

GUILD OF YOUNG WRITERS

SHORT
STORIES

POETRY

POETRY PROMPTS

LIBRARY
CHALLENGE

VOLUME #15

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2024-

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.

We acknowledge the support of the CRD Arts & Culture Support Service, the City of Victoria Strategic Plan Granting Program. and our generous donors.



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Cover Art by Raine:

The cloudiest skies bring the heaviest snowfall and the brightest light. The world around you transforms under a soft blanket of crystals, shining back at grey skies. A warm sun brushes tenderly across your shivering skin. You take cover underneath a bridge crossing a stream, the path extending endlessly in either direction across what once were fields of grass. The horizon cycling all around you as if the world was flat.

This art piece was created using Krita on my computer alongside my drawing tablet. I use pastel and watercolour brushes to create layers of colour and depth. I went straight into painting with colour and skipped using ink line art as well. I hope you feel a sense of peace and serenity amongst the eeriness that winter clouds bring.



Editor's Note

2025 marks five years of the Guild of Young Writers! Over the past five years we have had one hundred participants pass through our registration and join our online community in some capacity. What an incredible feat for our small but mighty Vancouver Island non-profit organization! We currently sit at forty members - young emerging authors dedicated to the craft of writing. We thank the authors, editors, and other members of the publishing field for joining us over the years to share their expertise and help to inspire our emerging authors.

This year we take a deep dive into the art of short story writing, characterization, writing enticing dialogue and subtext, creating compelling conflict, and the art of screenwriting. We look forward to welcoming new guests to help cover these topics and can't wait to see what stories our writers dream up.

As always, I am deeply moved by this group of young writers dedication to their writing and exploration of reading. They inspire me daily, and I hope you find some inspiration in the following pages as well.

Rebecca Ruitter

PROGRAM COORDINATOR



Get to know the Authors

Would you rather read the first half of a book and never the ending, or the last half of the book but never the beginning?

The first half. Though it would probably drive me insane to never know how something ends, it would offer ample writing opportunity. Imagination would take over and I could write so many alternate endings to one story. The beginning would essentially become the backstory, and then the story would be up to my manipulation.

-Zia

If given only these two options I would definitely read the first half. The first part of a novel is normally when you get to know the characters and develop a genuine care for the story. Without that, the ending wouldn't carry as much meaning.

-Myah

I would rather read the ending because I don't like not knowing, also if you read the end you can typically guess what happened in the beginning.

-Samantha

I would rather read the last part of the book because I'd be reading a conclusion to a story and I feel like that is very important. Endings of stories are often filled with hope and learning which I absolutely love. Reading just the beginning would make me leave it at a cliffhanger. I'd rather leave the book at the end where I can make up my own beginning.

-Abby

I would prefer reading the last half of the book, since I'd rather start where the action has already picked up. I personally also enjoy stories that don't tell too much, I like trying to figure out some of the details myself.

-Raine



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

What we're reading and loving these days

The Farthest Shore by Ursula K. Le Guin

The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown

The 9:09 Project by Mark H. Parsons

Legends & Lattes by Travis Baldree

Half Brother by Kenneth Oppel

Match Maker by Cam Marshall

Welcome to Night Vale by Jeffrey Cranor and Joseph Fink

The Lost Year by Katherine Marsh

Crow Lake by Mary Lawson

The Wilderness of Girls by Madeline Claire Franklin

Just Ash by Sol Santana

One for the Murphys by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

The War that Saved my Life by Kimberly Brubaker

Bradley

Looking for Alaska by John Green

Homebody by Theo Parish



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Mithras,
 Kalbim dekin deydare.
 Seni hissettigim her ahlakim sual
 tek neyistik yemec de.
 Kuyruigin " keliminde ki
 bahsediyimuzum qm.
 Kisi nasil ki her
 barmada geyvada dner
 Sogutklanim



The Library Challenge



Your local library is a treasure trove of learning and stories to discover! Nowadays it can feel like you are constantly bombarded with new things to buy, things you don't want to miss out on and things you need to catch up on; so instead of spending more money, support your local library by following this list. You'll help make sure library services stay available and you'll find everything you need to entertain yourself, pass time with friends, and keep your mind sharp. It's a win win!



Libraries are more than just books, there are so many different options to choose from. Over the next year, try to borrow each of these items from your local library:

01. A Music CD
02. A Travel Guide
03. A Video Game
04. A Poetry Collection
05. An Autobiography
06. A History Book on a topic of your choosing
07. A Play
08. A Zine
09. A Picture Book
10. A Photography Album
11. A Craft Tutorial
12. A Nonfiction Book
13. An Old Movie
14. A Short Story Collection
15. An Audiobook

By the end, you should have had a nice sample of what the library has to offer, and there may be even things that I missed, so don't let the list be the be all end all. Some libraries can let you borrow things like museum passes and musical instruments, and check their website for free educational and cultural programs. Remember that your library is there for you, so make the most out of it!



Do you ever miss your favourite characters?

BY RAINE HERMOSA

Do you ever wonder how your favourite characters are doing? God it's been, how long since you said hi to some of them. Some of them are buried deep into your childhood memory. Others are still as important to your life as ever, you just haven't had as much time to spend time together.

Do you think they still remember you?

Both of you have gone on incredible journeys since you first met. It can sometimes be difficult to keep in touch, and it can be even harder to miss them. You miss watching their adventures, fighting alongside them, being there for their most important moments. Together, we've all helped shape their stories. We became inspired to create art, writing music. Friendships and enemies were created over how much we cared about our favourite characters. We stayed up all night dreaming about them and spent all day talking about them.

