

Her or Me?

I have this friend named Marcy.

It can be hard to know where I end and she begins, that's how intertwined and connected we have become. People say we are joined at the hip. One doesn't exist without the other.

It can be overwhelming to be in the same place at the same time as Marcy. She attracts so much attention. People revolve around her like lowly planets, and she, the center of the galaxy, the bright sun, enjoys it.

I've never minded being the moon, the one who only creeps out at night and really only attracts any attention because the sun is technically illuminating it.

Other people have hated her though. They try and resist Marcy's brashness, superior beauty, her popularity.

Silly people, her gravity is too immense.

The thing about suns is that at one point or another they tend to either die out or implode. Very slowly, their own gravity can destroy them. When that happens, they draw other matter with them into the darkest of places.

I remember the day clearly when our sun first hinted at its dwindling reign.

It was the day of that party at Patrick So-and-So's house.

Naturally, we had been invited. Truthfully, it was Marcy who was invited, but her counterpart (me) usually accompanied her.

Marcy was exceptionally experimental this time. She said no to nothing. Everything she was offered was thrown back or entered her bloodstream one way or another.

The thing about Marcy was that she got ugly quickly.

One hour in and anybody that knew her would have had a hard time recognizing her.

“Emmmmmaaa, you are always here with me at these, these parties,” she slurred. She was standing in the middle of the living room at the party, having just completed a hazardous attempt at standing up.

“Of course I am Marcy. You always take me.” I try to talk sweetly and gently take her arm to signal an exit for the both of us.

“Yes but they never invite *you*.” By this time a few people are watching us.

“They invite you. You invite me. It’s all pretty much the same isn’t it?” I hear the dull thud of blood in my ears.

“No. I’ve always said it is, but it isn’t. You know I am the reason people talk to you at all. Honestly, people are scared of you. All you do is hide away at school and then randomly, you chauffeur me to parties and take me home when I have done something regrettable.” She watches me, head quirked to the side, smirk at the ready.

“It can be easy to hate the ones we love most.”

“What? What are you talking about?” she drawls.

“I said, I love you but I hate you right now.”

“She speaks!” Marcy giggles, I dig my fingers into my crossed arms.

I try to pull Marcy out of the room again, but miraculously she maintains a sober strength and stance.

“I know what you are thinking right now Emma. You want to know why I always do this to myself. You want to know why I am here, in front of you, in front of people, and making a complete fool of myself.”

I look at her. It's easy to see why everyone loves her. Her blue eyes dazzle easily with their bright color. Hair that catches the light when it is styled just so. Clothing that fits and was chosen with purpose. A smile that is quick to win you over.

But the mouth attached to that smile has so far only brought me pain. I devote myself to us, our friendship. She tears me apart, manipulates me, forces me into doing things I wouldn't normally do.

"Why then? Why are you doing it?" I play along. On some level I want to know.

"Because I can," she states simply.

Rage.

I manage to escort her out of the party and into my car.

I turn the ignition and the car roars to life and I, well I know just where I'm headed.

To the ridge.

We arrive. I get out and open her door for her. She leans heavily against me, with eyes processing her surroundings.

If you drive five miles from town, you reach the beginnings of the hills that separate the city from our small town. You drive straight up them a ways and reach the ridge. The drive is frightening at times. Twisty, craggy, tattered roads meet steep drop-offs. But the views from the heights there are what draw people to the ridge.

It's still dark, and the moon gleams high above.

We are at one of the lookout points along the ridge.

She looks at me with her crystal clear eyes that hold nothing but her rotten intent.

"Emma, you hate me, but you always let me do what I want. Why is that?"

“I don’t know what you are talking about Marcy.”

“Yes, you do you coward. You are hateful. But so am I. That’s why we’re a perfect pair isn’t it?”

I let go of her and watch her wobble.

“Isn’t the ridge scary at night?” she murmurs.

I see that she is awfully close to the drop-off of our particular lookout spot. I watch as she laughs quietly to herself, walking backwards while looking at me.

“Look at this!”

She disappears beyond the edge of the cliff.

I watched it happen with my own eyes. I didn’t stop it. She didn’t either though.

Marcy is gone. Marcy isn’t coming back.

I swear I didn’t do anything to her. People nod and agree and generally ignore my guilt.

I swear I loved her. Isn’t that enough?

It’s funny though, because sometimes, I hear her name and people are looking and pointing and generally talking about me.

Some even call me Marcy.

Hardly anyone knows my name is Emma.

It’s as if Emma doesn’t exist and Marcy didn’t die.

I guess I just have them fooled.

