haven’t had one in a while, but I still remember all the times that June tried to make it right with me. We had so many talks about what happened and none of them ended well. I just didn’t want to listen. I thought that there was no excuse for her behavior.

“Why won’t you try to fix things with me?” I see that instead of anger, she has tears coming down.

I begin to soften a little towards her, but I still don't want to budge. "Because, June, what you did hurt me. A lot."

"And you don't think it hurt me too?"

"Why would it hurt you? All you did was stand by the lockers and watch. Like a... like a... like a coward!"

"I'm a shier person than you are, Willow, and you know that there were other things on my mind at the time." That silences me. "My mother was very, very sick. I didn't know how to help her. I would hold her shaking hand and..." she takes a deep exhale and for a minute I don't know if she'll continue. "And I knew that she was going to die soon."

I'm blinking back tears myself. *Don't cry! Don't cry for June Bowman!* But I can't resist. Tears fall down my cheeks and I don't know what to say or do.

"And you thought that what a boy said about your braces was the most important thing."

Suddenly, the whole world is spinning. I understand now. I understand. There was a selfish one, and it was me.

"Maybe it finally worked," June said in shock.

"What worked?"

"Maybe I finally got you to listen."

Just hearing those words makes me feel even more guilty. I can't imagine if my mother died right in front of my eyes. "Do you miss her?" My voice comes out hoarse. I reach for a tissue and blow my nose.

"What do you think?" June snaps, but I can see behind the hard stare that she really appreciated the question.

I take a deep, shaking breath before I finally say it: "I'm sorry. I should have realized... the pain you were in."

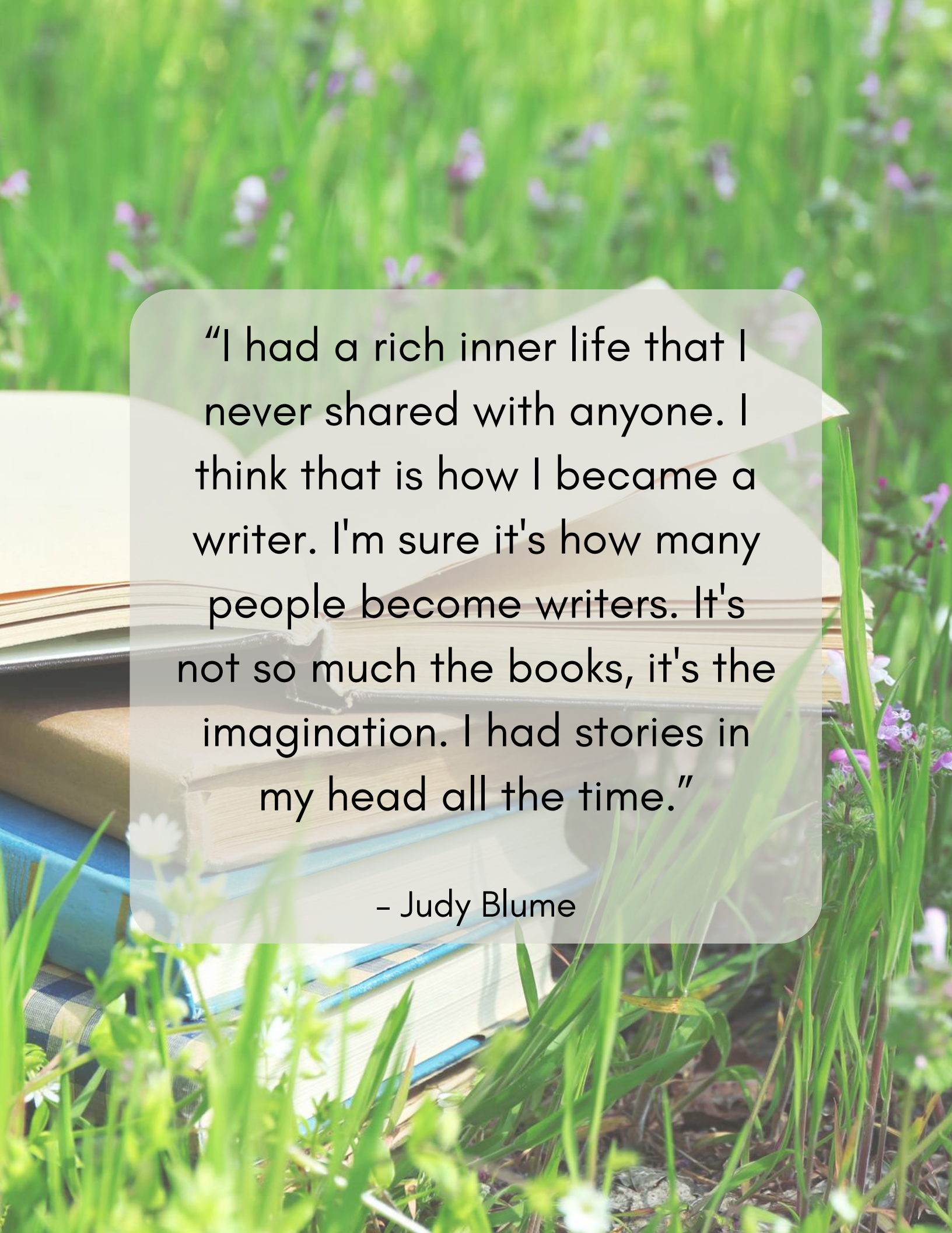
June gave a small smile and then reached out for a hug. "See? How hard was that?"

"Very hard," I say honestly. "But I'm glad I did it."

"Me too."

A camp leader knocks on our door, only to find two snotty, teary girls. "You two okay?"

I can't help but give a wide grin and say, "Couldn't be better."



"I had a rich inner life that I never shared with anyone. I think that is how I became a writer. I'm sure it's how many people become writers. It's not so much the books, it's the imagination. I had stories in my head all the time."

- Judy Blume

THE END: BORN TO BUT NOT LIVING

AN EXCERPT

BY SAMANTHA L.D. MARTIN

READ THE FIRST 5 CHAPTERS OF SAMANTHA'S
STORY IN OUR SPRING TO FALL ISSUES

Chapter Six: Stalag Fifteen

We all walk onto the train with our nerves fully intact. Despite the seriousness of the situation, a small smile played on my lips; Meinhardt and Raskopf are the closest thing I can consider a friend. The train is fairly nice, certainly better than I expected for transporting soldiers. Meinhardt, Raskopf and I end up nabbing a compartment pretty quickly and we put our bags up on the overhead spot. Raskopf and Meinhardt sit on the same side of the compartment and I allow myself to stretch a bit on my side.

"When will they tell us our Stalags?" I ask mid stretch, arms above my head.

"Most likely when they come around for our tickets." Meinhardt ponders as he rests his head in his hands.