For some, that might be all in the past now, or pushed to the side after real life got in the way. But don't forget about it. Don't forget about them.

Do you think they forgot about you?

Our imaginary worlds sit quite dormant when we're not there to take care of them. Not dying, but in deep sleep. They maintain their integrity, preserving their life for when they're awakened by you again.

All it takes is one word someone says, one reference, that takes your mind all the way back to summer afternoons laying on the couch in pajamas, morning sunlight falling through half opened blinds, controller in hand, you and your favourite character side by side exploring a new world together.

It takes you back to late nights in your room, deep under the covers watching the final moments of your favourite show as you root for your favourite characters to push until the end. Until the screen finally fades to black, and you're left in a silent house as you hold on to what you just witnessed in your fists, replaying the moments you shared in your head.

It takes you back to sitting on a ferry, flipping through page after page, paragraph after paragraph, hearing about your favourite characters day to day struggles and hopes and joys, almost as if you were there listening to them. You clutch onto the book covers, looking out onto the open sea, then back at the book you're holding, thankful that you can take it along on your journey.

These memories are what keeps us going.

Eventually, you'll be drawn back into their grasp, booting up an old game console, logging back into a mobile app or rewatching your favourite movie, and when that happens, it will feel like no time has past. You've been transported all the way back to when you first found each other, welcomed into their arms. Maybe you've even brought along some new friends from your side of the screen to introduce.

All of this to say, don't give up on them. Don't think that feeling is over. Don't forget about that feeling, don't trash it away don't bury yourself in a pit of shame for wishing that maybe things could be a bit more childlike again.

~ ~ ~

The drive to the beach was bumpy, we weren't going somewhere frolicked by tourist we were taking a more backcountry approach, slipping off the highway onto the side roads as we whisked past dense forest following the coast.

~ ~ ~

"What do you think?"

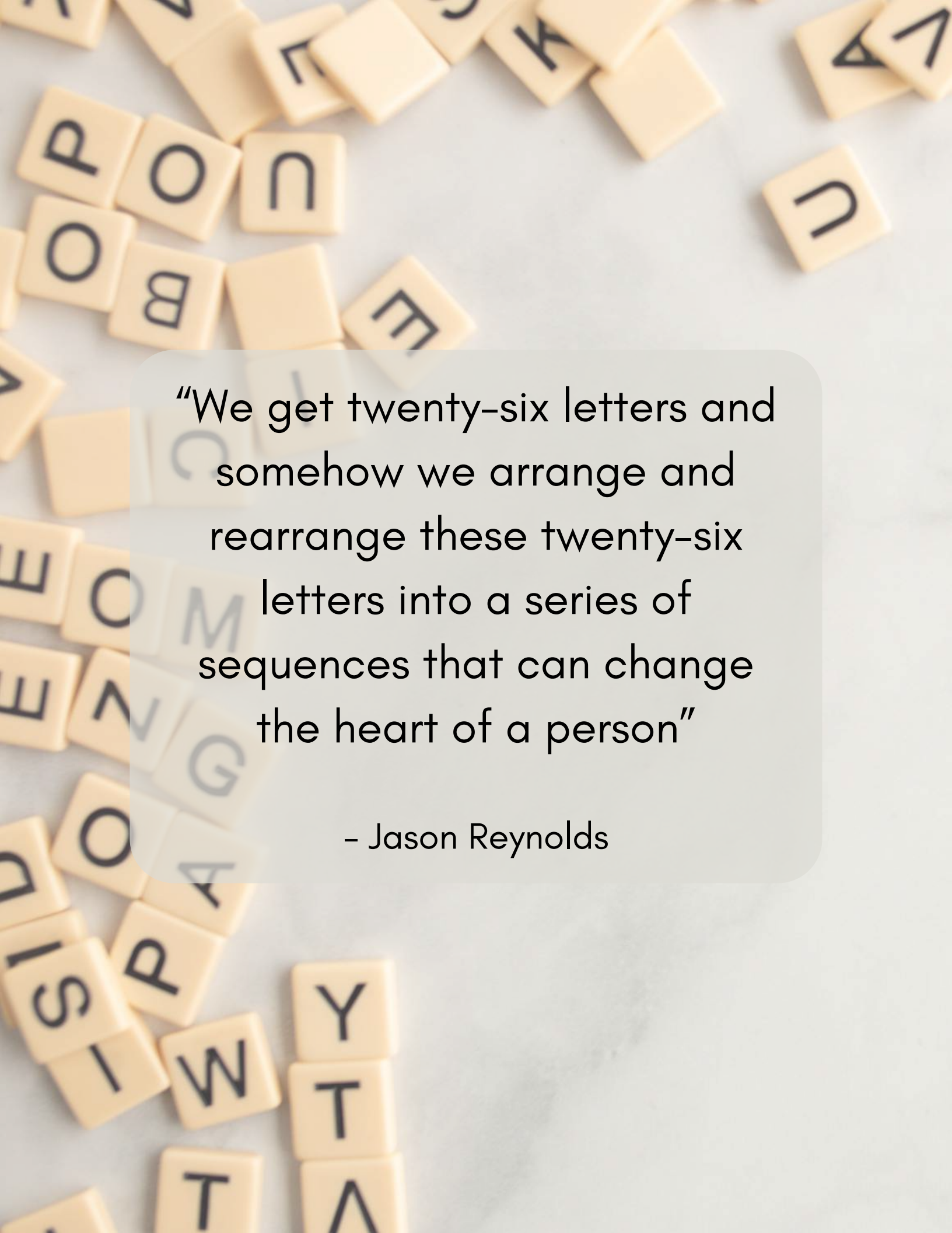
The figure in the computer spoke back. "It's, really special. But, you know I'm the only one who's actually real right? The rest of them are just simulated by a series of ones and zeroes."

