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Ms. Wynne jolted to consciousness when the 86th street crosstown bus screeched to a halt just below her bedroom window. The hiss of the opening bus door and clattering footsteps marked the bus's arrival at its final west bound stop on Riverside Drive. Each night, Ms. Wynne set her alarm clock for 6:30am and every morning some New York City racket roused her before the electronic device had the chance. But this morning was not every morning. Today, Ms. Wynne would host the high school's First Annual Classics Fair. The scrutiny of the entire school would loom over Ms. Wynne and her festival. It had taken 23 years of teaching to command this level of regard.

The bedroom was frosty and the bed soft but Ms. Wynne threw off the covers with enthusiasm, yanked up the blinds and opened the window to the brilliant February sunshine. She closed her eyes as the sharp morning wind bit her cheek. A small wet droplet fell on her nose and she blinked. Stray snowflakes drifted onto the parked cars below, each one glinting in the morning light for a moment before making its final descent.

In the kitchen, Ms. Wynne filled the teapot and turned on the stove, preparing to brew a single mug of coffee. The moment the water hit 202 degrees she drizzled it over freshly ground beans in a circular motion. Steaming coffee in hand, she paused to take small sips and recall the previous night's dress rehearsal.

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“Marvelous, marvelous,” she said to herself. “Elaine’s rendition of the role is simply chilling.” Talking to herself was a habit Ms. Wynne had developed over decades of living alone. Often, she struggled to remember whether a conversation was one she had held with herself or another living being. A sharp knock at the apartment door interrupted Ms. Wynne’s meditations. Before she’d had a chance to stand up the person knocked again.

“Coming,” she said. “Who is it?”

“Hi Ms. Wynne. It’s me, Joe. The neighbor down the hall. We ran out of milk this morning and we wanted to know if we could borrow some from you. I would go get some more myself but it’s so damn cold out and we only need a little for our coffees.”

“Sure, Joe. Come on in,” Ms. Wynne said, opening the door. Joe had been introducing himself as “the neighbor down the hall” for the past eleven years. Ms. Wynne hurried to the kitchen and grabbed the milk. Joe and his wife Justine were a sweet, elderly couple, but overly friendly for Ms. Wynne’s taste. She hoped Joe wouldn’t stay long.

“Hey, what’s all that?” Joe said, pointing to the stacks of papers on her kitchen table.

“Oh, those are my student’s homework assignments. The children are translating Ovid.” She handed the milk carton to Joe. “There’s not much left in there, you should take it back to your place. I trust Justine wants you to hurry back so she can have her morning coffee.”

“Ovid, huh. I think I’ve heard of him.” Joe said, accepting the milk. “He any good?” Joe ignored the invitation to return to his apartment.

“He’s my personal favorite,” Ms. Wynne replied. “But my students struggle with the poetry.” She gestured to a stack of spiral notebook papers that she’d scribbled over with a red grading pen.

“Wow. I bet you’re a tough teacher!” Joe said, scratching his scalp.

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Ms. Wynne offered a closed lipped smile in response.

“Well, Joe...I really have to get ready now. I have an especially important day at school today – can’t be late...” she trailed off.

“Oh sure, sure. Of course, Ms. Wynne. I wouldn’t forget – today is the big day, right? The big Greek and Latin festival. Justine wanted me to give this to you.” Joe handed her a small silver charm – a dolphin. “Justine says dolphins were considered good luck in ancient Rome. I don’t know anything about that though.”

“Oh, my! How lovely,” Ms. Wynne said. “Yes, Justine is correct. Please thank her for me. This was very thoughtful.” Ms. Wynne turned the pretty little dolphin over in her fingers.

“Well, that’s no problem at all. Glad you like it.” Joe planted himself at the kitchen table with his coffee mug.

“I always carried a lucky charm when I was a pilot in the war,” Joe began.

Ms. Wynne sighed.