As if on cue the ticket man knocks on our compartment. Raskopf, being the closest, pops the door open.

"Tickets please!" The ticket man is short and handsome with thick blonde hair and blue eyes. The perfect *Aryan.

Raskopf opens the door fully and is the first of us to hand over his ticket. The handsome man punches it and hands it back quickly. Meinhardt is next and then me. This man obviously has experience as he punches our tickets cleanly and efficiently. Upon receiving my ticket back I quickly notice that Stalag Fifteen has been punched. I hold my ticket up to the morning light to examine it and after the ticket man leaves I ponder aloud.



"He must have hole punched which Stalag we are going to..."

Meinhardt flips over his ticket. "I got Fifteen."

I nod in agreement and show him mine. "Same. Raskopf, what about you?"

Meinhardt and I glance over to see Raskopf staring gravely at his ticket. Meinhardt's face softens.

"Hans? What did you get..." He asks, placing a hand on Raskopf's shoulder.

"Stalag Fourteen..." Raskopf mutters, his voice breaking with emotion.

Meinhardt's face pales as he quickly checks Raskopf's ticket. Sure enough the words '*Stalag Fourteen*' have been punched. My hand tightens on my own ticket as sorrow for the two men builds up in my chest. Two close friends being forced apart by means out of their control, and they can't even argue about it.

"I'm so sorry Raskopf," I choke as I try to swallow with my dry mouth.

Raskopf's eyes sparkle sadly. "It's okay... it's not like there is anything you or I can do about it. As you said Müller, it's war, we have no control over anything anymore..."

My heart sinks. I did say that, didn't I? And here it is, being proven once again. I reach over and place a hand on Raskopf's shoulder.

"It's alright," I smile. "We are only one Stalag away right? If we get town passes perhaps we could meet up?"

Meinhardt nods quickly. "Yes! I do believe the town in between Stalag Fourteen and Fifteen is quite literally Düsseldorf. Fifteen seems to be right underneath Cologne on the map and Fourteen just outside of Essen."

Raskopf smiles and the room goes quiet as we all clutch our tickets. A loud clunk sounds through the train and the momentum of the train leaving the station causes all three of us to jerk in our seats. I watch out the window as Düsseldorf starts to get smaller as the train picks up speed.

Meinhardt gulps and breaks the silence quickly. "Do you guys ever worry Düsseldorf will be bombed again? Like it did the Forty and Forty-Two?"

Raskopf freezes as his eyes widen in shock. "Don't tell me you still worry about that..."

I raise a brow, I remember the bombings but luckily my farm is far from the spots that were targeted, however I do know a fair amount of people were killed and injured. A few of the neighbouring farms had family and friends who died during them.

"How can I not be!?" Meinhardt shouts. "I went out to the suburbs for a bit and when I came back they were dead!"

The room goes silent and Raskopf looks at his friend solemnly. "I know... but I don't think it will happen just because you leave town..."

"I'm sorry to interrupt —" I chime in. "But what?" Raskopf looks at Meinhardt, who gives a sharp nod as if giving permission to explain.

Raskopf takes a breath and explains. "Remember how Abraham doesn't have a driver's license?" I nod and he continues. "Well he did... back in Thirty-Nine to Forty-Two. See when the first bombing had happened Abraham was out with his wife and son, thank goodness they were out of the bombed areas... but the second time..."

Raskopf pauses and Meinhardt takes a breath to continue the story himself. "The second time, my wife was pregnant and she had a craving. I had gone out to get what she wanted when the bombs hit... both my son, my wife, and my unborn child were hit... since then I have never left Düsseldorf."

My mouth falls open. "Jesus... I- I am so sorry..."

My heart plummets again as my sorrow for them both double. The war really has done a number on everyone. Perhaps if I tell them what happened with Beiler and the Jewish man it would be fine? I open my mouth to speak when a knock sounds on the door.

"Hello? Is anyone in there?" a voice calls.

Raskopf raises a brow. "Yeah, who is it?"

"Hermann Eichel."

"Eichel?" Meinhardt mutters. "Open the door,"

Raskopf nods and opens the compartment, Eichel stands outside. His hair is a mess and he clutches his ticket tightly.

"What's wrong?" I ask, examining his disheveled appearance.

Eichel's grip on his ticket tightens. "Please tell me one of you has Stalag Fourteen..."

Raskopf raises his hand. "I do."

"Oh thank god..." Eichel laughs. "Thank god..."

"Are not many of us going there?" Raskopf asks, the taint of worry flowing back in.

"They are only sending two or three of us to each Stalag, I wanted to know who I was going to be with. Plus we are going to be there soon so I was getting nervous..." Eichel replies. "May I sit down?"

"Of course," Raskopf tells him, gesturing to the empty seat next to me.

I move over so there's more room and Eichel takes a seat. As the train lugs on the silence presses heavily. Feeling very uncomfortable, I try to strike up a conversation with Eichel. "So your dad is a Colonel?"

Eichel nods. "Yep, he is."

I lean forward in my seat. "So your family must have a strong military reputation?"

"My family does yes, not that it's much help to me personally..." Eichel sighs a hint of annoyance and dismay in his tone.

I raise a brow. "How do you mean?"

"I am not exactly the best soldier you know, so the pressure is... immense..."

"Oh, I see... I'm sorry," I look away. Perhaps this was a bad topic. I wanted to start a conversation, not a pity session, part two.

The compartment falls silent once again as Meinhardt, Raskopf, Eichel and I all stare at various spots awkwardly. I lean my head back and let my mind wander.

What would working at a stalag entail? Will it be safe? Oh who am I kidding of course it won't be safe... it would be safer than the front line though. God I would hate the front lines... maybe I am lucky...?

Before I knew it I had fallen asleep and I am being woken up for lunch by Eichel who hands me a ration.

"So how long are we gonna be here?" I ask as I frown at the military meal I was given.

"Dunno. Could be a day, or maybe two or three." Eichel sighs as he opens his own meal pack.

"Shame, this train is starting to make me feel ill..." Meinhardt mutters as he rests his pale head against the window and hands his meal to Raskopf.

Raskopf takes it and chuckles. "Are you ill because of the train or the people on it?"

"More so because of where we are headed," Meinhardt sighs.

"Fair enough, this gruellingly long train ride isn't exactly helping my nerves." Eichel mutters as he takes a bite, then immediately spits it out. "Yuck! What are they trying to do, poison us before we even get to our Stalags!?"

At this comment I immediately put my meal down. The train slows down and comes to a stop and upon glancing out the window I can see the station of Essen. Even though it has been only an hour since we left Düsseldorf it feels like it has been ages. Raskopf and Eichel look down at their tickets, this is their stop.