"Not to others they aren't. Through the power of creativity and personal motivation, anything in your mind can be possible. Even a fictional character can get you through the toughest times."

"I, it's hard to imagine doing all that yourself. To keep believing in it, that its real."

"It's less so believing whether they're actually real, and more so believing that with them, anything is possible."

The figure in the computer placed their hand against the other side of the screen. "I'm glad you believe it's possible, even though it's a bit different."

A top-down view of numerous light-colored wooden Scrabble tiles scattered on a light grey marble surface. The tiles are arranged in a way that suggests the formation of words, with some letters clearly visible like 'P', 'O', 'N', 'U', 'B', 'E', 'M', 'G', 'A', 'S', 'I', 'P', 'W', 'Y', 'T', 'A', 'D', 'O', 'N', 'E', 'K', 'A', 'V'.

“We get twenty-six letters and somehow we arrange and rearrange these twenty-six letters into a series of sequences that can change the heart of a person”

- Jason Reynolds

THE END: BORN TO BUT NOT LIVING

AN EXCERPT

BY SAMANTHA L.D. MARTIN

READ THE FIRST 4 CHAPTERS OF SAMANTHA'S
STORY IN OUR SPRING TO FALL ISSUES

Chapter Five: Two Like Minds

It's been a month and a half since my first date with Irmina and each day that passes we become closer. The incident with the Jewish man has long since blown over with the other men but the memory is still fresh in my mind causing me to wake up in the middle of the night. The rest of my training is going well and I am successfully keeping an average efficiency in my performance, on top of building our physical strength which was taught by Major Förstner, shooting and other weapons taught by Lieutenant Beiler, we also learnt tech, radio and paperwork, which was instructed by a Captain whose name I never cared enough to remember, as well as flight training being taught occasionally by Captain Koch. I did fairly well in most of the training, except for the Captain's tech and admin classes which I found immensely boring. Now we are all lined up to see where our training has taken us. Major Förstner, Lieutenant Beiler, Captain Koch, and the other Captain stand in front of us. Major Förstner, being the highest rank, steps forward.

"You have all trained tirelessly in the past month and I am pleased to announce that now is the next step in supporting the FatherLand!" Förstner pauses for breath while Beiler hands him a clipboard of names. "I will read out your name and where you will be sent, if your name is called please take a step forward. Understood?"

In unison the group shouts. "Yes sir!"



Beiler, the other Captain and Koch, exchange sinister smiles as Förstner starts to read from the list. "First off we have the paperwork, radio, et cetera... so the men for that are Achterberg, Schmidt W, Fischer, and Müller B."

The other Müller, the man who passed out on the first day, and I make eye contact before he and the other three men take a pace forward, as their names are called. We all watch as the Captain instructs them out of the room and they leave in a neat single file line.

"Next we have the aircraft team, Bauer, Schäfer, Zimmermann, Neumann, Handschuh, and Wagner."

Six new men step forward and follow Captain Koch out. Leaving twenty men, myself included standing stiffly in line. Along with Beiler and Förstner himself who stand proudly at the front.

"We now have active duty..."

My heart sinks with the realization that active duty is being assigned and I'm still here. My palms start to become clammy and everyone else in line exchanges side glances.

Förstner breaks the silence as he reads the names. "Kientz, Amsel, Baumann, Schmidt A, Brinkerhoff, Dittmar, Freud, Gerhardt, Geizler, and Gruber."

A wave of relief floods over me and the men who were named step forward, two of them being Buzz cut and Broad who have mixes of pride and terror on their faces. I hold back a scoff. Look where being a good shot got them. The front lines. I bet they won't ever brag about *that* again.

I expect Beiler to lead them out but Förstner continues. "As-well as guard duty, Hafner, Hofmeister, Eichel, Jäger, Langenberg, Meinhardt, Raskopf, and, Müller F."

My heart drops when I hear my name. I know it was inevitable but the realisation still hits hard. I take my pace forward and look at the two men left behind, the first a slightly overweight man with dark stubble and the young teen boy who Förstner had held the gun to. The two men look at each other confused. Why weren't they put in a group? Beiler barks the command for my group to march, and the teen and I make eye contact as I start to leave.

His eyes are panic stricken and his knees buckle. The man on his right seems to have no clue what is going on and I can hear him speaking loudly, and crudely, to Förstner. I am almost out the door when Förstner takes a step dangerously close to him and reaches to his side, and I have just left the building when the sound of a muffled gunshot and a grunt is heard from inside.

Bam.

The two men in front of me, Meinhardt and Raskopf, heard the shot as well and they both turn their heads to face the source of the noise, their steps faltering in shock. The rest of the group keeps marching quickly, unaware of what just happened inside. Banging on the door follows and I can hear the teen's screams. I want to go back and help him, I want to make sure that poor child is safe, yet the fear for my own life keeps me marching in line.

"Halt!" Beiler yells.

As one the line stops and I falter my step causing me to crash into Raskopf.

"Sorry!" I whisper-shout.

Raskopf simply nods and turns back to face Beiler, who is checking a clipboard.

"Congratulations to all of you," Beiler announces, looking up from his clipboard. "All of you, whether you are going to the front lines or guard duty, will be riding on the same train first thing tomorrow morning. Make sure to pack accordingly for your destination."