1919, New York

“I hate work, oh God! I’ve never worked once in my life. I was born in Bursa, a chilly, lazy place, in a family which never knew what work or worry meant.”

Bursa is a large city in northwest Turkey, lying in the foothills where Zümra spent her formative years. During the Turkish War of Independence, her son and daughter-in-law warned her it wasn’t safe in Bursa anymore. Zümra put up a fight; she protested that she’d rather die in Turkey than live the rest of her life somewhere else. All the same they told her she had to leave and to take their daughter Sümeyye with her, assuring Zümra they’ll shortly follow.

keeping her promise to isolate herself from American life, Zümra rarely leaves the apartment. Though she spends weeks in the confines of her room, Zümra still dresses every morning, just as she’s did before the Turkish War. Wearing a modest black dress rising to her neck, like a school teacher would wear, she follows the routine of reading the newspaper and afternoon naps.

The day before, a clipping for a job as a maid was placed on the table, and Zümra turned her head the other way to ignore it.

“I remember when I came home, a footman would pull off my boots, and my mother would speak loudly in adoration about me and wonder why other people didn’t see me in the same light.”

Her husband Barbaros folds his newspaper from his lounge chair and sighs at her, continuing to twirl his thick well-kept mustache with his fingers. Their granddaughter Sümeyye lying face down on the bed stirred gently from her slumber. Her Father taught her to always rise at seven in the morning. Now Sümeyye wakes at seven and stays in bed to meditate about something till nine at least. Howling winter winds hit against the thin wooden walls. Through the window the only view they have of the outside world is of dock laborers knocking off work,

scattering about in noisy groups, buying various edibles from women hawking food, and settling themselves on dirty corners of the pavement for breakfast.

“I’ll soon be seventy. I’m an old woman, a lonely worthless old woman. The only good thing in me is my love for you, and if it hadn’t been for that, I would have been dead long ago.”

Barbaros leaves pretending not to listen. A few minutes later he comes back with a tray of toast and black coffee. They eat in silence. Across the dining table, Sümeyye was lost to the sweet warm darkness beneath the billowing folds of the gray-checked quilt. Barbaros was raising his mug to his lips with a shaking hand, when outside came the musical peal of bells. Zümra screamed with a start, leaping under the table. The commotion aroused Sümeyye who rose gently from the bed stretching her limbs yawning. Zümra was still on the ground weeping.

“That awful bell! My heart can’t take it anymore. My mother shielded me from work, but only just in time! A new age is dawning, the people are marching on us all, a powerful storm is drawing near, soon it will be upon us to drive away any privilege and pleasure, in thirty years everyman will have to work”, wails Zümra.

“I shan’t work grandmother,” chimed Sümeyye from the bed.

“Bah! You don’t matter”, scorns her grandmother.

Sümeyye shrugged and pushes the sheets off her lap making a brisk pace to the washroom.

Barbaros comes over lifting Zümra from the splintered floor, he says,

“Do you know, I’m beginning to forget our son’s face. We’ll be forgotten in just the same way.” Zümra pushed back her dry, thinning gray hair from her face and finally had the courage to look at Barbaros again. His eyes were streaming tears down his old, worn face. Under a bulbous, pimply nose, his lips were trembling. Zümra’s stern face softened, and they fell into each other's arms in a long embrace, until the sounds in the washroom interrupted them.

Sümeyye stands rigidly in the door frame, “Where’s my coat Grandma?”

Breaking away from Barbaros’ arms, Zümra stars at her disdainfully, “I don’t know?”

Barbaros moves around the room turning things over. beneath his lounge chair he finds a small child-size felt coat with brass buttons. Sümeyye’s face beams as she gently lifted her hand over the chair to retrieve the coat from her grandfather. Zümra rolls her eyes and huffs,

“You’re not very bright today Sümeyye.”

Sümeyye lifts her long brown braid of hair over her coat, while she hums and slings an old scarf from the peg by the door around her shoulder.

“Where are you off to?” Zümra queries.

“To go play with Yusuf”

“No, he gets too angry!”

Sümeyye, pretending not to listen to her grandmother, softly closes the door behind her. Yusuf and his Mother rented the third floor below, which would later be sold to an American. They were forced to move up to the small sloping attic that had once served as a storage room. They had immigrated during the Great War in 1917, when Turkey was still apart of the Ottoman Empire. Yusuf loved to explore the docks and alleyways in the city which left Sümeyye with many scrapes and bruises.