Meinhardt's face pales as he watches Raskopf stand to grab his stuff. Quickly and on impulse, Meinhardt's hand shoots out and grabs the sleeve of Raskopf's uniform. Raskopf lurches to a stop and sighs. He turns his head to look at Meinhardt whose head is resting on his outstretched arm.

"Abraham?" Raskopf says softly.

Meinhardt gives no response but instead his shoulders shake soundlessly. Eichel and I exchange sympathetic glances as Raskopf's scleras start to turn red as tears prick at him.

"I don't want to..." Meinhardt eventually croaks.

"Don't want to do what...?" Raskopf whispers in a soothing voice.

Meinhardt's voice cracks. "I don't want to be here... I don't want you to go... not so soon..."

Raskopf swallows hard, his Adam's Apple moving up and down and his eyes fluttering shut in an attempt not to show his tears. "You think I want to? Abraham, let's face it, no one wants a part of... whatever this has become... anymore. Our only focus should be staying safe, that way once this whole thing is over we can each take comfort in knowing that the other is waiting for us. Okay?"

Meinhardt nods and lets go of Raskopf. "Promise you will write? And we will be doing Müller's idea, about meeting in Düsseldorf?"

"Promise." Raskopf smiles. "I really have to go now, okay?"

Meinhardt nods and Raskopf turns to leave, Eichel follows and just as Raskopf is just about out of the door he spins around and hugs Meinhardt.

"See you soon, my friend." He whispers before he turns back and leaves.

Meinhardt and I watch Eichel and Raskopf exit, the sorrow taking their seats. My gaze shifts to Meinhardt, his own gaze fixated on the door.

"You okay?" I ask despite knowing the obvious answer.

Meinhardt blinks and stares at me. "I don't know anymore... Raskopf and I have known each other for so long... to think this is the way we are getting ripped apart..."

I frown. "You aren't getting ripped apart, not fully at least. You can still see each other after the war."

I realise quickly that this came out somewhat harsh as Meinhardt stares at me in shock.

I quickly inhale and prepare my correction. "Look, that came out wrong but as Raskopf said, being sad won't do anything about it. You have to stay strong."

Meinhardt nods. "You're right... I can't show weakness. Just like you don't."

I raise a brow. Just like me? Does Meinhardt think that I am some hardened soldier or something? I try to wrap my head around that but I still can't figure out Meinhardt could have even come anywhere near that conclusion. Swallowing my pride I decide to just ask. "Meinhardt... how do you mean... like me?"

This time Meinhardt blinks in surprise. "Huh? What do you mean how do I mean?"

"I mean what makes you think I don't show weakness?"

Meinhardt thinks for a moment. "Well I mean... I don't know, you just always look so strong and sure... at least to me. Remember when the other Müller collapsed the first day shortly after that kid was threatened by Förstner? Everyone jumped and you just stood there, slightly surprised. Raskopf and I were the ones told to bring him to the infirmary and afterwards were so shaken we could barely walk."

I think back to that moment, it really was them who had carried the other Müller off... but that still didn't explain why they were so shaken. I mean sure the situation with Förstner and the teen was scary but it wasn't traumatic. "Why were you both so scared?" I inquire.

Meinhardt looks away and the familiar look of unpleasant memories floods his eyes.

"When we brought him down to the infirmary we overheard the medic muttering something about how basic training officers have been reporting more and more trainees death of misadventure... in other words —"
My mind wanders back to the deafening crack of the gun that Förstner had shot as Beiler was leading us out. "In other words they are shooting their trainees..."

Meinhardt nods. "Raskopf and I had thought perhaps it was just a rumor but then yesterday when we were leaving... well... I was scared stiff..."

I nod. "I know what you mean... I don't understand how they can get away with it though... if the medic knew what was happening why did no one end it?"

Meinhardt shrugs. "No one cares enough I suppose,"

I stand bolt upright, anger flashing in my eyes. "That is ridiculous! Why are Germans shooting *other* Germans!? Is it not bad enough that we have a Second World War!?"

Meinhardt nods in agreement. "The infighting is horrible... The Gestapo has spies everywhere, just last week I saw some middle aged woman being dragged off the streets by Gestapo agents."

I freeze and stare at him. "Why was she arrested?"

"Who knows, if the Gestapo wants you they will get you."

I sit back down and nod in agreement. "I mean that's the scary thing isn't it? Even if you are innocent the Gestapo can just fake evidence against you, and the scariest part is that no one knows if you are on their radar or who they even are."

"It truly is terrifying..." Meinhardt's fists clenched. "What I would give to be somewhere safe..."

I nod. "I fully agree, I remember thinking when I was drafted that I wished I could be anywhere but there."

Meinhardt blinks. "You were drafted?"

I arch a brow. "You weren't?"

"Well I mean no..." Meinhardt mutters.

"Then why are you here?"

"Raskopf was drafted so when I wasn't I enlisted to be with him."

I blink in shock. They were so close that Meinhardt had enlisted despite his distaste for the Nazis. A newfound respect for the man before me builds within my chest.

"That's phenomenal..." I mutter.

"Phenomenal?" Meinhardt scoffs. "What's phenomenal about it? I signed up to be a monster..."

"You signed up to stay with a friend in need." I correct. "That is phenomenal. I would not have been able to do that but you did. Don't sell yourself short."

Meinhardt stares at me in shock and a small smile forms on his lips. "You have no idea how happy that makes me, Müller."

"I'm glad, what you did is not something that should be overlooked."

"Yet it didn't help when Raskopf was sent to a different Stalag..."

"That was out of your control, you did what you could. That's what counts."

Meinhardt smiles and the rest of the day was a fairly quiet train ride as we both fell asleep before and after setting aside our untouched lunch pack and sleeping right through dinner.

<●>

The next day both arrives and passes uneventfully, which is probably for the best. Meinhardt and I watch as more and more people leave the train, each with pale faces. Meinhardt has been rather quiet since Raskopf left but less gloomy since my makeshift pep-talk. Occasionally I look over at him, making sure that he is still doing okay and we both watch as more and more men leave the train. As we arrive at Berlin station the active duty men leave with their bags slung over their shoulders. Buzz cut and Broad pass my compartment and their gazes narrow at me sitting semi-comfortably. I simply smile and wave politely. Buzz cut lunges towards my compartment but Broad quickly pulls him back and spins him to face the way off the train.

Meinhardt shivers. "Those men are terrifying..."

I raise a brow and scoff. "Oh please, they look tough but they are harmless."

"How do you know?" Meinhardt asks.

"They act fearless but they are scared, just like everyone in this war." I state, coolly.

Meinhardt stares at me in silent disbelief. "I suppose... but those men... they look like killing a man is no different than killing a bug..."

"That may be, but they are terrified to lose their *own* lives."

"So you are saying they are willing to kill others mercilessly yet fear the same being bestowed upon themselves?"

"That is without doubt, what I am saying."