Once she rid herself of AI, Ms. Wynne raced through a shower, scrubbing her body to a sheen and running a little shampoo through shorn hair. As she washed her face in the sink she wondered how many times in her life she had performed this routine. There was a fixed a number out there, probably somewhere in the thousands, but she would never know exactly what it was. She placed her glasses back on her nose and examined the steamy mirror. Spectacles the diameter of a soda can stared back at her, distorting the size of her eyes.

"Yes, you do have bug eyes," she said to the reflection.

Once she had pulled on her “work uniform,” a heather grey skirt and blue blouse, Ms. Wynne laced up her leather walking shoes.

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“And last, but not least, my sensible shoes,” Ms. Wynne declared. Ms. Wynne made this declaration every morning. She bundled up for the cold day, placed the silver dolphin in her coat pocket and headed to the 9 train, a rickety shuttle to the Bronx.

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A cold, red-faced Ms. Wynne entered the cheery teachers’ lounge an hour later. Floor lamps dribbled light over thick woolen rugs. Teachers sat on couches around the small fireplace, laughing in low tones. They nodded and smiled in Ms. Wynne’s direction. Ms. Wynne set herself up at the oak conference table with a stack of unmarked assignments. She had just attacked the first paper when the lounge door swung open. Two of her seventh-grade students, Perry and Eric, hovered in the doorway.

There was a small scuffle and Eric whispered loudly, “No, *you* go in first.”

“Good morning,” Ms. Wynne said.

“Good morning,” they mumbled in unison. A long, silent pause ensued.

“Can I help you boys with something?” Ms. Wynne asked. “You can come in here.” She beckoned with her left hand, while continuing to grade papers with the right. The boys trudged toward her desk. Both balanced precipitously under the weight of their textbook-laden backpacks.

“We wanted to ask you a question,” Perry said. He attempted the stoic expression of a politician.

“Yes, well, get on with it. As you know, we have a very busy day ahead of us.” Ms. Wynne put down her grading pen and gave the boys her full attention.

“Ms. Wynne, Eric and I were talking about the festival this afternoon.”

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“Good,” Ms. Wynne said. “Now the two of you are running the booth on ancient Roman weapons. Is that right? Is it ready to go? Set up begins in about 30 minutes and goes all morning.”

“Yeah, the booth is pretty much ready.” said Perry. “Our question is about something else that has to do with the festival.”

Ms. Wynne blinked her eyes closed. “I need you both to focus on your booth. That’s your main responsibility today.”

“Yes, we understand, but Ms. Wynne, we did some extra research on ancient Roman festivals.”

“Oh, well that’s wonderful, boys,” she said, softening a bit.

“And we uh, well we read that the traditional festivals always had an animal sacrifice. We know you want this to be a very authentic festival and we were wondering if we could perform the animal sacrifice.”

Ms. Wynne paused and examined the boys’ faces. They appeared thoughtful and serious. She sighed and clasped her hands together in front of her face.

“You are going to ruin my festival,” she wanted to scream. But she didn’t. Instead, she dug down into that regenerating reserve of patience unique to high school teachers.

“Boys, I’m very pleased to hear that you are doing research on your own time. And you’re correct. There was usually a grand festival sacrifice - called the hecatomb. To the best of my knowledge, however, the hecatomb involved the sacrifice of one hundred cows or bulls.”

“That’s exactly what I read,” Perry said. “The ninth graders dissect frogs in biology every year. So, we thought it wouldn’t be so different from that. I mean, obviously, this school doesn’t mind killing animals for the sake of learning.” Eric, who had remained silent, let out a big snort.

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The boys looked at each other and then in opposite directions. A storm cloud of suppressed laughter gathered above their heads.

“Personally, I am not interested in sacrificing cattle,” Ms. Wynne said sternly.

“Moreover, I don’t think our gymnasium could accommodate that volume of bloodshed.”

“You would need permission from the city,” Mr. Chuckrow noted from a couch across the lounge. Mr. Chuckrow was the high school physics teacher. He had built his own car and claimed to have taught his cat nine vocabulary words. If anyone knew the procedure for gaining government permission to sacrifice animals, it was Mr. Chuckrow.