Zümra wanting a distraction cleared the dishes from table, and soon sat down opposite her husband. Barbaros was an academic, but their son chose a career in the military that left him entangled in the affairs of Turkey. his wife stayed by his side. Zümra had once prided herself on coming from a wealthier family than her daughter-in-law’s. At the time of the wedding, the priest, Zümra, and everyone else in the church had been looking sorrowfully at her son, asking why he was marrying such a poor, uninteresting women. After a while Barbaros started talking:

“Zümra a time will come when everything that seems significant to us will be forgotten, or considered trivial. And the curious thing is we won’t know what is regarded as meaningful and what is inconsequential. This is our fate.”

From the window Zümra could see the figures of two small children with flushed red cheeks and shining eyes venturing back to the crumbling building from the their adventure, Sümeyye was kicking rocks on the sidewalk laughing.

Somewhere, Anywhere

I should have brought an umbrella. The ink is bleeding, beads of blue racing down my coat, and I hope she gets here soon. Not because I need the sketches. I have memorized it all from constantly running it through my mind. I just need to show her all of it somehow, so I pull the wings of my jacket tighter around my notebook.

A boom of thunder rumbles when I see her emerge from the trees. She is running, her hair heavy and tangled with rainwater, and I cannot be mad at her for being late.

“Sorry!” She shouts. I do not shout back. She says it again once she reaches my side.

I know that it is risky to be at the treehouse. But it was the best place I could think of, and plus, I trust it to keep my secrets. We climb up the sopping rope ladder together, and soon we are inside, the sound of rain like millions of muffled typewriter strikes upon the sheet metal roof.

“So, listen,” I start, flopping my damp notebook down on the rickety table that I built five years ago. “I don’t have much time - *we* don’t have much time -”

“Just start, Ash. I’ve got places to be, too.” She sounds agitated, and I guess I cannot blame her. She never exactly bought my plan. Even now. When it matters.

“Right. Here is the diagram I made. You see the moon here - yes, that angle is important - in relation to mercury, it’s perfect. There has been a lot of fluctuation lately with the poles, but tonight, both the geographic and magnetic ones should be lined up. Maximum effect. I hook up this generator, connect it here. . .” I point out things as I ramble, but the ink is so smeared that I do not think that it is doing much good. I glance briefly at her, and she is staring at me, instead of the pages. I ask her why.

“Why?” She retorts.

“Yes. Why are you staring at me?”

She shakes her head. “Because you’re crazy, Asher. Mental. Do you really believe in all of this crap? Look, it was funny in the beginning, I mean, *weird*, but funny too, but now this is out of hand. This isn’t going to work. The past is the past, Ashman. C’mon. Let’s go home.”

She is holding out her hand, pleading with her eyes, but I cannot give in.

“This will work. I’ll show you. Don’t you believe in me?”

“Of course I believe in you. I just don’t believe in *this*.” She sighs, exasperated, and gestures limply toward my notes.

Another strike of lightning illuminates the small room, thunder rumbling thickly through our bones. We should really get started soon.

“Look. I don’t care if you don’t believe in this stuff. But either way, I’m going to go through with it. This matters to me, Em. A lot. I think about it every day, have been for the past six months, and if I didn’t at least try to do it, I’d feel like a failure, like a failure of a brother, and -”

“Hey,” she says, stepping forward to hug me. She hugs like a tidal wave. “Hey, it’s okay.” I did not realize my hands were shaking until she grabbed them, and she is running her fingers through my hair, and I am crying. I did not realize that either. “Okay,” she finally whispers.

“Okay, what?”

“Okay. I’ll help you.”

Em puts me at arms distance, smiling, but I can tell she is doing this out of pity. I guess that is better than her not doing it at all. I wipe some straggling tears off of my face, then zip up

my coat, and soon we are back out into the fierce rain. The generator is on its side in the mud, and so is the rest of the equipment. We slosh over to them and try to clean it all off as best as possible. The downpour helps.

“What do we do first?” She shouts. She looks lost, like a bunny rabbit. A coil of copper wire dangles from one of her hands.

“Toss that over!” I yell back. My mind races as I catch the loop, and I begin to unravel it, as well as my thoughts.

We work as hard as we can given the circumstances. I explain as we go, as much as I dare to, and soon, despite the wetness of it all, I think the set-up is ready. We trip over each other a few times grabbing supplies, then again as we climb back into the treehouse, into dry safety. Em peels off her coat, hot from moving so much. I do the same. We are both drenched anyway.

“How long do we have to wait?” She asks. Cross-legged on the floor, we sit facing each other.

“Not long. Any minute now, really.”

Then it is quiet. Not the pristine stillness of a cool lake, or of a tile bathroom at three-o'clock in the morning. But it is quiet. A thick silence, full of longing and mystery. One that muffles thoughts and purges skin. I barely hear Em when she speaks to me again.