Eichel's hand shoots up. "Sir, for those of us with guard duty can we bring our families?"

A sour look forms on Lieutenant Beiler's face. "No, but depending on where you end up you might be able to see them. *Occasionally.*"

"But sir, I have a newborn daughter..." Eichel stammers.

"Well then it's a good thing you aren't going to the front now isn't it, knowing you, she would be losing a father if you were." Beiler sneers.

Eichel goes pale and so do all the men who were assigned to the front. I don't blame them, the realisation that we all have the potential to die at any moment is terrifying. Even the men who were assigned to guard duty have a look of bitter shock. I for one have known it this whole time. Lieutenant Beiler stares at all of our stunned faces with a certain kind of smugness that makes one both want to run away from and strangle the man the expression belongs to.

"You of all people should know about that eh Eichel? About your subpar abilities I mean, be thankful you are going to a Stalag. I just hope you are more respectful of your superiors there than you are here. I don't care who your Father is." Beiler chuckles.

The air is heavy and no one dares say another thing to Beiler, instead we all stand silently waiting for him to dismiss us. The anticipation and anxiety of our futures threatens to topple me over and still Beiler doesn't dismiss us, as if wants the terror to sink in further, to make us more vulnerable.

At long last Beiler says in a soft, dangerous voice. "And remember men, any disobedience will not be tolerated. I suggest that all of you follow the Führer's wishes and make sure Germany comes out victorious. You are dismissed."

The relief of being dismissed washes over us as we right turn and march off in our directions but the terror that Beiler had installed in all of us lingers. A fair amount of the men group together to discuss shakily everything that has transpired. Meinhardt and Raskopf approach me quickly, each with a pale face.

"Müller," Meinhardt calls as he approaches, once next to me his voice drops to a frantic whisper. "Müller! Inside, as we were leaving, did you hear the- the —"

"The gun shot?" I finish.

Meinhardt nods and Raskopf's eyes widen.

Raskopf's breath trembles. "Was it really...? But that means someone is... dead..."

I look at them solemnly, like me, the idea of a German shooting another German is horrific to them. Raskopf and Meinhardt exchange unreadable glances and Meinhardt mutters something I can't quite catch.

"Yeah, he's dead alright... I just hope the kid is still alive and well..." I mutter.

"Does it really matter? Even if that poor kid is still alive he's gonna have to deal with the trauma of that... it will tear him apart... it may be for the best if he was shot too." Meinhardt states.

Raskopf crosses his arms. "I agree, what they were thinking letting a teenager in here at all though I don't know..."

"It's war," I shrug. "We have no control over anything anymore."

At this we all nod in silent agreement. Through all my basic training these two men are the only two that share my principles. We hadn't talked much up until now despite the fact they had joined the shooting station about a week or so after me, but now we have something unanimous we can agree on, the brutality of the war we have been thrown head first into.

<•>

"Friedrich, do you have to go so soon?" Mother asks worriedly as she watches me pack from the doorway.

"Mother, I assure you if I had a choice I wouldn't be going at all." I sigh, shoving some clothes into a suitcase.

"I know..." she mutters. "You will at least write though?"

"Of course I will," I smile.

I zip up my suitcase and hug my Mother. I both feel bad for her and admire her, she is shaking from the shock but that's it. No tears. Not this time at least. Father comes up the stairs and sighs when he sees my Mother and I, Mother snuffles and Father walks over to join the hug.

"You are so strong my son," he whispers comfortingly.

"How? I am too scared to point out how wrong this all is..." I ask, stifling my own tears.

Father shakes his head and rubs my back. "You were thrown head first into this, you have seen unimaginable things and you haven't even gone out into the field... for you to stay standing is... incredible..."

I sniffle but cover it up quickly with a laugh. "Jesus, you are both gonna make me cry..."

"You're allowed to, no one will judge you," Mother comforts.

Upon hearing this a tear falls down my cheek. Mother and Father hold me tightly whispering comforting words in my ear. I have always been thankful for my family but now I am even happier for them. I break away from the hug and pick up my bag.

I am about to go downstairs when Father asks. "When do you leave?"

"First thing tomorrow morning, at o five hundred hours." I sigh.

Father glances at the wall clock. "But it's nine forty-five now."

Mother wrings her hands nervously as she does the calculations. "Sixteen hours and forty five minutes till you leave..."

I nod. "It will take a while to get to the train station too so I am gonna go talk to Avila and Freida and leave probably around three."

Mother and Father exchange glances, I used to suffer from severe insomnia so the fact that I will be driving myself to the station on such low sleep worries them. Eventually Father gives me a stiff nod of approval while Mother simply smiles sadly. I head downstairs to see my sisters. Avila is snuggled, asleep, in Freida's lap while she reads. It's adorable and I feel horrible to interrupt them with this news.

Freida looks up, her brow arching in confusion. "What's up?"

"Shouldn't you two be in bed?" I ask, ignoring her question in an attempt to stall.

"Never mind that. What are you doing down here?" Her gaze shifts to the bag in my hand. "With that."

Damnit. A puff of breath slips out of my dry lips. I can't ignore her question this time. Slowly I accumulate the sentence in my head as I take a seat in the armchair across from the twins.

"I think you should wake Avila first,"

Freida's other brow shoots up and she shakes her sister awake. Avila groans as she sits up, her wavy hair sprawled across her face like a veil.

"What's goin' on..." Avila mutters.

Freida pokes her and points to me. "Listen."

Avila looks at me, a hint of annoyance in her sleep-blurred eyes. I take a deep breath before continuing, trying to subdue the guilt in my soul.