“Well, we don’t have permission from the city and we’re certainly not going to get it in the next couple of hours,” Ms. Wynne said. She shot Mr. Chuckrow a grateful look, which didn’t seem to register.

“Awwwww, man.” Perry said. “So, if we get permission from the city, maybe we can do it next year?”

Ms. Wynne stood up and made her way around the table to the boys.

“No.”

“But we can at least have a discussion about it, right? I mean, if we get permission from the city?”

“Absolutely not.” Ms. Wynne put one hand on each mountainous backpack and directed the boys to the door.

“I’m looking forward to learning about ancient Roman swords this afternoon,” she said, and pushed them out of the lounge.

Amused expressions animated the other teachers’ faces and Ms. Wynne ignored them. She resumed paper-grading but once again, the squeal of the opening door disrupted her. A

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musty leather aroma trickled into the room. Ms. Wynne didn't have to look up. The newcomer could only be Mr. Hill, everybody's favorite English teacher.

"Greeting colleagues," Mr. Hill said in his smooth British accent. Tall and fit, Mr. Hill cradled a motorcycle helmet under one arm to accentuate his swagger.

"Chris! How's it going, man," grveled Mr. Sneed.

"Hiiiiii Chris," said Ms. Aquila. It was a tone of voice Ms. Aquila reserved for chiseled, Grecian beauty.

"It's really starting to come down out there," Mr. Hill said as he shook a few flakes from his jet-black locks. "I don't know if I'll be able to ride the bike back to Columbia today."

"Oh, that's too bad, Chris," said Ms. Aquila. "Do you have a meeting there later?"

Ms. Wynne looked up. Excepting Mr. Chuckrow, who was mending his handmade shoe, all the teachers had turned to face the bright, blue-eyed PhD student.

"Yes, I've got the final advisor meeting before my dissertation defense. My advisor, Milton, mentioned possibly publishing my dissertation. But they probably do that for all their PhD students."

"Gosh, I doubt that, Chris. That's amazing news," Ms. Aquila said. She tossed her hair over her shoulder.

"Milton said they were probably expanding the department to include another Assistant Professor position next year. I wonder if they have someone specific in mind."

"Well, of course it's you, silly," Ms. Aquila said. "And then you will be a full-fledged professor and abandon us in the high school dust."

"What an ego on that lobsterback," Ms. Wynne said to herself. Ms. Wynne had a tradition of making jokes that were lost on everyone else.

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Mr. Hill didn't respond to Ms. Aquila. He had heard Ms. Wynne's disdainful remark.

"I see at least one person who won't be sad to see me go," Mr. Hill said. He turned his glittering ice-blue focus on Ms. Wynne. "Why don't you like me Ms. Wynne? Is it because Literature is so much more relevant than Classics?"

"First, I don't agree with that statement," Ms. Wynne said. "As far as I know, there's no Literature festival today, just one for Classics."

"Ah yes. The festival. I certainly hope that doesn't get snowed out. It would be a shame if your hard work had to be rescheduled. Or canceled."

Ms. Wynne looked at him silently. She rubbed the dolphin charm.

"I for one, am waiting with baited breath to learn what's new in Classics," said Mr. Hill. However, I'm planning to make festival attendance optional for my English students."

Ms. Wynne seethed. She needed all the students to attend to ensure that the festival became an annual tradition.

"Oh, I didn't realize it was optional," said Ms. Aquila. I wonder if I should keep my kids in class."

"Oh no, Ms. Aquila, please bring them, even if it's just briefly," Ms. Wynne said. She felt the first fizzle of panic. "And even if your students don't attend, I'm pleased you'll be able to make it, Mr. Hill. Perhaps you'll learn something you don't already know."

"Impossible!" he said.

The other teachers laughed.

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“Ms. Wynne! Ms. Wynne! Have you had lunch yet?” It was Ms. Muzzy, the other Classics teacher. This diminutive bundle of energy flapped her arms at Ms. Wynne from down the hall. “Wait for me!”