“Are you scared, Ash?”

“Hm?”

“Scared. Of what will happen. I mean, how do you know what will happen?”

I ponder for a moment. “Honestly, I think I’m more terrified of what won’t happen.”

We both startle when lightning zaps a nearby tree. The sound is incredible, like I can feel the very waves of it vibrate through my blood. I know that if anything will happen, it will happen within the next ten seconds. So I count.

“Ten, nine, eight. . .”

Em grabs my hands again.

“Seven, six, five. . .”

Her shaking voice joins mine.

“Four, three, two. . .”

Our bodies tremble.

“One.”

Nothing.

Then, everything. We watch in horror and awe as a wave of electricity envelops the treehouse, blinding, sound deafening, and I feel as if I ought to die. I even think I do, for a moment. And then it is like the earth does not exist at all.

Instead, we are in a fishbowl, or maybe we are astronauts. What seems like shimmering fabric slips and dances around us, invisible yet visible, and yes, there she is, I can see her. Little Jules; a little bird. My baby sister.

Is this a memory? She lies on a hospital bed, her small head wrapped in mom’s old scarf. Light from a window brightens her features, and she is smiling, watching something outside. She seems okay. She is okay.

She is safe, whatever universe we are observing. Somewhere, anywhere, she is safe.

Then, just as I am about to look back at Em, a hook snares my belly button, and I am yanked forcefully back into this realm. The realm of the treehouse. I think I am crying, but I cannot quite feel my face, so I cannot quite tell. Em is. She is crying and smiling bigger than I have seen in five years.

She laughs now. Like wind chimes, like Sunday morning. Then she hugs me, hard, and we stand embraced for a long time, drenched in rain and quiet.

Immaculate quiet.

“Hey,” I say, finally breaking us apart. “I think it stopped raining.”

Now Requesting for Relocation

Flecks of dark gray ash floated in the air. The smell of nicotine was becoming pungent as smoke rose over Ethel Caldwell's frizzy hair. Her whole body was at ease as she took small puffs from her cigarette in a daze. She stood with a rigid straight posture, eyeing the grandfather clock, running over all the precautions she made. Her husband wouldn't be back until eight, but she would be long gone by then. The children were content with their sandwiches and milk and would never come out of the TV room and ask what was happening. All Mrs. Caldwell could do now was wait.

With the turn of the century, the government created a new law that allowed citizens to request for relocation. With the rise of depression and anxiety, the suicide rate was becoming a massive societal problem. There was great fear as people began to feel trapped by their lives. Relocation was enacted to allow people to escape the lives that were causing them severe unwellness. A neighbor could be seen on one day and gone the next. New faces would appear at workplaces. Relocation gave you a new name, career, and place to live. Doctors didn't know how to accommodate the increasing number of cases of mental illness affecting their patients. Relocation was the government's solution, it followed their belief that finding the right identity would provide happiness. Mrs. Caldwell experienced her parents going through relocation. They fought for long hours, yet eventually they agreed to both issue for relocation thinking it was best for everyone. Ethel was raised by distant relatives, she never saw her parents again. Down the hall the phone began to ring, Mrs. Caldwell came away from the clock, and left for the living room with her mouth set tight. In the corner of the room was an enamel table on which she placed her hands on to lower her body into a nearby chair. She stared at the phone, the receiver

shook a bit in its bone-colored cradle, she lifted the receiver and spoke in a husky, receptive voice,

“Hello?”

On the other end was her husband, Franklin Caldwell. There was a long pause before he decided to speak, “I just wanted you to know we all care about you.”

“Why are you saying this?” Here Mrs. Caldwell made the mistake of giving a little exhalation of impatience—she had just inhaled cigarette smoke. She coughed.

“It’s about what you said last night at dinner about relocation,” Mr. Caldwell said firmly

“It wasn’t as if I were going to do it. I was just curious about it that’s all. To tell you the truth the whole process would take too much of my time, and I have better things to do,” she replied balancing her cigarette in her fingertips.

“Yes I know” he took in a long breath and continues, “I’m just worried that your bringing up such a topic will upset the kids.”

“They’re too young to know what I’m saying.” Mrs. Caldwell was rolling her eyes

“That’s my point!” her husband said quickly.

“It might be too much for them. It was for me. I can’t get my mind off what you said. I can’t believe I never knew how much you supported this law until you spoke so highly of the idea of relocation. After all these years I have known you!”

“What’s the matter with my beliefs?” Mrs. Caldwell crushed what was left of her cigarette, and pulled out her pack to light another.