"So um... I'm sorry to wake you for this Avila, but I felt it would be better for you to hear it from me tonight rather than Freida passing it on in the morning." I pause, the bitter taste in my mouth intensifying. "I... I've been chosen to be on guard duty, for the military... I don't know where I will be sent but I leave at three am... I can't bring any of you with me as far as I know but I promise to write."

Avila straightens while Freida's jaw drops. In unison their shocked voices whisper, "...what..."

The now familiar knot resurfaces. "I'm so sorry..."

Slowly, Avila rises and makes her way over to me. She wraps her arms around me and a loud sob echoes through the silent room. Freida also walls over, hands shaking and eyes watering, she also wraps her arms around me.

"You can't..." Freida stammers

"You promised..." Avila sobs.

My own eyes start to water quickly.

I hate this... I hate what it is doing to me, to my family, to the country.

Avila pulls back, her nose dripping. "W- what about Irmina...? Your wedding was supposed to happen soon..."

That's right, I had completely forgotten about Irmina.

What will happen? Will the wedding be called off? Will she follow me to wherever the heck I am going?

Questions, that I guarantee will remain unanswered, flood my brain. I look around the room and spot the clock.

Nine fifty.

"I'm going to get some sleep..." I whisper, rubbing my sister's backs.

"Okay..." they both respond.

I squeeze them tight then turn back up the stairs and to my room. Closing the door and flicking off the light, I don't even bother to change my clothes as I fall asleep on my bed. The covers not even pulled back.

<●>

The sound of my alarm clock echoes through the still room. I smack it quickly, muffling the noise then groan as I roll off the bed. Glancing at the clock it takes me a while to read that it is exactly three 'o'clock. Grudgingly, I get up, grab my bag, and quietly make my way downstairs, careful not to wake anyone. I pass through the kitchen and put some of Freida's kartoffelpuffer in a napkin. Avila's wooden bracelet is snug on my wrist and I can feel it rubbing against my skin as I silently open the front door. The cold air hits me like a brick and I shiver violently as I make my way to the car. The recruiting instructions rest on the dashboard, the times and date I need are highlighted. I start the car and a sad smile forms on my lips as I pull away from the house.

I'll be back after the war and everything will be okay... I promise.

I drive for about an hour to get to the train station, my panicked thoughts not far behind. I park my car and run a hand along the hood as I pass. After I leave, Father will come by to pick up the car, yet another thing that I won't see till the end of the war.

"All passengers getting transported to either a *Stalag or the front please board now!" A loud voice instructs as I approach.

A deathly silence presses heavily on the small crowd as we all shuffle our way over to the train. We all huddle together and above the crowd, a middle aged man with scraggly hair is waving his arms trying to get our attention. He must be standing on something very tall, since I can see him from my spot at the back of the crowd.

"Hello! Um- could anyone heading to a Stalag please come to the front of the crowd please?" The man continues awkwardly.

A murmur passes through the crowd and slowly the rest of us from Förstner's training base push our way to the front as well as four from the neighbouring base. I can't help but be surprised and slightly impressed at how many of us there are in Düsseldorf that were chosen for this. As I push through the crowd I spot Eichel, who is currently trying to push his way forward, Buzz cut and Broad, who have to stay in the group, and eventually, Meinhardt and Raskopf, who have already made it to the front of the crowd.

Raskopf, whose eyes are darting around frantically, locks onto me. A wave of relief visibly washes over him, he elbows Meinhardt and gestures for him to look my way.

"Guten Morgen," I smile as I approach them.

"Müller, thank god you are here," Meinhardt sighs. "I was worried."

"About what? That I wouldn't make it here?" I asked, my brow arching slightly.

Meinhardt goes pink. "I mean yeah, it is pretty damn early after all..."

I allow myself to chuckle slightly. "So based off your expression I would assume that you almost didn't make it."

This time Raskopf chimes in with a sly grin. "Someone doesn't have a driver's license and didn't come out of his house when I arrived."

Meinhardt's face flushes deeper while Raskopf and I chuckle.

"I'm assuming you two must be very close friends then, eh?" I ask.

Raskopf smiles. "Oh yeah! Abraham and I have been friends since school!"

Meinhardt rolls his eyes and says jokingly, "Unfortunately."

"Oi! If it is that big of a problem how come we've never been apart?" Raskopf retorts.

Meinhardt laughs and shakes his head. "Fair, fair, but in answer to your question Müller, we are very close friends. Hans er- I mean, *Raskopf* lives close to here so he offered to pick me up rather than taking a taxi."

I smile at the fact that Raskopf had uttered Meinhardt's given name without batting an eye, while Meinhardt is making a constant effort to use Raskopf's surname, despite their close nature. Something about having a conversation with these two puts me at ease, probably because it adds a hint of normality and distracts me from the actual situation of the world.

"So where are you heading?" Meinhardt asks, changing the topic.

"Hm? Oh, which Stalag? Well... the paper is kind of confusing..." I mutter taking it out. "It has three on it. Stalag Fourteen, Fifteen, and Sixteen."

Raskopf nods. "Yeah Abraham and I have the same, so does Eichel. We met up with him on the way here. Turns out his dad is the Colonel who works at the recruiting office!"

Both of my brows shoot up. "Eichel eh..." *That would explain Beiler's comments about not caring who his dad is.*

"Did he know what the deal was with the three Stalags?"

"He said that we should all go to one of the three, whatever one has less Privates in it since they can't have too many new people in one place."

"Well that isn't comforting at all..."