“I haven’t, Ms. Muzzy, but I’m free now. Should we grab a quick bite then head to the gym and see how things are progressing?”

“Sounds like a plan.” Ms. Muzzy exhaled as she fell into stride with Ms. Wynne.

Ms. Wynne respected Ms. Muzzy, who was peppy and bright. Even so, she felt a pang of resentment for the younger, spunkier woman. Every year on the first day of classes, Ms. Wynne waded through the palpable disappointment emanating from the hearts of her students. Everyone who studied Latin or Greek had spent the summer with their fingers crossed that they’d be assigned to Ms. Muzzy.

The two classical women ambled down the tenth-grade corridor toward the cafeteria, shoes squeaking on the damp and dirty linoleum floor. Some students crouched around a rectangle of cardboard, adorning the sign for the Greek Architecture booth with Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns. Ms. Muzzy nudged Ms. Wynne with her elbow. “This is so great,” she whispered. Further down the hall, a skinny girl perched in the windowsill, a ten-pound Chemistry textbook splayed on her lap. Her right hand held the corner of a page she had yet to turn and she stared dreamily outside at the falling snow. Ms. Wynne’s smile faded.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Ms. Muzzy said to her. “It’s not supposed to get heavy until late this evening.”

An unmistakable smell accosted the teachers as they neared the dining hall. They breathed in the scent of lunchroom chicken mingled with dishwashing soap. A few recently

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refueled adolescents tumbled from the cavernous cafeteria down a small staircase. Ms. Muzzy and Ms. Wynne pressed themselves against the wall to prevent a disastrous collision.

“Ms. Muzzy, Ms. Muzzy!” one of the boys yelled when he noticed her flattened form.

“Yes, what is it, Andy?” she said, kindly.

“So, I just wanted to make sure, that if I push Ben, then in Latin, we would have to put Ben’s name in the accusative case? Is that right?”

“Yes, Andy, that’s right. That’s what I demonstrated today in class.”

Andy gave Ben a savage shove down two steps. “See ya later, Benum,” he said, escaping down the hall. Benum recovered and gave chase.

“What exactly did you demonstrate?” Ms. Wynne asked, wide-eyed.

“Oh, we were reviewing the accusative case and no one was paying attention. So, I brought Ben up to the front and knocked him across the room to demonstrate direct object. That woke them up!”

Ms. Wynne understood that Ms. Muzzy administered an unorthodox classroom. She also grasped that kids adored these inventive teaching techniques. But what had happened to standards? Were there no limits anymore? “So, you use violence to teach Latin,” Ms. Wynne said with raised eyebrows.

“Well, I don’t know about violence,” Ms. Muzzy replied lightheartedly. “To me, it’s an intellectual vehicle to release the aggression that builds up teaching these kids. What’s more, it’s good for Ben. He’s shy and not terribly popular. This gets him up and participating – makes him the center of attention for a couple minutes.”

“Ms. Muzzy, that’s not normal!” Ms. Wynne said.

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“Of course, it isn’t normal, Ms. Wynne,” Ms. Muzzy said. “But we are talking about the *accusative case*. Personally, I’m hard-pressed to think of a more important case in the Latin language. If the students don’t grasp the concept of direct object, they will be lost forever. Certainly, in Latin and quite possibly, in all of life.”

Ms. Wynne didn’t respond. She couldn’t condone this teaching methodology. She picked up a plastic orange tray and looked up towards the 50-foot cafeteria ceiling. Grey daylight from the second story windows poured in over the students.

“What can I get you Ms. Muzzy,” asked the lunch lady. Ms. Wynne grimaced at the wisps of hair escaping the lunch lady’s mesh hairnet.

“Pasta and vegetables, please,” Ms. Muzzy smiled. “Thank you, Linda.”

“And for you?” Linda turned to Ms. Wynne.

“I’d like the chicken and vegetables, please,” Ms. Wynne said.

“We’ve got to make sure no one chews gum at the festival,” Ms. Wynne said as soon as they sat down. “There are going to be a dozen booths with food and I want the kids to taste all the flavors.”