“It was very disturbing. I don’t know how anyone could abandon their obligations! How could they neglect their loved ones like that?”

Mrs. Caldwell was becoming increasingly irritated, “Well, even if they chose not to ask for relocation, people can still be accused of neglecting their family. I don’t see how someone is expected to take care of others when they can’t help themselves. Have you ever considered that a situation has become so toxic, for so long, people have inertia and are unable to change. There are parents in the world that only make their children's lives more miserable and it’s best for them to leave so their children can have healthier development.”

Her husband's tone became very grave “How am I supposed to assume you're alright when you say horrible things like that. In the beginning of our marriage, you seemed so at ease with yourself, you could relax, and laugh. There were months when you seemed very sad, but you always came out of it and were yourself again.”

Mr. Caldwell was lost for words again, struggling for anything to say. He began to talk again much more quickly.

“These last few years you’ve been smoking much more and ignoring the kids. sometimes you act like they’re invisible, what am I suppose to tell them when you act like this. Do you still care? You used to be so attentive, making sure they had everything ready for school, and asking how their days were.”

Mrs. Caldwell erupted into the phone “How can you accuse me of such a thing, how dare you say I’m a terrible mother.”

“I never said that,” he said “ I just want to know what you want?”

“I don’t know,” Mrs. Caldwell heard herself say. She felt a deep shock, hearing herself say that, because the minute she said it, she knew it was true.

“Please don’t do anything irrational before I come home,” But it was too late. she hung up the phone, knowing she had already made the arrangements needed for relocation a week before.

She realized she just wanted to tell Franklin that she could no longer stay with him and the children. Mrs. Caldwell advanced meditatively towards the upstairs. In her room she laid down on her back on the of the soft sheets of the bed staring up at the blank, white ceiling. The stillness seemed to grow bigger and bigger until it felt as if her eardrums would burst. When she gave birth to her first child, she wondered how everyone who visited could be so happy. Her small baby was so vulnerable, warmly swaddled in her arms, and she felt ashamed not able to shake the feelings of distance. Mrs. Caldwell rolled her head to the side of the pillow and closed her eyes so tightly until it hurt, waiting for relocation. She wondered why she couldn't go the whole way doing what she should anymore. She remembered when her distant relatives brought her into their living room to tell her it was in everyone's best interest that her parents both request for relocation, that they're both too unwell to look after her. There had been moments when her parents wouldn't stop arguing and it became out of control until it ended with one of them hitting the other. She felt crushed by this gloomy stillness and longed for her husband and children to come tell her not to leave. Waiting for it to happen was unbearable. The stillness grew more sinister as time went on. She knew she could never come back from this decision. Eventually, she gave a sigh of relief when she heard a car pull up to the house. Mrs. Caldwell made her way across the bedroom to open the closet. She stretched her body to the highest shelf to reach for the patent leather suitcase that she had packed. As she turned the corner she gradually approached the front door. She felt a strange uncomfortable impulse to look into the back room where her children were smiling with glowing faces at the TV, but propelled herself forward. The front door opened and shut. Mrs. Caldwell stepped out from the air-conditioned house onto the small wooden porch. A man in a crisp uniform was by a gray car. She looked down at the rocky pathway, her lips began to move, forming soundless words when she came up to meet him,

nothing came out and she continued to move. The gravel crushed under her feet, and Mrs. Caldwell crawled into the back seat with her suitcase. She felt guilty being there and didn't want the man staring at her with his accusing eyes all the way to relocation. The car purred into life, leaving the house behind it. This is the fifth time Mrs. Caldwell has requested relocation.

Racehorses

I know how the racehorses feel
As they rear back,
Whites of their eyes canvases for the
Kaleidoscope of anticipation and fear
Unsure of whether or not they are predator or prey.
Victims of the pounding hooves,
Beasts drunken on the roar of spectators,
A symphony composed of nervous laughter, cries of encouragement.
Blending together into only
White noise, all meaningless.
Each step bringing them closer,
As they dance down the track.
Chaos in liquid form, only blurs of red, blue, and green
All lost in the fray.
Often forgetting why they run so hard, so fast, so very tired.
Weary legs, limb crashing against the beaten path
Of so many racers before
Too far, too fast to be stopped.
Worthy opponents be damned,
We will run.

America's Dreams

Well, America sang and sure did moan
And the cities gulped and the prairies droned
But it was no surprise that the day turned to night
That roots were rooted and now the sunshine bites

— America, you tread far and jump high
On lies spread high across a blood red sky.

Your valleys rot and strain with fruits of pain
Your mountains melt disdain, yet greatness feign.
There is no blessed hum in the still, cold air.
Can you breathe? Is your heart still there?