Meinhardt shakes his head in disbelief but I can tell he knows I am right.

Throughout the day I start to make a plan on how to avoid unwanted attention. My goal... Do nothing spectacular. Do not report anything. Do not excel. Do not stand out. Do not fail as I have to remain somewhat useful to survive. That shouldn't be too hard, considering how desperate Germany is. Meinhardt also seems to be thinking hard, on what I do not know. I lean my head back and let it lull back and forth with the momentum of the train. At long last we arrive at our stop.

As I stand up the silence of the ghostly empty train weighs down on me, cold and stiff like the tip of a gun. My hands shake as I grab my bag and Meinhardt silently retrieves his. We are the only two people left on this train and it's almost like we are the only living souls on a train of the dead. As we move through the desolate gangways the whispers of silence pound in my ears, beckoning and mocking me, taunting me with the loss of my sanity and morals. The only sounds that dares split the silence is the clicking of our boots and the soft noise of our breathing. We make our way single file through the skinny hall of the train, each empty compartment like a missed opportunity to sit back down, hide, and ride back to Düsseldorf in safety.

Upon reaching the end I step out into the bitter cold of the outside world, something that seemed a mere lingering promise in the stuffy train compartment. Hunger and anxiety gnaws at my stomach and the weakness of exhaustion in my knees makes it difficult to stand and breathe in somewhat of a normal fashion. I wonder why my body is in such a weak state but the memory of the stack of untouched rations had grown quite large, and our hunger immense. I know that eating the rations we were supplied with would have remedied that in an instant, however the taste is unbearable and simply added to my nervous stomach.

Meinhardt and I stand in awkward silence as the cold bites through our uniforms. While we wait it suddenly becomes very clear just how blind every one of us is. From the moment I was drafted to me standing here right now I have had little to no clue as to what comes next. Perhaps that is the intention. If you are left in the dark about your future, you have nothing to miss if you drop dead. Frankly, it is a little insulting. Not that they are assuming I will drop dead, but that I am just sitting and accepting it. What else am I really supposed to do? If you fight- and are lucky -you die; if not your family dies. Despite my hatred I have no choice. After fifteen minutes of waiting a truck drives agonisingly slowly over to us and parks. An old man jumps out, his heavy boots thudding on the ground.

He looks to be in his mid fifties with thinning grey hair and dull brown eyes. He glances at Meinhardt and I and his shoulders slump, as if disappointed at the sight of us. His expression is unreadable as he makes his way over, the only emotion that is visible is the distinct blank gaze of someone done with the life they are living.

"I'm assuming you both are the new guards?" He asks, his tone flat.

Meinhardt nods.

"Right then, my name is Sergeant Conrad Bartel, seniormost guard at Stalag Fifteen. If you have any questions I shall try my best to support you," he introduces himself.

"Danke," I nod, "I'm sure your guidance will prove useful." *For anyone else...*

"Ja, much obliged," Meinhardt adds.

"Just doing my job gentlemen, just like everyone else." Bartel dismisses us in his flat and lifeless tone.

Meinhardt and I exchange confused and pitted glances. The man standing before us is a sad sight thanks to his post in the war, and I fear what we will look like by the end of ours.

Bartel checks his wristwatch and lets out a heavy sigh. "Alright, both of you in the truck, being late on your first day is not something I recommend."

There was a set time in the first place?

Meinhardt and I walk over to the truck and the opening at the back is up to my knees. I have to strain to get my leg up onto the ledge and then use my hands to grasp the side and pull myself into the truck. I land on my knees and turn around to extend my hand to Meinhardt, who is a good inch and a half shorter than me. He takes my band and I pull him up. My muscles tighten with the effort, he is surprisingly heavy. Once inside he takes the seat next to me.

"You're strong," he states as he settles onto the wooden bench.

I shrug. "Not really,"

Meinhardt raises a brow. "I weigh a good one hundred and twenty five pounds, Müller, you pulled me up no problem."

I have to prevent my jaw from dropping. "One twenty five?"

Meinhardt nods then gives me a wry smile. "Just learn to take a compliment."

A small smile tugs at the corners of my own lips. "Fine, thanks."

Meinhardt chuckles softly then looks out the window. I stare at him for a bit; it's hard to believe that he has eight pounds on me. I wonder if it has to do with the fact the rations are smaller at my house— thanks to the four other people living there —where Meinhardt has just himself.

My mind flicks back to the story Raskopf had told me about Meinhardt's family and my stomach churns with guilt and sorrow. I make a silent prayer of thanks to whatever has shown my family such mercy in these torrid times. The road is quite bumpy and uncomfortable and the barren truck does nothing to aid in comfort and simply adds to the lingering anxiety that I am more of a prisoner than a guard, and the anxiety only grows the closer we get to Stalag Fifteen. On second thought that's exactly what I am, what we all are: trapped in the hell that has engulfed Germany. I try to shove the feelings of anxiety aside but to no avail. After a hard left that threatens to throw Meinhardt and I out the open back, Stalag Fifteen looms into sight.

It's a chilling sight, a large barren ground with long, unkempt barracks lined up and down the grounds in a way that eludes strict military discipline. The whole camp is boxed in with a tall and daunting fence, the barbed wire gleaming in the sun like the murderous glint of a freshly unsheathed blade. There is a large wooden gate at the head of the camp and two guards open it as Bartel drives right in. The P.O.W.s stare at the truck— and us— in mixes of curiosity and hatred. I don't blame them. Given their circumstances, I would hate me too. The very air is cold and lifeless, thick enough to cut with a knife. From the corner of my eye I see Meinhardt shudder, guilt in his eyes. I want to console him— how, I don't know. The other part of me wants to yell at the P.O.W.s, tell them that I am just as much a prisoner as they, the only major differences being our uniforms and mother tongues.

"Not the most comfortable," Bartel admits slowly from the driver's seat, his voice deep and smooth in the crackling tension. "But at least you have a form of housing, shelter, and food with not an armed Russian in sight."

"Is... Is it always this chilly...?" Meinhardt asks, his hands wringing in his lap.

"You get used to it." Bartel responds simply, answering with neither yes nor no.

Meinhardt and I exchange glances, wary of the cryptic answer. The truck comes to a full stop near the Kommandant building and Bartel gets out. He walks over and lowers the gate and he helps me and Meinhardt get down.

"We can get your stuff afterwards, it'll stay in the truck. For now you will meet with Colonel Krüger, the Kommodant here. He will get you settled in." Bartel instructs, pointing at the office. "Just don't upset him."

A chill runs down my spine. What would happen if we did upset him? Meinhardt sways and I place a hand on his back.

"You good?" I whisper.

Meinhardt nods shakily. "Yeah... just hungry..."