“Oh, I’m sure they’ll spit it out when they see there’s real food,” Ms. Muzzy assured her. “Blowing bubbles and cracking gum is just a way to pass time in class.”

“Seriously. I’ve had a terrible time putting a stop to it. It would be one thing if they did it discretely, but they pop it in while I’m calling on them and continue snapping away as they muddle through the Latin.”

“As if the pronunciations weren’t bad enough already, right?” Ms. Muzzy salted her pasta and passed the shaker to Ms. Wynne.

“Exactly – do they do the same thing with you?”

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“They do and I don’t always stop it, but I’ve been trying a new approach.”

“Oh?”

“At the beginning of class I order everyone to spit out their gum. Some do, some don’t. So, I take the remaining offenders – well, really, I grab them by the scruff of the neck – and line them up. Military style. Then, I walk down the line and chant ‘Noli masticare gumnum.’ One by one, each culprit spits his or her gum into my open palm until I’m holding a wad the size of a snowball. Then we start class.”

Ms. Wynne would never ferry a saliva soaked stack of chewing gum to the garbage can. She supposed gum chewing would persist in her classroom. *Ad infinitum*.

The two women cleared their trays and poured themselves coffee from the dispenser.

“Shall we check out the festival?” Ms. Muzzy asked.

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The gymnasium was one of the places, along with the football field and the smokers’ alley, that Ms. Wynne usually shunned. Brassy, cold and abrasive, the gym had 30-foot ceilings, a regulation size basketball court and a set of wooden bleachers that on Friday nights, teemed with the shrieks of cutthroat parents. But when the gym doors opened with a whoosh, Ms. Wynne swooned at the transformation of the dreaded arena. The students had killed the fluorescent overheads. Only the natural light of the winter’s day illuminated the room. Dim and cloudy, the cool atmosphere soothed the students engrossed in making final touches. Someone had closed the bleachers, now a harmless wall of wooden slats. Black crepe paper covered all four walls on which two artistically inclined tenth-graders, Maya and Claudia, sketched scenes from Greek and Roman literature with gold and silver Sharpies. On the northern wall, Daphne fled from Apollo, from the west, a victorious Achilles rode a chariot dragging Hector’s lifeless

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body. A Trojan horse had begun to take shape on the east wall. Ms. Muzzy hurried off to help some of her younger students with a diorama of the Circus Maximus and Ms. Wynne attended to the stage in the center of the room.

A few Senior boys hammered the final nails into the platform where the performance would take place. Ms. Wynne hoisted herself up and took heavy, clomping steps across the center and around the perimeter. She brought each sensible shoe down with all her weight. The platform didn't budge. It was safe and solid. From her vantage point two feet above the ground, Ms. Wynne watched approvingly as students and their teachers streamed into the gym. Quiet and respectful, they passed from booth to booth, listening to the mini-lectures the classics students had spent the past month rehearsing. She even saw Mr. Hill walk in with his 15 Advanced Placement English students trailing behind him.

Satisfied that all was in order, Ms. Wynne ducked into the locker room to check on her thespians. Most had completed dressing for the performance and idled around, giggling, going over lines, and adjusting errant pieces of costume. Elaine glimmered in front of the bathroom mirror, which spit back a glorious reflection. Her slender figure was draped in a black silk toga. The girl's focused hand painted the frames of her green eyes with slow stokes of black liquid. Overcome by Elaine's dramatic makeover, Ms. Wynne took the student's hands in her own.

"Here," she said, handing Elaine the silver dolphin charm. "This is for luck."

Elaine smiled confidently. "Thank you, Ms. Wynne. I'll wear it on my necklace." She strung the little charm onto her chain.

"You will be wonderful. But don't forget to return the charm to me," Ms. Wynne whispered.