The wind used to howl, and laugh, and cry
It blew in the lonely, the wistful, the shy.
Now we only feel chills every time a kid is killed.
Will you build monuments for them high up on a hill?

Perhaps with time and a hardy dream
America can smile instead of scream.
But waiting and wishing never won any wars
Blind optimism only weakens the core.

Hope needs to ring, but no one knows where from
A beating heart or a pounding drum?
Not from the mouth of pompous glory—
No, America needs to tell its real story.

All I Ever Do Is Grow Up

All we ever do is grow up

Why can't we grow young?

Or grow down

Or shrink to three years old again

Content

Dirty

And yet

Minds so clear and untarnished

All we ever are is responsible

Why can't we be forgetful?

Or rude

Or go back to six years old again

Crying

Throwing fits and causing a scene

And yet

So easily sharing our true emotions

All we ever do is feel guilt

Why can't we be innocent?

Or unaware

Or foolish

Blissfully ignorant

Leaping in puddles may cause mud stains

And yet

We didn't even know of war

All we ever get is tired

Why can't we be awake?

Or content

Or spirited

Invigorated

Running for hours in circles, "you're it!"

And yet

Burdens never left us weighed down

All I ever do is grow up

Why can't I grow young?

I want to grow young

Or childish

Or forget what day it is

Or have butterflies in my stomach

Because I get to go on an airplane

Or cry because she stole my teddy bear

Or scrape my knee

Or play princess

Happy

Free

Lightweight

And yet

Dancing in public is no longer acceptable.

The Boat Rocks On

The boat rocks on
Far into the night,
Escaping the past
Fleeing the future.

And still the boat rocks on.

The girl stoically sits, silent
As the waves rock her forward.
She did not want to leave
But she knew she had to go.
How much further is it?
There is nothing on the horizon,
As far as the eye could see.
Her home is far behind her,
Her new future somewhere before her.

And still the boat rocks on.

She is escaping a life
She never wanted to lead,
A life set out by her parents,

A life which she did not choose.

She escapes a fiancé,

A man who did not love her,

Yet was marrying her solely

For her power.

And still the boat rocks on.

It passes wave after wave,

Creating ripples in its wake.

Day after day passes,

And she does not know where she is going,

As long as she is headed away,

She is content.

And still the boat rocks on.

She had brought only enough food

For three days.

She could not carry any more than that.

Yet as the third day comes and goes,

The girl remains in the boat.

And still the boat rocks on.

The girl weeps for the life she left behind,
The only life she has ever known.
She used to be surrounded by cloths,
Silk, and finery.
Yet look at her now,
Curled up at the bottom of the boat,
Her dress ripped and salt-stained,
Her stomach empty and her mouth watering.
Oh, how far she has come.

And still the boat rocks on.

As the stars begin to appear,
The girl begins to remember the tales
Her nursemaid had told her,
Describing the events in the stars.
There was the snake that wanted to eat the sky
Now forever conquered by the immortal hunter.
There was the horse with wings
Flying through the cosmos.
There was the king
Ruling over the world
With an iron hand and

An all-seeing eye.

There were her ancestors

Next to the king of the heavens,

Watching over her and her kind,

Guiding her on her journey.

And that was where she would be one day,

The blank space in the line of ancestors.

It calls out to her,

Wanting her to join the stars.

She shakes her head,

For her whole life is still in front of her,

Just on the horizon.

And still the boat rocks on.

And finally, as day breaks,

She sees it,

There,

A speck of land,

Far away yet right in front of her.

She cries salty tears of joy.

The promised land is finally attainable.

And still the boat rocks on.

“Ouroboros”

Take me on a journey that stirs the mind
to the boundless sea that leaves all behind
vast as the sky. Traveling the alpine peaks
in the temperate days of July, with warm hands and rosy cheeks
I'll find you. The fair dreams I'd cherished
have been born anew. And instead
a spectre hangs. I'm lost
in melancholy pangs of November's frost
On a mellow morning a mortal soul
took flight, a swallow, the sky it stole.
It flies to the castle resting on clouds,
greeted by familiar shrouds,
and eyes to wonder
among lightning and thunder.

Tell me a tale that stirs the soul
to wander from pole to pole
across the desolate world
in a ship with sails unfurled,
only to be confined
in a shelter against storms unkind.

Take courage from thine
with artless prayers and mercy divine.
In the midst of rapturous sin
unleash a great Leviathan.
Lead me to profound perdition
my worldly chores won and penance undone.