As if on cue my own stomach growls. Bartel looks at us with a mix of pity and confusion as of why we didn't eat the rations. His look soon changes to one that is clear he thought we are idiots, which of course, I don't blame him. In retrospect it would have been better to just go put up with the taste than starve. I suppose that just goes to show how stress can make any man an idiot.

Bartel finally sighs and says slowly. "Let's get you to the mess hall then, can't have either of you passing out on Krüger now can we?"

Meinhardt smiles thankfully and lets out a small chuckle. "That would not be ideal, no. Very well, thank you so much, Sergeant."

Bartel nods, "Think nothing of it. I know how bad the rations on the train can be. Although, I can't guarantee that the food in the mess hall will be any better."

I pause. "Hang on, don't we have to meet Kommodant Krüger? I thought you said we were going to be late?"

Bartel looks at me with an unreadable expression. "Ah yes... well I was more concerned with actually getting to the camp on time. See there have been some slight... detours... thanks to the Gestapo..."

Meinhardt's eyes widen. "Gestapo...? That can't be good... do you know why?"

Bartel shakes his head as we start to walk to the mess hall. "No clue, some of their agents have stopped by the camp a few times but no one told us why. I am not even sure Herr Krüger knows."

Meinhardt shifts nervously at this and my mind races with possibilities.

What were the Gestapo looking for? Were they looking for something, or someone? What could be so important that it could have caused us to be late? My thoughts are swiftly interrupted as we walk into the mess hall. It is a healthy size with long wooden tables lining the walls and going horizontally down the room, similarly to the barracks outside. There are a few guards eating silently or chatting to their neighbour but overall the place is as gloomy as the rest of the camp.

"Take your seat, there isn't any menu since the food is all the same." Bartel sighs as he grabs two trays for Meinhardt and I.

"And the food is...?" I prompt.

Bartel stares at me. "You're best off not knowing."

My eyes widen and Meinhardt and I exchange a glance. The hell is that supposed to mean? Meinhardt and I nervously approach the mess hall and food is schlopped onto our plates and bowls. The meal consists of a very cursed looking soup that has a thin foggy broth and floating chunks of who knows what, bread that is practically dust, and what I think is supposed to be coffee but looks more like bean tainted water.

"This... is food...?" Meinhardt asks in a tone that can only be similar to horror.

"It's better than starving." Bartel says, grabbing some of the 'food' for himself.

Meinhardt and I watch in silent shock as Bartel eats the supposed-to-be-food without batting an eye. I glance down and ladle some 'soup' up and bring it up. I try not to breathe as I put it in my mouth then instantly splutter and gag. Meinhardt attempts the 'bread' and chokes on the dryness of it. I quickly hand him the 'coffee' and he gulps it, then chokes again and turns green as if about to puke. Bartel barely looks up from his food before scoffing and shaking his head. My cheeks grow warm and my gaze drops in embarrassment. In comparison to the man in front of us we are so far behind, so naïve and used to the luxuries of being a respectable distance from the main front of the war.

**Watch for another excerpt from
The End: Born to but Not Living in the next
issue of our Zine.**



Poetry



THE LIFE YOU LIVE

There are a million postcards with millions of faces all that belonged to you but I
don't know any of them

You left all their legacies behind when you disappeared

They were your friend

They were someone's father or cousin or sister or child

They will stay unknown

Collecting dust in a scrapbook in a box in a basement in a lonely house

There are a thousand photos

Mountain tops

And rivers

And deserts

You travelled the world

Saw a little bit of all of it

And never told anyone the secrets you found

There are shoes only you've worn

There are things only you've seen

There are experiences only you could describe

But we lost all that when we lost you

We lost my grandmother

A mother

A wife

A child

A granddaughter

I never knew your story and you never told it

I will hold on to everything I know about you

Retracing the smile lines in every photograph of every person I'll never know

I will read the words below the stamps, read your cards over and over soaking in
every single moment I never got with you and the few I did

I promise I won't let you be some name in some brain that goes unthought, untold

I don't know much but you will be more than what's inside the boxes you left
behind

-Abby Hawthorne

OUR HOME

Kat Gillese

Our future home will be so warm
You'll have to wear oven mitts inside
Three friends rooming together, broke as
Hell, we'll curate our vibes from
Scratch even if we won't be able to afford
To add some spice, our noodles will be
Anything but bland, as long as we're
Together, us three, in our home
As long we're together

We'll all have jobs to afford
Victoria's atrocious rent, and to pay for
UVic fees, we'll all have different majors
But find classes with common interests
For the company, we'll play stardew valley
On split screens, I'll try to get those two
Into my 20 year old Wii, maybe I'll even
Convince them to watch something other
Than one of the Deadpool movies

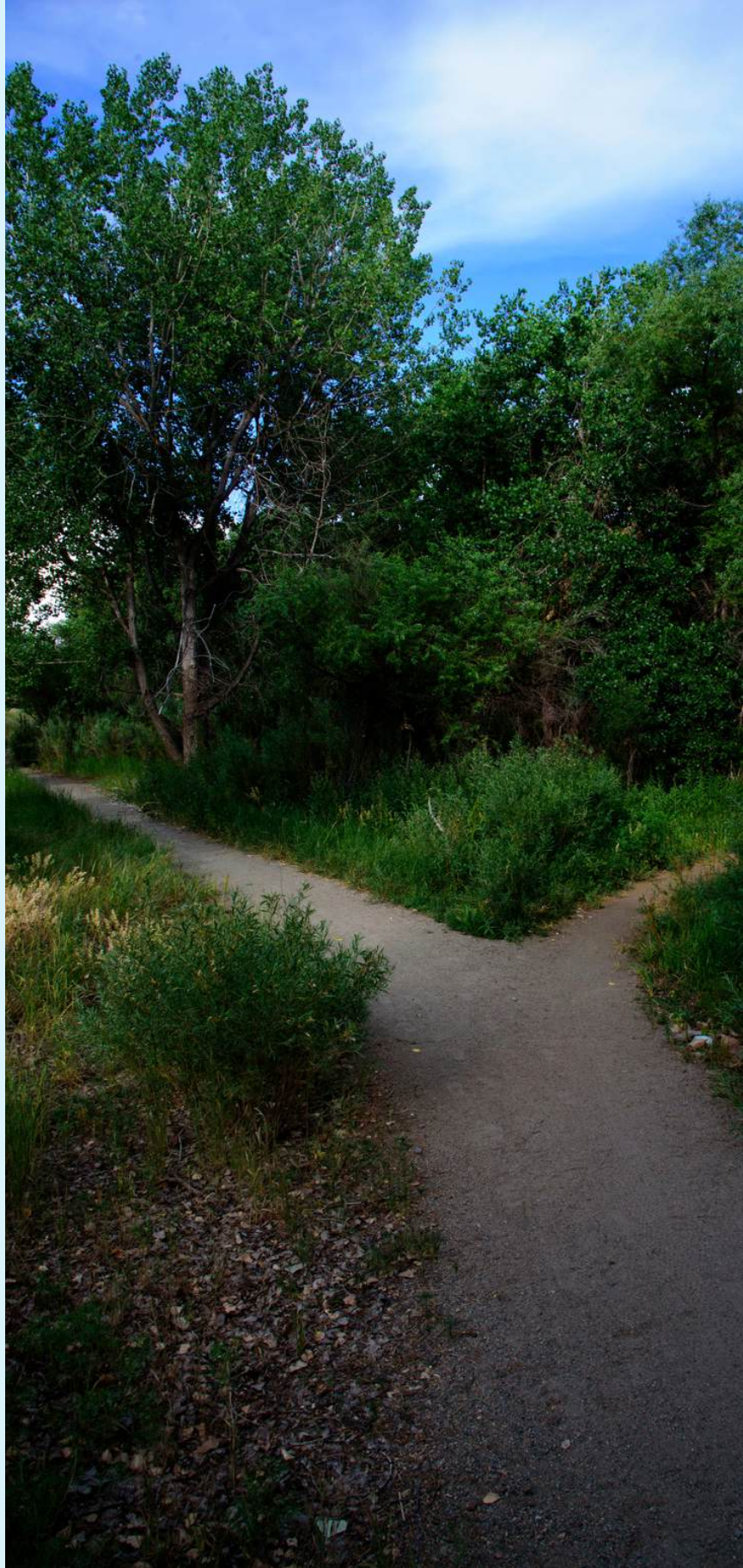
Our home will be bright and beautiful, with
One of us wanting to shell out for
Furniture that will last us and that we'll
Love, and the other two contributing
Woodworking skills
Our food will be fun, even if it's way too
Often breakfast for dinner, and we'll
Jam on air guitars in the kitchen
Blasting music as we clean up
Our time will be spent busily, between
Work, school and hobbies, but mainly
Each other, in some form or another, we'll
Get the privilege and pleasure to be
Together whenever we come home