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The gym darkened without warning. Stagehands curtained off the windows and a single spotlight shone on the platform. Lev, one of Ms. Wynne's seniors, appeared on the stage. Lev was an unusual boy who steeped himself in the study of Pagan and Judeo-Christian religions alike. His classmates tolerated him with amused exasperation but Ms. Wynne worried the audience might not take him seriously. Lev took the stage in a toga that belied authority and rapped a 6-foot wooden staff on the platform. As the crowd settled, Lev stepped up to the microphone and pulled a tragic mask from the folds of his clothing. With deliberation, he slid the mask over his face and spread his arms in a commanding, rhetorical gesture.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Lev boomed into the mic. "Welcome to Chase Academy's first annual Classics' festival. For the last hour, you've become acquainted with the sights, smells, and foods of ancient Greece and Rome. Now, you will experience the great art form that has lasted through millennia. The Greek tragedies thrived long after the civilization that created them collapsed. This year you will experience our rendition of *The Medea*. Perhaps the most well-known of the Greek Tragedies – it is also one of the most unusual. Please stay quiet and show respect your fellow classmates. And so, without further ado, *THE MEDEA*." Lev slammed his staff on the platform for emphasis, turned on his heels and exited stage left. The crowd roared with applause for the tragedian. Darkness overtook the gym. The only sound was the steady patter of snowflakes against the windows. Ms. Wynne held her breath as shadows mounted the stage, posed themselves and then froze into place.

When the spotlight returned, a dazzling, angry Medea stunned the audience. Elaine's normally neat hair flowed behind her in a wild black mane crowned with a wreath of flowers. A full bib of pearls hung around her neck and her eyes darted back and forth, filled with the vicious hatred of a woman scorned. Elaine took the audience through the turbulent machinations of

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feminine jealousy with ease. Watching Elaine, Ms. Wynne knew that Medea was justified in taking revenge on her husband's new wife. Her own exile imminent, Medea had no choice but to sew a delicate garment as a wedding gift for Jason's bride-to-be, lining the insides with a dastardly poison.

Ms. Wynne had deliberated for a long time over the execution of the final scene, where Medea slaughters her own children in the ultimate act of vengeance against Jason. Ultimately, decorum dictated that the filicide take place off stage. Elaine and the two seventh-graders playing her children stood in the corner while the lighting team projected their shadows onto the gym wall, just underneath the basketball hoop. The shadow children ran toward their mother, greeting her with hugs and kisses. But, Medea's towering shadow pushed the children's shadows away and held an enormous carving knife aloft. With one swift movement, the shadow arm brought the knife down upon the taller child, who had raised his arms in supplication. As one shadow fell to the ground, the other emitted a drawn-out, agonizing scream. The shrill crunch of breaking glass punctuated the terrified shriek and a cold blast of wind descended on the audience. Ms. Wynne glanced up to find the storm whistling through a broken gym window. The audience erupted in applause.

Elaine bowed and smiled broadly. She accepted the standing ovation with the grace of an older woman. But the crack of another window shattering interrupted her smile. The audience knew the full force of the blizzard was imminent. Inclement weather would have its way with the rest of the festival. Ms. Wynne scanned the gym, mentally pinpointing the location of other adults. The day's exemplary behavior dissolved before her eyes. At an ancient Roman food booth, Perry had extracted a lighter and was attempting to caramelize a half-eaten flan. Ms.

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Wynne arrived at the booth just as a corner of the “Ancient Flan” poster board went ablaze. She stamped out the inferno with her sensible shoes.

“Hand it over, Perry,” she said, pointing at the lighter.

“Sorry, Ms. Wynne. I thought it might taste better. Sort of a smoky flavor.”

The other children tittered.

“Start packing up these booths. It looks like the storm has hit early.”

“Ok, Ms. Wynne.”

Before she could move to the next booth Mr. Hill stood up on the theatre platform and tapped his forefinger against the mic.

“Everybody listen up,” he shouted. “The festival is over. We are closing school early. Get your backpacks and go outside. The school buses will be arriving momentarily.”

“Wait, Mr. Hill,” shouted a seventh-grader. “My backpack is in my locker can I go get it?”

“I think I left mine in the cafeteria,” cried Mable, another seventh-grader.