Meinhardt smiles weakly. "Yeah, but it's better than being sent to the front." He gestures to the group with Buzz cut and Broad. "What a bad reward for being a good shot..."

Raskopf nods his head in agreement then pauses. "Müller, weren't you a really good shot? Why are you going to a Stalag?"

Sweat starts to develop. "Oh... well..." Memories of the Jewish man come back to me. "I uh... I screwed up at a time I shouldn't have."

Raskopf and Meinhardt nod and mutter various words of agreement and condolences.

"Well, think of it this way.. you dodged about a hundred Russian bullets." Meinhardt places a hand on my shoulder and smiles.

"Yeah, plus if you come to a Stalag you aren't stuck with trusting your life in the hands of Geizler and Gerhardt." Raskopf laughs.

I raise a brow. "Who?"

"Geizler is the one with the buzz cut and Gerhardt is the shorter, more broad one." Meinhardt explains, pointing at each in turn.

"Ah," I smile. So that is their names, funny I am learning them now, when I won't ever see them again.

"All aboard!" The same middle aged man calls out loudly, disrupting my thoughts.

"Well, now or never." Raskopf says, grabbing his bag from the ground.

"Is never an option?" Meinhardt asks, grabbing his own bag.

"I wish," I mutter as I turn to face the train that is Stalag bound.

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



A winter forest scene with tall, thin trees and a snow-covered path. The word "Poetry" is written in a black, cursive font on a white brushstroke background.

Poetry



LEAVES & LOVE (MY DEAR)

Pound are the footsteps, running to their posts.

Bang are the guns, destroying lives and hopes.

Sobs are the pain of people in homes, Shaking and holding their children close.

Snap goes the heart of a 27-year-old widow.

Crack goes the sanity of a mother caught in limbo.

Is he dead? Is he safe? Wounded or scared? Does he know? Is he calm? Is he prepared?

For God hear my plea as we are so unsure. You're the only one who will listen, with intentions still pure.

Uncertainty lingers, followed by grief. If worst comes to worst I am a fallen leaf.

Once a delicate adornment for something strong and tall,

But now as you're gone piece by piece I fall.

You're risking your life and yet I am still here.

"I'm safe my love" I hear you in my ear.

But is that true, my love, or another white lie?

"It's for your safety" you smile and simply imply.

But I can't help but think that isn't quite true,

Are you saying that to save me or to convince you?

For leaves grow back, a cycle year-round. Though a piece of me will always stay on the ground.

Hold me tight and cling to me, my love. I'll keep you warm as you mourn those now above.

We shall heal and replenish anew.

But it will be there, grief, in me and you. When winter comes round and our leaves fall again, I'll keep you safe with angels heaven sent.

You fought for so long and you gave up a lot, Soon however it's just us; you, me, a kettle and teapot.

So take a sip and lean into me, my dear. And let yourself mourn, laugh, and fear.

But for now, as we are apart, Our roots are still strong, our mind, body, and heart.

When you come I'll wait for you, my dear. For we are just leaves growing back, every year.

-Samantha L.D. Martin

I did see the stars
 I did see them
 Bright galaxies
 The earth
 From up above
 I did see them before my lungs gave out
 And my eyes closed
 And my limbs went slack

I saw them
 Alone
 No one to share them with
 Just me
 My eyes
 Capturing space
 Momentarily
 Before their not caring killed me
 ~

They did love me they said
 He brought me to play with his kids before launch
 Joy filled my lungs
 I was all happy wags and cuddles
 I was beautiful in my life
 They loved me
 They all loved me
 I will live on forever
 Though they sent me off to die
 They memorialize me like gold kept in bottles
 I will stay in their minds
 Despite my broken breath
 Known to
 stop
 since the moment they chose me
 ~

They said
 They'd rescued me
 Given me a better life
 No more cages
 No more lies
 But then they stuck me in a small shuttle
 To test how little I would thrive
 They knew they were sending me off to die
 White walls big lies
 There was no better life
 There was only stars
 As I closed my eyes



Quote from the poetry book *Crushed Wilt Mint*, by Jess Housty, digital artwork by Abby Hawthorne

Home is where the heart is, they say
but we are tied between islands

our heart's arteries pulling
left to right
right to left

between the one I call home
and the one that raised me

the present that soothes me
and the past that guides me

Sometimes I call for you
I call for you to return home
Sometimes I call for you
I call for you to bridge things unknown

clouds

never found

ocean bound
starry eyed

across the sky

unmoored

meaning lost

death-wish defying
from all the meandering

navigating

islands

I am tied between islands
from stories
woven out of thistles and sheep's wool
hawthorne branches and camas flowers

I am tied from blood
tired of the bloodshed

we are broken on our own thorns
but not willing to swim towards healing

healing from the blade that I wield
passed from limb to limb
branch to leaf

The ocean tides I'm made of
Seaweed on shorelines, beautiful
sandcastles, stories of gold
Cast down by iron, spikes and thorns
a tie between us reduced to threads

ties between islands
wavering

weeping

wind blown

overthrown

long traveled

well trekked

long fought

never lost

for the love of our lives
we are slowly forgetting we love

I am slowly forgetting my love

for that journey

Our journey

that I want to cherish
for that destination i want
to want
for this beginning
where I am stuck between branches