A falling out
Between the two, not between me and
The three, but time heals all wounds and
we've still got a few years til we're all
Free
I have confidence that they can make
Repairs
But that's not the only thing boring
Tears into our vision, our future, our
Ideal idea of home, our someday soon
Apartment, our plan we all
Thought would work out so well
The architecture program... removed from
UVic
No other courses on the island
To get me my bachelor's
UBC was down the road, but now I'll have
To go through uni completely alone
A brand new city
More expensive, too
Seven long years ahead of me
What I used to be looking forward to
I know I should be grateful that it's not
Even that far, but our home won't be
My home now, our plan won't have a me
And if things stay the way they are, those
Two won't get their home either

Now we're three
All headed in different directions
I'm grateful that I had the chance
To dream of what might've been
I wish I had the power to have stopped
All those decisions, when the carpet's
Pulled out from under your feet
You tend to wish you'd listened

Do I change all my plans
Just to stay with my friends
While they go through college?
Do I challenge my so well
Thought out future
Just to feel their warmth again?
Am I throwing away my dreams
I've dreamt so long
For temporary comfort?
Can I find a way to make it work
With compromising my
Own self-worth?

These are the things I'm asking
Myself, mainly but also the
Universe
Of course, I've always loved many
Things, so at least I'll have plenty
New paths to divert to
If I choose something new now, will I be
able to
Come back to that dream?
If I become something else now
Will that path be waiting for me?
I don't want to close any doors
But I know it's going to happen
All I hope is that I won't have to choose
Between rooming with only one
Of them



POETRY

Use these prompts as inspiration to start a new poem, or use the line within a poem.

CHILDHOOD IN
YOUR CHEST

MEMORY
BREATHES

A HUMAN
SHAPED SHELL

REMEMBRANCE OF
REMEMBERING

I WILL HOLD YOU
TIGHT EVEN IF I
BURN TOO

YOU CAN'T FORCE
AN EPIPHANY

PERENNIAL FLOWERS
BLOOMING

WRITE A EULOGY

WE ARE CHILDREN
AT
TRANSFORMATION

A WALL OF
TALLIES

PROMPTS

I'M STILL
CRAYOLA ON A
NAPKIN

THE TIRED
HURT

YOUR LANGUAGE
IS

PLACES HOLDING
PAST FOOTSTEPS

BLEED MEMORY
ONTO A PAGE

GENTLENESS
ENCODED IN OUR DNA

A HISTORY I STILL
HAVE YET TO LIVE

NOOKS AND
CRANNIES

WAVES OF BROKEN
THINGS

PAPERCUTS ON
MY
FINGERTIPS



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A Splatter of Ink

BY MYAH RATHI LITTELJOHN

March 29, 1942

Dear Diary, Sayuri began—her brow furrowed in concentration. The undesirable sound of her parents shouting downstairs brought her back to reality. Although she could only make out snippets of their conversation, she knew they were arguing over the government's announcement that all Japanese Canadians on the west coast were to be deported until the end of the war. They had been deemed a threat to Canada despite the fact that many families, like Sayuri's, had ties to this land that went back generations. Her father wanted to stay put, but her mother thought that defiance could lead to their separation.

Her mother had sent her upstairs to pack her suitcase, saying they were to leave the next morning. Sayuri's suitcase lay empty on her unmade bed, devoid of any contents. She didn't know how to go about packing everything into that 2 by 4 rectangle—not just her worldly belongings but all the memories she would have to leave behind.

She remembered the previous day when her teacher had told her, (beady black eyes boring into her soul) that “You people are not welcome here.” Sayuri thought of herself as a proud Canadian. But now she wasn't too sure.

Sayuri stared down at the blank page, unsure how to transfer her emotions onto the paper.

She rested her head in the crook of her diary, tired of the arguing and the constant uncertainty. Her eyes drew shut and darkness encompassed her.

May 7, 1950

"This is not my room," remarked Sayuri, filled with bewilderment as she reopened her eyes. Despite this room seeming so familiar—so much like her own bedroom—this room was wallpapered in an ugly daffodil yellow and the floor was littered with plastic dolls and unfinished puzzles. In shock, Sayuri rose from the desk (which had remained oddly enough the same), and wandered to the center of the space.

A calendar decorated with kittens in various poses proclaimed that the day was May 7, 1959—approximately 8 years in the future. Sayuri opened the blinds to find the exact scarred maple tree that stood in her backyard staring back at her. After a closer look she realized that this was, indeed, her backyard. So this must be her room, 8 years later. Sayuri wondered how on earth her taste in furniture had deteriorated to this extent and proceeded to inspect every object in "her" room. And where was she now, this 18 year old girl that she would become?

