

Discrepancy in Scales

Shella pressed hard on her eyelids, praying that the free-flowing tears would stop. One slid onto the page with her writing prompt, obscuring part of the half sentence “The biggest influence in my life is...”

She felt exposed and invisible, all at the same time. Like every single classmate in that room was so engrossed in her melodrama that their own writing prompts sat unattended on their desks. But they couldn’t read the anguish written on her face or register the significance of Shella’s tears.

She pushed back from the table and swiped quickly at her tears. “I don’t have time for this—these feelings!?” she lamented in her mind, which was on fire and collapsing in on itself. Without realizing that her legs were moving, she found herself at Mrs. Anderson’s desk explaining that she was nauseous and felt sick and needed to go home.

“Not home, really. Just need to be anywhere but here,” Shella thought.

“Of course!” Mrs. Anderson gasped with concern. Because Shella, her star junior with the writing gift, must really be feeling unwell to lose precious time on the school district’s annual timed writing composition.

Wholly possessed, Shella again found herself in a different location not understanding how she got there. She faced her father with his head hanging out the Camry in front of the high school, telling her to ‘hop in’ to the passenger’s seat.

“I don’t feel good,” were the meek words that came out of Shella’s mouth, and they were true. But she felt guilty just the same, thinking about the circumstances that led her to miss school for the first time in years.

Back home in her bedroom, lying on the ruffled white duvet cover, she tried to reason a discrepancy in scales. What happened prior to her crying in class, prior to not being able to breathe, prior to feeling like she was going to collapse in front of Mrs. Anderson’s desk and cause a scene, was so miniscule. It was so inconceivably inconsequential, a flap of butterfly wings leading to whole-world apocalypse.

See, she liked to pretend she wasn’t bogged down by stupid teenage things like having a crush on a boy. But, she did, and his name was Thomas. He was a senior, quiet and mysterious, and played bass in a ska band. Shella envisioned that, in some world, she would be intriguing enough to be noticed, maybe strike up a conversation about trendy liberal topics like the war in Darfur, maybe pretend to be bisexual because that was cool. In reality, the idea of a boy even catching a whiff of her odorous ballet flats at the end of the day was so mortifying, she couldn’t imagine being intimate in any regard with anyone. Especially a boy. *Especially* a girl.

A half hour before entering Mrs. Anderson’s AP English Literature class, Shella noticed Thomas surrounded by three of his friends in their usual hallway corner near the stairs. She kept glancing his

way, wondering what he was talking about- probably something much more pressing than her conversation with her best friend Allie about their plans for after school.

The bell rang signaling the next period, and students started filing into the hallway from all sides. Shella was pulled away from Allie, which was fine because their next class was in the opposite direction anyway. Normally, navigating the small Cona High School hallways was catching waves, going with, and not against, the current. On that day, however, Shella got caught up in a whirlpool.

She skimmed the shoulder of a pimply freshman boy in a hurry to grab lunch and ricocheted towards the lockers. Someone's left elbow caught her in the ribs and knocked the breath right out of her lungs.

"Sorry," said Thomas curtly, and he looked at her for half a second with his bright blue eyes that related to her as if she were a locker door that wasn't fully closed and blocking his path. Thomas, who occupied her daydreams and hopes, who held her self-worth in his liquid pool eyes, didn't even register her as a person.

Since then, she forgot how to breathe. Shella stumbled up the stairs and fell in her seat in Mrs. Anderson's classroom and felt her heart breaking and her mind burning and her lungs collapsing. Again, the only external manifestation of the internal cataclysm was the tears streaming down her freckled cheeks. Oh, and her father later noticed she "looked flushed" when he picked her up from school and dropped her off at home alone.

So, let the record show, that those were catalysts for the next event of Shella's day: lying face down on her ruffled white duvet cover in her childhood bedroom contemplating all the ways she could kill herself.