Show me a sight to stir the heart,
Two lovers never to part,
But at the mouth of the Lethe,
I'll surely forget thee,
Blinded by the glorious sun
when the threads of fate are spun.
Remember those gracious days
of heroic praise
and fiery passions tamed
Forsaken. Wild and depraved soul aflame
enslaved to hope and pain
to envy and the sin of Cain
Spectre, who never sleeps,
will you leave me to weep?

Tell me a story that stirs the soul,
that heals wounds and fills empty hearts whole.

Merciful saviour, grant me salvation
from all-consuming deception
in endless desperation and blessed nights.

Bathe me in heavenly light,
On bright wings over silver stars
and the burning soul of Mars,

A saint returns home
in the earth's depths and sea foam.

Call me Ouroboros
who lives and dies in infinite repose,
and sets guileless hatred free
undeserving of clemency.

One Thousand Cranes

Despite the aching in my hands, my fingers flawlessly executed the familiar motions. Fold here, bend the wings down, flick the tail up. Delicate motions, the instructions ingrained in my memory 26 cranes later. The faint flickering of the TV lit the hotel room, the episode of the Voice I had been watching had ended hours ago. Pausing, I recounted the number of cranes I had finished. Now I had 27 down, only 3 left until I could go to sleep. 800 left to finish before Saturday, my grandparent's fiftieth wedding anniversary. My mother and I were in charge of completely 1000 cranes by then, it was a gift for my grandparents. 1000 cranes for one wish. I glanced over at my mother, her body propped up on pillows with fingers mid-fold. Her even breathing in combination with the murmur of the TV filled the room.

Throughout the day, my mother and I had traded stories about my grandparent's history. More specifically, we talked about a topic that my grandparents tended to shy away from, their childhood growing up during World War II. And so, as my fingers began to unconsciously trace the folds needed for the next paper cranes as my eyes glazed over, lost in the memories of my grandparents.

1931: Japanese Invasion of Manchuria

My grandmother was born in Iwakuni, Japan during World War II. She grew up in a small village, one that was often the target of bombing.

Years later, when I visited Iwakuni with her, my Oba-chan wandered through the streets, searching for something. We finally stopped at an empty intersection between two streets.

"Here. This was where my home was".

"Where is it?"

"Gone. Burned down years ago after the war, there is nothing left".

We were silent. I didn't know what to say, how to comfort somebody for something that had happened decades ago. My Oba-chan began to walk forward, slowly. Brow furrowed, she studied the ground, counting her steps. She stopped.

"What is it?"

"The bomb shelter, this was where it used to be".

Again, it was silent. Did they use the bomb shelter? What was it like? Before I could ask my questions, she began to amble away, trance-like. Her voice was far away, her focus deep in some distant memory.

And suddenly, I was there too. I could hear the shrieking of the air raid sirens, feel the panic filling people's minds as

they scrambled to grab valuables before disappearing into the dark hole, not knowing kind of destruction they would find when they emerged. My Oba-chan was running away from the bomb shelter, her sandals slipping against the mud. Darting back and forth, slamming doors as she searched. Finally, she found what she was looking for. My Oba-chan herded my great-great grandmother out of her room. She was babbling illogically, woefully unprepared for the bomb shelter. Later, I would learn that my great-grandmother had dementia, she was often completely unaware of who my Oba-chan was and that they were in the midst of a war. She would be reminded later by the familiar devastation that greeted them. Blackened earth, the ever present smoky aroma left behind by burning wood.

A boisterous laugh from the TV jolted me back to attention. I rubbed my eyes, once, twice, before glancing down. A completed crane sat in the palm of my hand. A yawn escaped as I readjusted my body, allowing myself to sink back into the pillows. I tossed the crane to the side, into the pile of brightly colored sheets of paper, each adorned with a different floral pattern. Hurriedly I began my next crane, my motions robotic. Within seconds a pale yellow crane was resting next to me on the bed. I lifted the crane up, waving it back and forth as its paper wings

swayed. And suddenly, I felt myself slipping into another memory belonging to another time including a small boy and his model airplane.

1942: Internment Camps

The boy's smile was infectious as he giggled, his model airplane shot through the air accompanied by sputtering sound effects. Running a finger over the freshly painted coat of blue veneer covering the wings, he carefully brushed away a small piece of lint. Dubbed the "Sentoki" or "Fighter", the model airplane was carefully put to bed each night on the battered surface of Mitsuho's nightstand.

And so, as the chirping of crickets filled the night time air, both boy and plane slept. When Mitsuho awoke the next morning, it was February 19, 1942, a day that would go down in history. United State's President Roosevelt had signed Executive Order 9066, declaring all people of Japanese heritage be sent away to the internment camps.