The bed lay unmade, just as she had left it all those years ago, but the comforter had turned from a rich navy to neon fuschia. A soft snoring sound emanated from under a tower of pillows and blankets. Curious, Sayuri began removing the pillows, expecting to find her own face aged eight years. But to her immense horror, her eyes fell upon unfamiliar features as she lifted the last pillow. The person in her bed turned out to be a girl about her age with blonde hair cut in a choppy bob, wearing pajamas decorated with fuzzy llamas. What was this strange girl doing in her room?

Sayuri tried to wake the girl up, yelling and then resorting to prodding her with a pillow, but the girl stayed put, snoring contentedly away. Eventually the girl woke up by herself and yawned tiredly.

"Hello," said Sayuri, taking a cautious step away from the bed.

The girl continued stretching, squinting as she got used to the sunlight pouring in through the open window. Despite Sayuri's screams of impatience the girl did not answer, and after a while Sayuri arrived at the conclusion that somehow she was invisible, despite the fact that she could quite easily see herself.

"Get ready, Sarah," someone called impatiently. "The school bus is leaving soon."

"Coommiinnngggg mom!" replied the girl, apparently named Sarah, as she threw on a sweater and pair of jeans.

Sayuri followed her out the door and through the house that was hers but lacked any of her family's belongings and mementos.

As she watched Sarah eat a bowl of cereal and converse with the adults in the kitchen—no doubt Sarah's parents—Sayuri couldn't help wondering where her own family was. Her grandparents had owned this house for 30 years before her parents had inherited it, and it was the prize possession of the Nakamura line. She could not see her father abandoning his childhood home by choice. Unless... Sayuri refused to go down that path.

She thought back on the last few hours before her sudden journey to the future, and remembered the diary that she had left lying on her desk.

"That's it!" she exclaimed; if she found her diary, then it would tell her what had happened to her and her family.

Racing up the stairs, she flew back to her room and began to search every inch of the space – but to no avail.

Sayuri was beginning to lose hope when she remembered the place she hid her diary when she had written an especially personal entry.

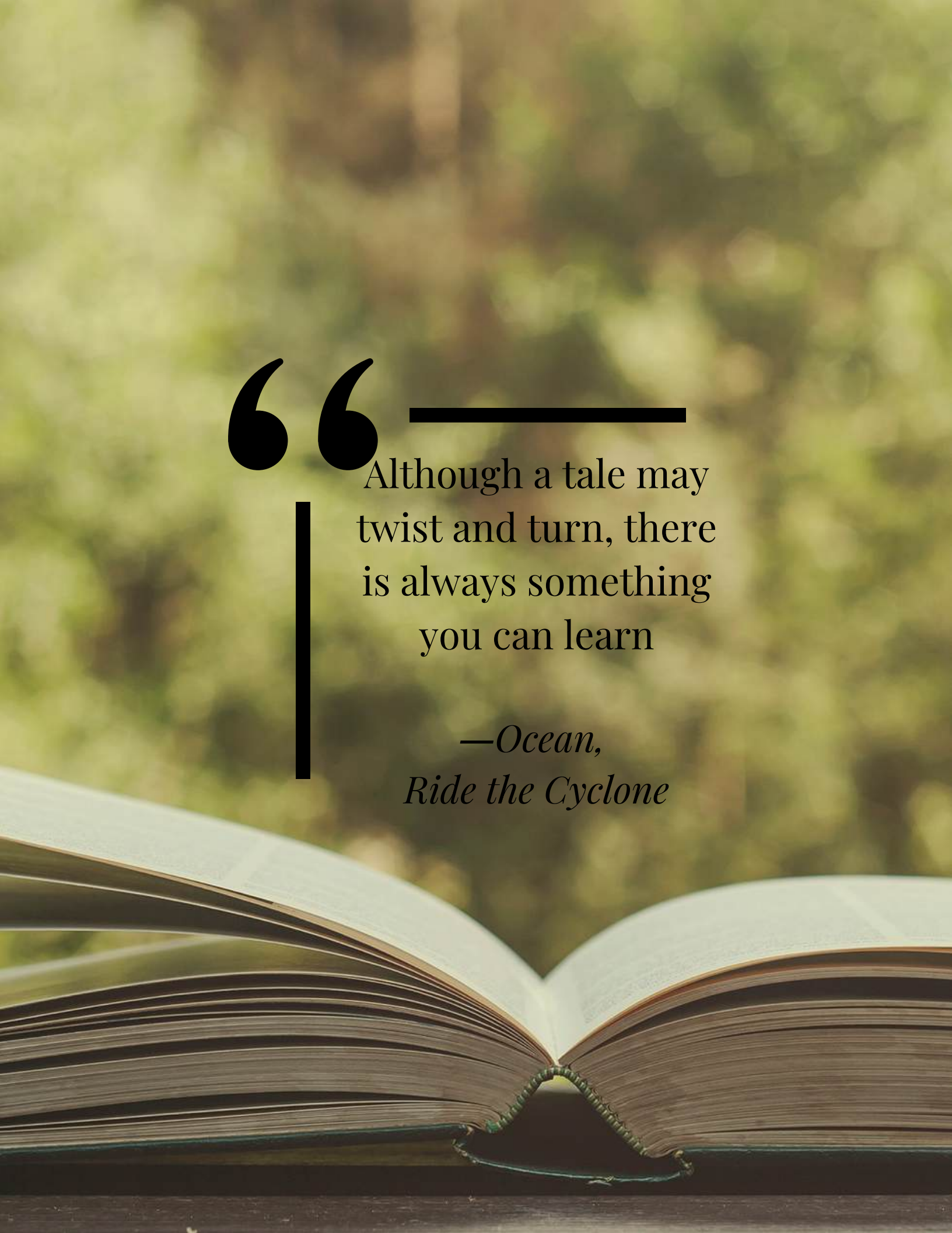
And there it was, in all its glory lying under a loose floorboard, its leather cover having seen better days. Pulling it from its grave, she blew the fine layer of dust away and set it down on her lap. Flipping through the yellowed pages she arrived at her last entry: March 29, 1942. *Dear Diary* appeared in neat cursive, before it was abruptly interrupted by a splatter of black ink. Sayuri frantically flipped through the remaining pages, but they were all blank. *What had happened?* she wondered, pressing a trembling finger against the ink blot as if it held some hidden meaning.

For the second time that day, her world went dark.

March 29, 1942

Sayuri was back in her present-day room, her books on their respective shelves and her empty suitcase lying like a bad omen on the bed.

Just as Sayuri was reassuring herself that it had all been a nightmare, a loud knocking sound filled her ears. Someone was rapping on the front door so hard that the house itself echoed. Sayuri's inkwell fell over as her desk began to shake on its knobbly limbs. The ink splattered all over her diary entry, the bottle breaking into a thousand shards of glass.