Falling through the cracks

of hopes and dreams of mine
and hopes and dreams
of that other islands ideals

Other islands with other pasts

that I sometimes don't want to be part of
but want to take into my hands
and crush into a fine dust
even if the flowered thorns poke at my heart
like dueling swords
past down bloodline to bloodline
from hand to scarred hand
broken when the blade struck

treasured gold
and
ice thin hope
wings afloat

bright eyes full of trying to catch that
freedom

tandem paths ever entwined
from your shore to mine

pine needles
buried deep
island seeds
your history
stuck in mine

when the seed sprouts
history made in conflict and bouts
memories run through my veins
and take root in my body

and when I'm lowered into the earth
I'll spread my cries throughout all the land
the soil is my rebirth
in the trees i still stand

my stories come in waves
my voice rushing through valleys
history carved in the dirt
tied together with loose threads

even if it will continue ripping at the seams
I'll keep breathing in
the sick
sweet
scent
of my own destruction

not just from me

not just from me

not just from the islands

not just from the sea

but that whole empty space
so vast
and cold
and far away

the tie between two worlds
out of sight

POETRY

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

A SMILE AWAY
FROM A LAUGH

THE LOSSES
THAT MATTER

THE SOUND OF
YOUR HEART
BREAKING

I HELD MY BREATH LIKE
A KALEIDOSCOPE

I CAN REMEMBER
EVERY FEELING
YOU EVER GIFTED
ME

THE TORNADO RUNS
THROUGH MY BRAIN

YOU HAVE INJECTED
ME INTO YOUR VEINS

PARTICLES OF OUR
CHILDHOOD

I MAKE NO APOLOGIES
FOR HOW I REPAIR
WHAT YOU BROKE

FIRE IN MY
BLOOD

PROMPTS

IN A WEEK THIS
MOMENT WILL BE
SMALL

STATIC ABYSS

IT FEELS SEPIA
TONED

A COMET
UNDESERVING OF ITS
FATE

STRAIGHT JACKET
EXISTENCE

LITTLE POCKETS OF
BEAUTIFUL EMOTION

WHAT IF YOU'RE
HOLY?

THE ESSENCE OF
YOUR VOICE

THE ESSENCE OF A
WRITER

YOUR
METAPHORS
ARE DIFFERENT
NOW

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Left Behind

BY MYAH RATHI LITTELJOHN

The packing began a week before the shiny, black car came and took mother and father away. At first there was the careful planning—never-ending to-do lists, prized family heirlooms wrapped carefully in newspaper, neatly folded clothes packed away in suitcases. And then there was the frantic, last-minute scurrying about—random items tossed into overstuffed bags, favourite pictures snatched from their frames and stashed hurriedly in pockets. But my clothes lay gathering dust in the bottom drawer, and Rin’s toys stayed shut up in their cardboard box.

The night before mother and father left, they pulled me aside for a ‘special’ talk.

“Aster, honey, we have something to tell you,” called mother.

“What?” I replied, curiosity getting the better of me.

“We’re leaving tomorrow morning, just mother and me,” responded father, his voice cutting in a way that was unnatural for him.

“Wh-wh-where are you going?” I murmured.

“I don’t know, Aster, but we are going to be gone for a little while,” replied mother, her tone cold and distant. “You and your sister are going to stay here.”

“Alright,” I said.

“I want you to take care of your sister—you’re in charge when we’re gone,” declared father.

“Alright.”

“Well, off to bed then,” said mother, as if nothing were amiss.

I turned and walked quickly to the bedroom that I shared with Rin, which was separated from the living room by a sliding metal door.

“And Aster?” called my father.

“Y-yes?”

“Good night.”

I closed the door as hard as I could without slamming it. Rin was already sound asleep, and her soft snoring reminded me of the gentle bleating of a lamb. But what did I really know about sheep, anyway? It had been years since sheep, or any animals for that matter, had been spotted around here—at least ones that were alive.

I crawled under my thin coverlet and lay there, deathly still. My bed was next to the sliding door, and if I pressed my ear to the cool metal I could just make out mother and father’s strained voices.

“This is wrong, Eraina...” father muttered, mother’s name sounding almost like a curse.

“It’s either them or us,” retorted mother.

“But this is wrong. We can’t just—”

“It’s what’s expected of us,” mother cut in. “We’re coming back; they’ll be fine.”

“Eraina, you know we aren’t ever coming—”

“Do you want to stay here, then?” mother interrupted like a stubborn child who didn’t get the toy she wanted. “I can leave on my own if you’d like—you don’t have to come!”

There was a long pause in which I could hear nothing but mother’s impatient breathing.

“I’ll put the tickets in the front pocket of the carry-on,” said father, defeated.

“Good.”

When I was sure their conversation was over, I turned from the door and buried my face in my pillow. I might have been too young to come with them, but I wasn’t too young to not know where they were going. For far too long, we humans had been frittering away our resources, and it took the felling of the very last tree for us to realise—too late, of course—the grave consequences of our actions. Our planet’s atmosphere had become so filthy and toxic that simply breathing the air could be fatal, and gas masks and oxygen tanks became sought-after commodities. Entire cities were forced to shut down, and many families were relocated to isolated saltbox cabins and shipping container homes. But as the human race is selfish, it is also industrious. A plan soon took shape, and this was to fly us away from our mistakes aboard several gigantic spacecraft. But there wasn’t enough room for everyone, and certain ‘compromises’ had to be made—only strong men and women could fly; the very young, old and sick were all to be left behind.

TBut despite our flawed nature humankind has found a way to survive – or at least some of us.

And then reality finally hit me: mother and father were preparing to leave. They were leaving us for good—leaving me and poor little Rin to rot in this sad house with babies and the elderly for neighbours, who-knows-how-many kilometers away. For the rest of the night I lay awake staring at the shadows dancing on the ceiling, trying to stop the tears from falling.