As night fell, his parents' hushed whispers from the kitchen became hysterical shouts. Mitsuho curled further under

his covers, clutching his model plane to his chest. Shouts became sobs, a noise somehow worse than the screaming. He closed his eyes and burrowed further under the comforter, blocking out as much of noise as possible. Fat tears rolled down a face still plump with baby fat, a silent storm.

His mother's red rimmed eyes and tired smile greeted Mitsuho the next morning. It all felt like a blur, frenzied words and hurried packing. Mitsuho was allowed to bring one backpack full of his toys. He would share a larger bag with his older siblings for clothes. Objects were prioritized, only the most important were hastily shoved into suitcases.

Mitsuho knew he should be as quiet and as cooperative as possible. But when uniformed men arrived at the doorstep, it felt like everything was falling apart. His brain was muddled with all the movement, with the confusion surrounding his family's situation. Where were they going? What would happen to his home? Why were these strange men taking away their brand new car? It just wasn't fair.

When the door closed behind the uniformed men and the rumbling of Mitsuho's family pick up truck had faded into the distance, Mitsuho fell apart. He sprinted outside, feet

pounding against the soil as he pushed his way past crops into the middle of the field.

That day would be the last day that Mitsuho, my Ojii-chan, would spend hiding in the crops. His family would move from their farm in Southern California to a camp in Arkansas and then to Tulu Lake, California. In ten years, my grandfather would go back to Hiroshima, Japan to deal with the aftermath of the atomic bomb.

I deposited the crane I had been working on into the slowly growing pile. There was one crane left, a single sheet of blue waiting to be the transforming element to my collection of cranes. The thousandth crane would complete the gift; the tradition states that for one thousand cranes there is one wish. The finishing touch to the gift we had made for my grandparents. But although my grandparents had been happily married for almost fifty years, it hadn't always been that way.

1967: My Grandparents' Marriage

As the plane took off, my Oba-chan sat with her face pressed against the window, drinking in the faces of her parents as they faded into the distance. Tears streamed down her face as she hugged her knees tightly to her chest. She knew nobody in this strange new world. Her broken English could only get her

so far, she had been stripped of all of the comforts of her home. She was being thrown into this foreign world, the only support she had was my grandfather, a man she had met mere weeks ago. And despite my Ojii-chan's clumsy attempts at comforting his new bride, my Oba-chan only became more withdrawn. For my grandfather he was just going back to the US with his wife, arranged and rushed marriages were common in Japan. It was the status quo, and in Japan the status quo was not to be questioned.

My Oba-chan swears that when the plane landed for a layover in Hawaii that she saw an alien, a guardian angel. When she tells me the story of her arrival in the US, she is adamant that there was an alien perched on the wing of the plane, gossamer wings extended in the breeze. My Ojii-chan affectionately denies ever seeing it, usually followed by my Oba-chan's animated explanation of the alien's appearance while he patiently listens.

Maybe that alien was good luck, a mythical creature sent to answer my Oba-chan's distress. Within the next year, my Ojii-chan had found a job helping to test and design private planes. My mother was born shortly after, her two brothers following in the next two years. They were happy, content.

Three days later we celebrated my grandparents fiftieth anniversary. My uncles uncovered old photographs, black and white images of my grandmother's sullen expression as she clutches my grandfather's hand before boarding the plane to the United States. There are pictures of my Ojii-chan and his seven brothers, all sporting toothy smiles as they beam at the camera. My Oba-chan's exhausted smile as she cradles my mom, the excitement on my uncle's face as my grandfather helps him construct a model plane; all snapshots in time. The photographs become more recent, my whole family at Christmas dinner five years ago. There were grainy photos of my grandparent's ecstatic smiles as they watch me wobble toward them on unsteady legs at two years old, teetering back and forth. There were photos of my Oba-chan carefully sewing satiny blue sheets of cloth as she constructed my Halloween costume in first grade when I wanted to be a made up superhero I had invented. We piled on the gifts at their anniversary, excited about whatever reminders of the past we could give to my grandparents.

I didn't see my grandparents shed a tear until the last gift. For the past month, my relatives and I had been folding cranes, 1000 cranes. In Japan, for ever 1000 cranes you get one wish. The cranes were meant to cement my grandparent's greatest desire in history. Instead, those cranes have been shipped to Hiroshima. They will be left at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. While the crumbling concrete skeletons of shops and houses act as a reminder of the devastation that occurred, the cranes are an instrument of peace. 1000 cranes added to the thousands already there, symbolizing the people's hope for an eternity of peace.

Word Count: 1,750