“ —
Although a tale may
twist and turn, there
is always something
you can learn

—*Ocean,*
Ride the Cyclone



Asteroid

BY RAINE HERMOSA

I was alone, in the middle of the Beluga Island countryside, when he biked past me.

I don't want to share anything about who I was before coming here. I don't need any judgement, or opinions.

I landed on the Island two weeks prior, needing an escape from my work, and everyone I work with. I heard that Beluga island was the perfect place to leave your old life behind, and my friends shared stories of endless dirt roads, laid back hamlets, and endless coastline. There were apparently so many coves and beaches that it would be impossible to see them all in one visit. I just hoped that I wouldn't see any of these friends when I actually got here.

Everyone else had their own summer plans anyway, they didn't have time to worry about me. Other people cared too much about the future, and I didn't bother trying to understand them either. I only told one person where I would be going. They were the only one who would actually care about what I'm doing, that is, that I'm not doing any work. It's why I opened my door on the day that I left home to find a stack of tapes on my front door, each labeled from hour one to six. I shoved them in my backpack before leaving.

To make sure of that, I got off the boat at the south harbor, and took the forest tram line deep inland, far enough to make sure there wasn't even a tiny stench of saltwater in my lungs. Beluga Island's interior didn't get much attention compared to its pristine beaches, the perfect reason for me to go there. It also helped that it was the cheapest accommodation available. Eventually, the tree line faded away as we rolled into a valley with a river running next to us. All around me were fields of crops and livestock grazing, with small homes and streetlights visible ahead. The sun was already disappearing behind the mountains, blanketing my surroundings in an evening glow.

"You don't have to write back, okay?"

I hit pause on my tape player. I didn't want to think about home. The only thing that matters is the present. The present is the only thing I have control over, the only thing I can experience right now. The only thing I remember that night is stumbling into a small room I rented out and collapsing on the bed.

When I woke up, I didn't really have a plan. I looked out my window onto a small town that had barely woken up. Blinding sunlight interrupted by deep shadows signaling a new morning. I sat up, reaching into my bag to find the map I got on the ferry, but couldn't feel anything. Frustrated, I stood up and emptied every pocket of its contents, only to realize I'd left it back on the tram the previous night. I would have to find an information stand or visitor centre to replace it, which would have been easier if I still had a map to find it.

It took me over an hour to finally get myself together to open my door. When I stepped outside, I could imagine a slow indie pop rock song playing from my non-existent tape, as if I'd stepped onto the set of a teen movie, or whatever amalgamation of teenagehood summer break stereotypes I've swirled in my head. Everything looked so peaceful. The buildings were aged and rustic, trees were planted at every corner. I didn't know I could breathe air this fresh. With no directions on me, I turned right and followed what seemed to be the main road, venturing deeper into the centre of town. My sandals brushed aside dust and kicked pebbles. Other residents were awake and opening up their shops. About three blocks from the Inn was an intersection in the road, where I noticed there was a path leading inside a grove of trees. The visitor centre was probably somewhere in the centre of town, but I couldn't resist doing a little exploring.

The path snaked through a small grove of trees behind the main street shops, before turning onto a wooden bridge. The water underneath was flowing at a steady pace through small rapids. The other side of the bridge looked more rural, with small houses spaced apart by fields and sparse trees. I took a moment to just listen to my surroundings, and feel the sun on my face, then I put my bag down and reached inside to find the small wooden box I'd been carrying since I left home. I stood there for a while, feeling it in my hand, observing its new colour in the warm lighting.

That's when he biked past me. A gust of wind swept my side as a boy with shoulder length fluffy hair biked straight across the bridge towards town. He was wearing a white short sleeve polo shirt and brown corduroy pants, his rusted metal bicycle swayed side to side as he balanced on the creaky bridge. There was also a small basket in the back with a pouch and a mini flag sticking out. From a distance, his outfit almost resembled a uniform. Maybe he was headed to work? He was actually the first person I saw that day.

I put the box back in my backpack. Now was not the time.

It wasn't until after lunch that I finally stumbled across the village tourist stand. I ordered a grilled cheese and a local tea specialty at a local cafe after realizing I hadn't eaten anything but smoked meat packets since I left home. I asked the cafe owner where I needed to go and he directed me exactly how to get there from the cafe. It was a small doorway underneath the post office on the second floor, which looked quite busy.

The visitor centre was quite small, only one room with brochures, maps, and informative plaques along the walls. In one corner there were souvenirs to buy, and in the centre of the room was a single desk with a shelf of paperwork, and a boy sitting in front of it, scribbling something in his notebook. He was wearing the same white polo shirt and the same corduroy pants.

"Hi," I said.

"Hello."

We made eye contact, and immediately knew.

"I saw you earlier, on the bridge right?" he asked.

"I think so," I replied.

He smiled, and I noticed how much cuter he looked now that I could see his face.

"You're my first guest, we only opened a few minutes ago," he said.

"Wow, I'm honoured," I smirked. I'd never felt this confident in my life, and his kindness helped me to finally relax for the first time since I got here.

After an awkward silence, I went straight to looking through different brochures and flyers available for me to borrow. Advertisements for farm fresh food, music performances, and wilderness tours, as well as different hotels and small businesses. The other boy went back to writing in his notebook, I assumed something important.

“Let me know if you have any questions.”

I had one question for him that had been bugging my mind since I got here, so while facing the wall of brochures I took a deep breath, and prepared what I was going to say, more so prepared myself to look face to face with a cute boy again.

“I did have one question.”

I stepped forward.

“Why is the town called Beluga Village? Aren’t we forty, fifty kilometers away from the ocean?”

The other boy smiled again, and got up from his seat, making my heart beat a little faster as he got closer to me. We were standing in front of the map of the island.

“In the past, maybe two hundred years ago, it was common to see Beluga Whales swimming up the river in the warmer months. It was a part of their migration routes. But as more farming took up space, the irrigation lowered the water levels of the river, and eventually, river whales would no longer be seen.”

“That’s fascinating,” I said.

“It is, isn’t it?” he responded. “There’s actually more to it, some locals think that with more people moving out each year, and the agricultural work slowing down, the whales could make a return.”

I looked back over at his face again. The excitement he carried while speaking, the joy in his eyes. It seems like he hasn’t been able to share this with anyone for while. I wanted to say more, but I didn’t know what.

“Thanks for that,” I said.

I started making my way towards the door, brochures in hand, and a lingering for something that I wasn’t sure of yet.

“Hey before you go- can I ask you something?”

I turned around to see him put his notebook down and close it shut, his eyes staring straight at me. He looked kind of nervous.

“You said you were here alone right? The meteor shower is passing by tomorrow afternoon, and the whole village is having a gathering on skyline peak tomorrow night. M-maybe you could go with me?”

I smiled. “You want to go together?”

That was my only goal coming here.

All I wanted to do was make a friend.





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