The next morning I rose early and slipped into my clothes—leggings and a black turtleneck made out of a waxy material that supposedly offered some protection against the toxic elements. I hadn’t been outdoors in weeks, not since dust storm Damon had landed (we had started naming these massive storms). But if I was going to take care of Rin when the food supply ran dry, then I’d have to brave the toxic air and forage for whatever remained in the barren, treeless wasteland. After waking Rin and helping her into her clothes, we went and stood in front of the full-length mirror in a corner of our room. We looked like nothing more than a pair of helpless, scrawny children, and I wondered if we would last a single day let alone a lifetime on our own. But when I glanced down at Rin—her shirt on backwards and her auburn hair pulled into one of her ‘experimental’ hairstyles—I had a sudden urge to protect her. Turning away from the mirror, I caught a glimpse of another Aster—tired yet determined eyes, straw-coloured hair almost silvery in the dusty morning light—and I knew that I would try everything I could to make do.

By the time we emerged from our bedroom, mother and father had finished packing. They seemed surprised and a little disappointed to see us, as if they thought they could slip out without even saying goodbye. I let them hug me, but I made a point of remaining still and expressionless; when they said that they loved us, I merely nodded. Rin, on the other hand, wrapped her arms around mother and father without hesitation, and for a moment I envied her effortless innocence. When the shiny, black car came to take mother and father away, I locked the door behind them and closed all the blinds. Rin seemed to think they were leaving for a short vacation—to Hawaii, where we last vacationed as a family—and I didn’t have the heart to break hers. But I knew that soon I would have to explain to her that mother and father were never coming back.

While Rin worked on a puzzle in the living room, I took the opportunity to check on our pantry. I calculated that we had at most sixty days’ worth of food and water before we’d be forced to leave the house in a dangerous and probably futile search for new supplies. I decided to ignore this looming disaster, and focused instead on making lunch—a few stale crackers and a small tin of expired sardines. When I presented the meager portions to my sister, she pretended to gag; for a moment I wanted to strike her across her still-chubby cheeks. We ate in silence, and afterwards Rin returned to her puzzle and I collapsed onto the nearby armchair with a favourite book.

Just as I was starting to feel a little bit more at ease, an incredibly loud and deep rumbling sound filled my ears and shook our tiny home—as if a herd of giant elephants was trampling towards us. I grabbed Rin’s hand and she looked at me for reassurance, but I had none to offer. Bolting for the kitchen window, we threw open the blind and scanned the now all-too-familiar wasteland for some something, anything. At first we saw nothing, but then I spied something incredible in the far-off distance. Out of the crumbling, abandoned ruins of our once-bustling city rose a massive grey object, and in its wake flowed great plumes of smoke and debris. And for the second time in as many days, reality hit me: this was one of the promised spacecraft sent to save humanity from itself. Squinting, I thought I could make out hundreds, perhaps thousands of shimmering porthole windows staring out from the spaceship like a thousand tiny eyes; I imagined that one of them belonged to mother and father. I wondered if mother and father could see our house, if mother and father felt guilty about leaving us, if mother and father loved us still, if mother and father were even looking.

“What’s that?” asked my sister, pointing to the sky with her thumb before sticking it back into her mouth.

“It’s a spaceship, and mother and father are on it,” I replied, not being able to keep the truth to myself any longer.

“I didn’t know that Hawaii is in space,” said Rin.

“It isn’t, stupid—they aren’t going to Hawaii!” I snapped.

“Where are they going, then?” persisted Rin.

“I don’t know, okay?”

“When are they coming back?”

“They aren’t coming back, Rin!” I yelled, all my pent-up anger and resentment surging through me. “They’re never coming back!”

Rin’s lower lip began to quiver, and she burst into a fit of tears.

“It’s okay, don’t cry—it’s okay,” I soothed, combing my hands through her knotty hair.

“M-m-mama! P-papa!” wailed Rin, tears streaming down.

“Stop!” I screamed.

But Rin would not stop, and instead she started to bang her small fists against the window pane, as if that would somehow stop the spaceship from its inevitable ascent. There was clearly no reasoning with Rin, so I sat back down on the armchair and tried (unsuccessfully) to read. At long last, Rin’s crying subsided and I was able to lose myself for a couple of chapters, maybe half an hour. And then reality hit for a third time—an eerie silence pierced the air and my thoughts turned back to Rin. I immediately raced to the kitchen, but it was empty save for a glistening puddle of tears by the window. I checked the bathroom, but Rin wasn’t there either. When I noticed that the back door was slightly ajar, I began to panic. Feeling like my heart might jump out of my body, I opened the door and stepped outside—a fresh trail of tiny footprints raced off through the blanket of toxic dust that had settled over our barren wasteland.

I dashed to the closet and grabbed two sets of oxygen tanks and gas masks. With my mask on and my oxygen tank connected, I stuffed Rin’s items in my backpack and threw on a pair of boots. Now outside, I raced to follow Rin’s tracks that pointed in the direction of our ruined city and mother and father’s spacecraft, which I could still just make out, suspended in the dark sky. I knew that if I didn’t hurry, Rin would surely succumb to the toxic air. After running for what felt like hours (but what could only have been twenty minutes or so), I spotted a small figure on a hill up ahead and knew it could only be Rin. Pushing forward, I was almost at her side. I stopped for a moment to catch my breath. And then reality hit for a fourth and final time – I looked up to see my sister’s tiny body hit the ground like a sapling being felled. And this time, there would be no solution.





“ “

—

There is something
delicious about
writing the first
words of a story. You
never quite know
where they'll take
you.

—*Beatrix Potter*



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