“Yes!” said Mr. Hill. “Think before you speak, people. If your backpack is anywhere on school premises you should go retrieve it and then find your bus.”

The gym rumbled in an adolescent uproar and Mr. Hill got back on the mic.

“And before we leave, let’s take a few seconds to thank Ms. Wynne for this wonderful festival!” He clapped loudly into the mic. At his bidding, the students dropped their belongings and clapped, cheered and hollered. Ms. Wynne blushed at all the teenage energy pulsating towards her. And then, as quickly as it started, the ovation ceased and the students pushed and shoved their way out of the gymnasium. Ms. Wynne smiled at Mr. Hill and he returned a warm grin.

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“Well, this is a real mess you’ve created” he said. He gestured to the collapsing booths, discarded togas, shattered pane glass and melting snow. “And it couldn’t have turned out better.”

“I should probably stay and clean it up,” Ms. Wynne said.

“Don’t be ridiculous. We’ll have the janitorial staff clean it once the storm is over. We don’t want anyone in here while windows are shattering.”

Ms. Wynne couldn’t argue with that logic. She returned to the teachers’ lounge. Neat and methodical, she slid her papers into her school bag. The door burst open. Elaine stood there breathless, her cheeks glowing in the aftermath of a successful performance.

“I couldn’t find you anywhere!” she said to Ms. Wynne. “Here’s your charm. It totally worked. Thank you so much.”

“Oh, you’re very welcome, Elaine...” but the girl was already gone.

Ms. Wynne wrapped her knit scarf around her neck and heaved on her down coat. She shut off the lights and left the building. It didn’t matter that the snowstorm had turned up early and ended the festivities. The success of the fair, the congratulations from her fellow teachers and the smiles on the students faces left Ms. Wynne refreshed and grateful. Her insides brimmed with a long-lost feeling of limitless possibilities. She watched the end of day preparations abstractedly. Yellow school buses lined the block. Despite the storm, the food truck that pandered hot buttered bagels and candy had arrived to take the children’s money and spoil their dinner appetites. Students clambered on the busses, sneakers soaked in grimy snow, backpacks drenched by the developing blizzard.

Ms. Wynne shivered. She dreaded the 15-minute walk down the slippery hill to the subway, but assumed a brisk stride that broke the heavily falling flakes. The train entrance beckoned like a brick beacon at the bottom of the hill, its staircase holding the promise of

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warmth. A sparkle of sunshine lured Ms. Wynne across the small, desolate park where the maple trees stood tall and bare, their branches pointing at the sky in warning. A couple of high school girls huddled on a wooden bench, giggling and smoking cigarettes. Ms. Wynne hurried past them and past a group of boys who were swearing and hurling snow at one another.

“Hey, I think that’s the Latin teacher,” she heard one say. Another boy said something she couldn’t hear and they all laughed.

Thwack.

Ms. Wynne’s head snapped forward. She’d been hit with a large icy clump of snow. The blow stung. Chunks of ice dripped down the back of her head and neck and underneath her knit scarf. She paused mid-step. The barren maple trees shuddered with sorrow, mournful shadows standing in the icy smooth drift. Underneath the protective wooded curtain, Ms. Wynne bowed her head and brought her hands over her ears. She couldn’t believe this was happening. Not today. Years of habit and instinct told her to sprint down the hill and escape her tormentors.

“But today is not every day,” Ms. Wynne found herself saying.

Instead of running, Ms. Wynne bent down and scraped together some icy snow in her mittens. She packed the white fluff tightly. Then, she turned 180 degrees to confront the perpetrator.

“Those cowards,” she muttered. How could the kids have cleared out this quickly? Ms. Wynne felt exasperated until she noticed the corner of a red jacket peeking out from behind a tree.

“Gotchya,” she said to herself.

Ms. Wynne wound her arm back, took a step forward and hurled the snowball in the direction of the red jacket. There was a muffled yelp and then the sound of teenage feet pounding

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away in the other direction. With a self-satisfied smile etched on her worn face, Ms. Wynne removed one hand from its mitten and rubbed the lucky dolphin in her pocket.